



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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Chair

ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.
District Manager

April 9, 2007

Hon. Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair
Board of Standards and Appeals
40 Rector Street
New York, NY 10006

Re: BSA Application No. 47-07 BZ, CEQR No. 07 BSA 060M
346-360 West 17th Street / 351-355 West 16th Street

Dear Chair Srinivasan:

The applicant gave a presentation of this application to the Chelsea Preservation & Planning Committee at a meeting on March 19, 2007, and a duly noticed public hearing was held immediately prior to the start of the full meeting of the Board on April 4, 2007.

The Committee carefully considered the prime variance proposal and found it a reasonable way to reuse a unique property. We did not consider the two lesser alternate proposals mentioned in the variance application because of their dismissal by the applicant. While there were a number of concerns over the proposal, we are pleased to note that most were mitigated either by applicant statements at the Committee meeting or by letter prior to the full Board meeting. These are discussed below. The Committee voted 7-3 to support the variance prior to knowing applicant's willingness to agree with some of the Committee's concerns.

Background

The existing building was erected by the National Maritime Union in the mid 1960's pursuant to a series of bulk and use variances. It provided training, recreational and medical services to union members as well as temporary residence facilities. The building has several wings -- an 11 story office and residence facility facing 17th Street with sloped façade and circular windows, a windowless 5 story rectangular building facing 16th Street with auditorium, office and classroom space and several smaller wings.

NMU sold the property some years ago to Covenant House for use as a community facility serving teen-age youth. Covenant House decided to relocate its operations in 2007 and attempted to sell the property. No community group was interested in the property and it was sold to the present owners -- Hampshire Hotels and Resorts -- who operate a number of transient hotels.

When first built, the 17th street side of the property was zoned R8 and the 16th Street side was zoned M1-5. Currently the entire lot is zoned R8B.

The proposal

The key part of applicant's plan was to separate the multi-winged structure into what would be essentially two buildings above the ground floor by removing the innermost portion of the 5 story wing and creating a courtyard. The removed bulk would be transferred elsewhere on the property. The 11 story building on 17th Street would have one floor added to create a 12-story transient hotel with 270 rooms. The visual impact of this addition will be minimized because of the 1 story bulkheads at the ends of the roof of the existing building.

The remaining portion of the 5 story wing on 16th Street was to have had its roof top bulkheads removed and 4 floors added with a 10 foot setback on the top 3 floors. Windows would be added and it would become a 74 unit apartment hotel.

Ground floor or cellar space was to have been reconfigured for use as retail space, hotel accessory space including restaurant and a public health club.

Of all of the proposed uses, only the apartment hotel is permitted as of right in an R8B district. All others require a use variance. Both buildings also require bulk variances because of the additions to their height. Lesser variances are needed for numerous construction details. We have no objection to these lesser items and therefore will not address them.

Committee Concerns

While the Committee voted to support the applicant's proposal it did make known a number of concerns. These and the applicant's response are noted below:

- Excessive Bulk on 16th Street: The Committee felt that adding 4 floors with a substandard setback of 10 feet would unduly reduce light, air and open space on 16th Street. The street is already burdened with the former Port Authority building and the 16th Street building would be higher than several neighboring residences. The Committee asked that the setback be increased to the standard 15 feet or that if the setback remained at 10 feet only 3 stories be added to the wing. Prior to the full Board meeting a letter was received from the applicant promising to change the proposal to increase the setback of the top 3 stories to 15 feet. However, the street wall would remain the same height as the bulkhead on the present structure, i.e., the first added story would not be set back. We assume a revised filing will be made and request that this change be reflected in any variance that is issued.
- Traffic Problems: The Committee expressed concern over potential traffic problems on significantly residential 16th and 17th Streets stemming from the new uses. It felt that the environmental impact statement finding that traffic would be about the same as now was unduly optimistic. In particular, there was concern over idling vehicles aggravating pollution as well as a greater prevalence of late night trips. The applicant has agreed in writing to:

“(i) designate an employee (separate from the doorman) who will coordinate traffic in front of the building on West 16th Street during peak hours with the goal of preventing cars and taxis from blocking through traffic, (ii) coordinate with the Maritime Hotel to minimize traffic congestion on West 16th Street, and (iii) support the collaborative

efforts of the community and DOT in developing improvement strategies to address traffic concerns in the Chelsea and Gansevoort area. The building will have trees along its West 16th Street frontage to help alleviate pollution and noise concerns.”

- No Nightclub: As a result of negative experience with clubs in the adjoining Maritime Hotel and other neighborhood problems with clubs it is unacceptable to the Board that the applicant operate any such disruptive club in the instant premises. Applicant has stated that eating and drinking establishments would be limited to those in use groups 5 or 6. Use group 5 includes accessory uses to the hotel without limit and use group 6 can include large establishments. We therefore ask that BSA specifically restrict the use variance to group 5 or 6 eating and drinking establishments with a seating capacity of 300 persons or less, a full menu in the main dining establishment, no cover charge and no set show time. We also ask BSA to prohibit all use group 10 or 12 uses.
- Jobs for Neighborhood Residents: As a quid pro quo for the negative impacts some development tends to bring to our area, we ask that incoming businesses offer employment to neighborhood residents. The applicant has agreed to conduct a Job Fair for this purpose.
- Green Building: In the interest of reducing pollution and saving energy the Board makes every effort to promote the use of green buildings. The applicant has stated in writing that the building will be designed to conform to the standard for LEED Certification, and the best efforts will be made to reach Silver LEED.

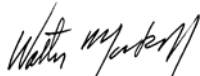
In light of the applicant’s accommodation to the Committee’s concerns it recommends approval of the variance.

At the full Board meeting on April 4th 2007, the above letter was adopted by a vote of 28 in favor, 12 opposed, 0 abstained, and 0 present but not eligible to vote.

Sincerely,



J. Lee Compton
Chair
Community Board 4



Walter Mankoff
Co-Chair
Chelsea Preservation and Planning

Lynn Kotler
Co-Chair
Chelsea Preservation and Planning

Cc: Applicant/Representative
Electeds