



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

330 West 42nd Street, 26th floor New York, NY 10036
tel: 212-736-4536 fax: 212-947-9512
www.ManhattanCB4.org

JEAN-DANIEL NOLAND
Chair

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

June 9, 2008

Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan
New York City Department of Transportation
40 Worth Street
New York, NY 10013

Re: Petition for a New Revocable Consent for a Pedestrian Bridge Connecting 360 Tenth Avenue and the High Line

Dear Commissioner Sadik-Khan:

After a presentation to its Chelsea Preservation and Planning Committee [and to the full board?], Manhattan Community Board No. 4 voted to recommend denial of the Petition for a New Revocable Consent for a pedestrian bridge connecting 360 Tenth Avenue and the High Line unless the design is altered to preserve the view corridor and sense of openness to the east of the High Line.

The applicant is building an as-of-right building at 360 Tenth Avenue, on the north side of the Lincoln Tunnel connector just north of West 30th Street, and wishes to build a pedestrian bridge connecting that building to the High Line spur at the corner of Tenth Avenue and West 30th Street. The applicant states that they have received all required approvals from the Port Authority to build over the Lincoln Tunnel connector, and are applying for a revocable consent to build over the city sidewalks and streets.

CB4 has been a strong supporter of the transformation of the High Line into an elevated park, and has worked with the city, especially with the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), and with the Friends of the High Line (FoHL) to ensure that it would become the best possible park. The nearly-completed first section validates these efforts: it is clear that the High Line park will be a significant asset for our community. It also is clear, based on discussions we have had and the marketing efforts we have seen, that adjacency to the High Line enhances property values beyond even the most optimistic predictions made at the time of the creation of the Special West Chelsea District (SWCD) that enabled the preservation of the High Line.

View Corridors

It always was understood that as a linear urban park threading its way between buildings, the High Line would be enclosed in some areas and open in others. The complex High Line adjacency requirements written into the Zoning Resolution when the SWCD was created were meticulously crafted to preserve a sense of openness where possible and prevent overwhelming encroachment by adjacent buildings, many of which would be significantly larger because of the rezoning.

Renderings of the proposed pedestrian bridge presented to CB4 show a wall of glass rising from the High Line spur to meet the new building at 360 Tenth Avenue, partially blocking views to the east. The applicant argues that the height of the wall is minimal and that the only view blocked is that of an insignificant building 600 feet to the east. We believe, however, that the important element is not the specific view, but the sense of openness that an unblocked view adds to the High Line experience at this point. We also note that even the applicant's minimal wall blocks the entire view for someone standing next to it.

This portion of the High Line has long been used to promote the vision of the High Line as a park. Starting just above West 29th Street, the High Line makes a broad curve to the west, joining the east-west 30th Street section. At this junction the westward views extend across the Hudson River to New Jersey while the eastward views extend to the eastern side of Ninth Avenue, one-and-one-half blocks away. Just as we would oppose even a minimal wall blocking views to the west, we oppose a minimal wall blocking views to the east.

CB4 recommends denial of the petition for a new revocable consent as long as the proposed pedestrian bridge would block more of the view corridor than the existing High Line blocks, and hopes that the applicant will be willing to modify his design in order to respect the openness that the community has sought to preserve.

Design and Materials

CB4 appreciates the value of having a notable, well-designed building anchoring the curve of the High Line and looks forward to its addition to our community. We would like to note some concern, however, with the manner in which the modernity of the building meets the industrial relic that is the High Line. The sizing of the glass panels on the proposed pedestrian bridge to match the steel panels on the High Line is an interesting approach, but the transition from modern glass to industrial relic is abrupt. We would ask that in addition to revising the design of the bridge to eliminate the blocking of the view corridor, the applicant consider alternative, less abrupt transitions from modern to historic.

High Line Programming

The transformation of the High Line into a linear urban park has presented both unique challenges and opportunities. Early, fanciful explorations that included modern trams, housing and a mile-long swimming pool have given way to designs that promote strolling, sight-seeing and sitting that recognize the limitations imposed by the narrowness of the park.

The Tenth Avenue spur, however, presents different possibilities because it is the single largest area of the High Line. Without the need to provide open traffic areas, it long has been recognized as offering the possibility of what the FoHL refer to as “programmatically intensive” use. We understand that the proposed pedestrian bridge could provide necessary egress in case of emergency, but we are concerned that by making the spur a major access point the opportunity to take advantage of its singular physical size would be lost.

The applicant suggests that pedestrian flow could be restricted to the northern edge of the spur, where the proposed pedestrian bridge would attach, leaving the rest of the spur available for other uses. We encourage the exploration of this possibility by DPR, FoHL and the applicant and support the careful consideration and preservation of the spur’s programmatic potential.

Maintenance

The proposed connection to the High Line would include the bridge itself, a stairway and an elevator, all of which would be publicly accessible. In addition, there will be entrances into the building at 360 Tenth Avenue. We are concerned that the juxtaposition of public and private spaces may blur the responsibility for maintenance. We believe that as beneficial as the proposed pedestrian bridge could be to the High Line and to the community, such a connection would be even more valuable to 360 Tenth Avenue with its hotel, bars and restaurants. Accordingly, we ask DPR to seek an agreement with the building owner to maintain the bridge, stair and elevator. We also ask DPR to investigate the possibility of locating public restrooms at this site.

Conclusion

CB4 continues to support the conversion of the High Line into a linear park and hopes that the section north of West 30th Street, including the spur over Tenth Avenue, will be preserved and included in the park. We understand that the proposed pedestrian bridge from 360 Tenth Avenue to the spur is in part an attempt to ensure that the spur is preserved in the face of the uncertainty surrounding the development of the Hudson Rail Yards, and as such we support that initiative.

Our support, however, is conditioned on the preservation of the eastward view corridors from the High Line, and thus we recommend denial of the application for a revocable consent as presented to us. Should this issue be resolved satisfactorily, our support would be further conditioned on appropriate agreements between the applicant and the city addressing the programming and maintenance issues discussed above.

Sincerely,



Jean-Daniel Noland
Chair



J. Lee Compton
Chair, Chelsea Preservation and Planning

Cc: Irina Fridman, DOT
Amanda Burden, DCP
Adrien Benepe, DPR
Michael Bradley
Peter Mullen, High Line
NYC Council Speaker Christine Quinn
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer
NYS Senator Tom Duane
NYS Assemblyman Richard Gottfried
Pamela Samuels, Extell Development Company
Brenda Levin, Applicant's Representative