



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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CHRISTINE BERTHET
Chair

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

January 9, 2014

Ruthanne Visnauskas
Acting Commissioner
NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development
100 Gold Street
New York, NY 10038

**Re: Irish Arts Center
726 Eleventh Avenue/553-555 West 51st Street
Proposed New and Renovated Building Program and Design**

Dear Commissioner Visnauskas:

At the December 11, 2013 meeting of the Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee ("C/HKLU"), the Irish Arts Center ("IAC") presented an updated design for its proposed building at 726 Eleventh Avenue. The Committee was pleased with the revised design and Manhattan Community Board 4 ("MCB4") is looking forward to certification of the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure application.

Revised Design

The IAC is a not-for-profit, multidisciplinary arts and cultural center with programming in live music, dance, theater, film, and literature as well as in visual arts presentations and cultural exhibitions. The center also holds dozens of classes a week in Irish language, history, music, and dance. The proposed project ("Project") includes the construction of a new building on Eleventh Avenue and the expansion of the existing three-story building on West 51st Street which has housed the IAC since 1972. The Project will be funded through the City of New York Department of Cultural Affairs, the State of New York Empire State Development Corporation, the Irish Government Department of Foreign Affairs, and private contributions.

Revisions to the design of the IAC were made since a previous presentation to the C/HKLU Committee on March 13, 2013. Most significantly, in consideration of community concern about the context of the adjacent early 19th-Century buildings at 565 West 51st Street and 564 West 52nd Street, IAC elected to remove one floor from the proposed building.

The design will incorporate into the new building the existing facades of the Cybert Tire building at 726 Eleventh Avenue as well as the current Irish Arts Center at 553 West 51st Street. MCB4 is very pleased with the design of this building, the choice of brick and stone for the Eleventh Avenue facade, and the consideration given to the neighboring residents' concern for their

privacy and the quite enjoyment of their homes.

Mayoral Zoning Override (see Attachment A)

MCB4 is aware that in order to construct the design as presented and comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, a Mayoral Zoning Override will be required. Zoning Resolution §24-33(b)(3) limits the height of a permitted rear yard obstruction to 23 feet above curb level. But for the Project to be functionally and financially viable a height of 26 feet is required — a three foot increase — for the following reasons:

The theater is located on the second floor of the proposed development and this allows it to be connected to and aligned with the floor to floor heights in the existing IAC building on West 51st Street. The stage location, including backstage spaces (dressing rooms, set storage, etc.) is at the eastern end of the site. The theater lobby and windows are on the western end, at Eleventh Avenue. With that stage location, the stage finish floor height is 14'-4" above grade.

The second floor connection between the IAC expansion on Eleventh Avenue and the existing IAC building on West 51st Street must be ADA accessible. The minimum back-stage ceiling height is 10'-0". The ceiling height combined with the ADA accessibility requirements creates a rear yard extension with a height of 26 feet above grade.

Accordingly, an override of Zoning Resolution §24-33(b)(3) is both necessary and appropriate and MCB4 supports IAC's request for a Mayoral Zoning Override to allow for an additional three feet of height in the rear yard.

Lead Agency Letter

MCB4 is anxious to see this project begin construction and the Board requests that the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) issue the Lead Agency Letter for the Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS) at the beginning of January to allow for certification of this ULURP in February 2014.

Sincerely,



Christine Berthet
Chair



Jean-Daniel Noland
Chair
Clinton / Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee

cc: Thehbia Walters – HPD
Aidan Connelly – Irish Arts Center
Matthew Lister – Jonathan Rose