



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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District Manager

February 7, 2014

Patrick Foye
Executive Director
Port Authority of New York/New Jersey
225 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10003

**Re: 551 Ninth Avenue
Fresh Food Use
Stiles Farmers Market & Big Apple Grocery**

Dear Mr. Foye:

At the January 16, 2014 meeting of Manhattan Community Board 4's (MCB4) Housing, Health and Human Services (HH&HS) Committee, the committee heard public comments regarding the closure of Stiles Farmers Market (Stiles) at 569 Ninth Avenue on December 31st, 2013. The market represents the only remaining affordable green market in the neighborhood and was a local institution prior to its closure. Community members from the neighborhood and far beyond spoke passionately in favor of relocating Stiles to the former Lamston's/Project FIND space at 551 Ninth Avenue. The 551 Ninth Avenue space is owned and operated by the Port Authority of New York/New Jersey (Port Authority) and most recently housed the Project FIND Coffeehouse, which was relocated to the basement of Holy Cross Church with assistance from the Port Authority in 2012. The 551 Ninth Avenue site provides a unique opportunity to provide space for both Stiles Farmer's Market and Big Apple Meat Market and use a public resource to balance neighborhood growth with neighborhood preservation. A fresh food market at this location will also serve to activate a reopened West 41st Street sidewalk, especially in consideration of the large housing developments under construction on Tenth Avenue.

History of Ninth Avenue Markets

Historically, Ninth Avenue between West 35th and West 45th Streets, known as Paddy's Market, housed a variety of both open air and enclosed markets selling produce, groceries, meat and regional specialties. As recently as ten years ago there were three produce markets, three bakeries, two fish markets, four green grocers, four butchers, three supermarkets and multiple food specialty stores. Currently there are three bakeries, one fish market, one small supermarket and no produce market and a handful of small specialty stores. The closest supermarket to the area has limited produce at high prices and inconsistent quality.

Until recently, the primary grocery in the area was a pair of stores located at 569 and 571 Ninth Avenue, between West 41st and West 42nd Streets. Stiles Farmers Market provided quality,

affordable produce and Big Apple Meat Market provided meats, dairy and groceries. These establishments served the many small tenement buildings between West 35th and West 50th Streets and larger developments on West 42nd Street, especially Manhattan Plaza with its 1684 apartments.

Due to the redevelopment of the site on the southwest corner of West 42nd Street and Ninth Avenue as a hotel, Big Apple Meat Market was closed in early 2013 and temporarily relocated to a small commercial space at 529 Ninth Avenue. This space is half the size of the original store and is divided between the ground floor and cellar of the space. The cellar is accessed through a steep staircase on the interior of the space which is very difficult for the elderly and disabled to maneuver. The space is not ADA accessible.

Stiles was not part of the initial development plans for the West 42nd Street and 9th Avenue site, however in November 2013 the site was sold resulting in the closure of Stiles on December 31, 2013. Stiles has another, smaller, market tent on West 52nd Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenue. The West 52nd Street market serves the northern portion of the neighborhood, however its distance from the West 30s and 40s makes it difficult to use, especially for the elderly and those with impaired mobility.

Save our Stiles

In response to the closing of Stiles, the community responded quickly and passionately. A website and mailing list have been created ([www. marketsofhellskitchen.com](http://www.marketsofhellskitchen.com)) and to date the mailing list has 100 plus members. Community residents attended the January 16, 2014 meeting of MCB4's HH&HS Committee with a standing room only crowd of approximately 80 community residents. All spoke about the need to keep affordable produce in the community and made an impassioned plea for assistance in finding Stiles a new home. Speakers supporting Stiles represented a broad swath of the neighborhood and beyond. Those that spoke represented:

- Manhattan Plaza (1,684 apartments)
- Geffner House (307 units of supportive housing)
- Metro Baptist Church and Rauschenbusch Metro Ministries
- West Side Neighborhood Association
- West 34th Street
- West 35th Street
- West 42nd Street
- West 43rd Street
- West 44th Street
- West 45th Street
- West 46th Street
- West 84th Street
- Tudor City

The committee was surprised to learn that the market was frequented not only by those in the neighborhood but also by those on the east side and uptown, due to the market's proximity to West 42nd Street transit options.

551 Ninth Avenue Relocation Site

The 551 Ninth Avenue space was originally the home of a Lamston's 5 and 10 cent store. Once Lamston's closed in the late 1970's the space remained vacant until the early 1980's when the rear portion of the site was sectioned off to create the Project FIND Coffeehouse for seniors. In addition to creating the Project FIND space, the Port Authority studied using the front of the

space, and space in an adjacent city owned building, for local retail. At that time, the local economy made it difficult to secure local retail tenants for the space.

In the mid 1980's the Port Authority responded to homeless issues in the Port Authority Bus Terminal by relocating Project FIND to the front of the 551 Ninth Avenue site and making the rear space available to the West Side Cluster who opened a drop in center called the Open Door. The Open Door center was poorly managed and was subject to many community complaints. The center closed in 2010 when the Port Authority determined that the Open Door space was needed for swing space during construction of a planned office tower development on top of the north terminal of the Port Authority Bus Terminal. In 2012, the Port Authority determined that it needed additional swing space and assisted in the relocation of the Project FIND Coffeehouse to Holy Cross Church on West 42nd Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. The West 41st Street sidewalk between Ninth and Dyer Avenue was also temporarily closed at that time. The office tower plan has not proceeded and the entire 551 Ninth Avenue space remains vacant.

The market dynamics in the community have changed greatly since the Port Authority study on local retail for 551 Ninth Avenue in the early 1980's. The community now has a strong retail real estate market which has had the unfortunate consequence of driving out many of the traditional fresh food market uses. The lack of affordable fresh food resources in the community has created a food desert in a once well-known regional food market area.

The streets of the West 30's and lower West 40's of Clinton/Hell's Kitchen lost a great deal of housing and businesses due to the construction of the Lincoln Tunnel and Port Authority Bus Terminal between the 1930s and 1970s. While this infrastructure was key for the region, it cost the community over 300 buildings which housed thousands of community residents. By making the 551 Ninth Avenue space available to Stiles and Big Apple Meat Market with rental rates commensurate with rates for other similar food-related uses, the Port Authority can be instrumental in bringing back affordable fresh food to the Ninth Avenue market while also providing a key resource for the community and reinforcing the character of Clinton/Hell's Kitchen.

MCB4 asks that a meeting be arranged with the Port Authority, MCB4 and elected officials to develop a plan to retain local fresh food and market vendors in the community.

Sincerely,

[signed 2/2/2014]
Barbara Davis, Co-Chair
Housing, Health &
Human Services Committee



Joe Restuccia, Co-Chair
Housing, Health &
Human Services Committee



Christine Berthet
Chair
Community Board 4



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

Attachments:

- West Side Alliance letter
- West 44th Street Better Block Association letter
- Save Our Stiles Relocation Support Group letter

Cc: Brad Hoylman, NY State Senator
Richard Gottfried, NY State Assemblymember
Jerrold Nadler, Congressman
Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Corey Johnson, NYC Councilmember