



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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**COREY JOHNSON**  
Chair

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

October 10, 2012

Mathew Wambua, Commissioner  
NYC Dept. of Housing Preservation and Development  
100 Gold Street  
New York, NY 10038

**Re: Lantern Organization - SRO Preservation - 330-332 West 51<sup>st</sup> Street**

Dear Commissioner Wambua,

At the September 20, 2012 meeting of Manhattan Community Board 4's (CB4) Housing, Health and Human Services Committee, the Board discussed Lantern Organization's proposal for the renovation of two Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings. The buildings, 330 and 332 West 51<sup>st</sup> Street, are five-story tenements located on the south side of West 51<sup>st</sup> Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. As currently presented to the Board, CB4 cannot support the renovation proposed by Lantern Organization.

**Background**

Lantern acquired these two buildings in 2011 as part of SRO Preservation commitments made in the December 2009 Western Rail Yards Points of Agreement (WRY POA) between the Mayor and the City Council. The preservation of SRO buildings as a permanent source of affordable housing has long been a priority of CB4 and CB4 strongly supports the gut renovation and preservation of 330-332 West 51<sup>st</sup> Street as affordable housing. CB4 believes that full renovation of these buildings can provide high quality housing for a mixed population of community and social service needy residents.

When redevelopment of the Western Rail Yards is complete, it will contain some of the highest income luxury units in New York City. Housing produced off-site pursuant to the WRY POA is a community benefit of the Western Rail Yards redevelopment and, as such, should be of the highest quality. CB4 has gone on tours of these buildings and they contain a total of 142 units in two five-story walkups, have single rooms off of a corridor which are undersized both functionally and for Code-compliance, and are in overall extremely poor condition. Therefore, the current layout of these SRO buildings is obsolete and cannot support functional affordable housing. While preservation of these buildings is an opportunity to renovate valuable units, CB4 can only support the highest standard of renovation. On this basis, CB4 has numerous conditions which must be satisfied before offering support for this project.

## **Proposed Project**

Lantern originally came to CB4 with a plan to renovate these buildings as-is; same room layouts, no elevator, and only a moderate rehabilitation including the new building systems. CB4 is pleased that over the last several months Lantern has moved ahead with plans for a more substantial renovation, though there is still more progress that needs to be made. Currently, Lantern is proposing to renovate both 330 and 332 West 51<sup>st</sup> Street and combine them into a single building with an elevator. Lantern has proposed to first renovate the 330 building and move tenants of that building into the 332 building. Once that renovation is complete, tenants will be moved back over to the 330 building. If necessary due to space constraints, some tenants will need to be relocated off-site during construction. Lantern has identified a building it owns and manages at 319 West 94<sup>th</sup> Street which could be used for temporary relocation of some of the West 51<sup>st</sup> Street tenants.

While the plan calls for renovation of the buildings, it is not the level of gut renovation required to create permanent affordable housing. Renovation plans currently include a reduction in the number of rooms from 142 to 113. Layouts will still consist of shared bathrooms on each floor and each unit will have a Dwyer-type kitchen facility. A front desk will be located in the 330 building, but it is unclear if there will be on-premise social service offices and where those offices would be located. The building design does not currently include a laundry room and there is a question of whether the units will have ceiling fans or window air-conditioning units. Most importantly, not all of the bathrooms will be Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) adaptable or accessible. CB4 cannot support a project that does not comply with ADA and HPD adaptability and accessibility requirements.

## **CB4 Concerns**

### *Full Relocation*

- CB4 requests full relocation of the existing tenants via relocation agreements that have been negotiated and executed prior to the commencement of the renovation of each building.

### *HCC Assistance*

- Housing Conservation Coordinators has been working with the existing tenants to resolve relocation issues and CB4 has found HCC to be helpful in negotiating and resolving temporary relocation issues in other affordable housing project in Chelsea/Hell's Kitchen. Thus, CB4 urges Lantern to engage with HCC on this project.

### *Maintaining Adequate Vacancies for Relocation*

- While Lantern informed CB4 that it was no longer renting units in these buildings, HCC met with tenants who claimed they had moved into the buildings within the last two weeks and a tenant informed the Board at the Committee meeting that she had moved in two weeks prior.

### *Layout*

- The current plans show six residents sharing one bath; this is not sufficient. CB4 recommends suite arrangements with a maximum of two or three units clustered around a shared kitchen and bath;
- According to the plans, many of the rooms are undersized. Rooms should be a minimum of 150 square feet;
- CB4 understands that layout changes and room reconfiguration will result in a reduction in the unit count but the Board supports high quality housing over high unit counts; and
- Lantern has presented plans to have a community facility space as part of the renovation. If community facility space is included as part of the project, it should have a separate entrance and be complete functionally separate from the residential space and any program space used for the residents of the building.

### *Scope of work*

- The scope of work should be a full gut renovation including new finishes and mechanical systems, reconfiguration of rooms to suite arrangements, an on-site laundry room and community facility space for on-site supportive services; and
- All bathrooms should be either ADA-adaptable or ADA-accessible.

### *Tenant Selection*

- CB4 requests that local residents receive preference for low-income community units.

CB4 appreciates that Lantern has continued to move in the right direction for the renovation of these buildings, however, CB4 urges Lantern to work with both CB4 and HPD to bring this renovation to a level commensurate with affordable housing renovated as an off-site benefit of the WRY POA.

Sincerely,



Corey Johnson, Chair  
Manhattan Community Board 4

[signed 10/10/12]  
Barbara Davis, Co-Chair  
Housing, Health &  
Human Services Committee



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

cc: NYC Council Speaker Christine Quinn