



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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**COREY JOHNSON**  
Chair

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

June 6, 2012

Dan Biederman  
President  
Chelsea Improvement Company  
1065 Avenue of the Americas  
Suite 2400  
New York, N.Y. 10018

**Re: Chelsea Plaza**

Dear Mr. Biederman:

Manhattan Community Board4 (CB4) appreciates the update on Chelsea Plaza design and programming provided by Chelsea Improvement Company (CIC) staff at the May 16 Transportation Planning Committee meeting. Chelsea Plaza has become an important part of the neighborhood, primarily by providing much needed usable open space. The greening, programming, music and art installations, and Wi-Fi that CIC has provided at the Chelsea Plaza improves its ambiance and has been an important addition to the neighborhood.

However, we are very concerned and disappointed that most of the suggestions contained in our February, 2007 letter in support of the creation of the CIC have not been honored, that there has been a substantial number of commercial events on the Chelsea Plaza without Community Board review, and that RFQs for Food Services and a farmer's market at the Plaza were released without review or discussion by the Community Board. Mostly, we deplore the lack of communication with CB4 and/or with the Chelsea neighborhood generally since the 2009 charrettes on its design.

CB4 requests

- A reduction in the number and duration of events,
- Consultation with CB4 for all new events, kiosks or installations,
- That CB4 and community representatives be invited to the board of the CIC as it is customary for Business Improvement Districts,
- That CIC improves its communication with the board and the community

That the plaza be made ADA compliant as a high priority ahead of any other capital expenditures.

CIC was created in January 2007 to enhance and provide services to the Southwest area of Chelsea, defined as between 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the West Side Highway and West 14<sup>th</sup> Street to West 17<sup>th</sup> Street. Several large owners in the area including Jamestown, Google, Related, Taconic and Belvedere Capital fund CIC and make up its Board of Directors. It provides streetscaping (unique lamps, furniture, plantings, street signs, and litter receptacles), landscaping, maintenance, safety services, and programming for the area. Through an agreement with DOT it maintains Chelsea Plaza, a public Plaza in the mid-block area of 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue between West 14<sup>th</sup> and West 15<sup>th</sup> Streets. Through an agreement with the Hudson River Park it also maintains Sapohonikan Park, a 3/4 acre park between 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the West Side Highway at West 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

On Chelsea Plaza, consistent with ideas emanating from a 2009 community-based charrette, CIC provided colorful planters, movable seating and umbrellas, Wi-Fi, temporary art installations, occasional concerts, and community programming included family yoga, salsa dancing, and Capoeira. They held over 20 commercial events since then, most at the request of SAPO, though several events were held at their own initiative as fundraisers. In 2011 CIC released an RFQ for a vendor to provide good services on the Plaza. In May 2012, CIC released an RFQ for vendors to provide a farmers market on the Plaza (food sales were recommended at the 2009 Charrette). CIC also proposes to invest \$ 155,000 to upgrade furniture and plantings on the plaza.

While there is much to applaud in the above, there are also grounds for concern.

First, we are concerned about the commercial events in the Plaza. These events have been held without Community Board consultation and have also caused the concern of neighborhood residents. There have been over 20 such events since 2007. While these events don't restrict public access, they often remove much of the seating area and make the Plaza more of an advertising staging area than a public plaza. One recent event lasted 9 days during which the Plaza seemed more like a sales desk with a large banner and tent than public area. While we are not opposed to occasional commercial events we feel they should be few and far between. Manhattan Community Board #4 has one of the most under-parked areas in the City. Through its creative landscape design, on-going maintenance and creative (two hour/week each yoga and dance) community programming, CIC has created a very successful highly and popular Plaza. Its primary use should be for that purpose.

- Specifically CB4 requests that the Community Board should vet all commercial events for review and approval. No more than two major commercial events should be held each year, with maximum length of two days each and no more than two free smaller scale events (e.g. free Chocolate and message sending on Valentine's Day).
- We are pleased that the CIC staff indicated they will honor these requests in the future. We understand that a majority of commercial events have been initiated directly by the City's Street Activity Permit Office (SAPO) often with minimal notice to CIC. We are writing separately to SAPO requesting those events be similarly restricted.

We are also concerned that CIC has contracted with a local restaurant to install an 11' by 11' food kiosk that will operate daily and, based on an RFQ released in early May, 2012, is in negotiations with a vendor to operate a farmer's market that would have 3-4 12' by 6' tables on the Plaza one or days a week. While we are not opposed to either concept, we are concerned that on such a small plaza revenue-producing installations will further restrict the space available without real benefit to the public.

- We are pleased that CIC has agreed to come before the Community Board with more specific designs and day/hours for the farmer's market before it begins. We are also pleased that CIC will be including a table in the farmer's market for Fulton Tenant's Healthy Food program.

Mostly importantly, we are concerned that most of the requests we made in our February 8, 2007 letter were not followed-up on and there has been very little communication between CIC and CB4 and/or the Council of Chelsea Block Associations (CCBA) since the 2009 charrette. We thus request that CIC:

- Expand the Board of Directors to include representatives from CB4 and CCBA;
- Outreach to the disability community to ensure street furniture and improvements are handicapped accessible. We note, with disappointment, that the Plaza is not compliant with ADA standards because it does not include detectable warning strips at the boundaries between both sides of the Avenue and the Plaza.

- Consult with the residents, businesses and owners beyond the current members of the Board of Directors to understand their concerns, issues and ideas for improvements
- Increase communication including listing events in the Community Board bulletin, and giving regular updates to CB4 and CCBA.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working more closely with CIC in the future and to preserve Chelsea Plaza as an appealing publicly available space.

Sincerely,



Corey Johnson  
Chair



Christine Berthet  
Co-Chair  
Transportation Planning Committee



Jay Marcus  
Co-Chair  
Transportation Planning Committee

cc: Carol Cross, Manager, Chelsea-Elliot Houses  
Brian Honan, Executive Vice President for External Relations, NYCHA  
Raymond Ribeiro, Executive Vice President for Capital Projects, NYCHA  
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