



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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JOHN WEIS
Chair

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

March 3, 2010

Commissioner Rafael Cestero
NYC Dept. of Housing Preservation and Development
100 Gold Street
New York, NY 10037

**Re: Western Railyards Points of Agreement
SRO Preservation Commitments
Identified Sites—Lantern Organization**

Dear Commissioner Cestero,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) gives its conditional support of the Lantern Organization's proposal to acquire and preserve two Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings in Clinton. As you know, this initiative is part of the December 2009 Western Rail Yard Points of Agreement (Section 3-e). The preservation of SRO buildings as a source of affordable housing has long been a priority of Manhattan CB 4. We appreciate the Department of Housing Preservation and Development's prompt follow up to the Western Rail Yard Points of Agreement (WRYPOA.)

The Lantern Organization is a not-for-profit corporation dedicated to developing and operating permanent affordable and special needs housing in New York City. Since its founding in 1997, Lantern Organization has 16 buildings in operation, development, or planning phases. These housing developments account for more than 1230 units of affordable rental housing for many communities in New York City. Lantern Organization developments meet high standards of architectural, green building, and energy efficiency design. The organization works with selected professionals at all phases of housing development and production, and provides rent-up, property management and program operations.

In July 28th, 2009, the organization received support from CB4 for a proposed supportive housing project on West 23rd Street to house a homeless and gay senior population. Ultimately, due to cost considerations, that project did not come to fruition. During the course of the WRY negotiations, CB4 asked Lantern to review sites the Board had identified for possible SRO Preservation. Subsequent to the execution of the WRYPOA, the Board asked Lantern to continue those efforts.

CB4 is also encouraged by Lantern's early progress in identifying sites and their plan to make these buildings a permanent resource for the community. Lantern has so far identified the following two buildings that together have 126 rooms and 61 existing tenants. The buildings are:

358 West 51st Street

This building, a 5-story SRO located on the south side of West 51st Street between 8th and 9th Avenues, contains 62 units, of which 15 are currently vacant. The building has been home to a long-term, stable population and the live-in superintendent has resided there for over 30 years. While the building is fairly maintained, it still requires full replacement of all mechanical systems. The overwhelming majority of units share kitchen and bathroom facilities; maintaining this layout is unacceptable.

354 West 56th Street

This building, a 5-story SRO located on the south side of West 56th Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, contains 65 units, of which 48 are currently vacant. This building is in poor physical condition and requires extensive gut renovation.

Lantern's Plan

Currently, the proposed plan includes:

General

- Redevelopment of the two buildings as one project;

Affordability

- Post-renovation, forty percent of the units must be affordable to single adults earning 60% of area median income (up to \$32,500) and sixty percent must be set aside for formerly homeless adults earning 50% of area median income (up to \$26,900) as required by the NY / NY III Supportive Housing program.

Tenant Relocation

- Temporary relocation of tenants from West 56th Street to West 51st Street during construction;
- Keeping tenants in place during moderate renovation of the West 51st building

Renovation

- Extensive renovation of the 56th Street building and moderate renovation of the 51st Street building;
- Installation of new mechanicals systems, including new plumbing, electric, sprinkler and fire alarm systems in both buildings.
- A proposed layout of individual SRO units off a central hallway with shared bathrooms and/or kitchens;
- Phased renovation with the West 56th Street building being done first followed by the West 51st Street building

CB4's Recommendations & Conditions for Approval

CB4 strongly supports the preservation for affordable housing of 358 West 51st Street and 354 West 56th Street and their renovation. The Board also supports housing for a mixed population of community and social service residents at these locations within the income band noted above. However, housing produced pursuant to the WRYPOA is a community benefit of the Western Rail Yards redevelopment and should therefore be of the highest quality. CB4 notes that the current layout of these SRO buildings is obsolete and cannot support reuse of these layouts. CB4 can only support the highest standard of renovation. On this basis, the following are conditions for approval:

Affordability & Program

- 40% of units will be affordable to single adults earning 60% of area median income (up to \$32,500)
- 60% will be set aside for formerly homeless adults earning 50% of area median income (up to \$26,900). Those units at 50% of AMI will house homeless mentally persons under as required by the NY / NY III Supportive Housing program.
- Social service supported residents and community residents must be integrated throughout the buildings.

Tenant Relocation

- Full relocation of tenants during each gut renovation.
- Housing Conservation Coordinators has offered to assist with tenant negotiation to resolve relocation issues and Clinton Housing Development Company has offered assistance in relocation resources.

Building and Unit Layout

- The current preliminary plan presented proposes six to eight residents sharing one bath/and kitchen. This arrangement is not acceptable. Suite arrangements with a maximum of two or three units clustered with a shared bath and kitchen is recommended.
- As presented, some rooms are severely undersized to HPD Supportive Housing Design. Each room must be a minimum of 150 sq. ft.
- CB4 understands that such layout changes and room re-configurations will result in a reduction in the unit count. The Board supports high housing quality over high unit counts.

Scope of work

- The scope of work should include:
 - new layouts to provide more privacy and less sharing
 - elevators in both buildings for maximum ADA accessibility
 - all new finishes
 - maximum energy efficiency and green measures where possible
 - community facility space, tenant laundry and office and program space for on-site supportive services.

Tenant Selection

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

Location search

- CB4 encourages Lantern to continue its search for SRO properties, especially in Chelsea, to fulfill the agreement between the City of New York and CB4 to preserve 150 units of SRO housing under the WRYPOA and return to the Housing, Health and Human Services Committee of the Board in May 2010 to report on its progress.

Manhattan CB4 applauds Lantern's efforts to date and looks forward to a continued productive relationship to preserve this critical community resource.

Sincerely,



John Weis
Chair
MCB4



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

[signed 3/5/10]

Dave Hanzel
Co- Chair, Housing, Health
& Human Services Committee

cc:

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Ann Weisbrod, Hudson Yards Development Corporation
D. Decerbo, City Council Land Use
Anthony Borelli, Deborah Morris - MBP Scott Stringer
H. Leicht, Deputy Commissioner for Development, HPD
T. O'Hanlon, Assistant Commissioner, Supportive Housing
J. Katz, Executive Director, Lantern Organization