



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 10
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Manhattan Community Board 10 Resolution regarding the Proposed Relocation of the USPS College Station Post Office to 273 West 138th Street

WHEREAS At the September Community Board 10 General Board meeting held on September 6, 2017, Gregory Lackey, a Real Estate Asset Manager representing the United States Postal Service (USPS), conducted a presentation, informing the Community Board and community members for the first time of the USPS' intention to relocate the College Station Post Office located at 217 West 140th Street to a building under rehabilitation located at 273 West 138th Street; and

WHEREAS the Community Board and community members had raised several concerns and questions regarding the poor quality of the service at the existing College Station post office and whether there would be a reduction of postal workers if the relocation actually occurred, the extent of outreach that the USPS conducted prior to the presentation at the General Board Meeting, and the status of the lease of the 138th Street site and whether the USPS had already executed a lease with the property owner; and

WHEREAS at this meeting, the Community Board first discovered that the intended ground-floor use of the property located at 273 West 138th Street was a post office and that this was the same property owner who had scheduled a hearing with the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) in August 2017 without a presentation to or consultation with the Community Board and that the property owner, HYK Properties, submitted an application for LPC approval of proposed rehabilitation work consisting of: window and façade alteration, the installation of windows of varied widths ranging from 10' to 25'-9" with a setback by four inches from the existing brick exterior, an extension of the windows to the cornice, the installation of one window on each exterior door, installation of 1'4" concrete bulkheads at the bottom of each window, the installation of 4.5" flat aluminum frames; and

WHEREAS LPC approved this application without consultation with the Community Board, which was in summer recess from July through August and entered its 2017-2018 session in September 2017; and

WHEREAS CB10 discovered that the property owner was able to obtain letters of support from the West 138th Street Striver's Row Block Association, the Kings Court West 139th Street Block Association, and the Saint Nicholas Historic District Central Alley Preservation Committee, however, it was also discovered that these letters of support were obtained because the Applicant misconstrued the proposed work and the proposed use of the properties with these associations and as a result, these groups had since retracted their support of the LPC application; and

WHEREAS on September 12, 2017, Erik Palatnik and a group of architects representing the property owner came before the Manhattan Community Board 10 Transportation, Historic Preservation, and Landmarks Committee to present the work that LPC had already approved at its hearing in August 2017 “as a courtesy” to our board and offered to give approximately 1,000 SF in community facility space in the cellar of 273 West 138th Street to the community board and/or block associations in exchange for support to the project; and

WHEREAS the Committee explained to the owner’s representative that they had not followed CB10 Landmarks policies and procedures, proceeded to do work without community board consultation and consent, intentionally omitted the intended ground-floor uses of the site, omitted details of the proposed large door on 138th Street which they contemplated as the door for truck deliveries to the proposed post office, failed to respect the community and block associations by presenting false plans, failed to acknowledge the transportation impact of relocating a post office branch to the busy thoroughfare of Frederick Douglass Boulevard, disrespected the Striver’s Row historic blocks and its residents by neglecting to conduct any type of community engagement prior to their appearance at the committee meeting, and deemed the offer of community facility space as an inappropriate bribe which neither the Committee nor the block associations tolerated; and

WHEREAS the Committee resolved to schedule a public hearing prior to issuing a statement on this property to LPC; and

WHEREAS on October 10, 2017, the CB10 Transportation, Historic Preservation, and Landmarks Committee hosted a public hearing to facilitate a discussion regarding the proposed relocation of the post office among the Community Board, community members, the USPS, and representatives of the proposed relocation site, 273 West 138th Street; and

WHEREAS the USPS conducted a presentation indicating that the USPS underwent a four-year search to identify a space to relocate the College Station Post Office and identified 273 West 138th Street as an adequate facility due to location’s size and that it is located in the boundaries of the area serviced – 137th Street-144th Streets between St. Nicholas Avenue and Lenox Avenue. The USPS also stated that it is facing financial hardships and is engaging in real estate sales to raise additional funding for the organization. The USPS stated, at the conclusion of the public hearing, that it would research other vacant ground-floor sites in its catchment area since the community is in staunch opposition to a potential relocation to 273 West 138th Street. The USPS indicated that the lease to the property at 273 West 138th Street had not been signed and they would execute a sale contract of the existing post office only if the USPS had already executed a lease for the proposed new site. The USPS refused to provide the community with the name of the potential buyer of the current College Station Post Office. Finally, the USPS initiated its 30-day comment period at the public hearing, which would conclude on November 9, 2017; and

WHEREAS the West 138th Street Strivers Row Landmark Block Association and the Kings Court West 139th Street Block Association presented testimony indicating that the USPS did not comply with its own Code of Regulations, Title 39, Section 241.4 which dictates how the USPS should conduct community outreach and planning regarding an expansion, relocation, or construction of post offices since there was a considerable lack of transparency and communication on behalf of the USPS to the community. These federal regulations require the USPS to identify the need to

relocate and fully communicate the need to the community, explain the process by which the USPS would solicit and consider input from the affected community, provide regular updates to the affected community and elected officials, advise local officials of their appeal rights and the appeals process, review comments and notify the community and elected officials of any changes to the proposed plans, make decisions that reflects community feedback and share the official decisions with the community and officials and post a notice at the post office; and

WHEREAS Manhattan Community Board 10 urges the USPS to follow post office expansion, relocation, and construction guidelines in its own Code of Regulations and urges the USPS Inspector General to conduct a thorough investigation on the lack of transparency in the proposed relocation of the College Station Post Office. CB10 also urges HYK Properties to follow the CB10 policies and procedures related to LPC applications, which details the step-by-step process for proper notification of proposed work to the Community Board and to the community to ensure that all residents are properly informed of proposed plans, especially plans such as this one which have such significant impacts on the community; and

WHEREAS at the public hearing on October 10th, community residents were vehemently against the relocation of the College Station Post Office to 273 West 138th Street And raised a significant number of concerns. There were concerns about the current operations of the existing College Station Post Office, in which there are excessive lines and long wait times, few USPS staff members working at the windows, short hours of operation, and very poor customer service. There were fears expressed that the USPS had already executed contracts to sell the existing post office and only presented at the public hearing as a formality to comply with their own process.

WHEREAS at the public hearing, the New York Metro Postal Union presented testimony regarding the proposed sale and relocation of College Station Post Office. New York Metro Postal Union is opposed to the sale and relocation of College Station Post Office and wants the Postal Service to restore services fully to College Station Post Office. The Union stated that the College Station Post office has served the community since 1937 and that the USPS should fully restore services to the community and should be looking for ways to enhance not diminish services. The community is steadily growing and the need for postal services are steadily increasing as well. The Postal Service reduced services at this post office four years ago by stopping letter carriers from being domiciled there which has led to delayed delivery of the mail to the community. The station needs to open more retail windows, which would minimize wait times in line. The station needs extended hours of services. The union also expressed that the USPS was not facing financial hardship, but is facing a crisis of mismanaging post offices and its staff. The sale of College Station Post Office was a reaction to a congressionally manufactured financial crisis that can only be solved by congress, not the sale of the College Station Post office building. The Union called for a thorough investigation to be conducted by the USPS Office of the Inspector General to investigate the USPS' non-compliance with its own regulations regarding proposed relocations and appropriate public and elected official engagement processes. The Union indicated that in 2014, the USPS Office of the Inspector General issued a report on the Post Office Relocation Process, which found that 25 of 33 relocation projects at the time were not in compliance with public comment and appeals processes, lacked transparency, and lacked communications with the community and elected officials. The Union also conveyed that CBRE often represents both the seller and the buyer in the sales of post offices creating conflicts of interest. The union added that

it was disrespectful to the community to not have representatives of the NYC postmaster/district manager appear as advertised in the USPS notice of the public hearing who are most acutely aware of the overall situation and decision-making that impacts this post office. Because the original notice of this meeting published by the USPS announced the wrong location, the Postal Service should have made sure that the needs of this community were met at this meeting; and

WHEREAS Save Harlem Now submitted testimony to CB10, recommending the College Station Post Office for LPC designation since the building has historical value and significance. The Post Office was constructed in 1935 and was designed by the architect William Dewey Foster in the neo-federal style with Holland-brick laid in a Flemish bond and articulated with limestone. William Dewey Foster also designed five other post offices in the New York City; and

WHEREAS on October 23, 2017, the USPS shared a letter to Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer dated October 20, 2017, notifying her that the USPS “has decided to reevaluate its position with respect to the potential relocation of the College Station facility,” however when the Chair of the CB10 Transportation, Historic Preservation, and Landmarks Committee asked the USPS to clarify whether the USPS decided to abandon its original plan to relocate to 138th Street and seek another location or stay in the current post office location, the USPS declined to respond; and

WHEREAS on October 24, 2017, the representatives of the owner of 273 West 138th Street returned to present at the CB10 Transportation, Historic Preservation, and Landmarks Committee meeting, seeking a letter of support to their LPC application for proposed work that included the following: installation of a chairlift at the exterior staircase at West 138th Street, an expansion of the staircase width from 2’-10” to 3’-3” at grade level, and an expansion of the staircase width from 2’-10” to 3’-7” at the basement level; and

WHEREAS at this committee meeting, the community raised multiple concerns regarding the continued intended use of the site as a post office

WHEREAS on October 24, 2017, the West 138th Street Striver’s Row Landmark Block Association and the Kings Court West 139th Street Block Association submitted testimony in opposition to the LPC application for the proposed exterior basement stairway, which they deemed would compromise the historical integrity of the building exterior on 138th Street. They expressed concerns about the intended use of the community facility space, which may present negative impacts on the traffic, parking, and overall quality of life of the residents on the block. They also raised concerns regarding the large bi-fold windows to be installed at both 273 West 138th Street and 272 West 139th Street, which would also compromise the historical integrity of the buildings. The groups called for an environmental impact study to be conducted by the USPS and HYK Properties to examine the potential impact of relocating the post office to the 138th Street building. This testimony was drafted and signed by C. Virginia Fields, President of the West 138th Street Striver’s Row Landmark Block Association and Elois Dupree, President of the Kings Court West 139th Street Block Association; and

WHEREAS on October 24, 2017, the Transportation, Historic Preservation, and Landmarks Committee received a letter dated October 3, 2017 which was submitted to Congressman Espaillat by Allan S. Moller, an officer of the King’s Court Alley Homeowners’ Association. The letter

expressed opposition to the proposed relocation of the post office, describing the concerns of the post office's presence in the St. Nicholas Historic District, which include houses that represent 19th century urban design, prominent architecture, and a historic nature that would be compromised by the presence of a Post Office on the block; and

WHEREAS the West 138th Street Striver's Row Landmark Block Association and the Kings Court West 139th Street Block Association collected 279 signatures to petition to proposed relocation of the College Station Post Office and submitted the petitions to the Transportation, Historic Preservation, and Landmarks Committee on October 24, 2017; and

WHEREAS the Committee voted 7-0 against the two LPC applications related to this property; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Manhattan Community Board 10 vehemently objects to the relocation of the USPS College Station Post Office from its current location at 217 West 140th Street to a 273 West 138th Street, urges LPC to revoke its August 2017 vote in support of the LPC applications related to this property, and strongly opposes the outstanding LPC application for a stairlift on the property at 138th Street. Neither HYK Properties nor the United States Post Office followed Community Board 10 protocol or USPS protocol regarding the proper community notification, engagement, and outreach processes. HYK Properties was negligent in their failure to provide the Community Board an opportunity to hear their presentation and provide input prior to scheduling a hearing with the LPC. LPC failed to properly coordinate and communicate with Community Board 10, as Community Board 10 was not even informed that an LPC hearing was scheduled for this property in August. We recommend that Congressman Espaillat request a thorough federal investigation with the USPS Inspector General's Office for transparency and accountability for what transpired with the proposed relocation of the post office to Striver's Row. The USPS should be in compliance with its own mandates on proper community consultation with the community.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that on November 1, 2017, Manhattan Community Board 10 objects to the relocation of the USPS College Station Post Office from its current location at 217 West 140th Street to a 273 West 138th Street with a vote of 32 in favor, 0 opposed and 1 abstention.