

LAND USE COMMITTEE – MEETING MINUTES

October 10, 2019

Committee Members Present

Wayne Benjamin, Chair
Christopher Ventura, Asst. Chair
James Berlin
Steve Simon
Nicholas Martinez

Committee Members Absent

Osi Kaminer (Excused)
Cindy Matos (Excused)

Board Members Present

Public Members Present

Public Members Absent

Vivian Ducat (Excused)

Staff: Ebenezer Smith

Guests: Pat Courtney (Volunteers for Isham Park), Laurie Tobias-Cohen (Office of Congressman Espaillat), Paul J Heinstezstein, Jammali Roman

- 1) The meeting of the Land Use Committee (“Land Use” “LU” or the “Committee”) of Community Board 12 Manhattan (“CB12M”), held at the Nagle Avenue YM&YWH, was called to order with quorum present at 7:20 PM. Chair Benjamin greeted guests and provide an overview of the agenda items. Committee members introduced themselves.

2) **Capital and Expense Budget Priorities for FY21:**

The Committee reviewed its Capital and Expense budget priorities for FY20 and established priorities for FY21. Chair Benjamin noted that LU had one expense and one capital item in FY 20, each was highly ranked by the Board in its FY20 ranking of Budget Priorities. He stated that the FY20 ranking was circulated to the Committee subsequent to the September LU meeting for review, no addition budget items were recommended, and given this suggested that LU submit the items for continuing support in FY21. Committee member Simon recommended that, given the City’s response to LU’s FY20 budget items, they be modified and submitted to for ranking anew, not for continuing support, which would be more appropriate for an approved, funded project.

LU’s FY20 Expense item requested the dedication of additional planning staff to work with CB12M and local residents to formulate and implement a community-based contextual zoning plan for Washington Heights and Inwood. OMB’s response states the request was partially accommodated in FY2019. The Committee assumed OMB is referring to the Inwood Rezoning and agreed to modify the expense budget item to clarify the request to exclude any work undertaken on the Inwood Rezoning, which was not a community-based planning effort.

LU’s FY20 Capital item requested the implementation of a scattered-site, infill planning and development initiative for Washington Heights that targets City-owned vacant lots and buildings to create new affordable housing. The City’s response states, “this is not a budget request”. The Committee agreed to re-state the Capital item to make it clear that we are requesting the allocation of capital funds to support the scattered-site planning and development initiative.

After further discussion a motion was made (Nicholas) and Seconded (Chris) to modify the Committee’s FY20 Budget Priorities as discussed and rank them as LU’s respective expense and capital budget priorities for FY21. The motion passed with the following votes.

	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>Abstaining</u>
LU Committee Members	5	0	0
Board Members	0	0	0
Members of the Public	3	0	0

3) **Potential Inwood Historic House District:**

Chair Benjamin reminded the Committee that at the September 4th LU meeting he advised that he was invited to attend a meeting on September 5th organized by Congressman Espaillat to discuss historic preservation in Inwood and would report back to the Committee in October. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the Historic Districts Council (HDC), the NYC Landmarks Conservancy, Columbia University Historic Preservation

program, City College's Bond Center for Urban Futures (the "Bond Center"), and other interested parties. Laurie Tobias-Cohen from Congressman's Espaillat's office provide the Committee with an overview of the effort spearheaded by the Congressman to list an Inwood Apartment House Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places as a first step towards eventually obtaining designation by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). National Register listing does not prove the same level of protection as LPC designation, but it can be used as a tool to demonstrate to LPC the merits of designation. Historic preservation is one way to protect and retain neighborhood character. Laurie stated that Inwood is one of the most underrepresented neighborhoods in the City with respect historic designation. The PowerPoint presented to the Committee was also presented at the September 5th meeting. It includes images of various buildings, generally along Seaman Avenue and nearby side streets, that might be included in an apartment house historic district. The buildings shown are of varying architectural styles, but many are Art Deco. Many of the buildings were constructed during the depression; some have undergone careful exterior and interior restoration projects.

Committee Member Simon suggested that research be undertaken to determine if the architects who designed any of the buildings in Inwood proposed for inclusion in a historic district also designed buildings elsewhere in the City that are designated or included in historic districts. The results of this research can be used as leverage to make the case of the Inwood Apartment House Districts. Community resident Pat Courtney stated that many of the architects of the buildings in the Grand Concourse Historic District, an LPC designated historic district, also designed buildings in Inwood.

Committee Member Berlin stated that we should keep in mind that Washington Heights has many buildings similar in architectural design to those in Inwood, for example along Fort Washington Avenue, and our focus should go beyond Inwood.

Ms. Tobias-Cohen stated that the Congressman's office can help with research but cannot apply for funds to hire a consultant; HDC can potentially serve as a conduit for grant funds. She also stated that Columbia historic preservation students are currently assisting with research, but only through the end of the current semester.

Chair Benjamin stated that we can also ask the Bond Center for help and that when CB12M undertook its neighborhood planning and land use study, completed in 2007, it received funds from elected officials and a NYS Agency to hire a consultant – the City College Architecture Center, now the Bond Center. He also stated that local residents played critical roles in the work performed under HDC's Six to Celebrate to explore the potential for historic preservation in Inwood and in the successful efforts to designate Audubon Park. The community must be engaged so volunteers can be identified to help move this initiative forward.

The Committee discussed how its FY21 Expense item might be modified to include historic preservation. Since historic preservation falls under the jurisdiction of LPC and the expense item request for the allocation of City Planning staff, it was agreed to modify the expense item to reference a neighborhood preservation plan as opposed to specifically a contextual zoning plan, since contextual zoning and historic preservation are each aspects of neighborhood preservation.

The Committee agreed that the presentation made tonight should be repeated at the November LU meeting and more extensive outreach should be undertaken to inform community residents about this initiative.

- 4) **Old Business**
No Old Business
- 5) **New Business**
No New Business

The meeting was adjourned at 8:19 PM.

Submitted by Nicholas Martinez and Wayne Benjamin