

LAND USE COMMITTEE

RESOLUTION SUPPORTING PRESERVATION OF THE SCENIC VIEWS OF THE PALISADES

February 6, 2013

WHEREAS: The Palisades is a line of steep cliffs along the west side of the lower Hudson River stretching from Jersey City, New Jersey to Nyack, New York. They rise nearly vertically from near the edge of the Hudson River to a height of approximately 300 feet at Weehawken, New Jersey and gradually rise to a height of 540 feet near their northern terminus. Originally the cliffs may have reached 1,000 feet in height; and

WHEREAS: The Lenape, native people of North America, called the cliffs Weehawken, which roughly translates to “rocks that look like rows of trees”. Weehawken is the also the name of a town at the top of the cliffs across from Manhattan. The Palisades is among the most dramatic geological features in the vicinity of New York City. From Fort Lee, New Jersey north they are part of the Palisades Interstate Park and were designated a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service in 1983; and

WHEREAS: Efforts to protect and preserve the Palisades began in the mid- to late-1800s when 20-foot high billboards advertising medicines and other products threatened to destroy the scenic cliffs. The Palisades was also heavily quarried for railroad ballast, which also contributed to local preservation efforts. In 1898 alone more than three tons of dynamite was used to bring down the Washington Head and Indian Head sections of the cliffs in Fort Lee. In 1899 work spearheaded by the New Jersey Federation of Women’s Clubs led to the creation of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, which was authorized to acquire the land between Fort Lee, New Jersey and Piermont, New York, and then in 1906 to Stony Point, New York; and

WHEREAS: In the 1930s John D. Rockefeller, Jr. donated 700 acres atop a 13-mile stretch of the Palisades for the purpose of preserving the land from any use inconsistent with the Palisades Interstate Park and preserving the Palisades itself. Rockefeller also donated 67 acres of the land in northern Manhattan, across from the Palisades, for the construction of Fort Tryon Park and set aside four acres at its northern end for Cloisters Museum, a medieval art museum that is part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the “Met”) and was created in large part through donations from the Rockefeller family; and

WHEREAS: Washington Heights and Inwood has a particular connection to the protection and preservation of parks and scenic views. Its street pattern was designed around parks and scenic views and was intended as a critique of Manhattan’s neutral grid, which terminates at West 155th Street. The Manhattan grid ignored and altered the island’s natural topography; and

WHEREAS: LG Electronics USA, Inc. (“LG”) proposes to build a new 143-foot-high headquarters tower in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey that would rise above the tree line of the Palisades. The site is almost directly across the Hudson River from the Fort Tryon Park and the Cloisters. The tower would be visible from the entire western half of the park, including the Cloisters, and from Wave Hill, a public garden and cultural center in The Bronx that was founded by the first chair of the New Jersey State Federation of Women’s Clubs, and by several thousand residents and visitors on the east side of the Hudson River. It would also be visible from Fort Washington and Inwood Hill Parks, which are known for their rugged naturalistic quality, open vistas of the Hudson River and the dramatic backdrop of the undeveloped Palisades; and

WHEREAS: The design of LG’s proposed project does not respect the integrity of the Palisades as a National Natural Landmark and would undermine a century of efforts to preserve and protect the scenic views and natural environment of the Palisades. It would significantly compromise the public’s experience of the Palisades from properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places including The Little Red Lighthouse, Fort Tryon Park and The Cloisters and would detract significantly from Fort Tryon Park, which is a New York City Scenic Landmark in large part because of its unobstructed views of the Hudson River and the Palisades; and

WHEREAS: The site of LG’s proposed project is 27 acres and is large enough to accommodate a headquarters building that is more horizontal and does not rise above the tree line. However, LG is one of the largest taxpayers in Englewood Cliffs and its development plans were accommodated by local government by the granting of a zoning variance to exempt the proposed project from 35-foot height limit; and

WHEREAS: LG’s proposed development has prompted conservationists, including environmental lawyer Larry Rockefeller, grandson of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Scenic Hudson, the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the New Jersey State Federation of Women’s Clubs, and local New Jersey residents to launch a lobbying effort to preserve the unspoiled view of the northern Palisades. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Fort Tryon Park Trust, New Yorkers for Parks, New York Restoration Project, the Historic Districts Council, the Preservation League of New York State, and the National Association of Olmstead Parks also have written letters to LG asking that it reconsider the design of its new headquarters so it does not pierce the tree line of the Palisades. Three former Executive Directors of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission have also written to LG’s chief executive officer urging the company to be a good corporate citizen; and

WHEREAS: Advocates for the preservation of the Palisades and its scenic views are not opposed to the development of LG’s headquarters, only to the design as it is currently proposed. A redesigned building will not adversely impact the economic development benefits Englewood Cliffs derives from LG as a major taxpayer and employer; and

WHEREAS: On February 6, 2013 a representative of the Met attended the meeting of Community Board 12-Manhattan’s Land Use Committee to discuss the issues posed by LG’s proposed project and the actions taken to-date to engage LG in discussions concerning the redesign of the project. **Now, therefore, be it**

RESOLVED: Community Board 12-Manhattan supports the efforts of local stakeholders, the Fort Tryon Park Trust and the Cloisters, and other interested parties and stakeholders to advocate for the design of LG’s new headquarters to be modified in order to protect the scenic views of the Palisades, respect its environmental heritage as a National Natural Landmark, which John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and others sought to forever preserve and calls upon our City, State and federal elected officials to also aggressively advocate for the project to be redesigned.

This resolution passed by the following votes:

Committee Members:	5-0-0
Other Board Members:	1-0-0
Members of the Public	6-0-0