

LAND USE COMMITTEE – MEETING MINUTES

June 14, 2017

Committee Members Present

Wayne Benjamin, Chair
Andrea Kornbluth, Asst. Chair
Anita Barberis
James Berlin
Isaiah Bing
Steve Simon

Committee Members Excused

Jason Compton
Osi Kaminer
Jonathan Reyes
Carlos Suero

Board Members Present

Chris Ventura
Angelina Ramirez
Sara Fisher

Public Member Present

Public Member Excused

Vivian Ducat

Staff: Ebenezer Smith

Guests: Carmen Ramirez, Josey Ventura, Timothy Frasca, Alba Taveras, Cesar Taveras, Marshall Douglas, Pat Courtney, Phil Simpson, Jenny Wollock, Jacob Wollock, Katherine Wollock, Nathan Wollock, Bev Solow, Marin Conaughty, Zoya Kocur, Jeanne Ruskin, V. Ranelli, Erica Garcia, Victoria Sadoff, Paul Epstein, Peter Higgins, Richard C., Jeanie Dubnau, Candida Uraga, Migdalia Santos, Siita Karkala, Lupe Mariscal, Brendan Krisel, Eva Okada, Crystal Lopez, Amelio Benitez, Jessica Brunacini, Daniel Pincus, Amanda Vasquez, Migdalia El-Saghir, Carmen Mendez, Paula Korsko, Jessica Martinez, Gretchen deChellis, Barbara Connolly, Denise Rickles, Lisseth Trinidad, Kimberly Williams, Richard Pitis, Elizabeth Bernard, Crimilda Reyez, Josefa Jorge, Luisa Garcia, Aaron Scott, Kristin Norderval, Fr. Felix Reyes, Adele Oltman, Paula Segal, Jose Rosario, Judith A., Michelle Kohut, Bennett Melzak, Luisa Perez, Melanie Rodriguez, David Thom, Ryan Mitchell, Nancy Bruning, Allegra LeGrande, Gwendolyn R. Chambrun, Jose Carrasco, Karla Fisk, Nayma Silver, Carole Mulligan, Abigail Savitch-Lew, Susanna Schaller, Chris Nickell, Cheramie Mondesire, Maya Bhardwaj, Alexandra Provo, J. Calderon, Yanilcia Espinal, Oneida Castro, Thomas Hall, Alex Pasch, Rucesteri Hidalgo, Elaine Hill, Jim Wilson, Karen Samberg, Renzo Moyeno, Deborah Cardona, Amelia Torres, Paloma Lara, Robert Kleinbardt, Diane Ninos, Tiffany Lee, Grant McKeown, Amla Sanghvi, Florie Charles, and others (illegible).

1. The meeting of the Land Use Committee (“Land Use” or the “Committee”), held in the ground floor conference facilities of Allen Hospital, was called to order at 7:20 PM. Chair Benjamin made the following opening statements:
 - a. At the May 2017 Land Use meeting, the New York City Economic Development Corporation (“NYCEDC”) Inwood NYC Team made a presentation on past efforts to rezone the Inwood area, starting in Sherman Creek and the area east of Tenth Avenue. The current proposal is more comprehensive, adding contextual zoning to the area that is west of Nagle Avenue/Tenth Avenue and north of Dyckman Street.
 - b. This meeting is a charrette (design workshop) led by NYCEDC facilitators to discuss existing built conditions, what is allowed under current zoning, what sorts of districts the community would like to see in the contextual zoning area, and other design issues related to the proposed Inwood rezoning. Attendees will participate in small group discussions with a facilitator and a note-taker in each group, and will report on key discussion points at the end of the session.
 - c. Unfortunately, the space provided by the Allen Pavilion for the meeting could not accommodate all of the attendees, and some people were unable to enter the room (the legal capacity of the room is 80 people, over 150 people were accommodated). Care will be taken in selecting off-site meeting locations in the future.
 - d. Community Board 12M (“CB12M”) is on hiatus during the months of July and August, but the Committee will hold a special meeting in July. This meeting was originally intended to include only a report from NYCEDC on the results of the charrette, but it must now be expanded to include a public hearing on the recently certified private application to rezone 112 and 114 Seaman Avenue and adjacent lots. According to Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (“ULURP”) rules, CB12M has 60 days from the date of certification to submit its comments and recommendations to the Borough President and City Planning Commission (“CPC”) for further review.

- i. The meeting is scheduled for July 6, but several community members expressed the opinion that this is too close to the July 4 holiday. Chair Benjamin will poll Committee members to see if a sufficient number would be available to achieve quorum if the meeting were held the following week.
 - ii. 112 and 114 Seaman Avenue are located within the proposed contextual zoning area, so the charrette discussion is relevant to the consideration of that proposal as well.
 - iii. A community member stated that 112 and 114 Seaman Avenue are currently being demolished, and it appears that asbestos removal is taking place without notice to the surrounding buildings.
- 2. Summary of Charrette Discussions.
 Roughly 150 participants met in twelve groups. At the conclusion of the charrette each group was asked to select a spoke person and share with all attendees the key points discussed. The principal conclusions of the groups are summarized as follows:
 - a. The zoning districts in the contextual area should be R7A. This designation best reflects the current character of the neighborhood. Less dense areas should be down-zoned (for example, an R5A designation on W. 217th Street would reflect that block's current built form.)
 - b. Any affordable housing created by the rezoning should be permanently affordable, and affordability should be determined on the basis of Inwood income levels. Affordable housing should be available to the lowest local income levels (\$15,000 - \$20,000/year). The Area Median Income ("AMI") encompasses too broad an area, and does not reflect conditions in Inwood.
 - c. Preservation of existing affordable (i.e., rent-regulated) housing needs to be a priority. Speculative acquisitions of rental buildings are increasing in anticipation of the proposed rezoning, and more tenants are experiencing harassment and pressure to leave. Low-income and elderly residents are particularly at risk. The rezoning proposal will actually lead to a net loss of affordable units, as more apartments are deregulated without being replaced by the limited number of MIH units.
 - d. The contextual zoning area should be extended south to W. 193rd Street, and north to include the Columbia University sports facilities and the hospital.
 - e. More affordable housing is needed, but Mandatory Inclusionary Housing ("MIH") is an inadequate mechanism for achieving this goal. The affordable housing created by MIH is outweighed by the large influx of market-rate units that will contribute to community displacement.
 - f. Small businesses are already experiencing rent pressure, and will be squeezed out by rezoning. Local businesses should be protected from excessive rent increases.
 - g. Any increase in housing capacity must be accompanied by complete infrastructure studies, and an overhaul of antiquated and/or overextended equipment and systems. Current utility and transportation systems are not equipped to handle a population increase of up to 75%.
 - h. The area's historic fabric and tradition of affordable housing for working-class residents needs to be recognized.
 - i. The renovation of vacant buildings for use as affordable housing should take priority over new construction.
 - j. The neighborhood needs fewer nightclubs and bars, and more of the types of business that sustain the community, such as laundromats, supermarkets, and diners.
 - k. The ethnic and economic diversity of the neighborhood needs to be preserved.
 - l. The Inwood library is a critical community asset that should not be sold or demolished.
 - m. Regarding the commercial corridors on Dyckman Street, Broadway, and 207th Street, there were some calls to preserve the low-rise, small-town feel, and some to consider building some of the 1-2 story buildings higher (but within R7A limits) to accommodate housing and retail.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Submitted by Andrea Kornbluth.