

LAND USE COMMITTEE - MEETING MINUTES

February 1, 2017

Committee Members Present

Wayne Benjamin, Chair
Anita Barberis
Steve Simon
Isaiah Bing
Osi Kaminer
Karen Arthur
Jim Berlin
Jason Compton
Carlos Suero

Committee Members Absent

Andrea Kornbluth, Asst. Chair (Exc.)
Jonathan Reyes (Excused)

Board Members Present

Public Member Present

Vivian Ducat

Staff: Ebenezer Smith

Guests: Nancy Preston, Martin Collins, Katherine O’Sullivan, P. Courtney, Jake Dell, Steven Heller – Manhattan Legal Services, Nina Bernstein, Cheramie Mondesire, Karla Fisk, Marshall Douglas, Jessica Matei, Jennifer Bristol, John Richards, Eric Umble, Danita Nichols, Graham Ciraulo, Leah Durner, Sara Fisher, Rita Gorman, Kevin Kunkel, Gwendolyn R. Chambrun, Phil Simpson, Nancy R., Barry Donaldson, Allegra LeGrande

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:11 PM. Land Use Committee (“Land Use” or the “Committee”) Chair Wayne Benjamin began the meeting by welcoming committee members and guests, asking Committee members to introduce themselves, and welcoming Carlos Suero as a new Committee member.
2. Inwood Library Development Project - Brainstorming. Chair Benjamin asked Committee members and attendees who participated in the recent workshops hosted by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and the New York Public Library (NYPL) to share their comments, which are summarized below.
 - i) The 1/25/17 workshop seemed disorganized and the conversation was acrimonious.
 - ii) The workshops did not offer a real opportunity for the community to provide comments, everything seemed a bit pre-determined, no explanation of what was going on, not organized.
 - iii) The project is presented as a new idea, but it is not, it is included in a 2014 report.
 - iv) Why are affordable housing and the library being linked and discussed together?
 - v) A group discussion was needed, not one-on-one discussions.
 - vi) Affordable housing and the library are separate issues. This project seems to fall into a pattern of selling-off libraries
 - vii) The workshops were presented similar to EDC’s workshops on the proposed Inwood Rezoning; i.e.: presented as an opportunity for the community to provide input, but the actual workshops are not organized to facilitate this. They seem organized to ask the community to pick from among pre-determined choices, not articulate their priorities and preferences.
 - viii) The 1/31/17 workshop had a large audience, but insufficient Spanish translators.
 - ix) If the Robin Hood Foundation will only contribute \$5,000,000 to a project that includes the library and affordable housing, is this real philanthropy?

- x) The workshops were deceptively named, there was no real discussion.
- xi) How can one of the most heavily used branches of the NYPL be replaced, even temporarily with a storefront?
- xii) Questions were not answered. In some cases, elected officials present and/or HPD and NYPL reps walked away from people asking questions.
- xiii) An objective, third-party facilitator was needed; no one trusts the City.
- xiv) The community is being asked to rubber stamp a decision that has already been made.
- xv) The process is moving too fast – with undue speed and haste. Next steps are not clear.
- xvi) The examples of residential buildings presented did not accurately represent the neighborhood; buildings taller than six stories were over-represented.
- xvii) An attendee learned of the workshops through a real estate industry email. Why is the real estate industry in the loop on this initiative if, as HPD stated, no developer has been selected?
- xviii) An accurate metric is needed to define what affordable means in Washington Heights and Inwood.
- xix) The flawed structure of the workshops argues for more community involvement.
- xx) Given the financial markets and other concerns, is there any guarantee that the project will proceed or will not be delayed?

Chair Benjamin shared with the Committee and attendees a list of questions and comments that he generated concerning the proposed project. The list, presented below, was generated to spur discussion for this evening's brainstorming session and for consideration by HPD and NYPL as they work to advance the proposed project and the associated Request for Proposals (RFP).

Background:

- How/why was it decided to redevelop the Inwood Library as a mixed-use building?
- Over what time frame did HPD and NYPL discuss the proposed project?
- Were other parties included / involved in the decision making?
- Has HPD explored development/redevelopment of other City-owned/controlled sites, including vacant infill sites, in CD12?
- What arrangements have been made to provide library services during construction?
- Will temporary library services be provided in a single location or multiple locations?

Site Disposition:

- Will the site be conveyed for development subject to a Land Disposition Agreement, a Site Development Agreement or both?
- Will site control be conveyed, pursuant to the RFP process, directly to a developer or to a third-party such as the Housing Partnership
- Will the RFP require development teams to include a "community sponsor" (typically a local CBO experienced with housing issues to assist with outreach, the lottery process, sales/leasing, etc.?)
- Will the RFP require or encourage joint ventures between for-profit and not-for-profit developers?
- During construction will the site remain a single zoning lot with any subdivision taking place after completion / issuance of a TCO?
- Will a long term, financeable ground lease be considered?
- Upon completion will the building be subject to a condominium plan whereby the library and residential components become separate legal entities with individual deeds and ownership?

Financing:

- What value/acquisition cost will be assigned to the site? Will HPD/NYPL require developer to pay market value or will they require a payment of only a portion of the market value with the balance being converted to a subordinate land lien to help subsidize development cost and enforce affordability requirements?
- What HPD, HDC or other public sector financing programs will be used to finance development of the project?
- What is the affordability period required by the public sector financing programs?
- Will any the provision of any subordinate land lien or capital grant funds be used to extend the required affordability period?
- What Capital Grant funds (Reso A funds) are or will be allocated to the project?
- What is the per unit level of subsidy?
- Will the RFP limit the developer fee/profit?
- What real estate tax benefits will be offered to the project?

Design and Planning:

- The existing residential buildings all or nearly all pre-date the current zoning. What type of urban design criteria will be included in the RFP? Will the building design be required to match the predominant street wall height and then set-back for any additional stories?
- An as-of-right building that maximizes the site's FAR and has 70% site coverage for the residential component would rise to 8 to 9 stories. Will the RFP encourage buildings that conform to or adhere closely to existing FAR limits?
- Will the library component of the project be built full with the roof of the library serving as outdoor space for the residential building?
- Will the RFP encourage building design that is sympathetic to building materials, colors and fenestration?
- Will the RFP require or encourage a unit mix that includes more than 50% two and three-bedroom units?
- What minimum square footage will be required for each unit type? Will units that are larger than the minimum required SF be encouraged – especially for any studio and one-bedroom units?
- Will consideration be given to allocating a percentage of the units to be developed to seniors?
- Will the building have a community room? A laundry room that is not located in the basement?
- Will the library and residential entrances have prominent, separate and distinct identities?
- Will the elevator bank and lobby of the residential building be visible from the street?

Affordability:

- According to the most recent Furman Center Housing Report (2015), in 2014 the median household income in CD12 was \$45,214; 63% of households in CD12 earn \$60,000 or less and nearly 50% (47% to be exact) earn \$40,000 or less. The breakdown of household income for CD12 in as follows: 25% earning \$20,000 or less, 22% earning \$20,001 to \$40,000, 18% earning \$40,001 to \$60,000, 21% earning \$60,001 to \$100,000, 13% earning \$101,000 to \$250,000 and 2% earning more than \$250,000.
- Given CD12's median household income and household income range, and the concentration of households earning \$60,000 or less, the project should target affordability tiers so that 100% of the units to be developed are affordable to households earning generally between \$20,000 and \$60,000.

Sustainability:

- Will the RFP require the building to be designed to LEED or similar standards?

3. Holy Trinity Church Inwood. Rev. Jake Dell discussed development plans underway at Holy Trinity Church. Rev. Dell was appointed interim Vicar about one year ago; he was joined by Barry Donaldson of Barry Donaldson Architects and by Kevin Kunkel, warden of Holy Trinity Church who is a resident of Inwood. Holy Trinity Church was founded in Harlem in 1868 and moved to Inwood in 1927. Holy Trinity has occupied a site on the southeast corner of Seaman Avenue and Cumming Street for the past 80 years. Its full build-plan was never finished; only the parish house, an auditorium and a "temporary" sanctuary for worship were completed. The grand gothic cathedral planned was never built. The parish house was designed by John Russell Pope, a graduate of Columbia University and the architect of the National Archives and Administration Building, the West Building of the National Gallery of Art and the Jefferson Memorial, all in Washington D.C. Holy Trinity also houses the Pied Piper Children's Theater, which operates as a ministry of the church.

In the past few years, Holy Trinity has wrestled with how to continue; its operations are not financially sustainable. Its buildings are either obsolete or in need of substantial renovation. The costs required to replace or renovate them is out of reach for its 30-person congregation. Holy Trinity is therefore exploring ways it can leverage the value of its land. It is working closely with the Episcopal Diocese of New York, its parent organization, and, last September, voted to become a mission of the Diocese, effectively turning over the property deed to the Diocese. Rev. Dell and a small group of congregation members will attend a meeting of the property task force of the Trustees of the Diocese of New York to begin the conversation about developing the land and the respective roles of Holy Trinity and the Diocese in the project.

The development project will be guided by the mission and vision of the Diocese and Holy Trinity Church, not by a developer. The Diocese is committed to staying and growing in Inwood. Holy Trinity's goal is to operate a church and community space in Inwood that is safe, accessible, and well-maintained. It has engaged an architect, Barry Donaldson, to help evaluate development options. The project is in a very early planning stage; no details are currently available on its size, program, cost, etc., although Mr. Donaldson said they envisioned a building that would be no more than 10 stories tall. The site is large and among the considerations guiding the planning process are stabilizing finances and operations; maintaining open, green areas; affordable housing; ADA compliance / accessibility; and retaining the John Russell Pope building.

Holy Trinity Church was applauded by the Committee and attendees for its open and transparent engagement of the community early in the process, noting that the church's outreach is a model for how we can all work together and suggesting that HPD and the NYPL follow its example.

4. Old Business. Committee member Steve Simon discussed the email circulated by the Historic Districts Council concerning the landmark designation of the Loew's 175th Street Theater being in danger due to Councilman Rodriguez's lack of support and urged attendees to contact the councilman to urge him to support the designation.

5. New Business.

Community resident Sally Fisher inquired about a change in regulations that permits the MTA to ignore New York City zoning when it develops properties it owns, even if the development is not used for a transportation purpose. It is the understanding of the Committee that MTA is not and has never been required to comply with New York City zoning. Sally will investigate further.

Steven Heller, a staff attorney with Manhattan Legal Services located at 5030 Broadway, introduced himself. Mr. Heller's contact information is 646-442-3197 and sheller@lsnyc.org.

6. After further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 8:59 PM.