

LAND USE COMMITTEE – MEETING MINUTES

March 4, 2015

Committee members Present

Wayne Benjamin, Chair
Anita Barberis, Asst. Chair
Isaiah Bing
Osi Kaminer
Jason Miller
Arlene Schulman
Steve Simon

Committee Members Absent

Board Members Present

Richard Lewis
Elizabeth Lehmann

Public Member

Vivian Ducat

Public Member Absent

Staff: Debra Blow

Guests: Sybil Young – NYC Parks, Jonathan Mellon – HHT/NYC Parks, Eldwin Fernandez, Dario Quinsac, Zead Ramadan, Martin Collins

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:10pm. Land Use Committee (“Land Use” or the “Committee”) Chair Wayne Benjamin began the meeting by welcoming committee members and guests. He stated that the presentation that Dan Cohen of the Housing Partnership was scheduled to make at tonight’s meeting as a follow-up to the presentation that he made before the Committee in December 2014 concerning the air rights transfer, now rezoning proposal, for Broadway to incentivize the development of affordable housing was cancelled because the Department of City Planning (“DCP”) requested further discussion. A new date for the presentation has not been established. Chair Benjamin also stated that Community Board 12-Manhattan (“CB12M”) received a Notice of Receipt of a ULURP Application for 474 West 159th Street on February 27, 2015; Land Use will not schedule the application for a public hearing until it has been certified by DCP and formally referred by it to CB12M for review. The application involves the acquisition of the building located at the site by the Administration for Children’s Services, which has operated a child care center there since the early 1970s. The acquisition or leasing of property by a city agency requires a ULURP action.

Prior to the meeting being called to order, Debra Blow advised that Tamara Rivera has resigned from CB12M; she therefore is no longer a member of the Committee.

2. Sybil Young of the NYC Parks Department (“NYC Parks”) and Jonathan Mellon of the Historic House Trust (“HHT”) presented the air conditioning installation project proposed for the Octagon Room of the Morris-Jumel Mansion (“MJM”). MJM is a historic house and museum located in Roger Morris Park between 160th and 162nd Streets, Edgecombe Avenue and Jumel Terrace; it is also located within the Jumel Terrace Historic District. Chair Benjamin advised that he is a MJM Trustee and would not vote on any action taken by the Committee. Sybil began the presentation by providing background on MJM’s history, noting that it is the oldest residential structure in Manhattan and has the distinction of serving as General George Washington’s headquarters during the Battle of Harlem Heights in the early part of the Revolutionary War. She continued by discussing the proposed air conditioning project (the “Project”), stating that most of the work, i.e. the air conditioning equipment to be installed, will be in the basement, one basement window will need to be replaced with a louver, six floor vents will need to be installed in the Octagon Room and a condenser unit will be installed outside. The condenser will be located on the east side of MJM, near a rock outcropping that will partially shield it from view. Evergreen shrubs will also be planted to further shield it, and it will be enclosed by a wood screen, made of either Douglas Fir or Red Cedar, similar in design to the wood lattice at MJM’s porch. The floor vents will be made of wood and will be stained to match the flooring. A pipe vent will also be installed from the basement to the exterior at the east side of MJM. NYC Parks has confirmed that the electrical service at MJM is adequate to accommodate the load to be generated by the Project.

Jonathan Mellon continued the presentation noting that the Octagon Room is used for events, it gets uncomfortable in the summer and the intent of the Project is to make it a more attractive, useable venue for meetings and events during the summer in order to enhance its ability to generate earned income for MJM. Mr. Mellon stated that introducing air conditioning into a historic building is a sensitive matter, but since most of the work is in the

basement, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (“LPC”) could have approved the Project at the staff level; the placement of the condenser outside of the building is the aspect of the Project that triggered the requirement for review and approval by the LPC Commissioners. He also stated that NYC Parks and HHT have consulted with an expert on the installation of air conditioning in historic houses, only the Octagon Room will be air conditioned, the doors to the Octagon Room allow it to be closed-off from the rest of the house, and that an 18-inch deep trench must be dug to connect the equipment in the house to the exterior condenser. He further stated that humidity is more of a concern than over-cooling the house and that a dehumidifier will be installed in the basement.

HHT is a not-for-profit organization associated with NYC Parks; it will act as the general contractor for the Project and has the ability to invite only qualified contractors to bid. The scope of the Project also includes an archeological survey, but since the site of the exterior work was raised and filled in 1930 it is not anticipated that any artifacts will be found. The controls for the air conditioning system will be inside MJM, but not necessarily in the Octagon Room – a location has not been finalized. Financing for the project was made possible by capital funds allocated to MJM a few years ago by then Councilman Robert Jackson.

The Committee and guests present further discussed the Project with the representatives of NYC Parks and HHT. It was recommended that a the dehumidifier be self-draining as opposed to requiring manual draining and that care be taken to ensure that the dehumidifier and the air conditioning equipment be compatible and work together. The Project is scheduled to be considered by LPC at its April 7, 2015 meeting. **After further discussion a motion was made (A. Schulman) and seconded (O. Kaminer) supporting the Project. Chair Benjamin re-stated that since he is a MJM Trustee he will not vote due to conflict. The motion passed based on the following votes:**

Land Use Committee:	6-0-0-1
Other Board Members:	2-0-0
Members of the Public:	1-0-0

3. The Committee and guests informally discussed the Broadway rezoning proposal. Topics of discussion included but were not limited to the potential for over-building; the appropriateness of proposed building heights and density; the impact of the rezoning proposal on infrastructure, public services, schools, etc.; the role of Community Boards in the ULURP process: contextual zoning; striking a balance between growth and preservation; the familiarity of the DCP with our community and its planning and land use goals and objectives; the neighborhood planning and land use study completed by CB12M and City College, and CB12M’s track record with respect to evaluating ULURP and BSA applications and communicating its recommendations, concerns and comments. It was agreed that it would be more appropriate and effective to have further discussion of the proposal at the to-be-rescheduled presentation by the Housing Partnership and that a representative of DCP should be invited to attend that meeting so they can hear our concerns first-hand.
4. After further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Wayne Benjamin