



# THE CITY OF NEW YORK MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD 3

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## **July 11, 2012 City Planning Commission Submitted Testimony of Dominic Berg, former Community Board Chair, In Support With Conditions of the Seward Park Mixed Use Project ULURP**

Good day City Planning Commission Members. My name is Dominic Berg. Up until a June 30th, I had been the Chairperson for Community Board 3, Manhattan since July 1, 2008. It was during my leadership that the application before you came to fruition. We overcame an acrimonious debate that had left the Lower East Side divided for over 40 years. It took a careful and methodical four-phase process over three-and-a-half years that led to a strong unanimous vote to approve the Seward Park Mixed Use Project with conditions this past May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Phase One started in October 2008 and gained steam in January 2009. During this time the CB's Land Use, Housing, Zoning, Public and Private Housing Committee ("the Committee") grew to include a range of community stakeholders that had historically been on opposite sides of the table. However, there was a civil tenor that allowed us to forge ahead with vignettes, brainstorming sessions, and eventually a set of Guiding Principles, which were adopted in June 2009. It was clear that there was a will for the first time in six years to find a compromise to turn the parking lots on the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area (SPURA) site into housing, commercial, community, and open space. The first step in a very transparent process was started by adding a section on the Community Board 3, Manhattan's web site to document and archive these early meetings and decisions.

Phase Two is best characterized as the Guidelines and Consensus Phase. The eight months following the adoption of the June 2009 Guiding Principles proved to make slow progress while the Committee tried to take care of other business, so it was agreed to start meeting once a month for a dedicated SPURA meeting. It was also during this time period that the committee asked me to formally invite the Economic Development Corporation, Housing Preservation & Development, and City Planning to become engaged partners in the process. In April 2010, the EDC hired a respected urban planner to facilitate what started as four planned meetings, but was extended to seven.

All of these meetings had Mandarin, Cantonese, and Spanish translators, except for one that did not have a Mandarin translator. No one from the public ever expressed an inability to participate due to a language or any other kind of barrier. Most of these meetings had a public session before each plenary session and often allowed the public to provide input during some points in the meeting. The meeting locations were held in various parts of the district in order to capture a diverse constituency, including the Lower East Side and Chinatown.

All of the discussion and input, along with the June 2009 Principles, led to draft guidelines being presented for thorough review over our last three facilitated meetings. This was a uniquely

transparent point in the process for a Community Board. Each meeting yielded a more refined version of the document. The public was able to submit written comments via email before each meeting. These comments were collated and organized and then addressed during the meeting, along with Committee members' own input. As the document was updated or comments were made during the meeting there were dual projectors that showed the original guidelines and their changes. Finally, on January 24, 2011, a unanimous vote was taken to approve formal guidelines, which would be our compass as we entered the Design and ULURP phases. Over 43 years of division had been ended!

Phase Three was a continuation of the community's strong involvement in the process as we tackled the design for the project site. We adopted the "Urban Design Principles for Sites 1-6 (those South of Delancey Street)" in June 2011 after four intense meetings that included giving the public and committee members the opportunity to move around Styrofoam buildings in order to imagine different designs. We also called for priority hiring requirements for CB 3 residents in stores with over 15,000 square feet. The end of this phase concluded with us commenting on the Environmental Impact Scoping Draft at EDC's hearing, which included a call for some of the key points that were reflected in our ULURP conditions and have been mentioned here today.

Phase Four was the ULURP Phase, which started in March of this year. It was heartening to see many of our January and June 2011 Guiding and Urban Design Principles reflected in the ULURP. It showed that the City had been a good partner and listened closely, however, there were very stark and significant principles that still had not been met. A Town Hall meeting on April 18 and our May committee meeting reflected a unanimous viewpoint that the City must offer permanent affordable housing as part of the final plan. 48 speakers spoke at the Town Hall meeting and we accepted email submissions as well. There were multilingual translators at the Town Hall and the May committee and full board meetings, which also included public sessions. The agreement by the City to provide an unprecedented CB role in the RFP process as well as their acquiescence to provide permanently affordable housing led the board to vote unanimously, again, for the fourth and final major vote, in favor of the ULURP with important conditions that others will stress remain today.