

2
3 January 28, 2014

4
5 Patrick Foye
6 Executive Director
7 Port Authority of New York/New Jersey
8 225 Park Avenue South
9 New York, NY 10003

10
11 **Re: 551 Ninth Avenue**
12 **Fresh Food Use**
13 **Stiles Farmers Market & Big Apple Grocery**

14
15 Dear Mr. Foye:

16
17 At the January 16, 2014 meeting of Manhattan Community Board 4's (MCB4) Housing,
18 Health and Human Services (HH&HS) Committee, the committee heard public
19 comments regarding the closure of Stiles Farmers Market (Stiles) at 569 Ninth Avenue
20 on December 31st, 2013. The market represents the only remaining affordable green
21 market in the neighborhood and was a local institution prior to its closure. Community
22 members from the neighborhood and far beyond spoke passionately in favor of relocating
23 Stiles to the former Lamston's/Project FIND space at 551 Ninth Avenue. The 551 Ninth
24 Avenue space is owned and operated by the Port Authority of New York/New Jersey
25 (Port Authority) and most recently housed the Project FIND Coffeehouse, which was
26 relocated to the basement of Holy Cross Church with assistance from the Port Authority
27 in 2012.

28
29 **History of Ninth Avenue Markets**

30 Historically, Ninth Avenue between West 35th and West 45th Street, known as Paddy's
31 Market, housed a variety of both open air and enclosed markets selling produce,
32 groceries, meat and regional specialties. As recently as ten years ago there were three
33 produce markets, three bakeries, two fish markets, four green grocers, four butchers,
34 three supermarkets and multiple food specialty stores. Currently there are three bakeries,
35 one fish market, one small supermarket and no produce market and a handful of small
36 specialty stores. The closest supermarket to the area has limited produce at high prices
37 and inconsistent quality.

38
39 Until recently, the primary grocery in the area was a pair of stores located at 569 and 571
40 Ninth Avenue, between West 41st and West 42nd Streets. Stiles Farmers Market provided
41 quality, affordable produce and Big Apple Meat Market provided meats, dairy and
42 groceries. These establishments served the many small tenement buildings between West
43 35th and West 50th Streets and larger developments on West 42nd Street, especially
44 Manhattan Plaza with its 1684 apartments.

45

46 Due to the redevelopment of the site on the southwest corner of West 42nd Street and
47 Ninth Avenue as a hotel, Big Apple Meat Market was closed in early 2013 and
48 temporarily relocated to a small commercial space at 529 Ninth Avenue. This space is
49 half the size of the original store and is divided between the ground floor and cellar of the
50 space. The cellar is accessed through a steep staircase on the interior of the space which
51 is very difficult for the elderly and disabled to maneuver. The space is not ADA
52 accessible.

53
54 Stiles was not part of the initial development plans for the West 42nd Street and 9th
55 Avenue site, however in November 2013 the site was sold resulting in the closure of
56 Stiles on December 31, 2013. Stiles has another, smaller, market tent on West 52nd Street
57 between Eighth and Ninth Avenue. The West 52nd Street market serves the northern
58 portion of the neighborhood, however its distance from the West 30s and 40s makes it
59 difficult to use, especially for the elderly and those with impaired mobility.

60
61 **Save our Stiles**

62 In response to the closing of Stiles, the community responded quickly and passionately.
63 A website and mailing list have been created (www.marketsofhellskitchen.com) and to
64 date the mailing list has 100 plus members. Community residents attended the January
65 16, 2014 meeting of MCB4's HH&HS Committee with a standing room only crowd of
66 approximately 80 community residents. All spoke about the need to keep affordable
67 produce in the community and made an impassioned plea for assistance in finding Stiles a
68 new home. Speakers supporting Stiles represented a broad swath of the neighborhood and
69 beyond. Those that spoke represented:

- 70
- | | | | |
|----|--|----|--------------------------------|
| 71 | • Manhattan Plaza (1,684 apartments) | 80 | • West 42 nd Street |
| 72 | • Geffner House (307 units of supportive | 81 | • West 43 rd Street |
| 73 | housing) | 82 | • West 44 th Street |
| 74 | • Metro Baptist Church and Rauschenbusch | 83 | • West 45 th Street |
| 75 | Metro Ministries | 84 | • West 46 th Street |
| 76 | • West Side Neighborhood Association | 85 | • West 84 th Street |
| 77 | • West 34 th Street | 86 | • Tudor City |
| 78 | • West 35 th Street | 87 | |
- 79

88 The committee was surprised to learn that the market was frequented not only by those in
89 the neighborhood but also by those on the east side and uptown, due to the market's
90 proximity to 42nd Street transit options.

91
92 **551 Ninth Avenue Relocation Site**

93 The 551 Ninth Avenue space was originally the home of a Lamston's 5 and 10 cent store.
94 Once Lamston's closed in the late 1970's the space remained vacant until the early
95 1980's when the rear portion of the site was sectioned off to create the Project FIND
96 Coffeehouse for seniors. In addition to creating the Project FIND space, the Port
97 Authority studied using the front of the space, and space in an adjacent city owned
98 building, for local retail. At that time, the local economy made it difficult to secure local
99 retail tenants for the space.

100 In the mid 1980's the Port Authority responded to homeless issues in the Port Authority
101 Bus Terminal by relocating Project FIND to the front of the 551 Ninth Avenue site and
102 making the rear space available to the West Side Cluster who opened a drop in center
103 called the Open Door. The Open Door center was poorly managed and was subject to
104 many community complaints. The center closed in 2010 when the Port Authority
105 determined that the Open Door space was needed for swing space during construction of
106 a planned office tower development on top of the north terminal of the Port Authority
107 Bus Terminal. In 2012, the Port Authority determined that it needed additional swing
108 space and assisted in the relocation of the Project FIND Coffeehouse to Holy Cross
109 Church on West 42nd Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. The West 41st Street
110 sidewalk between Ninth and Dyer Avenue was also temporarily closed at that time. The
111 office tower plan has not proceeded and the entire 551 Ninth Avenue space remains
112 vacant.

113
114 The market dynamics in the community have changed greatly since the Port Authority
115 study on local retail for 551 Ninth Avenue in the early 1980's. The community now has a
116 strong retail real estate market which has had the unfortunate consequence of driving out
117 many of the traditional fresh food market uses. The lack of affordable fresh food
118 resources in the community has created a food desert in a once well-known regional food
119 market area. The 551 Ninth Avenue site provides a unique opportunity to provide space
120 for both Stiles Farmer's Market and Big Apple Meat Market and use a public resource to
121 balance neighborhood growth with neighborhood preservation. A fresh food market at
122 this location will also serve to activate a reopened West 41st Street sidewalk, especially in
123 consideration of the large housing developments under construction on Tenth Avenue.

124
125 The streets of the West 30's and lower West 40's of Clinton/Hell's Kitchen lost a great
126 deal of housing and businesses due to the construction of the Lincoln Tunnel and Port
127 Authority Bus Terminal between the 1930s and 1970s. While this infrastructure was key
128 for the region, it cost the community over 300 buildings which housed thousands of
129 community residents. By making the 551 Ninth Avenue space available to Stiles and Big
130 Apple Meat Market the Port Authority can be instrumental in bringing back affordable
131 fresh food to the Ninth Avenue market while also providing a key resource for the
132 community and reinforcing the character of Clinton/Hell's Kitchen.

133
134 MCB4 asks that a meeting be arranged with the Port Authority, MCB4 and elected
135 officials to develop a plan to retain local fresh food and market vendors in the
136 community.

137
138 Sincerely,

139
140 Cc: Brad Hoylman, NY State Senator
141 Richard Gottfried, NY State Assemblymember
142 Jerrold Nadler, Congressman
143 Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
144 Corey Johnson, NYC Councilmember