



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4

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J. LEE COMPTON
Chair

ANTHONY M. BORELLI
District Manager

July 28, 2005

Hon. Amanda Burden
Chair
City Planning Commission
22 Reade Street
New York, NY 10007

Re: Public parking garage at 501 West 17th Street - ULURP C 050492 ZSM

Dear Chair Burden:

This application for a special permit for a 2-level, below ground 718-space public parking garage at 501 West 17th Street was presented by representatives of the applicant on July 13, 2005 to the Chelsea Preservation and Planning Committee of the Manhattan Community Board No. 4, which voted 5 in favor, 1 opposed, to recommend approval. A duly noticed public hearing was held on July 27, 2005, prior to the full Board meeting. **The Board voted to approve the special permit: 26 in favor, 4 opposed, 1 abstaining, and 1 present but not eligible to vote.**

The situation is a complex one. At present the full block site of the proposed garage is almost wholly occupied by a 377-space public surface parking lot that is almost completely leased by the Drug Enforcement Administration, located immediately to the south, for its vehicles, employee vehicles, and confiscated vehicles. Text adopted in the recent West Chelsea Rezoning provides for continuance of this use in an accessory parking garage for government vehicles underneath the building to be constructed on this lot. The applicant stated that negotiations with the Federal government are currently underway on these and other uses, including possible increased government parking on this site, but that no final decisions have been reached on any of these matters.

The final use, size, and impacts of the proposed garage are thus uncertain. The experience of the existing parking lot appears to show that an accessory garage on this site of the type at issue would have relatively low impacts on the nearby streets and community in comparison to a true public garage of the same size. The proposed building will also contain above ground the 180-space accessory parking allowed by the Zoning Resolution for its roughly 869 residential units with entrances on 17th and 18th Streets. It is necessary to evaluate the current application taking all possibilities into account, including the maximal situation of a truly public 718-space garage.

That there is a need for this garage seems clear. The EAS for this ULURP states that a minimum of 790 parking spaces will be lost by 2014 within a half-mile radius, and the FEIS for the West

Chelsea Rezoning projects that many other public parking facilities in the larger area are likely to be replaced by new buildings. Many of these are likely to require parking in their turn. Many businesses in the neighborhood have been served by the parking that will be lost, in particular the art galleries that it is the explicit goal of the City and the Community Board to support. These enterprises are already under pressure by real estate prices and the competition for space. Further, the new uses projected for Pier 57 will draw traffic that could be well served by a large garage nearby.

As a result of the West Chelsea Rezoning the character of the block on which the proposed garage is located and the surrounding area will contain a mix of uses, with large residential buildings mingling with existing uses. Since the site is on the westernmost block of 17th Street, between the major thoroughfares of Route 9A and Tenth Avenue, the garage will bring little traffic onto truly residential streets and be compatible with the mixed area.

Two concerns remain from the Board's responses to the West Chelsea rezoning and its EIS. 17th Street is one of the few in Chelsea to offer direct access to the river and the park. The combination on a block little more than 300 feet long of the 30-foot wide entrance to the public garage and the 20-foot wide access to the accessory garage just beyond a short row of townhouses to the west will concentrate turning traffic and diminish the ambiance of the street. Replacing the apparently redundant 17th Street entrance to the accessory garage with a more street-friendly use would improve matters considerably. At the Twelfth Avenue end of 17th Street the long delays and contention projected in the West Chelsea EIS for traffic leaving the Chelsea Piers and the facing traffic exiting the block will be exacerbated by traffic leaving the garage, and there is no reason to put off a solution.

Sincerely,



J. Lee Compton
Chair
Manhattan Community Board No. 4



Edward S. Kirkland
Co-Chair
Chelsea Preservation & Planning Committee



Walter Mankoff
Co-Chair
Chelsea Preservation & Planning Committee

cc: Applicant
Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields
Councilmember Christine Quinn
State Senator Thomas Duane
Assemblymember Richard Gottfried
Assemblymember Deborah Glick
New York City DOT
Hudson River Park Trust