



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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**JEAN-DANIEL NOLAND**

Chair

**ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.**

District Manager

January 3, 2008

Adrian Benepe, Commissioner  
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation  
The Arsenal, Central Park  
830 5th Avenue  
New York, NY 10065

**Re: 18<sup>th</sup> Street Plaza and the High Line**

Dear Commissioner Benepe:

Recently Manhattan Community Board No. 4 (the "Board") has reviewed concept plans and a model for the proposed plaza at the corner of 18<sup>th</sup> Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, including the elevated cantilevered café structure, as part of the overall High Line Design. After considerable discussion, the Board offers its conditional support for the plaza design in concept, but with some concerns and reservations discussed below.

General response

First, let us say that the Board applauds the overall design of the High Line, as presented previously, and looks forward with excitement to the opening of the first section in about a year. It is a design that respects the history of the elevated railway, not to mention the wild growths that have occurred naturally during its disuse – yet is modern and innovative, filled with variety and surprises.

Plans for the 18<sup>th</sup> Street Plaza area were presented briefly at a meeting of the Waterfront & Parks Committee on 8 November 2007, and more thoroughly reviewed and discussed by the same committee on 13 December, and the one thing all could agree on was that it was innovative. However, the reception was mixed regarding certain aspects of the design and it seemed to fall in the category of something people either strongly liked or strongly disliked. Aspects of the design most discussed included the following:

Basic design concept of the elevated café structure and the plaza

The proposed café structure consists of a stark glass rectangle cantilevered improbably over the plaza below, supported by a stark white square tower containing the elevator shaft to both the High Line and the café above. It is located on the northern perimeter of the plaza. A modern staircase at the south end of the plaza, wider at its base than at the top, provides access to the High Line while also providing raised seating facing north toward the café structure. The remainder consists of small ponds, seating and plantings, and the possibility of a concession under the staircase facing south. The overall design is very contemporary, to say the least. The idea that the south side of the café structure could be used as projection screens for special occasions was seen as a positive feature by some. However it was the design of what we have dubbed the "flying café" that produced most of the comments.

Relationship to the existing character of the neighborhood

Some felt that the extremely modern nature of the structure clashed with the predominately red-brick existing architecture of the neighborhood. At the same time, others loved the contrast and modern high-tech look of the design, and noted that the neighborhood is already host to a number of modern buildings in close proximity, with many more on the way. Discussion eventually focused more on the treatments (colors, materials, etc) that might be

used as opposed to the physical architecture (ie: the idea of a “flying” cantilevered structure) and it was agreed that further renderings were needed. A strong message was conveyed to the architects regarding the concerns that might drive the choice of treatments – namely, that the design needs to work in the context of its surroundings. With that caveat, the Board approves the general design conceptually.

#### The need for a café itself, as well as effects of the café on the plaza

The question was raised as to whether a café was needed at all, and the designers responded that this would be the only café on the High Line, given the very narrow nature of the project as a whole. It is worth noting, however, that other opportunities for cafes at the level of the High Line may present themselves as structures are erected adjacent to the High Line. Some suggested that the designers look at other uses such as a High Line museum in the structure, but the designers felt that the space was far too small for a museum. The Department of Parks & Recreation also suggested that the income from a café was an important component of the funding needed to maintain the High Line. In the end, concerns about the café fell into two camps – one that it should not be so up-scale as to be unaffordable for the neighborhood, and the other that it not look like a cheap highway overpass eatery. Without knowing what the café would actually be, its look (All glass? Bright & glaring? Subdued? Signage needed?) would be an important component of the design, and would require careful thought in execution. Finally at least one person was concerned about the effect of the café on limiting sunlight from reaching the plaza below. In the end, the Board’s conditional support is highly dependant on future use issues and the materials employed that could not be addressed by the concept plan presented, and will require further interaction between the Board and Department of Parks & Recreation.

#### Other suggestions

Other suggestions ranged from adding a fountain at the base of the steps, moving the steps to a different location in the plaza, and so forth, all of which were heard by the designers. It was also suggested that the staircase be designed in a manner more consistent with the structure of the High Line itself. It was requested that the Department of Parks & Recreation and the designers return at some point in the future with a more refined design.

#### Conclusion

With regard to the overall design of all sections of the High Line review by the Board, we can say we support it fully and applaud the efforts of the designers. Further, we feel confident that the concerns voiced by the community for the design of the plaza will be respected by the designers and by Department of Parks & Recreation as this process continues. We look forward to continued progress on this important amenity for the residents of Chelsea, Manhattan in general and visitors to our city.

Sincerely,



Jean-Daniel Noland  
Chair Manhattan Community Board 4



John Doswell  
Co-Chair Waterfronts & Parks Committee



John D. Lamb  
Co-Chair Waterfront & Parks Committee

Cc:

Mike Bradley, Department of Parks and Recreation  
Friends of the High Line  
Elected officials