



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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**JEAN-DANIEL NOLAND**  
Chair

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

August 1, 2008

Amanda M. Burden, AICP, Director  
Department of City Planning  
22 Reade Street  
New York, New York 10007

**Re: Sheffield Tower – 322 W. 57<sup>th</sup> St. – Applications N080326ZCM and M0700064AZSM to allow renovation of public plaza and arcades**

Dear Ms. Burden:

Manhattan Community Board 4 is pleased to provide its comments on these applications by the condominium created by Swig Equities LLC for a Chairperson's certification pursuant to ZR Section 37-625 and a modification of a previously approved special permit (CP-22110) to allow the renovation of the public plaza and arcades at the Sheffield Tower.<sup>1</sup>

The applicant presented its plans to the community at meetings of the Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee on May 14, 2008 and July 15, 2008. There was a large turn-out, at both meetings, with residents from many surrounding buildings in attendance, including Sheffield Tower, the Parc Vendome, 310 West 56<sup>th</sup> Street, and 320 West 56<sup>th</sup> Street.

Swig Equities is in the process of converting the Sheffield Tower from a rental building into a condominium. The process has not gone smoothly, and the remaining rental tenants have suffered mightily. Assembly Member Richard Gottfried wrote to you on April 17, 2008 of "Swig's pervasive and persistent misconduct," and urged you to "use special scrutiny while evaluating Swig's applications." Council Member Gale Brewer similarly wrote to you about these applications in June 2007.

This bonus plaza runs through the block from 56<sup>th</sup> to 57<sup>th</sup> Streets between the Sheffield Tower and the Parc Vendome apartment buildings. It was created when the Sheffield Tower was built in the 1970s, and is now in very poor condition. As originally designed, the plaza was bisected by a driveway that ran through the block and under a port cochere adjacent to the Sheffield Tower's lobby. In October 2006, a zoning certification allowed

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<sup>1</sup> These comments are based on the application and plans delivered to us by the applicant on July 3, 2008, and are subject to further comment if the application has been modified.

the area under the port cochere to be glassed in and incorporated into the building's lobby, effectively eliminating the driveway as well as the open view through the plaza from the street. This work is now complete. The application for the zoning certification was not referred to us for public comment.

The applicant now proposes to relocate the driveway to the west of the expanded lobby. This aspect of the application has provoked overwhelming negative comment at all our public meetings. In addition, the applicant proposes to completely renovate the remaining public space, with new landscaping, seating, lighting, sculpture and a fountain.

Except for the driveway, the proposed design is generally a huge improvement over the current plaza conditions, subject to the following comments.

- The driveway is now proposed to run through the middle of the plaza, rather than along one side as before. This will significantly diminish the usable amount of public open space. The driveway should be eliminated from the plan.
- The effective width of the driveway should be measured from the outside edge of the bollards, since that is the area within which cars will be allowed and pedestrians discouraged. The driveway will actually be approximately 13' wide<sup>2</sup>, not the 7' 9" shown in the application's zoning calculations. That makes the non-bonused area 2,635 square feet, which is more than the 1,570 square feet allowed by zoning. The driveway cannot fit within the available non-bonused area, and must be eliminated from the plan.
- The driveway has been closed for more than a year, yet the building is apparently attracting buyers. We question whether the driveway is still necessary.
- The absence of curbs makes the driveway a safety hazard. Pavement texture alone is not enough to indicate the presence of a driveway. The plaza is heavily used by students walking between the subway and the schools further down 55<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Streets. If the driveway has to be there, it has to be safe. Signage must alert pedestrians and drivers to the driveway. Curbs and bollards must prevent vehicles from leaving the driveway.
- Access to the driveway must be limited to vehicles dropping off or picking up from Sheffield Tower. Through traffic must be prohibited. Signage must explain these limitations.
- The driveway width is not adequate for emergency vehicles or vans, or even for large passenger vehicles<sup>3</sup>. It is certainly not wide enough for the trucks that used to use the driveway - USPS, FedEx, UPS etc. – though the applicant insists that these vehicles will now park at the curb near the service entrance on 56<sup>th</sup> Street.

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<sup>2</sup> The plans submitted with the application show that the bollards will be 12' apart on center. The diameter of the bollards is not indicated; we assume they will be approximately 12" in diameter.

<sup>3</sup> For example, a typical taxi, a Ford Crown Victoria, is 6'7" wide, leaving just 14" clearance.

- Lighting must be adequate for safety. We couldn't get an understandable answer about how bright the lighting will be – is two foot candles bright enough? It seems that most of the lighting will be under the seats and in the bollards along the driveway. Some lighting apparently will be strapped to trees; we are concerned that this may not be effective for permanent lighting.
- On the other hand, lights must not shine into apartments in the Parc Vendome (or anywhere else).
- Seating should skateboard-proofed. The sinuous design of the seating is appealing, but experience at Balsley Park to the west and Columbus Circle to the east suggests that measures must be taken to discourage skateboarders.
- **The** Seating area in **the** southern arcade must remain public, even if the retail space is used for food service. “Café creep” must not privatize this public space.
- Signs must be clearly visible from the street, indicating that plaza is open to the public. The signs on or near the walls of the Parc Vendome on both 56<sup>th</sup> Street and 57<sup>th</sup> Street seem particularly obscure. These signs should somehow be mounted parallel to the sidewalk, along the streetline.
- Many residents are concerned about security, especially since the plaza is tucked away in the middle of the block and, with the lobby now extended, mostly hidden from the streets. The applicant should be required to provide effective security at all times.
- The plaza must be actively maintained and cleaned twice a day to keep rats at bay. The owner's maintenance commitment must also include regular upkeep of plantings and fixtures, and replacement if necessary. These commitments must be implemented via a restrictive declaration recorded against the property and binding on all future owners. We note that the owner is also responsible for maintaining Balsley Park, and its record there has not been inspiring since the property was sold by Rose Associates to Swig Equities. The board office regularly receives complaints about Balsley Park, that it is covered with pigeon droppings on the pavement and the retaining walls where people used to sit, that there is graffiti in the toddler play area, and that the plants and lawn are dying for lack of water.
- There is much concern about the location of residential garbage, which must be piled at the curb awaiting SDNY pickup. There is an active rodent problem.
- There used to be a bike rack next to the lobby, for take-out food delivery. This should be included in the revised plan.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JD' with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

Jean-Daniel  
Chair  
Manhattan Community Board 4

CC: DCP Manhattan Office – Edith Hsu-Chen, Erika Sellke  
Kramer Levin – Samuel H. Lindenbaum, Robert E. Flahive  
Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried  
State Senator Tom Duane  
Council Member Gale Brewer