

1 **Transportation Planning Committee**

**Item #: 15**

2  
3 June 6, 2012

4  
5 Dan Biederman  
6 President  
7 Chelsea Improvement Company  
8 1065 Avenue of the Americas  
9 Suite 2400  
10 New York, N.Y. 10018

11  
12 **Re: Chelsea Plaza**

13  
14 Dear Mr. Biederman:

15  
16 Manhattan Community Board4 (CB4) appreciates the update on Chelsea Plaza design  
17 and programming provided by Chelsea Improvement Company (CIC) staff at the May 16  
18 Transportation Planning Committee meeting. Chelsea Plaza has become an important  
19 part of the neighborhood, primarily by providing much needed usable open space. The  
20 greening, programming, music and art installations, and Wi-Fi that CIC has provided at  
21 the Chelsea Plaza improves its ambiance and has been an important addition to the  
22 neighborhood.

23  
24 However, we are very concerned and disappointed that most of the suggestions contained  
25 in our February, 2007 letter in support of the creation of the CIC have not been honored,  
26 that there has been a substantial number of commercial events on the Chelsea Plaza  
27 without Community Board review, and that RFQs for Food Services and a farmer's  
28 market at the Plaza were released without review or discussion by the Community Board.  
29 Mostly, we deplore the lack of communication with CB4 and/or with the Chelsea  
30 neighborhood generally since the 2009 charrettes on its design.

31 CB4 requests

- 32
- 33 • A reduction in the number and duration of events,
  - 34 • Consultation with CB4 for all new events, kiosks or installations,
  - 35 • That CB4 and community representatives be invited to the board of the CIC as it  
36 is customary for Business Improvement Districts,
  - 37 • That CIC improves its communication with the board and the community
- 38 That the plaza be made ADA compliant as a high priority ahead of any other capital  
expenditures.

39 CIC was created in January 2007 to enhance and provide services to the Southwest area  
40 of Chelsea, defined as between 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the West Side Highway and West 14<sup>th</sup>  
41 Street to West 17<sup>th</sup> Street. Several large owners in the area including Jamestown, Google,  
42 Related, Taconic and Belvedere Capital fund CIC and make up its Board of Directors. It  
43 provides streetscaping (unique lamps, furniture, plantings, street signs, and litter  
44 receptacles), landscaping, maintenance, safety services, and programming for the area.  
45 Through an agreement with DOT it maintains Chelsea Plaza, a public Plaza in the mid-  
46 block area of 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue between West 14<sup>th</sup> and West 15<sup>th</sup> Streets. Through an agreement

47 with the Hudson River Park it also maintains Saponhikan Park, a 3/4 acre park between  
48 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the West Side Highway at West 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

49  
50 On Chelsea Plaza, consistent with ideas emanating from a 2009 community-based  
51 charrette, CIC provided colorful planters, movable seating and umbrellas, Wi-Fi,  
52 temporary art installations, occasional concerts, and community programming included  
53 family yoga, salsa dancing, and Capoeira. They held over 20 commercial events since  
54 then, most at the request of SAPO, though several events were held at their own initiative  
55 as fundraisers. In 2011 CIC released an RFQ for a vendor to provide good services on the  
56 Plaza. In May 2012, CIC released an RFQ for vendors to provide a farmers market on  
57 the Plaza (food sales were recommended at the 2009 Charrette). CIC also proposes to  
58 invest \$ 155,000 to upgrade furniture and plantings on the plaza.

59  
60 While there is much to applaud in the above, there are also grounds for concern.

61  
62 First, we are concerned about the commercial events in the Plaza. These events have been  
63 held without Community Board consultation and have also caused the concern of  
64 neighborhood residents. There have been over 20 such events since 2007. While these  
65 events don't restrict public access, they often remove much of the seating area and make  
66 the Plaza more of an advertising staging area than a public plaza. One recent event lasted  
67 9 days during which the Plaza seemed more like a sales desk with a large banner and tent  
68 than public area.

69 While we are not opposed to occasional commercial events we feel they should be few  
70 and far between. Manhattan Community Board #4 has one of the most under-parked  
71 areas in the City. Through its creative landscape design, on-going maintenance and  
72 creative (two hour/week each yoga and dance) community programming, CIC has created  
73 a very successful highly and popular Plaza. Its primary use should be for that purpose.

- 74
- 75 • Specifically CB4 requests that the Community Board should vet all commercial  
76 events for review and approval. No more than two major commercial events  
77 should be held each year, with maximum length of two days each and no more  
78 than two free smaller scale events (e.g. free Chocolate and message sending on  
79 Valentine's Day).
  - 80
  - 81 • We are pleased that the CIC staff indicated they will honor these requests in the  
82 future. We understand that a majority of commercial events have been initiated  
83 directly by the City's Street Activity Permit Office (SAPO) often with minimal  
84 notice to CIC. We are writing separately to SAPO requesting those events be  
85 similarly restricted.

86  
87 We are also concerned that CIC has contracted with a local restaurant to install an 11' by  
88 11' food kiosk that will operate daily and, based on an RFQ released in early May, 2012,  
89 is in negotiations with a vendor to operate a farmer's market that would have 3-4 12' by  
90 6' tables on the Plaza one or days a week. While we are not opposed to either concept, we  
91 are concerned that on such a small plaza revenue-producing installations will further  
92 restrict the space available without real benefit to the public.

- 93           • We are pleased that CIC has agreed to come before the Community Board with  
94 more specific designs and day/hours for the farmer's market before it begins. We  
95 are also pleased that CIC will be including a table in the farmer's market for  
96 Fulton Tenant's Healthy Food program.  
97

98 Mostly importantly, we are concerned that most of the requests we made in our February  
99 8, 2007 letter were not followed-up on and there has been very little communication  
100 between CIC and CB4 and/or the Council of Chelsea Block Associations (CCBA) since  
101 the 2009 charrette. We thus request that CIC:

- 102           • Expand the Board of Directors to include representatives from CB4 and CCBA;  
103           • Outreach to the disability community to ensure street furniture and improvements  
104 are handicapped accessible. We note, with disappointment, that the Plaza is not  
105 compliant with ADA standards because it does not include detectible warning  
106 strips at the boundaries between both sides of the Avenue and the Plaza.  
107           • Consult with the residents, businesses and owners beyond the current members of  
108 the Board of Directors to understand their concerns, issues and ideas for  
109 improvements  
110           • Increase communication including listing events in the Community Board  
111 bulletin, and giving regular updates to CB4 and CCBA.  
112  
113

114 Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working more closely with CIC  
115 in the future and to preserve Chelsea Plaza as an appealing publicly available space.  
116

117 Sincerely yours,  
118  
119  
120  
121