



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

330 West 42nd Street, 26th floor New York, NY 10036
tel: 212-736-4536 fax: 212-947-9512
www.nyc.gov/mcb4

JOHN WEIS
Chair

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

July 23, 2010

Muzzy Rosenblatt
Executive Director
Bowery Residents Committee
324 Lafayette Street, 8th floor
New York, New York 10012

Re: 127 West 25th Street
BRC Service Center and Proposed 328 Bed Homeless Shelter

Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) recognizes the substantial citywide need for emergency and transitional shelter for homeless persons struggling with mental health and substance abuse issues. The neighborhoods of Chelsea, Clinton/Hell's Kitchen have a long history of welcoming social services that meet both community and city wide needs. CB 4 is home to two DHS-funded shelters, eleven supportive housing residences primarily for homeless persons, and dozens of community health clinics, soup kitchens, alcohol and drug treatment facilities, and drop-in programs. It is a rare instance that CB4 has not had a favorable consideration of proposed social service facility.

However, in this case the BRC proposed 328 bed homeless shelter for at 127 West 25th Street, CB4 believes the size of the proposed facility is simply too large, both to provide adequate service delivery for the proposed clients and fitting into surrounding neighborhood. Siting a social service facility of this scale on a block surrounded by a dense residential neighborhood is not good policy. In the past 20 years, the Board has consistently reviewed and approved many smaller scale social service proposals. The Board supports integration not concentration of social services throughout Community District 4. Integration promotes acceptance by all community stakeholders as these well managed facilities tend to disappear into the streetscape and do not burden a single block.

There is widespread recognition that smaller shelters provide a higher quality of service to residents and have fewer negative impacts on the surrounding neighborhood. Indeed, in recognition of these facts, Local Law 57 of 1998 was passed by the City Council to limit homeless shelters to 200 beds. Irrespective of the category of shelter proposed at this location, CB4 expects the intent of that law to be applied at this location.

Concentration of social services changes the environment of a block and a neighborhood and does not promote acceptance of either the clients or the social services they need.

Concentration in fact polarizes a neighborhood, creates anxiety and stokes fear. The Board has heard from many residents who are afraid of what their future daily lives will be after the BRC facility opens. At the same time, however, the majority of concerns from local residents and businesses of West 25th Street were the size of the facility and the potential security issues related to concentrating such a large number of hard-to-serve clients in a single location. These concerns are valid and must be addressed.

The current proposal contains too many beds. The 128 beds transferred from the Lower East Side, the Reception Center and Chemical Dependency Crisis Center, serve an extremely needy and difficult to serve population. The 200 bed homeless shelter component for mentally ill chemically addicted males is too large in itself. Combining the facilities together would create too high a concentration of social services serving persons with highest level of need in one location. Serving the homeless in small settings best meets their needs and the needs of the surrounding community. The Board cannot support the proposed 200 bed shelter component.

At first BRC did not provide full information to the Board or the neighborhood regarding the project, the specifics of its programming, operation or security. At the BRC Public Forum of June 14th, 2010 and the Housing, Health and Human Services Committee of July 15th, 2010 a series of questions were raised and communicated to BRC. In their response, BRC has provided many answers to those questions including a draft security plan. Some questions remained to be answered, and the Board has conditioned its position on that final information. Specifically, the Board needs clarification of the following:

- 1) Compliance with the New York City Zoning Resolution
 - a) Floor plans attached to both the Property Lease and the application to the NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services indicate “Exam Rooms” and “Nurse’s Stations” while plans submitted to the New York City Department of Buildings (DOB) label those same areas differently, as “Corridors” and “Offices”. This apparent variance of labeling and therefore use has raised the question whether these spaces are medical facilities in Use Group 4A allowed in M1-6 zones only by Special Permit. DOB has ruled based upon the labels submitted in January 2010¹. The Board seeks clarification of the exact use from BRC, and then further clarification from DOB. If a Special Permit is required, then BRC should begin the application process, subject to required public review.
 - b) BRC has represented that its clients will be transient residents and only use the facility for 25 days. Longer terms stay would no longer qualify as a Transient Hotel use. How will BRC address the need for a client to stay for a longer period? And will such a need create a zoning compliance issue?

¹ CB4 has been informed that DOB is reconsidering this determination but has received no official word from DOB.

Based upon the above concerns, Manhattan Community Board 4 approves with conditions:

- BRC Service Center
- The relocation of the 96 bed Reception Center and the 32 bed Chemical Dependency Crisis Center from 324 Lafayette Street on the Lower East Side to create a smaller shelter of 128 Homeless Shelter beds both serving a population of primarily mentally ill men and women.

This approval is conditioned upon:

- Favorable finding and determination of siting the BRC Service Center and 128 bed Homeless Shelter under a NYC Charter Required Fair Share Assessment by the New York City Department of Homeless Services
- Establishment of a Community Advisory Committee
- Development of a final Security plan with community review and input
- Clarification by BRC and review and determination by DOB that the proposed uses are zoning compliant.

The Board thanks BRC for its continued service to the neediest New Yorkers and welcomes its services to Community District 4.

Sincerely,



John Weis
Chair
MCB4



Joe Restuccia
Co-Chair, Housing, Health
& Human Services Committee

[signed 7/23/10]

Dave Hanzel
Co- Chair, Housing, Health
& Human Services Committee

cc:

Department of Homeless Services – Seth Diamond, George Nashak, Lisa Black
Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs
NYC Council Speaker Christine Quinn
NYS Senator Liz Kruger
NYS Senator Thomas K. Duane
NYS Assemblyman Richard Gottfried
Congressman Jerrold Nadler
Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer
Manhattan Community Board 5
Chelsea Flatiron Coalition
Madison Square Park Conservancy
Flatiron B.I.D.
Save Chelsea

The Council of Chelsea Block Associations
The Apple Seed
The City Quilter