

CB9 Land Use & Zoning Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: 16-Dec-2008

Time: 6:30 PM

Location: Fortune Society, 630 Riverside Dr.

Committee Members: Yvonne Stennett, Co-Chair, present
Christa Giesecke, Co-Chair, present
Larry English, present
Anthony Fletcher, unexcused absent
Tamara Gayer, present
Diane Wilson, present

Public Members: Tom Kapner, unexcused absent
Peter Favant, present

CB9 Members: Savona Bailey-McClain

Invited Guests: Thomas Lunke, Harlem CDC, present
Melissa Cerezo, City Planning, present
Julie Gonzalez, Borough President's Office, present

Others: Edwin Marshall, City Planning
Vaughn Jackson, Fortune Society

Meeting called to order by Yvonne Stennett at 6:45, Agenda was adopted, no minutes were adopted. Bicycle Zoning amendment was explained and comments taken.

Meeting began with discussion of **West Harlem Rezoning Plan**, specifically the location of preservation versus development areas; noted that 'de-land marking' of the Special District is needed with the exception of the Citarella site.

City Planning continues their examination of existing land use patterns and discrepancies; also analyzing data and study of commercial blocks with BP's office. Info will be shared once study is finalized.

Committee members expressed desire to see the district study before it's finalized but City Planning prefers to have all the info gathered first.

On the Metropolitan Opera House: process will move ahead with certification and Board approval on January 5, 2009; waiting for Environmental Review to be signed off before going to City Planning.

CB9 clock (60 day review) will begin Jan 14th.

Discussion followed on how the Committee should prepare to address the findings: think through how to define "good usage", how to handle soft sites and how to look at the plan from a zoning perspective.

Marshall: Suggested we identify the unmet needs of the community and develop a compass, perhaps **preparing a questionnaire** to help us inform the direction we which to proceed. For example, West Harlem is in need of a copying center and a Fed Ex—needs that would support both business and residents in the area; a questionnaire could help us identify the needs of people living and working in West Harlem.

Also advised that we look at uses already specified in the 197A Plan; the 197A Plan can also serve as a compass, as a tool to tease from the community our unmet needs.

Bailey-McClain: Use of vacant store fronts as pop-ups discussed—interesting way to provide entrepreneurial activity while re-energizing vacant store front areas.

Giesecke: Expressed concern that we know what we need but where are we going to put these things? Which areas need more commercial use? Suggested that we need photos to better determine where opportunities exist for commercial development vs. preservation.

On areas for commercial development Lunke suggested we look at those cited in the 197A Plan, primarily Broadway and Amsterdam (manufacturing zones) and look at the lower floors of existing buildings. An opportunity exists for the community to come together to determine what uses they want to see—i.e., big box stores or smaller businesses. Zoning can be tailored to smaller businesses as big box stores disrupt pedestrian traffic and big delivery trucks are not pedestrian-friendly.

Lunke further noted that zoning is a way to implement a plan: preserving the neighborhood character, examining major intersections, looking at Amsterdam Avenue as a secondary market, figuring ways to tailor zoning to fit the context are among the many aspects we should be considering.

Discussion followed on how best to engage property owners. Suggested we engage brokers as property owners and encourage them to think more creatively—how best to reconcile your bottom line with your vision for the use of the property.

It was noted that people don't work here, they live here—we should look at office space needed to sustain smaller businesses— would it be more economical to have a smaller copier service than to try to attract a *Kinko's*? Also, we need to examine the type and number of home-based businesses in the neighborhood. We need to help brokers and real estate owners get a better sense of the community's needs and to think creatively about what it means to be an office; give thought to artist studios (living and working in a storefront, for example). Noted: **Creative thinking allows for flexible zoning.**

Special Purpose District -- landlords want land and build-out- should be included in our rezoning effort.

Stennett: A menu of commercial rezoning is needed; what are the mixes, what data collection and outreach must be done to property owners and how best do we tie this in with efforts of City Planning?

Gayer: There is a need for work and rehearsal space for artists in West Harlem. They need space where they can make noise; we are without visual arts space—moved because of need to be near work space.

Suggested the Committee needs insight into “use groups”— what are choices we have based on what is done in other parts of the city.

English - On shaping a zoning plan: we should work with people after we see what the needs are rather than state what we want; we want to build a zoning plan and create space for people living and working here now—that way it will act as a magnet.

We must also examine ways to further diversity within the mix; considering the attention that the lack of parking spaces in the community receives, perhaps we need to consider the need for auto repair shops—the very type of small business being forced out by Columbia.

Zoning is like furniture (Lunke): People can write down what kind of place they envision West Harlem to be—set the place first and then you furnish it using zoning tools. Zoning is tool that is blueprint for development (Marshall).

Noted: We can create wonderful spaces with wonderful ideas and have no one to fill them. It was suggested the Committee must have a vision (take a look at what was done in San Antonio, how a small city was transformed) we must take advantage of what we already have here in West Harlem.

Jane Jacobs on growing communities: *'Cities thrive when you grow inside business out'*.

Wilson: We must also take into consideration that the best plan and a wonderful vision can be meaningless without affordable commercial rents—what creative solutions can we develop to regulate commercial rents? If the plan is to keep and to attract smaller business we must find ways to make it affordable. Currently, landlords can increase their rent ten-fold without reasonable notice—this does not allow nor encourage 'ma and pop' shops to remain or move to the neighborhood.

Question: Is there such a thing as subsidized commercial space?

Response: Look at the *Green Point Manufacturing and Design Center*

An Exercise: Suggested we take an area, such as 145th Street from St. Nick to Riverside Drive, and start there, using this corridor as a test-run exercise to develop our ideas. Do a mock-up of what the area could like: experiment; mixed zoning; circulate a questionnaire as discussed earlier using this strip as basis for study—what's there, what do we want to see there and have city planners discuss mixed use potentials.

Homework: Write two questions about what you want to see re the development of 145th Street. Also, revisit your 197A Plan and see what it lays out for the West 145th Street corridor.

**NEXT LAND USE/ZONING COMMITTEE MEETING IS
THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 2009.**