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Wednesday, May 30, 2018

CB4's New Chair, Chelsea's Burt Lazarin, Talks Transportation, Landmarking, Leadership

Added by **Scott Stiffler** on February 14, 2018.

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Burt Lazarin during his Feb. 6 interview with Chelsea Now, held at CB4's W. 42nd St. offices. In the background, the emerging Hudson Yards neighborhood.

| Photo by Winnie McCroy

BY WINNIE McCROY | After more than 40 years living in Chelsea, including many serving as a member of Community Board 4 (CB4), Burt Lazarin has moved to the top of the ranks. He was recently voted in as the new Chair of CB4, taking over for exiting Chair Delores Rubin.

"I don't think of myself as a leader in the traditional sense, because we're a board of 50 people with lots of skills and expertise," said Lazarin humbly. "I have no problem if we're at a meeting and the head of the housing committee — who knows a lot more about that than I do — takes the lead. My function is to make sure that person is supported, and then to speak for the whole board."

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by Jay Lazarin

JOINING COMMUNITY BOARD 4 | “I have always been involved, so when I saw the announcement for CB4 members, I took a deep breath, thought, ‘It’s time to shit or get off the pot,’ and sent off the application with two recommendations,” said Lazarin.

He was appointed to CB4 in 2005, and later joined its Business Diversity Task Force (BDTF). Even before he joined, they had sought to maintain diversity when granting liquor licenses. One of the first things he recalls them doing was conducting a “windshield survey” — walking block by block to tally up the number of bars and restaurants in the area.

“We wanted to get some idea of what people meant when they said the area was saturated,” said Lazarin. “Your saturation might be my fun or my opportunity.”

The Task Force came up with their own definition, to remain aware of current businesses as people applied for new liquor licenses, and to allow the community to weigh in at public hearings.

Prior to joining the BDTF, Lazarin had already been serving as co-chair of the Business Licenses & Permits (BLP) committee (see nyc.gov/html/mancb4 for more info).

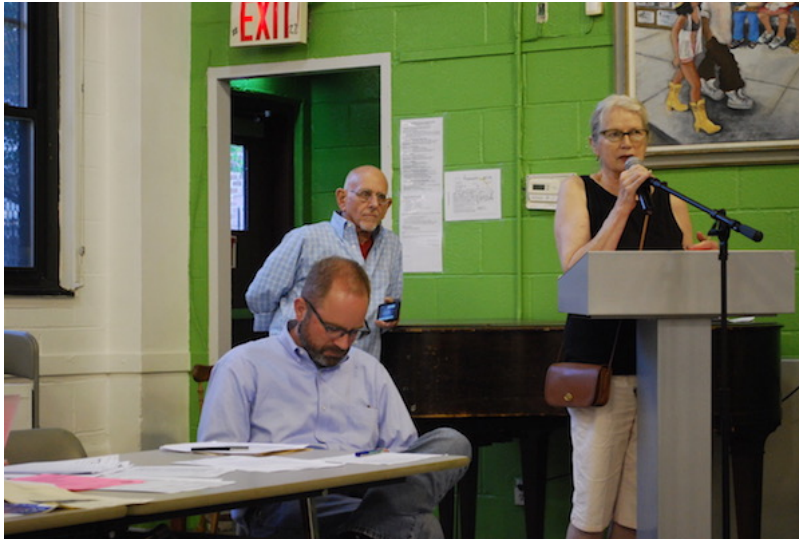
“We advise, and provide opportunity for people in the community to voice objections to specific aspects of a licensee or their method of operations,” Lazarin said. “Over the years, we have developed a format of ‘deny unless’ the business meets all of our stipulations. If Albany accepts those stipulations, they become legally part of the licensees’ method of operations. Then, if they are not following those stipulations — often things like no amplified music or an earlier closing time — then they’re liable.”

During his time as co-chair of the BLP committee, there have been several businesses the community has voiced opposition to. Lazarin recalls a fight over the gay sports bar Boxers attempting to move into a stand-alone building on 10th Ave., near a school.

“The whole thing was about the 200-foot rule, which means no bars within 200 feet of a school building’s entrance,” Lazarin noted. “The school was set far back, but people were measuring from door to door, questioning if the emergency exit counted. It became like ‘how many angels can dance on the head of a pin.’ The full board in October 2011 voted to deny Boxer’s application because of ‘proximity’ to the school, which was the real issue (not the exact footage), though we did list stipulations to be incorporated in a license just in case State Liquor Authority approved it. Boxers litigated the 200’ rule and subsequently lost and gave up the site.” They eventually moved near Ninth Ave, also in Hell’s Kitchen. A year ago, Lazarin recalled, Boxer’s withdrew an application for another location, Ninth Ave. in Chelsea, “where during a site visit I and another BLP member described to them problems they would have in getting community approval.”

More recently, the BLP committee has come up against issues like the drunken brunch crowds at Il Bastardo (whose Seventh Ave. and W. 21st St. location has since closed), and a proposed two-level, 20,000-square-foot Starbucks Reserve Roastery, which Lazarin said disregarded CB4’s list of stipulations, choosing instead to go directly to the State Liquor Authority. To him, it’s a balancing act.

“We want to make sure [new businesses] are compatible with existing businesses,” said Lazarin. “We are trying to find balance between both the residents and the people who come in for ‘regional recreation.’ You have to balance it out, so people who live there are not crazed and abused by the people who come to recreate.”



At the June 1, 2016 full board meeting of CB4, Burt Lazarin, in background, made sure speakers in the public comment session adhered to their allotted two-minute slot. | File photo by Winnie McCroy

LOOKING OUT FOR LOCAL CONCERNS | As Chair of CB4, it will be Lazarin's duty to make sure things remain balanced and fair for Chelsea residents. He was nonplussed by the recent announcement that Google would purchase the Chelsea Market building, saying that were he a businessman, he too would favor purchasing the property, as the rezoning battle was waged four years ago. He added that he "would hope they honor Jamestown's promised community commitments," and would assume that Google would keep the retail portion intact, saying, "it would be a pretty stupid public relations move to eliminate the Chelsea Market."

Lazarin looks forward to working well with new City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, who also served as Chair of CB4, from 2011–2013. During that time, Lazarin was Second Vice Chair under Johnson, with Christine Berthet as First Vice Chair.

"This is [Johnson's] district, where his feet are and where he lives, where his New York roots are," said Lazarin. "We have our priorities, most of which are probably aligned with his, so I don't see any problems. Not that he isn't going to be Speaker for the whole City Council — but he may have a softer spot for Chelsea."

He is encouraged by Johnson's promised changes to the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), hoping that there are ways to peel some of the layers off. He also applauded that City Planning will now manage ULURP electronically, which may speed up that process.

Lazarin is also in favor of extending the Special West Chelsea District when necessary to protect historic buildings. He will spearhead efforts to landmark or otherwise acknowledge these buildings, like [the Federal Houses](#) and the brownstone in the West 20s where GMHC was founded.

As Hudson Yards continues to grow, Lazarin will make sure that CB4 gets its promised seat on the board of The Culture Shed, the large performance space in the middle of this new neighborhood, saying, "We



Bringing a low-key style of leadership to the table, Burt Lazarin says he won't micromanage — but will defer to other board members whose

were supposed to get a seat on the board, which we have not gotten yet. And they specifically wrote into the agreement that they would limit the amount of private events held there, and add some public space to offset that.”

In his eyes, Hudson Yards has already transformed Manhattan, just because of the extension of the 7 Subway line. Eventually, he would like to see that line extended south down 11th Ave.

“The tunnel already goes down to 25th Street, so it’s just a matter of extending it down and bumping it up next to 14th Street and Eighth Ave., and having a cross-platform exchange,” Lazarin said. “It’s time to start thinking and planning for that, as we have that new community integrate with existing neighborhoods.”

Lazarin is also a fan of proposed crosstown bike paths on 26th and 29th Sts., and he’s not saying “no” to the controversial congestion pricing, either.

“Bike paths are very controversial, because it takes space from one and gives it to another. It changes patterns, and people often don’t like changes,” he noted. “We need to make arrangements to make deliveries, because that is important, but ultimately this makes it safer for both bike riders and for pedestrians.”

And when it comes to proposed congestion pricing, Lazarin said he’s seen it work in cities like London, Stockholm and Singapore, so why not New York?

“There are costs of driving a car into Manhattan — not only individual costs but costs to the community,” Lazarin said. “We often quote that CB4 has one of the highest asthma rates in the city, because of the traffic, the tunnels, the backups, and the tour buses. So, it’s something that could be useful, something that could benefit our district.”



At the Nov. 4, 2015 full board meeting, Burt Lazarin (standing) leads comments on CB4's Fiscal Year 2017 Capital and Expense Budget Requests. | File photo by Winnie McCroy

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