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Handbasket Full of Hell's Kitchen Concerns at CB4

Added by **Scott Stiffler** on November 18, 2015.

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BY WINNIE McCROY | The Hotel Trades Council building on W. 44th St. was the unusual, but not unprecedented, location for Nov. 4's Community Board 4 (CB4) full board meeting — where residents of Clinton Towers (790 11th Ave., btw. W. 54th & W. 55th Sts.) came out to oppose the notion of a restaurant opening in a space that should be serving the needs of locals.

"I have lived in Hell's Kitchen my whole life, and in this building for many years, and they are trying to give us this new bar and restaurant that we don't want," said Towers resident David Novoa. "We got a great letter about this from you [CB4], and we are very appreciative, but we'd also like to ask them to do acoustic engineering to soundproof this dome. And then if they do that, they'll also need to get a structural engineer in there to check the building, because it will alter its stability."

Another Towers resident, Violetta Dibujos, echoed these sentiments, saying that there was a certified pre-K in their building, and that it wasn't a good place for a restaurant and bar.

"We already have Terminal 5 across the street, which still causes problems from time to time, so we would like the board to take serious consideration of this," said Dibujos. "It's like the Boxers situation with PS 111, where they wanted to put their venue on school premises. This is the same; having a bar and restaurant where there are small children. This is a safe place for pre-education, to get kids ready for regular school. We appreciate your consideration, and so will the other tenants of the building."

The attempt for a commercial establishment to be built by Kurt Kalm was the topic of Item 1, a letter to the State Liquor Authority, as well as Item 29, a letter to Housing Preservation and Development regarding the commercial space lease.

Business License and Permits (BLP) Committee Co-Chair Frank Holozubiec explained that this was the second time the board had looked at the proposal to open an establishment in Clinton Towers, a Mitchell-Lama building.

"The application last year was going to have a huge outdoor space with 300 seats, and a committee did a lot of research, and there were serious zoning issues relating to both the indoor and outdoor space," he said. "They sent a letter to the DHP [Housing Preservation and Development], after which the proposal was withdrawn. They came back to the Business License and Permits Committee last month seeking only to use the indoor space to open their restaurant. At a recent BLP meeting, about 40 residents of the housing development spoke against it, and no one but the owners spoke in favor of it."

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Clinton Towers residents showed up in force to make the case that their building doesn't need a new ground floor business that serves alcohol.

Photo by Yannick Rack.

After learning that the recent hearing brought out such community opposition and determining that the space was originally intended for "convenient" residents,

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Burt Lazarin leads comments on CB4's Fiscal Year 2017 Capital and Expense Budget Requests. Photo by Winnie McCroy.

"I know how hard it is to prioritize in the budget. It's like choosing between your children," joked CB4 Chair Christine Berthet.

CB4 member Ambur Nicosia asked whether next year's process would be similar, and CB4 District Manager Jesse Bodine noted that although scheduling may be different, the problematic platform for filing the budget and operations will remain the same, adding, "Usually we have a statement of district needs and then requests, and they replaced that with a first and then a final

draft." The FY17 Capital and Expense Budget Requests passed.

QUALITY OF LIFE CONCERNS

Some Hell's Kitchen residents attended the meeting in an effort to get action on several quality of life issues that have been making their everyday routines difficult. They say that the NYPD has not been responsive to the drug dealers and homeless squatters that occupy the niche in front of their building.

"We are located on 43rd between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, and most people don't even know there's an apartment between the sex shops and the bars there," said Paulette Osborne. "We have a big problem with drug dealers, and homeless men who are also drug dealers. I've never been to a CB4 meeting before, and I'm not sure if this is the right venue, but I would really like to know why the street has suddenly become unclean and unsafe. I moved to the neighborhood in 1990, and I've lived through a lot, but I feel that it's regressing, and I don't want to see that in our neighborhood."

Osborne and her neighbor Megan, who said she's lived there for two years, explained that a homeless man with bandaged legs in a wheelchair has decided to live in the vestibule in front of their home, even inflating an air mattress at night to sleep.

"He leaves piss and blood everywhere, and blocks the doorway so that we can't even get out to walk our dog before 8 a.m.," said Megan. "It's terrible!"

Resident Douglas Leland echoed this sentiment, saying, "Religious groups have come to speak to them, but they are still laying around and pissing on the sidewalk. I say it's time for the Community Board to walk the walk and talk the talk!"

In his District Manager report, Bodine reported that they had formed a Quality of Life Homelessness Task Force, focusing on high-risk areas like W. 57th St. and Ninth Ave., and W. 26th St. and Ninth Ave.

NEW CB4 LEADERSHIP NOMINATED

Nominating Committee Chair Ambur Nicosia forwarded the new slate of nominees for CB4 leadership. They are as follows: Delores Rubin (currently 1st Vice Chair) for Chair; Burt Lazarin and Ernest Moderelli IV (currently 2nd Vice Chair) for 1st Vice Chair; Lowell Kern (currently Secretary) for 2nd Vice Chair; and Michael Noble and Lily Fan for Secretary.

"The Nominating Committee conducted interviews for dedicated and qualified individuals, and next month at the December full board meeting, we will hold the election," said Nicosia. "The staff will distribute paper ballots, there will be a vote. They will be collected and tallied at that meeting. The CB4 bylaws say that if there are multiple people for the same position, each can speak for three minutes. It's not required, but I encourage you to take this opportunity so that board members can understand why you are running for these positions."

NEWS FROM ELECTED OFFICIALS

Several elected officials or their representatives shared news of legislation and community programs they had supported. Among them was Assemblymember Richard Gottfried, who recently traveled to Puerto Rico to see how the US could help with their debts and financial issues. He explained that one issue that had not gotten any coverage was healthcare.

"Back in October, I was part of a delegation, mainly of people from the Health Department, that went to Puerto Rico," said Gottfried. "We have been in consultation about their Medicaid program for several months now, and we met to see what New York could do about this. The answer is the way the federal government treats Puerto Rico in dealing with the Medicare and Medicaid programs is one sour example of over a century of crude colonialism with which we've been treating Puerto Rico."

Gottfried explained that although every state gets matching funds for health programs, with New York getting the lowest matching rate at 50 percent, this was "wildly generous" compared to what Puerto Rico gets.

Compounding this is the fact that their health insurance plans are required to pay the taxes of the Affordable Care Act, but gets no subsidies under it. In addition, 68 percent of their population is insured on Medicare or Medicaid. Doctors there get only a small percentage of the pay of US doctors, and because they must go to the mainland for training, most don't return. Gottfried is hoping that, by convincing Washington of the high cost of having a mass of Puerto Ricans move to the mainland to receive full healthcare, they will allow for some waivers.

"Part of our effort to rescue Puerto Rico from this downward spiral involves rescuing their healthcare system," said Gottfried. "When I got back, everyone wanted to know how I enjoyed it. The only good part was that I was never in the sun. The bad part was the it was one of the most annoying and depressing three days I've ever spent, to see how this country treats Puerto Rico."

Congressman Jerrold Nadler's special assistant, Robert Atterbury, read a statement about what he called the "Republican's Select Committee to Attack Women's Health," and promised to uphold a woman's right to safe and legal abortion.

State Senator Brad Hoylman's office reported that he is working with Borough President Gale Brewer regarding the trend toward privatization in public housing, saying they wanted NYCHA to be required to go through the ULURP process.

His office also emphasized the Senator's opposition to drilling for natural liquefied gas 19 miles off New York's coastline, saying, "It's much worse than all the other fuels we're losing, in terms of the heat it traps." On Nov. 12, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced that he would veto the Port Ambrose project — described that day by the Sane Energy Project as a "contested marine project that has threatened a prime offshore wind lease area...off the shore of New York and Long Island." A statement issued by the Project acknowledged the "hundreds of advocates and dozens of elected officials who opposed this project and brought their considerable influence to bear."

Hoylman's rep also praised Governor Andrew Cuomo's executive order enacting pro-transgender GENDA legislation, but added, "The Assembly passes it every year, but the Senate won't put it to the floor for a vote. It's great that Cuomo enacted it, but we still need to pass the bill in case another governor comes in and decides he doesn't want it."

City Councilmember Corey Johnson's office invited all to attend his Nov. 18 Town Hall and Resource Fair. It has been rescheduled for Jan. 13 at the LGBT Community Center (208 W. 13 St., btw. Seventh & Eighth Aves.). The Fair begins at 5:30 p.m., with the Hall taking place at 7 p.m.

Ed Sullivan from Public Advocate Letitia James' office reported that she had won a court case that now allows for the monitoring of foster kids, making sure "no more kids are shuttled from family to family." James secured funds from State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli that have been unclaimed since 1985, and returned them to the city where they belong. And she is also working on legislation to aid the mayor's Vision Zero plan to make traffic safer.

At the end of the meeting, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer arrived to speak on senior housing, payphone advertising, mental health roundtables, and protecting construction workers. "Construction workers are dying more than even in the past, and so we are working with unions in the industry," said Brewer, who noted that her office scheduled a Nov. 10 working group "to talk about what we can do to make them safer."

The next full board meeting of CB4 is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Wed., Dec 2, in the Fulton Center Auditorium (119 Ninth Ave., btw. W. 17th & W. 18th Sts.). For info on CB4 committee meetings and concerns, visit nyc.gov/mcb4.

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