

The City of New York
Manhattan Community Board 1

Anthony Notaro, Jr. CHAIRPERSON | Lucian Reynolds DISTRICT MANAGER

Comment on the Draft Scope of Work for a Draft Environmental Impact Statement

New York City Borough-Based Jail System (CEQR. No. 18DOC001Y)

Testimony by Diana Switaj, Director of Planning & Land Use

1 Centre Street, Manhattan Municipal Building

Thursday, September 27, 2018, 6:00PM

Good evening. My name is Diana Switaj and I am Director of Planning and Land Use at Manhattan Community Board 1 (CB1). Our district encompasses a dense accumulation of office and community facility space for elected officials, city agencies, detainees, and courts in an area that is officially known as the “Civic Center” which also adjoins the residential neighborhood of Chinatown, and we house both the current Manhattan Detention Complex as well as the site at 80 Centre Street.

I will highlight some of the primary points in the resolution adopted by CB1 at the September full board meeting (attached) regarding the Draft Scope of Work for a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Borough-Based Jail System, specifically pertaining to the Manhattan Detention Complex.

The process thus far has been arbitrary, unilateral and accelerated which has resulted in a rushed public engagement process leading into an expedited environmental review and ULURP expected to begin by the end of 2018. Certification of ULURP should be delayed until meaningful environmental review has concluded and sufficient community engagement has been achieved, including discussion regarding the site selection.

The plan for a borough-based jail system hinges on the assumption that the city-wide detainee population will be reduced to 5,000 which is an unrealistic goal. The plan must account for the possibility that the goal of 5,000 detainees is not reached. More information is also needed about why Staten Island has not been included as part of this plan, including where detainees from Staten Island will be housed if the plan for a 4-borough jail system proceeds.

There is a large concentration of senior centers, schools, and daycares within a short distance of the proposed MDC site at 80 Centre St. Columbus Park is heavily used year round by both seniors and young people, including organized school and after-school play. The demolition of 80 Centre Street will undoubtedly establish an elevated risk of exposure to asbestos, lead, and other dangerous materials or compounds that are currently captive in older building materials and could be made airborne.

The misuse and abuse of municipal parking placards by DOC employees throughout Chinatown, the Civic Center, and Tribeca is long-standing, pervasive, and well documented. The proposed construction of a 125 car accessory garage beneath the detention complex will not accommodate all vehicles and the study must investigate the impacts of placard abuse on small businesses’ deliveries and patronage, residential quality of life, public transportation, and traffic congestion.

The additional density of detainees and services will bring a subsequent increase in density of visitors and workers to the area as well as the impacts of their means of travel on public rights-of-way, public transportation capacity, legal on-street parking, traffic congestion and air quality. The overall increase or decrease of detainee transport buses should be included as well. The de-mapping of Hogan Place is also unclear and should also be studied as part of the reasonable worst case scenario for traffic impacts. The de-mapping of Hogan Place would further contribute traffic to one of the most heavily congested areas and streets in the city regardless of the eventual re-opening of Worth Street to full traffic. Hogan Place is a viable East-West traffic route in Lower Manhattan and alleviates traffic from other nearby streets including Canal Street.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission should consider the merits of 80 Centre Street as an individual landmark, both in terms of its historic nature and the cultural significance specifically pertaining to the Wedding Bureau.

Security concerns as well as how security relates to public space are paramount. The scope of work should include what impacts on the free movement of people and goods along public rights-of-way would result from short-term or extended “frozen zones” (like those that exist around other sensitive buildings within CB1) that could be established to protect the MDC detainees as a whole, or a potential future notorious occupant, should a threat arise.

CB1 concludes that the study area outlined in the DSOW (a mere 400 foot buffer around the site) is woefully inadequate and leads to minimizing and overlooking impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods. CB1 would require that this be increased to at least a 1,200 foot buffer.

CB1 emphatically opposes the suggestion that the required ULURP action for this issue cover all four (4) boroughs involved in the proposed facilities. To be effective and serve the established process, all ULURPs should be specific to the location and not be packaged together which may lead to a rushed and sloppy process that results in poor decision making. CB1 rejects the administration’s opaque site selection and lack of community input. We call for a renewed process to look at a variety of sites that serve both the local community impacted and satisfy the goals of an improved justice system.

COMMUNITY BOARD #1 – MANHATTAN
RESOLUTION

DATE: SEPTEMBER 25, 2018

COMMITTEE OF ORIGIN: LAND USE, ZONING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

COMMITTEE VOTE: 9 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained 0 Recused

BOARD VOTE: 42 In Favor 0 Opposed 1 Abstained 1 Recused

RE: Manhattan Detention Complex

WHEREAS: Manhattan Community Board 1 (CB1) encompasses the seat of the government of the City of New York; a dense accumulation of office and community facility space for elected officials, city agencies, detainees, and courts in an area that is officially known as the “Civic Center” which also adjoins the residential neighborhood of Chinatown; and

WHEREAS: The current Manhattan Detention Complex (MDC) is the largest municipal detention facility in the borough with approximately 1,000 beds and approximately 387,800 gross square feet of court and detention center uses. The buildings that make up the complex are two towers along Centre Street that are linked with an aerial walkway that crosses White Street between them; and

WHEREAS: The impact of the current MDC has had several negative impacts on Chinatown along with the impacts from the 911 tragedy, Superstorm Sandy and various security zones impeding daily life; and

WHEREAS: Former Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito convened the Lippman Commission in 2016 to study the state of the detention facilities on Rikers Island and what should be done to create a more fair and humane justice system for the City of New York; and

WHEREAS: The Lippman Commission described Rikers Island as an “expensive penal colony” where reports of “daily humiliations and occasional acts of shocking brutality” befell detainees who are far from family and social services. The foundational justice principle of “presumption of innocence” itself was described as being denied in mass to New Yorkers as “on any given day, nearly all of three-quarters of the roughly 9,700 people held in New York City’s jails are awaiting the outcome of their case in jail because they are unable to afford bail; and

WHEREAS: The Commission recommended the complete closure of Rikers Island and that it be replaced with a borough-based jail system; and

WHEREAS: The New York City Department of Corrections (DOC) is proposing to build new, “state-of-the-art” jails in all boroughs, except for Staten Island. The Manhattan Detention Complex (MDC) is proposed to replace an entire-block, historic, nine-story office building at 80 Centre Street. This site selection appears to have had no community input or review, in fact the announcement was made suddenly just before the Draft Scope of Work was released; and

- WHEREAS: The Draft Scope of Work outlines the technical areas to be analyzed in the preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the MDC as part of the larger borough-based jails project; and
- WHEREAS: The new MDC would be an expansion of the current detention activities of the existing MDC on 125 White Street and 124 White Street. The Draft Scope of Work contemplates a program with 1,510 beds, support services, community space, retail, and accessory parking. The gross square footage on-site would increase from 640,000 to 1,560,000. The maximum zoning height for the analysis is approximately 432.5 feet tall; and
- WHEREAS: The closure of the North Tower of the current Manhattan Detention Complex is mentioned in the Draft Scope of Work. The future use of the building is not currently included in the environmental review process and will be left to a future, yet undescribed public engagement process; and
- WHEREAS: The borough-based jails will go through a “design-build” process, which leaves important details out of the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP). The members of Manhattan community boards 1 and 3 as well as the public who, live, work, or have a significant interest in the areas that surround both the current and proposed detention complexes have been promised a robust public engagement process to discuss these important details, yet the process has yet to be described; and
- WHEREAS: While four borough jails are included in a single environmental review process and will be considered a “city-wide” ULURP, all community boards are not being given the ability to have an official response as is typical for such actions. This deprives the residents of neighboring Community District 3 from working with their community board to officially go on the record with a recommendation to the City Planning Commission; and
- WHEREAS: DOC has not provided their analysis of alternative sites for the proposed MDC, nor have they provided a detailed listing of the criteria used to evaluate each site, moreover the study area is too small to be representative of the impacts; and
- WHEREAS: The process thus far has been arbitrary, unilateral and accelerated which has resulted in a rushed public engagement process leading into an expedited process for environmental review and ULURP expected to begin by the end of 2018. Certification of ULURP should be delayed until meaningful environmental review has concluded and sufficient community engagement has been achieved, including discussion regarding the site selection; and
- WHEREAS: The plan for a borough-based jail system hinges on the assumption that the city-wide detainee population will be reduced to 5,000 which is an unrealistic goal. The plan must account for the possibility that the goal of 5,000 detainees is not reached; and
- WHEREAS: More information is needed about why Staten Island has not been included as part of this plan, including where detainees from Staten Island will be housed if the plan for a 4-borough jail system proceeds; and

WHEREAS: There is a large concentration of senior centers, schools, and daycares within a short distance of the proposed MDC site. Columbus Park is heavily used, year round by both seniors and young people, including organized school and after-school play. The demolition of 80 Centre Street will undoubtedly establish an elevated risk of exposure to asbestos, lead, and other dangerous materials or compounds that are currently captive in older building materials and could be made airborne; and

WHEREAS: Lower Manhattan was inundated by the storm surge from Superstorm Sandy, which left residents without critical services for extended periods of time. Detainees are themselves a vulnerable population and the impacts from efforts to protect and secure this population during an adverse weather event should be known; and

WHEREAS: The misuse and abuse of municipal parking placards by DOC employees throughout Chinatown, the Civic Center, and Tribeca is long-standing, pervasive, and well documented. The proposed construction of a 125 car accessory garage beneath the detention complex will not accommodate all vehicles and the study must investigate the impacts of placard abuse on small businesses deliveries and patronage, residential quality of life, public transportation, and traffic congestion; and

WHEREAS: The additional density of detainees and services will bring a similar increase in density of visitors and workers to the area and the impacts of their means of travel on public rights-of-way, public transportation capacity, legal on-street parking, traffic congestion and air quality. The overall increase or decrease of detainee transport buses should be included as well. The de-mapping of Hogan Place is also unclear and should also be studied as part of the reasonable worst case scenario for traffic impacts; and

WHEREAS: The de-mapping of Hogan Place would further contribute traffic to one of the most heavily congested areas and streets in the city regardless of the eventual re-opening of Worth Street to full traffic. Hogan Place is a viable East-West traffic route in Lower Manhattan and alleviates traffic from other nearby streets including Canal Street; and

WHEREAS: The Landmarks Preservation Commission should consider the merits of 80 Centre Street as an individual landmark, both in terms of its historic nature and the cultural significance specifically pertaining to the Wedding Bureau; and

WHEREAS: Security concerns as well as how security relates to public space are paramount. The scope of work should include what impacts on the free movement of people and goods along public rights-of-way would result from short-term or extended “frozen zones” (like those that exist around other sensitive buildings within CB 1) that could be established to protect the MDC detainees as a whole or a potential future notorious occupant should a threat arise, now

THEREFORE
BE IT
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THAT: CB1 rejects the administration’s opaque site selection and lack of community input. We call for a renewed process to look at a variety of sites that serve both

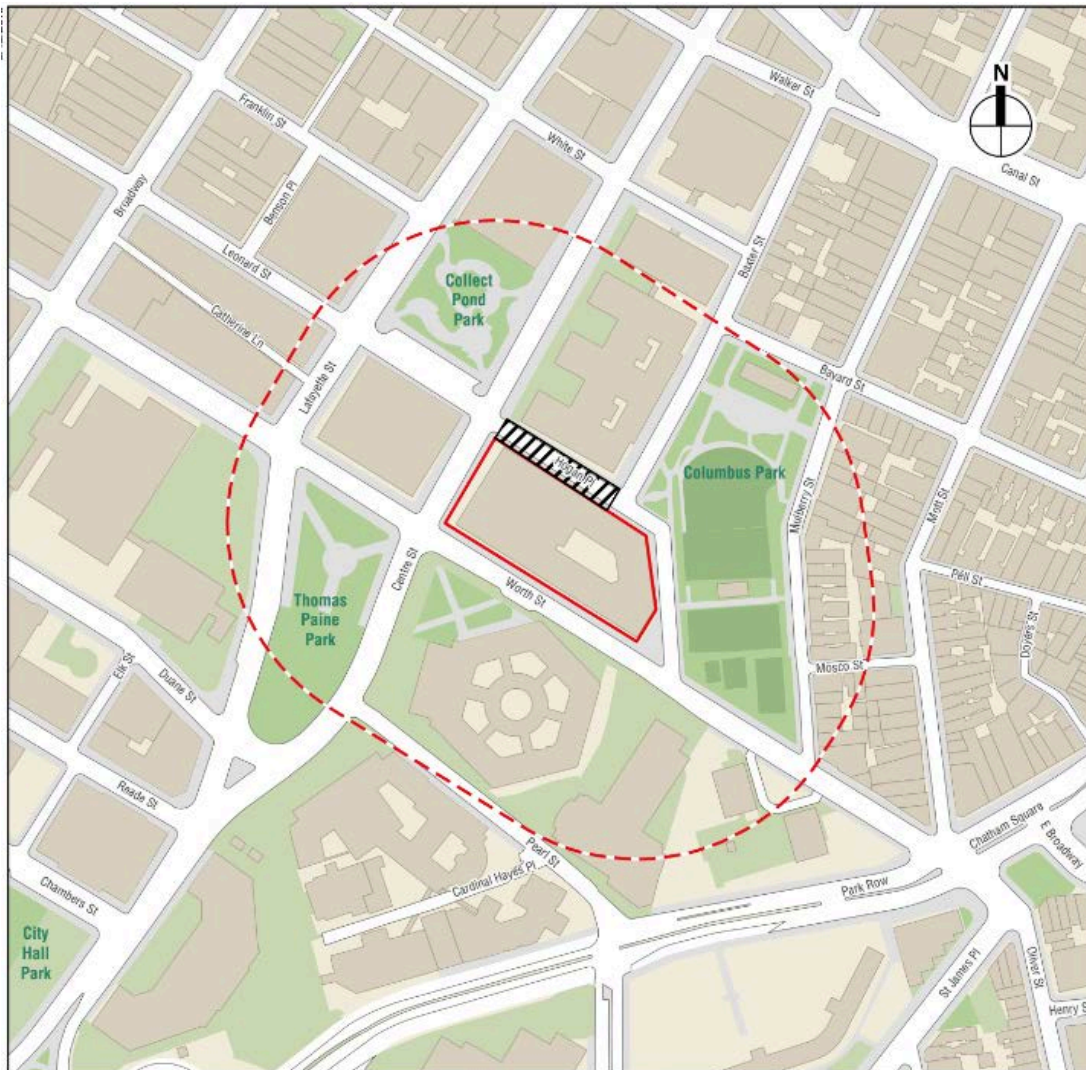
the local community impacted and satisfy the goals of an improved justice system; and

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CB1 emphatically opposes the suggestion that the required ULURP action for this issue cover all four (4) boroughs involved in the proposed facilities. To be effective and serve the established process, all ULURPs should be specific to the any location and not be combined which may lead to a rushed and sloppy process that results in poor decision making, and

BE IT
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THAT:

CB1 concludes that the study area contained in the DSOW (a mere 400 foot buffer around the site) is woefully inadequate and leads to minimizing or even missing impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods. CB1 would require that this be increased to at least a 1,200 foot buffer.



0 200 FEET

-  Project Site
-  Study Area Boundary (400-foot perimeter)
-  Proposed Demapped Area

