

**Community Board 7/Manhattan
Riverside Center Working Group
Ethel Sheffer, Chair
June 29, 2010**

The Riverside Center Working Group of Community Board 7 met on June 29, 2010, at the District Office, 250 West 87th Street, New York, New York 10024. The meeting was called to order at 6:40 pm, and was chaired by Mel Wymore, CB7 Chair, and Ethel Sheffer. The following topics were discussed.

- 1) Recap of CB7 presentation by Chair Mel Wymore (available on www.nyc.gov/mcb7.org).
 - a) Project represents approximately a 3.6% increase in the population of the UWS.
 - b) Givens remain school, affordable housing, and sustainability.
 - c) Needed common benefits include local employment, amenities to balance imposition on community.

- 2) Future meetings
 - a) Full Board meeting on 7/6 – to include additional public testimony and a vote on a refined list of priorities and specific recommendations.
 - b) 7/22 – vote on proposed resolution based on priorities.
 - i) Application requires several ULURP actions; resolution will discuss each.
 - ii) Possible that Board could vote to approve some applications and not others.
 - iii) Resolution to reflect rationale for approvals/disapprovals.

- 3) Consultant’s Report. John West (Buckhurst, Fish and Jacquemart, Inc.)
 - a) CB7 has defined its principles and provided clear guidance.
 - b) Open Space. Developer’s proposal creates open space that feels private because:
 - i) Wall and terraces along Riverside Boulevard and West 59th Street.
 - ii) Entrances to lobbies on the plaza/open space, not open streets.
 - iii) Narrow opening between Bldgs 1 and 4.
 - iv) “Choke Point” where West 60th extension meets Freedom Place separates plaza beyond.
 - v) Open space designed for passive use – does not support recreation or invite entrance.
 - (1) Shadows make space less welcoming, particularly Bldg 4, whose shadows impact most of the open space for most of the day.
 - vi) Narrow sidewalks along edges discourage access to site.
 - vii) Maze of paths through site discourage access to Riverside Park South (RSPS).
 - c) Retail – Concerns about success of the retail include:
 - i) Bldg 2 – shallow because of school.
 - ii) Bldg 1 – far removed from pedestrian traffic.
 - iii) Bldg 5 – auto showroom not a community-related use. Prominent location would be ideal for uses that serve larger community.
 - iv) Retail facing plazas and terraces less inviting and less successful than at grade.
 - d) West 59th Street as service corridor instead of vibrant part of improvements to community.
 - i) Multiple service access points to parking garage, loading dock, auto service.
 - ii) Good idea to put loading docks in the cellar rather than lining up on the street.
 - iii) 59th Street is the only connection to RSPS at grade, along blank walls, terraces.
 - e) Con Ed power plant – lost opportunity to enjoy architecture; eventual adaptive reuse.

- 4) Consultants’ Proposed Modifications:

- a) Bring site to grade - gently slope/terrace open space to grade at West 59th and along Riverside Boulevard.
 - b) Widen sidewalks along West 59th, RSB with a double-row of trees (e.g. 5th Ave and Central Park).
 - c) Extend West 60th Street to RSB (Provides street for access to Bldg 1; streets inherently public).
 - d) Remove Bldg 4 (with or without redistributing floor areas).
 - i) Increases public open space.
 - ii) Connects the open space to West 59th Street with a gentler sloping to grade.
 - iii) Virtually incorporates power plant façade into design of the site.
 - iv) Eliminates the primary source of shadows on open space throughout the afternoon.
 - v) Believed to improve wind effects.
 - e) Add new street to surround open space created by eliminating Bldg 4.
 - i) Allows bldg 3 to open onto street rather than plaza.
 - f) Concentrate retail along West 60th extension into site (at grade).
 - i) West 60th Street is the only uninterrupted corridor to Columbus Circle/mass transit.
 - ii) Make Bldg 5 retail at grade - more inviting.
 - iii) Move cinema entrance to Freedom Place – draw public into space (and past other retail).
 - iv) Change Bldg 1 to community facility (too remote for retail; don't want empty).
 - g) Arrange main building entrances to face the open space.
 - h) Keep trash collection away from open space.
- 5) Consultant's Responses to CB7 Questions:
- a) No flood problem if site at grade. Residential space still expected to be above flood level.
 - b) Sustainability not part of research requested by CB7.
 - c) Multiple access points to garages wanted by residents and retail. Big site – too far to walk.
 - d) Including power plant in site design makes area welcoming for future adaptive reuse.
 - e) Grade change and wider sidewalks mitigates service corridor effect. Cannot eliminate.
 - f) Bringing project to grade is important to make SW corner of site more welcoming.
 - i) Unsuccessful elevated playground at 67th and Central Park – not inviting.
 - ii) Ability to see into and out of space makes it inviting and safer (e.g. Bryant Park hedge).
 - g) Proposed plantings moderately abate wind. Different plantings could have improved.
 - h) Gentle slope allows open space to be both active and passive. Must plan carefully.
 - i) Project proposes to widen West 59th roadbed. Widening sidewalks proposed in addition.
 - j) Removing school from Bldg 2 would reduce West End Avenue congestion and open up retail areas.
 - k) Other buildings might be more expensive sites to build the school.
 - l) Bringing site to grade will still result in some slope, but gentler slope is more welcoming. If allow room for active or passive use between sidewalk and slope, will be more inviting.
 - m) Eliminating Bldg 4 approximates density permitted by the 1992 Restrictive Declaration.
- 6) Individual CB7 Members' Comments to Consultant Proposals:
- a) Retail on RSB is foolhardy; retail on platforms is unsuccessful; site needs successful retail.
 - b) Single access to underground a good idea; more important to bring site to grade.
 - c) Streets make inviting open space; not a given that all would be vehicular streets.
 - d) Should plan now whether each street in plan should be 2-way (especially West 59th Street).
 - e) Site must be inviting to those coming from the West (parks) as well as the East.
 - f) Must coordinate traffic improvements with needs of DSNY marine transfer station.
 - g) May need to segregate certain types of traffic so sanitation accommodated.
 - h) Bike routes to the West must be made more inviting than current mess along West 59th Street.
 - i) Important to have outdoor space for school at grade rather than on setbacks.

- j) School proposed for prime retail area. Might be better elsewhere.
 - k) Remote site, comparison to other area “centers” (Time Warner Center, Lincoln Center) – need for shuttle buses to bring workers, shoppers to site.
 - l) ... or possibly a light rail connection to Columbus Circle.
 - m) Expensive apartments with view of highway – impetus to bury the highway.
 - n) Chance to rethink streets. Need 2-way protected bike route to bike lanes on river.
 - o) Parking should be reduced to 700 spaces from 1800 to match comparable multiples.
 - p) Stairs, walls into site requires time and effort to access site – inherently less inviting.
 - q) Concern that sustainability not part of consultants’ brief – must plan for sustainability well in advance or it becomes impossible to add in to plans at a later time.
 - r) Not unreceptive to reallocating Bldg 4 floor area if sustainable and community needs met.
 - s) Adding back Bldg 4 floor area is not best solution.
 - t) Nearest neighbors across WEA should be kept in mind in making site more inviting.
- 7) Comments from Community Members
- a) Paul Elston- Riverside South Planning Corporation:
 - i) Would prefer if redefined open space were a true public park
 - b) Michael Kramer:
 - (1) Removing Bldg 4 – effect on amount of parking – eliminating parking associated with the building could improve viability of the planted open space.
 - c) Gene:
 - i) Bringing site to grade would put more of open space in view of elevated highway, absent different landscaping effects.
 - ii) Unclear that floor area from Bldg 4 could be reallocated, given Con Ed plume limits.
- 8) Affordable Housing
- a) Critical priority for CB7 – 20% permanent affordable housing based on floor area.
 - b) Applicant proposes 12% for short term.
 - c) Department of City Planning advised CB7 that it is working with the developer and the Department of Housing Preservation & Development on a permanent inclusionary housing program at 20% calculated by floor area with all units located at the site (i.e. not in another location as some inclusionary bonus rules permit).
 - d) City Planning Commission Chair Burden and other commissioners stated at certification that 12% was not adequate.
 - e) Proposal under discussion by DCP, developer, HPD would require a zoning text amendment. DCP would prepare.
 - f) In broad terms, current inclusionary program would be made applicable to this site.
 - g) Current program provides a 33% floor area bonus for 20% affordable housing.
 - i) No additional floors would be added to proposed RSC buildings.
 - ii) A portion of proposed floor area would be considered a bonus, and the FAR less the gross up would be considered the floor area to which the 20% threshold would apply.
 - iii) Exact numbers for percentages and floor area not currently available, but will be shared with CB7 once negotiations are at a sufficiently definite stage.
 - iv) Very rough estimate anticipates about 450,000 square feet of affordable units. Could be approx 450 affordable units (but define in terms of floor area and not units).
 - h) CB7 “given” of affordable/inclusionary housing is being taken seriously.
- 9) School

- a) Extell signed a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Education's School Construction Authority regarding a school at RSC.
 - b) Extell "reserving" 150,000 square feet for a school.
 - c) Extell agreeing to pay for construction of half of a half of the school.
 - i) MOU obligates Extell to pay for the construction of the "core and shell" of a school of appx 75,000 square feet.
 - (1) "Core and shell" means the exterior walls and intermediate floors.
 - (2) Excludes interior walls, facilities, etc.
 - ii) 75,000 square feet is estimated to be the size of school needed to accommodate only the enrollment from RSC itself
 - (1) Not the rest of Riverside South, and not any portion of the community at large.
 - iii) MOU requires SCA to pay for the "fitting-out" of the raw space into classrooms, gym, cafeteria, etc.
 - iv) So SCA must foot about half the cost of the school that will serve the children who live at this site.
 - d) MOU gives SCA an Option to build another 75,000 square feet.
 - i) SCA required to pay for both core and shell and fit-out of the second half of the school.
 - e) SCA already turned down an option to build a school at this site.
 - i) 1992 Restrictive Declaration obligated developer to give City an option to build a school at a different stage of the RSS project.
 - ii) Extell was the developer when that option matured – made the offer.
 - iii) SCA declined the option in November 2006.
 - f) School is a "given" – CB7's core principles stated that the school must serve the needs of the District, not just this development.
 - i) DoE's 2010-14 Capital Plan has no funding for new seats in this District.
 - ii) No reason to believe that the school likely to be built under the MOU will meet this community need and this CB7 priority.
- 10) Additional point: Burying the highway (presented by Klari Neuwelt)
- a) Developer's land will be made vastly more valuable as a result of changes in use and floor area that developer hopes/expects to obtain through this process.
 - b) Community should receive benefits in mitigation of effects of the project and in return for value enhancement. A one-time opportunity to achieve community benefits.
 - c) Many of our requests re site plan are cost neutral to the developer.
 - d) The Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement reveals substantial unmitigated impacts from this proposed development.
 - e) Burying the highway and covering it with a permanent play area/sports field is a significant, permanent community benefit commensurate with the value added, unmitigated impacts.
 - f) Responses:
 - i) Burying highway is not feasible; no federal or state dollars available.
 - ii) Other infrastructure improvements such as Metro North station being taken seriously, but likely must be at a different location (within CB4, not CB7).
 - iii) EIS needed to bury highway was completed in 1992.
 - iv) Burying highway will benefit developer as well as community.
 - v) Concern: huge cost of highway will drain resources from school, affordable housing.
 - vi) Should be able to meet givens plus another big-ticket item such as burying the highway.
 - vii) Shell for the buried highway currently ends at 65th. If extend to 61st, could make a permanent soccer field. Cost to extend is \$44MM, of which \$22MM may already exist.

- viii) Debate whether federal funds could be used for any purpose other than improving the Park
– use of these funds to construct the highway cavity in doubt. .
- ix) Fed Highway Admin will not allow fed money to be used for the cavity until they are convinced
that the project will be finished.
- x) State funds unavailable until useful life of existing elevated road expires in 15-35 years.
- xi) CB7 should not bid against itself – should add to our list of mitigations, not re-rank.
- xii) Should think big.

Adjourn: 9:25 pm

Present: Mel Wymore, Ethel Sheffer, Andrew Albert, Hope Cohen, Page Cowley, Mark Diller, Sheldon J. Fine, Phyllis E. Gunther, Klari Neuwelt, Lenore Norman, Helen Rosenthal, Roberta Semer, Elizabeth Starkey, Mel Wymore and Dan Zweig. **Board Members:** Jay Adolf, Louis Cholden-Brown, Kenneth Coughlin, Mark Darin, Robert Espier, Miki Fiegel, Nick Prigo, Suzanne Robotti, Madge Rosenberg, Eric Shuffler, and Charles Simon.