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MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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October 22, 2019

John W. Printup
Homeless Housing and Assistance Program
Bureau of Contract Management
NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
40 North Pearl Street, 12-D
Albany, New York 12243

Re: Covenant House Redevelopment Project
460 West 41st, 457 West 40th Street & 550 10th Avenue

Dear Mr. Printup,

At the July 10, 2019 meeting of Manhattan Community Board 4's (MCB4) Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use (CHKLU) Committee, Covenant House and the Gotham Organization presented plans for the Covenant House Redevelopment Project. MCB4 supports the Covenant House Redevelopment Project and related funding requests before the City and State, while maintaining its reservations regarding manner of preservation of the West 40th Street Library building.

Background – Large Scale Plan

Covenant House is an organization whose program model engages youth on the street, provides safe, short-term housing, and provides longer-term transitional housing as well.¹ In various efforts, Covenant House has worked with MCB4 since the 1980s. Since 2014, Covenant House has worked in partnership with MCB4 to develop a new site for its New York headquarters.

¹ <https://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-charity>

The site between 40th and 41st Streets between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues on Block 1050 was first identified as an affordable housing site by MCB4's Affordable Housing Plan and presented to the Deputy Mayor, Alicia Glenn, in 2014. The Site included the existing Covenant House facility, the former Hunter College Voorhees Campus, and a Port Authority bus parking lot.

After a charge from the Deputy Mayor, the Economic Development Corporation (EDC), the Department of Housing and Preservation (HPD), MCB4, and Covenant House began collaborating to develop a large-scale plan for a joint EDC and Covenant House RFP on the Site. The goal of the RFP was to maximize affordable housing and provide a new facility for Covenant House.² The plan would have allowed modification to various zoning regulations, providing more development flexibility.

In July 2015, MCB4 made specific requests to be included in the RFP regarding affordable housing, preservation of the West 40th Street Carnegie Library façade, community open space, and a ventilation easement for the #7 train line.³ The Executive Committee of MCB4 ratified two additional amendments in January 2016 for inclusion in the RFP. These amendments included an open space requirement for Covenant House residents and the preservation of the entire Carnegie Library building, not just its façade.⁴

However, due to multiple circumstances, the RFP did not move to execution. With the City owned site no longer part of the redevelopment plan, Covenant House released an RFP for the sites it owned. Covenant House selected Gotham Organization from the RFP to create a new facility that would serve both programmatic needs of the Covenant House New York and serve as both its New York and National headquarters.

The Project

The Covenant House Redevelopment Project (“the Project”) will include the construction by the Gotham Organization of two buildings on Covenant House’s current site (550 Tenth Ave). The redevelopment will entail:

- One new, purpose-built building on West 41st which will include:
 - 120 beds for Covenant House youth with multiple spaces for programming and support services
 - A Federally qualified health clinic operated by CHNY available to Covenant House youth and community residents

² [MCB4 Letter, July 30, 2015](#)

³ [MCB4 Letter, July 30, 2015](#)

⁴ [MCB4 Letter, January 26, 2016](#)

- A headquarters for Covenant House New York
- One building on Tenth Avenue will include:
 - A 45-story residential tower with 75% market rate and 25% affordable apartments
 - A headquarters for Covenant House International

Ground breaking for the Project is planned for September 2019.

The West 40th Street Carnegie Library

The decommissioned West 40th St. Carnegie Library was located at 457 W. 40th St. Designed by Cook & Welch, the structure was a Classical Revival limestone building that first opened in 1915.⁵ The former library is a significant building to many neighborhood residents. It was found to be a historic resource eligible for New York City Landmark status and eligible to be on the State/National Registers of Historic Places in the Hudson Yards Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).⁶ MCB4 subsequently requested the building be landmarked. The City took no action.

At the July 18, 2018 CHKLU Committee meeting, the development team presented the Project, which included the demolition of the West 40th St. Carnegie Library building. The Committee requested the completion of a feasibility study to maintain all or portions of the former library façade.

Covenant House presented the results of the study at the August 14, 2018 CHKLU Committee meeting. The study indicated that the preservation of the entirety of the first floor of the former library would present logistic problems with shoring and mechanical service entry, increase construction costs and cause project delays. The Committee requested CHNY find some middle ground to balance the needs of the community and its programming.

After conducting a subsequent study, Covenant House presented two feasible preservation options for the former library at the CHKLU Committee meeting on October 26, 2018. One option included the replication of the full façade. A second option included the removal, storage, and reinstallation of the first-floor façade. Between the two options presented, committee members indicated that the maintenance of original portions of the façade was preferred over the construction of a replication.

⁵ [Hudson Yards EIS, Chapter 9: Architectural Historic Resources, 9-7](#)

⁶ [Hudson Yards EIS, Chapter 9: Architectural Historic Resources, 9-7](#)

Between November 2018 and July 2019, Covenant House further developed plans for the Project and had several informational meetings with MCB4 leadership on progress. At the July 10, 2019 CHKLU Committee meeting, Covenant House presented its development plans to pursue the option of removal, storage, and reinstallation of the first-floor and basement façade of the West 40th St. Carnegie Library. Covenant House sought to commemorate the former library while meeting programmatic, construction logistic, and budgetary requirements for the new Covenant House facility.

Some committee members felt Covenant House's preservation efforts were sufficient, while others stated CHNY's preservation efforts had not gone far enough. The Committee remained supportive of the Covenant House redevelopment and its programs but maintained reservations about the scope of the preservation program in the Project.

Conclusion

MCB4 appreciates the CHNY's multi-year effort to preserve and commemorate this historic resource but remains disappointed that Covenant House could not arrive at a solution to fully preserve the West 40th Street Carnegie façade as part of its redevelopment. Notwithstanding, MCB4 will continue to work with CHNY on refining the basement and first floor preservation option.

At its October 2nd Full Board meeting, by a vote of 37 in favor, 0 against, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote, MCB4 endorsed the redevelopment of Covenant House and its programs since the project aligns with neighborhood, City and State goals to help alleviate youth homelessness and provide vital support services to vulnerable youth. In addition, the Covenant House Federally Qualified Health Center will be a valuable resource for the community.

Sincerely,



Burt Lazarin
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Jean-Daniel Noland
Chair
Clinton/Hell's Kitchen Land Use Committee

cc: Covenant House