



Economic Development and West Harlem Piers Minutes

3 January 2024 at 6:30pm

Attendees

Committee members present: Hon. Maritta Dunn (co-chair, virtual), Hon. Joyce Adewumi (co-chair, virtual), Hon. Clayton Sanford, Hon. Michael Iglesias (virtual), Hon. John-Martin Green (virtual), Hon. Clotilde Monguya, Hon. Chris Berry

Other attendees: Hon. Signe Mortensen (CB9), Hon. Victor Edwards (CB9 chair), Audrea Wachs (DCP), Christopher Lee (DCP), Jazz Hooks (WE ACT), Amelia Lewis (Custom Collaborative), Veronica Jones (Custom Collaborative)

1 Call to Order

The hybrid meeting was called to order at 6:37 PM with a quorum present.

2 Adoption of Agenda

Clayton Sanford (CS) added addendum to discuss the letter to the city comptroller regarding an accounting of the funding for the West Harlem Piers Park.

Motion by John-Martin Green (JMG), seconded by CS.

3 Adoption of Minutes

Motion to adopt by JMG, seconded by Michael Iglesias (MI).

4 Introductions/Presentations/Announcements

4.1 City of Yes Zoning for Economic Opportunity (DCP)

Signe Mortensen (chair of the CB9 [Housing, Land Use, and Zoning \(HLUZ\) Committee](#)) provided context about the Mayor's City of Yes zoning text amendment plan. Given the size of the text amendment (1100 pages), she emphasized the importance of all CB9 members and committees weighing in and shared the upcoming CB9 public hearing scheduled for 1/18 at the full board meeting meeting.

A presentation was given by Audrey Wachs and Christopher Lee from the [NYC Department of City Planning \(DCP\)](#) on the [City of Yes Economic Opportunity](#) text amendment. (The brief notes on the presentation are copied from those taken from the same presentation given to the HLUZ committee at their November meeting.) This amendment, the second of three zoning text amendments following [City of Yes Carbon Neutrality](#) and preceding [City of Yes Housing Opportunity](#). The amendment addresses 16 business zoning use groups, focusing on the size and type of businesses allowed at each site.

The motivations behind this amendment include lowering the barriers to owning, operating, and expanding businesses, and simplifying the zoning resolution. The goals are as follows:

1. **Make it easier for businesses to find space and grow**, with actions such as (Proposal 1) lifting time limits for reactivating vacant storefronts, (Proposal 2) simplifying rules for business types on commercial streets, (Proposal 3) expanding opportunities for small-scale clean production, (Proposal 4) modernizing loading dock rules, (Proposal 5) enabling commercial activity on upper floors, and (Proposal 6) simplifying the classification of businesses in zoning.

2. **Support growing industries** by (Proposal 7) clarifying rules for indoor urban agriculture, (Proposal 8) giving life science companies more certainty to grow, (Proposal 9) supporting nightlife with sensible dancing and live entertainment rules, (Proposal 10) creating zoning terms for amusement and recreation facilities, and (Proposal 11) enabling entrepreneurship with modern rules for home-based businesses.
3. **Foster vibrant neighborhoods** through (Proposal 12) introducing design rules for buildings, (Proposal 13) reducing conflicts between auto repair shops and pedestrians, and (Proposal 14) encouraging safe and sustainable distributions with micro-distribution facilities.
4. **Create new opportunities for businesses to open**, including (Proposal 15) facilitating local commercial space on residential campuses, (Proposal 16) creating processes for new corner stores in residential areas, (Proposal 17) rationalizing waiver processes for business adaptation and growth, and (Proposal 18) creating new kinds of transitional manufacturing and commercial zoning districts for the future.

This presentation summarizes the full [1100-page draft text amendment](#) and draws on the figures from [this info session deck](#). [CB9 contextualization](#) was provided, including statistics on job recovery, storefronts, and vacancies, along with a reference to visualizations available at <https://www.livexyz.com/>.

Questions on the presentation included the following:

- **Impacts on local street vendors (Proposals 3 and 11):** Questions were raised about provisions for local street vendors under the new regulations, such as those at the summer night markets on 12th Ave. Presenters noted that these vendors are usually regulated by other bodies, like [NYC Department of Transportation \(DOT\)](#) and [NYC Small Business Services \(SBS\)](#), while noting that changes to on-premises production and residential businesses may apply to those vendors' production processes. When asked about presenting at the coming Small Business Conference in April, the DCP representatives indicated interest.
- **Environmental and health regulations in small-scale production (Proposals 3 and 11):** To a question about maintaining and enforcing environmental and health regulations with small-scale production, especially in the commercial overlays in residential districts that are common in CB9, presenters noted that businesses under Proposal 3 are restricted from excess noise and other nuisances, which would require industrial ventilation and other accommodations. Proposal 11 is principally for home-based businesses that do not involve manufacturing and focuses more on light-touch changes, which would increase the number of allowable outside employees and the fraction of square footage that may be devoted to the business.
- **Impacts of upper-floor commercial on residential districts (Proposal 5):** To concerns over the impacts of new elevator bulkheads in residential buildings and the impacts of commercial activity on high floors, the presenters clarified that in commercial overlays (which represent the vast majority of CB9 commercial zoning), commercial activity would be limited to the first two floors.
- **Previously prohibited home businesses (Proposal 11):** When asked for a list of previously prohibited businesses in residences that would be permitted by the zoning amendment, presenters committed to sharing one.
- **Non-compliant vacant storefronts (Proposal 1):** To a question about how Proposal 1 would address vacant storefronts in commercial sites that were operated as such prior to the previous text amendment but are prohibited by current zoning, presenters noted that the text amendment would ensure that those storefronts would be permitted to reopen regardless of the duration of vacancy.
- **Delivery vehicles (Proposal 14):** To a question about the purpose of the micro-distribution sites, presenters noted that the intention was to incorporate other delivery vehicles (including bikes and other small vehicles) to reduce vehicle idling and improve pedestrian safety.
- **Parking impacts:** To a question about increasing parking impacts caused by more proprietors and clients parking in CB9 as a result of increased business activity, presenters mentioned that they have been collaborating with DOT and that—while they had limited information about traffic impacts of the holistic rezoning—the impacts of Proposal 11 have been studied.

- **Street scapes and bike lanes (Proposal 12):** The changes to zoning regulations of street scapes have little impact on bike lanes, since those are governed by DOT.
- **Life sciences expansion (Proposal 8):** Presenters were unsure whether there would be any relevant impacts to the Taystee Building life sciences hub and lab space on the Columbia Manhattanville campus.

4.2 Custom Collaborative Presentation

[Custom Collaborative](#) was represented by Amelia Lewis and Veronica Jones, who presented their program focusing on mentoring no/low-income and immigrant women in the fashion industry. The organization successfully completed its first cohort, consisting of a 15-week training program at Riverside Church with 15 women. They are currently in the second cycle of the program, which includes 15 women, 6 of whom are residents of CB9. The program, which started in 2016 initially as a 12-week program and later expanded to 15 weeks, provides a stipend and is conducted every day of the week.

Custom Collaborative has plans to work locally with organizations like Harlem Fashion Week and Princess Jenkins. They are hopeful for support from WHDC to collaborate with other local organizations. In terms of the grant cycle, a grant received last year is continuing until June 2024. The recruitment process involves flyers, on-the-ground canvassing, partnerships with community organizations, the shelter system, and churches. The eligibility criteria for the program include opportunities to learn more about it, a short application process, and an interview. Although there was a past collaboration with [SoHarlem](#), it was noted that SoHarlem is currently more focused on working with people already established in the industry.

4.3 WE ACT

[WE ACT](#) was represented by Jazz Hooks, who presented on the organization's workforce development initiatives aimed at the green economy. The focus of their program is to train and place clients, as well as to develop a network of employers in fields such as solar installation, sales, building assessment and engineering (in partnership with [Solar1](#)), offshore wind supply chain and on-shore connections, building performance on energy audits and air source heat pumps, and electric vehicle (EV) charging and smart planning.

Entry into the program is primarily through referrals and recruitment, and it includes support services and opportunities for feedback. Training does not currently offer stipends, but they are looking into the possibility of offering them in the future. The presentation emphasized that the focus of WE ACT is more on recruitment, such as interviewing and career services, rather than direct training. Federal grants for this program may be available through the Department of Energy (DOE), depending on the specific type of training.

5 Subcommittee Reports

6 Old Business

6.1 2024 Small Business Conference

Discussion on the 2024 Small Business Conference included various aspects such as budgeting, planning, and organization. Eutha estimated the budget at approximately \$1500 for the event.

It was noted that there is a need for a weekly side meeting to further plan the event, and CS will send out a poll along with meeting notes to schedule this.

6.1.1 Conference space and refreshments

JMG highlighted the challenges related to space reservations at Columbia under the CBA in-kind benefits provision, citing his recent challenges in coordinating an event for the LGBTQ taskforce. Chris Berry (CB) emphasized the importance of securing commitments for the space and refreshments well in advance to ensure smooth planning.

6.1.2 Small business matters

Clotilde Monguya (CM) shared suggestions on potential candidates, such as the owner of Oasis Jimma Juice or representatives from the West Harlem Chamber of Commerce. Joyce Adewumi (JA) requested that suggestions for panelists be shared with the committee for discussion.

6.1.3 Conference program

JMG has drafted an initial program for the conference, which is open for comments and suggestions from the committee members to refine and finalize it.

6.1.4 Promotion

The promotion of the conference, including the logistics for creating and distributing flyers, was discussed. There is a need to finalize the details of the event to proceed with the promotional activities.

6.2 Letter to Comptroller RE: West Harlem Piers

A [draft letter](#) to the Comptroller regarding the West Harlem Piers was presented for review and feedback. Prior the discussion, CM provided some initial feedback on the content of the letter.

A key point raised was the distinction between the capital projects that the community desires, as opposed to the operational expenditures that were previously utilized. This difference was highlighted as crucial in the communication with the Comptroller.

There was an agreement that comments and suggestions on the draft letter should be submitted within the week. CB proposed an idea to ask the Comptroller to consider setting up an escrow fund, in the event that there was further breakdown in trust over Parks as the allocator of the CBA funds. This suggestion stemmed from concerns about transparency and the need to ensure that funds are appropriately allocated and used for their intended purposes.

7 New Business

There was no new business to discuss.

8 Adjourn

The meeting was brought to a close with a motion to adjourn by CS, which was seconded by CB. The meeting officially adjourned at 9:12 PM.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Clayton Sanford.