



Economic Development and West Harlem Piers Minutes

6 February 2024 at 6:30pm

Attendees

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

Other attendees: Corey Ortega (Women's Chamber of Commerce), Heather Jason (CB9), Jerry Salama (Janus Property), Jason Ponterotto (virtual), Alyssa Ferreira (virtual), Karl Reynoso (virtual), Yuien Chin (virtual)

1 Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Maritta Dunn (MD) at 6:40 PM, with a quorum present.

2 Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was moved for adoption by Clayton Sanford (CS) and seconded by Chair Joyce Adewumi (JA).

3 Adoption of Minutes

The minutes were moved for adoption by John-Martin Green (JMG) and seconded by Michael Iglesias (MI).

4 Introductions/Presentations/Announcements

4.1 Janus Property Presentation, Jerry Salama

The [Janus Property](#) presentation by Jerry Salama, one of the principals of Janus, covered various aspects related to the Manhattanville Factory District, which includes several buildings of life science and industrial space on the intersection of 126th/127th Streets. Janus is actively looking for commercial tenants and has faced difficulties in finding tenants due to post-COVID inflation and high interest rates.

Salama provided an update on the recently opened Taystee Lab Building. Recently completed, it is set back behind affordable housing and is intended for life science work. It has achieved LEED Silver certification.

A grant from the [Empire State Development](#) was awarded to City College of New York (CCNY) to open a life science center on one floor of the building. This grant will also support the expansion of the Harlem Biospace Incubator, designed for start-ups requiring minimal desk space.

Janus is also the beneficiary of tax benefits unique to this Manhattan area. The company is involved in a competition for life sciences funding from the Chan-Zuckerberg Institute, with direct input from the governor's office favoring this site. An estimated 150 jobs are expected to be created. [Hope Knight](#), a Harlem resident and president of ESD, strongly supports this initiative.

Salama described other buildings in the development:

- The Malt House, a repurposed old brewery, lost leases accounting for 75% of its space during COVID.

- The Mink Building, originally an ice house for the brewery, is almost fully occupied.
- The Sweets Building houses offices, including those of WHDC and Janus.
- Public Outdoor Space: Janus aims to create public outdoor spaces, with part of it already open. Plans include a walking connection to 125th Street and a large outdoor area behind the Mink Building.

Several questions were raised by committee members and members of the public:

- Security on Site (Question by Madison Ayala): Concerns about security were discussed, particularly in light of issues at Montefiore. Jerry Salama responded that as the land is privately owned, they have the right to employ security measures as needed. He mentioned collaboration with nearby tenants to address security concerns.
- Use of Recently Bought Lot (Question by Yuien Chin): Yuien inquired about the preferred use of the most recently purchased lot, questioning if it could have been better used for affordable housing or arts and culture space. Salama explained that the lot went through a Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) and was too small (1600 sq ft) for building. He mentioned that [NYC Housing Preservation & Development](#) agreed to the ULURP on the condition of no building construction on site. He expressed openness to activating the green space for art or marketplace uses but noted challenges in obtaining insurance.
- Potential for Further Development (Question by MI): Michael asked if Janus considered developing housing. Salama recalled a rezoning initiative from 2016, where Community Board 9 (CB9) pushed for a contextual rezoning. He noted the difficulty in converting commercial to residential spaces due to code and cost challenges. He expressed a desire for enough commercial tenants to support restaurant usage and noted that it's currently too costly for Janus to undertake more development in the neighborhood.
- Space for Small Businesses (Question by JA): Joyce inquired about the availability of space or incubators for small businesses. Salama responded that they need an operator with financing for subletting. JA referred him to the [Harlem Collective](#) as a potential good commercial small-scale landlord, which currently offers spaces at approximately \$450 per desk per month and is nearly at capacity.
- Relevance to the Merchant's Association (Comment by Corey Ortega): Corey highlighted the relevance of these developments to the Merchant's Association, emphasizing the potential impact on local businesses.

These questions and responses underscored the community's interest in the development and utilization of the Manhattanville Factory District, particularly regarding security, community space usage, residential development, and support for small businesses.

4.2 Cory Ortega, Women's Chamber of Commerce

Cory Ortega represented the [NY Women's Chamber of Commerce \(NYWCC\)](#) and its West Harlem Merchants Association at the meeting.

His work with the West Harlem Merchants Association focuses on the area stretching from 123rd to 155th Streets, and from St. Nicholas Avenue to 12th Avenue/Riverside. The broader mandate of his work involves community development and improvements to commercial corridors. He has recently been attending CB meetings in order to assess the needs and priorities of the Community Board and its committees. Ortega is planning to work on marketing strategies and in engaging more with Community Board activities. One such event mentioned was the Senior Action event scheduled for May. Furthermore, the Women's Chamber of Commerce positions itself as a resource for local businesses, particularly in dealing with legal issues that may arise.

A significant concern raised during the presentation was the safety of employees at the Dunkin Donuts near Montefiore Park, particularly in light of reported incidents of theft and violence. Female employees, in particular, have expressed feelings of insecurity. In response to these concerns, JA, wearing the hat of the president of the 30th Precinct Community Council, suggested a potential role as a conduit between the police and local businesses. This discussion also included the idea of establishing a WCC presence at a vacant newsstand near 137th Street to enhance safety.

JMG brought up the issue of illegal vendors and the challenges faced by people who purchase from them, seeking insights into how they might be better engaged and assisted. Cory Ortega explained that the [Department of Sanitation \(DSNY\)](#) is responsible for managing illicit vendors, including the authority to confiscate illegal products. However, a persistent challenge is the lack of a permanent policing presence. The strategy proposed involves cleaning up the area incrementally, one block at a time, to establish a stronger case for additional funding.

Lastly, Yuien Chin emphasized the necessity for a maintenance plan for new open spaces, linking it to the approval process by the Community Board. This point highlighted the need to address not only the supply side but also the demand side of illegal purchases, indicating a deeper, unmet need within the community. In response, Ortega mentioned exploring opportunities for the utilization of such spaces, potentially for activities like farmers' markets or thrift stores, which could integrate some of the vendors involved in informal selling.

5 Subcommittee Reports

Subcommittee reports presented at the Housing, Land Use, and Zoning Committee Meeting included updates from three subcommittees:

- Strategic Planning (Michael): MI reported on the continued work regarding the Columbia Community Benefits Agreement (CBA), including promised educational benefits.
- Small Business (Clotilde): CM provided updates regarding the small business conference.
- Events (John-Martin): JMG discussed the development of two programs for the small business conference and sought feedback from committee members to align the programs with the committee's objectives.

6 Old Business

6.1 2024 Small Business Conference

The discussion on the 2024 Small Business Conference included several key points:

- Weekly Meetings: It was noted that weekly meetings for conference planning had not started yet, partly due to illness affecting those involved.
- Venue Considerations: The previous date for the conference was set for Saturday, April 27th. MD expressed being impressed by the Manhattanville Community Center space, highlighting its accessibility, the availability of five conference rooms, and an internal elevator. MD requested the space be held for the conference on April 27th.
- Proposal for June: A new proposal was floated to potentially hold the conference in June instead of the earlier scheduled date in April.
- Inclusion of New Participants: Corey Ortega expressed eagerness to be added to the conference plans, indicating a desire for active participation or collaboration.
- Site Visit: JA and MD planned to make an in-person visit to the proposed venue for further evaluation and arrangements.

6.2 Letter on West Harlem Piers

CS reported that the letter has been submitted to CB chair Victor Edwards for approval.

7 New Business

There was no new business to discuss.

8 Adjourn

The meeting was moved to be adjourned by JMG and seconded by CS at 8:19 PM.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Clayton Sanford.