



Housing, Land Use, and Zoning Minutes

13 February 2024 at 6:30pm

Attendees

All attendees are virtual due to inclement weather.

Committee members present: Hon. Signe Mortensen (co-chair), Hon. Liz Waytkus (co-chair), Hon. Barry Weinberg, Hon. Annette Robinson, Hon. Juan Colmenares, Hon. Ilana Mercado

Committee members absent: Hon. Eddy Antoine, Hon. Patricia Ramos

Other community board members present: Hon. Clayton Sanford, Hon. Patricia Caldwell, Hon. Michael Iglesias, Hon. Heather Jason, Hon. Clotilde Monguya

Public members present: Tanya Gallo

1 Call to Order

The meeting was called to attention by co-chair Signe Mortensen (SM) at 6:38 pm with all attendees participating virtually. A quorum was established with the presence of five committee members.

2 Adopt Agenda

The agenda was adopted with an amendment suggested by CB9 member Patricia Caldwell.

3 Adopt Minutes

The minutes were not available and hence not adopted.

4 Introductions/Presentations/Announcements

Committee and community board members introduced themselves.

4.1 Urban Resource Institute NYC

The [Urban Resource Institute \(URI\)](#) in New York City, known for its services focusing on domestic violence and homelessness, presented two housing proposals between Convent and Amsterdam Avenues. The initiatives encompass emergency and transitional homes, alongside rehousing programs, catering to victims of abuse and offering legal, economic, and various support services.

- At 478 W 130th Street, URI plans to establish transitional housing for families with children, featuring 84 apartments (67 studio apartments, 14 one-bedroom apartments, and 2 two-bedroom apartments), including 8 ADA accessible ones, with social service spaces and community rooms.
- At 487 W 129th Street, the proposal is for permanent affordable and supportive housing, with 84 apartments designed primarily for survivors of domestic violence, alongside social service space.

Questions and discussion

- **Family Housing Advocacy:** SM advocated for more family housing, noting the prevalence of studio apartments. URI responded that the large studios are flexible spaces, accommodating small families with options like bunk beds.
- **Transition to Permanent Housing:** SM inquired about how residents could transition to permanent housing. URI highlighted the importance of having supportive housing on-site in the building on 129th, alongside transitional housing on 130th. They also noted their rehousing programs and focus on domestic violence survivors and families with young children.
- **Community Placement Priorities:** SM asked about how placement works and whether CB9 community members can be prioritized for housing placements. URI emphasized the goal of reintegration into communities for those displaced. Units allocated for survivors of domestic violence are assigned via state agencies, while other units are allocated via [NYC Department of Housing Preservation & Development \(HPD\)](#) affordable housing lotteries (which can offer some reserved units for CB residents).
- **Local Presence and HPD Violations:** After noting the committee's support for transitional housing in the district and the large amount of transitional housing already in CB9, co-chair Liz Waytkus (LW) inquired about URI's existing services in CB9 and any HPD violations. URI confirmed its operation within CB9 and reported no open HPD violations at the moment, while acknowledging that some are periodically active.
- **Concerns Over Studio Units and Infrastructure:** Juan Colmenares (JC) expressed concerns about the number of studio units and the volume of transitional housing in CB9. URI clarified that the studios are designed for families and that ongoing design adjustments for the buildings are possible.
- **Property and Environmental Concerns:** Barry Weinberg (BW) asked about the property's ownership and environmental issues related to past industrial uses. URI has a purchasing agreement and is addressing soil contamination under the guidance of [NYC Office of Environmental Remediation \(OER\)](#).
- **Affordability and Building Design:** BW inquired about income levels for affordable units and potential design changes. URI indicated most units would target below 60% AMI, with design and zoning discussions ongoing.
- **Scope of Project:** BW asked about how the site plan would change and whether the rate of non-studios could be increased if the sites were zoned for R8A or R9A under the ULURP process. URI acknowledged that they had no plans to pursue a rezoning at the time. BW and LW expressed a committee interest in increasing the floor area ratio (FAR) of the site via ULURP.
- **Timelines and Financing:** BW asked about an estimated timeline and the availability of funding. URI estimates construction to begin in Fall 2024 for the 130th St building (which will last 18 months), with the other building to commence construction as soon as financing is available, likely in 2026. URI noted that approval of financing from HPD is not made available until after CB review.
- **Service Providers:** BW asked about whether service providers would be in-house or contracted. URI noted that all services would be provided by URI, except for possibly property management in the permanently affordable housing on 129th St.
- **Senior Housing and Green Space:** Brenda Price asked about provisions for seniors and green spaces. URI stated that some housing would be specifically for seniors and that the buildings would share a backyard.
- **Existing Plans and Community Interest:** Andres Orejuela inquired about current HPD postings at the site and interest in pet-friendly green spaces. URI clarified the plans are separate from existing ones and are exploring zoning and promised to look more into further green space arrangements.
- **Further Neighborhood Considerations:** BW encouraged reaching out to [Janus Property](#), which owns nearby commercial and life sciences developments. LW noted that the site

abuts a shuttered MTA bus terminal, which was suggested by the Borough President as potential affordable housing in his “[Housing Manhattanites](#)” document.

5 New Business Discussions

5.1 City of Yes Zoning for Housing Opportunity Text Amendments

The discussion on the [City of Yes Housing Opportunity](#) was led by SM, who mentioned the importance of staying proactive with the upcoming proposal, especially after the recent [City of Yes Economic Opportunity](#) process. Audrey Wachs from the [NYC Department of City Planning \(DCP\)](#) emphasized the focus on high-density proposals and the need for feedback from community boards like CB9.

SM highlighted the committee’s focus on the Universal Affordability Preference (UAP) proposal, in particular its Area Median Income (AMI) bands. Jose Trucios (DCP) noted the ongoing considerations for UAP densities and AMI levels.

BW reiterated the board’s support for developing “missing middle” housing in R1-R4 zones, emphasizing the role of local contractors. He expressed interest in the UAP proposal and noted the importance of the impact of AMI levels.

In response to LW’s query about the status of the economic opportunity, Wachs confirmed that DCP is currently accepting comments, with a vote pending.

Trucios highlighted the significance of aligning the City of Yes initiative with the forthcoming replacement of the 421a tax incentive, noting the critical interplay between these developments and funding allocations for affordable housing.

5.2 Unlocking Doors Program

The discussion touched on the HPD’s [Unlocking Doors](#) program, which allocates \$10 million to renovate distressed rent-stabilized apartments. JC inquired about tenant involvement in the program, expressing concerns about HPD’s support and landlord accountability.

5.3 Green Fast Track for Housing

SM indicated no immediate role for CB9 in the [Green Fast Track for Housing](#) initiative, with [public comments](#) open until February 17. Jose Trucios mentioned an upcoming public hearing on February 7, clarifying that the initiative is not part of the ULURP process but related to city charter amendments.

5.4 Right to Counsel Resolution — Health & Environmental Addendums

SM discussed the recent resolution passed by the community board in favor of the right to counsel, mentioning a potential merger with a separate resolution from the [Health & Environment Committee](#) that addresses the stresses of housing court. She suggested adding more data to the latter to complete the argument comprehensively. LW proposed amending the original resolution to note the concurrence of the other committee.

Heather Jason expressed concerns about quantifying the stress experienced in courtrooms and providing a medical analysis of it.

Gregory Baggett (a supporter of the previous resolution) appreciated the link between health and housing, noting that many involved agencies focus more on health rather than housing. He advocated for a more detailed exploration of this connection.

JC raised issues regarding the lack of support for Spanish speakers in court and its relation to stress.

Annette Robinson (AR) questioned why health advocacy does not push for more social services or programs, seeking the Health committee’s policy expertise.

5.5 FY 2025 Budget Responses

BW presented an overview of the budget responses to previous requests made by CB9 in the fall, noting generic responses to calls for more affordable housing and the need for CB9 collaboration on the RKO Theater request. He highlighted that the HPD categorized several requests as lying outside their jurisdiction.

With upcoming public hearings, BW recommended participation of the committee, particularly in discussions about [Tenant Interim Lease \(TIL\)](#) and senior housing. He urged members to send comments on agency feedback by February 15, prioritizing the RKO housing issue and subsequent follow-ups with agency heads.

SM committed to following up with agency representatives, and BW planned to distribute a calendar of relevant committee meetings for further engagement.

5.6 Landmarked Brownstone Changes in Sugar Hill (Patricia Caldwell)

CB9 member and clergy member Patricia Caldwell shared concerns about a proposed change in building usage by non-profit owners of a building under the Convent historic district. She expressed concerns that the architectural changes will negatively impact the character of this historically Black neighborhood. Heather Jason (the chair of [Landmarks Presentation & Parks Committee](#)) shared context of about the site, noting that this concerns the change in ownership of 43 St Nicholas Place by [Kota Alliance](#). BW said that there is little room for the CB to engage in property transfers, unless they concern city-owned land, and noted that other community facilities (e.g. WE ACT) operate out of residential buildings. PC reiterated her concerns, which were amplified by Karen Ward-Gamble. AR stressed the importance of ensuring that the services promised by Kota Alliance are indeed properly administered.

5.7 Proposed Resolution about Brokers Fees (Michael Iglesias)

The discussion, led by Michael Iglesias (MI), proposed a resolution regarding an [assembly bill](#) prohibiting brokers' fees from being demanded from tenants by landlords, highlighting their high costs and potential discriminatory effects. BW proposed a friendly amendment to condition support for the bill on HDFC co-ops not being treated differently from standard co-ops.

The committee members were generally supportive. Since the timeline does not demand urgent action, SM supported reviewing the resolution over the next month and voting on it at the subsequent meeting.

6 Old Business; Subcommittee/taskforce reports

6.1 Legislation We Are Watching

No specific updates were provided during the meeting.

6.2 Developments We Are Watching

Clayton Sanford (CS) provided updates based on publicly available information, including a new Environmental Assessment Statement for the [135th ULURP rezoning](#). He also discussed the Manhattan Borough President's proposal for affordable housing at a retired bus depot.

6.3 Public Members Updates

The executive committee has considered public member recommendations.

6.4 NYCHA

There were no new updates on the NYCHA front.

6.5 RKO Hamilton Theater Taskforce Update

A community board representative is needed for the RKO taskforce, potentially from the Arts and Culture or other committees. April Adams was suggested as a possible leader. Ilana Mercado

(IM) offered to report back on taskforce activities in the meantime, continuing the efforts of Walter Alexander.

6.6 TIL

Barry Weinberg (BW) relayed updates regarding [Tenant Interim Lease \(TIL\)](#), highlighting engagement from local council members.

6.7 HDFC Updates

Andres Orejuela raised concerns about high insurance rates at some cooperatives and stressed the need for HDFCs to validate that their rates are indeed market rate and not over-inflated.

6.8 Film and TV Taskforce Updates

Efforts to find leadership support for the Film and TV Taskforce continue, with IM engaging with [Arts & Culture Committee](#) members.

7 Action Items

No specific action items were listed for this meeting.

8 Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by LW and seconded by BW at 9:37 PM.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Clayton Sanford.