

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITINGS

AND DISPOSITIONS 1

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC  
SITINGS DISPOSITIONS

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February 29, 2024  
Start: 11:04 a.m.  
Recess: 12:30 p.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Kamillah M. Hanks, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Amanda Farías  
Oswald Feliz  
Christopher Marte  
Sandy Nurse  
Yusef Salaam

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Darlene Mealy

SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITINGS  
AND DISPOSITIONS 2

A P P E A R A N C E S

Anthony Drummond, Senior Planner for Brooklyn at  
Housing Preservation and Development

Serin Choi, Gilbane Development Company

Catherine Grave, Gilbane Development Company

Aleena Farishta, Director of Brooklyn Planning at  
Housing Preservation and Development

Arvind Sindhvani, Director of Land Use, Planning  
and Development at Housing Preservation and  
Development

Karina Leung, Project Manager at Housing  
Preservation and Development

Masiki Glover, self

Kofi Williams, Executive Director of Asase Yaa  
Cultural Arts Foundation

Kevin A. Joseph, Executive Director of Pure  
Elements: An Evolution in Dance

Quardean Lewis-Allen, Founder and Executive  
Director for the Youth Design Center

Catherine Mbali Green-Johnson, ARTs East New York

1  
2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone  
3 check for the Committee on Landmarks, Public Sitings  
4 and Dispositions. Today's date is February 29, 2024.  
5 We're located in the Committee Room. The recording is  
6 done by Rocco Mesiti.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: (INAUDIBLE) Landmarks,  
8 Public Sitings, and Dispositions.

9 If you're here to testify at today's  
10 hearing, please sign up with the Sergeants at the  
11 back.

12 If you have any written testimony, you  
13 may submit it here, or if you're joining us online,  
14 you can send it to testimony@Council.nyc.gov. That is  
15 testimony@Council.nyc.gov.

16 From this moment on, nobody can approach  
17 the dais. If you need somebody from the dais, please  
18 reach out to one of us, the Sergeants-at-Arms, and  
19 we'll help you out.

20 Thank you so much.

21 Madam Chair, we are ready to begin.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you so much.

23 [GAVEL] Good morning. I am Council Member Kamillah  
24 Hanks, Chair on the Subcommittee of Landmarks, Public  
25 Sitings and Dispositions. I would like to welcome

2 everyone to this meeting of the Subcommittee on  
3 Landmarks.

4 Before we begin with today's agenda, I  
5 will remind everyone that this meeting is being held  
6 in a hybrid format.

7 For members of the public who wish to  
8 testify remotely, we ask that you first register  
9 online and you may do so by visiting  
10 [www.Council.nyc.gov/landuse](http://www.Council.nyc.gov/landuse) to sign up and then sign  
11 onto Zoom and remain signed on until you have  
12 testified.

13 For anyone who is with us today in person  
14 wishing to testify, if you have not already done so,  
15 please see one of the Sergeants to fill out a  
16 speaker's card and we will call your name at the  
17 appropriate time.

18 For anyone wishing to submit a written  
19 testimony on the items being heard today, we ask that  
20 you please send it via email to  
21 [landusetestimony@Council.nyc.gov](mailto:landusetestimony@Council.nyc.gov), and please indicate  
22 the Land Use number and/or project name in the  
23 subject line in your email.

24

25

1  
2           On today's agenda, we will have one  
3 public hearing for housing proposal in Council Member  
4 Mealy's District in Brooklyn.

5           I will now open the public hearing on the  
6 Brownsville Arts Center and Apartments Proposal  
7 relating to the property in Council Member Mealy's  
8 District in Brooklyn. The proposal consists of three  
9 Land Use actions under ULURP number C 240029 HAK, C  
10 240030 ZMK, and N 240031 ZRK.

11           We are joined today by project team  
12 members, including Anthony Drummond of HPD, Serin  
13 Choi and Catherine Grave from Gilbane Development  
14 Company. We will also have available for additional  
15 questions as needed, Aleena Farishta, Arvind  
16 Sindhvani, and Karina Leung of HPD.

17           I will remind everyone who is testifying  
18 remotely, if you have not already done so, you must  
19 register online and you may do that now by visiting  
20 the Council's website at [www.Council.nyc.gov/landuse](http://www.Council.nyc.gov/landuse).

21           Counsel, would you please administer the  
22 affirmation?

23           COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Panelists, would you  
24 please raise your right hand and state your name for  
25 the record.

1 SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITINGS AND  
DISPOSITIONS

6

2 SENIOR PLANNER DRUMMOND: Anthony  
3 Drummond.

4 CATHERINE GRAVE: Catherine Grave.

5 SERIN CHOI: Serin Choi.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell  
7 the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth  
8 in your testimony before this Subcommittee and in  
9 answer to all Council Member questions?

10 SENIOR PLANNER DRUMMOND: Yes.

11 CATHERINE GRAVE: Yes.

12 SERIN CHOI: Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you. Applicant  
14 panelists, please begin. Please let us know when you  
15 are ready to share your presentation, and our Staff  
16 will display it on the screen.

17 SENIOR PLANNER DRUMMOND: Thank you very  
18 much. Good morning, Chair Hanks and Subcommittee  
19 Members. My name is Anthony Drummond. I'm a Senior  
20 Planner at the Department of Housing Preservation and  
21 Development, and I'm joined this morning by Aleena  
22 Farishta, who is our Director of Brooklyn Planning;  
23 Hallah Selah, our Deputy Director of Brooklyn  
24 Planning; and members of the development team from  
25 Blue Sea and Gilbane, and we're excited to be

1 presenting on the Brownsville Arts and Apartments  
2 Project, which was certified into ULURP on August  
3 21st. We are seeking a series of Land Use actions to  
4 facilitate the development of the Brownsville Arts  
5 Center and Apartments, which will include an Urban  
6 Development Action Area designation and project  
7 approval of UDAAP, disposition of City-owned land,  
8 zoning map amendment to rezone from existing R6/C2-3  
9 and C4/3 district to an R7A and R7A/C2-4, a zoning  
10 text amendment to establish the rezoning area as a  
11 Mandatory Inclusionary Housing, MIH. These actions  
12 will facilitate a new nine-story building with  
13 approximately 282 affordable rental apartments with  
14 one additional unit for a superintendent,  
15 approximately 25,000 square feet of ground floor  
16 community facility space dedicated to arts and  
17 cultural uses and several outdoor spaces. This  
18 project is being developed as a joint venture between  
19 Blue Sea Development, Gilbane and Art Space. Next  
20 slide.

22 The site was designated through the  
23 Brownsville RFP in August 2017 and required that  
24 proposals be responsive to the visions and goals of  
25 the Brownsville Plan. This plan was developed through

1  
2 a community-based planning process with the support  
3 of CB16 to develop a shared vision and plan for the  
4 future of Brownsville. We held a series of public  
5 workshops, community events, in conjunction with  
6 local partnerships, and a major component of HPD's  
7 investment in the neighborhood is creating new  
8 affordable housing on vacant City-owned land. The  
9 plan acts for a cultural community facility that  
10 promoted and supported arts and cultural activity in  
11 Brownsville.

12 In addition to affordable housing, the  
13 site is the last one of three City-owned sites  
14 developed, identified in the RFP to move forward into  
15 Euler. Next slide.

16 The Brownsville Plan has resulted in a  
17 series of neighborhood accomplishments such as the  
18 creation of over 2,400 new affordable homes under  
19 construction are completed with 1 billion-plus  
20 invested in the Brownsville community and over 150  
21 million plus of city invested in parks, NYCHA open  
22 space and streetscape. Now, I will pass it on to my  
23 development colleagues on the next slide.

24 CATHERINE GRAVE: Good morning. Catherine  
25 Gray, Gilbane Development Company. I'm going to just

1  
2 start by saying this project is a mixed-use endeavor,  
3 combining affordable housing with a cultural center  
4 and...

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry, could you turn  
6 on your mic?

7 CATHERINE GRAVE: Can you hear me? Sorry.  
8 We've been working on it since 2018 to bring as many  
9 cultural partners as possible to Brownsville, and I'm  
10 really proud to say we've got a variety of arts  
11 groups that are supportive of the work, including  
12 Flex Dance Program, Downtown Brooklyn Arts Alliance,  
13 New Yorkers for Culture and Arts.

14 We also, in the next slide, have been  
15 working very hard to identify a broad range of anchor  
16 tenants for the Cultural Center so we're bringing  
17 BRIC that will be doing multimedia, they're the group  
18 that do free parks concerts in Prospect Park every  
19 summer; Pure Elements, which is a homegrown dance  
20 group that does classes for children starting at five  
21 going all the way through high school and then  
22 additional classes for adults; the Brooklyn Arts  
23 Council that will be offering affordable studio  
24 space; Brooklyn Music School, which is over 100-year-  
25 old settlement house that, again, focuses on music,

1 but will also be doing music production; and Youth  
2 Design Center, which is a graphic design outfit that  
3 is also homegrown to Brownsville. We didn't start  
4 with all of these groups in 2018. We've expanded, and  
5 we continue to be flexible and open, and as we find  
6 additional groups that are interested in taking  
7 space, we will make room for them. We're also  
8 including a large black box theater, which is also  
9 available for rehearsal space and additional  
10 educational space that will be available for groups  
11 in the community, not just arts groups, but the  
12 Community Board or other community-based  
13 organizations that want a free or affordable space to  
14 use. Next slide.

16           The project as a whole is a nine-story  
17 structure. It started with 291 apartments and it's  
18 now down to 283, which is a response to ongoing  
19 communications with the Councilwoman and the  
20 Community Board where they were really focused on  
21 making sure that the individual apartments were as  
22 large as possible so working with HPD on their design  
23 guidelines, trying to redesign the spaces to maximize  
24 bedroom sizes, living rooms, etc. Again, it's a  
25 25,000 square foot ground floor arts facility, and

1 then there are a range of amenities specifically for  
2 the residents. There's laundry on every floor. There  
3 is free storage in the cellar assigned to every  
4 apartment in the development. We have a focus on  
5 active design, so there are fitness rooms as well as  
6 community rooms in the space. We also have a range of  
7 outdoor spaces, which we will discuss later in the  
8 presentation. Just want to stay on this slide and  
9 focus on the façade. Again, the façade design has  
10 evolved, and this is the latest image, really created  
11 in response to consultation with the Councilwoman and  
12 responding to critiques that we received, starting  
13 with the Community Board, really trying to bring a  
14 building that's beautiful and responds to the  
15 concerns and interests of the community itself so  
16 we're building something that the residents of  
17 Brownsville want. The site is three lots on Rockaway  
18 Avenue through to Chester, just north of Pitkin  
19 Avenue, next slide, sorry, and south of East New  
20 York, the lot area is 57,000 square feet, and the  
21 current zoning is an R6. We're going up to an R7A,  
22 which is a contextual zone. I'm going to hand it over  
23 to my colleague, Serin Choi, to finish off.  
24  
25

1  
2                   SERIN CHOI: Hi. Next slide, please. The  
3 open space that's getting developed as part of this  
4 project is in line with citywide goals of creating  
5 not only more publicly accessible space in the  
6 community but also to create like a nicer experience  
7 for all the residents and participants of the art  
8 center. The first type of open space that's available  
9 is a 5,100 square foot public plaza. It's right off  
10 Rockway Avenue, and the idea is to create like a  
11 segue into the cultural facility, so it's right next  
12 to the theater space. Not only will it be accessible  
13 for the public to use, but the idea is so the arts  
14 operators could have a maybe a flexible  
15 indoor/outdoor component to any of the performances.  
16 Then the second category of like open space is  
17 approximately 11,900 square foot inside the building  
18 area. Not only will there be private, passive  
19 recreational space for the residents like apartment  
20 residents, there'll also be outdoor space for  
21 designated for the arts facility users to use so  
22 there'll be a little over 2,000 square feet of an  
23 amphitheater space so people can have small  
24 performances outdoors and also a more passive outdoor  
25 space for the arts facility operators in order for

1  
2 them to use it if they want to have an outdoor  
3 exhibit or gallery showing or anything of that  
4 nature. It's important to note that everything will  
5 be landscaped. The idea is to increase the  
6 permeability to offset any stormwater issues that  
7 occur during the course of the rainy seasons, but the  
8 landscape design is not only centered around making  
9 sure that the neighborhood residents can use the  
10 space but also that it's a very enjoyable space for  
11 the arts operators and for the residents. Next slide,  
12 please.

13           Another component of the project that's  
14 really important to highlight is the social services  
15 component. Approximately 42 apartments will be set  
16 aside for supportive housing run by the Brooklyn  
17 Community Housing Services. What that means is that  
18 not only will there be set-aside for people who need  
19 additional support, but there will be on-site  
20 supportive office where case managers from the  
21 Brooklyn Community Housing Services will be there to  
22 offer on-site supportive services. The project is  
23 designed to the highest sustainability standards. The  
24 key ways to look at this is from a heating and  
25 cooling perspective, so it will be designed to

1  
2 passive house, which means that the building's  
3 insulation and windows and the way that's oriented  
4 around the sunlight is designed to minimize the  
5 amount of energy needed to heat and cool the  
6 building, but also there is renewable energy  
7 component to it. We are using a canopy solar system  
8 on the roof that will generate somewhere between 300  
9 to 400 kilowatt hours of energy to offset any energy  
10 usage to heat and cool the building. In addition to  
11 that, to address the City's concern around a climate  
12 change affecting the City's landscape, we are  
13 incorporating on-site detention tanks to minimize the  
14 amount of rain that can go onto streets and create  
15 flooding. Permeability is not only enhanced on the  
16 ground where there is the outdoor passive  
17 landscaping, but also on the roof, there's a green  
18 roof to try to absorb as much water that comes down  
19 to avoid it from creating flooding issues on the  
20 street, but also there's a workforce development  
21 component so we have partnered with CBEDC, the local  
22 economic development corporation, to identify not  
23 only M/WBE contractors who'd be interested in bidding  
24 on the projects to ensure that the investments that  
25 we're making stay within the local community but also

1  
2 to provide free OSHA training. The idea is OSHA  
3 certification is kind of a key component for anyone  
4 who's interested in entering into the construction  
5 industry so we remove that kind of barrier to entry  
6 through the project. We also are partnering with the  
7 Brownsville Community Justice Center. We are  
8 providing some on-hand marketing and placemaking  
9 experience for the local youths so they all get paid  
10 like a stipend to learn and work with us on the  
11 project and get outdoor to do some placemaking around  
12 the project, and then in addition to that, we have a  
13 local hiring commitment for construction and  
14 permanent jobs where within CB16, approximately 50  
15 percent of the jobs will be open for those residents  
16 who live there. Again, the idea is to not only ensure  
17 there's a big investment in Brownsville, but keep the  
18 investment within the neighborhood.

19           CATHERINE GRAVE: I'd like to supplement  
20 what Serin said. We were at the Community Board  
21 meeting earlier this week where there was an update  
22 on the Brownsville Plan, and many of the Community  
23 Board members commented on the fact that they felt  
24 they still weren't being heard, that there were all  
25 these accomplishments and yet, their basic needs were

1  
2 still not being met, and I just wanted to say the end  
3 of the ULURP is not the end of the consultation from  
4 our point of view. We're building a community center,  
5 this cultural center, which we hope is really going  
6 to flourish and be both a place where people are  
7 making art, but consuming art and everyone feels  
8 welcome, and we know that doesn't happen in a day in  
9 a community where there haven't been a lot of  
10 opportunities for formal cultural spaces. I just  
11 wanted to leave some thoughts that we're continuously  
12 working in the community, working with local elected  
13 officials to identify other arts groups that we  
14 should be communicating with who might want to be  
15 part of this larger process but also committed on the  
16 workforce side to work with the Workforcel office  
17 with New York City Housing Authority's REES  
18 Department, which has a very large footprint in this  
19 community, really to make sure that we use this  
20 project as an economic tool to improve the financial  
21 capacity in the community. It's not just arts and  
22 it's not just housing. Thank you. Next slide, please.

23 SENIOR PLANNER DRUMMOND: Thank you,  
24 Catherine. In response to Council Member and the  
25 Community Board's feedback, we have also made changes

1 to provide deeper affordability while also  
2 maintaining the proportion of family size units. The  
3 proposed project will be developed under HPD's  
4 Extremely Low and Low-income Affordability program,  
5 under ELLA. Approximately 74 percent of the units  
6 will be affordable to individuals and families  
7 earning up to 60 percent of the AMI, that's up to  
8 76,260 for a family of three. The project will  
9 include a range of units from studios, one bedrooms,  
10 two bedrooms, three bedrooms, and over a third of  
11 those units are family-sized units, and 15 percent of  
12 the units will be set aside for formerly homeless  
13 individuals and family.

14  
15           Next slide. All right, to summarize, we  
16 are here today before you as we conclude our ULURP  
17 process for the Brownsville Arts Center and  
18 Apartments and seek the approval of the Land Use  
19 actions from the Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public  
20 Sitings and Dispositions. We are currently in the 50-  
21 day review period with the City Council, which the  
22 ULURP clocks ends March 19, 2024, at which point we  
23 would anticipate the conclusion of the ULURP process.  
24 We thank you again for this opportunity to present  
25

1 before you, and we can open it up to any questions  
2 that you might have. Thank you very much.

3  
4 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you so much. I  
5 appreciate your testimony.

6 I just want to recognize that we are now  
7 joined by Council Member Feliz, Council Member Marte,  
8 Nurse, and Salaam is joining us virtually.

9 I will now pass it over to Council Member  
10 Mealy for the first round of questions. Thank you.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you, Chair.  
12 Thank you to this Committee. As you just said that  
13 you just went to the Community Board and you told us  
14 that you were not going to speak about this project,  
15 so what was the whole intent to go into the Community  
16 Board if you were not going to tell them about the  
17 upgrades that you say that you was going to do with  
18 the square feet of the apartments. My issue is who  
19 can live in a two-bedroom apartment, only 800 square  
20 feet. If that was what you said you was going to do  
21 when you did the charade, come in with the  
22 Commissioner, why wouldn't you tell this community  
23 about this? Wouldn't that be something to tell the  
24 community that instead of 800 square feet, two-  
25 bedroom apartment, y'all have made it bigger. I don't

1  
2 understand why this hearing came up so fast if y'all  
3 haven't did certain things already.

4           CATHERINE GRAVE: The Community Board's  
5 meeting was a presentation and an update on the  
6 Brownsville Plan. I spoke only to announce that the  
7 hearing was happening today for the ULURP and  
8 inviting people to come.

9           COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Could you tell me  
10 you, the Commissioner HPD, the Mayor's Office came to  
11 my office and now you're saying that you could do  
12 1,000 parking, right? It's in here. Chair, did you  
13 look and see that? One parking space required for  
14 every 1,000 feet of commercial space. Will that  
15 happen? This is your proposal.

16           CATHERINE GRAVE: Could you provide more  
17 feedback or context?

18           COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: No, it's your  
19 proposal, you gave us this. Yes, go back to your  
20 slide. It's your proposal, and you know that's the  
21 main thing. This is right next door to my office. I  
22 had asked, any day, it takes me 15 minutes to get out  
23 of the parking space on a public street, and I asked,  
24 this is our last opportunity to have parking, and I  
25 believe Brownsville deserves parking in which they

1  
2 are now taking away NYCHA parking and building  
3 housing, and people are losing their cars. People are  
4 triple parking. I asked you, we need parking, and  
5 now, in your proposal, you say you're going to give  
6 us one parking space required for every 1,000 square  
7 feet of commercial space, and this is a commercial  
8 building also, mixed-use, right?

9           CATHERINE GRAVE: It's non-profit and  
10 residential.

11           COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: It's mixed-use.  
12 It's going to be commercial on the bottom and housing  
13 on top, a theater on the bottom, housing on top.

14           I got two more questions.

15           COMMITTEE COUNSEL: If you would like to  
16 testify, would you like to just be sworn in?

17           DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Yes, please.

18           COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Panelists,  
19 would you please raise your right hand and state your  
20 name for the record.

21           DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Aleena Farishta.

22           DIRECTOR SINDHWANI: Arvind Sindhwani.

23           COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you both affirm to  
24 tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the  
25

1 truth in your testimony before the Subcommittee and  
2 an answer to all Council Member questions?  
3

4 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Yes.

5 DIRECTOR SINDHWANI: Yes.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Sorry about  
7 that.

8 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Thank you. Council  
9 Member, just want to clarify in terms of the zoning  
10 requirements and the land uses here, so this is a  
11 residential building plus community facility. There  
12 were no parking requirements per zoning for the  
13 development.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So why? Because  
15 you're building housing, and this is the last  
16 opportunity to have parking. Other than that, you  
17 could do parking there. Just because it's the housing  
18 now, but other than that, you could have done  
19 parking. Yes or no?

20 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Yes. Parking is an  
21 option, and I know we've had this discussion before.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I'm asking for that  
23 option to be included in this proposal. That's all.

24 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Yes, we understand,  
25 and I think, you know, we've had this discussion

1  
2 before that HPD and the team have been thinking about  
3 various alternative scenarios. There are many things  
4 that we had to prioritize, including deeper  
5 affordability, larger units, making sure we have  
6 really affordable rents for the non-profit space and  
7 cultural partners as well for the long term. All of  
8 those things affect the financial feasibility of the  
9 project as well. We also have a public plaza. We have  
10 other residential amenity spaces, including amenity  
11 spaces for the community facilities. While balancing  
12 all of these needs, we were prioritizing a lot of the  
13 feedback we heard from the years' long worth of  
14 feedback from the Brownsville Plan...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Excuse me, you just  
16 heard out of her mouth that the community, when you  
17 went last night, it was last night, they're still not  
18 satisfied. They feel we could get much more from  
19 this. Talking about, M/WBES, y'all already have that  
20 set already. Y'all came and told me how many people  
21 are going to be in it already, and for the record,  
22 everyone should know the space will be free, right?  
23 You said it's free. Y'all got 12 million dollars, and  
24 everyone who want to go in this space will be for  
25 free so let's give them just a little bit more.

1  
2           One other thing I want to talk about is  
3 how big are the apartments? You didn't put that in  
4 here, and you should be celebrating it. I came in  
5 here to think that y'all was doing the right thing in  
6 which y'all said y'all was going to do. That's a  
7 celebratory lap you could have done, but now not  
8 having how much space that y'all extended for two-  
9 bedroom apartments, and I really need to know how  
10 much the three-bedroom apartments, how big is that  
11 space, and if it's any way you could go down a floor.

12           DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Sure. So next slide,  
13 please. The ranges of the each of the unit types.

14           COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: (INAUDIBLE) feet.

15           DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Yes, next slide,  
16 please. The studios range from 368 square feet to 416  
17 square feet. The one bedrooms range from 501 square  
18 feet to 574 square feet. The two bedrooms range from  
19 656 square feet to 765 square feet. And the three  
20 bedrooms range from 874 square feet to 1,041 square  
21 feet.

22           COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: A three-bedroom,  
23 800 square feet.

24           DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Next slide, please.

25           COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Oh, my. I'm done.

1  
2 DIRECTOR SINDHWANI: Sorry. You have to  
3 keep going until the unit layout.

4 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: I'm trying to, yeah.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Can you talk about  
6 this slide, please as it relates to the three bedroom  
7 as opposed to the two.

8 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Yes. Next slide has  
9 the three bedrooms.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: No one can live  
11 like this.

12 CATHERINE GRAVE: The Department of  
13 Housing Preservation and Development has a design  
14 guidebook with maximum and minimum sizes for  
15 apartments that they apply when developers seek  
16 subsidy for affordable housing. We've been studying  
17 the layouts of the building and have been doing our  
18 best to push for the layouts of the apartments to be  
19 on the maximum end of the size guidelines and, in  
20 many cases, exceeding the standard HPD space  
21 requirements. This is an example of a three bedroom.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Hold off one second.  
23 I'm sorry, pardon me. Can you repeat, you were saying  
24 the standard? Can we just go back to that for a  
25 moment? Can we just, for the public and for my

1  
2 edification, what is the standard size for an HPD  
3 unit that is considered affordable for each apartment  
4 size..

5 DIRECTOR SINDHWANI: We'll get that  
6 information.

7 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Because I think that's  
8 a really important chart to display here.

9 CATHERINE GRAVE: I appreciate that.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: we have serious  
11 questions from the Council Member who was duly  
12 elected in that District to represent her  
13 constituency, and her constituency is saying that  
14 this is not acceptable so what we want to get to is  
15 yes, and so we really need to have explained to  
16 satisfy not only the Council Member, but satisfy the  
17 Community Board members and members of the community  
18 that have the questions.

19 DIRECTOR SINDHWANI: Absolutely, Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: So if we could just  
21 have a slide like that at some point because this is  
22 a little confusing.

23 DIRECTOR SINDHWANI: Absolutely, and we'll  
24 pull up the numbers right now.

1  
2           In the meantime, Council Member Mealy,  
3 these apartment layouts that you're seeing on the  
4 screen are the same ones that we showed you at your  
5 District office with the Commissioner, and we are  
6 showing the new...

7           COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Excuse me, but your  
8 testimony just said a three-bedroom apartment was 800  
9 square feet so that means the two-bedroom apartment  
10 pretty much 600. You didn't say anything about 1,000  
11 as of yet.

12           DIRECTOR SINDHWANI: Yes, Council Member,  
13 I want to reiterate the three-bedroom ranges from 874  
14 square feet to 1,041 square feet so there's a range  
15 for each of these different, not all the three  
16 bedrooms are the same size.

17           COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Well, that should  
18 be here today. This is the time for everything to be  
19 put out on display. Respectfully to my Colleagues  
20 that they don't think that this is a farce here, but  
21 you just vocally said 800 square feet for a three-  
22 bedroom apartment. Who can live in that? That's a  
23 box. A two bedroom is a box, 600 square feet. I feel  
24 y'all need to revamp and bring forth what you really  
25 going to do and let everyone see it. This is not the

1  
2 time to be confused. Chair, I'm not accepting this,  
3 and the community already stated they're not  
4 accepting this. This is the opportunity for them to  
5 really put their best foot forward and show the City  
6 what you're trying to do in Brownsville, and I'm not  
7 going to let you just come in and rape and put us in  
8 boxes in which you say one thing and now it's a  
9 totally different thing.

10 Thank you, Chair, for giving me the  
11 leverage and the latitude to say this, but I have no  
12 more questions because this is nowhere near what the  
13 community requested.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you, Council  
15 Member.

16 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Council Member, I  
17 pulled up the numbers for the different..

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: I do have some  
19 questions, and I know that my Colleagues have  
20 questions so I want to get through those first and  
21 then just make you understand that there are going to  
22 be additional work that needs to be done on this to  
23 see the juxtaposition as opposed to what you believe  
24 is the proper way to go and what changes the Council  
25 Member wants to have. I think that that is something

1  
2 that we just need to see. As a result of that, we  
3 will then see what the reduction is of affordability  
4 in comparison to the additional pieces that the  
5 Council Member wants to put in, which is parking and  
6 larger apartment sizes, but there is a trade-off  
7 (INAUDIBLE) my understanding and the M/WBEs, but  
8 there will be a trade-off in the affordability  
9 component so I'm just going to go along with some of  
10 my questions, and I'm going to pass it along to my  
11 Colleagues.

12                   Again, thank you very much, and I thank  
13 my Colleague, Council Member Mealy, for advocating so  
14 strongly for her District.

15                   I understand that this site is part of  
16 revitalization of Brownsville. When did HPD first  
17 approach the Community Board with this proposed  
18 project?

19                   DIRECTOR FARISHTA: HPD went through a  
20 community engagement process through the Brownsville  
21 Plan from 2016 to 2017. We released an RFP and  
22 through that process we designated this team in 2017.

23                   CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Are there any other  
24 sites which are part of this plan?

25

1  
2 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Yes, there are two  
3 other sites, City-owned sites, that were part of the  
4 Brownsville Plan. Site B, Glenmore Manor, and Site C,  
5 a cluster of sites on Livonia Avenue.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you. Is there a  
7 reason why this plan took so long?

8 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: For this project  
9 specifically?

10 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Yes, HPD. How long?

11 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Thank you. Yeah, so  
12 the pre-development process, it's a very lengthy  
13 process we know. We wish it could be a lot quicker.  
14 During this time, we do a lot of site survey and due  
15 diligence. We work on putting together a site plan.  
16 We work with sister agencies such as City Planning to  
17 make sure we're having a technically complete  
18 application since we are seeking various Land Use  
19 actions, including a rezoning. There was also the  
20 pandemic during that time, which slowed down our  
21 process a little bit, but we're here before you now,  
22 excited to present this project and hopefully move  
23 forward.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Quick question, from  
25 the time from 2016 to being like conceptualized to an

1  
2 RFP in 2017, we're now in 2024, how many reiterations  
3 did we have of this project because we're not living  
4 in a world of 2017 anymore, and how many steps or  
5 proposals did we see in that?

6           CATHERINE GRAVE: In 2018, we had a  
7 development of about 225 units, and it grew in size  
8 in part to respond to the demand for affordable  
9 housing in New York City. The ULURP is following the  
10 guidance that came out of the planning process where  
11 the rezoning anticipated was identified in the RFP.  
12 As part of the consultation with the community, there  
13 was an understanding that it would go to an R7A even  
14 before the RFP went out and then, within that zoning,  
15 we realized that we could do more than the 224 units,  
16 that we could get close to 300, and so that was a  
17 conversation with HPD about figuring out how to re-  
18 mast the building to accomplish that. We have laid  
19 out the apartments a number of times as we've evolved  
20 the size of the building. We have revised the façade  
21 really five times from where we started. Through that  
22 period from 2018 to 2024, we have gone to the  
23 Community Board over time to provide updates of where  
24 we are so that they could keep tabs on what we were  
25 doing, working with people in the community, with

1  
2 local elected officials to keep them apprised and so  
3 the evolution of the project does in part reflect  
4 going back to the drawing board to address the  
5 concerns that we've heard within the context of the  
6 criteria that the City provides for the development  
7 of affordable housing.

8           DIRECTOR SINDHWANI: Chair, in short, to  
9 answer your question, the project has gone through  
10 numerous changes since the Brownsville Plan since  
11 we've started engaging Council Member Mealy and the  
12 Community Board, and it's still undergoing changes to  
13 make sure that we're honoring the Council Member's  
14 requests throughout the ULURP process.

15           CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you so much for  
16 answering my questions. Before I recognize my  
17 Colleagues to see if they have any questions, I'd  
18 like to recognize Madam Chair, Majority Leader Amanda  
19 Fariás, has joined us. Now, I would like to recognize  
20 my Colleagues. Council Member Feliz.

21           COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Thank you so much.  
22 Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Chair, for this  
23 hearing, and I want to thank Council Member Mealy for  
24 really listening to your community and bringing their  
25

1  
2 voices and amplifying their voices at the City  
3 Council and in this context in this hearing.

4           Just curious, had a similar scenario in  
5 my District. I'm just wondering if we've looked into  
6 maybe modifying the plan, making the apartments  
7 bigger. That looks like, I don't know the area well,  
8 but that looks like a large lot and that's also a  
9 tall building so I'm just wondering if we've looked  
10 into potentially modifying the plan, making the  
11 apartments bigger. I mean these bedrooms look like  
12 closets, and this is obviously a building for low-  
13 income families, but low-income families deserve to  
14 live in dignity so, yeah, just wondering if we've  
15 looked into maybe modifying the plan. Again, you have  
16 a lot of space from left to right and from top to  
17 bottom.

18           CATHERINE GRAVE: We did reduce the unit  
19 count from 291 down to 283 to make apartments larger,  
20 and it is a large site, which is what allows us to  
21 produce the unit count that we've proposed.

22           COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Any way we could  
23 make additional progress on that and make them a  
24 little bit bigger just to make sure that the  
25 community is happy with the project?

1  
2           CATHERINE GRAVE: I think it goes back to  
3 the larger conversation of in the balance, the  
4 various goals that we are attempting to achieve.  
5 There are a range of issues that we are addressing.  
6 One of them is the general affordability level of the  
7 apartments. Another is the individual size of  
8 apartments. Another is the design and the appearance  
9 of the building. Another is related to the economic  
10 development opportunities within the project, both  
11 related to the cultural center and the jobs related  
12 to construction and management and maintenance of the  
13 building so all of those things are going into the  
14 mix, and the number one priority that we've heard has  
15 been to make the units as affordable as possible. One  
16 question that we hear, is this project affordable to  
17 me as a Brownsville resident, which means bringing  
18 the AMI levels down substantially, and if we divert  
19 the money to address that issue then, in the balance,  
20 other things.

21           COUNCIL MEMBER FELIZ: Yeah. Okay, cool.  
22 Hope that we could continue looking into that issue  
23 in this building and this project but also in other  
24 projects. Again, we create housing for low-income  
25 people, and these families deserve to live in

1  
2 dignity. They deserve a large room, not a room that  
3 looks like a closet, not a room that you could barely  
4 fit in a twin bed or something like that. Thank you.

5           DIRECTOR FARISHTA: I just like to add,  
6 Council Member, that HPD does deeply care about  
7 quality of life and the livability of these  
8 apartments, making sure all of them have light and  
9 air. Our design guidelines are meant for all of the  
10 units that we financed through City subsidies. There  
11 are set guidelines, and as Catherine mentioned, we've  
12 increased the units of all of the units from what we  
13 initially had. Now, each of these units have at least  
14 two-plus closets for a one bedroom, the three  
15 bedrooms shown here have at least four closets. They  
16 each have free storage in the basement as well, and  
17 there is laundry on each floor. There's a lot of  
18 other things here that we're adding, including  
19 meeting our sustainability goals. All of these things  
20 are being balanced, and we do care about livability  
21 and, of course, we'll continue to strive for the best  
22 project that we can do here.

23           CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you so much. Is  
24 that all, Council Member?

1  
2           Next, we're going to hear from Majority  
3 Leader Amanda Farías.

4           MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Thank you, Chair.  
5 Just a couple of quick questions, and my apologies if  
6 you've spoken about this before as I was at another  
7 hearing and I've just come in. In terms of the unit  
8 type for studios, I see that we have 69 in totality.  
9 I hear other Members talking about expanding space.  
10 Typically, studios are the most transient apartments  
11 that are in our buildings. Is there flexibility here  
12 to reduce the studio counts to maybe give more space  
13 for some of the other apartments or maybe  
14 consolidating studios to make one bedrooms versus  
15 just having studios or is this to your HPD term sheet  
16 requirements to have this many studio apartments?

17           DIRECTOR SINDHWANI: HPD projects try and  
18 balance the unit mix. There's a demand across the  
19 board for affordable studios, one bedrooms, two  
20 bedrooms, and three bedrooms. We have made unit mix  
21 changes in the past to increase the number of family-  
22 sized units in the project. We can definitely take a  
23 look to see where there's room throughout the  
24 duration of the ULURP process. Right now, we're  
25 focused on bringing the total number of 30 percent

2 AMI units up to increase the total affordability in  
3 response to Council Member Mealy's requests.

4 MAJORITY LEADER FARIAS: In my own  
5 personal perspective, I see the homeless set-aside,  
6 the number of 42 is listed under studio. Whether you  
7 are previously unhoused, currently unhoused, an  
8 elderly person, everyone likes a separation in their  
9 own bedroom and in an apartment so where there is  
10 flexibility, I would encourage you folks to try to  
11 bring that number down to help either with the sizing  
12 across the board in other units, which might mean we  
13 get less units out of this, but additionally just to  
14 actually provide some dignity in some of these  
15 apartments. As living in New York, as New Yorkers,  
16 we've all lived in a variety of apartments. I had a  
17 studio before, too. I thankfully had a door in my  
18 previous studio so it was separate from the rest of  
19 my living arrangements, but that's not the case for  
20 everyone, and if I can just ask additional questions.

21 In the C4, in your commercial overlay  
22 here, what were the commercial goals that you folks  
23 have listed? Is it like a supermarket? You're already  
24 doing laundry so you don't need a laundromat

1 downstairs. What are the goals for the commercial  
2 space?  
3

4 CATHERINE GRAVE: It was to create a  
5 cultural center so the whole ground floor is the arts  
6 space.

7 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Okay, and is that  
8 development an action area project for this?

9 CATHERINE GRAVE: We're working with Pure  
10 Elements, BRIC, the Brooklyn Music School, a youth  
11 design center, Brooklyn Arts Council.

12 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Okay. Is this,  
13 the commercial overlay is the entire bottom floor of  
14 the building?

15 CATHERINE GRAVE: That's the typical map  
16 on a zoning, yes.

17 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Okay, is there  
18 room to reduce the square footage for this part of  
19 the project to add residential units? If you have two  
20 separate entrances, one for residential that gives  
21 you extra units on the bottom floor next to  
22 commercial space?

23 DIRECTOR SINDHWANI: Council Member, I  
24 appreciate that sentiment. The current uses that we  
25 identified for the art space on the ground floor were

1 identified through the Brownsville Plan. That was a  
2 strong request from the community through our  
3 engagement to develop a big art space that's  
4 affordable to arts organizations in the neighborhood  
5 as like an anchor tenant to bring folks from the  
6 community into the front door of the art space. It's  
7 also part of the Mayor's Gun Violence Plan as well,  
8 to activate the neighborhood and to bring arts  
9 opportunities to residents of Brownsville. We want to  
10 make sure that while we are delivering high-quality  
11 apartments for residents of Brownsville and future  
12 residents of Brownsville, we will also want to make  
13 sure that we're delivering on our commitment to bring  
14 a high-quality and robust art space so I think there  
15 are trade-offs there of reducing the community  
16 facility space, there might also be zoning  
17 restrictions.

18  
19 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Sure.

20 DIRECTOR SINDHWANI: But I will just say  
21 that there are real trade-offs of exchanging  
22 community facility space for more residential units,  
23 and we want to deliver on both.

24 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Yeah, no, I'm not  
25 questioning the intentionality of the project or even

1  
2 the intentions of the community residents who have  
3 said we will forego residential space because we  
4 deserve and want and desire an arts and cultural  
5 space. Those things are existing at the same time in  
6 this building, it's in its development. I ask in  
7 terms of just in flexibility, whether the zoning  
8 allows it or not, whether the community would be  
9 even, I mean that's something that I believe, if this  
10 was my project, I would go back to community and say,  
11 hey, this came up, and it's allowable, are we willing  
12 to forego some space to get only two or three more  
13 units, right? Because that's really, it wouldn't be  
14 readapting an entire space in that way that we get 20  
15 more, but I only ask those things because we are  
16 talking about spatial equity here. We are talking  
17 about like affordability, but I appreciate that  
18 answer. My followup question was if there were going  
19 to be loading areas because I wasn't sure if there  
20 was going to need any for that commercial space, but  
21 thank you for the additional time, Chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: You're welcome,  
23 Majority Leader.

24 Next, we'll hear from Council Member  
25 Nurse.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you. Thank  
3 you for the presentation.

4 I've been hearing about this project for  
5 a while. It's not technically in my District, it's in  
6 Darlene's district, but it will impact many of the  
7 Brownsville residents that I do have who have been  
8 asking for arts and culture space so thank you for  
9 bringing that. I always have a gripe about the  
10 studios and one-bedrooms being the bulk of projects,  
11 but I would like to just in honoring the Council  
12 Member's concerns understand if you could just give a  
13 quick breakdown of the square footage that you added  
14 and to what type of units. I walked in late, so I  
15 might've missed it, but where you did respond  
16 previously to the request for increased square  
17 footage and in what units because you had the three-  
18 bedroom on here, and I wasn't clear, on that slide,  
19 it said on one side 961 the other side was 1,041  
20 square feet. Was that what was increased and was it  
21 only in the three bedrooms or was in the others so if  
22 you could just break down where you did increase  
23 square footage.

24 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: Thank you, Council  
25 Member. I'm just going to start by just for the

1  
2 record, reading into it what the HPD design  
3 guidelines are for each of these units so for a  
4 studio, it ranges from 350 to 400.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: No, I know the  
6 guidelines. Please don't read them to me because I  
7 know them. I take issue with them.

8 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: I just want to put it  
9 in context to what we're providing.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: I know the context.  
11 If you could just tell me what you adjusted.

12 CATHERINE GRAVE: In general, we looked at  
13 the existing layouts and we moved the walls,  
14 specifically related to the living rooms first to  
15 expand those beyond the standard HPD guidelines, and  
16 then as we moved those walls, we then took from  
17 apartments on either side to then shift the bedrooms  
18 out so depending, the floors from two to five have  
19 one set of layouts, and then at the setback, we have  
20 another set of layouts from six to nine. Generally,  
21 we took away studio apartments to stretch out the  
22 remaining units.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: The ones that you  
24 were able to stretch out by a reduction of the  
25 studios, were those twos, ones, or threes?

2 CATHERINE GRAVE: It depended on the  
3 proximity. It was based on proximity related to the  
4 other apartments.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Understood. Okay,  
6 so you wouldn't be able to provide, I think it's just  
7 really important because if this is going to be a  
8 sticking point for moving forward a project that I  
9 think is personally great, I would love to be able to  
10 have those receipts of where did you make  
11 improvements, which units were improved? If we could  
12 request that in the followup so that the Body can  
13 have that when we deliberate. I think it's really  
14 important to be able to honor if there are specific  
15 gripes about the project. I would love to see what  
16 you did to address those so we can at least say there  
17 was some action taken.

18 CATHERINE GRAVE: I appreciate that. Thank  
19 you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: Thank you. Thank  
21 you, Chair.

22 DIRECTOR SINDHWANI: We can create a  
23 followup report to share with the Committee.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you, Council  
25 Member Nurse, and I echo those sentiments. It's

1  
2 really interesting that penciling out means something  
3 different from whether you sit on that side or  
4 whether you sit on this side and you can't pencil out  
5 a community. It has to be equitable on both sides of  
6 that, and so there is some space in the middle and I  
7 want to acknowledge the requests of my Colleagues,  
8 and so we would like a letter explaining the design  
9 guidelines just for the record, what was changed, we  
10 want to see them, both sides, we would like to see  
11 what it would look like with parking and, what was  
12 the other piece, the M/WBES.

13 I did have a quick question, who is going  
14 to be working on the placemaking component of the  
15 cultural community?

16 CATHERINE GRAVE: We're working with the  
17 Youth Design Center with candidates from the  
18 Brownsville Community Justice Organization, so  
19 they're the young people that will receive the  
20 stipends that Serin mentioned working on that  
21 placemaking exercise. We're also working with Youth  
22 Design Center on a website for the project.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Great. Thank you so  
24 much. This project is wonderful. I think that we're  
25 almost there and, before we deliberate again, we

1  
2 would like to, one moment, I'm just going to finish  
3 my thought, that we would like to have all of that  
4 laid out, what the Council Member wants to see, and  
5 sooner rather than later.

6 With that, I'll pass it back to Majority  
7 Leader and Council Member Mealy after Council Member  
8 Farías.

9 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Thank you so  
10 much. I'm so sorry. I just was reading through with  
11 the public review from the Community Board. Do you  
12 folks have an image of what the façade, the outside  
13 of the building, looks or designed to.

14 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: If we could go to this  
15 slide..

16 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: And my question  
17 is around the feedback from the Community Board was a  
18 redesign or update of the façade to minimize  
19 institutional appearance?

20 CATHERINE GRAVE: Correct.

21 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: What's your  
22 response to that, and are you readapting what it  
23 looks like, and I actually would like to see what it  
24 looks like.

25 CATHERINE GRAVE: Yes, we'll bring it up.

1

2

DIRECTOR FARISHTA: We could go to slide  
seven, please.

3

4

DIRECTOR FARISHTA: There it is. Thank  
you.

5

6

MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Is this the  
revised version?

7

8

CATHERINE GRAVE: Yes, it is.

9

MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Of what the  
community?

10

11

CATHERINE GRAVE: Yes.

12

MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: From their  
feedback? Okay.

13

14

CATHERINE GRAVE: Yes, in consultation  
with the Councilwoman.

15

16

MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Okay, so we've  
represented this to the Community Board and to the  
Council Member.

17

18

19

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Just me (INAUDIBLE)

20

MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Just you. Okay.  
I'm a bit of a traditionalist sometimes so I love me  
some red brick, but I have Parkchester in my  
District, and it's all red brick. I would recommend  
going back to the Community Board to see if that's  
something that they feel comfortable with outside of

21

22

23

24

25

1 just the Council Member and how she personally feels  
2 We all know that re-adapting a building's façade also  
3 means at times unit count and what that means,  
4 affordability and what that means of removal of unit  
5 count, but if anyone in a community, especially in  
6 our outer boroughs or where our community members of  
7 color live, feel like a building is representative of  
8 an institution or institutionalization or an  
9 carceral institution, we need to take that feedback  
10 really seriously.  
11

12 CATHERINE GRAVE: Absolutely.

13 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Thank you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: They call it  
15 brutalistic architecture.

16 I just wanted to say I thought this was  
17 the opportunity for y'all to come in with all this  
18 information that we don't be spinning our wheels, and  
19 I don't know if you just trying to spin out the clock  
20 or all these things could have been presented today  
21 that we could have been moving forward. The  
22 affordability, you saying something verbally and  
23 looking on your phone when it's supposed to be right  
24 here before us, that we could look at it judgmentally  
25 and decide, and we got to think about maybe the

1  
2 community don't want art anymore. That was 2017, and  
3 y'all saying that things changed since then. I know  
4 people would rather have affordable housing, to stay  
5 in their neighborhood in which they've been through  
6 the bad and the good, and now would love to stay  
7 there affordable. A lot of things you're saying now  
8 is my first time hearing it. When you came to my  
9 office, we didn't have 30 percent on the agenda. It  
10 was 40 percent so kudos to that, but I feel we should  
11 do a little less studios and give people decent  
12 housing, and that's all I can really say about this.  
13 I definitely, always from day one, you did change  
14 what I said from the beginning, how it looked. I'm  
15 okay with that. And then parking, this is our last  
16 opportunity in the city to do parking, and I feel we  
17 should include parking in this proposal. It's not  
18 that you can't; it's just that you don't want to, and  
19 you making all this money off our people but still  
20 inconveniencing our people with not having parking so  
21 that's one of my things that I have put down. If you  
22 started off with 224, correct me if I'm wrong, why we  
23 can't go back to that and let people have decent  
24 housing. If you could explain that to me, I'm good.  
25 From 224 to now 283. That's to me just greed. You're

1  
2 not thinking about the people of the community. If  
3 HPD was going with the 224, this project was good,  
4 and now it's up to 283.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you so much. Any  
6 other questions or comments?

7 Thank you. This applicant panel is now  
8 excused. Thank you so much.

9 Counsel, are there any members of the  
10 public who wish to testify on this item?

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair Hanks, there are  
12 approximately five public witnesses who have signed  
13 up to speak. We're going to start with three members  
14 who have signed up in public.

15 If you are a member of the public who  
16 signed up to testify on the proposal, please stand by  
17 when you hear your name being called and prepare to  
18 speak when the Chair says you may begin.

19 As a reminder, in the event that Council  
20 Members have questions, witnesses are asked to remain  
21 online or to stay seated here at the microphone after  
22 the testimony until excused by the Chair.

23 We will now hear from the first panel,  
24 Masiki Glover (phonetic), Kofi Williams, and Kevin  
25 Joseph, please come up.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Members of the public  
3 will be given two minutes to speak. Please do not  
4 begin until the Sergeant-at-Arms has started the  
5 clock. You may begin.

6 MASIKI GLOVER: Hi, I'm Masiki Glover, and  
7 I live in Brownsville, Brooklyn close to where the  
8 project's going to be so let me start with saying I  
9 have two children, they're age 12 and 13, and I'm  
10 speaking in favor of the Cultural Arts Center. We  
11 very much do want it. My kids attend charter schools  
12 in downtown Brooklyn. I chose to do that when they  
13 started kindergarten because I wanted access to  
14 diversity and to cultural things, and so I schlepped  
15 them to downtown Brooklyn. They've had access to  
16 BRIC, to BACS, which is in Park Slope, they've been  
17 to BAM programs and participated in all kinds of arts  
18 programs because I schlepped them there, and many of  
19 my neighbors don't do the schlepping, and I think  
20 that we do need such a space, if it's truly free, if  
21 it's truly accessible let me just say all that,  
22 because it has to be affordable. I get my kids  
23 scholarships to be honest. I write, and I get them  
24 scholarships so they can participate in these  
25 programs so if these programs are going to be in the

1  
2 Cultural Arts Center, they should be free. Several of  
3 my neighbors have gone far off into the Bronx, one  
4 neighbor I'm thinking in particular, to participate  
5 in programs that were full of theater and dress  
6 rehearsals and of that nature and, having to schlep  
7 to the Bronx, she wasn't able to continue to keep  
8 that up and her daughter's now pregnant or just had a  
9 child. I have neighbors who have children that are  
10 jailed or dropped out of high school, and so we need  
11 spaces that our kids can go to and engage in and  
12 learn from and feel like it belongs to them and that  
13 there's something they can do technical. Besides just  
14 creative, I was thinking about technical skills you  
15 can learn in theater and of that nature, and I am in  
16 favor of this greatly. I obviously want you all to  
17 work with the developers. The things you're saying  
18 are absolutely true. We do want spaces. My daughter  
19 would die for her own bedroom with some space.  
20 Honestly, she would die for a closet if it was just  
21 all alone to herself so I will say that, but thank  
22 you for your time.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you so much.

24 KOFI WILLIAMS: Good morning. I'm Kofi  
25 Williams. I'm the Executive Director of Asase Yaa

1  
2 Cultural Arts Foundation, and we work through most of  
3 the central Brooklyn including Brownsville, but we  
4 work directly with BRIC, with Pure Elements, with  
5 Brooklyn Arts Council, and I'm totally in favor of  
6 the Cultural Arts Center because I know what it does  
7 for community. I know growing up in Bed-Stuy and  
8 Brownsville area what it has done for me as a child  
9 and for the tens of thousands of children and  
10 families that we service every year. This being a  
11 part of the community and children being able to have  
12 an outlet where they're not on the streets, having an  
13 outlet where they could go and really express  
14 themselves through the arts because, as we know, the  
15 arts helps you to express yourself and we've got some  
16 great talents from Brooklyn. I don't know much about  
17 the housing part, which I hope that just hearing it  
18 from today, I really hope that it could be worked out  
19 and people could live in something that's great, but  
20 I know that the arts is a big part of what I do for  
21 the development of children all over Brooklyn, but  
22 mainly in central Brooklyn, and I live in your  
23 District Council, Council Member Mealy, so I see the  
24 things that go on, I see what happens in the  
25 District, but Brownsville has been a stronghold for a

1  
2 very long time, but it's a beautiful place with very  
3 talented people, and I know given the opportunity to  
4 be able to come and have free classes, video classes,  
5 to have dance classes, music classes, theater, all of  
6 the different things, to be able to come to have  
7 shows. My company just now, because it's difficult to  
8 rent places like BAM and other very expensive places,  
9 to have another theater in our community would be  
10 amazing for me. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you so much. I  
12 couldn't agree more.

13 KEVIN A. JOSEPH: Good morning, Council,  
14 Council Member Mealy. Welcome back. It's been a  
15 pleasure to work with you in the past.

16 I'm just going to start. My name is Kevin  
17 A. Joseph, Executive Director of Pure Elements: An  
18 Evolution in Dance, son of Sylvia Joseph, who  
19 migrated to the U.S. in 1970. In 1980, we moved to  
20 East New York, Brooklyn, and I spent the next 10  
21 years in NYCHA housing, immediately fell in love with  
22 breakdancing as my outlet. Like so many other kids, I  
23 ran the streets looking to learn, looking to battle  
24 with our cardboard boxes, backspinning and the most  
25 electric B-boy dancing had to offer, but the streets

1 was my dance studio, and that came with some  
2 positives, and it came with a lot of negatives. I was  
3 extremely fortunate to find mentors to nurture me and  
4 guide me into institutions for dance training to  
5 further my career, and I ended up performing in the  
6 most magical places around the country and around the  
7 world, but so many of my friends were not fortunate.  
8 Other than BRC, Brownsville Recreation Center, which  
9 is currently closed, there wasn't much that gave  
10 access to spaces for cultivation and maturation. Pure  
11 Elements was formed in 2006 with the focus on East  
12 Brooklyn for one purpose, and that was to create  
13 access with a mastery of teachers to pave the way,  
14 but sadly, some of our obstacles are the same as the  
15 1980s, space and resources. Even though we rent space  
16 out of IS392 in Brownsville for the past maybe 15  
17 years, it has become common practice to use the  
18 cafeteria floor as a dance room or to move classroom  
19 desks every time we make space, and then God forbid  
20 we don't replace the room back exactly how we found  
21 it. You know what happens after that. I understand  
22 some of the concerns this project brings. Apartment  
23 sizes, ratios, the studios, two- versus three-bedroom  
24 apartments, but unfortunately, we are at the ninth  
25

1  
2 hour, and our community has spoken. Let's use this  
3 project to make future corrections for future  
4 community projects and not let our community go  
5 another day without tangible and credible support  
6 from our leaders. I'm finishing right now. The  
7 Brownsville Art Center is not just another  
8 development project. It's a culture restoration  
9 project. It's a safe haven, it's a beacon of light in  
10 a community that's been dark for way too long. And  
11 for my closing, as our government has said, the  
12 fabric of the City is the arts so let's invest in the  
13 fabric of the City, and that's our kids.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you. I couldn't  
15 agree more. Are there any Council Members who have  
16 any questions for this panel?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Did you know  
18 there's a dance studio on Livonia Avenue?

19 MASIKI GLOVER: Did not.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: On Rockaway.

21 MASIKI GLOVER: No. Named?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Victory Dance  
23 Music.

24 MASIKI GLOVER: Okay, I'll look them up.  
25

1

2

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Brand new. East New York had, I always send youth over there just as well, and you know PS28. That's where you started, right?

6

KEVIN A. JOSEPH: PS28? No, PS28 has been our home, our office is on Fulton Street, the building of PS28, but all of our services are out of IS392 on Sutter and Legion.

10

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So y'all aware that it will be free? Will that help y'all tremendously?

12

KEVIN A. JOSEPH: Based on the conversation with the developers, the work is so we can reduce our tuition, but with our strategic planning, we actually want to make more partnerships with foundations so our students are tuition-free for as many years as we can get them.

18

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So if the space is free, why wouldn't it pass on to the constituents?

20

KEVIN A. JOSEPH: It's already going to be passed on as tuitions, passed on to the constituents with really reduced tuition.

23

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: About how much would a family of four children would have to pay?

25

1  
2 KEVIN A. JOSEPH: Right now, we are at 100  
3 dollars a month, and that's two to three classes per  
4 Saturday where if you're at the Alvin Ailey's or the  
5 Mark Morris's, the more commonly known places, you're  
6 going to spend up to 2,000 per six months.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: So now if this go  
8 into play, what will it be? 25 dollars.

9 KEVIN A. JOSEPH: 25 dollars?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: For families.

11 KEVIN A. JOSEPH: Being that we wouldn't  
12 have to pay rent, we haven't got to that stage yet  
13 about what the price would be for tuition at that  
14 stage.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: That's what was  
16 presented to me at our meeting with the Commissioner,  
17 that it would be free. They got 18 million dollars  
18 that the people utilizing the facility would be for  
19 free.

20 KEVIN A. JOSEPH: That's our goal.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: (INAUDIBLE) wrong.

22 KEVIN A. JOSEPH: That's our goal to work  
23 with our foundations to ensure that the tuition  
24 remains free.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: See, that's even  
3 better. Thank you.

4 KEVIN A. JOSEPH: Thank you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: That's what the  
6 community need such as a time like this. We can never  
7 leave art out of this society. That's expression. I  
8 did it myself with you.

9 KEVIN A. JOSEPH: Correct.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: We should have won  
11 though. We did Dancing with the Stars but I...

12 KEVIN A. JOSEPH: We were going to win.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: I got my finger cut  
14 off, and Mayor Bloomberg made sure I got my finger  
15 back so it's still here, but it's needed. I enjoyed  
16 it myself. To have our youth at a safe place in the  
17 community would be great, but it's good that you can  
18 have it for a great price, that it can trickle down  
19 to the community. That's what real community is  
20 about.

21 KEVIN A. JOSEPH: Exactly.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: If we have an  
23 opportunity that the parents could afford it, the  
24 place would be packed and that would keep our  
25

2 community safe and our youth off the street so thank  
3 you for what you do.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you so much.

5 There being no more questions for this panel, this  
6 witness panel is now excused.

7 Counsel, please call up the next panel.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes, we're going to be  
9 calling up our virtual panel next and then moving  
10 back to in-person. Now, could Lucy Sexton please be  
11 prepared to give her testimony.

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Lucy, could you please  
14 unmute?

15 We're going to give it a couple more  
16 seconds. Lucy, we're not able to hear you. Are you  
17 able to unmute?

18 Okay, I think we're going to move to our  
19 in-person panel while Lucy tries to work on her  
20 technical issues.

21 We'll now call up Quardean Lewis-Allen,  
22 please.

23 QUARDEAN LEWIS-ALLEN: Good afternoon. My  
24 name is Quardean Lewis-Allen. I'm grateful to be here  
25 to speak with you all. I am the Founder and Executive

1  
2 Director for the Youth Design Center, formerly known  
3 as Made in Brownsville. I'm a Brownsville resident,  
4 born and raised. I started the organization, which is  
5 an award-winning non-profit, youth-led creative  
6 agency training and employing young people in design  
7 and technology through STEAM education to lower the  
8 barriers to design and technology professions, some  
9 of which I faced when I was growing up in  
10 Brownsville. Particularly my mode of interest was  
11 architecture, and in order to study arts, I needed to  
12 leave the community. I had to go to Bed-Stuy  
13 Restoration Center for a sculpture class, right, and  
14 I think some of the amenities and the services that  
15 we offer are going to be integral to the space being  
16 utilized to its full capacity by our community arts  
17 is in demand. I know that because looking at our  
18 applications for our creative apprenticeship program  
19 in graphic design, digital media, and architecture,  
20 and we're not able to service all the young people  
21 that we encounter because of lack of funding and a  
22 lot of money going towards us paying rent for the  
23 facility that we have on New Lots Avenue, and I think  
24 support around the capital application for this  
25 project would really help to reduce those costs to

1  
2 make it free or affordable for us anchor tenants but  
3 also for us to be able to continue to offer our  
4 programs for free. We stipend all of our apprentices.  
5 They get between 600 and 850 dollars for each studio  
6 that they take with us and so this is, yeah, really  
7 important project for us.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Colleagues, do we have  
9 any questions for this panel?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Could you clarify,  
11 you said your stipends are for 600 to 800 dollars?

12 QUARDEAN LEWIS-ALLEN: Per studio, yeah.  
13 600 dollars. Some of our Immersive or advanced  
14 studios, they go up to 1,000 dollars, and students  
15 are able to..

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Individuals have to  
17 pay to utilize.

18 QUARDEAN LEWIS-ALLEN: We stipend them. We  
19 give them the money so we have support from NBC  
20 Universal and Apple and Microsoft, and we're looking  
21 for seeking support from the Member as well to  
22 support us continuing to stipend students to learn,  
23 paying them to be trained in these professions that  
24 are in high demand that we know in design and  
25 technology to enter into the creative economy.

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COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Okay. Thank you.

QUARDEAN LEWIS-ALLEN: You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON HANKS: There be no more questions for this panel, this witness panel is now excused. Thank you so much.

Please call up the next panel.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We'd like to give another opportunity for the virtual witness, Lucy Sexton, to try and unmute and give testimony.

As a reminder, we will accept a written testimony on the items discussed today. Please send any written testimony to [landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov) and include the Land Use number and project name in the email.

Lucy, if you can hear this and you can unmute?

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I don't think that it's working. As we continue to wait for Lucy, if Catherine Green Johnson would like to come.

As a reminder, if anybody else in person would like to testify, please fill out one of these cards in the back.

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CATHERINE MBALI GREEN-JOHNSON: Thank you.  
Good afternoon. I'm Catherine Mbali Green-Johnson.  
Sorry about the wardrobe difficulties. I'm excited to  
stand before you all today. I'm really passionate  
about this project. The art center means a lot for  
our community. We Worked tirelessly and making sure  
that we received feedback from the neighborhood.

I used to run an organization at East New  
York called ARTs East New York and worked in  
collaboration and partnership with my colleagues in  
Brownsville to make sure that this came to fruition.  
This project holds profound implications for the  
future of our community and our city, and I speak  
from personal experience, having witnessed firsthand  
the devastating consequences of the inequitable  
distribution of resources for our community. I've  
been a part of the ARTs East New York, an  
organization that had to close its doors due to the  
lack of funding distributed throughout the city. This  
was not just a closure. It left a void and a chasm in  
the lives of the people we served. It was a stark  
reminder of how funding for institutions in  
communities like ours have gone ignored for far too  
long. Just to share a reminder, the New York City

1  
2 Department of Cultural Affairs, this sector  
3 contributes significantly to the City's economy,  
4 generating billions of dollars in economic activity  
5 and supporting thousands and thousands of jobs. Yet  
6 despite the immersed economic and cultural impact,  
7 certain communities like ours in East Brooklyn  
8 continue to be under-represented and underserved when  
9 it comes to cultural funding and resources. The New  
10 York state and federal arts funding also demonstrates  
11 disparities. We, as ARTs East New York, were the  
12 first organization to receive the National Endowment  
13 for the Arts in the East Brooklyn community. That was  
14 in 2016. I have more to share, but I think that it's  
15 a stark reminder of how inequitable the City has been  
16 and this importance of this project to come to  
17 Brownsville.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Any questions?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Could you elaborate  
20 on it, because I know in 2016, it was doing great. I  
21 was there. I went to a couple of events there so  
22 could you explain in equity? How our neighborhoods  
23 normally get left out.

24 CATHERINE MBALI GREEN-JOHNSON:

25 Absolutely. We were a part of a development project

1  
2 as well. We did not have a sweet deal like this one.  
3 We had to pay an exorbitant amount of rent and  
4 overhead. This deal, this opportunity provides the  
5 arts organizations and stakeholders that will be a  
6 part of it to be rent free or to share and  
7 collaborate on whatever resources are needed to keep  
8 the lights on. We did not have that luxury, and  
9 having to fight for funding, foundational funding, as  
10 well as the scarce amount of funding that was coming  
11 to Brownsville, East New York neighborhoods, as well  
12 as the federal and the state funding that we're  
13 competing against the large institutions that were  
14 not coming our way. A small staff, small amount of  
15 people running an institution like that can't  
16 compete, and so this opportunity, it will bring the  
17 funds to the neighborhood. It will attract additional  
18 funds that comes to the community.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Madam Majority Leader.

20 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Thank you. I just  
21 want to, just for clarification from my own ears,  
22 earlier I had asked and in case you were not here, I  
23 had asked the Admin could cultural space be flexible  
24 enough to be reduced for potential additional units.  
25 What I'm hearing you say though is the more cultural

1  
2 space, the more collaborative of a space it could be,  
3 so more folks could join in on having an opportunity  
4 of like low cost or free rent, more programming, so  
5 like we want, we as a Bronxite now, including myself  
6 in Brooklyn, we want as much cultural space as  
7 possible for the arts, the STEAM opportunities that  
8 may be presented out there.

9           CATHERINE MBALI GREEN-JOHNSON: Exactly.  
10 In addition to that, thank you for that question,  
11 it's the jobs that it will provide. I still work in  
12 the arts administration field, and we represent,  
13 black and brown people represent less than 10 percent  
14 in this industry. It is time to change that.

15           CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Excellent. Thank you  
16 so much. Council Member Mealy, you have an additional  
17 question?

18           COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: What is your  
19 outlook on the jobs that will be bringing to, I  
20 forgot to ask the developers, because we always get  
21 just the construction jobs and then they go off and  
22 nothing really comes back. No real sustainable jobs  
23 for the community so do you know what kind of budget  
24 you will have and how many people you think with  
25 this, and that's why I made sure what was said to me,

1  
2 free, I brought it out here that we could keep on  
3 them to make sure that they don't say one thing in  
4 close doors and here it is, we in the open now, and  
5 if it doesn't happen, please get back to me, but what  
6 significant budget you can do now with hiring to  
7 sustain some jobs in our community? Do you have an  
8 outlook on that?

9           CATHERINE MBALI GREEN-JOHNSON: Yeah, so I  
10 won't be a part of this project. I'm here in support  
11 of it. I still love the community so I'm here to  
12 support it, but I know for sure Pure Elements, BRIC,  
13 Brownsville Art Center, and the other stakeholders  
14 that would be a part of this this project are  
15 providing jobs for young creatives. I know Pure  
16 Elements and Kevin, you can remind me of how many  
17 people you currently employ, about to be about 100  
18 people, and most of those folks that work with Pure  
19 Elements are people who have gone through the program  
20 and they come back into and they teach and they have  
21 a sustainable income so that they can provide for  
22 their families and just knowing that this covering  
23 their overhead can provide equitable wages, living  
24 wages for their employees and be able to provide,  
25 health insurance and all the things that we need in

1  
2 this city to survive, and so that institution alone,  
3 that's one organization that will be a part of this  
4 project. That's what the power of the cultural  
5 institutions can bring, bringing in people from  
6 throughout East Brooklyn to partake in the  
7 performances that will take place at the Black Box  
8 Theater. Bringing in additional income into the  
9 neighborhood, right? Going into the businesses that  
10 are along the Pekin Avenue Corridor.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: But if they can't  
12 park, how are they going to come?

13 CATHERINE MBALI GREEN-JOHNSON: This is  
14 true, and this is something that we can work on  
15 together.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: It's a transit  
17 desert in Brownsville. That's the whole other thing,  
18 and I just hope that we don't neglect, people want to  
19 live here just as well. Y'all may go back to your  
20 homes, but people in Brownsville who've been  
21 disenfranchised for a long time and they want to not  
22 live in a house in development anymore and want to  
23 live in a building with a nice foyer, so we can't off  
24 their backs just as well. There's gotta be a balance  
25 for both.

2 CATHERINE MBALI GREEN-JOHNSON:

3 Absolutely.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Arts is good, but  
5 quality of living is even better.

6 CATHERINE MBALI GREEN-JOHNSON:

7 Absolutely.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Thank you.

9 CATHERINE MBALI GREEN-JOHNSON:

10 Absolutely. And if I could just add really quickly,  
11 so I've been displaced out of East Brooklyn so not  
12 only my organization, but myself as well, my family.  
13 We cannot afford to live in East Brooklyn, and so I'm  
14 still here to represent the neighborhood, but I  
15 understand how that feels, and so I know I'm making  
16 it my business and being passionate about working  
17 with responsible developers so that we can make sure  
18 that the people in the neighborhood stay in the  
19 neighborhood and participate in these projects. Thank  
20 y'all so much for your time.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you so much. You  
22 can always come to Staten Island. I'm not kidding  
23 though. Thank you.

24 There being no questions in this panel,  
25 this witness is now excused.

We're going to try our virtual person one  
more time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Lucy Sexton, we're  
giving you one more chance. We're calling you up, but  
you need to accept to be unmuted in order for us to  
hear you so we're going to just give you one more  
opportunity and, again, you can send any written  
comments to [landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov).

CHAIRPERSON HANKS: Thank you, Counsel.  
With there be no other members of the public who wish  
to testify regarding the Brownsville Arts Center and  
Apartments Proposal under ULURP number C 2440029 HAK,  
C 240030 ZMK, and 240031 ZRK, the public hearing is  
now closed.

This meeting is hereby adjourned.

[GAVEL]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date March 9, 2024