

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

----- X

June 19, 2014
Start: 11:30 a.m.
Recess: 12:02 P.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E:

DAVID G. GREENFIELD
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- ANNABEL PALMA
- MARIA DEL CARMEN ARROYO
- INEZ DICKENS
- DANIEL R. GARODNICK
- DARLENE MEALY
- ROSIE MENDEZ
- PETER KOO
- BRAD LANDER
- STEPHEN LEVIN
- MARK WEPRIN
- DONOVAN RICHARDS
- INEZ BARRON
- ANDREW COHEN
- BEN KALLOS
- ANTONIO REYNOSO
- RITCHIE TORRES
- VINCENT IGNIZIO

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

2

[Gavel]

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Good morning my name is David Greenfield, I'm a council member from the 44th Council District. I presently serve as the Chair of the Land Use Committee. First off today, I would like to acknowledge the many people who are here today, who are present for the final Land Use Committee that we are privileged to have Gail Benjamin in attendance at. I especially want to recognize her husband Bob Mealy. Bob if you could stand up and waive.

[Applause]

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Gail said she would have stayed for another 24 years but Bob insisted that she ride off into the sunset with him. So Bob you are officially the least favorite person here today.

[Mic stopped]

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: ... which is the fulfillment of the commitment to contextually downsize this site if the Jewish Home did not build a new facility here. Which is what's happening. We have the res 117th Street rezoning. We have some very loud council members as well. Quiet on

1 the set please. To facilitate the development and
2 reconstruction of property to be used for
3 residential uses which is located in Council Member
4 Dicken's district. We also have the Empire
5 Boulevard Rezoning in Council Member Cumbo's
6 district which would allow for a new construction
7 of a 68-unit building as well as facilitated fresh
8 supermarket and space for community facility.

9 Council Member Cumbo is now supporting the project
10 after she negotiated an increase of affordable
11 housing from 20% to 25% of the affordable units.

12 We have ten new UDAAPs some of which
13 are in Council Member Dickens' district. We have
14 20145598 HAM proposes to modify previously approved
15 project to allow tax exemption for the 127th Street
16 Cluster and 20145652 HAM, 20145653 HAM, 20145654
17 HAM, proposes a tax exemption from existing
18 affordable housing development. An exemption for
19 two additional projects to be developed by MS
20 Houses at 1895 Park Avenue and 123 East 129th
21 Street, and 62-68 East 130th Street. 20145543 HAM
22 modifies a previously approved project and grants a
23 new tax abatement Maple Court at 51 East 122nd
24 Street. 20140233 HAM and 20140238 PQM would
25

1
2 facilitate the development of a ten-story mixed-use
3 building at 492 St. Nicholas Avenue which would
4 assist in the ongoing maintenance and affordability
5 in an existing adjoining building. 20145589 HAX
6 would authorize a tax exemption for ten buildings
7 located in Council Member Arroyo's and Council
8 Member Torres' district, collectively known as 2015
9 Monterey Avenue. And 20140278 HAK and 20145277 ZSK
10 facilitates the construction of a 79-unit
11 affordable building with supportive services in
12 Council Member Mealy's district. Lastly we have
13 the matter 20145539 HAK in Council Member Treyger's
14 district which is on our calendar to be filed
15 pursuant to a letter withdraw from HPD.

16 The subcommittees have recommended
17 approval of these items as have the members of the
18 districts these projects are located. The Chair
19 recommends an Aye vote on all of these matters.

20 [Mic off]

21 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: We will now
22 take any comments or questions from members of the
23 committee. Hearing none, I'll ask the clerk to
24 please call the roll.

25 [Background talk]

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: We've been
joined by Council Member Richards.

COMMITTEE CLERK: William Martin,
Committee Clerk. Roll call vote Committee on Land
Use. Council Member Greenfield.

COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: I vote Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Ignizio.

COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Yes.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Gentile.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: Aye on all.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Palma

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Arroyo.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Dickens.

COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Aye on all.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Garodnick.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Mealy.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Aye on all.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Mendez.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: Aye on all.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Koo.

COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Aye on all.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

COMMITTEE CLERK: Lander.

[MIC OFF]

COMMITTEE CLERK: Levin.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Permission to explain my vote.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Of course.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you Mr. Chair. With great gratitude to Gail Benjamin for the many, many times as a council member where she looked after me and saved me and made sure that I was always doing the right thing. And for the years of her advice as Subcommittee Chair, I vote Aye on all. Thank you Gail.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Weprin.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Aye.

[MIC OFF]

COMMITTEE CLERK: Williams.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: A huge congrats to Gail. [MIC OFF] I owe you 88 which I abstain.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Richards.

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Aye on all.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Barron.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Permission to explain my vote.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Of course.

[MIC OFF]

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: First I also want to extend my congratulations and best wishes to Gail. I went to work with briefly, but know of her great work through my predecessor, Council Member Charles Barron, who had nothing for praise for her abilities and her competence and her thoroughness. So I want to extend that. And secondly to cast my vote with all due respect to my colleague, I'm voting no on Land Use 88. Aye on all the others.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Cohen

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Kallos.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Permission to explain my vote.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Of course.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: I just want to take a moment to recognize Gail Benjamin for her service to the City of New York. To the millions and millions of people who have benefitted from

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

your expertise and all that you've done over the years and specifically for the people of my district who can now appreciate an amazing park space because of your hard efforts as well as those of the entire team here. But, thank you for sticking around and being here to help us through so many big deals. And just thank you for your career of service. Our city is better for it. And I vote Aye on all.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Lander.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [Mic Off] Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Reynoso.

COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: Permission to explain my vote.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Of course.

COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: I just want to say the developers are treading water. I just want to make sure that's noted. And to Gail, thank you so much for everything you've done. The many, Antonio you can't do that moments. You've always kept us in line in making sure that we did what we were supposed to do. And I'm extremely grateful for you and my years as a staff member and now as a

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

council member. So thank you for everything. And I vote Aye on all.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Torres.

COUNCIL MEMBER TORRES: Permission to explain my vote.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER TORRES: I was just telling Council Member Garodnick that I believe when you came to the council I was two.

[Laughter]

COUNCIL MEMBER TORRES: And I think, I'm not sure, Antonio were you even born? But I admire deeply the quality and length of your service to the council. And I think when people think about institutional memory, I think it's your name that's synonymous with it. And so I'm just eternally grateful. Even in the short period that I've known you, you're such a delight to work with and your departure is a real loss for this body. So thank you.

[Mic Off]

COUNCIL MEMBER TORRES: And I vote Aye.

[Mic off]

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of 20 in the affirmative, zero in the negative and no abstentions. All items have been adopted with the exception of the following Land Use item which is LU-88 which is adopted by a vote of 18 in the affirmative, one in the negative and one abstention.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you. We're going to keep the roll open for 15 minutes. We have a final piece of unofficial business and I'd like to give our chairs the opportunity to make comments on the record.

We actually have an application submitted by the Land Use Committee of the New York City Council, pursuant to Section 201 of the New York City Charter for an amendment to the zoning resolution to add Article H, Chapter 5, establishing a special Gail Benjamin district.

[Laughter and Applause]

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: There's more. Let me read it into the record first. Chapter 5, the special Gail Benjamin District established in this resolution is designated in grateful recognition of the outstanding service, guidance,

1
2 counsel and friendship, provided by Gail Benjamin
3 to the Land Use Committee in fully promoting and
4 protecting the public health, safety and general
5 welfare of the City of New York. The general
6 purposes of this special district, including among
7 others, the following: a) to recognize the depth
8 and breadth of your institutional knowledge, having
9 been in public service to the great City of New
10 York for well over three decades. As well as her
11 expertise in the New York City zoning resolution
12 and the New York City Charter; b) to appreciate her
13 excellent communication skills and firecracker
14 negotiation abilities, trust me on that one, that
15 gained her the respect of whoever crossed her path
16 while proving herself to be a force to be reckoned
17 with on behalf of the New York City Council, an
18 institution that she holds in the highest esteem
19 and seek to acknowledge her unparalleled experience
20 of having served and worked with each of the four
21 speakers who have led this body to five Land Use
22 chairs to date, dozens of subcommittee chairs and
23 countless council members throughout four mayoral
24 administrations. Therefore, be it known that the
25 special Gail Benjamin District is shown on a

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

12

diagram, dated June 19, 2014 and subject to the condition of C-K Declaration E041694 calling all who come after the Benjamin era to know that for 24 years the Land Use Committee was served by a person of extraordinary knowledge, insightfulness and kindness, who will be missed more than our words can convey. We'll do a voice vote, all in favor say Aye.

ALL COUNCIL MEMBERS: AYE.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: It's unanimous.

[MIC OFF]

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: I'd like to invite our subcommittee chairs to make a few remarks and then of course to have the Woman of the Hour give her retort.

I will start first with Subcommittee Chair Mark Weprin, to be followed by Subcommittee Chair Inez Dickens, to be followed by Subcommittee Chair Peter Koo.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR WEPRIN: Thank you Chair Greenfield. This is indeed an honor. Gail is as unique a person as I've met in government.

1
2 It is rare and that she's brilliant. She's as
3 smart as any person you'll ever meet here. They
4 taught her well at Princeton and after that in real
5 life. She knows everything. And Ritchie Torres of
6 all people to bring up the institutional memory, is
7 right on the mark, because very few people these
8 days have that institutional memory and boy does
9 she have it. Remembering things from 1973 and
10 other days as well. And that sense of history is
11 so important to all of us and I really do think
12 that we're going to miss you greatly. It's rare in
13 this business that people make enough of a mark
14 that they are going to be so sorely missed. And we
15 are going to miss you so much. Your ability to get
16 things done, to do a negotiation, to put people in
17 their place. But to do it all with such style and
18 grace and class. To be such an icon and
19 institution and at the same time not be above
20 handing out pens. You know, that is a real
21 statement about Gail Benjamin. That she is not
22 someone who thinks she's better than you are. She
23 just is better than you are.

24 [Laughter and Applause]

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR WEPRIN: And that is rare. So Gail, I wish you all the best in the future. It really has been a privilege for me to work with you and I look forward to continue our friendship and I'm a better person for having known you. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Chair Dickens.

SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIR DICKENS: Thank you Chair Greenfield. Gail you have been a phenomenal person that has navigated the treacherous waters of Land Use. You've been here for many, many years. When I got here to the city council in 2006, I found you here. You helped many and most every council member that has passed through the portals of this phenomenal institution. The people's house. You have guided us all through the many land use items that come before us, whether big or small. Your brilliance, your ability to negotiate. Your aptitude for the knowledge. And as Ritchie said, your historic institutional knowledge has served all of us well. From the 125th Street rezoning that was most difficult and you sat with me and all of the Commissioners of all of the

1 institutions involved with that. You sat sometimes
2 till 2 and 3 in the morning and again at 7 in the
3 morning. You have done so through smaller land use
4 items such as the most recent difficult one that
5 Council Member Helen Rosenthal had in her district
6 that was very, very difficult. But you sat for
7 hours to help her to navigate through a difficult
8 land use items. And I say thank you personally and
9 on behalf of all of the colleagues here, either
10 that have come before us that are here now. And
11 it's unfortunate that those in the future will not
12 be able to avail themselves of your knowledge and
13 information. And while we're patting you on the
14 back, I just want to add, Chair Greenfield. That
15 will all the knowledge and all that she has
16 imparted to each one of us, she's very mean
17 spirited when she comes to pens. She doesn't allow
18 us to keep the colored pens. So as I am voting Aye
19 on the Land Use item that you have proposed I want
20 to add to that a friendly amendment. That if she
21 should ever return to the borders of this
22 institution that she must be allowed to provide us
23 with pens in which to sign the many, many pieces of
24
25

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

legislation we're forced to. Thank you Gail.
Thank you. And God bless.

[Applause]

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Duly noted. I will just add that for those folks who are watching at home. I'm actually one of the folks that late at night when I can't sleep I flip through the TV and I watch channel 74. And I will tell you that it's just..., take a step back. Because everything... when you're looking at this and you're trying to understand this is all sort of insidery. But for those of you who are watching at home, you have to understand that in the City of New York we have really, very few people who decide still that they will make a life out of public service. And we have less people who actually make an incredible impact from the work that they do. And we have even less, quite frankly, who have the integrity. And that's really the word I think, you know..., I was thinking of all different superlatives that we can think of today and certain there's wisdom and there's experience and there's knowledge. The one work that I think sums up Gail Benjamin best is integrity. Nobody has more integrity than Gail

1 Benjamin. She's somebody who, no matter what the
2 issue was, what the negotiation was, it was always
3 about simply the facts, doing the right thing,
4 getting through it. And really doing her best.
5 And the point that you made, I think, is an
6 important point. And both chairs made this, which
7 is, it went literally from the hardcore
8 negotiations on every single deal that we've ever
9 done which means that anything that's happened in
10 the last three decades in New York City in terms of
11 real estate, land use and development. For those
12 of you at home, Gail Benjamin has had an incredible
13 impact on that. And it goes down to the minutia of
14 literally, and this is how amazing it is, the pens
15 that we need to actually sign our forms and the
16 breadth in between. And that's why, for those of
17 you who are watching at home, today's really a
18 unique and a special day for us. A bittersweet
19 day. We're certainly happy for Gail, we're happy
20 for her husband, who finally gets her back and gets
21 to sail the world with her. But it is a great loss
22 and, you know, when you actually..., it's funny
23 because we always say in politics that everybody is
24 replaceable. I actually think, and I believe this,
25

1
2 there is an exception to every rule and I certain
3 believe that Gail Benjamin is irreplaceable. Gail
4 thank you so much for your service to the City of
5 New York.

6 [Applause]

7 And with that, we will ask Gail to say
8 a few words before we conclude this meeting at noon
9 today.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BENJAMIN: I'm going to
11 be very, very brief. Because I know that
12 everybody's been eyeing the cake, the cookies, as
13 have I. But it really is a remarkable day for me
14 as everyone has said. I've been serving to the
15 public for over 35 years. And serving to this
16 institution and the public for 24 years, almost 25
17 years. And it's been a fantastic, wonderful ride
18 of an experience. I've learned a lot from each and
19 every one of you. I have enjoyed every day that I
20 come into work. I've worked with some of the best
21 people, the smartest people, the most political
22 people, the most involved people, and the most
23 caring people that I've ever met. I have had
24 fabulous people work for me. Many of them are in
25 this room and they are the people..., you all thank

1
2 me, but they are the people that made me look good
3 and who enabled us all to do the work that we did.

4 [Applause]

5 And as fitting as it is, there are even
6 people here who were, I remember from before the
7 council, Michael Sillerman, was at the Board of
8 Estimate with me. Jessie Maiser who was here was
9 at the Board of Estimate with me. And in the back
10 row before, but they're, Marcie Kesner, was at the
11 Board of Estimate with me. And together we
12 represent enough votes to bring the Board of
13 Estimate back. All of you..., I love the thought
14 that I'm irreplaceable, but I know that I'm not. I
15 know that Raju will do a wonderful job with you.
16 And I know that you will work with him and give him
17 every opportunity to show you all the things that
18 he can do that I cannot. I'm proud to have been a
19 member of this institution in the way that I was.
20 And I hope that I was able to help the institution
21 solidify their new responsibilities when they got
22 them. And work with them to help the city move to
23 where it needs to be in this century. I will still
24 be here until July 15th. And I will always be
25 around if someone needs me. The chair will know

1
2 how to get in touch with me and he will determine
3 whether your request will be met.

4 [Laughter]

5 But I would most particularly like to
6 thank my Chair, my Subcommittee Chairs and all the
7 Subcommittee Chairs and Chairs. There have only
8 been four chairs of the Land Use Committee of which
9 David is the latest. And I want to give a special
10 thanks to all of my staff, who have been an
11 incredible group of people to work with all of
12 these years. I will miss them terribly. But I
13 know I leave Land Use in good hands with all of the
14 staff who will continue to be here to make all of
15 you look good. And to help you with all of the
16 things that you need. I will miss you all. Thank
17 you.

18 [Applause]

19 Now let's eat.

20 CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: And with that,
21 we conclude. We adjourn the Land Use Committee for
22 June 19, 2014. Thank you all.

23 [Gavel]
24
25

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 June 22, 2014