

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PLANNING, DISPOSITIONS, AND  
CONCESSIONS

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August 11, 2015  
Start: 01:40 p.m.  
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway- Committee Rm, 16<sup>th</sup> Fl.

B E F O R E:  
INEZ E. DICKENS  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
ANDREW COHEN  
DARLENE MEALY  
MARK TREYGER  
YDANIS A. RODRIGUEZ

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Arthur "Artie" Pearson  
Director of Land Use  
Governmental Relations & Regulatory Compliance  
HPD

Sarah Dabbs  
Director  
Multi-Family New Construction  
HPD

Nancy Biberman  
WHEDco

Les Bluestone  
Blue Sea Development Company

Veanda Simmons  
Deputy Director  
Manhattan Planning

Renee Epps  
Settlement House

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PLANNING, DISPOSITIONS, AND  
CONCESSIONS

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[gavel]

CHAIR: Good afternoon. I'm Council  
Member Inez E. Dickens, Chair of the Subcommittee  
on Planning, Dispositions, and Concessions. I would  
like to welcome everyone to today's hearings. And I  
want to thank and acknowledge the Sergeant at Arms  
Eddie Colozzo and Justin Roah. I want to apologize  
to the staff and to the members of the public who  
are here and to HPD for the lateness of getting  
the... this committee hearing started. Although it  
was not our doing, it was the prior hearing of Land  
Use. I want to put that on the record. I have a  
gold star that I'm going to give to Andy Cohen. He...  
he's really demanding a... a gold star but I'm not  
giving it. They're only getting a silver. I want to  
acknowledge my Land Use Director Raju Mann [sp?],  
Deputy Director Amy Levitan [sp?], and my Attorney  
Dillon Casey [sp?]. I want to acknowledge my  
esteemed colleagues who are the members of the  
Planning Subcommittee that have joined us; the gold  
star man, Council Member Andy Cohen, Council Member  
Darlene Mealy, no star, and Council Member Mark  
Treyger. We have three items on our calendar, two  
of which are related. We will be hearing and voting

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2 on all three. I am now going to open up the public  
3 hearing for Land Use Item 267 and 268 Melrose  
4 Commons, North Site B which are related. This  
5 application submitted by HPD seeks the approval of  
6 a special permit for the zoning resolution for the  
7 development over a railroad or transit right-of-way  
8 or a yard. And a UDAP.. app designation for property  
9 located in Council Member Arroyo's district in the  
10 Bronx. Please note that this application is related  
11 to the Melrose Common Site C application which we  
12 and this committee voted on and approved March of  
13 2015. We have to testify today the Director of Land  
14 Use at HPD, Artie Pearson, Sarah Dabose [phonetic]..  
15 that's correct?

16 SARAH DABBS: Dabbs.

17 CHAIR: Nancy... is it Bikewell  
18 [phonetic]?

19 NANCY BIBERMAN: Biberman.

20 CHAIR: Beaverman [phonetic]... Bieberman?  
21 You wrote this Nancy?

22 NANCY BIBERMAN: My apologies.

23 CHAIR: And you're the co-developer with  
24 WEEDco [phonetic] I see?

25 NANCY: WHEDco, yes.

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CHAIR: And Les Bluestone... Blue Sea

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Development Company. Please begin. Identify

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yourselves.

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ARTHUR PEARSON: Afternoon Chair Dickens

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and members of the subcommittee. I'm Artie

7

Pearson, Director of Land Use for HPD's Office of

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Governmental Relations and Regulatory Compliance. I

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am joined by Sarah Dabbs the Director of Multi-

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Family New Construction, Les Bluestone from Blue

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Sea, and Nancy Biberman from WHEDco. Land Use items

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number 267 and 268 are two related ULERP actions

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for a development project to be constructed within

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the Melrose commons urban renewal area. Land Use

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number 268 consists of the UDAP designation project

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approval and disposition of vacant land located at

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block 2384; lots 20, 25, 28, 32, 34, 33, 38, 48, 89

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hundred, 8901, and the air rights above lot 23 as

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well as portions of DMAP street beds of Brook

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Avenue and Melrose Crescent and is known as Norose

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[phonetic] Commons North RFP site B, also known as

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Bronx Commons. The sponsor is proposing to

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construct a new mixed use residential project that

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will be comprised of 274 units of rental housing

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plus one for a superintendent. The project will

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2 also include 15,166 square feet of ground floor  
3 community facility space, 26,700 square feet of  
4 ground floor commercial space. 9,000 square feet of  
5 open space, 36 parking spaces, 139 spaces for  
6 bicycles. There will be a mix of unit types  
7 including studios one and two... one, two, and three  
8 bedroom apartments, income eligibility levels need  
9 to be finalized were expected to be a mix of  
10 between 50 percent of AMI and 80 percent AMI. And  
11 the rents will be between 755 dollars and 1,121  
12 dollars for studios to three bedrooms under the 50  
13 percent AMI. And for studios to three bedrooms the  
14 rents will be 1,035 to 1,795 under the 80 percent  
15 AMI levels. The community facility space will be  
16 occupied by the Bronx Music Heritage Center which  
17 will relocate from 1303 Louis Nine Boulevard after  
18 providing services in the South Bronx since 2001...  
19 two... I'm sorry 2011. A tenant for the commercial  
20 space has yet to be identified but it'll be  
21 expected to be affordable to local businesses. The  
22 development team is currently looking for tenants  
23 and are open to a tenant for the entire space or  
24 smaller businesses. The site is currently occupied  
25 by vacant commercial building which used to be used

1  
2 as a floor scrapping supply business which is..  
3 which will be demolished. Land Use number 267 is  
4 related to a special permit. The development side  
5 is encumbered by a permanently discontinued  
6 railroad right of way for a tunnel no longer in use  
7 therefore a special permit is required to allow  
8 development of air rights over the railroad right  
9 of way. Development site B is the last of three  
10 sites in developing the designated urban renewal  
11 area sites within Melrose Commons Urban Renewal  
12 area. The project on site A completed construction  
13 in 2013. And the project for site 3 closed in June  
14 of 2015. Council Member Arroyo has been briefed on  
15 the project and has indicated her support. And we  
16 are available to answer your questions.

17 CHAIR: Thank you. Does anyone else have  
18 anything they want to add before I start asking  
19 questions? Alright. Now I want to ask about this..  
20 this construction over... there's an existing tunnel  
21 there now?

22 ARTHUR PEARSON: You want to take that.

23 SARAH DABBS: ...decommissioned..

24 CHAIR: It... it has been decommissioned?

25 SARAH DABBS: Yes.

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CHAIR: So it'll never be in use?

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SARAH DABBS: Correct.

4

5 construction of this project will be built over  
6 this tunnel?

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SARAH DABBS: Yes they'll be decking  
over it.

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10 CHAIR: Oh. Alright now it requires a  
mayoral... only override? Is that my understanding?

11

SARAH DABBS: Correct.

12

CHAIR: That hasn't been done yet?

13

SARAH DABBS: It's in process.

14

15 CHAIR: Alright. Mm-hmm. And it's 100  
percent affordable which I like, 30 to 80 percent  
16 AMI. Maybe I can get HPD to do that for... in my  
17 district sometimes. And then there's... this is a  
18 very large community space. That's very good. Now  
19 what are they going to... what is Bronx Music  
20 Heritage Center do?

21

NANCY BIBERMAN: Bronx Music Heritage

22

Center is...

23

CHAIR: Please identify yourself.

24

NANCY BIBERMAN: Nancy Biberman with the

25

illegible written name. So Bronx Music Heritage



1  
2 Center is accompanied together of musicians,  
3 community members, and academics who are working  
4 and have been since 2011 to bring back you know a  
5 pretty you know well known storied musical heritage  
6 of music that has been developed in the Bronx over  
7 many many decades. Music of immigrant groups to the  
8 city up until this day most recently in the New  
9 York Times which featured gunayan [phonetic]  
10 musicians. So the purpose of the center is to  
11 educate people from across the city and elsewhere  
12 about the music that was born in the Bronx and  
13 about the way this music has become the soundtrack  
14 of so many of our lives. It'll be a place for  
15 people to dance. There'll be exhibits, permanent  
16 exhibits. So young people after school can come and  
17 learn what a musical instrument is. So many people  
18 today listen to their music from their iPhones. And  
19 so much has been lost as you know in our public  
20 schools in the way of you know music education. So  
21 we intend to try to... to remedy that as best as we  
22 can with the educational offerings at this site.

23 CHAIR: Now is this... is... is there going  
24 to be a course attributable to the families?

25 NANCY BIBERMAN: Pardon me?

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CHAIR: Is there going to be a cost...

[crosstalk]

NANCY BIBERMAN: No.

CHAIR: ...attributable to the families.

NANCY BIBERAN: No we... the... there will  
be free admission.

CHAIR: Okay great. And that you're  
going to have classes there, is that correct?

NANCY BIBERMAN: Yes. We...

CHAIR: ...to teach... [crosstalk] about  
the... about... what... what... what instruments are all  
instruments?

NANCY BIBERMAN: Well the... you know  
the... the fundamental core instrument of the Bronx  
is the drum. And so you know the... the idea is to  
expand learning you know from the beat to you know  
all of the instruments that you will see in... in a  
band... in an... band. Jazz, hip-hop, salsa, etcetera.

CHAIR: Very good. Now is this going to  
be contextual. I... I see that this is going to be a  
12 story building. Is that contextual with what is  
existing in the area... the surrounding area? [cross-  
talk] Mr.... Mr....

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2

LES BLUESTONE: My name is Les

3

Bluestone, right. Uh it is... uh the building is not

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12 story all the way around. It has steps in it.

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It goes down from one story up to 12 in a variety

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of steps. Across the street is Boricua College

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which is a... I think a 13 or 14 story building. And

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on the site C side of the street which you approved

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is also I believe 10 or 12 stories.

10

CHAIR: Yes it is. Alright, thank you.

11

Do any of my colleagues have any questions? Council

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Member Cohen.

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COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you. I'm

14

just going to try to educate myself for... for a

15

second as long as we're all here. Why is a special

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permit required because of the train tracks? What...

17

what about that is... is there... in zoning code is

18

there like a train track designation?

19

LES BLUESTONE: Yes there is. There's a

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requirement for a special permit.

21

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: And also I... I

22

don't know what a mayoral zoning override is.

23

When... when did that happen? What is that?

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SARAH DABBS: So it's when you need a

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certain change in the zoning. It's generally

1  
2 smaller items. So in this case the shape of the  
3 street is currently curved and so they are seeking  
4 a zoning override so that they can make it more of  
5 a corner because otherwise the... the building would  
6 have had to have been arched which is not the most  
7 efficient building design. And so to make a more  
8 cohesive building and efficient building design  
9 they are getting a zoning override so that they can  
10 build a building as is.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: But that can be  
12 done administratively as opposed... [cross-talk]

13 SARAH DABBS: Mm-hmm.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: ...doesn't require  
15 changes to the... so that's... that's why we're...  
16 [crosstalk]

17 SARAH DABBS: Right.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Okay.

19 CHAIR: That's only for unique  
20 conditions on site such as the design that's going  
21 to require the setbacks etcetera because of the  
22 tunnel that they're building over.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: This committee is  
24 not only fun but it's educational so I just wanted  
25 to make sure that... that I understand.

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CHAIR: We try to be. We try to be.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: you always do.

CHAIR: Not all committees do so but  
this one does.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank you very  
much. Any other questions from my colleagues?  
Seeing none are there any other members of the  
public wishing to give testimony? Seeing none I am  
now closing the Land Use Item number 267 and 268.  
And I'm now opening up the hearing for Land Use  
Item 269. I want to thank you for your testimony  
and I... alright. We haven't voted though yet Mr.  
Bluestone just to let you know. Now open up the  
hearing for land use item 269 Henry Street. This  
application submitted by HOD seeks a UDAP  
designation, project approval and disposition for  
property located in Manhattan. And I understand  
Council Member Chin, As Council Member Arroyo they  
both approve both of these actions. Is that  
correct?

UNKNOWN FEMALE: That's correct.

CHAIR: We have to testify of course the  
indomitable Director of Land Use at HPD, Artie

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Pearson, we have Renee Epps, and now you.. these  
handwritings...

VEANDA SIMMONS: Veanda Simmons.

CHAIR: Veanda Simmons. Oh Veanda,  
beautiful name.. hand writing. Identify yourselves  
and proceed.

ARTHUR PEARSON: Okay. Artie Pearson,  
Director of Land Use from HPD. And I'm joined by  
Veanda Simmons, Deputy Director of Manhattan  
Planning and Renee Epps from Settlement House. Land  
Use number 269 consists of a proposed non-ULERP  
UDAP action seeking approval for the disposition of  
the Henry Street fire house, a vacant city owned  
property located at 269 Henry Street. The fire  
house was closed in November of 2001 along with  
several other fire houses that were decommissioned  
throughout the city of New York in the early 2000s.  
The sponsor will undertake the rehabilitation of  
the existing four story building containing  
approximately 6,500 square feet and the proposed  
plan will be a community facility center that will  
be operated.. operated by the Henry Street  
Settlement. Free walk-in services will be available  
to the community such as screenings and low cost

1  
2 health insurance and public benefits as well as  
3 parenting support, crisis intervention, financial  
4 counselling, legal services, and social security  
5 benefits. Council Member Chin has been briefed and...  
6 and supports this project and we are available to  
7 answer any of your questions.

8 CHAIR: Thank you so much for your  
9 testimony. Anyone else want to add anything?  
10 Veanda? Ms. Simmons would you care to add  
11 something?

12 VEANDA SIMMONS: No just that HPD is I  
13 full support of the project.

14 CHAIR: Ms. Epps? ...first time Henry  
15 Street Settlement has been so quiet. Alright so now  
16 this was a former firehouse and... and what is it  
17 going to be now? A resource center?

18 ARTHUR PEARSON: Yes a community  
19 facility center.

20 CHAIR: Uh-huh. And what's going to be  
21 in that... what is that... what's... what's going to...

22 RENEE EPPS: This is our neighborhood  
23 research center which currently is located around  
24 the block in an old townhouse. And so it's not  
25 handicap accessible. We're really excited about

1  
2 the opportunity to relocate this program to the  
3 firehouse. And it is where people can walk in off  
4 the street to apply for SNAP benefits, to seek  
5 legal counsel, to seek uh financial counsel, and  
6 also to get connected to the rest of Henry Street's  
7 program. So in an... in this... in essence it's a  
8 first responder program that will be located in a  
9 firehouse now.

10 CHAIR: Very interesting where you're  
11 putting it. Now is there going to be more than one  
12 floor in this fire house? And if so is there going  
13 to be an elevator for ADA accessibility?

14 ARTHUR PEARSON: Yes it's a four story  
15 building. There will be an elevator there so it'll  
16 be fully handicap accessible.

17 CHAIR: And I assume that the Community  
18 Board 3 passed a resolution in support?

19 ARTHUR PEARSON: Yes they did.

20 CHAIR: Do any of my colleagues have any  
21 questions to ask? Andy Cohen, please, Council  
22 Member Cohen.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Is there a cost  
24 to... are we selling the building? What is happening  
25 exactly?



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AARTHUR PEARSON: Yes we're disposing of  
the building for a dollar.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Thank... thank you.

CHAIR: Do any of my colleagues have any  
questions? Seeing none are there any members of  
the public wishing to give testimony. Seeing none I  
am now closing the public hearing for Land Use Item  
269. And I am now putting the items up for a vote.  
I know for the record that the applications that we  
are voting on today has the full support of the  
local council members and my support as well. I  
will now call on counsel to call the role on a vote  
to approve.

COUNSEL: Chair Dickens.

CHAIR: Aye on all.

COUNSEL: Council Member Mealy.

COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Aye.

COUNSEL: Council Member Cohen.

COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: Aye.

COUNSEL: Council Member Treyger.

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Aye.

COUNSEL: Land Use number 267, 268, and  
269 are approved with four votes in the  
affirmative, zero in the negative, and zero

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abstentions. And they're referred to the full land  
use committee.

CHAIR: Thank you. I want to thank the  
members of the public, my colleagues, my counsel,  
and of course the Land Use Staff for today's  
hearing. This hearing 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 August 11, 2015