

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

Katherine Gray, 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 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, 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 Katherine Gray 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.

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 KATHERINE GRAY: Katherine Gray.

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 KATHERINE GRAY: 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 KATHERINE GRAY: Good morning. Katherine
25 Gray, Gilbane Development Company. I'm going to just

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

4
5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sorry, could you turn
6 on your mic?

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

23 SENIOR PLANNER DRUMMOND: Thank you,
24 Katherine. 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 KATHERINE GRAY: 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 KATHERINE GRAY: 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 KATHERINE GRAY: 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 KATHERINE GRAY: The Department of Housing
13 Preservation and Development has a design guidebook
14 with maximum and minimum sizes for apartments that
15 they apply when developers seek subsidy for
16 affordable housing. We've been studying the layouts
17 of the building and have been doing our best to push
18 for the layouts of the apartments to be on the
19 maximum end of the size guidelines and, in many
20 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

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 KATHERINE GRAY: 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?

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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 KATHERINE GRAY: 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

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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 KATHERINE GRAY: 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 KATHERINE GRAY: 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.
16 One question that we hear, is this project affordable
17 to 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
20 balance, 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 Katherine 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
2 downstairs. What are the goals for the commercial
3 space?

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

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

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

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

15 KATHERINE GRAY: That's the typical map on
16 a zoning, yes.

17 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Okay, is there
18 room to reduce the square footage for this part of
19 the project to add residential units? If you have
20 two separate entrances, one for residential that
21 gives 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 FARIAS: 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 FARIAS: 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 KATHERINE GRAY: 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?

1
2 KATHERINE GRAY: 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 KATHERINE GRAY: 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

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 KATHERINE GRAY: 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 KATHERINE GRAY: 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 KATHERINE GRAY: Yes, we'll bring it up.

1
2 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: We could go to slide
3 seven, please.

4 DIRECTOR FARISHTA: There it is. Thank
5 you.

6 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Is this the
7 revised version?

8 KATHERINE GRAY: Yes, it is.

9 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Of what the
10 community?

11 KATHERINE GRAY: Yes.

12 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: From their
13 feedback? Okay.

14 KATHERINE GRAY: Yes, in consultation
15 with the Councilwoman.

16 MAJORITY LEADER FARÍAS: Okay, so we've
17 represented this to the Community Board and to the
18 Council Member.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: Just me (INAUDIBLE)

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

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.

12 KATHERINE GRAY: Absolutely.

13 MAJORITY LEADER FARIÁS: Thank

14 you. COUNCIL MEMBER MEALY: They

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

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.
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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?

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.

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

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.

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

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

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

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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.

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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

1
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

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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

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 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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2

CATHERINE MBALI GREEN-JOHNSON: Thank you.

3

Good afternoon. I'm Catherine Mbali Green-Johnson.

4

Sorry about the wardrobe difficulties. I'm excited to

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stand before you all today. I'm really passionate

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about this project. The art center means a lot for

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our community. We Worked tirelessly and making sure

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that we received feedback from the neighborhood.

9

I used to run an organization at East New

10

York called ARTs East New York and worked in

11

collaboration and partnership with my colleagues in

12

Brownsville to make sure that this came to fruition.

13

This project holds profound implications for the

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future of our community and our city, and I speak

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from personal experience, having witnessed firsthand

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the devastating consequences of the inequitable

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distribution of resources for our community. I've

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been a part of the ARTs East New York, an

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organization that had to close its doors due to the

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lack of funding distributed throughout the city. This

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was not just a closure. It left a void and a chasm in

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the lives of the people we served. It was a stark

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reminder of how funding for institutions in

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communities like ours have gone ignored for far too

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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

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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.

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