

Public Testimony from Betty Mackintosh

Co-Chair Chelsea Land Use Committee, Community Board 4

City Council Public Hearing for Starrett-Lehigh and Terminal Warehouse Rezoning

Tuesday, November 9th, 2021

Good morning. My name is Betty Mackintosh. I'm Co-Chair of the Chelsea Land Use Committee of Manhattan Community Board 4.

The Board has recommended approval with conditions of the proposed rezoning for the Starrett-Lehigh and Terminal Warehouse buildings.

The proposed inclusion of these two sites in the Special West Chelsea District is a much-welcomed, long-awaited measure that CB4 enthusiastically supports. Thoughtful master plans preserve these iconic buildings' historic features. The rezoning would accommodate current user demands. We do however have major concerns that we urge the City Council to work with the applicant and City agencies to address.

We ask that the applicant implement a solution to the dangerous pedestrian conditions on West 26th Street. Parked trucks extend into West 26th Street, blocking the sidewalk. Pedestrians are forced to cross the street mid-block, without seeing the on-coming traffic. A mid-block pedestrian crossing could provide a safe path for pedestrians.

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer agrees with us.

We are pleased that City Council staff have been discussing this solution with the applicant and with DOT. We are hopeful that this pedestrian safety measure will be implemented.

CB4 looks forward to joining with Hudson River Park Friends and the applicant to add streetscape improvements that would connect Hudson River Park, the applicants' sites and the High Line.

LPC has discouraged street trees on the sidewalks adjacent to the Starrett-Lehigh building. We urge the applicant to re-visit this issue with LPC.

The Starrett-Lehigh and Terminal Warehouse buildings have been carefully preserved and are now ready for a broad range of as-of-right uses that would help revitalize West Chelsea. We welcome the opportunity to facilitate this transformation, and to address several local needs.

Public Testimony from Paul Devlin
Co-Chair Chelsea Land Use Committee, Manhattan Community Board 4
New York City Council Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises
Public Hearing for Starrett-Lehigh and Terminal Warehouse Rezoning
Tuesday, November 9, 2021

Good morning, my name is Paul Devlin. I'm Co-Chair of the Chelsea Land Use Committee of Community Board 4. I'm here to speak in favor of this re-zoning, with conditions.

We have enjoyed working with the development team over the years and appreciate their considerations of our many issues and look forward to the repurposing of these buildings.

The goals of the West Chelsea District are to facilitate an appropriate integration of uses in the area surrounding the reuse of the High Line. These two blocks between the High Line and the Hudson River play an integral role in linking these uses in our community.

However, on the Use Group 10A issue, we think 15% is too high given that with the total square footage of these buildings this would result in over 440,000 square feet of destination retail. This proposed rezoning would allow approximately five large destination retailers on two blocks.

We are requesting a 10% cap.

We have had many conversations with the applicants requesting they offer solutions to address our concerns. We've discussed ideas such as restricting individual square footage per retailer; or, restricting retail only to manufacturers within the building. They have yet to offer up a specific alternative to be included in this amendment. 10% would still allow over 300,000 square feet of destination retail providing the developer adequate flexibility.

Large destination retail uses will alter the unique character of West Chelsea and is not consistent with the goals for the Special District.

The developer has stated that it's not their intent to market these buildings as destination retail centers and the current configuration wouldn't allow for many of these larger retailers.

This argument might be true today, but we are concerned about future owners of these buildings not honoring the current owners' commitments. And without the restrictions put into place today in the zoning -- which will extend beyond the Verizon lease -- we have no future protections.

In conclusion, we are requesting that the rezoning limit Use Group 10A to 10% to reduce the negative impact to the historic fabric of this site linking the High Line to the Hudson River, as well as eliminating any establishment of precedence to allow large scale retailers within the Special District.

I'm happy to answer any questions.