CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

----- X

September 18, 2014 Start: 11:19 a.m. Recess: 12:05 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room-City Hall

B E F O R E:

DAVID G. GREENFIELD

Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Maria del Carmen Arroyo

Vincent J. Gentile Inez E. Dickens Rosie Mendez Peter A. Koo Mark S. Weprin

Jumaane D. Williams Donovan J. Richards

Inez D. Barron Andrew Cohen

Ritchie J. Torres

Mark Treyger

Daniel R. Garodnick Stephen T. Levin

Ben Kallos

Antonio Reynoso Ydanis A. Rodriguez Jumaane D. Williams

2	CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you. Good
3	morning. My name is David Greenfield. I'm the
4	councilman from the 44th Council Community District
5	in Brooklyn. I'm privileged to serve as the chair to
6	the Land Use Committee. I want to welcome my
7	esteemed colleagues, who are the members of the
8	committee and are here with us today, and the gold
9	star goes to Council Member Arroyo for coming early.
10	Thank you very much, Council Member, and so far I
11	think you might actually be edging into the lead over
12	here, so that's exciting. We're going to do the
13	final tallies at the end of the year and we're going
14	to post it on the board and we'll give out some sort
15	of prize. Also, I want to recognize Council Member
16	Gentile, Council Member Dickens, Council Member
17	Mendez, Council Member Koo, Council Member Weprin,
18	Council Member Richards, Council Member Barron,
19	Council Member Cohen, Council Member Torres and
20	Council Member Treyger.

You'll see on the table before you one item relating to the committee and first there's the agenda prepared by the committee staff pertaining to those matters which have had a hearing and were viewed and fully vetted by the subcommittee. Those

are the matters on which we will be acting today.
I'd also like to take the opportunity to thank our
subcommittee chairs, Chair Weprin, Chair Koo and
Chair Dickens. Also before you are the joint reports
of the Land Use Committee and the applicable
subcommittee for each item we're voting on today with
the proposed resolution for each item. What the
committee is voting on today is to approve each of
the resolutions before you for presentation and vote
by the full council. The resolutions reflect the
recommendation of the applicable subcommittee. In
addition today, you will also find a briefing sheet,
which gives you additional information about those
matters and other matters which have been scheduled
to be heard by the subcommittee.

Today, we only have one application on our calendar for our consideration, Land Use Number 110, 24 Fifth Avenue, an application for a sidewalk café located at 24 Fifth Avenue to operate an unenclosed sidewalk café with 10 tables and 20 chairs in Community Board 2 in Council Member Johnson's district. This café is across the street from Council Mendez's district. Council Member Johnson is very much in favor of this; Council Member Mendez is

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

2.2

23

24

25

very much opposed to it. The Zoning Committee has recommended an approval of this item. I recommend approval of this item as well.

Just so you have some of the basic background of this, this originally started off as a project that had 25 tables and 52 chairs. current reduction is to 10 tables and 20 chairs; also a reduction in hours of operation. There is a commitment by the applicant that the sidewalk café will close at 10:00 p.m. Sunday through Wednesday, at 11:00 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, which is significantly earlier than the required time. Council Member Johnson, who is not a member of the committee, has asked me to express that he's very strongly in favor of this and he believes that this agreement, in fact, will be the best agreement for his community. As by coming to an agreement today, this is, in fact, enforceable and if the committee were to vote this down, this will inevitably likely lead to litigation, which, could in fact, lead to a much larger sidewalk café, which he would not be happy with.

I also want to acknowledge that we are in receipt of a letter from Neil P. Ritter of 25 Fifth

2.2

Avenue Condominium 25 Fifth Avenue, New York, New

3 York and that letter has been added to the record.

With that, I would like to...

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: With that, I would like to hand it over to Council Member Mendez to speak on this particular item.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: Thank you, Mr.

Chair, my colleagues. This issue that comes before
us is a very complicated issue. It has many layers.

My colleague and my dear friend, Corey Johnson, is
being a very practical individual and I, on the other
hand, am taking a position about preservation in
trying to preserve our community and the character
and the natures of our community.

So the ultimate issue here is whether this sidewalk café is a legal or illegal non-conforming use. Corey believes it is a legal non-conforming use and should be grandfathered as the law would allow for legal non-conforming uses to be grandfathered. In terms of that, I think it's a close call whether this a legal non-conforming use. They would have to show that the use existed for two years and the proof of burden is on the applicant.

2.2

They've provided some documentation, which, to me
is for me is just shy of the two years, but at the
end of the day, this issue fails on procedural
grounds. There are laws in this city which requires
that certain filings happen at a certain time, and if
we need more time that you have to request in writing
to have that additional time to modify or to submit
the application, modify the application and here, the
Department of Consumer Affairs did not my
colleagues, I'm speaking. Mr. Chair?

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Folks, if you're having a conversation, we ask that you please take it outside. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: Here, the

Department of Consumer Affairs did not abide by the

30-day requirement and in fact, submitted to the

Council this application 17 days after the deadline.

Moreover, the applicant, Claudette's Café, requested
an extension to modify the application nine days
after the deadline, so this fails on procedural
grounds 'cause they did not meet the 30-day

requirement. My colleague, Corey Johnson, thinks

this is a legal non-conforming use. He also would

want to see less tables and chairs as recommended as

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

2.2

23

24

25

2 an alternative by the community board. The community 3 board voted for 10 tables and 20 chairs only if the zoning allowed this. They do not want sidewalk cafes 4 and on Fifth Avenue the zoning prohibits sidewalk cafes for decades. For this reason, I'm asking my 6 7 colleagues to vote against this, making clear that the actual location of the café is in Council Member 8 Johnson's district on the West Side of Fifth Avenue 9 and I am on the East Side of Fifth Avenue. This, of 10 course, affects residents on both sides of Fifth 11

much, Council Member. I just was texting actually with Council Member Johnson. He's in a meeting with the administration. He did ask me to point out, which I will just for the record, that we, the Council has studied this issue, as have several city agencies and you pointed out, it's a debatable point, but all of the city agencies, including ourselves, actually believe that it is a legal non-conforming use. That is our opinion and he asked me to point out again that the... it is a very significant reduction of to 10 tables and 20 chairs, including

Avenue and with that, Mr. Chair, thank you for giving

me this opportunity to speak.

[crosstalk]

I certainly acknowledge your position, but as the

,

\_

chair, I'm going to follow the recommendation of the subcommittee chair and the subcommittee that we vote age on this project. Thank you. And with that, I will ask the clerk to call the roll.

COMMITTEE CLERK: William Martin,

Committee Clerk. Roll call vote Committee on Land

Use, Land Use Item 110. Council Member Greenfield.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Yes.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Gentile.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: May I explain my vote, Mr. Chair?

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Yes, sir.

COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: As I said at the subcommittee meeting, as the Dean of the Delegation, I always consider the desire of the council member whose district this is located as something very, very important and something that we really need to abide by. However, as Council Member Mendez has indicated, there are significant legal and procedural problems with this application and I think either way it goes it will be litigated in some fashion or form on either side. So that being the case, there's also I think an ethical issue here with the applicant and I think, although I don't know the applicant, I think

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

2.2

23

24

25

2 we may be dealing with a bad actor here because six 3 months before they came before the community board asking for this sidewalk café permit, they six months 4 earlier had testified before that same community board and said to them when they were applying for a 6 7 liquor license that they would never ever apply for a sidewalk café; that that wasn't in their plans and 8 they wouldn't do that. That was six months before 9 they were before the board again asking for a 10 11 sidewalk café. So I don't think we, as a Council, 12 should be rewarding bad actors. However, I understand Councilman Johnson's position on this and 13

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Chair also recognizes that we've been joined by Council Member Garodnick and Council Member Levin.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Arroyo.

so given that, I will abstain.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: And Council Member Kallos.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I'm not sure I'm going to vote, so I'm not going to ask for permission to explain, but I think given the conversation that's going on here between Council Member Mendez and the Chair, and the points that Council Member Gentile has

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

2.2

23

24

2 raised, I need more information. I'm not ready to

3 vote on this item.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Okay and we'll take that as a pass for now and then we'll come back around if you decide to vote. We... the... our committee staff would be happy to chat with you in the meanwhile and Pete is standing right behind you. Thank you. And I just also reiterate for the record that these items are fully vetted at the subcommittee. We've had extensive hearings at the subcommittee reviewing these items and the essence of the arguments are, in fact, correct that we are succinctly putting, which is that there has been a debate raised as to the legal non-conforming use. Every government agency that has looked at it, including this agency, the New York City Council, has agree that it is indeed a non-conforming use. importance of giving the council member I believe it is non... it is, in fact, not illegal conforming use and that was an item that was fully vetted at the subcommittee, which, one of three subcommittees and I think we met probably for close to two hours to discuss this matter, but Pete here certainly give you

I'm trying to ask now the Land Use staff to provide

me with the additional information because generally
I support a council member's decision in whose
district a Land Use item is in. However, this time
because of what Council Member Mendez has brought up
as far as procedural and the legal aspects that
impact upon the additional tables and chairs and
Council Member Gentile's issues that he raised, I
want to pass for now and see if I can get the
additional information that I would need in order to
support the position of Council Member Johnson.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you. What we are going to do is our members would like to vote and leave and what we're going to do is we're going to continue to vote. We're going to then hold the vote opened for an additional 15 minutes so that for those members who would like to confer with staff can do so and then we will come back for those members who want to vote, but to our members who would like to do so I want to give them that opportunity, if that's okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Thank you,

Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: You got it.

Let's keep calling the roll, please.

1	COMMITTEE ON LAND USE 15
2	COMMITTEE CLERK: Garodnick.
3	COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: [off mic] Aye.
4	COMMITTEE CLERK: Mendez.
5	COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: I vote no.
6	COMMITTEE CLERK: Koo.
7	COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: [off mic] Aye.
8	COMMITTEE CLERK: Lander.
9	COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: [off mic] Aye.
10	COMMITTEE CLERK: Levin.
11	COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: [off mic] Aye.
12	COMMITTEE CLERK: Weprin.
13	COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: [off mic] Aye.
14	COMMITTEE CLERK: Richards.
15	COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: [off mic]
16	COMMITTEE CLERK: Barron.
17	COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: May I be excused
18	to explain my vote?
19	CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Of course.
20	COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I expressed I
21	have a position that's similar to what has been
22	expressed by colleagues Dickens and Arroyo. Based on
23	what has been said here, I did not attend the
24	subcommittee meeting and it's only today that I'm
25	understanding that there is some question as to

1	COMMITTEE ON LAND USE 16
2	whether or not it's legal or not legal. However,
3	understanding that the matter will perhaps be most
4	certainly litigated, I will cast my vote as aye,
5	understanding that hopefully the courts will make the
6	correct decision and we may have to come back and
7	look at this again.
8	CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you.
9	[crosstalk]
10	COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you.
11	COMMITTEE CLERK: Cohen.
12	COUNCIL MEMBER COHEN: [off mic] Aye.
13	COMMITTEE CLERK: Kallos.
14	COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Pass.
15	COMMITTEE CLERK: Reynoso.
16	COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: [off mic] Aye.
17	COMMITTEE CLERK: Torres.
18	COUNCIL MEMBER TORRES: [off mic] I vote
19	aye.
20	COMMITTEE CLERK: Treyger.
21	COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Permission to
22	explain my vote.
23	CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Yes, sir.

 $\mid$  obviously legal implications that have been raised

COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: So there are

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

2.2

here and raised at prior hearings, and we all I think take them very serious, but I also take very serious recommendations of both the Chair of Land Use and the Subcommittee on Zoning, Chair Weprin; that their staffs and people have been working on this issue for a long time and I believe that you know, we are a lawmaking body. We are not judges and I do respect the fact that this issue will be followed up on and I will cast my vote aye, but making sure that those legal issues do get resolved and that we do respect the letter of the law. So I will be voting aye,

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Kallos.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: [Response not

heard]

Chair.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Would you like to spend... we're going to do this. We're going to take a 15 minute recess. I think we're done with our first call of the roll. Are we missing anybody else at this point?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: Chair?

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Yes?

so.

Clerk, where are we at?

COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: The... my opening that I read at the subcommittee I think provides more information than... 'cause it provides states and stuff, and I don't know maybe if I should walk through that and that might provide some of the additional information that my colleagues might need in order to make this decision or should I step with them outside and talk them through what I believe is the procedural issues here?

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Yes, if you don't mind, we're going ask the clerk to call the roll, if it's okay with you, just so we know you know, what the vote is. Then we're going to have a break so that we can all confer with our colleagues. Is that alright with you, Council Member?

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: No, no, we'll stay in here. We're not going outside. We're going to stay in here and chat about it. No, no, no. Does that work?

COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: You're the Chair,

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: Whatever you say.

COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Thank you, Chair. I take seriously the issues that were raised by Council Member Mendez, whose district is just adjacent across the street from the café in question. I have spoken with my Land Use staff in order to get

2.2

23

24

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Permission to explain my vote.

2.2

23

24

25

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Of course.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Which I rarely do, but Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the staff for

\_

the indulgence in trying to get my hands around the details of this Land Use item. I am comfortable that, as always, our staff have gone through the process and you, as the Chair, to ensure that what we're doing here is the right thing, and with my apologies to Council Member Mendez; I don't think we've ever disagreed on anything; I will vote aye on this item.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Kallos.

COUNCIL MEMBER KALLOS: Permission to explain my vote.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Sure.

tip to our Chair for encouraging a deliberative process and for allowing us to recess so that we could learn more and have a discussion. It's part of what makes this a deliberative body where everything doesn't just get rubber stamped, so I really appreciate this. This specific case is a border. It is down Fifth Avenue with one member representing the West Side and the other member representing the East Side, where each represents a constituency involved.

I think collegiality is important, but I also am

3

4

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

2.2

23

24

25

disappointed. I share borders with multiple council members and I always make sure to work together and in unison and in this I am disappointed that both of the council members are not here and unable to do that and that they were not able to achieve the collegiality. I have had a chance to confer with Land Use staff and I want to thank them for their diligence. They have assured me that this is, in fact, legal. I am relying on their legal opinions into this matter. It is irrespective of pending or threatened litigation. I do not believe that as a body we should be passing anything that is illegal. I think we have to rely on our Land Use counsel to help inform our judgments on what is legal and isn't legal and therefore, with respect to Council Member Mendez, for which I considered this, and respect to Council Member Johnson, I vote aye.

[Pause]

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Council Member Mendez.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ: Thank you, Mr.

Chair. I want to thank all my colleagues for taking the issues that I've raised into consideration and Council Member Kallos, I just want to put on the

3

4

6

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

2.2

23

24

record Corey Johnson and I are collegiately and amicably disagreeing and for me, this is a close call and like has been stated, this is going to be decided in the courts, so I still have not gotten to the point 'cause I haven't seen all the proof that I feel it is a legal non-conforming use and so that's why I'm going to be more dogmatic about what the zoning says where this is residential street as opposed to what is the exception, and if this is the exception we will see a café there, but this is not something that Corey and I are coming to blows. A judge is going to decide that later and I want to thank you, Chair Greenfield, for giving me this opportunity to speak. Council Member Johnson didn't know I was going to speak on the record today and I appreciate the opportunity afforded to me by all of my colleagues. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON GREENFIELD: Thank you,

Council member Mendez. I want to thank you for your advocacy. Your constituents are fortunate to have such a passionate council member fighting on their behalf at City Hall. With that, I'll ask the clerk to call the roll.

[gavel]

## ${\tt C} \ {\tt E} \ {\tt R} \ {\tt T} \ {\tt I} \ {\tt F} \ {\tt I} \ {\tt C} \ {\tt A} \ {\tt T} \ {\tt E}$

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 09/21/2014