



Legislation Text

File #: Res 0505-2023, **Version:** *

Res. No. 505

Resolution calling on the New York City Department of Design and Construction and the New York City Department of Correction to repurpose and convert the Manhattan Detention Complex into the new Borough Based Jail in lieu of demolition.

By Council Members Marte and Ung

Whereas, According to the New York City Department of Correction (“DOC”), the Manhattan Detention Complex (“MDC”), located at 124-125 White Street, colloquially known as the Tombs, is comprised of a North and South Tower, housing approximately 900 male inmates, many of whom are awaiting trial in Manhattan; and

Whereas, According to the official website of the City of New York, in 2017 the de Blasio Administration launched an \$8 billion 18 step roadmap titled “Smaller, Safer, Fairer: A Roadmap to Closing Rikers Island” which created a Justice Implementation Task Force and a \$30 million investment to accelerate safe reductions in the size of the jail population and replace Rikers with a smaller network of modern, safe, and humane facilities; and

Whereas, The network of facilities will be part of a borough-based jail system with jails in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, housing a population of no more than 3,300 people; and

Whereas, These jails will have 3,544 beds dedicated to promoting better connections to families, attorneys, courts, medical and mental health care, education, therapeutic programming, and service providers focused on the need to reintegrate individuals into their neighborhoods upon release; and

Whereas, According to the Design-Build NYC Borough-Based Jails Program (“BBJ Program”)

Manhattan Facility Design Principles & Guidelines 2022, The Manhattan facility project will build a facility located at the site of the current MDC containing 886 beds, provide 125 accessory parking spaces and 20,000 square feet of community and commercial space on the ground floor, in a structure standing around 300 feet; and

Whereas, According to a spokesperson from the NYC Department of Design and Construction (“NYCDDC”), all four borough-based jail sites are either being demolished to remove existing structures or in site preparation to prepare for construction; and

Whereas, The those affected in the Chinatown community that oppose the demolition process have not had their voices heard; and

Whereas, According to Neighbors United Below Canal (“NUBC”), in lieu of demolition, due to its environmental and other quality-of-life impact, the Chinatown community strongly suggests the adaptive reuse and modernization of MDC; and

Whereas, According to the community’s plan, adaptive reuse goes beyond renovation that includes North and South Towers of MDC being stripped down to the steel girders and built back with more efficient use of space built to code while maintaining a humane environment for those incarcerated as envisioned by the BBJ Program; and

Whereas, Adaptive reuse of the current MDC jails will be much more cost effective, thereby leaving resources that can be redirected to hospitals, schools, affordable housing and elsewhere; and

Whereas, According to NUBC, MDC’s site is in a very dangerous area to build the world’s tallest jail that spans blocks in every direction and requires digging down many feet into a landfill, which has caused flooding at the Downtown Community Television Center (“DCTV on Lafayette Street, because the water table

is very close to the surface and the soil is not stable; and

Whereas, At a spring Manhattan Community Board 3 meeting concerns were raised that demolition and redevelopment of the existing MDC North tower would result in the direct displacement of five ground floor retail businesses and would result in the loss of employment of an estimated 28 workers with no plan disclosed for the relocation of the displaced businesses; and

Whereas, There are approximately 15 small businesses on Baxter Street that will face significant adverse impact if the street is closed for construction staging and inhibit access and visibility; and

Whereas, There are 8 tenement buildings with over 180 residential units, many of which are home to senior citizens; and

Whereas, According to the NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health, a specialized health institute under NYU Langone's Section for Health Equity, after conducting a study expressed concern for the seniors citizens who live in senior housing next to MDC would be exposed to toxins, such as asbestos, from the old buildings that would be released into the air during demolition; and

Whereas, MDC is located very close to Columbus Park, one of Chinatown's only green parks, that thousands of residents use on a regular basis who's air quality will be compromised due to demolition and construction; and

Whereas, According to Community Board 1 Executive Committee on June 23, 2022, the South tower, along with the connected New York City Criminal Court building at 100 Centre Street, have been deemed worthy of evaluation as New York City landmarks by the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission; and

Whereas, A 2009 report by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation concluded that the criminal court building and south tower are together eligible for inclusion in the National

Register; and

Whereas, Demolition of MDC to build the new Manhattan borough-based jail facility is at direct odds with the city's budget priorities, climate policies, and preservation efforts; and

Whereas, Adaptive reuse in lieu of demolition is in the best interest for those incarcerated and members of the Chinatown community deserve a responsive government that takes seriously construction, environmental, and quality-of-life concerns such as parking, noise, and traffic; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls on the New York City Department of Design and Construction and the New York City Department of Corrections to repurpose and convert Manhattan Detention Center into the new Borough Based Jail in lieu of demolition.

CMB
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