

Community Board 7/Manhattan
Mel Wymore, Chair
Public Hearing on Riverside Center
June 15, 2010 at P.S. 191

Community Board 7/Manhattan conducted a public hearing on June 15, 2010, in the auditorium of PS 191 on West 61st Street in the District. The hearing was conducted as part of CB7's response to the proposed Riverside Center development pursuant to the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure ("ULURP"). The hearing was called to order at 6:40 PM by CB7 Chair Mel Wymore and Ethel Sheffer, chair of the CB7 Riverside Center Working Group.

Gary Barnett, President of Extell Development Company, Steven Hill, architect for the project, and Signe Nielsen, landscape architect for the applicant gave brief presentations concerning the highlights of the proposed development. Chair Mel Wymore then presented CB7's core principles for the development, as well as certain proposed changes to make the project more consistent with those principles. The materials supporting Extell's and CB7's presentations are available at (www.nyc.gov/mcb7/riversidecenter). After those presentations, the following public testimony was offered.

Marta Black:

- The community needs a real, full-sized park at this site, not more apartments.

Mary Hughes – PS 199 PTA:

- Since 2000, 10 buildings have been built in the PS 199 catchment zone. PS 199 faces great overcrowding with many still unaware of their kindergarten status for fall 2010.
- In 2006, SCA declined to exercise an option to buy land in the Riverside South complex for a school.
- We need to make Extell build and fund 100% of a school for the community.
- (written statement submitted)

Howard Yourow - Preservationist:

- Most of the supposed 30% open space provided is this water scrim which will be shut off once the units are sold.
- Extell will make immense profit from this project; they do not need all these additional apartments.
- Interested in the preservation of the Con Ed powerhouse; it was built at turn of 20th century and is one of the few remaining pieces of McKim, Mead, and White architecture in NYC.
- Would like to see it landmarked and become an integral part of the site; it has great space for commercial or community use.

Jason Delgado - Mason Tenders District Council:

- This project is important to the union; will put thousands back to work.
- Many have lost jobs; the work on this project is needed to help support members' families.
- (written statement submitted)

James Conway – IUOE Local 14 Building Trades:

- Supports this project so that our men can get back to work.

Joseph Khan – SEIU 32BJ:

- Development will create 1,400 jobs, including 100 for building services.
- (written statement submitted)

Mary Anne Ramer – 515 W. 59th St. Tenants Association:

- 59th St. is my home, not a service alley.
- Supports changes to the site plan proposed by CB7.
- Quantity does not equal quality; density without appropriate infrastructure equals degradation.
- Fordham and John Jay were supposed to be accessible to community, but are only accessible to students.

Ellen Danziger – Riverside Boulevard resident:

- Supports Extell project to get rid of eyesore parking lot.
- Miller Highway should be buried.

David Black – www.riversidecentric.com Blog

- 1992 Restrictive Declaration is a binding document that controls development on this site. Was the product of long negotiations between prior developer and the city.
- Extell aware of restrictions when it purchased the site; should not let it run roughshod over them.
- Extell ramming through the largest possible project; they must be stopped.

Batya Lewton – Coalition for a Livable West Side:

- 1992 Restrictive Declaration must be adhered to concerning density.
- The site must be built to grade.
- A new public park must be built at the front end of the development.
- Extell must build a full new school in the first building constructed.
- Need 20% permanent affordable housing.
- West End Avenue buildings are out-of-scale and must be reduced.
- The site must be built according to earthquake code.
- Would love CLWS alternatives to be considered.
- (written statement submitted from Nelson Nygaard, CLWS Transportation Consultant)

Evelyn Konrad:

- CB7 modifications would make immense improvements on Developer's proposals.
- Pedestrian congestion and vehicular congestion will be debilitating.
- Both the density and height are excessive and require reduction.

Anne Weisberg – Chair of 10 WEA Riverside Center Committee:

- Decisions concerning this project will impact entire west side.
- The 1992 Restrictive Declaration reflects a deal reached between developer, city and neighborhood. This proposal flies in the face of that deal, giving Extell a private windfall at public cost.
- Consensus that TV studios are no longer appropriate should not open door to Extell's greed.
- Limit development to original 2.4MM sq ft, number of parking spaces in 1992 Restrictive Declaration.
- Developer must provide a fully programmed school.
- (written statement submitted)

Olive Freud – Committee for Environmentally Sound Development:

- The below-ground space is not included in zoning count – huge source of “free” FAR.
- Extell design and construction must address global warming and rising sea levels.
- Buildings should be limited to 40 stories (limit of operable windows; energy consumption concerns).
- Supports sanitation proposal to provide public park on top of parking structure.
- School should be built now on lots J or K – should not wait for Riverside Center.
- (written statement submitted re need for a Metro-North station in the area)

Gloria Verdell:

- Developing this site would be good for neighborhood, but only per CB7 improvements used.
- Opposes the podium; site should be brought to grade to ensure we create one community.
- We need a school on the site.

Rebecca Woodard - Computer School:

- School must be at least 150,000 sq ft.
- Nearest middle school is overcrowded; children eat lunch at 10:30 AM, not enough gym time.
- School needs 2 auditoriums, gyms and cafeterias, and needs ground-level outdoor play space.
- School should be grades PreK-8, 6 sections per grade.

Kate Wood - Landmark West!:

- Historic IRT powerhouse is a symbol of grand architecture (McKim, Meade & White).
- CEQR statute requires that the powerhouse be examined as a historic resource.
- This building can be rehabilitated and adaptively reused.
- The curb cuts and loading docks opposite the powerhouse on West 59th Street will kill any sense of community and the prospects for adaptive reuse. Also site design blocks views of the building.
- Should create a co-generation facility on site to replace the steam generated at the powerhouse.
- (written statement submitted)

Courtney Rae - Riverside Boulevard / Trump Building Resident:

- Riverside Boulevard needs stoplights; currently it is very unsafe.
- RSC Proposal needs additional open space and public playgrounds.

Susan Wertzman:

- Plan is beautiful and a perfect bridge between UWS and midtown.
- Thinks the water scrim will be universally enjoyed; RSC a wonderful addition to our neighborhood.

Faith Steinberg:

- Amazed at density of buildings. Number of units and cars is inconceivable; will burden our children.
- EMS, police and fire trucks already struggle with congestion on WEA; this Project will only further delay the arrival of emergency services.

Gene Boxer – Avery (Riverside Boulevard) Resident:

- Cumulative effect of community requests and suggested improvements could overwhelm the financial feasibility of the project. Must avoid being consigned to a parking lot on the site any longer.

Thomas Pienkos – VP of Operations for Trump Corp.:

- Traffic concerns on Riverside Boulevard between West 66th and West 72nd Streets; need traffic safety devices.

Daniel Gutman:

- The 1992 Restrictive Declaration contemplated, but did not require, that the Miller Highway be relocated.
- In 1992, Trump could not afford to carry out this proposal.
- Hope that New York State or the city would bury the highway has evaporated.
- Extell can well afford to move the highway, and it is in their interest to do so.

Steven Gavios:

- Let's not compromise any more. We have an overbuilt west side with a dearth of open space.
- This will be a private enclave; limit to 2.4MM sq ft.

Shai Waisman – Riverside Boulevard Safety Coalition:

- New development will worsen dangerous and untenable traffic condition on RSB.
- No traffic lights, insufficient pedestrian crosswalks along RSB.
- Should not link RSB to Riverside Drive at West 72nd Street until traffic safety devices are in place.

Rachel Laiserin – PS 87 PA:

- Developer must fund the full build-out of a 6-section Prek-8 school in the first building.
- PS 87 has the largest K waitlist in city – overcrowding will only increase in coming years.

Noah Gotbaum - CEC 3 President:

- 8 of 9 elementary schools below West 96th Street are at or above capacity.
- Developers need to be held accountable for the enrollment their buildings create.

Mara Gavios:

- Building on a platform will impede access to Park, waterfront.
- 1,800 parking spaces, car dealership will not enhance the community feel of the neighborhood.
- Should not be allowed to bypass 1992 Restrictive Declaration.

Ira Mofsowitz:

- School playgrounds on building setbacks provide better supervision than at ground level.
- Building 2 is the most accessible to the rest of the UWS and provides easy pickup/drop off.

Slava Haun:

- Extell's proposal will create permanent jobs and generate tax revenues.
- Supports convenient access to retail and cinema.
- CB7 should not micromanage project; Extell has a proven track record of being a good neighbor.
- (petitions submitted)

Patricia Ryan – President of Amsterdam Addition Tenants' Association:

- Riverside South never delivered on promises of jobs and affordable housing to the community.
- Must require developer to provide long-term jobs and permanently affordable units.

Kipp Stevens:

- Very excited about Riverside Center proposal. Must reach a compromise and move forward.

Tila Duhaime – UWS Street Renaissance:

- Riverside South is an unwelcoming sterile area separated from the cityscape.
- Should not squander this chance to make the city accessible and welcoming to alternatives.

Adjourned at 8:39 PM.

Present: Mel Wymore, Ethel Sheffer, Andrew Albert, Richard Asche, Elizabeth Caputo, Louis Cholden-Brown, Hope Cohen, Kenneth Coughlin, Page Cowley, Mark Darin, Mark Diller, Sheldon Fine, Marisa Maack, Klari Neuwelt, Lenore Norman, Nick Prigo, Haydee Rosario, Madge Rosenberg, Roberta Semer, Elizabeth Starkey, Barbara Van Buren, Thomas Vitullo-Martin, and Dan Zweig.