

Molly Wasow Park
Commissioner

October 11, 2023

150 Greenwich Street
New York, NY 10007

929 221 7315 tel

The Honorable Gale Brewer
Council Member, 6th District
563 Columbus Avenue
New York, NY 10024

Re: Women's Shelter at 537 West 59th Street

Dear Council Member Brewer:

Thank you for your July 6, 2023, letter regarding the transitional housing facility being sited at 537 West 59th Street. Though the NYC Department of Social Services / Department of Homeless Services (DSS/DHS) notes and appreciates the concerns you've raised regarding this shelter site, we are affirming our intention to move forward with this project. New Yorkers experiencing homelessness come from every community across the five boroughs.

This purpose-built shelter will be the first of its kind in this community. Presently, there are no shelter resources for single adult women experiencing homelessness in this community and this population deserves access to services and supports that can help them restabilize their lives. In partnership with community members, advocates, and the experienced not-for-profit provider-partner Project Renewal, we're confident that our neighbors in need will be supported as they get back on their feet and transition to permanency. This site will provide robust wraparound resources and support to 200 single adult women experiencing homelessness, including case management, housing placement assistance, health and mental health services, and employment counseling while maintaining proximity to familiar and meaningful supportive networks.

DSS/DHS firmly agrees that permanent and affordable housing needs to be more available in NYC. Nevertheless, the Agency must be able to meet its obligation to provide shelter to individuals in need 24/7, 365 days per year; doing so requires opening and operating shelters that provide essential services to people experiencing homelessness. DSS/DHS will establish a Community Advisory Board (CAB) for this

shelter, which will hold regular meetings and maintain direct lines of communication between shelter staff and community members to ensure that any concerns are proactively addressed. We invite and encourage communities to be active participants and provide input so that we can identify ways to collaboratively achieve our shared goals. As with all DSS/DHS facilities, we will ensure that this facility complies with relevant laws, rules, and regulations, including City and State safety requirements and environmental reviews.

With over 110,000 people, including both asylum seekers and long-term New Yorkers, in the City's care, and thousands more arriving every week, our shelter system is consistently pushed beyond its limits. Each day, our remarkable teams work around the clock simply to manage capacity and ensure that all those who come to us in need of shelter continue to receive a safe place to stay. It is clear that the City is in desperate need of new capacity for both asylum seekers and long-term New Yorkers, and without the addition of new transitional housing facilities, like this one, we will struggle mightily to keep pace with demand and provide those in need with swift access to shelter services. Our most vulnerable neighbors, too, would be deprived of a high-quality transitional housing facility that would provide the critical services our neighbors experiencing homelessness need to stabilize their lives and transition to stable, permanent housing.

We look forward to continuing our partnership with you and maintaining open lines of communication so that we can continue to collaboratively address the needs of all vulnerable New Yorkers and communities at large, in a caring and compassionate manner. If you have any further questions, we would be happy to discuss at your request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Molly Wasow Park', with a stylized, flowing script.

Commissioner Molly Wasow Park



THE COUNCIL
OF

THE CITY OF NEW YORK

GALE A. BREWER

COUNCIL MEMBER, 6TH DISTRICT, MANHATTAN

DISTRICT OFFICE
563 COLUMBUS AVENUE, AT 87TH STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10024
TEL: (212) 873-0282
FAX: (212) 873-0279

CITY HALL OFFICE
250 BROADWAY, ROOM 1875
NEW YORK, NY 10007
TEL: (212) 788-6975
FAX: (212) 513-7717

GBrewer@council.nyc.gov
www.council.nyc.gov

CHAIR
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

COMMITTEES

CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION
FINANCE
GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS
HIGHER EDUCATION
RULES, PRIVILEGES, AND ELECTIONS

SUB-COMMITTEE
COVID RECOVERY AND RESILIENCY

July 6, 2023

Molly Park
Commissioner
Department of Social Services
150 Greenwich St., 40th Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Park:

I write to reiterate my long-held opposition to the women's shelter being constructed at 537 West 59 Street, New York NY 10019 by Project Renewal.

As far back as August 16, 2021, when I was Manhattan Borough President, I made it clear in the enclosed letter to then Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks that the new development should be permanent housing and not for temporary shelter for 200 unhoused women.

Given the current need for permanent, affordable supportive housing, this shelter seems even more out of place than before.

I followed up the letter to Commissioner Banks with a March 3, 2022 meeting between me, my staff, residents of the Element (555 West 59 Street) and other near-by buildings to strategize on how to convert this project into permanent housing. Participants asked for follow up meetings with Project Renewal and with City agencies, and we scheduled them.

On May 31, 2022, leaders of the near-by buildings met with staff from Project Renewal to discuss the proposed development and to argue for permanent housing.

On August 15, 2022, I met again with leaders of near-by buildings to evaluate what we had heard from Project Renewal.

On September 12, 2022, you (then Deputy Commissioner) and Hailey Nolasco (DSS) met with leaders of the near-by buildings as well as Project Renewal to discuss the many questions posed by neighboring residents (written questions and answers enclosed).

On February 28, 2023, I met with Project Renewal again to reiterate my opposition to a temporary shelter and support for permanent housing and to understand the status of the requests from

residents of near-by buildings. Their requests included no outside patients admitted to the health clinic; a smaller number of residents (100); catered food instead of scratch; rerouting kitchen exhaust system away from adjacent apartments; an alternate smoking location that would not entail second hand smoke going to adjoining apartments or the Gertrude Ederle playground.

Since then, I have received information from Project Renewal about their on-going construction work. I have not heard from DSS. Residents of near-by buildings held a rally against the project and have written me many e-mails expressing their opposition.

I continue to be opposed to this temporary shelter and I want to know how this building could be converted to a permanent home for women and/or families with children. This building is located near some of the best schools in New York City, CUNY's John Jay College, Lincoln Center and the beautiful Gertrude Ederle Recreation Center operated by the Parks Department (which I got funding to renovate - \$14 million - when I was in the City Council previously), and is used constantly by families and individuals from the community.

I have supported shelters in other parts of Manhattan and my district, often when there is criticism from the neighborhood. In this case, the people of the city of New York are paying for a NEW shelter when there is an appeal all over the five boroughs for permanently affordable units; why is this site not constructing what every New Yorker is asking for? I have been asking this question since 2021.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gale A. Brewer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gale A. Brewer

cc: Anne Williams-Isom, Deputy Mayor, City of New York, City Hall, New York, NY 10007



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

1 Centre Street, 19th floor, New York, NY 10007
(212) 669-8300 p (212) 669-4306 f
431 West 125th Street, New York, NY 10027
(212) 531-1609 p (212) 531-4615 f
www.manhattanbp.nyc.gov

Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

August 16, 2021

Steven Banks
Commissioner
NYC Human Resource Administration
150 Greenwich St., 40th Fl.
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Banks:

I write regarding 537 West 59 Street where Manhattan Neighborhood Network has sold their building to Project Renewal. I am delighted that MNN has sold to an excellent nonprofit organization.

I wish that the building could be a permanent, supportive housing program for women who have been homeless instead of a temporary shelter for 200 homeless women.

60 women could live there if permanent housing was available, but the cost would be more to rehabilitate the building. MNN says they sold the building for less than it was worth, and Project Return says that they paid a lot for the building.

I am requesting that DHS make an effort to make this project a real home for formerly homeless women.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Gale A. Brewer
Manhattan Borough President

Community Questions with DHS and Project Renewal Answers

DHS

1. May we understand the economics on reducing the proposed number of clients at the shelter – for example – why can't it be 100 clients or 150 clients?

DHS must provide high quality shelter to clients while also being a responsible steward of City resources and ensuring that we are a good neighbor in communities. Providing a very robust complement of services on site both improves the quality of life for clients, and is the foundation of our good neighbor policy. We have to have a range of staff and services to make sure that all the needs are being met. The 200 bed size ensures that we can provide that full complement of supports while still being fiscally responsible.

2. What services would be impacted if there were fewer clients at the shelter?

With fewer residents, there will be less staff to provide day to day coverage. This will impact administrative staff, staff providing clinical/mental health support, security staff, and other social service programming.

3. Are there any creative ideas/options to reduce the number of clients at the shelter?

No, we are not considering decreasing population size. As mentioned during our meeting, First Deputy Commissioner Molly Park – prior to our meeting – researched if there were any viable ways to reduce the shelter population size. As discussed, it is not economically feasible or morally responsible to reduce the size of the population given our City's housing climate.

4. Can a document be created to ensure that the women's shelter can never be converted to a men's shelter?

As per our recent discussion, we are currently looking into this.

5. Can we be involved in the hiring of the community liaison personnel? Community input is critical.

Agreed, community input is integral to this work. Project Renewal will be responsible for hiring designations and will introduce the hired staff to the community.

6. How do we escalate issues regarding lack of communication and etiquette relating to Project Renewal, based on their historical behavior?

Project Renewal is committed to being responsive to community concerns. In our recent meeting, the provider restated their interest in being a community partner. If additional support is needed in communicating with Project Renewal, you may reach out to Department of Social Services Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs.

The Borough Director for Manhattan is Leilani Irvin and she can be reached at irvinlei@dss.nyc.gov. Additionally, Deputy Commissioner Marricka Scott, [Scott-](#)

Mcfaddenm@DSS.nyc.gov and Assistant Deputy Commissioner Hailey Nolasco, NolascoH@DSS.nyc.gov are also available to support with matters such as these.

7. When will the CAB be formed? What can the community do to make sure we are involved in the selection process?

CAB's are usually formed closer to the shelter opening date, with the first meeting taking place within a month of the shelter's opening. Given the commitment shared at our recent meeting, we are willing to begin to form a CAB sooner to the opening of this location. Given that this shelter is proposed to open in 2025, we can begin the CAB in 2024.

As far as the selection process, we will work with Councilmember Brewer, Project Renewal, as well as yourself to include residents to the CAB. Keep in mind that this is not a large group, but rather a select group of around 15 people (usually no more than 2 representatives per agency). The CAB is also not limited to residents of the condominium to ensure representation from the larger community is also included.

8. Can we have quarterly meetings such as the September 12 meeting, on zoom, to ensure that the city, Project Renewal, and community are all on the same page?

When the CAB meetings begin, they will satisfy this request as they meet regularly. Prior to the CAB being formed, Project Renewal is open to facilitate quarterly meetings to share updates with the community starting this calendar year.

Project Renewal

1. Do you have any creative ideas/options to reduce the number of clients at the shelter?
Can some clients be moved to a different Project Renewal site?

Our number of clients is governed by DHS.

2. Regarding the on-site health clinic, may we request that the clinic is only open to clients?
There is an emergency room a half a block away that precludes the need for a clinic. Can we avoid an external clinic entrance?

The following are some details about the clinic we have planned for 537 West 59th Street: We plan to offer primary care (family medicine), psychiatry, dental, and if possibly podiatry. Expected hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5PM. Routine primary care and psychiatric medications will be prescribed.

We include treatment for substance use disorders as standard of care, including buprenorphine and naltrexone. We will not offer methadone maintenance treatment. On an average day we would expect the following medical staff to be on site: one psychiatric provider and two primary care providers, with part time availability of dental and podiatry. We will also have nursing staff to support these services. All of Project Renewal's clinics are Federally Qualified Health Clinic (FQHC's). As an FQHC the clinic will need to be open to the community and we can't legally restrict patients to just building residents.

The closest existing clinic similar to what we have planned is down on 46th St and 10th Avenue (Ryan Chelsea-Clinton Clinic). As far as using the emergency room for primary care, that is a very expensive and inadequate way to meet primary care needs. We expect there would be demand for primary care services at this clinic in this location, though we do not expect a noticeable increase in traffic.

3. With regards to cooking, can food be brought from an external venue as opposed to cooking on site? Any creative thoughts and ideas to eliminate cooking 100s of meals on site is critical.

The following is a bit more information about the kitchen we have planned for 537 West 59th St, which is an outgrowth of and designed and operated to reflect the core mission of our institution. It will not be a typical commercial kitchen for reasons including:

- *We serve fewer than 200 people a day*
- *There are no deep fryers*
- *There are no grills*
- *The entire kitchen would work on induction (electricity); there are no gas elements*
- *Cooking is finished by 4:00 p.m., at the latest.*

We are exploring the possibility of moving food preparation to an external venue, but the logistics are complicated and far from ideal. Additionally, we are exploring the logistics and costs of moving the cooking exhaust to be at the roof of the building to maximize the distance between the Element's rear.

4. Any incremental ideas on how to avoid smoke, marijuana, from filtering through to adjacent playground and building – is there any way to wall off these areas?

There are two areas where smoking will be possible at 537 West 59th St- the outdoor terrace on the 3rd Floor and the entry courtyard. See attached for more information about those spaces and their proximity to the park and Element condo. We will not be able to wall off these areas more than they are already walled off. We are exploring options for mechanical “smoke grabbers”, but so far our engineers haven't been able to find a system that works in outdoor environments.

There is a green wall being built at the Entry Court walls that will contribute to limiting air-borne particulates that may emanate from the smoking activities within this space.

5. Can we be involved in the hiring of the community liaison personnel?

We will introduce personnel to the community once they are hired.

6. What does 24x7 security mean in practical terms? During non-daylight-hours, how many personnel will be providing security on the outside of the building? How frequently will they patrol the community? Can there be a permanent outdoor guard?

Security and Operation staff do hourly rounds in the neighborhood from 6am to 11pm but not after curfew.

7. Thanks for sending us parts of the presentation.

We will circulate to building residents in the community. Great, thank you

8. Ideas on frosted glass windows or other privacy features on windows that overlook adjacent buildings and the playground?

In consideration of Element condo's request to limit the views of clients residing in 537 West 59th St onto the playground and the Element condo, attached is a study presenting an option that provides frosted glazing to a height of 6'-0" above the finish floor, with clear glazing above, at the corridor and dormitory windows along the east and west facades. Note that frosted glazing is provided at the transom window within the 2nd floor office closest to the Element Condo terrace.

9. Will we have a dedicated 24x7 phone line for community residents to call in with issues?

Once the building opens, we will provide a 24-hour phone line that connects directly with the front desk.

10. During the demolition phase, can we receive consistent communication regarding phases, construction hours, and especially during loud phases of excavation?

Yes, we are happy to provide updates to the Element condo board throughout construction. Currently, Broadway Builders (contractor for this project) is planning the following hours of work during demolition and construction phases: Mon – Fri, 7AM – 6PM;

Saturdays Broadway Builders will be requesting DOB permission to work 9AM – 4PM. No work Sundays. Can a 24x7 phone line be set up during this phase as well? Broadway Builders will provide a complaint number that we can share with the Element doorman/super.

11. Garbage management is critical to maintaining street access for neighboring buildings and avoiding infestations that will come along with that – kindly provide a detailed plan.

The facility planned for 537 West 59th Street will have a refrigerated garbage room in the basement. Refuse will be collected from the building on a regular basis and stored in this refrigerated room, reducing the risk of odors and pests often associated with garbage. A few times a week, garbage will be brought through the designated service corridor on the west side of the building to the curb at designated times for collection by either a private carter, or DSNY.

The exact schedule will be determined closer to when the building opens in mid-2025. Project Renewal welcomes the opportunity to work with the Element condo on a plan that works for both buildings and explore containerized curbside storage through DSNY if that is an option.

12. What is the pest control strategy? Please provide a plan.

Project Renewal has a longstanding relationship with Ozane Pest Management at our facilities.

They use an Integrated Pest Management program involving baiting, monitoring and dusts to reduce the amount of chemicals in use while maintaining a high level of control. Initially, Ozane installs new tamper resistant bait stations, mechanical traps, monitoring devices & perform treatments throughout the building. They follow up with regular service at least twice monthly to check all devices and replace equipment as needed.

13. What will the hours of the shelter be? Will there be women coming in and out late at night?

The shelter operates 24/7. DHS curfew is 11pm, after which time clients need to be in their beds until they can leave after 6AM. Clients who return after curfew will be allowed into the building and will not be left on the street. Clients who work at night will be provided passes.