

October 28, 2020

To:

Marisa Lago, Director, NYC Department of City Planning
Peter Fleming, Chair, Brooklyn Community Board 6



Re: Oct 22 CB6 Meeting on Gowanus Rezoning

We are writing to express our extreme concern about the format and content of the initial “public” pre-certification meeting for the Gowanus Rezoning that CB6 hosted on October 22. As we have previously stated, DCP and partners, including CB6, must facilitate equitable participation for local stakeholders and provide an informed, safe and transparent review process.

For future meetings, there must be clear expectations shared ahead of time for community members taking part, both in terms of the format of the meeting, and the content that will be shared. People are taking time out of their busy lives during especially stressful times, and need to know what they are dedicating time to.

Format - Community members must be able to actively participate in public meetings

There is no doubt that the Covid crisis has made community engagement more difficult, but community members must have clear and transparent ways to make their voices heard. More people may be able to attend a Zoom call, but the quantity of people is insignificant if the quality of engagement is lacking.

The “webinar” style at the October 22nd meeting left community members voiceless, without knowledge of who was in the room, and unable to communicate. There was no question feature enabled, leaving attendees to pile their questions into the chat, which were then not addressed by the speakers/presenters. It was not possible to identify the person making posts in the chat (visually or through affiliation); and this anonymity seemed to encourage personal attacks. Asking participants to put questions into a google form, where no one can see them but the people who created this form, is not transparent. You must do better.

In the forthcoming pre-certification meetings, CB6, DCP and other agencies must ensure that:

- Attendees can see who else is in the meeting, whether on video or by participant list.
- There is a transparent and fair way for people to sign up to ask questions and give comments, either by using the Q&A function in a way that all attendees can see the questions, or a google form of which the results are shared with attendees
- There is a transparent and fair way of letting attendees speak, ideally by order signed up during the meeting time, similar to the process in an in-person meeting
- There is significant time allotted for public questions and input. If questions are not answered during the meeting, questions and answers should be distributed to participants afterwards.
- All speakers are identified by their name and affiliation.

Content - We need answers to the questions we have been asking for the past 4 years.

The October 22nd meeting lacked any new information. In fact, there has been no new information on any of GNCJ's priorities or demands for a year. This is dismissive of, and disrespectful to, the community that has put years of work into this process. Upcoming pre-certification meetings must provide new content to address the questions we have asked over and over. The title, announcement and promotion of these meetings must make it clear what content the community can expect to learn.

There must be an additional meeting scheduled before ULURP begins on the following content:

Wyckoff Gardens and Gowanus Houses

- A clear and transparent plan for how the rezoning will provide full capital funding for Wyckoff Gardens and Gowanus Houses, beyond existing funds that have already been committed
- Details about the funding commitments for mold and lead remediation under the federal order that the City is already required to provide at Wyckoff Gardens and Gowanus Houses
- Information about what will happen if NYCHA does not address mold and lead by the court-mandated date

At a minimum, the announced pre-certification meetings should cover the following content:

Gowanus Green Update - November 19th

- Affordability levels for the development
- Information about phasing/timeline for the development
- Whether there will be a CD6 and/or local NYCHA preference for new affordable housing
- Commitment and timeline for construction of a public park & public school
- Timeline for NYC DOE decision on type of public school (elementary, middle, high school)
- Community engagement plan for the design of the public park

Infrastructure Update - December 2

- Modeling data from the DEIS and any additional studies to show:
 - The local impact of new development on combined sewage overflow (CSO) in the Gowanus Canal
 - The local impact of increased sewage in the rezoning area on the sewer system
 - If and how the Unified Stormwater Rule will serve as mitigation for these impacts
- A commitment for any additional needed mitigation to ensure a Net Zero Rezoning

MIH and Affordability - TBD date

- Data from the DEIS on direct and indirect displacement
- Information about the City's Certificate of No Harassment & Tenant Right To Counsel as resource for CD6 residents
- Which MIH Option(s) will be mapped as part of the Gowanus area-wide rezoning
- Whether there will be a CD6 and/or local NYCHA preference for new affordable housing

Prior to ULURP, DCP should also provide additional information to the community about the following content:

Gowanus IBZ Vision Study

- Progress and next steps for the City to meet its commitment to complete an investment, land use and jobs plan for the Gowanus IBZ before the Community Board 6 ULURP clock starts
- If DCP will conduct additional engagement with stakeholders before a draft report is shared

Sincerely,
Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice

Cc:

Councilmember Brad Lander

Councilmember Steve Levin

Louise Carroll, Commissioner, NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)

Vincent Sapienza, Commissioner, NYC DEP

Greg Russ, Chair and Chief Executive Officer, NYCHA

Vicki Been, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development