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**The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Zoning and Development Committee
Tuesday, March 23, 2021 - 6:30 PM
*This meeting was conducted remotely via Zoom***

MINUTES:

The meeting was called to order at 6:30.

Co-chair Anthony Cohn greeted representatives of the NYBC/Longfellow Partners team and they made a presentation of their proposed laboratory tower. Their appearance was especially timely, as the Department of City Planning announced the Pre-Certification of the proposal, which meant that it would be certified in no less than a month, which is to say on or after April 19. This Certification will start the formal ULURP process, giving the Community Board 60 Days to vote on the proposal.

Before the Applicants' representatives made their presentation, Co-chair Cohn called for a general show of hands among the 293 in attendance. Fewer than 5% expressed approval. Among the attendees were State Senator Liz Krueger (who voiced strong opposition), Councilman Ben Kallos (who also voiced strong opposition), and representatives of Assemblyperson Rebecca Seawright, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, Comptroller Scott Stringer, and the Department of City Planning. In her statement, Senator Krueger made clear her absolute opposition to the expansion. Councilman Kallos asked a series of questions about the supposed need for proximity to other medical research facilities and asked about the impact of the new labs announced at Rockefeller University.

The Applicant's presentation addressed in some form, many of the ongoing concerns of the Public, Committee and Community Board. Judging from the questions and comments that followed, few concerns were satisfied, although many expressed a favorable opinion of the work of the NYBC. The presentation, culled from the video of the meeting, can be found here:

[SLIDESHOW](#)

The presenters included Rob Purvis (NYBC), Jamie Peschel (Longfellow), Melissa Sarko (Ennead Architects) and Paul Selver (Kramer Levin – Land Use Attorney). The presentation featured a slide that described the benefits of the proposed tower, all of which benefitted the NYBC/Longfellow Partnership and did little or nothing for the community at large. After the conclusion, a lively question and answer period followed, largely responded to by Mr. Selver.

The questions and comments fell into categories roughly corresponding to the technical analysis chapter in the CEQR Manual. Adopting this format for salient points will allow for relative brevity but will omit individual contributions.

1. Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy

a. Land Use

- i. The overarching attitude was that the Applicant is asking to radically change the existing residential existing residential zoning (R8B, with a height limit of 75 feet, and an allowable floor area of 225,000 SF) to a commercial zone (C2-7, with no statutory height limit, and an allowable floor area of 450,000 SF).

- ii. After securing their zoning district change, the applicants propose to ignore virtually all of the rules governing bulk (setbacks, sky exposure plane, rear yard equivalent and signage) that apply to the new zoning designation.
 - iii. Further Land Use questions revolved around the appropriateness of commercial laboratories in a residential neighborhood, with all who addressed this issue feeling that while the Blood Center did valuable work, the commercial tower represented too big a change for the community.
 - iv. While the lot in question has been used by the Blood Center for over fifty years, it sits in a residential neighborhood zoned to prohibit commercial uses and severely restricts height.
- b. Zoning
 - i. The zoning discussion had two components: first there was the change of zone for the NYBC's current location and the further special permits required to achieve the 344-foot tall tower; second the rezoning of the Second Avenue blockfronts between 67th and 66th Streets.
 - ii. According to the applicants, the rezoning of the Blood Center site is necessary to create a modern facility for their work, to create a scientific synergy with the commercial laboratory tenants and continue their close proximity to the surrounding research institutions.
 - 1. Many speakers questioned this justification, calling it, among other things, "zoning for dollars", "nonsense" and "absurd".
 - 2. More than one speaker suggested that the tower might at some future date, be converted to residential use.
 - 3. Most of the details of the zoning change, zoning text amendment and special permits were discussed at length in November and December when the applicants initially came before the Committee. The Committee and subsequent Board Resolutions fully describe the zoning issues, and those interested can refer to them.
 - 4. A number of speakers reminded the meeting that the NYBC could build a new building on the existing site, completely as-of-right (under the current zoning) but are choosing to partner to build the "monstrous" tower they propose. In other words, were it not for the cost, the NYBC could build a new home without a financial partner.
- c. Public Policy
 - i. "Which do we value more, commercial development or quality of life?" This was a salient point among many of the speakers from both the Board and the Public.
 - ii. "How can we subsidize profits through a decline of our environment?"
 - iii. Some speakers brought our attention to the failures of the ULURP process, which largely permits the applicant to dictate the topics for discussion and accepts development as an inherent good in all cases.
 - iv. Despite the applicants' protestations to the contrary, a rezoning of this magnitude could set a dangerous precedent for future commercial development in residential neighborhoods. All it would take, noted one speaker, would be a developer willing to invest in assembling a similar sized property and applying for the same sort of zoning changes, using the Blood Center Tower as a precedent.
- 2. Socioeconomic Conditions
 - a. A point raised referred to the influx of relatively affluent persons working at the "Center East", and the effect that their presence will have on neighborhood services. Upwards of 2,000 additional people buying and eating lunch and dinner in the neighborhood would, to a certain extent, destroy the unique balance among various socioeconomic groups.
- 3. Community Facilities and Services
 - a. No direct effect on Community Facilities and services were noted. Much of the analysis required by CEQR in this category refers to residential developments, although the effects of the new building and its vastly increased population will strain police, sanitation, and fire prevention

services, and could also increase strain on the public library directly to the east of the construction site.

4. Open Space

- a. While Open Space, as narrowly defined by both CEQR and the Zoning Resolution, refers specifically to grade level open space, more than one speaker made reference to the loss of “sky” that would take place should this project be built.

5. Shadows

- a. Understandably, most of the comments related to the shadows that would be cast by the building focused on St. Catherine’s Park, which the applicants attempted to minimize. The speakers from the public violently disagreed.
 - i. Many spoke to the afternoon shadows that would coincide with maximum use of the park after school
 - ii. At least two speakers noted that the environmental damage done by the shadows could not be mitigated except by drastically lowering the height of the proposed building.
 - iii. This building, one speaker emphasized, will change the light in the park forever
- b. Additionally, several speakers discussed the shadows, virtually all day-every day that will be cast on the JREC, with its District 75 children most at risk. While this is not normally subject to analysis under CEQR, the damage is obvious, and it remains a shortcoming of the process that institutions like schools are not considered worthy of shadow studies.
- c. One speaker pointed out that the building would even cast shadows most mornings across 66th Street and onto the rear of 301 East 66th Street.
- d. An impact not frequently discussed was noted: the light pollution from a 185 foot square, 350 foot tall tower that operates 24/7/365. In contrast to an apartment house of comparable size (and most apartment buildings have a much smaller footprint) which goes “dark” for much of the night, research labs remain operational all night. This will create a lantern effect from the glass-skinned building that will be visible for miles around, disturbing sleep and disrupting normal life.

6. Historic and Cultural Resources

- a. The CEQR Manual very tightly defines Historical Resources, as pointed out by the applicant, and does not include effects of development on school buildings, or indeed any buildings, unless they are Landmarks.

7. Urban Design and Visual Resources

- a. From CEQR Manual (P. 10-6): *Determining the significance of an urban design impact requires consideration of the degree to which a project would result in a change to the built environment’s arrangement, appearance, or functionality and whether the change would negatively affect a pedestrian’s experience of the area. One important consideration is a project’s context -- for example, the scale and use of surrounding buildings.*
- b. Several questioners noted that the effect on the community for pedestrians would negatively impact the character of the urban context, and as they are mostly related to bulk (as opposed to decoration or façade treatment), they cannot be mitigated through “good design”.

8. Natural Resources

- a. Several speakers noted almost wistfully that the sky should be considered a natural resource, but the CEQR Manual does not agree. As the site is already completely built-up, the damage to natural resources is discussed elsewhere in the questions and comments.

9. Water and Sewer Infrastructure

- a. Several speakers expressed concern over the added strain on both water and sewer infrastructure caused by the 300,000 SF of new Laboratory space, noting the age and fragility of the existing infrastructure.

10. Solid Waste and Sanitation Services

- a. The additional floor area will increase the solid waste produced on site, and although the applicants stated that all solid waste will be retained within the building, the removals and the traffic and litter that might result concerned many speakers.

11. Energy

- a. The largely glass surface of the building will cause significant energy use throughout the year. Cooling in summer, especially with no operable windows, will be required, as well as heating during the winter, due to heat loss through the façade.

- b. Beyond that, noted at least one speaker, the Mechanical Equipment required to both ventilate and isolate the laboratories is very energy-heavy.
 - c. The night-time operation of the building will radically increase the energy consumption for lighting and equipment.
- 12. Transportation
 - a. One speaker reflected on the traffic that will be caused by the large population of the building. There is minimal parking in the proposal, so the employees who might drive into the city for work will strain the existing garages in the neighborhood.
 - b. Another speaker noted that the 2,000 additional people in the immediate neighborhood would increase bus and subway traffic in an already strained public transportation situation.
 - c. More than one speaker noted that both 67th and 66th streets are east west arteries for the hospitals, both for ambulances and private vehicles.
 - d. Furthermore, some noted, the M-66 bus travels west along 67th street, and the school busses that serve JREC line up along 67th street during the day.
- 13. Air Quality Greenhouse Gas Emissions
 - a. The exhaust air from the labs will be discharged into the air above the tower to be dispersed throughout the residential neighborhood, to great negative effect.
 - b. Although the NYBC has had a BSL-3 lab on site for some time, there is no guarantee that the commercial laboratories may not be someday used for research of airborne pathogens. The BSL-3 Lab is located on what is described as a “shared” floor located just below the commercial lab floors of the tower. While there are many safeguards in place for a BSL-3 lab, that is no guarantee that there will not be an accident, sending pathogens like COVID-19 into the air above the Blood Center Tower.
- 14. Noise
 - a. Aside from the noise generated by the huge mechanical equipment mounted on both the roof and at the “shared” floor level of the podium, Laboratory buildings are not particularly noisy. The primary sources of additional noise will likely come from the increased population on the surrounding streets during both day and night.
- 15. Public Health
 - a. Several speakers commented on the public health effects of the extensive shadows the tower will cast on the park, JREC and the sidewalks.
 - b. The possible accident, releasing airborne pathogens was also noted, as well as the possible effects of the “normal” exhaust on neighborhood residents with respiratory issues.
 - c. The 24/7/365 nature of the building and the resulting light pollution was also noted as a public health issue, especially for those living on the east side of 301 East 66th street, less than 50 feet away from the glowing wall of the tower.
- 16. Neighborhood Character
 - a. More than anything else, speakers noted the effect of the tower on neighborhood character. The residential quality of both 66th and 67th streets will be destroyed forever. The public library, just to the east of the site, would be dwarfed by the new building, reducing its urban presence to insignificance. Many speakers mentioned the crowded sidewalks and additional people using the already crowded and scarce open space. One speaker emphasized the “hospital creep”, which they defined as the expansion west of the hospital/Medical Research facilities along the East River. Senator Kreuger also mentioned that phenomenon in her remarks.
- 17. Construction
 - a. The four-to-five-year construction period will, in the opinion of many speakers, create chaos in an already chaotic neighborhood. The lane blockages necessary for urban construction will further clog the streets. The dust and dirt from demolition will reduce air quality, as will the dust from the construction process.
 - b. After-hours construction permits have become commonplace in the district, and there is no reason to assume that this project, across the street from a large school complex will hesitate to ask for permission to do potentially dangerous work after normal working hours. This will further degrade the quality of life for neighbors.
 - c. Deliveries of building materials will disrupt traffic, and concrete deliveries will require many cement mixers lined up either along Second Avenue or the side streets

- d. Finally, many noted, the noise from construction will be constant and very loud, disturbing the students at JREC as well as the residents “at home” during the day.

At the conclusion of the comments/questions, the Co-chairs invited the applicants to appear at the next meeting of the Committee, on April 27 to respond to the comments and questions from the public and Community Board members. Attorney Selver accepted for the applicants.

As the hour was late, most of the “Old Business” was dispensed with quickly. No news on the Eastern Avenue Height Limits, nor on the Northwell/Lenox Hill expansion proposal. The zoning mystery surrounding the “91st Street Safe Haven” proposal was set aside after some discussion in the hopes that the developers would have an acceptable explanation before the next meeting.

Alida Camp, co-chair of the Small Business Committee, proposed a bit of new business related to the West Side’s small business zoning initiative. The Co-chairs and the Committee suggested a joint meeting with Small Business to investigate the experience on the west side of zoning to protect small business tenants. This will take place on April 13.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:34 PM.

Elizabeth Ashby and Anthony Cohn, Co-Chairs