

Russell Squire
Chair

Will Brightbill
District Manager



505 Park Avenue, Suite 620
New York, N.Y. 10022-1106
(212) 758-4340
(212) 758-4616 (Fax)
www.cb8m.com – Website
info@cb8m.com – E-Mail

**The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Youth, Education, and Libraries Committee
Thursday, April 28, 2022 - 6:30 PM
Conducted Remotely via Zoom**

MINUTES

Board Members Present: Vanessa Aronson, Elizabeth Ashby, Gayle Baron, Michele Birnbaum, Taína Borrero, Ed Hartzog, John Philips, Peggy Price, Elizabeth Rose, Barbara Rudder, Barry Schneider, Rami Sigal, Russell Squire, Marco Tamayo, and Elaine Walsh.

Resolutions for Approval:

Item 1 – Resolution in Support of the Knickerbocker Greys' use of space within The Seventh Regiment Armory/Park Avenue Armory

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 PM.

Item 1 - Public discussion about The Knickerbocker Greys' use of space within The Seventh Regiment Armory/Park Avenue Armory. Including Rebecca Robertson, Founding President and Executive Director of the Park Avenue Armory and Adrienne Rogatnick, President of the Board for the Knickerbocker Greys.

Presentation by Adrienne Rogatnick, President of the Board for the Knickerbocker Greys: Ms. Rogatnick gave an overview of the history and activities of the Knickerbocker Greys, including information about the positive impact this group has had on its participants and the community more broadly. She shared the Greys' perspective on the events leading to the Armory's decision to ask the Greys to leave the Armory and shared information regarding her understanding of the Armory's tenancy situation.

Presentation by Rebecca Robertson, Founding President and Executive Director of the Park Avenue Armory: Ms. Robertson shared information regarding the history of the development of the Park Avenue Armory Conservancy, including that in 2004, the State of New York granted a 99-year lease to the Conservancy to restore, renovate, and maintain the space. She discussed the revitalization of the Armory as a not-for-profit cultural center for performing and visual arts and shared renovation updates and highlights from recent performances and presentations. She explained that the Armory is now in need of the space that had previously been used by the Knickerbocker Greys and that the Armory had assisted in the search to find alternate space for the Greys' exercises at the 5th Avenue Armory further uptown.

A record number of participants joined the committee meeting, with 110 who raised their virtual hands out of 175 in attendance indicating that they were present in support of the Knickerbocker Greys desire to stay at the Armory.

Council Member Julie Menin and a representative from Assembly Member Rebecca Seawright's office shared their support of the Greys, confirmed that they had reached out to New York State Governor Kathy Hochul on the Greys' behalf, and offered their assistance in finding a resolution that would allow the Greys to stay at the Armory.

Comments and questions from the public and the Board related to the below topics:

Lasting impact on participants - Numerous members of the public and Board, including ten current Greys, parents, and former Knickerbocker Greys, discussed the positive impact that being a part of the Greys has had on their lives. They shared examples of how the drills and exercises directly helped to develop their leadership skills and have continued to influence their life choices, even decades later.

The Greys' relatively small ask - Several speakers commented that the Greys are only asking to use 800 square feet of the Armory for two hours per week. They argued that given that this is less than 1% of the total space in the building, the Armory should be encouraged to accommodate the request.

History of the Greys in the armory and community - Because the Knickerbocker Greys have been conducting their drills and exercises out of the Park Avenue Armory for 120 years, the Armory is not only an important part of the Greys history, the Greys have become an important part of and resource to the surrounding community.

Unsuitability of the alternate space at the 5th Avenue Armory - Members of the public and Board shared their concerns that the suggested alternate space at the 5th Avenue Armory is not centrally located, is not accessible by many public transit options, and is too far away from the Greys' current and past location. The 5th Avenue Armory also does not have the adequate space for storage that the Greys require. In addition, remaining at the Park Avenue Armory is important to the identity of the Greys in keeping with traditions of well over 100 years.

Questions regarding the Armory's legal authority to evict the Greys: It was confirmed that the land is owned by the City, the building is owned by the State, and the shelter and National Guard on premises both have agreements with the City. As documents that were displayed indicate that the Conservancy's lease is with the State of NY, questions were raised as to the legal authority of the Armory to evict the Knickerbocker Greys, as well as whether the current NY State administration agrees with this action.

Resolution for Approval:

Whereas: The Park Avenue Armory located at 643 Park Ave, New York, NY 10065 is a New York State owned building on New York City Property;

Whereas: The Park Avenue Armory is 120 years old and hosts three tenants: the Park Avenue Armory Conservancy formerly known as the 7th Regiment Armory, also known as The Conservancy; the Women's Mental Health Shelter at the Park Avenue Armory; and the Knickerbocker Greys;

Whereas: The Knickerbocker Greys are a historic community institution with ties to both the Upper East Side and the Armory for 120 years, and have been headquartered in the Armory for 120 years;

Whereas: The Conservancy has had a lease agreement with the Empire State Development Corporation since 2006;

Whereas: The Conservancy has invested millions of dollars into the renovation of the building and seeks to renovate the basement where the Greys store drill equipment and seeks to remove the Greys from the building;

Whereas: The overwhelming majority of members of the public were in support of the Greys at the April Youth, Education & Libraries Committee meeting;

Therefore, be it resolved: That Community Board 8 Manhattan urges the State of New York to work with the Armory to reach a resolution that allows the Greys to stay in the historic Armory by providing official documentation supporting the Greys' use of space in the Armory immediately; as well as engaging in a conversation about a longer-term solution, including the possibility of allowing the Greys to enter a long-term lease directly with the State.

Yes (14): Aronson, Ashby, Baron, Birnbaum, Borrero, Hartzog, Price, Rudder, Schneider, Sigal, Squire, Tamayo, Walsh

No (0): None

Abstain (0): None

Not voting for cause (1): Philips

The meeting adjourned after a brief discussion about the importance of this topic.

Vanessa Aronson, Taína Borrero, and Rami Sigal, Co-Chairs