

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PLANNING, DISPOSITIONS AND CONCESSIONS

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August 20, 2012
Start: 1:24 p.m.
Recess: 1:35 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E:
INEZ E. DICKENS
Acting Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Stephen T. Levin
Charles Barron
Sara M. Gonzalez
Peter A. Koo

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Chris Gonzalez
Assistant Commissioner of Government Affairs
New York City Department of Housing Preservation and
Development

Thehbia Walters
Director of Manhattan Planning
New York City Department of Housing Preservation and
Development

Dr. Marta Moreno Vega
President
Caribbean Cultural Center and African Diaspora
Institute

2 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Good
3 afternoon. We're opening today, August 20th, 2012
4 the Land Use Subcommittee of Planning,
5 Dispositions and Concessions. My name is Inez E.
6 Dickens. I am not the chair. Stephen Levin is,
7 but I will be substituting for Council Member
8 Levin. I have with us this afternoon, Council
9 Member Sara Gonzalez from Brooklyn and Council
10 Member Peter Koo from Queens and seeing none
11 other, we are ready to start testimony. We will
12 have one—we are hearing one Land Use item today
13 and that's Land Use number 659 in Council Member
14 Melissa Mark-Viverito's district, 120 East 125th
15 Street Firehouse. We're laying over one other
16 item, Land Use number 627, 165 West 80th Street in
17 Manhattan in the district of Council Member Gale
18 Brewer. We have here HPD. Would you please give
19 your name and your title and identification of
20 affiliation before you begin your testimony
21 please? Thank you.

22 CHRIS GONZALEZ: Good afternoon.
23 My name is Chris Gonzalez, assistant commissioner
24 of Government Affairs at HPD.

25 THEHBIA WALTERS: Thehbia Walters,

1 director of Manhattan Planning, HPD.

2
3 CHRIS GONZALEZ: Good afternoon,
4 Land Use item 659 consists of the proposed
5 disposition of one vacant city owned building
6 located at 120 East 125th Street, Block 1773, Lot
7 62, through a negotiated sale. The sponsor will
8 undertake the rehabilitation of an existing four
9 story building formerly used as a firehouse. Once
10 completed it will contain approximately 7,290
11 square feet of community facility space and
12 related uses. Council Member Mark-Viverito has
13 been briefed and supports this project.

14 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Are
15 there any questions from my colleagues? Alright.
16 I have a couple, if it's okay. Thank you. Now, I
17 see that this is a firehouse. How long has that
18 firehouse been closed down? Why was it taken out
19 of commission?

20 CHRIS GONZALEZ: Engine Company 36
21 was closed in May of 2003 for budgetary reasons.

22 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: And
23 where is the nearest firehouse that protects that
24 community on the East Side?

25 CHRIS GONZALEZ: I'm not sure, but

2 we can get back to you with that information.

3 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Would
4 you let the Chair know?

5 CHRIS GONZALEZ: Absolutely.

6 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Please
7 because that is very important because as I recall
8 there was community activity generated around the
9 closure of that particular firehouse.

10 CHRIS GONZALEZ: No problem. We'll
11 get that to you.

12 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Now
13 what is this going to be used for once it's
14 developed? And it's four stories. What is going
15 to be used for?

16 THEHBIA WALTERS: So it is going to
17 be the home of the Caribbean Cultural Center,
18 African Diaspora Institute and it's going to be
19 their home office. In addition, there will be
20 work space. There will be space for events and
21 for community use, so it's a whole cultural
22 center.

23 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: So the
24 entire four story building will be used as a
25 cultural center as well as administration offices?

2 THEHBIA WALTERS: Yes.

3 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: No

4 living quarters?

5 THEHBIA WALTERS: No living

6 quarters.

7 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS:

8 Alright. Thank you. Any questions from my-
9 Council Member Gonzalez?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Yeah, I

11 just have a question in reference to the Caribbean
12 Center. Are they an organization—I'm not familiar
13 with them—have they been in existence for a long,
14 long time?

15 THEHBIA WALTERS: Let me see if I

16 have the date that they were - - but they have.

17 They were previously located on I think it's 58th
18 Street between 9th and 10th. So they've had quite a
19 history. I don't think I have the exact date.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Maybe you

21 could get it to the Committee, so we won't take

22 long, but I'm just interested because I know we

23 had a firehouse when we were looking to do

24 something similar and this is a wonderful thing

25 you're doing, so as long as we're not jeopardizing

2 anyone in respect to what Councilwoman Dickens
3 stated, but I'd like to really know because I
4 think the organizations are supposed to be
5 organizations with tremendous infrastructure, and
6 so on and so forth and maybe we could sort of
7 model or piggy back from that. So that's the
8 reason I am interested.

9 [crosstalk]

10 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS:

11 Council Member, just so you'll know Dr. Moreno
12 Vega is here and she is the CEO and the president
13 and the ED, the chief cook and bottle washer for
14 the organization and she might better be able to
15 answer some of your questions, and she is the next
16 to come up and give testimony if that's all right.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Alright.

18 Great. Thank you.

19 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Thank
20 you. Anything else? Council Member Koo?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: I'd like to
22 know how do you guys - - how do they finance it?
23 Do they get a loan from the city or...?

24 CHRIS GONZALEZ: I believe it's
25 being financed through Department of Cultural

2 Affairs through EDC. There's also private
3 financing in it and I believe Council Member Mark-
4 Viverito--

5 THEHBIA WALTERS: Yes, there's City
6 Council Funding, BP funding, state funding.

7 CHRIS GONZALEZ: There's quite a
8 few interested parties.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: How much cost
10 - - ?

11 CHRIS GONZALEZ: [Interposing]
12 What's the total cost?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: --to the whole
14 project.

15 THEHBIA WALTERS: I don't know if I
16 have the total development cost here with me.
17 Yeah, I don't have a new number, so I can get that
18 to you if I get an updated budget.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Thank you.

20 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: I'm
21 going to ask you to please report back to the
22 Committee with the answers for Council Member Koo;
23 however, Council Melissa Mark-Viverito did put
24 some funding in and there is private funding.
25 They also have property downtown--in midtown I

2 should say and Dr. Moreno Vega may be able to
3 better answer some of those questions. Thank you,
4 Council Member. Thank you so much for your
5 testimony.

6 CHRIS GONZALEZ: Thank you.

7 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: I'm
8 going to ask now would Dr. Marta Moreno Vega
9 please come up. Turn the mic on. Please identify
10 yourself with your title and the name of the
11 organization please. Wait a minute. Put your mic
12 on.

13 DR. MARTA MORENO VEGA: I'm Marta
14 Moreno Vega, founder and director of the Caribbean
15 Cultural Center, African Diasporas Institute. The
16 organization is 36 years old. It was founded
17 under the umbrella shape of the Phelps Stokes
18 [phonetic] fund. Then, the ambassador, Franklin
19 Williams, was the president and we went off on our
20 own and incorporate separately, and the
21 organization has been housed at 58th Street in a
22 brownstone that we own and that we recently sold
23 for \$2.5 million. The project is financed through
24 state funding, city funding. It also has gathered
25 private funding, including American Express, the

2 Ford Foundation, New York Foundation, and various
3 contributions that we have made through
4 fundraising efforts. Council Member Gonzalez?

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Dr. Vega,
6 welcome, and I just want to say that this is
7 exciting because I do have organizations that have
8 that kind of incredible history that you have also
9 and we were looking at the possibility of a
10 firehouse down the line. Now I'd really love to
11 have your number and whatnot so that we maybe
12 could go out there. That would be great.
13 Congratulations.

14 DR. MARTA MORENO VEGA: No. Thank
15 you. Thank you for your support.

16 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS:
17 Council Member Koo, did that answer some of your
18 questions about the funding, the funding source?

19 DR. MARTA MORENO VEGA: the total
20 project cost is \$5.2 million. We have raised 5.5
21 at this point.

22 ACTING CHAIRPERON DICKENS: Are
23 there any other questions from my colleagues?
24 Seeing none, we're going to ask my attorney to
25 please call the roll call and I want to - - .

2 Alright, we're going to close the hearing on Land
3 Use item 659 120 East 125th Street firehouse in the
4 district of Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito.
5 I recommend an aye vote on the one item we do
6 have.

7 COUNSEL: Chair Dickens?

8 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Aye.

9 COUNSEL: Council Member Gonzalez?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GONZALEZ: Aye.

11 COUNSEL: Council Member Koo?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KOO: Aye.

13 COUNSEL: By a vote of three in the
14 affirmative, none in the negative, no abstentions,
15 L.U. 659 is approved and referred to the full Land
16 Use Committee.

17 ACTING CHAIRPERSON DICKENS: Thank
18 you. I'm going to leave the—he's on his way?
19 This closes the Land Use Subcommittee of Planning,
20 Dispositions and Concessions.

21 [gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Kimberley Uhlig certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature Kimberley Uhlig

Date 8/30/12