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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

STATEMENT FROM MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT
GALE A. BREWER ON LUCERNE HOTEL
SEPTEMBER 9, 2020

“I was deeply shocked by the Mayor’s unexpected announcement that this week the 283 homeless men who are lodged at the Lucerne, and are clients of Project Renewal, are now being moved out to the Harmonia Shelter/Hotel Chandler, 12 East 31 Street. On July 27, 2020, they had arrived from the WJ Hotel, 318 West 51 Street at the direction of the Department of Homeless Services.

There have been legitimate concerns about the behavior of some of these homeless men, and they cannot be seen in isolation. The fact that there were two other hotels in the area housing, on a temporary basis, a similar population has added to the problems on the street. Coupled with encampments and the on-going homeless population on the UWS, community members have felt threatened.

I want to emphasize the extraordinary outreach to the community performed by the CEO of Project Renewal, Eric Rosenbaum, as well as the Director of Security and the staff. In my many years of working in the public sector, I have never seen such a high degree of responsiveness, ability to listen, and a commitment to clients as well as the community.

The shock of the sudden decision to move the men again was amplified because we had worked hard to address the community’s concerns. If not for the move, today we would have announced that Goddard Riverside had raised funds – from a generous donor – to find employment and 6-day a week programming at their site for more than 100 men from the Lucerne.

The threat of a lawsuit should not determine a rational decision-making process about the homeless crisis. The decision to suddenly move the men again makes no more sense than the decision to bring them to the Lucerne without any planning.

The Project Renewal staff is now required to start over their outreach in a community on East 31 Street, and as Borough President I will again be involved in facing the issues. At that hotel, DHS is now moving out adult families to still other hotels (family shelters) so that the Project Renewal men can move in. This approach by the City to repeatedly move large numbers of homeless individuals from one site to another cannot be good for clients or communities. We need permanent, supportive housing; we must do better.

I want also to thank the 20th, 24th Precincts and Manhattan North for their responsiveness, as well as the many stakeholders on all sides of the issue, but especially Community Board 7 and its Chair Mark Diller and my fellow elected officials.”