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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

June 23, 2021

**Recommendation on ULURP Application C210261 ZMM and N210262 ZRM
633-641 West 142nd Street Rezoning
By Soma 142, LLC**

PROPOSED ACTIONS

Soma 142, LLC (“the Applicant”) is seeking approval of two land use actions to facilitate the construction of a 17-story residential development at the northeastern corner of Riverside Drive and West 142nd Street. The Applicant is seeking approval for a zoning map amendment and zoning text amendment (“the Actions”) located at 651 Riverside Drive (Block 2089, Lot 14), 639 West 142nd Street (Block 2089, Lot 15), 635 West 142nd Street (Block 2089, Lot 16), 633 West 142nd Street (Block 2089, Lot 17), and 637 West 142nd Street (Block 2089, Lot 115), all located in Manhattan Community Board 9 (“the Development Site”). These actions would facilitate the creation of 81 units of housing, of which 20 would be affordable under Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (“MIH”). To facilitate this development, the Applicant also proposes a zoning lot merger.

The applicant proposes the following actions:

- a) Zoning map amendment to Section 6a, by changing from an R6A District to an R9A District within the Development Site; and
- b) Zoning text amendment to Appendix F of the Zoning Resolution to establish an MIH boundary within the Development Site.

BACKGROUND

The area around the Development Site was previously rezoned in 2012 as part of the West Harlem Rezoning. The goal of that rezoning was to contextualize zoning that was in place since 1961 that did not reflect the character of certain areas and limit out-of-scale development.¹ Community Board 9 supported this rezoning due to concerns about overdevelopment, which was already becoming commonplace in the neighborhood. This rezoning was collaboration between Community Board 9, the Manhattan Borough President, and the New York City Council.

The block where the Development Site is located was rezoned from R8 to R6A. This new zoning limits base heights to 40 to 60 feet and overall building height to 70 feet. This R6A designation

¹ [N120310 ZRM – West Harlem Rezoning and Text Amendment.](#)

was chosen specifically to “provide consistency between the existing built context of low-scale areas.”²

The Applicant acquired the sites from previous owners between 2013 and 2017 after the rezoning was in place. In 2016, the Applicant approached the Department of City Planning with their plan to redevelop the site. The team then met with Community Board 9 in 2018. The pandemic delayed progress on the application until later in 2020, when the Applicant returned to Community Board 9 with updates. Community Board 9 has and continues to support efforts to construct affordable housing in the district, particularly family sized units.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENTS

The Applicant proposes a 170-foot structure, with a setback at 120 feet. The proposed structure would consist of 81 units of housing, 20 of which would be permanently affordable under the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing Program (MIH). The Applicant has indicated that they are seeking Option 1 under MIH, which requires that 25% of the total residential units be affordable at an average of 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI). The structure would have approximately 62,835 zoning square feet (8.5 FAR). The rents for the units would range from 37% to 77% AMI. At the low end, an individual earning \$25,080 would pay \$419 in monthly rent for a studio apartment. At the upper end, a family of four earning \$95,440 would pay \$2,273 in monthly rent for a three-bedroom apartment.³ The remaining 61 units would be market rate apartments.

Area Context

The Development Site is located within Manhattan Community District 9 in West Harlem. The site is located at the northeastern corner of Riverside Drive and West 142nd Street. The site is located near several landmarks and destinations in West Harlem including Riverbank State Park (0.4 miles away or a 9-minute walk), Riverbank Playground (adjacent to the Development Site on Riverside Drive), The City College of New York (0.4 miles away or a 10-minute walk), the Alexander Hamilton Grange National Memorial (0.4 miles away or a 10-minute walk), and the Hamilton Heights Historic District. The site is close to the 145th Street subway station along the 1 line (0.2 miles away or a 5-minute walk). Also nearby are bus stops along the M4, M5, M11, M100, M101, and Bx19 routes.

Site Description

The Development Site consists of vacant land and four extant row houses. 651 Riverside Drive, which is currently vacant land, is irregularly shaped due to the curvature of Riverside Drive. The surrounding area is zoned R8 with multifamily residential buildings that vary in height from six to twelve stories. The exception is the area including and adjacent to the Development Site on the northern side of West 142nd Street. This area is zoned R6A and is made up entirely of 3-story row houses. The Development Site is located close to Broadway, one of the primary commercial

² [West Harlem Rezoning](#)

³ [2021 HPD AMI Guidelines](#).

corridors for the area. The table below outlines the existing conditions on each of the tax lots that comprise the development site.

Table 1: Existing Site Details

Lot Number	Address	Existing Condition
Block 2089, Lot 14	651 Riverside Drive	Vacant land
Block 2089, Lot 15	639 West 142 nd Street	3-story row house
Block 2089, Lot 16	635 West 142 nd Street	3-story row house
Block 2089, Lot 17	633 West 142 nd Street	3-story row house
Block 2089, Lot 115	637 West 142 nd Street	3-story row house

COMMUNITY BOARD RESOLUTION

Manhattan Community Board 9 held a public hearing on April 20, 2021. At the public hearing, numerous members of the Community Board, members of the public, and local elected officials voiced opposition to the proposed rezoning.

At its Full Board meeting on May 20, 2021, Manhattan Community Board 9 voted to recommend disapproval of the application by a vote of 0 in favor, 34 opposed, 0 abstentions, and 0 recusals.

BOROUGH PRESIDENT’S COMMENTS

I have been concerned about this proposed rezoning since my office first learned of the proposal in 2019 because of the lack of engagement with members of the community and Community Board 9. As was pointed out during the hearing on the applications by Community Board 9, several of the extant residential units are rent-stabilized. The addition of permanently affordable MIH units would be negated with the demolition of these row houses. Manhattan is in need of more affordable housing--particularly in West Harlem and the surrounding area. Yet this proposal does not offer anything beyond the minimum number of affordable units. This outcome is unacceptable coming from an application that proposes such a significant increase in allowable floor area, and the destruction of numerous existing units.

The Applicant raised the point that similar developments to the north and south are of approximately the same height. While there are residential buildings that reach twelve stories in the vicinity of the Development Site, what the Applicant has proposed would disrupt the low-scale character of West 142nd Street and impose an out-of-context development on this block.

One of the goals of the previous rezoning in 2012 was to protect the row houses along West 142nd Street from this type of development. The City Planning Commission (“CPC”) in their initial hearing on these applications raised their concerns that rezoning from R6A to R9A was too aggressive. I agree with the CPC and Community Board 9, which has also raised this concern. The proposed development would alter the character of this block and facilitate the demolition of three row houses, which the Applicant has agreed to proceed with regardless of whether or not the site is approved for a rezoning.

In addition to protecting the row houses, the 2012 West Harlem Rezoning was implemented to discourage overdevelopment in the area. Despite the goal of the rezoning to prevent overdevelopment, there are some recent examples of proposed developments that are out of context for the area. A proposed 28-story mixed use building located at 622 West 153rd Street (Block 2099, Lot 7502) across from Trinity Cemetery, and a proposed 13-story residential building located at 857 Riverside Drive (Block 2135, Lot 23), are just some examples of overdevelopment in the area.

Reducing the height of the building would yield a higher percentage of affordable units but would ultimately reduce the number of total housing units. The Applicant proposes an alternative scenario which seeks a rezoning to R8A instead of R9A. There is little difference between R8A and R9A in terms of the total number of units but the proposed height would be reduced by three floors. The table below shows the different scenarios.

Table 2. Development Scenarios

R6A (current zoning)	R7A	R8A	R9A
32 residential units	50 residential units	78 residential units	81 residential units
0 affordable units	13 affordable units	20 affordable units	20 affordable units
7-stories	9-stories	14-stories	17-stories
70 feet tall	90 feet tall	140 feet tall	170 feet tall

BOROUGH PRESIDENT’S RECOMMENDATION

Therefore, the Manhattan Borough President recommends disapproval of ULURP Application No. C210261 ZMM and N210262 ZRM – 633-641 West 142nd Street Rezoning.



Gale A. Brewer
Manhattan Borough President