Application: C 140404 ZSM, C 140405 ZSM

Docket Description:

C 140404 ZSM
C 140405 ZSM

IN THE MATTER OF an application submitted 39 West 23rd Street, LLC pursuant to Sections 197-c and 201 of the New York City Charter, for the grant of a special permit pursuant to Zoning Resolution Section 74-711 to modify the bulk regulations of ZR sections 43-28, 43-313 and 43-43 to allow the construction of a new mixed-use building and to modify the use regulations of ZR Section 42-10 to allow Use Group 2 residential to facilitate the construction of a mixed use building; and for the grant of a special permit pursuant to ZR Section 13-451 to permit an accessory parking facility containing up to 50 spaces in the proposed mixed-use building on property located at 39-41 West 23rd Street/20-22 West 24th Street (Block 825, Lots 20, 60 & 1001-1005), in an M1-6 District, Borough of Manhattan, Community District 5.

Borough of Manhattan, Community District 5.

(See Continued)

COMMUNITY BOARD NO: 5 BOROUGH: Manhattan

RECOMMENDATION

☐ APPROVE
☐ APPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS/CONDITIONS (List below)
☒ DISAPPROVE
☐ DISAPPROVE WITH MODIFICATIONS/CONDITIONS (Listed below)

EXPLANATION OF RECOMMENDATION – MODIFICATION/CONDITIONS (Attach additional sheets if necessary)
The Manhattan Borough President recommends disapproval of ULURP Application No. C 140404 ZSM, Special Permit pursuant to ZR Section 74-711, as it relates to the change of use to allow Use Group 2 residential, and approval as it relates to height and bulk waivers; and recommends disapproval of ULURP Application No. C 140405 ZSM to permit residential parking spaces.

[Signature]
BOROUGH PRESIDENT

1/27/2015 DATE
January 27, 2015

Recommendation on ULURP Application Nos. C 140404 ZSM and C 140405 ZSM – 39 West 23rd Street by 39 West 23rd Street, LLC

PROPOSED ACTION

39 West 23rd Street, LLC (“the applicant”) seeks two special permits to facilitate the construction of a new mixed-use building on a vacant through-block lot with the address 39-41 West 23rd Street a.k.a. 20-22 West 24th Street (Block 825, Lots 20 and 60) (the “Project Site”). The building consists of two residential segments, one 10-floors and one 24-floors, with retail use on the ground floor and an underground accessory parking lot. The first special permit is pursuant to Section 74-711 of the Zoning Resolution (“ZR”) to modify the rear yard equivalent regulations of Section 43-28, the rear yard regulations of Section 43-313 and the street wall height and sky exposure plane regulations of Section 43-43, and to modify the use regulations of Section 42-10 to permit Use Group 2 residential. The second special permit is pursuant to ZR Sections 13-45 and 13-451 to permit an accessory parking garage with a maximum capacity of 50 spaces. The project site is located in an M1-6 District in the Ladies Mile Historic District in Community Board 5, Manhattan.

Pursuant to ZR § 74-711, applicants may request a special permit to modify the use regulations and bulk regulations (except floor area) of zoning lots that contain landmarks or are within Historic Districts as designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (“LPC”). In order for the City Planning Commission (“CPC”) to grant use modifications, the applicant must first meet the following conditions:

1) LPC has issued a report stating that the applicant will establish a continuing maintenance program for the preservation of the building and that such modification or restorative work will contribute to a preservation purpose;  
2) The application shall include a Certificate of Appropriateness, other permit, or report from LPC stating that such bulk modifications relate harmoniously to the subject landmark building or buildings in the Historic District; and  
3) The maximum number of permitted dwelling units is as set forth in ZR § 15-111.

Further, in order to grant a special permit, the CPC must find for bulk modifications that:

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1 The project site is part of a larger zoning lot that includes an existing to remain building.  
2 The LPC issued a report dated April 1, 2014.  
3 The LPC issued a Report, Number 155585, dated April 9, 2013.
1) The modifications shall have minimal adverse effects on the structures or open space in the vicinity in terms of scale, location and access to light and air; and

for use modifications that:

2) Such modifications shall have minimal adverse effects on the conforming uses within the building and in the surrounding area.

The applicant also seeks a special permit pursuant to ZR § 13-45 and 13-451. The special permit requires that all of the applicable conditions of ZR § 13-20 (SPECIAL RULES FOR MANHATTAN CORE PARKING FACILITIES) be met and that the findings of §13-45 and 13-451 have been met. These findings are as follows:

(1) the location of the vehicular entrances and exits to such parking facility will not unduly interrupt the flow of pedestrian traffic associated with uses or public facilities, including access points to mass transit facilities in close proximity thereto, or result in any undue conflict between pedestrian and vehicular movements, due to the entering and leaving movement of vehicles;

(2) the location of the vehicular entrances and exits to such parking facility will not interfere with the efficient functioning of streets, including any lanes designated for specific types of users or vehicles, due to the entering and leaving movement of vehicles;

(3) such use will not create or contribute to serious traffic congestion and will not unduly inhibit surface traffic and pedestrian flow;

(4) for public parking garages, that where any floor space is exempted from the definition of floor area, such additional floor space is needed in order to prevent excessive on-street parking demand and relieve traffic congestion;

(5) such parking facility will not be inconsistent with the character of the existing streetscape; and

(6) the number of off-street parking spaces in such proposed parking facility is reasonable and not excessive in relation to recent trends in close proximity to the proposed facility with regard to:

(a) the increase in the number of dwelling units; and

(b) the number of both public and accessory off-street parking spaces, taking into account both the construction, if any, of new off-street parking facilities and the reduction, if any, in the number of such spaces in existing parking facilities.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes construction of a 24 and 10 story mixed-use building located on a through block site which has frontage on the north side of West 23rd Street and on the south side of West 24th Street in the Ladies Mile Historic District. The building would be predominantly residential, containing approximately 40 units with retail on the ground floor and accessory parking below grade. This would break down to 119,173 gross square feet of residential space, 2,500 gross square feet of retail space and 50 parking spaces. The proposed development would use approximately 24,000 square feet of development rights conveyed from the building on Lots
1001-1005 directly adjoining the building site to its east on West 23rd Street. That building will be restored and will have a continuing maintenance plan.

**Background**

The project site lies within the Ladies Mile Historic District and the Flatiron-23rd Street Business Improvement District. The Landmark’s Preservation Commission (“LPC”) established the Ladies Mile Historic District (or “Historic District”) in 1989. The Historic District generally covers the blocks between Broadway and Avenue of the Americas, from 15th Street to West 24th Street, with some portions east of Broadway and some west of Avenue of the Americas. The Ladies’ Mile Historic District gets its name from the stretch of Broadway from East 9th Street to East 23rd Street that was famous for shopping in the late 19th Century. It now consists of a mix of low and mid-rise buildings, some loft buildings originally built for manufacturing or as warehouses, tall buildings on large lots, and taller thin buildings on small lots. Many of the loft buildings in the district were built prior to the 1916 Zoning Resolution and are characterized by high street walls and no setbacks. In its Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed development, the LPC notes that the neighborhood’s many phases of development have resulted in a variety of building heights and widths adjacent to each other and that many of the early residential buildings on narrower lots were replaced with tall, thin buildings.

According to the applicant, it acquired the property in June 2011 at which point there was an existing special permit pursuant to ZR § 74-711 for Lot 20 and Lots 1000-1005 to amend the use regulations of the Zoning Resolution to allow residential use Group 2 and to waive the height and setback, and rear yard regulations. The special permit had been approved by CPC in 2006 and by the City Council on February 1, 2007 (C 060310 ZSM). The special permit was to facilitate the construction of a 21-story (West 23rd Street frontage) and 3 story (West 24th Street frontage) mixed use building and the restoration of the five-story building on Lots 1001 through 1005.

The design of that previously-approved building was controversial. Approved by a narrow margin by the LPC and disapproved by the Community Board, the building would have had a 21 floor, glass faceted tower on West 23rd Street, cantilevered over the adjacent historic building.
and a three story, single family townhouse on West 24th Street. The LPC found that most of the buildings on the north side of West 23rd Street on the block (except for the ends of the block) were relatively low scale and predominantly loft and store buildings. However, the majority of the LPC members believed that the contemporary building was appropriate to the character of the Historic District. The tower would have contained 63 residential units. The proposed building has never been constructed but in 2012 the special permit was renewed (N 110196 CCM).

Area Context

The site is located in the southern portion of an M1-6 district which extends from West 23rd Street to West 31st Street in the mid-blocks between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. M1-6 districts allow manufacturing and commercial uses as of right. Residential use is not permitted in an M1-6 district. M1-6 districts, mapped only in Manhattan, are the highest density manufacturing districts allowing an FAR of 10. Height and setbacks are governed by the sky exposure plane. Rear yards of 20 feet or more are required unless within 100 feet of a corner. Parking is not required. The area of the development is bordered on the south across West 23rd Street by a C6-4M district, to the west by a C5-2 district and to the east by C6-3A and C6-4X districts. The mid-block area between Sixth and Seventh Avenues from West 24th Street to West 31st Street are also zoned M1-6.

The area is generally commercial office, industrial, and mixed-use development. There are three significant residential developments with retail on 6th Ave between West 26th Street and West 23rd Street, and commercial office buildings along Broadway and Fifth Avenue. Throughout the neighborhood ground floor retail is a prevailing trend, significantly along Fifth Avenue and Avenue of the Americas. There have been a number of recent rezonings (1995, 1998, and 2006) in the area that have also increased the number of residential units through new construction and conversion.

In addition to Madison Square Park, other neighborhood markers include a number of Individual Landmarks such as the Flatiron Building, the Scribner Building (now the United States Synagogue), Church of the Holy Communion Complex, the Gorham Manufacturing Company Building, and the Lord & Taylor Store. There are three other nearby Historic Districts as well; to the north, Madison Square North Historic District, and to the east, Gramercy Park and Stuyvesant Square historic districts.

The site is well served by public transit. The F and M lines stop at West 23rd Street and Avenue of the Americas, a block and a half to the north and west of the site, and the N and R lines stop at East 23rd and Broadway, less than a full block away to the east and north. In addition, the site is

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This is according to the current application; the LPC Certificate of Appropriateness (LPC 06-5335) characterized the West 23rd Street building as a 17 story (22 stories in total) metal and glass tower on a five story base and a 5 story metal and glass clad townhouse on West 24th Street.

The CPC Report dated December 6, 2006 stated that the tower would have contained 63 residential units (C 060310ZSM). The application’s EAS states that the tower would have contained 77 units with a single family townhouse on West 24th Street.
within easy walking distance to the 23rd Street and 18th Street stations for the 1 line at Seventh Avenue, and the 23rd Street PATH station on Sixth Avenue. Nine bus lines also serve the immediate area.

Site Description

The proposed building would be constructed on two lots: Lot 20, a through-block lot, is the current site of a surface parking lot containing 42 spaces; and lot 60, adjacent to lot 20 on West 24th Street, is vacant. The lot area of these two lots is approximately 12,538 square feet.

Adjacent to Lot 20 on West 23rd Street are lots 1001-1005 containing a five story Neo-Grec/Queen Anne style brick building which is a contributing building to the Ladies Mile Historic District and which the applicant proposes to restore, as well as to use approximately 24,000 square feet of excess development rights conveyed by those lots to the proposed mixed use development. The entire zoning lot, consisting of lots 20 and 60 and lots 1001-1005, is in an M1-6 zoning district within the Historic District.

Proposed Project

The applicant proposes to construct a 24- and 10-story mixed-use building with the 24-story portion located on West 23rd Street and the ten story building segment located on the south side of West 24th Street. The building would be predominantly residential, containing a total of 40 residential units. The two building segments would be connected by a shared ground floor containing the shared lobby and retail space - both of which would be located on the West 23rd Street side. In total the building would contain 800 square feet of ground floor retail space and approximately 105,615 square feet of residential floor space. The gate to the parking facility would be on the ground floor of the West 24th Street side of the building and would exit to this street via a 22-foot wide curb cut.

The West 23rd Street portion of the building (“Southern Portion”) would have an 18-story street wall, with a height of approximately 196 feet that includes a 10 foot screen wall at the 18th floor. The Southern Portion of the building would then set back 15 feet and rise an additional 6 stories to the full building height of 24 stories or 278 feet. The facades of this would be constructed primarily of corrugated terra cotta and limestone and would include decorative metal balcony guardrails to evoke architectural elements found in the surrounding historic buildings. The ground floor of this portion of the building would contain the 800 square feet of retail space at the western end of the West 23rd Street frontage and the shared residential lobby entrance at the eastern end of the West 23rd Street frontage. The lobby would connect to the West 24th Street building portion. The West 23rd Street portion of the building would contain 33 residential units on floors 2 through 24. Landscaped balconies would be located on the setback at the 18th floor.

The ground floor would include an open yard next to the connection between the two building portions accessible to all residents. The second floor would include a terrace between the two building portions accessible from amenity space on the second floor of the 24th Street portion of the building.
The West 24th Street segment (“Northern Portion”) of the building would have a ten-story street wall rising to a height of 117 feet that includes a 10 foot 6 inch screen wall at the top floor. The building then would set back 11 feet and a mechanical bulkhead would top the 10th story for a total building height of 130 feet. The northern façade would also be constructed with limestone-clad façade with a double height expression and set in glass balconies and glass balcony railings facing West 24th Street. Landscaped balconies would be located on the setback at the 10th floor of this portion of the building. Seven residential units would be located in this Northern Portion on floors 2 through 10.

Finally, the cellar and sub-cellar would contain the below grade accessory parking garage with up to 50 parking spaces and 29 bicycle parking spaces for building tenants. The design of the garage is for an automated system. Although the garage is unattended, it will feature a turntable that allows the driver to exit the vehicle while the turntable files the car into an empty pallet space. The reverse operation will involve the vehicle operator or driver requesting the automobile via fob or keycode and the system will deliver the car or truck onto the turntable for use by the vehicle’s operator.

The LPC voted to grant a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed building on October 15, 2013. The LPC found that the proposed building would be appropriate to the streetscapes and to the Ladies’ Mile Historic District. Specifically, the LPC found that the design of the development as two distinct but architecturally related buildings allowed each component to relate successfully to each streetscape. LPC found that the height of the West 23rd Street component of the development will relate to the taller buildings on the north side of that street and that the massing, design and materials of this portion of the building are "a contemporary interpretation of the robust, highly articulated primary facades and exposed, planar secondary facades of a darker material palette of the buildings found in the Ladies’ Mile Historic District." With regard to the West 24th Street component, the LPC found that its façade evoked the typical composition of the early 20th Century commercial buildings on West 24th Street, that the open grid at the top of this component evoked a cornice and that the decorative grilles over the ground floor windows related well to the narrow street containing smaller, less transparent storefronts than those found on West 23rd Street. The LPC determined that the palette for both buildings of white and bronze terra cotta, limestone, painted metal and decorative metalwork would relate well to buildings in the Ladies' Mile Historic District.

Also on October 15, 2013, the LPC voted to issue a favorable report to the CPC in support of the Special Permit pursuant to ZR 74-711 based upon the agreement of the applicant to restore the 5 story building on the adjacent lot located at 35-37 West 23rd Street and to establish and maintain a program for continued maintenance of the building. The LPC notes that the building, a neo-Grec/Queen Anne style store building would be restored to a sound, first class condition with new wood and glass ground floor infill, the installation of new display and upper floor windows, cleaning repair and repointing of the masonry; repair or replacement in kind of the cast iron and sheet metal features, fire shutters, roofing and leaders and gutters. LPC determined that this work would restore the building to its historic appearance and prevent further deterioration.
PROPOSED ACTIONS

The applicant seeks a special permit pursuant to ZR § 74-711 (C 140404 ZSM) to construct the primarily residential development within an M1-6 zoning district in the Historic District. As stated, the preservation and maintenance of the historic building being undertaken is of the 5 story loft building located on Lots 1001-1005 adjacent to the proposed development.

The special permit would permit the waiver of the height and setback requirements of ZR Section 43-43 and the special provisions for rear yard regulations for through lots contained in ZR Section 43-28 and zoning lots with multiple rear yard lot lines contained in Section 43-313. These waivers are described in more detail below.

The applicant also seeks a special permit pursuant to Sections 13-45 and 13-451 (C 140405 ZSM) of the Zoning Resolution to allow an automated parking garage with stackers with a maximum capacity of 50 spaces to be located on portions of the ground floor and cellar of the proposed mixed-use building. 8 residential spaces would be permitted as of right if the related special permit to allow residential use was granted.

Bulk Waivers – Height and Setback

The proposed development would require a height and setback waivers because the West 23rd Street or Southern portion of the building would not set back from the street at 85 feet but rather would rise to a height of almost 196 feet before setting back 15 feet and rising to its height of 278 feet. The West 24th Street or Northern portion of the building would similarly rise above the allowed 85 feet to 117 feet before setting back 11 feet and rising to its 130 foot height. Both the West 23rd and West 24th Street components of the building would pierce their respective sky exposure planes for those portions of each component rising above 85 feet and not meeting the stated setback requirements.

Bulk Waivers – Rear Yard Requirements

On through lots in manufacturing districts, such as this, a 40 foot rear yard equivalent is required. For analyzing rear yard requirements, only a portion of the zoning lot is considered a through-block lot. The West 23rd Street portion of the proposed development would encroach into the required rear yard equivalent by 2.5 feet beginning at the 3rd story and this encroachment would increase to a maximum of 9 feet at the 15th floor. This is a substantially smaller encroachment than that which would be caused by development under the current special permit approved in 2006 which would have resulted in an encroachment over a substantial portion of the rear yard.

In zoning lots with multiple rear lot lines, ZR Section 43-313 requires a rear lot with a 20 foot minimum depth to be provided where this rear lot line coincides with an adjoining zoning lot’s rear lot line. The West 23rd Street or Southern Portion of the building would encroach 4 feet 9 inches into the required 20 foot rear yard.
COMMUNITY BOARD RECOMMENDATION

On December 12, 2014, Manhattan Community Board 5 ("CB5") adopted three resolutions relating to this application approving the special permit pursuant to ZR § 74-711 to modify the rear yard equivalent regulations of § 43-28, the rear yard regulations of § 43-313 and the street wall height and sky exposure plane regulations of § 43-43; disapproving the special permit pursuant to ZR Section 74-711 to modify the use regulations of § 42-10 to allow Use Group 2 residential in the proposed development; and approving the special permit pursuant to §§ 13-45 and 13-451 to allow an accessory parking garage with up to 50 spaces to be located in the building.

The first resolution approves the special permit pursuant to ZR § 74-711 to modify rear yard equivalent and rear yard regulations, and the street wall height and sky exposure plane regulations, stating that the proposed building has a more contextual design than the already approved special permit for the site which CB5 had disapproved in 2006. The height and bulk waivers were approved by a vote of 32 in favor, 0 opposed and 1 abstention.

The second resolution disapproves the special permit pursuant to ZR § 74-711 to modify the use regulations of Section 42-10 to allow Use Group 2 residential use in the proposed development by a vote of 23 in favor, 10 opposed and 1 abstention. The resolution points out that the immediate area has been traditionally a manufacturing and commercial district because during its rezoning in the 1990s and since that time, CB5 has consistently advocated for the importance of supporting commercial uses in this mid-block area and not permitting the "piecemeal encroachment of residential inside an M1-6 district."

The third resolution approves the special permit pursuant to ZR § 13-45 and 13-451 for an accessory parking facility by a vote of 18 in favor, 15 opposed and 1 abstention. The resolution notes that the proposed development is in a mass transit rich area and questions the appropriateness of the formula for granting special permits for off-street parking facilities, but notes that CB5 has approved such special permits based upon the residential growth in the area and the need to accommodate the need for more off-street parking in the area.

BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

ZR § 74-711 is typically used to achieve a use change, or bulk waivers in conjunction with the restoration of the same building for which such change or waivers are sought. In this case the applicant seeks a use change and bulk waivers for a new development in conjunction with the restoration of an adjacent building on the same zoning lot. A preservation purpose is fulfilled with the restoration and continuing maintenance plan of the adjacent, contributing building that sits on the expanded zoning lot. However, no waivers or relief associated with that restoration are being sought for the historic building. Instead, relief is being sought for a new building, and that relief may be an unintended increase of scope for the purpose of the ZR § 74-711 special permit. The findings of this permit are more broadly permissive findings than that of ZR § 74-712, which would have been used instead for the vacant lot had it no building to preserve.
The Borough President has previously raised serious concerns about using special permits as a means of piece-meal rezoning of an area to permit a non-conforming use and supports CB5's concern in the present instance. Here, the mid-blocks of West 23rd and West 24th Streets, as well as blocks north, have been maintained as part of an M1-6 manufacturing district and has provided a supply of Class B and Class C office space to firms. Moreover, the present proposal, while immeasurably more contextual and aesthetically appealing than the subject of the 2006 special permit, will provide substantially fewer residences - a total of 40 residents on 32 floors. According to the application, the apartments will average approximately 2,800 square feet each. This raises an important policy issue of whether the landscape and uses of an area should be changed for the benefit of so few.

There is no question that the proposed development, as designed, fits in with the character of the Historic District in a much clearer manner than the subject of the already approved special permit does. The building portions on the north side of West 23rd Street and the south side of West 24th Street would bring continuity to the street walls by replacing vacant lots and as the LPC has determined have features and use materials that relate well to each respective streetscape. While the size of the West 23rd Street building portion is significantly taller than other mid-block buildings on this particular street, it is consistent with other streets in the Historic District, which does contain a variety of building heights.

The height and setback controls of the M1-6 district would lead to a taller, more slender tower, which is less in keeping with buildings in the Historic District. The LPC found that the height and bulk of the building as proposed restored the continuity of the street walls and fit well with the character of historic buildings on each respective block front. The Borough President believes that the effect of the height and setback requirements is minimal, and in fact much less significant than the impacts that would result from the current 2006 special permit, and agrees that the height and bulk of the proposed development is in keeping with the context of the neighborhood and Historic District.

The Borough President also believes that the waivers of the rear yard regulations sought in the application will have a minimal impact on light and air and, again, that any impact is less than that which would occur pursuant to the current 2006 special permit.

In the case of the waiver to allow residential use in the proposed development, the Borough President is not convinced that the proposed development would not have an adverse impact on the character of the neighborhood and Historic District and therefore on conforming uses.

CB5 noted that there have been 31 new residential developments within a half mile of the project site between 2003 and 2013 and expressed concern that the ZR Section 74-711 Special Permit would be used to convert the remaining Class B and C office space in the Historic District into residential use, thus jeopardizing the mixed use character of the neighborhood and stretching the demand on educational and transportation resources beyond their capacity. It also noted that the piecemeal change of use neither takes these cumulative effects into account nor addresses the need for affordable housing in the area.
The Borough President agrees with the concerns raised by the Community Board with the piecemeal rezoning by special permit to residential of districts in which residential use is prohibited. The Ladies’ Mile Historic District is known for its commercial character. The mid-block buildings on West 23rd Street have a substantial amount of commercial use above the first and second floor. As stated in previous recommendations criticizing the use of Special Permits pursuant to ZR Section 74-711 to change uses from manufacturing and Joint Live Workspace for Artists in SoHo into residential uses (102 Greene Street C 140353 ZSM), if the CPC and Community Board believe these mid-block manufacturing areas should be rezoned a proposal should be put forward and discussed. And such a proposal should include a plan for affordable housing where new residential units are being created where none were previously permitted.

The parking facility is described as an automated, below-grade garage. The 50 accessory spaces could be used by the residential or commercial building tenants. If residential use is not appropriate for this site, then the need for parking spaces serving that use should be re-examined. Regardless, while automated designs can be more efficient in allocating garage space for parking, the proposed design does not describe any space being available to load or unload commercial or personal vehicles of their cargo or passengers. It is conceivable that a vehicle containing fully mobile people could be expected to quickly exit and leave the turntable to file the vehicle away, but loading or unloading a person who is has a physical disability or is fragile will create a bottleneck to the system. The same can be said for vehicles that are being loaded with a great deal of cargo such as a personal car with luggage or a commercial vehicle with merchandise.

BOROUGH PRESIDENT’S RECOMMENDATION

Therefore, the Manhattan Borough President recommends disapproval of ULURP Application No. C 140404 ZSM as it relates to the change of use to allow Use Group 2 residential, and approval as it relates to height and bulk waivers; and disapproval of ULURP Application No. C 140405 ZSM to permit residential parking spaces.

Gale A. Brewer
Manhattan Borough President