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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

January 22, 2020

**Testimony of Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
266 West 96th Street
ULURP Application No. 200140 PPM by the New York City Department of Housing
Preservation and Development**

Good morning Chair Lago and Commissioners of the New York City Planning Commission. My name is Lizette Chaparro and I am here to deliver a statement on behalf of Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer regarding the application to dispose of the city-owned site at 266 West 96th Street.

I have long believed that when city-owned land is redeveloped into housing, that housing should be 100% affordable. In March 1990, when the City first proposed to dispose of the site in question, Manhattan Community Board 7 noted that the site was “*an invaluable resource not only as an opportunity to raise capital but also as a location for critically needed services.*” The Board further noted the lack of sites on the Upper West Side that could be repurposed for public use. That statement remains true 30 years later. New York City is in the midst of an affordable housing crisis, and we cannot forego an opportunity to build more affordable housing. In 1990, the City was trying to raise money through the sale of its properties—including this one. Policies and priorities have since shifted and today, we are evaluating a proposal to give the site to a developer for a nominal price in exchange for the construction of affordable units. This parcel makes up 48% of the project site, yet the Applicant proposes to make only 40% of the residential units affordable. This is unacceptable. And what is even worse, only 36% of the residential square *footage* is proposed to be affordable. We cannot, in the midst of an affordable housing shortage, allow this to happen.

When it comes the compact units that are proposed by the Applicant, *more than half* of those would be designated as affordable housing units. Furthermore, fifteen of the compact units are proposed to be set at 130% AMI, making them accessible only to *individuals* earning \$97,000 a year. This is also unacceptable.

The EAS prepared by the Applicant rightfully cites policies in both One NYC and Housing New York. One of the tenets of Housing New York is to utilize city-owned properties to produce affordable housing in a more *effective* way. When we allow a city-owned property to comprise half of a site, but settle for a development in which less than half of the units are affordable, we are not meeting that goal. Furthermore, this project is slated to receive a number of benefits. In addition to being able to purchase the city-owned site for a nominal amount, the developer is expected to receive an HPD subsidy, a property tax abatement, and tax credits through the Brownfield Cleanup Program.

In the spirit of making *effective* use of this city-owned site, I suggest that the following changes be made to the proposed development:

1. A minimum of 65% of the units in the project should be affordable;
2. At least half of the affordable units should be for households earning up to 60% AMI;
and
3. Compact units should comprise no more than 15% of the total number of units in the project.

I appreciate your careful review of this application and thank you for your time on this matter.