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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

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Testimony of Manhattan Borough President to the City Council Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises on ULURP Application nos. C 200052 ZMM, C200050 ZSM, N 200051 ZRM, 200054 ZSM, N 200053 ZAM - Lenox Terrace

Good morning Chair Moya and Members of the Subcommittee:

There are few instances where a development the scale of the one proposed in this application can be viewed as responsible. The Proposed Development lacks the public and private investments necessary to make it a prudent exercise of planning for future growth. At its proposed scale, it promises to change the physical and socioeconomic character of Central Harlem.

The community's concerns are not unreasonable or unfounded. 1,200 of the proposed 1,700 dwelling units will be market-rate. This would result in a significant shift in the area's demographic composition; new residents will have much higher income levels. For a century, Harlem has been the epicenter of Black culture in America, but recent real estate trends have resulted in gentrification and led to a decrease in the area's Black population.

While no plan can insulate a community from market pressures leading to displacement, a project as large as the proposed project should include a plan that is equitable. An equitable plan would:

- 1) Create significantly more affordable housing;
- 2) Further preserve the current affordable housing stock;
- 3) Provide support to local entrepreneurs and small businesses;
- 4) Improve public transportation resources; and
- 5) Create and improve open space

The current proposal fails to meet these criteria. For the reasons stated below, I am recommending disapproval of these Land Use Applications.

The Proposed Development is expected to take place on a single development site and is expected to create 1,700 DUs, a population increase of approximately 4,000. That is nearly half the amount of the East Harlem Rezoning and the Inwood Rezoning. However, those rezonings covered over 60 square blocks. The Proposed Development will occupy just 3 square blocks. This will cause a disproportionate impact on local residents, infrastructure, economy, and educational resources.

For a plan like the one proposed in this application to provide equitable solutions it must also contain commitments proportional to the ones in the rezonings cited above. Both the East Harlem and Inwood rezonings led to commitments from the City in the amount of approximately \$300 to \$500 million for investments in infrastructure, housing preservation, open space, schools, and other elements essential to a neighborhood's high quality of life. One area in need of attention is public transit. Substantial improvements to the area's public transit resources must be made to ensure an equitable result.

According to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), the 2 and 3 lines are currently operating beyond capacity. 85% of the public transit usage generated by the Proposed Development forecasted to utilize the West 135th Street Station on the 2 and 3 lines. Serious overcrowding is foreseeable if the Proposed Development is built.

The DEIS study area has an overall open space ratio of 0.678 acres per 1,000 residents. This is significantly lower than the CEQR guideline of 2.5 acres of combined active and passive open space per 1,000 residents. While the open space expected to be created through the Proposed Development would offset an anticipated loss of existing open space, it will be only be accessible to residents of the Lenox Terrace complex. This proposal creates a disparity in access and in the amount of open space available to area residents.

One of the recurring concerns I have heard about the Proposed Development is the Applicant's ability to follow through on the commitments they have made in connection with this proposal. Many people have cited the long-term vacancy of the single-story commercial building at Fifth Avenue and West 132nd Street as an example. The planning process which led to the decision to keep over 17,000 square feet of commercial space vacant indicates indifference toward the local economy, and a lack of investment in the neighborhood's commercial vitality.

According to the Applicant and residents, there are upgrades and improvements that are needed at all six buildings in the Lenox Terrace complex. The Applicant insists that the proposed development is required to generate revenue necessary to perform these improvements. Many of the complaints by residents appear to involve conditions that the property owner is required by law to address, including brown water in their bathroom and kitchen faucets, lead contaminated water, inadequate electricity, rodents and other vermin, broken floor tiles, and similar conditions that have persisted for years.

According to the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)¹, in the last 12 months the residents of the existing residential buildings have logged 149 complaints, which include the lack of heat and hot water throughout the buildings, bed bugs, roaches, and failed electrical outlets.

Based on past performance, the Proposed Development will not resolve the challenges faced at Lenox Terrace. We need a long-term commitment to housing affordability, and in concert with public agencies, greater investments in infrastructure, open space, and schools.

The Applicant must work with city and state agencies to create a preservation package for the existing units, and increase the number of affordable units that will better balance the mix of affordable and market-rate units in the new buildings.

The City Council should require the Deep Affordability Option pursuant to MIH
NYCT should work with the Applicant to develop a plan to alleviate the overcrowding at the West 135th Street Station on the 2 and 3 lines by increasing and improving alternative transportation options

The Applicant should provide funds for significant improvements to the Howard Bennett and Lincoln Playgrounds, the Hansborough Recreation Center, and the Lt. Joseph Kennedy Center.

¹ https://hpdonline.hpdnyc.org/Hpdonline/select_application.aspx

Prior to demolition, the single-story vacant commercial building on Fifth Avenue and West 132nd Street should be renovated and marketed to local businesses, arts and cultural organizations, church groups, and local community-based organizations at an affordable cost.

The improvements on the existing buildings committed to by the Applicant should be prioritized and tied to the Temporary Certificates of Occupancy obtained for the new buildings.

There is an opportunity to preserve and create truly affordable housing in this area, improve open space for the entire community, relieve transit constraints, as well as improve and create new community resources. The Applicant must work with all the tenants and the surrounding community in order to create a more equitable plan and process with transparency in order to ensure they are protected and their concerns are addressed

Thank you for your time and consideration of this application.