



DEBORAH J. GLICK
Assemblymember 66TH District
New York County

THE ASSEMBLY
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**Testimony of Assemblymember Deborah J. Glick
Before the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation
Regarding the HPD Application for 21 Spring Street**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the application made by the New York City Department of Housing and Preservation Development (HPD) for grant money to redevelop a location at 21 Spring Street into affordable and senior housing. I am gravely concerned about the location of this project, as it is being proposed to be built on top of Elizabeth Street Garden; a public garden that currently occupies the lot and provides open space for the surrounding neighborhood. While there is no denying that we need more affordable housing, there is also no denying that this community has the 2nd least amount of open space in the City and this project would eliminate a well-used and public community garden. Furthermore, it is troubling that this application has never been presented to the local Community Board 2, as outlined in Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) protocol, and raises the question whether HPD is even eligible for funds.

I urge you to deny this grant request. It is my understanding that LMDC funding requirements indicate that HPD is required to first approach Community Board 2 regarding a proposed change in use of 21 Spring Street. This would allow the community to see an application, hold public hearings, and allow review by various Community Board committees and community members, prior to HPD seeking funding from LMDC. According to LMCD, “the project [must] demonstrate a high level of community interest and support” in order to be considered for funding. It seems as if the basic, foundational step of community notification and support has been completely bypassed. Not only was the Community Board not notified, I know my office was also never notified. Nor am I aware of any public hearing that took place regarding HPD’s intent to develop at 21 Spring Street.

While the development of affordable and senior housing is a worthy and necessary cause for our community, adhering to an effective public process is imperative when looking to redevelop community space that is currently in use. Downtown neighborhoods are so devoid of public space, that the loss of a public garden warrants a vigorous public discussion. Members of the local community who use the space deserve ample time and a forum outside of an LMDC hearing to discuss the project. While this site was raised as a potential location during the Seward Park Urban Renal Area (SPURA) land use review, that project is solely taking place in Manhattan Community Board 3, and there were no presentations or hearings regarding this site’s

role in the project at the time. Members of Community Board 2 and the elected officials in the area were not a part of the SPURA discussions.

Additionally, there is a tremendous amount of neighborhood support for Elizabeth Street Garden. Since it is not a formal New York City Parks and Recreation maintained space, local residents have joined together and formed a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization to fund the daily maintenance and up-keep of the garden, allowing for year-round care of the garden. In a time when public space is frequently seized by corporations, developers, or major universities, the potential loss of more public green-space creates an unsustainable situation, especially for our downtown neighborhoods.

Affordable housing is needed in our city, and Community Board 2 has worked to identify another location on which housing could be built in the district. The hope is that this alternative site might also even hold more units than proposed at 21 Spring Street. And equally important, it would do so without the destruction of existing community open space. I encourage HPD to work with Community Board 2 to find an equitable solution that allows them to have full support for a realistic affordable housing proposal and then successfully apply for a grant from LMDC.

I urge you to deny this application at this time. The community deserves to be a part of conversations that involve the development of public spaces and additional public funds should not be granted to project which do not follow such procedures. Thank you.