

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 10, 2016

Contact: Peter Marchese

West 136<sup>th</sup> Street Block Association

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**DEVELOPER MISLEADS HISTORIC BLACK CHURCH TO BUY VALUABLE CHURCH-OWNED PROPERTY, BEGINS ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTION OF HOMELESS SHELTER IN SPITE OF MORATORIUM**

**NEW YORK, NEW YORK** – Wealthy developer David Levitan of 339 Development LLC has begun illegal construction of a homeless shelter in Harlem - destroying a beloved Community Center in the process - after misleading an historic black church in order to buy their valuable church-owned property. Levitan is near completion on this project, despite a community-wide moratorium on new shelters, and without taking any of the city-required steps for public notification and input.

The West 136<sup>th</sup> Street Block Association is appalled by Levitan's complete disregard for protocol put in place to prevent exactly this type of community exploitation. They are joined by NY State Assemblyman Keith Wright, City Council Member Inez Dickens, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Police Precinct, and surrounding block associations in their outrage. They are calling on the city to withhold providing any contracts to Levitan, and for all work on the project to be stopped to allow for the community involvement that is already mandated by existing citywide regulations.

The James L. Varick Community Center is located at 151-155 West 136<sup>th</sup> Street. The neighborhood is a residential area and one of Harlem's most historic, home to the famous Schomburg Center for Research and Black Culture, Abyssinian Baptist Church, Striver's Row, Harlem Hospital, and the former house of Madame C.J. Walker. The Varick Center was formerly owned by the storied Mother AME Zion Church and used for community enrichment activities, often for children and teens.

Deeply in debt, the church sold the Varick center to Levitan in 2015 after he told members he planned to build condos on that site, revitalizing the neighborhood. Levitan has developed several homeless shelters throughout the city, and faced a 2012 wrongful death lawsuit following a murder in one of his facilities.

After misleading the church and purchasing the Varick Center, Levitan subsequently began converting the 18,000 square foot property into a homeless shelter. This is being done in direct defiance of an existing moratorium in Community Board 10, given an over-saturation of such facilities in the area, and the belief that "the Community has borne the weight of more than its

“fair share””. According to the city’s own “Fair Share” criteria, city facilities should be evenly distributed to “lessen disparities among communities”. Community Board 10 currently has more service providing facilities than almost any other area in all five boroughs.

City regulations also require that the designation of new shelters be preceded by public notification, a 90-day period for public comment, and a public hearing by the City Planning Commission. There has been no public notification and there have been no public hearings related to the shelter Levitan is creating.

Levitan argues that his facility is not subject to the moratorium, as it is not a “new” shelter, but merely a relocation of the Kelly Transitional Residence on West 127<sup>th</sup> Street. However, the Kelly Residence says they have no plans to close, no relationship with Levitan, and no agreement for relocation whatsoever.

Levitan is bypassing all protocols for opening a new shelter, illegally doing so in violation of a standing moratorium. **The city should not tolerate this arrogant disregard for protocol by rewarding Levitan with a contract for city services.**

The W136th Street Block Association plans to vocally address these issues at the following upcoming meetings, and invites distinguished members of the press to attend:

Land Use Committee, Community Board 10  
June 16 at 6:30pm  
215 west 125th street, 4th floor

The Health and Human Services Committee  
June 20 at 6:30 pm  
215 west 125th street, 4th floor

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## CONTACTS

Council Member Inez Dickens

212.678.4505

212.788.7397

Community Board 10

Brian Benjamin

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Community Affairs, 32<sup>nd</sup> Precinct

Officer Collado and Detective Pena

212.690.6345

212.690.6311

The following longtime members of the West 136<sup>th</sup> Street Block Association are available for media interviews:

James Horton

608.320.1776

Kerry-Ann Evans-Thompson

646.418.7750

Peter Marchese

917.572.8291

Michael McCarry

646.942.8642

Andrea (does not want to provide last name)

917.805.5269

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

### Enclosed:

- Community Board 10 resolution on new shelters
- Letter of protest, Council Member Inez Dickens
- Graphic, citywide site planning process
- Graphic, distribution of homeless shelters per Community District



## Community Board No. 10 - Manhattan

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Harlem, New York 10027  
(212) 749-3105  
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**OTT M. STRINGER**  
*Deputy President*

September 25, 2008

**A. FRANC PERRY**  
*Chairman*

Commissioner Amanda Burden  
City Planning Commission  
22 Reade Street  
New York, NY 10007

**JENEVA T. BAIN**  
*District Manager*

Dear Commissioner Burden:

**RE: Community Board 10 Resolution Calling for a Moratorium on New/Additional or Expansion of Existing City, State, Federal, or Private Special Interest Facilities in Central Harlem**

Community Board 10-Manhattan Transmittal

On Wednesday, April 2, 2008 at Manhattan Community Planning Board #10's monthly General Board meeting, the board approved by a record of:

30 YES    2 NO    1 ABSTENTION

for a Moratorium on New/Additional or Expansion of Existing City, State, Federal, or Private Special Interest Facilities in Central Harlem:

Whereas, The Central Harlem community has suffered the negative social and economic impact associated with drug and alcohol abuse and acknowledges the need for such substance abuse treatment facilities; and

Whereas, Service providers have not been accountable to the board or the wider Harlem community for the impacts of facilities or the results of services and treatments on clients, including but not limited to Harlem residents; and

Whereas, Community Board 10 has publicly and repeatedly voiced concern regarding the over-saturation of alcohol and substance abuse facilities located in Central Harlem most notably within our 197-a Plan and Statement of Needs Document; and

Whereas, Central Harlem is home to the largest Methadone Treatment facility in the City of New York; and

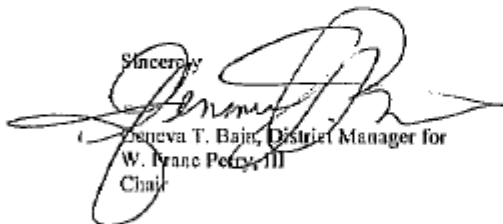
Whereas, Existing today is no less than 13 separate and distinct Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Service Centers (listed herein as an appendix to this Resolution); and

Whereas, Community Board 10 supports the concept of 'fair share' regarding such facilities be they City, State, Federal, or private, and feels the Community has borne the weight of more than its 'fair share'; and

Whereas, Community Board 10 seeks to preserve, stabilize and enhance the existing residential fabric and ensure that neither new construction nor new property uses undermine residential cohesiveness or retail continuity; so

Therefore be it resolved, that Community Board 10 Calls for a Moratorium on New/Additional or Expansion of Existing City, State, Federal, or Private Special Interest Facilities in Central Harlem.

Sincerely,



Geneva T. Bajer, District Manager for  
W. Franc Petry, III  
Chair

Cc: Hon. Scott Stringer, Manhattan Borough President  
Hon. Inez Dickens, Councilmember, 9<sup>th</sup> District  
Meilan Chiu, Director of Manhattan Planning, HPD  
Robert LiMandri, Commissioner, DOB  
Hon. Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor, NYC

**INEZ E. DICKENS**  
COUNCIL MEMBER  
9<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT, MANHATTAN

**DISTRICT OFFICE**  
163 WEST 127TH STREET, SUITE 729  
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THE COUNCIL  
OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

CHAIR  
LAND USE SUB-COMMITTEE OF  
PLANNING, DISPOSITIONS & CONCESSIONS

COMMITTEES  
LAND USE  
OVERSIGHT & INVESTIGATIONS  
RULES, PRIVILEGES & ELECTIONS  
SMALL BUSINESS  
STATE & FEDERAL LEGISLATION

April 29, 2016

Lucille McEwen  
Executive Deputy Commissioner  
Capacity Planning & Development  
Department of Homeless Services  
33 Beaver Street  
New York NY, 10004

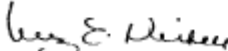
Dear Commissioner McEwen,

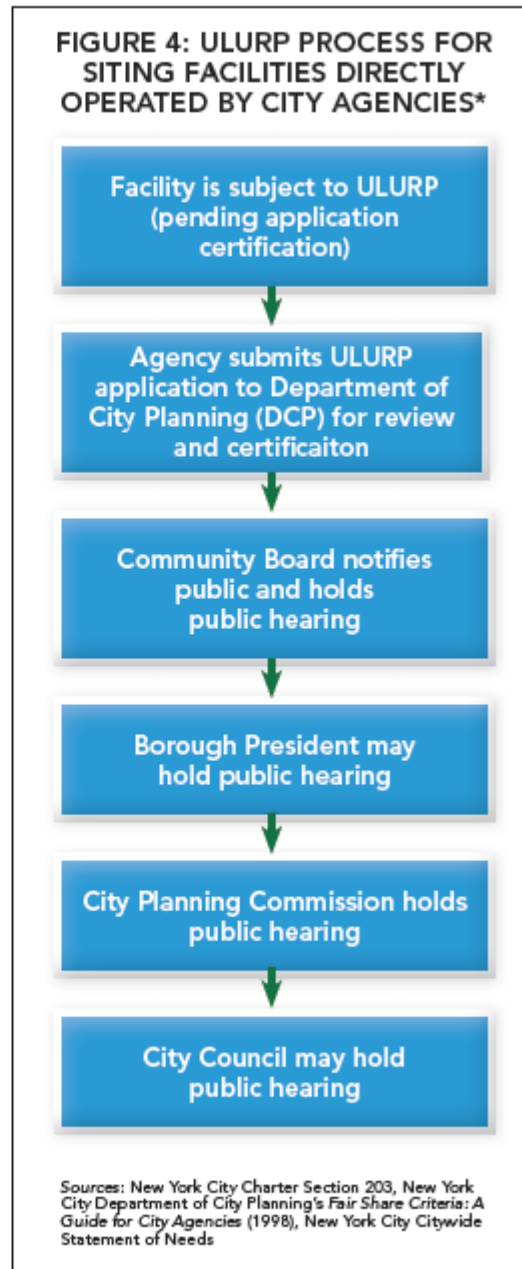
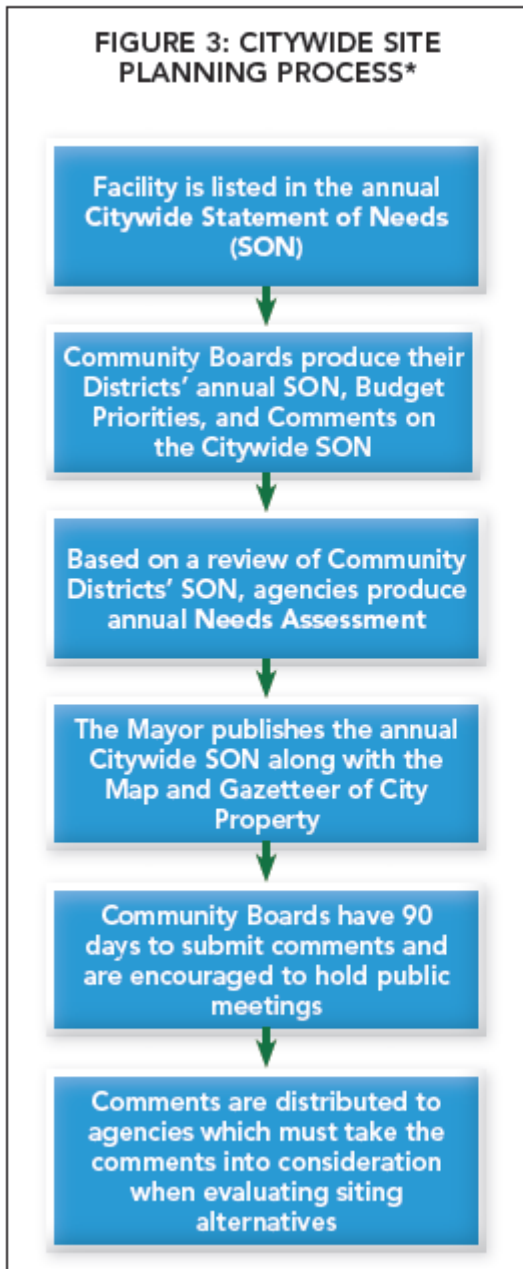
I want to work with the Department of Homeless Services to ensure that all supportive shelter and supportive housing placement is in the best interest of the residents in Harlem. I recently met with the organization Center for Urban Community Services(CUCS) I commend and support their noble work of providing housing, medical and mental services and promoting poverty fighting programs, to rebuild the lives of homeless and disadvantaged individuals and their families. But I do not support under any circumstances their proposal of the relocation of its Kelly Transitional Residence from its current location, 312-314 West 127<sup>th</sup> Street to a new location at 151-157 West 136<sup>th</sup> Street.

I am extremely concerned about the location of this proposed relocation and expansion of housing formerly drug addicted individuals to Community Board 10 which is already saturated with shelters. Let us not forget the close proximity of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture where adults, seniors and children patron everyday. It is also on the cusps of Saint Nicholas Avenue and in the part of the district where tourist frequently visit. Let us not disgrace the memory of Madam C.J. Walker whose former home graced this block and was recently renamed in her honor. It would be inappropriate to support this type of housing in the area.

I think we should revisit the implementation of the site. While we are working to improve the lives of some we should not negatively impact the lives of others. I am sure we can collaborate to come up with the best solution that works for the community and the organization. Together we can ensure that all our residents can receive the assistance and great quality of life that they need and rightly deserve.

Sincerely,

  
Inez E. Dickens  
9<sup>th</sup> District, Manhattan  
New York City Council



\*While the Statement of Needs and ULURP are separate processes, City facilities must go through both as part of the siting process.





