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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

November 30, 2015
Special Manhattan Borough Board Meeting
Opening Remarks by Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer

This special meeting of the Manhattan Borough Board has been called for the purposes of expressing our positions on the Administration's two Citywide zoning text amendments – Zoning for Quality and Affordability and Mandatory Inclusionary Housing.

I -- and I'm pretty sure everyone around this table -- strongly supports the goals of these proposals -- to promote affordable housing throughout our City. And I want to say for myself that I strongly support the provisions of the Mandatory Housing proposal that would require applicants for special permits for residential developments to provide affordable housing or funding to build housing.

And I know that we have all put an enormous amount of time and effort into understanding and reviewing these proposals. My office has had numerous meetings with the staffs and principals of all of the Manhattan elected representatives – City, State and Federal. Out of those meetings came letters to City Planning outlining our concerns with the two proposals.

Our office has also hosted numerous sessions with Community Board representatives and community groups explaining the proposals to them.

Every Community Board in Manhattan has had presentations by City Planning and the Administration, held Committee Hearings and full Board meetings to discuss these proposals.

We held a Borough Wide Public Hearing on November 16th to which hundreds of residents came and we heard well considered and thoughtful testimony from 55 people on the two proposals.

The level of discourse has been astonishing and I think we can all be proud of that. It is a tribute to the outreach we have all done to engage constituents and community groups in the zoning process around these important issues.

But we are not finished. We will take a vote this morning on these two resolutions. The resolutions praise the goals of the two text amendments but find that at this point there are too many concerns that remain unaddressed for us to support them. So they are what we call conditional disapprovals of the two resolutions. Each resolution contains a concrete set of conditions, which if satisfied by the Administration, would constitute a roadmap to text amendments we could support. The conditions are taken from the items we have been discussing for months now.

In the case of ZQA they include reigning in height increases in contextual districts, making sure the Sliver Law continues to apply, ensuring that affordable senior housing built in return for a height increase will remain in perpetuity, and commitments to begin working with us immediately to make sure the Voluntary Inclusionary Housing program – that’s the existing program where developers can opt in and build affordable housing in return for a density bonus – is fixed to provide more affordable housing for the bonuses that are given.

In the case of Mandatory Inclusionary Housing our conditions include requirements and transparency on the use of the fund into which developers of small projects would have to pay to help ensure the funds are used in the communities where the funds were generated; more income bands at the higher and lower end of the affordability spectrum so that residents who need housing can find it in their communities; ensuring fairness between affordable and market rate residents; and more affordable housing – especially if that housing is offsite. It seems to me that if we are going to have that option it means there is something in it for the developer so there should be something in it for the community as well – more housing.

The Administration is discussing every one of these concerns with us. For the past few weeks we have been in almost daily communication with them. You all saw representatives of both City Planning and HPD here at our Borough Board Meeting on November 19th and at our Public Hearing on November 16th and I am pleased that they are here today as well. We are hopeful that progress can be made on many of our concerns. I will continue discussing and pushing to address these concerns. My recommendations will be held for about an additional week so that we may continue our talks with City Planning and HPD but they will be submitted in time for full consideration by the Commission prior to its hearing on December 16th. What we don’t resolve by then I will bring to the Commissioners on the 16th. And what isn’t resolved at that point I will take to the Council.

I want to thank everyone for their hard work on these proposals. I will continue voicing our concerns throughout the entire process and work as hard as I can to achieve the goals of these proposals and eliminate potential problems.