

Cooper Square Committee supports the development of senior housing and 8,000 sq. ft. of green space at the Haven Green site. There's an urgent need for more senior housing throughout the city. There's 1.2 million seniors in NYC now over 65, and in 20 years there will be 1.6 million seniors. That's 400,000 more. A lot of them are aging in place in tenement buildings near the Elizabeth St. site and throughout Community Board 2. Cooper Square Committee is a tenant rights organization, and as part of our tenant counseling and organizing work, we see a lot of landlords harassing and trying to evict seniors who have been living in their rent stabilized apartments for decades and paying below market rents. A lot of gay and lesbian seniors are in an especially vulnerable position because they are often living alone, and don't have family to fall back on if they lose their homes. There's some 200,000 people on waiting lists for senior housing in NYC. When the Frances Goldin apartments were built at Essex Crossing, over 93,000 seniors applied for the 100 apartments.

I recognize that the garden is beautiful to look at, and it's "highly curated" as the man who created, Allan Riever, said. But from 1991 to 2012, it was a private space that he rented out for events and he earned money from it. When he found out the city planned to develop housing on it, he opened it up to the community to win public support for the garden. The sculptures and paving stones in the garden are his property, and he could decide to take them out at any time or bequeath them to someone, and that would change the character of the garden as much as the proposed Haven Green will.

The garden is currently open from noon to 6 pm from Wednesday to Sunday, 30 hours per week. And it's really only usable about 7 months out of the year, so that's about 900 hours of community use a year. Housing and a community garden would provide a much greater value to the community, and a community green space next to the new building could be made accessible to the neighborhood 7 days a week, and many more hours per week than the garden currently is since the building will have staff on site to manage it.

The supposed alternative site at 388 Hudson St. site that many people mentioned at public meetings is a long way from being available to develop. I hope that it can become an additional site for affordable senior housing and a green space for the community, but it is premature to say what can be done with that site. One thing is for certain. It cannot hold 650 senior housing units as Friends of the Garden contend. First of all, the site is zoned for manufacturing and it would require a special permit, and possibly a variance, to build a community facility there. The Hudson St. site is 25,000 sq. ft. and with community facility floor area ratio (FAR) of 6.5, you could get 162,500 sq. ft. of buildable housing. In theory you could get 200 senior apartments, but the site is owned by the NYC Dept. of Environmental Protection because it sits on top of shafts to the City's water tunnel #3, and the infrastructure under ground needs to be accessed so you can't just put a building on top of sensitive infrastructure. Civil engineers need to investigate what is feasible, and only then can they determine whether you can create a viable building footprint on the site. It's dishonest to lead people to believe there's an alternative site when HPD and DEP have not produced any evidence that it is possible to build at Hudson St.

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