

June 25th 2018

Members of CB#2

I am here tonight to speak both as the Project Director of the Cooper Square Community Land Trust and as a former resident of Little Italy when it still was Little Italy. I lived for a number of years at 219 Mott Street, directly across from the Haven Green project. I am here to give our strong support to the new project for senior housing sponsored by Habitat for Humanity and its partners.

I have visited the garden on Elizabeth Street a number of times. It is indeed beautiful. The sculptures are beautiful, although they remain property of Allen Riever, the gallery owner and could be removed any time he felt like it. The problem with this sculpture garden is that it is too big. It is 123 senior apartments too big.

Over the years, Cooper Square Community Land Trust working with Cooper Square Mutual Housing Association has developed several hundred units of very affordable housing on the Lower East Side. Newly renovated units, fully compliant with the building code. Because they are so affordable, almost nobody is moving out. As a result, our community is increasingly made up of senior citizens. Over 40% of our population is aged 55 years or older. We have been recognized as a NORC- a naturally occurring retirement community. As a result, while we have fulfilled our commitment of permanently affordable housing, our seniors have become virtual prisoners in their apartments. Our buildings are all five or six stories walk-ups with no elevators. The same problem exists in the very typical walk-ups of the Lower East Side and the Village.

Supporters of the garden are saying that they are all for the senior housing, just not at the Elizabeth Street site. They are proposing an alternate site on Hudson Street. That is a problematic site owned by the NYC DEP. But to the extent it can be used for senior housing, it should be developed in addition to and not instead of the Haven Green site. The Elizabeth Street site is ready to be developed; the Hudson Street site is not. Opponents of the Haven Green project complain about the lack of green space in their community. They seek to minimize the 8,000 square feet of fully accessible green space that will be developed at this site. They fail to mention the DeSalvio Playground on Spring Street with nearly 12,000 square feet. And they completely ignore the Sara Delano Roosevelt Park two blocks away on Chrystie St. and extending from Houston to Canal Street, with over 300,000 square feet of green space.

I urge the opponents of the senior housing to work with the developers to reach a compromise. Adam Purple with his Garden of Eden refused to compromise and the garden was lost. The Green Guerillas worked on a compromise with the Cooper Square Committee and Avalon Bay the Liz Christie Garden ended up bigger than its original size.

I urge CB#2 to give its full support to this urgently needed housing project.