



Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
Comment re: ULURP Borough President's Review - Haven Green Proposal
February 20, 2019
Lynn Kelly, Executive Director

New Yorkers for Parks is the City's independent research-based advocacy organization championing quality parks for all New Yorkers. I write to you today in reference to the Haven Green proposal that would impact the location of what is currently the Elizabeth Street Garden.

New Yorkers for Parks believes that healthy neighborhoods require a balance of essential City services – affordable housing, schools, access to healthy food, and of course, open space. While our organization seeks to maximize publicly accessible open space wherever possible, we also understand that there are other vitally needed institutions and services that neighborhoods require to be truly functional and equitable to all New Yorkers.

We believe it is unfortunate to have to choose between open space and new opportunities for deeply affordable housing. However, we ultimately believe that the City is within its rights to move forward with developing Haven Green on the site where the Elizabeth Street Garden currently is located. Furthermore, we support the City's attempt to balance the dire need for affordable senior housing in this area while still providing publicly accessible open space for the community.

An assessment of the recent history of the site, and conversations with multiple stakeholders on all sides of the issue have lead us to conclude that the City is within its right to move forward with the Haven Green development. We do believe there are substantial steps that could, and should, be taken to better address the open space concerns of residents and advocates, and we hope the City will take those into consideration as this project moves forward.

It is undeniable that in its short time as a publicly accessible space, the Elizabeth Street Garden became a treasured open space for both residents and visitors alike. We urge both supporters of the Garden and the City to find common cause in maximizing the public open space that will be included in the Haven Green development footprint. It is not always the case that affordable housing developed in the City includes provisions for publicly accessible open space, and we believe, if done well, the Haven Green project could be a compelling example of how affordable housing could be developed in other neighborhoods in a way that incorporates meaningful opportunities for programmable open space.

While we understand that projects undergoing the ULURP process are not usually at the point of being able to articulate fine-grained details such as the programming or maintenance plans of a site, because of the strong reaction of the community, we feel that the City should take serious steps to account for improved access and programming in the open space portion of the development. We appreciated that Community

Board 2's resolution regarding the proposal identified some conditions they felt would need to be met if the project were to move forward, and we think they bear highlighting and deeper consideration.

- First, if there is any flexibility in reconfiguring the footprint of the building to allow for more open space, we think that could be a meaningful option to pursue. We would encourage the City and the Haven Green development team to consider this option.
- Second, we also believe the City and development team should commit to a long-term maintenance agreement that is binding, and accounts for the ongoing care of the open space portion of the site. We don't feel that CB2's recommendation to enter into an agreement with NYC Parks is necessarily the best option, but we do agree that a meaningful, long-term maintenance agreement should be a detail that is ironed out as early as possible, and should also allow for maximum community input.
- Third, we believe that public access must be maximized. The open space portion of the site should be open to the public as much as possible, and the City and development team should consider open hours beyond 9am to 5pm. If the open space is to truly function as a community asset, it must have open hours that make it a resource for residents outside of traditional workday hours.

We understand that community input sessions were held to solicit feedback on the design of the open space portion of the development, but given the intense reaction of the community to this proposal, we believe the development team should consider additional input opportunities to ensure that maximum community feedback can be gathered. This would ensure that members of the community will still have the chance to help shape the public open space design and programming opportunities that will exist at the new site, and we would encourage this as a way to help restore trust to a community in which many are currently unhappy with the City's decision to develop housing on this site.

In sum, all too often, the narrative around neighborhood development unfortunately pits the creation of affordable housing against open space. While the Elizabeth Street Garden has provided a unique opportunity for public access in the past five years, we respect the City's right to move forward with affordable housing on this location. We have found no binding evidence of this land ever being promised as parkland, and although we understand the frustration of community members who have come to cherish the Garden, we also understand that difficult choices must be made by the City in light of the dwindling opportunities to create deeply affordable housing in high-income neighborhoods like Little Italy/NOLITA.

We encourage the City and development team to rethink the open space proposals, to ensure that they offer maximum public use and benefit, and we are heartened by the inclusion of open space in the current site proposal. The Haven Green project represents a unique opportunity for the City to rethink its vision for new affordable housing, and we hope that considerations of maximizing open space in tandem with housing will be a benefit to all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods.

Thank you for considering our comment, and you are welcome to contact our office with any follow-up questions you might have.

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For over 100 years, [New Yorkers for Parks](http://www.ny4p.org) (NY4P) has built, protected, and promoted parks and open spaces in New York City. Today, NY4P is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. www.ny4p.org