



Haven Green Public Presentation, June 24, 2018

Testimony of Peter Gee, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships

Good evening, my name is Peter Gee and I work at University Settlement, America's first social settlement house. We opened our doors on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1886, and have since grown to serve 40,000 low-income individuals annually at 32 sites in Manhattan and Brooklyn. We were founded on the core settlement belief that each individual can be an asset to the community's wellbeing and quality of life, which was particularly groundbreaking within the indigent and immigrant neighborhoods we have long served. Through direct services, innovative program models, and active advocacy, we are committed to developing progressive solutions to alleviate poverty and inequality, serving as an anchor in the low-income and immigrant communities where we work. Our holistic programs span across early childhood care and education, youth development, literacy, performing and visual arts, senior services, mental health, and housing services.

I am here on behalf of University Settlement to state our public support for Haven Green project. By the year 2030, we can expect seniors to make up 15% of New York City's total population. This will further strain our already limited supply of affordable housing. LiveOn NY did a study that speaks directly to the affordable senior housing crisis –in 2016, 111,000 low-income older adults were on waiting lists for senior housing for an average of 7 years – and this was based on a 43% response rate of the 277 Section 202 buildings in NYC. LiveOn NY projects that the list actually has over 200,000 on it.

One in four households in Council District 1 are severely rent burdened and it is expected that up to 9,361 affordable units could be lost from 2017 to 2022. This would

be in addition to the 11,623 rent-stabilized units that we've lots in the district between 2011 to 2014. Project Home, our eviction prevention program working with rent-regulated tenants, has had 105 cases around the Elizabeth Street Garden site since 2014 – nearly 60% of these cases have involved seniors. What we see everyday validates the larger data of the high likelihood that a NYC senior is rent-burdened and more likely to live on fixed-incomes than other NYC populations. Projects like Haven Green are an important part of the solution to this crisis.

University Settlement acknowledges the many community voices regarding concerns on this project. We took very similar public stances on two other projects that have had a tremendous impact on our neighborhood: the Cooper Square urban Renewal Site that resulted in 750 new mixed apartments, over 100,000 square feet of retail, and the 40,000 square foot Houston Street Center, a community center with a gym and swimming pool and Essex Crossing, 1,000 units of housing (half of which are permanently affordable), 15,000 square feet of open space, senior housing and community facility, and more. These projects were imperfect, but we compromised as a community because they helped address a need. We are here today to lend our support to this project and believe the City has created a meaningful project that meets the immediate need for senior housing while also providing 8,000 square feet of truly accessible open space. Each and every neighborhood in NYC should be open to caring for our elderly because, as a city, we should collectively be responsible for our most vulnerable. Thank you.