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April 19, 2011

Hon. Christine Quinn
Speaker of Council of City of New York
224 West 30th St., Ste. 1206
New York, NY 10001

Dear Speaker Quinn:

It recently came to our attention that a secret deal has been in the works to destroy the integrity of the Special West Chelsea Zoning District (“SWZD”). This deal would permit Jamestown Chelsea Market L.P. (“Jamestown”) to build substantially over zoning in exchange for a one-time contribution to Friends of the High Line. The process through which this deal has been crafted is suspect, at best; the outcome could have repercussions that will destroy West Chelsea. We count on you to help stop this violation of our community.

As you are no doubt aware, Jamestown has requested a zoning variance in the SWZD so it can build an additional 359,000 square feet of rentable space over the buildings on Block 713 Lot 1, popularly known as Chelsea Market and Buddakan Restaurant (“Chelsea Market”).

The SWCZD was created only after years of discussion and negotiation among the City’s elected officials, Friends of the High Line and representatives of the neighborhood. In order to create the District, Chelsea residents voluntarily gave up a million square feet of air rights – *a million square feet of sky*. Now we are being asked to give up yet more simply to accommodate the greed of a developer.

Chelsea Market is already built slightly over what its current zoning, M 1-5, allows. But Jamestown is not satisfied with that. It wants, as of this date, to build a commercial tower totaling 18 stories over the 10th Avenue portion of Chelsea Market and another tower that will total 12 stories over Buddakan. This will provide Jamestown with an additional 359,000 square feet of rentable space – a developmental windfall of over 40%! At a minimum of \$50/square foot for commercial space and an average \$365 /room /night for hotel rooms in this neighborhood, Chelsea Market becomes spectacularly more valuable as a piece of real estate. Jamestown argues that, for this windfall, it is willing to make a one-time contribution to Friends of the High Line of slightly over \$17 million. This has all the earmarks of “pay to play.”

If this kind of zoning regulation revision is permitted, it will not stop with Jamestown. Every developer within a block or two of the boundaries of the SWCZD will – understandably and justifiably – want exactly the same treatment.

In 2005, to facilitate the development of the High Line, properties within the boundaries of the SWCZD were granted some very generous development bonuses. Opening up those boundaries so as to give the same bonuses to sites outside those boundaries would set a terrible precedent and will inundate the area with more people and more traffic.

CRDC is not opposed to development in this area. Development can not only be good for the neighborhood, it is definitely good for the City’s tax base. And CRDC has been supportive of the High Line – and Friends of the High Line – in the past. But benefiting

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the High Line should not become a means of buying an exemption from applicable zoning regulations.



Finally, it is more than unfortunate that CRDC and other community groups could not participate in the discussion earlier in the land-use approval process. Other than a few select members of Community Board 4, the neighborhood simply had no idea of the scope of this project until Jamestown made an “informal presentation” to the CB 4’s Chelsea Preservation and Planning Committee on March 21, 2011. And it was not until March 25, 2011, when organizations in the neighborhood obtained documents in response to a FOIL request, that we realized negotiations between Jamestown, the City Planning Commission, Friends of the High Line, and those few members of CB 4 had actually been going on – outside the public spotlight – since at least 2009!

Why were the people who will be most affected by this precedent-setting project not made aware of the plans for over 2 years?

CRDC asks that you do all in your power to oppose the application of Jamestown to destroy the integrity of the Special West Chelsea Zoning District and set a precedent that could go a long way toward destroying all of West Chelsea.

Respectfully yours,

FOR THE CHELSEA REFORM DEMOCRATIC CLUB

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S. Skyles-Mulligan".

Steven Skyles-Mulligan
President, Chelsea Reform Democratic Club

cc: Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer
State Senator Thomas Duane
Assembly Member Deborah Glick
Assembly Member Richard Gottfried
City Planning Department Chair Amanda Burden
Manhattan Community Board 4 Chair John Weis
Manhattan Community Board 4 District Manager Robert Benfatto
Chelsea Preservation and Planning Committee Chair J. Lee Compton
Co-Founders of the High Line Joshua David and Robert Hammond
On behalf of Jamestown, Ltd. Melanie Myers, Esq.
Save Chelsea – Lesley Doyel and Justin Hoy
Council of ChelseaBlock Associations – Bill Borock