

December 9, 1953

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The Commission and its staff have reviewed the evidence of substandard conditions submitted by the Committee on Slum Clearance, as well as other information relating to the area in question and have made studies and field inspections of this area. The existing development generally comprises old loft buildings, with a few scattered residential buildings and garages. These buildings cover nearly 100 per cent of the land. Provisions for light and ventilation are inadequate. In the loft buildings, sanitary facilities are generally unsatisfactory. These loft buildings are non-fireproof and generally have outside fire escapes. More than 80 per cent of these structures are at least 50 years old and some of them considerably older. Real estate consultants retained by the Committee on Slum Clearance have rated 63.5 per cent of the commercial and industrial structures in the Washington Square Southeast area as "deteriorated" and additional 16.8 per cent as "badly run-down." They rated most of the residential buildings as "badly run-down." Existing narrow streets, 50 and 60 feet wide, within and bordering the area are inadequate for the present land uses in this area, as well as for any future appropriate land use for this part of the City. In view of all the facts, the Commission has reached the conclusion that the area under consideration is substandard and insanitary and appropriate for redevelopment.

This matter was considered further and it was determined that the proposed addition to Section M10(a) is a desirable modification of the Master Plan to permit suitable replanning and redevelopment of a substandard area.

The City Planning Commission, pursuant to Section 197 of the City Charter, hereby adopts a modification of the Master Plan of Sections Containing Areas for Clearance, Redevelopment and Low-Rent Housing, including Approved and Proposed Housing Projects comprising the addition of the area bounded by West 4th Street, Mercer Street, West Houston Street and Wooster Street, to Section M10(a), Borough of Manhattan.

JOHN J. BENNETT, Chairman; GOODHUE LIVINGSTON, JR., ROBERT G. McCULLOUGH, CHARLES J. STURLA, Commissioners; STUART CONSTABLE, Acting Commissioner.

No. 6

(CP-10203)

IN THE MATTER OF acquisition of title, pursuant to Section 72-K of the General Municipal Law of the State of New York, to property required for a redevelopment project under Title I of the National Housing Act of 1949, designated as Washington Square Southeast, comprising the area bounded by Washington Square South, West 4th Street, Mercer Street, West Houston Street and West Broadway, Borough of Manhattan.

(On August 12, 1953, Cal. No. 31, the Commission fixed September 9, 1953, for a hearing; on September 9, 1953, Cal. No. 64, the hearing was continued to October 14, 1953, on October 14, 1953, Cal. No. 58, the hearing was closed; on November 25, 1953, Cal. No. 6, the matter was laid over.)

Appearances—Alan G. Trebach and John Lawrence for Commercial Building Owners and Tenants Association of Lower Manhattan, Inc.

On the roll call for the adoption of a favorable report, Commissioner Livingston made the following statement:

Commissioner Livingston: This redevelopment of the Washington Square Area should in a dramatic way focus the attention of the general public on the tragic fact that the Planning Commission has to date been unable to produce a master plan for the City of New York. Lacking such a plan, we must continue to mull along with limited objectives. More often than not, such operations bear no relations to others. If we are ever to truly modernize this City, mesh it on a workable basis with the surrounding counties which it influences and which in turn influence the hard core of the City, an overall flexible plan is required as the first step towards attacking on a broad frontal base such major problems as traffic congestion, transportation, slum clearance, intermingled housing, the proper location of industry, the reduction of population density, and provision for the now sadly lacking open spaces.

The Harrison, Ballard & Allen study made at the time our present Mayor-Elect was Chairman of the Planning Commission contains some grievous shortcomings but it presents the backbone of a master plan which, if the Commission had had a sufficient staff to develop and provided the Board of Estimate had shown the fortitude to adopt, some real headway towards scientific and intelligent planning might be underway today.

Uncoordinated limited spot planning by agencies, authorities, personalities and pressure groups will not suffice to solve, in the future, urban problems that are already mountainous.

Producing an overall design and then working for its fulfillment step by step as funds become available is what we should be striving for.

The Planning Commission if composed of full time Commissioners, devoting their entire time to planning, backed with adequate funds to employ the necessary staff of experts could, I believe, produce such a realistic master plan. The idea that only second rate planners are obtainable in this country is nonsense. Such a grand design to be effective and come to life must have the understanding and active backing of the elected officials of the City, Counties and the States involved. The influence of these persons would be required for obtaining the full cooperation of all operating agencies within the region.

Under our present arrangements, the Washington Square redevelopment now before us with all its discrepancies is probably as good as can be tailored. It must be viewed in relation to certain other developments which it is hoped will come about in due course just south of it, such as the low income housing on Broome Street and the crosstown express vehicular highway on Broome Street connecting the Holland Tunnel with the Manhattan and Williamsburgh Bridges. Living near a great University should be welcomed by the residents, particularly as the plan calls for more attractive looking buildings with a far superior traffic arrangement in the Square itself. Replacing many obsolescent industrial buildings with apartments will reduce truck traffic. Relocating industry naturally is difficult from lack of a master plan. I quite realize that the lives of some will temporarily be disturbed but the cold fact is that this must always be the case if we intend to improve the living conditions for all in this City.

I, therefore, vote in the Affirmative.

On motion, the following favorable report was adopted, receiving five affirmative votes, Vice-Chairman Bloustein and Commissioner Orton, voting in the negative, and submitting minority reports, which are appended to the favorable report hereunder:

December 9, 1953.

Hon. VINCENT R. IMPELLITTERI, Mayor, Chairman, Board of Estimate:

Sir—In a communication, dated August 3, 1953, the Chairman of the Committee on Slum Clearance Plans transmitted a report and Redevelopment Plan, dated August 1953, under Title I of the National Housing Act of 1949 and New York State Statutes, for a redevelopment project designated as Washington Square Southeast and requested the City Planning Commission to report to the Board of Estimate on the proposed Redevelopment Plan and approve the acquisition of the property required for this project in accordance with law.

Section 72-K of the General Municipal Law of the State of New York provides among other things that the City may acquire real property or any interest therein necessary for or incidental to the clearance, replanning, reconstruction and neighborhood rehabilitation of substandard and insanitary areas, together with adequate provision for recreational and other facilities appurtenant thereto. In connection with the acquisition of such property, the prior consent of the City Planning Commission is required, which prior consent shall be based upon a finding made after a public hearing, that the acquisition is necessary for the above stated purposes.

The property proposed to be acquired comprises the area bounded by Washington Square South, West 4th Street, Mercer Street, West Houston Street and West Broadway, Borough of Manhattan.

The Redevelopment Plan includes among other data:

(1) The following general statement on the project:

"Limitations on Changes:

No increase in density or change in land use shall be made for a period of 40 years except upon the approval of the Board of Estimate of The City of New York.

Non-Discrimination:

Under this redevelopment plan and the Contract for Federal financial assistance with the Housing and Home Finance Administrator, the City covenants and agrees that in the redevelopment of this project it will not itself effect or execute, and will adopt effective measures to assure that there is not effected or executed by the purchasers or lessees from it (or the successors in interest of such purchasers or lessees), any agreement, lease, conveyance or other instrument whereby land in the project area disposed of by the City is restricted, either by the City or by such purchasers, lessees or successors in interest, upon the basis of race, creed or color, in the sale, lease or occupancy thereof.

Utilities:

No additions to the existing utilities will be required for the purposes of

this project. All utilities may remain in the beds of the closed streets and will be preserved and protected by the builder to the extent necessary or required by the City or the appropriate utility company. The City or such utility company will have the right to remove such utilities as are no longer required.

Easements:
In the contract with the redeveloper selected right of access for maintenance, repair or replacement will be reserved for all utilities both public and private left in place.

Building Requirements:
Building requirements for the structures to be erected in the business and retail areas designated on the Land Use Map shall be in accordance with applicable local codes and ordinances.

Conformity to General Plan:

(a) Land Uses:

The redevelopment plan for this area conforms to the general plan for the City as a whole and the land uses for the area in which the project is located are consistent with such plan.

(b) Streets and Highways:

The width and location of streets in the area as shown on the Boundary Map are adequate for the local traffic and the construction of this project conforms with the street system, existing highways and proposed extensions of the highway system of the City, as provided by the Master Plan of Arterial Highways, as last amended.

(c) Transit Facilities:

Transit facilities are adequate for the proposed redevelopment of the project area and the rebuilding of the area is compatible with the Transit Improvement Program of the Board of Transportation included in the Capital Budget and Program adopted by the City Planning Commission.

(d) Utilities:

Utilities in the project area are adequate to support and provide for the proposed redevelopment of the project area and such redevelopment is compatible with proposed improvements and extensions of the utilities system.

(e) Recreational and Community Facilities:

The redevelopment of the project area is compatible with the recreational and community facilities programs and the school programs provided by the Capital Budget and Program adopted by the City Planning Commission. The provisions made are adequate for the proposed redevelopment.

(f) Other Improvements:

The Capital Budget and Program provides for accelerated programs in hospital, incinerator, sewage disposal system, health building, school and library construction and of other City facilities. The extensive Arterial Highway Program is provided for through City Capital funds, City Assessable Improvement funds, and State and Federal funds."

(2) Land Use Map, showing areas to be devoted to residential uses, institutional uses, and retail and business uses.

(3) Boundary Map, showing project boundaries, proposed new property lines, streets to be closed and deeded to the developer and property to be deeded to the City for street widening.

(4) Map showing proposed zoning.

The Committee's Report includes among other data:

1. Unit Plan.

2. Site Plan, showing possible building locations and other plot details. Actual building locations and other plot details will be agreed upon between the redevelopers and the Committee on Slum Clearance Plans and will conform to the basic elements of the Redevelopment Plan.

3. Cost estimate and financial plan.

4. Maps showing existing utilities, utilities proposed to be abandoned and proposed new utilities.

5. Tenant Relocation Plan.

6. Data on general area, including transportation facilities and community facilities.

7. Data on existing conditions in area proposed to be redeveloped to demonstrate substandard conditions.

The Redevelopment Plan proposes the conversion of 9 existing blocks into three superblocks.

The northerly superblock, approximately 3 acres, bounded by Washington Square South, West 4th Street, Mercer Street, West 3d Street and West Broadway will be

developed for educational purposes. New York University proposes to bid for the acquisition of the real property acquired by the City in this superblock in order to expand its present plant through the erection of new educational buildings, if it is the successful bidder.

The southerly two superblocks, approximately 11.8 acres, bounded by West 3d Street, Mercer Street, West Houston Street and West Broadway will be developed largely for residential purposes. Two retail areas, approximately 0.7 acre, one on the northeast corner of West Broadway and Bleecker Street and the other on the northeast corner of West Broadway and West Houston Street will accommodate stores and offices in buildings not exceeding two stories in height. A garage on the southwest corner of Bleecker and Mercer Streets is to be erected. Open parking areas and scattered landscaped areas will also be provided.

The typical redevelopment plan outlined in the report of the Committee on Slum Clearance shows 19 fourteen-story apartment buildings which would house approximately 2,184 families or 4,000 persons. The proposed redevelopment plan indicates that the maximum population density will not exceed 375 persons per acre of the two superblocks devoted to residence; residential land coverage by buildings will not exceed 24 per cent of the net residential area.

Parking spaces equal in number to approximately 40 per cent of the total number of apartments will be provided. This is in excess of present zoning requirements.

All interior streets within each superblock are to be eliminated. West 3d Street is to be widened to 70 feet on its southerly side from Mercer Street to 5th Avenue South (West Broadway). Bleecker Street is to be widened to 80 feet on its southerly side from Mercer Street to 5th Avenue South (West Broadway). West Houston Street will be widened to 125 feet on its southerly side as part of a general improvement program by the City to convert this street into a major traffic artery across lower Manhattan. Mercer Street is to be widened on its westerly side to 100 feet from West Houston Street to West 34th Street and to 80 feet from West 3d Street to West 4th Street. It is proposed to widen West Broadway on its easterly side to 120 feet from Washington Square South to West Houston Street. The widened West Broadway is to be designated as 5th Avenue South.

The project is served by the Broadway Station on West Houston Street of the Independent Division; the West 8th Street and Prince Street Stations on Broadway of the BMT Division, and the Bleecker Street Station on Lafayette Street and West Houston Street Station on Broadway of the IRT Division of the New York City Transit System. There are bus lines on Houston Street, Lafayette Street, Broadway and The Avenue of the Americas.

The 8th Police Precinct Station House at 255 Mercer Street, is located within the redevelopment site and would be eliminated by the proposed project. It will be necessary to make provision at some other location for the police services supplied from this Station House.

The proposed redevelopment project is located wholly within Section M10a of the Master Plan of Sections Containing Areas for Clearance, Redevelopment and Low-Rent Housing, Including Approved and Proposed Housing Projects as modified on December 9, 1953. In its report of August 1953, on the proposed redevelopment project, the Committee on Slum Clearance submitted data concerning deterioration of buildings, age of existing buildings, excessive land coverage, inadequate light and air, and narrow inadequate streets, indicating that the redevelopment area is a substandard insanitary area.

The New York City Housing Authority has submitted a Redevelopment Plan for the area bounded by West Houston Street, West Broadway (5th Avenue South), Broome Street and Avenue of the Americas. This Redevelopment Plan provides for two housing projects, Simkhovitch Houses (State), a State-aided low-rent project and Simkhovitch Houses (City), a City-financed project, without cash subsidy. 5th Avenue South (widened West Broadway), which is to be established between Washington Square South and West Houston Street in connection with the Washington Square Southeast Title I project, would be extended southerly to Broome Street, at a width of 100 feet, in connection with the Simkhovitch projects. These projects would also make available a site for a future public school which would serve all three projects. The Washington Square Southeast and the Simkhovitch projects will provide for suitably related neighborhood redevelopment.

On August 12, 1953, Cal. No. 31, the City Planning Commission fixed a date for a public hearing on the acquisition of property required for the Washington Square Southeast Redevelopment Project.

The hearing was duly held on September 9, 1953, Cal. No. 64, and was continued on October 14, 1953, Cal. No. 58, pursuant to law. The hearing was combined with a

hearing on a proposed Modification of the Master Plan comprising the enlargement of a Master Plan redevelopment section to include the part of the area, involved in the Washington Square Southeast project, which is not now included therein. All persons so desiring were given a full opportunity to be heard.

There were appearances in favor of and in opposition to the proposed redevelopment project and the proposed Master Plan modification. The Commission has received and considered numerous communications and memoranda in reference to these matters.

Some of the opposition was based on the contention that the area involved is not substandard. The Commission and its staff have reviewed the evidence of substandard conditions submitted by the Committee on Slum Clearance, as well as other information relating to the area in question and have made studies and field inspections of this area. The existing development generally comprises old loft buildings, with a few scattered residential buildings and garages. These buildings cover nearly 100 per cent of the land. Provisions for light and ventilation are inadequate. In the loft buildings sanitary facilities are generally unsatisfactory. These loft buildings are non-occupied and generally have outside fire escapes. More than eighty per cent of all the buildings are at least fifty years old, and some of them considerably older. Real estate consultants retained by the Committee on Slum Clearance have rated 62.5 per cent of the commercial and industrial structures as "deteriorated" and additional 16.8 per cent as "badly run-down." They rated 7 of 16 of the residential buildings as "badly run-down." Existing narrow streets, 50 and 60 feet wide, within and bordering the area are inadequate for the present land uses in this area, as well as for any future appropriate land use for this part of the City. In view of all the facts, the Commission has reached the conclusion that the area under consideration is substandard and insanitary and appropriate for redevelopment.

Considerable objection to the project was based on the contention that the commercial and industrial establishments in the redevelopment area would find it impossible to find comparable space at equivalent rentals in other locations. In this connection, the Committee on Slum Clearance requested its real estate consultants to make surveys and inquiries concerning the availability of such space. The results of these surveys and inquiries, which have been submitted to the Commission and considered by it, indicate that there is available sufficient vacant loft space in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Long Island City section of Queens, to accommodate the industries which would be displaced in the Washington Square Southeast Area, as well as in the Pratt Institute Area, another proposed redevelopment project involving displacement of industrial establishments; that the available space is suitable for the industries involved, is well situated and the rentals are approximately the \$1.00 per square foot average annual rental prevailing in the Washington Square Southeast Area.

There were further objections to the Redevelopment Plan and the contemplated typical development. These objections generally related to the proposed rents and the small size of apartments and to general planning considerations including the proposed extension of Fifth Avenue through Washington Square Park, the street and traffic plan, adequacy of playground facilities, utilization of open spaces in the project for automobile parking space and the utilization of part of the redevelopment area by New York University, if it becomes the successful bidder.

In the light of the information brought out at the hearing and in the various communications and memoranda submitted, as well as the facts and information developed and reviewed in the course of the studies, inspections and investigations of this project by the Commission and its staff, the Commission believed that certain modifications should be made in the proposed redevelopment plan. In a communication, dated November 13, 1953, to the City Planning Commission from the Chairman of the Committee on Slum Clearance, modifications are set forth as follows:

1. The Redevelopment Plan modified to provide for a density of 350 persons instead of 375 persons per acre.

2. The typical development plan modified to provide:

(a) Open parking accommodations for tenants' cars reduced from 20 per cent to 10 per cent of the number of residential units; and enclosed parking increased from 20 per cent to 30 per cent, with garage to contain two levels below ground and three levels above. This will result in an increase in playground and landscaped areas.

(b) Two bedroom apartments to be provided by modification of the present apartment distribution to the following:

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| 2-Bedroom | 280 apartments | 14% |
| 1-Bedroom | 784 apartments | 39% |
| Efficiency | 952 apartments | 47% |
| Total | 2,016 apartments | 100% |

3. Elimination of all vehicular roadways through Washington Square Park and provision of a widened roadway around the park with one-way circulatory traffic around the park connecting 5th Avenue with the proposed 5th Avenue South. (Although the treatment of Washington Square Park is not part of the proposed Redevelopment Plan, this treatment has been agreed upon by the Committee on Slum Clearance, the Park Department and the City Planning Commission.)

In addition, the Park Department has agreed to extend and develop existing playgrounds in this neighborhood and to establish a combined school and neighborhood playground, to be jointly operated by the Department of Parks and the Board of Education, adjacent to a proposed new school at the southeasterly corner of Houston Street and West Broadway (5th Avenue South).

It should be noted that the proposed Washington Square Southeast Project is part of a comprehensive plan for redevelopment and rehabilitation of a larger neighborhood including Washington Square Park and areas extending southerly from the Park to Broome Street.

The general plan for this neighborhood involves, in addition to the Washington Square Southeast Project, a State-aided housing project for 1,440 families in the area bounded by Avenue of the Americas, Houston Street, West Broadway and Spring Street, and a City-financed housing project for 432 families in the area bounded by Avenue of the Americas, Spring Street, West Broadway and Houston Street. These projects designated as Mary Simkhovitch Houses are the subject of separate reports by the Commission (CP-9043 and CP-10300, dated December 9, 1953). It is anticipated that the Washington Square Southeast Project will provide housing at rentals of about \$48 per room per month, the State projects at rentals of \$9, \$10.50 and \$12 and the City project at rentals between \$19 and \$20. Thus, there will be provided in this neighborhood decent, modern housing for families of several different income levels.

In connection with the development of these housing projects major streets are to be widened and several existing narrow streets will be eliminated. Existing small blocks will be consolidated into super blocks which will permit the development of playspaces and landscaped areas and provide for arrangement and spacing of buildings to permit maximum light and air. The closing of narrow inadequate streets and widening of streets bordering the super blocks will result in elimination of an excessive number of street intersections with consequent improved traffic flow. The several housing projects will be connected by a wide avenue (5th Avenue South) extending from Washington Square to Broome Street.

Washington Square Park is to be improved and additional neighborhood playground areas are to be provided as noted above. The elimination of vehicular roadways and the bus turn-around in the park will add over 1½ acres to the usable area of the park. There are presently approximately 10 acres of playground area in this neighborhood. The total additional playground space is to be provided, including the additional area to be made available in Washington Square Park, will amount to about 3½ acres. In addition, there will be provided play and sitting park areas within the housing developments.

With respect to the proposed use of a portion of the Washington Square Southeast Area by New York University, if it becomes the successful bidder, it appears that the University development will provide for extension of the redevelopment area to more logical limits, and will result in appropriate development between the housing project and the existing University buildings and suitable transition between the housing development and the commercial and industrial areas north of the University. Construction of the contemplated low University building on the block fronting on Washington Square South will result in low structures on all of the frontage on the southerly side of Washington Square Park with more pleasing architectural treatment of this important park frontage and increase in the amount of sunlight reaching the park.

In the light of all the facts, it appears that the Washington Square Southeast Redevelopment Plan, as now modified, will provide for desirable housing and educational facilities forming an integral part of an appropriate plan for comprehensive improvement of this special section of the City.

The Commission finds that the Redevelopment Plan as described herein will afford maximum opportunity, consistent with the sound needs of the locality (New York City) as a whole for the integrated redevelopment of the area by private enterprise and conforms to the general plan for the redevelopment of the locality (New York City) as a whole.

The Commission has reviewed the proposed Washington Square Southeast project and the maps and documents constituting the redevelopment plan relating thereto and concludes that the project will provide advantages to the immediate neighborhood as well as to the City as a whole. It will eliminate substandard areas, will result in orderly

community development and provide decent homes in a good environment to be enjoyed by many families for years to come. The Commission hereby approves the proposed redevelopment project and the maps and documents constituting the Redevelopment Plan.

The Commission finds that the acquisition of the property proposed to be acquired as described above, is necessary for the clearance, replanning, reconstruction and neighborhood rehabilitation of real property in a substandard and insanitary area. The Commission approves and consents to the acquisition of such property.

JOHN J. BENNETT, Chairman, City Planning Commission.

Minority Report of Lawrence M. Orton re: Washington Square Southeast Redevelopment Project

(CP-10203)

December 9, 1953.

The Washington Square Southeast project differs significantly from other projects developed under Title I of the Housing Act of 1949 which have come before this Commission. Heretofore these projects have been designed to clear predominantly residential slum and deteriorated areas and to replace them with predominantly residential buildings from middle-income occupancy. In this instance, as Vice-Chairman Bloustein has pointed out, it is proposed to clear a predominantly manufacturing area of heavily occupied loft buildings, and to replace them with predominantly residential buildings at high room rentals.

Under the circumstances in which the City Planning Commission is forced to operate, we are unable to develop our own analyses of the facts and problems presented by these projects. In reporting we are therefore required to use data developed by others, often at second or third hand, when the responsibility that is ours would clearly indicate the desirability of arriving at and supporting our conclusions on the basis of our own independent work. This is true of such basic determinations as the use to which the land should be put, and the density at which it should be developed. It is also true of the traffic routes involved, of recreation space and the relation to other community facilities. It is likewise true of findings as to slum or deteriorated conditions to justify the use of the power of eminent domain to remove present occupants and clear sites for redevelopment.

I do not say that the facts in the case of the Washington Square Southeast project do not justify such action. I do question the propriety of the City Planning Commission assuming the responsibility for recommending such action in this instance, in view of the special circumstances surrounding this project and the inability of the Commission to do independent work on urban redevelopment projects such as would justify its assuming this responsibility. Believing that the City would be unwise to proceed until these doubts are resolved, I must vote Nay on the favorable report before us for consideration.

LAWRENCE M. ORTON, Commissioner.

Minority Report of Vice-Chairman Francis J. Bloustein re: Washington Square Southeast Project

(CP-10203)

December 9, 1953.

I vote "no" on the favorable report. In dissenting in this matter, I submit the following statement:

I have not been convinced that the redevelopment plan, even as modified, is satisfactory and well conceived at the proposed location. Furthermore, I fail to see compliance with the Federal Housing Act of 1949 and for those reasons I disagree with my colleagues.

In this instance we are not dealing with the usual case involving the elimination of a slum residential area because it was found to be substandard and insanitary. It is intended to eliminate a number of substantial loft and commercial buildings, a large percentage of them in good condition, to make way for high cost rental units. It is conceded that the area involved, with the exception of a very few residential buildings involving perhaps the relocation of less than 140 tenants, consists in the main of commercial and loft type buildings. We were told at the public hearing that the majority of the buildings are in good condition and that they comply with pertinent statutes. The worst that can be said about the buildings is that many of them may be old and obsolete. Such condition by itself does not call for the demolition of the buildings in this area as slum buildings under the authority of the Federal Housing Act of 1949.

The proposal would substitute one type of facility for another—the dislocation of a group of commercial tenants to make room for a group of residential tenants and educational buildings.