



July 11, 2020

Dear Borough President Brewer and Councilmember Levine:

I am writing this letter with appreciation, criticism and a proposed solution.

I appreciate the effort that has gone into creating the Morningside Heights rezoning plan. While I and others take issue with the process, there is some merit to the proposal, with the glaring exception of the portion currently under consideration in CB7. I object that CB7 should have to bear the burden of the rezoning needs of CB9 to improve its affordable housing numbers in order to win approval from City Planning. The two Broadway sites in CB7 being up-zoned to R-10A are nonstarters, I have yet to identify anyone on CB7 who supports this proposal, and I believe that when it is brought up for a vote in CB7 it will fail.

I am further led to believe that should this happen, then even if CB9 approves their component, City Planning will not certify the plan. I am unclear if this is an assertion that some merely think to be true, or if this is an actual statement from City Planning. It would be preferable that CB9 (and, as you know, I am a voting member) decide on the relative merits of the proposal, with the knowledge that their decision would be certified by City Planning without the dependence of CB7's decision, rather than likely rejected if CB7 does not comply. Holding the plan of one board hostage to another board voting against its own self-interest seems foolhardy.

But if the numbers in CB9 alone are insufficient to appease City Planning, I have another option. I have mentioned this idea to you both separately, previously, which is the Con Ed building on Amsterdam Avenue between 109th and 110th Streets, built on the former Women's Hospital about 50 years ago. The Con Ed building is constructed like a capital "T" with the top part along Amsterdam and the trunk heading eastward. The Con Ed site is a power substation - it takes higher voltage and cycles it lower for the surrounding residences. Critically here, Con Ed owns the building but the land is still owned by the City. There is no power generation on site, so there are no emissions, and it is adjacent to the Cathedral Parkway Towers residences.

The Con Ed site is R8 and a large, square-shaped 40,000 sf lot. That means under the current zoning it has a total of 240,000 sf of air rights, with about 200,000 available for residential use, less the one-story Con Ed building. That nets about 170,000 sf of residential space after a 15% loss factor, which could accommodate roughly 300 apartments. I would strongly suggest the entire site be made permanently affordable, and if I had my druthers it would be all senior housing. To be utilized a new building would have to be constructed over it, while leaving the Con Ed site in place. But constructing over an existing building is something folks on the UWS are familiar with - the Lyric over the Symphony Space at 95th Street being one such example, and this is not as complex. Building residences over substations is routine in Europe and Asia, and New York City has a brand-new building over a substation in Manhattan with the construction of 7 World Trade this past decade.

I suggest including the Con Ed site in the rezoning, but rather than changing the zoning, change the USE of the site to be 100% permanently affordable housing. Being that it is City-owned land, this is easier to accomplish than a privately-owned site, and it provides more units than the Broadway sites in CB7 could produce. In fact, it produces more affordable units than the entire plan proposes, which then may allow for a reduction of the R10A sites to R9A across the entire plan - otherwise several 24-story buildings will pop up along Broadway in Morningside Heights like mushrooms, dwarfing all of the surrounding buildings. I urge you to consider this alternative as a way to salvage the Morningside Heights rezoning, rather than risk its failure under its current trajectory.

I am available to discuss this proposal with you at your convenience.

Thank you.

With regards,

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