

CRAIN'S NEW YORK BUSINESS

Breaking News

Wednesday, January 22, 2020



Lenox Terrace redevelopment plan teeters on collapse

January 22, 2020 01:33 PM updated 8 hours ago

[Daniel Geiger](#)

A long-sought redevelopment plan on the site of one of Harlem's largest residential complexes appears to be on life support.

[The Olnick Organization](#)'s prospect of rezoning Lenox Terrace, a sprawling six-building, 1,700-unit apartment complex it owns between West 132nd and West 135th streets, is dwindling in the face residential and political opposition.

Harlem Councilman Bill Perkins and the tenant association are staunchly against it.

We have had no negotiations thus far,” Lenn Shebar, president of the Lenox Terrace Association of Concerned Tenants, told *Crain’s*. “We have opposed the process and the project from the get-go.”

Savanna Washington, vice president of the tenant association, said she would prefer the developer scrap the plan.

“We have been encouraging them to do as-of-right but include affordability and tenant benefits,” Washington said. “The tenants will have to undergo six to eight, or even 10, years of construction.”

The tenant group's position on the rezoning is considered a linchpin in garnering support from elected officials, including the local councilman.

In a letter in November, Perkins said he would not approve the rezoning.

“I have not changed my position that this project is not good for our community,” Perkins wrote in the letter. “The community and Lenox Terrace residents have not only opposed the up-zoning but have asked the [uniform land use review procedure] applicant, Olnick Organization, to downscale the height and scope of even the as-of-right development plan.”

The Olnick Organization is in the midst of the city’s uniform land use review process, ULURP, to rezone the property to allow for the construction of five new residential buildings with 1,500 units of housing, as well as retail space. The developer has agreed to set aside 500 units for affordable housing.

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer [issued an opinion last month against the project](#), pointing out that it would rival the scale of neighborhood rezonings such as Inwood and East Harlem but include none of the wider infrastructure improvements those plans had.

Shebar said his association would poll the complex’s tenants to gauge their support for the rezoning before determining its position.

“It is our tenants in the 1,700 apartments who will dictate how we best proceed,” he said.

Past tenant surveys have not gone well for Olnick’s plans.

In a one-question survey conducted by the tenant association in the fall, asking residents whether they were for or against a rezoning, more than 90% of respondents voted against, Shebar said. In his letter from November, Perkins stated that a 2013 survey found that 78% of residents were against a rezoning of the complex.

Shebar said the tenant association would issue a new survey soon that would solicit a more detailed opinion on the rezoning from tenants, including questions that would potentially parse what aspects were more objectionable or agreeable.

To try to win over tenants, Olnick recently agreed to create a new grand entrance to the complex and modify the redevelopment plan to exclude potentially large retail spaces.

Shebar described the changes as “a win for us” but stated the new project was still of “concern for us because it still allows for towering heights and density, which we oppose.”

Tom Corsillo, spokesman for the landlord, insisted the developer is making progress in winning support for the plan.

“The changes to the ULURP application are a direct result of the negotiations now underway with the Lenox Terrace Association of Concerned Tenants and also are based on feedback from key elected officials,” he said. “We believe that by agreeing to the requested modifications, we continue on the pathway to an approved project that will better meet the aspirations of residents, the community and the developer than would an as-of-right project.”

A collapse of the rezoning would be the latest in a [series of recent blows to the land-use agenda](#) of both developers and the city. Last month, a judge in state court [overturned the recent rezoning of Inwood](#) in a lawsuit launched by opponents of the plan. The city said it would appeal the decision.

In recent weeks, a city plan to rezone an area of Bushwick collapsed after opposition from local Councilman Antonio Reynoso. A group of developers’ effort to rezone Industry City has been [progressed at a glacial pace](#) due to concerns from local Councilman Carlos Menchaca.