

LINDA – Fieldnotes – Wednesday, August 15, 2007 – **INCOMPLETE**

Subject: Public Hearing for 197C
 Location: Manhattanville Community Center
 Time: 6:38-10:01pm

Announcement from CB9 website:

http://cb9m.org/show.php?CLm=08&CLd=15&CLy=2007&c_num=CB9M_Calendar

Public Hearing for 197C; ULURP Committee vote on 197C Plan, to be held at the Manhattanville Community Center, 530 W. 133rd Street@6:30 p.m.

I heard about this meeting from the Harlem Arts Alliance meeting, where Marcia Sells, from Columbia, told the audience to represent the Harlem arts community. I had missed an earlier meeting and read about it in the newspaper, so I was happy to hear about this one.

The meeting was held at the Manhattanville Community Center, part of the Manhattanville Houses that stretch from 126th St to 133rd St. The Community Center is between Broadway and Amsterdam.

I arrived at the place just after 6:30. On the corner of Amsterdam and 133rd a bunch of young dark-skinned men were hanging out on the corner. One of them handed me a flyer, the same flyer that had been mailed to me earlier in the week extolling the jobs and affordable housing that would be created by the expansion. I frowned at it and put it in my bag.

As I walked closer to the community center, another young man with dreadlocks tried to hand me the same flyer, and I told him I got it already. The community center was set lower than street level, and a ramp led down to the doors. More than 50 people were hanging on the fence above the ramp, and at least 80 people were waiting below, on the ramp. I made my way down the ramp.

The crowd included lots of African Americans and other blacks, a large group of people wearing yellow shirts who looked “Spanish,” young white people who looked like Columbia students, and a few Asian Americans (maybe 2 women other than me). What people were wearing ranged from suits to halter tops. I saw at least 3 camcorders and a number of cameras, from small digital cameras to professional-looking cameras with giant lenses.

The yellow shirts had a logo with “Mirabal Sisters” on it; I had read about them when researching the Columbia Manhattanville expansion. I stood behind a tall African American woman in a peach suit; a few minutes later, two short Dominican-looking

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112P

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519

women came and stood between us. Occasionally a male from the Mirabal Sisters would start a chant: ¡Fuera! ¡Columbia! ¡En la comunidad! The Mirabal Sisters took it up. Once they started chanting in English, others joined in: Harlem! Is for for sale! This chant was done as call-and-response, with the man shouting Harlem and everyone else answering.

I noticed at least three cops in the street a few minutes after I arrived. The mood was expectant, a little impatient, as people tried to figure out what was happening. Lots of new people arrived, and I estimated at least 200 outside at one point. A few people made their way to the doors, and some were let in; others not. At one point a small trim man, cocoa colored in a tie and slacks, came out asking if there were any community board members outside. A well-dressed dark-skinned African American woman said yes, and they hustled a man who was carrying a Citeralla bag and wearing a peach linen sport coat and white pants inside.

A woman came by with a young girl, and asked the white women behind me what was going on. They explained it was a meeting on the Columbia expansion. She explained that she wanted to pick up her baby. She waited for a few minutes. Maybe 10 or 15 minutes later she made her way to the doors.

Eventually someone came out to talk with the crowd, a dark-skinned African American woman wearing a bobbed wig. She held up her hands for attention, then announced amid the calls to let us in, “I *know* you don’t think you can play me like that.” This evoked jeers and boos. She told us that the room was too full and that we could be let in as people left. The boos drowned out her response. She went back inside. A number of people, including the woman in the peach suit, left soon after this announcement. I would hear later that at least some people returned.

A couple of cops, one with “community policing” or something like that on his badge, walked through the crowd. Later one came out and insisted that we moved to one side of the ramp, which was at least 10 feet wide, to clear a walkway and presumably, to help control the crowd. I had been leaning against the wall and shuffled over to the fence side along with other people. An African American woman started talking with the white women behind me. I asked one of them if she knew who the people were who were wearing “Coalition for the Future of Manhattanville,” all of whom appeared African American. She said that they were pro-Columbia and told me darkly that she heard the head of the group was being paid \$40,000 per week to recruit community members. She hinted at the group paying people to support Columbia.

When the wigged woman came out again, she was greeted with a chorus of boos. Throughout the next hour or so she got into confrontations with people waiting to get in. One man shouted at her about Uncle Toms and Thomasinas, implying that she sold out her people. I heard all kinds of rumors passed around about who she was, from a representative from the NAACP to former chair of the community board. (The latter is true, I haven’t confirmed the former.) People also said that she doesn’t even live in the area, she lives “all the way on the other side.” I do not know if the speaker meant Harlem;

anyways, the point was made that people in the street do not think she should have any authority in what happens. I also heard her called by another name.

From a google search I found that she is the CB9 representative for the Manhattanville Houses. According to the NYC Housing Authority, there are 2,756 residents of the houses (<http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/html/developments/manhattanvillehses.shtml>). I am not sure if she lives or used to live there. She used to be the chairperson of CB9, and also the executive director of the Harlem Valley Heights Community Development Corporation.

<http://media.www.bgnews.com/media/storage/paper883/news/2004/11/10/UndefinedSection/Columbia.U.Looks.To.Expand-1293183.shtml>

http://sipa.columbia.edu/about_sipa/sipa_publications/communique/spring2006-vol15-no2.pdf

http://www.citylimits.org/content/articles/viewarticle.cfm?article_id=3128

<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v51/i06/06a02901.htm>

<http://wirednewyork.com/forum/showthread.php?t=9323>

These articles show that Maritta Dunn is for the Harlem Piers, but skeptical of Columbia. She has served on Columbia's community relations board (can't remember the name) but also has spoken publicly about Columbia's plan as "invasive." Tonight there is no room for such nuance, with people publicly accusing her of selling out the neighborhood. A man on the fence keeps yelling at her, often asking if she is for or against Columbia. She does not respond directly to him.

When a reporter from NYC1 interviews Maritta Dunn, he keeps yelling at her. I can't hear her from where I am standing. One of the times when Maritta Dunn has retreated inside, he yells at the reporter. After getting her attention he asks if she was a "real reporter" and asked Ms. Dunn the question directly. The young white woman responds that essentially Ms. Dunn is for the expansion.

As the crowd thins I edge closer to the door. A thin mixed-race woman (looks similar to someone I know who is Filipino and white) has been taking pictures with a large camera. Eventually she interviews a short, trim older man with a white beard and dark chocolate skin. I can only hear bits and pieces of her questions, and not much of his responses, but I could tell from her questions that he was not willing to give her his name. She regrouped and asked if he lived in the neighborhood. I didn't hear this information. She took notes on the back of a packet of paper with a short pencil. She is interrupted when one of the noisy men above (presumably the same one yelling at Ms. Dunn) asks her who she is. She explains again that she writes a blog about eminent domain abuse. She gives the address over and over again, something like eminentdomain.org, but later I can't find it. She tells the old man if he does a search for blogs on eminent domain it should come up near the top. She is painfully thin. She wears slim beige pants and a green-turquoise thin sleeveless sweater, through which you can see the outlines of her soft-cup bra and

nipples. Her short hair is cut in layers around her face. She carries a large camera and a laptop bag, and her light skin shines with a sheen of sweat.

Ms. Dunn, along with a stern-faced heavysset white cop, comes back out with a clipboard. She tells people to put down their names. [One of the pieces of information being passed around, which I later confirmed online, is that people could sign up to testify at the meeting.] People jostle to put their names down. People on the left side of the entrance protest when they don't get a chance to sign. People on top protest when the board takes a long time to reach them, particularly when a frail-looking older white woman is signing. A large heavysset African American woman in a sleeveless yellow shirt (not part of the Mirabal group) standing next to the white woman assures the people on top, loudly agitating for the clipboard, that she will take it up to them next. Later a young black man tells the crowd not to sign, that it will not be useful to sign. Others complain loudly that there should be more than one clipboard.

Nipples runs over when the frail white lady is signing and insists on getting it next, telling everyone around that a whole bunch of people were skipped. The man above keeps shouting to pass it on up. The lady in yellow reassures, "I'ma take care of you, baby." I peer at the clipboard once when there are not too many people clustered around it to see the sign-up sheet. It looks like somebody made it up on their personal computer, with a bunch of lines topped by "Name," "Organization," and "Email." I think to myself that if someone went to the trouble of preparing this form and photocopying it (assuming that the stack of paper underneath is the same form), then it could have been circulated much earlier. The lady in yellow hands the clipboard up, along with the pen, admonishing the loud man to keep track of her pen.

Eventually Ms. Dunn starts letting 10 people at a time into the building. Although I am standing right across the doors by now, I do not join the people jockeying to get in. As the crowd surges, a man in a walker is not able to make it inside. The older man with the white beard and I start chatting, commenting on what is happening. He asks me where I live, and decides that I am part of the neighborhood. I do not ask any intrusive questions but sometimes ask clarifying questions, such as who makes the decisions. He tells me the mayor, the City Council, and some kind of committee (I've forgotten what he told me). He talks at great length about perceived biohazards, not in any detail but with great force. At one point he spots the petition, which has now been separated from the clipboard and stack of papers (perhaps individual sheets are being passed around?) and rushes over to sign it, letting me know what he is doing as if he is coming back. A dirty knapsack is left on the ground; when he manages to sign the petition, he does come back and claims the knapsack.

Once, when Ms. Dunn sees a man seemingly affiliated with the Mirabal Sisters, she jokes with him that he needs to stay outside. "I'm glad you're inside and I'm outside," he shouts back. But the next group of ten includes him. Ms. Dunn periodically comes out to usher more people in, counting carefully, or to make announcements, or to shout at the crowd. A third clump to go inside includes most of the Mirabal Sisters still standing outside. The old man next to me observes that people are going in but no one is going

out. I comment that perhaps there was room inside. Later we find out that people are asked to leave through another door (perhaps in part to avoid stirring up the crowd by reporting what was happening).

I eventually make it inside around 8:00, number fourteen of my group. At least 50 people were still waiting outside. This includes Loud Man, who may never have made it inside. Later, I saw some of the people outside inside the meeting room.

The meeting is held in an auditorium, which doubles as a gym. As far as I can tell, it's bigger than a regulation-size basketball court, with a stage at one end and two rows of bleachers on both sides of the room. Literature tables are set up in the back of the room, and I pore over these before walking around the back of the room and eventually selecting a seat. At least 250 people are in the auditorium, maybe more, but it looks as if the crowd is thinning.

Rows of chairs are set up in two main sections. People in Mirabal Sisters t-shirts take up over half of the left side, and the right side seats mainly older black women sitting behind who I assume are Community Board 9 members and Lee Bollinger.