

PRESS RELEASE

We, as members of the Soho and South Village Communities, wish to express our concern over a proposal which was presented by Charles Low of 110 Hudson St. at an open hearing at St. Alphonsus Church sponsored by Community Planning Board #2 on June 22nd. The proposal calls for a parking facility and indoor sports center to be located on an existing parking lot in the block bounded N & S by Grand and Canal Streets, and E & W by Wooster and West Broadway. Mr. Low is requesting variances to permit an excessive number of cars, and to allow the building to exceed height and square footage, penetration of sky plane allowed by existing zoning, and without rear yard equivalent.

Enclosed is a fact sheet distributed by Mr. Low which gives certain data concerning the structure. We wish to include further data which was omitted from the fact sheet and which is relevant:

- (1) The parking facility will accommodate 310 cars.
- (2) The proposed building height is 209 feet, about the height of a 21 story building. It will have a square footage 58% greater than that which is permitted by existing zoning regulations.
- (3) The building will have no setbacks and will rise from both sidewalks to its full height, and will occupy the entire area of the plot.
- (4) Granting of the requested variances will produce an increase in volume of 50% in the building.
- (5) The builder requests variances because subsol conditions (i.e. an underground stream) make the construction of underground levels more costly.
- (6) The sports center will seek to accommodate a daily turnover of 800 to 1000 people, in addition to the 80 to 100 employees.

At the open hearing, the proposal was described as a community project. However, the following considerations indicate that this is not the case:

- (1) Initially, Mr. Low did not consult community groups or organizations to get a sense of community feeling or interest in the project. Since the public hearing, he has been making promises to neighborhood children and groups from various communities pertaining to their free or sponsored use of the facility. However, Mr. Low has been completely vague and evasive concerning details and facts of how he plans to implement this use. Because of this, Community Planning Board #2 has found it necessary to call another meeting for July 6th at St. Alphonsus Church to again try to get the concrete facts from Mr. Low. It also appears that Mr. Low has made conflicting verbal commitments to various community groups for the use of the facility. He has also used this tactic, i.e. promises of use of the facility, to obtain signatures on petitions and other legal documents.
- (2) On June 20th Mr. Low sent out a letter (copy enclosed) soliciting approval for his sports center from local property owners within a 400 foot radius from the proposed site. The letter was factually misleading, incomplete, and mailed too late to reach the owners as required four weeks before the Board of Standards and Appeals Hearing on July 11th. Following the letters, Mr. Low made personal contact with the owners and again gave them incomplete information and in several cases made more vague promises concerning the use of the facility in order to persuade the owners to give approval. He has also been going to the owners with a notary to obtain signatures for his consent forms. The owners feel pushed and intimidated by these high pressure tactics. Mr. Low is obviously capitalizing on



the good faith of the community in order to obtain signatures through subterfuge and deception. The community has had no opportunity to review the facts intelligently and in calm consideration.

- (3) The verbal reaction at the public hearing was overwhelmingly opposed to the project. There was strong feeling that the center would be outside the financial reaches of the local community and would be designed to serve wealthy members of Wall Street and other areas. (Audio -visual tapes of the entire meeting are available by contacting Global Village at 966-1515 or 966 0888) The results of a written poll taken by Community Board #2 are 97 con and 13 pro and 10 in favor with modifications. In addition, there is a community concern for the safety of adjoining buildings of historic and architectural interest if the water table is affected as a result of construction.
- (4) In spite of Mr. Low's promises that the sports center would be completely public and open for community use, a tennis pro named Sydney Wood is visiting, on Mr. Low's behalf, Wall Street firms and superstars of the Sports World. Some of these people have contacted us and reported that Mr. Wood is soliciting their participation in the sports center based on making available to them a number of non-public facilities which include bars, restaurants, locker rooms, meeting rooms, etc. in return for their financial support.

There are further reasons why we feel construction of such a sports center would be inappropriate to this location:

- (1) The size and scale of this structure do not relate to the existing unity of this landmark district. It would, in fact, be a gross and monolithic intrusion that would jar against the slender and rhythmic elegance of neighboring facades and vitiate the general sense of human scale the area possesses. Mr. Low did not consult the Landmarks Preservation Commission despite the fact that the Soho area is pending designation as an historic landmark area.
- (2) Traffic influx brought in by so large a daily turnover will further exacerbate an already critical traffic congestion in the arteries leading to the Holland Tunnel. It is relevant to point out that prime time for the sports center will coincide with rush hour traffic. Local businesses which rely on truck deliveries and shipments are fearful that the added congestion will greatly hinder the flow of goods and services and will force them out of the area. Small industries and businesses now predominate and flourish here.
- (3) The resulting rise in real estate values will create undue hardships on small blue collar industries and artists whom the City Planning Commission sought to protect in establishing the M1-5A and M1-5B zoning changes on January 28, 1971.

We further believe that:

- (1) Soho is an architecturally unique entity. Nowhere in the city and probably the U.S. does such a large homogenous area of this type of architecture exist.
- (2) Granting variances to allow this construction will establish a precedent that could lead to the deterioration and destruction of the unique quality of Soho.
- (3) Soho must develop organically in a way that not only preserves but takes advantage of this architectural heritage. Soho must not be ruined by patchwork exploitation.
- (4) Development of Soho should not conflict with and should ~~not~~ be guided by the wishes of the community itself.

- (5) A master plan should be prepared for Soho that will incorporate it sensibly into the economic life of Lower Manhattan, as the South Street Seaport Restoration is incorporated into the Manhattan Landing Project. New York should be proud of its past and must learn how beauty and business can coexist and mutually benefit each other.
- (6) As an alternative land use for the space referred to, a green park or commercial facility including a substantial amount of green open space, would be appropriate and desired by the community. There are no parks of adequate size to serve the residential and business communities between Washington Square Park and Battery Park.
- (7) A large indoor sports center of the type described has always been provided for in the plan for the Manhattan Landing Project. If such a center is needed by the downtown area, Soho is not the place for it.

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Enclosures (6)