



October 16, 2012

Mr. Seth Diamond
Commissioner
NYC Department of Homeless Services
33 Beaver Street, 17th Floor
New York, NY 10004

Dear Commissioner Diamond:

We are writing in response to the community notification received by Brooklyn Community Board 6 on Friday October 5, 2012, in which Housing Solutions USA – in partnership with the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) – announced their intention to open a 170-bed homeless shelter at 165 West 9th Street, between Court Street and Hamilton Avenue, in Carroll Gardens. We have numerous concerns about the proposal.

With homelessness at all-time high, every neighborhood – including Carroll Gardens – has a role to play in making sure that all New Yorkers have a safe place to sleep at night. Safe and decent housing is essential for all of us, and we recognize that we all have to do our fair share. We recognize that it is our collective responsibility – as both a city and a community – to support the mission of the NYC Department of Homeless Services and to provide shelter for homeless New Yorkers. If DHS will work with us and our community in a collaborative fashion to develop an appropriate proposal, we are committed to supporting a shelter in Carroll Gardens.

However, that must not mean using the City's emergency contracting provisions to rush an ill-conceived project through, with only a half-page, 30-day notice to the community, squeezing 170 people into a 10-unit building, with no plans provided for social services or security, and disregard for City rules and processes, including an apparent conflict of interest. In particular:

- We do not understand how it is possible – or advisable – to squeeze 170 people into a 10-unit building on a block of three-family homes. We have asked this question several times, and received no answer.
- The building currently has a Certificate of Occupancy as a 10-unit, Class A apartment building. No plans to amend this have been posted on the NYC Department of Buildings website. Are you aware of plans to change the C of O? No plans have been provided to us, despite several requests.

- It appears to us that construction work has been taking place in the building without a permit. No permits have been filed with DOB, or posted on their site. This appears to be a violation of law, and reflects disregard for safety and the community. If permits are in fact required, but have not been filed, work should of course be stopped immediately.
- We have seen no plans for the provision of social services or security, which are of course an essential element of any homeless shelter. It is outrageous that the 30-day notice requirement could be satisfied by a half-page letter that includes no details – not the population intended for the building, not the plans, no provision for social services, no discussion of security. This does not reflect respect for the community or its elected officials, or a genuine desire for dialogue that would enable the proposed shelter to succeed in meeting the needs of its residents or its neighbors.
- The building appears to be owned by Charles Wertman, a board member of Housing Solutions USA. Given that the City of New York will pay substantial sums for the rent of the building, this suggests a large potential conflict-of-interest. Do DHS and HSUSA have conflicts-of-interest policies that are in accordance with relevant laws? Are these rules affected in some way by the emergency contract process?

Since you are providing the community with only a 30-day notice that is completely lacking in detail, we ask that you provide written responses to our concerns by the close of business on Friday, October 19.

We are aware that Housing Solutions USA has agreed to make a presentation at the Brooklyn Community Board 6 Human Services Committee meeting on Thursday October 24. DHS must also send a representative to attend this meeting.

If you have any questions, please contact Catherine Zinnel, District Director to New York City Councilmember Brad Lander, at 718-499-1090 or czinnel@council.nyc.gov. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Marty Markowitz
Brooklyn Borough President



Brad Lander
New York City Councilmember, 39th District



Daniel Squadron
New York State Senator, 25th District



Joan Millman
New York State Assemblywoman, 52nd District

CC: Robert Hess, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Housing Solutions USA
Craig Hammerman, District Director, Brooklyn Community Board 6