



Prospect Heights
Neighborhood
Development Council

284 Park Place
Brooklyn, NY 11238

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www.phndc.org

Member Organizations

The Prospect Heights Association

The Park Place/Underhill Avenue
Block Association

The Prospect Heights Parents
Association

The Eastern Parkway Cultural
Row Neighborhood Association

The Vanderbilt Avenue
Merchants District

The Carlton Avenue Association

The Friends of Underhill
Playground

The Sterling Place Block
Association

The St. Mark's Avenue Block
Association

June 29, 2015

Mr. Ross J. Holden,
Executive Vice President and General Counsel
New York City School Construction Authority
30-30 Thomson Avenue
Long Island City, NY 11101

Re: Proposed development of school at the Pacific Park/Atlantic Yards project

Dear Mr. Holden:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the SCA's plan to construct a public school facility as part of the building referred to as B15 at the Pacific Park/Atlantic Yards project. The information provided to the public for review is extremely limited, so this letter also includes comments on what type of engagement with the community we believe would be appropriate for the SCA and DOE to offer as this process moves forward.

The proposed facility should be purposed as a dedicated middle school.

The SCA's notice indicates the proposed facility will be designed as a primary/intermediate school. However, both the immediate neighborhoods and District 13 as a whole would be better served if the facility was developed as a dedicated middle school.

The primary schools in the neighborhoods surrounding the Atlantic Yards project—including PS9, PS11 and PS20—have seen dramatic improvement over the last ten years as a consequence of committed administrators, teachers and parents working together. Unfortunately, students rising from these schools have very limited intermediate school options. High-performing middle schools in District 13 are configured for grades K-8, so have few open seats available for matriculating students. Students fortunate enough to find seats must travel from their neighborhoods to school. Students less fortunate often leave the district entirely. In order to avoid this situation, parents begin transferring children to K-8 schools in the third, fourth or fifth grades, resulting in attrition of families within our primary schools.

Parent demand for a neighborhood middle school was demonstrated in 2012 when, following DOE's closing of MS571 in the PS9 building, the administration and families of PS9 sought permission for the school to expand to grades K-8. This request was supported by virtually all local elected officials and the Community Board. However, it was denied by the DOE in favor of co-locating a charter school in PS9, which primarily serves children from outside District 13. Demand for a middle school was further illustrated at the public hearing held by CB8 and CEC13 on June 3, where the call for a dedicated middle school at the B15 site was repeated by practically every parent and elected official represented. Community Board 8's capital request for FY2016 includes a middle school for the Prospect Heights neighborhood; at its general meeting on June 11, CB8 passed a resolution calling for the B15 site to be purposed as a dedicated middle school.

A dedicated mid-size intermediate school at the B15 site also appears to be the most efficient way for DOE to align resources with what will certainly be increased demand for primary and middle school seats as a function of development at Atlantic Yards and in northwest Brooklyn. For instance, although PS9 currently houses an intermediate charter school as a co-location, it was built as a primary school, and the DOE retains the

right to relocate the charter if additional primary school capacity is necessary. Certainly prioritizing the existing PS9 facility for primary school students from Prospect Heights should be done before building new primary seats elsewhere, given the virtual certainty of additional seat capacity beyond what is proposed for B15 being necessary due to expected population increases.

The proposed facility should be designed as a middle school from the ground up.

Dedicating the B15 facility as a middle school will enable a more efficient use of the 100,000 square feet being made available to DOE. Dual administrative offices for primary and intermediate schools would not be required. Bathrooms and play areas designed for small children would be not be required. The space that would have otherwise been necessary can be reclaimed for additional classrooms, which in turn can include lab, performance and physical education facilities appropriate for middle school students. The SCA and DOE should issue direction that the developer design the facility as a dedicated middle school as soon as possible so to take advantage of these opportunities without risking its projected September 2018 opening.

The proposed facility must respect and integrate with the surrounding neighborhood.

A school located at Atlantic Yards' B15 would also be situated across the street from the Barclays Center arena—in particular, a secondary arena entrance and the arena's loading dock. The experience since the September 2012 Barclays Center opening indicates that these uses often generate substantial pedestrian and vehicle traffic. In addition, productions at the arena have on multiple occasions staged events at and near the intersection where B15 will be located. Security precautions for these events have been extremely disruptive to residents and businesses on Dean Street, Pacific Street and Sixth Avenue, and it seems obvious that such disruptions also would be very difficult to manage for a public school. At present, residential development at Atlantic Yards shares some common control with the arena, but there can be no assurance that this situation will continue into the future. Therefore, it will be incumbent upon City agencies—including DOE, DOT, NYPD, and the Office of Film, Theater and Broadcast—to coordinate efforts that ensure the safety of students entering and leaving the school is maintained, and disruptions to the neighboring residents are minimized. The SCA and the DOE must explain how that coordination will be accomplished, and what protocols will be established, before plans for the school are approved.

Likewise, the DOE and SCA must engage with NYPD and FDNY prior to approval of the plans for the school to ensure its operations will harmonize with the nearby fire and police services.

Finally, at the time of the opening of the school, the nearest open space will be the Dean Playground. The DOE and SCA must assess whether the school will represent an impact to the Dean Playground, and develop a plan to mitigate the impact.

The community must be involved with design and implementation of the proposed facility in a meaningful way.

The SCA notice regarding site selection and development provides few details on the proposed facility, and no information regarding the project's design and approval process. Nor was Mr. Ou of the SCA able to provide any information at the June 3 hearing on the timing and availability of design documents for review by CEC13 and local elected officials. However, a document we received from Empire State Development indicates that the developer expects to have construction documents ready early in the spring of 2016.

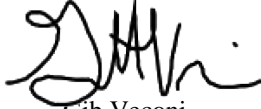
Given the school is being sited within a project that will add significant population density—and that has already added pedestrian and vehicular traffic—to a relatively low-scale neighborhood, we respectfully ask that the SCA at this time provide a clear time and events schedule for design approval to the community's elected representatives, and commit to incorporating an opportunity for public input into the review process.

Finally, although it is beyond the scope of the proposed facility at B15, we request that DOE and SCA present to the community and its elected representatives a near-term plan for addressing capacity issues associated with increased residential development in downtown Brooklyn and at the Atlantic Yards site. The 616 seats in the proposed facility represent less than a third of the increase in primary and intermediate school students projected for this

neighborhood in Atlantic Yards' 2014 Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. To that projection must be added demand from thousands of apartments recently completed, in progress, or planned for downtown Brooklyn. The current real estate market has made large parcels of land suitable for school construction practically unavailable at any price. School capacity shortfall is a looming certainty for northwest Brooklyn, and without a plan to address it, may have dire consequences for families already under pressure in our communities.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on the proposed school at the Atlantic Yards site.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gib Veconi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gib Veconi
Chair

cc: Mayor Bill de Blasio
Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams
State Senator Velmanette Montgomery
State Senator Jesse Hamilton
Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon
Assembly Member Walter Mosley
New York City Council Member Laurie Cumbo
Nizjoni Granville, Chair, Brooklyn Community Board 8
David Goldsmith, Chair, Community Education Council 13