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To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>
Subject: Setbacks and high density residential

Good morning Commissioners and staff, I'd like to expand on my comments from the meeting last night, in the hopes that future decisions may come down differently. In summary of the below, my wish for last night would have been that the developer had been told to come back with a different design for apartments that have a taller ground level ceiling height.

I spoke with the developer after the meeting and learned that the city desires even smaller setbacks than 14'. There is not a problem with that in theory, but in practice the design of the building will have a tremendous impact on the actual livability of the first level of residential units.

In high density cities, nobody lives on ground level. There is either retail/office space at street level with residential units above, or the entry is split so that there are English basement units half-below grade and the first level of above-grade units is raised so that windows are above pedestrian height.

In the particular decision for 999 Maiden Lane, I assume the residents of Medical Center Court, the Island Drive apartments, and the tall building over on Wall St and Island Drive counted in the beds:business ratio? The developer insisted to me that the Broadway end of the lot is where the storefronts need to be, so that drivers could see them, but there are significantly more people proximate to the Nielsen Court end of the lot, easy walking distance to potential shops. Not to mention the hundreds of residents of Beekman itself.

In a vision where cars are deemphasized, I would hope that visibility to drivers would not be the focal point in deciding where to place retail. Walkability is the key here, not bikes, due to the low numbers of people who bike in the winter. I notice that the question about bike rooms focused on where they are and whether they are convenient, but did not ask how many bikes are actually in there, and what the circulation is like.

I also asked the developer whether the street level units could be converted to commercial in the future. He said they could not, because of ceiling height. I asked if the ceiling height could be raised in the design to create that option, and he said that building height limits prevent that.

Hearing the commission's enthusiasm for iterative development, I strongly encourage you to demand that future building designs be able to support conversion of ground floor residential to commercial space, as the ratio of beds:business gets towards sustainability. If total building height needs to be adjusted by six or ten feet, I'm confident the commissioners would be open to that, and it would create more yes-and options for the neighborhoods into the future.

I would also hope, in a car-free future, that apartment sizes will be large enough for a family to live in - 1200 square feet or more, three bedrooms, two

living spaces. I'm not sure which employees of the hospital people think are going to live in the Beekman apartments, but it's certainly not anyone married/partnered with children. 811 square feet is an exclusion factor, even if the families could afford the rent. If you're seeking to create an enclave of upper class childless people, you're on the right track.

In a slightly different topic, regarding the exterior design of the buildings y'all are approving these days, they really are horrible. In 20 years they're all going to be as bad as the Frieze building was already in the '90s - design relics that everyone wishes would go away.

And in closing, I hope the city will improve code requirements for new construction as soon as possible. As was made clear in the meeting last night, the Commission doesn't have authority to change decisions that meet code, so the city's carbon neutral vision will be unattainable without changes to the building code. We'll just keep spinning our wheels.

Thanks for your consideration on these points,

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