

SoHo Broadway District Management Association, Inc.

Community Roundtable – October 20, 2022

Meeting Minutes

Pursuant to a written notice via email, website, and social media, members of the public attended an information session (Community Roundtable) organized by the SoHo Broadway District Management Association, Inc. (dba SoHo Broadway Initiative) on Thursday, October 20, 2022 remotely via Zoom at 8:30 a.m.

Executive Director Mark Dicus welcomed attendees, introduced SBI staff (himself, Brandon Zwagerman, Dan Hogle) and Board Members/Alternates (Brian Steinwurtzel, Emily Hellstrom, Pete Davies, Michele Varian, Ronnie Wolf, John Pasquale)

Mark introduced New York City Comptroller Brad Lander. Comptroller safeguards the City's fiscal health, roots out waste, fraud and abuse in local government, and ensures that municipal agencies serve the needs of all New Yorkers. Prior becoming our Comptroller, Brad was a New York City Council Member from Brooklyn where he co-founded the Council's Progressive Caucus.

Remarks from Comptroller Brad Lander:

- Big fan of SoHo and big fan of BIDs that activate community, property owners, small businesses. Love Park Slope 5th Ave BID in his neighborhood.
- Optimistic in long-term for SoHo, city, region. Early pandemic we had reasons for existential anxiety about future of city; feat things may have been changing in way we couldn't wrap arms around. Core of economic rationale for NYC still strong; people want to live and work here. Diverse energy and optimism of everyone from asylum seekers to Google employees wanting to live here.
- It is Comptroller's job to look ahead. Almost all economists predicting recession coming in next year. Hoping inflation may reduce and become "normal" recession. How does City prepare? Focus on basics: schools, pick up trash, help folks with mental health issues—deliver basic services that allow people to do economic creating. To get City's fiscal house in order, made biggest contribution to rainy day fund last year. \$10B in reserves. Support Mayor's Program to Eliminate the Gap (PEG) proposal.
- Was a lot of debate around SoHo-NoHo, Gowanus, really all rezonings, but need to provide more housing while protecting existing tenants. Need to be a city people can afford to live in.
- Some economic development work that the City can focus on, such as keeping hospitality and restaurants coming back. Have seen great growth in tech and healthcare sectors; need to keep them growing and create pathways for young people to get into those jobs. Create great schools, but share them. Reason for the

city: where everyone can find a place, work hard, create businesses... the heart of NYC success and SoHo success. Easy in sour times to lose optimism for inclusive multiracial democracy but is at core of city's economic rationale since its founding.

Discussion with SoHo Broadway Staff & Board and public with Comptroller Lander

- Mark: SoHo is a neighborhood that embraces diversity and thrives due to diversity of city. People from all over the world visit and people from all over the city work here. We think SoHo has been coming back stronger than other neighborhoods due to its mixed-use nature. Re: City services, we rely on City agency partners to come in and deal with sanitation, traffic, illegally located vending, etc. Would like to see improved responses. Lander: what makes mixed-use great is also what makes it difficult; special challenges.
- Pete Davies: I am residential representative on BID, and on steering committee of Broadway Residents Coalition. Am a rent stabilized tenant. One thing we are seeing is drop off in buildings registered with HPD; doesn't seem to be any system of tracking. HPD should have something in place to address buildings not registering. Lander: I'm sure everyone saw article in The City yesterday about this issue. I'm a big supporter of the Housing Stability & Tenant Protection Act of 2019, but not sure we saw consequences of that that so many owners are trying to deregister buildings in response. Not sure of HDP, HCR, City Hall Office to Protect Tenants' Rights, but somebody has got to address this.
- Michele Varian: Many of us saw The City article; shocking how many units being held off the market. Also lots of commercial spaces not being leased because rents too high and landlords can't rent for less than promised in mortgage. I'm a rent stabilized tenant... what are the economic systems to fix what is clearly broken? Lander: residential, retail, office market challenges all different. With residential, owners trying to slide out of rent regulation system. Commercial side has no regulation; is there some model of commercial rent regulation that can work, or appropriate to have some kind of vacancy surcharge? Difficult to figure out (e.g. vacant space in SoHo vs. East New York for very different reasons), hard policy to develop.
- Mark: district's vacancy rate is higher than we'd like. Real estate taxes don't go down for several years even if vacant. BID hasn't take a position on commercial rent regulation bills, however. Lander: perhaps BIDs could help in drafting compromise between different interests.
- Emily Hellstrom: Our building owns the ground-floor commercial space. During pandemic we were able to work with tenant to keep them in place. At government level, big players often get their voices heard. Pandemic was a spotlight on how small local business owners have got to have a fighting chance. We all love convenience of a Target or T.J. Maxx but what makes people want to come to NYC is, say, a small shop selling bespoke pants.
- Ronnie Wolf: Our building also worked with tenant. Small landlords didn't get much relief, just interest-free loans. 2 Howard Street is great site for affordable housing.

- Lora Tenenbaum: Regarding 2 Howard, we looked at that back when it was City-owned when I was on CB2. On another note, harder and harder to get data from City now. DOB system impossible to find out what is going on in our community; SLA info and Community Board resolutions similarly difficult to obtain. Almost as if there is concerted effort to keep public away from knowledge last 3-4 years.
- Lander: Closing response. We just launched very transparent dashboard re: pension system investments last week. Real challenge to make sure small businesses can get access to resources. Even though NYC is center of capital accumulation, how can government tilt playing field to make sure small actors can survive and thrive? Our office doesn't have influence on land use issues like 2 Howard but can have a policy perspective on how to make sure smaller businesses thrive.
- Via chat, contact if anything office can do: Evelin Collado, Manhattan Borough Director, NYC Comptroller Brad Lander. ECollad@comptroller.NYC.gov; 929 545-0262

Mark Dicus ended meeting with general BID update:

- Broadway has been repaved, needs to be re-marked. Replanting planters today, will move back to curb extensions when re-marked.
- We have been selected as a Clean Curbs partner by DSNY to pilot a prototype waste container for litterbasket waste on Prince St east of Broadway. Keeps corners trash bag free, creates more pedestrian space and a neater corner. Brandon shared slides of concept rendering in progress.
- Quality of life issues: Regular complaints we have been working to address re: counterfeit goods market, Broome Street traffic/honking, weed vendors. Some successes. Graffiti: we remove from public assets. Have worked with Graffiti-Free NYC program to remove from 470 Broadway. DSNY helped with dumping.
- Annual Meeting November 15, 6 p.m. via Zoom. Register here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84461212693>
- Retail vacancy still 25%. Gradually heading in right direction. New stores in last quarter include: Save the Duck, Target, Express Edit, GU, Windsor, Polene Paris, Blick. Coming soon: Athleta, La Bibliotheque, House of Cannabis, Waterford. Timberland moving. Trend of business moving to stronger locations.

Q&A from public with Mark Dicus:

- Leigh Behnke: Could BID develop official policy for meeting new store management and explaining constraints of neighborhood? Some sort of document about operating in mixed-use neighborhood. Mark: policy has been to visit when a store opens. Would like to make something more formal, however. Important to celebrate successes of new businesses opening, not only issues. Have received no complaints about Target, as example. Dan speaks to store staff when he sees issues, in the speed of their workday sometimes they don't follow rules. Businesses also reach out to BID with questions about operations (e.g. when to put out garbage).
- John Pasquale: flier outreach a few times a year seems to be good idea. We have

to remind our tenants, they just don't know sometimes. Is there a database for contacting all stores? Mark: Dan knocking on doors is probably fastest way.

Meeting adjourned.

No other attendees had questions; meeting adjourned.