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Mark Levine, Borough President

October 30, 2024

**Recommendation on ULURP Application Nos. C240342ZMM, C240343ZSM, and N240344ZRM
– 455 First Avenue
By 455 First Avenue Associates LLC**

PROPOSED ACTIONS

455 First Avenue Associates LLC and the New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC) (the “Applicants”) are proposing multiple land use actions to facilitate the development of a 13-story commercial life sciences building (“Innovation East”) located at 455 First Avenue, in Manhattan Community District 6 (the “Site”).

To facilitate the project, the Applicant is requesting the following actions:

1. A zoning map amendment to rezone the Site from an R8 district with a C2-5 overlay along First Avenue to a C6-4 district;
2. A special permit pursuant to Section 74-901 of the New York City Zoning Resolution (ZR Section 74-901) to modify bulk regulations; and
3. A zoning text amendment to Appendix F of the New York City Zoning Resolution to map a Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) area on the Site.

BACKGROUND

The project proposed at the site is part of EDC’s LifeSci NYC – a \$1 billion initiative to advance the life sciences industry in NYC, announced in 2016. In 2018, EDC issued a Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) for the creation of an Applied Life Sciences Hub at the location. By 2022, the City announced that the new project, called Innovation East, would be developed in partnership with Taconic Partners and DivcoWest as a new life sciences building.

The Site currently has an existing 14-story, 191-foot-tall, 359,000-square-foot building that is primarily occupied by New York City’s Public Health Laboratory, as well as New York City’s Poison Control Center. These uses would be relocated. The Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) has applied to acquire replacement space at 215 Lexington Avenue for New York City’s Poison Control Center, and the Public Health Laboratory is relocating to a new site at 40 West 137th Street, adjacent to Harlem Hospital. The new 240,000-square-foot Public Health Lab will have modern and upgraded facilities to allow the Department of Health and Human Services to strengthen their public health and disease prevention program. The new Public Health Lab is scheduled to be completed in 2026.

Proposed Development

The proposed project would replace the existing building at 455 First Avenue with a 443,680-square-foot, 255-foot tall, 13-story building, with bulkheads and mechanical equipment topping out at approximately 270 feet. Demolition of the existing building would begin in 2026 once the new Public Health Lab building in Harlem is operational, and construction for the new Innovation East building would begin in 2027. The public health use of the existing building does not comply with its current R8 zoning.

The proposed rezoning action would allow commercial laboratory use at the Site and the proposed modifications to height and setback regulations would facilitate the ideal internal configuration for laboratory use. The floorplates of the proposed building would be 40,000 square feet, including 11-foot lab modules and a 55-foot core-to-perimeter distance, as well as higher floor-to-ceiling heights for mechanical equipment and ventilation for laboratories. In order to obtain the special permit the Applicants must demonstrate that the project will not affect the essential character or impair future development of the area or obstruct access to light and air.

Innovation East would be occupied primarily by commercial life sciences tenants. The New York University Grossman School of Medicine would be the anchor tenant, occupying 40% of the building. Other tenants would be life sciences businesses at all stages of growth, from start-ups to established research and development firms. The building would also include a multi-purpose space on the ground floor for meetings, events, and lectures. Bike parking would be located in the building, accessible from East 27th Street. Ground-floor retail space would be located at First Avenue and East 27th Street, with seating for up to 200 people. The Applicant proposes to improve the 27th Street pedestrian walkway with active and well-lit facades, remove the existing parking, and reposition the Citi Bike station.

Area Context

The surrounding area includes multiple medical and institutional uses including Bellevue Hospital, the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, the New York University College of Dentistry, the Alexandria Center for Life Science, the proposed Science Park and Research Campus (SPARC); open spaces and recreational uses including Asser Levy Park and Recreation Center, Bellevue Gardens, and Bellevue Sobriety Garden; and residential campuses including Waterside Plaza, Nathan Straus Houses, East Midtown Plaza, Peter Cooper Village, and Stuyvesant Town.

The Site is located in Manhattan Community District 6 in the Kips Bay neighborhood. The surrounding area is zoned R8 with C2-5 overlays on the west side of First Avenue, and C1-8, C1-9, and C1-8A along Second Avenue.

The Site is served by transit by the M15, M15-SBS, M23-SBS, M34A-SBS, and M9 buses, and the 6 Subway line at East 23rd or 28th Streets and Park Avenue. There is a Citi Bike station on the corner of East 27th Street and First Avenue. East 27th Street between First Avenue and Mt. Carmel Place is currently a car-free pedestrian way.

COMMUNITY BOARD RESOLUTION

On September 11, 2024, Manhattan Community Board 6 (CB 6) voted to recommend approval of the project with conditions. The conditions include requesting that EDC identify sites for affordable

housing within CB 6, maximize the public benefits of the pedestrian and open spaces around the proposed campus, including 27th Street and Bellevue South Park, ensure adequate public transportation, ensure that the site design makes it accessible to the community, and uphold the highest energy efficiency standards.

BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

The life sciences industry is an evolving sector in New York City. We have seen the growth in employment and diversity of opportunities in the sector for a range of skill levels. Providing new spaces specifically designed for life sciences industry can help our city be competitive nationwide to attract companies and programs at all stages of development. Innovation East will allow the life sciences industry to grow in Kips Bay. The project is projected to create jobs and employ 1,000 people at a diverse range of skill and education levels. It is important to have space for start-ups and other emerging companies in addition to already established companies, and I hope that Innovation East will be a place in the Kips Bay corridor accessible to that sector of the industry. I am also excited that in advance of this project the Public Health Lab will be getting a new space close to Harlem Hospital.

By constructing a new building on the site, this project also has the opportunity to transform the surrounding streetscape. Right now, the pedestrian way on East 27th Street is in poor condition. Though lined with trees, the pedestrian walkway currently has uneven surfaces, fenced-off parked cars, blank facades, and minimal opportunity to stay or spend time. The pedestrian way has great potential to be a valuable public amenity with connections to Bellevue South Park, and I am glad that the proposed design incorporates streetscape improvements like transparent facades, seating connected to the retail space, lighting, and trees or plantings as needed. I hope that the surface of the pedestrian way will also be repaired or replaced, and that the public realm will be well maintained to preserve long-term use and enjoyment by the public.

I also encourage EDC to work with city and state agencies to determine if there are opportunities to fund the preservation of existing affordable housing in the area. Our city needs a balance of projects that promote jobs and economic growth while making sure New Yorkers can afford to live in the cities they work. Innovation East will help to accomplish the first goal, while the second is a critical need for the livability of our city.

BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION

Therefore, I recommend **approval** of ULURP Application Nos. C240342ZMM, C240343ZSM, and N240344ZRM **with the following condition**:

- 1) Transform the 27th Street pedestrian way into a space that is accessible, active, and repairs the surface of the pedestrian way.



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Manhattan Borough President