



**STATEMENT FROM COUNCIL MEMBER COREY JOHNSON BEFORE COMMUNITY BOARD 4
REGARDING THE SALE OF TRANSFERABLE DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS ABOVE THE OLD CHELSEA
POST OFFICE**

Wednesday, January 7, 2014

As the Council Member representing Council District 3 which includes the Chelsea neighborhood, please accept this statement concerning the proposed sale of transferable development rights ("air rights") above the Old Chelsea Post Office located at 217 West 18th Street.

I first learned about the proposal to sale the right rights above the post office in late November when residents brought to my attention a copy of a November 26, 2014 notice posted in the Old Chelsea Station. The notice states that there is a 15-day comment period, beginning the date on the notice, during which comments on the proposal from the general public will be accepted. While I appreciate the opportunity to present comments this evening, I am very concerned in the manner in which my office was notified about this proposal. It is critically important that the elected officials who represent this area and the residents who use this post office are given ample time to engage in a robust discussion with USPS regarding the proposal to sell air rights above this post office.

Like my colleagues here and members of Community Board 4, I have many unanswered questions about this proposed plan. My questions include knowing if the design of the new residential building will respect and preserve the character of the neighborhood; will a housing preference for affordable housing be included in the request for proposal; will the post office remain open during construction; will any portion of the funds from the sale be reinvested back to the post office station to upgrade its services for customers?

My office looks forward to engaging in a conversation with USPS and about its proposal to sell any transferable development rights above the Old Chelsea Post Office. This post office is an asset to the community, and it's critically important that its postal services are not relocated from this facility during or after this process.

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to continuing to work with USPS.

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Testimony of Representative Jerrold Nadler
Before Community Board 4
Regarding the Old Chelsea Station Post Office
January 7, 2015

Good Evening. I would like to thank Community Board 4 for organizing tonight's public discussion on the United States Post Office's (USPS) proposal to sell a portion of the property the Old Chelsea Station occupies, along with associated air rights. As the Congressman for the 10th Congressional District, which includes parts of Chelsea, I have many concerns regarding USPS's development of the Old Chelsea Station and I know that Community Board 4 shares these concerns.

Any plans to develop the Old Chelsea Station must take into consideration the concerns of the community that it serves. Disappointingly, USPS has yet to make a concerted effort to solicit the opinions of members of the community or elected officials, and has failed to give sufficient notice that it is moving ahead with plans to redevelop the site. Going forward, I ask that USPS act in partnership with members of the community, Community Board 4, and elected officials to ensure that the redeveloped Old Chelsea Station reflect the needs of the neighborhood. It is essential that community input is reflected in the most formal manner possible, and I ask that USPS do everything in its power to guarantee that the community will play a role in the development process.

Though it is a relief that retail postal services will remain on site, there are a number of outstanding issues regarding neighborhood character, land use, and the level of service during the construction phase. Community input is a crucial part of any development at the Old Chelsea Post Office and USPS must include community feedback in their planning. We will continue to work to ensure that community voices are heard and neighborhood needs are met as USPS moves forward.



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Testimony by Assembly Member Richard N. Gottfried
Before Manhattan Community Board 4
Wednesday, January 7, 2015

My name is Assembly Member Richard Gottfried, and I represent Chelsea in the New York State Assembly. I appreciate the opportunity to comment here today on the proposed sale of property and development rights attached to the Old Chelsea Post Office. I regret that the legislative session in Albany prevents me from delivering my comments in person.

This is not the first time the Postal Service has announced development plans for the Old Chelsea Station prior to community consultation and elected official notification. There is now an established pattern to the process: the sale of property and development rights is “announced” in a way unlikely to bring it to the attention of the community; a very brief public comment period is established, not long enough to allow for reasonable dialogue or widespread community input; elected officials request an extension of the public comment period, which the USPS denies; and finally a meeting is held between Community Board, a Postal Service representative and concerned affected residents.

This should be our last experience of that pattern. Development plans for neighborhood post offices should be discussed with community advocates and local representatives in a timely manner. In the meantime, the USPS should extend the public comment period until the end of January, since this is the first public meeting to occur. It is wrong, and show a disregard for the community, to think there can be a “comment” period when there is barely anything on which to comment.

The human scale of development in Chelsea is under constant attack and erosion, and the Postal Service should not contribute to this. Any sale of the property and development rights for the Old Chelsea Post Office must be undertaken with community input, review, and support for the size and use of the new development, because it could have a serious damaging effect on the surrounding community.

A much more reasonable process is being followed for the sale of air rights related to Moynihan Station, which is a much larger scale and more complicated project. If it can be done for the Moynihan project, then it could be done for the Old Chelsea Post Office.

Because this has not occurred, a number of questions remain about the development. What proportion of the new development will be residential, and what proportion will be for business? The USPS plan mentions only condos; will there be a preference given to developers who include an affordable housing element in their proposal? Why not a requirement that affordable housing be included? Will the RFP ask for designs that are aesthetically suitable for

blending with the current structure and surrounding structures? Will development rights only be sold for building on top of the Old Chelsea Station, or is the Postal Service exploring selling air rights for transfer to an adjacent site or otherwise offsite? If the rights are only for building up the current site, will the RFP require as-of-right proposals, or will others be considered? If air rights may be sold for transfer offsite, what will the catchment area be?

These questions should not surprise anyone at USPS. They should have been predictable, and the answers included in the first community notification.

I am glad to learn that retail postal services will remain on site and on the ground floor. Beyond this, it is imperative that what happens next is undertaken in consultation with the people who will have to live with the consequences.

Thank you for your time and consideration this evening. I look forward to continuing this conversation.

January 6, 2015

The Honorable Pat Donahoe
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Re: Sale of Air Rights above Old Chelsea Station Post Office at 217 West 18th Street

Dear Mr. Sirs:

Save Chelsea, a broad based coalition of organizations and individuals concerned with preserving the integrity of our neighborhood's historic sites and structures, writes to express our extreme concern, and consternation, over the USPS's abrupt and secretive decision to sell the air rights and to build above the Old Chelsea Station at 217 West 18th Street, NYC, effectively *without* public notification or an opportunity for public discussion. We join with many other groups and individuals to protest the utter lack of transparency in this process.

The USPS claims to have sent a letter to our group on August 14th. We received no such communication. Further, it seems there was no outreach to other local civic organizations, including our Community Board.

Not even aware that the "clock was already running" regarding the sale of air rights, Save Chelsea was astonished to receive a copy of the proposal (RFP) dated November 5th of 2014. We were even more stunned to discover that neither Manhattan Community Board 4 nor our elected officials had received copies. This is lack of communication is especially shocking given both the magnitude of the proposal and the time sensitive nature of the situation. Even more alarming is the fact that our Community Board 4 only learned of

USPS's new proposal to sell the site's air rights when a notice was posted at the Old Chelsea Station in late November 2014. The notice provided only a 15-day comment period for the general public to respond and did not provide any significant information regarding the details of the RFP process.

Community Board 4, in its letter to you of May 1, 2013, urged the USPS to work with the community with respect and focus. That request has been entirely ignored. As a quasi-federal agency you bear a responsibility to inform the community, and the elected officials in a timely manner of any plan that will have such a massive impact on our daily lives.

In the wake of the USPS's lack of outreach to the community, the role of calling a public hearing about this urgent issue has fallen on the shoulders of Community Board 4, which will take place during the full board meeting on January 7th, 2015. We can only hope that the USPS will take stock of the public's serious concerns and distress regarding the Old Chelsea Station, a postal facility which is of vital importance to Chelsea and other surrounding neighborhoods.

Old Chelsea Station was built in 1931 using Federal dollars, tax dollars...*our* dollars!
We feel that the USPS needs to recognize its responsibility to the public. We have a right to have a say in what is done to what is, after all, our property.

Lesley Doyel, president
Save Chelsea

Christine Berthet, Chair, Manhattan CB4
Lee Compton, Betty Macintosh, David Holowka, CB4 CLU Committee
Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
NYC Controller Scott Stringer
NYC Public Advocate Letitia James
NY State senator Brad Hoylman
NY City Councilmember Corey Johnson
NY State Assembly Member Richard Gottfried
NY State Assembly Member Deborah Glick
Manhattan Community Board 4 Chair Christine Berthet
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**COMMENTS OF STATE SENATOR BRAD HOYLMAN REGARDING
THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE'S CONSIDERATION OF THE SALE OF
A PORTION OF THE PROPERTY AND AIR RIGHTS OF THE
OLD CHELSEA STATION**

January 7, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my comments regarding the United States Postal Service's (USPS) consideration of the sale of a portion of the property and air rights of the Old Chelsea Station, located at 217 West 18th Street, which is in the district that I represent. I appreciate the USPS' commitment to continue retail operations in the building. However, I am extremely concerned about the substantial threat this plan would pose to the historic features of the building and the surrounding community, as well as the lack of notification to the community and relevant stakeholders regarding the potential sale.

The Old Chelsea Station was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. Designed by local architect Eric Kebbon in 1935, this building is a remarkably well-maintained and quintessential example of the Colonial Revival style that defined the post offices built in this era. In fact, Kebbon himself designed six such post offices in and around New York City. The principal facade of the building features Doric order columns, four terra cotta rosettes, and relief sculptures of Bald Eagles watching over the two main entrances. Of particular interest are two bas relief cast stone panels of woodland animals titled "Deer" and "Bear" created in 1938 by artist Paul Fiene in the lobby of the station. I share the opinion of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (SHPO), which is charged with protecting historic resources in New York State, that the sale of a portion of the property and air rights would jeopardize these important historic features.

Further, I am concerned that the sale of the air rights and construction of a residential building on top of the station would damage the low-rise character of the neighborhood. Building additional stories to the building would further reduce light



and air to the street and neighbors, significantly diminishing the quality of life for residents.

Finally, the USPS has not provided sufficient notice to the community and other stakeholders regarding its intentions to issue an RFP for the air rights and property sale, which has resulted in an inability for the public to provide substantive input on the proposed Request for Proposals (RFP). Stakeholders, including government entities, were first contacted in November 2014 through a notice of a 15-day comment period that did not include details regarding the proposed actions. As a result, there are a number of outstanding questions regarding the RFP that have not been answered, including how the proposed addition would impact the existing facility and nearby buildings, other options for a transfer of air rights that the USPS has considered and how the USPS intends on protecting the historic features of the building.

A federal agency has no business undermining the expertise of local and state agencies - in this instance SHPO and Manhattan Community Board 4 - and substituting its own opinion without consultation. The sale of air rights would amount to theft of our local public spaces, neighborhood character and history - a reversed form of eminent domain where the Federal government is privatizing public resources. These actions are all the more egregious because the USPS seeks to drastically alter something as familiar and beloved as a historic post office without even the semblance of public notice or input.

In light of these issues, I urge the USPS to reconsider its proposal and to restart the public engagement process with the goal of creating a transparent process and allowing for substantive community input on any proposed changes to the Old Chelsea Station.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.