

Chelsea now

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The party is over at West Chelsea's Club Mumbai

BY ALBERT AMATEAU

The State Liquor Authority last week imposed a two-year liquor license revocation on the troublesome Club Mumbai – also known as City – and then ruled that the location at 250 W. 26th St. would also have a two-year license ban.

The club's license was lifted because of dozens of underage drinking, disorderly premises and building and noise violations over the past four years, according to William Crowley, spokesperson for the S.L.A.

The agency sent notices of every violation to HAG Realty L.L.C., landlord of the club, said Crowley. "That's why the board, at its last meeting on Jan. 10, voted to proscribe the location as well," he added.

Continued on page 11

Politicians give postal trucks plan Bronx cheer

BY LAWRENCE LERNER

It is comforting to know that neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays United States Postal Service couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds. But if the Postal Service has its way, more of those rounds will begin at the Morgan Processing and Distribution Center, bringing additional traffic congestion to an area of West Chelsea and Hell's Kitchen already inundated with automobile traffic.

The Postal Service is studying whether

Continued on page 8



Chelsea Now photo by Lawrence Lerner

Urban planner Jee Mee Kim, far left, leads a small-group discussion at Tuesday's meeting held by Greater Gansevoort Urban Improvement Project.

Gansevoort project group told to think 'big and crazy'

BY LAWRENCE LERNER

Chelsea and West Village residents got an unprecedented chance to reshape the Meatpacking District Tuesday night at a public brainstorming session held at Fulton Houses Community Center by the area's newest community group, the Greater Gansevoort Urban Improvement Project.

Coming on the heels of a study commissioned by the group in November, which looked at motor and pedestrian traffic in the area bounded by W. 16th and Gansevoort Sts. between Ninth Ave. and the Hudson River, the public meeting made good on a promise to include the community in future plans for the district.

The goal of Tuesday's gathering was to brainstorm ideas for a small but cen-

tral part of the area, the Ninth Ave. corridor between Gansevoort and 16th Sts. Jo Hamilton, a member of the project's steering committee, kicked things off by addressing the approximately 80 participants.

"I know many of you thought you'd be hearing the results of our study tonight, and learning about what our consultants have come up with, but that's not the case," she said. "The consultants have come up with nothing so far. They're relying on you and hoping for your input to make this a more meaningful process."

With the district's historic buildings, wide streets and open plazas offering vast potential for the creation of a welcoming public space, the improvement project has several objectives in mind, including promoting pedestrian safety, reducing the

negative impacts of vehicular traffic and creating a sense of place in the Gansevoort area.

The group's initiative has gained momentum as nightlife, high-end retailing, art galleries and remnants of the wholesale meat industry bring crowds of pedestrians, cabs and trucks to the Gansevoort Market District, and the proposed 2008 opening of the High Line's southern end promises to make the area even more of a destination.

Planning consultant Sam Schwartz, former commissioner of the city's Department of Transportation, took over Tuesday's meeting where Hamilton left off, emphasizing D.O.T.'s recent decision to make the traffic on Ninth Ave. between 14th and 16th Sts. one-way southbound, which in

Continued on page 5

EDITORIAL, LETTERS
PAGE 16

KID OF COMEDY
PAGE 20



Chelsea Now photo by Lawrence Lerner

Planning consultant Sam Schwartz addresses participants at Tuesday's meeting held by Greater Gansevoort Urban Improvement Project.

Gansevoort group brainstorms about 9th Ave. corridor

Continued from page 1

his words, "presents enormous opportunities for the group assembled here tonight." He also noted the peak weekend traffic hours of 1 a.m. to 3 a.m. and said that 72 percent of stopped cars during these hours are double-parked.

"In my 30 years with D.O.T., I'd never seen statistics like this," he said. "Clearly, something needs to be done."

Schwartz then had the participants break up into nine groups at round tables accommodating up to seven people each, upon which sat large maps of the Gansevoort District area under consideration. Each group was led through their brainstorming by urban planners from Schwartz's company and the Regional Plan Association.

"We're taking a tabula rasa approach here," said Schwartz as the proceedings began. "We're wiping the slate clean and asking you to offer up anything you want for this part of the district. As you get further into your discussions, you'll hear me come around and say, 'That's a crazy idea!' And that's exactly what we want, because out of the most far-fetched ideas come some of the best proposals. So, think big and crazy."

As the discussions ensued, the groups placed a sizable piece of tracing paper over their respective maps and superimposed their ideas onto the paper with black markers.

Jee Mee Lee, vice president and director of planning at Schwartz's urban-planning company, Sam Schwartz PLLC, presided over a lively and far-reaching give-and-take on auto and pedestrian traffic, parking, the greening of Gansevoort Plaza — the intersection of Ninth Ave. with Gansevoort, Greenwich and Little W. 12th Sts. — and other topics with her group.

"How do pedestrians cross the street safely here?" a man at the table asked,

pointing to an area in front of Chelsea Market.

"Very carefully," responded another participant.

"That's definitely true," said Lee. "But I'm afraid D.O.T. wouldn't allow midblock crosswalks like the one you're suggesting, at least not without a traffic light, and there's a long, involved process for that."

Minutes later, a few tables away, West Village residents Elaine Young and Robert Isabel got into a passionate exchange about parking.

'In my 30 years with D.O.T., I'd never seen statistics like this. Clearly, something needs to be done.'

*Sam Schwartz,
urban planning consultant*

"I don't own a business in the Meatpacking District, but where do you suggest people put cars?" asked Young.

"The Port Authority parking lot," piped up Isabel. "There's no reason for private cars to park in this area."

"Yes, but if I owned a restaurant, I'd want my patrons to have parking," Young retorted.

"Well, cars start double-parking, and meat trucks come in at 2 a.m. and have nowhere to park. That's always been a problem," replied Isabel, leaving Young to

respond with resignation, "I don't know. Although I respect your idea, that seems pretty harsh."

After an hour of these internal discussions, one person from each huddle presented their group's findings to the entire room. Issues that emerged included the continual logjams at the intersection at 14th St. and Ninth Ave., along with the need for taxi stands and efficient queuing of cabs to avoid congestion, underground parking garages, wider sidewalks to accommodate cafés and increased pedestrian flow, better signage and safer pedestrian crossings.

The small-group, hands-on format was a sterling example of participatory democracy in action, and that was precisely the intent of the meeting's organizers.

"By doing this, we're bringing together people who know the neighborhood very well," said Josh David, co-founder of Friends of the Highline and a member of G.G.U.I.P.'s steering committee. "All have stored years of observations and ideas about how the area works and could work better. Many of these folks come to C.B. 4 meetings with complaints or opinions on city proposals. Tonight, with this format, they can be part of creating solutions, rather than just responding to other people's dictums."

Hamilton put it another way: "Each one of these tables is a microcosm of the community. Each has traffic and transportation people, residents, developers, business owners. You don't want each type sitting all together. This way, we get the broadest possible input from the community."

Representatives from the Department of City Planning and the Department of Transportation were also on hand for the meeting, as were staff members of various elected officials. D.O.T. and Planning have conducted their own studies of the area and are working with G.G.U.I.P. and its consultants to reshape the Meatpacking District. According to one Planning official

at the gathering, the collaboration makes for a holistic approach to the rapidly changing neighborhood.

Jay Marcus, chairperson of C.B. 4's Transportation Committee, said the community board has also been in close touch with Hamilton's group and is awaiting the findings of Tuesday's meeting before weighing in on the matter.

"C.B. 4 will likely back the community's recommendations, though it's important to remember we play only an advisory role," Marcus said after the workshop. "What's really important is the great job that Jo's done by bringing the city agencies onboard. We'll still have to lobby for any changes we want to the area, but with the agencies alongside us, they stand a much better chance of going through."

Schwartz was also pleased with the results of the meeting.

"I'm always so impressed when I go into meetings and hear great ideas such as, extend the L train along 14th St. I mean, why shouldn't the Meatpacking District be linked to the subway?" said Schwartz. "Or other ideas, such as what to do about buses that turn around at Abingdon Square and go north on Hudson St. — people talked about reversing the flow of traffic there. Or adding sidewalk space between 14th and 16 Sts. on the west side of the Ninth Ave., where pedestrian traffic is greatest. We'll take this information and do an internal charette, and ask questions like, 'Does any of this make sense? How about cost?' This is exactly how the No. 7 train extension came about."

Over the winter, Schwartz's company will collate the findings from the D.O.T. and City Planning studies, as well as Tuesday's open meeting, then present them to the public in late spring or early summer. He said the consultants will then leave additional time for public input before issuing a final report by the end of the summer.