

Chelsea now



Playing James Baldwin, p. 23

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C.B. 4 nixes Selldorf at 200 Eleventh Avenue

BY LAWRENCE LERNER

You're a Wall St. tycoon with impeccable taste in modern art and a desire for all things luxury. So, is it too much to ask for a parking garage to adjoin your \$2,000-per-square-foot Annabelle Selldorf-designed duplex loft overlooking the Hudson River?

Evidently, it is.

Community Board 4 may have thrown a wrench in the designs of celebrity architect Selldorf on Monday night when it refused to okay her plans for an interior elevator parking system that is a central selling point of her highly publicized 200 Eleventh Avenue project, at the corner of Eleventh Avenue and West 24th St.

At a meeting held at Penn South's

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Hell's Kitchen dreams a new Ninth Avenue

BY CHRIS LOMBARDI

Project Find Coffee House, a senior center across Ninth Avenue from the Port Authority Bus Terminal, was empty Wednesday evening. The seniors who eat breakfast and lunch there had gone home, but two other seniors, residents of nearby Manhattan Plaza, arrived right at 6 p.m. and sat firmly by the window, reminiscing about the good old days. "It was better then than it is now," said Mary Lettieri, who has lived in the neighbor-

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Chelsea Now photo by Jefferson Siegel

Kathleen Conway, a 50-year-old administrative assistant and inmate at Chelsea's Bayview Correctional Facility, helped start the prison's Learning Center for Women in Prison in 2002. She is now part of the center's freshman class and is on track for a liberal arts associates' degree from Bard College.

Bayview Prison: The road to college and beyond

■ SECOND IN A SERIES

BY CHRIS LOMBARDI

Kathleen Conway and Marlene Tejada enter the conference room resolutely, their smiles and handshakes confident and their hair just so, Conway sporting a stylish chin-tracing bob, Tejada's pulled into a neat ponytail. Like any college students, they confide that they haven't been getting much sleep, and talk about their schedules with a mix of resignation and pride.

"I'll think, I gotta just finish this reading—it's 11:30 at night," said Conway, a 50-year-old administrative assistant with a taste for literature. "Then I look and see: Oh no, it's 1:00! And I gotta get up at 6 in the morning to get to work on time."

Tejada, a 28-year-old executive assistant, adds that it's not easy taking two classes on top of working all day, as she and Conway both do before attending class from 6:00 to 9:00 every night. "Then we have to rush back," she said, "because the last shower is at 9:30, and then we have to be in our rooms, ready to be counted!"

Those last words and the pair's loose-fitting green jumpsuits signal that Conway and Tejada are not just college roommates, but inmates at Chelsea's Bayview Correctional Facility, who also helped establish a Learning Center for Women in Prison (LCWP) at Bayview and are now part of the center's freshman class, on track for a liberal arts associates' degree from Bard College.

For Tejada, a college education is all she's wanted for a long time. "It's an essential part," she said, "of changing who I was to who I am."

Established in 2002, Bayview's LCWP is part of a national and statewide push for higher education behind bars that is based on solid research showing that college programs prevent recidivism while improving the behavior and attitude of even long-term inmates. Modeled on an already successful and longer-term school at Westchester County's Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, LCWP required a lot of hard work and support from Chelseans and New Yorkers in its infancy: Many local academics, for instance, volunteered their time and expertise, while others focused on raising funds from myriad sources, including from the office of City Council Speaker Christine Quinn.

The first class at Bayview started last year with 15 students, including Tejada and Conway. But all concerned know that this pilot program is just that—a start—both for the women involved and for a national prison system just beginning to tilt in the direction of what works.

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C.B. 4 nixes Selldorf at 200 Eleventh Avenue

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Community Room, the board's Chelsea Preservation and Planning Committee voted 9-1 (with one abstention) against approving Selldorf's "en suite" parking configuration, which would enable condo owners to drive their sedans and SUVs into a special elevator and park next to their individual apartments.

It wasn't that committee members were waging class warfare—or were dismissive of Selldorf's ingenious design, an application of old industrial technology in a contemporary urban residential context. It wasn't even so much fire-safety concerns that caused the board to balk, concerns valid enough to prompt the New York City Fire Department to stringently object to the project in a letter addressed to the Department of Buildings, and sent to both C.B. 4 and Selldorf's architecture firm just prior to the meeting, which FDNY officials did not attend.

No, it was all about the parking.

In 1979, New York City made a commitment to the Environmental Protection Agency to comply with the Clean Air Act by limiting parking in Manhattan south of 60th Street to help reduce air pollution. Chelsea and the Hudson Yards District, both of which fall under C.B. 4's jurisdiction, are part of this arrangement, agreeing to limit the number of parking spaces in those areas to one out of every five apartments, or 20 percent of residences.

Selldorf and an entourage that included her developer partner, YoungWoo & Associates, LLC, came before the C.B. 4



Artist renderings of Annabelle Selldorf's design for 200 Eleventh Avenue

committee on Monday night to request a waiver from this regulation, in order to allow parking for 14 out of the 16 condos at 200 Eleventh Avenue.

"The extra parking spaces will have little impact on traffic in the neighborhood, given the small number in question," said Anthony Tortora, a lawyer for YoungWoo & Associates.

While the committee members agreed, few could countenance setting a precedent that might have unpleasant ramifications for West Chelsea and the rest of Manhattan below 60th Street.

Toward the end of a half-hour discussion on the subject, C.B. 4 Chairperson Lee Compton summed up the feelings of the committee: "The central issue here is the proportion of cars to each building. We

would undoubtedly set a limit of 20 percent cars for a large building. What we need to ask ourselves is, Why would we change that for a small building such as this? If we do that, developers may start chipping away at the regulation, one small building at a time."

Walter Mankoff, chair of the Chelsea Preservation and Planning Committee, announced the committee's verdict a short time later, saying the members could only recommend to the full board the allowable 20 percent of parking spaces for Selldorf's building, or a total of three spaces. (The next full board meeting is on May 4.) He added that the committee would wait to hear back from FDNY officials on their concerns as well.

In the letter sent to the Department of Buildings by FDNY, Howard Hill, chief of fire prevention, stated: "The Fire Department is officially opposed to any contemplated hi-rise or low-rise condominium design concept with an elevator that allows apartment owners to drive and park their cars into designed garages adjoining their high-rise apartments. For obvious life-safety reasons, this design concept and use should be prohibited. Our official position is respectfully requested to be upheld by the Department of Buildings."

Some watching the situation closely predicted as much some time ago.

For example, a commenter on the real estate Website Curbed.com wrote presciently back in January: "I can't imagine the buildings department—or the fire department—would allow a tank of gasoline and a spark-making carbon monoxide generator inside a residential high rise...if you want to avoid paparazzi, then all you have to do is have an underground garage with a passenger elevator for each apartment." (The paparazzi reference was to Selldorf's proposed building, deemed by the New York



real estate press to be "paparazzi-proof" because of the elevator system.)

While he was ostensibly correct on the first point, the commenter missed the mark on the latter issue. As Selldorf pointed out at Monday's meeting, high ground water under the 200 Eleventh Avenue site prevented her from considering a below-ground parking option.

Meanwhile, after their presentation to the committee, Selldorf and her posse of architects, attorneys, developer representatives and hazard-mitigation specialists picked up their belongings and marched out of the meeting a bit deflated but hardly defeated.

Compton gave a hint as to why after the meeting was adjourned. Asked whether C.B. 4's recommendation was likely to alter Selldorf's plan, he said, "The fact that the Department of City Planning and the Department of Buildings has already signed off on it is a pretty good indication that it'll probably go through anyway. But we've got an obligation to recommend what's best for the community."

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Braunstein trial set to begin

BY ALBERT AMATEAU

The trial of Peter Braunstein, charged with arson, posing as a firefighter, and sexually abusing and imprisoning a woman in her Chelsea apartment on Halloween, 2005, is scheduled to begin April 22 with jury selection.

State Supreme Court Justice James Yates ruled on April 18 that Braunstein, 43, was physically and mentally able to assist in his own defense despite skull fractures sustained while being held in Rikers Island. Jail officials said the injuries were self-inflicted when Braunstein banged his head against a jail cell sink.

Braunstein, a writer, was charged with gaining access to the W. 24th St. apartment of his victim, 34, a former Women's Wear Daily colleague, by setting fires in the hallway and convincing her to open the door because he was dressed as a firefighter. He bound her and held her in the apartment for 15 hours before fleeing, according to the charges.

A fugitive for six weeks, he was the subject of a multi-state police alert before he was captured in Memphis, where he slashed his own neck as police closed in. He has indicated he would seek acquittal by reason of insanity.