



THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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CM CHIN URGES COUNCIL TO REJECT CHANGES TO 55-57 SPRING ST.

CITY HALL – At a hearing today before the Council’s Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises, Council Member Margaret S. Chin gave the following testimony regarding an application to alter two buildings at 55-57 Spring St. in Little Italy:

“Good morning. I would like to thank Chair Richards and members of the Subcommittee for allowing me to speak at the start of this hearing. The application before you today concerns a text amendment to modify the map of the Special Little Italy District (SLID) to allow for rear yard enlargements at 55 and 57 Spring Street.

I have strong objections to this application, and wish to share them with you today.

Over the course of the last several months, I have heard from building residents and members of the larger community who have attended community board meetings or reached out to my office about this project. These buildings once housed many rent-protected apartments – affordable units that make up the life-blood of this neighborhood. In recent times, and under multiple owners, many of these units have been taken out of regulation. Today, these buildings house more market-rate tenants – new neighbors who are less familiar with the fight to protect the things that make Little Italy unique.

The remaining rent-protected apartments still house people who helped make Little Italy the desirable neighborhood it is today. In seeking to build support for this application, the owners cite that a majority of market-rate tenants are in favor, while ignoring or denigrating the opposition of rent-protected tenants. These longtime residents now fear retaliation for having voiced their concerns about the unfair impact these proposed changes will have on their quality of life.

In regards to this application, I am not convinced that this proposal is in the best interest of the tenants at 55-57 Spring Street and strikes the right balance between public and private benefit.

I do not share the view of the City Planning Commission that this text amendment is ‘appropriate.’ Therefore, this proposal does not have my support, and I urge this Subcommittee to deny this application.

Community Board 2 overwhelmingly rejected this proposal. I believe our Borough President has her own serious concerns. The last time the provisions of this Special District were altered, New York City and Little Italy were very different places. I cannot support a piece-meal approach to addressing these provisions, which were put in place to protect our community and the character of this neighborhood.

To the tenants of 55-57 Spring St. fearing retaliation from their landlord, I am here to give my unwavering support, and urge you to contact my office about any attempt to intimidate or harass you into silence.

In solidarity with these tenants who have voiced their legitimate objections about the proposed changes, I ask that my colleagues heed those concerns by voting “no” on this application.”

The current owners of 55-57 Spring St. are proposing a one-story addition encompassing the rear courtyard to enlarge two existing storefronts – one of which housed a popular bakery, Ceci Cela, that was forced to close its Little Italy location after 25 years on the block.

Joining Council Member Chin in opposition to the application were Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, Community Board 2 Chair Terri Cude, and many rent-regulated tenants and neighbors.

A vote by the Subcommittee on the application is possible in the coming months. The full City Council would have to approve any of the proposed changes to the property.

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