

Scoopy's Notebook, Week of Aug. 2, 2018

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L of a meeting: Putting all that behind us, as it were...in much more serious news, let's turn to the L shutdown chaos. So far, the community lawsuit filed over the L subway shutdown scheme's so-called "alternate service plan" — i.e., the "mitigation plan" — has already resulted in the M.T.A.'s pledge to add a handicap-accessible elevator at Sixth Ave. and 14th St., and the Department of Transportation's seemingly backing away from a two-way crosstown bike lane on 13th St. But the biggest result, of course, as attorney **Arthur Schwartz** will say, is that the two agencies finally agreed to do an environmental assessment, or E.A., for the project. That study could lead to an even-lengthier environmental impact statement, or E.I.S., being required. The two agencies are downplaying the E.A. as a "supplemental" study, but, as Schwartz notes, they basically did hardly anything on this front prior to the lawsuit. Anyway, along with doing the E.A., a public hearing is also a must. That hearing will be held Mon., Aug. 6, from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 2 Broadway, 20th floor. Members of the public wishing to comment must register on the M.T.A. Web site in advance by 7 p.m. on Aug. 6. Written comments may also be presented and submitted at the meeting. The official comment period for the E.A. is from July 20 to Aug. 19. In an e-mailed statement urging a big turnout Monday, **Paul Groncki**, of the 100 W. 16th St. Block Association, said, "At issue is the M.T.A.'s woefully inadequate environmental assessment that they claim is sufficient for them to proceed with their redesign of 14th St. We claim their [E.A.] does NOT even come close to addressing our impacted neighborhood's environmental concerns. Our lawsuit demands a much more thorough environmental impact study — an E.I.S. — that is required by federal and state law." Also, in some significant news, Schwartz claimed that the federal funding for the repair of the L train's Canarsie Tunnel tubes under the East River is "on hold" now that a genuine environmental study for the whole project is being done. When we asked spokespersons for D.O.T. and the M.T.A. about that, they dismissed it outright, saying it's just not true. But Schwartz sent us the relevant court document filed by the Federal Transportation Administration that notes that the money cannot be released until the M.T.A. and F.T.A. sign off on a "construction agreement," which has not happened yet. In another letter submitted to the court, provided to us by Schwartz, a top M.T.A. official states that if it turns out the federal funding ultimately is not available, the city would seek it elsewhere and forge on with the project.

Google it: Online giant buys Chelsea Market building for \$2.5 billion

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The Chelsea Market building on the morning of Wed., Feb. 7 — the day after news broke that Google is its likely new owner. Photo by Christian Miles

BY WINNIE MCCROY | After years of local residents wondering about the future of the Chelsea Market, it now appears that Google will purchase the famous food hall from its current owner, Jamestown, for nearly \$2.5 billion — in excess of \$1,600 per square foot. In fact, Google Maps already lists 75 Ninth Ave. between 15th and 16th Sts. as the “Google Building.”

On Tues., Feb. 6, The Real Deal reported that the tech giant was in negotiations to purchase the 1.2-million-square-foot complex. Google is currently the building’s largest tenant, having previously leased about 400,000 square feet of space. After all, it’s conveniently located right across the street from the search giant’s New York headquarters at 111 Eighth Ave., which it purchased in 2010 for \$1.8 billion.

This move makes sense when looking at Google’s history at the Chelsea Market; for the past seven years, it has aggressively acquired office space at the location whenever a lease expired. In October 2012, Google added 94,000 square feet to the 1.2 million square feet it was already leasing at Chelsea Market, then leased another 84,000 square feet at the location in 2013.

The deal is expected to close within the next two months. Once it does, Jamestown will make a huge profit from its original investment of \$225 million in 2011. This is the first billion-dollar-plus real-estate sale to go under contract this year in New York, and it is expected to give an early boost to the city’s investment-sales market.

Back in 2011, members of Save Chelsea expressed concerns that Jamestown, an Atlanta-based German company, had planned to obtain the necessary zoning variances for the building only to sell it. Longtime Save Chelsea member David Holowka said that the group strongly opposed granting Jamestown the right to add a tower atop Chelsea Market that would cast shadows over the High Line, a public park.

“It sounded like bulls— then, and it still does,” Holowka said. “We all suspected that Jamestown, originally a retirement-fund investment, was only interested in increasing the value of their property so they could cash out on that increased

valuation. And the fact that they haven't built vertically shows that they were only after additional profit. I suspect that they always had Google in mind."

"It is so transparent that they are looking to cash in on the views up and down the High Line and Hudson River," he said. "And what irks me is that the value of the air rights above Chelsea Market at that end were enhanced by public money intended for a park. Also, Chelsea Market is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. You don't lightly change zoning to allow buildings to be built on top of historic places. But all these things came to pass. The local community board got behind their proposal, and I hope they don't feel like fools now."

Similarly, Bill Borock, President of the Council of Chelsea Block Associations, said, "This is exactly what we told the community board that Jamestown would do, but they felt if they didn't compromise and approve it with stipulations, they would get it anyway."

By 2012, Community Board 4 had indeed approved Jamestown's plan to add Chelsea Market to the Special West Chelsea District as a mechanism to permit building up to 250 feet above the existing market. At that time, Michael Philips, then managing director of Jamestown, said the company had no plans to sell, pointing to its long-term \$380 million mortgage as evidence of its long-term commitment.



A design rendering of Chelsea Market, viewed from the West Side Highway, depicting a vertical expansion that has yet to happen. File image courtesy Jamestown

Waterfront activist Bob Trentlyon predicted at the time, "I do not believe they are going to get the rights to build the building and then not sell to someone else. Their history is to only stay a few years, then flip it."

Jamestown has a track record of purchasing notable commercial properties — including the General Motors Building and 1290 Avenue of the Americas — solely for the short-term maximization of return for its investors, selling the properties in an average of five years.

C.B. 4 Chairperson Burt Lazarin was resigned to the fact that Google could undertake the vertical expansion that Jamestown had secured.

"It's approved," he said, "so I wouldn't be surprised that they did. If I was in real estate, that's one reason I would want to buy that building, because you don't have to go through the rezoning process. It was done four years ago, and was very controversial at the time."

"Everybody in Manhattan plays real estate; they don't keep it for the rest of their lives," Lazarin added. "Eventually, they move out. And Jamestown is a German company. I don't care if it's based in Atlanta, they're only here to make money. I don't know if this move will be for the better or worse, but I would like Google to honor their community commitments. And I assume they will keep the retail portion. It would be a pretty stupid public-relations move to eliminate the Chelsea Market."

While Google is expected to keep things running as they are in the retail portion of Chelsea Market and the recently-renovated lower level a.k.a. The Chelsea Local, what the impact will be on upstairs tenants — including the Food Network and Major League Baseball, which has a lease through 2022 — is still unknown.

It's also unclear how the sale will affect the community "gets" that Jamestown previously negotiated with C.B. 4, including a one-time capital improvements payment of \$17 million to Friends of the High Line, promised hotel jobs and a passel of community programs — some of which Jamestown has already fulfilled. Friends of the High Line declined comment.

"It will be interesting to see if the High Line says, 'We'll take the \$17 million, and we'll take the shadows,'" Borock offered.

In the past seven years, Jamestown has made significant financial contributions to at least a dozen local projects — including a food-worker training program in Long Island City, a food-incubator space, a nutritional program at two local schools, landscaping and public-art displays on the Chelsea Market concourse, sponsoring Fulton Houses' holiday party and several \$10,000 Thanksgiving turkey giveaways. Jamestown's donations include \$100,000 to the James Beard Foundation, \$36,000 to the Wellness in the Schools program, \$1,500 to P.S. 11's Annual Gala, \$1,000 to the Corlears School and \$50,000 to Friends of the High Line.

Paul Groncki, president of the 100 W. 16th Block Association, said, "They're supposed to give money to the High Line. And there's the TechUp center at Hudson Guild — does this sale put that in danger? Also, Jamestown was involved in helping save the mural from Greenwich Savings Bank [at 14th St. and Sixth Ave.]. What will happen with that? There's a lot more questions than answers about the implication of this sale."

"I would also say it's disappointing," Groncki said, "because since the big fights the community had in 2011 about expansion of the Chelsea Market, Jamestown has actually been very proactive about their role in the community in positive ways, and redeemed itself a bit in the eyes of the community. Now to find them flipping and selling and walking away from Chelsea is very disappointing."

Jamestown and Google did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Trying to keep a mural from becoming a memory

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An effort to preserve artist Julien Binford's 1950s mural, "A Memory of 14th Street and Sixth Avenue," is gaining steam. The mural wraps around the west and north walls of the inside of the former HSBC bank branch at the northwest corner of the intersection. Photo by Christian Miles

BY DUSICA SUE MALESEVIC | Preservationists, City Councilmember Corey Johnson's Office and a developer are looking to conserve a piece of 1950s New York: Julien Binford's mural at a former bank building on the corner of W. 14th St. and Sixth Ave.

Binford's mural — "A Memory of 14th Street and Sixth Avenue" — graces the lobby of a now-closed HSBC branch, according to Web sites GothamToGo and New York Songlines. Binford painted the mural in 1954 for what was then the Greenwich Savings Bank, according to New York Songlines.

Built in 1953, the one-story commercial building at 101 W. 14th St. — also known as 531 Sixth Ave. — is slated for demolition, according to the project developer, Gemini Rosemont, and [streeteasy.com](#). City records show the building was sold in April for \$42.4 million.

Brian Ferrier, Gemini Rosemont's vice president of development, said a timetable has not been set for demolition. The developer is still in the design phase, he said, adding that, in general, the project will include retail space and residential condos.

On the mural, Ferrier said, "We're investigating a couple different options."

Andrew Cronson, a junior at New York University, would pass by the vacant building on his way from class to Penn Station to catch a train back to Long Island.

"Peering in through the windows, the interior was mostly gutted, but this 150-foot mural stood out prominently among the gritty rubble and dust," Cronson said, noting that the building was designed by Halsey, McCormack & Helmer.

In late October, Cronson said he reached out to a number of advocacy groups, including Laurence Frommer of Save Chelsea.

"We think it's significant artwork," Frommer said. "It reflects the history of the area. It seems to capture the glory days of Sixth Ave."

Save Chelsea contacted Johnson's office. Erik Bottcher, the councilmember's chief of staff, said the developer has been asking galleries if they were interested in the mural, but got no takers, so the developer is, in fact, considering preserving and keeping the mural.

Groncki, also of Save Chelsea, also suggested to Johnson's office that Jamestown, the owner of the Chelsea Market building, might be interested in taking the mural, Bottcher said. Bottcher has been in touch with the investment and management company, but, as of now, Jamestown is "waiting in the wings," he said.

Jamestown declined to comment.

Frommer of Save Chelsea said that whoever takes the mural, he hopes that "it is done properly with the right conservation mindset," and preserved "in perpetuity."

Binford was born in Virginia in 1908, and died shy of his 89th birthday. He created artwork in both Virginia and New York, and "about 37 paintings for the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project" between 1938 and 1940, according to a 2015 Richmond Times-Dispatch article.

Cronson said the mural at the former bank "depicts a jovial street scene in panoramic form of what this area would have looked like in the late 1800s, back when there was an elevated train and riders used horses as a mode of transportation."

"It would be a tragedy if this mural is demolished," Johnson said in an e-mail statement. "Losing it would really be losing a piece of our history. We are working frantically to find a new home for it. We hope to succeed at this in the next few days."

Surgeon General making strides for health

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BY ALBERT AMATEAU | U.S. Surgeon

General Vivek H. Murthy told the annual community breakfast of the Greater New York YMCA last week about the efforts of the U.S. Public Health Service to promote the nation's health by encouraging walking and other physical activity.

Dr. Murthy, whose duties include overseeing the U.S. Public Health Service, gave the keynote address at the Feb. 12 event, held this year in the gymnasium under the walking/running track of the McBurney YMCA, at 125 W. 14th St.

Among elected officials at the ninth annual event was Richard Gottfried, chairperson of the New York State Assembly's Health Committee, who introduced Vice Admiral Murthy, whose title derives from his leadership of the uniformed U.S.P.H.S. Commissioned Corps. State Senator Brad Hoylman and Mary Bassett, the commissioner of the city's Department of Health, were also among the guests.

"The YMCA has been an important partner in the U.S.P.H.S. call to action on walking and community walking," said Murthy. "We're working with the Y to bring generations together to walk to improve health," he added, noting that he recently convinced his mother to begin a walking program.

Murthy said the health benefits of walking have been proven.

"Just 22 minutes a day of brisk walking can reduce a person's risk of getting diabetes by 30 percent," he said.

Appointed to his post just more than a year ago, Murthy, 38, said that he has been traveling across the country to learn about people's health concerns, and he found that addiction, diabetes and heart disease were among the top problems.

How to support options that promote good health for everyone has been the focus of the U.S.P.H.S.

“The culture has viewed healthy options in food and activity as pain,” Murthy said. “We’re trying to change that view from pain to preference.”

One indication of that cultural shift has been the rise of the private sector programs, like Healthy Chef, that offer healthful meals online. Moreover, the U.S.P.H.S. is encouraging schools to offer fresh fruits and vegetables in lunch menus, which students are beginning to prefer. The agency has also been supporting local efforts to make neighborhoods more walkable by improving street lighting, which deters violence.

Murthy said the agency has achieved some success is convincing merchants to lower the price of fruits and vegetables and raise the price of junk food.



Better health is a walk in the park — or the gym: During his recent visit to the McBurney YMCA on W. 14th St., Surgeon General Vivek Murthy took a brisk walk on the jogging track with, from left, Paul Groncki, Rita Fischer and Ruth Gursky, as they discussed the benefits of walking. Photo by Raymond Liang

Prejudice, poverty and social isolation contribute to unhealthy choices, and reducing those conditions on the national and local levels will have a positive effect on the nation’s health, Murthy said.

In addition, he said, removing the stigma of mental illness is important to encourage people to seek help. More efforts must be made to reduce childhood obesity, he said.

“It’s true that the incidence of obesity has leveled off recently, but it’s still too high among children,” Murthy said. Making physical activity a significant part of education is also important in reducing the incidence of childhood obesity, he said.

“We should start encouraging healthy choices earlier and earlier,” he stressed. “Children would influence their families and help shift the culture for the next generation.”

Murthy, raised in Florida by immigrants from India via the United Kingdom, graduated from Harvard and earned his M.D. and M.B.A. degrees at Yale. At age 17, Murthy and his sister co-founded VISIONS, an H.I.V./AIDS education program in India and the U.S.

In response to a question from state Senator Hoylman about electronic cigarettes, Murthy said he hoped the U.S. Food and Drug Administration would make a policy decision soon about e-cigarettes.

"It's not entirely true that the smoke is pure water vapor," Murthy said. "It does contain nicotine and may contain other substances."

Work also must also be done to determine if e-cigarettes help people give up smoking, the surgeon general added.

"Some say they helped them to quit, but others say they now use e-cigarettes as well as regular cigarettes," Murthy noted.

"We live in an extraordinary nation," Murthy said in conclusion, "with intelligent and caring people. I see them everywhere. It can be easy to forget the role of good and compassionate people, but we can recognize and value it. We saw it in the healing of New York City after 9/11. We can save more lives if we invest more in prevention. It's time for a new generation, defined not by age but by spirit. We need a new contract for a new vision. I believe it will happen with people who come together and make it so."

Chelsea developer hid air-rights buy from neighbors

December 24, 2013 | Filed under: [News](#) | Posted by: [The Villager](#)

BY SAM SPOKONY | Residents of W. 16th St. between Sixth and Seventh Aves. aren't going to be happy with this Christmas present: plans for a new 11-story building that will tower over everything else on their block.

After originally telling the residents that its planned residential building at 124 W. 16th St. would only be six stories tall — equivalent in height to the rest of the block — the Einhorn Development Group, which owns the site, now says it will now build to almost twice that height.

Yiannes Einhorn, principal of the development group, reportedly admitted the new plans in a conversation last week with Paul Groncki, chairperson of the 100 W. 16th St. Block Association.

"I told [Einhorn] I heard he was going to be building to 11 stories, and he said it was true," said Groncki, in a Dec. 20 phone interview.

"I was so mad that I almost walked out of the meeting. The fact is that a building of that height isn't going to be good for the neighborhood, because it's completely out of context with what's on the block now. I can't believe he went ahead with this without first having any conversations with the neighborhood."

Groncki stressed that when he first met with Einhorn in the spring, the developer claimed the building would only be six stories, and said he "loved the block."

But based on real estate transactions for the site, it would appear a higher build-out may have always been the plan.

Einhorn originally purchased 124 W. 16th St. in April 2012 from the neighboring French Evangelical Church of New York, which had previously used No. 124 as a "miscellaneous asylum and home," according to past reports.

City records show that when Einhorn made that purchase, he simultaneously bought air rights above the church itself — paving the way for eventual expansion of his plans once he demolished No. 124.

In fact, by the time Einhorn first talked to Groncki in the spring and claimed that the new building would only be six stories, the developer was already in the process of amending his construction plans — which were first filed with the purchase in April 2012 — to include 11 stories.

Einhorn filed those amended plans this May 6, according to city records.

The developer just recently received city approval for the amended plans — on Dec. 12, according to those records — which may explain why he declined to inform the local residents until this past week.

Valerie Einhorn, a representative of the developer, confirmed the city's approval of an 11-story building during a Dec. 20 phone interview, but declined to discuss other details of the plan, saying instead that the developer would be "happy to talk about it in January, after the holidays."

Yiannes Einhorn also reportedly told Groncki last week that he is prepared to meet with other block residents in the near future to explain his plans.

"I told him that it's going to be a rough conversation," Groncki said. "Everybody on the block is going to be really unhappy about this."

But the developer is probably willing to take flak from the neighborhood now, since — with the construction plans filed and city approval — there's virtually nothing that can stop him from going forward with the building.

Groncki acknowledged that, this late in the game, there's little hope of stopping the 11-story residence from going up.

"We've got no gunpowder in our gun," he said. "But they can't stop us from being upset, and they can't stop us from making noise."

Chinese takeover of Tibet protested at art opening

By Albert Amateau

A gala reception for "Treasures from the Roof of the World," a special exhibit of art from the palaces and museums in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa, attracted more than 500 invited guests and about 20 protesters organized by Students for a Free Tibet and the Tibetan Youth Congress last week to the Rubin Museum of Art in Chelsea.

Carrying signs that said "China Stole My Country" and "China Stole My Heritage," the protesters stood behind a barrier on the sidewalk in front of the Rubin Museum on W. 17th St. on a cold Feb. 23 evening urging guests to pass up the invitation. Their leaflets dubbed the exhibit "Treasures Stolen From the Roof of the World."

But even guests who sympathized with the students and deplored the 1959 takeover of Tibet by the People's Republic of China went in to see the special exhibit on two floors of the new museum. Among the guests were Tibetan Buddhist monks from Lhasa, collectors of Tibetan art, Chelsea neighbors and graphic artists from all over Manhattan.

The protest was strictly nongovernmental, according to the Office of Tibet, the official representative in New York of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile. "We do not condone the protest," said Nawang Rabgyal, a spokesperson, in a telephone interview later. "We have nothing to do with it. This is a free country and the students can do what they want," he added.

Jeff Watt, curator at the Rubin Museum, said the Dalai Lama himself had written a letter in support of the exhibit in Feb. 2002 to the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana, Cal., which organized the exhibit.

"Despite the wholesale destruction that has taken place in Tibet in recent decades, some of the works of art have survived," the Dalai Lama's letter says. "I believe that if people can visit this exhibit...and have access to informative explanation of their significance, they will come to a better understanding of the Tibetan people and their traditions. I hope that such efforts will contribute to saving Tibetan culture from disappearing forever," the letter said.

But the explanatory texts in the exhibition make no reference to China's takeover.



Villager photo by Corky Lee

Protesters at opening of exhibit at the Rubin Museum of Art

"I think this exhibit keeps the culture alive as far as most people are concerned," said Paul Groncki, a Chelsea resident and

community activist who was one of the Rubin Museum guests. "Before China took over Tibet, no one knew anything about the country or its culture," said Groncki.

A man who identified himself only as a collector of Tibetan art observed that before 1911 Tibet had been a Chinese province for several centuries. "So even if the art was 'stolen,' who was it stolen from?" he added. However, Alison Aniston, an artist who lives in Westbeth, agreed that the 1959 Chinese takeover of Tibet was brutal and said she had conflicting feelings about visiting the exhibit. "They [China] tried to destroy the culture and when they found they couldn't, they turned it into a tourist attraction," Aniston said.

Another visitor said that during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, American troops entered Beijing, looted the Imperial Palace and made off with Tibetan art objects that eventually found their way into private U.S. collections.

The 126 art objects in "Treasures From the Roof of the World" come from the Potala Palace, the Norbulingka Palace and the Tibet Museum in Lhasa. The Bowers Museum in cooperation with the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China selected the items and mounted the traveling exhibit. In addition to showing in Santa Ana, the exhibit went to the Houston Museum of Natural Science and will go later to San Francisco before returning to Tibet. At the Rubin Museum, at 150 W. 17th St., in the building formerly occupied by Barney's, the show opened Feb. 19 and closes May 9.

The art objects include a Sanskrit scroll written by Buddhist monks in Northern India about 1,000 years ago. "The reason this has survived in this condition is because it has been buried in a palace at an altitude of 5,000 ft. for 1,000 years," said Watt, regarding the scroll, which looks as if it were created yesterday.

The Dalai Lama had been shown images of all the items in the exhibit and identified the ones that he personally used before his 1959 exile in India, Watt said. "He saw one gold bowl and said, 'Oh, yes, they used to give me soup in that,' " said Watt.

Lisa Schubert, director of external affairs for the Rubin Museum, said, "We're not responding to political things. It's our mission to bring the most important and most beautiful art of the Himalayas to as wide a public as possible."

But protesters in front of the museum last week said that by not referring to the Chinese takeover, the Rubin Museum's special exhibit has indeed taken a political position in support of China's Tibet policy.

One demonstrator, Geshi Ten Ba, 46, who left Tibet in 2000, said, "It's very hard for someone who loves freedom and worships His Holiness [the Dalai Lama] to live in Tibet." He said he had been a student of Tenzin Delek, a Buddhist monk who had been sentenced to death by the Chinese government but whose sentence was commuted to life in prison after two years of international protest.