

STATEMENTS TO COMMUNITY BOARD 1 REGARDING THE HOWARD HUGHES CORPORATION'S PROPOSALS FOR SOUTH STREET SEAPORT DEVELOPMENT

Lee Gruzen

I am Lee Gruzen, the co-founder of SeaportSpeaks. Please add my observations to the record of the CB #1 Landmarks Meeting, which I attended on December 10, 2014.

The Howard Hughes Corporation has shown us a great deal tonight that is new — radical plans for the District, a powered-up architectural team, and a well-orchestrated crowd telling us to bless Howard Hughes for its largesse. Kudos to the Howard Hughes advisors. What is old and too familiar is the obfuscation of this developer.

Before we take two of New York City's most significant historic structures and repurpose them commercially, let's spell out the public's right to these landmarks, the specifics of the City's deal, the details of the architectural plan, and the impact of these changes on the buildings and the South Street Seaport Museum and District.

As for Schermerhorn Row:

Will HHC pay \$3.50 square foot for the John Street lot and the Row, a rate set in an entirely different economy and now scandalous in view of today's real estate market?

How does the design apportion housing (affordable and market-rate), retail, Museum and other uses? Knowing the proposed floor plans, what income will potentially flow to HHC? Is the affordable housing substantial enough to justify this historic assault?

Tens of millions of dollars of public and private funds plus decades of sweat equity have saved and developed Schermerhorn Row. Personally, I think of my own hours, checks, letters, actions and gifts that shaped this building, which includes Joseph Mitchell's "Old Hotel," and am unwilling to gift them to Howard Hughes. Was all this care and vision for naught?

As for the South Street Seaport Museum:

It's often forgotten that the Museum is more than its ships. SSSM's collections fill two large floors of Schermerhorn Row in carefully controlled conditions. Another floor and a half on Water Street houses its library. These holdings have been entrusted by the public and safeguarded by the State of New York. No one should think a 5,000-square-foot glass box on a damp, windy pier does the job nor should Schermerhorn Row be handed over without evaluating the environment that the Museum has built and needs for its collections.

As for the Tin Building:

I believe that the proposed glass pavilion on top will damage the Tin Building's architectural and historic integrity. The beauty of the Tin Building comes from its clean, functional simplicity. Have you ever looked at the Austin Nichols Warehouse across the East River on the Williamsburg shore? Cass Gilbert designed this grand white building as a pure form for a

unique purpose. But developers overruled preservationists a few years ago and constructed penthouses that compromised its profile and historical impact. The Tin Building should not suffer this outcome. Even if used for "culture," something suggested by the architect, the glass addition is intended more likely for income and should not be endorsed without recognizing all consequences from this alteration.

As for Benefits to the Community, \$300 million of them according to HHC:

Name one. A school that we've been told is merely a few classrooms doubling as a community center? Support for a Museum that hasn't been forthcoming in any way since the HHC lease began? A promenade around the waters' edge and a market for fresh food — even New Jersey has that. Granted, a lively place could be more fun than the wasteland that HHC has administered since Sandy, but we have no guarantee, and certainly no indication, that it will be compatible to New Yorkers and residents. The rendering suggests a mega world that will obliterate the intimacy of a still-authentic Seaport. Until proven otherwise by the CB #1 Landmarks Committee, the benefits to the community remain fictional while the sacrifices are real.

Madeline Rogers

I submit the testimony below as a cofounder of SeaportSpeaks and a former New Amsterdam Market board member. My enduring interest in the Seaport took root during my 11 years on staff at the South Street Seaport Museum, where I served as editor of the magazine and eventually served as Vice President for programs & publications (1990-2002).

I attended the December 10 CB 1 Landmarks Meeting and felt compelled to respond to the Howard Hughes proposal.

Although I am technically not a member of the community, as I live and work in the Upper Westside, I am a lifelong New Yorker who — as I have said at previous CB1 meetings — views the Seaport historic district (its street patterns, its assemblage of buildings, its waterfront location) as a historic site of national importance that belongs to all of us, and whose integrity must be preserved if its significance as the birthplace of the Port of New York is to be communicated to future generations.

As a significant historic site whose preservation has come at a huge cost in taxpayer and private dollars, the fate of its precious artifacts, such as Schermerhorn Row and the Tin Building, should not be placed in the hands of a private developer who has, to date, demonstrated the grossest insensitivity to everything that makes the Seaport special.

I am particularly disturbed by the prospect of turning Schermerhorn Row into housing of any kind. This irreplaceable group of buildings with its preserved interior spaces and astonishingly rich history has long been one of the central artifacts in the Museum's collection and is key to understanding the district.

The Row also houses thousands of other Museum artifacts reflecting the history of Port and of the neighborhood, including many items from the now-relocated Fish Market.

To evict the Museum from that building, which was renovated with millions of public and private funds, would deprive the public access to one of the great treasures of New York.

It is a typically cynical move by HHC to propose using the Row for a purpose near and dear to our new mayor's heart. There are many better places to locate affordable housing than inside an irreplaceable historic structure.

As for HHC's proposal for the Tin Building: it is clear from their plans that this iconic market shed would be nothing more than a grand entrance to their monstrously bloated glass mall on the pier beyond. I point to the proposed canopied walkway that would link them.

Their proposed addition to the Tin Building roof also needs to be closely questioned. Unless they are willing to provide a concrete rationale for that extra square footage, which they airily describe as "cultural" space, this alteration to a historic structure must be viewed with extreme skepticism. HHC should not be given another square INCH of rentable space in the Seaport without being able to justify its true value to the public, and they certainly should not be allowed to alter a historic building simply, as I suspect, to further line their pockets.

HHC's showing on December 10 demonstrated one thing clearly: they know how to win "friends": give out free t-shirts, promise free food and skating to those who will wear them to a hearing, and win additional friends with vague promises of jobs and community amenities that are as flimsy and fleeting as the temporary signage and structures with which they have littered the historic district for the past two years.

Historic Districts Council

Last night, the Howard Hughes Corporation presented the [latest iteration](#) of the proposed South Street Seaport redevelopment to Community Board 1's preservation committee and the public.

The plan presented, as a whole, is a new attempt at reviving the failed festival marketplace strategy of decades ago and adding a 2014 patina of more bulk and retail to the district. The current schematic takes the oldest neighborhood in New York City and dresses it in an abundance of fluorescent lights, covers it in peculiar paving and awnings, and alters its historic buildings and urban fabric.

For consistency, the new features will be knitted cohesively with a thread of homogenized mediocrity. It will render New York's appearance to the likes of anywhere else, when our city's aesthetic is derived from its history and that is why it appears different. This plan is counterproductive, as it will move a landmarked building in order to afford better views of a new mall, yet its new tower will block views of New York's favorite icon: the Brooklyn Bridge.

As a Texas mall developer, Howard Hughes Corp. may be accustomed to a formula of building on pieces of flat land where nothing exists. This paradigm is translated to the corporation's treatment of the Seaport, where they are prepared to build what seems to be a new city within a city. The Seaport is not a barren piece of land with little investment or

public interest, nor a resource to bleed dry, but a unique palette of historic properties to work from, which contribute to all of Lower Manhattan and the city beyond.

Historic Districts Council statement to Community Board 1

The Historic Districts Council is the advocate for New York City's designated historic districts, individual landmarks and structures meriting preservation. We thank you for this opportunity to voice our opinions on the future of the South Street Seaport, one of the city's oldest and most distinctive neighborhoods.

Schermerhorn Row

Built in 1810-12, Schermerhorn Row represents the earliest commercial-style architecture in New York City. Commerce in New York City began here, and for over two centuries, this group of buildings has survived as the heart of the Seaport. HDC is disturbed by the proposal to convert these rare spaces into housing of any type—affordable or not. Home to the South Street Seaport Museum, this conversion would effectively divorce the museum from its history, including the time capsule gem: the Fulton Ferry Hotel spaces. Not long ago this remarkable collection of buildings received expensive and publicly funded interior renovations to be able to operate commercially and as a museum. This functional use remains relevant and constructing a new building for the museum is unnecessary. Residential conversion will erase these spaces and leave behind only a shell.

Tin Building

Together, the Tin Building and the New Market Building are the city's last remaining riverfront market halls. With only two buildings of this type left in New York City, the redevelopment and adaptive reuse of the Tin Building should preserve it in its original form, unadulterated. Accretions to the Tin Building are not merited as there is abundant space, both in the historic existing buildings and in the impending new construction. Further, HDC feels that moving a landmarked structure compromises its context: this building type is characterized by its location along the shore's edge – directly over the water on piles.

The buildings and context of the South Street Seaport have precedence over what is proposed to exist, just as the public's demands have precedence over the profit-making ambitions of the latest lease-holder. It is important to remember that most of the district, including the buildings in question, are not private property. They are owned by the City of New York, and its citizens have the right to help determine their future.