July 34, 2015

Honorable Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer

1 Centre Street, 19th Floor

New York, NY 10007

Dear Hon. Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer:

We request an investigation into the possible conflict of interest with our Community Board Eleven Chairperson Mr. Matthew Washington with his employer’s interests coming before, and conflicting with his public service. The problem for Mr. Washington’s interests raises concerns on his direct involvement with the up zoning of East Harlem that will clearly benefit his employer and his business associates.

Mr. Washington is the Deputy Director of External Affairs at The Durst Organization working directly for Mr. Jordan Barowitz (Vice President and Director of External Affairs). Mr. Barowitz oversees government and media relations as well as corporate giving. He directed public affairs for the construction and opening of the 2.1 million square foot One Bryant Park, the first LEED Platinum skyscraper ever built. In 2013, with the project team, he successfully won the zoning changes for a 709-unit residential rental tower on West 57th Street.

In light of Mr. Washington’s commitment to The Durst Organization and their future interests in rezoning East Harlem, it is imperative that we question his services as the Chairperson for Community Board Eleven. His continued role with CB11 appears to be in conflict with the fact that The Durst Organization owns two properties in East Harlem, 61-63 East 125th Street within the area currently being pushed by Mr. Washington (as chairperson of CB11) for major up zoning benefits that we believe to be developed in conjunction with the nearby East Harlem Media, Entertainment and Cultural Center that will send area rents skyrocketing in the immediate future.

Community Planning Board Eleven Chairperson Mr. Matthew Washington is currently on the board of two East Harlem housing organizations, El Barrio Operation Fight Back and Hope Community. We feel an otherwise underlining conflict can also be raised by the fact that Operation Fightback has just received an assignment for preservation strategy which simply has not been enough with the community now besieged by displacement pressure that Operation Fightback has not objected to in any of their public statements regarding their future programming.

Now, with the designation of the ‘East Harlem Media, Entertainment and Cultural Center’ project by HPD on 125th street and the Council President’s selection of El Barrio's Operation Fight Back to provide preservation strategies for El Barrio/ East Harlem is simply not sufficient to satisfy the actual needs of the community and it is viewed as an improper gesture by an administration that appears to operate outside of the ethical practice and principles of community development to serve the community. Our question is “who is being served by the power and prestige commanded by Mr. Washington while our community awaits a real focus on preserving the current affordable housing, and arresting the displacement pressure with sound community programming”. We raise our concerns awaiting your clearances while the future up zoning of East Harlem is up for grabs. Clearly it is time to halt further discussions on rezoning East Harlem until this important matter can be resolved. How can we wait this out while this issue is being digested without harming the neighborhood any further by these nefarious connections?

Many folks are questioning the ethics and interest conflicts since Mr. Washington works for a major developer of residential and commercial developments making substantial investments and programming changes in East Harlem. We simply wish for a clarification on his multiple roles and an education for the community on the ethical practices that must be followed as a matter of protocols and good government. We hope that you agree. Can you please call for an investigation into this matter as another example of sound governmental practices under your helm?

Sincerely,

Roberto Anazagasti

cc: Aldrin Bonilla, Deputy Borough President

Attached to this document contains the petition that displays the law in which we found that makes Mr. Washington’s position on Community Board 11 Manhattan a possible conflict of interest. It needs to be investigated by the ethics board.