ABSENT: Cao, McCall, Noti-Victor

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE on behalf of LUHZ COMMITTEE

Letter to the Dept of Buildings re: Ameritania Sign

Dear Commissioner Tigani:

The Land Use, Housing and Zoning Committee of Manhattan Community Board 5 recently heard testimony from the leadership of the West 50s Neighborhood Association on the matter of an allegedly illegal illuminated LED advertising sign located on the Ameritania Hotel at 230 West 54th Street in Manhattan and not accessory to the hotel use. The sign is believed to directly interfere with at least 180 apartments to the north of the sign along Broadway.

We are writing to request that the Department, as the enforcing agency for signage, review the status of this sign and inform the Community Board and the copied parties of this letter on its recommended course of action.

Here is a recent image of the sign:

As presented to the Committee and based on DOB records, this is the history of the illuminated sign:

- In 2017, DOB issued three “immediately hazardous” violations with the handwritten remedy to “Remove illegal sign” on each violation. The owner paid $15,000 in penalties but did not remove the sign;

The DOB summons, October 14, 2017.

- In 2019, the owner indicated that the sign was taken down and DOB accepted that status without making an inspection. Also that year, then Assembly Member to the area, Linda Rosenthal, asked DOB to enforce ZR 32-64 which protects residences from sign illumination but this did not occur;
- At some point after 2019, the sign was issued a permit which expired in 2022 but was not renewed;
- In 2023, the sign was sold to Blackstone, a large private equity firm, whose entity does not appear on the registration and DOB had indicated that any prior registration was not transferable;
- In 2024, the DOB Special Enforcement Team, in auditing a sign application for this location, indicated the applicability of ZR 32-64 and issued an Intent to Revoke;
- In a phone conversation with DOB earlier this year, MCB5 staff was told that a brightness reduction was arranged with the sign owner but this agreement is not on the public record.
- Soon after this conversation, there was a filing by the owner to add "Flashing" to the sign's expired permit in violation of the 2017 permit which allows direct light only.

The West 50s Neighborhood Association has filed FOIL requests to compile a complete record of DOB's actions in this matter, but a number of items were not provided or were deemed protected. The Community Board Five office has also repeatedly engaged with DOB on this matter, but the information we have received has not been complete, clear, accurate, or fully responsive to our inquiries.

We would therefore appreciate your assistance in fully revealing the paper trail and clarifying the record of DOB's actions in this matter.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and we look forward to reviewing the material as soon as possible.

Exec Committee Vote on DOB Letter: 14-0-0-0

APPROVE: **Borden, Dalal, Goshow, Hutton, Goshow, Lavingia, Mijatovic, Ng, Noti-Victor, Patel, Sigman, Sherburne, Stewart, Tuchman,**

OPPOSE: None

ABSTAIN: **None** ***PRESENT NOT ENTITLED:*** **None**

ABSENT: Chou, McCall