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FROM COUNCIL MEMBER

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Community Board 5 Report

January 11, 2007

Councilwoman Mendez Fights for Gramercy Parkside and Ten Eyck Tenants: Last month Councilwoman Mendez and East Side elected officials wrote the Salvation Army expressing their concern over the agency's plans to sell the Gramercy Parkside and Ten Eyck buildings, which housed over 300 SRO tenants. The officials have also contacted Manhattan Legal Services and Metropolitan Council on Housing to provide legal and organizing help for the residents. It appears that neither building has been sold yet, but a majority of tenants have already vacated their rooms, leaving only 1/3 of the rooms occupied. Elected officials and the Salvation Army will likely meet in the coming days to discuss how more displacement may be avoided.

Councilwoman Mendez Votes Against 421a Tax Breaks for Developers: The City Council passed a major reform of the 421-a Tax Abatement Program on Dec. 20, 2006. The new law significantly expands the geographic areas in which developers must build affordable housing to qualify for generous tax breaks. Additionally, to get the break in Councilwoman Mendez's district, a developer has to make 20 percent of the on-site units affordable to low-income households. This is a major reform from the existing policy that allowed developers to build the affordable housing anywhere in the city, leading to economic segregation. Councilwoman Mendez believes that the new law is an improvement on the old 421-a program, but voted against this compromise plan based on the testimony presented at the City Council. She believes the final bill should have required a higher percentage of affordable housing to be built on-site in most of Manhattan, considering the lucrative returns of developers in this area. Councilwoman Mendez is still hopeful that the state legislature will improve on the proposed reforms when the bill goes to Albany for approval this year.

Councilwoman Mendez Supports Pedicab Regulation: On Jan. 3, Councilwoman Mendez submitted testimony at CB5's public hearing on pedicabs in support of industry regulation. The Councilwoman is a cosponsor of Intro 75, a bill to require operators of pedicabs to have New York State driver's licenses and liability insurance, and to complete a pedicab safety-training course. It will also mandate that pedicabs have clearly displayed license plates and undergo regular inspections. In her testimony Councilwoman Mendez expressed her dissatisfaction with a provision of Intro 75 limiting the number of pedicab licenses issued. She believes that industry regulations and the laws of supply and demand will better control their numbers. She will push for an amendment to the Intro as it progresses through the Council.

Volunteers Needed to Help During Homeless Outreach Population Estimate: On Monday, Jan 29, the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) will conduct the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE 2007). The agency needs volunteers to assist in canvassing parks, subways and other public places to count the number of people living on city streets. Volunteers will meet at 10:30 p.m. on Jan 29 for a brief training and orientation. Teams of four-to-five people will then be dispatched throughout the city with an experienced social service provider to do the count between Midnight and 4 a.m. To register to volunteer, or for more information, please call 311 or go to: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dhs/html/about/hope_content2.shtml