

Ten Reasons Van Cortlandt Village Residents Oppose Plan by Urban Pathways

Supportive Housing Proposal is too big for 3469 Cannon Place – and its Prospective Residents

The following paper explains some of the reasons why residents in Van Cortlandt Village are opposed to the proposal by Urban Pathways to build a 74-unit supportive housing facility at 3469 Cannon Place a.k.a. 3482 Fort Independence Street. We are proponents of supportive housing and we have stated many times that an 8-10 unit facility is the appropriate size for the site. The project as proposed violates principles of supportive housing and urban planning. This paper is not intended to be an exclusive list, nor is it meant to represent the views of every person in the community.

Prepared by: Kristin Hart, Daniel Padernacht, Lynn Schwarz
Contact info: (347) 614-0005



1. Questionable and Wasteful Use of Public Funds

The use of public funds for this project is questionable and wasteful for these reasons:

- A. The cost of developing this site is notably more than comparable supportive housing facilities. By their own numbers, Urban Pathways estimates the cost of this project between \$22 and \$25 million dollars. The Jericho Project, a 72-unit supportive housing facility in the area has a projected cost of \$15.8 million dollars. Taxpayer dollars need to be spent more efficiently during our current economic crisis.
- B. The funding of this project will be done as a grant rather than a loan. At the end of 30 years, Urban Pathways will own the land and building at no cost to its own organization. This is an invitation to waste and corruption.
- C. Cost overruns are inevitable. The only reason that Urban Pathways can build on this site is because they have the full faith and confidence in taxpayer dollars to cover cost overruns. This site has never been developed because of its topography. Developers have feared going bankrupt because of the rock. It has been determined time and time again to be a financially infeasible site to build. In 1964, the owner of 3469 Cannon Place filed an Application for Extension of Period to Complete Construction with the Board of Standards and Appeals (attached). In this application, it is stated that: “when construction was about to be commenced the severe rock conditions which were found caused a revision of the garage plan.” This construction was abandoned.

Also in 1964, Cannon Heights, a Mitchell-Lama building within proximity to the subject site, used blasting to remove the rock on the same mountain. The developers realized a multitude of problems along the way including streams within the rock. The cooperators of that building were forced to take a second mortgage on the property to cover cost overruns for the construction of the property.

- D. Using taxpayer dollars for a project the community opposes is an insult to our community. Representative Eliot Engel has stated that construction of this project in opposition to the community board’s vote will be a miscarriage of democracy.

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- E. The homeless population who require supported services are better suited in smaller facilities to address their needs. Smaller facilities also address the concerns of the host community. A 74-unit facility warehouses homeless people in a large institution to line the pockets of developers.
- F. This size facility and its proposed mix of supportive housing and affordable housing can be viewed as institutionalizing its residents. This may be in violation of Title II of the American with Disabilities Act and § 504 of the Rehabilitation Act as highlighted in the recent decision by United States District Court Judge Nicholas Garaufis in Disability Associates, Inc. v. Paterson. Hence, the outlay of tax dollars on a site that may be found contrary to law is questionable.

2. Project Contrary to Fundamental Principle of Supportive Housing and May be in Violation of Federal Law

Supportive Housing works when it blends into the community and renders itself invisible. Speaking about a supportive housing project, Jessica Katz, production manager for New York City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), Division of Special Needs, which helps fund and develop these programs citywide, states: "These buildings are completely invisible...You can walk by it 100 times and not know it's anything special. It's just like everywhere else, and that's the way it needs to be for the people who are part of these programs to become members of society." Supportive Housing Preserves Dignity for Struggling New Yorkers, NY Daily News, February 14, 2008.

This project will not be invisible for two reasons. First, given the topography of the site, and the size of the structure, this building will be seen from miles away. Its physical presence will always attract attention. Second, a large supportive housing facility on a small residential street will be the subject of unfavorable notoriety within the community.

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Sun setting over 3469 Cannon Place, Bronx, NY

3. Obstruction of Air and Light

Cannon Place sits elevated above Fort Independence Street in varying heights ranging from approximately 45 feet on its northern boundary to 70 feet on its southern boundary. The land itself is comprised mostly of rock reaching different

heights throughout the lot. It can best be described as a rock cliff. Cannon Place sits near the peak of a large hill which makes this lot visible from miles away. The developer has stated that it intends to build the entrance on Cannon Place with stilts on top of the rock facing Ft. Independence Street and the ensuing valley.

It will loom over a narrow one-way street, cutting off almost all light and restricting air flow to the residents of Cannon Place. In addition, given the topography and location of the site, the structure will tower approximately 14 stories above Fort Independence Street restricting air and light to the community below.

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~Dan Donovan, Topographical Engineer, Borough of the Bronx

4. Destroy Aesthetic Cohesion and Space between Buildings

A structure of this magnitude will leave a disastrous footprint on our landscape. Our historic neighborhood is a diversified mix of single family homes, small apartment houses, large housing complexes and major social, health and educational institutions. In addition, there is a regional water system facility (the Jerome Park Reservoir) in which a runner's track is planned to be built. There is an aesthetic appeal to our streets. Our large buildings are situated far enough from each other to offer residents a feeling of open space.

The famous landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed Central Park, designed the streets in our neighborhood. According to Daniel J. Donovan, the Topographic Engineer of the Borough of the Bronx:

"the area surrounding the Jerome Park Reservoir is a remarkably intact portion of the Olmsted and Croes plan of 1877...It is clear that Olmsted's intent in providing neighborhoods like Kingsbridge Heights with narrow, curvilinear streets was to assure that they would maintain their residential character, discourage inappropriate development, and preserve their existing natural beauty. The charming character of the residential neighborhoods surrounding the reservoir is due not to chance, but to the intervention of Olmsted, whose influence similarly saved Riverdale from the imposition of a rectilinear street grid." Jerome Park Conservancy Report: History and Evaluation of the Jerome Park Reservoir, August 1998.

This site is directly across a narrow street from a large apartment building. It is approximately 100 feet north of another large apartment building and in proximity to a dozen single-family homes on the same street. This is not midtown Manhattan nor does our community want to

emulate the claustrophobic feel of that environment. The construction of another large building will interrupt the synergy of space in the area. This is a neighborhood in which many families have remained for generations.

The project proposed by Urban Pathways will undermine Olmsted's aesthetic vision of our residential neighborhood which remains intact to this day.

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5. Saturation of Community Facilities

Our neighborhood has more than its fair share of large social service and community facilities. A supportive housing facility blurs the line between commercial and residential use because it is providing commercial services. A facility of this size will further undermine the residential feel of the community.

Also, the proposed project will drain the already overburdened health resources and emergency services of our community. The occupants of a large supportive housing facility will need access to these local resources.

Some of the facilities in our area include, but are not limited to:

- a. **Kingsbridge Heights Rehabilitation and Care Center**, a 400 bed nursing home (equivalent in size to a large NYS hospital), which is less than 250 feet from the proposed facility, on the same narrow street;
- b. **Ft. Independence Houses**, a 21 story, 342 unit low-income housing project located two blocks away;
- c. **The Jericho Project**, a 72 unit mixed-use facility for veterans less than one mile from the proposed facility;
- d. **A proposed supportive housing facility** at 3882 Cannon Place, 1/4 mile away;
- e. **Bailey Houses**, another large low-income project in close proximity;
- f. A **group home** at 3356 **Ft. Independence Street**, two blocks from the proposed facility;
- g. **James J. Peters VA Medical Center**, 311 hospital beds and 120 nursing home beds;
- h. **FEGS operates a 50 unit supportive housing facility** at 2666 Kingsbridge Terrace.

6. Inexperience of Urban Pathways in Running this Type of Facility

Urban Pathways currently runs ONE supportive housing facility and has run that facility for 13 years. Now they are developing four additional facilities simultaneously. They will be expanding from 55 to 377 units in a very short period of time – while seeking at least \$65 million in taxpayer dollars to do so.

Urban Pathways has no experience running a mixed-use facility in which the occupants are subject to fewer regulations. There are reservations about their ability to expand in a way as to properly vet clients and run all of these facilities safely.

In addition, last year, Urban Pathways changed from a “continuum of care” model to the “housing first” model (See www.urbanpathways.org/pdf/annual_report_2009.pdf). This means that clients move directly from the street to housing without mandated sobriety or psychiatric care. Housing First “aims to move the most vulnerable homeless people directly to permanent housing without transitional placement...The Housing First approach offers direct access to housing without sobriety requirements as well as voluntary participation in supportive services, based on consumer choice... Housing First programs target those unable to succeed in a more structured approach to services and those resistant to accepting services.” (Pearson, Montgomery & Locke (2009), Housing Stability Among Homeless Individuals with Serious Mental Illness Participating in Housing First Programs, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 37, 3, 404-417).



7. Risk to Health and Public Safety

During construction, Cannon Place will be continually obstructed. The closing of Cannon Place risks the safety of our residents. In a medical emergency, each second is critical. Emergency vehicles will lose vital time in reaching and leaving destinations in our neighborhood. In addition to the private homes on the surrounding streets, Kingsbridge Heights Rehabilitation and Care Center is located on Cannon

Place, less than 200 feet from the site. That facility contains 400 beds. Cannon Place is the only route traveled by emergency vehicles from this facility. Construction closure places all of these residents at risk and creates the danger of vehicles travelling in the wrong direction on small one-way streets.

Large diesel trucks will constantly pollute the air in our community. There will be concentrated fumes inhaled by our community each day for two to three years. Notably, these noxious gases will be in proximity to many children and seniors whose immune systems may not be able to tolerate such poisons.

After the construction period, a building of this size will require and attract increased traffic on two small residential streets. The only entrance to Cannon Place is via Giles Place, another small residential one-way street. A facility of this size will require food deliveries, maintenance deliveries, trash collection, oil deliveries, vendor visits and there will be trash pick-ups. The occupants and staff will require transportation to and from the building. This activity means a constant inflow of trucks to these two residential streets. Trucks will interrupt the flow of traffic. Trucks will be parked on the sidewalk. All of the vehicles will pollute the air in the community.

Urban Pathways refuses to construct the entrance on Ft. Independence Street which is a larger street and more suitable for traffic.



8. Large Influx of Temporary Housing in a Family-Oriented Neighborhood

Urban Pathways proposes to comprise the building with a mix of 65% supportive housing units and the remaining 35% as affordable housing to individuals or families with an income of less than \$36,000 per annum. In the 74-unit facility that has been proposed, this amounts to 50 studio units of supportive housing coupled with 24 studio or one bedroom apartments. This creates a large population of temporary housing in a family-oriented area.

Urban Pathways provides housing until the occupant can successfully live independently. They do not force the occupant to leave but the goal is to transition the occupant to live on their own. It is temporary by design.

In addition, the proposed unit size of the remaining apartments is geared towards single occupants. This is a neighborhood in which many families have remained for decades. A building of this size will concentrate a large amount of temporary housing into a community where people have raised their families for generations.

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9. Impact and Risks of Large Construction Project to Community

The construction will have a devastating impact on the quality of life for our residents. Cannon Place, which is a narrow, one way street, will be used as a construction staging site. This is due to the extreme slope of the rock on the subject lot. Construction equipment, materials and machinery will be sited on Cannon Place. There will be idling dump trucks, concrete trucks, front-loaders and bull-dozers on Cannon Place. There will be a large crane on this small street. Construction will effectively close down the street each day. The noise level will be unbearable.

Sidewalks will be run over and cracked. Water and sewer lines may be damaged as has occurred in the past. Giles Place and Cannon Place have a delicate infrastructure. The retaining wall that holds up Cannon Place collapsed in 1979. Another collapse during the proposed construction will be horrific for the community.

These conditions and risks will last for years. Urban Pathways states that it will take approximately 18 months to build this structure. Due to the topography of the site, and the multiple number of projects that Urban Pathways is concurrently developing, we anticipate construction to take considerably longer.

As an indication of delays, Urban Pathways appears to have fallen behind schedule on its development located at Hughes Avenue in the Bronx. Urban Pathways stated that construction on that site would begin no later than June 2009. A visit to Hughes Avenue in January 2010 revealed a construction site where the ground had hardly been broken. The opening date of that building was pushed back to November 2011.

10. Exacerbate Parking Problem

Our community has a shortage of parking. Many of our residents are the targets of costly parking tickets due to the lack of parking. The construction of this building will exacerbate the parking problem in the area with an influx of occupants and staff to serve their population.

Thank you.