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Velázquez, Menchaca Call for Moratorium of Demolition at Lidgerwood Building

New York, NY – U.S. Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (D-NY) and NYC Councilman Carlos Menchaca (D-Red Hook) have written to UPS, calling on the company to place a moratorium on demolition activity on the south side of the Lidgerwood Building at 202 Coffey Street in Red Hook, Brooklyn. The moratorium would provide time for an engineering study on the feasibility of preserving at least the south façade of the historic building, which faces Valentino Park.

The full text of the letter is below.

May 31, 2019

David Abney,
UPS Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Corporate Office
55 Glenlake Parkway, NE
Atlanta, GA 30328

Dear Chairman Abney,

We write you with some urgency over UPS's treatment of a site purchased for a distribution center in Red Hook, Brooklyn, NY. Last Friday UPS commenced demolition of 202 Coffey Street, a building of historic and civic importance to the community. Constructed in 1882 before the Statue of Liberty was dedicated or the Brooklyn Bridge completed, the Lidgerwood building housed the manufacturing center for machinery used to build the Panama Canal and main dam of New York's Croton reservoir. This building is valued for its history, architecture and its dominant presence framing Valentino Park, the only City waterfront park in Red Hook, Brooklyn.

The Councilman's office has been meeting with UPS for months and was led to believe that UPS was looking into preserving part of the building the community most cared about, which it demanded by

petition. Last Friday's demolition permit on the eve of a holiday weekend came as a surprise. Following a conference call earlier this week of our staff with your development team, it became clear that UPS never fully analyzed the possibility of preserving the south façade, despite the Councilman's specific requests.

We therefore formally request that:

1. UPS do an engineering study on the feasibility of preserving at least the south façade of the Lidgerwood building publicly facing Valentino Park.
2. UPS put a moratorium on any further demolition of the south wall along Coffey Street until its preservation can be fully assessed and there has been community consultation.

The Congresswoman spoke at the end of the day yesterday with the UPS President of Global Public Affairs Laura Lane who reported that UPS had stopped demolition on the south building adjacent to the park and is no longer doing any more demolition to that part of the building complex. We would like to ensure this is and remains the case. President Lane also made the point that there is no way that wall can support a three-story building. We do not see why stabilization, wall-bracing and a set-back of the new structure behind it has not been explored. It is understood that this would need to be discussed considering the basic parameters of your plan for the site, which has not been shared. Hence, the Congresswoman strongly recommended UPS hold a community meeting reiterating what the Councilman has been requesting. President Lane agreed and had staff begin to follow up to coordinate with our staff on timing and location of the meeting, which we appreciate.

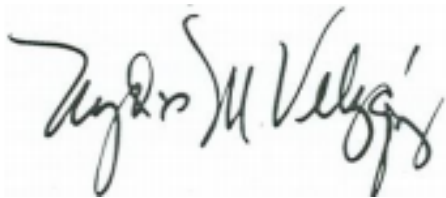
There has also been community concern over the quick method of demolition and the handling of asbestos to which there was a stop work order last Friday that was in effect until yesterday when demolition resumed. We understand that a lot of the interior and roofing asbestos had been or is being abated and what asbestos remains is in the sealant painted on the brick close to the roofline and not friable. Our staff established in talking with your staff that the remaining asbestos was inert and would not pose a safety risk if not disturbed and therefore would not constitute a reason to take the entire building down as has been previously stated by members of your team.

If structural integrity of this building -- which has stood for a century and a half -- is at issue, we suggest an engineer could shore-up the walls in question with steel I-beams and other techniques, which is a common construction practice. We therefore feel it is more a matter of will. It appears your approach to-date in assessing the options did not prioritize preservation. In fact, securing NYC Department of Buildings and Department of Environmental Protection permits for demolition ignored the local community board chairman's letter last month asking for an evaluation of the historic building and that no further permits be issued "that would alter the exterior or damage the structural integrity of these buildings until the Landmarks Preservation Commission has made a determination."

While UPS claims to respect the historical memory of the building, we suggest that knocking it all down and reincorporating some 4,000 bricks that can be salvaged and color matching new brick in the design of the future building is inadequate. The best way to respect the history and memory of the building would be at minimum to keep the original park-facing façade intact, shore it up and build the new building wall behind it. Since UPS has the whole block to work with, this should not greatly impinge on the usable space. While your team claims to have come up with the best and safest option, we suggest that it was rather the expedient option, not the best, certainly not by the community.

Having the community conversation about this and your plans for the site and operations is a first step. Thank you for your consideration of our requests, which are important if we are to work together going forward.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Nydia M. Velázquez in black ink.

Nydia M. Velázquez
Congresswoman

Handwritten signature of Carlos Menchaca in blue ink.

Carlos Menchaca
Councilmember

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