



Welcome To Chelsea, BRC

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For 40 years, the Bowery Residents' Committee has been working successfully to break the cycle of homelessness in New York. They do this through a unique program that helps clients first achieve stability in their physical health, mental health, and sobriety — then works with them to find and retain housing and employment. They operate dozens of well-run programs throughout the city, including multi-service sites at 324 Lafayette St. and 315-317 Bowery.

They now have a plan, in progress, to develop in Chelsea a 12-story, 100,000-square-foot vertical campus at 127 W. 25th St. Several programs will operate under one roof, including an expansion of their help to the homeless.

Last week, BRC executive director Muzzy Rosenblatt led our publisher, associate editor and reporter on an extensive tour of their 324 Lafayette facility, during which we met administrators, counselors and clients. We emerged fully confident about the necessity of a 25th St. facility, as well as the BRC's ability to successfully accomplish this undeniably ambitious project. The BRC has our unequivocal support.

The decision to support BRC was not made lightly. It happened only after a long and contentious vetting process by the city and community. The BRC is a nonprofit entering into a landlord/tenant relationship for which they are under no legal obligation to secure the blessings of the community board, politicians or neighborhood advocates. We nevertheless believe that the BRC has been responsive, open, and transparent with the community about their plan.

We encourage readers interested in learning more about this project to access the BRC website — www.brc.org — which lays out a description of the new program, detailed responses to questions from members of the community, the BRC's strategy for safety and security as well as the organization's funding sources, and support letters from business and residential neighbors.

The opposition to the BRC facility rightfully insisted on a transparent presentation of zoning, security, and other issues — but we believe their argument that the facility poses a security, economic and quality of life threat to the 25th St. block and the neighborhood in general is not persuasive.

The blocks on which BRC's Lafayette Street and Bowery facilities now stand are populated by everything from mom and pop shops to upscale stores to NYU dorms to numerous residences. This clearly demonstrates that such a facility can exist alongside business and residential entities without causing any damage to personal safety or the bottom line.

As for the effectiveness of their programs, BRC has, over four decades, been thoroughly vetted and scrutinized by city, state and local interests. A further vote of confidence must be given when one realizes that the most contentious element of the plan — a 200-bed shelter which will be filled by homeless men with mental health challenges — does not allow for any coming and going. These men will be effectively locked down until their treatment is complete.

Some neighborhood organizations are still calling for the BRC to start with considerably less than 200 beds and then work their way up as they prove their ability to manage the program. But for the entire project to be financially possible, the shelter must operate at or near capacity. We are confident that BRC has the experience and track record to make this larger project a success.

Having 200 homeless people off of our streets and getting quality care is far better than 75 or 100. Addicts come in all shapes, sizes and levels of economic status. Even the most upstanding of Chelsea citizens may one day find themselves in desperate need of the services being responsibly dispensed at BRC. When that day comes, we're grateful that BRC will be there to welcome and help you — without judgment — in your quest for sobriety.

We are convinced that, in the long term, Chelsea will not only embrace the BRC, but will be proud that W. 25th St. is home to a standard-setting facility that turns people's lives around.