

UNIFORMED
FIRE DEPARTMENT, CITY OF NEW YORK
FIRE OFFICERS
LOCAL 854, INTERNATIONAL ASSN. OF FIREFIGHTERS, AFL-CIO
ASSOCIATION

125 MAIDEN LANE * 6TH FLOOR * NEW YORK, NY 10038
T E L: (212) 293-9300 * F A X: (212) 292-1560 * WWW.UFOA.ORG

November 12, 2015

Daniel A. Nigro
Commissioner
New York City Fire Department
9 MetroTech Center
Brooklyn, NY 11201

RE: Request for information regarding proposed tall wood construction in New York City

Dear Commissioner Nigro:

We write today – as representatives of New York City’s bravest – regarding recent news reports concerning proposed plans for the construction of a 120-foot-high, 10-story luxury condominium building to be constructed in Manhattan entirely out of wood. The building in question, proposed by 130-134 Holdings LLC for a site at 475 West 18th Street, was recently announced as a winning submission to the U.S. Tall Wood Building Prize Competition.

Specifically, in the interest of protecting the safety of our members, we respectfully request information on what reviews, discussions, and/or approvals have occurred to-date at the Buildings Department and the Fire Department on this building’s proposed construction plans. As you can imagine, we are gravely concerned about the potential fire safety hazards that would be created for our members as a result of using only wood for the core, framing and other structural elements of a building of this unprecedented size and height in New York City.

It is our understanding that the 2015 International Building Code precludes wood-framed structures exceeding five stories; this is, in part, due to the obvious structural and safety concerns that the utilization of wood introduces to a given building, especially as such concerns relate to the combustibility of timber in relation to other materials. In fact, it was precisely these concerns raised at the International Code Council Committee Action Hearings, held in April of this year, that contributed to the Committee’s disapproval of a proposal to increase the timber building height limit to nine stories and 100 feet. The vote by the committee was overwhelming, with more than 87% of the committee voting in opposition to this proposed modification.¹

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* UNION LABEL & SERVICE TRADES COUNCIL OF
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NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL

Despite this recent review and rejection of such construction standards by a diverse array of industry experts, recent news reports would suggest that the City of New York is considering allowing such construction to occur in one of the highest density neighborhoods in the country.

A September 17, 2015 Wall Street Journal article on the project stated, “...part of entering the competition was ‘obtain[ing] early support from their respective authorities having jurisdiction to proceed.’”

Therefore, we are requesting clarification from your respective agencies whether or not such “early support” has, in fact, already been provided to the project and if so, what the exact process was for reviewing this seriously problematic proposal. With the lives of our members quite literally depending on your agencies’ actions, I once again would like to express the gravity of our concerns.

We thank you for your time and attention, and look forward to working with you to ensure the continued safety of New York’s first responders.

Sincerely,



James A. Lemonda
President

CC: Hon. Elizabeth Crowley, Chair, Committee on Fire & Criminal Justice Services
Hon. Jumaane Williams, Chair, Committee on Housing & Buildings
Hon. Corey Johnson, Member, NYC Council
First Deputy Mayor Anthony Shorris

ⁱ See <http://www.iccsafe.org/wp-content/uploads/2015-ReportCAHResults.pdf> (page 96)



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November 12, 2015

Rick D. Chandler, P.E.
Commissioner
Department of Buildings
280 Broadway, 7th floor
New York, NY 10007

RE: Request for information regarding proposed tall wood construction in New York City

Dear Commissioner Chandler:

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