



**GRAMERCY PARK BLOCK ASSOCIATION, INC.**

23 Gramercy Park South, New York, NY 10003 Phone: 212-260-3875 Fax: 212-529-8355

**MEETING RE QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES AND THE COBALT CLUB**

On Friday, May 2, 2003, at the request of Steven Greenberg, the new lessee of the Gramercy Park Hotel, a meeting took place at the 34 Gramercy Park East home of Arlene Harrison, president of the Gramercy Park Block Association, to discuss issues primarily involving traffic control, as well as the Cobalt Club, an establishment newly located in the Gramercy Park Hotel with an entrance on Gramercy Park North as well as through the Lexington Avenue entrance through the Hotel.

In attendance were:

Arlene Harrison, President of the Gramercy Park Block Association  
Steven Greenberg, Gramercy Park Hotel  
Kevin Stafford, The Cobalt Club  
Ted Merkel, President, 60 Gramercy Park North  
Nancy Bynum, Director, 60 Gramercy Park North  
Derek McLane, Director 1 Lexington Avenue  
Annette Green, President, 39 Gramercy Park North  
Bob Opatrny, President, 45 Gramercy Park North  
Dr. Pamela Rosenthal Chair, GPBA Quality of Life/Public Safety Committee.  
Deputy Inspector Paul McCormack, Commanding Officer, 13<sup>th</sup> Pct.  
Community Affairs Police Officer Scott Kimmins, 13<sup>th</sup> Pct.

- Arlene Harrison described the history and mission of the Gramercy Park Block Association, its long involvement in traffic problems around Gramercy Park and its close ties to the police and the New York City Department of Transportation. She pointed out that the owners, building board presidents or institution heads of 34 out of 38 buildings on Gramercy Park, are on the Block Association's Board of Directors and/or its Advisory Board. Harrison stated that she had already received nearly a hundred calls from area residents on the park, expressing their concern and curiosity about the presence of a club on Gramercy Park North.
- Steven Greenberg, lessee of the Gramercy Park Hotel, described his history, part of which has been in the club industry. Greenberg's first club involvement was Generation, which he sold to Jimmy Hendrix when he was 25, the Roxy and the Palladium (with Ian Schraeger). He said he has never had a problem at any of these clubs during the time he was involved there. Greenberg took over the Gramercy Park Hotel lease on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2002.

- Greenberg reported that the club uses the hotel's liquor license and that the Community Board was notified prior to the transfer of the Hotel's liquor license to him over six months ago.
- Club Information. The club is expected to open to the public in 3-4 weeks. For the foreseeable future, it will be open to the public only on Wednesday nights. On other nights, it is available for private parties. To date, there have been two private parties: one was hosted by James Truman of Conde Nast for Lucky Magazine and one for Richard Branson of Virgin Airlines. Greenberg asserted that he will be very discreet and that there will be no ropes outside the club. Certain people will be given the opportunity to purchase "cards" for \$1,000 that will entitle them to certain privileges, such as advance table reservations and avoidance of a drink minimum or cover charges. The bar, located in the former "Wedgwood Room" accommodates 50-200 people, versus the hotel bar, which has been having 600 people in and out over the course of an evening. There may be live music at private parties but not on nights open to the public (it was left unclear if there will be a dj on those nights). The bar does not have a cabaret license. Greenberg described the club as a "lounge" and very "upscale bar", furnished with expensive antiques some of which he purchased at Sotheby's and Christie's auctions. He stated that he has insulated the windows for noise abatement purposes.
- Traffic Concerns. Irrespective of the club, Greenberg expressed great concern about traffic on Gramercy Park North between Lexington Avenue and Park Avenue South, particularly traffic stoppages caused when large tractor-trailers get stuck making the turn from Lexington Avenue going west. Building representatives agreed with this but added that the traffic problem actually runs from Third Avenue to Park Avenue South. Greenberg is also concerned with police vehicles parked in the no standing zone toward the corner of Lexington Avenue on Gramercy Park North (vehicles he believes to be mostly from the Police Academy). Harrison agreed that traffic is a big issue on Gramercy Park North, and has been for many years. However, the situation has been exacerbated during the past ten years or so by the proliferation of restaurants and clubs in the Flatiron District and in Chelsea, which has resulted in greatly increased traffic going west on 21<sup>st</sup> Street from the tunnels and the bridges on the east side of Manhattan.
- Traffic – Response From Police. Deputy Inspector McCormack stated that it might be possible to keep the north corner of 21<sup>st</sup> Street and Lexington Avenue clear of parked cars. A thirty feet setback from Lexington Avenue was mentioned at one point. Inspector McCormack said that he would confer with NYPD Chief Diana Pizzutti, who heads the Police Academy, to discuss this issue, as Police Academy issues are not within his jurisdiction. McCormack suggested that more effective signage further up on Lexington Avenue, requiring all thru traffic to turn west on 23rd Street, might be helpful. He added that all traffic issues are governed by the Department of Transportation and that the Community Board Six oversees the services to this district of this city agency. He said that D.O.T traffic changes can only be implemented with approval of the Community Board.

- Effect of Club on Neighborhood. Building representatives expressed their concerns that the club might generate noise, traffic, vandalism, drugs, smoking on the street, and other adverse situations generally associated with a club. Greenberg responded that he would be the most hurt by that, since his hotel's patrons would be adversely affected. In fact, it was traffic congestion on 21<sup>st</sup> Street and honking horns that have disturbed his Hotel's guests that prompted him to request this meeting on the first place.
- Club Entrance. Harrison said it might be better if Greenberg could change the entrance from the residential side of Gramercy Park North, back to the main entrance on Lexington Avenue. Greenberg responded that in the next several weeks he would be monitoring the situation and will be doing everything possible to make sure that things run smoothly. He stated that he has every intention of being a good neighbor and indicated that if real problems arise, he will not rule out the possibility of directing patrons to the hotel's main entrance on Lexington Avenue.
- Smoking Matters. Deputy Inspector McCormack stated that new anti-smoking laws have created a whole host of new quality of life problems. For example, many female patrons go outside to smoke with a drink in one hand and a cigarette in the other, leaving their purses inside. This has caused an increase in handbag thefts in our area. Also, there is a possibility of people smoking on the street, having loud conversations, with smoke filtering up into the second and third floor windows of both the hotel and 60 Gramercy Park North. In response to this, Greenberg suggested a curtain coming down from the canopy, under which smokers could stand and be enclosed. Building representatives expressed skepticism over the practicality and aesthetics of such a plan. Harrison stated that the Gramercy Park Block Association has recently received complaints from residents on the south side of the park, of rowdiness and noise created by the smokers outside the private clubs there. Greenberg added that he will also have at least one employee stationed outside to control any above-average conversational tones.
- Conclusion. Overall, the meeting was very productive. Mr. Greenberg made it clear that it is in his best interest to do everything possible to be a good neighbor. He feels if there are any problems, he would be the biggest loser as it might affect his hotel business and possibly his residence, which he is considering moving to the second floor of the hotel on the Gramercy Park North side. The neighborhood representatives who attended the meeting expressed their appreciation to Mr. Greenberg for having contacted the Gramercy Park Block Association and its community building representatives to discuss ways to solve traffic congestion in our area.