

East River Plaza Public Hearing  
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church  
**Testimony of Matthew S. Washington**  
Member, Manhattan Community Board 11  
**March 5, 2009**

Good evening, my name is Matthew Washington. I'm a member of Manhattan Community Board 11 and I thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight on the request for the East River Plaza development to modify a permit to accommodate their tenant Costco Wholesale Corporation, which will allow them to make deliveries between the hours of 12am and 5am or they cannot operate.

I hold a lot of respect for Costco's philosophy on employee relations and believe that there is potential to provide members of our community with employment opportunities from a company that provides health care for an estimated 85% of its employees, a 2008 SmartMoney Article stated that the average pay of workers for Costco was over \$18/hr and the company likes to promote its employees to higher positions. They also treat the customer well and do not mark up any item above 15%, unlike the average 25% for supermarkets and the 50% or greater in stores like Macy's.

Despite these great qualities, Costco has held a shortsighted position that has a major negative impact on our community. Costco does not currently accept food stamps and does not exhibit a willingness to change this position. They have sighted reasons like 1) they would not be able to qualify to accept food stamps from the federal government, 2) it would cost too much money to adapt their equipment to receive food stamps and 3) they believe that people on food stamps could not afford their annual membership or pricing since they sell in bulk.

These reasons are only exhibit a lack of interest, but not one of ability. 1) If our local supermarkets and corner store can accept, then why can't Costco do the same? 2) How could it cost more money to "adapt their equipment" if the store hasn't been built yet and the federal government provides free equipment to stores that accept food stamps as long as they take \$100 dollars a month and I think Costco does more than \$100 of business each month 3) and how can they believe that families on food stamps

will not be able to pay \$50 for an annual membership and invest in bulk shopping. It is clear that they have not met anyone on food stamps or on a fixed income where the only way they can shop is in bulk because it saves so much money for them in the long run.

With over 30,000 people on food stamps in our community, allowing Costco to come in without accepting food stamps would be a slap in the face to over 25% of our population. And this project has received \$55 million in funding from the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone (UMEZ), which was created to support the communities it represents, but this does not sound like a plan to serve the community rather another slap in the face that funding for us is not used for us.

Unless the developers require Costco to accept food stamps and/or Costco makes a commitment to accept food stamps and there is a significant commitment to hire from within our community to work at this site, then I urge the Community Board and the City Planning Commission to reject this request for a modification to the permit.

This is our community and we have to represent the voices of those who don't feel like they have a voice. It is our responsibility to represent the needs of all, not just the needs of some.

Thank You.