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Letters

By You The Reader!

Over the last ten years, residents in SoHo have anxiously watched a steady erosion of the New York Loft Board created by former Council Member Kathryn Freed and community activists. The Board assisted many individuals with legal issues throughout the years. But, as the 1990s Renaissance of New York began, so did a movement to weaken those housing and zoning regulations that protected its residents.

The Loft Board helped stabilize the lives of the hard-working middle class citizens who make their homes in the SoHo community. Unfortunately, incomes have not kept pace with the continually rising cost of living, and rent hikes too often have caused many talented and productive artists to move out of the city and even out of the state. Escalating rents have dashed the hopes and dreams of countless young artists, actors, musicians, merchants, restaurant owners and commercial entrepreneurs—the very kind of people who make New York the magnet city that it has always been.

I believe that most people want to live in a community that offers safety, vibrancy and uniqueness—not only to its residents—to all New Yorkers and tourists. However, the real estate industry and the influence of corporate America have made SoHo a target for development for the rich. Other issues, such as the proliferation of billboards, illegal street vendors and traffic, further compound this problem. Even though I believe that change is healthy, it should not infringe upon and threaten the livelihood of the people who made their neighborhoods so special.

As someone who appreciates and supports the arts, we must explore alternatives to help the arts and to find a reasonable balance with development. And one of the best solutions to protect people and to preserve SoHo is to make sure that zoning changes conform to the existing structures in the community and that the new development is inclusive of the people in the arts community.

Carlos Manzano

(Mr. Manzano is a leading candidate for Manhattan Borough President in 2005)