Hello. My name is Sandra Malmquist and I am the Director of The Children’s Building on the corner of Orange and Wall Streets in an historic building deeded to City 100 hundred years ago to serve children into perpetuity. We have been here for 19 years, and in that time we have created and nurtured myriad programs, all designed to support the development of healthy, happy children and contribute to the early childhood tapestry of the City through a family-friendly space and the critically important Early Childhood Resource Center for educators to gain competency through professional development. We serve thousands of children, families, and teachers in our space every year. The heartbeat of the building is our early childhood program, Creating Kids. It is also the economic driver for all of our other programs.

We were last here to voice our concerns about the proposed development of 275 Orange Street, property that abuts our children’s play yard. Since the November meeting, there have been several meetings to address these concerns, each grounded by the developer’s stated commitment to work with us. I am here to say that there is much left to do to make that commitment a reality.

From the beginning, we have struggled to be heard. Plans were submitted that clearly reflected a lack of recognition for the needs of young children who would be new neighbors. For example, originally, multiple transformers and a blast wall were positioned on the property line next to the play yard, a clear and present danger. Yes, these were moved, but only because we (and the City) sounded the alarm. The Pinto House, a New Haven treasure, was proposed to be slid over to be six feet from where children play, positioning a massive two and a half story structure that both shadowed our currently sunny yard and created an alley. The architect recently offered to lower the house a few inches, hardly the change needed. Note that the house would be occupied with either residential or office tenants with windows a mere few feet overlooking young children playing. The architect has offered to put shutters or film on the windows, but the idea that there are people that close to young children is uncomfortable at best. The developer has offered to plant a hedge along the fence, hoping the children wouldn’t notice the Pinto House or the 7-story building. Alas, it turns out the hedge in the plan revised 12/5/19 pending your approval was made up of two very poisonous plants. They offered to build a bigger fence that our children could paint on. To us, this sounds like asking the children to participate in the demise of their outdoor life. All of these things represent effort, but none of them address the basic concerns.

While we appreciate the developer’s commitment to work with us, the importance of our voice is illustrated by the above issues.

At a meeting this past Monday, three plans emerged. Plan A is essentially the original plan and the one submitted tonight to City Plan for approval. We do not support this plan. Plan B emerged at a meeting two days ago with the architect and the developer where we asked the developer to explore moving the Pinto House across Orange Street to property they already own. This would preserve the Pinto House and keep it true to the Orange Street Jewish History Tour. This move would require juggling the parking spaces at both Orange Street lots owned by the developer and might require asking the City to work with the developer to replace parking spaces lost with spots from the Wall Street lot. The architect proposed a less optimal Plan C which would reconfigure our play yard, but not eliminate the problems presented by the Pinto House and would raise new issues of licensing and funding. Neither these, nor some other potential alternatives which you may hear about tonight, have been fleshed out and evaluated in the developer’s haste to seek approval.

We ask the City Plan Commission not to approve the plans as submitted in order to give both parties time to address the concerns of The Children’s Building and come to a mutually acceptable plan going forward. We take seriously the developer’s stated goal of working with us and hope they understand that we come at this with support for thoughtful development of the City I live and work in.