

CAPITAL

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Brewer wades into union's fight with luxury developer

By Ryan Hutchins



Rendering of proposed tower at 111 West 57th Street.

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer is jumping into a dispute between New York City's powerful construction union and a major developer who faces accusation of running dangerous job sites.

The battle between the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York and JDS Development, which is planning one of the tallest skyscrapers in New York, is fundamentally about the company's use of non-union labor on that and other high-profile projects.

But the trade council has not focused specifically on that issue, instead running a campaign to attack JDS on its safety record. President Gary LaBarbera said the company hires "irresponsible subcontractors," that workers haven't had apprenticeships and that they've had "no safety training."

That's where Brewer carefully inserts herself, writing in a letter to JDS' Michael Stern that she has "concerns" about safety issues and implying the company does not treat its employees well.

"As a developer, you have a legal as well as ethical obligation to comply with safety rules, and to employ contractors and sub-contractors that adequately train, protect and compensate their workers," Brewer wrote in the Feb. 20 letter, which was obtained by

Capital this week. “All workers should have fair wages and benefits, be informed of their rights, and be protected from injury.”

Brewer refers to “serious accidents at your construction sites” and mentions issues surrounding scaffolding with no rails, workers without “appropriate” safety harnesses and alleges a failure of protect people and property near construction sites. She says such problems can “put lives in jeopardy.”

JDS, through a publicist, declined to comment on the letter. But the publicist said “much” of what Brewer refers to are not actual Department of Buildings violations but rather complaints.

In January, Public Advocate Letitia James sent a similar letter to JDS about safety issues. Like Brewer, James is a friend to unions and has received political support from organized labor.

JDS, while not a household name, is a big time developer planning to build a super-skinny 80-story-tall tower at 111 W. 57th St., along the so-called “Billionaires’ Row.” The tower would reach more than 1,400 feet, surpassing One57 and the already-skyline-dominating 432 Park. It would become the tallest building ever built without union labor .

The developer is also behind another big non-union project called the Walker Towers, located at 212 W. 18th Street. The site is several blocks from an unrelated construction site where a woman walking down the sidewalk was killed last week when a flying piece of plywood struck her.