For Immediate Release:

STATEMENT: Council Member Menchaca on Fire Damage to Historic Red Hook Bowne Storehouse

The two alarm fire last night at Red Hook’s historic S.W. Bowne Grain Storehouse, on Smith Street is highly suspicious.

It occurred after the Red Hook community raised alarms about recent, potentially illegal construction activity on the roof and after my office and community leaders took steps to start land marking the building. The red brick structure was built in 1886 and is a prime example of the Gowanus area’s rich maritime history.

No one was injured last night and I thank the firefighters on land and water who risked their lives to protect the building and neighboring structures.

While I’m reassured that there is an active fire investigation, I also call for full public disclosure of its findings about the cause of the fire. I am also calling on the Department of
Buildings to make a thorough review of permits and violations at the site and to hold the owner accountable for a long series of irresponsible activities there.

The owner of this property, the Chetrit Group, has willfully neglected it and created a local nuisance for many years. Before the fire, my office was engaged with issues like sub-standard fencing, decrepit sidewalk sheds, unpermitted construction and demolition, and illegal dumping there. I also place the owners of this property on notice: I will not allow demolition by neglect or fire to prompt zoning changes that allow residential or other non-manufacturing uses at this site in Red Hook’s Industrial Business Zone.

As the Bowne Storehouse stood abandoned and unrepaired, a vital part of Red Hook’s history was threatened. This fire highlights the urgent need to land mark this part of Brooklyn’s history and I will work with Red Hook Community Activists to continue our efforts for preservation.

###

Images below, Office of Council Member Carlos Menchaca. Dangerous pre-fire conditions on Smith Street at Bowne Storehouse