MINUTES
Economic Development Committee
Manhattan Community Board 9
November 2, 2010

Present: Chair: Hon. LaQuita Henry  Assistant Chair: Hon. Elois Hernandez
Community Board Members Present: Hon. Javier Carcamo, Hon. Charles Cooper

The meeting of the Economic Development Committee of Community Board 9 was called to order at 6:40 pm by the Chair, LaQuita Henry. The agenda was adopted with approval by the members present with no additions or modifications. The Minutes of the October meeting were moved, seconded and approved to be accepted as presented without corrections.

Referencing the previous meeting with a presentation from the catering business located at 501 West 145th Street, 2nd floor, the Chair reminded members that a fire alarm had interrupted the October meeting and that the business owners would be invited back. Following this, the Chair introduced the concept of inviting area business owners to the meetings to hear their concerns, to see the entire picture for economic development concerns in the district, to better understand and create dialogue with area entrepreneurs.

With that, the owner of Cafe One (1619 Amsterdam Avenue at 140th Street), Jean Delphonse, was introduced and had been invited to speak about doing business in district. Having some successes and some challenging seasons, Mr. Delphonse spoke of wanting to expand when conditions improve for cash flow, labor costs, food costs, etc. Rent is big challenge for small businesses in the area. Often it is too much. If there is enough cash flow, then rent is paid. If there are enough people buying the product, then rent is paid. Business owners want to support programs and events in the community, but often the cost to do that is too great and may not be to the business owner’s benefit. He spoke of wanting to assist to bring more businesses to Amsterdam Avenue; however, the build-out cost is often so great that prospective owners have not committed. When Committee Member Pat Jones asked whether there had been increases in rent, he responded that 20% rent increases in area. What impact of Sub Conscious (“an all-American deli – any kind of sandwich you want, you can get it”), a take-out), more foot traffic to block, loss of some portion of lunch business but wants to see community grow. This is evidence that community is growing, forces him to take another look at his business plan, every two years, a business needs to reinvent himself, the customer expects that when they believe in you, when they patronize you. Mr. Delphonse referenced City College as a huge resource being a commuter college and other area programs. Continuing, he spoke of not only students, but staff, faculty, residents as well – very important at least for the five months when the college is closed for summer, winter break and spring school. Mr. Delphonse mentioned the oft talked about idea of a restaurants row is very good.

Committee Member Jane Arrendell expressed concern that community people do not patronize the businesses but take their money elsewhere.

Discussion of jobs creation: if more small businesses would hire a part-time worker, which would increase the number of jobs in our area. How can we impact that?
CB 9 member, Javier Carcamo, spoke with EDC who mentioned they do not have a program in the area or designated funding that would directly help businesses. **Recommended Eco Dev, Land Use and Zoning and Arts and Culture host a joint meeting with EDC and SBS** to learn of the programs that are not often used. Sometimes, it is a matter of people having the information and knowledge of resources. Though Committee Member Savonna Bailey-McClain felt these programs were a diversion and not of help to our businesses. She mentioned that most of food in our area was poor. Suggested model for Café One should be to provide sit down space, dessert, coffee and tea for the SubsConscious Area should improve food quality in our area. Even Trader Joe’s moved to 79th Street, one can hop on the M5 bus, get there and for better quality and then come back to the neighborhood. To this, Mr. Delphonse countered using the internet and finding out that feedback is good but that the food is expensive. Mr. Delphonse volunteered his business for one or two of the resources that are referred to.

CB 9 member, Charles Cooper, recommended cataloguing the resources that are available and focusing on getting the information out to as many of our small businesses as possible. Chair highlighted coop program that Bodegas Association (Committee Assistant Chair Elvis Hernandez) has promoted, set up meeting/forum fair for small businesses to have a way to guide (Javier) businesses so that they know their options. There is also a program at the public library and group mentioned (Javier) that can provide resources. Guest mentioned lawyers group that would be helpful to lawyers to incorporate their businesses, business plan, etc. For business owner, difficult to separate personal accounting from business accounting. They need to know that they must hire other people to do their work and the owner needs to know it’s OK. Though difficult always to pay someone else. Mr. Delphonse will handle this matter himself because he cannot always pay someone else. A model may be to have an economic development team to help small businesses in community. Not just have the small business owner do everything, but to have the econ dev team take what is going and do it for them.

Mr. Hernandez spoke on the Farmers Market stating that 80% of space is underutilized and asked if they could actually create jobs. He was hoping that it would and that spaces could be available. Not only should food be sold, but perhaps other related goods could be sold as well. Mr. Hernandez insisted that there is opportunity for jobs creation, not just for the farmers but for the baker, the crafts person, for others as well. Ms. Bailey McClain reminded of the health issues related to farmers market and need for license. Mr. Cooper suggested more information be researched to see what else can be sold. Jane referred to related goods, like a farmer sells apples, a baker sells pies using the apples. Mr. Hernandez also referenced bad reception at Department handling licenses, permits for this. no answer or when answered, that person is rude and says that no other licenses for anything other than farmers market.

Under New Business, the Chair brought up the request for a Letter of Support for revision to the MWBE new law. Chair was seeking letter of support or resolution in favor of new regulation. Model letter was emailed to Chair about four days ago, but deadline was looming. Since information was transmitted that same day, there was not enough time to review the voluminous document. Chair agreed to email it to each member and seek individual letters of support. There was no other New Business.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:30 pm.