



Economic Development and West Harlem Piers Minutes

3 October 2023 at 6:30pm

Attendees

Committee members present: Hon. Maritta Dunn (co-chair), Hon. Joyce Adewumi (co-chair), Hon. Chris Berry, Hon. Michael Iglesias, Hon. Clayton Sanford, Hon. John-Martin Green, Hon. Clotilde Monguya

Committee members excused: Hon. Ken Miles

Other community board members present: Hon. Victor Edwards (CB9 chair), Hon. Heather Jason (virtual)

Other attendees: Daniele Flemming (UMEZ), Yuien Chin (Harlem One Stop, virtual), Madison Ayala (community associate)

1 Call to Order

Called to order at 6:40 by Joyce Adewumi (JA).

2 Adopt Agenda

John-Martin Green (JMG) moved that the agenda be adopted, and Maritta Dunn (MD) seconded the motion. The motion passed without objection.

There was a brief reintroduction of the new members, namely Michael Iglesias (MI), Clayton Sanford (CS), and Clotilde Monguya (CM), who introduced themselves in [September](#).

Chris Berry (CB) was introduced as a new CB9 member. CB also serves on the vestry board at St Mary's Episcopal Church on 125th St and is a committee member on the Manhattan North Inter Parish Council, where she is involved in projects like a children's art program and the food program.

3 Adopt Minutes

MD moved that [last month's minutes](#) be adopted, and JMG seconded the motion. The motion passed without objection.

4 Presentation from UMEZ

Daniele Flemming (DF, a Commercial Lending Officer for the [Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone \(UMEZ\)](#)) presented the organization's hybrid micro-loan program designed to assist businesses.

For background, UMEZ's primary mission involves aiding Upper Manhattan businesses in growth and sustainability, with an emphasis on supporting Black and minority-owned businesses. Their efforts include cultural grants, workforce development, and employment training. Prominent beneficiaries of their work include the soon-to-open Victoria Hotel on 125th Street. They've also been involved in financing significant neighborhood developments such as the new Urban League building and the AMC Magic Johnson theater on 125th St. For smaller scale business, UMEZ provides loans and credit lines.

The hybrid micro-loan program was designed and launched during the pandemic as a response to assist struggling businesses and nonprofits. Although some businesses continue to face challenges,

there remains funding available in this program, which is set to sunset in December 2023, or sooner should funds run out. DF emphasized that this program must conclude by the end of the year and mentioned that UMEZ will offer other loan programs afterwards, but those have market interest rates. There's a significant push to fully deploy the available funds by this date.

Loans can reach up to \$50,000 with an interest rate of 3%. There's a provision for 25% principal forgiveness. This means that if a four-year loan is issued, then if 75% of the loan has been repaid in full after three years, the remaining 25% of the approved amount is converted into a grant for the final year. Qualifying businesses require at least two years of filed tax returns and a minimum revenue of \$100,000. To a question about the eligibility of [HDFCs](#), DF offered to follow up.

Victor Edwards (VE) asked about their methods of outreach. DF listed various channels, including the [Women's Chamber of Commerce](#), flyering, hosting breakfasts, speaking engagements, partnerships with community boards, promoting on LinkedIn, and word of mouth from borrowers.

5 Columbia University Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)

The committee continued a September discussion about the funds allocated by the CBA for West Harlem Piers. As a reference, Maritta Dunn (MD) called attention to section N.1.e. of the [2008 CBA](#):

West Harlem Piers Park. Columbia has agreed to provide to the City's Department of Parks and Recreation funds for staff and enhanced services for the West Harlem Piers Park, which payments commenced in 2008 and shall extend 24 years thereafter. Such funds shall be in the initial annual amount of \$500,000, escalating at 3% annually.

Victor Edwards (VE) gave some context on the issue. His initial concerns arose since it seemed apparent that far less than \$500,000 annually was being spent by Parks on the West Harlem Piers. VE made contact with Steve Simon of Parks about the issue, and received an "estimated" accounting, which is disputed by VE and MD. Requests for permanent bathroom facilities were only met with temporary solutions.

Michael Iglesias (MI) summarized recent discussions at the [Senior Planning Committee \(SPC\)](#); he noted that a lawsuit by CB9 is likely to be dismissed by the courts, referencing a precedent involving a Brooklyn community board. According to VE, the upcoming steps should involve drafting a formal letter by the committee, seeking an audit from the city Comptroller, and alerting the mayor and borough president. VE noted the importance of obtaining financial records of payments from Columbia to present a clear financial story to the Comptroller's office, despite the fact that Columbia is currently fulfilling its role in making the payments. The central issue, as MD pointed out, wasn't that CU didn't send funds but rather Parks not allocating them appropriately.

Clotilde Monguya (CM) raised concerns why these discrepancies were not identified in the fifteen years since the agreement was solidified, to which MD responded that no one had scrutinized it before.

John-Martin Green (JMG) questioned the measures to ensure fund retrieval, and MI said that acquiring a sworn statement (affidavit) from Parks would be foundation for a potential lawsuit if needed. CM wondered about the feasibility of requesting the city to freeze the funds until resolution.

Other strategies discussed include asking the city to freeze the funds available to Parks until the issue is resolved, involving Council Member Abreu's office, collaboration with the new Columbia University president, amending the CBA to reallocate funds to the [NYC Economic Development Corporation \(EDC\)](#), asking that funds allocated to Riverside Park be used for the West Harlem Piers, and requesting WHP funding directly in district needs process.

6 Community Board Letter to the Parks Department

JMG was volunteered to draft the letter concerning the issue, with a goal of preparing something for the November meeting. Other committee members will assist with drafting and editing, and the letter will be addressed to the Parks Commissioner.

7 New Business

7.1 Requested Letter of Support for Harlem One Stop

Yuien Chin (YC) recently requested a letter of support from Eutha Prince (CB9 district manager) for a project to be pursued by the [Harlem One Stop](#) art non-profit on the Amsterdam Corridor, and reiterated that ask. JE stated intentions to discuss this with Eutha but emphasized that such requests should first be presented to the Economic Development Committee. Currently, the Economic Development Committee cannot officially comment as the matter hasn't been presented to them.

7.2 Small Business Fair

JA proposed organizing an event to inform nonprofits and small businesses, especially those without physical premises, about various resources like benefits from the CBA and organizations like UMEZ. The fairs would address core operating challenges, such as obtaining street vendor licenses. CB added further various resources to highlight at such an event, including grants from the borough president's office, resources NYC Small Business Services (SBS), and opportunities like the (recently due) Carver Bank's pitch grant for women entrepreneurs. YC shared the importance of legal guidance for more established business.

A key challenge for planning the event is reaching targeted businesses, especially those without brick-and-mortar storefronts. MD particularly advocated for the use of multi-lingual flyers, while others suggested using social media and the LinkNYC kiosks. VE mentioned the value of the 125th St Business Improvement District (BID) in reaching businesses there, and suggested collaborating with CM Abreu on establishing BIDs for Broadway and Amsterdam.

The planning and execution would involve the Small Business Committee, comprising JMG and CM, and the Events Committee, led by JMG, aiming for a January event. Suggestions on event structuring ranged from organizing a series of events to a single event with breakout sections. Potential venues include Grandslam Banquet Hall and Columbia University spaces. Collaborative efforts with CU business students were mentioned (as this is guaranteed as a benefit of the CBA), as well as a group of law students aiding small businesses known by MI.

7.3 Taystee Building

JA proposed inviting the team behind the [Taystee Lab Building](#) to speak to the committee at the November meeting. She would like updates on their progress and on community benefits, since they promised incubator space for local businesses.

7.4 CB9 Statement of Needs

The annual Community Board Statement of Needs process is the primary way for CBs to communicate their priorities to elected officials and city agencies. Committees are to submit needs assessments internally by October 17, which all committee members should assist with. Members are advised to generate new ideas and reflect on the ideas offered [last year](#). The asks include shorter-term expenses and capital expenses.

JA expressed an interest in economic development be listed among the most pressing issues in CB9, alongside affordable housing, health care, and education.

8 Adjourn

John-Martin Green moved that we adjourn at 8:26pm, and Maritta Dunn seconded the motion. The motion passed without objection.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Clayton Sanford.