

Manhattan Community Board 9 General Board Meeting March 19, 2020

Meeting is held via Zoom/Conference Call due to ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Meeting started at 6:42PM.

Presentations:

Pauline Ferrante, Department of Health

Community spread of COVID-19 is wide across the city. Cases increasing exponentially by the day. Heed self-isolation and social distancing protocols. Young people feel invincible, still going on spring break. Staying home prevents further spread to keep elderly and immuno-compromised from being exposed.

Important to differentiate between need for testing. If you feel mild symptoms, you might determine that you don't need a test and can recover at home, because going out might put others at risk. Testing important for those with symptoms so severe that they need to go to hospital, and to protect healthcare workers serving them. City is no longer tracing contacts or travel history because NYC has so many cases.

Mayor's difficult decision to shut schools was essential to keep all New Yorkers healthy and safe.

In response to questions from board members:

City is expanding testing capacity, but if you feel ill, assume you have COVID-19 and avoid spreading it, and recover at home with OTC medication. Tests are not available to the public; they are administered in hospitals. For many people, test results don't matter.

Current information is coronavirus is not airborne; it's transmitted by droplets, which is why social distancing is important. Mild symptoms include low-grade fever, itchy throat, general malaise. Severe symptoms include difficulty breathing. If you need medical help, call your healthcare provider, go to your nearest hospital or an H&H hospital.

Masks are not necessary for ordinary people making short errands. They should be reserved for healthcare providers, those hospitalized with the illness. They may provide a false sense of security and be ineffective if you touch them and they become contaminated.

Private employers asked to let employees work from home. If you must work, walk or bike instead of riding the subway. Restaurants, bars, and venues asked to operate at half capacity to prevent crowds of 50 or more. City and state guidance designed to prevent reaching Italy's levels of outbreak. Concerned about demand on medical facilities. More information: nyc.gov/health.

CM Mark Levine

Testing needs to be reserved for severely ill. Facing potential overrun of our medical facilities. ERs around CB9 are full, including with people who shouldn't be there—lightly symptomatic should be resting at home. Facilities should be reserved for acutely ill—e.g., respiratory failure—which is about 20% of patients.

City mobilizing economic support: \$6K grants to businesses of 5 or less to cover payroll. Businesses up to 100 people eligible for zero-interest loan up to \$75K. Small business services website for businesses to apply: nyc.gov/covid19biz. Must have documented loss of 25% revenue since start of epidemic.

Streets still have too much traffic. People need to stay home, telecommute, gather online instead of in person—especially seniors or those with preexisting conditions. Those who feel healthy can visit vulnerable neighbors to offer to run errands, so they can stay indoors. Not too soon for buildings and blocks to organize around this model. Voluntary orders should be mandatory.

State providing paid sick time, to keep people from having to work if they feel sick out of economic need. Mobilizing on healthcare and economic fronts.

In response to questions from board members:

Plan for 8 weeks of this; could be longer before things return to normal. Use internet to maintain social interactions and relationships. Keep mental and behavioral health services. City help line: 888-NYC-WELL available for those with mental health concerns.

Uncertainty around budget process going forward. Probably will not hold in-person budget hearings. Facing difficult fiscal environment. Extremely worried about small nonprofits. Online learning starts Monday in public schools. Lots of children don't have adequate hardware. DOE is scrambling to fix that, accepting requests from families: coronavirus.schools.nyc/remoteteaching or 718-935-5100. May not be able to provide electronic devices to seniors, but they shouldn't come into senior centers, so we need to find ways to keep them connected at home; not enough supply at the moment.

Race against time. May not reduce number who ultimately get sick, but prevent all entering hospital system at once. Stretch out over months rather than weeks. Should close non-essential businesses, as has happened in SF. 90 day moratorium on evictions; housing courts are closed. Moratorium on foreclosures, and governor ordered utilities not to cut people off.

DHS has reserved 400 beds in hotels for homeless people in shelter system who are lightly symptomatic (i.e., who would otherwise be staying at home, rather than receiving treatment in the hospital).

Talk of amending unemployment rules so gig economy workers/freelancers can qualify, along with people who work in nightlife industry.

MBPO Gale Brewer

Office is sending regular newsletters with information on COVID-19. Goldman Sachs will also have non-profit grant program. In Hamilton Heights, a building of seniors closed, urgently needed meals. Seniors need access to supermarkets first thing in the morning. Lots of calls from small businesses to extend sales tax due tomorrow, but city budget also needs revenues if at all possible. Hotels are in bad shape and want reprieve from property tax. Theaters, hospitals, hostels with offers for space an email to publicprivate@oem.nyc.gov with offers for triage facilities.

Concerned about surgical masks and garments. Dupont in Wisconsin may be able to produce quickly. Concerned about NYCHA. Next week will be a test of remote learning and technology available to students. Construction sites asking to be closed down, though they are still working in SF, and mayor isn't inclined to close them.

Working with FreshDirect will provide 400 food boxes a day. Mayor and governor are working better together, but they need to stand together to talk about issues.

In response to questions from board members:

Also need a federal response to needs of freelancers/gig economy employees.

Ely Silvestre, Manhattan DA's Office

Washington Heights office working remotely. Available via phone and email. Clean slate event likely to be postponed. Office number: 212-335-3320.

Chair's Report

This is the new normal. Facing possibility of severe run on healthcare system. CB9 website updated with information on city and state's COVID-19 response, particularly in our neighborhood. <http://www.cb9m.org/coronavirus-news-updates>. Maintain social distancing, limit trips outside, take care of yourself and your family and friends. Thanks for flexibility with new technology, and thanks to office staff for working remotely. Office number (212-864-6200) forwards to staff working at home. Continue adhering to laws governing CB: city charter requires that we continue to meet; Open Meetings Law partially suspended by governor. Just purchased Zoom license; will try to maintain normalcy as much as possible.

District Manager's Report

Staff continuing to share vital information via email. No committee events during pandemic. Purchasing card still en route. No changes in Treasurer's report since last meeting.

Action Items

Item 1: Chairs of Uniformed Services/Transportation presented resolution in support of MHCC's request that MTA install an elevator at 125th and Broadway subway station. Adopted 33-0-0-0 (Y-N-A-P).

Items 2-3:

Posh Pizza by Dino BBQ (new liquor license). Adopted 31-0-1-0.

Dun Huang Upper West (renewal of liquor license). Adopted 31-0-1-0.

Item 4:

Unenclosed sidewalk cafe

Harlem Public (renewal of sidewalk cafe). Adopted 32-0-0-0.