

**Chair Report**  
**December 19, 2019**  
**General Board Meeting**

***Closing Out 2019 On a Somber Note***

I am deeply saddened to have to bring my report with an update on the tragedy that shook our community on Wednesday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, when Tessa Majors, an 18 year old Barnard first year, died at St. Luke's Hospital after sustaining several knife wounds to the chest, face, and arm during an apparent attempted robbery. We have been in communication with the 26<sup>th</sup> Precinct and the Manhattan District Attorney's Office as the case has unfolded.

The NYPD believes that the perpetrators are three boys aged 13, 14, and 14. They are believed to all attend the same school together. The 13 year old suspect, who lives with his aunt and uncle, was taken before a judge in Family Court, where he testified that he was with the other two boys when they attempted to rob Tessa Majors, and when she resisted, one of the other boys stabbed her repeatedly. The 13 year old remains in custody. It has been reported that one of the 14 year olds was questioned by police and later released.

CB9 released a statement on December 12<sup>th</sup> following the attack and participated in a community vigil in Morningside Park held on Sunday, December 15<sup>th</sup>. The Board is shocked by the tragic death of Tessa Majors, but we are also deeply concerned by the fact that the confession from the 13 year old suspect was apparently obtained by the police during a questioning at which the suspect did not have legal representation. The Board believes that it is imperative that any suspects questioned by the police be questioned in the presence of counsel. The Board is also concerned about reports that many juveniles with existing records were taken in and questioned by the police without any evidence linking them to this attempted robbery and homicide. The Board is mindful of previous errors and improper questioning by police and the District Attorney in past high-profile cases involving the young boys in our community, and we are determined that such problems not recur in this case.

I agree with Borough President Gale Brewer's assessment that the City's drastic cuts in professional youth program funding, including after school and weekend programs, contribute to conditions where youth are more likely to turn to crime. To that end, we will be working with local organizations and our elected officials to assess the current availability of such services to the youth in our neighborhood. We will also be attempting to secure additional mental health resources at schools and youth centers in CB9. Prior to the attack, CB9 has been advocating for additional lighting, cameras, and Parks Enforcement resources in Morningside Park and St. Nicholas Park in response to an uptick in violent attacks and robberies. We remain committed to obtaining that funding for our parks to ensure that everyone in our community is able to enjoy them in peace and safety.

Finally, we are angered and dismayed by the actions of the media and law enforcement regarding public information around this incident. Rushed articles have published what later

turned out to be spurious allegations and half-truths. The Board urges the NYPD and other officials involved in the case to not release information to the media until the veracity of such information has been confirmed. The Board also does not believe that the names of the suspects, who have not yet been convicted of a crime, should be published by the media, given their young age.

In my role as Chair and as a human being, I would like to urge everyone, but especially the youth in our community and students at Barnard and Columbia, to avail themselves of mental health and counseling resources available to them by calling 1-888-NYC-WELL or texting "WELL" to 65173. Additional resources, such as school counselors, Furman Center counselors for Barnard affiliates, or Columbia Counseling and Psychological Services for Columbia affiliates are also available.

This is something that every Chair or elected official hopes never happens during their tenure. It has been an emotional and sometimes overwhelming week, with the urge to take action complicated by the need to grieve and allow the space for the grief of others. If you have feedback on how the Board has handled this or suggestions on how Community Board 9 can continue to be part of the healing in our community, please do not hesitate to email me at [barryweinberg@gmail.com](mailto:barryweinberg@gmail.com).

As always, I want to thank you for serving our community of West Harlem.

Barry Weinberg

***Impeachment Proceedings Dominate in Washington, but Federal Funds Still Needed in West Harlem***

As almost everyone with a television or smartphone knows, the House of Representatives has voted for only the third time in our country's history to impeach the President. In effect, they have served as a grand jury and indicted the President. At this point, the trial now occurs in the United States Senate. I encourage everyone to take advantage of the heightened interest in civic matters to not only discuss the proceedings with their neighbors, but also use this moment to talk about all of the other issues that are also happening in our country and in our communities. We all must advocate for increased federal investment in public housing, public transportation, and other public goods that the federal government has been disinvesting in over the past 30 years. NYCHA is a particularly good example of an agency that has been forced to sell land and air rights to developers due to a systematic defunding by the federal government. If you meet a neighbor who is particularly passionate about these impeachment hearings, invite them to our next Board Meeting!

### **New Criminal Justice Reforms Take Effect Next Month**

Many of the new laws changing how our criminal justice system operates will take effect on January 1<sup>st</sup> of 2020. In particular, cash bail will end for all misdemeanors and most nonviolent felonies. Faster production of evidence during discovery and preservation of certain crime scenes. Many of these reforms are long overdue and will result in far lower costs both in terms of public money spent to house people in jail who have not yet convicted of a crime and far lower costs in the disruption of peoples lives (including childcare and employment) if they are detained because they cannot make bail. That being said, we must continue to work with our counterparts in the Department of Youth and Community Development, the Department of Education, and the NYPD to ensure that our young people and others in our neighborhoods have the support and productive opportunities that can assist them in reintegrating into the community after being involved with the criminal justice system or help keep folks out of the criminal justice system entirely.

### **Department of City Planning Rolling Out New Online Land Use Tracker**

The Department of City Planning has been unveiling new digital tools to allow community boards and members of the public to more easily discover and monitor proposed rezonings and variances in their neighborhoods. This tool will hopefully make it easier for us as a Community Board to schedule and publicize hearings on land use projects as required by the Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP) and gather public feedback on these proposed projects. The tool can be found at <https://zap.planning.nyc.gov/projects>.

### ***Census Recruitment is Still Happening!***

Census 2020 is still hiring! Their goal for Manhattan is to have 10,000-15,000 people, as there is at least one census tract in every Community District that is considered "hard to count," with low response rates on previous counts. Community Board 9 held a Census Recruitment Day in partnership with Columbia University and the West Harlem Development Corporation, and we had over 20 people stop through the CB9 office alone to apply for census jobs. If you know of anyone who is interested in working for the Census next year, please send them to the Community Board office 15 16-18 Old Broadway for additional information on how to apply!

### ***Examining Our Local School Overcrowding***

I am happy to report that our local Councilmember Mark Levine has introduced a bill Intro 1783-2019 to amend Local Law 64, which requires landlords with affordable housing properties receiving City subsidies to register their units on an online portal for a lottery or else face substantial fines. While good in theory, the original bill included HDFCs, which are private, owner-occupied units that do not have the resources to list their units in a portal and respond to thousands of applicants. They would have faced crushing fines under the bill, and the exemption in the new amendment is the only sensible course of action.

***Community Board Applications Are Now Open***

I was fortunate to be able to attend the groundbreaking ceremony for the expansion of the Montefiore Park Plaza with CB9 Member and President of the Montefiore Park Neighborhood Association Michael Palma, as well as former CB9 Member Basia Nikonorow. The expansion and redesign of the park was something long fought for by both the MPNA and Michael's mother, the late Alida Del Carmen Mir Palma. Construction adjacent to the site to enlarge the water main and move utilities has already been under way for some time, but construction on the actual park expansion has now officially commenced. Congratulations to Michael and all of the other members of the community who fought so long for this expansion.

Submitted by,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Barry Weinberg". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Barry Weinberg  
Chair