

Chair Report
December 17, 2020
General Board Meeting

Closing Out a Year for the History Books

It appears that the end of 2020, the *annus horribilis* of our lifetimes, is finally coming to a close. While many of us are no doubt relieved to put 2020 in the mirror metaphorically, we will be starting 2021 in the midst of a global pandemic, the deepest economic depression in 90 years, and mourning the loss of over 300,000 Americans, including CB9's own Walter South. The actions we take in the next year will define the future of our City for many years to come. Drastic measures that would once be unthinkable are now either seriously on the table or already being implemented.

Here in West Harlem, the ZIP code 10031 currently has a 5.86% positivity rate from the trailing 7 days, and it has been trending higher for at least 2 months. Indoor dining has been shut down again, and our schools are in the midst of a chaotic close/reopen dance that appears to change every day. Hope is in sight, however, with the approval of multiple vaccines by the Food and Drug Administration that have been found to be 95% effective in preventing the contraction of COVID-19, with vaccines being given in two doses 28 days apart. The first doses will be given to our medical first responders, then to residents in our nursing homes and other congregate settings with vulnerable populations.

Many in our communities are suspicious of these vaccines, for a myriad of reasons. Some remember the history of racist and unethical experimentation on Black and minority communities. Others remember how, both now and early in this pandemic, we had to fight to get the testing resources and capabilities in our neighborhoods that wealthier ones took for granted. Others watched as a deranged narcissist in the White House publicly politicized the vaccine development and rollout and question whether or not appropriate scrutiny and due diligence was conducted in the review of these vaccines before they were authorized on an emergency basis. While many of these anxieties are understandable, the FDA has worked hard to make the science and process as transparent and scientific as possible. More information on this, including video of the hearings on emergency authorization, can be found online at <https://www.fda.gov/emergency-preparedness-and-response/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/covid-19-vaccines>

As engaged and informed members of the community, we must work to educate ourselves on this vaccine and then go out and educate our neighbors and community members. The Co-Chair of our Health and Environment Committee, Edwin Torres, has already begun this work by serving as a presenter at a webinar hosted by P.A.'L.A.N.T.E. Harlem. I strongly encourage everyone to attend the town hall we are cosponsoring with Columbia University and the other uptown Community Boards this Monday, December 21st.

Only by making sure that our community takes care of our most vulnerable and our government serves the interests of the people can we come back from 2020 stronger than ever in the coming year. I look forward to doing that work with each and every member of our board in 2021. I also cannot close the year out without stating my immense gratitude to our Community Board staff, including our District Manager, Eutha Prince, and Ms. Hleziphi Zita and Mr. Ray McLaughlin. Our Board would not function without them.

I hope that everyone takes a moment to look back on this year and find some people, events, or achievements for which we can be grateful. I know I am grateful to be Chairing such a phenomenal Community Board. Please have a happy, safe, and healthy New Year.

Your Chair,

Barry Weinberg

Governor, State Legislature Agree that More Tax Revenues are Needed

In February of this year, before the pandemic upended all of our lives, Manhattan Community Board 9 was the first Community Board to pass a resolution calling on our State Legislature and the Governor to address an apparent budget shortfall by increasing taxes on the highest-income and wealthiest New Yorkers. Many of the proposals most likely to be adopted, including a possible tax on high-value second homes (the pied-a-terre tax), increasing the millionaire's tax, and removing the rebate for the stock transfer tax were included as possible solutions in our resolution. I want to commend all of our Board Members for their early advocacy on this issue.

Tax Lien Sale Delayed Until 2021, Measure Up for Renewal

When property owners do not pay their tax and water bill debts owed to the City, those unpaid debts become liens on the property. Since a law passed during the Giuliani administration went into effect, the City can choose not to take possession of those properties and instead can sell the liens to private Wall Street financial institutions for cash upfront. The financial institutions that purchase the liens can then attempt to collect the debt on an accelerated basis and with higher fees and rates. This process is called a tax lien sale.

The tax lien sales have been delayed until at least 2021 by Executive Orders issued by Governor Andrew Cuomo. Additionally, the City law allowing such sales is due to expire, requiring a renewal from the City Council. Given the dearth of real estate available for affordable housing and other priorities, this is an important opportunity to rethink and potentially end the practice of selling tax liens. Intro 2166-2020, introduced by Councilmember Adrienne Adams of Queens, would delay any future tax lien sales through at least December 31, 2024 and change what properties are subject to the sales. CB9 will be exploring proposed changes to the tax lien sale ourselves to submit to the City Council for further review.

NYCHA Blueprint for Change Proposes Privatization of NYCHA, Erodes Tenant Protections

With the public comment period for NYCHA's Blueprint for Change ending on December 28th, it is of the utmost importance that NYCHA residents and the public in CB9 give their feedback on the plan. The Blueprint proposes to turn NYCHA over to a private Preservation Trust, led by Mayoral appointees, that will have the ability to borrow money against the properties to make repairs. Borrowing against public housing is prohibited by law, which is why the buildings would have to be first transferred to a private trust. As with all debt, there is a danger that if the new Preservation Trust is unable to repay the debt, then New York could lose its public housing that have kept hundreds of thousands housed for generations.

Public housing is an integral part of any housing strategy that can meet the needs of a 21st century New York. The nearly 30 year deliberate disinvestment and austerity campaign, begun by Congressional Republicans in the 1990s, has starved NYCHA of previously-available federal funds for repair and

maintenance. The resulting long, slow decline of our public housing stock was specifically engineered to bring about the privatization of this housing. Community Board 9 will work together with NYCHA residents and others to make sure that NYCHA and our federal officials are held accountable and stop the march to privatization and, potentially, erosion of tenants' rights.

The feedback page is: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nycha/about/contact/transformation-plan-public-comments.page>

Federal Funding, Tax Implications of COVID-19 Hit West Harlem Hard

Our federal government continues to fail to address the spread of COVID-19 and its devastating impact on our health and our economy. Extended federal unemployment benefits and unemployment benefits for independent contractors and gig workers are set to expire at the end of the year, and our City and State are both grappling with billions of dollars in shortfalls in tax revenue from the closing of businesses and loss of employment related to the pandemic.

Unemployment in ZIP code 10031 is near 20% and in 10027 is over 15%. If these benefits are not extended through the duration of the epidemic, our small businesses, grocery stores, and restaurants will lose even more money, our residents will be in even greater danger of facing hunger and homelessness, and the pain in our community will deepen. I urge you to call your federal elected officials, and urge anyone you know to do the same, to demand that these supports be extended.

Similarly, the federal government must extend aid to states and municipalities whose tax revenues have been dramatically impacted by the pandemic. The City, the State, the MTA, and many other entities will face devastating service cuts, layoffs, and rate hikes if we the federal government does not meet its obligation to support the states through the pandemic that it carelessly allowed to ravage our country.

Fire at 3333 Broadway

I am sad to report that on Sunday, December 13th, there was a fire in the B tower of 3333 Broadway, in which one resident perished. The fire was contained to the resident's apartment, and no other families were displaced or injured in the blaze. I would like to thank the FDNY for their speedy response and efforts to save the resident on Sunday. Winter is an especially dangerous time for house fires, as poor heat or other circumstances may lead to increased use of more dangerous heating elements. The FDNY recommends limiting the burning of candles or gas stoves inside, as the combustion can result in dangerous gases without proper ventilation. If you are using a space heater, do not leave it unattended, and unplug the heater once the room is heated. The holidays are also a good time to check to make sure that each room has a working smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector with fresh batteries. More recommendations can be found at fdny.nyc

Free City COVID Testing at 21 Old Broadway

The coronavirus continues to spread in New York, albeit at a greatly reduced rate compared to the spring. New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation offers free coronavirus testing at the clinic at 21 Old Broadway at W 126th Street 7 days a week, Monday-Sunday, from 9am-7pm. No appointment is necessary. Please call 844-NYC-4NYC if you have any questions. Help us keep coronavirus in check and keep your friends, neighbors, and family safe. It pays to get tested!

Get Your Flu Shot!

Flu season has unfortunately arrived. This year it is more important than ever to be vaccinated for the flu so as to avoid getting sick and requiring medical attention, which may further expose you to COVID. Per the DOHMH, "Flu vaccines are widely available at doctor's offices, pharmacies, community health clinics and through employer-sponsored programs. Most health insurance plans cover flu vaccination without a co-pay." Many of the drug stores in our area offer flu shots with no copay and with no appointment necessary. To find the nearest location offering flu shots near you, you can go to <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/flu-seasonal-vaccination.page>

CB9 Hosted PPE Distribution on December 11th

Community Board 9, along with our elected officials including Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer's Office and the City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, helped distribute over 6,000 masks and other items of Personal Protective Equipment at 125th Street and Broadway, by Grant Houses. Thank you to our Health and Environment Committee, its Co-Chairs Edwin Torres and Miriam Aristy-Ferer, and our District Manager Eutha Prince for helping to set up the distribution.

Proposed Development at W 142nd Street and Riverside Drive

Manhattan Community Board 9's Housing, Zoning, and Land Use Committee saw a preliminary presentation by a developer seeking to build a 17 story residential tower on the north corner of W 142nd Street and Riverside Drive. The proposed tower would contain 81 apartments, 21 of which would be affordable. In order to develop the site, the owner would have to destroy two of the historic townhouse on the site. The development would require an upzoning on the site from the current R6A designation (which has a 70 foot height cap) to R9A, which has a 170 foot height cap. The developers have not yet formally had their application at the Department of City Planning finalized, which would begin the formal Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP), at which point the Community Board 9 would hold a hearing and formal vote to recommend for or against approval of the rezoning application.

If you are interested in this development, please email mcb9housing@gmail.com to sign up for the HZLU Committee mail list and plan on attending the upcoming meetings of the Committee, which meets the first Tuesday of every month at 6:30pm.

December 21 Uptown Town Hall on COVID-19 Vaccine

Manhattan Community Board 9 will be cosponsoring a virtual town hall about the COVID-19 vaccine with Columbia University, Ryan Health, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, and Manhattan Community Boards 7, 10, 11, and 12 at 6:30pm on Monday, December 21st. Members of the public can register beforehand by going to <http://neighbors.columbia.edu/vaccineNYC>.

St. Luke's Episcopal Church Potential Sale and Redevelopment

The Episcopal Diocese of New York is exploring a sale of the property and building of St. Luke's Episcopal Church on Convent Avenue and W 141st Street. CB9 has engaged in preliminary discussions with the Hamilton Terrace Block Association about the future of the site, which is in a Historic District. If you are

interested in being part of the research and discussion around the site, please email mcb9housing@gmail.com and mention St. Luke's Church in the subject line.