

Chair Report
October 10, 2019
Executive Committee Meeting

Budget Season (and Succession Planning) Begins

We are now in the full swing of things, in the midst of prioritizing our budget requests and refreshing our committees' contributions to our District Needs Statement. As this process builds up to our October 28th Budget Hearing and our October 31st deadline for submission, other items important to the community are also heating up.

On September 19th, during our General Board Meeting, City Council Speaker Corey Johnson announced his support for the proposed Morningside Heights rezoning and committed City Council money to fund an independent rezoning study in the face of the Department of City Planning's refusal to conduct such a study. This is an enormous win for our community and for this Community Board, given that we have been calling for such a rezoning for three decades. It will be imperative that we work together to make sure this rezoning passes the City Council and that affordable housing development replaces the current out-of-context luxury development in Morningside Heights.

Despite this good news, our community is also grappling with a rise in shootings, homeless encampments, and proposed methadone clinics and homeless shelters that threaten the gains in safety, sanitation, and retail environment we have made over the past decade. Dealing with these issues and responding with outreach that helps provide paths out of gang violence and the mass incarceration system, creating permanent supportive housing for our homeless neighbors instead of temporary shelters, and ensuring access to high-quality modern opioid addiction treatment instead of the 1970s-era "liquid shackles" of methadone will require that you as committee co-chairs be in constant dialogue with our liaisons from City and State agencies. Follow-up and follow-through will become even more important than the number of resolutions we manage to pass. If you have not had a chance this fall or summer to sit down with the representatives from the agencies your committees cover, I encourage you to schedule those conversations now so that we can strengthen those relationships and find proactive solutions to problems that we will otherwise only be able to react to. If you have questions as to the contacts your committee should be making, please reach out to Eutha and the office staff.

Finally, on September 24th, 2019, an intern at TheCity.nyc published an article accusing Community Board 9 of "giving" funds to a non-profit run by one of our members, Rev. Georgiette Morgan-Thomas, violating a City prohibition against Community Boards "doing business" with companies or non-profits owned or controlled by Community Board members. This reckless accusation mischaracterized the fact that, when the Board needs to make purchases in excess of \$250 from companies registered as vendors with the City, it must have a member register as a vendor with the City or else use another registered vendor for that purpose. In FY2013, after a member had to pay taxes on such a reimbursement CB9 was given a recommendation by the Manhattan Borough President's Office to use a non-profit registered as a vendor with the City as a fiscal conduit that would purchase things on behalf of CB9, which would then reimburse the non-profit later. Being a non-profit, it would not pay taxes on the reimbursement. This arrangement was used to purchase the backpacks and school supplies for our annual back-to-school community event with the 26th Precinct, as well as supplies for the Children's Pavilion we sponsor at the 125th Street BID Holiday Lighting each winter and other community outreach events. It is obvious to me that there was no conflict of interests in this instruction, and I am working with the Conflict of Interest

Board and the Manhattan Borough President's Office to get further guidance in this matter. Once that is clear, I will be communicating with the Editor of TheCity.nyc to express my disappointment at the lax editorial standards and supervision displayed by the piece. It took some time to assemble the facts in this matter, which is why I did not rush out a statement prior to my report. I trust the intelligence and judgement of our Board Members in being able to understand what has happened, but if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me directly.

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

Barry Weinberg

Homeless Encampments

Many of you have come to me with concerns about the homeless encampments forming in Jacob Schiff Park at W 136th and Amsterdam, under the Riverside Drive overpass at W 138th St and 12th Avenue, or in various other parks throughout the neighborhood. The office staff and I have been working closely with the 30th Precinct and the Department of Homeless Services to work to connect our homeless neighbors at these sites with transitional housing services and begin to clear the sites, but this is not a problem that can be solved with an "enforcement" mindset. Helping our homeless neighbors find the appropriate programs and housing that will meet their individual needs requires relationship-building and individualized attention. We will continue to work with DHS and begin reaching out directly to service providers in our community in an attempt to make sure this work is conducted in a coherent and effective manner that respects the dignity of these community members.

Methadone Clinics and Opioid Addiction Treatment Sites

While the community achieved a victory in blocking the establishment of a methadone clinic in a historic brownstone at 730 St. Nicholas Avenue, more organizing remains to be done to ensure that our neighborhood has a thoughtful, well-planned response to opioid addiction that does not violate the City Council's Fair Share Criteria or the spirit of Section 203 of the New York City Charter. Importantly, we must make sure that sites with detrimental effects on street life and public safety are not unfairly clustered in our neighborhood of West Harlem beyond the capacity needed to provide for the members of the community. I have confidence that the efforts of the Health and Environment Committee on these matters, working in concert with other groups and individuals in the community, will allow us to get a more comprehensive picture of the challenges and opportunities we face.

Third Party Transfer Task Force and Tenant Interim Lease Buildings

As many of you know, thanks to years-long efforts by Community Board 9 led by April Tyler and Signe Mortensen and the HDFC Coalition we helped to establish, the City has been forced to convene a task force to review the use of the "Third Party Transfer Program" to transfer ownership of HDFC co-operatives and even single-family homes to private developers, even in cases where the buildings do not owe back municipal charges (water/tax bills) or fall under the statutory requirements defining a distressed building. This is a critical component of our work to defend West Harlem from the Housing Development and Preservation Department's illegal depredations on homeowners in our community and across the city. I am happy to report that our Housing, Zoning, and Land Use Committee Co-Chair April Tyler has been appointed to the TPT/TIL Task Force. I know that she will be a voice against the

misuse of this law, originally passed to deal with bad landlords, to appropriate the homes of low-income homeowners and people of color in our neighborhood.

Marine Transfer Station

While the letter of support regarding the decommissioned Marine Transfer Station at 135th Street and Marginal Street failed to pass at the September General Board Meeting, I would encourage us to not allow this potential community asset to fade out of our minds. I am encouraging the Economic Development/West Harlem Piers Committee to bring additional stakeholders to the table and continue to push the Sanitation Department, the Economic Development Corporation, and the Department for Citywide Administrative Services to come up with a path forward to redevelop this former burden into a resource that will benefit our entire community for generations to come.