



Economic Development and West Harlem Piers Minutes

5 March 2024 at 6:30pm

Attendees

Committee members present: Hon. Joyce Adewumi (co-chair), Hon. Clayton Sanford, Hon. Clotilde Monguya

Other attendees: Corey Ortega (Women’s Chamber of Commerce, virtual), Joyce Freeling (virtual), Naomi Baker (virtual), Heather Jason (CB9, virtual), Nicole Carter (virtual), John McGregor

1 Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Joyce Adewumi (JA) at 7:00 pm.

2 Adoption of Agenda

A motion was made to add a presentation by John McGregor, moved by John-Martin Green (JMG) and seconded by Clotilde Monguya (CM).

The agenda was adopted, moved by CM and seconded by JMG.

3 Adoption of Minutes

No action was taken on the minutes due to an incorrect month’s meeting minutes being presented.

4 Introductions/Presentations/Announcements

4.1 Joyce Freeling, CUNY CREST Institute at City College of NY

Joyce Freeling, representing the [CUNY Remote Sensing Earth System Institute](#), highlighted its activities in research, education, workforce development, environmental justice, and stakeholder engagement. The institute is part of the [CUNY Climate Consortium](#), a network of labs across the CUNY system focusing on various community projects related to economic development, health, civic engagement, and environmental issues.

Freeling emphasized two main focus areas.

1. First, health and the environment, where urban farming and aquaponics are seen as avenues for significant production, climate resilience, and healthier living. There was a proposal to add a restaurant and a “therapeutic teaching kitchen” at the CUNY life sciences center in the Taystee building, tied to an interest in precision nutrition.
2. Second, the retrofitting of buildings for greening was discussed, with a note on the necessity to meet Local Law 97 requirements and the potential to integrate a microgrid to lower electricity costs for adjacent housing.

John McGregor (considering starting an independent bookstore in Harlem) showed interest in collaboration, citing the work of environmental planner [Ayana Johnson](#). As a nutrition instructor at Hostos, JMG recognized the value of urban farming and expressed eagerness for collaboration. Freeling acknowledged the ease of establishing a kitchen compared to a farm and appreciated McGregor’s interest. CM lauded the initiative, expressing a desire to delve deeper into how precision nutrition can aid in disease prevention.

Community member Nicole Carter expressed interest in hydroponic devices for the Bronx, seeking to connect with Freeling. The discussion extended to the institute's partnership with the National Science Foundation under the Civic Innovation Challenge, emphasizing the need for broad support and community buy-in. JA raised the concept of a teaching restaurant in the neighborhood that would educate community members on cooking healthy dishes, questioning how to effectively reach grassroots communities who are typically absent from such meetings.

Freeling noted the institute's role as a public education resource across the CUNY system, stressing the importance of spreading initiatives through word-of-mouth based on positive experiences. The conversation touched on the institute's need for space, with Freeling mentioning ongoing discussions with Janus properties for the Taystee building; JA offered to assist in these facilitation efforts. Finally, JA highlighted the effectiveness of public events, like festivals, in promoting health and environmental awareness, referencing the positive reception to vegan hot dogs as an example of successful outreach.

4.2 John McGregor

John McGregor discussed his aim to establish a general-interest bookstore in the neighborhood, addressing the current lack. He envisioned a space hosting a diverse range of authors, events, book clubs, and dynamic literary engagement, collaborating with institutions to foster a community hub for discourse and idea sharing. With past experience as an agent and in publishing, McGregor is considering a location at 41 Convent Avenue (on the corner of 129th Street) but has not yet secured a lease.

He expressed a desire for community feedback, ideas, and financial support to realize this vision. Yuien Chin (YC) of Harlem One Stop inquired about McGregor's connection with the property at 41 Convent and noting the space's potential challenges, including high ceilings and a significant required capital investment, given its long-term vacancy.

McGregor acknowledged ongoing renovations that need completion before he can proceed. JA highlighted the community's need for family reading initiatives and off-screen engagement. CM proposed integrating a café with the bookstore, prompting McGregor to consider how such a space could stand out among existing coffee shops, given the spatial limitations.

Chin recommended connecting with [Total Equity Now](#) and participating in Literacy Across Harlem Day to foster community literacy efforts. Corey Ortega ([NY Women's Chamber of Commerce \(NYWCC\)](#)) queried about the project's official status and timeline, with McGregor indicating the absence of incorporation and a pending timeline, contingent on the completion of current construction activities at the site.

5 Subcommittee Reports

There were no representatives present from the [Strategic Planning Committee \(SPC\)](#). CM reported that there are no new updates regarding the small business conference.

6 Old Business

6.1 2024 Small Business Conference

The 2024 Small Business Conference is scheduled for April 27th, with MD having secured the Manhattanville Community Center for the event. JA developed and shared a flyer and mock program on February 16th, eliciting a positive response, particularly from JMG, who was impressed by JA's planning. There's a focus on refining the event's content, with CM requesting more time for feedback.

The conference, titled "Empowering Grassroots Entrepreneurs," will run from 10 am to 4 pm, with the venue available from 9 am to 5 pm.

6.1.1 Keynote speakers and panelists

For the 2024 Small Business Conference, discussions centered on selecting a keynote speaker with a compelling "rags to riches" story, preferably from the local community. Yuien Chin (YC)

questioned the necessity for the speaker to own a brick-and-mortar business, introducing Dawn Demry of Da Little Hot Dog Wagon, a non-traditional business, as a potential candidate. JA considered reaching out to previously honored businesses for the keynote role. Additionally, John McGregor mentioned a connection with Chris Jackson of Penguin Random House's One World imprint, a Harlem native involved in grant projects, as a potential contact for the event. Cory (CO) suggested Junior Martinez, a successful business owner from upper Manhattan and the Bronx, with a recent venture in the legal cannabis market, as a potential speaker or panelist.

JA proposed several panel topics, including the dynamics of running successful for-profit and non-profit organizations, with Dawn Demry and representatives from Columbia-Harlem SBDC as possible speakers. The discussion also covered the importance of affordable space for business owners, with Abdul Salam of Jimma Juice, and the significance of marketing, suggested by Marco from the Uptown Night Market, as potential panel topics.

Yuien Chin (YC) recommended collaboration with the Small Business Services (SBS) and proposed additional topics like ConEd's utilities and alternative energy programs, as well as lease negotiations. She highlighted the need for translation services in Spanish and French and suggested conducting both pre- and post-event surveys to gather participant feedback and expectations.

John McGregor (JM) brought up the idea of discussing the new credit card surcharge laws, emphasizing the necessity for businesses to be transparent about these charges. CB9 member Heather Jason suggested including insurance as a topic of discussion, which CM thought could be integrated under the broader theme of financing. These suggestions reflect a comprehensive approach to addressing the varied aspects of business operations and legal requirements, aiming to provide a holistic learning experience for the attendees of the conference.

6.1.2 Workshops

The conference will feature workshops, each approximately 45 minutes long, combining presentations and Q&A sessions, on various essential topics for small business owners:

- **A grant application walk-through** by the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone (UMEZ) and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC), praised by JA for their quality workshops.
- **Financing loans opportunities**, facilitated by NYC Small Business Services (SBS), to explore financial support avenues for businesses.
- **Filing business tax** workshop led by the NY Women's Chamber of Commerce (NYWCC), with CO noting that although Kenya Abreu will not present, another expert will be found.
- **Digital payment systems** session by Trish Lewis and Arlene Benavidez from Ladies of Hope Ministries (LOHM), recommended by Nicole Carter for their relevant expertise and previous presentations.
- **Legal and licensing requirements**, covered by NYC Consumer and Worker Protection (CWP), providing guidance on compliance and regulatory matters.
- CO suggested a workshop on **retail theft prevention**, aiming to address strategies and support from government offices and council members to tackle retail theft issues.

6.1.3 Resource tables

The conference will feature resource tables from a variety of organizations providing information and support to small businesses:

- NYC Small Business Services (SBS)
- Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone (UMEZ)
- Darrell Downing representing I-AM-HARLEM
- Harlem Congregations for Community Improvement (HCCI), with Eutha as the contact person
- NYC Consumer and Worker Protection (CWP), responsible for issuing licenses
- NY Women's Chamber of Commerce (NYWCC)

- Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce (GHCC)
- Representatives from banks offering loans to small businesses, including franchise owners
- Union Settlement
- Columbia-Harlem Small Business Development Center (SBDC)
- Harlem Business Alliance
- Empire State Development
- Uptown Grand Central
- Harlem One Stop, Inc.
- West Harlem Development Corporation
- Harlem Media Group Inc
- SoHarlem, Inc
- Harlem Commonwealth Council
- Dream Development
- Success Solutions Business Consulting LLC
- Greater Harlem Coalition

6.1.4 Next steps

The next steps involve finalizing the participant list, initiating marketing efforts upon confirmation of speakers and panelists, and addressing logistical aspects like audio/visual needs and facility furnishings. A preliminary budget of \$1200 has been discussed, with a need for further refinement and approval. The organizing committee, with JA's expertise and contributions, is focused on ensuring the event's success, highlighting the importance of community engagement and support for local entrepreneurs.

6.2 Letter to Comptroller

Clayton Sanford (CS) reported that the letter to the comptroller regarding the West Harlem Piers Park funding has been passed along to the CB9 chair, Victor Edwards, and that the committee's role is complete.

7 New Business

No new business was discussed.

8 Adjourn

JMG moved that the meeting be adjourned at 8:57. CS seconded the motion.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Clayton Sanford.