

MINUTES

MCB9 Health and Environment Committee

September 14, 2026

PRESENT: **Co-Chairs:** Hon. Cameron Clarke, MPH, Hon. LaQuita Henry

Committee Members: Hon. Elizabeth Eastman, Hon. Monique Hardin-Cordero, Hon. Heather Jason, , Hon. Jordan Scherer (via ZOOM)

PUBLIC MEMBERS PRESENT: Hon. Lenna Nepomnyaschy (via ZOOM)

Call to Order

Committee Co-Chairs LaQuita Henry and Cameron Clarke called the Health and Environment Committee meeting to order at 6:37 p.m. with a quorum present. Participants attended both in person and online; Jordan joined remotely due to illness. The agenda was approved, while approval of the June minutes was tabled until the next meeting.

Meeting Overview

The Manhattan Community Board 9 Health and Environment Committee met to discuss arts and health initiatives, cannabis regulation, and community services. Ginger Mayer and Sandra Danzinger of the Theatre Development Fund (TDF) described programs linking arts participation to improved health, including discounted theater tickets, autism-friendly performances, and social prescribing projects. Yadira Velasquez of the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation provided updates on housing assistance, immigration services, and healthcare navigation. Deborah Levine of the CUNY School of Public Health outlined community engagement principles and upcoming research on hair care and digital health technology. Malik also reported on the cannabis task force's review of potential medical dispensary sites and its outreach to applicants and the community.

Specifics

Theater Accessibility Program Presentation

Theatre Development Fund (TDF) Vice President of Programs, Ginger Mayer, presented the organization's theater-accessibility initiatives and its use of the arts as a health intervention to Manhattan Community Board 9's Health and Environment Committee. She described programs offering discounted Broadway tickets, autism-friendly performances, and support for veterans, students, and people with sensory needs, citing new research on theater's positive effects on mental and physical health. She also identified opportunities to collaborate in District 9 by partnering with senior centers and affordable housing communities and serving local veterans through TDF's Access for All and Graduation Gift programs.

Continuing the discussion of language access and theater outreach, Ginger said Broadway offers open captioning, primarily in Spanish, as well as free tickets for community groups such as seniors, youth, and cultural organizations. The committee discussed reaching nonprofits and other community groups, and Manhattan offered to connect Ginger with the Senior Action

Committee co-chairs and Arts and Culture Committee members. Ginger also confirmed that most theater programs serve adults age 62 and older.

Task Force on Cannabis

Task Force Committee on Cannabis Co-Chair, Monique Harden-Cordero, updated those present. The cannabis task force has been addressing plans for potential medical dispensaries in Harlem, with Dashita Dawson's Holistic Wave company considering locations at 135th and Broadway and another site between Broadway and Amsterdam. The task force is working to review applications from other potential dispensary operators and will host community meetings to address community concerns about these establishments. The group also noted that two recreational dispensaries, Midnight Moon and another on Burnley, are already operating in CB9, with the task force maintaining engagement with these businesses.

NMIC Services Overview

Yadira Velasquez of NMIC outlined its services, including housing assistance, immigration legal services, disability advocacy, domestic violence support, education and workforce development, and access to public benefits. She noted that although its main office is in Washington Heights, NMIC serves all five boroughs, with a focus on Northern Manhattan. The discussion concluded with a plan to invite Deborah Levine, a Department Director at the CUNY School of Public Health, to share community health insights at a future meeting.

Community Engagement Principles Presentation

Special guest Deborah Levine, a professor and department head at the CUNY School of Public Health, presented principles for effective community engagement and discussed two current projects. She emphasized centering people with lived experience, engaging them early and consistently, maintaining transparency, providing fair compensation, and ensuring proper credit and authorship. Deborah also announced an October 5 event from 2–7 p.m., organized with WE ACT and the CUNY School of Medicine, on health and wellness in hair salons citywide. She introduced a community research project exploring who should decide how digital health technology and AI are used in the community; participants will receive \$50 per session.

Deborah shared details about upcoming OMNY Card sessions at 55 West 125th Street, available in person or virtually via Zoom. Manhattan asked whether the newsletter could promote recruitment for clinical research studies, and Deborah confirmed that recruitment would occur in multiple rounds. Deena offered to connect Deborah with natural hair care expert and author Miss Diane Bailey as a potential panelist. Manhattan also recommended contacting the CODA Alliance, a coalition of 12 organizations, to publicize the study and recruitment opportunities.

Deborah highlighted upcoming work with Dr. Oni Blackstock through the Harlem Health Initiative on AI and hair care research. She also discussed efforts to license hair braiders and beauticians, acknowledging concerns about cost while stressing the importance of training and professional development across the industry. The discussion concluded with plans for an October 5 hair and scalp health event and Manhattan's interest in supporting related community initiatives.

The group discussed meeting with Abby from the CUNY School of Public Health on October 5. Several members confirmed their availability, and Jordan planned to join virtually from Fresno. They also agreed to publish a Communities Planning Fellow paper on their website and consider future presentations on AI and safe technology and on women's health legislation. The meeting was set for 8:30 on October 5, with some members planning to leave early because they would be working at the polls the next day.

Next steps

- Ginger: Send PowerPoint presentation and outreach information to Laquita and committee members via email
- Ginger: Send presentation materials to Manhattan for distribution to committee members
- Manhattan: Email TDF information to community members including Walter Alexander, Teresa Ragan, Tina Lumley, and Daria Hardeman
- Manhattan: Reach out to Latin CB9 regarding senior centers for potential TDF partnerships
- Manhattan: Provide TDF information to Laquita for distribution to Arts and Culture Committee and Youth Education Libraries Committee
- LaQuita: Provide June meeting minutes before Thursday for September Board meeting
- LaQuita: Send TDF outreach information to community members who can benefit from their programs
- Malik: Release cannabis task force agenda tomorrow
- Malik: Follow up with Dashita Dawson regarding updates on medical dispensary locations
- Malik: Invite cannabis dispensary applicants to upcoming task force meeting
- Yadira: Continue outreach to schools and community events for NIMIC services
- Yadira: Provide specific flyers and PDFs with registration dates and contact information to committee members