

Chair Report
May 13, 2021
Executive Committee Meeting

A Welcome Spring

Manhattan Community Board 9 has much to be grateful for this spring. As the weather has gotten warmer, we have seen an influx of federal funding to New York State and City that has blunted some of the worst impacts that the pandemic had to our government budgets. The first grants have already gone out to local restaurants nationwide, including in our neighborhood, from the Restaurant Revitalization Fund administered by the SBA. We eagerly await the opening of applications for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) by the New York State Office of Temporary Disability Assistance (OTDA), which will provide funds directly to landlords and utilities to pay back rent owed by tenants making less than 80% of AMI who were affected by COVID. Most importantly, as our vaccination rates among residents aged 18 years and older have crept up past 50% in ZIP Codes 10027 and 10031, our positivity rates plunged from over 6% to 0.84% and 1.53%, respectively.

These welcome improvements show that our actions here at Community Board 9 matter. I want to thank everyone who worked tirelessly to ensure that our seniors and other vulnerable adults had early access to vaccines at a time this winter when the Mayor was refusing to open up even a single vaccination site in West Harlem. Your actions saved lives. Thank you, too, to those who helped their neighbors sign up to be vaccinated, or who reached out to a favorite neighborhood restaurant to encourage them to apply for an RRF Grant, or who called their members of Congress and State Assemblymembers and State Senators to make sure that these important programs were included in these budget bills.

I also want to take a moment to note that Manhattan Community Board 9 was the first Community Board in the City to publicly call on our State legislators to increase taxes on the wealthiest New Yorkers to fund critical programs like Medicaid, fair school funding, supportive housing construction, and much more. This year's state budget includes \$4.5 billion of new revenue. Your advocacy was part of making that a reality.

I do, however, want to take a moment to remind us all that our work is far from done. After our youth faced yo-yoing school closures and reopenings and unequal access to online learnings for over a year, while youth programming was curtailed, we have much work to do to make sure that our young people can enroll in educational enrichment programs to make up for lost time. This summer, in particular, will be a make-or-break season. What we must not allow is for the drug trade and gun violence to claim the lives of these disconnected young folks. Similarly, we must remain vigilant for resurgences in COVID due to new variants, low vaccination rates, and slipping of safe social precautions.

That being said, we have much to celebrate. I encourage all of you as Committee Co-Chairs and Officers to congratulate each other on jobs well done before finishing any messages to our City Councilmembers and the Mayor regarding the upcoming City budget votes.

Your Chair,

Barry Weinberg

Zoning for Accessibility Proposal Expands Opportunities for Subway Elevators, But Brings Risks of Overdevelopment on Affected Lots

The Department of City Planning has proposed a Citywide Zoning Text Amendment called “Zoning for Accessibility” that would require owners of lots within 1500 feet of a subway station or other mass transit rail site to allow the transit authority to require an easement on their site for new stairs, elevators, and other improvements when applying for Department of Building Permits for development or enlargement on the site. Additionally, the text amendment offers up to 20% in bonus Floor Area Ratio (the square footage than can be constructed on a lot) if the developer pays for the subway improvements and their maintenance.

While CB9 wholeheartedly supports greater subway accessibility, we remain concerned about the proposal to allow additional FAR for things that include “beautification” and “providing daylight.” CB9 will vote on its response to the ZFA text amendment at our upcoming May 20th General Board Meeting.

Small Business Administration is Distributing Grants to Restaurants, but Funding is Running Out

The American Rescue Plan included \$28.6 billion in grant funding for restaurants, delis, bars, breweries, bakeries, cafes, food carts and trucks, and other food establishments affected by the pandemic, with a 21 day priority period for establishments owned by women, veterans, or socially and economically disadvantaged minorities. The application opened on Monday, May 3rd at restaurants.sba.gov ([sba.gov/restaurantes en español](https://sba.gov/restaurantes-en-espaol)). However, the demand for grants and the number of applications has been so large that already applications for amounts totaling in excess of the \$28.6bn have been submitted. All establishment owners should still apply for the grants, as some of the existing applications may not be granted, and Congress may choose to allocate additional funding to the program.

Citywide Text Amendment for Special Hotel Permits Offers Community Input on New Hotels

The Department of City Planning today, Thursday, May 13th, certified as complete a proposal to amend the process by which new hotel permits are issued. Under the new proposal, all new hotels in manufacturing, commercial, and other applicable areas would require a special permit to open (residential areas do not permit hotels). Manhattan Community Board 9 will hold a vote on this proposed text amendment in June.

PPE Distribution and Wellness Walk Coming Saturday, June 5th from 10am-1pm

On Saturday, June 5th, Manhattan Community Board 9 will be partnering with Assemblyman Al Taylor to conduct a health walk along Amsterdam Avenue from 145th to 155th Streets. We will be distributing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) like masks and hand sanitizer, as well as informing our neighbors about vaccination options in our area. Please come out to join us and volunteer! Thank you to Assemblymember Al Taylor and our Health & Environment Committee Co-Chair Edwin Torres, as well as our District Manager Eutha Prince, for coordinating our efforts in this.

CB9's Public Hearing on Proposed Development at W 142nd Street and Riverside Drive Resulted in Unanimous 'No' Vote

On Tuesday, April 27th, Manhattan Community Board 9's Housing, Zoning, and Land Use Committee held a public hearing on a proposal by a developer seeking to build a 17 story residential tower on the north corner of W 142nd Street and Riverside Drive as required by the City's Universal Land Use Review Process (ULURP). 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.

11 Community Board 9 members were in attendance, along with over 50 members of the public. The CB9 members in attendance voted unanimously to recommend the proposed rezoning not be approved by the City Planning Commission, the City Council, and Mayor. After MCB9, the item will go to the Manhattan Borough President for her recommendation before the CPC hearing.

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.

Funding for Arts, Museums, Libraries and Restaurants included in American Rescue Plan

The American Rescue Plan included \$135 million in funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, \$200 million for the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and \$28.6 billion for grants to restaurants impacted by the pandemic.

Information for libraries and museums can be found at the New York State Libraries page at <http://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/stateaid/>.

Information for artists and arts organizations can be found at <https://www.arts.gov/american-rescue-plan-and-arts-and-creative-industries-faqs>

Rental Assistance from American Rescue Plan to be Rolled Out

The American Rescue Plan included \$2.5 billion in rental assistance for New Yorkers, including assistance in paying rent arrears and in placing homeless individuals into housing. Disbursement and applications details are still being worked out for New York, but will be handled by the New York State Office of Temporary Disability Assistance. Please check OTDA's website at <http://otda.ny.gov/programs/Emergency-Rental-Assistance/> for updates on when the application will open.

FDA and CDC Approve Pfizer COVID Vaccine for Children 12 Years and Older

The Centers for Disease Control on Wednesday, May 12th, approved the use of Pfizer and BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine for use in adolescents 12 years to 15 years old after the Food and Drug Administration approved the application on Monday. The vaccine was already approved for 16 and 17 year olds. In the 2,000 children between 12 and 16 who participated in the Pfizer vaccine trial, there were zero (0) serious adverse events reported. Schoolchildren are frequently the main vectors for many respiratory

illnesses like the cold and flu, so getting our young people vaccinated may go a long way towards preventing a resurgence of COVID when schools reopen this fall. Mayor De Blasio has announced that City vaccination sites will soon accept 12-15 year olds for vaccination, but minors will still need to be accompanied by a guardian.

Congressional Earmarks in West Harlem: Columbia, City College Included in Funding Requests

In much-overlooked news, the House of Representatives voted to reclaim its Constitutional power of the purse and allow individual representatives to direct federal agencies to fund specific projects, a practice commonly known as “earmarking,” under the program of “Community Project Funding Requests” or “Member Designated Projects.” This practice allows Congressional Representatives to more specifically and directly meet their district’s needs, rather than force local governments to apply for the project to the federal agency. West Harlem has a dire need of repairs to our NYCHA public housing, investments in transit improvements and accessibility at our subway stations, repairs to City College and our public schools, and much more.

The initial list of funding requests made by Congressional Representatives is now public. Our Congressman Jerrold Nadler (NY-10, including Morningside Heights south of W 122nd Street) requested funding for 10 projects totaling ~\$13.36 million, with the following project in MCD9:

- **Project Name:** High School Training Program for Small Business Accounting
Request Amount: \$134,000
Intended Recipient: Columbia University
Purpose of Request: The project would launch a new summer training program in accounting for low-income, first-generation, college-bound high school students from all over the Manhattan to meet small business owners’ need for accounting services and to provide students the skills to become accountants.

Our Congressmen Adriano Espaillat (Hamilton Heights, Manhattanville, and Morningside Heights north of W 122nd Street) requested funding for 10 projects totaling ~\$11.9 million, with the following project in MCD9:

- **Project name:** Charles B. Rangel Center for Infrastructure Workforce Training
Request Amount: \$1,500,000
Intended Recipient: City College of New York, City University of New York
Project summary: The Charles B. Rangel Center for Infrastructure Workforce Training will train for construction and operations across multiple infrastructures – transport, energy, communications, water and wastewater, food, health in built environments – with emphasis on digital skills for advanced forms of project management, system supervisory control and operations management. Experiential and simulation-based curriculum developed with industry stakeholders, extensive lab and remote-learning use of computers, smart phones, digital tools and apps. Coverage of GIS, BIM, SCADA, sensors and sensor arrays, working with data, AI and robotics. Community-based recruitment of trainees. Multi-media learning to facilitate the success of nonacademic learners. Focus on both entry-level positions and career paths. Opportunities for continuing work-study through CCNY programs. The Center addresses our country’s and region’s vast and diverse infrastructure needs using 21st-century tools and

methods. The basic objective of the Center is to train and prepare women and men of underserved communities for meaningful jobs and lifelong careers.

Montefiore Park Plaza Area Meeting Held With Neighbors, Parks, and NYPD on May 12th

On Wednesday, May 12th, members of Community Board 9 convened neighbors and members of the parks associations of Montefiore Park and Jacob Schiff Park to meet with the Parks Department, the 30th Precinct, and other government agencies to discuss issues of open drug use, narcotics sales, trash, unlicensed vending, and other issues affecting the area from roughly 134th Street to 139th Street between Riverside Drive and Amsterdam. The community is invested in taking a holistic approach to bring services to individuals affected by substance abuse disorders or experiencing homelessness while also requesting that the 30th Precinct increase its presence and investigate violent attacks that have occurred in the area. If you are interested in joining this conversation, please contact Michael Palma.

New Eviction Moratorium Allows for Hardship Declaration to Delay Proceedings Until August 31, 2021

In December, the State Legislator Passed and the Governor signed the COVID-19 Emergency Eviction and Foreclosure Prevention Act of 2020. This act stays pending eviction proceedings and residential mortgage foreclosure actions for 60 days, stays actions and proceedings first filed in December for 30 days, and allows tenants or mortgagors to file hardship declarations that will further stay any proceedings and actions until May 1st. The State Legislature and Governor recently acted to further extend the moratorium through August 31st while rent relief programs like ERAP are being set up. If you are facing eviction or foreclosure, I strongly urge you to consider going to <http://www.nycourts.gov/courts/nyc/SSI/images/corona/HardshipDeclaration.pdf>, download the Hardship Declaration form, and send it to your landlord or mortgage holder. More information can be found at <https://www.nycourts.gov/covid-eefpa.shtml>. Please note that this does not constitute legal advice, and I am not an attorney.

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>

Free City COVID Testing Continues 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!

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.