

Chair Report
September 17, 2020
General Board Meeting

Welcome Back... to Budget Prioritization

I want to welcome everyone back to the first Manhattan Community Board 9 General Board Meeting of FY21. Normally I would hope that everyone's summer was restful, but I believe that the pandemic and our incredibly frequent tempo of meetings and forums throughout the summer make that unlikely.

I will be blunt: West Harlem is facing an incredibly difficult and pivotal moment in the community's history. After decades of improvement in crime, cleanliness, and service levels, we are now seeing increases in stress on the streets. Those previous decades were accompanied by massive displacement through eviction and tenant harassment, gentrification, and the widening of economic inequality in our neighborhood, our city, and our country. The pandemic and the resulting deaths, illnesses, quarantines, and economic devastation have struck our community at a time when we are incredibly susceptible to an external crisis. With economic inequality has come health inequality, and our community has higher rates of asthma, obesity, and general stress that make us more susceptible to infection from COVID-19 and to severe complications from that infection.

The stress on the streets takes many forms. At the top of my mind is concern for the young people in our neighborhood whose schools have gone online, whose afterschool programs have been severely curtailed, and whose homes may lack decent internet connections and parents who have the ability to work from home and provide guidance and supervision during the day. We have seen more and more of our young people out on street during the day, and the resulting increase in youth participation in drug dealing, gang violence, and street crime has challenged neighbors and the NYPD, none of whom wish to see these youths become entangled in the criminal justice system. We are working with the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and local service providers to find ways to engage our youth in productive and enriching activities and specifically reach out to those youth most at-risk of becoming enmeshed in violence.

Many community members have also noticed an increase in visible street homelessness. As Chair of the Community Board, I want to firmly state that our neighbors experiencing homelessness, including those bedding down in the street, deserve and require our compassion and assistance. I am proud of the way the 30th and 26th Precincts have been responding to the increase in street homelessness by refusing to criminalize homelessness and instead working closely with service providers through the Department of Homeless Services. Community Board 9 held a meeting with local block leaders to highlight areas of concern and potential encampments to DHS and the Manhattan Outreach Consortium so that they can prioritize outreach and offers of shelter and supportive services to those hotspots. I do want to make it clear, though, that the Community Board will be working tirelessly to ensure that supportive services are offered to individuals experiencing homelessness and mental health or substance abuse problems in a way that builds their trust and offers appropriate services for their needs. I want to make it clear: the problems that accompany street homelessness like public urination and defecation, encampments that block sidewalks, public drug consumption, public and sometimes aggressive solicitation, and altercations that sometimes turn violent will not be ignored by our community. Our compassion for our neighbors experiencing homelessness does not mean these problems will be tolerated, but instead means that we will be focusing our efforts curbing those problems by treating the underlying problems of housing

instability, poverty, substance abuse disorders, and mental health issues to as to truly help all of those who are in our community, be they housed or not.

Finally, while we are grappling with a greatly increased need for services as a result of the pandemic, our City is grappling with revenue shortfalls from the pandemic and an intransigent federal government that has not only completely botched the response to COVID-19 but has also failed to support local governments and state governments in their response to the pandemic. We need our federal officials to ensure that New York City and New York State both receive federal aid to avoid devastating service cuts that will begin a spiral of unemployment, untreated mental health conditions, and evictions. CB9 is on record as supporting increasing tax revenue as a way to pay for these services, but the borrowing capacity of the federal government must also be brought to bear.

It is in this condition that Community Board 9 is beginning the annual, Charter-mandated process of updating our District Statement of Needs and our accompanying capital and expense budget priorities to submit to the Office of Management and Budget and the City agencies. These budget documents will help form the basis for the Mayor's Preliminary Fiscal Year 2022 Budget released in January of 2021, the ultimate version of which will be the City budget that takes effect on July 1, 2021 and runs through June 30, 2022 (Fiscal Year 2022). This year more than ever, we must bolster our Statement of Needs with data about the problems and challenges our district faces, and our budget priorities must be as specific as possible. Our follow-up with the budget representatives at the City agencies and with our elected officials must also be more thorough than ever if we are to advocate for and win the resources our neighborhood needs to survive and even thrive.

We have paid a terrible toll as a neighborhood in this pandemic. Community Board 9 lost Walter South, one of our longest-serving and most knowledgeable members, and many of us have lost other friends and loved ones or even suffered from the effects of the illness itself. We have become emergency homeschool teachers, mutual-aid organizers, and volunteer street cleaners. But this pandemic also can serve as an opportunity to strengthen our neighborhood by more forcefully advocating for the services like youth programs, sanitation, housing, and mental health and substance abuse services that we needed even before the pandemic. We may find that retail rents will come down, making it possible for small businesses to thrive in ways that they couldn't when asked to pay the astronomical rents that were required pre-pandemic. We may find that more neighbors have gotten to know and support one another, and that those ties and that engagement lasts even after the distribution, hopefully, of a vaccine. It is up to us as a Community Board to make sure that the neighborhood that emerges from this crisis is a better and more resilient one than the one that existed at the end of 2019.

Thank you, as always, for all the work that you do. It is more important now than it has ever been before.

Your Chair,

Barry Weinberg

Public Hearing on Agency Response to CB9 Capital and Expense Priorities for FY22

Community Board 9 is continuing to update the District Statement of Needs and its capital and expense budget priorities. Committees will continue to update the priorities and amend the statement of needs, and we will be scheduling a public hearing for the priorities in October. The budget statement and

priorities are due to OMB by Friday, October 30th. As I mentioned, this will be one of the most crucial budget processes that we will have undertaken in several years. We will continue to look for additional ways to gather public input on these crucial budget issues.

Update on 12th Avenue Street Collapse and 701 W 135th Street

The situation at 701 W 135th Street on 12th Avenue, between 135th and 138th Streets, continues to deteriorate. While the Department of Design and Construction have designated the street collapse as a capital project that they will take on, it is reportedly not scheduled to begin work until FY23. In the meantime, the site has proven to be what is known as an “attractive nuisance,” with young people sneaking in and playing the extremely dangerous collapsed street crater, and other individuals breaking into the building to seek shelter, perform sex work, or use illegal drugs. CB9 has been working to make sure the 30th Precinct and the Department of Buildings are on top of the issue and are putting maximum pressure on the owner of the building to secure the building. Yesterday, the DOB issued a summons to the building owner for the unsafe conditions at the site. We will continue to demand a scoping meeting for the project with DOT, DEP, Parks, DOB, and DDC along with representatives from Jenny’s Garden and the 600 W 138th Street Block Association to make sure that the repair is scoped appropriately. This includes not only restoring the street but also making sure that there is not a leak or crack in the sewer pipes that is contributing to erosion along 12th Avenue (DEP), repairing sidewalks along the east side of the avenue and installing new sidewalks along the west side adjacent to the Amtrak tracks (DOT), that electricity is restored and the street lights turned on and function (ConEd and DOT), and ensuring that the retaining walls for Riverside Park (Parks) and Amtrak (Amtrak) are in a state of good repair and are not in danger of collapsing partially or wholly.

Fire at 601 W 135th Street

On the night of Friday, September 11th, there was a 6 alarm fire at 601 W 135th Street, above Bus Stop Diner. Several people were taken to the hospital, but fortunately no one perished. Community Board 9 was on the scene with the assistance of residents of 3333 Broadway, including Alicia Barksdale and Grisel Ortiz-Thompson, as well as the Mayor’s Manhattan Representative Isaiah Jenkins and Manhattan Borough President’s Liaison April Adams. We were able to get families connected with the Red Cross and temporarily housed while P.A.’L.A.N.T.E. Harlem and the Northern Manhattan Office of the Manhattan Borough President assist with resolving the housing issues.

If you know of any family affected by the fire, please call the Board Office at (212) 864-6200, and we will connect them with the Borough President and the Red Cross.

Voter Registration and Absentee Ballots

As many of you know, the upcoming General Election for our federal representatives, including President and Vice President, will occur on Tuesday, November 3rd. Early voting in New York will take place from Saturday, October 24th through Sunday, November 1st. To find your poll site for early voting or for November 3, you can enter your address at <https://findmypollsite.vote.nyc/> and will be given the correct information.

You can apply for an absentee ballot through Tuesday, October 27th, by going to <https://vote.nyc/page/absentee-voting>. That site has links to apply online or via email. You can also download an application to apply via fax or post. You can also apply by calling 1-866-VOTE-NYC (1-866-

868-3692). Given the attempts to sabotage the US Postal System, it is **strongly** advised that if you want to vote by absentee ballot, you apply as soon as possible. You can also apply for an absentee ballot in-person at the Board of Elections at 200 Varick Street. You can track your absentee ballot application online at <https://nycabsentee.com/tracking>.

Once they are completed and placed in the appropriately signed and sealed special envelope, absentee ballots can be returned by mail. It must be postmarked by Election Day (Nov 3) and reach the Board of Elections no later than 7 days after the election. However, given the aforementioned issues with USPS, you can also drop off your absentee ballot at the Board of Elections at 200 Varick Street or at an early voting site or poll site on Election Day.

Finally, you must be registered to vote by Friday, October 9th in order to vote! If you are not sure if you are registered or if your registration is up-to-date, you can check your status at <https://voterlookup.elections.ny.gov/>. You can update your registration in-person at 200 Varick Street or online at the DMV at <https://voterreg.dmv.ny.gov/MotorVoter/>. Voter registration forms sent by mail must be postmarked no later than October 9th.

I strongly encourage *everyone* to talk to their children, friends, neighbors, relatives, and others to ensure that they have checked their voter registration and have a plan to vote on Election Day. This will be a crucial election, and given the coronavirus pandemic, the logistics will be more complicated than ever.

Reopening New York and Indoor Dining

The gradual reopening of New York City in the wake of stay-at-home orders, bans on indoor dining and public gatherings, and other public health measures continues. New York has had excellent success in bringing down positivity rates and transmission rates to some of the lowest in the country, and we cannot give up our hard-won gains. Everyone should wear a mask covering their nose and mouth while they are out in public and should continue to maintain 6 feet of distance from others not in their household.

New York City is now in Phase 4 of reopening. The City and Governor have announced plans to reopen restaurants for indoor dining on September 30th, with a limitation of 25% of capacity. I want to encourage everyone to continue to support our small businesses and restaurants, particularly through outdoor dining and takeaway orders. However, I cannot urge enough caution when dining, be it indoors or outdoors. Please wear a mask when not actively eating, and do not unnecessarily expose yourself or our restaurant workers to violations of mask wearing and social-distancing protocols.

The Mayor has also forged ahead with reopening public schools to in-person learning. While CB9 has not taken a position on this, my personal understanding is that the Department of Education has not adequately ensured that our school buildings are safe for re-opening, lacks the logistical preparations for hybrid in-person and remote learning, cannot deliver COVID-19 testing and contact tracing services with the necessary quick turnaround, and are therefore needlessly endangering our children and our educators. All parents have a right to enroll their children in 100% remote learning. To do so, you can find instructions and information at <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-year-20-21/return-to-school-2020/choosing-remote-instruction-for-fall>.

To follow updates on all aspects of reopening, continue to monitor <https://forward.ny.gov/reopening-new-york-city>.

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!

Working with the MTA to Make Our Subways Accessible

The ability to move around our city should be a fundamental right for all New Yorkers, but the MTA's service failures, rising fares, and inaccessible stations make the fastest way to travel long distances, our subways, out of reach for many of the elderly and disabled in CB9. Specifically, there are no accessible 1 train stations with elevators in CB9 or anywhere along the stretch between 96th Street and 168th Street. Recently, the MTA announced that it planned to add elevators to the 1 station at W 137th Street and Broadway. While we applaud this first, small step towards system-wide accessibility, we need much more. CB9 will be working with our state elected officials, local institutions, and the MTA to ensure that all stations in CB9 along the 1 line and the ABCD lines have a plan for accessibility renovations.

We Want Your Feedback on the RKO Hamilton Theater Redevelopment Proposals

On July 21st, CB9 hosted a virtual town hall on the future of the RKO Hamilton Theater. We heard updates from two developers with proposals to redevelop the landmarked site: Omni and BRISA. Omni currently has site access and has signed an option with the current owners. Both proposals call for putting steel beams through the portion of the building that houses the theater seating and stage and building affordable housing on top and on an adjacent site on W 147th Street that is currently vacant. Both proposals also contained space for performing arts groups. As a reminder, any redevelopment of the site would almost certainly require zoning variances and Landmarks Preservation Commission approval, which means CB9 must essentially support the project.

To view the town hall, please view the RKO Hamilton Forum on our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/114421275273320/videos/3113309588788450>.

After watching the Forum, please fill out our feedback survey with your reactions to the proposals and priorities for the site at <https://mcb9.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=779f2781842681ac8df8c613d&id=97c001cbd3&e=88a45640df>. Please fill out the survey by September 30th.

Street Clean-Ups

Thank you to everyone who turned out for our street cleanup along Broadway between W 135th Street to W 145th Streets on Saturday, September 12th! The Department of Sanitation has reduced trash bin collection in our area by about 70%, and we have been trying to involve our neighbors in helping to keep our streets clean. We will continue to petition for increased pickup services from DSNY, but we will also continue to support grassroots efforts to clean up our community like those of Hamilton Heights Cleanup Crew. To get involved with the cleanup crew, you can email hamiltonheightscleanupcrew@gmail.com.

Final Push for 2020 Census

The 2020 Census is coming to a close! The last day for households to respond to the Census is Wednesday, September 30th! Community Board 9's response rate is still only at about 65%, and we need to do better and get a complete count so that we do not lose out on our fair share of federal funding for schools, Medicare and Medicaid, Section 8 housing funding, small businesses, transportation funding, and so much more! CB9 is partnering with the US Census Bureau for a final blitz in the neighborhood. Please remind everyone you know to fill out the Census! It takes 5 minutes, and can be done at my2020census.gov or by calling 844-809-7717 (English) or 844-809-7718 (Spanish). To volunteer with CB9, please fill at the form at <https://forms.gle/DYNfZYyDitewwQoE8>.

West Harlem Restoration Re-entry Program Days

Manhattan Community Board 9 participated in two back-to-school re-entry days on September 10th and September 12th between W 125th and W 126th Streets on Old Broadway and Morningside Avenue, respectively. We provided information for the community about opportunities for youth jobs, youth enrichment programs, and healthcare services. We also brought the US Census Bureau, who assisted people with filling out the Census on the spot! We look forward to continue to work with the WHRRP and its partners to ensure that those returning from the criminal justice system are reintegrated into the community and have stable housing, jobs, and other social services.