



COMMUNITY
BOARD #14

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STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY DISTRICT NEEDS FISCAL YEAR 2015

Community Board No. 14 encompasses the Rockaway Peninsula and Broad Channel. At least thirteen distinct communities, each with its own name, neighborhoods, interests and problems bound together through a common geography and history, which is both written and hidden. From a westerly to easterly direction, we point to Breezy Point, Rockaway Point, Neponsit, Belle Harbor, Rockaway Park, Seaside, Hammels, Rockaway Beach, Arverne, Edgemere, Wavecrest, Far Rockaway, Bayswater and our new neighborhood Arverne by the Sea. Broad Channel sits in Jamaica Bay between Silver Hole Marsh and Big Egg Marsh snuggling close to the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge part of Gateway National Recreation Area.

The Rockaways is some eleven miles in length and averages less than three quarters of a mile in width. With its multi-ethnic, multi-religious groupings, the concerns of the poor, the aged, the young and the needy is often termed a microcosm of New York City. Patterns of housing are equally diverse with evidence of affluence in the western portion of the district, oases of attractive residences in garden-like settings in the far eastern portion, and large concentrations of public housing and publicly assisted housing in between.

THE ARVERNE URBAN RENEWAL AREA

In 2005, the first phase of the Arverne-By-The-Sea project started. The developers have done a wonderful job in constantly working with the community as the project progresses.

Despite a "down" real estate market, the development team of Benjamin & Beechwood has been able to sell well-designed quality two family homes. We look forward to the start of the next phase as well as the construction of the new school, and the grand opening this fall of the YMCA.

The proposed plan for Arverne East section of the Arverne Urban Renewal area has long been a concern for the Community Board and the Rockaway Community. The City had not kept its commitment to work with the Community Board in the formulation of the plan and the selected development team had not contacted the Community Board in five years. In recent months an effort has been made by the development team and HPD to right these wrongs by creating an advisory committee to re think the project in light of hurricane Sandy.

The FARROC group was formed to consider new strategies for the site keeping in mind resilient and sustainable building methods. We have been assured that any change in the plan will be submitted to the Community Board for review. We continue to have concerns regarding the density of housing units as well as the type of units proposed in the project. We are also concerned about the lack of school seats. It is our position that the project will mainly focus on economic development and recreation to provide much needed jobs for our residents.

EDGEMERE URBAN RENEWAL AREA

The Edgemere Urban Renewal Area (EURA) with its affordable, two family house format was approved by the board and the community. The Board believes that this project will enhance an area that has been in decline for over two decades. 400 two-family homes will be built. A retail area and two new parks are also planned. We are deeply concerned with the continuing poor sales in the last phase. HPD needs to better maintain these vacant unsold units.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Rockaways and Broad Channel long ignored by City and State government in regards to Economic Development is in much greater need since hurricane SANDY. As of this summer more than 40% of our businesses West of Beach 32nd Street remain closed due to Sandy. The Rockaway Beach and Rockaway Park business areas were the hardest hit. With the Far Rockaway shopping area and the Beach 129th Street shopping area also suffering damage. The problem remains that although the Federal and State governments have programs for businesses to take out loans, most of our businesses cannot afford to take on more debt thus they remain closed.

Our small family owned businesses need grants to help them re-open. It is our hope that City government will take this opportunity to quickly fund and complete a study of these areas and immediately fund capital improvements along the commercial areas on Rockaway Beach Boulevard from Beach 102nd – Beach 84th Streets as well as the Far Rockaway shopping Area along Mott Avenue from Beach Channel Drive – Cornaga Avenue and Central Avenue/Beach 20th Street from Nameoke Street to New Haven Avenue.

We would like to see the City and State help attract new business to our community as well. Community Board 14 has had the highest unemployment rate of any Queens Community Board for over 20 years; this unfortunate statistic Must be ameliorated. The shopping area along Beach Channel Drive from Beach 54th – 53rd Streets across the street from Ocean Bay apartments should also be addressed. We continue to look jealously at how government intervention can revitalize and provide much needed jobs in commercial shopping areas like Jamaica, Whitestone and Flushing, as well as many neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

We would like recognize and thank City Hall for its recent efforts to improve the greater Beach 116th Street shopping area. It is our wish that the City will address the issue of the SRO hotels on Beach 116th Street as well as the adult home on Beach 115th Street and the boardwalk. The revitalization of Beach 116th Street will be difficult unless these issues are addressed. But we are hopeful that recent efforts will succeed.

Finally commercial revitalization is vital in the recovery for all neighborhoods in Community Board 14; the lack of convenient, affordable shopping affects property values, our tax base as well as the local un employment rate. Assistance is needed, warranted and deserved for our communities to survive.

EDUCATION / SOCIAL SERVICES

The Peninsula's unemployment rate is high compared to the rest of the Borough and remains a serious problem. Our most precious resource, our youth, experience a 35% unemployment rate. Our adult unemployment rate remains at 16%. The state continues to open group residences for those with mental and substance abuse problems despite our objections. The city also is continuing a misguided policy of placing Section 8 clients and other Housing voucher client programs in our neighborhoods. Both state and city government must stop this destabilization of the fabric of our neighborhoods.

The Board's Youth Services Planning Committee, a hard-working dedicated group has made headway in providing vocational, educational and recreational opportunities for our youth, but they cannot do this significantly alone. Our schools are improving but new school seats are needed to help eliminate the over crowding in our many schools.

TRANSPORTATION

The commute to Manhattan or other parts of our City continue to be an adventure in poor public transit service. The fact that the residents of Western Suffolk County can commute to midtown Manhattan via Public Transportation in 40 minutes or less is shameful and must be addressed. Hurricane Sandy has highlighted how isolated our communities are from the rest of the city in regards to Public Transportation.

As a result of the storm the “A” train was rendered useless for almost 9 months. Residents were forced to take a series of buses on a route that was poorly planned. The commute to the mainland took almost an hour and the ride to Manhattan exceeded 1.5 Hours. To City Hall’s credit they implemented a ferry service from Beach 108th Street to Manhattan that was quick and affordable. Our community and the Community Board have been begging for such a ferry service for over two decades. While we are grateful that this service was provided it is scheduled to end after this Labor Day. It is the Board’s position that this same ferry service that City has been telling our community for 20 years is not possible, is a mode of transportation that can be successful. The ferry service Must remain in place permanently and a stop further East on the Peninsula should be added.

Another mode of transportation that the Board has long supported is the revitalization of the old Rockaway Railroad line. The right of way and the tracks are still in place. A high speed/ecologically efficient train would be able to transport thousands of residents every day to Manhattan in approximately 30 minutes. This makes sense in a number of ways and should be implemented.

Finally the most cost effective method of moving our residents to the main land and to Manhattan would be the creation of a Rockaway Express “A” train. It would be simple to have 4 or 5 AM/PM rush hour trains that would make all the stops in Rockaway, Broad Channel and Howard Beach and then go express until Jay Street in Brooklyn. This would cut the commute time into Manhattan by over 40%. A similar service was provided almost 20 years ago with the “Train to the Plane Service”. Rockaway residents used this to commute and were willing to pay two fares to have a reasonable commute.

As a result of Sandy our streets, sidewalks and curbs are in poor shape. Heavy equipment used during the clean up along with water damage has made many of our streets barely passable. Rockaway Beach Boulevard from Beach 84th Street-Beach 73rd Street, the Rockaway Freeway from Beach 97th-Beach 87th Streets are among many East West roadways that need resurfacing. Also it has been 9 months since Sandy and yet long stretches of the Rockaway Freeway remain un lit as well. This is dangerous and unacceptable.

Rockaway Beach Boulevard/Edgemere Avenue from Beach 63rd Street East has been and remains a public safety hazard. The Department of Transportation must implement a capital project to widen one of our only two East-West roadways to two lanes in each direction. This is needed to not only too address our drastic increase in traffic but also to provide for safe and quick evacuation off the peninsula when another hurricane occurs. At a minimum the transition from Beach 63rd-Beach 59th Streets must be addressed as a temporary measure.

Finally we would we would be remiss if we did not comment on the un constitutional tolls on the Cross Bay Bridge. While we are grateful that Community Board residents with Easy Pass ultimately do not pay a toll on this bridge our local businesses have to pay a toll as well as visitors to our community. It is our belief that this toll has stifled economic development for decades. It is the only toll bridge in the United States that is intra community/intra borough. It is like having a toll on Park Avenue between 42nd and 43rd Streets. It must be removed now!

MUNICIPAL SERVICES / QUALITY OF LIFE **PUBLIC SAFETY/ SANITATION**

The most visible signs of any community district at its best are police on the streets, and the cleanliness of the neighborhoods and shopping areas. Rockaway hosts millions of visitors each year. Along with this influx comes the added burden of crime and litter. The garbage deposited on our streets on a regular summer day can be classified as “imported” garbage. The need for daily basket pick up and mechanical broom cleaning of our struggling commercial areas is a priority.

Fifteen percent of the land in Community Board 14 is vacant and therefore provides an open invitation for dumping. Our most serious sanitation issue is the continuous illegal dumping activity that occurs on a daily basis. We have requested additional Sanitation police at night to prevent and apprehend the thousands of illegal dumpers that plague our community.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Our 7.5 miles of beach was devastated by HURRICANE SANDY. Almost 60% of the boardwalk was destroyed. The Community Board and the Community as a whole has been clamoring for years for our Federal, State, and City governments to better protect our communities in regards to storm surge. The Army Corps of Engineers started a study in 1995. Its purpose was to create a comprehensive plan to protect our beaches and thus protect our homes and businesses.

The plan was to install rock groins/jetties a series of beach/sand replenishment along with other measures. The study was never completed and the project was never provided and our community suffered because of Government inertia. As always in government “the closing of the barn door after the horses are out” the theory has occurred. Finally after hundreds of Millions of dollars in damage, the Federal Government has funded a study for our beaches and it is expected to be completed in the next year or so. Also a significant beach replenishment program has been funded and we are expecting almost 4 million cubic yards of sand to be placed on our beaches over the next 6-9 months.

This replenishment is welcomed and need, but clearly more needs to be done to protect us. The study Must be completed quickly and monies must be available for implementation of the plan. The next hurricane that comes may be much worse and the loss of life and property will be greater. We also request that the City install the studier HESCO type barriers along the beach as a temporary measure until permanent measures can be implemented.

The Boardwalk

Almost half of our boardwalk was destroyed as a result of Sandy. Block long sections of the boardwalk simply floated away. The boardwalk was not attached in any way to the concrete pilling they were sitting on. The boardwalk must be replaced immediately. It is clear that a much more stable, studier and protective boardwalk should be installed.

The community feels that the boardwalk should be 3-5 feet higher than it was originally, and that on the south side of the boardwalk a concrete seawall should be installed to protect our community from storm surge. We are requesting that more access to the beach will be included in the new boardwalk as well as more ADA compliant access. The Parks Department has signaled that plans for the boardwalk will be announced in the next 30-60 days. We anxiously await the proposed plans for the new boardwalk.

To our communities the Boardwalk is not only a tourist attraction; it is our protection from the Ocean. We would also like to start a dialogue with the Parks Department regarding more active recreation on the beach and in the water. Perhaps another surfing beach, paddle board and kayak access points can be implemented with community input and Community Board review and approval. It has also been the Board's wish that the beach remain open until 7pm on weekdays, so this City's hard working residents can enjoy a swim after they get home from work.

Rockaway Community Park

The closed Edgemere landfill has been Parks Department property for almost 20 years, yet monies have not been allocated to develop this natural "diamond in the rough". On the park's western bayside edge exists a relatively new fishing pier and a large parking lot. It has been this Board's request that a boat ramp be installed at this site and bathroom facilities and perhaps a restaurant, sail boat, kayak rental and a bait and tackle concession be constructed. This area could easily become a regional park for all the residents of this city for little capital investment. We also request the funding but put in place to construct the promised community park at the Thursby Avenue location and that the Parks Department keeps its commitment to maintain the Dubois Point natural area in Sommerville.

Finally while we have been disappointed in City Hall and the Parks Department lack of interest of working with the community regarding restoration of our boardwalk and adjacent Parks Department facilities including the over \$30 million spent installing the unwanted and visually disturbing metal raised bathrooms and life guard shacks. We are hopeful that we can work together in planning for our community's future. We are also very appreciative of the fine work of our local Parks and Recreation staff and hold them harmless of criticism of the agency for which they work.

FLOOD CONTROL

While we addressed the issue of flood control on the Beach/Southside of our district in our Parks and Recreation section the Board remains concerned regarding the lack of concrete plans for the Bayside/North side of our district. Jamaica Bay borders the whole of our northern border and surrounds Broad Channel. The City has proposed potential measures in the future including a storm surge gate at the mouth of Jamaica Bay. While this might be the solution, it is years away. Our bayside communities need immediate protection. The board has been requesting for over a decade that the City raise the streets and install bulk heads at every street end that is adjacent to Jamaica Bay.

Also tide gates or duck bills must be installed on ALL storm water outfalls in our community. Often with storm surges or even unusual high tides bay water flows back into the storm sewers and out of the catch basin and flood our communities. We would also like the City to consider placing temporary storm surge walls along sections of the bay when a storm is expected much like they proposed for Manhattan. During SANDY a 5-7 foot wall of water came from both the bay and the ocean side of our district we need to prepare, we need to be protected.

CAPITAL EXPENSE IMPROVEMENTS

As always, it is not our intent to list and comment on individual capital budget requests by location and tracking number. We are gratified when sanitary/storm sewer projects move from study to construction; however, a number of projects have languished in the bowels of city agencies for too long.

The Board requests continuing funding for all phases of HW631. The area in Arverne/Sommerville called “the valley” has suffered for years. The need for a new elementary school in the 11691 or the 11692 zip code must be met. The replacement of missing and bleached out traffic signs continues to be a serious problem.

The Board also requests that the Department of Health be funded each year for the purpose of a programed application of adulticide to mitigate the serious mosquito problem each summer that our bayside communities suffer from. We also request that the bay wall along Beach Channel Drive from the Crossbay Bridge to the Marine Park Bridge be repaired /replaced.

UNSAFE BUILDINGS / ILLEGAL CONVERSION

Within the boundaries of Community Board 14, there remain over 180 buildings with an SRO designation. We continue to be concerned with the illegal conversion of these buildings by the owners adding or sub dividing illegal rooms. However, our biggest concern is three City agencies HPD, DHS, and NYCHA. They continue to dump section 8 and other vouchered housing program clients in these dangerous buildings, as well as the dozens of un-sold two and three family homes on the Peninsula. This has a destabilizing effect on our working class neighborhoods and must stop now.

The Department of Buildings continues to improve its response to our concerns and its methods to deal with illegal construction, but more needs to be done. The Department of Buildings must be spared from the budget axe. As always, we continue to be disappointed with HPD when it comes to demolition of unsafe buildings. Our district has dozens of locations that should be demolished, but they have languished on the unsafe building list for over a decade.

WATERFRONT ACCESS

The Rockaways and Broad Channel are known as “Waterfront” communities; yet we still do not have the benefit of a legal, safe boat ramp or a public fishing pier anywhere within the boundaries of our district. The board would like also to see more active recreation and retail opportunities adjacent to some our beaches and on the boardwalk. Recently, the Department of City Planning updated its citywide waterfront plan. The board supports the proposals in the plan that were mentioned for Community Board 14.

The board would also like City Hall to start negotiations with National Grid for the former MGP site located on Beach Channel Drive and Beach 108th Street. The board requests the same effort by City Hall that was given to the acquisition of the Elmhurst Gas Tank site. Once the site is acquired, the City, our elected officials, the Community Board, and the community should work together to find a use that will enhance the economic and recreation needs of the community. The board would also like to see the elimination of the unjust, unconstitutional toll on the Crossbay Bridge. This toll has stifled economic growth and has put an undue financial burden on our residents.

In conclusion, the Board requests that our budget be held harmless in any future citywide cuts. Community Boards are the only agency that has not seen a real increase in budget for over a decade. The Board is grateful for the capital project projects that are ongoing to improve our infrastructure and hope that they continue to be funded. Rockaway which has been too long the dumping ground for City and State government is about to turn the corner for the better. It is up to our elected officials to assure that this promise is realized.