



COMMUNITY BOARD ♦ 14

COMMUNITY BOARD 14
City of New York
Borough of Queens

DOLORES ORR
Chairperson

JONATHAN L. GASKA
District Manager

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY DISTRICT NEEDS **FISCAL YEAR 2009**

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 are 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 and Bayswater. Broad Channel sits in Jamaica Bay, between Silver Hole Marsh and Big Egg Marsh, snuggling close to 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 long awaited ribbon cutting for the Arverne-By-The-Sea project took place. The first phase of this project will include market rate two family homes, retail space and the Community/Recreation Center. It is anticipated that when this western portion of the Arverne-By-The-Sea project is complete it will provide hundreds of good permanent jobs as well as bringing over 2,000 new homeowners to our community. HPD has selected the development team lead by Bluestone Equities for the Arverne East section of the AURA. Our vision of the site will provide for limited housing with recreation opportunities as well as a large retail / big box center that will provide for almost 2,000 new jobs for our needy unemployed residents. It is our hope that HPD will share our vision and not limit economic growth and new jobs. We are concerned that HPD's proposal will cause an over saturation of housing units and as a result, it will create a negative impact on our schools, libraries and property values. We are hopeful that these important issues can be resolved.



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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, a total of 400 two-family homes will be built, and a retail area and two new parks are planned. Construction of the Third Phase is expected to be completed in 2008.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Rockaways and Broad Channel still has a need for active government assistance in spurring Economic Development. Most of our residents do the bulk of their shopping in Brooklyn or Nassau County. It makes no sense to have millions of tax dollars go to another borough or county.

Our few shopping areas are struggling to survive and are in need of assistance. We look jealously to all the money and government assistance that was put into the revitalization of the Jamaica shopping area. The Far Rockaway shopping area has been dying a slow death for years despite the efforts of the board and many local leaders. Thanks to the efforts of Congressman Gregory W. Meeks, a study was completed that makes a strong case for condemnation of the Far Rockaway shopping center and redevelopment of the Far Rockaway shopping area. Recently, EDC has met with the board and we are developing a retail-based plan for revitalization of this area.

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 30% unemployment rate. Our adult unemployment rate is 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 in our neighborhoods. Both state and city governments 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.

TRANSPORTATION

Commuting to Manhattan or other parts of our borough remains difficult on a good day. The commute to Manhattan is still well over an hour by subway or bus. It is the community board's position that in order to attract working class families to live in our district, the commute to the city or the borough's business centers must be 35 to 45 minutes. Three transportation improvements would allow for this: 1) the revitalization of the Old Rockaway Railroad Line would allow for an approximate 30-minute commute to midtown. 2) Ferry Service: The Port Authority of NY and NJ recently completed a feasibility study looking at commuter ferry service from Rockaway to Manhattan and its results are positive. 3) Establish am/pm rush hour express subway service on the "A" train. It would be

simple to have 3 to 4 rush hour trains that would only stop in Rockaway, Broad Channel, Howard Beach and Aqueduct and go express until Jay Street in Brooklyn. The Board also believes that if transportation to and from Rockaway was made timely and convenient, it would spur Economic Development as well as attracting young families.

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 come the added burdens 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

Our 7½ miles of beaches and boardwalks, together with our 22 playgrounds and parks, show that we have much to offer not only to our residents but also to the many visitors who come to our beaches and boardwalks, which on any reasonably sunny day attracts 100,000 people. We have known the figures to show almost 1 million people enjoying the cool breezes and cooler water on a particularly hot weekend. Proper maintenance and clean up is a seven day-a-week operation during the summer and requires many hours. Seasonal employees should be hired on a 5-day workweek basis. The decimation of the Parks Department and its personnel has had a particularly disastrous effect on its parks and beaches, and most importantly, our community. The local parks' staff has done an admirable job with very little resources but more help is still needed. The boardwalk must be continuously maintained; the restrooms along the boardwalk must be completely rebuilt. The yearly reduction in seasonal hires must stop. The beach cannot be properly maintained without adequate seasonal help.

Our over 4 miles of Boardwalk is in desperate need of repair. Many sections are in poor condition and are a hazard. The Parks Dept. should consider replacing worn out wood with a combination of materials such as concrete, brick and plastic as well as wood. Finally, something must be done to end the lifeguard shortage. Part-time lifeguards should be hired to help with the shortage. All sections of Rockaway's beaches must remain open. Also, borough-based training and testing should be instituted.

FLOOD CONTROL

In the past few years, we have suffered through a number of storms. Sections of our beaches and portions of the bayside communities of Arverne, Bayswater and Edge-

mere area have been devastated. The Army Corp. of Engineers has proposed to replenish our beaches over a ten-year period and then install new rock T GROINS to help stop the erosion of the beach. This project must be funded. On the bayside, the Nor'easter of 12/11/92 was the "straw that broke the camel's back" and the bulkhead abutting Jamaica Bay is in serious disrepair. The communities of Arverne, Bayswater, Broad Channel and Edgemere have streets and homes that are in jeopardy of falling into the Bay. This issue must be resolved as soon as possible.

CAPITAL / EXPENSE CAPITAL 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, number of projects has languished in the bowels of city agencies for too long. The Board requests continuing funding for HW631. The area in Arverne called "the valley" has suffered for years. The construction of the new sanitation garage remains a top priority.

Replacement of missing and bleached out traffic signs continues to be a serious problem and must be addressed. The board also requests that The Dept. of Health be funded each year for the purpose of a programic application of adulticide to mitigate the serious mosquito problem each summer that our bayside communities suffer from.

UNSAFE BUILDINGS / ILLEGAL CONVERSION

Within the boundaries of Community Board #14 there are over 200 buildings with an SRO designation. Unfortunately, over the last decade these rooming houses have been bought by unscrupulous absentee landlords who have illegally added more rooms and have been renting to persons who have unique social, mental and behavioral problems and who are generally receiving public assistance from various City/State and Federal programs. A large number of these locations have become the sites of drug use and sales, as well as murder and other crimes. The Dept. of Buildings continues to improve the methods they use to assure building safety and compliance. However, more needs to be done. A good first step would be to substantially reduce the policy of "self certification".

We remain disappointed in the Dept. of Housing Preservation and Development when it comes to the demolition and sealing of unsafe buildings. In our district we have a number of buildings with an unsafe designation that should have been demolished years ago. HPD must take a serious look at its policy as to what conditions qualify for demolition; dozens of dangerous buildings await demolition.

WATERFRONT ACCESS

The Rockaways and Broad Channel are known as "beach" communities; however, we do not have the benefit of a legal public boat ramp or a public fishing pier. We hope the city can find the funds to support these two important priorities. Funding should be put in place for the design of a regional waterfront park to be located at Rockaway Community Park, which is adjacent to the old Edgemere landfill.

Finally, we ask that community board budgets be increased to fund the collective bargaining increases as well as increased costs of supplies, postage and equipment.

In conclusion, the membership of Community Board #14 has remained tenacious in its efforts to improve all of the districts neighborhood's quality of life. This has become increasingly difficult with the reduction of resources and capital dollars. A number of promising proposals are being considered which would drastically improve the quality of life of our residents, provide jobs and improve access to the peninsula. It is up to our local elected officials, the Governor and the Mayor to see that this promise is realized.