

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FIVE

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DISTRICT NEEDS STATEMENT FISCAL YEAR 2009

INTRODUCTION

Community Board Five represents the central business districts of New York City including midtown Manhattan. We also represent residential areas with diverse needs. This mixture is increasingly less defined and this presents challenges to balance the needs of both populations. Our district is the center of New York's tourism industry. Times Square, the Empire State Building and three of the regions transportation hubs; Grand Central Terminal, Penn Station, and the Port Authority Terminal, all fall within or lie on the border of Community Board Five. The majority of New York City's more than 50 million visitors each year will walk our streets. We strive to accommodate the residents, businesses and tourists of our community.

Everyday our district faces extreme congestion. Both vehicular and pedestrian traffic already exceeds sidewalk and street capacity. It is critical to both the quality of life in our area, and the impression made on tourists who visit New York City, that all city services focus on minimizing this congestion and its negative effects. Many of our needs are simple: improve traffic control, limit emissions from trucks and buses on our streets, enforce parking regulations throughout our district, improve pedestrian flow, enforce laws and regulations restricting street peddling, and consider limiting the size of trucks permitted in these congested areas.

Midtown has seen record development and we anticipate additional growth in this heavily congested area. Residential and office towers are continuing to be built on Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Avenues. Concern for safety, cleanliness, and the effects of these projects on pedestrian and traffic flow still top our district's needs. We continue to urge the City's agencies to increase inspections and fines as both an enforcement tool and a revenue source. Accident site prevention should be a high priority and construction sites should be closely scrutinized.

At the same time the libraries, parks, museums, and other institutions serving our area are vital to the cultural health of the City and our district's ability to maintain the tourism that is essential to our economic future.

Noise is a frequent complaint that the Board receives from its constituents. The Board welcomes the new regulations intended to reduce unnecessary noise and urges the City to provide sufficient funding for meaningful enforcement of the new provisions.

Community Board Five recognizes the need to provide safety and security to our citizens as a top priority for the City. The majority of the City's landmarks and tourist attractions are within our Board. We commend the heroic efforts of the Fire and Police departments. We believe that all city departments should focus on developing emergency information channels and a civil defense program.

We are privileged to have several Business Improvement Districts in our area and we feel they are successful in providing better services within their borders. We endorse the BIDs and the work they have been doing and are encouraged by the Mayor's willingness to allow increases in the BID budgets. However, the City should not reduce service in the BID areas in expectation of the BIDs covering the shortfall. BIDs should provide supplemental services to those already provided by the City and should not be used to reduce the cost of basic city services. Many areas within our district, which are not covered by the BIDs, are poorly maintained and unacceptably dirty. These areas should be provided with additional trash baskets, improved trash basket pickup, more frequent street cleaning and better sanitation enforcement.

HUMAN SERVICES (Dept of Homeless Services, Human Resources Administration and Dept. for the Aging Dept. of Youth and Community Development and Administration for Children Services).

There is a continuing need for basic services for the homeless individuals and families, affordable quality housing, mental health services (especially for the elderly), childcare, foster care, drop-in-centers, outreach programs and improved shelter programs. Homelessness in particular remains a serious problem citywide and especially in the CB5 area. We are particularly concerned about the re-emerging homeless issue in Times Square. Increased funding to serve this population is necessary.

The City should expand childcare services, particularly for low-income working people. Many parents, particularly women, are unable to enter the workforce because of the lack of good, affordable childcare services. This need is particularly acute in the Garment Center Area.

Monies for programs to combat domestic violence and to provide counseling are requested, particularly with respect to elderly victims of abuse.

CB5 applauds the additional funding for staff in the Administration for Children Services for programs serving children at risk. We urge the Department to provide additional funding for after school and summer programs. Programs helping immigrants should be supported

HOUSING PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The construction, renovation and restoration of affordable housing must be expedited. We recommend that the various agencies responsible for housing integrate strategies. There is an urgent need in our City for the development of programs that can provide permanent, affordable housing more quickly and efficiently than is done under currently existing programs. We support efforts to prevent the elimination of low and middle income housing units. Legislation should be enacted to prevent the emptying of buildings for redevelopment to seek greater profits and to prevent the rent deregulation of long-term tenants in Mitchell-Lama projects.

Proper code enforcement should be encouraged. We encourage HPD (along with DOB and Corporation Counsel) to vigorously pursue the collection of fines from repeat violators.

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The Board welcomes the new and stronger code provisions regarding permitted noise levels. We urge the Department to engage other relevant city agencies (like DOB for construction related noise and NYPD for commercial noise) and civic organizations in discussions regarding enforcement issues in the new regulations regarding noise. All 311 noise complaints should be routed to DEP. A significant increase in the number of inspectors is needed to ensure compliance with noise

code. Inspectors are also needed on weekends and evenings to address complaints.

Safety of our water supply is vital as is careful air quality monitoring. Given the wear and tear on the infrastructure, and the crush of pedestrians and vehicles on our streets, sewer and water main maintenance remain extremely important. Water main breaks in particular cause extensive damage in resulting in the expenditure of tens of millions of dollars, the loss of business and major disruptions to residents' and visitors' lives.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Traffic

The Board welcomes new initiatives intended to reduce traffic in the midtown area and recognizes that the Mayor's proposed congestion pricing plan, if successful, would reduce traffic congestion and cut pollution in Midtown as well as provide much needed funds for important public transportation projects. The proposal however, lacks important details and the Board would prefer that a three-year pilot program along the lines outlined in the Mayor's proposal would be an appropriate means of ensuring that the program is successful.

Whatever happens with congestion pricing, the City should continue to undertake programs to discourage the use of private vehicles in Midtown. The City should institute policies regarding black car services and tourist buses for strong enforcement of the City's prohibition against double parking and their wrongful usurpation of the MTA bus stop space. Also of concern are the disruptive Avenue street fairs in our District and we support a moratorium on any new such events. There is also still a pressing need for more traffic and parking control agents and Police Officers. The City should limit hours of operation and access to certain streets for large trucks in Midtown; this would reduce peak hour congestion and air pollution. We support the expansion of commercial metered parking as a means of alleviating congestion.

Prompt repair of potholes, cracks, replacement of street signs and the painting of lane markings are essential and should not be delayed. All repairs must be complete and flush with existing pavement. The muni-meter program has been well received in our district and we support expansion of this program, which has potential to reduce cost, improve enforcement and increase revenue. There will never be significant improvements to the traffic in midtown without meaningful improvements to our public transportation system. The Board welcomes the planned expansion of the L subway line west to 11th Avenue and an east side station for the Long Island Rail Road at Grand Central Terminal. Dedicated bus lanes and wider sidewalks on key streets and avenues could greatly improve traffic flow - particularly for cross town trips.

Late Night Towing

Community Board Five has a continuing problem of noise and traffic caused by the proliferation of bars and nightclubs. We support nighttime parking regulations that allow nighttime towing and ticketing as a successful strategy to the problems created by the City's nightlife.

Bicycles

Providing safe and convenient bike lanes and bike racks for commuters and shoppers is a vital first step to alleviating some of the overcrowded transit and road systems. At the same time, unsafe cyclists continue to present serious traffic problems. We need enforcement of traffic laws to protect both the cyclists and pedestrians. A licensing system, training and education should be considered.

Pedestrian Circulation and Traffic

Community Board Five has three major transportation hubs, the theater district, and commercial enterprises which cause a high influx of commuters and patrons. The City must study and develop a long-term strategy to ease pedestrian congestion and related safety issues. Wider sidewalks are desperately needed on many portions of 7th and 8th Avenues as well as some of the more congested streets in the West 40's and throughout east midtown.

Bollards and planters and pedestrian barrier fences often complicate pedestrian and congestion circulation problems and often force pedestrians into dangerous conflicts with vehicles. Planters in front of the Port Authority for instance, force pedestrians onto West 42nd Street and 8th Avenue at the height of rush hour. Pedestrian circulation barriers along 8th Avenue north of 42nd Street force pedestrians to take over a lane of traffic during the evening rush hour virtually every night. We need a more consistent and rationale approach to pedestrian and vehicular barriers that balances security concerns and the needs of pedestrian safety. Similarly, the Board continues to object to oversized phone booths on midtown streets.

PARKS

Park Sanitation

Community Board Five places a high priority on the Parks in our district. We need our parks to be clean and well maintained. Funds are needed for basic maintenance of the parks. Our parks by far the most densely used park lands in New York City. Indeed, on a sunny day it is virtually impossible to find a place to sit in Bryant Park, Union Square or Madison Square Park.

The parks in Community Board Five are also critical show pieces for the City's tourism industry. Central Park and the small parks in Community Board Five are the only parks that most tourists visit at all and it is critical to the City's image that they be maintained in excellent condition.

In addition to the very real benefits our parks provide to the City as a whole, the Board believes that parks, particularly in the dense urban environment of Manhattan, should be treated as a vital City service which should be fully funded by the City.

The Board believes use of our parks requires a strategy which is not focused on commercial, and fund raising activities. We are particularly concerned about the extensive use of Union Square, Madison Square Park and Bryant Park for commercial activity.

As long as full City funding for park needs is lacking, the Board supports efforts to encourage local business and community support to help with park maintenance, but we categorically disagree with placing management of parks in private hands.

Greater collaboration between park enforcement and the Police department is also desirable.

POLICE

We believe it is essential that this district be safe for its residents and visitors. Funding of communication and other technology will facilitate this goal. Police effectiveness is determined by the officers who are available to make arrests and deter crime through their presence. We strongly support hiring additional police officers.

Community Board Five would like to see Cabaret units reinstated in all precincts. We urge the expansion of the Paid Detail Unit (PDU) program to include nightlife establishments with liquor licenses.

We are also concerned with the impact of street vending on pedestrian congestion and on commercial store operators. Recent changes in street vending laws have made enforcement difficult, at best. Strong enforcement is critical to reduce sidewalk congestion and to protect legitimate merchants.

We urge aggressive enforcement of laws regarding bicyclists and bike lanes; police bicycle officers should be increased to combat this problem.

There is a pressing need for an increase in the number of traffic control agents and effective training for them. Direction of traffic and traffic enforcement, with particular emphasis on the problems of double parking and illegal standing, must become a top priority throughout our district. We also urge stricter enforcement of traffic violations, particularly the running of red lights and other violations which endanger pedestrians.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

As with the Police Department, emergency service systems must be integrated between all emergency responders. There is also need for improved training for personnel in the emergency (911) system. A media campaign is needed to alert the public to the importance of allowing emergency vehicles the right-of-way on our streets. Existing firehouses are essential to public safety and protecting property. Any firehouse closings would threaten the safety of this densely populated district. Firehouse renovations and upgrades are encouraged.

DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS

We encourage DOB to vigorously pursue the collection of fines from violators through increased inspection, additional plan examiners and reduction or elimination of self-certification. An increased emphasis on site safety and hazardous material enforcement is needed in our district.

Community Board Five feels that a comprehensive overhaul of construction regulations is needed to bring the building code concerning construction activity up-to-date. Inspection and enforcement of work sites is critical to reduce collapse and scaffold failures in our district.

The Board also encourages aggressive enforcement against illegal signage, including signage on temporary scaffolding. We do not support the use of over sized signage in mixed-use areas.

Midtown is crowded with tall skyscrapers which received a zoning bonus in exchange for providing a public plaza. Many of these plazas are treated like private space and the public is not welcome in the area. Others are locked and inaccessible entirely. Still others are left vacant, dark and unwelcome or given over to the homeless and mentally ill. Building owners have a responsibility to provide a useable and welcome public space in these areas and the Department should vigorously pursue enforcement of public plaza rules.

DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

With increased pedestrian usage in our district comes the need for more sidewalk area. At many hours of the day, Midtown sidewalks are overcrowded, creating a safety hazard. Coordination with the Department of Transportation and the Department of Buildings is needed to ensure that con-

struction in crowded areas includes increased pedestrian circulation provisions at the street level to allow for more sidewalk space.

Despite the recent changes in safety and other code provisions, the zoning and building regulations for new construction remain inadequate for modern building usage - particularly for large commercial projects. Zoning regulations are inadequate for dealing with modern building usage and do not reflect the accommodations necessary for integration of new buildings into the Midtown environment.

Current regulations do not provide for any accommodation for the many small and large trucks and vans that clog our streets by double parking. New buildings should include adequate off street loading and unloading facilities as well as enough room for large trucks to turnaround onsite. Vendor carts using garage space for parking also create congestion, which needs to be addressed. Many large tenants employ fleets of car service vehicles, which line the streets waiting for their designated passengers. New buildings should be required to accommodate this usage with on-site facilities and a plan to minimize traffic disruption.

All buildings must be designed to accommodate present-day recycling requirements including on-site accommodation for sorting, separation and storage as well as adequate off-street loading facilities. Loading facilities should accommodate trucks with 75-foot trailers and provide ample room to turn around inside the building so that trucks can both head in and head out for deliveries and pick-ups.

Pedestrian circulation requirements should be strengthened and expanded. All new large buildings (including so-called "as-of-right" developments) should undergo a discretionary review process designed to ensure that pedestrian and vehicle traffic will not be adversely affected by the new development. Included in this review should be a greater emphasis on the needs of persons with disabilities. Mid-block pedestrian passageways with appropriate safeguards should be a goal for every standard block in Midtown. Regulations to ensure that existing mid-block passageways remain open and visible to the public should be strictly enforced.

The Department should develop zoning regulations pertaining to commercial rooftop "gardens". The Department should also work with the Department of Buildings to develop green building standards applicable to new development projects.

EDUCATION

In view of the anticipated growth of population in the CB5 area in the next few years and the absence of any elementary or middle schools within the Board boundaries, we encourage the Department of Education to find locations for the creation of new elementary and middle schools within the geographic boundaries of CB5.

The overall success of the City's schools has a great impact on our community and the lives of all New Yorkers. Adequate funds for qualified teachers in all classrooms, after-school enhancement programs, E.S.L. initiatives, proper class size, and tutoring at the primary level are necessary. Class size should be kept small enough to allow learning. Capital must be provided to ensure the renovation or replacement of decaying schools. A better system for controlling costs of school operations is critical. We are also concerned with the rising cost of tuition within the City University of New York system. The City should aggressively seek funding from the state to supplement this vitally important education resource. We support an increase in funds for art, music, sports, vocational, nutrition and sex education.

311 COMPLAINT CENTER

A centralized information and complaint center for New York City has become an important tool for servicing our citizens and visitors. Complaints should be centralized so that statistics can be mapped and patterns discerned. Accurate and detailed statistical data as to what complaints in our district are being filed directly with the 311 system is critical for proper enforcement and district needs assessment. Stronger coordination between City agencies is needed. The Board should be provided with information on all complaints concerning the Community Board area.

There should also be improved training of 311 personnel to ensure that complaints are properly recorded and routed to appropriate agencies. Noise complaints should be given to the Department of Environmental Protection.

CULTURAL AFFAIRS

We strongly favor increases in the City's cultural affairs budget, not just for the Cultural Institutions Group, but also the Program Groups, which represent hundreds of large, medium and small arts organizations in neighborhoods of the City. We urge the development of a comprehensive plan for the arts that will maximize the potential of these activities and their links to tourism and business. It is important that cultural organizations be assisted in meeting increased rents and operating costs.

MAYOR'S SPECIAL TASK FORCE OF MIDTOWN ENFORCEMENT

We find the Mayor's Office of Midtown Enforcement (OME) critical to a safe environment in all of the Midtown districts. OME does an invaluable job of controlling illegal activities in Manhattan from 14th to 59th Streets. OME also develops specific civil enforcement initiatives in other areas of the City. The activities of personnel in this agency are also revenue generating and should not be cut. There should be a crackdown on the illegal practice of renting private residences as hotel rooms.

DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

DCA must be aggressive in licensing and inspecting sidewalk cafes, street vendors and cabarets.

HEALTH (Health and Hospitals Corporation and Dept. of Health & Mental Hygiene)

We rely on the hospitals in the City for crises and healthcare service. These hospitals must be funded appropriately.

Specifically, being in the catchment area for Bellevue Hospital, the district depends on the Hospital for a wide range of services including emergency and outpatient care. Bellevue needs adequate funding and equipment to provide:

- Social workers who can deal with post acute care treatment plans
- Treatment for non-English speaking and hearing-impaired patients
- Care for the victims of violent assault
- Care for AIDS patients
- Continuation of the TB program
- Enhancement of AIDS/HIV services in psychiatry

- Prison health care improvements
- Increased pharmacy access
- Patient education/counseling
- Asthma and diabetes treatment programs
- Upgrade generators
- Child health clinics

SANITATION

Community Board Five requires constant street sweep-up and basket trucks because of its high concentration of commercial activity, public areas, traffic congestion and escalating residential population. Streets in the non-BID sections of Midtown are unacceptably dirty. Trash baskets continue to overflow or are missing. More litter baskets will help keep the area cleaner as well. Damaged litter baskets should be replaced throughout the district with rodent proof receptacles. We believe that additional basket trucks and crews are necessary in the CB5 area.

Community Board Five continues to support recycling efforts. The Department of Sanitation should look for ways to make recycling more economically sound. We request an additional recycling truck. Strict enforcement of pick-up rules must be imposed to prevent diversion of trash to illegal operators. Waste prevention should be vigorously pursued. The City should look for ways to reduce the proliferation of non-degradable packaging. The City should study practical uses of waste materials and vigorously pursue utilization of recycled materials by City agencies that will allow the Department of Sanitation to realize significant savings in the cost of waste pick-up and disposal and allow the reinstatement of full recycling. There is a critical need for more frequent and better publicized recycling of electronic and computer equipment.

Additional sanitation enforcement agents and sanitation officers are needed. Since enforcement positions are revenue producing, it is economically advantageous to increase their numbers. The lack of enforcement is a particular problem at our many construction sites. The Board is also concerned that there is a lack of enforcement with respect to the amount of time garbage can be left on the street before it is scheduled to be picked up.

LIBRARIES

The New York Public Library continues to need additional funding to meet the demand for increased materials and hours of service. Funding for capital improvements is critical as many libraries in our district are housed in aging buildings. We support the request to upgrade the Donnell Library's Telecommunications Center and the support space at the Library for Science and Humanities. We request expansion of the libraries' websites, additional technological training and on-line access to reference materials. With the increased technological services offered by the library, additional funds are needed for computer equipment, maintenance, support and public training. In addition, sufficient funding levels for library building maintenance and security are essential, particularly the installation of a new book theft detection system.

LANDMARKS

Community Board Five is home to many significant landmark buildings and several Historic Districts. We are requesting increased funding for inspections and strict enforcement. We believe all landmark violations should result in significant fines.

The Board strongly support increased funding for staff research positions to aide the Commission in addressing applications for alterations as well as consideration of new landmark buildings and districts.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

New York needs a marketing plan that will bring technical, service, and professional employment opportunities. A cost/benefit analysis should be conducted before any subsidies or tax breaks are granted to retain or attract corporations to the City. Furthermore, a corporation that is granted a subsidy but which fails to fulfill its part of the contract should be penalized. Training programs for welfare recipients moving to work are essential to integrating this group into the work force.

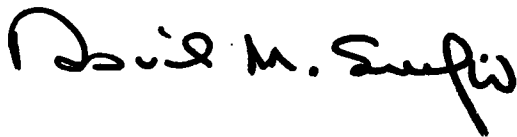
TIMES SQUARE

Additional resources should be made available in Times Square to ensure that traffic moves smoothly, construction sites are safe, pedestrian flow is unimpeded by barriers, illegal street vendors, or dangerous/defective sidewalks. Alternative transportation strategies should be considered. Community Board Five urges the City to adopt a moratorium on the erection of any new permanent impediments to pedestrian circulation (including but not limited to newsstands, kiosks, telephone booths, statuary, lighting poles, bollards, planters, sidewalk cafes and signposts and other street furniture) in the bow-tie area, between Broadway and Seventh Avenue, from 42nd to 48th Streets, except for such items designed to reduce congestion. We also support expanding pedestrian sidewalk space in the Times Square area.


CLOSING

Community Board Five appreciates the opportunity to present this evaluation of our district needs for the fiscal year 2009.

Respectfully submitted,



David Siesko
Chair



Gary Parker
District Manager