



## COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 18

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### **STATEMENT OF NEEDS AND PRIORITIES** **FISCAL YEAR 2008**

Within the boundaries of Community Board #18 are many communities that comprise the "southern tier" of Brooklyn which can be classified as middle income neighborhoods with a solid tax base.

The communities that comprise Community Board #18 are truly representative of the city as a whole. These neighborhoods must be maintained in order to attract and keep families, business, and industry in the city. Only through a comprehensive program of improvement and long-range planning can we attempt to fulfill these planning objectives. Every effort must be made by the city to grant and, hopefully, exceed our Capital and Expense Budget requests, and recognize the priorities that we have attached to these funding recommendations. Unfortunately, at the present funding level only the basic and essential facilities and services can be maintained.

Paerdegat Basin, located within Community Board #18 on the North-western edge of Jamaica Bay, is one of the largest remaining coastal ecosystems in the New York City area. Portions of the Gateway National Recreation Area are on both banks at its mouth and dot the landscape.

As part of the "Gateway System", we serve as host to Floyd Bennett Field -- an historic treasure -- the first Municipal Airport in the City of New York. Without community input or knowledge, the local Congressional Delegation authorized the National Parks Service to enter into a long-term arrangement to concession large portions of Floyd Bennett Field for a "mega" recreational facility. By virtue of its Federal Jurisdiction, they are immunized from impact studies concerning pedestrian/vehicular traffic and city infrastructure.

The Board urges the Department of the Interior to restore the boat docks at Floyd Bennett Field and study the use of water taxis as a means of moving participants of large outdoor events.

We support the efforts of the National Park Service to implement a pilot marsh restoration project encompassing approximately two (2) acres of Big Egg Marsh with the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, a component of the Gateway National Recreation Area. It is well documented by various scientific investigations that the tidal marshes that occur in Jamaica Bay are disappearing at an unprecedented rate. From 1924 to 1999 more than 50% of the bay's marshes disappeared.

The wetlands serve as flood protection and shoreline erosion control for the surrounding homes. The Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan Advisory Committee goals include reducing the impacts from contaminated sediment, reducing the amount of nitrogen in the water and the prevention of further loss of wetlands.

During the mid-to-late Nineteenth Century Brooklyn experienced explosive growth. Uplands were leveled, wetlands were filled, and as a progressively more urban landscape developed, storm sewers were constructed to convey street runoff directly to Paerdegat Basin. The tributary watershed to Paerdegat Basin includes 6,825 acres spanning portions of the Canarsie, Brownsville, Crown Heights, Flatbush, East Flatbush, Marine Park and Flatlands neighborhoods of Brooklyn. The bay is the depository of the city's treated wastewater -- approximately 300 million gallons a day.

Jamaica Bay and its inlets are under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, Gateway National Recreational Area. Jamaica Bay, which borders on Brooklyn, Queens and Nassau County, includes 26,645 acres consisting of open water, meadowland, marshes, dunes and forests. More than 500,000 people live within the Jamaica Bay watershed. The future of this ecosystem, including wildlife, local homes and infrastructure is of deep interest to conservation groups and environmentalists as well as community organizations and residents. We continue to stress the aggressive pursuit, by the Administration, to bring Jamaica Bay water quality to levels that would meet and, hopefully, exceed Federal standards for recreational use which would ultimately help save this lush, but threatened natural resource.

More than a decade ago, a firm commitment was in place by the Department of Environmental Protection as part of the Paerdegat Basin Water Quality Facility Plan to upgrade the Pumping Station and build a six-million gallon underground CSO (Combined Sewer Overflow) retention facility to hold and treat the overflow until the Knapp Street Sewage Treatment Plant could properly process the sewage. This project, coupled with "in-line" retention, is an engineering solution to the current pollution problems that continue to plague the Basin. After three different administrations and more than a half a dozen commissioners, the Paerdegat Basin Project is due for completion in April 2011. We eagerly await its completion.

The area surrounding the head of Paerdegat Basin supports New York City infrastructure. The Department of Transportation operates a maintenance and storage facility at the northwest corner. The Department of Environmental Protection operates a maintenance and storage facility at the northwest corner and a Pumping Station at the headwater terminus of Paerdegat Basin. Land use is primarily residential, with extensive parkland areas immediately adjacent to Paerdegat Basin. Within the Jamaica Bay area, however, are large sections of vacant land with intermittent commercial, industrial and institutional uses.

The Board urges increased funding to allow Community Boards to hire planners and consultants to provide the necessary zoning expertise and resources for effective neighborhood planning. The concept of community-based planning was why New York City's Community Boards were created. Four decades later, despite the tireless efforts of their members and staff, Community Boards and community-based organizations have few real opportunities to engage in proactive planning and even fewer opportunities to ensure that development suits neighborhood needs.

The "piecemeal" rezoning efforts by the Department of City Planning is just that -- a

piecemeal approach to deal with major zoning issues. It is the sense of this Board that all of the communities within our Board be rezoned to create a rational zoning plan that reflects natural residential, commercial, and manufacturing boundaries. The current land use is largely an artifact of historical urbanization. Future land use must be controlled by zoning, public policy, and land use regulations intended to promote activities appropriate to preserve the neighborhood character and infrastructure for those who live and work there.

Comprehensive planning is essential for zoning of the future. Overdevelopment is a city-wide concern. Zoning must be made to protect the infrastructure and the extraordinary neighborhoods of our City. The Zoning Resolution must be reformed to restrict community facilities from imposing non-conforming structures in residential districts, over-development of large box-like condominiums, or the replacement of an historic single family home with a huge community facility or multi-family dwellings. Neighborhoods are under attack by developers who often work in conjunction with city agencies to redevelop communities with low population and low density in the image of Manhattan's high-rise, mixed-use zoning.

A revised zoning text would eliminate the need for the Board of Standard and Appeals. In its current form, the Board of Standard and Appeals is frequently misused to circumvent existing antiquated zoning text. Their decisions reflect their own opinions and objectives while altering the zoning landscape without a concise cohesive zoning objective. We approach the monumental task of rezoning with trepidation since it has been our experience that the Board of Standards and Appeals does not uphold those efforts. They will continue to go through the public review process and ultimately use their powers to place their own "signature" on the zoning landscape.

We urge the Community Assistance Unit of the Mayor's Office to continue its strong working relationship between their centralized staff and our Community Board to assist in the resolution of problems and issues. We commend their expansion of internet access between community boards, city agencies, elected officials, and area residents.

We are bewildered, however, as to why the agency has not developed an on-line computer generated and electronically submitted Street Activity Permit Application form and process. The current form still requires the use of an antiquated typewriter! We urge increased computer support programs within the Community Assistance Unit to keep-in-step with the constant spiraling technological advances. The need for computer support services is becoming even more essential as the use of the internet for conducting government business increases.

City Council Introduction 174-A is a victory and a milestone for Community Boards and for all New Yorkers. The legislation amended the City Charter to require the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT) to provide electronic data, broken down by community district, on complaints collected by the 311 Citizen Service Center. This Charter Amendment is an important step toward sharing 311 data. However, we still need to be included in the city's complaint collection, tracking, and resolution processes. Only through personal interaction and sharing of information between the Community Board and city agencies can we enhance city service delivery and coordinate efforts to improve the quality of life for our residents.

Through the persistent efforts of our local elected officials and the Community Board, in a partnership with the community -- Civic and Block Associations, Parent Associations, Religious Groups, Merchant Organizations, and Community Based Service Providers -- we continue to de-

velop a mechanism to address the special needs of the communities and enhance the delivery of services as well as the maintenance and reconstruction of our infrastructure.

The communities of Board #18 have been identified as important, viable areas that provide our city with a solid tax base. There are many shopping centers and commercial strips that are thriving throughout the Board including Kings Plaza, a large regional shopping complex.

Throughout our communities there exists a network of volunteer civic, parent, religious, and service organizations working in a harmonious atmosphere of partnership with our elected officials to enhance the quality of life for all of our residents. It is that spirit of commitment and activity that makes the neighborhoods of Community Board #18 perhaps some of the finest places in which to live and raise a family.

As our communities age, it becomes increasingly essential that the Capital Budget needs of the area be met if we are to maintain public structures and facilities at acceptable levels. Emphasis must be placed on long-term infrastructure rebuilding as well as short-range improvements suggested by the Community Board to the appropriate agencies.

As the age of our basic one and two family homes advances, we encourage homeowners to do major home improvements using home equity loans that are available from area banks.

Community Board 18's housing stock basically consists of well maintained owner occupied one and two family homes with scattered co-op and large-scale condominium development. Additionally, there are several high-rise buildings and three New York City Housing Projects (Bayview, Breukelen and Glenwood) within our boundaries -- all of which have been upgraded using HUD allocations to the New York City Housing Authority.

The objectives of our housing priorities are to support continued development of vacant land suitable for housing with designs that are consistent with the residential nature and character of the communities. Our goals continue to be achieved by ongoing new development and home improvement incentives offered within the communities. The current private home construction in Georgetowne, the on-going private home construction in the waterfront communities of Bergen Beach and Mill Island, vividly demonstrate our commitment to support new construction that is in consonance with the surrounding area.

We are concerned about efforts to create "Retail Subdistricts" throughout the City. Our communities do not need the added heavy commercial burden on our streets and in our residential neighborhoods. Additionally, the tenuous economic condition of our local "strip" shopping centers, as well as our network of "Mom & Pop" stores, could not endure the "heavy-handed" competition of large discount mega-stores. We continue to work with merchant groups to develop strategies for commercial revitalization programs. "Strip" shopping is vital to the economic stability of our communities, and special attention must be paid to their well-being.

The Community Board vehemently opposes the further commercialization of Flatbush Avenue, south of Avenue U/north of Gateway National Recreation Area with "big box" development, and respect-

fully urges the Department of Business Services to cease their efforts to develop this land for a regional shopping facility. This wonderful and rare waterfront parcel suggests itself as an ideal opportunity for large scale residential development consistent with the high demands for new residential housing in our community.

Transportation needs, particularly contract resurfacing, total reconstruction and scheduled repair of the roadways within the Board area, present an ever increasing need. Much of the existing street system in the southern portion of the Board area was constructed by builders more than forty (40) years ago. Canarsie and surrounding communities were built on landfill that is rapidly deteriorating requiring an aggressive street and sewer reconstructive program. The Community Board urges the Department of Transportation to advance our Board's Capital Project requests.

Transportation issues persist to rank high on the problem list for our Community Board. Many of the intersections within our Board area are the source of continued concern. The intersections around the Kings Plaza Shopping Center, and the congested junction of the "Home Depot" shopping center on Avenue U at East 57 Street, present special challenges and are only a few examples of Board requests for pedestrian/vehicular traffic safety solutions to this Agency. A coordinated effort must be made to implement the suggestions of the studies already made and not initiate new studies that will only further delay implementation.

Kings Plaza Shopping Center, built on city-owned land and leased by the parent company of Kings Plaza Shopping Center, Vornado Realty, is the cause of constant consternation. Numerous costly and time consuming studies have been performed by outside consultants, the Departments of Transportation and City Planning, as well as the Borough President's Office, in an effort to improve pedestrian, vehicular, and bus circulation problems at the intersections and along Flatbush Avenue and Avenue U. These studies continue to identify the same problems and continue to propose a myriad number of improvements including changes in bus stop locations and operations, directional signage, street configuration, and the installation of pedestrian safety fencing along Avenue U -- To date...nothing of consequence has been done, except for the movement of bus lanes on Flatbush Avenue and Avenue U that have created additional confusion and further bottleneck the intersection, and the erection of huge directional signs above Flatbush Avenue indicating the entrances to the Belt Parkway and the direction to the Manhattan Bridge which is more than ten (10) miles north of the sign!

All the studies performed...All the dollars spent...All the changes suggested...All the promises made...All the time wasted -- To date...nothing of consequence has been done. It is the opinion of the Community Board that money should not continually be spent on costly studies. The problem is self-evident -- the solutions have been proposed -- yet none of the recommendations have been implemented!

After another repetitious pedestrian/vehicular traffic study identifying the same problems and offering the same solutions, we were given the same answers -- there is no money in the budget to implement the changes. But, as far as the promised pedestrian fencing along Avenue U -- DOT misread our recent Budget Request which read; "Install Safety Sidewalk Curb Fences or barriers along the South Side of Avenue U from Flatbush Avenue to East 55 Street" -- and the Agency Response was; "Requests for sidewalk replacement should be directed to the NYCDOT Sidewalk Management Unit. Requests for curb placement/construction should be directed to the NYCDOT Concrete Programs Unit. Requests will be followed-up with a site visit to determine eligibility for

inclusion in a future contract by the Bureau of Street and Arterial Maintenance.” Enough said on that subject!

We are optimistic that funds will be increased to establish an even greater emergency service presence for the improvement of service delivery to reduce crime, battle fires, and enhance quality of life conditions within our Community Board area.

Fire protection in a residential community, comprising tens of thousands of frame dwellings, is obviously of paramount concern. The theory used by the Fire Department for “manning” decisions includes statistics that do not include literally thousands of homes and tens of thousands of area residents that have become part of the Board area since that statistical information was compiled decades ago. Consequently, analysis of the Department’s decision should be the subject of “up-to-date” review.

The day-to-day “line” contact with the two area Police Precinct Commanding Officers from the 63rd and 69th Precincts, with active participation by the Police Department at the Community Council level, has further improved community relations. Special praise must be given to our Borough Chief, Joseph Fox, his local Commanders, Deputy Inspector Kevin McGinn, 63rd Precinct, and Captain Ralph Monteforte, 69th Precinct, who work closely with the community and make prudent command decisions in police utilization.

Our Community Board, together with the area Police Commanders, have identified specific areas of concern to improve the quality of life for our area residents. A rise in the number of “hate crimes” is deeply distressing. Efforts continue to be made, such as our recent Unity Day in Marine Park as well as interaction through identifiable organizations within the community, to address these scattered incidents. It was mutually agreed that special attention must be given to the rampant “double parking” that continues to plague our streets, in general, and the “Kings Plaza” shopping area, schools, and places of worship, in particular.

The proliferation of illegal “dollar” vans must be aggressively addressed by enforcement agencies particularly at and around the Kings Plaza Shopping Center. Stronger enforcement with severe penalties for operation of licensed, unlicensed, and “renegade” dollar vans is encouraged. We ask the Administration to cease their efforts to encourage van usage. We look forward to working together to bring this obnoxious blight on our communities under control. Rather than develop programs to shift the illegal van problem from block-to-block we must adhere to a strong commitment of enforcement.

We continue to urge upgrading and renovation of the 69th Precinct Stationhouse. The need for a new 63rd Precinct Stationhouse continues to be an absolute necessity. Although the Department allocates funds for rehabilitation of the antiquated Stationhouse to meet staffing needs and patrol requirements, the poor conditions and problems still exist. Funding must be set aside for relocation. Modern, adequately sized police precincts are essential to good policing. We urge the N.Y.P.D. to aggressively explore the acquisition of city-owned properties so that aging facilities can be replaced economically and expeditiously. The Board strongly recommended the use of the undeveloped city-owned property adjacent to the Construction Site for the future D.E.P. Paerdegat Basin Water Quality CSO Facility at Bergen and Ralph Avenues, and/or the N.Y.C.T.A. Bus Loop property, currently used as a parking lot for employees, at Utica Avenue and Avenue N. To date... we have still not received a response to these proposals, or given a viable alternative!

Special recognition should be given to the very active and effective Precinct Community Councils that service our two local precincts for the support and cooperation that they render to the Department and the entire community. The Auxiliary Police continue to play a vital role in the day-to-day operations of both Precincts. We strongly urge that the Police Department enhance their support of these vital groups of community volunteers.

We urge that the M.T.A. develop a long-term strategy for meeting the public transportation needs of our area residents.

We continue to ask for attention to, and relief from, the constant parking, double/triple parking of idling buses outside the Flatbush Bus Depot, 4901-23 Avenue O, on Fillmore Avenue, Utica Avenue, and along Flatbush Avenue. The buses regularly block the street and the Flatbush Avenue entrance/exit to the adjacent Floridian Diner and Burger King. They create hazardous pedestrian, vehicular, and environmental conditions. The T.A.'s lack of cooperation and action underscores their unwillingness to work with the community, City and State Agencies, and our elected officials.

Our thanks to the State Department of Environmental Conservation for their dedication, commitment, and tireless efforts in monitoring this offense as well as the progress and planned action for the ongoing diesel fuel oil spill clean-up at the Flatbush Bus Depot. We acknowledge with appreciation their generous spirit of cooperation with the community to answer concerns and provide timely information.

We also remain frustrated in our efforts to provide adequate public transportation to other parts of the Borough due to the lack of speed, curtailed, changed, and/or eliminated service on the surface bus lines. The speed and traffic flow can be easily improved by strict enforcement of regulations prohibiting the use of illegal "Dollar" vans on the bus routes along Flatbush Avenue as well as its adjacent streets. Fares continue to rise, service continues to deteriorate, equipment becomes antiquated, and no light appears on the horizon.

The maintenance and upkeep of our parks and playgrounds continues to remain a major area of concern due to inadequate staffing. Many of the parks and playgrounds in our District are in various stages of design, scope and reconstruction. The Board fully supports the continued funding of these projects. Several of our smaller parks and playgrounds require reconstruction or "in-house" spruce-up. We urge that these projects as well as increased staffing be promptly addressed through the Capital and Expense Budget.

The implementation of the Greenstreets Program provided us with an opportunity to beautify our barren neighborhood triangles and traffic islands. We wholeheartedly support and commend the continuation of this program. We encourage strategies for additional conservation and beautification programs to include sorely needed maintenance provisions. Special attention should be paid to the traffic islands along Kings Highway -- they are in desperate need of reconstruction and inclusion in the Greenstreets Program.

Parks' Department equipment and personnel are always needed and in short supply; we urge that our requests, as well as the Departmental requests, be given a high priority in budget negotiations. The park areas of Community Board #18 provide recreational and cultural outlets for all ages, and are truly a valued natural resource that must be protected and maintained. Marine

and Seaview Parks are regional facilities; coupled with Gateway National Park they serve an area much larger than our local neighborhoods.

Department budget cuts have historically negatively impacted the Forestry Division of the Department of Parks & Recreation and continue to cause great consternation for the residents of our community. The large geographic area of our Community Board and its residential neighborhoods are the "home" to the largest street tree population in the Borough. Consequently, we must cope with a Parks' Division that, year after year, falls behind in its pruning and dead tree/stump removal schedules. We are hopeful that additional funds will be allocated to this greatly needed, yet poorly funded, division.

Sanitation Commissioner, John Doherty, brought a life-time of experience to the job. We urge the administration to listen more closely to his advice and suggestions, and implement many of the management proposals he has advanced. Most particularly, give him the manpower necessary to do the job. The supervisory staff of BK 18 has been exemplary in their willingness to work with the Board in developing the maximum potential of their limited manpower and antiquated equipment to deliver quality service. Increased manpower is needed to maintain the center malls along our roadways. They become a community nuisance and safety hazard. Neglected and unattended they grow into breeding grounds for vermin and illegal dumping.

Increased staffing for the Department of Buildings is critical. Code enforcement personnel are a crucial component in enforcing the Zoning Resolutions and Building Codes. Unchecked greed and neglect will lead to gross abuse in many instances, and dangerous code violations in some instances.

The Board continues to develop broad outreach programs within the community and direct its attention to the needs of our area youth. We are currently working with our local elected officials, community and youth organizations, in securing funds for special programs designated to address identified youth problems.

The State Legislature has given the Mayor broad authority in running the retooled Board of Education as the Department of Education. Reading and math scores reflect a distorted picture of the crisis in our local schools. Fancy slogans such as "no child left behind" and "children first" become the advertising campaign of a failed system. We urge the Mayor to examine the direction that public education is going and recognize the role of the teacher and the need for parental involvement as the first line of defense in providing a sound basic education. That formula puts "children" first rather than "control" first.

Agencies such as the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York City Human Rights Commission are urged and invited to participate with our Board in bringing their message into the community. It is our intention to support further efforts to bring cultural and educational programs into our Community Board area.

The Charter has broadened the mandate and responsibilities for Community Boards as a grass-roots vehicle to deliver services to the community, as well as act as a citizen ombudsman. We continue to make a major impact in implementing our Charter obligations. We look toward the continued support of the city administration and the combined efforts of our elected officials as key ingredients in restoring these funds so that we may be even more responsive in addressing



the needs of our community. The partnership that has developed between government and community is best exemplified by our Statement of Needs and Priorities for Fiscal Year 2008 -- a true product of that joint cooperation.

Respectfully submitted,

*Saul Needle*

Saul Needle  
Chairperson

*Dorothy Turano*

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