



THE CITY OF NEW YORK BOROUGH OF THE BRONX

COMMUNITY BOARD #5

Honorable Adolfo Carrion Jr., *Bronx Borough President*

Chairperson
Dr. Bola Omotosho

District Manager
Xavier Rodriguez

District Needs Statement

Bronx Community District 5, known as the West Tremont area, is located in the mid-West Bronx. It is bounded by the Harlem River on the West, in the Cross Bronx Expressway on the South, Webster Avenue on the East, and the northern boundary zigzags from Hall of Fame Terrace at Bronx Community College to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. and 183rd Street, East to Jerome Avenue and North to Fordham Road.

Bronx Community District 5 is comprised of the following four neighborhoods: South Fordham, University Heights, Morris Heights, and Mount Hope.

Morris Heights is the lowest density area in District 5. Morris Heights is along the western ridge of the district, covering the area from Jerome Avenue valley to the Harlem River Valley. Here, the zoning ranges from R5 (typically 2 and 3-family row houses and small apartment buildings). In addition to the low density development, several high-rise developments including Sedgwick Houses, a NYC Housing Authority Development, several large private apartment towers along the Undercliff and Sedgwick Avenues, River Corporation, and the NYC Housing Authority's 31-building University Avenue Consolidation.

University Heights is part of the same rock ridge that characterizes most of Morris Heights, and is similar, architecturally. One of the key landmarks in this area is the beautiful Bronx Community College Campus, which gives the neighborhood its name. This public facility is the highest geographic point in New York City. University Heights is the least dense area of the district and benefits from a large proportion of 1-4 family housing stock.

The area East of Jerome Avenue and Fordham Road encompasses two neighborhoods: South Fordham, North of Burnside to Fordham Road, and Mount Hope, South of Burnside Avenue to the Cross Bronx Expressway. Both extend east to Webster Avenue. The Mount Hope/South Fordham neighborhoods are densely populated mostly with five and six-story housing. At the eastern edge of these neighborhoods is a large residential development known as Twin Parks West, consisting of four residential towers.

At the northern portion of this area is the Fordham Road Shopping District, the third largest generator retail sales in the City of New York. Fordham Road has approximately 1-million square feet

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*SERVING THESE NEIGHBORHOODS:
Fordham, Morris Heights, Mount Hope, University Heights*

of retail space. Separating South Fordham from Mount Hope is the Burnside Avenue Shopping Strip, a strong and vibrant local commercial corridor, and at the South-East area of these areas is a small manufacturing zone, which contains heavy auto uses, small manufacturing shops and warehouses.

The injustice regressive tax policies and shortsighted fiscal practices of local, state and federal administrations, as well as the effects of bad policy and consequent fluctuations in the economy among those directly affects many residents in Bronx Community District 5, in our city. The current Fiscal Year 2008 Budget appears bleak for areas such as District 5 in the Bronx, where the physical and social ills that affect poor and minority communities continue to be most concentrated.

Community District 5 is a severely stressed area. Listed are some of the conditions we face in our neighborhoods.

- The number of Special Needs Housing and Group Homes continues to increase at alarming rate in Bronx Community District #5. Large assortments of charitable and benevolent agencies in the private sector, that are either faith-based or non-denominational not-for-profit (N.F.P), operate Special Needs Housing facilities or Group Homes in the neighborhood. State and municipal agencies of government likewise directly administer community residences or fund private and charitable agencies that do so by means of the "R.F.P."- i.e., "Request For Proposals"- and the public bidding/contracting processes. these facilities serve a variety of populations defined by age, gender, economic class, condition of family life, physical and mental challenges and status vis a vis the criminal justice system.

The brisk expansion in the number of two-family, three-family homes, in the area has facilitated the uninterrupted growth in the quantity of Special Needs Housing and Group Homes. While price so as to defy being even remotely classified as "affordable," this new housing, nevertheless, is well within the means of public and private agencies wishing to establish Special Needs Housing or Group Homes in the district. Of course, houses or vacant parcel of land in more affluent, well-to-do neighborhoods are beyond their reach, thus repeatedly drawing these organizations and government entities backtime and again to Bronx Community Board #5 in their search for sites. This circumstance, when coupled with the inability of the Community Board to assert over-saturation of these facilities, has created a most frustrating state of affairs. The deliberate definition of over-saturation in New York State legislation based upon extremely narrow and specific categories guarantees that the tedious prerequisites of over-saturation cannot and will not ever be attained.

Bronx Community Board #5 calls upon our representatives in the New York State Legislature to enact a meaningful, realistic amendment of the state Mental Hygiene Law relative to what constitutes over-saturation of community residences in a neighborhood. A noteworthy suggestion in this regard would be to count on a strictly per capita basis, irrespective of population served, the total number of Special Housing facilities or Group Homes in a district when determining whether or not over-saturation exists in that locality. Moreover, Community Boards should be given an enhanced, authentic role in the site selection process for special needs housing community residences. Community Boards should no longer be reduced to their superficial contemporary condition of only being informed of the launch of this type of facility along with, perhaps, being requested to render an advisory opinion. Finally, state and local government must provide aggressive oversight or the fiscal and procedural operation of these Special Needs Housing facilities or Group Homes. These under-financed facilities are poorly staffed,

maintained, and managed too frequently become bad neighbors and nuisances to homeowners and local residents as well as lowering property values.

- Some of the highest crime rates in the City
- Many streets remain overrun by drug-dealing;
- One of the lowest sanitation score rating in the City;
- Very little acres of usable open space for every thousand people; far less than the city average;
- The largest overcrowded school district in the state; large number of schools in very poor physical condition;
- Concentrated and large immigrant population;
- Severe shortage in youth services
- Approximately 49% of households have income below \$12,000;
- Approximately 40% of residents pay more than one-third of their income on rent (1996);
- Approximately 61% of housing units are in fair to poor condition with 44.4% of rental housing overcrowded (placing CB#5 third in the City of New York).
- Approximately 14.6% adult unemployment rate;
- Approximately 82% of children born into poor families are children receiving public assistance;
- Over 40% of the population is receiving some form of assistance.
- The district has the 3rd highest ranked serious housing code violations in the city.

While much of this is very grim, many positive things are happening to improve the quality of life in some areas of our district. Over one thousand new housing units which include 13 new three family homes in University Heights area on Phelan Place and Billingsley Terrace, we also have six new homes in South Fordham Road area on Valentine Avenue. The other units are new construction and rehabilitated housing in areas such as Morris Heights which continues its redevelopment renaissance, as the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) works collaboratively with New York City Housing Marketplace initiative to preserve and provide affordable housing with the NYCHA scattered sites, University Consolidated buildings. Recently 5 buildings were completed with a total of 210 affordable housing units. Three more buildings are presently undergoing substantial rehabilitation and upon completion will have a total of 111 affordable housing units, creating 321 units. In addition, the Housing Preservation Development will issue a request for proposal to solicit proposals to rehabilitate ten (10) additional University Consolidated buildings consisting of 463 units. Also the Morris Heights Health Center and the Mount Hope Housing will be initiating an innovative expansion project consisting of 112,000 square foot community facility, providing vital health services and seventy (70) new housing units for seniors. The Harrison Circle project will be constructed on Burnside Avenue, and Harrison Avenue facing our second most important commercial strip in Community Board #5. We are also delighted to see the construction of the Mount Hope Multi-Cultural Center, and with the long abandoned Hebrew Institute of University Avenue will also undergo renovation to a new West Clubhouse for Kip Bay Boys & Girls Club that will provide education and recreation services for Community Board #5 Youth. Furthermore, a new 630 seat elementary-middle school on Macombs Road & University Avenue is scheduled for construction within the near future.

However, while there has been recent improvement in some areas, Community District 5 falls short of resources in order to address our devastating needs. As advocates for our community, we will continue seeking specific funding in the areas of recreation, parks library, youth services, and education.

In this regard, it is essential to the district's well-being that the Mayor's Budget reflected funding for Community Board #5 District in the following areas of priority:

1) Department of Transportation:

- Creation of a Step Street Task Force (Community Board #5 has approximately 14 Steps Streets in its district).

2) Department of Parks & Recreation:

- Improvement of the Aqueduct walkway providing connection at Burnside Avenue. Pedestrian bridge or Step Streets.
- Increase in budget allocation for the hiring of additional PEP officers;
- Increase in budget for the construction of additional neighborhood Playgrounds and recreation aides, as identified by CB #5 and residents;
- Development of the Harlem River Waterfront esplanade, with greater access by our constituents.

3) City University of New York:

- Increase funding to CUNY schools (Bronx Community College located in CB#5 is one of the major learning institutions in the Bronx, it is therefore imperative that services are maintained to continue providing quality Education to the less advantaged).

4) Department of Youth & Community Development:

- Increase in Youth funding services specifically in the area of Summer Youth Employment.
- The renovation of the Hebrew Institute as a recreation and multicultural facility.

5) Department of Business Services:

- Creation of the merchant's associations for University Avenue/West Tremont Avenue & Featherbed Lane, as well as Burnside Avenue.

6) New York City Board of Education:

- Increase funding for new construction and infrastructure development of our schools.

7) Department of the Aging:

- Increase funding for the improvement of senior citizens' facilities in Community Board #5.
- Increase funding for senior housing
- Increase funding for innovative senior programs in Community Board District #5

8) NYC Police Department:

Acquire and construct a new 46th Precinct with parking facilities;

Additionally, listed are areas where the budget responses from the agencies once again fall short of need. It is noteworthy, that while many of these capital and expense budget requests have in some form received favorable responses and approval, the actual implementation of capital and expense projects continues to remain idle to lack of effective coordination and communication among the appropriate city agencies. It is imperative that agencies become more responsive in the implementation of these capital and expense projects, which are constraints to the community residents.

Youth Services -- Department of Youth & Community Development

- Restoration of million of dollars in Youth Services and programs including additional funds for CB#5 Area Youth Programs: Fair Share, Anti Gang Prevention Programs, Cultural Arts/Music Program, and a Beacon School.

School Improvements -- New York City Board of Education

- Rehabilitation of MS 319x
- Reconstruction of retaining wall supporting PS 109 playground
- Rehabilitation of PS 26X
- Completion of scope and design for rehabilitation of PS 33X
- Construction of school playground at site adjacent to PS 204X
- Construction of school playground at PS 91X
- Construction of additional elementary-middle school

Street Reconstruction/Milling & Resurfacing/Step Streets (Department of Transportation)

- Reconstruction of West 174th step Street, between Popham & Undercliff Avenues
- Rehabilitation of Step Street at Davidson Avenue between Featherbed Lane & Davidson Avenue
- Mill and resurface sections of Tremont Avenue: West University to Sedgwick Avenue; East Tremont Avenue from the Grand Concourse to Webster Avenue
- Increase resources for the Bronx Bureau of Highway Maintenance Division
- Increase resources for the Bronx Bureau of Traffic Maintenance and Bridges.

Sanitation-Cleaning/Enforcement -- Department of Sanitation

- Creation of Step Street Task Force to clean the 128 Step Streets in New York City
- Increase personnel to service baskets in district (especially commercial areas)
- Overgrown weeds on Step Streets – (black top/weed killer)
- Increase funding for the Canine Unit

Parks Improvements & Maintenance -- Department of Parks & Recreation

- Rehabilitation of University Woods Park, including Park House

- the construction of pedestrian bridge connecting University woods over the Major Deegan to Metro North to Roberto Clemente State providing recreation and water front access to our residents
- Increase funds to Parks Department for Miscellaneous Park repairs;
- Reconstruction of Aqueduct lands and Aqueduct walkway Morton Place to West Burnside Avenue; construction of Step Streets or pedestrian bridge to reconnect Aqueduct Lands to Aqueduct walkway.
- Increase funds for the hiring of additional parks recreation specialist;
- Increase funds for the hiring of additional parks maintenance employees;
- Increase funds for additional parks enforcement personnel PEP.

Safety -- New York City Police Department

- Acquire and construct new 46th Precinct with parking facilities
- Increase funding for narcotics' enforcement
- Increase funding for personnel maintenance
- Increase allocation of police officer CPOP/Safe Halls Operation Impact program
- Increase funding for the purchase of additional noise measuring devices;
- Increase funding for NYPD Security cameras on West Tremont Avenue, University Avenue.

Housing -- Department of Housing Preservation & Development

- Increase funding for capital improvements of city-owned buildings
- Increase funding for the expansion of the Anti-abandonment program
- Increase funding for the expansion of Narcotics Control Unit
- Building Maintenance/Inspections (Department of Buildings)
- Increase finding to hire additional inspectors for the office of the Bronx

Health/Safety -- Department of Consumer Affairs

- Increase funding for expansion of Pest Control Unit including additional personnel
- Increase funding for additional field inspectors/Exterminators

Human Resources -- Department of Human Resources Administration

- Increase funding for workfare to work initiatives in Community District #5;
- Increase outreach services to large immigrant population in Community District #5.

Economic Development --Department of Business Service & Economic Development

- Creation of Business Improvement Districts (Fordham Road, Burnside Avenue, West Tremont Avenue, University Avenue/Featherbed Lane

Fire Prevention/Education -- New York City Fire Department

- Increase funding for fire safety houses, medical kits for each Engine Company, the Juvenile fire setters program, and fatal fire teams.
- Increase for carbon monoxide alarms.

Additionally, it is imperative that the Executive Budget maintains resources to the New York City Public Library Branches to allocate for additional materials, increase in staff and exterior renovations, and maintenance for extended library hours.

It is also vitally important to recognize that Economic Development in Bronx Community District 5 is a priority, especially since the district is comprised of major commercial strips such as Fordham Road, Burnside Avenue, and Tremont Shopping areas. In this district, with such a high level of unemployment rate, the need for commercial revitalization and community involvement is of the utmost importance's. The creation of Business Improvement District is a mechanism to improve conditions in our neighborhoods and brings a sense of pride and ownership to local merchants. We continue to encourage and support community and business collaborations.

Finally, Community Boards are indeed the link to the city. In this regard, Community Board #5 continues to advocate for the increase in Community Boards operating budgets, allowing for further strengthening and improvement in the delivery of services to communities at large. Equally important, are the obligations mandated to Community Boards by the New York City charter, which includes the development of a 197-A plan for each community district. Community Board #5 recognizes the significance and contribution that a 197-A Community Development Plan affords a district, specifically in preparation for future capital and expense budget requests. Bronx Community Board #5 has recently begun to engage in a planning process for the future development and preservation of its neighborhoods. In the last decade, this part of the mid-west Bronx, known as West Tremont, has seen the development of new and rehabilitated housing, the opening of regional shopping centers, some improvements to schools and community facilities, and increasing signs of community organization to improve commercial and retail strips. Nevertheless, there are still many more challenges facing the people living and working in the vibrant neighborhoods of Mount Hope, Morris Heights, University Heights and South Fordham. In addition the Community Board has continued to identify quality-of-life issues relating to safety, service delivery and effective programs for both its youngest and oldest residents. As the Community Board begins to work with its consultant planner and government agencies to develop its plans for the district, the Board recognizes that full citizen participation is essential. To facilitate deeper community involvement, Community Board #5 has initiated a "Visioning Process" for leaders and citizens working together to develop shared goals, objectives and strategies to fulfill their hopes for the future of their community. We therefore, wholeheartedly, urge that the City of New York to allocate to each of the 59 Community Development Boards for the planning and implementation of a 197-A Community Development Plan, which is a very costly and time-consuming process.

Community District #5, in echoing the sentiments of a community at large, understands that the budget development process has never been a painless exercise. We are deeply concerned, however, that the most vulnerable – children, senior citizens, and poor people are forced to bear a

disproportionate share of the pain. At a time when the city is reporting a surplus, we must insist that our community basic's needs are not sacrificed in an attempt to seek a balance budget in the outer years. Our city government must examine means to improve its efficiency without being mean-spirited. We are certain that with a proper revisit to these issues, the City of New York could find ways to maintain and secure a respectable quality of life for all of our citizens. Community's District #5 priorities remain a reflection of economic and community development, improvement of quality of life issues and most importantly, services to the future of our city youths.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Bola Omotosho

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Chairperson

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