



COMMUNITY
BOARD #14

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City of New York
Borough of Queens

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STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY DISTRICT NEEDS FISCAL YEAR 2014

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 completion of the YMCA.

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Well over five years ago, City Hall selected a development team for the Arverne East portion of the AURA. We still have serious concerns as to how this part of the project will be developed. We continue to question the very dense design of the project, lack of 100% parking throughout, lack of school seats, and that the retail section of this project will not be developed to maximize the potential for much needed jobs.

Our real concern is we lack confidence in the selected development teams' ability to successfully finance and develop this project. We have had very little contact with the development team in over 5 years, and we question its commitment to work with our community to make this project a success. Because of our many concerns, and the poor sales in the Edgemere Urban Renewal area's last phase as well as the over 150 unsold vacant privately developed affordable 2-3 family homes in the Arverne East area, the board voted to rescind its support for the Arverne East project.

We wrote the Mayor in the fall of 2009 informing him of our position on the project. We are still waiting for his response. We are still hopeful that we can meet with the Mayor's staff along with HPD to discuss the possibility of returning to the "drawing" board on this project. We will not be satisfied with the City just building units. We need a successful, low-density community with job generating retail and recreation that will be an asset to our community. We are hopeful that City Hall and the City Council share our vision.

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 poor sales in the last phase. HPD needs to better maintain these vacant unsold units.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Rockaways and Broad Channel still have 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 tens of millions of tax dollars go to another county. Our few shopping areas are still 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 Flushing, Jamaica and Whitestone shopping areas.

The Far Rockaway shopping area has been dying a slow death for decades despite the efforts of the board and many local leaders. Recently, the owner of the Far Rockaway Shopping Center has cleaned up the parking lot and has started to renovate some of the store fronts. This summer a newly renovated supermarket has opened as well. But more needs to be done. A comprehensive streetscape and parking plan must be funded and implemented to give the Far Rockaway Shopping area the impetus it needs to restore this area back to the “downtown” shopping mecca it once was. The requested capital improvements along with the construction of the new Far Rockaway library will assure this areas success for decades into the future.

Two other shopping areas in our district need assistance as well. The Rockaway Beach Boulevard shopping strip from Beach 86th to Beach 96th Street would benefit from streetscape improvements and perhaps a storefront program. The Beach 116th Street shopping area has been holding on in this tough economic climate, but the southern part of Beach 116th Street which is directly adjacent to the boardwalk has been struggling for decades. Recently, we rezoned this portion of the block to promote development of retail and market rate midrise housing. This section would benefit from government expertise as well.

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 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

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, which would allow for an approximate 30-minute commute to midtown. 2) Commuter Ferry Service: The Rockaways still needs an affordable commuter high-speed ferry service with multiple boats in the AM and PM rush hours. It should be located at a location that is convenient to all Rockaway residents. 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, and Howard Beach and then 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 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

Our 7.5 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 too many visitors who come to our beach and boardwalk, which on a sunny summer day can attract an additional 200,000 people. Each summer we have well over 2 million visitors come to enjoy our community yet until recently our boardwalk was allowed to rot, and our hardworking parks department maintenance crews have at times had to due without adequate equipment and personnel. The board also requests that a study be funded for the Parks department to conduct a comprehensive engineering study of the whole length of the boardwalk.

This study should include stairways and ramps as well. Once the study is completed, funding should be allocated for the complete renovation/repair of the over 7.5 miles of our rapidly deteriorating boardwalk.

We have requested that the Parks Department along with the community develop a plan for more beach related recreation and food orientated retail along the boardwalk. It would be nice to have a surf shop, bike rental and perhaps a Nathan's or some other well-known restaurant adjacent to the boardwalk. The installation of more shade structures along the boardwalk is needed as well.

We continue to request extended beach hours during the week. Keeping the beach open to 7:00pm a few days a week would allow local and Queens' residents alike to enjoy a refreshing swim after work.

We have also proposed to the Mayor in 2009 that the closed Edgemere landfill be turned into an Ecological themed waterfront park and a solar energy field. We still await a response from City Hall on what would be a national model for generations of renewable energy and waterfront recreation at the same location.

FLOOD CONTROL

In the past decades, we have suffered through a number of storms. Sections of our beaches and portions of the bayside communities of Arverne, Bayswater, and Edgemere areas have been devastated. Over 16 years ago, the Army Corp. of Engineers had 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. Street flooding is common and dangerous. This issue must be resolved as soon as possible.

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 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 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 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.