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THE CITY OF NEW YORK
COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 16

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STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY DISTRICT NEEDS FOR FY 2015

OVERVIEW

Community District #16 is located in East Brooklyn and encompasses the neighborhoods of Ocean Hill and Brownsville. It is comprised of 1,188.5 acres of land and is bordered on the north by Broadway, on the east by Van Sinderen Avenue, on the south by the Long Island Railroad, and on the west by East 98th Street, East New York Avenue, Ralph Avenue, Atlantic Avenue and Saratoga Avenue.

According to the 2010 census, Ocean Hill-Brownsville is home to 90,235 people, a majority of whom are African-Americans, Caribbean-Americans, and Latinos. As in past years, it is our belief that our population was undercounted due to families who are secretly doubled and tripled up in apartments because they cannot afford their own housing. In addition, our population continues to increase with the ongoing construction of housing units.

Our residential properties are comprised of one-to three-family homes, 4-story multiple dwelling walkups, Section 8 housing, Mitchell-Lamas, cooperatives, condominiums, New York City Housing Authority buildings, SRO housing, single and family shelters.

On the commercial strips of Broadway, Fulton Street, Saratoga Avenue, Pitkin Avenue, Rockaway Avenue, Belmont Avenue, Livonia Avenue, and Mother Gaston Boulevard, you will find personal service shops, small retail clothing, appliance and furniture stores, fast food eateries, supermarkets and bodegas.

Our needs for Fiscal Year 2015 are similar to those of previous years. We continue to need more permanent and affordable housing, safe community facilities, improved infrastructure and transportation, sanitation services, revitalization of our commercial strips, quality health care, and support services.

HOUSING

Community District #16 is over saturated with shelters contracted with the New York City Department of Homeless Services, three-quarter houses and privately-owned shelters. We need permanent and affordable housing, not homeless shelters. Permanent and affordable housing continues to be a high priority for our community to meet the increasing needs of senior citizens, families, and single adults with minimum wage jobs. We also need permanent and affordable housing for young adults whose income is below or above certain income thresholds – too much for subsidized housing but not enough for market rate housing.

Because of the downturn in the economy, the price of real estate has fallen; however, housing is still unaffordable for many of our residents. Even with government subsidies, many of our hardworking families find it difficult to attain the American dream of owning their own home because their incomes have not appreciably increased with the cost of living. Rental housing costs are also skyrocketing, thus making it difficult for families and single adults to maintain permanent housing.

We appeal to the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to continue with plans to build affordable and permanent housing on the remaining City-owned vacant lots in Community District #16, and provide subsidies to truly make the units affordable to our residents.

The townhouses, which are part of the New York City Housing Authority's (NYCHA) HOPE VI project, have been completed and are now occupied. We need NYCHA to move forth on plans to demolish the three remaining towers of Prospect Plaza and construct the much needed units of housing with priority given to former tenants who were displaced and are anxiously waiting to return to their homes.

Where there are small irregularly shaped City-owned parcels that are not suitable for housing construction, we urge HPD to dispose of these parcels to adjacent property owners. This will also place the property back on the tax roll.

As an alternative to disposing of properties to adjacent property owners, we ask that HPD allow urban gardeners to grow fruits and vegetables on these slivers of land until a more permanent use is decided for the property. Such use of the vacant parcels will prevent them from becoming overgrown with weeds and an eyesore to the community. It will also provide fresh produce to a community that is sorely in need.

We are pleased to see new homes being built on privately-owned vacant lots throughout the community. We encourage developers to make them affordable to our residents.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

We need continued funding for our three Beacon schools which provide a “safe haven” for our children, youth, and adults and offer a range of educational, cultural and recreational programs, and social services.

Our playgrounds and parks provide the only recreation for many of our residents. We need regular maintenance to prevent their deterioration from normal wear and tear of daily use. Several of our facilities are in dire need of rehabilitation:

- The basketball courts at Callahan Kelly Playground are in need of reconstruction.**
- The Betsy Head Park ballfield needs to be reconstructed with synthetic turf. The running track also needs to be resurfaced. In addition, the roof on the pool house is leaking and a complete renovation of the building is needed.**
- Howard Playground basketball courts are uneven in several areas and need resurfacing.**
- Ocean Hill Playground needs new backboards for the basketball courts.**

- The weather worn monument at Zion Triangle needs refurbishing.
- Floyd Patterson Field needs to be reconstructed to include a comfort station and installation of synthetic turf for multi-purpose uses such as baseball, football, soccer, and cricket.

Playground Assistants are needed during the summer months to provide structured activities in our parks.

We urge the Department of Education to continue with plans to rehabilitate our school buildings and provide a safe environment for our children and teachers.

Our day care centers also need capital improvements to make them safe for our children. Additional day care services are needed to meet the growing needs of working parents and those who desire to further their education.

We need job training centers and vocational schools to equip our young adults with skills to enhance their employability.

Many of our gifted youngsters and adults are unable to display their creative talents while others lack exposure to the artistic resources of our community. We encourage the development of a comprehensive cultural and performing arts center where our residents can display their talents, learn about cultural diversities, and foster better community relations in our neighborhood and City. We urge developers of the former Our Lady of Loreto Church building to move forth with plans to develop a cultural center for the community.

The importance of providing adequate and well-equipped educational facilities and programs cannot be over emphasized, especially in our attempt to attract middle-income families with children. The educational facilities, coupled with quality programming, are important determinants for those families contemplating residence in a community.

PARK AND STREET TREES

Many of our trees in parks and on the sidewalks need pruning on a more frequent basis to prevent the limbs from blocking street lights and

hanging low in the path of pedestrians. Limbs are frequently breaking off which presents a hazard to pedestrians and motorists. The planting of new trees through the Million Tree initiative is welcomed, however, resources must be allocated to maintain all of our trees.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

We continue to need regular maintenance of catch basins. During heavy rainfall, flooding and ponding conditions are common at a number of heavily trafficked locations throughout the district.

We are also seeing more sewer back ups, especially on streets where new housing has been built. It appears that the sewer capacity is inadequate to accommodate our growing population.

Potholes and depressions continue to imperil traffic. The Departments of Transportation and Environmental Protection need to jointly inspect locations that frequently depress and eventually cave-in to identify the origin of the roadway condition and repair them in a timely fashion.

With the new housing construction, the volume of traffic is increasing. It is imperative that the Department of Transportation conduct a districtwide survey to determine locations for new traffic lights and stop signs.

We need safer streets, especially in the area bounded by Livonia Avenue, Junius Street, East New York Avenue, and Rockaway Avenue where there is a large concentration of New York City Housing Authority buildings that house thousands of residents, schools, day care centers, and senior citizen centers. The roadways are unsafe for pedestrians, especially for our senior citizens and children. Our streets are becoming virtual speedways for cars, delivery trucks, and motorcycles. We need speed humps, traffic lights, all-way stop signs and other traffic calming devices to slow traffic.

Some of our streets are dimly lit and create an atmosphere conducive to criminal activities. The intensity of our street lights need upgrading, especially underneath the elevated train lines along Broadway and Livonia Avenue, and along bus routes.

Truck traffic is increasing throughout the district. Residential blocks, instead of designated truck routes, are being used by 18-wheelers which are

destroying our streets and creating congestion. More designated truck route signs are needed.

There are no accessible subway stations for handicap persons in the District. The Sutter Avenue, Livonia Avenue, and New Lots Avenue stations on the “L” line, and the Sutter Avenue-Rutland Road, Saratoga Avenue, Rockaway Avenue, and Junius Street stations on the “IRT” line are elevated structures and are not accessible to the physically challenged. We are requesting that they be made handicap accessible.

We call upon the Metropolitan Transit Authority to appropriate needed funds to construct a connecting passageway between the “L” line and the “IRT” line at Junius Street and Livonia Avenue to enable commuters to freely transfer between the stations.

The Broadway Junction station has a very high volume of traffic because of its connections to 3 train lines and 5 bus lines. The station has a series of steps that prevent the physically challenged from using the facility. We urge the Transit Authority to make this station handicap accessible.

We are encouraged by the study being conducted to ascertain methods to reduce the congestion of vehicles and pedestrians along Van Sinderen Avenue between Broadway and Fulton Street. We appeal to the agencies to follow through on their findings.

The East New York Station of the Long Island Railroad is in need of updating. Cameras are in place on the platforms and should also be placed in the tunnel connecting the stairwells leading to the service roads of Atlantic Avenue. Presently, there is no wheelchair access on the westbound platform. We are requesting that a permanent ramp be installed to provide access for wheelchair bound passengers who now must travel to the Atlantic terminal to disembark.

SANITATION AND PEST CONTROL SERVICES

New housing construction is bringing new families to the community. We need more Sanitation personnel to pick up garbage and clean our streets.

Community District #16 continues to remain at the bottom for recycling. We need ongoing community outreach to educate our residents about the benefits of recycling.

Illegal dumping in vacant lots and on sidewalks in front of vacant buildings and lots continues to obstruct pedestrian traffic and create a nesting place for rodents. We need regular Sanitation Police patrol of chronic dumping locations to apprehend violators. We also need manpower and equipment to keep these areas clean.

Because of limited onsite storage, garbage from several of our schools and New York City Housing Authority buildings that do not have containerization service is placed on sidewalks daily. We need daily pick up of this garbage which is unsightly and attracts rodents.

We also need more bulk collections to prevent the dumping of household debris on sidewalks in front of vacant buildings and in vacant lots.

Large rats are attracted by garbage on our streets and in vacant lots. Excavations for housing units are also unearthing them. We need Pest Control to bait these areas.

COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL REVITALIZATION

Belmont Avenue, a once thriving four-block commercial strip between Rockaway Avenue and Mother Gaston Boulevard, has a number of vacant stores. We appeal to the owners of these properties to market them at a reasonable rate to encourage entrepreneurs to come and provide goods and services to our community. We also need the owners of these vacant properties to maintain the facades and sidewalks so that they will not be eyesores in the community.

There are several undeveloped properties along the following commercial strips:

- **Rockaway Avenue between East New York Avenue and Newport Street.**
- **Broadway between Saratoga Avenue and Eastern Parkway.**

- **Livonia Avenue between Mother Gaston Boulevard and Junius Street.**
- **Atlantic Avenue between Howard Avenue and Eastern Parkway.**
- **Fulton Street between Saratoga Avenue and Van Sinderen Avenue.**
- **Saratoga Avenue between Atlantic Avenue and Eastern Parkway.**
- **Mother Gaston Boulevard between Pitkin and Sutter Avenues.**

We appeal to the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development and the New York City Economic Development Corporation to market City-owned parcels and work with private owners who are in need of financial assistance to develop their properties.

We appeal to the owners of the former school building at Rockaway and Blake Avenues, the former bank building at Pitkin Avenue and Mother Gaston Boulevard, and the former police precinct on East New York Avenue near Rockaway Avenue to develop these properties which have been eyesores far too long in our community. We appeal to the owners to market these buildings at a reasonable cost to allow development and provide much needed recreational, cultural and social services to our community.

As our residential population increases, so does our need for banking services, quality supermarkets, meat markets, bakeries, dry cleaners, pharmacies, hardware stores, family restaurants, and clothing stores. We appeal to businesses to come into our community and request that tax incentives be given to developers to encourage their investment.

We encourage the NYC Economic Development Corporation to continue marketing vacant parcels in the East New York In-Place Industrial Park to bring new businesses and employment opportunities to our community.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Gun violence involving young adults is an increasing problem in our community. Unreported crimes and injuries from street justice continue to negatively impact on our district. We need continued police presence on our

streets, in the subways, and in our New York City Housing Authority buildings to combat illegal activities. We also need programs for our teenagers and young adults to engage them in constructive activities and provide an alternative to “gang” membership.

We have witnessed the positive effects that an impact zone has had in reducing crimes in our community. We encourage its continuation and expansion.

After hours and social clubs in basements on residential blocks continue to be a problem in the community as they generate loud noise and large crowds. These establishments need to be identified and property owners made to comply with noise, fire and building codes.

We are also seeing an increase in the number of illegal boarding houses, many of which have hazardous conditions and house a vulnerable population of single adults with mental illness and other disabilities. Many of these occupants are formerly homeless who come out of the City’s shelter system and State prison facilities. They are least likely to complain about their living conditions for fear of losing this housing.

We need a coordinated effort involving the New York City Department of Homeless Services, the New York City Department of Buildings, the New York City Fire Department, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the New York State Department of Health to close down illegal boarding houses which are endangering the lives of those who live in the buildings as well as adjacent property owners and their tenants.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Many people have lost their homes and ended up in shelters due to loss of a job or a medical emergency.

We need homeless prevention programs to assist those at risk of homelessness from losing affordable housing by linking them to needed resources such as job training, childcare, and substance abuse programs. Community-based social service agencies that can give these families the long-term support they need must receive sufficient funds to outreach to this population.

Many of our elderly and infirm adults who live alone need escort services to accompany them on shopping trips and medical appointments. They also need assistance with personal care, housekeeping, and financial management as they strive to live independently in their own homes.

We need continued funding of senior citizen centers which provide daily meals and socialization for many seniors who do not have the family support and would be left isolated in their homes.

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

According to the World Health Organization, health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Ocean Hill-Brownsville is in urgent need of transformation.

Ocean Hill-Brownsville is part of the Central Brooklyn community where, according to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, its residents experience more barriers to health care access than those in New York City overall, with nearly 3 in 10 without a regular doctor.

We need the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to continue its partnership with the various community-based agencies to stem the tide of the maladies that are consuming our community and expand obstetric, pediatric, geriatric, mental health, HIV and AIDS services.

Many of our residents are uninsured and underinsured. We need health insurance companies to continue their outreach in the community to enroll individuals and families in health plans.

We seek assistance for adults who are experiencing financial hardship due to escalating costs of prescription medication. Our senior citizens, in particular, are finding it most difficult to pay out-of-pocket costs for prescriptions.

A healthy diet is paramount to the well-being of an individual. We need nutrition education outreach in the community to identify and assist persons who are not eating properly and are at-risk of becoming obese and developing circulatory and respiratory conditions.

Asthma and diabetes are on the rise in our community and we need services to combat these health challenges.

Teenage pregnancy continues to be a major concern to us. We need programs to outreach to our adolescents and educate them about the consequences of engaging in premarital sex. We also need resources to identify and assist those in need of prenatal care. Infant mortality is one of the leading causes of death in our community.

We need more primary care physicians to service the needs of our residents, many of whom use the hospital emergency rooms for primary care. We need our hospitals to remain open and call upon the Berger Commission to reassess their decision to downsize hospital services in our community.

SUMMARY

As our population increases, we must meet the community's needs for police and fire protection, garbage collection and street cleaning, parks and playgrounds, day care centers and public schools, employment opportunities and other resources for a healthy community. Therefore, we call upon the City Administration to work with us and provide those services that we so desperately need.

We also encourage the private sector to come and do business in our community where there is a need for quality goods and services and employment opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,

Viola D. Greene-Walker

**VIOLA D. GREENE-WALKER
District Manager**