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**DISTRICT NEEDS STATEMENT – 2013**  
**COMMUNITY BOARD 13 – BROOKLYN**

*...and then along came Sandy...*

Over its centuries of sorrowful incidents, the neighborhoods of Community Board 13 have never gone through the kind of tragedy and turmoil that resulted by the visit of Hurricane Sandy a/k/a Superstorm Sandy. At no time in its glittering history, have these areas survived the kinds of ongoing personal, professional, and business repercussions that were posed by the behemoth of a storm that came aboard on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

In times past, fires had taken their toll on the spectacular terrain of Dreamland amusement park; Conflagrations had also engulfed the original Luna Park several times until its final demise. The original Steeplechase had also toppled under the hot weight of flames. Still another blaze had roared its way through the west streets and leveled homes and portions of the Boardwalk itself. Brighton Beach had rallied from years of changes that had left it relatively quiet. The Brighton Beach Hotel, calling card to visitors from far and wide, had once been moved from one site to another and then disappeared entirely. The widely used Brighton Baths shuttered and became the site for the high rise buildings of the Oceana complex. The population that had moved from Delancey Street in Lower Manhattan to the Brighton Beach eventually saw the important Brighton Beach Avenue shopping strip reduced to many empty storefronts. Gone were the race track, the live theaters and, eventually, even the many movie theaters, beautifully built for escape from problems and into worlds of fantasy.

Sea Gate saw its sandy beachfront lost as a result of work done by the Army Corps of Engineers, and, today, its aged infrastructure causes enormous difficulties. Similar old sewer and water lines have plagued the entire peninsula. Over the decades, Gravesend, too, saw changes as the new Parkway zoomed on its west side, and barren areas were used for dumping of household trash.

*...and then along came Sandy...*

There is no doubt that many of the issues described in this report would have been in the forefront whether or not there had been a visit from the dreaded storm. But there is little doubt that many of the problems simply were exacerbated by the waters, the surges, the winds of Sandy...and the dire months and months after its coastal appearance. It must be stated that the storm, in many instances,

brought out the very best that its residents possess. They were on hand to help one another and to work closely with a myriad of groups providing aid – FEMA in the leading role along with dozens more. Volunteers, from all over, came down to offer solace and assistance of all kinds for the people affected by the storm. Sudden desperate needs for food, clothing, and all kinds of household aid were brought in by trucks and cars. The MCU ballfield's parking lot became one of the scenes for information, assistance applications, and more..by FEMA and others. Slowly, things, on appearance, seemed to be showing signs of recuperation. But looks can be deceptive, and support is still vitally needed by residents and businesses throughout all of C.B. 13.

### **THE BOARD**

Brooklyn Community Board 13 services the neighborhoods of the southern peninsula (Brighton Beach, Coney Island, and Sea Gate) as well as those north of the Highway and Coney Island Creek (Gravesend and portions of Homecrest and Bensonhurst). The eastern boundary of C.B.13 is made up of the Atlantic Ocean on the south; Gravesend Bay on the west; the Bay, 26<sup>th</sup> Avenue., 86<sup>th</sup> Street, and Avenue Y on the north; and Corbin Place (separating Brighton Beach from Manhattan Beach) on the eastern end. In its earliest incarnation, these neighborhoods were 'discovered' by people of wealth who sought the shore for summer recreation; by city residents who fled the hot streets during the warm months; by immigrants seeking nice clean living quarters away from tenement life; by summertime populations using the bungalow colonies; by visitors, all day long, using the newly-constructed Boardwalk and its eateries and amusements from Corbin on the east to West 37<sup>th</sup> Street on the west. Ferries carried people to the Iron Pier and the Dreamland Pier, along with other docks, along the beachfront. Eventually, trolley and rail tracks offered easy access to the area. The 'Island' ceased being an island with the installation of roadbeds for vehicles. The neighborhoods became all things for all people. The fifty members of C.B. 13 represent all parts of the community that is to be served. As with any such organization, there are long, deeply-involved discussions on issues that may affect the communities in total, or in part. Issues are delegated to Committees which then report back to the full Board at its month meeting, usually at Coney Island Hospital.

### **GRAVESEND, HOMECREST**

Gravesend was first visited in 1609 when Henry Hudson brought his ship *The Half Moon* through the Narrows and into the Harbor. By 1643, the area had become part of the New Netherlands Colony, and it was eventually granted to Lady Deborah Moody, an English expatriate. Over decades, it remained a quiet area where one and two family homes would be developed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The population of Gravesend now is estimated at somewhere around 4,500. Today, there are some high rise developments, largely co-ops, including Contello Towers, Waterview, and Harway Houses. In addition, there are several senior citizens' residences, churches and synagogues. Cropsey Avenue, north of the Parkway, is home to pleasant houses, mom and pop shops of varied varieties, and restaurants, along with the aforesaid high-rise and senior structures. Bath, and Harway Avenues, and the many side streets are scenes for pleasant smaller homes. Some newer one and two family structures have gone up in the last few years. Little Dreier Offerman Park, on Cropsey, is a prized park gem, home to children, families, and seniors alike. The western side of the area, separated by the Parkway, had been a lonely stretch where dumping of household garbage was evident. Then, the creation of the Verrazano Bridge saw tons of landfill added to this stretch, and the result has been the creation of a new park area, first called Large Dreier-Offerman and now

called Calvert Vaux Park, named for the landscape architect.

This greensward, at first, was used strictly for soccer games and even special events like the Great Irish Fair, which had been moved from the then-unused land that had been home to Steeplechase Park (later, this land became home to the Cyclones' baseball stadium – KeySpan Park which later became MCU Park). Councilman Domenic M. Recchia, Jr., as he had done with such other sites as Kaiser Park and West 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Park, promoted the beginning of the development of Calvert Vaux, and, now, its first phase is being utilized, with additional development on the horizon.

Despite the bucolic setting, there are problems that are endemic to this area. Traffic is a major problem, with vehicular movement to and from the Coney-Brighton areas, as well as to and from a shopping area where Shore meets Bay Parkway. Additional businesses are eyeing work along Shore. There is also concern over the potential for a Waste Transfer Station, just north of C.B. 13's terminus at 26<sup>th</sup> Ave. Environmentalist fear spillage from such a treatment plant, and should that occur, the fear is that contaminants can make their way along the shoreline southward to the beach areas. Traffic ills have also plagued Gravesend, and a hue and cry over the halting of the B64 bus in this area brought anxiety and concern because the B64 usually carried people south to Coney Island's Stillwell Terminal. Talks between legislators, civic leaders, and the Transit Authority have remedied that situation, and the B64 now operates as it did in the past. Work on the Avenue V Pumping Station had caused traffic delays on Cropsey as it was torn up; that situation, too, has been finished and remedied. There often are requests for speed bumps, stop signs, and traffic signals throughout the area, and the C.B. 13 office transfers the requests to DOT. Some of the requests are honored.

The Ulmer Park library, on Benson Avenue, serves a wide diversity of people and students. It had been on leased property, and a long time passed before the land issue was resolved. Today, this important structure remains the only one of its kind in a section that also sees the Lafayette Campus and John Dewey High School. Lafayette houses the High School of Sports Management that receives support from the New York Mets and the Brooklyn Cyclones. It is not, however, the only educational facility in that structure. Shore Parkway Jewish Center and Most Precious Blood Church serve the area. John Dewey was saved as a high school through the efforts of its alumni, civic leaders, students, and legislators. Past student problems involving Lafayette and Dewey have decelerated to a point where few, if any, reports are heard.

The Marlboro Houses also stands in this community; it is a NYCHA development. Its residents have been seeking assistance on many levels, a situation seen also in the NYCHA units within Coney Island. There has been work on several important aspects. The Parks Department has been working on fixing up the Marlboro Park, between Aves. W and X. It is a vita project, but the needed work on the park house is not included yet. It must be. The Marlboro Senior/Youth Center remains an important source for residents, and it supported, in part, by the Jewish Community House of Coney Island. One hopes to see more done to aid Marlboro – with its maintenance problems, its youth, its seniors, its grounds.

The independently-run Ty Cobb Field, only a matter of yards away from Marlboro Houses, serves as a key resource. The City's Railroad Yards separate this portion of C.B. 13's northside from the Shell Road-Beach Haven Houses side on the east. Several new housing units have been added to the Shell area portion, although one, at this time, remains fallow and unfinished. The Grace-Gravesend

Gil Hodges Field serves a wide group of young people, and it is located on Shell Road. Abutting all of this is Coney Island Creek, long a community dream for revitalization. Several years ago, National Grid (nee Brooklyn Union, Brooklyn Union Gas, KeySpan), under State mandate, cleaned its owned land here of contaminants, and it cleared the same toxins from the Creek (Shell-Stillwell).

What will happen with the National Grid land is still unsettled. The area near Stillwell, for decades, has been the site selected for a new Sanitation Garage to serve both C.B. 13 and C.B. 15 trucks. As of now, monies for land purchase is said to still be available, although there appears to be a lack of fiscal help to construct this facility. The large, architecturally interesting old BUG building, at Neptune and W. 8 St., is empty, and many groups and residents look to the structure for community use if it were made available. Apparently, such is not the case, however.

The Beach Haven Houses are well maintained, and the nearby West 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Park/Playground recently received work by the Parks Department with the help of Councilman Recchia. The Avenue Z strip, alongside Beach Haven, is filled with needed stores, including a large supermarket, pharmacy, Laundromat, and eateries. Mom-and-pop stores are seen throughout the entire Gravesend-Homecrest neighborhoods. One spacious, now blocked-off area, is adjacent to Calvert Vaux Park. Rose Cove housing units had been built there, jutting into the Creek and Gravesend Bay. Work was halted before there was occupancy and before a new street had connected this spot to Shore Road. The Cove's buildings had to be razed, and the stretch of land, fenced off, remains desolate. It stretches towards the Bay from Shore Road, Hunter Ave., and Bay 43 St. A special needs schools, well-run and pleasant, is close by – touching the grass of Calvert Vaux. A bridge linking the Cropsey side, over the Highway, to the Calvert Vaux side, was supposed to be rebuilt, and plans were presented years ago. New plans, however, are in the works for this bridge.

### **BRIGHTON BEACH**

Before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Brighton Beach had already become a beachfront escape for those seeking the heat of that pre-air conditioned world. It rose to world fame; its bungalow colonies were summertime 'cities', its beach crowded, and as the trolleys and rails began to move south to the shoreline, it became a year-round home to many. Over the next decades, its streets became lined with apartment houses, new residences for scores of families only recently welcomed to the States. Hotels, race tracks, theaters, music halls, restaurants, and, soon, a boardwalk provided bonuses for those seeking year-round residences in an oceanfront area. But time did take a toll, and, by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were empty stores along what was the busy Brighton Beach Ave. shopping strip. People were aging, and the area declined, but it never hit the bottom as Hollywood would dramatize in a film like *Boardwalk* in which the older residents were mugged, threatened, and beaten by thugs. A misbegotten Tinseltown image!

The history changed for the better with the arrival of new residents from the Soviet Union, and the area and its shopping strip became known as *Little Odessa*. The neighborhood took on a new look, and, now the community has a population of well over 76,000 people, with an estimated 3,000 households. The apartment buildings, once estimated at 36, are now more..as construction has increased. Brighton Beach Avenue, with the elevated train overhead, is crowded with shoppers. Its fruit stores, confectionaries, clothing shops, bakeries, and more line the crowded streets. Restaurants, many featuring the finest of Russian cuisine draw people from all backgrounds to the area, despite the fact that parking is difficult. The initial immigrants have been joined by many from the Ukraine, from Georgia, and from other parts of what had been the Soviet Union. The street is

served by the Brighton Beach Business Improvement District (BID), and the activities are also furthered by the work of the Brighton Neighborhood Assn. (BNA), and other civic and religious groups. In August the BNA runs one of the city's biggest street festivals – the *Brighton Jubilee* – which helps fund its many activities. Some of the Riegelmann bungalows have disappeared or were abandoned; others have become year-round homes. But, for the owners, part of their daily problems, includes the facts that their *lanes* are not city-mapped and thus face difficulties with sanitation pickup and with problems related to sewer backups and other infrastructure ailments.

Developers discovered the magnet that Brighton Beach had become, and they bought up homes on its meandering streetscape where they razed the smaller ones and constructed condos and co-ops. The largest development of all, however, was built on the site of the former Brighton Beach Baths, long a mainstay of Brighton living. The complex is the *Oceana*, and it has proven a success. But the neighborhood also has legal – and, in some cases – illegal SRO's. But nearby homes are well kept residences, still attracting younger residents to the neighborhood. The many theaters that dotted the area have vanished, but the *Oceana Theater*, one of the last of the large Brooklyn movie houses, closed and was reopened with a ground floor catering/restaurant business. The balcony was expanded, so a second floor became a theater space. Oceanview Avenue had always been the home of attractive homes, with two schools on its street. Today, there are some difficulties and at least one group of side-by-side buildings are fenced in and shuttered. Another older building, sought by BNA for use, eventually showed signs of imminent collapse and had to be demolished.

Brighton Beach, however, is more than a home for those of Russian heritage or for older residents. North of Brighton Beach Ave., and closer to Neptune Avenue and the Highway, are homes owned by those of African American heritage, South Americans, Pakistanis, and those of Asian backgrounds. Neptune Avenue, in itself, has become a busy thoroughfare with all kinds of restaurants and shops. Brighton Beach has its share of churches, temples, and mosques. There are senior homes, medical centers, and other social agency buildings. Traffic throughout Brighton Beach is busy, and there are intersections that are difficult for motorists and pedestrians e.g. Coney Island and Brighton Beach Aves.; and sites where motorists go on and off the Highway. The Coney Island Avenue Bridge links the Brighton area with the Homecrest section. The revamped Guider Avenue Bridge carries cars onto the Highway.

As has been noted, parking is one of the most difficult of obstacles for residents and merchants alike. There is one major parking facility, still-city run, Brightwater Court to the Boardwalk, at Brighton 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. Half of the lot is reserved for local residents, who pay for their spots; the remainder is for the general public. Problems arise when visitors to the area park in the residents' 'reserved' sites. Further quandaries arise when the residents may send in their site reservations only to find that their spots have been already designated to others. As a result, a resident with walking difficulties, who long has had a spot in the lot and who seeks a space for his/her car, may have to park an auto blocks away from his/her home. It is not an easy situation to resolve. The main streets of Brighton Beach Ave. and Coney Island Ave. have metered parking, but the former street is hindered also by double-parking delivery trucks during the day, along with bus traffic, and autos. The street often becomes clogged. Parking solutions may be very problematic to find, but work must be done to try to unsnarl this chronic civic ailment.

...and then along came Sandy...

Sandy's watery wrath hit Brighton Beach, and the result was damaged homes, flooded streets, and

ravaged stores. With the aid, over a long period by FEMA, OEM, the Mayor's Office, and others, food and clothing were made readily available. The Shorefront YM-YWHA became a key center for assistance. Year-round residents in the bungalow areas and along side streets, lost many possessions, but they have stayed and are still working to put their lives together again. Storeowners, for the most part, have returned to active status, and the BID program is working to assist all. Some of the devastation can be linked to overflowing sewers and catch basins, a situation that underscores the elderly infrastructure that is evident throughout the peninsula. Aid is still sought by those involved in rebuilding that which was damaged last October. The Parks Department was dismayed to see the destruction of its beach/boardwalk bathroom and lifeguard facilities, and work started on modular units to replace them – structures higher than the Boardwalk, and reachable by either stairs or ramped walkways. One near the Oceana housing complex has drawn complaints; residents do not want a raised building of its kind at the site. Among the worst to suffer the watery thrust of Sandy was Coney Island Hospital, and it was forced to shutter, spending months to even begin providing medical assistance to a wide swatch of Brooklyn. The floods ravaged the Ocean Parkway facility, and the resultant has been months of reconstruction costing a great deal of time, money, and the loss of service to a large population. Today, the Hospital is finally back to its former status, but much thought must be given to ways to halt any future dangers to this irreplaceable and respected hospital.

Perhaps one of the strangest side stories of Sandy's horrors is the fact that the Boardwalk, which is the link between Brighton Beach and Coney Island, did not get clobbered by the storm. Sand swirled around the famed walkway, but it survived from its eastern start at Corbin Place to its terminus at West 37<sup>th</sup> Street, at the start of Sea Gate. Over the last few years, debate has continued about fix-up activities on the Boardwalk, involving wood, concrete, recycled plastic wood, et al. Many areas of the Boardwalk have needed work, with time and some possibly misguided projects having led to some of its problems. Nonetheless, it was not dealt the savage hand that tore apart Rockaway's boardwalk, or others along the shoreline of the east coast. The Steeplechase Pier, in Coney Island, however, did suffer huge damage, but, as of this date, its wrecked structure has undergone extensive repair.

### **CONEY ISLAND AND SEA GATE**

In 2011, Hurricane Irene threatened to tear apart the peninsula, and evacuations were made. People feared the worst, but, fortunately, the peninsula was spared. As a result, the 2012 Sandy onslaught proved a deadly surprise to the communities of Coney Island and Sea Gate. The night before it struck, Sandy could only be imagined by a swelled surf and wind. Nothing had prepared the people of the areas for the slashing waters that crashed in from the Atlantic Ocean, Gravesend Bay, and Coney Island Creek – all of them hurtled by sudden windy and rainy thrusts at everything within reach. Five to eight feet of water rushed up and down the streets of the high rise areas, the amusement district, the mercantile streets – and into basements, first floor apartments, elevators...the entire fabric of the neighborhoods' life mosaic.

Sandy cast a dark aftermath in its wake, considering all of the diligent and thoughtful work done, over the last decade, by the Coney Island Development Corp. (CIDC), ( which has now evolved into the Alliance for Coney Island), along with legislators, scores of civic groups, residents from throughout the neighborhood, consultants, and more. The amusement district had had a successful season with its mix of new and time-honored – the landmarked Cyclone roller coaster, the Wonder Wheel, and Luna Park with its ScreamZone, Eldorado, Nathan's Famous, and others. Plans were

moving along with soon-to-open newcomers like Grimaldi's and Applebee's. and Tom's Coney Island on the Boardwalk. Popular Totonno's Restaurant, a lure for people all over the city, had only recently reopened after a fire. The construction of a new YM-YWCA had started in western Coney Island, and new affordable and other housing developments were either rising or on the drawing boards. Mermaid Avenue continued to come alive with its mom-and-pop stores, and newcomers.

*...and then along came Sandy...*

The Superstorm pounded Coney Island and the gated Sea Gate community that juts out along the western tip of the 'island'. The merging waters of the ocean, bay, and creek stormed through the streets and into all of the buildings. Damage was everywhere, and, soon, FEMA, the Red Cross, other assistance organizations, along with scores of volunteers, were on the scene. FEMA set up its premier operations at MCU's parking lot. Other sites were used by many groups, churches, temples, and civic groups to feed the hungry. Volunteers and agencies worked on providing disaster help to those trapped in high-rise buildings without working elevators or utilities. Con Edison, NationalGrid, Cablevision, and others quickly moved into the area. Neighborhood residents, aided by civic groups, had to learn to go through the difficult paper journey through FEMA, Sandy Recovery, U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), NYC Rapid Repairs, and others. Applications and proposals became a mainstay throughout the post-storm period. For many, it was proved a frustrating but needed learning experience.

Sea Gate's disaster scene was clearly evident, especially along Atlantic Avenue, closest to the water, where the rear of homes were simply washed away into the force of the giant tidal swell. But most streets throughout Sea Gate were ripped apart by thrashing waters that filled basements and first floor dwellings.

Residents, construction engineers, neighbors and volunteer organizations have since been working daily on correcting much of the damage though some sites still are using generators. A great deal remains to be accomplished. Civic groups, like Astella Corporation (which has a powerful history on working with housing and mercantile issues), Urban Neighborhood Services, Amethyst Women, and Coney Island Generation Gap, along with others, found themselves awash and seeking emergency sites from which they could carry on their responsible duties. #Coney Recovers was formed to handle, in many respects, potential funding operations offered to the citizens; it shared a trailer with Astella and others. The Alliance for Coney Island, which includes such entities as Deno's Wonder Wheel Park, Luna Park, the Brooklyn Cyclones, the New York Aquarium, Nathan's, plus others, banded together to help the community at the same time as they were busy trying to erase the damage to their own operations. Work on the latest addition to the Aquarium was halted as its administration looked to get, at least, partially on-line for the next summer; Nathan's on Surf Ave., severely damaged, prepared getting its Boardwalk site ready for the upcoming Memorial Day. All were united, though, in the planning for job hiring, from the community, for the spring-summer season. The previous year had proven a banner one in working with local groups in hiring young people for amusement operations. The landmarked Cyclone, Wonder Wheel, Parachute Jump survived. The landmarked Child's Building on the boardwalk became a suppository for the clothing and household needs of residents. Coney Island USA, housed in the now-landmarked second Child's Building on Surf, saw heavy damaged but continued to prepare for the new year. The problem for many resulted in 'delays' and miscommunication between residents and those who had promised fiscal and other assistance. Funds were slow in coming. Many are still waiting.

Insurance companies held back in many cases, and other funders kept coming on board to assist.

The 60<sup>th</sup> Precinct building, on West 8<sup>th</sup> Street, was decimated, as were the homes for the Transit Police (in the Stillwell Terminal Building) and Housing Police. Yet, all of those Police units were always on hand even though many of their vehicles had been destroyed and offices had been pulled apart by the floods. Some officers were stranded, by the sudden storm, and had to move to the top floors of their structures to survive the eight-foot high flood. All are back in their headquarters now, attending to the tens of thousands of people arriving in Brighton Beach and Coney Island every day. As the summer approached, Coney Island saw the reopening of the famed rides. New additions were part of the scene – the aforementioned new eateries, the spectacular lighting of the Parachute, courtesy of Borough President Markowitz and Central Amusement International (CAI), and the opening of Steeplechase Plaza with the eagerly-awaited return of the restored and beautiful B&B Carousell (sic). Several permanent losses included the razing of the Astroland Tower (reportedly tottering too much), and the signage on the landmarked Shore Theater exterior (Loew's Coney Island Theater) Building (sign lettering blown apart by the storm). Some area stores and businesses, in both the amusement and residential zones, could not return, including some shops in the Terminal Building, Denny's ice cream, along with stores on Mermaid Ave. The Parks Department worked to ensure that the beach and Boardwalk were readied in time. Unlike the Brighton Beach area, the western peninsula has no constructed bathrooms; bathers use Porto-San kinds of units. They have expressed the need for bathroom construction in the future. Note – the large bathrooms, beneath the Boardwalk in this area, had been buried during the sand replenishment work of the Army Corps of Engineers some years ago.

Crowds have resumed their trek to Coney Island, via public transportation and automobiles. Although very hot weather has been the 2013 situation as of July, reports, nevertheless, have indicated larger crowds than in the past. One July 4<sup>th</sup> photo, shot from above the beach, is a virtual lookalike of a similar shot taken on the beach in the 40's. No empty areas are seen in the picture. Auto traffic, as ever, is difficult for the motorist seeking parking, and for the police keeping things moving in spite of the bumper-to-bumper situation. A few years ago, DOT had altered the traffic pattern in and around the area of Cropsey Ave.-West 19<sup>th</sup>-West 15<sup>th</sup>-Neptune Avenue. The result has not been successful, and it seems to have created even more problems for all to navigate the busy amusement zone. Drivers leaving the beach, Boardwalk, ballpark, amusements, restaurants, and special events find it difficult going north on W. 19<sup>th</sup> into gridlock on Neptune, especially if the motorist is attempting to get into one of two lanes that will allow the car to left turn into in the northbound direction towards the Parkway.

Coney Island's heralded events have continued e.g. the Mermaid Parade, Nathan's 4<sup>th</sup> of July Hot Dog Contest, Friday Night Fireworks, January 1<sup>st</sup> large Polar Bear Club swim-in, Brooklyn Cyclones' baseball with special fireworks nights, the Annual Sand Castle Day on the beach, outdoor concerts with major stars, DJ events in streets and Boardwalk, Luna Park and Deno's 'specials', visits by students from schools and camps with free rides, along with a host of block parties and fun events sponsored by local civic and housing groups. One of the initial goals of the now-dismantled CIDC was to pave the way for a year-round 'life' for the entire Coney Island peninsula. It is starting to happen now in earnest. In spite of ongoing, unsolved problems, the peninsula's residents carry on with verve and hope. Commemorations are also visible, including the beautiful Wall of Remembrance, recalling those who served and lost their lives at 9/11, on the western wall of MCU Park. There was not a Fleet Week or Armed Forces Day this year, but their loss was due to Federal



budgets, and they were missed.

For years, an over-the-street walkway, connecting the West 8<sup>th</sup> Street station over Surf Avenue to the Boardwalk, has decayed and deteriorated when no city agency could take responsibility of its maintenance. It is now slated for demolition. New pedestrian assistance and lanes will be put into place to avoid Surf Ave. crosswalk accidents. C.B. 13 has noted that, should funds be available in the future, a new look will take place as to the possibility of a bridge in the future.

The upgrading and vast improvements to Kaiser Park on the northern part of the peninsula have been one of the most important actions for residents. It is a large greensward, and it is used by localites and visitors for a wide variety of sports and other activities. Thanks to Councilman Recchia working with the city agencies, and with the strengthening of the Friends of Kaiser Park (now also the 'friends' of Calvert Vaux Park), the Kaiser stretch is a magnet for soccer, baseball, basketball, tennis and scores more sports and other events. The park house has been restored and has been used for many events; it also served as a center for 'Sandy' victims to receive food and clothing. Children are enthralled by Easter Egg Roll contests, by Christmas events, all organized with Friends of Kaiser and other civic and non-profit groups. The area is home to many senior and children's centers, most of them always fearing budget cuts. PAL has organized street and park activities in 2013, with operations in, among others, Our Lady of Solace Church and Kaiser Park. Coney Island's north side is Coney Island Creek, and the future for that waterway is only positive. The Bayview Avenue area, just west of Kaiser, was hard hit by the impact of Sandy on the Creek and Bay. Bayview, too, is slowly returning to its former self.

The Cropsey Avenue corridor, and the streets adjacent to it, is now the homes for such business as Raymour & Flanigan, Home Depot, a Starbucks Drive-Through, Parkview Diner, and others. Complaints concern trucks using Cropsey to reach Home Depot even though a new route from Shore Road had been set aside for that delivery purpose. An iron works operation also fronts on Cropsey, with trucks entering its space. Auto body shops line the Cropsey-Stillwell-Neptune area, and double and triple parking poses a problem for pedestrian traffic as well as for motorists. It is a long standing issue that has defied corrective solutions.

SEA GATE residents suffered from the killer storm. The Sea Gate Association has been actively working with all of the utilities, the city agencies, architects and construction experts. Its return is underway, even though many razed buildings will be reconstructed over a longer period of time, following plans for resiliency for the future. Its seawall units were blasted through, but the projects of the Army Corps of Engineers, involving T-Groins and/or other safeguards, will do much to restore the shoreline and beaches just as the plans will prevent sand from moving from the Coney south to the north shore of Bayview. The Coney Island Creek Park (Bayview Park), along this route, however, is often used for less-than-legal purposes and for dumping of trash. The Parks Department is attempting to maintain a more vigilant watch along this stretch.

Coney Island's population, according to 2010 census numbers seems to be between 25-30,000, but reports seem to indicate that many individuals and/or families, for one reason or another, may not have been counted. The largest group, according to census, remains Black/African-American, with sizeable growing numbers of White (many of Russian heritage), and strong enclaves of those of Asian background. There are also Mexican Americans, those from South America, and smaller numbers of other ethnicities. Sea Gate has a population of almost 5000, largely white, with a

smaller number of residents who are African-American and of Asian background. The high-rise structures of Trump Village, Warbasse Houses, and Luna Park Houses, on the eastern side of the peninsula, have a predominantly white population, numbering somewhere over 10,000.

### **CITY SERVICES – POLICE/FIRE/PUBLIC SAFETY**

Although most of the following faced rough reconstruction after the Superstorm, they are now serving the large population of C.B. 13, and the warm weather crowds: the 60<sup>th</sup> Police Precinct and the next-door Fire Station on West 8<sup>th</sup> St.; the Mounted Troop E, on Brighton 3<sup>rd</sup> St.; Transit District 34 in the Stillwell Terminal building; Housing PSA #1 on W. 23 St. and Mermaid Ave.; Engine 318, Ladder 166 on Neptune Ave.; EMS Station 43 at 2601 Ocean Parkway; and Brooklyn South Narcotics, and other units. The Neptune Ladder Co site on Neptune is often flooded – although Sandy and its Creek flow did considerably more damage than the usual.

There is a huge demand on all of these units, with obvious reasons: the multiplicity of needs in the amusement area; the crowds using the beach, the Boardwalk, the shopping streets, the residential needs in high rise buildings including NYCHA structure; problems related to the aging of the Brighton Beach and Coney Island areas; needs to deal with large numbers of homeless individuals and families; brown and black-outs; and a range of special activities all year. The crime rate, in 2013, continued to nose-dive, and, as of late July in the busy and hot 2013 summer, no incidents had been reported on the sandy stretch. However, the only area still causing concern is violent crimes and reports of shootings. Nonetheless, the area is far from the bleak and threatening look of the community as depicted by the now cultish movie *The Warriors!* C.B. 13's CERT team has been working with all of the public safety units, but Sandy did the team disservice too; members lost much of their equipment and clothing due to flooding. OEM is now looking to try to assist in the workings of the growing CERT team.

The Summer Detail has been of invaluable service, but growing attendance indicates further needs. The Brighton Beach vicinity, with a variety of illegal vending (as in Coney Island) is a negative that must be ameliorated. Ditto the illegal placement of store items as well as street salesman in spots that should not be used. Russian-speaking officers are needed in this area where English may be a difficult language with which to communicate easily. Communication between these agencies and others is critical and has improved, but it, too, should be strengthened so that all can learn of the interlocking pieces of a neighborhood problem. The problems do get hearings at the month C.B. 13 Cabinet meetings, hosted by the District Manager. Still, it would be advantageous to all if all sorts of communiqués are shared to learn of needs referred by all. The men and women in public safety have been serving the area well in this era of growth. All deserve commendation, and all can benefit by additional strength and personnel power, as well as by ongoing communication techniques.

### **CITY SERVICES – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The work that has arisen from the first meeting of the Coney Island Development Corp. over a decade ago, and the upward movement of the Brighton Beach B.I.D. are only two instances that show the giant steps being taken into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century life of Brooklyn's south shore neighborhoods. Of paramount interest within the amusement area is the strength already shown by the newly-formed Alliance for Coney Island, created with the aid of EDC and with the assistance of Nate Bliss. None have forgotten the initial aim of CIDC is seeking to turn the peninsula areas into more of a year-

round economic ‘plus’ for its businesses, residents...and for the Borough and City at large. The original Master Plan, as presented by CIDC, has seen progress as a result, with such new and forthcoming situations as the YMCA on Surf Ave., new housing units, clean-ups of streets (especially after busy events), and support for organizations’ needs after the deluge of Sandy. Cooperation has been strong, even though fiscal solutions in particular, have been often vague and confusing.

There, however, are many elements involved in the upswings with Brighton Beach, Coney Island, Gravesend, and Sea Gate that deserve considerable attention and resultant work. These are problems that impact the today-to-day current lives of residents as well as any and all future projects that are likely to be discussion as a result of continued business interest in the shoreline world. The sad recent death of Horace Bullard potentially has opened one door to plans for the next years. His landholdings, particularly the Shore Theater Building, can mean a great deal for needs for economic stimulus in the peninsula. As one example, it can serve as a year-round draw for people who arrive via mass transit, through every season, if it housed any or all of the following: live theater, film, recording studios, galleries, dance and theater spaces, civic meeting rooms, etc. Arrivals via train would have the option, all year, of studying the arts, visiting theater (no movie theater stands anymore in the once-busy Coney Island cinema scene)...and also be able to eat at one of the many restaurants, shop at the many stores, and visit the sites. It’s an all-year-round possibility. The CAI plans for a brand new roller coaster (named the *Thunderbolt* in honor of Mr. Bullard’s earlier coaster of the same name) would be next door to a lot still owned by the Bullard’s. It would seem to be a fine moment to keep the Bullard dream alive with the updated newcomers to the amusement area. Thor Equities, though, remains a ‘question mark’. It has, among others, two giant empty lots now on the east and west sides of Stillwell Avenue. For a couple of years, they were used for flea markets that proved to be problems and were perhaps not offering the kind of ‘welcome’ people coming to the area feel warranted the name Coney Island. There is also a Thor lot at the busy corner of W. 12<sup>th</sup> St. and Surf. The fate of these properties is important to keep the spotlight on the health of southern Brooklyn. The housing, planned by Taconic, also merits careful thought and thoughtful timing. All of these elements play a role in the comings-and-goings, and involvement, of the tens of thousands of people living on the peninsula and the many more who feel a desire to visit, or live, along the shorefront – braving any storm for the sake of living in a vibrant area.

### **PARKS AND RECREATION**

The role of this agency in C.B. 13 always has been of high import, but there were years of neglect. Managers, on the city-borough-and local levels, have been diligent in the responsibilities, but the overall picture is daunting, and more personnel and funds are needed. Despite controversy, work had continued on Boardwalk and beach maintenance and on the needs of multi-use facilities at such sites as Kaiser Park, Asser-Levy Park, Calvert Vaux (nee Large Dreier-Offerman) Park, Nautilus Playground, West 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Park, Little Dreier (on Cropsey Ave.), among many others. Children, adults, and young people have made increased use of all of these sites. Difficulties with upkeep had always been faced with as much skill as possible.

*...and along came Sandy...*

One of the finest examples of people pulling together can be underscored by the fact that water-logged and storm-injured parks, for the most part, are serving their useful civic purpose in this

summer of 2013. The BOARDWALK, as noted previously, survived the Superstorm, but it had to be cleared of tons of sand, a similar situation to the other parks and to the streets of C.B. 13. It was done, but the ill-fated, post-Sandy state of the Steeplechase Pier seemed lost for the current year. Yet, work proceeded quickly, and it is once again a magnet for family strolls, fishermen, ocean informational programs, sitting, and taking a breather from all of the activities in the amusement area. The BEACH itself was filled with debris after the storm, with wreckage from the Rockaways and other hit sites floated onto its shoreline. It was cleared. And its shoreline was watched and will continued to be watched by neighborhood volunteers working with DEP. Word has come that the Army Corps of Engineers, once again, will be doing replenishment work on the sands from Corbin Place on the east to W. 37 St. on the west. The beaches of Sea Gate, virtually lost by the devastation, will still be aided, hopefully in the near future, by the plans of the Corps to create T-Groins, or similar set-ups that will prevent movement of sand from the Coney beach to the Bayview side, and, as a result, pull all the sand off the Sea Gate side.

KAISER PARK is the wonder of the western end of the peninsula, and its uses have grown with large-scale involvement from a community that had long sought its renaissance. After Sandy's wrath, the Kaiser park house became the scene of distribution of community needs, and there were programs and other help from a multitude of groups, including Friends of Kaiser Park, Coney Island Generation Gap, and more. Its tennis courts are busy all the time, although there appear to be ongoing problems with those with Parks-authorized permits having difficulty getting their allotted time. The future here offers much, however. The Creek side, with its walkway, as well as nearby sand stretches, has been used for aqua diving events, educational programs, and civic clean-ups. The Creek has already attracted boaters and jet-skiers, but there are problems at this time. The Creek is simply not ready. Two skiers were drowned recently. Fishing is done, but should not be encouraged for dinnertime uses. Fish and birds, some of them rare and unusual in these parts, are seen regularly. More thought and more fiscal aid is needed to keep the personnel power strong and to plan for a busy future.

Plans for a bike lane on the rear of the beach, and walkways from the Boardwalk to the shoreline for the disabled, had been promised, and monies had been set aside. Yet, it is said that the monies are gone. One wonders who actually stifled the project that would have been able to remove bikes from the Boardwalk as a safety measure, and would have allowed those, with physical needs, to get closer to the invigorating salt water. Bathrooms were destroyed, particularly in the Brighton Beach area, and there was a protest of construction of modular units that were built above the Boardwalk level in an effort to protect them from any future storms. Yet, the beach area on the west remains minus decent bathrooms. The community deserves better, and the growing crowds indicated the need. Playgrounds need regular monitoring, and personnel should be present at such sites as the Marlboro Playground, Nautilus, West 2<sup>nd</sup> St., Little Dreier, and others adjacent to housing and schools. Work on CALVERT VAUX should continue – it is a wide expanse offering many chances for sports of all kind, recreation and respite for everyone. People are pleased that the ABE STARK RINK for skating seems to be open to the local public more and more, often with the sponsorship of Councilman Recchia and other legislators. The wider use of this important building, off the Boardwalk and near the new Steeplechase Plaza and MCU Park seems inevitable.

All of the Parks & Recreation needs require the local Parks manager, and crew, to have additional helpers. The years-ahead indicate larger parks audiences of longtime and newer residents, tourists, and daily visitors.

## TRANSPORTATION

Superstorm Sandy could not halt the positive growth of the C.B. 13 neighborhoods. Throngs of people are now wrapped up in the excitement of Luna Park, Deno's, Steeplechase Plaza, restaurants in Brighton Beach and Coney Island...and so much more. As a result, bumper-to-bumper traffic everywhere is evident, and DOT must be on hand to help solve this difficult situation. As has been noted, the streets in and around Cropsey-Neptune-W. 15-19 Sts.-Surf-Mermaid face dire times with emergency needs as well as with day-to-day commerce. The same must be said of many of the ingress and egress from Brighton Beach. Because of its early settling and road arrangements, many of the streets throughout the Board simply zig-and-zag through the district. Although no longer an 'island' in the strictest sense, the peninsula and its northern neighborhoods must deal with extensive auto movement throughout the year, and particularly during warm weather. Brighton Beach and Neptune Avenues are routes that harbor omnipresent 'road rage' as stalled activities prevent adequate coverage. One Gravesend Traffic Study proved of little or no aid to an understanding of the peninsula's needs; further and deeper analyses are needed – especially with the not-too-distant future discussions on added housing (co-ops, condos, affordable units). Then, too, the always-discussed issue of casinos. Add to that the construction of an outdoor an indoor amphitheater/restaurant unit around the landmarked Child's Building on the Boardwalk, which could attract the same kind of star power as now draws record-breaking audiences to the Barclay's Center.

To add to Transit/Transportation problems, the Transit Authority has been generally unresponsive to the needs of C.B. 13. Subway lines are shifted around on weekends, when summer crowds are at the heaviest. Certainly, public transit is encouraged, but if confusion as to methods of 'getting around' is predominant during weekends, the effort of TA use is lessened. More cars are thus visible. Still another problem for the community rests on the fact that the TA seems to have a difficult time cleaning its properties, particularly those areas beneath its elevated structures. One particular loathsome spot is an 'extension' of West 6<sup>th</sup> St. between Sheepshead Bay Road (Neptune Ave.) and this former trolley-through terminus near Surf. This unmapped street is used by motorists exiting Trump Village, the West 8<sup>th</sup> Street Dept. of Motor Vehicles, and others. It is a dumping ground for trash, and, thus, a home for rats. Meetings have been held to try to get the strip 'mapped' so that Dept. of Sanitation workers could monitor it. Nothing has happened as a result of scores of meetings. Other TA spots are also magnets for trash. Bus routes should be restored or added. Ferry service should be studied with more diligence than has been in the past (Ferry Piers were once a part of the beach/amusement/hotel experiences...they could help again). All of these elements point out one of the greatest needs of C.B. 13 – PARKING FACILITIES in both Brighton Beach and Coney Island. There can be little doubt that the demands for this service will remain strong in the years ahead, and there ARE sites that can be developed for high-rise parking structures as well as street-level lots. It is known that future housing will involve parking areas, but it is also logical to accept the fact that there will NOT be enough to take care of the entire need. To add, it is NOT just summer parking... but the needs of people living in C.B. 13. PARKING is a year-round problem. Many merchants, residents, and motorists will attest to the inappropriateness of those BIKE LANES that have been placed on such streets as Neptune Avenue where they omen poorly for the safety of the bikers, the drivers, and storeowners. While bicycles may be a healthy move on the part of city planners, one must realize that southern Brooklyn is not a neighborhood where people can hop onto bikes and race into Manhattan... or even Downtown Brooklyn. Those biking to the south can use the lanes along Ocean Parkway easily, true, but designated bike lanes along Neptune, for example,

only hinder movement of cars and access to stores and restaurants.

### **DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

The aging of the infrastructure of southern Brooklyn was evident decades ago, and there were studies that led to actual plans for work to start on a Neptune Avenue Pumping Station that would have, at least, aided the healthy future for Coney Island and its environs. The project went to the Dept. of Design and Construction before it went *kerplunk*. Now, at long last, work has started on a new infrastructure methodology, and it has begun from an outfall in the Creek, and south down West 15<sup>th</sup> Street. Communication has been good, and merchants, residents, and restaurateurs have been warned of the time element involved as work progresses. This action is only Part 1 of what is decidedly warranted to replace the old water-sewer lines that wend their way beneath the streets of Brighton Gravesend and Coney. Funding must be found to continue work beyond this initial structure. Superstorm Sandy strongly showed the inadequacies of the old systems that are extant. Some of the worst flooding came from backed-up sewers and catch basins, all of them overflowing with the extensive water surges from Sandy. The infrastructure of Sea Gate, a private community with some city services now in evidence, is terrible. One of the oldest created districts in Brooklyn (where the rich from the City of New Amsterdam came to do 'summer'), this lovely area rises above an infrastructure that dates far back and offers only problems for the residents. While work proceeds on the first phase of infrastructure work, added personnel must keep watch on the sewers and catch basins of the troubled Brighton Beach. The men of the Department are on call all of the time and respond well. Problems are evident, though, as rotting fruits and household garbage are dumped into sewers at night, long after inspectors are on hand. The result, often, is stench and back-ups. The widely diverse and imposing shops and restaurants along the Brighton Beach Ave. strip await some correction of the problem. They have waited for years, and they are grateful for the ongoing work of the current DEP personnel. Still, long-term help is needed.

### **DEPARTMENT OF SANITATION**

The personnel at C.B. 13's Neptune Avenue Garage cannot be faulted; their work, throughout the year in local neighborhoods has been quickly responsive and more than merely capable. Busy summers, with street strewn with debris after special events and warm weather sidewalk traffic, demand a solid workforce, and the areas have been served well. Snowy winters also have been dealt with expediency and safely. For all of the effectiveness of DOS-C.B. 13, a long-planned new Garage, one that would also serve the DOS of C.B. 15 as well as a suggested office space for C.B. 13 itself, is farther off the planning scale than it was two decades ago! The Department deserves its new 'digs', and the involved communities would be even better served. When homes were constructed around the current DOS structure on Neptune, the homeowners were told that it would only be a short time before the garage would be moved to a modern site that could serve the neighborhoods with even more acumen. The homeowners would no longer be bothered by trucks that had to keep motors running on cold nights, by the possibilities of odors, and other inconveniences. The garage was to be built on Brooklyn Union space right off Stillwell Avenue and discussions were held on the manner by which trucks would enter and leave this site.

The plan stalled when contaminants were found throughout the no-longer-used BUG site, and the State mandated the remediation. It has been done, but there appears to be a problem with funds for this new service center. Monies may be available for purchase of the slice of the land, but fiscal aid

appears to have vanished for its actual above-land construction.

With the advent of growth in the amusement area in particular, DOS has been aided, through DEP, by the use of workers from the DOE Fund and by workers, supplied by the DA's office, to assist the men and women of the Coney Island Dancers. The combination of working units has kept the streets of C.B. 13 cleaner than in the past.

### **DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS**

As was noted in the 2012 report, no fiscal restraint should unfortunately fail to keep watch over illegally constructed buildings, or those altered without DOB approval. Sadly, one notes that both problems have continued to exist. COMPLIANCE DIVISION INSPECTION TEAMS remain critically needed. Buildings have been aging, and, sometimes, work on these structures has been haphazard at best, often sans approval. Abandoned buildings, or those with absentee landlords, can be menaces. One Oceanview Avenue building, for example, had shown signs of severe neglect for years. The Brighton Neighborhood Assn. had wanted to take it over and see that it was renovated for use. Time passed, and all watched the structure falling further into ruin. Finally, it appeared to be ready to collapse. A view from above saw that the long-unused building had no roof and few, if any, remaining walls. The once-beautiful structure had to be demolished. Other Oceanview Ave. buildings, next door to one another on this nice street, are all fenced in. Will they, as with others, be 'open' invitations to homeless, to vandals, to druggies and prostitutes? Will results be fires than can spread to neighboring homes? When a building is abandoned, for one reason or another, a communication network, between DOB, Police, Fire, the Community Board, and other involved groups and/or individuals should be in order, immediately, to prevent possible problems with the remaining building. A shuttered Burger King, on Cropsey Ave., as an example, proved a lure for vandalism and illegal entry. Its parking lot became a dumping ground, and relatives of the official owner lived on the next block. But the residents, though bothered by the resultant mess, were not responsible. The actual owner was in Europe and remains there. Court actions have resulted; the site has been fenced. But this neighborhood blight is also the first thing seen by those entering the area from the Parkway. It is a sad and ugly first encounter. Situations like this MUST be solved in the interests of health, of safety, of public perception. A method must be found.

### **DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Year ago, the Community Boards had a key role with DYCD. With input of those in and around youth programming, DYCD was able to serve groups that were really doing the job well. Members of the Community Board visited sites, helped to determine the effectiveness and/or promise of local organizations. Today, funding often may fail to find the appropriate units to receive aid. The youth population of C.B. 13 is large, and youth groups may have enormous difficulties in finding the mere funds to keep operating. The advent of Sandy has not helped matters, because remaining youth organizations suffered incredible damages; some are not yet operating at a point where they may be of service to the large community. Some important C.B. 13 agencies work well and receive support, but others, equally important to the well-being of the neighborhood, may not be known even though they reach out, with success, to wide populations. Communication and Clarity must be created with greater strength between DYCD and an area it may not know all that well.

### **DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESS SERVICES**

The problem of those who find themselves living on the streets is a poser that seems to come with every Metropolis, but it is one that demands the attention of all. The reasons for homeless on the streets is complicated and not without a single cause. Whatever the dynamics, many individuals – and families – seek whatever ‘temporary’ home they can find within the many possibilities within C.B. 13 – the Boardwalk Pavilions and areas beneath the boards, deserted and seemingly-abandoned structures, hillsides and park areas where simple amenities may be constructed, and even benches on the Ocean Parkway walk and bikeways. While there may be some drug users among them, there may be those released from perhaps overcrowded and overstressed city and state facilities --- but there may also be unfortunates who have lost jobs, dwellings, and hope. Some may even be families. Common Ground, the local C.B. 13 arm of the Department works diligently with the Police and Parks Department, and the workers respond to C.B. 13 calls when reports come into the office regarding a siting of homeless. The ongoing attempts to ‘reach out’ to the homeless and to find ways to assist them are critical. Common Ground seems to be doing a yeoman job, but greater support is needed to carry their findings further along the roadway to lead the homeless back into the framework of city life.

### **DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS**

Not every young citizen can be reached through sports programs; some simply are not athletic. Few can doubt that either sports – or the arts – are ways to get people involved in learning. One must learn to read and learn about life in order to succeed in acting, for example. Musicians require math skills. In short, the Dept. of Cultural Affairs, once active throughout Brooklyn, seems to be among the ‘missing’ in C.B. 13. No meetings are held to explain applications for funds, and there are many groups ready, willing, and competent to move along the path to the arts. The Brighton Ballet, which may have received aid from DCA, is forced to perform outside the C.B. 13 Brighton Beach district due to the lack of a possible home base. Other local groups, specializing in music, in theater, in the visual arts (including video and film) need attention from DCA. The absence of this agency prevents interests and growths for the C.B. 13 younger population. Years ago, the neighborhood fostered the very first Everyman Company of Brooklyn, involving young and older from the area – of all denomination – which went on to be the first group ever to appear outside of the Lincoln Center Fountain and, later, to a run off-off Broadway. The entire cast, was led, in part by theater-screen great Geraldine Fitzgerald and a host of professional volunteers. Coney Island and Brighton Beach was long the hub of cultural experiences. We must work together to see strides towards the arts goal in the future, with concerned looks at the Shore Theater Building (nee Loew’s Coney Island), the use of other new and older sites.

Eddie Mark  
C.B. 13 Chairman

Chuck Reichenthal  
C.B. 13 District