



COMMUNITY  
BOARD #14

COMMUNITY  
BOARD #14  
City of New York  
Borough of Queens

DOLORES ORR  
Chairperson

JONATHAN GASKA  
District Manager

1931 Mott Ave. #311  
Far Rockaway  
New York 11691

Telephone:  
718-471-7300  
Fax:  
718-868-2657

[cbrock14@nyc.rr.com](mailto:cbrock14@nyc.rr.com)

## STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY DISTRICT NEEDS FISCAL YEAR 2012

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 and Bayswater. 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. We await the ground breaking this fall of the much-anticipated community center/ YMCA as well as the grand opening of the Super Stop & Shop. 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. Well over two 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 that we lack confidence in the selected development teams’ ability to successfully finance and develop this project. We have not had any contact with the development team in over 2 years and 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 our district, the board voted to rescind its support for the Arverne East project. We wrote the Mayor

last fall informing him of our position on the project. We are still waiting for his response. We hope to meet with the Mayor's staff along with HPD this year 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 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. A total of 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 millions of tax dollars go to another borough or county. Our few shopping areas are 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 Jamaica shopping area. The Far Rockaway shopping area has been dying a slow death for years despite the efforts of the board and many local leaders. Recently we have met with representatives of the owners, and we are hopeful that renovation will start before the New Year.

### **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 30% unemployment rate. Our adult unemployment rate is 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 governments 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.

### **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 would allow for an approximate 30-minute commute to midtown. 2) Commuter Ferry Service: The Rockaways still need 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, Howard Beach and Aqueduct 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 come the added burdens 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. We also are awaiting the opening of the new district sanitation garage.

### **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. We have requested that the Parks Department along with the community develop a plan for more beach 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. We continue to request extended beach hours during the week. Keeping the beach open to 7pm 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 generation of renewable energy and waterfront recreation at the same location.

### **FLOOD CONTROL**

In the past few years, 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 a decade 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 completed. 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. 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, number of projects has languished in the bowels of city agencies for too long. The Board requests continuing funding for HW631. The area in Arverne called "the valley" has suffered for years. The need for a new elementary school in the 11691 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 Dept. 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 185 buildings with an SRO designation. While we continue to be concerned about the illegal conversion of these buildings, be the owners by adding or sub dividing illegal rooms. Our biggest concern is that three City agencies HPD, DHS and the NYCHA 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. DOB 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 and have languished on the unsafe building list for over a decade.

### **WATERFRONT ACCESS**

The Rockaways and Broad Channel are known as "beach" communities; however, we do not have the benefit of a legal public boat ramp or a public fishing pier. We hope the city can find the funds to support these two important priorities. Funding should be put in place for the design of a regional waterfront park to be located at Rockaway Community Park, which is adjacent to the old Edgemere landfill.

Finally, we ask that community board budgets not be cut and in fact be increased to fund the collective bargaining increases as well as increased costs of supplies, postage and equipment. Community Boards are the only city agency that has not seen a real increase in budget for over a decade.