



## **BROOKLYN COMMUNITY BOARD 13**

1201 Surf Avenue – 3rd Fl., Brooklyn, NY 11224

(718) 266-3001

FAX (718) 266-3920

[www.brooklyn13.org](http://www.brooklyn13.org)

**MARTY MARKOWITZ**

Borough President

**EDDIE MARK**

Chairperson

**CHUCK REICHENTHAL**

District Manager

### **District Needs Statement FY 2013**

***Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland...*** The tens of thousands of lights could be seen from the beach where people still walked along the sands during a hot summery night. And those sparking illuminations filled the night skies, glittering from the nearby Dreamland Park...or the dazzling Luna Park or the nearby Steeplechase Park. Feltman's and other restaurants were filled to capacity. The Elephant Hotel was busy as were other hostleries like the Brighton Beach Hotel. Not far from the amusement area were the large homes, in what was to be called Sea Gate, the western tip of this unique island. The 'nouveau riche', who had found their fortunes in this New World and this seaport city, had first found their way to that western tip where they migrated during the summer months to get away from the heat of the already-altered former New Amsterdam island. It was the turn of a New Century, and life had changed for the multitudes who were making up this burgeoning modern-day Metropolis. Railroads and trolleys soon appeared, and the multitudes discovered this sandy shoreline. Summer bungalows and cottages dotted the landscape, along with boarding houses that draw a multi-ethnic warm weather population. Edison's new electric lights thrilled the extraordinary summer population. For a while, the area had its own 'Boss Tweed' – a nefarious man named John McKane who ruled with an iron hand...until the law and the changing times sent him to prison. A New Century. A New World. A New Beginning! This was the land that became the southern sphere of a land called Breukelen – a land of towns that joined together...and then, propelled by the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, joined the City of New York.

***Under the Boardwalk/Down by the Sea...*** No longer an island and no longer the home of a rabbit population, this discovered elongated sand bar gained international importance as the years rolled on. Here were roller coasters (Tornado, Thunderbolt, Cyclone, etc.) along with other thrill-inducing rides. If you reached the beach after 10am, you had no place to put your blanket. People found that the area beneath the Boardwalk provided an escape from the sun, and it offered a wide range of commercial structures beneath the boards that offered the populace rentals of beach chairs (that were difficult to open!), umbrellas, and cold drinks. Huge bathrooms were also built 'neath the walkway. Apartment houses rose along the streets of Brighton Beach; a year-round population developed – a widely diverse ethnic population. Sea Gate became a private year-round community with its own police force. Churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship rose along the landscape... as did theaters of all kinds: live presentations (the Brighton Beach Theater was part of the Subway Circuit with a host of Broadway and Hollywood greats doing 'summer stock' along the ocean); live ethnic theaters; movie palaces like the RKO Tilyou, the Loew's Coney Island, as well as the Oceana, Tuxedo, Surf, and Mermaid. Stores, of all varieties, dotted Mermaid, Brighton Beach, Stillwell, and Neptune Avenues.

***You're my Coney Island baby...*** World War II changed the world. As it ended and veterans returned, the entire globe began to undergo enormous and rapid shifts in lifestyles....and in 20th century's new marvels. There were NEW advancements to change the way life would be altered. Heard was the call of Suburbia; the air conditioner (at home and in theaters); the giant new shopping malls; and there was the advent of television! The result of all of this slowed down the day-to-day lives of the people of C.B. 13. Smaller crowds streamed out of the Stillwell Terminal, the subway terminus. One and two story residential structures were razed in favor of high rise buildings. Long-time residents left the area. Many summer bungalows disappeared; a few remained with people attempting to turn them into year-round homes. Theaters, of all kinds, closed, the victims of that little box in the living room, simply called TV. Roller coasters, save for the Cyclones, toppled. Boardwalk enterprises shuttered. It was not unusual, even at City Hall, to hear the peninsula of Brooklyn called the 'outer part of the outer borough'.

Shopping streets displayed vacancy signs. In spite of it all, the area somehow survived ... on hope and on its natural wonders with the sound and beauty of the surf and the salt air welcoming to thousands.

*And all the time going to Coney Island I'm thinking, Wouldn't it be great if it was like this all the time'...* Steeplechase, with its indoor-outdoor fun and its glass-encased wonderworld was razed in the sixties, but the Parachute Jump, a fugitive from the 1939 Flushing Meadows' World's Fair, stood tall and proud, though now devoid of the chutes that produced screams of joy and excitement. It stood as the first structure that could be seen by ships cruising into the famed harbor. But in spite of all of the losses, the area began to see new hope over the next decades. The Cyclone Roller Coaster, the Parachute Jump, the Wonder Wheel at Deno's, the Boardwalk Child's Restaurant Building (which had gone through changes from an eatery to a skeeball center) and the Shore Theater building (once the home of the magnificent Loew's Coney Island Theater) with many offices and a rooftop restaurant, along with the original Child's Surf Ave. structure (now the home of the enterprising Coney Island USA) were declared landmarks. The Brighton Beach area earned the name Little Odessa as a huge emergence of former residents of the USSR found it to be a perfect new home. Gone were some of the past wonders (Dreamland, Steeplechase and its 'horses', Luna Park, et al), but Astroland stood proud with the Cyclone, Deno's Wonder Wheel Park looked as delightful as it had in the past, Nathan's prospered, and its original Surf-Stillwell site, with its delectable franks and French fries, remained a 24-hour destination in all kinds of weather. The Aquarium arrived on the site of the erstwhile Dreamland site, in the interim. home to a Bonomo's Turkey Taffy shop. And the residents, from all countries, all nationalities, all backgrounds made the peninsula and its neighboring areas alive. And, by the turn of the century, the wheels turned round-and-round, and the magic began to glitter stronger than it had in many years.

*...And the wheel goes round and round...* proclaimed a hit Perry Como song of the 50's, and it presaged a magnificent growth for Coney Island, Brighton Beach, Sea Gate, Gravesend, Bath Beach, and nearby Homecrest and Bensonhurst. As the calendar flipped into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the shorefront area became the focus of enterprising growth. With the support of the Mayor, Borough President, and energetic City and State legislators, the southern Brooklyn landscape became an important part of the planning for the entire future of the city. Brighton Beach once again thrived with new residents and an enthusiasm that had been unparalleled for scores of years. Coney Island's amusement district, once more attracting media attention, received the bolstering of a new City and Borough association called the Coney Island Development Corp. (CIDC). Discussions began in earnest as to how to correct the years of city neglect for its shorefront area, as well as developing blueprints for the future. Civic groups entered the talks gaining strength and renewed civic pride. Problems, though, were evident in the area's aged infrastructure; in its parks and waterways; in its youth programs and activities for its older populations. Much would have to be done. And the work started in giant steps.... People in the area found keen new means of dealing with the problems. Important were the Brighton Business Improvement District, Astella Development, Brighton Neighborhood Assn., CIDC, the Everyman Street Theater (which led to the start of the Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors Festival!), civic enterprises of all kinds, and the Community Board which brought together leaders from all corners of the neighborhoods – housing development residents, amusement area owners, business people and shop owners, young homeowners and older residents. With all this in place, the neighborhoods of C.B. 13, armed with a long list of needs, entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the kind of vigor that brought together the past, the present, and the future in one burst of energy and determination.

Everything is interconnected, and there is always a Domino Effect working, because what happens in one area, whatever the situation, must have some impact on neighbors and even those farther away. Such has been the case with Brooklyn. As the south shore declined in city services and was seemingly

ignored by the city, things vanished. Ebbets Field and the Dodgers skipped town, leaving a void that took years to fill. Downtown Brooklyn, with theaters, restaurants, and department stores suffered under an avalanche of Long Island and New Jersey mall developments. Film distributors, needing quicker results from a smaller moviegoing public, shuffled movies into dozens of now-multiplex theaters, dooming larger cinema palaces. The Domino effect resulted in restaurants and stores closing earlier with less people using the main streets at night. The impact could be seen on hitherto busy streets throughout the borough. In recent years, nevertheless, the tides changed. With the influx of new populations added to the Brooklyn scene, and with the excitement of new businesses and major attractions, the work has begun. Nonetheless, C.B. 13 saw chronic, long-standing problems that must be corrected if everything was to work as a unit in an exciting century. And it happened! During the summer of 2011, State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli released a report that proved that all elements working together lead to economic progress of unique potential. Coney Island and Brighton, supported by new and older businesses underscored by the unprecedented growth within the amusement area, began a sharp recovery from the recession. Private sector employment rose to 27,530 jobs, a gain of 7.1 percent – a much faster rate of job growth than in the City overall! It is estimated that foreign-born residents account for almost half of the C.B. 13 population, with the majority from the Ukraine or Russia, followed by China, Belarus, and Hong Kong. During 2010 alone, the Coney area rebounded sharply, adding 2840 jobs, or 60-percent of the 3,080 jobs lost in the recession. That is only for starters...the mammoth growth is continuing, thanks to a unity of purpose and abilities.

\* \* \*

COMMUNITY BOARD 13 comprises the peninsula neighborhoods(Brighton Beach, Coney Island, Sea Gate), along with locations north of the Belt Parkway and Coney Island Creek (Gravesend, Bath Beach, and portions of Bensonhurst and Homecrest). The actual 'island' of Coney, named for its original habitat for rabbits, no longer exists. As the area became more and more popular, the development of Ocean Parkway, Shell Road (nee McDonald Ave) meant the need to fill in of smaller water inlets that separated the New World's first giant amusement center from the mainland of Brooklyn. All of these neighborhoods have a close link to the busy waterways that surround southern Brooklyn. The Atlantic Ocean washes along the elongated beach; Gravesend Bay sends its water along the edges of Bath Beach, Sea Gate, and the northern portion of the peninsula at the relatively new Bayview section. Coney Island Creek sprawls from Shell Road westward to Gravesend Bay. This once toxic waterway, from Shell to Stillwell, has been totally cleansed by National Grid (nee Key Span nee Brooklyn Union Gas) under an order from the State. The land alongside the Creek is now pristine for much of its length. The Creek, from Stillwell to its terminus, still awaits cleansing so that this entire stretch can become a new haven for fishermen, kayakers, environmentalists, and others eager to enjoy a serene atmosphere. C.B. 13 is co-terminus with the 60<sup>th</sup> Police Precinct. Both are bounded on the south by the Ocean; on the west and north by Gravesend Bay, and a sharp view of the Narrows and the Verrazano Bridge; oh the east and north by Corbin Place ( the division line between the Brighton and Manhattan Beaches). East and north boundaries, zigzagging through the area, include 26<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 86<sup>th</sup> Street, Avenue Y, Coney Island, and Cass Place. All of C.B. 13's vicinities are part of the most vulnerable to flooding, a situation brought to light most strongly with the potential threats of Global Warming and shifting water patterns. Nonetheless, all of these sites are undergoing a widespread renaissance of construction and business. All City agencies have developed plans that would deal with problems of the environment, crowding, and the now-omnipresent threats of terrorism. C.B. 13 works closely with the Precinct as well as the Fire Department (a local Ladder Company had been threatened with closure, but the residents rallied, and it was saved), the Department of Sanitation, Transportation and Transit, Consumer Affairs, Buildings, Environmental Protection, Parks & Recreation, among others. The Office of Emergency

Management utilizes its Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), organized and run by C.B. 13, as an arm of information. The CERT team has worked with OEM and the Police on storm surges that have threatened homes; on operations with hospitals and nursing homes, as well as with high rise buildings that have lost power. In the latter, the CERT team assisted with data on people who were on oxygen support and checked to see if additional aid was needed. Changes in times, use, and environmental and other threats, have created a state of floating anxiety among many residents who know that there are really only a few ways to escape from the peninsula should dangers arise. Cropsey Avenue and Ocean Parkway are the key egress arms, with some escape also offered by Stillwell Ave. and Shell Road. Bumper-to-bumper traffic on Neptune Ave. might slow down roadway movement out of the area; the west end is highly populated on the peninsula. In recent years, with a rebirth of the amusement area, cars may often clog up these streets, a situation that concerns year-round residents. In terms of storms and flood warnings, OEM and the agencies work closely to prepare for any difficulty. Sea Gate has been most vulnerable with a diminishing beach and, thus, the ominous sight of surf washing onto streets. A recent nor-easter sent at least one home into the Bay. Sea Gate's shore ills were magnified some years ago with the Federal replenishment of the Brighton-Coney beach. A rocky T-Groin that existed to separate Sea Gate from the West 37<sup>th</sup> Street end of the Coney Island community, was extended further into the ocean by the Federal Corps of Engineers. The results created major problems, because resultant water shifts meant that Sea Gate sand, and even Coney sands, were pulled around the tips of Sea Gate to land on the northside of the peninsula where new homes had been built in the Bayview Avenue area. A 'new' beach was thus created in Bayview with sand dunes mounting higher every year and toppling into the streets and homes along these streets. The Parks Department, Transportation, and Sanitation were all called in regularly to see how the sand dunes could be handled. The beaches of Sea Gate eroded and the sands disappeared, leaving more shorefront homes in peril. The Federal Corps has admitted that a mistake was made, and new plans for added T-Groins to protect the sands of Coney (and help to restore sand to Sea Gate's private beaches), are underway. It must also be noted that the Federal Corps' work on the replenishment of the Brighton-Coney beaches also resulted in problems. The sand was brought up to Boardwalk level, thus closing up the air space between the sand and the wooden walkway. Also lost were businesses that operated beneath this popular Boardwalk. The wet sands eroded the wooden areas of the underbelly of the Boardwalk. The rotted woods resulted in trip hazards and more. The means of redoing the Boardwalk is a bone of contention that has caused community problems. While portions of the Boardwalk have been replaced by concrete, other areas have been restructured with wood (though endangered Rainforest woods should be eschewed). The Parks Department had sought to rebuild the remaining areas of the boards with concrete, but many civic groups and individual leaders opposed such an idea. Compromises have been sought, and scores of meetings have been held. The Boardwalk is one of the most vital elements in the south shore, and its reconstruction and maintenance scores high in area concerns. The Parks Department has sought to install a mid-Boardwalk concrete passage for vehicles that must use it e.g. EMS, Police, Parks, Sanitation, Fire. The agency feels that the other sections of the walkway can be replaced by recycled plastic lumber. At least two street ends, where ramps lead to the Boardwalk, are to be rebuilt, with concrete and landscaped surroundings. The eastern most end of the walk at Brighton 14<sup>th</sup> St. requires a larger amount of creative work as does the westernmost sector at West 37<sup>th</sup> Street. (At the moment, the W. 37 St. Bay is closed to swimmers due to undertows that were created by the extension of the aforementioned T-Groin). The outcome of the plan for work has yet to be determined at the time of this report. But work must start soon. The new Ocean Dreams high rise housing development, and the nearby Coney Island Commons, are both near ready to start construction in the west end, off the Boardwalk.

New condos, co-ops, affordable housing, rentals, and other buildings will be planned in the next few years. A key question remains – what will be done to update the entire infrastructure of the peninsula? Some work has been started concerning this problem – new water lines, sewer and catch basin needs are being addressed. Over two decades ago, a new pumping station had been set for the Coney Island area, but plans collapsed even as the project was in the hands of the City's Design and Construction Department. Then, things remained in limbo while debate continued as to the best method of handling flooding and other environmental hazards (clogged sewer lines et al). Now, funding indicates that the future programming may well be on its way... and none too soon considering the many construction plans for new towering occupancies throughout the area. It should be noted, as well, that the entire C.B. 13 neighborhoods are home to senior nursing homes, senior developments, New York City Housing Authority structures and other complexes. Still on the projected future are hotel(s), further amusement development, residential homes of all varieties, and other recreational development.

The half-decade work of the CIDC has been fostering growth and room for future development. In the forefront have been the Office of the Mayor, Borough President Marty Markowitz, Councilman Domenic M. Recchia, Jr., Assemblyman Alec Brook-Krasny, State Senator Diane Savino, Councilman Michael Nelson, Congressman Jerrold Nadler, and the other legislators serving at least part of C.B. 13. Accomplishments have been many, with more to come and with some key successes and some mistakes, as must be expected, along the way. Thor Equities had bought sizeable areas of the amusement sector while CIDC worked on its own Master Plan. The Thor plan, to many, seemed as if it were designed a la Las Vegas, and it drew many negative reactions from the many who, though wanting new elements brought to the amusement area, hoped to retain some of the honky-tonk flavor as well as a welcoming up-to-date list of amenities. The Municipal Arts Society also jumped into the fray, and contentious meetings were held with the agencies, while the residents of Coney Island and neighboring areas met often with CIDC officials to work out the best possible uses for the land. Through the CIDC and elected officials, notably Councilman Recchia, plans were drawn up for a new YMCA to serve residents of the west end. It will jut out from the new Coney Island Commons and will be open to the whole community. Residents opted for a list of things to be included at the Y to serve the young people and adults of the busy high-rise area e.g. a pool, gym, multi-purpose rooms, etc. Groundbreaking looms shortly.

Thor had bought the land on which Astroland had stood for many years and was considered one of the magnets for families and tourists. Eventually, Thor had Astroland torn down and spent one year using the site for a half-hearted area that carried the name of the once-great 'Dreamland'. It failed. Soon after, the City bought back some of the land owned by Thor, including the Astroland site. In came Central Amusement International LLC, and the terrain changed immediately. A new Luna Park opened on the site of the defunct 'Dreamland'-Astroland, complete with a frontage that followed the design of the original, beloved amusement Mecca. It was an instant success, and CAI followed it up, within a year, with a new amusement area called the ScreamZone, and that it is!! Four new rides were added, and screams of delight could be heard. One ride, called the Sling Shot, places riders in a seat that is then shot 90-miles per hour straight up into the air. It has become a Brooklyn phenomenon. Tens of thousands of people have found their way back to the shorefront --- to the rides, to the beach, to the Boardwalk. The Stillwell Avenue Terminal had been rebuilt in recent years, complete with a solar powered rooftop. It still stands at the corner of Stillwell & Surf, with a new indoor area that includes homes for the Transit Police, Dunkin' Donuts, newsstands, and more. Thor, though, is not out of the picture, and it has plans for its remaining parcels in the area; one is now taken up by a flea market area called 'BK Brooklyn'. Thor has razed turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup> Century buildings at Stillwell and Surf, including the Henderson Building, a group of buildings that once housed hotels, amusements, and, most recently,

a popular club called the Velocity. Work has now started on this land, with the 'temporary' result to be two story buildings to house commercial establishments. The area remains a C-7 one and should involve amusement-food related ventures. (Corner spots had been occupied by Popeye's Chicken and the Faber's Arcade). Also razed has been the West 12<sup>th</sup> Street Bank Building, and an unused lot now remains on the site. As of this writing, the land is filled with mounds of dirt. No plans have been released for this corner spot.

The CB. 13 office is located at 1201 Surf Avenue, diagonally across from this last-mentioned lot, but in clear view of all of the activities in and around the amusement area. The office is strategically located so as to be easy-to-reach by residents of all sections served by the Board, and most committee meetings are held in this office, as is the monthly District Service Cabinet meeting. The monthly General Board meeting is held at Coney Island Hospital's Auditorium, also a spot that can be reached by all those living and doing business in the areas.

The Board office, as mandated, tries to solve scores of complaints that are phoned in on a daily basis. There are also drop-in visits to report other issues in the neighborhoods. Civic group leaders, residents, business entrepreneurs, agency representatives are constantly visiting the office. It is the aim of Board staffers to remain in constant communication with everyone in the district. Follow-ups are made on all complaints, and referrals to city agencies are made by the staff. People have complained about what they believe is less-than-perfect handling by the '311' system and bring the complaints into the office, sometimes with a referral number from '311'. Many of these problems are then discussed by the staff Manager with the agency representatives who come to the Cabinet meetings every month. Interconnection between the agencies, clarification of the involved problems, and linkages between the involved parties are created. Communication and results are the factors sought by staff. Zoning issues often arise, and many involve the amusement area which is noted for its rare designation as a C-7 zoning. During those years when southern Brooklyn was virtually ignored, many infractions were developed in the C-7 zone, including, but not limited to, the appearance of furniture stores on the northside of Surf Avenue. One of them, Coney Island Furniture, was known to place mattress illegally on the sidewalk in front of the establishment. As of this time, after years of summonses and court appearances that resulted only in fines, this furniture store at last is giving up the ghost! But a larger one, which has changed names a few times, still stands one block away on the north side. And, nearby, are two more furniture shops. Plans are now moving along to tear down the decrepit West 8<sup>th</sup> Street Overpass, which has connected the West 8<sup>th</sup> Street Station to the Boardwalk, with steps leading down to the Surf Ave. south side and the Aquarium. No agency has assumed, or will assume, responsibility for its maintenance. Meetings were held over the years to seek an answer to its failing conditions, but nothing was resolved. It will now be razed, which will eliminate fear of its collapse and further end its sad looking entranceway to the Aquarium and the amusement area. With its demise, the northside of Surf Avenue, once again, might be a fine site for further expansion of the amusement area. It had once been the entranceway to the original Luna Park and to a wide range of games, attractions (including the B&B Carousell which is now being renovated out-of-state for its eventual inclusion in the new Steeplechase Parachute Jump Park). Flea markets, which once dotted the northside of Surf, have been removed over the last few years... and the C-7 designation seems to be strengthening with the renewal of worldwide interest in Coney Island's amusement district. The new plans, from CIDC, may modify some of the C-7 features, but commercial enterprises such as furniture stores should still be verboten. At this time, the northside of Surf is watched by the Precinct, the Board office, and others, and there seems to be no problem with the fact that several bars have opened, including one that features cabaret and karaoke, another that caters to well-to-do motorcycle enthusiasts, and another that heralds a Tattoo Parlor on one side and a pleasant bar on the other. An employment office for those seeking work in the security

field is also on hand, as are a restaurant, a disco-esque catering place, and a children's play center. Much more can be placed with room that is currently open due to an empty building adjacent to the Terminal, and a lot where flea markets once held sway.

Throughout Brighton Beach and Coney Island, there are problems that seem to defy correction, partly due to the lack of sufficient personnel, or lack of data on the actual rules and regulations concerning store rules and vendor usage. Traffic and transit issues remain as due the problems of vendors on zero visibility street, and illegal vendors on the beach. Despite all of the problems, one can point to the fact that SUCCESS brings with it PROBLEMS, and C.B. 13, with its strong supporters, is apt to keep working for the continued expansion of the famed neighborhoods that make it up. Problems will be solved!

### **GRAVESEND, HOMECREST, BATH BEACH**

Time has been relatively kind to these sections that are part of C.B. 13. Pleasant blocks dot these areas that are north of the Belt Parkway, Shore Parkway, and Coney Island Creek. But the headlined attention to the borough's watery exterior has brought new prospects into focus, and it may well be that some will be of concern to its many residents. Gravesend is generally thought of as the area between Coney Island and Bensonhurst, and it further believed to be one of the oldest populated areas on Long Island, and perhaps even in the nation. Historic homes dot the area, although some of them have fallen, in recent years, to the demolition crews. It is noted that the street plan appears to be the original one first adopted after the first settlements in 1643. Bath Beach has been called synonymous with Gravesend though it encompasses several different roadbeds – there are two-way routes that run thorough the area – Bath Avenue, Harway Avenue, and Benson Avenue. Cropsey Avenue proves to be the most traveled. The one-way cross-streets are numbered with the word 'Bay' attached. Many two family homes remain, with mom-and-pop stores on the avenues and on the Bay streets. Several higher-rise, well-maintained residential buildings fill the areas around Cropsey-Harway-Stillwell, including Contello Towers, Waterview Towers, Harway Houses, among them. C.B. 13 jurisdiction, to a great degree, ends at 26<sup>th</sup> Avenue, but there are routes that go further north than that street. An oasis between the Contello structures is Little Dreier-Offerman Park, which is safely protected by a fence from the traffic that zips around it. There is a well-used bocce court, as well as fun equipment for the young, and comfortable benches for the older people on the scene. The Park was part of a renewal initiated by the community with Councilman Recchia. It offers a fine respite for all in the area, and complaints about night time use has abated over the last few years. A nearby bridge over the Belt connects this part of the district with the in-development Large Dreier-Offerman Park (Calvert Vaux Park), and it, too, has been earmarked for redesign and replacement in the future. The Ulmer Park library branch of the Brooklyn Public Library serves a wide swatch of the population at Bath and 26<sup>th</sup> Ave. Nearby are the structures of the buildings that have housed Lafayette and John Dewey schools (the former is now a multi-use building for several charter units; the latter had been threatened with closure until the community rallied to save it from such a dire ending.)

There are several senior homes in this area, but the larger group has been constructed just north of the C.B. 13 terminus. Condos have also been built throughout Gravesend and Bath Beach. Religious needs are taken care by several entities, including Most Precious Blood Church(the Parish elementary school closed a few years ago) and the Shore Parkway Jewish Center. The last few years have seen some auto slowdowns through Cropsey Avenue as work has continued on the upgrading of the Avenue V Pumping Station, a situation that has seen much of Cropsey, and its neighboring streets, torn up for the placement of new lines. Residents were kept well informed of street closures, and the entire work is nearing a conclusion. Lighting for the Avenue V Station has now been approved, indicating that there is

illumination for the ending of this project. There is no doubt, however, that traffic along Cropsey, a key street to the Coney area and to turns into the direction of Brighton Beach and Sheepshead Bay, has been impacted by the work. Whatever the problems, the motorists have either found alternate streets or have braved Cropsey to make their way to their homes or to the shorefront areas. Localities, as well as drivers, have complained about the entries to both the east and west of the Belt Parkway from Cropsey. Backed-up cars are reported waiting to gain entrance to westbound; others find the eastbound entrance tricky.

Perhaps the most dynamic piece of the future for the area is the development of the Large Dreier-Offerman Park (a/k/a Calvert Vaux Park). This large tract owes much of its size to the fact that a great deal is the result of land excavated when the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge was constructed. Dredged materials were deposited at this site. For years, the largest occupant of the increased land mass have been soccer teams, and a few special events. Plans for a golf enterprise on the site went nowhere. However, the need for additional park space in the neighborhoods of C.B. 13 led to creation of a Master Plan. for this park, and Councilman Recchia, working with the Parks Department, initiated the work that has now begun to show progress. Work has begun on new baseball fields (at least one will be a regulation sized area). Fountain areas are planned, along with two needed park houses and other elements needed to serve a widespread group of park users. There will be environmental sections, waterfront areas, and much more eventually included in the work. The ballfield that had been created alongside the MCU Stadium (initially the Key Span Park) will be dismantled to make way for a new Steeplechase Park as part of the CIDC's plans for the Coney Island amusement district. The users of this field will eventually migrate to Dreier/Vaux thus making it one of the key athletic centers in the borough.

Dreier/Vaux's entrance is off the Shore Parkway, a somewhat narrow stretch that carries cars leaving the Belt along this route to Cropsey Avenue and, via a right turn, to Coney Island with its residential areas and amusement focus. There may be problems concerning this road in the future, and some concern has already been expressed by residents. Thor Equities has indicated a proposal to construct a large BJ's adjacent to this route, which would produce more traffic issue. At the same time, rumors continue about the advent of the City's first Walmart, a potential for nearby Caesar's Bazaar Shopping Center, already the home to Kohl's, Best Buy, Toys 'R' Us, and others. Cropsey already hosts, among others, a Home Depot, a Pathmark, and a drive-through Starbucks.

To add to the future of this zone just outside of C.B. 13 but propelling traffic through Shore and eastward into C.B. 13 is the plan for a Waste Transfer Station that would mean trucks making their way in and out of the same Shore Parkway. But fear remains regarding another issue – safety of the waterways that serve millions of people. There is anxiety about the movement of garbage into barges for removal to other dumping sites. Some fear spillage of materials into the waters that conceivably can be carried down the coast to the beaches of Sea Gate and Coney Island. There is apt to be more discussion on these issues within the immediate future. The entire economy and health of C.B. 13, and its neighboring C.B. 11, could be devastated by contaminated waters. Sea Gate beaches were closed in 2011 following the discharge of waste from a Harlem Waste Treatment plant. DOS, though, has maintained that all safety precautions will be strengthened and that there will be little, if no, possibility at all of waterway damage from the Waste Transfer Station.

Lafayette High School is no more. The majestic building, known for a large contingent of successful alumni, is now the Lafayette Campus, with several smaller schools occupying its large interior, including, among others, the successful High School of Sports Management which receives key support from the Brooklyn Cyclones and the Mets' organization. Its rate of college-bound graduates is commendable.



Only a short distance from Lafayette is John Dewey High School, built several decades ago as a school that had been touted as one that would be among the 'best' in the city. Time, here, has taken a toll, and the school was threatened with closure last year. The community rallied, with legislators, with abutting local groups, teachers, and students. It has been saved, at least for the present. The school has a beautiful, large campus. As it had been with Lafayette, there have been 'incidents' around the school, notably at the adjacent elevated train station which is used by the students. Transit Police are obviously on the scene now, and 60th Pct. patrol cars likewise monitor the goings-and-comings of the students.

Marlboro Houses, a NYCHA development, also stands in this residential area, and it, too, has had its share of problems over the years. Reports of neglect and crime have been reported. The Marlboro Senior/Youth Center flourishes, though, and there is help from the busy Jewish Community House of Coney Island. Playgrounds are not in the best of shape, and a roller rink near the Avenue X side, is now just a large slab of concrete baking in the sun. Some years ago, the Brooklyn Arts & Culture Assn. (BACA) held concerts on this stretch, but feuding factions within the project kept audiences small. The skating rink, with a remnant of a stage, could be a powerful addition to the needs of the youth and adults of Marlboro. Across from Marlboro, on Ave. X, is the seemingly ill-used Ty Cobb Field. Considering the recreational needs that are evident, it is sad to note that this Field is shabby. Here, again, there had been questions about who and what could maintain it --- was it Transit Authority property? Parks? The field touches the edge of the City's Railroad Yards, which separate the Marlboro/Dewey areas from the Shell Road, Beach Haven development at the other end of the district. This Shell Road section is filled with neat one-and-two family homes, along with the large Trump-developed Beach Haven apartments. The elevated trains bringing people into the district run above Shell Road, a street that also carries cars going on and off the Belt Parkway. The street also houses the Gil Hodges Field, used by Grace-Gravesend Athletic Assn. Grace lost its 90-foot main field, off Shell Road, when its owners, Key Span, were mandated to clear the land of toxic elements created by years' uses by the gas company. As it is with other sites in the city and C.B. 13 itself, there are unfinished and shuttered new condos, one of them at the busy corner of Ave. Z and Shell. Alongside is a large field, used for indoor and outdoor soccer over the years, but currently vacant and an eyesore. Beach Haven and other residents are served well by a group of Ave. Z stores, including a supermarket, pharmacy, Laundromat, pizza parlor, and liquor shop. The supermarket has a large parking area lot making it an easy shopping site for the many who use it. The neighborhood's Dank Court, Coback Court, and other short streets are filled with pleasant homes, but the streets are in bad shape. Paving cannot be done - the streets are simply not mapped, and the fog hangs over methods to correct the situation. Is Dank Court a street that is maintained by Beach Haven developers and others? The title must be cleared so that residents of these streets, between Shell and West 3<sup>rd</sup> St. can be PAVED.

Work has progressed well on the C.B. 13's eastern Coney Island end. Where there has been a reconstruction of the East 8<sup>th</sup> St./Guider Avenue Ramp to the Belt Parkway. Most work has been done during the day, but necessary actions are sometimes needed at night. There have been no complaints from its neighbors. Management has been excellent in communication data to residents, and there has been little problem in moving cars off the Parkway at Coney Island Ave., having them drive to Ave. Z where they make left turns, drive a few blocks and then get back onto the Belt. There is an on-site representative who has done a yeoman job in keeping the process moving effectively. The sad element, of course, considering the movement of earth, has been the increase in obvious rat infiltrations, but, here too, the offices have worked to eliminate the problem as much as possible.

Traffic issues, in and out of the C.B. 13 communities, continue to defy truly effective corrective movements, although there are attempts made on a regular basis but a recent Traffic Study failed to

deal with the housing and business growth in the area. The busy intersection of Neptune & Cropsey Ave., and the streets leading in and out of Neptune, have become more and more of a problem as development has increased. DOT has made changes in street patterns, and, after results have been watched, has restored at least two of the streets to their previous north and southbound movement. This action only underscores the difficulties in handling the best methods of auto movement in and out of the peninsula. Auto shops, on Neptune-Stillwell-Cropsey, have made turns difficult for motorists, with double, and sometimes triple, parking of cars by the businesses often forcing cars along these strips to enter only one lane and blocked thoroughfares. Cars turning left at Cropsey, going north to the Belt, for example, may have to squeeze into one lane to avoid parked vehicles. Back-ups of waiting cars are the norm.... as are problems for pedestrians.

Another swatch of land that has proven to be an enigma is an elongated spit of land bordering on Dreier/Vaux Park (West Shore Ave.-Hunter Ave.-Bay 43 St.). An attractive condo development had been constructed there, complete with yacht marina, underground parking, landscaping, and a magnificent view of the Verrazano Bridge and the Bay. It had its own entranceway, and there were plans to complete a roadway that would carry cars from the housing directly to Shore Parkway. All sounds good? It was. But it was never occupied. Within a few years, the 'abandoned' structures were home to vandals, druggies, and homeless. Soon, fires tore through the buildings; floors collapsed; and danger lurked. Eventually, the development was razed by DOB. The yacht docks plopped into the water; the underground parking lot was halted half-finished; and weeds and rats took over the site. As of now, this valuable land remains vacant, and there may well be interlopers on the site. Various attempts seem to have been made to redevelop the property; trucks were seen; a guide gate and watchman were seen. They, too, disappeared.

### **BRIGHTON BEACH**

The comeback of Brighton Beach, over the last two decades, has been a phenomenon, and its new life is largely attributed to by the massive influx of those who had once lived in the USSR. Founded as a beach resort in 1868, and named after the English resort, Brighton Beach had been a mainstay of summer bungalows (The Riegelmann Bungalows – honoring the man for whom the Boardwalk was also named), and, later, by large apartment houses with a population of middle class Jewish families. The Brighton Beach Hotel, which could and was moved from an initial site which was too close to the sea, had been a class hostelry for vacationers. Time took its toll, eventually, and the hotel was torn down. The Brighton Beach Baths, too, was an attraction with its pools and many activities for summertime fun. When its reign ended, the site eventually became one for the huge Oceana housing development. For years, there were vacant stores, dirt lots, decaying bungalows in Brighton Beach... and then came the renaissance. Today, Brighton Beach Ave. is filled with shops of all varieties, and all flourish to a large clientele – some coming from many other areas of the city. There are problems with the actions of some of the merchants, particularly fruit stand vendors who violate zero visibility street laws and whose owners have been seen dumping rotten fruits into street sewers. Grease has also been sent into sewers by store owners. Some nearby residents have also used the street for disposing of their own garbage. As a sad result, people have often complained about the stench of sewer vapors, and DEP has been called onto the scene. Task Forces, involving city agencies, the Community Board, and the active Brighton Beach BID, have had to traipse down the avenue to warn miscreants and to keep this busy thoroughfare prosperous and clean. The overhead elevated train has been scraped clean, in recent years, and repainted. A long-sought plan for downzoning Brighton Beach took too many years in the planning, and, when it was finally produced after these delays, the area had changed again, and its residents nixed it.

The bungalow colonies developed into a mixmaster of uses – some were abandoned and eventually vandalized, burned or used by prostitutes and ‘John’s’ who ‘met’ on the otherwise pleasant Oceanview Ave. Other bungalows were turned into year-round residences, and a group of these still stand – used and well maintained on pathways leading in and out of the major streets. Sadly, some of these pathways and other nearby streets are unmapped by the city. Sanitation trucks cannot enter these narrow lanes; DEP and other agencies have problems servicing the area. In addition, some of the bungalows and homes on other Brighton streets were bought by developers who ripped them down to build six-story co-ops and condos. Then, the proverbial bubble burst. As a result, some of these new buildings stand almost vacant; other lots remain devoid of any construction. Other structures in Brighton Beach are the properties of absentee landlords, and DOB has had to fence them in or board them up; some are directly across from schools. Some have been damaged by fires.

Other changes of a positive nature have occurred. New ethnic groups have moved into the area – Pakistani, Polish, Armenian, Turkish, Georgian, South American, Mexican. Mosques have joined the landscape of synagogues and churches. Neptune Avenue, not part of the BID mandate, has a variety of international shops and eateries. Neptune traffic has increased dramatically. Traffic lights and Stop Signs are sought, and turns from side streets into Neptune can be hazardous. And still another City problem is masked by the attractiveness of the neighborhood – there are reportedly many illegally constructed apartments (some in basements) where illegal occupancy and the lack of proper egress, can cause anxiety and concern from Fire and Building officials. The current laws prevent entry into some of these reported dwellings, and the results can be unfortunate. There are also stories of possible illegal sweat shops. Evidence of homelessness, drug sales, and alcoholism can be seen here as well. But Brighton Beach continues to show solid economic growth. The Oceana movie theater is now a catering hall on the lower level and a theater space on the upper level, once the balcony and mezzanine. Restaurants thrive with such names as the National and the Odessa. Some people complaint that stores have signage only in Russian, but future regulations in the city will change that situation. The bustling Brighton Beach Ave. has further problems, including truck deliveries that cut down traffic to one lane, with buses that also add to the congestion. At this time, the important Brighton Neighborhood Assn. must vacate its offices, and the operation is finding difficulty locating affordable space in the busy area. Parking for residents, shoppers, and visitors can be more than difficult. The city’s parking lot, alongside the Boardwalk at Brighton 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, is the only space of its kind, and the city wishes to rid itself of maintaining it. Part of this lot is reserved for residents who live nearby; the rest is set aside for bathers and others who come to Brighton. What will become of this important parking site? Parking problems can hinder the continued prosperity that has benefited Brighton Beach. The intersection of Coney Island and Brighton Beach Avenues, with added vehicles attempting to enter the street from Brighton 11<sup>th</sup> Street, remains a treacherous one. The Barnes’ Dance, which had been used at this site, was dropped a short time ago. There is debate as to whether or not the ‘Dance’ was of value and what can be done to safeguard pedestrians and to prevent collisions at the corner, beneath the area where the elevated trains turn into Brighton Beach Ave.

The BOARDWALK, along with the shoreline itself, is the uniting element linking Brighton Beach and Coney Island, from Brighton 14<sup>th</sup> St. westward to West 37<sup>th</sup> St. and the Sea Gate border. Tens of thousands of people use it for strolling and for its benches. Pavilions dot the walkway, and there are bathroom facilities, though far from enough of them. (As was noted, bathrooms were buried beneath the Boardwalk in the wake of the Federal Corps. Of Engineers’ beach replenishment). Then, too, the bathrooms’ open hours are shorter than needed. Only one or two are open at all during the longer part of the year, and opening to closing times are limited during the warm weather. The Boardwalk, nonetheless, is utilized every month. Bikes are supposed to be used only until 10am, but they bound

down the planks all day. Plans to create a bikeway along the rear of the beach at the Boardwalk, and walkways for handicapped to the water's edge, were in place with funding set aside. BUT the State has refused to allow such a construction, and the bikers use the Boardwalk all the time. But the biggest concern for the Boardwalk users is its rejuvenation. The Federal Corps. Work bringing sand, which stays wet, up to the wood, along with the use of needed agency cars on the boards. Nails have kept popping up on the walk, and jutting holes have appeared. It became necessary for walkway updating to be made, but, then, what materials could be used in this day and age? Certainly, the original Rainforest-like woods, in the interests of ecology, were thought to be the wrong answer. The Parks Department, in its initial thoughts, indicated that the entire walkway could be done in concrete, which would be budget-conscious. There was objections, however, and numerous meeting, debates, and attempts at compromise and conciliation were attempted. Parks of the Boardwalk already are made of concrete; recycled materials are used on the Steeplechase Pier, but there has been some concern as to whether it is meritorious. For the rest of the Boardwalk, the latest Parks' plan would have a central median, of about 12-feet, so that the needed vehicles could move along the stretch. The rest would be of recycled materials. Although all agreed that the Parks' is trying to find the answer, there is still need room for more productive negotiations to solve the issue; some people insist the boards should all be wood, though of a less expensive nature than Rainforest materials; others have indicated total thumbs-down on any concrete; still others insist that NO vehicles be allowed on the walk in spite of what others insist are the needs of EMS, Police, Parks, Sanitation, and Fire.

Brighton Beach's Boardwalk is the home for several Russian restaurants, that also have entrances on Brrightwater Court. Tatiana's and the Winter Garden, as examples, draw large crowds throughout the year. Both were devastated for a year apiece when fires, attributed to homeless encampments beneath the boards, played havoc with the establishments and the residential building above them. The amusement area of the Boardwalk plays home to several long-term residents, who will have to leave their summer businesses at the end of the 2011 season. Ruby's, Cha-Cha's, the Gyro Corner, and Gregory's Daughter are among the units that pled for, and won, another year of stay (2010-II). Their landlord is now CAI, operators of Luna Park and the ScreamZone. CAI will not raze the buildings, but will scut the interiors, modernize them, and then rent them. People are eager to see if area space can be found to keep those businesses within the amusement area.

### **CONEY ISLAND / SEA GATE**

The entire borough of Brooklyn has been in an exciting g, and sometimes controversial, state of flux over the last decade, e.g. Red Hook redevelopment and the Atlantic Yards'. But none has grabbed the world-wide attention garnered by the changes, and the future proposals, for Coney Island! Once the calling card for millions, on hot summer days, Coney Island's lifestream somewhat faded over the years since World War II ended. In spite of the loss of some of its attractions, Coney Island and its amusement district, Boardwalk, and beach never totally lost the Siren Call for tens of thousands each season. The Cyclone Roller Coaster still took its upward ride and downward swerves of screams; Deno's Wonder Wheel still swirled around with moving and stationary cars offering one of the best views in the City; Cars were still double and triple parked at Nathan's throughout the entire year; the beach and Boardwalk, connecting Coney and Brighton, never lost its appeal. But, over the years, with the loss of many of its lures, Coney Island screamed out for a Modern Day Renaissance, and it has emerged into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century for a sparkle, a twinkle, and a zest that has not been seen since its first days.

In the forefront of the work in Coney Island has been the Coney Island Development Corp. (CIDC), formed with the Mayor's Office and the Economic Development Corp., with dynamo energy added by

the Borough President Marty Markowitz, local legislators, the City Council, and, most importantly, the residents of the entire peninsula and its merchants and amusement area operators. Last summer evinced a clear picture of the changes and the look into the future, and 2011 has seen an even greater emergence of visitors, tourists, special events, job opportunities, all wrapped in an ongoing blueprint for future years. And, yes, there have been contentious items and, yes, there have been some failures. But none can deny the throngs that have brought with them the needs for better transit, for needed auto traffic controls, for Boardwalk reconstruction, for new ideas and revolutionary looks into merging the past glories with the present and the future.

While CIDC was initiating its plans for a renewed Coney (with special care to its amusements, its economic growth, and its large citizenry), an added factor was the purchase of lands by Thor Equities. As has been mentioned, the Thor empire issued proposals that were glitzy with more than a touch of Vegas, replete with shimmering attractions and hotels. CIDC came up with plans for the city-owned land and the residential component that had many different aspects. In recent years, the results of CIDC have been evident. The aging Boardwalk, despite the concerns of man, is undergoing extensive work. Of equal concern, in the last couple of years, has been the fate of the long-standing Boardwalk residents (Ruby's, Cha-Cha's, et al); they are still open in 2011, but it is apt to be their last year with CIA prepared to gut their structures, and to fix them up for future amusement uses. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey made Coney Island its home for a couple of seasons, but then left. Ditto the Volley Ball beach championships, and even a smaller one-ring circus that opened, sadly, sans time for publicity. It flopped. Thor tried a flea mart during its first summer, but it too failed. 2011 brought forth what had been planned as the 'BK FESTIVAL', but it was more successful yet definitely another glorified flea market.

Central Amusement Intl. opened a new LUNA PARK on the site of the former Astroland and the ill-fated Thor-supported 'Dreamland'. LUNA PARK proved an enormous success, with its thrills and chills' rides in 2010, and even more public excitement greeted it in 2011. CAI, for the latest season, opened its SCREAM ZONE adjacent to Luna and featuring even more attention-grabber rides, including a Sling Shot that sent riders into the ocean air at speeds of 90 miles an hour. Other rides provided further screams that filled the area and the nearby streets. DENO'S WONDER WHEEL PARK flourished, maintain its reputation as one of the visitors' calling cards. Other rides also drew the kind of visits that dwarfed previous years, like the Eldorado, the Polar Express, and more. New food sites have opened, including two new ice cream parlors – one on the Boardwalk and the other on Surf Avenue next door to the Surf and Turf Restaurant. Nathan's thrives, and its annual Hot Dog Eating Contest once again drew tens of thousands of onlookers and was shown live on television. The Village Voice ended its annual Siren Festival, but music abounded throughout the area, including a wide range of D.J. appearances and work by such groups as the Coney Island Dancers. Crowd control became extraordinary, notably on the Friday night Fireworks' events; an enormously successful 'Movies on the Beach' series, a particular favorite of families and supported strongly by CIDC, Councilman Recchia, the Community Board, and by thousands who brought blankets and chairs onto the beach. The Fireworks' nights, the Film Nights, and the general day-by-day events forced the addition of more Police to the entire peninsula, and some of the Boardwalk evening attractions (karaoke and music) were forced to shut down at earlier hours than in the past. Adding to both the renewed vigor and the ensuing crowding were events at the AQUARIUM (also with major plans for the future, including a formidable Shark attraction) and by the thousands of fans who poured into MCU PARK to see the Brooklyn Cyclones!! All of these, and more, meant added concern regarding traffic, health, consumer protection, transit, and, needless to say, sanitation!

With this whirlwind of activity, personnel cuts can prove to be a problem of giant proportions. Illegal vending on the beach has become a bigger problem than in the past, with more sales and fewer Parks

Enforcement. There have been illegal sales, on the sands, of drinks that contain alcohol, as well as the usual soda and water vendors, and those selling all kinds of food. While curtailment of these activities may not be as swift as it would be with a larger Enforcement patrol, there has been a strong presence by the effective work of the 60<sup>th</sup> Police Precinct, with its summer detail and additional men and women who joined the area following a midday shooting on the Boardwalk. The community expressed its horror and concern with meetings with Police officials in a wide range of sites throughout C.B. 13. Certainly, the crowds will not diminish in years to come, and further thought MUST be given to keeping and expanding the men and women who must deal with public safety.

Much remains clearly in need in 2011. Thor Equities, as has been mentioned, tore down buildings, but, in some cases, only empty and trash-riddled lots now can be seen in place of the once-popular games and frankfurter stands. As of this writing, chiefs of the Department of Sanitation have issued an edict to Thor to clean up these weedy lots where rats can be seen and where people toss trash. One of the lots, however, shows signs of work i.e. Stillwell-Surf, where Thor reportedly plans to construct two-story buildings for commercial uses. Other unkempt acres can be traced to Horace Bullard, who still owns the now-landmarked, but unused, Shore Theater Building (nee Loew's Coney Island Theater). Across from the Stillwell Terminal on one side, and Nathan's and the amusement area on the other, this structure can serve many uses. One can see this building as being a strong anchor for the incentive to turn Coney's amusement sector into more of a year-round center of activity (live and film theaters, art galleries, foods, studios for dance-theater-recording uses, etc.) Right now, the Shore signage still looms against the outdoor side of the building. The once grand interior, with a large stage and seating for some 2387 people, is darkened; and the office spaces on the upper floors remain empty. The theater was once was home to an organ with a stop-key console of mahogany and a cost of \$12,500. The theater was home to both vaudeville and film, with a rooftop restaurant. Such a valuable piece of property – both historic and contemporary – should open new doors of negotiations with Mr. Bullard and CIDC.

Plans for future housing development in the near-amusement area, including Surf Ave.'s northside, may well come into discussion when the current economic crises conclude. The future of Gargiulo's, the Abe Stark Skating Rink, and others must be taken into consideration. The MCU Stadium parking lot serves as one of the most important in the area, matched only by the Aquarium parking area. Losing any parking sites completely within this district may create more problems as can be shown by the current frantic needs of motorists. Gridlock has been common on Surf Avenue, but equally on Neptune Avenue, and Mermaid Avenue. Thought must be given to plans for parking. No matter how many pleas may be made to use mass transit to the south shore, it is illogical to think that many will leave cars at home and head for subways and buses. Transit has been known to shift routes on weekends, and that is an additional problem. Transit has other concerns throughout C.B. 13. The clean-up of TA properties proves to be very slow. Areas beneath the elevated trains are filled with trash. The TA unmapped street, that can be described as an extension of West 6<sup>th</sup> St., south from Sheepshead Bay Road/Neptune Ave. (once a trolley-through terminus) is not cleared by TA even though it is used by residents leaving the abutting Trump Village as well as the West 8<sup>th</sup> St. Dept. of Motor Vehicles Building. Rats are common, for example, behind the large Brightwater Towers, across from the Aquarium, because areas beneath the nearby overhead el are not cleaned. There have been reports of people using the Brightwater parking lot, at night, and being confronted by large rats. It is to be noted that the rat population throughout C.B. 13 must receive more attention. The rodents are common in parks, beneath the Boardwalk, and on streets in Brighton Beach.

There has been considerable anxiety felt by residents of the high rise buildings on the island's west end. They want to be assured, in spite of new construction, that they remain able to continue living in the

neighborhood in which they have resided for many years. CIDC and others have tried to assuage the fears. Some of the existing buildings, of course, are the property of the New York City Housing Authority, and many of them, as residents report, need corrective improvements. Other buildings may be privately owned. New structures are planned for the near future including the Coney Island Commons, with an important YMCA addition; and Ocean Dreams. Both of these developments went through the ULURP process, and community input was taken into consideration. The results have been applauded by many, including the latter's inclusion of room for a supermarket on Surf; a restaurant on the Boardwalk; and other commercial entities. Working together, developers and residents can produce the best results for the area. In addition, CIDC, working with businesses in the area, has held Job Fairs, and many young people have been hired by Luna Park/ScreamZone; by Nathan's; by Deno's; by MCU Park; by the Aquarium; among others. It is imperative that job training programs are kept in place so that the future work by Thor, Taconic, and other developers, can find a knowledgeable workforce right in the community. Astella Development has been effectively involved in scores of projects, including the construction of a multitude of comfortable one-family homes throughout the western end, and it, too, has been of enough aid in the revitalization of the stores on Mermaid Avenue. The census for the district, sadly, always seems awkwardly out of synch, and numbers are seen to be well under what is obvious. Some of the issues may involve undocumented people who still fear to fill out the needed forms. The less-than-adequate count can be of negative impact to needed city services, schools, and transit. In recent decades, population numbers included largest segments of Afro-Americans, Puerto Rican, and those of Caribbean backgrounds. Now, there emerges a large Russian growth, as well as those from South America, Mexico, Asian countries, and those of Jewish and Italian heritage. Coney Island's residential numbers are apt to rise considerably in the coming years, with the advent of new housing – co-ops, condos, apartment rentals, one-family homes, senior housing, and nursing homes. (Regular updates on the census will be attempted.)

After years of civic concern, plans are now in the works to raze the dilapidated West 8<sup>th</sup> Street-Surf Avenue overpass, which can be a resultant potential boon to the future of the northside of Surf in the amusement area. CIDC has also seen the need for a StreetScape plan for the entire stretch of Surf Avenue from its start at Ocean Parkway to its terminus at the entrance to Sea Gate.

Controversy continues over the future of Asser Levy Park nee Seaside Park. The park's busy Bandshell is not used this year due to court action that prohibited amplified sound within 500-feet of two temples on the adjacent Seabreeze Ave. The cause célèbre also involves plans for an 'amphitheater' that the Borough President had proposed for the park. The Borough President's concerts, in 2011, had been moved to a lot, used by Ringling Bros. in two previous years, on West 21 St. This site may not be available in 2012. Asser Levy Park now appears dusty and relatively unused, save for bench sitters on the outer peripheries. The famed handball courts, across Surf from the park, still draw sports champs, and there are plans to create an even better environment for the sport on this site, complete with a seating area so that sports enthusiasts can enjoy watching the games.

Kaiser Park, an important project led by Councilman Recchia, Friends of Kaiser Park and the community, finally has been turned into a first-grade park. Its tennis courts remain, but there are now first-grade ballfields, a state-of-the-art basketball court, a brand new park house, with up-to-date bathrooms, storage facilities, and room for parks personnel. Many events are now regularly held there, and this once-moribund facility stands as a testament to the hard work and cooperation between community and legislators, and the Parks Department. Its future can see many more additions, because of its link to Coney Island Creek. Fishing, bird watching, kayaking, and relaxation along the water edge are discussed.

But Parks personnel must be increased, and no further cuts in funds to parks maintenance can be tolerated.

SEA GATE, the westernmost part of the peninsula, remains a quiet private enclave with lovely old homes. The area remains ethnically mixed, with a large Orthodox Jewish population, Russians, among many others. Sea Gate has its own Police Force and handles many of its issues in-house but is able to utilize city services when needed. DOS, for example, works with Sea Gate. The beach problem, and the resultant threat to homes along the shore, will be dealt with by the Federal Corps of Engineers in the years ahead. There are aged infrastructure problems within this enclave; and talks continue with those handling the program to modernize the peninsula's water and sewer lines. Residents do have problems with the same transit issues as residents of western Coney Island. Buses to and from the Stillwell Terminal may sometimes seem few and far between, especially in early and late hours. 'Dollar cabs', now affected by new rulings from Traffic and Limousine Commission, still do well carrying people from the Terminal westward. They are needed. Problems do occur with buses on the narrow West 37<sup>th</sup> St. They tend to jam the street and slow and/or to stop vehicles attempting to get through the route. When reports are called into the Board office about this street, the men and women of the 60<sup>th</sup> Pct. immediately go down to the site and issue warnings and/or summonses. Residents of Sea Gate serve on the Community Board, are active in organizational and charitable work on the peninsula, and have taken part of all discussions related to the future of the entire area- its shoreline and currently-aborted attempts to dump garbage in off-shore pits. Most recently, immediate meetings were held with Councilman Recchia, DEP and Parks officials, along with Sea Gate leaders, to handle the threat of beach sludge following a fire at a Harlem sewage treatment plant. The resulting sludge made its way down the Hudson and threatened the shore of Sea Gate. City and community worked together for the safety of swimmers and possible added issues. It is to be noted that Sea Gate does indeed receive city agency support, save for attempts to have DOT repave its old streets. Discussions will be ongoing to seek solutions to allow paving in Sea Gate.

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

If Summer 2010 had proven to be a sign of the workings of the Public Safety departments, then 2011 would prove, in its entirety, much more of a test of strength. The agencies, thought, rose to the occasion. The 60<sup>th</sup> Pct., co-terminus with the Board map, strategically located on W. 8<sup>th</sup> St. near door to the equally urgent Fire & Ladder Co. (another Fire unit stays on Neptune Ave.) must deal with the needs of Brighton, Coney, Gravesend, Bath Beach, Sea Gate, and all remaining parts of C.B. 13, along with special activities and 'calls' related to emergencies elsewhere. The personnel are only yards away from the amusement district and the Aquarium, and within close proximity to the eastern sections and Marlboro Houses to the north. Each of them offer occasional difficult situations as well as needed work by the Community Relations, Anti-Crime, Narcotics, and other divisions. Transit District 34 holds its main office in the Stillwell Terminal, certainly one of the busiest hubs in the city; Housing PSA1, on Mermaid Ave., must handle the situations that may well exist in the high rise west end buildings, which, in 2011, showed more headlined cases of random shootings and knifings, drugs and prostitution. The 60 must handle enormous crowds for July 4<sup>th</sup>'s events (including the Nathans' Hot Dog Contest), The Mermaid Parade, et al.) Added, this year, were the mismatched dates that brought the same evenings set aside for games of the Cyclones and a new-nearby Thursday Night Seaside Concert Series. The men and women have been adept in learning to handle the traffic tie-ups that result when all of these activities exit the area at the same time. Add to them – the Friday night Fireworks, the Brighton Jubilee, Kaiser Park special events, along with the normal evening-to-evening, day-to-day meetings with civic groups and businesses. A special officer, who speaks Russian, is assigned to Brighton Beach Avenue.



Terrorism threats, vandalism, school area problems, are dealt with, while the command works diligently with the communities in maintaining safety and assistance. They may well be on the beach on January 1<sup>st</sup>'s morning for the Polar Bear Swim, as well as keeping watch with all of the film and television crews that consider Brighton and Coney as unique, perfect backdrops for their work. Blocks may be closed for any number of reasons, and amusement park area 'vendors' and miscreants are halted. What is needed, as time brings more and more residents and visitors to the south of Brooklyn, are more police units to handle matters all year. There can be no denying that winter and cold months bring a great deal of needed 'watch' and assistance in C.B. 13's shorefront vicinities. Strongly needed are more efficient vehicles, of less weight, for use on the Boardwalk. Gaters and carts would prove valuable, as would added unmarked cars.

The community rallied, in large numbers, when there was a threat to close the West 8<sup>th</sup> Street Ladder Company. The reasons were simple – the area is dotted with high rise units, and, on the day the Mayor announced the impending shut-down, a fire devastated an apartment in the Gravesend Houses, indicating strongly the need to keep the Ladder Company near. Time can be of the essence! The community's voice was heard; the Company stayed. There are more reasons for the Fire Department to keep equipment and person power strong throughout C.B. 13. As was mentioned, there are possible fire problems with illegal constructions, with overcrowded apartments, with abandoned buildings, with sweat shops, with prostitution (a major raid was made in the Brighton Beach area at the time of this writing!)

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

Much is happening at the same timer in dealing with the economic growth in the area. Jobs, though far from enough, were generated for young people throughout the Board area. New businesses began to rise on every street, with particular growth on Mermaid Ave., Surf Ave., and Neptune Ave. Much credit goes to the work of CIDC and the resultant development. Jobs for young people emerged from the amusement area, and the numbers pushed C.B. 13, as was mentioned, into a strong position in the statistics of the State Comptroller's office. More can be expected in the near future with the groundbreaking for the Steeplechase/Parachute Jump Park, with housing construction, a new school, and remodeling of existing aging building- all on the slate of possible work. It is fortunate that CIDC has played an on-site, almost daily part in the workings of the amusement area of Coney Island, with its president Nate Bliss able to work out all of the problems with existing businesses and upcoming actions – both plus and/or of minor changes. The Brighton Business Improvement District, under the leadership of Yelena Makhnin, keeps a close eye on all of the stores and workings on the Brighton Beach Ave. strip. The BID meetings are well attended by city agency officials, merchants, civic and legislative representatives, and the general public. Questions always remain as to how to handle some fruit store owners who do as they wish no matter the warnings and summonses. Nor are there easy answers related to legal – and even illegal – vendors who place their sidewalk wares in front of stores that may well sell the exact same material. (A similar situation has existed when the BK Festival (sic) in Coney Island proved to undersell nearby shops and eateries.) Strong support is needed for CIDC as growth and ard interest in the area gains even stronger momentum. Similarly, Astella Development, the Brighton Neighborhood Assn., the BID, and others working with merchant needs and problems must be kept strong as the economic strength of the area holds strong in spite of the national crises. Job training, for all capacities, must continue by the various agencies, churches, centers, et al who have been doing well.

#### **CITY SERVICES – PARKS & RECREATION**

Certainly, one of the most exciting things to happen to southern Brooklyn has been the rediscovery of the shore communities, and their many attractions, over the last few years... and with the anticipation of more on the horizon. The roles played by the men and women of the Dept. of Parks & Recreation, so urgently responsible for the safe and important environment, should never be underestimated. BUT the C.B. 13 workers and staff, all strong and highly competent, have much to accomplish... and, sadly, the amount of personnel assigned to the area remains far less than is needed. One only thing of the workload that must be handled, considering not only the parks, but much more! Consider the elongated beach, running from Corbin Place on the east to West 37<sup>th</sup> St. on the west. A deep swath of sand, ready for multitudes of beachgoers, means a formidable clean-up job each and every day. Here, from Brighton to Coney, masses of people gather to sunbathe and to swim. The teams have a yeoman job each day to keep it clean and free from debris. Trash cans are now placed at the rear of the beach nearer to the Boardwalk in an attempt to urge people to take their trash along with them as they leave the beach and dump the remains near the Boardwalk. Of course, as we have noted, the Boardwalk, in itself, is a chore unto itself: maintenance, safety, permits, etc. are all under the watch of Parks. But there is much more in C.B. 13 that demands capable, everyday workforce duties. Kaiser Park, finally turned into an A-One greensward, proves home to soccer, baseball, tennis, basketball, track, along with other public uses. Finally, the park house is ready to serve park users numbering a huge growth from previous decades. Asser Levy Park, controversially halted for use of amplified events and concerts, is nonetheless a place of respite for neighborhood residents. Large Dreier-Offerman Park (a.k.a. Calvert Vaux Park) has entered a new phase of development, and already is in constant use, while work proceeds, by soccer and baseball teams. Larger team usage is expected with the completion of areas that had once been mere dump sites. Here, there will be grassy stretches, park houses, and a wide use of amenities. Add to all of these the West Street Park (ballplaying and area recreation), Little Dreier on Cropsey Ave., Babar Yar Park, the Six Diamonds Ballfields, the Creek Side park behind Home Depot, Surf Avenue's famed handball courts, Nautilus Playground, Grady Park, and other facilities. C.B. 13's expansive district is homeland to parks and playgrounds, and the powerful teams that keep things running smoothly are pressed into increasingly vital work. There are Pavilions on the Boardwalk with bathrooms (with more needed!). Parks Enforcement is not able to take care of illegal beach vending. Tables are seen at eateries on the Boardwalk, and some may well extend too far into the walkway. Maintenance is imperative, as has been indicated, as the Boardwalk moves from rainforest wood into an era of controversy over concrete and recycled plastic uses. Lifeguards have been on hand at most bays over the last couple of years, but training of new ones must be ongoing, with proper salaries in order to keep things going well. Add to these, such events in the parks, as concerts, beach and parks' movie showings, special events e.g. It's My Park Day! There are barbecue sites to be maintained, permits to be checked and double-checked, scores of special days and events, sports' events, et al. There is a wide responsibility, and the capable hands of Brooklyn's Parks Commissioner and his staff has been doing a superb job, as has the local offices. But it is obvious that the continuing growth of the southern shore, and its Siren Call to millions only stresses the call for strengthened team work to keep the greenery and the outdoor activities of the areas working smoothly and with public safety and satisfaction. Working with groups like Friends of Kaiser Park proves extremely valuable and should be encouraged to aid in this widening scope for C.B. 13's Parks' needs.

#### **CITY SERVICES – HOMELESS**

The annual late-night Homeless Census, held this past winter on one of the coldest evenings with parks piled with snow mounds, obviously could not and did not get an adequate count of the large homeless population that fills the C.B. 13's parks, beaches, Boardwalk, hillsides, Creek areas, and more!! Representatives from operations, assigned by the Dept. of Homeless Services, for years, had been

meeting with local Parks and Police personnel to deal on the matter week-by-week, but there seems to be a gap developing in recent vintage. There MUST be greater communication and coordination between the agency and its selected outreach teams, with C.B. 13's precinct and parks' reps. Homelessness' issues are growing. Problems have been seen in agency plans for placement of families and of individuals. Homeless people are terrified of homeless shelters for many reasons. Yet, there are needs for placement on frigid nights as well as during the many other days and nights. Drug users, alcoholics, and mentally ill people are NOT the only homeless. More incisive cooperation and overviews concerning homeless must be developed to prevent complaints of homeless on hillsides near Coney Island Hospital as well as in its E.R., along with the more obvious dangers alongside waterfront areas (the parks, the Coney Island Creek shores, et al).

#### **CITY SERVICES – HEALTH**

Fortunately, for all concerned in C.B. 13, Coney Island Hospital remains as an excellent facility, but it does face a future that is apt to involve the need for added services from a growing C.B. 13 boundary. New housing means many new shorefront residents, and the need becomes evident. The Hospital's offshoot on Neptune Ave., still called the Ida Israel Center by localites, serves an important role too, serving functions for which people need not go to the hospital. Work proceeds on added elements at the Hospital, notably an expanded Emergency Room. Still, budgetary cuts by the city do prevent the Hospital from fulfilling all of its up-to-date needs. The areas of C.B. 13 play house to many individual medical centers, but it is noted that there have been some that have opened and then closed within short spans of time. The area, reported, is one that does not do well with pre and post-natal care. Similarly, the entire HIV-AIDS situation is not adequately faced; the subject is still well hidden within the streets of the area. Alcoholism and drug addiction seem to raise still more difficult problems, as do child and spousal abuse issues. Nursing homes for the elderly and infirmed, as well as other facilities dot the landscape. Greater outreach is needed on all health fronts. There are massive attempts to get people to take flu shots and other preventative actions. But the area is growing, and the informational network must gain great power.

#### **CITY SERVICES – SANITATION**

The work of the C.B. 13 DOS team is exemplary, considering the massive workload, especially during the warm weather seasons with tourists and visitors cramming into the Coney amusement areas, as well as the restaurants and stores in Brighton. The streets of the Coney Island amusement district are almost spotless on Monday mornings despite massive dumping of waste created by the thousands of weekend beachgoers and others. The work of the personnel thus is lauded by residents throughout the area. But DOS has to deal with more than that – there are ongoing needs on the populous Brighton Beach Avenue, by Mermaid Avenue, as well as on other shore area streets. Equipment must be kept up to date, and winter equipment especially must be checked – southern Brooklyn gets hard hit during snowstorms, and movement of vehicles and buses may result in accidents. Main streets must be cleared as quickly as possible, because there are enormous difficulties in leaving the peninsula for residents who must get to their workplaces. Still annoying to citizenry is the ongoing, long delay in seeing the development of the decades-delayed new Sanitation Garage that was to have been built on land that had been owned by KeySpan/National Grid/Brooklyn Union. The land is now cleansed, but there is no movement and allegedly no funding to go forward. Meanwhile, those living near the extant Garage on Neptune Ave. must continue their long wait to see the facility moved, a promise that had been made well over twenty years ago. Trucks that must run at night, to prevent freezing and stalling, disturb sleep. Despite all of

the work by Dos officials to keep the area clear, there is still the potential for rat infiltration. The garage should finally be built!

### **CITY SERVICES – YOUTH AND AGED**

One of the finest examples of agency-community, successful interrelationships used to exist between C.B. 13's Youth Committee and the Dept. of Youth Services. Local residents studied, throughout the year, the workings of area groups servicing the young population. The work of C.B. 13's members meshed well with the agency and, more often than not, the deserving groups received fiscal aid. This is no longer the case – the Board is not involved in helping the deserving organizations find their way to effective city funds. It is now all in the offices of DYCD. The result has been the loss of deserving groups. The area needs assistance for young people, and, with the aid of CIDC and City Council help, there will be a new YMCA as part of the soon-to-rise Coney Island Commons housing development. The one-time helpful Hirschhman 'Y' building is now used for other important civic assistance. But the Carey Gardens Youth Center, one of the most widely used, had been supported by the Madison Square Boys and Girls Club, but the parent agency dropped 'Carey' years ago, leaving it operating at less-than-peak operations. Then, the new Coney Island Prep Charter School also used the same facility, creating even less opportunity for local youth. 'Prep', doing excellent work, has been moved to a local school, causing more of a furor related to space and crunch for all of the young people involved in all aspects. These problems only touch the surface of the lack of programming for young people who might easily be caught up in a maelstrom of less than perfect out-of-school activities. Hanging in, and doing strong work are many local associations – but all lacking the needed financial handshake e.g. Grace-Gravesend, South Brooklyn Youth Consortium, Brighton Neighborhood Assn., JCC of Greater Coney Island, and a growing number of others. These young people are the future of the area, and they find themselves seeking outlets. The helpful city support in the days of the Everyman Street Theater of Coney Island, in the late 60's, seemingly has been mitigated. Greater assistance is needed especially in the light of a growing population with new housing to rise within the next few years. The AGING POPULATION faces just about the same situation, with constant threats to close senior centers (in the same manner as threats have been made – and sometimes followed – for the shuttering of day care units).

### **CITY SERVICES - TRANSPORTATION**

As has been noted a peninsula poses posers that may not exist in other areas, and C.B. 13's routes that take people in and out of the neighborhoods are not in great shape. Motorists rely on growing numbers of cars that must use Cropsey, Neptune, Stillwell, and Ocean Parkway to get out of the vicinity to the Belt and/or streets leading elsewhere. Various intersections indicate chronic diseased conditions, and DOT, though valiantly attempting to cure the ills, has failed. Pedestrians have reason to fear crossing: Coney Island & Brighton Beach Aves.; West 5 St. & Neptune Ave.; Stillwell & Surf Aves.; Brighton Beach Ave. at almost every intersection and beneath the El; among other chronic corners on Neptune, Surf, and others. Turn lanes on Ocean Parkway have helped, but that thoroughfare is still riddled with the problem of speeding vehicles. Lane markings confuse others at such sites as the off roads from the Parkway at Shell Road and Ocean Parkway (adjacent to Coney Island Hospital). North-to-south traffic has been changed and changed again on Neptune streets, but further study is needed at W. 19<sup>th</sup> and Neptune, only one block from turn lanes at Cropsey. Similarly, double and triple parking is an enormous problem on Brighton Beach, Cropsey, Neptune, Stillwell, and other routes. SCHOOL BUSES are a problem as well – with some 15-20 buses parking at Mark Twain on Neptune at 2:45pm, with some of the buses picking up only two or three youngsters. Where is the sense? Do we not further contaminate the atmosphere by sparsely used buses? The TRANSIT AUTHORITY has much to answer, including

cleaning the area beneath its properties, where rats and debris are often seen. Elevated trains, notably on weekends, should not be shifted helter skelter at the last moment; buses from the west end of the peninsula must be better organized and run; express buses must be considered; ferry service to and from Manhattan should be the subject of more intensified study. The full impact of borough study indicates a lack of cohesive thought as can be seen as southern Brooklyn motorists find themselves pushed into an overcrowded bumper-to-bumper Flatbush Ave. instead of being allowed to cut through Prospect Park to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street's exit in order to find a more logical route out of the borough. Must Park Slopers be given complete control of the roadways through the Park? And the hither-and-yon bicycle lanes are not planned well, and, in many cases, are totally useless, dangerous, or not needed. There is no rationale that makes sense to the residents of southern Brooklyn.

And, so, Community Board 13's neighborhoods are on the verge of formidable growth. It is not going to be a safe, speedy, people-friendly transition if all of the aforementioned agencies do not COMMUNICATE and respond to the needs of its people.

*Eddie Mark,*  
Community Board Chair

*Charles Reichenthal,*  
Community Board District Manager