



MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD SIX

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STATEMENT OF DISTRICT NEEDS AND PRIORITIES, FY 2008

Community Board 6 encompasses the East Side of Manhattan from 14th to 59th Streets, from the East River to Lexington Avenue and farther west to include all of Gramercy Park and all of Murray Hill. Additional well-known neighborhoods within the board boundaries: Sutton Place, Beekman Place, Turtle Bay, Tudor City, Kips Bay, Rosehill, Phipps Houses, East Midtown Plaza, Stuyvesant Square, Waterside, Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town. East Midtown is a mixture of residential and commercial use with offices located in Citicorp Center, the Chrysler building and other major structures; with retail shops lining the avenues. Community Board 6 is home to the United Nations as well as hundreds of missions and diplomatic residences. There are six major hospitals in the district, utilized by all New Yorkers - Beth Israel, Joint Diseases, Cabrini, Veterans, Bellevue and NYU Medical Center. Numerous substance abuses, mental health and other ambulatory care clinics are located in the district.

The assessed value of commercial and residential properties combined with the daily influx of workers, as well as tourists who shop and visit the district converge to contribute significantly to New York's economic base.

There are 4 and soon to be 5 Business Improvement Districts (BID) within the Board area or on our boarder: The Grand Central Partnership, 34th Street Partnership, the newly formed East Midtown Association, 14th Street/Union Square and in the process of being formed, the 23rd Street Association. We applaud these BIDs for improving, and continue to improve the quality of life within the district. We encourage the City to continue to endorse new Bids.

The commercial energy of East Midtown and the sedate apartments on Sutton Place, the brownstones of Murray Hill and the mansions surrounding Gramercy Park may overshadow the needs of this primarily middle-income community that also has significant numbers of low-income residents and a large elderly population living on fixed incomes. There are five SRO and sixteen residential facilities within the Board. The 30th Street Shelter has fourteen percent of the sheltered male beds in the city. The shelter at 215-225 East 45th Street has beds for one hundred thirty women. An additional ten percent of the sheltered female beds are at the Lexington Avenue Armory. Similarly, ten churches and synagogues in the Board area have opened their doors as private shelter. However, homelessness continues to be a major concern for the area; homeless people sleep Under the FDR, on the streets and in area parks.

PRIMARY NEEDS

Development

There are three new major development sites pending in Community Board 6 that will have a major impact on community resources, the Con Edison site along First Avenue between 35th and 41st Streets (see pg. 4); the East River Science Park on the Bellevue Campus; and a 950,000 square foot building being proposed by the United Nations for development on the Robert Moses Park site (42nd Street and 1st Avenue); this creates the need to find open space to relocate the parks active space area. The United Nations had proposed to extend the esplanade between E. 42nd and E 48th Streets; as mitigation for the proposed interim U.N. Building at Robert Moses Park.

In addition a replacement park for the use of Robert Moses Park must be found.

The Bellevue Campus

Bellevue is in the midst of a major modernization of some of its existing facilities. For decades, Board 6 has been advocating for a strategic plan to determine Bellevue's immediate and future health care and land use needs prior to any disposition of property; no study has ever been conveyed to the Board.

A proposal to develop a East River Science Park (ESP.) on the northern part of the Bellevue Hospital campus by the NYU School of Medicine and/or a private development entity has emerged. The Science Park will include the development of three new buildings devoted primarily to biotechnology facilities and also containing core research facilities, a library, local retail, parking and other uses. It will also include the renovation of the former Psychiatric Building, which will contain clinical and research facilities, staff housing, a conference center, and a day care center.

Most scenarios for developing the biotechnology industry in New York City focus on capitalizing on the City's existing assets to jump-start biomedical companies. While the bio-tech industry is assumed to be a potential source of high-wage jobs, the pay-off may come slowly and at the cost of significant investment of much needed public resources.

The February 2001 report of the New York City Investment Fund ("Market Demand Study for Commercial Biotechnology, Biomedical and Bioinformatics Facilities in New York City") estimated that the companies emerging from the City's academic research centers would generate a demand for approximately 1,000,000 square feet of space designed for bio-tech firms over the next few Years, of which about 40,000 square feet is needed as incubator space for start-up firms just.

Completion of Phase I of ESP. would produce a total of 300,000 square feet of bio-tech laboratory space.

HOWEVER, there are a number of other projects on the drawing board in New York City that would depend on public subsidies that are also in the planning stage. If they were all completed, the supply of new laboratory space would exceed the projected demand.

The IBO assessment: "It is unlikely that all will go forward difficulties in securing financing, assembling the sites, securing necessary zoning changes and re-assessments of market demand as earlier projects are completed, will inevitably remove some of these projects from "consideration."

If ESP. Phase I am one of the first of these projects to be completed, it would likely face a market that still has significant unmet demand for appropriate space.

The New York City Partnership has suggested that City's bio-tech subsidy programs not consist solely of projects that are closely tied to individual institutions. ESP., like other potential bio-tech projects in New York City, would inevitably be associated with a particular institution, if for no other reason than geographic proximity. It is reasonable to expect that the ESP., while not explicitly limited to NYU-affiliated tenants, would be most attractive to NYU faculty and staff, particularly its incubator space

To counter this isolation, the Partnership has been advocating the establishment of larger aggregations of bio-tech space physically and institutionally separate from the universities. Recent public statements by City and State development officials have raised the possibility of combining several proposed bio-tech projects into a single 1 million square foot project in Lower Manhattan. In response to a letter from the New York City Partnership, John C. Whitehead, chair of the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, expressed support for the creation of a downtown bio-tech hub to include the leading medical institutions, including NYU.

The retrofitting of existing buildings in Lower Manhattan would likely result in cheaper incubator space than would new construction, and allow for earlier occupancy. If these proposals gain momentum, the ESP. and other bio-tech projects will likely be reconsidered as the demand for space is met.

COB has been unable to obtain sufficient information from THC as to whether the transfer of land from THC/Bellevue to NYU is consistent with the strategic plans of Bellevue and THC.

Finally, the ESP. plan assumes that the Incline Corporation would be the lead tenant, occupying roughly half of the space. Incline has encountered regulatory and financial setbacks that have sharply reduced its share price and market value. If it were forced to withdraw from its commitment to take space at ESP., the project will be faced with the challenge of finding a new lead tenant. Although disruptive, it is not clear that such a change would necessarily threaten the project. Given the extent of the subsidies involved in this project, the importance of securing an anchor tenant prior to construction is critical.

Relocation of the Men's Homeless Shelter

The 30th Street Homeless Men's Shelter occupies the former Psychiatric Building is currently under transition. DHS is decentralizing its intake system from one center to three centers. It is DHS' hope to open an intake facility in each of the three boroughs with the highest concentration of street homeless individuals; Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Manhattan. In order to close the 30th Street shelter and proceed with this project, the City must create additional beds at alternate sites. The Doe Fund has developed and opened a 400-bed shelter in East Williamsburg, Brooklyn. A second proposal for a shelter in the Bronx was rejected by the local community.

DHS continues to cite a goal of decentralization of the adult intake system. However, there is little evidence of community review and consultation in this process.

Con Edison

The New York State Public Service Commission has mandated the disinvestment of many of Con Edison's assets. These include four sites along First Avenue between 35th and 41st Streets that collectively amount to 8.9 acres. Development along this corridor will have a major impact on the community. The 15th Street exit on the FDR, as well as E. 15th and E. 14th Streets from the FDR to Avenue C have been closed to the public since 911. Due to public safety concerns, the Community Board had no input into these closures which have created major traffic and pedestrian safety issues; and the loss of many of our residential parking spaces. The Department of Transportation

needs to develop a traffic plan for our streets caused by these closures.

The development of the Con Edison Waterside properties will be closely reviewed not only in terms of the height and bulk of proposed buildings, but also concerning access to the waterfront, affordable housing, and implementation of our goal to build a continuous esplanade along the East River. Community Board 6 has provided its own 197-c Plan encompassing the Con Ed properties east of 1st Ave.

The CB6 197-c Plan runs from East 34th to East 41st Street and from 1st Avenue to the East River. In addition CB6 has completed a 197-a Plan which encompasses the area bounded by East 14th Street and East 29th Street, 100 west of Second Avenue to the East River. The CB6 197-a Plan has been accepted by the Department of City Planning as complete and is now in the formal review process.

Construction

New high-rise construction, certainly a nuisance for immediate neighbors, does not present a threat to the community. These multi-million dollar projects are built by experienced contractors and are closely supervised by the Department of Buildings. However, we continue to be concerned about the length of time sheds surrounding buildings are allowed to stay up, and the flagrant disregard Building owners appear to have for the permitting process and building code regulations. Much work is done without any building permits, or with a permit that does not begin to cover the full scope of the work being performed. More and more work is being done in the evenings and on weekends when the Department of Buildings has only a few inspectors to cover all five boroughs. Also illegal uses and occupancies need to be addressed.

Transportation/Traffic Enforcement/Control

The district streets, bridges and tunnels receive a great deal of wear and tear; potholes, sinkholes, and deteriorating manholes permeate the district. The Board continues to request improved maintenance.

Traffic controls and enforcement of existing controls is another major concern of the Board. The most hazardous activity most people in this district encounter is crossing the street. Gridlock, spill back and red light running are the daily norm. This community needs more traffic control and enforcement!

Issues such as unauthorized parking including double and triple parking, non-permitted layovers, idling of engines, and use of non-route streets by buses and commercial vehicles must also be addressed.

Additional attention needs to be given to the maintenance, and cleaning of the FDR exit and entrance ramps, highways, bridges and tunnels.

Livery Cars

For years the for-hire vehicles have created lay over problems in East Midtown. During the day these cars commandeer much of our streets legal parking spaces, utilize metered spaces for hours without paying the meter resulting in lost city revenue; block hydrants and park illegally, blocking cars and buses making turns, especially on our one-way streets. Additional TLC oversight and enforcement is needed.

Area residents constantly complain that drivers congregate and talk; loudly play radios; sweep out their cars, dump coffee containers and pizza boxes onto our streets. Public urination has also been observed.

Discussions have taken place to address this problem. Plans have been proposed, but no plan has been implemented. Worst of all, existing laws are not adequately enforced.

Transit

Safe, convenient, efficient transportation to and from midtown Manhattan is critically important to the economic and environmental health of this city. The midtown streets are clogged with buses, cars, trucks and taxis. The long awaited construction of the Second Avenue subway line is scheduled to

Begin in the fall/winter of 2004. In order to ease our over utilized mid-town streets, this construction must include the full length of Second Avenue and extend to lower Manhattan.

Sidewalk Obstructions

Members of the Community Board spend a great deal of time carefully reviewing all sidewalk café applications and are looking forward to working with DCA Commissioner Gretchen Dykstra in making the review process more meaningful.

The sidewalks in this area are cluttered with both illegal and excessively large permitted sidewalk cafes, in many instances these restaurants/bars leave three to four feet of sidewalk space and in many instances this footage is cluttered with illegal planters, benches, signs, and have bicycles chained to street furniture; fruit stands extending more than four feet, newspaper boxes in some cases up to ten at every intersection create a pedestrian hazard and in many cases are unsightly. Another sidewalk obstruction is the mounds of trash placed at curbside too many hours prior to collection. All infractions are regularly reported to the appropriate agencies. Violations are issued in most instances and fines are paid, most businesses consider these violations to be a part of doing business in the city and continue their illegal behavior; fines should be increased to a level that would get these businesses to change their attitude. Also, nothing is done to actually remove the obstructions even though mechanisms to do exist. The Board feels that there are too few enforcement agents, and existing rules, such as the padlock citation, unlicensed operations or having more tables then stated on their permit; is difficult to address because enforcement of these laws is weak.

There has been a reduction of enforcement agents in most agencies; we believe this creates a large loss of city revenue and hurts the quality of life for city residents; damages the city's image and its' public relations efforts when trying to stimulate tourism. The City should review all agencies' enforcement branches with particular attention to the amount of revenue generated by each, and their potential to generate more.

Parks

"Quality of life" in the Board area is of major concern; open public, passive and active recreation space has a substantial impact on that quality of life. This district has less park space per capita than almost any other part of the city. Clearly the parks and open spaces of the district are crucial to residents and daily visitors. They provide oases from the hectic pace that characterizes midtown Manhattan and are necessary for the physical and mental well being of all. It is not surprising that, since Community Boards have been involved in the budget process, CB6 has always ranked Parks capital projects and expense budget increases for personnel among its top priorities.

Construction has been completed at Stuyvesant Cove Park. The Board is presently working on improving roadway conditions and traffic controls for both pedestrians and motorists. We thank all those who played a role in making this long held vision come to be.

Happily, through the efforts of our elected officials most of the parks in Community Board 6 have

been reconstructed. We anticipate additional improvements along our waterfront as the Esplanade/Bikeway plan for the East River progresses under the auspices of the Economic Development Corporation.

Reconstruction of the East 54th Street Recreation Center has been a high priority for Community Board 6 for almost twenty years. This is the third most heavily utilized recreation center in the city with a potential for even greater use if it were rehabilitated.

With all the capital improvements in our parks and recreation centers, we continue to emphasize the need for adequate maintenance, operation and protection of our rehabilitated parks. The need for additional maintenance workers continues to be a high priority within Board Six and throughout the city. Asser Levy and the 54th Street Recreation Centers are two of the three most heavily used centers in the city; they do not have adequate personnel to meet the needs of the many people they serve nor do they have sufficient funds for maintenance and supplies.

ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Given the nature of the midtown area - its dense residential population, the number of homeless people, tourists and daily work force - the Board has some very basic concerns:

The Need for Better Statistical Data

Although demographic data on our residential population is fairly comprehensive, we have no statistics on the number of people who enter this district on a daily basis to work, to shop and to visit our institutions.

The relationship of the quantity of such populations to the number of service delivery personnel allocated to Community Board 6 is crucial to it's' quality of life and should therefore be carefully analyzed by the City Administration.

Sanitation

Community Board 6 thanks the District Superintendent and his crew for all of their assistance. Although the districts streets are relatively clean, our scorecard has been going down in the districts southern portion. Additional enforcement of alternate sides of the street regulations is needed as well as additional city litter baskets; the existing baskets fill quickly creating overflowing conditions that add to the already existing rodent problem.

Health

The Board 6 area always has a great deal of construction, a large number of yearly street fairs and block parties; this creates the need for additional pest control and remains a high priority in this community.

Libraries

The branch libraries in this community are one of our most valuable resources; they are used by young and old, rich and poor; we are happy to see those open six days a week. However, additional funding is still required for the purchase of books and restoration of other library services.

Homeless Services

For several years the most serious service delivery issue in Community Board 6 has been created by the large numbers of homeless people on our streets and in our parks. East Midtown is one of the nicest areas in the city with one of the lowest crime rates. Homeless people need not fear that

local residents will rob them of their few possessions as they sleep. People engaged in panhandling have an easy commute to the Central Business District. This community has demonstrated great compassion for the homeless in its midst, and is aware of the enormous demands for service needed by this population. Persistent outreach continues to be necessary to provide service to the existing homeless and to prevent their expansion.

We acknowledge how very difficult it is to site any facility serving homeless people. However, creative avoidance of the issue by claiming contract agencies are not subject to ULURP even when the lease or purchase of a building is funded in full by New York City tax dollars is not an appropriate response. As painful as it is, Fair Share must be respected and community review must take place. Community input and involvement in DHS' siting of 9,000 units under the New York/ New York III program is essentially to the implementation of this objective.

Respectfully Submitted,

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