



BROOKLYN COMMUNITY BOARD 14
FLATBUSH-MIDWOOD COMMUNITY DISTRICT
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Brooklyn, New York 11230

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BROOKLYN COMMUNITY BOARD 14
STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY DISTRICT NEEDS
FISCAL YEAR 2008

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OVERVIEW

Brooklyn Community District 14 – Flatbush, Kensington and Midwood is a community with many strengths and resources, though also many problems. Located geographically in the heart of Brooklyn, (see attached maps), it combines neighborhoods of gracious one and two-family homes on tree-lined streets and stretches of apartment buildings, many built during an era when spacious comfortable apartments were the norm. It contains many active commercial strips, including Flatbush Avenue, one of the City's longest commercial corridors. Many of its educational facilities are among the best in the City, including the University campus of Brooklyn College. The board abuts Prospect Park on the north including the Parade Grounds within its boundaries. Although its local park facilities are limited, they are much valued and well used, and many see it as an urban forest, due to its size and number of its street trees.

The Board is served by the BMT Brighton Line, development of which helped spur the original growth of the area in the early years of the twentieth century, and is also served on the extreme east and west by the IRT Nostrand Avenue and IND F Culver lines, respectively.

The District's greatest resource is its approximately 169,000 residents who have organized effective block, tenant and neighborhood associations, merchant associations, local development corporations, and other citizen efforts to preserve and revitalize their community, and in some cases,

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performing services that elsewhere City government is expected to provide.

In recent years, problems have arisen, in part, due to population changes and the apparent inability of local government to meet the needs of new residents and effectively address these changes. Lower income people moving into many of the district's apartments found few social services to help them cope with the problems. An aging population, left behind as many of their contemporaries moved elsewhere in the City or the country, has found meager public services available, particularly for those elderly who were unfortunate to be homebound. Certain of the district's commercial streets faced a changed market along with the competition of Kings Plaza and other publicity-supported revitalized commercial areas. Growing apartment house deterioration and arson were signals that action was needed if the community were to remain a stable and attractive place in which to live for middle as well as moderate-income people, and for all the many ethnic groups which help give the community its unique character.

All this came at a time when City government, faced with various fiscal crises, decided on retrenchment, and began cutting back on the delivery of local services. The communities mobilized to face and deal with its problem – its residents are working together on issues that confront them. The problems are not, however, purely local. They are also the symptoms and effects of problems at the City, State and National level as well. The community must have adequate government support for necessary public programs and services to back up the local programs. Only with such a partnership can the “heart” of Brooklyn remain healthy and viable. The following discussion does not suggest priorities for individual needs and programs. Priorities are defined within the agencies for the Community Board 14's Fiscal Year 2008 Capital/Community Development and Expense budget submissions, recognizing inter-relatedness and interdependency of all needs and programs.

The location and boundaries of Brooklyn Community District 14 are depicted in the maps attached to this report. Six basic overall needs are perceived for the district. The following order does not imply degree of importance or priority):

- **A need to preserve and stabilize the district as a community of both one- and two family and multi-family housing units;**
- **A need to assure the health and vitality of commercial**

areas within the district;

- **A need to halt and reverse deterioration of the district's housing stock, and in particular, effectively address problems of residents of multiple dwellings;**
- **A need to reverse deterioration of the district's infrastructure and made maximum efficient use of all existing facilities;**
- **A need to provide adequate and effective social and other services for all residents of the district, particularly the most dependent population groups - the young, the elderly and the poor; and**
- **A need to assure effective communication and cooperation on community betterment among all groups in the District 14 community.**

More specific needs to address the above are grouped into the following seven program areas (again, order does not imply priority):

COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Street Trees: The district's trees are an irreplaceable resource. Besides representing a capital investment of over \$10 million, they are vital to preserving the unique attractiveness of the districts commercial and residential revitalization programs, which have direct impact on the City's real property tax revenues. In addition, they assist in energy conservation, significantly reducing cooling needs during the summer.

NEEDED:

- **Restore Parks Department Forestry and Maintenance personnel to adequately maintain trees in the district;**
- **A program to prune and/or restore to health, existing trees on an on-going basis; and**
- **Continuation of an adequately funded, staffed and equipped program to maintain and replace trees, as needed.**

Parks and Playgrounds: The district is severely under-supplied with public parks and recreational spaces. Except for two vest pocket tot-lots, there are only three such community recreational facilities in the district:

Kolbert Park in the southern half of the district, the Deputy Inspector Joseph DiGilio playground on the extreme western edge and in the north, and the Parade Grounds, which comprises athletic fields and tennis courts accessed by borough permit only. The only facility within this recreational area which is available to community residents without a permit is a heavily utilized playground.

NEEDED:

- Development of the recreational area at Crooke Avenue adjacent to UMMA Park (a sitting area located at the southwest corner of Woodruff and Ocean Avenues).

Sanitation Services: Adequate sanitation services are vital to the maintenance of public and the quality of life in all communities of the City. Community Board 14 feels strongly enough about this to have established, with the Department of Sanitation many years ago, its own plan for local sanitation services. This plan, approved by the Department and now in operation for many years, seeks to make optimum use of manpower and equipment and sensitively meet the needs of individual neighborhoods and facilities. The only modification made to the original plan was to accommodate the City's recycling program.

NEEDED:

- Continuation of "Operation Clean Stretch" to provide nightly pick-up of baskets and collection of residential garbage on commercial strips within Community District 14;
- Development of a recycling collection schedule indicating (specifically within the same week) when recycling will be collected after a legal holiday;
- Continuation of the special school collection truck route to include a provision for pick-up of recyclables on a weekly basis to meet the ever-increasing debris generated by the additional number of meals served to the youth;
- Special attention also to the particular sanitation needs of the North Flatbush area, where the district's largest apartment dwelling population resides; and
- Restoration of the community services programs which provided local civic, block and tenant associations with a one-on-one communication with the agency.

Air Quality and Water Sewer Facilities: Maintenance of good air quality and adequate water and sewer facilities is essential to

environmental health and the quality of life in the district. Flooded streets, inoperative fire hydrants, as well as air and noise pollution, counteract positive efforts made by the City and community towards revitalization

NEEDED:

- Adequate funding, equipment and staffing for maintenance of water supply and sewer facilities to assure long-term clean City water supply; and
- Adequate enforcement of air pollution and noise regulations.

HOUSING AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

One and Two-Family Housing: The district is endowed with a relatively unique supply of high quality one and two-family housing units, which is a key factor in making it a desirable residential area. This housing stock must be preserved if the district is to maintain its viability and attractiveness. Programs to preserve surrounding infrastructure must support direct preservation efforts. This district has experienced a trend of expansions of one and two-family homes. Although home improvement activities have been encouraged by this Board, blatant illegal building continues, with the agencies responsible for governing unable to control the proliferation.

NEEDED:

- Home improvement loan programs which support the effort of home owners and local organizations to preserve and upgrade the one and two-family housing stock; and
- Coordination by agencies to enforce a flagrant violation throughout the district of the illegal curb cuts. The Buildings Department issues a curb cut permit in most cases without inspections. Once reported to the agency and a violation is issued, however, there is currently no enforcement component to have the curb restored.

Multi-Family Housing: Community District 14 has, interspersed with and adjoining its one and two-family home area, a sizeable stock of multiple dwellings. Residents of these buildings range across all age and income groups, and include large concentrations of elderly and poor, many of whom receive some form of public assistance. Buildings vary from well maintained to the deteriorated; the latter in some cases due to deliberate land disinvestment. Such buildings are concentrated particularly in the North Flatbush area, though examples exist elsewhere as well. Much of

the deterioration has occurred in the last twenty years, accompanying dramatic socio-economic changes, as the less fortunate has replaced aging middle class apartment dwellers. It is still a mostly reversible process. Strenuous efforts are underway by local organizations and private institutions with public agency support to halt and reverse the deterioration that has taken place. These efforts must be supported and strengthened.

NEEDED:

- Continuation and strengthening of Citywide housing rehabilitation and tenant support services, in particular, the Neighborhood Preservation Consultation contracts for the Local Development Corporations within Community District 14;
- Continued and expanded funding of local organizations for provision of critically needed housing services;
- Continued funding for facade and street improvements to support housing rehabilitation programs;
- Support for more senior citizen housing projects to address the great housing needs of older adults; and
- A review and coordination of the maze of City agencies directly charged with all aspects of enforcing the New York City Zoning Resolution.

Commercial Revitalization and Economic Development:

Maintenance of the health and vitality of the community depends not only on an adequate housing stock, but also on preservation and revitalization of commercial areas that support upgrading efforts of local Merchant Associations and Development Corporations in all commercial areas, ranging from the more local areas such as Avenue J, Avenue M, Cortelyou Road and Church Avenue to Flatbush Avenue, one of the City's longest commercial corridors.

NEEDED:

- Continued support for and expansion where possible, of current commercial revitalization efforts; and
- Expansion of revitalization programs into areas where necessary and feasible, particularly the Flatbush/Nostrand Junction area, Cortelyou Road and Avenues J and M.

HUMAN SERVICES

The lack of adequate human services has been identified as a critical problem in the district, further compounded by the resettlement of a

newly-arrived population. This is a result in part of the failure of public agencies to address dramatic socio-economic changes and the lack of adequate planning by resettlement agencies. There continues to be a responsibility to analyze needs, service deficiencies and implement new and more effective programs for social service delivery. Program areas which the board has identified as critical counterparts to physical improvements include:

Services for the Elderly: Community District 14 has one of the City's largest concentrations of the elderly. They range in capability from the relatively self-sufficient to the homebound and very dependent. There are needs for all such groups, though they are certainly greatest at the more dependent end of the scale.

NEEDED:

- Programs which address the support services needs of the frail elderly;
- Programs which adequately address the needs of both Medicaid and non-Medicaid homebound elderly; and
- Necessary support for efforts to improve coordination of local delivery of services to the elderly.

Youth Services: Community Board 14's analysis of the delivery of youth services has shown that large gaps exist between youth needs and service delivery. There is a clear and imperative need to reflect the population changes, which have taken place in the district over the past decade in the youth services provided.

NEEDED:

- A broad effort by social service delivery agencies to effectively provide information on available services to potential client populations;
- Outstation service delivery staff within the Community District. Programs are desperately needed to provide pregnant and parenting teens with the resources to promote the health and well being of themselves and their families and to help establish a future of an economic independence. These programs are vital since many pregnant teens often find themselves without a support network when critical problems arise; and
- Continuation of Crisis Intervention programs which effectively address non-routine service needs.

Health and Hospital Services: Adequate hospital services are

essential in any community, particularly in an area such as Community District 14, which has a large proportion of more dependent groups such as the poor and elderly.

NEEDED:

- Adequate hospital facilities to serve all District 14 residents.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Fire Protection: Community District 14 and particularly, the North Flatbush area, has been identified as a “transitional area.” Changes have definitely occurred in the District in recent years, and the community is making strenuous efforts to assure that a transition does not take place which would transform the area from a stable residential community to an abandoned wasteland. An essential component of those efforts is fire protection, both to assure that the community is adequately protected when fires do occur, and to prevent the spread of fires in particular resulting from arson.

NEEDED:

- Adequate manning as well as specialized equipment for local fire operations.

Police Services and Neighborhood Security: Residents of Community Board 14 have on their own initiative, developed various forms of community-based security services to maintain stability. These programs must be supported by adequate provision of police services by the City government to assure that an effective overall Criminal Justice system supports the efforts of the local precinct.

NEEDED:

- ***Immediate acquisition of a site for a new 70th Precinct facility. The physical plant is antiquated and deteriorated. Its neighbor, the modern United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) complex has enlarged and expanded their facilities. This has produced one of the most active New York City Police Department facilities in the midst of the largest concentration of handicapped people in Brooklyn;***
- Restoration of funding for community-based crime prevention programs to provide special attention to the security needs of the

- elderly and the special needs of crime victims;
- Attention also to the special crime prevention needs of the more densely populated neighborhoods in the northern portion of the district; and
- Development of specialized programs to combat the illegal drugs sales within the district.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is by nature a support service, which enables a community to function. District 14's transportation needs reflect the need for transportation improvements which make optimum use of existing facilities and support community and public agency efforts in all other areas, *i.e.*, commercial development, housing, social service delivery, recreation, etc. Needs identified in particular program areas are as follows:

Street System: Many of Community District 14 streets, both local as well as arterial, are in dangerously deteriorated condition as a result of deferred maintenance. Not only does this present a severe safety problem and contribute to inefficient use of street capacity, but it also counteracts efforts to upgrade the quality of other facilities. The board believes that maintenance backlog, particularly for the streets in areas where major commercial and housing rehabilitation activity is taking place, must be addressed immediately by the agency. Traffic engineering services must be sufficient to assure safe and effective use of streets. Traffic management programs must support local retaliation programs and focus on the most congested areas.

NEEDED:

- Immediate attention to street improvement programs for the district's most deteriorated and hazardous streets with a maximum effort to overcome the large street maintenance backlogs;
- Coordination by City agencies and utilities on Capital projects. Currently, there is limited coordination producing waste and the perpetuation of negative public perception. In spite of this, the board has made a major effort to coordinate these agencies/utilities in an effort to reduce duplication and conflicts with scheduled projects;
- Adequate staffing and equipment for Highway and Traffic Operations Bureaus with particular emphasis on increasing Highway Operations "maintenance gangs" to restore routine street maintenance and address the ever-growing list of hazardous street conditions within Community District 14;

- Focus on traffic planning resources for better management of transportation system in congested commercial areas, specifically, Avenue J within Community District 14. We believe similar programs should be developed for other commercial streets;
- Continuation and expansion of sidewalk facade improvement programs for commercial streets; and
- Continuation of funding of programs to repair sidewalks in violation in the district and to provide needed curb cuts to increase pedestrian safety.

Parking Facilities: Adequate off-street parking is seen as an essential component not only of commercial revitalization programs, but also the District's Sanitation Service Delivery Plan. Sufficient off-street parking must be available to enable commercial streets to be effectively cleaned.

NEEDED:

- Proper maintenance, adequate security, effective signage and appropriate rate structures are essential for existing parking facilities;
- Coordination with the Department of Buildings to enforce the flagrant violation of installation of illegal curb cuts throughout the district. There is currently no enforcement component to have the curb restored, once a violation is issued. ***The Department of Transportation should restore the curb in violation and charge the owner of the property;*** and
- Development of additional off-street parking capacity in areas, where needed, to support commercial revitalization programs, including additional parking in the Avenue J/Coney Island Avenue area.

Public Transit Service: Community District 14 is relatively well supplied with rapid transit facilities. The BMT Brighton Line, for example, bisects the District, and eight (8) of its stations are located within the board's boundaries, as are the Flatbush/Nostrand Avenue IRT station on the east (a major transportation hub) and the IND 18th Avenue Culver Line station on the west. As with other elements of the City's infrastructure, however, they suffer from inadequate maintenance.

NEEDED:

- Expeditious completion of the station rehabilitation projects and advancement of station and line improvement projects for rapid transit facilities in the district, particularly those serving commercial areas; and
- Rehabilitation in particular of the Brighton Line right-of-way through

the District, including the restoration of deteriorated protective fences along the right-of-way.

NEW YORK AND ATLANTIC RAILWAYS: Community District 14 is bisected by the open cut of the New York and Atlantic Railways (formerly known as the Long Island Rail Road freight line. The line runs through both heavily populated residential and commercial areas. Despite sporadic cleanup operations to remove literally tons of refuse as well as extermination of rats during the past several years, the cut remains a serious sanitation and security concern of the board.

NEEDED:

- Continued cleanup operations to include removal of tires along the cut which provide a haven for larvae of the West Nile Virus mosquito, along with other necessary repairs of eroded sections of the embankment; and
- Rapid advancement of the long-delayed secure re-fencing of the entire open cut.

EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL FACILITIES

Primary and Secondary School Facilities: The stability and attractiveness of Community District 14 as a residential area is due in no small measure, to the quality of its educational facilities. This quality reflects to a high degree the effective and determined participation of local parents in school policy-making, through Community School Boards and Parent Associations. Community Board 14 strongly supports their recommendations for needed improvements to local primary and secondary schools, and their efforts to make a maximum use of school facilities for both education and other relevant community purposes. In particular, the board continues to support wholeheartedly, the removal of the teacher parking lot in the schoolyard of Public School 152 located at Bedford Avenue and Campus Road, and the development of this area as an outdoor recreational space for use by children as well as youth.

NEEDED:

- Expeditionary advancement of needed improvements to local primary and secondary schools, particularly to address the serious problem of overcrowding; and
- Maximum utilization of school facilities to meet community needs

Higher Education Facilities: Given its geographic location, Brooklyn College lies at the center of the community life in District 14. The Community Board enthusiastically supports implementation of needed improvements to this great institution to improve its ability to serve the local community as well as all citizen of the borough.

NEEDED:

- Advancement of vitally needed improvements to Brooklyn College's physical plant, including the West Quad Project.

Libraries: District 14's existing branch libraries are heavily used and highly valued by the community. The board ***strongly*** supports essential improvements needed by these libraries and objects to any budget cuts. Cuts to the libraries will greatly affect the literacy programs, including programs for Latch Key Children and for the newly arrived immigrants who use the libraries, GED programs and many more which have to be eliminated as a result of budget cuts. Proportionately, the cuts to libraries are far greater than to other City agencies.

NEEDED:

- Continuation of funding previously cut to the local branch libraries to avoid elimination of these important programs in the district;
- Advancement of needed improvements to local branch libraries;
- Adequate funding to assure that all branches remain open;
- Adequate staffing to assure acceptable levels of service are provided; and
- Advancement of construction of the new Kensington Branch Library.

Cultural Affairs: Community cultural activities are an essential component of quality of life in all communities of the City. Their continuation is needed to enhance City livability and promote the stability of communities.

NEEDED:

- Adequate funding for the Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts at Brooklyn College (BCBC), which has provided this community with performances by the world's famous artists; and
- Adequate funding for the Brooklyn Arts and Cultural Association (BACA), which has provided continuing support to District's 14 community activities, along with other local cultural and artistic program.

COMMUNITY BOARDS

Community Boards are an essential component of City government. In addition to their Charter-mandated responsibilities, they provide crucial agency linkages as well. The Boards have worked hard with local agency officials to assure that the limited resources available are effectively used. Despite the Administration's introduction of a Citywide 311 non-emergency telephone system, the current tendency has been to revert to a more centralized system, thus making it increasingly difficult for Community Boards to resolve problems and extract information from decentralized management as intended in the New York City Charter. The end result may be to increase the length of time in which problems are resolved. Although there has been some restoration to Community Board budgets, the budgets have not yet been substantially increased to meet demands of the ever-growing layer of bureaucracy, which has been created to deal with Community Boards.

To fulfill their Charter-mandated responsibilities and continue to act as a government "frontline," the Boards must have the necessary resources to do so.

NEEDED:

- ***Recognition of the critical role played by Community Boards with a provision for budget adjustment and/or adequate funding to meet their responsibilities to the community.***

Please do not hesitate to call the Community Board 14 District office for further information or clarification.

Respectfully submitted,

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