



Matthew S. Washington
Chairman

Angel D. Mescain
District Manager

COMMUNITY BOARD ELEVEN

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Land Use, Landmarks & Planning Committee
Wednesday, April 8, 2015 6:00 p.m.
Bonafacio Senior Housing
7 East 116th Street, New York, NY 10035

- Present: Beverly Alston, Adem Brija, Diane Collier, Holley Drakeford, La Shawn Henry, Alvin Johnson, Marissa Mack, Keith Massey, Frances Mastrota, Vincent Torres, Jemar Ward, Mia Brezin (staff), Angel Mescain (staff)
- Excused: George Gallego, Theresa Richardson, Candy Vives-Vasquez
- Absent: none
- Guests: James Garcia, CB11; Marina Ortiz, East Harlem Preservation; Bob Anazagasti, El Barrio Unite; Xiomara Pedraza, CB11; Juan Pagan, Positive Workforce; Jose Venegas; Isaac Kastenbaum; Dennis Osorio; Viveca Diaz, El Barrio Unite; Anne Kadamani, El Barrio Unite; Ronnie Hernandez, NERVE; Mahfuzur Kahmar; Andrew McAllister, El Barrio Unite; David Andino, Positive Workforce; Morgan Rivera, United Soliders for Christ; Nicole Assa, BDG; Robert Anazagasti; Clark Peña, Yes Public Relations

Meeting called to order at 6:00 p.m. by committee chair La Shawn Henry.

1. Call to Order – Adoption of the Agenda
2. Presentations/Discussions
 - a. El Barrio Unite (10 mins.)
 - i. Robert Anazagasti

Mr. Anazagasti, from El Barrio Unite, presented on the concern for the direction of the neighborhood and the concern for the high rise buildings coming to East Harlem. He asked that we reject item #3, on the paper presented, to stop high rise buildings from being built and keep the structure of the neighborhood as is. Mr. Anazagasti indicated El Barrio Unite is not against affordable housing but against the structure of the new buildings itself and ask the community to support their stance.

- b. Committee discussion to assess community district needs and to develop recommendations for inclusion in the CB11 Statement of District Needs for the upcoming fiscal year

George Janes presented on The Statement of District needs, which has to be submitted by August 2015 for fiscal year 2017. The statement covers all aspects of the community board. The board broke out into 3 separate groups to discuss the needs of the community on a more individual level. Most addressed topics include Economic Development, Affordable Housing, Education, Senior Citizens; Sanitation & Jobs (see attached notes from each group).

- c. Committee discussion on Neighborhood Planning

3. Old Business

4. Announcements

- a. The next Land Use, Landmarks & Planning Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 13, 2015 at 6:00 pm.

5. Adjournment

Vinny Torres made a motion to adjourn which was seconded by Holley Drakeford. The meeting was adjourned at 8:13 p.m.

Minutes prepared by: Marissa Mack

Notes from Land Use Committee Meeting April 8th, 2015

Working Group Members:

LaShawn Henry

Angel Mescain

Xiomara Pedraza

Most important issues in your community:

- Jobs and economic development, education, affordable housing, diversity, maintaining existing look of the community (zoning), infrastructure, open space, transportation, health, overall change, cleaning up 125th street

Economic Development:

- Employment discrimination against people in the community
- Lack of adequate training for people in East Harlem
- Equal employment opportunities
- The jobs available are low wage jobs and people can't support their families
- Need more skills training programs in tech industry and other growing sectors of the economy
- Need to develop a pipeline and partner with education institutions, community organizations and the private sector to train people and provide internships
- Enforceable wage protections
- More commercial business and commercial corridors with a variety of different businesses in the community from economical small business to higher end businesses and amenities (retention of disposable income)
- Affordable retail/commercial spaces
- Tech industry
- Factories and office buildings in the neighborhood
- Pipeline to health care industry and hospitals in the community
- Local business association newsletter/newspaper

Education

- Schools should start early teaching kids skills they can use in the workforce – health care and STEM education
- Financial literacy in school
- Partnership with businesses (SCORE)
- Charter/public school fight is an issue

Public Safety

- More “community policing,” less aggressive policing
- Police presence on 125th street to get substance abuse patients and homeless population to move along
- Keep methadone clinics out of East Harlem
- More pedestrian friendly area

- We do not want a “police state” (stop and frisk)

Sanitation

- Garbage pick up is an issue (125th street and Lexington and Public Housing)
- Demand clean streets
- Community clean up
- Pilot program for sanitation

Seniors

- Need more senior housing
- Seniors in NYCHA sharing large apartments together
- Improve senior mobility programs around the city

Other

- More transportation choices in the area to bring in business and consumers
- Fresh food and better food choices at a good price
- Improving parks, gardens and building the Esplanade
- Improving access to Randall’s Island
- Open space for “play” and recreation (street closures in summer)
 - Having school yards and gyms open after school hours for youth in community
- Support collaborative efforts in East Harlem like the East Harlem Community Alliance
- 2nd avenue line and more bus service

Notes from GJ's group from the 4/08/2015 Land Use Committee meeting

GJ facilitated a discussion with a group of 4 community board members and 1 member of the public.

Undesirable land uses

The area around 125/Lex/Park suffers from serious problems: blight, homelessness, criminal activity. Because of the M35 Bus, which shuttles the homeless to and from Ward's Island from 125th Street and Lexington, there are many homeless/jobless people with nowhere to go, who idle in the streets. Drug-dealing and drug use is commonly witnessed. Some of the homeless overnight under the Park Avenue viaduct, setting up cardboard partitions between the recently installed planters in the plaza in front of the comfort station.

Many homeless who shelter on Randall's/ Ward's Island save the fare, and instead walk over on the footbridge that connects the Island with East Harlem at 103rd Street and the East River Esplanade. The garbage, used needles and condoms that they leave behind on the bridge, East River Esplanade and further north, on Harlem River Park, make these public places undesirable places to be.

The area has many methadone / drug recovery clinics that serve thousands of patients who travel to the area on a regular basis.

East Harlem has far more than its "fair share" of drug recovery and residential shelters. These facilities need to be much less concentrated than they currently are so that negative effects associated with them are diluted over a much larger area. A larger dispersal of such facilities would also likely better serve their clients.

Other solution include allowing the homeless to stay in the shelter on Randall's Island all day and providing them something to do.

The M35, one of the shortest routes of any MTA bus, could have a longer route, decreasing the numbers of homeless let out at 125th Street and Lexington. Years ago, the main City shelter for homeless men dropped off at the Port Authority.

EAST HARLEM MUST HAVE A LONG-TERM SOLUTION TO THE CONCENTRATION OF THE HOMELESS RESIDENTS INTO THE DISTRICT. A scattered site solution is an obvious choice. A place where homeless can stay during the day with things to do, could be another possible solution (jobs, training, rehabilitation, etc.) The status quo cannot be allowed to continue.

Schools

While enrollment in East Harlem has dropped, class sizes in the public schools can be very large. Teachers in East Harlem schools are often inexperienced, learn their craft on the job in East Harlem and then move on to other locations when they have more experience. The result is that kids in traditional public schools are not getting good education. Too many kids are being mainstreamed. There are some number of children who are disruptive, who don't want to learn, need to be moved to separate facilities for the benefit of children who want to learn. The hope is that this will make a better learning environment for both kids and teachers, and will encourage teachers to stay for the long-term.

Transportation

Intra-district transportation is difficult. People in the northern part of the district are much more connected to Central Harlem than to the balance of East Harlem largely because of poor transportation. There is suspicion of DOT efforts to limit access to 125th Street. No tolls on the East River/Harlem River bridges, at least between those connecting East Harlem to the Bronx. Consider park-and-rides if appropriate sites can be found.

East Harlem needs bike racks, Citi-bike, bike lanes, but progress has been slow or non-existent.

Affordable Housing

East Harlem needs to ensure that every new development builds affordable housing, and 80/20 is not enough. Developers are triple-dipping and this needs to stop. 50 market, 30 middle, and 20 low is good, but if we got rid of triple-dipping we could get 40-60 housing, with 60% being affordable. Community Land Trusts and HDFS need to be supported as a way of creating and preserving affordable housing.

New developments need to have higher percentages of set-asides for senior and disabled housing.

Landlord abuse of tenants in affordable housing is an issue. The City should work to provide legal aide when gentrification increases incentives for landlords to abuse their tenants.

Policing

The community has the worst response times in the region. Can't really have community policing because officers move on after a year or two in the area. Police can be very disrespectful and not listen to resident's concerns. Body-cameras are necessary: every encounter with the police should be recorded.

Social issues

Too many children are having children and we're not well equipped to deal with teen births when they happen. Leads to distractions and drop-outs in school as well as a repeating pattern of poverty and poor education.

Parks and Open Space and Ferries

The waterfront in East Harlem is a terribly underutilized under-invested resource. In Manhattan we have excellent examples of great waterfront spaces, but the East River Esplanade is falling into the river and the Harlem River Park has become a place where families are not comfortable going because of criminal activities that occur there.

Without a solution to the concentration of homeless on Randall's Island, any improvements to the waterfront parks will have little lasting effect as undesirable uses will migrate to these isolated, relatively empty areas. Yet, with a solution to the concentration of homelessness, we'll have the river as a fantastic resource. A redesign of the esplanade to improve quality and to provide destinations could help to make this area into a regional destination. The pedestrian connection to Randall's Island: one of the City's largest parks, could bring bikers and hikers from all over the City. Ferry service and improvement of the existing piers could support these uses that would benefit both local people and the larger NYC population.

Green East Harlem

If we develop a community garden, can we make a roof top garden on the resulting building? How about allowing greenhouses on the roofs of new buildings that any resident can use? What about harvesting the energy of the tides with turbines placed in the East River? What about using an improved East River Esplanade as protective barrier for storm surges? First Avenue flooded during Sandy and there have been serious protections against future events installed to protect from future storm events.

Water quality is bad, especially in the Harlem River. As home to one of the City's largest sewage treatment plants, CSO discharges need to be minimized to help to improve water quality.

Economics

First Avenue commercial strip has serious problems. Dozens of storefronts are empty. Local people don't own the stores that are there, and they don't have the resources to start businesses here. Commercial rent incentives for economic development along existing commercial corridors may be a way to incubate new businesses that can grow into employment producing enterprises.

There seems to be housing for low income, housing for high income, but middle income is squeezed. There are also disincentives in our system for some middle income people who when they make more money just have to pay more money. This trickles down into fewer businesses and jobs because we don't have enough middle income people to spend their money in the neighborhood. We want local people and local businesses to grow and prosper without being displaced, but that's hard because so few local people own.

East Harlem could be the home of a new technology district, perhaps related to medical technologies building on the institutions in the area. Such a district could provide new opportunities for local residents but also help raise incomes in the area. It could be linked with a revamped education program focusing on STEM education.

Notes from Land Use Committee Meeting April 8, 2015:

Working group members:

Mia Brezin

Diane Collier

Frances Mastrota

Keith Massey

Three community residents

Overall view of community: Love the recent changes- less crime, improved parks, no vacant lots, but concerned about gentrification/displacement as new residents move in

Economic Development, Culture, Tourism:

East River Plaza development needs to create jobs to promote local stability (local hiring)

Outside perception of East Harlem is negative, need to create draw for tourists, need to foster culture- ideas include northern Central Park, establishing a cultural corridor

Build union/local workforce for better wages, job pride, kids can look up to gainfully employed adults

Need broadband and Wi-Fi throughout neighborhood

Want local movie theater, bowling alley, and performance venues

Felt good about the overall shopping options in the neighborhood (Target and Costco specifically), gyms

Want better quality clothes in the local stores

Small businesses need support, want to ensure they remain in the community

Libraries need better books, more computers

Don't like chain stores- Applebee's and Staples specifically mentioned

Current condition of 125th Street and Lexington: adversely affects tourism

Train/transit opportunity- Metro North, M60 from La Guardia, 456 trains, highways

Hotel on 125th- perfect location for tourist jumping off point

La Marqueta:

Used to be a "mecca"

Want vendors, modern day version of what it used to be

Essex Market, Grand Central Market mentioned as examples

Want it to be clean, a place to sit and have a coffee with lap top

Stalls all the way through (not just a handful)

Subsidized stalls

Regular foods, regular prices (not "fancy, organic")

Handcrafted jewelry

La Placita- a place to sit outside, coffee cart, nice music, plaza, open every day in the summer, winter-lights, greenhouse, closed off

Housing:

Fears about gentrification- will lose "El Barrio" and "melting pot" feeling, lose mom and pop stores

Homelessness issue—not as bad as it used to be, but needs to be addressed

Housing should be affordable, mixed use

Want protections to help people stay in their homes- homeownership programs, sweat equity, small houses by CB office

Senior housing should be affordable—need more/have enough

Want more support for middle income subsidies/housing

Adjust income brackets for middle income up and down, adjust criteria for subsidized housing

Young people can't afford to live in EH, take talent and leave

Need a better range of affordable apartments for youth and seniors

People need to own their apartment to take care of it, people don't have pride in where they live if they don't have an investment in it

People exploiting the welfare/public housing system

NYCHA used to fine people for littering/defacing property, but now HUD doesn't do their job with NYCHA

Parks/Open Space:

Pleasant Village Community Garden- community resource

Esplanade, parks- aspects of the community that are liked

Want more public access to space- benches, gathering places for all people

Create a green waterfront from 96th-142nd Streets

107th Street Pier revitalized

Transportation:

116th Street train station- dramatic population increase

Waiting for the 2nd Avenue station

Youth/Education:

In order to reduce poverty we need education- more funding for local schools, charter schools, alternative education with connection to gardens, GED classes

Parenting skills classes- too many kids are having kids

Need more community centers/sports/activities for kids

Church gymnasiums used to have programming

Police Athletic League- used to have, want to bring back

"Friends of" various parks groups do programming and should be supported

Neighborhood mentors- should have program to connect youth with mentors

Schools- technology- need to be up to date

New schools need to be built in EH

Need broadband and Wi-Fi throughout community

Lots of youths and elderly- foster intergenerational connections

Public Safety:

Used to have- NYCHA community patrols with NYPD, block patrols and community policing

Summer- need more police- especially at 125th Street and Lexington

Change police inspectors too often- 3 years and gone, doesn't foster trust or connection with community

125th Street:

Need bright lights

Want the M35 bus rerouted to 3rd Avenue (or another avenue)

Need more police from 12-8 am

Problem stems from a concentration of services and the social network that gets built up around these centers

Lack of sanitation/area is dirty

Proposal to relocate services to Randall's Island

Adversely affects tourism

Train/transit opportunity- Metro North, M60 from La Guardia, 456 trains, highways

Hotel on 125th- perfect location for tourist jumping off point