



COMMUNITY BOARD ELEVEN

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Nilsa Orama
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February 18, 2020

Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor
City Hall
New York, New York 10019

Re: Community Board 11 Statement on the Fiscal Year 2021 Preliminary Budget

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

In October 2019, our board submitted capital and expense budget priorities for consideration within the Fiscal Year 2021 budget. We are thankful for the consideration of many of our requests and for the opportunity to comment on your preliminary budget for Fiscal Year 2021.

AGENCY-SPECIFIC RESPONSES

Department of Housing Preservation & Development

The administration has stated that affordable housing for all New Yorkers is a central pillar of its agenda to meaningfully address inequality across the city. Since the adoption of the East Harlem Neighborhood Rezoning in 2017, we remain vigilant that all the commitments made to our community in the Points of Agreement are realized including those aimed at the preservation and development of affordable housing reflective of median incomes of East Harlem residents.

The four public sites identified in the Points of Agreement for the development of 100% affordable housing, which includes deep affordability at levels accessible for current East Harlem residents, remain a priority for CB11 and we look forward to working with HPD to ensure that these sites are developed in a way that reflects these needs of our constituents. It has come to our attention that the redevelopment of one of these sites, the Urban Assembly School at 2005 Madison Avenue, has been deemed not to be feasible but no explanation has been provided to our board. It is our full expectation that the City will make good on its commitment to this community and work with our board to identify an alternative site(s) to meet this commitment and priority need.

The Mayor's Office should continue its commitment to affordable housing, including the creation, preservation, and ongoing management and maintenance of affordable housing, such that the livelihood of our residents is protected and improved. HPD should elaborate on these issues in their responses and provide details of its current plans for new and existing affordable housing in our district.

Community Board 11 thanks the City for the significantly increased funding for the provision of attorneys for low-income tenants in Housing Court. However, the City must continue providing accessible and easily understood information on tenants' rights and funding group representation of tenants at least at current levels provided to legal services providers; group representation offers unique advantages that representation of individual tenants in eviction proceedings does not offer, like affirmative litigation against landlords shirking their obligations, collective action that helps to balance the scales of power and/or encourage individuals to speak up who might otherwise feel intimidated to do so on their own, etc. The city concurrently should provide adequate oversight to landlords, executing punishment for landlords who break the law that exceeds the return on investment these landlords might receive for breaking those laws (i.e.: illegal deregulation of rent regulated apartments). When a landlord consistently breaks the law, the city should consider removing the responsibility and power that they possess over the livelihoods of their residents.

Tracking codes:

311202101C, 311202102C - We seek clarification from the agency as to how much resources will be dedicated to these requests and what is the timetable. We also seek clarification as to whether the community preference threshold will be met.

- What existing resources will be used to fund these requests?
- Where will the funding be allocated?
- Community input on budget requests balanced incorporation of such units onto mixed income development. How does the agency intend to execute the development of housing below 30% of the AMI as it relates to concerns of concentrated poverty?

311202101E – We thank the agency for hiring additional inspectors to monitor building complaints and would like to know the total number of additional inspectors hired.

- What existing resources will be used to fund this request?
- What is the fiscal cost of satisfying this request?
- How will the agency respond to complaints?
- How will complaints be monitored, and corrective measures incorporated?
- What is the proposed timeline from “complaint” to “correction”?
- Does the agency recommend added budget requests to fund “correction” of issues?
- What is the timeline for newly hired inspectors to be dispatched to areas with a high quantity of complaints?
- Will there be inter-agency coordination with NYC Department of buildings?
- If intra-agency coordination occurs, can the community board be assured that open data will be available on DOB BIS “Complaint” queries?

311202116E

- The agency should provide input on how this request for monitoring the issues related to the aforementioned vulnerable demographic can be appropriately categorized, i.e. Capital expense request?
- Does the agency presently have available tools that accommodate this request?

Housing Authority

NYCHA developments are in dire need of repair after decades of disinvestment. With the concentration of NYCHA Developments in CD11, items such as bringing online warehoused properties, boiler repair/replacement, refuse maintenance and security mechanisms should be of the highest priority. Addressing many of these concerns through a coordinated approach will facilitate a more progressive approach to solving multiple overlapping issues for the district. Many of the requests require appropriations. With the reduction in funding from HUD, the City stands to lose one of the greatest resources of affordable housing. Many of the issues, which are the genesis of our requests require more than simple capital improvements.

Possessing the highest concentration of NYCHA Developments, CB11 maintains that it is imperative for funds from the City be channeled to these developments. The continued negligence of funds or depletion thereof, will create blight upon these hardworking and deserving constituents. Additionally, coordination with the State should be an ongoing process to bridge the gap in funding neglected by the Federal Government.

Tracking Codes:

311202110E

Department of Buildings

Manhattan Community Board 11 thanks the Department of Buildings for proactively inspecting construction work without a permit. We urge the Department to advocate for funding for the hiring of an Assistant Director for the Office of the Tenant Advocate, as well as for additional tenant harassment units. We request that the Office of the Tenant Advocate focus heavily on neighborhoods such as East Harlem that have undergone rezonings.

Tracking codes:

311202112E

311202114E

Department for the Aging

Manhattan CB11 thanks the Department for the Aging for advocating for seniors and senior related issues. We request that the City and DFTA lobby for state and federal funds. Without those funds, the projection demonstrates a clear neglect of new programs as well as existing ones for our district and throughout the city.

We will continue to support DFTA in its advocacy for funding and the expansion of services. Specifically, CB11 advocates for more caseworkers, increased hours of homecare, and faster service for seniors transitioning from hospital care to home care. We also urge the agency to increase funding for the hiring of Spanish-speaking homecare providers, as a significant portion of the East Harlem senior community is comprised of immigrants and persons with first languages other than English.

Lastly, CB11 encourages DFTA to create partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) and provide incentives for the creation of programming to meet the needs of the high concentration populations of seniors in our district and city.

Tracking codes:

311202111E
311202118E
311202122E
311202128E
311202132E
311202133E

Department of Education

We applaud Chancellor Richard Carranza's efforts to continuously find ways to improve the quality of education in our schools. However, we continue to ask for you to please take special interest in improving the existing infrastructure of our school facilities and technology needs. In order for the students of CB11 to remain competitive with the whole of New York City, our students require equitable distribution of resources. We will work with your office and the Department of Education to elevate these priorities as the district grows. Ultimately, your office remains integral in uplifting these requests.

Development following the 2017 rezoning is expected to bring a significant population increase, which the current school district cannot absorb. Subsequently, more allocation of funding should be devoted for the increasing population of CD11. Funds for existing school resources -- including but not limited to physical location expansion opportunities, technology resource acquisition and teacher hiring -- should be planned for in the future to prevent reactive scenarios.

CB11 asks that DOE strongly consider expanding 3K and Pre-K for All, Head Start Programs and other childcare programs to cover after-school hours. The gap of services during the hours between the end of the school day and the end of the workday disproportionately affect working class families.

Tracking codes:

311202103C
311202112C
311202130E

Department of Youth and Community Development

We thank the Department of Youth and Community Development for increasing funding for School's Out NYC (SONYC) and the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). Unfortunately, there is a growing trend of youth violence in East Harlem, particularly related to the gangs and crews in public housing. Programming for high-risk youth and their families should be expanded throughout the district and should include late-night and weekend programming. Offerings should be diverse and reflect community input and should include options for the families of high-risk youth.

Tracking codes:

311202102E
311202108E

Department of Transportation

We thank the Department of Transportation for taking our requests into consideration. The lack of street lighting continues to be a safety issue for CD11. Therefore, we expect routine updates from the Agency regarding the status of lighting studies along 104th, 105th and 117th Streets between Park Avenue and Lexington Avenue. On streets where a thick tree canopy obscures the effectiveness of traditional streetlights, DOT should consider installing lights that hang below the level of the tree canopy.

We appreciate DOT's efforts towards increased pedestrian safety in our district, however addressing the vehicular traffic along 116th Street and 125th Street is especially paramount following the 2019 fatal collisions involving 3-year-old Bertin DeJesus at 116th Street and 25-year-old cyclist Matthew Travis at East 125th Street. We urge DOT to provide regular updates to the Community Board on the status of the traffic studies along these two corridors.

Tracking codes:

311202109C
311202106E

Metropolitan Transportation Authority

We continue to call upon the MTA to secure funding for the timely completion of Phase II of the Second Avenue Subway project. We further call upon the MTA to improve the bus lines along Madison and Fifth Avenue. We are anticipating the upcoming Manhattan Bus Redesign, and strongly encourage the MTA to seriously consider changing the origin of the M1 bus line to above the 59th Street Bridge in addition to increasing the frequency of service along these routes.

Additionally, we call upon the MTA to complete further upgrades to the subway stations and bus stops as other Community Districts of Manhattan have received. The Mayor's Office should find additional measures to engage the State with all MTA related requests.

Tracking codes:

311202105C
311202134E

Department of Health & Mental Hygiene

Manhattan Community Board 11 would like to thank the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene for the agency's efforts to address the increased rodent populations plaguing portions of East Harlem. Unfortunately, the issue persists despite the agency's efforts and presents a health hazard to residents of our community. We therefore call upon the DoHMH to expand enforcement and vector control for rats and other pests. It is imperative that funding be provided to expand the Rat Reservoir Program in East Harlem to reduce the rat population. The catchment area for the Rat Reservoir program should be expanded to include more areas in East Harlem, especially busy commercial corridors.

Additionally, the program should target new construction sites as construction activity often drives rat populations into the streets and surrounding buildings. Abatement should be increased on commercial corridors, in green spaces and near construction sites. Outreach about the Rat Academy should be increased to encourage superintendents, building staff, property managers, homeowners and businesses to participate, especially in the spring and summer.

Manhattan Community Board 11 would also like to thank the agency for its diligence in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STDs through its community-based programming. We support the continued funding of providing HIV and STD education for residents, including seniors, as East Harlem residents are more than three times as likely to die from HIV/AIDS as the average NYC resident. There is a growing problem with the disposal of needles in CD11 that is becoming a health hazard and affecting quality of life. We ask that the administration consider fully funding safe needle exchange and drop off site to address this growing concern in our community.

Tracking codes:

311202111C
311202103E
311202117E
311202121E

New York Public Library

We draw the attention of the Mayor's office and NYPL to the Aguilar Library and the 125th Street Library. Libraries remain a lifeline for the community by providing free access to books, online educational tools, periodicals, job searches, and more. With the temporary closure of the 125th Street Library for renovations, we are anticipating that the Aguilar Library will be placed under extreme demand. CB11 urges the Mayor's Office to provide additional resources to the Aguilar Library.

Funding for our libraries must remain sufficient for our remaining branch to provide full service hours, full trained staff and updated facilities. We will continue to request all elected officials to continue finding sufficient funds to ensure these essential institutions remain relevant and effective.

Beyond just the expense requests, keeping the physical locations in good working order is paramount. Although we applaud the partial request fulfillment for Aguilar Library with the installation of a new HVAC system, additional structural work is necessary to prevent the building envelope from falling into disrepair. This request includes replacing and upgrading windows that will prevent large amounts of humidity from seeping into the superstructure and general area and thus cause degradation to NYPL's and the City's resources. This preventative step will be more cost effective in the long term.

CB11 applauds and thanks the NYPL for restoring six-day opening hours and supports any future expansion of services and hours. Youth violence is a growing concern in East Harlem, and public libraries provide youth with alternative ways to occupy time and energy. We further support NYPL's call upon the City to allocate additional capital funding for technology improvements at the 125th Street and Aguilar Branch Libraries. We appreciate the willingness to support these efforts. We continue to request that these basic city resources allocated to equally dense communities are appropriated for CD11.

In most instances, NYPL agrees and supports our requests. We request that the Mayor's Office and the Budget requests be taken under serious consideration for full appropriations.

We continue to be in support of the renovation and expansion of the 125th Street Library. Due to stated need we ask the Mayor to provide additional funding to NYPL for:

Tracking codes:

311202116C - extended library hours and enhanced programs

311202117C - renovation and expansion of the Aguilar Library

311202120E - extended library hours and enhanced programs

Department of Small Business Services

CB11 thanks the agency for accommodating our request for funding for more workforce development programs (Tracking Code: 311202104E). We also appreciate the recommendations and thoughtful responses offered by the Department of Small Business Services.

Regrettably, the current Rezoning requires a more careful and considered approach to advisement and implementation of all requests going forward with subsequent fiscal years. We draw attention to the need of training programs for the constituency, redevelopment of the commercial/retail corridors and expansion of brand awareness with all promotion as a few markers to address.

Working in conjunction with the multi-pronged approach, the Mayor's Office needs to exercise due compassionate compliance with City regulations whilst enforcing proper implementation of new City laws. As a multilingual population resides and/or operates within CB11, it remains crucial that SBS should continue educating our small business operators. CB11 appreciates the compassion when enforcing our small business owners and adopting rules that facilitate continued operations.

On a final note, please be advised that Bill 1447C (now Local Law 196 of 2017) should work in conjunction with the district's needs and our Rezoning. CB11 requires knowledge of the amount allocated by The City for developing and funding a construction safety-training program for day laborers, local hires, and employees of M/WBEs and other small businesses. Expected development will cause concern for safety with all employees constructing our new buildings.

CB11 continues to be in support of workforce development programs, expanded resources for CB11M small business and directed support for the economic development of El Barrio/East Harlem.

Tracking codes:

311202104E - We continue to respectfully requests notification on planned location of East Harlem Workforce 1 location as soon as it is identified and involved its Economic Development committee as a local stakeholder to best meet the workforce needs of East Harlem residents.

311202107E - We respectfully request more funding to create space for workforce centers in local libraries and increase funding beyond the amount currently allocated to attract growth industries and STEM related businesses.

311202109E - Although this item is partially funded, we respectfully request an increase in resources to support the small businesses in East Harlem.

311202113E - SBS must commit to meeting this objective considering the ending of the Neighborhood 360 grant.

311202126E - We respectfully request funding set aside to study and report to the community for business impacted by construction related to the 2nd Avenue Subway.

Economic Development Corporation

EDC, in collaboration with SBS, needs to create and package incentives to attract growth industries to locate in East Harlem, with emphasis on attracting STEM related businesses to open additional career opportunities for local residents. We appreciate that EDC is pleased to receive this comment and hear of community support for life science initiatives. We are aware that the City recently announced the LifeSci initiative, which is expected to create nearly 16,000 new jobs in New York City in life sciences innovation and R&D. Read more at the following link. However, given the projected impact of Rezoning, this project should be launched as soon as possible. The CB is committed to working toward this goal.

Tracking codes:

311202126E - We respectfully request funding be set aside to study incentives for business location in East Harlem that can open the area up to new career opportunities for residents

Department of Cultural Affairs

There is an increased need for an arts/cultural service organization to enhance, educate and expand public interest in the arts and culture of East Harlem. DCLA and/or the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone needs to provide seed funding to create such an arts/cultural service organization. Once established as a representation of a cross-section of the East Harlem community, this organization should work to develop a comprehensive arts and cultural strategic master plan for the community in support of local youth and seniors.

Tracking codes:

311202125E - We respectfully request this need be met through funding from both DCLA and our local elected officials.

Department of Sanitation

We continue to focus several of our capital and expense budget priorities on the state of sanitation facilities located within Community District 11.

Currently, separate antiquated garages serving CD11 and CD10 are located within CD11. Our board objected to the proposal to establish a new temporary District 11 garage on East 127th Street and we maintain our objection to the inequity of having a garage that services another community district located within CD11. Our concerns are exacerbated by the fact that the current M11 and M10 garages are located in antiquated buildings that are unfit to house a sanitation garage; as a result, dozens of sanitation vehicles are parked on the street and under the Metro North viaduct.

As part of the East Harlem Rezoning Points of Agreement your administration has committed to determine a site location and to build a new consolidated garage to serve both CD11 and CD10. To date, no funding allocation has been made to bring this project to fruition. We implore you to prioritize this project beginning with the FY21 budget.

Tracking codes:

311202104C

311202113C

Department of Parks & Recreation

While Community Board 11 recognizes that the preliminary budget will almost always be substantially lower than the previous fiscal year because it does not include any “one-shot” funding, it would be detrimental to our Community District’s needs if the Department of Parks and Recreation appropriation is not increased in line with other agencies. A continually diminishing budget, especially regarding East Harlem’s grossly inadequate and inequitable access to green space, will continue to have a negative impact on the quality of life and health outcomes of our residents.

We thank the Department of Parks & Recreation, in addition to NYCEDC and NYCDOT, for investing millions of dollars into the renovation and reconstruction of multiple portions of the East River Esplanade. That said, we emphasize the immediate need to fund and reconstruct the portions of the East River Esplanade not currently slated for construction. According to inspections conducted by NYC Parks, many portions of the Esplanade are still in poor, serious, or critical condition creating immediate and imminent safety hazards to persons using the park, including a lack of signage for safe egress in and out of the park due to blocked off areas. In particular, the East 107th Street Pier is in complete disrepair and requires a full reconstruction and structural rehab. The current state of the pier presents not only an environmental and safety hazard, but also concerns about inequity. We encourage the agency to lobby federal agencies and elected officials to secure funds to fully reconstruct the pier, allowing for increased programming, access to the waterfront, and an overall improved quality of life for East Harlem residents (tracking code: 311202106C). In a time of increasing threats to Manhattan from extreme weather events and potential sea level rise, it is even more important that the East River Esplanade and the accompanying East 107th Street Pier be secured for resilience and for the immediate use of our community.

Comfort Stations remain a paramount request for CB11. Further, a comfort station at Thomas Jefferson Park is essential for those using the spot (tracking code: 311202107C). Currently, there is no guaranteed public access to a bathroom, while ongoing year-round high traffic use including: outside leagues, schools, families and children, afterschool programs, summer camps, dog owners, and other special events outside of normal community use. Funding for this Capital improvement will ensure not only continued enjoyment for the residents of the district but play a needed part in maintaining a sanitary environment.

Our long-standing budget priorities – East River Esplanade infrastructure, Pier 107 rehabilitation, and comfort stations in our heavily used parks – all remain to be critical needs as indicated in our previous Statements of District Needs, the East Harlem Neighborhood Plan and New York City resilience initiatives. We recommend a comprehensive plan for funding these priorities starting with this budget cycle. We are happy to advocate for these capital projects alongside your efforts, in addition to our stated budget priorities.

Tracking codes:

311202106C

311202107C

Community Boards

We request that you join the Council in supporting a baseline increase to the annual budget of community boards. A baseline increase would allow boards to hire additional professional staff and invest in necessary technology to better perform our duties as staff and board members. It would allow us to purchase and maintain a records database to more easily catalogue and retrieve project records and board resolutions while sustaining the institutional knowledge of board staff and members. Additional funds would also allow us the opportunity to provide regular professional training for our members to give them the tools to better navigate the municipal budget, service delivery and land use processes that are fundamental to the work of community boards.

PUBLIC HEARING

Community Board 11 held a Public Hearing on the Preliminary Budget on February 18, 2020 at 6:30 pm at the Silberman School of Social Work located at 2180 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10029.

No members of the public provided testimony or comment during this hearing.

CONCLUSION

CB11 appreciates the opportunity to comment on the FY 2021 Preliminary Budget. We recommend that your office and the city agencies review and respond to our additional comments for the most comprehensive absorption. Upon doing so, we look forward to seeing the Executive Budget and to continuing to partner with this administration to ensure that our requests will be incorporated as the budget makes its way through the process.

Sincerely,



Nilsa Orama
Chair
Community Board 11

cc: Hon. Diana Ayala, New York City Council
Hon. Bill Perkins, New York City Council
Hon. Ben Kallos, New York City Council
Hon. Keith Powers, New York City Council
Melanie Hartzog, New York City Office of Management & Budget
Jay L. Gottlieb, New York City Office of Management & Budget
Hon. Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President

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