

Brooklyn Community Board 7

Asian Affairs Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: June 3, 2021

Time: 6:00 PM

Topic: Small Business Reopening and Assistance

Asian Hate Crime Prevention and Victim Service

DOT Proposal on One-Way Converting for 7th Avenue and 8th Avenue

I. Small Business Reopening and Assistance

Current major issues of the local small businesses introduced by Paul Mak:

Due to the pandemic, the majority of the stores in the community were closed. Most are now reopened for business. Many tried to apply for government COVID relief grant (PPP) and Restaurant Revitalization Fund etc., but most stores failed to secure the relief grant/revitalization fund simply because the differences between pre-pandemic tax returns and the one of post-pandemic are rather small. Since the results are quite discouraging, many local small businesses decided not to go through the process. One of the topics of today's meeting is to share some suggestions, information or ideas to support the local small businesses in order for them to resume their normal business model.

Jeremy Laufer: In May 2021, Economic Development and Waterfront Committee had meeting with the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce in regard to assisting local businesses by providing free resources and assistance in multiple languages including various grants, low-interest loans and programs which are still available to support local businesses. Any local business, a member of the chambers or not, is welcome to use their services. Meeting recording with Spanish and Chinese translation can be accessed from CB7 YouTube channel. It is available to any local business that wants to learn more.

Cindy VandenBosch: As a small business owner, I took the services Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce offered. Brooklyn Chamber is doing a great work. Also, NYC & Company has been doing promotions about outer borough businesses targeting not just tourists but also all New Yorkers about marketing campaigns. If this is one of the avenues to help the local business to raise their awareness, I am happy to help to connect you with the related members that are focusing on the outer borough promotion. NYC & Company also has virtual program to promote different kinds of experiences in the outer boroughs. Moreover, LinkNYC for small businesses is also posting free or very low-cost advertising. Maybe the community board or social media people could help to put the foot traffic back by utilizing promotion/campaign.

Paul Mak: Educational workshops are currently being offered to the business community.

Kenny Guan: Stanley Wong who is the outreach liaison for the Asian community from Brooklyn Chamber is also providing information and in-person assistance for any relief grant/fund/program application.

Nick Azadian: Covid-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) provided by SBA which is completely separated from PPP or other relief fund would be another avenue for small businesses to cover attributable loss. The interest rates are very low and it is very favorable for businesses to try to re-stabilize. But the challenge for the EIDL is the program launched by SBA is not language friendly. Business owners who don't speak English might not be familiar with those legal terms in English. They might not realize that PPP may not work but this one might work for them.

Cindy VandenBosch: NYS Assembly passed a bill on 26th to establish a restaurant meals program as part of SNAP funded by government and run by non-profit to support restaurants and address the issue of food insecurity. It might be another avenue to generate income for some of the restaurants which are struggling right now.

Denny Chen: We should do more about laying out the entire government assistance program to those businesses that are qualified around on 7th and 8th Avenues. Hopefully, this information can be effectively delivered from the board to the community.

Cindy VandenBosch: There are some classes/courses/projects on hospitality being conducted by CUNY. Students from CUNY who are speaking languages other than English could help to visit the local business to conduct in-person conversation and learn their immediate needs. With the input, students can provide some solution or ideas to benefit their project as well as merchants. Contact information of the professor from CUNY hospitality program will be sent for further collaboration.

Paul Mak: I will talk to Jeremy, Cindy, Nick and Kenny to work with Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce to create a newsletter for the businesses along 7th and 8th Avenues.

II. Asian Hate Crimes in Sunset Park and Surrounding Areas

Current major concerns regarding Asian Hate Crime in Asian communities introduced by Paul Mak:

Since the pandemic, reports indicated that there has been 150% or even 1,500% increase of Asian hate crimes. There are two types of hate crime. One is physical violence, the other one is verbal harassment. Since June 2020, BCA has worked with local precincts and establishing police hotline for crime reporting. The complaint and harassment reports have been increasing. A lot of seniors and residents are afraid of stepping out of their house doing their normal routine because of the increasing hate crimes and harassments. BCA has been working and coordinating a couple of major meetings with NYPD headquarter, Asian Hate Crime Taskforce and local precincts (72, 68, 66, 62, and 61). Because of language barriers, most of the residents from the meetings shared that they have difficulties to report through 911 system and it is also hard for the NYPD to capture the information. One idea has been brought up and implemented was developing 6 self-defense classes for the community residents. Another idea is to secure some funding to purchase portable personal alarm device for

residents to scare away the attackers. The local precincts have been doing a wonderful job but a lot of residents living in the community are not reporting due to whatever reasons they might have. When Asian victims report criminal activities to the telephone hotline, they expressed frustration that many incidents are not being investigated under the hate crime. We are trying to create a simple phone app which people can just easily enter basic information and in turn, we will forward the reporting data to local precincts.

Victor Swinton: If detailed incidents with time and location frequently happened or being reported can be summarized and provided to local precincts, local precincts could use this data to increase the manpower patrolling at the specific time and location for crime prevention.

Nick Azadian: According to the observation from local business, there is more discrimination in terms of business dealing other than assaults happening. Being assaulted can be put into reporting while being discriminated against on a contract or business negotiation is more likely to go unnoticed.

Cindy VandenBosch: Mutual aid that they are mobilizing neighbors to help their neighbors can be a way to help look out each other. Encouraging more volunteers to join and networking mutual aid groups to help out the neighbors can be a temporarily planned solution.

Paul Mak: BCA is working with some local businesses from 7th and 8th Avenues to create a safe haven at the stores by offering protection to the residents when they are being followed and/or harassed.

Kenny Guan: Mutual aid is a good idea. Now there are a couple of groups formed and carrying out in Manhattan Chinatown. I will reach out to those groups to see if they have any community volunteers from Sunset Park and Borough Park.

Pat Ruiz: DA office once had their safe haven program but not sure if they still exist. DA Eric Gonzalez is suggested to be contacted for further information or help.

Denny Chen: Talking with civilian patrol to see the current situation around 8th Avenue area and discuss how they could help out more is suggested.

Wai Ko: Because of the Asian hate crime, businesses are shortening their business hours which cause inconvenience to residents. 72nd and 66th precincts should arrange more patrol cars to keep the community safe so that the businesses could resume their regular business hours. Auxiliary police officers who speak English and Chinese can consider joining the community patrol to help out. With bilingual skills, they can be the bridge between the police station and the community. Since some patrol cars we see on the street are belonging to organization that is not under government control, the efficiency is not as high as NYPD. It doesn't help much for the current situation.

Cindy VandenBosch: Street Vendor project does have a fund to distribute to support shut-down businesses. More information will be shared later after the meeting.

III. DOT Proposal on One-way Converting

Traffic problems and DOT proposal briefed by Paul Mak:

Due to a big increase on traffic and customers on 7th and 8th Avenues with double parking of loading trucks, we are hoping to find a solution to resolve the traffic problems. In February, DOT planned to form a community advisory board to discuss their new proposal. During initiate meeting, DOT suggested converting 7th and 8th Avenues into one-way traffic to solve the problem. Last week, DOT presented the proposal to the community advisory board in the meeting. Video of the presentation will be sent later to share more details. Basically, they are going to convert 39th street to 67th street to a one-way street for both 7th and 8th Avenues. Also, protected bike lane and buffer will be installed along with assigned parking space. On 8th Avenue between 51st street and 60th street, one side of the meter parking space will be eliminated. The space will be painted and used as additional sidewalk for pedestrians. Approximately 200 meter parking space will be eliminated. More meter parking will be added on the side streets while free parking space will be gone for residents. On 8th Avenue between 60th street to 65th Street, there will be two traffic lanes due to the heavy traffic. Starting from 60th street to 39th street, the two-lane traffic must be merged into one-lane traffic, which definitely creates bottlenecking issue. Accordingly, DOT should visit the community board with the proposal and present to the community board and get feedback from the community. However, in this particular situation, DOT indicated that they have met with the community advisory board; they no longer need to talk to CB7, CB10 and CB12 for the proposal.

Jeremy Laufer: The community advisory panel including lobbyists seems be less advisory and more trying to get a result they hope to get. Although the merits should be judged by transportation committee, the process seems to be cut off the community boards.

Kenny Guan: DOT tried to skip the community board for the proposal. The community board should step up and be involved aggressively.

Nick Azadian: Reaching out to Assembly members, state senators and along with council members to make residents' voice heard is strongly suggested.

A motion was made by Pat Ruiz to ask DOT to delay the project until they could communicate and work with three community boards; it was seconded by Nick Azadian. The motion passed unanimously.

Denny Chen: The proposed project will affect a lot on the local business. The majority of these customers who drive to 8th Avenue are from other neighborhoods. If the proposed design would create worse traffic, the customers will turn around and go somewhere else; which leads to losing a lot of local business. We have been trying so hard to build up the community. The proposed project will destroy what we have been developing.

John Johnson: One-way converting in Bay Ridge and Dyker Height created a big issue. But we could defeat the proposal with community support.