

Brooklyn Community Board 7 Meeting Minutes (DRAFT)

April 21, 2021

Meeting hosted over Zoom

6:00PM-8:35pm

Minutes submitted by Secretary Cindy VandenBosch

- I. **Opening of the meeting** - 1st Vice Chairperson Julio Peña opened the meeting.
- II. **Adoption of the agenda for the meeting** - Peña made two amendments to the agenda: 1) by-laws update before the membership & attendance committee; 2) include a vote for the homelessness issues committee. Pat Ruiz motioned to accept the agenda with the two amendments and Cindy VandenBosch seconded. There were no objections and the agenda was adopted.
- III. **Adoption of the minutes of the Board Meeting of March 17, 2021** - Motion to accept from Joan Botti and a second by Pat Ruiz.
- IV. **Public Comment** - There were no members of the public who spoke at public comment.
- V. **Committee Reports**
 - A. Joint Committee Meeting with Public Safety, Homelessness Issues, Health and Mental Health (vote required)
 1. Announcement - Homelessness Issues Committee Chairperson Karen Rolnick reported that the second WIN family shelter is now open on 4th Avenue. We will be sending our welcome booklets once we have them printed, hopefully in a few days.
 2. Committee chair Rolnick presented and read into the record the attached document that she drafted after the April 6, 2021 joint committee meeting to summarize and reflect the consensus of concerns, issues, questions, and requests that were shared by community and board members with the intention to send seven letters to relevant government agencies and officials in efforts to elicit responses, information, and action. This document was not voted on in committee and was drafted after the meeting to reflect what was discussed and generally supported at the meeting by board members in attendance. Rolnick made a MOTION to introduce a resolution to send letters as outlined in the document, which she read into the record, and Pat Ruiz seconded.
 - a) DISCUSSION:
 - (1) Police enforcement
 - (a) Justin Collins expressed concern about language related to increased police enforcement considering the issue of police overenforcement.
 - (b) Rolnick clarified that there was no comment in support at the meeting for using social services in

lieu of security detail of hotels and police for petty issues. The board has also received many calls and emails asking for increased enforcement. She clarified that this proposal reflects the sentiments of those requests and the meeting and calls for increased patrolling by hotel security guards and that police summonses should be issued for "quality of life" offenses, and that community service should be recommended for those who are unable to pay fines. Regardless of her personal position, she indicated that these requests reflect a consensus of the community and community board members who spoke at the meeting.

(2) Panhandling

- (a) Rovika Rajkishun asked about why panhandling was included.
- (b) Rolnick explained that "panhandling" is among the many complaints that the board has received, and that it is provided as an example of a "quality of life" issue to clarify when a summons should be warranted versus criminal offenses. The precinct stated at one of the meetings that they were not issuing summonses because the people can't pay them. A board member then recommended community service if they can't pay the fines.
- (c) Rajkishun asked why panhandling is highlighted since it is not against the law and Rolnick noted that she could remove that language and replace it with public urination if this is the case.
- (d) David Estrada clarified that panhandling is not against the law, but that aggression and intimidation create a grey area of perception for people who are on the receiving end versus the person conducting the panhandling. Based on repeated anecdotes from shopkeepers and businesses conducting open restaurants on the street, they are repeatedly lodging serious complaints with the NYPD about individuals who are persistently aggressive and won't stop physically intimidating customers who are seated in public space. There is a line that gets crossed. He admitted that this is a matter of subjectivity and discretion, which may not warrant calling in the NYPD immediately, but that it is a breaking of the

social construct in a way that's not acceptable on the streets.

(e) Rolnick will amend the language to read, "such as harassment and drinking in public." Estrada responded that this would be inclusive of passersby who he has seen get heckled and grabbed by people at 41st Street and 5th Avenue since the weather has improved.

(3) Julixa Campisano asked whether there is a mandate that residents leave the shelter and also whether we know if residents have jobs.

(a) Rolnick said that it is her understanding that most of the residents are working and noted that there is no longer a mandate that they leave the shelters and that the shelters are available to them 24/7. There is a curfew for them to be back in the shelter by a certain time in the evening.

(4) Nicholas Azadian shared that while he and many of the board members do not live in close proximity to the shelters, he encouraged board members to put themselves in the shoes of many of the residents who do live nearby when taking this into consideration. While being sensitive about what should be done in terms of which city services respond to such calls, also considering people who live there, they also don't want to be continuously harassed. He appealed to the board to keep those people in mind regardless of our personal opinions on which services should be used.

b) AMENDMENTS:

(1) Cindy VandenBosch PROPOSED including contextual language at the beginning of the letters that provides a brief summary of the work of the Ad Hoc Homelessness Issues Committee. VandenBosch summarized language could read that the board understands the crisis facing the city in terms of homelessness and has sought to understand and address issues facing people who are homeless who reside in hotels and shelters in the district and to provide support wherever possible, but that Sunset Park is under-resourced and disproportionately affected by this issue, and the impact is resulting in a range of issues that are affecting local residents. Rolnick ACCEPTED this amendment.

(2) Cynthia Gonzalez PROPOSED "aggressive intimidation" in lieu of panhandling in the letters. She noted that there is a

detrimental impact on the people who are intimidated or have been threatened by these people, whose properties have been urinated and defecated on. These quality of life issues are a public nuisance that need to be put under control. If the police don't offer summonses, what's the deterrent? One person threatened to kill a family, that person was taken out of the shelter and returned three days later. It doesn't seem right to the people who are trying to protect their properties and maintain a good quality of life for themselves and their families. They're afraid to go out of their homes. This is concerning. The work of the committee and recommendations put together by Karen Rolnick and others who were there thought this was important to send a message that we sympathize and empathize with the homeless, but they can't ruin people's quality of life. Karen Rolnick ACCEPTED the proposed amendment and will remove panhandling and include language that reads, "such as aggressive intimidation and public urination in compliance with existing laws."

- (3) Cindy VandenBosch PROPOSED including social service response in addition to requesting the summonses. She asked whether we could express to the Borough President that we would like to see more of a response effort from social workers. Karen ACCEPTED this amendment for letter #6 and will add: "We would like to explore broader use of caseworkers and social workers to the area to address the problem."
- c) VOTE to support this motion with amendments - A roll call vote was conducted and the motion passed with 29 "yes" votes and 6 "no" votes.
- d) QUESTION: Antoinette Martinez asked whether Councilmember Menchaca's office was contacted to host a town hall with the community to discuss these issues?
 - (1) Rolnick indicated he was invited several times to both committee meetings and he did not attend.
 - (2) Barbara Lee also responded that the board has tried for four years to engage the councilmember and the assembly person on related issues. If they choose not to come to meetings, that's not the committee's fault. Rolnick has worked very hard to get people to come to these meetings, and well before COVID, and they haven't shown up. Lee feels it's not fair to infer that the committee hasn't been doing its job because it has. They've tried to look out for concerns of homeless residents and our neighbors.

- B. Public safety - No vote required. Committee members were referred to the written report.
- C. Asian Affairs Committee - No vote required. Committee members were referred to the written report.
- D. By-laws committee - No vote required
 - 1. Required reading of the minutes
 - a) There was a by-laws committee meeting in early April. The committee met to review the by-laws and discuss changes, which were reviewed by legal counsel at the Borough President's office and the NYC Law Department. There were minor changes after the committee meeting but they will be included in the reading of the Executive Summary of proposed changes.
 - b) Peña shared that the procedure is to read the proposed changes at this board meeting, the May board meeting, and they will be voted on at the June board meeting, as stated in our current by-laws.
 - c) Peña read the Executive Summary of proposed changes that were sent out to the board (see attached).
- E. Membership and attendance - No vote required
 - 1. Pat Ruiz reported that community board member Gloria Rodriguez Novoa was invited to discuss her attendance on Wed April 14, 2021 with the committee via Zoom. She informed them of the reasons why she missed some of the meetings. The committee felt her reasons were valid and saw no reason to take further action. There will be no vote.
 - 2. Jose Aleman - Term ended on March 31st. There's now a vacancy on the community board.

VI. Elected Officials & Representatives

- A. Assemblymember Robert Carroll
 - 1. Contact Carroll's office if you need help getting a vaccine
 - 2. The state assembly passed the state budget, which included fully funded Foundation Aid to help support public schools and \$2.4 towards rental and homeowner assistance. \$800M in direct small business relief. Environmental bond act was passed to build green infrastructure.
- B. Assemblymember Marcela Mityanes
 - 1. Provided a summary of various items that were passed in the state budget, including rental assistance for renters and landlords, allocations for converting hotels and vacant properties into affordable housing, mortgage assistance and assistance for foreclosure, small business support, aid to Department of Education for support staff, to restore programs, and for mental health support. Increased allocations for SUNY and CUNY were included, a 10% boost for tuition assistance, and tuition will be frozen at these universities for 3 years.

2. Excluded Workers Fund - For workers who have lost income and have not been able to collect unemployment. This program will be administered by the Department of Labor and will take a couple of months to finalize before applications open. Community organizations will help raise awareness about the process once eligibility criteria and the application process is finalized.
 - a) Nourish New York - Will allow for emergency food providers to continue to purchase surplus food from farmers to feed New Yorkers.
 - b) Legalization of marijuana, including medical marijuana as well.
3. Questions and comments:
 - a) Cindy VandenBosch mentioned that she is aware of people who have been approached by scams who claim to promise access to the Excluded Workers Fund in exchange for payment. She asked Marcela to clarify the timeline and the fact that no one should have to pay anything to anyone to apply for the Excluded Workers Fund.
 - (1) Assemblymember Mityanes confirmed that the fund is not distributing funds yet and that it will take a few months to get set up because they are still finalizing eligibility requirements and it will be administered by the Department of Labor and conducted under the Attorney General's office and the Comptroller's oversight.
 - (2) No one should be paying for any of these services and Assemblymember Mityanes will be hosting town halls in multiple languages to raise awareness and build partnerships with community organizations to assist with the roll-out.
 - b) Rovika Rajkishan - Thanked Assemblymember Mityanes for elevating the voices of our most vulnerable citizens in our district. There will be a lot of nonprofits, including the NY Immigration Coalition, to help with the application process once the Excluded Workers Fund starts.
- C. Jimmy Li hopes there will be language access for people who live in the district but speak other languages besides English so that they know how to apply to all of these assistance programs. Assemblymember Mityanes confirmed that her office is working on materials in multiple languages and that she'd be in touch.
- D. Sherman Jackson, Borough President's Office - Asked the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee on Homelessness Issues to get in touch with Sherman Jackson directly through the District Manager regarding the number of hotel-based shelters and number of residents within a certain radius to bring to the attention of the Borough President. Jackson also shared that he was not sure what role social workers would be able to play in issues such as aggressive panhandling and other activities described while people are away from the shelters where

they're assigned. Social workers would have to come through DHS or DOHMH. Will assist the members of the board. Jackson will arrange for the Chief of Staff to meet with members of this committee.

- E. Eli Slavin, Congressperson Yvette Clarke's office - Reported they are busy with immigration, passport issues, veterans' issues, and postal issues and that their office is open but by appointment only. Phone number: 718-287-1142. Located at 222 Lenox Road. Took notes from the meeting. Next week, Rep. Clarke will meet with Capt. Castro with the 72nd Precinct and we'll discuss these concerns then. If there's anything we can do on a federal level to address these issues, send him an email eli.slavin@mail.house.gov.
- F. Melissa del Valle Ortiz reported on behalf of Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez's office.
 - 1. New press releases have been submitted to the board for sharing and asked that the report be included in the minutes.
 - 2. An Anti-Asian Hate Forum will be held by the Congresswoman at 3pm via Zoom will be held on Friday, April 22nd, 2021.
 - 3. If anyone is receiving any federally subsidized funding for their rent, the rent relief program may not apply for them since they can apply for a rent reduction based on their income.
 - 4. Rep. Velazquez has funding available for nonprofits in the area. Information is on the website and in the attachment that was sent.
- G. Ken Lazar, Department of Buildings:
 - 1. Local Law 52, the Periodic Inspection of Gas piping deadline has been extended. Residents of CB7 have until 12/31 to hire a licensed plumber to have the gas piping inspected and filed by 12/31/21. More info is on the DOB website. 1 and 2 family houses are exempt. Letters were sent by the commissioner to all residences.
 - a) Question - Jimmy Li said that some community districts have until 12/31/2023. Does it depend on your community district? Lazar noted that the 2023 deadline applies to CB 11, 12, 14, 15, & 17
 - 2. DOB is having a digital sustainability conference between 5/3-5/7 and will cover building maintenance and building sustainability. Continuing ed credits will be available. Check the DOB website to register for the classes.
- H. Ed Cerna, Brooklyn Borough Director from the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs:
 - 1. Mayor announced on April 21, 2021 a path towards launching a program for geothermal utility service in the city and will be pursuing legislation through the City Council to give NYC the authority from the City Council to create larger geothermal systems.
 - 2. Based on recommendations from the Department of Investigations, the Mayor's office made reforms to protect protesters and legal observers, including designating representatives from NYPD's Community Affairs as key liaisons to on-the-ground protests, ensuring better collaboration and

coordination with protest organizers, clergy, and community members before and during protests so that we avoid confrontations as much as possible. They will also be improving access to legal observers and staging specialized units away from protestors to reduce potential for escalation, and 10,000 officers have been retrained on these new changes. Contact info: ecerna@cityhall.nyc.gov.

3. Question - Zachary Jasie asked what the mayor is doing about engaging the UFT to figure out how to open schools in the fall. Currently, the UFT is sitting down at SLT meetings, including at PS 10 and Murrow High School recently, where the UFT representative said that schools will not be in session five days per week in the fall. Cerna will take this back to DOE and share more information with CB7.

VII. District Manager's report

- A. Return to Work Day is May 3rd for city employees - This name does not accurately reflect that our office has been staffed since June 29th. City office workers are due back in their offices May 3rd. We will be back and figure out how we can make that a multi-person office safely with custodial and other workers as the needs dictate.
- B. We are not obligated to tell anyone whether we have been vaccinated. I have been vaccinated and am expecting my second shot coming up on Tuesday. I want to encourage everyone who has not been vaccinated to do so as long as you are over 16 and are eligible. Assemblymember Carroll's office or the Community Board would be happy to help you get a vaccine.
- C. Yesterday, I learned from DOT that the section of the Fourth Avenue Bike Lane between 56th - 60th Streets is scheduled to be completed this spring.
- D. Next phase of 4th Ave projects, which include medians, will be done by DOT and that will include plantings and they are looking to possibly start that in September, and we're looking to schedule a meeting prior to that so we are aware of what's going on. With regard to the pedestrian island cement work, they don't expect that cement work to be done until fiscal year 2025.
- E. There has been more NYPD enforcement on 3rd and 4th Ave over the past two weeks. That is part of Vision Zero enforcement. Laufer met with the Deputy Inspector in charge of that. Discussed issues with speeding, light violations and specific intersections (especially 60th and 3rd), pedestrian and bike safety with an emphasis on injuries and deaths on 3rd Ave, parking enforcement under Gowanus expressway, and illegally parked auto-shop vehicles and RVs.
- F. Last month, Laufer spoke about unification for underground resilience, a subsurface view of infrastructure by NYU researchers with a grant from the National Science Foundation. Sunset Park is in the demonstration area which is 59th-65th Street from 5th Ave to the waterfront. Board member Nicholas Azadian connected with them to discuss this demonstration project.
- G. Met with Stephanie Isles from DOITT about CB7's new website. City has a new template which is easier for staff to learn and use through Wordpress. The board

office staff are eager to get the new website started.. Thanks to Julio Peña III for giving us a training on Google Docs on a process that will enable information to be posted in a timely and up-to-date fashion. Members of the public will be able to access the website directly without having any kind of account.

- H. Liquor licenses - Renewals and applications received since last month was 16
- I. NYPD stats will be emailed to all

VIII. Chairperson's report

- A. Peña provided a reminder that the vaccine is now available to New Yorkers 16 year olds and older. Appointments are available 1-877-Vax-4NYC or visit nyc.gov/vaccinelocations.

IX. Old Business

- A. Gloria Rodriguez Novoa provided a reminder that people who are 50 and over don't have to do the line. Also, if you take someone who is over 50, you can also get vaccinated without having to do the line.
- B. Gloria Rodriguez Novoa requested that attendance for the meeting be amended to include her. Peña approved and the attendance list was amended to include Gloria Rodriguez Novoa.
- C. Cindy VandenBosch motioned to propose two amendments to prior meeting minutes that were approved that contained typos. The January 20th and February 17th meeting minutes in their current form state that we approved the meeting minutes from November 18th in both months. While we approved minutes from the previous months, each set of meeting minutes should state that we approved the minutes for the month prior (December minutes for the January meeting and the January minutes for the February meeting).
- D. Cindy VandenBosch highlighted the need for making trainings on parliamentary procedure available to all board members, and preferably in a recorded format so that board members can go back and reference them as needed. Laufer will make a request for links to the recordings for the parliamentary procedure trainings.

X. New Business

- A. Sunset Park Open Streets 2021 - David Estrada announced that the BID is intending to have the Open Streets program renewed this year. They intend to begin street closures on Saturdays from 4-11pm on May 1st or 8th through October 30th at 39th-42nd Streets, 46th-47th Streets, and 55th-59th Streets. The B63 is rerouted to Fourth Avenue during this time. Contact David at 646-305-5224 or david@sunsetparkbid.org if you would like to speak with him. This is not a city-funded program. There is a GoFundMe to support this program. People who want to donate or volunteer can help.
- B. Prospect Park - Cindy VandenBosch shared that dozens of garbage cans were overturned all over Prospect Park within the last 24 hours. Garbage was all over the park and park staff and volunteers have mobilized to clean it up.

VandenBosch encouraged everyone to help care for the parks, whether volunteering or picking up garbage when you see it in any of the parks in the district.

- C. Sunset Park - There's a part of the park that was being used as an ad hoc dog run. Now it's been locked. It's a portion of the park that's along 41st between 5th and 6th Avenues. It's not a dog run but it's not supposed to be locked off from all users. There's a ticket blitz with park police. Supervisor of the park won't speak to anyone about it. Zachary Jasie wants the board to reach out to the Parks Department to schedule a meeting to address this issue. There are a lot of people who take dogs to the park.
- D. Boricua Festival - Speaking as the President of the Boricua Festival Committee, Pat Ruiz reported that the festival will not happen this year. It's an all-volunteer event and they're concerned about having the capacity and funds to maintain healthy and safety measures.

XI. Public Comment

- A. John Santore spoke on both the North and South Campuses of the city-owned portion of the Bush Terminal site, as well as the housing development at 737 Fourth Avenue:
 - 1. Urged CB7 to call on NYCEDC to halt the Made in NY North Campus, the portion of the project that is theoretically going to be dedicated to garment manufacturing. It is an expensive project at \$218M. The design has not incorporated public feedback and it hasn't been discussed or explained to the public. This community board consistently demands and asks for engagement. When you have a project of this size on public land costing hundreds of millions of dollars in public money, this board and community should help craft the RFP for that. Santore expressed that the board should indicate that the project shouldn't move forward without significant public involvement. The community board should put pressure on public officials and engage with the Mayor on that. This is an issue Santore will bring to the Economic Development and Waterfront Committee.
 - 2. Expressed that the Steiner Studios \$335M film studio project on the south part of the campus should get more vetting and attention, and that the board and Waterfront and Economic Development Committee should have more information about what's happening there. Santore has reviewed what the board was and was not told about the project. The most salient issue, in his opinion, was that a presentation that was given to this board back in November of 2020 by the NYCEDC included data on NY TV & Film industry that was produced by Steiner Studios. Steiner got the data from a report that was not public and that report was not made public. How did EDC vet those numbers? This is one of many questions the board should have answers to as this hugely expensive project moves forward.

3. Speaking to the 737 Fourth Avenue rezoning, it was the first MIH project in the district. One of the big numbers that came out of this project was a \$100M project to build 135 units of housing, which seems overly expensive to Santore, and that the community can do better.
- B. Carline Hiteshew works with Grow NYC and oversees a lot of the green markets in the district. One is at Bartel Pritchard Square and it's opening on Sundays starting on May 2nd. The other two markets are both in Sunset Park, one operates year-round at 7th Avenue and 44th Street and the final one is on 4th Avenue between 59th and 60th opening later in the season on July 10th. All Grown NYC markets take cash, SNAP, EBT. Customers using EBT are also eligible for health bucks, which doubles the value up to \$10 per visit. If you have anybody that you'd like to give a flyer to, go to the website GrowNYC.org.
 - C. María Roca raised several concerns: 1) the 41st Street and 5th Avenue entrance steps to Sunset Park which is now populated by inebriated people engaging in sexual harassment of women and aggressive panhandling of elders. Friends of Sunset Park would like to see a public response by the appropriate committees of the community board; 2) 41st and 5th, proliferation of street vendors in front of brick and mortar family restaurants selling the same food as those restaurants. Something needs to be done about that for obvious reasons. Not good economic policy. Who knows where that food is being cooked? She feels that the vendors are a public health hazard; 3) Since spring weather arrived, there has been an astronomical growth in battery-powered skateboards, throttle, unicycles, gas-powered motorcycles and pedal bikes on our sidewalks. They're aggressive. They come on steps and ride on the sidewalk. It's totally menacing, but it's not safe to families and children in strollers. The NYPD says there's nothing they can do about it. Thank you Carolyn Hitshaw for Farmers' Markets. Ditto on John's Santore's comments on 737 Fourth Avenue, Totem LLC building which is not over until it's over. That building is unacceptable.
 - D. Grisel Amador - United Senior Center continues working from the senior center and from home making wellness check calls to seniors and providing services to apply for loans if they need it.
 - E. Katherine Walsh - 1) This is the period for public comment when community members are allowed to speak. Julio Peña III is chairing and Jeremy Laufer is keeping time and Walsh would like to see procedure upheld rather than community board members jumping in to cut off other people. Whether we disagree with opinions or not, it's important we model proper procedure and take care of one another. 2) The Last Mile Trucking committee will take place on May 6th.
 - F. Melissa Del Valle Ortiz - Sylvia Agosto is maintaining most of the gardens that aren't being developed by the landscaper in Sunset Park and she is requesting volunteers to help over the weekends or during the week to help with planting and weeding. There are six gardens throughout the park. Ortiz will forward her email to the community board for those who are interested.

XII. Motion to adjourn. Pat Ruiz motioned to adjourn. Barbara Lee seconded. There were no objections and the motion carried.