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August 1, 2012

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Statement of Community District Needs for Fiscal Year 2014

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Introduction:

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Youth
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For Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, Bronx Community Board No. 8 (BXCB8) continues to work to revisit long-standing budget requests and pare our list to the most essential services the community requires to remain a viable haven for our burgeoning neighborhoods of young families and elderly retired persons. In addition, we continue to make efforts to improve the budgetary process at BXCB8 and to attempt to partner with City agencies when formulating our budget requests. We encourage your feedback and direction so that the budget process is as efficient and productive as possible and will result in an increase in the number of positive responses to our requests.

Before we discuss BXCB8's FY 2014 budget priorities, we will provide you with some background information about BXCB8 to assist you in understanding our community and budget requests.

Boundaries:

Our district is located in the extreme northwest portion of New York City, bounded by the Hudson River on the west, Westchester County on the north and extending to Van Cortlandt Park and the Jerome Park reservoir on the east; to the south we are bordered by the Harlem River, West 225th Street and Kingsbridge Road. BXCB8 covers an area of 3.4 square miles encompassing the neighborhoods of: Fieldston, Kingsbridge, Kingsbridge Heights, Marble Hill, Riverdale, Spuyten Duyvil, and Van Cortlandt Village. In the case of the Marble Hill area, these statistics are not included in our city planning profile but this community is considered a part of BXCB8 and receives municipal services from the Bronx.

Our community also has 1,386 acres of parkland—fully 63% of the land in our area. There are 68 park sites, including smaller greenstreets as well as city gems such as Wave Hill and the 1,146 acre Van Cortlandt Park. To put this in perspective, we have 20% of the parkland in the Bronx. For that reason, historically, many of our capital requests have been for improvements to parks, natural resource for all the residents of New York City.

While most of our expense requests have been for the maintenance of our parks, we have had mixed results in getting them acted upon. We will redouble our efforts and look forward to improving that statistic in FY 2014.

*Serving the neighborhoods of Fieldston, Kingsbridge, Kingsbridge Heights,
Marble Hill, Riverdale, Spuyten Duyvil, and Van Cortlandt Village*

District Profile:

The following statistics provide a profile of Bronx Community Board No. 8, according to the Department of City Planning, based upon the statistics from 2010 census and estimates of population data from the American Community Survey (PUMA 03701):

Where most Bronx neighborhoods have decreased in population, BXCB8 has increased. In 2000 there were 101,332 and the current 2010 census indicates 103,000 persons (total population) living within our boundaries.

- 46% Male
- 54% Female
- 42% Hispanic origin
- 12% Black/African American
- 5% Asian
- 5% Veterans
- 26% Under 19 years old
- 21% Over 60 years old
- 39% Of families live below poverty level
- 32% Foreign born
- 60% Of the foreign born are from Latin America
- 62% Employed

According to the 2000 census, of the 27 census tracts that make up BXCB8, 6 tracts have 30% or more persons living below the poverty level.

As mentioned above, BXCB8 has two New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) locations: Marble Hill and Ft. Independence Houses. Marble Hill Houses accounts for a population of approximately 3,500. The Ft. Independence Houses account for a population of approximately 775. According to NYCHA information, as of January 2010, the average family income in conventional public housing is \$23,187; 49.5% of NYCHA's households are below the poverty line; 11.9% of NYCHA families receive public assistance; working families account for 47.4% of NYCHA families; social security, SSI, a pension, Veteran's benefits, etc., support 41.9% of NYCHA families; 35.4% of the households are headed by persons over 62 years-of-age; and 36.8% of the NYCHA population are minors under 21 and 29.7% are minors under 18.

Community Health Profile:

In addition, the NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene 2003 and 2006, Community Health Profiles for Kingsbridge and Riverdale (covering a population of 88,989, the majority of BXCB8 district) reports that:

- People in Riverdale and Kingsbridge are older than in the Bronx and New York City overall.
- The death rate increased 10% between 1997 and 2002
- In this neighborhood, the biggest health issues that impact the premature death rate are: cancer at 27% and heart disease at 17% (an increase of 6% in 3 years).
- The heart disease death rate is higher in Riverdale/ Kingsbridge than in the Bronx and NYC overall.

- The three (3) leading causes of death are: cancer at 28% and heart disease and stroke at 23% (an increase of 6% in 3 years) as well as pneumonia and influenza. These issues are higher in Riverdale/Kingsbridge than in the Bronx and NYC overall.
- Kingsbridge and Riverdale residents are less likely to be tested for HIV than others in the Bronx and 41% of positive HIV test results are “late” diagnoses.
- More than 1 in 10 adults in Kingsbridge and Riverdale engage in binge drinking monthly.
- More than 1 in 5 adults smoke in Riverdale & Kingsbridge, higher than in the Bronx and NYC
- The hospitalization rate for mental illness is higher in Kingsbridge and Riverdale than in NYC overall.

There is one mental health facility, Riverdale Mental Health Association that offers behavioral healthcare to individuals living in the Northwest Bronx. However, Bronx CB8 does not have a hospital or an in-patient facility within its boundaries.

FY 2014 Budget Requests

Our budget priorities reflect the diverse socio-economic mix of families, seniors and single-family households, and our common desire to maintain a vibrant community in the Northwest Bronx where people can live, raise families and enjoy retirement. As the city’s population continues to increase, this diversity has made BXCB8 a natural destination point for families and seniors relocating from Manhattan. This is very good for our community and for the Bronx, as a whole, but it also increases the demands placed on available resources and city services and shapes our capital and expense budget priorities.

Our first and highest priority is that the budget of BXCB8 office be increased from \$206,895 to \$350,000 in FY 2014. BXCB8’s basic budget has not been increased for over 20 years. With a continued increase in population and in costs over the years, this lack of increase has already required BXCB8 to struggle to do more with less. It is imperative that the BXCB8’s budget be funded at the \$350,000 level. Any lesser amount will have an impact on BXCB8 in performing the vital services to the citizens to whom they serve and to comply properly with the City Charter and New York City administrative code mandated responsibilities. Furthermore, funding at a lesser amount will only prevent the needs of our district from being heard and realized.

Aging

Our population of seniors, at 21% is the second highest in the Bronx so that services and programs to maintain and improve the quality of life of our seniors are vitally important to BXCB8. To better care for this population demographic, we seek FY2014 funding for the following items:

- Maintenance of senior centers and programs in accessible locations (including Ft. Independence Senior Center) providing services including: nutritional and educational programs, communal dining, health/educational and social services, case management for information and referral, geriatric mental health and recreational programs for all senior centers in Bronx Community Board 8.
- Maintenance of elder transportation programs.
- Maintenance of Social Adult Daycare programs.

- Support of Telehealth programs – the remote monitoring of health issues and homecare services to support “seniors aging in place.”
- Provide meal service at Ft. Independence Senior Center located at the NYCHA Ft. Independence Houses.
- Support organizations providing support and training for caregivers.
- Provide case coordination to allow seniors/caregivers to identify and receive all available services to maintain independent living, including home health services, health literacy i.e. pharmaceutical education.

Health, Hospitals & Social Services

Mental health and family services make a positive difference in the lives of BXCB8 residents especially for seniors. With 21% of the BXCB8’s population over 60 years of age and growing, we request funding from the Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) for the Riverdale Mental Health Association (RMHA) Geriatric Program. This RMHA program addresses the unique mental health issues in Bronx Community Board 8’s growing geriatric community.

Due to the lack of a hospital facility within the BXCB8 borders and the aforementioned DOHMH statistics, our constituency is inadequately covered in the event of health emergencies. Compounding this problem is the closing of the current re-stocking station located at the NYPD 50th Precinct which has provided two Basic Life Support (BLS) ambulances. Therefore, BXCB8 requests capital funding for the establishment of a new FDNY/EMS restocking station and decontamination station.

The Bronx has been identified with the highest obesity rates in the city. Board 8 supports the creation and funding of a Bronx specific obesity prevention program outreaching to families, youth and seniors that focuses on health, nutrition and wellness. The program could be administered through public schools, and city funded community and senior centers.

Youth

The youth of BXCB8 are a vital part of our community and of course are our future. The youth under 19 years old make up 26% of the population in the community board and we urge that funding be provided to make services available to the youth of our community to prepare them to make the right decisions in difficult situations and enable them to gain the skills to become productive members of our society. To that end, we request the Department of Youth and Community Development allocate \$500,000 through OST (Out of School Time) and/or Teen Action for programs specifically within the CB8 district at Kingsbridge Heights Community Center, Riverdale Neighborhood House, Mosholu Montefiore Community Center – program located at Van Cortlandt Heights/Amalgamated Houses and Riverdale Community Center.

Education

In 2008, 26% of our residents were school-aged children. Many more children are bussed in or commute from other neighborhoods. Consequently, our schools suffer from chronic overcrowding. We would like to continue exploring site acquisition opportunities for annexes to our existing educational facilities to better deal with overcrowding issues.

Our children deserve the same learning environment as the rest of New York State, and we need to speed the process of improving these learning environments in order to keep working families in our community rather than see them leave for the suburbs. Our schools are in urgent need of repair. We request that capital funds be allocated to make repairs to the infrastructure of our schools that were identified by the School Construction Authority and to conduct further thorough inspections of our schools and perform all necessary repairs and upgrades to the following facilities: In Tech Academy –MS/HS 368X, the Robert J. Christen School - PS 81 BX; P.S. 24 – The Spuyten Duyvil School.

BXCB8 has focused on several expense projects in FY 2014 that include funding to upgrade all gymnasium equipment in all schools in Bronx Community Board 8 to help reduce the epidemic of obesity among students; funding for after-school educational/recreational programs in particular remediation and enrichment programs for all of the schools in Community Board 8 including non-title No.1 schools and the allocation for funds to provide for a meaningful reduction of class size for all grades.

Department of Environmental Protection

The Hansen Reports issued monthly by the Department of Environmental Protection (“DEP”) show a high number of community complaints concerning noise from: alarms, construction before and after hours, construction equipment, air conditioning and ventilation equipment, jack hammering and other sources. We request that DEP hire more inspectors for enforcement of the city’s noise codes.

The Hansen Reports also show a high number of community complaints monthly concerning clogged catch basins. We request that DEP hire more workers to routinely clear clogged catch basins which cause flooding.

Libraries and Cultural Affairs

BXCB8’s libraries are an invaluable cultural, educational, and informational resource to all of the members of our community. The physical conditions of some of our libraries are in dire need of repair or replacement. Some libraries continue to operate in old, overcrowded and poorly maintained buildings. We request funding for a full renovation of the Spuyten Duyvil Branch Library with a priority on life safety systems, renovation of the fire alarm system, HVAC system replacement, interior ADA compliance and replacement of the roof. The Riverdale Branch library needs a partial renovation including upgrading the life safety systems, HVAC replacement, and rehabilitation of the entrance, sidewalk, retaining walls, etc. In addition, the existing Van Cortlandt Branch Library is too small to support the area need and is in dire need of repairs. It needs a full renovation and rehabilitation of the façade, a new roof, renovation of the interior spaces, including the staff room, new windows, new furniture and equipment; or the purchase of a new site to replace it.

Regardless of the conditions of our libraries, if they are not opened, our residents cannot use or benefit from them. We affirm the decision to keep these vital resources open six days per week and implore that funding continues.

Parks and Recreation

Some progress is being made thanks to responses to our budget requests, funding from our local elected officials and Croton filtration plant mitigation funding, but BXCB8's parks continue to be in great need of maintenance, enforcement, reconstruction and repair.

“The land that now comprises Van Cortlandt Park (VCP) was acquired by NYC as parkland in 1888. Today, the park is one of the City’s largest and most heavily used, and is a significant component of the extensive park system in the Borough of the Bronx.” (Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for The Croton Water Treatment Plant At The Mosholu Site, May 30, 2004).

VCP is one of the most heavily used public parks in the city. It caters to citizens throughout the City through soccer, baseball and cricket leagues, as well as concerts, and the multiplicity of schools who train their athletes or hold citywide sporting competitions in this historic park and in the stadium. In addition, the city residents use its swimming pool and lake, which are a mecca for thousands of young and old in the sweltering days of summer.

Capital funding is also needed for many other projects to improve and maintain our parks including:

- Construction of a new restroom and DPR maintenance area in Fort Four Park and related plumbing repairs.
- Reconstruction of the Bailey Avenue playground.
- Construction of a skateboard park in Van Cortlandt Park.
- Repair of the Henry Hudson Park basketball and handball courts.
- Construction of a restroom at Broadway and West 251 Street adjacent to the Parade Grounds.
- Installation of a pedestrian bridge in Van Cortlandt Park.
- Construction of a walkway with a hard surface at the southern end of Seton Park parallel to West 232 Street.
- Reconstruction of the pond wall at Spuyten Duyvil Park to prevent water runoff onto the roadway in the parking lot at the Metro-North station.
- Repair of the gas line in Classic playground to allow reopening of the restroom in the winter months.
- Resurfacing of the tennis courts in Seton Park.
- Renovation of Van Cortlandt Stadium

Van Cortlandt Stadium is in deplorable condition. It is a Bronx and city venue for sporting events. Renovation is long overdue and critically needed. An example of this is the bathrooms and locker rooms which are severely deteriorated and barely usable.

Proper maintenance of our community parks preserves them and keeps them safe and useable. Funding for expense items are needed for personnel sufficient for maintenance and enforcement in BXCB8 parks, especially on weekends and at times of high use for all of our community’s parks; and for two stump grinders at VCP

Public Safety

FDNY: We have previously requested funding for the EMS restocking station under the jurisdiction of the Fire Department (FDNY). Since mid-2011, that home base for ambulance crews serving Community Board 8 has been located in a newly established station in Woodlawn, which is several miles away from the former temporary restocking and decontamination station at the 50th Precinct, which was centrally located in Community Board 8 and served as home base for ambulance crews based in this area. Shorter response times translate into better outcomes in emergency situations and ultimately reduce the cost of medical care by allowing intervention by trained personnel before a patient's or accident victim's condition becomes more severe and thus more expensive to treat. BXCB8 requests the funding of a new EMS restocking and decontamination station in the board area.

We are concerned that many of the firehouses are turn-of-the-last-century buildings that need upgrades such as new roofs; apparatus floor replacements, waterproofing, pointing, electrical upgrades as well as new kitchens and bathrooms. We request funding to upgrade the facilities in the board 8 area.

We are also concerned about community fire safety education and outreach and request funding for to purchase smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors and nine volt replacement batteries for distribution to the public throughout the year in all five boroughs.

The Fire Department has 10 golf-cart sized EMS gators for use citywide. The gators allow our EMS staff to maneuver through crowds at large events and/or beach areas to get people needed medical assistance. Most of these vehicles are now over 10 years old. We respectfully request funds for Fiscal Year 2014 to include replacement gators.

NYPD: We are pleased with the work of the NYPD 50th Police Precinct to combat crime, provide public safety, and maintain superior community relations in our district. They are doing a fine job, but need added tools to help them. Many of our tax paying residents would leave the City if crime rates began rising.

The requisition of a Radar gun, soundmeter, binoculars and a laptop with webcam would aide the 50th Police Precinct in its ongoing efforts to reduce crime in our district. Of particular note is an increase in funding for the NYPD graffiti program to supply needed paint for covering graffiti.

Traffic and Transportation

The BXCB8 is seeking capital funds to rehabilitate the step street at West 229th Street between Kingsbridge Terrace and Heath Avenue. In addition, BXCB8 would like additional lane miles for resurfacing of our streets; an Arts in Transit Station for the West 242nd Street subway station; the possible extension of the BX7 and BX10 routes into Yonkers for better turn-around of the buses; changing of the walk/don't walk signs to countdown signs; a possible greenstreets on the southbound side of the Henry Hudson Parkway at the Manhattan College Parkway overpass and the removal of the island northbound at West 242nd Street for a dedicated left turn lane.

Economic Development

Businesses are the life blood of a growing, thriving community. To improve the business environment in our district especially under these dire fiscal times, we are requesting continued support for Small Business Services (SBS) grants that subsidize the creation and expansion of Business Improvement Districts (BID) and to provide grants or supplemental funding to businesses in the community.

Housing

Almost three-quarters of the housing units in our district are renter occupied and we ask for additional funding for the Department of Housing Preservation and Development and the Department of Buildings to hire additional personnel to keep pace with escalation of new programs and duties instituted by the City.

In addition, 39% of the population live below the poverty level and receive some form of public financial assistance. The installation of security cameras for the Bailey Avenue Houses, Fort Independence Houses, and Marble Hill Houses in BXCB8 is critical to public safety in these locations.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the members of Bronx Community Board No. 8 by:

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Chair, Budget Committee
Bronx Community Board No. 8

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