



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4

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WALTER MANKOFF
Chair

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March 3, 2005

Hon. Michael Bloomberg
Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Statement on the Preliminary Budget, Fiscal Year 2006

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

Thank you for the opportunity to review your Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2006. Manhattan Community Board No. 4 examined the budget carefully and while we find areas of agreement, we view others with concern.

Before turning to our detailed agency comments, two budget issues are of general concern to us:

Balancing the FY 2006 Budget

Your proposed FY 2006 budget includes an assumed \$500 million in funding from New York State and \$250 million in federal funding. We encourage you to pursue these external revenue sources aggressively, but we are concerned that they cannot be counted on. As we did last year, we urge you to postpone your proposed \$400 million property tax rebate until it is clear that the hoped-for external funding is secure.

Hudson Yards Financing Schemes

The budget issues that have consumed much of our attention this year are your financing schemes for the various elements of the proposed Hudson Yards redevelopment. As we and many others (including the Independent Budget Office and the New York State Comptroller) have written and testified on many occasions over the past year, the financing schemes for the Hudson Yards Infrastructure Corporation and the stadium are certain to be highly risky and expensive, and they represent cynical end-runs around the budget process established in the New York City Charter. They may even be illegal. They will also divert tens of millions of dollars in PILOT payments that would otherwise be available to fund the City's budget, creating even larger deficits than your budget now projects if the development you say will occur does not take place.

Those issues aside, we are relieved that increased economic activity is restoring some flexibility to the budgeting process. And we are particularly pleased that your administration continues to focus on the desperate need for affordable housing in our community, and the City as a whole. This is not an easy task given the significant cutback in federal funding of HPD's initiatives.

Finally, thank you for recognizing the important role of all community boards by preserving community board funding.

The Board's detailed agency comments follow.

Department of Youth and Community Development

The combined neighborhood of Chelsea/Clinton is home to more than 7,500 children under 18 years of age, more than 17 percent of whom receive public assistance. In our district, which ranked third in terms of reported abuse and neglect, only one quarter of the children eligible for public day care receive it and 1,200 children are uninsured, according to the Citizens Committee for Children of New York. There are extremely limited resources for safe recreational, cultural, and educational activities for youth of all ages.

In that light, Board No. 4 remains extremely concerned about the impact of the current reorganization and consolidation of youth services under DYCD. Given the very limited resources allocated to youth services overall, the Board urges the city to undertake any consolidations or reorganizations with extreme caution, preserving core youth services infrastructure before increasing its focus on more specialized programs and initiatives.

We are also concerned about the proposed \$42 million cut to the agency's budget. These cuts are like to adversely affect at-risk youth. We believe priority needs to be placed on maintaining the summer youth employment program at least at last year's level.

The Department for the Aging

While we are pleased that funding for senior services, as reflected in the proposed budget, is overall relatively stable, we note with continued alarm that core funding for senior programs - and most especially wages for workers in that area - have been disastrously neglected for many years. There is no doubt that this is placing severe strain on the capacity of providers to address the needs of this vulnerable population with responsive services of minimally adequate quality. It is especially unacceptable to try to maintain services at the expense of creating a new group of working poor among those who provide such services and we again urge the city to look seriously at the need for attention to this matter. In addition, while we appreciate and support the need for innovation as needs evolve, we urge the city to move with caution in implementing changes - as has been proposed with regard to the delivery of homebound meals - without fully identifying and addressing the multiple impacts of these changes.

Administration for Children's Services

Although we are pleased about the additional money available to serve children in foster care, we are very concerned about the elimination of 1,400 day care slots. We believe that all parents who have been certified for school-age child care should continue to have appropriate, available services and we oppose any decrease below this current year's actual level of funding of such services.

Department of Homeless Services

Homelessness has long been and continues to be a major factor in our Board area; we also have productively welcomed numerous and varied homelessness related services to our district. We are concerned that the proposed budget seems to cut funding in precisely those service components directed at preventing homelessness. We urge restorations to the adult rental assistance program; the anti-eviction and SRO legal services programs, which provide free legal services to low- and moderate-income people faced with eviction from their homes, as well as services for low-income Single Room Occupancy housing tenants; and aftercare services, which prevent families placed in permanent housing from returning to shelters.

New York Public Library

Use of our public library continues to expand particularly now in the age of computers. Since 1994 attendance has increased 35% and circulation 40%. In New York City 90% of all public access computers are in libraries. The unlimited freedom and personal growth a book gives a child or adult to travel anywhere geographically or in time, through imagination or another person's experience cannot be matched. Access to our public libraries by our children, elderly and families is the best value for the dollar that the City can find. Libraries enhance the educational experience.

To permit the library system to continue to provide its vital services, CB4 urges the following changes in the Budget for FY 2006:

- Additional funding to increase library materials to meet the demands in the branch and research libraries and to offset the impact of inflation;
- Provide funds for sufficient levels of building and technology maintenance and security to protect the City's investment in computers and electronic information resources;
- Funding to complete the phase-in of the CLASP program;
- Make library salaries competitive in order to attract and retain the services of valued individuals;
- Expand Library's website content in key areas including health, job and homework information; and
- Provide additional technology training.

However, the Preliminary Budget proposes an additional 6% cut of \$13.4 million. This cut will jeopardize five- and six-day service at branch libraries throughout the boroughs.

There is no doubt that Manhattan residents love their branch libraries.

- Manhattan branches have long been some of the most heavily used in the City, with over 4.4 million recorded visits to our branches in FY03.
- In FY04, 192,909 Manhattan residents attended 11,037 branch library programs – including lectures, book discussions and puppet and magic shows.
- The Summer Reading program in Manhattan experienced record levels of participation in 2003 – a 47% increase from 2002.
- In FY03 over 111,000 children in Manhattan attended public programs, including toddler times, preschool story programs and picture book hours.

We request that if libraries are kept to a five day schedule, or even reduced to four days, one of the serviced days should be a Saturday, and if possible the second evening reinitiated to provide for accessibility to those working a conventional week.

Department of Cultural Affairs

The Preliminary Budget proposes yet another reduction in the City's Cultural Affairs spending, which was already dramatically reduced in the previous two fiscal years. The Preliminary Budget for FY 06 reduces the cultural affairs budget by another \$6.2 million. These cuts will adversely affect small institutions, many of which are located in the Board 4 area, and larger institutions in the City as well. However, the larger institutions have greater capabilities for raising private funds than the smaller institutions. Needless to say, any cuts will result in less accessibility to these resources, a decrease in services to school children, a loss of jobs, etc. The thousands of cultural tourists who came to our City to see The Gates are testament to both the positive impact the arts can have on our economy, and to the harm that can be done to the economy when the arts are cut.

Department of Education

The Department of Education is the largest youth service agency in New York City, providing free primary and secondary school education to more than one million students. It also offers an array of necessary support services including meals, safety, recreation, guidance, health and transportation. For children from low-income or troubled families these services are not frills, they are essential to child development.

The school system needs more money to address problems of overcrowded classrooms, school safety, special education and at-risk students. There is currently inadequate funding for:

- The hiring and retention of certified teachers to replace the thousands who will be retiring;
- Making salaries competitive with surrounding communities to attract and retain the best;
- Repair, renovation, and new construction of school buildings, including upgrading electrical systems for computer use;
- Additional security within schools;
- Books, materials, and classroom supplies;
- Lowering class sizes in grades K-3.

Although we are heartened by the outcome of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit, we are dismayed by the spectacle of the City and State both denying any responsibility for the bill that has come due. We agree with you that the State must do its part, but the City budget must also contain substantially more money for schools. Knowing that the court will soon require this, the lack of additional funding in the budget both shortchanges our schoolchildren and puts the entire City budget at risk. Furthermore, your decision to delay funding for school construction until the issue is fully resolved could mean that students struggle even longer in buildings that are falling to pieces. If money is available to finance construction of a stadium, surely there are funds that could be used to build schools.

Police Department

We commend the continuing reduction, through the truly exemplary efforts of the NYPD, of crime in the city. We are concerned, however, with the reduced number of officers at our precincts, which remain below full strength despite increased demands for safety and security in District 4. The increasing number of nightclubs and bars in our District has placed extra demands on all three of our precincts, especially on the 10th Precinct. Terrorism concerns have increased the workload for officers, especially at the Midtown North Precinct.

CB4 neighborhoods have a pressing need for increased enforcement of many laws and regulations related to the safety of sidewalks and streets. More vigorous enforcement of violations including speeding and bicycle traffic on sidewalks needs to be adequately planned for in this budget.

We also support a continuing emphasis on traffic enforcement efforts, and urge that more traffic enforcement officers be assigned specifically to address conditions in residential areas where many side streets appear to have become arteries of the Interstate Highway System. Trucks and charter buses are increasingly avoiding traffic by racing through narrow residential streets, often speeding and failing to yield the right of way to pedestrians. Side streets signed as no parking or no standing zones have become free parking lots for black cars and limos, trucks and charter buses, all of which often idle intolerably beyond permitted time. Extra traffic enforcement personnel are needed to address these illegal, unhealthy, and dangerous conditions.

Department of Transportation

The management and maintenance of streets and sidewalks remain important priorities of CB4. Our neighborhoods are the focus of major redevelopment plans proposed by this Administration. We emphasize the considerable opportunities these plans present for good planning to control and reduce traffic, for improving the quality of life in our neighborhoods, and for creating a better and healthier pedestrian environment. We continue to urge an increase in enforcement.

Funds for Sustainable Transportation Planning: Two major rezonings are currently in development that will bring many new residents and businesses to the CB4 area, which is already plagued by some of the worst automotive congestion in New York City. As rezoning plans move forward, CB4 emphasizes the need for funds to plan innovative initiatives for infrastructure and programming that will prioritize the use of mass transit and non-motorized transportation options for commuting and discretionary travel to and within the CB4 area, while at the same time discouraging and reducing private automotive travel to and within our district.

Capital Funds for Safety Improvements: Capital funds should be prioritized to more aggressively address some of the pressing basic infrastructure improvements necessary to keep our district safe: accessible pedestrian signals; traffic-calming devices, such as speedbumps and raised crosswalks; bicycle lanes; sidewalk widenings; and other measures that will improve safety for pedestrians, transit-users, cyclists, and drivers. Specifically, we applaud the City's current demonstration program for traffic calming in front of schools and request the program be expanded to other schools as well as senior centers. The Board supports proposals to the federal government for needed funding.

Expense Funds for Street Maintenance: The heavy traffic and rapid pace of residential and business development in the CB4 area takes a heavy toll on our streets. The board appreciates the active efforts of DOT to maintain acceptable street conditions, but more frequent assessments by inspectors and speedier crew dispatchment are needed.

Sidewalk Maintenance and Enforcement: Sidewalk obstructions, such as cafes that sprawl beyond their permitted boundaries, illegally placed newspaper boxes, scaffolding that violates city regulation with protruding bolts, and violations by public pay telephone operators and newsstand operators that create obstacles and visual clutter on our sidewalks are a constant problem in our district, requiring additional funding. In addition, the inspection and enforcement of sidewalk repair violations is woefully inadequate. Recent changes regarding the way sidewalk-related liability is assigned do little to speed up the repair of dangerously uneven, and in some cases, collapsing sidewalks. Funds must be directed to a department within DOT to coordinate with DCA and DOB rigorous enforcement of regulations that ensure safe, unobstructed pedestrian movement on our sidewalks.

Traffic Control Signage: We urge a budget increase to provide for the manufacture and installation of more adequate traffic control signage. This is particularly true of mixed residential and commercial areas such as Chelsea and Clinton within the CB4 geographical area. Among repeated violations more frequent signage would help curb, are horn blowing, illegal vehicle idling, trucks on residential streets, failure to yield right of way to pedestrians, illegal parking, speeding, etc.

Bike Lanes: We support Transportation Alternatives' proposal for DOT to more fully utilize available federal funding for bike lanes - including hiring an additional staff person for that purpose - particularly given the Board's long time request for an Eighth Avenue bike lane and increased bike access from streets to the West Side Highway.

Department of Parks and Recreation

The Administration's proposed \$12 million cut to the Parks Department's general operating budget is imprudent. Currently Parks is funded at 3/10 of 1% of the City's capital budget. Comparing "apples to apples," Chicago's Parks funding is a full 4% of the Cook county budget. With much of this City's non-privatized public parkland falling into disrepair, poorly maintained by rotating crews of unskilled WEP workers, this \$12 million budget cut is bad policy. This board supports New Yorkers for Parks' position that a minimum of 1% of the City's budget must be dedicated to Parks funding.

We are very excited to see that the city and the Parks Department have included the 59th Street Recreation Center as part of the Design Excellence procurement process, and we look forward to working with an architect on the renovation of the center in the near future.

However, the project's budget is in the \$6 million range, mostly funded with money that Community Board 7 negotiated as part of a negative declaration on the Environmental Impact Statement for a project more than 10 years ago. We would like to see the city invest the same energy and money into 59th Street Recreation Center that it did for the Chelsea Recreation Center and make this project one that will last and truly benefit this growing community. The center already serves the Amsterdam Houses and the many city residents that work in the neighborhood. With the area almost completely rezoned for residential development and the block across the street being developed by John Jay College, an expanded and improved recreation center would become an anchor for the West Side.

We request that funds be allocated now to complete a \$20 million renovation of the center, a project that has full community support through years of planning and study.

Hudson River Park Economic Development Corporation Department of Sanitation

Although we are pleased that the city has committed an additional \$30 million toward the completion of Hudson River Park, the completion of this vital park remains one of the Board's highest priorities. As has been the case for the past several years, funding (to date: \$130 million from the City and \$115 million from the State) is still insufficient to complete the park as planned, in particular in the Chelsea segment from Gansevoort Peninsula to West 26th Street, including the western portion of Chelsea Waterside Park.

We urge the City, in conjunction with the State, to commit the additional \$165 million needed to complete the park. We've come a long way as segments of the park have been completed in the Village and are under construction in the Clinton area. But we have a ways to go to realize the vision of a complete 5-mile-long waterfront park that will provide high quality open space and waterfront access for our residents and visitors alike, provide tax benefits for the city, and spearhead the revitalization of the entire west side of Manhattan from 59th Street to the Battery.

In addition, within the park, several areas need special attention:

Pier 99. As the city moves toward a consolidated waste management plan that will involve the continued use of Pier 97 as a garbage transfer station, we are concerned that the proposed use of this pier for commercial waste (instead of recyclables, as is the case now) will have the potential to create noise, traffic and odor problems for both Hudson River Park to the south and Riverside Park South to the north unless designed and planned with these issues in mind. We urge the city to take into account this facility's placement within one major park and just south of another as planning proceeds.

Pier 97. It is now over one full year since DOS was to have vacated Pier 97 as per the Hudson River Park Act and the pier is still fully occupied by garbage trucks and a salt pile. Thus it is imperative that the new DOS facility under construction at 57th Street proceed as fast as possible. Meanwhile, some consideration must be given to the illegal occupation of Pier 97 by DOS for the past year as well as for at least two more years, whether that be in the form of rent or a significant capitol contribution to the park.

Piers 88-94. We are pleased that the city is moving forward with plans for a renovated passenger ship terminal at Piers 88 and 90. We are less pleased that the city has decided to develop Piers 92 and 94 as a mid-size convention facility since that is clearly not a water-dependant use, but we recognize that this move may allow for a more park-friendly design at Pier 94, just south of Clinton Cove Park, than the compromise proposal for the ENK development at Pier 94 only. We urge the city to consider the following priorities as these facilities are developed: 1. Maximum accessibility to the water at all piers. 2. Openness in the design so as to integrate cruise ship arrivals and departures into the park experience. 3. Optimized traffic flow so as to minimize traffic impacts of the combined PST and convention center activities. 4. Removal of the northern end of the Pier 94 headhouse, or conversion into a public glass atrium 5. Integration of a bridge (to be financed by NYS DOT) from Dewitt Clinton Park to Clinton Cove Park.

Pier 76. The Hudson River Park Act calls for the city to use its “best efforts” to find a new location for the existing tow pound so that this pier can be developed as 50% parkland as well as 50% compatible commercial use. So far, the only solution identified has been in conjunction with the proposed Jets stadium on the west side rail yards, a use that CB 4 has opposed and that may not be realized. We urge the city to consider other alternatives, including the possibility of privatizing tow pound operations among several existing garage facilities so that Pier 76 can takes it rightful place as part of Hudson River Park.

Gansevoort Peninsula. As with Pier 97, certain DOS facilities were to have been removed by the end of 2004 but still remain over a year later: the salt pile and the incinerator building (although the stacks have been removed). DOS and the city are to use their “best efforts” to remove remaining DOS uses as soon as possible. However, this date seems to be as far as 7+ years away as per the latest DOS estimates. And, in fact, DOS is now constructing a new steel building, said to be temporary, on the site of the old stacks, to handle garbage trucks from the upper east side. We urge the city to place the construction of new DOS facilities that will permit Gansevoort to be vacated at the highest possible priority , so that the important portion of Hudson River park can be developed as envisioned. And, as with Pier 99, there must be some form of compensation by DOS to the Trust in return for their continued occupancy of this land beyond that permitted by the Hudson River Park Act.

Department of Housing Preservation & Development

HPD plays a leading role in preserving and expanding affordable housing in the Board 4 area. Last year we wrote that this is “an area of prime importance to our Board.” This year, with the Hudson Yards rezoning just completed and the West Chelsea rezoning underway, it is even more important.

The current 80-20 formula used in most new housing construction ignores the needs of middle-income families who are essential to healthy, stable neighborhoods, but who are forced to leave their neighborhoods in search of affordable housing. This formula does not adequately address the needs of the vast number of New York's low income and working families displaced by gentrification and a poorly performing affordable housing market. We are delighted with the administration's initiatives

to seek new and creative approaches to the development of affordable housing and look forward to actively participating in the implementation of these plans within our area. We are especially pleased that the plans include a middle income component, that they acknowledge the importance of increasing our stock of permanent affordable housing, and that HPD and the Department of City Planning are now working closely together to implement housing initiatives through zoning.

Previously, the Board has recommended specific targeting of housing funds over multiple budget years for construction of affordable housing in the Board area, particularly in the Hell's Kitchen/Hudson Yards and West Chelsea areas. We are pleased with the commitments that were made in this area as part of the Hudson Yards rezoning, and we expect that similar commitments will be made in the West Chelsea rezoning. These commitments must be maintained and implemented in order to balance the development pressures on the low, moderate and middle income population engendered by the administration's other initiatives to spur commercial and residential development along the West Side from 14th to 42nd Streets in the far western reaches of the Board area.

The overall goals and specific targets we articulated last year continue in effect: this Board has an overall goal that 30% of new housing units should be permanent affordable housing. Since both the 421(a) and Inclusionary Housing Bonus programs are targeted only to low income citizens, the Board urges that the City's other programs include flexibility that would allow the overall achievement of our stated goals. This logic would apply to New HOP, the Brownfield Program, and the development of government-owned sites. We therefore reiterate our request that the City make a commitment to use additional programs and resources to generate additional non-market-rate housing in order to meet our goal. These additional units should be mixed income housing that is available to people with the range of incomes detailed below:

- 20% of the units should be available to people with incomes up to a maximum of 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI);
- 50% of the units should be available to people with incomes up to a maximum of 125% of AMI; and
- 30% of the units should be available to people with incomes up to a maximum of 165% of AMI.

In addition:

- It is crucial that the city work to maintain housing affordability through retention and support of Mitchell-Lama programs, Section 8 and other subsidized programs.
- We urge an increase for code enforcement activities.
- We continue to witness tenant harassment, and expect it to increase as development pressures increase. We must emphasize the importance of increasing HPD's ability to inspect and enforce its regulations in CB4 and everywhere in the City where tenant harassment takes place. We also strongly urge that efforts be made to better coordinate enforcement of regulations between HPD and the Department of Buildings in the interests of efficiency. Eviction prevention services are also needed.
- The City should step up its collection of fines levied by HPD for code violations, which could add significant funds to the budget. We suggest that some of these funds be earmarked for code enforcement or rehabilitation of affordable housing and that more funds be dedicated for low-cost financing for building rehabilitation.

At the same time, funding provided by HPD to local community-based organizations that perform a broad range of tenant and owner assistance, anti-abandonment and housing preservation activities must be maintained, given the essential role of these programs (especially the Community Consultant

M. Bloomberg
March 3, 2005
Page 9 of 9

Program and the Neighborhood Preservation Consultant Program) in preservation of the fragile existing stock of such housing.

New York City Housing Authority

More attention must be paid to the tenants living in New York City Housing Authority developments. More personnel, funds and police intervention must be made available to address persistent problems of security, drug dealing, gangs, graffiti, garbage storage and collection, and cleanliness.

Department of Buildings

Of equal importance to HPD is the Department of Building's ability to provide a level of code enforcement necessary to protect existing low-income housing stock. More inspectors are needed to ensure compliance with zoning bulk and use requirements in order to preserve community character at a time when self-certification is being more widely depended on, and we note with regret that the preliminary budget provides for no increase in DOB staff. Funds are also needed to train plan inspectors including training on the zoning regulations applicable to special districts.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



Walter Mankoff
Chair

This letter was approved at Manhattan Community Board No. 4's March 2, 2005 full board meeting.

cc: C. Virginia Fields, Manhattan Borough President
Christine Quinn, Councilmember
Gale Brewer, Councilmember
Mark Page, Director of OMB