



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD No. 4

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March 13, 2006

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

Re: Statement on the Preliminary Budget, Fiscal Year 2007

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

Thank you for the opportunity to review your Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2007. Manhattan Community Board No. 4 examined the budget carefully and while we find areas of agreement, we view others with concern. First though, we would like to 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

According to the Citizens Committee for Children, the combined neighborhood of Chelsea/Clinton is home to more than 8,400 children under 18 years of age, more than 17% of whom receive public assistance and 22% of whom live under the poverty line. Given that basic living conditions have a significant impact on a young person's ability to learn and thrive, it is worth noting that 17% of the housing stock is fair to poor and over 400 children are without health insurance. In our district, which has over 300 reports of abuse and neglect per year and about 450 felony arrests of youth, both subsidized child care and general youth services have long been underfunded; this has only been compounded by the recent reorganization and reduced funding of afterschool care and youth services. There are extremely limited resources for safe recreational, cultural, and educational activities for youth of all ages. Despite what large scale aggregate statistics might suggest, this is a district with a large low-income population - especially concentrated in several local public housing developments - several severely underperforming schools, and significant social needs, as evidenced by the data noted above.

In that light, Board No. 4 continues to be extremely concerned about the impact of the recent reorganization and consolidation of youth services under DYCD, which has resulted in significantly reduced resources for our district and leaves little, if any, safe, affordable, year-round child care for working parents. In neighborhoods such as ours, which include many low-income working families, quality, publicly-funded day care - including school-age child care - is a primary concern. The Board urges the City to take steps to restore the core youth services infrastructure for this district.

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Four percent of our older youth, ages 16 to 19, are not enrolled in school and are not working. While there are a number of reputable community providers trying to address the needs of this population through alternative schools and the provision of employment training and other support services, these organizations are under-funded and have already exceeded their program capacity. We are concerned that the City's clear preference for funding school-based OST programs does not address the needs of this population and urge increased funding for core teen and young adult recreational and developmental programming.

We believe priority needs to be placed on maintaining the summer youth employment program and, in fact, restoring it to previous levels as it provides such a unique opportunity for at-risk youth to be exposed to the world of employment. We are pleased that the Youth Employment Program was at least funded and implemented in a more timely way this past year, avoiding some of the horrendous delays and confusion of recent years. However, we continue to be very distressed by the decline in funding for this program overall. Across the City, an overwhelming number of older youth are not prepared to finish high school or to enter the workforce. Through YEP, these young people gain valuable vocational and soft skills, discipline and leadership. We feel strongly that funds should be restored to the level available as of 4 years ago.

With regard to other youth needs, we urge that housing for homeless and run-away youth be maintained and expanded, and that alternative to violence and creative justice programs, as well as job training and placement programs be maintained and expanded.

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 have been disastrously neglected for many years. While funding for long-overdue COLA increases for staff was an important step in the right direction, there is no doubt that stagnant funding overall is placing severe strain on the capacity of providers to address the needs of this vulnerable population with responsive services of minimally adequate quality. 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 with the delivery of homebound meals - without first fully assessing the multiple impacts of these changes.

There is an urgent need to stabilize and enhance funding for service models designed to address the needs and desires of seniors to age-in with dignity and security in their own homes, as best represented by the NORC initiative. We would also urge that funding to address the mental health needs of seniors be baselined into the City budget. In general, consistent with our desire to maintain the diversity of our district and ensure that it is "senior friendly", we believe a comprehensive range of services, including community centers, in-home supports, transportation, supportive housing, and preventive health and social services, are essential to assuring that they can live out their lives with dignity within their home communities.

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 continued vulnerability of day care slots and the elimination of school-age child care in our district. In addition, with regard to child welfare, we believe there is

a need for much improved coordination with local service providers regarding the needs of children and families who are or may be at risk.

Department of Homeless Services

Homelessness has long been and continues to be a major factor in our Board area. While we have productively welcomed numerous and varied homelessness-related services to our district, we are concerned that there be adequate funding for those service components directed at preventing homelessness. We urge full funding of 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.

Currently, two of the twelve citywide drop-in centers for homeless individuals are located within CD4. We encourage the City to continue funding these centers, as well as to maintain and expand funding for effective outreach, to ensure that the comprehensive interventions that are needed can be provided. We are also deeply concerned about the inadequacy of family shelter slots, especially for victims of domestic violence, as well as the lack of adequate resources for homeless youth. It is especially troubling that the needs of women, children and youth at risk are still far from being met.

Department of Housing Preservation & Development

HPD plays a leading role in preserving and expanding affordable housing in the Board 4 area. With the Hudson Yards and West Chelsea rezonings recently completed this is especially important.

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 and West Chelsea rezonings. These commitments must be maintained and implemented in order to balance the development pressures on the low, moderate and middle income population endangered 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 in the last two years 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.

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. Furthermore, the program's time limited affordability fails to provide what we desperately need – permanent, affordable housing. 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.

In addition to our concerns about the funding of new affordable housing, we also believe that the City must commit additional funds to the preservation of existing units in order to prevent loss of affordable housing through expiring Section 8 contracts, expiring-use programs, displacement from harassment, and an increasing number de-regulated units. In a community such as ours that relies heavily on rent-regulated apartments to provide affordable housing, vacancy decontrol, de-regulation and expiring affordability poses an enormous crisis.

We continue to witness tenant harassment, and expect it to increase as development pressures increase. We must emphasize the importance of increasing HPD's code enforcement budget, and therefore its 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.

We are disappointed about the proposed cuts to the Neighborhood Preservation Consultant Program and the Community Consultant Program at a time when new resources are needed in our community to preserve the existing affordable units.

New York City Housing Authority

Adequate funding is needed to assure that the quality of life for tenants living in New York City Housing Authority developments is maintained and improved. 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.

Funds are also needed for additional inspectors to monitor compliance with special district regulations and to stop illegal use of rent regulated apartments for transient "bed and breakfast" use. Private apartments and SROs are increasingly being used as "bed and breakfast" rooms, which both deprives the community of apartments that would otherwise be rented on a longterm basis as affordable, and secondly, the nature of such short term use compromises the security and habitability for those living in the building.

Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

CB4 is concerned about the continued growth of the use of crystal methamphetamine use as well as that of other non-traditional or boutique drugs. In addition to other health and mental health dangers, use of this drug has been associated with increased use of other illicit drugs and sexual practices which enhance chances of contracting HIV and other STD's. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene needs to increase funding for education, prevention and treatment programs to address this problem.

As noted in the comments regarding the Department for the Aging, there is a need to baseline funding to meet the growing mental health needs of our older adult population.

New York Public Library

As in past years, the Preliminary Budget for FY 07 includes steep reductions to funding for public libraries - a \$19.8 million cut to the New York Public Library alone. Before the proposed City reductions, the Library already faced a project budget deficit of approximately \$10 million. If these proposed cuts are enacted, libraries will be closed more - and when they are open, there will be fewer books and less programming.

The cuts planned will be devastating to both the Library and, more importantly, to the communities it serves. Limited hours, limited resources, limited staff - at a time when libraries are being used more than ever. They are places for young children to learn the joy of reading, for students to receive assistance with homework, for immigrants to learn English, for adults to learn parenting skills, and for entrepreneurs to find information about starting a small business. Therefore, we ask that the proposed cuts be restored.

Department of Cultural Affairs

The Preliminary Budget proposes yet another reduction in the City's Cultural Affairs program spending, which was already dramatically reduced in the previous three fiscal years. The Preliminary Budget for FY 07 reduces the cultural affairs budget by another \$37 million - the largest decrease in two decades. 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. We urge that the cuts be restored.

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.

We are heartened by the outcome of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit, and we agree with you that the State must drastically increase funding for City schools, but the City budget must also contain substantially more money for schools. In particular, we are concerned about the delays in funding school renovation and construction, especially given the expected growth in our community's school-age population due to the recent rezonings of West Chelsea and the Hudson Yards.

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. Counter-terrorism efforts 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 illegal 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. More enforcement is especially needed for the midtown West 42nd Street corridor and the increasingly dangerous 9th Avenue stretch from 45th to 37th street.

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: Our two recent rezonings 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 development 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 speed bumps and raised crosswalks; bicycle lanes; sidewalk widening; 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 maintenance are needed.

Sidewalk Maintenance and Enforcement: Illegal sidewalk obstructions have become more numerous and need to be addressed more rigorously. Sidewalk cafés, news racks, scaffolds, public pay telephones, and newsstands can limit the space available to pedestrians and create visual clutter when allowed to proliferate unchecked. Enforcement of laws pertaining to these items requires 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 have done 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. More frequent signage would help curb horn blowing, illegal vehicle idling, trucks on local streets, failure to yield right of way to pedestrians, illegal parking, speeding, and other common violations.

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. The Board is pleased that the 8th Avenue bicycle lane is finally reaching the implementation stage. We would like to reiterate our strong request, particularly given the number of bicyclist/car accidents in recent years, that the lane include a buffer zone. We look forward to working with DOT as the project progresses.

Alternatives to Automobile Use: Increasingly New York's neighborhood feel and pedestrian friendly nature is being challenged by traffic congestion. Community Boards need to have the tools to proactively plan for pedestrian-friendly places and sidewalks. We are excited to hear about the Street Renaissance campaign being undertaken by local transit-oriented nonprofits and the software products they are developing to assist community members to understand and devise design ideas for their neighborhoods. We request that the City partner with these nonprofits to encourage Community Board linkages to these products.

Department of Parks and Recreation

On a citywide basis, as in previous years DPR is funded at about 3/10 of 1% of the City's capital budget. This board supports New Yorkers for Parks' position that a minimum of 1% of the City's budget must be dedicated to Parks funding.

A major thrust for Community District 4 in FY 07 will be to secure significant funding for a major upgrade of DeWitt Clinton Park. A new group has formed, the DeWitt Clinton Park Conservancy, and is now in the process of identifying users, stakeholders and requirements as well as looking at options ranging from immediately needed fixes (steps in disrepair) to a complete re-visioning of the park.

We also, as we did last year, continue to request that funds be allocated now to complete a \$20 million renovation of the 59th Street Recreation Center, a project that has full community support through years of planning and study.

In May of 2004, the Chelsea Recreation Center opened in our district. While this facility is available to all ages, over half of its summer members are under the age of 21. The Center is in need of additional staffing, specifically playground assistants and other youth workers, to coordinate youth activities. Recreation Center members also have voiced the desire for services to be expanded to include Sundays, but have been informed that budgetary constraints do not permit this expansion.

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 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.

In addition, 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. We urge the City to consider alternatives as soon as possible,

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including the possibility of privatizing tow pound operations among several existing garage facilities, so that Pier 76 can take its rightful place as part of Hudson River Park.

Hudson Yards Infrastructure Corporation

We remain concerned that the financing scheme for the Hudson Yards Infrastructure Corporation is certain to be highly risky and expensive, and is an inappropriate evasion of the budget process established in the New York City Charter. Hudson Yards infrastructure should be included in the City capital program and financed in the same manner as other City capital projects, with general obligation debt. The plan to repay HYIC debt out of PILOT payments will divert tens of millions of dollars in real estate taxes that would otherwise be available to fund the City's budget. The tax incentives reflected in the PILOT agreements have yet to be justified on economic grounds, and will commit the City to a policy of long-lasting property tax breaks for large-scale commercial development for years to come.

Javits Convention Center Expansion

We support the expansion of the Javits Convention Center and the City's plan to finance its \$350 million contribution to that project through the City's capital program with general obligation debt. However, we are concerned that the Convention Center Development Corporation's current expansion plan will be inadequate to meet the Convention Center's need. City funds should not be committed to this project unless the plan is reconfigured.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



J. Lee Compton
Chair
Manhattan Community Board No. 4

cc: Scott Stringer, Manhattan Borough President
Christine Quinn, Councilmember
Gale Brewer, Councilmember
Mark Page, Director of OMB