

Waterfront & Economic Development Committee Manhattan Community Board Nine

Savona Bailey-McClain, Committee Co-Chair, Jane Arrendell, Committee Co-Chair
Eileen Merritt, Vicky Gholson Ph.D., Linda Walton, Ernestine Welch, Board Committee
Members, Maritta Dunn, Mark Irgang, Caren Irgang, Public Member

Committee Meeting Minutes of May 5, 2009

The meeting opened at 6:30 p.m. with a quorum by Committee Co-Chairs Jane Arrendell and Savona Bailey-McClain.

Present: Savona Bailey-McClain, Jane Arrendell, Ernestine Welch, Mark Irgang,
Absent:, Vicky Gholson, Ph.D., Linda Walton, Eileen Merritt, Maritta Dunn, Caren Irgang
Board Members: Elvis Hernandez, Brandon Brice

Adoption of agenda and the minutes were approved with necessary corrections.

Discussion

Our scheduled guests did not come to make their presentations but the committee continued their discussion on small businesses.

Board member Elvis Hernandez shared with Public Member Mark Irgang how many bodegas are fronted financially by their suppliers and that this has been going on for decades. This arrangement limits many bodega owners and 99 cent owners to the supplies and foods offered in these establishments. The only way that these owners can make a real profit, is to buy and then sell these stores. And because this practice has been going on for so many years, there is no investment in the look or cleanliness of these stores. If the owner knows that this is temporary in order to build wealth and take care of their family, there is no incentive to improve the stores. Mr. Hernandez shared that bodegas look the same today as they did thirty years ago.

Board member Brandon Brice shared his opinion and also wondered whether the lack of a business plan was the problem for many businesses uptown. Committee Co-Chair Savona Bailey-McClain and Public Member Mark Irgang shared how the regulations in the city with its overwhelming bureaucracy can ruin any good business plan. There are so many hidden rules and conditions that can come out of no where and for which no one can teach you in a business class.

Members then started sharing their business experiences with starting businesses and developing relationship. The issue of credit was further discussed and how many people are stuck in poverty cycles due to limited access.

Committee members then shared what they knew about consumer purchasing in the district. Many groups are more concerned with convenience (like the use of credit and food stamps) and a cultural connection. Others are more interest in service and quality products. All agreed that offerings in the district need to be more diverse and we discussed strategies.

Mr. Hernandez shared how some bodega owners were working together to buy food bulk in order to save money. Also, we discussed how bodegas need to become specialty food

stores because many property owners have expressed their non-interest in having bodegas in commercial spaces in our district. In fact, property owners are investing in the new gourmet delis popping up. The reasons are that the stores are attractive, the inventory goes more quickly (meaning the items are more fresh) and landlords can therefore charge more rent. By contributing to their build out, property owners have a stake in the success of these businesses.

Mr. Hernandez is looking to re-open his bodega with a bakery and to offer delivery service to customers to make his establishment different.

Committee Co-Chair Jane Arrendell shared that there is a new merchants association in West Harlem and that we should attend their upcoming meeting and talk with these businesses. Jane Arrendell also shared how building owners are looking for large retail chains to help subsidize residential rents. Therefore, showing how support for small local businesses is slim.

And committee member Ernestine Welch shared how Latino businesses need to be more friendly to non-Latino customers. Oftentimes, she said, it feels as though they do not want anyone else to come and shop in their stores. Again, we all agreed that more communication is needed in order to improve services and offerings.