

MINUTES OF COMMUNITY BOARD #16 – MAY 26, 2009

Attendance

David Alexander	Yolanda Matthews (E)
Renee Archer (A)	Sadie McNamara
Orlando Aupont (A)	Ted McQueen
Octavius Bamberg (A)	Rev. Joseph Norton
Sissi Benitez (A)	Marie Pierre
Josephine Blakeley (E)	Rev. Devon Ponds
Patricia Boone (A)	Mattie Pusey
Essie Duggan (A)	Melaine Rochford (E)
Samantha Dunn (A)	Linda Sanders (E)
Ivory Ellison (A)	Lashon Segar (A)
Helen Giles (A)	Tyrone Thomas (A)
Shirley Gonsalves	Ernestine Turner
Sarah Hall (E)	Rev. Miran Ukaegbu
Jessie Hilliard	Alice Vines
Kofi Hormeku	Annie Walkes (E)
Michael Howard (E)	Herman Winston
Allene Ingram	Hazel Younger
Daisy Jackson	Viola D. Greene-Walker, DM
Javonn Johnson (A)	E. Jane Coleman-Assistant ADM
Troy Johnson (A)	Jimmi Brevil, Community Assistant
Pamela Junior (A)	Christopher Lundy for Hon. Edolphus Towns
Eula Key	Latrice M. Walker for Hon. Yvette Clarke
Danny King (A)	Nathan Bradley for Hon. John Sampson
Bettie Kollock-Wallace	Mel Faulkner for Hon. Inez Barron
Shawn Lewis (A)	Ry-Ann Hermon for Hon. William F. Boyland, Jr.
Deborah Mack (E)	David Mann for Hon. Charles Barron
James Mack	Cathleen McCadden for Hon. Darlene Mealy

MEETING HELD AT BROWNSVILLE MULTI-SERVICE CENTER, 444 THOMAS S. BOYLAND STREET, BROOKLYN

Chairperson Hazel Younger called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m. and an invocation was said by Dr. Denise Boyce.

A motion was made by Ms. Pamela Junior, seconded by Mr. Ted McQueen, and carried to waive the reading of last month's minutes.

A motion was made by Ms. Pamela Junior, seconded by Ms. Marie Pierre, and carried to waive the reading of the District Manager's report.

District Manager Viola Greene-Walker advised the audience that some of the material contained in her report is time-sensitive and encouraged everyone to read the report.

Ms. Bettie Kollock-Wallace, Chairperson of the Land Use, Planning and Zoning Committee, reported that the Committee met on May 12, 2009 with representatives of Common Ground who gave an update on their two housing proposals.

Construction has begun on the 71 units of senior housing on St. Mark's Avenue between Howard and Saratoga Avenues. They will begin marketing the units in November 2009.

Changes have been made to the affordable housing program that is planned for the parking lot at 39-47 Hegeman Avenue between Thomas S. Boyland Street and Amboy Street.

The original proposal was for 124 units of 1, 2 and 3-bedroom apartments in a 12-story building for low-income and formerly homeless families.

Common Ground has encountered several obstacles to developing family housing, i.e., financing (Lower tax credit equity pricing, Increased borrowing costs, Fewer City subsidy loans, and Complex design with high construction costs) and timing (protracted ULURP review and availability of federal stimulus funding for affordable housing).

Because of the obstacles, they have revised their proposal and are requesting the Community Board's support to construct a 5-story building with 161 studio apartments for individuals.

Representatives from Common Ground were asked to come forward to elaborate on their revised proposal.

Ms. Amy Reisner of Common Ground stated that their original proposal was for 124 units of family housing, but because of the challenges mentioned by Committee Chairperson Kollock-Wallace, they had to change the model and develop housing for single adults. The new model calls for the development of 161 studio units for low-income individuals with incomes of approximately \$31,000 and for formerly homeless individuals (Literature summarizing the changes to their proposal was disseminated).

Common Ground is a well known developer and manager of affordable and supportive housing. Their plan for this project is to construct an attractive five-story building with a number of on-site amenities. Ninety-six of the units are to be set aside for formerly homeless individuals and sixty-four units for low-income individuals. Preference will be given to current residents of Community District #16 for the low-income units. The monthly rent will be between \$500 and \$600. Amenities will include around-the-clock security, exercise room, community garden (that will be accessible to the community), computer room, bicycle storage, and on-site services which will include case management, employment service, and recreational. They invite members of the Board to visit any of their buildings to see how they manage their buildings and the sense of community that they foster in their residents.

Common Ground is collaborating with the Brownsville Partnership with a goal of being an integral part of the community. They do not want to be a developer who constructs a building and has no other ties to the community. To that end, they will seek to insure that employment opportunities during and after construction are made available to qualified community residents. Construction is slated to start in 2010 with completion in the third quarter of 2011.

Mr. Ricky Jacobs, the project's architect, stated that he is pleased to have the opportunity to design a sustainable building for this community. A PowerPoint presentation indicating the site's location and schematic drawings of the building was displayed.

Rev. Ernest White, Pastor of St. James Holiness Church, stated that he is a leader of the East Brooklyn Congregations which is responsible for many of the homes that have been built in the area. They have been working with and supporting Common Ground's effort to bring new affordable housing to the community for sometime. They have had the opportunity to review with them the changes that they propose to make to their initial plans. Although the new plan is no longer suitable for families, it does address a need in the community, therefore, they are supportive of the plan.

Ms. Pamela Junior stated that she has concerns about the prospective tenants who were formerly homeless individuals. Who are these individuals? Where do they come from? Are they being deposited here by the Department of Homeless Services from elsewhere in the City? There is a school nearby; was this taken into consideration? There is a different dynamic at play between homeless individuals versus homeless families. As single individuals settle, they tend to form families who will need additional room, how will this tendency affect turnover at Common Ground's proposed building?

Ms. Reisner stated that these issues were raised during the Land Use, Planning, and Zoning Committee meeting. Their response is that to the extent that they can they select individuals who are currently housed in area shelters or come from Brownsville. Their intake process is extensive, not everyone will be accepted in their buildings. Once an application is received, a background check is done as well as two interviews so that they will be aware of what a prospective tenant's problems and needs are.

Ms. Junior stated that the issue is that we do not want more problematic individuals in the community.

Ms. Reisner stated that there are problematic individuals wherever we may go in the city. Their organization is up to the task of effectively controlling the issues. As property managers, they will insure that their tenants pay their rents on a timely basis. All of the tenants have leases and are responsible for the payment of rent. Tenants who do not pay their rents or are destructive to the property or the community will be evicted by Common Ground. However, their findings are that

their tenants integrate well with the community. One would be hard-pressed to determine the origins of their tenants. You will find that once they are no longer homeless, they will buy goods and services in the community and will participate in community programs and events.

Should tenants have issues that need addressing, there will be case managers available to them to help resolve their issues. There will also be security in the building. In effect, there are many eyes and ears in use to ensure that their tenants behave responsibly.

Chairperson Younger stated that Ms. Junior's concern about the origins of the prospective tenants was not fully addressed.

Ms. Reisner stated that the individuals will be referred to the building from locations throughout the city. Common Ground, to the extent that they can, will seek to have as many persons as possible with ties to this community occupy the building if this is the desire of the Community Board.

Chairperson Younger stated that the community should have a strong say in who will occupy the building. There are schools, private residences, cooperative apartments, professional buildings, and shops in the area, all of which will be impacted by the tenants of the building. We need assurances that the tenants are not coming from north, east, west, and south and being dumped into our community. If, however, there is a need by the community, it should be addressed.

Ms. Junior stated that because city and federal funds are being used, there can be no guarantee that the tenants will be from the Brownsville community, especially since the building will contain 161 units.

Ms. Reisner stated that 64 of the units will be set aside for low-income working people from the Brownsville community who may need a safe and affordable place to live. As to the homeless persons, some will have problems; however, there will be mechanisms in place to help them address their problems. This is not the first facility of this nature that Common Ground has operated. Common Ground has over 1500 units of this nature that operate in Brooklyn and Manhattan. They have facilities that are near schools and units that are near properties that are valued at two and a half million dollars.

Ms. Blanche Peltonbusch asked where are the units in Manhattan and Brooklyn located?

Ms. Reisner stated that in Brooklyn they recently opened a 217 unit facility Downtown on Schermerhorn Street between Smith and Hoyt Streets (which is in the rear of two and a half million dollar row houses).

Ms. Junior asked if the units are one-bedrooms or studios?

Ms. Reisner stated they are studios similar to what is being proposed this evening. The building is 11-stories. In Manhattan, they have units in the Chelsea community on West 24th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues, in the Times Square area on West 41st Street, and on East 23rd Street between Madison and 5th Avenues.

Ms. Daisy Jackson asked what criteria are they looking at during their background checks?

Ms. Reisner stated that for the low-income tenants the main criterion is that they do not earn more than 58% of area median income. Income checks are done on all prospective tenants, even the homeless have some source of income. Criminal background checks are also performed along with a check of their mental health history.

Ms. Essie Duggan asked what service will be available to tenants who are unemployed?

Ms. Reisner stated that several services will be in place to aid those who are seeking employment. There will be case management and employment specialists who will offer job training, computer workshops, etc..

Ms. Marie Pierre stated that she thinks that \$500 to \$600 may still be too much for a low-income individual from this community to afford for a studio apartment - rent of approximately \$400 would be more appropriate.

Someone asked if the other locations that they operate also house a formerly homeless population?

Ms. Reisner stated that they do. The first building that they opened in 1992 is a 652 unit building which serves as a model for this type of housing. The building is immaculate, secure, and has a very low turnover rate. She again extended an invitation for the audience to visit one of their sites. Arrangements can be made by contacting District Manager Greene-Walker.

Rev. White stated that many of the individuals who will become tenants will be arriving from a transitional setting that has prepared them for this type of situation. The training they will have received should eliminate many of the concerns being raised in this forum.

Ms. Mabel Davis asked how do they plan to deal with tenants who lose their jobs during their tenancy?

Ms. Reisner stated that their goal is to keep their tenants in-place. Towards that goal, they will work with tenants who may fall behind in their rents through tools such as creating a payment plan.

Mr. David Alexander asked if persons with MICA (mental illness and chemical abuse) backgrounds will be eligible for apartments; if so, will Section 8 subsidies be accepted?

Ms. Reisner stated that persons with MICA histories are not automatically disqualified. The building will be Section 8 eligible and they will assist their tenants with obtaining vouchers.

Someone asked if they will accept persons coming from jail?

Ms. Reisner stated that they do not accept persons coming directly from jail, however, some tenants may have criminal backgrounds if they demonstrate that they will not cause harm to the community.

Someone asked if they have a website?

Ms. Reisner stated that their website is www.commonground.org.

Mr. Gregory Jackson stated that he is the Executive Director for Brownsville Partnership and he stands by Common Ground and their proposal. He has had the opportunity to visit many of their sites and has come away impressed with their operation. The construction of the building will lead to many new jobs for community residents.

He was born and raised in Brownsville and if he had any inkling that something would have a negative effect on the community, he would be the first to rally against it.

Ms. Bettie Kollock-Wallace stated that on May 12, 2009, the Committee voted 6 in favor of the revised proposal and 4 in opposition with the stipulation that first priority is given to persons residing in single adult homeless shelters in Community District #16 and that community residents are given priority for employment during and after construction of the building.

Ms. Eula Key, Chairperson of the Nominating Committee, reported that the Committee met on May 15, 2009 and discussed names of Board members to fill Executive Offices for the period from June 2009 to June 2010.

The Committee submits the following names:

Chairperson – Hazel A. Younger
First Vice Chairperson – Bettie Kollock-Wallace
Second Vice Chairperson – Kofi Hormeku
Treasurer – Sarah Hall
Secretary – Sadie McNamara
Parliamentarian – James Mack

A motion was made by Mr. James Mack, seconded by Rev. Miran Ukaegbu and carried to accept the report of the Nomination Committee.

Ms. Key asked if there are any further nominations from the floor?

There being none, a motion was made by Ms. Daisy Jackson, seconded by Ms. Marie Pierre and carried to close the nomination.

There being no additional nominations from the floor, a vote was taken unanimously electing the entire slate of officers submitted by the Nominating Committee.

Chairperson Younger thanked the Nominating Committee and the membership for their votes of confidence.

Mr. Kofi Hormeku, Chairperson of the Parks and Recreation Committee, reported that on May 20, 2009, he and Mr. Tony Rosa, Manager of Parks for District #16, visited the parks and playgrounds in the District. Their findings are in his report that can be found in each Board member's folder and on tonight's distribution table and can be reviewed at your leisure.

The Committee continues to seek volunteers to adopt the parks and playgrounds in our community. Please contact the Board office at (718) 385-0323 to volunteer.

Ms. Sarah Hall, Chairperson of the Public Safety Committee, thanked the audience for their well wishes and kind thoughts during her recent illness.

She reported that volunteers are needed to join the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) for Ocean Hill-Brownsville. The CERT program is designed to train people to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergency situations in their communities. When emergencies occur, CERT members can provide immediate assistance to their neighbors until emergency authorities arrive. CERT members can further use their training to inform, educate, and train their fellow neighbors on disaster preparedness that will help improve the safety of their community.

If you are at least 18 years of age, the CERT needs you. By joining CERT, you will provide an invaluable service to your community and the City of New York.

For additional information and to sign up for the next training classes, please call District Manager Viola Greene-Walker at (718) 385-0323.

Ms. Marie Pierre, member of the Sanitation and Environmental Protection Committee, stated that contained within this month's District Manager's report is a long list of vacant lots that have been cleaned by the Department of Sanitation. This is an indication that the Department has been doing its job. Our community, however, has not been doing its job. The District is at the bottom of the list when it comes to recycling.

The Committee is appealing to the audience to spread the word to neighbors of their responsibility to recycle. Information on what to recycle and labels for recycling bins were disseminated to the audience.

Ms. Daisy Jackson, Chairperson of the Youth Services Planning Committee, reported that the Committee has completed plans for its annual Youth Conference entitled "A Second Chance", under the umbrella of "The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Yes I Can Teen Movement". This event will take place on Saturday, May 30, 2009, from 1:00 PM until 5:00 PM at Teachers Preparatory High School, located at 226 Bristol Street between Sutter and Blake Avenues.

The "Let's Grow Green" Project is well under way. They meet every Saturday at 1:00 PM at the Phoenix Garden, located on Somers Street between Rockaway Avenue and Thomas Boyland Street. This project will operate in the fall (from September until November) and in the spring (from April until June).

The next Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, May 28, 2009 at 6:00 PM to finalize preparations.

Chairperson Younger recognized Mr. Larry Watts from New Beginnings.

Mr. Watts stated that he made a presentation at last month's meeting seeking the support of the Board for New Beginnings' proposal to establish a comprehensive mental and primary healthcare facility at 1534 Broadway. At that meeting, there was no quorum present and no vote was taken on the item. He is here again this evening seeking the support of the Board for their project and request that a vote be taken even though there is no quorum. He asks this because they are under a time constraint.

Chairperson Younger apologized for the inconvenience and stated that it is rare that a quorum is not present for the Board meetings. However, in keeping with the Board's by-laws, the item cannot be voted upon until such time as there is a quorum present.

Chairperson Younger recognized Ms. Xamyla Rose-Persadi from Borough President Marty Markowitz' office.

Ms. Rose-Persadi stated that letters of appointment and re-appointment to the Board will be issued and should be received by next week.

Borough President Markowitz is co-sponsoring the Brooklyn Children's Sports & Fitness Expo on Saturday, June 13, 2009 from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. at Boys & Girls High School, located at 1700 Fulton Street between Utica and Schenectady Avenues. The Expo will bring awareness to childhood obesity and allow hundreds of school age children to participate in a wide range of sport clinics along with health tests, screenings, seminars and demonstrations. The event will be free of charge.

Borough President Markowitz, in collaboration with the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, will host a forum entitled "Homeowner Empowerment Month: The Fundamentals of Buying and Owning a Home" on Thursday, June 25, 2009, from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. in the Second Floor Courtroom at Brooklyn Borough Hall, located at 209 Joralemon Street.

Perfect attendance awards were issued to Ms. Sarah Hall and Ms. Shirley Gonsalves.

Chairperson Younger recognized Ms. Cathleen McCadden from Councilmember Darlene Mealy's office.

Ms. McCadden invited everyone to attend their next Neighborhood Advisory Meeting on Saturday, June 13th from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at their District Office. The Advisory Meetings are an opportunity to meet with Councilmember Mealy and voice your opinions on issues affecting the community.

The final session of their Housing Committee's series of housing information forums will be held on Monday, June 15th from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at their District Office, located at 1757 Union Street, second floor (between Utica and Rochester Avenues). Topics will include foreclosure prevention, financial literacy, credit issues, and information for homeowners and small investors in the real estate market. Participants will include NEDAP (Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project), PACC (Pratt Area Community Council), and South Brooklyn Legal Services. She can be contacted for additional information at (718) 953-3097.

Chairperson Younger recognized Mr. Melvin Faulkner from Assemblywoman Inez Barron's office.

Mr. Faulkner stressed the importance of prospective homebuyers bringing a trusted attorney with them to their closings. Too often buyers enter their closings with an attorney provided by the bank who does not truly represent the buyers' interest. Legislation is underway to prevent this from happening. However, it is important that buyers be aware of this all too common fraud potential. Assemblywoman Barron's Office is currently investigating twenty-six instances in which individuals have fallen victim to predatory lending schemes. In one instance the buyer unknowingly signed an agreement wherein their three hundred and sixtieth payment was in excess of \$300,000.

Chairperson Younger recognized Mr. Patrick Robinson from the Brooklyn Neighborhood Improvement Association (BNIA).

Mr. Robinson stated that he is the Director of BNIA's Youth Employment Services. This year, contractors for the Summer Youth Employment Program find themselves in an unusual situation in that they have more youth than they have available positions. He made an appeal for organizations and members to reach out to him if they know of businesses that may be able to hire some youth for a seven week period during the summer. He can be contacted by calling (718) 773-4116. The youth will be paid by the City and the employers will receive a tax benefit for hiring them. He publicly thanked Mr. Gregory Jackson for his acceptance of fifty youth.

Chairperson Younger recognized Ms. Christina Larkin from the Department of Health and Mental

Hygiene.

Ms. Larkin stated that information is available on tonight's distribution table concerning the H1N1 (Swine) flu virus as well as a brochure entitled: "Prepare Today Cope Better Tomorrow" which provides information on preparing one's self for crises and emergencies in order to lessen the effect of the stress that they cause.

The Health Department's Brooklyn Food and Fitness Task Force is sponsoring several Healthy Food and Fitness Expos. One will be held in Brownsville, in conjunction with the Brownsville Multi-Service Family Health Center's Health Fair, on Saturday, July 18th from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.. Informational fliers are available on tonight's distribution table.

Chairperson Younger recognized Mr. Gregory Jackson, Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation's Brownsville Recreation Center (BRC).

Mr. Jackson stated that many activities have been planned for the community in the upcoming months. On Saturday, June 13th, there will be a Cancer Awareness Walk. The event will begin at Zion Square (Legion Street at Pitkin Avenue) at 9:00 a.m. and end at the BRC at 1:00 p.m.. It is being held in honor of Al Dixon, a young man who grew up in Brownsville and worked at the BRC. Many elected officials including Senator John Sampson, Councilmember Darlene Mealy, and Borough President Marty Markowitz have committed to join them.

This year, the Brownsville Week Celebration will begin on July 8th and end on July 25th. For the first time, the event will be funded. While past events have been successful, they were limited by what could be done without funding. This year, Councilmember Mealy, Senator Sampson, and Assemblyman Darryl Towns have contributed funding for the event. The funds have allowed them to book the Whispers to perform on July 24th and First Choice on July 25th – marking the first time that they have had performers of this caliber. At Betsy Head Poolside, there will be live jazz performances on three nights. Following last year's performance of Dream Girls, this year's stage show will be Timbuktu.

This year, they will present four individuals with the Jeannette Gadson Award for their service to the community.

Starting on July 8th, they will have what they are calling their Subway Series with live entertainment presented at different locales in the community. On July 8th, it will be at the Broadway Junction Station (Van Sinderen between Broadway and Fulton Street), on July 9th, the activities will move to Rockaway Avenue and Fulton Street, and on July 10th, Latin Night, performances will be held at Callahan Kelly Park (Sackman Street between Truxton and Fulton Streets).

The BRC also has free movies and roller skating every Friday night and activities for senior citizens in the morning during the week.

Chairperson Younger recognized Mr. Charles Ladson.

Mr. Ladson stated that he is the Second Vice President of the Community Education Council and he is here tonight to advocate for parental control as opposed to mayoral control of our children's education. Along with the United Federation of Teachers and ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), they have petitioned legislators in Albany to end mayoral control of the school boards. Chancellor Joel Klein is a lawyer and Mayor Bloomberg is a businessman, they are not educators.

The Chancellor and Mayor seek to force charter schools into our communities. The charter schools will only select choice students; they do not enroll special education students or students with a lower aptitude for traditional learning. This creates situations wherein a student may live across the street from a school and is bused to a school out of their community. He is appealing to the Board for its support of a system that will allow parents greater influence in educational decisions for their children.

Chairperson Younger recognized Ms. Essie Duggan.

Ms. Duggan introduced Rev. C.B. Dawson who will soon be installed as the new Pastor of Bright Light Baptist Church (1676 Park Place).

Rev. Dawson stated that they have received correspondence from the Board and he wanted to

attend a meeting at the earliest possible date to express his desire to work with the Board to better our community.

Chairperson Younger recognized Deputy Inspector Samuel Wright, Commanding Officer of the 73rd Precinct.

Deputy Inspector Wright thanked the community for its continued support in helping to reduce the homicide rate in the Precinct. When he first arrived in the Precinct the papers were reporting that the Precinct with the highest homicide rate in the city was the 73rd Precinct. He voiced a commitment to this Board that if he received the assistance from the community, the collaboration would mean a reduced crime rate in the Precinct. He is happy to announce that citywide, homicides are down 18% for the 28-day period that ended May 24th. In that same timeframe, homicides in the 73rd Precinct were down by 56% (There were 31 homicides in the City and none occurred in the 73rd Precinct).

One key component in this surge is the removal of guns from our streets. Citywide, gun arrests are up 18%, in the 73rd Precinct, they are up by 42%. This again is due to cooperation from the community. In fact, he was delayed in his arrival this evening because he is returning from an arrest that was made earlier in the day of a person with a Tec-9 automatic weapon. That arrest was made because of information provided by the community. He looks forward to the continued good working relationship with the community.

Chairperson Younger recognized Detective Dean Elmore of the 73rd Precinct's Community Affairs Unit.

Detective Elmore stated that the recent arrest of four individuals who were plotting to perform terrorist acts in the Bronx should serve as a reminder of our need to remain vigilant. Acts of terrorism may be plotted from anywhere and it is important that we report suspicious activity to law enforcement authorities. This manner led to the arrest of the four men in Westchester County.

To combat the rash of burglaries that have occurred in the area around Van Dyke Houses, a joint meeting will be held by the 73rd Precinct and Police Service Area #2 at the Van Dyke Community Center on Tuesday, June 9th from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.. Commissioner Raymond Kelly and Community Affairs Chief Douglass Zeigler have been invited to the forum. There will be workshops on crime prevention and they will be able to fingerprint children as part of the National Child Identification Program that reunites parents with children who are abducted or run away. They encourage the entire community to participate in this event so that they may continue to bring more forums to the community.

There being no further business to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Eula Key, seconded by Ms. Sarah Hall and carried to adjourn the meeting.