

Brooklyn Community Board 4
Public Hearing and Regular Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, March 19, 2025 6pm

Hope Gardens Older Adult Center
195 Linden Street
Zoom

Chairperson: Robert Camacho
District Manager: Celestina Leon

Meeting Start: 6:05pm

Celeste called the meeting to order and announced the first public hearing item.

Public Hearing:

1. **Drisana Hughes, Brooklyn Borough Commissioner, NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)** - providing an informational Flooding 101 presentation, updates regarding Knickerbocker Avenue, and the flooding dynamics in Bushwick

Ms. Hughes presented on flooding in NYC, noting the city's reclassification to a humid subtropical climate and the increasing likelihood of intense storms (over 2 inches/hour). She explained the three types of flooding (stormwater, coastal, groundwater) and how NYC's combined sewer system (60% of the city) can lead to backups and overflows during heavy rain.

Specific focus was given to Bushwick and Knickerbocker Avenue, a known flooding area due to its valley topography. Ms. Hughes highlighted a \$390 million investment to upgrade the Knickerbocker sewer system, increasing capacity by over 800%, with construction starting in 2029.

She discussed DEP's toolkit to combat flooding: grey infrastructure (sewer upgrades), green infrastructure (rain gardens, porous pavement - nearly 400 rain gardens in CB4), blue infrastructure (new manhole covers), and real-time monitoring (FloodNet sensors).

Ms. Hughes provided tips for homeowners to protect against flooding: ensuring proper basement drainage and fixtures, rerouting downspouts away from buildings, using rain barrels, installing flood sensors and barriers, using sump pumps, and obtaining flood insurance and sewer service line insurance (noting the homeowner is responsible for the service line, which can cost up to \$10,000 to repair). She also advised residents to

reduce water usage during heavy storms and properly dispose of waste (no "flushable" wipes). Apps like Tide Alert and Notify NYC were recommended for storm information.

Board Member/Public Questions & Comments:

- Felix Ceballos asked about the location of DEP pumps; Ms. Hughes clarified about sump pumps available at hardware stores and potential DEP distribution events
- Stephanie Anderson asked about installing a "moat" or internal cellar sewer system; Ms. Hughes hadn't heard of it but encouraged consulting licensed plumbers.
- Christian Celeste Tate asked about the 2029 start date for the Knickerbocker project and interim mitigation plans; Ms. Hughes explained the complexity of capital projects involving multiple agencies and reiterated the ongoing use of green/grey/blue infrastructure.
- Annette Spellman asked about the recommendation to clean sewer lines and install a backwater valve/box; Ms. Hughes agreed it was a good idea for maintaining service lines.
- Barbara Jackson confirmed the optional sewer line insurance is offered on water bills. She shared her positive experience using the insurance for lead pipe replacement.
- Cecilia Fabian shared her negative experience of paying \$13,000 for a broken sewer line potentially damaged by nearby construction, emphasizing the value of insurance.

2. Jonathan Novella, Community Affairs Associate, NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) - providing an informational presentation regarding NYC Free Tax Prep (Presented via Zoom)

Mr. Novella introduced DCWP's mission to protect consumers and workers and offer financial empowerment programs. He focused on NYC Free Tax Prep, a free service provided by trusted, trained preparers. He highlighted its importance in helping New Yorkers claim valuable credits (Child Tax Credit, Earned Income Tax Credit) and noted that providers saved filers \$56 million in fees and helped them receive \$450 million in refunds since 2022.

Eligibility generally requires family income of \$93,000 or less / single income of \$65,000 or less (thresholds may vary by site). Over 140 sites offer services: in-person appointments, drop-off service, virtual tax prep, and assisted self-preparation. Services are available in 13 languages onsite, with access to translation services for over 180 languages.

Required documents include photo ID, social security numbers, proof of income (W2s, 1099s), childcare expenses, and bank account information. Specialized services are available for freelancers, gig workers, and small business owners (under the same income thresholds, with business expenses under \$250,000). Free workshops on tax filing and recordkeeping are also available.

Mr. Novella outlined tax preparer rights: preparers must disclose if they are not an attorney/CPA, post qualifications, list services and prices, and cannot require refund anticipation loans/products or charge fees based on refund amount. Consumers have the right to a written estimate before paying. He emphasized the service is free regardless of immigration status.

He also mentioned DCWP's free Financial Empowerment Centers, offering one-on-one counseling to anyone over 18 living/working in NYC (no income/immigration restrictions) to help with credit, savings, and debt management. He shared contact information and showed a map of nearby tax prep sites.

Board Member/Public Questions & Comments:

- Felix Ceballos asked about the timing for tax prep services and locations; Mr. Novella confirmed services are available now until the April 15th deadline at various locations found on nyc.gov/taxprep, and volunteer recruitment typically happens in the fall.
- Stephanie Anderson asked for clarification on filing as a small business; Mr. Novella reiterated the income/expense thresholds.– presenting the City of Yes Zoning for Economic Opportunity text amendment.

Regular Meeting:

1) First Roll Call:

Present: Isa Abney, Stephanie Anderson, Jo-Ena Bennett, Makeba S. Brown-Alleyne, Robert Camacho, Felix Ceballos, Cecilia Fabian, Freddy Fowler, Christopher Graham, Anne Guiney, Zachary Hendrickson, Barbara Jackson, Virgie Jones, Luisa Jose, Kristine Malden, Raul Rubio, Eliseo Ruiz, Milagros Sandoval, Annette Spellen, James Steward, Christian C. Tate, Ben Tocker

Present via a remote waiver: Elvena Davis, Deborah Hicks, Tanesha Honeygan, Jerry Valentin

Excused: Joanna Fuentes-Singh, Jason Gers (Zoom – no waiver), Alex Móreno, Romicka Nichols-Barnes, Linda Whitfield

Absent: Zulma Novoa, Freddie Mattison, Tara Jones-Thomas, Kyeshia Johnson, Andrew Choi, Isa Abney

Resigned: Kerina Dodd

2) Acceptance of the Agenda

Annette Spellen made a motion to accept the agenda. It was seconded by Felix Ceballos. All were in favor, so moved.

3) Acceptance of the Previous Meeting Minutes

Jo-Ena Bennett made a motion to table the previous meeting minutes. It was seconded by Ben Tocker. All were in favor, so moved.

4) Chairperson's Report

Mr. Camacho reported on several activities:

- Addressing heating issues at the CB4 office, resulting in the installation of dedicated heating/AC units.
- Receiving confirmation that the NYC Comptroller's audit of CB4 was successfully closed and passed for the four-year period.
- Attending a Build the Block meeting (Sector Charlie) and emphasizing the importance of community participation in these sector meetings to address local concerns directly with Neighborhood Coordination Officers (NCOs).
- Meeting with Riseboro regarding changes at Casa Paz Viejo.
- Attending the opening of "The Dark Room" gallery (334 Knickerbocker Ave) run by a local resident he knew from childhood, highlighting positive community engagement.
- Attending the Youth & Education, Housing/Land Use/Economic Development, and Permits & Licenses committee meetings.
- Attending the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the \$390 million Knickerbocker Ave sewer upgrade project with Council Member Sandy Nurse. He discussed the impact of flooding, the need for flood insurance (suggesting subsidies for seniors/low-income residents), and the challenges of homeownership affordability in Bushwick.
- Meeting with the Borough President (with DM Leon) to discuss issues like term limits and the need for a centralized system for District Manager service requests.
- Attending the Riseboro community breakfast.
- Attending the walk-out ceremony for retiring 83rd Precinct Detective Robinson (26 years of service).
- Attending the Borough Board meeting, noting the formation of a committee to update the Borough Board bylaws (last updated 1977).
- Discussing at the CB4 Executive Board meeting the recommendation for a 3% raise for the District Manager, aligning with union contracts, and the need for staff to use their vacation days.
- Attending the Hope Gardens Community Center Advisory Board meeting, raising concerns about DYCD funding compliance requirements related to serving NYCHA residents, given Hope Gardens' RAD conversion status.
- Attending the 83rd Precinct Council meeting.
- Attending (with DM Leon) the ribbon-cutting for the new St. Nicks Alliance Workforce Development Center at 92 Throop Avenue, detailing available programs (tech, green jobs, construction, ESL, healthcare training) and encouraging residents to utilize the services.

See the [Executive Board Report](#)

Elected Officials and Representatives:

Jonathan Betancourt, Rep. Congresswoman Nydia Velasquez
718-599-3658

Fran Sanhueza, Rep. Council Member Sandy Nurse
718-642-8664

Lacey Tauber, Rep. Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso
718-802-3894

Maria Valdez, Rep. State Senator Julia Salazar
718-573-1726

Kimberly Vega, Rep. Council Member Jennifer Gutierrez
718-963-3141

Jonathan Pomboza, Rep. Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez

Agency Representatives, Community-Based Organizations, and Businesses:

Amy Collado, Bushwick Housing Independence Project (BHIP)
929-324-7358, bhiporganize@gmail.com

Cirilo Nunez, Bushwick Sports and Recreation
(347-388-8271)

Varun Kataria, Xanadu / The Turk's Inn
612-867-8989, varun@xanadu.nyc

Cecilia Fabian, CB4 Member/Business Owner, Chila for Fun
963 Bushwick Ave

Nalisha Samlall, Neighborhood 360, Riseboro

83rd Precinct Report - Deputy Inspector David Poggioli

Deputy Inspector Poggioli thanked the board and community for their engagement.

- He reiterated the importance of Build the Block meetings (Next: Sector Adam, March 27th, 6 PM, 1288 Hancock St) as a forum for direct communication with NCOs.
- He noted high attendance at recent Community Council (52 people) and Clergy Council (40+ people) meetings, linking community dialogue to crime reduction.

- Bushwick's year-to-date crime decrease is 33%, significantly better than the citywide decrease of 13%.
- Eight Field Training Unit officers returned to the precinct (from Transit Bureau assignment) and were deployed on foot patrol (Wyckoff, Knickerbocker, Myrtle Aves), Thursday-Monday, 5:30 PM - 2:00 AM. He encouraged community interaction with the new officers.
- Update on Hydrant Parking: Increased summons enforcement and conducted a targeted towing operation with tow trucks accompanying officers. Highlighted this response to community concerns raised last month.
- Update on Wyckoff Ave Food Trucks: Coordinated effort with Dept. of Sanitation and Dept. of Health on March 6th resulted in summonses, removal of 4-5 conveyances, and closure orders for others, leading to a noticeable improvement. He thanked partner agencies and noted the new foot patrol will help maintain the progress.

Crime Stats/Trends:

- Robberies are down almost 70% YTD (28 total since Jan 1st). A small cluster of 4-5 incidents was noted on Linden St (Irving to St. Nicholas) during overnight hours. He advised situational awareness (e.g., putting phones away).
- Highlighted an increase in apartment rental scams where victims send deposits (via Zelle, etc.) for apartments they haven't seen in person, only to find the apartment occupied or non-existent. He urged caution and in-person verification before sending money.
- Cop of the Month: Honored Officer Jerez (Field Intelligence Unit) for work leading to a search warrant near Stanhope & Wilson, recovering meth, heroin, cocaine, and two loaded firearms (38 revolver, 9mm). This stemmed from an investigation into street-level narcotics sales reported by the community.

Board Member/Public Questions & Comments:

- Felix Ceballos thanked the Inspector for the visible difference in the neighborhood and acknowledged the ongoing nature of issues like hydrant parking.
- Annette Spellen requested a flyer for the Sector Adam Build the Block meeting. The Inspector confirmed they have flyers including photos of the NCOs and a map.
- Cecilia Fabian appreciated the neighborhood improvements and shared her daughter's experience being scammed out of \$2,500 in an apartment rental scheme.
- James Steward thanked the Inspector for an officer proactively calling his church regarding safety planning for Holy Week.

5) District Manager's Report - Ms. Celeste Leon

Ms. Leon provided an overview of her activities:

- Regular check-ins with committee chairs (e.g., Virgie Jones, Youth & Ed).

- Meeting with Brooklyn DMs and the Borough President's team regarding Charter Reform proposals. She noted the poor advertisement of the Brooklyn hearing and encouraged participation in hearings in other boroughs.
- Ongoing participation in the 311 Data Project (final presentation next month).
- Participating in the MTA Capital Plan (25-29) feedback session, reiterating CB4 priorities (DeKalb Ave ADA access, opening J/Z second entrances).
- District Office Committee meeting discussion on staff/managerial raises (final 3% increase in May) based on union agreements and mayoral orders.
- Meeting with City Planning regarding the City of Yes Zoning for Housing Opportunity presentation follow-up.
- Meeting with Joyce Freeling (City College) about potential expansion of the UniCREST program (community health/environment) to Brooklyn.
- Meeting with DMs, CUP, and CEC regarding the future of the Community Board Term Limit Project.
- Meeting with public member Kayla Stein to discuss city resources and processes.
- Attending the Borough Service Cabinet meeting where City Planning presented the District Needs Road Show. She noted DM dissatisfaction with agency responses suggesting removal of unmet budget requests and City Planning's apology for the poorly executed attempt to streamline the process.
- Participating in a webinar on AI in the workforce and its implications for government/community preparedness.
- Meeting with the DM Working Group and City Planning to refine the Budget Request Reference Guide.
- Participating in a budget testimony discussion ahead of the City Council preliminary budget hearing, planning to submit public comment on CB needs.

Board Member/Public Questions & Comments

None

6) Committee Reports (digital and/or hard copies are available upon request)

District Office - Robert Camacho

- Reviewed board member attendance; flagged two members for potential removal due to absences (one resigned due to health). Five members previously flagged showed improved attendance.
- Discussed staff updates: HR training platform transition issues (NYC CityLearn access delays), collective bargaining agreement raises, and the upcoming NYC Open Restaurants program (formerly Open Dining).
- No recommendations from the committee.

Economic Development + Housing and Land Use - Kristine Malden and Anne Guiney

- Met virtually on Feb 25th due to office heating issues.
- Completed review of the updated Responsible Development Policy (originally passed 2021). The policy outlines board values/expectations for developers

(affordability, unit size, parking, hiring, preference for ULURP over BSA variance).

- The committee voted to support the updated policy but couldn't make a formal recommendation due to the virtual meeting format.
- The updated policy will be presented as a public hearing item at the April 2025 full board meeting for discussion and vote. Committee notes (containing policy details) were circulated. Recommended reading committee mail.

Health/Human Service/Senior Citizens/Veterans - James Steward

- Met with only 3 committee members present (quorum not met). Emphasized the need for committee member attendance.
- Council Member Nurse presented the Progressive Caucus FY26 Budget Campaign ("Crisis to Care"). A vote couldn't be taken due to lack of quorum. (This was later moved to Recommendations).
- Julianne Roman (American Cancer Society) presented on colorectal cancer awareness and screening.
- Reviewed committee mail: Brooklyn Veterans Appreciation Parade (Fall), proposed DOHMH rule amendment hearing (March 27th).

Permits and Licenses - Isa Abney & Kristine Malden

- Reviewed four applications for beer/wine/liquor licenses based on board stipulations (no alcohol sales past 12 AM Sun-Thu, 2 AM Fri-Sat).
- Non-Controversial:* Recommended approval for:
 - El Jardin (266 Suydam St): Beer/Cider, hours within stipulations.
 - Chilango Taqueria (295 Wyckoff Ave): Beer/Wine, hours within stipulations.
 - J&D Restaurant (1546 Myrtle Ave): Full Liquor (New), hours within stipulations.
- Controversial:
 - Xanadu (Location not stated, assumed known): Requested extension of hours beyond stipulations (to 1 AM Sun-Thu, 3 AM Fri-Sat). The committee voted *not* to approve the extension request.

Youth and Education - Virgie Jones

- Met virtually on Feb 24th.
- Presentation by Natalie Susilo & Jake Levine (Reading Partners NYC), a literacy non-profit providing 1-on-1 tutoring (K-4th grade). They are seeking to expand into Brooklyn schools (currently none) and recruit volunteer tutors (age 14+). Program details (I Do/We Do/You Do model, history) were shared. Principals decide on school participation.
- Reviewed committee mail: CEC elections, schoolyards as playgrounds proposal, notice from Coalition for Hispanic Family Services.
- Announcements:

- Decline in Bushwick HS Adult Literacy enrollment due to migrant shelter safety concerns. Other sites (PS 106, 145, 162) open Saturdays 9-2. Potential for Spanish classes for non-Spanish speakers if 25+ people enroll.
- Encouraged youth (14+) to get working papers.
- Christopher Graham: Growing Forward HBCU College Tour (April 13-19). Website: growing4ward.org.
- Association for Black Educators of NY (ABENY) scholarships for graduating seniors (due Apr 30) and Human Service Awards (due May 31). Contact: sheilabobo@gmail.com.

7) Recommendations

Executive Board on behalf of Permits and Licenses

Letter re: Nightlife Venues

Recommendation from the Executive Board to send a letter to the State Liquor Authority regarding the proliferation of large nightlife venues (200+ capacity) near the Jefferson St L stop, requesting discussion on regulatory tools.

Motion (to approve sending letter): Jo-Ena Bennett

Second: Felix Ceballos

All in favor, motion carried.

Referred to the Full Board due to lack of quorum at the Health-Committee Meeting

Crisis to Care Campaign (Progressive Caucus Budget Proposal)

Recommendation to support the \$61 million investment plan for mental health/public safety, with stipulations. Stipulations (added during discussion):

- **Ensure community engagement throughout the process (not just at the start), involve local stakeholders (e.g., Woodhull Hospital, schools, senior centers), ensure accountability and collaboration.**

Motion (to approve with stipulations): Annette Spellman

Second: Virgie Jones

All in favor, motion carried.

Permits & Licenses

Non-Controversial Applications x3 - El Jardin, Chilango Taqueria, J&D Restaurant

Recommendation from the committee to approve the applications with the standard stipulations.

Motion (to approve): Jo-Ena Bennett

Second: Ben Tocker

Abstention: Raul Rubio and Elvena Davis

Motion carried

Xanadu Hours Extension

Recommendation from the committee to not approve the extension of hours to serve liquor.

Motion (to uphold committee recommendation): Jo-Ena Bennett

Second: Stephanie Anderson

Roll Call Vote conducted

16 members voted IN FAVOR (i.e., against the extension)

9 members ABSTAINED.

Motion carried (extension not approved).

8) Old Business

None

9) New Business

Annette Spellen reported on two recent fires in Bushwick (Halsey St church, Lafayette/Bushwick Ave building with critically injured firefighter), announced the Irving Square Park restroom is open, and relayed Sanitation Dept. warnings about mandatory compost bin usage starting April 1st (potential summonses for non-compliance) and reminded residents to call 311 for cars blocking hydrants.

Anne Guiney and James Steward discussed the upcoming NYC Tax Lien Sale (Auction May 20th). Highlighted the high number of liens in Bushwick (~300 blocks, ~800 liens). Emphasized the May 19th deadline to enter payment agreements to avoid the sale. Noted predatory risks once liens are sold. Urged residents to check the list, open notices, and utilize resources/workshops offered by Council Members Nurse and Gutierrez to prevent foreclosure. Mentioned water bills and property taxes as common reasons for liens.

10) Announcements (1.5 minutes each)

Kevin (Troutman Open Streets): Announcing season starts April 26th - Oct 26th (Sat/Sun, 10am-8pm). Seeking community groups/non-profits for free events. troutmanopenstreets.org / @gmail / @Instagram.

Fran (CM Nurse's Office): Participatory Budgeting voting March 29th-April 6th (10 projects, goal 10k+ votes). Tax Lien Sale workshops: May 6th (5-8pm) at Washington Irving Library (in-person w/ Dept. of Finance). Job Fair (Youth focus): May 17th at RiseBoro Youth Center (seeking tabling organizations).

Amy Collado (Bushwick Housing Independence Project): Monthly meeting March 26th (6:30-8pm) at El Puente (311 Central Ave) - Workshop on reporting landlord harassment (lease issues). bipbiporganized@gmail.com / 929-324-7358.

Chanel (I Am Federal Credit Union - formerly 1199): Credit union services (savings, checking, loans) available for members and underserved areas. iamfcu.org / 212-957-1555.

Jonathan Betancourt (Rep. Velasquez's Office): Congresswoman opposes Con Edison rate hikes. Voted NO on budget resolution due to cuts impacting ACA, Medicaid, SNAP in the district. Honored Elvena Davis at Black History Month event. Federal agency assistance: 718-599-3658.

Abu (CB3 Member / Resident): Seeking individuals interested in collaborative home buying to address affordability, maintenance workload, and knowledge gaps, particularly focusing on rehabilitating homes for owner-occupancy plus rentals. abu@abubuild.com / 929-488-3095 / abubuild.com/househack2025.

Kim Vega (CM Gutierrez's Office): CM Gutierrez back from maternity leave. PB ballots coming soon. Mobile Office Hours: March 28th (11am-3pm) at DeKalb Library. Virtual Town Hall (Immigrant Rights w/ CUNY Citizenship Now & BCP): March 25th (3pm). Tax Lien Sale events planned for April (details TBD). Ongoing: Affordable Housing Workshops (Thursdays), CUNY Citizenship Now (Mondays), Housing Attorney (3rd Weds). Appointments: 718-963-3141.

Maria Valdez (Sen. Salazar's Office): Highlighting End Toxic Home Flipping Act (S8574) - proposes tax up to 60% on investors flipping homes within 2 years. Tax Prep appointments available March 30th & April 14th (12-6pm) - call 347-682-5606. Tax Clinic: March 31st (4pm) at DeKalb Library.

Juanita James (Washington Irving Library): Online registration help (Thursdays). Free beginner drop-in English classes starting April 7th. Diabetes self-management course starting April 3rd (Thursdays).

Lacey Tauber (BP Reynoso's Office): State of the Borough Address: April 10th (7pm) at Boys & Girls HS. Free Tax Prep at Borough Hall (by appointment). Naloxone (Narcan) training: March 20th at Diana H Jones Senior Center. Deed Theft Prevention Workshop: March 25th at Bed-Stuy Restoration. She thanked CB applicants.

Cirilo Nunez (Bushwick Sports and Recreation): Taking registrations for in-house/travel baseball, girls softball, men's softball, soccer. Flyers available. 347-388-8271.

Christian Celeste Tate (CB4 Member): Follow-up on PB announcement - NYPD cameras project came directly from CB4 District Needs Statement, thanking the board and CM Nurse's office for a funding pathway.

Jo-Ena Bennett (Resident/CB4 Member): Raised awareness about national efforts to repeal Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies, potential impacts on funding (e.g., HBCUs), government jobs, and urged attention to economic boycotts and where money is spent.

Christopher Graham (CB4 Member): Reminder about Growing Forward HBCU College Tour (April 13-19). Final Parent Workshop: April 5th. Tour visits 11 schools (NY to Atlanta). growing4ward.org. Also noted the Water Board computer system was down during a recent visit.

Jonathan Pomboza (DA Gonzalez's Office - Zoom): Cash for Guns event: April 5th (10am-4pm) at Cornerstone Baptist Church (574 Madison St). Prescription Drug Take Back Day: April 25th at multiple sites including Hope Gardens.

Sabrina Lewis (Haitian Centers Council - Zoom): New grant for LGBTQ+ mental health programs (bwell community). Offer immigration services, ESL, FitBK program. Contact info requested in chat due to poor connection (718-940-2200 x124, SLewis@hccinc.org).

Karmisha Superville (Zoom): Connection unstable, info requested in chat.

Tessaria (Clean Bushwick Initiative - Zoom): Repair Fest: March 29th (12-4pm) at Mayday Space (fixing sewing, electronics, woodworking, jewelry, etc.). Info in chat.

11) Second Roll Call

Present: Ben Tocker, Christian C. Tate, James Steward, Annette Spellén, Milagros Sandoval, Eliseo Ruiz, Raul Rubio, Kristine Malden, Luisa Jose, Virgie Jones, Barbara Jackson, Zachary Hendrickson, Anne Guiney, Christopher Graham, Freddy Fowler, Cecilia Fabian, Felix Ceballos, Robert Camacho, Makeba S. Brown-Alleyne, Jo-Ena Bennett, Stephanie Anderson

Present via a remote waiver: Jerry Valentin, Tanesha Honeygan, Deborah Hicks

Excused: Linda Whitfield, Romicka Nichols-Barnes, Jason Gers, Joanna Fuentes-Singh

Absent: Zulma Novoa, Freddie Mattison, Tara Jones-Thomas, Kyeshia Johnson, Andrew Choi, Isa Abney

Resigned: Kerina Dodd

12) Adjournment

Motion: Annette Spellén

Second: Raul Rubio

All in favor, motion carried.

Meeting Adjourned: 9:03pm