

UNITED JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS
OF WILLIAMSBURG AND NORTH BROOKLYN
פאראייניגטע אידישע ארגאניזאציעס פון וויליאמסבורג

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August 11, 2022

**Plea and submission of the UJO of Williamsburg to keep the Jewish Community of Williamsburg, a
distinct community of interest, in one Council District**

NYC Districting Commission

253 Broadway, 3rd Floor

New York, NY 10007

The United Jewish Organizations of Williamsburg and North Brooklyn (UJO) is the central social services and advocacy agency representing more than 75,000 Yiddish Speaking Orthodox Jewish residents in North Brooklyn. Close to 95 percent of our community is currently in Council District 33, while the rest are in Council District 36. The draft council district maps released on July 15, 2022, propose to drastically change that. If the district boundaries in the area remains as proposed, it will result in the removal of roughly a quarter of the community from the 33rd district, into Council District 34, hence diluting the community's representation in the city council. We appeal hereby that our community – a clear and distinct community of interest – should not be divided among several council districts.

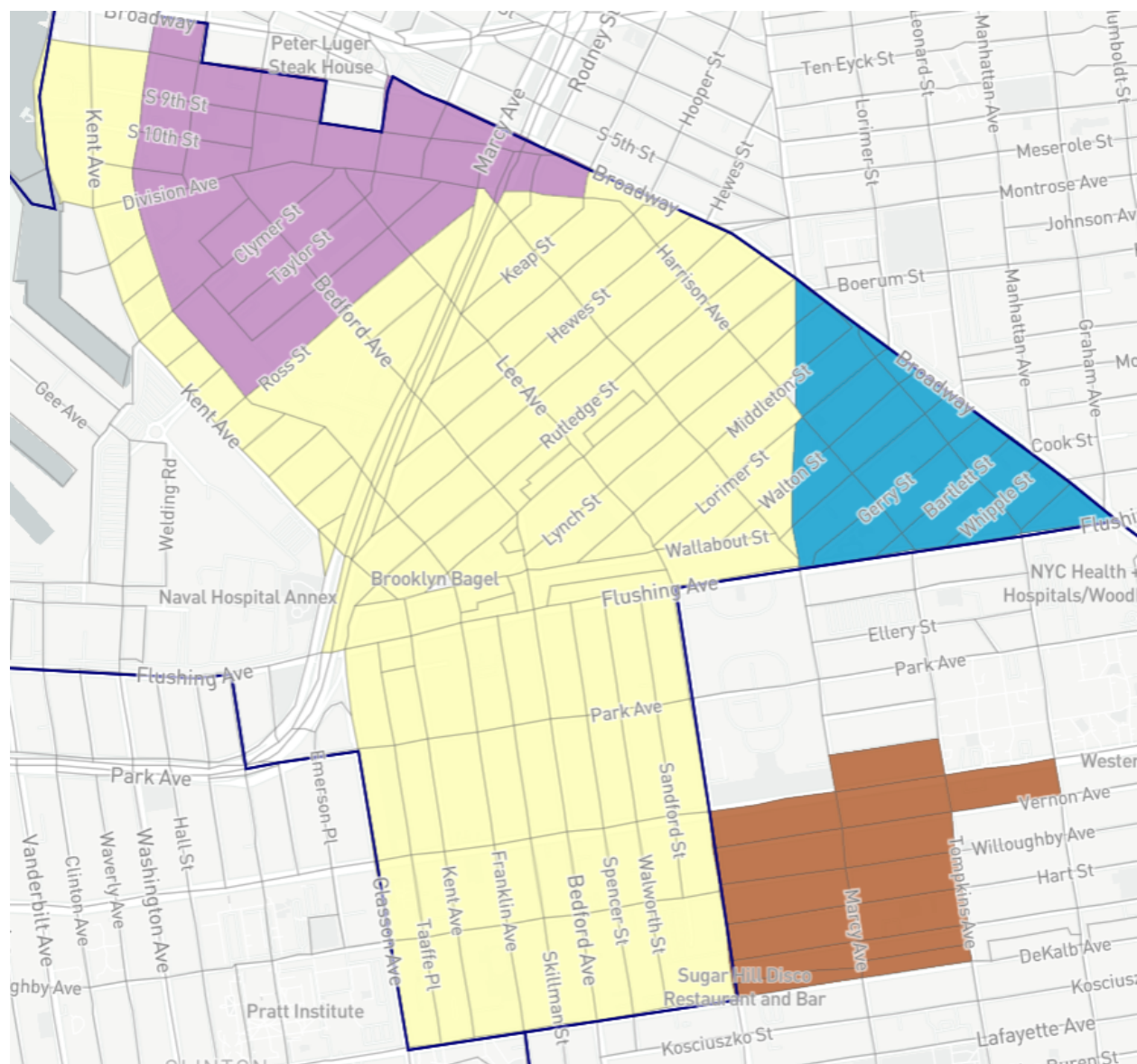
We already submitted written testimony on May 26, 2022, describing the strong-shared interests and needs of our community members. We share a religion and culture, as Orthodox and Hasidic Jews, that should be kept together. Our community is not a majority of any district in which we are a part of, but our community has a strong voice in the district we're currently in. Splintering our community would dilute our voice, it would even more disenfranchise those who would be moved to a new district where they will be less than 10 percent of that district. This would have devastating to the community's unique needs and concerns, including the elderly in the housing projects and community children and we hope that this will not happen.

Some of the key unifiers of our community of interest, is a high percentage of large families, resulting in roughly 50% of the community being under the voting age; the need for security and protection from anti-Semitic hate crimes which is an ongoing issue in our neighborhood; the unique housing and zoning needs geared towards family and larger family housing; the unique religious practices and services; and a unique Yiddish language social service delivery and advocacy system.

As said, the draft proposed maps eliminate an integral part of the Hasidic area of Williamsburg from the 33rd district, where the majority of the community will remain.

In the following sections we describe the parts that were eliminated from the district, how they are an integral part of the Hasidic area of Williamsburg.

For easy reference, we enclose the map below, with different colors for the different section of Hasidic Williamsburg that will be impacted by the map:



The yellow section is the area left within district 33 in the drafted maps.

The purple section is the area mostly north of Ross Street that the draft map moved from district 33 to district 34.

The light blue section is the area known as the Broadway triangle that the draft eliminated from district 33 and added to district 34.

The brown section is currently and remained in the draft maps a part of district 36, but this area has a significant and growing Orthodox Jewish population.

Below we discuss some of the characteristics of these sections.

Purple Area, North of Ross Street

The purple area north of Ross Street, has several thousand private units, condos and rentals, predominantly occupied by religious Orthodox Jewish families. Those blocs also maintain significant religious anchor institutions areas for the Williamsburg Jewish communities. This area also has four public housing developments, Taylor Wythe, Independence Towers, Williams Plaza housing, and Berry Street Houses, and also the Kent Village (Clemente) Mitchel Lama, with more than 2,000 of low-income housing units. While the public housing are more mixed developments, these developments have a significant population of Orthodox Jewish families and are the only ones of these types of public housing in Brooklyn where a significant number of Orthodox Jewish families and individuals reside.

The following is a quick and partial list of community institutions in the purple area:

- This area that was removed from the district 33 is home of the Satmar Grand Rebbe's house, at 550 Bedford Avenue (corner Ross Street), and adjacent to it, the new main Satmar shul is in middle of construction. This area also contains the historic house of the Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum OBM, at 500 Bedford (corner Clymer Street). A majority of Orthodox Jewish residents in Williamsburg identify at Satmar, and the fact that their main religious sites were removed of the core district, demonstrates how these new lines cut through the heart of the community.
- This area also encompasses the future headquarters of our organization, the UJO, on the upper floors of 500 Bedford Avenue, that is now in the final stages of construction. Additionally, we are about to embark on the excavation work to add an additional building, adjacent to the newly constructed building, to be able to cater to the social services needs of the community.
- This area also includes the main Viznitz shul at 2-6 Lee Avenue; the Vien shul, at 27 Lee Avenue; large Satmar shuls, on 165 Clymer Street, and 111 South 8th Street. Each of these synagogues has hundreds of daily worshippers. There are tens of smaller synagogues (shteeblech) in the area.
- The area includes large Yeshiva school buildings with a total enrollment of thousands of children, including a:
 - UTA (Satmar) Yeshiva at 75 Ross Street, with an enrollment 1,015 children Pre-K to 6th grade;
 - Yeshiva Kehilath Yakov (Pupa) at 206 Wilson Street, with an enrollment of 474 students pre-K to 12th grade;
 - Yeshiva Bnos Ahavas Israel (Viznitz) at 4 Lee Avenue, with 631 students, K-12.
 - Yeshiva Jesode Hatorah Wilson (Vien) at 185 Wilson Street, with 373 students, Pre-K - 12.
 - Bais Yakov of Khal Adas Yereim (also Vien) at 505 Bedford Avenue with 454 students, with Pre-K - 12.
- The draft maps also remove from district 33 a section of Lee Avenue, the heart of the community's shopping strip, where virtually every shop is closed on Shabbos. On Lee Avenue, we also have unique traffic needs. For instance, just two months ago the city changed parking and the meters, to enable to park on Lee Avenue Shabbos.
- As stated above, the NYCHA developments are the only such developments with a significant religious Jewish population in Brooklyn. The UJO, the Tenants Associations and community leaders advocated for years to secure the religious needs of these residents, such as ensuring

the buildings have Sukkos, increased police coverage during Saturdays and holidays, ensuring that locking mechanism don't pose a problem for Sabbath observers and that water shut-offs and other major interruptions aren't scheduled close to religious holidays and other unique needs.

We at the UJO are very active in servicing residents at the NYCHA and affordable developments. The following are several examples demonstrating our community's strong integration with the public housing/Mitchell-Lama developments.:

- The UJO is servicing a large number of holocaust survivors in these developments, and also ensured that food deliveries during COVID and other food drives provide kosher food for the Jewish residents.
- In general, the UJO was very active advocating for to restore heat and hot water services, and advocate for critical maintenance and on a range of safety issues and quality of life matters for the residents.
- During the process of contracting with a private management to manage three of the development, under the RAD/PACT program, the UJO was at the forefront to advocate and secure the rights of the tenants. Throughout the renovation of the development, the UJO was constantly liaising between the residents and the management to mitigate the impact on the tenants and have their needs addressed.
- The UJO provides social services for the residents, that included pop-up offices at the developments, especially geared to provide linguistic-appropriate services for the Yiddish-speaking residents.
- We have advocated for community preferences for the apartments and succession rights, so community members have a chance of public housing near the cultural and religious services they depend on.
- Similarly, we advocated for the tenants of Kent Village housing, Mitchell-Lama rental high-risers that co-exist with the NYCHA developments, when they experienced elevator shut-offs, security issues, or when they were facing rent hikes. We also constantly advocate for individual tenants' housing and quality of life needs.

In all the other newly drawn political maps, this entire area is included in our core districts (Congressional District 7, Senate District 18, Assembly District 50) together with the majority of Hasidic Williamsburg. In order to ensure proper representation for the residents of this area, we appeal that it should also remain a part of our core council district, which is District 33.

Demographics: The following are the Census 2020 findings for the purple area: The total population is 17,340. Are of those, 11,241 (64.8 %) are white non-Hispanic. That is more than double of the NYC average of 30.9% who identify as white non-Hispanic. The under-18 years population is 34.9%, also much higher than the 19.8 % citywide average. The average household size is 3.05, also higher than the 2.55 the city's average. All of these characteristics reflect that Hasidic families make up a majority of that area¹.

¹ Source: NYC Planning Population FactFinder. To view the data for the 33 census blocks in that area, please visit the link below:

<https://popfactfinder.planning.nyc.gov/explorer/selection/bf75b2041a89e656e492a86769aad1bf5b68fd2b>

Light Blue Area: Broadway Triangle

The light blue area encompasses the section between Broadway, Flushing and Union Avenues, an area known as the Broadway Triangle. For years, this former industrial area mostly sat idly, but it was rezoned in the last 15 years, with the strong advocacy from the UJO to bring more housing to the neighborhood. During the most recent census, the area had more than thousand units, and hundreds more units were completed since then. There is currently another 2,000 units at various stages of construction, and will be completed in the coming months to three years.

- Among those developments, is a large project on the area known as Pfizer lots, with 1,100 new rental units, a significant percentage of them 3-4 bedrooms and 25% will be affordable. This development is the first large development of this magnitude in the area to provide large family size rental units.
- In addition, the UJO with neighboring organizations are currently building more than 400 affordable units on city land. We just started excavation for the first phase of 140 units.
- This area has several large yeshiva schools, including:
 - UTA (Satmar) at 110 Throop Avenue, where 1,293 boys are enrolled in elementary and middle school grades.
 - Bais Ruchel High School (Satmar) at 177 Harrison Avenue where 1,377 high school girls are enrolled.
- Currently, a new Satmar shul is being constructed for the area, on Throop Avenue. There are many smaller synagogues in the area.
- Sadly, it was an area of a number of violent antisemitic incidents in recent years. We were working with law enforcement to bring better security to the area.

Demographics: The Census 2020 count shows the following for that 21 blocks area: The total population is 4,174, with 3,486 - 73.9% - white non-Hispanics. This is nearly 2.5 times the city average. The under-18 years population is 49%, again two and a half fold the 19.8 % citywide average. The average household size is 4.39, significantly higher than the 2.55 city's average. All of these characteristics reflect the predominance of Hasidic families in that area².

Brown Area: East of Nostrand Ave.- South of Myrtle Avenue to Dekalb Avenue

This is where the community more recently settled. It was never in the district, but now has at least 750 families from the Hasidic community. This area is bordered by the Tompkins and Nostrand Avenues, and Myrtle and Dekalb Avenues. Though, between Flushing Avenue and Myrtle Avenue, between Nostrand Avenue and Marcy Avenue, this area has the Marcy houses. Hence, the community is not fully contingent to the district from all sides.

² Source: NYC Planning Population FactFinder. To view the data for the more the 21 census blocks in that area, please visit the link below:

<https://popfactfinder.planning.nyc.gov/explorer/selection/821c0ac45deb721756951473a9e31798d9098bfe>

This area includes the new Cascade Development, on the block between Myrtle, Marcy, Stockton and Tompkins – with roughly 300 units, overwhelmingly occupied by Hasidic Jewish families.

Cascade has a large synagogue on Marcy corner Myrtle Avenue. The area also has many smaller synagogues.

Additionally, this area includes the Capstone development – where move-ins started at the end of 2021 - between Myrtle Avenue and Vernon Street, at Throop Avenue, with 101 units, again, overwhelmingly occupied by families of the community.

While it's very important to keep these areas connected to the district, we understand that the public housing in its midst poses additional challenges.

Demographics: The Census 2020 count found the following for these 14 blocks: Total population is 7,740, with 3,000 – 38.8% - white non-Hispanics - higher than the 30% city average. The under-18 years population is 20.9%, just a notch the 19.8 % citywide average. The average household size is 2.63, again a little above the 2.55 the city's average. However, we know that these findings don't account for the major development where move-in mostly took place after the April, 2020, census³. This area is now much more Hasidic.

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To sum it all up. Our community has distinct and unique needs. From the assistance of Chametz burning, to the funding for security for our private schools; from police presence at our high-holiday services to accommodating our pre-holiday garbage collection needs; from accommodating the burning of the Chametz, and to providing services for our holocaust population and culturally sensitive health and emotional care – we rely on city councilmembers who'd focus their time to understand and actively advocate for us. If we're being spread out in several district it will be harder to obtain the representation and attention to our concerns and needs.

It's for that reason that we ask that the purple and light blue areas in the enclosed maps should be kept as part of District 33, and if it's possible also to include the brown area into District 33.

Thank you!

³ Source: NYC Planning Population FactFinder. To view the data for these 14 census blocks, please visit the link below: <https://popfactfinder.planning.nyc.gov/explorer/selection/d4a274f6e51712428339f3c6f7c9f79fc0bd0050>