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Anatole Ashraf
Chairperson

Debra Markell Kleinert
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October 20, 2025

Health & Human Services and Education and Unhoused & Shelter Committee

Meeting Minutes

This meeting was teleconferenced using Zoom

Committee Member Attendees:

Lauren Springer, Chair
Amparo Abel-Bey, Vice Chair
Nellie Afshar
Warren Davis
Dr. Rosamond Gianutsos
Leticia Vasquez

Committee Member Absentees:

John Bahia
Benjamin Lucas
Alyssa Sawicki
Phugelzen Sherpa

Community Board 2 Attendees:

Pia Rahman

Health and Human Services Public Member Attendees:

Andrea Thomas

Health and Human Services Public Members Absentees:

Olivia Jackson Lewis
Robert Wohner
Judy Zangwill

Community Board 2 Staff:

Debra Markell Kleinert, District Manager

Guest:

Jamar Hooks, Deputy Commissioner with the Department of Social Services
Samuel Clarke, Borough Director of Queens & Staten Island with the Department of Social Services
Maggie Gavin, Soulhug Movement

“Serving the Communities of Long Island City, Sunnyside, Woodside, and Maspeth”

Lauren Springer, Chair of the Health & Human Services and Education and Unhoused & Shelter Committee, welcomed everyone to the committee meeting.

NYC Department of Social Services

The Chair introduced Jamar Hooks, Deputy Commissioner, and Samuel Clarke, Borough Director for Queens & Staten Island, both from the NYC Department of Social Services (DSS). The representatives provided the following updates:

- Following the recent increase in migrants arriving in New York City, many were initially placed in migrant shelters. These shelters have since closed, and migrants have now been absorbed into the general Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter population. Placement is based on the household's needs and composition.
 - Families with children are placed in family shelters.
 - Adults who have a familial relationship are placed in adult family shelters.
 - Single adults are placed in single adult shelters.
- Within the shelter system, there are employment-focused, mental health, and substance abuse shelters.
- Currently, there are over 85,000 people in the shelter system, and many of them are migrants.
- With the federal government shutdown, Deputy Commissioner Hooks stated that the shelter system is not expected to be affected dramatically because the majority of its funding comes from the City Tax Levy (CTL).
- He expressed concern about the impact on individuals receiving SNAP benefits, as the federal government shutdown won't fund SNAP. Households in shelters, such as those in family shelters, are required to have kitchens where many families prepare their own meals using food purchased through SNAP. Families in these shelters will be affected.
- Mr. Hooks noted that the 1.7 million New Yorkers who rely on SNAP may now face food insecurity. While there is a possibility of state intervention, DSS must process November benefits by October 21, 2025. If there is no funding for SNAP, demand on food pantries will increase.
- The Deputy Commissioner noted that during the recent state budget process, the legislature allocated 2 billion dollars from the rainy-day fund and gave the Governor the authority to use these funds to replace federal cuts.

Deputy Commissioner Hooks provided the following information about shelters:

- There are nine shelters in the district, consisting of one adult family shelter, three adult shelters, and five families with children shelters. While specific addresses were not shared, general locations and providers were shared. He provided the following information:
 - Adult Family Shelter – Van Dam Street, 140 occupied units, operated by Home Life Services.

- Adult Shelter – Hunters Point Avenue, 62 occupied units, operated by Samaritan Daytop Village.
 - Adult Shelter – Queens Boulevard, 115 beds, operated by Samaritan Daytop Village.
 - Adult Shelter – Crescent Street, 140 beds, operated by VIP Community Services.
 - Families with Children Shelter – Queens Boulevard, 77 occupied units, operated by Home Life Services.
 - Families with Children Shelter – Queens Boulevard, 61 beds, operated by NICA.
 - Families with Children Shelter – Queens Boulevard, 77 beds, operated by NICA.
 - Families with Children Shelter – Greenpoint Avenue, 58 beds, operated by Housing Works.
 - Families with Children Shelter – 9th Street, 105 beds, operated by Elmcour Youth and Adult Activities Incorporated.
- Mr. Hooks stated that all shelters are permanent and long-term, and there are no short-term emergency shelters in the district.
 - Mr. Davis shared that he regularly participates in CAB meetings at certain shelters in the district. He expressed interest in attending CAB meetings at additional sites, noting that these meetings provide a direct line of communication and prevent issues.
 - Ms. Afshar requested information on the maximum capacity of all shelters in the district. Mr. Hooks replied that most shelters are currently operating near full capacity.
 - Mr. Hooks shared that the community board can support the Department of Social Services (DSS) by expressing support for the continued need for shelters and the possibility of bringing additional shelters into CB2. He recommended directing individuals in need of food to food pantries. He also suggested adopting a shelter, which could provide employment or training opportunities to the shelter's residents. In addition, he noted that winter donations, such as coats, gloves, and scarves, would be helpful.
 - Committee members expressed continued interest in supporting unhoused individuals and discussed the possibility of participating in trainings on how to effectively engage with them.

Soulhug Movement

Lauren Springer, the Chair, introduced Maggie Gavin, founder and operator of Soulhug Movement. Ms. Gavin delivered a presentation (Attachment 1) that included background information about herself and the organization, an overview of the entity's programs, and existing partnerships. She provided the following information:

- Ms. Gavin described herself as a parent educator and community builder.
- The organization's programs are inclusive and primarily focused on supporting women and families, although fathers and other caregivers are welcome to participate.

- Soulhug Movement offers multi-generational classes that serve:
 - Infants and caregivers
 - Toddlers and caregivers
 - Caregivers with children aged 5 to 12 years old.
- Ms. Gavin explained that her goal is to build supportive communities for parents during their child's infancy and childhood, as parents can feel isolated during this period.
- Programming includes education on brain development, nervous system regulation, motor milestones, infant sleep, and functional fitness through yoga, dance, and somatic movement.
- She has a partnership with the Queens Public Library, where she provides a free session for all attendees.
- Ms. Gavin stated that she is seeking additional partners and affordable space. She is specifically interested in expanding into Sunnyside, Long Island City, and Jackson Heights, particularly with partners that offer family-related programming and may wish to expand to include infant support and pregnancy-related services.
- Ms. Springer suggested that Sunnyside Community Services (SCS) may be interested in partnering with Soulhug Movement. Andrea Thomas, a public member of the committee, and SCS staff will connect with Ms. Gavin offline to discuss this.
 - Ms. Afshar shared that Renew is a community center that hosts various providers that offer programming for children and families. She added that providers may rent space at a low cost, either for recurring sessions or one-time special pop-up events, which tend to do well in the community.
 - She also noted that Two The Moon, a private children's clothing business, has back space which is rented for programming and is geared toward children and families.
 - Programming such as Toddler Dance Story Time begins with a themed story followed by a dance class tailored to toddlers and their caregivers. Movements are thematically tied to the story. The session promotes nervous system regulation and motor milestones.
- Ms. Abel-Bey shared her positive experience participating in one of Ms. Gavin's toddler learning center programs. She noted that the session lasted approximately 1 hour and included caregiver-child interaction, a discussion with Ms. Gavin on developmental milestones, and children interacting with one another.
- Ms. Abel-Bey shared that caregivers attending these events form close friendships with other caregivers through these programs, helping reduce the social isolation they may feel.
- Dr. Gianutsos encouraged Ms. Gavin to share information about Soulhug Movement so it can be included in CB2's newsletter.

Capital and Expense Budget Discussion

- Ms. Springer encouraged committee members to provide their input.
- Mr. Davis urged the committee to ensure that local food pantries are adequately funded and have access to necessary resources. Ms. Thomas supported this concern, noting that while Sunnyside Community Services doesn't have a food pantry, it occasionally provides meals through its senior center. She expressed concern that potential budget cuts can negatively impact seniors in the program.
- A suggestion was made to create a food map that identifies food pantry locations or to provide links so residents can locate them.
- The committee discussed previous requests, such as the need to expand school capacity in the district, either by creating or expanding schools. Ms. Gianutsos recommended being more specific with these requests, such as identifying which specific community needs increased school capacity.
- Ms. Afshar noted that some schools in CB2 have minimal staff during the summer, which can make it difficult for parents to reach them. She stated that it would be beneficial for schools, especially elementary schools, to have sufficient staff available during this period, as parents enrolling their children into the education system may feel anxious. Having staff during this period could help ease these emotions.
- There was discussion of increasing funding for Pre-K and 3-K programs.
- Ms. Springer shared that she will try to add information related to SNAP benefits that are being cut to the District Needs Statement.

Additional Updates:

- The committee continues to reach out to the Queens Innovation Center, so representatives can discuss the center's services.
- Dr. Gianutsos shared that the program Witness to Mass Incarceration is looking for a larger space to operate.

A motion to adjourn was made by Amparo Abel-Bey, and it was seconded by Rosamond Gianutsos.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by,

Rafael Nava