

HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES – May 2, 2019

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Steve Simon (Chair), Daryl Cochrane (Asst. Chair), Richard Allman, Tanya Bonner, Elizabeth Lehmann.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT: Sara Fisher, Beatrice Hall (Public Member, Excused).

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Mary Anderson, Elizabeth Lorris Ritter.

GUESTS: Rayner Ramirez, volunteer advisor, and the following WHEELS students: Diane Arevalo, Ricardo Herrera, Mayerling Lantigua, Susana Sieunarine and Miah Soto; Lisa Saiman, MD, MPH, Columbia University Medical Center/NY-Presbyterian Hospital; Julio Batista, Dr. Mara Minguez and Dr. Will Patten, NY-Presbyterian Hospital; Kailin See and Adrian Feliciano, W.H. Corner Project; Enca Cao, Ryan Desso, Clifford Elkind, Angie Estrada, Michael Lemon, Richard Ortiz, Nayma Silver, Ryan Waltes, David Wood.

S. Simon, chair, called the meeting to order at 7:16 p.m. and introduced the committee members who were present.

1. **Environmental study of West 182nd -183rd Streets between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue** – Rayner Ramirez, volunteer advisor, and a group of students from the Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School (WHEELS) gave a Powerpoint presentation showing litter conditions on the streets near their school and in Highbridge Park, including needles from drug users in the park. They asked 60 people to fill out surveys during the recent Car-Free Day on St. Nicholas Ave. on what they thought of conditions in the community. They received a \$35K grant to plant flowers and install tree guards to create a “Green Community Corridor” on West 182nd Street. They want both sides of Broadway to be as clean as possible.
The committee commended the students for their community spirit, encouraged them to continue their efforts and asked them to come back in the future to update us. Dr. Minguez said that NY-Presbyterian Hospital would contribute \$2500 towards the students’ efforts.
2. **Presentation on the measles outbreak and the need for vaccinations** – Lisa Saiman, MD, MPH, Professor of Pediatrics, Columbia University Medical Center and Epidemiologist, NewYork-Presbyterian Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital, gave a Powerpoint presentation and made the following points:
 - Measles was declared to have been eliminated in 2000.
 - Most cases ever have occurred this year. NYC has the most cases in the U.S.
 - The epicenters have been Rockland County and Williamsburg/Borough Park, Brooklyn.
 - Children (about 85%) and those who are unvaccinated (about 80%) are predominantly affected.
 - There have been 55 suspect cases at NYP’s Morgan Stanley Children’s Hospital: 12 confirmed, 8 admissions, 3 patients in the ICU (a 7-year-old and two 1-year-olds). Patients are immediately put in isolation.
 - There was an outbreak in Washington Heights in 2014.
 - Lots of doctors have never seen a case of measles.
 - First signs: cough, running nose, red eyes.
 - Once vaccinated, 97% of people are protected. Two shots are given. No need to get re-vaccinated.
 - Rockland and NYC issued states of emergency, fining families who don’t get their kids vaccinated and prohibiting kids from going to school without vaccinations. Four yeshivas have been closed.
 - 19,000 doses of measles vaccine were given in Brooklyn in April.
 - Children can get pneumonia and die from the disease, and suffer brain damage from encephalitis.
3. **Presentation on Non-Medical Vaccine Exemptions** – Dr. Will Patten, NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital resident, gave a Powerpoint presentation providing additional information on the measles outbreak, the public health costs of measles, vaccination rates and the different policies among the 50 states regarding exemptions from required vaccinations.
 - In 2013-14, there were 285 schools in NY State with immunization rates below 85%, including 170 schools below 70%.
 - Vaccination rate necessary for “herd immunity” for measles is 93-95%. CDC recommends 95% or above.
 - NY State law allows two exemptions to school immunization requirements:
 - Medical Exemption – If a physician licensed to practice medicine in New York State certifies that an immunization is detrimental to a child's health, the requirement for that immunization is waived until such immunization is no longer detrimental to the child's health.

- Religious Exemption – If a parent(s) or guardian(s) of a child holds genuine and sincere religious beliefs that are contrary to school entry immunization requirements, the immunization requirements are not required for the child to attend school.
- Three states – California, Mississippi and West Virginia – only allow medical exemptions.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends state laws permitting non-medical exemptions be eliminated.
- Current legislation in Albany (A2371/S2994) would repeal provisions relating to exemption from vaccination due to religious beliefs. Another bill (A6564/S4244) would permit any child who is at least 14 years old to have administered to himself or herself certain immunizations required or recommended by law.

After some discussion, Lehmann/Cochrane made a motion that the Committee should support passage of the pending bills in the NY State Legislature. The motion was approved by the following vote:

Committee Members	5-0-0
Other Board Members	2-0-0
Members of the Public	6-1-2

4. Washington Heights CORNER Project Update – Kailin See, Director of Programs, began by discussing the history of the organization, which was founded in 2005. In 2012, it moved into office on W. 181st St. at St. Nicholas Ave. as a sub-lessee. It was evicted last September when the prime tenant failed to pay the rent.

- Serves almost 5,000 people, many from New Jersey, Westchester, The Bronx. Largest % of female clients.
- Have saved 362 lives. “The opioid crisis is the public health crisis of our time.”
- 1 of 23 syringe exchanges in NYC
- Since being evicted, WHCP has been using a van at W. 181st St. & St.; Nicholas Ave. “We don’t want to continue using a bus...We want a safe, dignified environment in a public health setting.”
- Problems in the neighborhood have increased dramatically since the eviction. “Overdoses have gone up, fatalities have gone up, public defecation/urination, breaking into buildings...We are not the cause. We are the solution.”
- WHCP has “the highest rate of return of any syringe exchange in NYC.”

Adrian Feliciano, Director of Harm Reduction, then stated that WHCP has found a possible new location at the George Washington Bridge Bus Station on West 179th Street.

- There would be no entrance into the bus station itself, only from the street.
- WHCP has the funding to renovate the space. It would include offices to provide case management services and a drop-in center with bathrooms for clients. It would be much smaller than the previous office (2,500 vs. 8,000 sq. ft.) but would still be adequate since administrative functions have been moved to another site. The site has been rated by NYS Health Dept. and fits the criteria.
- Medical services would be provided by NY-Presbyterian, Montefiore and Mt. Sinai hospitals.
- Borough President Brewer, State Senator Jackson, Assembly Member Taylor and Council Member Levine signed a letter supporting this move. They are talking to Council Member Rodriguez and Assembly Member De La Rosa.
- NYC Transit and NYPD also support the move.
- WHCP will provide a special phone number to businesses in the bus station and to businesses and residents along W. 178th & W. 179th Streets to report any problems with clients and others. WHCP will dispatch a trained worker to deal with the situation. They will hire a liaison to work with businesses and tenants.
- WHCP will install an all-weather booth with a security person to prevent loitering outside the office next to the Fine Fare supermarket.
- They plan to speak to Fine Fare next week. They have spoken to Holyrood Church and Congregation Shaare Hatikvah synagogue across the street to secure their support. The program director at the Dominican Women’s Development Center program in the church has concerns.
- The Port Authority as well as the private company managing the retail space has to sign off on the lease.
- The rent would be \$17,000 per month.

Wood: Having the entrance to the WHCP office on 178th Street would be better; would avoid potential conflicts with Fine Fare. See agreed to inquire whether space is available on 178th Street.

Allman: concerned about the impact on the DWDC youth drop-in center.

Lehmann/Bonner made a motion that the Committee support the Washington Heights CORNER Project’s plan to move to the George Washington Bus Station while urging WHCP to reach a mutually acceptable understanding

with the Dominican Women's Development Center and the Fine Fare supermarket and to explore the feasibility of using space that fronts on West 178th Street. The motion was approved by the following vote:

Committee Members	4-0-1
Other Board Members	2-0-0
Members of the Public	7-0-1

5. **Old Business** – S. Simon reported on the following:

- The contract between NYS Nurses Assn. and three hospital systems including NY-Presbyterian Hospital was ratified by all three NYSNA chapters as of last night.
 - CB 12 submitted the comments to the NY State Dept. of Environmental Conservation regarding the brownfield remediation plan for 3875 Ninth Ave. that were previously discussed by the committee.
 - Street and Sidewalk Cleanliness Ratings: The rating for acceptably clean streets in our district for March was 97.1%. The rating for acceptably clean sidewalks was 96.7%.
 - There were 327 service requests for DEP from WH-I residents in April. The most frequent ones were: Noise: Construction Before/After Hours (121), Noise – Ice Cream Truck (18), Noise – Jackhammering (18), Lead Kit Requests (17) and Noise – Barking Dog (16).
 - DDC provided a written status report on its four current projects in our district:
 - installation of sewer/water main in Inwood – 35% complete
 - water main/fire hydrant/water valve replacements on Haven Avenue, Fort Washington Avenue, Riverside Drive, W. 165th – W. 172nd Streets
 - installation of water main on W. 170th Street – 7.2% complete
 - pedestrian safety project at the Broadway/Nagle/Bennett/Hillside Avenues intersection – 15% complete
- Elkind: Work in Inwood has stopped; there has been no work for two months. Parking spaces are blocked. He was told by the DDC liaison that pre-construction survey work has to be completed and there is no resumption date. Simon said he would check with DDC.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 p.m.
Respectfully submitted, Steve Simon.