

March 7, 2003

Hon. Michael Bloomberg
Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Statement on the Preliminary Budget, Fiscal Year 2004

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

Thank you for the opportunity to review your Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2004. Manhattan Community Board No. 4 examined the budget carefully and while we find areas of agreement, we view others with concern.

We recognize the impact of the current fiscal crisis on the City and understand that cuts have to be made. We support your efforts to look for other revenue sources for the City, and in particular the initiative to reinstate the commuter tax. We also applaud your recent initiative to focus once again on the desperate need for affordable housing in our community and the city as a whole. To the extent that cuts are necessary, this Board considers the budget items related to human services to have the greatest significance and urges that they be cut as little as possible.

And, thank you for recognizing the important role of all community boards by preserving community board funding in your preliminary budget for FY 2004.

The Board's detailed agency comments follow.

City Agencies Dealing with Health & Human Services

There is no denying that the City faces severe budget challenges in this economic and political environment and the administration has taken many creative and thoughtful steps to more efficiently allocate the city's funds.

While the administration should be commended for placing a high priority on achieving savings from managerial enhancements and efficiency, we are deeply concerned about some areas of basic public health delivery and human services where the budgetary paring will have dangerous consequences. As is so often the case, we are concerned that this will have a negative impact not only directly on the individuals, families and seniors who depend on these services but on the over-all safety, stability, and quality of life in the larger community – and, ultimately, on future budgets, if dire needs are neglected now. We note below some specific areas of concern:

Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

We appreciate the efforts of the Department to keep us posted and to respond to our concerns over the possible effects of the combining of the Department of Health and the Department of Mental Health. We remain concerned that the integrity and strength of the mental health system be retained in the face of current budget pressures. Specifically, it is not clear, what the impact would be if increased revenue anticipated in the proposed budget does not materialize.

The Department of the Aging

The transfer of funding for NYCHA based senior centers provides a potentially creative and effective way to achieve savings and yet retain the vital network of core services for our older adults. We will be interested to learn of the specifics of this proposal and urge that you ensure that it does not in any way undermine the

quality, quantity, or range of services these centers provide. While we are pleased overall with the stability of services and funding reflected in this budget, we note with alarm that core funding for senior programs – and most especially wages for workers in that area – have been disastrously neglected for many years. There is no doubt that this is placing severe strain on the capacity of these services to address the needs of this vulnerable population with responsive services of minimally adequate quality. It is especially not acceptable to have services provided at the expense of creating a new group of working poor among those who provide such services and we urge the city, despite the budget environment, to look seriously at the need for attention to this matter.

Administration for Children's Services

We are very concerned about the potential combined impact of the proposed reductions in the budget for the Administration for Children's Services, which will unquestionably reduce actual services to clients. Given the critical need to maintain the fragile progress made in the area of preventive services, the proposal to decrease foster parent stipends seems ill-advised. In the area of child care, the Human Resources Administration has continuously acknowledged that thousands of eligible children citywide are still not served. In addition, increases in child care fees add an impossible burden on families already under enormous financial pressure: asking a family to pay 15% of gross income for child care places an impossible burden on too many working families and only jeopardizes their ability to maintain and increase their financial independence – or forces them into sub-standard and dangerous alternative care situations.

Department of Education

The Department of Education is the largest youth service agency in New York City, providing free primary and secondary school education to more than one million students. It also offers an array of necessary support services including meals, safety, recreation, guidance, health and transportation. For children from low-income or troubled families these services are not frills, they are essential to child development. Cuts to these services should not be made.

Board No. 4 is concerned that problems of overcrowded classrooms, school safety, need for additional schools, aid for special education and dealing with at risk students are not adequately addressed by this budget. Our Board is also concerned with the following issues involving the lack of adequate funding for:

1. The hiring and retention of certified teachers to replace the thousands who will be retiring;
2. Making salaries competitive with surrounding communities to attract and retain the best;
3. The deteriorating infrastructures of school buildings, particularly where plans are being made to use schools year-round;
4. Upgrading electrical systems in order to use computers and
5. Additional security within schools.

With the new regulations set forth by the Chancellor which demand that there be uniform lessons given in all public schools adequate provisions for updated books and supplies must be made available.

Board No. 4 opposes the use of public funds to provide for private management of ailing public schools. Studies have shown that where private managers such as Edison Schools have taken over schools, there has been no measurable improvement. In fact, while all aspects of the functioning of a public school under the Department of Education must be made available for public scrutiny - test scores, expenditure of funds, etc. - such accountability does not extend to Edison Schools.

New York Public Library

Use of our public library continues to expand particularly now in the age of computers. Since 1994 attendance has increased 35% and circulation 40%. In New York City 90% of all public access computers are in libraries. The unlimited freedom and personal growth a book gives a child or adult to travel anywhere

geographically or in time, through imagination or another person's experience cannot be matched. Access to our public libraries by our children, elderly and families is the best value for the dollar that the City can find. Libraries enhance the educational experience.

To permit the library system to continue to provide its vital services, Community Board No. 4 urges the following changes in the Budget for FY 2004:

1. Additional funding to increase library materials to meet the demands in the branch and research libraries and to offset the impact of inflation;
2. Provide funds for sufficient levels of building and technology maintenance and security to protect the City's investment in computers and electronic information resources;
3. Funding to complete the phase-in of the CLASP program;
4. Make library salaries competitive in order to attract and retain the services of these valued individuals;
5. Expand Library's website content in key areas including health, job and homework information; and
6. Provide additional technology training.

However, the Preliminary Expense Budget for FY 2004 would result in a 6.5% percent cut, on top of the 14.5% cut made in FY 2003, which would result in the following:

1. A complete end to six-day service with most branches going to five and some to four days. Already 67 of the 85 branch libraries have been reduced to five days;
2. A further drop in the ability of the libraries to acquire books. The FY 03 cuts reduced books per branch by 3,000 books on average;
3. Even fewer children reached through the connecting libraries and schools and summer reading programs;
4. Reduced technology, security and maintenance leading to deteriorating facilities and equipment.

We request that if libraries are kept to a five day schedule, or even reduced to four days, one of the serviced days should be a Saturday, and if possible the second evening reinitiated to provide for accessibility to those working a conventional week.

We also strongly urges that there be no cuts to the capital budget, which would result in deferring a significant portion of every capital project that is not fully funded or designed until FY 06.

Department of Cultural Affairs

The Preliminary Budget proposes a drastic reduction in the City's Cultural Affairs spending, which was already dramatically reduced in the previous fiscal year. The Preliminary Budget for FY 04 reduces the cultural affairs budget by over 25% from FY 02. These cuts will adversely affect small institutions, many of which are located in the Board 4 area, and larger institutions in the City as well. However, the larger institutions have greater capabilities for raising private funds than the smaller institutions. Needless to say, any cuts will result in less accessibility to these resources, a decrease in services to school children, a loss of jobs, etc. It will also harm the City's economy since our vibrant cultural life is a major attraction to visitors.

Department of Youth and Community Development

The combined neighborhood of Chelsea/Clinton is home to more than 7,500 children under 18 years of age, more than 17 percent of whom receive public assistance. More than 2,000 of these children are under the age of five, and in dire need of public day care. In our district, which ranked third in terms of reported abuse and neglect, only one quarter of the children eligible for public day care receive it and 1,200 children are uninsured, according to the Citizens Committee for Children of New York.

We are very concerned about the collective effect on children of cuts to many different agencies and programs that serve them. In particular, we are concerned about the following cuts to the Department of

Youth and Community Development:

The Summer Youth Employment Program, facing severe cuts from the State budget, will be unable to fund 35,000 jobs. We request that the City match the \$18 million in funding that it provided for this program last year and continue to push the State to restore funding for this important program.

We also strongly urge that the nearly \$40 million in cuts to youth programs be reduced. These programs are essential to children and provide places for after school recreational activities, homework assistance, cultural and social events and individual enrichment. These service organizations have been forced to curtail, close down, or charge for the services once given freely to youth.

Department of Transportation

We urge a budget increase to provide for the manufacture and installation of more adequate traffic control signage. This is particularly true of mixed residential and commercial areas such as Chelsea and Clinton within the Board 4 geographical area. Among repeated violations more frequent signage would help curb, are horn blowing, illegal vehicle idling, trucks on residential streets, failure to yield right of way to pedestrians, illegal parking, speeding, etc.

Police Department

We would like to express our support for the recent emphasis on traffic enforcement efforts and we hope that these efforts continue. This Board is glad that the Preliminary Budget for Traffic Enforcement for FY 04 reflects only minor cuts. We are hopeful that the new enforcement efforts will be able to address these areas of concern to our residents:

- § Charter buses, trucks and cars parking illegally in no parking or no standing zones
- § Motors idling long beyond permitted times
- § Horn blowing
- § Trucks and buses avoiding traffic by going through residential streets
- § Failure to yield right of way to pedestrians
- § Moving violations such as speeding and going through red lights

We particularly urge that police officers or traffic enforcement agents be assigned specifically to busy residential areas such as those in Board 4 and not be drawn off into areas such as Times Square.

Department of Parks & Recreation

The completion of the Hudson River Park remains one of the Board's highest priorities. With Segment 4 due to open in spring, 2004, and design underway for the remainder of the park, it is critical that political and financial support for this important initiative remain strong. As has been the case for the past several years, funding (\$100 million each from the City and the State) is not sufficient to complete the park. We understand that the monies to complete the Clinton segment are secure, but most of the Chelsea segment, from the Gansevoort Peninsula to 26th Street remains unfunded. We urge the City, in concert with the State, to commit the additional \$200 million needed to finish this project. Hudson River Park, when done, will provide much needed high quality open space for the residents of Board No. 4 as well as all of New York's citizens and visitors alike, will yield tax benefits for the City, and will spearhead the revitalization of the entire west side of Manhattan.

Within the park, several areas need special attention. Pier 97, while designed, cannot be constructed until the DOS garage at 57th Street is completed. Therefore, it is imperative that this garage move forward quickly. A new home for the tow pound at Pier 76 must be identified soon, whether as part of the new plan for Hell's Kitchen South and the rail yards, or, as has been suggested by this Board in the past, by privatizing the tow pound operation among several existing parking facilities. And a plan to relocated the Department of

Sanitation operation on Gansevoort Peninsula to a new facility, currently stalled, must be finalized as soon as possible so as to permit Gansevoort Peninsula to be developed as one of the largest open areas within Hudson River Park. We strongly urge the City to put in place a revised plan for Pier 94 that will make the northern end of the head house available for public use for the severely diminished Clinton Cove portion of the park. Finally, we understand that Pier 57 will become available for development soon, and while this pier may be developed commercially as of right, we hope that any future use for Pier 57 will include a measure of public space, and will, in any event be compatible with the park that surrounds it.

Beyond Hudson River Park, this Board hopes that the progress on the rebuilding of Hell's Kitchen Park and the eastern end of Chelsea Park continues apace. Finally, we hope that the additional funds needed to complete the interim plan for the refurbishment and expansion of the 59th Street Recreation Center, endorsed by both Boards 4 and 7, be identified soon, so that work can begin on this much used facility which has been sorely neglected for 10 years. And, as always, we urge the City to seek additional parcels of property, however small, that may be available for conversion to park use within the district using the Department of Parks & Recreation's Greenstreets and Greenthumb programs. While we recognize that vital city services such as police, fire, sanitation, transportation, and social services must remain high priorities, the role of parks as both important contributors to the health, sanity, and quality of life of New Yorkers as well as economic catalysts for the surrounding communities cannot be ignored.

Department of Housing Preservation & Development

HPD plays a leading role in preserving and expanding affordable housing in the Board 4 area. This has always been of prime importance to our Board. We urge an increase for code enforcement activities. The Board 4 district continues to witness tenant harassment, and we must emphasize the importance of increasing HPD's ability to inspect and enforce its regulations. We also strongly urge that efforts be made to better coordinate enforcement of regulations between HPD and the Department of Buildings in the interests of efficiency.

It is crucial that the city work to maintain housing affordability through retention and support of Mitchell-Lama programs, Section 8 and other subsidized programs.

Additionally, the City should step up its collection of fines levied by HPD for code violations, which could add significant funds to the budget. We suggest that some of these funds be earmarked for code enforcement or rehabilitation of affordable housing and that more funds be dedicated for low-cost financing for building rehabilitation.

The current 80-20 formula used in most new housing construction ignores the needs of middle-income families who are forced to leave Manhattan to find affordable housing. In addition, this formula does not adequately address the needs of the vast number of New York's low income and working families displaced by gentrification and a poorly performing affordable housing market. We are delighted with the administration's initiative to seek new and creative approaches to the development of affordable housing and look forward to actively participating in the implementation of these plans within our area. We are especially pleased that the plan includes a middle income component. In light of the major rezoning initiatives proposed for Hell's Kitchen/Hudson Yards and West Chelsea, the Board recommends specific targeting of those funds over multiple budget years for construction of affordable housing in the Board area. The funds must be used to balance the development pressures on the low, moderate and middle income population engendered by the administration's other initiatives to spur commercial and residential development along the Westside from 14th to 42nd Streets in the far western reaches of the Board area.

At the same time, funding provided by HPD to local community-based organizations that perform a broad range of tenant and owner assistance, anti-abandonment and housing preservation activities must be maintained, given its essential role in preservation of the fragile existing stock of such housing.

NYCHA

More attention must be paid to the tenants living in New York City Housing Authority developments. More personnel, funds and police intervention must be made available to address persistent problems of security, drug dealing, gangs, graffiti, garbage storage and collection, and cleanliness.

Department of Buildings

Of equal importance to HPD is the Department of Building's ability to provide a level of code enforcement necessary to protect existing low-income housing stock. More inspectors are needed to ensure compliance with zoning bulk and use requirements in order to preserve community character at a time when self-certification is being more widely depended on. Funds are also needed to train plans inspectors including training on the zoning regulations applicable to special districts.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



Simone Sindin

Chair

This letter was approved at Manhattan Community Board No. 4's March 5, 2003 full board meeting.

cc: C. Virginia Fields, Manhattan Borough President
Christine Quinn, Councilmember
Gale Brewer, Councilmember
Manhattan Borough Board