



Chairperson, Martha Taylor

*The City of New York
Borough of Queens*

Community Board 8

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District Manager, Marie Adam-Ovide

Health Committee Meeting

Date: Thursday, May 12, 2016
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Place: Community Board 8 Office
197-15 Hillside Avenue
Hollis, NY 11423

Seymour Schwartz, Health Committee Chair

Board Members: Susan Cleary, Mary Maggio Fischer, Florence Fisher, Kevin Forrestal, James Gallagher, Jr., Bhitihara Martha-Fulton, Carolann Foley, Frank Magri, Steven Sadofsky

Committee Members: Judith Guttman

Also in attendance: Masis Sarkissian, representing Rory Lancman
Alma Karassavidis, Community Board 8 Staff

Seymour Schwartz called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Seymour Schwartz – Mr. Schwartz reported that there has been no news regarding the T-Building for a couple of months. The first initiative taken was when it was suggested that the reason for the lack of new information was due to internal problems at HHC and staff changes. Perhaps these factors are what halted interest in this project. A meeting was held with HHC’s Interim Director, Donna Green and Cleon Edwards at Queens Hospital. Also present at the meeting was Seymour Schwartz, Susan Cleary and Florence Fisher. Douglas Sherman asked to be present but did not attend.

Chair Schwartz asked Susan Cleary to give her view of the meeting.

Susan Cleary – She stated that although HHC wants the project to move forward, she felt that financial problems were holding them back. They are desperate for the project to move forward.

Kevin Forrestal – Stated that it is costing them millions to keep the building.

Susan Cleary – She reported that Cleon had a lot of interesting things to say with reference to the unions and central labor. Local 3 does not have a problem with whatever situation they had worked out. There was an implication at the meeting that the reason for the hold-up was due to the resistance

of Councilman Lancman and Parkway Village. Susan stated Cleon mentioned that a heavy hitter was needed and Claire Shulman's name was brought up as a staunch supporter of Queens Hospital. She thought that HHC should be contacting Ms. Schulman. It is her opinion that we should be finding out whether or not all the unions involved with the project are on board. If all the unions are on board and Claire Shulman is supportive of the project for the hospital, then perhaps this will get Councilman Lancman's support.

Florence Fisher – She said that the hospital's concern was that if it didn't happen soon, the building may be demolished and it would become a homeless shelter.

Seymour Schwartz – He agreed that the problem seems to be our Councilman. He was told that the hospital met a number of times with Councilman Rory Lancman and they were very disappointed with the results. He has raised a couple of issues and the big one is the matter of union labor. They are prepared to make a presentation before the HHC Board of Directors at the monthly Board Meeting at the end of May.

During discussions at our Executive Board Meeting, it was decided that at this point, it is up to Mr. Dunn. He is the expert in working with the unions. We are not changing our position on union labor. One of the four modifications we asked for with the plan was the matter of union labor. Since we are not in a position to relinquish that demand, then we are not in a position to support the proposal. We therefore left it alone and promised the people at HHC that we will do what we can in seeing that this project comes to fruition. Mr. Schwartz said that he met with Councilman Lancman to discuss the matter of the Community Center. During the meeting, Councilman Lancman posed the question of the need for the Community Center. Mr. Schwartz informed him that the Community can certainly use something like this. The question also came up about funding for the Center. Mr. Schwartz stated that it would come from the Elected Officials and any other resources that we can think of. It is a priority to the Board. Also brought up at that meeting by Councilman Lancman was the fact that there is no comprehensive agreement with the unions. Mr. Schwartz stated that the reason that Local 3 came to terms was due to them creating a separate category for apprentices, therefore it would be a different wage standard.

Steven Sadofsky – He asked to clarify what was done by Local 3 so that everyone understands. He explained that a new division was started within Local 3. It is a residential wiring division designed to come in at a lower rate and a lower package with benefits. It is a union job and does offer a pension. In working with contractors in the bidding process they have been able to gain some ground in the residential market, which they have been losing. This building would fall under residential wiring and also the hospitality industry which is the boutique hotels and such.

Seymour Schwartz – He reported that when Mr. Dunn originally met with Mr. LaBarbera, the head of the Building and Construction Trades Council, LaBarbera was all for the accommodation. Subsequently, when he was backed against the wall, he said that he could not speak for all the individual Locals. It is reported that Mr. LaBarbera stated, "there is so much work in the construction industry in NYC that this is small potatoes for them. Considering the issue of union labor, they are not interested in pursuing this". During his meeting with Mr. Schwartz, Councilman Lancman denied hearing this. There is a disagreement here. Mr. Dunn will know how to work with the unions as the issues come up. This is another reason why it was decided that we should let go a little for the moment and leave the ball in Mr. Dunn's court.

Mr. Schwartz said that he asked about the issue of having a rent free facility. He was told that it would be one of two separate plans to be submitted to the Board of Directors of HHC. He stated that Mr. Dunn is prepared to ask the agency for the extra money needed to provide for that facility. We were also advised that the estimate would be close to \$30M extra if all union labor was used for the T-Building.

Parkway Village was mentioned and a spokesman said that residents have experienced people urinating in their bushes. Mr. Schwartz assured that the people who would be living in these new apartments were not going to walk across the street to urinate. He was certain that they would value their new homes. Those who visited some of the Dunn developments know very well that the people who came from poorer areas were thankful that they were now able to live in these beautiful facilities. They would never consider walking across the street to use bushes as a toilet.

The tenants who will live in the 75 supported units will be carefully vetted by HHC. Mr. Dunn explained that it is in their best interest to do so. He does not want any of the apartments to become empty. Many of these people or similar patients of the hospital are in the vicinity now. They will not be newcomers to the area. Mr. Schwartz stated that the Mayor's priority is to resolve the problem of housing the homeless in abandoned hospital facilities. We have to consider that if this proposal does not pass, there is a strong possibility of something far less desirable being housed there.

Mr. Schwartz said that at the meeting with Councilman Lancman, the Councilman stated that Parkway Village does not have a veto. He proposed that we move forward with a plan for the Community Center and enlist the support of an organization such as Community House, who operate The Kew Gardens Facility (*the "Darth Vader Building"*) and it is rent free. This was arranged by Claire Shulman. Mr. Schwartz advised that Councilman Lancman claimed he was not aware of this.

Mr. Schwartz reported that he is trying to get more clarity on the belief that the Mayor is trying to fill these kinds of buildings with the homeless. For that reason, he has been in touch with the Director of Community Affairs at the Mayor's Office, who referred him to the Queens Director of Community Affairs. Both of them are very new to the issue and do not have the information at hand and said they will get back to us. There will be discussion of course.

Mr. Schwartz suggested two things:

1. A sub-committee should be formed to sit down and talk to an entity like Community House. Questions that should be addressed; *Would they be interested? What are their ideas? If not, who else can we go to? How do they run such a thing?*
2. He strongly believes that we should talk to Claire Shulman. She still has a lot of influence.

Chair Schwartz opened the floor to discussion.

Judith Guttman – Ms. Guttman said that she was the only Parkway Village resident present tonight. She stated that her community has received no information about the T-Building. She added that when anyone claiming to represent that Parkway Village is for or against is not accurate, as there was no discussion about the issue. She said that she keeps informed about the T-Building and gets updates from the CB8 Newsletter. She stated that as the historical society they have only written to the village once. At that time, Assemblyman Weprin held a big meeting at the church, when it was a totally different notion. Communilife was then involved. She wanted to make it very clear that the new concept has not been publicized inside Parkway Village. She informed us that she was approached by Susie Tanenbaum at another function and Susie had relayed to her what was said by a

representative of Parkway Village. She suggested that information about the Dunn proposal be shared with the community that lives the closest to it.

Kevin Forrestal – He stated that the community that is closest is Hillcrest Estates. Parkway Village is the closest next to the area, there are residents who abut the building. Mr. Forrestal added that since there has not been a meeting in some time, a lot of opinions may have changed. He informed the Committee that he may have had a conflict of interest in the past but has since resigned from HHC. He added that they asked him to stay on for a period of time. His decision to resign had nothing to do with the T-Building issue. He noted that the difference between the Communilife proposal and the Dunn proposal is substantial. In addition to the numbers, the biggest difference is that you have someone [Dunn] who knows how to run facilities; Communilife runs community programs. Overall, he feels that the Dunn proposal is a good one. The building is literally falling down in places, the roof is caved in. Protection for pedestrians on the sidewalk has been put in place due to the falling bricks. Something needs to be done. This is a viable proposal. He feels that some people may be afraid, adding that we used to be afraid of the idea of group homes. Most of us don't have a fear of group homes anymore. A little over half of the Par-Central Hotel is now a homeless shelter. He said that he has not heard of one problem about it. On the other hand, we are talking about 75 apartments for people who would be considered homeless prior to moving in. Mr. Forrestal suggested that HHC and Mr. Dunn consider presenting some kind of a breakdown for the residents with physical disabilities and mental disabilities. In other words, there should not be 75 tenants with psychotic disorders. There would be some people with minor disabilities that need assistance. This would allow for a truly integrated community with people also renting at fair market value to subsidize the lower rents in between. He thinks that most of the people will do very well. There can be a tenant that causes problems anywhere. There are homeowners who are problems for that matter. He believes that just because a person was down on their luck does not mean that they are bad; just as doing very well does not mean they are good. He agrees that the Community Board should not get involved with the fighting between the various Locals. We should support that it should be the prevailing wage.

Seymour Schwartz – He advised that if this proposal proceeds, there will have to be a Public Hearing. The Community Board and Borough President's Office are not involved. The City Council Member is involved.

Kevin Forrestal – He added that before we approach any agencies with reference to the operation of the Community Center facility, we should check with the Counsel at the Borough President's office for any guidelines or restrictions we need to follow. He stated that he is not sure whether or not we have the authority to determine this based upon the charter. Then we will be able to structure it and talk about what the governance is going to be for the future.

Florence Fisher – Asked is we want to talk with Queens Community House?

Seymour Schwartz – He stated that he will make an appointment first with the Borough President's office, before we talk to an individual agency.

Susan Cleary – She stated that we need to get Councilman Lancman and Parkway Village on our side.

Carolann Foley – She thinks there is miscommunication with Parkway Village. The opinion of one of our Board members does not represent the feelings of the entire Village.

Judith Guttman – She advised that we are getting the wrong impression. Parkway Village has no publications reporting the Dunn proposal at all. She states that the only information that they ever received about the T-Building was published by her organization when Communilife was involved.

Seymour Schwartz – Mr. Schwartz directed the conversation to Masis Sarkissian, representing Councilmember Rory Lancman, stating that no information was presented before the residents of Parkway Village regarding this issue.

Masis Sarkissian – He stated that it was presented to the board by Dunn.

Seymour Schwartz – He commented that the people know nothing about it with or without a presentation.

Bhitihara-Martha Fulton – Asked for a very simple definition of what the plan is now.

Susan Cleary – Explained that it would be rehab for the T-Building, which would have 205 apartments of which 75 would be supportive for the people coming from Queens Hospital or HHC.

Bhitihara-Martha Fulton – Asked if the people would be incapacitated or homeless?

Mary Maggio Fischer – She stated that there are patients who are considered abusers of Medicaid. They are discharged today and given instructions to take insulin or other medications. They don't follow instructions and are back in the hospital; admitted for another 7 days. This causes the hospital to lose money. With the supportive housing, the patients will be checked on to make sure they are taking their medicine and whatever treatment is necessary to keep them out of hospitals.

Bhitihara-Martha Fulton – She asked if there will be oversight for the 75 people.

Mary Maggio Fischer – It was stated. Yes.

Masis Sarkissian – He clarified the issue of staffing at the T-Building under the current proposal. He said there will always be two (2) full time aids on site 24 hours. There will always be a person at the front desk. During the day there will be more people on site.

Bhitihara-Martha Fulton – Confirmed that the term “aids” did not pertain to security but to the 75 supported residents.

Seymour Schwartz – Correct, the aids are for the 75 supportive units.

Masis Sarkissian – The aids will be through the non-profit and their main function will be to assist or oversee the supported tenants. They will also provide doorman-like duties to the affordable housing tenants. The people in the supportive units will have either behavioral or mental health issues. There will also be people who have recovered from substance abuse and other medical conditions, as well as people with chronic health issues.

Seymour Schwartz – Suggested that we could use a little definition on that. It is a very broad spectrum.

Kevin Forrestal – Previously suggested that the latter group have a reasonably large share of the population.

Masis Sarkissian – Stated that he did not think that will be under Dunn’s control because the hospital will recommend all the people for housing.

Judith Guttman – Clarified that we are looking for a more diverse medical profile.

Kevin Forrestal – Pointed out that the people with persistent medical problems that require care management are costing HHC a fortune.

Masis Sarkissian – Stated that there could be some patients with only diabetes, which is a common problem, but there will be other people with other medical issues as well.

Seymour Schwartz – Community Board 8 has a history of being supportive of group homes. Mr. Schwartz stated with pride that Briarwood has been supportive of their homeless shelter from the beginning. He added that the community works with the shelter and does a lot for them.

Masis Sarkissian – Reported that CAMBA www.CAMBA.org is going to be the new non-profit organization partnering with Dunn to oversee the supportive units. They are a community group that offer different programs and services to the communities they serve.

Mary Maggio Fischer – Clarified that when you say medical disabilities, mental disabilities are considered part of that. Chronic physical and mental disabilities with mental encompassing emotional, behavioral, drug or substance abuse are all under mental disabilities. Mental disability does not only mean that someone is bipolar.

Seymour Schwartz – Summed up what steps we should be taking at this point in time.

1. *Contact Claire Shulman.*
2. *Visit Queens Borough Hall.*

Florence Fisher – Asked whether the union issue is still not resolved.

Seymour Schwartz – He stated that the issue is not yet settled. He added that most affordable housing has not been built with union labor. We will know when the project is approved and the work begins whether or not one or more individual Locals will present some opposition. Mr. Dunn will be the one to deal with that. From things that were mentioned, the feeling is that a few Locals will demand standard union wages. There is no way to dissuade them. There is money available, but if a lot more is required, there will be no room for the Community Center being rent free.

Frank Magri – Local 3 supports the project. An RW division was set up to combat the non-union end of the residential work. Residential housing for the past 20 years has been non-union but prior to that all of it was union. They are fighting to make a stand to get this work back. It doesn’t seem fair that the people building these buildings cannot afford to live in them. He promised to take on the task of working with Local 3 officials to find out what is causing the delay and to try to speed up the process.

Seymour Schwartz – Asked if there is a possibility that Local 3 can take the lead and contact some of the other unions.

Frank Magri – Local 3 usually does take the lead as far as contract negotiations and jobsites are concerned. He and Steve will discuss with their agents to see if they can go to the Building and Construction Trades Council to urge the support of the other involved trades Locals.

Seymour Schwartz – Agreed that talking to the others may be very helpful.

Judith Guttman – Inquired as to where the prior funding came from when they were able to build affordable housing with union labor? Was that Federal?

Frank Magri – Stated that if money for the projects were federally funded then it would have to be the prevailing rate. How the job is funded depends on whether or not it will be at the prevailing rate.

Steven Sadofsky – Added that from WWII onward, unions grew and everything was more equitable and fair. A lot of these developers and the banks want much higher profits than they used to get. They would put up a building and be happy with a 20%-25% profit. If they spent \$100M, they would expect to make \$25M profit once the job was done. They now want 40%, 50% or 60% profit. So when they are blaming it on the cost of the union labor, it is really because they just want higher profits. Banks want to make more on their money and keep cutting the middle class down. There are a lot of sides to this story.

Seymour Schwartz – Liked the idea that Local 3 will do its best to persuade other participating Locals to come to an agreement.

The meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alma Karassavidis, Community Board 8 Staff

May 26, 2015