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Minutes: March 15, 2011

The Social Services and Education Committee of Community Board #2, Manhattan, held its regular monthly meeting on March 15, 2010, at Judson Church, 239 Thompson Street.

Board Members Present: Steve Ashkinazy (vice chair), Keen Berger (chair), Lisa Cannistraci, Denise Collins, Doris Diether, Sasha Greene, Robin Rothstein, and Chenault Spence.

Board Members Excused: None

Board Members Absent: None

Public Members Present: Chris Leonard, Rhea Sohne Vadher

Public Members Excused: Vern Fry, Sharad Khemani

Public Members Absent: None

Other Board Members Present: Mary Johnson, Heather Campbell, Robert Ely

Chair Keen Berger welcomed everyone, and each person introduced him or herself.

The first part of the meeting was a report on NYU's pledge to build a public school

Denise Collins reported on the New York University/CB2 Task Force regarding the space which New York University is pledging to donate for a public school. Alicia Hurley of NYU informed the Task Force [which included the present and past chairs of CB2 (Jo Hamilton and Brad Hoylman), representatives of our local public officials (Nadler, Stringer, Duane, Glick, Quinn), representatives of parents and the local public school advocacy committee (Ann Kjellberg and Denise Collins) and chair of this CB2 committee (Keen Berger)] about the proposed school, which will seat 800 Pre-k through 8th grade students in 100,000 square feet. It will be on the Southeast corner of LaGuardia and Bleecker Streets, and will include a gym, cafeteria, music room and so on. The first 7 floors of the building will be entirely school, with the exception of an elevator bank which will go to floors 8-14, which will be a dorm for 100 students, who will have a separate entrance to their part of the building. Thus more than half of the building will be a public school, 7 stories tall, ending with a green roof for play. The other part of the building will be 14 stories tall, with dorms. Alicia Hurley said NYU is committed to providing the space for the school, that they have been in conversation with the Department of Education and will issue written Memorandum of Understanding that sets this forth. This is in phase one of their plans – which means the school might be open in 2016.

At the Task Force meeting, the participants asked what we or NYU needs to do to make sure DOE actually builds the school and what would happen if that does not occur. NYU is committed to a school, said Hurley, and DOE seems happy to have the site. The need for data on school population was raised, and the suggestion arose that a needs assessment of children within CB2 become a capstone project for an NYU student, supervised by a faculty. Hurley agreed this was possible, and said she would follow up; Hamilton said it was up to the Social Services committee to work on this.

The major part of the committee meeting was devoted to a presentation and discussion from four invited guests regarding strategies to accomplish our goals.

Julie Menin, chair of CB1, described how they got three new schools in the past 5 years. Since the DOE Blue Book statistics were inaccurate, crucial was developing a detailed needs assessment of their child population, spearheaded by a member of their paid staff and Eric Greenleaf, who is on their board. She said CB1 did not spend additional money on this [the staff member was reassigned from other administrative duties] and that much of the data was collected by volunteers who went door to door, and who checked the new approvals from the building department. The intern assigned from the Borough President's office also helped. Crucial was to recognize that developers are part of the community, and they must be included in negotiations.

Lisa Parson, representative of Assembly member Deborah Glick, spoke with the Assemblywoman who advised that we must have long-range plans, must organize parents, and should work with other CBs. She said the Assemblywoman Glick is very supportive of our goals, but that we also need to inform other Assembly persons who may know nothing about our issues.

Lisa Kaplan, Councilmember Rosie Mendez' chief of staff, spoke of how they got 100 square blocks rezoned with a sizable commitment to affordable housing – the largest ever in Manhattan. Again the process began with a door-to-door needs assessment, in the CB3 case regarding housing. The data helped convince the city officials that affordable housing was needed. She stressed that this was a lengthy process, involving many meetings. Finally the CB3 groups came to a consensus, which moved the process forward. Ideally more affordable housing would be better, but give and take was needed.

Sandy Myers of Borough President Scott Stringer's office stressed that people should become involved in local advocacy, particularly via the community boards or the school community council. Their office has issued three reports regarding schools (Crowded Out etc,) and has created a "war room" where the Department of Education negotiates with a Community Board. No war room has involved CB2 since Sandy has been at the Borough President's office.

The four members of the panel all agreed with each other, stressing the need for involvement, organizing, and specific data as the way to move the Mayor's office and city agencies. Members of the board and the public asked questions and commented, all agreeing that this was helpful and informative.

In the executive session, Sasha Greene distributed the draft of a list of organizations that seniors in our area might need to contact for their various needs. We each should look at it and get back to her. The committee approved the following letter, resolution, and questions that groups who wish to appear before us should answer before they come. In addition, a new resolution opposing teacher layoffs was approved. Denise Collins will follow up regarding a needs assessment, as this seems vital to getting new schools.

We discussed agenda and date for the next meeting. It will be on April 26th.

RESOLUTION REGARDING CUTS TO SENIOR PROGRAMS [to be sent to our state representatives and the Governor]

Whereas our senior citizens are valuable members of our community, and

Whereas many elderly people who live in CB2 are low income and lonely, dependent on senior centers for company, food, and well-being, and

Whereas the proposed closing of Our Lady of Pompeii and Greenwich House Senior Centers would leave CB2 with only one Center, The Caring Community on Washington Square North, which, because of the closing last year of the Senior Center at First Presbyterian Church, is overcrowded with two sittings for lunch,

Whereas our elected officials, Senators Duane and Squadron, and Assemblymember Glick, have already worked and voted to restore funding to these vital institutions, and

Whereas, we also are concerned about seniors elsewhere in our city, dependent on the more than 100 centers slated to be closed in the latest New York State budget, as well as seniors who are served by other groups, such as Visiting Neighbors, and

Therefore be it resolved that Community Board Two strongly supports all vibrant and essential programs for our seniors and commends our representatives for their efforts and

Therefore be it also resolved that Community Board Two urges Governor Cuomo to restore funds to all vital and effective senior centers.

Letter regarding Asian Community Organizations [to be sent to all city council members]

Community Board Two advocates for the most vulnerable of our people, including those who are a minority within their communities. Accordingly, we call your attention to an injustice.

The Asian community is more than twelve percent of New York City's population yet receives less than five percent of city's funds designated for organizations that serve our people. This is patently unfair. We also note that the Asian community has shown the fastest growth in the 2010 census. These groups are represented in the "Twelve Percent and Growing " coalition, who would be happy to provide details, including these specifics: 0.24% of City social service contract dollars, 1.4% of City Council discretionary dollars, and 0.5% of City Council initiative funding goes to Asian groups. [Asian includes East, South, and South East Asian regions.]

Within our neighborhood, we are particularly concerned that fair funding be allocated to Open Door senior center, which serves many of our Chinese residents. A sizable group of them are among the most needy of our city: linguistically-isolated and unable to work, without adequate pensions or Social Security to help them.

Thank you for your consideration.

Questions to be answered in advance by groups asking to appear before this committee

1. How are you connected to people living, working, or visiting the neighborhoods of Community Board Two?
2. How are you connected to the people this committee is charged to help (youth, seniors, homeless, LGBT and school children)?
3. What are your main goals, accomplishments and challenges at this time?
4. Is there a specific action you would like us to take?
5. Is there any urgency to your request? If so, what dates are crucial?

RESOLUTION REGARDING TEACHER LAYOFFS

Whereas Mayor Bloomberg has proposed to reduce the professional staff of New York City public schools by up to 6,000 teachers,

And Whereas New York City classrooms are overcrowded, well beyond limits recommended by the NYS Court of Appeals (in Campaign for Fiscal Equity vs. New York State. 2003), and are among the most overcrowded in the nation, with numbers particularly high in Community Board Two

And Whereas the city has lost 5,000 teachers in the past two years, cutting many curricula enrichment courses, such as music and art, as well increasing class sizes overall,

And Whereas high class sizes overburden teachers and prevent students from learning as much as they should and can,

And Whereas the debate over seniority (Last In First Out) distracts and obscures the true issue, which is the need to prevent any teacher layoffs,

And Whereas New York City is projected to have a budget surplus in 2011

And Whereas money spent on the education of our children is a sound investment for the future of our city,

Therefore Be It Resolved that Community Board 2 Manhattan strongly opposes any Teacher Layoffs in the next fiscal year, and

Therefore be it further resolved that CB2 requests that all city officials acknowledge that a sound basic education for our children is required by state law (affirmed by the State court) and that funds for teachers, supervisors, and school construction be allocated to ensure that our children learn.