

Housing & Human Services Committee Minutes
Thursday, May 7th, 2020 at 6:55PM Virtual Meeting via WebEx

Committee Members Present:

Ariel Miranda, Waldys Cruz, Ayisha Oglivie, Bruce Robertson, Osi Kaminer, Naysha Diaz,

Board Members Present: Curtis Young

Public Members Present: Marshall Vanderpool

Committee Members Absent: Carolina Charles

Public Members Absent: Alexander Melendez and Richard Habersham

Community Members Present: Christopher Beltre, Matt, Marlene Mrakovcic, Tony Mendez

Government officials: NYS Assembly Member Carmen De La Rosa

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. NY Immigrant Relief Fund
3. Upcoming legislation
4. Expanding Homeless Services
5. The City Council of New York's effort to address the COVID-19 pandemic
6. Announcements
7. Old Business / New Business

1. Chair Miranda welcomed committee and community members to the meeting

2. NY Immigrant Relief Fund

A \$20 million fund that was allocated for various organizations. The Federal administration is raising fear amongst the undocumented immigrants that need relief in this pandemic. Many are already in need of financial support and it is not clear if immigrants may be targeted by ICE or other governmental organizations for deportation if they sign on to the fund. The Committee produced a resolution and passed by CB12 regarding refugees, undocumented immigrants and detainees that may have been released into the community and were left without any social or financial support before COVID19. Federal or the State initiatives do not provide for the vulnerable population in our district so the intent of the resolution was to create a coalition of organizations that would bridge the gap.

3. Upcoming legislation

NYS Assembly Member Carmen De La Rosa gave an update on the NYS Dream Act legislation she is working on as well as conversations with Make The Road New York. Assembly Members Jessica Rebers and De La Rosa introduced the *Excluded Workers Bail Out Tax* bill that would establish a market tax on billionaire's unrealized capital gains on assets they have but do not pay personal income tax on. We need to define who these vulnerable people are and amend the way the State defines homelessness; for example, people that rent rooms and got evicted by the leaseholders and are now 'couch surfing' with friends and family. We can protect the individuals signing into the program by limiting access to the database to the agency that runs the homeless initiatives. The Committee will discuss a resolution in June.

4. Expanding Homeless Services

Since the stay-at-home order was in effect many homeless people are overwhelming the subway system as general ridership is down about 90%. There is an effort to keep social distancing standards in shelters and reduce the population to 50 individuals per shelter. Some homeless are moving to hotels to keep the required social distancing. The NYC shelter system does not deal with the base of the homelessness problem. A shelter is not a home; it is a temporary fix for issues like the COVID pandemic or weather related storms but it is not a long-term solution for those that need a meaningful solution. Only a program like the 100,000 Apartments initiative (www.100khomes.org) offer a meaningful solution that includes social programs.

The existing shelter system is not a solution but an immediate temporary help. If there are available apartments, landlords are charging higher rents because the presumption by the public is that the vacancy rate is low. The committee would like to bring policy experts to speak to us about immigration rights and housing policies.

Chair Miranda was looking to invite Alba Lucero Villa, the executive director of the Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights (NMCIR); so far he has been unsuccessful. Additionally, Giselle Routhier, the senior policy adviser for Picture of the Homeless along with other professionals in the field are to be invited for discussion over the next few meetings. We hope to gain a better understanding of the effects of the Section 8 program's partial elimination that began in 2005, the shelter program, and Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FHEPS) that pay up to 100% rent to families, and any other program that maybe available for homeless. Navigation programs should be included in any system that is designed to solve the homeless problem.

Additionally, some apartments are sitting vacant; in 2018, there were 250,000 vacant NYC apartments. While over \$2.1 billion is going into the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and the shelter system, there are potentially 20-30 thousand apartments that can be available for housing the homeless. Empty apartments can offer a long-term solution for the 63,000 people currently homeless in NYC.

5. The City Council of New York's effort to address the COVID-19 pandemic

The Rent Guideline Board (RGB) is pushing to increase rent by 2.5%. The problem is that this is the wrong time to be proposing a rent increase while millions are losing their jobs. More

specifically, many immigrants are working in industries that are most affected by the pandemic. It now takes about 6 weeks before one starts receiving unemployment benefits, and although the length of compensation was extended due to COVID19, many people have no jobs to return to or are returning to their previous positions with pay and benefit cuts. The unemployment rate as of April 18, 2020 was 14.7%. And that may not be the peak as it's estimated that unemployment at the end of the year could be as high as 30%.

Additionally, although renters received rent relief at the same time that landlords received mortgage relief, it is not clear yet if tenants will owe back rent for the period that they did not pay rent. Furthermore, renters that received public assistance (SNAP) benefits prior to COVID19 and maxed out are not eligible for SNAP. With an increase in rent and inflation, we may see an increase of homelessness while the programs that are in place to help them are already slashed to a minimum and may not be enough to cater to growing pool of people in need.

A resolution addressing this issue will be presented for a vote at the May Executive Committee meeting for CB12 to pass a resolution prior to RGB vote on that matter.

6. Announcements

None

7. Old Business / New Business

Elected officials proposed that CBO's and faith based organization be compensated for facilitating social distancing. Some neighborhood face masks are given away while in poor neighborhoods people are getting arrested for not keeping social distancing guidelines.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:11PM Moved by A. Miranda 2nd by W. Cruz