



## Community Board 12 - Manhattan Washington Heights & Inwood

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Eleazar Bueno, Chairperson  
Ebenezer Smith, District Manager

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June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021

The Honorable Ydanis Rodriguez  
NYC Council Member for Washington Heights and Inwood  
618 W. 177th Street, Ground Floor  
New York, NY 10033

Re: Resolution to investigate and make public all licenses for the utilization of the Fort Washington Avenue Armory.

Dear Council Member Rodriguez:

At the General Meeting, Tuesday, May 25, 2021, with a vote of 17 in favor, 3 opposed, 11 abstentions, 2 not voting, Community Board 12, Manhattan passed the following resolution, calling for a meeting to be held alongside City officials discussing the matter of the Fort Washington Avenue Armory and establishing a nomination process for appointments to a Fort Washington Avenue Armory Board of Directors; and urging the New York City Council to investigate, make public all licenses for the utilization of the Fort Washington Avenue Armory, and hold a public hearing on how the Department of Homeless Services has been overseeing the usage of public space at the Fort Washington Avenue Armory.

**Whereas:** Per the City Charter, Section 2707, subdivision a, states "Each agency with service districts within the community districts and boroughs shall prepare annually a statement of its service objectives, priorities, programs, and projected activities within each community district and each borough for the new fiscal year if requested by the respective community board or borough board.";

**Whereas:** Per the City Charter, Section 2707, subdivision b, states "In preparing such statements for community districts the agencies shall consult with the respective district service cabinets and community boards.";

**Whereas:** Per the City Charter, Section 2708, states that "Each agency with service districts within the community districts and boroughs shall make available to each community board ... current information on its operations and programs within each community district and borough.";

**Whereas:** Per the City Charter, Section 2800, subdivision d, states "Each community board shall...

- Consider the needs of the district which it serves",
- "Consult with agencies on the capital needs of the district, review departmental estimates"
- "Consult with agencies on the program needs of the community district to be funded from the expense budget, review departmental estimates"
- As well as "Evaluate the quality and quantity of services provided by agencies within the **community district**";

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**Whereas:** Per the City Charter, Section 2800, Subdivision e, states "Each agency shall furnish promptly to each community board on request any information or assistance necessary for the board's work. Each agency shall also report periodically to each board on its service activities programs and operations within the community district."

Whereas: The Fort Washington Avenue Armory is a 233,182- square-foot city-owned property converted by the City of New York to serve as a multipurpose community recreational facility;

**Whereas:** The City of New York placed the Fort Washington Avenue Armory under the direct purview of its Department of Homeless Services;

**Whereas:** In subsequent years, the Departments of Homeless Services decided to license parts of the property at the Fort Washington Avenue Armory to the Armory Foundation to operate "an indoor track and athletic facility and the National Track & Hall of Fame as described below, and for no other purpose";

Whereas: The City of New York has been granting several millions of dollars to the Armory Foundation through over 400 spending transactions to maintain the building and provide services to the public – specifically from:

- The Department of Education
- The Department of Citywide Administrative Services
- The Department of Youth & Community Development
- The Department of Small Business Services
- The City Council of New York
- The Board of Elections
- The Department of Design & Construction
  - \$4.43 million in 1 contract alone - Contract ID: CT185020060003350
  - \$7.27 million in 1 contract alone - Contract ID: CT185020100013454
  - \$2.82 million in 1 contract alone - Contract ID: CT185020181424333

**Whereas:** In subsequent years, the Armory Foundation, Police Athletic League, Columbia University Workers of Wonders, Columbia University Medical Center, Teach for America, New Heights Neighborhood Center, and Growth and Development Services received licenses for usage of space at the armory;

**Whereas:** In subsequent years, the Armory Foundation has allegedly -

- Breached the licensing agreement by sublicensing several other privately run organizations on the property on an ongoing basis;
- Breached the licensing agreement by allowing the renting of space to other entities for "corporate or social" events such as "corporate functions, galas, bar/bat mitzvahs, weddings, fashion shows, film shoots and more";
- Withheld space from being utilized

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- Allowed for the usage of public space by an out of state individual for his living quarters
- Required licensees of the Armory to discontinue services without the consent of the Department of Homeless Services
- Encouraged a caterer to request a liquor license from Community Board 12M's Licensing Committee on its behalf

**Whereas:** The Armory Foundation has for years been using a website page ([Armory Spaces — The Armory Foundation](#)) and been utilizing a billboard on the scaffolding of the building specifically seeking to "rent" the publicly owned facilities regularly to clients for "corporate or social" events such as:

- VH1 - Alexander Wang
- MTV
- H&M:

**Whereas:** Per Article 4 of the License given by the Department of Homeless Services to the Armory Foundation, the Foundation is required "to make the premises available for use by the Department of Parks & Recreation for the benefit of the community";

**Whereas:** Per Article 5 of the License given by the Department of Homeless Services to the Armory Foundation states "this license is for the exclusive use of the licensee and solely for the purpose hereinabove set forth and shall not be assigned either in whole or in part, or leased or sublet in any manner... nor shall any interest therein pass to any other person, firm or corporation whatsoever, either by the acts of the Licensee or by operation of law, without the prior consent in writing of licensor";

**Whereas:** In 2014, Community Board 12M was made aware of its community non-profit organizations' as well as public members' claims regarding the public space not being made accessible at the city-owned Fort Washington Avenue Armory;

**Whereas:** In late October 2014, both the New York Daily News and DNAinfo both interviewed several non-profit organizations and reported that they had been being charged "tens of thousands of dollars to use the facility";

**Whereas:** At the October 2014 Youth & Education Committee Meeting, Y&E passed a resolution by a vote of 29-0, noting that:

- "the City of New York, through the Mayor's Office recently conducted a tour of the Armory and found heavy underutilization of useable space throughout"
- "The Youth and Education Committee have a joint meeting with the Housing and Human Services Committee if that committee so accepts to determine what entities if any currently have the legal authority and responsibility to make day to day and long-range decisions on the operation of the building, its facility management, rentals, contracting and licensing its spaces"
- "All legal parties that have standing are invited to participate in this joint meeting and bring all licenses, agreements, and or related documents"

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- “both board committees conduct a site visit or tour of the entire 168<sup>th</sup> Street Armory building and its spaces by invitation”;

**Whereas:** Although The Department of Homeless Services had said they would assure that the community was given access to the building, it then began to evade addressing the aforementioned concerns until meeting with the Housing and Human Services Committee over 3 years later in 2018;

**Whereas:** Community Board 12M's Housing & Human Services Committee sent a set of 27 questions to the Department of Homeless Service regarding how it had been overseeing the facility as well as addressing previous issues raised on March 7, 2019 – CB12 HHS Meeting (however DHS has invited to January 10, 2019, HHS meeting and did not show up)

**Whereas:** Community Board 12M Housing & Human Services Committee finally met with representatives from the Department of Homeless Services and requested at the March 2019 meeting that the Department of Homeless Services return to the committee with a set of resolves to address these matters herein discussed as well as respond to the set of 27 questions sent by Ayisha Oglivie;

**Whereas:** Community Board 12M Housing & Human Services Committee met with representatives from the Department of Homeless Services at their March 7, 2019 meeting requesting that the agency return to the committee with a set of resolves to address the matters herein discussed as well as respond to an additional set of 27 questions sent previously regarding how it has been overseeing the building, but the latter never took place;

**Whereas:** The Department of Homeless Services thereafter returned 2 years later on March 4, 2021, to state it had already responded to the committee's 27 questions and only there “to take notes”; and...

**Whereas:** The Chair of the committee requested they sent the very email with those responses within one week to him and the Department of Homeless Services still did not send responses to the questions even after following up directly thereafter with them on March 11, 2021, at 11:45 PM;

**Whereas:** Community Board 12M's Housing & Human Services Committee has been pursuing a resolution of the matters herein described and yet to receive any information requested as is required to be shared by the City Charter for over 7 years by the Department of Homeless Services; therefore...

**Be it Resolved:** Community Board 12M calls for a meeting to be held alongside City officials discussing the matter of the Fort Washington Avenue Armory and establishing a nomination process for appointments to a Fort Washington Avenue Armory Board of Directors; and

**Be it Further Resolved:** Community Board 12M calls upon the New York City Council to investigate, make public all licenses for the utilization of the Fort Washington Avenue Armory, and hold a public hearing on how the Department of Homeless Services has been overseeing the usage of public space at the Fort Washington Avenue Armory; and

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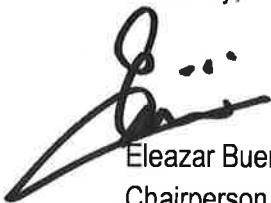
**Be It Further Resolved:** Community Board 12M calls upon the New York City Council to establish by local law a Fort Washington Avenue Armory Board of Directors that would be responsible for overseeing the:

- Operational usage of the Fort Washington Avenue Armory
- Approval of licenses to private, public, and non-profit organizations
- Annual detailed financial disclosures; and

**Be it further Resolved:** Community Board 12M calls upon the New York City Council to ensure the body of the Board:

- Has a composition of 1 representative from each licensee at the Fort Washington Avenue Armory, 1 representative appointed by the Manhattan Borough President, 1 representative appointed by the City Council Member of Council District 10, 5 representatives from Community Board 12 members appointed by Community Board 12M Chair (with the approval of the Executive Committee), 1 representative appointed by the Department of Homeless Services, 1 representative appointed by the Department of Parks & Recreation, and no less than 3 independent community members and/or community-based organization representatives (including 1 representative of the Neighborhood Advisory Board) appointed by Community Board 12M's Chair (with the approval of the Executive Committee)
- Conducts yearly a financial review before the public and make available a report regarding the usage of space within the facility
- Ensures changes are made to the current operational status of the Fort Washington Avenue Armory to allow further and fair community access following the guidelines provided in the 2002 License Agreement between the Department of Homeless Services and the Armory Foundation
- Meets at least quarterly throughout each year

Sincerely,



Eleazar Bueno  
Chairperson

cc: Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor  
Hon. Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate  
Hon. Scott M. Stringer, Comptroller  
Hon. Adriano Espaillat, Congressman  
Hon. Brian Benjamin, State Senator  
Hon. Adriano Espaillat, Congressman

Hon. Brian Benjamin, State Senator  
Hon. Robert Jackson, State Senator  
Hon. Alfred Taylor, Assembly Member  
Hon. Carmen De La Rosa, Assembly Member  
Hon. Mark Levine, Council Member  
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President