

HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES – September 9, 2021

Virtual meeting conducted via Zoom

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Steve Simon (Chair), Elizabeth Lehmann (Asst. Chair), Tanya Bonner, Katherine Diaz, Sara Fisher, Osi Kaminer, Jay Mazur, Wendy Pena.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT: Waldys Cruz (excused).

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Mary Anderson, Daryl Cochrane.

GUESTS: Yokarina Duarte, NYC Emergency Management; Jeffrey Shaman and Ross Frommer, Columbia University Irving Medical Center; Julio Batista, NY-Presbyterian Hospital; Pauline Ferrante, NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene; Dave Crenshaw, National Black Leadership Commission on Health; Orlando Ovalles, Assembly Member De La Rosa; Dodie Dohoney, Allegra LeGrande, 22 others.

S. Simon, chair, called the meeting to order at 7:14 p.m. and noted the presence of a quorum. He welcomed new committee member Wendy Pena.

- **Presentation on Hurricane Evacuation Zones in Washington Heights-Inwood**

The map of Hurricane Evacuation Zones was posted on the screen. S. Simon pointed out that most of Washington Heights is on a higher elevation and not in an evacuation zone. However, much of Inwood, especially east of Broadway, is in one of the zones.

Yokarina Duarte, Director – Intergovernmental Relations, NYC Emergency Management, stated as follows:

- Emergency Management is the coordinating agency for weather-related incidents.
- After Superstorm Sandy, the map was changed because more water came into NYC than expected.
- Different levels for possible impact from coastal storms and hurricanes – six zones instead of three.
- If you go to Know Your Zone website, you can plug in your address and find out which zone you live in.
- You can go to an evacuation center if you are ordered to leave your residence. They are usually in public schools or other City facilities. The designated centers in Washington Heights are P.S. 48 and I.S. 90; others would be opened if necessary. We haven't published all of them.
- You should have a Go Bag with all your documents and medicine.
- 10 feet extra of water would trigger an evacuation.
- Allen Hospital, despite how it appears on the map, is not in an evacuation zone.
- Dyckman Houses is in a Zone 2. We would work with NYCHA on any evacuation.
- The Hudson (former La Marina) is also in a Zone 2.
- There is a difference between flood zones and FEMA risk zones, which were created for insurance purposes. Our maps were created for life safety purposes.
- Landlords must inform tenants they live in an evacuation zone.
- Informational materials in 12 languages can be requested through 311.

Committee members then asked questions and made various comments.

Osi Kaminer: Con Edison's facilities at Sherman Creek would be flooded first.

Y. Duarte: Companies have been told they may be in jeopardy and to take precautions.

Osi Kaminer: Can you evacuate with your pets?

Y. Duarte: Yes, you would stay in a separate area, away from people who might have allergies.

A. LeGrande: Less than ½ of top 10 flood events in NYC were tropical storms and hurricanes. Flooding occurred in unexpected places during Sandy. Need a unified plan for low-lying areas.

Y. Duarte: We have just one map. Will take your comment back to the GIS unit to make sure it is reflected in the map. We work very hard to make sure each community gets what it needs.

Questions also were raised about how the large number of people who will live in high-rise buildings planned for the area at West 207th Street and Ninth Avenue will be evacuated. She said that OEM would work with NYPD to make sure people were evacuated safely.

Updates on the COVID-19 Pandemic in Our Community

- **Columbia University Irving Medical Center (CUIMC)** – Jeffrey Shaman, Professor, Environmental Health Sciences and Director, Climate and Health Program, Mailman School of Public Health, reported on a study that he and others at the school recently published in the journal Nature. They concluded that nearly one-third of the entire U.S. population had been infected with COVID-19 by the end of 2020, a much higher rate of infection than previously thought. They found that the rate of infection in NYC was even higher at 44%. He stated as follows:

- There were many more infections than the ones that were documented. Many people got mild or no symptoms. There were variables from community to community.
- We were capturing less than 10% of the infections in early March 2020; not much testing available.
- During 2020, 1 of 4 infections was being documented; a lot of people not being tested.
- COVID-19 not like chickenpox and measles, which you only get once. It's like influenza, which you can get more than once. We're going to be dealing with this virus for a long time. Not clear when we'll be done with it.
- Washington Heights not as bad as many other communities in NYC. It's been in the middle of the pack.

- **COVID-19 Statistics for Washington Heights-Inwood** – S. Simon then reported that the positivity rate for 10034 from 8/31-9/6 was 4.24% (36 cases), 10040 was 3.41% (35 cases), 10032 was 2.61% (40 cases) and 10033 was 2.25% (31 cases). There has been a total of 23,564 cases and 815 deaths in our community during the pandemic. The percentages of adults who have been vaccinated with at least one dose runs between 61%-65% in the four zip codes and who are fully vaccinated runs between 54.5% - 58.3%. These figures are below the Citywide percentages (67% and 60%) and those for Manhattan (77% and 70%). See attached chart.

- Professor Jeffrey Shaman continued his report:
 - Overall case levels are 10X what they were in June because of Delta variant; 1500-2000 cases per week.
 - Positivity rate depends upon people getting tested.
 - He and his fellow researchers used a mathematical model with an inference algorithm to estimate the level of infections.
 - People should be tested regularly.
 - Mu variant is not competing that much with the Delta variant, which is more transmissible. 99% of all infections are from the Delta variant.
 - People will get infected repeatedly, every 2 or 4 years; we'd be able to live with it. Should be less virulent.

- Ross Frommer, Vice President, Government and Community Affairs, CUIMC, reported as follows:
 - CUIMC has implemented vaccine requirement for faculty, students, employees as of yesterday or today. Less than 20 of 12,000 people are out of compliance. Religious and medical exemptions allowed. Most got vaccines.
 - Last week the State announced all health care workers must be vaccinated, no more religious exemptions.
 - CUIMC and the Herbert Irving Comprehensive Cancer Center received a \$10M grant from Pfizer Inc. to establish the Columbia-Pfizer Clinical Trials Diversity Initiative to reduce health disparities by diversifying participation in clinical trials and that of clinical researchers. S. Simon pointed out that the committee has been very interested in this issue and would like a full presentation at a future meeting.
 - His written report is attached.

- **Vaccine Effort in Inwood** – Dodie Dohoney, Inwood resident, reported on her successful effort to get a vaccination bus assigned to West 207th Street for four days. She got flyers from the Test & Trace Corps and worked with 8-9 volunteers to hand them out and post them in the neighborhood. Also sent emails. It was a big success: 747 people, including teens, were vaccinated. The bus is scheduled to return in two weeks.

- **NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene** – Pauline Ferrante, Manhattan Community Liaison, reported:
 - Close to 5 million people in NYC are fully vaccinated
 - Starting 9/27, childcare and afterschool program staff will have to be vaccinated.
 - Vaccine clinics will be opened in 700 school buildings starting next week. She will check whether family members will be eligible for vaccines too.
 - Enforcement begins next week to make sure restaurants, gyms and indoor entertainment venues are checking for proof of vaccination before admitting people.

S. Fisher: Why was our area the only one in Manhattan recently sprayed with pesticides for West Nile Virus?
P. Ferrante: Pesticides that are used don't show any harm to humans. They disintegrate in sunlight. DOHMH sprays when pools of mosquito traps show the virus. All the mosquitoes caught in a trap are tested. There are multiple traps in the area.
A. LeGrande: It's unclear whether there is a vaccine mandate for related service providers in schools, non-DOE employees. The mask mandate is also very vague regarding the type of masks that are required. Does DOHMH monitor for Lyme disease? A Columbia study found ticks in Inwood Hill Park.

P. Ferrante: Will reach out to DOE on first two questions. Will check on monitoring for Lyme disease. City Hall was working on the wildlife issue, a pilot program to reduce the number of deer. It helped with tick problem.

- **NY-Presbyterian Hospital** – Julio Batista, Government and Community Affairs Liaison, reported as follows:
 - NYP saw an increase in Delta variant cases this summer, mostly people who are unvaccinated. Still high but leveling off. In the 10 campuses, 220 patients currently admitted with COVID-19. 50 patients at Columbia and at Allen. The ERs have been very busy.
 - Transplant and cancer patients will be getting a third shot 8 months after the last vaccination. Waiting for guidelines.
 - No plan to reopen the Armory as a vaccination site. Vaccines still being provided at the Children’s Hospital by appointment.
 - The hotline run by the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corp. (646-838-0319) for help getting vaccines is still operating.
 - Continue to promote presentations to community groups on vaccine hesitancy in multiple languages.
- S. Fisher: Is there a date for reopening the psych unit at Allen?
J. Batista: No set date.
S. Fisher: How are you prioritizing behavioral health?
J. Batista: Process stays the same. Patients are brought to the CPEP unit at 168th Street for evaluation and if necessary, beds are found for them (either at Milstein, Gracie Square or Westchester).
S. Fisher: How many are going to City Health & Hospitals psych beds?
J. Batista: No info available.
O. Kaminer: would like an update on the anti-discrimination task force.
R. Frommer: You’re probably referring to CUIMC’s anti-racism task force. We can arrange a presentation.
O. Kaminer: Why are there no trauma beds for adults at the hospital? (Only the Morgan-Stanley Children’s Hospital is designated as a trauma center for children. The main hospital is not designated as a Trauma I center to handle gunshot victims and other severe injuries.)
J. Batista: It’s a very extensive process, not something the hospital wanted to pursue.
J. Mazur: Has NYP posted the prices for different treatments?
J. Batista: It’s on the website.
- **National Black Leadership Commission on Health** – Dave Crenshaw, Street Outreach Specialist, reported on his efforts to get people in the community vaccinated:
 - Partner with CBOs (CLOTH, Word Up, School in the Square) to promote vaccine vans and reach people who are normally not reached. Work with a team of young people. About 325 people vaccinated so far. [Another 100 since then.]
 - We explain how to get the \$100 incentive. They can pick it up at the American Museum of Natural History or it can be mailed to them.
 - We help them get the Excelsior Pass – fighting the digital divide.
 - We go into buildings to post flyers. Go into stores. Hand out business cards with vaccine info.
 - Give out books, basketballs, footballs, school supplies.
 - On Sunday, van will be parked outside C-Town supermarket on St. Nicholas Avenue and W. 161st Street.
- **Isabella Geriatric Center** – Betty Lehmann, Director of Marketing and Community Relations, reported as follows:
 - Isabella is following all DOH vaccine mandates. All nursing staff is required to have first dose by 9/27, second dose by 10/18 & 10/25. They cannot work if not vaccinated.
 - Compliance at Isabella has been very good.
 - The mandate also applies to consultants, vendors and volunteers – not to visitors.
 - All visitors must be tested and are provided with PPE. Indoor and window visits are being held.
 - There were a few COVID-19 incidents over the summer – 2 residents and 3 employees. Everyone OK now.
 - Resource center on St. Nicholas Avenue & W. 169th Street was closed.
 - Census has been down. Of the 705 beds, 550 are filled. As a result, there were staff reductions. Layoffs in July. Some have been brought back, others offered positions elsewhere.

- **Resolution on vaccination site** – Fisher/Bonner made a motion that the committee pass a resolution calling upon the City to establish a full-time vaccination site in Washington Heights-Inwood considering these facts: many residents are at higher risk of getting COVID-19 because of their first-line jobs and the vaccination rates in our community are lower than the City and Manhattan as a whole. There also should be a steady presence in Inwood. The motion was approved by the following votes: Committee Members 6-0-0 Board Member 1-0-0
- **Discussion of FY 23 Budget Requests** – The committee reviewed its lists of FY 22 Expense Budget and Capital Budget priorities. There was general agreement that most of the Expense priorities are still relevant but that two of them -- the #5 priority (Increase funding for a targeted educational outreach campaign for COVID -19 prevention and support services in underserved communities such as Washington Heights-Inwood) and the #11 priority (Create an educational campaign about the federal public charge rule to inform immigrants of their right to obtain health services and other benefits) could be dropped from the list. District Manager Ebenezer Smith said the local Sanitation superintendent asked that we advocate for a second shift for trash basket collections. S. Simon asked D.M. Smith to check whether the District needs additional garbage collection trucks and street sweepers with snowplows, our #2 Capital priority last year. We also need to check on the status of the new garage that is to be built for District 8 downtown.
- **Old Business** – S. Simon distributed the monthly report from DDC on its gas and water main installation project in Washington Heights prior to the meeting. It is 74.36% completed. He also distributed the reports from the Mayor's Office of Operations on Acceptably Clean Streets and Sidewalks. The ratings for streets were 89.6% in July and 91.8% in June. They were 69.9% in July 2020. The ratings for sidewalks were 96.9% in July, 100% in June and 97.9% in July 2020.
- **New Business** – S. Fisher reported that the deadline for submitting comments for the Environmental Justice for All report had passed and the final report would be issued at some point.
S. Fisher also reported that CB 12 has received a \$10,000 allocation again from Council Member Rodriguez through the Council's Greener NYC initiative. She suggested that the board use the funding by having the Lower East Side Ecology Center hold two additional e-waste collection events in Washington Heights-Inwood. This request was endorsed by the following vote: Committee Members 6-0-0 Board Member 1-0-0.
S. Fisher brought up the issue about the Parks Department's recent use of Round-Up in Fort Tryon Park to deal with poison ivy. While she said this use is permitted under Local Law 56, she urged that goats be used instead.
- **Announcements** – S. Simon: A 9/11 memorial will be held in Fort Tryon Park at 6 p.m. S. Fisher: A 9/11 service will be held at Good Shepherd Church at 4 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Steve Simon

COVID-19 Report for Washington Heights-Inwood - 9/9/21

Rank (of 177 zip codes in NYC)	Zip Code	Positivity Rate (8/31- 9/6)	# of New Cases (8/31- 9/6)	Case Rate per 100,000	Total Cases	Total Deaths	Deaths per 100,000	Adults Vaccinated (at least 1 dose)		Adults Vaccinated (fully)	
	10034	4.24%	36	11,022	4,656	125	295.92	25,673	60.78%	23,025	54.51%
	10040	3.41%	35	12,168	5,350	224	509.48	27,826	63.29%	25,100	57.09%
	10032	2.61%	40	11,175	7,046	277	439.33	40,999	65.03%	36,750	58.29%
	10033	2.25%	31	11,128	6,512	189	322.98	36,361	62.14%	32,949	56.31%

TOTALS

142

23,564

815

130,859

117,824

Data source: NYC Dept. of Health & Mental Hygiene website

Citywide	
67%	60%
Manhattan	
77%	70%

September 9, 2021

Updates for the Community Board 12 Committee

- **Campus Testing Data Available**– Columbia University continues to provide COVID-19 PCR diagnostic tests for all faculty, staff, and students returning to campus. Weekly reports of the data are available at covid19.columbia.edu for public review. As of the week of August 30th, 3,149 tests were conducted at the CUIMC campus with three positive test results. Furthermore, Columbia has implemented a policy requiring all students, faculty, and staff to be vaccinated against COVID-19.
- **Columbia University Leadership Updates** – Dennis Mitchell was recently appointed the Executive Vice President for University Life. While taking on this new role, Dennis will also serve as Senior Vice Provost for Faculty Advancement and will continue to hold his faculty appointment at the College of Dental Medicine. In addition to Dr. Mitchell, Dr. Mary Boyce is the new University Provost, Dr. Monica Lypson is the new Vice Dean for Education at VP&S, Dr. Jeannette Wing was appointed as the Executive Vice President for Research, Troy Eggers as the new Dean of the School of Professional Studies.
- **Columbia University and Pfizer Diversity Initiative**– Columbia University Irving Medical Center, the Herbert Irving Comprehensive Cancer Center, and Pfizer Inc. have established the Columbia-Pfizer Clinical Trials Diversity Initiative, to reduce health disparities by diversifying participation in clinical trials and that of clinical researchers. Read more about the announcement [here](#).
- **Northern Manhattan Neighbor’s Appreciation Day**– On Saturday, September 18, the annual neighbor’s appreciation day will take place, at the Baker Field Athletic Complex. Residents will receive complimentary tickets for a football game featuring Columbia vs. Marist College. A second game will take place on September 25th vs. Georgetown. Details are available here gocolumbialinos.com/nmh. All attendees twelve and over will be required to produce proof of vaccination to attend and all attendees must wear a mask inside and outside.
- **Screening in Haven Plaza** – Tomorrow, Friday, September 10, at 7pm a screening of a new comedy web series titled “Gross Anatomy” will be hosted in Haven Plaza. Directed by Washington Heights native- Adrian Miranda, the screening is free and open to the public. More information is available [here](#).
- **S-Prep Application Available**– S-PREP is a free high school and college preparatory program for 7th - 12th grade students, who are interested in a career in medicine or related STEM professions. The long-range objective is to increase the number of historically underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students prepared to enter college and improve their participation rate in healthcare and STEM. Academic Year offerings include academic enrichment in math & science, SAT prep, academic/career counseling, career development, college preparatory workshops, and college tours. The application is due on Thursday, September 15 and is available [here](#).
- **Velocity Ride** – On Sunday, October 3, 2021 Columbia’s Velocity Ride to end cancer returns. This year’s event allows participants to support Columbia’s Herbert Irving Comprehensive Cancer Center (HICCC) by riding, walking, running, or doing any activity of your choice on or before October 3- Velocity Day. Velocity Day will include a virtual ceremony and other exciting engagement activities. Registration and more information may be found at www.velocityride.org. Use this code to waive registration fee- WAHI21.