

# HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES – January 6, 2022

Virtual meeting conducted via Zoom

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:** Steve Simon (Chair), Tanya Bonner, Katherine Diaz, Sara Fisher, Osi Kaminer, Emily Marte, Jay Mazur, Wendy Pena.

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:** Waldys Cruz

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Joel Abreu, Mary Anderson, Maria Luna.

**GUESTS:** Kailin See and Jason Beltre, Washington Heights CORNER Project; Michael McRae, Chelsea Cipriano and Pauline Ferrante, NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene; Fernando Brigidi, NYC Test & Trace Corps; Ross Frommer, Columbia University Irving Medical Center; Julio Batista, NY-Presbyterian Hospital; Diane Ashley, MJHS Health System; Natalie Espino, Manhattan Borough President's Office; Nicholas Arture, NY State Nurses Assn; Gabriela Biel, Tim Frasca, Michael Funaro, Bernard Grobman, Carlos Manzueta, Cheryl Miller, Hope Miller.

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S. Simon, chair, called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m., took attendance and noted the presence of a quorum.

- **Overdose Prevention Center --** Kailin See, Senior Director of Programs, Washington Heights CORNER Project (WHCP), led the presentation and stated as follows:

- OnPoint NYC is the umbrella organization for WHCP, which remains a separate organization
- She extended an open invitation to people who would like to see the space at 500 W. 180<sup>th</sup> St. (Amsterdam Avenue)
- 30-year lease, very supportive landlord
- Currently open 7 a.m. – 11:30 p.m., 7 days a week. Plan to add a third shift and be open 24 hours by the spring
- Adding mental health providers and a satellite health clinic with a physician's assistant
- The Overdose Prevention Center (OPC), one part of WHCP, opened 11/30/21, along with another site in East Harlem
- 437 drug users have registered at both sites; there have been 3500 visits
- 78 overdoses have been prevented – 49 at Washington Heights site – as of last night (1/5)
- Many of these overdoses could have led to fatalities or serious health complications
- Only had to call an ambulance once for someone having a seizure
- Workers from two drug treatment providers have been stationed at the center ready to take drug abusers for treatment
- There are six cubicles where they can snort or inject drugs; two for smoking
- No time limit; checking on them every three minutes
- Ran an unsanctioned program for six years; now it is formalized, cleaner, better staffed and resourced
- This is a very unique political moment

Michael McRae, Acting Executive Deputy Commissioner - Mental Hygiene, DOHMH, noted that the NYC Board of Health recently issued a statement urging the federal and state governments to authorize Overdose Prevention Centers. "They are focused on saving lives." He said there is a need for these centers around the city. DOHMH is "developing a plan to engage and educate communities across the city."

S. Simon asked K. See for data on the number of clients who have accepted and successfully completed treatment, and for a zip code breakdown of their clients overall.

S. Fisher said she had visited the center and it is "beautiful." How is it funded?

K. See: The OPC is privately funded – "no city and state funds for now"

S. Fisher: Can there be vending machines with Narcan across the city?

M. McRae: "Public health vending machines are in an early planning stage. It will go through a thoughtful planning process."

O. Kaminer: Can we have another facility in Washington Heights-Inwood, maybe a van? Where are individuals coming from?

T. Bonner: "Community outreach should have been done before the OPC opened...creates opposition, lack of trust unnecessarily. Equity should be discussed along with education."

J. Mazur: "Residents' complaints about people coming from outside the community are beside the point."

N. Espino: WHCP should create a bilingual social media tool kit to help communicate to neighbors

K. See: Working with the MTA to increase services on the A and #1 trains; installing more kiosks in Highbridge Park to collect needles; putting a green roof on the building working with schools; serving meals to local residents; hard to do more in the community

B. Grobman: A recovering drug addict, he said he doesn't see "how it helps addicts or the community by continuing to let people use drugs...Technically, [the OPCs] are illegal. How are they sanctioned by the City?"

K. See: The OPC "doesn't enable drug use. It acknowledges drug use. We serve people who have been in and out of treatment programs. The highest number of people have tried treatment. We are not an enemy of abstinence."

J. Abreu: Who owns these centers? Are they non-profit? Was any outreach done before it opened? "A majority of people I've spoken to don't like these sites...What are you doing to help people with health problems?"

K. See: The building is owned by a private landlord. WHCP is a non-profit and has a 30-year lease. "We have done outreach for six years...We are part of the solution. This is about preserving life."

G. Biel: The OPC is "a godsend to our area. Another center is needed in Inwood. Narcan is not available in this area. We need resources. I see more and more opiate users. It's getting to a critical point."

### **Updates on the COVID-19 Pandemic in Our Community**

- **COVID-19 Statistics for Washington Heights-Inwood** – S. Simon: Our four zip codes have had a "high transmission rate" over the past 7 days: 2701 new cases per 100,000. This is below the Citywide rate (3038) and above the Manhattan rate (2568). There have been a huge number of **11,263** additional cases and 12 deaths since the last committee meeting on Dec. 2 -- a total of 36,621 cases and 835 deaths in our community during the pandemic. **31%** of all the cases have occurred in just the last month because of the highly transmissible Omicron variant. The percentages of people who have been vaccinated with at least one dose run between 73%-78% in the four zip codes. We are lagging behind the Citywide and Manhattan percentages (82% and 91%). There are similar gaps for people who are fully vaccinated: 66%-69% in our four zip codes, 73% Citywide and 79% Manhattan.
- **NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene** – Pauline Ferrante, Manhattan Community Liaison, reported as follows:
  - Anyone 12 or older should be getting a booster shot; everyone should get vaccinated; wear masks indoors
  - People 5 years or older must show proof of vaccination to enter restaurants and other indoor settings
  - Responding to a question sent in advance by S. Simon: the PCR testing site at the Washington Heights District Health Center, 600 W. 168<sup>th</sup> St., was scaled down because emergency staff working there were reassigned to their original roles, such as the STI clinic. Will find out if its use as a testing site can be reassessed.S. Fisher: We need at-home testing kits. The statistics are probably higher because they don't include people who test themselves.
- **NYC Health & Hospitals / Test & Trace Corps** -- Fernando Brigidi, Manhattan Outreach Director, reported as follows:
  - Distributing masks through faith-based organizations, CBOs, etc.
  - 6 million NYC residents are fully vaccinated
  - 50,000 tests were conducted on 12/20T. Bonner: Are the mobile units with private operators on the streets authorized to do testing? There have been complaints about long waits for results.  
F. Brigidi & P. Ferrante: recommend that you use Health & Hospitals sites  
M. Luna: set up testing and distribute masks at senior centers  
M. Anderson asked for Fernando's email so that she can connect him with WH-I senior centers  
G. Biel: on 12/25, the line to be tested at the Med-Rite Pharmacy on Dyckman Street was two blocks long  
P. Ferrante: The City provides at-home testing for seniors 65 or over and people who are immune-compromised  
O. Kaminer asked that the testing site at 175 Nagle Ave. @ Dyckman Street be reopened.
- **Columbia University Irving Medical Center** – Ross Frommer, Vice President, Government & Community Affairs, reported as follows:
  - Positivity rate for CUIMC staff and students was 12.65% for the week starting 12/27. Six weeks ago, it was .5% -- a 25-fold increase.
  - All classes are virtual until mid-January.
  - In-person meetings and indoor gatherings are on hold.
  - 100% staff and students are vaccinated -- .5% have been given medical exemptions.
  - Booster mandate will take effect 1/30.
  - CUIMC faculty are available to attend (virtual) meetings to discuss COVID-19 issues.
  - Katherine Armstrong is the new Dean and Vice President of the medical school starting 3/1. She is currently Chair of Medicine at Mass General hospital in Boston. She will be the first woman dean of the medical school.
  - Toy drive was conducted last month.
  - Application process for the Medical Center Neighborhood Fund will be open soon.S. Fisher requested data on medical school students who choose psychiatry residencies.

- **NY-Presbyterian Hospital** -- Julio Batista, Government and Community Affairs Liaison, reported as follows:
  - There has been a significant increase in COVID patients. There are 1,176 COVID-positive patients in the NYP system – 350 at the Columbia campus, including Allen and the Children’s Hospital.
  - All patients who are admitted for any reason are tested for COVID. Half of the COVID patients were admitted because of COVID; the other half had COVID along with other ailments.
  - 10% of the COVID patients are in the ICU vs. 20% who went to the ICU last year. This is because the illness caused by the Omicron variant is milder than the Delta variant that predominated last year.
  - Increase in pediatric cases, but cases are mild.
  - Staffing continues to be a challenge. We’re hiring more staff. The hospital is providing full services.
  - The hotline run by Northern Manhattan Improvement Corp. is still available to make appointments for vaccinations: 646-838-0319
  - A PCR testing site is being set up at the Ambulatory Care Network Urgent-Care Center, 21 Audubon Ave. Tuesday-Saturday, 7 a.m. – 9 p.m. walk-ins accepted. It will stay there as long as it is needed.
  - Hospital staff have conducted hundreds of presentations on COVID-19 and are available to do more.
  - The visitation policy has been changed. Hours have been reduced from 12-8 p.m. to 3-7 p.m. Only one visitor allowed at a time per patient.
  - Nursing team successfully completed coat drive. Coats were given to community organizations, including the CORNER Project.
  - NYP co-sponsored Xmas tree lighting at the Duarte triangle, Broadway & St. Nicholas Ave. @ W. 169<sup>th</sup> –170<sup>th</sup> Sts. S. Fisher: Where are psych patients who would have been admitted at Allen going? Are they just being discharged?  
J. Batista: NYP has not reduced any services. The hospital won’t put anyone out on the street because we don’t want to treat them. There are no discussions on restoring the psych unit at Allen. He suggested that we invite Dr. Warren Ng to a future meeting for a full discussion of the issue.  
G. Biel said she asked staff at the ACN site at 21 Audubon Ave. about getting shots for children and was told to call 311. She was not told about the hotline.  
J. Batista said he would inform all the ACN sites about the hotline.
  
- **Isabella Geriatric Center** – Diane Ashley, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer, MJHS Health System
  - She thanked the community for outpouring of support for Betty Lehmann, who passed away last month
  - Isabella has invested heavily on vaccinations. 100% of employees, 90% of residents are fully vaccinated, higher than the national average. Having been talking to families about getting residents vaccinated.
  - 75% of residents have received booster shots, 85% have received flu vaccine
  - Staff and residents are being tested. When asymptomatic residents are identified, they are isolated.
  - Following DOH guidelines regarding visitations inside building
  - Rapid testing provided on-site for family members who are visiting; can’t require that they be vaccinated.
  - As of 1/1, David Wagner is the new CEO of MJHS
  
- **Brownfield Cleanup Plan for 4650 Broadway** – S. Simon: NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation has announced that it is accepting comments on the draft Remedial Action Work Plan until Jan. 29. He read five comments that we have provided for similar plans for other brownfield sites and suggested that we submit them for this plan as well.  
O. Kaminer: we should request that DEC monitor air quality during the construction period by placing monitors on roofs of nearby buildings.  
It was agreed that we should ask DEC to extend the comment period so we would have more time to review the plan and schedule a presentation for the next meeting.
  
- **Old Business** – O. Kaminer: Any news about textile recycling resuming at the Inwood greenmarket? No  
S. Fisher: CB 12 should use funds it received from Council Member Rodriguez to sponsor e-waste collection events to be held in Washington Heights-Inwood by the Lower East Side Ecology Center.
  
- **Announcements** – S. Fisher: Mulchfest is being held this weekend at Inwood Hill Park, which is a chipping site. You can bring your Xmas tree; have it chipped on site and leave with a bag of fresh mulch for your garden or tree pits.  
E. Marte: WEACTION is having a membership meeting this Saturday at 10 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Steve Simon

