

HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES – March 3, 2022

Virtual meeting conducted via Zoom

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

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT: Waldys Cruz, Wendy Pena.

GUESTS: Brian Gochenaur, Langan Engineering; Pauline Ferrante and Padmore John, NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene; Jahneille Edwards, Columbia University Irving Medical Center; Julio Batista, NY-Presbyterian Hospital; Diane Ashley, MJHS Health System; Dr. Karen Thornton; Gabriela Biel, Patricia McMaster, Cheryl Miller, John Staton.

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

- **Brownfield Cleanup Plan for 4650 Broadway** – Brian Gochenaur, Project Manager, Langan Engineering, reported as follows:
 - Langan has been working on this matter for four years since the site voluntarily entered the state’s Brownfield Cleanup Program
 - Participants enter into an agreement with the State Dept. of Environmental Conservation and State Dept. of Health to clean up their properties under their supervision. Everything done is approved by the two agencies.
 - Langan investigated the whole site and found some soil and groundwater contamination in one area (1/4 of site) resulting from a petroleum storage tank removed a long time ago.
 - Treated residual groundwater contamination. Injected chemical that makes petroleum harmless.
 - Most wells were completely clean.
 - Contamination was contained on the site; no evidence of any leaks off the site. Perimeter of site was tested.
 - Prepared Remedial Action Work Plan.
 - Cleanup has not started. Residual soil will be removed (3500 cubic yards) in conjunction with the construction.
 - Soil will be removed to New York or New Jersey in 268 truck trips. After being loaded, trucks will be covered with tarps and washed down. No material will be tracked off on the street.
 - An environmental engineer will be on site at all times to make sure protocols are followed.
 - Community air monitoring plan will be in place for dust and odor controls. Daily reports will be submitted to DEC.
 - Site will be fully remediated in six months.

Updates on the COVID-19 Pandemic in Our Community

- **COVID-19 Statistics for Washington Heights-Inwood** – S. Simon: We had fairly low positivity rates in the 7-day period ending 2/28 – ranging from .87% in 10033 to 1.42% in 10040 – far lower than a month ago, but there were still 53 new cases in our community. We had a moderate transmission rate – 29.98 new cases per 100,000 people over the 7 days, much lower than the citywide and Manhattan rates. Total cases in

our community since the start of the pandemic: 46,776. Total deaths from COVID-19: 912. Vaccination rates for one dose range from 76.30% in 10034 to 80.64% in 10032. The rates for fully vaccinated range from 68.71% in 10034 to 71.88% in 10032. We lag behind the rest of the city (86% and 77%) and Manhattan (95% and 82%).

- **Mobile Vaccine and Testing Van in Inwood** – Dr. Karen Thornton has been stationing a van outside Good Shepherd Church on Broadway and Isham Street Mondays – Saturdays 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. This was arranged by Assembly Member Taylor’s office at S. Simon’s request. She also has a van outside Holyrood Church on Fort Washington Avenue and W. 179th Street on Mondays. She agreed to consider placing another van on St. Nicholas Avenue around W. 181st Street. Regarding the van in Inwood, she said the number of people stopping by has “slowed down a lot,” but she still thought it was worthwhile to stay there. She pointed out that she provides the boosters as well as the first two vaccine shots.
J. Mazur: Infection rates could be anticipated if the results of wastewater tests were released on a regular basis.
P. John: Wastewater id still being tested by DEP.
S. Fisher: How do we take “shysters” – vans that don’t give people results of their tests – off the street?
P. Ferrante: We send that info to the State. Health & Hospitals puts out a list of affiliated tents. You can trust them.
K. Thornton: Ask if the people doing the tests have a CLIA certificate from the state. It should be posted.

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- **NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene** – Padmore John, Acting Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Harlem Neighborhood Health, reported as follows:
 - Did a walkthrough with Dept. of Homeless Services and NYPD at Dyckman Houses; came upon two homeless people, one accepted services
 - CDC has updated the list of medical conditions that put people at higher risk of COVID-19
 - COVID-19 treatment options are more available – anti-viral pills and monoclonal antibody treatment. They are covered by Medicaid.
 - He gave a PowerPoint treatment showing that 10033 and 10034 are below 70% fully vaccinated, that black residents have lower vaccination rates in 10032, 10033 and 10040, that 5-12-year-olds have low rates in all four zip codes and that 13-17-year-olds have low rates in 10032 and 10033.

Pauline Ferrante, Manhattan Community Liaison, reported as follows:

- The Mayor will be announcing new mask guidelines under the Key2NYC program for businesses. They are still required for mass transit and congregate settings. No change to employee and business mandates at this time.
- The City will deliver anti-viral pills the same day.
- She will follow up on the status of the wastewater tests.
- Regarding complaints about the scaffolding outside the District Health Center, 600 W. 168th St., DOH is looking into improved lighting and utilizing its officers to patrol outside to make the area around the subway entrance safer. Façade work on the building is being done there.
J. Mazur: No work has been done there for six years.
P. Ferrante: I’ll find out the timeline.

- **NY-Presbyterian Hospital** – Julio Batista, Government and Community Affairs Liaison, reported

as follows:

- There are 235 in-patient COVID-19 cases and 35 ICU cases system-wide. Last year there were 172 ICU cases. No data for Milstein and Allen – usually they have 1/3 of the cases.
 - NYP is continuing to do presentations to parents at public schools about vaccine hesitancy.
 - In response to a column in the Daily News about the high cost of services at the hospital, he read a statement that NYP has been transparent about costs; the information is posted on NYP's website. "We care for anyone who comes through our doors, regardless of ability to pay."
- S. Fisher: Repeated her request for data on psych patients at the hospital. Also asked about the psych beds at Allen Hospital: "What would it take to bring those beds back since you don't need them anymore for COVID-19 patients?"
- J. Batista: It would take considerable time and cost.
- O. Kaminer: Response to issue about the hospital's costs was unsatisfactory.

● **Columbia University Irving Medical Center** – Jahneille Edwards, Community Affairs Associate, reported as follows:

- 834 PCR tests were conducted at the CUIMC campus during the week of 2/21 – only one positive result.
- Medical Center Neighborhood Fund applications have been released to CBOs in Washington Heights-Inwood. Grants up to \$5000 are provided.
- Community School District 6 Spring Health & Wellness Series begins 3/8. Topics to be covered include vaccines, nutrition, mental health & smoking.
- Applications now available to join the A'Leia Bundles Community Scholars program at Columbia University. Bundles Scholars have access to Columbia's academic resources for three years, including in-person and online libraries, course auditing and events.
- On March 1, Katrina Armstrong, MD, became Executive Vice President for Health and Biomedical Sciences, Dean of the Faculties of Health Sciences and the Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons, and Chief Executive Officer, Columbia University Irving Medical Center.
- Columbia Center for Children's Environmental Health published research highlights earlier this year on the hidden risks of chemicals used in beauty products and harms among women of color, the link between neighborhood characteristics and weight gain during pregnancy, and the success of the NYC Clean Heat Program.
- A new program at ColumbiaDoctors is uniting health care for both mind and body by embedding behavioral health alongside primary care providers at all ColumbiaDoctors Primary Care locations to care for patients' new or previously diagnosed depression. [The closest location is on Morningside Heights.]
- Researchers at the School of Nursing are studying why Black and brown pregnant patients have worse health outcomes than their white peers; improving communications with clinicians and patients with HIV using infographics, and the complex mental health and economic stressors that were associated with alcohol consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Isabella Geriatric Center** – Diane Ashley, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer, MJHS Health System

- Governor Hochul announced that requiring nursing home employees to get booster shots has been put on hold; will be reviewed in three months.
- 100% of Isabella’s employees are fully vaccinated. Some staff who refused to get vaccinated have left.
- 90% of residents are fully vaccinated; 75% have had booster shots.
- No change in requirements for visitors; on-site rapid testing is provided.
- Isabella Senior Resource Center is operating on a virtual basis.
- Case management, meals-on-wheels and family caregiver programs are still functioning.
- Occupancy numbers are slowly improving.

- **Old Business** – S. Simon: DDC reports that the gas main and water main replacement project in Washington Heights is 94.5% completed and should be fully completed March 27, weather and field conditions permitting. Plans to expand the citywide curbside composting collection program, including in our community, have been suspended as a result of a cut in the Mayor’s Preliminary Budget. The program is only in seven districts at this point.

O. Kaminer: Disappointed that textile recycling has not been reinstated at the Inwood Greenmarket. Would like a list of locations that offer it.

S. Fisher: CB 12 should utilize Council Member’s discretionary funds to hold two e-waste collection events.

T. Bonner: Should we do a resolution in support of the composting program? It was agreed that we should consider doing this next month.

- **New Business** – There was a discussion about the environmental impact of restaurant sheds used for outdoor dining, including noise from late-night patrons.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Steve Simon

