

# HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES – April 7, 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.

**GUESTS:** Dr. Liv Yoon, Earth Institute, Columbia University; Dr. Christian V. Braneon, Goddard Institute for Space Studies; Pauline Ferrante, NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene; Jahneille Edwards, Columbia University Irving Medical Center; Diane Ashley, MJHS Health System; Nicholas Arture and Jacqueline Vanacore, NY State Nurses Assn.; Jacob Banas; Nina Bernstein; Rosa Bido; Allegra LeGrande; Carlos Manzueta; Cheryl Miller; Ana Montano, Belkis Poche.

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S. Simon, chair, took attendance, noted the presence of a quorum and called the meeting to order at 6:40 p.m.

- **Extreme Heat, Social Inequities and Health in Washington Heights and Inwood** – Dr. Liv Yoon, Postdoctoral Research Scholar, Earth Institute, Columbia University, gave a PowerPoint presentation (attached):
  - Heat is the #1 weather-related cause of death, but not every neighborhood is affected equally
  - Can be 22 degrees warmer in urban areas because of higher absorption of heat, asphalt, tall buildings, traffic
  - 130 New Yorkers have died annually from heat-related causes since 2010
  - 3,300 New Yorkers could die annually by 2080 from extreme heat
  - 50% of heat-related deaths are in NYC's Black communities despite accounting for only 25% of the population
  - Heat Vulnerability Index: Washington Heights-Inwood is only 1 out of 5, which is the most vulnerable
  - The rate of heat-stress hospitalizations in Washington Heights in 2015 was much worse than the NYC average – 1.7 vs. .8 per 100,000 residents (the estimate is based on low numbers so should be interpreted with caution)
  - NYC one of 12 cities in national campaign
  - Heat Mapping Project collected data on heat levels in Washington Heights-Inwood and nearby communities
  - Earth Institute partnered with South Bronx Unite and consulted with other local groups such as WEACT.
  - Data collection day: July 24, 2021 – 3x/day, 12 routes, 40 citizen scientists, 42,386 data points collected
  - Sensors were mounted on cars and captured block-by-block differences in heat and humidity every second
  - Parts of Washington Heights-Inwood had some of the highest temperatures at 3-4 p.m. and 7-8 p.m.
  - Built environment: denser housing, inadequate infrastructure, more traffic, less green space
  - Socio-environmental factors: more likely to work outside, low access to A/C, inadequate/dilapidated housing, higher prevalence of pre-existing conditions, little access to health care
  - Poverty rate in WH-I is higher than most NYC neighborhoods: Inwood – 24%, Washington Heights North – 21.9%, Washington Heights South – 24.6%
  - 10-13% of adults in WH-I have diabetes, 24-28% have hypertension, 26% have obesity (NYC DOHMH, 2015-16)
  - Emergency Room visits because of heat and asthma (children) are worse than the NYC average
  - Emergency Room visits for asthma attributable to PM2.5 exposures: WH-I is in the mid-range for adults, worse than the citywide average for children
  - Population characteristics: older adults living alone (middle – compared to citywide average), psychological distress (middle), poverty (worse), independence difficulty (worse), obesity (worse)
  - Home maintenance: cracks (worse), leaks (worse), maintenance problems (worse)
  - Traffic density: traffic (worse), car traffic (worse), truck traffic (worse)
  - Vulnerability – built environment: grass and tree cover (middle), older adults with AC (worse), building quality (worse)
  - Mitigation: cooling centers, neighbors doing wellness checks
  - What can be done to rectify heat inequality? Undo centuries of urban development that has rendered many low-income communities of color at higher risk

S. Simon: Parks Department has planted 976 trees in WH-I since 2015 and plans to plant another 160 trees in 2022

O. Kaminer: Highway (U.S. 95) cuts through WH a big factor, need more permeable surfaces, a geothermal study

K. Diaz: Heat effect from taller buildings resulting from rezoning?

Dr. Yoon: Rezoning was one of the rationales for the study. Street-by-street data will be available this summer. You will be able to zoom in on the worst blocks.

A. LeGrande: Different variations block-by-block. Competing interests such as in East River Park, where mature trees are being cutdown for a resiliency project. How to balance these things?

O. Kaminer: Different varieties of trees take in different levels of carbon

Dr. Yoon sent the following note after the meeting:

Our team is working on a story map to show how extreme heat, social inequities and health are connected. We also hope to show real lived experiences on this story map, as it is these real stories that have more impact than sheer numbers and data alone. To this end, we are asking for your help. For those who would like their personal experience with extreme heat featured on this story map, please send me ([yoona.liv@gmail.com](mailto:yoona.liv@gmail.com)):

- 1-3 sentence blurb on your/your family's experience with extreme heat
- Indicate which neighborhood you live in (intersection is helpful – the idea is that your story will be 'located' on a map)
- If you have any photos that are relevant to the story, please send those as well (for example – photo of the location you're talking about)
- Alternatively, you can submit a short (1-2 min video) talking about your experiences in your neighborhood

### 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 4/3 but higher than a month ago – ranging from 2.19% in 10033 to 2.85% in 10040 – and 120 new cases, more than double a month ago. Our transmission rate was much higher than last month – 96.33 new cases per 100,000 people over the 7 days – but much lower than the citywide and Manhattan rates. Total cases in our community since the start of the pandemic: 47,345 – 569 more than last month. Total deaths from COVID-19: 921 – 9 more than last month. Vaccination rates for one dose range from 76.64% in 10034 to 81.12% in 10032. The rates for fully vaccinated range from 69.22% in 10034 to 72.5% in 10032. We lag behind the rest of the city (87% and 78%) and Manhattan (95% and 82%).
- **NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene** – Pauline Ferrante, Manhattan Community Liaison, reported as follows:
  - We're encouraging people to get their second booster shot – those who are 50 and older, 12 or older and immunocompromised, and 18 and older who received the J&J shot and a booster
  - The highest concentration of new cases is among 25-34 year-olds
  - Masking for children under 5 in childcare settings still required.
  - Mayor re-evaluating masking
  - Scaffolding at the District Health Center, 600 W. 168<sup>th</sup> St. was erected for safety reasons prior to a capital project reconstructing the exterior and roof. Work will begin in FY 23. Don't know anticipated completion date (will find out). Will check on lighting. DOHMH police who work inside building will be more visible. Will reach out to the police to ask the NCOs to have more presence near subway.

S. Fisher: What has been DOHMH's involvement with Mayor's policy on homeless in the subways and homeless encampments?

P. Ferrante: Some DOHMH staff are part of the initiative

O. Kaminer: Scaffolding has been up for 10 years. Why is it taking so long to start work?

J. Mazur asked about tests of wastewater for COVID-19 virus

P. Ferrante: A joint City Council hearing was held last month with DEP. Findings weren't published because we were checking to see if they correlated with what we find clinically. Found that trends in wastewater matched trends clinically. Trying to figure out what to do with the data. Don't know if it is a reliable indicator. Lagged behind testing data. Don't want to cause confusion.

A. LeGrande: Columbia is monitoring its own students using wastewater tests.

S. Fisher: The results of home tests are not reflected in the DOHMH data.

J. Mazur and O. Kaminer commented on elevated death levels during the pandemic.
- **NY-Presbyterian Hospital** -- Julio Batista, Government and Community Affairs Liaison, texted his report:
  - There are 152 in-patient COVID-19 cases system-wide, 45 at Milstein, CHONY and Allen – 8 in the ICU, 3 on ventilators.

S. Fisher: asked again for data about where psych patients are being treated by the hospital
- **Columbia University Irving Medical Center** – Jahneille Edwards, Community Affairs Associate, reported as follows:
  - Campus testing data: 650 tests were conducted at the CUIMC during the week of 3/28 with 14 positive results.
  - Community Health & Wellness Series with School District 6 concluded today after six sessions on various topics.
  - Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Administrator visited CUIMC for a discussion on insulin affordability.
  - Dr. David Kessler, Chief Science Officer for COVID Response for the Biden Administration, is giving a lecture 4/13.

- A vision screening program to improve early detection of glaucoma and other eye diseases in high-risk populations has screened over 600 people so far and found a surprisingly high number have glaucoma or pre-glaucoma signs.
- April is Parkinson's Awareness Month. Columbia neurologists discuss what Parkinson's patients and their families need to know about genetic testing and counseling.
- The full report is attached.
  
- **Isabella Geriatric Center** – Diane Ashley, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer, MJHS Health System
  - 90% of residents are fully vaccinated; we continue to educate the other 10% and their families on the need to be vaccinated
  - 75% have had booster shots. We'll be offering second booster shots.
  - Everything else is stable.
  
- **Presentation by NY State Nurses Association** – Nicholas Arture, Political Organizer, and Jacqueline Vanacore, NYSNA Organizer for NYP/Columbia, reported as follows:
  - Beth Loudin, a nurse who was scheduled to attend tonight, tested positive for COVID-19.
  - NYSNA is getting ready for contract negotiations starting this summer. Contract expires at the end of this year.
  - 10-member executive committee is determining negotiating priorities, such as additional health & safety standards
  - Concerned about high turnover among nurses, staffing challenges in the ED, OR, labor & delivery
  - Psych unit at the Allen Hospital closed at the beginning of COVID. NYP said beds were needed to handle surge of COVID patients. Nurses were redeployed, some went to Milstein med-surg units. NYP is planning to open a med-surg psych unit; it would have a better reimbursement rate. The medical condition would be the primary factor for admitting, not the psych condition.

J. Mazur: What are the staffing ratios?  
J. Vanacore: Working on grids and ratios for each unit to propose to NY State Dept. of Health. In ICUs, there should be one nurse for two patients.  
N. Arture: Working with 1199 and management on this. Ratios have to be developed by end of this year under the "Safe Staffing" law
  
- **Old Business** – S. Simon: DDC reports that the gas main and water main replacement project in Washington Heights is still 94.5% completed and the completion date has been extended by two months until May 27.  
There were 219 complaints to DEP by WH-I residents in March. Six of the top 10 complaints involved noise.  
FRESH application was approved for 4650 Broadway.  
S. Fisher: spoke to head of Lower East Side Ecology Center about utilizing CB 12 \$10K grant for two e-waste recycling sites at Dyckman Houses and in Washington Heights.  
S. Fisher: rat problems in vacant lots.  
O. Kaminer: Raised issue again about textile recycling not being reinstated at the Inwood Greenmarket.  
S. Simon agreed to contact GrowNYC again.  
A. LeGrande: Is DOHMH monitoring tick-borne diseases in parks such as lyme disease?
  
- **New Business** – S. Simon: DEC is soliciting public comment on a proposal for brownfield cleanup at 408 W. 207<sup>th</sup> St. Will try to arrange a presentation for the next meeting.  
S. Fisher: We should have a presentation by Fountain House about services it provides to the community. It was discussed that this could be scheduled for the June meeting.  
O. Kaminer: She has had difficulty scheduling a visit to the COIRNER Project. Asked for contact info.  
A. LeGrande: Suggested a presentation by a researcher who has looked into hospitals' mistakes in treating patents.
  
- **Announcements** – S. Fisher: 11<sup>th</sup> annual Riverkeeper Sweep in Inwood Hill Park and at Dyckman Pier on 5/7. Earth Day activities will be held in Inwood Hill Park on 4/22 and 4/23.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Steve Simon