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"No Room to Learn: Overcrowding in Our Schools"

A Public Hearing by Community Board 2's Social Services and Education Committee

May 8, 2008 at P S 41, 116 West 11th St

Chaired by Brad Hoylman, chair of Community Board Two

Social Services and Education Committee Members present:

Keen Berger (Chair) Steve Ashkenazy (vice Chair), Board members: Naomi Wender, Lisa Cannistraci, Zella Jones, Wendy Schlazer. Public members: Rhea Sohne Vadher, Vern Fry.

Other Board Members in Attendance

Ed Gold, Ian Dutton, Toby Bergman, Jo Hamilton

OVERVIEW

On May 8, 2008, members of Community Board 2's Social Services and Education held a public hearing on the need for more schools. The community turned out in large numbers to participate in the hearing, as did elected officials and their representatives. This was the second public hearing on school overcrowding. Our first hearing in January documented the need for more classroom space in Community Board Two, as all our schools are crowded, no new schools have been built for 50 years, and the neighborhood has thousands of children under age 6. This second hearing focused on solutions, continuing to hear from the community and elected officials and suggesting sites, financing, and specific needs for more room to learn.

SPEAKERS AND TESTIMONY

Brad called the hearing to order and introduced the first speaker, **State Assemblywoman Deborah Glick**. Assem. Glick thanked CB2 and the parents for their perseverance, reiterated the need for more classrooms and school space. She also commented specifically on the process of getting financial resources. State funds have been set aside specifically for education, funds that need to be used by the city Department of Education. She reiterated her commitment to schools, saying that public space belongs to the taxpayers, so when a public building is available, it should be utilized for a public cause, such as education.

Our second speaker was **George**, a future public school student, who asked when he will have room to learn.

Keen Berger, chair of the Social Services and Education committee, took the floor next. Keen reminded the audience that the Social Services and Education committee, and then the full Community Board Two, unanimous resolved that school space is crucial in our district. She cited the need for at least three new schools (early childhood, elementary, and middle) in the district, asking that the Department of Education relook at its forecasting processes. We need the places, the money, and the political will, and this hearing will demonstrate that we have all three. .

Then **Irene Kaufman**, parent and an organizer from the Public School Political Action Committee, presented and described a slide show of more than a dozen possible sites for new schools, including Pier 40, the St. Vincent's redevelopment, Hudson Square, 75 Morton St, 325 Spring Street and the UPS site, the New School's redevelopment, closed Parochial Schools, the building next door to PS41, and other city owned properties in the area. Irene also ensured that every official who spoke was given this a booklet with photographs and descriptions of these possible sites. .

Next **Borough President Scott Stringer** reviewed the highlights of his "Crowded Out" report (which is available on www.mbp.org) and the action points that grew from his committee's research. The data reinforced the reality of overcrowding in schools, and noted that every elementary school in CB2 was over capacity. He also challenged the current planning process, and showed how current school construction plans do not meet the current demand. Borough President Stringer presented a 3-point plan:

1. A transparent formula for projecting future growth.
2. Local school planning, since vast schools districts do not reflect neighborhood overcrowding.
3. A new, more aggressive Capital Plan.

Pres. Stringer said that the DOE was moving forward with these recommendations, and praised the partnerships with NYU and Rudin.

The sixth speaker was **John Gilbert representing the Rudin Family**. Mr. Gilbert announces plans to build a new elementary school at 590 6th Ave (at 17th St) on the site of the Foundling hospital. The school will be PreK-5th, and will have 563 seats. The School Construction Authority architects have drawn up plans. He thanked the parents – Irene, Ann, and Tamara – the Sisters of Charity, and the Rudin Family. The crowd gave a standing ovation.

Next, **Alecia Hurley from New York University** pledged that the University would integrate a new public school into its 25-year campus planning and expansion efforts. She said that the Borough President's report on school overcrowding helped drive home the community's need, and NYU was excited to help..

The eighth speaker was **Kate Seely-Kirk, the Chief of Staff for Speaker Christine Quinn**. Kate expressed the Speaker's commitment to public education, and noted that the Speaker could not be here because she was in Belfast with the Mayor and the Comptroller.

After Kate, **Tamra Rowe, from the School Political Action Committees** spoke about middle schools, and how the current middle schools are overcrowded, sharing space with elementary schools, She specifically mentioned the only middle school within the boundaries of Community District Two, Greenwich Village Middle School, with hallways are too narrow, cafeteria too small, and no gym..

Next **Evelyn DeJesus from the UFT** said overcrowding is even worse than we think. One reason is that people at the Department of Education are not educators, so they do not understand educator's needs.

Our eleventh speaker was **James Smarr, the Executive Director of the Educational Construction Fund**. Mr. Smarr discussed public/private partnerships in school building. After a long hiatus, the DOE is working to build schools with private partners.

Next, **Councilman Alan Gerson**, a proud PS41 graduate, discussed the need to invest in our schools, and keep the promise of smaller class sizes championed in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. We need to build a bridge between city planning, population growth, and education. He will work with the Council to resolve that new developments cannot go forward without plans for community facilities.

Councilman Gerson called up **Councilman Robert Jackson** who said, keep working, keep pushing, and congratulations on the progress made.

Next up was State Senator **Tom Duane**, who congratulated the community a great first step, and encouraged the community to continue to be vigilant, to fight for open space for art, music, cluster groups, and to develop room for all of the young families we have in CB2.

Lastly, **Christopher McGinnis from the Pier 40 Partnership** gave a third bit of great news that all parties hope for a school or schools on Pier 40. An SCA architect has reviewed the site, finding a school feasible. Mr. Davis called it a "perfect sunny day" – with space, will, and plans for a school on Pier 40.

Conclusion

Overall, great news, promising steps, political will, and renewed commitment to finding more room to learn.