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## COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 2, MANHATTAN

3 WASHINGTON SQUARE VILLAGE

NEW YORK, NY 10012-1899

www.cb2manhattan.org

P: 212-979-2272 F: 212-254-5102 E: info@cb2manhattan.org

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### **PARKS & WATERFRONT AND HUMAN SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING**

July 21, 2021

The Parks & Waterfront Committee of Community Board #2, Manhattan, held its monthly meeting on Wednesday, July 21, 2021 at 6:30 at MS 297, 75 Morton Street, Cafeteria.

The meeting covered one topic: Discussion on the latest plans for enforcing the rules at Washington Square Park and the results to date.

**Board Members Present:** Rich Caccappolo (Chair); Matthew Metzger; Shirley Secunda; Kristin Shea; Georgia Silvera Seamans; William Benesh; Keen Berger

**Public Members Present:**

**Other Board Members Present:** Jeannine Kiely (CB2 Chair); Carter Booth; Mar Fitzgerald; Patricia Laria; Valerie De La Rosa

**Board Members Absent With Notice:** Susanna Aaron (Vice Chair of Parks and Waterfront, Chair of Human Services); Coral Dawson; Adam Zeldin

**Public Members Absent With Notice:** Nancy Brous; Elizabeth Gilmore; Sharon Woolums

**Board Members Absent Without Notice:** John Paul Daverna; Wayne Kawadler

**Public Members Absent Without Notice:** Rachel Yarmolinsky

In total, approximately 95 people attended the meeting including community members, self-proclaimed frequent park visitors, and representatives of elected officials, the Washington Square Park Conservancy, social services outreach organizations, the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation and the 6<sup>th</sup> police precinct of the NYC Police Department.

**There were no resolutions created from this meeting.**

### **MINUTES**

Discussion on the latest plans for enforcing the rules at Washington Square Park and the results to date:

We held this meeting to enable conversation between several groups of Washington Square Park constituent groups. We asked the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), the New York City Department Police Department 6<sup>th</sup> precinct and two outreach organizations (Manhattan Outreach Consortium and Alliance LES Harm Reduction Center) that offer services in the park to update the community on what they have been witnessing, how they are currently operating each day and what they are planning to do in the park over the coming months. We gave attendees including residents, non-

residents who visit the park and other interested constituent groups, the opportunity to ask questions and make comments. The goal was to achieve a common understanding of status and plans, enforcement of rules, and desired results.

In an introduction at the start of the meeting I noted that our community board's stated position, in resolutions over the years and reiterated by our Board Chair, Jeannine Kiely, at a recent meeting held by the police, is that we believe the rules of the park should be enforced. I stated "We support the Parks Department's efforts to enforce those rules."

Next, Will Morrison the Deputy Administrator of Washington Square, a DPR employee, spoke to the attendees of the meeting. He stated that after a difficult time the park had been returned to a stable state (since July 5<sup>th</sup>) thanks to the approval of budget for more staff to help in maintaining the park (overtime for PEP officers), the efforts of the Police Department, and support from Borough President Gale Brewer's office. He further explained that DPR is now re-starting programming; all events had stopped during Covid. He also noted that the pandemic resulted in an increase of homeless visitors and drug use and that social service workers are in the park each day attempting to connect those who are suffering with support services. He concluded by stating that the DPR is open to any and all ideas to continuously improve the operations of the park.

Next, Captain Stephen Spataro, Commanding Office of the 6<sup>th</sup> Precinct, described the resources and tactics employed to assist the DPR. He explained that a focus of the police's efforts is on reducing amplified music in the park, especially after 10 PM, which combined with closing the park at midnight, has worked to end the weeks of illegal, late-night dance parties, the setting off of fireworks, the holding of boxing matches and other illegal activities, which has reduced the tension in the park and the surrounding neighborhood. He noted that during that period of unrest in the park felony crimes had climbed dramatically, but since July 5 cases have fallen dramatically.

Then, representatives - Serafina Payne of Manhattan Outreach Consortium, which addresses street homelessness, and Shantae Owens of Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center, which help those struggling with drug use - explained how they work to connect people in the park with the services offered by their organizations.

Community Board members asked questions to the four speakers. Then, those in attendance were given a chance to speak. Some asked questions of the speakers; many used their time to convey their experiences in the Park and make statements about what they felt should be allowed, e.g., amplified music. Many participants were rowdy and disruptive, yelling out while others spoke and extending well beyond the allotted time per speaker when they were given the chance to address the crowd. The meeting was chaotic, but every attendee who wanted to speak was given a chance to do so.