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JT. TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION/PARKS & WATERFRONT COMMITTEES

November 2021

The Traffic & Transportation and Parks & Waterfront Committees of Community Board #2, Manhattan held a joint monthly meeting on Thursday, November 4, 2021, at 6:30 p.m. via Video Conference.

Board Members Present: *Traffic & Transportation:* Shirley Secunda (Chair), Ritu Chattree, Joe Gallagher, Janet Liff, Daniel Miller (Vice Chair), Lois Rakoff, Antony Wong, Adam Zeldin. *Parks & Waterfront:* Rich Caccappolo (Chair), Susanna Aaron (Vice Chair), Georgia Silvera Seamans, Matthew Metzger, Coral Dawson, Frederica Sigel, D. Kristin Shea, Chris Dignes.

Board Members Absent with notification:

Board Members Absent: Ed Ma (T&T).

Public Members Present: George Haikalis, Joseph Flahaven (T&T).

Public Members Absent with notification: Nancy Brous; Elizabeth Gilmore; Sharon Woolums. (P&W).

Public Members Absent:

Other Board Members Present: Jeannine Kiely (CB2 Chair), Carter Booth, Bo Riccobono, Susan Wittenberg, Michael Levine, Eugene Yoo, Valerie De La Rosa, Brian Pape, Ryder Kessler, Sean Sweeney (Public Member; SoHo Alliance Director).

Guests: Mark Dicus (SoHo Broadway Initiative BID), Mike Lydon, Pete Davies, Eve Kessler, Emily Hellstrom, Jen Gatien, Rob Lee, Laura Hoffmann, Michele Worst, Talia Kornfeld, Ramy Atajoshi, John Wotowicz, Renee Monrose, Eddie Stern, Marion Lee, David Glassman, Madeleine Segall-Marx, Ursula Hegewisch, Jeanie Chin, Phyllis Rosenblatt, Michele Bender, Yichun Lin, Keith Barraclough, Patricia Ali, Susan Austad, Polly Carpenter, Lily Bender, Pauline Augustine, Barbara Hochstein, Jose Monfort, Chandler Forsythe (NoHo BID), Michael Schmutzer, Clarence Hahn, Scott Goldstein, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Shelly Friedman, Minerva Chin, Joanna Pousette-Dart, Barry Holden, Margo Margolis, Leah Gitter, Maria Paris, Martina Andorfer, David Peck, Rona Trokie, Katrina Tennis, Kate Lorenz, Jackie Ferrara, Stacey McArdle, Denny Salas, Joe Kornfeld, Michelle Landers, Tulio Vera, Reeva Potoff, Jenny Low, Lotus Chau, Carol Chen, Eddie Panta, Robin Fostel, John Haessle, Aviva Gorig, Cordelia Persen

(NoHo BID), Michelle Choi, Jeanne Wilcke, Marc Hirschfeld, Barbara Kopple, Noah K., Lawrence Benin, Susan Fortgang, Larry Sloman, Mercedes Martinez, Ellen Barz, Paul Vidich, Jane Nelson, Carol Blum, Anthony McBride, Chip Austin, Cynthia Chapin, Susan Lazarus, Michael Shulin, Ann Levy, Lora Tenenbaum, Myra Gorig, Julie Talen, Susan Shoemaker, Pat Kornfeld, Claude Samton, Debra Cooney, Mary Stone, Fredericka Foster, Elizabeth Dalton, Ranna Zaman, Toby Turkel, Ronnie Wolf, Zella Jones, Jane Fisher, Matthew Maxwell, Thomasine Dow, Christos Gianakos, Victor Gorlach, Jenny Wirtschafter, Susan Stoltz, Ruby Packard, Susan Numeroff, Melanie Friedman, Diana Kurz, Andrew Chang (MBPO), Brandon Zwagerman (SoHo Broadway Initiative BID), Charlie Anderson (Assembly Member Glick), Rosalie Hronsky, Miranda Frum, Carol Sloan, Jessica Wolff, Kay Powell, Darlene Lutz, Linda Mevorach, Stephanie Badini, Abby Kornfeld, Lia Vito, Patsy Ong, Stefan Boubilil, Nancy Norch, Jordana Gluckow, Nate Kornfeld, Ashley Natale, Maxi Cohen, Claudia Levy, Janet Froehlich, Barea Fehrenbach, Anita Jorgensen, Jack McNally (Hudson Sq. BID), David Lawrence, Phillip Galgiani, Yukie Ohta, Sal Lindsay, David L. Hirsch, Martin Bondell, Mollie Barz, Maria Feliciano, Arvind Sindhvani, Mafa Edwards, Otto Barz, DJ Williams, Leigh Behnke, Micki McGee, Giacomo Greco, John Keith, Vivek Hemded, Linn Broessel, Gabrielle Kornfeld, Ingrid Wiegand, Daffi Nathanson, T Allen.

Presentation of SoHo Broadway Initiative Business Improvement District
Public Realm Framework and Vision Plan

The SoHo Broadway Initiative (SBI) BID's recently completed Public Realm Framework and Vision Plan was presented to Community Board 2 Manhattan's (CB2) Traffic and Transportation and Parks and Waterfront Committees by Mark Dicus, Executive Director of the BID, and Mike Lydon, Principal of Street Plans. The Plan puts forth a long-range vision of what might be done in 20 years to improve streetscape conditions on Broadway between Houston and Canal Streets and including the adjacent streets, Mercer (west) and Crosby (east), with particular concentration on cross streets Prince, Howard and Broome.

The stated purpose of the Plan, which was developed between December 2020 and October 2021, is to address such issues as intense traffic congestion and accompanying noise and air pollution, inaccessible sidewalks and subway stations, pedestrian crowding, lack of usable open space, and logistical challenges servicing historic buildings. Its stated goals are: Provide more space for people; Streamline district operations (deliveries, waste, building access); Support and expand cultural activity; Increase district greenery and resilience; and Improve district connectivity and traffic safety.

Plan progress is envisioned in an iterative framework: Tactical Projects (first 5 years)-low cost, short-term demos/tests inviting public use and input; Strategic Initiatives (within 10 years)-more durable, but still adjustable or removable; Key Moves (5-15-20 years)-more costly, permanent installations/capital projects; Supporting Actions (within 20 years)-operational, regulatory changes. The Plan has been crafted with the recognition that "implementation will require City action to complete technical studies and policy changes, as well as community engagement with local stakeholders along the way."

Key Actions Recommended in the Plan

Broadway - Create curbless street; Divert all non-local vehicular traffic to the perimeter of the SoHo superblock defined by Houston St., the Bowery, Varick St. and Canal St.; Pilot Broadway redesign with temporary and interim materials; Improve pedestrian scale lighting. Includes planter seating, restored vault lights, combined waste bins. One vehicular access lane. Reduced bus stops.

Mercer and Crosby Streets - Curbless; updated parking regulations (for new weekday spaces for freight, service vehicles, short term pickup-dropoff; bike parking; southbound bike lane (Mercer); restored vault lights, planters/seating, flexible curb lane. One vehicular access lane.

Prince and Howard Streets (btw. Mercer and Crosby) - Pedestrianize both blocks (do short-term plaza demonstrations to evaluate impacts); streetscape redesign: ADA accessible, tree canopy, lighting; seating/tree planters, restored vault lights, movable chairs/tables.

Broome Street - Reduce vehicular travel lanes from two to one, add dedicated westbound bikeway, reallocate remaining space including parking lanes for public realm amenities; Divert all tunnel-bound traffic to perimeter of SoHo superblock defined by Houston St., Bowery, Varick and Canal Sts., update parking regulations, curbless street design btw. Crosby and Mercer, corner bollards, planters/seating.

Community Response

The most prevalent (and almost universal) response was that there was insufficient outreach to the residential community. Although a variety of surveys and focus groups took place, and a total of 300+ responses were received, only 24% of them (74) were from SoHo residents. Attendees conveyed that this was hardly representative of the more than 8,000 SoHo residents. Limitations in the survey design and process also were questioned, e.g., 1) The selection of preferences didn't allow for a category of "none" with provision for explaining why "none" was chosen and for indicating other preferences. 2) There wasn't enough allowance for participation in the process at alternative, more convenient times for some, such as in the evening.

Several other concerns were voiced, including:

- Access for emergency vehicles (fire, police, ambulances, etc.) that's needed.
- Potential for increased noise disturbances from greater numbers of visitors hanging out in pedestrianized streets, drinking, partying, skateboarding, etc.
- The impact of diverting traffic to Houston St., the Bowery, Varick St. and Canal St., which are already highly congested, as well as other adjacent and nearby streets, would be highly negative as well as unfriendly and inequitable to neighboring areas.
- When congestion pricing is implemented, conditions can be better evaluated.
- There's a need to map the residential buildings and entryways and the infrastructure in the roadbed, e.g., the transformer vaults and manhole covers.
- How would residents receive deliveries?
- Potential for more garbage and rats.
- Potential for reduced business from tourists and suburbanites who arrive by car.

- Need to consider that below the curbs are vaults and their retaining walls, and if their seals are broken, building basements could be flooded.
- People need bus stops - not their removal.
- Most NYC parks close at dusk and have regulations that prevent drinking. Who would police people hanging out drinking or congregating in large groups on these streets late at night?
- Would like a solution for the electric bikes and scooters speeding on sidewalks, bikes going wrong way on one-way streets and through stoplights before accommodating more bicycles.
- Truck parking on the narrow side streets will render them impassable.
- Greenery might not be legally allowed in SoHo; planters don't provide drainage and could interfere with sidewalk accessibility.

Some voiced support for the goal to achieve a more pedestrian friendly and less motorist intensive environment and more room for pedestrians: It was pointed out that only 24% of SoHo residents own cars, and that parking should not be encouraged. Another point offered was that the amount of people who drive cars to shop in SoHo is miniscule compared to the amount that take trains or walk, that studies world over consistently show that better pedestrian access and reduced parking/driving brings more shoppers, not less. One person applauded the effort to vision a more human-centric scheme (but asked for more examination of impacts). Another saw the need to re-work the curbs in some way, most of which are non-ADA compliant, poorly maintained and extremely unsafe.

CB2 Conclusions

CB2 members agreed with many of the voiced concerns, and also stressed priority needs in the SoHo community requiring focused attention, such as excessive trash, grime and debris from visitors, and safety threats demanding social outreach to homeless and drug users, as well as the possibility of engaging pedestrian safety managers (as in the Hudson Sq. BID) to address the dearth of Traffic Enforcement Agents. One member cited examples of how increased pedestrianization and reducing car lanes could reduce traffic and cited the success and popularity of the Flatiron-adjacent pedestrian spaces.

There also was recognition that electric motor vehicles (suggested as a solution to climate change) would still present the same potential as gas-fueled ones do for crashes endangering pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers and aren't the answer if the grid is still fossil fueled. A number of Traffic and Transportation Committee members were supportive conceptually of creating more pedestrian space on Broadway and a better pedestrian experience. They acknowledged that there's a need for further study, but they also referred to the City's development of pedestrian friendly areas along Broadway from Union Square up to Columbus Circle and their interest in exploring the potential to have a continuous pedestrian friendly pathway from uptown.

All agreed that the plan is at a preliminary stage, and it would be premature to reach conclusions, especially when there's a need for extensive outreach to the SoHo community to get broader, more community-targeted coverage and input. It was decided that this report would be compiled, including recommendations for more inclusive outreach to the community, which follow.

Recommendations for Outreach to the SoHo Community

The SBI has been conducting surveys and other outreach activities of a type that are applicable for collecting information, but they need an extended scope and greater emphasis on local needs, such as:

- Online Surveys - These need to be organized to more broadly address community concerns and distributed to reach the entire community. The format should include both multiple choice and open-ended questions. Consulting with community leaders, e.g., resident members of the SBI's own board or local organizations can be of help in developing questions and an appropriate format to elicit relevant information.
- E-Mailing List - Current sources indicate that the SBI mailing list has 2,964 names on it ¹, a limited number that includes many different groups, a small portion being residents. To reach a statistically meaningful number of residential respondents, this list would need to be significantly expanded. Again, consultation with local leaders and organizations also can be of help in developing an expanded e-mail list as well as in distributing surveys and other outreach initiative information through the other organizations' own e-mail systems. For example, CB2 has offered to distribute such SBI materials. The greater the numbers of residents reached, the more potential for drawing a variety of respondents and responses.
- Small Group Discussions - At present, SBI is conducting Q&A sessions on three consecutive Fridays, 12:00-1:00 pm. for small groups (up to 25) ². To allow for more diverse and extensive input, such sessions need to be structured to reach those who work or otherwise can't attend weekday sessions or at the one available time, i.e., by being offered on weekdays and evenings and other times of day.
- Walkthroughs - Group walks for local residents followed by sitdown meetings would be productive in observing, identifying and conferring about on-site conditions and discussing their improvement. Local organizations can help in organizing and outreach to participants in addition to outreach from an extended mailing list.
- Demonstration Projects - The SBI has already undertaken short-term tactical projects to demonstrate and test potential modifications in action (e.g. Little Prince Plaza). Such demonstrations can help people visualize, experience and assess suggested changes while having an opportunity to give feedback. If intercept surveys are used, they could have specific questions about where respondents live and work, to focus on local residential input, and contain questions that allow for evaluation and improvement ideas. Group walkthroughs also could be used in this context, to clarify treatments and engender dialogue.

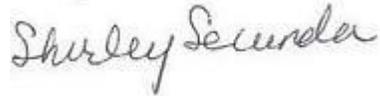
¹ <https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb2/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2021/10/FY20-BID-Trends-Report-CB2-BIDs.xlsx>

² <https://us02web.zoom.us/join/tZU5fuGqrzkvEtxYNYyoizTf1YJwTz87GX4k>

- Direct Contact - For those who expressed interest in contributing their ideas and working together with the SBI to develop feasible improvements, Mark Dicus provided his e-mail address, which also can serve as a channel for questions: mdicus@sohobroadway.org.

The SBI expressed willingness to work with the community and extend their outreach further to residents, and is prepared to find approaches that best facilitate this needed interaction. CB2 looks forward to the continuation of this process..

Respectfully submitted,



Shirley Secunda, Chair
Traffic and Transportation Committee
Community Board #2, Manhattan

Rich Caccappolo, Chair
Parks and Waterfront Committee
Community Board #2, Manhattan