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## COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 2, MANHATTAN

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### Social Services

The Social Services Committee of Community Board No. 2, Manhattan held its regular monthly meeting on Thursday, November 29, 2018, at 6:30pm at the Little Red Schoolhouse, 272 Sixth Avenue.

Committee Members Present: Susanna Aaron, Chair; Keen Berger, Amy Brenna, Tom Connor, Cathy Sullivan, Adam Zeldin

Committee Members Absent With Notification: Lisa Cannistraci, Maud Marron

Committee Members Absent Without Notification: William Bray

Public Members Present: Jessica Aaron, Rachel Yarmolinsky

Public Members Absent Without Notice: Christopher Leonard

Two agenda items were discussed. One resolution was passed.

- 1: A presentation by Cynthia Maurer, Executive Director of Visiting Neighbors, on its services and operations.**
- 2: A presentation by Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS) regarding a homeless shelter planned for 112-114 West 14<sup>th</sup> Street.**

**1: A resolution requesting regular funding from Department for the Aging (DFTA) to support Visiting Neighbors and its services and operations.**

#### Whereas

- 1) Visiting Neighbors (VN) was founded in 1972 with a mission to keep seniors independent and connected to their community. Its model employs a "Neighbor Helping Neighbor" tactic that pairs seniors with volunteers who provide emotional and logistical support. Its programs include Shop and Escort, Friendly Visiting, Health Advocacy, outings throughout the year, and "Elfing" – a gift-giving program - during the holiday season.
- 2) VN tends to seniors in a catchment area from 30<sup>th</sup> St south through Community Districts 2 and 3, with some additional clients in CD1. It estimates that 65% of its clientele is over age 85; that the average age is 90 (whereas ten years ago it was 75); that it has ten clients who are 100 years old or more. 88% of its seniors live on fixed incomes just above Medicaid eligibility. Almost all of its clients live alone. Its

volunteers span a wide age range, as young as 15, and number about 200, with an increase during the holiday season.

- 3) VN operates on a budget of \$360,000 per year and maintains a staff of 6. It serves approximately 1000 seniors in CD2, about 400 of whom receive services weekly.
- 4) VN lost its contract with NYC's Department for the Aging (DFTA) in 2011, and since then has relied on discretionary funds from the State and the City to operate. These critical allocations are limited and precarious, and VN suffers regular cash flow problems. Its hope is to obtain a contract with DFTA.
- 5) Community Board 2 views VN as a cost-effective program for reducing hospital visits, decreasing emergencies, and enhancing quality of life for seniors in its district and beyond.

Therefore be it resolved that

- 1) CB2 requests that the Department for the Aging employ Visiting Neighbors through a regular contract for services.
- 2) CB2 encourages continued support of Visiting Neighbors through grants and discretionary funds.
- 3) CB2 supports increasing support to Visiting Neighbors to expand its capacity.

VOTE: UNANIMOUS

**2: A presentation by Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS) regarding a plans to open a Safe Haven facility and drop-in Center at 112-114 West 14<sup>th</sup> Street.**

Our meeting was attended by Doug James, Chief Operating Officer for CUCS, and Erica Strang, Director of the Manhattan Outreach Consortium, which is dedicated to reducing street homelessness throughout the borough. The Consortium consists of Goddard Riverside, Breaking Ground, and CUCS, its lead agency. 17 members of the community signed our attendance sheet as well.

CUCS proposed the project in response to a mayoral request for proposals for a provider to open a Safe Haven facility south of 14<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan (this facility is on the south side of West 14<sup>th</sup> Street), an area which currently houses no individuals in shelters. (For the sake of comparison, 1,243 people reside in shelters in Community District 3.) CD1 is the only other district in Manhattan that hosts no shelters (although 140 homeless individuals are cared for in commercial hotel facilities in CD1).

CUCS's proposal was selected by the New York City Department of Homeless Services and in accordance with CUCS's City contract, it plans to open a Drop-in Center and Safe Haven facility for homeless men and women. The facility will include a 24-hour drop-in Center providing meals, recliners, showers, placement in nearby faith-based overnight shelters, and access to social services and mental health professionals for up to 75 guests. In addition, the Safe Haven facility will offer up to 24 beds in private rooms to single adults, providing temporary shelter

for individuals as they receive services from CUCS and other providers. The typical length of stay at the Safe Haven facility is approximately six months. An outdoor terrace set back on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the building will be available to individuals accessing services at the Drop-in Center and Safe Haven facility and will have limited hours and types of use. The model of a Safe Haven is designed to reduce street homelessness by providing a more welcoming and relaxed in ambience on a smaller scale than a typical homeless shelter and by being better equipped with robust case management services than other types of homeless shelters.

CUCS's clients will in part be referred or escorted to the shelter by the Manhattan Outreach Consortium, which conducts outreach throughout Manhattan streets 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This Drop-in Center and Safe Haven facility will be part of the Consortium's catchment area south of 23<sup>rd</sup> Street. Clients may also walk into the building to seek services on their own. Clients they will not be bused in from other facilities.

The siting on West 14<sup>th</sup> Street was the result of a long search for space in CD2, where most rents are prohibitively expensive. CUCS plans to undertake a renovation of the building and to open the Drop-in Center and Safe Haven in the Spring of 2019. CUCS is currently in negotiations with its landlord to correct a host of violations that must be cleared before renovation work can begin. CUCS's lease term is 30 years and the use of the property for the Drop-in Center and Safe Haven is as-of-right under current zoning, with a drop-in Center occupying floors 1 and 2, which are commercially zoned, and 24 rooms for clients on the upper floors, which are zoned for residential use. CUCS is working with the landlord to legalize the apartments currently occupied by residential tenants through the Loft Board and the tenants will be able to continue to reside at this location concurrently with CUCS's operation of the Drop-in Center and Safe Haven facility.

Nearby residents, and at least one nearby commercial tenant, expressed concerns about impact on quality of life in the area. West 14<sup>th</sup> Street had a history of incidents of violence, drug use, and vagrancy, but quality of life has recently improved. Neighbors are fearful of a return of increased lawlessness on the street if a homeless shelter opens. A next-door building houses families with children; an adjacent commercial space is scheduled to provide programming for young children. CUCS responded that it expects to improve quality of life on the street. Its intent is to reduce street homelessness by bringing men and women indoors to its shelter to receive services. It has policies against anti-social behavior, within and outside the shelter. It employs a security staff that is also trained in case management. It intends to involve the NYPD or 911 in cases of disruptive activity. It cited a long history of operating similar shelters in the city with no harm to quality of life, but rather with community support.

Some residents living on West 13<sup>th</sup> Street also spoke favorably about their recent experiences working with CUCS and the Manhattan Outreach Consortium to address challenges with homelessness in the neighborhood. They expressed confidence, based on their interactions with CUCS thus far, that CUCS will be a good neighbor in the community and will help to improve quality of life issues in the area.

CUCS is required under its contract with the New York City Department of Homeless Services to form a community advisory board once the Safe Haven and Drop-in Center opens and will ask the Council Member and others for recommendations for membership. CUCS also promised to host discussions with community members before the board is formed, to be responsive to community concerns, and to allow opportunities for the community to provide feedback on its operations. CUCS agreed to return to CB2 on a regular basis to apprise the community of its activities.