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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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The Social Services Committee of Community Board No. 2, Manhattan held its regular monthly meeting on February 21, 2023, at 6:30pm by Zoom videoconference.

Committee Members Present: Susanna Aaron (Chair), William Benesh, Keen Berger, Ritu Chattree, Wayne Kawadler, Ivy Kwan Arce, Ryder Kessler

Committee Members Absent With Notice: Adam Zeldin (Vice Chair)

Committee Members Absent Without Notice: John Paul DeVerna

Other CB2 Members Present: Jeannine Kiely (Chair), Mark Diller (District Manager), Carter Booth, Stella Fitzgerald, Susan Kent, Donna Raftery

Public Members Present: Rachel Yarmolinsky

Agenda: Department of Social Services/Department of Homeless Services and NAICA (Neighborhood Association for Inter-Cultural Affairs) regarding use of the Hanbee Hotel at 231 Grand Street to shelter asylum-seeking families.

Guests:

NYC DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES/HOMELESS SERVICES (DSS/DHS)

Leilani Irvin, Manhattan Borough Director, Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs

Hailey Nolasco, Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Intergovernmental Affairs

Maribel Garcia, Program Administrator for Department Homeless Services (DHS)

NYC HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION (HRA)

Marsha Horne, Intergovernmental Affairs

NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION FOR INTERCULTURAL AFFAIRS (NAICA)

Ricardo Cosme Ruiz, Senior Director of Public Relations

Jacqueline Santos, Program Director, Hanbee Hotel

Background: DSS/DHS notified CB2 at the end of 2022 that the Hanbee Hotel at 231 Grand Street would be leased as a sanctuary shelter for asylum-seeking families. At the time, DSS identified NAICA as a provider, but while NAICA worked to develop operating capacity for this site DSS/DHS staffed it from its own department and from members of the National Guard providing administrative assistance. The facility is now being run by NAICA.

[NAICA](#) is a 501(c)(3) not for profit organization that was founded in 1974 to provide free legal housing services for Bronx residents and that now operates a range of services. It opened its first shelter in 2011 with 241 clients and now operates 17 shelters of various types.

DSS/DHS siting of purpose-built shelters requires community notification approximately one year in advance and a Fair Share analysis before opening. In the case of emergency shelters such as this, notification is minimal and no Fair Share analysis is required. A huge influx of migrants seeking asylum in the US has created a crisis for NYC, which is the only city in the country legally required to provide shelter to anyone who requests it. NYC has sited 86 emergency shelters in the last 12 months – mostly within hotels - and NYC Health and Hospitals also operates several shelters to meet the needs of approximately [43,200 people that have arrived in New York in the last year or so](#).

Operation: 231 Grand St has capacity for 92 families. At the time of this meeting it is hosting 73 families, or about 140 adults and 154 children. These numbers fluctuate as families leave and arrive; reunite with family or friends in other communities; return to their native country; or fail to return for 48 hours after the 9:30pm curfew required of all DHS shelters. The clients come primarily from Venezuela but also from Colombia, Haiti, Russia. All arrived in the US within the last six months.

Labor issues with the Hotel Trades Council, which [foiled](#) an earlier proposal for 231 Grand St. to be sold to Housing Works for operation as a homeless shelter, appear to have no bearing in the operation of this emergency shelter.

The building has kept its single-room layout. Each room includes beds, refrigerator and microwave, plus linens and toiletries, diapers and formula. Case management services include two immigration specialists being on-boarded and two program recreational coordinators to assist children with homework and play; three meals daily heated (but not cooked) on premises and served communally; laundry pick-up three times per week. A representative from Department of Education (DOE) comes once a week to assist with enrolling children in school. Additional staff includes security, a director of social services and a supervisor, and 15 residential aides to help with meals, monitor wellness, etc.

Almost all school-age children are enrolled in school, with about 70% of them in local schools, especially MS 31 and PS 54. Family makeup ranges, between expectant, single- and two-parent households; infants to 18-year-olds; extended families. Families too large for one room are treated as a single case but given a second room in order to comply with dwelling standards imposed by the NYS Office of Temporary Disability.

Staff has had to call 911 on occasion, but most moments of tension among residents have been addressed by staff that has succeeded in deescalating conflict.

Within the DHS system, families may remain within shelter for approximately a year, but the duration is case-by-case. This population has different issues in terms of immigration, working papers, and eligibility for services – such as vouchers – that are permitted for domestic families.

The Mayor's Office of Immigration Affairs (MOIA) is also deeply involved with this issue. In general, asylum seekers are a population that wants to work.

Community response: Community response has been positive. Council member Chris Marte has initiated a toy and clothing drive that has provided a flow of donations from throughout the community. The Chinese American Planning Council has been in contact with NAICA. Morgan Stanley plans a sneaker drive this spring.

NAICA has continued need for programs providing free services to families, such as ESL or education, and welcomes assistance from the community in this area. It also has ongoing need for shoes for children, and board games and toys.

Discussion

Is this approach to shelter appropriate for broader use with the city's homeless population?

The city's policy is that commercial hotels are not ideal for families because the layout doesn't allow for personal kitchens or adequate space for social service providers. A hotel is sufficient as an emergency shelter but not ideal as a purpose-built facility.

Can the goodwill that has met the opening of this facility be an example for better community acceptance of other homeless shelters?

Those who work in intergovernmental affairs are working with partners across the board to shine more light on the issue of homelessness.

It is possible that the emergency sites housing single adults, rather than families, may provide lessons for improving community acceptance of shelters.

Is the rate of migration slowing? Can CB2 expect to see other emergency shelters open in our district?

DSS/DHS will be looking to open sites wherever it is able to do so. The rate of arrivals does seem to be easing, but people are still coming in. The shelter system is strained. As a result, it is difficult to shut down other temporary hotel sites that were intended to be phased out, such as one on Chrystie Street.