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Greenwich Village ✦ Little Italy ✦ SoHo ✦ NoHo ✦ Hudson Square ✦ Chinatown ✦ Gansevoort Market

The Human Services Committee of Community Board No. 2, Manhattan held its regular monthly meeting on May 25, 2023, at 6:30pm by Zoom videoconference.

Committee Members Present: Susanna Aaron (Chair), Keen Berger, Wayne Kawadler, Ivy Kwan Arce, Ryder Kessler, Emma Smith

Committee Members Absent With Notice: William Benesh, Ritu Chattree (Vice Chair), Ivy Kwan Arce

Committee Members Absent Without Notice: John Paul DeVerna

Other CB2 Members Present: Carter Booth, Michael Levine, Donna Raftery

Public Members Absent With Notice: Rachel Yarmolinsky

Agenda: *Update from Greenwich House: Senior programs and its Lifelong Skills and Opportunity Center; health services and progress on developing its Center for Resiliency and Wellness.

(While a * denotes a public hearing, this meeting did not result in a resolution.)

Guests from Greenwich House (GH):

Darren Bloch, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer

Laura Langner, Chief Health and Human Service Officer

REPORT:

Greenwich House (GH) this year celebrated its 120th anniversary. It recently updated its mission statement. It operates a pottery school, music school, nursery school, and after-school program, but also provides social services through its older adult centers and substance treatment center. GH's five older adult centers are sited in the Judith C White Center at 27 Barrow Street; Our Lady of Pompeii Church at 25 Carmine Street; Center on the Square at 20 Washington Square North; Westbeth Artists Housing at 155 Bank Street; and, outside of Community District 2, Independence Plaza, at 210 Greenwich Street.

Its Methadone Maintenance Treatment Program is sited at 190 Mercer Street.

Older adult services

A revised Request for Proposals (RFP) issued by the NYC Department for the Aging (DFTA) around 2020 now allows GH to operate its various centers as a network of services spread across satellites. GH has responded by giving each center particular specialization, though all of these

house computer labs and provide congregate meals. Most yoga, nutrition, and other wellness classes, for example, are provided at Our Lady of Pompeii. Center on the Square maintains a strong arts and culture focus. The Westbeth location – GH’s most recent addition – houses a health clinic and case management services. Independence Plaza is a more traditional center (and has seen 200% growth in the last year).

The greatest change has been to the Judith C White Center, 5,000 square feet of which have undergone renovation and been transformed into GH’s Lifelong Skills and Opportunity Center. A grant from DFTA permits GH to focus on older adults, but the program is merged with existing vocational services that GH provides through its behavioral health arm. The site offers classes to help older adults prepare and remain in the workforce.

Health Services

GH is also making significant changes to its health services. During Covid it merged two small mental health clinics – the Children’s Safety Project and the Senior Health and Consultation Center. A panel of about 90 clients has now grown to almost 365, with a waiting list of an additional 65. Laura Langner says “it is becoming the gold standard for trauma-informed care for individuals ages three to 100-plus.”

After failing to reach an agreement with the owner of the former Sushi Samba location on 7th Avenue, GH decided to site its expansion of the clinic on the second floor of GH’s Mercer Street location, where GH will now be the sole tenant. The third floor will house GH leadership and administration. The methadone program on floors four and five will increase its primary care services.

GH also received a geriatric mental health grant to open 11 new satellite clinics for older adults around New York City. DFTA will notify GH of the centers where these are to operate. GH anticipates that it will spend the first part of its next fiscal year, starting in July, bringing those clinics into operation.

Funding sources

Public contracts and grants support some services, such as geriatric mental health, while GH bills insurance for health services. State licenses permit operation of the mental health clinic under Article 31; the methadone clinic under Article 32; and primary care under Article 28.

A \$1 million grant that was part of the restrictive declaration of a development on Gansevoort Street is being used to make necessary repairs to the façade of 27 Barrow Street.

Meals

Initial pushback on elimination of meal services at 27 Barrow Street has eased. Members were primarily concerned about losing meal staff, which instead has been transferred to other centers. GH now employs two caterers and has added Saturday lunch at Westbeth to its offerings. The meals themselves are regulated by DFTA, which provides recipes, specifies ingredients, and requires menus be posted in advance.

Membership

Becoming a “member” of GH is a simple procedure and is free. GH has not generally seen a significant expansion of its membership of about 2,000 in CD2 (although Independence Plaza has seen an increase). As Darren Bloch asks, “Are we not seeing more participation because people aren’t buying what we’re selling, or just don’t know about what we’re selling? Do we need to keep changing and modulating the things we’re doing, or is it a matter of promotion and information?” GH leadership keeps this question top-of-mind, but also notes that its mealtimes are full and attendance is robust. At the same time, the Covid-19 pandemic kept many people home and only recently do they appear to be returning. GH noted that in addition to the returning members, there is also a large new population of program attendees who have come as Covid-19 has receded, particularly individuals needing more case assistance and social services. They believe this population already existed with these needs before the pandemic, but that more individuals in this group are now taking advantage of GH programming.

Unmet funding request

To complement the network approach of its older adult program, GH applied for funding of a shuttle service, but the city rejected its request. GH would still like to be able to fund a pilot program, budgeted around \$160,000, to operate several vans for its members. While it says it has no interest in entering the “transportation space,” the shuttles would facilitate movement among the specialized adult centers and also to key locations such as the local library. Greenwich Village is widely regarded as transit-rich, but the North-South subway lines and crosstown buses are insufficient to permit easy travel between centers for those with mobility issues.

Additional funding needs

The new City budget does not include a cost-of-living increase social service providers had requested. GH attended a rally at City Hall – and some of its members joined staff in protest. GH would like to encourage more civic activity among its membership.

The move to GH’s Mercer location carries modest (ie, five-figure) ancillary expenses that are nonetheless significant for a not-for-profit organization.