

CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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**BURT LAZARIN**  
Chair

**Jesse Bodine**  
District Manager

October 15, 2020

Bill DeBlasio  
Mayor  
City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dermot Shea  
Police Commissioner  
City of New York  
1 Police Plaza  
New York NY, 10038

Steven Banks  
Commissioner  
Department of Homeless Services  
33 Beaver St., New York NY, 10004

**Re: Public Safety Crisis & Density Reduction Requests  
Impact of 812 Temporary Homeless Shelter Beds  
West 36<sup>th</sup> & West 37<sup>th</sup> Streets**

Dear Mayor DeBlasio, Commissioner Shea, and Commissioner Banks,

**Public Safety Crisis**

The current density of temporary shelter beds relocated to budget hotels on West 36<sup>th</sup> and West 37<sup>th</sup> Streets between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenues has created a public safety crisis for the residents of those blocks, the struggling stores and restaurants on 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the West 30s, and the entire Hell's Kitchen community below West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. Manhattan Community District 4 (MCD4), its elected officials and the NYPD have been deluged with hundreds of public safety complaints since temporary shelters were relocated to those blocks in May 2020.

The relocation was done by the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) for the right reasons, to protect vulnerable New Yorkers in congregate shelters from the spread of COVID-19. However, the decrease in public safety has been dramatic, with an increase in crime, drug activity and aggressive panhandling. Coupled with an increase in street homelessness and blatant illicit drug use, these blocks have become unsafe for their residents and businesses. Along with public safety concerns, residents and businesses report daily public urination, defecation and masturbation on these once quiet mixed-use blocks. **These blocks were safe prior to the temporary shelter relocation. Today, they are not.**

Public policy decisions made in an emergency can be modified and corrected to resolve the unintended consequences. DHS needs to examine and correct its prior actions to restore public safety to this part of Hell's Kitchen. The Mayor's Office, our local City and State representatives, DHS and the NYPD must develop a plan to:

- 1) Reduce the concentration of clients with the deepest need for social services by relocating them to shelter facilities that can meet their needs
- 2) Hold the providers accountable for poor shelter and client management. This emergency situation demands better, not incompetent, management
- 3) Provide dedicated homeless street outreach to the area from West 41<sup>st</sup> to West 34<sup>th</sup>, between 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Avenues
- 4) Coordinate DHS street outreach and NYPD for increased public safety enforcement

MCD4 at its regularly scheduled Full Board meeting on October 7, 2020, voted by a vote of 42 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstain and 0 present not eligible, to support these recommendations.

MCB4 has never taken a NIMBY approach to social service facilities or homeless supportive housing. It instead has welcomed such uses with careful siting, planning and operational review.

The public policy decision to protect shelter residents does not relieve DHS and its contracted shelter providers the responsibility to effectively manage delivery of services to their clients. The public policy decision to relocate 812 shelter beds serving many with chronic and persistent mental illness (plus many contending with alcohol and substance abuse) in a one block radius, has been a social service disaster. These issues are not quality of life matters; they are major public safety issues.

**Maintaining public safety for a neighborhood is not in conflict with providing shelter and social services for New Yorkers.** Neither the shelter nor the community residents should have to bear such an unsafe environment

### **Background**

Between May and June, DHS relocated 2,142 shelter beds for single individuals (many of whom suffer from mental illness, alcohol, and chemical addiction) to Manhattan Community District 4 (MCD4). These shelters were temporarily relocated to protect

individuals in congregate shelters from the spread of COVID-19. The temporary shelters were relocated into hotels and include:

### Temporary Shelter Relocations

<b>Hotel</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>DHS Contracted Shelter Provider</b>	<b># of Beds</b>
The Watson	440 West 57 <sup>th</sup> Street	Black Veterans for Social Justice (BVSJ)	369
Skyline Hotel <sup>1</sup>	725 10 <sup>th</sup> Avenue	Acacia	300
The Washington Jefferson <sup>2</sup>	318 West 51 <sup>st</sup> Street	Project Renewal	182
The Comfort Inn	548 West 48 <sup>th</sup> Street	Bronx Parent Housing Network	65
Comfort Inn	343 West 44 <sup>th</sup> Street	Help USA	284
The Cachet <sup>3</sup>	510 West 42 <sup>nd</sup> Street	BRC	130
Hilton Garden	326 West 37 <sup>th</sup> Street	ICL	294
Springhill Inn	338 West 36 <sup>th</sup> Street	BVSJ	200
Double Tree	341 West 36 <sup>th</sup> Street	NAICA	318
<b>Total Beds</b>			<b>2, 142</b>

MCD4 agrees with the need for the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to protect the health of residents in congregate settings and to use commercial hotel rooms on a temporary emergency basis to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Commercial hotel rooms allow for social distancing, ensuring the safety of the residents and protecting the public health of all New Yorkers.

However, this critical initiative has been poorly communicated, poorly managed and poorly monitored by DHS and has created a public safety crisis affecting multiple temporary shelters.

### MCD4 - Homelessness and Social Services - Pre-Covid

<sup>1</sup> The Skyline Hotel, with family shelter rooms, became a single adult men relocation site.

<sup>2</sup> This shelter was subsequently relocated to the Lucerne on West 79<sup>th</sup> Street in July 2020

<sup>3</sup> This shelter was subsequently relocated due the discovery of Legionnaire’s Disease in the HVAC equipment

MCD4, comprised of Chelsea, Hudson Yards and Clinton/Hell’s Kitchen, is an area that has long welcomed both social services, homeless facilities and supportive housing as mapped in Appendix C. We have never taken a NIMBY approach to such needs. MCD4 has however, been probing and thorough with social service agencies to ensure the proposed facilities or housing sites are well designed, managed and integrated successfully into the community. These permanent facilities and housing include:

### Homeless Shelters & Facilities

Name	Address	Provider	# of Beds
Jack Ryan	127 West 25 <sup>th</sup> Street	BRC	200
Barbour House	330 West 36 <sup>th</sup> Street	Praxis	100
Holiday Inn	343 West 39 <sup>th</sup> Street	Acacia	30
Candlewood Suites	339 West 39 <sup>th</sup> Street	Acacia	48
The Dwelling Place	409 West 40 <sup>th</sup> Street	The Franciscan Sisters of Allegany	15
Covenant House	460 West 41 <sup>st</sup> Street	Covenant House	120
Travel Inn Hotel	515 West 42 <sup>nd</sup> Street	Acacia	81
Safe Haven	301 West 48 <sup>th</sup> Street	Urban Pathways	10
Alexander Abraham Residence	341 West 51 <sup>st</sup> Street	Women In Need	70
52 <sup>nd</sup> Street Women’s Center	427 West 52 <sup>nd</sup> Street	Care For the Homeless	120
Trinity Presbyterian Church	422 West 57 <sup>th</sup> Street	Partnership for the Homeless	10
Skyline Hotel	725 10 <sup>th</sup> Avenue	Acacia	63
Aladdin Hotel	317 West 45 Street	Urban Pathways	143

**Total Beds**

**1,010**

### Homeless Supportive Housing

Name	Address	Provider	# of Beds/Apartments
	105 West 17 <sup>th</sup> Street		18
Volunteers of America	226 West 26 <sup>th</sup> Street		52
Flemister House	527 West 22 <sup>nd</sup> Street	American Baptist Churches	50
St. Francis III	148 8 <sup>th</sup> Avenue	Franciscans	79
St. Francis II	151 West 22 <sup>nd</sup> Street	Franciscans	115

The Christopher Residence	202 West 24 <sup>th</sup> Street	Common Ground & Good Shepard	62
	353 West 30 <sup>th</sup> Street	CHDC	32
	454 West 35 <sup>th</sup> Street	CHDC	53
	347 West 37 <sup>th</sup> Street	Fountain House	30
Geffner House	351 West 42 <sup>nd</sup> Street	Project Renewal	313
	500 West 42 <sup>nd</sup> Street	CHDC	66
	327 West 43 <sup>rd</sup> Street	Project Return	6
	300 West 46 <sup>th</sup> Street	CHDC	68
	424 West 47 <sup>th</sup> Street	Fountain House	15
	441 West 47 <sup>th</sup> Street	Fountain House	20
	448 West 48 <sup>th</sup> Street	Project Renewal	41
Postgraduate Center Community Residence I	516 West 50 <sup>th</sup> Street		20
Stardom Hall	330-332 West 51 <sup>st</sup> Street	Lantern Group	112
The Flats/Old School	554 West 53 <sup>rd</sup> Street	CHDC	52
The Friedman	475 West 57 <sup>th</sup> Street	Common Ground, The Actors Fund	98

**Total Beds/Apts                      1,302**

**Manhattan Community Board 4's request to relocate and lessen density on West 36<sup>th</sup> Street is based, not on a knee jerk NIMBY reaction, but instead reflects its long-term serious work in integrating homeless facilities and housing into our neighborhoods.**

**DHS Communications and Response to MCD4**

DHS has met in 18 separate meetings with MCB4 regarding Temporary COVID Homeless Shelters. Meetings have been fraught with frustration and lack of information, with DHS staff lecturing MCB4 on the fact that “We are in a pandemic”, notwithstanding, we have all tried to work together to address the multiple issues at each site. MCB4 and DHS continue to meet and seek to resolve operations and public safety matters at each temporary site. However, there have been too many individual meetings. MCB4 requested a district wide Community Advisory Board (CAB) in its August 5, 2020 letter. We are happy that DHS announced in the September Housing, Health & Human services (HH&HS) committee meeting that the district wide CAB will begin to meet in early October.

The relocation of the both the Washington Jefferson and Cachet Hotel shelters, have lessened those public safety and operations issues. MCD4 appreciates DHS’s response to our June 23<sup>rd</sup> and August 5, 2020 letters, along with DHS attending the September 17, 2020 HH&HS meeting to hear questions and concerns directly from community residents (see Appendices A & B). MCD4 also appreciates that DHS acknowledged the lack of communication and coordination with community members prior to relocation of residents into emergency hotel shelters.

We must note however, for decades Chelsea and Clinton Hell’s Kitchen have been a welcoming community to social service needy populations. Unfortunately, DHS’s initial actions, its continued lack of acknowledgment regarding the public safety crisis and its lack of a plan to reduce the density of shelter beds has had a major negative impact on this long-held community view. It is noteworthy that the number of public attendees to the HH&HS meetings has increased significantly (see below)).

We cannot understate the current willingness of Chelsea and Clinton/Hell’s Kitchen residents to accept future potential social service or supportive housing development has substantially decreased. Reluctance in the future may reflect the current devastating situation not being adequately addressed.

**MCD4 Public Meetings Regarding Temporary Homeless COVID Shelters**

<b>Date</b>	<b># of Public Attendees (approximately)</b>
May 21, 2020	<b>Not Available</b>
June 18, 2020	<b>73</b>
September 17, 2020	<b>169</b>

**Concentration of Homeless Beds on West 36<sup>th</sup> & West 37<sup>th</sup> since COVID-19**

At its height in July 2020, there were 2,142 Temporary COVID Homeless Shelter Beds, in addition to the 1,010 existing shelter beds and 1,302 apartments/beds of homeless supportive housing totaling 4454 homeless shelter beds or apartments.

As of October 5, 2020, MCD4 now has **1,830 Temporary COVID Homeless Shelter Beds at 7 locations** for single adults. Of those locations, **812 beds or 45%, are located on West 36<sup>th</sup> and West 37<sup>th</sup> Streets between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenues.**

**The over-saturation is the result of poor planning and bad public policy. It is unmanageable and requires a reduction in the density.**

Budget hotels are simply not designed with needed facilities for counseling and programming to assist such a large population. Clients are isolated in their rooms. There is no opportunity for recreation and meals are taken alone. Staff cannot assist and monitor the severely mentally ill.

Even if only 25% of those individuals, or 203 persons, require major social service support, that is too much need to be effectively delivered in a one block area, let alone in budget hotels not purpose built for such programs.

**Public Safety Crisis on West 36<sup>th</sup> and West 37<sup>th</sup> Streets**

Since the relocations, there is a distinguishable difference between West 36<sup>th</sup> and West 37<sup>th</sup> Streets in comparison to any other blocks in the district. Almost any time of day there are:

- Individuals congregating, milling about, using and selling drugs
- Individuals passed out on the sidewalk from drug use, with the syringe in their arm
- People are observed high and drunk
- There is public urination, defecation and masturbation
- Mentally ill individuals are raving and have charged at residents and passersby
- There is constant aggressive panhandling, including for stated drug purchases
- Women sexually harassed and followed home
- Seniors have been knocked down on the sidewalk
- An increase in police and EMS calls on this one block radius
- Shelter residents who do not wear masks

Permanent residents feel unsafe and expressed feeling the block is a dangerous and an unacceptable situation (see Appendix B). **These matters are well beyond quality of life issues. They constitute a public safety crisis.**

MCD4 addressed this matter in a letter on August 5, 2020. There has been no improvement since that time<sup>4</sup>. The September 17, 2020 HH&HS committee meeting was attended by approximately 69 members of the public, the majority living on West 36<sup>th</sup> and West 37<sup>th</sup> Streets. They have witnessed these incidents or been personally harassed on multiple occasions. Several residents on West 36<sup>th</sup> Street are living in fear for their safety, not wanting to leave their homes. They find the area untenable and have demanded a reduction of the shelter density on that block (see Appendix B). This public safety matter was further addressed in a September 25<sup>th</sup> letter<sup>5</sup> to the Mayor from Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, State Senator Robert Jackson and Assemblymember Dick Gottfried.

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<sup>4</sup> [MCB4 8.23.20 letter to Mayor & DHS](#)

<sup>5</sup> [MBPO Sign on Letter 9.25.20 to DHS](#)

DHS, in meetings with MCB4 and in their written response, has consistently stated it has a moral and legal obligation to assist the most vulnerable New Yorkers. That moral and legal obligation must also extend to the permanent residents and public on West 36<sup>th</sup> and West 37<sup>th</sup> Streets. Their daily life has been rendered unsafe and unlivable due to the consequences of poor management by DHS, the overconcentration of the social service needy, and the lack of coordination and collaboration between DHS and NYPD.

**Conclusion**

MCD4 has carefully described and detailed the public safety crisis in our district resultant from DHS's actions to temporarily relocate shelter beds to protect against the spread of COVID -19 in congregate shelters. The current dangerous situation cannot be denied out of existence because it is politically uncomfortable. DHS took an action, the consequences have created a dangerous situation, it needs to modify the action.

We call upon the Mayor, the Police Commissioner and Commissioner of DHS to put politics and optics aside and develop an action plan to reduce the concentration of shelter beds on West 36<sup>th</sup> and West 37<sup>th</sup> Streets. Such action must be developed in consultation with MCD4 and local elected officials as a problem-solving matter, without either political expediency or fear of bad press.

**This action must be taken, to restore public safety and public confidence in our City Government.**

MCD4 looks forward to working together to develop a solution.

Sincerely,



Lowell Kern  
Chair



Joe Restuccia  
Co-Chair Housing, Health & Human  
Services

[Signed 10/15/2020]

Maria Ortiz  
Co-Chair Housing, Health & Human  
Services

Enclosures: 3

Cc:



Hon. Jerrold Nadler, U.S. Congress  
Hon. Brad Hoylman, State Senator  
Hon Richard Gottfried, NYS Assembly  
Hon. Linda B. Rosenthal, New York State Assembly  
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Hon. Corey Johnson, Speaker, NYC Council

## **Appendix A**

Questions raised by Committee Members and the Public at the September 17<sup>th</sup> HH&HS meeting. DHS stated in the meeting it would respond to further questions in writing:

- What is the City's plan to reduce density on 36<sup>th</sup> Street?
- What is the City's plan to begin movement back to permanent shelter sites?
- When will the additional security guards begin at the 36<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Street shelters?
- What will the City do to ensure there is not a lot of movement of individuals and families around the City?
- What is the average caseload of shelter Case Workers?
- Who oversees the sex offenders at sites or ensures they are not placed in communities they are limited from?
- How many shelter residents south of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street?
- What is the comprehensive plan for the remainder of the year?
- What is the plan for residents returning to shelter?
- Process for onboarding and receiving services?
- What is the plan to clean the sites after residents leave?
- What are the details of the security plan?
- What services do you have to keep drug users off the street?
- What percentage of clients are not receiving their services? What kinds of services are these individuals not receiving?
- With kids returning to school, how will School Safety and NYPD will coordinate?

## **Appendix B**

September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020 meeting of HH&HS. Attended/viewed by 169 members of the public, the individuals below also addressed the Committee:

1. Brian, lives on 36<sup>th</sup> Street, meetings are not solving the daily issues, 45% of the temporary residents are on 36<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Street, we need a reduction in density.
2. Lucy, lives on 36<sup>th</sup>, block has changed drastically, no regard to permanent residents on the block but lots of talk about keeping the shelter residents safe, reduce one site on 36th Street b/c of drugs, chaos etc.
3. Katherine, lives on 36<sup>th</sup>, observed drug use, pushed, charged at, move the most serious residents, she is concerned about the safety of her, her husband, neighbors and friends; they are seniors.
4. Alexander, lives on 42<sup>nd</sup>, spoke about a possible move of residents, need for a plan.
5. Sarah, lives on 37<sup>th</sup>, even if security, the drug use remains, not effective long term plan.
6. Owen, former head of HR at Breaking Ground, false promises to the residents.
7. Katy, lives on 43<sup>rd</sup>, concerned about sex offenders.
8. Joanne, lives on 37<sup>th</sup>, it has deteriorated, residents are afraid and unsafe.
9. Bernard, lives 47<sup>th</sup>, Skyline is an issue, this entire neighborhood is deteriorating, NYPD must reenter the picture.
10. Becca, lives on 57<sup>th</sup> and is afraid to go out.
11. Philip, lives on 36<sup>th</sup>, believes everyone is understating dangerousness; drunk, high, drug sales, urination, defecation, aggressive, psychotic, witnessed harassment, murder, attack on a police officer, the area is dangerous for everyone, residents, shelter residents, staff.

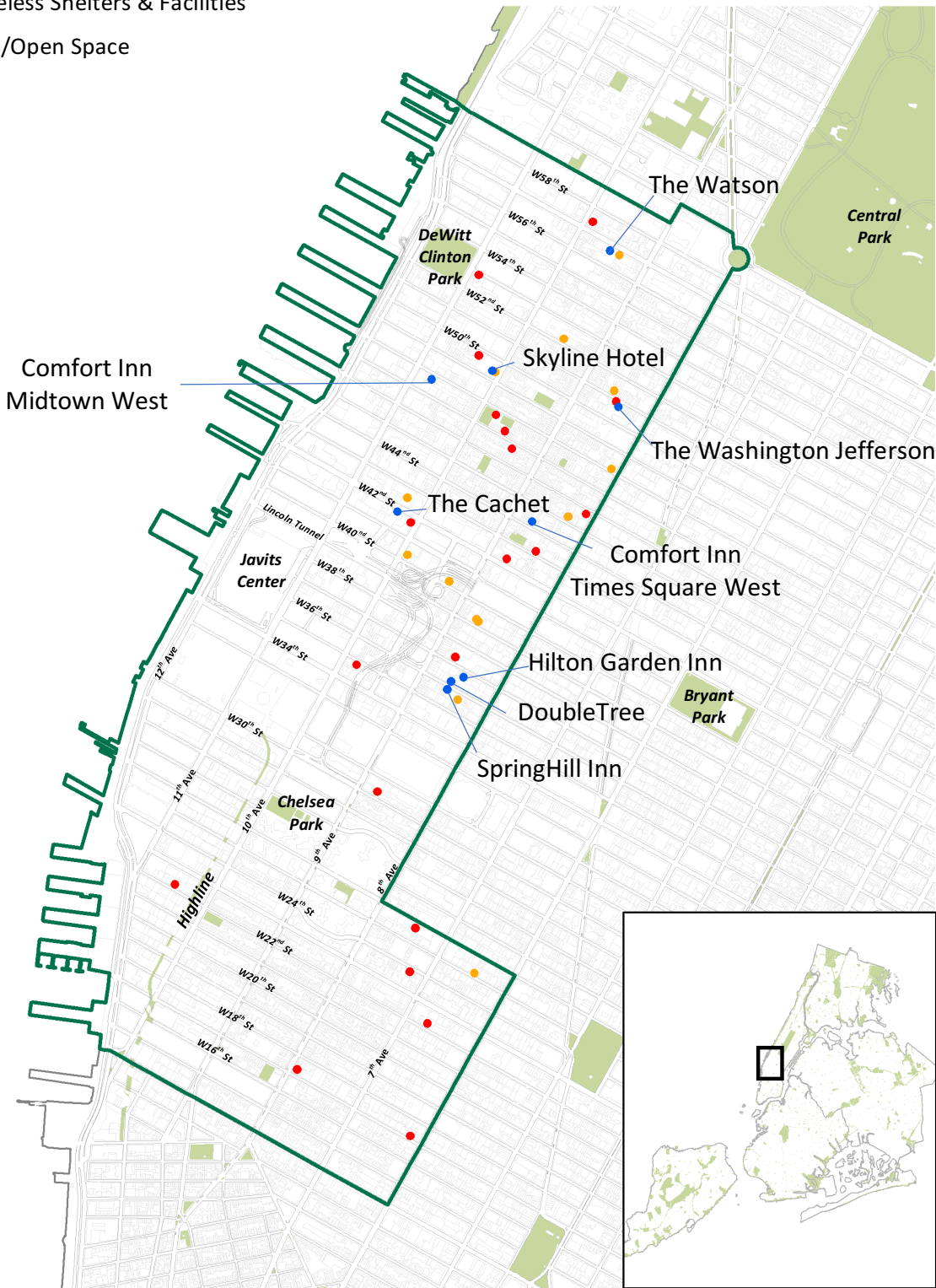
12. Marcia, lives on 36<sup>th</sup>, board President of her building, feels the same as last caller, people do not want to go out, her son was accosted, crisis for the permanent residents.
13. Angela, lives on 37<sup>th</sup>, fear for their safety, they need help (emotional).
14. Pamela, lives in Chelsea, BRC reduction on 25<sup>th</sup>, plan for folks to return for their services.
15. Christine, lives on 38<sup>th</sup>, neighborhood is affected by this, the most violent people need to be moved, and if selling drugs, DHS needs to solve this problem.
16. Bernard, lives on 36<sup>th</sup>, owns an apartment, 37 y/o 6'5" man and at times does not go out due to safety concerns, wants reduction.
17. Sanjay, lives on 35<sup>th</sup>, drug sales at least three times p/w, people passed out with syringe in the arm, has had to call the police before
18. Matt, lives on 39<sup>th</sup> and his apartment on 36<sup>th</sup> is far worse, observed someone overdose and die on the corner.
19. Craig, some relief b/c of relocation, encampment on 51<sup>st</sup>, using drugs with syringes observed.
20. Kevin, hotspots are 36<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Streets, the surrounding area and the encampments in the area.
21. Jessica, lives on 54<sup>th</sup>, Social Worker, concerns are real but also NIMBYism, this impacts the community to being open in the future to other services, should not be moving people as they are chess pieces.
22. Eva, lives on 44<sup>th</sup>, walked by the Skyline many times, no serious issues.
23. Dan, lives on 36<sup>th</sup>, the DoubleTree should close, rampant drug use in the front of it, sees a brown van near there selling drugs.
24. Joe, did not see this during the crack epidemic or during the time of the Westies.
25. Marta, DHS seems binary; everyone leaves, return some, third option is reduction.
26. Val, lives on 36<sup>th</sup>, single mom with a son, drug addict passed out on the street, no one assisted even with the police station nearby, she called 911, had to explain to her 9 y/o who told her about it, also observed a man arrested and saw him the following day.
27. Michelle, her family here for generations, this is the worst it has ever been.
28. Allan, lives on 36<sup>th</sup>, underscore everything others have said, saw someone urinating in a tree pit in front of the DoubleTree.
29. Randall, lives on 36<sup>th</sup> over 20 years, wants a reduction on the block.

30. Andrew, lives on 36<sup>th</sup>, backs up the neighbors, reduction of density needed.
31. Kathy, lives on 36<sup>th</sup>, saw people shooting up, has been asked to buy drugs for others, people screaming and music loud all the time, has not seen it this bad before.
32. David, drug addicts/homeless need some type of activities to keep them busy.
33. Ester, lives on 34<sup>th</sup> and President of Co-op, see drug sales, this must be dealt with immediately.

**Appendix C**

Map of Homeless Social Service Facilities and Homeless Supportive Housing

- Manhattan Community District #4
- Temporary Homeless Shelter Relocations (labeled)
- Homeless Supportive Housing
- Homeless Shelters & Facilities
- Parks/Open Space



Data Source: CHDC (2020), NYC Department of City Planning (2020)  
Map by Savannah Wu (2020)