

CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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November 13, 2020

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

Dear Elected Officials,

Public Safety Crisis

The current density of temporary shelter beds relocated to budget hotels on West 36th and West 37th Streets between 8th and 9th Avenues has created a public safety crisis for the residents of those blocks, the struggling stores and restaurants on 9th Avenue in the West 30s, and the entire Hell’s Kitchen community below West 42nd Street. Manhattan

Community Board 4 (MCB4), 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.

We are requesting an urgent meeting with our local elected officials to develop an action plan to reduce the concentration of shelter beds on West 36th and West 37th Streets, and restore public safety to those in the surrounding blocks.

MCB4 at its regularly scheduled Full Board meeting on November 4th, 2020 voted by a vote of 42 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstain and 0 present not eligible, to support this recommendation.

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.

Manhattan Community Board 4 addressed this matter in a letter on October 15, 2020, calling for Mayor DeBlasio, Commissioner Shea, and Commissioner Banks to take action.¹

The current situation presents a clear and present danger to the health and safety of the clients of the shelters, as well as to the residents, visitors, and businesses in MCB4. It cannot be denied out of existence because it is politically uncomfortable.

Concentration of Homeless Beds on West 36th & West 37th since COVID-19

At its height in July 2020, in MCB4 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 4,454 homeless shelter beds or apartments.

As of October 5, 2020, MCB4 now has **1,830 Temporary COVID Homeless Shelter Beds at 7 locations** for single adults. Of those locations, **812 beds² or 45%, are located on West 36th and West 37th Streets between 8th and 9th Avenues.³**

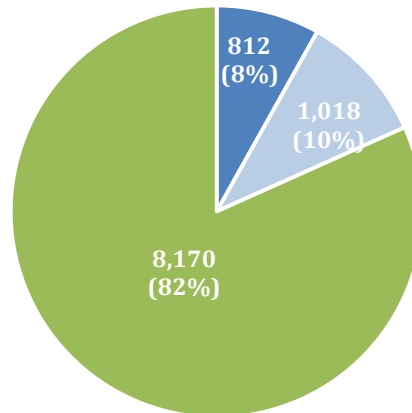
¹ [October 15th, 2020 MCB4 Letter](#)

² Information received by shelter providers on October 27th, 2020.

³ [Carol Tannenhauser. Updated: 'Homeless Hotels' Booked by City for Another Six Months; 'Shelters Not Yet Safe'; 'Lucerne Men Will Move'. West Side Rag, October 7, 2020.](#)

Number of Single Adults Assigned to Temporary "Covid-Related" Hotels²

■ W36th & W37th Streets ■ Rest of Manhattan Community District 4 ■ Rest of NYC



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

Permanent residents are unsafe and with the block in a dangerous and an unacceptable situation. In the past six months, over 200 members of the public have attended meetings of Housing, Health & Human Services Committee. At every meeting, many community residents of West 36th and West 37th have spoken about these matters. **These matters are not quality of life issues. They constitute a public safety crisis.** MCB4 (see Appendix A for most recent testimony by 17 members of the community).

For Homeless Shelters to effectively serve both clients and community, they must:

- Be properly sited and well managed both in property management and social service management
- Offer a range of support services such as mental health, substance abuse treatment and employment opportunities
- Have well trained and compassionate security staff to work the population
- Implement best practices in case management
- Gather data to measure and improve performance and accurately report
- Remain accountable to clients and all stakeholders

Conclusion

In its October 15th letter, MCB4 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.

Manhattan Community Board 4's request to relocate within the district and lessen density on West 36th 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.

MCB4 looks forward to working together to develop a solution.

Sincerely,



Lowell Kern
Manhattan CB4, Chair



[signed 11/13/2020]
Maria Ortiz, Co-Chair
Housing, Health & Human Services
Services

Joe Restuccia, Co-Chair
Housing, Health & Human

Cc:
Andrew Cuomo, NY State Governor
Bill DeBlasio, NYC Mayor
Steve Banks, DHS Commissioner
Dermot Shea, NYPD Commissioner

Appendix A

October 15th, 2020 meeting of HH&HS. 17 community members addressed the Committee, many of whom live on W. 36th Street:

1. Anne, lives on W. 36th, cites that shelters' population of 202,000 is now twice the size of the number of residents in the Upper West Side. Is concerned that the homeless are increasingly angry, as they have lived five months without regular services. Noticed drug services are only offered in the afternoon and does not meet the needs of the homeless.
2. Brian, lives on W. 36th, we are five months in and need a reduction in density, as increased number of sanitation and security staff does not address the situation. Witnessed 11 emergency response vehicles in two-hour period the night before regarding different occurrences.
3. Alexander, lives on W. 36th, concerned with lack of services and political will, as many people have been arrested and were put back on the street three hours later as if nothing happened; density should not be overlooked in comparison to other

- issues. Children are unable to ride scooters around the blocks or walk to get pizza as in the past. Untenable situation in the area.
4. David, W. 29th, suggests coordination with Manhattan Community Board 5 to address this issue.
 5. Bernard, 36th, feels like permanent residents are living in a weird time and have their own curfew and must quarantine.
 6. Lucy, W. 36th, shared a story of witnessing illicit substance use, emergency response to the individual and the same individual enter the Double Tree.
 7. Peter, W. 36th, media should concentrate on this issue more.
 8. Val, W. 36th, single mom with 9-year-old son, saw someone get robbed, and cannot sleep at night with ambulance, fire trucks, or people screaming crazily; prefers to walk in the street with cars to avoid the homeless due to fear.
 9. Carol, W. 36th, prosecutor at the District Attorney's office, saw people huddled around her front door, expressed concern that there is no directions or support from the Mayor to help people on the block from a safety perspective.
 10. Andrew, W. 36th, expressed that density is the main issue.
 11. Marta, W. 36th, spoke about the need for a delicate strategy with compassion.
 12. Cathe, W. 36th, feels under mental assault every day when going on the street or staying in her apartment, as there are sirens and police during the day and cannot even talk on the phone. Expressed anger at people outside the DoubleTree Hotel blasting music or shooting up. Suggests for someone to be permanently stationed at W. 36th and Eighth Avenue, as she has seen many drug dealers there, even offering to sell her drugs.
 13. M Krebs, W. 36th, has three kids and is distressed that her children have seen people shooting up. Concerned that there are always people urinating, smoking including marijuana, or people in delirium or anger. Can no longer go out at night in fear of being accosted.
 14. Alexandra, concerned that we are fighting the symptoms of homelessness, which will only increase after the pandemic with more evictions and higher unemployment rates. Believes we should target lack of affordable housing.
 15. Randolph, W. 36th, constant noise, men selling drugs, smoking marijuana, fear of being accosted, fear of getting COVID.
 16. Angela, W. 37th, asked about protections for people living in the neighborhood.
 17. Katherine, W. 36th, asked about how to deliver the message more aggressively. Has had great conversations with Corey Johnson's office, but no changes.

Appendix B

Questions raised by Committee Members and the Public at the September 17th 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 36th Street?
- What is the City's plan to begin movement back to permanent shelter sites?
- When will the additional security guards begin at the 36th and 37th 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 42nd 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 C

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

1. Brian, lives on 36th Street, meetings are not solving the daily issues, 45% of the temporary residents are on 36th and 37th Street, we need a reduction in density.
2. Lucy, lives on 36th, 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 36th, 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 42nd, spoke about a possible move of residents, need for a plan.
5. Sarah, lives on 37th, 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 43rd, concerned about sex offenders.
8. Joanne, lives on 37th, it has deteriorated, residents are afraid and unsafe.
9. Bernard, lives 47th, Skyline is an issue, this entire neighborhood is deteriorating, NYPD must reenter the picture.
10. Becca, lives on 57th and is afraid to go out.
11. Philip, lives on 36th, 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 36th, 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 37th, fear for their safety, they need help (emotional).
14. Pamela, lives in Chelsea, BRC reduction on 25th, plan for folks to return for their services.
15. Christine, lives on 38th, neighborhood is affected by this, the most violent people need to be moved, and if selling drugs, DHS needs to solve this problem.
15. Bernard, lives on 36th, owns an apartment, 37 y/o 6'5" man and at times does not go out due to safety concerns, wants reduction.
16. Sanjay, lives on 35th, drug sales at least three times p/w, people passed out with syringe in the arm, has had to call the police before
17. Matt, lives on 39th and his apartment on 36th is far worse, observed someone overdose and die on the corner.
18. Craig, some relief b/c of relocation, encampment on 51st, using drugs with syringes observed.
19. Kevin, hotspots are 36th and 37th Streets, the surrounding area and the encampments in the area.
20. Jessica, lives on 54th, 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.
21. Eva, lives on 44th, walked by the Skyline many times, no serious issues.
22. Dan, lives on 36th, the DoubleTree should close, rampant drug use in the front of it, sees a brown van near there selling drugs.
23. Joe, did not see this during the crack epidemic or during the time of the Westies.
24. Marta, DHS seems binary; everyone leaves, return some, third option is reduction.
25. Val, lives on 36th, 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.
26. Michelle, her family here for generations, this is the worst it has ever been.
27. Allan, lives on 36th, underscore everything others have said, saw someone urinating in a tree pit in front of the DoubleTree.
28. Randall, lives on 36th over 20 years, wants a reduction on the block.
29. Andrew, lives on 36th, backs up the neighbors, reduction of density needed.
30. Kathy, lives on 36th, 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.
31. David, drug addicts/homeless need some type of activities to keep them busy.
32. Ester, lives on 34th and President of Co-op, see drug sales, this must be dealt with immediately.