



CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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January 24, 2024

Mayor Eric Adams
City Hall
New York NY 10007

Molly Park
Commissioner,
NYC Department of Social Services/Department of Homeless Services
33 Beaver Street,
New York, NY 10004

Re: Continued lack of coordination and communication with Manhattan Community Board 4 Regarding Shelters

Dear Mayor Adams & Commissioner Park,

On November 2, 2023, the NYC Department of Homeless Services presented to Manhattan Community Board 4's (MCB4) Housing, Health, & Human Services Committee about the siting of yet another temporary shelter location with no discussion, collaboration, or input from MCB4. Committee members reviewed and discussed the siting process and community concerns about the process at the public meeting.

At its regularly scheduled Full Board meeting on December 6, 2023, MCB4 voted 37 in favor, 0 opposed, 4 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to vote to request that the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) communicate and consult with MCB4 in advance of siting any temporary shelters.

Lack of Collaboration/Input for Shelter Siting

After months of requests that DHS advise and consult with MCB4 in advance of siting shelters, DHS continues to locate shelters in Manhattan Community District 4 (MCD4) without any

notice or discussion/collaboration with MCB4. DHS has told the Board, month after month, “We hear you; we understand your concerns regarding the greatly increased number of shelter beds. We are taking those concerns very seriously.” And the following month, another shelter is sited in MCD4, usually on a late Friday afternoon. These actions are then explained as part of the homeless or asylum seeker emergency. The Board notes, even in emergencies and constantly changing situations, some planning and certainly communication with other city agencies, namely MCB4, is highly important and expected.

343 West 44th Street Ramada Inn Project Renewal

In October, DHS relocated Project Renewal’s adult women’s shelter to a Ramada Inn on West 44th Street. **This multi-year temporary relocation to our District was not a sudden emergency or an unforeseen circumstance.**

Instead, it is part of a planned, multi-year reconstruction project at Project Renewal’s current East 44th Street location. Obviously, several City agencies have been involved over many months in planning for Project Renewal’s construction project and temporarily relocation. Never once was there an attempt to inform or engage with MCB4 regarding siting in MCD4.

This siting, without any notification, is a particularly egregious example of DHS’ total disregard for input from MCB4 about shelter sitings. DHS stated it informed Manhattan Community Board 5 instead of MCB4. Considering DHS has approximately sited and funds 15 facilities in MCB4, it is hard to believe DHS is unaware of the boundaries of MCD4. The fact remains that MCB4 is looking for more than mere notice of a new shelter siting – we are looking to be a proactive partner with the City in the planning process to ensure that any sitings are safe and appropriate.

The ongoing lack of timely information, lack of timely response and lack of inclusion and transparency in the siting processes has seriously undermined our community’s trust in DHS and Mayor Adams’ administration. MCB4, even while managing solid working relationships with DHS staff, simply can no longer rely on information provided by the Agency to be truthful or accurate.

MCB4 is not in opposition to the planned and appropriate siting of shelters in MCD4 but cannot support the clustering of facilities in a several-block radius. To address this lack of planning, MCB4 requests DHS, and other relevant city agencies as needed, engage in a process to identify shelter sites within MCD4 that it may be considering, so that DHS and other social services operators can benefit from local knowledge on surrounding context and conditions.

In addition to engaging in a proactive planning process, MCB4 requests that City Hall and its agencies review the RFP process for the siting of shelters and social services to include community input at the beginning of the siting process.

Manhattan Community Board, a City Agency

MCB4, like the Department of Social Services, is a New York City agency, with Charter defined roles. To operate effectively, MCB4 should serve as both a conduit of public information to the public and generator of community issues and concerns to City agencies to notify them of neighborhood context, history and background to inform their decision making. With local information, New York City programs can better integrate and succeed in neighborhoods, and that integration is especially critical for programs serving the homeless, whether service- or residential-based. It is critical for the City to notify the Community Board early on before social service providers and shelters move into the community so that the Community Board can be ready to answer any questions and to help manage the process.

MCB4 has appreciated DHS and the City's partnership in the past, but the key aspect of listening to the community has been removed from DHS's philosophy. Shelters and social services are not successful without the thoughtful input, support, and partnership between agencies and the community. That factor in the siting process must return to ensure the success of facilities and shelters. Without community input, the ensuing result has been a clustering of social services and homeless shelters on multiple blocks, creating unintended consequences and compromising public safety.

Furthermore, DHS must work with other City agencies to more evenly distribute social service facilities and shelters throughout the five boroughs to prevent concentration in any one neighborhood.

Conclusion

To ensure the success of social service facilities and shelters, they must be sited thoughtfully and carefully, with facilities distributed more evenly among neighborhoods and community districts.

MCB4 asks that City Hall and the Department of Homeless Services engage in a proactive planning process for siting social services facilities.

It is clear that responding to community notifications after decisions have already been made about locations and providers does little to address ongoing community concerns. ***That lack of such discussion and input in advance has turned our hospitable community away from its welcoming approach for proposed new social service facilities.***

However, social service facilities, when planned in appropriate and thoughtful locations, with community input, are welcomed and encouraged. The most recent proposed social service facility in MCD4 is Bayview Chelsea (550 West 20th Street), the newest reuse of a historic YMCA building into Supportive Housing for homeless individuals, supervised housing for homeless mentally ill and a Community Center. After full public discussion, review and debate, the proposal was supported unanimously by the MCB4 on [February 1, 2023](#).

MCB4 asks DHS to communicate and consult with MCB4 in advance of any siting of any shelters, as noted above. MCB4 also requests a meeting with the Mayor's Office along with DHS and Department of Social Services to establish a revised, robust system designed to notify and work with MCB4 in advance of the occupation of new shelters.

The Board looks forward to rebuilding trust and cooperation with DHS.

Sincerely,



Jessica Chait
Chair
Manhattan Community Board 4



Joe Restuccia
Chair
Housing, Health, Human Services
Committee



Maria Ortiz
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