

1 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE Item#: 1 (corrected)
2
3 Recommendations for a consistent, high quality, and business-like style for writing letters
4 and resolutions from Manhattan Community Board 4.
5
6 By Capt. John Doswell
7 With
8 Jean-Daniel Noland (Chair CB4)
9 Lee Compton
10 Edward Kirkland
11 Robert Benfatto (DM CB4)
12 Mrs. Benfatto
13

14 **Table of Contents**

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32 **General – Who We Are**

33
34 We are **Manhattan Community Board 4**
35 The older styles:
36 Manhattan Community Board No 4
37 Manhattan Community Board #4
38 will no longer be used.
39
40 Our letterhead & website have been changed to conform to this style, which is already in
41 use by the Mayor’s Community Affairs Unit
42
43 Further, we should be careful saying “Community Board 4” without saying Manhattan, as
44 there are Community Board 4s in Brooklyn, Queens, and The Bronx. (Staten Island has
45 only 3 community boards).

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In a letter, once we have said Manhattan Community Board 4 (generally in the first sentence or paragraph), subsequent references can include:

Board (e.g. “at the next full **board** meeting” or “the **board’s** position is...”)

CB4 (e.g. “**CB4’s** position on this is...”)

(Note that “board” in this usage is in lowercase.)

It is not generally necessary to follow the first full reference to “Manhattan Community Board 4” with “(CB4)” (in parentheses) but this can be done for clarity if desired:

Example

1st Reference

Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) believes that....

Subsequent references:

Further, CB4 also believes that....

Or

Further, the board also believes that....

The use of “Manhattan” or “MCB4” is no longer needed after we have established the borough.

Obviously, if we are referring to a matter in another community board, such as Manhattan Community Board 2, we need to be clear as to which board we are referring to in each use. The following example may be helpful:

“Manhattan Community Board 4 realizes that our position is different than that of Manhattan Community Board 2 on this issue. At its last full board meeting on January 3rd, 2008, CB4 passed a resolution in opposition to CB2’s letter of whatever...”

Finally, Manhattan Community Board 4 represents a geographic area called Manhattan Community District 4, which has specific geographic boundaries. While we rarely use the word “district”, the distinction is as follows:

1. An address or establishment is located within a district, not a board (a board is a body of individuals that comprises a unit of NYC government)
2. A board can vote; a district cannot.
3. A board can have or express an opinion or position; a district cannot.
4. The jurisdiction of a board extends to the boundaries of its corresponding district.

Thus, JD’s Bar & Grille lies within Manhattan Community District 4 (a geographic area) and is governed by Manhattan Community Board 4 (a unit of government). Just as Manhattan Community Board 4 can be abbreviated CB4 in subsequent references in a letter, Manhattan Community District 4 can be abbreviated as CD4.

91 **Form of a letter**

92

93 In most cases (and unlike some other community boards), we make our positions known
94 in the form of letters, written in a business style, as opposed to “resolutions.” Resolutions
95 are treated later in this document. While the choice is up to committee chairs, the
96 conventional wisdom in our board is that our “business letter” style is less confrontational
97 and ultimately more effective than the “resolution” style.

98

99 Our letters have traditionally been formatted in block style, meaning:

100

101

102

103

104

105

106

1. All parts of the letter share a common left margin
2. Paragraphs are not indented (unless a paragraph from another source is cited, in which case the entire cited paragraph may be indented and, optionally, italicized.)
3. Paragraphs are separated from other paragraphs by a blank line

107

108

109

110

Do not justify text left and right together in a letter. Simply justify all text to the appropriate left margin. Justifying text left and right together can create odd spacing in the text, as this example illustrates.

111 **Our letters have the following form**

112

113

The date

114

The addressee(s) (Formal name, organization, mailing address)

115

The subject line (“Re: whatever”)

116

With optional additional applicant or situation information

117

The salutation (“Dear Whomever:”)

118

The letter itself, presented as follows:

119

a. A brief opening paragraph that expresses the situation clearly and further states that Manhattan Community Board 4 is (opposed, in favor of, has this opinion, whatever) regarding the subject.

120

121

122

b. One or more supporting or explanatory paragraphs, which may also include stipulations or caveats expressed as bullet points or as a numbered list

123

124

c. An optional closing paragraph, restating the board’s desired outcome.

125

Closing

126

Signature(s)

127

List of attachments (if any)

128

Cc list

129

130

131 **The addressee(s)**

132

133 We generally address a letter to an individual who may be a commissioner of a division
134 of city government, a specific elected official, or, on occasion, a business or other
135 organization. Rarely, but occasionally, we may write directly to the Governor or the
136 Mayor. In all cases, the form is:

137 Prefix Full Name Suffix

138 Full Title

139 Organization

140 Street Address

141 City, State, Zip

142

143 Some examples include:

144 Ms. Diana Taylor

145 Chair of the Board

146 Hudson River Park Trust

147 Pier 40 at West Houston St.

148 New York, NY 10014

149

150 Ms. Beverly Gotay

151 Assistant Director of Licensing

152 Department of Consumer Affairs

153 42 Broadway, 8th Floor

154 New York, NY 10004

155

156 Hon. Scott Stringer

157 Manhattan Borough President

158 1 Centre Street, 19th Floor

159 New York, NY 100??

160

161

162

163 **Honorable**

164

165 The prefix “Hon.” should be used only for elected government officials or judges. It
166 should not be used for chairs or commissioners or other appointed officials such as
167 deputy mayors.

168

169 The overuse of “Hon.” should be avoided and, in any event, should only be used once for
170 any individual in a letter, and only in the addressee section, not the salutation.

171

172 **New York**

173

174 We should consistently used the following form for NYC addresses

175 New York, NY 12345

176 The official name is actually **The City of New York**, often called **New York City**, but
177 the simple form **New York** is commonly used in an address. We generally do not use
178 **NYC** in letters.

179

180 **Multiple addressees**

181

182 On occasion we may write a letter to two or more individuals equally. This should only
183 happen where two or more agencies or departments share an equal (or nearly equal) role
184 on an issue or decision. Generally, a letter should only be written to a single recipient,
185 leaving others to the Cc: list (below).

186

187 **With regard to streets, avenues and piers**

188 • The words “Street” and “Avenue” should be spelled out in full and capitalized
189 when used with the number to form a proper noun.

190 ▪ East 23rd Street

191 ▪ Sixth Avenue

192 • Streets should be expressed with digits but avenue numbers can be spelled out
193 in full, as shown above.

194 • Note that with most numeric streets in Manhattan, the words “East” and
195 “West” are actually part of the name and are thus capitalized.

196 • Pier addresses vary – all of the below examples are in use. Simply use the
197 form preferred by the entity involved. (Note that “Hudson River” and “North
198 River” are synonymous):

199

200	Circle Line	Hudson River Park Trust
201	Circle Line Plaza - Pier 83	Pier 40 at West Houston St.
202	West 42nd St. & Hudson River	New York, NY 10014
203	New York, NY 10036	

204

205	Intrepid Sea Air Space Museum	Pier 66 Maritime
206	One Intrepid Square	Pier 66A North River
207	West 46th Street and 12th Ave	New York, NY 10011
208	New York, NY 10036	

209

210

211 **The subject line**

212

213 The subject line takes the form “Re: subject”. This should be a short statement of the
214 subject of the letter and/or the issue at hand. The subject line should be in boldface type.

215

216 A simple subject line may be expressed in a single line, such as:

217

218 **Re: Funding for Hudson River Park**

219 **Re: Request to improve safety at West 46th Street and Tenth Avenue**

220 **Re: Request for Historic Comments 450 West 15th Street**

221

222 In all cases where an address is on an avenue, the nearest cross street(s) should be
223 specified, and, if applicable, the corner (i.e. NW corner). If a west side pier is cited, the
224 nearest cross street should be named (i.e. Pier 40 at West Houston Street).

225
226 (Note – The street nearest a pier on the West Side of Manhattan can be estimated by
227 subtracting 40 from the pier number. Thus Pier 84 is at the end of West 44th Street and
228 Pier 63 is at the end of West 23rd Street. This, of course, only works down to about Pier
229 54 (14th Street) – after that the correlation breaks down.)

230
231 The text from a subject line will be used to identify a letter in agendas, voting sheets and
232 on the web, generally by removing the “Re:” and adding something like “Item 23: Letter
233 to (agency abbreviated) re:”

234
235 If the subject is a ULURP or BSA action, the ID number of the action should be included.

236
237 **Re: Zoning Text Amendment, ULURP # 080080 ZRY - American Institute of**
238 **Architects**

239
240 **Use same format as DCP or BSA docket**
241 **ULURP # / Project name / Description**
242

243 In the case of license or permit applications, or where additional information is useful
244 that might cause the subject line to be too long, a longer form should be used that consists
245 of one or more data lines with format of:

246 **Fieldname(colon) (tab) data** - as shown in the following examples:

247
248 **Re: Street Activity Permit Application (Renewal)**

249 Applicant: The Great Deeds Organization
250 Location: West 26th Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues
251 Date: Friday, August 14, 2008
252 Time: 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.
253 Street closure: 9:00 A.M. to 5 P.M.
254 Application #: 123-033/08

255
256 **Re: Sidewalk Café Application (New)**

257 Applicant: John LLC d/b/a Johnny’s Café
258 Address: 600 Tenth Ave (between 14th and 15th Streets)
259 DCA License: 1234567
260 Type: Unenclosed Sidewalk Café
261 Tables/chairs: 4 tables/8 chairs (applied by applicant)
262 3 tables/6 chairs (recommended by CB4)

263
264 **Re: On-Premise Liquor License Application (new)**

265 Applicant: Kirkland Corporation d/b/a Kirkland’s Bar & Grille
266 Address: 600 Tenth Ave (between 14th and 15th Streets)
267 Application: 1234567
268 Occupancy: 125 seated, 50 at bar

269
270 The data lines following the subject line should in normal (not boldfaced) text and should
271 not be indented. The actual field names can be specified by committees and will likely
272 have differences depending on the application – but should be consistent for all cases of a
273 particular application type.

274
275 A boxed table format should be avoided.
276

277 **The Salutation**

278
279 Dear Prefix Soandso (followed by a colon)

280
281 The prefix may be the same as used in the addressee, except for certain conventions.
282 Following are some examples:

283
284 Normal business form: Commissioners, chairs, etc

285
286 Dear Ms. Taylor:
287 Dear Commissioner Ash:

288
289 Elected officials (don't repeat the "Hon" – once is enough)

290
291 Dear Borough President Stringer:
292 Dear Council Member Brewer:
293 Dear Speaker Quinn:
294 Dear Assembly Member Gottfried:
295 Etc

296

297 **The Letter itself - Opening Paragraph(s)**

298
299 The opening paragraph should be simple, direct, and state the board's position clearly on
300 the matter at hand, with the assumption that the letter will be passed. If the letter is not
301 passed, it will not be sent. Thus, there is no need to say at any point "This letter was
302 passed by the board" – that will be evident to the reader by the fact that they have
303 received the letter.

304
305 Further the results of a committee vote or discussion are not relevant and should not be
306 stated except in special circumstances, and then only in the body of the letter, not the
307 opening paragraph (see below)

308
309 In the case of longer, more complicated issues, one or more paragraphs explaining the
310 conditions, context or the like may be added here, before the board's position is stated –
311 but the basic rule is to state the board's position early in the letter, if not in the first
312 paragraph. Indeed, for a quick read, everything that is important – and in particular, the

313 board’s position on an issue (on the assumption that the letter will be passed) - should be
314 in the opening paragraph or paragraphs.

315

316 Some samples are:

317

318 Manhattan Community Board 4 recommends denial of this liquor license
319 application for the following reasons: (bulleted sentence or paragraphs follow)

320

321 Manhattan Community Board 4 recommends denial of this liquor license
322 application unless the following stipulations, agreed to by the applicant, are part
323 of the method on operation for this establishment: (bulleted sentence or
324 paragraphs follow)

325

326 Manhattan Community Board 4 recommends approval of this liquor license
327 application.

328

329 Since the name and address of the applicant and license or permit type has already been
330 stated in the subject line, there is generally no need to repeat that information in the first
331 sentence or paragraph.

332

333 The use of the underscore under the words approval, denial and the like in the first
334 paragraph only, or where the board’s position is first stated, is optional but may be
335 helpful for officials and other readers who may scan the letter quickly. See **Emphasis**
336 near the end of this document for more on underscoring and boldfacing.

337

338 Also there is no need for date of vote. The exception is that for formal ULURP
339 applications or other actions that require a roll-call vote, both the vote totals and the date
340 of the vote should be included at the end of the letter (see **Closing Paragraph(s)** below)

341 **The Letter Itself - Supporting Paragraphs**

342

343 This is the portion of the letter where we can elaborate on our conclusions, provide
344 insights on how we reached our decision, or provide other supporting information. Most
345 letters for permits or licenses do not require much explanation, and there is nothing to be
346 gained by making a letter longer unnecessarily. However, some cases are more
347 complicated and may require supporting arguments or discussion.

348

349 In some cases it may be appropriate to summarize discussion of a committee’s
350 deliberations, but such discussion should be used with care as, in the end, it is the board’s
351 decision by its vote at the full board meeting that counts. It may be appropriate in some
352 cases to mention that a very large and vocal number of people appeared to support or
353 oppose an outcome, or that a certain applicant was the subject of numerous (or the
354 opposite, no) complaints from the board office, but again such information should be
355 provided only if there is compelling reason to do so. And there are cases where providing
356 additional unnecessary information might even be counter-productive. One of the oldest
357 laws of sales is that once you have secured the order, stop.

358

359 **Referenced Text from another Document**

360

361 If in a letter, text is quoted from another document, or from laws or regulations, or from
362 applicant submissions or whatever, that text should be:

- 363 1. Properly attributed
364 2. Indented and set off in quotation marks or italics

365

366 **Bulleted Lists**

367

368 Often material in a letter may be presented in the formed of bulleted lines or paragraphs.
369 Such material may be numbered or simply preceded by standard bullets. Numbered lists
370 have the advantage of providing easy reference points in the letter. Exotic bullet symbols
371 should be avoided; a simple dot or black square is sufficient. In accordance with block
372 style, bullets should be minimally indented if at all.

373

374 **Bolded Captions**

375

376 In the case of a long letter with several sub-parts, it may be useful to precede each section
377 with a bolded caption, as has been done with this style document. However, if done, the
378 closing paragraph (or paragraphs) may then need its own bolded caption, such as
379 **Conclusion**, to separate it from the last of a series of sections.

380

381 **Statistics**

382

383 If statistics are included of the body of the letter, they must be attributed to a recognized
384 source, which must be identified in the letter.

385

386 **The Letter Itself - Closing Paragraph(s)**

387

388 Short letters, especially simple permit/license approval or denial letters, may not require a
389 closing paragraph. Again, there is no need to say how the full board voted or even that it
390 voted at all. Notable exceptions are any letters that require a roll-call vote by law. In such
391 cases, the voting results may be appended to the letter as part of the closing paragraph,

392

393 Even if a matter passes by a narrow margin, that is not relevant to a letter. However,
394 board members should be aware that, in cases of split votes, there is a provision in our
395 bylaws for a minority report letter. (See Article VIII. VOTING, F. Minority reports)

396

397 Longer letters may benefit from a closing paragraph that wraps things up, contains polite
398 things like “Thank you for considering (whatever)...” and/or restates the conclusion of
399 the board as expressed in the letter. But usually there is no need for redundancy – and
400 shorter letters are always better than long ones.

401

402

403

404

405 **Conflict of Interest Statement**

406

407 If a vote for a letter included any who voted “present but not eligible to vote,” those
408 individuals must be listed at the end of the affected letter, in a sentence like this:

409 (exact wording to come)

410

411 **Executive Committee Statement**

412 (exact wording to come)

413 **Closing**

414

415 We simply say “Sincerely”. We generally do not say “Regards” , “Best Regards” or
416 “Thank You”

417

418 **Signature(s)**

419

420 Board letters are normally signed by the board chair, followed the committee chair(s) (in
421 alphabetical order). To save space, such signature can appear side by side, as follows:

422

423 Sincerely,

424

425 (signature)

426 Jean Daniel Noland

427 Chair

428 Manhattan

429 Community Board 4

(signature)

Christine Berthet

Co-Chair

Transportation Planning

Committee

(signature)

Jay Marcus

Co-Chair

Transportation Planning

Committee

430

431 Letters passed by the Executive Committee are signed by the chair only.

432

433 This is true no matter who actually wrote the letter – board letters, one approved by the
434 board, are the opinion of the board, not individuals.

435

436 When letters are presented to the board, the signers can be identified by their last names
437 only, as in “Noland, Berthet, Marcus” and board staff can fill in the complete form - but
438 be kind to our overworked staff. It takes maybe 30 seconds to fill in this information
439 completely. Signatures are generally applied as images by board staff. Chairs of
440 committees should make sure staff have bitmapped (jpg or whatever) images of their
441 signatures on file in the office.

442

443 In any event, letters submitted to the board for voting should have some clue as to who
444 the signers are (but not necessarily who actually wrote the letter). Signature will be added
445 if and when letter has been approved by the board

446

447

448 **List of Enclosures (if any)**

449

450 Following the signatures, list any enclosures as follows:

451

452 Encl: Whatever it is

453 Something else

454

455 It may be appropriate in certain letters, especially sidewalk café approval letters, to
456 remind applicants of certain regulations or laws such as sidewalk marking requirements,
457 regulations regarding storm enclosures or so forth, and, as a courtesy, provide an extract,
458 or extracts, in one or more appendices to the letter. In such cases:

459 1. Any such laws or regulations should be properly identified both within the letter
460 and in the appendix containing the extract.

461 2. The appendix listing the extract(s) should further be identified as an appendix.

462 3. The appendix should be listed as part of the list of enclosures, in a form such as:

463 Encl: Appendix Regulation 123-456 – Marking Sidewalk Café Boundaries

464

465 Note: If this is done, it is important in the letter to make it clear that the attached laws or
466 regulations are provided as extracts – and as a courtesy only. They do not replace an
467 applicant’s responsibility to be fully aware of all laws and regulations relevant to an
468 applicant’s situation, not just the one(s) cited.

469

470 **Cc list**

471

472 Generally the list of Cc's will include one or more of the following, in the following
473 order:

474 1. The applicant, assuming the letter is not already addressed directly to the
475 applicant. Apps lawyer

476 2. Relevant elected officials.

477 a. Pecking order

478 3. Relevant government agencies other than any addressed directly in the letter.

479 4. Others, depending on the letter.

480

481 Writers of letters must list these by name so that the office staff, with the exception of
482 staff members who are certified mind readers, will know who to send the copies to.

483 Simply saying “the usual electeds” is not sufficient. It is true, however, that office policy,
484 to keep unnecessary paper usage and postage to a minimum, has been to not send paper
485 copies of all letters to electeds, but to send a PDF file instead. If you have reason to insist
486 that an actual paper copy is printed and mailed to particular electeds, please let the office
487 staff know.

488

489 (Please remember, also, that “electeds” is not a real word – it is CB vernacular or short
490 hand for “elected officials” – and should not appear in a CB letter.)

491

492

493 **Emphasis**

494

495 The use of underlining and/or **boldfacing** (**especially** both together) should be minimized
496 as much as possible, except for headings or when special emphasis is required. If a
497 sentence is clearly written and succinct, such emphasis should not be needed;
498 unnecessary emphasis appears to the reader as “shouting.” Indeed, it may be interpreted
499 by a reader as impolite or a sign that we believe the reader is ignorant or stubborn (even if
500 that is the case). Any CB letter will have the same effect, legally, with or without such
501 emphasis.

502

503 Generally boldfacing should be reserved for subject lines and headlines of divisions
504 within a long letter or document.

505

506 Underlining may be used to highlight a word that, due to the nature of the sentence or
507 subject, needs emphasis because the word in question is unusual or counter-intuitive.

508

509 As stated previously, however, the use of the underscore under the words approval, denial
510 and the like - in the first paragraph only, or where the board’s position is first stated - is
511 optional but may be helpful for officials and other readers who may scan the letter
512 quickly.

513

514 A case where underlining might be appropriate is a sentence such as “Contrary to
515 conventional wisdom, tree pits are not appropriate for use as pet de-watering holes”.

516

517 **Form of a Resolution**

518

519 If a resolution is called for, the form is very simple:

520

521 Whereas, yada yada; and

522 Whereas, yada yada; and

523 Whereas, yada yada; and

524 Whereas, yada yada;

525 Therefore, futza futza; and

526 Therefore, futza futza.

527 - OR -

528 Now, therefore, be it resolved that futza futza; and

529 Be it further resolved that futza futza.

530

531 The words “Whereas” and “Therefore” are capitalized and may optionally be boldfaced.

532

533 Long elaborate resolutions, with dozens of Whereas’s and Therefore’s, can easily become
534 tedious and sound like manifestos, and are inherently challenging or unfriendly, and can
535 have the unintended consequence of turning a reader off, especially if the topic is

536 contentious. A big exception, of course, are resolutions of appreciation or recognition for
537 an individual or organization.

538

539 A resolution also violates a basic premise of a letter, as defined above, that the position of
540 the board on any issue should be stated clearly in the first paragraph of a letter, and not
541 left to the end. That could be solved, however, by including the position in the name of
542 the resolution, such as: Resolution of Opposition to the Establishment of a Nuclear Power
543 Plant in Times Square.

544

545

546 **Format and Submission of Letters or Resolutions to the Office**

547

548 It is presumed that chairs of committees have access to a word processor such as
549 Microsoft Word or an equivalent. The office can accept any of the following file formats:

550 Filename.doc (MS Word or WordPerfect)

551 Filename.rtf (Rich Text Format, an optional format from many word
552 processors)

553 Filename.txt (Simple text, but with no formatting)

554 Others (to be listed here)

555

556 Generally our letters are formatted in Times New Roman using a point size of 11 or 12.

557

558 Page numbers, if needed, will be provided by the office as the writer may not be able to
559 accurately determine where pages will break when the letter is applied to CB4 letterhead.

560

561 Line numbers and Item numbers are added by the office for use at full board meetings or
562 other discussions, but are removed before the letter is sent.

563