

Manhattan Community Board Five

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Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Corey Johnson
Speaker
New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Speaker Johnson:

COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on our citizens, businesses, and the budget, leaving no area of our lives untouched. There remain many unknowns at present, particularly how we safely reopen and, ultimately, the long-term impact on New York City.

Community Board Five believes it is important to share with you, our elected officials, the issues that board members and members of our community have indicated are important to them. We hope our suggestions and concerns will help guide the actions and public policies that are adopted which will shape the future of our city.

Budget and Tax Base

CB5 recognizes that New York City is facing dire financial straits and we believe that innovative and bold solutions will be needed. There is a projected \$9 billion deficit in the city's FY2021 budget, along with a 22% unemployment rate and a significant loss of revenue. Prospects of long-term flight of residents to the suburbs will further strain the tax base as increasing taxes on a shrinking population could have a counterproductive outcome and devastating impact on the economy. As a result, CB5 believes it is necessary for New York City to obtain the largest possible federal and state economic support immediately. In addition, many new sources of revenue should be sought and the creation of corporate and government joint ventures should be explored to solve many of the issues and concerns discussed in this letter.

CB5 believes that more needs to be done to reduce current spending. CB5 supports and recognizes the need for 5-7% budget cuts across all agencies while recommending that such cuts do not undermine social services, housing and education. In addition, CB5 believes that other cost-cutting measures should be

pursued to ensure that city debt, which increased 132% from FY2000 to FY2019 does not continue to rise. Some of the suggestions for consideration include cuts to top-level salaries, renegotiation of union pension plans, a shift to open software, and the abolition of property tax exemptions for entities such as Madison Square Garden.

Finally, CB5 hopes that our elected officials will look at ways to engage the large number of unemployed individuals either through leveraging nonprofit and volunteer initiatives, offering either transportation or educational credits for study at local institutions and colleges or through the development of other creative solutions to employ these New Yorkers.

Restaurants, Theatres, Tourism and Related Businesses

CB5 is New York's center for shopping, bars, restaurants and other entertainment and it relies on these industries, along with small businesses for our district's vibrancy. These critical industries have been severely impacted by COVID-19 leaving many workers without employment and owners with struggling businesses.

CB5 supports initiatives such as open streets that would allow these businesses to reopen. CB5 also supports immediate efforts to investigate and move toward innovative solutions that have been used in other cities and countries to safely navigate the reopening of its restaurants, bars and other businesses.

CB5 is concerned that the Department of Small Businesses' \$49 million loan and grant program for small businesses impacted by pandemic has been depleted and has not been extended into the next fiscal year and beyond. While this program is appreciated for the assistance it provided, more is needed in order to ensure that small businesses survive. CB5 supports funding directed to the support of these small businesses that make up the very fabric of New York City.

Hospitals

CB5 is concerned by the closure and downsizing of hospital beds throughout the city and particularly those contiguous to our district. Since 2000, over twenty hospitals have closed across the New York City area. Most have been redeveloped as luxury residential real estate, depleting our hospital system of its capacity to adequately respond to an acute health care crisis.

Most recently, Mount Sinai Beth Israel, a local hospital that serves many in our community, moved to downsize from 500+ beds to 70 beds. During the pandemic, this hospital was required to make these soon-to-be downsized beds available for the many hundreds of COVID patients that needed them.

While CB5 has supported the expansion of telehealth and home visits as a substitution for hospital beds, we strongly believe such services are complementary to, not a replacement for, hospital-based care.

In order to ensure adequate beds for the future, CB5 would like to see research and regulation that peg the availability of hospital beds to city block population, as it is the mandate of good city planning. Both the State and the City should reject further hospital closures and ensure funding to support this capacity both through federal, state and local programs along with public/private partnerships.

As the current pandemic has demonstrated, New York City requires a robust and well-funded health system in order to protect all of its citizenry, whether insured or not. CB5 is concerned that hospitals lack

the necessary funding and look to our elected officials to adopt funding strategies that will keep current hospitals viable.

Real Estate and Housing

New York City has had a shortage of affordable housing for many years and the pandemic has only exacerbated the existing housing crisis. CB5 has been consistently on record for its support for safe and affordable housing. Accordingly, CB5 calls on our elected officials to create a unified plan, with appropriate funding, to ensure individuals and families do not become homeless when the current moratorium on eviction is lifted and that renters are protected from any unscrupulous practices. Whether these protections come through the re-engineering, expansion and funding of the one-shot deal program, the provision of legal counsel, and/or some other strategies should be of the utmost priority for the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

CB5 also calls on city policy makers to ensure that the real estate value chain, and not just renters, be considered when adopting public policies in respect of housing, property and real estate. While we support the rent holiday and non-eviction measure, landlords cannot be expected to fully shoulder the costs. Instead, CB5 supports the establishment of equitable policies with regards to all real estate actors to ensure that both renters and owners are treated fairly as strategies for housing and property are adopted.

Public Safety

Many of our members have reported feeling unsafe on our streets and are very concerned about public safety. Lack of pedestrians on the streets due to COVID-19 and curfew, encampments under darkened scaffolding and the perception of more homeless individuals in the district have heightened people's fears. CB5 would like to make our elected officials aware of this concern and ask that the NYPD along with DHS and their partners work together to ensure that crime remains historically low in our district. CB5 recommends the utilization of a volunteer workforce supplementing the enforcement of many quality of life issues.

Homelessness

The vulnerability of the homeless population has only been highlighted by the pandemic. While many of the homeless have been temporarily housed in hotels to quarantine, many more appear to have congregated in our district. Whether there are increased numbers of homeless in our district or not, this perception has caused many residents to highlight the need for additional support for homeless services along with mental illness and addiction services.

Accordingly, CB5 encourages the Department of Homeless Services and their partners to seek new ways of ensuring homeless New Yorkers receive safe housing along with supportive services and to ensure that cuts to this agency do not impact homeless housing and support.

As many congregate shelters have been closed due to the pandemic, and those residents moved into hotels throughout the district, CB5 would like to understand how this housing is being funded and how, when or if DHS has a plan to move from these hotels into other models.

Further, CB5 is concerned that financing for congregate shelters will completely disappear and asks that DHS promptly develop next steps to ensure funding when financing for the current model is no longer available.

Transportation

CB5 is on record as supporting the increase of bike lanes as well as the immediate implementation of open streets to facilitate reopening restaurants and bars. Nevertheless, CB5 fears that some advocates and public officials neglect to recognize that some level of car usage is inevitable for certain members of our community. CB5 would like to ensure that those who use automobiles, particularly those that are unable to easily access or use public transportation, be accommodated and that the adoption of public policies with respect to transportation reflect the necessity of some cars in our district.

CB5 contains many of the central transportation hubs in the city and is anxious to see the public resume use of public transportation. In order to assure users of the safety of public transportation, CB5 requests that the Department of Transportation share cleaning schedules and methodologies used for sanitizing the trains and buses. Further, CB5 asks that any changes in operating schedules be immediately communicated, with a particular emphasis on learning whether the subway will continue to be closed at night.

Open Streets

CB5 fully supports open streets as a means of reviving the city but is concerned that the administration will ultimately use this plan as a means to raise revenue through rental of public sidewalks. CB5 is opposed to such action.

Schools

CB5 is on record supporting the reduction of class size in our public schools and believes that this policy extends to remote learning. Current programs and services must be funded to ensure that students have the resources that are needed in order to allow for successful remote learning, which includes ensuring appropriate teacher-to-student ratio. When in-person classes resume, CB5 believes that class size should be further reduced to provide both a safe health and learning environment.

In addition, CB5 believes that a social worker must be funded for each school. Now more than ever, students need to have support from trained mental health personnel in order to cope with remote learning, social isolation and other issues that have arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, existing resources should be funneled to ensure that students and educators are provided the necessary resources to ensure they have a successful academic year. CB5 supports students' access to iPads, tutors and free broadband to ensure equity and believes that any cuts made by the DOE should be focused on backend support and administration rather than the front line teachers and social workers that work directly to educate our children.

Summer Youth Program

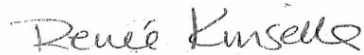
CB5 has recently passed a resolution calling for the reinstatement of the Summer Youth Employment program which keeps kids productively engaged during the summer months while providing participants with either an income or exchange for education tuition. CB5 does not believe it appropriate nor wise for cuts to be made to this program at this time.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this matter.

Sincerely,



Vikki Barbero
Chair



Renee Kinsella
Chair, Budget, Education and City Services

Cc: Borough President Gale Brewer
Hon. Brad Hoylman
Hon. Liz Krueger
Hon. Richard Gottfried
Hon. Carlina Rivera
Hon. Keith Powers