



The City of New York

# Manhattan Community Board 1

Julie Menin CHAIRPERSON | Noah Pfefferblit DISTRICT MANAGER

## **LMDC Public Forum**

*Testimony of Community Board 1 Chairperson, Julie Menin*

Over the past year, Community Board One had pressed LMDC to finally account for how much funds they had remaining. As the result of our demands, LMDC President David Emil presented at our World Trade Center Redevelopment Committee meeting in March 2010. At this time, we learned that approximately \$275 million was still unspent.

In the wake of this startling discovery, I waged a public battle, including OpEds in Crains and the Daily News, arguing that it was unacceptable to us that these funds had not yet been allocated and further, that the funds should be utilized to meet the pressing needs of Lower Manhattan rather than provide additional monies to Con Edison and other utility companies who had already received hundreds of millions of dollars in allocations from LMDC.

I was very grateful when my colleagues on the LMDC board voted to support my position in favor of allocating these funds to meet the critical needs in Lower Manhattan, in keeping with both the language of the law allocating these federal monies to LMDC and the legislative intent to help revitalize Lower Manhattan.

One of the needs for which the Community Board has fought is the allocation of \$100 million for the Performing Arts Center. This project would immediately create needed construction jobs as well as long-term jobs, which are critical in the economic climate our City faces, and would help to revitalize the Lower Manhattan neighborhood, which was the key legislative intent behind the Congressional allocation of federal monies to LMDC. For this reason, I led the charge to get utility money reallocated for this project. With the city facing 9.5% unemployment, job creation should be our top priority, and large infrastructure projects such as the Performing Arts Center can help meet that goal.

Beyond allocations to the Performing Arts Center and 9/11 Memorial, there will be significant funds still remaining at LMDC. I have stated at several LMDC board meetings and in a letter to Chairman Avi Schick dated September 7, 2010, the importance of allocating these funds through a public and transparent process involving a Request for Proposals (RFP). Only through such a public process can we solicit the best ideas for disbursing these funds and ensure that the public is involved in a meaningful way in this allocation of federal taxpayer money. And let me be clear: this hearing today should in no way be deemed a substitute for that public process.

What we cannot do is permit these monies to be allocated in a back room meeting with no public input or process in place. With the public distrust of government at an all time high, it is more important than ever that the public gets a transparent process. Federal taxpayer money should be allocated by clear standards through an RFP rather than for pet projects.

There are several other areas where there are pressing needs in Lower Manhattan. We need programs to retain currently affordable housing units in our district and develop additional ones

to enable us to enhance and preserve the demographic diversity characteristic of this area and prized by our residents.

We also need funds to shore up our small businesses, which were devastated by the loss of tens of thousands of jobs based at the World Trade Center and are still struggling to overcome adverse impacts caused by major reconstruction projects underway throughout the district and the challenging state of the economy.

There are numerous worthy projects related to waterfront development, affordable housing, education, parks, business attraction, community services and many other areas. That is precisely why LMDC should issue an RFP.

This is an opportunity we must not squander. We must seek out the ideas and projects that will address these needs, and the best way to do that is by utilizing a transparent, public process through which the private sector can submit proposals and the "best and the brightest" ideas can be considered and evaluated.

Thank you.