



The City of New York

Queens Community Board 11

Serving the Communities of Auburndale, Bayside, Douglaston, Hollis Hills
Little Neck and Oakland Gardens

Michael Budabin Chairperson / Joseph Marziliano District Manager

TO: All Board Members

**FROM: Victor Dadras, Transportation
Committee Chair**

DATE: May 14, 2020

**RE: MTA Bus Redesign Plan
Snow Plowing Procedures
Open Streets Initiative**

On Wednesday, May 13, 2020, a meeting of the CB11 Transportation Committee was convened. The meeting was conducted via Zoom teleconference. Present during the meeting were Michael Budabin, Board Chair, Christine Haider, 1st Vice Chair, Victor Dadras, 2nd Vice Chair and Committee Chair, Henry Euler, 3rd Vice Chair, Board Members Laura James, Carmen Collado, Stephan Popa, John Kelly, Christina Scherer, Ben Turner, Eileen Miller, Akshar Patel, Rob Liatto, Mary Donahue, Allan Palzer and Community Committee Member, David Schachner. CB11 District Manager, Joseph Marziliano and staff members Christina Coutinho and Jane Bentivenga were also in attendance. Representatives from our local elected officials joined the meeting as well: David Noh from CM Grodenchik's office and Klay Plakas from AM Braunstein's office. Also joining the meeting were residents Joby Jacob and Beryl Bush-Bain. NYC Department of Transportation personnel Andrew Arcese, and Craig Chin and NYC Department of Sanitation Community Affairs representative, Steve Caruso attended on behalf of their respective agencies.

Victor Dadras began the meeting by thanking all who were in attendance despite all the hardship that is occurring in this unprecedented time.

MTA BUS REDESIGN PLAN

Mr. Dadras introduced the topic of the MTA Bus Redesign. He asked Akshar Patel for an update. Mr. Patel stated that this issue has been postponed due to the current shutdown. Things are currently at a standstill. Meetings will be scheduled before any movement on the plan takes place. He will update the Board as soon as he hears anything. Mr. Dadras noted that the Community Board's input will be vital as the State and City budgets are reduced.

SNOW PLOW ISSUES

Mr. Dadras stated that Community Board 11 wrote a letter to the Department of Sanitation (DSNY) two years ago regarding some issues with snow plow procedures. Their reply stated these are DSNY policies that cannot be changed. A follow-up letter from CB11's Transportation and Environmental Committees was sent requesting DSNY revisit these issues. Mr. Dadras recognized several committee members to explain their issues. Mr. Euler said there is concern regarding damage that has been done to the malls; damage to concrete and to plantings. John Kelly stated that he has seen plows being operated at high rates of speed. Residents have been hit by flying snow and even knocked down on occasion. He also said that the last time DSNY addressed the Board, it was advised that in the event of a lawsuit regarding an issue with snow being plowed back onto a previously-cleared property, a photo should be taken of the cleared property before DSNY plowed it back onto sidewalk. Beryl Bush-Bain spoke about how hours of work clearing a property (she lives on a corner) can be undone in seconds by a plow throwing snow back onto a sidewalk. She has personally been hit by snow and ice from a passing plow. This has also happened to senior citizens. Mary Donahue spoke of how some people are forced to walk out into the street. This creates a dangerous situation for a lot of children who attend St. Kevin's Academy in Auburndale. She suggested that the snow be pushed to the end of the center malls in the area and then removed with a dump truck. She also spoke of the high rates of speed some of these plows travel. Ms. Donahue voiced her concern with the damage that has been caused by plows to the concrete curbs on 46 Avenue between 192 Street and 195 Street. Lastly, she spoke about the salt spreaders killing shrubs and plants and damaging sidewalks. She stated that 23 shrubs that were planted by the 46 Avenue Beautification Group died which they had to replace at their own expense. She suggested the amount of salt used needs to be regulated to preserve the plants and concrete.

Steven Caruso, DSNY representative, began his response by reviewing the Department's snow operations. They now operate on a sector plan: critical sectors are done first and include highways, bus routes, first responder locations and schools. Residential sectors are serviced after that which are broken down into smaller, more concentrated areas. Routes have been designed so that they can be completed in two to four hours. CB11 is unique due to its larger area which can take a bit longer to complete (their goal is plow an area twice in one shift) and its "holster" routes, which are dead ends and very narrow streets. A holster is a pickup truck with a salt spreader on the back. All of their trucks are equipped with Magellan devices which provide turn-by-turn directions. All trucks also have GPS tracking. They are always looking to come up with newer ideas to improve service.

Mr. Caruso stated that DSNY policy has **NOT** changed. They still plow curb to curb and snow is plowed to the right. They cannot just change direction; it requires several workers and a forklift to install the plows onto the collection trucks. Snow cannot be plowed to the left as it would be plowed into oncoming traffic on two-way streets. Their Charter-mandated objective is to get as close to the curb as possible to clear bus lanes, parking lanes, bike lanes and facilitate for emergency services. He advised that residents always stand as far away as possible from a plow. Any damage (concrete or otherwise) should be reported for reimbursement. Mr. Marziliano interjected at this point to advise that a claim can be made to the NYC Comptroller's

office. Mr. Caruso continued that they try to work as quickly as possible. He stated that all drivers should be operating their vehicles at the speed limit. Speeding should be reported when seen. Due to some of the areas they must clear (such as highways), trucks need to be able to travel at 50 to 60 mph. The best way to report an individual speeding is by recording the truck ID number which will identify the driver. That way disciplinary action can be taken.

For the last three years, snow training has been done during the summer months to ensure all streets can be navigated properly, efficiently and safely. Their policy has to be same for the entire City. Different salt spreader settings can't be left up to the operator; the setting depends on the route the truck is covering. That is a Department decision. With reference to the piling of snow on malls and then removal, DSNY would need several types of trucks to achieve this. Everyone all over the City living on these types of streets would request this service. He does not believe it is feasible but he can make the recommendation.

Laura James commented that the date, day, time and location of the occurrence should be sufficient to report an incident. Mr. Caruso responded that if there was more than one truck on a particular day in an area (which often happens), getting the identifying truck number is best. Beryl Bush-Bain commented that curb-to-curb plowing causes the snow to go onto sidewalks especially in areas without a grassy strip between the street and the sidewalk. (Her house is located on a corner with a "No Standing" zone.) Mr. Caruso stated the driver should be using discretion by going slower. Mr. Caruso suggested waiting to shovel until the snow has stopped falling and DSNY has made one pass on the street if possible. Ms. Bush-Bain requested that he address this issue further. Christine Haider added that she lives near a school on 189 Street. Snow is piled at the end of 58 Avenue. It is then hauled away. This has been done. She also mentioned that many times a plow comes and moves the snow across a driveway apron requiring additional shoveling which can be a hardship for many. John Kelly inquired about DSNY's use of Bladerunner software and commented that if they tracked the speed of these vehicles, residents would not have to get the truck information. Mr. Kelly expressed that residents should not have to deal with these situations. He feels that DSNY is not reasonable and feels residents should be respected. Mr. Caruso said that is something the Department can do and added that the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) has the ability to monitor speeds on the City's fleet. He feels that is a good suggestion and he will discuss this issue further during snow operations meetings. At this point, Mr. Dadras said CB11 was not asking for a change in DSNY's policies but a better understanding of their operations in this part of Queens. He also asked if residents have input into who makes these policies. Mr. Caruso is not aware of anything like that. Mr. Kelly asked who sets their policies so that the Board could continue this conversation in a few months. Mr. Caruso replied that it is probably a combination of DSNY, City Hall and legislation. He will check and advise the Board. Stephan Popa inquired if metal could be installed to protect malls/curbs. Andrew Arcese from NYCDOT commented he was not sure what the criteria were. However, Craig Chin, also from NYCDOT, stated this is done for wide streets and high volume installations (such as Northern Blvd.), not residential streets.

One last thing Mr. Caruso wanted everyone to be aware of is that DSNY has had some severe budget cuts. During this pandemic, there is a lot of personal protective equipment all over the streets. He asked that everyone please discard these items properly.

OPEN STREETS INITIATIVE

Mr. Dadras shared a Power Point Presentation he prepared regarding the Open Street Initiative. This is a plan to create more space for people to social distance during the current pandemic. It is in conjunction with the Mayor's Office, the City Council, NYPD, NYC Parks, NYCDOT, local Business Improvement Districts and civic organizations. This is an opportunity to identify and suggest streets that can be used by pedestrians and cyclists in this time of social distancing. Some of the sidewalks in CB11 are only five feet wide. The community would partner with NYCDOT. Bus, truck or emergency routes cannot be included. The hours this can be in effect are between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. The City is looking for community-based organizations to sponsor and manage these locations. Mr. Dadras spoke about the streets near P.S. 94 and P.S.98. He feels that if streets near these schools are included, when school re-opens, it will allow for greater social distancing.

Andrew Arcese thanked Mr. Dadras for his comprehensive presentation. He said that these streets can operate one day a week, several days a week or weekends only. The NYPD will assist with the management as well in some areas. Six hours per day or longer is encouraged.

Benjamin Turner said this initiative makes a great deal of sense from many aspects: the current need for social distancing and another transportation option. A network of open streets would be a great benefit for the area. Stephan Popa feels that 35 Avenue heading east into Crocheron Park could be a possible site. Joe Michael's Mile can be accessed from this area via the overpass across the Cross Island Parkway. Victor Dadras and Eileen Miller said the local civic should be contacted. Mrs. Miller also added that the Bayside Hills Civic Association is not interested. Discussion ensued regarding the recommendations by civic associations. Andrew Arcese stated that not every street will require a partner; however, it is highly encouraged. Mr. Dadras again mentioned the positive opportunity this initiative presents. He asked that members and residents confer with their neighbors, civics etc. and email their suggestions to him, Mr. Budabin and Mr. Marziliano. John Kelly said there needs to be a better, more comprehensive vision. Eileen Miller said we should to speak to the Bayside BID. Rob Liatto added that this type of thing should not be forced onto residents. Contacting civic associations is essential for individual neighborhoods. Mr. Turner disagreed. He said the current situation will probably being going on through the fall. People have said open streets could be an imposition. He feels not being able to get around safely is an imposition as well. Michael Budabin spoke about the City's response to the pandemic and the issues of transportation. Moving forward, if someone has positive comments and suggestions, please send an email to Victor Dadras with a copy to him and Joe Marziliano with a specific suggestion that is appropriate for this program. The Board can determine if there is a local civic or others representing that area to contact.

Mrs. Haider thanked Eileen Miller for checking with her civic association. She also thanked Robert Liatto and agrees that this initiative should not be forced upon any street. Mrs. Haider inquired as to how soon an open street can be implemented after it is requested. Mr. Arcese said it does have to go through a vetting process but should only take a few weeks. Mr. Euler feels that community residents that will be directly affected should have input. He feels several issues need to be addressed as this initiative moves along. Mr. Marziliano questioned residential access to driveways especially for senior citizens and people with disabilities. Mr. Arcese stated barriers are moveable. Mr. Dadras said local access is required to be maintained at all times.

John Kelly mentioned an increase in speeding and drag racing as the streets have become emptier. Mr. Arcese said that the speed camera program is still expanding and they also conduct mobile speed enforcement. Of course, the NYPD continues to enforce speeding as well.

Mrs. Haider made a motion to adjourn. Mrs. Miller seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted 5/15/2020