

March 5, 2004

Hon. Michael Bloomberg
Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Statement on the Preliminary Budget, Fiscal Year 2005

Dear Mayor Bloomberg:

Thank you for the opportunity to review your Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2005. Manhattan Community Board No. 4 examined the budget carefully and while we find areas of agreement, we view others with concern.

We recognize the impact of the current fiscal crisis on the City and understand that cuts have to be made. We support your efforts to look for other revenue sources for the City, and in particular the initiative to reinstate the commuter tax. However, we are concerned that your decision to refund \$250 million to a segment of City taxpayers undermines policies that you have begun, particularly given the fact that your budget relies on \$300 million in supplemental funding from Albany and \$400 million in funds from Washington. We urge you to postpone any contemplated refund until after such funds are in hand.

While the administration should be commended for placing a high priority on achieving savings from managerial enhancements and efficiency, we are deeply concerned about some areas of basic public health delivery and human services where the budgetary paring will have dangerous consequences. As is so often the case, we are concerned that this will have a negative impact not only directly on the individuals, families and seniors who depend on these services but on the overall safety, stability, and quality of life in the larger community - and, ultimately, on future budgets, if dire needs are neglected now. To the extent that cuts are necessary, this Board considers the budget items related to human services to have the greatest significance and urges that they be cut as little as possible.

We also applaud your recent initiatives to focus once again on the desperate need for affordable housing in our community and the city as a whole. And, thank you for recognizing the important role of all community boards by preserving community board funding.

The Board's detailed agency comments follow.

Department of Youth and Community Development

The combined neighborhood of Chelsea/Clinton is home to more than 7,500 children under 18 years of age, more than 17 percent of whom receive public assistance. In our district, which ranked third in terms of reported abuse and neglect, only one quarter of the children eligible for public day care receive it and 1,200 children are uninsured, according to the Citizens Committee for Children of New York. There are extremely limited resources for safe recreation, cultural, and educational activities for youth of all ages.

In that light, Board No. 4 is extremely concerned about the impact of the current reorganization and consolidation of youth services under DYCD combined with the elimination from the proposed budget of allocations that were baselined in the '04 budget (and, therefore, constitute a cut). It is the understanding of the Board that the consolidation of services under one agency involves a loss of roughly \$15 million in funds for school-age child care alone, as well as other cuts to various youth related initiatives. Especially given the very limited resources allocated to youth services overall, the Board urges the city to undertake any consolidations or reorganizations with extreme caution, preserving core youth services infrastructure before increasing its focus on more specialized programs and initiatives. We also believe priority needs to be placed on maintaining the summer youth employment program at least at last year's level.

The Department of the Aging

While we are pleased that funding for senior services, as reflected in the proposed budget, is overall relatively stable, we note with continued alarm that core funding for senior programs - and most especially wages for workers in that area - have been disastrously neglected for many years. There is no doubt that this is placing severe strain on the capacity of providers to address the needs of this vulnerable population with responsive services of minimally adequate quality. It is especially unacceptable to try to maintain services at the expense of creating a new group of working poor among those who provide such services and we again urge the city to look seriously at the need for attention to this matter. In addition, while we appreciate and support the need for innovation as needs evolve, we urge the city to move with caution in implementing changes - as has been proposed with regard to the delivery of homebound meals - without fully identifying and addressing the multiple impacts of these changes.

Administration for Children's Services

Increases in child care fees, as has been proposed, can add an impossible burden on families already under enormous financial pressure and only jeopardizes their ability to maintain and increase their financial independence or forces them into sub-standard and dangerous alternative care situations.

Department of Homeless Services

Homelessness has long been and continues to be a major factor in our Board area; we also have productively welcomed numerous and varied homelessness related services to our district. We are concerned that the proposed budget seems to cut funding in precisely those service components directed to preventing homelessness and assuring a successful transition out of homelessness, both of which seem critical to any substantive solution to this problem. For example, we urge restorations to the adult rental assistance program; the anti-eviction and SRO legal services programs, which provide free legal services to low- and moderate-income people faced with eviction from their homes, as well as services for low-income Single Room Occupancy housing tenants; and aftercare services, which prevent families placed in permanent housing from returning to shelters.

New York Public Library

Use of our public library continues to expand particularly now in the age of computers. Since 1994 attendance has increased 35% and circulation 40%. In New York City 90% of all public access computers are in libraries. The unlimited freedom and personal growth a book gives a child or adult to travel anywhere geographically or in time, through imagination or another person's experience cannot be matched. Access to our public libraries by our children, elderly and families is the best value for the dollar that the City can find. Libraries enhance the

educational experience.

To permit the library system to continue to provide its vital services, CB4 urges the following changes in the Budget for FY 2005:

1. Additional funding to increase library materials to meet the demands in the branch and research libraries and to offset the impact of inflation;
2. Provide funds for sufficient levels of building and technology maintenance and security to protect the City's investment in computers and electronic information resources;
3. Funding to complete the phase-in of the CLASP program;
4. Make library salaries competitive in order to attract and retain the services of valued individuals;
5. Expand Library's website content in key areas including health, job and homework information; and
6. Provide additional technology training.

However, the Preliminary Budget proposes an additional 5.25% cut resulting in a total cut since 2003 of \$21.7 million. This plus the State cuts add up to \$23 million. These additional cuts will force one third of Manhattan branches to go to four days of service.

There is no doubt that Manhattan residents love their branch libraries.

§ Manhattan branches have long been some of the most heavily used in the City, with over 4.4 million recorded visits to our branches in FY03.

§ Over the last fiscal year, 192,909 Manhattan residents attended 11,037 branch library programs – including lectures, book discussions and puppet and magic shows.

§ The Summer Reading program in Manhattan experienced record levels of participation in 2003 – a 47% increase from 2002.

§ In FY03 over 111,000 children in Manhattan attended public programs, including toddler times, preschool story programs and picture book hours.

We request that if libraries are kept to a five day schedule, or even reduced to four days, one of the serviced days should be a Saturday, and if possible the second evening reinstated to provide for accessibility to those working a conventional week.

We also strongly urge that there be no cuts to the capital budget, which would result in deferring a significant portion of every capital project that is not fully funded or designed until FY 06.

Department of Cultural Affairs

The Preliminary Budget proposes a drastic reduction in the City's Cultural Affairs spending, which was already dramatically reduced in the previous fiscal year. The Preliminary Budget for FY 05 reduces the cultural affairs budget by over 25% from FY 02. These cuts will adversely affect small institutions, many of which are located in the Board 4 area, and larger institutions in the City as well. However, the larger institutions have greater capabilities for raising private funds than the smaller institutions. Needless to say, any cuts will result in less accessibility to these resources, a decrease in services to school children, a loss of jobs, etc. It will also harm the City's economy since our vibrant cultural life is a major attraction to visitors.

Department of Education

The Department of Education is the largest youth service agency in New York City, providing free primary and secondary school education to more than one million students. It also offers an array of necessary support services including meals, safety, recreation, guidance, health and transportation. For children from low-income or troubled families these services are not frills, they are essential to child development. Cuts to these services should not be made.

CB4 is concerned that problems of overcrowded classrooms, school safety, need for additional schools, aid for

special education and dealing with at risk students are not adequately addressed by this budget. Our Board is also concerned with the following issues involving the lack of adequate funding for:

1. The hiring and retention of certified teachers to replace the thousands who will be retiring;
2. Making salaries competitive with surrounding communities to attract and retain the best;
3. The deteriorating infrastructures of school buildings, particularly where plans are being made to use schools year-round;
4. Upgrading electrical systems in order to use computers and
5. Additional security within schools.

With the new regulations set forth by the Chancellor, which demand that that there be uniform lessons given in all public schools, adequate provisions for updated books and supplies must be made available.

CB4 opposes the use of public funds to provide for private management of ailing public schools. Studies have shown that where private managers such as Edison Schools have taken over schools, there has been no measurable improvement. In fact, while all aspects of the functioning of a public school under the Department of Education must be made available for public scrutiny – test scores, expenditure of funds, etc. – such accountability does not extend to Edison Schools.

Police Department

We commend the continuing reduction, through the truly exemplary efforts of the NYPD, of crime in the city. We are concerned, however, with the reduced number of officers at our precincts, which remain below full strength despite increased demands for safety and security in District 4. The increasing number of nightclubs and bars in our District has placed extra demands on all three of our precincts, especially on the 10th Precinct. Terrorism concerns have increased the workload for officers, especially at the Midtown North Precinct. We welcome the city matching funds associated with the hire of 730 new federally funded police officers and urge that our District's needs be considered in their deployment.

CB4 neighborhoods have a pressing need for increased enforcement of many laws and regulations related to the safety sidewalks and streets. More vigorous enforcement of violations including speeding and bicycle traffic on sidewalks needs to be adequately planned for in this budget.

We also support a continuing emphasis on traffic enforcement efforts, and urge that more traffic enforcement officers be assigned specifically to address conditions in residential areas where many side streets appear to have become arteries of the Interstate Highway System. Trucks and charter buses are increasing avoiding traffic by racing through narrow residential streets, often speeding and failing to yield the right of way to pedestrians. Side streets signed as no parking or no standing zones have become free parking lots for black cars and limos, trucks and charter buses, all of which often idle intolerably beyond permitted time. Extra traffic enforcement personnel are needed to address these illegal, unhealthy, and dangerous conditions.

Department of Transportation

The management and maintenance of streets and sidewalks remain important priorities of CB4. Our neighborhoods are the focus of major redevelopment plans proposed by this Administration. We emphasize the considerable opportunities these plans present for good planning to control and reduce traffic, for improving the quality of life in our neighborhoods, and for creating a better and healthier pedestrian environment. We continue to urge an increase in enforcement.

Funds for Sustainable Transportation Planning: Two major rezonings are currently in development that will bring many new residents and businesses to the CB4 area, which is already plagued by some of the worst automotive congestion in New York City. As rezoning plans move forward, CB4 emphasizes the need for funds to plan innovative initiatives for infrastructure and programming that will prioritize the use of mass transit and non-motorized transportation options for commuting and discretionary travel to and within the CB4 area, while at the same time discouraging and reducing private automotive travel to and within our district.

Capital Funds for Safety Improvements: Capital funds should be prioritized to more aggressively address some of the pressing basic infrastructure improvements necessary to keep our district safe: accessible pedestrian signals; traffic-calming devices, such as speedbumps and raised crosswalks; bicycle lanes; sidewalk widenings; and other measures that will improve safety for pedestrians, transit-users, cyclists, and drivers.

Expense Funds for Street Maintenance: The heavy traffic and rapid pace of residential and business development in the CB4 area takes a heavy toll on our streets. The board appreciates the active efforts of DOT to maintain acceptable street conditions, but more frequent assessments by inspectors and speedier crew dispatchment are needed.

Sidewalk Maintenance and Enforcement: Sidewalk obstructions, such as cafes that sprawl beyond their permitted boundaries, illegally placed newspaper boxes, scaffolding that violates city regulation with protruding bolts, and violations by public pay telephone operators and newsstand operators that create obstacles and visual clutter on our sidewalks are a constant problem in our district, requiring additional funding. In addition, the inspection and enforcement of sidewalk repair violations is woefully inadequate. Recent changes regarding the way sidewalk-related liability is assigned do little to speed up the repair of dangerously uneven, and in some cases, collapsing sidewalks. Funds must be directed to a department within DOT to coordinate with DCA and DOB rigorous enforcement of regulations that ensure safe, unobstructed pedestrian movement on our sidewalks.

Traffic Control Signage: We urge a budget increase to provide for the manufacture and installation of more adequate traffic control signage. This is particularly true of mixed residential and commercial areas such as Chelsea and Clinton within the CB4 geographical area. Among repeated violations more frequent signage would help curb, are horn blowing, illegal vehicle idling, trucks on residential streets, failure to yield right of way to pedestrians, illegal parking, speeding, etc.

Department of Parks and Recreation

The completion of the Hudson River Park remains one of the Board's highest priorities. As has been the case for the past several years, funding (\$100 million each from the City and the State) is not sufficient to complete the park. We understand that the monies to complete the Clinton segment are secure, but most of the Chelsea segment, from the Gansevoort Peninsula to 26th Street, remains unfunded. We urge the City, in concert with the State, to commit the additional \$200 million needed to finish this project. Hudson River Park, when done, will provide much needed high quality open space for our neighborhoods as well as all of New York's citizens and visitors alike, will yield tax benefits for the City, and is already spearheading the revitalization of the entire west side of Manhattan.

Within the park, several areas need special attention. Pier 97, while designed, cannot be constructed until the DOS garage at 57th Street is completed. Therefore, it is imperative that the garage construction move forward quickly. A new home for the tow pound at Pier 76 must be identified soon, whether as part of the new plan for Hell's Kitchen South and the rail yards, or, as has been suggested by this Board in the past, by privatizing the tow pound operation among several existing parking facilities. And a plan to relocate the Department of Sanitation operation on Gansevoort Peninsula to a new facility, currently stalled, must be finalized as soon as possible so as to permit Gansevoort Peninsula to be developed as one of the largest open areas within Hudson River Park. Finally, now that the Hudson River Park Trust is evaluating proposals for Pier 57, we want to reiterate here that the community's preference among the respondents will be for the one that is park-compatible and provides a substantial amount of public open space in its plans.

Beyond Hudson River Park, this Board hopes that the progress on the rebuilding of Hell's Kitchen Park and the eastern end of Chelsea Park continues apace. We also encourage the city to move forward quickly on the reconstruction of the 59th Street Recreation Center. And, as always, we urge the City to seek additional parcels of property, however small, that may be available for conversion to park use within the district using the Department of Parks & Recreation's Greenstreets and Greenthumb programs.

While we recognize that vital city services such as police, fire, sanitation, transportation, and social services must remain high priorities, the role of parks as both important contributors to the health, sanity, and quality of life of New Yorkers as well as economic catalysts for the surrounding communities cannot be ignored.

Department of Housing Preservation & Development

HPD plays a leading role in preserving and expanding affordable housing in the Board 4 area. This continues to be an area of prime importance to our Board. We urge an increase for code enforcement activities.

The Board 4 district continues to witness tenant harassment, and we must emphasize the importance of increasing HPD's ability to inspect and enforce its regulations in CB4 and everywhere in the City where tenant harassment takes place. We also strongly urge that efforts be made to better coordinate enforcement of regulations between HPD and the Department of Buildings in the interests of efficiency.

It is crucial that the city work to maintain housing affordability through retention and support of Mitchell-Lama programs, Section 8 and other subsidized programs.

Additionally, the City should step up its collection of fines levied by HPD for code violations, which could add significant funds to the budget. We suggest that some of these funds be earmarked for code enforcement or rehabilitation of affordable housing and that more funds be dedicated for low-cost financing for building rehabilitation.

The current 80-20 formula used in most new housing construction ignores the needs of middle-income families who are essential to healthy, stable neighborhoods, but who are forced to leave their neighborhoods in search of affordable housing. This formula does not adequately address the needs of the vast number of New York's low income and working families displaced by gentrification and a poorly performing affordable housing market. We are delighted with the administration's initiative to seek new and creative approaches to the development of affordable housing and look forward to actively participating in the implementation of these plans within our area. We are especially pleased that the plan includes a middle income component.

Previously, the Board has recommended specific targeting of housing funds over multiple budget years for construction of affordable housing in the Board area, particularly in the Hell's Kitchen/Hudson Yards and West Chelsea areas. The funds must be used to balance the development pressures on the low, moderate and middle income population engendered by the administration's other initiatives to spur commercial and residential development along the Westside from 14th to 42nd Streets in the far western reaches of the Board area.

The Board has gone one step further this year, by articulating specific targets for the proportion of new housing that should be targeted at particular income bands. The Board has an overall goal that 30% of new housing units should be below market rate. Inclusionary housing and 80/20 housing will be insufficient to meet the housing needs of many of our residents who will not be able to afford market rate housing as this area develops, but whose incomes exceed the limits for these programs.

Since both the 421(a) and Inclusionary Housing Bonus programs are targeted only to low income citizens, the Board urges that the City's other programs include flexibility that would allow the overall achievement of our stated goals. This logic would apply to New HOP, the Brownfield Program, and the development of government-owned sites.

We therefore request that the City make a commitment to use additional programs and resources to generate additional non-market-rate housing in order to meet our goal. These additional units should be mixed income housing that is available to people with the range of incomes detailed below:

- § 20% of the units should be available to people with incomes up to a maximum of 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI);
- § 50% of the units should be available to people with incomes up to a maximum of 125% of AMI; and
- § 30% of the units should be available to people with incomes up to a maximum of 165% of AMI.

At the same time, funding provided by HPD to local community-based organizations that perform a broad range of tenant and owner assistance, anti-abandonment and housing preservation activities must be maintained, given the essential role of these programs (especially the Community Consultant Program and the Neighborhood Preservation Consultant Program) in preservation of the fragile existing stock of such housing.

New York City Housing Authority

More attention must be paid to the tenants living in New York City Housing Authority developments. More personnel, funds and police intervention must be made available to address persistent problems of security, drug dealing, gangs, graffiti, garbage storage and collection, and cleanliness.

Department of Buildings

Of equal importance to HPD is the Department of Building's ability to provide a level of code enforcement necessary to protect existing low-income housing stock. More inspectors are needed to ensure compliance with zoning bulk and use requirements in order to preserve community character at a time when self-certification is being more widely depended on, and we note with regret that the preliminary budget provides for no increase in DOB staff. Funds are also needed to train plan inspectors including training on the zoning regulations applicable to special districts. These points were emphasized in the Board's Expense & Capital Budget Request (November 6, 2003), and are not addressed in the Preliminary Budget.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



Walter Mankoff
Chair

This letter was approved at Manhattan Community Board No. 4's March 3, 2004 full board meeting.

cc: C. Virginia Fields, Manhattan Borough President
Christine Quinn, Councilmember
Gale Brewer, Councilmember
Mark Page, Director of OMB