

BOROUGH PRESIDENT RUBEN DIAZ JR.



BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD DISTRICT MANAGERS TASKFORCE ON DISTRICT OFFICE MANAGEMENT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The formation of this Taskforce is to reflect on ways we can individually contribute to our communities and assist in serving the borough's 1.4 million residents. The fundamental belief is that, together, we can work towards building a better borough and a stronger city. Community boards are a great place for community residents to help shape that agenda.

Community Boards, however, have historically lacked the resources and capacity to fulfill their community planning role in a consistently meaningful way. Community Boards can provide the basis for a comprehensive and structured approach to all levels of service delivery and land use planning within community districts.

In light of the strong emphasis on constituent services in other parts of government, the community boards' unique role in facilitating local planning has become more important.

Therefore, the formation of the taskforce and its recommendations on improving Community Board efficiency is both timely and necessary.

II. HISTORY OF COMMUNITY BOARDS

Community boards were established in the mid-twentieth century as part of a movement to ensure community based planning and to decentralize power in New York City's government. As early as the 1940's, civic and community groups had called for a locally based form of government to provide a mechanism for greater community planning and balance in City government. In 1951, the first prototype of today's community boards was developed. A total of twelve "Community Planning Councils" were established to advise the Mayor on local planning and budgetary matters. These modest beginnings marked the start of New York City's rich tradition of community based planning.

It should be noted that:

- In 1963, the City Charter was revised to adopt a neighborhood governance concept.
- In 1965, Mayor John V. Lindsay sought to emphasize community empowerment and proposed a system of mini-city halls to be opened in communities throughout the City.
- In 1975, voters by referendum approved a revised City Charter to establish the current community board system.
- Additional charter revisions in 1986 and again in 2010, recommended funding, staff increases and greater input on land use matters.

Community boards possess a wide range of responsibilities under the City Charter, including planning and zoning, oversight and monitoring of service delivery, budget analysis, capital needs, public outreach, information dissemination and other functions. One of their central roles is to analyze and make recommendations concerning land use action within their boundaries and through the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure. In addition, community boards are empowered to create comprehensive community development plans under Section 197-a of the Charter.

While developing this report the Taskforce examined the following:

- Service delivery and how community boards can leverage these developments to improve oversight, execution and equity.
- Technology advancements.
- Streamlining policies.
- Developing common strategies on issues that concern each board and the Bronx Borough as a whole.

III. SERVICE DELIVERY

Community Boards often negotiate and succeed in bringing needed services and service improvements to their neighborhoods, such as new parks, enhanced business and employment opportunities, youth, senior and immigrant service programs. The Boards actively engage in the establishment of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Local Development Corporations (LDCs) which supplement and invigorate the economic life of the community.

Community Boards provide personalized case management services and monitors the delivery of municipal services to the community. This is the heart of the community board's core responsibilities.

The Taskforce recommends:

A. CHARTER REFERENDUM

The Borough President and Bronx Council Delegation should initiate a charter referendum to amend the Charter sections 2704. Part a 1-2; Part c; 2707 and 2708.

With the establishment of the Department of Education (DOE) under Mayoral control, it is necessary for the DOE to be represented at the District Service Cabinet meetings to learn and assess departmental policies and their impact upon the community. This also holds true for the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), whose policies and sitings of contracted facilities often bring quality of life concerns that may affect neighborhood stability.

The Taskforce suggests a modification of the City Charter to include city agencies that either did not exist at the time of the Charter revisions or have recently come under city governance such as:

- Department of Education (DOE)
- The community boards would like to work as a team with DOE and create a detailed matrix by which the community boards receive notice of all school closings, charter schools establishments, school site identification, community growth, public safety and health issues in advance of the public.
- Department of Homeless Services
- The community boards would like to work as a team with DHS and create a detailed matrix by which the community boards would be notified of the location of new proposed

homeless shelters, new cluster housing proposals, contracted programs in our communities and issues concerning public notification procedures in advance of the public.

B. NEIGHBORHOOD ECONOMIC RESOURCES SURVEY (NERS)

In order to provide sound advice on socio-economic development matters, the Taskforce recommends that Community Boards implement Neighborhood Economic Resources Surveys (NERS). NERS is a useful tool in implementing economic development projects and addressing social concerns. NERS is a process by which Community Boards, due to our capacity constraints rely on external resources to collect data and analyze it.

NERS is an organizational way of processing collected data order to address existing conditions and embark on local initiatives to promote community outreach, public safety, and business development initiatives with the assistance of academic institutions, community groups, agencies, entrepreneurs and other professional experts.

C. COMMUNICATION OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The Taskforce, in response to recent natural disaster situations, examined the need to enhance interagency communication involving the Community Boards during emergencies. As the Office of Emergency Management, (OEM) continues to decentralize their emergency service delivery system by working with the Borough President's office; the agency should develop strategic alliances with the Community Board to broaden their outreach and to take advantage of local expertise.

The Community Boards would like to enhance their relationship with OEM to work closely with our Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) Teams, in order to advocate for ongoing recruitment and training for volunteers.

D. 311

Community Board responsibilities and oversight regarding complaints has been modified since the creation of 311 in 2003.

The Taskforce recommends to the Mayor's Office of Operations, that a direct connection to 311 with a dedicated Community Board Operator be created to exclusively handle Community Board calls to 311 directly. In addition, the system should simultaneously alert the appropriate agency and relevant Community Board with specific data regarding the complaint locations and the types of service calls received, and summaries that contain description of the resolutions.

This would require expanding access to the City's Intranet system. This way the Community Board could pinpoint service trends within their areas of concern and use their knowledge of the community to assist agencies in developing strategies to overcome problems, monitor service delivery and better target resources.

E. COMNET

The Taskforce recommends Community Boards use the Center on Municipal Government Performance's Computerized Neighborhood Environment Tracking program or ComNet a handheld system that allows the user to survey information about street level conditions. The information collected on this device would produce reports electronically and maybe uploaded for agency response or interoffice data collection.

ComNet could be useful in addressing quality of life complaints at District Service Cabinet meetings to track how conditions changed over time. This would be the next step in enhancing and monitoring service delivery. As stated on ComNET's webpage the system serves to enhance government's information about existing street level conditions and problems. It would provide [Community Boards and agencies] with street level information in useful, new ways: by street, block, agency jurisdiction, condition and local neighborhood.

ComNET reports would enable [Community Boards] to formulate more efficient approaches to ameliorate frequently observed problems in nearby locations at the same time, instead of responding in a sporadic fashion as individual complaints are registered. ComNET's consistent, verifiable reports and digital images help agencies determine strategies for remedying reported conditions including strategies involving interagency coordination and cooperation.

F. INTERNET QUORUM DESKTOP SOLUTIONS

Desktop Solutions is software that streamlines data collection to assist in constituent services to produce mail merges, spreadsheets, queries, scheduling and allows document scanning capability.

The Taskforce recommends that the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications install Internet Quorum Desktop Solutions at all Community Board Offices.

G. LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

Currently, the Department of Buildings can be denied access to a property by the owner or occupant for inspection purposes. The Taskforce recommends that legislative initiatives amending the Administrative Code and the Rules and Regulations of the City of New York to do the following be pursued:

- Develop policy and procedures inclusive of fine structures, to ensure the Department of Buildings has access to properties for inspections, especially when there are public safety concerns.
- For the Department of Homeless Services, each Community Board should receive a 30-day notice for the placement of any private/public shelter facility including cluster sites, contracted facilities and expansion of existing facilities in a given Community Board. The Board, at its discretion, hold a public hearing on the facility and submit its recommendation before the contracts are finalized with DHS. The host Community

Board should be notified of any changes made in contracts with the operators of these facilities.

IV. LAND USE

A. DEDICATED BOARD PLANNERS

Community Boards require the technical assistance of planners in the development of community based planning projects. These planning initiatives all require skilled professionals to conduct the research, outreach and identify development issues that will allow Community Boards to properly articulate and translate proposed plans to the community.

The Community Boards currently have access to the Department of City Planning staff liaisons. However, these planners are often guided by city planning policies which may not always be in line with the current needs and vision of the community boards.

The Taskforce recommends dedicated planners, per board, to assist them in fulfilling their Charter responsibilities such as:

- Technical assistance
- ULURP
- BSA
- Economic Development and Planning
- Fair Share
- Environmental Impact statements
- Social and Health Impact statements
- Rezoning

The Community Boards would also be interested in expanding our partnerships with local colleges and universities to provide planning interns to community boards to conduct research on specific planning initiatives. The Borough President's Office currently works in conjunction with the Fund for the City of New York and its Community Planning Fellowship Program to provide graduate student fellows to a limited number of community boards each year.

In addition, in order to update the community on critical planning and budgetary decisions on a range of geographically-based issues, the Taskforce also recommends that District Managers are provided with up-to-date training on key land use topics or the latest map-making technology.

B. BOARD OF STANDARDS AND APPEALS

The Taskforce recommends a amendment to the City Charter which would give each Borough President an appointment to the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA). Community Boards have been increasingly asked to render zoning accommodations by developers. The presence of a Borough President representative on the BSA would ensure that there is a borough perspective and balance in the rendering of any decisions in preserving neighborhood integrity.

V. BUDGET

Community Boards are charged with developing priorities for the City's capital and expense budgets. In order to provide consensus driven budget priorities, the Boards meet with their communities and develop priorities. Too often, these priorities are not given the attention that they deserve. To remedy this, Community Boards assert that existing procedures should be adhered to that will:

- Transform City agencies into local partners who are willing to integrate community board priorities into the city's priorities.
- Define the planning process to better inform and encourage public participation in the budget process.
- Ensure the implementation of community based plans by city agencies once approved by the Community Board.

The Taskforce recommends the following regarding the Annual Borough Budget Consultations:

- Commissioners and/or Commissioner level decision-makers should be present at the annual Budget Consultation meetings. There should be recognition at the highest level of the city agencies that the community board role in the budget process should be respected and that the voice of the people the boards represent should be heard by the top level representatives of the administration.
- Analysis by the Independent Budget Office of the Mayor's Preliminary Budget Response to Capital and Expenditure Requests.

BOARD MEMBER TRAINING

Discussion included the enhanced training process of community board members. The Taskforce recommends continuing to conduct ongoing training of board members.

- Understanding of Capital and Expense Budget Procedures
- Zoning and ULURP Procedures
- Parliamentary Procedures
- Writing of Resolutions and Motions
- Conflict of Interest

VI. SOCIAL MEDIA AND OUTREACH

It is the job and responsibility of any organization to keep up with the technology if it wants to stay a viable and competitive organization. Community Boards are not exempt from this fact, and therefore must embrace technology and its new applications. The questions are how and which applications.

A. FACEBOOK/TWITTER

Many Community Boards already have a Facebook page and many elected offices have web pages that offer Facebook and/or Twitter links.

The Taskforce evaluated social media applications and agreed that Facebook and or Twitter serve a purpose, ultimately a positive one. For example, they can be used:

- As an organizing and/or educational tool
- To create and/or allow for meaningful community dialogue
- To highlight general and/or specific problems and solutions
- To bring about community awareness

Allowing the public to post and comment can also be important to an active, vibrant page/online community. However, prior to developing social media accounts, rules and standards should be established. The Community Board NYC.gov website should be used for formal announcements, with Facebook and/or Twitter for all else.

B. WIKIPEDIA

Wikipedia is an extensive and professionally run online public encyclopedia that has set standards however, anyone can contribute to Wikipedia. The Taskforce therefore believes it is essential to have a blurb about Community Boards and each Bronx Board to have a Wikipedia page.

C. PUBLIC ACCESS/WEBSITES

The Task Force recommends that the Community Boards, in conjunction with the Borough President, participate in public access programming television through BRONXNET in an effort to outreach and educate the community on service delivery concerns.

A commitment by all of the Boards to maintain a NYC.GOV website that is provided free was also encouraged. All Boards should utilize DoITT's web services and while content may be varied, the overall functions would be uniform. This lends itself to the concept of a "One Bronx" initiative. Community Boards, while part of City Government, have limited resources. Utilizing the City website provides a public service for a board's resident. It should be updated regularly and include community board and committee meeting agendas and minutes, calendar of important meetings and public hearings, community organization information, links to city agencies, contact information for the community board and elected officials and the ability to submit complaints to the community board.

VII. STREAMLINING PROCESSES

A. STATE LIQUOR AUTHORITY LICENSING

The Taskforce is requesting the Borough President assist the Boards in proposing legislation facilitating and expanding the purview of Community Boards to be notified of new and renewal of off-premises liquor license applications.

The District Managers Taskforce proposes the support of State legislation (S7054-2011) and (S6924) which revokes and establishment liquor license after three convictions and allows for the community board participation to be codified. These legislative initiatives are needed to respond affirmatively to the marked increase in liquor dispensing establishments, the incidence of illegal behavior and health risks associated with alcoholism that has led to a deleterious condition within our communities.

B. ONE DAY SPECIAL EVENTS AND TEMPORARY PERMITS

Currently, the State liquor authority only provides notification for one-day special event permits to local police precincts thereby bypassing the Community Boards in the notification process and the opportunity to provide input on the applicant and the location of the event. The Taskforce recommends that the Community Boards be included in the notification process for one-day special event and temporary permits.

VIII. TASKFORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

- A charter referendum to amend the Charter Sections 2704. Coterminality of local services. Part a 1-2; Part c; 2707; 2708. The following agencies should be added as required to attend District Service Cabinet meetings:
 - Department of Education
 - Department of Homeless Services
- Community Boards implement Neighborhood Economic Resources Survey.
- Community Boards would like to enhance their relationship with OEM to work closely with CERT Teams, to advocate for ongoing recruitment and training for CERT volunteers.
- A dedicated 311 Community Board Operator to exclusively handle Community Board calls.
- The 311 system should simultaneously alert the appropriate agency and relevant Community Board with specific data regarding complaint locations and the types of service calls received.
- The use of the Center on Municipal Government Performance's Computerized Neighborhood Environment Tracking program (ComNet)
- Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT) should install Internet Quorum Desktop Solutions at all Community Board Offices.
- Legislative Recommendations:

- Support legislation to allow the Department of Buildings access to properties for inspections.
- Each Community Board should receive a 30-day notice from the Department of Homeless Services, for the placement of any private/public shelter facility in a Community Board.
- Dedicated planners assigned for each community board.
- Borough Presidents should have an appointment to the NYC Board of Standard and Appeals.
- Up-to-date training on key land use topics and the latest map-making technology for District Managers.
- City agency Commissioners or Commissioner level decision makers should attend annual Borough Budget Consultation meetings.
- Analysis by the Independent Budget Office of the Mayor's Preliminary Budget Response to Capital and Expenditure Requests.
- Action designed to earmark the monies collected by these agencies to be used by those agencies.
- Conduct ongoing professional training of community board members.
- Development of Wikipedia, Facebook and Twitter pages for all community boards.
- Community Boards, in conjunction with BRONXNET and the Borough President, to participate in public access programming.
- All community boards should use the City provided website and email provided by Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications.
- Legislative recommendations;
 - Facilitate the uniform notification of new off-premises liquor license applications.
 - Support of State legislation (S7054-2011) and (S6924) which revokes and establishment liquor license after three convictions and allows for the community board participation to be codified.
- Community Boards be included in the notification process for one-day special event and temporary permits submitted to the NYS State Liquor Authority.

IX. CONCLUSION

Like the City and Borough we are comprised of the role, image, and function of the Community Boards has changed and evolved over time. Our charge from the Borough President has been to analyze the constantly evolving roll of the Community Boards and provide our recommendations to adapt this crucial element of our city governance to accurately reflect a modern dynamic. As such, it is the assessment of this Task Force that the aforementioned recommendations take the most effective and cost efficient approach in ensuring the stability and function of the Community Boards while increasing services and the manner in which they are delivered. The recommendations highlighted provide a multi-disciplined approach including policy, social service and technology. It is the belief of this Task Force that this multi-pronged approach is vital to promote the continued growth and success of our city and Borough.

It is imperative to note that the Task Force is aware of the current fiscal situation the City finds itself in and as such, the vast majority of the reconditions require little to no additional funds or resources. More specifically, the recommendations of enhanced relationships, expanded access

of the internet system and additional programs, social media pages and support of legislation do not pose a fiscal constraint and can begin to be implemented almost immediately.

Therefore, we present these recommendations to the Office of the Borough President, in the hope that they will result in policy initiatives that will allow us to not only effectively meet the current challenges, but to also be prepared for the future.