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THE CITY OF NEW YORK
MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD SIX
211 EAST 43RD STREET, SUITE 1404
NEW YORK, NY 10017

December 8, 2020

Steven Banks
Commissioner
Department of Social Services
33 Beaver Street, 17th Floor
New York, NY 10004

Dear Commissioner Banks,

We all appreciate the work of the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) in serving the homeless population of New York City, thousands of whom are our own constituents. While current law does not give Community Boards or local elected officials any jurisdictional role in approving or siting homeless shelters, we have several serious concerns, comments, and questions about your agency's plans to open a new facility in our district at 118 East 40th Street.

1. Our offices received the Fair Share Analysis on November 30, 2020, two weeks **after** DHS and CORE Services Group presented to Manhattan Community Board Six (CB6) and the community at a meeting of CB6's Housing, Homeless, & Human Rights Committee on November 16, 2020. This is also nearly **three weeks after** DHS convened a public hearing to solicit feedback on the proposal to contract with CORE to operate a new shelter.

CB6 has repeatedly urged DHS to provide this Analysis **well in advance of** the committee meeting so that CB6 members and the public could review it and come prepared to the meeting with questions and comments.

2. It is deeply troubling that **neither Manhattan Community Board Six, nor the elected legislators who represent this district, nor the public, was adequately notified in advance about the November 10, 2020 public hearing.** In fact, the first time we were informed of this hearing was through reading page 11 of the Fair Share Analysis received in late November.

While DHS's only formal public notification requirement is to advertise in the *City Record*, to have this be your agency's sole communication with the community is insufficient and does not promote transparency or community participation in this process. Over the last several weeks, our offices have received numerous comments from concerned residents who mistook the CB6 Housing, Homeless & Human Rights Committee meeting as a public hearing on the site selection.

If more diligent outreach had been conducted to CB6, the elected officials, and the public, to inform us of the public hearing scheduled for November 10, 2020, we could have directed our community to participate in the hearing and to submit public comments.

We urge your agency to exceed the bare minimum required for public notification, and conduct additional proactive public engagement strategies to alert the community of any public meetings/hearings regarding the siting of a new shelter, especially if DHS intends to hold only one such meeting. This is to ensure that there is **opportunity for public comment** and so that questions of fact about the proposal can be addressed earlier in the process.

3. Over the past few months, CB6 has repeatedly requested from DHS a list of shelter sites, both permanent and temporary density-reduction sites, in neighboring community districts - particularly in Manhattan Community District 5, an area with a high density of permanent and temporary shelters and street homeless New Yorkers, which also shares a boundary with our district in the East 40's west of Lexington Avenue. **To date, CB6 has still not received a list, prompting us to reach out to other community boards for information that should be readily available to the public.**

In any evaluation of a potential site for a permanent or temporary shelter, a comparison of public facilities (including shelters) in Community District 6 and in neighboring community districts should be made available to community boards and the public. This would allow our offices to provide accurate and reliable responses to the questions and concerns our constituents will understandably have, specifically about how the number of homeless shelters located in our district compares to our neighboring districts.

4. Section 6.1(b) of the Fair Share Analysis references 7 DHS facilities within Community District 6:
 - 5 shelters for single adults
 - 1 shelter for adult families (The Renwick Hotel site)
 - 1 safe haven for adults.

CB6 is not aware of 7 facilities within our district. The Fair Share Analysis that we received ahead of the opening of the 17th Street Safe Haven site listed 4 DHS facilities within our district:

- 1 safe haven
- 3 shelters for single adults

Please provide us with a complete list of the 7 facilities located in Community District 6 as mentioned in the most recent Fair Share Analysis, or otherwise address this discrepancy. We do not believe that any additional permanent shelters have opened between mid-2017 (when the 17th Street Safe Haven site opened) and today.

Furthermore, this section provides a distribution of sites by borough, but not by community district or neighborhood, which for a Community Board's purposes would be more useful.

5. Section 6.51 of the Fair Share Analysis states that:

DHS does not anticipate any significant cumulative negative impact on neighborhood character by use of the Site, nor would such use contribute to a concentration of facilities that provide similar services. As stated, there is 1 DHS shelter facility within a 400-foot radius of the Site: 1 shelter for single adults. There are 6 DHS shelter facilities within a half-mile radius of the Site: 5 shelters for single adults and 1 shelter for families with children.

The main concern expressed by some district residents is that Murray Hill is “overburdened” with shelter facilities. What criteria is being weighed to make the claim that DHS does not “anticipate any significant cumulative negative impact on neighborhood character by use of the Site, nor would such use contribute to a concentration of facilities that provide similar services”? **Does DHS have a threshold for the number of sites within 400-feet or ½ mile that might lead to cumulative negative impact on the neighborhood? If so, what is that threshold, and how was it determined?**

This data must factor in temporary density reduction sites (which the public believes exerts an impact similar to that of permanent sites), and must **account holistically for the density of facilities across community district boundaries**, since these administrative boundaries are not relevant to the public experience. For example, Murray Hill, the neighborhood in which this new site will be located, straddles the boundary between Community District 5 and Community District 6, and the residents do not consider this administrative boundary when evaluating the local burden.

6. Section 6.53(a) of the Fair Share Analysis suggests that the data set being used is from 2015 - yet the 17th Street Safe Haven site opened in 2017. **Is DHS using an outdated dataset when compiling these Fair Share Analysis documents? How often is the dataset updated? Does it take into consideration the temporary density-reduction hotel sites?** Please clarify these questions about the data being utilized and provide it to us ASAP.

This same section in the recent Fair Share Analysis also asserts that Manhattan Community District 6 “ranks 36 out of a total of 59 Community Districts Citywide for the number of beds in all residential facilities. The Citywide average ratio is 18.4 residential care facility beds per 1,000 people - CD6 has a ratio of 14.3.” **Is this being concluded from the 2015 data? Is this ratio re-evaluated after each additional shelter introduced into the community district? Furthermore, as mentioned above, a holistic evaluation of the neighborhood burden across community districts needs to be taken into account.** Please update the Analysis to account for the impact of the total cluster of facilities in adjacent areas of Community District 5 and Community District 6.

7. Section 6.53(c) of the Fair Share Analysis lists other sites that were considered under the current RFP, and on page 16 offers a chart which briefly describes why sites were selected or rejected. Since we need to convey information about this process to constituents who reach out to our offices, **please explain this process more thoroughly. It is impossible to conduct an inclusive process without more transparency about DHS’s evaluations of sites and decision-making. In fact, we suggest developing a one-pager or brief pamphlet that walks through DHS’s evaluation process, which we can then share with the public through various mediums.**

8. The map shared as Exhibit A is completely unintelligible. The numbers and dots are printed over each other, rendering the inclusion of it completely useless. **We request the production of a new usable and intelligible map to replace the one currently provided as Exhibit A.**

9. **We believe that some of the information in Exhibit B is incorrect.** For example, the table lists the address of the 30th Street Men's Shelter as 145 East 39th Street when it is actually located at 400 East 30th Street. The table also lists the bed capacity of the 30th Street Men's Shelter as 378 beds when we know it has over 800. **Discrepancies like this erode credibility and impair our own ability as an agency to utilize the document as a tool in communicating with our constituents about the selection and siting process. We request that this table be reviewed and resubmitted with correct information.**

We all appreciate that our various municipal agencies all have challenging and often thankless jobs to do for our great city, especially during these trying times. We have historically supported well-run shelters in our community that are welcoming to those in need and are committed to addressing any problems that arise quickly and effectively. However, we depend on DHS and shelter operators to provide information about their decision-making processes in a clear, logical, and transparent way that invites input from the very community that their decisions will impact. A Fair Share Analysis that contains incomplete, inaccurate, and outdated information makes it impossible for CB6 to carry out our City Charter-mandated duties and has contributed to a climate of confusion and vitriol that has recently resulted in our members and staff being subjected to harassment from the public. In order to remedy this situation, we look forward to a prompt and complete reply to our concerns outlined above.

Sincerely,



Kyle Athayde,
Chair
Manhattan Community Board Six



Senator Liz Krueger
State Senate District 28



Assembly Member Dan Quart
State Assembly District 73



Carin van der Donk,
Chair, CB6 Housing, Homeless, & Human
Rights Committee



Rich Mintz,
Vice Chair, CB6 Housing, Homeless, &
Human Rights Committee

Cc: Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor of the City of New York
Hon. Gale Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Corey Johnson, Speaker of the New York City Council
Hon. Keith Powers, City Council Member