



August 18, 2020

Steven Banks
Commissioner
New York City Human Resources Administration
4 World Trade Center, 42nd Floor
New York, New York 10048

Dear Commissioner Banks:

We appreciate the risk facing people who are homeless during the coronavirus pandemic, and thank you for your efforts to ensure every New Yorker has safe housing during this trying period.

We write concerning a number of issues residents have raised regarding the operations of temporary shelters at The Hotel Belleclaire, The Lucerne Hotel, and The Belnord Hotel. Our constituents have alerted us, as well as the Administration, to the deteriorating street safety and drug activity in the area, affecting both longtime residents and those temporarily housed in the hotels.

Although we remain concerned by the Department of Homeless Services (DHS)'s disregard of public input and lack of notification to the community and major community institutions, we believe the following requests will assist in aiding both longtime and shelter residents:

1. **Recreational Space & Programming:** We are concerned about treatment and recovery services for shelter residents who are struggling with substance use disorder. Recently, there have been a number of drug-related incidents and overdoses in the community. The City must ensure that each provider has the proper staff and resources on hand to provide interventional supportive services, including but not limited to peer counseling, group support, medication assisted treatment, and naloxone.

Each hotel must have designated recreation space for its clients. For example, we strongly urge that DHS have the owner of the Lucerne Hotel repair the roof deck in the building. If there is no space available on the property, each provider should find a site within walking distance of the shelter that can be used by the residents. Just this week, we had an offer of space during the day and early evening for a limited number of individuals to take advantage of programming, but we need more such opportunities.

2. **Security:** All temporary hotel shelters must have experienced 24-hour security staff and DHS Peace Officers patrolling the area near and around each site. Additionally, there must be greater collaboration between the New York Police Department's 20th and 24th Precincts and the security firms at each hotel to look out for the safety of all Upper West Side residents. The non-profit providers must direct staff to conduct outreach outside the hotels as this will enable staff to utilize established relationships they have with shelter clients. All non-profit providers should be in contact with organizations like Goddard Riverside's Homeless Outreach Team to assist street homeless individuals. However, as you will see in the next bullet, we are requesting a more centralized approach that includes the providers and Goddard's Outreach Team working together.

In Community Board 4, the 10th Precinct has instituted 8 to 8. Eight officers are assigned for eight weeks to patrol the area where there is a concentration of hotels. Thus far, the program is working well. This precinct and the community are also working with the Center for Court Innovation's Midtown Community Court, 314 West 54 Street NY NY 10019, to address quality of life issues. The shelter providers and community stakeholders should discuss the efficacy of such an approach on the Upper West Side with the 20th and 24th Precincts.

3. **Outreach Workers:** In addition to security, we greatly need DHS to immediately fund outreach workers who are coordinated centrally and able to respond to the individuals in the street. The various providers active in the community cannot create such a staff as they are assigned only to work with their own clients. As a result, they are tripping over each other some of the time, or not in the right place at the right time. Central coordination and outreach workers would make a real difference both in the perception of responsiveness to homeless individuals on the street (regardless of whether they are housed), and in the care of those men and women who need help. Currently, individuals who appear to be homeless could be a client of one of the providers in the hotels, could be homeless and being addressed on an on-going basis by the Outreach program at Goddard Riverside Community Center (trying to get the person off the street and into a Safe Haven program), or could be in another situation. Central coordination would enable contact between all parties and would address some of the anxieties in the area.
4. **Community Input:** Historically, DHS created a community advisory board (CAB) for each permanent shelter. Given that these shelter placements are temporary, we understand DHS's reluctance to establish a permanent CAB for each one. However,

there is no definitive timeline for how long shelter clients will be using temporary hotels. For that reason, DHS has agreed to regular community meetings for the providers of the hotels located within Community Board 7. We agree that these meetings should be led by the community and should include DHS, the providers, community board members, elected officials, NYPD, block associations, residents, and other affected parties. This will give the provider the opportunity to hear and address concerns; will enable neighbors to alert the provider and NYPD to ongoing issues; and will better connect each shelter with the community and local resources. We look forward to participating in this meeting and have several community members to recommend.

5. **Contract:** We requested and received a copy of the 170-page contract made between the Hotel Association of New York and the City of New York. We are reviewing it. We understand that there might be some revisions to reflect the hotels that have been added since this document is dated April 2020. Please update us on how this contract has been amended, expanded, or extended since April 2020.

Lastly, street homelessness on the Upper West Side has now increased dramatically. We often hear that DHS and other homeless outreach organizations are doing all that they can. The increases in drug dealing, street encampments, and public disturbances make clear that more must be done. While there are dozens of conditions that need to be addressed, the following problem areas need immediate attention:

- W. 72nd Street between West End Avenue & Broadway
- Broadway between W. 78th and 79th Streets
- W. 79th Street from Broadway to Columbus Avenue
- W. 82nd Street & Broadway
- W. 86th Street & Broadway
- W. 95th Street & Broadway
- Theodore Roosevelt Park
- Panhandling in outdoor dining venues along Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues
- Panhandling inside of Fairway on 74th Street & Broadway

We look forward to your response in addressing these concerns.

Sincerely,



Gale A. Brewer
Manhattan Borough President



José M. Serrano
NY State Senator



Robert Jackson
NY State Senator



Jerrold Nadler
U.S. Representative



Helen Rosenthal
NYC Councilmember



Linda Rosenthal
NY State Assemblymember



Mark Diller
Manhattan Community Board #7 Chair



Ruth Messinger
Former Manhattan Borough President

cc: Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor, City of New York
Dermot Shea, Commissioner, NYPD