



East Harlem Center Community Advisory Committee Meeting

Meeting Notes

Thursday, July 11, 2019

6:00 pm to 7:00 pm

East Harlem Neighborhood Health Action Center

Advisory Committee Attendees:

- John Greene, Community Board 11 member and East Harlem resident
- Jose Rodriguez, East Harlem Center parent
- Mario Del La Rosa, Office of Council Member Diana Ayala
- Michelle Booker, Office of Congressman Adriano Espaillat
- Nilsa Orama, Community Board 11 Chair and East Harlem resident
- Pennylane Ortiz, East Harlem Center parent and alum, resident, Children's Aid Trustee
- Pilar DeJesus, East Harlem community member
- Raja Flores, Children's Aid alumnus
- Shana Harmongoff, Office of Senator Brian Benjamin
- Tammy Rodriguez, East Harlem Center parent

Advisory Committee Members Not Able to Attend:

- Denise (Mille) Jerez, East Harlem resident
- Gabrielle Hernandez, Office of Assembly Member Robert Rodriguez
- Ja'Nai Harris, East Harlem Center alumnus
- Matthew Washington, Office of Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
- Neven Cepeda, East Harlem Center youth

Children's Aid Staff:

- Ali Tan, Chief of Staff
- Anthony Ramos, VP of Marketing and Communications
- Christopher Rucas, Director of Marketing and Communications
- David Giordano, Director of the East Harlem Center
- Don Shacknai, Chief Operating Officer
- Courtenaye Jackson, General Counsel
- Phoebe Boyer, President & CEO
- Sandra Escamilla, VP of Adolescence
- Yolanda McBride, Director of Public Policy

Meeting Notes

- Phoebe Boyer, President & CEO, called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for coming.
- Phoebe reviewed the agenda for the meeting which was to provide updates on the community conversations on the rebuild process, what is happening with the East Harlem Center's programs and services, and where we are in the negotiations.
- Phoebe reminded the Advisory Committee that Children's Aid is in the middle of the negotiations process and will be unable to share any details on the sale. This is all with the intent of ensuring that Children's Aid is in the strongest position possible to negotiate.
- Phoebe turned the meeting over to Yolanda McBride, Director of Public Policy, to provide updates on East Harlem community conversations.
- Yolanda reminded that Advisory Committee that during the last two meetings the committee has discussed how holding large meetings to update the community about what is happening with the rebuild process might not be the best strategy.
- The turnout at the March community meeting was low, so Children's Aid and the Advisory Committee thought of different ways to get in front of the community to update all about what is happening with the rebuild process.
- Children's Aid over the past two months focused on attending the Community Board 11 meetings and family/parent focused events at Lexington Academy.
- Over the last month, Yolanda has attended the following meetings:
 - **June 1 - Saturday Deaf and Hard of Hearing program (DHH):**
 - 20 parents in attendance
 - Parents appreciated the update and expressed concerns about the need for summer programs for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and youth which can be expensive.
 - Children's Aid plans to poll the parents to get a better sense of their needs for summer programming
 - **June 18 - Community Board 11 meeting:**
 - **June 19 - Summer Program Parent Orientation:**
 - About 100 parents attended
 - Parents appreciated the update and were concerned about what would happen to programs at Lexington Academy
 - Received a positive response when it was mentioned that with the new center, Children's Aid would be able to expand programs
 - Parents were also relieved when they learned the site would be a Mount Sinai facility and not luxury housing

- Yolanda handed the meeting over to Sandra Escamilla and David Giordano to give an update on CPE II and Lexington Academy.
- David reminded the Advisory Committee that in October 2018 there was a fire in the classroom being used by Children's Aid at Lexington Academy.
- The renovation as a result of the fire was finally completed and Children's Aid moved back into our space at the end of June.
- Children's Aid also received a strong commitment from the Lexington Academy principal to be open later for the teens. And beginning fall 2019, Children's Aid will be open three to four nights a week for youth.
- Children's Aid found out late spring that the CPEII building would be closed for the summer due to longstanding renovations. The programs and services would move to Lexington Academy for the summer and return back to CPE II in the fall.
- Children's Aid staff met with the principal of both schools to discuss space. As a result, Children's Aid merged the CPE II summer program with Lexington Academy.
- Children's Aid further explained that they were less successful in moving over all of their early childhood education services and families to Lexington Academy due to space constraints.
- Of the 60 early childhood education families, Children's Aid had to inform 28 last month that they would not have a placement for the summer. Children's Aid worked to find alternative placements for the 28 families.
- This has happened to Children's Aid in other communities where they have not been informed by DOE about summer school closures or renovations until very late in the year. Children's Aid has been trying to mitigate this issue for the next school year because it can present a hardship for our families.
- Lastly, Children's Aid has gotten some questions from the community about the play street on East 101st Street for the summer. Children's Aid decided to use the Lexington Academy playground as the "play street" this summer, and not to have the 101st Street play street for this year.
- Sandra and David handed the meeting over to Don Shacknai and David Sweeny to provide an update on the rebuild process.
- Don recapped what is needed regarding space based on current analysis.

- The new building would be bigger than the current center (at least 12,000 square feet total) with at least 10 classrooms.
- The classrooms will be a combination of early childhood education space, which is very specific, and flexible classroom space for after school/summer and older youth.
- Children's Aid is pursuing having an indoor gymnasium and an outdoor basketball court.
- Don also updated attendees about testing that was conducted on the grounds in June. The developer, Oren Evenhar, is testing the underground rock and soil to explore the possibility of digging deeper into the ground to provide the needed height for the gymnasium. The test results are forthcoming.
- Children's Aid is still in the middle of the process and has had three meetings thus far. The hope is to finish the negotiations in the fall but the developer also has to negotiate with Mount Sinai and the Life Changers Church as well.
- Children's Aid continues to work internally to ensure that the current East Harlem Center building is secure, the property maintained, and pest control is addressed.
- Don asked the Advisory Committee to reach out if they hear from the community about issues with the current center site or if anyone sees anything that Children's Aid should be aware of.
- Yolanda closed the meeting with the dates for the 2019-2020 Advisory Committee meetings:
 - ✓ October 24, 2019
 - ✓ January 16, 2020
 - ✓ March 5, 2020
 - ✓ May 14, 2020
- Yolanda also said Children's Aid will reach out to Community Board 11 to provide an update on to the full board about the rebuild process.