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The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan

February 18, 2025

Hon. Eric Adams
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

RE: CB8M Letter of Comment on the FY 2026 Preliminary Budget

Dear Mayor Adams:

Community Board 8 Manhattan ("CB8M") appreciates the effort to provide a more thoughtful and responsive answer to our Preliminary Budget and Community Needs Request, one of the explicit responsibilities of which Community Board input is mandated by our City Charter. We hope that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Department of City Planning and your office understand that our requests reflect the ongoing needs of our community as expressed throughout meetings at the most local form of City government.

CAPITAL BUDGET

The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (Capital Priority #1)

The City is facing a well-documented housing affordability and homelessness crisis, crisis, and Community District 8, according to COYHO's DEIS housing market study, unfortunately ranks number #1 as to the number of housing units lost during the period 2010 to 2024. Recently, several new developments have entered the UES market, offering a portion of units designated for affordable housing. Over the past year, the community board has conducted a thorough evaluation of local zoning and identified sites that could be converted from commercial or manufacturing use to residential use; attached is a copy of our resolution dated January 15, 2025. While we acknowledge that zoning decisions fall under the Department of City Planning, we remain committed to exploring strategies to incentivize the construction of more affordable housing in our district. We strongly encourage the City to continue its efforts to expand affordable housing options and ensure the development of additional affordable units in every community and to work with us to accomplish our requested rezoning.

New York City Housing Authority (Capital Budget Priority #2)

NYCHA plays a crucial role in providing affordable housing for residents of the Upper East Side. We appreciate your highlighting the five-year and twenty-year capital needs of Isaacs Houses and Holmes Towers. The substantial capital requirements underscore the urgent need for repairs at these two NYCHA developments. As affordable housing and NYCHA housing continue to be top priorities for our district, it is essential that the City, State, and Federal governments provide the necessary financial support to address these critical needs.

The Police Department (Capital Budget Priority #3)

The officers in the 19th Precinct play an essential role in protecting the residents, visitors, and businesses of the Upper East Side. To do their jobs effectively, our police officers deserve a building in good condition and equipped with functioning air-conditioning. Our residents also deserve a police precinct in good condition. The 19th Precinct Station Building located at 153 East 67th Street is unquestionably in need of air conditioning. For the

past several years, there has been a "temporary" air conditioning unit parked outside the precinct that minimally cools the precinct and results in noise and vibrations disturbing to the neighbors. We urge the City to allocate funding to repair the roof of the building to support the installation of a permanent air conditioning system and to support the police officers who protect our community.

The New York Public Library (Capital Priority #4 and #13)

Libraries are an essential part of our community, serving residents by providing access to books, information, Wi-Fi, digital resources, and a variety of events and community support services. As such, it is crucial that our libraries remain ADA-compliant to ensure accessibility for everyone.

We are aware that the lift at the 67th Street Library has been replaced and will therefore be removed from our capital request. However, the Yorkville Branch does not currently meet ADA standards. Front-end planning conducted by the Department of Design and Construction has highlighted the need for a comprehensive renovation to bring the branch into full compliance. We strongly urge that this project be prioritized and expedited through full design and construction. Additionally, we recommend identifying an interim solution to ensure that this vital community resource remains accessible to all in the meantime.

The Department of Education (Capital Budget Priority #6 and #7)

We are disappointed with the response to our request for an increased number of high school seats in this district. In 2024, a large outpouring of parents raised concerns in our meetings and through petitions about the changes made during the de Blasio administration to the high school admissions process for applicants who are residents of District 2. They described long commute times for their students traveling to non-specialized public high schools in Manhattan since many 8th-grade students in District 2 and Manhattan are not receiving matches for non-specialized public high schools in New York City from their selection list. This meant that students in certain districts (including District 2) had a lower likelihood of admission to a school on their selection list, while all or almost all high schools in other boroughs give geographic priority to residents of that borough.

We know from news reports based on NYC Department of Education data that only about 55% of District 2 students received an admissions offer at one of their top three high school choices last year, making it the lowest rate of any district in the city. It is also our understanding that 13% of D2 families did not receive a match to any school on their list last year, which was the highest percentage of all districts Citywide. We find this troubling and unacceptable for the families in our community.

Given these community concerns, CB8M supports the public statement of the Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to restore District 2 priority to schools that previously provided this preference. However, we recognize that this action does not address the needs of District 2 students who may be in lower academic priority groups or the needs of residents of other Manhattan districts and further that this action will result in less diversity at these schools. As such, CB8M urges the Chancellor and the DOE to provide Manhattan borough residents priority admission to all non-specialized Manhattan high schools and to fully fund and develop a long-term plan that provides admissions priority to one or more local schools to all students citywide – which could include local district or borough priority for a portion of seats at all or almost all high schools citywide -- while also maintaining priorities to ensure socioeconomic diversity in selective public high schools. We request increased city funding to implement these measures.

Department of Parks and Recreation Capital Budget Request (Capital Budget Priority #5, 9, 10, and CS)

Parks and open spaces play a vital role in enhancing the quality of life in New York City, particularly for the residents of Community District 8. Community District 8 is recognized as being seriously under-parked; however, we acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of the City of New York, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Economic Development Corporation in upgrading many of the existing parks within our district. Well-

designed parks and open spaces can have a transformative impact on a community, and the improvements underway at Andrew Haswell Green (AHB) Phase 2B serve as an excellent example of such a transformation.

However, additional funding is still required to complete Phase 3 of Andrew Haswell Green Park (Priority #5), as well as to upgrade the restrooms at Carl Schurz Park on 87th Street (Priority #9). We are grateful for the funding that Council Member Menin allocated last year to help rehabilitate the restrooms at Carl Schurz Park, and we urge the City to allocate the remaining necessary funds to fully complete this project and enable it to progress.

We are also looking forward to the commencement of construction at Rupert Park, located on Second Avenue between 90th and 91st Streets, which will include the installation of much-needed restrooms. This project remains a top priority for our district (Continuing Support Priority #1 and #2), and we continue to strongly support its advancement.

Additionally, we commend the City's work in rehabilitating John Jay Park, including the completion of accessibility improvements to the multipurpose play area, as well as the enhancement of the central walkway and pool deck. However, further funding is required to convert one of the handball courts into a pickleball court to address the growing demand from the community (Capital Priority #10). Equally important is the need for extensive renovations to the nearly century-old bathhouse and its supporting infrastructure. The John Jay Park bathhouse, originally built in 1906, has not undergone a significant renovation since the 1940s and requires urgent attention (Capital Priority #10).

We continue to support funding to repair and upgrade Stanley Isaacs Playground at 96th Street, including improved lighting, new benches and play equipment.

We remain committed to supporting these critical capital projects and urge the necessary investment to ensure their successful completion.

The Department of Transportation (Capital Budget Priority #12)

In 2015 CB8M passed a resolution asking DOT to propose a network of painted crosstown bicycle lanes on the Upper East Side and to propose a longer term implementation of a network of crosstown bicycle routes on the Upper East Side using the safest appropriate design. In 2022 a bicyclist was killed heading crosstown on east 85th Street. This death may have been preventable if protected bike lanes had been in place. The Board passed a resolution in 2022 calling for fully protected crosstown bike lanes approximately every 10 blocks between 60th and 110th Streets. We strongly urge DOT to move forward with the necessary study and implementation of crosstown bike lanes to protect cyclists in our community.

EXPENSE BUDGET

Community Boards (Expense Priority #1)

In FY2019 and FY2020, recognizing the stagnant Community Board base budgets, the City Council established an initiative to increase Community Board budgets. This small $2.5 million initiative funded each Community Board a total of $42,500 – equivalent to the starting salary of a staff member at the Community Associate level. Unfortunately, this initiative was never baselined in the City's Expense budget, meaning that these funds could never be applied to the agency's Personal Services budget, and, as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Council was unable to renew the initiative in the FY21, FY22, FY 23, or FY 24 budgets.

An additional $2.5 million, the equivalent of a rounding error in the City's budget, should be baselined in the expense budget to support an additional $42,500 increase in each Community Board's budget – amounting to a 25% increase in staffing levels at the 59 community boards across New York City.

Your response confirmed that "as of the FY 2026 Preliminary Budget, each Community Board's budget is being maintained." While we appreciate that the budgets will not be reduced, we are specifically requesting increased funding so we are able to support and retain staff, and pay them fairly.

The Police Department (Expense Priority #2 and #4)

New York City has the fewest police officers on the Street since 1990 and that is true in the 19th Precinct in Manhattan. In a survey of community residents public safety was the top priority for constituents. An increased police presence would not only help in responding to emergencies more efficiently but also foster stronger community relations and prevent potential crime. Moreover, as the Upper East Side remains a prime location for both residents and tourists, additional officers would allow for a more visible and proactive approach to protecting public safety and addressing any emerging safety concerns.

Additional traffic enforcement agents are requested in the East 60s, an area home to a vibrant mix of residential buildings, businesses, and popular destinations, which draws a considerable amount of pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle traffic.

Department of Parks and Recreation (Expense Priority #3, #9 and #11)

The FY 26 preliminary budget would fund Parks at one half of one (0.5%) percent of the total city budget, a proportional decrease in comparison to the original adopted budget of the last fiscal year. The chronic underfunding of parks impacts public safety, enforcement of park rules and regulations, park maintenance, and parks programs for all New Yorkers. The current number of PEP officers, for example, are currently able to cover only around 9 percent of parks for 30 minutes a day, this is insufficient.

The Department of Sanitation (Expense Priority #5)

The sidewalks and streets of the Upper East Side are among the filthiest in Manhattan and main thoroughfares such as 86th Street, Second Avenue and other parts of our community are filled with litter. At street fairs and in response to community surveys, the cleanliness of the streets is a frequent complaint of our residents and visitors alike. The quantity and quality of trash receptacles currently in use are for most part, impractical and many of them are broken or disgustingly dirty and rusty.

The Department of Homeless Services (Expense Priority #6)

CB8 appreciates the Department of Homeless Services expanding its outreach efforts including working with NYC Health + Hospitals. However, although services for homeless clients doubled in recent years, the hotspots mentioned in your agency's response do not appear to be located in our district. For more than three years now we have been awaiting a “Safe haven” or “Welcome Center” at 419 East 91st Street; however, as recently as December 2024 (when the Welcome Center was originally scheduled to open), we were notified that the project has again been put out for a re-bid. Additional outreach resources are needed at 86th Street and Lexington Avenue, 72nd Street and Second Avenue and Second Avenue between 86th and 87th Street. Outreach is particularly needed overnight. The broken mental health system and difficulty of securing needed social services has led to the increase in the homeless population in our community.

The Department of Education (Expense Priority #7 and #10)

We are disappointed in the DOE's response. We recognize budget challenges but have requested expansion of early childhood seats in our district for several years. The lack of adequate seats for community youth forces parents to take small children to schools located outside the district. This is challenging both for young children who are forced to travel long distances as well as for parents who need to get to work on time. Available seats for early education will help keep families in the city contributing to both, the City's economic strength and vibrancy.

The Department of Youth and Community Development (Expense Priority #8, #10 and #12)

Programs to engage youth in appropriate workforce activities in CB8 should be expanded and fully funded. We appreciate that the Preliminary Budget calls for extending summer programming and Learning to Work initiatives. We would like to be informed when the agency releases RFP's to fund accessible and affordable out of school time and day care programs so we can promote this opportunity to providers within the CB8 community. We continue to request that additional funding for youth services at the Issacs Center be provided. We also would like priority given to programs for youth and adolescent residents of Holmes Towers and Issacs houses.

The New York Public Library (Expense Priority #16)

We continue to stress the importance of restoring Sunday service to one library in Community District 8 on a rotating basis so that our working parents will be able to spend time with their children at a library and our residents who need access to a computer and/or internet access will receive it, even on Sundays. We encourage the City to allocate the necessary funds to ensure this much needed agency can effectively continue to address the needs of the community. We will continue to work with NYPL to advocate for this request.

Sincerely,

Valerie S. Mason

Valerie S. Mason
Chair

Gayle Baron and Felice Farber

Gayle Baron and Felice Farber
Co-Chairs, Budget Committee

cc: Honorable Kathy Hochul, Governor of New York State
Honorable Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President
Honorable Jerry Nadler, 12th Congressional District Representative
Honorable Liz Krueger, NYS Senator, 28th Senatorial District
Honorable José M. Serrano, NYS Senator, 29th Senatorial District
Honorable Edward Gibbs, NYS Assembly Member 68th Assembly District
Honorable Alex Bores, NYS Assembly Member, 73rd Assembly District
Honorable Rebecca Seawright, NYS Assembly Member 76th Assembly District
Honorable Keith Powers, NYC Council Member, 4th Council District
Honorable Julie Menin, NYC Council Member, 5th Council District
Honorable Diana Ayala, NYC Council Member, 8th Council District