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The City of New York
Manhattan Community Board 8
Communications Committee Meeting

Community Board #8M Office Conference Room
June 28, 2010 at 6:30 PM

Community Board Members (Present): Dave Rosenstein, Will Sanchez (co-chairs), Lori Bores, Lorance Hockert
Public Members (Present): Benjamin Kallos, Monica McKane-Sanchez
Guest: District Manager Latha Thompson

The meeting was convened at 6:30 PM. Co-chair Will Sanchez summarized the current format and content of the CB8M Website, explaining that when it was clear that CB8M had to replace its former site, and Public Member Benjamin Kallos, an Open Government advocate and Internet consultant in addition to being an attorney, offered to construct a site using free "Open Source" software, the board's ad hoc working group decided the new site should initially duplicate the functionality of the old site -- without additional features the new software offered.

The initial goal in converting over to a CB8-owned/managed site was to assure that there would be little or no down time, little or no interruption in critical incoming and outgoing e-mail, and no radical changes that would upset or surprise board members, who, it was felt, would like to have input into enhancements and additions to the site.

In the months since the new site went online, many minor bugs have been fixed and the e-mail appears to be stable, albeit with occasional minor problems, largely related to mass e-mail "blasts." Mr. Kallos noted that CB8M's e-mail is currently operating on a no-cost platform, which if needed, can be replaced with a commercial service at a fee that would not materially affect our modest and likely shrinking Board budget. That option would offer a more robust and reliable e-mail service.

I. Where, if at all, is the site lacking in adequate disclosure?

Four areas were discussed. Two produced Resolutions for board consideration.

- **Names of board members:** Research done by a member of the community and confirmed by the committee's co-chair confirmed that of the 12 Manhattan community boards, only CB8M fails to list its members on its Web site. **Note: No community boards list personal contact information**, e.g. addresses, e-mail or telephone numbers of any board members, a privacy policy the committee

unequivocally supports. A few boards do have e-mail addresses at the board office for the chair, e.g., "jackieludorf@cb8m.com" and for specific committees, e.g., "streetlife@cb8m.com" -- the latter of which is an interesting idea worth further consideration.

Resolution I (below) is intended to bring CB8M in conformity with its peers.

- **Names of committee members:** Research done by the committee's co-chair found that 10 of Manhattan's 12 community boards lists members of all committees, one other lists chairs or co-chairs; only CB8M lists no committee members.

  Resolution II (below) is intended to bring CB8M in conformity with its peers.

- **Availability of committee minutes to the public on our Web site:** Considerable discussion was held on whether the minutes of CB8M committees that are distributed to the board members at the full board meeting should be available to the public via the CB8M Web site. While there was some agreement that such minutes often would be of interest to the public, two arguments ran counter to this position. (1) Minutes could be inaccurate as from time to time board members do correct errors in reported voting and also in attendance, arguing against posting "draft" minutes and (2) the burden on District Manager Latha Thompson and her staff ("Staff") of having to manage so many minutes (conversion to PDF, uploading to the Web site and possibly removing and replacing corrected minutes, argued against adding committee minutes. ***No recommendation to the board resulted.***

- **Posting of unapproved draft FB/LU Minutes** (marked "draft for approval" as a few other CBs do). Minutes of Land Use ("LU") and ("FB") meetings currently appear many months after the meetings because the draft minutes are presented at the next month's FB meeting and only after they are approved by the FB can Staff upload them to the Web site. After discussion of the pros and cons of posting unapproved minutes, and the additional burden on Staff of managing these additional uploads and subsequent replacement with approved minutes. ***No recommendation to the board resulted.***

RESOLUTION I:

Whereas Community Board members are already posted online by the Manhattan Borough President's office, and
Whereas Community Board members are public officers, and
Whereas CB8M is the only Manhattan Community Board that does not list its members' names,
Therefore be it resolved that CB8M will list its members' names, identifying those who are officers, without additional personal contact information, on its Web site.

Vote: 6-yes, 0-No: Bores, L.; Hockert, L.; Rosenstein, D.; Sanchez, W.; public members Kallos, B.; McKane-Sanchez, M.

RESOLUTION II:

Whereas 10 of Manhattan's 12 Community Boards list all committee members with the descriptions of the respective committees and one other only lists committee co-chairs and
Whereas CB8M alone lists none of its committee members,
Therefore be it resolved that CB8M will list its committee members, identifying those who are chairs or co-chairs, without additional personal contact information, on its Web site adjacent to the committee descriptions.

Vote: 6-yes, 0-No: Bores, L.; Hockert, L.; Rosenstein, D.; Sanchez, W.; Public Members Kallos, B.; McKane-Sanchez, M.

II. Ease of access to information on the Web site:

- **<u>It is difficult to locate material on the site.</u>** Presently, all public notices regardless of subject (ex. "DDC Daily Construction Bulletins" or "DOT Milling and Paving" notices) or those associated with specific CB8M committees or task forces, e.g., MTA reports on Second Avenue Subway progress, information about Parks or Education etc. are located under the Main Menu's "*Bulletin*" tab in a submenu called "*Updates*."

  It was agreed that this made it much too difficult for board members and the public to find specific items. It was further agreed that the DM and Consultants would reorganize the material currently in *"Updates":* (1) move those clearly related to board committees to new folders directly accessible from the respective committee listings, (2) organize the others under headings for the City Agency from which they come, and (3) move the scores of obsolete notices of movie shoots etc. into new archive folders to make the "Update" page less cluttered. (4) It was also agreed that the "Update" submenu would be renamed to something more easily recognizable as containing NYC government notices. District Manager Latha Thompson will work with Ben Kallos on this restructuring.

- **<u>Add an effective "Search" function</u>**. Benjamin Kallos explained that the open source software on which cb8m.com is built includes a "Search" function, which he turned that on the week before the committee meeting so we could review it. Many other CBs have Web sites built by the NYC Department of Information Technology (DoIT), which employ a Google-based search tool. Ben explained that he

could activate a Google-powered search for www.cb8m.com but urged that we wait at least a few months to do so. **[For the curious, type the following in a Google search box: site:cb8m.com "second avenue subway" -- the result is equivalent to having a Google search utility on our site, searching for the phrase in quotes.]**

Ben explained that the "hits" Google finds contain mainly links to our old site and when clicked on, produce "dead" links. The Google process is based on software that "crawls" across the Internet collecting information, a gradual process. At present, a Google-driven search tool would frustrate users with many "Page not found" messages. It was agreed to wait at least until September to switch our Search from the internal and less powerful utility to a Google search, to allow the Google servers to begin to "remap" our new site.

Note that the sole member of the public who attended expressed great frustration at finding that links ("bookmarks") she had saved for items on the old site now were dead links that brought her to a "Page not found" message. She asked if there were hidden pages available to board members but not to the public because of the phrase "Staff Only" on a link on that page. It was explained that the "Staff Only" links were for the site's managers to access the inner workings of the Web site to post information or update the calendar. Given the possibility that others might misunderstand the purpose of the "Staff only" links, it was suggested that the DM and Ben consider renaming these links to make clear their maintenance function.

III. What do Board members want from the site that is not presently provided?

Considerable discussion followed. For example, board member Bores proposed that PDF "public notice" fliers for committee hearings/meetings be available on the Web site. She felt this would allow members of the public to print-up fliers and help post. However, public member Kallos pointed out this could result in anonymous persons to paper-spam a neighborhood, with the CB inevitably blamed for the inordinate volume of posts or their placement on private or restricted access sites, again with unwanted and unjustified criticism of CB8M. Co-chair Rosenstein urged that this and other posting issues be referred to the Posting Committee and that said committee be restored as an active committee that could establish public bulletin boards in local banks etc. to broaden CB8M's visibility.

IV. What would the community/public like that isn't presently available?

The sole member of the public who attended the meeting noted many items that other CB Web sites carry, including lists of elected officials with their contact information. Staff with the aid of public member Benjamin Kallos will consider which informational items can be included, taking into account the large burden reorganizing the present material requires. The Committee applauded the DM's achievements in learning to use the new software, handling many tasks that had been outsourced to the former site support vendor. The Committee expressed concern that the DM not be overwhelmed with new tasks.

V. To what extent does the office need backup tech support if public member continues to provide overall site upkeep/maintenance?

Benjamin Kallos is committed to contributing his time as a public member bringing Web site management skills to CB8M. Staff has ascertained that the present hardware tech support resource, the Fund for the City of New York, is able to step in, in an emergency, in Ben's absence. So long as the present relationship is working, the committee saw no need to make any changes and once again expressed its gratitude to Mr. Kallos for his commitment to CB8 and the community.

Mr. Kallos communicated with our counsel at the Law Department confirming that CB8M is the sole owner of the Web domain, "www.cb8m.com."

VI. What if anything came out of the Borough President's recent conclave that should be considered as affecting the present or future function and role of CB8's site?

Public member Monica McKane Sanchez who attended along with board member Lori Bores summarized it for us as follows:

- There was felt to be a need for CB chairs to communicate among themselves online in some manner
- There is a continuing need to reach out to those not online
- Some CBs web sites went with the generic DoIT Web site, for which there is no cost. Conversion to a DoIT-built site would take many months and bring with it many headaches. While good in many aspects the DoIT site offers less control and flexibility than an open-source-software one. At least one CB wishes it had its own built version.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

David Rosenstein and Will Sanchez, Co-Chairs, Communications Committee