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**The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan**

February 16, 2024

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

RE: CB8M Letter of Comment on the FY 2025 Preliminary Budget

Dear Mayor Adams:

Community Board 8 Manhattan (“CB8M”) continues to be disappointed by the responses 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 request reflects the ongoing needs of our community as expressed throughout meetings at the most local form of government. While we understand that funds are limited, CB8M believes that the priorities and needs of local Community Districts as reflected by their respective Community Boards should foster more consideration when developing the City’s budget.

CAPITAL BUDGET

New York City Housing Authority (Capital Budget Priority #1)

NYCHA provides critically needed affordable housing for Upper East Side residents. The number of newly created work orders at Isaacs Houses and Holmes Towers has increased over the same period last year. While CB8M commits to reaching out to our local, state and federal representatives for additional funding -- including to those copied on this correspondence -- the need to support this available source of affordable housing remains a clear responsibility for the City of New York. In particular, the playground at Stanley Isaacs houses was inundated with water during Superstorm Sandy. While some repairs have been made to the playground, the playground surface mat requires replacement. As our number one capital budget request, we continue to request the City allocate additional funds to improve NYCHA facilities.

The Police Department (Capital Budget Priority #2)

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. Currently there is a temporary air conditioning unit parked outside the precinct that results in noise and vibrations disturbing to the neighbors. We urge the City to allocate funding to repair the building and support the police officers who protect our community.

Your response to our request states “initial design and estimate have been completed for the new HVAC system. A New need request will be submitted to fund project scope.” However, the 19th Precinct has not received an update on the project. We ask that you reach out to them promptly, assist them with the new need request, and

prioritize completing this project immediately. Please continue to coordinate with the 19th precinct and CB8M to ensure these critical next steps are taken.

The Department of Homeless Services (Capital Priority #4)

Community Board 8 Manhattan is pleased to hear that plans to open the Safe Haven CB8M approved for 91st Street when the DHS was partnering with Goddard Riverside is making continued progress identifying a new service provider. We look forward to hearing more about the new plans. We are excited to work with DHS to continue making steps towards opening a Safe Haven in Community District 8, starting with hearing from your representatives at the upcoming February 22 Health, Seniors, and Social Services Committee meeting. We will provide additional comments following the discussion.

We encourage DHS to work closely with HPD to fund much needed housing for the most vulnerable of our residents, which includes fully funding Safe Havens with experienced, compassionate, and capable service providers.

The New York Public Library (Capital Priority #5 and #16)

Libraries are a vital part of our community and continue to be used by all residents, providing essential access to books and information, Wi-Fi and digital access, as well as events and community support resources.

Libraries should be accessible to all, and we have once again prioritized in our requests that the 67th Street Library requires upgraded and rehabilitated accessibility. The chair lift at this branch is currently inoperable, negatively impacting the ability of our elderly, handicapped, and people with strollers from fully accessing the library. In addition, the adult section of the library is located on the second floor, which means when the lift is out of order, elderly residents and those with mobility restrictions do not have access to their predominantly-visited sections. Directing elderly and less abled residents to another library branch more than 10 blocks away is a barrier to library access. This project should be prioritized to ensure that our libraries are accessible to all. Your response, once again, states that “further study by the agency of this request is needed.” We request that study be completed promptly so the project can commence.

Similarly, it is appalling that the Yorkville Branch of the New York Public Library fails to meet ADA standards. Accessibility for the Yorkville Branch Library has been in the front-end planning with the Department of Design and Construction for at least three years. We strongly encourage that this project be prioritized and quickly advanced to full design and construction, which we have requested each year since at least our FY 2020 District Needs Statement and Budget Priorities.

Both of your responses to these requests have consistently been the same, and the board is concerned about the lack of progress on these vitally important projects.

The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (Capital Priority #6)

The City has a well-documented housing affordability and homelessness crisis. We urge the City to build more affordable housing in Community District 8 Manhattan, which has consistently been one of our three most pressing issues, as reflected in our District Needs Statements, for many years. The Upper East Side has barely added new housing units since 2010 and has actually lost affordable units since then, according to a February 2021 report from the Department of City Planning. Despite what seems like extensive new housing construction on the Upper East Side, as a net total the Upper East Side added less new housing over the past decade than 57 of the City’s other 58 community districts. A recent targeted look at 12 new developments on First, Second, and Third Avenues between 72nd and 86th Streets by a CB8M member showed that for every nine affordable units demolished only one was built. At the same time, costs for existing and new housing are rising faster than income. Just over 13% of the rental units on the Upper East Side in 2019 were considered affordable for a household earning 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI). Indeed, 14,000 units of affordable housing were lost in the district over a 12-year period. At the same time, the City must construct supportive safe haven services to ensure that housing insecure individuals and families also provides them with the tools and services needed to get back on their feet.

Community Board 8 Manhattan encourages HPD to work closely with the Department of Homeless Services to prioritize opening Safe Havens as opposed to other types of facilities.

The Department of Education (Capital Budget Priority #7)

Community Board 8M advocated for many years for the construction of a new high school in our district and this strong advocacy resulted in the construction and opening of Eleanor Roosevelt High School in 2002. It is a high performing and highly desired school in Community District 8 that is open to applicants from across New York City. Despite a high number of qualified applicants, last year resulted in the fewest number of District 2 students accepted to this neighborhood school in years. Unlike in some other districts, students living in Community District 8 are not given borough or zone priority in the lottery for their own neighborhood high school, so the lack of admissions at Eleanor Roosevelt has a particularly severe impact on families in our district, especially given that this district is the one that advocated for years for the school. Given the high demand for high school seats in Community District 8 Manhattan and School District 2, a new high school should be constructed in District 8.

Department of Parks and Recreation Capital Budget Request (Capital Budget Priority #8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, and CS)

Parks and open space are critical to the quality of life in New York City and to the residents of community district 8.

We appreciate the work of the City of New York, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Economic Development Corporation to upgrade many of the parks in our District. Beautifully designed parks and open space can be transformational for a community. The work at Andrew Haswell Green (AHB) Phase 2B is just such an example of a beautifully designed open space.

We would like to emphasize our continuing support for AHB 2B. While the above ground park work has been completed there remains ongoing work to fund and fully build the pilings under AHG 2B between 60th and 63rd Streets. We express our continuing support for this capital project.

Additional funding for Phase 3 of Andrew Haswell Green Park is still needed (priority #11), as is funding for the construction of the lower portion of 24 Sycamores Park (priority #9), and two restrooms in Carl Schurz Park at 87th Street (Priority #17). We will reach out to our Council Members to request additional funding for these essential projects.

The East River Esplanade is a critical resource for the community. Capital work remains to be completed on the Esplanade between 70th and 78th Streets in order to allow the HSS improvements on the Esplanade to continue. Specifically, sinkholes around 71st Street, 74th Street and 77th-78th Streets need to be repaired. We look forward to seeing the work completed as part of the Parks Departments East River Esplanade Stabilization and Reconstruction project. (Priority #8)

We look forward to construction work beginning on Rupert Park on Second Avenue between 90th and 91st Streets. We would like to separate the work in Rupert Park into two separate requests – the first for the reconstruction of the park, a Parks Department Project, and the second for the construction of a new restroom and parks maintenance facility, a Department of Design and Construction Project. We express our continuing support for the advancement of these capital projects.

We would like to move the request for funding for John Jay Park to continuing support. (Priority #12)

We look forward to the ribbon cutting on the new hockey rink in Stanley Isaacs Playground funded by the New York Rangers and Benjamin Moore. We appreciate the donation and request additional funding for lighting of the hockey rink as well as funding to renovate the adjacent playground and installation of seating.

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 2025 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. With Mayor Adams’ City of Yes proposal, in addition to the increased development across the City, we have not been able to adequately pay staff for their hard work, and Community Boards will have continued difficulty in recruiting experienced staff members.

The Department of Youth and Community Development (Expense Priority #3 and #5)

We were pleased last year to see that the city prioritized funding for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) in recent years. We support continued funding of SYEP at a comparably high level again this year. This is a critical program to provide opportunities for students to gain occupational and vocational experience. We also strongly support additional funding for youth vocational and employment programs and services that give priority to youth residing in NYCHA Housing located in Community District 8 Manhattan.

The Department of Education (Expense Priority #4)

The preliminary budget includes cuts to early care and education funding that comes on top of stalled expansion of 3K programs. There continues to be a high demand for early childhood education seats in District 8 Manhattan exceeding the available capacity. Availability of seats for early childhood education will help keep families in New York City and strengthen the City’s economy.

Department of Parks and Recreation (Expense Priority #6, 14, 15, 27)

The preliminary budget includes a 5% cut to the Parks Department. These cuts include a hiring freeze which will eliminate over 600 essential jobs. The Parks Department is chronically underfunded and understaffed. There are not nearly enough maintenance workers and PEP officers to keep our community parks clean and safe. We continue to call for increased funding for the Parks Department to allow for the hiring of more PEP officers and maintenance workers to keep our neighborhood parks clean and safe, provide rodent extermination, and plant new trees where missing.

Human Resources Administration (Expense Priority #7)

The combination of the end of supplemental COVID aid with increased food prices has exacerbated food insecurity throughout New York City. Our neighborhood food pantries are seeing an increase in the number of people seeking assistance with meals and groceries. We reiterate our support for increased funding for food pantries and other community organizations that support the food insecure in our district.

The Department of Sanitation (Expense Priority #16)

Curbside composting is essential to reducing the amount of organics in the City’s waste stream. We are pleased to see many orange curbside composting bins in the district. The frequency of pick up from these bins must be increased in order to encourage diversion of organics from the City’s waste stream. When the bins are full, as

they often are, residents turn to disposing of compostable material in the general garbage rather than in the composting containers. The residents of our community district are ready to do our part for sustainability; we just need support from the City.

The Department of Transportation (Expense Priority #18)

The CB8M Transportation Committee reviewed the location of all accessible pedestrian signals in the district and passed a resolution determining priority locations for new accessible signals in Community District 8. The resolution was unanimously approved by the full board on April 13, 2022. CB8 has provided a list of specific locations for consideration for installation of accessible signals.

The New York Public Library (Expense Priority #13)

We continue to stress the importance of restoring Sunday service to one library 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 appreciate that NYPL is in favor of this project, and that added or restored City funding is required for all expense budget costs, and that you will continue to work through the City’s budget process for needed funding. Community Board 8 Manhattan is requesting the City to provide sufficient funds to begin resuming Sunday service. We will continue to work with NYPL to advocate for this request.

Sincerely,

Valerie S. Mason Rebecca Dangoor & Felice Farber

Valerie S. Mason
Chair

Rebecca Dangoor and Felice Farber
Co-Chairs, Budget Committee

cc: Honorable Jerry Nadler, 12th Congressional District Representative
 Honorable Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President
 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 Julie Menin, NYC Council Member, 5th Council District
 Honorable Keith Powers, NYC Council Member, 4th Council District