



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas K. Duane

June 2009 Community Report

THOMAS K. DUANE June 29, 2009

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Dear Neighbor:

The following is a summary of some of my office's activities since my last community report:

Supporting Our Community Boards

Although I was in Albany, I was represented by several members of my staff at the June 9 rally at City Hall to save New York City's Community Boards. Community Boards play a vital advisory role on such issues as land use, zoning, liquor licensing and other community concerns, yet the Mayor's preliminary budget proposed cutting each Board's budget by 18 percent or approximately \$35,000. This would make it impossible for the City's 59 Boards, which have not had a budget increase in 18 years, to efficiently and effectively represent and respond to their communities.

I want to thank CB3 District Manager Susan Stetzer and Bob Gormley, her counterpart at Manhattan Community Board 2, for taking the lead on this issue by writing a powerful Op-Ed in [The Villager](#) articulating why the proposed cuts would have a crippling impact.

I am grateful that the New York City Council recognized how counterproductive these cuts would be, and restored full funding for the City's Community Boards in the City's Fiscal Year 2009-10 budget.

Marching for Safer Streets

On June 13, I spoke at a memorial march – organized by the Clinton-Hell's Kitchen Coalition for Pedestrian Safety (CHEKPEDS), Transportation Alternatives, the Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Association (HKNA) and the West Side Neighborhood Alliance (WSNA) – for pedestrians killed by automobiles on 9th Avenue in Clinton/Hell's Kitchen. I was joined at the rally by other elected officials, including New York State Assemblymembers Dick Gottfried and Linda Rosenthal, New York City Council Transportation Committee Chair John Liu, friends and relatives of the victims, and a host of community members and activists from all over the city.

While this somber event took place in Clinton/Hell's Kitchen, the concerns that were raised are regrettably applicable throughout my district. Too often in our city, where walking is a crucial mode of transportation, pedestrians are at risk of being hit by reckless drivers who are not held responsible for the harm they cause. We must continue to push for safer streets and tougher traffic laws, and I thank CHEKPEDS, Transportation Alternatives, HKNA and WSNA for their leadership on these issues.

Fighting for Tenants' Rights at Partially Collapsed 14th Street Building

On May 15, the NYC Department of Buildings (DOB) ordered the evacuation of tenants at 152 West 14th Street when an inspection found that the facade needed to be removed because it was in danger of collapse. It is clear that the landlord, Stanley Wasserman, who had received many violations from DOB, had neglected his responsibility to maintain his building. As a result, the tenants are now homeless, living in temporary housing either provided by NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) or that they arranged for themselves.

I have joined New York State Assemblymember Deborah Glick and other elected officials in working with the Westside SRO Law Project, which is representing these tenants, to ensure that they receive the appropriate legal attention and assistance as they wait for a court decision on the status of the building and of their residency. We have collectively written to DOB, HPD, and the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal requesting a meeting to address the multiple issues regarding 152 West 14th St. and the other Wasserman-owned buildings, which also have many violations. In addition, my staff has been involved in organizing the tenants of all the Wasserman-owned buildings, and I am fully committed to assisting them in every possible way to protect their rights.

Seeking Justice and an End to False Arrests

On June 13, I spoke at a Sheridan Square rally held by the Coalition to Stop the False Arrests to demand justice for the dozens of gay men falsely arrested for prostitution in lower Manhattan adult video stores. Since the beginning of the year, I have been working with the Coalition, its founder Rob Pinter, the New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project and other elected officials, community activists and organizations to have our concerns about these incidents addressed by the NYPD, New York City District Attorney (D.A.) Robert Morgenthau and the Bloomberg administration. The Coalition's efforts have led the NYPD to

reexamine its policies and, in fact, no further false arrests have been made since the Coalition formed.

As you may recall, in early March, I organized a meeting of the Coalition with D.A. Morgenthau and other local elected officials at which the D.A. pledged an investigation into the matter. Currently, the D.A.'s office has dropped all open cases against men accused of prostitution, and it is accepting Motions to Vacate from men who pled guilty to lesser charges but would now like to clear that admission from their records. I and my staff are following up with the D.A.'s office regularly as the investigation continues.

Opposing the Rent Guideline's Board Proposed Rent Increases

On June 17th, I submitted [testimony](#) before the New York City Rent Guidelines Board (RGB) opposing this year's proposed rent increases of 2 to 4.5% for one-year and 4 to 7.5% two-year leases. I am dismayed that the RGB even considered such increases in light of the current economic climate and the steady rent increases the RGB has approved in years past. I urged the RGB to instead freeze rents on all apartments, lofts, hotels, rooming houses, single room occupancy (SRO) buildings and lodging houses.

Working to Expand Testing and Treatment for HIV

On May 28, the Community Health Care Association of New York State (CHCANYS) joined the growing list of diverse organizations that have come out in favor of my and Assembly Member Richard Gottfried's legislation that will vastly expand the number of New Yorkers being tested and treated for HIV. Please see my [press release](#) announcing CHCANYS' support and explaining the urgent need for the legislation's passage.

Shaping Open Space through Collaboration with New York University

Since February 2008, my office has participated in the New York University (NYU) Co-Gen Landscaping Community Advisory Committee. The Committee includes local residents and businesses, CB2 members and elected officials' offices and has provided a rare and important opportunity for the community to be involved in shaping the new open space that will exist on Mercer Street after work on NYU's co-generation plant is completed. I thank the Committee and NYU for their hard work, and I was heartened that this collaborative process ended with unanimous support for the final design of this new public park. I encourage the community to come see the design proposal the Committee agreed upon when it is presented by the accomplished landscape architectural firm Mathews Nielsen at the CB2 Parks, Recreation & Open Space Committee meeting on July 8.

Advocating for a West 17th Street Playstreet

On May 28, I sent a [letter](#) to the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT), expressing my support for Fulton Youth of the Future's (FYF) proposed playstreet on 17th Street between 9th and 10th Avenues. FYF's idea, which would close much of the block from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on four Sundays during the summer, would be an invaluable public resource in an area with too little open space. FYF has done an admirable job of crafting a proposal that will cause few disruptions to the residents of the block, and has support from a wide range of community and neighborhood groups. I look forward to an affirmative response from DOT, and to summer Sundays of game-playing and arts and crafts on West 17th Street.

Securing Repairs for 14th Street IRT Subway Station

Earlier this year, I and other local elected officials wrote to NYCT reiterating the community's concerns about the deterioration of the 14th Street Subway Station at Seventh Avenue, which serves the 1, 2, and 3 lines, and connects to the Sixth Avenue L line station at 14th Street. I am pleased to report that in early May, I received a letter of response stating that NYCT has already corrected some of the problems at the station, including peeling paint on the station's ceiling, leaks and faulty drain pipes, and has plans in place for further improvements.

Promoting a Port Authority Bus Garage

On May 14, the Tri-State Transportation Campaign (TSTC) released a report calling for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to prioritize enhancing bus service for its 100 million annual passengers. Among the report's long-term recommendations is that the Port Authority "move forward with plans to renovate and add capacity to the Port Authority Bus Terminal with community input, and to construct a bus garage on the West Side." This is something for which CB4 and I have long been advocating and I am grateful to TSTC for identifying this need in its comprehensive, ground-breaking report. Please see [TSTC's press release](#), in which I am quoted to link to a .pdf of the full report.

Supporting Landmark Designation of Tammany Hall

On May 6, I [wrote](#) to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) asking that it designate as a landmark the former Tammany Hall headquarters at 100-102 East 17th Street on Union Square East. The letter reiterated a request I made in an August 2002 letter to LPC, which unfortunately has not been acted upon. Tammany Hall is a fine example of Colonial Revival architecture, built with red Harvard brick and limestone. As the headquarters to New York's former Democratic Party machine and later a labor union meeting space, it maintains important ties to New York's political history. I look forward to

the preservation of this important piece of New York's architectural landscape.