

April 2010 Community Report

Dear Neighbor:

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

Albany Update

As of this writing, the New York State Budget for the 2010-2011 fiscal year has yet to be enacted.

On March 22, the State Senate passed its own one house budget resolution in preparation for negotiations with the Assembly and Executive Branch. Tough choices were made - yet the Senate Democratic Conference went to great lengths to protect our most vulnerable citizens from the effects of disproportionate and harsh budget cuts.

Regrettably, one month later, negotiations have not led to a resolution. This past week, both the State Senate and Assembly passed a third emergency extender budget, which will maintain the operation of State government until April 25.

Without question this year's budget will have severe cuts across the board. There will be significant reductions in health, education, public protection, transportation, parks and recreation and much more. I believe it is imperative that we pass a sensible, fiscally responsible and kind budget as soon as possible.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the budget process, please do not hesitate to contact my office at (212) 633-8052.

Read my complete Albany Update [here](#).

Welcoming Tenants to Albany on April 27:

I look forward to welcoming tenants from across the state at the Real Rent Reform Campaign's first Tenant Lobby Day of the year in Albany on April 27. My staff has been assisting organizers in securing a gathering place for the event and I will be there to greet and encourage tenants before they head out on their lobbying visits.

In our effort to pass legislation that will truly protect tenants and preserve affordable housing, progress is difficult and each step forward is hard-fought. However, we cannot give up and say that it is impossible. We must remember that every day in Albany is truly a new day and we must be well-prepared and poised to capitalize on opportunities. More than ever, I need tenants to be a presence the Capitol in order to win in 2010.

To reserve a spot on a Tenant Lobby Day bus, please contact Giti Dadlani, Tenants & Neighbors' Rent Regulation Organizer, at gdadlani@tandn.org / 212-608-4320 x 316 or call Housing Here and Now at (718) 802-9540. ext. 9.

Working to Save Health Care in Lower Manhattan

The April 6, 2010 decision of the Board of St. Vincent's Catholic Medical Center to close the hospital's inpatient units was deeply disappointing. I understand that many of my constituents are wondering how this could have happened. I do not have all the answers, but it is widely recognized that St. Vincent's suffered from gross mismanagement. As the April 16, 2010 Crain's Health Pulse noted, "The bankruptcy documents for Saint Vincent Catholic Medical Centers list many reasons for its financial failure. Some of the financial travails are shared by all New York City hospitals. But others were clearly the result of poor decisions by SVCMC's leadership."

Because St. Vincent's is a private corporation, its Board of Directors is the fiduciary responsible for the hospital's operations. It is clear that leadership failed. While neither the New York State Department of Health (DOH) nor local elected officials could force this private entity, which was losing millions of dollars a week, to stay in business, we do have a role in making sure the overall health of the community is protected. It is to this imperative that I have turned my attention.

The day after the hospital board's announcement, I joined St. Vincent's doctors, nurses and staff; the unions who represent the majority of the caregivers; other elected officials and neighborhood residents at a rally in support of keeping a healthcare facility with urgent care on Manhattan's Lower West Side. As I told the crowd, I will continue to fight for the preservation of emergency services, widely available and culturally sensitive community-based primary care, and the specialty clinical services that have been at the core of St. Vincent's commitment to our neighborhoods and our city as a whole. I and my staff are keeping that commitment every day.

In the wake of the Board's decision, New York State Assemblymember Dick Gottfried and I, as the Assembly and Senate Health Committee Chairs and elected representatives of the community in which St. Vincent's Hospital is located, wrote to Governor Paterson to reiterate ways in which St. Vincent's is special and life-sustaining and to urge him and DOH to use the powerful legal and regulatory tools at their disposal to shape the outcome of this devastating impending closure. One of our requests (see our letter [here](#)) was for DOH to allocate HEAL NY grants for health care entities interested in taking over all or parts of St. Vincent's lower Manhattan medical operations, and indeed, that request has been honored.

While there are limits to public officials' power in this situation, I and my staff are collaborating daily with DOH and select St. Vincent's professional staff on strategies for preserving various St. Vincent's services. I am also continuing to work with other stakeholders, including City, State and Federal officials, St. Vincent's chief restructuring officer, labor and community members, to guarantee that the health care needs of our neighborhoods are met.

I do wish to dispel the idea that a potential deal between Mt. Sinai Medical Center and St. Vincent's was scuttled due to interference from DOH or from New York State Health Commissioner Richard Daines. When it became known that St. Vincent's was in financial trouble and seeking a partner, six hospitals expressed interest. They were all given access to the hospitals' operating and financial data. After reviewing these materials, they all independently reached the conclusion that that they could not establish a viable inpatient hospital there. Mount

Sinai's interest became public knowledge, but in the end, neither it nor any of the other five potential suitors chose to pursue an alliance with St. Vincent's that would maintain the hospital.

I have tremendous gratitude for the people who have worked at St. Vincent's over the past 160 years and especially the employees, who in recent months took pay cuts to ensure that care continued in our community. It is personally devastating to me, as I know it is to our community, that our much-loved and needed acute care hospital has not been saved. I have by necessity turned my attention to salvaging all the St. Vincent's services that we can and to guaranteeing that the health care needs of our neighborhoods are met today and in the future.

Continuing to Fight Risky Gas Drilling

On April 23, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) [announced](#) a separate environmental review process that will effectively prevent high-volume hydraulic fracturing in the New York City and Skaneateles Lake watersheds.

While ostensibly this is a step in the right direction to protect the drinking water of many New Yorkers from this risky gas drilling technology, I fear it is a cynical move that will pit New Yorkers against each other. We must not let DEC punt on prohibiting such drilling for natural gas in and around water supplies throughout the entire state.

Residents in Manhattan and Syracuse, for example, will benefit from this decision while those living in Ithaca and Jamestown will not. This is unacceptable.

It is a testament to the hard work of environmental and community advocates that we were able to reach this point, but we cannot allow this announcement to lull us into complacency.

New York City activists must maintain their vigilant support for statewide protections and I call upon the New York City Department of Environmental Protection to continue to fight alongside us.

Let us not doubt for a second that if DEC permits hydraulic fracturing in and around the rest of New York's water supplies then the New York City and Skaneateles Lake watersheds will once again be at risk. Once the large and well-financed energy companies get a foothold in New York State, it is only a matter of time before they convince DEC that drilling in the unfiltered water supplies is safe as well.

Encouraging Tenant Unity at Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village

In light of the recent notice of foreclosure on Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village and its likely sale, the Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village-Tenants Association ([ST/PCV-TA](#)) has been encouraging tenants to sign a "Pledge of Unity." While not legally binding, the pledge formally designates ST/PCV-TA to negotiate on tenants' behalf; expresses support for a plan that gives people an option to buy or continue to rent their apartments, keeps the community affordable, and preserves open space and quality of maintenance; and promises that, prior to making any agreement to purchase their apartment, tenants will first give ST/PCV-TA the

opportunity to present a plan for their consideration. A strong show of unity will demonstrate to potential partners and CW Capital, the complex's special servicer currently in control of the property, that residents are unified in their support for a tenants' bid. Having 25,000 residents united behind the Tenants Association will also give tenants a much stronger position at the bargaining table.

Residents of all 11,000 apartments in the complex have received pledges to return and Tenants Association members have been out in force to collect the forms. On April 10, I was pleased to join ST/PCV-TA at the kick off its outdoor Unity Pledge drive. On April 24, I participated in a Unity Reception at which I joined City Councilmember Dan Garodnick, State Assemblymember Brian Kavanaugh, ST/PCV-TA's legal and financial advisers and board members in answering residents' questions and encouraging them to sign the pledge.

Already residents of more than half of the complex's occupied apartments have signed the pledge, and I and my staff will continue our efforts to help the ST/PCV-TA secure full participation.

Being Recognized for My Commitment to Public Health

I was honored to be recognized as a "hero of public health" at the Commission on the Public's Health System's (CPHS) Public Health Awards Gala on April 22. I have received numerous awards over the course of my political career, but this one was especially meaningful.

CPHS has been a true partner in my efforts to make health care available to all, particularly in working to make sure that public dollars meant to provide care to people without health insurance actually go to those hospitals that welcome the uninsured.

For information on CPHS' work to ensure decisions about health care include public input and address the diverse needs of New York City communities, visit www.cphsnyc.org.

Protecting Tenants in Light of Roberts V. Tishman Speyer Court Decision

Following up on last year's victory for tenants in the Roberts V. Tishman Speyer Properties, L.P. New York State Court of Appeals decision, which ruled that buildings accepting New York City J-51 tax abatements for renovations must extend rent stabilization protections to their tenants during the life of the abatement, I spearheaded correspondence from the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) Policy and Practice Reform Group seeking to protect tenants in light of this monumental ruling. The group's letter to the DHCR asked the agency to affirm that all apartments in these buildings are subject to rent stabilization and notify all tenants and landlords of this fact. A second letter to the New York City Courts asked for a number of specific practical policy changes to help tenants who find themselves in Housing Court better defend themselves in light of the court ruling. The Roberts decision was a tremendous victory for New York City tenants, but it will take careful follow-up to ensure that it is fully implemented. Please download our letters in .pdf format [here](#).

Seeking Detailed Plans for Co-Locating PS 452 at M044

On March 17, I was joined by U.S. Representative Jerry Nadler, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, New York State Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal and New York City Councilmember Gale Brewer in requesting that the New York City Department of Education (DOE) and the New York City School Construction Authority (SCA) detail their plans to site a new three-section elementary school, PS 452, at the M044 building (100 West 77 Street). While we are pleased that DOE proposed the creation of this new school in response to concerns that we, the District 3 Community Education Council (CEC3), and many of our constituents have raised about severe overcrowding in southern District 3 schools, we need to be assured that other schools in the building will not be unduly burdened by the co-location of an additional school. Please see our letter [here](#).

Saying "Goodbye" to Tourist Helicopters in Hudson River Park

On April 1, thanks to a lawsuit filed by [Friends of Hudson River Park](#) (FoHRP), sightseeing helicopters ceased operating from the West 30th Street Heliport in Hudson River Park. I have long called for a ban on tourist helicopter flights, which bring noise, dust, and fumes to the park, its many users and residents along the West Side. Though tourist helicopters were prohibited at West 30th Street by the 1998 legislation creating the park, such helicopters continued to use the heliport and in 2007, FoHRP filed a lawsuit seeking to stop their operation. In 2008, the Heliport and helicopter operators, FoHRP, and the Hudson River Park Trust reached an agreement that set March 31, 2010 as the last date for tourist helicopters to use the Heliport. I congratulate FoHRP on its hard-fought victory, and I look forward to seeing you in a quieter, cleaner Hudson River Park.

Speaking Out Against Flag Burning at LGBT Community Center

I was angered to learn that a rainbow flag was recently burned and draped over a display case in front of New York City's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center. I joined City Council Speaker Christine Quinn and many of our local elected officials in releasing a statement denouncing this targeted vandalism. Please see our statement by clicking [here](#). I appreciate the swift response of the New York City Police Department's Hate Crimes Unit, and I am monitoring its investigation of the incident as a bias crime.