Students, parents, and teachers at DeWitt Clinton High School are once again being asked to share their campus with another school waiting in the wings. The new school, known as PS X721 Stephen McSweeney School, is comprised of students diagnosed with autism, intellectual or multiple disabilities as determined by their Individualized Education Program (IEP). The school would be part of District 75 (D75), where students from the district are already enrolled at DeWitt Clinton Campus, albeit in smaller classroom settings.

And with the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP), the governing body comprised of mayoral appointees and slated to vote on the proposal on April 17, it’s likely the Norwood campus will see a new student body next September. Much of the objections don’t stem from a D75 school being placed at the DeWitt Clinton Campus, but rather any school that could further congest the campus and diminish any academic impact the 90-year-old school can foster. The proposal by the city Department of Education...
PARKING. RENT. CONGESTION PRICING.
Topics Explored at Norwood Town Hall

By JOSEPH KONIG

Fresh off passing the state budget in Albany this week, legislators returned to their districts to laud their successes and discuss their next moves at a town hall specifically geared for Norwood residents. State Sen. Jamaal Bailey, Assembly Members Nathalia Fernandez and Jeffrey Dinowitz, joined Councilman Andrew Cohen in getting those ideas out.

Guests in the Cherkasky Auditorium submitted questions covering everything from the plastic bag ban (Dinowitz: “We didn’t need them 35 years ago, we don’t need them today.”), to parking, congestion pricing and marijuana legalization (Bailey: “Conversations continue to be ongoing... my main concern with legalization is impacted community benefit.”) Nearly 100 people attended the two-hour town hall on April 4.

Rent Reform

In Norwood, a neighborhood with “the highest rate of rent stabilization” in the Bronx according to Cohen, an unsurprisingly high number of the questions were about rent reform. Democrats won back the state Senate last fall in part thanks to their promises to fix New York’s notoriously rent laws.

“This is an issue which is probably more dear to my heart more than anything,” Dinowitz said. “Even before I could vote, I actually volunteered some of my time at a housing clinic helping people with landlord-tenant disputes.”

Complaints to his office of landlord abuse and rent disputes are more common than any other issue, according to Dinowitz, who said he was confident the legislation he and others in the Assembly tried to pass for years would finally make its way to the Governor’s desk. Among them is evoking preferential rent in favor of a standard rent that applies throughout the duration of the lease without invoking a legal rent.

Landlords can offer preferential rent—a lower rent than the legally regulated rent—but can increase it to the legal rent upon lease renewal. Dinowitz also wants to remove vacancy bonuses that allow landlords to jack up rent by upwards of 20 percent any time a tenant leaves. Dinowitz argues this gives landlord “a perverse incentive” to keep apartments empty and potentially force tenants out so they can hike up rents for the next tenant.

Parking

Longtime Norwood resident Sirio Guerino submitted the first question of the evening: Would elected officials support raising parking tickets from $115 to $500 in order to discourage double parkers, hydrant parkers, and the other lawless drivers who clog up East Gun Hill Road and elsewhere? The short answer: no.

“While the problem you described is very real, I don’t think I would personally be supportive of raising the fine to $500 because I kinda want to be re-elected,” Dinowitz said, to laughs.

While Dinowitz called for increased enforcement and improved public transportation, Fernandez said developers need to create parking decks along with their apartment buildings, something they frequently avoid due to a waiver that allows them to avoid providing more parking if their building is near a subway stop. Cohen floated a residents-only parking permit pilot program.

“It’s going to be very difficult to change car culture,” Bailey said. “Our mass transit system has by-in-large failed us, which forces people to purchase cars even if they don’t want to... I don’t know if we should be raising fines on the backs of working folks.”

Congestion Pricing

In an extension of the parking discussion, the elected officials discussed the impact of the new congestion pricing that was just passed as part of the budget. The plan is to charge a one-day toll for any vehicle traveling in Manhattan south of 60th Street, beginning as soon as 2021. Eighty percent of the revenue generated will be allocated for city subways and buses, while the remaining 20 percent will be split by Metro-North and the Long Island Railroad.

“That’s the big and most important to me, the money for the MTA,” Fernandez said. “We absolutely need it. It’s not a question anymore. This is the quickest and best way.”

Bailey, while optimistic about the new revenue, worried commuters from outside the five boroughs will park and transfer to mass transit, a problem that already exists in his bifurcated 32nd Senate District, he said.

Dinowitz, a one-time opponent of congestion pricing, shared similar concerns for a plan he said garnered its strongest support from Manhattanites and Brooklyn gentrifiers. Among them was the issue of parents from his district driving below 60th Street to pick their kids up from a school, a price tag Dinowitz estimates can run in the “thousands of dollars a year.”

“I always believed the best way to raise the money for the MTA was to have a charge that all of would pay a little bit, instead of a small number of people paying a lot,” Dinowitz said. “Not to be provincial about, but I’m not that worried about Manhattan. They seem to be able to take care of themselves.”

Public and Community Meetings

COMMUNITY BOARD 7 committee meetings are held on the following dates at the board office, 229A E. 204th St. at 6:30 p.m. unless otherwise noted: Public Safety & Quality of Life Committee meets on April 11; Health & Human Services Committee meets on April 16; Executive Committee meets on April 17; Economic Development and Long-Term Planning Committee meets on April 18; and Veterans Affairs Committee meets on April 18. For more information, call (718) 933-5650.

The 52ND PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL meets April 25 at 3100 Webster Ave. at 7 p.m. For more information, call (718) 220-5824.
TUESDAY APRIL 16TH
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM at
PS20 in the Cafeteria
3050 Webster Ave
Bronx, NY 10467

MPC surveyed residents, shoppers, business owners, and property owners about shopping in Norwood as part of our Commercial District Needs Assessment. Please join us to discuss our findings, and identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities for your neighborhood.

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Residents, Local Shoppers, Merchants, Parents, Students, EVERYONE is Welcome. Join us for a night of fun activities about your neighborhood!

FOR MORE INFO
mpc@mpcbronx.org
www.mpcbronx.org
718-324-4461
This week we asked readers where the money collected through Congestion Pricing tolls should go to improve the buses and subways.

Well, they need to accommodate women with carriages on buses; so I think they need to install more wheelchair snaps in so we would be able to snap in baby strollers in the same blue chair accessible spots. Right now, we’re not allowed to do that so they need to put some money into that, because their excuse is they are unable to accommodate so many mothers. Money should also be spent so that there’s elevators at every train station and create rider schedules that are on time and keep us from being so congested and create rider schedules that are on time and keep us from being so congested and keep us from being so congested and keep us from being so congested.

If they want to combat fare evasion, forget about the subways, do it on the buses. They need to stop the people getting on in the back of the buses. That bothers me so much because you put your money in, but you can’t get to the back of the bus because everyone that has gotten in has taken all the seats. They’re understaffed and that’s the problem. If they’re redeveloping the Bronx, they have to redevelop the transit system.

I think it’s going to go right into their pockets. It’s hard to determine why the cost to maintain it keeps rising because you figure they have a million riders a day; why do they need more money? Why are we increasing the fare and cutting services? Obviously, there’s mismanagement in the organization. Money should go to the overall maintenance, track work. It’s an old system.

I don’t believe the money they will be charging for [Congestion Pricing] will go to fix the MTA. I think this is another way to tax the middle- and lower-class people. I was on the subway on Saturday; what should have taken 30 to 45 minutes, took close to two hours. I live by the 5 train and it’s always closed for repairs on weekends, but I never see them fix anything. In many areas they need to run more buses as [there] are some areas that are a bit of a transportation desert. I also think it’s unfair for hospital workers and police officers to have to pay the extra toll to go to work; they tend to work odd hours and cannot easily take mass transit.

I’ve been taking the express bus as much as I can to avoid the subway. I have had a better luck with buses, especially getting to my Bronx Times assignments. I am not sure how to improve the system; it has got to be difficult to manage because of the massive amounts of people that travel it every day. If there’s a problem or construction on a particular line, it’s very confusing and a drag to be rerouted. I’m not sure where the money should be spent.

Lisa Ortega
Hunts Point

Rudea Smith
Tremont

Jonathan Nunez
Bedford Park

Debby Kawalick
Pelham Parkway

Eddie Watkins
Kingsbridge
Norwood Okays Projects With a Stroke of a Pen, Thanks to PB

By DAVID CRUZ

Inside tower one at Tracey Towers, volunteers man a small table inside the lobby. It’s the day before Participatory Budgeting—an initiative that allows residents within a Council District to decide how $1 million in capital funds should be used—and some tenants stop to make their voices heard on paper.

It’s the afternoon of April 4, and Delores Edwards and Evelyn McDonald, lure some familiar faces to complete ballots featuring the list of Participatory Budget projects residents spent months hammering out. The projects would impact the neighborhood, part of the 11th Council District that’s represented by Councilman Andrew Cohen. For the last five years, Cohen has left residents to decide how 20 percent of the $5 million he receives in capital funding should be spent.

While the question of what residents would do with $1 million in capital funding may sound simple enough, there are caveats that often get lost. Projects included for consideration must be over $35,000, have at least five years’ longevity, and be a public benefit.

Ironically, 11 projects were up for a vote for the 11th Council District. This year’s projects included improved amenities at local libraries, roadways, and real-time bus arrival information that would serve the entire district. The largest ticket item on the list is the installation of an HVAC system at Spuyten Duyvil Library earmarked for $600,000.

Maggie Robinson, a Norwood resident of 40 years, stopped by the table to fill out her ballot. She carefully assessed the projects, marking the top five projects she thought would greatly benefit her community. “Well, I always felt and I always want the very best for the neighborhood, and for myself. So if I vote, I hope that my vote will be counted, and supported by other people,” she said.

Next came Lois Belin, a 40-year resident, who finds the prospect of voting for improved neighborhood conditions a no-brainer: “The roads are definitely the problem. They are bumpy, they are not smooth. There are potholes everywhere,” said Belin, who also wants traffic flow to improve. “Just go up Jerome Avenue and you’ll see cars sitting.”

William Belin, another resident at Tracey Towers, carefully vetted each of the projects while running through the list.

Residents didn’t need to stop by the number of volunteer tables peppered across the district. They could have also voted online, another way of boosting the kind of civic engagement Participatory Budgeting is intended to create. This year saw 721 voters take advantage of the online voting platform.

Chosen projects will have the funds allocated during this year’s New York City Fiscal Year 2020 budget that goes into effect in July.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING DELEGATE Delores Edwards (l) helps Maggie Robinson, a Tracey Towers resident, fill out her ballot.

By ALONDRA VASQUEZ

Child Porn Charges for Fordham Teacher

A Theodore Roosevelt High School teacher was charged by the NYPD and federal authorities for possessing child porn. On April 3, law enforcement officers conducted a search warrant at teacher Jonathan Schweitzer’s apartment and took his laptop computer, which had many files containing child pornography. Schweitzer has been a teacher for more than a decade. He has been charged with one count of distribution and receipt of child pornography and one count of possession of child pornography. These charges carry a minimum sentence of five years in prison and a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison.

Bronx Parks Preservation Grant

The Bronx River Alliance, along with the New York Botanical Garden and the Bronx Zoo, is getting extra help preserving the woody Bronx Parks forest through a $5,000 in-kind grant by the Natural Areas Conservancy (NAC) nonprofit. NAC will offer consulting on forest management and long-term planning. Maggie Scott Greenfield, executive director of the Bronx River Alliance said the group will work in “harmonious partnership to protect, improve and restore the Bronx River corridor.” An NAC report found that the city’s forests are exposed to many threats including invasive plants, dumping, and unauthorized trails. They have also determined that the city’s natural areas are in need of public investments for the next 25 years.

Norwood Trees Cut

It has been said that the city Department of Parks has been cutting and trimming down dead trees in the Norwood area. A foreign bacteria has apparently been killing the trees in the neighborhood. “They choke the life out of these trees, so in order for them to not fall over people, property and cars, they have to tear them down,” said Kenny Agosto, deputy chief of staff to state Sen. Jamaal Bailey, who spoke at the latest Bedford Moshulu Community Association meeting on April 3.

Attorney Questions 5-2 Tactics

More cases involving questionable police tactics at the 52nd Precinct have cropped up. As first reported by the New York Daily News, there were several instances where the version of an officer’s legal standing to make an arrest conflicted with video surveillance, while another instance involved plainclothes officers entering a home to make a gun arrest without a warrant. A spokeswoman for the Bronx District Attorney’s Office, which dropped a prior case against Five Two cops engaged in alleged questionable police tactics, did not respond to the Daily News’ request for comment.

Bronx Dems Back Williams

The Bronx Democratic Party endorsed New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, who plans to run for the seat once again in the June primary. Williams was elected in February in a special election, filling the seat vacated by now New York Attorney General Letitia James. Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., who was at the endorsement, finds the election system “flawed” since Williams has to run just a few months after winning the seat. “[The] fact that he has to go out to collect petitions, put together another campaign after New York has already said that we want him, I think that is a travesty of the system and it should be changed,” Diaz said. Williams said, “I have tried my best to really live by elected official experience as advocating for the people even if it was not politically popular at that moment in time. I am proud to be here in the Bronx and to make sure that the people in the Bronx and their voices are heard.”
By EMILY SUZANNE LEVER

Only five percent of Norwood residents commute by car into Manhattan below 60th Street and so would be affected by an impending congestion pricing toll, according to an analysis of census data by the Tri-State Transportation Commission (TSTC), a nonprofit focused on public transit.

In other parts of the northwest Bronx, that number is closer to three percent, the report said.

But some residents told the Norwood News they were against the measure even if it would not affect them personally, saying it amounted to squeezing poor people.

“It’s an abuse. They need to stop raising the prices on everything,” said Luis Rosario, 56, an insulation worker, adding, “It’s always everything for the rich, nothing for the poor.”

Tyrone Blake, 41, a sanitation worker, found the measure unjust. “I’m a city worker, now I have to pay just to go to work,” said Blake, who drives to Manhattan for work and would be impacted.

Many Bronx residents who drive into Manhattan are choosing a car over a complicated commute involving multiple transfers. That’s why, to make congestion pricing as beneficial as possible, New York needs to be aggressive about providing more and better alternatives to driving, like adding park-and-rides and bus service, said Nick Sifuentes, the executive director of TSTC. “The MTA right now is doing a whole bus network redesign. They need to hear from folks who already or might have to have a ‘two buses to the train’ situation,” Sifuentes said. “The moment to do that is literally right now.”

The tolls are supposed to help with those transit improvements, raising an estimated $15 billion over the next decade, according to the current state budget. Commuters can expect other benefits from congestion pricing, according to Sifuentes, including a 15 percent dip in traffic in midtown and much more fluid traffic elsewhere.

“Commuters, whether they commute into the CBD or not, will see less traffic,” Sifuentes says, referring to the Central Business District, or midtown. Giving up on driving into Manhattan will result in fewer cars on the roads that lead into Manhattan, not just in the tolled zone itself, he explained.

That would include the Cross-Bronx Expressway, which is the most gridlocked road in the city, according to INRIX, a traffic data analysis company. INRIX’s most recent report also said New York has the worst traffic on the east coast, though there’s more to the issue of congestion pricing than fewer traffic jams; it has been touted as the way to finally fix the MTA.

But commuters are skeptical that the extra revenue will be the miracle solution that Governor Cuomo has promised it to be.

“The people that run this city misspend their money no matter what,” said Anthony, 40, who works in Norwood and lives in El Barrio in Manhattan. “And it’s always the normal people who have to work every day and fill up these trains at 6 a.m. who suffer.”

Norwood Sounds Off on Congestion Pricing

CARS INCH DOWN East Gun Hill Road between Putnam and Reservoir places on April 8. Cars driving south of 60th Street in Manhattan will be subject to a congestion pricing toll come 2021.

Photo by Emily Suzanne Lever

CARS INCH DOWN East Gun Hill Road between Putnam and Reservoir places on April 8. Cars driving south of 60th Street in Manhattan will be subject to a congestion pricing toll come 2021.
When you choose to teach in the Bronx, you join a community of educators committed to equity and excellence for all students. Whether you are a current or aspiring teacher, the Bronx offers opportunities to make an impact while growing your career in one of New York City’s most vibrant and diverse boroughs.

The NYC Department of Education is looking for individuals who are ready to make a commitment to Bronx students.

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Visit teachnyc.net/teachbx today to learn more
City Starts Vetting Process on Fordham Plaza After Failed Talks With BID

By DAVID CRUZ

The city is restarting the vetting process for a manager overseeing the massive $34 million Fordham Plaza, after the neighboring business improvement district could not agree to the city’s stipulations.

The Fordham Road Business Improvement District (BID), the largest BID in the Bronx, was on the cusp of signing a multi-year contract that would have allowed it to oversee Fordham Plaza, built in 2016 and complete with a café along with three vendor kiosks. The city Department of Transportation, which manages the plaza and was involved in talks, offered a tailored deal that included the city’s offer to fix and replace any defective parts of the plaza and picking kiosk vendors.

But a year later, the BID and the city couldn’t agree on the terms. Picking the BID appeared to be a natural fit given its proximity to the line of businesses along Fordham Road between Washington and Jerome avenues.

News of the fizzled deal, which was revealed the week of April 1, keeps the plaza and picking kiosk vendors.

As for the space that once occupied Soma Health Club, it’s unclear what property owners plan to do with it. “Let’s see what comes out of this,” said Padilla.

Norwood, Shocking Abruptly Closes in Norwood, Shocking Customers

By DAVID CRUZ

Soma Health Club, Norwood’s family-owned exercise gym, closed its doors a week after telling its clients of its plans to shut down. The closure presents fewer options in the immediate area for health-conscience residents and neighborhood employees.

A rise in rents caused the exercise gym to close its doors after more than a decade, said Kip Silva, the gym’s general manager. Silva said owners found the decision to close a tough one.

“We can’t fully express our deepest gratitude for your business and support. Working with you has been nothing but an absolute pleasure,” wrote Soma Health Club’s owners.

“The Jerome Gun Hill BID is very sad to lose a long-time small business, particularly a merchant like Soma that provided quality services to improve the health of our neighbors,” said Jennifer Tausig, executive director for the BID.

A chain-owned gym is located on Webster Avenue by Hull Avenue within walking distance from the BID, though the walk from her home along the largely isolated street is uncomfortable for Padilla, particularly at night when she regularly exercises.

“Those relationships wouldn’t have happened if they weren’t members of the gym.”

Padilla learned about the closure while in her kickboxing class. Members were devastated, she said.

Soma Health Club represented the only exercise gym falling within the Jerome Gun Hill Business Improvement District (BID), comprised of more than 200 businesses within East Gun Hill Road between Jerome and Webster avenues and Jerome Avenue between East Gun Hill Road and Mosholu Parkway.

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Norwood News Grabs Eight Awards at Statewide Journalism Contest

By NORWOOD NEWS

The Norwood News had a good year at the statewide Better Newspaper Contest awards ceremony, picking up eight awards for its coverage of the Bronx last year.

Among the big awards was the Thomas G. Butson Award for In-Depth Reporting, where editor-in-chief David Cruz placed third in a widely competitive category.

“Thorough reporting,” read the judge’s comments on the story examining the complexities behind affordable housing in New York City, and the repercussions. The series, dubbed “Housing Matters,” was made possible through a fellowship with the Marguerite Casey Foundation.

Other awards included a second place prize for Feature Story, which looked at the relationship between housing and mental health.

The News’ rotating crew of interns and freelancers also earned several awards. Joseph Konig and David Greene shared in the second place prize for Coverage of Local Government for their coverage on the Nov. 15 snowstorm that crippled the city.

Spot News coverage on a series of fires that swept through the Bronx during the winter of 2017-18.

Meantime, an Honorable Mention prize was given to the paper in the News Story category covering the aftermath of the Lesandro “Junior” Guzman-Feliz killing. Prize went to Cruz, Angel Mindanao, Christy Rae Ammons, Sophia Ebanks, and José A. Giralt. Judges said, “While the lede is the attention-grabber, the entire story maintains intensity. Nice reporting throughout.”

Adi Talwar, a seasoned photographer, earned a second place prize for Feature Photo that showcased a child running through the newly opened Whalen Park.

Other honors include third place prizes for Editorials and Coverage of Crime/Police/Courts, which went to Cruz, Greene, and Martika Ornella.

“We are so proud of the work that we published last year,” said Cruz. “We will continue putting out copy that is thought-provoking, in-depth, and a true benefit for the community.”

The awards were presented by the New York Press Association in Albany, New York on April 4.
Comprehensive Services Include:
- 24-Hour Skilled Nursing Care
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- Cardiac Rehabilitation
- Bariatric Services
- Pain Management
- Enteral Nutrition Therapy
- Wound Management

Other services
- Therapeutic Recreation
- Geriatric Care Management
- Age Well: Continuum of Care
- Beauty Parlor + Barber Shop
- Pet Visitation (Pet therapy)
- Religious Services for all
- Dining
- Outdoor Patio
- Family and Friends Transport Program
- Trips + Entertainment
- On-Ste Dialysis (Wormen’s & Morningside)
By DAVID CRUZ
And SHA-NIA ALSTON

When construction work on Phoe-nicia Herbert’s kitchen and bathroom was under way, she was expecting some kind of inconvenience. She just didn’t think it would turn out the way it did.

It was at 3425 Gates Pl. in Norwood in 2016 where Herbert was forced to share a bathroom and kitchen with other tenants while work inside the apartments, which also included the installation of new windows and a front door, was under way. “They allowed one apartment that was already empty to be used per floor.” She even had to wait over half a day for a bathroom, causing her to be late for work.

According to Herbert, the tenants were promised new appliances as well, but never received them. “We were supposed to get new fridges and stoves, that were supposed to be included with getting bathroom and kitchen and that never happened. They’re adding the price of the new stove and new fridge in order to get this MCI.” said Herbert, who personally received a new stove.

The Morgan Group, which manages the six-story property, passed the $1.9 million construction costs onto tenants, part of the controversial Major Capital Improvement program landlords can take advantage of. The plan was approved by the state Department of Housing and Community Renewal, which reviews MCI proposals. There were no objections from tenants, according to a lawyer representing Morgan Group.

Herbert is now part of a group of tenants who have gone on a so-called MCI strike, refusing to pay the extra $81.33 per room payment that kicked in last September following lease renewals. And even as work is completed, Olivia Guzman, another tenant of the building who was taken to housing court for not paying the MCI fees, feels building conditions still remain unsuitable even after the MCI was issued. Guzman does not agree with the MCI program. “We didn’t ask for them,” she said.

Tenant advocates with the North-west Bronx Community & Clergy Co-alition and Community Action for Safe Apartments have now been working with tenants as their cases make their way to housing court. It’s at the Grand Concourse courthouse where they staged a protest on March 29 calling at-tention to the issue.

MCIs usually involve a large reno-vation project for a building, which can include the installation of a brand new boiler, appliances for each apartment, or roof replacement. A fee is tacked onto a tenant’s monthly rent, putting greater financial pressure on renters, particu-larly those on fixed incomes.

Luise A. Barrack, a lawyer repre-senting the Morgan Group, said her client is willing to meet with tenants. “This is not an owner that is not con-cerned about their tenants. They make improvements to upgrade their build-ings, and they want to hear from their tenants,” Barrack said.

As for whether tenants were made aware they would have to share a bath-room and kitchen during the work, Bar-rack, who has been representing the Morgan Group for the last six months, said crews performing the work were expected to tell tenants.

Overall, Herbert finds the MCI pro cess unpromising. “I am against the MCI because it’s the assumption that building and the apartments were renovated in an appropriate way,” she said. “We’re really hoping that these in-creases get reversed.”

Photo courtesy Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition

MEMBERS OF NORTHWEST Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition and Community Action for Safe Apartments join tenants of 3425 Gates Pl. in a protest opposing an MCI fee.

3425 Gates Pl. Tenants Strike Against MCIs

By DAVID CRUZ
And SHA-NIA ALSTON

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Photo courtesy Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition

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April 22nd-26th
Taste of the District

Mention the "Bailey Special" at participating restaurants and enjoy a discount, giveaway, or deal!

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Deyar Food Court
Ultimate Grill
Lammy's Restaurant & Lounge
Lexa Bar & Garden
Cozy Cottage Restaurant
Royal Coach Diner
Freckle's Juice
Sangria Café
Steam House Restaurant and lounge
Finding Alternatives to Traditional Health Insurance

By ELIOT SCHIAPARELLI of

When Latrise Jack of Longwood was left homebound by a car accident, she was forced to retire from her job, leaving her and her two kids without health insurance. Her problems were compounded by other pre-existing conditions.

“The doctor wanted $89,000. The hospital wanted $93,000, and I lost I think it was $75,000 in wages,” said Jack. “If I don’t have the insurance for myself and my children when they get sick, what are we supposed to do?”

Jack sought help from the Health Information Place (HIP) at Urban Health Plan not too far from Jack’s home. Gabrielle Torres, Urban Health Plan’s outreach and enrollment coordinator, worked with Jack to transition her from private insurance to disability benefits through Medicare and Medicaid, serving as an alternative to insurance policies that go beyond someone’s financial means.

Without the state insurance that Torres helped her secure, she wouldn’t have been able to pay the costs.

Jack experienced a great deal of pain when she first met Torres. At other agencies Jack visited for help, she was met with indifference. “With Gabby, she hears me. She’s not blocking me out; she’s not like, yeah yeah yeah,” Jack said. “We’re actually having a conversation. We’re conversing. She’s my friend. That’s how I’m looking at her. She’s extremely helpful.”

The purpose of HIP is to help people in Jack’s situation. According to the US Census Bureau, 9.4 percent of Bronx residents under 65 are uninsured. Torres said HIP staffers carefully explain everything to clients to make them feel comfortable, reviewing their alternatives, outlining coverage, and filling out the application.

“We really try to break it down for them - not only verbally, but also visually. We might call them and follow up with them to kind of give them reminders,” said Torres. “It makes it more personal but then they can also build a trust and we can answer any little question they have.”

Once a client secures insurance, Torres continues to maintain a relationship. She still helps Jack with recertification so she can get all the help she needs.

HIP works with the New York State Department of Health and nonprofits to help provide insurance. It’s just one of the many services the community health center provides. The medical services at Urban Health Plan also go by a sliding fee scale so that everyone can get care regardless of their financial situation.

“It makes it like a one-stop shop for our clients,” said Torres. “When they come, they don’t have to be referred to another organization and provide the same information they provided to us. We’re able to make it very simple. They receive their health insurance information and we find out if they need other services so we can give them a warm hand-off to other departments.”

Everyone is eligible for health insurance, including undocumented immigrants, said Torres. With the current political climate, many of the undocumented will cancel their health insurance for fear it can jeopardize their path to citizenship status. Obtaining HIP insurance has no bearing on citizenship status, said Torres.

“One thing that we try to help them understand is that [health insurance] is very important. Your health is a priority. And we don’t want any of our clients to feel that if they’re sick, they can’t get the services they need because they can’t pay for it.”

Torres also sees a lot of insurance issues caused by poor communications. She said she has seen people have their insurance cut off because they misunderstood a letter from the government or never received it.

“I think the biggest barrier we have seen thus far I would say is reading levels. A lot of information that they receive comes from the state or [the New York City Human Resources Administration] through letters,” said Torres. “Even if it is translated in the languages they speak, a lot of them have different dialects where they’re not able to read. So maybe they miss a renewal date and their coverage gets cut off.”

Along with Urban Health Plan, Bronx Community Health Network (BCHN) provides a variety of medical services regardless of ability to pay as well as community outreach programs. BCHN is federally funded, mandated to cover everyone regardless of a person’s ability to pay, immigration status, sex, race, culture and gender.

Aside from meeting clients with no insurance, Renee Whiskey, BCHN’s community health programs developer, said BCHN sometimes sees people who are under-insured, meaning they might have coverage in case of an emergency, but not for primary care or ongoing health issues.

Whiskey also said it is sometimes hard to make health a primary concern in the community. Through programs that include insurance workshops and insurance eligibility screenings, Whiskey said BCHN looks at things that might prevent people from focusing on their health.

“What are the things that are causing some challenges for you to even be able to think about your healthcare,” Whiskey said. “Are you facing eviction? Can we maybe get you started on the process of securing housing, so that you feel more secure in where you live - and now you can pay more attention to you overall health and wellbeing?”

At Urban Health Plan, Torres underscored the importance of having a safe space to help people find coverage.

“You know how they say it takes a village to raise a child? Well, it kind of takes a village to raise a community,” said Torres. “If everyone can work together and we have a safe space, then more people are going to come and feel welcome and know that we’ll support them.”
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profitable vendor to occupy them. It’s unclear why the city held off on finding a partner for virtually an entire year, putting the plaza in a boondoggle state.

But costly obligations imposed by the DOT—including a $3 million general liability insurance, a liquor liability insurance of $5 million, general liability insurance, automobile insurance of $1 million, payment of utilities, complete legal responsibility of the plaza, and property insurance—drove the BID to reconsider signing a contract that could have stretched the BID’s financial resources.

“It was the hardest decision ever for me,” said Wilma Alonso, executive director of the BID, which collects roughly $900,000 from property owners within its BID that’s then earmarked for marketing and private sanitation services. Spreading its budget towards a city-owned property posed a gamble.

“There was no budging on the city in terms of tweaking the terms we had issues on, like the property insurance,” said Alonso. “I couldn’t validate the point of taking money out of our budget and investing it in a plaza where we couldn’t guarantee we would’ve been successful.”

Taking out a policy that satisfies the DOT would have been too costly. “Let’s say a car banged into one of the structures,” said Alonso. “They need to rebuild it to the standards of the city.”

The financial contract terms laid out in the DOT’s Request for Proposals (RFP), which wasn’t released when the BID first entered negotiations, apply across the board, and could be easier to accept prospective managers with a yearly budget that runs in the millions of dollars. This presents a less-than-lucrative proposal for the Fordham BID.

The DOT’s RFP shows any concessionaire with an interest in managing the plaza will need some deep pockets. That includes fronting costs for security, removing snow, installing energy-efficient lighting systems, landscaping, and fixing any wear and tear, except the concrete pavement.

Plus, a concessionaire’s vendors must also comply with other requirements, including submitting financial statements while also providing furnishings for the café that needs to first be approved by the DOT.

The construction of the Fordham Plaza is part of the city’s wider, more than decade-long effort to build pedestrian plazas along underused streets or commercial districts. Before 2015, the plaza was home to a daily flea market-style bazaar that seldom drew enough foot traffic. The construction of the plaza eventually attracted the homeless and panhandlers, becoming so much of a quality of life issue that the NYPD ultimately swept in to remove them, including the mattresses that were brought in.

Though any occupancy for the café and kiosks remain on hold, the BID can continue hosting yearly events at the plaza, thanks to temporary street permits it can file. A statement from the DOT agreed.

“DOT was in early conversations with the Fordham Road BID to manage the plaza, but ultimately could not reach an agreement. Fordham Plaza remains a public space and is available for anyone to host events through a [Street Activity Permit Office] permit. The BID continues to host successful events on the plaza and we believe they will continue to contribute to this important public space on Fordham Road,” read the statement, adding “the BID missed an opportunity to manage a newly reconstructed public space in a vibrant neighborhood of the Bronx.

As for the stipulations laid out in the RFP, the DOT said the terms are standard.

“This is similar to what we require for any applicant for a concession of this nature,” read the statement. “We are very confident that the offer of a long-term concession will attract many interested and qualified parties.”

Tours are now slated for April and May. The deadline for prospective managers to file is in June.

“We still have hope that if the terms changed that we can bid on that RFP,” said Alonso. “But unfortunately the terms have not changed since.”

DOT will manage the plaza until it finds a concessionaire.
A Musical based on the Disney Film

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Set in turn-of-the century New York City, Disney’s Newsies is the rousing tale of Jack Kelly, a charismatic newsboy and leader of a band of teenaged “newsies.” When titans of publishing raise distribution prices at the newsboys’ expense, Jack rallies newsies from across the city to strike against the unfair conditions and fight for what’s right!

Based on the 1992 motion picture and inspired by a true story, Disney’s Newsies features a Tony Award-winning score by Alan Menken (Little Shop of Horrors, Sister Act) and Jack Feldman and a book by Tony Award winner Harvey Fierstein (Kinky Boots). Featuring the now classic songs “Carrying the Banner,” “Seize the Day,” and “Santa Fe,” Disney’s Newsies is packed with non-stop thrills and a timeless message, perfect for the whole family and every audience.

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Free Bird Walks

Free bird walks are offered every Saturday beginning at 9 a.m. from April 27 through July 20 at the Van Cortlandt Nature Center. Bird watchers can look for various species of residents and migrants and discuss a wide range of avian topics. For more information, email Joseph McManus at mcmnaus638@aol.com. No registration necessary. No limit. Free thanks to grant by Councilman Andrew Cohen.

Summer Youth Police Academy

Young people between the ages of 10 and 15 can sign up to train with police officers at the Summer Youth Police Academy. The program is free, runs five days a week for six weeks, from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Classes include lectures, role playing, and demonstrations in the areas of law, behavioral science, drug prevention and gang resistance. Applications are due May 31. For more information, call (718) 312-5079 or email communityaffairs@nypd.org.

Tax Day April 15

The due date to file personal state and federal income taxes is April 15, returning to its traditional deadline date three years after falling several days after. For more information and details to file an extension, go to https://on.ny.gov/2CXrWPv. To determine your tax refund, call the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance’s automated system at (518) 457-5149.

Specialized High School Info Session

Learn about entry into the New York City public school system’s eight Specialized High Schools at an information session on April 27 at 1 p.m. at the Moshulu Library, 285 E. 205th St. Topics include understanding the Specialized High School Admissions Test, the admissions process, and the New York City Department of Education’s new online high schools registration tool, MySchools. For more information, call (212) 637-8040.

Housing Forum

Montefiore’s Campus Community Advisory Board is hosting a Health & Housing Forum on April 13 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Sister Annunicata Bethell Senior Center, at 243 E. 204th St. Attendees will learn about tenant’s rights, how to maintain a lead-free home, eliminate asthma triggers, fire safety, and sign up for a rent freeze. RSVP to Jason Caraballo, jcarabal@montefiore.org.

Free Tax Prep

Moshulu Montefiore Community Center, at 3450 DeKalb Ave., offers free tax return service Mondays through Fridays from 4 p.m. Those who made $54,000 or less in 2018 and have children, or $30,000 or less without children, qualify for the free service. For more information or to make an appointment, call (718) 882-4000.

Right to Counsel

Right to Counsel (RTC)—which assigns a free attorney to those sued for eviction in housing court and in NYCHA termination of tenancy hearings and who are income eligible—is available to tenants who live in Bronx zip codes 10457, 10467, and 10468. If a tenant is not income eligible, they have the right to a one-off legal consultation or advice session. Tenants facing eviction or harassment from management can call Nova Lucero at the Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition for support at (917) 952-5494.

Crime Victims Support

Crime Victims Support Services, a 501(c)3 group at 1138 Neill Ave., offers victims help in navigating the criminal justice system. Free confidential services include claim assistance, case follow-up, crisis counseling, and victim advocacy. The group accepts donations. For more information, call (718) 823-4925.

Free Legal Services for Immigrants

Low-income immigrants can receive free legal advice from volunteer attorneys through the New York State Liberty Defense Project and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York. For more information, visit CatholicCharitiesNY-ProBono.org or call (800) 566-7636. If you are interested in volunteering, visit catholiccharitiesny.org.

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Egg Hunt at the Oval

The public is invited to a free spring egg hunt at the Williamsbridge Oval on April 20 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Activities include the egg hunt, sack races, arts and crafts, carnival games, visit from the bunny, and more. Please bring a can of food for donation to local pantry. For more information, visit nyc.gov/parks.

Onstage

Williamsbridge Oval presents free theatre, Shakespeare’s “The Tempest,” in the Rec Center, April 11 at 7 p.m. RSVP bronxacf@parks.nyc.gov. For more information, call (718) 549-3200.

Van Cortlandt Jewish Center presents Magician and Mind-Reader, April 14 at noon at Vladeck Hall, 74 Van Cortlandt Pk., So. (entrance on Hillman Avenue). Additional events include a Pick-Your-Prize raffle. Tickets are $40 but a $25 option of show and dessert is available through the center at 3880 Sedgwick Ave. For more information and tickets, call (718) 884-6105 or visit vcjewishcenter.org/april2019/.

Lehman College’s Department of Music, 250 Bedford Pk. Blvd., W., presents Spring Dance Concert, April 11 to 13 at 7 p.m. in the Lovinger Theatre (tickets: $10; $8 with CUNY ID; free for Lehman students with valid ID); and New York Chamber Collective Recital, performing classical music, April 14 at 2 p.m., in the Recital Hall, 3rd floor floor Music Building. For more information, call (718) 960-8247.

Events

Friends of Mosholu Parkland and Mosholu Preservation Corporation present Earth Day: Composting and Planting, April 22 from noon to 4 p.m. Learn how to compost and bring your food scraps to be recycled. Meet at 3400 Reservoir Oval E. at noon. For more information, call (718) 324-4461 or email mosholuparkland@gmail.com.

Tour of Wave Hill, a Bronx oasis at 675 W. 252nd St. in Riverdale, offers Family Art Projects: Roots and Routes and Portraits, to draw your own silhouette to trace your own roots using junk mail, letters and family records, April 13 and 14; and The Earth on the Turtle’s Back, to create a printing plate using natural and upcycled materials and a turtle image and layers of earth, April 20 and 21; both in the WH House, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Grounds admission is free until noon Tuesdays and Saturdays all year. For more information and a schedule of events including tours and walks, call (718) 549-4244/46/57 or visit www.nypl.org.

Library Events

DON'T MISS THE Spring Egg Hunt at Williamsbridge Oval, the highly-anticipated yearly event, on April 20 (see Editor's Pick for more details).

The Museum of Bronx History, 3266 Bainbridge Ave., presents exhibition, The Bronx Goes to the Movies, through Oct. 6 (opening reception on April 11 from 4:30 to 7 p.m.). For more information, call (718) 881-8900.

Jerome Park Library, 118 Eames Place (near Kingsbridge Road), presents for children: film: “Crazy Rich Asians,” April 12 at 1:30 p.m.; and STEM: Kids Science at 3 p.m.: (ages 5 to 12 years), April 16 and 20. Adults can enjoy film: “In the Time of the Butterflies,” in honor of Immigrant Heritage Week. For more information, call (718) 579-4244/46/57 or visit www.nypl.org.

NOTE: Items for consideration may be mailed to our office or sent to norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org, and should be received by April 15 for the next publication date of April 25.
Residence to 3rd Co-Location at DWCC

(continued from page 1)

(DOE) makes it the third school to arrive to the campus since 2013.

The Clinton Campus already shares its space with three other high schools—Bronx Collaborative High School (10X351), World View High School (10X353), and PS X168 (75X168)—serving students in grades 9 through 12 in an inclusion program. Despite this, the agency argues the school is underutilized, opening the door for another school. Co-locating often involves several high schools sharing common amenities, including a cafeteria, auditorium and gymnasium.

At a joint public hearing by PEP and the Community Education Council (CEC) on April 2, a raucous crowd inside the campus’ auditorium warned that incorporating yet another school would diminish the academic gains and newfound school pride that has been attributed to its principal, Pierre Orbe.

“When I came here about three years ago, we had a target on our backs.” Orbe said. “There was a sense, a feeling, that DeWitt Clinton students were not living up to their potential.”

Performance data from the last three full school years point to significant gains in academic achievement at Clinton. For example, from the 2015-2016 school year to 2017-2018, the four-year graduation rate improved 21 percentage points from 48 to 69 percent. The four-year College Readiness Index—a metric that measures whether a student is academically ready for college—rose from 19 to 42 percent.

Many of those who signed up to speak at the hearing made clear that they do not oppose D75 students sharing existing classes, but are against giving up space to a separate high school within the campus altogether.

Alex Vega, a senior and president of the student body at Clinton, told the dual bodies that the school welcomes D75 students to “our community as one but not separate.”

The DOE sees an opportunity to establish a new high school at the Clinton Campus because of what it deems as “under-utilization” at the building. According to the 2017-2018 Enrollment, Capacity and Utilization Report, also known as the Blue Book, Clinton has the capacity to serve a total of 3,059 students. The total number of students currently attending the four schools is 2,367, yielding a utilization rate of 77 percent. If the new high school is approved with a projected enrollment between 48 to 64 students, the utilization rate will range between 76 to 80 percent.

A few students at the public hearing referred to the available space as proof that DeWitt Clinton High School can and should welcome the future students and not feel as if it threatens the academic progress made by students.

One student from World View High School expressed a less threatening view of a new D75 school inside Clinton. “A lot of people here are talking about what’s taken away, and nobody’s recognizing what’s being added to the school community if D75 students were to be here,” the student said.

The student’s positive outlook on welcoming students was also expressed by D75 superintendent, Ketler Louissaint. “We are asking to use a space that is vacant, a space that is not utilized, or that is under-utilized,” responding to concerns of losing classroom space. As for the D75 students, Louissaint said, “When you let District 75 come into your community ... you will not want us to leave. You’re going to fall in love with our students.”

Proponents of a new D75 high school within Clinton also point out the needs of 524 students residing in District 10 classified with IEPs. With only 89 D75 students being seated in District 10, DOE figures reveal a deficit of 435 seats at the high school level. DOE argues that establishing a separate D75 high school would help decrease the deficit.

Controversy over dividing the space at the Clinton Campus is not new. When discussions were held in the spring of 2013 over creating Bronx Collaborative High School and World View High School inside the campus, many educators and local elected officials opposed the plan. Many viewed it as an effort by DOE to set up the school for failure.

For Sydney Valerio-Candelaria, a ’99 alum of Clinton, the issue of carving up the campus is personal. She is not only a graduate, but has served as vice president of the alumni association, and currently has a daughter attending the school.

She sees Clinton as unfairly targeted for D75 expansion, citing the neighborhood of Norwood. “Does this happen in other zip codes of District 10 like Riverdale-Kingsbridge Academy, where my daughter can’t apply to because we live in the wrong zip code?” asked Valerio-Candelaria.

The DOE continues to examine comments made by email and letters from those unable to attend the April 2 public hearing.

PEP is expected to vote on the proposal on April 17 at Murry Bergtraum High School for Business Careers.
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