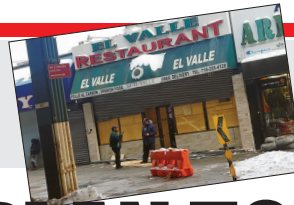




NORWOOD NEWS

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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER
DISTRICT 11 SPECIAL ELECTION | PG. 4



**TWO RESTAURANT FIRES IN
BEDFORD PARK | PG. 16**

CITY LAUNCHES PLAN TO HELP LOW & MEDIUM-INCOME RENTERS WITH CASH DEPOSITS



Photo by Miriam Quinoñes

A FOOD GIVEAWAY organized by Food Bank for NYC was held at Tracey Towers in the Norwood section of the Bronx on Wednesday, Dec. 30, 2020.

By SÍLE MOLONEY

On Wednesday, Dec. 30, the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and New York City Housing Development Corporation (HDC) announced that they were soliciting submissions from companies who can come up

with alternative ways of helping renters in City and HDC-sponsored affordable housing, pay their required security deposits when signing a lease.

The Security Deposit Alternatives RFEI program is the first step in identifying eligible companies that could potentially offer alternatives

to the traditional, lump-sum deposit requirement which plagues many low and medium-income renters.

The program is part of the City's plan to create alternative ways to help renters pay the required security deposits and make it easier for them to access affordable housing

when they need to, starting with City financed homes. The measure is one of Mayor Bill de Blasio's "State of the City 2020" commitments to ensuring that money that used to go on security deposits can, instead, be put back into the pockets of New Yorkers.

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Ben Franklin Reform Democratic Club Under Fire

By SÍLE MOLONEY

Citing factors relating to the pandemic, on Nov. 18, the executive committee of the Ben Franklin Reform Democratic Club (BFRDC), voted on a resolution which facilitated a departure from the club's bylaws relating to two club "critical functions." These were to postpone the annual vote to replace them, as members of the executive committee, a vote that would usually take place at the end of each club year, and to cede authority to the club's president, Michael Heller, to devise an alternate voting procedure for the club's endorsement of candidates for public office.

The vote was unanimously carried during the executive committee meeting on Nov. 18. Once the news became public and following pushback by all but one of the seven District 11 City Council candidates who had each been seeking the club's endorsement, on Dec. 21, Carlton Berkley, Jessica Haller, Mino Lora, Abigail Martin, Dan Padernacht and Marcos Sierra formally withdrew their endorsement requests in protest.

They cited violation of the club's bylaws as the reason. Such laws generally afford regular club members the opportunity to review the details of agenda items prior to votes being held.

"The new BFRDC voting system has serious security issues that were not thoroughly vetted by membership," the six candidates wrote in their formal letter of withdrawal to the process. "Club members are required to email a request for a ballot. It is unknown who has access to those emails. The ballots are to be mailed with the sender's information on the envelope. The procedure was approved without any knowledge of who would have access to the ballots, how the ballots would be counted, and when they would be tallied."

The six candidates added, "In New York State, the three-envelope system incorporates tens of thousands of ballots mailed to random Board of Election employees who work under an oath. In the BFRDC system, there are a few hundred voters who are known by Club leadership controlling the process. The insecure voting



Photo by José A. Giralt

MICHAEL HELLER, PRESIDENT of the Ben Franklin Reform Democratic Club, denies any violation of the club's bylaws pertaining to the process surrounding the club's ultimate endorsement of District Leader Eric Dinowitz in the 11th City Council District race.

procedure gives the appearance of impropriety, further marring the democratic process."

Asked about the assertions of bylaw violation, and the back and forth between the six candidates and the club prior to their withdrawal, Heller told the *Norwood News*, "In an emergency measure adopted at the Dec. 3 meeting, temporary substitute procedures were adopted by 82 percent present, after three separate motions." He added, "We are a private association where standard operating procedures had to be temporarily set aside."

The seventh candidate in the race, district leader for the 81st District, Eric Dinowitz, son of assemblyman for the 81st District, Jeffrey Dinowitz, did not object to the club's approach. In fact, the minutes show that both father and son attended the same Nov. 18 meeting of the club's executive committee. The minutes also show that because he was running for office, the district leader left the meeting before discussion of the resolution.

On Dec. 30, BFRDC, which is advertised as "one of the largest Democratic clubs in the city," announced its "overwhelming endorsement" of the 81st district leader. The 81st District covers Bedford Park, Kingsbridge, Riverdale, Norwood, Van Cortlandt Village, Wakefield and Woodlawn, and the club covers much of the same area.

Heller wrote in the Dec. 30 press release that over 140 votes were re-

ceived, with the district leader winning 117, Padernacht winning 10, Lora winning 9, Haller winning 6 and Berkley, Martin and Sierra not winning any.

Contacted by *Norwood News* for comment about the other candidates' withdrawal from the process, ahead of his endorsement, the District Leader did not address the issue directly, saying, on Dec. 28, "I've been a member of the largest reform Democratic club in the Bronx since I was 18, almost as long as I've been a proud teacher and UFT member."

He added, "The endorsements from the teachers and the club are so important to me because they both have fueled my values and community engagement. I'm proud that the club has an open process for participation that is also COVID-safe and is unique in using a democratic process for its endorsement."

Meanwhile, asked for the reason for his guest attendance at the Nov. 18 executive committee meeting, the assemblyman told the *Norwood News* in an email dated Jan. 3, "As the club's assembly member, I have a standing invitation to attend, but not vote, at executive committee meetings." He added that he was a longtime member of the club, and he neither voted nor spoke at the Nov. 18 meeting.

As part of the endorsement announcement, Heller wrote, "The endorsement was conducted by way of

(continued on page 8)

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By DAVID GREENE

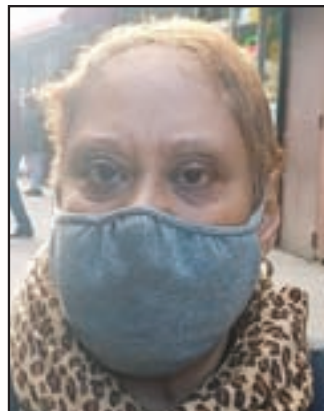


This week, we asked readers for their thoughts on former Councilman Andy Cohen stepping down from the City Council on Dec. 31, to take up a new judgeship position, and the fact that the District 11 special election to find his replacement will not be held until March 23. We asked residents if they feel they will be properly represented during this interim period.



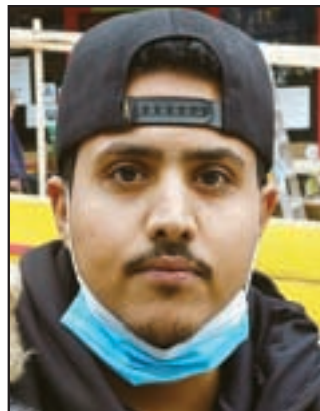
"The majority of people in government are driven by their own selfish needs. This action speaks for itself, being also driven by their own political agenda, taking sides or fighting with the other political parties, instead of thinking about the people and their needs. I hope his replacement thinks more of the people, and this city, rather than their own personal achievement."

Nancy Rogers
Kingsbridge



"This community has changed tremendously. It's not even recognizable - very negative. I've been here 50 years, and I've seen the changes. Different people come in. It's dirty, and nothing is updated. These officials we elect, we barely see them. You only see them when they want to run for something. That's the only time you see them. I'm angry in a lot of ways, I'm thinking of moving out of New York. I went to his office and I complained regarding the voter registration, after they moved the polling site... so I said I'm not voting."

Lourdes Maldonado
Kingsbridge Heights



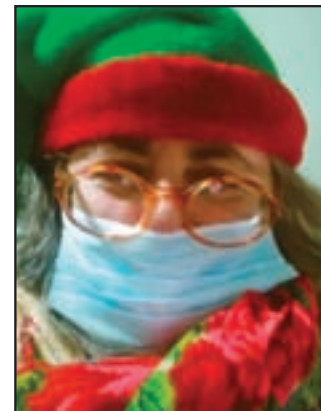
"Obviously I feel negative towards this. I have two businesses over here in Riverdale and we've been a part of the community for 25 years, and we have a Facebook community that gets together with any problems, and we need someone to pay attention to what we need in this community. No, I don't see our elected officials out here. Absolutely, I think something should be done, and I think something could be done. You can't just leave a neighborhood without representation, when people's voices need to be heard, especially during a pandemic."

Hail Alhumaidi
Riverdale



"I'm actually saddened as a community activist. Councilman Cohen provided funding for several of our projects because he believed in the outcome. He was in line with the work we were doing. We are nervous about the next selection of candidates and their environmental goals in the community, public health and safety. I'm happy for his judgeship, if that's what he wants. Selfishly, I'm worried about the future and what the next council person will bring."

Elizabeth Quaranta
Norwood



"Councilman Cohen and the people in his office were amazing for the community. They returned calls, addressed concerns and helped us. In addition to almost daily emails to his constituents during the pandemic, his office helped me on two challenges during this time. I don't want him to leave. I hope we can find a City Council member this good. The next two months, we've got to find ways to rely on 311 and the Mayor's office. I like that our State Senator Jamaal Bailey is sending reports now. Sometimes the City Council members from other districts send me updates. We should work to get on a few of their e-lists until we get someone working for us."

Anne Leighton
Norwood



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NEWS BRIEFS

By SÍLE MOLONEY

Issues with Get Food NYC Program

Some Bronx residents have complained about the non-receipt, poor selection or poor quality of food from the Get Food NYC program, managed by the City's Department of Sanitation (DoS). A City official said DoS takes complaints very seriously and urged people to call 311 to report any problems. The official added that food must be high quality, meet nutritional guidelines set by the City Department of Health, and must be palatable, but said it is meant for emergency use during an unprecedented time, to sustain people who cannot go out, have no one to go out for them, or cannot afford private options.

He added that it was not uncommon for individuals to receive deliveries from two different vendors week to week and confirmed that the City addresses any complaints received directly with the vendors. In response to one particular complaint, he also said it was not the case that some neighborhoods receive pantry boxes/groceries, while others receive prepared meals, adding that for several months now, the City only distributes prepared meals. He said other programs run by non-profits (sometimes with city funding) do provide groceries and that this may be the source of some confusion. He refuted, however, the suggestion that some neighborhoods get "better" or "different" food than others.

Stop & Shop Opens Pick-Up Store in Bronx

Neighborhood grocer, Stop & Shop, announced the opening, on Dec. 31, of its first pick-up location in the Bronx, at 1720 Eastchester Road in Morris Park. Shoppers can now place their orders online at www.stopandshop.com, or on the Stop & Shop mobile app. They can then select "pick-up" at their preferred store, head to the store at the pick-up time, park at the designated pick-up spot, and let the store's team know of their arrival. A Stop & Shop associate will load the purchased groceries into the customers' cars, minimizing both delays and close contact with other shoppers and staff.

Sammy Ravelo Runs for Bronx BP

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

Standing on Fordham Road across the street from the military recruiting center where he signed up for the United States Navy more than three decades ago, Sammy Ravelo announced his candidacy for the Bronx borough presidency on Dec. 30. Before a small crowd at the busy intersection of Grand Concourse, Ravelo addressed the mostly, Spanish-language media covering the event.

In reference to the building where the Bronx borough president's office is located, speaking in Spanish, Ravelo said, "The time is now for a person who has served his community for more than 25 years, like I did in the police [department], that one of our sons represent us in the borough hall building." He added, "I want to be that person that represents all the citizens of the Bronx."

Ravelo, 51, has special ties to some of the neighborhoods in the North Bronx, having attended Walton High School, located just under a mile northwest from where he launched his bid for the borough presidency.

With the formal announcement over, Ravelo then answered questions from the media on a wide range of voter issues affecting the community, including how to keep residents from littering ("implement stricter enforcement") and how to convince skeptical Bronxites to get vaccinated against COVID-19 ("get people of influence to set the example"). For his part, Ravelo then spoke to the main issues on which he hopes to connect with voters. These were education, housing, and the latest spike in crime.

With a 25-year career in the police department behind him, Ravelo said, if elected, his law enforcement experience would help serve as a guide when making decisions on how to combat crimes such as murder and burglaries, both of which were up in 2020, compared to 2019. Murders saw an increase of 28.4 percent, while burglaries saw a climb of 33.2 percent across the borough.

Locally, the 52nd precinct has also seen spikes in the same categories, with murders up from eight in 2019, to ten in 2020. Burglaries, similarly, rose from 174



Photo by José A. Giralt

AFTER A CAMPAIGN kick-off event on Fordham Road, Sammy Ravelo, 51, speaks to a Spanish-language media outlet about his run for Bronx borough president on Wednesday, Dec. 30, 2020.

in 2019 to 231 in 2020, up by almost a third at 32.8 percent.

Again, Ravelo has unique insights into the needs of residents within the 52nd precinct's boundaries. He shared with *Norwood News*, in English, some of the special memories he has of working at the Five-Two. "When I got promoted to lieutenant [in 2011], I was assigned to the 52nd precinct," he said. "The Five-Two had almost everything and everybody," he added. "I used to call it the, 'piece of America,' the 'piece of the real America.' They were very supportive of the police, and I like that."

Given that, clearly, periods of last year were marked by mass protests against police brutality in New York City and across the world, we asked Ravelo for his views on how trust in the NYPD can be improved so that all residents have faith that they will be treated fairly when interacting with police.

Ravelo said he had high praise for the Neighborhood Coordination Officers [NCOs] who are described by the NYPD as, "your local problem solvers." He wants to see that same support and appreciation for law enforcement [seen in the 52 precinct] extended throughout the borough.

The NCO program was launched in

2015 with the goal of strengthening non-emergency contact and community relations between the public and police officers, with the goal of improved communication and collaboration. "With the introduction of the NCO program, [the NYPD] has closed the gap even more in community police relations," Ravelo said. "We are very far along compared to other agencies."

Asked about the view that there's been a lack of accountability within the NYPD regarding police misconduct, Ravelo said, "I don't see any evidence of a *wide-spread* lack of accountability for police misconduct." He added, "I'm not saying that there isn't, but as a former Internal Affairs investigator myself, the police department has taken very serious, investigations involving police brutality, and continues to do so."

When it comes to calls to defund the police, Ravelo makes his position clear. "I am totally against any type of move to remove funds from the police department," he said. "I am for reform - perhaps reallocate the money differently, but 'defund the police' hurts minority communities," he said.

As of Dec. 30, the New York City Campaign Finance Board (CFB) listed five other declared candidates also aiming to replace Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. They are Fernando Cabrera, councilman from the 14th District, Nathalia Fernández, assemblywoman representing the 80th District, Vanessa L. Gibson, councilwoman from the 16th District, Luis Sepúlveda, state senator for the 32nd District, and Victor Gutierrez.

Although Rafael Salamanca Jr., councilman for the 17th District, is listed as "undeclared" on the CFB website, Salamanca announced his candidacy for borough president, via a press release, at the end of November. Ravelo reassures the people of the Bronx that he will fight for them like he fought for his adopted country in the first Gulf War.

"I will fight for the poorest county in the State of New York," he said. "The Bronx will have a new era, a new stage where people [elected officials] will serve."

Film Shot at Woodlawn Cemetery

Brooklyn Burial is a new short film shot at Woodlawn Cemetery which co-stars, and is written and directed by Christine Sloan Stoddard, who plays opposite Disne Sebastian. The film follows two friends, Cammy and Victrice, during an exchange which takes place in a cemetery, after Cammy's broken engagement. The film asks how Victrice will react to Cammy invoking a poetry spell for heartache. Shot in November 2020, using

Brooklyn and Bronx based talent, the film is available to watch, password-free, through Jan. 12, at <https://vimeo.com/495049603>.

Non-Profit Workshop

On Friday, Jan. 24, from 9 a.m. to noon, New York State Attorney General Letitia James and Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. will host, "A Non-Profit Incorporation and Tax Exemption Workshop." The event will have members from the Charities Bureau available to discuss the Attorney General's

role in protecting charitable assets, their beneficiaries and donors, the responsibilities of Boards of Directors, as well as registration and financial reporting requirements. The event takes place on the third floor of Hostos Café, C Building / East Academic Complex at 450 Grand Concourse. Refreshments will be served. Learn more at ag.ny.gov/non-profitworkshop.

Unemployment Benefits Expanded

Starting Jan. 3, unemployed New Yorkers

will receive an additional \$300 payment through the extended pandemic emergency unemployment compensation and pandemic unemployment compensation programs. New Yorkers currently receiving unemployment benefit do not need to call the Department of Labor to receive these extended benefits. Residents should continue to certify for unemployment benefit in the usual manner and will automatically receive their extended benefits.

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Ben Franklin Reform Democratic Club Under Fire

(continued from page 2)

absentee ballots that duplicated the method used by the Board of Elections (BoE) to maintain the secret ballot.”

Last year, on April 24, two months before the June primaries, at the height of the pandemic, and amid mass confusion surrounding absentee ballot application mailing delays, Gov. Andrew Cuomo mandated the automatic issuance of ballot applications to every eligible New York voter, saying, “The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our world. No New Yorker should have to choose between their health and their right to vote”.

It is therefore not completely accurate to say that BFRDC duplicated the BoE process because the club did not mandate the automatic mailing of ballot applications to each of the 400 odd BFRDC members, as the State did for its voters.

Dan Padernacht, who is a member of the club, along with Jessica Haller, told the *Norwood News*, he, initially,

did not receive his ballot. After contacting Heller about the matter, Padernacht did receive it. Separately, Heller told the *Norwood News*, on Dec. 24, that he had personally gone to 260th Street Riverdale post-office to place all the requested ballots in the mail.

“Now at the same time, we all know the postal system has been totally overwhelmed. It’s all over the news,” he said. “They’re picking up a huge amount of delivery work, because UPS and FedEx have kind of capped what they’re doing, so the postal service is drowning in mail so, you know, I think there may be some ballots still coming in.”

Asked what date all the ballots were counted, Heller said Dec. 29. Members were informed on Dec. 5 that they had to mail back their ballots by Dec. 22, a fairly tight turnaround taking into account the postal delays already reported. It was also insufficient to have the ballot postmarked by Dec. 22. It had to have been received by the club by Dec. 22.

Norwood News asked Heller about the club’s membership and size and why it was that only certain people had access to the membership list.

“We have always (60 years) kept the exact [membership] number confiden-

tial,” he said, though he confirmed that 400 members voted in the January 2020 club election. Meanwhile, when also asked about the membership, the assemblyman said, “What organization anywhere makes its membership list public? Across the political spectrum – from the DSA to the NRA and everyone in between – the vast majority of political organizations maintain private membership lists.”

Arguably, there *are* other political clubs, however, such as the Northwest Bronx Democrats, and the Northwest Bronx Democrats for Change where a review of the groups’ Facebook pages would give, at least, an indication of member names and numbers.

Dinowitz added, “BFRDC elects a corresponding secretary to maintain the membership list. The president and first vice president also have access to the list. The treasurer keeps the register of who paid dues. Nobody else has access to the membership list, including myself and other endorsed candidates, in order to maintain privacy for the club and club members.”

Heller said that any member was also free to disclose their membership of the club to the public. Meanwhile, the assemblyman went on to say that

the BFRDC endorsement was the most open, transparent, inclusive and democratic of any political group, especially during a pandemic, and that all candidates had participated in the process.

Indeed, the candidates’ bios were posted on the club’s website, a novel move this year according to Heller, and they were also each afforded some time to present their candidacy to club members, via zoom. Heller added, “In our 60 years of existence there has never been any hint of deception in any vote.” He said that the latest executive committee were voted in with 60 percent of the vote and that he personally, as president, received 62 percent of the vote in January 2020.

Referring to the six candidates who withdrew from the process Dinowitz said, “Two of the ‘boycotters’ even submitted ballots and only then attacked the validity of an honest election and cast doubt on the reliability of mail-in ballots once it dawned on them that they lacked sufficient support among club members to receive the club’s endorsement.”

A special election date of March 23 was announced on Jan. 4 by Mayor Bill de Blasio in respect of the 11th City Council District race.

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CRIME FILE

By SÍLE MOLONEY & DAVID GREENE



Man Slashed in Bedford Park

Police are looking for the assailant who slashed a man's face in Bedford Park. According to the NYPD, the incident was reported on Sunday, Jan. 3 at 3:57 p.m. near the intersection of East 198th Street and Briggs Avenue. The unidentified, 38-year-old, male victim was slashed on the side of the face, causing a laceration. Police added that there were no arrests, and the investigation is ongoing. Meanwhile, the FDNY reported the incident took place outside 2846 Briggs Avenue and added that the patient refused medical attention.

Van Cortlandt Village Murder

The NYPD opened a murder investigation after a man was discovered shot to death inside a Van Cortlandt Village apartment. On Tuesday, Dec. 29, at 10.50 a.m., police from the 50th precinct re-

sponded to a 911 call regarding an aided man at "The Van Cortlandt Gardens," located at 3951 Gouverneur Avenue, between Sedgwick Avenue and Van Cortlandt Park South. Upon arrival at Apt. 1J, officers observed a 35-year-old man, unconscious and unresponsive with a gunshot wound to the head. The victim has since been identified by police as James Kurian, a father, who lived at the location.

University Heights Fatal Shooting

On Tuesday, Dec. 29, at 8.50 p.m., the police responded to a 911 call regarding an assault in progress in the vicinity of West 184th Street and Aqueduct Avenue in University Heights. Upon arrival, officers discovered a 26-year-old man lying on the ground with gunshot wounds to his chest and neck. EMS responded and transported the man to St. Barnabas

Hospital, where he was pronounced deceased. There are no arrests, and the investigation is ongoing. The ID of the deceased is pending family notification.

Jerome Park: Man Sought in Shooting Incident

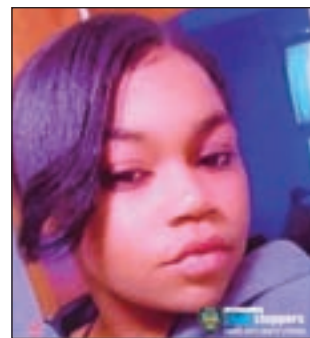
The NYPD is seeking the public's assistance with identifying an individual wanted for questioning in connection with a reckless endangerment incident that occurred in the 52nd precinct. On Friday, Jan. 1, at around 5 a.m., inside 2842 Grand Concourse in the Jerome Park section of the Bronx, individuals engaged in a dispute following a small-scale gathering. During the dispute, an unidentified man fired a gunshot inside the location. He did not strike anyone and there were no reported injuries as a result of the incident.

Fordham Heights: Man Shot in Back of Head, Dies

On Saturday Dec. 26, at around 9.26 p.m., police responded to a 911 call regarding a man who had been shot behind 365 East 183rd Street in Fordham Heights, in the 46th precinct. Upon arrival, officers discovered a man with a gunshot wound to the back of the head. EMS responded and pronounced the man deceased. There are no arrests, and the investigation is ongoing. The identity of the deceased is pending family notification.

Fordham Manor: Search for Missing 16-Year-Old Girl

The NYPD is seeking the public's assistance in locating Ishaliqua Johnson, 16, of 2555 Bainbridge Avenue in Fordham Manor, who was reported missing on Tuesday, Dec. 29, in the 52nd precinct. Ishaliqua was last seen at home on Tuesday, Dec. 29,



at around 10 a.m. She is described as female, Black, approximately 5 feet, 6 inches tall, weighs 160 pounds, has a thin build, black hair and black eyes.

Anyone with information with regard to any of these incidents is asked to call the NYPD's Crime Stoppers Hotline at 1-800-577-TIPS (8477) or for Spanish, 1-888-57-PISTA (74782). The public can also submit their tips by logging onto the CrimeStoppers website at WWW.NYDCRIMESTOPPERS.COM or via Twitter @NYPDTips. All calls are strictly confidential.

Martin, Sierra Drop Out of District 11 Special Election, Leave Door Open for June Primary

By SÍLE MOLONEY

Abigail Martin and Marcos Sierra, both candidates in the 11th City Council race, announced on Tuesday, Jan. 5, that they would not be placing their names on the ballot in the upcoming, March 23 special election, announced by Mayor de Blasio on Monday, Jan. 4.

Both were and still are aiming to replace former City Councilman Andrew Cohen, who stepped down from the role on Dec. 31, to take up a judgeship on the Supreme Court based in the Bronx.

Martin and Sierra were two of a number of candidates who recently called for the 450-minimum signature requirement to be waived by the mayor in order to get on the ballot for the special election, citing the health risks associated with COVID-19 for candidates, staff and voters through mass, person-to-person contact.

During a press conference on Monday, the mayor did not

address the calls directly and instead, encouraged "folks out there in those two districts who want to serve your communities, [to] get out there and get petitioning because we have special elections called for March 23rd."

Repeated requests placed with the mayor's office by email and phone by *Norwood News* for a comment on the matter have gone unanswered. In light of the announcements by both Martin and Sierra that they would not be running in the special election, we asked for a further comment from the mayor. Again, we did not receive an immediate response.

In a press release announcing her decision, Martin wrote, "Since entering this race, my focus has been winning the June 2021 Democratic Party primary and serving a full term as the Northwest Bronx's City Council member. That is still my focus." However, Martin added, "I will not be running in a March spe-

cial election."

In response to a request by *Norwood News* as to her precise reason for not participating in the special election, Martin said, "With the pandemic raging, and with the prospect of putting my volunteers and our community members at additional risk at this time, I know that this is the right decision. Democrats in the Northwest Bronx will have a real choice when they go to the polls in June."

For his part, in his video announcement, posted on his campaign Facebook page on Jan. 5, Sierra also cited health and safety risks associated with campaigning as his main reason for withdrawing from the special election.

"After a serious discussion with my family, for their safety, for the safety of my team, my safety, and more importantly, the safety of the residents in our district, I have decided to not participate in March's Spe-

cial Election for Council District 11, and will focus efforts on the June primary election," he said. "This time will allow for better preparation to safely campaign given the new level of infection that's hitting our community." He added the following hashtags: #ForOurDistrict #SafetyFirst #SeeYouInJune.

In announcing the special election on Monday, Jan. 4, the mayor said, "I am declaring Tuesday, March 23, 2021, as the date for the 15th and 11th City Council Districts special elections to elect a Council Member to serve until December 31, 2021." *Norwood News* also asked the mayor's office if this meant that no primary would be held in June in the 11th or 15th City Council Districts. Again, we did not receive an immediate response.

For now, both candidates are focusing their efforts on an expected June primary. Martin said, "Over these past several months, I have traveled

every corner of our district, listening to voters and hearing their concerns for the future of our community. I will continue to do so until I reach every Democratic voter before primary day. As Council Member, I will continue this effort, listening to each member of our community and seeking their input as we move our City forward."

Meanwhile, Sierra said, "I love my district and above all, I genuinely care about the safety and security of its residents. As candidates,

we called for measures that would help keep our communities safe as we campaigned." He added, We asked to have security changes made to the petitioning process that were ignored by both the mayor and the governor." Sierra implored the

other candidates who are out gathering signatures to be safe, be careful and to wear a mask.



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Elections 2021: Marcos Sierra on Housing, Education and Workers' Protection

By SÍLE MOLONEY

Marcos Sierra's lived experience is unique compared to his fellow candidates. As a front-line healthcare worker, a survivor of gun violence, and now, as a dad guiding his daughter through the trials and tribulations of remote learning, he said all these factors have helped shape his political outlook.

If elected to the 11th City Council District seat, now vacant since the departure of former Councilman Andrew Cohen on Dec. 31, Sierra hopes these factors will serve him in bridging the gap between what can sometimes be well-intended but theoretical policy formulation and real, day-to-day problems and solutions.

After launching his campaign during the second half of 2020, on Tuesday, June 5, Sierra said he would not be participating in the upcoming District 11, March 23 special election, announced on Monday, Jan. 4, by New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. Sierra, and fellow candidate, Abigail Martin, who also announced that she would not be participating in the special election, cited health concerns over mass person-to-person contact amid rising COVID-19 cases in the city, as their reasons for pulling out.

"I love my district, and, above all, I genuinely care about the safety and security of its residents," Sierra said during the brief Jan. 5 Facebook Live announcement. "As candidates, we called for measures that would help keep our communities safe as we campaigned," adding that he and others had asked for health and safety changes to be made to the required petitioning process in order to get on the special election ballot, but that their calls were ignored by both the mayor and the governor.

A minimum of 450 signatures is needed to guarantee that a candidate's name will appear on the ballot. Generally, candidates seek out many more than that, and with dozens of candidates running for office in the Bronx's 11th, 14th and 15th races, to name just a few, the increased risk of mass human to human spread of COVID-19 cannot be downplayed.

Sierra had participated in a press conference with a number of other City Council candidates on Tuesday, Dec. 29, where they discussed different proposals to mitigate against the health risks associated with campaigning in the Northwest Bronx, along with suggested alternatives. All were in favor of either a waiver of the minimum signature re-



MARCOS SIERRA

quirement or a reduction of it as had been done during the June primaries, last year.

Another alternative discussed was a draft bill proposed by Manhattan Council Member, Ben Kallos, representing District 5, which would allow ballot qualification to be based on the minimum campaign contribution threshold set by the New York City Campaign Finance Board (CFB)'s matching funds program.

This voluntary, small-dollar, public matching funds program incentivizes candidates to rely on regular New Yorkers, rather than special interest groups and corporates, for contributions to their political campaigns. As a reward, for each dollar (up to a maximum of \$250) contributed by a resident to a candidate's campaign, the CFB program allots up to \$8 in public funds to that campaign. Additional rules stipulate maximum allotment thresholds per contributor.

Sierra said while he was not opposed to the latter, his only caveat would be that there are some smaller, grassroots campaigns, such as his own, which have not had the ability to yet meet the CFB contribution thresholds, and by choosing that alternative, it could potentially disenfranchise some candidates.

But with nothing forthcoming from the mayor in terms of heeding their calls, Sierra took to Facebook on Tuesday to set out his plans for the June primary instead.

"I have decided to not participate in March's Special Election for Council District 11 and will focus efforts on the June Primary Election," he said. "This time will allow for better preparation to safely campaign given the new level of infection that's hitting our community." Sierra implored the other candidates who are out gathering signatures "to be safe, be careful and to wear a mask."

In terms of his platform, Sierra said his top three issues are housing, education and worker's protection but he added that he was concerned about many other issues besides. "Our housing crisis in the city is beyond the pale," he said. "We have so many homeless people, so many homeless families in our city, especially in the Bronx, who are rent-burdened. Yet, there are almost a million empty apartments in the city."

Sierra said that he was dismayed to learn that it was not possible to change the average median income formula at city council level, since it is a federal regulation.

According to U.S. Census Bureau's 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, the median individual income in New York City is \$50,825, while the median household income in New York City is \$57,782.

"It's unconscionable that in the Bronx, residents pay 50 percent of their income in rent, and you have an explosion in the homeless crisis that's going on," he said.

In terms of addressing the housing crisis, Sierra said, "What the city council can do is work with the New York City Housing Authority, give them proper funding, and work with them on a Land Trust project, and empower them to recommend zoning changes, so that you can put more affordable public housing into the market." Sierra said there were areas in the Bronx that look still like forests that are underdeveloped, public land that the city can utilize.

Norwood News mentioned that local environmentalists like Karen Argenti had previously raised concerns when the City began knocking out public parkland for different purposes because, according to Argenti, it was cheap. We asked Sierra if this would not raise some red flags. Sierra said he was referring more so to different residential areas around Co-Op City as one example, which he said was pretty severely underdeveloped.

"You have a row of normal houses, and then a big patch of land. It's not taking care of itself and this is city property," he said. "These are lands that the city can actively work on with nature, to develop and bring new affordable housing, but those major buildings that we have now that are almost 100 years old? I grew up in NYCHA. I know what those buildings are like. We cannot continue to use the existing public housing stock and think that it's going to be, you know, usable."

In terms of education, Sierra is also concerned that the impact of the pandemic has pushed students already at risk even further down the academic scale. "We have something like 50 percent of the students in New York City that read at, or below, the grade level at the implementation of remote learning," he said.

"If we were at 50 percent, sitting in class, could you imagine how far the retention rate has dropped now that remote learning [is here] and the catastrophe that that is, how that has been implemented," he said.

He said he has first-hand experience of the impact of this having had to help his daughter reconnect virtually over and over again when she would get logged out during a virtual classroom session. He described this as another example of the City's honorable intentions with the ideas it wants to imple-

ment but them not really working out well in practice.

He gave another example of how the vendor hired by the City to install air conditioning for low-income seniors was delayed due to a stalemate between the City and the vendor where the City allegedly owed the vendor, "something like almost a million dollars for service that was not paid."

"That led to a significant delay in other seniors getting their air conditioners, so from July to August, there were seniors who were not getting their air conditioners," he said, adding that he knew this because he works with seniors in the healthcare sector. We ask Sierra what he would do as a councilman to address such issues.

"There's a lack of understanding at the distribution level of how the council comes up with ideas, but then it leaves it up to the frontline workers, the community-based organizations to implement them," he said. "Oftentimes, because there's no frame of reference, then it leaves the CBOs and the personnel workers scrambling to fix a problem that is outside of their control."

"I, as a city council member, I have an understanding and my design is actually to be a chair for the Department of Aging," he said. "Because I have first-hand experience of what our seniors go through. Also, what the organization has to go through, to get the funding, to keep the funding, to make sure that we are meeting the criteria, starting off dotting our 'i's and crossing our 't's."

Sierra said he would continue to fight to get the funding for the much-needed services that the community's aging population need, because he has the frame of reference for seniors, and he would help people to stay in their homes, and help them get money back for paying for medical insurance unnecessarily.

On the topic of economic recovery, Sierra said it was not only about reimagining what the future would be, but the future of the economy post-COVID. "It's about protecting the essential workers who have become a component, a vital component to help keeping the economy functional," he said.

"I'm an essential worker. I'm classified as an essential worker. Our seniors, whether they're able to come out of their home or not, they still need to be provided with the services [they need] so that they can be safe, secure, healthy, [receive] nutritious meals, and get air-conditioners to do their exercise to maintain their physical activity," he said.

He said it was essential to make sure that front line workers had the relevant PPE and other workplace protections needed to assist the seniors and all vulnerable people. "Sometimes, when exposed, we have to make a sacrifice for the greater good, because people still need to be provided services," he said. "Our city needs to learn."

Seniors, the Victims of Hit & Run Incidents

by DAVID GREENE

At least two elderly women pushing shopping carts or strollers were injured in two separate hit and run incidents in the Bronx in December. A third female senior said she, too, was the victim of a hit and run incident, and that it was allegedly an FDNY EMS ambulance that left her lying on the ground in pain.

In the latest incident, cops are still looking for a driver who knocked an unidentified, 92-year-old woman to the ground at 1.08 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 30, at the corner of East Tremont Avenue and Daily Avenue in the West Farms section of the Bronx.

"I heard a boom," one female resident, who asked not to be identified, recalled, adding that when she turned around, she saw a woman lying on the road. The witness was one of several who rushed to the senior's aid. "She had a really big bump on her head," the witness said. "She knew her name, but she didn't know where she was."

Other witnesses reported that some people administered aid to the victim, while others ran to a nearby firehouse. Members of Engine 45 / Ladder 58 were summoned to the collision scene and also administered aid to the victim until paramedics arrived.

Afterwards, customers and employees at Tremont Deli and Grocery gathered around a pair of police officers inside the store to watch the store's surveillance monitor play back the video that captured the incident. A second video from another angle showed the driver briefly stopping, and then swerving back into traffic before speeding away.

Commenting on the incident on Thursday, Dec. 31, police spokeswoman, Detective Sophia Mason, said, "Upon arrival [at the incident location], officers observed a 92-year-old female pedestrian, complaining of head, neck and back pain." She added, "EMS responded to the location and transported the aided female to Saint Barnabas Hospital in stable condition."

Mason continued, "Further investigation determined the



Photo courtesy of Raqibah Basir

RAQIBAH BASIR, 64, said she suffered an asthma attack and doctors were concerned about her pacemaker after she was allegedly struck by an FDNY ambulance in Little Italy on Thursday, Dec. 10, 2020.

female was attempting to cross the intersection at the location, when a black Ford Edge made a left turn onto southbound East Tremont Avenue and struck the female as she attempted to cross East Tremont Avenue."

Mason concluded, "Upon impact, the motorist stopped, then continued to drive along East Tremont Avenue. There are no arrests, and the investigation remains ongoing."

Police are looking for the driver of the black Ford Edge SUV with New York plates, seen in the video footage.

Earlier last month, on Dec. 10, as she was pulling her laundry-filled shopping cart across Third Avenue, at East 183rd Street in Little Italy, Raqibah Basir, 64, said she was struck by an FDNY EMS ambulance as it pulled out of St. Barnabas Hospital.

Recalling the seconds before the ambulance allegedly ran into her, Basir told the *Norwood News*, by phone, from her home on Dec. 31, "I had the right of way and this guy came out of nowhere." She added, "I was trapped, and there was no way I could get out of the way because I had a cane, and I had the shopping cart. So, he was coming at me, and he puts the lights on, and then he puts the siren on, and he was still coming in my direction."

She continued, "I couldn't get out of the way fast enough. I swung the shopping cart [around], and it hit into my chest and my left arm, and it caused my body to twist." Basir said seconds later, while leaning on her shopping cart,

she hit the side of the ambulance with her cane. "He [the driver] paused, but then kept going," she said. "He didn't even stop to see how he injured me or anything."

She said a stranger came to her aid, and accompanied her to St. Barnabas Hospital, where she was examined. She said she suffered an asthma attack and internal injuries as a result of the incident.

Basir said she has requested a copy of her medical report from the hospital but was informed she had to pick it up in person. Because she has been recuperating at home, she said she has not been unable to do so.

Norwood News contacted St. Barnabas Hospital to ask about the victim's injuries, and to inquire whether the hospital's surveillance footage captured the incident. We did not receive an immediate response. Basir said she suffers from a heart condition, and that the doctors said they were concerned about her pacemaker.

She said for two weeks following the incident, she had been seeking the police report number. Upon receipt, she shared it with the *Norwood News*. We contacted the NYPD and were told the report number provided was incorrect. After providing the date and details of the alleged hit and run incident, an unnamed NYPD official located the report and said, "A 64-year-old female reported that she was at the location [Third Avenue and East 183rd Street] when her grocery cart got struck by

an unknown ambulance which left the location."

The police official added, "She stated she had sustained pain and an injury to her chest, and that she had walked to St. Barnabas Hospital for medical treatment."

Basir later said of the police account, "That's misinformation," and appeared to suggest that police were downplaying the incident.

She added, "That means I'm going to have to go, I guess, above their heads because I took the shopping cart to push in front of me, to catch the brunt of the hit." She added, "I still got hit. By them hitting, even the shopping cart caused injuries to my chest, my arms and it caused my body to twist."

Informed of the separate incident in the Bronx involving the 92-year-old woman who had been struck by the hit and run driver in West Farms, Basir said, "Unbelievable - like the grandmother who was hit pushing her grandbaby. It was out of this area, but it's still in the Bronx."

Basir was referring to an incident involving a 62-year-old woman who was pushing her 2-year-old grandson in a stroller when they were run down at Mace Avenue and Eastchester Road in Pelham Gardens on Monday, Dec. 21, 2020.

On Sunday, Dec. 27, police announced the arrest of Otello Rapini, 69, of Mahopac, N.Y., who was charged with leaving the scene of an accident in the Pelham Gardens case.

The *Norwood News* re-

ported previously how Sofia Gomez Aguilon, 20, was struck and killed by a police car responding to a call at the intersection of Pelham Parkway and Wallace Avenue, in the Pelham Parkway section of the Bronx on Monday, Oct. 5. Although, there is a discrepancy as to whether the officers had their vehicle lights and sirens on at the time of the collision, they did stop, and attempted to render aid to Aguilon at the scene. The incident still remains under investigation.

Hit and run incidents continued into the new year as police searched for an unknown vehicle that struck and killed a still-unidentified male who was discovered at East 140th Street and Bruckner Boulevard in Mott Haven, on Saturday, Jan. 2, at 10.51 p.m. The victim was found lying on the roadway and was pronounced dead at the scene, with no identification on his body. The NYPD's Collision Investigation Squad is continuing with its investigation into the incident.

A review of the latest Department of Transportation statistics on motor vehicle accidents resulting in either death or injury, show that 225 deaths were recorded citywide from Jan. 1 through Nov. 30, 2020, a 3 percent uptick from the 218 deaths reported for all of 2019, when there was, arguably, more traffic on the roads, pre-pandemic.

In addition, there were 40,486 traffic related injuries reported in the city during the same 11-month period in 2020. Meanwhile, at borough level, during the first 11 months of 2020, the Bronx recorded 37 road accident fatalities, and of those 37 victims, 15 were motorists, 15 were pedestrians, and 7 were cyclists. The Bronx also recorded 5,979 traffic related injuries during the same period.

More locally, the 52nd precinct reported two traffic related pedestrian fatalities during the same period, and a total of 490 traffic related injuries for the first 11 months of 2020.

Editor's Note: Raqibah Basir is a friend of Sile Moloney, Interim Editor of the *Norwood News*

Out & About

Compiled by AURÉOLE RIBES

Events

Join Peggy Robles-Alvarado for a generative writing workshop called **"Line Breaks and Bronx Beats,"** on Tuesday Jan. 12 from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. Open to writers of all levels, the objective of the workshop is to write/develop poems/pieces and get feedback on the work. To RSVP, and learn more, search for "Line Breaks and Bronx Beats," on evenbrite.com.

Lend a hand and help out laying mulch prune plants and more at the **Bronx River Foodway** in preparation for the 2021 spring revival! This event takes place on Jan. 9 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Concrete Plant Park in Longwood. Extra masks will be available on site. All ages and skill levels are welcome. Learn more at bronxriver.org, and register for the event by emailing Foodway@bronxriver.org.

The **Norwood Community Library** is hosting an event with food and free copies of *How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi on Jan. 9, from noon to 3 p.m. at 285 E 205th Street in Norwood.

The **Freedom Youth Family Justice Center** presents a youth-led discussion on the laws that protect youth when engaging on social media, the dangers of engaging with strangers online, and the spike in human trafficking recruitment. The event takes place on zoom at 6 p.m. on Jan. 26. RSVP to Info@FreedomYouthNyc.com.

Join **The Bronx Toastmasters Club of Riverdale** zoom meeting on Jan. 13, at 7:30 p.m. The club provides the opportunity to work on leadership, public speaking and communication skills at bi-monthly meetings. Learn more at bronxtoastmastersclub.com. To RSVP, email BronxToastmastersClub@gmail.com.

As part of the My Brother's Keeper program, Community School District 7 brings you **"The South Bronx Signs,"** a workshop serving hearing-impaired constituents in the South Bronx. Attendees will learn how to sign a song recorded on zoom, dedicated to the children of the South Bronx to help them cope with the hardships brought on by the pandemic. Classes will be on Wednesdays at 7 p.m. from Jan. 10 until March 25, via zoom. To learn more, search for "The South Bronx Signs" on eventbrite.com.

Art

The Bronx Museum presents **"Sanford Biggers: Codeswitch,"** the first survey of quilt-based works by the New York-based, interdisciplinary artist. The solo show features over 50 quilt-based works by the artist that seamlessly weave American history into a broader context of global traditions and styles. The exhibition runs through April 15. To learn more, go to the exhibitions section of the Bronx Museum website.

A virtual **"Family Art Project: Freedom Quilters of Gee Bend,"** event takes place on Saturday, Jan. 16 from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. In 1966, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. visited the Gee's Bend Community in rural Alabama, and the

Freedom Quilting Bee was established. The bold patterns and bright colors of these now famous quilts, made using fabric scraps, would later go on to fund aspects of the community's freedom. Create your own brilliant compositions out of bountiful squares of fabric scraps, honoring both Dr. King's birthday and the inspiring women quilters of Gee's Bend. Advance registration is required on wavehill.org, under calendar/events. To learn more, email information@wavehill.org or call 718.549.3200 x251.

Movement

Shape Up NYC presents seven, weekly walks at Allerton Skatepark, Franz Sigel Park, Van Cortlandt Park, Macombs Dam Park, St Mary's Park, Williamsbridge Oval Park, and Patterson Playground. This free fitness program includes a warm-up and a walking workout in these beautiful Bronx parks. More info on the days and times can be found by googling, "Shape Up NYC Bronx."

On Monday nights, the **Bronx Nomads** host an hour long run / walk for anyone interested in joining the group. The event starts at Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center at 6 p.m. More information can be found on the group's Instagram page, "Bronxnomads."

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Letters To The Editor

NYC Council

Our NYC Council is generally ineffective; they could do much more to encourage businesses to relocate or expand in our City. Meanwhile, their latest useless action is to repeal Section 240.37 of the NYS Penal Code which targets unlawful loitering. This law allows our great police officers to stop and frisk people acting strangely, or up to no good in our neighborhoods.

Richard Marias
Norwood

MTA Funding

Fare increases for NYC transit bus, subway and Metro-North Railroad were already assumed in 2019, as part of the approval process for the \$51 billion 2020-2024 Five Year Capital Plan. Governor Andrew Cuomo, Mayor Bill de Blasio and members of the State Legislature and City Council were all aware of this financial arrangement before signing on board. It included a 4 percent fare increase in 2021, and in 2023. What is new, is that MTA Chairman, Pat Foye, made clear if he doesn't obtain a second \$12 billion CARE COVID-19 bailout, the fare increase in 2021 may be far greater than 4 percent.

Within the 1953 master agreement between NYC and NYC Transit are "escape clauses." NYC has the right to take back control of its assets at any

time. This includes the subway and bus system. In 1953, the old NYC Board of Transportation passed on control of the municipal subway system, including all its assets, under a master lease and operating agreement, to the then, newly created NYC Transit Authority. NYC owns the NYC Transit subway and bus system. MTA is the management company hired to run it.

Why has the MTA not asked City Hall, its "boss," rather than Washington D.C., for a second \$12 billion bailout, to prevent the 40 percent, threatened reduction to bus and subway services? Albany provides the MTA with significant annual funding under the Statewide Transportation Operating Assistance (STOA) program.

Why hasn't the MTA asked Gov. Cuomo, State Senate Majority Leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and State Assembly Speaker, Carl Heastie, to increase their contribution? Washington D.C., via its Federal Transit Administration grants, riders, via farebox, and motorists, via tolls, continue to pay their fair share. Uncle Sam did even more by providing \$3.9 billion under the first CARE COVID-19 aid package. It is time for City Hall and Albany to pay their respective fair shares as well.

Larry Penner
Great Neck

Editor's Note: We reserve the right to edit letters for space, clarity, civility, and accuracy.

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Photo by David Greene

A DECEMBER 17TH fire at El Buen Ambiente on East 198th Street caused the temporary closure of the restaurant and bar. Employees were back at the restaurant making repairs on Saturday, Dec. 19, 2020.

Two Restaurant Fires in Bedford Park

by DAVID GREENE

Two fires reported at two different Bedford Park restaurants, within days of each other, have resulted in one being shut temporarily and one being closed indefinitely.

On Thursday, Dec. 17, at 7.14 p.m., the FDNY responded to a call for "all hands" in relation to a fire reported at El Buen Ambiente, a restaurant and bar, located at 108 East 198th Street.

According to officials, the fire began on the roof of the one-story, commercial building located between Creston Avenue and the Grand Concourse. Sixty firefighters from 12 units brought the fire under control at 7.48 p.m., with no injuries reported.

A few days later, on Saturday, Dec. 19, a second fire was reported at 12:42 a.m. at the popular El Valle Restaurant, located at 2448 Jerome Avenue, at East Fordham Road.

Fire officials reported receiving a

second "all hands" call regarding the fire, which broke out in a one-story, commercial building. Once again, 60 members from 12 units responded to the blaze, and no exact time was provided for when it was brought under control. No injuries were reported.

Fire officials added that the cause of this fire remains under investigation.

On Monday, Jan. 4, El Buen Ambiente was back open for delivery and pick-up. A call to the establishment found one employee who disputed the FDNY's account that the fire began on the roof but declined to comment further.

Meanwhile, on Monday, Jan. 4, El Valle Restaurant still had its damaged, roll down gates, which had been cut in half by firefighters, pulled over the entrance. Since then, graffiti can be seen on the plywood boarding the building's broken windows. Calls for comment continue to go unanswered at the location.

CORRECTION

In our last edition (Vol 33, No. 18) dated December 17, 2020 to January 6, 2021, we wrote that Nilda Irizarry Hofmann grew up in Norwood. In fact, we understand the building address of 2746 197th Street falls within the general area of Bedford Park, since it falls outside of Fordham Manor.



ESTAMOS PARA AYUDARLO

Que 2021 sea un año en que reciba cobertura.

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Public and Community Meetings

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the **52nd PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL** meetings have been held via ZOOM. Meetings are typically held on the **fourth Thursday of each month at 6 p.m.** Call the 52nd Precinct Community Affairs office at [718-220-5824](tel:7182205824) for further details.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, **BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD 7** committee meetings have been held via ZOOM. The next full Board meeting will be held on **Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021 at 6.30 p.m.** Zoom details will be circulated ahead of the meeting. Contact mirosario@cb.nyc.gov to be added to the distribution list.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, **Bedford Mosholu Community Association** meetings have been held via ZOOM. Generally, the meetings are held virtually on the **first Wednesday of the month at 8 p.m.** For further details, contact bedfordmosholu@verizon.net.



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City Launches Plan to Help Low & Medium-Income Renters with Cash Deposits

(continued from page 1)

"Many New Yorkers are living paycheck to paycheck making it difficult to afford the high upfront costs that come with moving into a new home," said HPD Commissioner Louise Carroll. "This administration is committed to creating better options for renters who might have trouble paying a security deposit all at once, and we're looking for the right partners to join us in this important goal."

"Security deposits create barriers to mobility for too many New Yorkers. Providing alternatives to these burdensome requirements is an important step towards creating a fairer and more equitable city," said HDC President Eric Enderlin. "We look forward to advancing this initiative to make it easier to obtain a safe, secure, and affordable home."

Security deposit alternatives are financial products that allow renters to pay a portion of the required security deposit value, instead of the full amount, at the time of lease sign-up. The obligation to come up with the traditional, lump-sum security deposit has long presented barriers to many low and middle-income households, preventing them, often at the most inopportune moments, from relocating to new housing.

HPD and HDC will determine if the alternative financial products offered by the financial providers meet the needs of the City's housing development partners (property owners and property managers) and tenants, in terms of security and risk assessment. If they do, the City will consider placing any vetted providers on a pre-qualified list. The City's housing development partners can then consider if they wish to work with these financial providers or not.

Under the terms of the RFEI, providers of the alternative financial products cannot charge renters more than one month's rent over the duration of a renter's tenancy. They must also allow renters to pay a small portion of their security deposit up front, or the full amount over time, while the providers themselves insure the property owners / housing development

partners against property damage claims or unpaid rent, among other requirements.

Norwood News had a number of questions about the program and reached out for clarification to HPD. For example, we asked HPD if solicitations from providers for acceptance onto the initial, pre-qualified list were to be received only from regulated financial service providers or from any type of company.

HPD said, in order to be considered for the pre-qualified list, applicants must provide a copy of their insurance license issued by the New York State Department of Financial Services.

We also asked, for the avoidance of doubt, if it is the provider of the new security deposit alternative product/service that will insure the development partner/property owner against property damage claims or unpaid rent (among other requirements), and we asked what those other requirements were.

HPD said, "We understand that most security deposit alternative providers cover owners (and not the tenants) for any property damage or unpaid rent on the part of the tenant. However, all proposals will be considered."

HPD said the other requirements are detailed in the Threshold Criteria and Scoring Criteria on pages 3-4 of the RFEI, found here: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/services/security-deposit-alternatives-rfei.pdf>

The HPD site states that the program is open to renters leasing newly constructed City and/or HDC-sponsored affordable housing. Since HDC is a City agency, we asked what the difference was.

A HPD representative said, "HDC is a state-chartered, public benefit corporation that serves New York City and works very closely with the City government. This sentence is intended to make it clear that HDC-financed new construction rental projects may use security deposit alternative products pre-qualified through the RFEI."

In terms of the timing of the program, HPD clarified that pre-qualified security deposit alternative products, identified through this RFEI, will be available to both City and HDC-financed new construction rental projects at the same time.

Finally, we asked HP which government or state agency will regulate the providers of the new security deposit alternative product/service, in order to ensure tenants are protected against any predatory entities. We were informed that the State, through the Department of Financial Services, will continue to regulate security deposit alternative providers in accordance with state law.

HPD added that once the initial pre-

qualified list of security deposit alternative providers is identified, HPD and HDC will have the ability to remove any provider from the pre-qualified list if they are no longer in compliance with the RFEI criteria, or if they do not comply with HPD and HDC's requests for data/information about their activities in our portfolios.

To be considered for the initial pre-qualified list, companies should send their submissions, in a single PDF attachment, to securitydeposits@hpd.nyc.gov by Feb. 15, 2021. More information about the RFEI program can be found on HPD's website at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/services-and-information/security-deposit-rfei.page>.

Capital One: Customers Should Check Account Status to Ensure Prompt Access to Stimulus Payments

By SÍLE MOLONEY

On Jan. 4, Capital One bank reminded customers to review their account status to ensure individuals eligible for the second round of the Economic Impact Payments (also known as stimulus payments) and expected on Jan. 4, 2020, could access their payments.

"We know the Economic Impact Payments can be a lifeline for many during these unprecedented times, and we want to ensure that individuals have full access to this money," bank officials said, before highlighted the following points:

Capital One customers whose accounts are overdrawn at the time of their Economic Impact Payment deposit will receive a temporary credit

equal to that of their overdrawn balance.

All Economic Impact Payments made through an ACH direct deposit will be made available to customers immediately after they are posted, as long as the account is open and there are no restrictions on the account.

The bank is also providing no-fee, check-cashing service to non-customers who receive their payment via paper check.

Capital One added that additional FAQs can be found on their website www.capitalone.com, and encouraged people to visit [IRS.gov/coronavirus](https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus) for the latest information on eligibility and individual benefit payments.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Gateway Counseling Center Inc. is posting a bid request for foodservice companies wishing to provide meal service for adults, compliant with the CACFP program.

Sealed bids will be received at Gateway Counseling Center Inc. office at 1776 Eastchester Road Suite 220, Bronx, New York 10461 until 12 pm on January 25th, 2021 for meal catering service delivered to 4500 Furman Ave, Bronx, NY 10470, and 175-41 Liberty Avenue, Jamaica, NY 11433. Specifications for at least 200 breakfasts, lunches, dinners, snacks on weekdays in addition to limited weekend service. This may only be obtained by contacting Jordana Velazquez at Gateway Counseling Center Inc. from 9-5 at 718-885-4992 or via email at Jordana.Velazquez@gccnyc.org. All work will be conducted in strict accordance with bid specifications. Bids will be opened and read on January 28th, 2021 at 2 pm.

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