



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

1 Centre Street, 19th floor, New York, NY 10007
(212) 669-8300 p (212) 669-4306 f
163 West 125th Street, 5th floor, New York, NY 10027
(212) 531-1609 p (212) 531-4615 f
www.manhattanbp.nyc.gov

Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

**Testimony submitted to the New York City Council Committee on Aging Public Hearing
on Age-Friendly NYC Aging Improvement Districts-Successes and Future Challenges
October 30, 2014
Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer**

Good afternoon Chair Chin and members of the Aging Committee. My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on the Age-friendly NYC Initiative, its success and future challenges. According to the 2013 American Community Survey, based on the 2010 Census, there are 231,326 older adults 65 years and older living in the borough of Manhattan. Throughout the five boroughs, the total rises to 1,074,547. The city's senior population is expected to increase by 45% in the next two decades, when one in every 5 New Yorkers will be age 60 or older.

As you know, in fall 2007, the New York City Council, in conjunction with Mayor Bloomberg and the New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM), launched Age-friendly NYC, a citywide initiative with the goal of making all parts of city life more inclusive of older adults. In March 2008 and April 2011, I hosted senior forums at the American Bible Society in partnership with NYAM and One Stop Senior Services, on various topics including Transportation, Housing, Civic Engagement, Employment, Health, Hospitality/Retail, Culture, and Social Services. Hundreds of seniors participated in these programs, and their input was integral to shaping the City's 'Blueprint' for improving services, as well as providing direction for the West Side Aging Improvement District, which I founded with NYAM in March 2012.

Essential to the success thus far of the West Side Aging Improvement District is senior engagement, in addition to the partnership of many wonderful West Side senior centers and institutions, NORCs, citywide nonprofits and city agencies. I would like to share with you several of our accomplishments in improving various areas of the quality of life for seniors on the West Side – which have also improved the lives of many others, regardless of age.

Transportation Safety: A concern frequently voiced by West Side seniors, especially with the establishment of the Columbus Avenue bike lane, introduction of electric bikes for commercial deliverymen, and an increase in cycling citywide, is that of pedestrian safety and cyclists. With NYPD, I visited restaurants that use delivery people to explain the relevant safety laws, and last year hosted with DOT a series of interactive workshops about the commercial bicyclists' law for business owners, with the goal of educating them about safety regulations that keep both pedestrians and employees safe. We also continue to work with seniors and advocates in the disability community on identifying safety 'hot spots' as part of the Vision Zero Initiative and assessing the streetscape and condition of pedestrian ramps and curb cuts.

CityBench: Seniors are on the move – but also sometimes just need a place to rest for a moment. Working with NYAM, local seniors, and the Department of Transportation, we

identified locations for the CityBench Program, a three year federally funded program to install benches throughout the city to support riders and encourage walking among older and mobility-impaired New Yorkers. According to DOT, in the fall of 2012 over twenty benches had been installed on the upper West Side.

Tickets!: Since the first Age-friendly forum, I've heard a familiar mantra – "We want free tickets!" The West Side is rich with cultural institutions of every size and discipline, but high ticket prices make it challenging for older adults on fixed incomes to enjoy these pleasures. In July 2011, I hosted a Senior Cultural Discount Fair at the American Museum of Natural History. Information from citywide cultural and arts groups – theatres, museums, and more – about free or low cost tickets and offerings for seniors were available at this event. The Mayor's Office of Film and Television has been a valuable partner in connecting seniors with free tickets to local screenings.

Technology: Prior to the Age-friendly initiative and while serving as Chair of the Council Committee on Technology, I've been a longtime supporter of increasing access to technology for all New Yorkers. In 2005, I launched "Senior Technology Touch Tanks" with the nonprofit organization Older Adults Technology Services (OATS). In 2007, I sponsored the "Connecting Seniors for the 21st Century" budget initiative, a collaboration between OATS, DOROT, and Per Scholas, which developed and implemented a technology program connecting, educating, empowering, and improving access to health resources for thousands of senior citizens in neighborhoods across New York City. I am delighted that funding has been allocated to continue senior technology programs, even after the federal three-year Broadband Technology Opportunities Program grant ended in December 2013. I have seen first-hand how they improve the connectivity and quality of life for so many older adults, with full credit due to the great staff who work within this community.

Grow Green Age Well Initiative: A strong advocate of food sustainability, I sponsored Local Law 50 of 2011 that encourages the sourcing of locally grown or processed foods by city agencies to the maximum extent possible. Through a partnership of the New York Academy of Medicine, New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA), Goddard Riverside Community Center, Citymeals-on-Wheels, Fairway Market, New York Sun Works, Project FIND, Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center, and our neighborhood nonprofits, I launched the Grow Green Age Well Initiative, comprised of four main programs Wholesale for Whole Meals, Greenhouse to Goddard, the Age-friendly West Side Grocery Guide, and the Westside Senior Supported Agriculture (WSSA) Food Bag Program, which continue to operate today. Here's how they work:

Wholesale for Whole Meals - In hopes of enriching senior center meals with local fresh food, I reached an agreement with DFTA to provide senior centers with a list of options available through GrowNYC's Greenmarket Co. wholesale program, identifying items rich in Vitamin A and C for substitution in already-planned meals, which are often prepared with frozen or canned foods; this approach also conforms to the six-month advance deadline to submit meal menus to DFTA. Seniors who lunch at Project FIND Centers, Lenox Hill Neighborhood Center, as well as the homebound serviced by Meals-on-Wheels, are now enjoying fresh fruits and vegetables from the Greenmarket! I applaud the support that Commissioner Corrado and the DFTA Bureau of

Community Services' Nutrition Unit staff have placed on encouraging the purchasing of fresh and local food in our senior center congregate and home delivered meal programs, as well as the Commissioner's focus in tackling the serious issue of food insecurity in our senior population.

Greenhouse to Goddard - For the past three summers, the Greenhouse at the Manhattan School for Children/MS 333 on West 93 Street, working with New York Sun Works, delivered over 200 heads of delicious lettuce along with fresh herbs – grown in hydroponics! - to west side senior centers. Due to the success of the program over the summer, the school has continued to share its harvest throughout the school year with the students visiting to the local senior center, establishing an important intergenerational connection. With the growth of school-based hydroponic classrooms and greenhouses, we are working to replicate this partnership in other neighborhoods.

Annual Age-friendly West Side Grocery Guide - In 2011, I unveiled the city's first Age-friendly West Side Grocery Guide, a unique survey of grocery store best-practices including: sale of fresh and prepared foods in single portions, various delivery and ordering options, accessible aisles and floors, availability of seating and water, and senior discounts. Expanding on the fresh food focus, the 2012-2013 guide included information on the neighborhood's Greenmarket locations, as well as grocery stores' hours of operation and prices for phone ordering and home delivery.

Senior Fresh Food Bag Program - Thanks to my innovative and unique bi-monthly Westside Senior Supported Agriculture (WSSA) Food Bag Program, participants receive a bag of assorted fresh, locally grown produce from NY State farmers for only \$8! Unlike a typical Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, seniors do not need to pay for more than one week in advance and were not required to participate each week. Home health aides are also welcome to join. Before beginning the program, my office engaged local senior centers and organizations to determine how the type, weight, and packaging of the produce could meet the widely varying needs and abilities of seniors. Attention is also given to striking a balance between familiar produce and introducing new items, and my office prepared a produce guide with storage and recipe tips to accompany each bag. The bags are packed and distributed on the same day by a dedicated team of older adult volunteers, students, FEGS members; and seniors collect their bags at the same location where they registered.

The program's first year – as documented in a report released February 2013 – was a great success and grew steadily, with over 120 seniors enjoying tomatoes, corn, apples, peppers and swiss chard! Orders and deliveries are coordinated through local senior centers and organizations including Goddard Riverside, NCJW's Council Lifetime Learning, DOROT, Project FIND Hamilton House, Bloomingdale Aging in Place, and several West Side NORCs. In October 2013, we completed the second year of the program with seniors from over 10 sites participating, including DOROT's homebound seniors. The success and growth of this self-funded program is directly attributable to its simplicity and ease of access, which we conceived from the direct input of seniors and local centers. I am proud to have partnered this year with Council Members Helen Rosenthal and Corey Johnson to expand this program in their respective Councilmanic districts. Every two weeks, a combined average of over 260 seniors participate in this program, including VISIONS, one of our newest partner sites, which produces a special

braille and large print version of the weekly produce guide. This fall we also launched a Northern Manhattan pilot with Corbin Hill Food Project and the Doe Fund at the Central Harlem Senior Citizens Center, Lincoln Senior Center and Carter Senior Center.

SCRIE: With my advocacy, the Department of Finance, with the Department for the Aging, opened a SCRIE acceptance office in downtown Manhattan. This office acts as a SCRIE/DRIE service center. The office is located at 66 John Street, 3rd Floor, NY, NY. It is open from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM. While our office still receives a steady flow of seniors seeking information about the status of their applications and related issues, the seniors also appreciate a place where they can go in person (as opposed to trying to get answers through 311). We continue to work with DOF to increase awareness of the recent increase in income eligibility for the SCRIE program.

In addition to the many seniors who have shaped the West Side Age-friendly District through their participation, I would also like to recognize the following partners for their contributions: the New York Academy of Medicine, GrowNYC and the Greenmarket farmers, DFTA, DOT, NYPD, DCA, Goddard Riverside Senior Center, Bloomingdale Aging in Place, West Side NORC, Project FIND Hamilton Senior Center, JASA's St. Martin's NORC, DOROT, JASA's Club 76, Project Open Lincoln Towers, NCJW Council Lifetime Learning and MS333: Manhattan School for Children.

I laud the creativity, partnerships and programming originating in the East Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant Age-friendly districts as well as Jimmy Vacca's Bronx district and commend Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Chair Chin and members of the Council for their leadership in dedicating resources to expand the Age-friendly initiative. New York City continues to be an international and national leader in creating policies to benefit older adults, as our senior population increases. It is particularly important that we work together to integrate age-friendly services across city agencies and neighborhoods.

I would also like to recognize the wonderful work of Dr. Ruth Finkelstein and Dorian Block, at the Columbia University Robert N. Butler Columbia Aging Center. One of their current projects is creating a guide for small businesses on best practices for hiring, valuing and retaining older workers. They are working together with our city's small business owners and employees about their challenges in terms of workforce and the innovative ways small businesses have hired, used and retained older workers to meet various business needs. This guide builds on the earlier work of the Age Smart Employer Awards. I believe that by identifying these best practices and working hand-in-hand with employers, we can increase hiring of older adults and am happy to be involved and supportive of this initiative.

One of the challenges moving forward is defining what it means for our City to be more 'Age-friendly' while maintaining an active role for seniors in generating priorities and initiatives that are reflective of the neighborhood's interests and needs.

This September, I convened the Manhattan Borough President Senior Advisory Board. Our appointees, a diverse group of older adults representing neighborhoods and communities throughout the borough, are providing integral assistance in finalizing our Senior Resource

Guide, which will be released next month. In addition, they identified several key action areas to increase Age-friendly policy and programming, including: Community Boards, Higher Education, Technology and Affordable Internet Access, Emergency Preparedness, Arts & Culture, and Parks and Recreation. The Higher Education Subcommittee has devised a survey for higher education institutions to find out more about what programs they offer for older adults including courses and access to health and computer facilities. Following analysis of the survey results, we will be hosting a forum for seniors with these institutions. The Arts & Culture Subcommittee is reaching out to the Broadway League, CIGs and additional cultural programs to identify free and low cost performance opportunities for older adults, in addition to best practices by senior centers and organizations in disseminating these tickets.

In summary, I am so pleased to continue working with my Council colleagues and the New York Academy of Medicine toward the goal of making all Manhattan communities Age-Friendly. I also commend DFTA for its work on behalf of the city's seniors, and it is always a pleasure to work with the agency, its leadership and staff. I encourage all those who are committed to the well-being of our older adults to join and support these age-friendly initiatives.