



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

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**City Council Committee on Governmental Operations
Oversight – Appointing and Supporting NYC’s Community Boards
February 28, 2023**

Good morning Chair Ung and thank you for holding this hearing today. My name is Carol-Ann Church, and I am the Director of Community Boards for Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso. Before taking on this new role last year, I served as Assistant District Manager of Brooklyn Community Board 2, so I am very familiar with the issues that community boards face.

Community boards are a critical link between the public and City government. They weigh in on extremely important issues that impact everything from small businesses, to street safety, to the availability of affordable housing. As Director of Community boards, I am not only the first point-of-contact for all of Brooklyn’s 18 boards when they need assistance, I also oversee the appointment process. I share the Borough President’s goal of ensuring that Brooklyn’s boards are diverse and that they accurately reflect the populations of the communities they represent.

We know we have a long way to go to achieve that goal. Although our office has struggled to quantify this due to a lack of available data reported by the Community Boards, we are aware that historically, board members tend to be older, more white, and more likely to own their home and drive a personal vehicle than the general population. To address this, our office has taken several steps to improve the appointment process. The first is utilizing an updated application designed to capture additional demographic information such as more precise age ranges, housing type, preferred transportation method(s), educational attainment, and comfort with technology.

This year, we also targeted our outreach efforts to two populations that we know remain underrepresented on our boards: public housing residents and youth. We contacted 150 NYCHA Tenant Association presidents, youth leadership organizations, and many local colleges to enlist their assistance with promoting the applications. Our partners at NYC College of Technology sent out the form to 14,000 students. We also met with community-based organizations from across the borough, such as Chinese American Planning Council, Organization of Staff Analysts, 500 Men Making a Difference, and tabled at the Brooklyn Public Library. Finally, we advertised the opportunity to apply through the media, including partnering with BRIC on a public television episode, utilizing LinkNYC kiosks, and placing a series of radio, online, and local newspaper interviews and opinion pieces. Our application deadline was Thursday, February 23, and we have already started interviewing applicants on a rolling basis. I look forward to doing a robust demographic analysis of all the applicants and appointees so that we can quantify the impacts of these efforts.

In addition to implementing new outreach methods, our office is also working to codify best practices for appointments. We have drafted an interpretive statement on the requirements outlined in the City Charter. Our goal is to articulate standards that can inform the Comptroller's periodic audits. These standards include:

- All applicants must complete a full application by the posted deadline in order to be considered.
- Once selected for an interview, the applicant must attend; unexcused failure to attend the interview will remove the applicant from consideration.
- If an applicant is appointed by a Council Member, the Council Member must fill out a certification form in which they attest that the applicant meets the qualifications and that their appointment furthers the goal of having diverse and representative board membership. The Borough President will appoint those recommended by the Council Member unless they do not meet these standards, or in the case of reappointments, they have poor attendance.

In addition to making appointments, I know the Council is also interested in how we support our community boards. This has been a fraught subject for many years, as Borough Presidents' offices and City agencies have debated their roles and responsibilities, sometimes leaving boards with nowhere to turn. Our proposed interpretive statement will also address this by defining what types of "training and technical assistance" our office will provide, as opposed to what other agencies should provide. For example, the BP's office can provide connections to other City agencies, legal perspectives, and training on administrative tools; whereas agencies should provide trainings upon request about their areas of technical expertise. Our goal is to ensure that community boards will be able to obtain the assistance they need from the appropriate source. We understand that this will require buy-in from City agencies, and we will continue to advocate for them to have dedicated staff available to provide boards with meaningful assistance.

I want to end by noting that all of this only works if boards have the resources they need to function, and right now they are struggling. Staffing is a particular concern; the boards' existing budgets only provide for a minimal number of staff lines, and leave little room for competitive salaries, making recruitment and retention of professional staff difficult. Additionally, unlike many other City offices, they must handle many tasks with little external support and no dedicated staff. For example, Council Members' offices rely on a central staff for tasks such as HR, IT, and procurement, but the community boards do not have a similar resource. Increasing their staff budgets and providing more administrative support would allow the boards to be more efficient, and to connect more directly with their constituents and encourage engagement from more diverse populations, including youth. Advocates have also long been asking for professional planners to work with boards, which our office continues to support. The boards also need funding to support technology upgrades to facilitate holding and livestreaming hybrid meetings, as well as producing non-digital communication such as flyers and mailers, as well as translation services for those materials, for their websites, and for their meetings.

Thank you for your time today and for drawing attention to this very important issue. We look forward to working with the City Council and our fellow Borough Presidents' offices to diversify and support our community boards.