



The New York Academy of Medicine

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**Harewood Senior Center
Council Member Albert Vann
April 17, 2008**

Approximate number of attendees: 120

Approximately 25% of attendees indicated living in this community for 50 years or longer; about half of attendees indicated living in this community for 40 years or more. Only 2 people indicated living in the community for 5 years or less.

Over half of all attendees indicated that they raised their children here and about the same number indicated that they have grown children in the community. About 10 people indicated having a grandchild living in their home.

Outdoor spaces and buildings

- Need more speed bumps. People go too fast on small streets and when I have to slow down to park into my garage people get mad and want to pick a fight (they use her street as a shortcut to avoid red lights and are agitated when she slows them down)
- Need to trim trees. One gentleman indicated that he has been asking the City to cut back the trees near his house since the 1980s to no avail. “How can we speed things up?”
- Need better intersection safety in the crosswalk
- The sidewalks need repair
- Need more public benches
- Need a park (or section of an existing park) designated for older people
- People need to curb their dogs in parks. “I remember when you used to be able to lay down on the grass. God forbid you do that anymore.”

Transportation

- Public transportation
 - Need to reopen public restrooms in the subways because I have diabetes and have to urinate more often than I used to. How can we open these closed restrooms? They must be safe however because people fear crime.
 - No elevators or escalators here in Brooklyn; subway steps are tough to maneuver (need to speed up the plan to put elevators at subways while improving Access-a-Ride)
 - Seniors should not have to pay for public transportation
 - Need additional express buses
 - Seniors should have their own buses
 - Buses don't always lower to the curb and it's a long way to step down
 - People take the priority seating on the buses
 - Need benches at bus stops
- Access-a-Ride:
 - I've had cars take off because they are fearful of the safety in the NYCHA development (Council Man Vann indicated he has worked on this issue and has come to an agreement with DOT officials to designate a safe place within the development where Access-a-Ride cars can stop to pick-up and drop off passengers)
 - Not getting better. It should be a top priority for your report

Housing

- Need more senior housing at a reasonable rate. When asked to give a show of hands:
 - 6 attendees indicated that they climb at least one flight of stairs to get to their apartment
 - about 35% are worried about potential rent increases
 - about 10 people are worried about getting tossed out of their apartments because of gentrification
- Utility bills are too high; one man was turned down for the HEAP program because application process was too complicated, he needed assistance: "can we simplify the process?"

Employment

- Where can we go to get temp work? Many people were interested in the ReServe model touched upon by the facilitator but few had knowledge of it
- A show of hand s:
 - Only a handful indicated that they still work for pay
 - About 10% would like to work for pay, but no one wants a full-time job
 - About 75% of participants indicated that they are happy to be retired

Affordability

- Medications are so expensive
- An older woman who serves on the local community board discussed the growing economic divide affecting seniors in the community. The definition of poverty is wrong and needs to be examined because the cost of living is so high. There isn't enough low-income housing so people fall through the cracks (low-income and middle-income)
- Need to increase food stamps given out for use at farmer's markets. "Twenty dollars is not enough."
- Need free legal services for seniors
- Cell phone companies charge too much for service; they should create a senior rate that is cheaper and offers fewer minutes per month. "This is a safety issue."

Where do you get information?

- Newspapers
- Borough President's Office
- Internet
- Radio
- Television
- Free local papers
- Amsterdam News
- Converse with family and friends
- KISS FM radio program on Sunday mornings

Miscellaneous

- Shouldn't have to use so much energy to get advocacy/community changes. We need to make it easier to go through the process such as creating a centrally located place that triages problems instead of 311
- Our block association has been successful: we have block parties and we've received a new speed bump on our street
- Taxes are unfair for seniors. One woman thought she didn't have to pay taxes anymore because she was a senior and was hit with penalties because she was mistaken. Need help navigating the system and getting help filing taxes
- A staff member at the senior center offered suggestions:
 - Larger print on cell phones and computers
 - More curb cuts
 - More community health fairs for men