

Borough Board Atlantic Yards Committee
Summary of the November 15, 2005 Meeting on Public Health

Borough Board Atlantic Yards Committee Members in Attendance:

Borough President Marty Markowitz
Community Board 2 Chair Shirley McRae
Community Board 6 Chair Jerry Armer
Community Board 8 Chair Robert Matthews

Supporting Staff

Deputy Borough President Yvonne Graham
Greg Atkins, Office of Borough President Marty Markowitz
Jon Benguiat, Office of Borough President Marty Markowitz
Bob Lipinsky, Office of Borough President Marty Markowitz
Ellen Oettinger, Office of Borough President Marty Markowitz
Mary Lou Bradley, Office of Council Member David Yassky
Kate Suisman, Office of Council Member Letitia James
Sam Cooper, Office of Assembly Member Joan Millman
Che Chester, Office of State Senator Carl Andrews
Robert Perris, District Manager, Community Board 2
Craig Hammerman, District Manager, Community Board 6
Doris Alexander, District Manager, Community Board 8

Guests & Panelists

Mr. Robert Kulikowski, Director of NYC Office of Environmental Coordination
Dr. John Carroll, Chief of Medicine, Brooklyn Hospital

I. Discussion with the Panel

See below questions and topics covered during the conversation with the Director of the Office of Environmental Coordination, which reviews all Environmental Impact Statements and coordinates assessments, the Chief of Medicine from Brooklyn Hospital and the Borough Board Atlantic Yards Committee about the Public Health section of the Atlantic Yards project. Neither the Office of Environmental Coordination nor Brooklyn Hospital is formally involved in the EIS process or the Atlantic Yards project.

Will the public health section have the potential to impact other areas studied in the EIS?

Mr. Kulikowski stated that the public health assessment reflects the synthesis of the impacts, for all the other areas of the EIS. He responded that the public health assessment will be conducted at the end when the impacts have been assessed. There is no particular threshold that triggers a public health study. It is a subjective analysis. Epidemiologists and risk assessors will take impacts into consideration and recommend as further study is necessary.

Dr. Carroll responded that from a medical point of view, particulate matter is the utmost concern as a public health impact.

How is the study area determined for public health?

Mr. Kulikowski responded that the city has guidelines for the study area, but assessment may need to go outside it. As the review moves along, the study area for public health can be determined.

Asthma rates are very high in this area, and there is legitimate concern about additional activities. Will they assess air quality as it relates to asthma?

Mr. Kulikowski responded that nothing precludes the EIS from an asthma assessment. Even if the threshold doesn't meet qualifications that could trigger a study, comments can recommend the EIS to study this.

We have asked that the public health study area be expanded. From an OEC perspective, is this likely to happen?

Mr. Kulikowski responded that you can ask, but there are no guarantees.

How prepared is Brooklyn Hospital for the influx of residents?

Dr. Carroll responded that once the hospital has the actual numbers of potential new residents, it's fairly easy to prepare the hospital's capacity. Actually, the hospital has seen a small decline in inpatient numbers.

To the east there is no hospital because of the closing of St. Mary's. What is local hospital capacity?

As a committee, we should talk to Long Island College Hospital about their capacity as well, and King's County because they also have a trauma center.

There is much concern about runoff into the Gowanus canal as a result of this project. What type of study will there be of the Gowanus runoff as it affects health? Is there a plan for remediation for overflow of the canal?

Mr. Kulikowski responded that the Gowanus is currently undergoing study separately from this project. The results will be out in late winter or early spring. Keyspan's study and information may be useful as well.

Is Brooklyn set up to handle the psychological trauma of "root shock" as a result of residents being displaced?

Dr. Carroll responded that Brooklyn's mental health system already has a lot of activity and is currently set up to handle this type of situation.

If there are contaminants at the site, how would it affect public health?

Mr. Kulikowski responded that if there are significant contaminants, they would be removed as part of a remediation process. It might be expensive, but not a technological challenge. Dr. Carroll responded that people have been looking and have been remediating sites in the city for various project, and the expertise is available to effectively perform remediation.

Since State has a lot of oversight do you find that if the city finds contaminants, could it stop the process?

Mr. Kulikowski responded that the City's OEC works closely with State Department Environmental Conservation. The situation of this stopping the process hasn't happened in the last couple of years. OEC has worked on protocols with the State.

What role can OEC play on an ongoing basis with this project?

Mr. Kulikowski responded that OEC has not been asked to play a role.

Can we put these questions raised to ESDC?

[Chair] Yes, send them to us. They will become part of the record and sent to ESDC.

Is Brooklyn Hospital doing anything to prepare for terrorism threats?

Dr. Carroll responded that the City has put into place emergency plans. The hospital rehearses at various levels and has planned how to triage patients.

What section of the EIS are the Gowanus issues and terrorism under?

Mr. Kulikowski responded that the EIS does not handle terrorism, a subject left to the police. The Gowanus canal would fall under infrastructure, or possibly natural resources. An EIS can be very redundant.

Mr. Kulikowski stated that the EIS review should be coordinated. Typically the appropriate chapter will be sent to a city agency by the ESDC to review for city concerns.

II. Written Questions

The Borough President's Office has submitted the below questions to appropriate agencies and is awaiting reply. The answers will be posted when we receive them from the agencies.

Questions submitted by Community Board 6

Can the agencies provide a comprehensive inventory of existing public and private health care service providers who serve the study area for the project? Using the existing health care service inventory as a baseline, can we get projections for additional services that will be needed given the additional residential and transient project-induced populations?

What risk assessment modeling methodologies would be most appropriate to use to evaluate the overall impact of the project on the study area? Can the agency representatives provide any common references? Which local organizations specialize in public health planning?

Since the traffic intersection at Flatbush, Atlantic and 4th Avenues are already Federally-designated Carbon Monoxide Non-Attainment Area, meaning it's so congested that the CO levels are not within Federal standards, have the agencies performed any studies of the area within the past decade and can they share their results with us for additional background?

Based on the anticipated increases in vehicular traffic, which are likely to increase traffic emissions through the regional approaches to the project site, what steps can be taken to address related public health concerns such as a feared increase in asthma and other respiratory-related illnesses? What mitigation measures can be taken to protect sensitive receptors for the long-term along the project approaches?

With regard to any exposure pathways that might be created between the public and any environmental contaminants and/or hazardous materials that might be handled during the construction phases of this project, what assurances can the agencies give us that public health will be protected?

Can the agencies provide a longitudinal epidemiological analysis of the study area going back 10 years to establish a baseline profile of public health indicators for the affected area? We ask for a 10-year longitudinal study since the construction timeline is expected to last at least 11-years into the future. How will these specific indicators be monitored over the full construction period and beyond?

Given the State's interest in evaluating the existing inventory of health care service facilities to identify excess capacity within the health care providing system, are there any current plans to reduce the service capacity within the study area?

Written questions submitted by Community Board 8

The closing of St. Mary's Hospital requires that particular attention be paid to Brooklyn's already overburdened health care infrastructures.

A comprehensive baseline health profile for the project area should be developed to assess whether existing facilities are currently sufficient to fully understand the impact of any project of this magnitude.

Traffic and pedestrian patterns should be studied. As a result of the traffic and pollution it can increase asthma in our children and the elderly.

Natural resources, hazardous materials, infrastructure, solid waste, sanitation and energy: How will the physical aspects of this massive development impact the already fragile environmental and eco systems of Brooklyn?

Particular concern is given to water and waste run-off into the Gowanus watershed, energy conservation, pollution and the necessary infrastructure enhancements required to accommodate the multiple new residential and commercial towers.

Air quality, noise, construction impacts and public health: How will the multi-year construction phase of the project impact the quality of life concerns of residents?