

**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING
PUBLIC HEARING ON THE 2010-2011 ANNUAL PLAN
TESTIMONY OF BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT
MARTY MARKOWITZ**

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2009

I want to first commend Mayor Bloomberg for appointing Lilliam Barrios-Paoli to be commissioner of DFTA. It's clear that her rich background will bring a unique perspective to the position — and I know she'll work hard to make life better for seniors in Brooklyn and New York City. In fact, the only important thing she lacks is a Brooklyn address.

Before I go any further, I want to say to everyone that I am a proud card-carrying member of the AARP. In fact, in just a few weeks, my life will begin again — I'll officially begin the best years of my life. I'll belong to the most exclusive club in America — the over-65 club. I will officially be a senior citizen, and I can't wait. I haven't met even one young person who doesn't want to be part of that club.

I want to commend DFTA for addressing some of the concerns I raised during my testimony last year. Chief among them was my concern that DFTA might change its policies to remove much of the discretion borough presidents have to direct funding to senior centers. I am happy to say those proposed changes have been abandoned. And I am delighted that plans have been scrapped to centralize the senior center system, decreasing the overall number of centers while designating others as regional "hubs."

Unfortunately, there are still some areas of funding where our hands are tied. Many of our senior centers are in dire need of renovations. But certain city capital dollar spending rules make it difficult to obtain the funding — for example, setting a minimum of \$500,000 and demanding that a 10-year-lease be in place. Many senior centers are in religious institutions, and are thus ineligible for certain funding. We support the establishment of a small capital grants program, to allow capital funds from the mayor, city council members, and borough presidents to fund the renovations some of these centers so desperately need.

On a related note, senior centers should be allowed more flexibility in terms of how they allocate funds, as long as they maintain the bottom line. Right now, we believe DFTA "micro-

manages” when it comes to telling centers how to spend their money, tying the hands of the professionals who run these centers.

The city should investigate the so-called “adult day-care” model, which I believe is being abused by certain nursing homes in South Brooklyn — thereby reducing the number of clients in some centers.

In the past, I have called for improvements to be made to the Access-a-Ride program. I am pleased to hear that some improvements have been made, such as the adoption of the automatic vehicle locator system, which has decreased the average waiting time. We must continue to look for ways to improve Access-a-Ride, as well as expanding on what some senior centers are already doing, using cabs and car services to get people to doctor’s appointments and other places they need to be.

A perfect example of what I’m talking about is using school buses to transport seniors to and from grocery stores, during the hours when kids are in school. I saw this work in Albany during the ’70s and ’80s, and I commend DFTA for just beginning this practice in New York City.

I don’t need to tell you that senior services are already operating with a bare-bones budget — and they should be exempt from any further reductions. The city budget should never be balanced on the backs of those who are most vulnerable — and who have paved the way for the rest of us to live the life we do in this city.

I want to commend the City Council for restoring 32 million dollars for DFTA to the 2010 fiscal year budget — including reinstating \$6.1 million in borough president funds.

That’s commendable, but I’m sorry to say, it’s not enough. For example, it still represents a 20 percent cut in the borough presidents’ budgets. More than any other elected office in the city, borough presidents have a much better handle on the needs of senior centers. And yet, prior to these cuts, our budget had been the same since the mid-’90s. So not only have we not been able to keep up with the cost of living — now we’re going backwards.

The truth is, all of us have to find new and innovative ways to meet the needs of seniors in New York — because very soon we’re going to see the biggest population of seniors in the history of New York. The baby boomers are reaching retirement age. That’s over two million new seniors over the next two decades in New York City alone.

They’ll have unique needs that will require us to change the way we operate services. For example, rather than fully retire, many will choose to continue to work part-time, and their

socialization needs may occur at non-traditional hours, such as evenings and weekends. And of course, the need for senior housing will increase in the coming years. I call upon the City Housing Department to work with DFTA to ensure that any development that receives city funds or tax benefits should be required to set aside not less than ten percent of the lower floors for senior housing.

I firmly believe that Brooklyn — and, I admit, all of New York City — is the best place on earth to spend the best years of your life. Our transportation options, medical centers, and higher education programs — to name just a few examples — are the best in the country. So why go anywhere else? Florida is the place to be if you just want to “veg out” on the beach, but Brooklyn is for those of us who still want to surf the waves of a full life.

Those are the seniors we serve in Brooklyn. I look forward to working with DFTA and Commissioner Barrios-Paoli to improve the lives of seniors in the years to come.