



THE CITY OF NEW YORK Borough Of The Bronx

COMMUNITY BOARD #12

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TESTIMONY
of
FATHER RICHARD F. GORMAN
CHAIRMAN
of
COMMUNITY BOARD #12 (THE BRONX)
re
INTRO. #0028 – 2014

At Local Law to Amend the Charter of the City of New York, in relation to Requiring that All Community Board Full Meetings be Webcast

Chairman Vacca, Members of the Committee, and Friends:

Unfunded Mandates have been the bane of Local Government's existence. The Federal Government has imposed them with their onerous administrative and bureaucratic requirements – not to mention their hefty fiscal burden – upon the States. The States have followed suit by doing likewise to Counties, Municipalities, and other local jurisdictions. This afternoon, I come to urge the Standing Committee on Technology of the New York City Council not to kick this deceptive little can further down the road by throwing what appears to be an Unfunded Mandate upon the backs of New York City's fifty-nine (59) Community Boards.

Who can argue with such noble precepts as bringing Government closer to the citizens that it serves? Who can find fault with the principle of making Government more transparent to the public who pays for it? These tenets are bedrock democratic articles of faith that are intended to enhance our



democracy by enabling a sovereign people to establish and to maintain their Government as one that is of, for, and by them. Who would dare to challenge these sacred beliefs?

Nevertheless, as the old, familiar adage advises us "*The Devil is in the details!*" or, as in the instance of this proposal, the lack of them!

This Standing Committee is suggesting that §2800,1(h) of THE CHARTER OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK be amended so as to mandate that all Community Boards in the City of New York record in digital video format all meetings of the entire Community Board and all public hearings conducted by a Community Board. Further, this wished-for Charter Amendment requires that such recordings be archived and available on either the website of the Community Board or of the City of New York within seventy-two (72) hours of their making. This, prima facie, appears reasonable enough. Additionally, who could deny that its adoption would benefit, not only the public, but the Community Boards per se by increasing the knowledge of the good work that our Community Boards are doing, by making their operation more readily transparent, and by encouraging augmented public accountability of the Community Boards to those served by them?

However, upon more detailed and thoughtful reflection, one – especially one long associated with the Community Boards and their work – is obliged to ask several plausible and sober questions.

Since the Administration of Mayor David N. Dinkins, Community Boards have been the paragons of the prescription that more must – and can – be done with less. Their operating budgets have remained essentially unchanged and, as of late, have become the annual, hapless targets of small-minded bean-counters looking to reduce the annual allocations of the Community Boards. If not for the wisdom and the tenacity of our City Council, the budgets of our Community Boards would be even tighter and smaller than they are at present. Digital video-taping does not come free-of-charge. People are required to do it, as are the proper equipment for videoing and the space for the storage of tapes. All of the aforementioned cost money. From where do the funds for them come? Will the Office of Management and Budget of the City of New York (N.Y.C.O.M.B.) and this City Council guarantee that the requisite funds will always be there for the Community Boards to fulfill this obligation, even if, over time, the tab for them swells? Will this requirement be assiduously enforced even if Community Boards have their budgets reduced in years to come? I need not remind this

Standing Committee and all of your Councilmanic colleagues that, in essence, for all practical purposes, the operating budgets of our Community Boards have actually diminished due to the double-whammy of inflation and the ever-rising cost of living. Is it really fair – and does it truly make sense – to tie this technological millstone around the waist of our Community Boards?

Touching again upon the issue of personnel – of people – what people and whose personnel will be assigned the responsibility of arranging for the dictated taping? Will personnel be assigned from other agencies of Municipal Government? Community Boards have seen their staff reduced under the prior two (2) Mayoral Administrations. Will Community Board personnel now have yet another task levied upon them? Who will train them? How shall they be compensated for having to stick around after the termination of the customary work day in order to perform this function? Will transportation to various sites for meetings and public hearings of the Community Board be provided? How will they be trained for this added duty and who will do said instruction? A yet more legitimate inquiries comes to mind relative to this anticipated Charter change – *viz.*, how the cost of these personnel-related concerns enumerated above will be provided. These are good questions. Pray tell, what are the answers to them?

Since the proposed Amendment calls for the video tapes of Community Board full meeting and public hearings to be archived, where will such archives be situated? Must Community Boards now make space for even more official records? For how long will tapes have to be stored? Will a uniform system of archiving them be formulated and required? Oh, and by the way, who will provide and pay for the needed supplies for this process?

Community Boards already contend with a tight, lean existence in terms of budget, staff size, space, and personnel work load. Any significant additional responsibility assigned to them must come with the supplemented resources – the most important of which being funding – in order to implement such dependably and competently.

In conclusion, I wonder and must inquire as to the evidence that the Charter change in question will realize the desired consequences that its authors and supporters imagine. Was any research actually conducted and the results of it analyzed? Might this data be shared with those of us associated with Community Boards so that, at the very least, we could at least share an

understanding of why this Charter change is suggested, whether or not we completely concur on its value and/or effectiveness.

One final point nothing has been as injurious to the effectiveness and the viability of Community Boards as the denial of access to all information - - predominantly complaints -- in the much heralded "3 - 1 - 1" system. If I am not mistaken, legislation passed by this very City Council dictates the sharing of these facts and figures with Community Boards. Regrettably, this legal mandate continues to be ignored, much to the detriment of our Community Boards. If this Standing Committee seeks to enhance the efficacy and the usefulness of our Community Boards, if the City Council wants to strengthen the relationship between Community Boards and the neighborhoods that they serve, and if our true purpose and objective is to bring agencies of Government closer to the public who pay for them, then giving back to our Community Boards the ability to address complaints and requests relative to the provision of Municipal services -- the foremost concern and the primary need of neighborhood residents -- would be a most appropriate and welcomed step. Moreover, the trouble of having to amend THE CHARTER OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK could be avoided and the already strapped fiscal resources of our Community Boards would not be further stretched. Come to think of it, with regard to monetary resources, enlarging the operating budget of Community Board would not be such a bad idea either!

Thank-you for your kind attention to and consideration of my remarks.