

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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April 7, 2022  
Start: 10:12 a.m.  
Recess: 10:57 a.m.

HELD AT: HYBRID HEARING  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Justin L. Brannan  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Diana Ayala  
Charles Barron  
Gale A. Brewer  
Selvena N. Brooks-Powers  
David M. Carr  
Amanda Farias  
Kamillah Hanks  
Crystal Hudson  
Ari Kagan  
Farah N. Louis  
Francisco P. Moya  
Chi A. Ossé  
Keith Powers  
Pierina Ana Sanchez  
Marjorie Velázquez  
Julie Won

2 \_\_\_\_\_: At this time, will the sergeants  
3 please start their recordings.

4 \_\_\_\_\_: Recording to the computer all  
5 set.

6 \_\_\_\_\_: Cloud recording is up.

7 COUNSEL: Thank you and good morning, and  
8 welcome to today's remote New York City Council  
9 hearing of the Committee on Finance. At this time,  
10 will all council members and staff please turn on  
11 their video. To minimize disruption, please place  
12 electronic devices on vibrate or silent mode. If you  
13 wish to submit testimony, you may do so at  
14 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that is  
15 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your  
16 cooperation. We are ready to begin.

17 Chairperson Brannan: Thank you Sergeant.  
18 Good morning, and welcome to today's Finance  
19 Committee meeting. I'm Council Member Justin  
20 Brannan, and I am privileged to be the chair of the  
21 Finance Committee. Today, The Committee will be  
22 holding a public hearing on Intro 103, which would  
23 authorize an increase in the amount to be expended  
24 annually in the Sutphin Boulevard Business  
25 Improvement District, or B.I.D. It would extend the

2 boundaries of the B.I.D. and rename it the Downtown  
3 Jamaica B.I.D. It would change the method of  
4 district charge assessment. It would increase the  
5 maximum total amount to be expended for improvement,  
6 and dissolve the boundaries of the existing 165th  
7 Street Mall and Jamaica Center Mall Special  
8 Assessment Districts. Today's hearing was noticed by  
9 Resolution #79, which we adopted on March 24th. We  
10 have since converted this to a hybrid hearing, so I  
11 and my colleagues are joining today by Zoom.

12 However, our Committee Council is participating from  
13 Chambers in case any member of the public shows up to  
14 give testimony at the location originally noticed on  
15 The Resolution. I want to also acknowledge my  
16 colleagues who have joined us today, starting of  
17 course with Speaker Adams, Council Members Powers,  
18 Brewer, Ayala, Velázquez, Farias, Moya, Hudson, Ossé,  
19 Barron, Lewis, Kagan, Hanks, and Carr. We have also  
20 been joined by Council Members Williams and Gennaro,  
21 whom I will invite to give remarks in a little while.

22 So, we will hear shortly from any  
23 witnesses who wish to testify. Once we have heard  
24 any testimony, we will then adjourn the hearing for  
25 at least 30 days to allow any property owner within

2 the proposed extended area to file an injection to  
3 the B.I.D. extension with the City Clerk. In the  
4 absence of objections filed either by a majority of  
5 all the impacted property owners, or by the property  
6 owners owning a majority of the assessed value of the  
7 property within the proposed extended district, The  
8 Committee and the full council may adopt the  
9 legislation extending the B.I.D. In order to do so ,  
10 The Committee and the Full Council must be prepared  
11 to answer the following four question in the  
12 affirmative for the B.I.D.

13 Question #1: Were all notices for all  
14 hearings required to be held published and mailed as  
15 so required?

16 Question #2: Does all the real property  
17 within the district's boundaries benefit from the  
18 expansion of the district, except as otherwise  
19 provided by the law?

20 Question #3: Does all real property  
21 benefitted by the district included within the  
22 district?

23 Question 4: Finally, is the expansion of  
24 the district in the best interests of the public?  
25

2                   If The Committee and the Full Council  
3 find in the affirmative on these 4 questions, and the  
4 number of objections required to prevent the  
5 extension of the B.I.D. are not filed, then the  
6 legislation of the new boundaries and the new B.I.D.  
7 name can be adopted. Additionally, The Committee and  
8 the Full Council must determine that it is in the  
9 public interest to authorize an increase in the  
10 maximum annual expenditure amount that the relevant  
11 tax and debt limits will not be exceeded, and that  
12 the notice of the increased proposed expenditure  
13 amount was properly published. Additional  
14 information regarding this B.I.D. item can be found  
15 in The Committee report, which was prepared by The  
16 Committee Finance Division Team, the report prepared  
17 by The City Planning Commission, and the B.I.D.'s  
18 proposed district plan. Council Members Williams and  
19 Gennaro who represent this area are supportive of  
20 this B.I.D. item. Speaker Adams is also a longtime  
21 supporter of this B.I.D. action, dating back to her  
22 pre-council service as Co-Chair of the Jamaica Now  
23 Leadership Council, which first advanced the idea of  
24 combining these 3 B.I.D.s into 1 unified as a whole.

2 So it is great to finally, hopefully see that  
3 through.

4 Before we proceed with testimony from The  
5 Administration and Small Business Services, I would  
6 like to give each of these members an opportunity to  
7 give remarks. We will first hear from Speaker Adams,  
8 followed by Council Members Williams and then Council  
9 Members Gennaro. Speaker Adams?

10 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you so much Chair.  
11 Good morning. I am off camera, but I am City Council  
12 Speaker Adrienne Adams representing District 28  
13 Queens, which includes the neighborhoods of Jamaica,  
14 Richmond Hill, Rochdale Village, and South Ozone  
15 Park. Thank you again Chair Brannan and members of  
16 the Finance Committee for hosting today's hearing in  
17 Intro 103. It is a proposal to create a unified  
18 Downtown Jamaica business improvement district. As  
19 The Chair said, prior to be elected to the New York  
20 City Council, one of the many ways I served by  
21 community was by co-chairing the Jamaica Now  
22 Leadership Council, a diverse group of community  
23 stakeholders that provided oversight of the  
24 revitalization of Downtown Jamaica. Our action plan  
25 steered more than 150 million dollars in funding for

2 critical improvements to the area, and we also  
3 proposed the idea of bringing the 3 separate B.I.D.s  
4 in Jamaica into one unified organization. When the  
5 city conducted a Community District Needs Assessment  
6 in 2019, it also confirmed our findings that a single  
7 B.I.D. representing Downtown Jamaica would strengthen  
8 this commercial area. Three years later, we are  
9 seeing this proposal come to fruition.

10           There are many benefits to creating a  
11 united Downtown Jamaica B.I.D. Our downtown area  
12 will have a singular brand and voice which will  
13 facilitate more opportunities for investment and  
14 large-scale transformative projects. It will reduce  
15 any overlap in responsibilities among the current  
16 B.I.D.s and will more strategically position Jamaica  
17 to meet the ever-grown needs and challenges of our  
18 small businesses, residents, and our visitors. A  
19 unified B.I.D. will also mean consistent events,  
20 programming, and services to ensure that downtown  
21 Jamaica is safe, clean, and thriving. It will allow  
22 community stakeholders like elected officials and  
23 Community Boards to provide greater input on long-  
24 term concerns or issues.

2 I fully support Intro 103 to unify our  
3 B.I.D.s and create a cohesive, effective entity to  
4 promote the Downtown Jamaica core. I am excited  
5 about the future of this area that I called home for  
6 so long, and the potential for positive change that  
7 this proposal will bring.

8 Thank you again Chair Brannan and the  
9 members of The Council's Finance Committee for  
10 hearing my testimony. I am hopeful that together we  
11 will move this unification process forward.

12 I just want to note that I see on this  
13 call long-time partners of mine in the community. I  
14 see Laurel Brown. Good morning, Ms. Brown. I see  
15 our CEO of ABNY, Melva Miller, who has been in the  
16 trenches in Southeast Queens and this Downtown  
17 Jamaica Core, and the Jamaica Now Leadership Council  
18 with me for years, and I also see former Council  
19 Member Daneek Miller, also in the trenches in  
20 Jamaica, all for the interest of building our  
21 Downtown Jamaica core. So once again, thank you all  
22 so much, and I am looking forward to great things out  
23 of this B.I.D. consolidation. Thank you chair for the  
24 time.



2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you speaker.  
3 Before we hear remarks from Council Members Williams  
4 and Gennaro, I also just want to acknowledge that we  
5 have also been joined by our colleagues, Council  
6 Members Yeger, Sanchez, and Barron. Council Member  
7 Williams, do you have remarks?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Good morning  
9 everybody. As the Council Member of District 27, the  
10 revitalization of Downtown Jamaica is incredibly  
11 important to my constituents. As such, I am glad to  
12 be here today in support of the unification of the  
13 Sutphin Boulevard B.I.D., Jamaica Center S.A.D., and  
14 the 165th street S.A.D. The merging of these 3  
15 B.I.D.s will be incredibly beneficial to all parties  
16 involved. Some of the benefits include cost  
17 efficiency; our B.I.D.s will be able to combine their  
18 resources and allow for more specialized approach at  
19 their staff. It will also reduce some  
20 administrative costs such as rent and insurance. It  
21 will also allow the B.I.D.s to qualify for a larger  
22 amount of funding. It will grant the B.I.D.s an  
23 opportunity to tackle larger projects and open the  
24 door to grant opportunities that were not afforded in  
25 the past. With this newer, larger-scale B.I.D., it

2 will be much easier for The Board to be an advocate  
3 for businesses. Additionally, the unification will  
4 ensure that all businesses are being adequately  
5 represented through the B.I.D., as S.A.D.s do not  
6 have residential representation like a B.I.D. does.

7           While this predates my tenure, and I am  
8 excited to also have former Council Member Miller on  
9 this call, I am glad and humbled to carry this effort  
10 forward after years of stakeholder discussion on this  
11 topic as mentioned by Speaker Adams. The pandemic  
12 has decimated our commercial districts, and if the  
13 unification means our businesses will be paying less  
14 but receiving more services, then this is a no-  
15 brainer. I am in full support, and I look forward to  
16 working with the B.I.D. on future projects.

17           Thank you so much, Chair Brannan, and  
18 Speaker Adams for their leadership and making sure  
19 that this very important measure comes to fruition.

20           CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you Council  
21 Member Williams. Now we will hear from Council  
22 Member Gennaro.

23           COUNCIL MEMBER GENNARO: Thank you Mr.  
24 Chairman. Thank you Madame Speaker. Thank you,  
25 Council Member Williams. Thank you, former Council

2 Member Miller, for being so engaged in this process.  
3 I have a long history with Downtown Jamaica, and I  
4 wish to be associated with the remarks of The Speaker  
5 and with Council Member Williams. I think The  
6 Speaker really said the right words with regard to  
7 making this cohesive and effective. This is what has  
8 been needed. This is what the speaker saw years ago  
9 in trying to make this coalesce. I would also like  
10 to thank my own Chief of Staff, Henry Yam, for putting so  
11 many hours into this. I am very strongly supportive  
12 of this for all of the reasons that have been  
13 mentioned by The Speaker and by Council Member  
14 Williams. I am very grateful that this is being  
15 brought forward, and I urge all the members of the  
16 Finance Committee to give it full support. Thank  
17 you, Mr. Chairman.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you Council  
19 Member Gennaro. We will now hear testimony from  
20 S.B.S. on the Jamaica B.I.D. consolidation. We are  
21 joined by the Deputy Commissioner for Neighborhood  
22 Development, Blaise Backer, as well as the Director  
23 for the New York City Business Improvement District  
24 program, Roxanna Earley, and Senior Policy Advisor,  
25 Zach Owens. Before S.B.S. begins, I am going to turn

2 it back over to our Committee Council to swear in the  
3 witnesses.

4 Noah Brick: Thank you. So I'm going to give  
5 the affirmation one time and then ask each of you to  
6 so affirm. Do you affirm that your testimony will be  
7 truthful to the best of your knowledge, information,  
8 and belief? Mr. Backer?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BACKER: I do.

10 Noah Brick: Ms. Earley?

11 DIRECTOR EARLEY: I do.

12 Noah Brick: Mr. Owens?

13 ADVISOR OWENS: I do.

14 Noah Brick: Thank you. Deputy Commissioner  
15 Backer, you may begin when ready.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BACKER: Good  
17 morning, Chair Brannan and members of the Finance  
18 Committee. I am Michael Blaise Backer, Deputy  
19 Commissioner of Neighborhood Development at the  
20 department of Small Business Services. I am joined  
21 by our B.I.D. Program Director, Roxane Earley, and  
22 our Senior Policy Advisor, Zach Owens.

23 Today, I am pleased to testify before you  
24 in support of the proposed Downtown Jamaica Business  
25 Improvement District. The Downtown Jamaica B.I.D.

2 is, in function, the merging of 3 separate but  
3 adjacent B.I.D.s into a single, better-resourced  
4 organization by way of extending the Sutphin  
5 Boulevard B.I.D. and dissolving the Jamaica Center  
6 and 165th Street Mall Special Assessment Districts.  
7 S.B.S. is dedicated to investing in neighborhoods and  
8 strengthening commercial corridors to support an  
9 establishment of community-based economic development  
10 organizations like B.I.D.s. We are pleased to  
11 present this project for The Council's consideration  
12 today, as we believe it represents an important  
13 moment in helping downtown Jamaica reach its full  
14 potential as a vibrant destination commercial  
15 district of New York City, and is sorely needed to  
16 accelerate its post-pandemic revival. This project is  
17 the culmination of almost 7 years of community  
18 effort, outreach, and stakeholder engagement, and  
19 fulfils the final outstanding commitment from the  
20 Jamaica Now Action Plan issued in 2015. The  
21 unification of the B.I.D.s was also a key opportunity  
22 identified in the Downtown Jamaica Commercial  
23 District Needs Assessment completed in 2019 that  
24 involved feedback from over 300 merchants and  
25 residents. The pandemic only further demonstrated

2 the need for a centralized, high-capacity  
3 organization that could advocate on behalf to he  
4 downtown area and provide critical business support  
5 services to district merchants. A single B.I.D. has  
6 many benefits to Downtown Jamaica. This organization  
7 will have increased staff capacity and resources to  
8 providing community programs and services such as  
9 retail attraction, district beautification, and  
10 public space programming, all of which will support  
11 small businesses and create jobs. A single B.I.D.  
12 can more effectively the downtown business community  
13 with a unified identity, elevating public awareness  
14 of the district locally and regionally as a place for  
15 visitors to shop, dine, and stay. Further, with  
16 operational and cost efficiencies that come from  
17 elimination of duplicative services, less money will  
18 be spent on administrative expenses, more would be  
19 reinvested directly into programs and services, and  
20 coordination with city agencies like NYPD, DOT, and  
21 Sanitation will be simplified and streamlined. The  
22 proposed Downtown Jamaica B.I.D. will utilize a  
23 formula that will assess properties at 50% of their  
24 linear frontage, and 50% of their assessed value,  
25 thereby creating a more equitable formula across the

2 entire district. The average property owner and  
3 business will save money, and the maximum, minimum,  
4 median, and average annual bill for all properties  
5 will decrease as well. The average median assessment  
6 will decrease 9%, giving money back to property  
7 owners and businesses at a time they need it most.  
8 The Downtown Jamaica B.I.D. will have a first year  
9 annual budget of \$1.3 million and maximum assessment  
10 cap of \$1.5 million.

11 S.B.S. has been working with the B.I.D.s  
12 and area stakeholders to plan for and realize this  
13 merger for several years. No B.I.D. board has  
14 opposed the unification effort. While the 165th Mall  
15 S.A.D. has a noncompliant board due to the  
16 insufficient size of the district (an issue which  
17 will be addressed by unification), both Sutphin and  
18 Jamaica Center have voted to approve unification. As  
19 required by law, S.B.S. coordinated the mailing of a  
20 summary of The City Council resolution no less than  
21 10 days and no more than 30 days before today's  
22 hearing to property owners and tenants of the  
23 proposed district. Furthermore, S.B.S. arranged for  
24 the publication of a copy of the summary of the  
25 resolution at least once in the city record.

2 I would like to acknowledge and thank the  
3 former Queens Borough President Melinda Katz and  
4 former Deputy Borough President Melvin Miller,  
5 current Borough President Donovan Richards, Speaker  
6 Adrienne Adams, Former Council Member Daneek Miller,  
7 and current Council Members Nantasha Williams and Jim  
8 Gennaro for their support of the Downtown Jamaica  
9 B.I.D. formation effort as well as the members of the  
10 Sutphin Boulevard B.I.D., the Jamaica Center S.A.D.,  
11 and the 165th Mall S.A.D. for their role in this  
12 process and participation in the countless merger  
13 discussions over the years. Finally, we would not be  
14 here today without the tireless work of both current  
15 and former S.B.S. staff on my team who have advised  
16 the B.I.D.'s boards and staff and our elected  
17 officials throughout this almost-7-year effort. I  
18 particularly would like to shout out my colleague  
19 Zach Owens and Roxanne Earley, who are both here with  
20 me today for their exceptional service to S.B.S. and  
21 the Downtown Jamaica community. We look forward to  
22 working with the unified Downtown Jamaica B.I.D. and  
23 enhancing a more vibrant and thriving, Jamaica,  
24 Queens. At this time, I am happy to take any  
25 questions you may have.



2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you Deputy  
3 Commissioner. I also want to acknowledge we have  
4 been joined by Council Member Brooks-Powers. I want  
5 to see if any of my colleagues have questions for  
6 S.B.S.?

7 Counsel, do you see any?

8 COUNSEL: I do not see any hands.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Thank you  
10 all for your testimony. Uh, counsel?

11 COUNSEL: I am now going to call upon  
12 various members of the Public who have joined us  
13 today, starting with former Council Member Miller.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Good morning.  
15 Can you hear me?

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: No, we can't hear  
17 you.

18 COUNSEL: No, we can't hear you. I think  
19 we have some technical difficulties with the former  
20 member, and we will have to circle back. Can I move  
21 on at this time to Jennifer Furioli?

22 Sgt. at Arms: Starting time.

23 COUNSEL: We cannot hear you. You're  
24 unmuted, but your mike is not picking up sound. You  
25 may need to change your audio settings. I think we

2 will maybe also circle back to you. Next, I would  
3 welcome testimony from Aaron Schwartz.

4 Sgt. at Arms: Starting time.

5 AARON SCHWARTZ: Good morning. My name  
6 is Aaron Scwhartz. I have been a property owner in  
7 Jamaica for over 30 years. For over 25 years, I have  
8 been on the Executive Board of both the Jamaica  
9 Center B.I.D. and the 165th Street Mall Improvement  
10 Association. I am currently The President of the  
11 165th Street B.I.D., as we call it, and will be  
12 speaking as its representative. I am appearing here  
13 today to support the proposal for the unification of  
14 the 3 Downtown Jamaica B.I.D.s. The 165th street  
15 B.I.D. is only 1 block long and is one of the  
16 smallest B.I.D.s in New York City. Our Executive  
17 Director, who has been with us for over 20 years does  
18 an excellent job maintaining the B.I.D. and running  
19 various programs and services. However, we find it  
20 very frustrating when numerous quality of life issues  
21 are not being addressed and are certainly not being  
22 resolved. Illegal street vendors and numerous  
23 vehicles on the street (consider this is a pedestrian  
24 block) make the street uninviting and deters shoppers  
25 and keeps foot traffic away. The merchants on the

2 street are negatively affected by these issues, and  
3 the number of vacancies on the block are greatly  
4 increasing. National retailers that have an interest  
5 in opening up stores in the area do not even want to  
6 consider the block because of poor quality of life  
7 issues. Our B.I.D. cannot combat these issues,  
8 because we cannot get the cooperation of the  
9 government offices, city-run agencies, and local  
10 nonprofits. If our B.I.D. was part of a larger,  
11 louder, and stronger body, we know that things would  
12 move a lot faster and smoother. We simply do not  
13 have the voice and the resources to mitigate these  
14 challenges. Considering we are only 1 block long,  
15 our liability premium has been staggering, with last  
16 year's premium of over \$44,000, and is due to  
17 increase this year. Our board members consist of 5  
18 property owners, and filling board positions that  
19 meet B.I.D. board requirements can sometimes be  
20 challenging. With the unification of the B.I.D., the  
21 165th street B.I.D. as well as the Jamaica Center  
22 B.I.D. would be able to maximize cost efficiencies,  
23 generate an equitable budget, and command the support  
24 needed to keep the Downtown Jamaica area attractive  
25 and inviting. A larger organization will have the

2 heft to advocate for more city resources and be able  
3 to take an ambitious process that benefits all of  
4 Jamaica. We have been talking about this project for  
5 years, but now it is time to act. I hope that The  
6 Council supports this proposal. I thank you for your  
7 time.

8 COUNSEL: Thank you, Mr. Schwartz. Let's  
9 attempt again Ms. Furioli.

10 Sgt. at Arms: Staring time.

11 JENNIFER FURIOLI: Okay. Can you hear me  
12 now? Yeah, great. Thank you for The Chair and the  
13 Finance Committee. My name is Jennifer Furioli. I  
14 am the current executive director of the Jamaica  
15 Center B.I.D., and I am reading my colleague, \_\_\_\_\_,  
16 testimony, who regrettably could not be here today.

17 "My name is Michael Hirschorn and I am a  
18 longstanding property owner in the heart of Jamaica  
19 Avenue. My building is 161-21 Jamaica Avenue, which  
20 has been home to 2 popular and family-friendly sit-  
21 down restaurants. I have served as the President of  
22 the Board of the Jamaica Center B.I.D. for nearly a  
23 dozen years and am proud of our organization efforts  
24 to remove what is likely over a half million bags of  
25 litter from the corridor, and thousands of incidents

2 of graffiti during my tenure. We have served as a  
3 longstanding advocate for businesses and a partner to  
4 the city in creating a welcoming commercial corridor.  
5 We want to nurture a thriving downtown, and by  
6 partnering with our peers on Sutphin and 165th  
7 Street, I believe we can. In addition to serving as  
8 The President of the Jamaica Center B.I.D., I am a  
9 longstanding board member of 5 additional B.I.D.s,  
10 the 34th Street Partnership in Midtown, the 125th  
11 Street B.I.D. in Harlem, the Third Avenue B.I.D. and  
12 the Fordham Road B.I.D., both in the Bronx, and the  
13 Fulton Street Mall, which is managed by the Downtown  
14 Brooklyn Partnership. Given my participation on  
15 other B.I.D. boards, I see firsthand how our  
16 organization is severely limited in what it can  
17 accomplish due to escalating administrative expenses,  
18 and how we could benefit if we all operated under a  
19 single organization. As my executive director,  
20 Jennifer Furioli has put it, we are constantly trying  
21 to quell a tsunami of issues with a bare-bones staff  
22 and duct-tape budget.

23 This year, 25% to 30% of our operating  
24 budget is allocated to liability insurance expenses,  
25 including deductibles alone. In FY22, we expect to

2 pay \$222,905 for the policy and another \$38,000 for  
3 deductibles, or more depending on legal outcomes.  
4 For context, The Downtown Alliance in Lower  
5 Manhattan, which has a \$20 million budget (the  
6 largest in the country) only pays \$113,000 for  
7 insurance per year. This issue is unsustainable for  
8 Jamaica Center. This is why this past summer, The  
9 Board approved a resolution to begin dissolution if  
10 there is no change to the status quo. That means no  
11 more sanitation, graffiti removal, marketing, or  
12 programming on Jamaica Avenue. Much of the liability  
13 cost is related to decorative papers on Jamaica  
14 Avenue. By unifying under Sutphin's legal structure  
15 as is proposed, the liability would be eliminated,  
16 and the new B.I.D. would not have any legal exposure  
17 that Jamaica Center now contends with. We could save  
18 even more money by eventually combining office space  
19 and achieving economies of scale on significant  
20 contracts, such as sanitation. Just imagine what we  
21 could do."

22 Sgt. at Arms: Time expired.

23 COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

24

25

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: She could finish.  
3 I do not know how much more she has got, but I think  
4 we have time. You can finish it.

5 COUNSEL: For sure.

6 JENNIFER FURIOLI: Okay. I needed to be  
7 unmuted. Okay. Just one more line.

8 "I am certain that working alongside our  
9 partner property owners and small businesses on  
10 Sutphin Boulevard and 165th Street, we would easily  
11 come to shared conclusions on how we could work  
12 together to better enhance our district. The 3  
13 B.I.D.s have many of the same problems, but we share  
14 many of the same opportunities as well. That is why  
15 I support unification and believe that the rest  
16 should support this as well. Thank you."

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

18 COUNSEL: Former Council Member Miller,  
19 we will try you again and see if this works.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Is that better?  
21 Can you hear me now.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We can hear you.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MILLER: Good morning  
24 Council Members, Mr. Chair Brannan. It is so good to  
25 see you and hear from you this morning, as well as

2 everyone else, Madame Speaker, and my colleagues.

3 Greetings, Chair Brannan, members of the Finance

4 Committee. I am Daneek Miller, past Council Member

5 for the 27th Council District that encompasses

6 Downtown Jamaica. It is my honor to come before The

7 Council and this Committee today. I am here to

8 testify in support of unification of the 3 Jamaica

9 B.I.D.s, technically an extension of the Sutphin

10 Boulevard B.I.D. to taken the areas which encompass

11 Jamaica 165th Street, Central Mall Assessment

12 District as well. This proposal is a culmination of

13 8 years of work between S.B.S., Jamaica Now, local

14 officials, business, and community members. It is

15 also the next step in the renaissance of Downtown

16 Jamaica. The unification of the Jamaica B.I.D. will

17 complement the work that we have already begun,

18 including the development of thousands of units of

19 affordable housing, investing millions in New York

20 College, the new Jamaica Depot, and pushing and

21 controlling with the enclosed removal of the nearby

22 waste transfer stations. Decades ago, shoppers from

23 all over the city flocked to Downtown Jamaica to do

24 their shopping. We had such retailers as \_\_\_\_\_,

25 Macy's, and so forth. In the time since then, we



2 have been inundated with discount businesses, many of  
3 which failed to reflect the investment in the  
4 Committee. Their merchandise spills onto the streets  
5 over the broken and uneven sidewalks, sanitation, and  
6 public safety concerns remain prevalent. Therefore,  
7 it is no surprise that many of our local residents  
8 choose to take their business elsewhere oftentimes to  
9 nearby Long Island, which not only takes away revenue  
10 from local businesses and local community, it takes  
11 away tax dollars, and we receive nothing in return  
12 from spending our money outside of the city  
13 boundaries. However, we have a chance to turn this  
14 situation around. By creating one unified and  
15 therefore more efficient Jamaica B.I.D., we will be  
16 able to streamline services and reinvest the savings  
17 to create a better commercial corridor. This  
18 includes hiring additional staff for sanitation,  
19 grant writing, allocating B.I.D. board seats for  
20 community boards, representing and developing a  
21 unified business and branding strategically to  
22 advocate for the Jamaica area. What we know is that  
23 status quo is not working. The current Sutphin  
24 Boulevard B.I.D., and the 165th Street entities have  
25 been out of compliance with the B.I.D. laws for

2 years. As such, their boards are unable to vote on  
3 this matter that is before us today, let alone  
4 properly serve the properties that they are  
5 responsible for. Meanwhile, the Jamaica Center  
6 B.I.D., by far the largest of the three, is drowning  
7 under the archaic 1970s insurance obligations and  
8 financial turmoil.

9 I thank you all for allowing me to  
10 testify here today. Thank you Chair Brannan, and  
11 certainly Speaker Adams for the work that she has  
12 done, Jim Gennaro, and especially Council Member  
13 Williams for the work that she is doing currently to  
14 spearhead this proposal moving forward, and the  
15 members of the Community Board 12 as well. I trust  
16 that The Committee and the The Council will see the  
17 importance of supporting this proposal, and equally  
18 important, the dangers of inaction. Thank you for  
19 consideration, and I urge you all to vote in favor of  
20 Intro 103. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Council  
22 Member Williams. Good to see you again.

23 COUNSEL: Thank you. We will now here  
24 from Melva Miller.

25 Sgt. at Arms: Staring time.

2 MELVA MILLER: Can you hear me?

3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yup.

4 MELVA MILLER: Great. Thank you. Thank  
5 you so much. Thank you for this opportunity to  
6 testify today. My name is Melva Miller and I am, the  
7 Chief Executive Officer for the Association for a  
8 Better New York, affectionately known as ABNY, but  
9 more importantly, I am the founding executive  
10 director of the Sutphin Boulevard B.I.D. and the co-  
11 creator of the Jamaica Now Action Plan, and the  
12 technical advisor to the Jamaica Now Leadership  
13 Council.

14 I have spent nearly 20 years to make  
15 Downtown Jamaica a vibrant, economically inclusive,  
16 and beautiful downtown for those who live, work, and  
17 visit the area. Throughout my career, I have seen  
18 commercial districts all across the city with less  
19 access to public transportation, less cultural and  
20 shopping offerings, less public and civic  
21 institutions achieve better-quality jobs and small  
22 business support, better commercial growth and  
23 economic development, and improved livability through  
24 quality-of-life enhancements, all due to a well-  
25 organized, well-resourced, on-the-ground

2 organization. Such results could be obtained by an  
3 organization that results all of Downtown Jamaica. A  
4 well-resourced organization would achieve, like many  
5 spoke about today, economies of scale with  
6 infrastructure, technology, staffing, all to ensure  
7 the efficacy and allow the organization to devote  
8 more of its resources directly to neighborhood  
9 improvement. I at one time underestimated the  
10 benefits of a unified larger structure when I was the  
11 director of the Sutphin Boulevard B.I.D., but I found  
12 that it was difficult for my very small B.I.D. to  
13 partner with nearby institutions and anchors with  
14 adequate influence and capitalize on synergies and  
15 likeminded missions to strengthening the downtown  
16 area. Partnering presents opportunities to  
17 streamline and co-promote business support services  
18 to ensure that all existing and new downtown  
19 businesses are given an opportunity to prosper, which  
20 we need desperately. In addition, neighborhood  
21 branding authentic to Downtown Jamaica is desperately  
22 needed. Economic development practitioners know that  
23 to attract visitors, both globally, nationally, and  
24 locally, and potential businesses, you must clearly  
25 articulate a neighborhood brand. This is difficult

2 to do when Downtown Jamaica is divided into different  
3 districts with little coordination, insufficient  
4 marketing support, and inconsistent branding. By  
5 consolidating marketing efforts under a single brand,  
6 it would be easier to draw attention to the  
7 community's unique assets, and create positive  
8 imagery for visitors and potential businesses.  
9 Consolidation is a time-intensive endeavor, and it  
10 depends on consistent followup and relationship  
11 building. That is why these efforts must be  
12 adequately staffed and managed in order to succeed.  
13 A larger B.I.D. would have the resources to hire  
14 staff solely focused on improving the tenant mix of  
15 the downtown core, which we desperately need, to  
16 former Council Member Miller's point. Of course, to  
17 all business...

18 Sgt. at Arms: Time.

19 MELVA MILLER: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Melva can finish.

21 MELVA MILLER: Thank you. Just a couple  
22 more points.

23 So as we think about the revitalization  
24 of the city, and we want to make sure that people  
25 return to our commercial core, clean and safe

2 environments are essential, right? While existing  
3 B.I.D.s do a commendable job at trying to address  
4 grime and crime, these issues are no match for a  
5 resource-strapped organization. So we desperate need  
6 a larger organization to mitigate these quality of  
7 life issues. Although Downtown Jamaica has made  
8 tremendous progress in recent years, there is still  
9 much work to do. Now is the time to unify the 3  
10 B.I.D.s under the Downtown Jamaica umbrella, really  
11 to help position the community that I love, Downtown  
12 Jamaica, be a robust economic environment, post  
13 COVID. The residents of Jamaica deserve better: A  
14 better downtown, a better shopping experience, and I  
15 encourage the city council to support this  
16 unification because I truly believe that the whole is  
17 greater than the sum of the parts.

18 Thank you so much for this consideration,  
19 and I am happy to take any questions.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Melva.

21 COUNSEL: I see no questions. Next, we  
22 will hear from Elena Barcenes.

23 Sgt. at Arms: Starting time.

24 ELENA BARCENES: Can you hear me? Hello?

25 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes we can.

2                   ELENA BARCENES: Okay. My name is Elena  
3 Barcenes. I am the owner of New York City's first  
4 and oldest Salvadorean Restaurant, Rincón  
5 Salvadoreño, located at the junction of 149th Street  
6 and Jamaica Avenue. I am also a board member at the  
7 Jamaica Center B.I.D. I am here today to express my  
8 support of the unification of the 3 Business  
9 Improvement Districts in Downtown Jamaica. As a  
10 business owner, I can attest that the quality of life  
11 issues affecting downtown -- homeless, drug use,  
12 theft, harassment of employees and shoppers -- is  
13 shared along Sutphin Building, just a few blocks from  
14 my business. It would make logistical sense to have  
15 one organization working to address these issues  
16 rather than 3 separate organizations. I can also  
17 attest that the positive opportunities for Jamaica,  
18 the rise in apartment buildings on the periphery of  
19 our downtown, the growing transit opportunities, and  
20 the no-income retail are items that will benefit all  
21 in the community, stakeholders along Sutphin Building  
22 and Jamaica Avenue, Archer Avenue, 165th Street, and  
23 the General Trade Area known as Downtown Jamaica.  
24 Those results will come only if the stakeholders work  
25 together...

2 COUNSEL: Elena, you just reconnected  
3 there. You're good now.

4 ELENA BARCENES: Okay. So we have 3  
5 separate streets competing to benefit from these  
6 changes, when we compete as a stronger whole in an  
7 entire downtown. I do not see my neighboring  
8 businesses on 165th Street or Sutphin Boulevard as my  
9 competition. I see the malls or other neighborhoods  
10 or meal delivery services as my competition. I wish  
11 to work with my neighboring businesses to encourage  
12 loyalty and love for Downtown Jamaica from its  
13 residents, visitors, and daytime employees. It has  
14 been a rough couple of years for businesses. In my  
15 own businesses, I identified efficiencies and  
16 partnerships to ensure my survival. It feels wise  
17 for these 3 B.I.D.s to do the same by joining forces.  
18 I am in support of the unification of the 3 downtown  
19 Business Improvement Districts and encourage the City  
20 Council to strongly consider this petition. Thank  
21 you all for your consideration. I really hope that  
22 you call take consideration in everything that has  
23 been said, because it is really tough out there,  
24 especially for small businesses like myself, and I've  
25 been in the community for 42 years, and I wish to



2 stay there longer. So I thank you all for your for  
3 your consideration again. Thank you very much.

4 COUNSEL: Thank you. Next, we will hear  
5 from Ms. Sari Kulka

6 Sgt. at Arms: Starting time.

7 SARI KULKA: Hi everybody. Can you hear  
8 me?

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes we can.

10 SARI KULKA: Hi. My name is Sari Kulka.  
11 Thank you for allowing me to join you today to  
12 express my support for the consolidation of the 3  
13 Business Improvement Districts in Downtown Jamaica.  
14 My family is a longstanding owner of commercial  
15 properties in the western end of Jamaica Center  
16 B.I.D. on the blocks close to Sutphin Boulevard. We  
17 are not just property owners. We are locals too. My  
18 husband grew up in Jamaica, and his family owned and  
19 operated Kulka's Fine Baking for several decades on  
20 Jamaica Avenue. Jamaica is the Kulka family's  
21 hometown, and we want to see the best for it. Today,  
22 our family-owned company, KJL Property Management  
23 manages properties from Sutphin Boulevard to 150th  
24 Street on Jamaica Avenue and other properties in the  
25 surrounding area. We take pride in leasing our

2 properties on Jamaica Avenue to diverse and  
3 responsible small business tenants ranging from  
4 restaurants to local healthcare providers and taking  
5 good care of our properties. We know from all these  
6 years of living, working, and investing in Jamaica  
7 that the commercial corridors of Sutphin Boulevard,  
8 Jamaica Avenue, and 165th Street are economically,  
9 socially, and commercially linked. For example, our  
10 Jamaica Avenue restaurant tenants rely on the heavy  
11 daytime foot traffic generated from the courthouse  
12 and legal offices on Sutphin, and that both corridors  
13 stand to benefit from the new apartments and hotels  
14 rising on Sutphin and Archer. Recently, we have seen  
15 businesses on 165th Street, Sutphin Boulevard, and  
16 the western end of Jamaica suffering from similar  
17 quality of life issues such as merchant harassment,  
18 or drug use and sales. In order for our community to  
19 thrive socially and economically, it makes sense to  
20 market our collective businesses under the singular  
21 banner of Downtown Jamaica to focus on and solve an  
22 issue, rather than creating conflicting or competing  
23 messaging, and the programming between the 3 B.I.D.s.  
24 These corridors share both frustrating problems but  
25 also magnificent opportunity that could be better

2 addressed as one entity with cost savings for all.  
3 For that reason, I am in support of the unification,  
4 and I believe it is something that we need to do now.  
5 Thank you.

6 COUNSEL: Thank you.

7 I see that we have a hand up from Council  
8 Member Sanchez, if she is available to give comments  
9 or questions.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you. Yes.  
11 I just wanted to pop in and have a quick note and  
12 say... well... congratulations to being at this point  
13 to all of the stakeholders involved. I see so many  
14 familiar faces. After Speaker Adrienne Adams, I was  
15 the next Co-Chair of the Jamaica Now Leadership  
16 Council, and this was something we worked really hard  
17 on. So just congratulations to everyone and I urge  
18 my colleagues, also to support this consolidation  
19 along with the local members and The Speaker. So...  
20 and special shout out, because I have to, for Mevla  
21 Miller, who has really worked so hard on this. Thank  
22 you.

23 COUNSEL: Thank you, Council Member.

24 We have testimony next from Ms. Laurel  
25 Brown.

2 Sgt. at Arms: Starting time.

3 LAUREL BROWN: Hello all. Laurel Brown.

4 I am a long-time economic development executive and  
5 Downtown Jamaica advocate, here in favor of the  
6 proposal to consolidate the B.I.D.s. I guess the  
7 question really at hand is": How many administrative  
8 entities does it take to clean up the streets of  
9 Downtown Jamaica, or even more to the point, which is  
10 more effective: Having three organizations for  
11 simplicities sake managing one guy or gal cleaning  
12 the street, or having one entity managing 3 people  
13 spread out across the street. My answer, having  
14 shots in a number of different seats relevant to this  
15 question is that the one-to-three model, where you  
16 have less admin and more programming is significantly  
17 more effective than the alternative. Of course, you  
18 can substitute cleaning up the streets for any of the  
19 other programmatic priorities that came through the  
20 Jamaica Now Action Plan, but generally speaking that  
21 one-to-three is the better sweet spot that you want  
22 to hit. So I sat in a number of relevant seats that  
23 led me to this conclusion. I was a finance and real  
24 estate development attorney on Wall Street. Then a  
25 Direct of Operations and Executive Director of the

2 Jamaica Center B.I.D. for 4 years. After that was at  
3 the time where we had the heavy three-to-one model.  
4 Then went on to the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership as  
5 the Executive Vice President for another 4 years, and  
6 that was the more efficient one-to-three model, and I  
7 let a lot of the work to consolidate that  
8 organization. I then went back to Downtown Jamaica  
9 because I love it so much, and I was the C.O.O. of  
10 the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation for 2  
11 years, and now do economic development work  
12 internationally for a big tech company. I also led  
13 the consultancy and feasibility study around the  
14 consolidation. So it is not just even in theory that  
15 I am saying this. When I was the Executive Director  
16 of the Jamaica Center B.I.D., I would look at my  
17 brother and sister districts in Manhattan with the  
18 fancy parades and ball drops and new public spaces  
19 and think, "Well, we are a major New York City  
20 Downtown, and we should have access to those same  
21 type of things as well." And it was not that we were  
22 lacking for vision. We were just lacking for budget.  
23 So I actually, at that time, worked with two other  
24 B.I.D. directors, and we did away with our separate  
25 sanitation contracts, and our separate marketing

2 contracts, leveraged economies of scale, and entered  
3 into one single contract, and the result was we had  
4 noticeably cleaner streets because we were able to  
5 hire more staff. The results were that we had more  
6 investment interest in Downtown Jamaica, because we  
7 were able to hire a shared marketing and retail  
8 attraction consultant, and this was in the papers.  
9 The results were we had safer streets because we were  
10 able to pilot a public safety officer with these  
11 saved funds, and we actually won a neighborhood  
12 leadership awarded at the time because we were able  
13 to punch well beyond our weight, having done this  
14 model.

15 Sgt. at Arms: Time.

16 COUNSEL: Thank you. At this time, I see  
17 no other members of the public present to give  
18 testimony. If we have skipped over you, please use  
19 the Zoom raise-hand function. Seeing none, I turn it  
20 back over to The Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you Counsel.  
22 I thank everyone for their testimony today. If there  
23 are no other questions. Counsel, there is no one  
24 else testifying from the public?

25 COUNSEL: No one else.

2

3 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. With that, I  
4 will adjourn this hearing. Thank you so much.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date May 23, 2022