

Committee on
Lower Manhattan
Redevelopment
jointly with
Higher Education

Date	6/20/2008
Start Time	
Finish Time	

June 20, 2008

**Testimony to Barron-Gerson Hearing on Fiterman Hall/CUNY
City Council
Arthurine DeSola, Secretary
PSC-CUNY**

Good afternoon. Thank you for holding this essential hearing into the status and funding needs for Fiterman Hall, a necessary and beloved center of life for the Borough of Manhattan Community College.

The PSC-CUNY represents 1,250 faculty and staff members at BMCC. Most were there on that terrible day in September, when they were urgently (and I must add, properly) evacuated from both Fiterman and the main campus at 199 Chambers Street. As you are undoubtedly aware, Fiterman was crushed by debris from 7 World Trade Center, and filled with toxins from the oil tank buried beneath that building, as well as the remains of the World Trade Center. The building has stood as a hulking, toxic shell, surrounded in netting for these 7 years. And now, when CUNY stands on the brink of finally getting the financing from insurance and the State, we are met with the continuing nightmare of the missing \$78.7 million from the City of New York to permit CUNY to go forward with the reconstruction of Fiterman.

The rebuilding of Fiterman Hall is not only necessary to fill in this last piece of the surrounding World Trade Center site and ease our memories; it is critical to the survival of BMCC. Our members and the over 20,000 students they serve, are shoehorned into the 199 Chambers St. building which was designed for a maximum of 8,000 students. What does this mean for BMCC students and staff?

Among other problems, the Heating and Ventilation system was not designed to service this many people. We get reports of excessive heat in many classrooms, as well as serious problems due to lack of air, a critical health issue, particularly for students and staff with asthma and other respiratory problems. Indoor air quality is of particular concern for people who were in the area in September and October of 2001 and may be experiencing World Trade Center related cough and other symptoms. We will be urging all of our members who have symptoms to be examined by the WTC Environmental Health Center at Bellevue. We hope elected officials will help get the message out to students and others who were in the area at that time.

While the City needs to budget its share for rebuilding Fiterman, this specific funding need is but an ugly reminder of the urgent needs of all of our Community Colleges which desperately require the requested \$88 million to patch the holes in their buildings in order to continue their vital mission.

20 June 2008

**Testimony for Barron Hearing on Fiterman Hall
Borough of Manhattan Community College
City University of New York**

**Joan Greenbaum
Professor Emerita
Environmental Health and Safety Coordinator
Professional Staff Congress-CUNY**

Thank you for holding this hearing. The failure of the City of New York to come up with the funds needed for rebuilding Fiterman is criminal. It is symptomatic of the neglect the City has perpetrated against CUNY in failing to match state critical capital funds to keep our community colleges from falling apart. We know that the City Council is not responsible for this neglect, therefore we appeal to you to make our colleges whole.

I will first address the ongoing saga of Fiterman Hall and the students and staff of BMCC. For the last 7 years, while Fiterman lay shrouded in netting with its toxic hull reminding the community of September 11th, more than 20,000 students and 1,250 faculty and staff have been teaching and learning in the main building. This main building, at 199 Chambers St. was not built for the ever expanding number of inhabitants. It has critical air flow shortages, and an ailing infrastructure that should have been rebuilt during the last 10 years. But our community colleges have been shortchanged, and the holes in their aging hulks go un-repaired, or at best cobbled together to last another year.

The State of NY budgeted \$51 million to rebuild Fiterman with the assumption that the city would come up with the requested \$78 million. This has not happened on the City side. This is unacceptable for everyone concerned, but in particular in it should be considered a criminal action against those people at BMCC whose respiratory problems arose from contact with the dust and debris in the Fall of 2001.

Our members were evacuated from the buildings on Sept 11th and returned to work shortly thereafter. The World Trade Center cough is now well documented as a component of serious respiratory illnesses now being treated by the WTC Environmental Health Center at Bellevue. The combination of dedicated teachers, staff and students, crowded into the ailing infrastructure of 199 Chambers St. is a prescription for continuing health problems. We ardently urge you to come up with the funds to rebuild Fiterman as well as

the \$15 million needed to replace the roof on Chambers St and upgrade the HVAC system.

CUNY community college faculty and staff work in unacceptable conditions—conditions that their brothers and sisters in the Senior Colleges do not have to put up with. For example, Bronx Community College has a sink hole in the middle of its campus—symptomatic of years of neglect caused by underfunding. Now Bronx CC needs \$105 million in infrastructure improvements so that the staff and students can work without their hats and mittens in the winter and can have access to working bathrooms. Pennywise and pound foolish-- this has been the City's approach to critical health and safety repairs and rebuilding for the community colleges. What message does this give to the diverse tired and poor who pour into our colleges. As a newly retired professor of 34 years at LaGuardia, I call on you to give us working conditions fit for teaching and learning. Please, please make the requested capital budget for CUNY whole, so that we can educate the whole people, as the original charter of City College calls for.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**STATEMENT FROM
ALLIANCE FOR DOWNTOWN NEW YORK ON
CUNY'S FITERMAN HALL**

*Fiterman Hall Must Be Deconstructed and Rebuilt, says President
Elizabeth H. Berger; Further Delays Threaten Lower Manhattan's Standing as a
Premiere Business and Residential District*

New York, June 20, 2008 —

Good afternoon Chairman Gerson, Chairman Barron.

I am Elizabeth H. Berger, president of the Alliance for Downtown New York.

I am here to voice the Lower Manhattan business and residential community's collective frustration that Fiterman Hall is still standing.

It is hard to believe that this once critically important community and New York City resource remains long abandoned, boarded up and shrouded in black.

What should by now be a vibrant, new, state-of-the-art center for learning, another success story in Lower Manhattan's remarkable renaissance, is still a foreboding presence that continues to cast a physical and symbolic pall over Lower Manhattan.

With no date set for deconstruction or reconstruction of the new Fiterman Hall, it is likely that the Borough of Manhattan Community College, Downtown's landmark public institution of higher learning, will still be "recovering" come the 10th anniversary of 9/11.

This is not acceptable.

The shrouded Fiterman Hall is a symbol of what was, not what is, and must be deconstructed and rebuilt now.

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Like the rest of Lower Manhattan, the Borough of Manhattan Community College suffered terrible damage on September 11, 2001.

Despite great challenges, BMCC has done a remarkable job of emerging from this tragedy bigger, stronger and more vital than ever. Enrollment at the school has increased 20% since the Fall of 2001, and its success is one reason why Lower Manhattan is a global model of a 21st century business district, a 24/7 live/work community with 311,000 employees, 50,000 residents and six million annual visitors. Over the past three years, nearly 200 companies have relocated to Lower Manhattan from midtown and other parts of the metropolitan area, leasing nearly 4.5 million square feet of space.

A new Fiterman Hall is vital to Lower Manhattan's and BMCC's future growth, and further delay cannot be an option.

CUNY has a magnificent plan for a new Fiterman Hall – Let's get on with it.

Deconstructing and rebuilding Fiterman Hall is critical to keeping Lower Manhattan a competitive and world-renowned business district and residential community. It must be done right, it must be done safely, and it must be done now.

Thank you.

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The mission of the Alliance for Downtown New York is to be the principal organization that provides Lower Manhattan's historic financial district with a premier physical and economic environment, advocates for businesses and property owners and promotes the area as a world-class destination for companies, workers, residents and visitors. The Downtown Alliance manages the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Business Improvement District (BID), serving an area roughly from City Hall to the Battery, from the East River to West Street.

City University of New York

Testimony on Replacement of Fiterman Hall

Vice Chancellor Weinshall

June 20th, 2008

Good afternoon and thank you Council Members Barron and Gerson, and members of both the Higher Education and Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Committees for the opportunity to testify about this important project for both the City University of New York and Lower Manhattan.

As most of you know, Fiterman Hall, which is located one block north of where the World Trade Center Towers stood and next to World Trade Center 7, was nearing completion of a major renovation on September 11, 2001 when it was severely damaged by the collapse of World Trade Center 7 on its south and west sides. In addition to the extensive structural damage which the building sustained, Fiterman Hall was contaminated by World Trade Center dust, and, in the months following 9/11, it developed severe mold rendering it uninhabitable. CUNY was then faced with the question of whether this 40-year old building was to be rehabilitated or replaced. In the months following 9/11, CUNY staff, along with our consultants and FEMA, analyzed and evaluated these two options and eventually determined that replacement was the most cost effective and appropriate approach. Unfortunately, due to the presence of contaminants and mold in the building, the structure could not simply be taken down. Instead, the building had to be cleaned or "remediated" before deconstruction could take

place.

As a result in 2005 CUNY and the Dormitory Authority (DASNY), our construction and financing partner for the Fiterman project, retained a team of consultants to develop a plan for remediation and deconstruction of the existing Fiterman Hall, and complete a design for the new building. Completion of the remediation and deconstruction has been seriously delayed. This is due to community concerns about air quality and mold, as well as the problems with the Deutsche Bank building. As a result, it took the Environmental Protection Agency and other City and State regulatory agencies an extended period of time to finalize their approval of CUNY's remediation plans for the building. That plan is now approved and in place and our contractors are working extended hours to implement it. We expect remediation to be complete by the end of the summer. The current plan calls for deconstruction of the existing structure to immediately follow our remediation efforts. Design for the new building is complete and as long as funding is fully in place we will be able to begin construction of the new building starting in the first quarter of 2009.

As you are well aware, all State funding for our community colleges and Medgar Evers require an equal City match, otherwise the State funds cannot be accessed. The cost to remediate, deconstruct and replace Fiterman Hall is currently estimated to be \$325 million, slightly less than previously reported. Due to the method that the Dormitory Authority (DASNY) is using to bid out the project, a construction management contract with a guaranteed maximum price, all funds for the project need to be available by the

beginning of Fiscal Year 2009. DASNY has hired a construction management firm and they will bid out the contracts for the core and shell of the building between August of this year and January of 2009. That portion of the project is estimated to cost \$202 million and will include, among other things, the foundations, structural frame, skin, elevators and base building mechanical systems for the new building. With all of our Community College and Medgar Evers projects, DASNY will not bid a project until we have provided proof of the availability of all City funding. That proof takes the form of a signed Certificate to Proceed from OMB. To keep the project fully on track, ideally CUNY will need to award the contracts for the fit-out of the building, including the partitions, ceilings, finishes, mechanical systems on the floors, furniture, fixtures and equipment before the end of Fiscal Year 2009. That portion of the project is estimated to cost \$75.4 million. By doing this we allow one continuous construction mobilization in the building rather than two, thus saving money, and more importantly to the college, keeping the project on schedule. The timing will also ensure that when construction is completed, all the furniture fixtures and equipment can be delivered so the college can use the new building right away.

Simply put, to make all of this happen on schedule we need \$71.2 million from the City, so we will have the entire \$325 million for the project in place. We currently have available \$142.7 million of funding that does not have matching requirements from the City or State. These funds are \$62.7 million of insurance funds, \$15 million of Lower Manhattan Development Corporation funds and \$5 million of 9/11 Fund grants, and \$60 million of FEMA funding. The State has appropriated their full share of the amount

needed for this project - \$91.2 million, and the City has put another \$20.8 million in FY'10. We will need the City to move the \$20.8 million of funding to FY'09 and appropriate the final \$71.2 million, so that we can build the new Fiterman Hall in an efficient and timely manner.

I am sure all of you are aware that there has been a construction boom in New York City in the last few years and we have experienced escalation costs as high as 18% per year for certain trades over the last few years. There is no reason to believe that if we delay completion of this project even further, the price will do anything but rise due to higher steel and oil prices.

We have had extensive discussions with OMB about the Fiterman Hall funding and are now at a critical point. Funds must be placed in the Adopted Fiscal Year 2009 budget in order to generate the appropriations needed to keep the project on schedule. If that does not happen we will not be able to keep to our schedule and we will only be able to remediate the existing structure and the Borough of Manhattan Community College community will have to go for an even longer period of time without enough or appropriate space.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on this important topic.

City Council, Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Committee Joint
Hearing- Testimony: Dr. Emily B. Anderson

Good afternoon, Chairman Barron, Chairman Gerson, members of the council, invited guests. I am Dr. Emily Anderson, a BMCC faculty member for the past 27 years. Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this joint hearing.

When I reflect on that dreadful, horrific day 9/11/01 I recall speaking with many students, who during the week of the attack, called the CUNY Hotline concerned about our national safety and about their own futures in this city. I shared their psychological pain and provided counseling support, but most of all hope.

Under the leadership of President Perez, BMCC did re-open October 2001. With the stench and aftermath of the horror, still swirling all around us, we came back! Some students said they could not bear to stay, but the majority stayed and completed the school year. We used temporary classrooms and trailers in order to meet the needs of the thousands of students who came, ~~seeking to renew faith in their~~

~~ability to survive and thrive.~~ Promises were made that the city and the nation would rise from the ashes. We will rebuild lower Manhattan was the promise and it soon became our mantra. We waited!

Our hopes rose in 2005 when an architectural firm was hired to oversee the cleanup & demolition and to design the new building. BMCC expanded the curriculum to include degree programs in elementary and bilingual education, engineering, math, science and multimedia. These programs will prepare our nearly 19,000 students, working class and immigrant students for full participation in the workforce and life of this great city.

Since 2005, BMCC has hired approximately 100 new faculty who are committed to educating our wonderful students.

Most Recently, when New York State agreed to allocate funds, the BMCC community began feeling more confident that we would not be forgotten and the overcrowding would end.

Presently, three to four faculty members are sharing one office, consulting with colleagues and students

in hallways and stairways due to lack of space. Forty students are packed into classrooms designed for twenty; they stand in line in front of computer labs in the hope of getting to a computer station before they have to go off to another class or go to work or to pick up children from school.

WE DESERVE BETTER!

The rebuilding of Fiterman Hall would mean that faculty and students could study science in a proper laboratory with adequate space to do experiments and test knowledge, engineering students would be able to use new technology in our virtual library, all faculty members would have space to collaborate, develop ideas and possibly break new ground in social science research and in the helping professions.

Our students and faculty are doing a good job under terrible conditions, think of what could be accomplished if we had Fiterman Hall. Yes the economy is in a downturn, and that means more people will seek a higher education. I ask, can we afford to turn them away?

Chairpersons Barron and Gerson, members of the Council, we urge and beseech you to do everything in your power to ensure a bright future for all of us. Waiting should no longer be an option. Full funding for Fiterman Hall must be allocated and the rebuilding must begin now!

Thank you!

**President Antonio Perez
Remarks
New York City Council Higher Education and Lower
Manhattan Redevelopment Committees
Council Chambers, City Hall
on
Friday, June 20, 2008
1:00 PM**

Chairman Barron and Chairman Gerson, members of the City Council Higher Education and Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Committees, I welcome this opportunity to discuss the needs of Borough of Manhattan Community College – Manhattan’s only community college, and the largest community college in the City University of New York System.

While in Manhattan, our student population comes from all five boroughs, and is splendidly diverse: 39 percent are black, 16 percent are white, 31 percent are Hispanic, and 14 percent are Asian.

The majority of our students are from upper Manhattan and the heart of Brooklyn.

These students, like generations of students before them, have come to CUNY – and to BMCC – to find hope and opportunity, and to learn the skills they will need to be productive and engaged citizens.

This is not the first time that the hope that BMCC holds out for the citizens of New York City has been delayed.

During the New York fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s, the construction of our main campus at 199 Chambers Street was put on hold for nearly a decade.

The consequences of this delay were disastrous for thousands of students and to the City that desperately needed their skills.

Holding Fiterman Hall hostage today will have an even more dire impact for BMCC's more than 20,000 students.

Today, BMCC is only blocks away from the site that the world has come to know as 'Ground Zero.'

The financial and physical strains related to the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 continue to take their toll on our college.

On the afternoon of 9/11, BMCC's Fiterman Hall, a 15 story building gifted to the college in 1993, was destroyed when 7 World Trade Center collapsed into it.

At that time we were just six weeks short of completing a \$64 million renovation of Fiterman.

Even while the building was being renovated, 6,000 of our students took classes there every day.

With the loss of Fiterman Hall, BMCC lost one third of its instructional space.

Fiterman Hall contained 360,000 square feet of space that was critical to the educational BMCC's mission.

At the time of the attacks, Fiterman contained 70 classrooms and computer labs.

One floor of Fiterman was home to the college's innovative Telemedia Accelerator – an incubator for emerging high tech companies.

Fiterman was to be the new home of BMCC's business and technology degree programs, our state-of-the-art workforce development center, and our division of Continuing Education and Workforce Development.

It was also to include a virtual library for the use of all downtown residents as well as BMCC faculty and students.

In addition to losing the building, BMCC lost new computer equipment and new furniture, items which had just been moved into the building.

In the aftermath of the attack, Borough of Manhattan Community College responded in the way that a community college should – it used its resources in service to the community.

The college contributed significantly in the City's WTC rescue and recovery mission.

Our main building at 199 Chambers Street served as the command center for many first line responders including the NYC Police, Port- Authority Police, NYC Fire Fighters, and FEMA.

The college spent or lost nearly \$10 million overall in the rescue and recovery effort.

To make financial matters worse, within three months of the terrorist attacks the college suffered a \$1.3 million budget cut due to a combination of a P.E.G. and a collective bargaining cost item.

Since then, the college has been subject to the same budget cuts as the rest of CUNY.

Even before 9/11, B.M.C.C. was cramming approximately 16,000 students into a building meant for 8,000

Since 9/11, the college's student enrollment has jumped to 20,000.

Roughly 28,000 students use the Chambers St. building each week.

Rented space near Fiterman Hall is helping ease the crunch, but B.M.C.C. is still woefully in need of space to accommodate student demand.

The difficult economic times we are now experiencing will only increase the demand for community college education.

People experiencing downsizing and those dissatisfied with their opportunities, turn to community colleges to learn new skills or to acquire the knowledge base to begin a new career.

The growing number of students who choose BMCC is a validation of the college's success – and of its importance to the people of New York City.

But because of those growing numbers of students, BMCC's current physical plant is stretched beyond capacity, and our facilities are strained to their limits.

To help meet demand while keeping class sizes at least manageable, the college has extended class times well beyond the 'traditional school day.'

BMCC is now open 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week.

To address our urgent need for faculty office space, the college has also converted classrooms into offices for faculty. Even with this new configuration three, four or even five professors crowd into shared offices.

This lack of space and privacy makes it hard for faculty members to conduct research or to have private conversations with students – making it harder for the college to retain quality professors.

Dozens of computer labs fill every available space in the building: computers for student use line hallways and are even in the cafeteria.

Students stand outside of the labs, waiting for a seat to open up so they can do their work.

Many of our students do not have computers at home and have to do Internet research and word process their assignments at B.M.C.C.

Our temporary trailer classrooms on West Street and Harrison Street are just that — a temporary solution to the loss of classrooms in Fiterman.

They are noisy and remote - difficult places for professors to teach and for students to learn.

To alleviate these problems, we have had to rent additional space in the neighborhood that can be used for classes until we can replace Fiterman Hall.

Among the college's highest priorities is to address our pressing space shortage.

We wait expectantly for the additional \$78.7 million we need to complete the re-construction of Fiterman Hall.

In the meantime, our students are forced to suffer.

Right now, our students have limited space to eat and socialize.

This means that we can't provide them with a full college experience.

The project to demolish and replace Fiterman Hall has been in the planning phase for more than seven years.

Funds have been promised, but there is currently a \$80 million shortfall in appropriations for this vitally important project.

I am now simply asking the City to fulfill its promise to BMCC and its students, and to shoulder its part of the project so that Fiterman Hall can be rebuilt without delay.

Our faculty and students need this building up as soon as possible – so that we can continue, with your help, to build

not merely a building, but a better future for all New Yorkers.

"The Rebuilding of Fiterman Hall"

Joint Hearing of the New York City Council's

Higher Education and Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Committees

Friday, June 20, 2008

1 p.m.

City Council Chambers

Good afternoon Councilman Barron, Councilman Gerson, and the members of the Higher Education and Lower Manhattan Redevelopment Committees. On behalf of Borough of Manhattan Community College Foundation Board, I thank you for making the rebuilding of Fiterman Hall a priority for public discussion.

Let me tell you a bit about myself and why I'm appearing before you. I have a long been engaged with the downtown community and issues affecting its quality of life. As you may know, for years I was the owner of *The Villager* and *Downtown Express* newspapers, which report on the significant issues that have an impact on the quality of downtown life. I've been on the political scene for a long time and know the challenges Councilman Gerson and his predecessors on the City Council have confronted in your attempts to bring positive change to the district.

I also understand the politics of Brooklyn, having lived and voted there for many years. Councilman Barron, I know you are an outspoken advocate for education in New York, and especially for institutions like BMCC that are serving underserved populations and poorly served populations. I welcome this opportunity to have a conversation with you and I trust this conversation will be beneficial for many in your district, since I know a large contingent of BMCC students live in Brooklyn.

I am here on behalf of the BMCC Foundation Board members to express our dismay with the City's failure to support the speedy reconstruction of BMCC's academic facility, Fiterman Hall. The BMCC Foundation is dedicated to seeing that all students, regardless of their financial resources, will be able to pursue their dreams of a college education. Through outreach initiatives and major support from private donors, the foundation provides more than 300 scholarships each year.

BMCC is one of New York City's great resources. It is a vitally rich and diverse community with talented, ambitious students, and a distinguished faculty. The college is known for its excellence in teaching and learning. It

is a student-centered college that provides a full array of services to maximize student success.

The college is respected nationally for its rigorous academic standards and caliber of its graduates. The US Department of Education and the Institute of International Education rank BMCC #1 in awarding degrees to African-Americans in the Northeast; #2 for awarding associate degrees in business; and #3 in communications technology.

BMCC has forged many partnerships with the surrounding business, educational, and cultural communities. These partnerships offer students internship and employment opportunities

The reconstructed Seven World Trade Center has been up for several years now. Stores like Barnes and Nobles, Starbucks, Bed, Bath, and Beyond, have all settled into their new homes and are providing their services to the downtown community.

BMCC, which provides a far greater service to this city, is left to wonder about its future and its more than 20,000 students are forced to study in overcrowded and cramped conditions.

BMCC's faculty, who are the backbone of the institution, must work in inadequate office and lab spaces, unable to meet with students in the privacy of their own offices.

I urge your committees, and the entire Council, to reverse the Executive budget Cuts of \$87.7 million to Fiterman Hall and to ensure that this vitally important facility is reconstructed and put in service as soon as possible.

Failure to do this sends a terrible message about the City's priorities.

Fiterman is a wise investment in New York City's economic and cultural future. Don't let this opportunity to build a better City escape you.



**TESTIMONY OF THE
NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP (NYPIRG)
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
HIGHER EDUCATION AND LOWER MANHATTAN REDEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEES**

FRIDAY, JUNE 20, 2008

**CHRISTINA CHAISE, BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT**

Good afternoon members of the City Council. My name is Christina Chaise, and I am a student at BMCC. I'm also a student activist with NYPIRG because I believe in change and development for the better. This is why I'm here today.

The inclusion of Fiterman Hall is necessary for academic growth and progress at BMCC. You know, last semester I had my classes in the class trailers, where conditions were horrible. Cars were constantly disruptive, there was little heat, and above all, there were no bathrooms! This kind of atmosphere hinders opportunity to excel. With the addition of Fiterman Hall, I know we can change this.

College enrollment is at its highest, now more than ever, with hopes of further increase, so Fiterman Hall is mandatory for expansion. This is an investment in our students that cannot go wrong. It will provide an even better college community, offering space for more enriching classes and activities. Perhaps we can even have a NYPIRG office as well, so we can accomplish more work and have a better presence on campus. Hopefully then, we can continue to empower students to stand up and make a change. I am one of these students.

I know the inclusion of Fiterman Hall will make a difference — not only in my life, but also in the lives of many New Yorkers. This addition can only encourage more strength and education among New York City citizens. Considering the location, where we are still in a state of repairs from 9/11, Fiterman Hall would be an exceptional addition to lower Manhattan because it would not just be a building; it would be a statement — a statement saying that nothing can tear us down, and we will keep building for a better tomorrow. Thank you.



The Council of the City of New York
Joint Oversight Hearing Committees on
Higher Education and Lower Manhattan Redevelopment
Update on Reconstruction of Fiterman Hall
Testimony by Noah Pfefferblit, District Manager, Community Board One

Friday, June 20, 1 PM
City Hall

Thank you, Councilman Gerson, for convening this important hearing on the reconstruction of Fiterman Hall, and for giving me the opportunity to testify on behalf of Manhattan Community Board One. I am Noah Pfefferblit, District Manager of Community Board One.

The reconstruction of Fiterman Hall is an important part of the redevelopment of Lower Manhattan. Fiterman Hall, located just north of 7 World Trade Center and a block from the World Trade Center site, was also a casualty of September 11. Like 130 Liberty Street, it has stood vacant and contaminated since that day. The City University of New York (CUNY) and the New York State Dormitory Authority (DASNY) have worked diligently and closely with government regulators and the community for the almost seven subsequent years to develop a sensible plan to safely abate and demolish the structure currently on the site and replace it with a new building.

As CUNY and DASNY have worked out these remediation plans, which were approved by federal regulators in March 2008 after many revisions and consultations with the community, a plan to finance the project was arranged.



This plan requires that the City and State each contribute \$98.6 million, with \$62.7 million coming from insurance funds, \$60 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, \$15 million from the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation and \$5 million from the 9/11 fund.

New York State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Assembly Member Deborah Glick – both of whom have worked hard and effectively to bring this agreement to fruition – have committed \$50 million in the State's Fiscal Year 2009 budget for this project. Unfortunately, the city has so far matched only \$20 million, with \$78.7 million outstanding.

Decontamination of the building is already underway and deconstruction and rebuilding are scheduled to follow. This project is now moving forward with a great deal of momentum, and it is essential that it not be delayed by the City withholding or delaying any of the funds that it committed.

Fiterman Hall is desperately needed by BMCC. The conversion of Fiterman Hall from an office building to a college was almost complete when the entire structure was rendered unusable on 9/11 by debris and contamination from the collapse of World Trade Center 7. Since then, BMCC's student population has grown by 20 percent, leaving it increasingly starved for classroom space, computer labs and offices.

In the aftermath of the tragedy of September 11, a number of commitments were made to our community. In recent months, we have seen the timelines of several of these promises be delayed, even as others have entered or remained in limbo. Specifically, the Fulton Street Transit Center is now being reassessed, there has been no movement whatsoever on the Performing Arts Center, and there are disquieting rumors about the financing of the PATH station.

It is imperative that we not allow another important part of the rebuilding of Lower Manhattan to be stalled. Fiterman Hall is a crucial piece of our district's educational infrastructure. As a measure of progress in redeveloping Lower Manhattan in a timely fashion and a symbol of moving past the trauma of 9/11,

Fiterman Hall remains a significant factor in redeveloping Lower Manhattan, and it is vital that it be rebuilt as quickly as possible.

Community Board 1 therefore passed unanimously at our meeting earlier this year a resolution urging Mayor Bloomberg to allocate sufficient funds in this year's budget to match the amount allocated by the State, so that Fiterman Hall can be demolished and rebuilding can begin on schedule in the coming year.

It is also critically important that any work done at this and other Lower Manhattan construction sites be done safely so that workers at the site and the surrounding community are kept as secure as possible. This need was dramatized yet again in recent weeks by accidents at 130 Liberty Street and the Goldman Sachs building. In this regard we commend you, Councilman Gerson, along with your colleagues on the City Council for leadership in this area, including the overhaul of the Building Code and the recent vote to overhaul the Fire Code. We urge CUNY and DASNY -- as we did the Port Authority—to voluntarily conform to these codes so that work at Fiterman Hall will benefit from the improvements that have been made this year to these codes.

In conclusion, we must do everything we can to keep the decontamination, demolition and rebuilding of Fiterman Hall on schedule. With all the work that has already been done and the funding that has been put in place by various parties, it would be unconscionable to let this project get off track.

Thank you, Councilman Gerson for this opportunity to speak and for holding this hearing. We look forward to continuing to work with you on this and other important issues that face our community.

Good Afternoon, and a pleasant day to all who have come here to support the rebuilding of Fiterman Hall. I would like to acknowledge Councilman Charles Barron and Councilman Alan Gerson, our faculty, staff, students and administration.

My name is Khrystal De Myers. On May 30, 2008, I graduated from Borough of Manhattan Community College. I graduated with a 4.0 grade point average and received a few awards of recognition for my academic achievement such as the Louis Horowitz Award for Accounting and the Katy Helapi Graduating Scholarship for women. As a result, my college selected me to speak at Madison Square Garden as the salutatorian on behalf of the 2008 graduating class.

Why then would a student who has graduated with a perfect transcript want to come here today to speak to you? I am here because I can speak about the BMCC experience from start to end. I am here because it's not only about me, it is about 19,000 other students. I am here because there is more to college experience than "A" grades. I am here because I joined a family that gave me a foundation, a family that I will never leave behind, because my fellow students, the staff, the faculty, and the administration have all contributed to the person I've become today.

What then is missing from this equation? The structure- The building, Fiterman Hall. BMCC is the home in which I lived with my family for the last two years. There were moments – many moments that I wanted to move away and just leave for another college. There were many moments that I did not want to be at BMCC. But, it was a professor who persuaded me to "hang in there" despite the cramped, crowded environment which many of us deemed unfit for the optimum learning experience.

It was the transfer advisors who told me of a BMCC scholarship, and tried to get me to ignore the fact that my class was in a noisy trailer.

It was the administrators who put windows in a cafeteria to try and convince us that the over crowded cafeteria is also a lounge. Can you imagine- I do not know what a lounge looks like in a college, because we do

not have one. Students do not have a space to congregate and socialize, when some colleges have an entire student union building.

Faculty, staff, administrators and fellow students should not have to spend their time making excuses, sugar coating what is real and begging students like me to stay at BMCC. They should spend their time teaching, advising, developing and counseling students.

So I am not here to ask for a student union building; for BMCC, we have accepted that as luxury. We are asking to get back what we had- a building that will alleviate the congestion on our escalators, elevators, in our classrooms and increase the quality of life. We are asking that you allow us to have the college experience we've been missing since we lost our structure, our home.

I must describe for you an experience I had at BMCC. Over a year after Katrina, I had the opportunity to do service learning in New Orleans. And as I walked with other students and looked at the homes and the neighborhoods, I saw how nothing changed since the flood. My fellow students and I talked about how quickly New York pulled together after 911 and how we would have cleaned up so much more and begin the rebuilding process. I do not want to believe that we could be so naïve. I do not want to believe that our building, like those in New Orleans, has not been touched for seven years. After all, this is New York City.

In closing, I am going to borrow the theme from the Diversity and Tolerance Week that was held at BMCC. The mantra was "United in Purpose; United in Thoughts." The BMCC family would like to bring this to our politicians and make you show us that you are also united in purpose and thought by funding the rebuilding of a facility that will serve thousands of students who come from all the boroughs in this city.

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

Before I begin, I would like to recognize the honorable Councilman Charles Barron, and distinguished members of the higher Education Committee and the honorable Councilman Alan Gerson, and distinguished member of the Lower Manhattan Redevelopment committee.

Let me first thank you all for having this hearing today regarding the future of BMCC and the reconstruction of Fiterman Hall.

My name is Horace Henry, I am the Vice President of the Student Government Association at Borough of Manhattan Community College. It is summer and most of us, are not attending summer school. But when I was informed that there would be a hearing here today I requested to speak on behalf of the 19,000 students that I represent at BMCC.

You know, I remember for the first time seeing the twin towers standing tall right here in downtown Manhattan. I also recall a few years later watching them being destroyed by the enemy.

But ladies and gentlemen, funding was promptly allocated for the rebuilding of the Towers. Not only will the structure be rebuilt, but it will be built better this time around. And for that we applaud and we are proud of all those who were involved. But today, standing 19,000 strong, as the largest community college in the city, Borough of Manhattan Community College was also wounded by 9/11, and our open sore is yet to heal.

I now ask - what kind of message is our city sending if we fail to treat the BMCC wound - Fiterman Hall?

Let me tell you the message we hear.

The message we hear is that we do not care about the type of college experience that our students receive.

The message we hear is that no one is listening to the outcry of our suffering students. The message we hear is, as a city, we do not care about the people who will make up our future workforce.

You see, BMCC is lacking the true spirit of a college environment. How would you feel as a freshman if you walk into a classroom that is a trailer sitting on the sidewalk of the Westside highway?

How would you feel as a Computer Science student if you had to wait for long periods of time to get into an overcrowded computer lab?

How would you feel if you live in Queens, attend BMCC in Manhattan, and your psychology class is in Brooklyn?

Is this the experience you want a future councilperson to have?

Is this how you want to educate a future mayor?

Is this what you want a future governor to remember?

Is this the story you want a future president to tell?

Everyday we hear that today's youth are the leaders of tomorrow, but how great of a tomorrow can this city have if we are stifling our tomorrow... today.

When the decision was made to fund the rebuilding of Fiterman Hall you bandaged the wound and it began to heal. Now the decision was made to remove the bandage and reveal the open sore.

As millions of dollars are taken from us, its hurting thousands of students suffering in overcrowded classrooms. As thousands of dollars are taken from us, its hurting hundreds of frustrated faculty and staff who have to teach and work in a challenging environment.

Rebuilding Fiterman hall is not just rebuilding a physical structure of bricks and cement. It's rebuilding the confidence, the hope, the faith, and the trust of 19,000 students that this city will not disappoint us.

As a representative of the 19,000 students at Borough of Manhattan Community College, and as a product of this great institution, I ask the City Council: hear our cry today restore the full funding for the rebuilding of Fiterman Hall.

-Help us to eliminate our overcrowded classrooms

-Give us the space we need to properly educate college students.

Let 19,000 students remember the legacy that your council will leave behind

- And most importantly, close the wound of 9/11 and let it heal.

- Bring Fiterman Hall back.

THANK YOU.