

**SBS Statement on Proposed Downtown Jamaica BID**  
**Before City Council Finance Committee**  
**April 7, 2022**

Good morning Chair Brannan and members of the Finance Committee. I am Michael Blaise Backer, Deputy Commissioner of Neighborhood Development at the Department of Small Business Services (SBS). I am joined by our BID Program Director, Roxanne Earley and our Senior Policy Advisor, Zach Owens.

Today I am pleased to testify before you in support of the proposed Downtown Jamaica Business Improvement District. The Downtown Jamaica BID is, in function, the merging of three separate but adjacent BIDs into a single, better resourced organization by way of extending the Sutphin Boulevard BID and dissolving the Jamaica Center and 165<sup>th</sup> Street Mall Special Assessment Districts.

SBS is dedicated to investing in neighborhoods and strengthening commercial corridors through the support and establishment of community-based economic development organizations like BIDs. We are pleased to present this project for the Council's consideration today, as we believe it represents an important moment in helping downtown Jamaica reach its full potential as a vibrant destination commercial district for New York City and is sorely needed to accelerate its post-pandemic revival.

This project is the culmination of almost 7 years of community effort, outreach, and stakeholder engagement, and fulfills the final outstanding commitment from the Jamaica Now Action Plan issued in 2015. The unification of the BIDs was also a key opportunity identified in the Downtown Jamaica Commercial District Needs Assessment completed in 2019 that involved feedback from over 300 merchants and residents. The pandemic only further demonstrated the need for a centralized, high-capacity organization that could advocate on behalf of the downtown area and provide critical business support services to district merchants.

A single BID has many benefits for Downtown Jamaica. This organization will have increased staff capacity and resources to provide needed programs and services such as retail attraction, district beautification, and public space programming, all of which will support small businesses and create jobs. A single BID can more effectively market the downtown business community with a unified identity - elevating public awareness of the district, locally and regionally, as a place for visitors to shop, dine, and stay.

Further, with the operational and cost efficiencies that comes from elimination of duplicative services, less money will be spent on administrative expenses, more would be reinvested directly into programs and services, and coordination with city agencies like NYPD, DOT, and Sanitation will be simplified and streamlined.

The proposed Downtown Jamaica BID will utilize a formula that will assess properties at 50% of their linear frontage and 50% of their assessed value, thereby creating a more equitable

formula across the entire district. The average property owner and business will save money, and the maximum, minimum, median, and average annual bill for all properties will decrease as well. The average median assessment bill will decrease 9%, giving money back to property owners and businesses at a time they need it most. The Downtown Jamaica BID will have a first-year annual budget of \$1.3M, and a maximum assessment cap of \$1.5M.

SBS has been working with the BIDs, and area stakeholders to plan for and realize this merger for several years. No BID board has opposed the unification effort. While the 165<sup>th</sup> Mall SAD has a non-compliant board due to the insufficient size of the district - an issue which will be addressed by unification - both Sutphin and Jamaica Center have voted to approve unification.

As required by law, SBS coordinated the mailing of a summary of the City Council Resolution, no less than 10 days and no more than 30 days before today's hearing, to property owners and tenants of the proposed district.

Furthermore, SBS arranged for the publication of a copy of the summary of the Resolution at least once in the City Record.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the former Queens Borough President Melinda Katz and Deputy Borough President Melva Miller, current Borough President Donovan Richards, Speaker Adrienne Adams, former Council Member I. Daneek Miller, and current Council Members Nantasha Williams and Jim Gennaro for their support of the Downtown Jamaica BID formation effort, as well as the members of the Sutphin Blvd BID, Jamaica Center SAD, and 165<sup>th</sup> Mall SAD for their role in the process and participation in the countless merger discussions over the years. Finally, we would not be here today without the tireless work of both current and former SBS staff from my team, who have advised the BIDs' boards and staff, and our elected officials, throughout this almost 7-year effort. I particularly would like to shout out my colleagues Zach Owens and Roxanne Earley, who are both here with me today, for their exceptional service to SBS and the downtown Jamaica community. We look forward to working with the unified Downtown Jamaica BID in enhancing a more vibrant and thriving Jamaica, Queens.

At this time, I am happy to take any questions. Thank you.

Good Morning Speaker Adams, Chairman Brannan, Commissioner Kim and the entire membership of the NYC Council's Committee on Finance.

My name is Shurn Anderson, Director of Economic Development for the Office of the Queens Borough President. I am here this morning on behalf of Queens Borough President Donovan Richards.

I am delighted to join the NYC Council's Committee on Finance to provide testimony in support of the expansion of the Sutphin Boulevard Business Improvement District, which will in turn allow for the unification of the three downtown Jamaica Business Improvement Districts. Furthermore, this proposed expansion will create a variety of positive outcomes for Downtown Jamaica, most specifically cost efficiency, increased capacity and representation, and a unified brand to attract many to the area.

The Borough President of Queens serves as an ex-officio member on all 13 business improvement districts in the Borough. As such he is aware of the challenges these small organizations face to provide resources to the small businesses in their corridors, especially under the challenges of the past two years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Small non-profit organizations, with minimal staffing and budgets, endure a difficult time to address the needs of their stakeholders and communities. It is imperative that they build capacity in order to provide resources to meet the growing needs of the community. Expanding the Sutphin Boulevard Business

Improvement District to include the 165th Street Mall Association, and the Jamaica Center Business Improvement District corridor will only strengthen the BID.

The expansion of the Sutphin Boulevard Business Improvement Districts will provide cost efficiency, more specifically the opportunity to share resources and to eliminate duplication of services. It will also increase capacity, meaning that the business improvement district can undertake more ambitious projects and attempt to secure outside funding opportunities, and hire more specialized staff. Furthermore, this proposed business improvement district will be more representative. Local elected officials and the community board will be able to assist on behalf of the increased number of stakeholders. Finally, this new business improvement district will unify marketing opportunities and create a brand that will only help make Downtown Jamaica even more attractive.

In recent years, my office supported downtown Jamaica with the Jamaica NOW Action Plan that included 26 investment projects to enhance the neighborhood of Jamaica. Additionally, Jamaica has seen significant growth in recent years benefiting from several new mixed used developments, such as Archer Green Apartments, Alvista I and II, The Crossing, The Tree of Life which includes several hundred units of housing, an almost completed co-working space at MODA, improved NYC Select Bus Service, several new hotels, improved Wi-Fi connections, a transportation study, increased dining establishments, new stores like Target, Burlington, Urban fashions, Urban Gifts and more.

Jamaica is part of the JFK Airport village and it serves as a gateway to New York City with the LIRR Headquarters and Air Train Station located at Sutphin Boulevard and Archer Avenue Station, which means it needs an organization that can match that growth.

I am here to say that Queens Borough President Richards wholeheartedly supports the expansion of the Sutphin Blvd BID. Expansion of the BID has the support of the community leaders, and expansion of the BID will allow it to best serve the larger business community in the neighborhood of Jamaica.

Thank you.

**Testimony of I. Daneek Miller before the Committee on Finance**

*Sutphin Boulevard BID Extension (Jamaica BIDs Unification) – Introduction 103  
Thursday, April 7, 10:00am – Hybrid Council, Council Chambers*

Greetings Chair Brannan and Members of the Finance Committee. I am I. Daneek Miller, past Council Member for the 27<sup>th</sup> District that includes Downtown Jamaica, and it is my honor to come before this Council and Committee today.

I am here to testify in support of unifying the three Jamaica-area BIDs, technically as an extension of the Sutphin Boulevard BID to take in the areas encompassed by the Jamaica Center and 165<sup>th</sup> Street Mall special assessment districts.

This proposal is the culmination of eight-plus years of work between SBS, Jamaica Now, elected officials, businesses and community members. It's also the next step in the renaissance of Downtown Jamaica. The unification of the Jamaica BIDs will complement the work we've begun, including developing thousands of new affordable housing units, investing millions into York College and a new Jamaica Bus Depot, and pushing for the enclosure and removal of waste by rail.

Decades ago shoppers from across the City and surrounding areas flocked to Jamaica for destinations such as Gertz, Mays and Macy's. In the time since then, we've been inundated with discount businesses, many who fail to reflect and invest in our community. Their merchandise spills out into the street over broken and uneven sidewalks. Sanitation and safety concerns remain prevalent, and therefore it's no surprise that even local residents chose to take their business out to Long Island or online.

However, we have a chance to turn this situation around. By creating one unified and therefore more efficient Jamaica BID, we will be able to streamline services and reinvest savings to create a better commercial corridor. This includes hiring additional staff for sanitation and grant writing, allocating BID board seats for community board representation, and developing a unified business and branding strategy to advocate for Jamaica.

The status-quo is not working. The current Sutphin Boulevard and 165<sup>th</sup> Street entities have been out of compliance with BID law for years. As such, their boards are unable to vote on the matter before us today, let alone properly service their boundaries. Meanwhile the Jamaica Center BID, by far the largest of the three, is drowning under archaic 1970s insurance obligations and is in financial turmoil.

I thank you for your time today, and also to Speaker Adams, who spearheaded this proposal while in leadership at Jamaica Now and Community Board 12. I trust that this Committee and Council will see the importance of supporting this proposal and also the dangers of inaction. Thank you for your consideration and I urge you to vote in favor of Introduction 103.



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY FROM MELVA M. MILLER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,  
ASSOCIATION FOR A BETTER NEW YORK (ABNY), INC.  
SUBMITTED TO CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF FINANCE REGARDING JAMAICA BID UNIFICATION  
(BDQ SUTPHIN BOULEVARD BID EXPANSION)**

April 7, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Melva M. Miller, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Association for a Better New York (ABNY), Inc.

I have spent nearly 20 years working to make Jamaica a vibrant, economically inclusive, and beautiful downtown for those who live, work, and visit the area. Throughout my career, I have seen commercial districts across the city—with less access to public transportation, less cultural and shopping offerings, and less public and civic institutions—achieve better quality job and small business support, better commercial growth and economic development, and improved livability through quality-of-life enhancements, all due to well-organized, well-resourced, on-the-ground organizations. Such results could be attained by an organization that represents ALL of Downtown Jamaica.

A well-resourced organization would achieve economies of scale with infrastructure, technology, and staffing to ensure efficiency and allow the organization to devote more resources directly to neighborhood improvements. I, at one time, underestimated the benefits of a unified larger structure with more influence and more engagement from Downtown Jamaica stakeholders. As Executive Director of the Sutphin Boulevard BID, I found that it was difficult for my small BID to partner with nearby institutions and anchors with adequate influence to capitalize on synergies and like-minded missions to strengthen the downtown area. Partnering presents opportunities to streamline and co-promote business support services to ensure all existing and new downtown businesses are given an opportunity to prosper.

In addition, neighborhood branding authentic to Downtown Jamaica is desperately needed. Economic development practitioners know that to attract visitors and potential businesses, you must clearly articulate a neighborhood brand. That is difficult to do when Downtown Jamaica is divided into subdistricts with little coordination, insufficient marketing support, and inconsistent branding. By consolidating marketing efforts under a single brand, it would be easier to draw attention to the community's unique assets and create a positive image for visitors and potential businesses.

Consolidation is a time intensive endeavor and depends on consistent follow up and relationship-building. That is why these efforts must be adequately staffed and managed in order to succeed. A

larger BID would have the resources to hire staff solely focused on improving the tenant mix in the downtown core.

Of course, for all businesses, a clean and safe environment is essential. While the existing BIDs do a commendable job in trying to address grime and crime, these issues are no match for resource-strapped organizations. A larger organization may be able to better mitigate quality-of-life issues and have the heft to hold City agencies accountable.

I firmly believe for the betterment of downtown that one corridor should not compete for investment with another corridor only blocks away. Rather, Downtown Jamaica should compete with other regional business districts, such as Queens Center, Green Acres, and Roosevelt Field, and capitalize on the thousands of passengers who disembark from the AirTrain.

Although Downtown Jamaica has made tremendous progress in recent years, there is still much work to be done. Now is the time to unify the BIDs under the Downtown Jamaica umbrella to help position downtown for a robust economic recovery post-COVID. The residents of Jamaica deserve a better downtown! I encourage the City Council to support unification because I truly believe that the whole is greater than the sum of all parts.

Thank you so much for your consideration.



Downtown Jamaica  
Hearing Talking Points  
Brigit Pinnell

Hi, thank you for this opportunity to speak today.

I was Executive Director of the Jamaica Center Improvement Assoc. from 2008 through 2010. Without hesitation, I can say that my greatest concern was the issue of sidewalk pavers and the associated revenues that were diverted from much-needed programs and services to cover the growing costs of maintenance.

In 2009, I began raising this issue in earnest with my Board, local council members, SBS, EDC, DOT, and the Greater Jamaica Development Corp. These paver expenses will only increase. Jamaica Center alone has two miles of pavers that are nearly fifty years old. The growing age of the pavers and the sheer size of the district makes this unsustainable. I know that not only from my time at Jamaica Center, but also having worked at one of the only other SADs in NYC - the Fulton Mall Improvement Association in downtown Brooklyn.

I worked at Fulton Mall from 2005-2008. It, too, had sidewalk pavers and, as a SAD, the liability that came with it. The organization had struggled financially due to the exponentially growing expense of not only maintenance, but also the significant amount of staff time needed to deal with the numerous trip and fall cases. As a result, Fulton Mall was limited, budgetwise, in providing the programs and services that were needed by the district. Fulton Mall joined with the MetroTech BID and I cannot emphasize enough the benefits this partnership had on my organization. Fulton Mall was much smaller, budget-wise, than MetroTech. But with shared overhead costs, and a larger team, Fulton Mall reaped the benefits. We were able to execute new marketing and retail outreach programs as well as advocate and secure city resources.

This is why I know this proposal is the right choice for downtown Jamaica. It addresses the two great challenges for the district - it ends the special assessment sidewalk liability that has negatively impacted the community for decades, redirecting this large expense back into programs and services; while also providing economies of scale. The increased leverage, cost savings and creation of a unified effort to spur economic development for downtown Jamaica cannot be understated.



### Submitted Testimony from Jamaica Center BID Constituents

#### **Michael Hirschhorn, Board President and Property Owner—Jamaica Center BID**

My name is Michael Hirschhorn and I am a long-standing property owner in the heart of Jamaica Avenue. My building is 161-21 Jamaica Avenue, which has been home to two popular and family-friendly sit-down restaurants. Soon, Health First insurance will become a ground floor business tenant, ideally bringing more foot traffic to the area.

I have served as the President of the Board of the Jamaica Center BID for nearly a dozen years. I am proud of our organization's efforts to remove what is likely over a half million bags of litter from the corridor, and thousands of incidents of graffiti during my tenure. Our BID has served as a longstanding advocate for our businesses, and a partner to the City, in creating a welcoming commercial corridor.

We want to nurture a thriving downtown... and by partnering with our peers on Sutphin and 165<sup>th</sup> Street, I believe that we can.

In addition to serving as the President of the Jamaica Center BID, I am a longstanding Board member of five additional BIDs: the 34<sup>th</sup> Street Partnership in Midtown, 125<sup>th</sup> Street BID in Harlem; the HUB 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue BID and Fordham Road BID, both in the Bronx; and the Fulton Street Mall which is managed by the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership.

Given my participation on other BID boards, I see firsthand how our organization is severely limited in what it can accomplish due to escalating administrative expenses, and how we could benefit if we all operated under a single organization.

As my Executive Director Jennifer Furioli has put it, we are constantly trying to quell a tsunami of issues with a bare-bones staff and duct tape budget. This year, 25-30% of our operating budget is allocated to liability insurance expenses (including deductibles) alone. In FY22 we expect to pay \$222,905 for liability insurance and deductibles, (or more depending on legal outcomes!) For context, the Downtown Alliance in lower Manhattan, which has a \$20 million budget, the largest in the country, only pays \$113,000/year.

This issue is unsustainable for Jamaica Center. That is why this past summer the Board approved a resolution to begin the dissolution process if there is no change to the status quo. That means no more sanitation, graffiti removal, marketing, or programming on Jamaica Avenue.

Much of the liability cost is related to the decorative pavers that you see on Jamaica Avenue. By unifying under Sutphin's legal structure as is proposed today, the liability would be eliminated, and the new BID **would not** have any legal exposure that Jamaica Center is now contending with. Insurance costs for a



single BID would be reduced by hundreds of thousands of dollars annually, freeing up money to be spent where it belongs and where it was always intended: improving Downtown Jamaica.

We could save even more money by eventually combining office space and achieving economies of scale on significant contracts such as sanitation services.

Just imagine what could we do to improve downtown Jamaica with an additional \$100,000, 150,000 or 200,000 in annual savings? I am certain that working alongside our partner property owners and small businesses on Sutphin Boulevard and 165<sup>th</sup> Street we would easily come to shared conclusions on how we could work together to better enhance our district.

The 3 BIDs have many of the same problems, and we share many of the same opportunities as well. That is why I support unification and believe the Community Board should endorse the proposal.

**Norman Fairweather, Board Treasurer and Property Owner --Jamaica Center BID**

My name is Norman Fairweather and I am the longstanding Treasurer of the Jamaica Center Business Improvement District.

I joined the Jamaica Center BID's Board as a property owner under my title of Chief Operations Officer for the First Presbyterian Church in Jamaica, which serves a multi-cultural congregation with congregants from over 35 birth nations in the heart of Jamaica, Queens.

Today I now serve as the Vice Chair of the church's First Jamaica Community and Urban Development Corporation. First Presbyterian Church also owns several properties along the north side of Jamaica Avenue from 163-19 Jamaica Avenue to 163-33. We are located within the heart of the Jamaica Center BID district, and just a few minutes walk from the 165<sup>th</sup> Street BID corridor.

As an institution dedicated to feeding the spirits and enhancing the lives of our congregants and our neighbors, I see the value in the public service and improvements that our local BIDs attempt to provide. As a property owner located just adjacent to 165<sup>th</sup> Street and Jamaica Avenue, I also see the challenges with which our community's BIDs must contend: pervasive crime and safety issues, including, but not limited to organized shoplifting and drug sales; outdated streetscape and City infrastructure; and struggling small businesses create more work than there are resources for these small nonprofit organizations.

As a professional that has dedicated my career to the responsible fiscal management of charitable causes, it makes sense to me that these organizations would consolidate to achieve economy of scale and allocate financial resources towards mission-driven activities that directly correlate to the safety, cleanliness and beautification of the district, rather than overhead administrative costs.



We can all do better when we strategize and work together. I am in support of consolidating with my neighboring BIDs.

**Samantha Champaigne, Business Owner and Board Member-- Jamaica Center BID**

My name is Samantha Champaigne and I am a merchant tenant representative on the Jamaica Center BID's Board of Directors. I own and operate two Golden Krust restaurants on the Avenue—the first located at Parsons, a few steps down from the movie theater, and the second at 165-10 Jamaica Avenue, in the heart of the Jamaica Center BID and just a minute's walk from the 165<sup>th</sup> Street BID boundaries.

Over the years, The Jamaica Center BID has been a resource that helps us navigate doing business in downtown Jamaica. More recently they have helped our business community advocate for better broadband quality and ensured that our opinion has been heard regarding the new busway and construction effects on business pertaining to the slated redevelopment of Parsons Public Space into a new Plaza. The BID also provided helpful Covid closure and reopening information during the height of the pandemic to our business community and of course continues to provide the daily cleaning support that we all value.

But because I serve on the Jamaica Center BID board, I also understand how limited the organization currently is in terms of capacity, mostly due to escalating administrative costs, notably insurance. Our leadership is competent and our Board is heavily engaged, but the current budget allows for very little wiggle room and consumes a lot of the executive director's time to resolve crises/issues; time that could be better allocated to street and business conditions.

I am also aware of the ever-escalating quality of life and safety challenges with which the Jamaica Center BID, our neighboring 165<sup>th</sup> and Sutphin Boulevard BIDs, and our full business community must contend. As an accountant, and an owner of two small storefront businesses that collectively employ several dozen people, it makes perfect business sense to me that these three BIDs, with such similar missions, the same type of contract with the City of New York, and many of the same subcontractors—all located within the same small walkable area-- would reconsolidate into one organization. The savings of the combined organizations would be significant—for programming purposes, but also for the rate-payers. It seems to be a case where nearly everybody would benefit.

A consolidation also makes sense from a branding perspective. Consumers don't think of shopping districts in terms of arbitrary and artificial BID boundaries. Doesn't it make sense to work together as a community to market this area as Downtown Jamaica to shoppers and other business investors instead of having three different marketing programs?

I am hopeful that this initiative will be successful, as I believe our community only stands to benefit from the end result.

## **Justin Rodgers**

### **Interim President and CEO**

#### **Greater Jamaica Development Corporation**

- Hello, for those who don't know me, my name is Justin Rodgers, and I'm the interim President & CEO of Greater Jamaica Development Corporation, or GJDC for short.
- GJDC is a community-building organization that plans, promotes, coordinates and advances responsible development to revitalize Jamaica and strengthen the region.
- We own and operate several commercial projects including small office buildings, a food market, parking facilities serving Downtown Jamaica and have a co-working space and business training facility currently under development
- We also administer a small business loan fund, restaurant incentives, government programs in industrial retention and commercial revitalization, and a host of other programs and projects designed to improve the quality of life, general marketing and perception of Downtown Jamaica.
- Although Downtown Jamaica has made a lot of progress in recent years, there is still much work to be done.
- That is why I believe having a larger, better-resourced, on-the-ground organization that represents ALL of downtown Jamaica, is critical to helping Downtown meet its potential for transformation.
- A single organization would achieve economies of scale with their infrastructure, technology, and staffing that would make it more efficient, and allow it to devote more resources directly to neighborhood improvements.
- It would be easier for GJDC to partner with a single BID to better capitalize on our synergies and like-minded desire to strengthen the downtown area. We could streamline and co-promote business support services to ensure all existing and new Downtown businesses are given an opportunity to prosper.
- Economic development practitioners know that to attract visitors and potential businesses, you must clearly articulate a neighborhood brand. That is difficult to do when downtown Jamaica is divided into sub-districts with little coordination, insufficient marketing support, and inconsistent branding.
- By consolidating marketing efforts under a Downtown Jamaica brand, it would be easier to draw attention to our community's unique assets that differentiate Jamaica from other communities, which would create a positive image for visitors and potential businesses looking to locate downtown.

- Given my first-hand experience in retail attraction I can tell you it is a time intensive endeavor and depends on consistent follow-up and relationship-building that does not yield efforts overnight. That is why these efforts must be adequately staffed and managed in order to succeed. A larger BID would have the resources to be able to hire staff that are solely focused on improving the tenant mix in the downtown core.
- Of course, for any new or existing businesses, they must have a clean and safe environment to be able to survive and thrive. Unfortunately, Downtown has had no shortage of quality-of-life issues as of late. While the existing BIDs do a commendable job in trying to address the crime and grime, these issues are no match for these resource-strapped organizations, and a larger organization may be able to better mitigate these issues and have the heft to hold city agencies accountable.
- I firmly believe for the betterment of Downtown that one corridor shouldn't be competing for investment with another corridor that is only blocks away. Rather, Downtown Jamaica should be competing with other regional business districts, Green Acres, Roosevelt Field, and capitalizing on the thousands of passengers who disembark from the AirTrain.
- Now is the time to unify the BIDs under the Downtown Jamaica umbrella to help position Downtown for a robust economic recovery post-COVID. I encourage the Community Board to support unification because I truly believe that "the whole is greater than the sum of all parts"

I am in favor of the Sutphin Boulevard BID Expansion. I was the Executive Director of the Sutphin Boulevard BID for 7 years (2008 – 2015). During my tenure, I worked closely with the Jamaica Center SAD and 165th Street Mall SAD (neighboring BIDs). Some of the programs that took place would have been impossible without the joint resources of these organizations. Unifying creates a major economic development stakeholder with a strong voice for business owners in Downtown Jamaica.

Simone Price