

Calvin T. Brown Statement on Proposed Flatbush Avenue BID Extension
Before City Council Finance Committee
April 27, 2023

Good morning, Chair Brannan and members of the Finance Committee. I am Calvin T. Brown, Deputy Commissioner of Neighborhood Development at the Department of Small Business Services (SBS). I am joined by Emily Edwards, Executive Director of BID Development and Leslie Velazquez, Director of BID Development and Legislation. We are here to testify in support of the extension of the Flatbush Avenue Business Improvement District (BID) in Brooklyn.

At SBS, we are working hard to open doors for New Yorkers across the five boroughs – focusing on creating stronger businesses, connecting New Yorkers to good jobs, and fostering thriving neighborhoods. We believe that the vitality of the City’s commercial corridors is a key part of achieving this goal, and BIDs have been valuable and proven partners in small business support, neighborhood revitalization, and economic development across all five boroughs. City services, which by law cannot be reduced because of the existence of a BID, are only supplemented through the BIDs delivery of services and improvements in their respective districts.

In addition to our role overseeing and supporting the City’s existing network of 76 BIDs, SBS also supervises the BID formation and expansion process, serving as an advisor and resource for communities interested in developing or expanding BIDs. We are careful to ensure that each steering committee we work with adheres to our planning process and policies, solicits robust community input, and performs extensive outreach to collect and demonstrate broad-based support across all stakeholder groups.

Moreover, we are cognizant of the unique nature of each community we assist, and aim to empower local stakeholders to make determinations on (1) proposed services, (2) boundaries, and (3) budget size that best suit their community’s needs, appetite, and ability to pay assessments. While we always impart strong planning principles and share our data and best practices from across the BID network when working with any BID formation and expansion effort, we recognize that the

power and effectiveness of BIDs rests in their unmatched understanding of local needs and issues.

There are numerous benefits to the Flatbush Avenue-Church Avenue BIDs merger. Currently, the two BIDs, which meet at the intersection of Flatbush and Church avenues, share the same administrative staff, office space, supplemental sanitation among other programming and services. The merger will allow for a single unified organization and budget; streamline programming, messaging, and decision making. Thus, enabling operational and cost efficiencies across the organizations.

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

FINAL Testimony by Lauren Elvers Collins, rev. (4/24/23)

Good morning. My name is Lauren Elvers Collins and I'm the Executive Director of the Church Ave. District Management Association and the Flatbush Ave. District Management Association, dba the Church Ave. Business Improvement District and Flatbush Ave. Business Improvement District ("the DMAs"). I've been with Church Ave since Dec. 2010 and with Flatbush Ave. since Dec. 2013. I appear on behalf of both organizations to request approval of the Flatbush Ave. DMA's expansion and Church Ave. DMA's dissolution as described by SBS, leading to the formation of the combined organization to be known as the Church Avenue/Flatbush Avenue business improvement district. Please note that I will refer to it as a merger since that best reflects how it would work operationally.

The DMAs cover roughly 1.5 miles of commercial and mixed use properties on Church Ave. from Coney Island Ave. to Flatbush Ave., and on Flatbush Ave. from Parkside Ave. to Cortelyou Rd. Our total number of businesses constantly changes as businesses divide, combine, or are torn down for construction but right now, we represent a combined 494 businesses and 282 properties. The boundaries remain the same and on April 14, 2023, we mailed out notification about this hearing to our combined list of 1,528 businesses, property owners, and residents.

In 2020, the two boards voted to merge pending board approval of the details (Flatbush on Nov. 9 and Church on Aug. 4), formed a Steering Committee which started meeting in April 2021, and completed the final votes in summer of 2022 (Flatbush on June 29 and Church on July 17).

This merger will be a mostly administrative change, codifying the way we have already been operating for several years. We share staff, office space, and manage most of our programs jointly. The proposed total assessment would equal the two current assessments combined (\$203,000 and 386,000 = \$589,000). This would place us roughly in the middle of the 76 BIDs operating in NYC (which have annual assessments ranging from \$73,392 to \$20,143,857).

Why merge?

1. **Saved Staff Time:** We estimate that staff spend an estimated 725 hours/year doing work a second time (maintaining two social media accounts on each platform, two QuickBooks accounts, entering compliance paperwork twice, etc.). This newly available staff time would allow us to provide more assistance to BID businesses and properties, establish more partnerships, and apply for additional grants and funding.

2. **Economies of Scale:** While some costs are shared, each BID pays for an annual audit, expenses to hold two annual meetings, separate insurance policies, etc.

3. **A Unified Message:** Bringing both BIDs under one budget and with unified decision-making will give the district more consistent programming and messaging that crosses the barriers between the two districts.

The BIDs' Steering Committee and boards held meetings to discuss services, which would continue without any reduction in services and with added flexibility to pivot within each service area. The proposed new public-facing name would be the Church Flatbush Community Alliance, which reflects our increased work with community partners on events and other initiatives (Back-to-School, planning with the local school district, daffodil planting). Services would be:

Supplemental Sanitation (\$210,448)

Public Safety (\$67,466)

Marketing (\$107,550)

Holiday Lights (\$50,400)

Econ. Dev. (\$43,895)

Admin. (\$109,241)

We have the support of our BID members, both of our community boards (9 and 14), our Council Member Rita Joseph, and we are grateful to Council Member Farah Louis who spoke in favor of this proposal at the Council's Finance Committee on 4/11/23. Thank you for your consideration and I welcome any questions you might have.

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/27/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Fabiola Santos-Gaerlan

Address: 147th St. Brooklyn, NY 11215

I represent: Homebrew Dog Clubhouse

Address: 1113 Church Avenue Brooklyn

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 958-A

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/27th

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Calvin Brown, Deputy Commissioner

Address: 1 Liberty Plaza

I represent: Dept. of Small Biz Services

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/28/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Collins

Address: Reeve Place, Brooklyn, NY 11218

I represent: Church Ave BID/DMA + Flatbush Ave BID/DMA

Address: 495 Flatbush Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11225

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms