

Minutes of the Economic Development Committee for Bronx Community Board 8

Tuesday, March 4, 2025

Meeting was held at Blackstone Bar & Grill, 3713 Riverdale Avenue, Bronx, NY 10463

Committee Members in attendance (8): Oscar Martinez (Chair), Constance Barnes-Watson (Vice-Chair), Nick Fazio, Angel Ortega, Ashley Medina (Community Committee Member), Jyll Townes, Caesar Tobar Acosta, Karen Walker

Absent Committee Members (1): Dr Julia Gomez

Guests/ Attendees: Royce and father

Chair called the meeting to order at 7:20 PM

Chair's Report:

Oscar shared that he would not be seeking re-election to the position as Chair, and that he would be stepping down this year from this role and the Board due to increasing work responsibilities stated that he would continue to work on the projects pending through the end of the month and would officially announce his departure at the next full Board meeting.

Local Business Report: Blackstone Bar & Grill:

A representative from Blackstone Bar & Grill spoke to the Committee about the pending Dining Out NYC application, which is due 3/26/25. Applications are sent to the Community Board for review and commentary, which is submitted to NYC DOT. The representative shared the following: Blackstone has been utilizing the outdoor dining for the past four years and it has been well received by the community. They've experienced a decline in business this winter and anticipate the outdoor seating will help boost sales. The street seating will include six to eight seats in a 12-foot-long space. There are two existing tables on the sidewalk closest to the building which seat eight. A large percentage of people in the community have expressed to the owners that they prefer outdoor seating. She also noted that the new license application is different from last years, mostly due to restrictions regarding the size of outdoor dining space. The Committee discussed and asked questions about the size of the space, parking, and the differences in the applications.

Oscar presented the vote to approve or deny support for the application: 1 abstention (Karen Walker), the remainder were in favor of supporting the application. Oscar will type up the formal resolution and send to the district to present to the full Board.

Application is approved:

In Favor (7): O. Martinez (Chair), C. Barnes-Watson (Vice-Chair), N. Fazio, A. Ortega, A. Medina (Community Committee Member), J. Townes, C. Tobar Acosta
Opposed (0):
Abstain (1): Karen Walker

Budget FY27 Priorities:

We discussed last year's budget requests which included the following Expense items:

- Increasing funding for SBS' Business Express Services Team (BEST) outreach specialists.
- Increasing funding for additional SBS workshops.
- Increasing funding for the SBS Emergency team.
- Increasing funding for the Commercial Leasing Assistance Program (CLAP).

We also discussed capital expenses from last year, which included the "Bronx Bucks" loyalty program and mobile application. We discussed the pros and cons of the app, and ways we might be able to offer more support to local small businesses. Jyll noted Bella Notte as an example of a local small business that had been in the community for many years, attempted to expand their business, and the pandemic hit hard, and they didn't recover and ended up shuttering the business last year.

Oscar will contact Angel Pagan (SBS BEST) to discuss top priorities and inform the committee.

Betty Campbell-Adams Award:

We've received three nominations and the applications will close on March 21, 2025. The Committee decided to wait until the application closed to review and will discuss at the April 1, 2025, meeting.

Commercial Corridor Walk:

Oscar noted that the Riverdale strip where Blackstone is located had several businesses and could be a potential option. Nick mentioned that there was a walk through this strip last year. Oscar suggested we visit the Kingsbridge Corridor from Aqueduct to Bailey Avenues, and invite the CLAP team, SBS members, and the Kingsbridge Merchant's Association. He will reach out to all the agencies to invite them to join us. The Committee discussed dates and agreed on Thursday, April 17, 2025, from 3pm-5pm; a time that there would be less foot traffic from the many schools that are in the area.

Approval of February 4, 2025, Meeting minutes – unanimously approved

In Favor (7) O. Martinez, C. Barnes-Watson, N. Fazio, A. Ortega, J. Townes, A. Medina, C. Acosta
Opposed (0)
Abstain (0)

8:05 pm meeting adjourned

Submitted by Constance Barnes-Watson