

Minutes of the Economic Development Committee for Bronx Community Board 8 Thursday, June 22, 2023; In-person meeting held at Community Board 8, 5676 Riverdale Ave, Bronx, NY 10471.

Committee Members in attendance: Nick Fazio (chair); Julia Gomez; Constance Barnes-Watson; Miguel Matos

Guests: Tim Gamory, CEO of Elevate Digital, LLC

Community Board 8 Members: None

Community Members: Brett Costello

I. Chair Nick Fazio called the meeting to order @ 7:30

II. Betty Campbell-Adams Most Valuable Merchant Award (BCA MVM)

A. N. Fazio described the award and noted that CB 8's Economic Development Committee seeks to identify merchants within our community that have worked to enhance economic growth, improve community relations, and increase civic participation. He stated

that Betty Campbell Adams was an iconic entrepreneur devoted to our community's betterment. By honoring outstanding local businesses, CB 8's Economic Development Committee (the Committee) aims to celebrate Betty and elevate her example for other entrepreneurs to follow.

- B. The Committee discussed the nominee and agreed to name the Tree Army this year's award recipient. N. Fazio stated that the Tree Army is a veteran-owned local business founded and operated by Nicholas and Joelle Lynch of Jerome Park Village. The Tree Army refurbished (and continues to maintain) the flag pole on 239th Street near the Bell Tower and the adjoining Veterans Park. They have also deployed crew members and equipment to numerous disaster-relief efforts, including Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. N. Fazio thanked Barbara Zentner for nominating the Tree Army for the BCA MVM Award.
- C. N. Fazio asked the Committee to amend the BCA Nomination Form to state that businesses should be "For Profit" establishments to qualify for the award. The committee members agreed, concluding that the BCA MVM Award intends to recognize "for-profit" companies that compete successfully in the free market and go above and beyond their stated missions by making significant contributions to the community. N. Fazio said he would update the nomination form and submit it to the Board Office.

III. Small Business Resource Network (SBRN)

- A. Miquel Matos provided the Committee and attendees with an update on the impending cuts to the SBRN program. He thanked N. Fazio and Chair Spalter for sending a letter of support for the SBRN to City Council Speaker Adams and other City Council Members, including CM Amanda Farias and CM Julie Menin.
- B. The committee members discussed other city funding for small business support services.

- IV. Business Owners Report: Tim Gamory, Elevate Digital LLC (<https://www.elevatedigital.nyc/>).
- A. Mr. Gamory stated that he was a long-time Bronx resident and developed the Bronx Exchange for the Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative (BCDI) as a business-to-business marketplace to source locally and find resources such as financial services and access to capital. Mr. Gamory stated that his latest initiative, Elevate Digital, LLC, is developing a business accelerator called “Syngine Platform” (<https://syngine.io/>) to organize resources and service providers for small businesses. The platform is modeled on Charity Navigator’s platform but focuses on women and minority-owned firms in the Bronx. The Hearst Corporation partially funds the business accelerator aspect of the initiative. Mr. Gamory indicated that he is currently piloting the program and has partnered with over 40 Bronx-based businesses. Five participating companies will receive \$15,000 in grant capital and strategic and tactical support to help businesses expand. Other supporters include M and T Bank, Mercy College, Fordham University, and the Bronx Zoo, according to Mr. Gamory.
 - B. N. Fazio asked who was funding the capital. Mr. Gamory said that Hearst is providing the funding. The plan will expand the accelerator to include other private sector companies and community partners.
- V. Chair’s Report:
- A. N. Fazio discussed the Kingsbridge BID’s vacancy report. According to their data, there are only 17 vacancies out of 197 storefront establishments with the BID.
 - B. The Committee discussed vacancies in other areas within Community District 8. N. Fazio stated that most of the vacancies on Johnson Avenue were rented and waiting for property owners or businesses to complete renovations. He also reported that of the 23 local firms that the Committee visited during the W. Kingsbridge Road walk-through, they counted three vacancies. One of the vacant storefronts was rented and undergoing renovations for new tenants.

- C. N. Fazio stated that he attended the Executive Committee meeting on June 7, where committee members discussed Expense and Capital Budget Item Requests for FY 2025. The capital items the Committee recommended included the Bronx Bucks App concept and Argus cameras in various commercial corridors such as Baily Avenue and 238th Street.
- D. Julia Gomez suggested asking the Budget Committee to revise the current master list to include SBRN funding. N. Fazio said he would find out from the Budget Committee if that were possible despite it being past the deadline.
- E. N. Fazio recapped the Committee's initiatives and accomplishments for the 2022-2023 calendar year. He thanked the committee members for their contributions and dedication to the community. He also thanked the outgoing Committee Vice-Chair, Moses Esema, for his hard work and commitment to the Committee's short and long-term objectives.
- F. In closing, N. Fazio thanked Chair Spalter for supporting the Committee and her outstanding leadership as CB 8's chair.

VI. Outstanding Business/ New Business

A. Outstanding Business: None

B. New Business:

1. The Committee discussed possible initiatives for the following year's Economic Development Committee.
2. N. Fazio suggested a commercial corridor walk-through and clean-up on Johnson Ave and West 238th Street in collaboration with students from RKA.
3. Julia Gomez suggested creating a resource guide for small businesses that committee members could distribute during future commercial corridor walk-through events.

VII. Approval of Minutes

A. The Committee unanimously approved the meeting minutes from Tuesday, March 7, 2023, and Thursday, May 11, 2023.

VIII. The Committee adjourned the meeting at 8:28 PM.

Nick Fazio, Chair Economic Development Committee, submitted the minutes on Tuesday, June 26, 2023.

