



Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District  
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## **FY 2009 GOALS AND ACHIEVEMENTS REPORT**

### **Section I. District Background and Review of Fiscal Year 2009 Activities**

#### **A. Neighborhood Needs Assessment**

The mission of the Pitkin Avenue BID is to retain, stabilize and expand business and opportunity through providing supplemental services and marketing to the BID area.

In FY 2009, the tenants remained stable. The BID did, however, lose two longtime retailers as they were asked to relocate for the redevelopment of the Loews Pitkin Theater, and were unable to find comparable space they could afford despite the intervention of the BID on their behalf. Four new businesses opened on the street: two discount stores, one women's clothing store, and a fast-food restaurant. These businesses were similar to the existing makeup of the street.

There is one new development in the area, the Beacon. This is an affordable housing project by the New York City Department of Housing, Preservation and Development. It will be completed in FY 2010, and will contain 166 apartments.

The Loews Pitkin Theater, located at Pitkin Avenue and Legion Street, was slated to be redeveloped to contain two large retail spaces (approximately 20,000 square feet a piece) and 66 affordable housing units. This construction project has been stalled due to lack of funding, however the existing retail tenants were already relocated, meaning the building is now totally vacant.

The main problem with Pitkin Avenue is perception. It is perceived by people to be dangerous and run down. This is something The BID is working on changing through our maintenance program, where we provide additional sanitation services. The BID is also seeking to change the perception of Pitkin to one that is more community oriented and safe. By holding special events on the street, painting murals, and reimbursing merchants for storefront improvements, we hope to change the overall image of the avenue.

#### **B. Review of Accomplishments**

*Note: Although no formal list of goals was submitted in last year's report, when the Board of Directors of the BID hired new Executive Director Kat Taylor Rutkin, a list of duties was presented to Ms. Rutkin. For the purpose of this report, that list has been condensed into categories and will serve as the goals of the BID for FY2009.*

### **GOALS FOR FY 2009**

The goals for FY 2009 revolved around getting the BID back on track with its mission to better the overall economic health of the avenue. The top five goals are as follows:

- Increase marketing efforts and create a public presence for the Pitkin Avenue BID
- Beautify and maintain Pitkin Avenue
- Increase interaction and communication between merchants, Board, and Small Business Services
- Expand and increase the BID budget
- Strengthen the BID leadership and plan for its future

### **ACHIEVEMENTS OF FY2009**

Each of the above listed goals was approached in a number of ways. Because Pitkin Avenue has many unique strengths and weaknesses, some of the efforts were more conventional than others. Overall, the neighborhood was wonderfully receptive to some of the new ideas, and a sense of excitement was generated on the Avenue around the activities of the BID. The work of the BID to reach the FY2009 goals is outlined below.

#### **GOAL: Increase marketing efforts and create a public presence for the Pitkin Avenue BID**

The marketing and public presence goals of the BID were approached in about five different ways: through the internet, BID banners, BID newsletter, special events, and some holiday-based marketing campaigns.

**Website/Internet:** A new blog and FaceBook page were created for the BID. This will allow the staff to make quick, in-house, real-time changes to the web presence of the BID. This type of media is also more conducive to reaching a larger, younger audience. There are many young people in the area that would be much more likely to follow the BID on FaceBook than visit the BID website.

**Banners:** In February, the BID Board voted to hold a banner contest to engage local youth in creating a design to be displayed on the banners mounted throughout the district. In May the Board selected two winners from a dozen entries; these designs are on the back of the new banners. A third design was selected to become a mural, which was painted on the side of a building located on Herzl Street and Pitkin Avenue.

**Newsletter:** We issued two newsletters this year, and are on track for a quarterly newsletter to be issued (winter, spring, summer, fall.) The newsletters are distributed

to merchants and the board and posted on our website. They contain news of BID events, resources for small businesses, and stories of local interest.

Events: The board had identified a desire to hold street fairs on Pitkin Avenue. The Mayor has, unfortunately, declared a moratorium on street fairs for streets that have not previously held such events. The BID looked into other events that could draw the community to Pitkin Avenue. The BID held a block party and mural dedication in June, and planned a series of street events for September. Although they were originally supposed to be held in May of 2009, permits were not obtained in time and the events were pushed back to FY 2010. The September events are being held in conjunction with the Department of Transportation as part of their Summer Street program and are envisioned as community-oriented street fairs, like long block parties, on a closed portion of Pitkin Avenue. During these days, merchants can use the entire sidewalk to display their merchandise- a concern they had repeatedly expressed to the BID, as Pitkin Avenue is normally a zero-visibility zone, which does not allow sidewalk displays of merchandise.

Holiday Promotions: The BID created several marketing opportunities around the holidays. Flyers were printed and distributed for special sales at Valentine's Day and Easter. Easter sales featured an "Easter Egg Hunt", where shoppers looked for special egg posters in the windows of stores that were having special sales. Giveaways sponsored by the BID included special "I ♥ Pitkin Avenue" buttons at Valentine's Day and flowers for Mother's Day to promote our local florist. There was a Father's Day t-shirt making craft at the June Block party.

### **GOAL: Beautify and maintain Pitkin Avenue**

The Board of the BID required that the Avenue be well maintained, and wanted to encourage participation in the Façade Program, which reimburses merchants who make approved storefront improvements. The appearance of the Avenue has been maintained through supplemental trash pickup and by our graffiti removal program.

Graffiti removal: The BID solicited bids for a new graffiti contract after it was discovered that the old company, Exclusive Powerwash, had gone out of business. After getting proposals from three companies, the board voted to enter into a contract with CitySolve. They did an initial cleaning of the avenue and come back as needed to assess the graffiti and remove it. So far they have done one initial cleaning and then come back once. Graffiti is not bad on the Avenue.

Sanitation: Midwood Development Corp handled Sanitation effectively through the year. The supervisor for the Pitkin Avenue crew, Florence Bennett, has been wonderful and accessible, and they were able to meet our requests for additional work, like the clearing of tree pits that were full of weeds, when asked. It is estimated that 1,456 trash bags were removed from Pitkin Avenue this year. Each bag holds 55 gallons of trash, for an estimated 80,080 gallons of trash removed.

Façade program: The Board has allotted \$25,000 of our annual budget for a matching grant façade program. This year two merchants took advantage of the program. The BID partnered with Norman Mintz to develop design concepts for the storefronts, which the merchants then carried out. The BID provides Mr. Mintz's services to the merchants free of charge, and the BID will reimburse half of the merchant expenses, up to \$5000 per merchant. Since the two storefronts have been completed, there has been more interest in the program from area merchants.

**GOAL: Increase interaction and communication between merchants, Board, and Small Business Services, and city agencies.**

Communication has been a longstanding issue for the Pitkin Avenue BID. It was an important goal in FY 2009 to increase communication between the BID and city agencies, stakeholders, and elected officials. This was accomplished as follows:

Media: Through the blog, FaceBook, and newsletters, The BID has greater communication with the local residents and merchants.

Merchant interaction: Merchants now see a BID employee almost every day on the avenue, and know to call or visit the office to reach someone.

Reports: Monthly reports to the Board and SBS keep everyone in the loop about what is going on on Pitkin Avenue.

City Agencies: The BID has been in contact with key people at DOT, SBS, Parks, EDC, BEDC and the Mayor's office to keep things on Pitkin Avenue running smoothly.

**GOAL: Expand and increase the BID budget**

The Pitkin Avenue BID has had an assessment of \$125,000 since it was created in 1993. The BID had attempted in previous years to increase this assessment, but a lack of leadership and follow through had made this impossible. In FY 2009, two approaches were taken to increase the budget.

Assessment Increase: The BID has submitted its first assessment increase request since it was formed. This has been submitted to SBS and has an approval letter from Councilwoman Mealy. This should go before the City Council this fall and if all goes well the BID should receive the increased assessment retroactively to the beginning of FY2010 after the council approval.

Apply for grants: The BID applied for an Avenue NYC Grant from Small Business Services this year, and was awarded a \$25,000 grant to conduct an economic development study in FY2010.

**GOAL: Strengthen the BID leadership and plan for its future**

One of the major problems of the BID has been a lack of consistent leadership and a small board that does not meet the minimum requirements. As such, the Board was interested in hiring a new Executive Director and growing the Board. The new director, Kat Taylor Rutkin, started working for the BID in January of 2009. The following approaches were taken to strengthen the leadership of the BID.

New board members: A new board member was identified in FY 2009. He is the owner of 1686 Pitkin Avenue, which houses a pizzeria (also owned by the new board member) that is just being reopened after a few years of being vacant.

Interns: The BID has two new interns in the BID office. Catesia Aiken is a high school student from East New York, who worked with us over the summer and now comes in several times a week. Katie Raffa is a student at Pace University majoring in Political Science, and works with us one to two days a week in exchange for experience and college credit. These interns take some of the work from the Executive Director to allow her to focus on some of the larger projects in the district.

Database of information: the BID received a \$25,000 grant from NYC Small Business Services for FY 2010 which will allow us to conduct a thorough economic development study on the avenue and have completely updated databases of existing businesses, vacancies, and area demographics, among others. This information, along with a procedure manual and binder of contracts will allow for continuity between directors in the future.

**C. Review of Activities Data**

See attached spreadsheets for a review of contracts and activities.

**Section II. Looking Ahead: Fiscal Year 2010 Goals**

**GOALS FOR FY 2010**

Building on the successes of FY 2009, the following goals have been identified for FY 2010.

- Continue to grow the Board and gain more community involvement.
- Partner with neighborhood institutions
- Grow and expand the façade program
- Conduct the Economic Development Study and apply the results to marketing efforts for the district in FY2011
- Hold more street events, sidewalk sales and holiday themed events to bring the neighborhood and merchants together.

**GOAL: Continue to grow the Board**

The BID plans to grow the board in the following ways:

- Form committees: The BID has already identified a group interested in working on safety issues to be part of a safety committee.
- Revamp meetings with “consent agendas” and other streamlining methods: by shortening our meeting times, we will be able to focus on training, presentations by other neighborhood groups, and other methods to allow the board and organization to grow.
- Hold elections for officers: The BID has not held elections in several years, and now that the board is growing, there will be more people to assume leadership roles.
- Form advisory committees: The BID would like to engage more of the local residents and merchants through advisory committees, which would meet at different times and focus solely on issues of interest to the members.

**GOAL: Partner with neighborhood institutions**

The BID has already established relationships with organizations such as Brownsville MultiService Center (BMS) and the Brownsville Recreation Center/Brownsville Partnership to become stronger and more effective in the neighborhood. The BID currently holds seats on their advisory committee of the Brownsville Partnership, and has been asked to join the advisory committee of BMS.

**GOAL: Grow and expand the façade program**

The BID plans to increase awareness of the façade program through marketing efforts including:

- Informational brochures: A brochure detailing the program will be created and printed
- Postcard marketing: Each merchant will be mailed a postcard with an overview of information on the program to increase the awareness of the availability of funds in a very concise manner.
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**GOAL: Conduct the Economic Development Study and apply the results to marketing efforts for the district in FY2011**

The BID plans to complete the economic development study as outlined in their Avenue NYC contract, and use the results for district marketing in FY 2011.

**GOAL: Hold more street events**

Sidewalk sales and holiday themed events are popular with the merchants and residents of the district, and they help to bring the neighborhood and merchants together. Three of these events, listed below, have already been planned. These will bring more foot traffic to the avenue as well as increase community involvement.

- Holiday tree lighting- December 4, 2009- Zion Triangle
- It's My Park Day- October 24, 2009- Zion Triangle

- Halloween parade –October 30, 2009, Pitkin Avenue from Mother Gaston Blvd. to Howard Avenue.

### Section III. Contracts

See the attached spreadsheet for contract information.

### Section IV. Organizational Information

The Pitkin Avenue BID employs one full-time employee, Executive Director Kat Taylor Rutkin. A part-time employee has been added for FY2010. The BID has also added an intern who works approximately one day a week in exchange for school credit.