

FLATBUSH *Life*

Apr. 29 - May 5, 2010

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Nostrand buses on fast track

BY HELEN KLEIN

By the middle of 2012, commuters who use the Nostrand Avenue bus could be barreling along the strip at a whopping 11 mph.

That's when the MTA plans to launch bus rapid transit on the avenue, with the goal of making riders' daily commutes less of a burden.

Currently, buses on the thoroughfare travel at about eight mph, said MTA representative Dominique McAfee during a meeting with Community Board 14's Transportation Committee at the board office at East 16th Street and Avenue H.

The BRT will replace the existing limited service on the B-44, and will run southbound on Nostrand Avenue and northbound on Rogers Avenue, said Robert Thompson, senior project manager for the Department of Transportation, which is working on

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Second-grader Emily Mosheyev will no longer be able to attend an after-school program at PS 197, one of nine Brooklyn programs shuttering next school year. Photo by Steve Solomonson

MIDDLE 'CLASS' ATTACK

School's too rich for programs

BY STEPHEN WITT

The city is shuttering a much-needed after-school program in East Flatbush because the neighborhood isn't deemed poor enough to justify its existence.

As a result, more than 200 students who use the Out-of-School Time

programs at PS 269 (on Nostrand Avenue between Foster and Farragut avenues) will be left to fend for themselves beginning next year.

"I don't know what I'll do without it," said Manuela Vega, who has two of her four kids in the program. "I'r

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A CNG Publication • Vol. 65 No. 19



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Vox pop: Tax man shuttered Ditmas Park coffeehouse - again

BY STEPHEN WITT

For the second time in less than six months, a quirky, self-styled revolutionary coffeehouse in Ditmas Park has been shuttered by the taxman.

Vox Pop, the bookstore, eatery, and jam space on Cortelyou Road between working class Kensington and hip Ditmas Park was padlocked on Tuesday night by state tax officials who slapped the dreaded word "SEIZED" on the front metal security gate, claiming that the coffeehouse owes \$66,000 in taxes.

"The tax supervisor just told me that if we give him \$15,000 up front and \$1,000 a month after that he would allow us to reopen," said Debi Ryan, who took over the café/community center from former owner Sander Hicks a little more than a year ago.

Hicks, the part-time anarchist, part-time gubernatorial candidate and full-time conspiracy theory publisher, failed to do that most patriotic of things: pay his taxes.

Ryan, along with some 190 like-minded investors,



Debi Ryan, leader of the Vox Pop coffee shop/collective, which was once again shuttered by tax authorities.

Community Newspaper Group / Stephen Witt

ended up buying out Hicks, but remained saddled with his tax debt. And in December, the state shuttered the literary haunt for owing \$56,000.

Ryan paid \$10,000 to

the state to reopen in January, and has cut deals with the landlord, vendors and employees to slowly pay off other debts.

But that payment wasn't enough to keep the

taxman at bay — because the interest and penalties on Hick's remaining debt has ballooned. Now Ryan is again brainstorming for a way to come up with the \$15,000 to reopen.

"I'm sure it will involve a fundraiser effort. We had one planned for May 25, but we'll have to have one sooner to get the place reopened," said Ryan. "I'll speak with the shareholders from the community and the board, and we'll figure out the most logical steps ahead."

State Department of Tax and Finance spokesman Brad Malone refused to comment, citing privacy restrictions.

Neighbors said that they hope the quirky coffee shop will reopen soon.

"Maybe they just can't make the money," said Raul Cassetto, who has worked at George's Restaurant around the corner on Coney Island Avenue for over 20 years. "We're a 24-hour place, and they have these bands. I guess that cost money. It's just one of those things. I don't think it's negligence."

Fast buses

Continued from Page 1
the plan with the MTA.

Local service on the line will remain the same, utilizing New York Avenue for northbound service along the stretch between Farragut Road and Fulton Street, where Nostrand Avenue is a one-way thoroughfare, heading south.

In all, said McAfee, based on the first BRT operating along Fordham Road in the Bronx since 2006, the MTA estimates that launching the service along the Nostrand Avenue corridor will cut down an average commute by about 20 percent, thus, a commute that had previously taken an hour would take 48 minutes with BRT in operation.

"We have the opportunity to do something really good here," McAfee said.

How is that achieved? In part, it's by reducing the amount of time spent waiting at red lights by equipping buses with a mechanism to change lights to green, as well as by eliminating delays faced by buses trying to pull away from the curb by creating a dedicated bus lane on the right of the strip during busy weekday hours. The lane will only be open to cars making right turns.

In addition, BRT passengers buy tickets before they board, so passengers don't have to swipe their MetroCard before boarding.

Because the sidewalk bumps out to meet the bus lane at all BRT stops, there is added waiting room for

passengers within shelters where fare machines are located.

To make up for the loss of the lane during busy times, the lane closest to the curb on the left side of the street would be a moving traffic lane during peak hours, Thompson said.

That shift sparked concern among those who attended the meeting, who pointed to the block of Nostrand Avenue between Glenwood Road and Flatbush Avenue as a potential roadblock to the success of the plan. Even now, despite regulations against parking there, "It's a horror getting down the street," contended CB 14 member Marshall Tames.

Resident Connie Goss agreed.

"I go back and forth all the time," she said. "It's cra-

zy around the Junction."

Residents feared that without police intervention, the plan would backfire.

"It would never work without strict enforcement," added Morris Sacks, the committee chair.

Not only will there be enforcement, said Joseph Barr, the director of transit development for the Department of Transportation, but the agency will also take the opportunity provided by the institution of BRT to reevaluate the corridor in general, evaluating the timing of traffic lights and whether areas that don't currently have parking meters could benefit from their installation.

"I think you'll see improvement not just for buses but for general traffic as well," Barr said.

Programs

Continued from cover

a single parent with a full-time job and can't afford to pay for an after-school program. It's going to be very difficult."

But those difficulties aren't difficult enough, says the city.

According to Department of Youth and Development spokesman Ryan Dodge, the program, which provides extra help in homework along with snacks and other activities in schools from 2:30 until 6 pm, and the summer program, which runs in July and August five days a week from 8 am to 6 pm, will continue only in the most-needed neighborhoods.

"[We] examined our entire portfolio and sought to preserve programs that serve the needs of working parents of youth residing in high-need areas," he said.

So the city will cut 33 after school programs city-wide, with nine in Brooklyn getting the axe, and 31 middle school summer programs — including 11 in Brooklyn — saving a total of \$7.5 million.

But Christie Hodgkins, program director for CAMBA, the non-profit organization that runs the after-school program, said the school is in a heavily immigrant neighborhood with more than half the students directly affected by the Haiti earthquake.

"PS 269 is literally a half block outside a high-need area," said Hodgkins. "This is not the poorest neighborhood in Brooklyn, but it is working poor."

And the cuts has parents like Vega searching for answers on finding a places for their children to go after school while they finish the work day.

"The after-school program is a very safe environment. It is supervised and they help my kids with their homework," said Vega. "All I keep thinking about is what am I going to do with my children after school."

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