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## HEALTH FORCE FORMED TO ADDRESS 'UNTHINKABLE'

The acrid air permeating lower Manhattan in the wake of the World Trade Center attack has instigated a rash of respiratory illnesses, raising concerns among residents and officials about the long-term effects, Board 2 members were told at their Oct. 18 meeting.

Citing reports from the Mt. Sinai Medical Center, the chairwoman of Board 2's environment committee said the "irritant burden" from the fumes appears to have sparked a rise in sinusitis, asthma irritation and reactive airway disease. She said the fumes are now "a much more serious public-health concern than asbestos."

Board members passed a resolution agreeing to form a task force to study all of the environmental hazards associated with the collapse of the Twin Towers and the still-burning steel and other debris.

The resolution included a vote of support for the Ground Zero Elected Officials Task Force, which includes Board 1, Representative Jerry Nadler, State Senator Tom Duane, City Council member Kathryn Freed and others. The group is researching the respiratory dangers of such airborne pollutants as asbestos, dioxin, metals and PVC's, and has taken on the task of educating the public about ways to mitigate the effects of exposure—steps like restricting time spent out of doors, particularly when exercising; keeping windows closed; changing air filters; and taking one's shoes off at the door.

But Board 2 also voted to call for an independent task force, which it hopes will include representatives from the city as well as private hospitals, occupational-health groups, labor unions and others from lower Manhattan, particularly from the West Village area.

The group sees itself as a conduit for public information, and it is planning to disseminate the latest public-health advice to the community. Further, it hopes to create a source for information should new public-health hazards emerge in the days ahead.

"We really want to address the unthinkable, just as the World Trade Center thing was an unthinkable," Ms. Arlen told *The Observer*. "And so we were thinking, we need to be opening the frame of view wider and taking into account that we're not going to anticipate everything."

—Benjamin Ryan

## CRACKDOWN ON PROSTITUTES?

In between worrying about liquor licenses and zoning changes, Board 2 has decided to take on one of the oldest scourges in the community—nay, in mainstream society: prostitution.

After trying to combat the problem for years, board members are deciding whether to throw their support behind the only measure some think will work: decriminalizing or legalizing the profession, which they hope will mean relocating the trade to specially designated districts away from their streets. A resolution on the matter is tied up in a closely divided executive committee, and it's expected to come before the board next month.

But since law changes aren't likely to take place anytime soon, the board voted on Nov. 15 on a separate resolution to support the work already being done by the police to combat prostitution in the West Village. Specifically, the board advocated greater use of the Midtown Community Court, which adjudicates "nuisance crimes" of this variety and often takes appropriate steps to try to change the behavior of the offenders, as opposed to just slapping them with jail time.

The resolution seemed to bend over backwards to avoid offending any of the various opposing interest groups, from the highly upset neighbors who deal with public urination and sex on their stoops to the prostitutes themselves. Consequently, many board members felt that the wording of the resolution contradicted itself by first criticizing past police action for being "inconclusive," as well as for unwittingly persecuting innocent members of the lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender (LGBT) community, and then proceeding to state its wholehearted support for the NYPD.

Ann Arlen, second vice chair of Board 2, voted for the resolution, acknowledging its flaws but ultimately siding with fed-up neighbors. Still, she said, the only real solution is the ultimate one—decriminalization and even legalization.

"I don't find that it makes sense to say, 'Stop carrying out what our law tells you to do,'" she told *The Observer* about the vote of confidence for the police. "In other words, [the police] are trying to do their job until they are given another job to do."

Melissa Sklarz, head of the LGBT Committee, however, voiced strong opposition, later telling *The Observer* that she tries to serve as an advocate for the prostitutes. She said she believes the policing of public sex often boils down to the unfair persecution of transgendered people and people of color.

Nonetheless, the resolution narrowly passed with 16 yes votes, seven nos and seven abstentions (which count as nos). But because two board members were out of the room at the time, board member Ed Gold called for a revote. Board chair Aubrey Lees objected. And for 20 minutes, the board members argued loudly over what some saw as Ms. Lee's erroneous application of Robert's Rules of Order.

In the end, Ms. Lees—who had voted with the majority—did not allow a revote, and much of the board left in protest, with barely a quorum remaining for the rest of the meeting.

—Benjamin Ryan