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Some Community Board Budget Priorities Face Budget Axe, Again

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Posted by Eddie Vega, June 4, 2010

As part of the city's budget process, New York's 59 Community Boards are provided surveys each year that ask them to rank, by order of importance, government services in their districts. The survey lists 90 services provided by 24 public agencies. This year 46 Community Boards, two less than last year, submitted responses. Some top priorities align with the Mayor's budget. Most do not. (Click [here](#) for the survey.)

While there was some reordering from last year, for example, child protection services jumped from 8th to 4th place, the same items appear in the top 10 priorities for both years. Taking care of the city's elderly continued to be an important concern for the Community Boards; for the second year in a row, services for the elderly ranked first. Likewise, protecting young people and developing their talents has weighed heavily in the boards' considerations. Programs and services intended to help young people find jobs and access educational opportunities and to protect children from abuse scored high in the rankings: youth development services, after school/summer school programs, and child protection services, took 2nd, 3rd, and 4th place, respectively. Also important were parks and public safety: parks maintenance (down from last year's 2nd place finish) and police patrols of public housing and transit along with auxiliary patrols tied for 5th place. (See IBO's blog [About Those](#)

[Services You Prioritized](#) on last year's Community Board rankings.)

The surveys also identified the priorities by borough. Services for the elderly were among the top two priorities for each of the boroughs except Staten Island, where it dropped to 14th from 12th place last year. Youth development services were among the top five priorities in each of the boroughs except Staten Island, where it ranked 24th. There was greater variation in rankings of after-school programs: after-school was included among the top three priorities in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Manhattan, but was ranked 11th in Queens and 38th in Staten Island. And while branch library services ranked in the top 10 citywide (with a rank of 7th), Brooklyn and Staten Island community boards ranked it even higher at 2nd and 3rd, respectively.

As was the case last year, the Mayor's Executive Budget proposes cuts to some of the services at the top of the Community Boards' priorities. If enacted as written, the budget for 2011 would provide the elderly with fewer places to socialize and receive services because 50 senior citizens centers serving a total of 1,600 seniors would close. There would be fewer and busier child protection specialists to investigate complaints of abuse and neglect after the elimination of 32 units in the Division of Child Protection and a projected increase of the average workload for investigators from 9.5 cases to 10.9 cases. The parks might not be as well maintained after a reduction of 113 full-time equivalent positions for seasonal workers who clean, maintain, and provide security in the parks; also, four swimming pools would close and the pool season would be shortened by two weeks.

Other youth service-related cuts proposed in the Mayor's budget include the elimination of Out-of-School Time programs at 33 schools that currently provide activities for 4,110 elementary and middle school children—about 7 percent of the 61,000 youth now served by the program. Additionally, there's a \$2.7 million reduction (7 percent) to school-based Beacon Centers, which provide after-school and other youth and family oriented programs.


A proposed \$31.2 million cut in subsidies to the city's public library systems would have a substantial effect on another of the Community Boards' top priorities. This reduction, along with previously planned cuts, would bring the city's subsidy for the libraries down about 20 percent to \$247 million compared to this year's level of nearly \$310 million. The Brooklyn, New York, and Queens library systems have said that the reduced subsidy will mean branch closings and shorter hours of operation at many of the libraries that remain open.

While proposed cuts to youth, seniors, parks, and library services are often reversed in negotiations between the Mayor and the City Council, the challenging budget climate for the next few years means that the restoration of these reductions is far from certain.

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