

Stop and Frisk policy questioned statewide the same week that police officers are shot at in Red Hook

by Matt Graber

The debate over the NYPD's stop and frisk policy continues, both locally in Red Hook and at the state government level. In the neighborhood, Occupy Red Hook activists are beginning a campaign to raise awareness about the practice. And according to the *Daily News*, State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman has assigned a team of investigators to review the policy based on publicly available data. The investigation fulfills a campaign promise made by Schneiderman in 2010, when he vowed to "crack down on unjustified stop and frisks." The year 2011 saw a record high of 685,724 stop and frisks in New York City.

Civil rights advocates see racial injustice in the policy

The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) is one of many organizations that have been counting incidents carefully and analysing the stats based on variables like the ethnicity of people being stopped, whether the stop led to an arrest or summons and what these practices are accomplishing, measured by the number guns recovered by police. Of those stopped last year, 53 percent were black, 34 percent were Hispanic and 9 percent were white. Only 12 percent of stops led to an arrest or summons. And by the end of 2011, 819 guns are reported to have been removed from the city's streets.

Police Commissioner Ray Kelly and Mayor Bloomberg point to the recovered guns as evidence that stop and frisks are saving lives. The elevated contact between police and residents of high-crime communities also functions as an intelligence-gathering system, despite Kelly's program to create a digital database of every individual stopped by police, (including the vast majority of innocent civilians), being struck down by the City Council in 2010.

For the policy's opponents, the guns recovered do not come close to justifying the intrusion into people's everyday lives and the apprehension that a generation of young black and Hispanic men are growing up to feel instinctively when they see a police car.

Recent violence against police officers makes for a touchy climate of debate

The debate is escalating while cop-killings are on the rise nationwide, even as violent crime is falling, according to a *NY Times* article published on April 9th. As the article cites, the four officers that were shot in Sheepshead Bay in early April brought the number of city cops shot since December 2011 up to eight.

"This is a dangerous job," said 76th Precinct Captain Jack Lewis at the scene of a shooting that took place on Columbia Street on Saturday, April 7th at approximately 3 p.m. The gunfight was the product of a routine stop gone bad.

According to the Community Affairs Department, two patrolling officers spotted a man with an open alcohol container near the Red Hook Houses. When they approached, the man ran in the opposite direction, then turned and shot at the officers.



A furious investigation followed the police shooting at Columbia and Lorraine.

The cops returned fire and grazed the man's shoulder; he managed to get away, but not without dropping his cell phone on the sidewalk. He was apprehended at his girlfriend's house in Far Rockaway the next day after detectives used the phone to contact and locate her.

Occupy Red Hook focusing on stop and frisks

The 76th Precinct Community Council meeting in early April was the second such meeting in a row in which members of Occupy Red Hook came out in numbers to voice their opposition to stop and frisks, and police misconduct in general.

Several Red Hook residents recounted disturbing incidents in which they were stopped by uniformed or plain clothes officers without being given a reason. Many asked for clarification on specific legal issues, such as whether an individual being stopped has the right to ask for an explanation from the officer before deciding to comply. "I just want to separate myth from fact as far as that goes," said one Occupy member.

Captain Lewis promptly debunked the myth, pointing out - much like he did in the March meeting - that every situation is different and that in many cases officers *do not* have to provide an explanation right away.

"It depends," he said. "There's a million different scenarios. If I give a reason before the arrest, I can endanger myself, or escalate the situation prematurely, so in many situations you don't need to give the person an explanation."

For the past few years the NYCLU has been circulating a pocket-sized pamphlet called "What to do if You're Stopped by the Police." The handbook is part of a broader public education campaign meant to inform citizens of their rights, and to council citizens on how to conduct themselves in encounters with the police.

The pamphlet inspired Occupy Red Hook to start its own campaign, which will include t-shirts reading things like "Am I Being Detained or Am I Free To Go?," and lines taken directly from the handbook such as "I Do Not Consent to this Search."

(To learn more about legal issues surrounding stop and frisks and what to do if you find yourself being subjected to a stop, attend the workshop hosted on April 25th at 7 p.m. at PS 15. As part of its Community Education Workshop Series, the Red Hook Community Justice Center has partnered with the Red Hook Civic Association and invited a speaker from the NYCLU to come to the workshop. Local police will be there as well.)

Promised B61 improvements seem to be real this time

by Matt Graber and Kimberly Gail Price

Changes will soon be coming to the notorious B61 line that many locals rely on - often in vain - to get in and out of Red Hook.

According to elected officials, the MTA has committed to installing "BusTime," a tracking system that "provides real-time bus arrival and location information." Starting no later than June 2012, B61 riders will be able to track the nearest bus on their cell phone or computer. BusTime was first implemented in New York City last year on the B63 line; it is also used in Staten Island.

The MTA is promising other improvements to our highly flawed B61 after a report in December confirmed the community's complaints that the line is unreliable. We can soon expect more frequent buses in the evening rush hour. The MTA is taking measures to increase efficiency, such as having drivers switch shifts at the end of the line, instead of at the midpoint.

We can also expect "countdown clocks" to be installed eventually at every stop. The clocks will display the waiting time for the nearest bus. These clocks were scrapped from the Participatory Budgeting project list earlier this month, when residents of Councilmember Brad Lander's district voted on how to allocate \$1 million in project funds. But the MTA has since approved the project.

We spoke to several Red Hook residents about their experiences with the B61 and their reactions to the coming improvements. Here's what they had to say.



Candice Sering, Coffey Street.

Your experience with the B61?

"I've been relying on the B61 for seven years to get in and out of Red Hook. It has been consistently inconsistent. Sometimes I have bus-magic, but it's mostly not on time. I was around when there was a B61 and a B77 and they were both bad, and now there's just one.

I think this community often gets neglected. And I think it's really hard to understand why it's so inconsistent. And I don't understand why it has to pass the IKEA twice. Why do we have stop at IKEA?"

Feelings about upcoming improvements?

"It sounds like just another band aid. There should be another way to fix the problem instead of making us spend money on texts."



Francisco Marin, Dikeman Street.

Your experience with the B61?

"I rely on it to get to high school, on Baltic and Court. It's been bad since I started at school, since September I guess."

Feelings about upcoming improvements?

"It's not going to make a difference though. It'll still come late, I'll just know how late it's going to be now."



Ana Ocampo, Wolcott Street.

Your experience with the B61?

"It's good except on weekends, and between 8-10 a.m. on weekdays. I mean sometimes they get behind schedule and you get two at the same time.

Feelings about upcoming improvements?

"I have my friend giving me a ride to the city every day now, so it doesn't affect me as much."