

# AUDIT REPORT



CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER  
BUREAU OF MANAGEMENT AUDIT  
WILLIAM C. THOMPSON, JR., COMPTROLLER

## **Follow-up Audit Report On the Monitoring of Senior Citizen Center Conditions By the Department for the Aging**

*MG05-093F*

**June 17, 2005**



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER  
1 CENTRE STREET  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007-2341

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WILLIAM C. THOMPSON, JR.  
COMPTROLLER

**To the Citizens of the City of New York**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In accordance with the Comptroller's responsibilities contained in Chapter 5, § 93, of the New York City Charter, my office has audited the Department for the Aging to determine whether it has implemented 16 recommendations made in a previous audit, *Audit Report on the Monitoring of Senior Citizen Center Conditions by the Department for the Aging* (Audit # MG01-194A, issued June 28, 2002).

The results of our audit, which are presented in this report, have been discussed with the Department for the Aging officials, and their comments were considered in the preparation of this report.

Audits such as this provide a means of ensuring that senior citizen centers are properly maintained with respect to their safety, cleanliness, physical condition, and accessibility.

I trust that this report contains information that is of interest to you. If you have any questions concerning this report, please e-mail my audit bureau at [audit@comptroller.nyc.gov](mailto:audit@comptroller.nyc.gov) or telephone my office at 212-669-3747.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'William C. Thompson, Jr.'.

William C. Thompson, Jr.

**Report:** MG05-093F  
**Filed:** June 17, 2005

*The City of New York*  
*Office of the Comptroller*  
*Bureau of Management Audit*

**Follow-up Audit Report on the  
Monitoring of Senior Citizen Center Conditions  
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**AUDIT REPORT IN BRIEF**

This is a follow-up audit to determine whether the Department for the Aging (DFTA) implemented the recommendations made in an earlier audit, *Audit Report on the Monitoring of Senior Citizen Center Conditions by the Department for the Aging* (# MG01-194A), issued June 28, 2002. The earlier audit determined the effectiveness of DFTA's efforts to ensure the proper maintenance of senior citizen centers in terms of the centers' safety, cleanliness, physical condition, and accessibility. This audit discusses the details of the recommendations of the previous audit report and the current status of each recommendation.

**Audit Findings and Conclusions**

The previous audit made 16 recommendations to DFTA. Of the 16 recommendations, 11 were implemented and five were partially implemented.

This follow-up audit determined that DFTA has also taken steps to enhance its survey efforts and to ensure that senior center operators corrected the fire safety, cleanliness, physical condition, and accessibility problems observed at 39 senior citizen centers during the previous audit.

DFTA has taken measures to ensure that senior centers have written evacuation plans, regularly test and inspect their emergency systems, maintain well-lit and unobstructed exit passageways, provide adequately illuminated exit signs, and maintain documentation of Fire Department and safety system inspections. In this follow-up audit, we conducted observations of 15 senior centers (10 from the previous audit plus five additional centers), identified in Appendix I. The results of the observations showed that some centers were deficient in complying with the aforementioned requirements, indicating that DFTA's survey efforts may need to be further strengthened.

Also, this follow-up audit determined that DFTA has modified and implemented changes to its computerized Program Assessment System (PAS) that allow for survey dates to be

recorded into the system and for the tracking of outstanding deficiencies observed during the formal assessment survey of senior centers conducted by DFTA program officers each year.

### **Audit Recommendations**

DFTA should implement the recommendations of the previous audit that are still applicable but were not fully addressed. Upon implementation of these recommendations, DFTA will have corrected the conditions cited in the previous report and in this follow-up report. In accordance with the findings of this follow-up report, the applicable previous recommendations are somewhat revised. The recommendations are that DFTA should:

- Require that senior center operators include an evacuation diagram as part of their written emergency evacuation plans. The diagram should map out the floor plan of the facility and highlight the evacuation path, emergency exits, gathering points, and location of fire extinguishers and other fire suppression apparatus throughout the facility.
- Require that senior centers regularly inspect and test *all* of their safety systems and maintain documentation (i.e., invoices, inspection reports, etc.) or, at the very least, a log that reflects the date of such inspections and tests and the name of the person(s) or organization(s) conducting them. Where required, these systems should be inspected and tested by individuals possessing the applicable certificates of fitness issued by the New York City Fire Department.
- Continue to ensure that all senior citizen centers possess current place-of-assembly permits (for those centers that are required to have such permits).
- Continue to ensure that all senior citizen centers maintain documentary evidence, or at least a log, of an annual Fire Department inspection, or a request for such an inspection (for those centers that are not required to have place-of-assembly permits).
- Continue to ensure that all senior citizen centers maintain well-lit and unobstructed exit passageways and provide adequately illuminated exit signs as needed.

### **DFTA Response**

The matters covered in this report were discussed with DFTA officials during and at the conclusion of this audit. A preliminary draft report was sent to DFTA officials and discussed at an exit conference held on May 6, 2005. On May 10, 2005, we submitted a draft report to DFTA officials with a request for comments. We received a written response from DFTA officials on June 6, 2005. In their response, DFTA officials generally agreed with the audit's findings and recommendations.

The full text of the DFTA response is included as an addendum to this report.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

DFTA plans, administers, and coordinates the provision of services that assist many of the City's 1.25 million elderly adults to participate in their communities and maintain their independence. DFTA funds and administers a wide range of services for the elderly, directly as well as through contracts with community-based organizations. Services include the provision of senior citizen centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, transportation, case management, social services, legal assistance, and home care. DFTA receives federal, state and City funds as well as private grants and contributions.

DFTA contracts with approximately 335 senior citizen centers throughout the City's five boroughs to provide services to the elderly. As part of its oversight and monitoring of these centers, each year DFTA conducts a formal assessment survey of each senior center consisting of inspections by a program officer and a nutritionist. The survey is primarily geared towards the evaluation of the center's social and nutritional programs; however, it also concerns the maintenance of the center. Centers that need improvement in service or maintenance areas are required to do so by a specified date.

In 2002, this office issued an audit report on the effectiveness of DFTA's efforts to ensure the proper maintenance of its senior citizen centers in terms of the centers' safety, cleanliness, physical condition, and accessibility. That audit disclosed that DFTA needed to improve its efforts in those areas. In the previous audit, auditors visited 39 senior citizen centers and found that, although most of the centers were clean and several were accessible to the handicapped, there were fire safety problems at many of the centers visited. Problems cited related to the centers' evacuation plans and diagrams, fire drills, safety system inspections, and exit passageways. Further, none of the 39 centers was able to provide evidence that all of their emergency safety systems, including fire alarms, emergency lighting, sprinklers, and smoke detectors had been regularly inspected or tested. The audit concluded that DFTA's survey efforts needed to be improved to ensure the proper maintenance of the senior centers.

### **Objectives**

The objective of this audit is to determine whether DFTA has implemented the 16 recommendations made in an earlier report, *Audit Report on the Monitoring of Senior Citizen Center Conditions by the Department for the Aging* (#MG01-194A), issued June 28, 2002.

### **Scope and Methodology**

To evaluate DFTA's implementation of the previous recommendations, we reviewed the most current documentation available that covered Fiscal Year 2005.

To gain an understanding of the controls and processes involved with DFTA's oversight and monitoring of the senior citizen centers, we interviewed officials of the DFTA Bureau of Community Services (BCS), Contract Evaluation Unit (CEU), Community Coordination and Program Unit (CCPU), and Facilities Management Unit (FMU). We reviewed the DFTA *Contract Agency Program Management Manual* to determine the maintenance and performance standards that it applies to senior citizen centers. We also reviewed the survey assessment tools used by DFTA Program Officers and Nutritionists to monitor senior citizen centers compliance. We evaluated DFTA's report on the implementation status of the previous audit recommendations and accompanying corroborating documentation, training materials, and informational literature. We also reviewed other relevant documentation obtained from DFTA, the Internet, and other sources.

To assess DFTA's monitoring of physical conditions of senior centers since the previous audit, we judgmentally selected a sample of 15 centers for observation from the population of 335 centers. Ten of the centers were chosen from the 39 centers visited in the previous audit; these ten had the greatest number of fire and personal safety problems. We judgmentally selected five additional centers from the remaining 296 centers for observation using the Vendex Contractor Performance Evaluation ratings<sup>1</sup> for Fiscal Year 2004. We selected three centers with an overall evaluation rating of "Needs Improvement" and two centers with an overall rating of "Very Good."

We developed an updated audit observation checklist modeled after the checklist used in the previous audit. In addition to DFTA's standards, we reviewed the *Building Code of the City of New York*, *The City of New York Fire Code*, and the federal *Americans with Disability Act Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities* for changes in standards since the previous audit that we could readily check at the centers.

We conducted our observations of the 15 senior centers from December 9, 2004, through December 14, 2004. (The 15 centers that we visited are listed in Appendix I.) Using the audit observation checklist, we recorded our observations of each center's safety, cleanliness, physical condition, and accessibility. We also obtained and reviewed documentation from the senior centers relating to evacuation plans, fire drills, safety inspections, incident reports, and Notices of Violation issued by City agencies.

We also met with DFTA officials, including the Director of Information Technology to determine the actions the agency had taken to address the previous audit recommendations regarding its Program Assessment System (PAS). Specifically, we determined whether DFTA had updated or modified PAS to allow for formal survey dates to be recorded in the system and for outstanding deficiencies cited during the formal surveys to be tracked. We also assessed the manual procedures in place to track formal survey dates and outstanding deficiencies.

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<sup>1</sup> The VENDEX Contractor Performance Evaluation rating is the overall rating that DFTA assigns to a senior center program, based on the program's performance in the provision of services, in meeting its contractual obligations, and in operating its programs in compliance with DFTA standards and other regulatory requirements.

Our sample was judgmentally selected; therefore, the results of our observations were not projected. However, our sample size was sufficient to provide us reasonable assurance about the conditions of the senior centers and a reasonable basis from which to determine whether DFTA had implemented the recommendations made in the previous audit.

This audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards (GAGAS) and included tests of the records and other auditing procedures considered necessary. This audit was performed in accordance with the audit responsibilities of the City Comptroller as set forth in Chapter 5, §93, of the New York City Charter.

### **Discussion of Audit Results**

The matters covered in this report were discussed with DFTA officials during and at the conclusion of this audit. A preliminary draft report was sent to DFTA officials and discussed at an exit conference held on May 6, 2005. On May 10, 2005, we submitted a draft report to DFTA officials with a request for comments. We received a written response from DFTA officials on June 6, 2005. In their response, DFTA officials generally agreed with the audit's findings and recommendations.

The full text of the DFTA response is included as an addendum to this report.

## RESULTS OF FOLLOW-UP AUDIT

**Previous Finding:** “Numerous Fire & Personal Safety Problems at Senior Citizen Centers”

The previous audit noted that there were fire and personal safety problems at many of the 39 senior centers visited by the auditors. These problems primarily related to the centers’ evacuation plans and diagrams, fire drills, safety system inspections, and exit passageways. In addition, there were some cleanliness and physical condition concerns noted.

***Previous Recommendation #1:*** “DFTA should ensure that all senior citizen centers have written emergency evacuation plans that are posted on a public bulletin board on each floor. These plans should include diagrams showing the designated exit passageways at the center, and written instructions that include, among other things, the roles of employees and volunteers during an emergency.”

***Previous DFTA Response:*** “Currently we require written emergency procedures, but not their posting. We also do not require diagrams, other than at sites with elevators where signs at each landing must display a diagram showing stairs with instructions to use the stairs in case of fire. . . . DFTA will revise its requirements for emergency evacuation plans to include diagrams and posting. We will send more reminders to center staff of their responsibility for the safety of their participants.”

**Current Status:** PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED

Since the previous audit, DFTA has taken measures to ensure that senior centers have written evacuation plans (or diagrams). DFTA has reengineered its formal assessment tools to address areas not previously included, such as questions pertaining to senior center emergency evacuation plans.

For example, the revised assessment tools direct program officers to ascertain during their inspection of the centers whether posted written emergency evacuation plans (or diagrams) are easily visible to senior citizens in each room and office of the senior center. The program officers must also ascertain whether written emergency evacuation plans identify the location of fire extinguishers, primary and alternate fire exits, and the names and titles of persons responsible for leading groups outside and for searching the premises.

In addition, DFTA officials stated that between March and August 2003, the DFTA Training Unit had organized a series of “Safety and Fire Prevention” seminars for senior center staff, center participants, and DFTA staff. The training was offered in conjunction with the Fire Department and the Citywide Central Insurance Program. According to DFTA officials, this training has become mandatory for all DFTA program directors and select senior center staff and center participants. Training topics includes fire evacuation information and the writing of safety policies and plans.



Based on our visits to senior centers during this current audit, we found that all of the 15 centers that we visited had either a written evacuation plan or diagram conspicuously posted throughout the center, in compliance with DFTA requirements. Thirteen (13) of the 15 centers we visited had an evacuation diagram conspicuously posted in the center. Two remaining centers—Bridge Street Senior Center and Murray Hill SRO Center—did not have diagrams.

DFTA does not require that evacuation diagrams be included in senior centers' evacuation plans. Rather, DFTA standards make it optional for center operators to have either a written plan or diagram. Nevertheless, in the event of an emergency a graphical diagram that maps out the floor plan of the facility and highlights the evacuation path, emergency exits, gathering points, location of fire extinguishers, and other fire suppression apparatus would be easier for many people to follow.

***Previous Recommendation #2:*** “DFTA should ensure that all senior citizen centers conduct fire drills at least twice yearly and maintain documentary evidence of such drills.”

***Previous DFTA Response:*** “We already require programs to keep records of fire drills. Program records can be checked during any DFTA staff visit. The number of drills per year is determined by the New York City Fire Department.”

***Previous Auditor Comments:*** “DFTA’s program manual requires that its senior centers conduct at least two fire drills per year. Our concern is that 26 of the 39 senior citizen centers we visited did not maintain records showing compliance with this requirement.”

**Current Status:** IMPLEMENTED

DFTA requires that senior centers conduct at least two fire drills each year. As evidenced by DFTA’s reengineered assessment tool, senior centers are required to keep records to reflect that at least two fire drills are held each year. DFTA program officers review these records as part of their annual assessment inspections of the senior centers.

The results of our inspection of senior centers found that the 15 senior centers we visited maintained records and documentation to reflect that at least two fire drills had been conducted within the year in compliance with DFTA standards.

***Previous Recommendation #3:*** “DFTA should ensure that all senior citizen centers regularly inspect and test their emergency safety systems. The centers should possess documentary evidence of such inspections and tests or, at the very least, maintain a log showing the dates of such inspections and tests, and the names of the individuals or organizations performing them. These systems should be inspected and tested by individuals possessing the applicable certificates of fitness issued by the New York City Fire Department.”

***Previous DFTA Response:*** “We agree that safety systems should be tested regularly to assure good operation. This includes fire alarms, emergency lighting, sprinklers and

smoke detectors. We do not require tests at specific intervals; rather, all systems should be in good working order at all times, including whenever any DFTA staff chooses to conduct a test. We will revise our requirements, but we think the ‘we can test at any time’ approach has merit in that it lets programs know they must always be ready. Where the landlord, not the DFTA center, maintains such records, we will encourage centers to maintain their own log of inspection or request [for inspection]. Regarding certification of persons inspecting and testing such systems, DFTA follows requirements of the New York City Fire Department and will continue to do so.”

**Current Status:** PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED

DFTA officials stated that the agency continues to monitor the safety systems of all centers annually as part of assessment inspections. During the annual inspections, DFTA program officers perform on-site checks of all emergency lighting equipment. Exit lights are checked to ensure that they are properly illuminated. Fire extinguishers are checked to ensure that they are adequately charged and have been inspected within the 12 months preceding the date of the assessment inspection.

During our visits to the 15 senior centers in this current audit, we found that the majority of the centers’ fire safety systems were regularly inspected and the centers maintained documentation evidencing such inspections. Ten of the 15 centers were equipped with fire alarm systems and had evidence to show that the systems were regularly tested, serviced, or inspected. Twelve of the 15 centers had smoke detectors and maintained records to show that they were regularly checked. Six of the 15 centers were equipped with sprinkler systems that were regularly inspected.

All of the centers had at least two fire extinguishers on each floor, as required. We observed a total of 80 fire extinguishers at the 15 centers. Seventy-eight (78) of the 80 fire extinguishers observed had tags indicating that they had been serviced and/or inspected every six months. However, two of the fire extinguishers at the Community Lounge Senior Center were not appropriately tagged or were expired and had not been inspected, as required. Moreover, three of the 15 centers had no smoke detectors: the City Hall Senior Center, Murray Hill SRO, and Encore Center at St. Malachy’s.

***Previous Recommendation #4:*** “DFTA should ensure that all senior citizen centers possess current place-of-assembly permits (for those centers that are required to have such permits).”

***Previous DFTA Response:*** “The Department already requires current Place of Assembly Permits, including public posting of such Permit. This is one of the items checked annually and we will continue to do so and to follow-up with any site found not in compliance. DFTA considers having Place of Assembly (PA) Permits for programs with room occupancy of greater than 75 persons to be of utmost importance. The code compliance items required to have a PA permit ensure the safety of our seniors in event of fire.”

**Current Status:** PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED

During this current audit, we found that 12 of the 15 senior centers required a New York City Place-of-Assembly (PA) permit. Eleven of these 12 centers possessed and conspicuously posted their PA permits. One center, the Decatur Grant Square Senior Center did not have a PA permit at the time of our visit. The director stated that the center had applied for the permit; however, it was not approved. Upon the initial inspection of the facility, the Fire Department cited the center for not having two means of egress in its congregate dining room. The center has hired a contractor to construct the required second exit. Upon completion, the facility will have to be re-inspected by the Fire Department. Thereafter, the center must wait for its PA permit to be approved and issued.

Three of the 15 centers—Murray Hill SRO, Farragut Senior Citizen Center, and SNAP of Eastern Queens—are not required to have a New York City PA permit. According to DFTA and center operators, the Murray Hill SRO and Farragut Senior Centers service less than 75 people each day. The SNAP of Eastern Queens program serves more than 75 people each day; however, the facility is housed in a New York State Office of Mental Health building at the former Creedmore campus. According to DFTA, the facility was renovated in accordance with the New York State Building Code and filing was handled as a state job; therefore, no PA permit is required.

***Previous Recommendation #5:*** “DFTA should ensure that all senior citizen centers maintain documentary evidence, or at least a log, of an annual Fire Department inspection, or a request for such an inspection (for those centers that are not required to have place-of-assembly permits).”

***Previous DFTA Response:*** “As with the previous recommendation, we already require annual Fire Department inspection. Senior centers can only request such inspection, so the record of request must be maintained if the Fire Department has not been able to carry out the inspection. Where the landlord, not the DFTA center, maintains such records, we will encourage centers to maintain their own log of inspection or request.”

**Current Status:** PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED

DFTA requires that each senior center undergo a Fire Department inspection each year and maintain a record of such inspections or requests for inspections. DFTA officials stated that if a request is made, there is no assurance that the Fire Department will conduct the requested inspection in a timely manner. The inspections are generally unannounced. At the time of the Fire Department inspection, unless a notice of violation is issued, no documentation is provided to the centers to verify that the inspection was conducted. DFTA officials also stated that in situations where a senior center program shares the same space with a community center, especially at NYCHA sites, the senior center staff may be unaware that an inspection was conducted outside the hours of operation of the senior center program.

Our field visits revealed that 10 of 15 centers maintained documentation to show that Fire Department inspections had either been conducted or requested. Five centers—Murray Hill

SRO, SNAP of Eastern Queens, Selfhelp Clearview Senior Center, IPR HE Corona Senior Center, and Bridge Street Senior Citizen Program—did not have documentation to show whether Fire Department inspections had been conducted or requested by the senior center operator.

***Previous Recommendation #6:*** “DFTA should ensure that all senior citizen centers maintain well-lit and unobstructed exit passageways, and provide adequately illuminated exit signs as needed.”

***Previous DFTA Response:*** “We agree that unobstructed and well-lit exits are essential for the safety of senior participants. We already require this; DFTA program staff checks each site at least once a year and we will encourage staff to note the condition of exits at each visit.”

**Current Status:** PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED

In general, we found that conditions regarding blocked and obstructed exit passageways had improved. In the previous audit, 54 percent of the centers (21 out of the 39 centers) visited had obstructed exit passageways; whereas, in this audit, 33 percent of the centers (5 out of 15 centers) observed had obstructed exits. Specifically, eight (13%) exit doors at five centers out of 55 exit doors observed and tested at all 15 centers were found to be temporarily obstructed. For example, at one center (Community Lounge Senior Center) a table holding holiday sale items was set up and blocked an exit passageway. At another center (Eileen Dugan Senior Center), an exit leading to the street was blocked by trash bags. While these obstructions were temporary in nature, in the event of an emergency, obstacles of any form can prevent the free movement of people out of the facility.

However, regarding illuminated exit signs, we found that the rate of centers with unlighted exit signs remained fairly consistent. In the previous audit, approximately 54 percent of the centers (21 out of 39 centers) visited had unlighted exit signs. In this audit, 60 percent of the centers (9 out of 15 centers) visited had unlighted exit signs or signs that were not illuminable. A total of 25 (35%) of the 72 exit signs observed at nine centers were not illuminated. Overall, this represents 24 percent of the total 103 exit signs we observed throughout the 15 centers. At one center (the IPR HE Corona Senior Center) 15 exit signs were observed, all of which were not illuminable.

In addition, during our field visits, we found that 14 of the 15 centers had at least two means of egress (exits) to the outside as required; one center at the Farragat NYCHA Housing Development did not.

DFTA officials stated that senior centers are required to maintain well-lit and unobstructed exit passageways. During DFTA’s annual assessment inspections, exit passageways are inspected. Also, CEU and CCPU Program Officers and Nutrition staff are encouraged to note these and other safety conditions found out of compliance during any visits they make to the senior centers.

***Previous Recommendation #7:*** “DFTA should ensure that all senior citizen centers immediately resolve the specific fire and personal safety problems noted in this audit concerning the 39 centers we visited.”

***Previous DFTA Response:*** “DFTA staff is actively following up on each of the problems found during the course of this audit. Please note that fire alarm systems are not required by code for senior centers (See Article 5 27-968 of the NYC Building Code). Also note that sprinkler systems are typically required only in spaces below grade, exceeding certain heights depending on type of construction, or lacking a required ‘free openable area’ (See Article 4 27-954 and Table 4-1 of NYC Building Code). Most of our senior centers are below the height limits and have adequate operable windows and, as such, are not required by code to be sprinklered.”

***Previous Auditor Comments:*** “By referring to the need for fire alarms and sprinklers in the wide variety of building types in which its senior citizen centers are located, DFTA raises issues beyond the scope of this audit. We suggest that DFTA confirm its interpretations of Building Code requirements concerning these safety systems with the Fire Department and the Department of Buildings.”

**Current Status:** IMPLEMENTED

DFTA officials reported that in April and May 2003 assessment teams from the agency’s Bureau of Community Services were dispatched to follow up on the specific fire, personal safety, cleanliness and physical condition problems observed at the 39 senior centers visited by auditors between December 2001 and February 2002 and cited in the previous audit.

Subsequently, DFTA sent letters to the centers found with noncompliant conditions, listing the findings of the DFTA inspection. Those senior centers with outstanding issues were instructed to correct the noncompliant conditions and informed of their responsibility to meet compliance standards. Follow-up visits were conducted by DFTA’s Community Coordination and Program Unit (CCPU) program officers, who provide technical assistance to, and monitoring of, the centers.

***Previous Recommendation #8:*** “DFTA should ensure that the senior citizen centers take immediate action to correct the cleanliness and physical condition problems noted in this audit.”

***Previous DFTA Response:*** “We agree with this recommendation. Concerning cleanliness, there is no reason why senior center staff cannot maintain a clean and sanitary site and we will continue to enforce these requirements. DFTA Nutrition staff visits each center four times per year, while DFTA Program staff visits at least once. At each of these visits, cleanliness is checked. . . .Concerning physical conditions, we must note that centers do not always have full control over their surroundings. Physical changes in sites that are owned by NYC Housing Authority must be made by NYCHA. Likewise, physical changes in sites that are owned or leased by NYC must be made or

negotiated by the Department of Citywide Administrative Services and the Department of Design and Construction.”

**Current Status:**      IMPLEMENTED

During April and May 2003, DFTA took action to follow up and notify senior center operators to correct specific fire and personal safety, and cleanliness and physical condition problems observed at the 39 senior centers that the auditors visited during the previous audit.

The results of our field visits to 15 senior centers indicated that DFTA took action to ensure that senior center operators improve the general cleanliness and maintenance of their centers. With the exception of a few minor problems observed, all of the 15 centers were reasonably clean and adequately maintained. Paint and plaster at all 15 centers were in reasonably good condition. Thirteen of the centers were equipped with windows that were found to be in good condition; no cracked windows or missing panes were observed. At 14 centers the auditors observed that the dining/program areas and the exterior of the center were generally clean and free of litter. Also, at all 15 centers the bathrooms were found to be generally clean, sanitary, and well supplied.

Some of the minor problems (noncompliant conditions) observed by the auditors include: two centers (Decatur Grant Square and Eileen Dugan) had either cracked or water damaged ceiling tiles that should be replaced; two centers (Decatur Grant Square and Hudson Guild) had flooring or carpets that were not well maintained; one center (Hudson Guild) had dirty floors, and at two centers (Murray Hill SRO and Hudson Guild), vermin droppings were observed. At one center (IPR HE Corona) the hot water faucet of one bathroom sink did not work. In addition, one center (City Hall) had a refrigerator without a working thermometer, and three centers (City Hall, Fort Hamilton St. Johns, and Hudson Guild) had a freezer that did not maintain temperatures below zero degrees (0°) F.

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**Previous Finding:**      “Some Accessibility Problems Noted during Visits to Senior Citizen Centers”

The previous audit noted that DFTA categorized only 10 of the 39 centers that were visited as being compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines. The auditors checked on the handicapped accessibility features at these 10 centers and identified some concerns, including automated lifts and elevators and their respective inspections, and a broken handrail by a toilet.

***Previous Recommendation #9:*** “DFTA should ensure that the senior citizen centers take immediate action to correct the accessibility problems noted in this audit.”

***Previous DFTA Response:*** “The report noted that 2 automated lifts had not been inspected in more than 3 years. DFTA will remedy as required by code. Please note that there are no code required inspections for open lifts, only for lifts with shaft enclosures.

It was indicated that the interior light in one elevator did not work. We are unclear as to the center where this was noted. Please advise as to which center and DFTA will remedy. One center, Pomonok, was identified in the survey as not having a current elevator inspection. We will notify NYCHA to remedy.

“The survey noted that a second handrail at a toilet in a non ADA compliant site was broken off. Since this center does not meet ADA, the handrail serves as a convenience item only. When ADA construction projects are performed all required handrails are installed in the ADA toilet stall or at the ADA unisex toilet as per ANSI standards. Audit report was not clear as to specific location.”

***Previous Auditor Comments:*** “We did not base our recommendation that automated lifts for the handicapped be periodically inspected on a code requirement, but rather on the position that periodic inspections of the lifts would help ensure their safe operation. Similarly, we did not base our recommendation that the broken second handrail for a toilet in a non-ADA compliant center be repaired on a code requirement, but on the position that centers should maintain their physical conditions, including, in this case, a fixture that helped make the center more accessible to the handicapped. We have provided extensive documentation to DFTA identifying the centers at which we observed the safety, cleanliness, physical condition, and accessibility concerns noted in this report. We will provide any additional clarifications DFTA needs to ensure that all of these concerns are addressed.”

**Current Status:** IMPLEMENTED

DFTA officials reported that issues that were reported in the 2002 audit have been monitored and traced by DFTA’s Bureau of Community Services. The DFTA senior center assessment tool requires that the elevators and lifts in handicapped-accessible sites be inspected and checked for proper operation. In addition, they stated that during April and May 2003 DFTA took action to follow up and notify senior center operators to correct specific problems observed at the 39 senior centers that the auditors visited during the previous audit.

During this current audit, we observed that all of the 15 senior centers we visited provided handicapped accessible entrances; 13 of the 15 centers were designated as barrier-free facilities. Only one center, not designated as ADA-compliant, had no handicapped-accessible bathroom facilities. Eight of the 15 centers visited had elevators. All eight of these centers had documentary evidence to show that the elevators were regularly inspected and handicapped accessible. Two of the 15 centers had mechanical lifts for the handicapped. The lifts at both centers were found to be in working order, and, according to center personnel, the lifts were inspected regularly. However, only one of the two centers had documentary evidence to show that the lifts were regularly inspected.

***Previous Recommendation #10:*** “DFTA should ensure that Community District (CD) #2 in the Bronx, CD #4 in Brooklyn, CD #4 in Manhattan, and CD #11 in Queens have at least one ADA-compliant senior citizen center.”

***Previous DFTA Response:*** “Bronx CD 2: Casa Boricua will be made ADA compliant as part of the Landlord’s Lease Renewal Scope of Work. Brooklyn CD 4: Hope Gardens and Ridgewood Bushwick are ADA compliant. Manhattan CD 4: Newly funded project to make Project Find Clinton to commence in September. Queens CD 11: BFFY Bayside, an ADA compliant site, has been temporarily relocated so that upgrades can be performed to the building systems. Hence, it did not appear on the report furnished to the audit team.”

***Previous Auditor Comments:*** “The list of ADA compliant senior centers that DFTA provided us did not include Hope Gardens or Ridgewood Bushwick. In addition, the list of active renovation projects that DFTA provided us did not indicate that these centers were scheduled to receive accessibility upgrades.”

**Current Status:** IMPLEMENTED

During this current audit, DFTA officials reported that in Bronx CD #2, Casa Boricua was renovated and made ADA-compliant. In Brooklyn CD #4, Hope Gardens and Ridgewood Bushwick were already ADA-compliant; therefore, no further action was taken. In Manhattan CD #4, NYCHA has initiated a handicapped accessible project at Project Find Clinton Senior Center. In addition, Project Find Coffeehouse Senior Center at 551 Ninth Avenue is an ADA-compliant site. In Queens CD#11, BFFY Bayside Senior Center has moved to a permanent ADA-compliant site. DFTA officials stated that there is at least one ADA-compliant senior center in each community district. With the exception of the Hope Gardens Senior Center in Brooklyn CD #4, we found that all of the centers reported by DFTA as being ADA-compliant were so categorized on all of the applicable documentation we reviewed. In all instances, Hope Gardens was not listed as an ADA-compliant site.

Nevertheless, our review verified that DFTA had classified at least one senior center in each community district as ADA-compliant. As of February 11, 2005, DFTA’s records showed that there were 158 ADA-compliant senior centers in the City.

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**Previous Finding:** DFTA’s survey and assessment process for monitoring and evaluating senior centers’ compliance with requirements for fire and personal safety was inadequate and needed improvement.

The previous audit stated that DFTA surveys and assessments were inadequate in identifying such issues as lack of a current place-of-assembly permit; there were problems with exit signs, smoke detectors, and fire extinguishers and their inspections; and some problems of cleanliness and physical condition also existed.



***Previous Recommendation #11-#14:*** “DFTA should enhance its survey efforts concerning:

11. The maintenance of safe conditions at the centers.
12. The presence of thermometers showing the maintenance of the proper temperature ranges in its centers’ refrigerators and freezers.
13. The physical conditions of its centers’ ceilings, walls, floors, steps, windows, and doors.
14. The proper maintenance of ADA-compliant features at its centers.”

***Previous DFTA Response to Recommendations #11-#14:*** “DFTA is looking again at its system of monitoring and assessing senior centers. Since DFTA staff cannot possibly check each center each day, we must rely on sponsors to maintain safe conditions, proper food storage temperatures, appropriate physical conditions and proper maintenance.”

**Current Status of Previous Recommendations #11-14:** IMPLEMENTED

In conjunction with fire safety issues (discussed earlier), DFTA has taken steps to enhance its survey efforts as they relate to physical conditions, food safety, and maintenance of ADA-compliant features at the senior centers. DFTA has reengineered its formal senior center program performance and contract compliance assessment tools. Questions were added and modified to address relevant statutes and regulations and to incorporate the recommendations made in the previous audit. The assessment tools provide program officers and nutritionists with a comprehensive list of items to be aware of and to check for during their inspections of senior centers, including maintenance and safety conditions, certain physical conditions, accessibility features, sanitary issues, and food preparation, handling, and storage. DFTA has also organized and mandated additional training seminars with the objective of raising awareness about fire and safety issues for DFTA staff, senior center staff, and senior center participants.

In addition to these actions, DFTA officials stated that beginning in Fiscal Year 2005, rather than allowing senior center operators to submit documentation to show correction of deficient conditions cited during the annual assessment, program officers will be required to conduct follow-up visits to senior centers to determine the status of non-compliant issues.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Previous Finding:** “DFTA’s Program Assessment System Needs to be Upgraded”

The previous audit noted that DFTA’s PAS computer program did not allow for deficiencies cited by DFTA assessors during a senior center survey to be tracked from year to year. In addition, PAS did not contain a field so that the surveyors could enter the dates of their surveys.

PAS is used to enter the results of senior center assessments and surveys. The program officers and nutritionists are expected to enter their survey results in PAS within two weeks of the survey and are instructed to provide the center at least an additional four weeks to correct identified problems. When conditions are corrected, evidenced either through re-inspection or by documentation provided by the center operators, the information is noted in PAS.

However, the previous audit stated that when a new assessment year begins, the results of all of the surveys conducted in the previous year were placed into a read-only file and the centers' records were cleared for the new assessment year. Therefore, DFTA was unable to update information in PAS about problems that remained outstanding at the end of the year and subsequently corrected. For example, Fiscal Year 2001 survey assessment reports generated by PAS for the 39 centers visited in the previous audit reflected 472 (66%) outstanding deficiencies out of 717. There was no indication that any of these outstanding deficiencies cited by the surveyors (relating to both services and maintenance) had ever been corrected. In addition, because the survey date could not be recorded in PAS, the system could not be used by DFTA management to track senior centers' compliance with established timetables.

***Previous Recommendation #15:*** DFTA should continue to monitor, through its Program Assessment System, the correction of outstanding deficiencies at each center until the time of the next formal survey.

***Previous DFTA Response:*** "We plan to continue this monitoring."

***Previous Auditor Comments:*** DFTA does not address the recommendation. Our position is that DFTA should modify its Program Assessment System to be better able to track outstanding deficiencies at each center up until the time of the next formal survey."

**Current Status:** IMPLEMENTED

During the course of the audit, DFTA officials stated that members of the agency's Information Technology Department were actively meeting with representatives from the DFTA Bureau of Community Services to discuss and implement changes to PAS. At a meeting held on March 21, 2005, DFTA officials reported that PAS had been modified to allow for the system to keep track of and report on outstanding deficiencies for each center from one fiscal year to another. DFTA's Director of Information Technology provided us with a demonstration of the new modifications and functions that allow for the review of outstanding deficiencies. At the time of the meeting, the modifications were still being tested.

At the exit conference on May 6, 2005, DFTA officials stated that the modified system had been fully implemented and in use for several weeks. Consequently, on May 9, 2005, we met with DFTA personnel and conducted a cursory review to verify that the modifications had indeed been implemented and were functioning.

We observed PAS functions that allow for the review of outstanding deficiencies that remained in Fiscal Years 1999 through 2004. Moreover, for survey assessments conducted in the current Fiscal Year 2005 and beyond, PAS has the functionality to track and report on non-

compliant conditions, follow-up visits, and assessors' observation notes. In addition, DFTA officials provided documentation verifying user sign-off on the modifications as well as user training. Therefore, we concluded that DFTA has modified PAS as previously recommended.

It should be noted that we did not conduct extensive testing of PAS to determine the efficiency and accuracy of the system.

***Previous Recommendation #16:*** "DFTA should record the dates of its senior center surveys in its Program Assessment System."

***Previous DFTA Response:*** "The Program Assessment System (PAS) has been revised for FY 03 to include the date of each visit by DFTA program staff and DFTA nutrition staff. Also, in FY 03 PAS allows notes related to any DFTA standard, not just problems."

**Current Status:** IMPLEMENTED

We observed options in the modified PAS system that, going forward, provide for the dates of the senior center assessment surveys, as well as follow-up visits to be entered into the system. This option also allows Program Officers to enter notes or comments regarding a particular visit to a senior center. Provided that the system operates as designed, going forward, this option should assist DFTA Program Officers to readily assess the status of a senior center's outstanding deficiencies.

\* \* \* \* \*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the five issues that still exist, we recommend that DFTA should:

1. Require that senior center operators include an evacuation diagram as part of their written emergency evacuation plans. The diagram should map out the floor plan of the facility and highlight the evacuation path, emergency exits, gathering points, and location of fire extinguishers and other fire suppression apparatus throughout the facility.

***DFTA Response:*** "DFTA agrees that an evacuation diagram should be included in the senior center's emergency evacuation plan. The DFTA assessment now requires that the diagram be included in the emergency evacuation plan [and] that the diagram maps out the floor plan of the facility, highlights the evacuation path, emergency exits, gathering points, and the location of the fire extinguishers and other fire suppression devices."

2. Require that senior centers regularly inspect and test *all* of their safety systems and maintain documentation (i.e., invoices, inspection reports, etc.) or, at the very least, a log that reflects the date of such inspections and tests and the name of the person(s) or organization(s) conducting them. Where required, these systems should be inspected

and tested by individuals possessing the applicable certificates of fitness issued by the New York City Fire Department.

**DFTA Response:** “DFTA agrees that safety systems should be regularly tested and that corresponding documentation of the inspections be kept. DFTA tests and regularly inspects providers’ safety systems, and the results of these tests are recorded and monitored for corrective action plans (when applicable). DFTA tests and inspects safety systems regularly by conducting tests of fire extinguishers, emergency lighting, exit lights, elevators, and lifts as part of the annual assessment.”

3. Continue to ensure that all senior citizen centers possess current place-of-assembly permits (for those centers that are required to have such permits).

**DFTA Response:** “DFTA agrees that senior centers should possess current place-of-assembly permits. DFTA has historically always placed a high priority on this criterion on all phases of contract management, and will continue to do so.”

4. Continue to ensure that all senior citizen centers maintain documentary evidence, or at least a log, of annual Fire Department inspections, or a request for such an inspection (for those centers that are not required to have place-of-assembly permits).

**DFTA Response:** “DFTA agrees that senior centers [should] maintain documentary evidence of annual Fire Department inspections, or a request for such an inspection. DFTA’s annual assessment includes monitoring senior center’s compliance for an annual Fire Department inspection. Since senior centers must request inspection from the Fire Department, DFTA requires that senior centers keep documentation of the request and/or inspection. In addition to the assessment noted above, DFTA is now collaborating with the Fire Department so that DFTA will be notified of violations of our senior centers in a timely fashion. This process will further strengthen out monitoring of program compliance with Fire Department regulations and will alert us sooner of issues that require agency follow-up and response.”

5. Continue to ensure that all senior citizen centers maintain well-lit and unobstructed exit passageways and provide adequately illuminated exit signs as needed.

**DFTA Response:** “DFTA agrees that all senior centers should maintain well-lit and unobstructed exit passageways and provide adequately illuminated signs as needed. DFTA Program Officers, and Nutritionists and other staff monitor this through multiple site visits throughout the year. The need to adhere to this safety requirement is constantly being reinforced with programs that must ensure the day-to-day compliance. In order to ensure compliance with the requirement for properly illuminated exit signs, DFTA continues with its regular assessment of the centers. Results of the assessments are forwarded to the Facilities Management Unit for code compliance and remedial action.”

## Appendix I

### List of the 15 Senior Centers Visited by Auditors

| #  | Name of Senior Center              | Borough   | Community District | Observed In Previous Audit |
|----|------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 1  | Murray Hill SRO                    | Manhattan | 06                 | YES                        |
| 2  | Farragut Senior Citizen Center     | Brooklyn  | 02                 | YES                        |
| 3  | Community Lounge Senior Center     | Manhattan | 06                 | YES                        |
| 4  | City Hall Senior Center            | Manhattan | 01                 | YES                        |
| 5  | Decatur Grant Square Senior Center | Brooklyn  | 08                 | YES                        |
| 6  | Caregiver Program of SNAP          | Queens    | 13                 | YES                        |
| 7  | Selfhelp Clearview Senior Center   | Queens    | 07                 | YES                        |
| 8  | IPR HE Corona Senior Center        | Queens    | 04                 | YES                        |
| 9  | Bridge Street Senior Center        | Brooklyn  | 03                 | YES                        |
| 10 | BFFY Ozone Park Senior Center      | Queens    | 10                 | YES                        |
| 11 | Eileen Dugan Senior Citizen Center | Brooklyn  | 06                 | NO                         |
| 12 | Roundtable Senior Citizen Center   | Brooklyn  | 04                 | NO                         |
| 13 | Fort Hamilton St. Johns            | Brooklyn  | 10                 | NO                         |
| 14 | Encore at St. Malachy's            | Manhattan | 05                 | NO                         |
| 15 | Hudson Guild Case Management       | Manhattan | 04                 | NO                         |



**DEPARTMENT FOR THE AGING**

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Edwin Méndez-Santiago, MSW, CSW  
Commissioner

Julie Friesen, Assistant Commissioner  
Bureau of Management and Budget

June 6, 2005

Mr. Greg Brooks  
Deputy Comptroller for Policy, Audits,  
Accountancy and Contracts  
Office of the Comptroller  
One Centre Street  
New York, NY 10007-2341

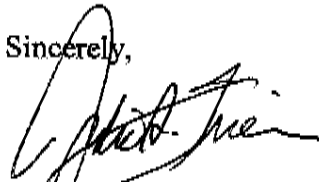
RE: Follow-Up Audit Report on the Department  
for the Aging  
Monitoring of Senior Citizen  
Center Conditions MG05-093F

Dear Mr. Brooks:

Thanks for allowing us to revise our response to your draft audit report dated May 10, 2005. The attached pages will replace our May 27, 2005 submission.

Please use the cover letter signed by Commissioner Méndez-Santiago on 5/27 for a complete submission. If there are any further questions, do not hesitate to contact Grennett Campbell at 212-442-1159.

Sincerely,



Julie Friesen  
Assistant Commissioner

**Recommendation #1:**

***DFTA should require senior center operators to include an evacuation diagram as part of their written emergency evacuation plans. The diagram should map out the floor plan of the facility and highlight the evacuation path, emergency exits, gathering points, and location of fire extinguishers and other fire suppression apparatus throughout the facility.***

**DFTA Response:**

1. DFTA agrees that an evacuation diagram should be included in the senior center's emergency evacuation plan. The DFTA assessment now requires that the diagram be included in the emergency evacuation plan that the diagram maps out the floor plan of the facility, highlights the evacuation path, emergency exits, gathering points, and the location of fire extinguishers and other fire suppression devices.

**Recommendation #2:**

***DFTA should require that senior centers regularly inspect and test all of their safety systems and maintain documentation (i.e., invoices, inspection reports, etc.) or, at the very least, a log that reflects the date of such inspections and tests and the name of the person(s) or organization(s) conducting them. Where required, these systems should be inspected and tested by individuals possessing the applicable certificates of fitness issued by the New York City Fire Department.***

**DFTA Response:**

2. DFTA agrees that safety systems should be regularly tested and that corresponding documentation of the inspections be kept. DFTA tests and regularly inspects providers' safety systems, and the results of these tests are recorded and monitored for corrective action plans (when applicable). DFTA tests and inspects safety systems regularly by conducting tests of fire extinguishers, emergency lighting, exit lights, elevators, and lifts as part of the annual assessment.

**Recommendation #3:**

***"DFTA should continue to ensure that all senior citizen centers possess current place-of-assembly permits (for those centers that are required to have such permits)."***

**DFTA response:**

3. DFTA agrees that senior centers should possess current place-of-assembly permits. DFTA has historically always placed a high priority on this criterion on all phases of contract management, and will continue to do so.

**Recommendation #4:**

**“DFTA should continue to ensure that all senior citizen centers maintain documentary evidence, or at least a log, of an annual Fire Department inspection, or a request for such an inspection (for those centers that are not required to have place-of-assembly permits).”**

**DFTA response:**

4. DFTA agrees that senior centers maintain documentary evidence of annual Fire Department inspections, or a request for such a inspection. DFTA's annual assessment includes monitoring senior center's compliance for an annual Fire Department inspection. Since senior centers must request inspections from the Fire Department, DFTA requires that senior centers keep documentation of the request and/or inspection. In addition to the assessment noted above, DFTA is now collaborating with the Fire Department so that DFTA will be notified of violations of our senior centers in a timely fashion. This process will further strengthen our monitoring of program compliance with Fire Department regulations and will alert us sooner of issues that require agency follow-up and response.

**Recommendation #5:**

**“DFTA should continue to ensure that all senior citizen centers maintain well-lit and unobstructed exit passageways, and provide adequately illuminated exit signs as needed.”**

**DFTA response:**

5. DFTA agrees that all senior centers should maintain well-lit and unobstructed passageways and provide adequately illuminated signs as needed. DFTA Program Officers, Nutritionists and other staff monitor this through multiple site visits throughout the year. The need to adhere to this safety requirement is constantly being reinforced with programs that must ensure day-to-day compliance. In order to ensure compliance with the requirement for properly illuminated exit signs, DFTA continues with its regular assessment of the centers. Results of the assessments are forwarded to the Facilities Management Unit for code compliance and remedial action.