



NEWS

# Hell's Kitchen Residents Demand Immediate Action Over Rising Drug Crime



by **Ariel Pacheco**

1 week ago

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Drug crime is rife in areas of Hell's Kitchen — and residents and business owners in the neighborhood are saying enough is enough.



353-357 W45th Street Hell's Kitchen last week. Photo: Phil O'Brien

In a highly-charged email sent to city agencies and community leaders, a group led by David Stuart, President of the HK45/46 St Block Association, has issued an ultimatum — with a four-week deadline to tackle the out-of-control drug crime plaguing Hell's Kitchen and outlining an aggressive course of action aimed at hot spots of drug activity, in particular 353 W45th Street.

The email includes emotive and hard-hitting quotes from locals, including:

- “I see people urinating, defecating, or performing public sex acts, shooting up and ODing on a near daily basis” (Resident).

- “They come into our store, they’re high. They act erratically and the place clears out. We are forced to let them stay now because when we ask them to leave or ask them to step outside they become angry or erratic” (Business Owner/Manager).
- “Our sidewalks and streets are covered in piles of trash and human filth left by drug users. Building owners aren’t cleaning it up. It’s affecting our business” (Business Owner).
- “People are always on the steps, strung out or using drugs. I walked past a woman with a needle dangling from her arm last week. It makes me a little on edge if I am by myself. We don’t let anyone around there at all late at night.” (Local Business Owners and Employees)

According to the concerned citizens, crimes include open drug dealing, theft and aggressive panhandling. Drug paraphernalia and human waste litter the streets, creating a health hazard and a haven for rats.



353/357 W45th Street in Hell's Kitchen. Photo: Phil O'Brien

The email calls for an immediate, public, multi-agency investigation at 353-357 W45th Street. Allegations claim the building, owned by notorious slumlord Steve Croman, is home to a drug dealing ring, squatters and prostitution. Croman was jailed in 2017 and in a separate civil case was stripped of his right to manage his property portfolio for five years. In January this year, he again took control of his property empire, much to the dismay of tenants.

“We are calling on you for immediate, substantive and effective action to put an end to the out-of-control drug crime occurring in Hell’s Kitchen and the ancillary impacts this type of crime has on our community,” said Stuart.



David Stuart, HK45/46 Block Association President, has led calls to city agencies and community leaders. Photo: Phil O'Brien

“Our goal here is to partner with you to develop and execute a solution within four weeks, but please be aware that we will not tolerate inaction or lethargic action. Our community is no longer going to live with drug crime, and the filth, degradation and fear such crimes promulgate!” If the deadline is not met, there are plans

to release a hard-hitting video of “drug dealing, drug use, and the filth and degradation occurring at 353 W45th Street and across our community” and to hold a press conference outside the property.

“Our community has reached a tipping point. We’re fed up. We’re angry. We’re scared. It’s time to affect change at a higher level,” said Stuart in the email.

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“I spoke with Attorney General Letitia James’s office, as well as Inspector O’Connell, and both are eager to participate in our meeting regarding this extremely problematic location. We will also pull together staff from Mayor Adams’ office, as well as the Department of Sanitation and other stakeholders, such as the NYPD

narcotics unit,” said councilmember Erik Bottcher in an email. “All the relevant agencies need to come up with a coordinated plan to address this ASAP.”

“I absolutely agree the situation at 353-357 W45th needs an immediate all hands-on-deck approach to ensure the illicit activities there are put to an end and the multi-agency approach Erik is organizing can be utilized for other known hotspots in HK. I and my office will fully participate and lend all the support we can to these actions,” said assemblymember Tony Simone.

At Midtown North’s police precinct community meeting last week, residents reported an increase in the use of injection-based drugs in Hell’s Kitchen. The Department of Sanitation cleaned up more than 90,000 needles in the past year — an increase of over 20,000 from fiscal year 2022.



Landlord Steve Croman. Photo: New York State Attorney General

The landlord of 353 W45th Street is Steve Croman, listed in the [Village Voice's 10 worst landlords. In 2017](#), he pleaded guilty to grand larceny, tax fraud, and filing a false financial document and was sentenced to eight months in prison, along with a \$5 million fine. In 2015, tenants of Croman's properties in Hell's Kitchen [leveled allegations of harassment](#) at him, citing a prolonged disruption to gas services that lasted several months.

Back in 2016, Croman was the feature of a New York Times Editorial Board opinion piece ["Tenants vs Landlords from Hell"](#) — seems like not much has changed...



**Tom**

October 4, 2023 at 8:59 am

I saw two guys shooting up on 45th between 10th and 11th last week. Once had his pants down in order to inject in his leg. What can be done in a situation like this? Call 911? 311? This is a genuine question. Who do we bombard with calls in order to report such things?



**Kelsey**

October 4, 2023 at 2:41 pm

My husband and I were going home one night and found two young men actively shooting up on our front stoop. (54th st) They became super aggressive when we asked them to move on and blocked our front door. We called 311 and they told us "if someone is actively shooting up it is a 911 call." We called and they never showed up. This is a huge issue.



**Susan Ameal**

October 11, 2023 at 9:20 pm

Please call 911 immediately



**Riley**

October 4, 2023 at 9:21 am

Same thing on W 48th by the Hell's Kitchenette deli. The dealers are out all night with a constant stream of buyers on foot, bikes and in cars. Buyers use on our doorstep and won't move to let tenants in and out. You know to look the other way from the dealers if you don't want a brick through your window. Cops do nothing... 911 useless, same for 311. Super won't fix the situation because he's lazy/inept or because we're rent stabilized and management wants us to move out.



**Susan Ameal**



October 11, 2023 at 9:22 pm

Please call 911 – the data is used to show that we have a problem.



**Florian**

October 4, 2023 at 9:32 am

if people really want any real change, then they gotta stop voting for the same incompetent soft-on-crime Democrats. It's insanity to keep voting for the same people over and over again and then expect them to change and do their jobs when they haven't done so in years and decades.



**Joanne Lotsko**

October 4, 2023 at 11:23 am

Agree with Florian



**G**

October 4, 2023 at 4:20 pm

Agreed!!!



**Gregg**

October 5, 2023 at 7:00 am

Since politics is always a choice if the lesser of 2 evils, what is the alternative to the current ineffectual politicians that we currently have? Clearly, based on what is happening in the US House, Republicans can't even run their own party let alone actually legislate, and their top national candidate is a criminal psychopath. I am disgusted by Adams' continuing incompetence (as evidenced by his pathetic inaction with the recent flooding) and I voted for other Democrats in the primaries. But there is no way in hell I would ever vote for the hateful, anti-trans, anti-choice, pro-January-6 party of the grotesque Republicans. Better Democrats? Yes. Republicans? Never.



**Pat Hughes**

October 4, 2023 at 9:50 am

You can call all you want. No one is coming to help you. Once again you elected an incompetent leader and wonder why your neighborhood is turning into Portland, Oregon. It is sad and so unnecessary. Elections have consequences.



**Jennifer Smith**

October 4, 2023 at 9:54 am



W 48th between 8th and 9th on both sides is just as bad. Every night I walk home and it used to be what I called as the rat walk, so many! Now it's the the junkie/dealer walk they're literally are sometimes 5-6 just roaming the block. Mostly towards 9th Ave. And this is has been going on for at least a year.



## Christopher

October 4, 2023 at 9:58 am

West 54th between 10th and 11th is another hotspot. I recently watched a man use a knife to slowly slice many, many infected injection sores off his legs and arms and proceed to bleed profusely onto the sidewalk. Police and 311 were called by multiple people, but alas, they did nothing. In fact, officers told a gathering crowd that he had a right to cut himself. The proceeded to laugh together and play on their phones for about 10 minutes, and then they drove off and waved to the guy.

This is probably another topic, but perhaps police should live where they serve? We care because it's our neighborhood, because our neighbors are affected, and because the people who are addicts are hopeless and helpless. It's clear more than a few police officers in this precinct have sheer disdain for people who live and work here, or they wouldn't be so callous and uncaring.



## Mary

October 4, 2023 at 2:40 pm

Cops should DEFINITELY live where they serve. They absolutely don't care about us or our neighborhood. I'm sure we all have lots of stories about the laziness and apathy of the cops. They are pathetic and disgusting—the only thing that would change their performance is if it affected their families. Otherwise, they are a waste of money, enabled by Adams.



## CHiPs

October 4, 2023 at 5:21 pm

Here is an example of why it can be actually a bad idea for cops to live where they serve:

Let's say they are doing a big drug bust in the kitchen of a restaurant. Now all these neighborhood line cooks, and their friends in other kitchens, know who busted them.

Now, thanks to De Blasio, all those bad guys are back on the street, working in other restaurant kitchens. The officer who was doing her duty now has to be afraid of eating there if recognized and what they will do to her food.

The residence issue is more complicated than people realize.



## Edward Love

October 4, 2023 at 3:55 pm

Do you really think a cop could afford a market rate apartment in this neighborhood?



## Joe

October 4, 2023 at 11:44 pm

Yes because the cops got an insane salary boost thanks to Eric Adams.



**Tierney**

October 4, 2023 at 10:21 am

Syringe possession used to be a class A misdemeanor. So when you called the cops they could actually do something when they arrived on scene. Now it's legal to possess hyperdermic needles. Cops show up to your call about open air drug use. Nothing they can do about it. You can't idle a car outside a school but you can shoot up now! So please don't complain if you voted for the people who create these policies. We already had a clean needle exchange program in place. Making it legal to carry one around was not saving lives or lowering infection rates. Just made it impossible for the cops to help. That's it.



**Pat**

October 4, 2023 at 10:27 am

49th between 8th and 9th. A kid shot up in his neck in front of the parking garage using a rear view mirror of one of their cars. WW Plaza is littered with needles at night and is a shadow of its former self. It used to be organized, clean and respectable but now it seems like anything goes. The buildings on the south side of 49th are called meth row for a reason. There are school children up and down this street that are being exposed to all of this. Someone needs to do something!!



**Marisa**

October 4, 2023 at 10:39 am

This has been HK reality since COVID when a cartel made HK a home base. It took two years for a federal investigation to finally arrest 8 members of the "crew" operating near W43 and 8th Ave. A federal offense luckily is not a desk appointment ticket but jail.

Our "elected officials have avoided the issues like the plague. They only show up and "fight" for easy issues, planting flowers, paper shredding and fund raising.

Good for you David. I ask you and the group (if not already) hit the issue where it hurts. With the ineffectiveness of those getting paid to push for more investigations.

David has demonstrated in my dealings with him that he doesn't bend a knee to false idols.

Good for you, my friends!!



**Joanne Lotsko**

October 4, 2023 at 11:25 am

Need to Elect New Officials and not the same old ones year after year! They do nothing ! Just collect their paycheck!

**Zach**

October 4, 2023 at 11:43 am

I've owned a business in Hell's Kitchen for over a decade and since COVID our entire neighborhood has changed and it seems like it's only getting worse. My business has been robbed and vandalized numerous times in the past 6 months and I see people openly doing drugs on our street almost every day. Mental illness and drug addiction are rampant in our neighborhood and it is just not safe anymore. We call the cops and they arrive telling us there is nothing they can do... These people are a danger to themselves and the people around them and something needs to be done. The city needs to take public safety seriously and deploy cops on corners and implement regular patrolling to have an actual presence in our neighborhood until things improve.

**Sophia**

October 4, 2023 at 12:42 pm

The corner of 46th street and 10th avenue under the scaffolding has constant heroine use. It is terrible. I have tried to find the owner of the building to urge having the scaffolding removed but to no avail.

**Therese**

October 4, 2023 at 12:51 pm

When you give free needles, free meth pipes, & access to free NARCON to "Save" the druggies WHAT DO YOU EXPECT!! YOU ARE SUPPORTING this behavior.. Oh but now it is on Your block so it is different!!!!

**Gabriel**

October 4, 2023 at 11:14 pm

Sorry, just if you could be clear, could you please openly state that your position is "I think drug users deserve to die"?

I mean, if that's what you think, surely you can at least have the decency to own it.

Drug use is a messy issue and I'd agree that there's a lot that could be done about it, but I think most people generally have at least enough empathy in them to think that saving lives is a good thing, but I of course can't pretend to know you.

**Joe**

October 4, 2023 at 11:46 pm

Amen! Compassion goes a long way. Supportive housing, not makeshift overpriced shelter systems will take us further.

**Ronny from Hell's Kitchen**

October 4, 2023 at 2:13 pm

Honest question for the "stop electing the same soft-on-crime people and expecting different outcomes" folks: what are the solutions that alternative elected officials will bring?

**Gordon**

October 4, 2023 at 7:28 pm

You're not going to get an honest answer, because the truth is that they want the NYPD to come crack skulls. They won't settle for anything less than bloodshed, but they're not quite comfortable saying it out loud yet.

**Belle Knox**

October 4, 2023 at 11:12 pm

I am very comfortable with saying it. How do you think Giuliani "cleaned" everything up? And this didn't "just" happen. Bloomberg decided especially towards the end he just wanted to concentrate on tourism and then 8 years of Deblasio led right to this. Not going to lie.. I had high hopes for our current mayor. 😞

**Ronny from Hell's Kitchen**

October 5, 2023 at 4:20 pm

I think Giuliani put homeless people on buses either to prisons or other cities, but I'm not sure about that. These options don't work. Other cities are dealing with the same problems. Prisons are atrocities.

**Alberto**

October 4, 2023 at 2:50 pm

When enforcement was called about (ALL-NIGHT DEALING) weeks ago on the west end of WEST 48TH ST. a patrol car came and did a wellness check on the addicts (which I have no problem with, since they're sick and in need) while the dealer(s) watched from across the street... and then they rode away!

I actually went to the meet police on the meet your local law enforcement/people day at the P.S. 111 playground and handed a cop a piece of paper with the address of the stoop these people hang out on... to no avail. I even spoke to the drug dealer!!!

I would like a city official to advise me what I need to do next.

**John**

October 4, 2023 at 3:49 pm

I've called 911 and 311 and reported the drug/sexual activity at 353 W 45th St via the 311 app. When I called 911, the responding officers from Midtown North said to me, "What do you expect us to do about it?" When I reported via 311, all of the reports were closed within minutes, with a "The police investigated and found no such [activity]," message. If NYPD chooses to turn a blind eye and not do what we all understand is their primary function (enforce laws in order to keep the community safe), it seems impossible to expect any meaningful progress towards public safety.

**HKGirl**

October 4, 2023 at 5:01 pm

also live on this block and have had entrance in/out of my building blocked by drugged-up individuals on the stoop (and even trying to break into the building) and the cops who show up just don't GAF and say they can't do anything about it. it's just like what's even the point anymore? no one cares.



**Melissa Jo Bell**

October 4, 2023 at 5:57 pm

Leticia James is busy with other priorities.



**Chris**

October 4, 2023 at 11:29 pm

Hell's Kitchen is not what it was before the pandemic – no one to blame but the former mayor and current. The police need to be able to handle situations. It's obvious they've been ordered not to thus there is no order. Things won't change until we get a Juliani like mayor again. Median rent 2900 a month to live in “-across 110th st” environment.



**Albert regis**

October 4, 2023 at 6:26 pm

Really unpleasant understanding the costs of the neighborhood and the rent... I found a girl without a leg with a needle. on her arm, I told the police, I thought she was dead, but the police were not interested. Another day I saw people having sex under the stairs, rats, cockroaches, needles and garbage around. What kind of police are there in NYC now? completing the Hotel Row. on the same street but on 8th avenue immigrants with drunk children on weekends prostitutes and thieves at what point did this become this neighborhood, the city also opened a space for them on 8th avenue so they could put their motorcycles and have barbecue the sunny days. What else should we put up with? nobody does anything



**Marisa Redanty**

October 5, 2023 at 10:24 am

Guys, it is not about the police. The police CANNOT arrest or engage any longer the way they used to. The new “bail reform” was put into place with major problems. They screwed up the law that was supposed to keep 12 year old kids who stole a backpack from going to jail awaiting trial. Instead, it emboldened and gave a free pass to dangerous, armed drug dealers. After the “brilliant” (not) bail reform got passed these criminals if arrested got “hit” with a slip of paper with an “appointment date” on it. This is after being caught having 100 ONE HUNDRED hits of cocaine/crack on them and they walked out of the precinct after a couple of hours, filled up their pockets from the refill dealer and were seen back on the same friggin' corner.

Ask a cop. It's true. And these elected officials, the ones just recently elected are scaredy cats and crumble before they will say this needs to be addressed. I voted for Alvin Bragg. What a mistake. Then he comes out and says he will NOT PROSECUTE certain offenses???

So there you have it. Remember this: Elected officials MAKE the laws. That's why they are called legislators. I hate to say all of this. We used to have real fighters in office who weren't afraid to engage and work with the police. Skull cracking? No sir. That's not the point.

Nobody wants someone to take advantage of the badge like that. However, we need to give our NYPD the ability to police! Get the bad cops who are clearly in the wrong OUT of the department. But we have made our NYPD useless in the matters HK residents care about. Flowers and paper shredding and BBQ fund raisers are all well and good. But when we have people defecating in our doorways, shooting up on the sidewalk in the middle of the day, engaging in prostitution anywhere, anytime with no regard since they won't be arrested, shop lifting in plain view then I think the flowers and the paper shredding and the new bike lanes need to be lower on the priority list. I disagree with comment about being ashamed. No one is ashamed to shout that we need our police to be able to keep the peace. Enough is enough.

**Gregg**

October 5, 2023 at 12:46 pm

Bail reform – look at the actual facts. This right wing talking point about bail-reform supposedly increasing crime has been disproved several times over, but this myth persists.

Have we all forgotten that as bail reform went into effect, there was a global pandemic which caused: societal shutdown, emptying of NYC, loss of institutions to serve the needy, widening income inequality, and general desperation among those who couldn't "work from home" or escape to their country homes. We have in no way fully recovered from all of that – then add the fentanyl crisis and a Supreme Court allowing guns to be carried in NYC.

Crime has increased nationwide since the pandemic. But I guess it's easier to blame one simple law instead of addressing the massive problems this country is facing.

We need actual solutions to help our fellow humans beat the disease of addiction. Throwing the poor in jail (with bail that only the rich can pay) is not the answer.

**D Mack**

October 7, 2023 at 11:06 am

44th between 8th and 9th has become a hellhole. People lying in doorways high off their asses and dangerous EDP wandering back and forth assaulting people. I don't know how the restaurants there like don Giovanni survive.

**Av8rgirl**

October 7, 2023 at 1:21 pm

SOLUTION -> My time here in the city goes all the way back to the Guardian Angels days. In the intervening years traveling for the media covering stories just like this one, I've seen this same pattern of a neighborhood's devolution repeat itself over and over again.

I can also say with certainty borne of experience that if you think that this can be left to the politicians and LE to sort out – you are only sewing the seed of what is going to happen next, right here, right outside your door. Flip on your TV and scroll down to the Internet feed from CBS News and select the San Francisco affiliate's evening news... It's a war zone. The politicians aren't to blame, the community is – for failing to act aggressively.

What does work? The Guardian Angels knew what they were doing and were led well back in the day. In fact they performed admirably without even the most basic cell phone / communications capabilities. We need to do build on this with a formal community policing

program, run by us. That means multi member block patrols, a command and coordinating structure, common communications channels, a liaison with LE, and getting the best advice from those who have already been successful at this.

There are ways to do this right without being injured, and it would clean our neighborhood up. It would build a sense of community that has been disappearing as well. But its takes work, much more involvement than just calling 911.

The question is – what are YOU willing to do?



**Susan**

October 11, 2023 at 9:25 pm

The police are unable to stop this as a lot of the activity has been decriminalized – this is a policy issue and not a police enforcement issue. The only remedy is to change the policy, which may require a change in leadership.

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