

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION 2019

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MAY 7, 2019  
Start: 6:06 p.m.  
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HELD AT: Lehman College (Bronx)

B E F O R E: GAIL BENJAMIN, CHAIRPERSON

COMMISSIONERS: SAL ALBANESE  
DR. LILLIAM BARRIOS-PAOLI  
LISETTE CAMILO  
JAMES CARAS  
EDUARDO CORDERO SR.  
STEPHEN FIALA  
PAULA GAVIN  
LINDSAY GREENE  
ALISON HIRSH  
REV. CLINTON MILLER  
SATEESH NORI  
MERRYL TISCH  
SATEESH NORI  
MERRYL TISCH  
JAMES VACCA  
CARL WEISBROD

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

BETTY MALONEY, Radial Women

ALEA MARCHELLO[SP?], New York City  
Resident

DEBORAH ROSARIO, Bronx Queen Parts

BRIAN MORGAN, City University of New York  
at Lehman College

ANDREW COHEN,

JOHN REYNOLDS,

FRANK MORANO

MAGGIE CLARK, PhD in Environmental  
Science and Policy

ROXANNE DELGADO,

SHIVONA NEWSOME, Black Lives Matter  
Greater New York

HAWK NEWSOME, Black Lives Matter Greater  
New York

MICHAEL BELTZER, Civic and Community  
empowerer in South East Bronx

JITEO SIMONELLI

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

PAUL GILMAN, Green Party, Bronx Community  
Greens of New York

ADAM WEINSTEIN, President and Chief  
Executive of Phipps Houses

GEORGE DIAZ,

2 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Hello  
3 everyone, welcome. Good evening and welcome to  
4 tonight's public meeting of the 2019 New York City  
5 Charter Revision Commission. I'm Gail Benjamin, the  
6 Chair of the Commission and I am joined by the  
7 following Commission members: The honorable Jim  
8 Caras who is seated left, the honorable Lisette  
9 Camilo, the honorable Sal Albanese, the honorable  
10 Paula Gavin. I am sorry, I am just getting old and  
11 losing my memory. The honorable Carl Weisbrod and  
12 the honorable Sateesh Nori and the honorable E  
13 Cordero has just joined us. With that we have a  
14 quorum. Before we proceed, I'll entertain a motion  
15 to adopt the minutes of the Commissions hearing held  
16 on May 2<sup>nd</sup> at Brooklyn Borough Hall. A copy of which  
17 has been provided to all of the Commissioners. Do I  
18 hear a motion? Second? All of those in favor?

19 ALL: Aye.

20 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Opposed? The  
21 minutes are adopted.

22 Tonight, we continue our second round of  
23 the public hearings in order to solicit feedback from  
24 the public on proposals the commission is considering  
25 for changes to the New York City Charter.

1  
2           As I have emphasized throughout our  
3 public meetings, as the City's fundamental governing  
4 document, the Charter plays a vastly important role  
5 in establishing the structure and processes of City  
6 Government, which in turn affect many aspects of our  
7 everyday lives. It has been our task to evaluate how  
8 the current Charter has performed since it was  
9 largely put into place in 1989 and to identify areas  
10 in which improvement should be made in order to best  
11 serve the city over the next 30 years.

12           At our first round of Borough hearings in  
13 September, as well as through engagement online and  
14 in person, we received hundreds of suggestions for  
15 changes to the Charter. The Commission ultimately  
16 adapted a set of focus areas which outline those  
17 ideas which we decided to pursue further and then  
18 held a series of expert forums at which we were able  
19 to hear from a wide variety of people knowledgeable  
20 in those areas.

21           Following that month-long process, the  
22 Commission staff issued a preliminary staff report  
23 containing recommendations regarding those proposals  
24 which they feel particularly merit further  
25 consideration for presentation to the voters on the

1  
2 ballot this November. That staff report is what  
3 brings us here today. We look forward to hearing  
4 your comments about any recommendations in the report  
5 that you support or oppose, or ideas you may have for  
6 how best to craft any specific proposal. Then,  
7 following testimony from the public, we will have  
8 some time to open the floor to the Commissioners so  
9 that we may discuss with each other the ideas and  
10 recommendations that have been raised.

11           Now, we begin the public testimony. If  
12 you wish to testify and have not yet done so, please  
13 feel out a speakers form which are these yellow forms  
14 and submit it to the staff. When you are called up  
15 to speak, we are happy to accept any written  
16 testimony you may have. We will limit testimony to  
17 three minutes per individual in order to ensure that  
18 we can hear from everyone who wishes to speak.

19           If you approve what someone is saying or  
20 you feel particularly strongly, I would appreciate in  
21 the interest of both an orderly commission and good  
22 manners, that we use jazz hands instead of clapping  
23 or applauding. Or if you really hate something, you  
24 can use negative jazz hands. We would greatly  
25 appreciate your assistance on this. After you

1  
2 testify, members of the Commission may have a  
3 question for you to follow up on your ideas.

4           For the first panel, I call up Betty  
5 Maloney from Radical Women. Come right up, yes, I am  
6 going to call the other three people and I believe  
7 that the Honorable Sal Albanese wants to make a  
8 comment before we start. Aleah Marcello [SP?], Ryan  
9 Morgan, and Deborah Rosario. Sal?

10           SAL ALBANESE: Thank you Madam Chair. I  
11 just wanted to bring to everyone's attention that if  
12 they didn't read the article in the New York Times  
13 today about conflicts in fundraising, especially as  
14 it related to one of our focus areas, the Conflicts  
15 and Interests Board. And even I that follow these  
16 things, was surprised that members of the Conflict  
17 and Interest Board can actually donate to campaigns  
18 of municipal office holders and the article and once  
19 again, this was just reported what the Times said  
20 today, pointed out that two of the members of the  
21 Conflict and Interest Board belong to the same law  
22 firm and that law firm hosts their meetings. Also,  
23 that law firm has bundled money to the Mayor and the  
24 appearance of impropriety is very important in all of  
25 these issues. Especially, when it comes to the

1  
2 Conflict and Interest Board. I mean we don't want  
3 the people evaluating the conflicts and the City  
4 having their own conflicts.

5           So, I am asking the staff to research the  
6 possibility based on this article, banning anyone who  
7 is a Commissioner on the Conflict and Interest Board  
8 from donating to municipal office when they are in  
9 office. So, I am asking the staff to do that. There  
10 is also an issue about disclosure in there. What  
11 they can and cannot disclose. I think Ritchie Torres  
12 put it very well today, the councilman. He was  
13 quoted in the Times article. He said that he didn't  
14 vote for a particular commissioner because that  
15 commissioner was a donor, a pretty large donor to the  
16 Mayor and he said the optics are terrible of having  
17 someone appointed to the Conflict and Interest Board  
18 that's a donor to a person who will be evaluating the  
19 pros and cons of a conflict.

20           So, I think it's an important issue. I  
21 didn't realize if those folks could donate and once  
22 again, the appearance of impropriety is significantly  
23 higher on the Conflict and Interest Board. So, I am  
24 asking the staff to research it and possibly we can  
25 vote on something like that, which I think this

1  
2 involves the Charters ethics rules. Thank you, Madam  
3 Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Okay, thank  
5 you very much Sal. I think staff has heard the ask  
6 and will provide information. Deborah Rosario, oh, I  
7 am sorry, I have it backwards, you're right. Betty  
8 Maloney.

9 BETTY MALONEY: Okay, good evening  
10 Commissioners and the public and the audience and the  
11 public that is watching the live stream at home. My  
12 name is Betty Maloney and I am here as a  
13 representative of Radical Women. I am also a retired  
14 public-school guidance counselor and member of  
15 American Federation of Teachers for over 40 years and  
16 a former rape crisis counselor and advocate trainer.

17 Radical Women is a national organization  
18 of women which is engaged in grassroots activism  
19 aimed at eliminating sexism, racism, homophobia, and  
20 labor exploitation since its founding in 1967. It  
21 was on the spaces that we allied with the campaign  
22 for an elected civilian review board. I want to draw  
23 attention tonight to the stake that woman have in  
24 creating an ECRB and why our lives are affected by  
25 the ramped police misconduct and violence. I draw

1  
2 upon my personal experiences as a raped victim and  
3 the first word uttered to me by a police officer  
4 after the rape was, are you a prostitute?

5           In the early 70's, I also worked on the  
6 rape crisis line for five years and during that time,  
7 trained over 100 advocates and I saw firsthand how  
8 police treated women of color. They would arrive 90  
9 minutes to 2 hours after the call was made, they  
10 would not gather evidence and they would take a very  
11 short statement. All of these experiences were  
12 during a time when rape was considered a crime  
13 against property. Women were property in the state  
14 legal codes across the country. Black women know  
15 very well from the history of slavery in this  
16 country, that rape was never and never will be just a  
17 personal issue but was the economic systematic  
18 impression of Black women. Black women under slavery  
19 were never people but property.

20           Now if we go fast forward to now, has  
21 life changed for women? Yes, the legal textbooks may  
22 say crimes against women are no longer listed under  
23 the legal codes of property, but during this ECRB  
24 campaign, I have talked to hundreds of women and read  
25 reports and still in cop land, we are still property.

1  
2 Sexual misconduct by police officers or public  
3 officials is the second most prevalent form of police  
4 crimes as noted by a 2010 annual report conducted by  
5 the Cato Institute.

6           Women, especially women of color,  
7 immigrant women in gender or sex role, nonconforming  
8 women are often seen as targets for sexual  
9 misconduct. They face extortion to perform sexual  
10 acts for cops in order to avoid arrests or protect  
11 their children from harassment or arrests.

12           Structural racism and sexism is inherent  
13 in the police departments and it makes it impossible  
14 for women especially women of color to report to  
15 police officers. I would like to have more time just  
16 to finish this because it's such an important issue  
17 to deal with women and issue of rape and sexual  
18 abuse.

19           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: If you could  
20 take a few more seconds, but if you could begin your  
21 summation.

22           BETTY MALONEY: Okay. The NYPD has  
23 demonstrated a complete inability to police itself.  
24 In the New York Department of Investigation has  
25 issued a report earlier this year that reflected the

1  
2 police department abysmal failure to deal with sexual  
3 crimes against women. We saw this in the case Anna  
4 Chambers, where the cops, the charges were dropped  
5 even though she was handcuffed and under arrest when  
6 they raped her.

7           And one of the things I want to say, when  
8 you were chosen to be on this panel, there was  
9 probably a letter than mentioned that you were an  
10 outstanding citizen. Well, in the Me-Too era we are  
11 sick and tired of outstanding citizens that uphold  
12 the status quo. You are striving for a seat at the  
13 table by being yes, women and men, appointed by city  
14 officials at the expense of the most vulnerable is  
15 not going to create a world without abuse.

16           Women demand accountability. We demand  
17 justice. We demand the rights of women be protected  
18 or written into the legal code. Radial Women  
19 believes as do others participating in this campaign  
20 that only an elected board that has disciplinary  
21 power and works in tandem with an independent  
22 prosecutor can effectively improve police  
23 accountability.

24           If you fail to act for justice and  
25 whether you are a woman or a man, you will be known

1  
2 by the ever-expanding me-too movement for your  
3 failure to act. Nobody is getting a free pass, just  
4 ask Joe Biden. For those in the audience and at  
5 home, we will continue to fight for the ECRB  
6 legislation, and we ask you to join us in building a  
7 broad-based movement, so that citizens of New York  
8 City can go into the ballot box and pass this  
9 legislation. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you  
11 very much Ms. Maloney. Are there any questions?  
12 Seeing none, thank you. And you are?

13 ALEAH MARCELLO: Good evening. My name  
14 is Aleah Marcello. I am a New York City Resident and  
15 a Professor of Geographic Information Systems. This  
16 is abbreviated as GIS and remote sensing at Lehman  
17 College.

18 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Could you  
19 move the mic closer to your mouth?

20 ALEAH MARCELLO: Okay, at Lehman College  
21 where I also serve as the interim director of our  
22 Masters of GIS science and coordinator of the  
23 internship program.

24 I am here to testify in support of the  
25 proposals made by GISMO and to emphasize why

1  
2 strengthening New York City GIS capacity is necessary  
3 to better serve its citizens and the city's use of  
4 resources.

5           But first, I want to thank you  
6 Commissioners for your consideration on this issue  
7 throughout all the borough meetings. I am aware that  
8 many of you are not familiar with GIS and I want to  
9 invite you to discuss more about it and to see the  
10 work of our students because we are here at Lehman  
11 College.

12           GIS enables the spatial information and  
13 analysis of data and has become a critical component  
14 of the spatial systems. Although its importance have  
15 gone unnoticed by many.

16           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Hold on one  
17 minute please. Okay, go ahead, there was music  
18 coming.

19           ALEAH MARCELLO: I know, I heard it to.  
20 Although it's important, it may have gone unnoticed  
21 by many. GIS has already permeated many aspects of  
22 our daily lives and become critical to our security  
23 and our economy.

24           Common examples of GIS applications  
25 include how to get from point a to point b in the

1  
2 most efficient manner, but also important  
3 applications such as 311 and 911 that rely on GIS  
4 technology.

5 My colleagues from Gizmo have already  
6 provided detailed accounts on how GIS helped save  
7 their lives during 911 and Sandy in previous  
8 hearings.

9 It is not surprising that over the last  
10 decades GIS has increasingly been used in New York  
11 City and many other cities of the world. More than  
12 40 students have graduated from our masters program  
13 since 2015 and I am proud to say that the majority of  
14 them have had internships and now hold positions  
15 using their GIS expertise at several city agencies.  
16 This includes the Department of Information  
17 Technology and Telecommunications, The Department of  
18 Transportations, the Parks Department, the Police  
19 Department and the Department of Environmental  
20 Protection among others.

21 Through our work, we've become well aware  
22 of the opportunities and challenges of working with  
23 GIS in New York City. This includes limited  
24 coordination among city agencies, the absence of a  
25 GIS leader and a strategic plan to guide the city's

1  
2 GIS effort and missed opportunities to share good  
3 practices across agencies.

4           We don't know when the next Super Storm  
5 or emergency will hit, but we know that it will  
6 happen and that we need to be ready. We have a  
7 unique opportunity this year strengthen GIS capacity  
8 in New York City to better respond to emergencies,  
9 use our resources more efficiently and improve the  
10 day-to-day services to our citizens. For all these  
11 reasons, I urge you to support the amendment to  
12 Chapter 48 of the city chapter. Thank you very much.

13           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you Ms.  
14 Marcello. Brian Morgan.

15           BRIAN MORGAN: Yes. Good evening. My  
16 topic is the same as Dr. Marcello's, but I have a  
17 little different take on it. My name is Brian Morgan  
18 and I am GIS Professional and user of GIS in higher  
19 education. I work for the City University of New  
20 York at Lehman College as the Senior College Lab  
21 Technician in my department and my job is primarily  
22 within the GIS program. We offer undergrad and grad  
23 level GIS certificates as well as a master's degree  
24 in GIS and our geography bachelor's degree is  
25 primarily concentrated in GIS.

1  
2           My colleagues and I guide the very people  
3 who will be the future of movers and shakers in the  
4 New York City GIS community and beyond which is the  
5 students.

6           As such, my concerns are aligned with the  
7 needs of our students both during and after their  
8 college experiences. As information technology is  
9 continually expanding, so will the realm of GIS.  
10 With increased growth comes the ability to widen the  
11 field and open up new jobs with forward minded  
12 agencies and businesses. Along with that comes more  
13 data and subsequent users making up what we all hope  
14 is an active and robust network of GIS professionals.  
15 However, as the Geospatial arena increases, so does  
16 the need for a stronger infrastructure within this  
17 field as any new or existing issues will become  
18 magnified with this expansion.

19           I am here to express my support of the  
20 city charter amendment proposed by GISMO to provide  
21 for improved leadership and management of Geospatial  
22 information in New York City. The GIS Charter  
23 Amendment is important to CUNY students because it  
24 will directly impact the workplaces that our  
25 graduates are aiming to join. The required

1  
2 interoperative ability and standardization of spatial  
3 data will be key to the continued development of this  
4 technology by tomorrows GIS professionals.

5           Furthermore, the appointment of a Deputy  
6 Commissioner for GIS and the creation of committees  
7 to oversee the complex terrain of open public and  
8 private data across the greater New York City area,  
9 should serve to facilitate efficient innovative and  
10 productive GIS and Geospatial within our community.  
11 Thank you for your time.

12           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you  
13 very much Mr. Morgan. And now I have Ms. Rosario.

14           DEBORAH ROSARIO: Hello, I represent the  
15 Bronx Queen Party and I am here to advocate ranked-  
16 choice voting. I am here to advocate for Ranked-  
17 Choice voting for all elections, primary, special an  
18 in general. I left one of the major parties in  
19 September 2016 because I felt excluded and I also  
20 didn't want to vote for the lesser of two evils. The  
21 green party adhered more to my moral and spiritual  
22 values. In fact, the green party lobbied for the  
23 green new deal, health care and reparations among  
24 other issues before it became mainstream  
25 conversation.

1  
2           When I did switch, it came with the  
3 understanding that I might not have a say on who is  
4 on the ballot, especially in the Bronx where the  
5 democratic dominate the county and I'm thinking that  
6 the democrats or republicans dominates other  
7 counties. However, because the winner in the  
8 democratic primary usually goes unchallenged, they  
9 usually are the elected official of that area.

10           As a result, once the primaries are over,  
11 most people don't bother to vote. Voting for the  
12 lesser of two evils is not a choice. Giving voters a  
13 choice of multiple candidates, allows them to hear  
14 independent voices whether the voices are from the  
15 green party, the independent, the conservatives or  
16 unaffiliated candidates running.

17           I think people should not be afraid to  
18 step outside box and should really express a true  
19 preference in the ballot. So, I urge you to vote in  
20 for Ranked-Choice voting. I think this is a step  
21 forward to making our elections more democratic.

22           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you  
23 very much Ms. Rosario. Are there any questions for  
24 any of the members of the first four panelists? May  
25 I just ask if the green part A has any particular

1  
2 view on whether Ranked-Choice voting is appropriate  
3 for all city offices or for some?

4 DEBORAH ROSARIO: I think for all city  
5 offices. We actually have Ranked-Choice voting when  
6 we elect our candidates within the party.

7 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Okay, thank  
8 you very much. Anyone else? Thank you very much.

9 DEBORAH ROSARIO: Thank you very much.

10 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: The next  
11 panelists are Andrew Cohen, John Reynolds, Frank  
12 Morano, and Maggie Clark.

13 There are comments on your new beard Mr.  
14 Cohen.

15 ANDREW COHEN: I am ready when you are.  
16 Good evening everybody. It is good to see you all.  
17 I really came really because I miss working with  
18 Councilman Vacca and I wanted to come and say hello.

19 I really want to say that what a  
20 tremendous opportunity this is that the charter  
21 really, that we're taking a more comprehensive view  
22 of charter revision as opposed to some of the more  
23 narrow work that's been done. I submitted two  
24 letters over the last few months to the Charter  
25 Revision Commission. One of them I think that was

1  
2 addressed pretty well, the other one, and I think  
3 maybe the challenge was I didn't have any great ideas  
4 on the solution, but I will say as a Council Member,  
5 it is clear to me that the capital process is  
6 severely broken and I know that there is some  
7 procurement reform you recommend but I don't know if  
8 that really goes far enough that will get it. The  
9 prices are astronomical beyond commonsense. The  
10 timelines are absurd.

11           In my experience with the Parks  
12 Department, which you know, I love parks, but it has  
13 been incredibly frustrating. I literally, I think  
14 had my second groundbreaking as a Council Member on  
15 projects that I funded in the very first year I got  
16 to the council. I am still trying to get some of my  
17 predecessors projects completed, or I have a library  
18 project that they haven't broke ground on that was  
19 funded by my predecessor. And I would also just like  
20 to give this example of in terms of contract review  
21 for a capital project, you have the agency lawyer,  
22 say the Parks Department, the Law Department, and the  
23 Comptroller who all work for the city and in theory  
24 have the same client reviewing a contract, it adds  
25 many, many, you know, a long delay in terms of

1  
2 getting these projects approved and moving. I do  
3 think that school construction authority has a pretty  
4 good record of getting work done, so that maybe a  
5 source as a model maybe for a capital reform.

6           The other letter I wrote was regarding  
7 election reform and I do think that particularly  
8 around special elections, I think that also that you  
9 guys did a good job in addressing that. There needs  
10 to be some flexibility in terms of calling the  
11 specials and having them coincide with either primary  
12 day or election day. I think that the new change in  
13 primary day has sort of made that more feasible.

14           I will say that as a Council Member, and  
15 this was not in the report, but I find that  
16 anecdotally that the Council Members or elected  
17 officials in general have a lot of difficulty dealing  
18 with the Campaign Finance Board. I know the public  
19 really appreciates it but I do think that there needs  
20 to be a reform in the CFB that would separate their  
21 ability to levy fines and so, they are really the  
22 judge jury in execution currently in the current  
23 model and I know there has been some reform to get  
24 people to be able to access oath, but I don't think  
25 that goes far enough and it should not be an

1  
2 adversarial system when candidates deal with the CFB  
3 and it is. I find that, and again, while the public  
4 loves it, the people who actually deal with it find  
5 it very, very difficult to deal with.

6 My testimony on ranked voting is, I'm  
7 very concerned about ranked voting be as it be at  
8 least the local races. I could see perhaps citywide.  
9 I am concerned as someone who ran on a local level  
10 that it could just lead to sort of mischief in a way  
11 that might not achieve the goals that we wanted to  
12 achieve and you know, you might have to run a more  
13 sophisticated campaign than people are capable of  
14 running now in order to have these strategic  
15 alliances. I think it adds a level of complexity  
16 that I wonder if that would really get to the goal  
17 that we're trying to achieve.

18 I'll keep going fast.

19 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Perfect.

20 ANDREW COHEN: Budget transparency. You  
21 know, particularly and you deal with this also, the  
22 units of appropriation. It is very frustrating at  
23 the Council and you do make some recommendations on  
24 CCRB. I think that the public has very little  
25 confidence in CCRB and you know, just a need of I

1  
2 think a total reform. I think everybody wants to  
3 have accountable police, including the police and the  
4 system we have now I think is not good. I will say  
5 this; I think that the term limits needs to be looked  
6 at. As a Council Member, I think the regime makes no  
7 sense. I would not be here except for term limits.  
8 I support term limits, but the current regime  
9 weekends and already relatively week legislature, I  
10 think that that's been a problem. I do support  
11 advise and consent you recommended in various places.  
12 I think that that should be used more greatly, and I  
13 will just say one of the frustrations, but I think  
14 that there needs to be clearer definition around  
15 elected officials. I find it difficult as an elected  
16 official as someone who illegally engages in politics  
17 to comply with the same rules who people who were  
18 appointed or people who are actually get their job  
19 unmerited. Like, it's a challenge, those rules.  
20 They could be looked at. It would be nice if there  
21 were alternate means, easier alternate means for  
22 initiating Ulurp and I also think that your  
23 recommendations on Rainy Day Fund are important.

24 So, thank you.  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you  
3 very much Council Member. Mr. Reynolds?

4 JOHN REYNOLDS: Yes, good evening and I  
5 am representing Charter Commission Audience  
6 Participants and all. My name as I said, is John  
7 Reynolds, I am a lifelong resident of New York City,  
8 68-year resident of the Bronx and I am gratified to  
9 be speaking after my Council Member Andrew Cohen.

10 I am here to speak in favor of RCV  
11 Ranked-Choice Voting and I'm sorry, I have to  
12 disagree with the Council Member, I believe that RCV  
13 should be implemented in all elections but certainly  
14 the purpose of the Charter Revision, in all New York  
15 City elections.

16 I became a politically active voter I  
17 guess, when I first voted in the late 60's. I  
18 actually was a democrat than. I am not a member of  
19 any party at the moment. This is not a partisan  
20 issue in my opinion. When I became a democrat, I was  
21 actually a member of the same club as Council Member  
22 Cohen is and my earliest recollections of elections  
23 were that we had Ranked-Choice Voting in the  
24 democratic party then.

1  
2           Actually, I recall, even though it was  
3 before I was born, being told that we had  
4 proportional representation in the City Council in  
5 the 30's and 40's. I don't want to be ideological.  
6 I mean, I don't think this is an ideological issue  
7 and I think that its an issue of small d democracy.

8           My colleague that is front of me, John  
9 Stuart Mellon in the 19 Century advocated for Ranked-  
10 Choice Voting and proportional representation as a 19  
11 Century liberal measure. So, I would say that  
12 democrats can be for this, republicans, liberals,  
13 conservatives, marines, libertarians. I don't know  
14 who was against it. So, the advantages are clear.  
15 We will save money for not having to have runoff's  
16 elections in city races. These cost millions of  
17 dollars that is probably unnecessary. I believe we  
18 need this in the general election as well. I can't  
19 remember, forgive me. I know in my lifetime, there  
20 have been runoff's in the general election in New  
21 York City and we can just eliminate that.

22           So, I ask you to consider this. I mean,  
23 I keep professional. If I were advising a  
24 corporation about corporate governance, I would  
25 advocate for this. Maybe corporations already have

1  
2 it, big corporations because they want to give the  
3 minority some seats on the board. Why not?  
4 Otherwise, you might have a shareholder revolt. So,  
5 this is good corporate governance. So, if New York  
6 City were a corporation, oh, wait a minute, New York  
7 City is a corporation, I would advise for it. I am in  
8 favor of Ranked-Choice Voting in all of New York City  
9 elections. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you Mr.  
11 Reynolds. Mr. Morano. I think I've seen you -

12 FRANK MORANO: Once or twice. Thank you,  
13 Commissioners, good evening. I want to reiterate my  
14 admiration for the incredible job that the staff did  
15 in putting together their report. How they were  
16 able to piece together hundreds of ideas from so many  
17 different ideologies and New Yorkers is a testament  
18 to their thoroughness and the really comprehensive  
19 job they did in looking at this and I think the most  
20 important aspect of their report is in the  
21 introduction when they say it is important to  
22 remember that these recommendations do not in any way  
23 bind the commission, nor do they reflect the official  
24 position of the commission. It becomes so tempting  
25 when you put the amount of work into something that

1  
2 the staff has here to defer to their recommendations  
3 and I want to remind you that you were all appointed  
4 for a reason. Like Harry Truman, the buck stops with  
5 you. You were appointed for your unique experience,  
6 your unique intellect, your unique perspective on the  
7 world and ultimately it is going to be your records  
8 that the public remembers and there is one issue  
9 where I differ significantly from what the staff  
10 recommends and that's the issue of democracy vouchers  
11 and I know that's come up repeatedly. But before KI  
12 think the staff is flawed in their analysis of the  
13 issue, let me briefly go into a little bit of the  
14 history of campaign finance in this city.

15 We all remember the city for sale  
16 scandal. We all remember the corruption of the  
17 1980's. A lot of us have seen the picture at City  
18 Hall and the sad thing about that was, that era was  
19 essentially a lot of legalized very large campaign  
20 contributions and essentially in this city, we had a  
21 system of legalized bribery. Not surprisingly, the  
22 City Council in part with Council Member Albany's at  
23 the time, acted to enact the campaign finance act to  
24 reform this. Now what they did was they instituted a  
25 one to one match.

1  
2           Now, a lot of people would say a one to  
3 one is not going to do very much good. Sort of  
4 insufficient, than they went to four to one which  
5 became very costly. So costly, that at a time when  
6 New Yorkers were being asked to spend 18 ½ percent  
7 more on their property taxes and at a time when we  
8 were told the city was so broke, we had to turn off  
9 the lights on the Brooklyn Bridge. Even with that,  
10 we were still giving politicians millions of dollars  
11 even if they didn't have an opponent. So then, that  
12 wasn't good enough. We went to a six to one system,  
13 which we saw with the indictment and the arrest of  
14 people like Malcolm Smith and Dan Halloran and  
15 numerous others became a magnet for corruption. That  
16 wasn't good enough. So now, we've advanced to an  
17 eight to one match, which has created a cottage  
18 industry for lawyers, political consultants,  
19 accountants and people that know how to game the  
20 system.

21           So, we still have legalized bribery. We  
22 still have a system that is insufficient. We have a  
23 system that is more costly than ever and serves to  
24 enrich essentially a gang of political insiders. So,  
25 who are we helping with our current political system?

1  
2 And then you all know the democracy vouchers program  
3 better than me, I am sure in part because Sal has  
4 repeatedly advocated for it. But let me finish with  
5 why the staff says they're not going to go along with  
6 it.

7           They say it doesn't go along with the  
8 focus areas that you voted on and that you  
9 established. What they said, is that the city  
10 generally can without a referendum enact local laws  
11 relating to campaign finance and they point to areas  
12 they have. They said, the city can enact local laws.

13           Now, if you look at the very first focus  
14 area that you adopted and that you voted on, it says  
15 focus on ideas and proposals that likely would not be  
16 accomplished by local law. No one questions that the  
17 City Council has the ability to adopt democracy  
18 vouchers by local law. They are not going to. You  
19 have a collection of people here and a lot of good  
20 folks among them who got to where they are as  
21 beneficiaries of the current system. Whose campaigns  
22 were funded by many of the very same interests that  
23 are benefiting from the current system. They are  
24 never going to adopt it.

1  
2           So, please, don't go along with what the  
3 staff recommends. Put it on the ballot and let these  
4 people vote.

5           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you  
6 Frank. Maggie Clark?

7           MAGGIE CLARK: I'm Maggie Clark PhD in  
8 Environmental Science and Policy. Founder of Inwood  
9 Preservation unified Inwood and Inwood Legal Action  
10 Environment Committee.

11           Rezoning's are straining the very limited  
12 air and water resources that we have. We can't  
13 continue to pack more and more people into the  
14 limited land area that is New York City. We have  
15 been in violation of the federal clean air and clean  
16 water act since the beginning and the rezoning's  
17 exacerbate this. We are in nonattainment for ozone  
18 but adding thousands of new cars and congestion makes  
19 this worse and adds to asthma rates.

20           The health impacts in the future can't be  
21 undone once the buildings are in place and the  
22 gridlock is inevitable. Combined sewer overflow  
23 violations caused by the new toilets, showers, and  
24 sinks will be worsened by climate change and by  
25 addition of new population here.

1  
2           The environmental impact statement  
3 process for each rezoning has been a sham and rules  
4 need to be changed so that the City Planning  
5 Commission and City Council cannot further aggregate  
6 the laws.

7           Here are five of the main issues. One,  
8 each of the city rezoning's contravene federal law,  
9 Clean Air and Clean Water Act and the City Planning  
10 Commission and City Council keep ignoring this and  
11 approving them. Rezoning adds many high-rise  
12 buildings to low rise neighborhoods adding  
13 congestion, more ozone to the air that's already out  
14 of attainment. More sewage to the waters already out  
15 of compliance. These are illegal and the Charter  
16 should disallow this from happening and should undo  
17 such rezoning's that have already happened. There are  
18 legally mandated limits to growth to.

19           Accumulative impacts of the multiple  
20 rezoning's across the city are not calculated. Yet,  
21 the city continues to rezone. EPA requires that  
22 environmental impact statements review for cumulative  
23 impact. The city's EIS is never do, all the  
24 rezoning's never do. This is illegal, free.

1  
2           There is a lack of urgency of alarming  
3 information contained in EIS's. There is no law or  
4 Charter Provision that prevents the disabling of a  
5 community by a city action like a rezoning and  
6 apparently, nothing can be done to undo such an  
7 action.

8           In Inwood, where I'm from, at all 45  
9 intersections studied, some of them near the  
10 hospital, there is up to ten minutes of delay  
11 predicted. Most of the intersections become grade  
12 letter F, where grade letter E is full capacity.  
13 That equals gridlock for the neighborhood. This can  
14 cause deadly delays in fire and ambulance services.

15           In other neighborhoods rezoning's without  
16 needed infrastructure, schools, and other public  
17 works is done routinely. EIS's predicting the  
18 disabling of a neighborhood should be prevented by  
19 the City Charter.

20           Four, the City's predictions of growth  
21 have been way off in the past. The rezoning of Long  
22 Island City said there would be 300 new apartments,  
23 there were 10,000. No new sewers or schools.

24           Tourism, commuter factors are  
25 underreported, undercalculated, a third of Inwood is

1  
2 in a flood plain, half will be in a few decades. 30  
3 story buildings are planned there. Can the City  
4 Charter protect New Yorkers from bad planning that  
5 endangers life and health.

6 And the fifth, citizen proposals and  
7 alternative plans such as the one I wrote for Inwood  
8 need to receive full consideration by the City  
9 Council, City Planning Commission agencies, Borough  
10 Presidents, Community Boards, and anybody else  
11 involved with ULURP AND CEQR.

12 As it is now, some of these officials and  
13 agencies ask citizen groups to devise alternative  
14 plans and when they do, their plans are ignored,  
15 rejected, without consideration. Why should we  
16 bother to comment on EIS's and draft scopes of work?  
17 Why bother to participate in the pointless meetings  
18 drawing circles on maps in a charade for the city's  
19 developers. Unified Inwood's and Community Board 12  
20 comments were rejected. Uptown United's Alternative  
21 Community Plan was totally ignored. None of these  
22 illegalities should be allowed in the City Charter,  
23 by the City Charter and we hope the Commission will  
24 recommend changes to the Charter to correct this.

1  
2 We would be happy to share with you the  
3 Uptown United Plan, our 100's of pages of comments on  
4 the DEIS and draft scope of work for Inwood and  
5 answer any questions.

6 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you  
7 very much Ms. Clark.

8 I am going to take one minute and  
9 recognize that we have been joined by three of our  
10 members, Reverend Miller, Ed Cordero, and Jimmy Vacca  
11 and ask if you would like to vote on the minutes from  
12 the session last Thursday?

13 ED and JIMMY: Yes, I vote I.

14 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Reverend  
15 Miller?

16 CLINTON MILLER: I voted I.

17 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Okay, thank  
18 you very much. Are there questions for these  
19 panelists? Mr. Vacca?

20 JAMES VACCA: First Councilman Cohen, it  
21 is great to be back with you, my colleague and my  
22 friend. To our final witness, miss, I am sorry -

23 MAGGIE CLARK: Dr. Clark.

24 JAMES VACCA: Dr. Clark, I was interested  
25 in some of the things you talked about because many

1  
2 neighborhoods share your frustration with ULURP and  
3 the fact that community engagement is not what it  
4 should be. Now, one thing that I've mentioned that  
5 I've spoken about that I've submitted to the  
6 Commission, is the where there is a ULURP item, any  
7 Commissioner would have a right to hold up that item  
8 for 30 days if he felt that there was not adequate  
9 community engagement and I wanted your view on that.  
10 Do you think that would be helpful to you? Should a  
11 commissioner feel that way, that that would be a  
12 place a neighborhood or community could go to?

13           MAGGIE CLARK: Well, it all depends on  
14 the Council Member and not all of them -

15           JAMES VACCA: No, not a Council Member,  
16 this would be a member of the City Planning  
17 Commission, could hold it up if a community board or  
18 a group felt that there was not adequate community  
19 engagement before the item was certified?

20           MAGGIE CLARK: Surely that would be  
21 helpful. You know, but part of the problem is  
22 ingrown. We have the Mayor controls the City  
23 Planning Commission, so that's one person and one  
24 person controls the Council. The Council Member of  
25 the local district and if that Council Member, for

1  
2 whatever reason, which may or may not be supported by  
3 the data, he doesn't read this stuff, our guy.

4 JAMES VACCA: Well, the Planning  
5 Commission really by virtue of its current setup, the  
6 Chairperson of the Commission is the most powerful  
7 person and one thing that I mentioned and that we  
8 proposed is that the Chairperson of the Commission be  
9 elected by the Commission, not necessarily appointed  
10 by the Mayor. We had expert panels from the City  
11 Planning Commissions and the experts felt that all  
12 was working well the way it is now. I do not agree.  
13 I think the Planning Commission is a rubber stamp and  
14 they have been a rubber stamp for many, many years.

15 You mentioned about Environmental Impact  
16 Statements EIS's.

17 MAGGIE CLARK: Correct.

18 JAMES VACCA: Alright, so in  
19 neighborhoods throughout the city, they are  
20 witnessing over development. They are witnessing  
21 buildings going up that are not constructed in  
22 context with the surrounding communities, over  
23 development.

24 MAGGIE CLARK: Correct.

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JAMES VACCA: So, one thing I mentioned is that these communities now, they are told by the Buildings Department, oh, it can go up as a matter of right. The Community Board, no one has anything to say about it, it just can go up. So, I had proposed that one thing we look at was environmental assessment statements EAS's. That even where it is a matter of right, that there be a threshold. Whether it's residential or commercial and even if it was a matter of right, that once that threshold is reached, it would trigger an EAS statement that would have to access the schools, the sewage, the traffic, and the impact.

So, is that something you think would have helped you in Inwood.

MAGGIE CLARK: Well, there was actually an environmental impact statement which is even more information. And that was totally ignored by everybody.

JAMES VACCA: You know, I have to be honest about the EIS's. I think many times the EIS's are copy and paste.

MAGGIE CLARK: Yes, they are.

JAMES VACCA: They are copy and paste.

1  
2           MAGGIE CLARK: I was part of the group  
3 that was meeting for a whole year with the Borough  
4 President and RPA. You know, two years ago that  
5 engendered this commission and we were talking about  
6 that and a lot of what we talked about a year ago  
7 didn't make it into what I'm seeing here, and I am  
8 kind of disappointed.

9           JAMES VACCA: Unfortunately, I think that  
10 bureaucracies, what they do sometimes is that they  
11 take from one proposal to another proposal and they  
12 copy and paste many, many sections, so that those  
13 sections are not particular to the development that's  
14 proposed.

15           MAGGIE CLARK: That's exactly what  
16 happens. There is a lot of flaws and I hope that you  
17 will decide as Commissioners that you really need to  
18 dive more into the seeker process. The City  
19 Environmental Equality Review process because that's  
20 not one of your focus areas as your staff determined  
21 and it's broken very badly. You are contravening  
22 federal law. You know, this is the only opportunity  
23 we're going to have to fix the system in this way.  
24 To allow the environmental laws to not be broken.

25           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you.

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JAMES VACCA: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Are there any other questions? Sal?

SAL ALBANESE: Mr. Morano, thank you for your testimony. You know how passionate I am about democracy vouchers.

CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: You got to move the microphone closer.

SAL ALBANESE: Can you hear me? Alright, I wanted to thank you for your testimony. You know how passionate I am about democracy vouchers and in your testimony, you pointed out that it is catching on now. Not only in Austin and Albuquerque but also Senator Gillibrand proposed in a national level this weekend, a major release, which I think says a lot about the kind of democracy that will promote. And I think Council Member Cohen made some pretty good points about the CFB, which is you drown in bureaucracy. I don't think anyone - who is going to run for office, can appreciate what you go through to deal with the campaign finance board. It's accusatory, it's adversarial.

As a matter of fact, as a candidate, you worry more about the CFB than your opponent. So,

1  
2 obviously, if you have any other suggestions Council  
3 Member, I'd love to hear them.

4 I'll just add in terms of Senator  
5 Gillibrand's presidential candidacy, I think it says  
6 a lot that someone from right here in New York, or be  
7 it not in New York City, that seen firsthand how  
8 broken the federal campaign finance system is and  
9 what we do here in New York City is actually  
10 proposing this on a national level. Think of what  
11 that looks like if we have a New Yorker running for  
12 president and yet, we're not even going to take the  
13 opportunity in New York City to do what she is  
14 proposing. Not that everything she is proposing is  
15 great, but my broader issue is how the staff said  
16 they were dismissing it. Under the category of under  
17 proposals, your criteria that you adopted, they  
18 completely either misrepresent or misunderstand and  
19 that's why I don't think you should go lock step in  
20 totally deferring to the staff and all their  
21 recommendations.

22 ANDREW COHEN: I certainly wont go on  
23 lock step but I think look, let's talk really politic  
24 here. This is an issue that will open up the process  
25

1  
2 and quite honestly insiders don't like the process to  
3 be opened up, it's that simple.

4 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you.

5 SAL ALBANESE: I'll tell a brief  
6 anecdote. I have a colleague who was at the final  
7 stage with the Campaign Finance Board and I  
8 ultimately voted for this legislation, that the rule  
9 is now that the Council to Campaign Finance Board  
10 cannot participate in the final deliberations. And I  
11 thought to myself when I saw this bill, that doesn't  
12 make any sense. The board members, you need your  
13 council, everybody needs their council, but because  
14 the setup is that the Board sits here and hears the  
15 case, but the attorney for the Board argues for the  
16 "prosecution for the fine". You argue that you  
17 shouldn't be fined. Then they kick you out and the  
18 prosecutor essentially goes into the room with the  
19 judges and decides on the outcome.

20 So, I mean, we changed that at the City  
21 Council, but I think it just points to a broader  
22 problem with how ultimately the CFB resolves a case.  
23 It should not be an adversarial system like you said  
24 and I hope that if you don't take that up, I hope we  
25 take that up.

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ANDREW COHEN: It's a nightmare.

CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you.

Carl?

CARL WEISBROD: Council Member, first of all, I like your beard. It is very distinguished. Good addition. I was a little surprised to hear that you have reservations about Ranked-Choice voting at the local level, at the Council level where I would think we first have many, many candidates frequently running and where the Ranked-Choice voting at least from what we've heard from many places that practice it, add to the education and awareness of the electorate and also, doesn't create as far as we can tell any confusion among the electorate. And wouldn't that result generally in council elections and local elections where the winning candidate was more fully embraced by the district as a whole than the first past the post system that we have now?

ANDREW COHEN: I will tell you, I really try in my job not to be cynical, but I think it's important that I be optimistic and I do try to be a class half full person, but I really, having been involved in politics for a very long time, I just really see an opportunity for mischief for people who

1  
2 are not – you know, a lot of people run for office.  
3 Not all of them get elected for good reason, but  
4 there is an opportunity I think for people to come up  
5 with some bad ideas and then carry those bad ideas  
6 out.

7           CARL WEISBROD: I guess on my question, I  
8 understand your concern, it's a concern we all share  
9 obviously. That we don't want to see bad ideas  
10 perpetuated but why do you think that Ranked-Choice  
11 Voting is more likely to produce that kind of  
12 chicanery than the system we have now?

13           ANDREW COHEN: Well, now, you know, when  
14 I ran, I was in a heads up but there is no incentive  
15 for me to have any interaction with the people I am  
16 running against in terms of trying to clued or come  
17 up with a scheme to get your voters to vote for my  
18 voters. You know, we live in a city with a lot of  
19 ethnic politics – like, I feel like there's an  
20 opportunity again, for people who have never run for  
21 office to get entrapped in a way that and it's not  
22 entrapped, you shouldn't break the law. But again,  
23 the people who want to win, who feel passionately  
24 might come up with again, some bad ideas about how  
25 they could scheme to get people to sort of vote the

1  
2 way they want them to and I think on the local level,  
3 we are particularly vulnerable to that.

4 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: That's  
5 certainly possible but several days ago, Mr. Morano  
6 spoke about this issue and suggested to the panel  
7 that the very thing you're talking about could lead  
8 to more civility because persons who are running for  
9 election would not only need to appeal to people for  
10 their first vote, but they would have to be civil  
11 enough about others that they could get someone's  
12 second vote or third vote, or fourth vote and Mr.  
13 Morano suggested that it would lead to more civility  
14 in our election process, not less in the way that you  
15 are describing.

16 Mr. Morano, is that an accurate  
17 description of what you had posited?

18 FRANK MORANO: It is, and I will  
19 absolutely give a shout out to the staff who also  
20 made a similar illusion in their preliminary staff  
21 report, especially, I didn't want to sound like I was  
22 beating up on them too much before, they've done a  
23 great job. But yes, that's exactly what I was  
24 saying.

1  
2           ANDREW COHEN: There are a few of you on  
3 the panel and myself who have run for office, and I  
4 will tell you, you know, I would like to believe that  
5 I have conducted my to the highest ethical standards,  
6 but I will also tell you it was a terrible personal  
7 strain. I was not as nice to my wife as I would like  
8 to be.

9           So, I am not sure that people are always  
10 at their best in these moments. It is very, very  
11 stressful. It is very difficult. People are relying  
12 on you and again, I think that people who – you know,  
13 a lot of first-time candidates could make mistakes or  
14 come up with an idea that could lead them into  
15 getting into a lot of trouble and one of the concerns  
16 I had was CFB. I don't want to see people running  
17 for office being criminalized. Like, you make a  
18 mistake, it's clear that this could lead to people  
19 with you know, I'll help you, you help me, in a way  
20 that is not appropriate and again, I am concerned  
21 about that.

22           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Okay, thank  
23 you. I mean, I would just say that in the old days,  
24 when we had elections for anti-poverty boards and for  
25 school boards, political clubs were the people who

1  
2 made those judgements. Who suggested that a slay of  
3 candidates and that you vote for this person one,  
4 this person two. I am not sure that I would agree  
5 that is political chicanery. I think it may be  
6 people exercising their vote in a collective and  
7 responsible way. So, I guess I'm disagreeing with  
8 you, I'm sorry.

9                   ANDREW COHEN: Well, you're certainly  
10 free.

11                   CARL WEISBROD: I think I tend to agree  
12 with Gail on this but Council Member we are not  
13 reinventing the wheel here. I mean this rank order  
14 voting has been implemented in many cities around the  
15 country and I think we can learn from that. There is  
16 always an opportunity for chicanery. We know that,  
17 you can do that during regular process, but I think  
18 the testimony we've heard from where it's been  
19 implemented around the country has been generally  
20 positive.

21                   ANDREW COHEN: Nobody knows better than  
22 you, New York City politics is very rough and tumbled  
23 and I wonder if -

24                   CARL WEISBROD: Oh, yeah, it's a contact  
25 sport.

1  
2                   ANDREW COHEN: It certainly is, and I  
3 also wonder if more sophisticated candidates will not  
4 be in a better position where people experience,  
5 people associated with biblical clubs to make those  
6 alliances. Again, I have concern, I think that we  
7 should just trade, like, I am more open to it for the  
8 citywide offices, I think there is a better  
9 opportunity there to sort of see how it works.

10                   CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you  
11 very much. Are there other questions? I'd like to  
12 thank the panel.

13                   PANEL: Thank you.

14                   CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: And I am  
15 going to call the next panel. Roxanne Delgado,  
16 Shivona[SP?] Newsome, Hawk Newsome and Michael  
17 Beltzer. Ms. Delgado?

18                   ROXANNE DELGADO: Thank you Commission.  
19 I would like to first start with my - I have a table  
20 that I took from your report regarding the drop-offs  
21 from the primary and the run-off primary. From the  
22 213-public advocate, we had a turnout drop-off of 60  
23 percent. The 2009 Comptroller and public advocate  
24 you have drop off of 35 percent and 36 percent.

1  
2 I would like to argue with you that the  
3 reason there was just a large drop off, is the fact  
4 that if you just include the top two candidates, for  
5 example, 2009 Comptroller rates, the drop-off  
6 actually is only 5 percent. I believe that - because  
7 if I include only the top two candidates that made it  
8 to the runoff, their turnout for those two candidates  
9 in the primary versus the runoff is basically 5  
10 percent drop-off. Because I believe the people who  
11 didn't get their candidates make it to the top two,  
12 didn't come off the vote because their candidate was  
13 not on the ballot on the runoff. That's my argument.

14 The same case with the 2009 Public  
15 Advocate. The drop off, if I just include the top  
16 two candidates, in this case with de Blasio at Mark  
17 Green is actually one percent. Again, it's only the  
18 top two candidates in the primary versus them in the  
19 runoff. It doesn't include those who didn't make it  
20 to the top two.

21 For my argument again, its those whose  
22 candidate didn't make it to the top two or to the  
23 runoff, didn't come out to vote because their  
24 candidate was not in the race any longer.

1  
2           Regarding the 2013 Public Advocate, there  
3 is a big drop-off in 45 percent. But my argument is  
4 because it was only a Public Advocate race as opposed  
5 to the Comptroller and I think most people really  
6 don't care much for the PA's race. They stay home  
7 for that.

8           So, my argument is that runoff part again  
9 demonstrates that people don't care much about the  
10 Public advocate race and actually the drop off, if we  
11 just include the top two contenders who made it  
12 primary to runoff, is actually much less than  
13 comparing apples to oranges when you include total  
14 line up in the primary versus two contender's in the  
15 runoff. That's my argument.

16           Regarding turnout, for the most recent  
17 race was a 2019 special election for PA race. The  
18 turnout was 9 percent and that's my argument.  
19 Ranked-Choice doesn't cure lower voter turnout and it  
20 won't change that barely 9 percent of registered  
21 voter and less than those of eligible voters voted  
22 for the office of public advocate. Ranked-Choice  
23 only assumes that people vote for the person they  
24 assume will win instead of the person you want to win  
25 despite the odds. Which I don't agree with that

1  
2 assumption, because I vote based on who I like, not  
3 who I think will win.

4           Ranked-Choice will put those at low-  
5 income areas at a disadvantage not because low-income  
6 people are not intelligent. Because in areas such as  
7 mine, the voter turnout are lower than the norm.  
8 Which means candidates often canvas in campaign in  
9 pockets of high voter turnout. Many of us in our  
10 district won't even meet the candidates. For  
11 instance, in last year centennial race the candidates  
12 focused more on Riverdale as opposed to my  
13 neighborhood which has a lower turnout than  
14 Riverdale.

15           We are **[inaudible 1:00:27]** in which often  
16 confuses people since they often select the same  
17 candidate in several different parties for the same  
18 elected office and have to redo their ballots. First  
19 of all, it takes up a lot of prime space on our  
20 ballot and the Ranked-Choice will increase that space  
21 only will cause more delays as it did in November of  
22 last year.

23           Advocates for Ranked-Choice vote  
24 recommend education yet BOE doesn't even train their  
25 poll workers properly. On May 2017, several poll

1  
2 workers didn't inform the voters to flip their ballot  
3 to vote on the Constitution Convention.

4 I see no visits to RCV, it won't address  
5 the low voter turnout and in fact, the candidates who  
6 win, whether it is with our without RCV, did not win  
7 by a majority of registered voters since all turnout  
8 is less than 25 percent of registered voters.

9 Instead of masking the low turnouts of  
10 RCV, let's focus on treating the disease, not the  
11 symptoms. People have lost faith in our system and  
12 we need to regain the public trust with real reform.

13 Reforms such as allowing voters to decide  
14 if they want to strengthen the public advocates  
15 office or eliminate it. Let the people have control  
16 how our government runs and maybe perhaps more will  
17 come out to vote. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you  
19 very much. The next speaker is Ms. Newsome.

20 SHIVONA NEWSOME: Good evening. My name  
21 is Shivona Newsome. I am a Bronx resident and a  
22 Director of Operations for Black Lives Matter Greater  
23 New York. I stand before you on behalf of all in  
24 favor of an elected civilian review board.

1  
2           In the last report filed by New York City  
3 Civilian Complaint Review Board, there were 95  
4 complaints filed by Bronx residents for the month of  
5 March alone. A total of 281 complaints since  
6 January. My beloved borough ranks number two for the  
7 most complaints filed in the city. Ironically, the  
8 location chosen for this very meeting lies in the  
9 52<sup>nd</sup> police district.

10           Certainly, everyone sitting on this board  
11 knows the 52<sup>nd</sup> Precinct leads in civilian complaints  
12 in the history of corruption. While we are meeting  
13 here to discuss revisions for a committee that we  
14 know lacks any real power, that's padded with the  
15 Mayor and City Council Members and oh, let's not  
16 forget the three law enforcement members who were  
17 sworn to their blue code of silence, that very  
18 precinct, the 52<sup>nd</sup> precinct, as I am speaking is  
19 holding a forum asking civilians, how can they help  
20 face the challenges of the community. Here is the  
21 answer, stop corruption.

22           Stop police brutality and met that we all  
23 no matter Black, White, Brown, or Blue, we should all  
24 be held accountable for our actions. An elected  
25 civilian review board offers the level of

1  
2 accountability that our city needs. There will be no  
3 discrimination. Citizens of the Bronx and other  
4 boroughs would elect people like them, community  
5 members, mothers and fathers, people living above and  
6 below the poverty line. No matter the race or creed,  
7 will be elected to protect and ensure real justice  
8 for the people of this great city.

9           A committee appointed by the police  
10 commissioner, the Mayor, and the City Council will  
11 forever be bias and ineffective. And most  
12 frightening, it is untouchable. The ruling of this  
13 current board can never be challenged by the very  
14 people it is supposed to serve and protect.

15           How can we ask a District Attorney with  
16 such close ties to the NYPD, to ever be unbiased in  
17 the prosecution of cops. We need a special  
18 prosecutor, we need a board that has the power to  
19 investigate, discipline and order restraining and  
20 subpoena to cops who have committed crimes. The only  
21 way bad cops will ever be held accountable is with an  
22 elected Civilian Review Board.

23           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you  
24 very much Ms. Newsome.

25           SHIVONA NEWSOME: Thank you.

1  
2                   CHAIPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Hawk Newsome.

3                   HAWK NEWSOME: My name is Hawk and before  
4 the clock starts, I'd like to address a matter of  
5 housekeeping. For me to take these shades off would  
6 be to show you a sign of respect. I chose to  
7 disrespect you because people like James Vacca who  
8 just looked up from his cellphone, had been on his  
9 cellphone for 80 percent of this hearing. You sir  
10 are guilty as well. You Ma'am did not listen to the  
11 whole first panel and it's extremely disrespectful to  
12 the people of New York City and I would appreciate if  
13 you show these people the respect that they are  
14 entitled to.

15                   My name is Hawk Newsome, I am the  
16 Chairman of Black Lives Matter Greater New York. 70  
17 percent of the most violent acts of police brutality  
18 in the country have been committed by the NYPD. 70  
19 percent have been committed by the NYPD. Why?  
20 Because it is people like you who are in essence  
21 place holders. Who do the bidding for this  
22 bureaucracy that is New York that are to afraid to do  
23 anything about it. It is people like you who point  
24 fingers at Donald Trump but here locally implement  
25 his tactics of this delusion of White supremacy. Why

1  
2 is it that our enemy Donald Trump passed the first  
3 step act when democrats failed. It's because  
4 democrats fail Black people consistently with no  
5 remorse.

6           You betray us, you betray our mothers,  
7 you allow our children to be victimized and over  
8 policed in schools and you do nothing about it.

9           I read your report; it was insulting. It  
10 was a waste of paper and a waste of oxygen for those  
11 of you who debated it. It does nothing. Right now,  
12 activism is taking over the country. The Women's  
13 March, Black Lives Matter; Start it down and Occupy;  
14 and guess what? Every piece of what you are and what  
15 you represent right now is going down the shitter.

16           Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez should be an  
17 indicator to all of you that change is coming but you  
18 sit here in this farce and this hypocrisy and you  
19 listen to us and you act like you care yet you do  
20 nothing about it. This Mayor brought his son out with  
21 his afro when he was running for election and they  
22 said, oh, I fear for my son when he walks the streets  
23 of New York, but yet and still he did nothing to  
24 correct the police. They turned their backs on him  
25 and he cowered to them.

1  
2 I have a question. When was the last  
3 time any of you saw a police officer who was charged  
4 with misconduct, say you know what, there is the  
5 report, guess what, I did it?

6 Get off your phone brother. Mr. Vacca,  
7 please get off your phone. When was the last time  
8 you saw a police officer admit wrongdoing before  
9 trial? Never. When was the last time you saw Pat  
10 Lynch and Ed Mullins come out and say that these  
11 officers are wrong? Never. They have all the  
12 protection in the world, and we have none and the  
13 reason we have none is because we rely on people like  
14 you who don't do shit.

15 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Excuse me.  
16 If you could just - Mr. Beltzer?

17 MICHAEL BELTZER: Good evening  
18 Commission. I will amplify the words that Mr. Hawk  
19 Newsome just said. Even if it makes me feel  
20 uncomfortable. The respectability politics needs to  
21 go. My name is Michael Beltzer, I am a civic and  
22 community empowerer in the South East Bronx. I thank  
23 the Commission for holding this hearing today and the  
24 work that you did and the Commission staff for your  
25 report. And of course, like I'd like to do at all

1  
2 these public hearings is thank the City Charter for  
3 allowing us to be here today. So, I really disagree  
4 with the tweaks of the CCRB. I am going to agree;  
5 you didn't really do anything. Too many people that  
6 we love have been murdered in their homes, on our  
7 streets, and it's time to hold the forces killing our  
8 neighbors accountable. It's time for our ECRB.  
9 Ranked-Choice voting; I am in full support of Ranked-  
10 Choice voting. Please ensure that it goes for all  
11 races, especially City Council races, which we see a  
12 high number of candidates run and accompanied  
13 politicians many times don't even achieve a majority  
14 of the vote.

15 I would ask that six choices be made so  
16 you don't have ballot exhaustion. I agree that the  
17 public advocate should have subpoena power. The  
18 Commission should make the PA. The Chair of the  
19 newly Commission Civic Engagement Commission and  
20 integrate the citywide participatory budgeting  
21 process into that office. The small changes you all  
22 suggested for the BP's, I mean, I don't really know  
23 what the purpose is of most of them are. A lot of  
24 the power is really underutilized that they currently  
25 have in the City Charter. A lot of this stuff seems

1  
2 similar to power that could be used through something  
3 like the contract performance panel in section 333  
4 but I haven't seen a borough president convene a  
5 contract performance panel. Having more pre-  
6 certification review is welcome as is the extended  
7 summer community board review. I think that's a good  
8 change. But what would really alleviate a lot of the  
9 short comings would be to have 59 comprehensive  
10 community plans in each community district and a  
11 master citywide plan, so we can actually have true  
12 engagement and buying in the communities. That is  
13 where the frustration comes from. We know this.  
14 Stop developing by block and lot and pitting people  
15 against each other. It's not right, it's not fair  
16 and we're not going to take it anymore.

17           And democracy vouchers are great. I  
18 think they should be done in supplement to the  
19 matching fund program. So, if a candidate receives  
20 the democracy vouchers, that should take away from  
21 their limit of their cap of the matching funds that  
22 they would receive. I think this is fair because  
23 those are direct public dollars, so it's the same  
24 thing as receiving public matching funds in my eyes  
25

1  
2 and it's definitely something that should be extended  
3 to all races in New York City. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you Mr.  
5 Beltzer. Are there any questions for him? Mr.  
6 Caras?

7 JAMES CARAS: Have you made your  
8 testimony available to us?

9 MICHAEL BELTZER: I can put this in. I  
10 would also like to reiterate all my prior testimony.  
11 I did see a lot of the proposals you know, listed. I  
12 did appreciate that. I thought some of them could be  
13 further looked into. Specifically, things like safe  
14 streets, the road allocations. I think that was  
15 something that could built into make sure that if  
16 we're trying to address pedestrian fatalities and  
17 make our city more walkable, is something that should  
18 be built into the City Charter mandating that when  
19 roads and public right a ways receive capital  
20 dollars, that they be done for the most vulnerable  
21 users first in our city which are pedestrians and the  
22 disabled.

23 JAMES CARAS: Thanks, if you could submit  
24 it either online, or to one of the staffers that  
25 would be great.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you any  
3 others? Thank you, Mr. Beltzer. The next panel is  
4 Jiteo[SP?] Simonelli, I think we have seen you  
5 before. Good, how are you. Paul Gilman, Adam  
6 Weinstein, and George Diaz.

7 The floor is yours.

8 JITEO SIMONELLI: Thank you Madam Chair.  
9 Good evening to all honorable members, especially to  
10 Mr. Albanese and my former Councilman Mr. Vacca, who  
11 beat me in a democratic primary, but I have forgiven  
12 him, so I hold no grudge, twelve years later, maybe  
13 more.

14 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: If you could  
15 move the mic a little closer.

16 JITEO SIMONELLI: Is that good Madam  
17 Chair?

18 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: But you just  
19 moved back after you moved it.

20 JITEO SIMONELLI: Oh, I did. Okay, here,  
21 how is that?

22 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: That's good.

23 JITEO SIMONELLI: Okay, thank you so  
24 much. I served on a community board for twelve  
25 years, I was land use Chairperson for awhile and I

1  
2 dealt with a lot of issues and the ULURP process was  
3 interesting and I reviewed it. I remember many years  
4 ago, 20 years ago, I looked at it and I said, well,  
5 how did we get to this point? And interesting enough  
6 Ed Koch had established this board to come up with  
7 this ULURP process and interesting enough who was on  
8 the board? All of these real estate developers, so  
9 we see why we are still dealing with the same issue  
10 here and the community board.

11           Just recently, we had dealt with an  
12 issue, a project in our district, Blondell Commons.  
13 We had two community boards. Two community boards  
14 that have ordered against it that were very vocal  
15 against it and what happened? Obviously, nothing  
16 happened. They discarded the community board. They  
17 did not consider any of the comments, seriously. Mr.  
18 Cohen, who just left, I hope he would have stayed to  
19 hear my comments. I mean, he voted for it, our  
20 Councilman voted for it and that's a problem. I  
21 think the problem is and we spoke last time, when I  
22 testified at this hearing that we would like to see  
23 the community board members to be elected. A  
24 petition process, independent. When they created one  
25 vote, one manual, one vote equal to whatever the -

1  
2 one person. Thank you, thank you Madam Chair. I  
3 don't think they intended to have this finished  
4 product that we have here today. I think we needed  
5 more input, more participation from the people and I  
6 think that is the problem. I requested this board  
7 last time. Thank you by the way for term limits on  
8 community boards, I think that's a first good step,  
9 but we need to take another little step and we need  
10 to make these independent. There is a separate  
11 entity when individuals can kind of reference the  
12 school board. Go out there and gather some support  
13 from the community and be elected and be independent  
14 and be binding. The decision to be binding. I think  
15 that we don't have an upper house in New York City.

16 I think the Community Board is that  
17 balance. We lack an upper house. I mean we have  
18 over 8 million people and 51 City Council people make  
19 the decision. Either we have to empower the  
20 community boards, we have to make them other house,  
21 lower house or upper house, or however you want to  
22 describe it, but we do need to empower the community  
23 boards, or we need to expand and create a at large  
24 positions for City Council as there was many years  
25 ago, at large. Where we can't have maybe a body of

1  
2 20 or 15 individuals, which can be the upper house  
3 and lower house. Here it's a one man show. It's the  
4 City Council. I mean at this point; the City Council  
5 has forgotten that they're legislators. That they  
6 also want to be administrators at the same time.

7           So, we do require more participation, and  
8 I think that would be an extremely – I like the  
9 school boards, I ran many slates during the school  
10 boards time. I think it was participation, it was  
11 grassroots participation and I think this is where we  
12 should take the community boards to the next level.  
13 I think that was the intent and otherwise, I think we  
14 have to go back to the drawing board.

15           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you.

16           JITEO SIMONELLI: Thank you so much Madam  
17 Chair. Mr. Gilman.

18           PAUL GILMAN: Hello, my name is Paul  
19 Gilman and I am a member of the Green Party of New  
20 York. Bronx Green, Bronx Community. I am here to  
21 testify in favor of Ranked-Choice Voting. The other  
22 issues are important, and I especially want to show  
23 my support for Mr. Hawk Newsome, everything he said  
24 is correct. I hope you're paying attention  
25

1  
2 everybody. Just because he is gone, I don't want you  
3 to sleep on me or anyone else here.

4           Anyway, the current system of winner take  
5 all voting in creating a situation which only two  
6 parties, the ones with the most money and we know  
7 which they are. With the most money has a chance to  
8 win, has created a situation in which the majority of  
9 elections, most of the people eligible to vote,  
10 cynically don't vote.

11           When there are two candidates who are  
12 often compromised in some way or are out and out  
13 corrupt and that happens all the time, look at our  
14 presidential election. Or who simply don't represent  
15 the needs and ideologies of their supposed  
16 constituents, that is the people in their  
17 neighborhoods, people don't bother to vote. Its hard  
18 to get excited about an election when the hope is the  
19 lessor of two evils.

20           Our democracy suffers from apathy. The  
21 corruption often involves communities disempowerment  
22 and sometimes community destruction because we are  
23 voting for the lessor of two evils down and into a  
24 spirals of miseries created. Our whole country is  
25

1  
2 going down the tube because we have only two parties  
3 that don't respond to the needs of the people.

4           They respond to their heavy-duty campaign  
5 donors that are like Monsanto who are out and out  
6 poisoning the whole planet. People are now  
7 struggling with housing issues, meanwhile the lessor  
8 of two evils is ignoring the catastrophe of global  
9 warming.

10           This is serious, I hope you are paying  
11 attention because this is going to be a little power  
12 bull here. Reverend you are used to power bulls,  
13 right?

14           Okay, I wrote this one. One candidate  
15 may promise to ameliorate the housing situation while  
16 both candidate support and get support from entities  
17 that exacerbating in global warming. The lesser of  
18 two evils will win maybe while disaster awaits for  
19 all of us, because there is not a third vote, there  
20 is not a third choice that wants to ameliorate,  
21 really ameliorate the housing crisis and end global  
22 warming.

23           Ranked-Choice voting offers a chance of  
24 electing candidates who are not compromised. I don't  
25 have a lot of money or come from political machines.

1  
2 People voters can vote for candidates who promise to  
3 ameliorate housing issues and deal with global  
4 warming. Both democrats and republicans are ignoring  
5 this. Well, he went on a little longer. They can  
6 rank the candidate they like number one and if they  
7 are worried about not getting anything out of the  
8 election, they can vote for the lesser of two evils,  
9 candidate number two. There may be a hierarchy of  
10 evil candidates, I hope the reverse. A choice of  
11 good candidates and whatever the case maybe, the real  
12 politic of electing the best candidate, we must have  
13 Ranked-Choice voting on all levels which includes  
14 primaries and special elections. Any questions?

15 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: I'm doing  
16 questions at the end of the whole panel.

17 PAUL GILMAN: Oh, good, because I am not  
18 good at answering them.

19 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Mr.  
20 Weinstein?

21 ADAM WEINSTEIN: Thank you Madam Chairman  
22 and thank you members of the Commission for having us  
23 and giving us an opportunity to speak. I will be  
24 brief. I am Adam Weinstein; I am the President and  
25 Chief Executive of Phipps Houses. New York's oldest

1  
2 and largest not-for-profit organizations devoted to  
3 creating and maintaining affordable housing. I am  
4 speaking only on land use and specifically with  
5 regard to pre-certification requirements. I just  
6 encourage the commission to encourage transparency  
7 and notification and to avoid opportunities for two  
8 bites at the apple and opportunities to stop  
9 certification of applications.

10           Most folks appearing before Community  
11 Boards should be encouraged to show up long before  
12 the certification process. Only good things can  
13 happen in the instance.

14           The second matter in the commissions that  
15 deserves some attention is the importance of  
16 consolidating existing planning documents that the  
17 city is obliged to produce. I think the commission  
18 has the right idea in using those documents and to  
19 expand upon them to fashion long range objectives,  
20 strategies, needs of the city. But to use that in  
21 any way as an inventory or prescriptive document for  
22 what is ultimately partly a local decision, then  
23 partly a citywide decision and the land use matter  
24 seems to me to be ill founded.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you  
3 very much Weinstein. Mr. Diaz?

4 GEORGE DIAZ: Good evening. Thank you  
5 for letting me speak and thank you everybody who is  
6 here. A few things, as far as the land use, as  
7 someone who regularly has attended Community Board 7  
8 meetings, which we are within the boundaries of  
9 Community Board 7, we had a change in the zoning a  
10 few years back along Webster Avenue and that allowed  
11 for a significant number of new developments to come  
12 up and a lot of the members of the community and  
13 board members have been upset because a lot of these  
14 property owners were putting houses that have some  
15 form of transitional housing and a lot of them were  
16 upset because they felt like they didn't have proper  
17 - they weren't notified about this a head of time.

18 A lot of this pretty much goes through  
19 and the community boards don't really get the say so  
20 that they want. So, this is not about whether I like  
21 that type of housing. It's about the fact the  
22 community boards don't really have the power. They  
23 are basically just an advisory board.

24 So, one of the things I want to see is a  
25 change in the Charter Commission to actually help

1  
2 empower the community boards more to have these  
3 decisions. Several people have spoken about issues  
4 regarding the police. They want the CCRB to be  
5 empowered to be able to recommend and cases where a  
6 police officer has been accused of things to go to a  
7 sort of special council that would specifically go  
8 to investigate and possibly prosecute the police  
9 officers that have committed misconduct and this  
10 person will be independent of that particular  
11 district attorney, as well as whatever the staff that  
12 are going to be there with that.

13 I am also going to talk about the  
14 campaign finance. What I have heard, and I think  
15 this is part of what Councilman Cohen who was up here  
16 speaking about and because there are two former  
17 Council Members on this board, that you may relate to  
18 this. Is that people are concerned about with the  
19 campaign finance about how they get penalized if  
20 they've done something wrong or if the person who has  
21 filed has committed some kind of error.

22 So, one of the things to look at is to  
23 make something more similar to the State of  
24 Connecticut system, where it's less punitive. This  
25 is a relevant issue because this is a fight that

1  
2 several groups have been fighting for I Albany to  
3 change this to have some sort of state version of  
4 campaign finance reform.

5           So, I think that if the City looks into  
6 this, now it makes it easier for that advocates to go  
7 to Albany and say, you know what, see the city looked  
8 at this as a problem and they went to do something  
9 about it. So, we need you to step up and go and do  
10 this because we have been fighting for this for a  
11 long time. And as far as Ranked-Choice, I am very  
12 much in favor of it because you have a system where  
13 you may have a great encumbrance, but a lot of people  
14 often vote for the incumbent because that's the name  
15 and face that they recognize. Sometimes they don't  
16 even know why, they are like, oh, wait a minute, if  
17 you have a discussion, they like, oh, wait a minute,  
18 I don't like what he or she did with that vote and it  
19 may change their mind and I know this gentleman, he  
20 is with another party, that's something that is  
21 relevant to them because ranked-voting may allow for  
22 a system where maybe the person who is at the second  
23 most votes, is somebody who is of a third party  
24 because maybe that person actually appeals more, than  
25

1  
2 maybe some of the other democrats that are running in  
3 the election.

4           Now, I am a registered democrat, so it  
5 doesn't mean that I am supporting that, but I do  
6 think that I would like to have legitimate runoffs.  
7 I am going to use the example of the previous Public  
8 Advocate Letitia James, how she won in a runoff. She  
9 actually was behind in the primary and she managed to  
10 come back and win. So, I think that's the reason why  
11 we have Ranked-Choice voting.

12           It is going to be very important because  
13 even though it is a congressional seat and not a City  
14 Council seat, we're going to have a very important  
15 open seat congressional district in the South Bronx  
16 coming up next year and you have a system where you  
17 could potentially have six, seven, eight, ten people  
18 running in the democratic primary and now, whats  
19 going to happen is you have a system that the person  
20 who wins may only get about 20 percent of something  
21 like that. Is that really the person that should be  
22 going to the general election.

23           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Right, but  
24 you are aware we can't change government.

1  
2                   GEORGE DIAZ: I understand that, but I am  
3 using the sake of argument of why we need something  
4 like that for the city because most of the City  
5 Council members are ineligible to run for reelection  
6 next time. And you're going to have a system where  
7 you may have multiple people, four or five or such  
8 who are going to run for the City Council seat, and  
9 you are going to have an issue where the person that  
10 wins may only get 30 percent and they get  
11 significantly less.

12                   Council Member Diaz, when he won the  
13 reelection previously, he got 42 percent of the vote.  
14 That's not a clear majority, that's a reason why we  
15 should have things like runoffs.

16                   CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Thank you  
17 very much. Are there any questions for the panel?  
18 Sal?

19                   SAL ALBANESE: Diaz, I am glad you  
20 brought up the Connecticut system, Campaign Finance  
21 System, which I think is vastly superior to New York  
22 City's and I happen to agree with you. I think the  
23 state is making a grievous mistake if they emulate  
24 what New York City is doing. It is very expensive,  
25 overly bureaucratic. It doesn't really help

1  
2 grassroots candidates and basically kills the spirits  
3 of candidates. So, do me a favor, look at democracy  
4 vouchers, is another option. Have you?

5 GEORGE DIAZ: I know that there is a  
6 system in the State of Washington that has something  
7 like that, and it is something that I would also  
8 consider. Something that the panel should look into  
9 as well.

10 SAL ALBANESE: In city limits.

11 GEORGE DIAZ: Maybe some kind of  
12 combination.

13 SAL ALBANESE: Great, it's called leading  
14 the witness.

15 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Council  
16 Member Vacca.

17 JAMES VACCA: Thank you Mr. Weinstein. I  
18 just want to preference my remarks by saying that I  
19 know that many developers feel that anytime - I do  
20 know that there is a tendency of many developers to  
21 say that every time we want to modify ULURP, we are  
22 doing something wrong. I am suggesting modifications  
23 to ULURP because the community has been locked out of  
24 the process too often. Not necessarily delaying a  
25

1  
2 developer but making sure that we're at the table. I  
3 think that Mr. Simonelli spoke to that.

4           You indicated, well, the developers go to  
5 the community board and they meet with the community  
6 board. So, you are part of the process.

7           ADAM WEINSTEIN: That's not what I said.  
8 What I said was any successful or good developer, is  
9 smart enough to bring proposals, because land use  
10 proposals are a combination. They are a balancing  
11 act of local need and addressing local needs with  
12 citywide needs. That's the purpose of ULURP. It is  
13 a balancing act among those things, and I was  
14 encouraging change actually, not discouraging change  
15 through the process that gives notification,  
16 precertification notification to community boards,  
17 Borough Presidents, to those with advisory role.  
18 Because I think that does give the kind of  
19 encouragement for folks to engage earlier in the  
20 process.

21           I can only speak from personal  
22 experience, we engage with communities months, often  
23 times even years before we actually prepare a  
24 precertification, a preapplication statement. So,  
25

1  
2 that's even long before the ULURP process, the  
3 certification is even done.

4           So, I'm just encouraging the commission  
5 to think of ways to encourage notice and transparency  
6 as some might being the tool that you first  
7 complained about. That you complained that  
8 developers hide the cheese. And there are developers  
9 that do that work and they tend not to be people who  
10 can do repeat work with communities and build that  
11 kind of trust relationship that you are looking for.

12           JAMES VACCA: I have advocated that when  
13 the city planning commission starts to have the pre-  
14 ULURP meetings, which sometimes go on for months, and  
15 if not a year or two as you just said. That when  
16 those meetings take place that the Community Board be  
17 at the table with the other agencies so that there is  
18 greater transparency. The Community Board may get a  
19 pre-ULURP application, or they may get information  
20 that something is coming down the pike, but when all  
21 the agencies meet with City Planning before  
22 certification, the Community Board, as a City agency,  
23 is not brought into those meeting and I think that  
24 that would lend to greater transparency.

1  
2 ADAM WEINSTEIN: It might, I don't agree  
3 that that's because usually it's the technical  
4 aspects of the application namely the scoping of any  
5 environmental review that's the subject matter.

6 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: The scoping  
7 is a public session.

8 ADAM WEINSTEIN: Yeah, scoping is,  
9 correct but that is the point, those are public  
10 sessions. But I'm just - I think there is common  
11 ground do be found in being able to know and to be  
12 ready, right? As opposed to being in the dark and  
13 not knowing.

14 JAMES VACCA: Right.

15 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Are there  
16 additional questions? Than I would like to thank the  
17 panel.

18 PANEL: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: With that, we  
20 have gone through all of the people who have signed  
21 up to speak. Thank you all for coming, you are  
22 welcome to stay and listen and at this point we will  
23 move to the next item on our agenda which is  
24 discussion.

1  
2                   We had a very robust discussion last  
3 week.

4                   CARL WEISBROD: Sure, I just sort of  
5 throw this out as a question. I am throwing out to  
6 my fellow Commissioner a question in terms of the  
7 trying to unify and make more rational and  
8 comprehensive, all the different planning documents  
9 that we do and using that in some way. I am just  
10 throwing out there how we all envision that might  
11 work?

12                  CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Well, I think  
13 from the report that the way in which we envision it  
14 would work is that they would be sequential and then  
15 one would rely on the work of another one. Each one  
16 of them has a particular area and many of them have a  
17 particular timeframe in which they have to be done.  
18 But how that timeframe relates to the other reports  
19 is not something that is specified currently. So,  
20 that it may well happen that report A, doesn't take  
21 into account at all report D, even though report D  
22 came first, because the two are not required to share  
23 information or to learn from each other in a robust  
24 kind of way. That one would want to have happen, if  
25

1  
2 each report is really going to be really  
3 comprehensive.

4                   CARL WEISBROD: And I guess I will ask  
5 you Gail, and I think that definitely needs to be a  
6 huge part of what we need to do, and I wonder if -  
7 and I think the gentleman from Phipps houses.

8                   CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Mr.  
9 Weinstein.

10                   CARL WEISBROD: Yes, would it be  
11 proceeded by sort of goal setting so that the same  
12 goals would be carried through all of the documents.  
13 Because I think to me would be helpful and useful.

14                   CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: How do you  
15 envision you would do goal setting? I mean, there is  
16 one report that is about populations and population  
17 growth and where it will happen and there is another  
18 report that's about housing starts and how do you  
19 envision the goal setting?

20                   CARL WEISBROD: Well, I guess I'm  
21 thinking in terms of we have strategic plans. We  
22 have the requirement that you know, City Planning do  
23 a report on their which I understand from Staff's  
24 work is mostly their website. We had the Capital  
25 Plan. I think it would be useful if those all tried

1  
2 to address the same set of goals and that perhaps  
3 having some kind of both community official process  
4 where ultimately those goals are with input, not  
5 actually the Community establishing the goals but all  
6 the various sort of players have an input into that  
7 and then a set of goals being decided that at least  
8 would be attempted to be carried through in many of  
9 those documents.

10 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: I guess I'm  
11 not really understanding what kind of goals we are  
12 talking about. Are we talking about goals like,  
13 improve housing opportunities for people, or are we  
14 talking about goals like build housing at this  
15 location?

16 COMMISSIONER JAMES VACCA: Well, I think  
17 the broad goals and then for example, so lets say a  
18 goal is improve housing opportunities for people and  
19 another goal is make the city more resilient and able  
20 to cope with climate change. Than you know, the  
21 capital plan would have to try to address those goals  
22 and show how it's addressing those goals. The city  
23 planning or the strategic plan would have to show how  
24 it is addressing those goals.

1  
2                   When City Planning, if they come out with  
3 sort of, these are what we view as our zoning  
4 initiatives over the course of the next X-number of  
5 years, would have to show how those would address  
6 those goals.

7                   CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Actually, if  
8 you could hold that for a minute. Paula was next,  
9 and then you.

10                  PAULA GAVIN: I just wanted to affirm  
11 what Jim's idea is, is that there is a need I think  
12 to have some of our arching goals for the city. They  
13 could deal with poverty; they could deal with  
14 housing. Than would be the linkages that the other  
15 plans would respond to. They would have other things  
16 that they would go deeper on, but I do believe that  
17 that is something that would really strengthen our  
18 city going forward.

19                  CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: And who would  
20 you imagine would be doing that? Or setting those  
21 goals?

22                  PAULA GAVIN: In my opinion, I think it  
23 would start with the Mayor setting out a vision for  
24 the city, but it could be done in conjunction with  
25 City Council and Public Advocate and Comptroller,

1  
2 that it could be a unified vision for our city that  
3 is then addressed with planning documents.

4 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Carl?

5 CARL WEISBROD: I am sorry, I missed the  
6 beginning of this conversation and I just heard Jim's  
7 I think, embrace of the idea of larger goals along  
8 the lines of we need to produce more housing for  
9 people as major, major goals. I think the issue  
10 that I would see as two-fold. One, I do agree that  
11 the various plans that the city is required to  
12 produce, at the very least should at least take  
13 cognoscente of each other.

14 Okay, so I am sorry to be redundant and  
15 second, I think we should take a careful look at the  
16 timing of each of these, so that we know that they do  
17 not only take cognoscente of each other but the cycle  
18 in which they produce is rational and coherent and to  
19 me, that's what the city should be doing and I do  
20 think as each of those plans get created and updated,  
21 they have to - as we've learned from experience, they  
22 really do have to maintain a degree of flexibility so  
23 that they can respond to conditions as they arise,  
24 but the larger goals in terms of housing.

1  
2           In terms of how we do welcome people from  
3 all over the world, the DNA really of the City of New  
4 York that's existed for 300 years, that those larger  
5 goals ought to be and have been pretty much mutable  
6 for a very long time and those are the goals that we  
7 should be underscoring, reiterating and each of the  
8 plans could be cognoscente of those.

9           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: I think Jim  
10 has suggested and Paula maybe suggesting something  
11 more in the DNA that would be an organizing goal, so  
12 to speak for the creation of the plans that would  
13 then feed off each other in terms of those goals.  
14 And that's why I asked the question, who would  
15 organize that initial kind of setting of the stage?

16           CARL WEISBROD: Well my view is that that  
17 ultimately really has to start with the Mayor. The  
18 Mayor gets elected based on a platform that most  
19 Mayor's of the city, from my experience, over a very  
20 long time now, have had very different goals. Or  
21 different goals that they have emphasized within  
22 these – all of them, I think within these very broad  
23 categories. But ultimately, if those goals are going  
24 to be refined and implemented, they really have to  
25 start with the Mayor because that's the Chief

1  
2 Executive of the City and that's the person who is  
3 charged with the responsibility to articulate the  
4 goals by which he or she gets elected.

5 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: But I think  
6 part of what we've been hearing certainly Mr.  
7 Simonelli and others, is how can we expand the world  
8 of those who are helping to set that? How do we get  
9 more people involved in informing the Mayor's  
10 possible goal setting? How would we envision that  
11 happening? The Mayor may be - you're right, the  
12 Mayor is elected to do that, but I think people are  
13 asking for some - What I heard over and over again,  
14 is people asking for some involvement in setting  
15 those broad goals so that they have some input. Not  
16 that they - some people would like more final say,  
17 but everyone seems to want more input into the  
18 setting of those goals. Jimmy?

19 JIMMY VACCA: Yes, one thing, when you  
20 talk about that, I cant help but mention the Bronx in  
21 particular right now. So, the Mayor has said that he  
22 is going to close Rikers Island and the Mayor has  
23 said we are going to have four borough jails. But  
24 the Mayor's Office or the City Planning Commission,  
25 which is an arm of the Mayor's Office has determined

1  
2 that all those four jails should go into one uniform  
3 land use review application. Those four sites are  
4 specific but the City Council at the end of the day  
5 must vote yes on all four or no all four and that is  
6 something we should not have.

7           When the Mayor says there is a citywide  
8 need and he proposes sites to address the citywide  
9 need, they should be borough specific and allow the  
10 community boards and the borough president to comment  
11 on the at that application based on the site in their  
12 borough.

13           This is an instance that I think the  
14 Charter Revision's we are suggesting has to correct.  
15 You don't maximize local input and you don't allow  
16 for engagement by doing what we've now done. I think  
17 the jails are an example. I am sure that there are  
18 others but it's the most prominent example that I can  
19 site in so much as the avoidance of local input  
20 through a citywide application even though the sites  
21 in the four boroughs are specifically chosen.

22           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: But if the  
23 program itself, let's say the closing of Rikers  
24 relies on - in order to close Rikers you need each  
25 one of these, so that if one of them is not on board,

1  
2 than none of them can be on board. How would you  
3 then deal with that?

4 JIMMY VACCA: Than there has to be other  
5 sites submitted through a process. There are  
6 arguments in favor of one site and against another  
7 site. The site in one borough has different  
8 variables that are in play as opposed to the site in  
9 other boroughs and I understand that the Mayor wants  
10 to close, and this is just an example again.

11 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Right, but I  
12 am not the Mayor.

13 JIMMY VACCA: I understand. The Mayor  
14 has a citywide objective, but it does not allow for  
15 maximum input to say vote it up or vote it down in  
16 total. It does not, in my view. I understand your  
17 point Madam Chair. I understand you point but that  
18 is something that we have to look at. I feel  
19 strongly about that.

20 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Why couldn't  
21 the Council amend it. You said they have to vote it  
22 up or vote it down, why couldn't the Council -

23 JIMMY VACCA: That's a legal question.  
24 Right now, it's all in one application.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: It doesn't  
3 matter whether it is one application, if we have one  
4 application, you can remove parts of the application.

5 JIMMY VACCA: So, are we saying, do you  
6 feel that members from the other four boroughs will  
7 say to the Bronx indifference to you, you don't want  
8 that site, we'll vote no.

9 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: No, I think  
10 they can vote yes but -

11 JIMMY VACCA: I think the likelihood -

12 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Wait, wait,  
13 wait, let me, they can vote yes, but I think when it  
14 comes to the Council, the Council can say, we vote  
15 yes on Part A, B and C and Part D we vote no.

16 JIMMY VACCA: But I do think those sites  
17 were all grouped into one application in this case  
18 because the likelihood is that that will not happen.  
19 The feeling was that it will be voted as a package  
20 because if one part of the package goes down, then it  
21 may go down in other respects. Than other members in  
22 other boroughs will say, why is this borough being  
23 shown difference, we don't want the jail in our  
24 borough either. Well, that's your prerogative if you  
25 have separate borough applications, you can work on

1  
2 site selection but if you don't, it becomes a whole  
3 deck of cards that goes down.

4 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Sal?

5 SAL ALBANESE: I'm switching.

6 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Oh, I thought  
7 that was your hand.

8 SAL ALBANESE: That is my hand. Yeah, so  
9 switching topics. Everything that we do here and  
10 there is an awful lot that is before us. Everything  
11 that we talked about flows from how the government is  
12 organized and we're actually dealing with the city's  
13 constitution and I think we have an obligation to the  
14 public to allow them to vote on issues that provide  
15 confidence in their government. And the issues of  
16 governance I think are at the core of everything that  
17 we discuss here. Democracy, how do we get more  
18 people involved in the process? How do we revamp or  
19 political system, make it more open? And one of the  
20 things I know as a former legislator and I am sure  
21 Jimmy would support this notion. Is that, people in  
22 public office generally do not vote for reform that  
23 impacts them personally. It's just the way it is.  
24 It is their mind set. I saw it with Term Limits in  
25 New York City. It has to be done via referendum.

1  
2 That would have never happened with the City Council  
3 it's by doing it on their own.

4           Obviously, most of them were opposed to  
5 it. As we see around the country, we see it in  
6 California, we see it in Seattle, we see it in other  
7 places. When it comes to political reform, despite  
8 the fact that it can be done as Commissioner Camillo  
9 pointed out by legislation, those things just will  
10 not happen. The chances of political reform that  
11 impacts people in office, just don't happen.

12           So, I think that we could take those  
13 issues out of the bucket of well, the City Council  
14 can do it, so we don't have to address it. I don't  
15 think that's reality. I don't think it's practical.  
16 I think the issues of redistricting campaign finance  
17 reform, lobbying reform, are areas that we need to  
18 address and let the people vote on it in November  
19 because it's not going to happen, and people are  
20 concerned about pay to play. They are concerned  
21 about corruption and we should have the best  
22 constitution possible.

23           So, my point here is that those issues,  
24 even though they could be addressed by local law,  
25 will not be practically addressed by local law and we

1  
2 have a responsibility to take those on and allow  
3 people to debate and discuss it and actually vote on  
4 it in November.

5 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Well, I  
6 certainly think there has been debate and discussion.

7 SAL ALBANESE: Well, the other thing. I  
8 was shocked yesterday. I had a conversation with a  
9 former elected official. Highly respected and I  
10 won't even go into the gender and the person said to  
11 me -

12 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Is that  
13 relevant?

14 SAL ALBANESE: Yeah, it's relevant. Said  
15 to me, what is the Charter Revision Commission? I  
16 mean they had no knowledge that it was even taking  
17 place. So, you know, that's another issue that we  
18 have to address, and I know the staff is doing a  
19 great job. How do we get more people engaged in  
20 letting them know that this is going on, so that they  
21 can participating at debate. I was shocked at the  
22 conversation yesterday. As I said, this was a person  
23 who has been in office, and had no idea that we even  
24 had a commission. Just a thought.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Anyone else?  
3 Reverend Miller? If somebody could pass him the mic.

4 CLINTON MILLER: Yes, thank you. So, I  
5 am in agreement to an extent with Mr. Albanese that  
6 we have an opportunity to bring these issues straight  
7 to the people. In addition to that, that would  
8 increase voter turnout which is something that we've  
9 seen a problem with. If we can have goals based on  
10 the issues that we've heard.

11 We've heard that really base themselves  
12 on how New York City can improve its quality of life  
13 for its residents. I don't agree with how everything  
14 was phrased today because I don't think we are  
15 responsible for everything as a Commission, but I  
16 think we can be more responsible if we take it upon  
17 ourselves to bring some of these issues straight to  
18 the people and see what we think. The danger,  
19 although, I am not against Mayoral vision, but  
20 sometimes we've seen in the past where Mayor's run on  
21 issues and those issues have become their issues to  
22 catapult them in office. So, I think there is  
23 something we can do to make this process more  
24 democratized and bring these issues straight to the  
25 people.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Anyone else?  
3 Commissioner Nori.

4 SATEESH NORI: Alright, okay, well, yeah,  
5 this works. So, I have taken off my sunglasses out  
6 of respect to all of you. Just on the record. But  
7 just to offer a counter point there. We are a  
8 representative democracy, not a direct democracy.  
9 So, I think the staff report does strike a balance  
10 where we are not trying to legislate and we have to  
11 be very careful about that and a lot of the comments  
12 and the proposals that we're getting are legislative  
13 in nature and if we were to legislate, that would be  
14 a very dangerous thing.

15 CARL WEISBROD: You know, the people  
16 should have the power, but they elect people and  
17 that's the system we have. So, that's all I have to  
18 say.

19 I just want to underscore what Sateesh  
20 just said. We are as Sal indicated sort of  
21 addressing issues of our constitution. We are not  
22 addressing issues of legislation. I don't think that  
23 the fact that the City Council, our legislative body  
24 doesn't always do what we think that they should do,  
25 does not mean that we should be aggregating their

1  
2 responsibility to do the right thing. We are a  
3 representative democracy. We invest in our elected  
4 officials, the responsibility to act and as we know,  
5 many people in the public and probably all of us from  
6 time to time are dissatisfied the way with the  
7 outcomes of what our elected officials do and what  
8 our legislative bodies do. But ultimately, that is  
9 the system we have, and I think what we should be  
10 doing is underscoring their responsibilities and not  
11 aggregating them.

12           SAL ALBANESE: I tend to share that view.  
13 Commissioner Weisbrod raises a good issue. I am not  
14 beating up on the City Council. I don't think we  
15 should legislate as a Commission, but I do know this.  
16 That and we see it at the federal level, we see it at  
17 the state level. Politicians tend not to pass  
18 political reform. They just don't do it. Yeah, look  
19 at the history. That's why there is a referendum in  
20 place and that a part of the Constitution in  
21 California and we don't have it in New York but  
22 certainly, the reason why people go to a referendum  
23 route when it comes to political reform is that it's  
24 just their nature. Most of them, 99 percent want to  
25 stay in office forever. I mean that's the bottom

1  
2 line and they will not, and I repeat do anything that  
3 will change that equation.

4 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: But isn't  
5 that why we're looking at ways to democratize the  
6 process to allow more candidate in. More candidates  
7 who might represent more fully the constituents who  
8 elect them. Isn't that the progress of that is to  
9 elect people who will do a wider variety of  
10 activities. Have a wider variety of opinions, so  
11 that that representative democracy will increase in  
12 its diversity and may do some of the things you think  
13 an elected official would never do.

14 SAL ALBANESE: I think, and this is not  
15 about individuals. It's about a system. How do we  
16 devise a more open political system that would allow  
17 that to happen? We just don't have that now. We  
18 have tremendous influence. Money is a powerful  
19 force. I mean most Americans know that the system is  
20 broken. Most New Yorkers know that the system is  
21 broken. I think our responsibility is to develop a  
22 more open system, one that minimizes conflicts of  
23 interests. One that allows for more participation  
24 and one of the things I talk about a lot when I talk  
25 about democracy. Vouchers that will allow people of

1  
2 lesser means to be real players in our political  
3 process.

4 I am not talking about overhauling the  
5 City Council or what have you. What I am saying, and  
6 I look at this from a systemic perspective. It's  
7 like, I compare our political system to a corporation  
8 that is bankrupt. It has got to be reorganized and I  
9 think what a Charter can do is reorganize our  
10 government, so we can have a better democracy.

11 I mean, we can nibble around the edges  
12 and around the margins, tinkle around the margins,  
13 but unless we do some real — I mean the Ranked-Choice  
14 Voting, I think is a big issue. I think that will  
15 help but unless we eliminate the influence of money,  
16 I mean, you can't go a day in this city without  
17 reading a story about pay to play corruption.

18 And there is a way to minimize is or  
19 eliminate it. There is a system in place. There is  
20 a vehicle to do it and people want it and I think our  
21 responsibility is not to take over the legislature or  
22 responsibility but to develop a system which  
23 unfortunately doesn't happen through our elected  
24 officials that will make them more effective. It  
25 will make the democracy more open and will allow for

1  
2 more participation. We can't have a political system  
3 where 13 percent of the people turn out to vote  
4 because they don't believe that they matter.

5 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Do you think  
6 the term limits has really led to more participation?  
7 Has it really - has term limits changed the  
8 participation? Has it changed who run for office? I  
9 am just curious.

10 SAL ALBANESE: I think overall, it's a  
11 positive thing. My biggest concern has always been  
12 the influence of big money which is eroding our  
13 democracy. Term limits is I think a good thing. I  
14 would have love to see 12 years instead of 8 if I had  
15 my druthers, but I think overall, it's good.

16 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: And we had 12  
17 years and the public moved it back.

18 SAL ALBANESE: And you got to yield to  
19 the public, but I think term limits is a good thing.  
20 I think that it opened up the process.

21 I mean, when I got to the City Council in  
22 1982, there were people that were there for 30 years.  
23 I mean, you know.

24 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Yeah, but how  
25 much did the job pay then also? It was clearly a

1  
2 part time job and other things, you know, you had the  
3 Board of Estimate.

4 SAL ALBANESE: I understand that, but I  
5 do think it has brought new blood into the system. I  
6 think there are a lot of very good City Council  
7 Members there. I think it enhanced the minority  
8 participation on the Council.

9 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: There are  
10 fewer minorities. There are a lot fewer women now  
11 than ever before.

12 SAL ALBANESE: Well, that's another  
13 issue, but there are a lot more people of color on  
14 the Council than when I got there years ago. I mean,  
15 so that's been an improvement and my believe is that  
16 people should go into government, spend some time in  
17 government as elected officials and then go back to  
18 their jobs. I mean maybe it's kind of wash and tone.  
19 Jefferson or Washington, those guys all believed that  
20 you spend some time in government and then you go  
21 back to your regular job where you were a teacher, or  
22 whatever you were. You were a reverend. You know, I  
23 am not a big fan of professional politicians. I  
24 mean, I am just not. I think that they lose  
25 perspective and I don't think it's a good thing.

1  
2           On balance, term limits is a good thing,  
3 but we need a whole collection of reforms to really  
4 open up the process.

5           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Anyone?  
6 Reverend Miller, if you could grab a mic.

7           CLINTON MILLER: Real quickly. I think  
8 there is an opportunity based on the original  
9 question, which was if we can identify goals that can  
10 set the tone for our city, for us not to have the  
11 people directly legislate that but for us to bring  
12 everything that we've heard, housing, police  
13 misconduct, how we vote and then ask the people if  
14 that's worthy for their representatives to vote on, I  
15 think that would make us responsible.

16           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Okay, are you  
17 suggesting that those general goals should be a part  
18 of the ballot or are you thinking it would happen in  
19 some other way?

20           CLINTON MILLER: Either ballot or through  
21 agency. Either representative or through agency.

22           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Okay.

23           CLINTON MILLER: Or Commissions.

24           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Paula.  
25

1  
2 PAULA GAVIN: So, this is a bit of an  
3 echoing, but I want to just say, I think over our  
4 jingle is to strengthen our city and strengthen  
5 democracy and it seems like there an opportunity for  
6 us to go in the planning realm, which is sort of the  
7 top down if you will, but then look for ways for the  
8 civic engagement and community voice to be present in  
9 our proposals.

10 So, for me, I want to see us strengthen  
11 our city with the big ideas, but also just whenever  
12 we have an opportunity to strengthen community voice  
13 and I think that's a way we can blend the goals of  
14 strengthening our city and democracy.

15 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Jimmy.

16 JIMMY VACCA: One thing I have proposed  
17 is that we require community boards mid-term, so the  
18 census comes out in 2020, so in 2025, which is mid  
19 census, we would require community boards to do a  
20 197A plan, but we would have to provide funding to  
21 the community boards. Not like the city did years  
22 ago where they said community boards shall have  
23 planners and then they gave community boards no money  
24 for them. But if we require 197A's of community  
25 boards every ten years, mid term of the census, those

1  
2 plans can serve as a point for community board to  
3 have input going into the next census, going into a  
4 ten-year period.

5           So, I do believe we have to enhance, and  
6 I do believe we have to give community boards the  
7 funding for that and the funding for the planners  
8 that they never received, so that they have the  
9 expertise in their offices. I was a district manager  
10 for 26 years, every time somebody applied to build  
11 something, I was on the computer challenging the  
12 applications at the Buildings Department. I am not a  
13 planner, but I learned to be a planner because many  
14 of the applications were filed in error and we had to  
15 tell the Buildings Department, you approved this by  
16 mistake, stop the work. But with a planner,  
17 community boards can be protected from out of context  
18 development and they can also plan for the future of  
19 their neighborhood when it comes to facilities that  
20 maybe sited there.

21           So, I do think those are two ways that we  
22 can help community boards.

23           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Mr. Caras.

24           JAMES CARAS: One, sort of circling back  
25 but taking something that Jimmy had said and Paula

1  
2 had said, and something I think the man's whose name  
3 I keep forgetting.

4 CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Mr. Weinstein  
5 or Mr. Gilman?

6 JAMES CARAS: Mr. Weinstein. Would it  
7 make sense to have a representative from the  
8 community board, a representative from the borough  
9 presidents office, the affected Council Member and  
10 maybe – those are the ULURP players in some kind of  
11 pre-scoping meeting for large ULURP's that going  
12 through an EIS, so that not a public meeting, just a  
13 meeting. The scoping session is a hearing. People  
14 get two minutes or whatever but in one pre-scoping  
15 meeting where there can be some back and forth and  
16 some give and take. I just throw that out, because I  
17 think as Paula was saying you know, and even as Carl  
18 was saying, you know, the Mayor has to be largely  
19 responsible for putting forth proposals and putting  
20 forth a vision.

21 And I think I was trying to say this at  
22 the last discussion we had, but we should be trying  
23 to allow more voices, even it they are not going to  
24 be the ultimate decision makers, more voices at the  
25 table and that might be one way of doing that.

1  
2 Often times at the Borough Presidents  
3 Office, we don't really realize that something is an  
4 issue until the community board puts it in their  
5 resolution or discusses it at their hearing. While  
6 at that point, you know, we are down to 30 days  
7 before it goes back to the City Planning Commission.  
8 If people sat in a room, maybe you would hear issues  
9 that you might not think about until it was sort of  
10 your time to get something and work could actually be  
11 done to address those. It was just a thought that  
12 occurred to me you know, as I was sitting.

13 UNIDENTIFIED: I will just respond very  
14 briefly to this Jim, because I don't know how you  
15 would define large projects, but I am unaware of in  
16 my total experience of anything, and project that  
17 could reasonably be defined as large. Whether it's a  
18 project that the city itself is the applicant or  
19 private party is the applicant that has not in effect  
20 gone through exactly that process, either by meeting  
21 first - and not only with the community board, where  
22 the borough presidents representatives are present.  
23 it's a public session with separately and with the  
24 borough president with a council member. Virtually  
25 every project I am familiar with, and it goes back

1  
2 quite a number of years has gone through that  
3 informal process and I think there is a certain  
4 advantage in doing that in some respects on a one on  
5 one basis because you get a degree of candor that you  
6 don't always get if the Council Member, the Borough  
7 President, the Community Board are all in the same  
8 room together and in various different ways have to  
9 maintain an institutional position. So, I do think  
10 that happens now and I would be quite concerned about  
11 seeing that formalized in a way that you are  
12 suggesting.

13           JAMES VACCA: If I may, I think what  
14 Commission Caras is suggesting, is a variation of  
15 what I had proposed. I thank you. There are  
16 meetings that happen at the City Planning Commission  
17 that the Community Boards are not privy to.

18           Those meetings are different than having  
19 the developer come to the Community Board and saying,  
20 we are doing this and producing these wonderful  
21 diagrams that look like the most beautiful thing in  
22 the world. That's what they produce. When they come  
23 to the Community Board, you should see these artist  
24 renderings make you think like, oh, it's fantastic,  
25 the community, we're doing you such a wonderful

1  
2 favor. The reality is that those meetings at the  
3 City Planning level are attended by people who do not  
4 live in the Community. They are professional  
5 planners, but they are not rooted in the community.  
6 It's the presence of the Community Board that adds to  
7 that. In fact, we should also be looking because I  
8 know that this was discussed in previous Charter  
9 Revision Commissions years ago. We should be looking  
10 at how can a Community Board initiate a ULURP survey.  
11 There is something in the Charter and I need staff to  
12 look into this that speaks to this, but it speaks to  
13 it without resources and without mentioning  
14 specifics. That's my recollection because it was an  
15 impossible navigation right now. It is rather. So,  
16 if we have a planner, you see, let's say a  
17 neighborhood was rezoned. So, the neighborhood was  
18 rezoned under a City Planning study and maybe ten  
19 years later people are saying wait a minute, these  
20 three blocks are our seven, they should be our five.

21 So, if people in the community say that  
22 and the Community Board wants to submit a ULURP  
23 application, why do they now have to wait for City  
24 Planning to say, oh, you know what, that a good idea,  
25 but we're back logged. It is going to take us two to

1  
2 three years to study this. Or we don't think it's a  
3 good idea, we are not doing it. How does that engage  
4 the community and that happens right now. City  
5 Planning is telling local communities, we're back  
6 logged. It is going to take three to four years for  
7 us to get to you if we get to you.

8           So, we're talking about engagement. If  
9 we really want to do it, there are ways to do it and  
10 the Community Board should be used as the mechanism  
11 for that engagement.

12           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Although  
13 Jimmy, as you know, we are not a budget agency and we  
14 can't provide money, funds or budgeting or even  
15 require that somebody do that. So, I understand what  
16 you're saying but it's also not possible as Charter  
17 Revision to equip each Community Board with a planner  
18 or with the money for planning. That's just not  
19 available to us. So, we're looking at ways within  
20 the governmental structure to try and change.

21           JIMMY VACCA: But you are saying that we  
22 cannot put in the City Charter that every Community  
23 Board must have a planner and that the City must fund  
24 it accordingly. I'm not saying specify salary.

1  
2                   CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: We can't make  
3 the City fund it. We can put in the Charter I  
4 suspect. We can put something in the Charter, but  
5 that doesn't make it happen. If we were to say I  
6 mean, there must be planner, that doesn't provide  
7 funds for the planner and without funds, there won't  
8 be a planner.

9                   JAMES VACCA: No, but if we say there  
10 must be a planner and the city must provide funds  
11 accordingly.

12                   CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: We can't  
13 require the city to provide funds.

14                   JAMES VACCA: We can't require that the  
15 city provide funds?

16                   CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: No.

17                   JAMES VACCA: Well, if we do a runoff,  
18 what do we call this incremental voting, if we do  
19 incremental voting aren't we by nature of doing it  
20 requiring the city to fund it and pay for the balance  
21 and pay for the election people and the engagement  
22 and the orientation that has to go on when it comes  
23 to outreach. Aren't we an inference telling the city  
24 that we are doing this, and you better implement it.

1  
2           We have to tell the city. That's the  
3 intent of the people by referendum and we say it  
4 shall be funded, than they shall fund it. That's the  
5 Charter of the City of New York and if it's not  
6 funded, the Mayor and the Council are not obeying the  
7 Charter. That's why we have this going to the  
8 people.

9           We need clarity on that. Or else so much  
10 of what we are doing that it's just going to be the  
11 wish of the people with no money, with no level of  
12 commitment.

13           There has got to be resources, resources  
14 are inherent in what we do because of what we do.

15           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: But they are  
16 not inherent in the budget process.

17           JIMMY VACCA: We have to say funding  
18 shall be provided.

19           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: Any other  
20 discussion? Is there a motion to adjourn? Second?  
21 All in favor.

22           COMMISSIONERS: Aye.

23           CHAIRPERSON GAIL BENJAMIN: All opposed,  
24 this meeting is adjourned.

C E R T I F I C A T E

Worldwide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date April 22, 2019