



The City of New York

Manhattan Community Board 1

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New York City Council Committee on Government Operations

Hearing on Best Practices for Recruitment and Appointments to Community Boards

Testimony by Catherine McVay Hughes, Chair Manhattan Community Board 1

**Monday, March 3, 2014
City Hall, 1:00 P.M.**

Good afternoon, Chairman Kallos and members of the Government Operations Committee. Thank you for convening this hearing. This is an excellent time to consider best practices for recruitment and appointments to community boards. As you pointed out in your invitation, we have four new Borough Presidents and 21 new City Council Members, who will be making appointments to community boards along with their previously elected colleagues during their first months in office.

The previous Manhattan Borough President, Scott Stringer, who is now the New York City Comptroller, made important reforms to the community board appointment process, including the formation of an independent screening committee to oversee the process. There have been improvements to the process made by Borough Presidents in other boroughs as well.

Our new Manhattan Borough President, Gale Brewer, has announced the formation of a screening committee that will evaluate applicants as well as current board members. Borough President Brewer has also made available useful demographic information about board members and applicants, which will surely help guide this year's appointment process in a constructive way. We appreciate that Borough President Brewer's office has made this data available to community boards in a clear visual format, something that has not been done before.

We welcome this hearing as an opportunity to share information about the various improvements in the community board appointment process that have been made throughout the city and look at what other potential improvements and reforms are possible. At our Executive Committee meeting on February 19, 2014, CB1 held a discussion on this topic and decided to submit recommendations for your consideration.

We support efforts to analyze the composition of community boards and try to make them as representative as possible and at least as diverse as the districts served by them. Specifically our members recommended that special attention be paid to the following:

- Diversity of Background – Diversity should include key demographic characteristics such as age, gender, type of housing and significant demographic groups such as parents of young children. The composition of the board should be representative of the geographic

area of the district so that all neighborhoods are represented. This is especially important on a community board such as ours where we have committees covering neighborhoods including Battery Park City, the Financial District, the Seaport/Civic Center and Tribeca.

- Background and Expertise - There are numerous professions and backgrounds that are helpful to community boards including attorneys, urban planners, small business owners, architects, teachers and educators and numerous others. An effort should be made to recruit people from as many of these and others as possible.
- Interpersonal Skills – Interviews should be designed to identify applicants who perform well in a group setting since community boards operate by committee. People who write well are also of great value since community boards communicate by resolutions, testimony and other written documents.
- Online applications – Many people with the backgrounds that are most needed by community boards are very busy. Enabling people to apply online would make it less time-consuming for them to apply
- New Residents – The residential population of Community Board 1 has experienced very rapid growth in recent years, making it the fastest growing community district in the city. We have many new residents and it is important that their needs and concerns be reflected in our decision-making process. A special effort should be made to reach them.
- Merit – While diversity is an essential goal, it is also important that community board members are conscientious about attending meetings and contributing to the board in significant ways. No matter what their backgrounds are, people are only valuable to the extent that they actually participate. Everyone appointed to a community board must fully understand the time and other commitments and be willing and able to meet them. In this regard, it is important that attendance of reapplying members at both full board and committee meetings be carefully assessed.
- Term Limits – Consideration should be given to whether term limits should be established after a certain number of years of service on the board and whether the potential gain in new energy would outweigh the loss of valuable expertise.

As you know, community boards are the eyes and ears of the community and provide an opportunity for community residents to get involved. Community Board 1 in particular was the first line of defense after Superstorm Sandy and the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify this afternoon. We appreciate your interest in identifying and sharing information about best practices for recruitment and appointments to community boards. We hope this discussion will continue and produce reforms and improvements that will lead to stronger and more effective community boards.