



**The Charter Revision Commission
Hearing on the Revision of the New York City Charter**

**Testimony by Julie Menin, Chairperson
Manhattan Community Board One**

**Tuesday, April 20, 2010 at 4:00 p.m.
St. Francis College, Founders Hall
180 Remsen Street, Brooklyn, New York 11201**

Thank you, Chairperson Goldstein and other Members of the Charter Revision Commission, for convening this public hearing. I am Julie Menin, and I am here to testify today as Chairperson of Manhattan Community Board One (CB1).

The work of this charter revision commission will be first major revision of the City Charter since 1989. It is extremely important that there be extensive outreach to the public so that the Commission's recommendations are informed by the input of a broad cross-section of New Yorkers. I am very concerned that the existing time frame will not allow for adequate public participation, especially in light of the disappointing turnout at prior hearings, which were held on very short notice. Sufficient time should be allowed for a deliberative process that considers the many recommendations made by the public.

There is an especially acute need for a thorough and comprehensive review of the City Charter in the area of land use, and in particular the role of community boards in the process. The City Charter is intended to promote meaningful community involvement in land use review, but does not always accomplish this goal. The current New York City Charter assigns Community Boards the role of evaluating and making recommendations with respect to land use applications. CB1's Planning and Community Infrastructure and geographic area committees review several hundred applications per year.

Community Boards are uniquely situated to bring a needed local perspective to development projects. Members live or work in the community and possess extensive knowledge of local conditions and needs to an extent that centralized agencies cannot hope to equal. Community Boards must therefore play a vital role in assessing and addressing the impact and appropriateness of development projects in New York City's local communities.

However, No clear standards currently guide Community Board land use review evaluation and recommendation. As a result, land use review can be unpredictable to the

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detriment of both communities and the overall process. At times, legitimate development projects are delayed or proceed with inappropriate mitigation measures while at other times, inappropriate developments may move forward.

Our Community Board passed a resolution on March 23, 2010, urging the Charter Revision Commission to consider including specific standards to guide the Community Board land use review evaluation and recommendation process as have been adopted in other major US cities. Specifying standards would result in a more uniform, efficient process. In our resolution, we suggested eight particular standards that we recommend for inclusion among the new standards. These include:

1. Whether the proposed project places significant demands on local schools and infrastructure;
2. Whether the proposed project makes a positive contribution to community infrastructure;
3. Whether the proposed project impacts (positively or negatively) affordable housing in the community;
4. Whether the proposed project contributes to environmental sustainability;
5. Whether the proposed project provides open space for public use;
6. Whether the proposed project assists in the creation of an active streetscape;
7. Whether the proposed project design and building materials relate appropriately to surrounding buildings and neighborhood context; and
8. Whether construction will cause significant disruptions.

New York City's Community Boards not only provide an essential local perspective in land use review, but carry out many other vital responsibilities as well. Community Boards review applications for liquor licenses, street activities, sidewalk cafes, newsstands, landmarks designations, and street co-namings, among others. We work with agencies to improve service delivery, identify capital and expense budget priorities, advocate for local needs and plan for the future of our neighborhoods.

At this time, Community Boards face a drastic proposal that could severely reduce operating budgets in coming years by as much as a third. Boards are already functioning with the minimum budgetary resources needed to meet chartered responsibilities, and the impact of proposed cuts would be crippling.

It is extremely important that the Charter Revision Commission not adopt any proposal that would lessen the role or resources of Community Boards but instead defend the critically important role of Community Boards in New York City government. It has been proposed that Community Board budgets be set independently as is done with the Independent Budget Office. This would make sense since Boards are also independent, non-Mayoral agencies and therefore vulnerable to reductions.

In short, Community Boards are an essential part of land use review and service delivery and coordination in New York City, and we urge you, in making your recommendations, to strengthen the role and resources of Community Boards in a manner that will make these processes more efficient and systematic.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak today.