



The City of New York

# **Manhattan Community Board 1**

Catherine McVay Hughes CHAIRPERSON | Noah Pfefferblit DISTRICT MANAGER

**New York City Council Committee on Government Operations**

**Public Hearing on**

**Int. No. 732-2015,**

**A Local Law to amend the New York City Charter in relation to making urban planning professionals available to community boards**

**Testimony by Diana Switaj, Director of Planning and Land Use**

**Manhattan Community Board 1**

**Thursday, April 30, 2015 at 1:00 p.m.  
250 Broadway – Committee Rm., 14<sup>th</sup> Fl.**

My name is Diana Switaj, I am Director of Planning and Land Use at Manhattan Community Board 1. I began my work at Community Board 1 as an urban planning graduate student through the Fund for the City of New York Community Planning Fellowship Program. Over time, I have also served as Planning Consultant before taking over as Director of Planning and Land Use in 2013.

Working as a planner for a Community Board, I am able to assist on a wide range of issues ranging from land use and zoning matters, traffic and transportation, historic districts, community facilities and infrastructure, housing, population, employment and economy, and senior services. I work primarily with the Planning Committee, but also assist each other committee as needed in dealing with planning issues. This work includes special planning projects as well as standard operations including but not limited to: Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) actions referred by the Department of City Planning; procedure actions referred by the Department of City Planning; Board of Standards and Appeals actions; applications for approvals from the Landmarks Preservation Commission as well as any and all other discretionary actions.

Institutional knowledge and history developed over time have proven to be critical in dealing with the planning issues outlined above. It has been especially important in regards to major projects such as the development of the World Trade Center and the South Street Seaport. However, knowledge developed over time on local parks and buildings, relationships formed with local government agencies and representatives, the local business improvement district and other prominent organizations or individuals have proven to be just as important in working on the day-to-day planning issues that face our district. The importance of institutional knowledge and history makes it imperative that any existing urban planning professionals at Community Boards be grandfathered in and allowed to remain.

We believe it is essential that through this new law, planners be assigned by Board rather than by project. It is critical that urban planning professionals assigned to Community Boards have the opportunity to develop a relationship with their Boards and knowledge of the areas over time. We also believe that to ensure this, there must be a low Board-to-planner ratio to allow the relationship and knowledge to develop.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.