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2 CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING

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4 MCKEE HIGH SCHOOL

5 290 SAINT MARKS PLACE

6 STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK 10301-1855

7 APRIL 13, 2010

8 6:11 P.M.

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11 CHAIR: DR. MATTHEW GOLDSTEIN

12 COMMISSION MEMBERS:

13 JOHN H. BANKS, VICE CHAIR

14 ANTHONY PEREZ CASSINO

15 BETTY Y. CHEN

16 DAVID CHEN

17 ANTHONY W. CROWELL

18 STEPHEN FIALA

19 ANGELA MARIANA FREYRE, SECRETARY

20 ERNEST HART

21 REV. JOSEPH M. McSHANE, S.J.

22 KENNETH M. MOLTNER

23 CATHERINE PATTERSON

24 CARLO A. SCISSURA

25 BISHOP MITCHELL G. TAYLOR

1 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Good evening, ladies and
2 gentlemen. My name is Matthew Goldstein. I'm the
3 Chair of the New York City Charter Revision
4 Commission. I am deeply pleased to welcome you
5 to McKee High School, and I thank everyone in
6 this school for graciously hosting this evening's
7 hearing.

8 Before we begin to hear testimony from those
9 of you who have signed up, I'd like to give an
10 opportunity to all of our Commissioners to
11 acknowledge themselves, and I'll start all the
12 way to the right.

13 COMMISSIONER HART: Ernie Hart, Queens.

14 COMMISSIONER SCISSURA: Good evening, Carlo
15 Scissura from Brooklyn, and a special hello to a
16 great Borough President, to Jim Molinaro. Thank
17 you for having us in your borough.

18 COMMISSIONER CHEN: Hello, this is Betty
19 Chen, am I'm from Manhattan.

20 COMMISSIONER CROWELL: Anthony Crowell, and I
21 echo Carlos' sentiment. Thank you for having us.

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: John Banks from
23 Brooklyn, thank you.

24 COMMISSIONER FRERE: Angela Mariana Freyre,
25 from Manhattan.

1 COMMISSIONER FIALA: Steve Fiala, Staten
2 Island. The night is young, Chancellor.

3 COMMISSIONER CHEN: David Chen from Brooklyn.

4 COMMISSIONER CASSINO: Tony Perez Cassino,
5 Bronx.

6 COMMISSIONER COHEN: Hope Cohen.

7 COMMISSIONER MOLTNER: Good evening, Ken
8 Moltner, from Manhattan.

9 CHANCELLOR GOLDSTEIN: Thank you all. I
10 don't know if any of you know Steve Fiala, who is
11 a very distinguished member of our Commission.
12 I've asked him to introduce this evening by
13 talking passionately and from the heart about the
14 great Borough of Staten Island.

15 So Steve, if you could get us going, please.

16 COMMISSIONER FIALA: I will be very brief,
17 Mr. Chairman, in the interest of hearing from the
18 public.

19 One hundred and fifteen years ago the Bronx,
20 Manhattan, Brooklyn, Staten Island and Queens
21 held a referendum. The people decided that they
22 would unite as one city. One hundred twelve years
23 ago in January of 1898 that vision, that
24 collective vision, became a reality and we are
25 all part of the Greater City of New York.

1 We're here tonight in historic St. George
2 District of Staten Island, which is the gateway
3 of the Borough President's office. First, this
4 is the gateway, correctly so, of Staten Island.
5 You are in the southernmost county not only of
6 the City of New York but of the State of New
7 York.

8 I think tonight you will experience the
9 passion that Staten Islanders have, and I know it
10 will be done with the utmost dignity and grace,
11 because we all know that tonight is a unique
12 opportunity to talk to the Commission about the
13 structure of city government and how, how we
14 could possibly come together to improve in two
15 areas: Making our Charter more efficient and more
16 responsive to meeting the needs of not only
17 Staten Islanders but of all City residents.

18 We're in St. George tonight. I know we'll
19 be back to another area of Staten Island later
20 on. But tonight is about listening. And I'm
21 looking forward to hearing from my fellow Staten
22 Islanders. I know a great many of them in this
23 crowd and I know that they're passionate about
24 what they're going to be speaking about. I know
25 that they're angry.

1 We were in the Bronx last evening, all of
2 us, and we were received graciously. We also
3 heard from angry residents. It's the life in a
4 big city. There are eight million of us and
5 we've all got different ideas on how we should be
6 doing things.

7 I have the privilege, ladies and gentlemen,
8 of working with 14 others who I've gotten to
9 know. And I know that they are sincere in their
10 interest in trying to shape a better Charter for
11 a more efficient and more responsive government.
12 It is not an easy task.

13 I close with this thought. I talked about
14 115 years ago when we came up with the idea of
15 becoming part of something larger than ourselves.
16 It's ironic, because 73 percent of Staten
17 Islanders at that time voted for becoming part of
18 the Greater City of New York. Brooklyn voted
19 50.1 percent to become part of that city. And
20 here we are years later, 112 years later, and
21 we're talking about the Charter again.

22 The Charter in 1989 was adopted by the City,
23 which I disclose to this Commission and the
24 public, I, like many of you, voted against
25 because we felt that our voice was going to be

1 lost. When the Charter eliminated the Board of
2 Estimate it fundamentally changed the structure
3 of government. It created a strong mayoral City
4 Council government.

5 I voted against that Charter as a concerned
6 Staten Islander. I went on to hold elective
7 office and appointed office. I went on to serve
8 in the City Council, and what I learned was that
9 Charter was designed by some very smart people,
10 and that while it has its flaws the language in
11 it does afford us a lot of opportunity to
12 participate.

13 We're not looking to throw the Charter out.
14 We're looking to do three things: Charter
15 revision -- this is only my opinion, I don't
16 speak for the Commission -- the three R's, we're
17 in a school, let's talk about the three R's of
18 Charter revision: Review, revise, reform.

19 Tonight we are reviewing by listening to all
20 of the constituents of Staten Island that want to
21 come out and vote. We're going into session and
22 look for revisions that will ultimately lead to
23 greater efficiency and responsiveness in
24 government, and then hopefully present to you,
25 the voters, potential reforms that will resolve

1 the anguish, the anger, the concerns that we
2 have. So I'm thankful for the members of this
3 Commission for joining us tonight in St. George
4 and I'm thankful for all of you for showing up
5 tonight to express your views. This is democracy
6 as it should be.

7 Mr. Chairman, thank you.

8 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Fiala.

9 Let me just give some background information
10 that I think will set the context as we move
11 forward. This is the third of five public
12 borough hearings we will hold this month, with
13 many more opportunities for public engagement
14 over the months to come.

15 As I have said in the two prior public
16 hearings, this Commission is deeply committed to
17 an open and welcoming process of public
18 engagement. A critical part of our work is to
19 ensure that the public is afforded extensive
20 opportunities to participate.

21 To that end, a comprehensive outreach effort
22 has been developed in order to garner input from
23 New Yorkers throughout the five boroughs. We
24 invite all New Yorkers to participate in this
25 critically important review process.

1 The public hearing, very first, was held in
2 Manhattan on Tuesday, April 6. The second was
3 held yesterday in the Bronx, and today's hearing,
4 obviously in Staten Island; two additional public
5 hearings will be held in April. April 19, next
6 Monday, will be held at La Guardia Community
7 College at 6 P.M. La Guardia is one of the six
8 community colleges of the City University of New
9 York. And the last of the first round of public
10 hearings will be held on Tuesday, April 20, at
11 St. Francis College in Brooklyn at 4:00 P.M.

12 Members of the public are invited to attend
13 and share their views at all of the hearings.
14 Those who wish to speak can begin signing up 30
15 minutes before we start each hearing and
16 throughout the hearing. The public hearings in
17 April will be followed by a series of issues
18 forums, and we look forward to having one of
19 those issues forums here in Staten Island, which
20 will be held throughout the City during a period
21 of time in the month of May. These will be
22 followed by additional public hearings and other
23 meetings throughout the summer. So we're going
24 to be quite busy and we hope to see all of you in
25 the months ahead as we listen and start shaping

1 our own views.

2 Information about the Commission and its
3 members can be found on its Web site
4 NYC.gov/charter. Hearing schedules, transcripts
5 and videos are available on that site along with
6 downloadable copy of the current City Charter and
7 directions to hearing sites. Translations are
8 offered in Mandarin, Korean, Spanish and in
9 Russian. Members of the public may also send
10 written communication to the Commission via the
11 Web site. This public hearing is available to the
12 public through Web casting at NYC.gov/charter. A
13 link has been posted on that home page.

14 Again, I want to thank CUNY TV and the
15 City's Department of Information Technology and
16 Telecommunications for working with the
17 Commission's staff making this important part of
18 using technology available to wider audiences.

19 All future notifications of hearings and
20 meetings will include a note about Web casting.
21 Notices of hearings and forums can also be
22 accessed through the City Record. Commission
23 staff will continue to send notices of hearings
24 to major media, community and ethnic news outlets
25 in appropriate languages and also community

1 boards and community groups, civic groups,
2 elected officials, citizens, and many others
3 across the City.

4 We have a very distinguished and experienced
5 staff to work very closely with the Commission.
6 Lorna Goodman, who is in the audience with us
7 today, is our Executive Director. Her Deputy
8 Executive Director, Ruth Markovitz. Our Research
9 Director, Dr. Joseph Viteritti is in the audience
10 with us tonight. Our General Counsel, Rick
11 Schaffer, our Senior Counsel. Lisa Grumet, Jeff
12 Friedlander, Special Communications, a special
13 advisor. Matt Gorton, our Communications
14 Director for day-to-day work of the Commission is
15 with us this evening. Jay Hershenson,
16 Communications Advisor to the Commission is here
17 with us tonight. And Lisa Jones, our Director of
18 Administration. This is a very experienced and
19 highly talented group of women and men. The
20 Commission's work is also available on Facebook
21 at "NYC Charter Revision Commission" and at
22 Twitter at "City Charter NYC". Links to the live
23 Web cast will also be available there.

24 The Commission will continue to ensure that
25 its outreach is as broad and as deep as possible.

1 We very much appreciate the interest and
2 involvement of all New Yorkers whose input will
3 be fully considered by members of the Commission.
4 But before we take people who have signed up this
5 evening, I'd like to start by acknowledging the
6 very distinguished Borough President of Staten
7 Island, the only James Molinaro.

8 BOROUGH PRESIDENT MOLINORO: Thank you,
9 Mr. Chairman, and welcome to Staten Island. The
10 true Borough of Parks, no matter what the Bronx
11 says.

12 Good evening and thank you for this
13 opportunity to address this very distinguished
14 panel. I would like to commend your work on this
15 important Commission. Improving the government
16 of the City as large as New York City is
17 definitely no small task.

18 Of the five Borough Presidents that are
19 currently serving in office, I am the only one
20 that has had the experience and the good fortune
21 of serving under both Charters. The old Charter,
22 as a deputy Borough President, and now as the
23 Borough President under the present Charter.

24 The previous Charter gave the Borough
25 President more control in decision-making

1 authority, thereby giving the larger voice to the
2 residents of the City of New York.

3 As we all know, New York City's quite a big
4 place. If it was a state it would rank 13th in
5 America. With a population larger than the State
6 of Virginia. And each of the five boroughs would
7 be substantial in its own rank. In fact, in fact,
8 even little old Staten Island with half a million
9 residents would rank as the 35th largest city in
10 the nation. Larger than Cleveland and Kansas
11 City.

12 The five cities are definitely just too
13 populous to be governed by executives from New
14 York City, one executive from New York City. It
15 must need, it needs and it must have, executives
16 in each and every Borough. And that is why
17 Borough Presidents are necessary and invaluable.
18 They effectively serve their Borough constituents
19 with limited but very important powers.

20 Now, let's talk about some of our successes
21 on Staten Island with the limited powers that we
22 have under the present job.

23 We were able to close the Fresh Kills
24 landfill, preserve its roads, despite resistance
25 from the City.

1 We created Bloomingdale Park, despite City
2 opposition and lawsuits, to build ball fields and
3 playgrounds that were badly needed and with just
4 \$54,000 in seed money. We started the Staten
5 Island Economic Development Corporation to help
6 business leaders navigate the massive government.
7 Today, it is a thriving organization with a
8 budget of nearly \$2 million.

9 The Borough Presidents are effective because
10 of our unique perspective. We are more familiar
11 with the issues and problems of our Boroughs. And
12 this is not to criticize any of the agencies or
13 commissioners, because no matter who that
14 commissioner is, chances are they do not know the
15 Borough as well as a Borough President.

16 Agencies are responsible for serving the
17 entire city. Borough Presidents serve the
18 constituents of their Borough. After two decades
19 of operating under the current Charter, its
20 strength and weaknesses as they pertain to good
21 and effective government must and should be
22 evaluated. For instance, as many veterans of the
23 New York City government know, one of the most
24 difficult tasks is to ensure that our city
25 agencies are in communication on issues that

1 cross their jurisdiction.

2 Let me give you an example. On the North
3 Shore the Police Department is building a new
4 precinct. Bordering that precinct is a street
5 called Wilcox Street, a mapped but unbuilt city
6 street. But a variance was granted to its
7 development allowing construction in the bed of
8 this mapped street. As a result, Wilcox Street is
9 now partially obstructed by a newly built retail
10 complex limiting the access to the new precinct.
11 This unfortunate circumstance could have been
12 avoided with better communication.

13 So tonight I would like to recommend a
14 Charter revision to improve agency coordination
15 at the Borough level which can and should be on
16 the ballot this November.

17 Give the Borough Presidents the authority to
18 convene and chair multi interagency meetings with
19 the Borough Commissioners of five city agencies:
20 The Building Department, the Fire Department,
21 Department of Transportation, City Planning and
22 the Parks Department.

23 Meetings that would have deadlines and "real
24 world" agendas and require the Borough President
25 appoint a licensed Borough Architect along with

1 the existing requirement of a licensed Borough
2 Engineer. This proposal follows the groundwork
3 that already exists in the City Charter. Then you
4 would ask: Why is this necessary? And how would
5 it improve the operations of local government?

6 Currently, there is no coordination,
7 coordinating body that oversees the completion of
8 work with an eye on the long-term planning
9 strategy for the public.

10 So here on Staten Island, at my request, we
11 have been holding interagency meetings for over a
12 year and a half. These monthly meetings have
13 become the life-line of involved agencies to
14 voice their concerns, assisting agencies prior to
15 a proposal moving forward. They have been highly
16 praised by many of the commissioners of the
17 participating agencies and they have been
18 enormously successful.

19 So you might ask again: If these meetings
20 are already taking place and they are already
21 successful, then why the need to amend the
22 Charter? Well, there are two good reasons. First,
23 as successful as our meetings have been, there
24 are still additional related initiatives that are
25 not covered by the existing joint review process.

1 These topics include, but are not limited
2 to, such items as agency maintenance schedules,
3 capital project time lines, pending variance
4 applications and emergency services notification.
5 As a result, we have missed some opportunities
6 for some smart planning. The failure to properly
7 build Wilcox Street is just one example.

8 There are some others. On Arthur Kill Road,
9 a new building was constructed in such a way that
10 the Fire Department cannot get their trucks in
11 because of the width of the street. At the
12 intersection of South and Forest Avenues a waiver
13 was given to the developer, a car wash, allowing
14 him to build sidewalks in the bed of a mapped
15 street where a right turn lane is planned.

16 On Amboy Road trees were actually planted on
17 the sidewalk where a capital project is planned.
18 Now the City is going to have to move the
19 sidewalk back or we'll have to destroy all the
20 trees. And daycare centers and medical
21 facilities have been constructed in neighborhoods
22 throughout the Island, towering over the
23 surrounding homes.

24 Many of these types of issues could be
25 resolved, and even prevented, by mandating that

1 all of the relevant city agencies meet at the
2 same table lead by the Borough President.

3 The second reason is that agencies are
4 currently participating on an informal basis. The
5 truth is this. These interagency meetings are
6 occurring thanks to the wonderful cooperation of
7 Mayor Bloomberg and his commissioners. There is
8 no guarantee that these meetings will continue
9 with a different executive administration over a
10 different agency of commissioners. Ending this
11 unprecedented communication and cooperation
12 between our city agencies will be a loss for the
13 people of Staten Island and the quality of life.
14 And I strongly feel that these ongoing
15 interagency meetings should be made permanent.

16 The solution is really simple. Amend the
17 City Charter so as to mandate that the Borough
18 Presidents bring all of the relevant agencies to
19 the table and require the Borough Presidents to
20 maintain a licensed architect on their staff.
21 Under this plan, the Borough Presidents would
22 have more authority and responsibility for
23 coordinating the efforts of our city agencies
24 with regards to land use issues within their
25 Borough. It would increase the effectiveness of

1 the present Charter mandate planning
2 responsibilities of the Borough and of the
3 Borough President. It would keep the authority of
4 our city agencies intact. It would not interfere
5 with their daily operations. It would serve as an
6 additional support for both the agencies and the
7 community at-large and allows us to better and
8 smarter improve the quality of life for our
9 constituents. We know this reform will be
10 effective because, very simply, it works on
11 Staten Island, it has been working for a year and
12 a half. So let's work together to make
13 government function as a team, not as
14 competitors.

15 Now going forward. While I am confident
16 that the work of this Commission will result in
17 meaningful reform proposals, it is obvious that
18 sufficient time is not available between now and
19 November to study many needed changes in depth.
20 Therefore, I would recommend that the Commission
21 remain intact after November and continue to
22 explore additional changes to make the system of
23 government in New York City more effective.

24 Working in a partnership with the chief
25 executives of each of the Boroughs, this

1 Commission can bring further recommendations to
2 the people of New York for another vote in
3 November of 2011.

4 In closing, I would just like to add that I
5 will be providing this committee with a formal
6 submission detailing my proposal in the near
7 future. Thank you for the opportunity.

8 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you very much
9 Mr. Borough President.

10 BOROUGH PRESIDENT MOLINARO: I would like to
11 comment on something else which is not written.
12 My proposal is doable, very simple, as I
13 explained, but also it will cost the City
14 absolutely zero in dollars. So there's no
15 transfer of money that I need from the City to
16 continue to do what I'm doing. Just I need it to
17 be codified so that I can do it and not worry
18 about somebody stopping what I need to done. The
19 City doesn't have to worry. There's really no
20 reason this is not on the ballot. It's in the
21 best interests of the people. We've had it for a
22 year and a half. Commissioners, and I'll tell
23 you the truth, the Commissioners right offhand,
24 Commissioner of City Planning Purdy says this is
25 great. Commissioner of the Building Department

1 Limandri said this should be in every Borough,
2 and you could call him and quote him, so this
3 should be on the ballot, and it be would
4 tremendously useful, thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Commissioner Fiala would
6 like to make a statement, ask a question.

7 COMMISSIONER FIALA: Thank you, Mr. Borough
8 President, for the presentation. I just wanted to
9 get a baseline understanding of the proposal.

10 The existing Charter has a borough service
11 cap in it, as you know. This seems to be
12 distinguishable from that. Could you just
13 revisit the example you gave so that I
14 understand? Did the Borough Presidents who chair
15 an additional board and were mandated in the
16 Charter that certain high level officials
17 participate in those meetings, is that what
18 distinguishes it from that which is presently in
19 there?

20 BOROUGH PRESIDENT MOLINARO: The only
21 difference would be in the way it functions. Now
22 it's only local commissioners that attend a
23 meeting. They can bring an aide with them. The
24 local commissioners are there Commissioner of
25 Parks Commissioner of Fire, Commissioner of

1 Buildings, Commissioner of City Planning.
2 They're actually Commissioners, they're Borough
3 Commissioners, they attend.

4 What you're talking about is the Borough
5 Service Cabinet, which was never, never a
6 success, going back 21 years from the day they
7 put it in place. It was a committee made up of
8 about 35 people, all agencies, community boards,
9 and everyone else. It was a list four and a half,
10 five pages of requests that you gave out to
11 people from DEP or Fire Department or Police
12 Department to low-level people, who then passed
13 it on and nothing was ever heard after that.

14 We haven't had a Borough Service Cabinet
15 meeting in 18 years, to tell you the truth,
16 because they're useless.

17 These are different. Everything that starts
18 in the Borough starts in Borough Hall. You
19 cannot build a house, you can't build a store,
20 you can't build anything unless you come to
21 Borough Hall. We first give you a house number.
22 Then we look at your plans. And we see if your
23 plans match what the law says. Right?

24 I'll give you an example. At one of the
25 recent interagency meetings there was a

1 commercial building being built on Amboy Road.
2 There was a plan submitted to the Fire
3 Department, a plan submitted to the Building
4 Department, and a plan submitted to us. And they
5 were all three different plans. One plan had
6 residential on the second floor with an entrance
7 behind the building. So when we notified the
8 agencies that a new building was going up, we
9 were not going to be able to tell them there were
10 residences on the back of the floor. That's what
11 the Building Department had. So there were three
12 different plans.

13 Now, at that meeting my chairman, who was my
14 architect, who was my architect on staff, he
15 caught, he said, "These plans are different." We
16 called in the department. We said, "These plans
17 are different." He says, "Well, I submitted them
18 in different years. At different times."

19 And we've had plans submitted that has one
20 design downstairs and then if it's in violation,
21 what they should be doing, we tell them, "No, you
22 have to submit us a new one." So they come along
23 and submit us a new one. Then the old one, which
24 is easier, less costly, they bring it upstairs to
25 give it to the Building Department. And the

1 Building Department doesn't know what we have
2 downstairs. So he's okaying the plans that are
3 different than ours. That aggravated me recently
4 with a bank on Staten Island.

5 So that's the difference between these
6 meetings. These meetings are monthly meetings and
7 they're in communication with each other all
8 month. That's why an architect is important. It
9 should be mandated the same as the Borough
10 Engineer. Each Borough should be mandated to
11 hire a licensed architect.

12 COMMISSIONER FIALA: Two proposals: One,
13 mandating an architect the way we do a
14 topographical engineer. The second one is the
15 creation of this interagency council and the
16 language would in effect say, correct me if I'm
17 wrong, that the Borough President will chair this
18 council and that the Charter will specify that
19 five commissioners in the borough level,
20 decision-makers, must attend on a monthly basis.

21 BOROUGH PRESIDENT MOLINARO: Monthly basis.

22 COMMISSIONER FIALA: Thank you,
23 Mr. President.

24 BOROUGH PRESIDENT MOLINARO: Thank you.

25 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: We have a few elected

1 officials that would like to be heard and I would
2 like to acknowledge them. I would like to ask all
3 of our speakers to try to be as brief as you can.
4 Adhere to the three-minute clock that buzzes
5 approximately towards the end of your statements.

6 Let me start with Councilman Oddo.

7 COUNCILMAN ODDO: Telling a politician he
8 has only three minutes is very courageous.

9 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: I wasn't referring to
10 you, Councilman, I was talking about the people
11 signing up. We're giving you the courtesy to go
12 over, but be cognizant we have a lot of people.

13 COUNCILMAN ODDO: Trying to start with a
14 little humor there. If at some point during this
15 testimony I break into tears, I want you to know
16 that's because today was the Yankee home opener.
17 They handed out their World Series rings. I was
18 at the stadium, and I am a New York Mets fan.

19 It's good to see some friends up on the
20 dais. Carlo, Anthony. John Banks, good job
21 keeping the lights on. Of course, Commissioner
22 Fiala, who always has Staten Island's best
23 interests at heart. And I want to particularly
24 thank and special recognition to Hope Cohen, who
25 I'm a big fan of her work, and she did a

1 phenomenal white paper called "Rethinking
2 Environmental Review" that is now in the hands of
3 Howard Wolfson in the administration to hopefully
4 take a second and third look, because that's a
5 wonderful way of changing government and making
6 New York City a better place.

7 I'm going to submit seven pages of
8 testimony. I won't bore you with reading all of
9 it, although I do want to highlight a couple of
10 points. But I have a pretty simple plate.

11 Ever morning I wake up and I wrack my brain
12 trying to figure out how to make Staten Island a
13 better place. And I ask you, who in the agency is
14 doing the same? Who at DOT and who at DOB? Who at
15 City Planning? And if the answer is "Oh, that's
16 Borough Commissioner X or Borough Commissioner
17 Y," my response is then empower him or empower
18 her.

19 What you are going to hear tonight from
20 Staten Islanders is, again, it's simple. We don't
21 want to completely change City government. We
22 don't want a revolution. We want administrative
23 decentralization. We want our Borough
24 Commissioners to have the ability to make local
25 decisions that frankly, with all due respect to

1 the learned men and women that are part of this
2 administration and future administrations, we
3 think we know Staten Island a little bit better
4 than some bureaucrat in Manhattan.

5 So when it comes to closing schools, when it
6 comes to which streets we're going to pave, when
7 it comes to which street we're going to put a
8 bike lane on, when it comes to those local
9 quality of life issues, the local government, the
10 elected officials, and the Borough Commissioners,
11 the people that work for the Mayor, we need to
12 empower them, and I have in my testimony seven or
13 eight specific examples.

14 Powers that should be given to the Borough
15 President . The Borough President should have a
16 say in perhaps suggesting some names. Maybe he
17 has to give a list of three names who should be
18 considered for a particular Commissioner locally.
19 But this notion that we're going to take someone,
20 because it happens to be the issue of the day,
21 Tom Cocola, who is an earnest public servant, the
22 Borough Commissioner for the Department of
23 Transportation, the notion that we are going to
24 make him in essence a glorified clerk to take all
25 the correspondence from Debi Rose and Vinnie

1 Ignizio and myself from the Borough President and
2 all the officials and run up to Worth Street and
3 then run back with an answer and then run up a
4 rebuttal and run back, it's, it's not efficient,
5 it's not the way government should work.

6 I will close with this one example. There
7 was a tragedy on Locust Avenue in my District
8 where there are a lot of children who live on the
9 block, they play, a car hit a kid. The community
10 was so frustrated they put their speed hump in
11 and DOT came and removed it. And we started a
12 study to see if a speed hump is wanted on Locust
13 Avenue. We were told by DOT up to six months. My
14 staff very religiously every month E-mailed DOT
15 and said, "Where are we on the study? Where are
16 we on the study?"

17 Sunday I got an E-mail from an angry
18 constituent saying, "I don't think your office
19 has done enough. I don't think you're working
20 hard enough."

21 It's 2010. It's six months into the study
22 and DOT off-island can't tell me where they are
23 in that study. Surely there's a better
24 government. And that government is allowing a
25 local Commissioner to figure out in two weeks or

1 six weeks, certainly not six months or more,
2 where to put a speed hump on Staten Island.

3 Again, I ask you if you don't want to endure
4 all the verbiage, read the bullet points. I talk
5 about specific things about decentralization but
6 I also talk about broader things, and I'll
7 mention one.

8 We're sort of in the lull after the
9 overdevelopment decade. We know what will
10 happen, the market will turn, and over
11 development will come again. We have two
12 agencies: City planning and DOB. One writes the
13 zoning resolution and for some bizarre reason a
14 completely different entity interprets it. We
15 put out the idea a few years ago. I asked you
16 guys to consider it. As much as we're talking
17 about decentralization, how about a consolidation
18 for the Department of Land Use? Put those folks
19 under the same roof, empower the local Borough
20 Commissioner of the Department of Land Use on
21 Staten Island, but get those two folks under the
22 same roof talking to each other so you don't have
23 one writing and one in interpreting.

24 I thank you for your time. I thank you for
25 your interest. Again, Commissioner Fiala, thank

1 you for having our back.

2 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you for your very
3 well-written statement, and all of us will read
4 it carefully.

5 I would like to acknowledge Council Member
6 Ignizio.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Thank you, thank
8 you very much, and thank you, Chancellor
9 Goldstein, and members.

10 First, I want to make the sincere pledge and
11 shout out to my good friend Steve Fiala, who we
12 may be sparring partners in the paper at times as
13 of late, but we are good friend and he serves our
14 Borough well.

15 Really, I want to address the criticism
16 levied at the Board. I want you to hear it from
17 me and not just read it in the paper. My concern
18 was not for where this was in any given Borough.
19 It was central to an area where the entire
20 Borough can take part.

21 I represent the South Shore of Staten
22 Island, and it's very difficult for those coming
23 off express buses at 7:00, 8:00 o'clock at night
24 to get up here for your time. I recognize day of
25 time to fill out and go online. But I believe

1 casting the widest net possible is the more
2 prudent course of action. And for each hearing
3 to be within a quarter mile of the Borough of
4 Manhattan and within a five-mile radius of each
5 other, I don't think that sends a message
6 correctly.

7 That being said, here we are in the Charter
8 Revision Commission, and I'm going to be speaking
9 before you, and I have implored this Commission
10 to take up that, which you will now, to extend,
11 if you will, for a greater depth and a greater
12 look into the Commission.

13 Obviously, you heard my colleague,
14 Councilman Oddo, speak with regard to
15 decentralization. That's kind of the buzz word
16 here today. But a lot of us want to sit with
17 your experts, those of you who say have the
18 expertise of charters going before us, and
19 expertise that some of us may not have, to put
20 meat on those bones to say what a decentralized
21 government for Staten Island, how it would help
22 us and how we can achieve that. That's something
23 that I would hope, and I spoke to your Executive
24 Director and your Policy Analyst today to be able
25 to do so.

1 But the challenge of any Commission is to
2 reorganize the Charter that is way too mayoral
3 centric and push back and curtail those that
4 appoint you. Reform of this process as a whole.

5 I recognize the composition of the Charter
6 in Albany. But I believe that there ought to be
7 some representation from City government, from
8 other aspects and not just a mayoral appointment.

9 The main issue I hear you taking up is term
10 limits. Despite my opposition to term limits, I
11 voted with the public and did not to alter their
12 will.

13 I ask that you strike any language that
14 permits the City Council to overturn a referendum
15 of the voters regardless of what that's about.
16 Whenever the voters vote we need to send a
17 message that is sacrosanct.

18 There are several other reforms that I will
19 tick off here relatively quickly.

20 Direct appointments from the Community Board
21 from the Council Members. Why do I as a Council
22 Member have to go through my Borough President --
23 who I like very much -- in order to get my
24 appointments on the Community Board? Perhaps
25 there is a needed attention between the Council

1 Members and that Borough President, whomever he
2 or she is, and that holding back those
3 appointments would not allow for government to
4 function as good as it can.

5 The abolition of the Office of Public
6 Advocate. There has been a lot of discussion
7 about this. It is clear in its history that this
8 office was created for political expediency in
9 order to comprise a deal. Well, those deals days
10 are over. In the lean days and closing
11 firehouses, the Office of the Public Advocate,
12 under this current Public Advocate, because he
13 was elected but ought to be looked at for its
14 abolition.

15 The Independent Budget Office for the
16 Conflict of Interests Board. The Conflict of
17 Interests Board has a massive portfolio that has
18 to train ethically the entire 300,000 workforce
19 of the City of New York and to not have it come
20 back to us begging the Council, begging for one
21 additional lawyer, is something that I don't
22 think serves in the best interests of those who
23 seek ethics in the City of New York.

24 Revenue of projections in the City I believe
25 should be set by the Comptroller, perhaps

1 studying a multiyear budget to avoid the annual
2 budget dance.

3 Merging the Department of Records with that
4 of the City Clerk is the appropriate agency.

5 The scope of land-use review from City
6 Planning. City Planning should not rule on
7 scope. We have final land-use authority.

8 Allow the City Council to rule on scope and
9 deduct 15 days off of our time line which that
10 scoping question has.

11 Reformation of the Board of Standards and
12 Appeals, which is an agency of the Mayor.
13 Extensions are granted somewhat at will and
14 communities don't know what to expect. You should
15 change the standard from Board of Standards and
16 Appeals from any evidence to substantial
17 evidence. That would give us greater power in
18 order to save that which we want in our local
19 communities.

20 The composition of the Charter Revision, I
21 recognize that because of Municipal Home Rule
22 Law, I recognize that has to come from Albany.
23 But this Board has a huge say in the Charter
24 Revision Commission since you are the Charter
25 Revision Commission. Since you felt that should

1 be the case, you more appropriately make the
2 case.

3 Land is something that ought to be looked
4 at. I believe they should create an agency
5 subject to the Open Meetings Law, rule making
6 process and the owners of homeownership rights of
7 land marking ought to be taken into account.

8 Parks concessions should be reviewed by the
9 Council. Many people don't know that a parks
10 concession under a certain threshold never comes
11 before the Council. That's something that we've
12 had many problems with in the past right here on
13 Staten Island.

14 Finally, I think this Commission has the
15 obligation to work extra hard to convince that
16 you are truly independent and without a set
17 agenda and to really delve into the issues
18 brought before you and by the public. For better
19 or worse, you carry the burden of those that are
20 skeptical about this impanelling of the Charter
21 Revision Commission. But understand, have an
22 appreciation for the learning curve of the
23 populace out there. People don't know what the
24 Charter is. They think the Charter is going on a
25 boat fishing or going to Atlantic City. They

1 don't have a full appreciation for what it is and
2 what it does, and I believe it's incumbent upon
3 all of us to really teach them and to really
4 allow them to ask, solicit the most opinions that
5 we can in order to create a better city and a
6 better government for us all.

7 Thank you very much.

8 COMMISSIONER COHEN: Can I ask the Council
9 Member a question?

10 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Absolutely,
11 Councilwoman. Hope.

12 COMMISSIONER COHEN: Council Member? That
13 was an extraordinary list of suggestions, and
14 actually off the top of my head some of them are
15 quite interesting, but it's kind of hard to take
16 them all in.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Happy to send them
18 to you.

19 COMMISSIONER COHEN: So I'm hoping that you
20 will be fleshing them out, submitting them in
21 writing to us, those things we heard before, but
22 also some completely new things to me that I
23 think are really worth discussing.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Thank you, happy to
25 provide them to you.

1 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: I would like to
2 acknowledge Debi Rose.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Good evening, good
4 evening to everyone. And good everyone to
5 Chairman Goldstein. I am Debi Rose and I'm the
6 Council Member for the 49th District of the North
7 Shore, and I want to welcome you to McKee High
8 School here in the 49th District.

9 While I and many others here will come
10 before this panel this evening with many changes
11 and ideas that we would like to see adopted in
12 the City Charter, the overriding issue for me is
13 that what is most pressing to us, is that the
14 Charter Review Commission slow down the
15 proceedings in order to conduct an open,
16 transparent and comprehensive review.

17 As stated in the news, the Mayor charged the
18 Commission with conducting an extensive outreach
19 campaign. "Every issue will be on the table and
20 every voice will be heard," the Mayor was quoted
21 as saying.

22 My question is how will that happen in four
23 months' time? This 15- member panel is expected
24 to alter the 400-page rule book of government for
25 this city in such a brief period of time. That

1 seems highly unlikely.

2 The City Charter is our localized
3 constitution that governs how this city shall
4 operate, and this is purported to be the first
5 comprehensive review of the City's governing
6 constitution since the review in 1989, which then
7 took three years and consisted of 141 public
8 hearings.

9 As such, more time should certainly be used
10 or given to flesh out important matters
11 concerning our City government and the
12 opportunities that can be made to improve the
13 government's structure.

14 As part of that effort, the Commission needs
15 to take a comprehensive look at what has worked
16 or what has not worked in city government. These
17 issues should be extensively researched,
18 documented with recommendations proposed to the
19 Charter Commission based on findings resulting
20 from public input and a full deliberative
21 process.

22 For instance, I feel that a closer look
23 should be given to local control. I strongly
24 urge the Charter Review panel to consider imbuing
25 more power to the Borough Presidents, local

1 Community Boards and local government entities.

2 In addition, I believe local agency heads
3 should have the right to make procedural and
4 budgetary decisions on local matters which are
5 predicated on local needs and their situations on
6 the ground.

7 I also believe we should not only keep
8 Borough Presidents but vest them with the ability
9 to make decisions at the local level that
10 directly affect their communities. I suggest this
11 because Staten Island historically, and the North
12 Shore specifically, has long been overlooked in
13 terms of receiving proportionate resources based
14 on residents' needs.

15 As the fastest growing Borough of the five,
16 we deserve to have our needs fully addressed.
17 Case in point. Yet once again we find our
18 interests represented by one lone voice on the
19 Commission, when each of the other four boroughs
20 have multiple voices at the table. While I have
21 the utmost confidence in Steve Fiala's ability,
22 Steve is my friend, and he's more than competent
23 for this task, this doesn't bode well in terms of
24 having equal representation of our, our ideas and
25 concerns. Is Steve Fiala's voice louder than or

1 equal than to six Manhattan voices?

2 Other areas of concern pertain to having
3 substantive discussions around term limits,
4 mayoral control, the City Council's power and
5 purview, the City's land-use process, procurement
6 bidding processes and contract oversight, among
7 other issues.

8 These are important matters with direct
9 implications for our citizens that should not be
10 hurried through in an effort to get them on the
11 ballot in November.

12 In addition, the people of New York are
13 entitled to have the time to research and prepare
14 for these hearings in order to provide informed
15 feedback to the Commission.

16 As such, at the next meeting on Staten
17 Island, my office will submit in-depth
18 recommendations to address many of the
19 aforementioned areas of interest.

20 In conclusion, I would like to submit again
21 that we slow the process down, do our due
22 diligence that the people deserve, and report the
23 recommendations next year or in 2012.

24 I want to thank you for all of the work that
25 you're putting into this effort. But I want to

1 make sure that this effort is one that has been
2 carefully vetted.

3 There are many issues that we need to look
4 into that are important to our continuance to be
5 able to provide good government for all of our
6 citizens. And I think by rushing through this
7 project we do the City of New York a disservice.
8 And while people will come with wonderful
9 suggestions, I think that we need the time to vet
10 these ideas and to look at what has worked in
11 other places also so that we come up with a
12 comprehensive plan, one that has the same staying
13 ability that our United States Constitution has
14 that was crafted many, many years ago, and it
15 still is relevant, and it's still a document that
16 is workable and functions well in terms of our
17 ability to govern. And I think we are due
18 nothing less than to give this the full kind of
19 support and importance that is due it.

20 And so my remarks tonight are not issue
21 specific, but they are a plea to ask you to look
22 at this process and to honor it and to give us
23 time so that we come up with the best government
24 that we can have in New York City. Thank you.

25 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Representative for

1 Assemblyman Lou Tobacco, his Chief of Staff,
2 Michael Coppotelli.

3 MR. COPPOTELLI: Good evening, members of
4 the Charter Revision Commission, and on behalf of
5 Assemblyman Lou Tobacco, thank you very much for
6 allowing me to deliver testimony on his behalf.

7 He does ask, though, in the future when you
8 are planning these hearings if you could just
9 take into consideration the opening schedules.
10 So thank you.

11 For far too long, Borough governments have
12 had limited control over the services that city
13 residents need and rely on most. And this needs
14 to change. The best and most cost efficient way
15 to serve residents of Staten Island and other
16 Boroughs be given local control, greater control
17 of the city services and departments like
18 Education, Transportation, Buildings and Health
19 Department and zoning laws, are just a few
20 examples of where we need local control.

21 The debate over which style of government
22 works best, centralized or decentralized, has
23 been a long fought battle here on Staten Island
24 and the City. Numerous elected officials and
25 candidates have called for Staten Island to

1 secede as a way to escape from under the yolk of
2 city and state government while they strangle the
3 citizens with some undue burdens.

4 As to date, state and city governments
5 continue to grow and efforts to give Boroughs
6 more power have been stifled.

7 Tonight it is our hope that a new course can
8 be chartered not only for residents of Staten
9 Island but for all residents of the city. Put
10 simply, one where Staten Islanders are
11 determining Staten Island's future.

12 To move Staten Island and New York City
13 forward and to improve the quality of life for
14 all New York City residents, we propose that the
15 Charter be amended to give Borough elected
16 officials, Commissioners and agencies greater
17 control over their budgets and local services
18 that they provide. Greater control at the
19 Borough level would empower local officials,
20 those who are on the ground and nearest to the
21 situation, to decide what is best for our
22 community, and to do it in a more efficient and
23 sometimes more cost effective manner. It is
24 imperative that we reduce centralized power,
25 promote governmental checks and balances, and

1 give people a louder voice and address zoning and
2 land-use policies locally.

3 The issue of local control is a decisive
4 matter that this committee must address regarding
5 the City Charter, and it's our hope that you will
6 seriously consider it.

7 I appreciate the time that you've given me
8 to testify on behalf of the Assemblyman, and he
9 will be submitting much more extensive remarks in
10 writing with specifics. Thank you.

11 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you, Mr.
12 Coppotelli.

13 Representing Senator Andrew Lanza is Anthony
14 Rienhard.

15 MR. REINHARD: Thank you, members of the
16 Charter Revision Commission for meeting here on
17 Staten Island. My name is Anthony Reinhard. I'm
18 the District Operations Director for Senator
19 Andrew Lanza. Senator Lanza is in legislative
20 session in Albany and thus asked me to represent
21 him here tonight. He asked that these remarks be
22 kept short to allow the public to have more time
23 to speak and will be submitting formal remarks in
24 the very near future to the Commission.

25 The key point that Senator Lanza would like

1 to convey tonight is that for far too long Staten
2 Island has not received its fair share, nor have
3 its citizens had sufficient control over Staten
4 Island's issues. It has been for this reason that
5 in recent years Senator Lanza has invited public
6 discussion about secession of Staten Island.

7 This Commission has the unique opportunity
8 to do what past Charter Revision Commissions have
9 failed to do: Give the people of Staten Island
10 the kind of control it so properly deserves and
11 urgently needs. Let the people of Staten Island
12 have more control so that we can obtain and
13 direct resources there where they are most
14 needed, better maintain our roadways, realize and
15 develop economic opportunities and enhance our
16 quality of life. All in a way that is fitting to
17 the unique character of Staten Island and
18 beneficial to the city, the region and the state.

19 Senator Lanza also would like me to express
20 his support for the residents who are taking time
21 out of their busy lives to speak tonight. He
22 looks forward to hearing about the many thoughts
23 and ideas that come out of this hearing and is
24 prepared to actively continue the dialogue so
25 that many of these ideas can be brought to

1 fruition.

2 And of course I'd like to thank Commissioner
3 Fiala for his ongoing support and dedication to
4 Staten Island. Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Reinhard.
6 Representing Senator Savino is Michael
7 Arvanites.

8 MR. ARVANITES: Good evening, Commissioners.
9 I'll try to sum up as many of the points that
10 have already been discussed by earlier speakers.

11 My name is Michael Arvanites. Senator Savino
12 is in Albany, amongst other things, is working on
13 the budget tonight. We would like you to take
14 that into account for the upcoming things as
15 well.

16 The customary argument is that Staten Island
17 is different from every other Borough. Geography
18 is destiny. For instance, starting here at 6:00
19 P.M. doesn't allow for people with the longest
20 average commute in the nation to attend the
21 hearing.

22 This Commission, although I respect every
23 member of it and know some of them, has but one
24 member from Staten Island. Every other Borough
25 has at least two. In fact, Manhattan has one

1 commissioner per 256, 199 residents. I ask, how
2 is that representative of our government?
3 Moreover, the rush to ballot seems misplaced
4 while trying to turn the project over in a mere
5 four months before the upcoming ballot.

6 I would remind the Commission all four
7 statewide offices, both United State Senators and
8 all Representative and State officials, are up
9 for election. This all against the backdrop of
10 voting on new machines this November. The ballot
11 is full.

12 That said, if we're determined to move
13 forward with altering a government that has
14 governed this municipality since 1898, I would
15 ask you to tread lightly. It was altered in 1989
16 to the detriment of Staten Island and it led to a
17 secession movement that still burns within every
18 Islander.

19 One proposal we should be particularly
20 careful with is the apparent targeting of the
21 Public Advocate's Office for elimination or
22 downgrade. The Budget for this office is a
23 miniscule portion of the \$54 billion budget.
24 However, it's necessary to deal with systemic
25 citywide issues. I would also recommend that

1 the Public Advocate's office somehow tie into
2 either Conflict of Interest Board, the Civilian
3 Complaint Review Board. Perhaps we can proceed
4 on those independent bodies; offices with a vote,
5 somehow greater acknowledgement.

6 I would also recommend that the Comptroller
7 play a greater role in the budget process through
8 perhaps coordination with the Independent Budget
9 Office.

10 The Borough President's office simply must
11 be maintained. And it is our hope that the role
12 and scope will be expanded. As I stated at the
13 beginning, every Borough is unique. We must have
14 an advocate, an executive that can promote the
15 interests of our Borough. As Councilman Oddo
16 noted, perhaps we could have a Borough Commission
17 of City Planning, of the Buildings Department
18 to be nominated or a list to be developed by the
19 Borough Presidents and allowing that person on
20 City Planning or the Panel For Educational Policy
21 that we would hope would be the Deputy Borough
22 President, who is quite well-versed on these
23 issues, to have a veto that reflects their
24 specific Borough only on those panels.

25 In 2006, Councilman McMahon suggested a

1 Borough Planning Commissioner in the EDC, which I
2 know isn't a governmental agency, but every
3 single member of its board is appointed by the
4 Mayor.

5 Presently, just on the North Shore we have
6 the following projects: Goethals Rebuild, Berth
7 4, construction of New York Container Terminal,
8 North Shore Rail revitalization, West and North
9 Shore manufacturing zones studies, Blissenbach
10 Marina Park Development, Ferry Terminal retail
11 development. The rebuilding of the Ferry Terminal
12 bus ramp. You get the idea. All of these
13 projects should be coordinated by a single
14 person, a Commissioner, a Director on the EDC
15 level.

16 Staten Island means 6 percent of the City's
17 population, yet we're the sole Borough without a
18 single city agency headquartered within its
19 Borough. Again, geography is destiny.

20 Recently, the Department of Information
21 Technology and Telecommunications, which you
22 referenced earlier, Commissioner Goldstein, is
23 looking for hard-wired back office space in --
24 you guessed it -- New Jersey. We have such space
25 available on Staten Island. Somehow the

1 Commission should foster and encourage a physical
2 presence in the Borough. Geography is destiny.

3 Greater control could feasibly save the city
4 millions as projects concocted and overseen by a
5 central location have a knack for overruns and
6 cost overruns.

7 As Charlemagne noted, "By simply being
8 present one can effectively coordinate your
9 Empire." Management by walking around in the
10 Ninth Century. It's about time we caught up.

11 I was also intrigued by Councilman James
12 Oddo's proposal in 2006 for Department of Land
13 Use, Department of City Planning, Department of
14 Buildings, Landmarks Preservation Commission and
15 Board of Standards and Appeals. These agencies
16 often give blanket one-size- fit-all zoning and
17 construction requirements across the entire city.
18 They serve neither the multimillionaire's trying
19 to build a skyscraper or the Islander trying to
20 build an extension onto his kitchen.

21 In addition, these agencies often contradict
22 each other. They ignore community advisory
23 opinions from the Community Board to the Council
24 members and the Borough Presidents with such
25 great frequency, the question arises why do we

1 even bother drafting them?

2 Lastly, as I stated earlier, it's important
3 to maintain the checks and balances on the
4 executive branch of government. I would
5 recommend, just reiterate our request that the
6 Public Advocate's role be maintained; the Borough
7 President's, and the Comptroller's role be
8 expanded. We'll be following up with a full
9 proposal, and thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: I would like to
11 acknowledge that one comment that was made
12 earlier by the Council Member Ignizio. When we
13 return to Staten Island we certainly are going to
14 be cognizant of expanding the catenary wherein
15 the geography of Staten Island we're going to
16 hold our next meeting, so thank you for that
17 comment, I appreciate that comment.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Thank you.

19 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: We are at the point of
20 acknowledging members of the public who have
21 signed up. I just want to mention two very quick
22 things. If you do have written testimony we very
23 much appreciate you leaving it with our Reporter
24 of Record, who is seated in the front, and she
25 would be very pleased to take your written

1 statements. And secondly, because we do have a
2 rather impressive list of people who wish to be
3 heard this evening, please make every effort to
4 acknowledge the three-minute time limit that we
5 have asked all of you to adhere to.

6 Before I call the first person who has
7 signed up, I want to ask if there is any member
8 of the Commission that wants to make a comment or
9 statement or ask a question of anybody who has
10 testified thus far? And if there are not, I don't
11 see any acknowledgement, let me get right to the
12 list.

13 Our first speaker is Gloria Smith. Welcome,
14 Miss Smith.

15 MS. SMITH: Good evening. My name is Gloria
16 Smith. I am a resident of St. George and I'm a
17 New York City government retiree.

18 My suggestion to the Charter Revision
19 Committee is not a local suggestion, it is a
20 citywide suggestion, and it has to do with term
21 limits.

22 I want the loophole that the Mayor used to
23 circumvent the voters of New York closed. I want
24 any other loophole that circumvents the Boroughs
25 of New York closed. Which means if there are any

1 changes in term limits, it goes back to the
2 voters.

3 Now, the Mayor changed it to three terms for
4 himself, he said, and that the Charter would take
5 it back to the original two that the voters voted
6 on. Now, this is what he said when he changed
7 it. He said it was only for him. So I want it to
8 go back to the two term limits. Or if it is to
9 be changed from the two term limits permanently,
10 or done away with, it must be voted on by the
11 voters and that must be put in the City Charter,
12 not going to the City Council. So when you look
13 at that Charter, what he used to circumvent the
14 voters, find it, close it, and see if there are
15 any others in there. Okay?

16 And now I will tell you I was a Plaintiff on
17 a lawsuit against the Mayor. Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you very much,
19 Miss Smith.

20 Yes.

21 MR. MOLTNER: May I submit a question?

22 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Yes, Mr. Moltner.

23 MR. MOLTNER: Miss Smith.

24 MS. SMITH: Yes.

25 MR. MOLTNER: Do you believe there's been

1 sufficient public discourse and debate on this
2 issue on the ballot in November of 2010? And do
3 you think it be would a disservice if this
4 Commission did not put it on the ballot in
5 November of 2010?

6 MS. SMITH: Yes, I do. I think there was a
7 lot of animosity. And just like my reason for
8 the lawsuit was not because I didn't think maybe
9 there should be a change or maybe it should be
10 reconsidered, it was the way it was done. I
11 thought that it was a slap to the voters, and I
12 think that some of the votes against the Mayor
13 were a backlash because of what he did. Okay?

14 MR. MOLTNER: Thank you.

15 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you, Miss Smith.
16 Thank you, Mr. Moltner.

17 Our next speaker is Richard Thomas.

18 MR. THOMAS: Mr. Chairman Goldstein,
19 representatives of this panel, my name is Richard
20 Thomas, a retiree from the New York City School
21 Construction Authority. And as a member of the
22 initial Charter Commission here on Staten Island
23 around 1988, '89, I find it a little bit
24 appalling that Staten Islanders only have one
25 member of this esteemed Commission, Steve Fiala.

1 I know Dr. Viteritti, who basically chaired the
2 Commission that I was on.

3 This Commission is very important to Staten
4 Islanders and you'll have the impact of the lives
5 of Staten Islanders as well as the impact of all
6 the other four Boroughs. My recommendation is
7 that we should have equal representatives on this
8 Commission due to the fact that this new Charter
9 will not only affect Staten Island but all the
10 other four Boroughs. I thank you kindly.

11 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Thomas.
12 Our next speaker is Joe Valentin.

13 MR. VALENTIN: Good evening, Panel, and
14 welcome to Staten Island. I just wanted for some
15 of you that probably don't know or have never
16 been in Staten Island, I happen to love Staten
17 Island. I moved here because it was a place that
18 I wanted to come to.

19 I've been fighting issues for at least 25 to
20 28 years on Staten Island, and I'm proud to say
21 that some of the issues that we fought in Staten
22 Island, even though I know there are a lot of the
23 other boroughs do not agree with us and don't
24 like us for some reason or other, but when we
25 have say so, we say so. We have to do something,

1 we just do it. And we're not ashamed about it, we
2 don't care what anybody else thinks, or the rest
3 of the city thinks about what we do here on
4 Staten Island.

5 The issues that you're basically are going
6 to be confronted with are some of the issues I'm
7 worried that hopefully you're not influenced by
8 anybody else that was appointed, that you were
9 appointed by, or in any way that your decision
10 becomes hampered by that any one individual. It
11 should be your own decision, and hopefully
12 well-thought and considerate, besides the rest of
13 the City, but considerate of Staten Island.

14 I think some of your officials, what the
15 officials have brought out to you, which I'm not
16 going to repeat because it's basically repeating,
17 but just think about it. It makes sense to us
18 people in Staten Island. These are the people
19 that we confront. These are the people we trust.
20 These are the people we elected. We put them in
21 place for that purpose for them to do the job and
22 for us to watch over us and take care of the
23 issues for us. And protect us in every way.

24 Unfortunately, in taxes and stuff like that,
25 is one of the biggest things I have a problem

1 with. There's a lot of issues that I have with
2 taxes that because the City puts certain things
3 in place that affects the people that pay these
4 taxes and having their say so.

5 There is a lot of agencies that are not
6 accountable for what they do with the tax monies,
7 and these things that affects us.

8 Some of the issues that we have fought on
9 Staten Island we accomplished because we were
10 determined and we had the right people in place.
11 So to consider, for you to consider of removing
12 Borough President or any of the officials in
13 Staten Island weakens our power of say so of
14 voters to be able to agree and determine to what
15 we really want or what we need here.

16 The point I'm trying to bring out here is
17 what is good for Staten Island might not be good
18 for Manhattan and vice versa. If whatever is good
19 for Manhattan and Brooklyn or Queens might not be
20 good for Staten Island. So by having us doing
21 our own choice and our own decisions we would
22 basically accomplish what we really want.

23 Hopefully you'll have that. There's not
24 enough time basically to talk. I gave in my
25 statement. Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Please leave it with the
2 Reporter, if you don't mind, right up front.

3 MR. VALENTIN: I did.

4 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you.

5 Our next speaker will be Allen Carpelli.

6 Mr. Carpelli?

7 MR. CARPELLI: Chairman Goldstein, my name
8 is Allen Carpelli. I'm a Staten Islander, a New
9 Yorker. I have the distinction of representing
10 Staten Island and fighting for Transportation on
11 the MTA Board with my colleague there, John
12 Banks. I'm one of the surviving members of the
13 Staten Island Charter Commission which studied
14 the issue of empowering and the feasibility of
15 creating a City of Staten Island back in 19...
16 I've heard some criticism of the composition of
17 this panel and perhaps what you lack in a
18 geographic affinity to Staten Island, I do
19 appreciate the talent that I see amassed by the
20 Mayor, our distinguished Chairman, and other
21 members. Steve Fiala, and a terrific Policy
22 Director, Joseph Vitteritti, who understands
23 charters and government. Unlike many people
24 throughout the United States, Joseph is a very
25 talented person and we spent literally thousands

1 of hours looking at New York City government, how
2 to deconstruct it and how to construct a
3 government locally that would make Staten
4 Islanders feel empowered.

5 I also come to the table as somebody who
6 worked for Borough Presidents in the Bronx and in
7 Manhattan. And I will say that many of the
8 frustrations that are felt by our Staten Island
9 Borough President are also felt throughout the
10 City of New York.

11 The issue of decentralization, which I
12 support, is something that had a lot of momentum
13 in the '70s. When a charter revision took place
14 in the '70s, the movement was to in fact empower
15 local communities to have greater say in
16 decisions, land-use decisions, transportation
17 decisions, and other decisions that Borough
18 President Molinaro outlined before.

19 We need to have the pendulum swing back and
20 look toward a decentralized government and in
21 fact empower Borough Presidents to have that
22 authority on the local level.

23 The idea of eliminating Borough Presidents
24 is preposterous. The Borough Presidents in the
25 Borough are the identity the people of the City

1 identify with most. They are the person on a
2 Borough-wide level at most in touch with the
3 needs of that Borough. If you think centralized
4 city services work, my apologies to my good
5 friend the Commissioner of Transportation, get in
6 your car and ride around on Staten Island, or any
7 other part of the City, and bounce around with
8 the potholes that plague our city. All you have
9 to do is go to Nassau County or Suffolk County.
10 You will see a vastly different environment, and
11 you will see what local control on a countywide
12 basis can bring to the process.

13 If I can just have another minute. I'm here
14 to ask you to slow this process down. There are a
15 lot of complex issues that need to be addressed.
16 I know that Borough President Molinaro wants to
17 get some new powers in his ability, and he does a
18 great job for us with what he has quickly, but
19 this is very serious stuff that you guys are
20 looking at, and there are lots of ideas.
21 Councilman Ignizio spouted out 400 of them in his
22 three minutes. I could spend months with you
23 going through many of the ideas that Joe
24 Viteritti and I and others kicked around. So
25 please, look at this as a plea on behalf of the

1 neighborhoods around the City, which Staten
2 Island is a very big one of 500,000 people.

3 Please help us to empower ourselves. Look
4 at the Borough President's suggestions very
5 carefully. I think that they can even be improved
6 on beyond what he asked for. I think the Borough
7 Presidents should have greater powers.

8 I thank you for your time here today.
9 Please come back many times over the next two
10 years while you're studying and developing these
11 issues, and let's talk about specific ideas that
12 you put forth and our comments and criticisms
13 with respect to them. Thank you so much.

14 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: I'm just going to call
15 out three names so that we'll go through that
16 seriatim so that you're ready when the person
17 that precedes you has finished their testimony.

18 Barbara Fisher, Joseph Rampulla and David
19 Goldfarb are the next three. We'll start with
20 Barbara Fisher, please.

21 MS. FISHER: I'm Barbara Fisher. I live in
22 Stapleton. I'm also Co-Director of The Waterways
23 Project of Ten Penny Players.

24 As a small New York City arts agency, a
25 non-profit arts agency, we support maintaining

1 and strengthening the office and the role of the
2 Public Advocate.

3 An ombudsman is critical to ensuring a
4 response is made of the oppressed, of the small,
5 lonely voices of those disenfranchised by age,
6 the young and the old, poverty and disability;
7 that their needs will not only be heard but
8 appropriately addressed.

9 For 30 years we've been publishing and
10 teaching these populations. And I believe our
11 city will be strengthened if the office of the
12 Public Advocate is not only continued but
13 expanded.

14 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you very much,
15 Miss Fisher.

16 Phillip Rampulla.

17 MR. RAMPULLA: Good evening. My name is
18 Phillip Rampulla. I a native Staten Islander. I
19 am an urban planner with the firm of Rampulla
20 Associates & Planners here on Staten Island.
21 Prior to that I was an area planner with the New
22 York City Department of Housing Preservation and
23 Development.

24 I applaud Mr. Molinaro's suggestion. Our
25 projects have been subject to the task force

1 meetings. They have been productive. They have
2 cut down time in the development process and we
3 get feedback from four or five different agencies
4 at the same time instead of me going to each one
5 of those different agencies at a different time,
6 which spreads out the approval process. So I
7 would support that recommendation.

8 Secondly, and more specifically, in terms of
9 the Board of Standards and Appeals, I feel that
10 the Charter now says that there shall be no more
11 than two persons per Borough appointed to the
12 Board of Standards and Appeals. Prior to 1989
13 the Charter said that one person from each
14 Borough should be appointed, and I believe that's
15 what it should revert back to.

16 The Board of Standards and Appeals is a
17 relief valve agency for the zoning resolution.
18 It is important that you have a local person who
19 knows the topography and knows the terrain at the
20 BSA to make an informed decision.

21 Not less than eight years ago or nine years,
22 we were at the point at the Board where we had no
23 Staten Island representation because of the
24 two-per-Borough. Similarly, I would suggest that
25 the City planning Commission have two appointees

1 per Borough on the 13-member City Planning
2 Commission. If need be, to make the Mayor more
3 comfortable, expand the Commission from more
4 than 13 members so this way there will be 10
5 appointed from the Borough Presidents and three
6 or another four or five appointed by the Mayor.

7 Lastly, I see that there is a movement that
8 their be more public participation in the land
9 use process, which I am not against, but I think
10 the Charter Commission should mandate that local
11 civic associations register with an agency within
12 the City of New York. Too many times one or two
13 neighbors will bandy together, make up a civic
14 association name, and make like they represent
15 the neighborhood at large. Which is just not
16 true. It would behoove the process if the civic
17 associations, like a lot of other agencies, would
18 register and re-register on a yearly or reporting
19 basis. I thank you for your time.

20 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you.

21 David Goldfarb.

22 MR. GOLDFARB: My name is David Goldfarb and
23 I'm a resident of St. George on Staten Island. I
24 live a block up from here. I'm a past president
25 of the St. George Civic Association, and I've

1 lived here for 37 years. So I'd like to welcome
2 you to St. George. I was also in 1993 president
3 of a group called Staten Islanders for a Unified
4 New York. And that group opposed secession of
5 Staten Island from New York City. We came up with
6 a concept for local control and decentralization
7 of the delivery of services, which were then
8 supplied by the City of New York, and we felt
9 this was a viable alternative that would take
10 people in the Boroughs with local control and yet
11 it would maintain a unified city.

12 I recognize, we recognize, there are many
13 decisions that should be made citywide and many
14 services that are better coordinated citywide
15 such as human services, police, sanitation and
16 fire.

17 However, particularly in the area of
18 land-use and transportation, to name two, it
19 seems that local control and decentralized
20 delivery would be wanted. I remind you when the
21 United States Supreme Court invalidated the Board
22 of Estimate they did not reject the concepts of
23 local control for the local delivery of services.
24 Land-use decisions are now made by the City
25 Planning Commission, approved by the City

1 Council.

2 There is some input from the Community Board
3 and the Borough Boards, but the City Planning
4 Commissioner appoints the local Director of City
5 Planning and all requests for changes in zone
6 goes to the citywide agency. This is one area
7 where local decision-making makes sense. Who
8 better knows the land-use issues than the local
9 residents and the local officials?

10 Staten Island, for example, would be better
11 suited for a policy that no subdivision of a
12 building lot could take place as of right but
13 would require approval from a local city planning
14 department. Now, as you know, if you own a lot
15 and it could be divided into three lots, three
16 buildings, put it up, it is done as of right.
17 Throughout townships throughout the City of New
18 York and State of New York and throughout other
19 states in the country, if you're going to divide
20 a zoning, a lot, even though it's as of right,
21 you must get permission from the local township,
22 and that is something that should be done on
23 Staten Island.

24 Also, variances should be approved by a
25 local board rather than a citywide board of

1 Standards and Appeals. There are other areas
2 like Transportation, decisions about roads,
3 maintenance, could be also better handled at a
4 local level. The Borough Presidents should
5 appoint a local Transportation Commissioner and
6 the buck should stop at Borough Hall.

7 I'm sure there are many details that have
8 not been completely thought out on this and it
9 would need a lot of study. But I think this is a
10 concept whose time has come and should really be
11 looked at by the Charter Revision Commission.
12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: The next three speakers
14 are Ronald Meisela, Lee Covino and Robert
15 Scamerdella.

16 MR. MEISELA: Hello, Charter Review
17 Commission. First thing I wanted to say, first
18 thing I wanted to mention is that I think this is
19 a complicated process that should take longer,
20 kind of seems too quick, and a more thorough job
21 could be done if it's extended. There's a lot of
22 things that need to be fixed with our government
23 and I support more local control, especially of
24 the Community Boards, which should have some real
25 powers to make land-use decisions in the

1 community.

2 There's a lot of other problems with our
3 government and that's with a lot of our city
4 agencies, which don't seem to have their ear to
5 the public. And they come to public information
6 sessions and want to have public hearings, yet
7 they don't really listen to our public.

8 And Professor Joe Viteritti, I hope you take
9 a lot of his advice, and also if you haven't read
10 the book by Jane J. Cobbs, "Life and Death of a
11 Great American City", I wish you would all read
12 that book because there's a lot of useful input
13 in there. She was a real trailblazer.

14 And to have more localization of powers with
15 our land use, that's what we really need. Our
16 waterfront is neglected. Our historic places are
17 neglected, and our open spaces are vanishing, and
18 we need to preserve them, and we need local input
19 for that.

20 Also, what I'd like to say about our
21 historic places and our open spaces, right now we
22 have banks of various names and pharmacies of
23 various names. They're popping up all over the
24 place. Except sometimes they're back-to-back.
25 Sometimes they're two or three on one block. You

1 could easily build your banks and your pharmacies
2 and whatnot and your franchises, but you really
3 can't build new historic places. And you're
4 historic places are what keep your communities
5 unique places.

6 Open spaces provide a meeting place for your
7 community. And there's a lot of documentation
8 about the benefits of open space, about how it
9 actually increases economic activity in the area
10 and improves real estate values, and also
11 contributes to a healthier community, less crime,
12 and allows communities to have more respect for
13 themselves and have self-esteem in their
14 community.

15 And right now, our streets are dirtier than
16 ever, people throw their garbage out their
17 windows, and there doesn't seem to be any sense
18 of community as a whole. And for whatever you can
19 do is try to draft a document that preserves a
20 sense of community and gives back our historic
21 places and our open spaces to the public. Thank
22 you.

23 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you.

24 MR. COVINO: Honorable Chairman,
25 distinguished members of the Charter Revision

1 Commission, I appreciate this opportunity to go
2 on record with my feelings as a private
3 tax-paying citizen of the great Borough of Staten
4 Island. In August of 2011 we look forward to the
5 350th anniversary of our little island with high
6 hopes that our unique character will never be
7 diminished or obscured via the centralization of
8 power on the other side of the water.

9 In 1989, a series of Charter revisions began
10 a disturbing trend in a dilution of the
11 governmental and political infrastructure of the
12 five Boroughs of the City of New York in what may
13 be described as most significant changes to the
14 Charter in the 91 years since it was adopted. The
15 powers of the Borough Presidents were reduced and
16 the City Council expanded as a result of the
17 Court ruling, which declared the Board of
18 Estimate unconstitutional. In 2002, the roles of
19 the Borough Presidents s were further muted with
20 the dissolution of the Board of Education with
21 the advent of the Mayor control of the city
22 school system.

23 Despite these developments, the bully pulpit
24 of the Borough Presidents has continued to
25 provide direct benefits to the Boroughs, often

1 shaping the outcomes of issues important to the
2 entire county as opposed to a single Council
3 District.

4 On Staten Island you've seen the BP's direct
5 influence in blocking a city plan to place either
6 a 4,000 inmate prison or four homeless shelters
7 in 1990. We've seen the blocking of the sale of
8 Staten Island Community College's grounds to
9 private interests in the creation of the Petrides
10 School in 1995; the reopening of Howland Hook
11 Terminal after a decade in mothballs in 1996; the
12 closing of an incident-plagued women's homeless
13 shelter serving off island clients in Midland
14 Beach in 1998; closure of the world's largest
15 illegal landfill in 2001, and implementation of a
16 state contract express bus service, also in 2001,
17 for commuters south of Richmond Avenue after the
18 City failed for over a decade to pass an
19 authorizing resolution allowing restoration of
20 services.

21 These are but a few local examples. Were the
22 five Borough Presidents to have been eliminated
23 in the Charter of '89, I very much doubt our
24 Borough's remaining officials and constituents
25 answering to unelected bureaucrats would have had

1 similar outcomes.

2 Over the years, some print media have tended
3 to portray the Borough Presidents in tabloid
4 fashion in an attempt to reduce the office to a
5 caricature status while touting the "savings"
6 which would be realized by the elimination of the
7 offices. The "savings" argument may easily be
8 applied to any number of political offices,
9 government agencies or even commissions. But
10 this simplistic spinning ignores the basis upon
11 which the five Boroughs were brought together to
12 form the municipality and fails to give any
13 consideration to the loss of the sole
14 Borough-wide elected office in each of the
15 counties.

16 The office of the Borough Presidents was
17 created at the time of consolidation of the five
18 Boroughs and created the City of Greater New York
19 in 1898. Rather than dilute the powers of the
20 office further, I submit to you local authority
21 should instead be enhanced.

22 When a ballot measure such as a proposition
23 is passed by the voters it should not be subject
24 to legislative executive fiat. Nor should it be
25 subject to change via legislation unless approved

1 in the voter's booth. Instead, the Charter should
2 prohibit methods other than proposition to
3 overturn or change such publicly voted measures.
4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Covino.
6 Robert Scamerdella.

7 MR. SCAMERDELLA: Mr. Chairman, ladies and
8 gentlemen of the Commission. I am envious. I
9 look at the 15 members of this Commission and I
10 marvel at the extraordinary opportunity each of
11 you has been given. You get to propose a
12 restructuring of City government. Your proposals,
13 free from the drag of petty politics or other
14 institutional oversight, go right to the voters
15 of this fair City.

16 I urge you to take what uniquely has been
17 given to you and do not squander it. Take your
18 time. Use all your resources and present to the
19 people a governing document that will greatly
20 enhance the quality of their lives. I wish I
21 could stand before you and make specific
22 proposals for Charter revision. I cannot. I found
23 out about tonight's hearing 12 days ago.

24 The Charter is a lengthy document. And
25 specific amendments to it require extensive and

1 thoughtful research and deliberation. I suspect
2 your own Executive Director would be hard-pressed
3 to stand before you today and make specific
4 recommendations. Please consider whether it is
5 unfair to expect a member of the public to be in
6 any better position.

7 Keeping this in mind, I would hope that you
8 will consider reevaluating the process to give
9 citizens like myself more time to weigh in on
10 such an important matter.

11 Being unable to specify change, I would
12 nonetheless request that this Commission fully
13 study the matter of governmental
14 decentralization. In effect, ask and answer the
15 question whether Borough empowerment should be
16 part of a Charter revision. If centralization of
17 authority was a self-evident good, one would have
18 to ask why we have cities at all. Admittedly, it
19 is a difficult question to decide how diffused
20 authority should be, but it is not difficult at
21 all to determine that a body studying the
22 structure of government must study the issue of
23 decentralization.

24 As a Staten Islander, I admit the matter is
25 particularly pertinent. In 1898 the people of

1 this Island made a compact with the people of
2 this City to unify under an agreed political
3 arrangement. In 1989 that arrangement was
4 nullified by the Supreme Court, and in 1993, by a
5 large margin, the people of this Island asked to
6 return to its status as a separate political
7 entity. That was denied. In effect, Staten
8 Islanders have been made to lie in a bed they did
9 not make.

10 Although I cannot cite specifics, it is my
11 belief that a system of Borough empowerment can
12 be fashioned that will both address the wrong
13 perpetrated on this Borough and simultaneously
14 serve the common good of the City as a whole. In
15 particular, I believe that the Office of Borough
16 President must be strengthened and that matters
17 of transportation maintenance, traffic operations
18 and land use would be more efficiently executed
19 if they were left in Borough hands.

20 And so I am left to respectfully ask this
21 Commission to take the privilege it has been
22 afforded and to structure a government that's
23 both fair to this Borough and beneficial to the
24 citywide common good, and to further consider
25 lengthening the process to afford the people of

1 this city more time to weigh in on such a
2 critical undertaking. Thank you very much.

3 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Our next three speakers
4 will be Patrick Hyland, Linda Brown and Michael
5 Grimm.

6 MR. HYLAND: Good evening, the Commission,
7 thank you for coming out here today. My name is
8 Patrick Hyland. I'm a District Director for
9 Congressman Michael McMahon. The Congressman
10 thanks you for coming out here tonight. He
11 regrets that he cannot address you himself.
12 After a brief holiday break, Congress was called
13 back to votes about an hour ago, so he checked in
14 for duty down in D.C. So I'm here to deliver some
15 remarks.

16 I had a lot of remarks drafted up here.
17 I've been in the back for the evening listening
18 to a lot of our elected officials. I think the
19 Congressman wanted me to address a lot of what
20 has already been said, I think in regards to what
21 the BP said, his former colleagues in the
22 Council. I want to touch on a couple of points
23 he wanted me to hammer home here tonight and then
24 I will be brief.

25 Everyday, whether it's Congressman McMahon,

1 the Borough President, our Council members or his
2 colleagues in government, Staten Island Chamber
3 of Commerce, Staten Island Economic Development
4 Corporation, we are constantly working and
5 pushing economic development initiatives in this
6 Borough, and we feel that we're pushing a rock
7 way uphill. And I think the list can go on. We
8 can go on and on. Whether it's the Home Port,
9 the Lighthouse Museum, Charleston, other areas
10 where we have seen some modicum of success but
11 have just taken way too long. And I think what
12 always happens is as we've seen. I should say in
13 many instances these projects take too long,
14 budgets get blown up, they have to go back to the
15 well and work on them and work on them. And what
16 happens here is things get set back; the public
17 at large is hurt; jobs are not created in this
18 economy. I can't stress that enough how
19 important it is.

20 So the Congressman wanted me to come here
21 again tonight. A lot of land-use issues had been
22 raised. Several years ago he and Councilman Oddo
23 called for land-use consolidation, Borough-wide
24 czars, anything along that nature, I just wanted
25 to take back he asked me to stress that is of

1 crucial importance. Staten Island is too often
2 short-shrifted when it comes to public-private
3 partnerships. Public projects, we get shifted to
4 the back of the line and things too often
5 languish and are pushed beyond the schedule.

6 Beyond that, the Borough President touched
7 on some of the projects his office has pushed. A
8 lot of people have talked about strengthening
9 Borough Hall. The Congressman would just like to
10 state without question those things would not
11 have happened if we did not have the Borough
12 President's office here. It is more important to
13 strengthen. Taking away power from the Borough
14 President's office would cripple Staten Island.
15 It would deal us a very crippling blow and cannot
16 be even evaluated by this Commission.

17 Beyond that, we ask you strengthen that
18 office, focus on economic development and a lot
19 of his colleagues, what his former colleagues
20 worked on. Thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Linda Baran.

22 MS. BARAN: Good evening. Welcome to Staten
23 Island. My name is Linda Baran. I'm president
24 of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce. On
25 behalf of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce

1 and 900 small businesses who employ over 20,000
2 people, I would like to thank you for the
3 opportunity to testify before the New York City
4 Charter Revision Commission tonight.

5 I agree that the Charter is in need of
6 revision. New York City has gone through
7 enumerable changes and it's time to take a
8 comprehensive look at the organization at each of
9 the Boroughs and how they relate to the entire
10 city. However, this critically important process
11 must not be rushed for the sake of turning out a
12 short-term solution. As the City's governing
13 document, the Charter should be broad enough that
14 it does not require revision every five years. I
15 challenge the Commission to take its time and
16 develop a Charter that is capable of remaining
17 relevant for the next 50 years.

18 Similar to the purpose of the Constitution
19 of the United States, which was to organize 13
20 independent states, the City Charter must find a
21 way to balance the interests of five very diverse
22 Boroughs. The Constitution's solution was to
23 give the vast majority of power to the states.
24 The Charter, however, places almost all
25 decision-making power over the Boroughs with the

1 City. For example, the Borough President cannot
2 do something as simple as adding a stop sign at a
3 busy intersection without City approval. Clearly,
4 there must be increased local control, especially
5 for certain issues such as traffic and Borough
6 planning.

7 Nowhere is the need more obvious than on
8 Staten Island, a population woefully
9 underrepresented in local government. We only
10 have three City Council members and a City
11 Charter that hamstring the office of the Borough
12 President. Local Staten Island officials have
13 limited ability to fight for the needs of Staten
14 Island. The Second Avenue Subway is a perfect
15 example of this. Does Manhattan with
16 approximately one subway line per 70,000
17 residents deserve priority over Staten Island,
18 which has a single rail line servicing nearly
19 5,000 residents? I can tell from you experience
20 that both Staten Island residents and businesses
21 are fed up with the lack of ability to control
22 what happens here. The simplest way to rectify
23 the situation is it to allow the Borough
24 Presidents an increased measure of control over
25 Borough-specific issues.

1 Another example of how lack of local control
2 affects people in businesses in the Borough is
3 the complete absence of citywide agencies offices
4 on Staten Island. Why do Staten Island taxicabs
5 travel to Queens and pay and \$11 toll, and pay an
6 \$11 toll that taxi owners in other Boroughs do
7 not, for an inspection? Why are business owners
8 and residents forced to spend a half a day in
9 Manhattan to challenge a citation? Why do our
10 Borough Commissioners find they have a need to
11 come to Manhattan to get approval?

12 Permitting each Borough to create its own
13 master plan would increase further local
14 decision-making power over local issues that are
15 unique to that Borough. Unlike the other
16 Boroughs, Staten Island was not planned out. Due
17 to its proximity to Manhattan and Brooklyn since
18 the construction of the Verrazano Bridge, Staten
19 Island's residential population grew
20 exponentially over a short period of time. There
21 is no community design, and, therefore, a
22 significant lack of infrastructure. Not only is
23 there the obvious absence of mass transit
24 infrastructure, but there's also no strategy for
25 road development and a lack of forethought

1 allowing certain neighborhoods without access to
2 sewers.

3 Although I recognize the need for a coherent
4 Citywide plan, each Borough must be able to deal
5 with Borough-specific issues that simply cannot
6 be addressed adequately at the City level.
7 Allowing each Borough to develop independently
8 within the framework of an overall City plan
9 would strengthen community bonds between
10 residents, businesses and elected officials and
11 ultimately make the entire City better off. Our
12 representatives know Staten Island. All I ask is
13 that you give them the opportunity to do what's
14 best for the Borough. Thank you.

15 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Michael Grimm.

16 MR. GRIMM: Good evening. Thank you for the
17 opportunity to be heard. My name is Michael
18 Grimm. I'm here tonight to urge the Commission
19 to put term limits on the ballot. Now, I we've
20 spoken about it before but the residents are very
21 passionate about this issue, so I think it needs
22 emphasis.

23 As many of you in this room may know, I'm
24 running for Congress here in New York's 13th
25 Congressional District. And as I walk the

1 neighborhoods almost nightly, the common theme is
2 the theme of anger. The people are angry for many
3 reasons. But the most coherent reason is they
4 feel that their politicians are not listening to
5 them; that they're not respecting them.

6 When I first ring someone's doorbell or
7 approach someone at a shopping plaza parking lot,
8 I introduce myself. I explain a very little bit
9 about my background, that I served in combat with
10 the Marines, that I'm a former FBI agent that
11 fought corruption, and immediately I have a very
12 positive response. As I segue into running for
13 political office, the tenor of that conversation
14 changes drastically. Almost immediately I get a
15 completely different response whereby they say,
16 "If you get into that office you'll forget where
17 you came from. You'll lose your integrity.
18 You'll become like all those politicians."

19 Term limits happens to be one example, but
20 it's an example that epitomizes, it epitomizes
21 exactly why people are outraged. In 1993 and
22 again in 1996, the people spoke clearly and
23 loudly. They wanted term limits. Period. Our
24 City Charter is our local Constitution. It stands
25 for the fundamental premise that we are

1 self-governed. For that reason, I strongly
2 believe that only the people can repeal term
3 limits. Not the legislature.

4 Now, I know most of you on this
5 Commission -- I don't know most of you. But
6 Commissioner Fiala, I do know you, and I know
7 where you stood in 2001. I expect you not only
8 to vote but to lead this Commission in putting
9 term limits on the ballot. And I ask you to do
10 that because it's the start to repair the breach
11 of trust. It's the first step in repairing the
12 damage caused by undoing the will of the people.
13 And it's an opportunity to show the people that
14 the elected officials are listening and do
15 respect their opinion.

16 So please, I implore you. Begin the process
17 in restoring the people's faith. Thank you.

18 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you very much.

19 Our next three speakers will be Alessandra
20 Kane, Kenneth Hicks and Randy Lee.

21 Alessandra Kane.

22 MS. KANE: Good evening. My name is
23 Alessandra Kane. I'd like to introduce myself as
24 independent voter but I cannot vote in every
25 election, particularly the primaries. These are

1 crucial elections in which I do not have the
2 right to vote.

3 I graduated from the College of Staten
4 Island last year, and a family member offered to
5 help find me a job, as he has friends and
6 contacts in local politics. I was quite surprised
7 when he asked me what party I belonged to. When I
8 told him my political affiliation he said, "Oh,
9 that's too bad, because all of my contacts are
10 Republicans." Then he told me, "That's okay.
11 You're a kid and no one takes you seriously
12 anyway." But that was as far as it went. Why
13 should I be a Republican or a Democrat to have a
14 job, vote, or be recognized in our city in our
15 country? In my opinion, the New York City
16 Charter doesn't represent everyone. Young voters,
17 who increasingly do not affiliate themselves with
18 either the Democratic or Republican parties,
19 aren't taken seriously when it comes to these
20 elections. Young people, like myself, are told
21 that we are the future of New York City and are
22 encouraged to be involved in the decision-making
23 process.

24 I want to ask the Charter Revision
25 Commission to take young people seriously, to

1 take me seriously, and to put nonpartisan
2 elections on the ballot so we can have the right
3 to participate and be heard. Thank you for your
4 time and have a good evening.

5 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Alexandra, we're very
6 pleased that you're a College of Staten Island
7 graduate. We appreciate that.

8 Kenneth Hicks.

9 MR. HICKS: Chairman Goldstein, members of
10 the Commission, guests. I am Kenneth Hicks, New
11 York born and raised. I lived my first 44 years
12 in Brooklyn and in Staten Island since 2001.
13 I've been a registered Independent since 1984.
14 Currently, I'm the Treasurer and Executive
15 Committee Member of the Independence Party of
16 Richmond County.

17 I'm a staunch supporter of nonpartisan
18 government. Bipartisanship is a just a means for
19 the Democrat-Republican parties to both benefit
20 from legislation with the trickle down effect for
21 the American voter.

22 I favor open primaries because I believe one
23 of the things that make the United States the
24 ideal in every other world is its efforts toward
25 inclusion. In urging the Commission to adopt open

1 primaries, I would remind the Commission that
2 George Washington, in his farewell address in
3 1789, warned against aligned political parties to
4 gain too much influence in government.

5 He warned that political parties "to acquire
6 influence misrepresent the opinions and aims of
7 others. They tend to render alien those who ought
8 to be bound by fraternal affection."

9 He continued that "parties distract public
10 councils, enfeeble the public administration,
11 agitate the community, kindle animosity of one
12 party against another."

13 George Washington cautioned that it is in
14 "the interests and duty of a wise people to
15 discourage and restrain it."

16 The relentless jockeying for power between
17 Republicans and Democrats also leaves the state
18 and country at a standstill on some of the most
19 important issues.

20 I think it's great that people have drifted
21 from support of the two- party system. However,
22 the under-30 segment of our population, who
23 identify themselves as Independent, are being
24 denied participation in the most important part
25 of the, process: Candidate selection. We run

1 the risk of alienating them from future
2 participation.

3 The independent movement was instrumental in
4 sweeping a long shot into the White House.
5 President Obama's overall goal is to bring the
6 United States into the 21st Century. New York
7 City took an important step into that future by
8 electing an independent Mayor. Please, let's
9 continue into the future by using Washington's
10 path of nonpartisanship. Thank you.

11 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Randy Lee.

12 MR. LEE: Good evening. After about 20
13 speakers, including the elected officials, most
14 of what I was going to say has been said already
15 and probably better, so I will skip from point to
16 point.

17 My first point is take your time.
18 Deliberate. Don't allow yourselves to be strong
19 armed by the City-wide media, particularly what
20 they call "newspaper of record" in the City.

21 As to the public offices and term limits,
22 the Office of the Public Advocate, I'm not
23 exactly sure what it is, although I know what it
24 is historically, except currently it's a platform
25 to run for higher office. And Staten Island

1 doesn't need an ombudsman in the Municipal
2 Building. We have one right here in the office
3 of the Borough President, as do the other
4 Boroughs. And in the Boroughs is where we need
5 that ombudsman-like effort. And although someone
6 said before the budget is very small, whatever
7 that small budget is, divided five ways can be
8 substantive in the Borough.

9 The City Council people and the Borough
10 Presidents I believe should have three terms of
11 office. As has been crudely stated, in the first
12 term it takes one term to find out where the
13 bathrooms are and how to get a committee
14 assignment and then you're a lame duck. So I
15 would hope that three terms would be appropriate.

16 The Mayor, however, and the Comptroller,
17 eight years is enough for anybody to serve in
18 those offices.

19 I'm also surprised after 20- plus speakers
20 that nobody has called Staten Island the
21 Forgotten Borough although I did read in the
22 papers that the Bronx thought it was the
23 Forgotten Borough last night. But having been
24 born and raised in the Bronx and attending the
25 Bronx High School of Science, I don't think it

1 was forgotten. I think it's a fine place.

2 I was also surprised to hear a reference to
3 Sisyphus and Czar Nicholas tonight or a czar of
4 some sort, and we all know what happened to both
5 of those, so we should be careful.

6 I would ask you to take note of an Intro in
7 the City Council, Intro 632, which we call the
8 Master Plan Bill, which had a veto-proof number
9 of sponsors but was not allowed to move forward
10 by the leadership. What that bill does is create
11 a system for each Borough to do their master
12 plan. Not a binding master plan, but for each
13 Borough to allow through its elected officials,
14 through the Council and through the public
15 process to decide what's best for each Borough.
16 It's interesting that every Borough you've been
17 to and every Borough you go to is going to tell
18 you that the problems are traffic,
19 transportation, education, and all the names are
20 the same in each Borough, but the traffic problem
21 in Queens is far different from the traffic
22 problem in Brooklyn and Staten Island. So each
23 one should be looked at carefully.

24 People have spoken about a fair distribution
25 of city offices, services and budget spending in

1 each Borough. You have 6 percent of the
2 population. We do not have a city headquarters
3 in Staten Island.

4 Land use. My last topic. Land use. As a
5 homebuilder and developer, having built probably
6 6,000 houses in every borough of New York City,
7 the current land-use system does not work. ULURP
8 doesn't work. CECRA doesn't work. The City
9 planning Commissioner of the Department of City
10 Planning doesn't work. They need to be reformed
11 from the bottom up or from the top down, however
12 you look at it.

13 And last thing I'll say is the Borough
14 Presidents are the elected representatives of the
15 people who live in each Borough. They should
16 remain in place. They should be empowered
17 further. And each Borough should be allowed to
18 chart its own destiny in terms of education,
19 transportation, parks, DOT, things like that.
20 Thank you very much. CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN:

21 John Zacccone.

22 MR. ZACCONE: Mr. Chairman, rather than
23 burden the Commission repeating recommendations,
24 I'll submit mine in writing.

25 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you very much,

1 Mr. Zaccone.

2 Dee Vandenburg.

3 MS. VANDENBURG: Good evening. Our
4 Island-wide organization -- which, by the way, is
5 registered in Albany so I don't know why I need
6 to register with the City, but I'll register with
7 them; they know who we are. Our Island-wide
8 organization is against these hearings being held
9 without being given ample time to address the
10 issues in a thorough manner. These items need to
11 be put out over the next few years to allow for
12 comprehensive changes. We are requesting that
13 more power be given to the individual Boroughs.

14 Is your Commission aware of the following
15 facts? Many main arterial truck traffic routes
16 have no substructure under them. We only have 2
17 sewer treatment plants for the entire Island.
18 Both sewer treatment plants were built with a
19 35-year lifespan. They are past that and
20 currently running over capacity according to the
21 New York State DEC SPEEDES permits that they
22 operate under.

23 Many areas have no sanitary sewers still,
24 and many areas have combination sewers. We still
25 have septic tanks, cesspools, and even some

1 leaching fields. We are the only Borough of the
2 City of New York that has to use bridges to enter
3 or leave. Public Transportation does not link as
4 it does those of the rest of the boroughs.

5 Are you aware of these facts? Our Borough
6 President is. Our Community Boards are also
7 painfully aware of these facts. We fight tooth
8 and nail to protect what we have. Why? We have no
9 infrastructure to support any more development.
10 The City and one-size-fits-all approach keeps
11 giving the OK to more and more projects despite
12 this fact.

13 Our City Planning Special Zones and their
14 requirements are ignored and laughed at by
15 developers. The enforcement we have to rely on
16 is the New York City Department of Buildings, and
17 most of the time they do not know the Special
18 Zones. Do you?

19 Case in point. The New York City Board of
20 Standards and Appeals -- I'm sorry.

21 When a developer wants to change the zones,
22 or what is allowed, well, they just file with the
23 New York City BSA and plead a hardship. Avoid
24 City Planning at all costs.

25 Case in point. The New York City Board of

1 Standards and Appeals in February of 2009 allowed
2 for residential and manufacturing zones based on
3 a hardship. No sanitary sewers. Unique to that
4 particular parcel? No, the entire area has no
5 sanitary sewers. So now there will be yet
6 another private sewage pumping station. This
7 particular project did not meet, as required in
8 the New York State General Law 81B, all of the
9 five findings. New York City Board of Standards
10 does not care. That's one of the first things you
11 people need to look at very strongly.

12 Our Island needs, no, we demand, that more
13 power be given to our Borough for making decision
14 for what we can sustain here. BSA process needs
15 to be changed to allow a vote from our Borough
16 President and Community Boards, not just comment.

17 These cases set precedent across the entire
18 City. Waivers can no longer be granted by
19 someone sitting in an office in Manhattan. This
20 process needs to be here with the people that
21 know. The changes we demand to the City Charter
22 will not cost anything, just allow for a common
23 sense approach to govern everyone. We, the
24 people, know where every rain drop falls, every
25 bump in the road is, every jam packed school is,

1 and every problem is.

2 So unless City Hall's decision makers are
3 going to walk the walk here on a daily basis,
4 which would cost way too much, let us change the
5 Charter to allow the decisions to be made right
6 here on the front lines. Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: James Pocchia.

8 MR. POCCHIA: Good evening, Mr. Commissioner.
9 My pleasure to be here tonight to offer some
10 testimony. I am a nearly life-long resident of
11 Staten Island, and I try to do my best to be
12 active in my community in, trying to be a
13 positive force both in my in home community of
14 Richmond Town, and also Borough-wide, and that's
15 why I'm here tonight.

16 My comments are in two different categories.
17 First, the manner in which this Commission will
18 operate. I have some thoughts and suggestions,
19 and second some specific ideas.

20 First with regard to how this Commission
21 will work. I think it's critically important
22 that this Commission establish a new level of
23 credibility with residents of the City of New
24 York and, in particular, the residents of Staten
25 Island. I think it's important that we establish

1 a new credibility in the City Charter and that
2 this Commission demonstrate an independence from
3 the Mayor of the City of New York.

4 And so far from what I have seen, you have
5 hit the right cord on one note and missed on two.
6 First, the location of your meeting could not be
7 less central to Staten Island. It couldn't be
8 any closer to Manhattan if we had the meeting on
9 the ferry heading back to Manhattan. It would
10 have only sent a worse message to the residents
11 of Staten Island.

12 Second, while I am confident that the skills
13 of Mr. Fiala are going to represent the Borough
14 of Staten Island well in this Commission, he is
15 outmanned on this Commission, and he needed
16 another representative. And to send a message to
17 Staten Islanders that we only deserve one person
18 on this panel, where every other Borough has at
19 least two, is a slap in the face.

20 Now on a more positive note. I am
21 encouraged by Commissioner Goldstein's decision
22 to appoint Mr. Joseph Viteritti as a member and a
23 special member to this Commission. That act alone
24 does demonstrate some independence from the
25 Mayor.

1 With regard to specific plans and
2 suggestions. I oppose any idea of the elimination
3 of either the Borough President's office or the
4 Public Advocate's office. We have seen on Staten
5 Island, in particular that the office of the
6 Borough President, is an excellent conduit to our
7 relationship to the Mayor of the City of New
8 York. And the idea to do away with that office
9 would be a terrible detriment to Staten Island in
10 particular.

11 I also call for this Commission to examine
12 more local control. And I know this has been
13 said on many occasions this evening, but it is no
14 more important in any other Borough than it is
15 here. We have some very competent elected
16 officials who are very dedicated to their jobs,
17 and they know what is best for Staten Island.
18 They have the ideas to help us with regard to
19 transportation and infrastructure and health and
20 hospitals. Please find a way to return power to
21 our local elected officials so that they who know
22 our Borough best can serve our Borough best.

23 With regard to the issue of term limits. I
24 want to take a different approach to the issue
25 than has been spoken so far. No one has mentioned

1 the fact that the Mayor's decision in this past
2 election cycle to reverse the will of the people
3 had an even far greater effect than simply
4 placing candidates against incumbents. My
5 understanding of the City Charter is that in the
6 year following the census, such as 2010, an
7 additional set of elections needed to be held.
8 And had the Mayor not changed, or overturned,
9 term limits then all citywide offices would have
10 been up for reelection in 2011, not 2013. So by
11 overturning term limits, not only did the Mayor
12 give himself an additional four years, but he
13 gave himself an additional two years where it
14 should have been a two-year term.

15 And I ask that you look at that particular
16 law, how it was applied in the past, because
17 there have been elections held on a two-year
18 cycle in the year following the census. And that
19 shouldn't have taken place and that is a manner
20 of disenfranchising voters and the electorate in
21 Staten Island.

22 Finally, I ask that this Commission take its
23 time. Don't rush to judgment. And don't rush to
24 have issues placed on the ballot this November.
25 The issues that you're going to consider are

1 weighty issues. Important issues. Take your
2 time. Be thorough. Have meaningful discussions
3 and make changes that stick, not changes that can
4 be overturned with a simple stroke of the pen.
5 Thank you.

6 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: The next three speakers
7 will be Michael Morris, Allen Koehler, and Sara
8 Lyons.

9 Is Michael Morris here?

10 MR. MORRELL: Yes. Good evening,
11 Commissioners. My name is Michael Morrell.
12 Sorry for the spelling there.

13 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Noted, thank you.

14 MR. MORRELL: I'm President of the
15 Westerleigh Improvement Society, a civic
16 association on the North Shore of Staten Island.

17 Charter revision for The City of New York is
18 an immensely important endeavor for all New
19 Yorkers. The implications of any changes to the
20 governmental structure of our City are
21 far-reaching and will affect the day-to-day lives
22 of all of the citizens of our great City.

23 It is for this reason that I urge the
24 Commission to deliberate carefully and at length
25 over all proposals it may consider. I feel it

1 should be done over more than one year to give
2 ample opportunity for public input and careful
3 thought on the part of the Commission.

4 One observation. We are a civic
5 association, a rather large one, that covers two
6 Councilmanic Districts, the 49th and the 50th. We
7 are in constant communication with both Council
8 Members, Debi Rose and Jim Oddo. And of course we
9 have contact with the Borough President's office.

10 Case in point, a rezoning application that
11 our civic association submitted to the Department
12 of City Planning several years ago. We had the
13 support of the entire community. We checked with
14 the Borough President's office and his Land Use
15 Director. They were totally in favor of it. Our
16 two Council representatives also supported it.
17 Yet that application was held up for three years
18 by the Department of City Planning before it was
19 able be voted on, and it was voted upon, finally,
20 overwhelmingly in favor of the community. I use
21 that as an incident to support the idea that
22 local control is vital in any Charter revision.

23 The local officials that have hands-on to
24 the community, we are in constant contact, are
25 the best ones able to determine whether something

1 like land use in this issue is to go forward. And
2 I urge you to consider that in your
3 deliberations. Thank you very much.

4 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you very much.

5 Allen Koehler.

6 MR. KOEHLER: Chairman Goldstein, members of
7 the Commission, good evening. My name is Allen
8 Koehler and I am a recent graduate of Wagner
9 College right here on Staten Island.

10 Majoring in international affairs and being
11 a part of the Government and Politics department,
12 I've always been involved in the political scene
13 since I moved here from Ohio five years ago. I
14 got involved my freshman year in the 2005 mayoral
15 race and have continued in 2009. However, I was
16 stunned to find out when I registered as a New
17 York resident in 2009 as a blank voter that my
18 vote means nothing in this Democratic town in
19 regards to helping choose a candidate during the
20 primary season.

21 I'm not alone. Many of my peers do not
22 identify with either major political party. Why
23 are more and more people like this today? It's
24 because we have grown up in the vicious partisan
25 environment that exists today. We grew up with

1 the Bush-Gore presidential election that was
2 centered in partisan bickering and court
3 hearings. Then the Bush-Kerry election followed
4 and the hateful personal attacks were prevalent
5 just because one was a Democrat and one was a
6 Republican.

7 Our generation finally saw some light in the
8 tunnel with President Obama in 2008, largely in
9 part because of his message of independence and
10 getting past the partisan politics. Now, I'll
11 leave whether or not he is independent to the
12 political pundits, but his message is still
13 clear.

14 My generation is yearning to get past the
15 political bickering between Republicans and
16 Democrats and for our elected officials to get
17 back to working for the people and not down the
18 party line. This is where nonpartisan elections
19 come into play.

20 This City needs to move forward and catch up
21 with the majority of major cities around the
22 country and adopt nonpartisan elections. More
23 people identify independent than ever before.
24 And this was clear in the previous mayoral
25 election, when New Yorkers elected our City's

1 first independent Mayor. The Republican party saw
2 decline in voters. The Democratic party
3 stagnated. Close to 900,000 New Yorkers are not
4 registered with either the Republicans or the
5 Democrats and over 750,000 are like me and not
6 registered with a political party. 25 percent of
7 them are again, like me, under the age of 30.
8 Nationwide, half of all voters under the age of
9 29 are independent.

10 I did not come to this Commission this
11 evening to convince anyone to change how they're
12 registered or to tell someone they should not run
13 on a specific line. I'm here tonight to urge
14 this Commission to look at the numbers and to let
15 my generation vote and not shut us out.

16 We are tired of partisan bickering. We are
17 tired of people saying, "Vote for me because I'm
18 a part of this party." We are going to vote for
19 someone because of who they are and what they
20 believe in, not for what party they are
21 registered with. We deserve the right to help
22 choose our leaders and to vote for the person,
23 not the party. This City needs to move forward
24 and adopt nonpartisan elections and stop shutting
25 out voters who want to do what's best for the

1 City and not for a political party.

2 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Sarah Lyons.

3 MS. LYONS: Good evening, Commissioners. My
4 name is Sarah Lyons. I am the chair of the
5 Independence Party of Richmond County. I'm here
6 representing 8,000 members, and I'm also speaking
7 tonight on behalf of the 52,000 residents of this
8 Borough who are registered without a party
9 affiliation. It is the case that 25 percent of
10 the electorate on Staten Island is registered as
11 something other than a Democrat or Republican.
12 That's slightly higher in the Citywide average,
13 but whatever their party affiliation may be, it's
14 the case that Staten Islanders tend to be
15 independent minded.

16 Ticket splitting is widely practiced here,
17 and the makeup of our elected officials is
18 diverse. Our Borough President is a member of
19 the Conservative Party. Our congressman is a
20 Democrat. The majority of us, of our City Council
21 members are Republicans and so on.

22 In this environment the Independence Party
23 has been able to thrive. Our registration
24 numbers have climbed steadily, more than tripling
25 since 1998. And in the 2007 general election

1 cycle the Independence Party was the only party
2 on Staten Island to show an increase in voter
3 turnout on our line in a Borough-wide race.

4 I've come here today to urge you to place an
5 initiative for nonpartisan elections on the
6 ballot. When this issue came before the voters
7 in 2003 it was one of five initiatives to appear
8 on the ballot, and while it is unknown to the
9 general public, nonpartisan elections received
10 its highest level of support on Staten Island,
11 receiving a 44 percent of the vote. It was also
12 the initiative among the five the most voters
13 weighed in on.

14 I also want to address today some
15 misstatements regarding nonpartisan elections
16 that were made in a New York Times editorial last
17 Saturday. I'm sure many of the Commissioners
18 read it. The editors wrote, "Winners in
19 nonpartisan elections often turn out to have one
20 real asset: Loads of cash." I'm frankly very
21 curious as to why the editors would even make
22 this statement. There is no evidence to support
23 this claim. The elections in this City that are
24 conducted on a nonpartisan basis are special
25 elections and there's not a single example of

1 what they're suggesting. It's also the case that
2 major municipalities across the city use
3 nonpartisan elections, and it has not been shown
4 to skew election results to wealthy candidates
5 only.

6 The editorial went on to state that
7 nonpartisan elections could "undermine New York's
8 model campaign finance law." I want to point out
9 that the campaign finance system we have in place
10 in New York City operates whether it's a regular
11 election or in instances where a special election
12 is called. Clearly the system has been able to
13 function well during both kinds of elections and
14 could handle a nonpartisan system quite easily,
15 as it already does.

16 In closing, I just want to add that we are
17 the current caretakers of our democracy, and we
18 can improve it by supporting the inclusion of the
19 growing numbers of voters who choose to be
20 independents. We're far from being a special
21 interest group. Our members are 25 percent of
22 the electorate and growing, so thank you so much
23 for your consideration.

24 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you.

25 Our next three speakers will be Rich

1 Flanagan, Anthony Rei and Frank Morano.

2 MR. FLANAGAN: Greetings, Commissioners and
3 thank you for your service. I'm Rich Flanagan
4 from the College of Staten Island. And I think as
5 the Chancellor knows, this room is teeming with
6 friends of the college and graduates and I'm very
7 proud.

8 I would just like to leave you with one
9 thought. I think citizen disengagement,
10 particularly among young adults, is the great
11 question of our time. And I think it is a mistake
12 to consider, this is a Times editorial, any
13 remedy in isolation from that central goal.

14 And I suggest you frame this in terms of
15 what can be done to better plug New Yorkers into
16 the process to dispel some of the cheap cynicism
17 that I see in my classroom. You know, we're
18 getting to a point where if we hold an election
19 in New York City will anyone show up to vote?
20 Particularly in the primaries. And again I think
21 it will be an awful mistake if we get into
22 debates about specific remedies and pros and cons
23 and not focus on that bigger question.

24 To be honest -- at least the way I see it --
25 most of the remedies at the table are exaggerated

1 both in terms of their benefits and the harm they
2 can do. I'm more interested in this question of
3 how we can engage the culture.

4 Within the context of a lot of what's going
5 on, on Staten Island, I would ask you to consider
6 the Los Angeles model and how they've handle
7 decentralization. Mr. Lee had the idea regarding
8 the Borough Master Plan is a fine one. Maybe
9 that can be incorporated into some of the Charter
10 work. I think any remedy should be on the table.
11 Even if the Times doesn't like it.

12 If you're looking for a political science
13 nerd, Staten-Island based, to help you with some
14 of this work, please feel free to call on me.

15 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Anthony Rei.

16 Frank Morano?

17 MR. MORANO: Hello, my name is Frank Morano,
18 I'm chairman of Community Board 3. I'd like to
19 start off with a little story.

20 I grew up in Brooklyn, and as a young boy my
21 mother would take me on a train into Manhattan.
22 I would say, "Mom where we're going?" She would
23 say, "We're going to New York." And I'd say, "Ma,
24 we live in New York." She would very
25 emphatically say, "No. We live in Brooklyn. We

1 don't live in New York."

2 And I say this to you because New York is
3 unique. It occupies five counties, probably the
4 only city in the entire country that occupies
5 five counties, and that's because it was formed
6 over a century ago. Before then New York City
7 was just Manhattan Island. Brooklyn was a great
8 city unto itself. Steve, I think the vote was
9 less than 200 people that wanted to become an
10 entire city in Brooklyn. I think it was less than
11 200. That's how close it was. If that didn't take
12 place we would still be five separate cities.

13 And how New York is becoming so
14 Manhattan-centric, I really wonder if we would
15 have been better off the vote went the other way.
16 And as everybody else said, my feeling is, is
17 that power should be in the boroughs. And the
18 best way to put the power in the boroughs is to
19 strengthen the power of that man over here, the
20 Borough President. I think that's the best way
21 we have to do it.

22 And one of the recommendations, and I'm
23 going to back up what the Borough President said,
24 is the creation of a Planning Commission for each
25 Borough. The cost would be minimal. Borough

1 President would have to hire an architect. And
2 there would be periodic meetings involving the
3 Borough President, DOT, DEP, City Planning,
4 Buildings Department and other agencies. Issues
5 that the Borough could be addressed by people who
6 are familiar with the issues. This could save the
7 City much money in many ways as not digging up
8 streets and repaving them numerous times.
9 Development could occur in a much more beneficial
10 manner.

11 Another thing I'd like to say is that the
12 Buildings Department grants waivers. We have
13 somebody sitting in an office in Manhattan doing
14 this. Waivers should be given first with the
15 recommendation of the Community Boards to the
16 Borough President, and that's where the decision
17 should be made, not in an office in Manhattan.

18 Another thing is referendums. And as Steve
19 Ignizio said, if a referendum takes place and the
20 people vote on it, the only way it should be able
21 to be reversed is by referendum.

22 Third, the other thing is, my honest
23 opinion, I really don't know what the Public
24 Advocate does, and, therefore, I would say I
25 don't see the need for the position. I thank

1 you.

2 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Our next three
3 speakers: Alex Zablocki, Michael Beck and Maria
4 Bodnar.

5 Is Alex Zablocki here?

6 MR. ZABLOCKI: Good evening. Thank you,
7 Chairperson Matthew Goldstein, and the entire
8 Commission for holding this hearing here on
9 Staten Island tonight. My name Alex Zablocki, and
10 I am a lifelong resident of Staten Island.

11 While I can't pretend to be an expert of
12 City government or the City Charter, for the past
13 seven years I have worked in the trenches of
14 government, both in the City Council and the New
15 York State Senate. Over this period I served as
16 Director of Land Use for the 51st Council
17 District and successfully managed many rezoning
18 projects, navigating them through ULURP and into
19 law. In full disclosure, I was also the
20 Republican candidate last year for New York City
21 Public Advocate, and I am a CUNY grad.

22 While three minutes doesn't afford me the
23 time to speak about all of my proposals in
24 detail, which I've submitted here to the
25 Commission, about 14 pages worth, I can briefly

1 summarize my thoughts. What I've submitted to the
2 Commission are 10 ideas I believe worth looking
3 at and discussing with New Yorkers.

4 In brief, I ask the Commission to look at
5 the following proposals. 1. End the "pocket
6 veto" of the City Planning Commission as it
7 relates to the certification of ULURP
8 applications by setting a time frame for
9 certification and allowing the City Council Land
10 Use Committee to certify applications by a two
11 thirds vote if City Planning fails to act. 2.
12 Define the position of City Council position --
13 Council Member as full-time, ending the
14 possibility of all outside employment.
15 3. Restructure the Board of Standards and
16 Appeals, giving the Public Advocate and the five
17 Borough Presidents one appointment each to the
18 Board; allow the City Council Land Use Committee
19 to override BSA decisions by a vote of two thirds
20 so that community groups don't need to file
21 Article 78s against the City; that the City
22 Council can do the job for them.
23 4. Give the Chair of the Commission on Public
24 Information and Communication, which happens to
25 be the Public Advocate, subpoena power, and Amend

1 the Charter to mandate the Commission of Public
2 Information and Communication to set a time frame
3 for agencies to follow in answering FOIA
4 requests.

5 5. Eliminate the Voter Assistance Commission,
6 known as the VAC, and replace it with what I call
7 Civic Involvement and Voter Improvement
8 Commission, also known as CIVIC, which could
9 carry on the mission of VAC but expand its role
10 as a ballot access center.

11 6. To better coordinate decisions between
12 agencies on the most local level, amend the
13 Charter to form an Office of Coordination under
14 the Office of Operations, which is currently
15 controlled by the Mayor, and create five new
16 Borough Director positions to work with
17 coordinating decisions, approvals and permits
18 between key agencies and the Borough President's
19 office.

20 7. While it has failed in the past, examine the
21 feasibility of holding nonpartisan elections for
22 either of the positions of Public Advocate and
23 Borough President. And I echo the statements of
24 Alessandra, behind me, about nonpartisan
25 elections for all New York City offices.

1 8. Amend the Charter to reorder succession to the
2 Mayor from Public Advocate to the Comptroller.

3 9. Suggest ways to amend the Charter to give the
4 Office of Public Advocate either an independent
5 budget or a budget equal to that of the Speaker
6 of the New York City Council.

7 And 10. Reform the appointment process to
8 Community Boards by giving the Public Advocate
9 two appointments to each board, 23 appointments
10 by the Borough President, and allow 25 members to
11 become members of a community board by filing
12 petitions, much like the county committee process
13 in New York State. If all 25 positions were not
14 filled by this process, the Borough Presidents
15 would fill the remainder by appointment. If more
16 than 25 petitions were filed for each community
17 board, an election would be held in a nonpartisan
18 manner to fill those slots.

19 I can't continue with any more here. You
20 have this in detail, and I thank you for coming
21 to Staten Island again tonight, and I look
22 forward to meeting with you in the future.

23 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you for
24 testifying.

25 Michael Beck.

1 MR. BECK: Thank you. I just wanted to say
2 wow. We have four elected city officials that
3 all got up: Debi Rose from the 49th, which is a
4 liberal Democrat. We have Jimmy Oddo from the
5 50th, which is staunch Republican. We have our
6 Borough President, which is conservative, and we
7 have Vinnie Ignizio in the 51st, which is
8 probably a little more right of the Borough
9 President. And the thing that's amazing is all
10 four of these elected city officials all agree.
11 Washington D.C. should throw their hand up and
12 learn something by this, and I think this panel
13 should look at this. All right. It's amazing.

14 And what are we agreeing on? Two main
15 issues. The first issue is slow the process down.
16 There is no reason to rush this. I've been in my
17 community, I've spoken to my people, that I have
18 spoken to over 50 people. Three of them think
19 the charter is a boat. Two of them think they're
20 going down to Atlantic City. One of them thinks
21 that they know something about it. I asked them
22 what they know. They know absolutely nothing.

23 Please, if you want to bring up one issue at
24 a time, bring up term limits. Bring it up this
25 year. Let's vote on it, no problem. But take

1 the rest of the issues that will determine the
2 future of this Borough, please, carefully. Sit
3 down with the people. Explain it to them so when
4 they vote they know what they're voting for.
5 They're not going up to the pole, they're not
6 looking at "Do you agree Yes or No with the
7 referendum?" And nobody knows what that
8 referendum is. Nobody reads. Let's face it, you
9 go on line, you wait, you try to look for two
10 seconds and you vote Yes or No. This is too
11 important. Don't let that happen. All right.
12 Please.

13 And the second issue which is of utmost
14 importance, the Borough President and our local
15 officials. Nobody, no commissioner, knows more
16 about the issues that they deal with every single
17 day than them. If they deal with a thousand
18 issues, I'm not a better man, I would bet you a
19 thousand to one there's not a commissioner that
20 knows an issue better than our elected officials.
21 They need more power, not less. It has to be
22 brought in. If it isn't and we are reduced, as
23 Steve so eloquently stated before, 115 years ago
24 we discussed whether or not we were going to
25 become a city. A hundred twelve years ago we

1 voted on it. Do not, do not bring Staten Island
2 back down the road of looking into secession
3 again and bringing up that vote from a hundred
4 and twelve years ago, because the 76 percent vote
5 that Staten Island voted for to be part of the
6 City is going to be 76 percent against it.

7 We want to be part of the City. We want the
8 City to be great. We want to grow the City. I
9 love this City. Do not force Staten Island to go
10 down the road they don't want to go on. Just give
11 the elected officials that are doing one hell of
12 a job, give them the power to go further. Thank
13 you.

14 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you very much.

15 Just one very quick comment. There have
16 been a number of you that have talked about we
17 the Commission rushing to judgment. There is no
18 rush to judgment here. We've said over and over
19 again that this is going to be a deliberative
20 process, and don't think any of us want to come
21 to conclusions that we think were done too
22 rapidly without real engagement with all of you.
23 So please, let's try to correct the record with
24 respect to what this Commission is thinking. Our
25 next speaker is Marie Bodnar.

1 MS. BODNAR: Marie Bodner, Annadale
2 resident. Thank you.

3 Staten Island is a very unique and wonderful
4 place to live. That is why our population
5 continues to grow. Families love the mix of
6 suburban and rural areas. Known as the Borough
7 of Parks, with beaches, boardwalks, playgrounds,
8 excellent schools, shopping malls. I could go on
9 and on. In large part, thanks to the vision and
10 plans and funding by the Borough President, not
11 by anyone else in the City, but by the Borough
12 President, on many of these things.

13 But we have a problem. The Commission on the
14 Charter Revision wants to look into eliminating
15 the Office of the Borough President. We cannot
16 let this happen. We need to give more power and
17 control to the office of the Borough President,
18 not take away the vital service this office
19 brings to the people of Staten Island. Give the
20 Borough President control of our city agencies
21 in the Borough. Decentralize city agencies,
22 empower the local Commissioner. Let our local
23 officials control our District needs and
24 services.

25 As an example, the New York City Department

1 of Transportation Commissioner installed bike
2 lanes on Hylan Boulevard against our wishes. No
3 one rides the bikes to work from to Tottenville
4 to Manhattan along Hylan Boulevard. We need
5 sidewalks, not the bike lanes, as the Borough
6 President repeatedly requested the Commissioner.
7 We are still waiting for those sidewalks. We
8 need streets widened, no waivers. Staten Island
9 is a community on wheels, especially on the South
10 Shore, with very limited public transportation.

11 The Borough President has been our biggest
12 advocate to help improve the roads on Staten
13 Island. Give the Borough President power over
14 the DOT on Staten Island.

15 Then we have the DEP Bluebelt. Does anyone
16 outside of Staten Island know what a Bluebelt is?
17 It is the storm water management system using the
18 natural resources, the creeks, the woods, the
19 wetlands in our area. This system protects and
20 preserves areas from flood damages, protects
21 wildlife and beautifies neighborhoods at a
22 fraction of the cost of the installation of huge
23 storm water pipes.

24 There are still many areas on the South
25 Shore without storm or sanitary sewers. It is the

1 Borough President and our Councilman that push
2 for the funding to continue the Bluebelt program
3 and fund sewer projects.

4 Then we have Bloomingdale Park. The New York
5 City Parks Commissioner fought the community
6 against developing this park. Thanks to the
7 Borough President and the then Councilman Steve
8 Fiala, Bloomingdale park was built. Thousands and
9 thousands of people across the Island -- even
10 across the border, meaning New Jersey -- enjoy
11 the playground, fields, walking paths in this
12 beautiful park. Again, we need to make the right
13 choice to get this park built with the people.
14 And the Borough President went to bat for all of
15 us.

16 Staten Island is very different from other
17 Boroughs. Centralization does not work. Bring
18 the power of the city agencies to the local level
19 and to the Borough President. Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Next three speakers, I
21 believe, if I can read the handwriting here,
22 Brendan Lantry. Am I close enough? Ralph
23 Martell and Bill McCarthy.

24 MR. LANTRY: Good evening, Commissioners.
25 That was correct, thank you. My name is Brendan

1 Lantry. I am a resident of Eltingville. I'm a
2 law student and I currently serve as the
3 Republican District Leader for the South Shore of
4 Staten Island.

5 In my three minutes I could discuss the
6 inconvenient location of this hearing; Mayor
7 Bloomberg's appointment of a single, albeit
8 experienced, talented and intelligent Staten
9 Islander to serve on this Commission; the
10 importance of maintaining the Borough President
11 offices; the need for additional transportation
12 resources for the Island; creating an alternative
13 process for appointing members of the community
14 board other than solely Borough Presidential
15 appointment; changing the community board lines
16 so that they are in sync with the lines for City
17 Council to create efficiency; the need for
18 campaign finance reform so that candidates for
19 Comptroller and Public Advocate don't need to
20 raise \$125,000, and Mayoral candidates don't need
21 to raise \$250,000 to qualify for matching funds;
22 for the Mayor and City Council's decision to
23 overturn the will of the voters of the City by
24 extending terms limits to three terms.

25 Instead, I'd like to turn to nonpartisan

1 elections. There are several ways that this City
2 can improve its system of election, all of which
3 I'm sure are not foreign to you. You've been
4 doing a few hearings now.

5 First, my friend Frank Murano has proposed
6 that we turn to a system of proportional
7 representation. While it's easy to brush this
8 proposal aside because it's foreign and
9 complicated to most of us, I think it deserves a
10 second look. Allowing each Borough to vote
11 almost as a unit for its City Council members
12 would certainly empower each Borough, something
13 that is important in an age when Staten Island
14 secession seems to come up at nearly every major
15 political debate I've attend over time the past
16 few years.

17 Second would be the system of City elections
18 proposed by the 2003 Charter Revision Commission.
19 Under that proposal, candidates for the three
20 citywide offices, the Borough President and the
21 City Council, would have had the options of
22 placing their party membership or independent
23 status on the ballot. While this proposal would
24 have saved taxpayer dollars by doing away with
25 primary elections, it would have done little to

1 change our system itself. The solution is
2 nonpartisan elections without party designation
3 on the ballot. In theory, by removing candidates'
4 party affiliations and party endorsements, voters
5 would not be as willing to go blindly into the
6 ballot box and pull the lever without first
7 educating themselves about the office and its
8 candidates.

9 Therefore, I request this Commission explore
10 the possibility of submitting the question of
11 nonpartisan elections to the voters with the
12 provision that candidates would not be allowed to
13 indicate their party status on the ballot.

14 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Ralph Mantell.

15 MR. MANTELL: Hello, my name is Ralph
16 Mantell. I really didn't have anything prepared,
17 but a lot of things were covered. But in regard
18 to local control and why it's so important, I'd
19 like to give just a few examples of the few
20 things which sort of emphasize that.

21 Traffic. To keep traffic moving, it's a
22 good idea to have right-hand turns on red lights.
23 I lived in California for 20 years, in Hollywood,
24 California, and you could make right-hand turns
25 almost everywhere except where it was designated.

1 I heard the reason why we don't have right-hand
2 turns is because the other Boroughs don't have
3 right-hand turns.

4 And Staten Island is very unique. It's more
5 suburban, similar to L.A. You go to residential
6 streets and there's no one in sight and you're
7 waiting for a red light to make a turn. But if
8 you're on Hylan Boulevard, Victory Boulevard,
9 with a lot of traffic, nobody's there, you make a
10 right-hand turn, keep traffic moving. We have no
11 control of that.

12 Now, a few in guys took the ferry here. And
13 this was the weekend and you got to the ferry at
14 8:36, you'd wait 59 minutes for the next ferry.
15 Now, we should decide the hours on the ferry as
16 far as the frequency, but we have no control of
17 that, it seems. They figure there was not too
18 much people waiting at those hours on the
19 weekend, so the ferry will run every hour instead
20 of every 15 or 20 minutes. We have no control
21 over that.

22 But it's the same for every Borough. If you
23 have no control things are dictated by other
24 people, you know. Not us, you know.

25 One other thing, too. We have here a

1 sanitation garage in the middle of a residential
2 area. They park on the sidewalk halfway in the
3 street. 15 feet away are residences. Mostly --
4 not mostly, all-low income people, mostly
5 African-American. Nothing has been done about
6 it, because they say there's no, there's no money
7 available. I mean, our Borough President is
8 trying to get rid of it. We can't do anything if
9 there's no money. It's like a quality of life
10 issue. We have no control over that because it's
11 a decision made by others.

12 That is just my point with which has been
13 pretty much said all along, that we should have
14 local control, and I think that's so important.

15 One other question in three minutes. How is
16 the selection, the number of members on the
17 Commission selected? By population of the
18 Boroughs? Can somebody explain that? I'd
19 appreciate it. I don't know. Why we have one in
20 Staten Island, some have more. What's the reason?

21 Wake up. Wake up. What is the reason?

22 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: That was an authority
23 figure outside of this Commission. What this
24 Commission is, is absolutely focused upon, given
25 what our makeup is, that's where we started the

1 process, is to ensure that each of the Boroughs,
2 and we're here in Staten Island, and I made the
3 commitment tonight that we will be back in Staten
4 Island to ensure that all of you have an
5 opportunity to be heard and that we can really
6 understand the particular issues.

7 We also made a commitment this evening that
8 when we do other events in Staten Island that we
9 will attempt in every way that we possibly can to
10 expand the catenary so that people who don't live
11 in this particular area of Staten Island have an
12 opportunity to be heard as well.

13 MR. MANTELL: Oh, I see. Now --

14 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you.

15 MR. MANTELL -- could somebody really answer
16 the question? How did you figure that? By
17 population three, two or one? We have one. I'm
18 not saying we should have more, but why did
19 Brooklyn or Manhattan have six?

20 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: It's not the decision
21 of this Commission. The Commission was formed. We
22 can't speak on behalf --

23 MR. MANTELL: Someone must have some kind of
24 a system. How did they figure that out?

25 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: I think I've answered

1 the question to the best of my satisfaction.

2 MR. MANTELL: You don't know.

3 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Frank Murano. Is Frank
4 Murano here?

5 MR. ZUDA: For those of you that know Frank
6 Murano, I'm not Frank Murano. Frank Murano has
7 stepped out and I'm a later-on speaker. My name
8 is Guy Zuda. If I could speak in Frank's place,
9 and whenever Frank comes back if he could speak
10 in my place. Is that okay with the Committee?
11 Thank you very much.

12 My name is Guy Zuda. Some of you may know me
13 as King Henry. I am not a politician. I am no a
14 community activist. I am a professional clown by
15 trade. However, I am a blank voter and -- thank
16 you for the round of applause for that. Thank
17 you. I am a blank voter. And Frank Murano
18 actually sent me an E-mail to talk about, which I
19 took notes, one second, to perhaps learn and try
20 to understand a little bit more about, excuse me,
21 proportional representation.

22 Now, I'm not really a person that comes to
23 these type of things and speak. But, however, my
24 daughter is a ten-year-old in the Gifted and
25 Talented Program in P.S. 50. And an aspiring

1 lawyer, soon want to be a judge, so I asked her
2 to read what Frank Murano sent to me about
3 proportional representation. Now, this is a
4 ten-year-old. She read it. And she sort of, kind
5 of grasped it. And I explained to her I'm a
6 blank voter and I really have almost no say in
7 primaries or close to no say in elections, for
8 that matter, because I'm a blank. And she said
9 something so interesting. She said, "You know,
10 but our government was, you know, for the people,
11 by the people. Not for the people by a select
12 small group of people." And that was from a
13 ten-year-old that she was able to figure out that
14 our system is really, you know, not -- the people
15 aren't really getting the representation that
16 they should in our local government.

17 And one of the reasons why I came here is
18 because I said, "Oh, I don't think I'm going to
19 go and speak on behalf of this type of thing."
20 She said, "No, you have to. You have to, you
21 know, this is something that's important as all
22 people that vote." She says, "I can't wait until
23 I'm 18 to vote."

24 So with that said, I really just wanted to
25 give my two cents. I know that that's a far cry

1 to give proportional representation. I understand
2 that. But at least have bipartisan elections and
3 consider that so somebody like myself has a
4 little bit more, because I don't want to pick a
5 political party, because actually Republicans and
6 Democrats are my customers, which some of them up
7 there I actually have done stuff for. I know
8 Carlo very well. So I really don't pick a
9 political party, because I, you know, do a lot of
10 things for a lot of people. But I would like to
11 be able to choose a little bit better of who is
12 going into a primary and who my candidate and
13 elected by. Thank you very much.

14 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: You should be proud of
15 your daughter.

16 MR. ZUDA: Oh, absolutely. Actually she was
17 just accepted to the scholarship program in IS 2.

18 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Very perceptive --

19 MR. ZUDA: Yeah.

20 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN -- and very bright, so
21 you should be very proud.

22 MR. ZUDA: Thank you.

23 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Our next speaker is Bill
24 McCarthy.

25 MR. MCCARTHY: Good evening, ladies and

1 gentlemen of the Commission. I had the privilege
2 of spending a night with you folks last week in
3 Manhattan. And it was enlightening. What I did
4 then I'm going to do the same thing now.

5 First, I'd like to commend the Staten Island
6 elected officials who most of whom spoke
7 tonight, their impassioned pleas and
8 well-thought-out comments. But I would endeavor
9 to say I knew what they were going to say and
10 everybody behind me knew what they were going to
11 say because everybody knew what our politicians
12 were going to say -- I'm sorry, elected
13 officials. "Politicians" have a less attractive
14 connotation. However, by putting them first, it
15 took an extra hour and 15 minutes for the Staten
16 Island residents to get a chance to speak, and I
17 thought we were the ones they came to listen to.
18 Apparently not. Given the fact that you folks
19 have all been appointed by a politician and
20 you're kowtowing to the politicians in the City,
21 I fully expect shortly your faces are going to be
22 on the first page of the Post portrayed at
23 puppets. That would be (inaudible) to your
24 credibility, Mr. Fiala, and I'll leave you with
25 this story mentioned that the City has been

1 incorporated for 112 years with the five
2 boroughs. What he didn't say was not one single
3 day, not one single hour in those 112 years has
4 Staten Island gotten a fair share of commitments,
5 resources, or access to City government.

6 The City Charter doesn't work. If it hasn't
7 worked for 112 years why do you think you can fix
8 it by tweaking a few things? I don't know what
9 you're expected to accomplish. But given the
10 fact that this is a politically motivated Council
11 and you're trying to tweak and put a
12 twelve-year-old document for a city that is more
13 complex now than it was 112 years ago, I'm not
14 sure that there's any possibility that it will be
15 effective. However, you still look like very
16 intelligent people, and possibly you can pull
17 this off. I'm not sure that that's possible.

18 What I think you should look at is the
19 bigger picture. Everything that was said tonight
20 is not the problem. May have seemed like the
21 problem. It's not the problem. It's the
22 manifestation of the problem. The problem is a
23 much bigger issue. If you're going to address
24 fixing the problems, that's one thing. If you're
25 not going to address fixing the manifestation of

1 the problems, you're not going to fix the
2 problems. So I would suggest that you look a
3 little deeper into how the Charter works with
4 everything else that's going on.

5 For starters, Albany is like a big stone
6 around the neck of everybody in the City. Maybe
7 they shouldn't on our state, maybe we should be
8 our own state where they would have 9 (inaudible)
9 and we could have our own state. Then you
10 wouldn't have to worry about what the Borough
11 President's office or the Advocate's office
12 thinks is important. We could make our own
13 decisions.

14 If you look at what the City officials are
15 doing, Staten Island officials are doing, the
16 Council people and the Borough President, they're
17 probably spending at least 50 percent of their
18 time trying to get the Mayoral agencies to do
19 their job. I wouldn't be surprised if what they
20 spend is 80 to 90 percent of their time. So in a
21 perfect world we don't need the Borough
22 Presidents, we don't need the City Council, we
23 don't need the Advocate. However, this is not a
24 perfect world and you have to look at what you
25 have to work with. And you have to look at the

1 situation that we're in, and you have to make a
2 decision on whether or not tweaking this document
3 is going to make it better or worse. Thank you.

4 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you. The next
5 three speakers will be Alan Weissman, David --
6 I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing this right --
7 Mario Curcio and Christopher Rooney.

8 MR. WEISSMAN: Good evening, Commissioners.
9 My name is Alan Weissman. I am a 25-year-old
10 independent voter from Brooklyn and I'm here to
11 urge the Charter Review Commission to put
12 nonpartisan elections on the ballot this fall.

13 I became an independent because the very
14 idea of having to enroll in a political party in
15 order to participate in our democracy has seemed
16 ludicrous to me since I was a child. Therefore,
17 it is no surprise to me that the number of voters
18 who identify themselves as independents is
19 growing at an increasing rate. Americans are
20 waking up to the ways in which parties have
21 tainted our democracy and wedged themselves
22 between the people and the political process
23 posing as the government itself.

24 Yet despite our growing numbers now,
25 representing nearly half the country, the

1 partisan structure of our political process still
2 relegates independents to the outskirts and
3 discourages voter participation on all fronts.
4 The majority of elections are won in the
5 primaries, and if you cannot participate in such
6 an important stage of an election then why
7 participate at all?

8 Unfortunately this is the mentality of many
9 young voters, such as myself, and there are some
10 things seriously wrong with our system when the
11 right to free association becomes a mechanism for
12 constricting political participation.

13 I recently watched an interview on CNN
14 talking about the growing numbers of independents
15 and how Americans are becoming fed up with
16 partisanship. The partisanship official asked,
17 "How can these parties win these people back?" I
18 was insulted by the sheer arrogance of the
19 question, as if sustaining the existence of
20 political parties should be our top priority.
21 The real question should have been: "How can we
22 ensure that these people's voices are heard?"
23 That should be the motivating force of our
24 democracy, not how to make getting elected easier
25 for politicians.

1 Does demanding more direct access to the
2 political process make me an idealist? Perhaps.
3 But I am also a realist. The parties are not
4 going away anytime soon and are certainly not
5 going away without a fight. That is evidenced by
6 the failure of nonpartisan elections to pass in
7 2003. Regardless, nonpartisan elections is a
8 reform that our City desperately needs in order
9 to restore some integrity to the political
10 process. It is the responsibility of the Charter
11 Revision Commission to present to the voters the
12 changes that would most benefit them. By not
13 putting nonpartisan elections on the ballot you
14 would be ignoring what would benefit over 750,000
15 New York City voters who are unaffiliated and
16 fundamentally enhance our entire democratic
17 process.

18 That is why I strongly urge the Commission
19 to favor unrestricted political participation
20 over partisan exclusionary practices by putting
21 nonpartisan elections on the ballot this
22 November. Thank you.

23 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: David Mario Curcio.

24 MR. CURCIO: Members of the Commission, let
25 me begin by thanking you for your public service

1 to our City. My name is David Mario Curcio, and
2 it is my pleasure to speak before you this
3 evening. I presently serve as the Law Chairman
4 for Staten Island Community Board 2. I'm also a
5 past employee of the Office of the Mayor, along
6 with having served as a law intern for the 2003
7 Charter Revision Commission, so I take great
8 interest in the work before you.

9 As Commissioner Fiala correctly pointed out,
10 later on in the late 1890s Staten Islander voted
11 overwhelmingly to join the City of New York under
12 a Charter that provided considerable power to the
13 office of the Borough President . That was a
14 major selling point to the three quarters of the
15 voters that supported that measure. And these
16 powers were largely maintained until 1989 with
17 the elimination of the Board of Estimate,
18 significantly reducing the role of the Borough
19 President .

20 Now there's proposals to further reduce that
21 with the potential to eliminate the office, and
22 these suggestions are simply unacceptable.

23 Here in 2010, Staten Island is the only
24 borough without a municipal hospital. We're the
25 only borough not to headquarter a City agency.

1 We pay a disproportionate higher share of tax
2 revenues than we receive in city services in
3 exchange. As we well know, we pay a higher share
4 of tolls and get less public transportation.
5 Adding to that, we have only one of the 15
6 appointments in this Commission. And even adding
7 to the feeling we are all too often the Forgotten
8 Borough, the Department of Transportation posted
9 signs on the Staten Island Ferry with the labels
10 "Staten Island End" and "New York City End"
11 erroneously implying we're not even part of the
12 City in which we pay a higher share of taxes.
13 This is why the Borough President's office is
14 such an essential part of our City government and
15 why its powers must not only be maintained but
16 strengthened. It's also why community boards
17 must continue to play an active role in land use
18 and other local matters. Staten Island needs the
19 advocacy of our Borough President and community
20 boards to ensure that our interests continue to
21 be represented effectively.

22 With only about five percent of the City's
23 population, it's all too easy for Staten Island
24 to be forgotten by City Hall, as has often been
25 the case, in the past. While the administration

1 of Mayor Bloomberg and Mayor Giuliani before have
2 done a good job of looking into our concerns, we
3 must be sure to have respect from future
4 administrations. Increasing the powers of the
5 Borough President and community board is a vital
6 mechanism to insure that respect.

7 It's also been said that all politics are
8 local and it's these local entities that are the
9 grassroots champions of so many civic causes. I
10 strongly urge the Commission to evaluate ways to
11 strengthen and enhance the roles of the Borough
12 President and community boards. I wholeheartedly
13 endorse the suggestions made earlier this evening
14 made by Borough President Molinaro. We are
15 fortunate to have a leader in Borough President
16 Molinaro, who by the way, is still here listening
17 to the members of the community. No one has done
18 more to maximize the potential of the Borough
19 President in the post-Board of Estimate era as
20 has Borough President Molinaro. He should be
21 given every available resource to do his job
22 effectively and represent our interests.

23 I want to thank you for taking the time to
24 listen to the members of the community this
25 evening, and I thank you also for your public

1 service to the City of New York. CHAIRMAN

2 GOLDSTEIN: Christopher Rooney.

3 MR. ROONEY: Good evening, Chairman, and
4 members of the Commission. I want to join many
5 who have spoken before and thanking you for
6 coming to Staten Island. I am the Second Vice
7 Chairman of Community Board 1 of Staten Island.
8 I've been a Staten Island resident for 37 years.
9 First 13 on the South Shore, Eltingville; the
10 last 24 in West Brighton on the North Shore. I
11 have a variety of experience. Also I'm a member
12 of the Community Board for 20 years, that being
13 the most economically, social diverse community
14 board on Staten Island, so we've got a lot of
15 experience with City government.

16 We haven't had an opportunity yet to take a
17 vote on the issues. But there is a consensus
18 among the members of the executive committee and
19 the steering committee of the Board.

20 First, we support the continuation of the
21 role of the Office of the Borough President. We
22 also support more particularly the Borough
23 President's proposal for a Charter-mandated
24 Borough Coordinating Committee involving the
25 local Borough Commissioners, and Councilman

1 Oddo's proposal for local control, more local
2 control on the part of the Commissioners.

3 There are too many examples, some of the
4 speakers have hit on before, I don't know how
5 many times I try to explain to members of the
6 public why a street is just repaved one month and
7 three months later here comes the DEP digging up
8 that same street to put a sewer in. The local
9 coordination needs to happen and it's the only
10 way we can effectively be governed.

11 An earlier speaker mentioned a number of
12 projects that are scheduled for the North Shore.
13 There are three major projects on the North Shore
14 waterfront. All scheduled for this summer
15 between the former Home Port and the ferry. There
16 is a liaison person appointed by the EDC who
17 controls over that property, but there's no way
18 that person can be as responsive to the immediate
19 problems as the Borough President's office.

20 We also urge to continue the community
21 boards in operation as the liaison between
22 members of the public and City government,
23 particularly with respect to land-use issues, and
24 that our opinions, ultimately our votes on
25 land-use issues, the advisory votes be given more

1 force, and the Borough President's vote be made
2 binding, and that BSA, in order to overturn,
3 should be subject to an "abuse discretion"
4 standard rather than any evidence as another
5 speaker mentioned before."

6 Finally, I echo the sentiments of many of
7 the previous speakers. I was a member of the
8 Secession Review Committee of the Board when we
9 had that issue come up in the early '90s. We
10 looked at that subject just for Staten Island for
11 two years. Went back and forth, debates. Pro and
12 con. And we considered proposals made by each
13 side. And it took a long time to get there. We
14 would like to ask you to take the same time to
15 look at the issues for the entire City.

16 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN:

17 Fursso Ojo?

18 Charles Sorrentino.

19 MR. SORRENTINO: Good evening I my name is
20 Charles Sorrentino, private citizen. I'm going
21 to talk on three areas: Operational/ functional,
22 succession of power, and political.

23 Operational/functional. The combination of
24 two or more city agencies must ensure that all
25 preexisting Charter-mandated functions are

1 maintained.

2 The reason why I mention this, this is a
3 caveat to Council Member Oddo's comments
4 regarding possible combination of the Department
5 of the Building and the Department of City
6 Planning agencies.

7 If the Commission attempts to combine two
8 different City departments to eliminate or reduce
9 the operational overlap, please keep in mind they
10 may also have entirely different Charter-mandated
11 activities that still need to be addressed.

12 The concerns that if there is one agency
13 that is, I'll call it, subsumed by another, the
14 other core functions of the subsumed agency will
15 be neglected or ignored, I'll call it, by the
16 consuming agency, thereby negatively impact the
17 City in the long run.

18 The reason why I mention that also is case
19 in point, the Department of City Planning is also
20 in charge of the Comprehensive Waterfront
21 Planning for the City, which goes before the City
22 Council. If the two agencies are combined, do
23 you honestly think the Department of Buildings
24 regarding the zoning is going to care about the
25 waterfront? Three out of the four out of the

1 five City Boroughs are on high land and the other
2 one has to be rechecked.

3 Succession of power. Any change directly or
4 indirectly to succession of Mayoral power must be
5 to a duly elected official.

6 If the Commission attempts to eliminate the
7 Office of Public Advocate there will be no
8 explicitly defined succession to the Mayor should
9 he be unable to complete his term. Both the
10 Federal and State Constitutions define the
11 succession of power to a duly elected official.

12 Naturally, the day that Governor Spitzer
13 resigned, the next day Lieutenant Governor
14 Patterson succeeded him. And also I recall the
15 day that Ronald Reagan got shot, where Chief of
16 Staff Alexander Haig got in front of TV cameras
17 and said, "I'm in charge." Whereas everyone with
18 a third grade education remembers their civic
19 lessons and remembers no, he's not. It is the
20 Vice President, according to the Constitution.

21 The City Charter should not be without the
22 explicitly stated -- any attempt to eliminate the
23 PA, the Public Advocate, should also trigger an
24 explicit proposal on the ballot to indicate the
25 succession to a duly elected official.

1 Currently, Deputy Mayors are appointed and
2 therefore cannot be considered. So you either
3 have two choices. Either combine it so that
4 there's a mayoral ticket between a Mayor and a
5 Deputy Mayor; or that there be another duly
6 elected official on the Charter that would be the
7 successor to the Mayor. Excuse me, I'm trying to
8 rush here.

9 Political. If you're going to do anything,
10 split the proposals on the ballot into the three
11 areas I indicated: The operational/ functional,
12 succession of power, and the political. Do not
13 attempt to combine different proposals on the
14 ballots in the hopes that the voters will "hold
15 their nose" and vote "yes" to the combined
16 proposals, because they are only in favor of a
17 few of them but not of all the sub-proposals on
18 the ballot. Do not attempt to eliminate the
19 Office the Borough President or the elimination
20 of community board review and approval in the
21 ULURP process. That would be dead on arrival.
22 Thank you.

23 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you.

24 The next three speakers: Amy Zodo. Is she
25 here?

1 Brian Whelen, and Debra Derrico.

2 MR. WHELEN: Good evening, ladies and
3 gentlemen. My name is Brian Whelen. I'm a
4 private citizen from the community of
5 Westerleigh.

6 Earlier, a gentleman, Mike Morrell and the
7 Westerleigh Improvement Society, mentioned an
8 incident with the Department of City Planning
9 wherein we had the rezoning going to go on for
10 quite sometime and it was followed by the
11 citywide folks. A good example.

12 I had another one. I work as a volunteer in
13 the Westerleigh Park. We asked for a new tree to
14 light at Christmastime. It took them almost a
15 year, because we had to go citywide instead to
16 our Borough President.

17 I think the one theme that has been
18 disproportionately expressed this evening is that
19 government must function properly in order for
20 people to be engaged. The disengagement at the
21 Federal level, because there's so much
22 partisanship going on. The State level is, I'll
23 just call it what it is, it's a joke right now.
24 At the City level, the people of Staten Island
25 that have formed this Tea Party that's so

1 prevalent in the last couple of months, it's been
2 such an idea here because people feel that
3 they're not represented. We are a part of the
4 City of New York. Yet we are not. We have local
5 elected officials yet we have to be told by the
6 City of New York what we can and can't do on a
7 very local level.

8 I'm a native Staten Islander. This Island
9 was a beautiful place at one time. It was built
10 very ugly. Because The City of New York, that
11 didn't know anything about Staten Island, allowed
12 it to be built very ugly. I always tell people
13 listen to that song by the Eagles: "They built a
14 bunch of ugly boxes and gave people water."

15 This Borough President talks about
16 right-hand turns on red, such a simple thing. We
17 can't get it done. That's the reason I'm here
18 tonight.

19 As a volunteer, I'm becoming very
20 disillusioned because the City of New York cannot
21 do as much as we do as volunteers. That's sad.
22 That's very sad.

23 It's getting late, so I'll cut it short.
24 Please, take your time, do the right thing.
25 We'll be grateful. I'll send a personal

1 thank-you. CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you,
2 Mr. Whelen.

3 Debra Derrico.

4 MS. DERRICO: Finally. Good evening,
5 Honorable Chairman Goldstein, and distinguished
6 Commission Members. My name is Debra Derrico.
7 I'm the proud District Manager of Community Board
8 2. Thank you for the opportunity to share our
9 views on proposals to reform the Charter Revision
10 Commission's work in New York City. The City
11 Charter is the governing document of the City and
12 establishes the framework within which the City
13 governs itself. It defines the organization,
14 power, function, and essential procedures and
15 policies of the City's political system, and the
16 authority and responsibilities of the City's
17 elected officials and City finances.

18 The Charter Revision Commission has an
19 opportunity to reshape the future of City
20 government and how it works. However, if the
21 Commission's intent is to place greater emphasis
22 on Mayoral power, then the millions of citizens
23 of this diverse city must insist that our voices
24 and perspectives are heard.

25 The checks and balances in place between the

1 executive and local branches of government should
2 be strengthened, not weakened. And each Borough
3 President, who know their respective Boroughs'
4 needs better than anyone, must be given more, not
5 less, say over local issues.

6 I need to speak about two specific areas:
7 Land use and transportation, where increased
8 local control would benefit City government.

9 1. There are those who see the current city
10 land use policies, notably the Uniform Land Use
11 Review Process, or ULURP, as inefficient, time
12 consuming and often wrong-headed. They would
13 like to see it streamlined with such changes as
14 shorter time frames for review and elimination of
15 some steps. We agree, however, increased local
16 control by Borough Presidents and respective
17 community boards over zoning and land-use matters
18 is the only way to enhance efficiency and shorten
19 the process.

20 As the District Manager of Community Board
21 2, a board that has been against land use waivers
22 for decades, I wholly support our Borough
23 President 's recommendation that any change in
24 the land use policies must include the
25 establishment of local land use planning offices

1 and paid licensed architects working under each
2 Borough President 's jurisdiction. At the local
3 level we would be better prepared to determine
4 future development on Staten Island. Now that's
5 progress and efficiency at its best.

6 2. The Department of Transportation moves
7 people and goods throughout New York City safely
8 and efficiently and in a very environmentally
9 responsible manner. It also enhances and
10 maintains the transportation infrastructure,
11 which is crucial to the economic vitality of the
12 quality of life of New York City residents.
13 However, the need for increased local control
14 seems obvious. If you drive on most roads and
15 streets throughout Staten Island you can
16 understand why. Can anyone tell us why the local
17 Council Member needs to provide funding for local
18 road paving? The answer is obvious. The Revision
19 Commission again must provide greater local
20 control.

21 In closing, I'm very hopeful that the
22 Charter Revision Commission will conduct a full
23 and independent review of City government that
24 embodies all of our values and not just a
25 centralized government. The process must strive

1 to exemplify government at its best and include a
2 participatory form of all who hope to shape a
3 better City. Thank you. CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN:
4 Thank you, Ms. Derrico.

5 The last four speakers are George Spitz, Roy
6 Moskowitz, John Ryan and John Tobacco.

7 Start with George Spitz.

8 MR. SPITZ: Honorable Commissioners. My
9 first page of this is just a guidance. But I
10 want you all to see this horror story from the
11 New York Times of 1953, how the MTA, how much the
12 transit system set up by Fiorella La Guardia was
13 stolen from the people of New York.

14 Would you distribute this, please. I want
15 the Board to see the Times story, that story from
16 the New York Times.

17 Honorable Commissioners, my testimony
18 yesterday concerned the questionable legality of
19 imposing tuition at the City University. My
20 rationale was that free tuition was ratified by a
21 referendum June 7, 1847 by a vote of 19,305 in
22 favor and 3,490 against. But tuition was imposed
23 June 1, 1976 not by referendum or even by
24 legislative action, like term limits, but by the
25 New York City Board of Higher Education by a vote

1 of 7 to 1.

2 Tonight I'm questioning the legality of the
3 MTA. In this respect I'm appending a document
4 from The New York Times of 1953. New York City
5 consolidated its transit, privately owned IRT,
6 the BMT, and the independent subway, which was
7 started by an unappreciated Mayor John Hyland.
8 Fiorella La Guardia consolidated them all. The
9 New York City taxpayers paid for them. But in
10 1953 they were stolen from New York City by
11 blackmail. And in a New York Times story Dewey
12 told the New York City Impelliteri, who was Mayor
13 at the time, unless he turned over the system to
14 an authority that he would set up, you couldn't
15 raise taxes, the state would give you no aid. He
16 had Impelliteri by the throat and a majority of
17 the Borough Presidents with the exception of
18 Manhattan Borough President, Robert Wagner and
19 Rudolph Halley, they voted for it. Wagner said it
20 was illegal at the time, so did Halley, and they
21 threatened a lawsuit. But Halley died soon
22 after. And when Wagner was elected Mayor he did
23 not do anything about it. Rockefeller
24 consolidated this authority that was set up with
25 the suburban rails into the present day MTA. It's

1 illegal. I think we should take it back and I
2 want this body to start the action.

3 Now, this hurts, the MTA is hurting Staten
4 Island badly. All the Federal money is being
5 taken by the MTA and put into two East side
6 Manhattan projects. The (1) the Second Avenue
7 Subway and (2) an East Side access. If McMahon
8 and Schumer and Gillibrand would fight to get
9 some of that money for you, the Second Avenue,
10 light rail on Second Avenue would cost 500
11 million. The remainder of the 1.3 billion of the
12 Federal money that George Bush promised the East
13 Side Democrats in turn for their support in the
14 Afghanistan and Iraq wars could be used for the
15 light rail on the West Shore and North Shore of
16 Staten Island you'd get nothing for it. The MTA's
17 taking all of that and putting it into the East
18 Side of Manhattan. I just want you to know that.

19 I could expand on that but my time is up.
20 And thank you very much I'll see you next week.

21 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Next Monday.

22 MR. SPITZ: I'm going to discuss campaign
23 finance and then contracts and pensions.

24 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: We look forward to
25 seeing you next week.

1 MR. SPITZ: Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Is Roy Moskowitz here?

3 MR. MOSKOWITZ: Hi, I'm Roy Moskowitz. I'm a
4 professional gadfly and political flack. And I've
5 been living in Staten Island for one-third of my
6 life.

7 As long as the City is divided into Boroughs
8 the Presidents of such are needed. Contrary to
9 the opinion of those doubting the offices'
10 utility, the BP's are useful, even in their
11 current limited role as cheerleader and pulpit
12 bully.

13 The Charter Revision is an opportunity to
14 upgrade the spot into being the equivalent of
15 being an individual City Mayor, the power to set
16 an agenda, and a budget and make decisions
17 concerning transportation, education, health care
18 and land use.

19 The Public Advocate's office is unique to
20 New York City and I'm glad that it exists. When
21 given teeth and adequately funded it is the most
22 important citywide office. It helps New Yorkers
23 navigate the bureaucracy and represents each
24 citizen against the government; consumers against
25 businesses; small businesses against large

1 businesses; and local large businesses against
2 nonlocal competition.

3 I disagree with those that say the office is
4 redundant. At 311 the Borough Presidents and City
5 Council have adequately performed its
6 informational and advocacy roles. 311 operators
7 lack Internet access and can scarcely provide
8 more information than 911 operators. Although
9 the BP's and Council Members can and do engage
10 ombudsmanship, we need an office that is
11 dedicated to problem solving. Particularly if a
12 Borough President or Council staff drop the ball.

13 I'd like to talk about the very first
14 Charter which Staten Island was enticed to join
15 with a promise of being part of the subway. The
16 City never honored its promise, and now the
17 Forgotten Borough but remembered Borough by Rail.
18 While remembered boroughs have 24/7 mass transit,
19 we are limited to very limited express bus and
20 ferry service, which is nearly nonexistent on
21 nights and weekends. It would cost billions to
22 link the Island to the subway system, something
23 impossible to fund even during better financial
24 times. However, the situation can partially be
25 rectified by increasing bus and ferry frequency

1 to the equivalent of subway service. How is this
2 possible with budget shortfalls mandated by
3 transportation cuts? Simple. Take money
4 earmarked for the Second Avenue Subway and use it
5 to increase service here.

6 I used to live between First and Second
7 Avenues in Manhattan and my walk to an express
8 bus stop is actually longer here than when I
9 lived in Manhattan.

10 The most important change I think the City
11 Charter should do is mandate a budget allocation
12 based on population. Staten Island does not get
13 its fair share of transit dollars based on
14 population, educational funds. We're the only
15 borough without a public hospital. And although
16 public hospitals are not in the cards, we should
17 at least based on population the proper
18 allocation.

19 Thank you very much.

20 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you.

21 John Ryan.

22 MR. RYAN: There are only two of us, ladies
23 and gentlemen, hang in there.

24 My name is Jack Ryan. I went to college in
25 the Bronx. I lived in Manhattan 24 years, I've

1 been here 16 years, and I grew up in that capital
2 of dysfunction, Albany, New York, and I'd like to
3 address, first of all, the question of Home Rule.

4 I hope you get a chance away from some of
5 the specific proposals to discuss the philosophy
6 among yourselves of how much you create more Home
7 Rule for this great City. It is truly a mosaic.
8 You've heard tonight a few good Staten Islanders,
9 a few cranky Staten Islanders, but the fact of
10 the matter is Staten Island, and all our
11 Boroughs, are comprised of great people.

12 When you open up the Charter Revision you
13 open up a wonderful Pandora's box of potential.
14 And I believe you when you say you're committed
15 to being deliberative. I hope that
16 deliberativeness includes that basic question
17 you've been beaten over the head with for the
18 last three hours of how do you slow it down long
19 enough that you're not pressured by outside
20 sources?

21 You're clearly intelligent. I personally
22 think we have a superb Mayor, and I believe he's
23 appointed good people. But I beg you to figure
24 out ways to give this the time it deserves.

25 The issue of Borough President out here is

1 absolutely critical. For 16 years I've worked as
2 head of a retreat house and now I'm in a social
3 service agency. If we didn't have a Borough
4 President and we didn't have strong City Council
5 and good people in those spots, Staten Island
6 would truly be lost.

7 This is a great city. And the fear that
8 scares me is that a large number of people equate
9 decentralization and local power with the
10 paralysis that would say that's typical or the
11 caricature of the Board of Education 25 years
12 ago.

13 It doesn't have to be that way. There really
14 are ways to decentralize and still figure out how
15 you retain strong City government. We don't need
16 balkanization, we know that. What we need is
17 some way of combining local authority, local
18 people knowing what is best, with an opportunity
19 to serve the people in each of the Boroughs while
20 we create a cohesiveness in this mosaic.

21 It's a tough balance, I know that, but it's
22 going to take time. You're talented, you've got
23 skills, we all know that. We've got local people
24 out here in all the other four Boroughs that are
25 going to be after you with all sorts of

1 proposals. But get away from it all and discuss
2 the philosophy of this event.

3 My last question is truly profound. After
4 the last speaker go down to the Carvel Cafe, go
5 for a drink and relax.

6 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Mr. Tobacco.

7 MR. TOBACCO: Good evening. I know I'm
8 challenged with being the dreaded last speaker,
9 so I'll do my best. But I want to thank the
10 members of the Commission for holding this
11 hearing on Staten Island tonight. In light of
12 our disproportional representation, I commend the
13 Commission for their inclusion of Commissioner
14 Fiala. Throughout a lengthy and distinguished
15 history of public service, he has proved to
16 deliver voluminous results in service to the
17 communities of Staten Island. In times of
18 unending scandal, his ethical and respected
19 approach to service should be a model to many.
20 As the sole Staten Islander, he is the perfect
21 choice to single handedly do the work of many.

22 Many people have spoken about proportional
23 representation tonight.

24 The discussion alone of eliminating Borough
25 Presidents is an insult to the intelligence of

1 Staten Islanders. It's the only place where we
2 have proportional representation.

3 I want to speak a little more about
4 proportional representation this evening, but
5 first there's several others. I want to urge the
6 Commission to take immediate action to place term
7 limits on the ballot once again. Thanks to the
8 repeated scandals which poisoned public
9 confidence in our system, New York, which is
10 looked upon as the capital of the world, but
11 stands today as nothing more than an example of a
12 mutilated and prostituted democracy. New York
13 currently has no elected executives. Our
14 Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Comptroller and
15 U.S. Senator were never legally elected by their
16 people to hold their current office.

17 As a City, some would say our Mayor holds
18 the same distinction. The weakness of the system
19 was exploited to allow the votes of 29
20 self-serving politicians, many voting to extend
21 their employment, overturning, trampling the
22 explicit will of New York voters. New Yorkers and
23 Staten Islanders are outraged at the travesty
24 that occurred. I think it's important to note
25 why exactly it did occur. It was not, as many

1 have said, Mayor Bloomberg's financial largess to
2 blame. Democratic rights of New Yorkers could not
3 have been mitigated by the Mayor's high finance
4 without the cooperation of 29 conspirators who
5 ignored and disregarded two referenda and
6 hijacked one of the most out of control,
7 fraudulent institutions in this country, the New
8 York City Council.

9 In recent history, our politicians have been
10 arrested, investigated for a litany of crimes,
11 including fraud, bribery and tax evasion, all
12 while New York taxpayers and municipal employees
13 are faced with higher taxes and decreased
14 services. The politicians who knowingly stash
15 cash in slush funds while teachers, cops and
16 firemen are being shaken down for salary and
17 benefit concessions causes this once meaning
18 vessel for the voice of the people to be
19 diminished to nothing.

20 Recently the community organizing group
21 ACORN announced they were disbanding. This after
22 being exposed as a corrupt and illegal
23 organization and stripped of their funding by the
24 Federal government. Yet, the New York City
25 Council had been hijacked by ACORN's own party,

1 the Working Families Party. New York City is
2 currently run by a Council which approximately 70
3 percent were all backed and funded by the Working
4 Families Party, a recognized wing of ACORN. Just
5 last year the New York State Supreme Court found
6 the Working Families Party engaged in numerous
7 election law violations and compromised the
8 electoral process. Yet, our Council sits
9 overwhelmingly elected with the backing of a
10 known illicit organization.

11 It's my view the primary duty of this
12 Commission to do just as Mayor La Guardia did
13 when he radically reformed New York City
14 government, abolishing the incompetent and
15 corrupt Board of Aldermen. As our democracy is
16 being tested, scrutinized on the global stage,
17 voter outrage challenged to the forefront through
18 Tea Parties, your Commission has the unique
19 opportunity to rock the establishment and start
20 over.

21 I'm not a lawyer. I hear there's a legal
22 term called nunc pro tunc, which means now for
23 then. An actual lawyer told me it's like a do
24 over, like a start over. Maybe that's what we
25 should do right now to get the people back behind

1 our government.

2 I urge the Commission to put the question to
3 the people on the ballot in 2013. Should the
4 entire City Council be up for re-election under
5 proportional representation, give New Yorkers the
6 chance to follow in the brave footsteps of other
7 Charter Revision Committees. Abolish the New
8 York Council and replace it with something
9 radically different. Thank you very much.

10 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: That concludes our list
11 of the speakers.

12 BOROUGH PRESIDENT MOLINORO: Can I just thank
13 you for coming to Staten Island and giving us an
14 opportunity to air our views. And also to say to
15 you that I appreciate the fact that you
16 volunteered for this nonpaying job and you have
17 in your heart the best interests of not only
18 Staten Island but the City of New York. And you
19 have committed to do what's best for all of us
20 and we appreciate that.

21 And if anyone made a statement here tonight
22 that offended you I apologize. So thank you and
23 God bless you.

24 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: It was our pleasure,
25 Mr. Borough President.

1 COMMISSIONER FIALA: Closing hour is late.
2 I'll be very brief.

3 Part of our job is to educate. Let me just
4 state for the record earlier on, earlier in the
5 evening, one of the witnesses testifying talked
6 about two-year terms and the Mayor. I just want
7 to read into the record the relevant section.

8 "... the Council Member elected at the
9 general election in the year two thousand and one
10 and at the general election in every twentieth
11 year thereafter..." Twentieth year thereafter.
12 That's important to note. Facts don't cease to
13 exist because we ignore them. Additionally,
14 citywide elected officials, Mayor, Public
15 Advocate, Comptroller, run for four-year terms.

16 That was in the Charter, it has remained in
17 the Charter, they do that because they're
18 citywide. Council members have that quirk
19 because of redistricting. It's every 20 years.
20 So the record should just reflect that.

21 Finally, I just want to thank my fellow
22 Commissioners. This was a long night, we didn't
23 know what to expect, but I think, Mr. Chairman,
24 you would agree that everyone who participated
25 was quite civil and there were a great many

1 suggestions, thoughts, that are worthy of our
2 debate and consideration.

3 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Here, here. Thank you.

4 Yes, Commissioner Chen.

5 COMMISSIONER BETTY CHEN: I'll be brief. An
6 overriding theme this evening was about local
7 control and decentralization. And one of the
8 speakers stated that she thought that this panel
9 was here to look at eliminating the position of
10 the Borough President. And I just wanted to
11 clarify that having been to all the various
12 Commission meetings, that idea has not originated
13 from this body and in any of those meetings. And
14 in fact, I think we've been charged with a broad
15 ranging top to bottom look at the Charter and the
16 task of then setting what those specific agenda
17 items to be. As Steve Fiala laid out at the
18 beginning of this session, we're still in that
19 review and fact finding part of the process.

20 So in that spirit I just want to say it was
21 very useful to me. I was very gratified to hear
22 all the input this evening about the role of the
23 Borough President and to be able to hear directly
24 from the Borough President, his take on things,
25 and especially his role in coordinating

1 interagency cooperation.

2 Also to hear from so many constituents from
3 their point of view, the results of that, and
4 their satisfaction. So I thank you for all of
5 that testimony.

6 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Commissioner Scissura.

7 COMMISSIONER SCISSURA: Thank you. I just
8 want to be very quick just to add on what my
9 fellow Commissioner said. As someone who serves
10 as a Chief of Staff to a Borough President, I can
11 assure you that I will be sharing with my
12 colleagues some important insight from what I go
13 through day-by-day, both the positive and the
14 negative.

15 And I just want to touch upon something that
16 Borough President Molinaro stated earlier. The
17 Borough President really is an opportunity for
18 the average citizen to go to a local place to
19 speak to a representative who really understands.
20 And the Borough President mentioned some perfect
21 examples of when he will know that if a street
22 needs something he knows what it's about. So,
23 Mr. Borough President, I can tell you I am
24 committed to letting the colleagues up here know
25 exactly what you go through on a day by day

1 basis.

2 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: I just wanted to thank
3 all of the organizers here this evening, the
4 local control was really at a very high level and
5 we deeply appreciated all the good work that
6 you've done.

7 Hearing no further comments, I'll entertain
8 a motion to adjourn.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I'll move.

10 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Second.

11 All in favor?

12 (A chorus of ayes.)

13 CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN: Thank you all.

14 (Whereupon, at 9:40 P.M., the above public
15 hearing concluded.)

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18 I, NORAH COLTON, CM, a Notary Public for and
19 within the State of New York, do hereby certify
20 that the above is a correct transcription of my
21 stenographic notes.

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NORAH COLTON, CM

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