

Councilmember Stephen Levin
Testimony to the NYC Districting Commission
January 10, 2013

Thank you very much, members of the Commission, for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Stephen Levin and I am currently the City Councilmember for the 33rd District in Brooklyn, which includes the neighborhoods of Greenpoint, Williamsburg, South Williamsburg, The Brooklyn Navy Yard, Vinegar Hill, DUMBO, Downtown Brooklyn, Brooklyn Heights, Boerum Hill and Park Slope. The 33rd District is remarkably diverse both ethnically and geographically, and I consider it an honor every day to represent all of these great neighborhoods in the City Council.

First, I would like to thank the Commission and the Commissioners for the diligence and transparency you have exhibited throughout this process. It is a massive and extremely complex endeavor to balance the various interests that exists, at times at odds with each other, within each of the 51 districts of New York City, in each of the 5 boroughs, and in the City as a whole.

With regard to the proposed lines of the 33rd District and its neighboring districts, I believe that the lines presented in early December reflect the population shifts that have occurred in North Brooklyn over the past 10 years. The 33rd District currently has a population of roughly 171,000 people, which is well over the target population of 160,000 for the Council district. Therefore, a geographical decrease is inevitable, and the proposal to reduce the district at the southeastern edge in Park Slope makes logical sense. Under the previously proposed lines, Park Slope would be redrawn into the 39th District, which would allow all of Park Slope to be represented by a unified Council district. In addition, the Commission had proposed including several additional election districts in Northern Bedford-Stuyvesant to the 33rd District. Over the past 10 years, this area has gone from being mostly manufacturing and industrial to significantly residential, as the Orthodox Jewish population in Williamsburg, which is currently almost entirely within the 33rd District, has moved south. This expansion makes sense for two reasons. First, this would allow for the Orthodox Jewish community in North Brooklyn to be within a unified Council district. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, this shift would allow for the 35th Council District, which has seen a tremendous increase in Caucasian population over the past 10 years, to maintain its status as a majority minority district, something that I believe is important for the diversity of the Brooklyn Council delegation and the Council as a whole.

There are two areas in which I believe the Commission should amend the December 4th proposed maps. First, the 78th and 79th ED's of the 53rd AD, which is commonly referred to as the Broadway Triangle, should remain in the 33rd District instead of the 34th District. These ED's are bounded by Broadway and Flushing Avenue, both of which are clearly defined, natural border shared by the 33rd, 34th, 35th and 36th districts. Secondly, the 50th ED of the 52nd AD, which sits at the base of the Gowanus Canal, should be included in the 39th District, not the 33rd. While it has been a pleasure to work with the residents of these blocks, they have expressed to me that they generally identify with the Cobble Hill neighborhood. In the interest of unifying communities, I suggest that the 50th ED is moved to the 39th District.