



The City of New York

# **Manhattan Community Board 1**

**Julie Menin** CHAIRPERSON | **Noah Pfefferblit** DISTRICT MANAGER

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

**Testimony by Jeff Galloway, Chairman, Planning and Infrastructure Committee  
On Behalf of Julie Menin, Chairperson  
Manhattan Community Board #1**

**Monday, July 26, 2010 at 6:00 p.m.  
Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building  
163 West 125<sup>th</sup> Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor**

Thank you, Chairperson Goldstein and other Members of the Charter Revision Commission, for convening this public hearing. I am Jeff Galloway, the Chair of Community Board #1's (CB#1's) Planning and Community Infrastructure Committee. I am testifying on behalf of Julie Menin, Chairperson of CB#1.

In testimony presented at an earlier hearing, Chairperson Menin raised concerns about the Charter Revision Commission's outreach to the public. We are still concerned that the existing time frame does not allow for adequate public participation. Sufficient time is required for a deliberative process that considers the many recommendations made by the public.

We commend the Manhattan Borough President's Office and the Office of the Public Advocate for their proposals for reform to the City Charter. The Manhattan Borough President's Office presented to us Recommendations to the New York City Charter Revision Commission in April 2010, and we strongly support the Borough President's proposals to strengthen Community Boards' ability to address land use and other local issues; to rationalize and standardize the Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP); and to ensure a mechanism for long-term comprehensive planning.

As Chair of CB#1's Planning and Community Infrastructure Committee, I review numerous applications for ULURP and other actions. The object of the Community Board's role with respect to land use applications is to promote meaningful community involvement in land use review – something which not always possible to accomplish. For one thing, only a small percentage of projects in the district fall under ULURP; for another, the City Charter currently lacks clear standards to guide the Community Board land use review and recommendation process. The result is that land use review can be unpredictable to the detriment of both communities and the overall process.

Our Community Board passed a resolution on March 23, 2010, urging the Charter Revision Commission to consider specific standards to guide the Community Board land use review evaluation and recommendation process as have been adopted in other major US cities. Such standards would result in a more uniform, efficient process. We suggested the inclusion of eight standards by which to evaluate a proposed project:

1. Does it place significant demands on local schools and infrastructure;
2. Does it make a positive contribution to community infrastructure;
3. Does it impact (positively or negatively) affordable housing in the community;
4. Does it contribute to environmental sustainability;
5. Does it provide open space for public use;
6. Does it assist the creation of an active streetscape;
7. Does its design and building materials relate appropriately to surrounding buildings and neighborhood context; and
8. Will construction cause significant disruptions.

We supported other proposed changes to the City Charter, including some to be considered at our full board meeting on July 27. We support an enhanced role for Community Boards in the ULURP to require that Community Board recommendations be specifically addressed by ULURP applicants before applications are reviewed by the Borough President. If our recommendations are rejected, applicants would be required to provide a reason for rejection.

Our Committee has supported proposals by the Manhattan Borough President's Office and the Public Advocate to bolster Community Boards' ability to properly respond to urban planning and land use issues. We particularly support the Borough President's proposal to provide an urban planner to each Community Board office, and along a similar vein, the Public Advocate's proposals to create a Community Board Resource Center to assist with urban planning and real estate development issues and to help develop Community Needs Assessments to augment annual Community Board District Needs statements.

CB#1 is both fortunate and unique in having a Director of Land Use and Planning who provides guidance to the Board in its consideration of applications. We have also benefited from the Manhattan Borough President's Urban Planning Fellow program, which places graduate students in Community Board offices. However, these resources are not available to all Community Boards, and the Public Advocate's proposal to create a Community Board Resource Center to assist with urban planning and development issues would ensure that all Community Boards are properly equipped to carry out their responsibilities as established in the Chartered.

Careful consideration should also be given to the concept of Community Benefits Agreements, or "CBAs." CBAs can have positive and negative impacts on the land use process. Care should be taken that CBAs do not undermine the role of the Community Boards in the land use process. CBAs should ensure that relevant parties are appropriately held accountable to those they are affecting. Community Boards are uniquely qualified to arbitrate such agreements, as we are well-positioned to assess community needs and how these needs can be satisfied by CBAs.

Community Boards are uniquely situated to bring a needed local perspective to issues. Members live or work in the community and possess extensive knowledge of local conditions and needs to an extent that centralized agencies cannot hope to equal. We review applications for liquor licenses, street activities, sidewalk cafes, newsstands, landmarks designations, and street co-namings. We work with agencies to improve service delivery, identify capital and expense budget priorities, advocate for local needs and plan the future of our neighborhoods.

As a Community Board, we sometimes find ourselves holding different positions from those taken by the Mayor's Office. Our independence, in fact, is an essential part of our advisory role. However, the budgets for Community Boards are currently under the Mayor's direct control and vulnerable to discretionary reductions. Like the Public Advocate, we believe that Community Board budgets should be set independently in a way comparable to the Independent Budget Office.

It is extremely important that the Charter Revision Commission not adopt any proposal that would lessen the role or resources of Community Boards but instead defend the critically important role of Community Boards in New York City government. Community Boards are an essential part of land use review and service delivery and coordination in New York City, and we urge you, in making your recommendations, to strengthen the role and resources of Community Boards in a manner that will make these processes more efficient and systematic.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak today.