## 2018 NYC CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING

BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN 1000 Washington Avenue Brooklyn New York 11225

MAY 7, 2018 6:11 P.M.

A P P E A R A N C E S:

COMMISSIONERS:

CESAR PERALES, Chair
LIRAN ANGELO
KYLE BRAGG
UNA CLARKE
RACHEL GODSIL
DALE HO
CARLO SCISSURA
JOHN SIEGAL

WENDY WEISER

MR. PERALES: Good evening. My name is Cesar Perales and I have the honor of chairing the New York City Charter Revision Commission of 2018. And I am pleased to call this meeting here at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. We are holding hearings in each of the five boroughs. This is the fourth. We will have one more hearing later this week in Manhattan at the public library, the Central Library, on Fifth Avenue. We normally call on one or more of the commissioners to welcome us. We have host commissioners, obviously, from every borough. But this evening we've got a lot of them from the County of Kings, so -- and I, too, will confess that I live in a place called Park Slope.

Are there any other commissioners who are willing to indicate that they are from Brooklyn and want to say a word or two. MS. CLARKE: I am a Brooklynite. MR. PERALES: All right. MR. MIROCZNIK: Brooklyn, as well. MS. GREENBERGER: I am, too. MR. PERALES: Another Brooklyn. Who is it. MR. SPEAKER: Sharon.

MR. PERALES: One. Sharon is Brooklyn. My God. As well. Half the panel is home. So we are home and we want to express our appreciation for those of you who have taken a time to be here with us this evening.

Let me explain for a moment what the Charter Revision Commission is. The New York City Charter is, in essence, the constitution of the City of New York. It contains the basic rules of how we govern ourselves. And every few years a mayor decides that there is something in particular about the City Charter that he'd like to see amended, improved, made better so that the governance of the City of New York is better and it's done more easily and in a more transparent way to the citizens of our city.

Our role as commissioners is to review the entire City charter, as well as the particular thing that motivated this mayor to call a charter of Revision Commission. And his particular interest is in democracy. In making our election system more democratic. Making it easier for people to run. Making it easier for people to vote. And so we have been hearing from throughout the City, comments about making our city more democratic, making elections better.

So that's been the theme. And I'm hoping we will hear comments on those particular themes that motivated the mayor to call this commission together. But we will listen to comments on anything else that has to do with the City Charter. Remember, we are here to talk about the City Charter, not about all of the issues that may be of concern to you.

The way it works is that the Commission will, as a result of these hearings, as a result of our deliberations, as a result of hearing from experts, we will write a report and recommend a few things that have come out of these discussions. We will recommend that they be put on the ballot in November so that the citizens of our city will decide whether or not they want to amend the charter in that particular fashion.

I think you've all gone into voting booths and seen referenda. Some of which is very long. Some of which you don't bother to read. But you're asked to vote yea or nay, yes or no. Well, as a result of these hearings, we're going to have referendum -- referenda being the plural -- on the November ballot.

For the record, we have followed all of the
legally required notice requirements. We've posted public notices in newspapers, and in the City record. We've sent e-mails out to thousands of New Yorkers. And we have our own website, which we use. We've got Facebook and Twitter. So that we are trying to be as transparent as possible.

This meeting is being live-streamed to people who want to watch this from their homes or from their offices. We also have language interpreters available. There is the deaf interpreter. I won't go through the rest of our schedule, but I do want to tell you that I'm going to try to get people up here in panels three at a time on subjects that they may have in common that they want to speak about. I will limit each speaker to three minutes. And we, members of the Commission, will have an opportunity, if we so desire, to ask for clarification of something that may have been said by one of the -- one or more of the speakers.

With that, I think we are ready to proceed. We're going to have -- I'm sorry. I didn't allow the commissioners to introduce themselves. You
don't know who you're testifying before. It's a very distinguished group.

Let's start on the extreme right.
MR. CARRION: Thank you. Good evening. My name is Marco Carrion. I currently serve as commissioner for the mayor's office of community affairs.

MS. GREENBERGER: Good evening. I'm Sharon Greenberger. I'm the president of the YMCA of Greater New York and a proud Brooklyn resident.

MS. WEISER: Hello. My name is Wendy Weiser. I direct the democracy program at the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law. And also delighted to be in my home borough.

MS. CLARKE: My name is Una Clarke. I'm a former member of the New York City Council and I'm pleased to be serving on this commission.

Let me welcome all of you to this hearing and hope that you will testify and give us a real crystal clear mission for which we can now endeavor. So welcome again. I'm a Brooklynite to the core.

MR. MIROCZNIK: Good evening. Mendy Mirocznik. I am the president of Staten Island COJO. I'm also a board member of Brooklyn's Bridge Multicultural Project of Flatbush Avenue. I have to confess $I$ was born in Brooklyn and I lived there for a good decade before I got married move to Staten Island.

MR. SCISSURA: First of all, welcome to Brooklyn. It's obviously a great place to live. I'm one of the few natives. Although I think I have some friends here who are also natives of Brooklyn. I currently serve as the president of the New York Building Congress. But my last two jobs were all about Brooklyn. I was the former president of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce. And before that, chief of staff to Borough President Marty Markowitz. And we know Brooklyn is cool, it's great. But I always like to say it's the people that made Brooklyn cool and great. So it's an honor to be with you all. MR. PERALES: My name is Cesar Perales, as I indicated. I have the honor of serving as the chair. I, too, am a Brooklynite. I live in Park Slope.

In terms of my professional career, I was a former secretary of state of New York. I also served as deputy mayor of the City of New York. I filled a number of jobs in government. But I also spent a significant part of my life as a civil rights lawyer.

MS. SEECHARRAN: Good evening. My name is Annetta Seecharran. And I am a very proud Queens resident. I know I'm a minority here. And I am the executive director of Chaya Community Development Corporation.

MS. ANGELO: Good evening. I'm Liran Angelo. I went to Brooklyn College, but I don't live in Brooklyn currently. I worked in city government for many years and I'm right now a researcher at CUNY's Institute for State And Local Governance.

MR. PERALES: Matt is not a member of the Commission. He doesn't get to introduce himself. But he's the executive director of the Commission.

We're going to start with a four-person panel. We're getting an awful lot of people who want to speak, so I'm going to be pretty strict about the three-minute rule.

The first panel will include someone from Represent New York, RJ DeMelo. The director of public policy at the Citizens Union. Is it Pachel Bloom? Was it Rachel Bloom?

MS. SPEAKER: Rachel.
MR. PERALES: Rachel.
Megan Ahern from NYPIRG. And Jeremy Gruber from Open Primaries. Susan Lerner from A Common Cause.

Is that four or five?
MS. SPEAKER: That's five.
MR. PERALES: What? That's five.
Susan, do you mind waiting for the next one? You'll get more attention.

MS. LERNER: I don't mind at all.
MR. PERALES: All right. Who goes first?
MR. GRUBER: Dear members of the New York City Charter Revision Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this evening. My name is Jeremy Gruber. I'm the SVP of Open Primaries, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to more open and inclusive elections. I'm also a longtime resident of Park Slope, like the Chair, just down the block.

In 2016, New York became the poster child for electoral dysfunction around the country for one reason and one reason only; closed primaries. New York City alone shuts out close to one million registered independent voters every primary election. That's over a quarter of all registered voters in the City. Simply because they declined to join one of our two major political parties. One million registered voters. That's more registered voters than members of the republican conservative working families and independent parties combined. Indeed, that's more registered voters than exists in several small states in this country. Almost as many voters are shut out of voting in closed primary elections in New York City than actually voted in the last general election for mayor. New York City is experiencing the same voter flight from party identification that is gripping the rest of the country. And the reality is that independent voters are now the second largest body of voters in this city. Our election system has simply not kept up with this reality. One million New Yorkers shut out of city elections is simply unsustainable. Who are these voters? They are a cross-section of New Yorkers from all boroughs and all walks of life. 37 percent of young voters in this city, 33 percent of Asian voters, 20 percent of Latino voters, and 18 percent of African-American voters are shut out of voting in elections in New York City because of our system of closed partisan primaries. Primary elections in the City of New York are held in public facilities manned by public poll workers, administered by the City and paid for by all of us, the taxpayers. But only some of us are granted the right to participate. Primary elections are often the most meaningful elections in this City. That's because the democratic primary often determines the general election winner. And the party organization which, to a lesser extent, special interest coalitions, that can influence low turnout democratic primaries, dictate the outcome.

But with an open nonpartisan primary, all candidates are on the same ballot and all voters can participate. A wider variety of candidates are encouraged to run, having a greater likelihood of prevailing in open primaries than in the existing closed system. Every New York City voter benefits from a healthier, more inclusive political system that encourages competition. That is how most cities in this country work. Today more than 80 percent of American cities have nonpartisan elections for local office. These include major cities, like Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Detroit, Dallas, San Francisco and Houston. The time for change has come. Instead of lagging behind the rest of the nation, New York City needs to do what it normally does best, lead. It's really a simple proposition. If we want to turn around the alarming drop in New York City voter turnout, encourage increased voter participation in our local elections, and attract more good --

MR. PERALES: Mr. Gruber --
MR. GRUBER: -- candidates to run for local office, we need to learn a lesson from the rest of the country. Nonpartisan elections would enfranchise a million New York City voters and work to accomplish these goals. I hope the Commission will take a serious look --

MR. PERALES: Thank -- thank you very much. MR. GRUBER: -- at nonpartisan elections. Thank you.

MR. PERALES: I'm going to ask the commissioners to let us hear from the entire panel and then we'll make notes about questions we may have.

MS. AHEARN: Good evening. My name is Megan

Ahern. I'm the program director for the New York Public Interest Research Group, or NYPIRG. We've provided testimony at the Staten Island hearing on voter empowerment changes. So we're going to focus tonight's testimony very briefly on campaign finance revisions to the Charter.

NYPIRG believes the City's campaign finance program is the most important piece of anti-corruption legislation enacted by the city in many, many years. It's central to all city efforts to deliver fair and honest municipal government. The 1988 law has made great contribution to New York over 30 years. The six to one public matching funds, large commitment to voter education through the debate requirement and widely respected voter guide. And high-level transparency through the enormous data it discloses on campaign contributions and spending. In fact, it's a model for the state, that the state -- if this is a state charter revision, that we would be testifying to, to follow the New York City version -- the New York City model. All of these improvements were hard-fought and hard-won. With extraordinary effort put into analysis, studies, papers and hearings through the 88 commission process. And followed by 30 years of supportive case law. Any proposals to replace the current structure of the campaign finance program face a high bar. We're a strong supporter of the current program and its matching fund framework. And, of course, any law can be improved. For example Council Member Ben Kalos has made recommendations to increase the percentage of public funds received by candidates. NYPIRG suggests that the Commission review and report on the impact that lowering contribution limits would have on campaigns. And should review these plans and others to make the current City's campaign finance law even stronger. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

MR. PERALES: Thank you.
MS. BLOOM: Good evening, Chair Perales and distinguished members of the New York City Charter Revision Commission. My name is Rachel Bloom and I am the director of public policy and programs at Citizens Union. We thank you for holding this and other public hearings and giving Citizens Union the opportunity to publicly share our recommendations with you.

We believe that this commission must not simply revise but undertake some bold and broad electoral reforms. This process and the recommendations that come out of it must strengthen the integrity of and transparency of government institutions so that public confidence is greater and New Yorkers are able to better participate in governmental decision-making. My testimony is far longer than my allotted time, so I urge you to take a look at the longer testimony, which we have submitted when we checked in.

Our first recommendation is to institute rank choice voting. Citizens Union urges the Commission to consider instant-runoff voting for New York City Elections. Instant-runoff voting allows voters to rank their preferences for candidates, rather than only voting for one candidate. New York City election law provides that unless a candidate running in a citywide primary receives 40 percent of the vote, a runoff election is required. This is held at great expense to New Yorkers. In 2013 the runoff for the public advocate race cost New Yorkers more than 13 million dollars, which is greater than a four-year budget for the public advocate's office.

In addition, in a city marked by terrible chart voter turnout in even high profile elections, run-off elections have abysmal voter participation. Leading to a tiny percentage of voters selecting citywide candidates. The voters who vote in turn out -- the voters who turn out in runoff elections tend to be older, richer and whiter, and not representative of New York City as a whole. Instant-runoff voting leads to more diverse candidates by gender and race, where it has been implemented. And this city -- this diversity is greatly needed in the New York City Council, where we have a mere 11 female council members out of 51 . It is not reflective at all of the city it serves.

Now I'm just going to do a top-level listing of our other recommendations. Our second recommendation is to institute a top two elections system. Making the first primary election open to all eligible voters. Our third recommendation is to increase ballot access by reducing petitioning signature requirements. This will make -- this will -- in the spirit of increasing opportunities to participate in elections as a candidate. We want to make it easier for people to become candidates and get on the ballot. We want to see improved laws regulating elected officials' non-profits. In 2016 Local Law 181 brought non-profits that are affiliated with elected officials under certain campaign finance regulations. But more needs to be done. We believe we need to be enacting true independent New York City council redistricting so that we have an independent council drawing districts at the city level. We believe we should transfer lobbying reporting and enforcement to the campaign finance Board so that the people who have oversight and enforcement are not people that the City Council can -- have control over.

And finally, we urge you to protect the strengths of the campaign finance Board. Established in 1988, through a referendum by the people of New York, the campaign finance Board has revolutionized the way elections are run in New York City, helped to bring about a much more diverse range of candidates, and has served as a model for campaign finance for cities nationwide. We urge the Commission to consider the myriad strengths of the campaign finance Board when recommending reforms.

Thank you very much.
MR. PERALES: Thank you.
MR. DEMELO: Good evening, Chair Perales and members of the Charter Revision Commission. I thank you for the opportunity to testify in front of you this evening. And thanks for everybody for coming out. This is very important, so it's great to see you turn out.

My name is RJ DeMelo. I'm a New York City resident of four years now. So thanks for welcoming me in with open arms. And I'm a volunteer member of Represent New York. We're a nonpartisan anti-corruption organization. And here we're focusing on campaign finance reform. The thing is I'm actually not here to talk to you about Represent New York, even myself. I'm actually here on behalf of my parents and so many countless other people just like them. For my dad, an Army veteran that grew up in public housing, the oldest of nine, with an absent father, he made a life for himself despite only obtaining his GED. For my mother, one of the hardest-working people I know. She's had at least two jobs at a time, usually more than that, since she turned 16 years old. Raising a family of five, they made it work financially. But only by just enough. And so my question is, why should their voice matter less than anybody else's? The fact of the matter is with our fiscal situation over the years, there was just no extra money lying around to donate tenant candidate. The thing about New York City is that yes, the system is better than many places. That certainly does not mean we should settle for good enough or just better than someplace else. Now, the public matching system in the city allows for people of similar circumstance to my parents have a louder voice. Yet a candidate can only raise up to 55 percent of their campaign funds from public monies. Therefore, there is still a reliance on large donations for many candidates. Those large donations become a priority and they have influence. Which leads me back to my earlier question. Why should that person that can afford to donate $\$ 1,000$ potentially have their opinion matter more than that of my hard-working parents? Now, there are many solutions, potentially, to this issue. Raising the cap on publicly matched funds could be a start. Doing so could allow candidates to focus less on large donations to fill that 45 percent gap now under the current system. And more on the struggling mother of two in their district that deserves just as much attention. So all that I ask is you consider my parents and the numerous others like them to ensure that their voice is heard when contemplating campaign finance reform. Everyone deserves a fair and equal voice. And now given that opportunity of raising someone's voice who is less fortunate can help ensure that their opinions and needs do not fade off into night, behind those who can afford to raise their own.

Thank you very much for your time.
MR. PERALES: Thank you.
Kyle, you didn't get to introduce yourself?
MR. BRAGG: Thank you. Good evening. I'm Kyle Bragg. I'm secretary treasurer of SEIU 32BJ. Thank you.

MR. PERALES: And Dale.
MR. HO: Good evening. Thank you everyone for coming out tonight. My name is Dale Ho. And

I am the director of the ACLU Voting Rights Project.

MR. PERALES: I usually start the questioning, but $I$ won't today. I want to give my fellow commissioners an opportunity to get the ball rolling.

Who's got a question?
MS. ANGELO: Thank you all very much for your testimony.

Ms. Bloom, can you -- first of all, I missed your proposal between redistricting of council districts and protecting the campaign finance Board. What was that?

MS. BLOOM: Oh. I'm sorry. That was transfer lobbying reporting and enforcement to the campaign finance Board. Currently the city clerk has responsibility for lobbying oversight and enforcement. And when that position is held by someone appointed by the city council, the very entity in which the lobbying of elected officials occur. We believe that a conflict of interest arises.

MS. ANGELO: Now a second question.
Can you -- can you give a little more detail on your second proposal on the primary system, where the first one is open and the second part of the primary is not?

MS. BLOOM: You mean instant-runoff voting?
MS. ANGELO: Yeah -- no, no.
MS. BLOOM: Or you mean top two --
MS. ANGELO: Top two. Yeah.
MS. BLOOM: Top two election system is much like Jeremy was talking about. Which is that people can run and it makes the first primary election open to all eligible voters, regardless of their party status. So that every registered voter can participate. In New York City, where so many election decisions are decided in the democratic party -- by the democratic primary, 1.3 million voters -- registered voters in New York City are effectively cut out of. When, in most cases, is the most determinative election in a cycle.

MS. ANGELO: And so what's the top two?
MS. BLOOM: Top two is that everyone --
there's a primary, anyone can vote, regardless of party. And the top two vote-getters run in the general election. And those two people, whether it's two members of the democratic party, two members of the republican party.

MS. ANGELO: Gotcha.
MS. BLOOM: The Rent Is Too Damn High and the Working Families Party, whatever it may be. And the -- you're allowed to -- you know, the way it's set up, you can still -- you can have two people from same party running. People have party affiliations and you're able to have those two parties listed when you vote.

Am I missing anything?
MR. SPEAKER: And as I mentioned in my testimony, that's the norm in 80 percent of American cities.

MS. ANGELO: Can I just ask one -- would that not -- I'm sorry. But in a city that's so -- that's predominantly democratic, could that not result in never having a republican making it in the top two? So that every general election would have two democrats?

MR. SPEAKER: But the point is to make sure that the election -- in a nonpartisan election, the election is run in -- similar to general elections is run by the City. It's not run -it's not run on behalf of the parties. All candidates are on the same ballot. And the top vote-getters go on to the general election. So there might be some cases where, certainly in particular elections an individual from a particular party might not make the ballot. But it also ensures that the candidates that have the widest range of support in the community make it onto the ballot. And it ensures that every voter, regardless of their political party or independent status, is allowed to participate.

MS. SEECHARRAN: So I wanted to ask a question of the speaker from NYPIRG.

I'm sorry I didn't catch your full name.
You -- so you talked about campaign finance reform. But do you have a specific -- I didn't hear a specific recommendation.

MS. AHEARN: No. Besides, if there is going to be robust changes to the current system, that it be more than -- you know, that there be more public process than these public hearings. That there be robust conversation with groups that have worked with us on this. And people in the community beyond these slew of hearings in the past few weeks.

MR. PERALES: I don't want to be -- well, I'm playing the devil's advocate here.

You do know that that nonpartisan elections was put before the voters of the City of New York?

MR. SPEAKER: Yep.
MS. SPEAKER: Mm-hmm.
MR. PERALES: You know that?
And you know the result?
MR. SPEAKER: Well, I -- yes. And I also know that that happened before the revolution election in 2016, when the vast majority of New Yorkers stood up and said they wanted an open primary, according to recent polling. So I think --

MR. PERALES: I'm sorry. I'm listening.
MR. SPEAKER: I think the -- I think the understanding has changed about nonpartisan elections in the City. I think the number of independent voters has risen dramatically since that conversation. And I think the opportunity to have that conversation again in the current political climate is incredibly relevant.

MR. PERALES: For those of you in the audience who don't understand.

Nonpartisan elections was put before the voters by a prior charter commission. And it was overwhelmingly rejected.

So the argument being made here is that people's opinions may have changed.

MR. SPEAKER: I believe they changed dramatically. I think those hearings were prior to 2016. I think the public attitudes towards open primaries has changed dramatically. I think the people deserve an opportunity, with all the recent political developments that have happened, to revisit this issue. And I really encourage this commission to do that.

MS. SPEAKER: I would just add that, you know, New York State has the longest timeframe for when someone can change their party of any state in the nation by far. You have to register often the year before the primary that you want to vote in in order to be able to participate. Which many people discovered when they wanted to vote in the presidential primary in 2016. And they just could not participate. And so when we talk about this -- this feeling, like there might be a different vote outcome this time, a lot of that stems from that. And, you know, the 100,000 plus people that were erroneously removed from the rolls. And so, you know, as someone who has been lobbying on this party request change in

Albany, it -- you know, neither party really wants to make that change. So we're trying to make it more -- we're trying to make it so that more people can participate in New York City. MR. SPEAKER: Again, the numbers are pretty stark. One million voters aren't -- can't participate. I think that, by itself, deserves an examination.

MS. CLARKE: I just wanted to ask a little bit about voter registration and voter participation.

In many communities, including my own, it takes a lot of educating for people to even want to register, never mind voting. If we're looking at the City to make it more diversified, make sure that everybody who has something at stake in the City are able to vote, how would you do that? Because the more things change, the more they remain the same. And the aim of keeping things the way they are, just twisting to somebody else's thought and idea, sometimes sound good. But when you put it on the ballot, it doesn't work.

So tell me how would you ensure fairness that every community in the City of New York would be educated enough to understand what all these changes are about?

MR. SPEAKER: Well, I happen to put a lot of trust in the voters. I think the voters understand what it means to vote. I think part of the reason that we need to revisit voting rules in the City of New York is because we're not just facing an issue where voters are not participating because of simple administrative hurdles. I think we're facing a serious challenge to meaningful elections in this City. I think many voters aren't voting because they don't find those elections to be meaningful. Not because -- simply because of administrative access. So I believe that nonpartisan elections would immediately enfranchise a million voters in this City, but they would also produce a political climate that is more robust, more inclusive and would allow a much broader conversation and a much broader candidates to come to the floor. So I think this is a question not just of inclusiveness, but a question of changing the political climate in this City for the voters for the good. And I think that's what nonpartisan elections would begin to accomplish.

MS. SPEAKER: I would just add that New York doesn't have so much of a voter registration problem, as we have a voter turnout problem. And there are a myriad of reasons why our voter turnout is low, from noncompetitive elections, which perhaps the top two election system would change. People not being able to vote in the primary, which are determinative for so many elections in this City. And, you know, there has been so much effort at the state level to change things that would make voting easier, to have early voting, same-day registration. And there's a lot of people working on that. I'm one of them. But that's a whole -- you know, we've been working on that for decades and we're still not quite there. And so what we could -- whenever we have to opportunity to in New York City, that can make it, you know, a top two election system or instant-runoff voting then -- you know, instant-runoff voting allows so that people get to feel like one of their candidates was chosen. They'll feel like they have more of a say. Or with top two elections, maybe there's an opportunity for people in districts where, you know, to have two people talking about the needs of their community, rather than someone who's only going to get five percent of the vote. Which is what happens in City council races. So I think we have to look at what we can do in New York City. Because our voter turnout is one of the worst in country. And it's not a matter of registration. It's a matter of turnout. And what we can do at the city level, versus the state.

MR. PERALES: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Are there any other commissioners that have questions? No? I think we'll move on.

And rest assured, this -- your testimony has been very important. You're talking about the things that we're concerned with. We're going to be making some determinations.

So thank you again.
MS. SPEAKER: Thank you.
MR. PERALES: On the next panel -- yes. The next panel. Susan Lerner, Common Cause New York. Mariana Alexander, New Kings Democrats. Looks like Amina Fofana, but it's not clear, from Integrate New York City. And Paula Segal, The Community Development Project.

MS. LERNER: Hi. I'm Susan Lerner. I'm the executive director of Common Cause New York. I do have written testimony, which I'll leave behind. But I want to summarize the highlights of our suggestions of areas which we believe the Commission should be looking into.

First we'd like the Commission to consider institutionalizing participatory budgeting on a much broader basis here in New York City. Common Cause is one of the founding members of the Participatory Budgeting Steering Committee. We think it's been very successful at the county level, but very limited. And we think that there are models around the world for a much more expansive participatory budgeting system which should be considered here in New York. On campaign finance, our preference is to get as close to a full public financing system as we can under the current US Supreme Court laws. While the matching fund system is certainly of long-standing and well admired in a model, it certainly can be improved. And we are, I think, very much aware of its limitations over the last several election cycles, with scandals and corruption problems. I think the impact of philanthropic and advocacy organization sponsored by elected officials and those close to them are an area which, as Citizens Union pointed out, needs further expansion so that the goal of lessening corruption would be more successfully taken on. We also believe that -- we strongly support lifting the cap on the matching fund system so that, indeed, a person could run only with small dollar matches. And we think that -we're supportive of efforts to make compliance with the City's campaign finance laws less onerous. Right now it works to penalize the less sophisticated candidates. And we think that consideration should be given to designing a system of sampling to be used in post-election audits to substantially cut down on the time to conclusion of those audits. For ethics oversight, we suggest changing the manner in which the conflicts of interest board is appointed so that it is not solely appointed by the mayor. There is a history of a deference to executive waivers that we think is not fair to the City as a whole. And we note the explosion of consultants who claim that they are not lobbyists provides a problem for which there has
currently not been any regulatory solution. And we think that that is an area for the Commission to look at. On election reform, we're troubled by the idea -- by the uncertainty as to how far we can change the election system here in the City, as opposed to at the state level. We are strong supporters of rank-choice voting in New York City because of the large number of candidates who run on the primary. We are also supportive of civic engagement efforts. And we want to be sure that the City consolidates its civic engagement efforts. And we don't have a chief democracy officer, an Office of Civic Engagement, and a voter administer -- a voter assistance administration commission, which is duplicative. So we hope that there would be some thought given to how to unify and strengthen the City's civic engagement efforts. Of which there are many ongoing, but uncoordinated.

Thank you.
MR. PERALES: Thank you.
MS. ALEXANDER: Good evening. My name is Mariana Alexander. I'm the vice president of policy for the New Kings Democrats, NKD. NKD is a political reform club founded in 2008, committed to bringing transparency, accountability and inclusionary democracy to the Kings County Democratic Party and New York City by extension. I'm excited to be here, as the stated purpose of this Charter Revision Commission aligns closely with the work we've been doing for the last ten years.

I'm here to advocate for changes to the city charter, to strengthen voting rights and reduce the influence of money and special interests in politics. NKD membership has formally adopted the following policy platforms as to how these ends can be achieved. To strengthen voting rights, amendments to the Charter should be made to simplify voter registration. Registration should be automatic for all eligible voters and available through any contact with the City. In addition, voters should be informed when registering that only voters who are registered with a political party are allowed to participate in that party's primary elections. Primaries are often decisive in New York elections. Same-day enrollment should be available for political parties, assuming there was no prior registration in a party. And voters should be allowed to correct registration errors at the polls. NKD supports the expansion of enfranchment to young voters, non-citizens, and those with a criminal record. Young voters form habits that last a lifetime and are intellectually capable of making informed voting decisions. Citizenship should not be a barrier to political representation. And all verified residents, including non-citizens, should be allowed to vote. The right to vote should not be provided -- should be provided, regardless of criminal status. Especially since laws that restrict voting access based on criminal record status, overwhelmingly affect people of color and the poor. NKD supports full voting rights for those convicted of a felony, those awaiting trial, and those currently serving a sentence. Re-registration should not be required. Lastly, we support reforms to enable anyone to vote in a primary if they were -- will be eligible by the time of the general election.

In terms of reducing the influence of money and special interests in politics, NKD advocates that contribution limits should be dramatically reduced and should limit contributions, including those from candidates themselves. Entities that do business with the City should be subject to lower contribution limits. And the City should find a way to limit contributions to party funds, also known as housekeeping accounts, which often go to fund campaign activities. Lobbyists should be subject to stricter disclosure requirements and regulation. And any consultant performing a role similar to a lobbyist should be subject to the same rules. Campaign finance regulations should be accessible and not a barrier to those unfamiliar with the law. And there should be robust resources available to candidates on the procedural and legal requirements of running for office. And these resources should be made available in multiple languages. I realize that some -- not -- some of these policy goals are not within the jurisdiction of the city's charter. However, I thought it would be useful to delineate them here tonight.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. MR. PERALES: Thank you.

MS. FOFANA: Good afternoon. I hope you guys had a lovely day. My name is Amina Fofana. I'm a part of the youth led organization called

Integrate NYC. We focus on integrating schools in New York City and around the country because we have a deeply segregated public school system. We have a five-point platform which was generated by youth of -- across the U.S. and also in New York City, which consists of integration policies that will ensure that everybody gets a fair and just equitable education, no matter who you are or the color of your skin. So I'm here to testify on behalf of the Office of Civic Engagement. Well, to -- for the implementation of the Office of Civic Engagement. At Integrate NYC we stand for real representation of young people and in decision-making at local city and state levels. I believe that we should have this Office of Civic Engagement so youth can be able to voice their opinions and have, you know, a part in the decisions that are being made. The essence of having the Office of Civic Engagement would give youth opportunities to share their experiences, opinions, on the decisions. And it is important that we activists and community organizers have a voice and are included -included in the processes of positive affirmations of our society. We also stand for
real democracy where coalition of group -- groups work together to make change. Having this office would encourage and ensure that community, including youth leaders, can be connected to one another to better achieve the change we dream of. We stand with the call for the Office of Civic Engagement and expect to have meaningful student representation.

MR. PERALES: Well, thank you very much. Very good.

MS. SIEGEL: Hi. My name is Paula Siegel. I am a senior staff attorney in the Equitable Neighborhoods Practice of the Community Development Project. I did bring copies of my testimony and it's a bit of a list. I don't know if you -- did you guys get them? No. Okay. They're at the front somewhere. You'll need them. So -- so we work with local coalitions to foster responsible equitable development and help make sure that people of color, immigrants and other low-income residents who have built our city are not pushed out in the name of progress. We work together with our clients to ensure that residents and historically under-resourced areas have stable housing they can afford, places where they can connect and organize, jobs to make a good living, and other opportunities that allow people to thrive. We're extremely excited to collaborate with this Commission on a thorough review of the city charter, which is long overdue in the land-use context, where we work.

We encourage the Commission to examine the following areas closely. These are all portions of the Charter, which is why you'll need the list. And we're happy to provide more background or expertise in any of them. I'm going to try to hit as many as I can in the next two minutes. But there is a list. It's bulleted.

The first set focuses on ensuring that more land that's public land is subject to approval through the City's existing uniform land-use review procedure. At the moment the New York City Housing Authority is either selling or leasing parcels of land. And the city charter does not require a public review of that process. That's something that you can change. And you can change immediately.

There are also certain areas that have been described as blighted by planners of generations past that are allowed -- in which public land is allowed to be disposed of to private developers with no public review at all. The program has the curious name of the Urban Development Action Area Program. But what it means -- what it really is is an exception to the uniform land-use review procedure that we all have learned and understand. That exception should be eliminated. Because what it allows is a back door for the disposition of public assets.

We're also looking for some improvements to you ULURP itself. We're looking for unification of the process of public land dispositions, a limit on how long after a city council approval ULURP -- of a land-use action, that action can actually be done before a new approval is needed. Right now that's infinity. And we're still seeing this administration utilize approvals from 2004 and 2006, as though nothing has changed on the ground. We're also looking for timelines and transparency in the -- in what happens before ULURP in the design of land use applications. Some of our other recommendations target oversay in disposition of public land and directing public land to non-profits and community land trusts instead of private developers, reforming the tax lien process to protect charity properties, and to leverage vacant properties for the preservation and creation of new affordable housing -- I'm sorry. And the creation -- and the enshrinement of a right to housing in the city charter. Right now the city is subject to state law, which provides a right to shelter, and creates a shelter industrial complex. Where we really need is a right to housing for all New Yorkers. There's more. I gave you a list.

MR. PERALES: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Does anybody have a question, any of the commissioners?

MS. CLARKE: I really don't have a question. I just want to commend the two young persons who have come as next generation with their ideas. And I think that we ought to -- we ought to take their testimony very seriously. And I am particularly concerned about education, Brown versus Board of Education is a long time. And I'm glad that you brought that up, and that we should be able to look at that. Because our schools should be a reflection in every classroom of what the City looks like. And if I can commit
myself -- if I can commit myself as an educator to be a companion at that, I would love to do that.

MS. GREENBERGER: I have a question for Susan Lerner, actually, about the COIB composition and a recommendation to change that. What would be your recommendation?

MS. LERNER: It sounds that the recommendation would be to have it be a mixed application so that it is not solely the mayor who appoints with approval of the council, but that there would be an appointment by the council and by the mayor so that you have more diversity. And that no one appointing authority would have the leading voice in the body.

MS. GREENBERGER: Okay. Thank you.
MS. ANGELO: Can you speak a little bit further on the tax lien process and charities.

MS. SIEGEL: And charities? Yeah. Absolutely.

So the New York State Constitution is very clear. Charity properties are in tight -- I'm sorry. Charities that own properties are entitled to local property tax exemptions from the moment that they acquire the property until
they don't own it anymore. The term of art is from the date of deed. In 2012, the Bloomberg administration, which is still haunting us, invented an annual renewal requirement for charities to renew their property tax exemption. Many of our charity properties are owned by legacy organizations that have owned them since the civil rights movement in the 1960 s and didn't get the memo that now they're supposed to go online once a year, type in a password that they got in the mail, and assure the Department of Finance that the church is still a charity, or that the community center is still running a headstart program. Absent that annual renewal requirement, the Department of Finance has been removing the property tax exemption and then starting to send bills, which then often don't -though organizations don't open because they've never gotten a tax bill before. Or they go to somebody who's passed away because there's been no reason for a charity organization to keep its address up to date with the Department of Finance, with whom they have no dealings. It goes into arrears. And in the summer, as is about to happen in about three weeks, the

Department of Finance compiles the tax lien sale book and includes those charity arrears in the book. That's the -- that's the big overview. There's a lot more detail.

MS. ANGELO: Do you know how many charities have lost their tax-free status?

MS. SIEGEL: I would not put it that way. Under the state law, they have the status. It has gone nowhere. It's the City that's making an error. And it's an administrative error that's leading to liens being placed on properties that are then purchased by a hedge fund backed trust that then initiates collection action. I've represented a few organizations in the foreclosure proceedings that follow. As of this morning, there were 120 organizations with water debt and 176 heading to the 2018 tax lien sale. The Department of Finance should be updating with a ten-day list soon. This is not a small number. MS. ANGELO: Okay. But the -- but the water issue is a separate issue, the water bill issue?

MS. SIEGEL: The water bill issue is a separate issue. But until the Bloomberg administration -- the arrears were real, but it was the City who would do the collection. Now it
all gets bundled and sold to the tax lien trust. Which then initiates collection, adds interests and fees and starts foreclosure. And I can -- I could introduce you to some clients of mine, churches and community centers that we've gotten out of that process. And it's hairy. Because those foreclosure cases get decided on default. Which means no one ever needs to appear.

MS. ANGELO: And is the charity liable for the taxes or --

MS. SIEGEL: So I have -- we have -- despite the process that I have just described, actually, the City ends up owing these organizations money. So if we can catch them before the foreclosure happens and the auction happens, and then a private investor ends up owning their church or their community garden, they apply for a refund and they get a check from DOF. I could show you some lovely checks for, you know, \$30,000. Numbers like this. Where the organizations have come up with money to try to protect their properties that they never owed. You can keep asking. I got a lot -- I got stories.

MR. PERALES: I just noticed that we have been joined by Angela Fernandez.

Angela, introduce yourself.
MS. FERNANDEZ: Hello. Good evening. My name is Angela Fernandez and I am the executive director of the Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights. And I am also mayoral designee for the Civilian Compliment Review Board.

MR. PERALES: I have a brief straightforward question to both Ms. Lerner and Ms. Alexander.

You both referenced campaign contribution limits. Do you have a number in mind? Can you help us.

MS. SPEAKER: Well, I think in any case we shouldn't be looking at any campaign contribution limits that are higher than the federal limit, which is \$2,700. And I -- for the mayor, for citywide offices. And I would hope that we would have lower limits for council members.

MS. SPEAKER: I personal agree with --
MR. PERALES: You like that number?
MS. SPEAKER: Yeah.
MR. PERALES: All right. 2,700. I'll write that down.

Anyone else have a comment, question?
With that, let me thank you all.
MS. SPEAKER: Thank you.

MS. SPEAKER: Thank you so much.
MR. PERALES: The next panel, someone will be representing Borough President Adams. I think it's Stephan Ringle. From Fair Vote, Tim Hayes. It looks like Stewart Bilberg or Belberg.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Balberg.
MR. PERALES: And Christine Parker-Bay. Who is going to start?

MS. PARKER: Okay. They said I can go first, even though I'm in the middle.

Good evening everyone. And thank you for taking the time out to revise the city charter, which is really way overdue. So I'm really excited to be here.

I agree with everything that everyone said in the last panel. And I can go on and on. But my biggest question would really be about the civic engagement aspect. And let me introduce myself. I'm Christine Parker. I ran for city council, all-around community advocate. I've run a museum. Mother of 2.2 children. And very well committed to voter engagement here in Brooklyn because I feel that there's a sense of suppression around lack of knowledge. And I'm not sure you can change that. But I do believe that in terms of civic engagement, that there needs to be something around education. And if we are going to have -- continue to have such abysmal numbers in terms of voter turnout, we actually do need a community democracy officer that, to me, is not appointed by the mayor. There are a number of folks here that I know who are on the panel. And again, thank you for doing this. My concern would be that we have more civic engagement and that we do, in fact, have someone who is -- or an area or an agency around civic engagement, as well as also having that in our public school system. Which is what I'm sure you're not able to change. But I've got so many questions, so much to say in a very little time. So I'm just going to leave it there. But another thing that concerns me is that with so much mayoral influence, how objective will this body be around the changes that are really necessary not only around voting, but certainly around land-use issues? Thank you.

MR. PERALES: Thank you.
MR. HAYES: Hello. My name is Tim Hayes. I'm with an organization called Fair Vote. Thank you very much for having me today. I'll try to be very brief.

Fair Vote has been recognized as one of the leaders in electoral reform nationally for more than 25 years. And with that, I would like to encourage everyone to take a close look and consider rank-choice voting for the city of New York. Some people refer to it as instant-runoff voting. I think studies have shown that it can save the City -- instant-runoffs can save the City of New York as much as twenty million dollars over a four-year election cycle. And it has been proven around the country. Cities that have adopted it, like Minneapolis, Memphis, the State of Maine. They've shown that it makes elections more civil, kinder, nicer. Because people, if they can't be -- if candidates can't be your first choice, they reach out beyond their base because they want to be your second choice or third choice. So it brings civility, it saves money. And it -- it has more New Yorkers involved because there's no need for a second runoff election. Thank you.

MR. PERALES: Thank you.
MR. BALBERG: All right. Good evening. I'm Stuart Balberg. As a matter of disclosure, I know Una Clarke, for many years when -- from when I was on the school board. And I also recognize Mr. Scissura, who was Marty Markowitz's -- he was a school board number. And I wish I knew Mr. Perales, because he's an inspiration. I'm a republican district leader. I'm here as a member of the Republican State Committee for New York. We have 20 of us in Brooklyn. I found the position of the district leader very inspiring and very useful. For example, Letitia James called me a switch-hitter because not only do I involve myself with republicans, but I also try to influence my friends and people in my community. Which is one community. I try to influence people regardless of what party they're in. That influence in their party for the good. And that involves a lot of time going over party lines and what's now a divided populous. But that's what you do. You don't need a government to push it, to play around with it. Because every time the government -- the more things change -- like you said, the more things change, the more they stay the same. The more the government mixes in over here, the more things -they -- the more they remain, there's more --
it's like the government stifles the ability to have free and open debate. And to call this open primary is not only an oxymoron, but it's -- it's Orwellian in the structure. It's like the Help America To Vote Act, which makes it unfair because you can't use the machine ballots, which you can't cheat. New York resisted it because you resist -- because New Yorkers resist things when they're crooked. Not like we follow the crowd and they don't do it. And the No Child Left Behind Act was another one with poison pills. And then to be bipartisan, the Patriot Act also carries that same kind of a taste to it. And basically the agenda going on today is that you're allowed to speak local only if you're act global. If you can't act global, they don't let you speak local. Where does it stop? First they got rid of the neighborhood action boards. Then they got rid of the school boards. Which was the only thing that let local people have a say in the school. Then the next thing they got out of the precinct councils, community boards, and everything else. And just have a small group of people globally that run this whole thing. That's a pessimistic view on the voters. And what I wanted to say, when we had the charter -to try to do the Charter Revision Commission -not the Charter -- they tried to -- the Constitutional Convention. I opposed it. Well, every district leader that $I$ knew, democrat and republicans, opposed such a thing. And many of the legislators opposed it. And for good reason. Because the main item that would've ran through was the so-called open primary. Everything else would have been killed. And the open primary, which would have had a white spray and -- a wide spread. And Bloomberg would have ran this through everybody's -- who everybody -- I supported Bloomberg. Yeah. I supported Una Clarke and -- but everybody would have -- they would have got -- if Bloomberg would have gotten rid of another thing, either the school board, he would have gotten rid of the primary elections, district leaders, board of Elections, bipartisan Board of Elections and everything else.

MR. PERALES: Your time is up, sir.
MR. BALBERG: Yeah. Thank you.
And anyway, if you do put this thing in there, I'm going to have no choice. If you open it up, I'm going to vote for Cuomo. Because compared to that de Blasio, Cuomo is a saint. Thank you. And that's not saying much.

MR. PERALES: Thank you.
MR. RINGLE: Hey. My name is Stephan
Ringle. I'm the communications director for Borough President Eric Adams. Good evening, members of the Charter Revision Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on issues of importance to be considered before the Commission. And, of course, welcome to Brooklyn.

The borough president applauds this commission for its focus on the need to revisit and reform our campaign finance rules and laws, as well as the way we conduct our elections. I'm here on his behalf to highlight just two of the many issues that he believes this Commission should be considering.

Instant-runoff voting and the need for 100 percent publicly funded campaigns. Recently in partnership with Fair Vote and his colleagues in government, Borough President Adams called on this Commission to implement instant-runoff voting. He supports instant-runoff voting because it enhances the voice of the people, while saving taxpayers money. We have a golden opportunity to implement electoral reforms that enhance engagement in our democracy. Particularly in communities who have historically faced under-representation. The system is currently used in local elections at 11 cities across the United States. New York City must catch up to this trend as a way to enhance democracy and protect taxpayer dollars.

Another way to protect our taxpayer dollars is for this Commission to reform our current public financing system. Which is often regarded as one of the best public/private campaign finance (inaudible) in the country. While this may be true, it certainly does not mean that it has been a truly effective enough system to eliminate the barriers to entry for those interested in serving their fellow New Yorkers in elected office. In his 1907 State of the Union address, President Theodore Roosevelt called for a federal public financing system. In one paragraph he touched on the role of corporations in elections, the presence of corruption, limits on contributions, the time politicians must spend soliciting money, and the role that public financing could have in helping to alleviate those challenges. It took over 60 years for a federal public financing regime to be put into place. And that system is all but useless today because 100 million dollars is not enough to run a viable presidential campaign in the era of citizens united. New York City's public financing system still injects too much private money into our politics and shuts out the voices of those who have the least among us. Citywide candidates are much less likely to go door to door in East New York, one of the poorest census tracts in the United States, looking for donations and connecting with residents than they are to be in five-star restaurants on the Upper East Side. Imagine if residents at Gowanus Houses had as equal an opportunity to bend the ear of candidates as those living in Gramercy Park. Do we really think NYCHA would still have a heating crisis? This charter revision must take a fresh look at our public financing system and see where we can learn from other cities that either have fully taken out or severely limited the role of private donations in public fundraising. For example, in November 2015 voters in Seattle, Washington passed the citizens
led initiative known as Honest Election Seattle. Which enacted several campaign finance reform that changed the ways campaigns are typically financed for Seattle municipal candidates. In Arizona, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, and Minnesota full public funding systems attempt to remove money from the system as determining defend factor in elections for governor, lieutenant governor, and state legislative offices. I have a full testimony to this effect on behalf of the borough president that I urge the Commission to consider on his behalf. MR. PERALES: Thank you. Thank you very much. Don't leave. Don't leave. Again, I will play the devil's advocate, because we often hear comments about public financing and whether or not we can have a totally financed election. My question would be, do you mean anybody could raise their hand and say, I want to run for mayor, and the taxpayers would pay for the campaign?

MR. RINGLE: One of the proposals that the borough president is particular fond of is the second one that I had just briefly mentioned, the full public funding system. It does require a candidate for office, whether state or local, to collect a certain number of small donations. After requiring a minimum of this -- and again, this is utilized in states such Arizona, Connecticut, Hawaii --

MR. PERALES: No one has 100 percent public financing.

MR. RINGLE: It gets us closer to that goal. And I think with the existing -- as the representative from Common Cause had said, there are currently limitations on the federal system that prevent us from getting all of the way there. But there are systems that we can put in place that get us closer to that 100 percent and get us closer to that goal of getting candidates in communities where voters that have typically not had a voice due to fundraising challenges, can have a hand.

MR. PERALES: Who else has got a question?
MS. CLARKE: I just wanted to make a comment. One of the witnesses talked about the mayor appointing -- nobody ever considered me a rubber stamp for anything. And I think that each of us here as commissioners who have come not only as volunteers, but we've come because we
have the interest of our city at heart. And so I just want -- I just want the witnesses to know that, although we are appointed by the mayor, each of us is an independent agent, if you want to say more than that. Those who know me in this room as an elected official, they know that nobody can buy me. I came poor, I stay poor, and I'm proud.

MR. PERALES: Thank you.
MS. PARKER: Well, I didn't mean it in that way. What I was -- what I was saying is that -because I know -- and you've done amazing work in the community -- is that you also sit on the commission where there is going to be an overview of the electoral process. You also have a daughter who's running in a congressional race and that would -- in terms of conflict of interest, I would look at that. I know that you are your own person. But I also do know that you are a proud mother and an avid supporter of someone who is running for office.

MR. BRAGG: So If you don't mind, I will just jump in.

I was actually -- Commission Clarke has taken a lot of my thunder because that's what I wanted to speak to. Is that, we are a volunteer commission. And every one of these commissioners, these honorable commissioners, are here to serve the interest of the residents of these neighborhoods and communities in this great city. That's who influence us and how we move the charge of this Commission, is what the residents of this great city needs to happen to have government -- better government interaction, better interaction with the bureaucracy of this city and to make this city more inclusive city for everyone. So that's what influences us. Not any particular political entity or person. MR. BRAGG: And then, $I$ wanted to ask you a question. I was a little confused. What is a .2 child? MS. PARKER: 2.2. MR. BRAGG: I just didn't know what that was. Thank you.

MS. PARKER: Neither one of my children really believe that they're just one individual. MR. BRAGG: Okay. All right. Thank you. Thank you.

MS. PARKER: Thank you.
MR. PERALES: Let me thank the panel. Thank you very much.

MR. RINGLE: Thank you.
MR. PERALES: We will extend the courtesy to an elected official. We have been joined by Councilman Brad Lander.

I'd like him to come forward and present testimony.

MR. LANDER: Thank you. And I have copies of the written testimony, so $I$ can give it if you don't mind. Thank you.

MR. PERALES: But I will keep you to three minutes.

MR. LANDER: Chair Perales, thank you. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify. It's wonderful to see such a good turnout here. And thanks very much to all the members of this Commission for your service. And I have testimony that is longer than three minutes, so $I$ will not read it. But you will each -- you will each get a copy.

First I want to thank you for your service. Obviously, this is a really critical moment. There are a lot of reasons to be anxious about our democracy. In Washington DC, it's at risk from corruption at the very highest levels. In Albany, the LLC loophole and a range of other things give voters just a challenge, feeling confident their government works for them. And even here in New York City, we have some real challenges when only 15 percent of people came out to vote in the primary election that decided who the elected officials would be that would govern. So you've got some real big challenges. And I'm glad you're listening and I hope you take some bold efforts to really do something significant about them. There are some real signs of encouragement, as well.

I have never seen more young people engaged in our democracy. I was out in Washington Square Park with thousands of them recently. And at their walkouts, on issues from gun control, to police reform, to school integration. They are engaged deeply, asking to be more involved in shaping what happens in our city. And this is a really good moment to confront those challenges and try to build on that set of opportunities.

I'll also note that just a couple of weeks ago -- we haven't announced the total numbers yet, but tens of thousands of people came out to vote in participatory budgeting. In my district they voted to fund new iPads for kids with autism, and self-defense classes for Muslim women, and a new media lab in a women's shelter, and a study of endangered bats in Prospect Park. So people are -- they want to be engaged. They want to have a hand in shaping the real critical decisions of our time. And when we do engage them, it's possible, even at this moment of such serious tribalism and division, for people to show up with their best selves, work together across lines of difference, and try to solve problems together and really improve this common trust we have in this city. So it's an important opportunity.

I'm going to just speak briefly about three issues. But I think you're hearing about a whole range, and I'm looking forward to seeing what you -- what you come up with.

The first $I$ know you've heard a lot about. And that is indeed getting big money even further out of our politics. Our campaign finance system is strong, but it is not strong enough. \$5,100 contributions get noticed more. Surprise. I think everybody knows it. And so reducing that contribution limit -- I don't know. Cut it in half. At least down below the federal limit. It will help further push out moneyed interests folks who are more likely to show up wanting something. Obviously, if you do that, you have to both increase and extend public matching funds. And I think both are important. And I want to make a case for this. You know, whether that's going to a match of ten to one on 175, or going back to matching up to 250 . You're going to have to find some formula. Eight to one, ten to one on one of those. But extending is actually even more important. And I want to talk about that for just one minute.

Right now a candidate can only receive up to 55 percent of the total of their spending limit in public matching funds. So when you've done the raising of small dollar contributions that trigger that 55 percent, after that your incentives are to raise in the largest amounts you can. That's just the reality. Elected officials are rational, they're going to take the incentives. And so when you reach the limit of your public matching funds, your incentive is to go raise in larger dollar amounts. You could change that. If you just made it possible for people to keep getting matching funds up to their spending limit, then every time they have to decide what additional contribution to go seek, instead of thinking it'd be easier for me to go get it at 5,100 , or 2,950 , or 2,750 , or 2,500 , wherever you leave it, they could think, I could get that next contribution matched and I could go seek to do a party of people that could give me 25 or 50 or a hundred dollars. There's no reason to have an arbitrary limit. And wherever you leave it, it means when you get to the end of it, people are still going to have the incentive to raise big dollar.

Another possible advantage of extending the match so that you could continue to receive it up to your spending limit is that, in those cases where the spending limit gets increased because a candidate is facing a wealthy independent spender or someone who isn't participating in the system, or a big independent expenditure against them and their limit gets increased, it might be that allowing them to keep receiving matching funds, if you could always just receive them up to the applicable -- applicable campaign finance limit, would survive a challenge to the Arizona Federal Elections case and strengthen our city by enabling candidates to participate in matching funds, even when they're competing against a wealthy outside spender. I don't want to dig too down into the legal wormholes. You've got some experts in your Commission. But both increasing and extending the match could really make a big difference in getting big money out of politics if you also decrease the contribution limit. So I think that's a valuable thing to do. I know you've heard a lot about instant-runoff voting, so I'm not going to go too much into it. I have some more information in my testimony. But it really does just seem like a win-win-win. We save money, we stop having these runoffs, which are the lowest turnout elections, two weeks later. They're difficult to administer. We get candidates who would have incentives to campaign in every community and not write off communities where they think one candidate is likely to get most of the votes. It would increase participation. It would save money. All the evidence says people become able to do it quite quickly. We spoke to some folks in Minneapolis, where they shifted to instant-runoff for --

MR. PERALES: Who is "we?"
MR. LANDER: My office. My policy director and some folks that we're working with.

And they said that the transition was smooth. We have some data in here about how well -- you know, very high percentages of people may be able to cite this statistic because I found it fairly significant. You know, in the first election after they -- they implemented instant-runoff voting, a 31 percent increase in voter turnout. 92 percent of voters found instant-runoff voting easy to use, including 86 percent of voters 65 and older. 93 percent of voters felt candidates spent more time on issues than criticizing opponents. We have the same voting technology, the same machines as they have in Minneapolis. So the system they have there, the software already exists to implement it here. There's plenty of time. But especially if you put it on the ballot this year. If we miss this opportunity, we're going to be later in the election cycle and the odds of getting it ready by 2021 are slimmer. I'd urge you -- so I should have mentioned. I'm the sponsor of the bill in the City Council to bring rank choice voting or instant-runoff voting to New York City. But it requires a referendum. And your ballot proposals would bump anything else that would go on the ballot this year. So the only way it gets on the ballot early in the cycle is if you guys put it there. So I promise not to move my legislation if you guys will take it seriously, hold a drill-down session, a meeting of experts where you could really take a good hard look at it, and consider developing a ballot proposal for the election in November.

The final issue that I want to talk about goes a little bit bigger. Because while you're looking at campaign finance and elections, I also think there's so many other forms of civic participation and we want to do more to lift them up. You've got some folks who have great expertise on your panel in civic participation of young people, of workers, of a whole range of folks. We've -- I've proposed the creation of a New York City Office of Civic Engagement that would build from NYC Votes and the mayor's idea of a chief democracy officer. But really reach out in much bigger and broader ways to offer new forms of service. Let's give many more people the opportunity for one year of a position in civic engagement, where they could get ready to go to school and reach out. Let's do a lot more to kind of train and develop community board members and really lift them up. Let's expand participatory budgeting. I support the proposals that are to be made to take some chunk of dollars and make that happen. It's incredible when you see people start to develop proposals themselves, come up with ideas, reach out to their neighbors. We could put all of that together in an independent nonpartisan commission, modeled on the campaign finance Board, or the Voter Assistance Commission that would represent a diverse set of stakeholders. So it wouldn't just be any individual elected official's point of view, but really include a broader set of outside stakeholders, as well. Civic engagement isn't just a thing of government. It's out in our communities, in our neighborhoods, in our nonprofit organizations, our youth organizations, our unions. We could use this moment to really lift up and elevate that work in a way that builds on what has been suggested so far, but could truly empower people to engage in shaping their communities. Which is really what democracy is supposed to be about, so.

MR. PERALES: Thank you very, very much.
MR. LANDER: Thank you very much.
MR. PERALES: I'm hoping that you've got enough meat in what you're distributing about the New York City Office of Civic Engagement so it will help as we think about that issue. So I'm asking your help, if you've got real specifics that we might include in our referendum, it will be very, very helpful.

MR. LANDER: That's great.
So in addition to my testimony, we have a little handout on the New York City Office of Civic Engagement.

MR. PERALES: I think that's -- we have it.
MR. LANDER: And we did one meeting with about 25 stakeholders from different organizations throughout the City on this -- this idea a few months ago. And $I$ know if that's another area you would like to -- to drill down and explore furtherer, that there's some real -the experts in this work are the ones toiling away in our neighborhoods and our communities and our workplaces. And they have a lot of great ideas for what that would look like.

MR. PERALES: I agree.
Now, let me ask you something. I'll use the prerogative of the Chair to ask you a question of which you had no notice, but it's of interest to us.

We've heard people talk about the creation of an independent redistricting commission. The current system is not as independent as it might be.

As a member of the council, as an elected official, what do you think about these people over which you would have absolutely no control drawing the lines in your district?

MR. LANDER: Well, if you're asking me as an individual, would I like to draw the lines of my own direct? Of course. Any elected official would love to. If you're asking me is it good for democracy when elected officials get to draw their own districts? Of course it's not a good idea. So I, you know -- there's the challenges that you're familiar with with figuring out who appoints the independent commission, how the process works. But yes, broadly speaking, at the state level and the city level, $I$ think it is better to have a truly independent body draw the lines as objectively as possible and not place it in the hand of the people who represent those districts.

MR. PERALES: So you would welcome our looking into a way of creating an independent commission?

MR. LANDER: I think it would be the right thing to do.

MR. PERALES: I would like to ask the other commissioners if they've got their questions.

MS. WEISER: This is just a follow-up question on the Office of Civic Engagement, which might be in the testimony which I just received, so I haven't read.

I couldn't tell if you were recommending that it be merged with the Voter Assistance Advisory Commission and sort of that function be contained in one single entity, or whether there be two different bodies with slightly different but maybe overlapping missions, so.

MR. LANDER: I think it would be a good idea to merge it with the Voter Assistance Advisory Commission. Whether it makes sense to leave it under the CFB I think a harder question. The CFB Board, they have a very particular regulatory job to do and they take it very seriously. This goal of sort of sparking participation, it's related. So I think there's some -- you know, some questions to ask here, I guess. I think probably voter engagement and broader forms of civic participation do make sense to link together.

MS. WEISER: Thank you. That answers my question.

MR. SCISSURA: Hello, Councilman. How are you?

So I have a quick question.
Obviously, the idea of the instant-runoff is something that intrigues me a lot. As someone who has worked on runoff campaigns, I know how almost impossible it is. But we've also heard testimony from some other people at various hearings about, you know, we'll call it nonpartisan elections. They call it other things now, but that's at its core what it is.

If -- as we start looking at expert
testimony, how do you feel about combining the two, of a two-tier and an instant-runoff all as one? I'm just curious to get your thoughts on that.

MR. LANDER: So I continue to support having a party primary and then a general election. I think the parties continue to serve a valuable function in communicating to voters that there's, you know, a abroad set of shared values, that it's a good function for getting people to be able to move and think about issues in a way, as opposed to just individual candidates. I think when you go down to individual candidates, it's much harder for voters to like really understand, you know, what people's positions are, who they are. Obviously, individuals look to distinguish themselves with in-party primaries. But I think they really serve a valuable role. And I think -- I certainly understand why people think, oh, the parties this or that. But I think they serve a valuable function. Not just in defining for voters who candidates are, but creating a system through which people try to build a shared sense of politics. A little more like a team than -- I guess I prefer team sports to individual sports as maybe one way to think about is. So I think here the proposal would be -- and I guess in the legislation that I propose, you do instant-runoff voting in the primaries for the three city-wide offices, where you have to get that 40 percent so you wouldn't to have the runoffs. That's where you save -- save money. I would propose doing them also in the special elections that we have for council or other offices. Those are nonpartisan already. And I would leave them that way. But there's only one cycle. And in those elections, you really have a risk that someone could win, you know, if you've got seven, eight, nine candidates with just like 17, 18 percent of the vote. And instant-runoff makes it that you'd know you had someone who really had majoritarian support.

MS. CLARKE: I did want to ask a question about the participatory budget and how would that work if we were to consider it as a broad stroke. How would it work?

MR. LANDER: It's a great question. I think though -- so I saw some folks in the audience from the Participatory Budgeting Project who have done this all around the country. And indeed, participatory budgeting exists all around the world. The way we do it right now, it's just in the hands of an individual city council member. And if they wish to take a piece of the capital money -- or in my district we even put a little piece of expense funding up. But in places where it's citywide, a modest percentage of the city's capital budget is set aside. You know, it's -we've got a big capital budget. It even could be a small percentage. And then you -- you have to choose. You could do it still organized by council district, or by community board, or by borough. And people get to participate to suggest project ideas. And then you have an election. Then it's for everyone in the city to be able to participate on which of the projects that they would like to see their capital dollars go for. Now, you would not want to do this with all the money because there are plenty of kinds of infrastructure, like keeping our water supply clean that -- that wouldn't get chosen. But you'd be amazed when you open this idea up what kinds of creativity -- and I've seen a real balance between people saying very practical projects. The winning projects in my district the first two years were decrepit school bathrooms. Which was not especially creative, but people were like, "These bathrooms. We should have already fixed them up." And participatory budgeting served as like a ringing of a bell to say, this is an issue that's not getting enough attention from our government and we ought to do something about it. In year three, folks said, "We're tired of funding school bathrooms." And we organized a big campaign that got the Department of Education to put a hundred million dollars into fixing up decrepit school bathrooms all around the city. But sometimes people do really creative projects. Like if you get a chance to check out the Park Slope library children's reading garden, it was a piece of grass most people never even noticed was there. But because the Library Friends Group felt empowered to propose an idea, they created this magnificent new public space that only cost in that case about 250,000 dollars. It was a fairly modest project by capital standards. And it's full of kids, you know, reading and playing every day. So just that little bit of capital dollars spread citywide, with an opportunity for people to engage, it's so tangible. Democracy sometimes is about these candidates or values. Like "what's a project in my neighborhood that's needed" is a great way for people to get
involved. And because you just see directly, like the projects that got the most votes get the funding, I find it really helps restore people's faith in a democratic practice because of how -how concrete it is.

MS. CLARKE: Thank you. Thank you.
MR. PERALES: We got a question.
MS. SEECHARRAN: So -- good evening. Thank you for your testimony.

So just to be clear, are you suggesting that all council members be required -- or are you suggesting that the amount that council members are given --

MR. LANDER: I think what we could do as a matter of, you know, a ballot proposal would be to do it citywide, as a citywide function that wouldn't necessarily run through the council members. You might still use council districts as the geography, although you could also use community boards, and some projects might be borough wide. But if we took a little percent of the capital budget -- I haven't done the math, so I don't know what -- you know, what it would be. But if you took -- if we said we're going to take a little percentage of our capital budget and run
a participatory budgeting, I think then you'd want it run by the -- by the executive probably, by the city government. I mean, I'd love to have the council participate in some way. But if you want to run it evenly across the entire city, you'd pick a geography and you'd let people work in that geography to come up with -- with ballot proposals. So this is another way where we'd be really happy to drill down and go into deeper. If you're serious about the possibility of a ballot proposal here, we could certainly bring some -- some of our experience. We're near -- we just finished year seven. So we've -- we've gone quite a few rounds. And there's some real expertise in the city.

MR. PERALES: Mr. Councilman, I want to thank you for taking the time.

MR. LANDER: I thank you for giving me this much time. And I -- I really -- this is -- I mean, I guess you probably -- you guys probably did introductions. Obviously, we've got a wonderful turnout of people who cared enough about their democracy to come out. I have the good fortune of knowing a lot of these volunteer Charter Review Commission commissioners. And it
really is like an all-star set of people who care about strengthening our democracy and our participation. So I really, Mr. Chair and to the whole Commission, want to appreciate the work that you guys do.

MR. PERALES: Thank you.
The next panel, Juan Restrepo, Hector Robertson, Fred Baptiste, and Brian Solomon Huertas.

Can I have your -- I'm just trying to figure out who is not here.

What's that?
AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hector Robinson. MR. PERALES: He's not here. All right. Okay.

Whenever one of you is ready to start.
MR. RESTREPO: I was called first, so I'll go first. Good evening, Commissioners, and thank you for the inflection on my name. Thank you for hosting me and everyone else speaking passionately tonight. My name is Juan Restrepo. I am a New York City native, born and raised in Astoria, Queens. I come to you today to discuss implementing term limits for community board members in our city charter and why this is important to the democratic health of our neighborhoods.

I work as a community organizer for Transportation Alternatives. We are a New York City based nonprofit organization. But I am representing just myself in my experiences. My work is exclusive to the borough of Queens and I organize street safety advocates to make their streets safer. Through my work, I attend community board meetings regularly. Many of the projects I work on go through a community board system at some stage or another. Usually when they are presented by the Department of Transportation for suggestions, or approval, or rejection from the board. Community boards are an improvement to the times of Robert Moses because they have diversified policy conversations --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Boo.
MR. RESTREPO: You clapped before. Let me finish. Let me finish.
-- and community's bigger role in approving city policy. But there is a darker side to the system. Community boards are their own political entity. Without term limits, their ability to represent constituents goes down.

Community board reform. Community board members are some of the most civically engaged neighbors and deserve a lot of respect for the time they give their community. But there have been clear examples in the history of the system where members overstayed their position as a representative of the community. Here's an example. I am all too familiar of Ann Pfoser Darby served on Queens Community Board 4 for 30 years. In that time, she was a part of a generational shift that saw Corona shift from being primarily white to 90 percent Latino and Asian. As the neighborhood changed, membership on the community board continues to not reflect those demographics. And as a member of community board, Pfoser's transportation committee resisted safety improvements to 111th Street, which is adjacent to Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. And was only one of three members on this subcommittee. Her stance on the proposal, as quoted by the New York Times, was -- and this relates to the bike lanes that were part of the proposal. "The bike lanes in the proposal are made specifically for the people who come into the country illegally." She also -- she also surmised in that article that "discussions about the safety proposal were not necessary because those who came into the country illegally would be removed by ICE and nobody would use the lanes afterwards."

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Boo.
AUDIENCE MEMBER: KKK go away.
MR. RESTREPO: These comments from Ann Pfoser Darby did not represent her community. But they were the expressed opinion of a member of that community board. The distinction is important because our city makes many of its policy decisions off the recommendations of a community board. And is only one of many long-standing board members in our system who has represented their board for too long and lost grasp of what the community needs. Community board term limits would provide equity and fairness of representation at the neighborhood level. Many community boards at this moment are represented by white older home and car owning residents, both at the leadership and membership level. So --

MR. PERALES: You've run out of time, Mr. Restrepo.

MR. RESTREPO: -- when -- there are a few exceptions. When this happens, we're losing the perspectives and needs of our most vulnerable residents in the policy-making process, other races, people rent and transit riders. Without term limits, there is no means for debt -- for leadership and membership to naturally turn over. A healthy democratic process needs that.

MR. PERALES: Thank you very much.
MR. RESTREPO: Thank you.
MR. HUERTAS: Hello, Commissioners. My name is Brian Solomon Huertas. I grew up in Flushing, Queens, but I've been a Brooklyn resident for about four or five years now. I have a new young daughter that is growing up in the neighborhood. I'm going to say things that might be a little bit radical. Just bear with me.

Making the city more democratic, a way to do that is nonpartisan municipal elections. Voting rights are civil rights. And keeping a large amount of voters from meaningfully participating is infringing on their civil rights. As an independent, my vote doesn't mean much in New York City. I'm excluded from voting in
primaries, even though they're paid for with my public tax dollars. Well, a portion is mine. Those primaries, especially the democratic party primary, are the decision-making elections in this city. And yet turnout has been alarmingly low and it's getting worse, as you know. Keeping more than a million voters out of elections they are paying for leaves them with no meaningful way to exercise the levers of influence that elected officials respond to. When only ten percent of voters are effectively picking our elected officials, the elected officials only have to talk to ten percent of the voters. So I've been a political activist and organizer since I was 19. I vote every year and have worked on the streets to engage New Yorkers in conversation around issues of civic participation. I'm an idealist, someone who believes we should never stop striving for a more perfect union. And I'm actually optimistic that we can do that through intelligent public policy and rigorous grassroots organizing. The science writer, Malcolm Gladwell, said it takes 10,000 hours to become an expert in something. And I can tell you, through over ten years of conversation on the streets
with New Yorkers, that the number one barrier to their participating is that they know most of the time their vote doesn't matter in getting a candidate elected. And once their elected officials are in office, they have almost no incentive to be responsive to the constitute -to their constituents. Unless they're that ten percent of the voters that voted in the primary. So we can do something about this. We can expand the franchise so that all voters vote in primaries for candidates they believe in, regardless of whatever party they're in. The top two vote-getters square off in the general election. Nonpartisan elections incentivizes coalition building, that allows people of color, independence and insurgent candidates a chance to be competitive. And it forces candidates to get out and actually talk to more of their voters if they want to make it to November. And it makes my vote, and the votes of millions of independents, finally matter in this city. The public -- the political parties are private organizations. If they've been given this mandate of running our election process, having nonpartisan municipal elections takes that away
from them, where a party endorsement is no guarantee that a candidate will be on the November ballot. They have to earn it by going out and talking to the voters.

MR. PERALES: You have run out of time.
MR. HUERTAS: I ask the Commission to strongly consider this reform.

MR. PERALES: Thank you. Thank you very much.

MR. BAPTISTE: Good evening, Commissioners. My name is Fred Baptiste. I'm a 20-year resident of this neighborhood. Lifelong Brooklynite, with 3.3 kids because they, too, also think they are more than one. I am very heartened -- and I think my remarks probably will be a little bit shorter because I think a lot of people have said, probably better than I would have, in terms of this is a real opportunity to strengthen our democracy, to strengthen our participation. Today what I would like to speak to is a very, very, I guess, obvious way of doing that is in terms of strengthening the role of the community boards. I think that what we need to do is we need to empower community boards to be more than just advisory. I think we need to encourage participation in community boards. I think there are a number of proposals that could be done in terms of that. But I think this charter revision represents an opportunity to do exactly that. I think we need to make sure that community boards move from the position of being rubber stamps or voices crying out in the distance for change, to an opportunity where people can come and directly affect their neighborhoods, their blocks, their communities, their schools, participatory budgeting, and any other number of items that are there, as well. I think we see that our process works when it's -- people have an opportunity to take ownership, to be directly invested in it, to actually make changes happen in their own neighborhoods and communities. And I strongly recommend that this commission recommend -- that we review the charter to do so and strengthen community boards and encourage participation. Thank you.

MR. PERALES: Thank you very much.
MR. SCISSURA: Can I?
MR. PERALES: Yes.
MR. SCISSURA: Good evening. Thank you. So this is directed to you about community board
term limits. So I served on a community board for a little over a decade, Community Board 11 in Brooklyn. And then, when I was chief of staff to the borough president, oversaw the appointment process. And, you know, I'm not going to share my opinion on term limits. But $I$ am going to say that -- and I know there are many members of community boards in the room who are also leaders in their community boards. I can tell you, as someone who oversaw the appointment process, it is not as easy as you think to get people that want to serve on community boards. And there are vacancies on various community boards because it is difficult. And then it's not only difficult to get them there, it's then difficult to get people to come to meetings, to have quorums. So while I get what you're saying, and as someone who actually believes in term limits in general for elected officials, I understand what you're saying. But there does have to be a little thought process that goes into it because it's much more challenging than it seems.

MR. RESTREPO: Can I respond to that?
MR. SCISSURA: Yeah.
MR. RESTREPO: It's been -- thank you. It's been from my experience that a lot of people discover community boards. Oftentimes it works under the periphery of what we would see as being part of the city government. You kind of have to discover, oh, parks, transportation, zoning. Oh, the community board handles that. I would think it's just like the big elected guy. And when people go to community board meetings, I think a lot of times they come with the intention of being a bigger part of their community. And oftentimes are disappointed when they see the community is represented by a group of stakeholders who aren't what they would have expected as being the community. It -- the way a community board looks oftentimes is not even close to representative of what the community is. Which is why council member Richie Torres has proposed legislation to make it known, the statistics of what demographics, what -- what salary ranges, etc, etc, the members of the community board have. When we don't have that information, the information's not flowing freely and you just go to this meeting and you are -and you see what the community board is, oftentimes that's what keeps people away from wanting to be part of that process.

MR. PERALES: All right. I mean --
MR. RESTREPO: So --
MR. PERALES: We have another question.
MS. WEISER: My one question -- and this might be for Mr. Baptiste, is that right? You recommend strengthening the role of community boards. I understand your recommendation. But I wanted to know, for you, what concrete recommendations do you have for strengthening? Or is it just more of a request that the -- the commission will get other recommendations?

MR. BAPTISTE: Absolutely, Commissioner. I think one idea that I had just written down was with regards to even the ULURP process. I think that with regards to the community, especially when it comes to zoning, the people who live in the neighborhood are the experts. But I think sometimes some of the frustration that happens in the process, and it speaks to some of the points that were raised before, where if you think it's going to be an advisory process, where no matter how hard I work, no matter how much I give you, how much knowledge I transfer, at the end of the day, thank you very much, and it's move on to the next step. I think that's part of what dissuades people from doing that. However -- and I think that, really, there's some real things and real concrete items that come out of these meetings. I know from the community board, which I am one -- I'm sorry I didn't disclose that before. But I'm also on a community board. And I think that I've seen some really talented people, and we've tapped into some real great resources in the community that I think often get overlooked. And I think we should really be making that the first step, in terms of tapping into those resources, because they live there, too, and they have that vested interest. And you know what? If it's something where it's like no, this is a concrete discussion, where you actually have the power to negotiate with those people who are going to be doing things, I think it changes the entire dynamic. So definitely the ULURP committee. Absolutely, I think empowering community boards may be an option with participatory budgeting. Where that goes through there, as well. It brings people into the process. And I think when you bring people in and they see they can make a change, it gets infectious and you can do a lot of other things, as well.

MR. PERALES: Commissioner Fernandez.
MS. FERNANDEZ: Thank you. This is a question around the nonpartisan voting, which -which I don't know if maybe the staff that is working with the commission would have the answer, and maybe yourself also may have the answer.

When did it start where, if you are not registered with the democratic party or the republican you cannot vote in primary elections? Do you know where -- what the genesis of that is? MR. HUERTAS: Well, the rules are different throughout the country. Some -MS. FERNANDEZ: I meant for here, for New York City.

MR. HUERTAS: I'm uncertain as to the answer for that. But $I$ do know that it keeps a large amount of voters from participating. My conversation with New York City voters, a lot of them said the only reason they are democrats at all is to vote in the democratic party primary. They don't identify with the party. They don't really -- they don't vote straight down the party
line in November. A lot of them vote for minor party candidates. But they know -- so the only meaningful election for, in practical terms, is the democratic party primary. So that's where they go to participate. If you want to make a more principled stand, like I do, you have to give that up.

MS. FERNANDEZ: Right.
MR. HUERTAS: And it's a shame.
MS. FERNANDEZ: Thank you. I just got a nod from one of the staff. That's something that we can look into, which I think will help inform that part of conversation. So thank you. MR. PERALES: Thank you very much. And thank the panel. The next panel of Waldobar Stewart, Stephan Yearwood or Tearwood, Lutchi Gayot, Susan Chung. Nice to see you, Senator. Who will start? MR. YEARWOOD: Good evening, Commission Chair Perales and Commission members. My name is Stephen Yearwood. I am a member of SEIU 32BJ. I've been a member for over 20 years. And I'm also an MPO, that's member political organizer, and very active in the union in the political arena. You know, thank you for holding tonight's hearing. On behalf of myself and my fellow members of SEIU 32BJ, we applaud your efforts to ensure the voices of all New Yorkers are heard and to strengthen our city's democracy. Our union is 163,000 members strong. Including 85,000 members here in New York City. We are security officers, commercial cleaners, airport workers, and residential building workers, like myself. We hail from 60 countries and speak dozens of language -- languages. But we are proudly united in our fight to ensure all people, regardless of color of the skin, their immigration status, or their income, can live safe and healthy lives with dignity and respect. As a member of -- the leader of $32 \mathrm{BJ}, \mathrm{I}$ take every opportunity to forward -- further my understanding of the democratic process and the policies that can make a difference to working families. I am passionate about talking to my union brothers and sisters about what's at stake when we vote and how we can win progress by standing together. Which we really work hard together to make some changes in this state. Through the cut -- the union, members understand what they have in common and have a vehicle for civic engagement that they might not otherwise have access to. In order to get the best results of working -- for working families, it is important that we're heard at every level of government. Unfortunately, New York City's campaign finance laws makes it harder for union members to communicate with one another about candidates in a city election to champion their cause. Unlike federal law, the expense of organizing members to canvass and talk to their fellow members is counted as a campaign contribution if the candidate has been briefed by the union and is present to talk to members beforehand. This is a shame. The law discourages union from engaging members face to face on political issues, and instead incentivizes them to contribute directly to candidates or buy media ads. By restricting -restricting our abilities to hear from a candidate and to talk to one another about why we support them, I believe we are reducing one of the most effective means of engaging working people in the political process. And I urge the Commission to revise this part of the law so that the labor members organization can communicate freely with the members, even if the communication are coordinated with candidates.

MR. PERALES: Thank you very much.
MR. GAYOT: Good evening, Panel. How are you today. My name is Lutchi Gayot. And I am a native of this district. My family's been in this district for 50-plus years. And I am a congressional candidate. I'm running as a republican in this district and I am really here just to tell you about my story. I'm a small business owner, and I decided to run for congress this year. And in running for Congress I came to realize how complicated the actual process to become a candidate is. And I really have an issue with how, in a sense, all of us are locked out of the process by these regulations and these rules. And I'll tell you my story. I am a candidate, but I had to first go through a complicated petition process, where they had all these pitfalls set up for you in order to strip you up. The next, I have to deal with a gerrymandered district that's gerrymandered down to a science. And what I mean by that is when you look at the EDs, the lines are actually drawn right around certain precincts if you didn't like the voters that happen to live in that precinct. Next, I'm sitting in front of a board that has my opponent's mother as one of the members. Which, to me, seems like it is a conflict of interest. MR. PERALES: Let me just -- because this was raised before. We have nothing to do with federal elections. MR. GAYOT: Oh. MR. PERALES: This is the City Charter we're talking about.

MR. GAYOT: No. Fully understood. But these -- these issues still apply. These issues still apply and I'd like to be able to voice -MR. PERALES: Sure. Go ahead. MR. GAYOT: -- what I wanted to say. Thank you. And Una, I have a lot of respect for you. My parents voted for you many of times. It's just simple the process and the way that the rules are set. They're set for the people who are empowered to stay empowered. And this is really why I'm here and why I'm trying to say what I am trying to say here.

And lastly, a lot of people came up here and had a lot to say about the process. And some of
it -- a lot of it, I would agree with. And I really hope that you really take a look at the conflict of interest. And when it comes to the voting for this actual process -- and Una, I would ask, if it's possible, for you to abstain from voting because you have a daughter that is -- that is in office currently. So that is, in a sense, a conflict of interest.

MR. PERALES: Let me just explain this. The point that I'm making, if, for example, we're dealing with -- the last panel talked about community boards and their role. It's got nothing to do with her, or her daughter, or anything else. So that's the reason I tried to make the point that this is nothing to do with your election --

MR. GAYOT: It -- it doesn't. But this
board is in charge of the process and --
MR. PERALES: What process? I'm sorry. And I didn't mean to interrupt you. I'm just trying to clarify it so that everyone will understand. MS. CLARKE: Mr. Chair.

I am the product of a charter revision. In 1989, we advocated to make sure that we could deepen the democracy so that immigrants, especially black immigrants from the Caribbean, would be able to find themselves in a position where somebody could run. There were five people who wanted to run. And at the last minute, they said, "We're not going to run." And Dr. Waldobar Stewart, who is sitting next to you, who did the research at Medgar Evers College, they all stepped out and said, "Una, since you're so smart, why don't you run?" I run and I won by 38 votes. So don't think anything was handed to me. Nothing was handed to me. And my daughter being in congress, just said that we deepen the democracy. You never ask the Kennedys why their sons, daughter and grandchildren can run for office and mine can't.

MR. GAYOT: That's not the point that I'm trying to make. The point -- the point that I'm trying to make is that we have a system that's designed and built to keep one side in power. And the voice of the people aren't heard. That's -- that's the point that I'm trying to make.

MR. PERALES: It's a point well taken.
Who speaks next?
MS. CHUNG: My name is Sue Ann Chung --

MR. SCISSURA: Just move the mike closer. MS. VOICE: Yes, please. Thank you.

MS. CHUNG: My name is Sue Ann Chung. And I belong to a group -- a citizen called Concerned Citizens For Community-Based Planning. We're based in Prospect Lefferts Gardens, which is close to this neighborhood. And we work on land-use issues, including historic preservation and zoning. And I'd like to suggest that the Commission think about changing the system by which landmarks commissioners are appointed. Currently all 11 are appointed by the mayor. Seven of them need to have a certain professional background, which is -- I agree with. But I'd like to suggest that the remaining four be popular -- be chosen by popular election. I am lucky enough to live in a historic district. I imagine that some of the commissioners are, as well. And before that, $I$ lived in a landmarked and rent stabilized apartment building in Manhattan for several years. So I'm sure that you all know that preservation isn't just about old buildings and dead architects. It's much more than that. It's about preserving communities. And if that's the case, then I think that the landmarks process and the Landmarks Commission, since it plays such an important role in deciding what gets preserved, needs to reflect the great diversity of our city. And I have every confidence that the electoral process is the best way to do that. MR. PERALES: Thank you. Don't leave. We may have questions. Senator?

MR. SPEAKER: I have a few things that brother me. But in five minutes, I can't cover all --

MR. PERALES: You're only getting three minutes, so you really --

MR. SPEAKER: Okay. Okay. I'll start with the most important one. The idea of allowing independent persons who have not had the -- the chutzpa to organize their own political organization to interfere with someone else who organized their own political party and sought their own voters, educated their own voters, and worked towards their community is dangerous.

It means -- and that at some point, given the new electronic age, what was done to the United States by Russia could happen electronically through use of the independent voter to overcome parties that the people do not like. And I am saying this, having organized my own political party. It's a lot of work. But I did. And that's how I got my start in politics. And, incidentally, I recruited independent voters to vote for my political party.

Item number two -- stop me when you feel like. Item number two, the planning boards need to be energized. The planning boards are supposed to be part of the political process. And right now, they are not. It doesn't mean that the planning boards should be in the business of running for office. But they should be creating what we call master plans for land use in their planning board district.

If you understand the concept of a master plan, it doesn't allow you for corruption because in that kind of process, the entire planning board community is involved in the decision-making process. And if the local people get accustomed to making meaningful decisions in the planning board, they will also decide, "You know something. I need to either join the democratic party, or the republican party, or the conservative party, or start my own party." MR. PERALES: You did suggest that I stop you when your time had run out.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes.
MR. PERALES: So I do want to thank all of you. I want to thank the panel for -- don't leave. We may have questions here.

You must have answered all of our questions already.

Thank you very much.
The next panel will include Josh Lerner, Tracy Jackson, Reginald Sweeney, Haseem Mohammed.

All right. I think we're about to start. I think you have to decide who goes first.

MS. JACKSON: Hello. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Council Member Lander's proposal to establish a nonpartisan New York City Office of Civic Engagement. My name is Tracy Jackson and I'm here as a resident of City Council District 39. My own engagement includes serving on the Board of Heights and Hills, which provides services to older adults in Brooklyn. And as a member of Brooklyn Community Board 6's Youth Human Services and Education Committee. Many of us in the social services know well how critical it is for all people to have a seat at the table when policies and budgets are created and prioritized. An Office of Civic Engagement would be a great step toward strengthening participation in our democracy. And most critically, in opening the process up to people who have historically been excluded by those who hold power. Increasing voter participation is important, for sure. And so is promoting greater access to resources by larger numbers of people all across the city. During my involvement in Community Board 6, it's been discouraging to see how few people come to or even know about public meetings. It's even more disappointing that there hasn't been robust outreach by leadership to try to recruit a broader range of people to join the board and its committees and we need to change that. My hope is that a citywide Office of Civic Engagement would create meaningful opportunities for individuals and communities. Particularly those who have been marginalized to connect to resources and to be supported in their efforts to engage with government officials and institutions and to even run for office themselves. It is
inspiring to see a proposal that encourages skill development and pathways for leadership and seeks to facilitate substantial community-building activity and dynamic civic participation by all New Yorkers.

Finally, if an Office of Civic Engagement is established, it is essential that the formation of the office, the development of its plans, and its leadership and staff be inclusive and reflective of the great breadth of diversity we are so fortunate to share in New York City.

Thank you.
MR. PERALES: Thank you.
MR. SWEENEY: Good evening everyone. My
name is Reginald Sweeney. And I was a candidate for city council. So I'd like to just thank everyone, the comments -- I mean, I just changed my entire testimony with all you geniuses from New York and Brooklyn. But let's get really down to the real nitty gritty.

I got into a city council race thinking that I can win with this $\$ 5,000$. And, you know, I would expect to hear that. And I did pretty well. I did 5.8 percent of the votes. But what I noticed, because Mr. Lander has sent this
e-mail last night and I try to type up everything. But what I want to show you gentlemen and -- ladies and gentlemen. These are the mailings. A city council race turned out to be a little less than a million dollars in my district. I have about a hundred different mailings. And all of the mailings came from different special interest groups in packs. So with that being said, for someone like myself -and I have to really say on the record, that the Board of Elections, campaign finance, and all of the people that I came across, they -- it works, ladies and gentlemen. There was a vote count. I was involved with the process. The whole nine yards. But the biggest problem is the groups that are funding and the ads and the mailing. Some of the mailings, when it -- when you have to identify who's paid for, needs to be -- the font needs to be bigger. Some seniors and people need to understand who's really doing this mailing. With the campaign finance, if you had category mandated for the money that needs to be spent, I think we can eliminate a lot of this mailing. I mean, this is a lot of stuff. And if you're an independent small guy, just trying to get -- or woman trying to get into this process, it's very difficult. I think the charters should be changed when you get knocked off the ballot, who -- I think a candidate -- and the candidate should be the one that makes that challenge instead of somebody out of the blue from the district and they just come and they challenge your petitions and some crazy thing that happens and you made a small mistake, you get knocked off. But the money is the problem. I know for a fact that you can run a decent city council campaign with less than 50 to 60,000 dollars because the vote counts. When you got special job for New York, small business services -- and if you do see a candidate -- because one of the candidates had 25 mailings done by himself. And I've never seen -- I was -- I'm a little upset that I left my mailing. I did everything. I did that palm cards. I created it all. And it didn't take much. That book that they give you at the Board of Election works. So if you look at campaign finance and you cut out, as many others said, who can contribute, break it down to the point where the big money is not there. Because if I give you \$5,000 and I live in New York City, I'm going to be looking for something. And it usually -- if you've track who funds the campaign, who help put in that money, you'll see that the favors come down the line.

And one last point. Because I know some other people ran over. When you have six to one, whatever contribution that you get from a constituent from your district should be matched. You should have more debates, public debates that give other voters the opportunity to see the candidate. You can be a candidate that just made the ballot, worked on the petitions, did it all, and made it. And then, when it comes down to the debates, if somebody wants to vote for you and it's a public video type -- type of debate, that's going to stir and help a lot of people understand who they're running for. And I'm -Mr. Lander invited me. But I definitely disagree but one -- and he's -- hopefully we could stay a friend or something. It doesn't matter what party you run for. It matters of the candidate. And I believe in the city charter and MWBEs. Please, look at that small business aspect. And I yield that.

MR. PERALES: Thank you very much.

MR. SWEENEY: But I have a lot more to say and I appreciate all of you guys.

MR. PERALES: Thank you.
MR. SWEENEY: And Una, you have done a lot for a lot of folks. And that's all I got to say. MS. CLARKE: Thank you.

MR. LERNER: Good evening. And thank you to the Commission for sticking around so late. I know it's a long evening, so I appreciate everyone who's very attentive to discussion still.

So my name is Josh Lerner and I direct a national nonprofit called the Participatory Budgeting Project. The project I had mentioned before. So we support cities across the country and the world in setting up and building participatory budgeting processes. Including partnering with New York City Council in the process here. And now with the mayor's office, as well, on the new expansions of participatory budgeting in schools across the city. It's all high schools. And I really -- I applaud the efforts and the proposals to improve the electoral process. I mainly want to talk with you a bit about civic engagement, though, and what we can do beyond elections. Trust in democracy is at an all-time low. And we're not going to rebuild trust by focusing just on one or two days a year. You don't just ask people to come out and vote once or twice and expect them to suddenly trust government. If you want to build a better relationship with your kids or your parents and you call them twice a year and expect that to do the trick, you're going to be disappointed. I think that we expect more, as well, as residents. And we're seeing a lot of excitement across the country and in New York, people who want to get engaged in other ways. And so I just encourage you to include proposals that go beyond electoral reform, as important as that is, and take advantage of this as an opportunity to be bold.

The two things I want to advocate for in particular, one is the Office of Civic Engagement. Partly, you can see how hard this work is. Imagine if you had an office of experts living in civic engagements that could work with you to engage people who are not in this room, and coming up breath and building agreement around proposals for the charter revision. It would make your work easier and better, and more likely to get passed, probably, in November. So this can be a resource for you. We can do better than three minutes at the mic. Even though I'm speaking here now, this is not the best way to have engagement.

The second thing is -- the second thing is that this is an opportunity to expand participatory budgeting. As Brad mentions, around the world this is usually done in the citywide level. And so this is an opportunity to take the initial program that we started here in the council level and make this across the city. And so I think that you could put on the ballot a measure to have a set percent of the budget be decided by the people because it's our money. And that that would actually work much better than the current process, which is divided up into many different council districts. So there's other recommendations. I'm glad to talk more and bring together other folks who can help advise and how to set that up. I think it's a big opportunity to think big and to enable people to participate in government beyond elections every day and ways that work for them.

Thank you.
MR. PERALES: Thank you.
Any questions? None.
Let me thank all of you.
The next panel is Janine Nichols, Matthew Fairley, Zarena -- looks like Frederick, and John Flatow.

Mr. Flatow, I've already called your name.
You should be sitting there.
MR. FLATOW: I was surprised --
MR. PERALES: That I called you?
MR. FLATOW: -- by the call. Yeah, Mr. Chair.

MR. PERALES: One more.
How about Marlon Donnelly. You can take the fourth chair. Oh. Is it Marlene?

MS. DONNELLY: Marlene.
MR. PERALES: Oh. Look at that. It's your handwriting, Marlene. There's a chair right here.

MR. SCISSURA: There's a chair right here.
MR. PERALES: There's a chair right here on
this side of the -- right there.
MR. SPEAKER: Oh. We can all (inaudible).
MR. PERALES: All right. Do you have an order in which you would like to proceed?

Why don't you start with the extreme left here.

MS. NICHOLS: Yes. Hi my name is Janine Nichols and I am a resident of this neighborhood. I'm part of my block association, the Sullivan Ludlum Stoddard Neighborhood Association. And I am an activist confronting gentrification issues with the movement to protect the people and the Flower Lovers Advocating For Communities, or FLAC. I came here to talk about an idea I keep hearing being promoted about the Department of City Planning embedding a representative of DCP in all community boards as a paid position. I have been predicting this for some time. Our infamous Community Board 9 here was very, very tumultuous. And -- and I've been predicting that our success in holding off a rezoning of our neighborhood would lead to an attempt to close the loophole that DCP requires a formal request from a community board in order to start one of their studies. The conclusions of which are foregone. So our community board -- our community residents, I believe, overwhelmingly oppose a rezoning. But they're disengaged from the process and they are upset by what they see if and when they do come to our community board. Our Land Use Committee is dismissive of laws and process. And we have spent countless hours and our own money taking them to court, trying to get them to adhere to the city charter, to the open meetings law, to their own bylaws. We believe that if this community board followed procedure, it would result in an accurate representation of how the neighborhood feels. But that's not what happens. Where, as I heard someone talk about term limits, and there are certainly people on the community board who have been there, as far as I can tell, from time immemorial. There also seem to be other people on the board who are there for the express position of just advancing this rezoning and then getting out. This is a targeted neighborhood. And at this point we have seen East New York, Chinatown, Harlem, the Lower East Side, people encouraged to give up hours -countless hours for visioning sessions and planning committees and to try and imagine a rich future for their neighborhood only to see the results of their plan summarily dismissed by the Department of City Planning when the day comes.

The -- Winston Von Engle, who is our chairman of -- the director, I guess, of TCP in Brooklyn, recently told people in Bushwick, who had just finished their own neighborhood plan that he doesn't care about people. He cares about buildings and characters. So these are my concerns.

MR. SCISSURA: Thank you.
Sir.
MR. FAIRLEY: Thank you very much. And thank you all for being here to take these -- to take ideas from the community.

My name is Matt Fairley. I live in Community Board 6. I'm one of Mr. -- I'm sorry -- Councilman Lander's constituents. And I'm glad that he was willing to send out a nice e-mail and be so good about getting everyone here and be so forward about transparency. Although I wish, if he was really serious about transparency, he would have sent it to us more than 24 hours in advance. I'd also like to object to how this meeting has been run, in that I noted that the people who signed up with actual organizations to their name were given primacy of place. This is a public hearing. And the fact that people came here with a -- with NYPIRG or came here as -- on behalf of organization, were given the fact -- the chance to speak first, when the room was still full, while this whole table was still full, only increases the space of alienation that voters in this city feel. That people who are connected will be given primacy of place. So I have to object to how this meeting has been run. And I think in the future it should not matter whether or not you're here with a group. You should be given a chance to speak, no matter what. My voice is just as important as everyone else's in this room.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you. Thank you.
MR. FAIRLEY: I would like to say that I am leery of the idea of a director of civic engagement. I do not like the idea of a government official or anyone involved with the government deciding what civic engagement means in this city. It is such an underdeveloped idea, that I'm afraid that if put into the wrong hands, we could have a director somewhere in this city deciding what it means to be a civically engaged citizen. And so I find that to be very, very troubling. But what I really came here to talk about is the number 64. And that is the number of elected officials that exist in the City of New York. In a city of 8.5 million, the fact that we only have 64 elected officials is crazy. 51 City Council members, five borough presidents, five district attorneys, the comptroller, the public advocate, and the mayor. That is all.

If we want to talk about how to get people more engaged with their community, we need to increase the number of people that are elected. We need to increase the number of people that are in the city council so that city council members don't have more constituents than members of the New York State Assembly. Because that is what is happening right now. If we want to find a way so that money can be taken out of politics so that people can actually win by knocking on doors, by getting forward and going down to the constituents, so that insurgent candidates can actually have a chance to run, we need to make it so that less votes are needed and so that the people that are representing and being part of this community are actually much closer to the people that are represented him. By increasing the number of city council members, we can do that. The other way to do that is to decrease the amount of time that a city council member served from four years to two years. Our assemblymen -- our assembly members, our state senators, our congress people, they have to face their votes every two years. And a city council person should, too. City council people should have to come before the voters every once in a while. And the last thing I'd like to say is I think that everyone here who has been concerned with community boards, we should make community boards elected by proportional representation. This way they are actually representatives of the people and that they are reflective of the people and can have real powers that way. Thank you. MR. SCISSURA: Thank you. Sir.

MR. FLATOW: Distinguished Commission I, too, will have to talk fast. Three minutes and 21 recommendations.

Review -- please review the composition of various boards and commissions. There was a Supreme Court case a few decades ago that wiped out the New York City Board of Estimate and the at-large city council system because they were structurally not representing the voters and the people of New York City. And one of the key constituencies being screwed was Brooklyn. Because Brooklyn has the largest population. So there should never be a configuration where the borough of Brooklyn and the borough of Queens has the same number of votes on a policymaking body as Staten Island, which has one-sixth the population of Brooklyn and Queens.

A more extended request for a more extended public hearing process here, we're now in round one. After round two, come back to the voters with a draft of the proposals that are being percolated by this commission. And then have one more set of hearings. So that everybody has the opportunity to comment one more time before this commission then structures that referendum that will go on a ballot. And give the Board of Elections and the voters and the organizers and advocates time to -- to stake out their positions and for the public to be educated.

Advice and consent power for the full city council on city council appointments and with respect to appointments by their mayor. Grant permanent residents of New York City the right to vote in municipal elections. This right to vote existed for hundreds of years. And the last time it was used was for school board elections in the City of New York. Request that you seriously consider that.

Coterminality. That's kind of a -- for some it might be an esoteric term. It means that all of these agency districts should have coordinated boundaries. As a CUNY professor, I do research. And recently I do a lot of mapping. And when you compile over -- start overlaying all of these boundaries for city agencies, it now looks like a bowl of spaghetti. So Commissioners, take at least charge someone to take a look -- a second look at coterminality.

I never met this gentleman before to my right. But increase the number of city council districts from 51 to 59. That's how many community boards we have right now. I -- I listened to the Queens hearing, where the Asian-American community complained about not being able to achieve their fair share of representation, okay. There are a million people -- one million Asian-Americans in New York City now. The smaller those districts are, the greater the likelihood that you'll be able to capture a neighborhood and communities of interest so they can elect the candidates of their choice.

MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, sir. You went a little bit over, but that's okay.

Do you have a copy of that for us?
MR. FLATOW: Yes, you have --
MR. SCISSURA: Perfect. That's all we need. Ma'am.

MS. DONNELLY: My name is Marlene Donnelly. I have been an active community -- activist citizen for quite some time. I am one of the activists who actually brought us the Gowanus Canal Superfund cleanup to the -- Brooklyn. The Gowanus Canal Superfund cleanup was the first time that a community has actually overstepped the authoritarian power that our mayor does have to bring -- to make something happen in this city since Westway. The -- the mayor fought us tooth and nail against that whole process. But Barack Obama's EPA followed the federal law and we got a Super -- we're getting a Superfund cleanup. Contaminants are being removed from our community for now. I -- I thank you for your volunteer work here, but my community members who are not on the community board volunteer attending meetings for the past eight years once a month, 12 months out of the year, plus committee meetings on a volunteer basis because we want those contaminants out of our community. The authority -- the problem with our charter is it -- it institutes the authoritarian government that we live under. The reason we don't have participatory democracy in this city is because of our charter. If you want to know why people aren't voting, it's because of the way the charter is organized. Community -- people who want to be active in the community are -- have their voice locked out of every step of the way. Brad Lander also didn't tell you about the city council hearing where they were planning -- that just took place affecting the Gowanus Canal, where they passed a 1.2 billion dollar project that has gone through with no questioning. That everyone here is going to pay for and nobody even knows about. There is no participation. There is no -- there is no transparency going on. It's an authoritarian system. Every agency works at the behest of the mayor. He does his will and
there is no agency that -- that functions with any kind of autonomy based on what they're charged to do. My -- my recommendation I came to talk about, I've heard many people in the -fellow citizens speak about is that we don't have representative government and we need a charter that institutes real representative government. And that will begin by having our community boards as elected officials. We need to expand a lap -- a participation with -- with the collective voice of the community. We sit here with a -- my community board, I think all community boards. I am represented one out of a 160,000 people. That's what my voice is. He can't possibly -- our -- my councilman, Landers, can't possibly figure out what is the collective voice of a 160,000 people. You go up to Albany, where the whole city of Albany is 90,000.

Their -- their first chair of elected government is one in 5,000. It's difficult enough to figure out what 5,000 people's collective voices. Here it doesn't happen at all and nobody even bothers to try. We need to institute local government. Everybody keeps talking about campaign finance and looking at all these other states. You should all be looking at the one state that has the highest participation in voting of all the other states. That's up in Massachusetts. And it's because they function with local real town government, where everybody gets to vote on community planning at every town meeting. Everybody gets to vote on what they -- what you pay for projects. Everybody gets to vote on what you tax themselves. That's why they -- that state repeatedly has the highest level of participation. Not Minneapolis. Nowhere else. We got to look at how we bring democracy to the city. And the charter needs to be rewritten to dismantle the authoritarian system that we do live under.

MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, ma'am. Thank you.
Any questions from the Commissioners?
Dale?
MR. HO: Just a few questions for Dr. Flatow.

Dr. Flatow, you suggested increasing the number of city council districts from 51 to 59. And I'm just wondering where the number 59 comes from.

MR. FLATOW: Why, I'm starting with the
current number of community boards for the City. But I think that's a logical place to go. Understanding that those 59 community boards are not all coequal in population. But you already have a set -- a major set of natural boundaries out there for communities and neighborhoods. And so raising the number from where it is now would increase the likelihood of getting a more diverse council from those constituencies that are not yet on that board.

MR. HO: I guess that was a part of my question. Because the community boards aren't equal -- equal in terms of population.

MR. FLATOW: Right. I'm not suggesting -it's an overlay --

MR. HO: With the 59 districts, it wouldn't overlap. Shouldn't the number be -- in your opinion, do you think the number should be even higher optimally? Or what do you think?

MR. FLATOW: No. No. Because what we're also looking at is expense. It costs money. Every time you create a district, you got another council member, another salary, another staff body. So I think there's a -- I think a small increase. I think the council is almost there,
in terms of inclusion and diversity. But adding a few more slots would allow us to further balance out our constituents.

MR. HO: Another question about the City council districts.

One issue that I don't see -- or one recommendation I don't see that you've listed here is one that we've talked at a few meetings. And that's the idea of an independent redistricting commission. Is there a reason you've omitted it from your list of recommendations?

MR. FLATOW: Priority. I know that there are other groups that are going to raise that issue. I have served -- I served on a quasi independent city council redistricting commission. They're not bipartisan. There are no elected officials. I also served on the state one, where two thirds of the commissioners are state legislators, okay? At least in New York City, there are 15 civilians. And the charter currently specifies that they have to come from a diversity of political affiliations and it has some other criteria in there. So I think the -our current body that has done the growing of
city council districts is almost there. The last round, there were no voting rights lawsuits against the plan that the last council came out. MR. PERALES: Now that -- if I might -- or you're still on?

MR. HO: I just have one last question.
MR. PERALES: Go ahead. And then I'll follow up.

MR. HO: Your question -- your
recommendation here about granting New York City permanent residents the right to vote in municipal elections, you mean to -- is your recommendation limited to legal permanent residents or Green Card holders?

MR. FLATOW: Legal permanent residents. That's my recommendation.

MR. HO: You think -- do you have a reason why you wouldn't extend, in your opinion, the right to vote in municipal elections beyond legal permanent residents to other noncitizens? MR. FLATOW: How -- who's going to define a permanent resident? The federal government already has that purview. So I think the easiest way to proceed with that category is whoever is a, quote, "documented legal resident" according to the federal government, should have the right to vote in municipal elections. That would be my approach. I think it's a clean approach. And notice, $I$ repeated "municipal" in a lot of places. What I'm suggesting is a lot of these issues we've heard coming from a lot of the good government groups, this isn't the venue that can -- that can resolve the problem. A lot of this is coming out of Albany. So I would rather take a shot at revising the city charter and specify some good that can be generated at the municipal level so we don't get into this jurisdictional battle. Where we can't tell -the City of New York, as it's been made pretty clear, can't tell the State of New York what to do and darn sure can't tell what the federal government what to do. So why don't we carve out what is within our municipal jurisdiction. Municipal elections. That may be challenged, but I think you're standing on much stronger ground defending the extension of voting rights for municipal elections only. You do not have the authority to extend that right to state elections or federal elections.

MR. SPEAKER: If I may also respond.

Just to disagree with you, respectfully. I don't think this panel should ever take cost into effect or into account to determine how much democracy New York should have. The fact that we should have more councilmen, we shouldn't be sitting here saying, oh, it's too expensive. If it gives us more representation, gives us more transparency, we shouldn't have to worry about the cost. Especially when you consider that it's probably maybe one percent of the multiple billions of dollars that this city spends every year. We can spare a couple million dollars to make this more democratic and make this more transparent.

MR. SPEAKER: Agreed.
MS. DONNELLY: And I do -- I do think we deserve equal representation in city council, as the people who live in the City of Albany. As I understand, New York has a lot -- has a lot more money than the City of Albany. And if they can afford city council representation, one in 5,000, I think we can afford it, also.

MR. PERALES: Let me just follow up with Mr. Flatow about -- because I know he has been drawing district lines for a long time.

You said that you worked with the districting commission of New York City.

MR. FLATOW: I was a commissioner.
MR. PERALES: You were one?
MR. FLATOW: Yes.
MR. PERALES: Now, who appointed you?
MR. FLATOW: The city council.
MR. PERALES: You're making my point for me.
Should we not have a commission that is not directly appointed by political party and by elected officials who are dependent on those lines?

MR. FLATOW: You could move to that model. California has that model.

MR. PERALES: Exactly. Do you like that model? I'm asking you your opinion, sir.

MR. FLATOW: I -- I provided some advice to California.

MR. PERALES: Which means that you like -that you like the idea?

MR. FLATOW: Full disclosure.
Excuse me?
MR. PERALES: Does that mean that you support the idea of the California model?

MR. FLATOW: Ideally, yes. But I can -- I can live with some tweaking. I don't think that's the biggest issue right now.

MR. PERALES: I appreciate your opinion.
MR. FLATOW: I think the city body that we have is a lot better than the state body. MR. PERALES: I agree. But we're here to deal with the city and we're trying to make things better and improve things. And so, it's something that we think of. And need to think of, I think.

MR. FLATOW: You can go all out. Throw the dice -- roll the dice. Let the voters decide. That's why I have a list of 21 up here.

MS. SPEAKER: If I may, I just want to -this is -- this is completely, you know, off -it's not off topic. But it's not what I came here to speak about. But in listening to all this talk about the elections, I have to say that I went to Washington to march with our teenagers after the Parkland shootings. And I left -- when I left there, I had this idea that we should -we should be restricting voting age to the most idealistic years of our lives.

MR. FLATOW: Number 11.
MS. SPEAKER: We would have gun control. We
would have free college. We would have universal healthcare. We would have a lot of things because they're not already thinking about their taxes and their houses and their --

MR. PERALES: Unless the Commissioners have more questions, let me thank the Panel --

MR. FLATOW: Can I mention one more -- one more item that $I$ think is very, very important.

The United States Supreme Court, not -- in a case called Shelby County, Alabama versus Holder wiped out or put a big hole in the U.S. Voting Rights Act that required the City of New York to submit all voting procedures, all redistricting plans to the U.S. Justice Department before they could be imposed on the voters of the City of New York.

MR. PERALES: We know that. And that's one of the reasons why I'm so interested in a better way --

MR. FLATOW: Well, let me get to my punch line.

MR. PERALES: You'll get to your punch line, but you got -- you got to let me say --

MR. FLATOW: I know. This is the former general counsel and founder of the Puerto Rican

Legal Defense and Education Fund, in case you folks didn't know. This gentleman right here.

MR. PERALES: Therefore --
MR. FLATOW: I outed you.
MR. PERALES: The -- since there's no longer a review of the city council redistricting -MR. FLATOW: Right.

MR. PERALES: -- that's what raises the questions and what has motivated me to ask you about the ideal way to address redistricting in New York City.

MR. FLATOW: So whatever body is going to draw lines, that's one body. We need another mechanism to replace what was wiped out by the Supreme Court.

MR. PERALES: Or draw -- or a better body to draw the lines, ideally.

MR. FLATOW: Both. Because we already have the bodies to draw the lines. And we had an oversight body called the U.S. Justice Department. The City of New York no longer has to go --

MR. PERALES: We -- we'll --
MR. FLATOW: -- get permanent from anybody to do whatever it wants to do. And I think
that's a dangerous place for democracy in New York City.

MR. PERALES: Thank you. Thank you, John. Thank you very much.

MS. SPEAKER: Thank you, John.
MR. PERALES: Carrie Tan, Karen -- I think it says Flemming, Lashawn Ellis. Is this Teresa Westershorn?

MS. BOYD: Excuse me. I have been here since 6:00. I put my name down --

MR. PERALES: They're all here.
MS. BOYD: -- before anybody of you was here. And I've been sitting here waiting. But you know something? My name just -- just does not appear. I wonder why. I wonder why.

MR. SCISSURA: What's your name?
MS. BOYD: My name is Alicia Boyd. I've been here before you got here.

MR. PERALES: Alicia Boyd.
MS. BOYD: Thank you. Yes. My goodness.
MR. PERALES: We'll get -- it's a long list, ma'am.

MS. BOYD: I mean, really.
MR. PERALES: Whoever is ready to begin can begin.

MS. BOYD: I would like to begin.
My name is Alicia Boyd. And I am the member of MTOPP, the Movement To Protect The People, that exists in this community, CB 9.

In 1989 the City Charter Commission formed and looked at community boards who were conducting themselves like private clubs. The commission declared sunshine on committees and sunshine on their documents. Requiring community boards to adhere to the open meetings law and allow residents to speak at every open meeting. 11 lawsuits have been filed within this community, both in the state and federal courts since 2014. Ranging from CB 9's failure to comply with the Freedom Of Information Law, denial of freedom of speech, denying us to be on committees, not being notified about meetings, not giving us minutes and voting records, being surrounded by police, board members calling residents cunts and hos and bitches. CB 9 engaging in rezoning applications with private entities. Borough President Eric Adam violating the city charter by placing more board members in his lawful quota. The arrest of residents. And unqualified board members trying to be hired as district managers. A chairman of a board being a real estate lobbyist. And the fabrication of a vote and list of recommendations on a ULURP application. Seven out of 12 of those lawsuits have been upheld, one was dismissed, one withdrawn, and two are on appeal. That's our community board.

Despite these lawsuits, nothing has changed at our community board. And let me just repeat, it's CB 9, Brooklyn. Currently we still have the real estate lobbyist, who has been there for two years. We have board member engaging in conflict of interest, where they -- where -- for example, we have a Mr. Michael Liburd, who is the board member of the Brooklyn Public Library. He brings his committee -- his Brooklyn Public Library to his committee, which is the Landers committee. He requests that they get permission to change the uniform land-use review process. And he does it without declaring his conflict of interest. He chairs the board. He votes -- takes an illegal vote without quorum, and he passes it on to the CB 9. CB 9 approves the application. For the past three years we have been denied the right to have a district manager. The city charter states that we are supposed to have a district manage. Three years, no district manager. Why? Because CB 9 wants to sit there and hire a member of their board that's
unqualified. The first lawsuit, the judge agreed with us and said that they violated all of their bylaws and threw out the results. Now we are again looking at another possible district manager. This one has a personal relationship with the Chair. And, on top of that, is also on the board. The board demanded the resumes from this community committee. And the committee told the board, "No. We're not giving you the resumes. We're not giving you the voting records, we're not giving you anything." And this was supporting my borough hall -MR. PERALES: The time has lapsed. MS. BOYD: This community board is absolutely a shame. You have a city charter. And this community board does not obey the city charter. We have filed complaints with every known agencies. We have petitions, we have protests, and nothing has happened. So now you come before us talking about another city charter reform, when our community board is uncapable of even understanding what the city charter means and is uncapable of following the city charter.

So what recommendations will you have, that will then help us understand and enforce the city charter on our community board, because our community board has no concept that a city charter exists.

MR. PERALES: Thank you. Thank you very much.

MS. BOYD: Did I wake them up.
MS. FLEMMING: I believe they're awake. Okay.

My name is Karen Flemming. I have been in this community, same Community Board 9, for 50-some odd years. I won't tell you exactly how many. And I have suffered through the purgatory of an infective institution. The same one that she's talking about. But I want to broaden where I'm coming from a little bit. I remember the institution of community boards when they first put them into play. I said, "Well, this is a good thing." Now, a community board, from my thinking, should be as grass rootsy as it could get. I should be able to walk into my community board and be home. That's not what we have. And
it's not only here that that does not exist. Because I get around the town and there are a lot of similar problems from institution to institution. Part of the problem is how community board members are appointed. Because they're appointed by the -- half of them are appointed by the borough presidents. Now -- I'm speaking. Now, the problem with that is if you have a borough president who is inclusive and tries to get as many different ideas and creative and constructive people into -- and I would mention Gail Brewer, because I've seen her interview with people. She's somebody that I know well in the political space. And I've seen what she can do with it. So therefore, it's possible to do. But the rules are not allowing us to get there. Because when I go to a community board in Bay Ridge, I should be able to adhere to the -- just about the same regulations as what I have on Community Board 9 or Community Board 17, or the one in the Bronx. Because the way that the charter was written is so loose, you can go over there and you don't even recognize yourself being in a community board. You're saying, what -- is this how they act over here?

Is this what they do? I don't understand. You can't do -- but we have -- we have to set enough rules -- if we're going to have community boards, we have to set enough rules so that $I$ can go to any community board and be able to operate as a citizen because, even though I may be in this district, I'm still a citizen of the city and a citizen of -- of the borough as a whole. So I would recommend that we make the rules for the community boards so that they are somewhat equivalent. You got to give each neighborhood a little room. Because Gowanus is not Bay Ridge and Coney Island is not -- I understand that. But right now, they're not in force. Plus, the city agencies that should be helping and assisting the people as we complain about an institution of this kind are not doing -- they're not doing their job. We -- we call, we send e-mails. Nobody even bothers to respond. This happens to us all the time. Now, as far as I'm concerned, my thing is I believe the community board members should be elected. Or at least half of them in the process that we need elections.

MR. PERALES: That's a good point.

MS. FLEMMING: So that those people can, you know --

MR. PERALES: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

MS. FLEMMING: -- get a chance to be where we're supposed to be.

MR. PERALES: Next.
MS. SPEAKER: Good evening. I first want to address Cesar. Because I came in and I was like, I know that face. I know that face. I never forget a face. And I went to school with your stepson Jaime Hicky Mendoza. So I just want to say welcome to this side of the park.

MR. PERALES: And how do you know Jaime?
MS. SPEAKER: Jaime? We went to Brooklyn
Friends together.
MR. PERALES: Oh.
MS. SPEAKER: So, I want to -- I don't -- I mean, everyone has said pretty much what I have said, or what I'm going to say here tonight. I am a member of MTOPP. I'm a member of FLAC. I'm a member of this community. Albeit a younger member of this community. I want to first address what was said earlier about being a volunteer commission. And yes, you are. And our Community Board 9 uses that all the time, to say they are volunteering and they are doing wonderful work in the community and how dare we question them. And I just want to say that just because you volunteer does not mean that -- and it's not to you, Una or Kyle. But I just want to address the fact that being a volunteer does not mean that you do not do certain things that may not be the opinion or in the best interest of a community. So that -- that can't be used as an excuse. Because as we have stated, we have a real estate lobbyist on our board. We have someone who continues to push rezoning in our faces, even though the community has been vocal and clear that we are not interested in a -- in a rezoning here. So I just wanted to make that point.

One of the things that $I$ would like to see changed in the city charter is for community boards to -- to have -- to not have members appointed by the borough president. That has proved to be a big issue for us in Community Board 9. We have a lot of people who seem to be very tight with the borough president and they -that is a conflict of interest.

The other thing is a lot of people have mentioned the limits, having term limits. And again, that is in the city charter. There was supposed to be -- there's supposed to be a two-year term limit, and you come up for review, and reelection is supposed to happen, I believe, in April. And that doesn't happen. So again, if we have the city carter that we have right now, one, how do we adhere to it and use it as a living document. And going forward, how do we revise it to make it better. So I think those are things to consider. How do we really use this document as it is and in terms of revising it. So how do we do that.

Someone mentioned -- I believe it was Carlo mentioned, you know, it's hard to find people who want to be on community boards. And, you know, it shouldn't be. It shouldn't be. We're all members of this community. We should all know that this thing exists. I had no idea growing up in middle school -- elementary school, middle school, high school, that community boards existed. This is a problem. In our educational facilities, this should be something that students know about. That's a huge, huge deficit. And that needs to happen. And I, myself, asked to be on the ULURP committee. And I was on the ULURP committee because it's very -I'm very passionate about maintaining communities the way they are. Things will change. Things always change. But people should not feel like they are left behind. And I was kicked off. MR. PERALES: Well, we're running out of time.

MS. SPEAKER: Thank you.
MR. PERALES: But I do appreciate your comments.

MS. TAN: Hi. My name is Carrie Tan and I am -- I don't live in $C B$ 9, so $I$ will be the one person that has nothing really to contribute on that topic. But CB 8 stands with you.

So I -- I'm here basically because I, like many people, apparently, received the e-mail from Brad Lander's office, even though I'm not actually a resident in his district anymore. But I have stayed on his mailing list for the last five years of living in Maury Cumbo's district because I seem to get all my news from him instead.

MS. SPEAKER: But not from Maury Cumbo.

MS. TAN: Yeah. So this is -- I mean, I didn't come here to plug Brad Lander. But I am appreciative of finding about this. And I consider myself a reasonably informed person. But I actually had not realized that the city charter was up for review by two different bodies. So --

MR. PERALES: This is the only body that is changing.

MS. TAN: Right. Right. So I -- I wanted to come here and just voice my concerns as just a member of the community. I'm not here representing any organization. I'm an educator, Prospect Heights resident. And the things -there have been a lot of great ideas here, but the ones that I am particularly passionate about, I would say, are campaign finance contribution limits. I think that's a great idea. We do have one of the best matching program -- donor matched programs in the country and I'm really proud of that. But it definitely could be better. And I'd also agree with raising the cap on the number of donations that could be matched, you know, in this post citizens united era of small down -small donor empowerment is super important. I also wanted to raise the profile of voter enfranchisement, rather than disenfranchisement. I do -- I personally believe that everybody who is a New York City resident should be able to vote, regardless of their documentation status and regardless of whether or not they have been convicted of a crime. I think New York is made strong -- stronger by its diversity, its immigrant communities, and we should embrace that. And then finally, $I$ just want to say more generally that I -- again, I have been voting in New York City for almost 11 years now and I participate in every election. And it has been a pain in the butt every single time. We really need to look at like what is going on with our local Board of Elections because it's -- it's kind of a disaster. The first six years that I lived here, I was on the rolls twice. I tried every election to get them to fix it. They didn't. My polling place was moved this year and they didn't tell anyone. And then, when I went to the new place, they had no idea what I was talking about. I mean, the list goes on and on. And I know I'm not the only one. So while we're talking about making our city more democratic, we also need to talk about how to make it easier for people to vote.

MR. PERALES: That's a good point. Thank you.

I'd like to ask he commission members whether they have questions of this panel.

MS. SEECHARRAN: I have a question.
I was wondering if you -- so you had some strong opinions about community board and making them, I guess, more democratic. Are you suggesting that they are elected? You were saying that you -- you don't think that they should be -- so I was wondering if you agree --

MS. SPEAKER: Yes.
MS. SEECHARRAN: No. I was wondering if you agree --

MS. SPEAKER: Yes.
MS. SEECHARRAN: Yes. With her. Okay. Okay.

So that is your recommendation, that they be elected.

MS. SPEAKER: That they be elected. Yes.
MR. PERALES: There are no other questions.
Let me thank the panel.
Thank you very much.

Simone, looks like Harris. Jeannette Lloyd Lewis, Jacob Goldstein and Mark Freelander.

Your name, sir?
MR. FREELANDER: I'm Mark Freeland.
MR. PERALES: You are? Your name?
MS. HARRIS: It's Simone Harris.
MR. PERALES: Yes.
Harry White?
Noel Nathan or Nathois.
That will make three.
Constance Lesold?
There's one left.
Oh. Only one left.
Leslie Clarke.
MR. SCISSURA: We need one more chair.
MR. PERALES: Mr. Clarke?
All right. As Mr. Clarke joins us, we will begin with the person on the left. Thank you. My left.

MS. HARRIS: I came to this meeting --
MR. PERALES: You have to use that -- the mic. You have to get real close.

MS. HARRIS: My name is Simone Harris. I was invited to the meeting. I came, not really knowing anything about the meeting. So it's
like, I hope my mission is at the right place. Because I'm really -- I really want to address housing fraud. And --

MR. PERALES: Housing fraud?
MS. HARRIS: Housing fraud in Brooklyn. Yes.

MR. PERALES: That's not something in the city charter.

MS. HARRIS: Okay. So as I said, I came to the meeting not knowing the full extent of what --

MR. PERALES: Well, we appreciate your coming.

MS. HARRIS: -- it was about. Yes.
MR. PERALES: Thank you.
Mr. Freeland.
MR. FREELAND: Can you restart?
MR. PERALES: Yes.
MR. FREELAND: I -- I thank the Commission for --

MR. SCISSURA: Get closer.
MR. FREELAND: Okay. I want to thank the Commission for the opportunity to address them on instant-runoffs.

My name is Mark Freeland. I was born in Queens and moved to Brooklyn by way of San Francisco. So I am familiar with instant-runoff. I was there when they implemented it. And it does work. You've already heard the major points in favor of it. Brett Lander spoke about it, Fair Vote, other people. And they are right that -- you know, obviously, it saves money because you have fewer elections and it encourages more participation because the people who finally decide are the ones who vote on the first election, which is usually the greatest participation.

But I'd like to urge the Commission to expand its perspective a little bit. What --instant-runoffs allow you the opportunity to build a fairer election system. The election system that we have -- and as far as I know is one being proposed -- is still a runoff of two candidates. And that's there for pragmatic reasons. Before computers, when you voted by machines or voted by paper, you could not have multiple elections. You could not say, we'll take the top five winners and have the top five vote-getters have a runoff. And then, if necessary, we'll have another runoff and so on and so on. So what -- what happens is you have a second round, where you have the two top vote-getters who are very often polarized in figures, and you eliminated the consensus candidate or candidates. There are very many different algorithms that you can use. You know, obviously, in the amount of time and at this late hour, I'm not going to explain any of them to you, nor are you experts on them, and you shouldn't be. But I want to urge you to consult with experts. This has been something that's been studied for over 200 years. There are a number of ways of doing it. It's very easy to be done by computer. The people do not have to say anything other than what you're already suggesting. Rank the voting. It's just how you look at that. And there are ways to extract candidates that are better, that most people like, rather than getting the candidate that only 40 percent like. Thank you.

MR. PERALES: Thank you. Just out of curiosity, where would we find where -- these alternative methods of counting the vote.

MR. FREELAND: I'm almost hesitant to say Google it, but --

MR. PERALES: Seriously, Google.
MR. FREELAND: There -- you know, I have a very nice book called Chaotic Elections. It was put out by the American --

MR. PERALES: What was it?
MR. FREELAND: Chaotic Elections by the American Math Society. It was put out after the 2000 election, talking about all the different calculations. And -- and it's very readable. It's at the undergraduate level.

MR. PERALES: Thank you.
MR. FREELAND: Okay.
MR. NOEL: Hello. My name is Natu Noel. The pronunciation was kind of firm, but it did not turn out well.

MR. PERALES: I can hardly hear. You got to put that up --

MR. NOEL: The name is Natu Noel.
MR. PERALES: All right.
MR. NOEL: First I would like to thank you all for taking the time to come here today on a Monday evening to have this commission. And I want to thank you all for coming out to help us out.

So one of my recommend -- recommendations is on the city charter, Title 662, merely for city planning. Where -- I'm not sure if you guys are from the south Flatbush area, where there is a heavy -- what is a heavy new construction and development movement moving into the area. And there are basically buildings -- new buildings on the area that -- that many people in the community does not agree with.

And despite the fact that certain community boards have fight against it and stand against it, many of the projects that they have still moved on. So -- and by my -- by my understanding, it's -- it's because that there's a top to bottom outreach to city planning for New York City. And I recommend that that we have a down of approach, where the community board and the community itself submit their recommendation to -- to -- to the Department of City Planning on to -- as to what they want in the community instead of City Planning giving to us what we want in our community -- where they think that the people should build up hotels and things like that in our community.

MR. PERALES: All right. Thank you very much.

Ma'am.
MS. LESOLD: My name is Constance Lesold. Don't let the southern accent fool you. I lived across the street for 50 years and I've lived in various parts of Brooklyn from Bay Ridge to Bed-Stuy.

MR. PERALES: So where did you pick up that accent?

MS. LESOLD: In North Carolina.
MR. PERALES: Okay.
MS. LESOLD: Durham.
I'm mainly here today, to be honest, because of the location you have chosen to hold this hearing in. I really find it hard to believe that you choose this location. It shows some grave sensitivity on the part of this Commission that you chose the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, where there is no longer any free day at all in Brooklyn. Which still has a huge poor community and a huge immigrant community which needs the beauty, the education, the comforts of the Botanic Garden. The only free time now is 8:00 to 12:00 on Friday mornings. For a whole century, the Brooklyn Botanic Garden was free. Until the '90s. And when the fees were put on in the '90s, one of the Caribbean councilmen from this area held a press conference in front of the Botanic Gardens and said that this would be the first generation of Caribbean children who did not have a free Botanic Garden. This was very important and meaningful to me at the time because my husband was an immigrant from Nazi Germany. He came as a five-year-old. My father-in-law called this place his synagogue. And the family used the comforts of the garden to wait, even after the war was over, to find out which of their relatives were alive and which were dead in the concentration camps. This cannot continue. As somehow, into the city charter, if it's going to make any sense at all, the city charter has to address how the city deals with its cultural and public institutions. Especially those that deal with open space. Which is so scarce in this community. I served on Community Board 8 for many years as chairman of transportation and parks and worked hard on all of those issues.

I think that there are good things about having an elected community board. And there are dangers in having an only elected. I -- I don't have a strong opinion on that. However, I do think that the issue of the borough president having most of the power in the appointments is not working. I have to, in all fairness, say that when I served on the community board, Howard Golden never told me how to vote on anything. I didn't agree with him on everything. He never told me everything. And so, you know --

MR. PERALES: We get the message. Thank you very much.

MS. LESOLD: I would like to say, though, it is -- within the Board of Elections, there are problems. When I lived in Bay Ridge, I was being forced to -- to vote under the pictures of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. Finally the minister took those pictures down. That's --

MR. PERALES: The Board of Election is a state agency. We have absolutely no interest --

MS. LESOLD: I suppose it's a state thing, too, that you can't change your party. You have to wait six months to change your party. Which interferes --

MR. PERALES: We can -- I mean, there are lots of things that we're not happy with that that are within the purview of the State Board of Elections. There are some things that we can do here with the city charter. But --

MS. LESOLD: Well, thank you for -- for listening. And I would say that community boards can be very valuable. But only if they are independent community boards. And if the people who serve on them are independent.

MR. PERALES: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Are there any questions from Commission members?

Hearing none, again, my thanks to all of you.

Is there a motion to adjourn, Dale?
MR. HO: Motion to adjourn.
MR. MIROCZNIK: Second.
MR. PERALES: Second. All those in favor?
THE BOARD: Aye.
MR. PERALES: Those opposed?
The motion is passed.
(Whereupon, at 9:21 P.M., the above matter concluded.)

C E R T I F I C ATE

STATE OF NEW YORK )

COUNTY OF NASSAU )
: SS.:

I, KEVIN HAGHNAZARI, a Notary Public for and within the State of New York, do hereby certify:

That the above is a correct transcription of my stenographic notes.

I further certify that $I$ am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or by marriage and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 8th day of May 2018.






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