

Exec General Workspace - Charter Revision Commission

Moderated by Patrick Gaspard, Chair of New York City's
Commission on Government Efficiency

Wednesday, July 8, 2026

5:20 p.m.

Riverside Church
490 Riverside Drive
New York, NY 10027

Reported by: Paul Grasso

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A P P E A R A N C E S

List of Attendees:

Patrick Gaspard, Chair

Emma Wolfe, Vice Chair

Susan Kang, Commissioner

Theodore Moore, Commissioner

Kathy Wylde, Commissioner

Barika Williams, Commissioner

Kapil Longani, Commissioner

Esther Rosario, Commissioner

Ana Oliveira, Commissioner

Marco Carrion, Commissioner

Henry Garrido, Commissioner

Dawn Pinnock, Commissioner

Carlina Rivera, Commissioner

Ruth Messinger, Commissioner (by videoconference)

Mark Shaw, Commissioner, (by videoconference)

Ariela Kohen, Spanish Interpreter, Eiber Translations

Beth Zuriff, ASL Interpreter, Effective

Communications

Candace Davider, ASL Interpreter, Effective

Communications

Ahmed Tigani, Commissioner of the New York City

Department of Buildings

Seth Bynum, Senior Advisor for Housing Policy and

1 Development, Deputy Mayor for Housing and Planning
2 Samuel Eluto, Public Attendee Testimony
3 Michelle Napp, Public Attendee Testimony
4 Bruce Baker, Public Attendee Testimony
5 Katrina Long, Public Attendee Testimony
6 Emily Jacobi, Public Attendee Testimony
7 Michael Riley, Public Attendee Testimony
8 Tom Harris, Public Attendee Testimony
9 Andrew Rein, Public Attendee Testimony
10 Michael Piccirillo, Public Attendee Testimony
11 Jeremiah Bornemann, Public Attendee Testimony
12 Robert Avaltroni, Public Attendee Testimony
13 Jessie Fields, Public Attendee Testimony
14 Suzanne Ventura, Public Attendee Testimony
15 Faiza Khalid, Public Attendee Testimony
16 George Lee, Public Attendee Testimony
17 Servia Silva, Public Attendee Testimony
18 Adria Quinones, Public Attendee Testimony
19 Dr. Camelia Tepelus, Public Attendee Testimony
20 Ira Gershenhorn, Public Attendee Testimony
21 Mark Levine, NYC Comptroller
22 Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate
23 Meisha Smith, Manhattan Deputy Borough President
24 Hindy Schachter, Public Attendee Testimony (by
25 videoconference)

1 Darien Glasser, Public Attendee Testimony (by
2 videoconference)

3 Patrick Hall, Public Attendee Testimony

4 Hayden Brockett, Public Attendee Testimony

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. GASPARD: Good evening, everyone.

3 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Evening.

4 MR. GASPARD: I was just telling my
5 fellow commissioners that I lost my voice screaming
6 for Lionel Messi. So you're going to have to endure
7 with the scratchy-voiced commissioner.

8 My name is Patrick Gaspard and I'm
9 honored to be the chair of just this commission on
10 government efficiency. We are thrilled to be able to
11 be joined by a number of citywide elected officials
12 and boroughwide elected officials this evening. I'll
13 introduce them shortly and give them an opportunity to
14 speak.

15 We are here because we are all
16 determined to help create the 21st century government
17 that New Yorkers deserve and need, a government of the
18 possible, one that makes it so much more possible to
19 reform and innovate.

20 One that makes it a good deal more
21 accessible for all New Yorkers to be able to
22 participate in a city that is livable, that's durable,
23 that is less expensive than it currently is and one
24 where it's possible to have more childcare slots, more
25 affordable housing built and to be able to make

1 groceries accessible and affordable for all.

2 So we are doing all of that work and
3 we're doing it under the guise of this charter
4 revision commission and we are determined to make a
5 set of recommendations to the mayor and the city
6 administration that will then, in turn, we hope and
7 expect, to be converted into a set of referendum that
8 will appear on the ballot this November for all New
9 Yorkers to decide upon.

10 We have gone through a rigorous process
11 of a number of public hearings in every single one of
12 the boroughs. We've received testimony, at this
13 point, from nearly 300 New Yorkers and we've had
14 audiences, including this one, that -- that are --
15 easily peak at about a thousand participants at this
16 point.

17 We're excited that you are making the
18 decision to take time out from your lives this evening
19 to testify, to hear from your neighbors, to give us
20 your very best ideas, to share your grievances and
21 concerns, but also to help us maintain a gaze on the
22 possible by giving us your very best solutions to some
23 of the thorniest issues that we're all -- have been
24 contending with for some time.

25 I know that I speak with -- for my

1 fellow commissioners when I say that this is an
2 independent, non-partisan commission that intends to
3 hear the very best ideas that are available to us
4 irrespective of what the source of those ideas are.

5 We are hearing the -- the testimony,
6 absorbing it and recording it without any favor. And
7 I know that sometimes in life and in public policy
8 making the very best ideas come from people who you
9 may not have always agreed with on public policy. So
10 we're excited to hear from everybody.

11 Joining me in this task are 14 other
12 commissioners, extraordinary New Yorkers who have
13 given of their time of these last -- over these last
14 many weeks. They are Vice Chair Emma Wolfe, Secretary
15 Susan Kang, Marco Carrion, Henry Garrido, Theodore
16 Moore, Kapil Longani, Ana Oliveira, Dawn Pinnock,
17 Carlina Rivera, Esther Rosario, Barika Williams, Kathy
18 Wylde; attending virtually tonight are commissioners
19 Ruth Messinger and Mark Shaw.

20 Although this is intended as a top to
21 bottom review of the entire city charter, the
22 commission is looking in particular at the processes
23 built into our charter that could be updated to
24 deliver a more efficient -- government for New Yorkers
25 with excellence.

1 Today, we are focusing on
2 streamlining -- permitting. New Yorkers move fast,
3 but too often the services and programs they rely on
4 take far more time than New Yorkers can afford to
5 wait. Approval for a construction permit can remain
6 tied up in red tape, keeping much needed construction
7 of new housing mired in delays.

8 The process of issuing permits to build
9 in New York City is complex, crossing multiple
10 agencies and offices. A government of excellence must
11 deliver high quality goods and services quickly, and a
12 government that keeps pace with New Yorkers needs to
13 help keep costs down making our city, therefore, more
14 affordable.

15 That said, while we welcome the ability
16 for New Yorkers to testify on all topics that touch on
17 the New York City Charter, we are focused on
18 streamlining permitting and towards that end the staff
19 and I will work to front load those of you who intend
20 to testify on that issue.

21 If that's not the issue that you're
22 testifying on, we will hear you, we will hear you out.
23 But just understand why we may be advantaging in the
24 queue and in the order folks who have signed up in
25 particular to testify on streamlining permitting.

1 Tonight, we're privileged to have
2 experts speak -- expert speakers to focus on our
3 theme. I don't know how he's done this, but our
4 outstanding commissioner of the Department of
5 Buildings, Ahmed Tigani, is joining us and we all, I
6 think, appreciate what he's been doing the last few
7 days in Midtown Manhattan to keep everybody safe.

8 We're also joined by Seth Bynum, senior
9 advisor for the deputy mayor for Housing and Planning.
10 Those experts will have five minutes each to testify,
11 followed by questions from the commission. For
12 members of the public who would like to be heard,
13 those of us who are either joining in-person or
14 virtually, you will be given three minutes to testify.

15 There's a clock that you can all see
16 that will keep you at three minutes. And if you're
17 not watching the clock don't worry, I am. So we'll
18 keep it to three minutes and then you'll have an
19 opportunity to engage directly with the questions of
20 our commissioners.

21 We hope to be able to hear from
22 everyone who wishes to testify, but this hearing
23 tonight will conclude on time at 8:00 p.m.

24 So if we're close to that hour mark and
25 you haven't had a chance, you can submit your

1 testimony in writing online on our website or you can
2 choose to attend the last public hearing that we'll
3 have and I'll -- I'll give you some details on that by
4 the end of this -- this dialogue that we're having
5 tonight.

6 So actually I should -- you know what?
7 I should share the -- the website now so you can take
8 it down just in case you don't have an opportunity to
9 be heard and you want to testify. It is nyc.gov/coge.
10 I know that we're all going to work together to get
11 through everybody's testimony, but just in case,
12 the -- the website is nyc.gov/coge.

13 Before we proceed further with the
14 formal parts of this hearing, I'd like to ask my
15 fellow commissioners for a motion to approve the
16 minutes from our June 30th Brooklyn hearing and our
17 July 1st Bronx hearing. Is there a motion?

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 1: So move.

19 MR. GASPARD: Is there a second?

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: Second.

21 MR. GASPARD: Is there a discussion?

22 All those in favor say "aye."

23 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Aye.

24 MR. GASPARD: Any opposed?

25 Abstentions? Great. The minutes have been approved.

1 Thank you so much.

2 We're ready to hear from our expert
3 witnesses, but before we do that I'd like to invite
4 our friends in elected office to -- to join us to --
5 to share their thoughts about this process and about
6 the future of our city as it relates to charter
7 revision.

8 I would love to invite testimony from
9 Comptroller Mark Levine and Public Advocate Jumaane
10 Williams.

11 MR. LEVINE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.
12 Congrats on Messi.

13 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

14 MR. LEVINE: Thanks to the members of
15 the commission for stepping up and serving and for
16 allowing me to testify this afternoon. Last month I
17 submitted testimony regarding adopting clear rules for
18 the city's Revenue Stabilization Fund, commonly known
19 as the rainy day fund.

20 And I was excited to see the topic
21 included in the commission's preliminary report, and
22 in particular am grateful that this board appreciates
23 the need for insuring there are clear targets and
24 clear deposit rules.

25 MR. GASPARD: -- Comptroller, I know

1 that -- I -- I -- you -- we've known each other for a
2 long time. I've never -- had to ask you to speak up.
3 However, we do have many friends online who will not
4 be able to hear you unless you move the microphone
5 closer --

6 MR. LEVINE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Oh.
7 Now, that's much better. That's much better. Would
8 you like me to start again or are we good to -- okay.
9 Excellent.

10 Today, I want to focus on some of the
11 details of this proposal and further explain how this
12 commission can preserve the budgetary flexibility the
13 city requires while simultaneously putting in place
14 the basic guardrails needed to make the fund work.

15 First and foremost, I want to be clear
16 that we are not proposing that rigid formulas or
17 narrow economic triggers be written into the charter.
18 Instead, the charter should set a target for the
19 balance, require formula based deposits and define the
20 framework for withdrawals.

21 The specific rules, deposit formulas,
22 the withdrawal cap and triggers are instead defined by
23 policy, policy jointly adopted by the mayor, the
24 council and the comptroller. That structure and the
25 subsequent policy that would be adopted would allow

1 flexibility, adjustment and refinement over time.

2 This model shows that we can have
3 objective data-driven criteria without handcuffing the
4 city with rigid statutory language. Beyond that
5 point, I want to emphasize that key details regarding
6 the reserve target -- I want to emphasize key
7 details -- details regarding the reserve deposits and
8 withdrawals.

9 The commission has shown interest in a
10 reserve target equal to the revenue shortfall of the
11 first two years of a recession, and we agree, but
12 believe that this should be seen as a floor.

13 The appropriate target should be the --
14 expected full revenue loss over the entire period of
15 the recession or else the fund will fall short when
16 the city needs it most. Our deposit proposal is
17 intentionally counter-cyclical.

18 Deposits would occur during periods of
19 economic strength, they would pause in downturns and
20 we do not recommend automatic replenishment rules that
21 would force deposits at the worst possible moment. In
22 other words, deposits would never compete with
23 essential services.

24 Additionally, some have suggested
25 conditioning deposits on "other immediate fiscal

1 needs." But the city will always have immediate
2 needs. If this becomes the standard, required
3 deposits will rarely, if ever, occur. The rainy day
4 fund exists precisely to manage resources across time,
5 not only within a single fiscal year.

6 Lastly, I wish to touch on withdrawal
7 rules, which by my reading the commission seems to
8 have some reservations about. And this concern is
9 understandable. The fund must be readily usable in
10 moments of genuine distress, but the current framework
11 is far too loose.

12 The mayor may withdraw up to 50 percent
13 of the funds without certifying financial need, making
14 the fund vulnerable to use as a routine budget
15 balancing tool. That undermines the entire purpose of
16 the rainy day fund.

17 Withdrawal should be allowed during
18 recessions and major emergencies, events like 9/11,
19 the 2008 recession or the COVID-19 pandemic, events
20 that are time limited and have significant fiscal
21 impact.

22 Clear policy-based withdrawal rules
23 would protect the fund from misuse while ensuring it
24 remains fully -- available when the city needs it
25 most. Some have argued that because New York has

1 built reserves in recent years, formal rules are
2 unnecessary. But history shows the opposite.

3 The rainy day fund has received only
4 one deposit since its creation despite extraordinary
5 revenue growth over that time. Without rules
6 political pressures make saving during good times
7 extremely difficult. Rules do not limit flexibility,
8 they protect it.

9 By adopting a professionally designed
10 policy framework we can balance flexibility with
11 discipline and by embedding the core requirements in
12 the charter we ensure the rainy day fund is resilient,
13 accountable and adaptable.

14 This is how we protect New Yorkers, not
15 just in the next downturn but for the long term.
16 Thank you, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

17 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much,
18 Comptroller. Would you mind terribly if we --

19 MR. LEVINE: By all means, please.

20 MR. GASPARD: The public advocate and
21 then we'll --

22 MR. LEVINE: Absolutely. Thank you.

23 MR. GASPARD: Questions to both of you.
24 Thank you.

25 Public Advocate.

1 MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you so much.
2 Peace and blessing, love and light to everyone,
3 Mr. Chair and just a -- a awesome panel of civic
4 leaders. So I'm proud to be -- and this is the only
5 charter review commission that I recognize, so I'm
6 happy to be here.

7 And I know you mentioned Messi, but I
8 have to -- I'm still high on Knicks on five, so. I
9 got to say that.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 3: We're with
11 you. We're with you.

12 MR. WILLIAMS: So as -- as I mentioned,
13 my name is Jumaane Williams, public advocate for the
14 City of New York. Thank you to the members of the
15 commission on government efficiency for holding this
16 hearing today and allowing me the opportunity to
17 testify.

18 The city charter functions as our -- as
19 our local -- constitution. It reflects the values we
20 agree to abide by and guarantees key protections. As
21 the city's elected ombudsman it is my duty to advocate
22 and investigate on behalf of New Yorkers.

23 My office is open to constituents
24 minimally weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. to
25 support with anything from complaints of mold and

1 discolored water in apartment buildings to parents
2 reporting delayed special education services for their
3 children.

4 In order to carry out this duty, the
5 charter grants the Office of the Public Advocate
6 oversight obligation so that when New Yorkers come to
7 my office with an issue I have the duty to investigate
8 and remedy that.

9 Unfortunately, this process is both
10 time consuming and expensive for the city. As it
11 currently stands in my -- if my office requires
12 information from city agencies we must petition the
13 courts for a summary inquiry on the charter section
14 1109, but only for instances where a city agency or
15 official has not upheld a law or failed in performing
16 a specific duty.

17 In the spirit of government efficiency,
18 my recommendation today is simple. The charter
19 language should explicitly grant subpoena power to the
20 Office of the Public Advocate in order to streamline
21 our charter mandate duties.

22 Without this power the 1109 process is
23 both expensive and time consuming. It requires filing
24 a lawsuit which allows the agency in question to argue
25 in court as to why it shouldn't grant the inquiry.

1 With appeals -- with appeals this
2 process can take months, even years and cost the city
3 time and money in adjudication and prevent the very
4 oversight this office was -- was created for.

5 Subpoena power would require my office
6 to go to court -- it would -- subpoena power would not
7 require my office to go to court in the first place.
8 It would save the city money and conserve valuable
9 resources and information that, per the charter,
10 should already be shared if requested.

11 This position is supported by several
12 court opinions which set the precedent and rationale
13 for enshrining the right to sue for information within
14 the charter language. Transparency to the city's
15 ombudsman should be assumed as default.

16 Further interpretation of 1109 and the
17 grounds for a summary inquiry petition has been
18 consistently narrowed by court opinions. It applies
19 strictly to incidents that fulfill the legal
20 dictionary, definitions of violation and neglect of
21 duty.

22 This does not permit inquiries into
23 administrative inefficiency, deficiency or
24 mismanagement, which are all critical components of
25 the cases New York is bringing to my office. Examples

1 of judicial narrowing clearly show that the Public
2 Advocate's Office will be remiss in this charter
3 mandate duties if limited to 1109 summaries,
4 inquiries.

5 In line with this commission --
6 subpoena power would allow the Public Advocate's
7 Office to fulfill its duties and more efficiently on
8 behalf of New Yorkers and tangentially, last year, the
9 governor acknowledged that in the current climate of
10 corruption and the appearance of corruption, citywide
11 elected officials in New York City should have the
12 ability to hire independent counsel and have standing
13 to sue, which is a similar request that we have.

14 Moving on from subpoena power, but in
15 the same vein of improving oversight functions, I want
16 to echo the Department of -- Investigations requests
17 to add commissioner removal protections to the
18 charter, which would allow the removal of the DOI
19 commissioner only for cause and would require the
20 opportunity for a public hearing.

21 These protections are consistent with
22 the Board of Corrections Commissioners and Civil
23 Servants Commissioners. I see this protection as a
24 means of increasing transparency and reducing the risk
25 of improper removals.

1 As last year's City Council Charter
2 Review Commission, my testimony addressed the -- the
3 ways a charter can support external independent review
4 of our law enforcement bodies, including proposals to
5 tie the New York City Board of Corrections minimum
6 budget to 1 percent of the expense budget of the
7 Department of Corrections and changing the BOC's
8 appointment structure, allowing for more independence
9 between agencies and removing the impression of undue
10 political influence.

11 I also support setting a minimum on the
12 definition of a quorum at no less than five BOC
13 members. This will guarantee a wider array of
14 perspectives on vital decisions regarding jail
15 operations.

16 As mentioned in my testimony for the
17 2025 commission, I would like to request independent
18 funding for the Commission on Public Information and
19 Communication, also known as -- COPIC, which many of
20 you may not know about as most of the city does not,
21 which was created in 1989 to improve the public's
22 access to city information, which includes publishing
23 a data access directory.

24 Due to budgetary constraints, COPIC has
25 been unable to produce the annual data directory since

1 1993. And while the city's open data law now
2 maintains much of the city's public information, not
3 all information -- not all information is subject to
4 open data.

5 With rapid advancements of technology
6 use, having a body such as COPIC reviewing and
7 recommending its proper usage is instrumental to the
8 city's -- operations. I look forward to any questions
9 and I'm happy to pursue further conversations about
10 these recommendations with the commission. Thank you.

11 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much, Public
12 Advocate.

13 Thank you both for the precision and
14 ambition of your recommendations. I'm sure that there
15 are a number of questions from our commissioners. I'd
16 like to turn first to one of the commissioners who's
17 on remotely, who I know is terribly pained not to be
18 here in-person in her community, Commissioner Ruth
19 Messinger.

20 Ruth, if you can hear, I'd love to take
21 first questions from you.

22 MS. MESSINGER: Thank -- thank you,
23 Mr. Chair. Can you hear me?

24 MR. GASPARD: We can.

25 MS. MESSINGER: Okay. So thank you

1 first of all for recognizing me. I'm happy -- I've
2 been at every hearing. I'm happy to be on vacation
3 now, but also at this hearing and I'm delighted that
4 you're meeting in Manhattan, in my neighborhood.

5 I want to thank the Public Advocate for
6 raising a couple of issues that I was not aware of.
7 I'll say that I look forward to looking at them
8 more -- in more detail.

9 The comptroller, I have two questions.
10 One is, as the staff of the commission will tell you,
11 we had a presentation by three or four experts on
12 rainy day funds -- about which I don't know nearly
13 enough, and they had various comments, not on your
14 proposal, but on the kinds of rainy day funds and the
15 ways in which they think a fund should be presented.

16 And I would love for you, with the
17 staff, to take a look at how we're -- the proposal
18 that we're getting from you and the mayor, which I'm
19 assuming I'm inclined to support, but how it would be
20 commented on and evaluated by those experts. That's
21 the first thing; you don't need to answer.

22 But the second one is, I just want to
23 tell you -- separate from what you -- talked about
24 today, we had lengthy testimony, particularly at our
25 last hearing, about the extraordinary delays in

1 delivering money to not-for-profit agencies that have
2 contracts with the city and in delivering money that
3 is actually approved by the city council to be given
4 to not-for-profit organizations but gets held up
5 someplace in city government, including we've been
6 told in the comptroller's office.

7 So I'm going to ask that you talk with
8 the staff and look at those issues carefully because
9 it is at a level that makes it really impossible for
10 some religious organizations and some secular not-for-
11 profit organizations to -- to operate.

12 MR. LEVINE: Thank you, Madam Borough
13 President. So appreciate you always.

14 I would love to see the kind of
15 commentary that the experts offered on rainy day
16 funds. I can tell you that New York City is an
17 outlier among our peers nationally in not having rules
18 around our rainy day fund.

19 And -- and perhaps it's no coincidence
20 that we also have far less in reserve relative to our
21 budget compared to other cities. We ranked ninth out
22 of ten, only ahead of Chicago nationally. It's part
23 of why I think we need a stronger set of rules in
24 place.

25 And on -- on the late payments, this

1 is -- this is a huge problem. It's not new. It's
2 been building. It's really outrageous that we make
3 nonprofits do work on behalf of the city and then we
4 don't pay them.

5 My office actually today released a
6 dashboard which for the first time makes it possible
7 to track the delay to registration of contracts, which
8 is obviously part of the delay. You can look at it by
9 agency, over time, you can check the trends.

10 As for the comptroller's role, we are
11 the only stage of the process that has an actual clock
12 on it. And so the charter gives us 30 days to review
13 and register contracts. And I'm very happy to say
14 that our average turnaround time is 18 days and we are
15 trying to shave further time off that.

16 But for the most part, the delays are
17 at other stages of the process and we're working
18 closely with the administration and many advocates to
19 try and fix that.

20 MS. MESSINGER: Thank you very, very
21 much.

22 MR. LEVINE: Thank you.

23 MS. MESSINGER: One specific there was
24 that on -- which to look -- we'll look at is that on
25 the contracts, when the city council members add money

1 to the budget for some large not-for-profit
2 organizations they are added as contracts and the
3 recommendation from MOCK [ph] is that they might be
4 added as grants which would allow them to move more
5 quickly, and I would urge you to engage with that as
6 well.

7 MR. LEVINE: We will. Thank you.

8 MS. MESSINGER: Thank you, Mr.
9 Chairman.

10 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you,
11 Commissioner.

12 Comptroller, want to -- want to tell
13 you that every single hearing that we've had, there's
14 been an avalanche of grievances around this point that
15 Ruth just raised.

16 And I'm heartened to know that your
17 staff has developed a dashboard and I hope that you --
18 that your -- that your staff will share that with the
19 staff of this commission so that we can add it to the
20 report in order to build momentum on a solution to
21 this terribly terrible, terrible, sinful approach that
22 the city has taken to this matter.

23 MR. LEVINE: Absolutely. We will,
24 Mr. Chairman.

25 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you.

1 Know that Henry Garrido has a question,
2 followed by Emma Wolfe.

3 MR. GARRIDO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 My question is around something you
5 mentioned, Mr. Comptroller, regarding when does a
6 rainy day fund get triggered?

7 You mention three catastrophic events,
8 almost catastrophic event regarding COVID, 9/11 and
9 the financial control, but those are all completely
10 unexpected.

11 MR. LEVINE: Yeah.

12 MR. GARRIDO: Is there another way to
13 look at it from the perspective of once the fund is
14 created, if there's a trigger when there's a deficit,
15 for instance, like we just saw during this budget
16 process, a \$12 billion deficit mayor announced as a
17 result of some of the actions or not actions that
18 resulted in money not being registered.

19 But with the creation of the fund are
20 there other triggers that are not necessarily
21 catastrophic in nature, that is not a COVID or
22 September 11 or something, that could also trigger
23 the -- the potential withdrawal of that fund, in your
24 view?

25 MR. LEVINE: Yeah. So I think we're

1 recommending fairly general language for the charter
2 that would list a recession or a temporary emergency
3 and then we'd need a policy hammered out that would
4 get much more specific on what would define each of
5 those two categories.

6 Temporary emergency would -- would
7 obviously cover something like a pandemic. It could
8 potentially cover something like a migrant crisis
9 where there was an unanticipated expense that the city
10 bore.

11 And how we would define temporary would
12 also be up for debate and you'd probably want to have
13 some objective measure of the financial hit the city's
14 taking in such a crisis. But I think that if you're
15 talking about a situation where there's -- there's no
16 obvious emergency, I don't think that's the time that
17 you want to dig into the rainy day fund.

18 And to be honest, we confronted that in
19 the budget cycle in the last few months and there was
20 really a consensus ultimately across every part of
21 city government, I think it's fair to say from the
22 city council, ultimately, from the Merrill
23 Administration, certainly my office and many
24 advocates, that this was not a moment to tap the rainy
25 day fund.

1 And I think if we -- if we open the
2 door to use in such circumstances it'll be very hard
3 to build a balance that will be ready when we do hit
4 an actual crisis like a recession. And, as you know,
5 because you've heard me say I'm -- I -- I see
6 uncertainty ahead and I want to make sure we're ready.

7 And so a year like this, when revenue's
8 growing, when the economy's strong, when Wall Street
9 is doing well, it should be, in my opinion, that we
10 are depositing, not taking out of the rainy day fund.

11 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

12 Emma Wolfe, followed by Kapil Longani.

13 MS. WOLFE: Okay. Thank you so much.
14 This is just personal editorial comment. I had to
15 spend four years in the Public Advocate's Office
16 myself way back. I'm very sympathetic to the
17 challenges of fulfilling the charge of the office with
18 such a small staff.

19 But you've been at it for a while and
20 you just talked about one of your -- one part of your
21 testimony, Mr. Public Advocate, was about requesting
22 information from the city and getting more power to
23 receive information in a timely basis.

24 Can you tell a story or give an example
25 of how you would, moving forward, use more power to --

1 use the power to request more information or
2 challenges that you've encountered to date as public
3 advocate and how that would have impacted New Yorkers?
4 I think it would be helpful to sort of elucidate that
5 in real life --

6 MR. WILLIAMS: You know, I think each
7 administration has been a little different. The last
8 one was probably the -- the most challenging. We've
9 often requested information for a -- from a number of
10 agencies.

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: -- just --
12 opportunities --

13 MR. WILLIAMS: Oh, okay. Some
14 additional -- but we've -- we've asked information
15 from a lot of different agencies and particularly last
16 year we had difficulties getting information from the
17 NYPD and from the Department of Corrections. We also
18 had some difficulty getting information, believe --
19 from -- from DOB, fire department.

20 That was around when we were trying to
21 figure out the intersection of DOB, FDNY and the
22 federal building. So we're just trying to get those
23 informations. We got -- we got stopped and it was
24 hard to advocate without understanding what's
25 happening in a number of those agencies.

1 And then we, because of how small our
2 office is, we got to figure out, well, do we fight
3 that fight? Do we use information that we have or do
4 we move on to something else? And there are times we
5 actually -- that information would be very, very
6 helpful to figure out and navigate which direction to
7 go.

8 MS. WOLFE: Thank you.

9 MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

10 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

11 Kapil.

12 MR. LONGANI: Thank you, Chair.

13 Thank you both for your terrific
14 testimony.

15 Comptroller, as it pertains to the
16 rainy day fund, beyond a framework governing deposits,
17 withdrawals and target size, is there something else
18 that we should prioritize in the charter as it
19 pertains to the fund?

20 MR. LEVINE: To the rainy day fund?

21 MR. LONGANI: Mm-hmm.

22 MR. LEVINE: Well, I think you covered
23 the three pieces of it. I -- it's -- if I'm reading
24 your report right, it sounds like there's some
25 questions on one of those three pieces, which is the

1 conditions for withdrawal.

2 And I've spoken some about why I think
3 you do need rules around that or ultimately you just
4 don't build up the balance over time. So I'm not sure
5 I would have anything to add beyond that.

6 MR. LONGANI: Okay. Great. Thank you.

7 MR. LEVINE: Thank you, Kapil.

8 MR. WILLIAMS: Chair, I just -- I just
9 want to add one thing to -- to the last question.
10 We -- we've always been thankful because staff,
11 sometimes I work with staff, and so I do -- I do want
12 to just acknowledge the servants that work and that
13 sometimes help -- help -- very helpful in us getting
14 that.

15 But it does become difficult and you
16 don't want to get -- push people past the point where
17 they may get in -- in trouble. So I just want -- I
18 just want -- I -- I do want to acknowledge the people
19 who are actually there and trying to help. But the
20 subpoena part would really just make it much --

21 MR. GASPARD: We -- we appreciate that.
22 And I was also going to -- to note, Public Advocate,
23 that we do have the Commissioner of Buildings here.
24 So given that your staff had difficulty getting
25 information from --

1 MR. WILLIAMS: Right. Well, so this
2 is -- Commissioner Tigani just -- just got there.
3 This is six months -- the administration, so.

4 MR. GASPARD: I understand. I
5 understand.

6 MR. WILLIAMS: This is mostly about
7 previous administrations and over a -- a long time
8 period. But he has been great.

9 MR. GASPARD: Great. I -- I believe
10 that we've exhausted the questions that we have for
11 now for both of you and your -- and your teams and we
12 welcome the written testimony and we'll follow up.

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 5: -- one more.

14 MR. GASPARD: You know what? I take
15 that back.

16 Barika.

17 MS. WILLIAMS: Hi. Sorry. I just
18 needed to check that you hadn't covered it. So one of
19 the things that we heard previously, what Comptroller
20 and, of course, hello Public Advocate JDW, was around
21 the recession as the indicator and the lag or maybe
22 not accurate reflection as recession being indicator,
23 especially for low income and marginalized
24 communities.

25 So how are you thinking about recession

1 being the marker of rainy day fund either input or
2 access versus the actual, like, impact felt by many
3 communities which doesn't always correspond to, sort
4 of, the meta economic recession indicator?

5 MR. LEVINE: Sure. Economists are very
6 slow at declaring a recession at the federal level.
7 It can take like a year or more before there's an
8 official declaration. That obviously wouldn't work in
9 this case. We can't sit back and wait. So there are
10 a variety of proposals.

11 One is to simply look at payroll data
12 because we get that every month. And so one standard
13 would be to say if we have employment reduction as
14 reflected in the payroll data for five months
15 straight, then we would consider that a -- a
16 recession.

17 And that -- that is the kind of measure
18 that's -- it's pretty broad; right? It -- it reaches
19 out into jobs at all levels, from blue collar to the
20 highest paying, and I would say that's probably the
21 best measure that we have.

22 MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

23 MR. LEVINE: Yeah. Thank you.

24 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much. Thank
25 you both for your testimony. Thank you for your

1 commitment and your outstanding service. We
2 appreciate you and -- and we'll look forward to
3 continued engagement with you and your staff.

4 MR. LEVINE: Thank you. Thank you.

5 MR. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

6 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

7 All right. We'll hear from -- we'll
8 hear testimony for -- from one more representative
9 before we move on to our experts and then to the rest
10 of the public hearing. Representing the Manhattan
11 borough president is the Deputy Borough President,
12 Meisha Smith.

13 Welcome.

14 MS. SMITH: Thank you. Thank you
15 everyone so much. I apologize Brad couldn't be here,
16 our borough president. He had dental work done
17 earlier today and is not capable of being here right
18 now.

19 MR. GASPARD: We -- we understand. Can
20 I -- can I ask you to just raise the microphone so
21 that our online audience can hear you? Great. Thank
22 you.

23 MS. SMITH: Wonderful. Thank you.

24 So thank you, Chair Gaspard, Vice Chair
25 Wolfe, Executive Director Chang and commissioners for

1 the opportunity to testify on behalf of myself and
2 Manhattan Borough President, Brad Hoylman-Sigal.

3 A charter revision committee is a rare
4 and important opportunity to reconsider the basic
5 structures of city government and I'm grateful that
6 some of New York's most experienced and thoughtful
7 leaders are serving on this commission. So thank you.

8 Today, I'd like to share a few ideas
9 that the Manhattan borough president and I believe
10 would make our government more efficient and the city
11 an easier place to live.

12 First, it seems clear, based on the
13 substantial testimony heard by this commission and
14 hearing from our own constituents and affordable
15 housing developers, that permitting is too slow on
16 several fronts.

17 A single affordable housing building
18 can require 40 separate permits and procedures across
19 15 different city agencies. We support the
20 commission's proposal to explore a central permitting
21 hub to bring these reviews under one roof.

22 Even a simple centralized online portal
23 for permit users would be a great start to this
24 effort. We're also glad to see the commission is
25 considering vesting the Department of Buildings with

1 rulemaking authority to update all or part of the New
2 York City building code.

3 This would be a meaningful improvement
4 in the city's approach to building safety. Currently,
5 all changes to the New York City building code must go
6 through the city council. This has led our code to
7 fall behind peer jurisdictions and best engineering
8 practices.

9 A code that only updates on the
10 legislative body's calendar, competing every time
11 against the city council's very full agenda, will
12 always fall behind up-to-date safety standards, and
13 ours does.

14 Of course there will always be some
15 delay in adapting a nationwide standard to the
16 particularities of our city, but this process should
17 only take as long as the technical work itself
18 demands. The city does not need to look for a new
19 model here.

20 New York State's building code is
21 updated by a standing body of engineers and industry
22 officials through notice and comment rulemaking under
23 the state Administrative Procedure Act and that
24 process moves more quickly.

25 As a result, the state's newest

1 building code effective next week will reflect the
2 2024 national model code, whereas the city's newest
3 building code effective next year will still reflect
4 the code from 2015.

5 Delegating regulatory authority does
6 not limit state legislators from stepping in when they
7 think it was wise to do so. In fact, the last
8 legislative session in Albany, Borough President
9 Hoylman-Sigal, then a state senator, passed a bill
10 updating the state's operable windows requirements in
11 the multiple dwelling act.

12 But the overwhelming majority of
13 routine technical updates were handled by experts on
14 an ongoing basis without waiting for a legislative
15 session.

16 We're also glad to see the commission's
17 work on the disposition of city owned land, which
18 brings to mind important affordable housing projects
19 in Manhattan such as Sendero Verde and Timbale Terrace
20 that were delayed due to unique requirements imposed
21 on the disposition of city-owned land.

22 I encourage the CRC to consider actions
23 that would make it easier to bring these kinds of
24 projects online. The commission's efforts to speed up
25 contracting by reforming procurement and similar --

1 and -- are similarly important.

2 It's a common refrain that city funded
3 capital projects take three times as long and cost
4 three times as much as those that are privately funded
5 and not subject to the city's procurement rules. This
6 creates adverse incentives and inequitable outcomes.

7 Projects in neighborhoods with strong
8 access to private capital will simply avoid city
9 procurement along with the labor standards and anti-
10 discrimination protections it requires, while those
11 without that access are struck -- are stuck with far
12 slower timelines.

13 Closing the gap by improving city
14 procurement processes will both speed up important
15 public and private projects and ultimately increase
16 adherence to city integrity checks.

17 Finally, we'd like to raise an issue a
18 little closer to home. How the charter allocates
19 capital funding to the borough presidents under
20 Section 211.

21 Each borough president's office is
22 charged with allocating a share of the city's capital
23 budget every year to fund the kinds of local
24 infrastructure and facility projects that a borough
25 president is uniquely positioned to identify and

1 prioritize for their borough, including parks --
2 schools, human service programs and arts and culture
3 institutions.

4 Section 211 vaguely sets aside 5
5 percent of a defined slice of the city's capital
6 appropriations for the borough presidents,
7 specifically those funded by the city tax levy debt or
8 by state and federal funds "over which the city has
9 substantial discretion," only carving out a lump sum
10 for school construction and rapid transit money spent
11 to public authorities.

12 However, the charter never defines
13 substantial discretion, nor does it explain exactly
14 which appropriations to exclude from the full bucket.
15 OMB, in turn, doesn't publicize a basis for its
16 calculations of the Section 211 appropriations.

17 Our office was unable, even under the
18 most judicious interpretation of the charter, to
19 reconstruct the actual capital allocations. Borough
20 presidents -- that the borough president's offices
21 receive.

22 Our office's construction of the 5
23 percent is in fact significantly higher than the
24 actual allocation any given fiscal year. We urge the
25 commission to assist in clarifying the formula's

1 calculation.

2 Once that allocation base is set, the
3 charter's default formula splits it among the five
4 boroughs by averaging each borough's share of the
5 city's nighttime population with its share of the
6 city's land area.

7 The charter-set default formula
8 currently overvalues geography as a measure of capital
9 need and in practice penalizes population density.
10 Manhattan holds roughly 20 percent of the city's
11 population, but only about 7.5 percent of its land
12 area, the smallest footprint of any borough.

13 The charter effectively mandates that
14 Manhattan receive roughly the same level of capital
15 funding as Staten Island and, with all due respect to
16 my friends across the New York Harbor, Manhattan has
17 vastly greater capital needs. Manhattan is a hub
18 for --

19 MR. GASPARD: -- Deputy Borough
20 President, I'm going to give you one more minute.

21 MS. SMITH: Almost done. Sorry.

22 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

23 MS. SMITH: Manhattan has vastly
24 greater needs. Manhattan is a hub for all of our
25 city's residents to access healthcare, education,

1 social services, transportation and arts and culture,
2 among other things.

3 The charter fails to account for the
4 fact that capital projects in Manhattan far outweigh
5 its relatively small land area. The formula also only
6 counts residential or nighttime population, ignoring
7 the commuters, patients, students and visitors who
8 push Manhattan's daytime population past 3.9 million
9 in cultural institutions concentrated here.

10 We urge the commission to review the
11 formula and consider revising it with one built around
12 actual capital need, accounting for daytime population
13 and the concentration of citywide institutions rather
14 than an average of a head count and square mileage.

15 We appreciate the seriousness with
16 which the commission has approached its work and
17 particularly its focus on making government more
18 efficient. We look forward to continuing to work with
19 the commission and its finalized recommendations. And
20 I thank you, again, for the opportunity to testify.

21 MR. GASPARD: -- thank you. Please
22 forgive me for interrupting.

23 MS. SMITH: Oh, you're fine. No, no,
24 no.

25 MR. GASPARD: It's just that there's so

1 much we're trying to get in.

2 Questions for the -- Deputy Borough
3 President?

4 We have no questions. I think that
5 your testimony had a powerful clarity, all well
6 received.

7 MS. SMITH: Thank you. Thank you all
8 for your work, seriously.

9 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

10 MS. SMITH: It's very helpful. Thank
11 you. Have a good one.

12 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. We -- we
13 appreciate you.

14 We're now going to -- with that, we're
15 going to turn to our panel of experts and then we'll
16 open up to public testimony. I'd like to welcome
17 testimony from our outstanding Department of Buildings
18 Commissioner Tigani.

19 Commissioner, please. I know you
20 haven't slept in two days so.

21 MR. TIGANI: No. But this is just how
22 my face looks regularly. Just because we're, you
23 know, I want acknowledge, yes, to the Knicks, I want
24 to acknowledge Messi. But just remember it's 67 days
25 until Giants football starts -- so let's not lose

1 our --

2 MR. GASPARD: So you're -- so -- so in
3 addition to being the buildings commissioner, you're
4 apparently the patron saint of lost causes, so.
5 Welcome.

6 MR. TIGANI: You know what? I wear
7 many hats, Chair. I wear many hats.

8 MS. WILLIAMS: This is, on the record,
9 probably the number one sports fan, Commissioner.

10 MR. TIGANI: Good evening, Chair,
11 Executive Director and distinguished members of the
12 commission. My name is Ahmed Tigani and I proudly
13 serve as the commissioner of the New York City
14 Department of Buildings.

15 I want to first thank you for the
16 opportunity to speak with you today on these issues.
17 Also, while I have the opportunity to talk to New
18 Yorkers today, I want to acknowledge the dedicated
19 efforts of first responders, of the DOB team who are
20 currently on site at 235 East 42nd Street.

21 As many of you know, the construction
22 crews working through the night have made significant
23 progress in stabilizing the impacted building and this
24 work continues today.

25 DOB inspectors, engineers and some

1 incredible construction workers will remain on the
2 site to monitor the progress, ongoing work and
3 continue the investigation into the structural
4 failure.

5 We are continually assessing the
6 progress that's been made by the contractors to make
7 this building safe and we'll look to remove further
8 restrictions in the area only when it's safe to move
9 so.

10 Now, I will transition into why I'm
11 here tonight, to speak about DOB's work related to
12 efficiency and ideas for how we can be better and do
13 better for New Yorkers.

14 For years, DOB has approached this work
15 with intention and a focus on working to get results,
16 striving to improve the experience of applicants,
17 licensees and members of the public by making our
18 systems more accessible and refining our protocols,
19 our systems and our guidance.

20 The purpose of these efforts is to
21 boost confidence and clarity in -- in navigating the
22 process. New Yorkers deserve a local government as
23 worthy of our well-deserved title as the best city in
24 the world.

25 While we have made great strides to

1 improve our services in recent years, this agency also
2 acknowledges that much more can be done to improve the
3 way we build and maintain our city. This includes
4 changing how things are done within DOB in an effort
5 to support needed development, public safety, and
6 greater quality of life.

7 I also want to say in addition to being
8 grateful to the members of the commission, I am very
9 grateful to members of the public who have come and
10 testified. I've looked at testimony from Brooklyn --
11 from Brooklyn and Bronx, particularly, and others.

12 You've had small business owners, real
13 estate experts, contractors talk about ideas on how we
14 can be better and we -- and we thank you for that.

15 To that end, the mandate of the
16 commission, which is improving efficiency, modernizing
17 city government and ensuring government keeps pace
18 with New Yorkers needs, deeply aligns with DOB's
19 mission under this mayor and in this administration as
20 we pursue increasing safety, economic opportunity
21 and -- equitable growth in the work that we pursue day
22 to day.

23 In our recent history, the department
24 has demonstrated this objective through several
25 initiatives and accomplishments. We recently adopted

1 a new existing building code in January 2026,
2 providing a modern streamlined framework for
3 renovation and alter -- and alter -- alternative
4 methods for work.

5 We are advancing important reforms to
6 Local Law 11, facade inspection regulations, that will
7 protect New Yorkers while reducing unnecessary
8 compliance burdens on the building owners.

9 We are implementing new rules and
10 educational materials to facilitate more building
11 typology options, from office to residential
12 conversions, to easing the way -- easing the ways to
13 build basement apartments.

14 We are adopting reforms through the
15 SPEED Task Force and as recently announced in the
16 mayor's housing plan, block by block, we will soon
17 lead a -- an affordable and efficient code reform task
18 force to identify areas of the construction code that
19 can be reformed to encourage more and better housing
20 development without compromising safety.

21 And we are pursuing legislative
22 priorities that would modernize New York State's
23 multiple dwelling law and alignment with modern New
24 York City construction standards. This is all while
25 giving no ground in our responsibility to keep workers

1 and the public safe.

2 And, in fact, seeing injuries on job
3 sites decrease over 50 percent over the last six
4 years. That said, any injury -- any individual who
5 cannot go home after working on a job site is an
6 unacceptable number.

7 In these ways and many more, we believe
8 it is a core responsibility of the department to help
9 eliminate obstacles to development and we are proud to
10 partner in that effort. Today, in the same spirit, I
11 want to share the commission's three charter reforms
12 that would directly accelerate safe construction
13 across New York City.

14 Before I dig in, I want to note that
15 I'm joined here by my colleague, Seth Bynum, from the
16 mayor -- from the deputy mayor's team who will be
17 giving a more detailed review of the SPEED Task Force
18 permitting recommendations and the work we are all
19 undertaking together across agencies to improve
20 permitting.

21 But for now, I'll start with the DOB
22 specific charter proposals. After my colleague
23 testifies, we are both happy to take any questions you
24 have about the SPEED Task Force or DOB's proposals.

25 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. And I should

1 have introduced your colleague, Seth Bynum, the senior
2 advisor to the deputy mayor for Housing and Planning.

3 Welcome, Seth.

4 MR. TIGANI: So I -- I'll start with
5 the waterfront construction permitting. So waterfront
6 construction permitting is currently split between the
7 Department of Small Business Services and Department
8 of Buildings.

9 Responsibility for water-related
10 reviews has evolved over many decades as new
11 regulations, agencies and policy priorities were
12 added. While each agency's role serves a distinct
13 purpose, the resulting framework often requires
14 coordination between multiple agencies on construction
15 related matters.

16 The current system is one in which many
17 waterfront approvals involving construction,
18 engineering and building code issues are formally
19 administered by SBS. Though in practice, SBS and DOB
20 frequent -- frequently work in tandem to evaluate and
21 support project review for waterfront permits,
22 creating parallel review timelines.

23 This creates a structural redundancy.
24 DOB's engineers and inspectors due to substantive
25 technical work, but the formal decision making

1 authority rests elsewhere, requiring coordination
2 between agencies before -- approvals can be issued.

3 We are in support of a charter
4 amendment consolidating the waterfront permitting
5 within DOB subsequent to the implementation of a
6 waterfront code, which is currently being developed.

7 As the city pursues an ambitious
8 waterfront resiliency and infrastructure agenda, this
9 reform will create a more efficient review process for
10 applicants and place technical decisions where the
11 expertise actually sits.

12 While DOB continues to make rule
13 technical -- make routine technical amendments to the
14 construction code to improve evolving industry
15 standards, these updates must still proceed through
16 the local legislative process which extends
17 implementation timelines.

18 The more structured and cyclical code
19 revision process introduced in recent years was an
20 important and forward-looking investment designed to
21 support a rapidly evolving urban development
22 environment.

23 However, ongoing experience has
24 demonstrated that even well-designed processes must
25 adapt to the changing circumstances. As the needs of

1 our communities and stakeholders continue to evolve,
2 we must consider whether our current approach enables
3 us to deliver the level of service and responsiveness
4 they expect.

5 In practice, the length of the current
6 limited option for adoption of new regulations has
7 constrained our ability to adopt emerging best
8 practices at the speed required by the industry.

9 The 2022 construction codes took seven
10 and a half months to go through -- seven and a half
11 years to go through the legislative process, the
12 electrical code update took nine months, and neither
13 timeline includes the years of technical work that
14 preceded introduction.

15 The result is that New York City
16 consistently lags, as heard before, behind peer cities
17 in adopting more -- more modern standards, which
18 includes safety enhancements.

19 We support a charter amendment allowing
20 routine technical code amendments to be adopted
21 through the city's existing administrative rulemaking
22 process which under -- which includes public notices,
23 comment provisions and is available for feedback.

24 The council will also retain its
25 authority to direct specific changes to the code.

1 This reform simply removes delays on the back end of
2 code adoption for code updates that are technical and
3 routine, which would more properly approve the
4 regulations governing construction work.

5 And finally, the Department of
6 Buildings historically operated through geographically
7 based borough offices and the charter's provisions
8 reflect that earlier organizational model. Over time,
9 however, DOB has -- has evolved.

10 For example, the agency has -- has
11 created centralized units to review certain
12 construction projects, including increasing complex --
13 increasingly complex projects, bringing consistency,
14 depth of -- of expertise and institutional knowledge
15 to the review process for those projects.

16 Because the charter does not recognize
17 current operations, certain processes, including the
18 issuing of certificates of occupancy, may require
19 routing through geographically assigned borough
20 offices even when a project's substantive review has
21 been completed by a centralized unit that has
22 developed extensive familiarity with the application,
23 project history and technical issues.

24 A charter amendment to recognize
25 current organizational structure and efficiencies and

1 operations to allow the commissioner to designate
2 other senior officials to issue final determinations
3 would streamline DOB operations.

4 Fewer administrative steps would reduce
5 unnecessary delays in delivery of housing, hospital
6 seats, infrastructure, resiliency, economic
7 development projects, while still ensuring that the
8 department's experts are providing appropriate
9 oversight and accountability.

10 The commission, its mission, pillars,
11 were created for this moment and the Department of
12 Buildings is proud to stand alongside the
13 administration in our pursuit of increasing
14 efficiency, safer standards and building more. Our
15 proposed reforms to the charter will meet the moment
16 and deliver on that mandate.

17 We thank you again for this opportunity
18 to weigh in and thank you for your service on this
19 commission, to the city and to these high ideals and,
20 of course, happy to answer any questions.

21 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much,
22 Commissioner.

23 Seth.

24 MR. BYNUM: Absolutely. I actually
25 have a -- a presentation here. Perfect.

1 Good evening, commissioners. My name
2 is Seth Bynum and I'm senior advisor to the Deputy
3 Mayor for Housing and Planning, Leila Bozard.

4 On January 1st, Mayor Mamdani signed
5 executive order number five, establishing the
6 streamlining procedures to expedite equitable
7 development task force, otherwise known as the SPEED
8 Task Force.

9 In my capacity as senior advisor I work
10 with my fellow city hall -- city hall colleagues to
11 form, manage and lead the SPEED Task Force. This task
12 force consists of city government representatives from
13 the housing and the housing permitting agencies and
14 mayor's offices such as HPD, DCP, DOB, DEP, DOT and
15 MOC -- MOEC to just name a few.

16 Next slide please. Oh, technical
17 difficulties. I can -- I can continue.

18 MR. GASPARD: You may have to go
19 forward without it. Sorry about that.

20 MR. BYNUM: The purpose of the SPEED
21 Task Force --

22 MR. GASPARD: Those who live by the
23 power force.

24 MR. BYNUM: I know.

25 The -- the purpose of the SPEED Task

1 Force was to develop a list of recommendations to
2 streamline and expedite the affordable housing
3 production process. Earlier this spring, the -- the
4 SPEED Task Force publicly released this list of
5 recommendations and named them the SPEED Report.

6 For my testimony I'll be focusing on
7 how the SPEED Task Force form these recommendations in
8 the report and what they are.

9 Over the course of the four months
10 leading to the release of the speed report, my city
11 hall colleagues and I have received 500
12 recommendations, met with over a hundred external
13 stakeholders in the affordable housing community and
14 consistently met with roughly a hundred staff in ten
15 plus agencies to formulate the 52 recommendations in
16 the SPEED Report.

17 These recommendations, spanning the
18 affordable housing -- production process, are
19 actionable and feasible items that we believe, after
20 conversations with affordable housing stakeholders and
21 CD agency staff, will meaningfully expedite affordable
22 housing development in New York City.

23 But before we go into the
24 recommendations, I want to talk a little bit about
25 what the affordable housing production process is. In

1 the SPEED Report we broke the affordable housing --
2 production process down into four phases,
3 environmental review and planning, pre-development,
4 permitting and approvals, and marketing and lease up.

5 For my testimony I'll be focusing on
6 the recommendations concerning two of the phases of
7 the affordable housing production process, pre-
8 development and permitting and approvals.

9 Before I walk you through these --
10 recommendations I want to point out that most of the
11 feedback we received from the affordable housing
12 development community was centered around the need for
13 speed, pun intended, and flexibility in our permitting
14 processes for housing.

15 We attempted to address this by
16 focusing on making policy reforms that give agencies
17 more discretion in an ever-changing development
18 environment and providing agencies and affordable
19 housing stakeholders with the tools and information
20 needed to make decisions more quickly and accurately.

21 Some of the more impactful
22 recommendations we are actively implementing are
23 creating a new team at HPD that would help manage
24 ongoing inter-agency coordination for a hundred
25 percent affordable housing projects going through the

1 financing process at HPD, expanding DOB's affordable
2 housing hub program that will provide every affordable
3 housing project on city-owned land a DOB project
4 advocate that will better help them navigate DOB's
5 processes, creating a new team at the mayor's office
6 of technology and innovation that will help to link
7 the permitting portals and data between various
8 agencies so status and information can be shared more
9 quickly, streamlining the processes and policies
10 surrounding city-owned land that will allow buildings
11 to begin site -- preparation and construction more
12 quickly.

13 And to address how the city handles
14 permitting and approvals, we are developing a process
15 to establish a new kind of stormwater pollution
16 prevention construction permit that will allow
17 projects to close on financing and begin construction
18 more quickly.

19 We're creating a third-party inspection
20 procedure in advance of FDNY's -- FDNY's final fire
21 alarm inspections that will provide certainty to
22 development teams and fire alarm inspectors and thus
23 allow fire alarm inspections to happen more quickly,
24 standardizing the expiration dates for asbestos
25 remediation and paperwork that will reduce the risk of

1 construction delays, installing mobile field
2 technology for DEP staff to automatically create daily
3 staff routes that minimize travel times for water and
4 sewer line inspections, and creating a single, easily
5 understood permit guide that lists and describes the
6 processes of obtaining the most common permits needed
7 to begin and complete construction.

8 MR. GASPARD: Seth, you have about one
9 more minute.

10 MR. BYNUM: Perfect.

11 These recommendations that I just
12 walked through are a small amount of the 52
13 recommendations in this -- in the SPEED Report that
14 this administration is actively implementing.

15 All 52 of these recommendations
16 represent our commitment to installing public
17 excellence in our housing and permitting processes to
18 ensure housing is built and New Yorkers are housed
19 safely and quickly.

20 Thank you for the opportunity to talk
21 about the administration's SPEED efforts and I look
22 forward to all of your questions.

23 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much, Seth,
24 and thank you, Commissioner.

25 Commissioners, questions?

1 Emma and Henry.

2 MS. WOLFE: Okay. This may be very
3 easy and it's not a got you or putting you on the
4 spot, although I think you want to be put on the spot
5 for this one.

6 MR. TIGANI: Yes. Yes.

7 MS. WOLFE: I noted that one of the
8 recommendations out of the SPEED Task Force was for a
9 DOB advocate for affordable housing builders, which
10 I'm noting with some irony that you are literally
11 recommending for your partnering agency, an advocate
12 that one is assigned to navigate, a bureaucracy.

13 Are some of the reforms that you're
14 talking about also going to reduce that maze that you
15 apparently need and advocate to help you navigate?

16 MR. GASPARD: Yeah.

17 MR. TIGANI: So from the DOB
18 perspective, one -- one big recommendation there is in
19 the MPP program, expanding the affordable housing team
20 and the major -- MPP is the Major Projects Program.

21 It is a program that in many cases has
22 reduced six months off a project timeline, maybe
23 millions of dollars for an additional fee that comes
24 with the program. The --

25 MR. GASPARD: Mr. Commissioner, I'm

1 going to ask you to bring the microphone a little
2 closer.

3 MR. TIGANI: Oh, sorry.

4 So there is a part of this where it's
5 technology and there's actually a part of this that
6 will always involve wanting to engage with a human
7 being.

8 So from the DOB NOW perspective where
9 we are putting more handshakes in, handshakes meaning
10 that you have agencies that have paperwork that you
11 often have to take from one place and move to another.

12 In the examples that we're -- we have
13 rolling out soon or working on as part as SPEED, the
14 Office of Environmental Remediation, where you have
15 paperwork with them that we need to see to move a
16 permit moving forward, we're creating a handshake to
17 try to reduce a step for the applicant.

18 The Department of, sorry, DEP,
19 Environmental Protection, there are paperwork related
20 to asbestos. Again, handshake to make that happen.
21 And so there -- there are other examples like that.

22 But the -- there is a lot of steps
23 and -- and permitting elements are required to make
24 sure that the project is safe, to make sure that
25 people have the proper insurances and licenses, that

1 people have done the right structural, architectural
2 drawings and reviews. As we know, that's never been
3 more important.

4 And so to know that process for a
5 complex experienced individual, that might be easier
6 for someone who is newer to the industry, an
7 emerging -- emerging developer needing that help,
8 that's where the advocates come in.

9 So what we're trying to do is actually
10 give people the ability on the technology side to have
11 more transparency, a clear way to move forward, less
12 touch points by creating those handshakes, and then
13 you have an advocate who can make sure that you are
14 prepared when you submit so you don't have go -- go
15 back and forth and that you know what the checkpoints
16 are and you get to the finish line faster.

17 MR. BYNUM: And just to double click,
18 you know, in those meetings with external, like,
19 folks, developers, one thing they really said is they
20 actually really like DOB NOW they love the -- being --
21 technology forward.

22 But they also really appreciate and
23 want a -- someone to actually speak to because things
24 do get complex and they do want a human being to be
25 able to ask those questions, just like what the

1 commissioner just said.

2 MR. TIGANI: I think there's one piece
3 of this that relates back to the -- the code changes.
4 So in many cases they may be working with a -- a
5 methodology, a material, a construction element that
6 is not yet a reference to a national construction
7 standard that we don't have yet in New York City and
8 they have to go through an -- alternative approval
9 process.

10 Having an advocate in place helps them
11 with that. But, again, if the agency was able to more
12 quickly update our codes, you would have to use less
13 alternative approval processes and maybe less
14 dependent on advocates. So a lot of these things are
15 interdependent.

16 MR. GASPARD: Right. Thank you.

17 MS. WOLFE: Thank you.

18 MR. GASPARD: Henry.

19 MR. GARRIDO: Thank you for your
20 testimony. I -- I appreciate all the recommendations
21 on streamlining that you put together. But my
22 questions related to who's going to do this work,
23 because in many of the recommendations that I have
24 seen, I've not heard once any references to the number
25 of fire inspectors that I -- that I represent that

1 have gone down by more than 20 percent in spite of the
2 number of emergencies going up.

3 Nor the DEP inspectors that you
4 mentioned that have gone on by 32 percent, when you
5 are sending them out in the field with new technology.
6 So I guess my question, forgive me, it's loaded
7 because I represent working people and great processes
8 do not get executed unless you have the people behind
9 it to execute them.

10 So this budget that just got approved
11 does have a slight increase on position, but with the
12 attrition that we had and the number of emergencies,
13 I -- I don't know that the -- that I have a -- a right
14 number. But I'd like to ask you about that, if you
15 can comment on that.

16 MR. BYNUM: I absolutely can. I'm --
17 I'm actually very excited to comment on that. So one
18 thing I failed to mention, I apologize for that, is a
19 part of SPEED in this budget that just got approved
20 we're 96 increased head -- heads. So 96 folks to be
21 hired across those agencies.

22 And just to go through a little bit of
23 them, at FDNY we're going to be hiring 11 more FDNY
24 inspectors there, as well as three fire alarm plan,
25 I'm sorry, three emergency plan -- planners as well.

1 We're also hiring about 34 people at
2 DEP, including the stormwater prevention pollution
3 plan reviewers, as well as site connection plan
4 reviewers, as well as site connection inspectors. So
5 like I -- I could not agree more.

6 One thing that we -- we had these
7 meetings with agency staff and one of the loudest
8 things they said, Commissioner, was exactly what you
9 just -- what you've just expressed here, was that
10 there was a lot of less hiring done over the years and
11 that sometimes you do need more people to be able to
12 do this.

13 And I'm really happy to say that we did
14 get 96 heads approved in the budget and we're actively
15 trying to -- actively working with OMB and actively
16 trying to get those folks in there as soon as possible
17 because people need housing right now. Thank you for
18 that question.

19 MR. GARRIDO: Thank you.

20 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

21 Theodore, then Barika, then Kapil.

22 MR. MOORE: Good evening. One, I -- I
23 love a good acronym. So the -- the constant use of
24 SPEED --

25 MR. BYNUM: I'm full of them.

1 MR. MOORE: It's good. It's good. I
2 wanted to ask a little bit if you can expand on the
3 duplicative process and the environmental review
4 processes.

5 My concern is that as we try to, you
6 know, push the SPEED, we're -- we're eliminating some
7 of the -- the safety concerns that people may have
8 about these locations and then be building really fast
9 on -- on toxic locations.

10 Can you just go a little bit deeper
11 into the -- some of those duplicative processes that
12 you're looking to eliminate and -- and, you know, just
13 talk a little bit a how -- about how we really want to
14 make sure that the environmental review process is
15 still robust?

16 MR. BYNUM: I will -- I will -- one
17 thing that I -- I did not mention was, you know, one
18 of the phases was environmental review and planning.

19 So one of the things that we are doing,
20 we are modernizing our environmental review and
21 planning, as well as getting staffers and providing
22 consultants to some of our environmental review
23 agencies such as DEP there. So I'm going to point
24 that out.

25 And then from a -- from a process

1 standpoint, you know, we kind of started looking at
2 where the bottlenecks were, like which specific
3 processes for permits and approvals there was a
4 bottleneck and we tried to address them here.

5 The -- one of the biggest ones we heard
6 was the stormwater prevention -- stormwater pollution
7 prevention plan where, I don't know if the
8 commissioners are familiar with this document; it's
9 like a 500-page document and it's a fairly newish
10 document and -- and requirement.

11 And I think there was, back to the
12 hiring, I think there was a little bit of a -- folks
13 did not quite grasp how many folks would be -- that
14 would apply to. And so DEP was actually, like,
15 overwhelmed with quite a few of those plans to review.

16 So that's one of the reasons why we are
17 giving -- we're hiring folks at DEP and we're also --
18 one thing I failed to mention, DEP is also going to be
19 updating their permitting systems front-end to make it
20 easier for folks to submit those plans, as well as
21 back-end to make it easier and -- for folks at DEP to
22 review those plans as well. So that -- that -- we
23 tried to kind of look at it that way.

24 Like how can we -- we wanted to give
25 our agency -- capacity to do those reviews because

1 we -- we had a lot of people -- a lot of reviews
2 assigned to one person, and so we felt like if we gave
3 capacity and some better electronic tools they can do
4 a deeper dive into the review as well as work with
5 developers and builders to -- to create better
6 practices and ensure better practices.

7 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

8 Barika.

9 MS. WILLIAMS: Go ahead.

10 MR. TIGANI: No. I was just going to
11 add that you'll see a lot in the language that there's
12 so much time that can be saved, not by not having the
13 forms or not requiring it, just getting the forms back
14 and forth to the right people faster.

15 And so we want the information, we want
16 to hold the standard high and we know that right now,
17 as long as we make that connectivity faster, we've
18 already done a service to New Yorkers.

19 MS. WILLIAMS: So thank you both. I
20 want to first just clarify, because we've talked a lot
21 about SPEED, I also love the acronym, but to clarify
22 for a lot of folks, the intent behind SPEED, not just
23 being to move fast but making sure we're still
24 ensuring safety, affordability, getting units online,
25 but not skipping things like public engagement or time

1 for review hearings. So just naming that.

2 Ahmed, a question for you on DOB being
3 able to do building code changes and updates. How
4 would you think about creating predictability and
5 certainty to -- for developers who may see changes to
6 building codes in the process between environmental
7 review all the way to marketing and lease up, let's
8 say the end of construction?

9 So how would we plan for the fact that
10 DOB could -- roll out updates while a project is still
11 in process?

12 MR. TIGANI: That's a good -- that's a
13 great question. I think, first and foremost, we still
14 have to rely, I think welcomingly, the structure we
15 have to look at our code changes.

16 So we have a robust code committee
17 process that we've had for nearly 20 years where we
18 have nearly 400 professionals over 14 committees go
19 through a meticulous detailed evaluation of standards.
20 And we would still rely on that research, technical
21 analysis to derive what the next steps are.

22 And so from -- it -- it will still be a
23 multi-year process, but the question is that versus a
24 seven year process is something that we're trying to
25 reduce and shrink.

1 I do believe that for the purposes of
2 looking at what a pre-development timeline is, we
3 would still be in a situation where A, people would
4 have -- they would have lens into what we're doing.

5 Because many members of the
6 construction trades, the development world, are
7 actually part of our code committee process. And B,
8 it would still be a multi-year process so you would be
9 able to take account of that work.

10 Additionally, depending on where you
11 are in the process, you may be subject to one code
12 versus another. So I -- I think it's -- it's
13 navigable. I think we can control for those
14 circumstances.

15 They are part of the process and we'll
16 see what's coming and be part of the discussion, and
17 may actually benefit from being able to meet a
18 standard which will better improve the outcome of
19 their project.

20 MS. WILLIAMS: Got it.

21 And then, Seth -- sorry, Chair.
22 Following up on Henry's question, appreciating the
23 intent and budget lines for additional inspectors for
24 DEP. I guess not to put the -- Ahmed, you, in a
25 difficult spot, so you can just give us the, like,

1 time but not weigh in or opine if you don't want to.

2 From the time that we would, let's say,
3 the city would green light budget money, how long
4 would it take you to actually hire and bring on a new
5 inspector?

6 MR. TIGANI: So -- so an actual
7 inspector timeline is about 16 to 20 weeks, plus
8 specialty. We just graduated 78 individuals this last
9 month.

10 MR. BYNUM: Last month.

11 MR. TIGANI: And we have 58 individuals
12 sitting in seats today looking to graduate the
13 beginning of next year. So we -- we're -- once we
14 have a candidate, we're able to onboard them, the
15 training is about 16 to 20 weeks.

16 Maybe a specialty may require some more
17 time. But it's half in the classroom, half, you know,
18 on-the-job training.

19 MR. GASPARD: Kapil.

20 MR. LONGANI: Thank you both for your
21 testimony.

22 Commissioner, you're doing a great job.
23 It's great to see you.

24 I thought all three of your proposals,
25 with respect to changing the charter, were very

1 thoughtful. On the second proposal relating to
2 technical and routine code changes and making the
3 process more efficient for review on the back end, if
4 the charter is amended to allow that, can you quantify
5 either in money or time how significant such a change
6 would be for DOB?

7 MR. TIGANI: So I think in terms of
8 time, we have seen the legislative component of it and
9 I want -- I know we've said this a couple times, but
10 we've had tremendous success with the council.

11 We -- council member Sanchez, with
12 Chair Sanchez, we have moved forward with proactive
13 enforcement legislation and policies that have been
14 tremendous. The existing building code was a huge,
15 tremendous win for the city and for preservation work
16 and it was due to her leadership.

17 That -- part of the process, however,
18 is subject to the council's ability to move that
19 forward between, you know, pre-discussions,
20 transmittal, introduction, navigating the council's
21 calendar and then moving to negotiation and process.

22 It could be nine, you know, it could be
23 anywhere from like seven months to one year, maybe
24 longer. The existing building code was first, sort
25 of, formed and finalized in 2021 and we didn't see the

1 existing building code passed until 2025.

2 The elements of that building code
3 could move through a CAPA process, which takes time to
4 form the rules, but then there is a very specific
5 public commenting period and then review typically
6 four to six months.

7 So there is a distinct difference in
8 the two processes. And then at the same time, if the
9 council chose to weigh in they would retain the
10 ability to pass legislation to -- to adjust what we
11 were working on and we can work with them on that.

12 But that legislative timeline versus
13 the CAPA process I think is -- is distinct and every
14 month, every day, week equals dollars that could go
15 toward a project, hiring people, moving it forward.

16 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much,
17 Commissioner. I'm -- I'm going to forego any other
18 questions at this point because it -- I really want to
19 invite public participation. I appreciate your
20 presence, given what you're managing. I appreciate
21 your commitment.

22 Same to you as well, Seth. I -- I
23 just -- tiny little bit of editorializing. We know
24 the difficulty of what you're managing and the thicket
25 of bureaucracy that you're governing over and I don't

1 use bureaucracy in the pejorative at all; right?

2 Bureaucracy is necessary. But I think
3 that there's just a real desire and impatience, a
4 sense of urgency that we've got to disrupt the status
5 quo a little bit more in order to achieve the outcomes
6 that we know that you're driving -- that you're
7 driving towards.

8 So we appreciate this and look forward
9 to continued engagement on -- on these issues.

10 MR. TIGANI: Duly noted. Thank you
11 all.

12 MR. BYNUM: Thank you.

13 MR. TIGANI: It means lot to New York
14 that you're doing this.

15 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much.

16 All right. I'm going to open this up
17 to public testimony. I'll remind you that I will call
18 you in pairs to testify and each individual will have
19 three minutes to make their presentation. If you feel
20 that you can make your point without hitting the three
21 minute mark, I invite you to do so. It is not a --
22 the three minutes are not a requirement.

23 Samuel Eluto and Michael Piccirillo.
24 I -- if I've mispronounced your name please don't
25 hesitate to correct me and to sanction me as well.

1 Thank you for joining us. Samuel and Michael. Thank
2 you.

3 MR. ELUTO: Thank you for the
4 commission -- thank you to the commission for the
5 opportunity to testify. My name is Samuel Eluto,
6 Director of Member Relations.

7 I'm speaking on behalf of President and
8 CEO, Elizabeth Crowley, who's unfortunately able --
9 unable to attend today. The BTEA, or the Building
10 Trade Employers Association, is comprised of 24
11 contractors associations.

12 We represent more than 1200 union
13 general construction managers, specialty trade
14 contractors, and many of them are small family-owned
15 MWBE businesses that build and rebuild New York's
16 infrastructure, and we share the commission's goals on
17 making the public work faster and more cost efficient.

18 The BTA was proud to serve on the 2024
19 Mayoral Capital Process Reform Task Force where
20 critical reforms, including the expansion of
21 alternative project delivery were advanced.

22 And so, generally, our -- our testimony
23 just focused on two themes, that the city should get
24 better priced work when agencies have the flexibility
25 to manage contracts according to the realities of each

1 job, and then when contractors and subcontractors are
2 paid properly and fairly for the work they perform.

3 And so we recommend that the commission
4 looks into the following eight points. The first is
5 that the flexibility to match projects -- contracts to
6 the project delivery method. So New York uses a range
7 of delivery methods now, including design built --
8 construction manager built, design bit built, and
9 others.

10 The second is the flexibility in how
11 agencies administer contracts, day-to-day -- contract
12 administration, approval change orders, payment
13 processing and coordinated across these agencies is
14 where schedules are often lost.

15 And so -- when these contractual issues
16 stall they're often ended in litigation that drains
17 resources for the city. And so we need to give agency
18 projects teams greater latitude to administrator -- to
19 administrate these contracts and shorten timelines
20 without sacrificing oversight.

21 The third is flexibility for agencies
22 to control project level processes such as time
23 extensions. Routine matters like time extensions
24 frequently stall, not because the merits aren't
25 dispute -- but because the authority to grant them

1 sits too far away from the project.

2 When agencies responsible for a project
3 often hold the authority to manage these processes
4 directly legitimate adjustments can be made and claims
5 are reduced which keeps the work moving.

6 The fourth is the -- to -- to reform
7 the procurements of family-owned businesses, emerging
8 contractors and M -- MWBE firms can compete for public
9 work. Things like lowest bid is still a -- a valid
10 option but there needs to be a plurality of ways to
11 bid on -- public works.

12 The fifth is the payment transparency
13 on flow on public projects. There needs to be a
14 greater transparency for the way that contracts are
15 distributed out so they're able to see the payment
16 flow. So if there's disputes then they're able to
17 address those disputes.

18 To -- also the sixth is to protect
19 subcontractors and MWBE firms from unfair delay
20 clauses. Sometimes in public contracts there's --
21 there's specific clauses which say that if there's a
22 delay then those delays -- that -- that there's no way
23 to -- to pay forward with those delays, so contractors
24 end up eating these costs.

25 And so contractors no -- no longer feel

1 like they should work with the city. Sorry. Seven --
2 seventh, that there needs to be fast --

3 MR. GASPARD: You're -- you're at three
4 minutes. You can conclude.

5 MR. ELUTO: Got you. I just -- the
6 last point I just wanted to make is that there is a
7 Mayoral Capital Process Reform Task Force that
8 happened in the last administration and we think that
9 there should be a new one in the new administration,
10 and that it should include contractors as well. Thank
11 you.

12 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, Samuel.
13 Michael.

14 MR. PICCIRILLO: Sure. Good evening.
15 My name is Michael Piccirillo. I'm here on behalf of
16 the New York City District Council of Carpenters. I
17 want to start by saying this clearly. We're not
18 against making government work faster.

19 We're not against cutting red tape when
20 it -- when it helps get housing built, infrastructure
21 moving and people working on the job. But yesterday's
22 emergency at the former Pfizer building in Midtown is
23 exactly why streamline --streamlining cannot -- can
24 never come at the expense of worker safety or public
25 safety.

1 When columns buckle, floors sag, nearby
2 buildings are evacuated, streets are shut down and
3 workers are pulled off a job site. That is not
4 paperwork, that is not bureaucracy, that's a warning
5 sign.

6 It shows what could happen when
7 complicated construction work moves faster than
8 transparency, oversight and accountability. If this
9 commission is going to recommend changes to streamline
10 permitting then job site information has to be easier
11 to find, not harder.

12 The city cannot make the process faster
13 while leaving workers, inspectors, employment
14 enforcement agencies and the public in the dark about
15 actually who is performing work on these job sites.

16 The general contractor's permit, or at
17 the very least in the DOB NOW virtual folder, should
18 clearly identify every subcontractor working under
19 that permit and the type of work they're performing.
20 The law is already on the books.

21 New York City Construction Code Section
22 28-418.5.1 says "the general contractor is responsible
23 for providing the DOB with information about its
24 subcontractors and the particular work that they
25 perform on jobs where the DOB has issued permits to

1 that general contractor."

2 Right now, too much --critical
3 information is buried or hard to track. I shouldn't
4 have inspectors from the city and state agencies
5 calling me to figure out where -- predatory
6 contractors are working within the five boroughs.

7 Contractors accused of wage fraud, tax
8 fraud and misclassifying workers, that information
9 should be in the system, it should be visible to
10 agencies responsible for enforcing the law, it should
11 be available before workers are hurt or cheated.

12 This matters most to the most
13 vulnerable workers who often do not have a voice and
14 are taken advantage of. Faster permitting only works
15 if the city gives workers, inspectors and the public
16 better access to the information that helps keep
17 people alive and protects workers from abuse.

18 We can build faster, but we have to
19 build safer. We can modernize the DOB, but we cannot
20 weaken oversight or let efficiency become a free pass
21 for bad actors to hide behind complicated filings.

22 So my -- so my message is simple.
23 Streamline the process but strengthen the
24 transparency. Put subcontractor information directly
25 on general contractor's permit, or at least in the DOB

1 NOW virtual folder.

2 The city already has the legal
3 authority to do so. Now, it needs to use it -- use it
4 in a way that protects workers, protects taxpayers,
5 and protects the public. Thank you.

6 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much,
7 Michael. Great testimony.

8 Questions for Samuel and Michael?

9 Great. thank you both for your
10 testimony. Really -- really well done.

11 Nile Berry and Robert -- Avaltroni.

12 MR. AVALTRONI: Good evening, Mr.
13 Chairman. Good evening, commissioners.

14 MR. GASPARD: Good evening.

15 MR. AVALTRONI: It's a privilege to be
16 here. My name is Bob Avaltroni. I've served with
17 four administrations at the commissioner level, from
18 Mayor Koch cleaning up the PVB scandal, to leaving in
19 2009 in Michael Bloomberg's second term.

20 I embrace what Seth said earlier
21 because it's been a privilege also to work with them
22 in -- in terms of the SPEED initiative. But I think
23 there's a misconception. When we talk about SPEED, I
24 think the first and foremost thing in any initiative
25 is safety first. And that will never be sacrificed or

1 compromised.

2 And I represent the Environmental
3 Contractors Association and I practice public service
4 on the outside. What we do is we have union people
5 working for us from Local 78, the best trained people
6 that there are out there, and asbestos is something
7 that can tie a project up for many, many months,
8 unfortunately.

9 Where it used to take three weeks to
10 get approvals and now it takes three to six months
11 before something can start. So that needs to be done
12 and Seth highlighted before that there will be
13 resources dedicated to that process, have reviewers
14 and what have you, and there are other ways we can do
15 things without compromising public safety because
16 that's got to be number one.

17 But expediency is something because
18 economic growth -- and when we're talking about
19 housing, people have the opportunity to have good
20 housing, which this mayor is highlighting and I
21 couldn't support him any more than I have in the past.
22 We need to come together, we need to make sure that we
23 learn from experience.

24 For instance, 2009 construction and
25 abatement regulations were put in place with safety as

1 the paramount issue and they were implemented and put
2 side by side -- have DEP, DOB, together, working --
3 concurrently to make sure projects were advanced
4 without compromising safety.

5 And as I said, three weeks something
6 would be approved. Now, it's three to six months.
7 And that's unacceptable. But we're hoping with the
8 change in administration that will change. We -- we
9 are willing partners -- in this endeavor because what
10 we do is now the future.

11 I sit here before you with respect
12 because this is a -- seeing you all in this forum is
13 very enlightening and also very -- something I -- I
14 adhere to in -- in my private life. Just one comment
15 for Commissioner Shaw, if I may.

16 Commissioner Shaw has a very great
17 history and I -- he and I go back a long way. He was
18 the keeper of the gate when he was budget director.

19 I say make sure where the resources are
20 dedicated, that's exactly where they wind up because
21 that is the -- the model to make a successful
22 administration challenge into a reality and get the
23 work done properly.

24 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much. We
25 appreciate these points.

1 Questions for our former commissioner?

2 Questions? Comments?

3 Thank you.

4 MR. AVALTRONI: Thank you. Thank you.

5 Nice seeing you.

6 MR. GASPARD: I -- I'm assuming that
7 you're -- you're submitting your testimony with the
8 details and examples of --

9 MR. AVALTRONI: We will -- we will be
10 submitting it and I've been working on the SPEED
11 initiative, quite frankly, with the mayor's folks,
12 including Seth. And, obviously, that's why I
13 appreciate this commission. It's a breath of fresh
14 air.

15 MR. GASPARD: Well, we're -- we're
16 grateful for your continued service to the city.

17 Nile is, apparently, is not here.

18 Tom Harris and Andrew -- Andrew Rein.

19 MR. HARRIS: You want to go first?

20 MR. REIN: Oh, take it away.

21 MR. HARRIS: Okay.

22 MR. GASPARD: Tom.

23 MR. HARRIS: Thank you very much. My
24 name's Tom Harris. I'm the president of the Times
25 Square Alliance. I would first like to commend Mayor

1 Mamdani and the COGE members for thoughtfully
2 considering how our city government can better serve
3 New Yorkers by reducing bureaucracy, supporting small
4 business and improving accountability.

5 Times Square is the city's front window
6 and when our neighborhood thrives New York City
7 thrives. The Alliance offers a boots on the ground
8 perspective. We know what works and we also know what
9 could be a little bit more efficient.

10 Today, I would like to highlight three
11 areas where service delivery could be significantly
12 improved and save money for the city, a focus of this
13 commission. These areas are pedicabs, homeless
14 outreach and 311 reporting.

15 An unregulated pedicab industry is
16 proliferated in some of the most crowded areas of the
17 city, including Midtown and Central Park. Pedicabs
18 could provide welcome alternatives to cars for getting
19 around and sightseeing in New York City. However,
20 this industry is expanded without proper regulation or
21 fair and effective enforcement.

22 Oftentimes, this is relegated to the
23 New York City Police Department who has bigger
24 priorities than pedicab enforcement. It also is
25 failing both its workers and the consumers.

1 We envision three solutions to this
2 problem. Revising the city charter to move pedicab
3 oversight from DCWP to TLC, decriminalize the industry
4 so that violations result in civil penalties not
5 criminal penalties, and mandating metering and setting
6 fair rates.

7 Homeless outreach in New York City is
8 not working. \$310 million is spent each year, yet too
9 many of our community members continue to suffer on
10 the street. A coordinated approach using
11 multidisciplinary teams would better serve the
12 clients, be more efficient and be more effective.
13 It's worked in other cities.

14 After implementing a new strategy
15 involving multidisciplinary teams in 2019, San
16 Francisco saw a 15 percent decrease in unsheltered
17 homelessness. Rather than endless outreach, New York
18 City needs to dedicate resources to personalized case
19 management and performance-based contracts where
20 providers are held accountable for placement. Focused
21 resources with accountability will save money for the
22 city.

23 Lastly, the 311 system has become far
24 too focused on reporting incidents, not resolving
25 problems. In a -- in a 2025 survey of 57 bids, 97

1 percent said that issues take too long or are closed
2 without resolution. The city needs to increase
3 accountability and transparency, requiring agencies to
4 verify an -- agency was -- resolved an issue.

5 Thank you for taking the time to hear
6 our recommendations. I have some information that I
7 can pass out to the members.

8 MR. GASPARD: Fantastic. We -- we
9 welcome that.

10 Andrew.

11 MR. REIN: Good evening, Chair Gaspard
12 and commissioners. Thank you all for prioritizing
13 improvements to the rainy day fund, one of the city's
14 most important tools to protect New Yorkers.

15 The rainy day fund's purpose is simple.
16 To ensure resources are set aside during good times so
17 they're available to protect New Yorkers, particularly
18 our most vulnerable neighbors, from harmful service
19 cuts during recessions or emergencies.

20 When structuring the fund it's
21 important to distinguish between ongoing and temporary
22 needs. Ongoing needs should be supported by the
23 baseline budget, whereas the rainy day fund should be
24 designed to address temporary fiscal stress caused by
25 an economic downturn or extraordinary event.

1 To meet that purpose the fund needs
2 some rules. Immediate priorities will always command
3 the greatest attention and support, usually winning
4 over long-term fiscal preparedness.

5 Just look at recent experience.
6 Despite several years of exceptionally strong
7 revenues, the city made only one voluntary rainy day
8 fund deposit. Relying on discretionary decisions has
9 not yielded the discipline needed to build adequate
10 reserves to protect New Yorkers.

11 We also saw an appropriate reaction
12 from the rating agencies and fiscal monitors when the
13 preliminary budget proposed to use the fund to help
14 close a structural budget gap, not one caused by
15 temporary fiscal emergency. All were positive when
16 Mayor Mamdani thoughtfully changed course.

17 If set aside money can be used whenever
18 budgetary pressures arise it ceases to be a rainy day
19 fund. Well-designed rules preserve flexibility while
20 protecting the fund for its intended purpose.

21 CBC recommends that the charter include
22 only the basic guardrails, the framework requiring
23 deposits, governing withdrawals and setting the target
24 size.

25 The charter should require the detailed

1 formulas and definitions be established in local law,
2 subject to the comptroller's review, though setting
3 these policies as the comptroller suggested, setting
4 these in -- in policy as the comptroller suggested may
5 work just as well.

6 We offer four recommendations to
7 address the items outlined in your preliminary report.
8 First, the charter should require mandatory formula-
9 driven deposits when tax revenue growth exceed greater
10 of 3 percent or inflation, leaving the precise formula
11 to the law.

12 Establishing a floor for required
13 deposits ensures that the funds are available for
14 ongoing priorities and deposits remain in good times.

15 Second, withdrawal should be
16 permitted -- permitted only during recession based on
17 economic indicators, again, established in law or
18 during a temporary emergency that leads to revenue
19 decreases or expenditure increases exceeding 2 percent
20 of city funds.

21 We've heard the concern that withdrawal
22 rules would impede using the fund for significant
23 recurring needs as that may arise, but that's actually
24 by design. Using the fund like that would drain
25 resources needed for fiscal emergencies to only

1 temporarily prop up ongoing programs.

2 Third, annual withdrawals should be
3 limited to two-thirds of the fund, preserving some
4 reserves for future while providing immediate relief
5 and time for other actions or intergovernmental aid.

6 Finally, the charter should establish a
7 target size of 16 percent of tax revenues because once
8 reached policy makers can fund other non-recurring
9 priorities rather than accumulating excess reserves.

10 This approach would preserve the
11 flexibility to fund ongoing needs while ensuring the
12 rainy day fund is there for New Yorkers when they
13 truly need it. Thank you very much.

14 MR. GASPARD: Well done. Thank you.

15 Questions, comments?

16 Henry, please.

17 MR. GARRIDO: Thank you both. And real
18 quick on my previous question, the 2 percent that
19 you're proposing is something around the neighborhood
20 of \$3 billion.

21 MR. REIN: It's probably 1.8, but it's
22 significant, no question.

23 MR. GARRIDO: Right. So your
24 suggestion is that as soon as the deficit reaches that
25 it would be an automatically suspension? I'm trying

1 to clarify what you're --

2 MR. REIN: To -- to clarify, what we're
3 talking about, put aside the recession, which is one,
4 going back to your question, Commissioner Williams,
5 this would be a temporary emergency causing revenues
6 to drop or expenditures to increase equal to 2 percent
7 of city funds which is about one -- \$1.8 billion.

8 It should be both temporary and
9 emergency and not just a regular budget deficit but
10 emergency and significant enough that it's not the
11 normal day-to-day. You got to manage the budget, as
12 former director Shaw on the screen knows well.

13 Some of the stuff you do day to day,
14 it's the normal course of business. This should be
15 for an emergency.

16 MR. GARRIDO: But I guess my question
17 is this. Since we often, you know, have to rely on
18 the state to give us, right, the revenue and -- and
19 that process takes place first, in -- in your view
20 when would that trigger?

21 With -- upon the negotiations with the
22 council, after the budget with the state or when
23 the -- when the executive budget puts up, as an
24 example?

25 MR. REIN: So the two different -- in

1 the charter, there should be a general explanation, a
 2 general description framework for that emergency.
 3 That specific triggers should be defined in either law
 4 or policy, and that should be negotiated between the
 5 mayor, the council, with the comptroller -- define it.

6 Because your point is well taken. It
 7 can happen in the middle of the year. We need a way
 8 to say this is what an emergency is and a process to
 9 declare it and move forward to use the funds to help
 10 New Yorkers.

11 MR. GARRIDO: Thank you.

12 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, Henry.

13 Kathy.

14 MS. WYLDE: Tom, I just wanted to
 15 clarify, are -- do you have any specific suggestion
 16 for how the charter should deal with the 311 mental
 17 health issue, which I think are linked since most
 18 reporting of the homeless mental health situation
 19 comes through 311 and -- and has limited effects. But
 20 I'm not sure how the charter would address it.

21 MR. HARRIS: So I -- I was looking at
 22 this through the lens of focusing on saving the city
 23 money, which was one of the focuses of the commission.
 24 So I think that it would just be a more efficient
 25 government, especially with the homeless services.

1 We see day in and day out people
2 suffering. In Times Square we have nine service
3 organizations with overlapping responsibilities, no
4 clear-cut person responsible for each individual. And
5 this is wasting money and it's -- it's allowing New
6 Yorkers to suffer unnecessarily on the street.

7 MS. WYLDE: Okay. And on the pedicabs,
8 the charter explicitly puts the pedicabs under the --
9 under a different jurisdiction than TLC?

10 MR. HARRIS: So the Taxi and
11 Limousine -- Commission is -- is prescriptive in the
12 city charter and it does not allow for pedicabs.

13 So we did a -- a task force with the
14 pedicab operators, with the pedicab owners, with the
15 Midtown Justice Center, with the community and with
16 the defense attorneys who were representing them and
17 we -- we believe that TLC is a better place to
18 enforce -- to -- to both regulate and enforce petty
19 caps.

20 Right now, DCWP licenses them, the New
21 York City Police Department does the enforcement.
22 Because of discovery reforms, 90 -- over 90 percent of
23 the summonses are dismissed in the Midtown Justice
24 Center. That's an inefficient use of police
25 resources, it's over-policing an industry.

1 The industry should be regulated
2 civilly. TLC is a civil agency that would do the
3 licensing, the -- the rules and the enforcement.
4 TLC's --

5 MS. WYLDE: Right now, does the charter
6 say anything about who regulates them?

7 MR. HARRIS: No. But our -- our goal
8 is that -- that the TLC is in the charter and if we
9 add pedicabs to the TLC mandate that would allow for
10 the - for the reforms that we're looking for.

11 MS. WYLDE: And this couldn't be
12 accomplished without a charter change, that there
13 could -- it couldn't be accomplished statutorily or
14 administratively?

15 MR. HARRIS: So if you ask -- if you
16 ask the lawyers -- if you ask two lawyers you'll get
17 four opinions. So what -- what we found is --

18 MS. WYLDE: What else is new?

19 MR. HARRIS: Yeah. So -- so we have
20 been told that this is a requirement -- that -- that
21 this -- that TLC's mandate is in the city charter.
22 Now, when I read the city charter there's a number
23 nine, which allows TLC to do innovations and different
24 types of -- of initiatives, which I think could fall
25 under this, but they don't think so.

1 So we are asking that there be a
2 charter revision to include pedicabs. And if you
3 think about it, it works. It's -- it's a for-hire
4 vehicle. We want to legitimize them. There are a lot
5 of people out there working hard. The -- the drivers
6 are being taken advantage of by the owners who
7 oftentimes lease them pedicabs that are uninsured,
8 unregistered.

9 It's not fair to the drivers. The
10 drivers then take this out on the consumers who
11 oftentimes pay hundreds of dollars for a trip around
12 the corner.

13 This is something that everyone in the
14 entire sphere -- I mean, it's very rare that you have
15 the industry, the community, the courts, the -- the
16 police, the DCWP, they all feel the TLC would be a
17 better area for this and it would free up the police
18 for -- for serious issues, not minor pedicab
19 infractions.

20 MS. WYLDE: Thank you for your work on
21 that.

22 MR. GASPARD: Yeah. You know, I
23 appreciate Kathy's question because it reminds all of
24 us that there's an important distinction that needs to
25 be determined between things that require a charter

1 change and things that require a more liberal
2 interpretation of agency authority. So we need to dig
3 in on this.

4 Really admire the detail and the
5 conviction that you bring to this. I -- we don't have
6 time for this now, but I'm interested to understand
7 why we think the TLC would be -- it seems
8 counterintuitive that TLC would want to -- incentivize
9 this -- this innovation. When you leave New York you
10 see, like, this service everywhere else; right?

11 There's a kind of reverse
12 exceptionalism in New York -- around -- around how
13 this is deployed. So I'm really keen on this and want
14 to learn more and I appreciate that you've brought us
15 additional material to back up your -- your testimony.

16 MR. HARRIS: Thank you.

17 MR. GASPARD: -- great insights. Thank
18 you.

19 Thank -- thank you both.

20 MR. HARRIS: Thank you for your service
21 and --

22 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, thank you,
23 thank you.

24 Bruce Baker, Katrina Long. Bruce and
25 Katrina.

1 Bruce, you're up first.

2 MR. BAKER: Thank you. I'm Bruce
3 Baker. I'm a public school teacher, science. So I
4 think maybe we should all get up. I teach bio-med;
5 get our blood flowing.

6 I want -- I'm here because about 75
7 cents on every dollar is public money that go into the
8 public charters and I feel like we need to reignite
9 the discussion of accountability for the charters.

10 I came to New York a few decades ago to
11 start Teach for America with a small group of people.
12 Mark Levine may or may not have told you, he was one
13 of our first New York directors.

14 And just a few years in we realized
15 there were things that could be changed within the
16 public school system, that needed to be changed in
17 order to have the outcomes for students that we wanted
18 for those students.

19 And so we pushed hard and we got
20 charter schools in New York City. We paid ourselves
21 what the teachers paid themselves. We thought it was
22 a lucky break. We were all about this happening for
23 the right results for the students.

24 Fast forward to these decades later, I
25 spent three years in a charter school at the border

1 between the two poorest congressional districts in the
2 United States.

3 The mission was stated to bring these
4 kids, get them a seat at the table, to get them a
5 chance to go to four-year colleges and to break
6 generational cycles of poverty, something that we
7 would all absolutely be behind.

8 We -- I was brought in specifically
9 to -- for science to get the school IB world status, a
10 world school status and -- another to have a program
11 that could vouch for these kids having a academic
12 rigor standard that would allow them to be seen by
13 these elite schools as candidates.

14 And what I've seen on the ground is
15 horrifying. What -- if you go to the neighborhood
16 now, Parkchester/Soundview, you'll see the placards
17 with school around the neighborhood advertising the IB
18 program.

19 You will see, if you come to a
20 introduction night about the school, the logos of
21 institutions like Yale up advertising to the parents.
22 But it's a bait and switch. The IB program was ended
23 in its first cycle.

24 It was replaced by four really
25 technical certification programs masquerading as

1 academic programs, a bio-med program that really --
2 certify you to be a lab tech, an education program
3 that was formerly Montessori and is now something
4 called Baby Einstein, which maybe qualifies you for 3-
5 K, the lowest paying profession in the United States
6 of America.

7 A science -- a, excuse me, a computer
8 science and cybersecurity program that no college
9 would respect and something they're calling the
10 classical core, which they describe in-house as a
11 dumping ground.

12 This cannot happen. This can't be
13 happening and yet it is happening. And the
14 administration of the school is regularly junketing
15 around the country to leadership conferences and
16 paying themselves a -- significant amount of money.
17 That's 75 cents of every dollar is the public dollar.

18 As you all know, the charter schools
19 are either accredited -- either chartered by the DOE
20 or by the state or by SUNY and are -- my school,
21 accredited by SUNY, brought a group in to evaluate our
22 school. They were well-meaning, they were --

23 MR. GASPARD: I've allowed you to go a
24 little over. If you could just conclude.

25 MR. BAKER: They're -- they're well-

1 meaning, elderly, without diversity, and when they
2 were confronted with three stairwells in our cathedral
3 where the school was housed, they elected not to look
4 at the school.

5 Eleven months later they delivered an
6 added -- report that gave us a clean bill of health.
7 This can't continue.

8 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

9 Katrina.

10 MS. LONG: Hello. Good evening. My
11 name is Katrina Long and I'm here to talk about wasted
12 money and wasted time. I have served as a New York
13 City paraprofessional for over 22 years, and for over
14 two decades I have worked side by side with teachers,
15 therapists, administrators and families to support our
16 city's most vulnerable students.

17 I am also an elected chapter leader,
18 which means my colleagues elected me to represent them
19 in disciplinary meetings. But today, I am here to
20 talk about funding the Para RESPECT check.

21 This is not simply a pay proposal. It
22 is a strategic investment in New York City's public
23 schools education, in our students with disabilities
24 and in our workforce. I can tell you there was
25 definitely no respect under Mayor Bloomberg so I'm

1 hoping we get some respect today.

2 Every day paras implement IEPs, support
3 students with behavior and medical needs, provide
4 academic interventions and ensure that students can
5 safely access their education.

6 Yet despite the critical nature of our
7 work, paras own significantly less than any employee
8 in other city agencies performing work that requires
9 similar responsibility and public service. The
10 reality is that many paras simply cannot afford to
11 stay in these positions. We all know the living wage.

12 In Brooklyn, for a single person it's
13 around 68 to 70,000; right? For a single parent with
14 two children, it's well over 145,000. Well, I'm a
15 single parent with two children and I live in Brooklyn
16 and I don't even make enough for those, the minimum
17 livable wage of a single person.

18 My daughter, in fact, booked The
19 Marvelous Mrs. Maisel right here in this church and
20 her residual checks from the Marvelous Mrs. Maisel in
21 Abbott Elementary equate to almost my salary every
22 single year. That is -- we should be ashamed.

23 We should not have an 11-year-old, by
24 the way she's 11, an 11-year-old with no high school
25 diploma, no college degree, getting a residual check,

1 which is equivalent to her mother's salary. And
2 that's where the budget conversation begins.

3 This is the conversation. When schools
4 cannot provide mandated special-ed services, we go
5 outside. The city then spends billions of dollars
6 responding to Carter cases 1.7 to 1.3 billion to be
7 exact, which is -- equates to about 101 thousand,
8 757,000 per student.

9 If we want to talk about numbers and we
10 want to talk about conserving them, it would only be
11 about 22 million to cut the Para RESPECT check. That
12 is actually a lot less than 1.7 billion. When schools
13 cannot -- I read that already.

14 The Para RESPECT check addresses these
15 problems by helping recruit and retain paras. We
16 strengthen the workforce. The RESPECT check isn't
17 just an expense, it's a preventative maintenance for
18 New York City's special education system.

19 We can invest in paraprofessionals now
20 or continue for paying more after students are denied
21 their services. After more than 22 years of service,
22 I can tell you that paras have never stopped showing
23 up for New York City and for the children, and today I
24 am simply asking that the city shows up for us. Thank
25 you.

1 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. Questions for
2 our two witnesses? Any questions, comments?

3 Thank you both for your work as
4 educators and we're going to look out for your
5 daughter.

6 MS. LONG: Thank you. She's here in
7 the back, by the way. Because she has a dance
8 conservatory at Barnard College. But, thank you.

9 MR. GASPARD: All right --

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 6: Thank you.

11 MR. GASPARD: Emily Jacobi and
12 Dr. Camelia -- Tepelus.

13 Emily, you're up first.

14 MS. JACOBI: Thank you to the charter
15 revision for the opportunity to testify today. My
16 name is Emily Jacobi. I'm the Manhattan organizer at
17 Transportation Alternatives.

18 We are the organization that helped
19 bring Vision Zero to New York City and the United
20 States because we know that every traffic fatality or
21 serious injury is a design infrastructure or policy
22 failure.

23 I'm here to talk today about the need
24 for New York City to speed up safety redesigns on our
25 streets. Every year more than 200 New Yorkers are

1 killed in preventable traffic crashes.

2 This is a public health crisis that
3 demands urgency, but overly bureaucratic processes and
4 red tape keep our streets dangerous and these delays
5 impact redesigns both large and small, from full
6 corridor plans to the small intervention of retiming
7 signals for pedestrian safety.

8 We know how to save lives on New York
9 City streets. We have the data. We know which street
10 designs works best. We know where traffic crashes are
11 happening in the city and we know which designs will
12 prevent them.

13 The issue is too many life-saving
14 redesigns and infrastructure solutions are put on ice
15 or watered down before they're built and some
16 neighborhoods have hardly any safety infrastructure at
17 all.

18 Even in Manhattan where we've made real
19 strides in street safety improvement projects, it can
20 take years and years of delay to implement street
21 safety improvements, both large and small.

22 For example, on the Queensborough
23 Bridge, we lacked proper striping, painting and
24 signage for cyclists and pedestrians nearly a year
25 after the south outer roadway was opened, creating

1 separate space for cyclists and pedestrians.

2 It took a deadly crash on the south
3 outer road -- on the north outer roadway for the city
4 to finally come and paint the bridges and add the
5 signage necessary to delineate who should be on which
6 side of the bridge.

7 Manhattan is a walking borough and we
8 have streets that are unsafe for pedestrians. We've
9 known this for many, many years, if not decades.
10 Canal Street, a Vision Zero and Senior Priority
11 Corridor, has seen 11 cyclist and pedestrian
12 fatalities since 2014.

13 We should not have to wait years longer
14 to see shorter crossing distances, turn calming, more
15 visibility at intersections and accessible curb cuts
16 along the length of Canal Street. These are tried and
17 true tactics that save lives.

18 We are wasting time, effort and money
19 by over studying, returning to community boards
20 repeatedly presenting the same types of designs over
21 and over again when we know these interventions work.

22 We see this dynamic play out in
23 neighborhoods across the five boroughs, not just
24 Manhattan and the -- cumulative effective under
25 previous administrations has been that street safety

1 projects and best priority projects get slowed down or
2 sometimes even shelved entirely.

3 In short, things just don't get done or
4 if they're done, they're not done to their fullest
5 extent. This is a waste of internal agency resources
6 and community resources that go towards outreach and
7 engagement for projects that don't move. This is a
8 new era and it's time for a new approach.

9 To reach every neighborhood and to
10 protect every New Yorker, to speed up commutes for
11 every worker, the city needs to shorten its timelines
12 for implementing tested, standard redesigns of our
13 streets. These are not novel.

14 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you, Emily
15 for your time.

16 MS. JACOBI: Thank you. Thank you so
17 much for listening and for your time.

18 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

19 Doctor.

20 DR. TEPELUS: Good evening. My name is
21 Camelia Tepelus. I'm the executive director since
22 eight years ago of the Morris Park Business
23 Improvement District in the Bronx. I cover 21 blocks
24 of commercial and residential mixed space, Albanians,
25 middle Eastern, Yemeni, Hispanic, Italian, I have them

1 all.

2 By all accounts, we are a very
3 successful commercial corridor. We have among the
4 lowest vacancy rates in the city of New York.
5 Consistently since COVID, I was called shockingly
6 healthy by three different inspections under -- under
7 COVID.

8 I'm here to -- to touch three points.
9 Public space, more business -- improvement districts,
10 accountability of city agencies, NYPD and some obscene
11 salaries, and I will go very quickly into everything.

12 I might be the only one that actually
13 read in full your draft report issued last week.
14 Everybody should read -- read that report. You
15 touched critical points. Notably, number one, public
16 space that elevates the level of life and quality of
17 life of everybody, from the poorest to the richest.

18 Thank you so much for having the
19 courage of going into areas that city agencies don't
20 want to mention and especially don't want to mention
21 in combination with each other. As a bid, I do public
22 events all the time. I have to jump through hoops.

23 DOT, Parks, DEP, nobody wants to talk
24 to each other but I have to somehow be the negotiator
25 amongst all the -- all these agencies. I always say

1 the bids are the original "tax the rich." We take
2 money from -- from commercial property owners and we
3 distribute them equally into the public space.

4 It is my feeling, strong feeling, that
5 the city is dragging its feet, especially the
6 Department of Small Business Services, in keeping
7 creating bids. We are self-funding.

8 The Department of Finance takes money
9 directly from the taxes of these commercial property
10 owners and I can do public beautification events,
11 marketing, all these things that are public space that
12 everybody benefits from. We can create more bids,
13 particularly the Bronx --

14 MR. GASPARD: You're -- you're at --
15 you're at time, Doctor.

16 DR. TEPELUS: I'm at time. Well, I
17 said my most important part. Pardon. And thank you
18 for listening and I will submit --

19 MR. GASPARD: And you -- and -- and you
20 said it with the New York Spirit.

21 DR. TEPELUS: Thank you.

22 MR. GASPARD: We appreciate that.
23 Questions, comments, commissioners? None.

24 Thank you both.

25 DR. TEPELUS: Thank you.

1 MR. GASPARD: Servia Silva and Michael
2 Riley.

3 And, Doctor, thank you so much for
4 reading our report. We -- we appreciate that.

5 Servia.

6 MS. SILVA: Me first?

7 MR. GASPARD: Yes, please.

8 MS. SILVA: So good evening and thank
9 you all for giving me this opportunity to speak
10 tonight. My name is Servia Silva and I have taught
11 for over 30 years. I serve as a district
12 representative for the United Federation of Teachers
13 for over 20, and most recently the Union Manhattan
14 Borough Representative with over 271 schools.

15 Any time you ask a New York educator
16 "what is the matter," it doesn't matter the grade
17 level, what school, what borough, can you quickly rely
18 to get the service materials for the needs of your
19 classroom, your school, your district, or your
20 borough? They will always answer "no."

21 Let me share three examples. If you
22 ask a principal, a school community, to decide and
23 they will write an after school program, they will
24 work for hours and submit tons of paperwork for the
25 grant and they will win the grant.

1 Will you -- will they get the grant?
2 Will they get the money? Will they be able to get the
3 after-school program that they worked so hard for?
4 No. It will take from one to two years for the money
5 to be funneled to the schools.

6 Right now, the city is expanding the 2-
7 K and 3-K programs for families in need if they live
8 in New York City and thrive in New York City. But our
9 union, we have some 47 home-childcare providers who
10 are collect -- owed money that half a million dollars
11 for the service they provided in the last spring of
12 2024.

13 They were supposed to be paid by the
14 Highbridge Advisory Council Family Services, but the
15 network shut down without paying and providing the
16 providers of the money they owe. They shut their
17 doors and ran. Until this day, the city has not
18 figured out a way to make these educators whole.

19 Thirdly, New York City Department of
20 Education spends hundreds of billions of dollars on IT
21 contracts. Yet I could go into most any school in
22 Manhattan and ask them, "how long does it take for
23 your students to get a broken laptop?" Their answer
24 will be three months, six months or even more.

25 We are a large system and I understand

1 that, what that means. But it infuriates me and it
2 infuriates all my colleagues, the lack of urgency in
3 which these problems are dealt with. And these are
4 our children, these are our students.

5 If I could light fire under any of
6 these folks that make these decisions, I am telling
7 you, every educator, every parent across -- the New
8 York City will be extremely grateful. Thank you so
9 much.

10 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much. We
11 share your sense of urgency. Thank you.

12 MR. RILEY: Hi. My name is Michael
13 Riley. I live in Harlem. I work right over here at
14 the Interchurch Center on Riverside Drive. And I want
15 to thank the commission for the opportunity to
16 testify.

17 Thank you also to our refreshing mayor
18 for coordinating this and giving us the opportunity in
19 the way that he and his office and the workers
20 communicate this to us. I -- I find everything he's
21 doing to be very refreshing and everyone who supports
22 him, thank you.

23 So I want to speak about something
24 relatively minor compared to some of today's
25 testimony, but it crosses over several agencies and

1 departments of the city and that's why I think it's
2 important. And that is the lack of parking
3 enforcement in this city.

4 It has a cascading effect. Many -- I
5 can take you to my neighborhood in Harlem where you
6 will -- I can point to you many vehicles that have not
7 moved in three years.

8 I can also point you to many that maybe
9 sit there for -- how many people know that a car is
10 allowed to be parked for a maximum of seven days
11 without moving in this city. And so the reason why
12 this is important is it's not being enforced.

13 In many cases, somebody will come and
14 sit in the car and wave them off, the enforcement.
15 This crosses over to Department of Sanitation. It
16 creates traffic backups, it causes vehicles to double-
17 park. It creates noise from honking. Has this
18 cascading effect across multiple agencies that impacts
19 your lives.

20 Safety, pedestrian safety, vehicle and
21 bicycle safety is impacted by this. Sometimes lack of
22 movement of these vehicles that, again, it just -- it
23 creates bottlenecks and congestion points all
24 throughout our residential neighborhoods.

25 And, similarly, the lack of enforcement

1 of placards that are being used illegally, fake,
2 expired, massive, rampant violations of these types
3 of, for lack of a better word, crimes.

4 I'm going off the top of the dome here
5 to paraphrase the mayor. I don't have a script. I
6 will, if the commission will allow me, present some
7 written testimony later that's more cohesive.

8 MR. GASPARD: Yes.

9 MR. RILEY: Thank you. So, again, I --
10 I think that this needs to be addressed across
11 multiple agencies. Maybe we need to rethink it. I
12 would love to go back to my neighborhood right now and
13 hand out some tickets on some of these vehicles that I
14 could point to you that have not moved or maybe one of
15 them -- and -- and so we call 311 --

16 MR. GASPARD: You might not be the most
17 popular guy in the neighborhood.

18 MR. RILEY: Yeah. That's okay. We
19 call 311. It -- it, you know -- maybe they send an
20 officer to go investigate it and I receive a notice
21 back saying that they've taken no action, and then
22 months later I'll see this vehicle in the same spot.

23 And then one, recently, one of them was
24 gone. I was like, "wow, something happened." I
25 walked around the corner. There it was. It sat there

1 now for six months. So, again, I will present some
2 testimony later in written form. Thank you for this
3 opportunity.

4 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you and
5 thank you for bringing this to our attention. It's
6 not a minor -- item at all. So thank you.

7 Questions, comments?

8 Thank you both.

9 MR. RILEY: Thank you.

10 MS. SILVA: Thank you.

11 MR. GASPARD: I'm going to take two
12 more -- in-person witnesses and then I want to invite
13 some of our friends and neighbors on Zoom to join us.

14 Jessie Fields and Michelle Napp.

15 And don't worry. I'll come back to
16 those of you who are in the room as well. Going to go
17 back and forth.

18 Jessie Fields, Michelle Napp.

19 Jessie, please.

20 MS. FIELDS: Thank you.

21 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

22 MS. FIELDS: Okay. Good evening,
23 Chairman Gaspard and commissioners. Thank you for the
24 opportunity to testify for a second time. I came
25 today, as many independent voters have come before

1 you, I wanted to show up again.

2 As you know, independent voters are
3 excluded from voting in primary elections in New York
4 City and we want to show up to advocate for equal
5 voting rights. For many independents, their political
6 independence carries great meaning.

7 For me, it is such a courageous example
8 of political independence as Dr. Martin Luther King
9 Jr.'s independence of the Democratic Party and
10 President Johnson when he spoke out against the
11 Vietnam War.

12 Dr. King was assassinated exactly one
13 year to the day that he gave his Beyond Vietnam, A
14 Time To Break Silence speech, right here in the
15 sanctuary of this church, Riverside Church on April 4,
16 1967.

17 The late attorney, Michael Hardy, who
18 was executive vice president and general counsel to
19 the National Action Network, co-authored a 2019 law
20 review article entitled, Let All Voters Vote,
21 Independence and The Expansion of Voting Rights In The
22 United States.

23 And I would like to submit this law
24 review article for the record. I quote from the
25 article, "segregating unaffiliated voters, preventing

1 them from meaningful participation in the primaries is
2 inherently unequal and deprives them of what is due
3 them under the constitution."

4 Young people are registering as
5 independent voters and I believe we should let them,
6 as well as all unaffiliated independents, vote in New
7 York City primary elections.

8 Putting forth a ballot initiative to
9 allow unaffiliated independents in New York City to
10 vote in primary elections extends equal voting rights
11 for all. It is an assertion of voting rights at a
12 time when these rights are being undermined by the
13 Supreme Court, by voter suppression and restrictive
14 voter identification laws.

15 I call for a simple initiative that
16 would give unaffiliated voters the right to vote in
17 New York City primary elections.

18 And I quote historian, Taylor Branch,
19 the author of the Three Volume America In The King
20 Years, "every ballot is a piece of nonviolence,
21 signifying hard won consent to raise politics above
22 firepower and bloody conquest. The whole architecture
23 of representative democracy springs from the handiwork
24 of nonviolence." Thank you.

25 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. Thank you.

1 Michelle.

2 MS. NAPP: Hi. I'm Michelle Napp of --
3 can you hear me? I'm a textual analyst. Textual
4 analysis takes a little more than three minutes so
5 I'll be light on this. However, the United States
6 Constitution does define primary elections.

7 The 24th Amendment, the poll tax
8 amendment, has three words in it that can't be
9 explained by the need for a control on poll taxes,
10 effect on political participation. The three words
11 are "primary or other."

12 The only way they can be explained is
13 that elections can be and must be public and
14 nonpartisan. In the colonial era, candidates
15 nominated themselves or nominated by congregations or
16 trade unions, trade guilds.

17 The Article 1 Section 2 on the house
18 elections separates chosen by the people from the
19 qualified electors. Every phrase in the constitution
20 must have both meaning and purpose. It must both say
21 something and do something.

22 The problem is that nomination
23 influences an office and during the ratification
24 conventions people tended to divide into Federalists
25 and Anti-Federalists. By 1796, a committee leader was

1 allowing only members of the Anti-Federalists on his
2 committee.

3 By 1800, we had two parties that were
4 nominating presidential candidates. Equal privileges
5 or immunities prohibit state laws, even charters,
6 charters are by state law, from bridging any privilege
7 of citizenship. Voting and seeking office are both
8 privileges of citizenship.

9 And the state constitution Article 1
10 Section 1 distinguishes elections to nominate
11 candidates for public office from elections for party
12 positions. A party candidate is a party position.
13 They no longer represent all of their constituents,
14 they represent half of their constituents, a quarter
15 of their constituents.

16 This is a serious problem because of
17 the influence that nomination has on the conduct of an
18 office in advance. By 2017, a major party could admit
19 an open court to having no duty to its members or the
20 public interest. They could "go into back rooms like
21 they used to and smoke cigars and pick the candidate
22 that way."

23 In 2024, they did. The single most
24 effective move against public corruption is one
25 primary election; all voters, all candidates. It is

1 also what the Constitution says in Amendment 24.

2 Thank you very much.

3 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. Thank you so
4 much, Michelle.

5 Questions, comments for Jessie and
6 Michelle?

7 Thank you both.

8 Jessie, of the hundreds of people that
9 we've seen across all five boroughs, you're the very
10 first to -- to come as a -- as a repeat -- testifier.
11 Very moved by everything that you said last time and
12 tonight. It's all incredibly powerful.

13 I will tell you from a -- a personal
14 perspective, thank you for citing Michael Hardy on
15 this issue. Some of us were very, very close to
16 Michael.

17 MS. FIELDS: Absolutely.

18 MR. GASPARD: And it's so -- it's so
19 strange to hear you describe him as "the late Michael
20 Hardy." I miss him terribly.

21 MS. FIELDS: So do I.

22 MR. GASPARD: So thank you for bringing
23 his spirit into this debate.

24 MS. FIELDS: Thank you. He -- he was
25 someone very special, very important.

1 MR. GASPARD: He was a -- he was a
2 beautiful spirit.

3 MS. FIELDS: Actually, I will -- the
4 article that I was quoting, I'm eager to submit it to
5 you.

6 MR. GASPARD: Please do. Please do.

7 MS. FIELDS: I will. Thank you. Thank
8 you so much.

9 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. Thank you so
10 much.

11 MS. FIELDS: Thank you.

12 MR. GASPARD: Let's -- let's go online
13 for our next two participants and then we'll come
14 right back into this room.

15 Hindy Schachter and Darien Glasser, if
16 you can hear us. Hindy Schachter.

17 MS. SCHACHTER: Hi.

18 MR. GASPARD: Hi, Hindy.

19 MS. SCHACHTER: Can you hear me?

20 MR. GASPARD: Yes. we can.

21 MS. SCHACHTER: Excellent. Then I'll
22 start speaking. So I'm a member of Families For Safe
23 Streets. What that means is someone in my family
24 had -- was involved in a crash, a traffic crash. And
25 in my case, it's my husband who passed away in 2014.

1 Since that time, I have been advocating
2 for Safe Streets, streets made safer by expeditious
3 design. Some people in this meeting have -- have
4 talked about the incompatibility of speed and safety,
5 but sometimes speed is essential to save lives.

6 Between 2014 and when I come before you
7 in 2026, I have seen so many times where Safe Street
8 advocates are able to show that a certain street needs
9 change, design change, and then what happens? Years
10 passed and nothing is done. There are so many ways of
11 delaying things.

12 For years people said Central Park West
13 needs a bike lane, but it took the death of Madison
14 Lyden to get a bike lane. In 2015, I remember
15 speaking at community board eight, put bike lanes on
16 the upper East side, north to south. Or east to west,
17 sorry. It wasn't until Carling Mott's unfortunate
18 death in 2022 that we actually got civilized
19 discussion.

20 Beforehand, someone said to me, "stop
21 talking about death. It's silly." We have let so
22 many of these safety projects stew until we get a
23 totally unnecessary death and then we begin to say,
24 "let's move." I asked this board, change that
25 calculus.

1 When we see that there's a problem,
2 when we see that there's a safety solution, let's have
3 legal procedures that allow us to forestall the death
4 before it happens. Let's have speed for safety.
5 Thank you very much.

6 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you very
7 much.

8 Darien.

9 MR. GLASSER: How's it going folks?
10 Thank you so much for me to take some time to testify
11 here. My name's Darien Glasser. I'm calling in from
12 FiDi and actually for a very similar topic.

13 I'm calling in because I believe the
14 city needs to cut red tape around these lifesaving
15 street infrastructure designs to make New York City
16 streets the -- the envy of the world.

17 To paraphrase our mayor, we know what
18 needs to be done. We've consistently failed to scale
19 our proven best practices at every corner of the city.
20 I've been downtown for a while and I've seen things
21 improve little by little.

22 For instance, the pedestrian -- Wall
23 Street, Broad Street was amazing -- has transformed
24 Lower Manhattan. These are broadly popular policies
25 but always take so long to implement despite us

1 knowing what's needed to make the city better.

2 Every month, every year, or in some
3 cases even decades, we wait -- we wait causes cost to
4 inflate, delays very necessary lifesaving street signs
5 and in some cases causes changes to be stopped
6 entirely.

7 Consider Canal Street. We all know
8 it's a problem. It's a Vision Zero, senior pedestrian
9 priority corridor for the DOT and it has been since
10 2015, which is over a decade at this point, which
11 sounds kind of crazy to say.

12 And, honestly, a priority for anyone
13 who walks or takes transportation there regularly and
14 yet major design changes have been languishing in
15 review for a very long time while the problem has not
16 gotten any better.

17 We know Canal Street's been a problem
18 for over a decade and yet we're still waiting for
19 significant changes, all the while there have been a
20 number of injuries and deaths, basically, since --
21 since 2022.

22 Every year the -- streets plan DOT has
23 been able to implement enough projects fast enough to
24 hit their projected bike and bus lane benchmarks. To
25 reach every neighborhood, to protect every New Yorker

1 and to truly make our streets the envy of the world,
2 we need to shorten timelines for implementing tested
3 and tried standard designs.

4 The city should consider ways to --
5 reform the major transportation projects process to
6 speed up standard safety redesigns. New York -- New
7 Yorkers cannot afford to wait and every delay costs
8 real physical dollars and in some cases, New Yorkers
9 their lives.

10 Projects like the Canal Street
11 Redesign, the Delancey Street Safety Redesign and the
12 34th Street Busway and many others have strong locals
13 for it but have been delayed or stalled for multiple
14 times and in some cases for years or Canal Street,
15 over a decade.

16 Every New Yorker deserves to be able to
17 have pedestrian dignity, the ability to walk from the
18 door both safely and comfortably knowing they'll be
19 able to make it home safely each night. And they
20 deserve a city that works harder to make it easier to
21 make our streets safer.

22 Let's continue to work to make NYC the
23 greatest city in the world. Thanks for listening to
24 me.

25 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you both.

1 Questions, comments, commissioners?

2 Thank -- thank you, Darien, for your --
3 and call on pedestrian dignity.

4 And, Hindy, we're terribly sorry for
5 your tragic loss but appreciate how you've turned it
6 into energy that fuels your civic activism.

7 Thank you both.

8 Patrick Hall and Hayden Brockett.

9 Patrick and Hayden.

10 Oh, I recognize you.

11 MR. HALL: Hi. Yeah. My name's
12 Patrick Hall.

13 MR. GASPARD: So -- so I'm going to
14 stop you for a second. So you're our second repeat
15 offender tonight and I'm excited by that because I've
16 been quoting you everywhere.

17 Every time I'm interviewed about our
18 commission and the work that we're doing, I quote your
19 work as a small business owner and the fact that you
20 came before us at our very first hearing and you asked
21 us as a commission to make sure that we listened
22 before we legislate.

23 I've been using that line everywhere.
24 I actually stopped by your shop on Ward [ph] Street
25 and I left a note for you thanking you for your

1 testimony. I hope that you got the note.

2 MR. HALL: I did. Thank you so much.
3 And that's one of the reasons I'm here again tonight,
4 just still advocating for small businesses.

5 I am a small business owner downtown
6 and I'm here to talk about, tonight, just one
7 government efficiency for small businesses by using
8 one practical thing that has been alluded to here in a
9 couple of the other testimonies, but that's commercial
10 loading access.

11 As small businesses were asked to
12 follow a lot of rules. We deal with permits and
13 payroll and taxes, insurance, inspections and
14 sanitation and deliveries and customer service and
15 congestion pricing and we try to comply, but the
16 system doesn't -- not always work for the small
17 businesses trying to do the right thing.

18 Around my business in downtown
19 Manhattan, commercial loading and unloading zones are
20 often occupied all day by vehicles that do not appear
21 to be loading, unloading, or making deliveries or
22 performing service work.

23 Many display city, state or federal
24 placards, but they appear to be personal vehicles
25 using commercial loading zones as all-day parking.

1 Those -- vehicles often do not receive tickets, while
2 my own business vehicle registered to my business and
3 used for deliveries, can receive tickets while we are
4 trying to operate.

5 To a small business owner that looks
6 like placard or permit misuse. And it -- it makes the
7 system feel unfair and -- unaccountable. So for a
8 florist, loading access is not optional.

9 Flowers are perishable, deliveries are
10 time sensitive, staff should not have to double-park
11 or unload across traffic or circle back around the
12 block and get tickets just to do their jobs.

13 I -- I'm only asking -- I'm not asking
14 for, like, special treatment or anything. I'm -- I'm
15 just asking for a -- a fair and a clear and a workable
16 system and I -- I respectfully ask the commission to
17 recommend three things.

18 First, protect the commercial loading
19 zones for actual commercial use, deliveries, pickups,
20 unloading and service calls. And second, create one
21 clear reporting pathway for blocked loading zones and
22 placard misuse.

23 A business owner should not have to
24 guess whether to call 311, DOT, NYPD, a precinct, a
25 bid or an elected official. And third, track and

1 publish the problem.

2 MR. GASPARD: You're -- you're right at
3 three minutes, Patrick. If you can conclude quickly.

4 MR. HALL: That's just it. Just,
5 third, is track and publish the problem. Yeah.

6 MR. GASPARD: Got it. Thank you.
7 Hayden.

8 MR. BROCKETT: Thank you. My name is
9 Hayden Brockett. Thank you. I'm -- I'm a volunteer
10 with the New York Clean Air Collective. I'm also --
11 I'm not speaking on behalf of Community Board seven,
12 but I am on Community Board seven. Thank you COGE for
13 coming to our neighborhood.

14 We, at the Citizens Area Complaint
15 Program, represent participants in -- in the city's
16 hugely successful environmental whistleblower program.
17 And it actually dovetails exactly what -- with -- with
18 what you said.

19 This is government efficiency in
20 practice because it lets ordinary New Yorkers help
21 enforce our environmental laws in partnership with the
22 Department of Environmental Protection.

23 And this program actually works and it
24 can be expanded to the parking program that we -- the
25 parking problems we just heard about from the

1 gentleman before, because you have citizen enforcement
2 on the ground taking a one or a three minute video,
3 sending it to the DEP and it has resulted in over
4 330,000 illegal idling violations just since 2017.

5 That's up from less than one per day
6 for city agencies for a law that was on the books for
7 50 years. City agencies did not enforce this law and
8 because of civilian enforcement, we now have the
9 ability to do that.

10 The DEP still needs to strengthen that
11 program, but this is -- has collected \$135 million in
12 idling violations with more unpaid fines yet to come.
13 I believe it was Commissioner Wylde who said, at your
14 first meeting, that when it comes to improving
15 government efficiency there is no philosophical fix to
16 this question.

17 It takes grinding work every day. And
18 while that's true, the mayor did announce this in May,
19 that the city had collected \$9 million from Amazon in
20 unpaid idling fines, all of them from civilian
21 complaints.

22 But my message tonight is the city
23 must -- must strengthen the Citizen Air Complaint
24 Program and use it maybe philosophically as a model to
25 make city government more efficient and effective,

1 particularly for -- protecting our public space and
2 making our streets safer and more efficient.

3 Specifically, the commission should
4 propose a charter amendment to create a Department of
5 Civilian Enforcement because the CACP model can be
6 used to stop illegal parking, to end illegal dumping
7 and to make our buses fast by doing what ACE cameras
8 cannot do, catching those drivers who block their
9 license plates while they park in the bus lanes.

10 Civilian enforcement actually helps
11 city agencies expand their reach and hold corporations
12 accountable for violating our environmental,
13 sanitation and street safety laws. Let me just tell
14 you briefly how this works.

15 MR. GASPARD: You have 30 seconds.

16 MR. BROCKETT: Thirty seconds. I can
17 do it. All day, every day for years, Amazon trucks
18 double-parked on Broadway from 59th Street to 168th
19 Street, they idled all day, every day and that stopped
20 overnight in June 2023, thanks to people like myself
21 and my friends and neighbors who took their phones,
22 put -- put it up to the engine for three minutes, sent
23 those reports in. It's a lot of work.

24 Unfortunately, the DEP has a lot of
25 barriers to entry. That 25 percent that citizens get,

1 which is the innovative part of this program, is
2 extremely important because it is a lot of work.

3 But the result was that Amazon in this
4 neighborhood shut off overnight and then that there's
5 been -- similar success in Queens and Brooklyn thanks
6 to citizen enforcement. So thank you for your time.

7 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you.

8 Question.

9 MS. WYLDE: I -- there -- how was that
10 created, under law or administratively or -- wasn't
11 charter?

12 MR. BROCKETT: I'm glad you asked that.
13 So Helen Rosenthal was the city councilwoman who got
14 that passed. And I have to shout out Samara Swanson
15 who worked for the DEP -- for the council. That was
16 a -- a real representative democracy issue.

17 But I think when I was talking about a
18 charter issue, we see that unfortunately there is just
19 a cross-agency problem where agency employees sort of
20 get set in their ways or maybe sometimes agencies are
21 a little too close with regulators or just don't do
22 the job they need to be done, so you have placard
23 abuse for instance. Just to take one example.

24 I think where the charter could come in
25 is if you have an overarching government initiative to

1 say we're going to have citizen enforcement to hold
2 those agencies accountable and also to expand their
3 reach. And so that's why I think the charter --
4 commission is really the right place to -- to look at
5 that.

6 MS. WYLDE: Thanks.

7 MR. HALL: And to connect it, if the --
8 if there were places for them to pull over, they could
9 turn off the vehicle and not idle.

10 MR. BROCKETT: Absolutely. Absolutely.
11 Curb -- curb reform is -- is vital, which is what
12 Hindy was talking about as well. All right.

13 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much for
14 your testimony.

15 MR. BROCKETT: Of course.

16 MR. GASPARD: And for this -- this
17 really intriguing idea.

18 And thank you for returning, Patrick.

19 MR. HALL: Yeah. Thank you.

20 MR. GASPARD: Thank you both.

21 Jeremiah Bornemann and Suzanne Ventura.

22 As Jeremiah and Suzanne come to the
23 front of the room, I want to remind everyone that we
24 will conclude this hearing at 8:00 p.m. tonight. And
25 if you are interested in testifying and you're on the

1 queue and you fear that you may not make it to the
2 mic, I will invite you to please submit written
3 testimony.

4 If you're online, you're on the
5 platform already and you can follow the cues to submit
6 online. Thank you.

7 Jeremiah.

8 MR. BORNEMANN: Thank you members of
9 the commission, members of the public. I'm Jeremiah
10 Bornemann, a special education and paraprofessional in
11 our city's public schools. I work at the Battery Park
12 City School as an elected leader in my union, as well
13 as the District 2 Paraprofessional Coordinator.

14 I represent a couple thousand
15 paraprofessionals and citywide there are about 28,000.
16 Today's hearing about streamlining government, the
17 permitting process desires much attention.

18 But I also want to focus on what else
19 is costing our city government and also our students a
20 great deal. My job as a para is to make sure that
21 special education students get the help they need in
22 an individual or group setting.

23 The kid who needs regular insulin, the
24 kid on the autism spectrum, the kid who has trouble
25 controlling their behaviors. There are many ways to

1 streamline things at the DOE. The hiring process can
2 currently take up to four months, from nominations to
3 coming into the school building as a new staffer.

4 The DOE even claims that they need our,
5 UFT's, help in finding space to hold hiring calls and
6 to onboard staff. And as one of the lowest paid city
7 workers, paraprofessionals have double the turnover
8 rate as teachers.

9 Meaning that every year the DOE needs
10 to hire thousands of paras, leaving students to start
11 the year without the assistance they need. Let me
12 discuss how this has a fiscal impact on the city too.

13 When the city fails to provide special
14 education services as mandated by a child's IEP,
15 parents sue the city. This can be both at great cost
16 and as a backdoor to privatization that should be
17 looked at by this commission.

18 When parents sue the city they are paid
19 out to these contractors for these services instead
20 these "Carter cases" mean that private agencies,
21 private schools and lawyer fees are currently costing
22 the city billions of dollars.

23 I look at the code preliminary report
24 and I don't seem to touch on education issues or even
25 privatization generally. When we allow these

1 essential city services to be privatized, that's a
2 choice. Government efficiency can't just mean cutting
3 costs.

4 But worse, once we're on the job our
5 wages are not respectful. I love my job. It feels
6 great to help the students, watch them grow. But what
7 I can't help is that my paras need a second job --

8 MR. GASPARD: You're -- you're at time.

9 MR. BORNEMANN: Thank you much for your
10 time.

11 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. I'm really
12 sorry I had to cut you off.

13 Suzanne.

14 MS. VENTURA: Hi. I am Suzanne Ventura
15 from Greeningfullife. Thank you for the opportunity.
16 This administration is daring us to hope. For nearly
17 a decade I've operated within sustainability across
18 food, fashion, art, hospitality, architecture,
19 infrastructure and policy.

20 I've attended and documented thousands
21 of panels, workshops and public events and have
22 learned that many of the best ideas don't come from
23 experts on a stage, they come from practitioners and
24 community members in the audience who are doing the
25 work every day.

1 What I've witnessed over and over is
2 not a lack of solutions, it's a lack of coordination.
3 Young professionals graduate from world-class
4 sustainability programs and don't know where to plug
5 in. Small businesses want to make sustainable choices
6 but don't know where to find resources.

7 Community organizations are solving
8 problems in isolation. Too often, passionate New
9 Yorkers start from scratch when dozens of
10 organizations already exist that could benefit from
11 their energy and support.

12 I echo the call from colleague, Anna
13 Sacks, the Trash Walker, to move forward with the
14 Office of Circularity and Resource Coordination. Not
15 to create another layer in bureaucracy, but to connect
16 the incredible assets we already have.

17 This office would serve as the mycelium
18 network of the city, connecting talent, organizations,
19 businesses, educational institutions, community
20 gardens, reuse centers and policy makers with
21 resources and programs.

22 It could expand successful programs
23 like big reuse and materials for the arts into every
24 borough, supporting circular business practices,
25 establish collective purchasing groups, coordinate

1 resource directories, strengthen pathways from
2 education into impact careers and make it easier for
3 New Yorkers to participate in solutions that already
4 exist.

5 Waste is not just a sanitation issue.
6 Circularity is economic development, workforce
7 development, small business development, economic
8 resilience and community health.

9 New York has no shortage of talent
10 organization or ideas. What we need is cohesive
11 connective tissue. We've spent decades managing
12 waste.

13 In the next chapter, let's rethink our
14 waste as resources and assets and Office of
15 Circularity would turn isolated efforts into a
16 coordinated ecosystem and could establish New York as
17 a global leader in the regenerative economy. Thank
18 you.

19 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

20 Thank you both for your testimony.

21 I'm going to actually insist that Emma
22 Wolfe respond to you because she's -- she's worked on
23 this issue here in the city.

24 MS. VENTURA: Wonderful.

25 MS. WOLFE: I'm thrilled too and I'm

1 certain that I was a big advocate of your work when I
2 was just down the street at Barnard working with
3 Sandra Goldmark who's a huge advocate for circularity.

4 And I think it would be terrific for
5 the city to think about different ways of promoting
6 circularity because it's both a benefit for the
7 environment but also really brings community members
8 together. You can see it.

9 So, anyway, thank you for the great
10 work that you do.

11 And thank you for allowing me that
12 editorial.

13 MR. GASPARD: Of course. Thank --
14 thank you.

15 Any other questions, comments,
16 commissioners?

17 Great. Thank you both.

18 Faiza Khalid and George Lee. Faiza and
19 George.

20 Welcome. You're up first.

21 MS. KHALID: Hi. Good evening,
22 everyone. My name is Faiza Khalid and I'm a proud
23 educator and parent in the Harlem community. I've
24 been teaching for over 19 years. I started out in
25 special education classrooms and up until last year I

1 taught computer science for the past seven years.

2 This year I transitioned into a new
3 role as the teacher's junior representative for Harlem
4 Community School District 5, with 27 schools in my
5 charge. I appreciate the opportunity to be here with
6 you to discuss about streamlining, although not
7 particularly for building permits, but more about the
8 process of getting funding into the classroom.

9 So earlier, I think it was you,
10 Chairman Gaspard, that made a comment about the delays
11 in the building permits taking away from the
12 excellence in our city, and we have a similar problem
13 taking away from excellence in our schools.

14 There's a delay or a disconnect between
15 funds going into -- allocated for schools and actually
16 trickling down into the classrooms. Every year my
17 colleagues and I spend hundreds of dollars out of our
18 pockets in trying to get resources and materials in
19 the classroom.

20 We do grant writing; this September I
21 have a grant writing workshop schedule because it's so
22 pertinent for us to get materials and supplies.
23 However, it takes months before we ever see the
24 materials and supplies that we request.

25 We lobby for funding in Albany every

1 year. And even with the release of funds from the
2 campaign for fiscal equity, there's still great
3 inequity.

4 The injustice that I see is that a
5 child can go to school in one school and they may have
6 supplies and technology and materials, but they can go
7 to another school even in their own community and
8 there may be little to no supplies.

9 All children should have equitable
10 access to the best materials that the 21st century has
11 to offer so that they can be successful. This should
12 not be left up to classroom teachers.

13 My colleagues and I ask that this
14 commission just really dig deep to investigate this
15 disconnect between the funds that are allotted to
16 schools for materials and them actually reaching the
17 students.

18 We hope that your commission and that
19 all of our local leaders as well will make this a
20 priority. Thank you.

21 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

22 MR. LEE: Good afternoon. I'd like to
23 first thank the Chair and commission for allowing me
24 to speak. I had just about given up; you know, hoped
25 that I was going to get chosen.

1 Word of your, you know, government of
2 the hospital has made its way all the way to rainy
3 England. I'm a student from Oxford University but I
4 represent Centura, an AI GovTech efficiency startup.

5 I've listened to a few of these
6 hearings now, some online, some in-person, and from
7 this and other conversations that I've had on this and
8 the other side of the pond, it seems that there are
9 sort of the same problems coming up again and again
10 that are sort of behind a lot of this.

11 And this can be everything from, you
12 know, permits that expire too soon which results in,
13 you know, a -- a whole project needing to get sent
14 back from the round review.

15 Small businesses needing to wait months
16 for consent on something as simple as a table on the
17 pavement. And, you know, every month of delay in this
18 respect, every time that, you know, things are slower,
19 the proxy, you know, holds things back, this is New
20 Yorkers not getting housing.

21 This is people, you know, having their
22 lives affected. This is schools not getting, you
23 know, sufficient funding and sufficient, you know,
24 things they need.

25 And what struck me about all of this,

1 all of these problems that are, you know, very real
2 problems, is a lot of it comes from the same thing.

3 These sort of mountains of paperworks
4 that people have of whether they are sort of ordinary
5 New Yorkers trying to interface with the government
6 system or they're people working within the government
7 that have a huge amount to do often, you know, far
8 more than can be reasonably expected of them within,
9 you know, the time they have in a day and certainly
10 the amount they're being paid.

11 It's a slightly impossible task on all
12 front because there is so much to get through, so much
13 difficulty, so many different things you need to check
14 against each other, different contracts, et cetera.

15 Centura, the company I represent, was
16 sort of founded on the mission of fixing exactly this,
17 making it easier for all the individuals, be they
18 working in the government or be they the consumers, to
19 make it their way through this amount of paperwork.

20 You see, we've got a tool in Oxford
21 with a team from Harvard and Stanford, which goes
22 through all manner of documents, all sort of contracts
23 and compares them against each other.

24 It makes judgments on whether these,
25 you know, whether is compliance, whether there is, you

1 know, even on nuance cases, let's say procurement,
2 which is one area that we look at or even, you know,
3 permitting which is something we're looking at today.

4 A huge amount of this is working out
5 when you have a hundred documents and a hundred pages
6 in each one on one hand and you have a single
7 contract, an invoice for a purchase order or a single
8 person that wants to, you know, get a permit for a
9 certain thing and you want to know, does this comply
10 with this, does this work with this?

11 This is a hugely complex process and
12 normally it's going to take someone a huge amount of
13 time to be able to go through this, which creates this
14 massive load that no government official can be
15 expected to do.

16 Our product goes for exactly this. And
17 this engine doesn't care whether the document is, you
18 know, an invoice or a permit -- application. A
19 submission against the zoning code is exactly the same
20 thing as reading an invoice against a contract, and
21 extends to permitting just as easily.

22 We use AI checks, deterministic checks,
23 all matter of things like this in order to be able to
24 provide the perfect experience. So I say this not to
25 solve, you know, just one specific product, but more

1 as a point to code that, you know, the ambition that
2 government should have.

3 This government of the possible should
4 think big because a lot of these problems historically
5 were not able to be solved. You know, this -- having
6 this massive amount of paperwork it's easy for people
7 to say "cut bureaucracy," you know, "make it easier,
8 make it simpler." But there's a reason that paperwork
9 exists.

10 Those things need to be taken into
11 account. People talked about safety earlier. There
12 is a reason that paperwork exists. That paperwork is
13 also a huge barrier to the things that people are
14 trying to do at every stage of government.

15 We now, finally, due to a current AI
16 developments, due to technologies that are being
17 innovated on now and only in the past few years, we
18 have the ability to keep all of that regulation that
19 needs to be there to keep people safe while also not
20 holding people back, not preventing people from
21 getting housing built, not preventing people from
22 getting the things they need to get done in this city.

23 So on that, thank you so much for your
24 time. Happy 250th America and thank you.

25 MR. GASPARD: Wait. I'm sorry. What

1 was the last point that you made?

2 MR. LEE: Which one? The happy 250th
3 or before that?

4 MR. GASPARD: No. About America.

5 MR. LEE: Happy 250th. You know,
6 you're not -- not quite as old as us, but you're a lot
7 bigger.

8 MR. GASPARD: I -- I appreciate the
9 generous spirit. Unfortunately, I will not
10 reciprocate by wishing you well with Jude Bellingham
11 and -- and Mr. King, but we appreciate the testimony.
12 I'm glad that we got it in.

13 Glad that we got both of your
14 testimonies in. We're not going to take up any
15 questions for you because I'd like to invite two final
16 panelists, but both of what you submitted is really,
17 really appreciated and important. Thank you.

18 MR. LEE: Thank you so much.

19 MS. KHALID: Thank you.

20 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

21 So -- apologies. We're working out a
22 technical issue. Unfortunately, there are more people
23 who want to testify than -- than we have time.

24 I'm going to remind you all again that
25 you can submit your written testimony and those of you

1 who are online can also submit testimony or you can
2 come to one of our additional hearings. I am going to
3 take two final witnesses this evening.

4 Ira Gershenhorn and Jodi Liss, if you
5 come up and join us. We won't have any questions for
6 you but your testimony is important. Please join us.

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 7: I -- I don't
8 see --

9 MR. GASPARD: Ira and Jodi. I

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 7: I don't see
11 Jodi. Anyway, Jodi --

12 MR. GASPARD: If Jodi's not here, I'm
13 going to ask Adria Quinones to join us.

14 Adria, are you still here?

15 That's a yes. Adria's making her way
16 up. You can -- you can begin.

17 MR. GERSHENHORN: Okay. My name is Ira
18 Gershenhorn, 35 years volunteering in Riverside Park.
19 I -- I'm wearing a Riverside Park Conservancy hat
20 right now. I was volunteering before they were in the
21 conservancy.

22 Anyway, DOT has an incredible inventory
23 established in 1950. I think things have probably
24 changed. Every year DOT should probably look at what
25 they've got in front of them. Also, the Henry Hudson

1 Parkway has a speed limit of 50 miles an hour. Cars
2 flip, they crash. NYPD doesn't prevent any of this.
3 They clean it up.

4 So you've got your highway unit one,
5 which basically could be replaced with speed cameras,
6 maintain the speed at 50. And this is probably -- all
7 highways in New York are the same thing. Cars were
8 different then. We should close exit 12 North
9 permanently and transfer its land to parks.

10 That piece of property is -- no one
11 noticed it was closed; it's opening up now. Also, in
12 terms of public space, you've got issues like there's
13 a lot of places you could go swimming in New York
14 City; people don't realize they can. Hudson River is
15 one of them and even the Jackie Onassis Reservoir,
16 which is a lot of ducks right now.

17 Police, EMS vehicles should be smaller.
18 In Europe, other countries of the world, they have
19 justice, they have better response times and people
20 can get help in parks where vehicles don't go and this
21 is not a problem.

22 But we spend a lot of money on our --
23 on our fighting vehicles and the -- the guy just --
24 not just cars, has a nice video about why we have such
25 large EMS vehicles and the rest of the world does not

1 and why it costs us so much more money. That's it for
2 now.

3 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. Thank you.
4 Please.

5 MS. QUINONES: Hi. My name is Adria
6 Quinones. I'm a lifelong New Yorker. I have 35 years
7 in the IT industry, including 16 years in global
8 trading systems, global multinational -- trading
9 systems. And for the last six years, it's been my
10 honor to be a member of the New York City workforce.

11 I work at Metro Plus Health, which is a
12 subsidiary of H and H. As part of my work in IT, I've
13 been lucky to work on multiple infrastructure projects
14 based around the modernization of IT infrastructure to
15 allow for efficient and improved delivery of services
16 to New York's most vulnerable population.

17 But as part of this, these projects,
18 I'd like to look at how we deliver these projects and
19 what room there is for efficiency and the creation of
20 demand in the consulting industry.

21 When you roll out a big infrastructure
22 project, you are going to look for expertise based in
23 that system, whatever that is. You will go directly
24 to the people who have experience in rolling that out,
25 which makes sense. You will also go to look for

1 experience to staff into your project.

2 And in general, you do not go directly
3 to the agencies, part of the agency, but you go to the
4 consulting agencies. You go to places like Deloitte
5 and Accenture where you are hiring people; right?

6 And you are trading on the Deloitte and
7 Accenture name. They are good inherently; right?
8 That's who you're hiring. You are looking for
9 expertise and yet you are hiring people who have no
10 expertise in the agency. You are bringing in people
11 who you have to then train into what your agency does;
12 right?

13 In the latest project that I'm working
14 on, we have a very, very different business model at
15 Metro. Who are we supporting? We're taking care of
16 Medicaid, Medicare, New York City workers, union
17 workers, the workers who are daycare workers.

18 It is a diverse footprint and nobody
19 can come to us with that expertise. Moreover, you do
20 not get experts who have any experience in what it is
21 to work in New York City.

22 There are work rules that need to be
23 expected -- respected, and all of these people must be
24 trained, and these contracts are limited and that
25 expertise that you have given them is walking out your

1 door. Your project is still running. You're going to
2 go for another set of consulting contracts.

3 So what am I saying? What am I saying
4 that we should look at? How can we save the city
5 money outside of these? Where do we bring work in-
6 house? How do we take advantage of in-house
7 expertise?

8 MR. GASPARD: You're right at time.

9 MS. QUINONES: I know. I'm going to --
10 I'm going to submit online.

11 MR. GASPARD: Please. Please.

12 MS. QUINONES: But I do think that
13 there are things that we could look at.

14 MR. GASPARD: And we look forward to
15 reviewing that. So we appreciate your testimony.

16 Appreciate yours as well, Ira. And,
17 Ira, I'm just going to say that I -- I live in this
18 community, I grew up in Riverside Park.

19 It is night and day and the
20 improvements that we see there are a consequence of
21 you and over 1000 volunteers that regularly, like,
22 give of their time and their energies to that park.
23 And I just can't thank you enough for that. So we
24 appreciate you.

25 MR. GERSHENHORN: Thank you.

1 MR. GASPARD: Thank you both.

2 MS. QUINONES: Thank you.

3 MR. GASPARD: So thank you to everyone
4 who testified this evening. Again, if you did not
5 have an opportunity to testify, you can submit at
6 nyc.gov/coge. I want to thank you all and a special
7 thanks to the staff here at Riverside Church, our
8 stenographer, our fantastic sign language interpreter
9 for helping to make this an accessible and inclusive
10 evening.

11 The next public hearing of this
12 commission will be held in Queens on Monday, July 13th
13 at 5:00 p.m. at Queensborough Hall, the Helen Marshall
14 Cultural Center at 120-55 Queens Boulevard in Kew
15 Gardens.

16 It will focus on outdoor dining and
17 street safety, but like today, we welcome testimony
18 from New Yorkers on all topics that are related to the
19 charter.

20 Is there a motion to adjourn our
21 meeting?

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 8: So move.

23 MR. GASPARD: Is there a second?

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 9: Second.

25 MR. GASPARD: Okay. All in favor.

1 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Aye.

2 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. We are
3 adjourned.

4 (Whereupon, at 8:05 p.m., the
5 proceeding was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

I, PAUL GRASSO, the officer before whom the foregoing proceedings were taken, do hereby certify that any witness(es) in the foregoing proceedings, prior to testifying, were duly sworn; that the proceedings were recorded by me and thereafter reduced to typewriting by a qualified transcriptionist; that said digital audio recording of said proceedings are a true and accurate record to the best of my knowledge, skills, and ability; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which this was taken; and, further, that I am not a relative or employee of any counsel or attorney employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

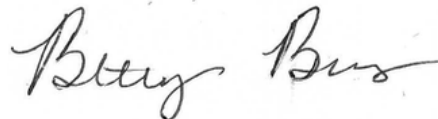


PAUL GRASSO

Notary Public in and for the
State of New York

CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIBER

I, BETHANY BROOKS, do hereby certify that this transcript was prepared from the digital audio recording of the foregoing proceeding, that said transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings to the best of my knowledge, skills, and ability; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which this was taken; and, further, that I am not a relative or employee of any counsel or attorney employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bethany Brooks", is written in dark ink.

BETHANY BROOKS

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