

Charter Review Commission Manhattan Hearing 1

Moderated by Patrick Gaspard, Chair

Tuesday, June 9, 2026

5:19 p.m.

New York Law School

185 West Broadway

New York, NY 10013

Reported by: Abigail Rodriguez

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A P P E A R A N C E S

List of Attendees:

Emma Wolfe, Vice Chair

Susan Kang, Secretary

Kathryn Wylde

Marc Shaw

Henry Garrido

Kapil Longani

Ruth Messinger

Theodore Moore

Ana Oliveira

Carlina Rivera

Esther Rosario

Barika Williams

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

2 THE CHAIR: Good evening. Welcome to
3 the public hearing on the Commission on Government
4 Efficiency. My name is Patrick Gaspard. And it is a
5 tremendous honor to be as the Chair of this
6 Commission.

7 We are here today because New Yorkers
8 deserve and need a government of the possible -- one
9 that can urgently build infrastructure, promote small
10 business growth, and make the city more livable and
11 more accessible with childcare that we can afford and
12 groceries that we can afford as well.

13 The task we are going to undertake is a
14 review of the entire charter to build the 21st century
15 government that New York made. So if you have not
16 read all 1,100 pages of the charter, please exit now.

17 Only if the voters agree to the changes
18 that we recommend at the election on the ballot in
19 November will any changes into the charter go into
20 effect.

21 I know that I speak for my fellow
22 commissioners when I say that we're committed to hear
23 from a broad spectrum -- a cross-section of New
24 Yorkers -- and to pursuing the very best ideas that we
25 find.

1 This hearing is just one of many public
2 hearings which will be held across every borough to
3 hear ideas from experts, community leaders, elected
4 officials, and any member of the public who wishes to
5 testify.

6 Importantly, this is an independent,
7 non-partisan commission. In making our
8 recommendations to the city voters, we are bound only
9 by our judgments and our shared values.

10 We will pursue ideas regardless of who
11 proposes them or regardless of who supports them.
12 Joining me in this task are 14 outstanding
13 commissioners who care deeply about New York City.

14 They are Vice Chair Emma Wolfe,
15 Secretary Susan Kang, Henry Garrido, Kapil Longani,
16 Ruth Messinger, Theodore Moore, Ana Oliveira, Carlina
17 Rivera, Esther Rosario, Marc Shaw, Barika Williams,
18 Kathryn Wylde. Absent tonight are commission members
19 Marco Carrion and Dawn Pinnock.

20 Although, as I said, we are considering
21 the entire charter, Commission is looking in
22 particular at the processes and procedures built into
23 our charter that could be update -- updated to deliver
24 a more efficient government that serves all New
25 Yorkers with excellence.

1 Today we're focused primarily on
2 streamlining government for infrastructure projects in
3 the public realm. Infrastructure, of course, is key
4 to organizing our society. There are -- no one would
5 be in this room tonight or on our live screen who are
6 not caring for our infrastructure.

7 Infrastructure includes everything from
8 how we got here to the roads and bridges and bike
9 shares that we use across the city. Infrastructure is
10 the Williamsburg Bridge bump that mayor personally
11 fixed in his first week office.

12 It's also the McGuinness Boulevard we
13 designed that's underway in New Point, Brooklyn. It's
14 the 31st street redesign in Astoria, Queens and the
15 Madison Avenue double bus lane expansion in Manhattan,
16 if one cares about these things.

17 It's the water tunnel that DEP digs,
18 the networks that bring us 5G Internet, the parks
19 where our children play. And throughout all of this
20 we bring the imperative to use city dollars as
21 effectively as possible so that we can provide the
22 services that working New Yorkers rely on.

23 The challenges we encounter with
24 building our infrastructure when improving our shared
25 public spaces will be the focus of this hearing. But

1 we will invite testimony on any topic related to the
2 charter. All input will be welcome.

3 Let me say just a few words about how
4 this hearing is organized and how it's going to
5 unfold. For members of the public, we will hear first
6 from those who have -- who are attending this meeting
7 in person. We will then move to testimony from those
8 who are attending virtually.

9 Members of the public are asked to
10 testify for no longer than three minutes. We'll call
11 for testimony from two people at a time, followed by
12 any questions from the Commission.

13 Now I have to tell you that I'm going
14 to be pretty rigorous about the time so that we can
15 hear from as many folks as possible -- and unlike the
16 referees, who refuse to call any fouls on the San
17 Antonio Spurs.

18 So if you wish to testify virtually,
19 there's a form online. You can find it on the meeting
20 page for this hearing. Go to nyc.gov/COGE, click on
21 the "Get Involved" tab, and select the Manhattan
22 Hearing.

23 We will also drop the link to the form
24 in the chat. We're going to do our best to attempt to
25 hear from everyone. And we're going to be rigorous

1 about moving the process along.

2 You all can hang out any anywhere you
3 want the rest of this evening. But we're going to be
4 tossed out this room at 8:00 p.m.

5 In the event that we don't hear from
6 all of you who want to testify, there will be other
7 opportunities to submit testimony. This is -- as I
8 said, it's just one of several hearings.

9 You can submit your written commission
10 by completing the online form on the website that I
11 just named. If you cannot attend the hearings, each
12 of the hearings will be public, livestream, and
13 recorded for archival purposes.

14 Before we proceed, I would like to ask
15 for a motion from this Commission to approve the
16 minutes from our very first public meeting last week
17 on June 4th.

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 1: So moved.

19 THE CHAIR: So is there a motion?

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 1: So moved.

21 THE CHAIR: Is there a second?

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: Seconded.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 3: Seconded.

24 THE CHAIR: Is there any discussion on
25 the motion? All those in favor, say "aye."

1 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Aye.

2 THE CHAIR: Any opposed? Any
3 abstentions? The minutes have been adopted. I think
4 that we have completed our first bit of business as a
5 Commission.

6 With that, we are -- we're prepared to
7 get started. And we'd like to begin with our
8 testimony. And I'm waiting for our exceptional staff
9 to understand who we have on queue at the top.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: Sorry, I
11 missed that.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 5: Testimony.

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: The list is
14 ready.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 5: Testimony.

16 THE CHAIR: What's that?

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: The list is
18 ready.

19 THE CHAIR: It's not updating.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: It's not
21 updating?

22 THE CHAIR: I'll take the -- I'll take
23 a handwritten note. I'm a 20th-century guy.
24 Apologies. It must be lost.

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: Sorry about

1 that, folks. Tim Hopkins and Jim Chavit are the first
2 two.

3 THE CHAIR: Tim and Jackson, welcome.

4 MR. HOPKINS: So thank you. I'm
5 excited to be here because I know the importance of a
6 charter commission. My first job out of college was
7 working for the Charter Commission in '89 with Richard
8 Ravitch, where, Ruth Messinger, I think you testified
9 at that time.

10 You did an amazing job in shaping that.
11 And you said -- I think you said real estate is New
12 York as oil is to Texas, which is so great.

13 Later I worked with Carl Weisbrod and
14 the Dickinson Administration -- I started an
15 organization called Partnerships with Parks with the
16 City Parks Foundation working with neighborhood groups
17 to try and improve city parks, especially in
18 less-resourced areas.

19 And an early success was helping in
20 small ways to start the Road to Reliance. As
21 important as we know the public space involvement is
22 by community groups, it's not enough.

23 There must be adequate public sector
24 investment in the public route with an adequate and
25 unified -- unionized city workforce, especially with

1 respect to both maintenance and recreation programs,
2 which were savagely reduced during the 70s and 80s.

3 That's one of the reasons why I stepped
4 out after partnerships to lead an effort -- Parks
5 2001 -- to get an adequate funding for city parks.
6 9/11 happened. And resources went elsewhere for very
7 good reasons.

8 I then led Times Alliance and was
9 chair -- co-chair of the New York City Bid Association
10 and also worked with other city agencies like SPS and
11 DOT that play a role in improving public realm.

12 And now I work at NYU Marron with
13 amazing people like Mindy Tallah, who work in city
14 government, and at NYU Wagner with people like Polly
15 Trottenberg, and really thinking about how do we
16 improve places.

17 How does the City have a set of
18 intentions saying that we value community partners?
19 And if we value them, that we're going to empower them
20 and enable them, especially in less-resourced areas.

21 There still has to be adequate city
22 resources. But the key thing is to invest in -- a key
23 thing is to support these neighborhood efforts. And
24 there isn't a lot of time to talk. So I will add -- I
25 will --

1 THE CHAIR: Yeah, you have one minute.

2 MR. HOPKINS: Yeah, I will send
3 specific ideas relating to several things which have
4 to do with provisions in the charter relating to
5 infrastructure maintenance, which Richard Ravitch was
6 focused on and that they're not really adequately
7 being looked at.

8 The provisions related to the mayor's
9 management report, which also are ways of creating
10 accountability at the neighborhood level and
11 integrating the different city efforts and agencies.

12 And these are not new problems. I will
13 send specific recommendations. But Jane Jacobs wrote
14 about them 50 years ago. She said citizens of big
15 cities are forever berated for not taking sufficiently
16 active interest -- it's amazing rather that they keep
17 trying.

18 She talks about the fragmentation of
19 city government. And the key thing is to understand
20 not just specific city services, but also to
21 understand places. And the way to understand places
22 is to work with the communities that know them best.
23 Thank you very much.

24 THE CHAIR: Thank you so much, Tim.
25 Jackson, I'm turning to you.

1 But, Tim, please if you -- if you'd
2 stay there because I'm actually going to ask you to
3 just be a little bit more specific about the mayor's
4 management report. And we have to see if other
5 commissioners have questions as well, please.

6 MR. CHABOT: Thank you. Good evening,
7 everyone. My name is Jackson Chabot. I'm the
8 Director of Advocacy and Organizing Open Plans. And
9 we work across the city to advocate for livable
10 streets.

11 I'm here tonight to testify in support
12 of reforms that would make it easier to permit outdoor
13 dining in New York City. Outdoor dining has become an
14 important feature of New York City's landscape since
15 the pandemic.

16 It supports small businesses, creates
17 vibrant public spaces, and it gives New Yorkers more
18 opportunities to gather in their neighborhoods. Now
19 that the City has established a permanent outdoor
20 dining program, our governing processes should reflect
21 this reality.

22 We urge the Commission to recommend
23 charter changes that would allow outdoor dining to be
24 administered through Department of Transportation's
25 permits and licenses rather than revocable consents.

1 More broadly, the charter should give
2 the City flexibility to use permits instead of
3 revocable consent for routine and recurring uses of
4 the public right of way where appropriate.

5 Doing so would create a more efficient
6 and predictable process while maintaining public
7 oversight and accountability.

8 We also encourage the Commission to
9 review the charter's public hearing notice
10 requirements for out outdoor dining applications.
11 Public notice is important.

12 But under the current processes,
13 restaurants must pay to publish hearing notices, with
14 costs typically ranging, according to the New York
15 City Department of Transportation, from \$100 to \$800
16 per application.

17 For small businesses, these costs can
18 represent unnecessary and high burden to participation
19 in the program. We urge the Commission to consider
20 capping these publication costs at a reasonable level
21 or eliminating them all together.

22 New York has already made a policy
23 decision to support outdoor dining. And the next step
24 is ensuring that this administrative process is
25 aligned with that goal.

1 By modernizing the charter's revocable
2 consent provisions and reducing unnecessary costs, the
3 City can make outdoor dining more accessible, more
4 equitable, and easier to administer while continuing
5 to support thriving commercial borders across the five
6 boroughs.

7 We've done some analysis. And
8 presently at the date of publishing right now there's
9 about seven restaurants in the Bronx that use outdoor
10 dining in the roadway. And there's one in Staten
11 Island and 24 in Queens.

12 The overwhelming majority are in
13 Brooklyn and Manhattan. And we're reproducing spatial
14 inequities across our city based on the way that we've
15 designated and set up the program.

16 So speaking to what this means for
17 small businesses across the five boroughs, I sincerely
18 ask you to review this. Thank you so much.

19 THE CHAIR: Jackson, thank you for the
20 testimony. And thank you for the thorough analysis
21 that you've clearly conducted. We'll see if anyone on
22 the Commission has a question for you.

23 Tim, I just want to give you 45 seconds
24 to give us any top lines that you possibly could on
25 MMR and how you think it's implicated in charter

1 reform. And I just want to thank you for conjuring up
2 Dick Ravitch, which means a great deal for those of us
3 who were privileged to have served with him.

4 MR. HOPKINS: I think that the MMR,
5 when it was really -- originally created, was a great
6 mechanism for creating KPIs and performance indicators
7 and accountability.

8 I think when you look at it now, at
9 least into what's publicly available, you have
10 information that's provided on an annual or semiannual
11 basis and not broken down by neighborhood and not with
12 respect to smaller indicators.

13 So I worked with some CUSP NYU students
14 to try and create a new version of a neighborhood
15 dashboard where you combine things that reflect
16 citizen sentiment, like 3-1-1 -- which has some
17 problems.

18 But as a starter, things like the
19 Citizen Budget Commission Resident Survey, which up
20 until 2023 was broken down by neighborhood, and then
21 combine that with more real time online things.

22 My suggestion would be to work with
23 some tech and open data people to say how do we make
24 this work. As an example of it, the New York City
25 Equity Map, which was a very important thing

1 that -- folks did. But to do that more with respect
2 to more day-to-day city services.

3 THE CHAIR: Great. And thank you.

4 Any additional questions,
5 Commissioners?

6 Ruth?

7 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: Yes, I got to
8 get my mic to work. But for both of you, each of you,
9 I -- you'll hear me ask this question often.

10 If you know of cities where this issue
11 is being addressed better, can you please send us
12 short references that are in your own words that say
13 "This is how the other cities do it." And I'm
14 particularly interested that with regard to AI because
15 I think there are cities that are way ahead of us now.

16 MR. HOPKINS: Atlanta is doing great.
17 And -- trying to organize the silos of city government
18 by neighborhoods with the local administrators.

19 THE CHAIR: Marc?

20 COMMISSIONER SHAW: Given how
21 technology's constantly changing, do you have any
22 thoughts about -- from either of your comments -- what
23 things belong in the charter versus --

24 MR. HOPKINS: I was thinking about
25 that. And it might be to set out a process whereby

1 every five or ten years the City engages, you know --

2 COMMISSIONER SHAW: We're only doing
3 this once.

4 THE CHAIR: I think that we're only
5 doing this once.

6 MR. HOPKINS: Yeah, yeah. But the
7 charter basically says, you know, convene
8 technological experts with respect to UI and these key
9 performance indicators and open data to sort of say
10 "What are best practices for measuring performance
11 using technology?"

12 MR. CHABOT: And we can follow up with
13 more thoughts. But going off of what Tim described
14 with 3-1-1, I think it's really important for this
15 Commission as well as for city government to continue
16 to evolve to reflect what frustrations or challenges
17 people have across the state. So we'll follow up with
18 specifics.

19 THE CHAIR: Great. Any additional
20 questions, Commissioners?

21 Fantastic. Thank you so very much for
22 your testimony.

23 MR. CHABOT: Thank you.

24 THE CHAIR: We are now going to ask
25 Susan Lee and Melanie Westlock to join us.

1 MS. LEE: Good evening. My name is
2 Susan Lee. I'm the President of Alliance for
3 Community Preservation and Betterment.

4 I commend Mayor Mamdani for the
5 appointing of a commission for government efficiency,
6 whose mission is to examine how New York City Charter
7 can better serve the public excellence by improving
8 efficiency, modernizing city government, and ensuring
9 that the government keeps pace with New Yorkers needs.

10 My testimony will focus on the last
11 point, which is ensuring that the government keeps
12 pace with New Yorkers needs.

13 According to the most recent voter poll
14 from February 2026, New York City has over 1.2 million
15 unaffiliated voters, meaning that these voters are
16 disenfranchised simply because they are not registered
17 as a Democrat or a Republican.

18 This is approximately 24 percent of the
19 voting population. They are shut out from the closed
20 primary. How are we addressing the needs of 1.2
21 million voters if they can't cast a ballot in the
22 primaries? How are their voices heard?

23 A study by the Bipartisan Policy Center
24 titled "The Effect of Open Primaries on Turnout and
25 Representation" found that open primaries and

1 nonpartisan primaries tend to produce a more
2 representative electorate than a closed primary.

3 The electorate grows more
4 demographically and politically representative.
5 Currently the City has a matching funds program where
6 candidates can receive public money when they run for
7 office.

8 Regardless of your party affiliation,
9 you as a New York City resident are paying taxes. But
10 you cannot cast a vote because you are an unaffiliated
11 voter. It begs the question again.

12 How does that ensure the government is
13 keeping pace with New Yorkers needs when they are
14 using our tax dollars to fund public -- sorry, to fund
15 political campaigns that unaffiliated voters cannot
16 participate in?

17 On the 250th anniversary of the
18 founding of this beautiful country, I think it's
19 important to remember that the colonists went to war
20 against Great Britain because they believe no taxation
21 without representation. 1.2 million New Yorkers are
22 locked out of the primary. As Americans, we need to
23 do that. Thank you.

24 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Susan.

25 Melanie?

1 MS. WESTLOCK: Hello. And thank you
2 for this opportunity to speak. This is actually my
3 second time giving testimony on the subject of open
4 primaries.

5 My name is Melanie Westlock. I'm a
6 lifelong New Yorker, a parent, and a small business
7 owner of multiple small businesses in New York City.
8 I'm also a proud member of One City Rising, which is a
9 grassroots organization of bipartisan New Yorkers
10 throughout New York City.

11 I'm here to speak about my support of
12 open primaries. Open primaries, especially in a
13 diverse and politically dynamic city like New York
14 City, would create a more inclusive, representative,
15 and democratic electoral process.

16 As many know, primaries encourage voter
17 participation as opposed to disenfranchising voters
18 who simply do not identify as either a Republican or a
19 Democrat. In New York City, many registered voters
20 identify as independents.

21 And under the current closed primary
22 system, these voters are excluded from helping to
23 choose candidates in major party primaries, which
24 often -- pretty much every time -- determine the
25 eventual winner in this heavily one-party city.

1 Currently voter turnout in New York
2 City, as you know, is a shameful 10 percent. Allowing
3 all voters to participate in primaries can lead to a
4 high -- higher voter turnout and greater civic
5 engagement, which I think most of you as people in the
6 positions that you're in agree it should be a
7 priority.

8 Open primaries are -- encourage
9 candidates to appeal to a broad range of constituents.
10 I think this is very important that rather than
11 catering only to their party's base, candidates must
12 consider the perspectives and primaries -- priorities
13 of all voters.

14 This can result in more moderate,
15 consensus-driven leaders who are better fit to govern
16 a diverse and complex city like New York City. As a
17 business owner, I have a personal state in the success
18 of this city, which depends on proper representation.

19 Open primaries would foster an
20 environment where independent voters such as myself
21 would finally have a voice. Open primaries promote
22 fairness and transparency. They empower voters rather
23 than parties.

24 In a city like New York, embracing open
25 primaries would be a step toward a more equitable

1 democracy instead of a one-party rule. In conclusion,
2 open primaries release a greater voter participation,
3 more balanced representation, and a more robust
4 democratic process.

5 By opening up the system to all voters
6 regardless of party affiliation, New York can better
7 reflect the will and needs of its people. New York
8 City's one of the few major cities not to have open
9 primaries.

10 We pride ourself on being the leader
11 and example of what a great city should be. It's time
12 that our primaries live up to this expectation. Thank
13 you for your time.

14 THE CHAIR: Thank you so very much for
15 your testimony and your passion on this issue.

16 Can I ask both of you, before I turn it
17 over to other commissioners, whether or not you have
18 data that compares participation in New York City
19 against participation in other cities in America that
20 have open primaries?

21 We just came off with an election last
22 year where we had record turnout and participation in
23 New York in the primary period but also the general
24 election period. It seemed to be robust.

25 There was a tremendous amount of

1 engagement. And I wonder how you're tracking that
2 versus other open primary cities?

3 MS. LEE: So there were several studies
4 that demonstrated that when you open primaries to
5 nonpartisan -- we're not talking about jungle
6 primaries but nonpartisan primaries -- there has been
7 an increase in voter turnout.

8 And I think that it is one of those
9 things that if you are locking out 1.2 million
10 voters --

11 THE CHAIR: No, no, I -- no, I heard
12 your opening testimony. I'm asking whether or not
13 there's specific data that --

14 MS. LEE: Yeah, there are.

15 THE CHAIR: -- compares New York to
16 other cities that have open primaries?

17 MS. LEE: There are data out there.

18 THE CHAIR: Any you would cite in --

19 MS. LEE: I can't -- I left my phone in
20 the back. I can't --

21 THE CHAIR: No worries. I understand.
22 You can submit it with your --

23 MS. LEE: Okay.

24 MS. WESTLOCK: I think both of us can
25 submit that. And I also think that this last election

1 and the voter turnout for the last election is a
2 little bit of an anomaly for New York City. I think
3 we can all agree on that. It was a very different,
4 unique election that happened.

5 I think that -- I mean, I know for a
6 fact that there is data to support it. And we are
7 happy to send that. I mean, I'm not -- we're not a
8 team.

9 But I'm certain that both of us --
10 because there are facts. And they exist. And it's
11 very important when you're looking at over a million
12 voters that don't have a say in an election.

13 THE CHAIR: Yeah.

14 MS. WESTLOCK: It's just -- and people
15 don't show up though.

16 THE CHAIR: I --

17 MS. WESTLOCK: I mean, if you know that
18 your vote doesn't count, which is what everyone says
19 when they're an independent, they just don't show up.

20 THE CHAIR: I ask because I care deeply
21 about this issue. We have poor voter participation
22 all across America. So it's great to know that you're
23 so engaged --

24 MS. LEE: I would like to add -- I'm
25 sorry, if you don't mind -- apologies. I had to

1 register for a party that I do not want to be in in
2 order to have a vote in our primaries.

3 So that personally -- it's -- I don't
4 believe -- I don't want to be part of this party. But
5 I'm in it just so I can vote. And I think that is
6 insulting.

7 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you.
8 Questions from Commissioners? No.

9 Thank you so very much for your
10 testimony.

11 Ms. LEE: Thank you for your time.

12 THE CHAIR: Thank you for yours. I'd
13 like to now call on Jeffrey Aaron and Michael Hickey.

14 MR. AARON: My name is Jeff Aaron. I
15 have to say I'm very excited about the last few
16 testimonies. I am a lifelong New Yorker. I went to
17 City -- Brooklyn College. I taught at Brooklyn
18 College and worked in mental health and youth
19 development my whole life in New York City.

20 I'm also an independent. And that
21 means in New York City I can't vote in the primary. I
22 testified at the commission hearings last year. And
23 it's good to see Commissioner Wylde again.

24 I testified in support of open
25 primaries, which wasn't initially on the Commission's

1 agenda, but which became the number one issue which
2 citizens became before the Commission was focused on.

3 And the Commission affirmed both its
4 importance to the city and that it should be addressed
5 and acknowledged that New York City was an outlier
6 compared to 85 percent of US cities, which have some
7 form of nonpartisan elections.

8 As the other folks just mentioned, in
9 New York City there are 1.2 million voters who are not
10 registered in any of the parties and who cannot vote
11 in the primary elections. Fifty-four percent of those
12 voters are people of color.

13 650,000 people of color in New York
14 City are excluded from voting in the elections that
15 matter when choosing who will represent the
16 government.

17 Some might say this is a civil rights
18 issue of the same magnitude as what we are seeing in
19 states that have had a long history of excluding
20 people from the polls.

21 There are so many people -- young, some
22 old like myself -- who would like to cast a meaningful
23 vote in our elections. I met Mayor Mamdani when he
24 came to Stuyvesant Town.

25 I told him how proud I was to meet him

1 and to have voted for him, and that I wished I could
2 have voted for him in the primaries as well but that I
3 had been excluded because I am an independent.

4 And I asked him if he would consider
5 supporting open primaries. And he said it was an
6 issue that was on his agenda and that it -- he was
7 open to considering it.

8 So I'm here to ask you, both given his
9 interest and as the mayor's commission, if this is an
10 interest that you'll be considering.

11 I'm wondering how you are thinking
12 about it and frankly wondering how it would be
13 possible for a government to be efficient that blocks
14 1.2 million people from participating in the elections
15 that decide who will be their elected representative.
16 Thank you.

17 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

18 MR. HICKEY: Good evening. I'm Michael
19 Hickey. I'm Chief of Strategy and Operations for
20 Citizens NYC. For 51 years we've been finding funding
21 and growing the capacity of New York City's
22 community-based and hyper-local leaders.

23 In 2026, we'll issue 500 grant awards
24 totaling more than \$2 million to small non-profits,
25 volunteer-led organizations, small businesses.

1 They'll use these funds to tackle issues ranging from
2 education to climate resilience, ethnic culture, et
3 cetera.

4 What I'm really going to talk about is
5 the fact that this year we will also issue payments to
6 another 750 community-based organizations totaling
7 some \$12 million for issues ranging from participatory
8 budgeting to workforce development and childcare
9 access to open streets and supporting LGBTQ-plus
10 communities.

11 The difference is that these funds will
12 be city tax labor dollar issued from eight city
13 agencies through our master contract -- the \$75
14 million procurement visa goal that allows these
15 agencies to partner with Citizens NYC as their
16 streamlined payment pathway.

17 The groups we're funding typically go
18 from applying to an RFP to being funded in about 45
19 days. They do this with a greatly reduced
20 administrative burden and a much deeper working
21 partnership with the city agency program staff.

22 City agency partners can enact their
23 programs with flexibility, speed, and simplicity, all
24 while retaining full oversight and authority over the
25 implementation and funding.

1 As someone who formerly ran in the
2 inner-city office working with highly vulnerable
3 families and students, I'm frankly a little jealous
4 that I didn't have this as I was leading my team.

5 I would have had greatly improved my
6 ability to respond to both immediate and longer-term
7 needs, empower my team to innovate, and deepen trust
8 with New York City residents who are otherwise the
9 first to experience hardship when the bureaucracy
10 can't live up to its intentions.

11 The Citizens NYC master contract is an
12 exception process -- an outlier. It cannot itself
13 serve as the model for overall procurement
14 transformation.

15 But it can serve as an example of what
16 happens when the city agency commits to creating an
17 innovative procurement pathway that's purpose-built
18 for engaging hyper-local leaders, restoring trust
19 within communities by partnering with those who
20 already have it, deepening understanding of
21 neighborhood needs, and applying those learnings to
22 agency planning and operations.

23 Finally, building the capacity of the
24 non-profit sector using that most fundamental and
25 powerful of tools -- on time payment in full. We

1 recommend that the PPB be better empowered to set
2 rules, that mods be better empowered to enforce them.

3 We recommend that the Commission raise
4 a small purchase special and inject it to inflation so
5 that groups who would've been included before could be
6 included once again.

7 We recommend that all contracting
8 agencies disclose timeline data by contract type and
9 processing stage to make timing visible and
10 accountable.

11 Finally, we recommended the contract
12 administration be scaled to size and scope of funding
13 so that community-based and hyper-local partners are
14 no longer excluded from competing because the
15 administrative cost is to damn high.

16 The Citizen's NYC master contract makes
17 all of these possible now as exceptions. Please help
18 us make this the exception that proves the rule.
19 Thank you.

20 THE CHAIR: Thank you so much. Thank
21 you for the clarity of your recommendations.

22 Questions from Commissioners?

23 Henry, please.

24 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: Thank you for
25 your testimony. I have a question regarding your

1 proposal to amend that given rules because the PPP
2 already has broad range of authority to set those
3 rules.

4 And they don't seem to work. They
5 don't seem to work because it's not tied to an OMB
6 process. And later on with city council -- and it
7 seems like a bifurcated process.

8 But more specifically, your suggestion
9 about the creation of master contracts that
10 requires -- will this master contract goes through the
11 regular procurement? And if that's the case, aren't
12 we replicate the very same thing that doesn't work?

13 MR. HICKEY: Well, in the case of our
14 master contract, it did go through a standard
15 procurement. It took about two years to create. But
16 once the master contract itself is in place, we can
17 move with incredible efficiency. We'll go from
18 creating a task order to implementing funding in about
19 a hundred days.

20 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: Thank you.

21 MR. HICKEY: Yes.

22 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: I think you've
23 addressed this already. I love your testimony. And
24 I'd love more details about the master contract. But
25 any suggestions that you have which you can get to us

1 in writing that would deal with the time delays for
2 approved contracts would be hugely welcome.

3 I'm going to testify to say that the
4 most embarrassing thing about the City of New York is
5 that city agencies tell small organizations to call
6 the New York Foundation to get a loan after they've
7 been approved for a contract because it takes so long
8 for an approved contract to actually deliver money.

9 And I find that appalling. And I'd
10 like to know any suggestions you could have for, as
11 the procurement process proceeds, when a group,
12 whether it's a master group or whether it's smaller
13 groups that are finally getting access to city
14 contracts, when that contract is approved, I do not
15 understand why we can't get them money.

16 MR. HICKEY: There are so many people
17 in this room who would be able to speak to that a lot
18 better than I can.

19 But what I will say is I'm hopeful that
20 the Charter Commission views this purview as an
21 opportunity to create the accountability and
22 transparency infrastructure that we can use to drive
23 the responsibility at the implementation level.

24 The charter vision results will be just
25 the beginning of the process of actually creating true

1 leverage.

2 THE CHAIR: Please.

3 COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS: Thank you,
4 Mike. And I just want to -- it was in your testimony.
5 But also can you outline a little bit more about your
6 transparency piece of those data contracting-type
7 delays?

8 Are you looking at agencies? How are
9 you thinking about sort of capturing -- hopefully
10 solving the problem but also collecting the data on
11 the magnitude of what the problem is right now?

12 MR. HICKEY: You know, I'm really
13 interested by the work of CJ & Capital. Folks
14 probably know John McIntosh.

15 He's done a really good job of working
16 with public data to create a series of tools and
17 dashboards that are really opening up the tracking of
18 contracts -- procedures for the registration and
19 repayment. And I -- I'm happy to make sure that he
20 joins me for another opportunity to testify --

21 COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank
22 you.

23 THE CHAIR: Thank you both.

24 I'd now like to invite the testimony of
25 Stan Panuccio and Stacy Chemesnik. And my apologies

1 if I have --

2 MS. CHEMESNIK: It's perfect.

3 THE CHAIR: -- butchered any names.

4 MR. PANUCCIO: Good evening, Chair,
5 Commissioners. Thank you for the opportunity to
6 testify this evening. I also want thank you for your
7 service on the Commission for examining how the New
8 York City government has served its residents.

9 My name's Pete Panuccio. I'm a retired
10 39-year veteran of the NYPD, proud member of Free
11 Police Unions. I strongly believe in the
12 representation that unions provide.

13 For generations unions have played a
14 vital role in protecting working people, ensuring fair
15 treatment on their job, advocating for safe working
16 positions, and giving workers a collective voice in
17 decisions that affect their lives.

18 I also want to acknowledge important
19 roles unions play in our democratic process. Unions
20 help educate voters, encourage civic participation,
21 and endorse candidates they believe will stand up for
22 working families and advocate for policies ensuring
23 that New York City can improve the lives of working
24 and middle-class residents.

25 This Commission has been empowered to

1 identify ways to improve government efficiency,
2 strengthen public trust, and ensure that government
3 works better for all New Yorkers.

4 In my view, there's no reform more
5 fundamental to achieving those goals and expanding
6 representation from greater voter participation that
7 can best be achieved by having open primary.

8 Just as unions help ensure that workers
9 have a voice in the workplace, our election system
10 ensure -- should ensure that every voter has a voice
11 in our democracy.

12 This why I believe our current system
13 of closed partisan primaries is ultimately against the
14 interest of union members and against the interest of
15 the working middle-class voice.

16 More and more Americans today are
17 choosing to register as independents rather than
18 affiliating with either major political party.
19 Independent voters, or one of the fastest-growing
20 segments of New York.

21 Here in New York City, approximately
22 1.4 million voters are registered without a party
23 affiliation. And nearly half of those voters are
24 under the age of 40.

25 As someone who believes strongly in the

1 future of organized labor, I feel that -- I find that
2 concerning. We want young people to understand the
3 important role unions play in protecting workers,
4 advocating for better wages and benefits, and
5 strengthening the middle class.

6 We want them engaged in civic life and
7 invested in the future of our city. When the
8 government tells more than 1 million voters that they
9 cannot participate in elections that often determine
10 who will govern them, it sends a powerful message.

11 It tells those voters that their voices
12 matter less. It tells them they're outsiders in a
13 process that should be representing all New Yorkers.
14 It is telling over 700,000 New Yorkers that their
15 voices don't matter and their voices don't count.

16 This is not how you build trust with
17 government. It is not how you encourage civic
18 participation. And it's certainly not how you build
19 support among younger generations for institutions
20 that depend on public engagement, including unions.
21 People won't --

22 THE CHAIR: Sir, you're at time. I'll
23 let you finish the sentence.

24 MR. PANUCCIO: No, go ahead. You have
25 the idea.

1 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you for
2 your testimony and for your service.

3 MR. PANUCCIO: Thank you.

4 MS. CHEMESNIK: Good evening, chair and
5 Commissioners. Thank you for listening to my
6 testimony tonight. My name is Stacy Chemesnik. You
7 pronounced it perfectly.

8 I'm a lifelong New York City resident
9 who cares deeply about our city and believes that
10 fair, representative, and democratic elections are
11 essential to New York's future success.

12 In my view, a good and effective
13 government begins with broad participation in our
14 elections. That is why I believe one of the most
15 important reforms this Commission should adopt is
16 replacing our closed partisan primary system with open
17 primaries.

18 I'm a voter who participates in every
19 election, including primary elections. But I also
20 recognize that I'm one of the exceptions rather than
21 the rule.

22 The reality is that only a small
23 percentage of New Yorkers participate in primary
24 elections, even though those elections often determine
25 who will ultimately hold public office.

1 As a result, a relatively small number
2 of voters exercise and outsize influence over the
3 future of our city. When only a fraction of eligible
4 voters participate, government becomes less
5 representative of the people it serves.

6 Over the years, New York City has
7 adopted a number of reforms designed to increase voter
8 participation. We have implemented rank choice voting
9 and one of the most generous public matching fund
10 programs in the country.

11 Yet despite these reforms, turn out in
12 primary elections remain stubbornly low. One major
13 barrier remains in place -- our closed primary system,
14 which excludes voters who are not registered to a
15 political party -- over 1.4 independent voters.

16 The evidence supporting open primaries
17 is substantially growing. A 2024 study by Joshua
18 Correa for the Bipartisan Policy Center examined
19 states that switched from closed primaries to systems
20 that allowed unaffiliated voters to participate.

21 Using millions of voter records, the
22 study found that opening primaries increased turnout
23 by approximately 5 percentage points. Importantly,
24 the gains were seen across all racial groups,
25 including Black, Latino, Asian, and White voters.

1 The study also found that open and
2 non-partisan systems produced electorates that were
3 more representative of the broader population.

4 A separate 2024 study by Micatka and
5 Tolbert and their co-authors found that voters living
6 in states with non-partisan primary systems were 12
7 percentage points more likely to vote in congressional
8 primaries than voters living in closed primary states.

9 What is particularly noteworthy is that
10 independent voters benefited the most. The study
11 found that independents were significantly more likely
12 to participate when barriers to
13 participate -- participation were removed.

14 Another major study by Donovan and his
15 colleagues published in 2025 used approximately 2
16 million voter records found that non-partisan
17 primaries were associated with higher turnout across
18 all age, income, and educational groups.

19 The largest gains were among younger
20 voters with participation rates for younger adults
21 substantially higher under non-partisan systems than
22 under traditional closed primaries.

23 THE CHAIR: You are right at time.

24 MS. CHEMESNIK: Okay.

25 THE CHAIR: -- finish with that

1 sentence.

2 MS. CHEMESNIK: Thank you. The
3 conclusion from these studies is clear. When voters
4 are given greater access to participate, more of them
5 vote.

6 THE CHAIR: So Mayor Bloomberg was fond
7 of saying "In God we trust. But everybody else, bring
8 data." So I really appreciate your data that you were
9 able to bring to this conversation.

10 Questions from commissioners?

11 Great. Thank you so very much for your
12 testimony.

13 MR. PANUCCIO: Thank you.

14 MS. CHEMESNIK: Thank you.

15 THE CHAIR: I'd now like to invite
16 Maria Danzilo and Michael Picarello if they are
17 present. Are you present? Here we go.

18 MS. DANZILO: Usually I'm here for,
19 like, four hours before I'm called. So it's a real
20 pleasure to be called really early. Okay. Good
21 evening, Chair and Commissioners. And thank you for
22 this opportunity to testify.

23 My name is Maria Danzilo. And I'm
24 Executive Director of One City Rising. We're an
25 actual grassroots good-government organization with

1 more than 2,000 members across the five boroughs.

2 We're non-partisan. And our
3 organization advocates for reforms that improve
4 quality of life, strengthen civic participation, and
5 make government better for all New Yorkers.

6 So this Commission is empowered to make
7 New York City government work better for the people it
8 serves. And as you've heard from many people this
9 evening who believe in open primaries, One City Rising
10 also feels that open primaries are extremely important
11 to address inequities in our election system.

12 And that prevents more than 1.2 to 1.4
13 million New Yorkers from participating in the
14 elections that determine who will govern them.

15 So the issue was taken up of, course,
16 as I'm sure you all know, in the 2025 Charter Mission
17 Commission, which consisted of a diverse and
18 independent group of New Yorkers who spent many months
19 taking testimony.

20 I also testified a number of times and
21 submitted written testimony, sat in very cold rooms
22 for many long hours. I attended every hearing. And
23 one thing that came across very clearly was how
24 seriously the previous commission took this issue.

25 They heard from academics, civic

1 leaders, community advocates, and election experts.
2 They even commissioned an extensive report under the
3 pre-clearance provisions of New York's Voting Rights
4 Act, which was written by former Attorney General
5 Loretta Lynch.

6 And I quote, "The main effect of moving
7 to an open primary followed by a top two election
8 would be to give unaffiliated voters the ability to
9 participate in the primary process and a greater
10 incentive to participate in the general election
11 because they will have had some say in whether a
12 candidate moves forward from the primary to a general.

13 "In New York City, these voters
14 comprise just over 20 percent of the electorate.
15 Further, there is some evidence that the shift has a
16 general possible effect on turnout" -- which I believe
17 the previous person testified to significant data on
18 that point.

19 And Ms. Lynch goes on to say that
20 "There is significant evidence that the proposal would
21 be not to diminish the ability of any protected class
22 member to participate in the political process and
23 indeed may have significant salutatory effects
24 depending on the class.

25 "As noted, a significant benefit of the

1 proposed change would be to give more voice to
2 unaffiliated voters.

3 "And these voters come from across
4 protected classes, a majority of unaffiliated voters
5 or minority voters" -- that's 54 percent --
6 "with more than a third" -- 33.5
7 percent -- "consisting of Black and Hispanic voters.
8 And the Asian share of unaffiliated voters is twice
9 the share of all registered voters."

10 There's some recent data showing that
11 up to 50 percent of unaffiliated voters are under the
12 age of 40. So, you know, this is a great way to get
13 people who are younger voters to participate in our
14 election. The Committee --

15 THE CHAIR: You're at time.

16 MS. DANZILO: Okay. May I make one
17 more point?

18 THE CHAIR: Yes, please.

19 MS. DANZILO: So I just would like to
20 urge this Commission to take this issue seriously, as
21 I'm sure you all will. As you said already, there's
22 significant evidence and data in the record already.
23 And I just would really respectfully request that you
24 all take a look at what has already been done last
25 year. Thank you.

1 THE CHAIR: Thank you so very much.

2 MR. PICARELLO: All right. Good
3 evening, Chair and Commissioners. My name is Michael
4 Picarello.. I'm the Director of Area Standards for
5 the New York City District Council Caucus representing
6 about 17,000 caucuses across the city.

7 Our men and women are the ones actually
8 building this city. We're in the dirt, in the mud on
9 these jobs from day one through the finish line. So
10 when something's off, we see it immediately.

11 And right now what we see isn't a lack
12 of effort. It's a lack of coordination. Jobs get
13 slowed down because people aren't on the same page.
14 Work gets redone. Time gets wasted for no reason.

15 That's where the real inefficiency is.
16 Everyone talks about efficiency like it's some
17 abstract idea. For us, it's simple. Stop making the
18 same mistakes over and over again.

19 If you want projects to move, then put
20 people on the job who know what they're doing. When
21 you have experience with unions onsite, things run
22 smoother, safer, and faster without cutting corners.

23 That's not opinion. That's just how
24 jobs actually play out. And here's the part that gets
25 missed a lot. It isn't just about buildings. This is

1 about people.

2 We train people from the ground
3 up -- young people at high school immigrants,
4 veterans -- and turn that opportunities into real
5 careers -- not temporary jobs. Real paychecks, real
6 benefits, and real stability.

7 So if we're serious about fixing the
8 system, we can't just look at how fast something gets
9 approved. We have to look at what happens once the
10 job actually starts.

11 Build smarter, set the job up right
12 from the start, make sure the right trades are in
13 place, and make sure they qualify. And if public
14 money's in the mix, then the public should actually
15 see return -- good jobs, accountability and work that
16 lasts.

17 Because at the end of the day, planning
18 a project isn't just about what gets built. It's also
19 about who's doing the building. Apologize for my
20 phone, guys. And if you get that part right,
21 everything else starts to fall into place.

22 We don't have to choose between getting
23 projects done and doing right by working people. We
24 can do both, but only if we stop treating them like
25 separate issues. That's what efficiency should really

1 mean. Thank you.

2 THE CHAIR: Thank you so much for that
3 testimony. And Michael, I suspect that you're going
4 to hear a lot of people quoting from your remarks.

5 MR. PICARELLO: Thank you.

6 THE CHAIR: Very, very impactful.
7 Please, Emma.

8 COMMISSIONER WOLFE: Thank you so much
9 for your testimony and your service. Can you say a
10 little bit more about what you are recommending for
11 the Commission?

12 MR. PICARELLO: So kind of what we're
13 speaking about is when you have a large project like
14 this, reach out to organized labor. Reach out to the
15 building trades. Ask us how to get a project done.

16 We're the ones that, you know, you look
17 at this room, I'm not the only one from the building
18 trades here. You have decades and decades of
19 experience. We know what it takes to build something.
20 Right?

21 So definitely reach out to us. We know
22 how to work efficiently. Right? There's nothing a
23 carpenter, an iron worker, or anybody else hates more
24 than do something over and over and over again.
25 Right? Just we're -- you know, we should definitely

1 be involved in the process.

2 COMMISSIONER WOLFE: Thank you.

3 MR. PICARELLO: You're welcome.

4 THE CHAIR: Other questions?

5 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: Yeah, one
6 question. We've seen naturally the challenge of
7 private labor agreements as a mechanism to slow down
8 projects. In your opinion, are private labor
9 agreements a tool to execute some of the
10 recommendations that you had?

11 MR. PICARELLO: No, I think it actually
12 speeds up the process. Right? Because you're going
13 to guarantee that you have trained people there,
14 people who went through the apprenticeship that have
15 years and years of experience.

16 I think that's just a rumor that you
17 get from, you know, developers and billionaires and
18 everybody else that just wants to haggle with us
19 later.

20 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: Thank you.

21 MR. PICARELLO: You're welcome.

22 COMMISSIONER ROSARIO: Thank you for
23 your testimony. Do you have any data on the process
24 by which -- I believe there's a lot of data out there
25 on PLAs speeding up that process in organized labor --

1 MR. PICARELLO: Yeah.

2 COMMISSIONER ROSARIO: -- helping speed
3 up projects?

4 MR. PICARELLO: There is. So I believe
5 the building transaction just -- recently.

6 COMMISSIONER ROSARIO: Okay.

7 MR. PICARELLO: That actually states
8 that they went about it a little bit faster. I could
9 have the -- I got Gary to reach out to Esther.

10 COMMISSIONER ROSARIO: Yes.

11 MR. PICARELLO: I'll have Gary reach
12 out.

13 COMMISSIONER ROSARIO: I believe he
14 submitted that for the record.

15 MR. PICARELLO: Okay.

16 THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you so very
17 much.

18 MR. PICARELLO: You're welcome.

19 THE CHAIR: Thank you for your
20 testimony.

21 I'd like to now invite Bill Murray and
22 Taylor Palmer to join us.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: Bill Murray?

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 5: Groundhog Day
25 for us.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 6: Who you going
2 to call?

3 MR. MURRAY: I actually saw Bill Murray
4 in person for the first time in my 42 years on this
5 earth last weekend at Greenpoint. But he was busy.
6 So I didn't -- maybe next time.

7 Thank you, Commissioners. I am Bill
8 Murray. And I'm a lifelong resident of Queens,
9 graduate of Queens College, member of Community Board
10 2 Queens.

11 I also worked at the city council for
12 many years, both for an individual member as well as
13 the Institution on Committees, where I was involved in
14 about 50 bills that were eventually enacted into law.
15 Currently in the private sector.

16 And this is just to say that I've seen
17 the city, you know, from very many perspectives. And
18 I hope to bring them to bear in this process. I'm
19 here on behalf of the American Council of Engineering
20 Companies of New York.

21 Our firms are the engineers who plan,
22 design, and manage the construction of New York City
23 infrastructure and building projects. In January, we
24 published a paper on procurement reform. Most of our
25 recommendations regard administrative changes that

1 agencies can make without amending the charter.

2 I have a copy of this paper and would
3 love to submit it for the record if I may. Tonight,
4 however, I will focus on two areas where the charter
5 itself can improve capital policy delivery to
6 streamline it better.

7 First, across nearly every agency, the
8 most damaging delays often occur after a vendor called
9 an engineering firm is selected but before its
10 contract or change order can be registered with the
11 comptrollers.

12 Under Charter Section 328, "A contract
13 cannot be implemented until it is registered"
14 according to the language there. However, agencies
15 routinely direct firms in one form or another to begin
16 work before registration is complete.

17 Firms are asked to hire and organize
18 their staff, mobilize the necessary resources, incur
19 overhead, incur payroll costs, and perform
20 services -- oftentimes for many months -- and we do
21 have data, which I can talk about -- without an
22 enforceable agreement or payment in place.

23 In effect, the City relies on private
24 firms to finance when delays occurs. This burden
25 falls particularly hard on smaller firms who are

1 sub-consultants to prime contract holders, also to
2 prime contract holders, and to MWBEs who often are
3 small firms, and many whom are in our membership.

4 Because agencies don't bear the direct
5 cost of these delays, there's little incentive to
6 accelerate the registration process. The City
7 recognized this problem when it took steps to
8 accelerate contract registration for non-profit
9 vendors.

10 Last year the City enacted Local Law
11 156 and 157 to address this problem in the non-profit
12 sector. However, the same issue is widely impacting
13 vendors who are responsible for designing
14 infrastructure. And in our sector the problem remains
15 unaddressed.

16 Our recommendation is straightforward.
17 Amend the city charter to expressly prohibit city
18 agencies and personnel from directing any vendor to
19 begin work on a contract or change order before it has
20 been registered. I have one other comment regarding
21 budget costs. Is that -- I don't --

22 THE CHAIR: You're at time. But maybe
23 you'll have an opportunity to address that during the
24 Q&A.

25 MR. MURRAY: Thank you.

1 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

2 MS. PALMER: Hi, everyone. My name's
3 Taylor Palmer, also former public servant. And I work
4 in the construction industry as well. I'm also here
5 on behalf of the American Council of Engineering
6 Companies of New York.

7 My colleague Bill Murray here talked to
8 you guys about actionable steps that the Commission
9 can take. I would like to provide some additional
10 information in relation to everybody's favorite topic,
11 cost.

12 When public infrastructure projects
13 result in contract registration or change orders, the
14 cost of delay is sometimes measured by construction
15 escalation alone.

16 However, this is a narrow view that
17 obscures the true cost that are in place on New
18 Yorkers. Engineering and professional services costs
19 also rise when projects are delayed.

20 Labor benefits, overhead increases over
21 time, often in line with inflation. Delays can also
22 disrupt product staffing, requiring additional time
23 and resources to maintain continuity. Team members
24 retire, change roles, or leave organizations.

25 The institutional knowledge surrounding

1 these projects, why key decisions were made, what
2 alternatives were considered, and what risks were
3 evaluated begin to fade.

4 As a result, delays often lead to a
5 loss of continuity and efficiency. New team members
6 must spend time reconstructing project history rather
7 than advancing project delivery.

8 Much like how a patient benefits from
9 having the same doctor who knows their medical
10 history, a project benefits from maintaining the same
11 personnel who understand its background and prior
12 decisions.

13 The longer the delay, the more likely
14 that staff would need to be reoriented and working
15 relationships reestablished among all parties.
16 Regarding permitting and regulatory impacts, in many
17 cases a lot of these delays trigger new rounds of
18 review and design work.

19 Permit approvals and agency
20 authorizations expire before a product advances to the
21 next stage, requiring resubmittal, renewed agency
22 review, and additional information.

23 And some regulatory requirements may
24 also change during the delay period, which require
25 updated design standards, resiliency criteria,

1 sustainability requirements, et cetera, or
2 agency-specific policies that necessitate redesigns
3 for portions of a project that were previously agreed
4 upon by everybody but now are no longer compliant.

5 So ultimately New Yorkers wind up
6 paying for these additional -- for the initial design
7 and then additional changes that need to be made
8 because of delays.

9 But this also reduce -- reduces
10 competition from these costs. When agencies develop a
11 reputation for lengthy costs, the time of contracts,
12 and then its invoices or change orders, some firms
13 just decide that the cost is not worth it.

14 This goes ahead and reduces the number
15 of folks who are willing to participate, which limits
16 competition, may sometimes increase prices, and may
17 not have as many innovative solutions for city
18 agencies to get done.

19 Most importantly, this is a harm to the
20 public. Whether it is a new fire station, new
21 resiliency projects, when these projects are delayed,
22 it ultimately hurts all of us New Yorkers who just
23 want to --

24 THE CHAIR: Thank you so very much for
25 your testimony.

1 Questions from the Commission?

2 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: Sorry, quick.
3 Section 328 of the city charter specifically refers to
4 the registration on contract by the controller. It
5 also suggests parallel processes that could be
6 followed in the event of different procurement
7 methodologies are reached.

8 I want to understand your suggestion
9 about amending the part of that charter because I
10 think that's one of the areas that we need to work on
11 when it comes to expedited payment, to your point.

12 So I want to understand more some of
13 the suggestions you're making to amend that part. And
14 the question is for the both of you.

15 MR. MURRAY: So really the spirit of it
16 or power of what we are recommending is that it
17 changes the incentive structure permanently.

18 Right now when there is a delay, you
19 know, in the registration of a contract or a change
20 order, which can take -- you know, I have data here
21 from the comptroller's checkbook website where change
22 order registration can take 12 months.

23 So all that time, you know, the vendor
24 is working at risk. They are -- you know, they have
25 no agreement to, you know, to ensure, to enforce upon

1 if that project, for whatever reason -- there's an
2 economic recession in those months.

3 There's, you know, project priority
4 shift. They're working at risk. And so, you know,
5 this risk adds to their costs. It adds financial
6 strain to their relationships with their
7 sub-consultants.

8 A lot of these big projects -- there
9 are consortiums of many firms working together to pull
10 it off. And all that money, you know, is passed down
11 to sub-consultants and so forth -- and to many times
12 small firms.

13 And they cannot withstand that risk,
14 you know, and they will stay out of the competition
15 pool. And so really we want to shift that incentive
16 structure to put, you know, the pressure on the City
17 to find ways to get their processes done faster, to
18 register that contract faster.

19 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: Yeah, and I
20 think just to add really quickly, this is something
21 that's already in federal laws. So the feds won't
22 allow you to proceed on a project unless, you know,
23 the contract has gone through this whole process.

24 And just to support what Bill is
25 saying, you know, we represent firms that are one

1 person to firms that are, you know, 500,000 people.
2 And we're concerned about all of them.

3 But especially for our small
4 businesses, our MWBEs -- maybe some that have 5, 10,
5 maybe 20 people -- being able to work on a city
6 project could be life-changing for their firms,
7 individually.

8 But if it doesn't -- the math doesn't
9 work out, they don't have the capacity to be able to
10 stretch out all that time without, you know, being
11 paid.

12 And unfortunately we're seeing a really
13 big contraction of smaller firms in the market either
14 being acquired or just choosing not to work in New
15 York City period. Just means it's a, you know, such a
16 challenging work environment to work in.

17 MR. PALMER: And just to follow up, the
18 same thing happened to my --

19 THE CHAIR: I'm sorry, we got to move
20 on --

21 MR. PALMER: All right.

22 THE CHAIR: -- move this forward.

23 Ruth, I know that you're anxious to get
24 in as well.

25 COMMISSIONER RIVERA: Well, thank you,

1 Taylor, because you mentioned -- is he all right?

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: Yeah.

3 COMMISSIONER RIVERA: Okay. You
4 mentioned the costs, the permitting, the new rounds of
5 review. All of that leads to slower infrastructure
6 projects. And we all know how important it is to
7 create reserve affordable housing.

8 I did want to ask you, Bill -- thank
9 you for your service of course, to the council
10 specifically, if I may. You said you might have had a
11 complementary comment or an addition about the budget
12 process that you wanted to add. You think you can
13 give us that really quickly?

14 MR. MURRAY: Yes, thank you,
15 Commissioner. It is simply that we recognize the
16 cause of the delay along with actually getting a
17 contract registered -- usually it's with OMD.

18 And it's the budget review process. We
19 also understand -- you know, we work in partnership
20 with the City, with the agencies. We're constantly
21 talking.

22 We understand, for example, agencies
23 are locked out of the OMD system in a -- it's FMS lock
24 out, you know, periodically. And approvals totally
25 close down.

1 So this is just to say that the second
2 notion is could the charter maybe be amended in some
3 way that puts timeframes on OMB budget review. And I
4 know that's challenging because life is messy, and,
5 you know, there are competing processes, and there's
6 bills. There's hearings and you have to testify.

7 But, you know, that is -- if you're
8 looking for a cause of the delay as part of this
9 larger delay in getting things registered, we know
10 that is a cause --

11 COMMISSIONER RIVERA: -- moment. Okay.
12 Thank you.

13 MR. MURRAY: Thank you.

14 THE CHAIR: Any other questions on -- I
15 thought I saw your hand, Kathy.

16 COMMISSIONER WYLDE: I was just going
17 to ask you to clarify. You're not suggesting this
18 just be done for engineering contracts. You're
19 suggesting -- I mean, this is obviously a much larger
20 issue.

21 MR. PALMER: Yes, absolutely. And I
22 think, you know, what we've recognized in this
23 industry and do think -- as of late, I think for
24 everyone to be better there's been a lot of attention,
25 you know, given to non-profits as of late.

1 And they're super important. But we'd
2 also like to see some of those similar reforms sent to
3 us as well. Right? I think it's, you know,
4 piecemealing things is not a good thing.

5 I think, in our opinion, fix the system
6 for everybody. So then we don't have to, you know, go
7 to the council, go to our agencies and say like, "Hey,
8 like, we haven't been paid in X amount of time."

9 But we have some firms who are owed
10 millions of dollars from the City going on years now
11 for work that is, you know, closed out and is done.
12 So it's not appropriate. And it shouldn't happen for
13 every -- anybody.

14 THE CHAIR: One final question from
15 Ruth.

16 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: You know, I
17 think, Mr. Murray, I think you got into this
18 responding to Council Member Rivera, but I don't want
19 us to understand this backwards.

20 I understand the directive not to start
21 work until the contract is registered. Okay? But we
22 also need, whether it's a charter issue or a
23 government issue, is what needs to be done to register
24 these contracts faster.

25 MR. MURRAY: Yes, absolutely. And our

1 thinking is this will force the City to figure that
2 out. So it's kind of all -- but, I mean, I think we
3 also know, like, once it gets to the comptroller,
4 right, it's supposed to take 30 days.

5 But when things need agencies, they go
6 ahead and negotiate on a contract. That takes a
7 certain amount of time. It's going to OMB. There's a
8 lack of clarity about what's going on.

9 The agency may go back and forth in
10 OMB. It's going through the whole process. And then
11 it gets to the comptroller. They may kick it back.
12 Right?

13 So there's not -- there's also just not
14 a lot of data, a lot of honest data, about how long
15 things are actually taking because it's not taking 30
16 days to register a contract or a change order.

17 COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS: Chair, if I
18 may. So also just trying to get us to, like, things
19 that feel like actual concrete suggestions to actually
20 solve the underlying problem would be thinking about
21 not just accelerating the registration or accelerating
22 when contracts are -- what we are running into as non-
23 profits is that the contract registration date is now
24 being extended. Right?

25 So how to also not potentially put

1 private firms into that same bucket of now having a
2 stretched-out contract registration and when the delay
3 in precarity is, like, to be just shifted. So I think
4 trying to really understand how you all would tangle
5 with that and recommendations around that?

6 MR. PALMER: Yeah, I think one thing in
7 particular also regarding OMB -- when it comes to
8 determining if things are actually eligible or not,
9 right, like, there's a lot of -- there's a certain
10 amount of nuance and a certain amount of, like,
11 flexibility that doesn't necessarily hold true for all
12 projects.

13 So we don't necessarily need people to
14 decide "Okay. This is happily eligible one day and
15 this is not." It should be the same for whatever kind
16 of projects throughout the, you know, universe.
17 Right?

18 So then you can just move forward.
19 There doesn't need to be all this conversation about
20 what is allowed and what is not allowed. It should
21 just be clear, firm, and, like, just get the paperwork
22 on it.

23 THE CHAIR: Thank you so much for that
24 instructive testimony.

25 Charles Diamond, Robert Brunat.

1 MR. DIAMOND: I don't know about you
2 all, but I've already learned a conceivable amount
3 tonight. It's really been -- this has all been really
4 quite fantastic.

5 Thank you, Commission. My name is
6 Charles Diamond. I served the City for almost a
7 decade, including a special counsel for the Mayor's
8 Office of Contract Services under Chief Procurement
9 Officer Lisa Flores, where we executed an aggressive
10 reform package that took over 70 days off of the
11 standard procurement timeline.

12 Mr. Garrido, you were responsible for
13 at least 50 of those, to your credit. Council member,
14 you voted for that one so I'll give you credit as
15 well.

16 We also introduced unprecedented
17 transparency tools, including passport public, the
18 root of a lot of the data that Mr. McIntosh and Mr.
19 Hickey talked about, as well as moving to an online
20 comment process for contract public hearings.

21 We were able to achieve a lot. And if
22 we're talking about a commission on government
23 efficiency, there's no way this Commission can end its
24 work without a big part of it being procurement
25 because it is so big.

1 I'm here to advocate for the Commission
2 to have -- to undertake a comprehensive procurement
3 reform package. I have detail -- I have submitted a
4 detailed written testimony.

5 I give about seven specific points.
6 I'll highlight two for you now. First, requiring
7 advance published procurement planning by agencies
8 beyond what is required for health and human services
9 contracts and centralized post hoc values for money
10 reporting through MOX.

11 Second, requiring emergency procurement
12 planning similar to our current coop planning, but
13 instead of being focused on agency operations under
14 emergency conditions planning for a dramatic increase
15 in an agency's contracting portfolio -- we've spent at
16 least \$15 billion in emergency contracting since 2020.
17 We can't pretend that it's not going to happen very,
18 very soon again.

19 Let's talk about the scale of the
20 problem. Had a lot of people talk about it already.
21 I love it. Usually I'm the only one talking about
22 procurement. We spend about \$40 billion annually in
23 new contracts. That's new contracts.

24 So if you talk about what our contract
25 commitments are at any one moment in time, it's surely

1 over a hundred billion dollars. So a 1, 2, 3 percent
2 increase in our contract efficiency and procurement
3 efficiency -- we're talking about billion-dollar
4 percentages. That's what those percentages represent.

5 As we've already talked about,
6 participants already know this process is Byzantine.
7 It's repetitive. It's complicated. And all of this
8 bureaucracy has not stopped a constant feed of fraud,
9 waste, and corruption.

10 As I like to say, at our worst our
11 procurement system is like the immigration line at an
12 international airport where it takes an hour. And
13 then you get through it and you think "Gosh, if anyone
14 was really trying to gain the system, I bet you they
15 could."

16 In that sense, it's so complicated and
17 yet we still have bad outcomes. Let -- that's just
18 fraud, waste, and corruption, let alone just bad
19 business outcomes. So we can't pretend like the
20 system is working well because it's not.

21 Procurement reform drives prices down,
22 improves the quality of services received by limiting
23 cost and time overruns. People have already spoken
24 about that. Reducing administrative burden -- people
25 who've already spoken about that.

1 Paying vendors on time, as people have
2 spoken about, so we can become a competitive business
3 partner, not charge the New York City premium on every
4 single thing that we buy because we most certainly are
5 right now. And perhaps most importantly --

6 THE CHAIR: You're at time.

7 MR. DIAMOND: Yeah. Thank you very
8 much. I'll just advocate that beyond just the
9 proposals that I'll submit and written testimony, Mr.
10 E said that this be a start of the conversation about
11 comprehensive procurement reform. Because again,
12 can't do government efficiency without procurement.
13 Thank you.

14 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Please.

15 MR. BRUNAT: Good evening everyone. My
16 name is Robert Brunat. I'm a lifelong Brooklyn
17 resident. And I'm speaking tonight as a
18 representative of construction and general building
19 laborers, Local 79.

20 Our union is the largest concentration
21 of laborers local in the United States with over
22 10,000 members, the majority of whom live within the
23 five boroughs.

24 We are proud to be a part of the Labors
25 International Union of North America and the Building

1 and Construction Trades Council for New York. We
2 represent the essential workers who build New York
3 City.

4 Laborers are sending our support to the
5 Commission on Government Efficiency's mission to
6 deliver public excellence for all New Yorkers.
7 Infrastructure is key to our city running.

8 Streamlining government processes for
9 infrastructure should ensure efficient project
10 delivery for communities. On-time payment helps
11 projects stay on schedule and means stability for
12 workers and their families. Centralized permitting
13 can improve government functions and transparency.

14 However, no form should create a fast
15 pass for exploitation. We ask the Commission to make
16 sure any proposals do not undermine long 44
17 regulations that provide the necessary protections and
18 oversight for workers and their -- and the community.

19 Jumping the line on special
20 considerations should only be available to firms
21 committed to strong labor standards. We are ready to
22 do public work that creates a better New York City.

23 Our members also rely on
24 transportation, energy, and housing infrastructures
25 that affect daily lives as well. Any New York

1 program -- any new program, such as building
2 decarbonization, should also support workforce
3 opportunities for pension training and
4 family-sustained careers.

5 We cannot solve the affordability
6 crisis without solving the low-wage crisis. Economic
7 development can only succeed if it invests in workers.

8 We need to prioritize infrastructure
9 investments that delivers a better quality of life to
10 improve the lives of New Yorkers for future
11 generations. Thank you very much.

12 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

13 Question?

14 COMMISSIONER RIVERA: The submission
15 you're going to give -- does it point to the areas of
16 the charter specifically --

17 MR. DIAMOND: Yeah. So it has a -- so
18 I think in particular Charter 315 -- the Council
19 earlier this year passed some legislation -- I
20 testified beforehand they made some adjustments, to be
21 quite frank, that ensconced current practice.

22 I detailed a couples suggestions on
23 Charter 315 where we could make it more
24 accountable -- always be having an off ramp. So with
25 charter -- we mentioned Charter 328. We mentioned

1 procurement timelines.

2 I've identified a couple -- I'd say
3 four distinct parts of that chapter of the charter
4 where we could base some specific reforms. It's a
5 really important point.

6 Talking about procurement in
7 particular, one part of it is charter reforms. Huge
8 part -- state law, operational government doing our
9 job better, unfortunately, is a giant part of it that
10 perhaps this Commission can't touch.

11 But what we can do is make change to
12 emergency procurement in 315. But then also the
13 Mayor's Office of Contract Services is having written
14 in -- by again another very, very good council
15 action -- we now need to write them in so we have
16 strategic sourcing.

17 We touched upon the topic that I want
18 to be using it to enforce the budget process. But the
19 budget process is different than a procurement
20 planning process. That was not written into the
21 charter in '89.

22 Now is an opportunity for us to write
23 into the charter the idea of strategic sourcing other
24 than the idea of agency says it's good value for
25 money.

1 That's the only thing that is "Is this
2 a good deal" in the entire process. And it actually
3 says it. Most of our -- are heroes, not to smear
4 their work. But we are -- I think we're at a point
5 where we can do a more holistic --

6 THE CHAIR: Five more seconds.

7 MR. DIAMOND: Sorry, sir.

8 THE CHAIR: Don't apologize.

9 Commissioner Kapil, please.

10 COMMISSIONER LONGANI: Thank you.

11 Thank you, Chair. Procurement inefficiencies are a
12 significant issue in every city in the country. And
13 New York City's not an exception in that regard.

14 Is there a city in the country that
15 really has set an example for how it should be done
16 and recently? And what specific reforms have they
17 utilized that have worked while keeping fraud in
18 check?

19 MR. DIAMOND: It's a fantastic
20 question. We have an unfortunate problem of a scale
21 problem. We're by far the largest municipality in the
22 United States.

23 Sometimes that seems semantic. In the
24 idea of procurement, it matters. We are five counties
25 in one. So we buy a much different scale than LA or

1 Chicago. It's a completely different scale. So we
2 lead the way.

3 I would say this. We have good people
4 at MOX who follow this stuff. I would actually say
5 there was a fantastic recent study by a labor party
6 affiliated group in the UK about how actually we
7 should be doing 10 percent non-competitive
8 procurements in areas where we don't have a very
9 healthy portfolio of companies.

10 Again interesting things that we can
11 follow. But our guidelines are nations and not even
12 really even US states. So we have a scale problem
13 there.

14 But we are the leaders. But that means
15 we need to be very creative. But that is, I think,
16 one of the crucial problems. We are outliers. Tokyo
17 is the best city that we need to be looking at.

18 THE CHAIR: Thank you both.

19 MR. DIAMOND: Thank you.

20 THE CHAIR: I'd like to now call on
21 Martha Snow and Devon Lomax.

22 MS. SNOW: Good evening. My name's
23 Martha Snow. And I'm the Director of Community Design
24 at Urban Design Forum, a member-powered organization
25 of more than a 1,200 civic leaders working to design,

1 build, and care for a better New York City.

2 Through our local center initiative,
3 our partnership with the Association for Housing
4 Development, we have worked alongside neighborhood
5 leaders in 17 low-income communities across all five
6 boroughs to activate parks, plazas, and streets.

7 We have seen what becomes possible when
8 local leaders are resourced and supported. We have
9 also seen up close what gets in the way. The barriers
10 are structural. And many of them live in a system
11 that this Commission is here to reform.

12 First, our permitting systems are
13 broken. Activating a public space means navigating a
14 fragmented maze -- the Department of Transportation
15 Parks, the Street Activity Permit Office, and others
16 with no uniform process and no accountability.

17 We recommend accelerating stable
18 permitting and creating a single regulatory interface
19 so neighborhood organizations can actually get to
20 work.

21 In addition, DOT should be made legally
22 able to make grants to non-profit partners to ease the
23 burden on the Department of Small Business Services
24 and other agencies for grant-making ability.

25 Second, temporary installations have no

1 pathway to permanence community-built structures, the
2 products of years of engagement that improve the
3 quality of life and often become beloved social
4 infrastructure.

5 However, they must come down after 365
6 days with no clear route to lasting change. The
7 Public Design Commission's one-year rule should be
8 extended to at least two years with defined pathways
9 from pilot projects to permanent solutions.

10 And finally, civil service rules are
11 the limiting governance on capacity to deliver.
12 Cumbersome exam requirements, infrequent testing
13 dates, and pay scales disconnected from the private
14 sector make it hard to fill critical positions in
15 housing and public problem agencies.

16 The City should modernize civil service
17 by removing unnecessary barriers to hiring, creating
18 pay parity and performance incentives, and upgrading
19 the technology infrastructure that relies on your
20 agency coordination.

21 New Yorkers in every neighborhood
22 deserve public spaces that work. This Commission has
23 a real opportunity to remove the obstacles that have
24 accumulated for decades. Urban Design Forum looks
25 forward to being a resource to the Commission as that

1 work moves forward. Thank you.

2 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

3 MR. LOMAX: Leading Chair,
4 Commissioners and staff, my name is Devon Lomax. I'm
5 the Political Director of District Council 9, painters
6 and allied trades who represent 10,000 men and women
7 in the construction and finishing trades industry.
8 Thank you for the opportunity.

9 Our members help build and maintain New
10 York City. We construct, preserve housing, schools,
11 hospitals, transportation systems, public facilities,
12 and critical infrastructure that New Yorkers rely on
13 every day.

14 But we do not simply build the city.
15 We live here. We raise our families here. We have a
16 direct stake in its future. We want to help create a
17 New York where our working people can continue to
18 afford to live, work, and raise a family.

19 Because our members work on projects
20 throughout every borough and interact with city
21 agencies at every stage from construction to
22 maintenance, we have a unique perspective on what
23 happens when projects move forward and creates
24 unnecessary delays and increased costs and barriers to
25 delivering public benefits.

1 We understand the importance of
2 efficiency because our members are the workforce
3 responsible for delivering these projects. The
4 skilled workforce is not an obstacle in -- to
5 efficiency. It is one of its foundations.

6 Through our registered apprenticeship
7 programs, DC 9 provides one of the most successful
8 workforce development systems in the country.

9 These programs create pathways to the
10 middle class, for working New Yorkers from every
11 neighborhood and every background for generations,
12 Union construction opportunities for immigrants,
13 communities of color, veterans, public housing
14 residents, and working families seeking stable
15 careers.

16 You know, the City actually
17 helped -- has a built-in apprenticeship model already
18 that was created maybe about ten years ago, creating
19 the first ever painter apprenticeship model. We were
20 able to get over a hundred actual residents into our
21 apprenticeship program and change their lives.

22 So we know this works. And it's
23 already built in. So we should definitely recommend
24 that we expand these apprenticeship opportunities
25 through city projects.

1 Also as the Commission examines ways to
2 improve efficiency and accountability, it's equally
3 important to distinguish between responsible
4 contractors and those who repeatedly fail to meet
5 their obligations.

6 You know, one of the things we always
7 talk about is what is the definition of responsible.
8 Everyone says "responsible contractor." Well we
9 recommend examining what that actually means. So we
10 look forward to working with you guys. Thank you.

11 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

12 Question?

13 COMMISSIONER RIVERA: I have a question
14 for you. You mentioned the single regulatory
15 interface for permitting. Can you just talk a little
16 bit about that very briefly?

17 MS. SNOW: Yeah, sure. So we, you
18 know, as I mentioned, work with Parks and others. And
19 I think, you know, what we've really seen is that the
20 kind of entry point into understanding the permitting
21 process for community-based organizations is rather
22 opaque.

23 And that -- you know, I think we've
24 been in conversation with folks like the Director of
25 the Public Problem and others about, you know, if

1 there's a kind of stable entry point so that folks
2 know where to go and can really understand whether
3 they're permitting on a park space, OTC space, and
4 things like that.

5 Yeah, so I'm happy to follow up with
6 more details as well. I know, you know, many of our
7 members are even more in Queens on some of these
8 recommendations. So happy to share my information as
9 well.

10 COMMISSIONER RIVERA: Thank you.

11 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: Could you just
12 say more word or two about the apprenticeship
13 programs? And I guess I would be interested in
14 knowing whether there might be a system in which
15 contractors that offer apprenticeship programs get
16 additional benefits from the --

17 THE CHAIR: Let's start crowding some
18 of our questions together. So Ruth's question and
19 Henry.

20 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: Sure.

21 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: My question was
22 about this Commission's charter is to amend the city
23 charter. Right? And some of the recommendations you
24 made about the civil service system are actually built
25 by the State Civil Service Commission. That requires

1 state law, not city charter amendment.

2 So in your point about pay parity and
3 other issues, it is not a creature of the city. And
4 so I was just wanting to make that clarification
5 because the State Civil Service Commission has those
6 rules, not the cities.

7 THE CHAIR: So we have clarification
8 between city and state and a pointed question about
9 the training programs.

10 MR. LOMAX: Yes. So our apprenticeship
11 program -- all of the different building trade unions
12 have apprenticeship programs, which is second to the
13 military training throughout the United States.

14 What I was mentioning is that in the
15 city they have a painter apprenticeship program -- a
16 painter apprenticeship type, sorry.

17 And what I was recommending was that we
18 should expand that not to just other trades but into
19 every agency where we can actually change people's
20 lives because we already seen what it can do with
21 NYCHA when we created that program that many years
22 ago.

23 And so far we actually have painter
24 apprentices in the -- in health and hospitals. And so
25 the apprenticeship programs -- a lot of them are based

1 in Queens.

2 And, you know, it's a full-blown
3 training center where it's either three, four or
4 five-year apprenticeship model. And they learn
5 everything about their trade.

6 And as they finish the program, they
7 are full-fledged journey persons. And they are paid
8 while they apprentice. So there's a big misconception
9 that apprentices aren't paid. But they are full-blown
10 union members and they get paid while they train and
11 learn.

12 THE CHAIR: Fantastic. Thank you so
13 very much for your testimony.

14 We would now love to hear from Fabien
15 Levy and Rich O'Malley. Is Fabien present?

16 MR. LEVY: Yeah, I'm Fabian.

17 THE CHAIR: And Rich? Rich does not
18 appear to be here so I will invite Diego Opperman to
19 join us.

20 Diego?

21 MR. OPPERMAN: Yes.

22 THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you.

23 Fabien, feel free to start.

24 MR. LEVY: Good evening. My name is
25 Fabien Levy. I'm the former Deputy Mayor of

1 Communications for the City of New York. I am, like
2 you, Chair, a former member of the Obama
3 administration.

4 I also have worked for Attorney General
5 Letitia James, Governor Kathy Hochul, Secretary
6 Hillary Clinton, and numerous other elected officials
7 and candidates across the nation. But more
8 importantly, I am a resident of New York City,
9 specifically Manhattan.

10 I'm here tonight to discuss how to make
11 our city government more efficient, specifically by
12 being more representative of our city population by
13 adopting open or what some may call jungle primary
14 elections and city electors.

15 I'm here to lend my personal voice to
16 this cause as someone who has worked on different
17 political campaigns in multiple cities across the
18 nation.

19 Specifically in three of the races I've
20 worked on in conservative Louisiana and liberal
21 California and in middle-of-the-road Jacksonville,
22 Florida -- red, blue, and purple -- my candidates have
23 participated in general primaries where the top two
24 vote getters moved on to a general election or a
25 runoff.

1 These races ensure all the candidates
2 were trying to speak to a -- as large of a swath of
3 voters as possible, not just consistent voters who
4 often participate in closed primaries like myself.

5 I also want to point out that I'm not
6 in support of jungle primaries because my past
7 candidates did well in these races. In fact, in all
8 three of the races I've worked on with open or jungle
9 primaries, my candidates did not move on to the
10 general election or lost the general runoff election.

11 On the contrary, in the numerous local
12 or statewide races that I've worked on that had closed
13 primaries, my candidates actually won those elections.

14 This, however, is not about winning
15 elections but about ensuring we do what's best for our
16 city. And that is having every voice heard, even if
17 my candidate of choice did not always win. That's how
18 our system of government should operate.

19 If you examine why our elections,
20 especially our primaries, have such slow voter
21 turnout, it's because our system is rigged to turn
22 voters away.

23 Why is that? Why is it that in New
24 York City you can register to vote in the election up
25 to ten days before the election -- before election day

1 nut changing from an unaffiliated voter, for
2 example, to a general Republican has to happen more
3 than four full months before an election?

4 That means that this year to register
5 to vote in the upcoming June primary, which is
6 obviously a statement about our -- the deadline to
7 register is still four days away.

8 To change your party registration from
9 unaffiliated, let's say, to Democrat, you had to have
10 registered to change that affiliation 115 weeks ago or
11 129 days before our upcoming primary. That's about
12 four months sooner than most voters start paying
13 attention to a race.

14 Among those most disenfranchised by our
15 current closed primary system are young people. I
16 know this firsthand because I was once one of those
17 young people who thought I could vote in a primary.

18 But I was told no because the deadline
19 to change from an unaffiliated voter, which I
20 registered as before I was 18 years old and didn't
21 know much about party politics. It was long before
22 the voter registration deadline in that election.

23 I've been a registered Democrat since
24 that time about two decades ago. This unfair set of
25 rules is why so many major cities across the nation

1 have adopted open primaries and why so many good
2 government groups support it.

3 For years, my fellow Democrats have
4 rightly said "Every vote must be counted." So every
5 vote should be counted. Why are we restricting legal
6 citizens from voting in the first place? I simply
7 believe, like I would hope many of you would, that
8 every vote should count.

9 And if we do believe that every vote
10 should count, then every potential voter should have
11 the ability to vote whatever party they belong to or
12 even if they do not belong to a party. I encourage
13 the Commission to consider all the testimony to
14 leverage --

15 THE CHAIR: You're at time.

16 MR. LEVY: -- on this topic and in
17 support for open primaries as well. Thank you.

18 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

19 Diego?

20 MR. OPPERMAN: Hi, I'm Diego. I'm a
21 Local 40 iron worker. And I've worked on projects
22 like the Queensborough Bridge, Park Avenue Viaduct,
23 various MTA projects -- I have as well.

24 And like a lot of other people in the
25 building trades, including some of my union brothers

1 and sisters who will be speaking later, they made some
2 points regarding infrastructure projects.

3 So the first I would like to say is
4 that the current system for infrastructure projects,
5 whether the execution or the permitting of the
6 project -- bless you -- is -- results in a tremendous
7 amount of money and time to be dedicated to navigating
8 city bureaucracy that leaves people like me sitting at
9 home waiting for things like this to clear.

10 And it means that we get to spend less
11 of our time directly building the infrastructure we
12 know that ordinary New Yorkers need, including
13 ourselves.

14 So we see delayed projects also runs
15 workers sitting at home, machines sitting idle. This
16 may be a good situation for a certain type of
17 consultants but not for us in the building trades or
18 for ordinary New Yorkers.

19 So our experience in the field
20 is -- concurs with a report from the comptroller's
21 Office that I think was released a couple of years ago
22 saying that the City hasn't hit its spending targets
23 regarding capital projects a single time in the last
24 10 fiscal years, sometimes spending as little as 50
25 percent of the target.

1 And this is despite cost overruns and
2 delays that you would think usually help reach
3 spending targets. But apparently not in this case.

4 So we're of the opinion that
5 streamlining the process for -- at least I
6 am -- streamlining the process for infrastructure
7 projects would allow -- make it easier for us to go to
8 work and for us to provide essential infrastructure
9 for workers.

10 I concur with the gentleman from the
11 carpenters union who was suggesting that we be
12 involved as building trades in all phases of funding
13 and execution.

14 I've personally been on jobs where one
15 old timer sees something that the engineers have not
16 yet understood. And it's, I think, not correct that
17 the people that plan and execute the work being
18 so -- I would also agree with other people that have
19 said that government deficiency is no excuse for
20 allowing exploitation.

21 And one thing that we hear about but
22 then we don't see on the union side is prevailing wage
23 fraud, which is when a contractor's pockets -- the
24 difference between a worker's hourly wage and the
25 legal minimum they're supposed to be paid.

1 It's one of the most common forms of
2 wage fraud nationwide. It undercuts union labor. And
3 it exploits what is typically workers coming from the
4 long -- the most vulnerable working population in New
5 York.

6 So we would ask that anything in the
7 direction of efficiency make sure that this kind of
8 dual exploitation that's much more common than we
9 would all want be taken care of.

10 THE CHAIR: Thank you so very much,
11 Diego.

12 Questions?

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 6: Chair, if I
14 may ask the questions in a first --

15 THE CHAIR: Let me poll them first. I
16 want to make sure there are questions.

17 Do you have a question?

18 COMMISSIONER RIVERA: No, just a -- can
19 I put on the record that the iron workers and the
20 carpenters agreed on something.

21 MR. OPPERMAN: I know.

22 THE CHAIR: I have a little bit of
23 Union envy as somebody who had -- once had the
24 privilege of representing service workers. I'm always
25 jealous when folks from unions like yours can point to

1 actual infrastructure in the city and say "I did that.
2 I built that." I'm always so impressed by that.

3 MR. OPPERMAN: It is one of the great
4 parts of the job.

5 THE CHAIR: Please, Fabien, I have a
6 question for you.

7 MR. LEVY: Sure. Please --

8 THE CHAIR: No, you first.

9 MR. LEVY: Will you ask the first one
10 about the data so I can pull up the data to --

11 THE CHAIR: Yeah. And another person
12 testified with the actual data.

13 MR. LEVY: Oh, okay.

14 THE CHAIR: So I think we cleared that
15 up.

16 MR. LEVY: Okay. No problem.

17 THE CHAIR: I just have a question for
18 you, Diego. So I -- thank you for your testimony. It
19 was rather impressive. There's a word that you used
20 though that's a pretty charged word. And I wonder if
21 you could just kind of unpack it a bit.

22 MR. LEVY: Sure.

23 THE CHAIR: And that's the word
24 "rigged." There are many things about the way that we
25 vote that I find to be problematic and that I think

1 requires, like, some real pressure to be put on it,
2 reform, innovate, open it up.

3 MR. LEVY: Sure.

4 THE CHAIR: But when you use the word
5 "rigged," it speaks to intent. And I wonder if you
6 might say just, you know, with a little bit of time of
7 it that you have if you might speak specifically to
8 your notion of intent.

9 MR. LEVY: Absolutely. I think last
10 year, if you look at the Charter Revision commission
11 that we had in place, I went and testified as a
12 private citizen.

13 My -- I was a deputy at that point. I
14 did not let my boss know. I did not know -- I sat
15 there in line, just like I did right now, for two
16 hours. I testified. Overwhelming testimony from that
17 Charter Revision Commission was about open primaries
18 and housing.

19 And multiple people on that Charter
20 Revision Commission told me specifically that they
21 were told that if open primaries was on the ballot,
22 they're going to -- there's going to be people that
23 are going to be elected officials specifically that would
24 be rallying against the housing proposals. So
25 basically if you go after this, we're going to go

1 after your other thing.

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 7: That's true.

3 MR. LEVY: I'm sorry?

4 THE CHAIR: So --

5 MR. LEVY: Council Member, I believe I
6 see right there --

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 7: I was --

8 MR. LEVY: She just said "that's true."

9 THE CHAIR: Sounds like Gail Gruber --

10 MR. LEVY: Yes.

11 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Fabien.

12 MR. LEVY: No problem.

13 THE CHAIR: No other questions. And so
14 I think you gave us the appropriate bridge to our
15 council member.

16 So, please, Council Member Brewer, if
17 you would join us.

18 MR. LEVY: Thank you.

19 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

20 MS. BREWER: I hate that idea.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 9: She disagrees
22 with me.

23 THE CHAIR: You mean to suggest that
24 Council Member Brewer has a strong opinion
25 on -- shocking.

1 Council Member?

2 MS. BREWER: Thank you very much, Chair
3 Gaspard and everybody. So I am Gail Brewer, City
4 Council. I will be submitting --

5 THE CHAIR: I was her intern once so --

6 MS. BREWER: Yes.

7 COMMISSIONER WOLFE: I was president.

8 MS. BREWER: Oh my god --

9 COMMISSIONER WOLFE: -- we still have
10 to go home.

11 MS. BREWER: Thank you very much. And
12 this is an exciting proposal. But I will point out
13 that there have been -- and I think somebody must have
14 said this -- 1989, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2005,
15 2010 -- two in 2018, one of which Tish James and I
16 passed a law about, which included representatives
17 from different levels of government.

18 Blasio did his own 2019 and 2024. And
19 then I don't know how many in 2025 -- at least three.
20 So I've tried to look at some of the past discussions
21 of infrastructure in public realm.

22 But it seems to me just in the very
23 broadest -- and there are many more people here who
24 have much more specifics than I do -- but the notion
25 of infrastructure and building it -- obviously the

1 School Construction Authority is very popular.

2 And they have built really good
3 schools. I mean, sometimes there might be a gym
4 that's more dated than an auditorium and they don't
5 like that.

6 But basically the schools are healthy.
7 They are well-built. They have what is needed for the
8 students of the future. The ones that Josh Wallack
9 did -- they're beautiful. Those are really great. So
10 all I'm saying is so now what's the equivalent. Is it
11 DDC? Is it DDC taking over other agencies?

12 When you talk to the libraries, DDC
13 builds them. They do a beautiful job. But they're
14 expensive. There's a lot of admin costs. So I don't
15 know how to balance that.

16 Cost of DDC, the efficiency of DDC
17 versus cultural affairs, housing, you know, HPD, et
18 cetera. Who's building -- who's the equivalent of the
19 School Construction Authority for the building world
20 that would be everything else?

21 I don't know I know the answer. But I
22 know that is something we should consider. And I
23 think we need a long discussion about what DDC could
24 or could not do.

25 And that could be a way to solve would

1 there be efficiencies in having -- I'm making this
2 up -- the library folks and the library and the
3 cultural folks and so on sharing whatever is
4 appropriate. So that's something to think about.

5 The second thing is just I also want to
6 make sure that this -- on the public realm
7 front -- and I'm not exactly sure what that means.
8 But I'm very excited about what the streets could
9 provide.

10 We're all trying -- okay. What's a
11 sidewalk now? What's a street now? Is it a bike? Is
12 it a bus? Is it a pedestrian? Is it, you know, the
13 guy with the Amazon cart -- where does he go? Where
14 does everybody go?

15 And that's the public realm to me. I
16 don't know if that's what it is for everybody else.
17 And it needs a lot of thought. I'm dealing with bike
18 lanes all day long. And so we want it. But
19 how -- it's not thought out in a comprehensive way.

20 It's a little bit -- understandably
21 want to build bus lanes. We want to build bike lanes.
22 But that hasn't been completely thought out. So that
23 could be some help.

24 I love open streets. But if you don't
25 have a neighborhood that somebody is paying attention

1 to, programming it with movies and face painting and
2 so on, it sits there. Doesn't attract a lot of
3 excitement.

4 So then we talk about public realm.
5 What is that? Who's in charge of it? How is it being
6 programmed? Is there funding for the programming?

7 And again is there funding for putting
8 it on the streets? Police do have to be involved.
9 Somebody has to help traffic that. So those are my
10 immediate thoughts on these two huge topics. But
11 also --

12 THE CHAIR: Council Member, I hesitate
13 to say this to you, but you are at time.

14 MS. BREWER: Thank you.

15 THE CHAIR: -- thirty-four seconds if
16 it's urgent.

17 MS. BREWER: That's perfect. Thank you
18 very much for doing this. And I will keep thinking
19 about this ideas. Thank you.

20 THE CHAIR: Thank you. I'm certain
21 that there are many questions for you.

22 MS. BREWER: I doubt it.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 10: -- Ruth
24 Messinger.

25 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: Council

1 Member, I have two questions. One is, I mean, because
2 you were speaking very fast.

3 So I just want -- the first question is
4 were you talking in public realm when you're talking
5 about the fact that there are now, at least I'm aware
6 of, two large companies that are using public streets
7 and public space and bike lanes as their dispersion
8 centers and taking up huge amounts of space?

9 MS. BREWER: When I say about the
10 streets it's -- I don't even -- there's a loading
11 zone. But guess what? The loading zone doesn't fit
12 the 18-wheeler. That's what I'm dealing with. And it
13 goes on and on from here.

14 And then the one that's there for a few
15 minutes unloading. And then there's the one there all
16 day waiting for the cars to come and go. And then the
17 complaints of 301 -- how to cut 301 complaints is
18 address these issues.

19 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: For
20 Commissioners, in my neighborhood there's huge amounts
21 of public space that have now been taken -- claimed by
22 Amazon and by pressure because it was their business.

23 So Council Member, on another issue --

24 MS. BREWER: My name is Gail.

25 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: Gail, on

1 another issue not to be pursued tonight, I would love
2 it if you would come back to testify to this
3 Commission about anything that we might do via the
4 Charter Revision Commission that affects NYCHA because
5 in my judgement you know more about NYCHA than anybody
6 in the city.

7 MS. BREWER: Oh, thank you.

8 THE CHAIR: Indeed. I know we have a
9 question from Emma Wolfe. And I'll just say that when
10 Ruth Messinger accuses you of speaking too quickly,
11 you've accomplished something.

12 COMMISSIONER WOLFE: Council Member --

13 MS. BREWER: You better not do that,
14 Emma Wolfe.

15 COMMISSIONER WOLFE: Yeah, that's the
16 last time I'll do it.

17 MS. BREWER: Please.

18 COMMISSIONER WOLFE: Professor --

19 MS. BREWER: That's true.

20 COMMISSIONER WOLFE: That's better. In
21 all seriousness, I think the SDA idea is a great one.
22 I'm sure folks have a lot of ideas. All I'm saying is
23 there's going to be more of these hearings.

24 And as you think about it
25 more -- certainly we'll do our homework more. But as

1 you think about it more, I'm just asking that, you
2 know, you encourage folks to come back and start
3 flushing it out.

4 MS. BREWER: I will. Thank you very
5 much.

6 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: And may I
7 just -- just want to point out the obvious. Hi, Gail.
8 How are you?

9 MS. BREWER: Thank you, Henry.

10 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: The School
11 Construction Authority is an authority and thereby an
12 entity of the State, which has its own rules and
13 procurements. I represent both. The work is on both.

14 DDC, on the other hand, is a city
15 agency which has to -- which has a lot of federal
16 funding. And we've been talking about procurement
17 reform. And I know you. You've been advocating for
18 procurement reform for a very long time.

19 What I would like to hear, since you
20 were former president, right, at one point, is what
21 sort of procurement reforms you could do that would
22 make some of the same conditions that we filed in the
23 School Construction Authority within the city agency,
24 within DDC, that would be streaming up.

25 MS. BREWER: I wish I could do that

1 right now. If it's okay with you, I have to think
2 about it because I don't know that I could do that off
3 the top of my head.

4 But it is the procurement in general
5 needs help. So you have to really spend some time
6 before you send this -- dump this into DDC because you
7 know what's going on with your cultural and all of
8 your non-profit right now.

9 COMMISSIONER WYLDE: I guess the
10 question is though we -- what we ought to be thinking
11 about is how do we fix the system for everybody, not
12 how to use a mechanism to get around it, which is what
13 DDC does.

14 MS. BREWER: Okay. Perfect situation.
15 The question is what is it that works for everybody
16 that would be more streamlined. That's a good
17 question. Kathy also has a big mind. All right.
18 Thank you very much.

19 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Council Member
20 Brewer.

21 Tristan Lewis, Craig Covil.

22 MR. COVIL: Good evening, Chair and the
23 Commissioners. Thank you very much for the
24 opportunity for both the public and industry feedback.
25 It's an extremely important topic. My name's Craig

1 Covil.

2 THE CHAIR: I'm really sorry. There's
3 now a murmur. I know that Gail always creates the
4 buzz. There's a murmur in the room that I hope will
5 quiet down. Thank you.

6 MR. COVIL: So my name's Craig Covil.
7 I'm President of the Design Build Institute of
8 America, a national organization. I am president of
9 the New York City Metro Region. We have 1,600
10 members.

11 Our members include architects,
12 engineers, surveyors, general contractors,
13 specialists, subcontractor and trade association
14 members, owners -- the whole gamut.

15 And I'm pleased to see that my other
16 trade associations have either already testified or
17 are going to testify. This is probably one of the few
18 times where you see the GCA Construction Managers
19 Association, the ACC, AIA, SDA -- we're all here. So
20 this is extremely important.

21 As I said, DBIA is -- includes our MWBE
22 and our vets. And it includes nine city agency
23 members. So I can't remember them all. But DDC,
24 CDOT, EDC, NYCHA, Public Housing Preservation
25 Trust -- we are -- they are all part of our membership

1 as well. So all part of our membership.

2 DBIA supports the Commission's
3 initiative for improved efficiency and more
4 accountability. We are an institution.

5 So we -- our main objective is
6 education -- education and sharing of knowledge both
7 nationally and internationally. So design build done
8 right and best value procurement.

9 In 2025, Design Build in the United
10 States delivered more than 45 percent of all
11 construction in the United States -- infrastructure,
12 buildings, and housing. In New York City it's less
13 than 20 percent -- less than half of what -- the
14 national numbers.

15 Design Build delivers projects faster
16 and more efficiently than design and build by others.
17 It is a tool in the toolbox. It is not the only
18 delivery method.

19 And I'm not here to say that it only
20 should be Design Build. There are lots of tools in
21 the toolbox -- Design Build, Design Bid Build, P3s,
22 construction management risk.

23 There are loads of great tools that
24 should be used. And the city agencies and departments
25 should have that ability to do all of those.

1 But Design Build delivers projects with
2 more cost certainty and greater schedule confidence
3 than design build in a lot of other delivery methods.
4 And it's more collaborative.

5 We are especially interested tonight to
6 be able to talk to you about some of the aspects that
7 our members ourselves we see as issues. And I think
8 the issue is from the point of view of empowering and
9 enabling.

10 THE CHAIR: You're right at time. I'll
11 give you 30 seconds to close.

12 MR. COVIL: Empowering and enabling
13 from the controller's office to those departments the
14 ability for them to have dedicated authority with
15 regards to contract changes, contract administration,
16 procurement, permit approvals, and alignment with the
17 controller's office. So thank you very much.

18 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you.
19 Please.

20 MR. LEWIS: My name's Tristan Lewis.
21 I'm a longtime resident of the city as well as a
22 serial technology entrepreneur in the city for the
23 last 25 years.

24 And one of the things that I want to
25 talk about is actually a bit of a shift from the

1 philosophical standpoint for the Commission when
2 thinking about infrastructure.

3 Today all infrastructure projects are
4 treated in the same way. But digital infrastructure
5 is fundamentally different than any other
6 infrastructure that exists.

7 Digital infrastructure is currently one
8 of the largest growing sector when it comes to
9 employment in the city. It has grown and it is now
10 employing over 2 million people in the tri-state area.
11 It is also servicing every agency and is being
12 hindered by the procurement process.

13 As a vendor in the technology space and
14 a vendor particularly in the government technology
15 space -- because I'm also the president and CEO of
16 Engagement BBC, which sells software to human services
17 agencies.

18 I have encountered this process. And I
19 have encountered the resistance that investors have to
20 investing in companies that are servicing government
21 because of the procurement process.

22 The challenge is that SaaS companies or
23 AI companies are selling software either on
24 subscription or on a usage basis. The procurement
25 process is primarily built on the idea of a

1 pre-packaged type of solution.

2 It is something that worked very well
3 in the 1980s, 1990s. But it is no longer something
4 that works in today's world. In today's world,
5 software is acquired mostly on an operational budget
6 basis as opposed to being acquired on a capital
7 expenditure basis.

8 The term procurement process is asking
9 you to work on an RFP. And so as a result, what is
10 happening is that the only companies that will bid on
11 those kinds of projects will be companies building
12 custom solutions for the states as opposed to
13 operating -- open, operating models and providing you
14 with a solution that is built interpretively over a
15 period of time.

16 Part of the challenge that exists with
17 this is that each agency is trying a different
18 approach to procure to working with those vendors.

19 As a result, what is needed for the
20 city is a centralized office of digital technology, a
21 centralized office that would not only deal with the
22 industry, deal with the legal aspects of new
23 technologies, and deal with the procurement issues of
24 technologies for city agencies.

25 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

1 COMMISSIONER WOLFE: Question. Yes,
2 thank you. How does that agency differ than
3 this -- than doing -- or whatever it's called?

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 11: Yeah.

5 MR. LEWIS: So the challenge --

6 THE CHAIR: Let's go off the --

7 MR. LEWIS: Yeah. The challenge as it
8 exists this way is that to do it is just another step
9 in the procurement process as far as lenders are
10 concerned.

11 So today, for example, as -- I'll take
12 the example of my own company. If I am selling into
13 the counseling, mental services agencies of the city,
14 I will first go through the procurement process in the
15 health office.

16 Then I will go through NE. Then I will
17 go to do it on top of it. It really furthers the
18 overall process to a much longer timeline.

19 And as a small start-up, it leads most
20 start-ups to go "It's not worth it." The cost of the
21 pursuit is not worth it. The net result is that the
22 agencies are presented with not -- solutions that
23 aren't as innovative.

24 COMMISSIONER WOLFE: Thank you.

25 COMMISSIONER WYLDE: I was going to ask

1 Craig -- you didn't get to say what specifically would
2 you change in the city charter?

3 MR. COVIL: Yeah, thank you very much,
4 Commissioner Wylde. We are submitting a written,
5 detailed, many-pages testimony. So it will all be in
6 there.

7 But what we've seen from other cities
8 both internationally and here is the ability for the
9 city to actually delegate that authority to a level
10 within those agencies where they can actually do some
11 of the actions of procurement, contract
12 administration, permitting, et cetera, et cetera.

13 A lot of our cities in this nation and
14 overseas -- those dedicated powers are there. So we
15 will in our written testimony provide that.

16 COMMISSIONER WYLDE: In other words,
17 push it down as opposed to going through multiple
18 agencies -- push into the agency?

19 MR. COVIL: Correct. What we're seeing
20 is too many layers. And everything has to go to the
21 top for a decision.

22 COMMISSIONER WYLDE: Yeah.

23 MR. COVIL: And a lot of those things
24 that go to the top are already decided and already
25 documented at a lower level. So the idea of being

1 more efficient and more accountability overall but the
2 ability is push the decision to the meaningful
3 responsible level where it can be.

4 It doesn't take away from the top of
5 the path because they, you know, the controller's
6 office is going to control everything. But the idea
7 is to take some of those dedicated duties and
8 responsibilities they have and allow those to work in
9 the agencies and the departments.

10 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: At the risk of
11 sounding like a broken record, DDC and the Design and
12 Build is a creature of the State. The controller
13 doesn't have control right now under the current
14 rules.

15 Secondly, if you pass those to the
16 agencies, you -- there's a budget process that the
17 city council would have to do. So I guess my question
18 in your proposal goes back to what Kathy said.

19 And it's what specific on the charter
20 would you change? Is it -- Design Build is a branch
21 of the State that approves or denies using the state
22 budget.

23 What is designed and what's built
24 during the process and how do you amend it to reflect
25 the fact that city council does have authority to

1 authorize projects moving forward? If you put it on
2 the agency, you're taking that authority away from
3 them.

4 MR. COVIL: No, I do not want to take
5 authority away. I just want to delegate some of those
6 aspects that go into that. At the moment
7 there's -- too many things are going backwards and
8 forward with regard to the contract.

9 Getting it registered -- it has to be
10 registered at the top level. And the contract from
11 the point of view of the administration of it, the
12 change management, all of that has to go back to the
13 boards.

14 Synthesizing value to a more efficient
15 accountable is better for the agencies. It's better
16 for trade and industry as well. And that's what we're
17 saying.

18 MR. OPPERMAN: May I amend my answer to
19 your question? Yes?

20 THE CHAIR: Yes, please.

21 MR. OPPERMAN: Okay. I think I
22 answered the procurement part of your question. But
23 what I'm advocating for is actually something larger
24 because when you are looking at procurement, you are
25 not -- when you are looking at technology, you are not

1 just looking at procurements.

2 You are also looking at equity. You
3 are looking at legal aspects of an overall solution.
4 And you are looking at the impact on the economy in
5 terms of jobs in the city. And so it is not just a
6 procurement question. It is a much broader question
7 than just procurement.

8 THE CHAIR: Thank you. I believe we
9 have one final question.

10 COMMISSIONER WILIAMS: Yeah, I just
11 want to -- I'm not sure if this is in your proposed
12 office. But how would you be contemplating existing
13 technology systems and changes?

14 I think you've all been a part of and
15 seen agencies who have ballooning contracts for
16 systems upgrades or who avoid it chronically for
17 years, sometimes decades, in order to avoid that
18 situation.

19 MR. OPPERMAN: So first of all, this is
20 not a problem that is unique to New York City. So be
21 glad for that. Some of the cities are doing a better
22 job, cities like Houston, for example, cities like
23 Atlanta.

24 Or some of the countries that are doing
25 a better job -- Estonia is actually a perfect example

1 of this -- have not only created an agency to do the
2 procurement to centralize a lot of the build and
3 design and distribution of those things, but
4 those -- within those agencies they had a consulting
5 component that works as a consultant to the other
6 agencies.

7 And so the other agencies come in when
8 they have a particular need -- when they need to
9 upgrade their infrastructure.

10 And then it is the responsibility of
11 that centralized agency to look at how that integrates
12 with maybe other plans or with a vendor maybe that is
13 doing the task and to negotiate the contracts across
14 agencies.

15 So the net result is that when they're
16 negotiating the contract across agencies, they can
17 actually realize economies of scale and therefore get
18 lower cost from vendors.

19 THE CHAIR: All right. Thank you for
20 your testimony.

21 MR. LEVY: Thank you.

22 THE CHAIR: I would like to now invite
23 Nick Guariglia and Andrea Harris.

24 Nick, apologies if I mispronounced your
25 last name. Nick and Andrea Harris.

1 MR. GUARIGLIA: Nobody can speak my,
2 you know, pronounce my last name. So don't worry
3 about it. No, I haven't read every page of the
4 charter. But I hope you don't, you know, expel me
5 from the room.

6 Good evening, members of the
7 Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to speak
8 tonight. My name is Nick Guariglia. I'm the advocacy
9 manager for the New York Offshore Wind Alliance as
10 well as the Alliance for Clean Energy in New York.

11 And I'm here to discuss the importance
12 of infrastructure and investment as a core component
13 of government efficiency and economic growth.

14 When we talk about government
15 efficiency, we go often focus on reducing costs,
16 streamlining operations, or improving service
17 delivery.

18 Those goals are important, but
19 efficiency should also be measured by government's
20 ability to plan for the future and deliver critical
21 infrastructure in a timely manner.

22 Infrastructure delays are themselves a
23 form of government inefficiency. When projects are
24 slowed by fragment planning, insufficient
25 coordination, duplicative processes, or a lack of

1 long-term investment, New Yorkers ultimately bear the
2 cost of higher expenses, missed economic
3 opportunities, and delayed public benefits.

4 As the Commission evaluates
5 opportunities to improve how government functions, I
6 encourage you all to consider the critical role order,
7 infrastructure, and electric grid readiness play in
8 the -- in New York City's future.

9 A modern efficient core infrastructure
10 helps drive economic development, create jobs, and
11 positions New York City as a competitive help for
12 commerce and industry.

13 To achieve these outcomes, the City
14 most proactively invest in the waterfront facilities,
15 transportation connections, and support infrastructure
16 that can meet the demands of a growing economy.

17 New York City's ports and waterfront
18 assets are the -- among the region's economic
19 advantages.

20 Investments in these facilities should
21 keep in mind our renewable energy industry but also
22 extend beyond the operations and management's needs
23 for offshore wind, although it's still very important,
24 and focus on strengthening the broader supply chain,
25 supporting industrial activity, and facilitating the

1 movement of manufacturing needs.

2 At the same time, economic growth
3 depends on reliability and resilient energy
4 infrastructure.

5 As electrification expands and energy
6 demand continues to increase across transportation,
7 buildings, industry, and emerging technologies, I
8 encourage the city to work closely with ConEdison and
9 other stakeholders to identify the infrastructure
10 upgrades necessary to meet the future needs.

11 That planning should include
12 investments in transmission systems, substation points
13 of interconnection, and other infrastructure, readying
14 the grid for delivery of large-scale energy generation
15 for renewable sources, which will be required to
16 support residents, businesses, and future economic
17 development.

18 Government efficiency means identifying
19 these needs before they become constraints. It means
20 improving coordination between city agencies,
21 utilities, and infrastructure developers so that
22 investments can be planned proactively rather than
23 reactive. It means we're ensuring --

24 THE CHAIR: Nick, you're at time. If
25 you can wrap up.

1 MR. GUARIGLIA: Got you. I did want
2 say that of course we can do this all with good
3 quality work from union labors. And I encourage the
4 Commission for you to ultimately invest in this.

5 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

6 Andrea?

7 MS. HARRIS: Thank you for the
8 opportunity to speak. My name is Andrea Harris. I'm
9 a New York City resident, a consistent voter, and
10 someone who cares equally about the future of our
11 city. I'm also the proud mother of a daughter who
12 serves in active duty in the US military.

13 This Commission has been charged with
14 identifying ways to make government work better for
15 New Yorkers. And if that's truly the goal, then we
16 really should begin to ask the simple question does
17 our election system work for everyone.

18 For military personnel, families,
19 military veterans, the answer is clearly no. A large
20 number of service members and veterans are not
21 registered with a political party.

22 New York City's closed primary system
23 effectively excludes those voters from participating
24 in elections where many of our leaders are actually
25 chosen. Many of our armed forces swear an oath to

1 defend the constitution of the United States, not a
2 political party.

3 They're trained to put mission before
4 politics and country before party. Many veterans and
5 military families carry these values throughout their
6 lives and therefore choose to remain politically
7 independent.

8 Under our current system, independents
9 come -- independence comes with a penalty. Voters who
10 choose not to affiliate with a political party are
11 excluded from participating in these primary
12 elections.

13 The statistics show that, as you've
14 heard before, that there's approximately 1.2, 1.4
15 million of voters unaffiliated. And it's estimated by
16 veteran groups that at least 700,000 of those voters
17 are veterans or active-duty personnel.

18 If this Commission is serious about
19 making government work better, then government must
20 work better for those who serve.

21 I respectfully request this Commission
22 to review the work of last year's Charter Revision
23 Commission and adopt the recommendations to let the
24 voters decide whether to open our primaries. That's
25 it.

1 THE CHAIR: Thank you so much.

2 Questions, Commissioners?

3 COMMISSIONER KANG: I was
4 wondering -- thanks so much for your testimony, Nick.
5 What specifically would you suggest in terms of a
6 charter commission to sort of integrate your
7 suggestions about, like, power grid readiness and
8 renewable energy sources?

9 MR. GUARIGLIA: So I think that a lot
10 of what we see in the renewable energy industry is
11 that there's a bit of -- services that we have to do
12 within the industry that we have to abide by not only
13 on a city level but also on the state level.

14 And I think greater coordination can
15 be -- not only different sectors of government in the
16 city but also coordinating more with state policy as
17 well would be helpful. I can submit more information
18 on that in writing if you'd like.

19 THE CHAIR: Okay. Thank you so very
20 much. We would now like to invite testimony from
21 Ashley Roelofs and Corey Hannigan. Thank you.

22 Ashley?

23 MS. ROELOFS: Good evening. My name is
24 Ashley Roelofs. And I am the program coordinator at
25 Trust for Public Land, a national non-profit committed

1 to connecting everyone to the outdoors.

2 We have worked in New York City for
3 decades to protect land and transform schoolyards and
4 underutilized spaces across all five boroughs. Thank
5 you for opening this hearing to the public.

6 I want to highlight six concrete areas
7 where changes to city processes would make non-profit
8 partners more effective and stretch public dollars
9 further.

10 First, advance a portion of city
11 funding to non-profit partners up front. Non-profits
12 obtain city-funded work thus far most often at
13 commercial rates while waiting for reimbursement and
14 then fundraise to cover the interest.

15 Philanthropic dollars are effectively
16 paying banks for city-funded projects. Advancing even
17 a portion of grant funding at the outset would solve
18 this.

19 Second, pay us back within 30 days.
20 Reimbursement timelines vary widely across city
21 agencies. A citywide 30-day standard enforced
22 consistently would reduce our own costs and help
23 non-profits plan. Some agencies already do this well.
24 Make that the rule, not the exception.

25 Third, build maintenance funding into

1 capital projects. A facility or open space built
2 without a maintenance budget is a future liability.
3 Requiring a funded maintenance plan as a condition of
4 capital approval would prevent deterioration and save
5 money long-term.

6 Fourth, shorten the lag between budget
7 adoption and disbursement, especially for RESO A
8 funds. The current four-month delay disrupts project
9 timelines and increases borrowing.

10 Even a modest direction would make a
11 meaningful difference. It can improve cross-agency
12 coordination on capital projects, silo decision-making
13 as to time, cost, and duplication.

14 Other cities, including
15 internationally, have developed coordination models
16 that work. We encourage the Commission to look at
17 those examples.

18 Six, audit and streamline capital
19 process steps. Some approval sequences have
20 accumulated steps over time that may no longer be
21 necessary.

22 But plain language review of each -- is
23 each step still needed -- could reduce friction
24 without sacrificing accountability. Thank you for the
25 opportunity.

1 THE CHAIR: Thank you so much, Ashley.
2 Just a just a quick point. Should I assume that in
3 addition to testimony you just delivered that you will
4 also submit the comparative analysis with other cities
5 that you're aware of who have these processes in
6 place? I just want to take up Ruth Messinger's
7 suggestion from earlier.

8 MS. ROELOFS: Yes, we can do that.

9 THE CHAIR: Awesome. Thank you so
10 much.

11 Please, Corey.

12 MR. HANNIGAN: All right. Good
13 afternoon. My name's Corey Hannigan. I'm the Policy
14 and Government Relations Director for Safe Streets and
15 Transportation Alternatives.

16 We applaud the Mamdani administration's
17 efforts to simplify bureaucratic processes and speed
18 up infrastructure redesigns because New York City
19 knows what works best on our streets. But it's failed
20 to scale our proven best practices to reach every
21 corner of the city.

22 Currently rolling out proven safety
23 improvements can be slow and onerous. Months and
24 sometimes years of stakeholder engagement are required
25 to just to bring our streets in line with best

1 practice, inflating project costs and delaying crucial
2 safety projects.

3 To reach every neighborhood and protect
4 every New Yorker, the City needs to shorten its
5 timelines for implementing tested standard safety
6 redesigns.

7 When a protected bike lane is proposed
8 and presented to the community, the DOT has already
9 conducted months of outreach analysis and research.
10 And the design is professionally drafted in accordance
11 with all local, state, and federal guidelines.

12 From there, additional months of
13 outreach and delays cost, time, money, and lives, with
14 hundreds of deaths and thousands of serious on the
15 streets every year.

16 We can't afford to keep waiting for
17 these projects. For example, DOT incorporates
18 emergency response management and FDNY consultation
19 into its planning from the start.

20 But it is then required to provide
21 proposed street design specifically for firehouse's
22 formal approval afterwards. This process is
23 duplicative.

24 And without a clear timeline for
25 responses, lifesaving projects can be delayed by local

1 firehouses simply by not responding to community
2 outreach.

3 In line with standard FDNY-approved
4 accessibility guidelines, street safety projects like
5 protected bike and bus lanes reduce the number and
6 severity of crashes on our streets, helping stabilize
7 without first responder involvement and freeing up
8 their capacity for other emergencies.

9 They also provide open lanes to allow
10 fire trucks and ambulances to bypass traffic and
11 improve access to hydrants, speeding up emergency
12 responses.

13 Imposing a sensible timeline during
14 which the station has to register objections or
15 removing the requirement for duplicative comment
16 entirely would help the DOT install more lifesaving
17 safety improvements faster.

18 Additionally, the City's popular
19 outdoor dining program has also been severely hampered
20 by unnecessary bureaucratic requirements like seasonal
21 limitations and high fees.

22 Only about 1,300 businesses are fully
23 approved for outdoor dining this year, down from the
24 high of roughly 8,000 during COVID for a temporary
25 program, which had created a hundred thousand jobs at

1 its peak.

2 The more onerous and time-intensive the
3 process is, the fewer outdoor dining opportunities are
4 available to New Yorkers, harming local businesses,
5 abandoning the immunocompromised, and reducing tax
6 revenue and failing to capitalize on the opportunity
7 presented by a summer World Cup.

8 And the current process makes it hard
9 for outer businesses who need it most. Only 38
10 percent of the businesses currently approved for
11 outdoor dining are located outside of Manhattan.

12 So we support streamlining the
13 application process and call for eliminating the
14 duplicated processes for street fed sidewalk dining,
15 making the program year-round easy and removing city
16 council and community board notification requirements
17 and creating simpler, more flexible sidewalk and
18 curbside specifications, licensing, and liability
19 requirements.

20 No matter where they live, every New
21 Yorker deserves streets that are both safe and full of
22 life. And they deserve a city that works to make it
23 easier, not harder, to make that happen. Thank you
24 for the opportunity to testify today.

25 THE CHAIR: Thank you so much, Corey.

1 Questions, Commissioners?

2 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: I have a
3 question. So actually regarding the announcement for
4 the non-profit, have you considered what percentage of
5 that advancement? Is it 50 percent? Is it 70
6 percent?

7 And in cases where the city would need
8 to recoup because of any problems, what would that
9 process look like?

10 MS. ROELOFS: Thank you for the
11 question. And I would like a chance to follow up with
12 an answer if that's okay.

13 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: I have a
14 question. You used very quickly a statistic, which I
15 assume is accurate, that fewer open -- whatever
16 they're called -- restaurants now than COVID,
17 significantly loss of jobs.

18 I guess I'm wondering is it your sense
19 or from a poll that restaurants would open these
20 facilities again at the level that they were at during
21 COVID with the resulting jobs if we made the process
22 easier or not?

23 MR. HANNIGAN: I wouldn't say at the
24 same exact level. But certainly there are businesses
25 across the city that are eager to expand back to, you

1 know, the footage and seats they had during the
2 temporary program.

3 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: Thank you.

4 THE CHAIR: Thank you. One quick
5 question, Ashley. You noted that there are some
6 citywide agencies that have taken it upon themselves
7 to impose this 30-day standard for reimbursements.

8 Do you know how many agencies
9 that -- are abiding by that? I was not aware of just
10 how uneven this is across the agencies.

11 MS. ROELOFS: I don't personally. I
12 apologize. But I'll make a note of that and then
13 follow up.

14 THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you so very
15 much.

16 MS. ROELOFS: Thank you.

17 COMMISSIONER LONGANI: Just a real
18 quick question to follow up on outdoor dining. Can
19 you say a little bit more about specific reforms
20 you're looking for with respect to the charter to help
21 streamline some of the issues you discussed?

22 MR. HANNIGAN: Yeah. And certainly I'd
23 like to follow up, you know, with a detailed outline.
24 But the primary aspect we're looking at is first of
25 all the year-round aspect. Right?

1 Currently we're doing seasonal only.
2 It's a huge cost for businesses to pay for the
3 construction of their outdoor dining at the beginning
4 of the season and then pay to either deconstruct or
5 store it over the winter months only to do that again
6 the next year.

7 That -- we've heard that's been a
8 really big burden. So removing that rule would be
9 huge as well as addressing what the actual minimum fee
10 would be required to apply for this. We've
11 heard -- yeah, I'll get back to you with the specifics
12 and share that.

13 COMMISSIONER LONGANI: Thanks very
14 much.

15 THE CHAIR: Thank you so much. And --

16 COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS: Sorry. Just,
17 Ashley, it doesn't need to be answered now. But if
18 you can get back to us on timeline for the
19 recommendation on the maintenance plan and what you
20 all are proposing in terms of what that would be.

21 MS. ROELOFS: I will. Thank you.

22 MR. HANNIGAN: Apologies for --

23 THE CHAIR: Thank you so much for your
24 testimony. We'd now like to hear from Michael
25 Grunnert and Maria Donahue. Thank you.

1 MR. GRUNNERT: Good evening. My name's
2 Michael Grunnert. And I'm a proud local free member.
3 And I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to
4 testify on behalf of the skilled, hardworking men and
5 women of Local 3 International Brotherhood of
6 Electrical Workers.

7 Being part of the workforce which fills
8 these infrastructure projects, we uniquely understand
9 the importance of streamlining the efficiency of set
10 processes.

11 Our members not only build our
12 communities of New York, but we live in them too and
13 have direct stake in it future. As the Commission
14 considers ways to improve efficiency, we encourage you
15 to think more holistically about infrastructure
16 projects and efficiency.

17 Build more and build faster, build
18 better. Most importantly, build union. Building
19 unions builds pathways -- a pathway to the middle
20 class.

21 For generations, Union construction has
22 provided economic opportunity for immigrants,
23 communities of color, veterans, and working families
24 seeking careers with economic security, healthcare,
25 proper training through a rigorous and approved

1 apprenticeship, college degrees, and a self-funded
2 pension program and so much more. Thank you for your
3 time and consideration.

4 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

5 MS. DONAHUE: Thank you, Chair Gaspard
6 and members of the Commission for holding today's
7 hearing. My name's Maria Donahue, Director of
8 Government Affairs at the American Institute of
9 Architects New York Chapter.

10 AIA New York is the leading design
11 non-profit, representing 5,000 architects and design
12 professionals committed to positively impacting the
13 physical and social qualities of our city.

14 We commend Mayor Mamdani for his
15 demonstrative leadership and commitment to responsible
16 use of public dollars to ensure our city is
17 effectively delivering public goods and building a
18 quality, resilient public program.

19 The 700-plus pages of the city charter
20 are really meant to reflect the City's priorities and
21 rules for operations. However, the layers of
22 bureaucracy has stifled the City's ability to deliver
23 critical projects in an efficient and cost-effective
24 manner.

25 These restrict -- the restrictive and

1 overly cautious nature of our current system makes it
2 a challenge to operate and deliver projects for both
3 agencies and design professionals.

4 When we burden projects with so many
5 boxes to check and hoops to jump through, how can we
6 expect to deliver high-quality public good in a way
7 that taxpayers can trust that the City is getting the
8 most bang for its buck?

9 We recommend the follow -- we recommend
10 the Commission evaluate the following reforms to the
11 city charger -- charter.

12 First, launch a coordinated citywide
13 capital planning process. Agencies often plan and
14 budget projects independently with limited shared
15 data, leading to missed opportunities to coordinate
16 and difficulty advancing citywide priorities.

17 By coordinating capital priorities and
18 conducting more front-end planning, the City can
19 identify opportunities to maximize co-benefits, such
20 as utility and infrastructure coordination, permanent
21 approvals, and minimizing construction disruptions.

22 Smart, comprehensive planning enables
23 the City to deliver quality projects with the
24 mentality of do it once and do it right.

25 Second, prioritize quality --

1 qualification-based selection -- QBS. Provide
2 flexibility to capital agencies to select --

3 THE CHAIR: You're at time. If you --

4 MS. DONAHUE: All of this is provided
5 in written comments.

6 THE CHAIR: Apologies.

7 MS. DONAHUE: All good.

8 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

9 Question from Commissioners? Any
10 questions?

11 Fantastic. Thank you for your
12 testimony.

13 MR. GRUNNERT: Thank you.

14 THE CHAIR: Thank you. I'm sorry to be
15 a tough ref.

16 Henry Sullivan and Catherine Vaughn.

17 MR. SULLIVAN: Good evening. My name's
18 Henry Sullivan. And I represent Local 3, the
19 International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. This
20 hearing is about streamlining projects.

21 Local 3, as far as I've been in the
22 business -- over five decades -- has been an integral
23 part of the neighborhood, community, and the five
24 boroughs of New York.

25 You see so much interaction between the

1 way Local 3 and the building trades interact and
2 streamline projects. We realize every agency -- what
3 their protocol is, what their safety measures are, and
4 we bring the best possible product to the community,
5 no doubt.

6 Not just with our intellectual ability
7 to change the dynamic of the situation -- through
8 verbalization, visualization, professionalism, and
9 safety. So we're looking to keep this government
10 going strong.

11 In streamlining projects you really
12 need to keep the building trades intact. And I know
13 someone on this board asked about, you know, are
14 unions efficient.

15 We're in the private sector. If you
16 don't produce within three or four hours of starting a
17 job, pretty much by the end of the day you're going to
18 be looking for work opportunity.

19 So if we want to continue this being
20 the great city that it is, I just ask if you want to
21 streamline projects, always keep the building trades
22 in what we are doing and continue what we're doing.
23 God bless you. Thank you for your time.

24 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

25 MS. VAUGHN: Chair Gaspard and members

1 of the Commission, thank you for your time and for
2 your service. My name is Catherine Vaughn.

3 I'm the executive director of Abundance
4 New York, a 5,000-member advocacy organization focused
5 on making it easier, faster, and cheaper -- and fairer
6 -- to build and deliver what New Yorkers need.

7 I'm also a member of Brooklyn Community
8 Board 6, a renter, and the mother of two young
9 children. So I also bring personal experience
10 interacting and volunteering with local government.

11 I'd like to offer two proposals tonight
12 that fit squarely into my scope. My first proposal
13 concerns permitting. New Yorkers who want to build
14 housing wait too long.

15 A new residential building takes 18
16 months to permit and 4 years from filing
17 occupancy -- time spent paying too much rent or
18 waiting in a shelter.

19 The delay is caused by how the process
20 is structured. A single building requires separate
21 permits and inspections from DOB, FDNY, DEP, Parks,
22 and HPD, each on its own timeline with no single
23 application and no single queue.

24 The same fragmentation applies to clean
25 energy. Installing a battery storage system requires

1 three separate agency tracks -- a DOD filing, a
2 separate FDNY examination, and a utility
3 interconnection application for a single installation.

4 A rooftop solar project or heat pump
5 faces a similar conflict. New York has among the
6 highest residential electricity rates in the country.
7 And this fragmentation holds back the distributed
8 generation that would add supply.

9 The 2026 state budget will affect the
10 CLCPA's 2030 targets, which makes fixing city-level
11 permitting more urgent, not less.

12 The Mamdani administration's speed
13 report made real progress through executive action,
14 but it is explicit that consolidating permitting
15 authority across agencies requires charter changes.
16 The executive cannot make one. The Commission should
17 make two changes.

18 First, designate DOB as the single
19 permitting and inspection authority for all
20 residential and commercial construction, with FDNY,
21 DEP, and other agencies retaining their substantive
22 standards while DOB administers them under one
23 application and one inspection sequence. And delegate
24 to DOB the authority to update the construction codes
25 by poll.

1 Second, consolidate clean energy
2 permitting -- rooftop and community solar, battery
3 storage, heat pumps, EV charging, and interconnection
4 signoffs in a single office of the DEP with one
5 application and one inspection and with the mayor
6 retaining flexibility to relocate function as long as
7 it stays centralized.

8 My second proposal concerns -- for
9 public -- the City's own capital projects --
10 firehouses, libraries, sewage treatment plants -- face
11 the same seven-month review as major private land use
12 actions.

13 The New York City Comptroller's 2023
14 audit, down to the fair share framework, is broken
15 with no centralized compliance oversight. Voters
16 approved the model last November.

17 Ballot question two. Fast track
18 affordable housing projects in districts not building
19 their fair share.

20 The Commission should extend that logic
21 to public facilities, waiving -- for projects under \$5
22 million and expediting review in districts not
23 carrying their fair share of a given disability type.

24 This reform would provide a pathway to
25 enforce fair share for the framework. Thank you. And

1 I did submit additional recommendations in writing.

2 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you for
3 your testimony.

4 Questions, Commissioners?

5 COMMISSIONER RIVERA: I just wanted you
6 to expand a little bit on the Department of Buildings
7 being that single agency for the affordable housing
8 projects specifically.

9 MS. VAUGHN: Sure. You know, I think
10 there's different safety standards that the DOB is
11 currently administering. And then there are fire
12 safety standards that are administered by the FDNY.

13 And it's kind of odd that, you know,
14 you wouldn't have that centralized in one place. You
15 shouldn't have to go to different agencies for
16 different types of safety.

17 And I think that the substance of the
18 standards can be retained while the administrative
19 oversight can be done through a single agency. And
20 that would just make the whole process of applying
21 different queues much streamlined.

22 COMMISSIONER RIVERA: Thank you.

23 COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS: Can I ask a
24 fast question about your streamlining for public
25 service? You said public service project --

1 MS. VAUGHN: Facility, yeah.

2 COMMISSIONER WILLIAMS: Public facility
3 projects under \$5 million. So are there -- is there a
4 certain typology of service projects that you're
5 talking about?

6 MS. VAUGHN: Yeah, I mean, what I
7 listed here were, like, firehouses, libraries, sewage
8 treatment plants. I don't know if any of those would
9 be under \$5 million.

10 But, you know, I'm on Community Board
11 6. We have been -- have had to go through the process
12 with the revised -- facility in Gowanus. And, you
13 know, these are public -- this is public
14 infrastructure that should be -- have traction.

15 THE CHAIR: Great. Thank you so much
16 for your testimony.

17 Grace Rauh and Christopher Loscalzo.

18 Grace, I have to confess that when I
19 see you there I feel as if I'm about to get grilled.

20 MS. RAUH: You get to ask the questions
21 tonight. So the tables have turned. Chair Gaspard,
22 members of the Charter Commission, good evening.
23 Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is
24 Grace Rauh.

25 I'm the Executive Director of Citizens

1 Union, a nonpartisan democracy organization dedicated
2 to honest and accountable government, free and open
3 elections, and civically engaged public.

4 Reducing red tape, streamlining
5 permitting, and increasing government capacity to
6 execute its mission are all crucial to providing New
7 Yorkers with effective services.

8 But as you all seek to tackle
9 longstanding bureaucratic hurdles, I am also here to
10 urge you to focus on prioritizing our public integrity
11 and accountability watchdogs.

12 By ensuring we have strong, independent
13 oversight agencies, we can keep government more
14 effective, efficient, and committed to the public
15 interest.

16 How can you do this? By investing in
17 money-saving, waste-reducing oversight agencies.
18 Strong watchdogs save taxpayer dollars by preventing
19 fraud, waste, and abuse.

20 Department of Investigation and
21 Investigations has generated more than \$6 million in
22 financial recoveries last year. And then we know that
23 there are additional dollars saved from the deterrent
24 value that a robust watchdog agency provides.

25 On the federal level, Offices of

1 Inspector General are known to generate \$17 in returns
2 for every \$1 invested in their work. There is a clear
3 and persuasive return on investment.

4 The Conflicts of Interest Board
5 provides same-day legal service to thousands of city
6 employees annually and helps prevent violations before
7 they occur.

8 Yet these agencies have been
9 underfunded for years and must go before the very
10 officials that they regulate to ask for the funding
11 that they need. We think their budgets need to be
12 protected.

13 The Charter revision commission that
14 was established by the city council last year and
15 co-chaired by one of your fellow commissioners, Henry
16 Garrido, conducted significant research, public input,
17 and legal analysis on this issue and developed charter
18 amendments to protect these agencies.

19 These amendments have already been
20 vetted by the Law Department. Given the work ahead of
21 you and your tight timeline, these proposals are
22 well-positioned for consideration.

23 We would also encourage you to look at
24 restructuring oversight bodies in the city to make
25 their work more effective -- things like bringing

1 lobbying oversight out of the city clerk's office and
2 into the Conflicts of Interest Board.

3 We also support merging the three
4 external police oversight agencies -- the Inspector
5 General for the Police Department, the Mayor's
6 Commission to Combat Police Corruption, and the
7 Civilian Complaint Review Board -- into a unified
8 Police Oversight Board.

9 This proposal was included in the 2021
10 police reform plan and would create a more effective
11 and empowered oversight body.

12 We will follow up with written
13 testimony but certainly encourage all of you today as
14 the first charter revision commission to follow the
15 Adams administration to demonstrate very clearly that
16 New York has turned the page on ethical and corruption
17 scandals.

18 Don't worry, I will be back. I know
19 you have future hearings and look forward to
20 testifying on additional proposals focused on
21 reforming government operations in key areas like
22 workforce, technology --

23 THE CHAIR: Grace, you're at time,
24 please.

25 MS. ROUH: -- innovation, procurement,

1 and open primaries. Thank you.

2 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

3 MR. LOSCALZO: Good evening, Chair,
4 Commissioners of the Charter Revision Commission, and
5 staff. My name is Chris Loscalzo. And I'm proud to
6 speak on behalf of Laborers' Local 1010 and Laborers'
7 Local 1010 LECET.

8 Thank you for the opportunity to
9 testify today. Laborers' Local 1010 represents more
10 than 2,500 members who live and work across New York
11 City.

12 Our members build and maintain the
13 roads, sidewalks, parks, playgrounds, and airport
14 runways that keep the city moving.

15 Our members also perform essential
16 climate resiliency and flood mitigation work,
17 including coastal protection, wetlands restoration,
18 urban forestry, and other infrastructure projects that
19 reduce flood risk, promote sustainability, and
20 strengthen the city's resilience to extreme weather.

21 As the Commission examines ways to make
22 government more efficient, we encourage reforms that
23 reduce bureaucratic delays, improve coordination among
24 agencies, and help public projects move from planning
25 to completion more quickly.

1 Efficient government is not simply
2 about cutting processes. It's about delivering
3 high-quality public services and projects on time, on
4 budget, and with accountability to taxpayers.

5 A recent study conducted by Cornell
6 University's School of Industrial Labor Relations
7 offers an example of how this can be achieved. The
8 report -- the, excuse me, the report examined the
9 feasibility of the project labor agreement for the New
10 York City Parks Department street tree planting and
11 urban forestry work.

12 The study found that a PLA structure is
13 not only feasible but has the potential to provide
14 benefits to the city, the public, the contractors, and
15 the workers.

16 As the report notes, project labor
17 agreements function as a job site constitution,
18 establishing a single set of rules and expectations
19 across an entire project rather than relying on a
20 piecemeal approach.

21 This creates greater coordination,
22 workforce stability, safety, and efficiency. For
23 public agencies managing complex projects, that can
24 bring fewer disruptions, higher quality work, improved
25 project delivery, and better use of taxpayer dollars.

1 This is particularly important as New
2 York City continues investing in parks, street trees,
3 climate resiliency, and public realm improvements that
4 directly benefit neighborhoods and small businesses.

5 When projects are delivered efficiently
6 and completed to a high standard, communities see the
7 benefits sooner and public resources go further.
8 Laborers' Local 1010 is committed to building the
9 workforce necessary to support these investments.

10 Through our apprenticeship and
11 workforce training programs, we prepare New Yorkers
12 from diverse backgrounds, including many immigrants
13 and first-generation Americans, for safe, productive
14 and sustained careers.

15 Our members receive an extensive
16 training that helps ensure public projects are
17 completely safely, efficiently, and with the highest
18 level of crowds from the ship.

19 In addition to workforce training,
20 Local 1010 is committed to helping our members fully
21 participate at a civic level through a partnership
22 pursuing citizenship. Now we have a system of more
23 than a hundred members in navigating the United States
24 citizenship process.

25 As the Commission considers ways to

1 improve government operations, we encourage policies
2 that promote efficient project delivery, workforce
3 development, and strong labor management standards.
4 Thank you.

5 THE CHAIR: Chris, you're somebody who
6 clearly has been accustomed to performing under time
7 pressures.

8 MR. LOSCALZO: Yes.

9 THE CHAIR: You were --

10 MR. LOSCALZO: I was.

11 THE CHAIR: -- to get it all in.

12 MR. LOSCALZO: I was.

13 THE CHAIR: It was impressive.

14 Questions for Chris and Grace?

15 COMMISSIONER MOORE: Grace, I was
16 wondering if you could expand on some of the ideas for
17 investing in oversight agencies or protecting their
18 funding?

19 MS. ROUH: Sure. Thank you. You know,
20 fundamentally the structure as it exists right now
21 where these agencies go before the city council or the
22 mayor to seek funding when they are charged with
23 providing oversight over those elected officials is
24 hugely problematic.

25 And the City Council Charter Revision

1 Commission last year proposed fixing a set
2 percentage -- an incredibly small percentage to be
3 clear -- of the annual budget of the City to go to
4 those agencies.

5 So in the case of the Conflicts of
6 Interest Board, had that formula been in effect, the
7 Conflicts of Interest Board would've had a \$4 million
8 budget, an increase of about \$1.2 million.

9 For the Department of Investigation, it
10 would've been on track to have a \$69 million budget
11 this year, which is about a \$13 million increase.

12 But big picture, these are really, you
13 know, cost savings, efficiency agencies in the city.
14 They have a -- the potential to have a big deterrent
15 effect in terms of waste, fraud, and abuse.

16 And then they actually, through their
17 investigations, are able to find and crack down on any
18 efforts to waste public dollars.

19 THE CHAIR: Please.

20 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: Just, Grace, I
21 appreciate that. I would just note -- relaying this
22 for the Commission as well as for you -- but we might
23 look at -- the one place that I'm aware that that
24 exists in the city charter right now is, I think, Mr.
25 Chair, that the IBO budget is larger now.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: Ten percent of
2 all --

3 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: So it's a
4 function of the IBO budget. And that has worked very
5 well and avoided some of the battles. And Marc
6 probably thought it was too much. But that's -- but
7 it's a way of locking it in.

8 MS. ROUH: Yes. And there's -- and the
9 Campaign Finance Board as well has a fixed budget. So
10 there's -- there is precedent for structuring it that
11 way.

12 COMMISSIONER LONGANI: Chair, I spent a
13 lifetime in the oversight world. I worked for the
14 late great Elijah Cummings -- one of the great
15 oversight people I've ever seen.

16 And I feel that New York City actually
17 has the most robust oversight in the entire country,
18 frankly. Like, take COIB for example. It's so much
19 stronger than the federal or state equivalent. It's
20 not close.

21 So besides funding -- and we can always
22 improve. And you've set out some improvements that I
23 think we should consider. Besides funding, what do
24 you see as the greatest weakness in our current
25 oversight system?

1 MS. ROUH: I mean, I think -- I don't
2 know that there is a single sort of reform that I
3 would point to as the one, big, sort of silver bullet
4 that changes or revolutionizes our system.

5 The Citizens Union put out at the end
6 of last year a broader ethics and accountability
7 agenda for the incoming administration.

8 And that includes a series of
9 reforms -- many of them were in place during the de
10 Blasio administration -- that were either set aside or
11 abandoned by the prior mayoral administration that we
12 would certainly have been advocating for those to
13 return around lobbying disclosures, revolving door
14 prohibitions.

15 I think the oversight agencies play
16 such a foundational role in this work. And so
17 for -- certainly for the purposes of this Commission
18 and the look at the city charter, I -- we would argue
19 this area is ripe and very much in -- very much helps
20 you all to achieve this government efficiency goal,
21 which is incredibly laudable important.

22 And finally it has the added advantage
23 of already having been vetted by the Law Department.
24 It was -- you know, has been packaged very nicely and
25 clearly by the prior Charter Revision Commission that

1 the City Council convened last year that Henry Garrido
2 was the co-chair of.

3 And so it's an off-the-shelf reform
4 that we think would be really fantastic and impactful
5 for this group to take up.

6 COMMISSIONER LONGANI: We would love to
7 see some prioritization if there are, like, specific
8 ones that you think are higher priority than others.

9 Thank you, Chair.

10 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you for
11 your testimony. Really, really thorough.

12 And Grace, I want to in particular just
13 show some appreciation for how you provoked us on
14 objecting to things at a time when we need to be
15 asking harder questions about these issues. So thank
16 you.

17 MS. ROUH: Thank you.

18 THE CHAIR: Rachel Fauss and Felise
19 Farber. As Rachel and Felise come to the podium, I'm
20 going to make some quick announcements. At the very
21 top of this hearing I told us all that we would be out
22 of here about 8:00 p.m.

23 I told a little bit of a fib. We're
24 going to have some extra time in this game. And we
25 will add 15 minutes for those of you who have been

1 waiting quite some time who have not yet had an
2 opportunity to testify.

3 I have 16 individuals who are on queue.
4 That means eight more panels. So we'll extend to
5 8:15. For those of you who are online, I hope you've
6 noted the message that we sent to you indicating that
7 we will not be able to take online testimony this
8 evening.

9 We invite you to submit written
10 testimony or to come to one of the other nine public
11 hearings that we will hold in these next --

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 12: Love to see
13 you.

14 THE CHAIR: Yes, please.

15 MS. FAUSS: Good evening, members of
16 the staff and the charter commission. My name is
17 Rachel Fauss. And I'm senior policy advisor for
18 Reinvent Albany. We advocate for transparent and
19 accountable government in New York.

20 We welcome the appointment of this
21 Commission. And despite the short timeline, we
22 believe you can propose realistic actions to make New
23 York City government more effective and accountable.

24 The last mayoral administration was
25 rocked by the biggest series of corruption scandals in

1 decades to reveal strength and weaknesses in the
2 City's internal controls and watchdogs.

3 We believe the Commission must respond
4 to this eruption of corruption by taking steps to
5 strengthen New York City's frontline ethics
6 agencies -- in particular, the Department of
7 Investigation and Conflicts of Interest Board.

8 This will sound a little familiar to
9 what Grace said so I will try to get in some different
10 points. First, we strongly support independent
11 budgeting for both agencies -- the DOI and Conflicts
12 of Interest Board and -- as well as more independent
13 appointment processes and removal protections.

14 We strongly support making ethics
15 guidance issued by the Conflicts of Interest Board far
16 more transparent. And as an amendment to Chapter 68
17 of the city charter, we also support putting lobbying
18 and ethics under one roof, ideally in a more
19 independent New York City Ethics Commission.

20 And lastly, we support strengthening
21 ethics laws regarding city affiliated non-profits.
22 One other stat I would add for you as far as how
23 investing in oversight agencies is a good use of
24 public taxpayer dollars.

25 In addition to federal inspectors

1 generals saving \$18 for every \$1 that is spent -- I
2 think Gracie used a similar statistic -- the General
3 Accounting Office in DC results in \$123 in savings for
4 every dollar spent. So that's another example of why
5 oversight saves money.

6 Again, you know, the City Council's
7 Commission studied a number of these proposals.
8 They're off the shelf. They're ready to go. Another
9 thing they studied that I'd recommend to you is that
10 the DOI commissioner needs to be more protected.

11 Two ways to do that are to make sure
12 that removal is only for cause with written notice and
13 an opportunity for a public hearing with the City
14 Council. And the second part is giving the DOI
15 commissioner a five- or seven-year term.

16 And then I'll leave it there. My
17 written testimony has a lot of statistics on the way
18 that this agency budgets have been decimated. DOI is
19 down to a quarter of its staff versus ten years ago.

20 That's a huge number. We've lost more
21 than a hundred staff. I think in particular they're
22 in dire need of protection. Thank you.

23 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

24 MS. FARBER: Good evening. I'm Felise
25 Farber, Executive Director of the Subcontractors Trade

1 Association. STA represents more than 350 specialty
2 trade firms that deliver New York City's public work
3 infrastructure. And I should emphasize we're 100
4 percent union contractors.

5 The Commission should consider removing
6 or meaningfully -- consider removing or meaningfully
7 narrowing the controller's role in the procurement and
8 contract administration process, particularly with
9 respect to contract registration, change or review,
10 and extra work disputing terminations.

11 Reducing duplicative administrative
12 steps would accelerate project delivery, improve cash
13 flow, reduce claims, and allow agencies to manage
14 projects more efficiently.

15 The charter recognizes the need for
16 flexibility and procurement through Charter Section
17 332 authorizing the PPD.

18 Many existing permitting requirements
19 were developed around the traditional design bid bill
20 delivery model where complete construction documents
21 are available before construction begins.

22 The charter should expressly authorize
23 permitting agencies to establish phase permit
24 submission and review processes, concurrent reviews,
25 and other streamlined approaches tailored to

1 alternative delivery methods.

2 For design build and other alternative
3 delivery procurements, it should -- the City should
4 require the plumbing, mechanical, and electrical
5 contractors be identified as part of the proposal
6 submission process.

7 These specialty trades are responsible
8 for the most complex and technically sophisticated
9 elements of public infrastructure projects and play a
10 central role in project planning, constructability,
11 pricing, scheduling, and execution.

12 Timely payment is critical to success
13 of the public construction projects through financial
14 viability and stability of subcontractors to perform
15 the work.

16 The City should track payment
17 timeliness beginning on the date of payment
18 requisition submitted rather than measuring the period
19 only after an agency approves payment.

20 Public reporting should track the
21 amount of time required for agency review and
22 acceptance of payment requisitions. The City should
23 also create a publicly accessible payment tracking
24 database that allows subcontractors to monitor the
25 status of payment requisitions.

1 While the Controller's Checkbook NYC
2 provides useful information regarding payments for the
3 dependent contractors, does not provide requisition
4 level information.

5 Finally, the Commission should
6 recommend reforms to the subcontractor approval
7 process to ensure greater transparency and
8 predictability.

9 When an agency declines to approve a
10 proposed subcontractor, the agency should be required
11 to provide written notice to both the prime and the
12 sub explaining the basis for the decision.

13 The City should also establish a formal
14 appeal process with defined timelines for
15 reconsideration and final agency action.

16 Currently, subcontractors may be
17 rejected without sufficient explanation and without a
18 meaningful opportunity to address concerns or correct
19 perceived deficiencies.

20 Greater transparency would improve
21 fairness, reduce delays, and ensure subcontractors are
22 not unnecessarily excluded from public work. Thank
23 you.

24 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you for
25 your testimony.

1 Questions from Commissioners? No
2 questions.

3 Thank you so very much.

4 MS. FARBER: Thank you.

5 THE CHAIR: I'd like to now invite
6 Aaron Feinstein and Pedro Rodriguez to testify.

7 And as Aaron and Pedro prepare to do
8 so, I just want to encourage those of you who have not
9 yet testified to please take this time to go over your
10 statement to make a determination as to whether or not
11 someone has already -- or a number of other
12 individuals may have already read into the record some
13 of your recommendations, some of your observations.

14 That way we can try to get as many
15 speakers in before 8:15 as possible. Thank you.
16 Please.

17 MR. FEINSTEIN: Hi, everyone. My name
18 is Aaron Feinstein. And I am a Local 40 iron worker.
19 I want to thank you all for listening to what we have
20 to say today.

21 We as Local 40 iron workers like to say
22 we are proud sponsors of the New York City skyline.
23 We are also proud sponsors of the MTA weekend
24 shutdowns and other level closures from the Americano
25 and other borough bridges.

1 THE CHAIR: That's quite a flex.

2 MR. FEINSTEIN: As we look towards
3 being more efficient, the first thing I'd like to
4 stress is to not sacrifice a focus on safety. No job
5 or infrastructure project is worth more than a
6 worker's health or their wellbeing.

7 Every worker wants to be able to go
8 home at the end of the day and see their families.
9 Maintaining a positive safety culture is vital to a
10 healthy city.

11 Secondly, like Diego spoke to earlier,
12 a lot of these infrastructure projects are partially,
13 if not fully, state-funded. This means that workers
14 are paid at prevailing wage scales as required by law.

15 Even so, some of these jobs are awarded
16 to non-union companies who do not pay their workers at
17 this rate and thus are committing prevailing wage
18 fraud.

19 The State Department of Labor has their
20 Bureau of Public Work and Prevailing Wage Enforcement.
21 And the Comptroller Office in the city offers wage
22 protections and opportunities to file complaints on
23 their websites.

24 But I would like to see the City work
25 more closely with the State and commit to stronger

1 enforcement of preventing this fraud. Thank you.

2 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

3 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Chair and
4 Commission. My name is Pedro Rodriguez. And I am a
5 father, community board member in Community Board 6,
6 and a huge safety advocate.

7 And I'm the founder of Neighbors Safely
8 Cross the Street, which is a local group in Forest
9 Hills trying to find pedestrian safety. However, I
10 know -- hundreds of people are killed and tens of
11 thousands are injured every single year on our streets
12 due to traffic violations.

13 In our neighborhood in Forest Hills, on
14 average we see 11 injuries every week and two
15 fatalities every year. And that is just my
16 neighborhood.

17 I'm sure all of your neighborhoods have
18 similar statistics. This is why I decided to get
19 involved in my local community. And, sadly, for
20 several reasons, the City is not moving with the
21 urgency this issue demands.

22 And just let's be honest. Efficiency
23 has been a failure. I mean -- and we are nowhere
24 near -- Mayor Mamdani said that he wanted the New York
25 City streets to be the envy of the world, quote,

1 unquote.

2 And to help in that goal, this
3 Commission should look at the following problems. One
4 is the speed of street improvements. At the moment,
5 speed -- the speed at which the City moves to improve
6 our streets is just too slow.

7 Widening bus lanes, sidewalk
8 expansions, lighting -- whatever it takes -- can take
9 years. If anyone has made efforts to speed this up,
10 why do they still exist? This Commission should look
11 into what we can do around that.

12 Two, at the moment, the City has to beg
13 the State actually every couple of years to request
14 improvements and speed cameras. According to
15 the -- cameras have a significant decrease in street
16 fatalities. We should look into how we can allow the
17 City to just expand as needed.

18 On the same topic, the Commission
19 should look into returning traffic equipment to DOT.
20 This was a change in the 90s where we went from DOT
21 to -- under Giuliani. And this just doesn't work.

22 Lastly, this Commission should look
23 into allowing automatic enforcement, not just the
24 speed and lighting and red lights, but also parking,
25 ASPs, and other violations.

1 Because let's be honest, in 2026 it's
2 kind of strange that we're still relying on someone
3 walking up and down the street giving tickets.

4 And then thirdly, or in the grander
5 scheme of things, we've already talked about this.
6 But the Department of Design and Construction can take
7 at least ten years to do any project.

8 When I first found out this I thought
9 that was incredible. But a lot of our street safety
10 relies on the DTC. So this Commission should also
11 look into what kind of changes DTC -- and the rest of
12 the agencies -- I'm not trying to target DTC. But
13 something other -- but something needs to be done.

14 So while I get a lot of the focus is on
15 crime, the simple fact is that many of us were to die
16 today, it would probably be because of a car. That's
17 just a fact. It scares the heck out of me. And I
18 definitely want to change this. Thank you so much.

19 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Pedro.

20 Thank you both.

21 Questions from our commissioners?

22 Great, thank you.

23 MR. FEINSTEIN: Thank you.

24 MR. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you.

25 THE CHAIR: Marco Tang and Lauren

1 Napier. Okay.

2 In addition to the concrete
3 recommendations that have been made about
4 charter-specific potential ballot initiatives, there's
5 so much else that we've been able to gather up tonight
6 that can inform the work of efficiency in building an
7 excellent government into the future that sits outside
8 of charter reform.

9 And we appreciate all that. And so far
10 this area has also given me the opportunity to
11 discover that Kathy has a hip hop ring tone.

12 Marco, would you like to start?

13 MR. TANG: Okay. Hello, I am Marco
14 Tang. I'm an NYC resident. And I will testify
15 the -- it may not be pipes and roads. But I would
16 argue that education is infrastructure for everybody.

17 But it's -- I am probably asking for a
18 pie in the sky over here. But I -- this is a big
19 problem that's been plaguing human society -- not just
20 America, every society -- ever since -- believe it or
21 not -- man are both putting pressure on the -- for
22 the -- standardized testing has been a bane on our
23 society. And literacy, yes.

24 Listen, but the huge -- forget about
25 race, culture -- the federal -- all that is important.

1 But the most important is about the -- this -- the
2 education system has been designed to crush creativity
3 and beat it to death. Death.

4 I am a polygraph. I literally learn
5 listening to people learning to do things. I learned
6 about Middle Eastern culture, Middle Eastern history.
7 I learned about upper philosophy, sciences. These
8 are -- guess my grades. I was a C, C, D, F, F, F
9 student.

10 The system keeps beating me
11 down -- neurodivergent kids like me -- beat over and
12 over and over. The common core beats us down over and
13 over and over. I love us -- the system -- despite the
14 system.

15 And if the system keeps -- I tried to
16 climb out and common core keeps stepping on
17 me -- stepping on me -- on my hands. Pearson, who, by
18 the way, he is infuriating how we -- our kids are
19 forced to basically squeeze the life out of their
20 creativity, out of the inner child just to
21 be -- hopefully get a job.

22 Do you know how screwed up that is? Do
23 you know how screwed up the society is? Like, there
24 are so many alternatives to it -- trade schools,
25 different credit schools having philosophy classes in

1 schools, freaking better teachers for our schools,
2 civil right schools, schools for common core.

3 And -- have crushed this vision so hard
4 that -- hard that according to the CDC -- CDC has
5 supersized, including those of my -- of Asian and
6 Chinese community at least -- rival at least 20
7 percent because of this system.

8 This system is not only messed up; it
9 has a blood toll. It has been crushing. And we need
10 to fix it. This needs to be fixed in the school
11 charter or more people will die -- die in both their
12 body and little spirit because of this.

13 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Marco. Thank
14 you for your testimony. And I'm sorry for some of
15 what you experienced in the education system. Thank
16 you.

17 Please, Lauren.

18 MS. NAPIER: Good evening, everyone.
19 My name's Lauren Napier. And I'm very --

20 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

21 MS. NAPIER: Okay. I am here. And I'm
22 also nervous and cold. So I just want to start by
23 saying give me a little grace here. I am going to
24 share something also that is quite personal but
25 something that I believe is affecting many people

1 throughout the city.

2 Through a cataclysmic series of events,
3 I am now experiencing homelessness. And I am living
4 currently in a women's shelter. I have arrived at
5 this position, at this place -- that's one story.

6 But what I have learned within the
7 shelter is a completely different story. Very
8 important. And what I've seen, I believe, is just
9 a -- the City is -- and the city resources and
10 taxpayers are just being -- they're working on merging
11 funds by what's going on in these shelters.

12 For seven months, I have been a
13 firsthand witness to the extraordinary inefficiencies
14 that exist across the network of city agencies,
15 non-profit operators, contractors, and private equity
16 partners responsible for serving the homeless in the
17 city.

18 Gail Brewer was here. My shelter is
19 actually in her district. And I've been on numerous
20 occasions trying to get in touch with her office. So
21 if anyone can connect me with her, I would appreciate
22 that.

23 The shelter that I reside in operates
24 under a contract that is nearly \$80 million for 5
25 years. And I have -- in my seven months have seen

1 that investment not be put to work at all.

2 I have watched housing placements for
3 myself and for many, many of the women in the shelter
4 being delayed. Approvals have gone unsolved. Women
5 have lost apartments because of bureaucratic delays
6 and agency inefficiencies. And the human cost is
7 devastating.

8 But as I mentioned, there is a
9 financial cost. And I believe that it's a really
10 staggering cost. I once was a six-figure incomer in
11 the city. And so I expected that my taxes would be
12 paid into these systems. And they clearly are not.
13 I'm about to run out of time.

14 But the average shelter stay in the
15 city is 500 days for an individual, 800 days for a
16 family. I have been in the shelter for 208 days. And
17 I have had over 140 days of just administrative
18 stagnation.

19 So the shelter is what I feel and what
20 I believe is what -- we are helping women. We are not
21 being processed. And we are being held, you know,
22 there.

23 Again, as I said, the City is
24 hemorrhaging money. And there are numerous ways to
25 resolve this issue. And I would be happy to present

1 some of those. I have discovered lots of information
2 and would be happy to share more about that. And I
3 know my time is up.

4 THE CHAIR: Thank you so much, Lauren,
5 for your firsthand testimonial. It's terribly
6 important to receive this direct interaction and
7 direct intervention from those who are on the
8 consuming end of public services.

9 Thank you both for sharing and for your
10 vulnerability.

11 MS. NAPIER: Thank you.

12 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

13 Questions from our commissioners?

14 COMMISSIONER OLIVEIRA: Just a question
15 for you, Lauren.

16 MS. NAPIER: Sure.

17 THE CHAIR: Ana, I have to --

18 COMMISSIONER OLIVEIRA: Sorry. So
19 first of all, thank you so much, Marco, and thank you
20 so much, Lauren.

21 As Chair just said, there's a special
22 value hearing from our consumers, our city
23 members -- people in our city -- in addition to those
24 of us who are working in policy and making
25 recommendations.

1 I wanted to see how we could
2 incorporate some of the experiences that you both
3 shared, each of you, in the recommendations in the
4 charter.

5 So I'm assuming, Marco, that your
6 comments about your experience about restrictive
7 education options --

8 MR. TANG: Yes.

9 COMMISSIONER OLIVEIRA: -- and the
10 quality of that and what that does to individuals and
11 communities is one of the ways that we can look at
12 educational recommendations and guidance and things in
13 the charter. Am I assuming correctly?

14 MR. TANG: Yeah, yeah. There are so
15 many -- so many solutions. There are the Sudbury
16 schools, including one that's in New York
17 City -- Hudson Valley Sudbury School.

18 These people -- the way the Sudbury
19 school works -- it's a democratic school where
20 students and teachers both are equal. Right now they
21 still -- nobody gives a single care -- kid care.

22 They're more likely to smash you in the
23 dirt and make you test, test, test until your eyes
24 fall out. There are so many -- and, like,
25 mental -- if you wanted to, like, crush, bully -- give

1 mental health classes. Give philosophy classes. Give
2 social interaction classes.

3 Why you need just regular -- just throw
4 in to the charter -- like put on to the -- like why?
5 Or what -- or even better, martial arts classes. You
6 know what would be better to crush a bully?

7 How about that? How about black belt?
8 Smash them to the ground. And it's better. Tell them
9 that they're freaking -- that their violence is meant
10 to be used as a last resort. I think martial arts --

11 THE CHAIR: Marco, Marco, I have to
12 give you 20 more seconds to --

13 MR. TANG: Yeah. I know martial arts
14 myself so -- and I still get -- to my -- I have a
15 black belt. But do you want to -- and so much is stop
16 bullying. Too much -- too little for -- too little.
17 This needs to be handled bigger. It is a big ask.
18 But it's something to spark conversation at least.

19 THE CHAIR: Thank you, Marco.

20 And we have --

21 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: Just a
22 clarification from Lauren.

23 MS. NAPIER: Yes?

24 COMMISSIONER GARRIDO: You said the
25 stagnation you felt -- was that at the shelter or was

1 it with the city agencies?

2 MS. NAPIER: The stagnation is with
3 both. There is a -- what I would call a constellation
4 of agencies and operators that are working. They
5 should be working in tandem. But they seem to be
6 working in opposition with each other.

7 There is not continuity or transparency
8 between the agencies. And so there are consistent
9 delays. I think I mentioned -- I wrote it down -- but
10 I have -- I acquired an apartment in March. And it is
11 now June. And I'm still in the shelter because of the
12 administrative delays and the bureaucracy.

13 And so I wanted to -- my frustration
14 exists because the taxpayer is paying for me to reside
15 in the shelter. But they're also paying for my
16 apartment. And I cannot access it.

17 And that is consistent not just with
18 myself, but I can count right now ten people who were
19 eligible to move out of the shelter in -- on June 1st.
20 And we are waiting for HRA to provide checks and
21 documentation. There is some, like I said, some
22 inefficiencies. And I would call it out right here.

23 THE CHAIR: What's the --

24 MS. NAPIER: -- call it -- I'm sorry?

25 THE CHAIR: Just have to wrap up.

1 MS. NAPIER: Okay. I'm sorry. I'll
2 come by --

3 THE CHAIR: Thank you both. Thank you.

4 MS. NAPIER: Thank you.

5 THE CHAIR: Thank you. So an
6 announcement and an apology. I'm inviting Trisha
7 Joyce and Patrick Lyons to testify now. Their
8 testimony will take us over the extended time.

9 We will not have an opportunity to hear
10 from those of you who have waited patiently through
11 this evening. I'd like to ask that if you are still
12 interested in testifying that you can do one of two
13 things.

14 One, submit your testimony in writing
15 or speak to our staff immediately at the conclusion of
16 this meeting. And we will make every effort to
17 advantage you at the next public hearings that we
18 have. So you have an opportunity to speak off record.

19 I'm going to ask the staff to raise
20 your hand now, please, so that -- okay. Thank you.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: It looks like
22 Patrick not be here, so --

23 THE CHAIR: Patrick's not here. So I'd
24 like to ask Karen Q to join us. Karen not being here,
25 I'm going to mispronounce his name. Forgive me. Alao

1 Gransome?

2 MR. GRANSOME: Yeah.

3 THE CHAIR: Thank you. Tricia?

4 MS. JOYCE: Good evening. Thank you
5 all very much. I have to say it's almost disorienting
6 after working and living here 36 years to have a mayor
7 pull together a commission like this.

8 I can't tell how much we appreciate
9 being heard. Anyway, I'm a 36-year resident and
10 business owner in this community district and the
11 chair of the youth and education committee of that
12 community board. Though I'm speaking on my own behalf
13 tonight.

14 I started my business in the early 90s
15 here when this neighborhood was largely an artist
16 district, mixed use -- a lot of commercial warehouses.
17 And it's now become more of a family-friendly
18 neighborhood, largely thanks to a public school that
19 opened on Brent Street just before then.

20 We couldn't have known that ten years
21 after that that we would sustain a terrorist event of
22 epic proportions that not only destroyed much of our
23 infrastructure but sickened our residents, devastated
24 our housing, and our economy here.

25 After 9/11, the City wisely

1 incentivized people to move back down here. But as a
2 result, the financial district alone saw 238 percent
3 growth in 5 years. Just for context, that would've
4 been the largest growing city in the United States of
5 America.

6 The success of that incentivization
7 created challenges the City somehow failed to
8 anticipate. And it was never matched with the
9 infrastructure investment the moment demanded.

10 While we were still recovering, we had
11 to fight for it and get four new schools sited,
12 approved, and built to meet this demand, often through
13 relentless sustained community advocacy and
14 partnerships with our elected officials.

15 Gail, who was one of them -- who was
16 one of our most precious resources. The process for
17 approving schools is something I'd like to expound on
18 at some point when there's more time because it is
19 desperately in need of revision.

20 Schools placed in former post offices
21 in retail stores, which is what we ended up having to
22 do under fire, created resulting infrastructure
23 demands of their own -- pedestrian safety, traffic
24 management, outdoor spaces to evacuate students in
25 fires, fire escapes or fire drills, and crossing

1 guards.

2 Sanitation wasn't properly addressed.
3 Twelve feet of trash stacked up. Affordable housing
4 was completely overlooked as residential conversions
5 were approved at breakneck speed.

6 We are still fighting for many of these
7 things 25 years later. We have no crossing guards at
8 three of the four of our elementary schools. Lower
9 Manhattan pays some of the highest housing costs and
10 taxes in the city. And we can't park in front of our
11 own apartments. Why?

12 THE CHAIR: Please be aware you're at
13 time.

14 MS. JOYCE: Okay. It's because the
15 City -- the city agencies have all of our parking
16 spaces down here. I don't know if people are aware of
17 that.

18 Anyway, I'll wrap up by saying that our
19 hope is that city agencies can work together better
20 and more efficiently, not only in cost but in getting
21 things done in a timely manner.

22 We have experienced unbelievable delays
23 and inefficiencies in about six or seven agencies
24 we've had to work with in this recovery period. Thank
25 you so much.

1 THE CHAIR: Thank you.

2 MR. GRANSOME: Good evening. And thank
3 you to all the Commissioners volunteering their time.
4 Thank you to all the passionate New Yorkers who take
5 time out of their day to contribute to the next
6 chapter of our great city.

7 My name is Aleo Gransome. And I've
8 lived in New York my whole life. I'm testifying today
9 because of the defining crisis of my
10 generation -- housing affordability.

11 There are countless people who, like
12 me, cannot fathom leaving the city. But the cost of
13 housing is making that painful choice the only
14 realistic one.

15 We need to address the housing crisis
16 head-on. And revising the charter is the right tool.
17 New York's problem has never been demand. People want
18 to live here. They always have.

19 The problem we face is lack of supply.
20 There simply are not enough homes to go around. And
21 we've made it prohibitively difficult to build more.
22 The city government needs to get out of its way -- own
23 way, and let New York build.

24 Between 2010 and 2023, permitting a new
25 apartment building took about 18 months. Owners pay

1 taxes, debt service, and insurance the whole time.
2 And projects -- on a shorter timeline simply don't get
3 built.

4 The cause is structural. One project
5 can need separate permits and inspections from the
6 Department of Buildings, from the fire department,
7 from the Department of Environmental Protection
8 Department, the Parks Department, Department of
9 Housing Preservation and Development -- each on its
10 own timeline.

11 On top of this, changing the building
12 code requires a local law from city council, which
13 slows and politicizes what should be just a technical
14 update.

15 This Commission should make DOB, the
16 Department of Buildings, the single permitting and
17 inspection authority for construction. Agencies would
18 keep their own standards.

19 But DOB would administer them and
20 administer all the inspections. The Commission would
21 also -- should also let DOB update the construction
22 and building codes by simple rule adoption. And this
23 would mirror the states currently. Thank you.

24 THE CHAIR: Thank you. No final
25 questions for our panelists. Thank you so much for

1 your testimony. Thank you to everyone for your
2 testimony this evening.

3 The next public hearing of this
4 Commission will be held tomorrow evening in the Bronx
5 at 5:00 p.m. at Fordham University in the Machine
6 Campus Center at 441 East Fordham Road.

7 It will focus on streamlining the
8 experience of working with government for small
9 businesses and community organizations like today. We
10 will welcome testimony from all New Yorkers on topics
11 related to the charter.

12 I'd like to ask for a motion to adjourn
13 this meeting.

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 13: So moved.

15 THE CHAIR: Is there a second?

16 COMMISSIONER MESSINGER: I second.

17 THE CHAIR: All in favor?

18 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Aye.

19 THE CHAIR: Thank you. We are
20 adjourned.

21 (Whereupon, at 8:24 p.m., the
22 proceeding was concluded.)
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE

I, ABAGAIL RODRIGUEZ, 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.



ABAGAIL RODRIGUEZ

Notary Public in and for the
State of New York

CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIBER

I, LEANN TRUMBLE, 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.



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