

Exec General Workspace - Charter Revision Commission

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

Tuesday, June 30, 2026

5:23 p.m.

Medgar Evers College

1650 Bedford Avenue

Brooklyn, NY 11225

Reported by: Paul Grasso

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A P P E A R A N C E S

List of Attendees:

Patrick Gaspard, Chair

Emma Wolfe, Vice Chair

Esther Roasrio, Commissioner

Ruth Messinger, Commissioner

Theodore Moore, Commissioner

Kapil Logani, Commissioner

Barika Williams, Commissioner

Kathryn Wylde, Commissioner (by videoconference)

Marco Carrion, Commissioner

Henry Garrido, Commissioner (by videoconference)

Marc Shaw, Commissioner (by videoconference)

Juan Carlos Castanede, Spanish Interpreter/Public

Attendee Testimony

Nadia Shihata, Commissioner of the Department of
Investigation

Ronald Shiffman, Public Attendee Testimony

Eve Baron, Public Attendee Testimony

Caroline Donnola, Public Attendee Testimony

Nancy Wang, Public Attendee Testimony

Celina Su, Public Attendee Testimony

Yvonne Murray, Public Attendee Testimony

Vanessa Rudin, Public Attendee Testimony

Liz Peralta, Public Attendee Testimony

1 Mayna Bragdon, Public Attendee Testimony
2 Angel Martinez, Public Attendee Testimony
3 Pritha Mukherji, Public Attendee Testimony
4 Carolina Salguero, Public Attendee Testimony
5 Tamara Al-Sharji, Public Attendee Testimony
6 Saunders Riffin, Public Attendee Testimony
7 PJ Berg, Deputy Commissioner of Real Estate Services
8 Fabricio Caro, Chief of Staff to Commissioner of FDNY
9 (by videoconference)
10 Olivia Goldberg, Public Attendee Testimony (by
11 videoconference)
12 Paul Hoti, Public Attendee Testimony (by
13 videoconference)
14 Jonathan Burke, Public Attendee Testimony (by
15 videoconference)
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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. GASPARD: Apologies for our delay.
3 We're having a slight -- technical difficulty at the
4 start so I sincerely apologize to that. It is
5 wonderful to see all of you at Medgar Evers College.

6 My name is Patrick Gaspard and I am
7 honored to be the chair of this commission on
8 government efficiency. We're here today because all
9 of us know and understand that New Yorkers deserve and
10 need a government of the possible.

11 One that can help build urgent
12 infrastructure, promote small business growth and make
13 the city more livable and accessible for all who are
14 in it. The task we're going to undertake is a
15 complete top to bottom review of the entire charter of
16 the City of New York to build that 21st century
17 government that New Yorkers need.

18 Once we conclude our process, we'll
19 make a set of recommendations to all New -- to the
20 mayor, and to all New Yorkers that will then appear on
21 the ballot in November. And only if voters agree with
22 those changes at an election will any of those changes
23 come into effect with the -- with the full force of --
24 of the law.

25 I know that I speak for my fellow

1 commissioners when I say that we're all committed to
2 hearing from a broad cross section of New Yorkers and
3 to pursue the very best ideas that come before us no
4 matter what the source of those ideas are.

5 This is a non-partisan commission that,
6 you know, I'm -- I'm really proud to be a part of
7 because it represents the very finest of New York
8 public service. It's an independent commission and
9 it's comprised of New Yorkers who have volunteered
10 their time over the last many weeks to attend hearings
11 across the city.

12 To date, we have had several hearings
13 that have been attended by more than 650 New Yorkers.
14 Over 220 of them have submitted written testimony to
15 this commission. We have engaged in over 14 hours of
16 live testimony at those hearings, and I'm excited to
17 see what you will contribute to this process.

18 Joining me in this task are 14 other
19 commissioners. They are vice chair Emma Wolfe, Marco
20 Carrion, Kapil Longani, Ruth Messinger, Theodore
21 Moore, Esther Rosario, Barika Williams, attending
22 virtually tonight are commissioners Henry Garrido,
23 Mark Shore, Kathy Wylde, and absent this evening but
24 important voting members of this commission, are
25 secretary of the commission, Susan Kang, Dawn Pinnock,

1 Carlina Rivera, Ana Oliveira.

2 Although, as I said, we will be
3 considering the entirety of the New York City Charter,
4 we're looking in particular at the processes and
5 procedures in the charter that can be updated and need
6 to be updated to deliver a more efficient government
7 to serve New Yorkers with excellence.

8 Towards that end, today we are focusing
9 on unlocking public space. Public space is about how
10 we all live together. It's our connective tissue, the
11 places where we see each other, the places where we
12 hear each other, the places that we're able to convene
13 and, certainly, spaces, infrastructure like this one.

14 As we welcome testimony that has
15 that -- specificity of focus, we are also holding
16 space open for any testimony on any issues that impact
17 the charter directly.

18 In the hearings that we've been
19 privileged to preside over the last several weeks,
20 we've had remarkable New Yorkers, small business
21 owners, folks who are working in the healthcare
22 industry, everyday working New Yorkers who are
23 consumers of public services, we have then come and
24 testify on things that are not specifically charter
25 related.

1 And the excellent staff that we have at
2 COGE are taking in their information, because there
3 are a set of recommendations separate and apart from
4 our charter recommendations that will go to the mayor
5 and to the commissioners of agencies to help them
6 appreciate how New Yorkers are experiencing the
7 delivery of services and their interface with those
8 agencies to look for means of improvement that are
9 outside of the charter purview.

10 Tonight, as we go through this hearing,
11 we're going to begin with some expert testimony that
12 we have from the Department of Citywide Administrative
13 Services on unlocking public space, and then we'll
14 have additional testimony from -- we'll have questions
15 from the commission and there's additional testimony
16 that we'll receive from -- from the fire department
17 of -- of New York as well.

18 For members of the public, when I call
19 your name and I ask you to come to testify I will
20 invite you in pairs, whether you're in-person or
21 online. We'll cycle back and forth based on the
22 questions and the frequency of -- of sign-ons online.

23 We'll go back and forth between those
24 who are in the room and those who are joining us
25 remotely. I will ask that you observe the three

1 minute clock that you can see right here for your
2 testimony. You're not to exceed the three minutes --
3 minutes.

4 I'm going to press you to really adhere
5 to that, to really observe that so that we can get as
6 much testimony in as possible due to the course of
7 this evening. I'd like to ask the commission --
8 members of the commission to hold off on a -- on a
9 vote to approve the minutes of our last meeting.

10 We'll push that towards by the end of
11 this so that we can move directly into testimony
12 following our brief delay. I know that we are joined
13 this evening by the commissioner from the Department
14 of Investigations as well, who I will invite to
15 testify at the very top of this hearing and then we'll
16 turn to our experts.

17 Commissioner, if you're present, Nadia
18 Shihata, I welcome you to beginning this hearing and,
19 again, I apologize for the technical delay that we had
20 at the very start.

21 Good evening, Commissioner.

22 MS. SHIHATA: Good evening.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 1: Good evening.

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: Good evening.

25 MS. SHIHATA: My name is Nadia Shihata

1 and I'm the commissioner of the Department of
2 Investigation. Thank you to Chair Gaspard and all the
3 commission members for this opportunity to discuss
4 several proposals that would further strengthen the
5 independence of DOI, the city's inspector general that
6 investigates corruption, fraud, waste and abuse
7 involving New York City government.

8 DOI provides robust oversight by
9 conducting objective fact-finding investigations,
10 holding responsible those who seek to compromise the
11 integrity of city government, and issuing
12 recommendations for policy and procedural reforms.

13 Our broad oversight and ability to
14 follow the facts wherever they lead are unlike any
15 other oversight agency in New York City. Corruption
16 in city government inherently undercuts efficiency and
17 the ability of government to reach and positively
18 impact everyday New Yorkers.

19 Consistently, through our
20 investigations DOI sees how this plays out. Every
21 taxpayer dollar that a vendor fraudulently overbills
22 the city is a dollar that is not being spent on city
23 services.

24 Each inspection that is bumped to the
25 front of the line because an inspector takes a bribe

1 means that other small businesses and homeowners who
2 play by the rules have to wait longer for their turn.

3 And each time an agency or a senior
4 city official violates the laws, rules and regulations
5 governing their conduct it erodes New Yorkers faith
6 and trust in their city government.

7 DOI exists to ensure accountability to
8 identify and prevent waste, incompetence and
9 corruption and to prompt government reform in real
10 time. DOI's investigations and factual findings can
11 lead to criminal prosecutions, disciplinary
12 proceedings or other administrative actions.

13 Where relevant and appropriate based on
14 these findings, DOI also drives reform by making
15 policy and procedure recommendations to city agencies
16 aimed at addressing corruption vulnerabilities or
17 otherwise improving government efficiency.

18 In addition to criminal and
19 disciplinary investigations, DOI investigates
20 potential conflicts of interest that may result in
21 referrals to the Conflicts of Interest Board, conducts
22 background investigations for certain -- certain city
23 employees, such as those in high level and sensitive
24 positions, provides vendor name checks of city funded
25 vendors to agency procurement officers and oversees

1 integrity monitorships of certain integrity
2 compromised vendors or large-scale city projects.

3 Our public reports provide critical
4 transparency about city government and enhance the
5 public's confidence by ensuring that corruption risks
6 and inefficiencies are brought to light and
7 appropriately addressed.

8 Through these functions, DOI plays an
9 indispensable role in ensuring the accountability of
10 city government. We are the investigate --
11 investigatory body for the COIB and thus bear almost
12 sole responsibility for investigating conflict of
13 interest cases.

14 Both local and federal prosecutors
15 routinely seek our expertise by partnering with us on
16 public corruption investigations. And our
17 investigations lead to policy recommendations that are
18 grounded in actual tangible identified frauds on city
19 programs rather than the more traditional auditing
20 work done by other oversight entities like the
21 Comptroller. DOI's independence --

22 MR. GASPARD: Commissioner?

23 MS. SHIHATA: Yes?

24 MR. GASPARD: I'm really sorry to
25 interrupt your testimony, but apparently your

1 microphone is too -- a little too far away from you
2 and that is making it difficult for those who are
3 online to be able to hear all the important things
4 you're saying.

5 MS. SHIHATA: Apologies.

6 MR. GASPARD: If you could pull it
7 up --

8 MS. SHIHATA: Hopefully, this is
9 better.

10 MR. GASPARD: Yeah. That's much
11 better. Thank you.

12 MS. SHIHATA: Okay. DOI's independence
13 from one of the very entities it oversees, City Hall,
14 is at the heart of all the work we do. It instills
15 public confidence in our work, ensuring that our
16 findings are unbiased, free from undue influence and
17 based solely on the facts and the best interests of
18 the city.

19 DOI's independence is already supported
20 by the city's charter and a number of executive orders
21 and the agencies has -- has maintained its
22 independence throughout our 150-year history.

23 I am here to urge the commission to
24 consider four additional changes that would strengthen
25 DOI's independence and which are also aligned with

1 best practices within the oversight and inspector
2 general profession and the mission of this commission.

3 These proposals are not new. My
4 predecessor, Commissioner Jocelyn Strauber, put them
5 forth to the commission to strengthen local democracy
6 just over one year ago. That commission broadly
7 adopted the proposals in its final report to wide
8 public support.

9 There are four core proposals, each of
10 which would require a change to -- in the city
11 charter. First, DOI should be afforded budget
12 independence to reduce the risk of city hall or the
13 city council interference or retaliation against DOI
14 through control of the agency's budget and staffing.

15 To be clear, I am not suggesting that
16 DOI has been the target of retaliation in the budget
17 process during my brief tenure or during Commissioner
18 Strauber's tenure.

19 However, I believe it is fair to say
20 that our budgetary needs have not been made a priority
21 in light of the severe and significant cuts that the
22 agency has faced over the past five years and
23 continues to face.

24 These budgetary challenges have
25 significantly impacted DOI's ability to hire and to

1 retain employees, and the constant shifts in the
2 city's approach to hiring have made long-term planning
3 with respect to staffing difficult, if not impossible.

4 The approval process for hiring,
5 promotions or raises, other than personal services
6 spending and capital funding, is generally burdensome
7 and time consuming, including for requests within our
8 existing budget.

9 It also hinders our ability to conduct
10 proactive investigations, such as reviews of large
11 amounts of data that allow us to identify
12 inefficiencies and waste early on.

13 In advance of putting forth these
14 proposals last year, DOI conducted a preliminary
15 analysis regarding the best model for an independent
16 budget and concluded that an appropriate and
17 independent budget is best established by determining
18 DOI's budget as a percentage of the city budget.

19 This would not be a novel approach.
20 The inspector general for the City of Chicago's budget
21 is set in this way, for example, as is the New Orleans
22 Office of the Inspector General.

23 It is also important to note that
24 budgetary independence for oversight agencies is a
25 feature of many city institutions such as the City

1 Campaign Finance Board, which sets its own budget, and
2 the Independent Budget Office, whose funding is a set
3 percentage of the budget of the Office of Management
4 and Budget.

5 Funding DOI at an appropriate
6 percentage of the city budget and giving DOI full
7 control over its hiring and spending would safeguard
8 DOI's independence and reinforce the city's commitment
9 to rooting out and preventing fraud, waste and abuse.

10 DOI initially proposed that the agency
11 should be funded at approximately seven to eight one-
12 hundredths of 1 percent of the city -- city's budget,
13 and the commission to strengthen local democracy,
14 ultimately adopted a proposal of six one-hundredths of
15 1 percent of the city budget, which would bring DOI's
16 budget back to roughly the proportion of the city
17 budget it was in fiscal year 2021.

18 That would be a 0.06 percent of the
19 more than \$124.7 billion that the city plans on
20 spending in fiscal year 2027, or \$74.8 million which,
21 in our view, is a modest investment in absolute terms
22 and a -- and relative to the value DOI provides.

23 By comparison, the inspector general
24 for the City of Chicago's budget is fixed at 0.14
25 percent of Chicago's budget, almost 2.5 times higher

1 than our requested benchmark.

2 MR. GASPARD: Commissioner, I'm going
3 to abuse the privilege for -- for just a moment of --

4 MS. SHIHATA: Sure.

5 MR. GASPARD: Of having the imaginary
6 gavel. I know that your point on independent --
7 independent budgeting is your first of four different
8 points.

9 I wonder if you could just give us the
10 top line of those points given that you're submitting
11 the testimony, and I -- I can make a commitment to you
12 to meet with you and I'm sure other members of the
13 commission will want to -- to engage directly with you
14 as well --

15 MS. SHIHATA: Sure.

16 MR. GASPARD: For a more fulsome sense
17 of the challenges and the opportunities that you see
18 in this charter reform.

19 MS. SHIHATA: Sure.

20 Our second proposal is that the charter
21 should be amended to expand and strengthen the
22 control -- controls around the mayor's authority to
23 remove the DOI commissioner.

24 And essentially it would be a removal
25 for cause with an opportunity for a public hearing and

1 a statement of reasons from the mayor as well.

2 The third proposal is that the charter
3 should establish a tenure of five years for the DOI
4 commissioner so that the commissioner's term would
5 span administration's, thereby limiting the risk that
6 a DOI commissioner would be subject to improper
7 influence or retaliation by any mayoral
8 administration.

9 And the fourth is that the charter
10 should be amended to codify some of the provisions and
11 authorities granted to DOI through the mayoral
12 executive orders.

13 In particular, we'd ask for
14 consideration of -- of putting in the charter
15 employee's obligation to cooperate with DOI, the
16 consolidation of all agencies inspectors general
17 within DOI and DOI's access to agency data and
18 records.

19 In the interest of time, I will -- I
20 will conclude with the following. Commissioner --
21 former DOI Commissioner Logani -- sorry, Commissioner
22 Logani noted in one of this commission's earlier
23 meetings that New York City's oversight system is
24 among the best in the country, a comment that I
25 wholeheartedly agree with, and urge the city to

1 continue advancing through the reforms I discussed.

2 When Mayor Mamdani nominated me to lead
3 DOI, he described a new era of government where my
4 appointment would hold city government to the highest
5 standard as well as -- as well as, and I quote, "help
6 usher in a new era of accountability as we build a
7 government that -- that New Yorkers can trust."

8 The reforms I outlined earlier do just
9 that. They were adopted by the previous -- charter
10 revision commission and ensure New York City continues
11 to be at the forefront of this important area.

12 Strengthening DOI's independence is
13 part of that new era of accountability and a new era
14 of government that fully embraces the value of
15 oversight and its ability to protect and improve city
16 government.

17 I want to thank the commission for
18 considering these changes and, of course, will be
19 happy to answer any questions.

20 MR. GASPARD: Commissioner, thank you
21 so much for that testimony. My apologies, again, for
22 having to compel you to present it in an abbreviated
23 fashion.

24 I'd like to ask whether or not any of
25 our commissioners have any questions for you?

1 Ruth.

2 MS. MESSINGER: I do.

3 Commissioner, thank you -- first of
4 all, thank you for getting this to us in advance.
5 Thank you for how clear it is. Thank you for having
6 very specific charter relevant recommendations.

7 I'm a big supporter of the percentage
8 set aside since I had something to do with -- that we
9 set aside for the Independent Budget Office; whatever
10 years that was, 30 years ago.

11 I would like a little more information
12 from you either now if the -- if the Chair allows or
13 in writing about the items in your fourth proposal,
14 which sound all like things we could codify.

15 And I'm particularly interested in
16 the -- obviously, you should codify people's
17 obligation to cooperate with you, but I'm particularly
18 interested in the consolidation of all agencies
19 inspectors general because I'm sort of interested in
20 how that works.

21 You can't do the whole city, obviously,
22 you know, out of one office. Every agency has an
23 inspector general and I'm just sort of interested in
24 how that part of the system has been working and why
25 you recommend bringing them all together or how --

1 what -- what do you envision us doing.

2 MS. SHIHATA: Yeah. So this is
3 already -- I'm sorry if --

4 MR. GASPARD: No, please. Yeah.
5 Please respond --

6 MS. SHIHATA: This is already in
7 existence right now by -- by executive order.

8 MS. MESSINGER: Okay.

9 MS. SHIHATA: All of the inspectors
10 general are within DOI at this time and so this would
11 just be to codify that in the city charter. So it --
12 it's -- it's been ongoing for quite some time. It's
13 working quite well and we'd just like to see it
14 codified in the charter.

15 MS. MESSINGER: Thank you.

16 MR. GASPARD: Theodore.

17 MR. MOORE: Good evening. Thank you
18 very much. I wanted to ask a quick question on the --
19 on the budget independence. I understand the need to,
20 kind of, create a -- a budget floor so that there's,
21 you know, guaranteed funding every year.

22 Is there a possibility that a proposal
23 like this also creates a -- a budget ceiling and then
24 in years when there is -- is more need you would have
25 that and not be able to go -- go above that?

1 Could you explain like what -- what
2 would necessarily be done in a year where maybe we saw
3 a need for DOI to have more funding but there's that
4 percentage in there?

5 MS. SHIHATA: Yeah. I mean, I -- I
6 think were that to be the case we would be able to
7 engage in the sort of advocacy we currently engage in
8 with respect to our budget every year where we are
9 putting forth what our needs are. And -- and so I
10 don't think this would limit our ability to do that
11 would -- would -- should we need more funding.

12 But, honestly, to get the 0.06 percent
13 would be a game changer for us because it would really
14 establish that minimum, which is significantly above
15 what we currently -- our current budget is, that it
16 would make a huge difference in our ability to conduct
17 the oversight that the city charter expects of us.

18 MR. GASPARD: Great. Thank you so much
19 commissioner for your testimony. Again, I'm very much
20 looking forward to the conversations that we will soon
21 have about your recommendations.

22 MS. SHIHATA: Thank you so much.

23 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

24 We're going to now move to our expert
25 testimony on our -- our public infrastructure. We're

1 going to -- we will start with PJ Berg, deputy
2 commissioner of Real Estate Services from the
3 Department of Citywide Administrative Services, and
4 that will be followed by testimony from Fabricio Caro,
5 chief of staff to the commissioner of the fire
6 department.

7 MR. BERG: Good evening Chair Gaspard,
8 commissioners and staff. Thank you for the
9 opportunity to testify today on behalf of the New York
10 City Department of Citywide Administrative Services or
11 DCAS. My name's PJ Berg and I'm the deputy
12 commissioner for Real Estate Services.

13 DCAS is responsible for supporting the
14 real estate needs of our city government through
15 acquisition, leasing and management and property used
16 to deliver essential public -- services.

17 We oversee 56 public buildings and
18 approximately 24 million square feet of lease space,
19 operational facilities, courts, municipal assets and
20 offices. Our agency also manages the city's surplus
21 property portfolio.

22 We have a disposition -- program
23 meaning -- the process by which we sell or lease land
24 that we no longer use, which helps -- underutilized
25 properties to productive use while generating revenue

1 and putting properties on the tax rolls.

2 DCAS owns approximately 1800 of these
3 surplus properties, such as small vacant lots, parking
4 lots and a few abandoned buildings unsuitable for city
5 use. These properties continue to require
6 maintenance. For instance, snow and ice removal,
7 fencing, pest control, tree pruning, it goes on.

8 DCAS does our best to maintain these
9 properties, but given the scale of what we have to
10 manage they often fall into disrepair and can become
11 an eyesore for neighbors and the surrounding
12 community. I brought some photos. Can someone
13 from -- oh, there we go.

14 So we have vacant parcels with a
15 recurring need for trash and vegetation removal, tree
16 maintenance. Dilapidated vacant facilities that can't
17 serve agency needs right now have languished in our
18 portfolio.

19 And city-owned lots that are useful to
20 nearby community-based organizations, and we want to
21 let them use them, but the owners processed for
22 leasing out the property even for a term of only a few
23 years, impedes the city from entering into sensible
24 agreements with our neighborhood partners.

25 These examples represent missed

1 opportunities both for the city, which loses out on
2 income, and adjacent homeowners or businesses, which
3 miss out on putting the property to productive use.

4 So as many of you know, DCAS must
5 obtain approval under charter Section 197-C or ULURP
6 to sell or lease surplus property. Then we also have
7 to take projects through a second approval process
8 under charter Section 824 on the business terms of the
9 sale or lease.

10 The secondary approval process can add
11 many months to a project. Let me be clear, oversight
12 and public input are critical, but the commission
13 should study whether these processes achieve either of
14 these goals.

15 Since December '22, DCAS has held 34 of
16 these Section 824 hearings and received testimony in
17 only two. In both of those hearings, the testimony
18 supported our disposition. The administrative
19 requirements associated with these hearings also --
20 extended transaction timelines.

21 I will skip over the number of days for
22 each step in the interest of time, but it's many days.
23 I just want to say it's a one size fits all charter
24 requirement that applies, whether we're leasing out a
25 small lot, transferring development rights or selling

1 one of our crown jewel multi-million dollar
2 properties.

3 Moving on to my second point, current
4 laws also place the city at a competitive disadvantage
5 when we seek to lease office space for our municipal
6 workforce.

7 Charter Section 195 requires the city
8 planning commission to hold a hearing and approve
9 office leases and purchases, even if the city's moving
10 office workers into an existing commercial office
11 building with no change of use.

12 After the city planning commission
13 approves the office space acquisition, we're back to
14 that 824 hearing and multiple other steps. All told,
15 this series of notifications and reviews adds up to
16 more than three months and in practice it can delay
17 entering into an office lease for far longer due to
18 prep time.

19 In a recent case, the approvals added a
20 year to our leasing process. Because no private
21 entity is subject to these requirements, the city's at
22 a competitive disadvantage when looking for office
23 space, resulting in more expensive rents and causing
24 us to lose out on properties that would've been
25 financially or programmatically advantageous to the

1 city.

2 I want to emphasize these challenges
3 are not superficial. DCAS is currently managing
4 approximately 100 active agency requests for new
5 space, spaces that they could use to deliver policy
6 goals, and over the next three years we have 130
7 existing leases scheduled to expire that need to be
8 renewed or removed.

9 When the lease transaction process is
10 delayed the city often finds itself as a holdover
11 tenant, paying penalty rent that exceeds market value
12 and avoidable costs borne by taxpayers. And we're
13 currently holding over on approximately 50 leases
14 where we need a solution.

15 The volume of leasing activity and need
16 to reduce the city's reliance on holdover leases
17 underscores the importance and necessity of an
18 efficient leasing process.

19 Just to share some recent examples
20 where we've lost opportunities to secure desirable
21 space, and I do want to exclude identifying details
22 because we remain in the market for negotiated
23 solutions, we were in advanced talks to lease office
24 space for a city agency, but the building up -- ended
25 up changing owners before we could execute the lease

1 and the new owner was not interested in leasing to the
2 city.

3 Similarly, we were far along in a lease
4 negotiation but the owner had an impending financing
5 deadline and then ultimately had to decide to
6 reposition the building instead of leasing to the
7 city.

8 Again, public input and accountability
9 are essential but the charter's current requirements,
10 which involve a series of poorly attended hearings,
11 cause delay without balancing a clear corresponding
12 benefit.

13 So I'm here today to ask the charter
14 revision commission to take the opportunity to
15 modernize these provisions and ensure that the city
16 can operate with speed, efficiency and flexibility.
17 Thank you for the opportunity.

18 MR. GASPARD: Thank you for joining us,
19 Deputy Commissioner. Are you -- are you able to
20 quantify in -- in budget terms what this -- what we
21 think the impact has been over the course of the last
22 few years of these delays and the other obstacles that
23 you described?

24 MR. BERG: On our sale program, in FY
25 25 we spent about \$2 million maintaining overgrown

1 surplus lots that we would rather not own and,
2 frankly, that number should have been higher because
3 neighbors deserved better maintained properties than
4 what we were able to deliver.

5 And on leases, I mentioned that we're
6 in holdover on 50 leases and holdover rent is between
7 25 and 50 percent above market. So sometimes we're
8 perversely having to stay put because we don't have
9 approval to move, but the landlord knows that we're in
10 a tough spot.

11 MR. GASPARD: Yeah. Of course.
12 Thank -- thank you.

13 Commissioners? Ruth?

14 MR. LONGANI: Just following up on --
15 on the Chair's question. So you said there was 50
16 holdover leases currently. Are you suggesting that
17 the -- that the commission should consider eliminating
18 that -- those second hearing, those 824 hearings?

19 MR. BERG: I think that's a -- a worthy
20 idea to consider. Yes.

21 MR. LONGANI: With replacing it with
22 something else or just eliminate them altogether?

23 MR. BERG: So, look, we remain subject
24 first to budgeting. When we go out to look for
25 leases, agencies are working within a budget and we

1 know what budget. That budget is something that the
2 city council works hard to oversee and -- and agencies
3 remain subject to council oversight on that.

4 In addition, the comptroller audits
5 DCAS and registers every lease because a lease, like
6 every city contract, has to be registered to become
7 effective. So I would submit that we remain under a
8 lot of oversight, but we're happy to discuss with the
9 commission what additional, you know, measures could
10 be taken in lieu of a -- a 824 hearing.

11 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

12 Ruth?

13 MS. MESSINGER: Thank you. That was
14 very, very clear and I'm delighted if we could make
15 that process more efficient.

16 I just -- there's one question from old
17 history, and it might be irrelevant to this, but does
18 it remain possible for the city to make a
19 determination that in some instances it will make a
20 property available to a non-for-profit organization or
21 a community-based organization for other than the
22 highest and best rent?

23 MR. BERG: Yes. With a lot of
24 restrictions, including it has to be terminable at
25 will, which really handcuffs organizations that want

1 to make capital improvements.

2 MS. MESSINGER: Good. I would love to
3 get some more information about that, having lived
4 through an era when we actually turned over a lot of
5 city-owned buildings to tenants quite successfully for
6 no money at all.

7 MR. BERG: Sure. We'd be happy to give
8 you more details on our CBO programs.

9 MS. MESSINGER: Thank you.

10 MR. GASPARD: Please.

11 MS. WILLIAMS: So I -- I guess two
12 questions. So on the charter 197-C, understanding
13 that there's a desire to, sort of, break apart the
14 fact that potentially there's two ULURP points; so one
15 at disposition and then the second one if the property
16 needs to go through an additional you look to change
17 its FAR or uses.

18 Is there any -- or, well, I guess I
19 want to ask, you also talked about your crown jewels.
20 So I want to understand how many crown jewels are
21 there and would you all propose using -- or a
22 different process for your crown jewels as opposed to
23 most of the probably smaller, more standard
24 properties?

25 MR. BERG: I think every New Yorker

1 would have a different answer to how many crown jewels
2 there are.

3 MS. WILLIAMS: That's fair.

4 MR. BERG: So you make a great point,
5 which is the disposition on its own, disposition of
6 city property, on its own is a 197-C ULURP action and
7 change of use, change of zoning is another ULURP of
8 action. And so that is, you know, worthy of studying
9 whether both of those need to apply.

10 And then the other point is that it's
11 a -- it's a one-size fit all disposition ULURP.
12 Whether DCAS is trying to lease a parking lot to a
13 religious school for their school buses for a term of
14 three years or we're trying to sell a crown jewel.

15 MS. WILLIAMS: Do you think -- do you
16 have data on -- that you could provide to the
17 commission on square footage of the different sizes
18 and/or building square footage for lots that have
19 existing buildings on them?

20 I think it would just be helpful for us
21 to understand how much these are small -- sort of
22 small lots versus larger parcels versus big buildings
23 and small buildings.

24 MR. BERG: Absolutely. So I mentioned
25 that we have 1800 surplus properties and we can

1 absolutely get some data to you on the size. And none
2 of those surplus properties, by the way, are -- are --
3 contain valuable buildings.

4 MR. GASPARD: Any other questions,
5 commissioners?

6 Thank you so very much, PJ. I -- I
7 understand that the chief of staff to the commissioner
8 of the FDNY's statement or presentation will augment
9 some of what you said. So I'd ask you to please stay
10 with us, PJ, in case there's any need for you to come
11 back in.

12 MR. BERG: I'd be delighted to.

13 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

14 Fabricio, and -- and forgive me if I
15 mispronounce your first or last name, Fabricio Caro,
16 chief of staff to commissioner of FDNY, joining us
17 virtually.

18 MR. CARO: Yes. Good evening. Do you
19 hear me?

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 3: Yes.

21 MR. GASPARD: We can hear you. Yes.

22 MR. CARO: Perfect. Apologies because
23 I'm in commute, but I did want to take the opportunity
24 to testify. So good evening, Chair Gaspard and
25 members of the commission. My name is Fabricio Caro,

1 chief of staff to the fire commissioner FDNY,
2 testifying this evening in support of the development
3 rights proposal.

4 It's simple. I mean, with the FDNY, we
5 love being part of the community and essentially as a
6 staple in the community as public first responders, we
7 will not be leaving. FDNY has a number of landmark
8 firehouses, which are iconic buildings that are
9 fixtures of their neighborhoods.

10 City laws authorize a process for
11 landmark buildings to sell their unused development
12 rights. We would like to use this process to fund
13 maintenance of our landmark firehouses.

14 In 2024, the zoning resolution was
15 amended to provide a more streamlined approval process
16 for transfers of development rights from individual
17 landmarks, but the city is not able to make use of
18 this streamlined process, leaving city-owned landmarks
19 at a unique disadvantage.

20 The transfer of development rights
21 requires a maintenance program. This would help
22 ensure that the sale of rights will inure to the
23 benefit of our landmarks by providing financial
24 assistance to help repair and ensure the long term
25 maintenance of our landmarks.

1 This gives FDNY the funding opportunity
2 to enhance our firehouses and to continue to maintain
3 our landmark buildings and have them be part of the
4 community for many years.

5 Again, thank you for the opportunity
6 to, basically, be able to provide testimony today.
7 I'll take any questions.

8 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much,
9 Fabricio.

10 Any -- any questions, please?

11 MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you. I just want
12 to clarify. So understanding and -- and appreciating
13 the desire to be able to support landmark firehouses,
14 wanting to understand for the transfer, but for the
15 TDR, for the transfer of development rights, is this
16 already baked in or would some -- would a -- after the
17 sale go through an additional process to approve
18 transfer development rights?

19 Is it already built into these sites
20 and there has already been developments rights
21 transferred to them that you all want to utilize or
22 would you want to dispose of the site that then
23 potentially is eligible for new development rights?

24 MR. CARO: I think it's -- it's the --
25 and repeat it again because you're -- you were

1 breaking up a little bit.

2 MS. WILLIAMS: So I'm trying to
3 understand if the development rights have already been
4 provided to the lot and you all want to sell to be
5 able to take advantage of that or if you're selling
6 and then that site can receive development rights.

7 What I'm trying to understand is could
8 you be disposing of this site and then the
9 neighborhood has something that is, you know, three to
10 five additional FAR with no public process or is there
11 going to -- would there still be required public
12 process in order for the TDR to happen?

13 MR. CARO: I -- I would have to confirm
14 with our -- our facilities and our budget folks and I
15 can follow up with you on that. I don't have that
16 information in front of me --

17 MS. WILLIAMS: I understand that.
18 Thank you.

19 MR. GASPARD: Any other questions,
20 commissioners?

21 Thank you both for your testimony. We
22 look very -- we very much look forward to continued
23 engagement with you on these issues. Thank you.

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: Thank you.

25 MR. GASPARD: We'll now turn to

1 testimony from the public. I will call you two at a
2 time to testify and, again, we'll ask you to pay close
3 attention to the three minute countdown clock.

4 The first two members of the public,
5 one is an old friend, Ronald Shiffman, and Eve Baron.
6 I shouldn't say one is an old friend. I should say
7 one is like a known legend.

8 MR. SHIFFMAN: I think old is very
9 appropriate.

10 MR. GASPARD: Ron, it's so very, like,
11 exciting to see you.

12 MR. SHIFFMAN: Thank you.

13 MR. GASPARD: Great to see you.

14 MR. SHIFFMAN: My name is Ron Shiffman.
15 I -- I'm --

16 MR. GASPARD: Let's pull the microphone
17 closer.

18 MR. SHIFFMAN: First of all, I would
19 really like to thank you all for being -- playing the
20 role that you're all playing. This commission and the
21 membership of this commission is really very, I think,
22 an example of the progressive nature of our government
23 today and it's something I really applaud.

24 I've worked with community-based
25 organizations for over 60 years and I'm a professor

1 emeritus at Pratt. I know many of you so I'm not
2 going to go into detail about who I am.

3 But I urge this commission to define
4 government efficiency, not simply as faster approvals
5 or fewer procedural steps, but as a capacity of public
6 institutions to deliver justice, repair longstanding
7 inequities and serve all New Yorkers.

8 As part of the charter revision, the
9 commission should examine structure, accountability
10 and public obligations of quasi-independent agencies
11 such as the New York City Economic Development
12 Corporation and other public benefit or development
13 authorities.

14 These entities exercise public powers,
15 control or influence public land and shape the city's
16 economic future. But often they're not accountable.

17 Their mandates must therefore be
18 aligned with economic, racial and environmental
19 justice with the principle that housing is a right not
20 just a commodity and with the obligation that public
21 land and public authority be there to benefit all New
22 Yorkers, not only those that are powerful and well
23 connected.

24 Their actions should also be governed
25 by clear environmental justice principles, meaning

1 community accountability, respect for indigenous and
2 community-based organizations, the histories of
3 leadership, wherever that public -- wherever that
4 public decision affect land, water, culture and
5 community life.

6 The commission should also support the
7 city's ability to capture publicly created value for
8 public purposes. The sale of public land should be
9 for the public benefit, not just for the benefiting a
10 few.

11 One important tool that I would suggest
12 is -- this city begin to take hold of is to look at
13 New York State's existing stock transfer tax, a tax on
14 financial transactions. The mechanism already exists
15 but the revenue is rebated rather than dedicated to
16 urgent public needs. A small financial transaction
17 tax, roughly one-tenth of 1 percent exists on the
18 books.

19 We collect it every day but we rebate
20 it. That would be a minimal tax on -- financial
21 transactions that could benefit and allow for us to
22 rehabilitate public housing, to develop the kind of
23 infrastructure we need, to build climate resilience
24 and in the industrial capacity, to build our future.
25 That revenue should be used for --

1 MR. GASPARD: Ron, Ron. You're -- but
2 I'm going to allow you to --

3 MR. SHIFFMAN: Okay. I have just
4 two -- two paragraphs more; all right?

5 That revenue should be used for capital
6 investments the private market will not make on its
7 own. This is -- also, it's essential in the age of
8 artificial intelligence. AI and automation may create
9 enormous wealth but without public action that wealth
10 will be concentrated among a few corporations and
11 investors while workers and communities face growing
12 insecurity.

13 I would suggest that we -- what we
14 basically do here is look at how we can use our
15 charter to democratize capital and to make sure that
16 people have access to capital, not only to jobs.
17 Because whenever we invest something within the
18 community it should benefit that community and -- and
19 expand its opportunity for business development and
20 business ownership.

21 I urge the commission to recommend
22 charter changes and related state and local actions
23 that strong -- strengthen public accountability,
24 protect public land, capture publicly created value
25 and advance environmental justice. I have a full

1 testimony which I'll be willing to submit to you.

2 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

3 MR. SHIFFMAN: And also a separate memo
4 I developed for a community-based group in Sunset Park
5 on what democratization of capital really means and
6 how we can go about doing it. So thank you for the
7 privilege to meet with you all and I really applaud
8 what you're doing.

9 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, sir, for the
10 testimony and thank you for the additional submission,
11 and we'll take a question with you, Ron, after Eve has
12 an opportunity to testify.

13 MR. SHIFFMAN: Okay. Fine.

14 MS. BARON: Thank you. Use this mic?
15 This mic?

16 MR. GASPARD: No. Let's just slide it
17 over.

18 MS. BARON: Thanks for setting the
19 tone, Ron, and thank you, commissioning members, for
20 your service. I'm Eve Baron. I'm an urban planner
21 and a professor at Pratt Institute. I'm a member of
22 the New York City Civic Engagement Commission, which
23 itself was a product of the 2018 charter revision
24 commission process.

25 I'm a member of a collective for

1 community culture in the environment, a group of women
2 planners, architects and designers who work to promote
3 equity and sustainability in New York City. We've
4 done planning projects across the city with community
5 groups and across the region.

6 I'm here representing the collective to
7 talk about, surprise, the value of good urban
8 planning, planning that begins with community
9 engagement and results and implementation and
10 government accountability.

11 So we're all here today at Medgar Evers
12 College and this college would not exist without the
13 grassroots organizing efforts of central Brooklyn
14 residents who wanted a voice in the future of their
15 neighborhood. They knew that quality local education
16 was key to opportunity and social mobility.

17 This college stands as a tribute to
18 grassroots planning and a symbol of the connection
19 between the civil rights movement and the community
20 development movement. Some lessons from these
21 movements are implicit in the 1989 charter revision
22 commission reforms.

23 Those historic transformations of our
24 charter, which will -- which were fueled by the
25 mandate of democratization, gave us Section 197-A.

1 Section 197-A in theory is quite a powerful tool for
2 New Yorkers to engage in local planning decisions.

3 It allows community boards, among other
4 entities, to create plans for development, growth and
5 improvement at the local level. Eleven 197-A plans
6 have been created by community boards since then.

7 These plans stand as examples of some
8 of the most holistic planning undertaken in the city
9 in some of the city's most underserved areas. So we
10 have the charter mechanisms to enable comprehensive
11 neighborhood planning. What we don't have are the
12 planning staff and resources at the community level or
13 the guarantee of government to implement plans.

14 What we also lack is a citywide
15 comprehensive plan, which makes us the outlier among
16 most major world cities. A comprehensive planning
17 framework could connect neighborhood plans to citywide
18 goals so that communities planning for their own
19 futures are contributing to, not competing with, a
20 shared vision for the city.

21 And the city itself could set out a
22 holistic agenda of goals for climate response, growth
23 and development, and social and racial justice.

24 So the collective for community culture
25 and the environment and scores of other activists,

1 community boards, community groups, civic and
2 government leaders, worked in coalition to develop
3 draft charter changes focused on -- focusing on
4 requiring the city to create a 197-E plan.

5 This is a citywide planning framework
6 that connects goals, policies, local plans and budget
7 decisions. Alongside the 197-E plan, we also need
8 charter changes to ensure diverse representation on
9 community boards, provide communities with planning
10 resources and give 197-A and other local plans more
11 certainty of implementation.

12 Taking these steps will go far toward
13 restoring trust and trust is at the heart of efficient
14 and functional government. So I want to thank you
15 again, and I'm going to provide more detailed written
16 testimony.

17 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much, Eve.

18 Commissioners, questions?

19 Ruth?

20 MS. MESSINGER: First of all, thank
21 you.

22 MS. BARON: Thank you.

23 MS. MESSINGER: My -- office staff two
24 197-As, both of which were successful. So I'm
25 delighted to hear that.

1 Ron, gobsmacked by the information that
2 we actually rebate these tax. Under what provision do
3 we rebate the tax?

4 MR. SHIFFMAN: In 1905, the state of
5 New York created a stock transfer tax.

6 MS. MESSINGER: Right.

7 MR. SHIFFMAN: Today, that tax, we
8 generate about \$16 billion a year. In 19 --

9 MR. GASPARD: Ron, I'm sorry. Did you
10 say 60 or 16?

11 MR. SHIFFMAN: \$16 billion a year.

12 MR. GASPARD: Sixteen.

13 MR. SHIFFMAN: It is one-tenth of 1
14 percent of a stock transfer. It is instantly --
15 it's -- it's -- the -- the law is still on the books
16 today. It's -- it -- it's collected daily, it's
17 rebated instantly.

18 MS. MESSINGER: Why? Or how?

19 MR. SHIFFMAN: In 1982 or '83, Mayor
20 Koch felt that the stock -- the stock market might
21 leave New York City and as a result they began to --
22 to rebate a certain percentage each year and by 1983
23 it was a hundred percent. That bill, all it needs to
24 do is to abolish the rebate.

25 And everybody today will argue that the

1 stock market might leave. It's ridiculous because it
2 is one-tenth of 1 percent. It's infinitesimal.
3 London has it, Hong Kong has it, a number of other
4 countries have it at much greater than one-tenth of 1
5 percent.

6 MS. MESSINGER: I'm well familiar with
7 the stock transfer tax proposals. I was an advocate
8 of many of them. But I didn't realize that there was
9 actually something that was collected and rebated
10 and -- is it a law that rebates it, is it a practice
11 that rebates it?

12 MR. SHIFFMAN: It's a practice. I -- I
13 think it's -- it needs to be amended and taken away,
14 but it's forgiven now. And that was an action of the
15 state legislature. There are about 40 members of the
16 assembly that are supporting changes in it. I think
17 it needs mayoral attention, it needs the city's
18 attention.

19 If we dedicated that to the capital
20 budget of the City of New York, it would improve the
21 living conditions in the city for everybody, including
22 some of the wealthy. And by the way, it's a great way
23 to tax the wealthy, is by -- by taxing financial
24 transactions. They can't hire a -- a tax accountant
25 to evade it.

1 It's instantly connect -- collected by
2 a -- a federal agency. And it could be done simply,
3 and I could send you a separate memo on how it could
4 be done. But people need the political courage to
5 stand up to what they think -- think is an argument
6 against it that they --

7 MR. GASPARD: I just want to -- I just
8 want to be clear on that point, Ron; right? So some
9 of us have worked on this issue before and I
10 understood that it would bring 14 to \$16 billion in
11 revenue to the city.

12 But I also understood, and -- and
13 you'll have to correct my -- my misunderstanding or my
14 miscomprehension of the history, but I understood that
15 this was taken up as a -- as part of the reforms
16 following the -- the fiscal crisis in the city.

17 And because it's an agreement between
18 the city and the state, that state law has to be
19 passed for -- for the rebate and that -- that the city
20 can't just enact the measure through the charter.

21 MR. SHIFFMAN: The city can't just
22 enact but they can request the state to do it.

23 MR. GASPARD: Okay.

24 MR. SHIFFMAN: And they're not doing
25 that at the moment. And some of the money would

1 accrue to the state. It would -- also, there was some
2 opposition to changing it by some of the trade unions
3 and pensions --

4 MR. GASPARD: Yes. Yes.

5 MR. SHIFFMAN: Because they were afraid
6 it would affect the pension returns. In reality,
7 it'll generate so much more for the -- for the -- if
8 it's invested and dedicated to capital investment
9 because it will lead to, you know, securing us against
10 climate change, it'll help us renovate our public
11 housing stock immediately without leading to the
12 privatization of public housing.

13 It would enable us to use some of our
14 waterfronts for really creating a blue highway system
15 rather than giving it away for nothing for private
16 development and the wrong kind of housing development
17 at this point in time.

18 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

19 MS. MESSINGER: Mr. Chair, can we just
20 ask Ron to give us --

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 5: Please.

22 MS. MESSINGER: A separate memo just on
23 that.

24 MR. GASPARD: Yes.

25 MS. MESSINGER: The history and the

1 process that would be required?

2 MR. SHIFFMAN: I'll do it.

3 MS. MESSINGER: Everything you just
4 said.

5 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

6 Please.

7 MS. WILLIAMS: I -- I -- just, first, I
8 wanted to say, Ron, please, thank you for all of your
9 years of work really seeding justice oriented urban
10 planning and community development here in New York
11 City. So just wanted to start with that.

12 Eve, I wanted to ask specifically if
13 you have more details on the 197-E proposal? In your
14 testimony, right, 197-A is a thing that people used to
15 use, but by and large now nobody does it because
16 you're going to propose a nine -- 197-A plan and it's
17 not going to go anywhere; right?

18 And that's what's -- we're sort of
19 where we are now. So we, in a sense, created the
20 mechanism to do community-based -- well, community-
21 based planning and then set it aside and set a --
22 created government systems, structures where people
23 know that it's not going to move forward.

24 So I'm just curious -- I'm wanting to
25 understand is, like, 197-E more a citywide plan in

1 which you all -- how you all are envisioning that and
2 ensuring that it doesn't also become potentially, sort
3 of, a -- a integrated piece that then -- to continue
4 to, like, confiscate again?

5 MS. BARON: Sure. Thanks. Thank you
6 for your work as well. The 197-A portion of the
7 charter is -- it's an unfunded mandate and there's
8 never been money set aside to do this type of
9 planning, nor is there any enforcement or
10 implementation mechanism within the charter.

11 With those two revisions, I think 197-A
12 planning could actually, you know, be a much more
13 effective tool and we already have it on the books.
14 You know, I think the -- the last 30 so some years of
15 practice has shown what the failings are but those,
16 you know, could be addressed within the charter.

17 The 197-E plan is a citywide planning
18 framework and it's actually the -- the -- we did draft
19 some charter revision language, which I'd be happy to
20 share with the commission, and that is predicated on,
21 you know, 197-A plans and other citywide policies and
22 goals, and sets out benchmarks and targets for growth
23 that then communities have the ability to take up and
24 plan for themselves with the proper planning
25 resources.

1 MR. SHIFFMAN: I -- I'd like to add one
2 thing and it refers to before the sale of public land.
3 When I was on the commission, I had the honor of being
4 appointed by David Dinkins, I was very concerned with
5 the disposition of public land that didn't fit a
6 framework or a plan.

7 And as a result, in many cases we would
8 sell off land that could be assembled to create infill
9 housing or community gardens or other purposes. I'm
10 also concerned that we may sell off land that could be
11 used for other kinds of public purposes.

12 So it should meet and have a -- a
13 review by a public planning entity and the 197-Cs and
14 other ways of those plans really could inform the
15 disposition.

16 The BQX, Cross Brooklyn Expressway,
17 that's now being built, we sold off certain pieces of
18 that land over the years for a ridiculous sum of money
19 and we opt -- and we undermined the ability to create
20 a continuous freight lines running through or a
21 residential transportation network.

22 We did the same along the Gowanus
23 Canal. We have to make sure that when we dispose of
24 land we do it for a clear public purpose. Some of it
25 may be to generate income, but land is too valuable to

1 give away without really ascertaining how it fits a
2 bigger picture.

3 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, Ron.

4 Barika, was that --

5 Any other questions, commissioners?

6 MR. SHIFFMAN: Thank you.

7 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, Ron. Thank
8 you, Eve, for that excellent testimony.

9 MR. SHIFFMAN: Who should I give this
10 to?

11 MR. GASPARD: Commission staff will --
12 will take that. And -- and, Ron, don't forget, I
13 think that Ruth has given you some homework --

14 MR. SHIFFMAN: Okay. She always --

15 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much.

16 Caroline Donnola and Nancy Wang, please
17 join us. Caroline and Nancy.

18 Caroline, welcome.

19 MS. DONNOLA: Thank you. Thank you for
20 holding these hearings. So I'm here to talk about the
21 election process which I think is, for me, more
22 important than anything that we're looking at these
23 days.

24 I am a native New Yorker. I live in
25 Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. And I've been an independent

1 voter for more than 40 years. I lived in California
2 in the early 2000s when I volunteered on Proposition
3 14, which was passed, which set up a top two
4 nonpartisan primary system for the whole state. It
5 enabled every independent to vote in every round of
6 voting.

7 As we know, that round is critical. In
8 many jurisdictions it determines the outcome of the
9 election. So we won that battle and I think
10 California's doing pretty well. They had a primary
11 recently where more than 40 percent of registered
12 voters participated.

13 New York City's most recent Democratic
14 primary had only about 17 percent participating. And
15 by the way, as an independent, I was not allowed to
16 vote in it. I moved back to New York in 2011 and I've
17 been disturbed by my inability to significantly impact
18 on New York City's elections because of my status as
19 an unaffiliated independent voter.

20 Voting in an open primary would give me
21 a chance to voice my concerns through the ballot box
22 in the first round of municipal elections.
23 Increasingly, our elected officials represent a small
24 segment of the city. Open primaries will increase
25 voter participation, and isn't that what democracy is

1 supposed to be about? Thank you.

2 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so very much
3 for your testimony, Caroline.

4 I -- I'm -- I'm hoping that someone can
5 help us here, but our countdown clock is frozen.
6 Thank you.

7 Please, Nancy.

8 MS. WANG: Thank you to the commission
9 for the opportunity to testify. My name is Nancy
10 Wang. I've been a product manager for six years
11 building technology products, first at Microsoft and
12 most recently reconsulting for the State of Maryland.

13 My work now focuses on how technology
14 can be used to achieve the governor's aims of
15 increasing economic mobility and reducing childhood
16 poverty. The tech industry has learned many best
17 practices from the government, for example, human-
18 centered design.

19 And today I want to talk about one
20 practice in tech that our government could adopt from
21 the tech industry, open space procurement evaluation.
22 Open space procurement evaluation would assess
23 contract performance based on the results achieved
24 rather than simply whether the required deliverables
25 were completed.

1 For example, the success of a
2 government benefits modernization project might be
3 measured in the reduction in applications, completion
4 time, increases in approval rates for eligible
5 applicants or decreases in application errors, not
6 just whether the new digital form was completed.

7 By defining these outcome measures
8 upfront agencies give vendors clear goals to optimize
9 for and create accountability for delivering results.
10 The city's MyCity initiative illustrates why this
11 shift is needed.

12 The project was intended to create a
13 one-stop digital portal for New Yorkers to access
14 government services, but after more than four years
15 and over \$100 million of spending, a comptroller audit
16 showed that many of the core promises had yet to be
17 realized.

18 Outside of not meeting key
19 requirements, such as the unification of city benefits
20 under one common platform, the project also fell short
21 of the outcomes it was decided to achieve.

22 For example, due to the system's lack
23 of basic eligibility checks for household income in
24 children's ages, 46 percent of MyCity benefits
25 applicants on-site were found ineligible in the two

1 years since the initial site launch.

2 A site chatbot that was provided to
3 users with more benefits information was found to
4 provide legal and inaccurate advice, and the site
5 loaded so slowly that it scored under 10 out of 100
6 for performance across mobile desktop.

7 At the end of 2025, the recommendation
8 for fixing these issues was to request an additional
9 \$81 million of taxpayer money to maintain the existing
10 site and add additional functionalities.

11 As a taxpayer, I question why our
12 government is planning to double the additional budget
13 of a project that has still largely failed to improve
14 New Yorker's lives in any way. But as a technologist,
15 I also see how MyCity exemplifies a broader risk in
16 public procurement.

17 When contracts are evaluated primarily
18 on whether deliverables are completed rather than
19 whether intended outcomes were achieved, governments
20 can spend significant taxpayer dollars without
21 ensuring that those investments lead to meaningful
22 public outcomes.

23 If procurement had been evaluated, not
24 only on whether that software was delivered but also
25 on outcomes such as reductions in application time,

1 increases in successful benefits enrollment or
2 improvements in percent -- satisfaction, agencies
3 would have clear -- clear accountability for
4 delivering meaningful public value. You may --

5 MR. GASPARD: You're at -- you're at
6 three minutes, Nancy. If you can just conclude with
7 this sentence.

8 MS. WANG: Sounds good. New Yorkers
9 need proof that the services that we pay for will make
10 our lives better. Let's amend the charter to measure
11 procurement outcomes to make that happen. Thank you
12 for your consideration.

13 MR. GASPARD: Thank you both for
14 your -- your testimony.

15 Questions, commissioners, for Caroline
16 and Nancy?

17 Thank you. You both -- you both should
18 appreciate that on both of your issues, on open
19 primaries and the use of technology to deliver for
20 efficient and excellent government, we've heard
21 considerable testimony at our prior hearings.

22 We're weighing all of it, of course,
23 and it's informing our deliberations when we sit
24 together as a -- as a commission. So just -- just --
25 I hope you can appreciate that. Thank you both.

1 MS. DONNOLA: Thank you.

2 MS. WANG: It's great to hear.

3 MR. GASPARD: Celina Su and Saunders
4 Riffin, please join us. Celina and Saunders, welcome.

5 MS. SU: Thank you so much for this
6 commission and for the chance to speak today. My name
7 is Celina Su. I'm a CUNY professor focusing on
8 community organizing and participatory democracy, the
9 parent of a second grader in public school and a
10 volunteer researcher with the People's Budget
11 Campaign.

12 I'm thankful for a commission trying to
13 recover the word "efficiency's" true meaning so that
14 it's not just another code word for reckless
15 weaponized posterity. Today, I ask for basic reforms
16 towards making budgets accessible, legible and
17 comparable.

18 First, budget documents currently
19 obfuscate patterns of distribution in the city, both
20 across programs and across neighborhoods. We need
21 basic transparency on spending and staffing.

22 Right now, the administration could
23 lump together and mask a decrease in funding for high
24 impact prevention focus programs like violence
25 interruption with an increase in funding for a

1 completely different program in the same unit or for
2 lower impact administrative overhead.

3 I ask that the commission require
4 budget function analysis across agencies. And we also
5 need some spatial disaggregation. Community boards,
6 for instance, could make immediate use of more
7 transparent budgets.

8 These boards submit statements of needs
9 that city agencies have to respond to and they already
10 have soft powers via the city charter. Some have the
11 information they need to submit detailed, clearly
12 written budget priorities and others submit statements
13 of needs asking for -- asking for district level
14 information. This doesn't just obfuscate
15 inequalities, it -- it exacerbates them.

16 Second, the public should help to
17 inform how these budget function analyses are defined.
18 As a member of the steering committee that first
19 helped to implement participatory budgeting in New
20 York City, I saw how incorporating more public input
21 at the writing the rules design stage could have saved
22 us many headaches later on.

23 I appreciate the commission's attention
24 to this issue and urge you to go further. We could
25 then become a model for cities around the country and

1 the world.

2 While researching my latest book Budget
3 Justice, I learned that cities with transparent
4 democratic budgets and processes, like participatory
5 budgeting, raise significantly more tax revenues than
6 cities with opaque ones, because people felt invested
7 and confident in those budgets, helped to make
8 government policies more efficient and benefited from
9 the better conditions that resulted from them.

10 These reforms for budget transparency
11 are a first step towards ensuring that New Yorkers can
12 press for the programs we know we need most and which
13 are most efficient. Thank you.

14 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

15 Saunders.

16 MR. RIFFIN: Yes. Thank you. Good
17 evening, commissioners. Thank you for this
18 opportunity to testify. My name is Saunders Riffin
19 and I'm a resident of the East Village. I work nearby
20 at NYSEM, our city's emergency management agency,
21 where I manage, excuse me, our monitoring and
22 evaluation program. My views on my own and do not
23 reflect my employer.

24 In December 2025, one month after Mayor
25 Zohran Mamdani won the mayor's race, another prominent

1 New Yorker, Jamie Dimon, the CEO of JPMorgan Chase,
2 sat for an interview with CNN to talk about his
3 thoughts on Mamdani's victory.

4 Instead of targeting the mayor elect,
5 Dimon issued a challenge. "Show me policies that work
6 and I'll stand behind you. Show me that we're
7 tackling affordable housing. Show me that we're
8 improving public safety." I agree with Dimon.

9 To achieve total efficiency, that is to
10 achieve maximum productivity with minimum wasted
11 effort or expense, we need to know exactly how well
12 we're doing so we know where to double down and
13 increase spending or where to cut ties.

14 That, in my opinion, is how we build
15 trust with the public. Dimon ends that interview by
16 saying "government has a lot of speaking up to do
17 about what they're doing with your money." As a
18 business person, I always ask myself, "am I doing
19 well" before I ask for more.

20 If we ask the public to entrust us with
21 their tax dollars we should be able to show them the
22 effectiveness of those dollars. But here's the thing,
23 as many public servants know, demonstrating success in
24 our jobs isn't as easy as showing off a filled
25 pothole.

1 Those are easily measurable,
2 demonstrating to the public that the city is running
3 well, and in my line of work, showing just how
4 prepared the city is to face a hurricane or, like
5 right now, a heat emergency, is more challenging but
6 one we can't shy away from.

7 That brings me to my proposal. I
8 believe we should codify language in the charter that
9 establishes roles and responsibilities for creating,
10 measuring and reporting more meaningful and analytical
11 performance metrics.

12 So for some context, I'd like to
13 highlight the mayor's management report that is found
14 in section 12 the -- of the charter. In that very
15 report, you know, I -- I find that this is an
16 excellent way for the public to, you know, sort of pop
17 the hood of -- of local government, see how we're
18 doing.

19 There are output metrics in that
20 document but I don't think it's a sufficient -- excuse
21 me, proxy for government productivity. So I'll give
22 you an example.

23 One of eight critical indicators in
24 that report from my employer, NYSEM, and one often
25 cited in budgetary hearings with NYSEM and city

1 council, is the number of participants at emergency
2 preparedness education sessions per year.

3 Last year, there were 34,000
4 participants alone; that's very impressive. But what
5 does that number reveal alone about the effectiveness
6 of those emergency preparedness sessions?

7 Did each participant feel like they
8 were more prepared? Were they creating their own go-
9 bags? Were they meeting with their families to
10 discuss what they learned? When you follow this line
11 of questioning, you arrive at more profound answer
12 about how we're actually doing.

13 So in closing, I encourage the
14 commission to explore how we can institutionalize
15 asking those kinds of questions beyond reporting
16 static metrics, but establishing a mandate to conduct
17 more rigorous research-based evaluation experiments
18 across our government.

19 MR. GASPARD: You're at time, Saunders.

20 MR. RIFFIN: Okay. Thank you so much.
21 I'll just close with this one quote. In establishing
22 this commission, Mayor Mamdani said, "Let's restore
23 faith in government by proving government that can
24 actually deliver. Let's create those systems to
25 actually measure that delivery." Thank you.

1 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you so
2 much. Thank you both for your testimony.

3 Questions, commissioners?

4 MR. LONGANI: I'm just going to ask one
5 quick one.

6 MR. GASPARD: Please.

7 MR. MOORE: Saunders, are you
8 suggesting that we should consider updating those
9 metrics and, if so, would you give a couple examples
10 of ones that you would prioritize that would have
11 maximum effect in terms of increasing efficiency and
12 providing the public with the information you've just
13 been talking about?

14 MR. RIFFIN: Certainly. Yeah. And I
15 can speak on behalf of personal experience here at the
16 emergency management. Of course we have a strategic
17 plan, and in that document our leadership outlines
18 priorities for the agency; right? What matters most
19 when we're delivering for the public.

20 In the example I gave about emergency
21 preparedness, it's about evaluating preparedness.
22 That's an abstract -- you know, concept. Not one that
23 you can easily, with one single metric, demonstrate
24 whether it's happening or not.

25 So I would just advise that agencies

1 across government, in prioritizing what matters most,
2 you know, focus on those particular metrics. And you
3 know, for example, I think, in my opinion, if we can
4 tell the government with that extra dollar that we
5 invest in that emergency preparedness session we're
6 seeing, you know, X, Y, or Z increase in "individual
7 preparedness."

8 That level of analysis is something
9 that I think would be profound in showing the public
10 we're spending your dollars effectively. Thank you.

11 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

12 Celina, my -- my ears perked up when
13 you said that you had written the book Budget Justice.
14 Okay. So does that -- are you -- were you a member of
15 the mayor's transition team? Aha. Okay.

16 So I -- I want you to, if you could,
17 just help us better appreciate the relationship
18 between some of your scholarship on participatory
19 budgeting and the pressure you think that we need to
20 bring to bear on the charter to reform it in ways that
21 will bring increased accountability.

22 In your scholarship, you make the --
23 the very -- very challenging and troubling point that
24 opacity in our -- in our budget system is not a bug,
25 but actually a strategic part of government budgeting

1 in order to reduce accountability.

2 And so I -- I wonder if you could help
3 us better understand how you're thinking about the
4 charter relationship to the accountability that your
5 scholarship demands?

6 MS. SU: Thank you so much for -- for
7 asking me this question. I work with community groups
8 and I -- I will say that it's not just big advocacy
9 groups. I was thinking of, for instance, even the
10 community garden that my block -- that I'm a member
11 of, how they look for numbers on composting every year
12 and they get upset if composting programs get cut.

13 So they try to wade through the city
14 budget and it's like a 500-page PDF and they can't
15 figure out where to look for basic numbers and all
16 their -- and they feel like they're told that
17 austerity is inevitable.

18 But even if the city is in a tough
19 position and cuts are to be made, they just want to
20 help inform where -- where they're willing to make
21 sacrifices and what they would want to prioritize.

22 And this is a way in which I feel, not
23 just I feel, like my -- what I learned through doing
24 research, that opacity abets austerity and shows
25 political choices to seeing, like -- politicians, our

1 hands are tied, when it's not necessarily the case.

2 And -- and promoting transparency helps
3 to turn a vicious cycle in which there is a lot of
4 anti-tax sentiment and then government doesn't have
5 enough resources to do a good job into a virtuous one,
6 whereby people really do raise more tax revenues when
7 they believe in government.

8 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so very much.

9 Please, Theodore.

10 MR. MOORE: Just to Saunders, I was
11 wondering how do you deal with the -- the need to --
12 to collect better data and metrics going along with a
13 lot of the agencies and -- and service providers
14 either, one, don't have the capacity for the follow-up
15 to collect that data or -- or, two, don't collect
16 information for -- to -- to do that follow-up for
17 various reasons, one of them being like security and
18 safety of the people that are -- are using those
19 services.

20 So how do we marry those two needs
21 along with the capacity issues and the lack of
22 information to follow-up?

23 MR. RIFFIN: Yeah. I -- I -- that's a
24 fair question and I think it starts with actually
25 understanding what that gap is. So maybe the

1 assessment here or the first step here is just
2 understanding exactly what that capacity is.

3 You know, speaking on behalf of my
4 agency, we have that in-house evaluation team. I
5 don't think that is, certainly among emergency
6 management agency, is extremely rare and the extent to
7 which, you know, what are those existing capacities, I
8 can't speak to across the government. But I would,
9 you know, start there. Yeah.

10 MR. MOORE: Thank you.

11 MR. RIFFIN: You bet.

12 MR. GASPARD: Any additional questions?
13 Thank you both for your testimony.

14 We're really grateful for it.

15 Our next participants will join us
16 online, Olivia Goldberg and Paul Hoti. Olivia and
17 Paul, are you both on?

18 MS. GOLDBERG: Yes. Hello.

19 MR. GASPARD: Fantastic.

20 Olivia, let's begin with you.

21 MS. GOLDBERG: Thank you so much for
22 this opportunity. I'm here today to present an issue
23 that is very important to me, which is preservation of
24 the city's tree canopy and how city agencies can more
25 efficiently collaborate to that end.

1 Isolation of the DDC, the DOT and DPR
2 has resulted in -- in my experience, needless removal
3 of many mature street trees throughout New York City
4 and often in neighborhoods that already experience the
5 worst effects of the urban heat island.

6 DPR foresters then spent many hours
7 investigating damage and pursuing financial
8 restitution, time which might otherwise be spent
9 inspecting and caring for our city's street trees.

10 It is difficult to accurately quantify
11 the financial consequences of removing mature trees,
12 but New Yorkers certainly experience the consequence
13 of environmental benefits lost

14 I understand that these tree removals
15 are often part of projects to improve -- improve
16 infrastructure, but my question is why do we as New
17 Yorkers have to choose between tree canopy cover and
18 functional infrastructure?

19 I am an ISA Certified Arborist who
20 works with trees in New York City. I often work as a
21 third-party consultant for projects managed by the
22 DDC, the DOT and occasionally by DDP and DPR. This --

23 MR. GASPARD: Can I -- can I -- I'm --
24 I'm so sorry to interrupt you, Olivia, but it would be
25 helpful for everyone if you would not use acronyms --

1 MS. GOLDBERG: Sorry.

2 MR. GASPARD: But give us the -- the
3 complete name of the agencies that you're referring
4 to. Thanks.

5 MS. GOLDBERG: Of course. Apologies.
6 Thank you.

7 MR. GASPARD: No. Don't apologize.
8 You're great.

9 MS. GOLDBERG: Department for Design
10 and Construction, Department of Transportation, the
11 Department of Environmental Protection and the
12 Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Parks
13 Department specifically is responsible for caring for
14 New York City Street trees, as well as parks.

15 I have witnessed harm to city-owned
16 trees, both through carelessness on the part of
17 contractors and by design when trees are removed due
18 to conflicts with projects aimed at improving
19 infrastructure. Most common examples are replacement
20 of curbs and sidewalks.

21 In my experience, most of this damage
22 is preventable in the design stage by shifting
23 excavation by as little as six inches to avoid tree
24 roots.

25 Implementation of more careful design

1 using proven tree protection measure -- measures at
2 our disposal today would certainly allow New Yorkers
3 to retain vital canopy cover during many construction
4 projects citywide.

5 I have proof of this in the ongoing
6 Department of Parks and Recreation project at Archie
7 Spigner Park in Queens, which thoughtfully avoids the
8 most important structural routes of nearby trees while
9 providing an important stormwater drainage measure for
10 the neighborhood.

11 My recommendation is that DDC and --
12 sorry, Department of Design and Construction and the
13 Department of Transportation have direct collaboration
14 with the Parks Department regarding protection of
15 trees during the design phase of construction
16 projects.

17 The Department of Parks and Recreation
18 has proven that they are able to implement tree
19 protection protocols that preserve trees during
20 construction, and I believe that more direct
21 collaboration at the earliest stages of these
22 projects' design would certainly help New Yorkers see
23 mature tree canopy retention and the many
24 environmental benefits that come with it. Thank you.

25 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so very much,

1 Olivia. My apologies for having interrupted you. I
2 just wanted to make sure that we were getting the, you
3 know, the -- the full context of everything that you
4 were providing. So thank you. Stay with us, Olivia.
5 We may have some questions for you.

6 Paul?

7 MR. HOTI: Hello. I'm a -- I'm a
8 substitute teacher for the DOE and I'm, kind of, my --
9 my -- what I have to say is actually, I think, a lot
10 quicker than what everyone else kind of had to say.
11 I've been -- so I'm a substitute teacher.

12 I was suspended in service in early May
13 and the department that handles, I mean -- I mean,
14 that's kind of what I'm here to talk about is I -- I
15 was not informed what I was suspended about and I've
16 dealt with this, like, two other times over the past,
17 like, year and a half.

18 And it's just very frustrating and
19 inefficient. And the -- the name of you all -- the
20 committee assembled here. I don't know how that works
21 with the charter or whatever, I don't know what policy
22 you have to pass to address that.

23 But in my time just, again, as a
24 substitute, it seems like the actual administration at
25 the DOE is, like, understaffed. It seems like -- like

1 I remember going to -- I had a meeting with them in,
2 like, September of last year and the line was through
3 the door; not, like -- very long line down to the
4 sidewalk, basically.

5 And -- and I -- I remember
6 commiserating some of the people there; it's like,
7 "Yeah, this is so frustrating." I remember people
8 complaining about how it took them forever to get even
9 accepted as sub. Like, they were nominated and they
10 had to go through this whole process, just took
11 forever.

12 And so that's kind of it. I mean,
13 it -- I -- I have no idea how that impacts the charter
14 but I figured -- I saw the meeting in my email. I
15 checked to see if there was an update, there wasn't.
16 But I saw this in my email from DOE and I figured I'd
17 show up. And that's that.

18 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. We -- we
19 appreciate that. You're right, it's not directly
20 charter related, but your -- your testimony is
21 received.

22 Any questions at all for Olivia and --
23 and Paul? Or -- or Olivia or Paul? No. Great.

24 Thank you. We -- we appreciate both
25 your input. And -- and again, Olivia, I apologize for

1 having interrupted you.

2 Back to in-person

3 Yvonne Murray and Vanessa Rudin.

4 Welcome. Thank you, Yvonne.

5 MS. MURRAY: Thank you. Good evening.

6 My name is Yvonne Murray and I'm a registered
7 independent voter. I came here this evening to appeal
8 to this commission requesting putting open
9 primaries -- can you hear me?

10 MR. GASPARD: We can. Loud and clear.

11 MS. MURRAY: Okay. Putting open
12 primaries on the ballot for the citizens of New York
13 City to vote on. As an independent, it has been -- I
14 have not been allowed to vote in the very important
15 primary elections where, for my tax dollars, I don't
16 get the opportunity to participate.

17 Eighty-five percent of US cities have
18 open primaries, elections, and in New York there are
19 1.2 million independent voters with 54 percent of them
20 being people of color. We're locked out of
21 participating. This is one of the largest forms of
22 voter suppression. And I'm really pretty pissed about
23 it, I must say. I have to take a breath here.

24 New York City is my hometown and this
25 really does hurt, as well as the fact that I am a poll

1 worker and I've been working the polls for several
2 decades as a information clerk.

3 I get to see several people come in to
4 vote in the elections and many of them being turned
5 away because they are unaffiliated, unregistered and,
6 like myself, independent. And they go away very
7 disappointed and very frustrated. It's very unfair
8 and it's very undemocratic.

9 I would say in a democracy we should
10 all have the opportunity to participate in it, and I
11 would like to ask this commission, after so many, many
12 years, to please consider putting open primaries
13 before the voters to vote on and let's bring New York
14 City into the 21st century. I thank you for your time
15 this evening, commissioners.

16 MR. GASPARD: Thank you, Yvonne.

17 MS. RUDIN: Well, Yvonne was very well
18 spoken and I'm speaking on the same topic, and I also
19 want to thank you for your volunteer time and the
20 opportunity to be heard. My name is Vanessa Rudin.
21 I've lived in Brooklyn for 30 years.

22 I'm currently working on a tech
23 startup, but have in the past founded a business
24 microfinance institution that served under-resourced
25 New Yorkers and I also had other work strengthening

1 federally qualified health centers.

2 So most of my time has been spent in
3 the non-profit world. I have two sons in college. I
4 recently received, well, the day before the primaries
5 I received an email encouraging me to vote in the
6 primaries. There was only one problem; I can't.

7 And it said how important it is to
8 participate which, honestly, got me pretty angry. If
9 it's important to participate, then let me participate
10 either in an open primary or, if you prefer, let's
11 have a third unaffiliated primary.

12 You might say, "well you could join a
13 different party if you don't want to be in the
14 Democrat and Republican." But, actually, I'm an issue
15 driven voter so there isn't really a party because I
16 might match this party at this time and this party
17 another time and I don't believe in -- it's kind of
18 tribal, frankly, the party system.

19 So -- so it's basically taxation
20 without representation and I really don't want to have
21 to have another Boston Tea Party. So I've come to
22 you, commissioners, and I came the last time that
23 there was a meeting under the previous mayor to speak
24 about the same topic. So I hope you'll take action.

25 I want you to imagine being invited to

1 a dinner party but the only people who are allowed to
2 eat are wearing blue or red. Yet at the end, everyone
3 who didn't eat has to help clean up the mess. So
4 that's what being an independent voter is like.

5 I mean it's almost crazy and it's
6 almost crazy how inured I have been to this situation.
7 Like, it's -- I -- I'm kind of speechless about it.
8 Democrats and -- Republicans talk about voter rights
9 but they don't really mean that everyone has rights.
10 They mean that people on their political football team
11 have rights. But it's not a football game.

12 The rest of us don't have those rights.
13 Those of us who want to vote our conscience regardless
14 of political tribe aren't allowed in until the end and
15 the decision has already been made, especially in this
16 study. I mean, in some ways Republicans are in the
17 same position.

18 The founding fathers, I'm sure, are
19 turning over in the graves. They knew how bad
20 political parties are for democracy. That's why
21 parties aren't in the federal constitution. I was
22 aghast to find out before the last commission meeting
23 that New York actually does have parties in the state.

24 That's not your fault, this is the city
25 level. But it's unbelievable. The level of

1 disrespect for constituents is immense. How dare the
2 city and the state marginalize millions of people, as
3 Yvonne said, 1.2 million in the city alone, in this
4 way and make us pay for this marginalization because
5 we're paying for the primaries.

6 If you truly want community cohesion,
7 maybe look to the unaffiliated to actually temper the
8 extremes of the two major parties. Anyway, I ask that
9 you protect democracy.

10 I know I've been a little bit forceful
11 in my speech, but it is because of the injustice and I
12 think you can protect democracy and voter rights,
13 which are talked about a lot, by changing to open
14 primaries with ranked-choice voting or a separate
15 unaffiliated primary.

16 That's more work and it's not as
17 efficient. So I think open primaries would be the way
18 to go. Thank you so much.

19 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you.
20 Thank you both for your testimony and for your passion
21 on this issue.

22 Questions from our commissioners? No.

23 Please -- please know that there are
24 many questions that we've asked of others who've
25 testified on open primaries in our other hearings.

1 But I do have one quick question for you.

2 So I'm -- I'm -- I -- I wonder if in
3 the course of the research that you've conducted on
4 this and your experience with other independent
5 voters, if you can help me to appreciate why
6 independent voters, when they do have an opportunity
7 to -- to vote in New York, participate at considerably
8 lower number of percentages than major party voters in
9 general elections; right?

10 So in -- last year, for instance, in
11 the general election in New York, 63.5 percent of
12 registered Democrats and Republicans participated.
13 The percentage for independent voters was around 49
14 percent.

15 Even minor parties like the Working
16 Families Party, Green Party, et cetera, get over 50
17 percent participation in the general election from
18 those who are registered in those parties.

19 Why do you think that even, we're not
20 talking about the primaries now, but in general
21 elections, why independents perform at a lower
22 percentage?

23 MS. RUDIN: Well, this is just a guess
24 and then I'm sure Yvonne can give her opinion, I think
25 it's probably twofold. One, is that your denominator

1 is all people who have, I guess, it's all people
2 who -- oh, no, no. You're right. It's registered
3 people who have not affiliated. So, okay. So forget
4 that argument. Sorry.

5 I -- I -- my guess is just probably the
6 feeling of disenfranchisement. I mean, by the time
7 that the vote comes the major parties, but in
8 particular the Democrat party, because in essence a
9 Republican party rarely decides, has already chosen
10 who -- who the candidates are.

11 MR. GASPARD: And that's what --
12 actually, that's what vexes me about it; right?
13 Because if you're a registered Democrat or a
14 registered Republican and you participated in your
15 primary and you feel as if your vote in the primary
16 was decisive, it would suggest that your -- your vote
17 would be significantly lower in a general election;
18 right?

19 Because you already, like, had the
20 opportunity to cast a ballot that was -- that
21 determined, you think, outcome. And so, but -- so --
22 but -- but interestingly enough their voting
23 percentage is much higher in the general --

24 MS. RUDIN: Well, I -- yeah. I -- I
25 think there's a couple reasons. One is, I mean, still

1 they're going to get out to vote to, you know, the
2 Democrats are going to go to vote to make sure the
3 candidates being put forward is -- is going to win;
4 right?

5 The Republicans are going to go hoping
6 that this year will be different and occasionally at
7 the state level it is. But I -- I think in the end,
8 if you don't really -- didn't get to participate in
9 choosing who was even on the ballot, I -- I still
10 think you should show up and I do, but I can
11 understand why many people wouldn't.

12 Also, a lot of unaffiliated voters are
13 young and so younger people have to create the habit
14 of going.

15 MR. GASPARD: I think that's -- yeah.

16 MS. RUDIN: And the final thing is that
17 the Democrats are really, like, I think the reason I
18 got that email is because there's an assumption I'm a
19 Democrat because maybe I've supported certain things
20 that Democrats support.

21 I've always been unaffiliated. So I
22 got that email, but many unaffiliated voters maybe
23 don't get the outreach from the party.

24 MR. GASPARD: That makes sense. that
25 That makes sense. Yeah. That -- that explains a lot

1 and so does -- so does you. But thank -- thank you.

2 MS. RUDIN: Thank you so much for your
3 question.

4 MR. GASPARD: Thank you for filling --
5 helping me to fill the gaps in my knowledge.

6 Liz Peralta and Carolina Salguero.

7 Liz -- Liz are you here? Oh, thank you.

8 And Carolina Salguero. Is Carolina
9 present?

10 MS. SALGUERO: Yes.

11 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. And, again,
12 if I've mispronounced your names just correct me. I
13 apologize.

14 MS. SALGUERO: You can go first.

15 MR. GASPARD: Liz.

16 MS. PERALTA: Okay. Yeah. I'll go
17 first. First, thank you for having me. My name is
18 Liz Peralta and I've worked in economic development
19 for over a decade, from representing students, then
20 minority grocers and launching my own tech startup
21 that helped feed over a million food-insecure
22 families.

23 But the reason I'm here -- standing
24 here today goes back further than any job title. I've
25 dealt with food scarcity since I was a kid. Inside

1 food systems that were supposed to help communities
2 like mine survive when no big corporations wanted to
3 be there in the first place.

4 So abuelas, papis, the habibis, they
5 stepped up to fill the gap. I'm a product of a single
6 mother who came here from the Dominican Republic and
7 found home and community at the bodega. I voted for
8 Mayor Mamdani because of that. What drew to me --
9 what drew him to me was that he tells stories of the
10 people he represents.

11 He doesn't just talk policy, he makes
12 you see the person behind it. So I'm going to try to
13 do that tonight. During COVID I was running the
14 National Supermarket Association. Every morning and
15 every night our grocers got on a call together and I'd
16 hear the men and women -- sobbing.

17 They had separated from their families
18 to keep their stores open and their families safe from
19 the virus that was killing so many, sleeping behind
20 the counter because they refused to leave their
21 communities without food.

22 While they did that, elected officials
23 stood -- stood in front of cameras calling them price
24 gougers when the real markup was happening upstream
25 with distributors, not at the register. Those grocers

1 built emergency infrastructure overnight; senior
2 hours, vaccines, free food, delivery solutions, all
3 with their own hands and their own money.

4 The crisis ended and the people who
5 used to call us for help building these solutions
6 disappeared. I read the comments on the city's new
7 grocery store announcement. So many people are
8 excited and that genuinely brings me joy.

9 But I also saw people saying that the
10 bodega guy, the independent grocer, is price gouging
11 them. And that's not true and it's not harmless.
12 It's propaganda that teaches -- teaches people to
13 resent the very small businesses that held the city
14 together.

15 I'm asking this commission to help
16 educate the public on that, the same way the city has
17 taken on misinformation -- on other issues. These
18 owners are not the problem. The actual problem is the
19 buying power.

20 A bodega changes more not because of
21 the owner is -- charges more not because the owner is
22 price gouging but because it can't negotiate supplier
23 pricing the way a chain can.

24 And because I'm short on time I'm going
25 to the end, which is my ask, is that there's another

1 model, a city supported grocery hub, shared purchasing
2 infrastructure that gives independent stores the same
3 leverage a chain already has.

4 My ask is this. It's time to reimagine
5 the economic development corporation. No more writing
6 checks to consultants that make cool dashboards that
7 no one ever uses. We -- reimagine the EDC by building
8 the buying power solution alongside the government
9 store and use the city's platform to correct the
10 record on who's actually driving up prices.

11 Since we only have three minutes I kept
12 it brief, but I'm happy to discuss the full-fledged
13 plan to anyone who's willing to discuss. Thank you.

14 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

15 MS. SALGUERO: Okay. Hi. I'm Carolina
16 Salguero or Carolina Salguero -- I'm founder and ED of
17 the award-winning maritime nonprofit PortSide New
18 York. I'm here to speak about New York City's biggest
19 open space and that's our magnificent harbor, the
20 waterways, the blue space, the wet part of the
21 waterfront and its maritime.

22 And so for PortSide, maritime ranges
23 from canoes to container ships. Much of the greatness
24 of New York City is due to how we used the blue space
25 for centuries. The maritime economy is why Wall

1 Street is here, why USA publishing is concentrated
2 here, why we're the media capital of the country.

3 It's why immigrants arrive from so many
4 nations and create a glorious mosaic of New York. The
5 Underground Railroad used the waterways and so did the
6 suffragette movement.

7 So we are calling for a pro-growth
8 maritime policy for a new city agency for maritime so
9 maritime is no longer straining to grow. New York
10 City had a maritime agency under changing names for
11 over a hundred years and the last one closed in 1991.

12 Now, the maritime -- the waterfront is
13 no longer managed by maritime experts. That means the
14 Blue Highway Initiative, a revival of moving freight
15 locally by water, needs to retrofit itself into spaces
16 that should have been designed for it from the start,
17 as I know the maritime force -- voices advised.

18 Last year, the Department of Buildings
19 created code for waterfront structures and they had to
20 create a special maritime advisory committee. For the
21 4th of July and our nation's 250th, we've got a great
22 tall ship parade, a Navy Vessel parade, next weekend.

23 But those plans have been challenged by
24 lack of pier space or lack of town docks where
25 dinghies and harbor launchers could bring passengers

1 out to boats that are out on the anchorage --
2 anchorage due to lack of piers.

3 So New York City's Maritime Management
4 is chopped up between big new waterfront parks such as
5 Hudson River Park, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Governor's
6 Island, none of which have centered maritime in their
7 plans, and the work of a quasi-governmental nonprofit,
8 the EDC, Economic Development -- easy acronyms.

9 So the ED's work to develop housing,
10 they've got internal conflicts. Their work on
11 housing, for example, conflicts with the city's
12 maritime functions. So the Brooklyn Marine Terminal
13 is under threat that way.

14 My nonprofit, PortSide, analyzed many
15 ways the EDC fails -- fails and in our 2022 campaign
16 Rethink EDC, which included covering the EDC's waste
17 of public funds through avoidable mistakes, tangible
18 harm in tenant businesses and nonprofits,
19 unwillingness to work with communities and a lack of
20 follow-through to create the promised jobs and
21 benefits, including not delivering the permanent home
22 the EDC promised to PortSide, a space big enough for a
23 maritime hub

24 Something that we proposed and actually
25 became city policy -- EDC recommendation in the 2008

1 Maritime Support Services Study, and city planning
2 recommended their 2016 waterfront revitalization
3 program.

4 So, like, we've established policy; no
5 one's let us do it. So NYC deserves better. A
6 waterfront planned, designed, built, managed by
7 maritime people. We need a pro-growth maritime
8 policy, a new city agency, a waterfront that works for
9 all.

10 But a waterfront works -- that works
11 for all policy will grow jobs, working class jobs,
12 many of them union jobs and sectors with an acute
13 shortage of crew. This policy will connect people to
14 maritime jobs that most people don't know exist.

15 Since the community's ashore, the
16 community afloat is not connected the way they once
17 were. And this policy will unlock, I hope,
18 recreational opportunities in an inclusive manner
19 making boats accessible to low-income communities as
20 they once were, actually, and neighborhoods like where
21 we are, Red Hook, Brooklyn.

22 MR. GASPARD: -- Caroline, just please
23 know that the clock is wrong and that you're really at
24 time already. It was stuck. So if you could just get
25 to -- to wrap up.

1 MS. SALGUERO: Oh, I have three
2 sentences. I was happy about that; I noticed that.

3 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

4 MS. SALGUERO: Sorry. -- Mayor Mamdani
5 for identifying the EDC needs to evolve and PortSide
6 and others are going further to say that maritime
7 should be taken away from the EDC completely, all of
8 it.

9 We also support the proposal of a
10 group, Save Our Seaport, that the -- is a maritime
11 community board created. Because maritime currently
12 has no kind of grassroots representation.

13 So in the archipelago that is New York,
14 we need a better maritime manager, we need a
15 waterfront that works for all. Thank you very much
16 for your work.

17 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

18 MS. SALGUERO: It's been inspiring
19 watching you all tonight.

20 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. I really
21 appreciate that. We're inspired hearing from you and
22 so many other New Yorkers. You should know that Save
23 Our Seaports has submitted testimony to the commission
24 prior to this evening and it's wonderful to -- to have
25 your affirmation of it.

1 Questions from commissioners?

2 Questions, thoughts?

3 Liz, I really appreciate that you
4 forced us all to remember the essentiality of those
5 workers and -- and those small business owners during
6 the pandemic.

7 You're right that there has been some
8 reckless rhetoric in regards to the contributions that
9 they make to communities. Thank you so very much for
10 your able representation of their interests and of
11 their commitment. So appreciate that. Appreciate
12 both of you.

13 MS. PERALTA: Just wanted to add that
14 there's a way -- like, I'm not saying government
15 supermarkets shouldn't -- shouldn't exist; I think
16 they should. But I think the real problem is buying
17 power and if we could create hubs --

18 MR. GASPARD: Understood. Understood.

19 MS. PERALTA: To fix that, it would be
20 really sustainable.

21 MR. GASPARD: Understood. It's a
22 question of coexistence.

23 MS. PERALTA: Exactly. Exactly.

24 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you.

25 MS. PERALTA: Thank you.

1 MR. GASPARD: Oh, actually, Emma, I
2 think, has a question.

3 MS. WOLFE: Yeah, I just have one
4 question.

5 Thank you both, also, for your
6 testimony.

7 On waterfront, yes?

8 MS. SALGUERO: Yes.

9 MS. WOLFE: Have you considered or
10 advocated for -- with folks in, I'm sure part of the
11 coalition that you have, an initiative or an office,
12 something out of city hall or the administration that
13 is not an agency?

14 MS. SALGUERO: Yeah. I'm -- that we
15 want something more than an office. So Waterfront
16 Alliance is there and I've told them I'm very unhappy
17 with that and I think that's a milk toast solution.
18 We really need to have the assets really managed by
19 maritime professionals. And so the EDC doesn't have
20 those.

21 -- for lack of time, something else I
22 didn't bring up, the state DEC regulations and the way
23 they go about things, has hindered a lot of maritime
24 things, park design, and the problem is there's no
25 voice in New York City representing everybody.

1 MS. WOLFE: I understand.

2 MS. SALGUERO: And so everyone's kind
3 of terrified of them. The Parks Department themselves
4 told me that they would welcome a voice like that.
5 So --

6 MS. WOLFE: I understand. But -- but
7 they're not mutually exclusive necessarily. You could
8 have an office that's tasked with waterfront that is
9 run by or comprised of or listens to maritime
10 professionals.

11 It doesn't have to necessarily be an
12 agency. You just don't want the status quo, which is
13 right now where it's housed inside EDC.

14 MS. SALGUERO: Yeah. EDC is bad but
15 I -- I'm not alone, is I think what we all want is to
16 actually have -- the assets managed by maritime
17 people. So maybe I'm misunderstanding.

18 So when I hear "mayor's office" I --
19 I -- and all the descriptions I've ever seen and,
20 like, a liaison -- other agencies, but then who is the
21 other agency who's directly managing the asset?

22 MS. WOLFE: Very good. Yep. Very
23 good.

24 MS. SALGUERO: And so that's what we're
25 trying to solve. And also the waterfront, what is it

1 called, the Waterfront Management Advisory Board is
2 often involved, which that was unbelievable. They
3 refused to answer me and other people, completely
4 transparent. They didn't meet for years.

5 And I'm sorry, the first thing that
6 occurs to me, it was like a bunch of suits, and I'm
7 sorry, I mean, because, like, they're not maritime
8 people.

9 I mean, like in this city for example,
10 I used to be a photojournalist and I was sort of
11 transitioning from documenting the harbor -- I've
12 worked -- working overseas, documenting the harbor to
13 becoming an advocate.

14 I was still a photojournalist when 9/11
15 happened and I had a small power boat. I kept my
16 father's power boat; he just died. Twenty-eight feet,
17 modest little thing. That's how I get from Red Hook
18 to the burning World Trade Center.

19 I was the only journalist,
20 photojournalist, to cover what's now called the "boat
21 lift evacuation." The media in town didn't cover it.
22 I was flabbergasted. And I was like, "I'm out of
23 here. I'm not going to be a journalist anymore."

24 So the Coast Guard has determined that
25 750,000 people were evacuated by an impromptu flotilla

1 of boats in a handful of hours who go on to -- pump
2 water on the fire, supply ground zero, set up floating
3 cafeterias. This is how mariners roll.

4 We would've had a blue highway 25 years
5 ago if maritime people were on it, because the EDC
6 just generates study after -- that's money, by the
7 way. I know someone in our neighborhood in another
8 nonprofit who refers to them as -- laundering money by
9 now. Do the thing. We don't need more study of the
10 thing.

11 So when the towers were coming down
12 mariners made a solution. And that's like operational
13 knowledge. Because this is actually -- maritime,
14 because of how things change, the water's moving,
15 storms, boats can sink -- sink, things can break, you
16 have to decide in the moment.

17 It's -- and I've work as an artist,
18 sort of as a photographer. There's something
19 incredibly creative operationally about maritime
20 people. They make solutions. It's the nature of the
21 job. And everybody's been struggling for years and
22 unfortunately the -- the business end of maritime
23 doesn't speak up very much.

24 MS. WOLFE: Thank you.

25 MS. SALGUERO: They're afraid to lose

1 the contract or something. So it's little non-profits
2 like mine who do this work.

3 MR. GASPARD: Got it.

4 MS. SALGUERO: And then I get beat up
5 by the EDC's attendant.

6 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- well --

7 MS. MESSINGER: And just to comment on
8 the -- on the vice -- on Emma's comment, EDC operates,
9 as it should, out of economic interest and the
10 waterfront needs to be seen as a public resource.

11 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you for
12 that. And -- and I'll just note that the highest
13 knowledge is operational experience and you bring
14 that.

15 So we appreciate your thoroughness,
16 your rigor and your passion, and please know that
17 there isn't anyone up here who is personally or
18 politically attached to their suits. So we -- so we
19 appreciate your candor.

20 MS. SALGUERO: -- I don't know. It
21 came to mind --

22 MR. GASPARD: It's great. It's great.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 6: We'll take our
24 jackets off.

25 MS. SALGUERO: I'm sorry.

1 MR. GASPARD: It's great. Thank you
2 both.

3 MS. SALGUERO: Okay. Thank you --

4 MR. GASPARD: Tamara Al -- Tamara Al-
5 Sharji and Pritha Mukherji. Again, please correct my
6 pronunciations. Tamara.

7 MS. AL-SHARJI: Okay. Hi. I'm Tamara
8 Sharji and I am a native New Yorker and I'm a high
9 school student. So --

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 7: Yay.

11 MR. GASPARD: Tamara can you hold on
12 second? Okay. They -- they fixed the clock.

13 MS. AL-SHARJI: Okay.

14 MR. GASPARD: You can -- you can start.

15 MS. AL-SHARJI: So I really want to
16 talk about two things I'm passionate about. Yes, not
17 all of it could be solved by the commission, but I
18 would like to talk about improvements of cleanliness
19 in the city, as well as transportation.

20 Lots of major cities around the world,
21 including London, Paris and Tokyo, have really good --
22 good transportation systems. Anyway, the MTA runs
23 about 24 hours. While they pause they are more
24 efficient, there's less delays, as well as the fact
25 that they're just cleaner.

1 I would like to -- I would like for
2 people to fund more for public transportation. As
3 well as about 3.4 million to 3.6 million people take
4 the subway every day, as well as people take the
5 buses, the ferries and I feel like they should be more
6 emphasis on how to improve those systems.

7 As well as I feel like we should
8 improve the cleanliness of the overall city. Like,
9 for example, the parks and recreation should, like,
10 improve, like -- like the -- littering as well as,
11 like, the Department of Transportation, which is also
12 not as commonly known in charge of sidewalks and bike
13 lanes.

14 So I feel like we should, like, maybe
15 tax people, I mean, find people who litter and, like,
16 make it more of a penalty. That -- and also that
17 money could go to, like, the Department of Sanitation
18 to, like, more frequently clean up public spaces.

19 As well as, back to my point about
20 public transportation. I feel since so many people
21 take every -- in the year about one -- more than one
22 billion people take public transportation throughout
23 the year in New York City.

24 I feel like we should have a more
25 efficient system and people -- and it should be taken

1 better care of. Thank you for your time.

2 MR. GASPARD: Thank you for your
3 testimony.

4 MS. MUKHERJI: Good evening, members of
5 the commission. My name is Pritha Mukherji. I belong
6 to a group of people in New York who cannot vote, who
7 have a lot to say but can't or don't know how, but yet
8 dream of making this city their home, an international
9 student.

10 Today, I'm here to talk to the
11 commission about two things I'm definitely passionate
12 about and two distinct groups of New Yorkers who are
13 system -- who are systematically locked out of their
14 public realms, those ensuring basic reproductive
15 dignity and improving the city accessibility to
16 international student population.

17 First things first, we cannot talk
18 about public space accessibility without talking about
19 reproductive rights and bodily autonomy. When I say
20 this, I refer to menstrual rights.

21 Right now, New York City ranks near the
22 bottom, 93rd out of a hundred large -- a hundred of
23 the largest US cities for public restaurants per
24 capita, with fewer than a thousand operational toilets
25 for 80 million people.

1 But the crisis grows deeper, I'm
2 afraid. A recent city council investigation published
3 in December 2025 found that out of a hundred restrooms
4 in New York City, only four were equipped with
5 machines which could deliver sanitary napkins and
6 tampons.

7 Currently, New York state is pushing
8 forward legislation with total access to Menstrual
9 Products Act, also called the TAMP Act, and the state
10 senate recently passed Bill A3866 to mandate free
11 menstrual products in public state buildings.

12 And I really hope this commission does
13 not simply rely on the state to give a directive, and
14 New York City should proactively take up this and
15 recommend the city's charter to incorporate standards
16 already issued in the TAMP Act.

17 Secondly, New York City is a vast city
18 with its intensive subway networks, public spaces, and
19 yet we, as international students, are restricted to
20 our classrooms because we don't know how to navigate
21 the city.

22 Fortunately, I was -- I was fortunate
23 enough to grow up in a big city like Mumbai, India.
24 Not many students have that privilege. When I talk
25 about international students, they have a tougher life

1 than the average New Yorker.

2 They navigate hyperdense housing
3 markets on strict F-1 student visas that heavily
4 restrict their ability to go out or to work. For
5 them, free public spaces like parks, open streets,
6 libraries, are not just a luxury, they are their
7 living rooms and study spaces and work spaces.

8 I really hope that these public
9 spaces -- I hope -- I really hope that this commission
10 recognizes that these public spaces represent untapped
11 economic potential and by bridging these gaps, the
12 city really wins when it includes everybody, even
13 those who cannot vote or don't know how to navigate
14 their bodily autonomy. Thank you for your time.

15 MR. GASPARD: Thank you both for your
16 testimony.

17 Commissioners, questions? Anyone?

18 I just have one question for Tamara.
19 I'd like to know when you might be eligible for some
20 of us to vote for you for city council.

21 MS. AL-SHARJI: Oh, I think in, like,
22 three years.

23 MR. GASPARD: Okay. We will -- we will
24 pay close attention.

25 But both -- both of you, thank you for

1 your commitment, thank you for your -- your testimony.

2 And I expect that there are -- there's
3 probably more, Pritha, in your testimony that you'll
4 attach to what you submit to us.

5 MS. MUKHERJI: Yes. Yes.

6 MR. GASPARD: Some backup data. Thank
7 you so much.

8 MS. MUKHERJI: Definitely.

9 MR. GASPARD: Appreciate both of you.
10 Mayna Bragdon and Angel Martinez.

11 Mayna or Mayna. It's M-A-Y-N-A.

12 MS. BRAGDON: Mayna.

13 MR. GASPARD: Mayna. Sorry, Mayna.

14 MS. BRAGDON: It's all right. I'm used
15 to it -- thanks, mom.

16 MR. GASPARD: Angel, are you present?

17 MR. MARTINEZ: I'm here. Yes, sir.

18 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

19 MS. BRAGDON: Hi. Good evening. My
20 name is Mayna Bragdon. Thank you for having me here
21 and letting me be heard. So for years I've always
22 complained about not being able to vote in New York
23 City primaries because I'm an independent. I assumed
24 every state was the same, didn't really think about
25 it.

1 I was like, "Oh, this sucks. Can't
2 even have a voice." But then I started talking to my
3 friends in other states. They're like, "No, no. We
4 can vote. What are you talking about?" I said,
5 "What?" So then I got annoyed; okay? So I'm in New
6 York, New York City, and I can't vote as an
7 independent.

8 So as soon as someone reached out to me
9 to testify tonight and I realized I had an opportunity
10 to actually be heard, I was ready to go. And here I
11 am. My very first ever city anything.

12 From what I understand, 30 percent of
13 voters in -- in New York are independent and we have
14 no say as to who ends up on the ballot no matter what
15 the election -- what election is happening.

16 Yes, we get to choose in the final
17 election from whom everyone else chose for us, but
18 there's no reason why we shouldn't be allowed to help
19 decide who actually belongs on the ballot. We pay
20 taxes like everyone else.

21 The choices put on the ballot affects
22 us like everyone else and we should be able to vote on
23 all parts of all elections like everyone else. Thank
24 you for your time.

25 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

1 MR. MARTINEZ: Same topic. Good
2 evening.

3 MR. GASPARD: Good evening.

4 MR. MARTINEZ: We the people. Three
5 words. Simple, timeless, profound. They are the
6 opening words of our constitution, the foundation of
7 our constitutional republic and the enduring promise
8 upon which this nation continues to strive.

9 Not I people, not some of the people.
10 Simply we. Within those three words lies an
11 extraordinary idea; that the strength of America does
12 not come from one voice, one political party or one
13 ideology. It comes from all of us, from the people.

14 The Constitution begins with, "We the
15 people," and the Bill of Rights follows by protecting
16 the freedoms and liberties of the people. Our freedom
17 to speak, to assemble, to petition to our government
18 and to live as free citizens.

19 Together they affirm a timeless
20 principle, government derives its just authority from
21 the people, exists to safeguard their liberty and it's
22 strongest when every citizen has a meaningful voice.
23 America has long been called the great experiment in
24 democracy.

25 What has sustained that experiment for

1 nearly 250 years is our willingness to expand liberty,
2 broaden participation and move ever so closer to the
3 promise of a more perfect union. Throughout our
4 history, we have worked to include those whose voices
5 were once excluded. That is the American story.

6 The right to have our voices heard is
7 the light that guides this experiment and voting is
8 one of its most powerful expressions. My name is
9 Angel Martinez and service has always been part of my
10 life. I proudly served eight years in the United
11 States Army Reserve, and for more than a decade I have
12 served as an educator.

13 Whether in uniform or in the classroom,
14 my life's work has been dedicated to serving others,
15 strengthening communities and helping people find
16 their voice and their purpose. When I enlisted, I did
17 not swear in oath to a political party. I swore an
18 oath to support and defend the constitution of the
19 United States. That oath was to the American people,
20 all of them.

21 Today, I stand before you as one of 1.2
22 million independent New Yorkers who are excluded from
23 voting in publicly funded primary elections. Nearly
24 half of America's veterans identify as independents.
25 That makes perfect sense to me. We serve a nation,

1 not a -- not a party.

2 If we the people truly means all of the
3 people, then independent voters should not be excluded
4 from participating in publicly funded primary
5 elections. My voice matters. The voices of 1.2
6 million independent New Yorkers matter.

7 Opening our primaries would not be a
8 radical experiment. It would be -- it would continue
9 America's greatest tradition, expanding participation,
10 strengthening democracy and ensuring that we, the
11 people, includes all of the people. Thank you.

12 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much, Angel.
13 Thank you. Thank you both.

14 Questions, comments, commissioners?

15 Thank you, Mayna and Angel for your
16 testimony and your --

17 MR. MARTINEZ: Thank you.

18 MR. GASPARD: Thank -- thank you.
19 Your -- your service is noted with gratitude, Angel.

20 MR. MARTINEZ: Thank you. Appreciate
21 it.

22 MR. GASPARD: Jonathan Burke on Zoom
23 and Juan -- and Juan Carlos -- Juan Carlos Castaneda
24 in-person are the last two witnesses in this evening's
25 hearing.

1 Jonathan, are you available on Zoom?
2 Can you hear us?

3 MR. BURKE: Yes. Can you hear me?

4 MR. GASPARD: Great. Yes. The
5 microphone is yours.

6 MR. BURKE: All right. Thank you for
7 the opportunity to testify here. My name is Jonathan
8 Burke. I am a general surgery resident and a
9 graduating doctoral student in epidemiology, studying
10 city budgets as determinants of health.

11 I'm also a volunteer budget analyzing
12 researcher with the People's Budget. I've undergone
13 training through the Government Finance Officers
14 Association and examined hundreds of budget books for
15 cities and counties across the country, including
16 award-winning budget books.

17 Few, if any, cities put forth proposed
18 budgets on timeline, format and level of detail that
19 will allow -- that would allow for real community
20 engagement.

21 This year, our team used open data's
22 expense data along with custom Python code to format
23 the data in a way that allows for a clear examination
24 of proposed appropriations to agencies, units of
25 appropriation and budget codes. After dozens of

1 hours, I still struggle to determine where the money
2 is actually going in many instances.

3 For example, the public assistance,
4 OTPS, Unit of Appropriation, shows a \$1.3 billion
5 increase for city -- budget code in the executive
6 budget, which is \$235 million less than the
7 preliminary budget.

8 And that aligns with the independent
9 budget office estimate, while the Office of Management
10 and Budget summary reports 519 million in savings for
11 the same program.

12 There are also numerous examples of
13 massive sums of money that do not have further
14 breakdown even in the budget codes, while important
15 functions to the community such as waste
16 containerization are not included at all.

17 This opacity exists throughout the
18 budget and our public data remains only partially
19 accessible even to someone with my level experience
20 reviewing it. The timeline compounds this problem.

21 This year's executive budget was
22 published May 12th and the open date on May 19th.
23 Even with the more typical release date of the
24 beginning of May, this leaves just over a month to
25 extract process and analyze the budget before most

1 decisions about the adopted budget are made.

2 That is not enough time for genuine
3 communication. I proposed several changes to the
4 budget development process and reporting.

5 Give the community more than a few
6 weeks between the executive and adoptive budgets and
7 require open data to be available within 48 hours of
8 any budget release, expand the budget function
9 analysis to all agencies with functions to find
10 collaboratively with community members and community-
11 based organizations, not just budget and agency
12 officials, explain these functions in plain language,
13 pair this with a more detailed reference for the full
14 budget which is currently incompletely and
15 inconsistently represented its budget codes.

16 This should allow for the
17 differentiation of expenses for administration,
18 overhead cost, contracts and programs, and not leave
19 vast sums of money without explanation. It should
20 also include neighborhood level appropriations for
21 place-based agencies like Department of Education and
22 Parks and Recreation.

23 Any funding changes above a meaningful
24 threshold, maybe 10, 20 million, should be applied
25 with a clear explanation of what function any increase

1 will support, and how many -- how any cuts may affect
2 functions, programs and staffing.

3 Finally, this data should be output by
4 the city as spreadsheets that do not require
5 processing to readily understand and analyze. With
6 this charter revision, New York City has the
7 opportunity to lead the country by providing the time
8 and transparency our budget process needs to cultivate
9 real community engagement. Thank you for your time.

10 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

11 Juan Carlos?

12 MR. CASTANADE: Yes. Yes. My name is
13 Juan Carlos Castaneda and I'm a resident from -- of
14 Chelsea. And the topic I would like to talk about is
15 bikes of the sidewalks. Sidewalks are public spaces
16 designed and designated for pedestrians and not for
17 bikes or bikers.

18 Currently, bikes are out of control all
19 over the city, not only on the sidewalks but also in
20 the streets and in public parks. We need regulation
21 for bikes and bike riders.

22 Some examples that I consider, they are
23 an area of opportunity that will bring some income to
24 the city are bike -- bike riders need to get a bike
25 rider license. Bike riders, they need to be insured

1 and protected.

2 Bikes need to be registered and must
3 have a plate number. Bike riders must wear safety
4 equipment. Bike riders must respect traffic laws.
5 Bike riders must respect traffic lights. There need
6 to be regulations for delivery workers who ride -- who
7 are riding a bike.

8 There must be a law to implement to
9 ensure bike riders dismount their bikes on the
10 sidewalks when they are in parks and public areas.
11 Within a -- we need a safer -- we need safer streets
12 for all New Yorkers, and I'm sure we can all coexist
13 in a civilized society. Thank you.

14 MR. GASPARD: Thank you so much.

15 Questions, comments from our
16 commissioners?

17 Thank you so much. We're grateful for
18 both of your testimonies.

19 And I'm pleased to say that we have
20 managed to hear from every single person who had an
21 interest in testifying in tonight's hearing. So
22 that -- I'm -- I'm so pleased to be able to say that.
23 We appreciate all of your contributions.

24 We also appreciate the contributions of
25 our interpreters, our stenographer and the wonderful

1 staff of Medgar -- Medgar Evers College that made this
2 meeting as accessible as possible.

3 I will say that it's been many years
4 since I've been here at Medgar Evers. I used to come
5 here with some regularity to meet with a mentor of
6 mine named Betty Shabazz, and it's just wonderful to
7 be able to be in this community again.

8 We are at the end of this meeting, but
9 before we move to adjournment I would like to just
10 inform the general public that the next hearing of
11 this commission would be held tomorrow evening in the
12 Bronx at 5:00 p.m. in Lehman College at -- which is at
13 250 Bedford Avenue in the Bronx.

14 It will focus on improving franchises
15 and concessions. But like today, we will welcome
16 testimony from all New Yorkers on topics related to
17 the charter.

18 Is there a motion to adjourn this
19 meeting?

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 8: Can we -- are
21 you going to --

22 MR. GASPARD: No. We're doing it
23 tomorrow evening. Yeah. We moved it. Sorry. Is
24 there a motion to adjourn?

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 9: So move.

1 MR. GASPARD: Thank you.

2 Is there a second?

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 10: Second.

4 MR. GASPARD: All in favor?

5 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Aye.

6 MR. GASPARD: Thank you. We are
7 adjourned.

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 11: We should do
9 it all over again.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 12: Nice job.

11 (Whereupon, at 7:27 p.m., the
12 proceeding was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

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

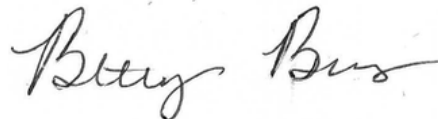


PAUL GRASSO

Notary Public in and for the
State of New York

CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIBER

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



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