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**From:** East Side Neighbors NYC [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 22, 2022 12:00 AM  
**To:** Public Testimony  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Public Testimony in Opposition Re: Proposed Redistricting of Manhattan D5 and Queens D26

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September 21, 2022

Dennis M. Walcott  
Chair, Districting Commission  
253 Broadway, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10007

Re: Opposition to Redistricting Eastern District 5 into District 26

Dear Chair Walcott:

We respectfully and vigorously oppose the proposed redistricting plan that would assign the easter part of our community currently in City Council District 5 (D5) to a district across the East River, City Council District 26 (D26).

The draft proposal violates four of the criteria set forth in City Charter Section 52 (1) (c) (d) and (e) and Section 52 (2). The violation of those criteria results in districts where:

- neighborhoods and communities of interest are not kept intact,
- the proposed district is not compact,
- the proposed district results in an extreme crossover district, and
- the proposed district is very oddly shaped.

Further, the proposed districts will create significant practical difficulties for the affected neighborhoods.

We write to you as members of a long-standing, tight-knit community, unique in its composition of sentient, ambulatory seniors - the largest such community in New York City. We have a history, for over 40 years, of providing community service to our area. We have helped, for example, to preserve the largest block of affordable housing in Yorkville, to advocate for and to implement the placement of bus shelters, to expand Sunday service for the M31 bus and to gain a new express MTA bus service to Wall Street, to support local schools and libraries, to plant over 200 neighborhood trees and help to install their tree guards, and to train volunteers as block watchers in coordination with our 19<sup>th</sup> precinct. We have organized our area residents to become members of New York City's Community Emergency Response Team, teaching the response skills needed for fire safety, light search and rescue, community disaster support, disaster medical operations and traffic control, given our unique geophysical demands and unique population. We have been advocating for a safe, clean area with tables and chairs in a small asphalt-laden park that is frequented by our seniors.

We work closely with our City Council Member (currently Julie Menin) to address the needs of our local population. Our senior population is unique in our City. This redistricting proposal would have a devastating effect on this population in New York City as it tears this unique, vibrant community in two.

Our seniors regularly access our current City Council Member's office **on foot**. Many of our seniors do not have access to computers and cell phones, and participate in matters of civic concern **in person**. Although some seniors are able to utilize public transportation, many of our seniors who use walkers and wheelchairs would find using public transportation to reach their Council Member's office an entire day's trip, causing unnecessary expense, and likely actually making the visit impossible. To move the current eastern Manhattan Council District 5's representation to Queens is to effectively deny these thousands of seniors the representation to which they are Constitutionally guaranteed.

For District 26 residents in Manhattan to reach their Council Member under the proposed redistricting, we would have to traverse a river. If this trip were to be made by car, our residents would be subject to tolls if the likely congestion pricing is enacted. For the public to have to incur the expense of a toll just to visit the office of one's City Council Member is entirely unreasonable. Multiple visits to our City Council Representative's office, if located in Queens, would be prohibitively expensive, especially for our many seniors on fixed incomes. For those of our seniors who are dependent on walkers and wheelchairs, public transportation to a City Council Representative's office across the East River is not an option. This redistricting plan cuts off our representation and access to our elected representative.

The newly drawn Queens District 26 would create a district that spans two boroughs. With the majority of inhabitants of District 26 residing in Queens, the Council Member's office will likely be headquartered in Queens. To ask a Council Member to maintain two offices is an expenditure that would negatively impact the profound needs of both Queens and Manhattan residents of this proposed district. To expect taxpayers to assume this unnecessary financial burden when there are so many pressing, life-saving needs in both proposed District 26 and District 5 is entirely unreasonable.

In fact, how will the Manhattan-side residents be truly represented? Will a Queens Council Member send representation to two additional Manhattan Community Boards? Will a Queens Council Member hold full membership on two Borough Boards? What is the cost to us taxpayers for a City Council Member having to cover this proposed expanded terrain? Why would this non-essential new expense be justified when both Council districts (and the City as a whole) have other pressing dire needs? What is the likelihood that the Manhattan portion of the proposed district will ever prevail in a matter of Participatory Budgeting? Manhattan and Queens residents may hold vastly different positions on important matters of public policy including, but not limited to, congestion pricing. Which position will a Queens Council Member adopt?

The proposed redistricting would remove the only public parkland that exists in Council District 5. Removing Council District 5 resident's regulatory and budgetary participation for our well-used and well-loved too-few parks in our only Manhattan area is unconscionable. It is also entirely unreasonable to expect Queens residents to support parkland to which they, too, have limited access across a wide river - a trip that would incur undue travel expenses and undue travel time.

It is important to take notice of the geology underlying current D5 and D26. Current D5 rests upon Manhattan Schist, ancient hard bedrock that enables the construction of underground tunnels and taller buildings. D26, on the other hand, rests upon much softer sedimentary rock. Not only must building and development in each of these two very different geological regions be considered differently, we also need to plan for and remediate past damage caused by, for example, super storms and hurricanes for these two very different regions. Both D5 and D26 require the legislation, regulations, resources, and

funding that each unique region needs. Lopping off the eastern-most portion of one geophysical type of region (D5) and placing it under the control of a much larger, entirely different geophysical type of region (D26) with unique geophysical needs of its own would lead to the subsummation of the needs of the smaller area into those of the larger. Both regions deserve individual, vigorous representation.

A more immediate consideration is this: if the proposed Council District 26 were to take effect, the hospital availability for the Queens side residents, at least 75% of proposed Council District 26 would be entirely misrepresented. The Queens side residents are currently dangerously underserved; Manhattan-side hospitals, as we are informed by members of Queens Community Board 2, will not send ambulances across the East River to save Queens-side lives, nor would the time it would take for a Manhattan ambulance to cross the East River to get to any part of the Queens-side proposed District 26 constitute responsible healthcare.

Further, the proposed redistricting separates communities of interest, including senior groups, neighborhood associations, Community Boards, tenant associations, and more. We each have a vital interest in the maintenance and betterment of our communities and unique geo-physical spaces. To permit this proposed redistricting would be to oppress the decision-making capabilities of our residents.

Finally, this oddly-shaped, extreme crossover district will significantly and adversely impact the provision of municipal services and diminish or eliminate the political voices of thousands of Manhattan's residents. With respect to some key transportation networks alone, this proposed redistricting would cause the important hub of the Roosevelt Island Tram to be represented by two different Council Districts, and the MTA F train, an essential transportation artery for Manhattan Island, would have **three** Council Members representing the Roosevelt Island station and its two adjacent stops.

Please help us! In the strongest terms possible, we urge the Commission to return to the drawing board and not adopt the proposed districts referenced above. members of our community stand ready to meet with Commission staff to address these matters and to propose alternatives.

We thank you in advance for your consideration,

Sincerely,

Wendy Machaver, John McClement, and Andrew Ravaschiere  
East Side Neighbors, NYC