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**Admin Law General Workspace
CRC Public Hearing**

**Moderated by Carlo Scissura
Wednesday, June 5, 2024
10:01 a.m.**

**Queens Borough Hall
120-55 Queens Boulevard
Kew Gardens, NY 11424**

**Reported by: Abigail Rodriguez
JOB NO.: 6740473**

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A P P E A R A N C E S

List of Attendees:

- Stephanie McGraw, Commission Member
- Ruben Diaz Jr., Commission Member
- Kyle Bragg, Commission Member
- Hazel Dukes, Vice Chair (by videoconference)
- Carlo Scissura, Chair
- Edward Kiernan, General Counsel
- Jackie Rowe Adams, Commission Member
- Lorraine Grillo, Commission Member
- Herbert Daughtry Sr., Commission Member
- Ken Ngai, Secretary (by videoconference)
- Chaim Steinmetz, Commission Member (by videoconference)
- Irak Cehonski, Director of Budget
- Danielle Brecker, Community Board 2 Member
- Yiatin Chu, Queens Resident and Final Five Member
- Lauretta Humphrey, Greater TriAngula Civic Association Member and SQREJC Member
- Frank Morano, New York City Resident (by videoconference)
- Kimberly Comes, Council President Far Rockaway (by videoconference)
- Sherif, New York City Resident (by videoconference)

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

2 MR. SCISSURA: Okay. Good morning.
3 Good morning. It's wonderful to be at Queens Borough
4 Hall. It is a pleasure to be here, and I want to
5 thank everybody for coming out today. We are really
6 beginning, today. Welcome to our first public hearing
7 of the 2024 Charter Revision Commission, and on behalf
8 of the entire commission, I would like to thank
9 Borough President Donovan Richards for hosting us here
10 in Queens. By the way, this room is spectacular, so
11 congrats to Queens for having such an amazing public
12 meeting space.

13 My name is Carl Scissura. I'm chair of
14 the commission and honored to be here. We have with
15 us our vice chair, Dr. Hazel Dukes, who I believe is
16 here virtually on Zoom; our secretary Ken Ngai who is
17 also on Zoom; Kyle Bragg; Reverend Herbert Daughtry;
18 Ruben Diaz, Jr.; Lorraine Grillo; Stephanie McGraw;
19 Jackie Rowe Adams; and Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz, who is
20 also joining us virtually.

21 So before we begin, I'd like to ask our
22 commissioners to just give a quick hello, and I'm
23 going to start, Ruben, with you.

24 MR. DIAZ: Welcome, everyone, from
25 greens from the boogie-down Bronx. It's always a

1 pleasure to be in Queens, and I'm looking forward to
2 hear the concerns of the residents here in Queens on
3 how is it that we, on this commission, can move
4 forward to do something significant with regards to
5 the charter of the City of New York that will impact
6 in a positive way at least the most amount of New
7 Yorkers. Good morning.

8 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you.

9 MS. MCGRAW: Good morning, everyone.
10 My name is Stephanie McGraw. I am from Harlem and
11 honored to be here in Brooklyn and honored to be here
12 from this community, and I thank the mayor. And I am
13 here to your voice and your concerns and to be the
14 voiceless of the people of Queens. And I love Queens
15 because this is where all the queens are, you know. I
16 mean, we got kings here, too, but Queens. Thank you
17 very much.

18 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you.

19 MR. BRAGG: Thank you. Good morning.
20 I'm Kyle Bragg, a lifelong resident of Queens. I live
21 less than eight miles from Queens Borough Hall I'm
22 just honored to be here with my commissioners to work
23 to make this city a city that works and addresses
24 issues for all communities of New York City and
25 particularly the most marginalized communities and

1 make sure that those communities have a voice in
2 government.

3 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, Kyle, and I
4 should add -- I think I said this at the last meeting.
5 Kyle and I served on the 2019 Charter Commission.
6 Great.

7 Jackie?

8 MS. ADAMS: Good morning. Jackie Rowe
9 Adams. I'm in Harlem, Manhattan, and I just want to
10 welcome all of you and I'm just so glad to be a part
11 of the charter, just to hear your concerns and to get
12 a chance to let our voices be heard and be the voice
13 for the voiceless. So thank you. We have work to do
14 together, and I'm looking forward to it.

15 MS. GRILLO: Good morning, everyone.
16 My name is Lorraine Grillo, and I agree with all my
17 colleagues on the commission that this is a real
18 pleasure to be here to see all of you show up. And I
19 want to let you know that I grew up in Queens and was
20 a Queens activist for many years, so it's really a
21 pleasure to be on the other side of the microphone.
22 But thank you so much for coming.

23 MR. DAUGHTRY: I'm Herb Daughtry. Just
24 glad to be on this commission. And to our chairman
25 and to all the members of the commission, it comes

1 rarely that you have an opportunity to engage in
2 business activity that, indeed, has limitless
3 potential influencing not only the City of New York
4 but, because New York is an international city, you
5 have the opportunity, perhaps, to say something, to do
6 something, that will have an impact on the world. And
7 that comes rarely, and I'm glad and proud and humble
8 to be a part of the commission.

9 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, sir.

10 And I agree. Whatever New York does
11 has an impact on the world, and I like that. I also
12 want to thank our executive director, our general
13 counsel, and the entire staff for their work in
14 getting us here today. I know you guys are going to
15 be busy today and tomorrow in particular, getting all
16 of our schedule ready for the next few weeks, and we
17 are excited to continue to work hard on this.

18 So before we hear from members of the
19 public who have joined us today and who want to
20 testify, let me just say a couple of words, some of
21 them I said last week. We were formed by Mayor Adams.
22 The commission was created May 21st. We are tasked
23 with reviewing the entire city charter and
24 recommending changes that will help New York City
25 government work more efficiently and better serve all

1 New Yorkers. We are excited be here, as I said, in
2 Queens, which is -- although we had a meeting last
3 week, this is our first public hearing meeting, and we
4 will be soliciting recommendation and comments on how
5 to improve city government from members of the public,
6 like at this forum, from experts in certain areas of
7 expertise that we will hear from, hopefully, in the
8 next week and two weeks. And it'll be exciting to
9 hear what's on people's minds.

10 At the end of the process, the
11 commission will determine what proposals to take to
12 the voters in form of a ballot question or questions,
13 and that will appear on the ballot at the November 5th
14 general election. So today, the commission welcomes
15 members of the public to comment both in person and
16 via Zoom, and we will be hearing comments from both
17 in-person and virtual participants.

18 This hearing, or what we like to call
19 input session, is the first in a series of meetings
20 and a series of hearings to listen and gather ideas
21 from the public on improving the city charter. We
22 will be hosting additional sessions around the city in
23 the coming weeks, and I believe we will come back to
24 Queens for a round two. We encourage you to tell your
25 friends and neighbors to come out and let us know how

1 they think we can ensure that city government is
2 working for all New Yorkers. We will do our best to
3 accommodate everyone who speaks. If we run out of
4 time before it's your turn, we ask that you please
5 consider attending a future meeting or submitting
6 comments in writing, but it is, at least, my desire to
7 hear from everyone who comes to these meetings.

8 Future hearing dates will be on our
9 website, www.nyc.gov/charter, and comments may be
10 submitted in writing to
11 charterinfo@citycharter.nyc.gov between now and July
12 12th, so we've got about five weeks. If you can't
13 make a meeting, please submit your comments,
14 obviously, in writing.

15 So we are ready to rock and roll, and
16 I'm going to call, as our first speaker, Irak
17 Cehonski -- and if I said that wrong, I am sorry --
18 who is the director of budget at the Queens Borough
19 president's office.

20 MR. CEHONSKI: Hello. Thank you. The
21 last name, perfect.

22 MR. SCISSURA: Awesome. I have a tough
23 last name, so I appreciate your suffering.

24 MR. CEHONSKI: Thank you. Thank you so
25 much. Well, good morning, everyone and rest of

1 charter revision commission.

2 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Good morning.

3 MR. CEHONSKI: My name is Irak Cehonski
4 Rivas, and I serve as the director of budget for the
5 Queens Borough president, Donovan Richards.

6 Unfortunately, the borough president is unable to
7 attend today's session, so I will be delivering the
8 following testimony on his behalf.

9 Today, we'd like to speak about section
10 102, paragraph B of the New York City charter, which
11 addresses expense allocations available to the board
12 of presidents in the City's budgetary process.

13 MR. SCISSURA: Can you just repeat what
14 section that was again?

15 MR. CEHONSKI: 102, paragraph B.
16 Specifically, it gives us the formula for how funding
17 is dispersed to each borough president's office. This
18 formula is the average of each borough's share of the
19 city's population, each borough's share of the
20 population living below the -- 125 percent of the
21 poverty line, and each borough's share of the city's
22 total land area.

23 In its current state, the formula does
24 not allow for an equitable distribution of funding
25 across the boroughs. This formula does not take into

1 consideration the rapid pace of population growth
2 which Queens has experienced in the recent years. It
3 does not take into consideration current economic
4 impact to renters and homeowners, even though Queens
5 continues to be the fastest growing borough in terms
6 of population and housing and that Queens is the
7 largest borough by land area.

8 Our expense funding per capita is the
9 lowest in the city. For example, in the fiscal year
10 2024 adopted budget, Queens' population was over
11 2,400,000 and receive -- received \$2.20 per person in
12 expense funding. In comparison, Manhattan receives
13 \$3.05 per person in expense funding, despite having
14 nearly 800,000 few residents. Even more egregious is
15 Staten Island, which receives \$9.54 per person in
16 expense funding, despite having nearly two million
17 fewer residents than Queens.

18 All of these means Queens residents
19 receive much less in overall investment that residents
20 of other boroughs, and this injustice must be
21 rectified. The expense funding formula is outdated
22 and has not kept up with the times, plain and simple.
23 If we are to ensure that every New York City resident
24 gets their fair share of funding, the formula must be
25 updated. For example, the formula could include the

1 forecast of creation of school seats projected by the
2 school construction authority in the five-year capital
3 plan. This element will allow the city to factor in
4 the population growth already expected by the
5 administration and will allow it to reach population
6 who may not be receiving any benefits and therefore
7 not considered in other population metrics.

8 I urge the charter revision commission
9 to look into this matter and ensure the legal text our
10 city adheres to takes into account the current
11 socio-economic reality we live in. I thank you for
12 your time and commitment to work together in
13 addressing this and other pressing matters as to
14 better serve the communities we represent in New York
15 City. Thank you.

16 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, sir.

17 I'm not going to do this with every
18 speaker, but because it is the borough president's
19 official testimony, do any of the commissioners have
20 any comments or questions? Sorry to bring you back.
21 Yes. Yes, former borough president.

22 MR. DIAZ: Good morning. Just for a
23 point of clarity, is it the borough president's
24 position or your office's position that the capital
25 budget for borough presence is not equitable, or is it

1 also the budget that's allocated for running the
2 office?

3 MR. CEHONSKI: This is for running the
4 office, expense funding, like the operational funding.

5 MR. DIAZ: How about a capital budget?

6 MR. CEHONSKI: Well, capital, we -- I
7 think we're -- it's -- it's distributed by, mostly,
8 like, land. So Brooklyn is the one that receives more
9 than us, and we are --

10 MR. DIAZ: So you don't want us to
11 examine that?

12 MR. CEHONSKI: No, that one's good.

13 MR. DIAZ: Okay. Do you feel that or
14 is it your position of the borough presidency that, as
15 an elective office, maybe you should participate more
16 or there should be a set amount of allocation for your
17 office and the fact that it's in the hands of other
18 elected officials, even though the borough presidents
19 are elected, as well?

20 MR. CEHONSKI: I'm sorry. Can you
21 repeat that question? I don't think --

22 MR. DIAZ: In other words, the borough
23 presidents are elected; correct?

24 MR. CEHONSKI: Yes.

25 MR. DIAZ: The city council is elected.

1 MR. CEHONSKI: Yes.

2 MR. DIAZ: The mayor is elected.

3 MR. CEHONSKI: Yes.

4 MR. DIAZ: And does the borough
5 president work for the mayor?

6 MR. CEHONSKI: No, it's an independent
7 office.

8 MR. DIAZ: Does the borough president
9 work for the city council?

10 MR. CEHONSKI: No, it's an independent
11 office.

12 MR. DIAZ: And yet, they are the ones
13 who determine what your budget should be?

14 MR. CEHONSKI: Yeah, it -- it says in
15 the charter it has to be to -- also to introduction
16 change law, but also we -- we do believe that it's --
17 it's worth the time of the charter revision commission
18 to analyze this because it's been a disinvestment that
19 has been done for over 40 years, and I think it's time
20 to revisit that.

21 MR. DIAZ: So you want us to look at
22 that. Do you have any suggestions as to what we
23 should do with that?

24 MR. CEHONSKI: Yes. As mentioned --
25 so, I mean, we can send more options, but, like,

1 the -- on the top of mind is if you're -- if the
2 school construction authority is already projecting
3 school -- that we need to increase schools in Queens
4 because we're under -- like, we have less seatings
5 than most. We're overpopulated in terms of schools.
6 That element will allow you to catch people who -- who
7 do not manage to into other population metrics, you
8 know, people who are not receiving any type of
9 benefits and for -- therefore, are not considered into
10 any formula to distribute the funding. And we do
11 every board president, as you know, we do our effort
12 to reach out to every member of our borough, no matter
13 if you're receiving benefits or not, and that impacts
14 the way we can operate with the funding that we --

15 MR. DIAZ: And Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry.
16 But the reason why I posed the question, and I'm sorry
17 that my English didn't serve me well, the way I posed
18 it initially about being part of the process is that,
19 in my former life as a borough president, the borough
20 presidents are the only elected officials who
21 represent an entire borough. And so even in that
22 assessment, you know, I was wondering whether it was
23 the position of the borough president that you should
24 be able to at least submit what do you think are the
25 projections, you know, moving forward, in terms of

1 schools to the city council, to the mayor's office,
2 and so on and so on and so on.

3 MR. CEHONSKI: Oh, definitely. These
4 are conversations that we already started --

5 MR. DIAZ: As opposed to them, you
6 know, just giving you what they believe the projection
7 should be.

8 MR. CEHONSKI: No, no, definitely.
9 That's something -- the conversation that we already
10 started with OMB and, I believe, some members of the
11 council, so that's something we're pursuing, but this
12 announcement came very at hand and timely so we
13 decided to explore both because, you know, we're all
14 to -- we want Queens to get the money so --

15 MR. DIAZ: I yield my time,
16 Mr. Chairman, just I have a special place in my heart
17 for borough presidents.

18 MR. SCISSURA: As do I.

19 MS. MCGRAW: Excuse me.

20 MR. SCISSURA: Yes, ma'am.

21 MS. MCGRAW: I'd like for him to repeat
22 the section because I like to study it.

23 Can you repeat it, please?

24 MR. CEHONSKI: The section is section
25 102, particularly, this is paragraph B.

1 MR. SCISSURA: Just to put a little
2 context, only because I spent many years in a borough
3 president's office, the way formulas are allocated, as
4 you mentioned and as Ruben mentioned, is based on land
5 and population. So for example, in the capital
6 budget, Queens will always get the most in terms of
7 capital funding. Brooklyn is second. In my previous
8 life, I would've argued that Brooklyn should be first,
9 but I don't argue that anymore because we love all
10 five boroughs equally.

11 And I can tell you in charter
12 commissions in the past, this issue has come up a few
13 times, so it's not the first time we're hearing it and
14 we appreciate you bringing it to us. I would say if
15 you want to elaborate on your testimony and forward us
16 a copy of more, we'd be happy to take it, and we
17 appreciate your testimony.

18 MR. CEHONSKI: I'll make sure to expand
19 on that example and others.

20 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, sir.
21 Yes, sir?

22 MR. DAUGHTRY: Is there a time limit on
23 how long do we meet?

24 MR. SCISSURA: How long do we meet?

25 MR. DAUGHTRY: Today, I mean.

1 MR. SCISSURA: Let's see who's here to
2 testify. Let's see how many people are testifying.

3 MR. DAUGHTRY: Oh, so our time is
4 dictated by the --

5 MR. SCISSURA: I wouldn't say it's
6 dictated, but we'd like to hear from as many people as
7 we can.

8 MR. DAUGHTRY: All right.

9 MR. SCISSURA: So we'll see shortly
10 where we are. I should mention there are a little
11 over, maybe, 35 to 40 folks and counting on Zoom,
12 which is exciting.

13 Danielle Brecker.

14 MS. BRECKER: Good morning. Thank you.
15 I am Danielle Brecker. I live in Long Island City in
16 Queens. I am a member of community board two in
17 Queens, but I am speaking today as -- well, being a
18 member of community board two informs my testimony.
19 I'm not speaking for the community board. And I also
20 just want to say that I just found out about this last
21 night at about five o'clock, so more notice would be
22 great. And my testimony is -- I don't have a section
23 of the charter. I will send you more detailed
24 testimony that I will write later.

25 But I'm actually here to talk about a

1 frustration of being on a community board and doing a
2 lot of work to kind of negotiate with developers to
3 make sure we're getting truly affordable housing and
4 amenities, such as libraries and park space, and then
5 having no ability as a community board to enforce
6 that, and it would be nice if the charter would help
7 back that up -- back community boards up.

8 We are the first line of government.
9 Often, we are hearing the concerns about housing and
10 climate and so many other things, but when we go in
11 and spend hours and hours, you know, talking with
12 people who are doing things in our community and
13 making agreements, there's no way to enforce what
14 we're agreeing to. So it would be great if the
15 charter could help us do that.

16 I also just want to add to what the
17 borough president's testimony was that finding a way
18 to make sure we get, especially, capital funding for
19 the many infrastructure issues we have in the district
20 would be really terrific because I do live in a
21 community that is suffering with lack of park space,
22 lack of sewer, updated sewers, problems with transit,
23 and a lack of investment in public housing. Thank you
24 so much.

25 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much.

1 And we, I'm certain, will look at community boards as
2 the last charter one did, as well, and they are
3 clearly a very integral part of society and of the
4 landscape of New York. I served on community board 11
5 in Brooklyn for many years, many years ago, but so I
6 understand.

7 Okay. Do we have any other speakers
8 signed up to provide testimony? Yes. Forward it.
9 He's coming. Yiatin Chu. I hope I said that right.

10 MS. CHU: You said it perfectly.

11 MR. SCISSURA: All right. I'm batting
12 1,000 on names today.

13 MS. CHU: Yes, you are. Thank you so
14 much. Good morning, everyone. My name is Yiatin Chu.
15 I am a resident of Queens and a public school parent.
16 I've become more politically engaged in the last few
17 years due to my advocacy in public school education.
18 I'm here to speak about the -- the bill that city
19 council has put forward to change the -- their role in
20 the mayor's appointment of his commissioners. I want
21 to say that we elected the mayor as the leader of the
22 city, to run the city, and to be held accountable for
23 everything that goes on in the city. The problem with
24 letting city council advise and consent is then no one
25 is accountable. The mayor will blame the council, and

1 the council will say the commissioner reports to the
2 mayor and the clear lines of accountability is then
3 blurred. And I believe that our government needs to
4 be held accountable. Our leaders need to be held
5 accountable.

6 While I was no fan of Mayor --
7 Former Mayor DeBlasio, I did support mayoral control
8 for the same reason. Additionally, as an
9 Asian-American, my community has been very unhappy
10 with the current city council members and the policies
11 that they've pushed forward. I do not think that this
12 minority caucus should have a stronghold on what
13 happens in the city. The latest example was what
14 happened in December when they pushed through the How
15 Many Stops Act and the mayor correctly vetoed it and
16 they overrode his veto, and that was a symbol to me
17 that we have a city council that's not truly
18 representative of the majority of New Yorkers who want
19 effective policing -- community policing.

20 Additionally, many of our city council
21 members, just glancing at their records -- their
22 election records, were elected by less than 1 percent
23 of their constituents. I mean, it's a travesty that
24 we have such low turnout in our local races, but that
25 is the fact and I do not believe that we should be

1 giving this body of city council members, each of them
2 having a very small number of constituents that
3 actually support them, to actually have more power.
4 So I'm here to ask this commission to put this up for
5 referendum. I mean, if this is what we think it is --
6 should be considered. It should not be done by city
7 council. I think it needs to be done by the populace.
8 All of New Yorkers need to have a say in this. Thank
9 you for considering my opinion. Have a good day.

10 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much.

11 Our next speaker is Laretta Humphrey.
12 Ms. Humphrey, come on up.

13 MS. HUMPHREY: Greetings and good
14 morning.

15 MR. SCISSURA: Good morning.

16 MS. HUMPHREY: I know a few of you up
17 there. I -- I'm a novice at this.

18 MR. SCISSURA: Just speak closer to the
19 mic.

20 MS. HUMPHREY: I said good morning.
21 I'm a novice at this. I -- I want to say that my name
22 is Laretta Humphrey. I am the president of the
23 Greater TriAngula Civic Association in southeast
24 Queens. I am a retired of DC37, and I want to talk
25 about Queens. I live in Queens. Queens, Queens, the

1 fastest growing borough in the world. I'm very proud
2 of Queens. I'm very proud of my council member,
3 Nantasha Williams, and the work that she does, but I
4 want to say that wherever the money is coming from, we
5 need more money for infrastructure in southeast Queens
6 and Queens alone. We -- Queens suffers a high water
7 table that -- that is a band aid. Everything is a
8 band aid for our high water table.

9 I'm also a member of SQREJC, which --
10 which is the Southeast Queens Environmental Justice
11 Council, and we have been fighting for the last 20
12 years trying to get those wells pumped in northern
13 Queens and southern Queens. We know that the high
14 water table cannot be solved unless you pump those
15 wells. Now it is my understanding that they --
16 they're saying that they don't have the money to pump,
17 but in some areas, like in the western Queens, the
18 wells are being pumped and they have a solution there.
19 But southeast Queens is overburdened. I don't want to
20 get emotional, but we are overburdened with the high
21 water table and the flooding, and hopefully the
22 borough president and the mayor will hear.

23 And I also wanted to talk about --
24 somebody talked about private developers. I think
25 that government is giving the private developers too

1 much authority to come into our communities and make
2 decisions about how we should live or be living. I
3 think we -- we may not know infrastructure, we may not
4 be experts here and there, but we definitely know what
5 harms us in our community because I've been in my
6 community over 40 years and I definitely know I
7 wasn't -- my floors was not saturated with moisture,
8 but now, today, my floors in my home is being
9 saturated. So I think that wherever the money's
10 coming from, we have to put it into the infrastructure

11 And the private developers, I'm not in
12 agreement with an 80-year moratorium on their taxes.
13 The homeowners, they have to pay taxes every year.
14 There has to be some limit for the developers as far
15 as how many years the tax break gets because I -- we
16 don't get a tax break.

17 And community board 12 absolutely has
18 no power, and it's very hurtful for the community to
19 come out ever Wednesday and -- and listen to people
20 who tell us what they're going to do in our community
21 and not say, you know, work with us. So I'd -- I'd
22 like to see more private developers come into the
23 community, talk to the community, and take -- take
24 some ideas from the community. It's -- it would be
25 very helpful.

1 And this is why I'm proud of Nantasha.
2 She's doing a great job. She's doing a great job
3 there. So I'd like to see the community board have
4 more input and in decision making and have a little
5 more power than they have.

6 MR. SCISSURA: Great. Thank you very
7 much.

8 We are waiting to see if we have
9 anybody on Zoom who would like to testify.

10 Do we have any comments so far from the
11 members of the commission?

12 And if you are on Zoom, if you can
13 raise your hand if you would like to speak, that would
14 be helpful. We have Frank Morano.

15 Frank, I know this is not your first
16 charter commission hearing.

17 MR. MORANO: This is true. It is my
18 first charter commission hearing by Zoom. I hope you
19 can hear me okay.

20 MR. SCISSURA: Yes, we can, and that's
21 one of the good things about Zoom is we're able to get
22 folks all over the place. So Frank, you're up.

23 MR. MORANO: Thank you very much. As
24 President Scissura alluded to, this -- I think I hold
25 the distinction of testifying at more charter revision

1 commission hearings than any New Yorker in history.
2 I've been doing this since 2002, and it's my intention
3 to come to every meeting that you have and offer
4 testimony. And it's not because I don't have anything
5 better to do.

6 I've never been busier on a personal
7 and professional level, but it's because I -- I have a
8 lot of suggestions for things that you can consider
9 and it's because that I really think that you guys
10 have the -- the opportunity to shape the future of New
11 York for a century. And the decisions that you make
12 about what you're going to put before the ballot not
13 only is going to affect New Yorkers for a century but
14 as you guys have already alluded to, what New York
15 does really does set the pace for every municipality
16 and many states throughout the entire country.

17 And while I've had the opportunity to
18 testify before six or seven charter revision
19 commissions in the past, I don't think I've ever had
20 one that has the unique mix of legends and public
21 servants, so it's great to be here.

22 The issue that I'm talking about today,
23 and will in several subsequent hearings, as well, is
24 the issue of nonpartisan elections, and it's my hope
25 that you guys will decide to put nonpartisan elections

1 or some form of proportional representation which New
2 Yorkers had for 12 years in the 30s and 40s on the
3 ballot this November. There's two quotes that I want
4 to share with you which I really think hammer home the
5 importance of this issue, both from New York City
6 mayors. One is that there's no Democratic or
7 Republican way to clean a street, which, of course,
8 was said by Mayor LaGuardia.

9 And the other one is this one, as it
10 currently stands, the system of choosing candidates is
11 not open to all New Yorkers. Our system of elections
12 cannot continue to lock out legal registrants who
13 decided that they do not want to be affiliated with
14 any party but rather want to vote based on the issues.
15 That's a quote from Eric Adams in 2003, the last time
16 New Yorkers were seriously considering transitioning
17 to some form of nonpartisan elections, and he's
18 exactly right on -- only the situation has gotten
19 much, much worse.

20 We have turned a class of voters into
21 this -- in this city into second-class citizens,
22 voters like me, political independents, of which there
23 are about a million in New York City or close to it,
24 have no meaningful say in our electoral process. We
25 are in a position where we're paying taxes for

1 elections that we can't participate in. We literally
2 have a situation where it's taxation with
3 representation, but it's not just political
4 independents that are affected by this. We have
5 Republicans in Democratic districts, and in the two or
6 three, you know, Republican districts in this city, we
7 have Democrats in Republican districts who have no
8 meaningful say in the electoral outcome because they
9 can't vote in the only part of the process that
10 matters, the primary, even though they're paying the
11 bill for this.

12 Now why do we want to convert to this
13 now? Is this too soon to put on the ballot for
14 November? No. New York City has a track record of
15 nonpartisan special elections going back 36 years. We
16 have had elections since 1988 conducted in a
17 nonpartisan manner. They've gone well. The people
18 that are elected there are no less equipped, no less
19 functional, no less competent than every other elected
20 official, so it's not fair to the voters. We are left
21 out of every meaningful stage of the process. I'll
22 point to a city council election in 2001 where --
23 where Carlo Scissura was on the ballot, lost a
24 Democratic primary, and then, even though there were a
25 lot of independents and Republicans in Brooklyn that

1 wanted to vote for him in 2001, they didn't have the
2 opportunity. How is that fair to them?

3 It's also not fair to candidates. Max
4 Rose, a member of this commission, was my congressman.
5 Almost everybody agreed, who pays attention to this
6 stuff, and he did a great job. He was praised by the
7 Republicans, by activists, by everybody. Almost
8 everyone acknowledges that the reason he lost that
9 election is because he was a Democrat. Now what sense
10 does that make? Why should people be relegated to a
11 status of losing elections because they're in the
12 wrong political party? Now maybe you could understand
13 it at Congress because there's some ideological
14 aspects to -- of it, but not when it comes to
15 municipal services. These should be delivered in a
16 non-ideologic --

17 MR. SCISSURA: Frank, I love hearing
18 you --

19 MR. MORANO: Last thing I'll say,
20 please just put it on the ballot. Let the voters
21 decide.

22 MR. SCISSURA: Frank, I have a -- while
23 you're here, because I know this has been a passion of
24 yours at least at the last two charter commissions
25 I've been on, is it my understanding correct that many

1 major US cities have what's called open primaries
2 where everyone can vote in a primary and then -- I
3 don't know if it's final two or three go to the final.
4 I think LA just had that election. Frank, are you
5 still on? He is not okay, but -- you are. Frank did
6 you hear me? Are you on mute?

7 MR. MORANO: Yes. Can you hear me now?
8 They mute --

9 MR. SCISSURA: Okay. I don't know if
10 you heard my question.

11 MR. MORANO: I heard your question, and
12 I thought it was a good one and a very apt one. About
13 half of the cities in this country -- half the largest
14 cities in this country, including out in Los Angeles,
15 have some form of nonpartisan elections, including,
16 yes, Los Angeles. In fact, every municipality in
17 California has nonpartisan elections. It's in their
18 state constitution, and San Francisco, Oakland,
19 Albany, they have combined two aspects of non -- of
20 this that we have in New York, nonpartisan elections
21 and rank choice voting, and yet the world has not
22 stopped spinning on its axis in those municipalities.
23 Chicago is the same thing.

24 Half of the cities in this country, it
25 works well. Everyone gets to participate. Everyone

1 gets a fair shake.

2 MR. SCISSURA: So Frank, are you
3 saying -- and I just want to make sure that I
4 understand you -- some of the cities that have what
5 you're calling nonpartisan elections also have ranked
6 choice voting, which New York has?

7 MR. MORANO: That's right, and we've
8 tried that with special elections and it -- it's
9 worked well. But yes, every municipality in -- in
10 California has, you know, open primaries or
11 nonpartisan elections, and in California, you have San
12 Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, San Leandro, Albany,
13 they all have both rank choice elections for city
14 office and nonpartisan elections. The two are not
15 contradictory at all. It can easily be done in New
16 York City, and I hope you'll give New Yorkers the
17 choice as to whether it should be done.

18 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, Frank.

19 MR. DIAZ: I just have a question. I
20 have a question.

21 MR. SCISSURA: Yes?

22 MR. DIAZ: Under this scenario, would
23 then the general elections be obsolete?

24 MR. SCISSURA: No, so the way I know it
25 works in several other cities is you have a primary.

1 So our primaries are in June -- and let me just be
2 clear because I know Frank mentioned Max Rose,
3 obviously, this would only be for New York City
4 elections because we have no role on federal or state.
5 So the way it works in many other cities is you have a
6 primary, and everybody runs in the primary. So
7 Republicans, Democrats, working families,
8 non-registered, anybody can run in that primary, and
9 then the top two, top three, depending, will face each
10 other in November. So there is still a primary and
11 still a general.

12 The difference is, under this scenario,
13 rather than a Republican primary where only
14 Republicans vote, a Democratic primary where only
15 Democrats vote, you would have one primary, and
16 everybody gets to vote, including, you know, a lot of
17 people who didn't choose a party affiliation

18 MR. DIAZ: But they're not precluded
19 from choosing somebody in the general election?

20 MR. SCISSURA: They can then choose
21 whoever they want in the general election. So let's
22 say eight people run in the June primary. The top two
23 people, whatever they are, right -- Democrat,
24 Republican, independent, et cetera -- they finish one
25 and two. They then run against each other in

1 November.

2 MR. DIAZ: I get it.

3 MR. SCISSURA: Okay.

4 MR. DIAZ: I understand.

5 MR. SCISSURA: All right. Good.

6 MR. DIAZ: I'm just saying that
7 that's -- in order -- we're not stopping -- I don't
8 think that -- anyway, we'll talk about this later.

9 MR. SCISSURA: Okay. All right.

10 Anybody else on Frank's comments?

11 Thank you, Frank.

12 Kimberly Comes.

13 MS. COMES: Good morning. My name is
14 Kimberly Comes. I am the referend council -- resident
15 council president here in Far Rockaway, New York a --
16 development in Far Rockaway. I'm also a member of the
17 Queens community board 14, as well as the NAACP Branch
18 2213 in Far Rockaway. I wanted to -- well, first I
19 would like to say I received the email last night for
20 this email at 9:11 p.m. to this -- for this morning at
21 ten, so that means I had to switch things around. I
22 had no idea this was happening, but I am on, so I am
23 blessed. However, I don't know the name of the woman
24 that spoke before Mr. Frank. I was agreeing with her
25 because here in Far Rockaway, the -- when it rains

1 hard or when the tide is high, Far Rockaway is
2 flooded. I live on Beach Channel Drive, and Sandy,
3 which was 12 years ago, Beach Channel Drive was a
4 raging river, and that is the -- the route to
5 evacuate. So I have concerns.

6 I'm a part of a group with -- called
7 The People's Police Academy, and our group has been
8 formulating evacuation information to residents in
9 case another storm like Sandy -- a severe storm like
10 Sandy happens, that we're able to get out, we're able
11 to evacuate. So our issues have been with the
12 flooding. On a day -- on a day-- a beautiful day and
13 the tide is high, most of Far Rockaway is underwater.
14 Some people, if their basements -- I live in a
15 building, but when it rains hard, the whole -- the --
16 the entire intersection is flooded, way past the
17 sidewalk where, if you don't have on waders -- and I
18 don't know how many fishermen are -- or fisher people
19 that fish are here who know what waders are. Waders
20 are those pants you wear when you fish in the river.
21 If you don't have those on, you're not able to come
22 and go. Your car will be flooded, and the cars are
23 floating and being destroyed.

24 So I don't -- I don't have any
25 solutions, but I'm asking is there any way that Far

1 Rockaway, Queens -- Queens, period, can get some help
2 when it comes to the flooding -- the severe flooding
3 that's happening in our communities. And I happen to
4 live in a low-income community, so a lot of -- of our
5 residents are -- are disabled seniors and may not even
6 have the finances or family to -- to go to. So we
7 would end up going to shelters, but that's not my
8 question. My question is can someone help us when it
9 comes to the flooding that happens in our community.
10 Thank you, and I yield.

11 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much, and
12 we will certainly bring your comments to the relevant
13 city agency. I just want to be clear that our vice
14 chair, Hazel Dukes, is on the Zoom.

15 Good morning, Hazel. Thank you for
16 being here.

17 Yes, sir?

18 MR. DAUGHTRY: Is it in order to back
19 up the question on nonpartisan?

20 MR. SCISSURA: Sure, go ahead.

21 MR. DAUGHTRY: It's just resonating in
22 my mind. If the one and two candidates are of the
23 same party, how did that work? In other words, if the
24 person who gets the most votes -- as I understand, the
25 two persons who get the most votes are both

1 Republicans or both Democrats, they will continue with
2 the election, although that's one party?

3 MR. SCISSURA: Correct. So at least my
4 understanding, the way it works in California is when
5 you run in this primary, what they call an open
6 primary, that allows every voter to participate, two
7 people will make it to the general election in
8 November. It doesn't matter what party they are, so
9 yes, you could have two Democrats, two Republicans,
10 two independents, two whatever.

11 MR. DAUGHTRY: So in the real sense,
12 you still locked into some kind of partisan politics.

13 MR. SCISSURA: Yeah, that's a good
14 question. Okay.

15 MR. DAUGHTRY: Thank you, Mr. Scissura.

16 MR. SCISSURA: No, thank you for
17 bringing that up.

18 Yiatin, I know you wanted to add one
19 more thing. And I generally don't do this, but we
20 like to hear from people, so go ahead.

21 MS. CHU: Thank you very much for the
22 opportunity. It's on two different topics, since I'm
23 here. I want to actually reiterate the prior speaker
24 regarding changes to our primary elections. In full
25 disclosure, I've been an adviser to a group called

1 Final Five. We advocate for open primaries, and I
2 believe it's an important election reform that should
3 be considered by all New Yorkers. I got involved with
4 this open primary reform because I noticed that Asian
5 communities, Asian registered voters, are often not
6 affiliated with a party. In looking at the data of
7 districts that have high Asian voters, up to a third
8 of the voters do not have a party affiliation.

9 They are blanks or what we call
10 unaffiliated voters, and it -- you know, I just feel
11 like our closed system, number one, is a hard system
12 for people to understand, especially immigrants that
13 want to get involved. And two, you know, by the time
14 they vote in November, they're getting -- I want to
15 say, you know, stuff that -- people that other people
16 pick for them, a very limited choice, and I -- I think
17 that is not what our democracy is about. I very much
18 want you to consider this to put as a referendum in
19 terms of opening up our primaries in New York.

20 As the prior voter -- as the prior
21 speaker said, there are models of it that's been
22 working well, and look, I -- I spoke to people in the
23 party, both the Democrat party as well as one of the
24 smaller parties, the conservative. No one wants to
25 change this, so we're not going to be able to make

1 these type of reforms by leaning on the people that
2 are in power today. We need to give that to the
3 people of New York and let them decide. So that's
4 point number one.

5 The second thing, which may not be so
6 popular with the mayor, I've been a strong voice in
7 opposing the city of yes. It is an ill-conceived plan
8 that takes away the right of local communities to
9 decide for ourselves what's right and how we choose
10 to -- to live. I've been to a number of community
11 board meetings. I've heard presentations dozens of
12 times, and look, they're -- they're coming after --
13 the plan is coming after one- and two-family zoned
14 neighborhoods and it's wrong. We represent less than
15 25 percent of the entire city. Whatever housing
16 shortage that you want to handle should not be done on
17 the backs of tax paying -- high property tax paying
18 homeowners in the city.

19 We move to the outer rims of eastern
20 Queens, southern Queens, southern Brooklyn for a
21 reason. We want a little more green space. We're
22 inconvenienced by that, and -- and what this plan is
23 going to do is uproot everything that we have built
24 and invested in -- in our properties, in our homes.
25 You know, specifically, the elimination parking is

1 outrageous. Have you driven around parts of Queens?
2 Where I live, we cannot find parking. Houses are
3 getting bigger within their zone, and we have
4 multi-generation families that now live 'cause housing
5 is expensive, and we have three or four cars. So if
6 you are visiting someone, you can't find parking. How
7 can we build more if there's no consideration for
8 parking? The other is the infrastructure --

9 MR. SCISSURA: I just want to have you
10 wrap it up.

11 MS. CHU: Yes, I will wrap it up. I
12 understand this is a contentious issue. Look, I've
13 been an education advocate. The class size law, which
14 I think the mayor has been, you know, pretty
15 reasonable on, we can't even handle families that live
16 now in these neighborhoods. Okay? With the school
17 that we have in 2526 school district, we are busting
18 out, and unless you're building hundreds of more
19 schools, how can we do the city of yes? Thank you.

20 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much.

21 Okay. Do we have any more speakers on
22 Zoom? If we could just get one of the staffers to
23 grab the names? We have Sherif on the phone.

24 MR. SHERIF: Hi, everyone. Thank you
25 for giving me the opportunity. I'm going -- I'm going

1 to second what the previous lady just mentioned about
2 parking. Parking in Queens is atrocious. It's --
3 it's not realistic to think that we're all going to
4 turn to public transportation with public
5 transportation being the way it is. For example, I
6 live in Jackson Heights. I want to go to Astoria. I
7 have tried to take the Q66 bus which travels down
8 Northern Boulevard.

9 It takes three times as long to take
10 the bus to go 40 or 50 blocks than it does to take my
11 car. Just the other day, I looked it up. It's at 45
12 minutes versus my car, which was 15 minutes. The idea
13 of saving the environment is a -- is a good one that
14 I'm, you know, fully in support of, but it's childish
15 and immature to think that we're just going to remove
16 New York City from the rest of the United States where
17 motor vehicles are required. So I just wanted to
18 bring up the -- the issue about parking.

19 My -- my second issue is that taxes are
20 used to run elections, yet as an independent, I'm shut
21 out of this process. So I pay for it with my taxes,
22 but I'm not allowed to -- to make a voice -- to -- to
23 give my voice unless I have to sign -- unless I sign
24 up to one of the two parties and I -- I think that's
25 wrong in -- in many ways. Maybe if the parties

1 themselves pay for their primary elections -- at least
2 primary elections, I might be okay with it, but if
3 you're going to take my money and not take my voice,
4 I -- I fail to see how that's even constitutional.
5 Thank you.

6 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much.

7 Do we have any more Zoom testimony?
8 No? Is there anyone else here that has not testified
9 that would like to? No? Okay. I'm going to turn it
10 to the commissioners for any comments.

11 Yes, ma'am?

12 MS. ADAMS: Hello, again. I'm Jackie
13 Rowe Adams, and I just want to say to all of you I
14 really appreciate you because it is time that we speak
15 up and speak out so we could get things done. So I
16 want you to know that you are appreciated. And I do
17 want to thank the mayor for giving us the opportunity
18 to hear the voices of our city, of our community, and
19 I always say of our world. So this is good, and we're
20 looking forward to working with you all, so let's keep
21 it going, and let's take back our community and let's
22 take back our city by doing the work together. Thank
23 you.

24 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, Commissioner.

25 I echo that. We really appreciate everyone who came

1 out today, the folks on Zoom. I know everyone's busy,
2 so we all have to make a little time for this. So
3 we're going to have another hearing in Queens before
4 the end of this month. It will be in the evening. We
5 will get notice out ASAP, and we are going to be
6 working today and tomorrow to get a full list of
7 hearings for the coming few weeks. At least it would
8 be my desire, and I've heard from many of the
9 commissioners, our desire to have a full list of
10 hearings for the month of June by the end of this
11 week, and then this way, it allows people to schedule
12 accordingly. We will continue to accept public
13 testimony on the website that I read earlier, and
14 tomorrow, we will be in the great borough of Staten
15 Island and I look forward to seeing all of you there.

16 And I will ask for a motion to adjourn.

17 MS. ADAMS: Motioned.

18 MR. SCISSURA: Thank you. Second? All
19 in favor?

20 MULTIPLE SPEAKERS: Aye.

21 MR. SCISSURA: Any opposed or
22 extensions?

23 Thank you very much, again, Borough
24 President Donovan Richards for hosting us. Have a
25 wonderful day.

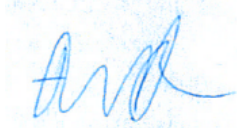
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(Whereupon, the meeting concluded at
10:54 a.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

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



ABAGAIL RODRIGUEZ
Notary Public in and for the
State of New York

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CERTIFICATE OF TRANSCRIBER

I, JOSHUA SHEPHARD, 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.



JOSHUA SHEPHARD

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