 1 CITY COUNCIL
    CITY OF NEW YORK
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    TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES
 3   Of the
 4 NEW YORK CITY CHARTER
    REVISION COMMISSION 2024
 5 -------------------------X
 6   Date: June 6, 2024
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 8
    HELD AT: BOROUGH HALL
 9   10 Richmond Terrace
                       Staten Island, NY 10301
10
    BEFORE: Carlo Scissura, Chair
11
12 COMMISSIONERS: Kyle Bragg
                       Ruben Diaz, Jr.
13   Lorraine Grillo
                       Kenny Ngai
14   Max Rose-Secretary
                       Jackie-Rowe Adams
15   Ed Kiernan
                       Dr. Hazel Dukes
16   Rev. Herbert Daughtry
                       Stefanie McGraw
17   Rabbi Chaim Steinmeitz
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1   MR. SCISSURA: Good morning everybody. It's

2   nice to be in Diane Savino and Max Rose territory. I live

3   in the suburbs of Staten Island, also known as Bay Ridge

4   Brooklyn, so it's great to be in this wonderful island.

5   Welcome to our second public hearing and the

6   third meeting of the Charter Review Commission of 2024 and

7   the first of our two meetings in Staten Island. As we

8   committed to and promised, we will host two meetings in

9   every borough. Yesterday we were in Queens, today we are

10   in Staten Island and we will be announcing some meetings

11   shortly.

12   So let me thank first of all my friends,

13   Borough President Vito Fossella and his team for hosting us

14   here in Staten Island Borough Hall. I'm Carlo Scissura,

15   Chair of the Commission and I'm joined by an esteemed group

16   of members. I will start with my left; Ruben Diaz, Jr.,

17   Lorraine Grillo, Ken Ngai, Max Rose, Jackie Rowe-Adams and

18   Kyle Bragg. So welcome everybody. And including our

19   executive director general counsel and the entire team that

20   is working so hard on getting this done.

21   I'm going to ask our Commissioners before I

22   begin to just give a quick good morning. So Ruben, Ruben,

23   we always start with you.

24   MR. RUBEN: Good morning, Mr. Chairman, I

25   don't mind. Good morning to the Island of Shaolin as we

1   call it where we come from. I'm (in audible) from the

2   birth place of Hip Hop and it's great to be here this

3   morning.   Yesterday we had, I thought was a good start,

4   and we were able to hear from the people in Queens some

5   provocative and some great suggestions as to how we should

6   approach with this Commission.

7   Let me just put this out to those who are

8   viewing and for further meetings, I think that every

9   borough should have a friendly competition. So of all of

10 you who are going to come to these hearings, I would

11 suggest that you look over the Charter and I would love for

12 there to be this friendly competition as to who can come up

13 with the most, you know, innovative ideas and thoughts that

14 we as a Commission who are filled with distinguished Board

15 of Commissioners, how it is that we can do something so

16 impactful with this Commission that Mayor Adams has formed

17 .

18   So it's good to be here on this island, I look

19 forward to hearing from everyone here this morning and I

20 look forward to everyone moving forward taking me up on my

21 challenged.

22   MR. SCISSURA: I love the challenge.

23   MS. GRILLO: Good morning everyone. My name is

24 Lorraine Grillo and I just love being in the borough of

25 Staten Island, it's my favorite place because as President

1   of -- former of President of School Construction Authority,

2   I built a lot of schools in Staten Island and I loved every

3   minute of it. Everybody was so happy and so grateful. So

4   hopefully we will get some good input for this Commission

5   and work really hard to solve the problems of the City of

6   New York.

7   MR. NGAI: Good morning everybody, my name is

8   Ken Ngai. Thank you for coming to the Staten Island

9   borough here today to join us in a unique opportunity to

10   voice your concerns about the direction of the City.

11   We have an opportunity here to review the City

12   Charter and we would love to gather your input and whatever

13   issues or concerns that you may have. We are eager to

14   listen to you, and, you know, put forward good government

15   and that's something that we had said previously and I

16   think everyone can agree that that's what we are driving

17   for.

18   Thank you again and I look forward to hearing

19   from everyone.

20   MR. ROSE: Good morning everybody, it is

21   great to be home for one of these events. I look forward

22   to hearing all of your thoughts and concerns and continuing

23   to serve the City with delivering a sound recommendation on

24   revision. Thanks again.

25   MS. ROWE-ADAMS: Good morning Staten Island.

1 Staten Island in the house. Well, we are in the house with

2 you this morning Staten Island and I'm Jackie Rowe-Adams

3 and I hail from Harlem, but that's all right.   Staten

4 Island is beautiful, it really is. But everybody says oh,

5 it's so far. We got here in like half an hour from Harlem.

6 I mean how cool is that? So I just want to say I'm honored

7 to be here with the team, with the other Commissioners

8 because we have work to do and, you know, and that's why

9 you're here this morning, because you care and that's what

10 we need. We need people to care about their community,

11 about their City of what's going on. And I said at the

12 first meeting, I said, you know, you have to know what's

13 going on and you have to be able to help fix it.

14   So this is your opportunity to be the voice for

15 the voices and let people know that you know what's going

16 on. And that's the song I love by Marvin Gaye, what's

17 going on. And so again, congratulations to you all that is

18 sitting here so we could get the job done and we want you

19 to voice your opinion and your concerns, it's so important.

20 Thank you.

21   MR. SCISSURA: If that doesn't get you ready

22 for this morning, nothing will. Kyle you have a tough act

23 to follow.

24   MR. BRAGG: I know I do. I always do when I

25 sit behind Jackie.

1   Well, good morning everyone, I'm Kyle Bragg

2   again. I hail from the borough of Queens and it's actually

3   a real honor to be here on the beautiful borough of Staten

4   Island. This is my second go round with the Charter

5   Revision Commission. I had a pleasure of serving with

6   Carlo, the Chair, in 2019 under DeBlasio.

7   It's very important the work that we will get

8   done through this Charter Revision Commission. To make

9   government work for everyone, we need to hear from the

10   people that it impacts the most which are all of you and

11   those who we hope to be talking to in the future. People

12   will come out and voice their opinions and concerns about

13   how to make government better work for everyone and with

14   your engagement and the participation, we'll be able to put

15   together, and we hope, some really good changes that will

16   impact all of your communities and again make government

17   work for all of us.

18   Good government is hearing from the people and

19   that's why we're here today and we will be continuing to

20   have these meetings and hear from those folks that are

21   impacted by the government that serves them. So thank you.

22   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, Kyle.

23   We are joined virtually by our

24   Vice-chair Dr. Hazel Dukes, Reverend Herbert Daughtry,

25   Stefanie McGraw and Rabbi Chaim Steinmeitz. Would any of

1 you like to say anything before I proceed? No, okay.

2   Okay, I want to touch upon something Kyle and

3 Jackie said which we are here to listen to the people. And

4 while I've learned, this is my third Charter Commission,

5 that often times people who come to Charter Commission

6 meetings who testify in person or now we are adding virtual

7 testimony which allows more people to participate, often

8 times those people are not coming to talk about the

9 Charter, they're coming because they are frustrated, they

10 have an issue and they want somebody to hear what they're

11 saying. So I am saying to people, to New Yorkers, we're

12 here to listen. It doesn't mean we can answer everything,

13 it doesn't mean we can solve everything, but at least we

14 can hear you and at least share your concerns and your

15 comments with people who may be able to do something. So

16 that is important and it is important for New Yorkers to

17 know that this is a group of individuals committed to

18 listening to your voice.

19   So couple of words, we were formed by Mayor

20 Adams on May 21st. We are tasked with reviewing the entire

21 City Charter and recommending changes that will help City

22 government work more efficiently and better serve all New

23 Yorkers.

24   We will be soliciting recommendations and

25 comments on how to improve City government, the members of

1   the public at forums like this and from experts in certain

2   areas in forums that we will be hosting later this month.

3   At the end of the process, the Commission will

4   determine what proposals to take to the voters in the form

5   of a valid question or maybe more than one question and

6   those questions or questions will appear on the ballot

7   November 5th in the general.

8   Today we are excited to welcome, as we said,

9   folks to Staten Island to provide comments in person and

10 via Zoom and also in writing. So we are excited to get

11 testimony from a variety of sources.

12   This is our input session and we are excited

13 that it is the first of two that will be in Staten Island.

14 We will be back in Staten Island on the evening of

15 June 24th at Curtis High School and so that will be

16 exciting. And on June 13th we will have an issue forum and

17 public hearing on fiscal responsibility at New York Law

18 School in Tribeca.

19   Please tell your friends, please tell your

20 neighbors to come out and share your comments. We will do

21 our best to accommodate everyone who wishes to speak. We

22 are going to try and stick to a three-minute rule if we can

23 and if time allows I will be happy to extend the three

24 minutes for the speaker.

25   So with that I'm going to begin. And as I

1   said, thank you to Borough President Vito Fossella and we

2   have with us today Daniel Master, Jr., who is the legal

3   counsel to the Borough President.

4   Daniel, welcome.

5   MR. MASTER: Good morning everyone and the

6   audience as well. Good morning everyone. As you just

7   heard, my name is Daniel Hale Master, Jr., I'm legal

8   counsel to the Staten Island Borough President and I will

9   be delivering his testimony to the Commission today.

10   First I'd like to welcome the Charter

11 Commission to Staten Island, the borough whose residents

12 and elected officials are often the least satisfied

13 consumers of New York City services and who often find

14 themselves on the proverbial short end of the stick when it

15 comes to governmental dysfunction.

16   As you're aware, the 1989 City Charter Section

17 203 required the City Planning Commission to adopt criteria

18 that are now referred to as the Fair Share Provisions of

19 the New York City Charter. I'll just read some of that

20 paragraph;

21 "The criteria shall be designed to further the fair

22 distribution among communities of the burdens and benefits

23 associated with City facilities."

24   Now this is a lovely sentiment and a lovely

25 verbiage, but unfortunately it's only aspirational, it's

1 not something that is self executed.

2 For example, when this provision, this

3 particular provision was adopted and inserted into the

4 Charter in 1989, Staten Island was the only borough in the

5 City of New York that was collecting all of the City's

6 garbage and all of the City's garbage was dumped. Now

7 that's kind of a prima facie proof that we were doing more

8 than our fair share with regard to this particular burden

9 of government.

10 So for Staten Islanders right in the beginning,

11 1989 when the Fair Share Provisions were adopted, we have

12 kind of looked at those Fair Share Provisions as being an

13 empty slogan with regard to our own treatment. That's a

14 historical example of not being treated fairly, but it's

15 not an isolated incident and it's representative of a

16 continuum that persists right up to the end lines of today

17 For example, the environmental assessment for

18 the City Congestion Pricing Plan was sold to residents of

19 the City as a plan that was going to result in less traffic

20 and less air pollution, but in verifiable fact, if you go

21 through the 5,000 page study, the study actually found that

22 on Staten Island traffic would increase and pollution would

23 increase and that those increases in both traffic and

24 pollution would persist through the year 2024. So

25 approximately another 25 years of more air pollution and

1   more traffic on Staten Island and there would be no

2   mitigation efforts that were offered in that study,

3   although they have been offered to the Bronx. Staten

4   Island is the only borough that can say that they're being

5   harmed this way by this program.

6   Now I understand this is an MTA program that

7   falls under the Governor, but one of the projects's

8   sponsors of Congestion Pricing is the New York City

9   Department of Transpiration, so the City is a partner in

10 this new initiative.

11   Let me share with you one more current example

12 of harmful treatment for Staten Island, it's right now in

13 the planning process, it's in the process of being planned.

14 The so-called City of Yes for Carbon Neutrality passed by

15 the New York City Council on December 6th of last year,

16 2023. It effectively changes the zoning and use group

17 requirements for storage battery energy system, they're

18 better known as BEST Units, battery energy storage systems

19 in New York City.

20   Before the 6th of December 2023 these units

21 were considered inherently dangerous and could only be

22 located in commercial zones far from residential areas.

23 That changed on December 6, 2023, when the New York City

24 Planning Commission proposed and the New York City Council

25 approved the placement of BEST Units in 1 and 2-family

1   residential zones.

2   Just to give you a visual aid, and I'll submit

3   these along with copies of my remarks, when you look at

4   BEST Units in other parts of the United States or in other

5   parts of the world, they're not in residential

6   neighborhoods. In fact, they look like they've been

7   constructed on the moon, they're so far away from any kind

8   of business or other activity, human activity. That's

9   because they are inherently dangerous.

10   I hope the folks that voted for this provision

11   allowing these units to be in 1 and 2-family residential

12   neighborhoods, I hope they have been listening to or

13   reading the news for the last month because in Otay Mesa,

14   that's, O-T-A-Y new word M-E-S-A, Otay Mesa just outside of

15   San Diego, a BEST unit went on fire on May 15, 2024 and it

16   burned for two weeks. It burned for two weeks. During

17   that time millions of gallons of water were poured on the

18   blaze to no avail because water cannot put out this kind of

19   battery, these litium batteries. Fire evacuation orders

20   were issued and not once, but twice, these battery storage

21   units reignited and the fire department had to go back out

22   there.

23   The fire is only part of the problem with these

24   units, I think an even larger problem is the toxic gases

25   that are let off when these things burn. And remember,

1   this fire burned for two weeks. The fluoride gases, the

2   carbon monoxide, these gases can migrate off a site even if

3   the fire itself has been contained. So my worry is both

4   the fire and the toxic gases that will be released into a

5   residential neighborhood, for example.

6   This is only the most recent battery

7   storage fire. For the record, there have been four such

8   fires in New York State within the past 13 months. Four

9   fires in New York State in the past 13 months.

10   Now closer to home, as of April 19th of

11   this year for New York City there are 31 battery storage

12   sites proposed for New York City, 15 of which are proposed

13   for Staten Island. That's just under half, that's

14   48 percent. I'll exaggerate and say half of those battery

15   units are going to be on Staten Island. Many of them are

16   going to be in densely populated areas or densely populated

17   commercial areas.

18   I hope that the lesson we learned from the Otay

19   Mesa fire just two weeks ago, they put it out finally at

20   the end of May, I hope the lesson we learned is that if we

21   don't know how to extinguish one of these fires once they

22   start, then we shouldn't be placing them in residential

23   neighborhoods. We really need to know much more about the

24   Science and the imperfections of these batteries than we

25   know now before we start putting them in residential areas.

1   Now this leads me to my proposed revision for

2   the City Charter for your consideration. I'll bring all of

3   this home to a solid recommendation for the Commission. My

4   proposal is that going forward, let me say it this way,

5   currently every proposed law before the City Council has to

6   have attached to it a statement of fiscal impact, how much

7   is this going to cost us essentially? Our proposal is that

8   going forward every proposed law should also require a

9   statement of compliance with the Fair Share Provisions of

10   the New York City Charter and if they can't state that it's

11   going to be in compliance, state why it's not going to be

12   in compliance. Such a statement will insure that those who

13   proposed our laws, as well as those who enact our laws,

14   will better understand the impacts of those laws on our

15   neighborhoods.

16   There are also variances of the Fair Share

17   Provisions, for example, while Staten Islanders may

18   preliminary, and for good reason, complain about being both

19   a literal and figurative dumping ground for everything that

20   is unwanted in the other boroughs, Staten Islanders also

21   complain that they don't receive their share of the

22   benefits of government. Remember fair share is both a

23   balance the benefits and burdens.

24   For example, here is a list, okay, the 62

25   New York City agency headquarters with their addresses and

1   the number of employees and some of these employ thousands

2   of people. These agencies bring jobs and economic activity

3   to wherever they're located. While the boroughs of

4   Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens are well represented,

5   there's not a single New York City agency headquartered on

6   Staten Island. We have space right here at the Ferry

7   Terminal which would be very easy to get to for anyone from

8   the rest of the City and of course the ferry is a free

9   ride. We have adequate space here. Please give us some

10   benefits of government. We'd be glad to take them.

11   Further examples of lack of fair distribution

12   of the benefits and services on Staten Island range from

13   the ridiculous to the sublime and here I have to mention

14   the City's new UR Luck Program. Yes, urine is a play on

15   the word urine, UR in Luck Program. And this is an

16   initiative that is going to be bring public bathrooms to

17   the five boroughs.

18   Now fortunately for Manhattan, Manhattan is

19   going to receive 28 of these new bathrooms, Staten Island

20   is going to get 7. Again, from the ridiculous to subline,

21   Staten Island is many times larger in terms of geography

22   than Manhattan and I'm sure if you're walking in Manhattan

23   there is going to be a free bathrooms somewhere within a

24   stone's throw.

25   In closing, until more is done to insure the

1 Fair Share Provisions of the City Charter are met, these

2 provisions will do nothing more than an empty slogan and

3 the City of New York can expect to hear further rumblings

4 of succession from the people of Staten Island and thank

5 you for your kind considerations of these remarks. Thank

6 you.

7   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much.

8   Do any of the Commissioners have any questions

9 or comments? Thank you.

10   MR. BRAGG: I'm sorry, I did have a quick

11 question.

12   MR. SCISSURA: Sure, go ahead.

13   MR. BRAGG: In your testimony earlier you spoke

14 about the -- you mentioned, you said 2024. You said it

15 would be 20 years, but it's 2024 I think you said.

16   MR. MASTER: Through 2048.

17   MR. BRAGG: '48, all right. You had said 2024,

18 I wanted to get the date correct.

19   MR. MASTER: 2048.

20   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you.

21   MR. DIAZ: Thank you for that testimony.

22 Question: Is there an example in the City of New York of

23 any facility where they did comply with Section 203, where

24 we have seen a compliance on, you know, for instance the

25 distribution among the communities for, it says here,

1   "burdens and benefits associated with the facility

2   consistent with community needs for services and efficient

3   costs effective delivery."

4   Have you ever seen an example where there was a

5   compliance of that?

6   MR. MASTER: I think there are compliance, for

7   example, if there are, if they're distributing, for

8   example, birth control for safety for AIDS or to make sure

9   facilities are available in every borough, they're not

10   going to have facilities only available in one place. And

11   I think it is aspirational, this is what we try to do

12   I would just like to see it -- I would like to

13   see it in print when a law is being enacted how do you see

14   from this point on how is this going to affect various

15   neighborhoods in the City of New York if you know in

16   advance.

17   MR. DIAZ: I'm sorry, should environmental and

18   even health impacts statements be considered?

19   MR. MASTER: Yes. Short answer yes.

20   MR. BRAGG: I have one more comment, maybe

21   question.

22   I hear you clearly on this battery storage

23   issue which is I think vital issue for Staten Islanders.

24   Sometimes Science and technology advances quicker than we

25   can really understand the impact that it will cause, the

1 human impact, but I'm trying to understand how would you

2 address this through the Charter Revision Commission as a

3 challenge for our City?

4   MR. MASTER: Well, I think that you could have

5 foreseen that most of these storage facilities would be on

6 Staten Island because we have more space and open space

7 available than the other boroughs, so it's going to be

8 difficult to put storage fields anywhere else in the City

9 of New York.

10   So I think it could have been readily

11 anticipated that the only place these could be adapted

12 would be on Staten Island and sure enough when the

13 applications came in, half of them are for Staten Island.

14   MR. BRAGG: I guess my question was how would

15 you address us through the Charter Revision Commission to

16 make sure that if they're going to be created that they're

17 created in a safe manner that does not impact our

18 residential communities.

19   MR. MASTER: Well, if you were to put, if you

20 were to revise the provisions in the Charter, the Fair

21 Share Provisions in the Charter, you would put in that if

22 the City Council is going to vote on this as they did, they

23 should understand that it will probably affect Staten

24 Island more than the other boroughs for the following

25 reasons.

1   MR. BRAGG: Thank you.

2   MR. SCISSURA: Okay, thank you very much.

3   MR. MASTER: Thank you very much.

4   MR. SCISSURA: I'm going to ask Assemblyman

5   Michael Tannousis who is on Zoom to provide his remarks and

6   testimony

7   Assemblyman, good morning.

8   MR. TANNOUSIS: Good morning. Can you hear me?

9   MR. SCISSURA: Yes, we can.

10   MR. TANNOUSIS: Perfect.

11   First of all, thank you very much for meeting

12   on Staten Island today. I'm coming to you from Albany as

13   we wrap up the legislative session. Today's remarks, I

14   just want to be very brief.

15   I want to address certain things that New York

16   City Council has done in recent memory, especially when it

17   comes to Bills that involve public safety.

18   As was noted by the prior speaker, many times

19   the City Council has acted without impunity, without input

20   from agencies that would be affected by these laws, without

21   input from the community that will be affected by these

22   laws and, you know, in the New York State Assembly, when we

23   pass legislation, we have to jump through various hurdles

24   in order to pass that legislation and they are need to be

25   organization bodies, local governments that would have to

1   be in agreement for us to pass those pieces of legislation

2   As City Council however continues to pass Bills

3   that affect our daily lives, affect our City agencies,

4   affect our communities without any type of responsibility

5   and they do that continuously and they have done that

6   continuously for the past few years, City government, just

7   like the Federal government, just like the State

8   government, is supposed to be a balance of powers. It is

9   not supposed to be a bullpit to pass whatever agenda any

10   specific member may have. You're supposed to be passing

11   Bills and laws to benefit New York City as a whole and to

12   benefit our communities.

13   So although I'm not going to go into specific

14   instances with you today, I do ask that as you go through

15   this process, please keep in mind that there needs to be a

16   fair and adequate balance and the City Council should not

17   just be allowed to pass any type of Bills without having

18   analysis, any type of input from agencies as to what these

19   would do for the agencies, for the community and, you know,

20   unfortunately on Staten Island myself, my elected

21   colleagues, whether they be from the City Council, from the

22   State Assembly, 80 percent of our time is fighting against

23   various initiatives that the City Council passed, and I say

24   this to you not only as a Assembly member, but as a former

25   employee of the New York City Council.

1   I worked for a New York City Council member for

2   a few years, so I do have a little bit of experience in

3   that process. At that time the New York City Council was a

4   much different body than it is today.

5   So going forward I ask that you take that into

6   consideration for the betterment of our community and for

7   the betterment of our City and thank you so much for

8   joining us here today.

9   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, Assemblyman. Any

10 questions or comments? Kyle, please.

11   MR. BRAGG: Thank you again, Assemblyman, I

12 appreciate your comments. I just wanted to understand in

13 regard to the Charter Revision Commission, what would you

14 recommend on how to address this issue because I agree that

15 the community needs to be engaged in particularly these

16 type of legislative laws that are changing the fabric of

17 this City and how government engages our communities and

18 unlike this forum there should be more forums with the

19 community to get their reaction or opinions to this type of

20 legislation that has a great impact on the City

21   So how would you address your concern through

22 the Charter Revision Commission as putting out something

23 for the people to vote on?

24   MR. TANNOUSIS: So one potentiality, and I want

25 to use this as an example, there was a Bill that was passed

1   in the New York State Senate and the New York State

2   Assembly a few years back in regard to some homeless

3   shelters. I believe at that point then Senator Savino and

4   Assemblyman Fall passed a Bill that would require public

5   hearings to be held before a decisions to open home a

6   homeless shelter

7   Using that as an example, maybe something could

8   be done where a public hearing is required in our

9   communities, perhaps in our specific communities on site to

10   make it easier for people to attend the hearings as opposed

11   to just doing hearings at City Hall and forcing people to

12   come into lower Manhattan. That's one possibility.

13   I'm sure that there are many other

14   possibilities and they will come as we continue the

15   process, but I just want you to have that theory in your

16   mind as we go forward because I don't see any type of end

17   in sight when it comes to New York City Council in regard

18   to the laws that they continuously pass. It needs to be

19   more accountability and more transparency and it shouldn't

20   be -- the community should not be up in arms after a Bill

21   is passed by the New York City Council, they should have

22   their input before it's passed and that's something that I

23   would ask you to keep in mind as you go forward in in this

24   process.

25   MR. BRAGG: Thank you.

1   We also heard someone in Queens at our hearing

2   yesterday in regard to this similar issue, one was public

3   safety, but also Mayoral control and the City Council

4   passing legislations without engaging the community. So

5   thank you for your comments.

6   MR. TANNOUSIS: Thank you. Thank you for

7   having me.

8   MS. ROWE-ADAMS: Thank you Assemblyman, music

9   to my ears. Because that's why we are here today. That's

10   why we are here, to make sure that our City and our

11   community voices are heard because we are the taxpayers.

12   You are the taxpayers and we have to make sure that the

13   ones that don't understand what's going on know what's

14   going on in their community and their City and that is very

15   key.

16   So we have to be a part of the voting, the

17   hearing, we have to have these hearings. We've got to let

18   our people understand and that's why I thank Mayor Adams

19   for being concerned and caring about his City and caring

20   about the community. Thank you.

21   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you. Anybody else? All

22   right, Assemblyman, good luck with your final day. Thank

23   you.

24   I'm now going to call Frank Morano to come

25   speak.

1   MR. MORANO: Good morning, Commission. I'm

2   limited to three minutes, I have a whole book worth of

3   recommendations on a wide variety of subjects. If I had

4   extra time I'd be sharing with you all of them

5   Welcome to Staten Island and the good news for

6   those of you who are on your first Commission is that Max

7   Rose, since this is his home borough, has to buy lunch

8   today. But fortunately for you there is a wide variety of

9   great restaurants in the neighborhood. I don't think the

10   Congressman knew that when he agreed to serve on this.

11   Also first my compliments on behalf of all

12   Staten Islanders in terms of your staff's elections. I

13   don't think you could have a better selection for Executive

14   Director than Staten Islands own Diane Savino. We got a

15   first-hand seat for 18 years for what an incredible

16   representative that she was and a big part of the reason

17   for that was because assembled an incredible staff with

18   people like Rob Cataldo and I'm glad both of them are on

19   this Commission staff as well. Staten Island is being well

20   representing, not only with Congressman Rose there, but

21   with a staff like that.

22   I do want to try and focus my remarks on the

23   areas that you guys are focused on as a Commission because

24   there is a short amount of time and I know you're focused

25   primarily or public safety and fiscal responsibility as is

1   your mandate from the Mayor and really, just speaking on

2   public safety today, one of the things that can be done,

3   which will safeguard public safety for generations of New

4   Yorkers and maybe turn back the clock on some of the bad

5   public safety steps we've seen these last few years is

6   non-partisan elections

7   People may say, well, what sense does that

8   make? How does electoral reform have anything to do with

9   what's going on in terms of safety in our streets. It has

10   everything to do with it. Because if you look now at

11   what's gone on in the City Council, we have seen the most

12   anti-cop body in New York City's history pass legislation

13   after legislation that's overtly hostile to the NYPD. You

14   know it, I don't have to list all of them for you, although

15   I'd be happy to.

16   This is rapidly becoming one of the most

17   anti-police entities in the entire country. It's not

18   progressive. I'm not going to call it progressive, it's

19   anti-cop. And why does that happen? Why do they pass

20   things like defunding the police and making police fill out

21   a mirage of paperwork whenever they have a conversation

22   with someone. It's because in 43 out of 51 Council

23   Districts and Citywide, the only meaningful election is the

24   Democratic primary.

25   When all you have to do is win a Democratic

1 primary, the only thing that you do is campaign to win the

2 Democratic primary and that leads to people staking out the

3 most radical left wing positions possible because they know

4 that's their only method of getting elected. Fortunately

5 there is another way and you can make this transition to

6 non-partisan elections. This would result in a more sane

7 and sober elected official, it would result in a

8 contingency that includes people that are not Democratic

9 primary voters feeling like they're represented. It can be

10 done and I hope you guys will put this on the ballot this

11 year in order for New Yorkers to have the choice as to

12 whether it should be done. Thank you.

13   MR. SCISSURA: I have a question. We know each

14 other a long time and you've talked about this for many

15 years. Explain to this Commission in your proposal how it

16 would work.

17   MR. MORANO: So I would suggest that at the

18 issue forum on the 13th that this be one of the issues that

19 you look at with experts who can delve into a wide variety

20 of the possibilities because there are several ways to go.

21   Personally I think that the simplest, the

22 easiest for New Yorkers to understand given their 30-year

23 track record in voting in elections like this, the easiest

24 to implement without requiring new voting machines or

25 people to learn other methods of voting is to simply do

1   what we do for non-partisan special elections in this City

2   for every election in this City. The same method that

3   elected Christine Quinn and Jimmy Otto and Gifford Miller

4   where you have a non-partisan election which now includes

5   Ranked Choice Voting in that special election, that should

6   be the election.

7   And as far as fiscal responsibility goes, if

8   you were so inclined, you could have just one round of

9   elections saving the cost of the first round of elections

10   entirely.

11   Now you may hear expert testimony and determine

12   maybe that's not the best course of action. Other people,

13   other entities in other cities do it in different ways, but

14   in Oakland, in San Franscico and in a lot of other

15   municipalities throughout the country, they do one round of

16   Ranked Choice Voting and in those two cities -- excuse me,

17   one round of non-partisan elections and in those two cities

18   include Ranked Choice Voting. It prevents companies from

19   slipping in with morality to prevent the taxpayer for

20   putting the Bill for two different directions and most

21   importantly the voters get to have a say, a meaningful say

22   in every step of the process which they're completely

23   denied now.

24   I made the reference to your candidacy in 2001,

25   where you having lived, grown up in Brooklyn and having a

1 lot of relationships in Brooklyn, those relationships

2 included Republics and Independents. When you lost that

3 Democratic primary, not one of them could vote for you and

4 I happen to know personally quite a few people who were

5 quite ticked off that they couldn't vote for you. I think

6 that's not a unique story. I could point to election after

7 election where that's been replicated around the City.

8 Why? Why don't people that are paying the bills for these

9 elections deserve the say in terms of who is representing

10 them?

11   We have a system now of taxation without

12 representation. I'm not asking you to change that. I'm

13 just asking you to put the question on the ballot and let

14 us, the voters, decide whether we want to change it.

15   MR. DIAZ: I have a question.

16   MR. SCISSURA: Yes, please. Anyone that wants

17 to jump in. Ruben.

18   MR. DIAZ: I want to steer away from a specific

19 issue in this case you brought up de funding police.

20   MR. MORANO: Only because I know that mandates

21 in terms of public safety.

22   MR. DIAZ: Right. But do you know of anybody

23 on the City Council now or before who voted to defund the

24 police who won in a non-partisan special election?

25   MR. MORANO: I'm sure I could find some

1   examples, right, but I'd have to look at the specifics of

2   the --

3   MR. DIAZ: So a non-partisan election did not

4   stop someone from being elected who voted on an issue that

5   you don't agree with?

6   MR. MORANO: I would have to look at the

7   specific election, but probably not.

8   MR. DIAZ: Would you say that the overwhelming

9   majority of people who are registered as say Democrats are

10   also against defunding the police?

11   MR. MORANO: I would say that, yes.

12   MR. DIAZ: I would say that too and I'm from

13   the Boogie Down Bronx. But what do you say to those who

14   don't come out and vote.

15   MR. MORANO: Well, I would say two things; one,

16   the people that vote in Democratic primaries aren't

17   representative of the Democratic party as a whole. And I

18   would say that they tend to be more representative of the

19   most partisan and the more strident ideologies in the

20   process and not representative of the general public.

21   MR. DIAZ: But for instance, in the Bronx the

22   overwhelming majority of registered voters -- I don't want

23   to say that, I don't have the --

24   MR. MORANO: You have a Republican in there

25   now.

1   MR. DIAZ: I don't have the data in front of

2   me, but there is a great deal of registered voters in the

3   Bronx are registered Democrats. A lot of them do not come

4   out and vote in a Democratic primary election. They do

5   come out in bigger numbers in a general election and the

6   general election they can vote for whoever, they can cross

7   party lines.

8   So I don't know if the solution is a

9   non-partisan primary election when if someone who is

10 putting out their record currently now as a person who

11 wants to defund the police, even though I believe like you,

12 that the majority of the registered Democrats are not in

13 favor of defunding the police just don't come out and vote

14 during the primary election.

15   MR. MORANO: So why not simply have the

16 election be what we have as the special election now, a

17 non-partisan election on general election day which has a

18 wider degree of public turn out.

19   The problem as it stands now in the Bronx and

20 other areas that are primarily one party is that the

21 general election doesn't matter. It's a ProForma

22 enterprise. You have the right honorable former City

23 Councilman and State Senator Ruben Diaz, Sr., ran a

24 Democratic primary for Congress. I realize we are talking

25 about municipal elections here, but the same principal

1   applies

2   He has an enormous amount of support among

3   Republicans and Independents as I'm sure you know and are

4   occasionally frustrated by, but he wasn't able to be a

5   choice in the general election for any of those folks and

6   yet those folks are still paying the taxes for the

7   Democratic party to have their selection process.

8   And, by the way, I live in the South Shore of

9   Staten Island and I'm not a Republican. Same thing applies

10 in the South Shore of Staten Island. If you're a Democrat

11 or Independent in the South Shore of Staten Island, you

12 have no meaningful say in who your elected officials are.

13 Why should we offer to be paying the taxes for these

14 elections that don't matter?

15   MR. DIAZ: What I'm struggling with, Mr.

16 Chairman, on this one, and I'm looking forward to hearing

17 more from you in future hearings I suppose you'll be coming

18 to, is I'm not sure that by having a non-partisan election

19 that A, that you get an increase in voter turnout during

20 the non-partisan primary election. And B, I'm not sure

21 that you still get a result in terms of philosophy because

22 according to, and we talked about this yesterday, if you

23 have say the top 2, 3, 4, 5 go-getters in that non-partisan

24 primary election then go off to the general election, those

25 top 2, 3, 4, 5 individuals could be of light mind and may

1   all support a certain philosophy that you may not agree

2   with in the general election.

3   MR. MORANO: Yeah, I don't see Tom DeLay

4   getting elected in Harlem or, you know, Alexandria

5   Ocasio-Cortez getting elected in the South Shore of Staten

6   Island, that's not going to happen

7   What this is a means of is actually having

8   elected officials that are more representative of the

9   community which really isn't the case now. You know, in

10 terms of the City Council for instance, you have about

11 30 percent of the City of New York that votes Republican,

12 right, and yet if we were equate that to Council seats,

13 they would have about 15 Council seats. Instead they have

14 I guess about six.

15   So New York is already a liberal City as many

16 large cities are, but the body representing New Yorkers is

17 far more left wing than the population is and I believe

18 that's because they're not being represented.

19   Now as for the question you raised about

20 comparing voter turnout in non-partisan elections versus --

21   MR. DIAZ: Is that where the real indictment

22 is? The real indictment is on the people who are

23 registered to vote who don't come out and vote in any given

24 primary regardless of the party. That's the real

25 indictment.

1   MR. ROSE: Can I just step in for a second

2   here. You're a master communicator, I've always

3   appreciated that about you, but there is something that I

4   think is getting lost here. You're not really talking

5   about something that is non-partisan. What you're talking

6   about is first-past-the-post.

7   MR. MORANO: No, I'm not. For instance, I

8   mentioned your example yesterday. Everyone agreed you did

9   a great job as a Congressman. I believe the reason you

10   lost was because you were running as a Democratic and you

11   had what a lot of people in Staten Island viewed as a

12   scarlet letter given what was happening on a national

13   perspective, stuff that you had very little to do with.

14   What if there was no Democratic label on the ballot, no

15   Republican --

16   MR. SCISSURA: Let me interrupt for a second.

17   We all know whether it's non-partisan or the system we have

18   today, people, voters will know what the person's

19   ideology is. They will know if they're a Democratic, a

20   Republican or an Independent.

21   MR. MORANO: That's great. That's part of

22   outreach and communicating to voters what you stand for and

23   what you believe in, but at far as that notion that an

24   ideology is attached to our partisan identification, for

25   about 15 years in Brooklyn both Dov Hikind and Charles

1   Baron were running for office in Brooklyn as Democrats.

2   Now I can't think of two people with more dynametrically

3   opposed views as Dov Hikind and Charles Baron and, yeah,

4   they were both nominated by the Brooklyn Democratic party.

5   What clue do the voters get about their ideology?

6   MR. SCISSURA: They want their primary and I

7   think there is a couple of things, and we will -- I'm

8   actually going to ask the staff that ensure that we do have

9   experts that appear at a hearing at a forum that talks

10   about this, but we do have elections and I think Ruben, you

11   made a point, and I think you did as well. People don't

12   vote in primaries and the numbers are the numbers, the

13   facts are the facts. Primaries have small turnout.

14

15   Do we believe, and this is where I think the

16   experts and the facts can tell us, do we believe that in a

17   June primary was for all voters would it be more people

18   voting or would it just be the same number of people just

19   thrown into one primary?

20   MR. MORANO: Or if there was a special election

21   in November on the general election day would there be more

22   people voting and I think the answer to that is yes. When

23   your predecessor's Commission studied this issue in 2002

24   and 2003 they solicited expert testimony that reviewed,

25   they did a comparative analysis of cities with non-partisan

1   elections around the cities, around the country and around

2   the state by the way and they found that, yes, in areas

3   where all things are equal, where there are non-partisan

4   elections there are -- there is an increase in turnout and

5   in the 12 years that New York City had proportional

6   representation in in the 30s and 40s, there was greater

7   turnout and those proportional representation elections

8   were non-partisan.

9   You had anybody able to compete as a candidate,

10   anybody able to vote. The system we have now is

11   discriminatory towards minority views. It is

12   discriminatory towards people that are not in the majority

13   party. It's unfair to candidates and unfair to voters

14   As I eluded to yesterday, Eric Adams

15   acknowledged this in 2003 and this is exactly what Fiorello

16   La Guardia talked about when he implemented proportional

17   representation and said there is no Democratic or

18   Republican way to clean the street.

19   I guess what I'm trying to figure out is why

20   keep the system as it is now? Who is benefiting from this

21   aside from the cottage industry of consultants, lobbyist

22   and the shallow state that knows how to make money in terms

23   of gaming out elections?

24   MR. SCISSURA: Okay. More to come. Any other

25   -- Max you look like you're thinking.

1   MR. MORANO: The chairman did sort of cut you

2   off.

3   MR. SCISSURA: I apologize.

4   MR. ROSE: I appreciate him bringing up all our

5   respected political scar tissue, psychotherapy session.

6   MR. MORANO: I think you guys turned out okay.

7   MR. ROSE: All I would just draw the

8   Commission's attention to, the party affiliation matters,

9   political parties matter. They serve a role and they're

10   important for democracy, but there is I think a really

11   strong example of what your North Star is in California,

12   which is just the first two past-the-post

13   For instance, there was a chance that the

14   California Senate general election was going to be Adam

15   Shift versus Katie Porter, it was just going to be the two

16   that got the most votes in the primary and then they

17   advance on to the general electors where you have a

18   different elector than a primary.

19   So as you're thinking about this, and I'm sure

20   we will continue to hear you from you, publically,

21   privately and all the rest, I would just urge you to think

22   about ways in which you can advance your general cause here

23   without waging war on the entire notion of party

24   affiliation. It could do us all, you know, a positive

25   MR. DIAZ: A point of

1 information because something was said about, you testified

2 about how this negatively impacts minorities and, you know,

3 other communities. This City Council, for better or worse,

4 just a point of information has more minorities on it and

5 more women than the history of the City Council.

6   MR. MORENO: I'm sorry if I was unclear. I was

7 talking about political minorities, just meaning people

8 that are not in the majority party in any given district.

9 I appreciate the opportunity to clarify that.

10   Just in response to what Commission Rose said,

11 the problem with first past-the-post and a top two style

12 election rather than what I'm proposing which is Ranked

13 Choice Voting which is what we have for special election

14 currently is two fold; one, you have a situation which you

15 just eluded where could have two Democrats or two

16 Republicans in that final round of the election and you're

17 leaving out a wide swap of the electors that feel they're

18 not representative. It's also totally discriminatory

19 towards people in minor parties. You know, you won't have

20 a green choice, you won't have libertarian choice. Even if

21 it ends up with two candidates that are Republicans and

22 Democrats, you know, that there is a lot of folks that are

23 in the green or libertarian sphere that wouldn't be

24 comfortable with that choice in the general election.

25   So why not just do a November election,

1   non-partisan, no party labels just like we have for

2   specials with Ranked Choice Voting?

3   MR. SCISSURA: Okay.

4   MR. MORANO: Thank you, appreciate it.

5   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you. More to come.

6   Okay, just a reminder for the folks on Zoom, if

7   you do have a question, please raise your hand.

8   Annmarie Aka sh

9   MS. AKASH: Hello. Thanks everybody for taking

10 a listen to our voices today. Am I coming through on the

11 microphone?

12   MR. SCISSURA: Yes, you are.

13   MS. AKASH: I wanted to the address the City

14 FHEPS Program which I guess comes under public housing in

15 the City Charter, I'm not sure because I haven't seen a

16 copy of it yet. It stands for Family Homeless and

17 Evictions Prevention Services for anybody who might not

18 realize what FHEPS stands for, okay

19   So I have some personal testimony, I know a

20 tenant who are living in apartments where there FHEPS

21 payments that they rely on are not being paid, so they're

22 now being evicted by their landlords. Some have paid their

23 eligible shares, some pay nothing, but some pay a certain

24 amount depending on their work status and that might be 1

25 or 200 a month and they paid their 1 or 200 a month

1   reliably for months or years and they're still getting

2   evicted because the majority of the rent has not been paid.

3   I know of landlords who have FHEPS tenants

4   who are not getting their payments so they cannot meet

5   their budget. Many landlords here in Staten Island area

6   are in two-family houses where only one apartment will be

7   under the FHEPS payment role I guess you call it. They're

8   now in danger of losing that house under foreclosures from

9   either bank because they cannot make their mortgage

10   payments. They have utility, threats from the utility

11   companies for turning off their utilities and there is no

12   monies extra available to maintain the houses, so the

13   tenants are in there with toilets not working or laundry

14   machines not working, refrigerators not working.

15   There is also in between the landlord and the

16   tenants are real estate agents who apparently work cross

17   borough, a Queens real estate agent might be working on a

18   Staten Island property and the real estate agents are

19   pulling their hair out, maybe having heart attacks because

20   they can work for months and months getting the apartments

21   arranged for someone and it's not going through and they

22   cannot get proper communication from the FHEPS department.

23   I just want to make sure I read everything I

24   noted here. I wanted to mention personally I'm a landlord

25   in this position. My FHEPS tenant is also my neighbor, I'm

1   usually a good neighbor in my community, I've been here

2   30 years in Staten Island and 37 years in this house and I

3   raised my two kids in this house as a single mom, right.

4   Now my FHEPS tenant is a single dad without his kids being

5   in there with him, but this is pretty irritating because

6   now my tenant hates me.

7   He was told by either the real estate agent or

8   the FHEPS program that the reason I'm not getting my money

9   for about eight months now is because I never submitted my

10   Social Security number to that department and because my

11   apartment did not pass inspection. That's what is he being

12   told. However, I have an inspection that passed in early

13   December, paperwork from it and not only that, but I had a

14   FHEPS tenants there for a whole year previously that had a

15   passed inspection and my Social Security number was in the

16   first packet of information that I sent to the agent in

17   late October of last year.

18   So for some reason, and I've gone to -- I

19   should say I've gone in person down to the offices where

20   they line up the programs here on Bay Street and I just was

21   told I cannot talk to anyone because of the HIPAA program

22   and it's protecting of course the tenants, but they don't

23   want the landlord to know the tenant's business which I

24   understand, but I said please just go to wherever the bank

25   is and have them cut me a check because I have, you know,

 1 foreclosure notices from my bank and possibly my water can

 2 be turned off.

 3   MR. SCISSURA: I want to make sure I understand

 4 and I get your issue. And let's make sure this is brought

 5 to the proper folks, but is there anything you're asking us

 6 to do on the Charter?

 7   MS. AKASH: Like I said, I didn't have a chance

 8 to read the Charter where it stands right now. I'm not

 9 sure where this would fit in, but I think the FHEPS need to

10 be overhauled, maybe abolished, that's what I think. So

11 that's what I'm asking Council to do, if they can fix

12 anything with it and I'm bringing it here today because --

13 well first, I'm a member of this community, I know other

14 people are having similar problems and it's just something

15 that looks like -- I've already gone to my council person,

16 the City advocates, the person for the offices for a few

17 times. I've gone kind of gone to everywhere, that's why

18 I'm brining it here. I'm not sure, like I said, where it

19 fits into Charter, but it's probably somewhere in there.

20   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much. Any

21 questions, comments? Thank you very much.

22   Maybe someone can just get the information and

23 we will send it to the relevant agency.

24   MS. AKASH: Thank you.

25   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you.

1   Okay, so we have got about 30 people, close to

2   30 people on Zoom. Do we have any questions or testimony

3   from folks on Zoom?

4   Do we have any of our Commission on Zoom who

5   would like to say anything?

6   I'm going to take a couple of minutes since

7   it's 11:00 a.m. to just go around the table here with our

8   Commissioners, and as you know, all of our meetings are

9   public and just a chance to get some of your thoughts so

10   far as to where we are and some next steps

11   I can go down the row or would anybody like to

12   jump in? Kyle.

13   MR. BRAGG: Thank you, Chair. I think that

14   this process is important. I think that what we are

15   hearing is important, whether or not it pertains directly

16   to our mission or our work as the Charter Revision

17   Commission and I appreciate the fact that you take those

18   issues that are not necessarily issues that should be

19   before us, but hear about and make sure that we translate

20   that back to the proper agency so that the people of the

21   City both get an opportunity to be heard, but also the City

22   has an opportunity then to react to those challenges

23   So I just think that this process again is

24   important and appreciate those people who have taken the

25   time to come out and share those issues with us.

1   MS. ROWE-ADAMS: I agree. Thank you, Kyle.

2   I'm really impressed because this is my first

3   time really sitting on a Charter, but not my first time

4   dealing with other Charter of leadership, but I'm impressed

5   because of some of the stuff that I'm hearing that the

6   concern of the communities, like we were in Queens, we were

7   in Manhattan and now we are in Staten Island and I'm just

8   so glad that people care, the ones that's out and I'm sure

9   others that will be coming out to hear what's going on.

10   Again, so I'm impressed and we got a lot of

11 work to do. And I'm glad that you're interested in doing

12 it and I'm looking forward to it. So I'm listening and

13 learning along with you so we can get it fixed, whatever it

14 is. We will work together and make a difference on this

15 Commission.

16   Thank you.

17   MR. ROSE: I think it's important for us to

18 consider what is the challenge that New York City is facing

19 today and how is that related to the political process in

20 New York City. That's how I, you know, see partially what

21 we are considering in an era where hyper-partisanship is so

22 very real and politics is so incredibly tribal, do we need

23 to adapt in any way, shape or form

24   So I look forward to having that conversation

25 over the coming weeks and months and serving the City. So

1   thank you.

2   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you.

3   MR. NGAI: What was said previously by the

4   Assemblyman up in Albany, Mike Tannousis was very impactful

5   for me. I served the City for 32 years with the NYPD and I

6   just recently retired, so what he had mentioned in regard

7   to the City Council unilaterally, and that's probably the

8   wrong word, when they're pushing out policy without

9   considering any analysis or public hearing on the impact on

10   the community is something that I think that we need to

11   work on.

12   What we really need to do is just to see what

13   the checks and balances are here. Are they going to be

14   just partisan ideology that's just pushed forward without

15   any community thought on the policies that they're putting

16   forth is something that I think we can definitely work more

17   on for a more inclusive City so that everyone can be safe.

18   I think by and large some of the policies that

19   are pushed forward now is impacting the City and it's where

20   we are right now and this Commission is taking all of this

21   input and we are going to digest it and we are going to

22   come up with a good resolution to perhaps, you know, put a

23   more robust check and balances into these processes.

24   MS. GRILLO: If I may, the issue of

25   non-partisan elections has come up a couple of times now

1   and I'm just wondering, and maybe it's our responsibility

2   to find data from those cities that have begun that process

3   to see if in fact there is a large increase in the number

4   of voters that participate.

5   So if you would as Chair let us know how we

6   should proceed gathering up that information. Thank you.

7   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you.

8   MR. DIAZ: I just -- first of all, Frank

9   Morano, thank you for that exchange.

10   MR. MORANO: Likewise.

11   MR. DIAZ: I'm a little out of fighting

12 condition when it comes to hearings being I'm a recovering

13 politician.

14   The fact is that being outside of elective

15 office, believe it or not, I actually get to hear from more

16 New Yorkers than ever before on the ground level and people

17 are frustrated or people are concerned by a myriad of

18 different issues

19   Mr. Chairman, moving forward, I would love for

20 more of these exchanges to occur. And so I think that our

21 challenge is how is it that we make this, for lack of a

22 better word, sexy. You know, people don't know what they

23 don't know. They don't know what the Charter is quite

24 frankly. I have now the Charter since I've been appointed

25 on this Commission on my phone now and it's been several

1   years since I even looked at the Charter.

2   The Charter is essentially the constitution of

3   the City of New York and, you know, how do we get people to

4   know even what the Charter is, how this City is governed by

5   it and how often maybe the things they're frustrated about

6   because they're codified in the Charter, you know, they can

7   complain about all they want about individuals who are

8   elected or a bodies that are elected and so this is an

9   opportunity that have happened every so often where we can,

10   you know, change that or impact that or amend it or augment

11   it.

12   So I don't know how, I think I would challenge

13   how do we get it out there to New Yorkers, average New

14   Yorkers that this is a perfect opportunity to be heard on

15   everything that you have concerns about, everything that

16   you are frustrated about, but before they even do that,

17   this is not a Commission to hear constituent services or

18   constituent needs, with no disrespect to that, but about

19   how do we change or amend the Charter and have them present

20   their case in the same passion that Frank did this morning

21   I'm looking forward to that. I hope that

22   moving forward that we can get the information out there

23   and have more and more people participate, not just on

24   non-partisan elections, but public safety, on education, on

25   transportation issues on citing, you know, so on and so

1   forth and they would just give us more and more ammunition

2   to debate and delivery as the Commission moving forward.

3   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much

4   Chris Lynch, I know you have your hand up.

5   MR. LYNCH: Yes. Good morning. I'm just super

6   excited about being on board with the Commission and being

7   here at this meeting today with Staten Island and I heard

8   some very good points here, especially on the election

9   process and I think Ruben hit the nail on the head, that

10   the vote is mainly on the registered voters. You know, we

11   have the elections that are there, but how do we get the

12   people to come out and vote in these primary elections, not

13   so much should they be partisan, not partisan.

14   I think it was very interesting dialog, a lot

15   of information was taken away from that. I think as the

16   Charter Commission, that is something that we should

17   carefully look into as this is an issue that involves all

18   of the boroughs as we have learned so far from Queens and

19   as well as here in Staten Island

20   So yes, I'm super excited on being on this

21   Commission. Look future to future hearings.

22   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, sir.

23   Before I provide my remarks, we do have one

24   more speaker who signed up in person. Mona Davids.

25   MS. DAVIDS: Good morning. I had initially --

1   I wasn't planning on speaking today, but I'm going to any

2   way. Mr. Chair, I just wanted to just put out a disclaimer

3   because I know it will come up later.

4   So my name is Mona Davids. I'm a publisher of

5   Little African News. I'm the founder of the New York City

6   School Safety Coalition as well as the New York City

7   Parents Union and I'm also the community advocate that

8   requested that Mayor Adams convene this Commission,

9   officially requested it. It's in the minutes and it's out

10   there. So I represent a number of different organizations.

11   So I don't know, Mr. Chair, how we can do this,

12   but each organization has a specific issue related to the

13   Charter. So I will start first with the New York City

14   School Safety Coalition and of course let me just say this,

15   I am from the Bronx, so I'm happy to see my Borough

16   President here. Co-op City to be precise.

17   So my name is Mona Davis. I'm a parent, I'm an

18   education advocate, I care deeply about public safety and

19   school safety, the New York City School Safety Coalition is

20   a Citywide coalition of parents, community leaders, clergy

21   as well who care deeply about insuring the safety of our

22   children inside and outside of schools, traveling to and

23   from schools and we are deeply concerned about the rise in

24   weapons as well as youth violence and gun violence in our

25   communities.

1   The previous cohorts of the City Council with

2   Mayor DeBlasio wanted to remove our school safety agents

3   from under the purview of the NYPD and parents throughout

4   the City rallied. We rallied here outside of Staten Island

5   Borough Hall, we have rallied in every borough including

6   outside of City Hall and we were able to push back removing

7   our school safety agents from under the purview of the NYPD

8   back to the DOE, but the City Council was intent on doing

9   that. Such decisions, Commissioners, should not be made by

10   the City Council. Such decisions, when it comes to the

11   safety of our children and our communities, whether it was

12   the removal of school safety agents or something as to how

13   many (in audible) which we (in audible) opposed. These

14   decisions should not be made by the City Council. These

15   decisions should be made by the Mayor, whoever the Mayor is

16   and by the Police Commissioner, they are the experts.

17   I know that the City Council members like to

18   say that, oh, they were elected by their communities, but

19   Commissioners, if we look at just the recent 2023

20   Democratic primary, because as Frank said, we are pretty

21   much a Democratic City, if we even look at the 2021

22   municipal elections that included as Citywide elections you

23   will see that turnout when it comes to our elections are

24   low. Therefore, when City Council members say that they

25   represent their constituents, when we look at the empirical

1   data, which mind you I do have right here on my laptop, the

2   percentages for the industry for both the 2021 and 2023

3   primaries, most of them that got elected were elected with

4   less than five percent of the registered Democratic voters

5   in their district. And I'm just talking about the primary

6   because the general really doesn't matter so much in most

7   of our City Council districts

8   So here we are being dictated by a small group

9   of people who have an anti-police bias, who are not putting

10   the safety of our children, of our families, of our

11   communities first because of their political ideology who

12   were voted in on average by less than five percent of the

13   voters, the registered voters, registered Democratic voters

14   in their district. That to me is simply outrageous

15   So when it comes to the power of the City

16   Council with regard to public safety and the NYPD, we

17   oppose the City Council having the authority to dictate and

18   to develop NYPD policy when it comes to protecting our

19   communities and we would like that language put on the

20   ballot in the Charter and let us New Yorkers decide if we

21   want unqualified people voted in by less than five percent

22   of voters in their district to decide what's in the best

23   interest of our City and our communities. That's one.

24   That's New York City School Safety Coalition

25   Now I'll go on to the next organization. As

1   the founder and president of the New York City Parents

2   Union I must say it's very interesting to be back in this

3   building. Years ago, I think it was 2014, when they were

4   is doing construction the court was here in this building

5   and I was a plaintiff in Davids versus New York which was a

6   Parents Union lawsuit with parents from throughout the City

7   including Staten Island residents and that's why we were

8   here.

9   With that lawsuit filed Judge Minardo, God

10   bless him, was the judge in that lawsuit. This lawsuit was

11   about giving parents a voice and a seat at the table. That

12   lawsuit, Commissioners, in the Supreme Court building went

13   all the way up to the Court of Appeals and parents won

14   every step of that lawsuit and it was parents against the

15   State, the teacher's union and the City. The lawyer that

16   got us from the Supreme Court whose work put us over the

17   top that we won this case in the Court of Appeals and now

18   it's continuing with discovery was Randy Mastro. And this

19   is why the New York City Parents Union and other parents

20   throughout the City we oppose advice and consent when it

21   comes to the City Council.

22   We keep on hearing that Randy Mastro worked for

23   Giuliani. What we are not hearing is all the work that

24   Randy Mastro does for families, for communities of color.

25   All the work that Randy Mastro does to support and help New

1   Yorkers. So it comes back, Commissioners, to the City

2   being held hostage by the City Council that is not really

3   representing the populus. They're not representing us and

4   there are voting numbers, the voting, that empirical data

5   that no one can dispute shows they're not representing us

6   should not stand in the way of us having qualified people

7   representing the City and the City 's interest and our

8   interest as constituents such as Randy Mastro

9   So I propose, and I would ask the Commission to

10   consider completely repealing advice and consent by the

11   City Council in the Charter. Corporation Counsel

12   Department of Investigation and whatever else that they can

13   sometimes, that they can weigh in should be completely

14   repealed because DOI and Corporation Counsel should not

15   have been put under the purview of the City Council for

16   advice and consent because they are keeping and they would

17   keep great people like Randy Mastro from representing the

18   interest of New Yorkers. So on that, we ask that you

19   explore completely repeal that and putting that on the

20   ballot for New Yorkers to decide.

21   Last thing that I want to speak about, just as

22   myself, in my personal capacity is Ranked Choice Voting.

23   Ranked Choice Voting was decided by referendum, yes. It

24   was decided by a low turnout referendum and that's the

25   problem with New York City elections. We have voter apathy

1 because New Yorkers are fed up. Ranked Choice Voting we

2 were told was going to increase voter turnout, but the roll

3 out of Ranked Choice Voting was so poorly done that they

4 actually had to have a City Council hearing to talk about

5 the crisis of the low turnout.

6   Ranked Choice Voting has not increased voter

7 turn out. What happens with Ranked Choice Voting,

8 Commissioners, was Ranked Choice Voting there wasn't

9 information put out about Ranked Choice Voting in time.

10 Education on Ranked Choice Voting. Everything happened so

11 late that our communities, our seniors weren't aware

12 exactly what the hell Ranked Choice Voting was and it

13 wasn't just our seniors, most New Yorkers weren't aware

14 that for the first time they're going to have to rank their

15 votes. They didn't understand what that meant, so many

16 people didn't come out in 2023. It also has affected

17 special elections as well.

18   Now I get it, Ranked Choice Voting was voted

19 in, but now we had two elections plus some special

20 elections to look at the data and see where the Ranked

21 Choice Voting, whether this experiment has worked and I

22 also want to add when it comes to or Ranked Choice Voting,

23 not only did I disagree with it, I did not vote for it, but

24 even after Ranked Choice Voting was passed, when I saw that

25 our communities weren't being educated about this new way

1   of voting, I personally did Ranked Choice Voting seminars,

2   training, I did it with elected official, I did it with the

3   NAACP, I did it with my councilmen, I did Ranked Choice

4   Voting training on the Facebook page, Ranked Choice Voting

5   NYC. Myself and others, we did all of this to educate our

6   communities. The campaign finance (in audible) came to my

7   Ranked Choice Voting seminars.

8   So this is about educating our voters so that

9   they can be civically engaged. And Ranked Choice Voting

10   has been an utter failure. So I am asking that you

11   consider repealing Ranked Choice Voting because it has not

12   increased voter turnout

13   So I thank you for your time. I was going

14   to wait until you guys got to the Bronx, but...

15   MR. SCISSURA: We are happy to see you in

16   Staten Island. So I appreciate it. That was a lot, a lot,

17   and I didn't want to stop you because I think it was

18   important to hear and you came all the way from the Bronx.

19   A lot to process.

20   If anyone has a comment or question?

21   MS. ROWE-ADAMS: I do. I'm going to go before

22   her Borough President.

23   First, just let me say thank you, thank you,

24   thank you, Mona for that wonderful detailed presentation.

25   You have given us, and especially me, something to really

1   think about, look at. So you did a charge and you really

2   spelled it out

3   So we have, like I said earlier, we have work

4   to do, but you did a great, great plan, planned it out

5   well, planned and this is what we need as Ruben said

6   earlier. You know, we need more, we need to know what

7   direction our community, our City is going in and thank

8   you. That was so much needed and I needed to hear it. I

9   needed to hear it. So we definitely have work to do with

10   you and so many others.

11   Thank you

12   MR. Ruben: As they say in Spanish, I'm (spoken in

13   Spanish." We are New Yorkers. I feel Bronx proud and I

14   started this in my opening remarks by having a challenge to

15   New York and that is how we do it in the Boogie Down Bronx.

16   In all seriousness, this is exactly what I mean

17   when we move forward is what we want folks to step up to

18   the challenge of reviewing the Charter as best they can or

19   whatever issue, you don't have to read the whole Charter,

20   but whatever issue, find that in the Charter and delineate

21   and outline to us exactly what in the Charter you want to

22   us revisit or to deliberate such as the way Ms. Davids did

23   this morning. Well done.

24   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you. Any other

25   Commissioners?

1   Okay, just a couple of comments and I think the

2   first one is for the team and the staff. Let's insure that

3   at one of our public forums we have some experts on

4   election, law election reform. I think obviously there are

5   lots of questions around it. One of the questions I would

6   have is implementation, how long would that take if we put

7   something on the ballot. Would it take effect in the next

8   election or would you have to wait until something after

9   and I think as folks come in to testify to us it would be

10   good to hear how other cities are doing it and how it works

11   and if it has in fact increased turnout.

12   And I want to preface, a lot of what we are

13   dealing with. We cannot force people to come out and vote.

14   We have elections. People choose not to vote. We can't

15   force people, but can we do something that will allow more

16   voters to vote perhaps, but I think we have to hear from

17   folks about what that means.

18   Ruben, I agree with you, we've got to get

19   people excited about the Charter. It is not easy, but we

20   will get people excited. And we will listen to people's

21   voices.

22   So speaking of voices, we have a member of the

23   City Council from Queens, Council member Joann Ariola and

24   I'm going to ask her to present her testimony now.

25   MS. ARIOLA: Thank you so much. And my testimony is on

1   public safety portion that this Charter committee will be

2   discussing.

3   In an era where adherence to political ideology

4   has overtaken common sense, it is incredible that the

5   Mayor's office has been forced to take this step to protect

6   the people of the City of New York.

7   Thanks to the misguided policies from radical

8   progressives at both City and State levels the New York law

9   enforcement agency have been handcuffed. The decision to

10 create this Charter Commission presents an opportunity to

11 restore normalcy to the greatest City in the world and

12 reverse the disasters unleashed by fellow law makers.

13   The Commission is not being created for no

14 reason. It's being created because communities across the

15 City have repeatedly expressed that they feel left out of

16 the equation when it comes to passing laws and that

17 criminally friendly legislation is making it increasingly

18 harder for them to raise their families and do so and have

19 businesses here.

20   Through the creation of this Commission we can

21 more directly address the concerns of the average every day

22 New Yorker rather than simply cater to the loudest voices

23 of the most radical voices. Voices which tend to drown the

24 real issues to hyper focus on narrow partisan politics.

25   I support the Mayor in his decision to create

1   this Commission and I urge all of my colleagues who wish to

2   truly represent the interest of the every day New Yorkers

3   to do the same.

4   Thank you for the time to weigh in.

5   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you, Council member.

6   Do any of the Commissioners have questions for

7   the Council woman? Okay, I'm sure we will see you at

8   another Commission hearing in the coming weeks, but we

9   appreciate your time today.

10   Okay, before we motion to adjourn, are there

11   any other members here who would like to testify? Is there

12   anyone else on Zoom that we may have missed or that just

13   decided they would like to testify? No? Do we have any

14   members of our Commission who would like to add any final

15   thoughts?

16   Okay, hearing done. I will ask for a motion to

17   adjourn hearing. Second?

18   MS. GRILLO: Yes.

19   MR. SCISSURA: All in favor?

20   (Commissioners agreed in unison.)

21   MR. SCISSURA: Thank you very much

22   everyone, have a great day.

23

24   °   °   °   °

25

1   I, Patricia A. Venditti, a Notary Public

2   for and within the State of New York, do hereby

3   certify that the above is a correct transcription

4   of my stenographic notes.

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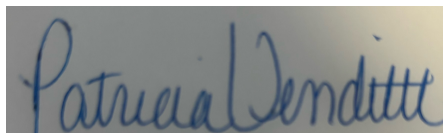
8   **PATRICIA A. VENDITTI**

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