

Alida Camp
Chair



505 Park Avenue, Suite 620
New York, NY 10022
(212) 758-4340

Will Brightbill
District Manager

(212) 758-4616 (Fax)
info@cb8m.com – E-Mail
www.cb8m.com – Website

The City of New York **Community Board 8 Manhattan**

CB8 Charter Revision Task Force Meeting
Monday July 30, 2018, 6:30 PM
Community Board 8 Office

Minutes

Present: Michele Birnbaum, Barbara Chocky, Ed Hartzog, Shari Weiner, Sophia James, Alexandra Harrington, Alida Camp, Tricia Shimamura, Peter Patch, Vicki Barbero (member of public; chair of CB5), Alexandra (from Ben Kallos's office), Ben Kallos (Council Member)

Alida recapped her testimony before the Mayor's Charter Revision Commission. Among the points made in that testimony was that CB8 does not have time to properly evaluate the Commission's with proposals coming out before full Community Boards get a chance to meet. Central to the discussion at this meeting was the Commission's Preliminary Report, in which it began to indicate the areas in which it would propose ballot items. Those areas include term limits for Community Board members, increasing resources to Community Boards, and increasing the uniformity of the Community Board appointments process. The issue of whether Community Board members should be elected or appointed also came up during the hearing at which Alida testified.

The Task Force discussed the importance of reaching consensus, and potentially passing a resolution that is expressed as the consensus of the Task Force only—and not the consensus of the full community board—because there has been not opportunity for the full board to weigh in.

On the substance of the issues the commission is considering, there was Task Force consensus against elections of Community Board members. Michele said it would diminish the applicant pool and increase the odds of corruption; Sophia said she did not agree with elections, and that the Community Board should be about volunteering. There

Councilmember Ben Kallos joined the meeting at this point. Kallos addressed the origin of the Mayor's commission stating that the City Council could have put the issues the commission is considering before a vote in a deliberate and proper process, giving Community Boards the chance to comment, but the Mayor decided he wanted a commission.. Kallos said that there are now "two bites at the apple"—anything not achieved via the Mayor's commission could be taken up next year with the City Council's Charter Revision Commission. Kallos added that some issues can be dealt with directly by the Council; other issues have to go to a vote of the People, and those are issues relating to balance of powers and similar items.

Kallos predicted that the ballot would contain proposals on instant runoff voting, campaign finance reform, and Community Board term limits. Kallos said he thinks it is possible that the Community Boards get an urban planner, and increased uniformity in the recruitment and application process.

Tricia asked if we can require agencies to respond to our resolutions. Kallos said that this is something he achieved for the BSA, and therefore he thinks the Council could get it done for other agencies.

Kallos, who supports term limits, argued that he has colleagues on the City Council who are “afraid” to remove members from Community Boards. Kallos was asked if he would support a term limits proposal that would term limit someone after 8 years, but permit them to serve again after taking time off. Kallos said he used to be OK with that idea, but changed his mind after he saw how such a term limit structure worked on the City Council.

The Task Force pressed Kallos on what term limits would solve. Kallos said that you have issues where people are on a Community Board do not show up. Kallos wants term limits to create a climate where people leave the board and still remain active. Kallos also pushed back against the argument that term limits will take away institutional memory, citing examples of former board members who remain active in the community and at board meetings, and also citing initiatives that the Community Board took on without institutional knowledge, but with harnessing research skills and looking at old documents—for example, the 91st Street public plaza, the Queensboro Oval, and Brearly School. Kallos cited 86th Street, where the 1904 ground lease was obtained to figure out what was going on at that location. Kallos described the competitiveness of the application process currently and his difficulty in removing members.

Kallos expressed support for Community Boards having public membership, and support for removing Community Board members if they are absent for a certain number of meetings, with an exemption for members who need an ADA accommodation, a medical leave, or family leave. Kallos left the meeting, and the Task Force continued its discussion.

Tricia discussed the importance of not having term limits, given that some projects take longer than 10 years (such as the Second Avenue Subway, East River Esplanade, and projects around the Queensboro Bridge). With respect to standardization, Alida said the Task Force is not in a position to define what would get standardized, but that we should advocate for a standardized process.

The Task Force discussed the possibility of working with the media to get our views and concerns out. The Task Force also discussed the possibility of issuing a joint statement by all the Community Board chairs, saying that there is mutual feeling among the Community Boards that they have been essentially left out of the process. Vicki Barbero, the chair of Manhattan’s Community Board 5, stated that she thinks a Borough Board meeting, and a response by all the Community Boards, were good ideas. Vicki and Alida thought that a working group of Community Board chairs should be set up via the Manhattan Borough President’s office to address the commission’s proposals.

Other suggestions at the meeting: Tricia suggested having an independent entity conduct the first round of review for Community Board applicants, and Alida suggested having more transparency regarding potential conflicts of interest, but Barbara said she would prefer to address this in the Community Board bylaws, rather than the charter.

The general consensus of the Task Force was that the Community board process should be standardized throughout New York City; that lack of attendance should be a basis for removal, with certain exceptions, subject to review of the Community Board chair and the Borough President; that the Community Boards should have more resources, including, at a minimum, 1 urban planner per Borough dedicated only to Community Boards, and that this urban planner be without conflicts of interest; that Community Boards should have more financial resources, to be used toward consultants and sufficient to enable the Community Boards to do their job; funding for livestreaming of Community Board meetings; and that the Task Force stands in disagreement with term limits for Community Board members.

Alida offered to write a letter to send to the commission, citing these issues and the Task Force's views on them. The Task Force also noted that we would need to obtain an opinion from the Borough President's office as to whether or not the Task Force or Community Board as a whole can take a position on the Commission's ballot proposals.

Alida Camp and Billy Freeland, Co-Chairs