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The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Voting Reform Task Force
Tuesday, July 19, 2022 - 6:30 PM
Conducted remotely on Zoom

Please note: The resolutions contained in the committee minutes are recommendations submitted by the committee co-chairs to the Community Board. At the monthly full board meeting, the resolutions are discussed and voted upon by all members of Community Board 8 Manhattan.

Minutes

Resolutions for Approval
Item 1: Review NYC Redistricting Commission's proposed map reconfiguring District 4 and District 5.

Board Members Present: Elizabeth Ashby, Gayle Baron, Michele Birnbaum, Alida Camp, Anthony Cohn, Saundrea I. Coleman, Rebecca Dangoor, Ed Hartzog, Paul Krikler, Addeson Lehv, Sharon Pope-Marshall, John McClement, Jane Parshall, Rita Popper, Margaret Price, Barbara Rudder, Judy Schneider, Lynne Strong-Shinozaki, Russell Squire, and Sharon Weiner.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30.

Item 1: Review NYC Redistricting Commission's proposed map reconfiguring District 4 and District 5.

Co-chair Shari Weiner stated the purpose of the meeting, which was to formulate a Resolution concerning the Preliminary City Council Redistricting Plan, which was released on Friday, July 15. She outlined the changes for Community District 8 and reviewed the criteria for modifying Council Districts based on the 2020 Census:

1. The Redistricting Commission is obligated to redraw district boundaries based on **legal requirements** set by the U.S. Constitution, federal law, state law, and the City Charter. The Council districting plan **must**:

    - **Abide by "one-person, one-vote**". The U.S. Constitution requires legislative districts to have roughly equal population size. Under New York State law, the difference between the least populous and the most populous Council district cannot exceed 5%. For the purposes of the current redistricting, the population target for each District is 172,612 (NYC population divided by the number of City Council seats set by the Charter, or 8,803,220/51).
    - **Protect minority vote**. The 1965 federal Voting Rights Act forbids the new district maps from diluting the voting power of racial and language minority groups. The City Charter also includes a similar provision that ensures "fair and effective representation" for minority groups.
    - **Have only contiguous districts**. According to the Charter, each council district must be contiguous, and if parts of a district are separated by a body of water there must be a bridge, a tunnel, a tramway or regular ferry service connecting the areas.
    - **Not have more than one crossover district per set of two boroughs**. The Charter states that a district shall not cross borough or county boundaries, "to the greatest extent possible". If there is need to create a district that crosses two boroughs, as has been the case in previous redistricting cycles, then it may only occur once per set of boroughs.

2. The Charter lists the following redistricting criteria but prioritizes them and provides the commission some wiggle room by noting criteria must be followed "to the maximum extent practicable". The **districting plan should follow these rules, prioritized in the order in which they are listed:**

    - **Keep neighborhoods and communities of interest intact.** One of the most important criteria for drawing new maps, which is used by New Yorkers that testify before the Commission, requires district lines to keep intact neighborhoods and communities of interest, meaning communities "with established ties of common interest and association, whether historical, racial, economic, ethnic, religious or other." Neighborhoods include uninhabited places uniquely connected to the community, like a waterfront. And communities could be defined by various common factors, like country of origin, broadcast and print media, employment, schools, and public transportation. However, final maps can split communities of interests if that is necessary to comply with "one person, one vote" or Voting Rights Act criteria.
    - **Keep districts compact**. Each district shall be compact, such that no district is drawn to be more than twice as long as it is wide.
    - **Prevent partisan gerrymandering**. Districts cannot be drawn in order to diminish the effective representation of voters enrolled in the same political party. This refers to intentional discrimination against a group of party voters. An actual effect of diluting their vote does not need to be shown
    - **Avoid oddly shaped districts**. The districting plan as a whole should be compact – it should minimize the total length of district boundaries. This is meant to prevent "strange" and non-standard shapes of districts, which are often indicative of gerrymandering.

The initial discussion was led by representatives of elected officials and former CB8M Board Chairs.

Cameron Koffman from District 5 Councilmember Julie Menin's office (she was unavailable to appear at the meeting) outlined the process going forward:

1. Public Hearings will be scheduled sometime after August 15. No borough-specific schedule has been set as of July 19.
2. A second draft Redistricting Plan will be submitted to the City Council for approval on September 22. Historically, no plan has been accepted by the City Council, at which time it goes back to the Commission.
3. Further hearings are held.
4. The Commission further modifies the plan and declares it complete.

Kevin Rogers from the office of Assemblyperson Rebecca Seawright also spoke against the plan, which would move Roosevelt Island and a large part of the eastern portion of Council District 5 into District 26 in Queens.

Chris Collins, former Chair of CB8 spoke to what he believes to be an effective strategy for opposition to the Draft Plan:

1. Clearly align the arguments in opposition to the Charter Restrictions.
2. Provide concrete examples of ways in which the proposed redistricting violates those restrictions.
3. Present examples of practical difficulties that may arise from the redistricting but are not expressly restricted by the Charter.
4. Concede that while violations of the Charter Restrictions are sometimes necessary, this redistricting fails due to the particularities of these neighborhoods and their geography. Again, provide concrete examples.

The comments made by the Public and Committee Members can be summarized as follows:

- Proposed redistricting divides Community District 8M into three Council Districts, diluting our representation on the City Council and at the Borough Level
    - Manhattan residents will make up only 26% of the residents of City Council District 26.
    - Will the Councilmember for district 26 attend both Manhattan and Queens Borough Board meetings?

- Will there be a district office for District 26 in Manhattan and on Roosevelt Island?
- Will the Council District 26 Councilperson attend four Community Board meetings every month (CB6M, CB8M, CBQ1, and CBQ2)?
- City Council Members have discretionary funds, and respond to community-based funding programs that will be affected by the redistricting

- Proposed Redistricting moves five schools into Council District 26: PS 158, PS 183, Yorkville East Middle School and Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Manhattan, and PS 217 on Roosevelt Island
- Proposed Redistricting moves Public Library on York Avenue into CD 26.
- Congestion Pricing negotiations will be complicated by the removal of the 59th Street Bridge into a Queens Council District.
- The East River Esplanade and the unfinished Andrew Haswell Green Park are uniquely connected to the Upper East Side and will be split in two by the proposed redistricting.
- Roosevelt Island, referred to as "Manhattan's utopian community" by former Mayor John Lindsay has always been part of Manhattan. Most of its residents work in Manhattan, and the connection to the West is much stronger than that to the East.
- Zoning and Development issues in CD 4 and CD5, while not unique, are sufficiently different from those of CD26 as to call into question responses to ULURP applications that may affect the Upper East Side of Manhattan but are discussed at the City Council as part of CD26. Queens Community Districts 1 and 2 have population densities less than one-third those of Manhattan Community District 8.

CB8 will send the NYC Districting Commission a resolution expressing our opposition to including part of the Upper East Side in a Queens-based council district and asking that that area be put back into Council District 5, for reasons stated during the meeting of the Voting Reform Task Force. The Co-Chairs of the Task Force and the Chair of CB8 will collaborate on final wording of the resolution, along with other interested board members; draft wording is below.

> **WHEREAS,** the New York City Districting Commission (the "Commission") is in the process of redrawing City Council district boundaries to reflect population and demographic changes; and
>
> **WHEREAS,** the Commission is seeking public input into the redistricting process from different stakeholders which includes Community Boards; and
>
> **WHEREAS,** City Council District 4 ("M4") and City Council District 5 ("M5") overlap with the boundaries of Community Board 8 Manhattan ("CB8M"); and
>
> **WHEREAS,** CB8M's Voting Reform Task Force has reviewed the new boundary lines proposed by the Commission for M4 and M5 and has concluded that the proposed M4 and M5 do not comport with the Commission's own redistricting criteria; and
>
> **WHEREAS,** the Commission's proposal to add a portion of Manhattan and all of Roosevelt Island to a Queens-based Council District, District 26 ("Q26"), violates the City Charter Districting requirement in the following ways: (1) it fails to keep neighborhoods and communities intact; (2) fails to keep the district compact; (3) it creates an oddly shaped crossover district; and
>
> **WHEREAS,** the Commission proposes that 36,000 Manhattan Island residents and 12,000 Roosevelt Island residents–which equates to 48,000 of the 173,000 people in the proposed Q26, or 27.7%--be moved to Q26, where these residents will not receive the representation, attention, and discretionary funding to which they are entitled due to their small percentage of the total Q26 population; and
>
> **WHEREAS,** the eastern portion of the Upper East Side and Roosevelt Island have major differences with Q26 such that the proposed combination may result in a significant diminution of municipal services to, amongst others, senior citizens and people with disabilities which populate a large share of those areas; and

WHEREAS, the practical difficulties of having a two Borough Queens-Manhattan district cannot be ignored; and

WHEREAS, the proposed lines would separate numerous medical and research facilities with sprawling, densely populated campuses from the neighborhood in which they have long resided and where most neighboring residents live; and

WHEREAS, the areas being proposed to be moved to the Q26 district contain numerous parks and green acres including amongst others the Esplanade and Andrew Haswell Green Park, which are critical open spaces for the neighborhood and which would be separated from most of the neighborhood residents who use them; and

WHEREAS, numerous public schools including P.S. 158, P.S. 217 and Eleanor Roosevelt High School are located in the area being proposed to be placed in Q25 and would be adversely affected by being separated from the rest of the neighborhood; and

WHEREAS, Hunter College, a major educational institution, has a foot bridge connecting two buildings on its campus, which would be located in two separate council districts; and

WHEREAS, there are several ongoing issues affecting the Upper East Side, including congestion pricing and the historical zoning in the neighborhood, and residents and the community would be disserved by having a part of their community of interest combined with other neighborhoods in a different borough that do not share these issues; and

WHEREAS, Roosevelt Island was created to be part of Manhattan and historically has always been considered and treated as part of the Borough of Manhattan and it should remain in M5; and

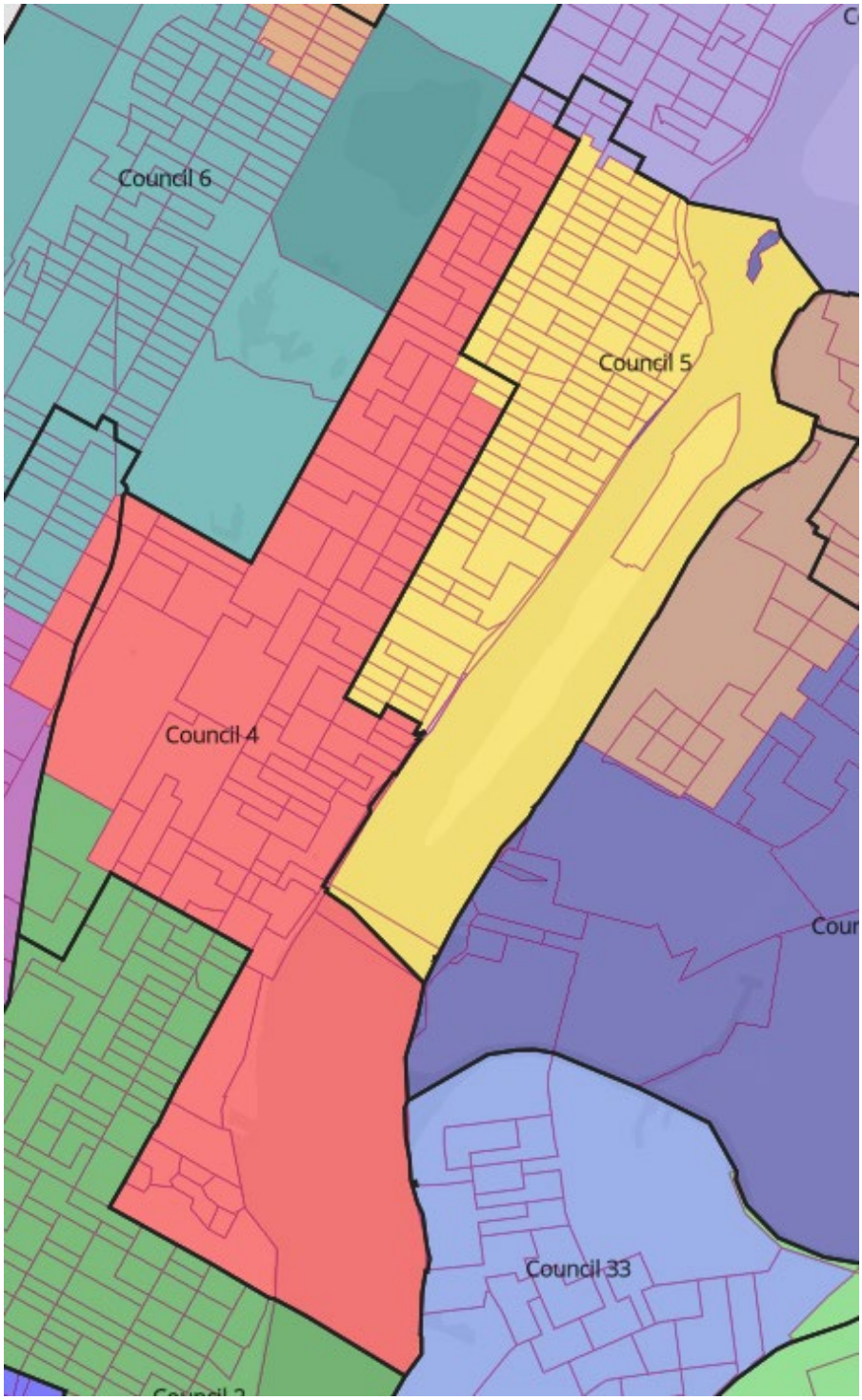
WHEREAS, self-identity if very important. Historically, all residents of the Upper East Side and Roosevelt Island have considered themselves to be Manhattanites. They have bought their residences with the expectation that they would be represented by a Manhattan Council Member who would be locally accessible, would give their complaints and concerns priority and provide the necessary municipal services; and

WHEREAS, two-borough districts that have existed in the past have been comprised of neighborhoods that are contiguous, have similar demographics, share similar public transportation, public education and other services, while the Manhattan and Queens areas of the proposed Q26 do not have these similarities.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Community Board 8 of Manhattan disapproves of the Commission's proposed redistricting map which removes approximately 54 blocks of the easterly side of the Upper East Side and Roosevelt Island to a Queens-based City Council District and strongly urges that these areas remain in a Manhattan-based City Council District; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that CB8M proposes the following redistricting boundary lines which would result in District 4 having a population of 177,446 and District 5 a population of 177,176:

- Give D4 back the area between Stuy Town and 34th Street east of 1st Avenue
- Give D2 (from D4) the blocks between Broadway and 5th Avenue south of 39th Street.
- Incorporate the proposed westward expansion of D4 out to 8th Avenue to cover the Broadway core instead of leaving it divided between two districts.
- Trace that up 8th Avenue to Columbus Circle, where D4 currently ends.
- Give D5 back Roosevelt Island, Sutton Area, and the parts in the East 60's and 70s, with a minor modification of the area just south of 79th so the new line would be 78th (Lexington to 3rd) and 77th (3rd-2nd).
- Keep the previous district lines for D4 and D5 along Lexington from 79th up to 96th.
- Give D8 all of the area north of 96th Street from D4 and D5.



YES (UNANIMOUS) 20: Elizabeth Ashby, Gayle Baron, Michele Birnbaum, Alida Camp, Anthony Cohn, Saundrea I. Coleman, Rebecca Dangoor, Ed Hartzog, Paul Krikler, Addeson Lehv, Sharon Pope-Marshall, John McClement, Jane Parshall, Rita Popper, Margaret Price, Barbara Rudder, Judy Schneider, Lynne Strong-Shinozaki, Russell Squire, and Sharon Weiner.

Ed Hartzog spoke to the lawsuit on the part of the DCCC against New York's absentee voting laws. The major change will be that un-postmarked ballots received between 2 and seven days of election day will be counted.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM.

Anthony Cohn and Sharon Weiner, Co-Chairs