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**The City of New York**  
**Community Board 8 Manhattan**  
**Voting Reform and Charter Revision Task Force**  
*Wednesday, June 25, 2025 - 6:30 PM*  
*Conducted remotely on Zoom*

**MINUTES**

**Board Members Present:** Gayle Baron, Michele Birnbaum, Ed Hartzog (Co-chair), Valerie Mason, Shari Weiner (Co-chair)

**Board Members Unexcused:** Barbara Rudder

**Approximate Number of Public Attendees:** 13

The meeting was called to order at 6:30.

**1. Discussion on Open Primaries and its Impact on Voters in New York City with Hon. Kathryn Freed, J.S.C. (Ret'd.) – Former member of the New York City Council.**

The Committee welcomed the former City Councilmember and Ret'd. Supreme Court Justice Kathryn Freed to our meeting to discuss the proposal to open primary elections to voters outside of the respective political parties.

To help facilitate the discussion the Committee considered a resolution put before Community Board 3. Specifically,

**OPEN PRIMARIES – CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION RESOLUTION**

**WHEREAS**, the Charter Revision Commission has deemed it important to consider several possible changes to the City's Election process in order to increase and improve voter turnout; and,

**WHEREAS** the commission is also looking into the impact on voter turnout should the city switch to Open Primaries. Currently, we have Closed Primaries, which means a voter must be enrolled as a member of a political party in order to vote in that party's primary election. The State of New York also has closed Primaries; and

**WHEREAS** New York City has almost One Million unaffiliated voters who cannot vote in party primaries and it is posited that opening our primaries may increase voter turnout; and

**WHEREAS** several past Charter Commissions have considered whether to implement open primaries and the various ways to do so, including considering a top-two system, where the top two vote getters in the Primary Election run for Mayor in the general Election; however, that proposal was overwhelmingly rejected by NYC voters in 2003; and,

**WHEREAS** other possible permutations of open primaries include top four candidates, where the top four primary candidates compete against each other in the General Election allowing any unaffiliated voter to vote in any party's primary, allowing any voter, regardless of party affiliation to vote in any party's primary, restricting affiliated voters to only vote in the primary of the party they are affiliated with or allowing political parties to decide how to allow unaffiliated voters to vote in its primary and also considering if a candidate can include their party affiliation on the ballot or not; and

**WHEREAS** the impact of Open Primaries on Voter Turnout has been mixed, not only on voter turnout but also on its impact on traditionally disenfranchised groups like people of color or younger voters, for instance, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) opposed Open Primaries in 2010; and

**WHEREAS** since the last Charter Revision, New York City implemented Rank Choice Voting (RCV) as a way to reform and increase voter participation, and there is NO evidence as to the impact RCV has on Open Primaries or even how it would work. Nor does any City currently have both RCV and open primaries, although Seattle will try it in 2027. But, since RCV

was voted for by the Citizens of New York in 2019, and we have only had one election with RCV and are in the middle of another RCV election, it makes sense to determine the impact of RCV before we institute a new form of voting; and,

**WHEREAS** Open Primaries have not necessarily resulted in higher voter turnout, for instance, while the State of California has had a Top Two Open Primary system for 14 years and while it has increased unaffiliated voting, the overall number of voters has not increased, other venues in other types of elections have had varying results; and,

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** That Community Board 8 takes no position at this time but encourages the Charter Commissions to continue to evaluate the impacts of the differing Open Primary systems, especially considering NYC's RCV system, to determine which would increase voter turnout and result in greater participation of disenfranchised and unrepresented groups; and,

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** That further assessment of all proposals must be specifically assessed for the impact on minority and marginalized communities to determine that they will comply with the New York Voting Rights Act and to determine if they need preclearance from the New York Attorney General's Office.

A lengthy discussion ensued among the public and members of the board who were in attendance, especially around those points in the resolution involving the various forms of "open primary" voting.

In the end, the Committee did not vote on the resolution for a variety of reasons, including the recent implementation of RCV and its unknown impacts on overall voter participation and the uncertainty of the yet-to-be-announced open primary system.

The Committee moved on to old business at this point.

## **2. Old Business**

No items of Old Business were discussed.

## **3. New Business**

No items of New Business were discussed.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 PM.

*Sharon Weiner and Ed Hartzog, Co-Chairs*