

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON RULES, PRIVILEGES, AND
ELECTIONS

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Monday, April 28, 2025
Start: 10:34 A.M.
Recess: 12:28 P.M.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: Keith Powers, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Adrienne E. Adams
Diana I. Ayala
Justin L. Brannan
Gale A Brewer Selvena
Brooks-Powers Amanda
Fariás Crystal
Hudson, Rafael
Salamanca Pierina
Ana Sanchez

COMMITTEE ON RULES, PRIVILEGES, AND ELECTIONS

A P P E A R A N C E S

**CANDIDATES FOR APPOINTMENT: NEW YORK CITY BOARD
OF CORRECTION**

Dr. Robert Cohen
Helen Skipper

**CANDIDATES FOR APPOINTMENT: LANDMARKS
PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

Stephen Chu
Erasmus Ikpemgbe
Frank Mahan
Angie Master
Stephen Wilder

**CANDIDATE FOR APPOINTMENT: NEW YORK CITY TAX
COMMISSION PRESIDENT:**

Robert J. Firestone

PUBLIC TESTIMONY:

Andrea Goldwyn - New York Landmarks Conservancy

Matt Dillon - Importance of Landmarks
Preservation

Scott Elliott - Founder/Director of The New Group

Simeon Bankoff - President of Fine Arts
Foundation; Historic Preservation Consultant for
The Center for West Park; Former Executive
Director of the Historic Districts Council

Mark Ruffalo - Supporter of The Center at West
Park

COMMITTEE ON RULES, PRIVILEGES, AND ELECTIONS

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Debby Hirshman - Executive Director of The Center
at West Park

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2 SERGEANT LEVY: This is a soundcheck for the
3 Committee on Rules, Privileges, and Elections,
4 recorded on April 28, 2025 in the City Hall Committee
5 Room. Recorded by Sergeant Ben Levy.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, and welcome to
7 today's New York City Council Hearing for the
8 Committee on Rules, Privileges, and Elections.

9 At this point, I would like to remind everyone,
10 please, silence all cell phones and electronic
11 devices.

12 At no point going forward is anyone to approach
13 the dais or the witness table unless you are invited
14 to testify.

15 If you would like to testify and have not signed
16 up to do so, please fill out a witness slip in the
17 back with the Sergeant at Arms. Please feel free to
18 seek out the Sergeant at Arms to assist you with any
19 questions or concerns throughout the hearing.

20 Chair we are ready to begin.

21 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: [GAVEL] Good morning, and
22 welcome to the meeting of the Committee on Rules,
23 Privileges, and Elections. I'm City Council Member
24 Keith Powers, Chair of the Committee.

25

2 And before we begin, I'd to introduce the other
3 members of this committee who are present, Council
4 Member Brannan, Brewer, Brooks-Powers, Hudson,
5 Sanchez, Ayala, Fariás, and I believe that is it for
6 now.

7 I'd like to acknowledge the Committee Counsel,
8 Jeff Campagna, and the committee staff that worked on
9 the appointments that we will hear here today: Pearl
10 Moore, Chief Ethics Counsel; Francesca Della Vecchia,
11 Director of Investigations; Alycia Vasell, Deputy
12 Director of Investigations.

13 Today's Agenda is a bit larger than most
14 meetings of this committee. We're going begin with
15 the reappointment by the Council of Helen Skipper and
16 Dr. Robert Cohen to the New York City Board of
17 Correction, because the Board of Correction intends
18 to meet on May 13th to consider the renewal of DOC
19 variances to allow overcrowding at its facilities.

20 To address overcrowding at its facilities, the
21 Committee will, out of necessity, vote on these two
22 candidates before we move on to other business.

23 We'll then hold six public hearings on mayoral
24 appointments subject to the advice and consent of the
25 City Council, five to the Landmarks Preservation

2 Commission, followed by one nomination for the
3 President of the New York City Tax Commission.

4 I'm also losing my voice, so bear with me.

5 Our first public hearing will be on the
6 nomination of Helen Skipper and Dr. Robert Cohen for
7 reappointment by the Council as members of the New
8 York City Board of Corrections – You may join us on
9 the dais.

10 The BOC established by § 626 of the New York
11 City Charter is responsible for the inspection and
12 visitation at any time of all institutions and
13 facilities under the jurisdiction of Correction as
14 well as the evaluation of DOC performance.

15 The BOC must establish minimum standards for the
16 care, custody, correction, treatment, supervision,
17 and discipline of all persons held or confined under
18 the jurisdiction of the department; and it shall
19 promulgate such minimum standards in rules and
20 regulations after giving the mayor and commissioner
21 an opportunity to review and comment on the proposed
22 standards, or amendments or additions to such
23 standards.

24 The BOC consists of nine (9) members. Three
25 members shall be appointed by the mayor, three by the

2 Council, and three by the mayor on the nomination
3 jointly by the presiding justices of the appellate
4 division of the supreme court for the first and
5 second judicial departments. Appointments shall be
6 made by the three respective appointing authorities
7 on a rotating basis to fill any vacancy. The chair of
8 the board shall be designated from time to time by
9 the mayor from among its members.

10 These members are appointed for six-year terms
11 with vacancies filled for the remainder of the
12 unexpired term. The BOC may appoint an executive
13 director to serve at its pleasure with such duties
14 and responsibilities as the board may assign, and
15 other professional, clerical, and support personnel
16 within appropriations for such purpose.

17 The BOC is required to establish procedures for
18 the hearing of grievances, complaints, or requests
19 for assistance by or on behalf of any person held or
20 confined under the jurisdiction of the department or
21 by any employee of the department. BOC also issues a
22 report, at least every three years, on issues related
23 to the department's grievance process. Such report
24 must incorporate direct feedback from incarcerated
25 individuals and proposed recommendations for relevant

2 improvements, and include a section of
3 recommendations on how to improve the grievance
4 process for vulnerable populations, including
5 incarcerated individuals who are lesbian, gay,
6 bisexual, transgender, intersex, and gender
7 nonconforming. Such report shall be submitted to the
8 Council and posted on the board's website.

9 To your nominees here today, if reappointed by
10 the Council, Helen Skipper will be eligible to serve
11 the remainder of a six-year term that ends on October
12 12, 2026, and Dr. Robert Cohen will be eligible to
13 serve the remainder of a six-year term ending on
14 October 12, 2029.

15 Welcome to you both, nice to see you again.
16 Please raise your right hands to be sworn in.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell the
18 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in
19 your testimony before this committee, and to respond
20 honestly to council member questions?

21 *PANEL AFFIRMS*

22 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. I welcome you to
23 make an opening statement. We will start with Dr.
24 Cohen, and then we will go with Mrs. Skipper, thanks.

25 DR. ROBERT COHEN: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

2 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Oh, turn your microphone on.

3 DR. ROBERT COHEN: Members of the City Council to
4 invite me to continue as your representative on the
5 Board Of Correction.

6 Very brief biography - I grew up in New York in
7 Queens. I went to public schools. I went to Bayside
8 High School and then left the city.

9 I went to Princeton and Rush Medical College in
10 Chicago, came back to New York in 1981, worked for
11 five years on Rikers Island as the Director of
12 Medical Services and Psychiatric Services, then
13 became a Vice President of Health + Hospitals
14 Corporation for Medical Affairs, then the Director of
15 the AIDS Center at Saint Vincent's Hospital, and a
16 private practice in medicine.

17 I served for seventeen years on the National
18 Commission for Correctional Healthcare, and I served
19 as a federal appointed monitor by federal courts to
20 oversee settlement agreements around medical care in
21 Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Florida -
22 that's all I can remember right now.

23 It's an honor to... it's been an... I just
24 really want to say that it's been an honor to serve
25 the Council. I feel that you've been leading this

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2 important work in criminal justice, and I have never
3 found any daylight between what I believed and what
4 you presented. I don't believe that I am under your
5 orders to vote in a certain way, but it's been an
6 honor to work so closely with you. Thank you very
7 much.

8 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you.

9 HELEN SKIPPER: Good morning, Chair, Committee
10 Members.

11 My name is Helen "Skip" Skipper, I just want to
12 thank you for this opportunity to appear again before
13 you. And I also want to push forward the fact that I
14 am directly incarcerated. For twenty-five years, I
15 cycled in and out of Rikers Island. And for me to
16 return there as a member of the Board of Correction,
17 for me to walk through those same hallways and sit in
18 those same seats that I sat in is very beneficial.

19 I lead by example. My life is a direct
20 reflection of the impacts of the Criminal Justice and
21 Behavioral Health System that I have endured. Next
22 month I graduate with my Master's of Criminology from
23 John Jay. I am a Criminologist, I am a researcher,
24 but more importantly, I am a criminal justice reform
25 advocate leading by example, leading because I sat

2 there - I went through the trauma. And today, as a
3 member of the Board of Correction, I am so grateful
4 to be able to enter into that space and bring
5 beneficial programs, bring benefits, and show people,
6 by me standing in front of them, that this is not the
7 last stop, that second chances are available, that
8 there are pathways for second chances.

9 We're not talking about whether we have a
10 system. We're talking about whether that system is
11 humane and it looks like the people that are
12 ensconced in that system - and are given the proper
13 rights and minimum standards that they should have.

14 And I would also ask the Council to please look
15 further and put other directly impacted people on the
16 board because we've been there. We've done that. We
17 fought the good fight, and we've made it out. We lead
18 by example. This is what people who live and work on
19 Rikers Island need to see - that there is a next
20 step, there is a higher platform.

21 So thank you again for this opportunity. And
22 y'all know I'm a little hard, but I feel I need to be
23 sometimes because I'm just not taking any quarters.

24 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you, thank you both
25 for your testimony and your service on the board.

2 I am going to hold questions, because I'm
3 familiar with your work, pretty extensively, being
4 the former Criminal Justice Chair, uh, Dr. Cohen, I
5 know we worked together often. And I just deeply
6 appreciate your interdependence and your
7 thoughtfulness and your commitment. And you are
8 always a great advocate and voice here in the
9 Council. And as you just mentioned, there is no
10 expectations on an appointment, but certainly you
11 have been a good voice, I think, for making sure that
12 we are doing right by people who need help.

13 DR. ROBERT COHEN: Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you, and thank you for
15 your service.

16 I am going to move to council members, and we
17 will start with Council Member Brewer.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you both very much.

19 I think the main issue I have is, what would you
20 do to try to get the numbers down? I'm for closing. I
21 was borough president. I supported closing Rikers
22 then, continue to do so. But in order to do so, we
23 need to get the numbers down. How would you go about
24 that?

2 DR. ROBERT COHEN: Well, it's a... it seems to be
3 an overwhelming problem, but it has been done. Most
4 importantly, it's been done. Five years ago, in a
5 terrible time, at the beginning of the pandemic, the
6 population was over 6,000. And within six weeks, it
7 went down to 3,500. That required the activity of the
8 Council, the judges, the district attorneys, the
9 Defense Bar, and the Department of Correction and
10 Medical Services of... Correctional Health Services
11 of Health + Hospitals Corporation.

12 Everybody worked together. They identified
13 people who did not need to be there. And
14 successfully, they got it down to 3,500, which would
15 work right now.

16 So that's my best example of how to do it. I'm
17 sure there are others, but that one worked.

18 HELEN SKIPPER: I'd also like to add that as we
19 try to get the numbers down, and we are succeeding,
20 we also need to look at that from two ways - We need
21 to look at who is entering into Rikers Island. And we
22 also need to look at recidivism and the fact that if
23 you go there, are you giving the appropriate services
24 and programs and supports so that you do not return,
25 you do not have to walk that same path?

2 That is another available way for us to get the
3 numbers down, is to make sure that once they enter,
4 they do not leave the same way they went in.

5 Part of my story was my twenty-five years of the
6 in-and out, that I went in addicted to drugs,
7 suffering from an unchecked mental illness, never
8 received any support or services, left out only to
9 return again. We're trying to stop that from the
10 onset as well.

11 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. Other questions
12 from members? Seeing none, and seeing... I don't
13 think we have any on the virtual as well, you guys
14 are both excused, thank you.

15 HELEN SKIPPER: Thank you.

16 DR. ROBERT COHEN: Thank you, very much.

17 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: I now open the floor to
18 public testimony. Are there any members signed up to
19 testify on the nomination of Helen Skipper or Dr.
20 Robert Cohen to serve on The Board of Correction?

21 Seeing no one signed up to testify, I am going
22 to actually now call on the Clerk to call the roll
23 call on these two nominations.

24 CLERK: Thank you, Chair Powers. The Committee
25 will vote on two Resolutions approving the following

2 appointments to The Board of Correction: Helen
3 Skipper and Dr. Robert Cohen.

4 Chair Powers, we will start with you.

5 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: I vote aye.

6 CLERK: Thank you.

7 And now Council Member Salamanca?

8 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAMANCA: I vote aye.

9 CLERK: Thank you, Council Member Salamanca.

10 Council Member Ayala?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Aye.

12 CLERK: Brannan?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BRANNAN: I vote aye.

14 CLERK: Council Member Brannan, thank you.

15 Council Member Brooks-Powers?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: I vote aye.

17 CLERK: Council Member Brewer?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Aye.

19 CLERK: Council Member Farías?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER FARIÁS: I vote aye.

21 CLERK: Council Member Hudson?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Aye.

23 CLERK: Council Member Sanchez?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Aye.

25

2 CLERK: Thank you. Chair Powers, by a vote of
3 nine in the affirmative, 0 in the negative, and 0
4 abstentions, both Resolutions have been adopted.

5 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you, Congratulations
6 on your reappointments, thank you, guys, for your
7 testimony as well.

8 Our next group of hearings will be on
9 nominations by the mayor for the Landmarks
10 Preservation Commission.

11 Pursuant to the New York City Charter § 3020,
12 and by letters dated April 25, 2025, Mayor Eric Adams
13 requested the advice and consent of the Council
14 regarding the appointments of Erasmus Ikpemgbe,
15 Stephen Wilder, Frank Mahan, Stephen Chu, and Angie
16 Master to the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

17 Pursuant to § 3020 of the New York City Charter,
18 the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission,
19 also known as the LPC, has the power to designate
20 landmarks, interior landmarks, scenic landmarks, and
21 historic districts.

22 LPC has the duty, after a public hearing, to
23 designate a landmark site for each landmark to be
24 designated. The LPC also has the power to regulate
25 construction, reconstruction, alterations, and

2 demolitions of landmarks and to approve them and deny
3 requests for Certificates of Appropriateness and
4 Certificates of No Effect.

5 The LPC consists of eleven (11) members.
6 Membership must include at least three architects,
7 one historian qualified in the field, one city
8 planner or landscape architect, and one realtor, and
9 must include at least one resident from each of the
10 five boroughs.

11 Members serve for terms of three years and serve
12 until the appointment of a successor. The mayor also
13 designates one of the members to serve as Chair of
14 the LPC, and designates another member to serve as
15 Vice Chair.

16 The members of the LPC, with the exception of
17 the Chair, serve without compensation, but are
18 reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in the
19 course of performing their duties.

20 I extend my welcome to the candidates who have
21 joined us today. You're welcome to join us here at
22 the dais.

23 I am going to go through a quick bio.

24 Frank Mahan, as a resident of Manhattan, has
25 been nominated by this mayor to serve on the LPC for

2 a three-year term beginning on June 29, 2025 and
3 ending on June 28, 2028. He's worked at the
4 international architecture firm Skidmore, Owings &
5 Merrill since 2008, where he's principal and the
6 leader of the firm's adaptive reuse practice. Prior
7 joining the firm, worked for renowned architects Stan
8 Allen and Frank Gehry.

9 A few of the adaptive reuse projects he has
10 worked include landmark and historic buildings such
11 as the Waldorf Astoria, South Street Seaport Museum,
12 Moynihan Train Hall, retail and office space in the
13 Farley Post Office, New York Stock Exchange, and
14 renovations of Lever House, and 28 Liberty.

15 He's worked on new construction projects as
16 well, including 1 World Trade Center, 35 Hudson
17 Yards, Jersey City's General Square, to name a few.

18 He's a winner of the American Institute of
19 Architects Young Architects Award and was named to
20 Building and Design Construction's 40 Under 40 list
21 in 2017. He's a 2018 graduate of Princeton University
22 School of Architecture.

23 Stephen Chu, resident of Queens, has been a
24 commissioner since 2023. He is up for reappointment
25 for a three-year term expiring on June 28, 2027. He

2 has worked at Ennead Architects, where he is now a
3 design principal to the firm, specializing in design
4 of cultural, educational, and civic institutions,
5 including NYU Langone's Kimmel Pavilion;
6 International Performing Arts Center in Shenzhen
7 China; Jazz at Lincoln Center's Rose Hall; the façade
8 restoration and master plan at The Public Theater;
9 redesign of Shakespeare In The Park Delacorte
10 Theater; and much more. Since 2015 he has been a
11 Associate Professor of Pratt's Graduate School of
12 Architecture; he is a member of American Institute of
13 Architects (AIA) and a 1994 graduate of Berkeley
14 College of Environmental Design.

15 Erasmus Ikpengbe, you're (INAUDIBLE) the
16 pronunciation from me (INAUDIBLE) A resident of
17 Brooklyn, has been nominated by the mayor to serve
18 the remainder of a three-year term that expires on
19 June 28, 2027. He is currently a Senior Associate at
20 the firm of Sabir, Richardson & Weisberg of
21 Engineering and Architecture where he has worked
22 since 2012. In that capacity he has worked on
23 projects for the Port Authority of New York and New
24 Jersey, the Office of Management and Budget, the MTA,
25 School Construction Authority, and the Administration

2 for Children's Services. He has been a registered
3 architect in the state of New York since 2016 and is
4 a 2008 graduate of Georgia Institute of Technology.

5 Stephen Wilder, a resident of Manhattan, has
6 been nominated to serve the remainder of a three-year
7 term that expires on June 28, 2027. Since February of
8 2013, he has owned his own architecture firm, which
9 has worked on a variety of residential and commercial
10 projects. He has been a registered architect since
11 October 2014. For nine years, prior to starting his
12 firm, he worked as a project manager for construction
13 projects at JP Design and Abyssinian Development
14 Corporation. He's a 2004 graduate of Carnegie Mellon
15 University.

16 Angie Master, a resident of Staten Island, has
17 served on the Landmark Preservation Commission since
18 2023. She has been renominated by the mayor to serve
19 the remainder of a three-year term that expires on
20 June 28, 2027. She was recommended for the position
21 by Staten Island borough president, Vito Fossella.
22 Since 2015, she has been Associated Broker at
23 Prendamano Real Estate of Staten Island. Her
24 portfolio includes retail and strip malls. Her
25 reappointment would fulfill the requirement that one

2 member of the LPC be a realtor and then one must be
3 from Staten Island.

4 Before you begin your testimony, I ask you all
5 to raise your right hands in order to be sworn in.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell the
7 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in
8 your testimony before this committee, and in response
9 to all council member questions?

10 *PANEL AFFIRMS*

11 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you, and, first of
12 all, congratulations on your nominations and
13 renominations, and thank you for being with us here
14 today.

15 We will start over here, and we'll just go down
16 the line for opening statements, and then we will
17 follow with questions.

18 STEPHEN CHU: Good afternoon, and thank you,
19 Chair Powers, and members of the Committee for this
20 opportunity to testify before you. It is a great
21 honor to be renominated for the position of
22 Commissioner of the New York City Landmarks
23 Preservation Commission. Having served as a
24 commissioner for over two years now, I have gained
25 experience and a better understanding of how to carry

2 out the responsibilities of an LPC commissioner. It
3 has been a collaborative and rewarding experience
4 working with my fellow commissioners and LPC staff to
5 enforce Landmark's law in this constantly growing,
6 evolving, and adapting city of ours.

7 As an architect, I've had the fortune to work
8 for some of the city's most important institutions
9 and had a hand in several cultural civic projects
10 that have been approved by the LPC over the past
11 thirty years, including the Brooklyn Museum, The
12 Public Theater at 425 Lafayette, New York City
13 Center, Carnegie Hall to name a few.

14 I'm currently a partner at Ennead Architects,
15 formerly Polshek Partnership, where I've been
16 employed since 1996. My mentor and former employer,
17 the late James Polshek, founded the firm on
18 principles rooted in the tradition of respect for
19 context and belief that making architecture is an
20 inherently civic act that comes with great social
21 responsibility. He taught me that a building must
22 belong to its community and remind us of the power of
23 public space. These are principles that have guided
24 me through my years in the practice. I believe that
25

2 the experience I've gained in the practice of
3 architecture will continue to benefit the Commission.

4 In past years, I've learned much about the
5 process and dynamics of the Commission and how to
6 carry out its mission to protect New York City's
7 architecturally, historically, and culturally
8 significant buildings and sites.

9 Some areas where I feel that I have brought
10 insight and value are understanding the perspective
11 of architects coming to the Commission and the
12 challenges they may face technically and
13 programmatically. I also understand the flexibility
14 they have in implementing a design. There are many
15 variables that need – and should be – considered when
16 dealing with sensitive historic context. I'm able to
17 analyze the architectural and therefore historical
18 characteristics of a building, and or streetscape,
19 and apply that knowledge towards the design of a
20 newly proposed architecture, experience in
21 construction methods, project delivery process, and
22 budgeting implications and their potential impact on
23 the project at hand.

24 I have experience in designing various building
25 typologies, cultural, educational, commercial, and

2 civic. I can bring some insight into the issues and
3 factors involved in each building type and how they
4 may affect the historic settings. I understand the
5 value of proportion, scale, and harmony. They are
6 characteristics that should be recognized in the
7 historical context and reflected in the new work. And
8 I believe that the design concept and detailing to
9 ensure proper execution and quality are both equally
10 important in the proposal. And finally, an
11 understanding that the changing needs of the city,
12 its institutions, residents, and visitors required
13 upgraded facilities that must accommodate... that
14 must be accommodated in the historic context.

15 I can only hope that the skills and experience
16 I've gained continue to serve and be useful to the
17 Commission and the people of New York City.

18 The city represents the past, present, and
19 future. I understand that it needs to evolve, adapt,
20 and change, that it can continue its tradition of
21 being diverse, progressive, inclusive, and stay
22 vibrant and relevant into the future. If reappointed,
23 I would do my best to apply the law to preserve and
24 protect sites that reflect diversity in history in

1 all five boroughs and ensure that they remain
2 relevant and vibrant in the future years to come.

3
4 It is an honor to have served the past year on
5 Landmark Preservation Commission. I take this very
6 seriously and the responsibility of reserving the
7 history and culture of this great city. It is my
8 desire to continue to play a role in the stewardship
9 and continue as it continues to adapt and meet and
10 evolve the needs of the city and its diverse
11 population.

12 Thank you for your consideration of my
13 nomination, and I welcome any questions.

14 ANGIE MASTER: Thank you, Speaker Adams, Chair
15 Powers, and members of the Committee, for this
16 opportunity to testify before you. I am honored to be
17 considered for reappointment to the New York City
18 Landmarks Preservation Commission.

19 My name is Angie Master; I am a Korean American
20 immigrant who grew up on the West Coast, and I've
21 been a proud resident of Staten Island for the last
22 thirty years. I graduated from Stanford University
23 with a BA in International Relations and an MA in
24 International Educational Policy. I later earned an
25 MBA from Columbia Business School.

2 For the last decade, I have worked in commercial
3 real estate across New York City, facilitating sales
4 and leasing across a wide range of sectors as varied
5 as retail, restaurants, religious institutions,
6 educational facilities, and office buildings.

7 Since February 2023, I have had the honor of
8 serving on the New York City Landmarks Preservation
9 Commission. I don't come to LPC as an architect or as
10 a preservationist, but as a real estate
11 representative. I have truly enjoyed my role at LPC
12 and have learned so much about historical
13 architectural styles and terms. I've gained a
14 newfound appreciation for mullions, lintels, and
15 cornices.

16 During my time on the Commission, I believe I
17 have contributed in three meaningful ways:

18 First, real estate expertise – the landmarks law
19 recognizes that historic preservation is good for the
20 economy of the city and that proper regulation of
21 historic buildings will strengthen the city's
22 economy. As a realtor, I've been able to help the
23 Commission consider how historic buildings can remain
24 vibrant and functional for their tenants while still
25 supporting the LPC's mission to preserve the

2 building's historical architectural features. For
3 example, Aritzia, the fashion retailer, came before
4 LPC to propose the opening of two new retail
5 locations in Manhattan, one at 115 Fifth Avenue in
6 the Ladies' Mile historic district and another at 608
7 Fifth Avenue, the Gillette Building, an individual
8 landmark. I was able to speak to the retailer's need
9 for appropriate signage and display of merchandising.

10 Secondly, I represent Staten Island. Last June,
11 I was especially proud when LPC designated the
12 Frederick Douglass Memorial Park on Staten Island as
13 an individual landmark. It was established in the
14 1930s as an African American cemetery. It reminds us
15 of a shameful time in New York City history, but one
16 that deserves recognition and remembrance. This
17 designation had strong community support, and Council
18 Member Camilla Hanks even gave public testimony
19 before LPC.

20 And third, equity and designations for
21 underrepresented communities and outer boroughs – I'm
22 proud that during my tenure, the Commission has
23 designated sites such as the Joseph Rodman Drake
24 Park, an enslaved African burial ground in the Bronx,
25 and the Frederick Douglass Memorial Park in Staten

2 Island. We have also designated individual landmarks
3 in The Bronx, including the Old Croton Aqueduct as a
4 scenic landmark, the Bronx Opera House, and the
5 Tremont Branch of the New York Public Library.

6 Serving on the Landmarks Preservation Commission
7 has been a privilege. I am proud to have played a
8 small role in preserving the cityscape and the unique
9 sense of place in New York City's historic districts.
10 If reappointed, I hope to continue to share my
11 expertise as a realtor and my knowledge of Staten
12 Island as I work collaboratively with my fellow
13 Landmarks Preservation Commissioners. Thank you.

14 STEPHEN WILDER: Good morning, Chair Powers, and
15 members of the Committee. I want to thank you for
16 holding this hearing and for considering my
17 nomination to serve on the Landmarks Preservation
18 Commission. I would also like to express my deep
19 gratitude to the Administration for this nomination.

20 I believe that city service is an honor. I am
21 writing to express my fervent desire to serve as a
22 member of the Landmark Preservation Commission.

23 As an architect and owner of Think Wilder
24 Architecture from Harlem, New York, I bring over two
25 decades of experience in shaping the built

2 environment with a deep commitment to community
3 enrichment that has been the cornerstone of my
4 career.

5 My academic credentials, which include a
6 bachelor's degree in architecture from Howard
7 University and a master's degree in the science of
8 architecture from Carnegie Mellon University, provide
9 a solid foundation for my professional journey.

10 My affiliations with esteemed organizations such
11 as American Institute of Architects, AIA, the
12 Preservation League of New York State, and the
13 National Organization of Minority Architects, where I
14 currently serve as a President for the New York
15 Coalition of Black Architects, underscore my
16 dedication to advocating for the preservation of our
17 architectural heritage.

18 My formal involvement in historic preservation
19 began in 2021 when I became a trustee for the
20 Preservation League. Since that time, I've been
21 exposed to projects and sites throughout the state
22 that highlight the challenges, values, significance,
23 and impact of preservation work. Through my service
24 on committees such as Seven To Save, the Preservation
25 Opportunity Fund, excellence awards and governance,

2 my knowledge has deepened around preservation policy,
3 funding strategies, advocacy, and the intersection of
4 preservation with equity, sustainability, and
5 community development. This experience has
6 strengthened my commitment to ensuring that
7 preservation efforts reflect the full breadth of New
8 York's cultural and architectural heritage.

9 My passion for preservation; however, was
10 sparked nearly two decades ago. My first job after
11 graduate school working in Harlem ignited a deep
12 commitment to improving and protecting my community.
13 Harlem is not just a neighborhood to me, it embodies
14 a rich history and cultural significance that I hold
15 dear. I cherish its legacy and strive to honor its
16 past while contributing meaningfully to its future.
17 This personal connection fuels my belief in the vital
18 role the Landmarks Preservation Commission plays in
19 safeguarding New York City's diverse architectural
20 narrative.

21 My work with two Harlem-based companies during a
22 transformative period for the neighborhood provide
23 invaluable experience in revitalizing and preserving
24 historic brownstones, multi-family residences,
25 churches, and cultural institutions. Many of these

2 projects were designated landmarks or located within
3 historic districts. Through this work I came to
4 understand the critical importance of restoration and
5 the profound impact these buildings have on community
6 identity. I also witnessed the loss of unrecognized
7 structures that, while not officially landmarked,
8 were essential to the fabric of the neighborhood.

9 Recently, someone asked me about the backdrop of
10 my professional headshot and why I chose that
11 location. I explained that every member of our team
12 selected a Harlem landmark meaningful to them.
13 Demeris posed in front of Hamilton House, Malika
14 chose Marcus Garvey Park, and Montgomery selected
15 Strivers Row.

16 I chose Astor Row as a group of individually
17 designated row houses built in the 1880s. That
18 location is especially significant to me because, at
19 my first job after graduate school, I was part of the
20 team responsible for preparing the architectural
21 drawings submitted to the Landmarks Preservation
22 Commission for the restoration of one of those homes.
23 It was my introduction to the formal process of
24 preservation and continues to shape how I view the
25

2 role of architecture in honoring and sustaining
3 community legacy.

4 I am drawn to the Commission's mission of
5 preserving the buildings and places that reflect New
6 York City's rich cultural, social, and architectural
7 history. My belief in this mission aligns with my
8 strong interest in utilizing architecture to uplift
9 underserved communities. Serving on the Commission
10 would not only be an honor, but also an opportunity
11 for me to further my knowledge of effective historic
12 preservation while collaborating with dedicated
13 individuals who share my passion.

14 I am dedicated, motivated, and enthusiastic
15 about contributing to the preservation of our city's
16 history, and I believe my unique perspective and
17 experiences would be a valuable addition to the
18 Commission.

19 Thank you for considering my nomination. I look
20 forward to the opportunity to discuss my vision and
21 commitment to historic preservation further.

22 ERASMUS IKPEMGBE: I would like to extend
23 greetings to the Speaker, Chair Powers, and all other
24 council members for the opportunity to sit before
25 this committee. I'm honored to be considered as

2 candidate for the New York City Landmarks and
3 Preservation Commission.

4 Growing up west of the Hudson in New Jersey, I
5 can always remember wanting to be an architect. My
6 journey began with a bucket of Lincoln logs given to
7 me by my father as a child. That was followed by a
8 formal education in the arts, and over the years I
9 progressively gained more knowledge about the design
10 world.

11 During my graduate studies, I spent two
12 consecutive summers embedded in the urban landscapes
13 of Europe exploring art and architecture.

14 Neighborhood fabrics, place making, cultural
15 influence, the convergence of new and old, and
16 adaptive reuse were major themes. These experiences
17 greatly influenced my understanding of the built
18 environment and assisted me in developing the
19 necessary tools to critically examine it.

20 Today, I identify a bit of architecture in
21 everything and use it to help me assess the world
22 around me. This multifaceted profession allows for an
23 expression that is creative, structured, and
24 aesthetically acute, which also explains my decision
25

2 to reside in the culturally and architecturally rich
3 neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn.

4 Currently, I run the Architecture Department at
5 the engineering and architecture firm of Sabir,
6 Richardson & Weisberg. There, I oversee matters
7 specific to various disciplines, provide direction
8 for project delivery, function as an expert technical
9 resource, distribute information for professional
10 development, and facilitate quality control
11 procedures.

12 With two decades of diverse architectural
13 experience, I apply my competencies to a wide range
14 of project types including transportation,
15 institutional, mixed-use, resiliency, and building
16 assessments.

17 I pride myself as an interdisciplinary and, most
18 importantly, a problem solver. With these skills, I
19 hope to bring real world knowledge about the built
20 environment to the Commission.

21 I'm confident that my work within the public
22 sector and with our city's infrastructure will
23 benefit New Yorkers. I have inspected hundreds of
24 city owned properties, provided data for capital
25 improvements, and worked on complex infrastructure-

2 based projects that reside in the confines of
3 inflexible budgets. I believe that these types of
4 practical cost implications should be considered when
5 making determinations that affect our city and its
6 eight-million+ inhabitants.

7 I'm also no stranger to the Landmarks
8 Preservation Commission process. I converted a
9 historically important modernist single family
10 residence on the Upper East Side located at 32 East
11 74th Street into a triplex residence. Working with
12 the staff preservationists and the Commission, we
13 were able to maintain the aesthetic integrity of the
14 property, while providing a rooftop addition, and
15 massaging the front entry to accommodate an ADA
16 compliant elevator. Most notably, we salvaged
17 existing steel windows on the front and rear facades,
18 thus celebrating their delicately articulated
19 profiles. At the completion of the project, we were
20 able to preserve the building's cultural significance
21 as being one of the first modernist structures in the
22 city.

23 In 2021, I completed a six-year stint as a board
24 member and parliamentarian for the National
25 Organization of Minority Architects. There I focused

2 on his mission to foster justice and equity in
3 communities of color through outreach, community
4 advocacy, professional development, and design
5 excellence.

6 Prior to that appointment, I worked tirelessly
7 in NOMA's local New York chapter. There we crafted
8 valuable programming for our membership and curated
9 introductory camps for children like Project
10 Pipeline, a NOMA national initiative designed to
11 increase the number of Black architects in the nation
12 currently at a steady 2% by showcasing architecture
13 as a viable career path to children who would
14 otherwise never be exposed to the profession.

15 Again, it is an honor to be considered as a
16 candidate for the Landmarks Preservation Commission.
17 I believe my diverse experience and variable skills
18 would add value to the already illustrious
19 commission. If appointed, I look forward to
20 championing the Commission's charge to protect
21 architecturally, historically, and culturally
22 significant buildings and sites within New York City,
23 and ensure they can meet the challenges of the
24 future.

2 Thank you for your nomination, and I look
3 forward to fielding your questions.

4 FRANK MAHAN: Good morning, Chair Powers, and
5 members of the Committee. Thank you for holding this
6 hearing and considering my nomination to serve on the
7 Landmarks Preservation Commission. I'm also grateful
8 to the Administration for this nomination.

9 I'm an architect who, if appointed, will bring
10 to the Commission extensive expertise in preservation
11 and adaptive reuse. I believe that historic
12 preservation, and more broadly, how we care for our
13 past is one of the most critical activities for
14 charting our collective future. It is why I've spent
15 much of my nearly two decade career working to
16 protect and preserve New York City's architectural
17 and cultural heritage. I'm a design principal at
18 Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, one of the largest and
19 most influential architecture, interior design,
20 engineering, and urban planning firms in the world.
21 In this role, I lead our Adaptive Reuse Practice
22 coordinating our work on historic buildings around
23 the world to preserve them for the future, retrofit
24 them for energy efficiency, and convert them to
25 vibrant new uses. But it is working on civically

2 scaled projects in my hometown that is the most
3 rewarding.

4 I've led the restoration and adaptive reuse of a
5 number of designated New York City landmarks. At the
6 James A. Farley Post Office, across from Penn
7 Station, my team converted one million square feet of
8 warehouse space to public concourses and retail,
9 connecting the surrounding neighborhood with a new
10 Moynihan Train Hall, all surrounded by four floors of
11 high-tech office space above. The result is a
12 historically rooted front door for Manhattan's newly
13 developed Far West Side.

14 At the Waldorf Astoria on Park Avenue, we are
15 meticulously restoring the many public spaces,
16 lobbies, lounges, and event rooms while
17 reinvigorating the rest of the building with new
18 hotel rooms and residences. The 1.6 million square
19 foot undertaking will revive one of New York City's
20 most iconic landmarks, and I once again invite New
21 Yorkers to meet me at the clock in its celebrated
22 lobby.

23 I've also helped to pioneer work with historic
24 buildings of more recent vintage, mid-century modern,
25 while revisiting many of my firm's own buildings now

2 landmarks themselves. In the Financial District, my
3 team adapted One Chase Manhattan Plaza after JP
4 Morgan moved to Midtown. The neighborhood had changed
5 around the building, transforming into a 24-hour
6 residential community. So we opened up its fortress-
7 like base and plaza to entertainment, food, and
8 shopping supporting the families that live nearby.

9 In Midtown we adapted the glass jewel box at
10 Fifth Avenue and 43rd, originally housing
11 Manufacturers Hanover Trust from a rundown bank
12 branch to vibrant retail kicking off the rejuvenation
13 of Lower 5th Avenue.

14 And most recently, I led a loving restoration of
15 the pinnacle of mid-century corporate modernism,
16 Lever House on Park Avenue at 53rd Street. We
17 approached this project with the careful eye of
18 material scientists, polishing the building to the
19 high gleam of its mid-century heyday.

20 Whether classical in form or mid-century modern,
21 my team and I begin these projects with deep research
22 to understand the history of a building before
23 shaping its next life. We must understand the
24 original architect's intent, the way a building has
25 changed over time, since all buildings do change, and

2 how it has served its community. These influences
3 ranging from buildings changing meaning to its
4 historic construction technologies must be understood
5 and woven together to create a new future.

6 Noted architecture critic, Justin Davidson,
7 recently wrote in New York Magazine of my work at the
8 Waldorf Astoria and at Lever House, "His approach to
9 historic preservation is both sweepingly
10 philosophical and obsessively detailed."

11 Our collective history and culture, relationship
12 with the environment, and changing patterns of living
13 all come together in preservation. I cannot think of
14 another field that deserves such careful stewardship
15 by diverse and experienced professionals.

16 Through preservation we have the opportunity to
17 adapt our city to new patterns of living, address
18 climate change by caring for the buildings we already
19 have, and preserve cultural continuity within our
20 communities.

21 I was introduced to the possibility of building
22 as a professional at a young age. My grandfather was
23 a contractor and my father was a public school
24 teacher – He taught architecture in high school, and
25 I took his class all four years. After starting my

2 professional journey in his classes, I made my way
3 east for graduate school at Princeton, where I met
4 and eventually married a native New Yorker who grew
5 up on the Upper West Side. We've settled in Manhattan
6 where we also send our daughter to school. I now have
7 been working ever since to protect and preserve New
8 York City's architectural and cultural heritage while
9 giving historic buildings new life.

10 I would be honored to serve our great city and
11 my fellow New Yorkers in this new capacity on the
12 Commission. Thank you for your time. I'd be happy to
13 answer any questions you might have.

14 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you, and thank you all
15 for your testimony.

16 I will start with members first, then I am going
17 to come back and ask some questions. We will start
18 with Council Member Brewer.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.

20 I have questions that are very specific. I want
21 to know what you think and when you think it's
22 appropriate to grant a hardship. I want to hear your
23 definition of "demolition by neglect". And I want to
24 know what the Department of Buildings and LPC can do

2 to permit necessary restoration without the owner
3 signing off.

4 I can start with you, Mr. Chu.

5 (NO RESPONSE)

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Shall I repeat the
7 question?

8 ANGIE MASTER: Yes, yes, please.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: When is it appropriate to
10 grant a hardship? What is "demolition by neglect"
11 according to you? And what can the Department of
12 Buildings and LPC do to permit necessary restoration
13 without the owner signing off?

14 Those are my three questions.

15 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: We will just go one at a
16 time down the line.

17 STEPHEN CHU: So let's... the first question
18 was...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: When is it appropriate to
20 grant a hardship...

21 STEPHEN CHU: When is it appropriate to, deem
22 hardship? Well, the Landmark Commission has to accept
23 every application. If the application asks for
24 hardship, it is something that we have to review and
25 look at the case that they're making. I will say that

2 every case is specific, and the commissioners will
3 look at all the information available to us. We also
4 recently have had an application that came to the
5 Commission, it was a very robust process and had
6 multiple hearings. There was extensive testimony. The
7 Commission had expert analysis. We do have an
8 engineer, a structural engineer that we can turn to
9 look at and do our own investigation to validate the
10 claims of the applicant in terms of hardship. In that
11 case, the application was ultimately withdrawn. If
12 that were to come back again, we would have to
13 carefully look at their case that they're making for
14 hardship and review it and determine whether or not
15 we feel that it was appropriate or not.

16 Should we go on to the next or do you want to
17 see if any of the others...

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Negligence by neglect?

19 STEPHEN CHU: Demolition of neglect.

20 In terms of demolition, I would say that, again,
21 in every case, we have to look at whether or not...
22 the piece that's being asked to be demolished needs
23 to be reviewed to see what importance it has per the
24 letter of law, what the designation was and how
25 important that aspect or feature of the building was

2 to its designation. If it was an important part of
3 the designation, then we would look at opposing that
4 or seeing why it was being demolished and look at the
5 case and its specifics.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Well, sometimes the owner
7 says one thing, and then the people who want to keep
8 it standing say something else. So you're saying you
9 have to look at it carefully?

10 STEPHEN CHU: I think we'd have to investigate
11 it; and, as I said before, if the demolition is
12 claimed... or asked for because of neglect and
13 condition of the of the building and its , that
14 would need to be investigated. And as I said prior,
15 we would have somebody, a third party engineer, also
16 look at it. The DOB also can provide us with
17 engineers' expert opinions at our request.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And what can the
19 DOB and LPC do to permit necessary restoration
20 without the owner signing off?

21 STEPHEN CHU: The Landmark Commission can and
22 will protect a facility or a structure that is being
23 protected and demand that it be, of course, being
24 taken if the owner has left it in a neglect state.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So then you're saying if
3 it's in neglect state by the owner, then somebody
4 else could sign off?

5 STEPHEN CHU: I'm sorry. Could you ask that
6 again?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: If in fact, the owner
8 hasn't taken care of the building...

9 STEPHEN CHU: The...

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: We all want to save our
11 landmarks, obviously.

12 STEPHEN CHU: Landmarks can, again, I don't want
13 to speak out of hand if I legally do not understand
14 this question. My understanding is that we have the
15 power to demand that certain reparation be made to a
16 landmark building.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, thank you.

18 ANGIE MASTER: Yes, Council Member Brewer, in
19 terms of your first question, I think you're asking
20 about hardship cases?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes.

22 ANGIE MASTER: In the two years that I've been
23 on, I think we've only had one hardship application
24 before us. And I think we actually spent a lot of
25 time - there was a lot of material, and there was a

2 lot of testimony in terms of the process. I believe
3 over eighty people signed up to testify, and we had a
4 lot of public testimony. And ultimately, that
5 application was withdrawn. Is that... I think... is
6 that what you're...

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah. If it comes back,
8 how would you analyze it?

9 ANGIE MASTER: Yeah, that's a really good
10 question. But given that it is an open application, I
11 don't feel that I can comment on that, because I
12 believe that it may come back.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And then in terms
14 of demolition by neglect, how would you deal with
15 that?

16 ANGIE MASTER: So demolition by neglect, I think
17 I can recall that we do have some applications that
18 we had, in particular, I think Greenwich Village,
19 where there was concern by the community. I think
20 that what we typically do in these situations is that
21 we ask for an enhanced review by our engineer. I
22 think the DOB and LPC, we have a structural engineer
23 that goes in and I guess essentially triple checks to
24 make sure that there's structural integrity when
25 there's construction.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And again, you have
3 two different... you have the owner, and then you
4 have perhaps somebody else testifying from the
5 community, they have two different definitions of
6 what is actually neglect. Sometimes, you know, there
7 might be reasons to have it, you know, neglect. Who
8 would you look to?

9 ANGIE MASTER: I think that, you know, we have
10 public testimony for a reason, because we want to
11 hear all sides. And I think on a case by case basis,
12 we would have to very carefully consider it.

13 But I do want to reassure you that, you know, we
14 are volunteers here, and we are here because we do
15 want to protect and preserve these buildings, and we
16 care very deeply about that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And then finally,
18 DOB and LPC – to permit necessary reservation without
19 the owner signing off. How do you feel about that?

20 ANGIE MASTER: You know, I feel like that's
21 really not within my purview, because it's more of a
22 DOB process than what we do, you know, where we
23 consider cases that really come before us.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, thank you. Next?
25

2 STEPHEN WILDER: Good morning, and thank you for
3 your questions.

4 I think the first question was in regards to
5 when it is appropriate to grant hardship?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Correct.

7 STEPHEN WILDER: As a new nominee for the LPC,
8 I'm not experienced enough to really speak on when it
9 is or when it's not appropriate for hardship. I can
10 say that I know part of the reason why I want to be
11 on the Commission is for the responsibility of
12 protecting and preserving New York's historical
13 buildings. And I do know, from what I understand,
14 that granting hardship is also rare. So beyond that I
15 can't really speak on it. I think it does come down
16 to individual case and actually seeing all of the
17 information that's in front of me before I can make a
18 decision on that or comment on that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and demolition by
20 neglect is that something that you can comment on
21 with how you would...

22 STEPHEN WILDER: No, I understand it as an
23 architect and also as someone that's been doing this
24 for over twenty years, I know what it looks like. But
25 as a commissioner on the LPC, I don't think I can

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2 really speak on it at this point without having
3 experience working in that space.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And also DOB and LPC to
5 permit necessary restoration without the owner
6 signing off. Can you comment on that?

7 STEPHEN WILDER: No, because I don't think... I'm
8 not sure if it falls within the LPC's purview of
9 applications for landmark designation.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. Next?

11 ERASMUS IKPEMGBE: Please begin with the first
12 question again.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Sure. When is it
14 appropriate to grant the hardship?

15 ERASMUS IKPEMGBE: Deemed appropriate to grant a
16 hardship? Again, I'm new to this process, and I'm
17 looking forward to working on the Commission and to
18 be able to better field these types of questions.

19 But, to my understanding, hardship is something
20 that's not normally case in the Landmarks Department,
21 but I am looking forward to working with more types
22 of this in the future.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And demolition by
24 neglect, do you have some sense of how you feel about
25 that or how you would address it?

2 ERASMUS IKPEMGBE: Again, as stated by, Mr.
3 Wilder as well, I do understand the term itself as an
4 architect, but under the purview of landmarks and how
5 that is utilized, I would need more experience to do
6 so.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Then Department Of
8 Buildings at LPC, what can they do to permit
9 necessary restoration without the owner signing off?
10 In other words, you have a building falling apart and
11 the owner doesn't wanna do anything. Would you want
12 the tenant sort of to sign off?

13 ERASMUS IKPEMGBE: I understand the importance of
14 wanting to preserve structures and also knowing that
15 that is the charge of the Commission itself. But my
16 knowledge in that is limited. Just based as an
17 architect, I know we always look for the signature of
18 the owner more or less to move projects forward, but
19 I'm not sure how that applies. And I would need to do
20 some more research and have more understanding about
21 the process.

22 FRANK MAHAN: Hi there, with regards to when it's
23 appropriate to grant hardship ,you know, I honestly
24 don't know a lot about that process; although, I do
25 understand within Landmarks it's fairly long and

2 detailed economic and legal analysis that happens.
3 It's fairly unusual. So I would look forward to
4 learning more from my colleagues and Landmark staff
5 and counsel should that become before us.

6 I would say that ,you know, the remit of LPC is
7 to preserve and protect buildings. It's what I've
8 spent my career working to do and I would look
9 forward to doing that.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: In terms of demolition by
11 neglect, have some sense of that?

12 FRANK MAHAN: I understand the concept that it
13 is, you know, as an architect, it's a shame to see
14 neglect of any sort with regards to buildings, but I
15 don't honestly know how that can be taken into
16 account by LPC now. I'd have to learn more.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And then DOB and LPC, to
18 prevent necessary restoration without the owner
19 signing off, if in fact the owner won't sign off, to
20 keep the building in good shape. Would the tenant be
21 able to do that, do you think?

22 FRANK MAHAN: I don't know, Ma'am. That sounds
23 like a legal question, you know, with regards to
24 permitting that is likely outside the purview of
25 commissioners.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. I would, just so
3 you know, in terms of hardship, you may know there
4 are like four categories that you have to meet in
5 order to have a hardship. And we feel in many cases,
6 you know, the building, uh, you can... have to have a
7 way to meet the hardship, and in many cases we feel
8 they don't. So we're very conscious of not granting
9 hardships. Uh, thirteen landmark buildings have been
10 demolished. We don't want any more landmark buildings
11 demolished.

12 So just so you know, there are four categories.
13 You might want to look at them. Thank you - I've
14 memorized them, just so you know. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. Council Member
16 Hudson?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you. I guess my
18 question is somewhat related to the questions from
19 Council Member Brewer, but a few of you mentioned in
20 your testimonies the loss of structures that, though
21 may not have been landmarked, were significant to the
22 local communities and also mentioned preserving, you
23 know, structures that might be important to historic
24 communities.

2 And so I'm just wondering how you would suggest
3 LPC preserve these types of structures. What type of
4 assessment might you make if there are structures
5 that might be important to the community,
6 significant, culturally significant, or relevant to a
7 particular community that might be slated for
8 destruction and how you think LPC should look at
9 those structures?

10 STEPHEN CHU: Okay, sorry, could you just... the
11 first part of your question, could you repeat?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: I guess, I'm just trying
13 to get a sense of how you would suggest LPC assesses
14 or addresses structures that they might suggest, uh,
15 well, I guess let me give a more specific example.

16 I represent a district in Brooklyn that has a
17 lot of landmarked buildings, but also buildings that
18 aren't necessarily landmarked, that are culturally
19 significant, historically significant to the
20 community, a historically Black community. And so
21 there we've seen buildings, in my district and in
22 other districts, that have been demolished, that were
23 beautiful homes or beautiful structures that had
24 significance, historical significance, to the
25 community but that LPC deemed should be demolished.

2 Which, you know, separate and apart from ,like, any
3 legal ownership, whatever situations, I'm just trying
4 to assess how you think LPC should handle those types
5 of matters in the future...

6 STEPHEN CHU: Okay.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Or since you have
8 experience already, maybe how you've thought about...

9 STEPHEN CHU: I mean, I'll try to answer your
10 question.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Sure, sure...

12 STEPHEN CHU: If I don't, stop me, (INAUDIBLE)

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: And it's not really
14 ,like, a "gotcha" question...

15 STEPHEN CHU: Right.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: I'm just curious to
17 know...

18 STEPHEN CHU: Okay...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: You know...

20 STEPHEN CHU: I think I understand.

21 So the Commission does have a robust and
22 talented staff that actually is constantly, full-
23 time, looking at the five boroughs and doing research
24 to figure out which potential buildings or districts
25 would be designated which we as commissioners then

2 review. I will say that in the past two years that
3 we've been on the Commission, we've approved and
4 green lighted every proposal that came from our
5 staff. That regards one aspect of your question in
6 terms of process.

7 The other part of your question, I'll just say,
8 first of all, the five boroughs of New York City, I
9 believe, are important. I also want to say that
10 historical significant and aesthetics and physical
11 fabric are both important to the Landmark Commission.
12 I think that it would depend on the specific
13 structure in question in terms of the significance of
14 the place, maybe what event happened there. And we
15 would need to review the details of each of these
16 cases. They all are specific and have factors that
17 weigh more on historical events or maybe more on
18 physical building fabric. It is important that,
19 because ultimately we're regulating physical fabric
20 of the city, that it represents a part of the period
21 of the style of the time. If the building doesn't any
22 longer appear the way it did when the event happened,
23 maybe Landmarks wouldn't be the right avenue to
24 protect that structure. There may be other ways to

2 protect its historical significance in the community.

3 I hope that somewhat answered.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

5 STEPHEN CHU: Okay.

6 ANGIE MASTER: Yeah, thank you for that question.

7 The list of, I guess, buildings or historic
8 districts that come before us to be reviewed is
9 really prepared by the Landmarks Preservation staff.
10 I think that they continually do surveys. They spend
11 a lot of time and energy kind of reviewing their list
12 of, I think, architecturally significant – and in the
13 last two years, a lot of landmarks that have been
14 culturally and historically significant as well. So
15 by the time we see it, it's already been kind of
16 proposed, and, you know, we kind of look at it on the
17 merits once it's been researched and proposed to us.

18 So, I'm sorry that something in your district
19 that was culturally significant was not able to be on
20 the list and, you know, forwarded in time that we
21 could see it. But, you know, by the time we get the
22 proposal, you know, the staff has really gone through
23 the process that you're talking about.

24 STEPHEN WILDER: Thanks for your question.

2 So I think for me this is a two part answer. I
3 think as, similar to what's been stated, from my
4 understanding of how things work, the Landmarks
5 Preservation Commission staff are the ones that look
6 at these types of projects throughout the New York
7 City communities.

8 So as a commissioner, I'm not sure if I'm... if
9 I have a role in getting to decide how that process
10 works. So that's the first part. But the second part
11 is kind of my personal and professional experience
12 with these types of things.

13 And I'm one of those people that mentioned in my
14 testimony having to kind of endure and see those
15 things right before my eyes. Growing up in... growing
16 up in Harlem, and kind of living through the changes
17 of what it's... what it was and what it is now, it
18 was definitely bittersweet to see places that I grew
19 up going to, whether it was restaurants or various
20 buildings that were... and spaces that were in places
21 that we thought were historic, and seeing those
22 things no longer there. Especially today, I think
23 those are some of the things that sparked my interest
24 in Landmarks and wanting to learn more, and seeing
25 how I can empower myself and also my community.

2 And then also the fact the past few years that
3 I've been a board member or trustee on the
4 Preservation League of New York State, every year
5 they put me on the Seven to Save Committee. And so
6 it's like you get 30, 40, 50 applications to review
7 and you can only pick seven throughout the entire
8 state. And so you hear - you see these really long
9 applications that people put, and they're ,you know,
10 putting it all out there of why this project should
11 be saved. And you kind of wish you could save all of
12 them, but it's called Seven to Save, it's limited in
13 what we can do. And so I think something that can
14 always be done is really informing the public, right?
15 I think it can go both ways, in terms of the public
16 really understanding what they have in their
17 communities, what the value of some of these
18 historical places are, so that it becomes more of a
19 relationship with landmarks in the entire city of
20 what should be kept and what's the process of making
21 sure that these places are preserved.

22 And I think most of the work I do is really
23 about partnerships and not just, hey, this is our
24 job, but I think as an entire city, we all have to
25 look at all of these different situations.

2 ERASMUS IKPEMGBE: I guess first I'd like to say,
3 thank you for your question. And I understand the
4 importance of it as well. Hopefully, if I'm allowed
5 to become a commissioner, I'll be able to look in
6 more depth at things like this. The charge for the
7 Commission is to protect architecturally, historical,
8 and cultural significances within our city. And
9 through that protection, it's important because it
10 actually... it deals with the economics of the city
11 and just the cultural life of it as well. And these
12 are things that are important to me. So if given the
13 opportunity, these are things I would want to work
14 with, as well and actually see what I can do to
15 actually maybe provide some type of influence as I
16 can, in whatever capacity that I can, to actually be
17 able to serve... to actually serve and actually
18 preserve structures that may not more or less be in
19 the system per se and see how what can be done to
20 actually maybe move things along.

21 FRANK MAHAN: Thank you for your question,
22 Council Member Hudson. I appreciate it, because I
23 interpret it in a way to be about what is the meaning
24 of architecture of buildings. And I believe it's
25 certainly not just about aesthetic styles or

2 movements. Buildings signify history, they signify
3 community, they signify culture, and this is such an
4 important reason that their preservation is
5 important. You know, so I definitely believe that
6 history can be preserved through architecture. I
7 think of buildings as kind of like the framework,
8 like the scaffolding upon which our shared social
9 experiences are built. So it can be very disruptive
10 ,you know, when one is demolished in one's community.
11 It's much better to preserve, even if it's reused as
12 something different. There's a kind of continuity
13 that's created there. Thank you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you. And I just
15 want to say that I think it's important, as
16 commissioners, that you all are open to pushing back
17 against the recommendations and suggestions that are
18 made by the staff. I recognize that your job is
19 different from what theirs is. But I think rather
20 than always just going with whatever it is they're
21 proposing or suggesting, it's important sometimes to
22 have folks who can question what's been presented,
23 why it's been presented, and who's going to be most
24 directly impacted by the decisions that you all will
25 make. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you, Council Member
3 Farías?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Thank you, Chair.

5 I'm a proud Bronx City Council member, and so I
6 know really like firsthand how critical the Landmarks
7 Commission is, not only in protecting the city's
8 history, but also trying to reflect its full
9 diversity and really future potential. So I have a
10 couple questions. I'm gonna... I really have tried to
11 minimize them because there's so many of you that
12 need to answer. So if you can work with me being as
13 brief as possible just so we can get through them.

14 How do you view the role of the Landmarks
15 Preservation Commission in balancing historic
16 preservation with the need for new housing
17 infrastructure and economic development?

18 And then just coupled with that, is in your
19 views, how can preservation practices evolve to
20 better reflect the diversity of New York City's
21 history particularly around communities of color and
22 working class folks that have been historically
23 overlooked? Anyone can start.

24 (PAUSE)

2 STEPHEN CHU: I'm sorry, I didn't hear the end of
3 your... could you repeat again?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Sure, so, just how do you
5 view the role of the LPC and balancing historic
6 preservation with new housing, infrastructure, or
7 economic development? And then coupled with that, how
8 do you view the preservation evolving for the LPC to
9 really reflect the full diversity of New York City
10 and around the communities of color that are
11 particularly overlooked?

12 STEPHEN CHU: So to address your question about
13 the need for housing in the city, is that
14 specifically about housing in general or affordable
15 housing? (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

16 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: I think...

17 STEPHEN CHU: both.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: When looking at
19 preservation efforts, the balance between the
20 historic preservation and the need whether... the
21 need whether it's for a new housing, infrastructure,
22 or the focus on economic development?

23 STEPHEN CHU: Okay. So I think that the city is
24 experiencing a need for housing in general. That's
25 something that I am very aware of. I also do support

2 affordable housing under that topic. I think that the
3 commission, at least during the time that that I've
4 been on it, has in fact approved a large... one
5 example of a large housing project that was
6 indirectly behind Saint Augustine's Church in the
7 Lower East Side, and it was, I believe, a 20-story
8 tower for residential. So a large building was
9 approved, and the great thing about it in my mind is
10 that it provided needed housing, but at the same time
11 it funded the restoration of the church that was
12 adjacent to it.

13 In terms of your question about how to address
14 the needs of the five boroughs, I would go back to a
15 bit of the question that was asked before, and
16 combine it with the fact that the commissioners, I do
17 think, can work with the staff in terms of seeking
18 designations. And if that is a goal of ours is to
19 increase the amount of representation by all five
20 boroughs in areas that may not have gotten that
21 protection for historic fabric, it's something that
22 we could work with our staff to help push for more
23 designations.

24 But in general, as said before, it is generally
25 a staff selected process. But I think that it's

2 something we can all work together to help improve
3 and get equality in terms of where and what is being
4 designate in the city.

5 ANGIE MASTER: Yeah, thank you for those
6 questions. In terms of the first one, LPC with
7 historic preservation versus development - And I
8 think what we're talking about is probably housing,
9 because housing is such a big priority for New York
10 City. And on LPC, I think we're very aware of this.
11 We have done a lot of development within historic
12 districts on individual vacant lots and on non-
13 contributing structures such as garages and things
14 like that. We're also very proud that we've done some
15 adaptive reuse projects. So for example, 43 West 22nd
16 Street in the Ladies' Mile Historic District was an
17 art deco factory building. And I think they created
18 150 new residential units. So I think it's something
19 that we are very aware of and that whenever it's
20 possible, I think we very much want development,
21 especially housing, you know, even within our
22 historic districts.

23 And secondly, you asked about how can we better
24 reflect diversity and historically overlooked, I
25 guess, buildings? I think over the last two years

2 during my term, I think we've done a lot of
3 designations. And we've done a lot of designations in
4 the Bronx. We've done the Croton Aqueduct. We've
5 done, let's see... We've done, I think the Bronx has
6 really been a priority. The Bronx Opera House, the
7 Tremont Library, the Joseph Rodman Drake Park and
8 Enslaved Africa Burial Ground. So it's certainly
9 something that's a priority right now for LPC. Thank
10 you.

11 STEPHEN WILDER: Thank you for your question. If
12 I recall the first question, I think the important
13 thing to note in your question is balance. And I
14 think for me, without having much experience working
15 on the landmarks is kind of difficult to answer that
16 question without information in terms of what the
17 numbers are and understanding what the proper balance
18 for historic preservation and new development should
19 be. So for that one I can't really speak too much on.

20 In terms of designation and landmarks throughout
21 the outer boroughs, I think New York is really
22 culturally rich beyond just Manhattan, and I think a
23 lot of places throughout the city have possibly been
24 ignored or maybe not have had been brought to the
25 forefront in terms of recognizing those stories and

2 the public knowing more about them. So I'm encouraged
3 by at least some of the things that I've seen or read
4 about what Landmark Preservation's priorities and
5 things that they're focusing on.

6 So I'm all for just working with the LPC on the
7 unique opportunity to kind of lead in these spaces
8 where we get to kind of honor and identify some of
9 these places that have been ignored over time.

10 ERASMUS IKPEMGBE: Thank you for your question. I
11 can definitely see the importance of ensuring that
12 the infrastructure for the residents of the city is
13 as provided.

14 When it comes to the needs of housing, I do
15 understand this a larger problem and to actually come
16 to some type of head, we definitely need to
17 potentially even think outside of the box about it.
18 As mentioned before, noncontributing sites could be
19 looked at. Also we may even start to reimagine how we
20 actually think about building envelopes themselves. I
21 guess these are just a couple of ideas to kind of
22 just spark conversations, but definitely new
23 conversations can be had to see what we can
24 actually... what we can actually provide to provide
25 some type of warranted change.

2 FRANK MAHAN: Thank you for your question.

3 The development of housing is certainly a
4 critical need in New York City right now. And I would
5 just say that I believe the role of preservation is
6 to manage change not to prevent it altogether. And
7 that would include development of new housing or
8 other infrastructure, as you noted, both in new
9 buildings or ,you know, in the conversion of existing
10 buildings as well.

11 With regard to ,you know, sort of representation
12 of geographic diversity within landmarks, I think
13 that's critically important. As I mentioned in my
14 answer to Council Member Hudson's question, and ,you
15 know, I know that Chair Carroll I believe has made it
16 one of her objectives actually to prioritize
17 designations that reflect the diversity of New York
18 culturally and geographically. So I would look
19 forward to supporting those efforts.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: I appreciate those
21 responses.

22 I just have two more but just in the same vein
23 of around this question - I represent Parkchester,
24 which is a really... it's a neighborhood that the
25 same architect as StuyTown. We have terracotta

2 statues that are unique to Parkchester itself. It's
3 not historically landmarked, and it causes... the
4 conversation around that causes a lot of different
5 tensions because of the potential risk of the, you
6 know, increasing costs for people that live within
7 the condos that are there.

8 So how would you folks balance carrying out
9 LPC's preservation mission with competing community
10 voices, for example, between residents who support
11 landmarking, and those who are concerned about
12 increased costs and restrictions that can lead to
13 potential housing unaffordability?

14 And anyone can take this, not all of you have to
15 if that's easier.

16 ANGIE MASTER: I'm sorry, but can you repeat the
17 question one more time?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Sure.

19 How would you balance carrying out LPC's
20 preservation mission with competing community voices?
21 For example, between residents who support
22 landmarking and those concerned about increased costs
23 and restrictions that can lead to potential housing
24 unaffordability?

2 ANGIE MASTER: Yeah, that's a great question. I
3 think, again, I think it's really the staff that goes
4 through and identifies a lot of these sites and
5 proposes these historic districts. But I think one of
6 the reasons that we don't get a huge number of
7 proposals is that they spend a lot of time doing the
8 research. And I do think that they spend a lot of
9 time really talking to the stakeholders, whether it's
10 the property owners, the neighbors, you know, the
11 local politicians. I think they do a very good job of
12 talking to the stakeholders and making sure, you
13 know, that the timing is right and that, you know, to
14 try and meet their needs to the extent possible.

15 So I think a lot of that stuff probably goes
16 behind the scenes, you know, before something is
17 proposed. Once it gets to us, I think something
18 that's very important is the public testimony. You
19 know, we encourage the public to come and speak,
20 either supporting, you know, a potential landmark
21 designation or, you know, voicing their concerns. And
22 I think that's a very important part of the process.

23 STEPHEN CHU: I guess I can add to Angie's
24 comments there by saying that there does tend to be a
25 public opinion that landmarking a property gives more

2 restrictions, but at the same time, there's also data
3 that says landmark properties are cherished and have
4 more value because of them. I think that that that is
5 something that we hope could be educated to the
6 public, that landmarking is in fact something to
7 cherish the culture and the history of a place or an
8 event.

9 In terms of, we don't really... we aren't
10 involved in that process of negotiating between
11 existing owners and whether or not they decide or not
12 that they want to pursue landmarking for their
13 structure. So tenants, for example, and owners who
14 may or may not agree on that, it is not in our
15 purview to determine who has the right to decide.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Okay. And then just my
17 last question around climate sustainability, as you
18 folks are super familiar with, something we are
19 grappling with.

20 How do you think LPC can better integrate
21 climate resiliency like reducing emissions, keeping
22 to our goals of retrofitting buildings into the
23 decisions without compromising historic character?

24 ANGIE MASTER: I guess we should probably start
25 with that.

2 Climate sustainability comes up quite a bit when
3 we review a lot of these renovations. You know,
4 barrier free access comes up in a lot of the parks,
5 Central Park, Prospect Park. A lot of... some of the
6 stuff that they're doing is ensuring that the water
7 drains more appropriately because flooding is an
8 issue. I know that in a lot of the historic
9 districts, when they're doing roof additions, we're
10 also approving a lot of solar panels. And we also try
11 to make sure that when they're replacing windows,
12 that they're replacing with energy efficiency
13 windows. So I'd have to say that it comes up quite a
14 bit. Climate sustainability is something that's very
15 top of mind. And to the extent that we can, when they
16 do renovate, we do discuss it, and we do challenge
17 the property owners to be sustainable.

18 STEPHEN CHU: Yeah. I Would support Angie's,
19 again, comment there is... we definitely ask many
20 questions, and we do encourage the resilient approach
21 to any proposal that's coming to us. But I think in
22 terms of what the city needs, it is also, at least
23 for myself I will speak, an understanding that
24 buildings and occupants and certain uses do have
25 requirements, that life safety is a big issue,

2 accessibility is a big issue, and so that when we are
3 looking at applications that address these issues,
4 that we keep that in mind – with regard to how they
5 may or may not affect the historic building or its
6 fabric.

7 FRANK MAHAN: I might add that, you know, the
8 climate... the climate crisis is one of the greatest
9 threats and challenges that I think this generation
10 faces. And the number one best decision you can make
11 is to keep a building and reuse it instead of tear it
12 down. And I suspect all the architects here, and on
13 the Commission, have experience, as I do, with how to
14 integrate insulation into historic buildings, how to
15 integrate high performance windows into historic
16 buildings, how to integrate resiliency. There's
17 building technology evolving, quite honestly,
18 constantly with new products, new methodologies all
19 the time, so ,you know, architects on the Commission
20 could bring that experience to bear.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER FARÍAS: Thank you, folks, thank
22 you, Chair.

23 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. Any other
24 questions? Seeing none, thank you, guys,
25 congratulations on your nominations, thanks.

2 We have one more nominee, then we are going to
3 move into public testimony. This one is for, sorry,
4 next is up for the New York City Tax Commission.

5 Pursuant to Sections 31 and 153 of the City
6 Charter, and by a letter dated April 25th, Mayor Eric
7 Adams requested the request of the advice and consent
8 of the Council regarding the appointment of Robert
9 Firestone to be president of the Tax Commission
10 within the New York City Office of Administrative Tax
11 Appeals. The Tax Commission (the "Commission") is
12 charged with the duty of reviewing and correcting all
13 assessments of real property within New York City
14 that are set by the New York City Department of
15 Finance. Any Commissioner shall exercise such other
16 powers and duties as the President of the Commission
17 may from time to time assign.

18 The Commission consists of the President and six
19 Commissioners, all of whom are required by law to
20 have at least three years of experience in the field
21 of real estate or real estate law. At least one
22 resident of each borough shall be included among the
23 Commissioners. The President of the Commission
24 receives an annual salary of \$221,151. Commissioners
25 receive an annual salary of \$25,677.

2 Robert Firestone, a resident of Manhattan, has
3 been nominated by the Mayor to serve as the President
4 Of Tax Commission for the remainder of a six-year term
5 expiring on January 6, 2026.

6 Since 2006, he served as Commissioner on the New
7 York City Tax Appeals Tribunal, which hears appeals
8 on income tax, excise tax, and real estate tax
9 assessments.

10 From 1993 to 2006, he was an attorney in the Tax
11 and Bankruptcy Division of the New York City Law
12 Department where he supervised tax litigation rising
13 to the position of Assistant Chief and Senior Counsel
14 Division.

15 From 1990 to 1992, he was a tax associate at the
16 firm of Sullivan & Cromwell.

17 He is an adjunct professor at New York Law
18 School where he teaches a course on state and local
19 taxation.

20 He holds a JD from New York Law School, an LLM
21 in tax from New York University School of Law, and a
22 BS in accounting from Brooklyn College.

23 Before we testify, please raise your hand to be
24 sworn in, your right hand to be sworn in.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell the
3 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in
4 your testimony before this committee and in answer to
5 all council member questions?

6 ROBERT FIRESTONE: I do.

7 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you, please make an
8 opening statement.

9 ROBERT FIRESTONE: Good morning, Chair Powers,
10 and members of the New York City Council Rules
11 Committee. Thank you for considering me for an
12 appointment as President of the New York City Tax
13 Commission. It is a privilege and an honor to be
14 considered.

15 I am a lifelong resident of New York City, born
16 and raised in the East Flatbush section of Brooklyn.
17 I have also lived in Midwood and Sheepshead Bay and
18 for the past thirty years in Manhattan where we
19 raised my daughter.

20 I am proud to have served in the city and state
21 government for over forty-four years, all in the
22 field of taxation. I have served thirteen years as a
23 tax auditor for the state, where I also was asked to
24 assist on issues involving the implementation of
25 audit policy, which included having input into

2 drafting the investment capital regulations under the
3 corporation tax. And I spent another thirteen years
4 as an attorney with the City Law Department, where I
5 supervised tax litigation and advice to city
6 agencies. I was recognized by both the State
7 Department of Taxation and by the, City Law
8 Department for my public service.

9 I have served for over eighteen years as a
10 Commissioner with the Tax Appeals Tribunal, hearing
11 appeals of determinations rendered by administrative
12 law judges on the City's income and excise tax cases,
13 and as a Hearing Officer with the Tax Commission.

14 During my eighteen years with the Tax
15 Commission, I conducted Property Tax Valuation
16 Hearings on over 26,000 applications, and conducted
17 many hearings on applications claiming exemption from
18 the Real Property Tax.

19 I hope to continue that service as President of
20 the Tax Commission, and I believe that my experience
21 has prepared me to do so.

22 As the Council is fully aware, annual property
23 tax assessments are the City's single largest source
24 of revenue. There are over 1 million parcels of real
25 property in the City, and under New York State and

2 City law, each property owner has the right to an
3 independent administrative review of the assessed
4 value of its property before the Tax Commission.

5 The Tax Commission's mission, and my mission if
6 appointed president, is to ensure that determinations
7 of real property assessment appeals are made fairly,
8 efficiently, and in a transparent manner. That
9 mission can be fully accomplished only if property
10 owners receive adequate guidance to better understand
11 their assessments in knowing how to proceed to appeal
12 them and generally feel that they are being treated
13 fairly when they appeal their assessments –
14 particularly regarding property owners who are
15 unrepresented, providing adequate guidance on how to
16 pursue an appeal, and demonstrating that the process
17 is fair will encourage them to pursue their appeals
18 by dispelling any perception that their efforts will
19 be futile.

20 During my eighteen years with the Tax
21 Commission, I have attended many borough outreach
22 sessions as a representative of the Tax Commission,
23 where I explained to individual property owners how
24 their assessments and taxes were calculated, walking
25 them through the calculation step by step, and

2 explained what they need to establish in order to
3 challenge the assessment.

4 If the challenge of the assessment of a Class 1
5 property requires the property owner to use
6 comparable sales, I will explain to them how to
7 access the rolling sales files on the Department of
8 Finance website and the general process to find
9 appropriate comps in the area. I also provide this
10 information to unrepresented applicants during
11 hearings.

12 In hearings involving unrepresented applicants,
13 I answer their questions, explain what they were
14 missing in their presentation, and what they will
15 need to provide in future hearings. By explaining
16 what they need to show at hearings, unrepresented
17 applicants are more likely to leave with a favorable
18 perception of the Tax Commission. I find this aspect
19 of the work extremely gratifying.

20 I also intend to continue our process of
21 annually reviewing the Tax Commission's forms,
22 instructions, and procedures to improve accessibility
23 and clarity.

24 I wish to also add that while at the Law
25 Department's Tax and Bankruptcy Division, where I

2 supervised the staff attorneys in tax litigation and
3 rendered tax advice to other agencies, I also was
4 involved in drafting tax legislation. On one major
5 project, I worked with a law firm to draft
6 legislation that would incentivize development in
7 Lower Manhattan, which was placed on the
8 congressional calendar as the World Trade Center
9 Holding Company Act of 2003, and which,
10 unfortunately, was removed from the correct
11 Congressional Calendar when The United States invaded
12 Iraq.

13 In addition to my experience at the Tax
14 Commission hearing real property tax cases, I've also
15 encountered real property issues under the excise tax
16 litigation I supervised while at the Law Department
17 and here as a Tribunal Commissioner. The Real
18 Property Transfer Tax involves legal issues
19 pertaining to the ownership, leasing, and financing
20 of real property. Some of these issues appear under
21 the Commercial Rent & Occupancy Tax, and I have even
22 encountered significant real property legal issues
23 under the corporation tax and the unincorporated
24 business tax.

2 In conclusion, I believe that my experience well
3 qualifies me to administer the real property tax
4 appeals process in a manner that is as fair,
5 transparent, and efficient as possible.

6 I again thank you for your attention this
7 morning, and I'm happy to answer any questions you
8 may have.

9 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. Thanks for the
10 testimony. Just a few questions here.

11 You've informed the... you've informed the
12 Council that if appointed as President of the Tax
13 Commission, you intend to continue to serve in your
14 appointment as Commissioner of the New York City Tax
15 Appeals Tribunal.

16 Section 1115 of the City Charter provides that
17 no officer shall hold any other appointed office,
18 except if the mayor authorizes a person in writing to
19 accept the civil office, and no compensation or
20 salary is provided.

21 Has the Mayor provided a written authorization
22 to you, and have you provided to the City Council at
23 this point in time?

24 ROBERT FIRESTONE: I'm sorry, that very last...
25 it's little hard for me to hear some of the...

2 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Sorry, I said have you
3 provided... has the Mayor provided a written
4 authorization to you to serve on both the New York
5 City Tax Appeals... (CROSS-TALK)

6 ROBERT FIRESTONE: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Tribunal?

8 ROBERT FIRESTONE: Yes, mean, we 1115-A requires,
9 uh, says you can get a waiver, which we can get.
10 We've been informed by, first of all, by COIB
11 (Conflicts of Interest Board) that there's no
12 conflict. The Tax Commission and the Tax Appeals
13 Tribunal have entirely different jurisdictions and
14 they're not overlapping.

15 The Tax Commission has jurisdiction, they hear
16 real property tax cases, and the Tax Tribunal has
17 jurisdiction to hear income and excise tax cases. And
18 there's no overlap, there's no conflict.

19 And all of the prior Presidents of The Tax
20 Commission have also been presidents of the of the
21 Tax Appeals Tribunal for the last, you know, the two
22 last few.

23 But we can get a waiver, and that would be, you
24 know, possible.

2 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Are you planning to get a
3 waiver?

4 ROBERT FIRESTONE: We... yeah, the Mayor would
5 issue one, sure.

6 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Okay. Yeah, so I think it
7 would be helpful if we got the letter from the Mayor
8 that gave the authorization for both, just because
9 our reading of the Charter means we believe there
10 there's a need for the Mayor to authorize, not a COIB
11 interpretation, but a Mayor authorization. So if you
12 can provide that to the Council, that would be...

13 ROBERT FIRESTONE: Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: helpful.

15 And then the qualifications for Tax Commission
16 are different from the Tax Appeals Tribunal. Members
17 of the Tax Commission are required to have experience
18 in real estate or real estate law. Tribunal members
19 must have experience in tax law.

20 I think you've spent your career as a tax
21 associate in private practice and a tax lawyer in the
22 Law Department. If there's a distinction between tax
23 law and real estate law, can you just provide us with
24 your understanding of what the distinction is between
25 those two things?

2 ROBERT FIRESTONE: Between tax law and real
3 estate law? Yes, well, I mean, real estate law or
4 real estate taxation?

5 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: It's my understanding that
6 the members of the Tax Commission are required to
7 have experience in real estate or real estate law.

8 ROBERT FIRESTONE: Okay. So you want to know my
9 experience in the two...

10 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Yeah...

11 ROBERT FIRESTONE Okay, sure. I'm sorry, it's
12 just I wasn't sure what you were asking.

13 Yeah, I've served on, in terms of real estate
14 law, I've served on the Tax Commission as a Hearing
15 Officer for over eighteen years, during which time I
16 conducted real property valuation hearings on over
17 26,000 applications. And I've also heard, many
18 appeals of on applications claiming exemption from
19 the real property tax.

20 I also attended many borough outreach sessions
21 during those eighteen years where I had the
22 opportunity to explain to individual property owners
23 their assessments and how to commence an appeal
24 before the Tax Commission. In addition to that, I've
25 - during many of the cases that I supervised and

2 litigated during my thirteen years at The Law
3 Department, and heard on appeal during my eighteen
4 years on Tax Appeals Tribunal, involved issues of
5 real estate laws, like the real property transfer tax
6 and commercial rent and occupancy tax, and also even
7 corporation tax and unincorporated business tax, I
8 encountered real estate law in many of some of the
9 bigger cases. So I have the background in in that
10 area.

11 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Okay, thank you.

12 Any other questions, Members?

13 Okay, congratulations on your nomination. Thanks
14 so much.

15 ROBERT FIRESTONE: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you.

17 ROBERT FIRESTONE: Thank you so much.

18 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: We are now going to move to
19 public testimony on the nominees that we just heard
20 from. I have four names here, we're going to hear
21 from Matt Dillon, Simeon Bankoff, Andrea Goldwyn.

22 (PAUSE)

23 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: All right, thank you, and
24 welcome, thanks for joining us. I know there was a

25

2 little bit of a delay. We will start with testimony
3 over here, and we'll go to the left, thank you.

4 ANDREA GOLDWYN: Hey...

5 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Just please introduce
6 yourself when you speak.

7 ANDREA GOLDWYN: Good afternoon, Chair Powers and
8 Council Member Brewer. I'm Andrea Goldwyn speaking on
9 behalf of the New York Landmarks Conservancy.

10 The Conservancy is a fifty-two-year-old
11 organization dedicated to preserving, revitalizing,
12 and reusing New York's historic buildings and
13 neighborhoods.

14 My statement made a little more sense when the
15 nominees were still in the room, but I will just go
16 ahead with that.

17 As we welcome the returning and new nominees to
18 the Commission, we note that this is a crucial time
19 for preservation in the city. We believe preservation
20 has lived up to Mayor Wagner's expectations when he
21 signed the Landmarks Law sixty years ago. The
22 Conservancy's comprehensive study on the economic
23 benefits of preservation quantified the tremendous
24 benefits. Less than 5% of the city's land is under
25 the regulation of Landmarks Commission, but those

2 historic properties over deliver for the city. Yet
3 today, the emphasis is only on building as much as
4 possible in as many places as we can. The second
5 upzoning of a historic district is currently going
6 through the approval process. If approved, it will
7 add development pressure to the historic blocks of
8 Midtown South. But with 95% of the city not under LPC
9 review, surely there's room for additional building.

10 We support affordable housing, many historic
11 buildings provide existing affordable housing, we
12 support converting underutilized commercial,
13 institutional, and other types of building into more
14 affordable housing. We want to ensure that New York's
15 rich diversity of architecture continues to enhance
16 the city, creating jobs, housing New Yorkers,
17 encouraging sustainability, and welcoming visitors
18 from around the world.

19 Our individual landmarks and historic districts
20 maintain the city's identity. We ask the nominees -
21 hopefully they'll hear this - to protect those
22 buildings and protect them from upzoning and
23 inappropriate development. They will help preserve
24 the heart of the city by doing so. Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you.

2 MATT DILLON: Hi, I'm Matt Dillon, and I, you
3 know, I would like to just start off by saying that
4 landmarks are incredibly important to me. I live in
5 New York. I'm a New York City resident. I live on the
6 Upper West Side.

7 And this is not my first time down here to City
8 Hall. I was here fifteen years ago as part of the
9 Committee to Save St. Brigid. I remember Gale. And,
10 fortunately, I have to say at that time, I was a
11 little bit shocked that a couple of buildings right
12 on Tompkins Square Park were ready to be razed, and I
13 couldn't believe that that was going to happen. And,
14 fortunately, those buildings are standing today, and
15 that neighborhood has maintained its integrity. And I
16 think that's really important.

17 I live on the Upper West Side, I have had the
18 privilege to be actively participating with the
19 church on the corner of 86th Street and Amsterdam
20 Avenue. It's a Presbyterian church, and it houses the
21 Center at Park West, (***Transcriber Note:** The Center at
22 West Park) which is a cultural center and it serves
23 the community. It serves an entire community,
24 worshipers as well as artists. We have many programs
25 and projects we've been doing there as well as it

2 serves the community, young people. It really is part
3 of the lifeblood of the neighborhood. And so that's
4 important to me on a personal level living in that
5 district.

6 But, also, I really feel it's really important
7 that this city preserves the architectural integrity
8 that is here. Without our landmarks, without our
9 distinctive architectural character, we're losing so
10 much. I mean, this city is so important to that. I've
11 traveled the world. I've seen the mistakes that other
12 countries have made, and I've also seen the benefits
13 of other cities by maintaining and protecting. And I
14 think — I want to point out that I think that's what
15 (TIMER)... that's what the... is that my buzzer for
16 me?

17 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: You can finish, you can
18 finish.

19 MATT DILLON: Anyway, that's my spiel on it. It
20 means a lot to me, you know, preserving and
21 protecting the integrity of this city through its
22 architecture. Really hugely important. And I'll pass
23 it over to...

24 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Okay.

25 SCOTT ELLIOTT: Thanks, Matt.

2 Hi, hello, I am Scott Elliott; I run a nonprofit
3 theater company in New York City called The New
4 Group. I founded it thirty years ago, still thriving
5 in spite of all the challenges that the arts face in
6 New York City at the moment.

7 You know, when I first started thirty years ago,
8 you know, I made a decision to not build a building
9 or build a monument to my company, but to occupy
10 spaces around the city and bring communities
11 together, you know, through the work that we do.

12 And, you know, I've seen over the thirty years,
13 you know, first one I was in, we got kicked out
14 because it got knocked down. The next one we were in,
15 we got kicked out because it got knocked down.

16 It's been sort of a series of events. Now,
17 developers have come in and have built theaters,
18 newer theaters in their buildings. You know, we
19 occupy them, but they lack a lot of character and
20 things that have really brought artists to New York
21 which is sort of, you know, the hub for artists. And
22 places like the church, other places around provide
23 opportunities for us that are a little less expensive
24 — or a lot less expensive — for people to be able to
25 actually make work.

2 And we all know how important arts are for New
3 York City. If the arts went away – if the artists
4 moved away, it wouldn't be a good thing. And, you
5 know, we all came here because, I mean, I personally
6 live in a modern building. Right? And my partner's a
7 real estate broker and, you know, Charles Renfro, the
8 world renowned architect, sits on my board of
9 directors.

10 So, I'm not against progress. That's not what
11 I'm talking about. What I'm talking about is we have
12 to preserve for the artists in New York places like
13 this. Of course, I could speak for communities in
14 general, but because I'm arts focused, I'm speaking,
15 you know, for arts and how arts intersects with
16 community, but the landmarks that are up they feed
17 us. They feed artists' souls and artists' souls fill
18 this feed this city.

19 So, I encourage you to, you know, help us
20 preserve progress, yes, but also preservation of
21 character so that artists continue to come here and
22 the city can thrive because of that.

23 Okay, I'll stop before my buzzer.

24 SIMEON BANKOFF: Good afternoon, I'm Simeon
25 Bankoff, a long time observer of the Landmarks

2 Preservation Commission; former Executive Director of
3 the Historic Districts Council; also President of the
4 Fine Arts Foundation, and for full disclosure, also a
5 historic preservation consultant working with The
6 Center for West Park.

7 Should the nominees get a copy of my remarks, I
8 wish they were still here, I would say that this is
9 going to be the most important, boring appointment
10 they will ever have. That they are going to be
11 sitting, listening to very, very, very small minute
12 things that are very, very, very important. And that
13 they should be rigorous in the regulation of the
14 landmarks law and be expansive in their designation
15 of the landmarks law.

16 I would ask the nominees, both the return, the
17 renewals and the new ones, to be bold in their
18 conversation. Talk about big... take big swings. Have
19 good public conversation and advocate, suggest, and
20 engage with the buildings themselves.

21 The preservation community is incredibly
22 involved, opinionated and knowledgeable. Get to know
23 them. They know things, and even if you disagree with
24 them, don't be scared of them, engage with them, you
25

2 will find that they are a welcoming, interesting
3 group of people.

4 Finally, and I think this speaks to something
5 that Commissioner Master said, I believe that
6 commissioners have the power to set the agenda for
7 the meetings, that they can bring things up,
8 particularly with regard to designations, that the
9 staff of the Landmarks Commission as under resourced
10 and expert and wonderful as they are, should not be
11 the gatekeepers to what are public commissioners. And
12 there is a role in all of this for the commissioners
13 to be fair, impartial, but advocates for the
14 properties. That is all.

15 I've spent a lot of time in front of this
16 committee in previous administrations. I would just
17 suggest, in my last remaining minutes, to, once
18 again, perhaps reorder these meetings, so that the
19 public can go first, and then the commissioners could
20 perhaps, with the council members, who had an
21 incredibly fulsome – and thank you for that
22 incredibly fulsome and helpful conversation – you
23 could build off of some of the concerns that the
24 public had. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. And I think we do
3 have Mark Ruffalo on Zoom.

4 MARK RUFFALO: Hello, can you see me?

5 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: We can hear you.

6 MARK RUFFALO: Okay, good.

7 Hi, Mark Ruffalo, I'm sorry I was there, but I
8 had to leave; I was an hour late for work. But I
9 wanted to participate, and I wanted to weigh in with
10 the commissioners. It's sad that they were actually
11 taken out of the room, uh, I just found out.

12 But it does feel like a – just for the City
13 Council, and thank you, Chairman Powers, for having
14 us today – It just feels, from my experience with
15 Landmarks and the general counsel, to be kind of
16 indicative of the relationship that Landmarks has
17 with the public today.

18 They're sequestered. They spend more time
19 talking to developers, and so on and so forth, than
20 public gets to speak to them. And it was an
21 experience that I had when I first met with
22 Landmarks, which is on the Street of 86th Street.
23 Gale Brewer was there, and the Council for Landmarks
24 refused to allow the tenant, The Center, to speak
25 about the church.

2 And so I urge you, as a city council, to do all
3 you can to make sure that that we have a connection
4 to our commissioners, because they're so integral to
5 the quality of the city and the quality of what we
6 see, and those are economic drivers.

7 So, I want to just move to the to the church,
8 The Center at West Park, which I'm part of, and just
9 say how much in the past two years we've seen an
10 influx of support. This goes back to this question
11 about *where does the public sit within the*
12 *conversation with the commissioners?* I think it's an
13 integral part of it, and it needs to be, uh, it needs
14 to have an equal sort of footing as any other person
15 or community member in those conversations.

16 Since the two years that we've been trying to
17 save the church, 24,490 people have come expressly to
18 show support for saving that landmark.

19 Now how that relates to the rest of the city is
20 how that drives our economy. And I don't think it's,
21 uh, I don't think we could put enough importance on
22 how important these landmarks are, not just to us as
23 artists, but also to the growth and the economy of
24 the city, which is in great part an art center.

2 And I think something that's happened, and is
3 happening with our landmarks, is they're being
4 targeted for these kinds of demolitions by neglect.

5 (TIMER) And I know there was only one last year, and
6 I do want to say, I thank the Commission for its
7 diligence. They did the due diligence, and they saw
8 that the numbers that were going to be needed to
9 repair the church were inflated by the developer by
10 tenfold.

11 That was beautiful to see, and I hope that - I
12 don't know if any of this will ever get to them, but
13 I hope that they are able to know that they should be
14 independent. They should remain independent.

15 And there's going to be a lot of outside forces
16 that are going to want to control these decisions. I
17 mean, these are multi, multi-million, tens of
18 millions, billion-dollar industries that are asking
19 to tear down these landmarks.

20 Lastly, I want to say that we have raised the
21 money to - going back to Gale's question, we have
22 raised the money to fix that shed. It's \$8 million.
23 Those are the 24,000 people that showed up to pay for
24 fixing that shed. And I'm asking the Commission, I
25 mean, City Council to remember that, because this

2 is.. this becomes a loophole. If the money is sitting
3 there, and the people who are trying to de-landmark
4 for hardship are refusing to make the adjustments, I
5 think the City Council has to get involved.

6 And that's the end of my comments. I'm sorry if
7 I went too long.

8 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: No worries, thank you. And
9 thanks for being here. Sorry we couldn't have you
10 here in person as well. Thanks for testifying on
11 Zoom.

12 And we will go to our next testimony.

13 DEBBY HIRSHMAN: Debby Hirshman, and I have the
14 privilege of partnering with all of these people, and
15 with the City Council, and with Gale, as the
16 Executive Director of The Center at West Park.

17 I'm going be very brief, because what we have
18 established in two years or less, as the DCLA said to
19 me in a meeting, "You have now given a model for a
20 self sustaining community arts and community facility
21 that can then be replicated in other spaces
22 throughout the city."

23 It is really important, as Mark said, we believe
24 in being financially self sustaining. The City
25 doesn't need one more arts and culture or any entity

2 at this moment to take responsibility for. And the
3 impact, having founded and built the JCC, and you all
4 see the impact that that community center has at 76
5 in Amsterdam, we being in Upper Manhattan will now –
6 and are extending ourselves to Harlem, Washington
7 Heights and Yonkers – We become the public of Upper
8 Manhattan without a burden to the City, and with the
9 capacity to manage this building, which we've proved
10 over two years, the physical plant – we can fix the
11 facade and the roof and take down a 23-year-old
12 sidewalk shed.

13 So all of the reasons that at one point might
14 have been – during COVID – reasons to consider
15 destroying and demolishing the landmark have totally
16 been disproved.

17 And we thank you all, because today's meeting
18 was really very important – and the new commissioners
19 – and it is problematic that they didn't get to hear
20 any of this.

21 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Okay, thank you, we'll go to
22 Council Member...

23 SCOTT ELLIOTT: Can I just say one more thing
24 just on Debby's statement?
25

2 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Time is... We have to do it
3 in order.

4 SCOTT ELLIOTT: Okay, great.

5 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: We'll go to Council Member
6 Brewer, and Council Member...

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, I want to thank
8 you. Obviously, I feel very strongly about preserving
9 the church and the work that you've done to preserve
10 and enhance the cultural center. We can make sure
11 that the Commissioners - we have their addresses.

12 The ones who are, being, nominated have not yet
13 been assigned the job. Let's just be clear. This is a
14 nomination process. Their background has to be
15 investigated even further, so I just want to make
16 that clear. But we do have their addresses. We will
17 send them your testimony. It is all categorized,
18 archived, et cetera. So they will get it.

19 I was a little shocked, nobody had read the four
20 points of hardship. It's all in the Landmarks
21 Preservation Commission material. I've memorized it
22 for obvious reasons, but I would say that that would
23 be something to give me a little bit of pause about,
24 if you don't know that, and you're applying, then
25 even if you're on it, should mention, you may or may

2 not agree with the four criteria, that's up to you,
3 but at least know what they are.

4 So they will get the material. Thank you for
5 your testimony. And for all those who have been so
6 kind to lend your amazing talent, creativity, and,
7 understanding, I am deeply, deeply appreciative.
8 Thank you.

9 MATT DILLON: Thank you, Gale.

10 UNKNOWN: (UN-MIC'D) (INAUDIBLE)

11 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: And we will have the... the
12 sergeants will grab it.

13 Thank you, and thank you for being here. Sorry
14 for the wait. Thanks, guys, appreciate it.

15 PANEL: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Do we have any other members
17 of the public?

18 Seeing no other members of the public, I am
19 going to now adjourn the meeting. Thanks, everyone.

20 [GAVEL]

21

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date May 27, 2025