

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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December 14, 2021
Start: 11:35 a.m.
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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Karen Koslowitz
CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Adrienne Adams
Margaret Chin
Corey Johnson
Steve Matteo
Keith Powers
Deborah Rose
Mark Treyger
Paul Vallone

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

Gail Nayowith, Nominee
Board of Health

1 COMMITTEE ON RULES, PRIVILEGES, AND ELECTIONS 3

2 [background comments]

3 [gavel]

4 CHAIRPERSON KOSLOWITZ: Good morning. I
5 want to call the Rules Committee to order. And
6 welcome to the Committee on Rules, Privileges, and
7 Elections. Actually, we never had elections while I
8 was doing this. My name is Karen Koslowitz and I'm
9 Chair of this Committee. We are joined here today
10 Council member Adrienne Adams, Council member
11 Margaret Chin, Council member Keith Powers, and
12 Council member Paul Vallone. I just want to say, as
13 we said before, this will be my last meeting of the
14 Rules, Privileges, and Elections and my last meeting
15 of all committees.

16 [applause]

17 CHAIRPERSON KOSLOWITZ: Including the
18 Council meetings. I just want to thank everyone,
19 everyone: the staff, my Committee members, my
20 counsel, Lance Polivi-- did I say it right?
21 Finally. Finally. And all the sergeant-at-arms. To
22 Chuck Davis and Carl who keeps us in line. And I
23 just want to say thank you for all that you have
24 given me being the Chair. And, of course, to our
25 Speaker Corey Johnson and Jason, who we call all the

2 time and bother him. But thank you. Thank you very
3 much to everyone. Today, I would like-- We will
4 consider the nomination of Gail Nayowith for the
5 Board of Health. If appointed, Ms. Nayowith, a
6 resident of Manhattan, will replace Susan Klitzman
7 and serve the remainder of a six-year term that
8 expires on May 31, 2026. The primary function of the
9 Board of Health is to legislate and oversee the New
10 York City Health Code which encompasses the roles
11 governing all matters and subjects within the
12 jurisdiction of the New York City Department of
13 Health and Mental Hygiene. The Department of Health
14 jurisdiction is among the most extensive and varied
15 of all of the city agencies from communicable
16 diseases and mental health to food safety and
17 veterinarian affairs. The fact that health code
18 rules have the force and effect of law and cover such
19 an extensive range of measures aimed at improving the
20 physical and mental well-being of New Yorkers
21 highlight the importance of the work of the Board of
22 Health and consequently the vital needs for crucial
23 consideration of all potential appointees. The Board
24 of Health 11 members serve six year terms without pay
25 and cannot be dismissed without cause. Welcome, Ms.

2 Nayowith. Would you please raise your right hand to
3 be sworn in?

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you swear to
5 tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the
6 truth?

7 GAIL NAYOWITH: I do.

8 CHAIRPERSON KOSLOWITZ: Do you wish to make
9 a statement?

10 GAIL NAYOWITH: Yes, please. Thank you
11 so much, Chair. How's my-- Is it too loud?

12 CHAIRPERSON KOSLOWITZ: No. It's fine.

13 GAIL NAYOWITH: Good day to everybody
14 and thank you, Chair Koslowitz, Speaker Johnson, and
15 members of the Rules Committee for considering my
16 nomination to the Board of Health. I cannot imagine
17 a greater privilege than the ability to invest in the
18 mental health and well-being of New Yorkers by
19 serving on the Part of Help at this critical time.

20 Of course, my name is Gail Nayowith and I am
21 principal of One Digit LLC, which is a project
22 management and consulting practice that works with
23 nonprofits, government, and philanthropy to meet
24 community needs by increasing their ability to solve
25 conflicts, problems, solutions, build solutions that

2 increase performance, impact, and reach. One Digit
3 is a certified MWBE in the city and in the state. I
4 came to New York in the 1970s and I fell in love with
5 the city and I have never left. I attended New York
6 University, Columbia School of Social Work, and I
7 majored in Child and family policy, nonprofit
8 administration, and community engagement. I spent 40
9 years serving in various capacities inside, outside,
10 and alongside of government working to make the city
11 a better place for people to live, work, Reese
12 children, and age in place. I started to work in the
13 city government right out of grad school and I spent
14 my early career at what is now the New York City
15 Department of Helping Mental Hygiene, HRA, and Health
16 and Hospitals. I went on to lead Citizens Committee
17 for Children of New York and I continued there,
18 focusing on child and adolescent mental health,
19 maternal and child health, and what are now called
20 the social determinants of health: homelessness,
21 access to healthy food, income security, child care
22 and early education, child welfare, juvenile justice,
23 youth development, and community life. When I was at
24 CCC, I created the city's first database on child
25 well-being in community risk ranking and we mapped,

2 for the first time, disparity and health, education,
3 community life, safety, and the like. I also drafted
4 the city's first children mental health plan and I
5 began the first campaign to get reinvestment funds
6 from converting 25% of the savings from the closure
7 of state psychiatric centers into community mental
8 health services for children. CCC also secured the
9 cities first investment in newborn home visiting and
10 nurse family partnership. And working with the
11 Council, we were a whole to initiate city's earned
12 income tax credit and the child care tax credit. I
13 left CCC in 2007 to help open a new foundation, the
14 Lori M. Tish Illumination Fund, and served as the
15 founding executive director working with the
16 philanthropist founder to create a portfolio that
17 supported New York City organizations that focused on
18 access and opportunity. We made plays based grants
19 to increase the availability of healthy food in New
20 York City food deserts, to make an investment in
21 public art and civic service. We see to funded the
22 New York City Green Cards, we worked to establish the
23 Office of Food Policy, the NYC Civic Corps, and NYC
24 Service and those were among the early
25 accomplishments of the foundation. We also developed

2 and integrated hydroponic and aqua pot egg farm he in
3 culinary career development program at the Food and
4 Finance High School. I had the opportunity to roll
5 my sleeves up and lead a direct service organization
6 SCO family of services in 2011. SCO is a regional
7 network of 85 health and human service programs and
8 100 locations serving 60,000 children, youth, and
9 families in the city and Long Island. While at SCO,
10 we redesigned the clinical and residential services
11 and positioned the organization for Medicaid managed
12 care. During my time at SCO, I also chaired the New
13 York State Children's Medicaid Redesign Team, tasked
14 with producing the states mental health plan for
15 children. I served as an officer and member of
16 Cities of Service for 10 years before I stepped into
17 the role of interim Executive Director in 2020 to
18 plan and manage the merger with Johns Hopkins
19 University, Bloomberg center for Public Innovation at
20 Johns Hopkins University. I opened One Digit after
21 that in 2015-- before that in 2015. When Digit
22 helps leaders align their mission, their resources,
23 and their operations through strategic and
24 sustainability planning, organization design, and
25 developing quality performance and risk management

2 systems, also doing business in program development
3 and public policy solutions. Some of my recent
4 projects in my One Digit practice include leading the
5 COVID 19 activation and engagement initiatives for
6 nonprofits for the city of New York and working in
7 the Vaccine Command Center. I have also their
8 planned and implemented Senior, youth, and homebound
9 equity appointment vaccination campaigns taking
10 vaccines to people in locations that are close to
11 where they live. Or at home. I designed,
12 implemented, and build out with the teams learning
13 bridges which was the city's emergency childcare
14 system for 100,000 children 3K to eight when schools
15 were closed and, just recently this past summer,
16 built the new hybrid academic and enrichment summer
17 camp program for 200,000 kids K to eight called
18 Summer Rising. We also redesigned the Summer Youth
19 Employment Program to turn it to a digital and
20 virtual career development and project-based learning
21 program. And I also developed and implemented a
22 court mandated health and behavioral health plan and
23 office for children in foster care for the state of
24 South Carolina Department of Social Services and a
25 criminal justice diversion and substance abuse

2 treatment initiative for the Staten Island district

3 attorney's office, among many other projects. I've

4 served on the board of the Kenworthy Swift

5 foundation. It's a small foundation that provides

6 funding to New York City organizations that work to

7 improve children's mental health and well-being.

8 I've served on the board since the early 2000's and I

9 served on the New York City Board of Health and

10 Chaired the Community Services Board until last year

11 when I step down to work with the Vaccine Command

12 Center on the city's COVID response. I publish

13 occasionally and, in 2017, I co-authored a book. I

14 write and speak publicly on matters of child well-

15 being, family policy, the business of nonprofit

16 organization, health and human service policy, civic

17 service, and so forth. I want to just thank you so

18 much for the opportunity to be here today. I am

19 grateful to you all for considering me for an

20 appointment to the Board of Health. Thank you, Chair

21 Koslowitz.

22 CHAIRPERSON KOSLOWITZ: Thank you. I have

23 a few questions. COVID 19 has highlighted long-

24 standing health inequities within our city. How

25

2 would you like to see the city better address the
3 health needs of the most marginalized New Yorkers?

4 GAIL NAYOWITH: Thank you. COVID has
5 had a devastating impact on communities of color and
6 on the essential workforce. What I would like to see
7 is the ability to continue to provide access to the
8 vaccine, to provide guidance around masking and other
9 precautions, to encourage people to get vaccination
10 through rapid engagement and outreach that is
11 targeted to their special concerns and
12 considerations. I'm sorry. My glasses are fogging
13 up. And I also would like to see a particular focus
14 on older New Yorkers who have among the lowest
15 vaccination rates in the city. To that end, I think
16 what I would say just in a nutshell is continue to do
17 the multifaceted work that's being done now and to
18 focus it more specifically as time goes on on
19 populations that are at extreme risk.

20 CHAIRPERSON KOSLOWITZ: Can you please
21 confirm that you will terminate any contract with
22 MOCS if you are appointed prior to the termination of
23 your current consulting contract for your firm, One
24 Digital LLC, in order to avoid a potential conflict
25 of interest?

2 GAIL NAYOWITH: Yes. When I'm appointed
3 to the Board of Health, if I'm given that
4 opportunity, I will end my contract with MOCS
5 immediately.

6 CHAIRPERSON KOSLOWITZ: Okay. And can you
7 please confirm that you will see-- CORD Gardens for
8 any potential conflicts of interest concerning your
9 firm, One Digital LLC, upon your appointment to the
10 Board of Health?

11 GAIL NAYOWITH: Yes. Upon appointment
12 to the Board of Health, I will write to the COIB
13 asking for guidance. I have written to the COIB in
14 the past and what they advised was to inform them if
15 my situation changed. So that would be consistent
16 with the guidance that you're suggesting now and I
17 would do that. Absolutely and immediately.

18 CHAIRPERSON KOSLOWITZ: Okay. Do any of my
19 colleagues have any questions that they would like to
20 ask? Council member Chin?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you, Chair.
22 Yeah. Thank you, Ms. Nayowith. I mean, you have
23 such a wealth of experience in this field of public
24 health and especially with mental health for our
25 children. And I wanted to ask is that how do you see

2 in terms of your role going forward to make sure that
3 mental health wellness opportunities are available
4 and accessible to immigrant communities and to make
5 sure that they know these resources are available for
6 children and also as you talk about, you know, for
7 our aging population, you know, to really bring more
8 awareness and for people to know that these resources
9 are available and how they can access and also to
10 overcome the taboo of, you know, mental health is
11 something that communities and, especially a lot of
12 immigrant communities, don't want to talk about but
13 do need this service?

14 GAIL NAYOWITH: You know, the
15 conversation around mental health has really changed
16 in the last year since COVID. It's more in the
17 popular press now. People are talking about it and
18 there is more comfort discussing depression,
19 isolation, and anxiety particularly because it stems
20 from COVID, so it makes it more acceptable because so
21 many more people in the community are having the same
22 feelings. I think it's critically important to reach
23 deeply into the immigrant community and to find ways
24 to engage older New Yorkers and seeking help if they
25 need it. The systems historically have not been good

2 at doing item what needs to happen is to create more
3 aggressive engagement and outreach and to have
4 targeted information that can be delivered by trusted
5 messengers in ways that people can understand
6 language appropriate, culturally appropriate. The
7 system itself is very hard to navigate, so everybody
8 needs help finding a bridge to seeking the mental
9 health services that they need.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you. Thank
11 you, Chair.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Thank you, Chair,
13 and welcome, Ms. Nayowith. As my colleague
14 mentioned, you do have an extensive background and I
15 just want to thank you. I've been reading your work
16 and thank you for your work during this pandemic. It
17 has been very, very substantial. One of the
18 questions that you were asked in your pre-questioning
19 was what is your approach towards vaccine hesitancy?
20 My community is southeast Queens and we have had
21 vaccine hesitancy and I would be interested to know
22 or hear you expound on your thoughts about that.

23 GAIL NAYOWITH: Thank you, Council
24 member. You know, everybody comes to their
25 healthcare with a particular set of beliefs and

2 experiences and for people who have not had a good
3 experience in the healthcare system-- have to take
4 these classes offer something. I apologize. But I'm
5 Trevor hard to figure out how to see you and manage
6 the fog.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: I understand.

8 GAIL NAYOWITH: You know, people come to
9 their health seeking behavior with a whole set of
10 experiences and it's very hard for people just to
11 accept the fact that the vaccine works, so there are
12 a number of things that are in place and have to
13 continue to be in place for the long haul to help
14 people make informed decisions, individual by
15 individual by individual. Some of that requires
16 explanations again by trusted messengers in the right
17 places. Whether it is a house of worship, there is a
18 barbershop and beauty salon, nail salon initiative.
19 There are ways to reach the community in place that
20 is where they are comfortable to have really
21 meaningful, deep conversations so that people can get
22 the information, think about it, and have an
23 opportunity to go and seek vaccination. The other
24 thing is that vaccine-- the vaccination is
25 accompanied by-- and all were should be-- by

2 education around masking, handwashing, Orient
3 sanitizing, and precautions and safety measures that
4 people can take. Essential workers have had to get
5 vaccinated, so that has been a way to help people see
6 that their neighbors are getting vaccinated and that
7 they are safe. Kids are now eligible for vaccines.
8 That is another consideration for families and they
9 can see other people's children who are being
10 vaccinated. And it's going to come from an approach
11 that reaches deeply into an interpersonal contact.
12 And to make sure that people understand that they
13 have choices and they can make good choices and that
14 vaccination won't keep them and their families and
15 their neighbors safe and protected from disease.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Yeah. Thank you
17 for that. I noticed, in particular, senior
18 population and different places in the city seem to
19 be more hesitant than others and I was curious to
20 hear your take on that. But thank you very much.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Hi, there. Good
22 morning. Congratulations on your nomination. I just
23 wanted to go through one of the issues that we have,
24 you know, as we are looking through the book. It's
25 just sort of your transition from private sector to

2 public sector and I know that you are, I think,
3 confirmation would take place after you discharged
4 your contract. But could you just give us a sense of
5 your contract right now with MOCS and how you plan to
6 work use yourself or handle any matters? You are,
7 obviously, in the space that you are working with
8 right now and just how you might handle the
9 safeguards with regards to your work now as you
10 transition over to Board of Health?

11 GAIL NAYOWITH: You know, before I took
12 on that responsibility, I wrote to the COIB about
13 appearing before the Board of Help because I was a
14 former board member and Chaired the Community
15 Services Board and we, basically, concluded that I
16 would not appear before the Board of Help or the
17 Health Department and that I would have other vaccine
18 related projects to work on. And so that is what I
19 did. I created a firewall and I did not have those
20 engagements. Now, in the case, you know, with
21 vaccine, it's complicated because the guidance comes
22 out and you want to make sure that you understand it
23 before you translate it to the nonprofit sector or,
24 in that case, what I was doing. And, you know, but
25 my contact was very minimal. I had no business

2 before the Health Department or the Board of Health
3 and I continued to work on other projects. So, for
4 example, I described Summer Rising, Learning Bridges.
5 I have been working on a transition from the
6 Sanitation Department Emergency Food to the
7 Department for the Aging Aging Recovery Food Program.
8 So, there are all kinds of things that happened that
9 are COVID related that I've been able to work on
10 without having to appear before the Department of
11 Health or the Board of Health.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: But we're talking
13 about the flipping. So, when we--

14 GAIL NAYOWITH: So, I will end my
15 contract upon appointment. I mean, that is my
16 commitment.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: And if there is an
18 issue that-- Will you have clients after you become
19 a member of the Board of Health?

20 GAIL NAYOWITH: I can't hear you. I'm
21 sorry.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: I said well you
23 have any further clients after you leave the Board of
24 Health?

2 GAIL NAYOWITH: Not with the city of New
3 York.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Not with the city
5 of New York. Can you clarify that? What do you mean
6 not with the city of New York? I mean, you will have
7 clients, but they do won't do business--

8 GAIL NAYOWITH: One Digit is a
9 consulting practice. I am a little long in the tooth
10 and I have had a long career, so I was hoping to cut
11 back, but I will probably do two small projects.
12 They will not really be-- They are not government
13 related. They are nonprofit related. So I won't
14 really be in a conflict situation.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: And if they were to
16 come before the board, I assume you would have to
17 recuse yourself or figure out some way to--

18 GAIL NAYOWITH: Of course. But the two
19 that I'm thinking of don't have-- There's just not--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: You don't see a
21 conflict.

22 GAIL NAYOWITH: No. I don't.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay. Thank you.

24 GAIL NAYOWITH: Thank you.

1 COMMITTEE ON RULES, PRIVILEGES, AND ELECTIONS 20

2 CHAIRPERSON KOSLOWITZ: I now open it to
3 the public. Anybody? Seeing nobody, we're ready for
4 the vote.

5 COMMITTEE CLERK: Matthew Destephano,
6 committee clerk. Committee on Rules, Privileges, and
7 Elections. Roll call vote on the preconsidered N
8 submitting the name of Ms. Gail Nayowith for
9 appointment to the Board of Health. Chair Koslowitz?

10 CHAIRPERSON KOSLOWITZ: I vote aye.

11 COMMITTEE CLERK: Chin?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: I vote aye.

13 COMMITTEE CLERK: Vallone?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Madam Chair,
15 just a moment to explain my vote? Karen? Just a
16 moment to explain my vote? Just a moment to explain?
17 Thank you. I will not be able to be later at the
18 Stated. I will be remote and I want to thank serving
19 with you as Chair and as Queens Delegation leader and
20 as a friend to the entire family here and in my
21 family. It has truly been an honor and I wouldn't
22 get the chance to say that later. And to my fellow
23 Council members who are here, Margaret, you were my
24 first Chair. We were always the right and left hand
25 of seniors. Adrienne, so many prior things are

2 coming your way soon and I'm so proud of you. And,
3 Keith, we go back enough and it's been an honor. And
4 sorry you got that in the middle of your-- you're
5 going to have my yes vote and I thank you for what
6 you bring to this position and I'm sure you'll work
7 out how that transition is going to happen. But this
8 is probably-- this will be the last until,
9 hopefully, my kids. Since 1974, there has been a
10 Vallone in the City Council and as of December 31st,
11 that 48 year streak will end and it has been truly an
12 honor. So, my kids are quick to take that mantle and
13 get back at some point, but finish school first, I
14 told them. Finish school. So, Karen, with that, God
15 bless you. Thank you for everything you've done and
16 I vote aye with an open heart. Thank you very much.

17 COMMITTEE CLERK: Adams?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: I vote aye.

19 COMMITTEE CLERK: Powers?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Permission to
21 explain my vote? Thank you. First of all, I want to
22 thank Chair Koslowitz for running this committee so
23 well and for the work you've done here in the
24 Council. And I found on a number of occasions we've
25 encountered pieces of legislation or issues that we

2 are working on here that were things that Council
3 member Koslowitz working her prior term here,
4 especially when she was the Chair of the Consumer
5 Affairs Committee. So, her legacy is undoubted here
6 in the Council and the way she has conducted herself,
7 I think, as a model for all of us in terms of being
8 strong, being a great legislator, and being a great
9 colleague. So, I want to say a very big thank you
10 for that and you will be missed in a very sincere
11 way. I am voting aye on the appointment. I
12 appreciate you taking the time to answer the
13 questions, as well. You are not my constituent, but
14 I think you are across the street from me, so you're
15 in good hands, too. But, anyway, thank you for your
16 service and we are looking forward to working at a
17 very important time. And I will be voting aye.
18 Thanks.

19 COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of five in the
20 affirmative, zero negative, and no abstentions, the
21 appointment has been adopted.

22 GAIL NAYOWITH: Thank you so kindly.

23 CHAIRPERSON KOSLOWITZ: This meeting is
24 adjourned.

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 January 31, 2022