

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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May 20, 2009
Start: 12:48pm
Recess: 1:05pm

HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E:
DIANA REYNA
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Joel Rivera
Maria Baez
Leroy G. Comrie, Jr.
Erik Martin Dilan
Lewis A. Fidler
Robert Jackson
Larry Seabrook
David I. Weprin
Vincent Gentile
Inez E. Dickens
Daniel R. Garodnick
James S. Oddo
Christine C. Quinn

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

Karen Phillips
Appointee
City Planning Commission

Rayann Besser
Appointee
City Planning Commission

2 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: I'd like to ask
3 everyone to take a seat. I apologize for the
4 delay. Good morning. My name is Diana Reyna. I
5 am Chair of the Committee of Rules, Privileges and
6 Elections. Before we begin I would like to
7 introduce members of this Committee. Council
8 Member Maria Baez, Council Member Inez Dickens,
9 Council Member Leroy--I'm sorry.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Comrie,
11 Comrie.

12 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: I'm sorry.
13 Council Member Leroy, Council Member Larry
14 Seabrook, Council Member Lewis Fidler, Council
15 Member Joel Rivera, Council Member Vincent
16 Gentile. And no other members present right now.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Permission
18 to vote on the candidates so that I can go attend
19 a meeting that's already started.

20 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: Permission
21 granted.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Aye on
23 both, congratulations, ladies.

24 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: Thank you very
25 much. We've been joined by Council Member Jimmy

1
2 Oddo. Today we have before us two candidates for
3 appointment to the City Planning Commission. They
4 are Karen Phillips, a resident of Manhattan, a
5 candidate for reappointment by the Public Advocate
6 to the Planning Commission. If the Council gives
7 its advice and consent, Ms. Phillips will serve
8 the remainder of a five-year term that expires on
9 June 30th, 2010. And Rayann Besser, a resident of
10 Staten Island, is a candidate for appointment by
11 the Staten Island Borough President to the
12 Planning Commission. If the Counsel gives its
13 advice and consent, Ms. Besser will replace John
14 Morolo, and serve the remainder of a five-year
15 term that expires on June 30th, 2011. The City
16 Planning Commission has 13 members, seven
17 appointed by the Mayor, one by the Public Advocate
18 and one by each of the Borough Presidents. The
19 planning commission is responsible for the long
20 range planning to ensure orderly growth and
21 development, assist in developing the ten-year
22 capital plan, prepares and modifies the zoning
23 resolution among a number of other critical
24 functions. Commission Members serve five-year
25 terms. There is no limitation on the number of

2 terms that a CPC member may serve. CPC members
3 are prohibited from holding any other City office
4 while they serve on the planning commission. The
5 Chair receives an annual salary of \$181,719. The
6 member who is designated as Vice Chair receives an
7 annual salary of \$57,573. The other members
8 receive an annual salary of \$50,064. Welcome Ms.
9 Phillips. Will you please raise your right hand
10 and be sworn in by counsel?

11 BARBARA B. BUTLER: Do you swear or
12 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and
13 nothing but the truth.

14 [Off Mic]

15 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: Thank you,
16 Ms. Phillips. And if you have a statement you'd
17 like to share with this Committee now is the time
18 to do so.

19 KAREN PHILLIPS: I just would like
20 to thank the Committee and the Counsel for giving
21 me the privilege for the past five years of
22 serving on the New York City Planning Commission.
23 My experience and background prepared me to play
24 this role for the citizens of the City of New York
25 City. And the leadership of the Public Advocate

2 has been great in my service here, and she does
3 advocate for people. And as her appointee, I have
4 taken particular interest in City Planning
5 Commission deliberations to ensure that they are
6 in the best interests of the citizens of New York
7 and the residents of our city and neighborhoods.
8 This work, the role that I serve, is an
9 unrecognized power of the Public Advocate, and
10 it's essential for a citywide voice in many of the
11 issues that we deal with that are very detailed
12 and affect one area. But it's not only the
13 project that we're doing, but it's also the
14 process to ensure that the public is included.
15 And I would appreciate the reappointment so that I
16 could serve out the end of this term. Thank you
17 very much.

18 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: Thank you, Ms.
19 Phillips. I have a statement from Council Member
20 Inez Dickens.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS: Thank you
22 so much, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to voice
23 my strong support for the renomination of Ms.
24 Karen Phillips to the New York City Planning
25 Commission. Ms. Phillips has demonstrated her

1 unremitting support for community-based and
2 community centered planning and development. She
3 brings with her a long list of experience well
4 suited for her role on the City Planning
5 Commission. She has been president and CEO of the
6 Black Equity Alliance, which aims to create
7 coalitions of organizations and individuals of
8 color to leverage their collective strength to
9 achieve economic and civic equity. Prior to that
10 she was the first president and CEO of the
11 Abyssinian Development Corp., providing quality
12 affordable housing, social services and economic
13 empowerment to my district and to the City. She
14 successfully went to the New York State Senate
15 confirmation hearings for her recent appointment
16 by Governor Patterson to Housing Finance Agency in
17 August of 2008. Most of all I personally know
18 Karen; she is my constituent. She has been a
19 tremendous resource to me and to my office. I am
20 proud to call her a colleague and a friend, and
21 for these reasons I stand beside Karen and
22 strongly support her for this position. I ask my
23 colleagues for their support and thank the chair
24 for this time.

2 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: Thank you so
3 much, Council Member Dickens. The best comes out
4 of Council Member Dickens's district and I'm happy
5 to hear her comments concerning your appointment.
6 No other comments? Council Member Seabrook.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Thank you
8 very much, Madam Chair, and I too would like to
9 express a deep appreciation for Karen Phillips,
10 who I've known for many, many years, and the fine
11 work that she has done. And she has certainly
12 been helpful beyond the borders of Harlem and
13 Manhattan. And I truly appreciate the work that
14 you've done for this city and that you will
15 continue to do that so well. And do I need to
16 also say that she's a member of my church as well.
17 Just, put it out there for the record, Chuck, it
18 might be a part of a news article. I just wanted
19 to be clear.

20 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: Thank you
21 Council Member Seabrook for your full disclosure.
22 I would like to just follow the sentiment of my
23 two colleagues and just mention to you as a
24 Commissioner on a City Planning Commission, taking
25 the needs and resources that you have only one

1
2 opportunity to balance. I'd like to make sure
3 that we learn from our past mistakes and continue
4 to grow on the victories that we have been able to
5 do together, particularly one particular example I
6 can attest to is the Greenpoint Williamsburg
7 rezoning is we have to always strive for the very
8 best, and there will be follow up rezonings
9 throughout the City, I know within my district as
10 well, where we want to be able to balance the
11 resources of housing, industry, recreation and
12 culture and I hope that your expertise comes to
13 the table each and every time with the real faces
14 of our community--not those that have political
15 ties to say they are the face of the community.
16 And so with that in mind I'd like to move on to
17 our second nominee. Rayann Besser, will you
18 please raise your right hand and be sworn in by
19 Counsel?

20 BARBARA B. BUTLER: Do you swear or
21 affirm to tell the whole truth--

22 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: [Interposing]
23 That's not on.

24 BARBARA B. BUTLER: --and nothing
25 but the truth?

2 [Off Mic]

3 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: Is your mic on?
4 Talk in to it.

5 RAYANN BESSER: Yes. Can you hear
6 me?

7 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: Yes, now.
8 Fantastic. Ms. Besser, you will be appointed for
9 the remainder of a five-year term and now is the
10 time to express a statement if you have one
11 prepared.

12 RAYANN BESSER: Yes, I do.

13 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: Okay.

14 RAYANN BESSER: Good afternoon
15 Madam Chair and distinguished Council--

16 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: [Interposing]
17 Get closer to... Own the mic. There you go.

18 RAYANN BESSER: Okay. Good
19 afternoon Madam Chair and distinguished Council
20 Members. It's a privilege to appear before you
21 today. It's an honor to be nominated for a
22 position on the City Planning Commission
23 representing the great borough of Staten Island.
24 My name is Rayann Besser. I was born and raised
25 on South Beach, Staten Island. I'm a second-

2 generation native and also work in my hometown. I
3 have worked as a licensed real estate salesperson
4 for more than a decade. I have served on various
5 committees including the MLS Board of Governors,
6 Commercial Real Estate Chair, Appraisal Committee,
7 Professional Standards Committee and Rules
8 Committee as well as Attorney Liaison Committee.
9 I've also maintained top producer status for the
10 past three years. My experiences in the real
11 estate industry have afforded me an opportunity to
12 see the uniqueness of the City and our
13 neighborhoods firsthand. Over the last decade
14 there have been many changes to the City's
15 landscape. In the post 9/11 world even the
16 components that craft a master plan have been
17 altered. The City Planning Commission has been at
18 the forefront of the issues that serve the public
19 interest including growth, affordability,
20 sustainability, preservation of neighborhood
21 character and economic opportunities. I have
22 listened and learned as residents fought to
23 preserve their quality of life on Staten Island.
24 I have watched as the Lower Density Growth
25 Management tax amendment spread from Staten Island

2 to the Bronx. I followed intently as the Westerly
3 Community and their elected officials made a case
4 for their unpopular rezoning to the Commission.
5 No matter what the issue, the people of our
6 diverse communities are the life breath of our
7 City. I would be grateful to serve as part of a
8 body that strives each day to make New York a
9 better place to live, work and play for each of
10 those residents. If appointed I will make every
11 effort to ensure that you are more than satisfied
12 with my--

13 [Off Mic]

14 RAYANN BESSER: Once again, I thank
15 you for this opportunity and I'm honored to have
16 been nominated.

17 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: Thank you so
18 much, Ms. Besser. I know we have special comments
19 on behalf of Council Member Jimmy Oddo.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: Thank you,
21 Madam Chair. I just want to tell the Committee
22 that I know Ms. Besser for probably--I don't want
23 to admit to how many years I know her, admit to my
24 age. But she is a bright, intelligent young lady.
25 I just want my colleagues to know that those of us

1
2 on Staten Island were talking about the
3 overdevelopment issue slightly before the rest of
4 you, and we are on sort of the cutting edge of it.
5 And then eventually that issue kind of crept its
6 way to all of the boroughs. And I think Ms.
7 Besser is quite familiar with that and will bring
8 to the Commission the sort of outer borough
9 sensibility and values. Although the market seems
10 to have dipped, hopefully soon it will turn. And
11 probably in the not too distant future we're going
12 to have overdevelopment issues again, and I think
13 it would be good for the Commission to have a
14 Staten Islander who has lived it, has seen it from
15 both sides and will reflect in her votes the
16 concerns of the community and the concerns of our
17 constituents and I ask my colleagues for support.
18 Thank you, Madam Chair.

19 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: Thank you,
20 Council Member Oddo. I wanted to just mention how
21 your comments in your statement for the ability to
22 be able to strive and represent the constituency
23 throughout the City of New York to live, work and
24 play is something that we must always be able to
25 strive for. I know that I just came from a ribbon

2 cutting ceremony this morning, which was the
3 reason why I was late, I apologize, building new
4 industrial space that this Council has been the
5 catalyst in providing funding to acquire space, to
6 protect space, for industry to be retained in the
7 City of New York, and the concept of walking to
8 work to come back into our neighborhoods is
9 something that I hold true. So I look forward to
10 working with you. I don't know if there's any
11 other comments, statements? I'd like to call the
12 vote.

13 WILLIAM MARTIN: William Martin,
14 Committee Clerk, roll call on the Committee on
15 Rules, Privileges and Elections. Council Member
16 Reyna.

17 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: I vote Aye.
18 Congratulations to the two Commissioners.

19 WILLIAM MARTIN: Rivera.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: I vote Aye,
21 and also congratulations.

22 WILLIAM MARTIN: Baez.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BAEZ: Aye.
24 Congratulations.

25 WILLIAM MARTIN: Dilan.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER DILAN: Aye on both.

3 WILLIAM MARTIN: Fidler.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER FIDLER: If I may,
5 Madam Chairperson? First, I'd like to vote Aye on
6 both and just note that both of you will be
7 sitting at the City Planning hearing on June 3rd,
8 when the Canarsie Rezoning will be on the calendar
9 and I just wanted to urge you both while I had the
10 opportunity to support that proposal. It is the
11 largest contextual down zoning in the history of
12 the County of Kings, and will protect over 250
13 blocks in Canarsie from overdevelopment and has
14 the virtually unanimous support of all the civic
15 leaders in Canarsie and does have the unanimous
16 support of all of its elected officials, and I
17 hope that you will be voting on June 3rd and I
18 hope that you will take these comments to heart.
19 Thank you.

20 WILLIAM MARTIN: Seabrook.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Yes. I
22 vote Aye, and I certainly extend congratulations
23 to both of you and may you have a fantastic few
24 years at the City Planning Commission.
25 Congratulations.

2 WILLIAM MARTIN: Gentile.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER GENTILE: Aye on
4 both.

5 WILLIAM MARTIN: Dickens.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DICKENS:
7 Congratulations to both and Aye on both.

8 WILLIAM MARTIN: Oddo.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: Yes.

10 WILLIAM MARTIN: By a vote of nine
11 in the affirmative, zero in the negative and no
12 abstentions, both items are adopted. Council
13 Members, please sign the Committee reports. Thank
14 you.

15 CHAIRPERSON REYNA: We will be
16 holding the vote open for another half hour.
17 Thank you to our Committee staff and thank you to
18 our colleagues for your patience.

19 [Pause]

20 WILLIAM MARTIN: Council Member
21 Jackson.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: I vote Aye
23 on all.

24 WILLIAM MARTIN: Garodnick.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: I vote

2 Aye.

3 WILLIAM MARTIN: Speaker Quinn.

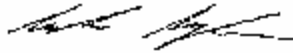
4 SPEAKER QUINN: Aye.

5 WILLIAM MARTIN: The vote now
6 stands at 13 in the affirmative; zero in the
7 negative and no abstentions. Roll is still open.

8

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Erika Swyler, certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Signature _____

Date September 16, 2009