

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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Wednesday, December 7, 2022
Start: 9:58 a.m.
Recess: 10:56 a.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers, City Hall

B E F O R E: Keith Powers, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Adrienne E. Adams
- Joseph C. Borelli
- Justin L. Brannan
- Gale Brewer
- Selvena Brooks-Powers
- Crystal Hudson
- Rafael Salamanca
- Pierina Ana Sanchez
- Shahana Hanif

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

Isabel Castilla
Candidate
Public Design Commission

James Van Bramer
Candidate
Public Design Commission

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and welcome to
3 the Committee on Rules, Privileges, and Elections.
4 To minimize disruption please everyone place all
5 electronic devices to vibrate or silent mode. Thank
6 you for your cooperation. Chairs we are ready to
7 begin.

8 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Good morning and welcome to
9 the meeting of the committee on Rules, Privileges,
10 and Elections. I'm city council member Keith Powers,
11 Chair of the committee. Before I begin, I'd like to
12 introduce the other members of the committee who are
13 president, Speaker Adrienne Adams, and Councilmember
14 Justin Brannan, Councilmember Joe Borellim
15 Councilmember Selvena Brooks-Powers, Councilmember
16 Gale Brewer, and I believe we're joined by
17 Councilmember Pierina Sanchez and Councilmember
18 Crystal Hudson remotely as well. I'd like to
19 acknowledge the committee Council staff Jeff
20 Campagna, and the committee staff who worked on the
21 appointments that we'll be hearing today, Pearl
22 Moore, Director of Investigations, Francesca Della
23 Vecchia, Deputy Director of Investigations, Alicia
24 Vassal, and Investigator Ramses Budan.

2 Today first we're going to vote on nominations of
3 three candidates for appointment to the local
4 Conditional Release Commission. We will then hold a
5 public hearing on the nominations of two candidates
6 for appointment to the Public Design Commission.

7 By letters dated September 30, 2022, Mayor Eric
8 Adams requested the advice and consent of the council
9 regarding the appointments of Lily Shapiro, David
10 Fuller, and Gregorio Mayers to the New York City
11 Local Conditional Release Commission, also known as
12 LCRC. On November 14, this committee held a public
13 hearing on the nominations during which all three
14 candidates appeared before the committee. No members
15 of the public appeared in support or opposition to
16 the nominations.

17 Before we open up the vote, do we have any
18 members with questions or comments about the
19 nominees? Okay, I'm going to now call the clerk
20 speaker to take a roll call on M95, M96, M97. The
21 nominations of David Fuller, Lily Shapiro, and
22 Gregorio Myers to the LCRC.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Powers?

24 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: I vote aye.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Brannan?

2 COUNCILMEMBER BRANNAN: Yes.

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Brooks-Powers?

4 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Aye.

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Brewer?

6 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Aye.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Hudson? Councilmember Hudson?
8 Sanchez? Is Councilmember Sanchez unmuted? Borelli?

9 COUNCILMEMBER BORELLI: I vote no.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Speaker Adams?

11 SPEAKER ADAMS: Aye.

12 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: I'm just going to ask that
13 we hold open the vote for members. I think we have
14 one remember coming and some members remote. So
15 we'll hold up in the vote.

16 Thank you. I'm going to now off recognized
17 Speaker Adrienne Adams to offer her remarks with
18 regard to the two nominees before us today.

19 SPEAKERS ADAMS: Thank you very much Chair
20 Powers. I would also like to acknowledge my
21 colleagues on the committee, and thank the committee
22 staff for their work on today's hearing. I extend my
23 personal welcome to the candidates who have joined us
24 here today, Isabel Castilla, and James Van Bramer. I
25 congratulate you both on your nominations. I extend

2 of course a very special welcome to Mr. Van Bramer,
3 who spent 12 years as the council member representing
4 District 26 in my home borough of Queens.

5 Before the end of his term in the council last
6 December, he'd served as the majority leader and the
7 Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries
8 and International Relations. He now serves as the
9 chief growth and strategic partnership officer at the
10 Girl Scouts of Greater New York, an institution that
11 is also very near and dear to my heart. Thank you
12 for your service, and welcome back to council
13 chambers. It's great to see you.

14 Isabel Castilla is an accomplished landscape
15 urban designer who has been the principal in charge
16 of multiple phases of the High Line extension, and is
17 currently leading the public realm design for the
18 175th Park Avenue Project on Manhattan's East Side.

19 The Public Design Commission is charged with
20 advising the city on the design of all public spaces.
21 I look forward to hearing from both of you about your
22 vision for the role of public art, and the
23 Commission's role in urban design and what you will
24 bring to the commission if appointed. Thank you very
25 much, Mr. Chairman.

2 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. And just to give
3 a little bit of context about today's hearing about
4 the Public Design Commission: the New York City
5 Public Design Commission, formerly known as the
6 City... New York City Art Commission reviews
7 permanent works of art, architecture, and
8 landscape... landscape architecture proposed on or
9 over city owned property. Projects include
10 construction, renovation, or restoration of buildings
11 such as museums and libraries, creation or
12 rehabilitation of parks and playgrounds, installation
13 of lighting and other streetscape elements, and
14 design, installation, and conservation of artwork.

15 The Commission itself does not contract for any
16 artwork, nor does it select contractors, negotiate
17 fees, or otherwise involve itself in the selection or
18 approval of contracts. The Commission brings its
19 expertise to the process by reviewing submitted plans
20 or work and according to the standards enumerated in
21 the charter. Commission members have no say in what
22 projects are initiated or how city funds are
23 allocated. The charter states that the commission
24 has general advisory oversight over all works of art
25 belonging to the city, and advise agencies having

2 jurisdiction over the methods and procedures for the
3 proper maintenance. The commission is composed of
4 the Mayor or his representative, the President of the
5 Metropolitan Museum of Art, the President of the New
6 York Public Library, the President of the Brooklyn
7 Museum, one painter, one sculptor, one architect, one
8 landscape artist, all of whom shall be residents of
9 the city, and three other residents of the city who
10 cannot be painters sculptors, architects landscape
11 architects are active members of any profession in
12 the fine arts.

13 The mayor, and the museum, and library President
14 serving in ex officio capacity. The mayoral
15 appointees are subject to the advice and consent of
16 the City Council.

17 All members serve on the commission without
18 compensation. Members serve for three year terms or
19 until a successor has been appointed and qualified.

20 Today we're joined by two candidates, Isabel
21 Castilla and James Van Bramer, who have both been
22 nominated to the Public Design Commission. Upon
23 appointment by the mayor with the advice and consent
24 of the Council, Ms. Castailla will fill a vacancy and
25 serve as the landscape architect member for the

2 remainder of the three year term that expires on
3 December 31 2024. Upon appointment by the Mayor with
4 the advice and consent of the city council, Mr. Van
5 Bramer, resident of Queens will fill a vacancy of
6 service as a lay member for the remainder of a three
7 year term that expires on December 31, 2024.

8 Ms. Castilla and and Mr. Van Bramer, welcome...
9 welcome back. Thank you for coming here today. If
10 you will, please raise your right hands to be sworn
11 in.

12 COUNSEL: Do affirm to tell the truth, the whole
13 truth and nothing but the truth in your testimony
14 before this committee and an install council member
15 questions?

16 BOTH: I do.

17 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. We're going to
18 allow each of you to make an opening statement.
19 We'll start with Ms. Castilla and then go to Mr. Van
20 Bramer. Rules committee members will find copies of
21 the candidates' resumes and opening statements in
22 your red books.

23 Before we go to those opening statements, I just
24 want to wish my congratulations to you both for being
25

2 appointed. With that you can offer your opening
3 statement.

4 MS. CASTILLA: Good morning, Speaker Adams, Chair
5 Powers, and members of the Committee on Rules,
6 Privileges, and Elections. My name is Isabel
7 Castilla, and I want to thank you first for
8 considering my nomination to serve as the landscape
9 architect member of the New York City Public Design
10 Commission.

11 I am trained as an architect and as a landscape
12 architect. And for more than 15 years, I have been
13 practicing landscape architecture and urban design in
14 New York City. I was born and raised in Puerto Rico.
15 I grew up in the Rio Piedras sector of San Juan, a
16 suburban and car-dependent area of the city. In
17 fact, there were no sidewalks outside of my apartment
18 complex, and going anywhere meant getting in a car.

19 My closest experience to city life as a child was
20 running around the University of Puerto Rico campus
21 where both of my parents were professors.

22 That said, my father was Spanish and I was
23 fortunate to have the opportunity to travel to Spain
24 several times during my childhood to visit my family.
25 And it was during those trips that I fell in love

2 with large walkable cities such as New York City.

3 Visiting cities like Madrid and Barcelona left a

4 great impression of me as a child. I was fascinated

5 by how life took place on the streets, from afternoon

6 strolls, to animated conversations in outdoor cafes.

7 Streets, plazas, parks, public spaces are the centers

8 of social life in Spain and many other cities around

9 the world, including New York City, and I dreamt of

10 one day living in a big city like the ones I lived...

11 I visited during my childhood.

12 Influenced by this interest, I studied

13 architecture at the University of Puerto Rico, where

14 I obtained a Bachelors of Art in Architecture. I

15 later moved to Philadelphia to pursue two masters

16 degrees, one in architecture and one in landscape

17 architecture from the University of Pennsylvania,

18 where I received a full ride scholarship. Upon

19 graduating in 2006, I moved to New York City where I

20 began working at James Corner Field Operations, a

21 world renowned landscape architecture and urban

22 design firm, where I have been to today.

23 I started out as an entry level designer, and

24 after several promotions six years ago, became a

25 design principal.

2 At Field Operations, I've had the opportunity to
3 work on a wide range of projects ranging from large
4 scale master plans for entire city sectors abroad and
5 in the US to public parks and art exhibits. My most
6 relevant experience, however, is that of leading the
7 design and implementation of transformative public
8 spaces in New York City and across the US. As
9 mentioned originally, of particular note has been my
10 involvement on the High Line, a project I have worked
11 on for the past 11 years. On this project, I have
12 led the design and implementation of multiple phases.
13 I have been the main coordinator of the
14 interdisciplinary design team, and have also been the
15 prime point of contact with the client team and city
16 agencies overseeing the development of the project.

17 My most recent work on this project includes the
18 High Line Moynihan connector, a walkway that will
19 connect the High Line at 30th Street to the Moynihan
20 Train Hall, through the new Manhattan West public
21 plaza. This project is currently under construction
22 and slated to open to the public in spring of 2023.

23 In addition to working on numerous public
24 projects in New York City, many of which have been
25 subject of PDC review, I have also led large-scale

2 master plans and their implementation in Miami.

3 These projects include the renovation of historic

4 Lincoln Road, encompassing the transportation of 12

5 city blocks in this iconic commercial street in Miami

6 Beach. In addition, I also lead the master plan for

7 The Underline in Miami, and award leaning 10 mile

8 long linear park that will be built on the vacant

9 land underneath Miami's elevated metro rail.

10 Following the completion of the project's master

11 plan, I led the design and implementation of the

12 project's first phase, which was built and open to

13 the public in the spring of 2021 during the pandemic,

14 and was just awarded the design contract for the

15 project's last phase, which will be seven and a half

16 miles long completing the work.

17 Many of the projects that I have worked on are

18 public spaces, built on public land, many led by

19 public-private partnerships between city agencies and

20 nonprofit organizations. This experience has allowed

21 me to gain a deep understanding of the complexities

22 behind the public design process, how it must address

23 and resolve significant design challenges, while also

24 balancing multiple interests and maximizing tight

25 budgets, with the goal ultimately, to create spaces

2 that enrich the users experience within the city. I
3 have seen firsthand how this complex and layered
4 design process can often lead to compromises
5 affecting the quality of design and its impact on the
6 public. Over the course of my work, I have played
7 the role of a facilitator, choreographing
8 conversations between entities of varying interests
9 to build consensus, while striving for design
10 excellence. This experience has allowed me to
11 appreciate the process of crafting quality public
12 work and respect the collaboration behind each
13 project execution.

14 At this point of my career, I am eager to expand
15 my contributions beyond the projects I lead as a
16 landscape architect, by applying my expertise and
17 experience in design and consensus-building to the
18 projects across New York City by hopefully becoming a
19 commissioner at PDC.

20 But in addition to that, I'm simply just deeply
21 interested in investing in the city I now call home.
22 I currently live in the East Flatbush neighborhood of
23 Brooklyn, where I have been a homeowner for six
24 years. I live with my husband Steve, who's an
25 architect, and our dog Pepe, who's a Pitbull rescue

2 from Brooklyn. And Pepe is my faithful companion
3 exploring our neighborhood streets and public spaces.
4 I love city life, the streets, the public spaces and
5 the buildings that make the backdrop to our everyday
6 life. Public projects, including open spaces,
7 streetscapes, buildings, and art impact everyone from
8 those who purposefully engaged with them to the
9 unexpected passerby. Public work has the power to
10 prompt a moment of pause on everyday routine, to
11 spark interest and imagination, to encourage social
12 interaction connect people to nature, to culture and
13 to each other.

14 I strongly believe that well designed spaces can
15 improve the quality of life in cities by promoting
16 beauty, resilience, sustainability, inclusivity, and
17 equity. I have a profound respect for the role that
18 urban design and public projects play in a city like
19 New York, and how these projects are leading by
20 example, in many other cities across the US. If
21 approved, I will be fully committed to supporting the
22 commission in every effort to achieve design
23 excellence to public work. So I want to thank you at
24 this time for your time and consideration. And I
25 look forward to your questions.

2 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. We're going to
3 first just let two of our colleagues vote, then we're
4 going to go to Councilmember Bramer. I should note
5 you're sitting in council chambers old seat on the
6 City Council, I believe.

7 We're going to go up reopen the vote, and we're
8 going to call on Councilmember Hudson and
9 Councilmember Sanchez. We'll start with
10 Councilmember Hudson to vote on the nominees.

11 Not these though. The LCRC.

12 CLERK: Councilmember Hudson, how do you vote.

13 COUNCILMEMBER HUDSON: Hold on sorry. We've seen
14 time and time again, that our city has not
15 prioritized the release and support for individuals
16 who are incarcerated. All the nominees for the New
17 York City Local Conditional Release Commission have
18 lengthy histories working for the very agencies or
19 administrations that have kept predominantly in black
20 and brown New Yorkers locked up, endangering their
21 health and well-being and upending their lives. I
22 cannot in good conscience support any nominee for
23 this board that has deep ties to flawed approaches to
24 reforming our justice system, and does not make

2 decarceration their central priority. As such, I'm
3 abstaining on M 95, M 96, and M 97. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you.

5 CLERK: Councilmember Sanchez? Councilmember
6 Sanchez? Councilmember Sanchez, how do you vote on
7 the LCRC?

8 COUNCILMEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you., I was
9 waiting for the unmute. Thank you. I... I vote aye
10 on all, with the exception of the appointment for
11 member Fuller, from which I abstain. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. And I believe
13 we're going to be joined by one more member, so we'll
14 keep the vote open. Jimmy van Bramer, you're up.
15 Good morning. Welcome back.

16 MR. VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much. Good
17 morning to Speaker Adams, Majority Leader and Chair
18 Powers, and all of the Councilmembers of this
19 committee. My name is Jimmy van Bramer, and I'm
20 thrilled to be back here at City Hall, where... a
21 place that is so close to my heart, while I was a
22 council member for 12 years, often seated where you
23 all are today. I come before you this morning, as a
24 layperson nominee for the Public Design Commission.
25 I want to thank Mayor Adams for putting my name

2 forward. And I thank all of you for your time and
3 consideration.

4 While the Public Design Commission isn't well
5 known by most New Yorkers, it plays an important
6 role. One I truly believe in. Good design in the
7 public realm, combined with great architecture has
8 the power to inspire the people of this city that we
9 all love so much. And over the past 25 years, I've
10 gained experience with, and insight into the PDC,
11 having worked with the agency from a variety of
12 perspectives.

13 I will speak more about my experience and
14 qualifications in a moment, but I thought I would
15 share a little bit about myself, what brings me here
16 today, and why I want to continue to serve our city
17 at the PDC. I was born in Queens and grew up in
18 Astoria. My mother worked at the local Key Food
19 grocery store, and my stepfather was a janitor at the
20 junior high school, both struggling often to pay the
21 rent. There wasn't a lot of time or money for
22 cultural excursions. So for me and my seven
23 siblings, our first experiences with the public realm
24 were our public schools, our local library, parks,
25 playgrounds, and spaces where our summer vacations

2 took place. It was museums. It was in these spaces
3 that I grew up. And with the help of school field
4 trips at PS 70 in Astoria, I got to see museums and
5 cultural attractions for the first times. These
6 experiences changed me, inspired me, and allowed me
7 to see a future beyond where I started.

8 I know the power and importance of well-designed
9 public spaces, and their ability to change lives for
10 the better. That is why I want to serve on the
11 Public Design Commission. I've long been involved in
12 the arts in New York City's cultural community. I
13 served on the board of Queens Council on the Arts for
14 several years beginning in 2002, serving as its
15 president from 2004 to 2006.

16 As I mentioned before, I Chaired the Cultural
17 Affairs Committee of the New York City Council for 12
18 years, which has oversight of, and allowed me to have
19 extensive involvement with thousands of cultural
20 organizations and artists from every discipline.

21 Through relationship building, I gained valuable
22 insight into the challenges faced by these groups and
23 opportunities for growth. I served on the boards of
24 MoMA PS1, and the Museum of the Moving Image. And I
25 worked at another institution close to the Speaker's

2 heart, the Queen's Public Library, from 1999 to 2009,
3 and currently have the privilege of serving ex
4 officio on that board of that great institution as an
5 appointee of Comptroller Lander.

6 In each of these roles, I worked with the Public
7 Design Commission at different stages of numerous
8 projects from a variety of roles and perspectives.
9 These experiences have allowed me to gain insight
10 into the work of PDC, its importance and even the
11 criticism it has faced over the years. Working with
12 the School Construction Authority, we sited and built
13 numerous new schools, including a middle school
14 nearing completion, adjacent to the Sunnyside Gardens
15 Historic District. This school is being built with
16 materials and an aesthetic that mirrors the historic
17 district, something I worked closely on and very
18 proud of. And it is in Sunnyside that I live with my
19 husband, Dan Hendrick with whom I have been with for
20 nearly 24 years.

21 Great design, and inspiring art and architecture
22 are vitally important, but I've often heard from
23 elected officials, particularly Councilmembers,
24 concerned that projects in their districts can be
25 delayed by PDC consideration and recommendations. I

2 hope to bring an earnest, experienced appreciation
3 for great design, while also advancing projects in a
4 timely and responsible manner that builds trust and
5 confidence in the Public Design Commission.

6 Public service is something I love, and it can
7 take many forms. I am a proud gay man and my LGBTQ
8 activism since my days, as a student at St. John's
9 University is part of my service. I am grateful to
10 have served in this body for 12 years representing
11 the community that raised me, while working on behalf
12 of the cultural communities across the five boroughs,
13 and at the Queens Public Library.

14 Serving on the Public Design Commission would be
15 an honor, and a great opportunity to continue to
16 serve this city that I owe so much to. Thank you for
17 your time and consideration. And I'm happy to answer
18 any questions.

19 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you and welcome back
20 to a chamber you served for 12 years, I think, if I'm
21 correct. Nice to have you back. And thank you both
22 for your testimony.

23 I'm going to start off with questions from the
24 Speaker, and then I'll go through a few questions
25

2 myself, and then we'll open it up to the
3 Councilmembers as well.

4 So with that, I'll hand it over to Speaker Adams.

5 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you again, Mr. Chair.

6 Thank you so much. Welcome again to both of you.

7 I'm going to start by just asking one question to
8 both of you, and then I'm going to ask maybe one or
9 two to you independently: What opportunities do you
10 see for the city to improve urban design in the five
11 boroughs through public projects, and that's for both
12 of you.

13 MS. CASTILLA: I will start. Thank you, Speaker
14 Adams. I see great opportunities for the city to
15 improve public design in all five boroughs. I think
16 public design occurs on a variety of scales, which
17 means it also occurs a variety of different
18 intensities and different timelines. We have
19 boroughs in New York City that need intensive urban
20 design because they're going through transitions, and
21 they need, projects that require quite a lot of
22 planning and quite a lot of work, projects that may
23 take some time, but ultimately will have great
24 impacts on the neighborhoods and the communities they
25 serve.

2 But I also see great opportunities to make faster
3 impacts across the five boroughs by upgrading and
4 renovating existing public spaces that are fully
5 embedded within communities. To give you an example,
6 I live in a neighborhood that has a lot of
7 playgrounds. And some of these playgrounds are quite
8 old. They're very hard, they have a lot of asphalt.
9 But there's opportunities where the parks department
10 can work on opening up the paving, creating more
11 planting, adding trees, increasing biodiversity in
12 the neighborhood, providing natural spaces for
13 children, and that way creating a stronger impact on
14 the community that can happen much faster than some
15 of the other longer term projects. So I do see great
16 opportunity to take some of those existing spaces and
17 find surgical ways to improve them, so they can
18 really impact the communities that are really using
19 them today and create community champions that really
20 welcome and receive these spaces within their...
21 their communities themselves.

22 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you.

23 MR. VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much for the
24 question, Speaker Adams, and of course your very
25 kind, opening remarks and welcome.

2 I really feel very strongly about public art and
3 public-facing design in our projects. One of the
4 examples that you're very familiar with is the
5 Flushing Public Library, and built into the very
6 steps of that library is a terrific piece of art,
7 listing great authors and titles of books through the
8 ages. And I love that piece in particular because it
9 is facing and open to the public at all times. You
10 don't need to even go into the building to be witness
11 to that great piece and inspired by it. And I want
12 more public art, right? We want our people,
13 particularly young people, to go into our great
14 cultural institutions, museums. But the truth is,
15 that is not easy to get to for everyone from every
16 place in the city. But what we can do more of is
17 make sure that great public art and great public
18 design are in the very neighborhoods that all of our
19 children live in, and they will then have access to
20 that.

21 So public facing design, public art, in
22 particular, combined with our green spaces is
23 something that I very much want to work on.

24 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you so much, Jimmy, you
25 know, I'm going to stay right there. Since you

2 brought up public... public art, because in recent
3 years, there's been an increased attention on public
4 monuments in the city, and whether existing statues
5 and the controversial figures and the scenes that
6 they depict, are relevant for today's times. And
7 during your tenure as a council member, serving
8 together you and I, we successfully removed the
9 Thomas Jefferson statue from this very room, from
10 this very corner together. So in looking at your new
11 position, would you support removing any existing
12 monuments in the city?

13 MR. VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much, Speaker
14 Adams. And, yes, I think that there are and must be
15 moments where we reconsider some of the pain
16 inflicted on many of our people and reassess. And at
17 various moments, it will be appropriate to remove,
18 relocate, and contextualize certain monuments. I
19 also supported the removal of the J Marion Sims
20 statue from in front of the Museum of the City of New
21 York to now in Greenwood Cemetery. Right? That was
22 an incredibly painful statue and monument to a man
23 who inflicted great harm on particularly African
24 American women. And so that needed to be done,
25 right? We must reckon with what is often a very

2 painful past. And yes, in this very space, a statute
3 that caused great discomfort, right?, and pain to
4 many was here in the people's house. And... and I
5 supported that removal as well to the New York
6 Historical Society where it now can be properly told
7 with context. And so what I would pledge to you is
8 to continue what I've always done, which is lead with
9 integrity, and... and a belief that we have to do,
10 right by the people of the city of New York and when
11 appropriate, removal, and recontextualization is
12 appropriate.

13 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you. Ms. Castilla, I'd
14 like to hear your response to the same question.
15 Would you consider the removal of any statues or
16 monuments in the city?

17 MS. CASTILLA: Thank you, Speaker Adams. I think
18 generally, the consideration to remove a statue or
19 monument needs to be a collective one. I haven't
20 been in the position that Jimmy has, where this has
21 come through me, or I have had to evaluate it. But I
22 fully understand the issues that come along with it.
23 And as you said, I fully understand that monuments
24 and statues were erected at a certain point in time,
25 and history has changed, and how relevant that

2 history is to the local community, to local
3 sociopolitical issues may be different.

4 But I also think it's important to hear all
5 points of views. Again, public art is for the
6 public. So I support the idea of creating a
7 collective process through which one can hear
8 multiple points of view, in favor or opposition,
9 understand how the community feels about that
10 particular monument and how it affects directly the
11 beliefs and aspirations of that community, and then
12 collectively, again, by facilitating conversation,
13 determine whether a removal, or relocation, or
14 further contextualization of that statue is
15 appropriate.

16 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you. And Ms. Castilla, you
17 are a highly accomplished landscape architect.
18 You've worked on major privately funded urban design
19 projects all over the world. Why do you want to work
20 on the Public Design Commission?

21 MS. CASTILLA: Well, thank you for that question,
22 and for the compliments. I want to work on the
23 Public Design Commission because I'm very passionate
24 about public work. Even though I have worked in the
25 private sector for the past 15 years. I always tried

2 to concentrate on projects that have public spaces
3 within them, whether they're privately funded,
4 publicly funded, or a combination off. And that's
5 because I truly believe that public spaces are the
6 one element that makes an impact on everybody, from
7 those that publicly engage... purposefully engage
8 with those faces to those that simply pass by. And
9 because of that they have a strong power to impact
10 people's lives in a positive manner.

11 I have been on the other side of PDC, I have
12 submitted multiple projects to PDC, I have been on
13 the side of coordinating with public agencies and
14 balancing different interests, different aspirations.
15 But ultimately, I have always managed to ensure that
16 the quality of the design space is there, while still
17 trying to meet everybody's desires on the projects.

18 Through that experience, I see how important the
19 public process is, but also how complicated it is.
20 And I want to be able to facilitate that on the other
21 side, not just the projects I lead, but the projects
22 that the city sponsors to make sure that that quality
23 of design work continues improving New Yorkers lives.

24 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you very much. Another
25 question for you, Jimmy. Early in your tenure, as a

2 council member, you supported legislation to
3 characterize graffiti as a public nuisance and
4 authorize the government to enter onto public... to
5 private property to remove it. And I can tell you as
6 a resident of Queens, I was very grateful for that
7 law. In your written responses, you recognize that
8 some great artists have emerged from street art
9 backgrounds, including Shepard Fairey and Banksy.

10 What distinction do you make between their street
11 art and the graffiti that the law targets?

12 MR. VAN BRAMER: The key question there is
13 whether or not there is an agreement with the
14 property owner, if there's a private property in
15 question, right? And why I continue to support that
16 legislation is because as a Councilmember -- and
17 maybe all of you have had the very similar situation
18 -- where folks would reach out and say, my storefront
19 or my home, were... were painted over, and I did not
20 approve of that. I do not wish that to remain. And
21 I would like it to be removed. I am deeply
22 sympathetic to that.

23 But as we've seen, with great murals throughout
24 our city, and in fact, some of the great artists
25 mentioned have done that, when done in conjunction

2 with either the city or with store owners who often
3 do want the side of their store painted in a
4 beautiful mural, then it works, right? It is both an
5 agreement between the artist and the store owner or
6 the homeowner, and it is a great contribution to the
7 public realm. But I think it is vitally important
8 that there be an agreement, and that we cannot just
9 simply go to someone's home, or storefront and paint
10 over it without their permission.

11 SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you. Ms. Castilla, I think
12 I'm going to ask you the same question. I know going
13 through some parts of Europe, it's illegal to remove
14 graffiti, through... through some parts. And in my
15 travels, I was quite taken aback by the enormity in
16 some places of graffiti that we would consider to,
17 you know, to paint over, to change. But in some
18 areas, it is totally illegal to do that.

19 So what are your feelings about graffiti about
20 the law as it pertains to graffiti and your... your
21 potential appointment onto this commission?

22 MS. CASTILLA: So I would agree with Jimmy's
23 statement, I think graffiti is something that can be
24 a form of expression that can reach a wider
25 project... public as opposed to perhaps a piece in a

2 museum. So I think there's some merit to it, where
3 graffiti is in fact, something that's done with the
4 consent of the property owner where the graffiti is
5 placed. So in general, I do see a lot of value in
6 street art and I would say you know, an anecdote the
7 neighborhood where I live in, store owners are
8 starting to lend blank walls to local artists to
9 paint murals. And there's this beautiful mural
10 painted on this restaurant that I walk by every day
11 to on my way to the subway. And it always makes me
12 happy, because it's very colorful. It enlivens the
13 streets, especially in the winter, where trees don't
14 have leaves. It makes an impact on the community.

15 So again, I see a lot of value in it. I see a
16 lot of how it impacts the community, but again, it
17 needs to be with consent. And I think also, what is
18 being represented needs to have a certain level of
19 relevancy with that community and a certain level
20 have responsibility as well, because again, it is in
21 front of everybody. So it has the power to impact
22 people. We want to make sure that that impact is in
23 fact a positive one for that community.

24 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Thank you very much.

25 Thank you both.

2 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you, Speaker. Oh, we
3 want to just quickly just reopen the vote so
4 Councilmember Salamanca can record his vote.

5 CLERK: Councilmember Salamanca voting on M 95,
6 M 96, and M 97, how do you vote?

7 COUNCILMEMBER SALAMANCA: Aye on all. Thank you.

8 CLERK: The Vote stands at seven in the
9 affirmative for M 95. Give me one moment. You can
10 proceed.

11 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Okay. We'll read the vote
12 after. I'm going to keep it quick. I think you guys
13 answered most of the questions that I had alongside
14 with the speaker's question.

15 So one topic I wanted to just raise is climate
16 change, and it's... As we've seen in my district,
17 and other districts around the city, it poses an
18 existential threat to the built environment,
19 especially those along the coastline, my district,
20 right on the East River.

21 What would you hope to do as a public dying
22 design commissioner and influence urban design and
23 public spaces to adapt to climate change?

24 MS. CASTILLA: So I can start with that question.
25 I mean, that's something I deal with every single day

2 as a landscape architect and urban designer. Climate
3 change is real. We saw how Sandy affected a lot of
4 neighborhoods around New York City, and how other
5 subsequent, you know, storms have done the same.

6 And public spaces, our spaces and public
7 buildings that need to, you know, confront climate
8 change head on. They need to be designed in a way
9 that can... that they can sustain flooding, they can
10 sustain hurricanes, they can sustain any major
11 events. Because ultimately, these are the public
12 spaces that our community needs after a storm, after
13 an event, to be able to reengage, to be able to get
14 supplies, to be able to basically get back to daily
15 life. So I think is important all projects take this
16 into account, I think is best practice. I know the
17 city works on regulations that are now establishing
18 higher elevation levels, flood proofing, etc. But I
19 would say that as public design, it needs to be best
20 practice that all projects do address this, and not
21 just in a protective measure, but also in a proactive
22 measure, by creating more green spaces, by installing
23 vegetation that's native, by creating spaces that are
24 paving diasporas, that can help when those events
25 happen, minimize their impact.

2 And again, it's something I would hope to
3 encourage, as a potential member of the design
4 commission and something that I think every single
5 project... public project in New York City needs to
6 address.

7 MR. VAN BRAMER: Just to add a little bit to that
8 incredible answer. You know, I did represent a
9 district that had a significant amount of waterfront
10 acreage and... and we learned a lot and needless to
11 say, believe in design that is sustainable, durable,
12 and that can be maintained. So we've learned a lot
13 of lessons. We know what not to do and what we
14 should be doing. And we have some experience. I
15 have some experience. We built a library on the
16 waterfront there and made a lot of changes in
17 relation to its proximity to the water, right in
18 front of it. So absolutely imperative that we
19 consider sustainability, durability, and the ability
20 to maintain when we're taking into consideration the
21 changes that we know are coming, and going to
22 continue to come sadly, as a result of climate
23 change.

24 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thanks. I have one more
25 question, and just... just for Ms. Castilla. You had

2 mentioned earlier, your work submitting applications
3 before the PDC.

4 I just wanted to understand if you're appointed
5 here, how you're going to handle your relationship as
6 being an appointee with your private sector work that
7 might include doing PDC work.

8 MS. CASTILLA: Sure. Thank you for that
9 question. I have consulted extensively with the
10 Mayor's office to ensure that there are no issues
11 with this. And what's been determined is that I will
12 continue working on public projects. Those are my
13 passion. But public projects that are sponsored by
14 city agencies or by partnerships with nonprofit
15 organizations. In those events, when a project comes
16 in front of PDC I will recuse myself from evaluating
17 it, so the project does have a fair process. On
18 other occasions where I am working on projects that
19 do need to go through PDC that are sponsored by
20 private entities or the private sector, I will not be
21 working on those projects to ensure that there is
22 equity and fairness when evaluating the work.

23 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Okay, thank you. I'm going
24 to... we're going to read the vote, and then I'm
25 going to have colleagues ask questions.

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2 CLERK: Thank you. William Martin Committee
3 Clerk. The final vote in the Committee on Rules: M
4 95 is adopted by the committee with 7 in the
5 affirmative, 1 of the negative, 1 abstention. M 96
6 with 6 in the affirmative, 1 of the negative, and 2
7 abstentions. And M 97 with 7 in the affirmative, 1
8 in the negative, and one abstention. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. We're going to
10 go to Councilmember Brooks-Powers followed by
11 Councilmember Brewer.

12 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you, and
13 thank you both for your opening statements.
14 Sometimes landmarks are... and other structures are
15 erected on public land that committee members don't
16 like. How can the Public Design Commission help
17 ensure community feedback is incorporated into the
18 design of new features on city-owned land?

19 MS. CASTILLA: I will start with that question.
20 Thank you for the question, um, Councilmember. One
21 of the important aspects of the PDC process is that
22 before a project is submitted to the Public Design
23 Commission for review, it must go through community
24 board, and it must go through the... it must be
25 presented to the community for feedback. Statements

2 of that community board are then provided as part of
3 the package of information that's provided to
4 commissioners to review. And those statements need
5 to be fair, whether the community was in favor of the
6 project, against the project, or whether they had key
7 concerns criteria they wanted addressed.

8 I strongly believe in the community process
9 because I think public projects are for the
10 community. They're not for the designers. They're
11 not for the agencies. They're for people that will
12 use them. So I personally will pay very strong
13 attention to what the community has said. If there
14 is a situation or project where the community perhaps
15 does not have a very favorable view of the project, I
16 would recommend to the staff and work with the staff
17 to perhaps continue that community process, fully
18 understand what are the community's concerns, and
19 through that understanding, be able to evaluate the
20 work.

21 Again, I think the community is just so critical.
22 So important. A huge part of my work has been to be
23 the community leader on a lot of the projects I do.
24 So I want to respect their wishes or desires or
25 aspirations from the other side as a commissioner.

2 MR. VAN BRAMER: So you won't be surprised to
3 know that I'm a big supporter of robust community
4 engagement, and listening to all of the stakeholders
5 involved. And... And quite frankly, there are lots
6 of moments where the community opposition can be
7 lessened if there is meaningful community input. And
8 we had that experience with a piece of public art in
9 Long Island City years ago. So I think that, should
10 I be on the Public Design Commission, you know, one
11 of the things that I will want to know in all of
12 these projects that come before review is what kind
13 of community process was... was happening here. And
14 how were stakeholders -- including, by the way,
15 elected officials. I mean, I do think that that is a
16 perspective that I have, and come from, as well as
17 from the perspective of being at the Queens Public
18 Library for many years, and having many of our
19 projects go before the commission for review.

20 But public comment, public participation, and
21 listening to stakeholders in a meaningful way is
22 incredibly important, when... particularly when faced
23 with opposition.

24 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you. And are
25 there any special initiatives or projects you would

2 like to see the Public Design Commission take up in
3 the coming years?

4 MS. CASTILLA: So I think generally, you know,
5 the Public Design Commission works with city agencies
6 to review projects. They don't have a lot of purview
7 over what projects are submitted or can say what
8 projects get done. However, the Design Commission, I
9 think, does have a lot of opportunity to influence
10 the quality of those projects and design aspirations,
11 aspirations about equity, sustainability, resilience,
12 that I think can help set a higher standard for those
13 projects moving forward.

14 So what I would like to see is the continued
15 development of public work in New York City that
16 really meets those aspirations, that is equitable,
17 that is inclusive, that is sustainable, and that is
18 resilient, that again, takes head-on how things are
19 changing and really allows projects to sustain the
20 test of time, so that the committee can enjoy them
21 for many years to come.

22 MR. VAN BRAMER: And I would just add... and I
23 mentioned this a little bit before that while the PDC
24 is not selecting contractors or contracting for any
25 artwork, I do believe, and I would certainly want to

2 make sure that there is a focus on projects where
3 there's public art or public-facing design, and
4 particularly in all communities, all neighborhoods,
5 all zip codes in the city of New York. Our lives are
6 better and enriched when good public design and
7 architecture is in every single neighborhood.

8 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And Ms. Castilla,
9 in your answers to written questions from the
10 Committee, you talked about how the city sometimes
11 focuses on specific neighborhoods, resulting in a
12 large concentration of quality public realm
13 improvements in some areas, inevitably creating an
14 imbalance of the new... of new public space in other
15 neighborhoods. I agree that there's a clear inequity
16 of investment in public space across New York's
17 neighborhoods. Do you see a role for the PDC in
18 addressing these inequities?

19 MS. CASTILLA: I think, again, while the PDC may
20 not be able to select what projects move forward, or
21 what projects are even developed, the PDC does have a
22 very close relationship with the city agencies that
23 do promote these projects. So again, by being part
24 of potentially the commission, by having that closer
25 relationship with those agencies, I think we can have

2 a little bit more open conversations and again,
3 suggest, encourage, you know, push forward
4 opportunities, where some of those neighborhoods that
5 perhaps don't see as much investment today can see
6 investments in the future.

7 And again, I see these opportunities, perhaps not
8 happening at the level of new development, which is
9 what I was referring to in that response. New
10 Development often is how you get new public projects
11 done. But again, there's so many public projects
12 within the five boroughs that have been there for
13 many years that could use a little bit of sprucing
14 up. And again, that's what I look forward to, in
15 working with the city agencies to identify the
16 potential of those projects, and even with minimal
17 monetary investment make bigger impacts on those
18 communities.

19 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: And my last
20 question to Mr. Van Bramer: You mentioned in your
21 answers to written questions from this Committee that
22 you've heard concerns about projects being delayed by
23 PDC consideration and recommendations. Can you talk
24 more about these concerns and how you plan to address
25 them with a PDC?

2 MR. VAN BRAMER: Yes. So in my years as a
3 Councilmember, and as Chair of the Cultural Affairs
4 Committee, there... there were even calls for the PDC
5 to be abolished at certain moments from members of
6 this body because of the frustration over delays in
7 projects that were attributed to PDC review and
8 recommendations.

9 So, as I said, in my opening statement, I think
10 it's really important to have people on the
11 commission, right?, that have a variety of
12 perspectives on this. And I've interacted with the
13 agency from a variety of perspectives, including that
14 of an agency from my time at the Queens Public
15 Library, when numerous library construction projects,
16 renovation projects, went before the PDC. So I think
17 that I look forward to working with the staff, and my
18 fellow Commissioners, in making sure that we are both
19 having laser-like focus on great and inspiring public
20 design, but also paying very close attention to
21 timeliness and making sure that projects are moving,
22 because the elected officials who are often the
23 funders of those projects really want to see those
24 projects move forward, the communities who have paid
25 for those projects really want that park to open,

2 that library to open, that school. And so we have to
3 be mindful of all of those things.

4 I would also argue that when we are doing those
5 things, and projects are moving, that we're building
6 confidence in the Public Design Commission itself, so
7 that... that all of the stakeholders understand its
8 importance, and also its role in making the projects
9 better.

10 COUNCILMEMBER BROOKS-POWERS: Thank you so much.

11 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. We'll go to
12 Councilmember Gale Brewer. And I want to acknowledge
13 we've been joined by Councilmember Kagan as well.

14 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Thank you. May Lou
15 Fiddler rest in peace. I love Lou Fiddler, but he
16 hated PDC. And so he and I would argue about this
17 all the time, but I certainly loved his... him
18 personally.

19 So my question is I spent seven years getting the
20 suffragists into Central Park. That was seven years.
21 And actually the PDC at the time was quite
22 challenging. It's become the most visited monument
23 in Central Park, if not all New York City. So my
24 question to you is, again, back to this: Even though
25 you look individually at what is presented, it is

2 also my understanding that the previous
3 administration had a committee to look at more women
4 statues, monuments, memorials, et cetera, in the
5 parks. Do you know if that scenario is moving
6 forward? Would you consider working -- even though
7 you're respond, and you're not necessarily proactive
8 -- but it does seem to me that we do need a more
9 proactive response to this issue of public art. And
10 I'm actually not quite sure who's supposed to do
11 that. It's one by one. So my question to you is, do
12 you see any role for PDC either having a more
13 proactive role, getting agencies to think more
14 creatively about what they're presenting? Et cetera,
15 because it seems to me we need something like that.

16 MS. CASTILLA: I will answer first. Thank you,
17 Councilmember for your question. At the moment, the
18 PDC does not have the power to elect what artwork or
19 monuments are going before the commission. They're
20 simply evaluating what agencies propose. However, it
21 is city agencies that do have the ability to propose
22 what goes in front of the Commission. The value I
23 see in being a member of the PDC commission is that
24 you have a closer relationship to these agencies.
25 You are able to have closer conversations or perhaps

2 you may be able to have sitting in another location.

3 And I do see that as an opportunity, again, to

4 continue that dialogue to see how within city

5 regulations within what is permitted in how things

6 work, we can encourage more diversity in the in the

7 projects that are being submitted before the

8 commission.

9 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: I mean, I think one way to
10 handle that would be to sit down with the agencies...

11 the agencies hate PDC. Just so you know. They hate

12 PDC. And so the question would be to try to develop

13 a relationship with them so that they better...

14 either better understand or maybe create something

15 that's more appropriate before they get to you.

16 Because the process... it was two years for the

17 statute at PDC. I must going to say that is the

18 future, but I spent two years in front of the PDC.

19 And I've spent two years on other projects. So I

20 happen to think design is important, and needs to be

21 overseen. But the project timelines are really

22 horrific. So I didn't know, Jimmy, if you want to

23 comment on that. You've been through it too. But it

24 does need to improve. And I do think you have to be

25 proactive.

2 MR. VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much,
3 Councilmember. And... And I think your story
4 illustrates one of the challenges that I hope to be
5 helpful with, right? I know you to be personally and
6 professionally committed to good public design,
7 and... and a real champion of culture in the arts in
8 our city. And so you absolutely get it. And yet,
9 you have still had this incredibly frustrating
10 experience trying to do an incredible thing for the
11 city of New York. It shouldn't be that difficult,
12 right? And it also -- while I'm not surprised, and
13 I've heard the same thing -- pains me to hear that
14 the agencies hate the PDC.

15 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Hate. Hate the PDC.

16 MR. VAN BRAMER: Right. And so we've got to get
17 to a place... and again, I hope that my nomination
18 and hopefully joining the PDC will help by having
19 someone with our collective experience also inside at
20 the PDC. Because I agree, as I've said in my opening
21 statement questions, public art is incredibly
22 important. And it shouldn't be that challenging for
23 our city to erect public art. And it should also be
24 something that city agencies want to do. And
25 sometimes, the difficulty in accomplishing those

2 works is what prevents people from moving forward
3 with them or even suggesting them in the first place,
4 because of their past experiences. We've got to do
5 this better.

6 COUNCILMEMBER BREWER: Alright. Alright. Thank
7 you very much.

8 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Thank you. Do I have any
9 other colleagues who want to ask questions? Oh, I
10 have one more question. This is actually a question
11 Councilmember Sanchez asked me to ask on her behalf.

12 The question is essentially, you know, what role
13 do you view the PDC is having in educating the public
14 on the work that you do? Particularly because I
15 think we know that, as elected officials, we have a
16 familiarity with your work, but even the public often
17 does lose sight of some of the work that's being done
18 here. And how to spur participation in the project
19 review and perhaps activate folks in proposing new
20 ways to work with a PDC or new projects?

21 MS. CASTILLA: So again, I think the PDC is very
22 well-positioned to engage with the public, to engage
23 with the communities, because it is part of the
24 requirements of the process. So I do think what
25 needs to happen is that when projects are coming

2 before PDC, we need to work with staff, we need to
3 work with city agencies to ensure that there has in
4 fact been an... a community process in earnest, that
5 that process has been well advertised, that the
6 community knows of it, have been able to attend
7 meetings, that the meetings are accessible, and that
8 there has been a thorough collection of community
9 input, before the project actually comes to PDC. To
10 again, understand that there has been an engagement.
11 Through that process, I see the opportunity to also
12 educate the public on what the PDC does, from, I
13 would say, the positive lens of what I hope to bring
14 to the Commission, which is, again, creating quality
15 spaces that can improve people's lives.

16 I do know, there's concerns with extensive
17 schedules, I do know there's concerns with the
18 projects that actually come through PDC. But I also
19 again, see such a powerful opportunity to improve the
20 communities.

21 So I think through that process, that engagement,
22 working with the community boards, working with the
23 city agencies, we can let the public know that, you
24 know, the future of these projects is in their hands
25 and that their opinion, their feedback, their

2 aspirations, and concerns are important when
3 evaluating these projects, and when evaluating if
4 these projects are proper to serve their communities.

5 MR. VAN BRAMER: Just to briefly add to all of
6 those remarks that I associate myself with. While we
7 are not staff, obviously, I'm interested in talking
8 to the team about just how PDC communicates to the
9 general public, right? Again, trying to build
10 support for the ,agency build support for the
11 mission. And so I know there's social media, and
12 other ways in which we can educate the public about
13 the value of PDC and good design, and also update
14 folks about the projects that are being approved.
15 And I'm very interested to see how that's done now,
16 and how that could be improved, organizing and
17 communities before public hearings, other ways to
18 actually allow more people to know just what this
19 very important, but little-known piece of city
20 government does in their neighborhoods.

21 CHAIRPERSON POWERS: Great, thank you.

22 We're going to now... if we have no other
23 colleagues with questions, we're going to now open it
24 up to the floor for public comments. If anyone is
25 here to wishes to speak, they can fill out an

2 appearance card with the sergeant at arms and wait to
3 be recognized. The comments will be limited to two
4 minutes or you can submit a written statement
5 providing a copy of the statement to Sergeant of
6 Arms.

7 We do not have any people from the public here to
8 testify. Just give it one more second. Okay.
9 Seeing none, the public hearing on the nominees is
10 now closed.

11 I'd like to again thank you both for... Well,
12 first of all, congratulate you both for your
13 nomination, and I think I speak for many folks here
14 who think your qualifications speak for themselves.

15 I'd like to thank anyone who's joined us here
16 today the speaker my colleagues on the Committee,
17 Committee Counsel, Staff, and Sergeant at ArMs.
18 Former Councilmember van Bramer, you're now a
19 layperson nominee. I can't believe it. They really
20 made you... reminded of that. But with that, a big
21 congrats to both of you and this hearing is now
22 closed. Thanks.

23 [GAVEL]

24

25

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 12/12/2022