

Third Council District Candidate Questionnaire

Please return by June 1. No limit on the length of responses.
If helpful, feel free to include links for further information.

Landmarks

Name a historic preservation battle with which you've been involved — what was your role, why were you involved?

I have owned a building in the GV Historic District since 1991, so I am acutely aware of the intricacies of the law. I have frequently supported efforts by the GVSHP, most recently the 14-16 5th Avenue fight where I testified at CB2 and attended a rally. I was very involved in the fight to preserve the St Vincent's Hospital Buildings, the Poe House (along with advocating for expansion of the Historic District into the South Village), and against NYU's expansion. Perhaps the most important fight I got involved in involved the effort by the Related Co. to build an entertainment complex on Pier 40. I worked as CB2 Waterfront Chair to have the biggest public hearing in CB2 history and worked with Friends of Hudson River Park (where I was an original Board member) to build tremendous public opposition. I also threatened litigation to block the allowance of commercial office use on the Pier several years ago, a bill the Governor vetoed.

Would you like to see more buildings or areas landmarked in City Council District 3, especially Greenwich Village, less, or would you keep it as is? If you would like to see more or less, where would you expand or decrease landmark designations?

I would like to see more. I would like to see 13th and 14th Streets landmarked, including the entire area below that which is not already in the Historic District.

How would you evaluate the job the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) has done in regulating District 3, especially Greenwich Village? Have they done a good job with approving or not approving changes to existing buildings? With approving or not approving proposed demolitions and new construction? In considering and approving new landmark designations?

I believe that over the course of the de Blasio Administration the LPC has become less transparent, less mindful of making decisions which proceed first from the need for historic preservation, and far, far less cognizant of the position expressed by the community, whether it be by GVSHP or Community Board 2. The approval of the demolition of 14-16 Fifth is just the latest in a series of bad votes

Landmarks (continued)

If there are changes you would like to see with the LPC, how as a City Councilmember would you help effectuate that?

In general, I want Community Board opinions to have far greater weight. CBs have the most broad-based and comprehensive public hearings, and the Commission should have to follow its recommendation absent compelling reasons to do otherwise. I would also like to see more input into appointment of LPC members by Council members in Historic Districts.

What would you tell a property owner who was opposed to their property being landmarked, given that you as City Councilmember must ultimately uphold the landmark designation when it comes before the City Council?

Generally this happens when some massive, unneeded project is about to be proposed. I would actually be able to point to 30 years of owning a landmarked building, and the benefits of landmarking to the value of my property. I would try to demonstrate (except to developers) that opposing landmarking is shortsighted.

Zoning

What sort of changes to zoning in Council District 3, and especially Greenwich Village, would you support or advocate for? Would you support upzoning (i.e., increasing the allowable density of development as compared to current rules), and if so, where and/or under what circumstances? Would you support contextual rezonings (i.e., limiting the height of new development and limiting the transfer of air rights) or downzonings (i.e., reducing the allowable density of new development as compared to current rules), and if so where and/or under what circumstances?

I am totally opposed to upzoning if it is to build any sort of "market rate" luxury housing. I oppose the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing program, and believe that truly affordable housing can only be built using capital funds raised by the City. I also oppose structures which block light. I would support contextual rezonings which limit the height of new development, or reduction of allowable density or denial of transfer of air rights as a tool to forcing more affordable housing. I would be more lenient with City built affordable housing than with private sector housing, proceeding from the purpose being served.

Zoning (continued)

Do you support the City's current mandatory inclusionary housing program, and if not, why (and be specific — do you oppose all mandates for affordable housing? The fact that it requires a very large upzoning? The breadth or depth of affordable housing it requires)?

As I said, I oppose MIH, and its twin, Area Median Income. I do not believe that government should rely on the private sector to build affordable housing because history shows that it is a tool to greater gentrification, and racial exclusion.

Would you seek zoning changes that would require new affordable housing in parts of the 3rd Council District and especially in Greenwich Village? If so where and under what conditions (upzoning? subsidies?)?

In the 3rd District yes, In most of the zVillage no, although I think there are some areas left in the Southwest Village/Hudson Square area where we could build affordable housing. I think what happened with the St. John's building, and the transfer of air rights followed by the loss of hundreds of affordable units (which had been promised by Corey Johnson) to be one of the great tragedies of the last 8 years .

What is your position on the proposed SoHo/NoHo rezoning, which the Mayor and leading Mayoral candidates have said they would seek to replicate in other historic neighborhoods with median incomes above the city average, such as those in the 3rd Council District? Do you support the approach in the plan or any elements of it? If so, which? What is your position on the SoHo/NoHo community alternative plan? Do you believe that upzonings increase pressure for demolition of existing rent-regulated housing and create a huge amount of new very expensive market-rate housing, which has the opposite effect of the purported increase in affordability and diversity?

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I oppose the plan entirely and support the Alternative Plan. I gave the lead testimony at the Planning Commission's scoping meeting (as a public official) and have attended protests against it. Upzonings and MIH eliminate affordable housing and create luxury housing and unaffordable "affordable" housing.

Zoning (continued)

In general, are there changes to our zoning and planning system you would seek to implement or support, and if so, what are they? What is your position on the City Council's proposed "Planning Together" framework?

I also have joined protest against the Planning Together concept which I think Corey Johnson introduced at the behest of big real estate. Like with landmarking, I want Community Boards to have almost complete veto power over proposed zoning changes.

Small Businesses

The City has implemented a plan to make permanent the outdoor dining allowed during the pandemic. Do you agree with this move? If not, how would you seek to change it, and what system and allowances for outdoor dining would you support?

I oppose the current plan. I believe that it creates a false means of "helping businesses." It gives landlords City property to rent, creates excessive noise with no control, adds tremendous amounts of garbage, with a concomitant increase in rats, blocks sidewalk for people with disabilities, blocks Access-A-Ride access, and leaves many streets in the Historic District with ugly structures. The real way to help businesses recover will be to a) help them pay unpaid rent, b) pass the Small Business Jobs Survival Act, and c) launch commercial rent control.

What sort of measures would you support or propose to help small businesses? Do you support the implementation of zoning restrictions on chain stores in certain locations, and if so where? Do you support the Small Business Jobs Survival Act? Any other measures?

As I have said I support the SBJSA. I support zoning restrictions on chain stores, limiting their number per a certain number of square blocks. I want to see commercial rent control, and I want a faster rollout of State Plans to pay unpaid rent in commercial settings.

Name Arthur Schwartz

E-mail arthur@arthurfornyc.com Phone 917-923-8136

Thank You for Your Answers