

First 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.

Zoning

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 throughout the First 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?

I strongly support the preservation of historic neighborhoods and am not convinced that the upzoning plan proposed by the Mayor accomplishes the goals that the administration uses to justify the plan--namely the creation of more affordable housing. Moreover, I think the rezoning plan runs the very real risk of destroying existing affordable housing in the name of creating more affordable housing--an absurdity that is baked into poorly thought out plans that the Mayor is trying to rush through at the end of his term. Destroying existing rent regulated housing and creating expensive market rate housing is of course counterproductive to the goal of creative, affordable and diverse housing. Soho/Noho are part of our cultural inheritance and vital to our economy. We must protect them and seek to develop more housing to both address the lack of affordable housing in our city and meet the demands of a NYC that is on the path to recovering from the lockdown.

The neighborhoods of SoHo/NoHo require a change to zoning which brings it into compliance with reality. Our community is no longer a light manufacturing zone and many of the AIR units are no longer occupied by artists. We should have zoning regulations that reflect reality. I would support some aspects of the community alternative plan, but would need to see widespread community support for changes before moving forward. Towards that goal we need to move beyond zoom meetings and allow people to meet in person for community board events and related zoning hearings.

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?)

The City's current mandatory inclusionary housing program (MIH) has failed to deliver on its promise of creating sufficient affordable housing. Relying on MIH to solve the affordability crisis in the city has not worked and we have seen the loss of thousands of units of affordable housing while only actually creating a mere 2,000 units of affordable housing! That is unacceptable and a sign that the program needs to be seriously re-evaluated.

We all know that there is a dire need for greater affordable housing units in New York City. Affordable housing needs to be preserved and created. We accomplish this by a combination of protecting existing rent subsidies and new development; it does not need to be entirely dependent on upzoning that lessens the quality of life of NYC residents.

What sort of changes to zoning in Council District 1 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?

As mentioned earlier, we should seek to bring our zoning into compliance with the modern day reality of our neighborhoods. We are no longer a light manufacturing district and many new residents in our district are not seeking JLQWA protections nor do they qualify for AIR lofts. The burden it creates on retail to function within outdated zoning regulations has many negative impacts. The current proposal to build an oversize homeless shelter in a parking garage is a good example of the ways in which outdated zoning regulations are hurting the SoHo community. Bringing our zoning up to date would allow for more nimble and constructive commercial and residential uses for mixed use buildings.

Any zoning changes should be more specific and thoughtful regarding how the changes will impact historic districts and non historic districts differently. I have not seen any down-zoning plans that could accomplish the multiple goals that are reasonably laid out in plans such as the community alternative plan.

Would you seek zoning changes that would require new affordable housing in parts of the First Council District, and if so where and under what conditions (upzoning? subsidies?)?

Zoning changes such as the one proposed by the current Mayor need to be evaluated on a case by case basis. The goals of creating more housing generally and including broadly, deeply affordable housing must be prioritized and exist alongside the goals of supporting small businesses and acknowledging the hardships that small property owners faced drawing the year plus covid restrictions. Climbing out of the economic impact of Covid lockdowns will be a significant focus of the next City Council term.

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 would like to see changes to many of the systems that currently exist to approve development projects. For example, ULURP absolutely needs reform. Right now, land use proposals pass through a series of non-elected boards in a process that is both rushed and undemocratic. I would like to see the process involve more true community input and assurances that there is true distance between people making decisions and large scale developers. Additionally, I believe that community boards, which have a significant impact on local planning, should be elected rather than appointed. Those that have a say in issues such as development and the city budget should be accountable to the people they supposedly represent.

I believe that the city does need some form of comprehensive city planning. It is astonishing that New York has survived this long on what Planning Together correctly describes as a "piecemeal approach" — we are virtually the only major large city without one. I wholeheartedly support empowering city agencies to work better together, streamlining unnecessary bureaucratic processes, and having an office to coordinate the many aspects of the public realm. That being said, there are some significant issues with Planning Together. For one, despite mandating two years of community input in each 10 year plan, the legislation does not actually require the city to act on the voices heard during these two years. That is unacceptable and will allow the opinions of communities to be utterly ignored. Additionally, I am concerned by how much decision making power is put into the hands of the Mayor's administration compared to the City Council.

New York City is a large metropolis with a very diverse collection of neighborhoods and housing styles. I do not think Planning Together accounts for the differing needs of different neighborhoods and instead places far too much power in the hands of one agency under the Mayor's control. Instead of a top-down approach, any city plan should empower local communities to create plans for their neighborhoods, while coordinating city agencies so that they work better together to achieve results.

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 do support the continuation of outdoor dining post-pandemic. Our restaurants have suffered enormously under pandemic lockdowns and the city should do everything it can to support their survival now. That being said, I believe that the current Mayor's administration did not provide adequate regulation around what are acceptable outdoor structures and would like to see the outdoor dining become more consistently regulated if it were to continue post-pandemic.

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?

New York City needs to grow its way to post-pandemic prosperity. We need to support the

existing small businesses of our city, and create a climate which encourages other businesses to open and expand in NYC. Small businesses account for nearly 50% of the private sector employment in NYC. The Battery Park City/Tribeca/Greenwich Village/Soho neighborhood with nearly 30,000 retail jobs accounts for 8.6% of the citywide total.

In the past year, NYS and NYC responses to the pandemic have resulted in the loss of one third of small businesses--and it is all too apparent downtown. Crushing commercial real estate taxes that get passed on to businesses coupled with unnecessarily complex regulations and arbitrary fines have added to the difficulty of operating during the last year. Regulatory burdens alone can actually shutter small businesses. Local businesses have had to contend with unjust fines from the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearing (OATH) while trying to survive the lockdown. The changes concerning closures and reopenings have been rightfully frustrating for many establishments, particularly restaurants. When the changing rules and the timelines are not grounded in data-backed public health science or common sense, they can seem almost monarchical. Our small businesses face vast and prohibitive bureaucratic burdens and obstacles. To address this, we need to elect representatives who work with, not against, our local businesses.

Additionally we must ensure that the federal money in the latest stimulus actually makes its way to the businesses it is designed to help. We saw with PPE loans and programs that some neighborhoods were cut off from the relief they needed to survive. Council members must work with local businesses to make sure they know how to access available funds and make the process as manageable as possible — particularly within our immigrant communities.

I do not support the implementation of zoning restrictions on chain stores for private landlords. Commercial landlords have also suffered in the pandemic and I do not think we should place a greater burden on them. In regards to city-subsidized spaces, such as the Moynihan Train Hall and Hudson Yards, I would like to see small businesses prioritized over large, chain retail stores.

I support the Small Business Jobs Survival Act. I have advocated through social media and by working with businesses for the mayor to allocate more funds towards small business recovery and would support all measures for the city to take similar action.

Landmarks

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

I was deeply engaged in the effort to save the Children's Aid Society. I was personally devastated to see that historic and deeply loved community institution turned into condominiums. I have also lent my support to the fight to preserve the South Street Seaport and opposed the bough based jails, which would be a terrible blow to Chinatown and nearby neighborhoods. I have used my platform as a city council candidate to advocate for a strong community voice in all local preservation efforts. Additionally, I have publicly spoken against the plan to rezone Governors Island and submitted written testimony to a community hearing about the plan.

Would you like to see more buildings or areas landmarked in City Council District 1, 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 live in SoHo and as a resident I appreciate the landmark protections that are in place and I am grateful to the activists that fought to establish the historic district. I have publicly opposed the building of an enormous tower in the South Street Seaport Historic District and share residents' concerns about the impact of an oversized tower on Historic District. When Landmarking makes sense it is an excellent tool to safeguard our neighborhoods and balance the necessary new building with a reverence and respect for our historic structures and neighborhoods.

How would you evaluate the job the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) has done in regulating District 1? 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 sat on Community Board 2 for five years and for some of those years I was on the Landmarks committee. I understand individual homeowners' frustration with the slow pace of the approval process, but I also know that a community needs real notice in order to be heard. The process is not likely to change significantly in the near future and I think the focus should remain on making sure the process is fair, transparent and timely.

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

Bringing all stakeholders together remains the benchmark by which successful legislative efforts and committee actions should be measured. As a city councilmember, I would strive to make sure all voices are heard and everyone has a seat at the table to give input and advocate for the changes that are most significant and important to them as residents and/or business owners within the District.

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?

I would listen to the concerns of a property owner and try to understand where their opposition stems from. As someone who lives in and patronizes many successful businesses in a historic district I see and experience daily the success of historic landmarking. I could and would share that perspective and see if there are any ways to alleviate the concerns of the property owner.

Name: Maud Maron

E-mail: maud@maudmaron.nyc

Phone: 212 254 3255

Thank You for Your Answers