

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 believe that all parts of the city need to be part of addressing our affordability crisis and rezoning can be part of the solution if done thoughtfully. However I am disappointed with the current proposal and feel that it leaves out many of the important components I heard highlighted through community meetings on the topic, such as how to truly support the arts & culture community. In addition, there are no zoning text changes to protect against tenant harassment and demolition. Lastly, while I do support upzoning, it should be focused outside of the historic district. I support having continued conversations to address these critical issues as I believe that SoHo/NoHo's zoning is outdated. I share some concerns outlined in the SoHo/NoHo community alternative plan, such as needing protections for JLWQA and loft tenants - residents that helped make the NoHo/SoHo neighborhood what it is today. I do believe that upzonings can increase demolition pressure, which is why anti-harassment and anti-demolition protections need to be included.

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?)

I support the concept of MIH as a way to create new affordable housing, but I believe the current Mandatory Inclusionary Housing paradigm limits the amount of affordable housing that can be negotiated, and would work toward a higher percentage of affordable units and deeper affordability bands. It has also locked us into a specific framework that doesn't allow us to look at specific community needs.

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?

Distinct 1 is incredibly diverse and includes many neighborhoods with distinct personalities and needs. I am open to possible zoning changes in general but not one type of change across the district. Given these challenges, contextual rezonings are a great tool and as Councilmember I would advocate for them where appropriate. For example I would like to see contextual zoning implemented along the waterfront of Two Bridges.

Zoning (continued)

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?)

Yes, I believe that every neighborhood in this City should play a role in addressing the affordability and homelessness crisis that NYC is facing. Currently, almost all of the affordable housing is located in the Lower East Side and Chinatown neighborhoods in CD1. Subsidies and upzoning are two tools that can be utilized to create affordable housing, but the conditions would be determined on a project by project basis.

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 a more comprehensive approach to the EIS. Issues such as access to public transportation, infrastructure (waste management capacity, community facilities) and secondary displacement are not factored into impact. I would like to see a "built in" component of providing a technical expert to the community to help navigate complex land use/architecture/zoning jargon. The Planning Together framework lays out a comprehensive approach to planning, addressing some of the high level challenges to land use decision making today, such as lack of coordination between budget, long term planning, and land use decisions. However, there are still some areas of concern. For example, 1) no details are provided on how NYCHA's portfolio fits into the planning process, 2) community engagement is not detailed - which is particularly problematic for a trilingual CD1, and 3) it is unclear how the proposed steering committee will reflect the diversity of our communities.

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?

The roll out of outdoor dining was haphazard. As it was happening it was a necessary lifeline for restaurants but we need clarity for everyone, restaurant owners and residents, about guidelines, enforcement, and timelines. Outdoor dining in some form is here to stay but it can't take a one size fits all approach.

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?

We need to make sure that small businesses actually receive the resources that have been promised as part of COVID recovery efforts by monitoring funding from city, state, and federal government. I also support reducing the bureaucracy and fees currently burdening small businesses and proposals for a public bank, which would increase access to capital for small businesses owners, particularly in communities of color. Larger banks often refused to work with small businesses to apply for PPP and require businesses to have a certain wealth portfolio before giving loans. A public bank would open up opportunities to people who have historically been blocked out of the banking system.

Landmarks

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

As Chair of CB 3 I was part of the fight to get Bialystoker Nursing Home landmarked and worked with preservationists and community leaders to push past the objections of the building's owners. As a Council Member Chin's Chief of Staff I have worked on efforts to get landmark status for the Kimlau War Memorial and push for a preservation study at 70 Mulberry Street.

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 would like to see parts of the Lower East Side and Chinatown landmarked. These neighborhoods are deeply under-designated. I also support more individual building landmarking throughout the district.

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?

LPC has generally done a good job limiting demolitions and has usually, though not always, been on the side of advocates in regulatory decisions in recent years. However I think LPC has not consistently engaged advocacy groups and given local stakeholders the needed tools to push for preservation.

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

As Councilmember I would support advocacy groups and community boards through the landmarking process. I believe that by taking an active role I could help fill gaps that currently exist in LPC's work in Lower Manhattan. I would also like to ensure that LPC has the resources to help advocacy groups to outreach in all the languages spoken in our communities.

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?

There are many misconceptions about the lack of flexibility and/or lack of support provided by the LPC when it comes to renovations.

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Thank You for Your Answers

