



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 do not support the Mayor's rezoning of SoHo/NoHo. I am the only candidate who has been standing with the community from the start of this long process. I was at the first community envisioning session and called out how poorly organized it was, as if the City had no intention of listening to residents right from the start. I have hosted in-person town halls before the pandemic, and virtual town halls during the pandemic, to help neighbors organize and learn more about how this rezoning will affect them.

The current proposal is flawed because it makes no commitment to building affordable housing, or to examine the potential displacement of surrounding low-income and rent-stabilized tenants. SoHo and

NoHo do not exist in a vacuum as they closely border the working-class and immigrant communities of the Lower East Side and Chinatown. Luxury development in SoHo will raise the property values of its neighboring communities, which leads to the displacement and harassment of low-income tenants as their landlords realize they can charge higher rents.

I do believe in a rezoning of SoHo, but this rezoning should follow the SoHo/NoHo community alternative plan. There are changes that need to be made to the zoning in order to protect the existing artist community, legalize all tenants, create a better balance between residential and commercial, and even convert empty offices into affordable housing. The loft tenants of SoHo have a long history of community activism, and a depth of knowledge on the intricacies of the neighborhood's existing zoning. They will be my partners in a rezoning process, not developers trying to profit off the community these tenants created.

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?)

When we create new affordable housing, it can not be at the expense of destroying the affordable housing that already exists. Often the market-rate apartments that are built as a part of MIH fuel speculation, which incentivizes landlords to force out rent-stabilized tenants. Our district currently still has the top 10 most rent-stabilized apartments in the entire city, but we have to fight hard to protect this affordable housing stock and cannot settle for compromises. I disagree with the current approach to MIH because it presents a false choice. We need to build large amounts of affordable housing, but we don't need to upzone and build luxury towers to do it. As an alternative approach to upzoning, we should focus on the underutilized spaces that already exist: there are many vacant hotels and office buildings in our district, and they should be converted to affordable housing. This model was used in the Financial District to create hundreds of new affordable apartments, and Governor Cuomo recently earmarked money for similar conversions.

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?

My top priority in office is to pass the Chinatown Working Group Rezoning Plan, The SoHo/NoHo community alternative plan and the Seaport coalition plan. The Chinatown Working Plan will limit speculation and increase the affordability of Chinatown and the Lower East Side. It's our district's best chance at stopping the luxury towers in Two Bridges. It represents the guiding principles I will use for all land use decisions: it's a community-based plan that reflects the character of the neighborhood, including everything from height limits to affordability. It identifies under-utilized sites but instead of seeing them as potential luxury towers, proposes affordable alternatives that are to-scale. My track record as a community activist can assure residents that I will never accept a real-estate driven rezoning, whether it's initiated by the City or developers themselves. Regarding air rights, I do not see them as a good land use tool. Our natural assets, like sunlight and air, shouldn't be bundled into development deals so that luxury developers can claim they have the right to build even taller. I would support tighter regulations on air-rights transfers since their sale often leads to out-of-context and unaffordable development.

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First Council District Candidate Questionnaire

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?)?

I would implement the Chinatown Working Group plan which would create an affordable housing overlay on any new development, forcing it to have affordable apartments that match the neighborhood's AMI. There is no need for upzoning in Lower Manhattan to build new affordable housing. In addition we must end developer give-away subsidies like 421a and 421g that don't

create permanent affordable housing. This just pushes the displacement of working class residents further down the road, but does nothing to create a stable affordable housing stock. Lower Manhattan still has some vacant lots where we can build 100% affordable housing with the right nonprofit developer to do it. Investing in models like community land trusts is also key to ending subsidies to real estate interests and creating better affordable housing than current programs provide.

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 am a dedicated advocate for community-based rezoning, and if elected I would work with the people living in the district, not real estate lobbyists, to protect our district from overdevelopment and displacement. There are many problems with the City Council’s “Planning Together” proposal as it still gives those at the top, developers and lobbyists, too much influence over the planning process. We need rezoning plans that focus solely on community input and meet the critical affordable housing needs of our district and our city as a whole. I think Community Boards should have a binding vote on rezonings, and the City Planning Commission should not allow any real estate or finance executives sit on the board or make decisions that impact working class New Yorkers.

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?

Outdoor dining is great when it works, but I believe the City should not blanketly approve all outdoor dining in perpetuity. Just as sidewalk cafes are regulated, with input from Community Boards and City agencies, I support outdoor dining being held to a similar standard. As small businesses are able to

recover and fully re-open indoors, they should be able to pay for permitting to increase their capacity outdoors so that the City is not giving away this public space for free. The Department of Sanitation, Transportation, and Consumer Affairs should have a unified oversight committee as well. I also support adding additional places to sit and congregate outside for people who can't afford to eat at restaurants frequently, and would support the City investing in more pedestrian plazas that will ease traffic and reclaim public space for public use.

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?

To support small businesses, we need lower rents, renewable leases, fairer fines, and a robust support system to bring our small businesses back. The Commercial Vacancy Tax, Small Business Jobs Survival Act, and a kind of commercial rent control should have been implemented before the pandemic, when so many of our small shops were already stretched thin. I will use my office to help organize small business owners, as I have in previous community campaigns, to lobby Albany to pass the Commercial Vacancy Tax, and will vote for a Speaker who is committed to the SBJSA and a progressive version of commercial rent control.

We have to make sure that the businesses that are open now receive interest free loans and federal grants packages which can refund and cover their rent while we are in the pandemic. In addition, we have to give them relief from unnecessary regulations and arbitrary fines. Repealing the item pricing law, where bodegas have to individually price every item in their store, even if there is a price listed on the shelf, is just one example of an overly burdensome fine that any mom and pop can easily get slapped with.

There is a city agency meant to help small businesses survive in a tough climate, Small Business Services. However an informational website and occasional town halls are not enough to help small business owners who typically don't have enough time in the day to search through city websites for the information they need. I will advocate for a budget that gives SBS the staff and technology it needs to proactively build relationships with small stores and restaurants. I will pass legislation to bulk up the services this agency provides, so that the City can start to take action and accountability for the precarious market of small businesses. Part of these reforms will include funding community canvases administered by SBS, where multilingual representatives can provide on-site advice on how to comply with the complex bureaucracy of rules and restrictions before getting fined by other agencies.

Landmarks

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

One of the most recent preservation battles I have been involved in is the fight against the Howard Hughes Corporation's attempt to undermine the South Street Seaport Historic District. I became active in this fight very early in the process, as I was friends with a lot of parents at the Peck Slip School, which faces the development site. I started organizing with them and we soon learned that the parking lot used to be the world's largest thermometer factory, meaning there was an extraordinary amount of mercury in the soil that would be disturbed by any construction. As the campaign against this development grew, I worked more closely with preservationists. Nobody was against development, but nobody could understand why there should be an exception to this site when it was already zoned as part of the historic district. The Seaport is one of the oldest parts of the entire City, so it has incredible historic significance. As a Councilmember, I am committed to funding the Seaport Museum, helping draw attention to this corner of history, and keeping the historic district in tact. I am the only candidate who has been organizing against the proposed tower, and has testified at every meeting from the Community Board to the multiple Landmarks Preservation Commission hearings.

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?

Even though New York City started in Lower Manhattan, many of its founding buildings have been destroyed or still face imminent threats. I support landmarking and would take the recommendations of Village Preservation and similarly focused groups. We must do more to honor and learn from the waves of immigrants who have called this district home for centuries, and I believe landmarking plays a critical role in keeping this history alive.

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?

Thanks to the work of local activists, we have had a fair share of successful landmarking. However the LPC's recent approval of 250 Water Street is disastrous. Even though LPC voted "no action" on this site twice, Howard Hughes was still able to lobby their way to an approval with minimal site changes. This is a clear example of how LPC has weakened commitment to preservation during the de Blasio administration.

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

We shouldn't have the LPC compromise on historic zoning. We've seen this happen in the past where LPC has protected parts of Tribeca, but not other parts. And in the unprotected parts we see massive towers. Is this what we're going to allow happen in the Seaport and SoHo and NoHo? LPC should make decisions based on the principles that the commission was created on, and see landmarking of buildings part of a greater effort to preserve our City's history.

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?

We will uphold it, but involve the property owner in conversations from the start. We will also work with them to take advantage of the incentives like Emergency Preservation Grant

New York State Historic Tax Credit Program for Income Producing Properties, New York State Historic Homeownership Rehabilitation Tax Credit, Real Property Tax Exemptions for Historic Properties

Federal Investment Tax Credit Program, that come with landmarking.

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Thank You for Your Answers

