

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?

As a member of the Board of Directors and Board of Advisors for the Lower East Side Preservation Initiative for the past seven years, I've been fighting for a new historic district on the Lower East Side, to protect the historic streetscapes surrounding the Tenement Museum. I've organized letter writing campaigns to public officials and the LPC, rallies, walking tours and information sessions. I've obtained resolutions of support for the district from local political clubs. I've met with two LPC chairs and lawmakers at all levels of government. As a result of our efforts, before the pandemic, the LPC began work on a designation report and made a preliminary presentation to property owners in the district. Unfortunately, the pandemic stalled our efforts, but we will not be deterred. I will continue fighting to win protections for these historic blocks that welcomed so many of our ancestors to this country.

In the Speaker's office, I negotiated the landmarking of Tin Pan Alley, which had been sought by advocates for many years, which saved the endangered stretch of buildings on West 28th Street. I joined with local advocates to stop the overdevelopment of Gansevoort Row. I worked with Village Preservation and the LPC to win landmark designation for the Stonewall Inn, the LGBT Center and other sites of LGBT historic significance. I've delivered testimony before the LPC on many occasions, including against rules changes that would have watered down landmark protections. I spoke at the rally against the demolition of 14-16 Fifth Avenue. I was part of the fight to landmark the South Village. I was part of the fight to beat back Intro 775-A, a bill that would have put unfair time restrictions on how properties and proposed historic districts are calendared for consideration by the LPC. I've worked with Andrew and Village Preservation to achieve many local wins for preservation, such as the rejection of the inappropriate redesign of 11-19 Jane Street.

These are just some of the historic preservation fights I've been part of.

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 of our historic fabric protected. Specifically, the area south of Union Square has many historic buildings and streetscapes that are currently threatened. Elsewhere in Council District 3, landmark protections are lacking, particularly in Hell's Kitchen. I will work with Community Board 4 to win landmark protections for historic buildings and streetscapes in the West 30s and 40s.

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?

Although we have victories to celebrate under this chair, in no small part due to the efforts of Village Preservation, the LPC has a mixed record in our district. On one hand, we saw the creation of the Sullivan-Thompson Historic District, the designation of LGBTQ historic sites, and other wins. We were able to prevent the inappropriate redesign of 11-19 Jane Street, 85-89 Jane street, and achieved positive modifications to many other applications. On the other hand, Unfortunately, the LPC moved forward wrongly on applications, including the development at Gansevoort Row and alterations to Kushman Row in Chelsea. The LPC still has not green lighted the preservation of the area south of Union Square. Also, they have not moved quickly enough on the creation of a new historic district on the Lower East Side in the blocks surrounding the Tenement Museum.

1

Third Council District Candidate Questionnaire

Landmarks (continued)

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

As a Council Member, I will insist that all future chairs of the LPC are preservationists, as it is vitally important that LPC chairs have a background in preservation. Additionally, I will fight to ensure that the LPC does not come under undue influence from the real estate industry. The members of the LPC must be independent and free of commercial interests that may influence their decisions. I will advocate for a budget increase for the LPC so that it can better fulfill its mandate and process applications in a thorough and timely manner. I

will hold oversight hearings to explore the lack of responsiveness to resident requests for designation. I will also push for pro-preservation incentives for owners of landmarked properties, which will help us win new designations.

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?

This is not a hypothetical question for me. On many occasions, both as an advocate and in my professional capacity as a City Council staff member, I've met with property owners who had concerns about landmark designation. In almost every instance I was able to bring them to a place of comfort with landmark designation. What I generally say is that in most instances, as long as a requested alteration is in line with the designation report, the LPC will approve alterations at the staff level without a lengthy review or a public hearing and full vote by the Commission. In the event that there is a delay, my office will be helpful in ensuring a reasonable turnaround.

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?

We must never repeat the zoning mistakes of the past. For example, the West Chelsea rezoning abutting the High Line was a big missed opportunity and an example of flawed zoning policy. If zoned correctly, the blocks around the High Line could have formed a vibrant residential corridor with thousands of units of affordable housing, affordable street level retail, and full time residents that are active in the community. Instead, the vast majority of the buildings built that rezoning contain no affordable housing and are almost always sparsely occupied. Any changes to zoning must be crafted in partnership with the community and must create significant amounts of affordable housing, while preserving neighborhood character and streetscapes. In some instances, reductions in zoning are appropriate, especially when zoning increases happen nearby, or when historic streetscapes are compromised.

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)?

I support requiring all new development to include a percentage of affordable housing. Under the right circumstances, it may be advantageous to allow for a larger structure if that will produce more affordable housing, as Community Board 2 and Community Board 4 have done on numerous occasions. These are decisions that should be made in partnership with local communities. Affordable housing should be made available to a range of income levels, including formerly homeless New Yorkers, very low, low, and middle income New Yorkers.

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)?

I would be open to sitting down with our local community boards and looking at individual locations that could be appropriate for affordable housing. In Community Board 4, for example, there is a Con Edison parking lot on the West Side Highway, which could be a great location for hundreds of units of affordable housing, and Community Board 4 has already identified this plot for this purpose.

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?

Although it is not in Council District 3, I do not support the plan as it is currently written

because it does not take the concerns of community members and advocates into account. The fact that property owners would be able to build 100% commercial buildings, without any affordable housing, is problematic. Additionally, allowing property owners to convert buildings from SoHo's current manufacturing use to retail use for free while subjecting residents to a fee for updating their certificates of occupancy is unfair. I believe an agreement can be reached that allows for higher density in appropriate locations, such as single story parking garages, if they will truly generate affordable housing. The de Blasio administration needs to come to the table with Community Board 2 and advocates to negotiate a workable plan in good faith.

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?

The ULURP pre-planning process needs to be expanded significantly to include true community input, early in the process. By the time a ULURP project is certified, the main contours of land use projects are already baked in, and the community only has the opportunity to make tweaks and changes at the edges. Community-based planning needs to happen much earlier in the process. Additionally, the ULURP definition of "environmental impact" must be expanded to include more vital services. I support citywide planning in partnership with local community boards. When planning for the city's growth, we must also take a citywide perspective that forecasts the need for vital services such as school seats, library capacity, transit improvements, greenspace, and more. The City Council's proposed framework has not received adequate buy-in from stakeholders such as Community Boards 2 and 4. More work is needed to achieve consensus before the concept proceeds.

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 was a lifeline for many small businesses during the period of COVID restrictions, and many locations are popular and work well and are supported by the community. However, there are locations that do not work, such as those that alter historic facades in historic districts, those that block sidewalk accessibility, and those that hinder access by the Fire Department. Any permanent program needs to be the result of a community-based planning process with local stakeholders at the table. Outdoor dining should have a fee associated with it that generates funds that will benefit the communities in which they are located.

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?

I am going to fight for a vacancy fee on landlords who intentionally keep storefronts vacant for prolonged periods of time. I also have proposed a program to facilitate artist pop-up space in vacant commercial spaces. I will push government agencies that serve small businesses to open satellite offices in street level retail spaces, offering walk-in services for small business owners that are conveniently located in their communities. I support the Small Business Jobs Survival Act and zoning restrictions that limit chain stores. Additionally, I will fight to exempt small businesses and supermarkets from the Commercial Rent Tax. Because no small business owner should need to hire an 'expeditor' to get fast service from city agencies, I will work to streamline burdensome regulations that make doing business more difficult. In order to help small business owners, employees, and freelancers save for retirement, I support the creation of a universal retirement savings program that is voluntary for anyone working at least 20 hours a week and automatically withholds at least 3% of a paycheck for retirement. A major program I have proposed in this campaign is to work with local stakeholders to create a "West Side Employment Network" so that companies located in Council District 3 hire more local residents, particularly residents of public housing. Finally, I support the creation of a New York City Public Bank to spur economic recovery and invest in communities, including small business owners and entrepreneurs who have been historically denied fair access to capital, and a public bank would help right these wrongs while spurring economic development.

Name: Erik Bottcher

E-mail Phone: Info@ErikBottcher.com