



HARVEY EPSTEIN
Assemblymember 74th District

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**Testimony to the City Council Charter Revision Commission
Office of Assemblymember Harvey Epstein
September 27th, 2018**

Good evening, my name is Harvey Epstein and I am the Assemblymember representing New York's 74th Assembly District, which includes the neighborhoods of the Lower East Side, East Village, Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village, Murray Hill, Tudor City and the United Nations. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I'm happy to once again to provide testimony to another Charter Revision Commission whose work will ultimately empower New Yorkers to decide for themselves what our city's guiding document should look like. The Mayor's Charter Revision commission was mandated to focus on reducing the power of money in politics and increasing civic participation: worthy goals. This commission has an opportunity to take a more holistic look at the charter and identify where we can improve the function, accountability, and transparency of our government so New Yorkers are better served.

Some of the important proposals heard by the Mayor's commission but not taken up should be given the further consideration they deserve by the Council's commission. In particular, I strongly encourage this commission to work towards bringing equity into the city's planning and land use process.

The current process does not balance community concerns and community planning efforts adequately. Negotiations happening in a black box, before the ULURP clock starts ticking, severely undermine the spirit and intent of the what should be a fully public process and create a lack of trust in government. To discourage the deal-making that happens outside of the process, without public oversight, pre-ULURP negotiations should be a matter of public record. In addition, the public should have a reasonable period of time, perhaps 60 days, where they can review and weigh in on an application before it is certified by the City Planning Commission.

Another way to ensure communities have a greater voice in the evolution of their neighborhoods is to require that all development on public land be subject to ULURP regardless of whether or not such development would typically trigger it. We must also ensure more New Yorkers can attend public hearings held on land use matters by providing childcare and language interpretation services.

To increase civic participation and improve the city government's function, accountability, and transparency we need New Yorkers to feel as though their elected officials truly represent



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them. This is possible through instant run off voting. I believe implementing instant run off voting in municipal elections, including special elections, would bring to New York the many benefits that other cities have seen since switching to an instant run off system, including voters electing candidates who better reflect who the public supports and ultimately reducing costs. The cost and complications associated with the reallocation of votes is overblown, as recent reports FairVote have shown. The value of increased voter turnout and more representative government is priceless.

New Yorkers deserve a city charter that works for them. Taking up land use reform that gives communities ample time and information to have their voices heard along with implementing instant run off voting are two ways this commission could bring more equity fairness and democracy into our city.