

Dear Chair Benjamin, Commissioners Albanese, Vacca and others-

My name is John Doyle, I'm a community activist in the Northeast Bronx. I thank you for the opportunity to submit my suggestions to your Charter Revision Commission and I thank each of you for the service you have undertaken to listen to the residents of this City on how to make their government better.

Last year's Mayoral Charter made several important reforms to our local government but in my opinion, it did not go far enough. Our city faces severe threats that undermine our democracy by industries that spend great amounts of money to influence public policy in many cases against the wishes of our citizens. Potential reforms to this charter could very well serve as a buttress against these influences. The following are my suggestions for you to consider:

1. **Further expansion of the matching- funds system-** I appreciate that the City recently expanded the matching fund system from a 6 to 1 match to an 8 to 1 match. Eventually, I think we need to bring the system to a 10 to 1 match (for residents of that particular district) to properly incentivize candidates to raise their contributions from the citizens they seek to represent. I also suggest that if a candidate is bypassing the system (usually with the support of high-priced special interests) the candidates who remain in the system should see their potential maximum matching funds doubled. This should serve as an incentive for all candidates to stay in the system.
2. **Exploration of Ranked Choice Voting-** As we have recently seen in the State of Maine, when ranked choice voting ("RCV") is implemented, citizens are free to vote for their candidate of choice without fear of the consequences of "electability". This fear can contribute to the cynicism many voters feel of not being represented by only certain choices in the political process about participating in an electoral process where only two or three candidates are considered "electable" or likely to win and that their vote may not make a difference. It can also lead to the election of a candidate who does not enjoy the confidence of the majority of voters. It is my belief that in my own race, the Democratic Primary for NYC Council District 13, if RCV was implemented we may have different representation today.
3. **Expansion of the New York City Council-** Our City Council is supposed to be the most local form of government, yet as our City continues to expand in population, our local council seats are now representing more residents than our State Assembly seats. Thus, I propose expanding the Council such that there will be one council seat for every 100,000 residents. Alternatively, I propose expanding the Council to 100 members, whichever allows for less people per district. I ask that you keep in mind that our City itself is larger than 38 states and many of those states have more local representatives (local government, state representatives and senators) than we have. Citizens' ability to interact with their local elected officials can leave them with a very positive view of our democracy

system and can go a long way to restoring their faith in our government. I believe this is well worth the investment.

4. **Greater restrictions on developers-** It's a poorly kept secret that even before a person is elected, those with financial interests in their district are already seeking to influence prospective elected officials with monetary contributions. I have seen real estate developers and their employees contribute to candidates in districts where they have pending projects or are developing projects in the coming years. While there is no silver bullet to counteract this, I suggest any person or entity with a pending DOB permit for developing a building of a large number of units, a pending housing application seeking city funds, or having signed a letter of intent be excluded from donating during the political season.
5. **Financial Disclosure Statements for Community Board Members-** In recent years, there has been greater scrutiny on volunteer members of our Community Boards. I think this is appropriate as these individuals do play an important role on many land use and municipal matters. That said, I have been surprised to see members of certain boards voting on matters where they clearly have a personal financial interest. Accordingly, I recommend requiring community board members to file annual disclosures where they must list any business they have with local entities and any donations they receive either directly or from non-profit entities where they serve as board members. This form could easily be confined to a page or two and the completed forms should be publicly available on every Community Board's website.
6. **Support of Democracy Vouchers-** Through the work of Commissioner Albanese, I'm aware of the democracy voucher program and the success it had in the City of Seattle. I strongly suggest studying this system so it can eventually be implemented within our City. The best thing we can do to restore citizens' trust in government is removing the stigma that "money talks" in this City.
7. **Land Use Reform-** Listening to the public hearings of your Commission, I've heard many thoughtful remarks from both those testifying and those serving on the Commission when it comes to land use items. I could write another letter in support of many proposals that I think should be considered but in the interest of brevity I'll list a few below for your consideration.
  - It was suggested that those looking to develop on lands owned by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) are NOT required to go through the Universal Land Use Review Process. If true, this is outrageous and defies common sense. I strongly urge this Commission to rectify this matter.
  - There has already been much discussion about changing the composition of the City Planning Commission (CPC) to give elected officials beyond the Mayor greater influence over the board. Given recent news reports that the City's deal with Amazon may be able to bypass the City Council by going through the CPC, I strongly urge you to consider steps to reform this entity to allow the voices of the Council as well as the Borough Presidents, Community Boards and the Public Advocate to be heard in these deliberations. Similar efforts should be undertaken with the Board of Standards and Appeals.

- 197a Development Plans should be given additional teeth as Commissioner Vacca has suggested. If Community Boards and neighborhood activists have gone to such lengths to propose these detailed plans that are often 100 plus pages, the plans should be binding and require detailed explanations from planning experts or developers before they may be altered. Ideally, Community Boards, with the help of their own city planners, would also be empowered to counter such requests for alterations on equal footing with wealthy developers.
- Finally, as I alluded to earlier, the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA) should be reviewed for significant overhaul. It's outrageous that an unelected body is given such broad powers to affect land use when many of the property owners bringing these appeals were fully aware of the land use restrictions at the time they purchased the property. In effect, the BSA has become a clearing house for real estate interests to get approval for proposals that enjoy no support within our neighborhoods by circumventing citizens and their elected officials. New York State Senator Tony Avella has many thoughtful proposals that I encourage you to review for inclusion in this Charter Review.

Thank you again for listening to my thoughts and I wish you the very best in your efforts to review and reform the City Charter. If I can be of any assistance, please contact me at (646) 469-8339 or at [doylejc1@gmail.com](mailto:doylejc1@gmail.com).

**Respectfully submitted,**

**John C. Doyle.**