



CITY OF NEW YORK  
**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

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**JESSICA CHAIT**  
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District Manager

July 3, 2025

Richard R. Buery Jr., Chair and Commissioners  
NYC Charter Revision Commission  
One Center Street  
New York, NY 10007

Re: Response to 2025 Charter Commission Report

Dear Chair and Commissioners,

Manhattan Community Board Four (MCB4) would like to thank the Charter Revision Commission (CRC) for its preliminary and interim reports and submits the following comments in response. While many aims put forward by the CRC are laudable, MCB4 urges the Commission to preserve and strengthen, rather than weaken, public input and review, in its final recommendations. Furthermore, MCB4 encourages the CRC to better define terms within proposals for consideration to allow for a more thorough evaluation for voters. MCB4 has concerns that the revising of the NYC Charter is now being used too often and as a run-around the standard process of political negotiation and compromise with the City Council, other elected officials, and/or voters of agreement on an issue or issues. Democracy is messy but requires and indeed needs meaningful discussion and engagement.<sup>1</sup>

### **Support Comprehensive Planning**

MCB4 supports the CRC's willingness to explore planning more holistically and urges the Commission to consider comprehensive planning. MCB4 has stated the request for comprehensive planning in reviewing nearly every major land use action, of which MCB4 has seen numerous in the past year, including NYCHA's Fulton Elliott Chelsea

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<sup>1</sup> These comments were approved by MCB4's Executive Committee on June 23rd and will be ratified at the July 23<sup>rd</sup> Full Board meeting.

redevelopment, new development on the Western Rail Yards, the Midtown South Mixed Use Plan, and the New Port Authority Bus Terminal. Given that each project is a separate land use action with separate environmental review, no one public input process provides an opportunity to assess and plan for pollution burdens, solid waste, schools, emergency services, social services, arts and cultural spaces, recreational spaces, and social amenities for projects that collectively will have a significant impact on the surrounding neighborhood over a defined time horizon.

MCB4 believes a comprehensive approach to planning would be one that would account for both community input and concerns around adequate resource allocation prospectively rather than project by project. Since 2015, MCB4 has conducted our own form of comprehensive planning in the creation of our Affordable Housing Plan, which, among other elements, provides for community input as to the types and scale of affordable and mixed-income housing projects board members wish to see in the community.<sup>2</sup> These up-front discussions have helped to generate support for and lower opposition to land use actions that have generated approximately 14,000 new units over the past decade, the fourth most of any community district in the City.<sup>3</sup>

### **Support a Fair Share Housing Framework**

MCB4 supports an enforceable fair-share framework for housing that would encourage all communities to share in the work of ending the housing crisis, such as one that furthers similar principles as the Mount Laurel doctrine. Such a proposal would benefit from concrete details, including clear definitions, transparency, and public engagement to avoid backlash or misuse.

### **Oppose Reducing Public Input in Land Use Actions**

#### ***Reducing Process Costs***

MCB4 supports making the process more efficient and less costly but discourages sacrificing public review as a means of doing so when projects will have a substantial public impact. MCB4 encourages the Commission to consider whether other means of reducing process costs, such as legal requirements, fees, and public presentation requirements could be scaled down for smaller affordable projects. Furthermore, MCB4 is not supportive of proposals such as the creation of a zoning administrator insofar as it limits local knowledge of conditions and needs highlighted during community board review.

#### ***Acquisitions and Dispositions***

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<sup>2</sup><https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/01/Affordable-Housing-Plan-Summary-of-Sites-12.15.22.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/079066aeb25741b78344098e1f4acf24>

MCB4 would like to express concern about the potential for major acquisitions and dispositions of land without public review, namely that a lack of a formal and transparent review process could lead to corruption and abuse. MCB4 is particularly concerned about the potential for disposition of public land for private uses given the ongoing community discussion on NYCHA's Fulton Elliott-Chelsea redevelopment, where MCB4 has heard concerns over the sacrificing of tenant protections without proper oversight. While some de minimis applications contemplated by the Commission may be appropriate, any relief from ULURP should be small and confined to a project's accessory uses.

### ***ULURP***

MCB4 is concerned by proposed changes to ULURP. ULURP is an established process that has been in the Charter for fifty years. Your own reports acknowledge its importance in providing predictability and transparency to land use actions, and MCB4 is concerned changes may harm those features. Namely, any reductions in the 60-day public input window would be very challenging for a volunteer-run board to meet. Aligning board and borough president review timelines could be effective if they promote borough president integration with the community board review process, but many members expressed a preference that community boards speak first on land use actions in order to enable authentic public input to inform a borough president's opinion. Many board members had concerns that removing City Council approval of a ULURP action could lead to less accountability of local members to residents in their districts.

### **Oppose the Centralization of the City Map**

MCB4 is concerned that changes to the City Map maintenance may move power further away from the boroughs that have deep understanding of their communities in favor of a centralized approach.

### **Support Streamlining the Creation of Resilient and Clean Infrastructure**

MCB4 supports many of the Commission's proposals to exempt small changes from ULURP for climate-related purposes, including make de minimis changes to correct inaccuracies in the City Map and being able to raise street grades within a reasonable height for resiliency projects. Major resiliency infrastructure, such as those on scale with the Army Corps' proposed Manhattan floodwall, should still require ULURP. It is important that in pursuing these changes that limitations for these small changes be clearly defined.

MCB4 believes there may be utility in modernizing the revocable consent process to facilitate a network of electric vehicle chargers. Getting rid of duplicative hearings may be useful, though MCB4 remains opposed to enabling the use of existing pedestrian space

on sidewalks for this purpose absent community input.<sup>4</sup> MCB4 has not found DOT to be a good steward of pedestrian resources and large networks (5G) have created a further space crunch on the community's congested sidewalks.

### **Support Even Year Elections**

MCB4 is supportive of even-year elections as a means of increasing turnout and promoting greater accountability of elected officials. MCB4 is not supportive of open primary elections.

### **Support Faster Non-Profit Contracting and Payments**

Finally, MCB4 is supportive of changes to the nonprofit contracting processes that would incentivize the City to pay its vendors on time, including the charging of interest. The City's failure to provide timely payments jeopardizes the community's nonprofit service providers' ability to meet the needs of the Chelsea and Hell's Kitchen community.

Thank you for your consideration and have appended the Board's full discussion comments to this document for your further review.

Best,



Jessica Chait

Chair

Manhattan Community Board Four

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<sup>4</sup><https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2023/04/17-WPE-TPC-Joint-Letter-re-EV-Charging-on-Sidewalks.pdf>

## **Manhattan Community Board Four Extended Committee Comments**

Memo

Date: 20 June 2025

To: Executive Committee, MCB4

From: HHHS Committee

Re: City Charter Revision Commission

HHHS Response & Comments

At the June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025, Housing, Health, and Human Services (HHHS) Committee meeting, the Committee reviewed the revisions to the City Charter proposed by the City Charter Revision Commission. HHHS members reviewed the proposed revisions regarding housing, zoning, not-for-profit payments & voting regulations. The WPE Committee will review the proposals to change environmental regulations. Both these committees will refer their response to the MCB4 Executive Committee to reconcile the matters and create a joint letter from the three committees.

HHHS is creating this memo for discussion purposes for its committee members to further review and amend to generate a more fleshed out and complete version.

### **Overall Comments and Impressions**

The members reviewed, discussed at length and in depth, (1 hour, 20 minutes), a synopsis prepared by committee member Roberta Barnett of detailed proposed NYC Charter revisions, regarding housing, zoning, not for profit payments & voting regulations. The Committee came to overall broad conclusions:

- The NYC Charter is the City of New York's main governing document and should be amended carefully in a thoughtful and minimal manner, not to solve specific city management or political problems between the Mayor and the City Council
- In the name of housing and affordable housing production, the Mayor is using the Charter Revision Commission process in an attempt to increase the power of the Executive branch of the City government.
- In the name of in the name of housing and affordable housing production, many of the proposed revisions seek to remove legislative review at multiple

levels, including the Community Board, the Office of the Borough President, and the City Council.

- Most of these actions would remove basic checks and balances in the negotiation of how development proceeds in the City of New York.
- Many of the proposed removals of levels of public review would result in less transparent and open negotiations providing more opportunities for lobbyists to influence the City's decision process.

Therefore, MCB4 has concerns that the revising of the NYC Charter is now being used too often and as an run around the standard process of political negotiation and compromise with the City Council or other elected officials and/or voters of agreement on an issue or issues. Democracy is messy but requires and indeed needs meaningful discussion and engagement.

With the exception of the question of removing Councilmember deference, (upon which a separate vote was taken), these responses represent both consensus and an unanimity among the Committee members.

Below are the proposals raised and HHHS's draft response.

### **Housing – Reducing Process Costs**

**Q: Should ULURP be amended to reduce the application burden for small projects, such as those for small-scale residential buildings?**

- Should there be a faster procedure to expedite small projects?
- Should there be a streamlined approval process for 100% affordable projects?
- Should the City designate a zoning administrator to review certain certifications, special permits, or authorizations?

### **HHHS Response**

- Small-scale residential buildings must be a defined term.
  - o Small-scale varies by neighborhood – small-scale development in Bay Ridge is different from small-scale in Hell's Kitchen. A relative measure must be created to define small-scale.
- Describe and define the details of a proposed faster procedure to expedite small projects.
- Define and describe what makes a small project.
  - o Are the determining factors the number of apartments, the size of apartments, the size of the lot, or other factors?
  - o The Preliminary Report mentions 6-8 units as small-scale. HHHS says that small scale is not the same for every location and there needs to be a

standard applied. Small-scale could be relative to building stock in surrounding area, creating a contextual measure to apply to specific neighborhoods instead of a one size fits all approach.

- There are other ways to reduce process costs without eliminating public review.
  - o The City should tie the cost of the application fees and requirements needed for hiring professionals, including attorneys, to the size of the proposed project. Presentation standards for public presentations should be developed to lessen costs for public presentations.
  - o The City should develop mechanisms to assist small owners and/or small projects so the overall application costs are more equitable. One strategy could include using the City's Small Business Services (SBS) to assist small-scale development and small developers, providing special training, or creating referrals for pro bono legal assistance. Further, such services could be subsidized or written down by an SBS program to manage those costs for small owners with limited real estate ownership.
- A zoning administrator, either elected or appointed, would remove both the local Community Board and the Borough President from the public review process for certain certifications, special permits, or authorizations.
- Zoning administrators lack local knowledge of conditions, needs, and surrounding context.
- MCB4 has for decades used its 60-day, 45-day or 30-day review period to meet with developers, shape the project for more thoughtful and responsive development, to secure more amenities for residents and neighbors, and develop a well-constructed response to a development proposal, that is often adopted by the Borough President.
- Removing such local input reinforces the current trend of one-size-fits-all at NYC Department of City Planning.

Q: Should ULURP be amended so that the Community Board and Borough President review be consolidated into the same 60-day timeframe?

### **HHHS Response**

- Consolidating the Community Board and Borough President review into the same 60-day period could be effectively implemented if there is a requirement developed for the Office of the Borough President to meet with the affected Community Board in the 60-day window and develop a coordinated response.
- MCB4 believes there is a housing crisis, and the need to address it is urgent. Many functional and production problems have been identified as

contributors to the housing crisis. However, in all the discussions or presentations at committee meetings, members of the development community have never stated that the length of time for required public review has impeded or been a barrier to development. Reducing the process by 30 or 60 calendar days, while well-intentioned and laudable, seems in part a solution in search of a problem. Further, using a risk-benefit analysis, the benefit of the process being slightly expedited is outweighed by a rushed decision by a community board and/or Borough President to, in the one case deny because there was not enough time to consider, or in the alternative, to approve in error, in whole or in part. Once housing decisions are approved and building done, it cannot be undone. The permanence of that decision and the permanent impact on the community is greater than the benefit of a month or two quicker process. We should strive to build more housing and "get it right" including, but not limited to, the number of affordable housing units, community benefits, and the impact on infrastructure including schools, police, FDNY, health care, environment, etc. Many applications and projects, even smaller ones, are complex. Further, the role of elected (by voters- not appointed) Borough Presidents and City Council members are critical and should be protected, not eroded.

Q: Should the City Council be required to act in a limited time frame to approve projects on land controlled by Health + Hospitals?

**HHHS Response**

- Health and Hospitals is a public agency, and the City Council should not lose its public review process. This proposed revision seems to be tied to a specific issue in City Council occurring at this moment. Charter revisions should not be used to solve a political problem.

**Housing – Local vs. Citywide Needs**

Q: Should the Charter be amended in order to make it more challenging for neighborhoods that have typically blocked new housing, particularly affordable housing, to veto a land use action of citywide importance?

**HHHS Response**

- By creating a means to veto the denial or approval of local land use action in the name of citywide importance, creates a means for the Mayor to veto power a public review. ULURP process. Is this a revision which in essence says, "We, (i.e., the Mayor) don't agree with what the local community representative



decided” and therefore the Mayoral Administration is going to override member deference? There are council districts for a reason, to elect a local representative to represent local interests, not city-wide interests. In this wide-ranging, physically, demographically, and ethnically diverse city, what works for one neighborhood simply does apply to another. The needs of each neighborhood, especially in housing, cannot be put into one size fits all box, Canarsie, Todt Hill and Hell’s Kitchen are all part of the city’s puzzle, not the same piece.

Q: Should there be a streamlined public review process for some subset of housing in Community Districts that fail to permit housing in line with the City Council’s Fair Housing Framework?

**HHHS Response**

- Describe and detail the proposed streamlined public review process.
- If a Community District disregards the Fair Housing Framework or does not meet some sort of housing production target, then there should be some actionable penalty, similar to the legal framework for municipalities in New Jersey built out of its Mount Laurel case to prevent exclusionary housing. Conversely, in Community Districts in which housing is developed in support of the Fair Housing Framework no streamlined process should apply.
- Some matters to consider when invoking a streamlined process due to not meeting the Fair Housing Framework:
  - o What is the measure of compliance?
  - o What is the proposed penalty?
  - o Can the penalty be appealed and to what body?
  - o How are acts of God or broader economic factors treated? For example, another pandemic or the current tariff war creating supply chain issues.

Q: Should the capital planning process set out in the Charter ensure that community investments in infrastructure and amenities are made in concert with new housing?

**HHHS Response**

- HHHS supports this proposal. For decades, MCB4 has consistently requested that capital funding be required and coordinated for its communities in infrastructure and amenities in concert with new housing or commercial development.
- HHHS notes, however, that such infrastructure improvements must be requested by the Department of City Planning prior to certifying an application.
- Infrastructure improvements should be based on cumulative impacts of all planned or projects in construction, not just for a current project under consideration.

Q: Should the Charter be amended to require the City adopt comprehensive planning frameworks that account for not just housing, but also aspects like workforce development, infrastructure sustainability, schools, and access to open space?

**HHHS Response**

- MCB4 has stated the request for comprehensive planning in reviewing every major land use action. Looking at the effects of a project on infrastructure, schools, and open space, and planning to address the public needs, accordingly, is effective planning.

Q: Should the precedent of member deference on land use projects be able to be appealed or reviewed subsequently by another actor, such as borough president or panel of citywide or borough-wide elected officials?

**HHHS Response**

- HHHS does not support creating a mechanism to appeal member deference. Such an action is a blatant political move. As we stated earlier, democracy is a messy, imperfect process. A local councilmember is elected to represent local interests. A citywide panel or a Borough President represent broader interests, some of which may be completely contrary to the locality. At the same time, a councilmember sometimes may not represent constituent interests. The remedy is the voting box not an expert panel.
- The proposal echoes the prior NYC Board of Estimate, dominated by Mayoral appointees and Borough Presidents. It was declared illegal in the early 1990s, such an action for appeal also presents more opportunities for lobbying and corruption.
- Finally, Charter revisions should not be used to circumvent the compromise inherent in the political process.

**Housing - Leveraging Public Land**

Q: Should the City reform its land disposition process to streamline land use reviews for projects on public land that meet certain affordability requirements?

**HHHS Response**

- Public land should be subject to public review. A public agency has a commitment to the public to develop a site appropriately and deliver the maximum public benefit, which can be ensured through the public review process.
- How does affordability remove the need to consider environmental review, neighborhood context or community and resident amenities? In fact, those factors take on heightened importance to ensure success of affordable housing.

- A public agency or public benefit corporation should be held to the same standards as private developer.
- Public authorities should be subject to ULURP.

Q: Should the City be able to streamline the land disposition process to HDFCs and other affordable housing opportunities?

**HHHS Response**

- Private sector developers frequently set up HDFCs to access real estate tax exemptions, including the Article XI tax exemption.
- In MCD4, in 2020, the owners of 308-310, 318-340 West 49<sup>th</sup> Street set up an HDFC to access an Article XI tax exemption, in exchange for providing affordability. Today, due to poor management, those buildings are source of major criminal activity affecting not only their tenants but multiple surrounding blocks. They are severely troubled with break-ins, drug activity, shootings, squatters and a murder.
- An HDFC ownership structure needs the same scrutiny as any private development.
- This proposed revision is fraught with the potential for fraud.

Q: Should the City be able to streamline the land disposition process for irregular lots that are not otherwise developable as housing?

**HHHS Response**

- Define and describe the standard for publicly owned irregular lots.
- With definition, this proposal may be a useful revision.
- Disposing a small piece of land to a developer as part of a larger project can create a public good.
- However, such relief from ULURP, should be only for a use directly related to an existing accessory use.
- If other unrelated uses are proposed, such as a park or school, the disposition should be subject to ULURP.

Q: Should the City have a streamlined process for the acquisition of modest amounts of land for affordable housing and supportive uses such as parks, schools, and access easements?

**HHHS Response**

- Define and describe “a modest amount of land” The phrase “a modest amount of land” is equivalent to “good faith efforts” as it is useless, open-ended statement with no enforceability. Without definition, this revision will decrease public review and remove public review.

## **Elections**

Q: Should municipal elections be moved from odd to even years to coincide with other state and national races?

### **HHHS Response**

- MCB4 supports this revision as a way to generate higher voter turnout by coinciding the local with the state and national election races.
- MCB4 recognizes the City Charter Review Commission Report stating, “Despite a vibrant civic life, New York City sees abysmal voter turnout in local elections” (page 16). The Community Boards are the independent and representative voices of the community and should be encouraging the community to participate in local government through voting. Increased Community Board outreach can assist in increasing voter turnout.
- Lastly, as noted by the [NYC Independent Budget Office \(IBO\)](#) in testimony delivered on May 28, 2025 before the New York City Charter Revision Commission, "There would be fiscal year savings of approximately \$42 million every other year if the City held even-year (“on-cycle”) local elections." This change is also the fiscally responsible thing to do.

Q: Should New York City allow voters who are not registered with a particular party to vote in that party’s primary election?

### **HHHS Response**

- MCB4 does not support this proposed revision. Primary elections should be limited to voters registered with a political party. In the same manner, should all citizens vote for a labor union president? Should all neighborhood resident vote for a PTA President? Voters with common interests should choose their candidate for public office.

## **Nonprofits**

Q: Should the City pay interest on late payments to contractors?

### **HHHS Response**

- Yes, the City should pay interest on contracts with nonprofits. The City should be held to the same standard as any party engaging with a contractor or vendor.

## **City Map**

Q: Should the Department of City Planning take over administration of the City Map from the Borough Presidents’ offices?

### HHHS Response

- This proposal is an attempt to take power from the offices of a Borough President. For example, the City Map dictates how addresses are presented. Local elected officials have local knowledge; therefore the map is a local piece of administrative work.

## Chelsea Land Use Comments:

The Chelsea Land Use (CLU) Committee of Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) respectfully submits the following comments in response to the preliminary report and proposed ballot questions of the New York City Charter Revision Commission. Our committee has reviewed the land use, housing, and planning-related items and offers the following recommendations and perspectives based on our discussion during the June 16, 2025 meeting:

### **1. Preserve the Full ULURP Process and Community Board Review Periods**

The committee strongly opposes any proposal that would reduce, consolidate, or otherwise diminish the role of community boards in the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP). Current timelines are already limited, and the 60-day window is essential to meaningful public engagement. Moreover, we object to the proposal to consolidate Borough President and Community Board review periods. These staggered timelines enable authentic public input to inform borough-level decisions.

### **2. Reject the Creation of a Zoning Administrator Role**

The proposed zoning administrator role raises significant concerns about the centralization of decision-making authority and the potential elimination of local review for certifications, authorizations, and special permits. Such a role would erode accountability and replace locally grounded oversight with bureaucratic discretion.

### **3. Require Precise Definitions for Key Terms and Concepts**

Many of the proposals in the preliminary report lack adequate specificity. Terms such as “small projects,” “modest land,” “streamlined,” and even “affordable housing” are undefined, leading to ambiguity and confusion. We urge the Commission to clearly define these terms before placing any associated proposals on the ballot.

### **4. Support Comprehensive Citywide Planning—If Inclusive and Publicly Anchored**

We acknowledge the potential value of a citywide comprehensive planning framework that integrates housing, infrastructure, open space, workforce development, and sustainability goals. However, any such plan must be informed by local planning, enforceable, and created with extensive public engagement. Comprehensive planning must not be used to override local land use authority or community-led frameworks.

### **5. Uphold City Council Member Deference on Land Use Matters**

The proposal to allow appeals or overrides of council member deference by borough or citywide actors is deeply problematic. This tradition is fundamental to representative land use decision-making and should not be weakened. Removing or bypassing councilmember input risks disconnecting land use policy from neighborhood needs.

## **6. Maintain Public Oversight in Land Disposition and Acquisition**

We strongly oppose streamlining or bypassing public review for the sale or acquisition of city-owned land, even in the case of “irregular lots.” The city’s public land is a scarce and critical asset, and all disposition actions must remain transparent and accountable.

Streamlining without safeguards risks undermining public trust and enabling backdoor privatization.

## **7. Include NYCHA and Federally-Owned Land in Disposition Considerations—with Caution**

While we acknowledge that NYCHA properties may fall under federal oversight, the committee is concerned that references to “public land” in the Commission’s report could be interpreted to include NYCHA campuses, raising the stakes for tenant protections. We urge clarity that any proposal regarding land disposition must not bypass community board input—especially for properties with vulnerable populations.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Charter Revision Commission’s proposals. The Chelsea Land Use Committee urges that any reforms strengthen—not weaken—community oversight, transparency, and equity in the land use process. We look forward to continued dialogue as the Commission refines its final recommendations.

Transportation Planning Committee Comments:

Environment “

*“Should City be able to offer revocable consent non-adjacent property owners for the purpose of installing electric vehicle chargers on public streets and sidewalks? Should the process of offering revocable consents and franchises be streamlined to remove duplicative notice and hearing requirements?”*

We oppose amending the Charter to facilitate revocable consents or other mechanisms to enable EV charging on sidewalks even if it is in accordance with a plan developed by the Department of Transportation. WE ask that we continue to receive separate notices

Community board 4 is on record<sup>[1]</sup> for opposing the installation of any vehicle chargers on sidewalks - Fast charging infrastructure is the norm in other countries and should be deployed in private locations to mirror or augment the network of gas stations.

We have not found the DOT to be a good steward of pedestrian resources and large networks ( 5G) have been an unmitigated failure. It falls upon the communities to be vigilant and weight the benefits versus hyper- local space needs.

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://cbmanhattan.cityofnewyork.us/cb4/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2023/04/17-WPE-TPC-Joint-Letter-re-EV-Charging-on-Sidewalks.pdf>