

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

DEMOCRATIC CONFERENCE OF THE  
COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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OCTOBER 15, 2020  
Start: 1:14 P.M.  
Recess: 1:30 P.M.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING

B E F O R E: Corey D. Johnson, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Adrienne E. Adams  
Alicka Ampry-Samuel  
Diana Ayala  
Inez D. Barron  
Justin L. Brannan  
Fernando Cabrera  
Margaret S. Chin  
Andrew Cohen  
Costa G. Constantinides  
Robert E. Cornegy, Jr.  
Laurie A. Cumbo  
Chaim M. Deutsch  
Ruben Diaz, Sr.  
Daniel Dromm  
Mathieu Eugene  
Vanessa L. Gibson  
Mark Gjonaj  
Barry S. Grodenchik  
Robert F. Holden  
Ben Kallos

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Peter A. Koo  
Karen Koslowitz  
Rory I. Lancman  
Brad S. Lander  
Stephen T. Levin  
Mark Levine  
Farah N. Louis  
Alan N. Maisel  
Carlos Menchaca  
I. Daneek Miller  
Francisco P. Moya  
Bill Perkins  
Keith Powers  
Antonio Reynoso  
Donovan J. Richards  
Carlina Rivera  
Ydanis A. Rodriguez  
Deborah L. Rose  
Helen K. Rosenthal  
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.  
Ritchie J. Torres  
Mark Treyger  
Paul A. Vallone  
James G. Van Bramer  
Kalman Yeger

3 CHAIRPERSON COREY D. JOHNSON: Sargeant  
4 Bradley, Sargeant Bradley, can you please start your  
5 recording please?

6 SARGEANT BRADLEY: I've started.

7 CHAIRPERSON COREY D. JOHNSON: Backup is  
8 rolling. Cloud is rolling. Good afternoon everyone.  
9 Welcome to today's Democratic Conference Hearing for  
10 the New York City Council. We ask everyone to please  
11 turn on their videos at this time for verification.  
12 Once again, all panelists please turn on your video  
13 for verification. We ask everyone to please place  
14 electronic devices on silent or vibrate. Madam,  
15 Majority Leader the floor is yours.

16 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Welcome to  
17 this meeting of the New York City Council's  
18 Democratic Conference, my name is Laurie Cumbo and I  
19 am the Majority Leader of the New York City Council.  
20 We are here today to consider Rodney Pepe Souvenir  
21 for appointment as a Democratic Commissioner of  
22 Elections for Kings County. This position is to fill  
23 a vacancy created when the prior Democratic  
24 Commissioner for Kings County resigned earlier this  
25 year. According to New York Election Law, Section

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3 3204.4, we as the members of the New York City

4 Council who are members of the Democratic Party may  
5 appoint any eligible person to fill this vacancy.

6 Eligibility requirements are limited to being a  
7 registered Democrat and a resident of Kings County.

8 The person appointed will fill the remainder of a  
9 four-year term expiring December 31, 2020.

10 Commissioners receive a \$300 per diem for each day of  
11 attendance at DOE meetings or any of its committees  
12 with a maximum of \$30,000 per year. Ms. Pepe

13 Souvenir was subject to a full background  
14 information. No adverse information, conflicts of  
15 interest or compatibility of office concerns were  
16 identified. Ms. Pepe-Souvenir is a registered

17 Democrat and a resident of Kings County so she meets  
18 the eligibility criteria. Today's meeting will be  
19 governed by Robert's Rules of Order, would any

20 Council Members like to be recognized prior to a vote  
21 on this nominee? And I will ask at this time if the  
22 Parliamentarian will inform me if any members have  
23 asked to speak?

24 PARLIAMENTARIAN: No, not at this time

25 Madam Majority Leader.

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3 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: At this  
4 time, would someone like to make a motion for a roll  
5 call vote on Ms. Pepe-Souvenir's appointment?

6 JUSTIN BRANNAN: Uhm, Majority.

7 CHAIRPERSON COREY JOHNSON: Madam  
8 Majority Leader, before that motion, Council Member  
9 Kallos, did you just raise your hand to speak?

10 BEN KALLOS: I will wait to vote to uhm  
11 to make my statement with my vote. Thank you.

12 JUSTIN BRANNAN: Uhm Majority Leader  
13 Cumbo, I would like to make a motion to appointment  
14 Rodney Pepe-Souvenir as a Democratic Commissioner of  
15 Elections for Kings County.

16 CHAIRPERSON COREY JOHNSON: Justin, you  
17 have to ask for a roll call vote.

18 PARLIAMENTARIAN: First, we need a  
19 second.

20 ROBERT CORNEGY: Uhm, Majority Leader, I  
21 would like to second that nomination.

22 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you.

23 MATHIEU EUGENE: I would also like to  
24 second the nomination.

25 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you  
Council Member Robert Cornegy and thank you Council

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3 Member Mathieu Eugene. So, we have a second. At this  
4 time, Counsel would you please conduct a roll call  
5 vote on this nominee? This requires a majority vote  
6 of all members of the Democratic Conference.

6 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Adams?

7 ADRIENNE ADAMS: Aye.

8 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Ampry-Samuel?

9 ALICKA AMPRY-SAMUEL: I vote aye.

10 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Ayala?

11 DIANA AYALA: I vote aye.

12 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Barron?

13 INEZ BARRON: I vote aye.

14 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Brannan?

15 JUSTIN BRANNAN: Aye.

16 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Cabrera? Cabrera?

17 Chin?

18 MARGARET CHIN: I vote aye.

19 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Cohen?

20 ANDREW COHEN: Aye.

21 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Constantinides?

22 Cornegy?

23 ROBERT CORNEGY: I vote aye.

24 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Deutsch?

25 CHAIM DEUTSCH: Aye.

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3 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Diaz? Council Member

4 Diaz? Council Member Cabrera?

5 FERNANDO CABRERA: Yes. Diaz yes.

6 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Diaz yes. Council  
7 Member Cabrera? Council Member Cabrera, we can't  
8 hear you.

9 SPEAKER COREY JOHNSON: Fernando, can you  
10 hear us? Uhm, just keep going Lance.

11 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Dromm? Council Member  
12 Dromm?

13 SPEAKER COREY JOHNSON: I don't believe  
14 he signed on.

15 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Council Member Eugene?

16 MATHIEU EUGENE: I vote aye.

17 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Gibson?

18 VANESSA GIBSON: Aye.

19 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Gjonaj?

20 MARK GJONAJ: I vote aye.

21 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Grodenchik?

22 BARRY GRODENCHIK: Aye.

23 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Holden?

24 ROBERT HOLDEN: I vote aye.

25 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Kallos?

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3 BEN KALLOS: Permission to explain my  
4 vote?

5 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Permission  
6 granted.

7 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Time starts now.

8 BEN KALLOS: As Council Members of the  
9 vote on various candidates for appointment I have  
10 taken that opportunity to interview Rodney Pepe-  
11 Souvenir, an attorney client director of Title XI at  
12 the City University of New York. In our  
13 conversation, she agreed that long lines, broken  
14 machines, voter registration, absentee ballot  
15 failures are an impediment to voting that has  
16 disenfranchised countless voters who might not  
17 return. She has agreed to focus on expanding the  
18 number of early voting sites, reducing long lines,  
19 fixing broken voter machines, commitment to register  
20 any and all voters even those who have only been  
21 residents for 30 days not precluded by state law, she  
22 will support the implementations of laws that I have  
23 offered to enfranchise voters including local law 238  
24 of 2017 to provide online voter registration, local  
25 law 65 of 2016 that would provide tracking for  
absentee ballots from request to mail-in to receipt

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3 by the Board of Election. This is specifically  
4 needed to help the 95,610 voters in Brooklyn whose  
5 absentee ballots were never received. This law has,  
6 since our conversation, been implemented for the most  
7 part. She is going to define the voter verifiable  
8 paper trail and plans to take on an active role of  
9 the Brooklyn Board of Elections. As Commissioner, she  
10 will work with local elected officials by her co-  
11 workers and translators for Russian, which my  
12 colleague Mark Treyger and I have fought for and  
13 Creole that are not as required by the Voting Rights  
14 Act. She has heard my concern that a patronage and a  
15 culture of incompetency have apparently broken the  
16 Board of Elections and as a Director of Diversity and  
17 Compliance as CUNY, she has the experience to enforce  
18 the anti-Neptunism laws and to manage and provide  
19 training for employees for failing on the job. Where  
20 all else fails, she is committed to working through  
21 the disciplinary process until its resolution so that  
22 everyone is working toward the best election. She  
23 knows that the reform of the Board of Elections is an  
24 uphill battle. The board has equal representation  
25 amongst Democrats and Republicans. The Commissioners  
who are approved by the Council who did keep their

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2 promise to behavior of many of these reforms were  
3 defeated by a Coalition of Republican Commissioners  
4 who had not come before this same process. I believe  
5 Rodney Pepe-Souvenir knows the job ahead of her, the  
6 stakes and will do her best to fix what's broken.  
7 For those reasons, I vote yes.

8 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you,  
9 Council Member Kallos.

10 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Council Member Powers?

11 KEITH POWERS: I vote aye.

12 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Koo? Koslowitz?

13 KAREN KOSLOWITZ: Aye.

14 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Lancman?

15 RORY LANCMAN: Aye.

16 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Lander?

17 BRAD LANDER: I vote aye.

18 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Levin?

19 STEPHEN LEVIN: Aye.

20 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Levine?

21 MARK LEVINE: Aye.

22 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Louis?

23 FARAH LOUIS: I vote aye.

24 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Maisel? Council Member

25 Maisel?

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3 CHAIRPERSON COREY JOHNSON: I don't think  
4 he's on.

5 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Menchaca?

6 CARLOS MENCHACA: I vote aye.

7 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Constantinides?

8 COSTA CONSTANTINIDES: I vote aye.

9 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Council Member Miller?

10 CHAIRPERSON COREY JOHNSON: He's not on.

11 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Moya?

12 FRANCISCO MOYA: I vote aye.

13 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Perkins?

14 BILL PERKINS: I vote aye.

15 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Reynoso?

16 ANTONIO REYNOSO: Permission to explain  
17 my vote.

18 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Permission  
19 granted.

20 ANTONIO REYNOSO: Thank you Majority  
21 Leader.

22 SARGEANT REDONDO: Time starts now.

23 ANTONIO REYNOSO: Thank you Sargeant  
24 Redondo. I just want to say that, uhm, while we know  
25 that the, that the test for how we elect  
Commissioners or how we appoint Commissioners or the

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3 process that currently exists, is set forth by the  
4 State, uhm it does not preclude us from having the  
5 most stringent process in the City Council as to how  
6 we move that forward. The Board of Elections, is  
7 especially in Brooklyn has be fraught with issues and  
8 we would be wise to not ignore them and while I  
9 believe that these issues are systematic the City  
10 Council can do more to make sure we ask uhm you know  
11 at least more aggressive or comprehensive vetting  
12 process that allows for the public to hear the  
13 candidates speak on issues that are important to  
14 them, uhm so that we can be transparent and they can  
15 have faith that the Board of Elections is going to  
16 ensure the foundation of democracy which our  
17 elections. After the speaker allowed us to meet with  
18 Ms. Pepe-Souvenir through the Brooklyn Delegation  
19 many questions were answered satisfactorily. It is  
20 somebody that I think we are going to be part of for  
21 a time to come and I am looking forward to seeing her  
22 time as a Commissioner in Brooklyn and I hope moving  
23 forward that we continue this process or a more  
24 complex process that allows us to vet these  
25 candidates so we don't have, what we seen in Brooklyn  
which is not only the purging of hundreds of

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2 thousands of voters in the registration but also the  
3 mismanagement of absentee ballots during arguably the  
4 most important election of our time. With that said,  
5 I would like to vote aye.

6 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you  
7 Council Member Reynoso.

8 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Richards? Rivera?

9 CARLINA RIVERA: Aye.

10 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Rodriguez?

11 YDANIS RODRIGUEZ: Aye.

12 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Rose?

13 DEBORAH ROSE: Aye.

14 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Council Member Rose?  
15 Council Member Rosenthal?

16 DEBORAH ROSE: Rose, no, aye. Rose, aye.

17 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Thank you Council  
18 Member Rose. Council Member Rosenthal?

19 HELEN ROSENTHAL: I vote aye.

20 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Salamanca?

21 RAFAEL SALAMANCA: I vote aye.

22 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Torres?

23 RITCHIE TORRES: I vote aye.

24 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Treyger?

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3 MARK TREYGER: Permission to explain my  
4 vote?

5 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Permission  
6 granted.

7 SARGEANT REDONDO: Time starts now.

8 MARK TREYGER: Thank you Majority Leader  
9 and with great thanks to the Brooklyn Delegation and  
10 to my colleagues in the Council for their support of  
11 this nominee. To give some greater context, Brooklyn  
12 has been without a borough Commissioner from the  
13 Democratic Party since February, right before the  
14 pandemic took shape. Brooklyn also experienced a  
15 change in leadership this year and this has been  
16 quite the challenging year. Uhm, and I just want to  
17 note for the record that uhm Ms. Souvenir made  
18 herself available to each and every member of the  
19 body uhm, answered all of my questions and made a  
20 very strong commitment to expand language access  
21 which is very greatly personal to me in addition to  
22 greater efforts to make the voting process as  
23 accessible and easier for all of our residents. And  
24 again, I think the Brooklyn Delegation and thank the  
25 colleagues for their support and I do vote aye, thank  
you.

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2 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you  
3 Council Member Treyger.

4 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Vallone?

5 PAUL VALLONE: I vote aye.

6 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Van Bramer?

7 JAMES VAN BRAMER: Permission to explain  
8 my vote?

9 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Permission  
10 granted.

11 SARGEANT REDONDO: Time starts now.

12 JAMES VAN BRAMER: Thank you, uhm so I,  
13 just like my colleagues in the Brooklyn Delegation  
14 and my vote is not about the qualifications for this  
15 particular individual which may in fact be tremendous  
16 but I am voting no on this because the process is  
17 broken. The Board of Elections is broken in so many  
18 ways and I am primarily voting no because political  
19 machines should have no place in the Board of  
20 Elections process at all, so, with all due respect to  
21 the candidate and to the delegation, I vote no, thank  
22 you.

23 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Yeger?

24 KALMAN YEGER: Aye.

25 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Cabrera?

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3 FERNANDO CABRERA: Aye.

4 DANIEL DROMM: You didn't call me.

5 Majority leader. I'm alright.

6 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Dromm?

7 DANIEL DROMM: Aye.

8 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Maisel? Miller?

9 ROBERT CORNEGY: Parliamentarian, with  
10 all due respect, uhm Council Member Miller who I had  
11 a conversation with earlier has a family emergency, I  
12 doubt that he will be joining us today.

13 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Thank you Council Member  
14 Cornegy. Richards? Majority Leader Cumbo?

15 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: I vote  
16 aye.

17 PARLIAMENTARIAN: Speaker Johnson?

18 SPEAKER COREY JOHNSON: I vote aye.

19 PARLIAMENTARIAN: One moment as we tally  
20 the votes. Madam Majority Leader, the vote on the  
21 appointment of Rodney Pepe-Souvenir is 42 in the  
22 affirmative, 1 in the negative, 0 abstentions.

23 MAJORITY LEADER LAURIE CUMBO: Thank you  
24 so much Parliamentarian, thank you Council. The  
25 majority of the Council Members who are members of  
the Democratic Party have voted to appoint Ms. Pepe-

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3 Souvenir as a Democratic Commissioner of Elections

4 representing Kings County. The motion passes, this

5 meeting is hereby adjourned.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date October 28, 2020