

**Testimony of Gail Benjamin Mayoral Nominee to the City  
Planning Commission Before the New York City Council  
Committee on Rules, Privileges, and Elections**

**September 7, 2022**

Good afternoon Speaker Adams, Chair Powers, Council Members of the Committee on Rules, Privileges, and Elections- Borelli, Sanchez, Brennan, Salamanca, Brooks-Powers, and my own Council Member, Crystal Hudson.

First, I want to thank all of you for the opportunity to appear here today as you consider my appointment to the City Planning Commission. As a former staff member of the City Council for over 25 years, I do not take lightly your interest in, and responsibility for determining whether my candidacy is the right fit for the Commission in 2022 and for the City as a whole. I hope that after evaluating my credentials, 40 years of experience in government, mostly in the land use arena, training, and experience, you will agree that my voice will add value to the Commission's deliberations, while helping to balance the diverse positions of those who participate in discussions on land use matters.

My background is in Urban History, which gives me a unique perspective when looking at New York City of today. The problems we are experiencing, particularly post pandemic, are not new. They may exacerbate trends that began in the pre-pandemic days, and many go back decades. Often the City has tried various strategies to address these issues with greater and lesser success. It's important to be able to review new proposals in planning and development to solve perennial urban problems in light of earlier attempts to do so. We can learn from our failures as well as our successes.

I am a lifelong New Yorker. I grew up in Queens in a NYCHA development, Pomonok and my family was among the first to own and occupy an apartment in Rochdale Village. Both of my parents worked in government, and we were a middle-class black family that was able to live and thrive in the City, because of the many benefits offered to us by the City: from NYCHA housing and Mitchell Lama co-ops to libraries, excellent public education to parks and playgrounds to museums. I have always wanted to make sure that these opportunities would continue to be available to existing and future generations of City residents.

I started my career in government with former Comptroller Harrison J. Goldin and represented him at the Board of Estimate. I learned much about how the City works and about the necessity to hear all parties, read all materials and to consider the interests of all parties of interest before coming to a decision. I learned that in a city where land is an increasingly scarce commodity, all decisions which affect how land is used are fraught with contentions. I learned that all politics is local and should not be discarded but heard and discussed.

At HHC (Health and Hospitals Corporation) I worked to develop projects, more specifically, housing for nurses as a tool for recruitment and retention. I learned firsthand the difficulties and rewards of bringing development to fruition.

As Co-Director of NYC CEQR (City Environmental Quality Review) I was tasked with managing the regulatory process as well as presenting the findings of the review. While the review became a more contentious and visible process, it was during this period and due to the public interest that the first CEQR Technical Manual was released and has been updated frequently since that time.

Lastly, I spent the last 25 years as the Director of the Land Use Division for the City Council. I assisted leadership in setting up the Division as well as in determining how best to implement the new land use responsibilities given to the Council in the Charter Revision of 1989. The division assisted all 51 councilmembers or more than 200 members over time. We functioned as staff to the Land Use Committee and the Subcommittees as well as performing the administrative tasks that enabled the Council to handle their land use role. We all learned that the impact of land use is different depending on the community in which it is located, and that each community is unique. No singular solution will work citywide and so it is important to listen to all the voices that speak.

Our city is facing critical challenges and all of us must have as our first commandment to restore our city to good health in a way that recognizes the value of all neighborhoods and citizens. We must present a well-balanced, creative, equitable, and legal set of solutions. We must be transparent in these efforts and seek to involve all parties in this search for solutions.

I am excited to be part of this effort.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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Address: 41 Convent Avenue

I represent: Self

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Sarah Carroll

Address: LPC, 1 Centre St, 9th floor

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Address: Adams St. Bklyn. NY

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: Milton Williams

Address: 250 Vesey St., 21st fl.

I represent: Milton Williams

Address: 250 Vesey St.

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NY Landmarks Conservancy

Address: 1 United Hall of NYC

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Date: SARAH CARROLL

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Name: SIMEON BANKOFF

Address: 10 Street, BKlyn NY

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: CHRISTABEL GUGON

Address: 115 TUDOR CITY PLACE NYC

I represent: SOCIETY FOR THE ARCHITECTURE

Address: OF THE CITY "

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Date: 9/7/22

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Name: Clisa Velezquez

Address: 241st Street, Bellerose, 11426

I represent: Myself

Address: Same as above

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Name: Stana Sassow

Address: Stuart Place - White Plains NY

I represent: Center for Judicial

Address: Accountability, Inc

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Date: 9/7/22

Name: Gail Benjamin  
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Address: Clifton Place, Brooklyn NY.

I represent: myself

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 9/7/22  
Milton Williams

Name: Jena Sassou  
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address: Stewart Place NY 10013

I represent: Center for Judicial

Address: Accountability, Inc

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