

## **DOWNTOWN INDEPENDENT DEMOCRATS MEETING**

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

### MINUTES

Present: Sean Sweeney, David Reck, Jean Grillo, Linda Belfer, Ian Dutton, Shea Hovey, Peter Gleason, Diane Stein, Diane Lapson, Julie Nadel, Frank Nervo, Amy Seidman, Rose Silver, Hilda Merle, Alia Hartmann, Carla Rupp, Judy Karnas, Ronit Leora, John Ost, Vincent Scilla, BJ Berti, John Scott, Mark Stein, Allan Horland, Daniel Squadron, Mary Cooley, Elliot Silber, Sally Etta Sheinfeld, Anita King, Jacqueline Celestin, Andrew Berman, John Garguilo, Nicole Ferree, Gayle Rene Fried, Janice Brown Spitzmueller, Alan Schulkin, Arthur Kriemelman, Catherine McVay-Hughes, Julie Menin, David Cohen, Laura Braddock, Manotte Beatrice, Paul Rackow, Pat Moore, Andy Jurinko, Franklin Bennek, Martin Hechtman, Barry Skolnik.

Sean Sweeney, President, asked if we had received our D-Notes and said we were one of the few clubs still putting them out before elections.

Council Member John Liu, Chairman of the New York City Council Transportation Committee, spoke about traffic and congestion pricing. He said the Transportation Commission came out with their recommendations last week. Council Member Liu supports congestion pricing because traffic congestion is choking the city both environmentally and economically. Jobs are leaving because there is no room to grow. He said a lot of the revenue has to be reinvested into alternate forms of transportation. For instance, in his District in Queens, there needs to be more transportation options, like more express buses or expanded access to the LIRR. Congestion pricing is an excise tax that would be only be fair if there were more transportation options. He also believes it would be sending the wrong message if the revenue were used to plug the holes in the MTA's budget.

#### Q& A for Council Member Liu:

Q: What about New Jersey drivers?

A: You can't charge different prices for them.

Q: Can there be a partial waiver for people who live in New York City who have to work where there are no buses?

A: Before implementation, they will set up more buses and other transportation options.

Q: What about the extra taxi charges?

A: The cost should be partially borne by people who take taxi cabs.

Q: What about eliminating the one-way toll on the Verrazzano Bridge?

A: It would take an act of Congress to eliminate this toll. The original reason for the toll is no longer there.

Q: Will residents have to pay for moving their cars due to alternate side of the street parking?

A: Under the Commission's plan, they will not have to pay for this (under the Mayor's plan, they will).

Next, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver spoke about congestion pricing. He said there is no charge to move your car for alternate side of the street parking. If you drive out of the zone, you don't pay. Bridge tolls eliminate the need for cameras on every street corner.

1. The concept of congestion fees is to keep cars out of the congestion zone. It works for the boroughs, but not for New Jersey. The Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority tolls will put most of the money into mass transit. Across the Hudson, none of the Port Authority tolls go to mass transit, and that is the distinction. Speaker Silver also expressed optimism that Albany would pass legislation to enable the TEA the ability to write tickets for Gridlock Box blockers as part of the congestion pricing plan.
2. The MTA would submit a Capital plan before the plan is voted on, providing bus access and express buses.
3. The impact on lower-income people: it is a regressive tax discriminating against people who work odd shifts who are not safe taking mass transit late nights or early mornings.

There is an ancillary issue regarding residential parking permits. If you live on the border of the zone, people may park in your area and take mass transit, creating congestion and parking problems. This is what has been happening in London.

Q & A for Speaker Silver:

Q: The plan doesn't take away from placard parking.

A: The Mayor is committed to reducing placard parking.

Q: Regarding the drivers from New Jersey, what is the rationale for doing this?

A: For New Jersey the prime issue is they are paying the same \$8 as New Yorkers would, but none of that is yet dedicated to be used by New York City or even New Jersey. It goes to the TBTA coffers, and no New Jersey toll money is used for New York City mass transit. Regarding the Holland Tunnel vs. the Verrazzano Bridge: the one-way toll was designed so that traffic and pollution would not affect Staten Island. Now, as a result of the one-way toll, it is affecting Brooklyn. instead. Speaker Silver doesn't think the situation will change if you eliminate the one-way toll, due to political considerations, like trying to maintain a Democratic Congressional and State Senate seat in Staten Island. Speaker Silver disagreed with Council Member Liu that the Verrazzano Bridge tolls could not be changed except by an act of Congress.

Q: Regarding construction safety, how many violations will it take before something will be done?

A: There have been ongoing meetings for Deutsche Bank and Fiterman Hall and 12 agencies will oversee the operations. They agreed to decontaminate before deconstruction. An emergency response system will be in place.

Q: Thank you for the new Green School in Battery Park City and the PS 234 Annex.

Q: Regarding rent regulations, will there be a \$2,000 vacancy decontrol?

A: Working with Gateway Plaza on refinancing, to extend their rent stabilization agreement.

Senator Martin Connor spoke.

1. First he talked about congestion pricing. According to a survey his office conducted, Manhattan residents did not like the \$4 fee to drive within the zone. The caveat was that they don't have a drafted bill. The economic disparity for the average New Jersey commuter will be pretty high, and the Port Authority would not get any revenue. It would be reasonable to have some of the money go back to New Jersey for the PATH and NJ Transit. Senator Connor also wants to see the MTA capital plan. He wants to see that the funding won't get diverted from its original goals.

2. There is a vacant New York State Senate seat. There will be a special election on 2/26/08. There are 32 Republican members, a bare majority.

3. Pier 40 – The Hudson River Park Trust threw out the old proposals for the pier at Houston Street. The Related plan would have put in Cirque de Soleil, which would have added more congestion. The Greenwich Village Partnership Group has made a proposal, and Nadler, Glick, Connor, Duane and Quinn have signed on. There was a large rally two Sundays ago. The goal is to give the partnership time to come up with an alternate plan, keeping in mind that the pier is in need of timely repair.

Q & A for Senator Connor:

Q: Independence Plaza started sub metering electricity. Are there any programs to help senior and low income people with these charges?

A: The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) is one, but staff member Matt Vigilant will get back to you.

Q: What is your position on affordable parking at Pier 40?

A: They have to maintain parking but the revenues will have to support the park.

Q: What can be done about the dusty, dirty trucks in front of 90 Church Street?

A: The LMCCC, our office and Port Authority have met. There are sweepers and washdowns, but the sanitation sweeper was not equipped at that time to work without turning the debris into black ice.

Q: What about the \$2,000 vacancy decontrols for rent stabilized apartments?

A: The cap has recently been raised to \$2,800. Also, luxury decontrols will occur when the rent stabilized rent is over that amount and the household income is \$175,000 for two years in a row.

Q: Thank you for supporting the SLA.

A: Commissioner Healy's term expired, they think she will get reappointed. More of the agency's functions are moving to Albany, including possibly the Licensing Division. They don't want to go all the way to Albany to make arguments to the SLA.

District Leader Jean Grillo announced that the Board of Elections is looking for poll monitors. She was able to get three D.I.D. members to sign up to become Poll Watchers at Downtown voting sites. This is wonderful news since we need well-prepared and knowledgeable poll workers, especially when we move into computerized voting machines. Anyone interested should contact her at [jbgny@aol.com](mailto:jbgny@aol.com).

Respectfully submitted by Diane F. Stein, February 19, 2008.