

THREE PARKS INDEPENDENT DEMOCRATS

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CLUB MEETING, APRIL 8, 2015

Topic:

WHY IS PUBLIC EDUCATION IN JEOPARDY?

Speakers:

Leonie Haimson, Executive Director, Class Size Matters

Noah Gotbaum, Second Vice-President, District 3 Community Education Council (CEC3)

Patrick Walsh (invited), Teacher, PS 149

Date: Wednesday, April 8, 2015

Time: 8:00 PM

Place: The Youth Hostel, 891 Amsterdam Avenue at 103rd Street, Chapel/Ballroom

AGENDA

7:45 PM Sign-in

8:00 PM Call to Order

Wednesday, April 8, 8:00 pm

Three Parks Membership meeting
The Youth Hostel, 891 Amsterdam Avenue

1. District Leader Reports

2. *Why is Public Education in Jeopardy?*

Speakers: Leonie Haimson, Noah Gotbaum and
Patrick Walsh (invited)

3. Nomination of Judicial Delegate Candidates

4. Adjourn

CALENDAR

Wednesday, April 8, 8:00 pm

Three Parks Membership meeting
The Youth Hostel, 891 Amsterdam Avenue

Wednesday, April 22, 8:00 pm

Three Parks Board Meeting
The Youth Hostel, 891 Amsterdam Avenue

Sunday, May 3, 1:00-4:00 pm

Three Parks 40th Anniversary Fundraiser
Mexican Festival Restaurant
2672 Broadway at 102nd Street

Wednesday, May 13, 8:00 pm

Three Parks Membership meeting,
The Youth Hostel, 891 Amsterdam Avenue

Wednesday, May 27, 8:00 pm

Three Parks Board Meeting
The Youth Hostel, 891 Amsterdam Avenue

President's Report

by Lauren Williams

At our March meeting, speakers Bertha Lewis from The Black Institute and James Parrott with the Fiscal Policy Institute provided noteworthy remarks and cautions about the privatization of government services and public sector institutions at all levels. They cited examples of private/public partnerships that have resulted in the erosion of public services and institutions, including affordable housing, education, zoning and health care. Meaningful campaign finance reform and continued vigilance, and action by progressives, were among strategies they advocated to limit further privatization and address situations where they are not delivering promised services. Their remarks were clearly supportive of our Three Parks issues agenda.

Our April meeting will feature a forum on challenges to public education, including the expansion of charter schools, co-location of charter schools in public school buildings, increased use of high stakes tests, and proposed funding cuts. (The speakers' organizations were among the sponsors for the March 28th education rally outside Governor Cuomo NYC office.)

Leonie Haimson, Founder and Executive Director, Class Size Matters will bring both national and local perspectives to the discussion. Class Size Matters is a non-profit organization that advocates for smaller classes in NYC public schools and the nation as a whole. It provides information on the significant and wide-ranging benefits of smaller classes, advocates for alleviating school overcrowding, and works for more parent decision-making in the area of education policy. Leonie, a public school parent for 15 years, has received the John Dewey award from the United Federation of Teachers, was named one of NYC family heroes by NYC Family Magazine, and was honored as an extraordinary Advocate for our Children by Advocates for Justice.

Noah Gotbaum, Second Vice-President, District 3 Community Education Council (CEC3) and Patrick Walsh, Teacher, P.S.149, will provide more of a neighborhood view. They participate in CEC3, one of the City 32 Community Education Councils. CEC3 represents Community School District 3, which includes public elementary and middle schools. CEC3's responsibilities are established by state law and encompass approving school zoning lines, holding hearings on the capital plan, evaluating community superintendents, and providing input on other important policy issues. CEC3 includes areas within Manhattan Community Boards 7 and 10 (Upper West Side and Central Harlem).

Despite our long cold winter, Three Parks members were busy attending hearings and rallies across the city and in Albany. With spring arrival, we have begun our neighborhood tabling and petitioning activities focused on important issues like the proposed citywide rezoning, state-level legislation renewing Rent Stabilization, and consideration of city and state budgets.

I encourage you to join other club members in these activities and to purchase your ticket for Three Parks' 40th Anniversary Fundraiser to be held on Sunday, May 3, 1:00-4:00 pm at the Mexican Festival Restaurant on Broadway and 102 Street.

District Leader's Report

Undermining Community Planning and Control

by Bob Botfeld

Last month, the New York City Planning Department unveiled a proposed citywide zoning amendment that would undo, in a single stroke, not only this neighborhood's Upper West Side Rezoning of 2007, but hundreds of rezoning plans painstakingly devised by individual communities throughout the city over the past 30 years.

The Upper West Side Rezoning of 2007 came after two years of detailed block-by-block analyses, neighborhood surveys, shadow studies, and dozens of community meetings. Thousands of local residents participated in the discussion. Then the New York City Planning Department, Community Board 7, community advocates (Three Parks Independent Democrats and Westsiders for Responsible Development), and elected officials worked out a comprehensive contextual zoning plan for the blocks between 97th Street and 110th Street from Central Park West to Riverside Drive. This plan preserves the character and livability of our neighborhood by limiting the height and bulk thereby preventing the erection of future skyscrapers in our neighborhood. Furthermore, the community spirit engendered by the participation of so many residents and local groups working together to create a thoughtful plan for their own neighborhood was as important as the final plan.

How does the New York City Planning Department (the City) propose to undo all this?

Normally, as when we bargained with the City for the Upper West Side 2007 rezoning, the negotiation is primarily over permissible building heights and bulk. After the parties agree upon the height and bulk, the zoning code that fits the height and bulk is assigned to the area. For the Upper West Side, these zoning codes were 8B which limits building height to 75 feet for the side streets,

9A (145 feet) for Broadway, and 8A (120 feet) for much of Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues.

Last month, instead of proposing zoning changes of height and bulk for a specific block or area, the City redefined what each zoning code means—erasing what every community had negotiated over the years. With a broad brush, the City sweeps away the work done over the past decades determining what height and bulk is best for each area. As one person sarcastically noted, “It certainly saves the City the hard work to actually figure out what is best for each neighborhood.” The zoning codes “redefinitions” in our area would change 9A to permit a building height of 175 feet instead of 145 feet; 8A (120 feet to 145 feet); and 8B (75 feet to 85 feet). (It should be noted that as in much bad legislation, there are some positive proposed changes mixed in. In this proposal, there are some sensible zoning changes to facilitate more senior housing.)

What can we do about it?

There will be public hearings at the Community Board, City Planning Commission, and the City Council. Borough President Gale Brewer and most of the City Council representatives, state officials and Congress members representing Manhattan have already expressed their opposition to these broad abrupt changes.

Come to our future club meetings to hear more about this.

Gov. Cuomo’s Education Reform Agenda

By Elizabeth Kellner

Among the many contentious and important policy issues which Gov. Cuomo tried to push through in the 2015 budget (e.g., ethics reform, raise the age for juvenile offenders, minimum wage increase), was a long list of so-called education reforms. Cuomo has explicitly stated that his inclusion of these measures in the budget demonstrates their priority in his second term agenda. So regardless of whether these education measures are included in the budget or fall by the wayside for now (the budget will likely be approved by the March 31 deadline which is after this newsletter goes to press), they will very much remain “live” policy issues to be taken up later in the Legislature’s 2015 session or in subsequent years. Therefore, the public outcry and protest in opposition to the threat to public schools must be sustained. Assembly Democrats are to be congratulated for holding firm, but the fight is far from over.

Here is a list of where things stand:

Education Funding—Cuomo initially insisted there would be no increase to funding unless his reforms are

adopted. although he has backed off from this position, even the maximum commitment he is willing to make falls hundreds of millions of dollars short of the obligations imposed on NYS as a result of the ruling by NY’s highest court in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity’s lawsuit.

Raising the Cap on Charter Schools—Last year brought the charter movement several victories in a direct challenge to Mayor DeBlasio. After a campaign-year-gusher of millions in political contributions and lobbying to Cuomo and Senate Republicans, the charter movement is poised to win authorization for at least another 100 schools.

Teacher Evaluation—Cuomo wanted 50% of teacher evaluation to be based on students’ scores on standardized tests further raising the stakes. Now it appears that yet another Cuomo commission will take this issue up. In the meantime, with statewide school budgets due May 19, local districts still do not know how much money will be coming from Albany, since aid to education is being held hostage.

Teacher Tenure—Cuomo wanted to require five years experience for tenure eligibility; the Senate has proposed four, the current requirement is three.

School Receivership—Cuomo wants to cast aside DeBlasio’s plan for revitalizing “failing” schools and, instead, have the state take them over with some form of receivership imposed; this, no doubt, would be yet another opportunity for private interests to make money at the expense of public school students.

Education Investment Tax Credit (EITC)—Cuomo wanted this give-away to wealthy charter and religious school supporters, so much so that he sought to tie it to the Dream Act (see below). The Senate wants it, and even though Cardinal Dolan has been lobbying as if it would substantially benefit the Archdiocese’s financial struggling schools which serve many low income, working poor and middle class families (as with many yeshivas and Jewish schools), the details of the EITC proposal make pretty clear it is really designed to benefit the very wealthy. It has a \$1 million dollar per contributor cap, requires the filing of paperwork, and will be approved on a first-come first-serve basis, not to mention causing NYS to lose \$100 million in tax revenue that could be given to public school children.

The Dream Act—Cuomo supports this as do senate democrats and the Assembly. It would enable undocumented students (virtually all of whom were brought here as children by their parents) to apply for financial aid from the state, thereby enabling them to

improve their education and contribute to the state's economy. Senate Republicans are steadfastly opposed and spewing vile rhetoric about "illegals."

Mayoral Control—DeBlasio wants to make it permanent; even Rudolph Giuliani supports this. Cuomo, not wanting to concede anything to his downstate rival, is talking about only a couple of years while Senate Republicans still refer Mayoral Control (achieved by Bloomberg 10+ years ago) as an "experiment."

All of the above are critical policy issues concerning public education that should alarm and concern us all. These battles will continue after the budget passes, and proponents of some of the more obnoxious "reforms" will be expending plenty of money and lobbying effort to sway public opinion and legislators. Cuomo is already on board

DeBlasio Zoning Plan Threatens Upper West Side by Lynn and Steve Max

Mayor DeBlasio has slammed neighborhoods here and around the city with his new rezoning plan. In the name of building "affordable" housing, DeBlasio intends to rezone the entire city with a one-size-fits-all blueprint that does not allow distinctions by neighborhood. Except for six specific neighborhoods, the one in Manhattan being East Harlem, there is no requirement that any affordable housing be built when a developer takes advantage of increased height opportunities to construct luxury apartments.

The most troubling aspect of the plan is that even a small boost in zoning height makes it profitable to take down or gut existing low-rise rent stabilized and affordable units. While we will not yet see a return to Extell Towers heights, there will be increases in the two-to-four story range above the maximums now allowed, and a few additional stories will be added if 20% are below market rate "inclusionary" apartments.



Indeed, a statement just released by Borough President Gale Brewer, and signed by 27 Manhattan elected officials, says, "While the proposed zoning text will make it easier to create new apartments in contextual districts, there is a real concern this will create development pressure on existing buildings. In order to build those new, market-rate units, rent stabilized tenants may have to be displaced, resulting in a net loss of affordable units."

A net **loss** of affordable units! How can that be the result of an affordable housing plan?

First, the City has made no projections of a net gain in affordable housing. They are relying on the hope that something will come from giving developers the ability to make even greater profits. Second, there is no protection in the plan for existing rent stabilized and affordable units. The plan does provide a small sum to help tenants fight eviction, indicating that the Mayor is aware that there will be evictions, but there is no rule that affordable units cannot be demolished, or that they must be replaced by comparable new units with the original tenants invited back at the same rent.

Only a year ago, two empty brownstones on West 83rd Street were purchased by a developer; plans were filed to demolish them and put up one new condo building with six very large floor-through apartments. If the new zoning is passed, that developer will get an approximate bonus of two more floors plus an extension of the first floor into the back yard. The block has the same zoning designation "R8B" as do the side streets in our area.

Another example of what can happen is the row of three brownstones on West 104th Street. These buildings have a total of about 24 units, most of them stabilized, and are two stories below the current zoning limit. Add the two more stories from the new zoning plan for a total of four, and there is incentive to take them down. With air rights purchased from brownstones across the street or directly in back, these four-story buildings could go to nine or ten stories with no affordable housing. What's more, they would get a generous 421-a tax break.

Thanks to Gale Brewer, our local elected officials are alerted to the problem, as is Community Board 7, but we must keep pressure on everyone to have this plan stopped. As District Leader Cynthia Doty said at a recent Board 7 committee meeting, "The way to get affordable housing is to build it, not to bribe developers with tax breaks and permissive zoning that undermines the protection that communities like ours fought to hard to win."

50th Anniversary of Voting Rights Campaign

by Mary Geissman

On March 7-8, I was privileged to participate in the re-enactment of the crossing of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, AL. Last summer I learned that the Unitarian Universalists (UU) were organizing a conference around the Selma anniversary. I decided to go because this was an important anniversary of an event that I remember vividly seeing on television. I registered for marching in the Arc of Justice: Re-Visiting Selma, a conference from March 5-8 in Birmingham that included the Sunday trip to Selma.

Three other members of All Souls Unitarian Church registered: our Assistant Minister, Lissa Gundlach, Minister Emeritus Richard Leonard, and Linda Rousseau, head of Peace and Justice at All Souls. Rev. Leonard (Dick) had been in Selma for 18 days in 1965 and walked the entire 50 miles from Selma to Montgomery then. It was a great honor to be with him on this trip.

However, the NY winter intervened. Linda and I planned to fly to Birmingham on March 5, which turned out to be the day of a heavy snowstorm. A plane skidded off the runway, shutting down LaGuardia Airport until evening. Our flight was canceled and we could not get a rebooking until Saturday noon. Linda decided not to go. Though I knew I would miss much of the conference, I decided to go anyway; I still would make the march to Selma on Sunday. Lissa and Dick were already in Birmingham.

I arrived Saturday afternoon, met up with Lissa and Dick, and was able to attend the dinner that evening as well as socialize with some of the people who had come from around the country. There were over 500 attendees in all. On Sunday morning, we all boarded buses and headed first for Montgomery where we had lunch and worship with music at the City of St. Jude. The City of St. Jude, a Catholic complex, was the campsite for the final night of the 1965 March from Selma to Montgomery, and there was a huge concert with many well-known entertainers.

Then we left for Selma and were dropped off at the UU gathering point in a park. The day was beautiful and warm, a welcome change from NYC! We started walking towards the Brown Chapel—the starting point of the official march to be led by Attorney General Eric Holder, Rev. Jesse Jackson and others. However, there were so many people in Selma at that point—estimates of 70,000-80,000—that the organizers gave up the idea of an official march and we all joined the crowd and slowly made our way to the bridge. It was a thrill to finally reach our destination and stand where real heroes had walked before us. I especially thought of Rep. John Lewis.

After crossing the bridge, we boarded our buses and returned to Birmingham for dinner and a closing service with music.

Although this ended up being a very short trip, I'm glad that I went. It made me recall the sacrifices that many people made 50 years ago to ensure that all Americans had the fundamental right to vote. It's hard for me to believe that, today, this right is still under attack in many parts of our country. We must all continue the fight until all of our citizens have the right to vote.

Why Don't We Vote?

By Betsy Malcolm

In 2014, New York had the fourth lowest voter turnout in the country at 28.8% despite three statewide races and 27 House races. Why? Non-competitive elections are a big part of the problem. When election results are a foregone conclusion, why bother to vote!

In order to get competitive campaigns and win back the people's trust, radical reform is required, not just tinkering around the edges. A decade ago, the Brennan Center called NYS's legislature the most dysfunction in the nation. Despite revisions to income disclosure rules in 2005, 2011 and 2014 (called "groundbreaking at the time), little has changed. We deserve comprehensive laws that will lead to competitive elections.

It's time to pay our state legislators a decent wage and place strong limits on outside income. Currently, the outcome that looks most likely from budget negotiations in Albany would require legislators to reveal the names of their clients and give some explanation for payments not directly associated with a client. This might have made a difference in Sheldon Silver's case, but it would have had little effect on Pedro Espada who looted Soundview Health Center, a federally-funded health care clinic in Espada's low-income Bronx district, to the tune of \$14 million. This is an example of tinkering around the edges of corruption.

NY Attorney General Eric Schneiderman has proposed a plan that would get to the heart of NYS's corruption problem. He says we should ban outside income, end "per diem" payments and reimburse legislators for their actual cost of travel, and have four-year-terms instead of two, so that legislators have time to govern and do not have to constantly fund-raise. An assembly member's Chief of Staff once told me that, despite a 96% reelection rate, the key word to keep in mind in any dealing with any legislator is "fear." In order to attract the kind of people we want and need as legislators, we need to free them from the constant need to raise money and kowtow to big donors. That means real campaign finance reform.

New York City's system of matching small donations with public funds at a 6:1 ratio has produced more competitive elections and is seen as working well. If you combine that with closing the LLC loophole through which wealthy individuals can give unlimited donations, and eliminating "housekeeping" accounts that are essentially slush funds, real progress can be made toward cleaning up Albany corruption and encouraging competitive elections.

Now that would be groundbreaking!



Participatory Budgeting, 6th and 7th Districts

Vote on How to Spend \$1 Million in Your City Council District!

Over the next two weeks you can help choose how the City spends over \$1 million. The projects with the most votes will get funded.

6th DISTRICT—Council Member HELEN ROSENTHAL
Project and voting information:
helenrosenthal.com/participatorybudgeting

In our neighborhood:
Rosenthal District Office
563 Columbus at 87th Street, April 13-19
Monday-Thursday, 10:00 am-6:00 pm;
Friday, 10:00 am-4:00 pm

96th Street & Broadway
Broadway Mall Community Center
Wednesday, April 15, 8:30 am-10:30 am

Community Board #7 Office
250 W. 87th Street, 1st floor
Sunday, April 19, 12 noon-4:00 pm

7th DISTRICT—Council Member MARK LEVINE
Project and voting information:
marklevine.nyc/participatory_budgeting

In our neighborhood:
P.S. 145, Bloomingdale School
105th Street & Amsterdam
Monday, April 13, 7:45 am-8:30 am

Morningside Library
2900 Broadway @ 112th Street
Monday, April 13, 10:00 am-3:00 pm

Council Member Helen Rosenthal's April Events

Monday, April 13, 6:00-8:00 pm

Senior Forum

Hosted by Helen Rosenthal and The Age-Friendly
Neighborhood Initiative

Goddard Riverside Community Center
563 Columbus Avenue

RSVP: Marisa Maack

mmaack@council.nyc.gov or 212-873-0282 x200.

Monday, April 27, 6:00-9:00 pm

Town Hall

Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 150 West 83rd Street.

Over 12 agencies will respond to questions.

Submit questions in advance to

hrosenthal@council.nyc.gov or call 212-873-0282.



*Please join us for the
40th Anniversary Benefit
Three Parks Independent Democrats*

**Honoring
NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer
and the P.S. 163 Parents Association**

Sunday, May 3rd

1:00-4:00 PM

Mexican Festival Restaurant
2672 Broadway at 102nd Street

To sponsor or buy tickets:
threeparksdems@aol.com

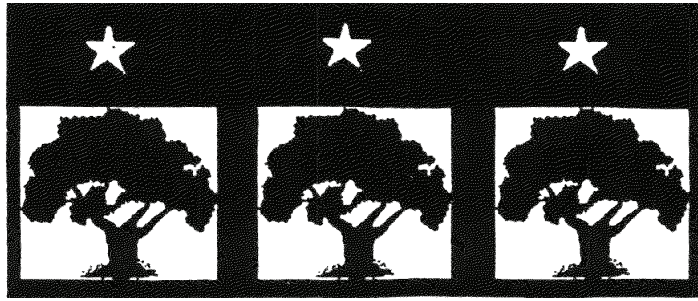
\$500 Benefactor

\$300 Patron

\$175 Sponsor

\$50 Member Ticket

\$150 Guest Ticket



Three Parks Independent Democrats

Cathedral Station P.O. Box 1316, New York, NY 10025, tel: 212-539-7602

Please pay your 2015 dues by filling out the form below and bringing it to the next meeting or by mailing it with your check to:

Three Parks Independent Democrats
Cathedral Station P.O. Box 1316
New York, N.Y. 10025
Attn: Treasurer

2015 MEMBERSHIP FORM

New Member _____

Renewal _____

Membership Category -- Check One

Individual (\$25) _____

Family -- two adults in the same household (\$40) _____

Low Income (\$15) _____

Low Income Family (\$20) _____

Sponsor (\$50) _____ Patron (\$100) _____

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (H) _____ (W) _____

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Check here if you prefer to receive the newsletter solely by email.

Please pay your dues with a check or via PayPal—cash and money orders are far more difficult to process.

Please make out all checks to “Three Parks Independent Democrats - Dues 2015

Thank you for your cooperation!

Three Parks Independent Democrats

Cathedral Station P. O. Box 1316

New York, NY 10025

Next Meeting

Wednesday, April 8, 2015

Why Is Public Education in Jeopardy?

Speakers: Leonie Haimson, Noah Gotbaum & Patrick Walsh (invited)