

PRESS RELEASE

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NY Jobs with Justice and Urban Agenda Urge City Charter Commission to 'Slow Down'

Charter Revisions Should Not be Rushed but Undergo Careful, Deliberate Review

21 April 2010, New York - NY Jobs with Justice and Urban Agenda, alongside other community, labor and public policy advocates, testified before the City Charter Commission Tuesday, urging the Commission not to rush through with revisions to the Charter. The two groups argued the necessity of having an unhurried and comprehensive review of the Charter given the significant impact any revision will have on the economic, environmental and social well-being of the city.

The reach of New York City's Charter goes far beyond simply setting out the governing rules for the city. It touches on the unique powers of city officials and agencies, the city's land use policy, the power of local bodies such as Community Boards, and more. The last substantive charter revision was in 1989 and took three years to complete. Yet, the current Charter Revision Commission was only appointed not quite three months ago and already hopes to complete its mandate by September.

This timeframe seems untenable both for the Commission and the community. In fact, the first series of public hearings were organized in less than a month and with minimal public notice. The issues being addressed go far beyond what appears on paper, warranting much stronger, more comprehensive consideration that seems unlikely given the timeframe. One such issue for example, is the way the city engages in land use planning. The Charter determines not only how the city uses land, but also how the city encourages, or discourages, the development of local businesses. Similarly complicated are the roles and powers of the city council, public advocate, comptroller, and borough presidents, set out in the Charter, which determines how decision making power is spread within the city.

According to Mijin Cha, Director of Campaign Research at Urban Agenda, "We are at a crucial point in our city's development. A few well-placed adjustments to our Charter can move us far down the path towards a more sustainable, prosperous, and just city. We hope the Commission will take this opportunity to do as much as possible with its mandate, particularly given this moment in time. If the Commission were to only address one or two issues, it will have fallen short of its potential and promise – rather there is an opportunity to do as thorough a review of the Charter as possible."

Matt Ryan, Organizing Director of NY Jobs with Justice agreed, "The current Charter Revision Commission has a tremendous responsibility before it. There is no short cut, since the decisions they make will impact the city for decades to come. Rushing through with a charter revision in order to place something on the fall 2010 ballot will not only diminish the ability of New Yorkers to engage in this process, it will undermine the legitimacy of the Commission."

NY Jobs with Justice is a permanent coalition of worker and community organizations building power to secure good jobs and strong communities for all New Yorkers. www.nyjwj.org

Urban Agenda engages in policy development, action research, and coalition building to promote a more sustainable, prosperous, and just New York. www.urbanagenda.org