

**NYC Districting Commission
Public Hearing**

Thursday, October 4th 5:30PM – 9:00PM

**Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
515 Malcolm X Boulevard
New York, NY 10037**

Testimony by Council Member Margaret Chin, District 1-Lower Manhattan

Good evening, Commissioners. I am Council Member Margaret Chin, the New York City Council representative for District-1, Lower Manhattan. I thank you for the opportunity today to offer some insight regarding the current and proposed district lines as an elected official, long time lower Manhattan resident, and also someone who was involved in this process many decades ago.

District-1 currently includes the Financial District, Battery Park City, Tribeca, Chinatown, the Lower East Side, parts of SoHo, and some of Greenwich Village. I am proud to represent a district that is extremely diverse, both ethnically and socio-economically. We have both Wall Street and nine public housing developments. We have 18 subways, and many more buses. We have more than 5 miles of waterfront – more if you include Governors Island.

Our district has experienced a large amount of residential growth in the last ten years, and this could continue as new residential construction and conversion projects resume with the economic recovery. However, our population right now places us very close to the median district size, and it is my strong feeling that very little change is needed in our district.

For this reason, I support the draft proposal by the Districting Commission, at least where it applies to District-1, with a few minor edits.

- For example, I hope you'll further consider the inclusion of housing complexes like Gouverneur Gardens which has traditionally been included as part of the Lower Manhattan community, and which under your draft proposal would be in District-2.

I know that the Districting Commission looks very closely at balancing population size, and tries to achieve districts that are close to the median, rather than the permitted 5% margin. However, I do think it is important for the Districting Commission to consider future growth as well. I am concerned about proposals that show a 7% among districts in Manhattan, namely in the so-called "Unity Map" proposal, spearheaded by AALDEF and LatinoJustice. To the extent possible, minimizing population deviation from the median is an essential part of protecting the democratic principle of one-citizen-one-vote. It also is important, especially for higher poverty areas, to ensure that each district has enough resources to address its needs.

For my district specifically, I am very concerned that this "Unity Map" proposal suggests removing Tribeca and Battery Park City from District-1. ***This is something I adamantly oppose.***

For one thing, and those living in Lower Manhattan will tell you, there is a community of interest here that crosses any racial or socioeconomic lines. The "Unity Map" map blatantly ignores the shared interests between downtown neighborhoods and instead only considers at the color of people's skin. This is a community that experienced and was directly affected by the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Ten years later, and after much community advocacy, we are just reaching some major milestones in rebuilding:

- The Memorial opened last year; Tower 1 at the World Trade Center is beginning to be leased and is almost topped out; the Fulton Transit Hub should be complete in 2014; and the WTC site will be open to the public soon as well.

We also are just seeing the roll out of the Zadroga Act and federal compensation for those in our community whose health was affected by 9/11.

Now is not the time to cut this community in half – not when we still have work left to be done.

Additionally, the argument that the "richer" areas should be separated out from the "poorer" neighborhoods in our district glosses over the fact that many neighborhoods downtown are economically mixed.. There are many who live in Tribeca who are middle class

Independence Plaza North, Southbridge Towers and Gateway are three examples of areas where very large concentrations of middle class families reside. These families rely on rent-stabilization agreements, Section-8 and other subsidized housing programs. The residents who live in these

building built the downtown community and fought for its first public schools. These are our artists living in lofts; they are our area's first pioneers.

That being said, any attempt to carve out a Chinatown/Lower East Side district will only reduce socio-economic diversity. This will double the number of housing projects in the district and create a district with a high concentration of poverty. Concentrating high needs in one district only ends up resulting in resources having to be spread more thinly. For this exact reason, I believe that District-1's income and ethnic diversity has been arguably one of its strengths.

I am also concerned about any plans that propose packing Asians and Latinos in one district. When I first testified twenty-two years ago at a Districting Commission hearing like this, we asked for Chinatown to remain intact and for there to be an opportunity for an Asian to be elected. We didn't ask for a guarantee. And at that time, we also respected the hopes and aspirations of the Latino community to have their own representation. At that time, three districts were drawn to create opportunities for the election of a Latino, Asian, and LGBT candidate. It took some time, people had to get registered, people had to get politically organized – but that is what we have today.

The “Unity Map proposal,” to combine Chinatown and the Lower East Side, is most likely to pit minority groups against one another, instead of providing the opportunity for the election of representatives from each group.

Furthermore, the dramatic redrawing of lines proposed in the “Unity Map” will **NOT** result in an equally dramatic increase in minorities in District-1. This proposal seeks to tear apart the Lower Manhattan community for a mere 1.5 percent increase in the Asian population in District-1, a 4.8 percent increase in the Latino population, and a 1.4 percent increase in the Black population. This is certainly not worth reducing minority opportunity for representation in Manhattan and cutting the Lower Manhattan community in half, especially since the demographics of lower Manhattan are likely to continue to change over the next ten years. In fact, according to census data, the fastest growing Asian population in Lower Manhattan was in Battery Park City and the Financial District.

In any case, the main point I want to make is that no matter how you redraw lines in lower Manhattan, you will never be able to guarantee the election of a minority candidate. The only way to guarantee the election of a minority candidate is to make sure minority community register to *vote*, are organized, and active in their local communities.

I support the Commission and the draft proposal for District-1. I ask you not to be swayed by whichever group yells the loudest, for they do not represent the true voice of the Lower Manhattan community. Contrary to what the critics want you to believe, these communities share

more in common than they count as differences. I firmly believe that in Lower Manhattan our diversity is our greatest strength, and I urge to to keep our boundaries intact as this process moves forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Contact:

Kelly Magee
Director of Communication
(212) 788-7259