

DEAR NEIGHBOR,

My office is here to serve you: giving you a place to seek help on everything from pothole repairs to fighting tenant harassment; voicing concerns in meetings and hearings with commissioners of city agencies; and when necessary, finding legislative solutions to our problems. In this newsletter you will find information on some of the issues and legislation my office has been working on over the past year.

This fall I'll do another series of **Council Member on the Corner** events, where you can stop by and tell me what's on your mind. Stay tuned to my website, helenrosenthal.com, for dates and locations.

Warmly,

Helen Rosenthal

If you missed
the PB Neighborhood
Assemblies held in
October, email
your idea to
district6pb@gmail.com
or call us at
(212) 873-0282.



2015 FALL NEWS BULLETIN NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL MEMBER

HELEN ROSENTHAL

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL • 250 BROADWAY • NEW YORK, NY 10007

6th District, Manhattan

563 Columbus Avenue
New York, NY 10024

Tel: (212) 873-0282

Helen@HelenRosenthal.com

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STREET SAFETY is of paramount importance, and I'm happy to report some advances in street redesigns and in our neighborhood.

By the time you receive this newsletter, the Department of Transportation will have built out **street safety improvements in Lincoln Square** and on Columbus Avenue from West 59th Street to West 69th Street—an area long known to be extremely dangerous. Changes include minimizing left-hand turns onto and off of Broadway, painted bicycle lanes, retimed crossing signals, and audible pedestrian signals.

The Central Park Loop is a great path for runners and cyclists and a necessary crossing for pedestrians enjoying the park, and I firmly believe that cars don't belong there. June 29, 2015 marked the first day of a **permanently car-free Central Park Loop north of 72nd Street.**

I will continue to work towards a fully car-free Central Park Loop. Many of you voiced concerns to my office about **cyclists breaking traffic laws** and riding the wrong way down a one-way street or even riding on the sidewalk. Our office made outreach efforts standing next to the bike lanes to educate the cyclists, and in the fall I will hold a delivery cyclist forum for local restaurant managers and their staff.

Current law requires delivery cyclists to wear a vest with the business name, but it is often too small to read while a cyclist is speeding by. I introduced legislation (Int. 863-2015) that would require the text on delivery cyclist vests to be reflective and at least two inches in height, which would **make lettering on bike vests more legible** so residents can file a complaint against businesses whose cyclists break traffic safety laws.



2015 FALL NEWS BULLETIN

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL MEMBER HELEN ROSENTHAL

6TH COUNCIL DISTRICT: 563 Columbus Avenue (at the corner of 87th St.) New York, New York 10024 • (212) 873-0282

THE ENVIRONMENT is a major priority of my office. When the City decided in 2013 that all of its vehicles should run on biodiesel blends (clean diesel with 5% – 20% biodiesel, usually made from vegetable oil), I was surprised to learn that school buses were left out. I introduced legislation (Int. 880-2015) to **require all New York City school buses to run on B5 biodiesel, or fuel with 5% biodiesel.**

Many of you ask what the City is doing in regards to **climate change** and its impact on our City's financial future. I welcome the dialogue and have participated in several 350NYC forums exploring the financial risks of fossil fuel investments in our City's pension funds. NYS Senator Liz Krueger recently introduced legislation requiring the NYS Comptroller to divest from fossil fuels over the next five years. I've written to the pension boards asking for a financial risk analysis of our current fossil fuel holdings, phasing-out fossil fuel investments, and phasing-in renewable energy investments. Given the collapse of the coal industry and the volatility of the fossil fuel industry, I believe it is critical that we study this market thoughtfully, prior to giving directions to our pension fund managers.



Helen, Melissa Elstein from the West 80's Neighborhood Association, and neighbors clean up Upper West Side tree beds for Love Your Tree Day (May 2, 2015)

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT is a long standing tradition of the Upper West Side, **but young New Yorkers have alarmingly low voter turnout.** Voters between the ages of 18 and 30 have the lowest voter turnout rate in New York City; a paltry 4 percent of this group voted in the 2009 general election. This past year, I worked with NYC Votes to bring a day of civic engagement and voter registration to public schools called **Student Voter Registration Day (SVRD)**. On March 20, 2015 15 Council Members partnered with nearly a dozen non-partisan voting organizations to hold SVRD at 25 schools in all five boroughs. The event brought civic education to over 3,000 students and registered over 2,200 of them that day. Upon my urging, the City Council funded a city-wide SVRD initiative, so every Council Member can participate in SVRD in 2016.

SMALL BUSINESSES are a big part of our neighborhood's identity, and they are under attack by rising property values and the influx of big box stores.

Manhattan businesses between 96th Street and Chambers Street pay an additional tax that no other New York City businesses face: the **Commercial Rent Tax**. Council Member Dan Garodnick and I introduced legislation (Int. 799-2015) to increase the threshold of businesses that receive the tax from \$250,000 to \$500,000 in annual rent, so smaller businesses can avoid this discriminatory tax.

When any city agency issues a violation, the case goes to the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH). Nearly half of these violations get dismissed, which is a waste of time and money for the City and for the individual or small business receiving the summons. On June 10, 2015 the Council passed my bill (Int. 456-2014) **requiring OATH to regularly issue data on its cases, including**

its rate of dismissals and analysis of the reasons behind the dismissals. This bill will help small businesses who face violations. The New York State Restaurant Association has already expressed appreciation on behalf of restaurateurs.

Protecting and creating good jobs, with fair wages and hours, continues to be a topic I hear about from constituents. **Worker cooperatives** can provide higher wages, better hours, and more job security to those in traditionally low-wage industries, such as housekeepers and caretakers. In March 2015, the Mayor signed into law my bill to require the City to report on the number of city contracts awarded to worker cooperatives and the number of worker cooperatives that received assistance from the Department of Small Business Services. Upon my urging, the Council also allocated \$2.1 million in Fiscal Year 2016 to create 40 new worker cooperatives and hundreds of new jobs.

HOUSING is a right, and hundreds of you have come to my office with reports of harassment from your landlord, poor living conditions, and the threat of eviction. My office holds **free monthly housing clinics** from October through June, and lawyers will be available to offer free consultations. Here are the topics for this year's season:

- OCTOBER 7, 2015:** Introduction to Rent Control and Rent Stabilization; Update on Rent Laws
- NOVEMBER 4, 2015:** Finding Affordable Housing; Roommates & Subletting
- DECEMBER 2, 2015:** HPs, Repairs, Bedbugs & Cockroaches
- JANUARY 6, 2016:** Non-Primary Residence
- FEBRUARY 3, 2016:** Harassment & City-Wide Housing Related Campaigns
- MARCH 2, 2016:** DHCR Overview, including MCIs and IAs; Preferential Rent; Reduction in Services
- APRIL 6, 2016:** Housing Court 101
- MAY 4, 2016:** SCRIE and DRIE
- JUNE 1, 2016:** Succession Rights

All housing clinics take place on the first Wednesday of the month at Goddard Riverside Community Center, 593 Columbus Avenue (between 88th and 89th streets) from 6pm to 8pm.

At City Hall I am working to protect the housing stock. When a landlord uses an apartment as a hotel room that takes away a home from a New Yorker. Upon my and Council Member Jumaane Williams' urging, the City allocated an **additional \$1.2 million to combat illegal hotels**. In addition, Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez and I introduced legislation to require the city to track illegal hotel violations and to increase fines for illegal hotels. Paying violations should not be the "cost of doing business" for landlords who illegally rent apartments for hotel use. I introduced legislation (Int. 780-2015) that would **require all building supers to have a photo of themselves placed in a public area of the building** in direct response to tenants coming into my office with tales of being harassed by someone claiming to be the building super. The bill will also help emergency personnel, who need to find the super immediately to enter an apartment.

I worked closely with my colleagues to **keep low income seniors and people with disabilities in their homes**. I sponsored and cosponsored bills to remove the rent freeze "sunset provision," so the newly expanded income cap for seniors and people with disabilities receiving a rent freeze would be permanent; expand the income cap for the property tax exemption for seniors; and expand the income cap threshold for renters who have disabilities. The Council also passed my Resolution calling on the State to pass A. 398, which will provide rent control tenants relief from high rent increases, and the bill to extend rent stabilization.

Our neighborhood is lucky to have incredibly active and constructive public housing (NYCHA) resident leaders, and they face an uphill battle as they work through NYCHA's bureaucracy and lack of funding. Over the past year I have shared their frustration, as we worked with NYCHA to improve security through camera installation as well as fund repairs of on-site playgrounds. I allocated **\$1.05 million in capital funds for public housing**, including a renovation of the Barrels Playground, a senior center renovation at Harborview Terrace, security cameras at Wise Rehab, and age-friendly first-floor apartments at Amsterdam Houses. I also created a **NYCHA hotline** in my office, **(212) 873-0282 x.205**, so NYCHA residents can get the support for repairs and other issues they face.

QUALITY OF LIFE has always been paramount to Upper West Siders. Many of you contacted my office about the **homeless**. Recently the community, local religious institutions, homeless outreach organizations, and our local police came together to discuss strategies for dealing with this issue at a local level. In addition, the Mayor devoted more resources for addressing the chronically homeless and the mental health issues that plague many of these individuals. Homelessness is a complicated problem, but we are all working on it together so people get the treatment they need and our streets feel safe and open for everyone.

Many of you expressed frustration about overflowing trash bins. I see it, too, and am in touch with the Sanitation Department as to how we can resolve this issue. I hope that this, along with **enhanced services from the Doe Fund**, will leave us with cleaner streets.

I also heard from many of you that the **trash on our streets** and sidewalks has become a noticeable problem. In May I joined the West 80's Neighborhood Association to hold the first ever **Love Your Tree Day** event: an evening of talks and a day of volunteering to clean and

plant flowers in the tree beds that line our streets. We cleaned dozens of tree beds, and I look forward to holding the event again next spring.

Rats have long been a scourge in our neighborhood, but while building owners with multiple rat violations are required to pay a fine, there is no requirement that they change their behavior. I introduced legislation (Int. 879-2015) that would require building owners with repeated rat violations to use **rat-resistant garbage bins**. Rats are able to chew through the soft plastic of garbage bags, and these bins, made of hard plastic or metal with a tight-fitting lid, would keep rats away. The bill had a first hearing in September, and I'm hopeful that with the help of the Department of Health, we will pass it into law.

Helicopter noise is another quality of life issue about which so many of you have contacted my office. It's a nuisance to the Upper West Side, but we're not alone: helicopter noise impacts everyone who lives, works, or uses public parks along the helicopter tour route, including residents of the Financial District, southwest Brooklyn, Staten Island, and New Jersey. Several colleagues and I worked together to cosponsor

QUALITY OF LIFE CONTINUED...

legislation (Int. 859-2015 and Int. 858-2015) to regulate tourist helicopters based on noise.

In other public safety news, **911 calls along the West Side of Manhattan were regularly bouncing to a New Jersey operator**, with people on both ends of the call not immediately realizing what had happened, which delayed the arrival of an ambulance. I worked with NYPD 24th Precinct Captain Marlon Larin to bring the issue to Verizon and NYPD Inspector Richard Napolitano. As a result of their efforts, the problem is now fixed.

EQUALITY under the law is the goal of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but 25 years after its passage, people with disabilities continue to face barriers to the City's civic and cultural life. In August I introduced legislation (co-sponsored by Council Member Ritchie Torres) to **expand access to people with disabilities**. The bills would:

1. Require an ADA coordinator at every relevant City agency (Int. 881-2015)
2. Require publicity materials for every event held or sponsored by the City to include icons about the location's accessibility, and a contact name, phone number, and deadline to ask for reasonable accommodations (Int. 883-2015), and
3. Install hearing loops in spaces where City government meetings are held for the public (Int. 882-2015)

The New York City Fire Department (FDNY) has a shockingly low rate of women firefighters: less than a half of one percent. Meanwhile, 13 percent of San Francisco's firefighters are women, 15 percent of active duty U.S. military members are women, and 17 percent of New York police officers are women. The Council passed my and Council Member Elizabeth Crowley's legislation (Int. 579-2014) **requiring the FDNY to publish online the demographics of people applying to become firefighters**. The FDNY will also be required to post details on their efforts to recruit women and minorities.

In the pursuit of **equality and fair treatment for all**, transparency is a valuable tool to hold our government accountable. Nearly 40 percent of the City's inmates are in jail because they cannot afford bail. Even



Helen greets Monica Bartley from the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY) at her accessibility press conference (August 13, 2015). Credit: John McCarten for the New York City Council

relatively short stays in jail can wreak havoc on the lives of detained men and women, so in September the City Council passed my bill (Int. 753-2015) requiring the City to **post an online report identifying the length of stay and bail amount of all people held in City jails**.

PARKS are the gem of the Upper West Side. We are so fortunate to be bordered east and west by two great parks and to have committed conservancies that help run them. This year I allocated **\$765,000 in capital funds for parks**, including repairs to the path around the Crab Apple Grove in Riverside Park, landscaping Clinton Cove in Hudson River Park at 55th Street, and safety measures for pedestrians and bicyclists along the Hudson River Greenway.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS are the foundation of our community, and I am grateful to our active parent leaders on the Community Education Council (CEC), Presidents' Council, and those on each school's Parent Association. They work hard, and our excellent schools are models of their commitment. I was thrilled to see the new District 3 middle school, West End Secondary School, open this fall in the old Beacon High School building. However, due to a lack of planning by the Department of Education, public schools in our district find themselves once again facing severe overcrowding. While a new school is coming online in the Riverside Center complex, the area will go through a rezoning process to help address overcrowding.

Standardized testing continues to be an issue. As our colleges move away from considering standardized tests for admissions criteria, it raises the specter of how tests are used at all grade levels. I believe tests are best used as diagnostic tools to help a teacher gauge the needs of each student. However, to the extent that standardized tests become a distraction for students, parents should know that they have the right to **opt their children out of standardized tests**. I'm pleased that the Council passed my and Council Member Daniel Dromm's Resolution calling on the Department of Education (DOE) to inform families at the start of every school year of their right to opt out of standardized tests.

For years parents have spoken to me about the lack of enrichment programming in our schools, so I allocated **\$300,000 in expense funds** for youth arts, education, and after school programs, including digital literacy programming, guidance for applying to college, tutoring, tennis, and basketball.

Our neighborhood also faces issues of outdated infrastructure, so I allocated **\$2.45 million in capital funds** for schools, including playground renovations for P.S. 75, a science center for P.S. 199, gym and library upgrades at John Jay College, and computer labs and technology upgrades for several public schools.