

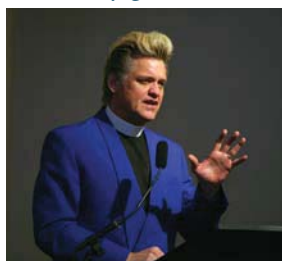
Mayoral Candidates on Preservation

Since the priorities of the mayor most directly dictate the agendas of the city's agencies and authorities, HDC invited all five main mayoral candidates to present to Conference attendees their thoughts on preservation in New York City. Three accepted and attended the March 7 event: City Councilmember **Tony Avella** (D), **Bill "Reverend Billy" Talen** (Green) and **Congressman Anthony Weiner** (D). **Comptroller William Thompson** (D) declined to attend, though his campaign office has since contacted HDC to discuss the city's preservation issues. Mayor Michael Bloomberg (R) did not respond to HDC's invitation.

HDC Executive Director Simeon Bankoff posed the same questions to each candidate in attendance. Portions of their responses are quoted below. To listen to their appearances in full, please visit www.hdc.org/Conference2009.htm#audio

As mayor, what will you do to stem the inappropriate development which is ruining our city's historic neighborhoods?

Avella: "Reforming the public review process, reforming the Board of Standards & Appeals, but actually I'm going to eliminate the Board of Standards & Appeals, the agency will be gone. The legitimate functions that the Board of Standards & Appeals has can easily be handled by two other agencies, the Department of City Planning and the Department of Buildings. That old boys' network for developers has to absolutely go."



That neighborhood is an underexploited market that they move in and colonize, that basic economic, political equation must end."

Weiner: "We have to do that

balance better, but I also think we have to do it not one building at a time. I really do think that we need to have a conversation about what kind of a city we want to have. Part of the challenge that we have is we have this binary conversation: Should this go here at this time, yes or no? When I think we'd have a much more healthy conversation to say, What type of a community do we want to construct?"

As mayor, how will you balance the economic and housing needs of New York City without sacrificing the social and spiritual necessities of maintaining the character of our neighborhoods?



Avella: "I think the first thing you do is making sure that neighborhoods are properly zoned, so that where a neighborhood needs to be contextually zoned or downzoned to protect the quality of the neighborhood, we do that [...] The second thing is telling the developers and working with them, saying listen, here's where we're doing preservation, but we'll give you opportunities in conjunction and consultation with neighborhoods as to where to do development."

Talen: "The way we measure housing units and the way that we measure dollars exchanged, these indices are suspect. Prosperity comes from a healthy neighborhood. In a healthy neighborhood, we take care of each other [...] People are making their economies right now out of successful neighborhoods that have that human stamp."

Weiner: "I think that we have the opportunity to make more fuller use of public housing resources. I think that we have to do a much better job in cataloguing and making use of the brownfields in existence in the city that just sit as sores in our communities for no better reason than just we can't untie the legal thicket of who is responsible to deal with it [...] New York City is what it is because of the nature of its neighborhoods."

As mayor, how will you make the agencies responsible for the city's physical fabric— the Landmarks Preservation Commission, the Department of City Planning, the Department of Buildings and the Parks Department — more transparent in their decisions and more responsive to ordinary New Yorkers?

Avella: "If [a developer with known building permit infractions] goes and buys another piece of property, and submits a permit request, the city will give him another permit. How stupid is this, as a city, that we don't say to these unscrupulous developers, 'That's it, you're done. You so proved yourself to be incapable of following the law, that we now are prohibiting you from doing construction in the city of New York.'"

Talen: "It seems to me that the preservation movement in this city, where the movement began in this city, has always been at odds with the fact that year in and year out our biggest donors to the major candidates are real estate speculators. Not just the top donor, but the top ten donors. That must end [...] The government's job is to defend neighborhoods; the government's job is to defend the memory of our city."



Weiner: "I think that these infrastructures are intentionally forbidding to normal citizens [...] I would livestream all of the meetings. I would let people participate.

I would make sure that the records are not only put online, but digitized. Which means not just making a .pdf that you can scroll through and read, but you digitize it so people can insert comments and insert commentary, and you can aggregate people's thoughts in a way that makes it more of a community square."

Editor's Note: After his appearance at the HDC Conference in March, Congressman Weiner issued a statement announcing that he will not run for mayor in the November 2009 election. 🗳️

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