



Office of the Borough Presidents

The Bronx · Brooklyn · Manhattan · Queens · Staten Island

New York City

July 14, 2025

Charter Revision Commission

City of New York

1 Centre Street, 20th Floor

New York, NY 10007

RE: Unified Opposition to the Proposed Elimination of Topographic Functions from the Borough Presidents' Offices

Dear Members of the Charter Revision Commission,

As the duly elected Borough Presidents of the City of New York, we write in united and unequivocal opposition to the proposal in the *Charter Revision Commission Interim Report* and *Proposed Amendments to the New York City Charter*, both dated July 1, 2025, to eliminate the topographic responsibilities from our offices. This recommendation reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature, purpose, and value of this function and ignores the very real consequences its removal would have on neighborhoods across all five boroughs.

The Charter Revision Commission frames this proposal as an administrative streamlining measure yet fails to demonstrate how transferring topographic duties to another agency will improve efficiency, accuracy, or responsiveness. In fact, the Commission's report offers no evidence of systemic failure or inefficiency within the current borough-based Topographic Bureaus. On the contrary, these functions are a vital part of the City's land use, zoning, and infrastructure ecosystem, and are executed with the local precision, institutional

knowledge, and community responsiveness that only borough-based governance can provide.

Stripping this function from our respective offices would:

1. Erode Local Authority and Oversight

Topographic review is a critical tool for evaluating the impacts of land use decisions on the built environment. The mapping of streets, public places, easements, and utilities must reflect not just technical requirements but also local realities, many of which are not visible from citywide maps or planning frameworks. Without this function, the Borough Presidents' ability to engage in meaningful land use review would be substantially weakened. This work directly ties into reporting, such as the Borough Office's *Annual Development Reports*, which help determine and influence where resources should be allocated across each of the five boroughs.

2. Disrupt a System That Works

The Commission claims this change will reduce redundancy, yet there is no duplication today. Borough Topographic Bureaus work in coordination with, not in opposition to, city agencies. Eliminating them would only shift the burden onto centralized departments already stretched thin, increasing delays and decreasing responsiveness, particularly for communities where infrastructure is aging or geographically complex.

The timeframes and statistics listed in the report are grossly inaccurate for how the Borough Offices function. We have staffs that turn around City Map requests, address verifications, and street status letters with incredible efficiency due to their accumulated knowledge of their respective boroughs that could not be replicated if they were centralized. The drawn-out timeframes for City Map applications, that are stated in the report, are a function of unresponsive applicants and incomplete work that is sent to the Topographic Bureaus. The Topographic Bureaus turn around these revisions very quickly rather than getting backlogged into an agency queue of other projects. To speak of efficiencies is to assume DCP could do it quicker and DCP has proven through this very *Charter Revision Commission Interim Report* that their pre-certification process has its own inefficiencies due to the large pipeline of projects they process, whereas the Borough Presidents' Topographic Bureaus are able to expedite and streamline these City Map requests.

3. Centralize Decision-Making Without Accountability

Topographic review is often the only layer of technical scrutiny that ensures infrastructure decisions are not only compliant but context-sensitive. Consolidating these responsibilities into citywide agencies would make it harder for residents and stakeholders to access

information, raise concerns, and engage with decision-makers who understand their neighborhoods. Our Topographic Bureaus have office hours that allow anyone from the public to come in and speak to someone who will assist them immediately. This function would be removed if centralized at DCP, and public assistance would become far more cumbersome and significantly delayed. This is directly relevant for address applications because many homeowners are the ones who file these applications and they have limited knowledge on how to navigate a complex agency, which may require them to hire consultants, adding time and cost to a relatively simple process today. Each Topographic Bureau receives hundreds of applications each year; altogether, the five boroughs receive approximately 3,000 address applications per year, averaging between 10 to 15 applications per business day, many of which are from residents without technical skills and require assistance. Centralizing this work would make it difficult for these homeowners to receive that assistance as well as create additional time and cost burdens compared to each borough being able to provide direct support.

4. Undermine the Charter’s Promise of Borough Representation

Topographic responsibilities are not just administrative; they are foundational to our role as borough advocates. This function ensures that decisions about physical development are not made in isolation from the communities they affect. Its removal represents a step backward in the evolution of local democracy and cuts against the stated goal of improving government responsiveness.

5. Ignore the Real Need: Modernization, Not Elimination

If there are opportunities to digitize, coordinate, or better integrate topographic work with broader planning systems, we welcome that conversation. But modernization should not be conflated with elimination. Reform should build capacity, not erase it. Our Topographic Bureaus have regularly worked together with agencies such as DCP, DEP, DOB, DOT, DPR, and DDC for decades, and we will continue embracing those relationships and working to make our systems more efficient, but any problems identified in the report would not be fixed by centralizing this work. Additionally, the City’s Administrative Code has limits on how the Topographic Bureaus are able to modernize and updating this language would allow for some additional positive changes.

The Charter is not just a governing document; it is a statement of values. It must affirm the importance of local voice, technical expertise, and democratic checks and balances. The removal of topographic functions runs counter to all three.

We call on the Commission to rescind this proposal and recognize the indispensable role that Borough Presidents play in shaping the physical, social, and environmental fabric of this city. The work we do through our Topographic Bureaus is not obsolete, it is essential.

Sincerely,



Vanessa L. Gibson
Bronx Borough President




Antonio Reynoso
Brooklyn Borough President



Mark Levine
Manhattan Borough President



Donovan Richards
Queens Borough President



Vito Fossella
Staten Island Borough President