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Wednesday, May 30, 2018

A Speaker Talks: Corey Johnson on District 3, Chelsea, Future of City

Added by **Scott Stiffler** on January 17, 2018.

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The people that you meet, when you're walking down the street; a Speaker is a person in your neighborhood. Chelsea resident Corey Johnson, headed to the subway for his commute to City Hall. |

Photo by William Alatrisme

BY WINNIE McCROY | On the evening of Wed., Jan. 3, just a few hours after being elected 48-1 as New York's new City Council Speaker, it made sense that Corey Johnson would want to celebrate with friends. And he did — by heading over to Mount Sinai West for the monthly full board meeting of Community Board 4 (CB4).

"As your councilmember, I want to thank you for your friendship. I also want to let you know that I'm not going anywhere," said Johnson at that meeting. "I still live in Chelsea. I don't own a car. I do my own grocery shopping. I walk in sweatpants and a baseball cap down the street. I

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look forward to staying in touch with all of you. Even with this new role of leading the Council, I'm not going to forget the neighborhoods that elected me, the people who elected me. I'm not going to stray too far away. You have to remember where you came from — and I will."

FROM OUR SISTER NEWSPAPERS

THE VILLAGER
Johnson, 35, was raised in a working-class Massachusetts household and made national headlines in 2006 when, as captain of his high school football team, he very briefly became a Chelsea resident since 2001, he moved to New York City as a 19-year-old. It rained on their parade, but they danced on

In 2011, Johnson was elected to chair of CB4. He narrated his nominating to be the 3rd District Council Member. We got the ball rolling; How Pr. 40 fight brought us Hudson River Park

From splintered piers to fancy park of today, we've come a long way

Keeping cool on the West Side, 1940s style

Fish, forests and fields coming to Tribeca pier

During a Jan. 9 interview at City Hall with NYC Community Media papers in **DOWNTOWN EXPRESS**, **Manhattan Express**, Johnson assured Chelsea Now that his first obligation remained to his constituents; the 170,000 people who live in District 3

Police Blotter: Week of May 24
tenant association meetings; and local events.

Cacophony of colors brings harmony at Governors Island Holi Hai celebration

Meatpacking District, Chelsea, Flatiron, Hell's Kitchen, Clinton, a little bit of Si

Wave vs. glacier: Slow pace of resiliency plans will leave Downtown

at risk for many years to come

Terminal: The Javits Center, the Whitney Museum and Sheridan Square

Once upon a moral panic...

"I've a dilemma about a big decision and I think it has bigger challenges"

All booked up: CB1 worries zoning change will push more hotels into

crowded Downtown

GAY CITY NEWS

Sheltering Homeless Youth 21-24 Gets \$1MM in New City Budget

Connie Kurtz, Lesbian Activist, Artist, Dies at 82

Albany LGBTQI Advocacy Day Draws 250

Band of Brothers

HOP: Nabe Complaints Led to New Parade Route

second only to

EAST VILLAGER NEWS

Among powerful friends, Chin enters her second term

Top cop says special unit, outreach can cut thefts

Muscle-headed gym keeps flouting regs with illegal signage

Judge says city broke the law by approving N.Y.U. superblocks plan

De Blasio seems on same page with evicted news vendor

Port Authority Bus

In some ways, because

ix to my district brings

stricts don't have."

Brandishing a sheaf of papers, Johnson began stringing out a long list of his legislative priorities,

among them improving the city's parks, schools, transportation issues, infrastructure projects,

land use deals, and subway upgrades. He also promised that he would not neglect his

constituents in District 3, for whom he has been a vocal and active presence in issues of

landmarking, traffic safety, and tenant advocacy.

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From July 2013: CB4's Corey Johnson (center) and other board members at Fulton Auditorium. Johnson stopped by the Jan. full board meeting of CB4 on the night of his election to the speakership, thanking former colleagues and pledging allegiance to the neighborhood. | File photo by Winnie McCroy

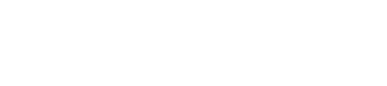
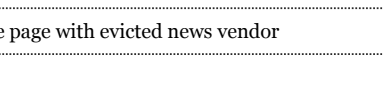
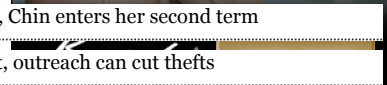
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR DISTRICT 3 | The City Council Speaker job comes with a wide scope of responsibilities, including serving as a check against the mayor, approving the city budget, receiving submissions of proposed legislation and setting agendas for and presiding at City Council meetings. But Johnson assured his constituents that these new duties wouldn't affect his office's ability to get things done in his home district.

Tapping Matt Green, his longtime Deputy Chief of Staff, Community Affairs to run things in District 3, Johnson assured that he would hire additional people to work in his district office, with Green saying, "For staffing, as mentioned by the Speaker when we met [Green was present

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on Jan. 9], we aren't going to lose focus on district issues even as we deal with citywide issues. We're excited to have more resources and staff to address pressing needs of the district." They will soon announce more about the increased resources for the district office.

But Chelsea Now readers know that Green (now working under the title Deputy Chief of Staff, District Director) has been a tireless advocate for Chelsea residents facing harassment from landlords looking to ditch existing rent-stabilized tenants, spruce up the units a bit, then jack up the prices to market rate.

Green has worked to help tenants facing "harassment by neglect" via a lack of cooking gas, heat and/or hot water, like those Chelsea Now reported on at 311 W. 21st St., 206 Ninth Ave., and 336 W. 17th St. (see "[Knowledgeable Tenants Challenge Lack of Utilities, Shady Landlord Tactics](#)"). Johnson's office said the increasing number of incidents in individual buildings in Chelsea over the past four years are all part of a wave of gentrification that is now being seen across New York City.

"Chelsea started to gentrify earlier than other areas of the city, so those development pressures and harassment issues started earlier [here] than they probably did in other neighborhoods and boroughs. So, we're probably going to see more on a case-by-case basis where we have to work with tenants and buildings," said Johnson. "Matt and Erik [Bottcher, Chief of Staff] let me know literally when something happens in a building, because sometimes I will call the [Department of Buildings] commissioner myself or show up at the building myself. I will continue to do that."

Johnson will rely on Green to handle individual incidents in District 3, and is "not going to lose sight of helping my district." But pointing to these housing-related issues as "the number one issue every single councilmember during the Speaker race told me they deal with," Johnson vowed that his office would continue to put the pressure on agencies like the NYC Department of Buildings (DOB), NYC Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA), and New York State Homes and Community Renewal (DHCR), which handles rent-controlled apartments.

He also plans to set up a centralized way that the City Council as a body can serve as a resource for individual councilmembers to get problems in their districts resolved through these agencies. This means pushing legislation, protecting tenants through the land use process, using oversight powers with individual agencies through budget hearings, and ensuring budget resources are allocated to city agencies that work on these specific issues.



From Sept. 2016: Matt Green with a model of a raised pedestrian crosswalk, one of the winning projects from District 3's first year of Participatory Budgeting. Even with his expanded responsibilities, Green will continue to oversee the PB process. | File photo by Sean Egan

PRESERVING OUR HISTORY | Following in Quinn's footsteps, Johnson has worked hard during his time in City Council to ensure that District 3's historic landmarks are protected. Part of this is his efforts to preserve and expand the Special West Chelsea District, running from W. 15th St. between Ninth and Tenth Aves.; West 24th and 25th St. between 11th and 12th Aves.; and W. 29th and 30th St. between 11th and 12th Aves. He also fought to get individual buildings landmarked for preservation.

And he has found success: The third council district now has more landmarked locales than just

about any other district in Manhattan, including the Chelsea Historic District, Gansevoort Market Historic District, Greenwich Village Historic District, the South Village Historic District, the Charlton-King-Vandam Historic District, and part of the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District.

“I’m also really committed to working with Ken Lustbader [co-director of NYC LGBT Historic Sites], who has done a great job at landmarking individual LGBT landmarks in both Chelsea and Greenwich Village, and across the city. The mayor a few years ago landmarked Stonewall, and Julius’ bar needs that status as well, because of its history.”

Saying he would need to first consult with building owners, he rattled off a list of perspective sites for landmarking, including the brownstone in the West 20s where GMHC was founded, the building on W. 29th St. that is the only known site of the Underground Railroad in Manhattan (located within the Lamartine Place Historic District), and lesbian poet Audre Lorde’s home in Staten Island.

“As the city becomes more gentrified, we need to ensure that these places are protected, not just in my district, but in sites in the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island,” he said. “Every borough has these cultural landmarks that deserve respectful, proper recognition and I support doing that in a greater way as Speaker.”



L to R, from NYC Community Media’s Jan. 9 meeting at City Hall: Speaker Corey Johnson, NYC Council Communications Director Robin Levine, Deputy Chief of Staff, District Director Matt Green, reporter Winnie McCroy, Lincoln Anderson (editor, The Villager), and Scott Stiffler (editor, Chelsea Now). | Photo by William Alatraste

KEEPING DISTRICT 3 SAFE | Between commuters hurrying to and from Port Authority and Penn Station, charter buses dropping off their charges on Seventh Ave., and trucks delivering supplies to area stores and restaurants, District 3 includes some of the city’s busiest streets. Johnson worked hard with CB4 Chair Christine Berthet to track and mitigate pedestrian and cyclist safety in the district. But after three traffic fatalities last summer, more work needs to be done.

“Chelsea Now did a great job **covering these very tragic incidents**,” said Johnson. “We saw the first Citi Bike fatality on West 26th between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, a young father with two kids, horrible. Then we saw another incident with a senior citizen on West 29th, an older gentleman hit by a bus and killed.”

That’s one reason Johnson supports designated bike lines — from the new bike lane on Seventh Ave. to the city’s first protected bike lanes created six or seven years ago on Eighth and Ninth Aves — even though many constituents complain to him about them, because people’s lives are on the line.

“We need to continue to protect pedestrians and cyclists,” he continued. “The motto goes: Pedestrians first, cyclists second, vehicles last. That’s the order of priority in protection as it relates to making our streets safer.”

His views toward lessening city traffic diverge from those of Mayor Bill de Blasio, as Johnson is a vocal supporter of congestion pricing. He supports the Move New York plan on lessening the tolls on outer borough crossings to create some equity there, while at the same time tolling the East River bridges, and imposing a surcharge on for-hire vehicles which would go to the MTA to invest in mass transit.

“The number one thing we have to do as it relates to congestion and air quality, and pedestrian and cyclist safety, is we have to decrease and disincentivize cars coming into Manhattan,” said

Johnson.

Johnson said that he supports the city making a substantial investment to the MTA with the following caveats: accountability for where exactly the money is being spent with funds not siphoned off to other authorities or the state; setting up timelines; and managing projects in a responsible way so the cost of tax dollars and city levy is being used appropriately.

“The subway is probably the most egalitarian thing about New York City: the rich, the poor, people of color, LGBTs, the young, the old — everyone uses the subway,” said Johnson, who vows to continue taking the subway to work. “It’s the thing that affects most New Yorkers on a day-to-day basis. I am not caught up in any political fight related to the subway; I am all about improving service on the short term, and coming up with a long-term plan to invest in the MTA responsibly and for the future.”



When not dancing in the streets, as he did at the 2014 LGBT Pride March, Johnson might be found on Instagram, lip-synching to the work of various pop divas (@coreyjohnsonnyc). | Gay City News file photo by Donna Aceto

GOVERNING WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE | “My mantra going into the new year was to do the most good for the people who need it the most,” said Johnson. “This is a lot of responsibility, but also a lot of opportunity. When I ran for City Council in 2013, it was a hard-fought, difficult race. But when I won, I did not feel any different. Today, six days on the job as Speaker, I don’t feel any different. The only weird thing is to have a police detail, a reminder that there’s always someone following you around. But I feel like the same guy who just wants to do a great job.”

Johnson said that while it’s too early yet to set his sights on the future, he does intend to work hard and continue serving in public office. He vows to completely support the body of the City Council, while at the same time continuing to be part of the resistance movement, fighting for a better country for all Americans. And above all, he promises to continue working tirelessly for the people in the city, especially his neighbors in District 3.

“Every day while I’m shaving, I look into the mirror with a clear conscience,” said Johnson. “And every night, I put my head on my pillow with a clear conscience. I have a clear conscience about my track record, about my experience, and about my life’s work. And if you keep that core, you’ll do a good job as an elected official.”

The District Office of Councilmember Corey Johnson is located at 224 W. 30th St., Suite 1206 (btw. Seventh & Eighth Aves.). For more information, call 212-564-7757 or visit coreyjohnson.nyc.

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January 29, 2018 at 3:21 pm

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Eugene Stein ·
Hunter College

As a major series in the New York Times has pointed out - probably the major force making New York City great in so many ways has been our transportation system, especially the subway. Our subway system, as Speaker Johnson rightly points out is the one thing that almost everyone has in common. And yet, as we all know, it is on the verge of breakdown, with a lack of upkeep in the past and a bleak future. The fares are already a burden to workers who must use the system daily; add to that, the burden of unreliability and danger.

The subway was a major draw for businesses, educational and cultur... [See More](#)

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Speaker Johnson, Matt Green and the District Office Staff have been doing an excellent job. My family and I would like to thank them for their service!

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