

# New 10th Pct. CO Makes Public Debut, Community Council Pres Makes Zoom Pledge

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Far left, Crime Prevention Officer Jarett Di Lorenzo looks on as the 10th Precinct's new CO, Captain Robert Gault, introduces himself. | Photo by Winnie McCroy

**BY WINNIE McCROY** | About 20 community members and almost an equal number of local law enforcement members gathered at Penn South on the early evening of September 30, for the 10th Precinct Community Council meeting—an

opportunity for area residents and business owners to hear the latest crime statistics, interact with the NYPD, and voice matters of concern.

Normally held on the last Wednesday of the month, with the exception of its annual June-August summer recess, this was the first Council meeting since February 28, after which COVID-19 concerns put the public gathering on hold. (In the months to follow, the 10th Precinct's then-Commanding Officer, Deputy Inspector Kevin J. Coleman, availed himself to Chelsea Community News for a series of Q&As covering what one would normally hear from the man behind the podium).

The September 30 in-person Council meeting was the first opportunity for members of the public to interact the 10th Precinct's new Commanding Officer, Captain Robert Gault, whose first day on the job was Monday, September 21. (Click [here](#) to read our account of DI Coleman's departure and Captain Gault's arrival.)

"The only crime that is up right now is burglaries, which has risen 111 percent," said Captain Gault, to the surprise of many. After reading the laundry list of recent crime stats—many of which were very low compared to the same period last year—he introduced himself to the crowd and expressed his eagerness to work with the community. (As DI Coleman noted several times over the course of his Q&As, the lack of criminals and potential victims on the street played a role in lowering felony assault and robbery stats, just as the opening of Hudson Yards accounted for a spike in shoplifting arrests.)

"I was a sergeant here 10 years ago, so I know this is a great place with great people, and I look forward to being with you for the next two or three years," said Captain Gault.

The native New Yorker grew up on Long Island, to a family of public servants. He attended Stony Brook and Fordham University, served at the 42nd Precinct in the South Bronx, and later, in police headquarters. Captain Gault worked in a newly formed unit called Strategic Communications, and built out a lot of the community partner programs through social media and video production.

Captain Gault eventually became Commanding Officer of the Times Square Unit—his last assignment before arriving in Chelsea. His former proximity to Midtown affords him a lot of familiarity with the local players. Gault brings 22 years of experience to the job, with eight years as a captain. This will serve him

well as he deals with the escalating quality of life crimes throughout Midtown and Chelsea.



The meeting drew about 20 local residents—including NYC Council Speaker Corey Johnson’s Chief of Staff, Erik Bottcher (background, in black). | Photo by Winnie McCroy

## **Sex, Drugs & Twerk ‘N’ Roll**

Local residents were not shy to begin listing the many quality of life crimes they see happening on their block. Building owner Kalliopi Giannatos said when she first moved to Chelsea in 1992, she was relieved to see the prostitution and drug use was waning. Things are going downhill again, she noted, with drug users and johns heavily populating an area with five schools.

“There are fights right outside my door. I’m a small landlord who pays huge taxes, and I’m afraid to go out at night. And now, there are about to be thousands of students returning to school in an area with a concentration of porno shops,” said Giannatos, adding, “And the guy who owns the Sexy Boutique and Rainbow Station always has dozens of people waiting for their chance to go in. He sends them a text message and a minute later they go in... Prostitution is illegal; can’t you do something?”

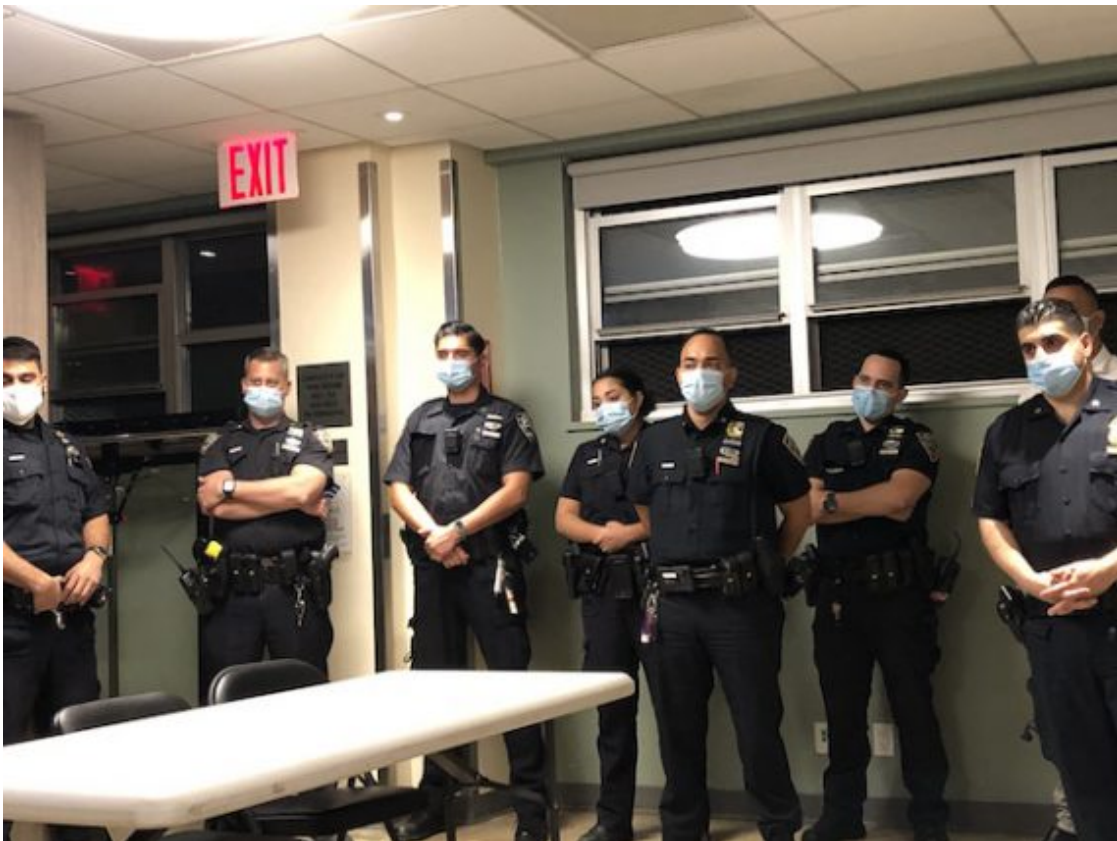
Captain Gault said that while people have a First Amendment right to gather on

the street, his officers would look into any crimes or open-air drug use that might be occurring.

“And prostitution is illegal,” he added. “We have a Vice Unit, and if there is prostitution going on there, we can do observations. We would generate what is called a ‘kite,’ take down as much information as we can, and alert the Vice Unit to open an investigation.”

When Giannatos asked whether loiterers sitting on her steps constituted trespassing, Captain Gault said that in order to arrest someone on that charge, the building owner would need to come out and give a verbal warning, then be willing to go on record and sign an affidavit. Giannatos asked whether posting signage outside could constitute that “verbal warning.”

Said Crime Prevention Officer Jarett Di Lorenzo, “Unfortunately, they just discontinued the program where building owners could sign up with the DA to allow us to enforce a trespassing charge without having a conversation with owners each time. But even then, the owner would have had to be in touch with Community Affairs or their NCO [Neighborhood Coordination Officer] to register that complaint.



CO Gault brought a full cadre of local Neighborhood Coordination Officers (NCOs) with him, to hear

concerns about hot spots in their patrol areas. | Photo by Winnie McCroy

Local NCOs Samuel Baez-Veras and Ricardo Roman said they engaged in a multi-agency operation last year targeting Rainbow Station and another local store, as well as increasing foot patrol and criminal court summonses for littering, jaywalking, and “anything else we saw, to deter the knuckleheads over there,” said Baez-Veras.

“I am not here to impose my morality or values on people, because we are all adults, but that one owner of Rainbow Station and Sexy Boutique is creating all these situations,” said Giannatos. “[His patrons] ring all our bells and enter the building, they turn our hallways into a brothel.”

Officer Baez-Veras advised folks not to open the door or buzz in anyone unexpected and promised to disseminate tips for preventing the rash of package thefts plaguing the area.

Sometimes, said Pamela Wolff—a public member of Manhattan Community Board 4 and a member of the Council of Chelsea Block Associations—folks will bust door locks to steal packages, have sex, or set up camp in the building’s basement. Gault said building property managers would need to take a stronger role in installing surveillance cameras and contacting the police.

Longtime resident Ray has lived in Chelsea for 50 years, and often enjoys dinner at The Dish restaurant (201 Eighth Ave. btw. W. 20th & 21st Sts.). He said the owner, a friend of his, has become very frustrated with the traffic from the nearby porn shop.

“It’s hard for him to be conducting business with the vileness going on next door. The fighting, language, and carrying on is so offensive and he’s just trying to conduct business,” said Ray, who launched into an anecdote about being at The Dish when a police car pulled up to a nearby deli. He said he asked the cops to get rid of some of these loiterers and was told they could not do anything about it per people’s First Amendment rights. “But what about the rights,” asked Ray, “of the people sitting at this business?”

“Then a flamboyant gentleman in drag brushed by the policemen twice, sat on the table and began bouncing up and down, twerking on the table,” recalled Ray. “I said to myself, ‘Where are the civil rights of this poor owner? What about my right to have a peaceful dinner?’ ”



“I hear you,” said Captain Gault. “But based on what you told me, twerking doesn’t meet the elements of a crime. If the table was broken during his twerking, and a police officer was an eyewitness to the crime, and the owner said he wanted the police to do something about it, we could charge him. But somebody’s bad manners are not a crime.”

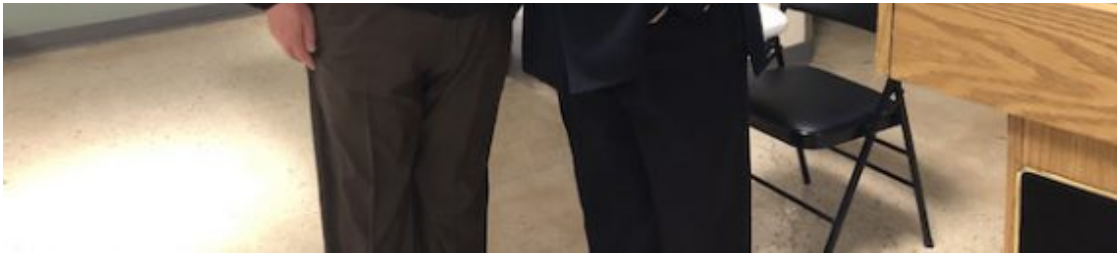
Still, Captain Gault said the presence of more uniformed officers might act as a deterrent. He promised to discuss additional deterrents with the community.

Another area resident, who requested anonymity, said she has been living in the area since 1985, and, back in the day, helped the police shutter 14 crack houses. Now, she said, there is a return of drug users in her area. She asked the 10th Precinct to reinstate the old Block Watchers program, where people monitor their area and send pictures and videos of drug activity to the NYPD.

“That sounds great, but we need evidence to prosecute these crimes,” said Captain Gault. “Drug dealing is a crime, and every time you see it, you should call 911. Due to the Fourth Amendment, if we don’t see drugs, we can’t do anything. But if you want increased presence, call 911. We look at where these 911 calls are coming from, and if we see them coming in every day from the same area, it will get a lot more attention.”

Longtime school crossing guard Cathy Serrano said of the cops, “I’m on that corner every day and I know what you guys are talking about. I have seen [the cops] chase these guys down only to have them say, ‘You can’t touch me.’ If we want them to help us, we have got to get [NYC Mayor Bill] de Blasio out. Their hands are tied! We need to help them get their respect back.”





Tenth Precinct Community Council President Larry O'Neill, left, and newly installed CO Captain Robert Gault. | Photo by Winnie McCroy

## 8 For 8 Working Great

Recently, the 10th Precinct instituted a patrol program known as 8 For 8, where eight officers are assigned for eight weeks to patrol the area where there is a concentration of shelter hotels or high-crime areas, to address quality of life issues. Gault said increased patrols by officers Edison Alba and Daniel Sendrowski in the Midtown triangle caused this population of drug users to move north, closer to Port Authority. Although the program's original time parameters have expired, it is still in effect.

"We started 8 For 8 in July and apparently, it is doing very well and there is overwhelming support for it," said Captain Gault. "There was a decline in officers during COVID, which knocked us down, and then the racial justice movement stretched cops thin. We had to take resources from the quality of life issues to deal with protests that turned into riots. Now we are trying to bring things back to the way they were."

This will include extending the 8 For 8 program as long as possible, said Captain Gault. The area's two NCOs will team up with their sergeant and five other officers, for a total of eight officers, to do patrols.

"We decided to do things incrementally, observe the positive changes for eight weeks and then see how it works before we commit long-term to it," said Captain Gault. "But eight weeks have passed and as you see, [we] are still doing it. It is obviously a big commitment of resources, but conditions are always changing so we will do it for short increments, but right now there are no plans to change it."

Twillla Duncan, from Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer's office, said they had heard many compliments about the 8 For 8 program and were interested in how various precincts might work together to present a stronger community effort.

Captain Gault said that although there is now new leadership throughout the

borough, he is pleased to report he is familiar with the officers in the Times Square precinct at which he recently served, Deputy Inspector Robert O'Hare (whose Commanding Officer rank transferred from the West Village's Sixth Precinct to Midtown South) and up-and-comer Deputy Inspector Megan O'Malley, who transferred from Brooklyn's 76th Precinct to Midtown North (O'Hare and O'Malley both began their new assignments on the same day Gault arrived in Chelsea).

"Just yesterday, I did a collaborative cleanup effort with O'Malley and DHS [NYC Department of Homeless Services], with Breaking Ground there, offering services," said Captain Gault. "That's just one of the things I intend to do more of."

### **With Velvet Glove, Community Gifts Captain Gault Gauntlet**

Those in attendance encouraged their neighbors to support and respect local police officers, with Wolff telling Captain Gault, "I do not envy you walking into this job at this time, but I admire your ability to be cool about it."

She talked about the continuing problems with people using newspaper distribution boxes as street furniture, to set up shop at LinkNYC charging stations, as well as unhoused individuals turning sidewalk sheds and scaffoldings into ersatz bedrooms. But Wolff was pleased to report that after working with PO Di Lorenzo and NYC Council Speaker Corey Johnson's office, pressure was placed on one derelict building owner to apply for a work permit and complete building scaffolding to address its structural problems.

Wolff had one more challenge for Captain Gault, however. Noting the sparse attendance and speaking to her own health concerns, said Wolff, "People are afraid to come into rooms like this one with so many people, but I know many people would be attending this if it were on Zoom. Given that you have been working in the technology part of the police department, when can you commit to bringing this meeting online?"

"Well, I thought it was important today as the new CO to come here and introduce myself, and meet with people," said Captain Gault.

"But the next [Community Council] meeting, on October 28th, is going to be available on Zoom," interjected 10th Precinct Community Council President Larry O'Neill, adding, "I wanted you to meet CO Gault in person today, and I thank you for coming. Thank you so much."



*The 10th Precinct serves Chelsea, Clinton/Hell's Kitchen South, and the Hudson Yards neighborhoods. At Build the Block meetings, Neighborhood Coordination Officers (NCOs) speak with the public about neighborhood crime and safety concerns. Chelsea-area sectors A, B, and C, he said, are, respectively, 14th to 21st St., 21st to 29th St., and 29th to 43rd St. For info, [click here](#). The 10th Precinct's Community Affairs Office can be reached at 212-741-8226. The precinct's main number is 212-741-8211. On Twitter: @NYPD10Pct. On Facebook: [www.facebook.com/NYPD10PCT](http://www.facebook.com/NYPD10PCT). For access to NYPD crime statistics particular to the 10th Precinct, [click here](#).*

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