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# Game Changer: CB4 Chair Jeffrey LeFrancois

*By Winnie McCroy*





**As the Chair of New York City's Community Board 4**, gay man Jeffrey LeFrancois is heavily invested in his district, which comprises the queer wonderland that is Chelsea and Hell's Kitchen. He has been in New York City for 20 years, and for the past eight years has lived in Hell's Kitchen, five of those with his partner Carter and their mini wire-haired dachshund, Scarlet.

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"We live on 53rd Street and Eleventh Avenue, so far west we jokingly call it East New Jersey. It's right across from the DeWitt Clinton Park, and is a lot quieter than the rest of Hell's Kitchen," said LeFrancois. "I love it though, because it's so far west that I have a very easy commute along the Greenway on a Citibike right into the Meatpacking District."

LeFrancois spends a lot of time in the famed Meatpacking District, an area that in the past 25 years has moved from offal to awesome, chucking dumpsters full of animal carcasses in favor of art galleries, the High Line, ateliers for designers including Diane von Furstenberg, and even The Whitney Museum of American Art.





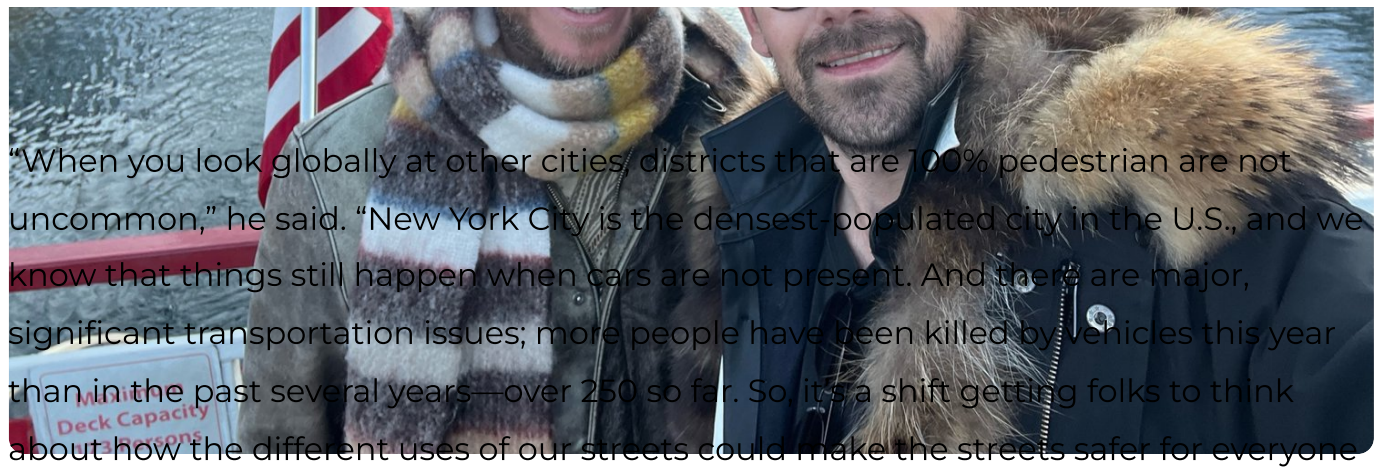
He is currently serving as executive director of the [Meatpacking District Management Association](#), and just unveiled the Western Gateway Vision Plan to transform streets designed for cars and trucks into a place for pedestrians and businesses to thrive.

Back in 2014, LeFrancois was serving as Chief of Staff for City Council Speaker Corey Johnson—the state's first openly gay, HIV-positive elected official. He helped negotiate the creation of this BID (Business Improvement District), and a year later went to work for them as Director of Operations and Community Affairs. In 2018, LeFrancois took over as executive director.

"The Meatpacking District used to be home to hundreds of meat lockers and butcher facilities, but now it's full of shops and restaurants and galleries... and 30,000 square feet of plazas along Ninth Avenue," said LeFrancois. "The pandemic forced us into thinking about how much outside space we allowed for people; we realized that 80 percent of outside space was dedicated to cars. So, we created a plan for a Pedestrian Gateway District."

They took a series of strategic steps to reprioritize the streetscape, including limiting cars during specific times of the day, better scheduling freight management (what time of day deliveries arrive), and focusing on the creation of more public space, including parklets and plazas.





“When you look globally at other cities, districts that are 100% pedestrian are not uncommon,” he said. “New York City is the densest-populated city in the U.S., and we know that things still happen when cars are not present. And there are major, significant transportation issues; more people have been killed by vehicles this year than in the past several years—over 250 so far. So, it’s a shift getting folks to think about how the different uses of our streets could make the streets safer for everyone and could help people and businesses. Attention to foot traffic and revenue is important.”

He also serves on the boards of many local organizations, including the Stonewall Democrats and Housing Conservation Coordinators, a Hell’s Kitchen-based institution providing legal services and tenant organizing for immigrants for 50 years. Right now, they are handling the crunch of providing housing and services to a glut of immigrants—the asylum-seekers sent over to New York from Texas.

“Governor Greg Abbott is a monster to use human beings as political pawns,” said LeFrancois. “There is a major need for housing that is coming up against people who are wanting the neighborhood to stay exactly the same. But I learned in the pandemic that when the city is not changing, it’s really unhealthy.”



LeFrancois grew up as a young Red Sox fan in Franklin, Connecticut, but swears that he is now a bonafide Mets fan. As a theatre kid with a sporty side, LeFrancois spent high school carrying campaign signs in the Gore v. Bush election and attended Pace University in Lower Manhattan for Political Science.

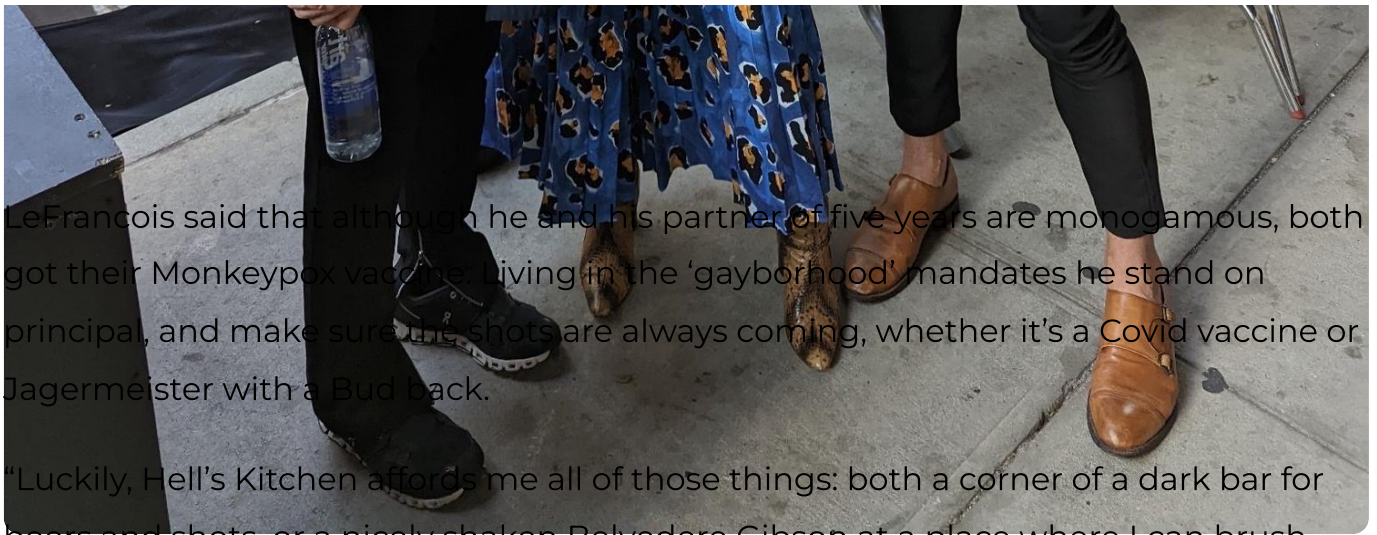
He started his career as an LGBT liaison for Assembly Member Richard Gottfried, and then moved on to work for openly gay Speaker Johnson, taking care of his community as part and parcel of advancing his career.

“It’s not a cliché to say my identity is always a part of what I’m doing, whether it’s making the Meatpacking District a little gayer or the community board a little more lavender, it is inherent,” said LeFrancois. “You could say I had a gay-for-pay resume: while other people were hiding their identity, I got a job where my identity was super-important. It was transformative for me, as an up-and-coming, newly-

graduated member of the LGBT community figuring my way out on the West Side of Manhattan.”

His past work taught him how to effectuate policy in the city and state of New York on behalf of the LGBT community and all New Yorkers. He points to their strong reaction against the Monkeypox outbreak as an example, saying, “gay men got vaccinated in droves because of our past history. We take very seriously all threats to public health, whether it be Covid or Monkeypox, and that’s why it’s largely gone away. I always ask, ‘How can I work to make sure the lessons the LGBT community have learned benefit everybody?’ There’s no silver bullet, but it’s important to share that experience.”





LeFrancois said that although he and his partner of five years are monogamous, both got their Monkeypox vaccine. Living in the 'gayborhood' mandates he stand on principal, and make sure the shots are always coming, whether it's a Covid vaccine or Jagermeister with a Bud back.

"Luckily, Hell's Kitchen affords me all of those things: both a corner of a dark bar for beers and shots, or a nicely shaken Belvedere Gibson at a place where I can brush elbows with the high and mighty," he said.

And while straight families have moved in, "the fact that the Eagle is expanding on 28th Street at the same time luxury condos go up alongside the kink, leather, and bears is kind of remarkable. Only on the West Side could you leave Rawhide and have a little old lady looking out for you as their neighbor. Because we're New Yorkers, and that kind of stuff never mattered."

Both his wins and the losses have taught LeFrancois important lessons. He attributes his current success to losing every campaign he worked on in his first six years, saying, "understanding how sweet it is to win success comes though knowing how to lose and still being able to stand up and defend something, to dig in with charisma and panache, even when you're up against something significant."



LeFrancois vows to fulfill the remainder of his term on CB4 while doing everything possible to improve his neighborhood and city in general.

“Although my partner would like me to take a goddamned break, I’m a New Yorker! I have been here for 20 years, and I don’t see myself going anywhere else soon,” said LeFrancois. “It’s always just about focusing on what I’m doing, because that will get me to where I’m going next.”

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Check out Jeffrey’s Instagram at <https://www.instagram.com/jlef423/?hl=en>

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