

Politics, Williamsburg Style

A Guide to the Democratic Primary on September 11, 2001

by MeryLynn McCorkle

[Editor's note: Here are Mery Lynn McCorkle's picks for the races affecting Williamsburg in the upcoming Democratic primary: Mayor, Public Advocate, Comptroller, Brooklyn Borough President, 33rd City Council District, and 34th City Council District. Whether or not you agree with Mery Lynn's picks, don't forget to vote in the primary. If you're not sure which City Council District you're in, go to NYPIRG's Who Represents Me? site and enter your address. Want more substance? Go to savvyvoter.org and examine the statements of the candidates for each race.]

What I love about politics is its inventive nature. Peter Vallone's recent flier for his race for Mayor brags that he "has expanded city efforts to prevent and screen for lead poisoning" for children. In fact, he virtually single handedly passed legislation which allow landlords to do next to nothing about lead paint, the leading cause of childhood lead poisoning. Grateful landlords rewarded him with extremely generous contributions. And Juan Martinez, running in the 34th City Council district, did not like the fact that his opponent, the lovely Diana Reyna, had so many political supporters, so he removed her image from several publicity shots and inserted his own via Photoshop. Maybe he should get a show at Roebling Hall?

**I'm Voting for
Alan Hevesi
for Mayor**

Peter Vallone deserves his early retirement through term limitations. His staff, additionally, is supercilious and condescending. Having someone tell you, "Well, why don't you just move?" when you describe how your landlord is harassing the tenants is so enormously helpful. He will make a great mayor if you are a millionaire landlord. vallone2001.com

Mark Green likes to whine. (Why did I used to like this man?) His staff, additionally, defines the term "bureaucratic mentality". When my landlord cut off electricity, heat, elevator service, hall lights, water, and emergency lights one weekend, a member of his staff told me she couldn't help me. If she did, the city would evict me for "imminent peril" because my situation was too dire. She offered no other options. Green will make a great mayor if you want to watch which way the wind blows. markgreen.com

Fernando Ferrer just reminds me too much of David Dinkins. His opinions and credentials look great on paper, but...

Alan Hevesi has earned the unmitigated hatred of the Post. He is my man. Additionally, he is not ashamed of associating both with tenant groups and with the Governor. A Mayor with a good working relationship with the Governor is a good thing for the city but he is also not a toady. He told Al Sharpton that one of Sharpton's comments was racist and it was. I think he will be effective and fair managing the city and I encourage you to vote for him.

This and more online at www.wburg.com.

**I'm Voting for
Steven DiBrienza
for Public Advocate**

There are many people running for this office. I will be voting for Steve DiBrienza. He's from Brooklyn - everyone else is from Manhattan. He's also been in the City Council for 16 years and is strong on tenant rights. The City Council is having a major turnover -- 35 of the 51 seats are changing. Under other circumstances I would probably vote for Norman Siegel, a civil liberties attorney and political gadfly, because I've enjoyed his sparring matches with Giuliani. But with so many novices in office, I just don't think that someone who polarizes is what we need. I highly recommend that you go to gothamgazette.com and read about the candidates. I think you'll come to the same conclusion I have.

Candidates: Steven DiBrienza, Kathryn Freed, Betsy Gotbaum, Norman Siegel, and Scott Stringer.

Comptroller

This is one of those races you could decide with a coin toss. Both candidates are from Brooklyn, both have experience, both seem competent. Herbert Berman and William Thompson. I will probably vote for Thompson because Berman has initiated some negative campaigning. All things being equal, I vote for good manners.

**I'm Voting for
Marty Markowitz
for Brooklyn Borough President**

Ken Fisher is my current City Council member. I will say for him that he has hired good constituent service staffers. He is notorious, though, for treating others as publicity props. One of his loyal supporters described him as "shy" as a way of explaining his lack of interest in other human beings. When I interviewed him for the Waterfront Week, he talked to the filing cabinets behind me, only occasionally looking at me. (I suspect he's spent too much time with the Hasidim who are his core constituency.) When I tried to tell him how much I appreciated the help of one of his staffers, his eyes glazed over with a supreme lack of interest. He is good at moving money, but as more than one person has commented, where and for whom is he moving it? He's slick without being charming.

Jeannette Gadson has been Deputy Borough President for the past eight years. She is a good woman and has devoted her life to public service. When I interviewed her, she had to stop during it to do a talk radio spot. The question from the caller was about what the borough presidency had done in the last ten years, and her answer sounded defensive. If Ken Fisher seems to want the job so he can continue moving large sums of money around, Gadson seems to want to continue in Howard Golden's tradition. The waterfront was never rezoned, in part, because Howard Golden thought manufacturing would return and never rethought the issue. His administration was not bad, just not proactive, not energetic. Status quo material.

Marty Markowitz is the eleven term State Senator from Flatbush. He is a fireball and hard worker. If Brooklyn wants energy, enthusiasm, and a big heart (and voice), Marty

should become the next Borough President. He is a long-time tenants' rights supporter and thinks waste and pollution should not be dumped on one area. During the Live/Work lobbying in Albany, Marty (who gets angry if you call him Senator) would literally corner Republican State Senators, drag them out to meet us and stand between them and their avenue of escape. He would make them laugh and then tell them to listen. He'll do the same for Brooklyn.

I have interviewed these candidates for Waterfront Week. The transcript can be found at h2oweeek.com.

My Pick for the 33rd City Council District Steve Cohn

David Yassky, the youngest of the candidates, is also the least connected to Brooklyn and the working class in general. A professor at the Brooklyn Law School and former aide to then-Representative Schumer, he is smart, patient, and has very admiring contacts in New York magazine, New York Times and the Village Voice. During my interview of him, though, he stated at least twice that people could no longer afford to BUY their own apartments. Coming as he does from Manhattan, that made sense. But most people in Brooklyn rent and many can't even afford to continue to RENT their own apartments when their leases expire. Let Yassky work with displaced seniors and immigrant families for a few years rather than putting quite so much time into parks and green spaces and he will be ready to represent Brooklyn. At the moment, though, he really is white bread.

David Reiss is a housing advocate. I unfortunately did not have the time to interview him. His website, though, is the only one to be in Polish, English, and Yiddish.

Ken Diamondstone has wonderful ideas and cares passionately about people. The city probably isn't ready to use windmills as a source of power and that's a shame. Just think of Fresh Kills and Governor's Island covered with windmills. The tourists would eat it up. But like anyone who tilts at windmills, Diamondstone doesn't have much of a chance getting elected.

Diamondstone, Yassky and Reiss are all from the Brownstone district which has controlled the 33rd for some time.

Steve Cohn was born and raised in Williamsburg and now lives in the Brownstone district. Steve is an attorney who has a distinguished history doing pro bono work for environmental groups. He cares about the waterfront and offered to go to Albany with the Live/Work Coalition to fight for the expanded loft law. His major flaw is his ability to raise too much money for his campaign, some of which does come from real estate developers. He is not charismatic but he knows everyone and knows the issues of the entire district. The next City Council will have 35 new members out of 51 positions. This means that approximately 20 of these new members will be chairs of committees. Let's hope the learning curve is Himalayan. Steve will quickly become a pivotal member of city government and our district accordingly will be very well represented. I admire the fact that Steve wants to create consensus, not pit elements of the community against one another. I will be voting for him and encourage you to support Steve for City Council.

I interviewed these candidates for the July 26th issue of Waterfront Week. Go to h2oweb.com to read the transcripts.

**I'm Voting for
Diana Reyna
for the 34th City Council District**

This district, one of the poorest in the city, has three Democrats running with no websites up for any candidate. The two forerunners are Diana Reyna and Juan D. Martinez.

Diana is a caring, hard working, bright woman. She is also beautiful and photogenic. If she's elected, she will get so much press for her district. And she'll do a great job. Currently she's Chief of Staff for Vito Lopez, a sponsor of the expanded loft law.

As for Martinez, as my mother used to say, if you can't say something nice about someone, don't say anything at all. If you want details about him, go to the archives in the Daily News. Scandals seem to gravitate to him.

I unequivocally support Diana Reyna for this seat.

I've also interviewed both of these candidates for Waterfront Week (h2oweb.com).

Why Vote?

The most common reason people don't vote is that it doesn't much matter because all politicians are the same. All politicians are crooked just as all female lawyers are anorexic and all painters do abstract work and live in rat infested lofts, drink too much and suffer from nearly debilitating depression forcing them to die young. Stereotypes are easy to believe and are simply not categorically true!

Who gets into office impacts your life.

Do you want electric generators outside your bathroom window? Do you want a landfill instead of a park? Do you want landlords to be able to charge \$900 for an apartment one year and \$2100 for the same apartment with no improvements two years later? Do you want to live in a loft with no electricity and no heat? Do you want to be evicted from your home on a cold night just before Christmas with two hours notice? Do you want working families and the elderly pushed out of New York altogether? You can have an impact on these issues. You can start by registering to vote.

It's easy. Download the voter registration form now from wburl.com/0104/context/pdfs/vote.pdf. You are not permitted to register on-line because they can't verify your address. You can, though, print off the voter registration form to mail in. You can also email a request for a postage-paid form at www.vote.nyc.ny.us. You can call 212 VOTE-NYC and request a postage-paid form. Or you can pick one up at your local library. Then fill out your form and mail it to: Board of Elections, 32 Broadway 7th Fl, New York, NY 10275-0067.

To vote in the primary your registration must be postmarked by August 17. The primary is on September 11th. Register as a Democrat. Most city positions are held by Democrats. Selecting which Democrat wins the primary for the most part determines who wins the position in the General Election on November 6th. Registering as a Democrat allows you to help select the best candidate.

If you are registered elsewhere, change your voting address. Register [HERE](#) where you live and breathe.

Mery Lynn McCorkle is an artist living and working in Brooklyn.