

# City Council District 1

**Focus here is on City Council Members but please note that voters in this District will also be able to vote for Manhattan DA, Manhattan Borough President, Mayor, Public Advocate, and Comptroller.**

## Overview

- a. The 1st Council District comprises Battery Park City, Civic Center, Chinatown, Financial District, Little Italy, the Lower East Side, NoHo, SoHo, South Street Seaport, South Village, TriBeCa, and Washington Square.
- b. Current City Council District 1: Margaret Chin since 2010
- c. There are six Democratic contenders for City Council District 1. All are seeking office for the first time except for Christopher Marte (community activist). Li and Marte are the expected frontrunners.
- d. The district has 10 developments operated by the New York City Housing Authority, according to [NYCHA](#), the largest concentration of NYCHA for Manhattan. NYCHA is tens of billions of dollars behind in basic repairs, all exacerbated because of the pandemic making day to day living for people living in public housing more difficult.
- e. District 1 has some of [the most segregated schools](#) in the city, despite a program that allows families to choose where their children go to elementary school. Efforts to reform the system have been unsuccessful.

## Key Issues in District 1

- f. **COVID recovery-** All candidates say they will support small business recovery efforts, all candidates have said they would advocate for better conditions in public housing, but distinctions in their positions on how to do so.
- g. **Lower Manhattan Development – Affordable Housing, Jails, & Community space**
  - i. **Elizabeth Street Garden & Haven Green:** Debate over whether or not Elizabeth Street Garden in Nolita, a source of local community greenspace on city-owned land, should be replaced by Haven Green, an affordable housing building for seniors which would include some greenspace of its own. New York City Council [voted last summer](#) in favor of the Haven Green project, which would replace the garden with housing for low-income senior citizens. Manhattan Supreme Court Judge Debra James has now heard oral arguments from both legal teams that filed the suits

and has taken the case under advisement, leaving both the city and garden advocates in limbo [as of December 2020].

- ii. **Two Bridges Development:** On the Lower East Side, the Two-Bridges development would construct skyscrapers for luxury residential units, but it has garnered heated resistance from local community members, though it would also provide some affordable housing and, as part of the plan, provide repairs to a nearby NYCHA complex and the East Broadway subway station. Lawsuit went to the State Supreme Court where, in February 2020, Judge Arthur Engoron [upheld a ruling](#) ordering the development plan to go through ULURP.
- iii. **Planned construction of the new jail in Chinatown:** replacing one already there with a larger modern structure, as part of the city's plan to close Rikers Island has resulted in backlash by residents who do not want to see it built in their community.
- iv. **South Street Seaport Development:** Plans to construct two 470-foot towers and expand a museum in the historic South Street Seaport neighborhood. The Howard Hughes Corporation [presented a proposal](#) for a \$1.4 billion mixed-use project consisting of rentals, condos, and office space at 250 Water Street, as well as a new building for the South Street Seaport Museum at 89 South Street. While those in favor of the project say it will bring much-needed affordable housing to a neighborhood that has almost none and help the museum stay open, opponents claim the project is out of scale with the rest of the district.
- h. **Education:** NYPD School Safety agents, addressing segregation and enrollment issues
- i. **Preventing and responding to Anti-Asian violence**
- j. **Homelessness**

## The Six District 1 City Council Candidates [Democrat]

### 1. Gigi Li

- k. Currently Chin's Chief of Staff
- l. **Elizabeth Street Garden & Haven Green:** In support of (as was Chin).
  - i. "Every community should be contributing to affordable and subsidized housing throughout the City of New York," said Li, who previously served as chair of Community Board 3 and as an organizer at the Neighborhood Family Services Coalition, an advocacy group for children and families, in an interview. "I go back to the principle of everyone doing their part when it comes to a citywide challenge like the ability to have a place to live."
- m. **Planned construction of the new jail in Chinatown:** In support of (as was Chin). On the jails plan, Li said she is "willing to reassess, if the conversation becomes open again, what is best for Chinatown," and that she would want to see a more significant investment in alternatives to incarceration programs.
- n. **South Street Seaport Development:** Expected to be in support of, by association - Council Member Margaret Chin and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer testified in favor and called the project an important opportunity to preserve both the historic district and the museum.
- o. **Two Bridges Development** – specifically opposed the megatowers that are part of the Two Bridges plan. She worked on a [lawsuit](#) by the City Council and Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer against the city's Department of City Planning (DCP)
- p. **Anti-Asian violence:** "Education campaigns are great, but I don't think that it's enough," Li said. "These incidents that are happening, we need to do a better job at encouraging people to report to and really follow through on all of the different avenues and all of the different agencies that have a role and a responsibility to step in and to intervene."
- q. **Policing:** Police need to have a better relationship with the communities where they serve.
- r. [Major endorsements:](#) Candidate for Mayor Andrew Yang, Assembly member Catalina Cruz, Councilmember Helen Rosenthal, Councilmember Diana Ayala, Councilmember Margaret Chin, Councilmember Deborah Rose, former City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, 21 in '21, New York Pan-Asian Dem Club, Women of Color for Progress

## 2. Jenny Lam-Low

- a. Currently the Director of the Community Engagement Division at the New York City Council Speaker's Office, longtime local power broker
- b. **COVID Recovery:** She said as a Council member she would:
  - i. Put more resources into job training programs and encourage more lending to small businesses to help them recover.
  - ii. Lean on her experience as a banker to develop a loan program for struggling property owners.
- c. **Open Streets:** In favor of the idea of expanding the Open Streets program
- d. **Two Bridges Development** – Opposed. Also supported and was part of the lawsuit by the City Council and Manhattan Borough President - “They said it was a minor modification, how would anyone in their right mind believe that?” Lam-Low said in an interview. “As a senior member of [Johnson’s] team, I provide input and being a resident of this community that’s impacted by this crazy thing, I help keep him informed and give him feedback directly as a resident of the community.”
- e. **Planned construction of the new jail in Chinatown:** Similar to Li’s position, said that the community should have been consulted more and mentioned how the proposed jail is larger than what was anticipated at 29 stories, creating another issue.
- f. **Education:** Lam-Low’s idea to address segregation specifically in specialized high schools is to increase gifted programs in public schools, as she said increasing accessibility to gifted programs will better prepare students from all backgrounds to test into specialized high schools.
- g. **Policing:** Similar to Li, said police need to have a better relationship with the communities where they serve.
- h. **Major Endorsements:** Congressmember Nydia Velazquez, Congressmember Carolyn Maloney, State Senator John Liu, District Leader Daisy Paez, Councilmember Carlina Rivera, Jim Owles Liberal Democratic Club, United Federation of Teachers, NY City Central Labor Council, Hotel Trades Council, District Council 37, 32BJ SEIU, New York State Nurses Association, Communications Workers of America District 1, Tai Look Merchants Association, Gee How Oak Tin Benevolent Association

### 3. Christopher Marte [most progressive]

- a. Currently helps run a political training academy called Arena and [lost to Chin by just 222 votes](#) in 2017, former financial analyst
- b. A progressive in the field, Marte is leading in fundraising and has devoted supporters who almost helped him unseat Chin four years ago.
- c. **Policing:**
  - i. “I was the first candidate to support defunding the police,” he said, “especially by a billion [dollars], at the very least. I believe in defunding and making sure those funds go to youth programs and summer programs.”
  - ii. According to **Marte**, who has called for “defunding” the NYPD, [the spike in crime is due to a reduction in social services during the pandemic. Once the city opens up again “we can make sure that people who needed help before the pandemic, \[as well as those\] dealing with isolation and substance abuse ... will get the help they need.”](#)
- d. **Elizabeth Street Garden & Haven Green:** Opposed. Received substantial support in 2017 from groups organizing against Haven Green (Elizabeth St gardens)
- e. **Planned construction of the new jail in Chinatown:** Opposed.
  - i. [Supports No New Jails](#), an abolitionist movement that calls for Rikers jails to close but without any new jails being built. The movement calls for an investment in community-based resources to address issues that contribute to crime, such as housing insecurity and mental health treatment.
  - ii. “If this jail moves forward, Chinatown will literally be a construction site for the next six years,” Marte said, adding that the current reconstruction of 70 Mulberry Street—a [cultural center destroyed by a fire last year before the pandemic](#)—is a preview of the kind of disruption large-scale projects can cause to the neighborhood. “That construction site has closed a lot of businesses on that street because they closed off the street to traffic,” Marte said. “And a lot of the small businesses like the local flower shop, and a few smaller restaurants have already explained how that one small site has done so much damage to their business, even in this pandemic.”
- f. **South street seaport development:** Marte noted that [“I’m the only candidate” who has been working with the Seaport Coalition](#) and testifying to defeat the project. [“When you look at land use issues across this district, no one’s really being proactive about it and no one’s really allowing community members to have a say in what a neighborhood they live in, helped build, should look like.”](#)

- g. **Education:** “This is one of the most segregated school systems in the country, where there’s invisible lines that doesn’t allow someone who lives in Smith Houses to go to a school in the Seaport,” Marte said. “Even though the Council office has very little to do with education policy, it’s mostly mayoral control, a state issue, I think we have to start focusing on how to change that. And I think one of the biggest things we have to do is fix district lines, and we can do that with the census.”
- h. **Zoning:** he has stated he plans to develop and pass community-based rezoning plans. He also wants to create neighborhood plans that expand affordability. He attributes the policy positions to his working class family, with Lower East Side origins. The rezoning plan—which had been in the works well before the pandemic—looks to tamp down on real estate speculation and prevent property taxes from increasing. The proposal does require a majority vote by the Council. If approved, it would kickstart the months-long public review process.
- i. **Endorsements:** Downtown Independent Democrats, Chinatown Working Group, Grand Street Democrats, Village Independent Democrats, Run for Something, NYC Asian American Democratic Club, Freelancers Union, Art Against Displacement, New Downtown Dems, Sheet Metal Workers Local Union 28, Voters for Animal Rights, Kids PAC

#### 4. Maud Maron [most conservative]

- a. Currently a public defender and president of Community Education Council 2
- b. An education activist, has raised a lot of money while appealing to more conservative voters in the district
- c. **COVID recovery:** Maron cited affordable housing as a key issue for her campaign, in addition to helping small businesses affected by the pandemic through loans and more outdoor seating, stopping evictions, cutting “job losses by telling the big corporations to take a break,” creating more parks, and preparing for the next superstorm.
- d. **South Street Seaport Development:** Called the issue “complicated” because the developer has also promised to save the struggling South Street Seaport Museum but “we don’t need mega-towers that loom over historic districts.”
- e. **Education:**
  - i. Maron had penned a New York Post op-ed criticizing anti-bias training. In the op-ed, Maron objects to having had to refer to herself as a white woman during a Department of Education anti-bias training session. Also in the piece, Maron calls the doctrine of anti-racism “chilling,” saying it “insists on defining everyone by race, invites discrimination and divides all thought and behavior along a racial axis.”
  - ii. Advocates for keeping the Specialized High Schools Admissions Test

- iii. Maron has faced backlash over comments she made about integrating public schools, such as when she defended parents who may be concerned integration would result in their children receiving a worse education
  - iv. Said New York City Department of Education anti-bias training does “nothing to actually improve our broken schools,” and, in 2019, criticized DOE guidelines to address bias and diversify the curriculum.
  - v. Maron came under attack by some club members on school issues, who accused her of supporting screened school admissions and also of not making public a grant application for funding from the \$3 million New York State Integration Plan. (Only a four-page summary of the School District 2 application, not the full 40-plus pages, has been made public.)
- f. **Policing:**
- i. When asked about homelessness, Maron said that all communities are entitled to streets “that are safe to walk at night,” adding that the de Blasio shelter policy “has both failed to serve the actual people who are in need of shelter, who certainly deserve compassion, but has also put undue burdens on our communities.”
  - ii. Called the crime spike “a real and urgent concern,” spoke of law enforcement as part of the solution. She said she wants to see more police on the street and in the subways. “We need to make sure that people feel safe going to work, coming home from work, and they need to be able to see community patrols,” she said

## 5. Denny Salas

- a. A former stockbroker turned Democratic Party staff member
- b. Of the candidates, Salas has spent the least amount of time living in the district. Though his Dominican-born parents immigrated to the Bronx before having him, he has only lived in the city for the last five years.
- c. **Housing:** Platform - building more co-ops that provide middle-class New Yorkers the opportunity to own their homes
- d. **Policing:** Platform - Will require individual police officers to pay for half of a liability insurance policy in the case that there is a winning lawsuit against them.
- e. **Planned construction of the new jail in Chinatown:** In support. “The goal is to close Rikers Island, that is 100% the goal, that is exactly what we should be doing. And we do need to build new jails in order to make that happen,” Salas said. “There’s a lot of validity to the criticisms and the community feedback when it comes to building new jails, what has happened and with all the proposals and what does occur is that every single time there needs to be a social responsibility to do the right thing like close Rikers Island, that responsibility falls upon usually the lowest socioeconomic populations within the city.”

- f. **Elizabeth Street Garden & Haven Green:** In support. Salas supports Haven Green due to the affordable housing it would bring
- g. **Two Bridges Development:** Not fully behind it — Salas said he would be in favor of the Two Bridges development if it brought more affordable housing (currently, 700 of the estimated 3,000 units planned to be built would be affordable).
- h. **Open Streets:** Salas is proposing so-called “super blocks” that began in Barcelona, Spain. In that city, vehicular traffic was diverted to major roadways to open its streets up to pedestrians. It’s similar to the city’s existing Open Streets program, though on a larger scale.
- i. **Endorsements:** supermodel, and fashion icon, Martha Hunt; Michael Capuano served ten terms as a United States Congressman representing the 7th District of Massachusetts; Political commentator, entrepreneur, and host of the popular podcast, Dworkin Report, Scott Dworkin; The Honorable Patrick Murphy served as a United States Congressman representing the 8th District of Pennsylvania and later served as President Obama's Under Secretary of the Army; celebrity chef, and television personality, Aliya LeeKong; New York City street art pioneer, inspiration, and entrepreneur, Hektad.

## 6. **Tiffany Winbush** [also most progressive but more new to the scene]

- a. **COVID recovery:** She’d push for “no strings attached grants” to storeowners seeking a financial leg-up. “This is free money, you don’t have to pay it back, do what you need to do in order to stay open, survive, and to continue to thrive, and still be here after COVID,” Winbush proposed.
- b. **Policing:** “Poverty is not the answer to everything crime related but a lot of it is,” **Winbush** said. “We need to focus on getting people what they need...so that they don’t resort to a life of crime.”
- c. **Homelessness:** she said she would welcome the homeless men, who would be relocated from the Lucerne Hotel on the Upper West Side to the Radisson Hotel, on William St., if the project goes forward.
  - i. Co-founder of Friends of Fidi, dedicated to respect, resources, and amplification for the unhoused community in D1.
- d. **Education:** Winbush also said she supports eliminating the Specialized High School Admissions Test, currently required to get into the city’s elite high schools, like Stuyvesant and Bronx Science.



## **City Council – What they do and why you should care**

- e. The City Council is “New York City’s legislature.” City Council Members “can have an impact on the mayor to carry out his or her agenda.”
- f. [The City Council passes laws:](#)
  - i. They propose and vote on legislation that makes the rules for all sorts of things ranging from public health, education, housing and transportation.
  - ii. Bills passed by a majority of the Council go to the mayor to be signed into law. The Council can override a veto from the mayor with a vote of at least two-thirds of the members.
  - iii. **Example:** The Council has passed laws authorizing things such as [police reforms](#) (just last month members proposed [another set of reform bills](#)), [bike lane protections](#), the [plastic bag ban](#), [protecting tenants from harassment](#) and the [tax lien sale](#).
- g. [The City Council helps decide the budget](#)
  - i. The Council negotiates with the mayor to pass the city budget every year. That means members help decide how your taxes and other revenue will be spent to fund different city agencies and programs — ranging from the public schools to policing to a bunch of social services.
    - 1. The most recent budget was more than \$88 billion.
  - ii. Your Council member can advocate for certain programs or projects to be funded in your neighborhood. And each Council member has their own [discretionary budget](#) to help local projects and groups.
  - iii. **Example:** The Council has a huge say in [how the city funds its police force](#), and it [cut funding for affordable housing programs](#) in the last budget.

- h. [The City Council keeps an eye on city agencies](#)
  - i. Council members make sure agencies like the Department of Education, the Department of Housing and Preservation, NYCHA and the NYPD are doing their jobs well.
  - ii. **Example:** The Council can monitor what the DOE is doing about school segregation and provide a check on how NYCHA manages and maintains its buildings.
- i. [The City Council has a say in how the city uses public land](#)
  - i. That means where to build, what to preserve and what to close (like Rikers Island). The Council has a major say in real estate deals for city-owned land and votes on all zoning changes or rezoning.
  - ii. Council members vote to approve or reject development projects that need public approval.
  - iii. How land is used can affect if housing is affordable, what kind of greenspace is available and how much pollution is likely to affect a neighborhood, among other things.
- j. [City Council members can advocate for you](#)
  - i. Council members can advocate on behalf of their constituents to advance certain causes
  - ii. Most candidates are hosting campaign events on Zoom or offering other ways to be in touch directly with potential constituents.
  - iii. City Council candidates are extremely accessible in a way that candidates for higher offices aren't. If you want to get involved in local government, meet with your council candidates, get to know them and ask them questions.