

## **Keep Hell's Kitchen Whole: Testimony to NYS IRC, 07 February 2023**

My name is Barbara Knecht. I live in Hell's Kitchen, Assembly District 75, at 357 West 55<sup>th</sup> Street, at the corner of 9<sup>th</sup> Ave. I have lived here since 1988. I represent the West 55<sup>th</sup> St Block Association (created in 1978) on the Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Coalition. By profession, I am an architect and urban planner. I worked for the City of NY in the 1980's-90's, developing housing and social services programs for people experiencing homelessness. My ongoing work as a practitioner, educator and writer has been immersion in the analysis, development and livability of urban neighborhoods and cities.

I am here to speak in support of Keeping Hell's Kitchen Whole and, therefore, in favor of a district that runs from 14<sup>th</sup> St to West 57<sup>th</sup> St and Broadway / 8<sup>th</sup> Ave to the Hudson River. These boundaries include three distinct neighborhoods – Hell's Kitchen, the Garment District and Chelsea – that should all be preserved within the district. It also coincides with existing northern boundaries of Community Board 4, the Clinton Special District, and the Hudson River Park.

Redistricting should keep neighborhoods and “Communities of Interest” intact. “Communities of Interest” self-define and self-identify; neighborhoods often have externally designed boundaries. In the case of Hell's Kitchen, the physical boundaries of the neighborhood are coincident with the Community of Interest. Hell's Kitchen is bounded by 8<sup>th</sup> Ave and the Hudson River, 34<sup>th</sup> St and the 57-59<sup>th</sup> St corridor. 9<sup>th</sup> Ave is its “main street” and 10<sup>th</sup> Ave its “working street.” These commonly acknowledged boundaries and characteristics of Hell's Kitchen are reinforced by every result in a Google search, as well as by the Special Clinton District established by the NYC Department of City Planning in 1973 to preserve the character and scale of the neighborhood.

A recent example of the strong Community of Interest is how dozens of neighborhood block associations, businesses, BIDs, alliances, individuals, and institutions came together, in a matter of weeks, in the Fall of 2020 to form the Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Coalition to address pandemic related public safety. The coalition continues its work on behalf of HK.

The Special Clinton District, which shares north, west and east boundaries with Hell's Kitchen, was created in 1973 to preserve the character and scale of the neighborhood. The current redistricting proposal would severely compromise the ability to maintain that purpose. By siphoning off parts of the district to other council districts, it will adversely affect our ability to realize the goals of the special district to "protect the mixture of income groups currently residing in the area," "and promote and protect public health, safety, general welfare and amenity." Furthermore, the Hudson River Park's northern boundary is at 59<sup>th</sup> St. It already crosses more than one Assembly District but syphoning off the northernmost six blocks to yet Assembly District unnecessarily reduces its coherent voice.

We understand that the population changes necessitate changing the boundaries of the Assembly district, but it does not benefit anyone to break up an historically coherent neighborhood with robust associations and coalitions.

Thank you.

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