

13 Leaders Already

Michael O'Laughlin

Director, Campaign for New York's Future

The failure of congestion pricing may have been a body blow to Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC, but the Campaign for New York's Future—a coalition of nonprofit and community organizations assembled to support the plan's goals—has not yet ground to a halt. If anything, Michael O'Laughlin, the Campaign's director, sees the city's recent financial troubles as an opportunity to crystallize the organization's message. "A lot of the things that the Campaign advocates for in terms of, let's say, expanded transit infrastructure, increasing energy efficiency—those are also exactly the kinds of investments you want to make when the economy starts to go down," he said.

Carl Heastie

**Assembly Member,
Bronx Democratic Chair**

Fresh off a court victory that installed him, Carl Heastie is the Bronx's new boss, and if he has his way, the city's poorest borough will look much different, and very quickly. Heastie also chairs the Assembly's redistricting committee, which will redraw the state's district lines after the 2010 Census, giving him a power to shape the state and city's political makeup for decades to come that he sees no reason to relinquish to a nonpartisan process. "The problem that I have with the so-called term of 'nonpartisan redistricting' is, I don't believe that there's a person that has any knowledge of politics that's non-partial," he said.

Lenzie Harcum

**Vice President for Biosciences,
Economic Development Corporation**

People come to scope out New York as a place to innovate and do business—and Lenzie Harcum's role as the vice president for biosciences at the Economic Development Corporation is, in part, to get them to stay. "We have all the raw elements in place," he said, "but certainly one thing that has prevented us from growing is a lack of commercial lab space." He will have his hands full over the next five years, as the Bloomberg administration hopes to ease those concerns by getting some major biotech developments—such as the Brooklyn Army Terminal and Phase I of the \$700 million East River Science Park—under way.

Jennifer Jennings

Education Blogger

The administration's next major battle with Albany will be over mayoral control of schools—a topic that keeps Jennifer Jennings pretty busy. In addition to her graduate work on education at Columbia University's Department of Sociology, she keeps a regular blog on New York City schools at **Education Week**, known online as "eduwonkette." She takes the myriad statistics offered by the administration in support of its policies and tries to poke holes in the spin. "No one is really talking about teaching and learning," she said. "I think the model has become a model where we talk about identifying places that aren't doing well and cutting them out."

Michael Hickey

**Executive Director, Center for
New York City Neighborhoods**

The alphabet soup of nonprofits and community organizations can often be difficult to parse for homeowners under threat of foreclosure. And predatory lenders seem to lurk around every corner. So the Center for New York City Neighborhoods tries to make it easy, coordinating the activities of those groups, helping fund them and steering homeowners away from unregulated lenders. "The core part of our work is that interaction between a homeowner and their bank," said the Center's executive director, Michael Hickey, who just took over this summer. "How do we get in there and make that go as well as possible?"

Edith Hsu-Chen

**Manhattan Director,
Office of City Planning**

The political fireworks over the Bloomberg administration's development plans may go off at City Hall, but the actual blueprints get laid out in Edith Hsu-Chen's office. Hsu-Chen has been the Director of the Office of City Planning's Manhattan Office since September, overseeing growth in Manhattan as the economy continues to tumble. "We have to keep planning through this period, and we have to keep encouraging growth, affordable housing," she said. "Some of the most robust times of planning are when there is an economic downturn." The next five years, should keep her busy, with major rezonings planned for Northern TriBeCa and the Lower East Side.

Hiram Monserrate

State Senator-elect

Love it or hate it, the Willets Point redevelopment proved by the City Council in November may well become for controversial development projects, and will certainly one of the city's most depressed neighborhoods. The ad said Hiram Monserrate, who will leave the Council in January to become the area's next state senator, "has set a new bar set a pattern that we can do major developments and set a significant percentage of housing to working-class and poor New Yorkers." Personally, as the first Latino Council member from Queens and now first senator, Monserrate is positioning a community growing larger and more prominent.

Shaping 2013

Greg Floyd

President, Teamsters Local 237

Greg Floyd's first conversation in May of last year with then-candidate Barack Obama was about public housing—fitting, since Floyd has become something of an expert on the issue. As president of the Teamsters Local 237, the largest in the nation, Floyd has many members who either live in, or work on, public housing projects. “He wanted to talk about his candidacy,” Floyd said of his conversation with the president-elect, “we wanted to talk about public housing.” Aside from playing a potential role in an Obama urban agenda, Floyd has been mentioned as a possible choice for the next president of the Central Labor Council.

Jeff Zupan

Senior Fellow for Transportation, Regional Plan Association

In addition to his work on three transportation “mega-projects”—the Second Avenue Subway, East Side Access and a new rail tunnel under the Hudson River—Jeff Zupan has been trying to get policymakers and transit officials to think creatively about ways to keep money for transportation projects flowing. “If there’s one thing that’s more important than anything else at the moment, it’s filling the gap that the MTA has,” he said. And then, of course, there are other projects, like a new initiative Zupan is planning to decrease congestion at the city’s airports. His proposals—from building new runways to cutting service—are likely to irritate plenty of people, he admits.

Jan Gehl

Urban Planner

If “Summer Streets” seemed like a foreign concept—no cars on Lafayette Street?—that is because New Yorkers have a foreigner, in part, to thank for it. Danish urban planner Jan Gehl has been consulting with the Department of Transportation since the fall of last year on how to make New York a more pedestrian-friendly city—think esplanades on Broadway and bike paths on 9th Ave. “I do think that New York has started to turn around toward a path that is much more people-friendly than the previous path,” he said. “We have become tired of having the totally auto-dependent cities.”

Michael McMahon

Representative-elect

“For what the political ramifications are, we’re going to have to just wait and see,” said Michael McMahon, reflecting on the meaning of his win as the first Democrat elected to Congress from Staten Island in decades. But the policy implications are clear: McMahon will be in the majority, which will help him get things done, especially in the form of transportation funding. “I think that that will be—for the nation and for New York and my district—very timely, because I think not only will there be a six-year transportation funding bill next year, most likely the new administration is going to make infrastructure investment very much a part of their long-term economic plan,” he said.

Ronnie Lowenstein

Director, Independent Budget Office

The barbs over the proposed budget cuts have already started to fly, with tense exchanges bubbling over in committee rooms and the Council’s and mayor’s respective budget directors mired in the back-and-forth—all of which makes the role of referee more crucial. As the director of the Independent Budget Office, Ronnie Lowenstein supplies independent information to policymakers while questioning the administration’s projections, such as when Bloomberg exaggerated the deficit during the term limits debate. “The city, ironically, releases reams of data, but the data is nearly incomprehensible unless you know what you’re looking for or how it works,” she said. “And for that reason, that makes people like us particularly useful.”

Dina Levy

Organizing and Policy Director, Urban Homesteading Assistance Board

The State Legislature may pass a bill in the next few years to give New York City more authority over its own rent laws, in which case Dina Levy’s portfolio is going to get very thick, very fast. Levy, the director of organizing and policy at the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board (UHAB), directs efforts to preserve distressed public housing projects and increase access to affordable housing. “Part of that,” she said, “is to sort of strengthen and reinvigorate the opportunities for city government to do things that are more proactive.”