

QUEENS Chronicle

Pols want 21 women in the Council by '21

■ New initiative will help cultivate and elect female candidates: organizers



PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER BARCA

City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, at podium, announces "21 in '21," a new initiative aimed at recruiting and helping elect at least 21 women to the City Council by 2021, when 39 of the 51 legislators will be term-limited out of office.

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by Christopher Barca, Associate Editor | 0 comments

The year 2021 is going to be a frantic one across the five boroughs, as 39 of the 51 members of the City Council — including 14 of the 15 lawmakers from Queens — will be term-limited out of the legislative body.

But Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito (D-Manhattan, Bronx) and colleagues Elizabeth Crowley (D-Glendale) and Margaret Chin (D-Manhattan) see that year as a perfect time to make the group look much more like the city as a whole.

"We live in the most progressive city in the United States. We are a Council that prides itself on its diversity," Mark-Viverito said. "Yet the underrepresentation of women in this City Council has been a longstanding problem."

Speaking at the Knockdown Center in Maspeth last Friday, the officials announced their new "21 in '21" initiative, which aims to find, cultivate and help elect "at minimum" 21 women to the Council by 2021.

Only 13 Council members are women, down from 18 in 2009.

And of the 13 female lawmakers, four of them — including Mark-Viverito — are term-limited out of office this year.

In 2021, that number grows to nine, including Crowley, Karen Koslowitz (D-Forest Hills) and Julissa Ferreras-Copeland (D-East Elmhurst) — the three female members of the Council from Queens.

"We know that in every single district in this city," Crowley said, "there are talented and exceptional women who should be candidates for office."

When asked exactly how the initiative will find and develop those female candidates, Mark-Viverito said discussions on the organization's structure and the "exact vehicle" to meet the goal are ongoing.

But a press release circulated after the event said 21 in '21 will only support candidates running for open seats and will not give money to those candidates.

Instead, it will bring "worthy female candidates to New Yorkers' attention with the hope that they will decide to contribute directly to the candidates," the release said.

Helping lead the initiative is businessman and former Democratic lieutenant governor candidate Bill Samuels, the founder of nonpartisan think tank EffectiveNY.

Samuels, who has pledged \$25,000 to the effort, said the "male culture" that dominates both state and city government needs to change.

"This isn't just about electing women. If we achieve our goals, corruption will be less, undeniably," Samuels said. "We will have more moral and better legislation. We will encourage young women to go into service. Whether you're a Republican or Democrat, this will help all parties."

Former Congresswoman, Brooklyn District Attorney and city Comptroller Liz Holtzman said, at the end of the day, "the vital endeavor" is about encouraging young women across the city to chase their dreams.

"Women make up more than half the population of New York City and they are entitled to a seat at the table," said Holtzman, formerly the youngest woman ever elected to Congress. "This initiative is extremely important for every man, every woman, every girl and every boy."