



The Transition Network

TTN-NYC Newsletter January 2017

## Getting Involved: Interview with Councilwoman Helen Rosenthal

By Betty Rauch



Helen Rosenthal, a very effective Council Member, was elected in 2013 to represent the 6th City Council district. When we spoke she remembered having previously addressed TTN members and was all the more interested in sharing the most effective way for TTNers to get involved in civic action. In talking about how people could be more engaged in the political process, Rosenthal commented how "New Yorkers take issues very seriously."

They want to be engaged and find ways to effect change. After the election, so many people came into my office asking 'What can I do?'"

In response, on December 8th, Rosenthal's Community Board 6 sponsored a Post-Election Community Organizing Forum. It was attended by several hundred residents and included a panel of experts from organizations representing women's health, civil rights, immigrant rights, religious freedom and environmental issues.

Her website: [www.helenrosenthal.com](http://www.helenrosenthal.com) has a review, under the heading Post-Election Community Organizing Forum, of what was discussed, as well as a list of the participating organizations.

When asked for recommendations on how to get started, she answered directly and to the point, "It's a three-step process."



### Rosenthal's 3-Step Process:

**First Step:** People need to identify where they personally fit in. "It's critical to know what you like, what you want to do." For example, are you a worker, an organizer, a writer, a data analyst, a funder...?

**Step Two:** Once a person is clear on what her skills are and what she wants to do, she then needs to focus on the area in which she is most interested. On Rosenthal's website, you can find links to organizations that deal with Immigration issues, Women's Rights, LGBT issues, the Environment, and Civil Rights and Liberties. Google is also a big help for finding organizations active in other areas. Investigate organizations that fit your interests. Find the one or ones whose work and focus appeal most to you. Then, it's easy.



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**Step Three:** Contact the organization(s) that appeal to you. Be specific about your skills and interests, offer your help, and "go!"

When I questioned Rosenthal about whether it was important for New Yorkers to contact their elected officials, she was adamant: "Never assume! It's always helpful for an elected official to hear from her constituents." And, she noted, "You cannot always be certain that you know how an elected official stands on an issue. It's not unusual that an elected official counts the pros and cons. And they matter.

"Importantly, the shorter and clearer the email or phone message, the better! Long screeds don't help," she added.

Rosenthal shared some sense of why short and direct are important. She told me that she currently had 5,000 unread emails! So keep it short but do contact your representative. We talked about how important it is for people to be engaged in local politics. Rosenthal: "It MATTERS who is on the City Council, in the State Senate, on the local Planning Board." And when I asked if those TTN members, like me, who are past official retirement age were too old to run, she laughed. "That's silly; look at the age of all three Presidential candidates this last year!" She makes an important point. "And," Rosenthal continued, "if you don't want to run for office, help others do it. Take the time to find the active races; offer your help. You don't have to have a fund raiser, have a Friend Raiser."

As a final note, and a direct way to get involved NOW, Rosenthal's office needs volunteers. She is especially interested in finding folks who can help with data analysis. And help her get through those thousands of emails.



**NOT TO MISS:** Rosenthal's next Forum will focus on how to distinguish between Real and Fake News. Information about date, time and place can be found on her website. Even if you don't live in City Council District 6, you're still welcome to attend.