



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

Serrano Discusses Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts

JOSÉ M. SERRANO August 13, 2010

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Senator José M. Serrano participated in a roundtable discussion yesterday on how best to support New York City's Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts. The roundtable was sponsored by the Fourth Arts Block, the leadership organization for Manhattan's East 4th Street Cultural District.

The event featured a diverse group of New York City's creative practitioners, policymakers, funders and scholars to discuss the challenges facing cultural districts that have emerged

throughout the city over the last several years. These naturally occurring cultural districts are brought to life by local artists, grassroots community groups, and local “creative” businesses, and can be found throughout New York City.

“Nurturing cultural districts is a worthy investment in our communities,” said Senator Serrano. “My district includes East Harlem and the South Bronx, areas that have long been great incubators for cultural work and artistic thought. These communities also have a remarkable history in both the performing and visual arts, and are home to a significant concentration of creative businesses,” said Senator Serrano, who has been a vocal supporter of the arts throughout the city and state.

The Senator and other roundtable participants discussed the significant economic impact created by local naturally occurring cultural districts. They also examined the challenge of gentrification and displacement in these neighborhoods.

"We have a fantastic opportunity to promote naturally occurring cultural districts by ensuring that our elected officials fully understand the transformative economic and social impact of the arts on our communities," said Serrano. "In order to achieve this it's important that we find ways to quantify this positive impact- not just on the economy, but on school test scores, lower crime rates, and quality of life."

“The challenge for New York City is to foster growth in the creative sector without displacing the residents who helped to generate it in the first place,” said Serrano who serves as Chair of the Senate Committee on Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation and previously served as Chair of the City Council’s Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries, and International Inter-group Relations.

He continued, “To ensure the growth of naturally occurring cultural districts we must promote and preserve affordable housing within the communities in which they exist. With the loss of Mitchell-Lama, under-funding of NYCHA and the loss of rent stabilized apartments, this is quickly becoming a city where artists cannot afford to live and work. We must push for real rent reform and a sure way to promote continuity in our neighborhoods and, by extension, protect our naturally occurring cultural districts.”

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