

4. small businesses protections

Protecting small businesses is a top priority for Helen. Among other things, small businesses employ New Yorkers. Neighborhoods throughout the city are experiencing a loss of small businesses, as skyrocketing rents and competition with online retailers and services combined make it harder and harder to make ends meet. Helen recognizes that as times change, so too must the City's regulations and support for small businesses to help our neighborhoods keep up. For Helen, this has first and foremost meant fighting to eliminate the Commercial Rent Tax. This 3.9% tax is tacked on on top of what are already far too expensive rents. Since it is only applied in Manhattan between 96th Street and Chambers, it puts local businesses at a disadvantage right out of the gate and is a major challenge in promoting small business on the Upper West Side. It's a relic of another era, and Helen has sponsored legislation to exempt an additional 4,800 small businesses from it. In addition to tax policy, it is clear that the City's overall posture toward small businesses has to change. While Helen supports the intention of the Small Business Jobs Survival Act and is a co-sponsor, the legal staff at both the City Council and the City's Law Department have determined that the legislation as drafted would not withstand a court challenge. To that end, Helen is working to come up with a new way forward to protect small businesses. She supports legislation requiring landlords to register their vacancies with the City, charging a fee for doing so and a fine for failure to register. This would not only give policymakers a powerful data collection tool to help promote small business friendly policies, but could also serve as a disincentive for turning over properties to begin with. Helen is a strong partner with Upper West Side businesses. She promotes Shop Local campaigns. Helen funded a project for local students to profile small businesses and create a moving mural in honor of them. Her staff started conducting a Small Business Clinic, modeled after the successful Housing Clinics Gale Brewer introduced and that Helen has continued. Too often, she found that business owners facing lease issues were contacting her office only when it was too late to connect them with city services. This clinic is designed to connect small business owners with these services.