

IBO BALTON COMMUNITY PLANNER AWARD

LIZETTE CHAPARRO

DIRECTOR OF LAND USE, MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

In just a short time, Lizette Chaparro has built an impressive career as a planner in New York City, rising to become the Director of Land Use and Planning for the Manhattan Borough President's Office, a role she has served since 2020.

The origins of Lizette's interest in urban planning, and her work experience so far, have made her an ideal recipient of the Ibo Balton Community Planner Award. Following in the legacy of Ibo, Lizette is dedicated to the pursuit of uplifting communities through the development of affordable housing, local businesses, and other community improvements that enhance people's lives. Her approach to planning is centered around working with diverse communities, relationship-building, respecting the individual resident as well as understanding the big picture goals for the neighborhood, and a deep commitment to the painstaking work necessary to direct neighborhood improvements to reap the most equitable outcomes.

Though born in the Bronx, Lizette grew up in Union City and is proud of her New Jersey roots. Her childhood in Union City provided an inspiration for urban planning. She built an intuitive understanding of how the city offered opportunity for communities, while at the same time witnessing structural inequities. With support from a high school teacher, Lizette attended the Governor's School of New Jersey on Public Issues at Monmouth University, a tuition-free, residential summer program for high-achieving high school juniors. She went to the summer school expecting to learn a great deal about urban planning. Instead, she left with a growing confidence that her lived experience had brought her to the same conclusions that others had found from textbooks. She realized that she wanted to go to college to acquire the tools, labels, structures, and processes to ground her own experience of the interaction of a city and its communities. The first in her family to graduate from college, Lizette majored in urban studies at Brown University and completed a master's degree in urban planning at Rutgers University.

In her first jobs in NYC, Lizette worked at two prominent community-based non-profits: Ascendant Neighborhood Development and Clinton Housing Development Company (CHDC). She built experience working directly with residents; from helping seniors build personal resiliency plans with Ascendant to working with the artist population at 545 West 52nd Street for CHDC. Originally hired by CHDC as a project manager, she developed a skillset for undertaking granular work with communities to truly understand their experiences of their buildings and their neighborhoods. She also became a go-to

“Genuine relationship building is the foundation of good community planning.”
- Lizette Chaparro



for coalescing multifaceted planning strategies, building relationships with a broad array of stakeholders, organizing town halls, and doing in-house mapping to make the case for the right planning approaches.

Lizette’s next rational career step was to move into government to apply her skills on a larger scale, and to work with more Community Boards – which she had become passionate about through her work with CB4. She would even invite friends to come with her to Community Board meetings (only one did)!

She joined the Manhattan Borough President’s Office and became the Director of Land Use and Planning just as the city shut down in 2020; her work suddenly becoming focused on PPE need and supervising remote staff. Through her tenure as Director of Land Use and Planning, Lizette has worked on such projects as the SoHo/NoHo Neighborhood Plan and the recent report *Housing Manhattanites: A Report on Where and How to Build the Housing We Need*.

NYC is incredibly lucky to have planners like Lizette. They are often unsung heroes, and the purpose of the Ibo Balton Community Planner Award is to sing about them. We are delighted to honor Lizette with this award today and very excited to see her continued contributions to the city’s future throughout her career.

Lizette will also be joining a new panel to support the Ibo Balton Committee in the future selection of community planners for this award.