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New York City Council Stated Meeting Report

Every two weeks the New York City Council meets for its Stated Meeting to introduce and pass legislation. As a regular feature, Searchlight covers these meetings and posts a summary of the bills passed.

STATED MEETING - November 19, 2003

Quote of the Day:

"We all witnessed the loss of a warrior, the late Councilman James Davis, whose shoes I cannot fill, but whose legacy, vision and spirit I will keep alive." - Councilmember Letitia James, being sworn in after winning the vacant seat of slain Councilmember James E. Davis.

Meeting Summary:

With much fanfare, Letitia James was officially sworn in as the new City Council member for the 35th district in Brooklyn. She fills the vacant seat of slain Councilmember James E. Davis, who was shot in City Hall on July 23, 2003.

James, who ran on the Working Families Party line in the November election, won by a wide margin and defeated three other candidates, including Democrat Geoffrey Davis, the brother of the deceased council member.

"We recognize that this victory was born out of tragedy," said James. "It is difficult for me to celebrate. But it is essential that we bring about unity. Unity is the greatest need this hour."(Read her full [speech](#))

James's entrance into the City Council chambers was carefully choreographed for

by Gotham Gazette Staff

Wednesday, November 19, 2003 12:00 AM

photographers, and Speaker Gifford Miller escorted James onto the council floor where she took her oath of office. A crowd of supporters and family members attended the meeting and they cheered when James cast her first "yea" vote on a series of landuse items.

While new to the council, James has a long resume of political experience. She served as an aide to Assemblyman Roger Green, worked in the office of the state attorney general, and established the Urban Network, a coalition of African-American professional organizations that promote education. James narrowly lost the 2001 election to James Davis.

James promised to work on issues like affordable housing, health care, and education and to create employment opportunities in the district. (Read about [development issues](#) in the district.)

After the ceremony, the council had a light legislative agenda.

The members unanimously voted for a measure that adjusts the property tax rates for one, two, and three-family homes. The measure was a required response to a state law passed in August. While the action actually shifts some of overall property tax burden from homeowners to utilities and commercial real estate owners, most homeowners will still see an increase because their property values have risen considerably in the last year. The average homeowner will see a \$48 increase in their November property tax bill.

"None of us will be able to explain that to our constituents because I can barely explain it myself," said Brooklyn Councilmember Lewis Fidler, who called for a reform of the property tax laws.

The council also approved a business improvement district (Intro 564) on Sutphin Boulevard in the Jamaica Center area of Queens.

The most hotly debated measure of the day concerned a resolution (Res 1133) denouncing former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad for his anti-Semitic remarks. At a recent conference, Mohamad said that "Jews rule this world by proxy; they get others to fight and die for them."

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Brooklyn Councilmember Charles Barron voted against the resolution because he said he was tired of the City Council's "pro-Israel agenda." Speaker Miller defended the measure. "This has to do with bigoted, hateful, and offensive remarks," said Miller.

The next Stated Meeting is scheduled for December 3.

For an archive of past meetings and council votes, visit Gotham Gazette's [Searchlight](#) .