

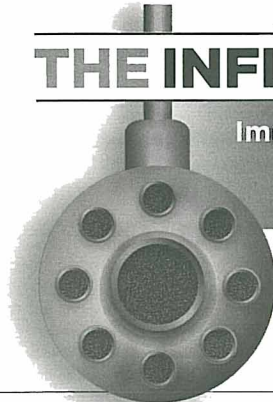


CITY HALL

AUGUST 15, 2011

THE INFLUENTIALS

Important non-electeds most New Yorkers have never heard of



Real power doesn't always show its face in New York City. Behind the scenes in government, business, labor and the nonprofit world, the forces that propel the city are often marshaled by people who rarely

rise to public prominence. While politicians, top executives and other leaders may be the faces outsiders see of major initiatives, insiders know better.

City Hall's second annual list of 20 influential non-elected officials profiles those people with deep contacts, long institutional memories and sterling reputations for getting things done.

In these pages, you'll meet the people who can build skyscrapers and rezone neighborhoods, who can steer elections and guide City Hall, who can mobi-

lize tens of thousands of people and millions of dollars, who can quietly build a consensus before most New Yorkers even know what's at issue.

We recognize them to honor their ability to drive the agenda in a city as complicated as New York—and to provide a guide to New Yorkers who want to know how the city really works.

Photos by Andrew Schwartz and Dan Burnstein



James Whelan

Senior Vice President for Public Affairs, Real Estate Board of New York

New York City bears the imprint of James Whelan's career: a resurgent Union Square Park, renovations throughout downtown Brooklyn and the master plan for an enormous development in Willets Point, Queens.

Yet the man behind them—and other major city projects in recent years—is largely unknown outside of the offices in the city and Albany where he directs his efforts.

"I don't often surface publicly," explained Whelan, who still lives in Queens, where he was born and raised.

He specializes in bringing complex projects to fruition by coordinating public- and private-sector efforts, drawing on his experiences in government, nonprofits and the business world. In his first major development, he ran the 14th Street–Union Square Local Development Corp. as it turned its namesake park into a destination again—paving the way for the area's resurgence.

"It was [my] first real demonstration of the ability for advocacy to really improve an area," he recalled. "Fourteenth Street was down and out. There was nothing going on, on the perimeter of the park. You didn't go into Union Square Park. You didn't want to go into the area."

His résumé later grew to include experience at influential nonprofits like the Downtown Brooklyn Council, in the City Hall bull pen as the chief of staff to former Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff and as a senior vice president at Muss Development.

"The fact that he lived in both worlds—meaning government and the private sector—permits him to be more influential," said his boss, REBNY President Steven Spinola. "It lets him understand how someone sitting in City Hall or the governor's office will react to something. He sees things from a much broader point of view."

Today Whelan represents the interests of the city's real estate industry, which is dominated by families who know that the value of their holdings is tied up in the long-term health of New York City.

"What's important is ensuring the health and growth of the city," Whelan said. "We have a particular point of view, but it's one that's good for the city."

—Adam Lisberg