

“The gods do not limit men. Men limit men.”
TOM ROBBINS JITTERBUG PERFUME

Alder loses Democratic organizer role to wife of former opponent

BY NELLIE KENNEY AND GEMARD GUERY
STAFF REPORTERS

A New Haven alder from the Hill will not continue to represent her ward as a Democratic Town Committee co-chair after a nail-biting election on Tuesday. Democratic co-chairs — two for each of New Haven’s 30 wards — encourage voter engagement in their neighborhoods, help register voters and endorse Democratic nominees to local office. All but two wards’ co-chair pairs went uncontested this year. But in the Hill’s Ward 3,

incumbents Angel Hubbard and Clarence Cummings faced off against challengers Sandra Pittman and Lisa Velazquez Torres. In Ward 29, which includes Beaver Hills, Bryanna Wingate and Betty Alford ran a friendly race against Alexandra Taylor and Jorge Lopes after the ward’s previous cochairs stepped down. In the last two years, Hubbard and Miguel Pittman, Sandra Pittman’s husband, have competed in three Ward 3 races — most recently an alder general election last November in which the two candidates traded cheating

accusations, the New Haven Independent reported. Tuesday’s co-chair election was the first time Sandra Pittman had run for office, she said. A red tent flanked by signs which read “YALE: RESPECT NEW HAVEN” faced a food truck from Pittman’s restaurant, Sandra’s Next Generation, outside of Career High School as voters went to cast their ballots. Hubbard received 120 in-person votes and Pittman received 119 in-person votes. To the surprise of many, it seemed the two would serve together as co-chairs, splitting the two slates. In tears, Hubbard expressed relief that the Pittman-Hubbard saga had come to an end, with both apparently elected co-chair. However, after absentee ballots were counted at City Hall, the winners in Ward 3 were Pittman and Velazquez Torres with 168 and 150 total votes, respectively. Hubbard received 19 absentee votes, and Cummings received 15. “I knew that a lot of my supporters told me they were going to be here rain, sleet, or snow because they didn’t like what happened with my husband in the election prior with our name being smeared,” Sandra Pittman said in an interview following the announcement of her victory. “They were upset about that. People lost faith, people lost trust, but they are

starting to believe again.” Pittman, Hubbard and Ward 3 residents all expressed exhaustion with the repeated competitive elections. Before the final results were tabulated, Hubbard said she was “over the whole ‘Pittman versus Hubbard,’” adding that she felt the focus on the ward had been lost, with neighborhood leaders unwilling to collaborate. Stacie Jones, a Ward 3 resident, said she wished the separation between Pittman and Hubbard supporters could end and that the community could come together. She said she voted for Pittman, citing her longtime familiarity with the family. “I love that she’s family-oriented and feels like family. If you’re lacking something, you could go there, and they’d help you,” Jones said. Meanwhile, there was little drama in Ward 29. The four candidates stood bundled under a pair of tents outside Beecher High School during the day, talking with residents of the ward as they headed in and out of the polls. Wingate and Alford — who received 115 and 105 votes, respectively — will serve as co-chairs. Taylor received 65 votes and Lopes received 63. Wingate and Alford agreed that the biggest challenge facing the ward was affordability. Wingate, who is a member of UNITE HERE Local 34, the Yale

clerical and technical workers’ union, echoed recent union calls for Yale to significantly increase its voluntary contribution to the city to \$110 million. “They don’t pay taxes. So I think that is really important,” Wingate said, pointing to high rent costs and the 4 percent property tax increase included in Mayor Justin Elicker’s proposed city budget. Elicker has suggested that a bump in Yale’s contribution might allow for a lower tax increase. After the votes were read, Taylor hugged and congratulated Wingate. Taylor and Lopez each said that running was a “win” regardless of the outcome of the race. “We met amazing people. We introduced ourselves. We sent a message out there that you can believe that there’s someone out there that loves where they live and would like to do amazing things there,” Taylor said. Alford, who serves as the lead cook at Truman Elementary School, echoed the sentiment. All the candidates are “winners,” she said, “because we all still continue to fight.” Ward 3 is centered on The Hill neighborhood in southern New Haven.

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KIMBERLY ANGELES / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Alder Angel Hubbard was voted out of her position as a Democratic Town Committee co-chair in Ward 3, where two challengers won instead.

Two alders want to cater to local caterers by lowering license fees

BY JESSICA HICKLE
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

As they push for licensing reforms, two alders have a clear message for city officials: It is too expensive to start a food business in New Haven. Alders Caroline Tanbee Smith ’14 SOM ’25 and Sarah Miller ’03 are advocating for two specific policy changes that, if implemented, would significantly reduce the cost of obtaining a catering license for local businesses. The alders’ first proposal would eliminate fee requirements for catering businesses in their first year of operation. Businesses would pay \$250 in fees in subsequent years. According to Tanbee Smith, catering businesses are currently required to pay a fee of \$650 in their first year and \$550 in subsequent years. Rick Langerak, a Newhallville resident, said the proposed changes would be transformative for his nascent home baking business Bapple Pie, which specializes in Langerak’s native Dutch pies and cookies. After starting his business in October 2025, he said he cannot afford a catering license in New Haven at the current cost level. “It’s just such a small budget. I would be broke right away,” he said. Tanbee Smith and Miller’s second proposal earned its nickname, the Pickle Jar Permit, because it targets businesses selling consumer packaged goods, like teas, cereals, sauces — or pickles. Under the current requirements, these businesses must pay the same \$550 licensing fees as catering businesses to sell their products at venues like farmers markets or fairs. But advocates say these local requirements unnecessarily duplicate the rigorous state- and federal-level certifications that consumer packaged good businesses must obtain. The new proposal would waive these fees by creating a new licensing category for consumer packaged good businesses. Hamden resident Kwame Asare, founder of Oh Shito!, a local brand of Ghanaian hot pepper sauces, said the city’s high fees deter him from selling at New Haven farmers’ markets. “I would love to be able to return to the farmers’ market because that’s where my journey began. But the current licensing requirements have become a significant issue,” Asare said. Tanbee Smith presented the two proposals at a meeting of the

Board of Alders Health and Human Services Committee last Thursday. She was joined by Langerak, Asare and at least a dozen other local food entrepreneurs and community members who voiced their support for the initiatives. Some carried colorful signs branded with the campaign’s slogan, “Best City to Start.” “We’ve seen a spirit of buoyancy and joy and forward-looking momentum,” Tanbee Smith said of the group. “We hope to carry that energy as an increasingly larger coalition towards any policy or change that we want to see.” Tanbee Smith has used her Instagram page to build support among business owners and the broader community. In a video posted last week, Tanbee Smith spoke with Bill Frisch, owner of the local bakery East Rock Breads, about how small businesses like his own help communities grow and flourish. “It’s a gathering place for so many neighbors,” Tanbee Smith said in the video. “Through Best City to Start, we’re hoping to make it easier for entrepreneurs to start bakeries and other places just like this that we love.” Business owners and community members can sign up for updates on the campaign through a link on Tanbee Smith’s Instagram page. In addition to local business owners, Tanbee Smith and Miller have collaborated with officials from the New Haven Health Department to develop the proposals. Speaking at the Feb. 26 committee meeting, Brian Wnek, the city’s environmental health director, described the rigorous inspection process and requirements for catering businesses. “Temporary food service operations follow the same code as food service establishments do, so the rules don’t change because the location changes,” Wnek said. Tanbee Smith said the proposed fee reduction would not introduce any changes to the inspection process or requirements for catering businesses. The proposal would also have little impact on the city’s bottom line. Tanbee Smith said in a phone interview that the fees account for only 0.00004 percent of the city’s \$700 million budget. In the long run, Tanbee Smith added, the reforms might result in increased overall revenue by enabling more businesses to start and grow. The bulk of the city’s revenue from permits, licenses and fees is derived from building permits.

“And how do we get building permits? That’s when small businesses actually have a fighting chance to start and actually occupy a storefront,” she said. Tanbee Smith, who co-founded the local small business accelerator Collab in 2017, said the idea for the two initiatives grew out of her years of experience working with food entrepreneurs. “I had the privilege to be able to work with hundreds of entrepreneurs in the city and one issue that came up over and over again when we were working with food entrepreneurs is the permitting and licensing process,” she said. She has also taken inspiration from similar programs in other cities. Tanbee Smith cited San Francisco’s First Year Free program, which began in 2021 and waives permit and business registration fees for new small businesses. And, closer to home, Tanbee Smith said she has not identified a nearby city with higher licensing fees than New Haven.

Tanbee Smith and her allies hope that bringing fee requirements in closer alignment with other Connecticut cities will draw more entrepreneurs to New Haven. “It will make it more allowable for food businesses and small businesses to start,” she said. “We’ll see more catering, more food business activity, more resilience.” The Board of Alders Health and Human Services Committee will next meet at 6 p.m. on March 26 at City Hall.

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MARTIN PERALTA / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Alders Smith and Miller have proposed licensing new catering businesses without fees for their first year.

New alder sworn in, filling downtown seat



COURTESY OF SADIE SCHOENBERGER
Christine Kim ’99 took her oath of office in a brief ceremony at City Hall on Wednesday.

BY NELLIE KENNEY
STAFF REPORTER

A downtown alder was sworn in Wednesday evening to fill a seat on the Board of Alders that has been empty since January. Christine Kim ’99 was elected to represent Ward 7, which includes parts of downtown and East Rock, in a sleepy special election two weeks ago. The seat had been vacant since New Year’s Day, when former Alder Eli Sabin ’22 LAW ’26 stepped down minutes before his own swearing in. Kim, a community organizer and longtime New Haven resident, said she plans to focus on public safety and quality of life as she assumes her duties as alder. “I’m a very opinionated middle-aged woman,” Kim said in an interview after her swearing in. “However, I believe — and this is what I’ve talked to my constituents about — that I’m their advocate, and I’m their voice here. And so their priorities are my priorities.” Kim said she has spent the past several weeks “talking about rents and how we can help our residents stay in our city.” Many love the city but feel they have “no choice” but to move elsewhere because of concerns related to affordability, public safety and quality of life, she said. Kim added that she hopes to follow in the footsteps of a former Ward 7 alder, Frances “Bitsie” Clark, by supporting the arts, which she said are “pillar institutions in our community.” Clark, who died in 2025, was known for her patronage of local artists, according to previous reporting by the News.

In a brief speech following her swearing-in, Kim credited a 2021 phone call from Mayor Justin Elicker with inspiring her to become involved in the city. Elicker asked her who he should reach out to about addressing anti-Asian hate in the city, Kim said. “I thought, well, there’s this Chinese church here, there’s this leader here, but there was not really a space or a group,” she said. Following the conversation, Kim reached out to Caroline Tanbee Smith ’14 SOM ’25, now the alder for Ward 9, and other community members, with whom she collaborated to found the pan-Asian collective called aapiNHV, she said. “So that was the first time I really took a leap locally to get involved, and it’s just been an amazing, enriching, fulfilling part since then,” Kim said. “I blame you,” she added to Elicker. Addressing Kim before her swearing-in, Elicker said she was “throwing herself into the fire.” “It’s a thankless job, it pays virtually nothing, but it’s a really important job for the function of our city, so thank you for stepping up,” he said. Tanbee Smith said she didn’t think Kim “needs advice” as she enters her first term. “She’s new to this role, but she’s been a longtime advocate in the city and brings just tremendous experience, joy, vibrancy, creativity,” she said. The ceremony took place in the Aldermanic Chambers on the second floor of City Hall.

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