

Another news story about the June 12 City Hall news conference [organized](#) by Queens Civic Congress, Four Borough Neighborhood Preservation Alliance and Historic Districts Council.

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## *Queens Ledger*

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### DOB Needs Overhaul Before It Totally Collapses

CAPTION: Councilman Tony Avella spoke outside City Hall on Wednesday to discuss a need for change to the DOB.

### **Groups hold rally on steps of City Hall to call for department reform**

By Henrick A. Karoliszyn

The steaming City Hall steps were boiling with outspoken activists who fear the crumbling Department of Buildings (DOB) will only get worse if a major restructuring is not undertaken immediately.

With temperatures reaching nearly 100 degrees on Wednesday afternoon, dozens of angry citizens, politicians and organizations vented their concerns about DOB in the wake of 15 fatal construction accidents that occurred in the past 6 months. There were 12 fatal construction accidents in all of 2007.

Raul Rothblatt of the Four Borough Neighborhood Preservation Alliance kicked off the scorcher by issuing a need for community input in further DOB projects, and he pointed the finger at Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

“DOB reform is not an obscure debate, it’s about people dying and it’s been going on for years in every neighborhood of the city,” he said. “It’s encouraging that the mayor is using strong rhetoric but it’s time for his actions to speak louder than words.”

Rothblatt said that the issues with the department go beyond crane safety.

“That’s only the tip of iceberg,” he said. “We have been witnessing death after death, accident after accident, and the mayor has only acted recently.”

Mayoral candidate and Councilman Tony Avella prefaced his own speech by saying he'd be less diplomatic before going on a tirade about DOB conditions.

"It is a disaster," he said. "And it has been for years."

Avella then covered the issue of responsibility. The Department of Buildings, he said, should continue to maintain housing in New York to be safe and to ensure secure construction be undertaken by following the zoning codes, and not be involved in promoting development.

"That is a huge conflict of interest," he argued. "Give that responsibility to the Economic Development Corporation or HPD."

No matter who takes on the job, Avella said the current situation is outlandish.

"You can't have the watchdogs of the developers working with the developers at the same time," he said to applause and encouragement. As for the current reality, Avella rode the wave of clapping to add one more question.

"How stupid is this that the city of New York doesn't say to these bad developers and contractors: 'That's it, you're done'?" he asked.

Councilman John Liu agreed that DOB has had issues for some time now.

"We know that for a long, long time, we needed a top-to-bottom overhaul of the Department of Building," he said. "I'm shocked that all of this [construction-related accidents] happened, but on the other hand it's not all too surprising."

Councilman Jimmy Vacca of the Bronx suggested ending the self-certification process, which allows architects to approve their own plans, and that the DOB and the mayor's office stop putting what he calls a "band-aid" on the issue instead of fixing the department from top to bottom.

Norman Siegel, a likely public advocate contender for 2009, added that there was a large systematic problem sprouting from the building boom in the past few years, and that the issues are not just in the Manhattan.

"These accidents are not isolated in Manhattan, but stretch to Queens and the outer boroughs," he said.

Yet Siegel added that he was not anti-development. Instead, he questioned training and working conditions, as well as funding for DOB inspectors. He suggested a raise of standards and executive decisions to shed a brighter public spotlight on the department. "We cannot fail," he concluded.