

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday, March 2, 1998

CIVICS FIGHT ILLEGAL HOUSING

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The Queens Civic Congress [QCC] held a town hall last week to focus on the failures of government to prevent the violations of zoning and building codes, announced Sean M. Walsh, QCC President. The Monday, February 23, 1998 meeting at the Kew Gardens Community Center featured the adoption of a resolution that “urges the State and City of New York to adopt legislation, policies and administrative practices that will contribute to compliance with the Building Code and Zoning Resolution” after presentations about the impact of inadequate and/or failed enforcement in several Queens Communities, noted QCC Vice President for Public Affairs Corey Bearak. “The Queens Civic Congress organized this forum to get government to address the illegal and unsafe conditions in neighborhoods where, absent respect for the law, more and more legal homes and illegal apartments will be converted or subdivided to create multiple units, explained Mr. Bearak.

QCC Vice Presidents Patricia Dolan and Paul Kerzner coordinated the program which also featured a discussion of the limits of self-certification practices and related problems by Mohamed A. Mohamed, President of Five Boro Electrical Contractors, and Mario Centa, Co-chair of the Illegal Practices Committee of the NYC Master Plumbers Council. “Community impacts and examples of failed or inadequate enforcement were related by Fran Lieu of the Jamaica Estates Association, Janet Fash of the Rockaway Action Committee, John Liu of the Bayside Avenue Estates Civic Association, Ann Barbera of the Rockaway Park Civic Association, Adrian Sumowicz of the Jackson Heights Beautification Group, Julius Hintz and Ann Keller of the Ridgewood Property Owners and Civic Association, and Ruth DuBerry of the United Neighbors Civic Association [Baisley Park/Rochdale Village]. Barbara Stuchinski of the Forest Hills Community Association submitted a statement.

Following the program moderated by QCC Vice President Dolan, the Congress approved the motion to support:

- *the enactment of the *Pheffer Bill* [A.269A/S.4597A] which would permit the conversion of outstanding NYC Department of Buildings fines into real estate tax liens;
- *the creation of additional contextual zones to reflect existing residential configurations;
- *a multi-agency tax force, under the direction of a Deputy Mayor, to coordinate the enforcement of the Zoning Resolution and Building Code; and
- *programs to educate and inform homeowners to educate and inform homeowners of their rights and responsibilities regarding the Zoning Resolution and the Building Code.

“Government inaction threatens the integrity of our neighborhoods,” stated QCC President Walsh. “The Congress appreciates the efforts and commitment of Buildings Commissioner Gaston Silva but new laws and additional inspectors to address these code violations have yet to produce the intended results: prevent illegal conversions.”

The agenda also included Committee Reports and (proposed) Resolutions on JFK Airport Rail Access by Ruth Bryant and QCC Secretary Seymour Schwartz, HOV lanes on the L.I.E. through Queens by Douglaston Civic Association President Nancy Sakas, and the Flagship Park by QCC Parks Chair Dan Donohue. President Walsh reported on other QCC activities, including the QCC's testimony on the City's preliminary budget and its ongoing involvement in plans to dispose of land the state declared surplus at Creedmoor State Psychiatric Center.

The Resolution, presented by Parks Chair Donahue "Resolved that the Queens Civic Congress approve, support and advocate and encourage by all means at its disposal, the establishment of an independently budgeted *Flagship Park* administrative structure to manage and maintain the parkland within the Alley Watershed, and recommends to the NYC Parks Department that it adopt this proven method of park management for the long-term benefit of the parkland of Northeast Queens."

The Resolution on airport access urged efforts "convince Governor Pataki and (our) elected officials to force the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to drop the \$600 million 3-mile JFK Airport-Jamaica segment of its \$1.5 billion Airport Light Rail System."

The HOV resolution "urge(s) Governor Pataki and Mayor Giuliani to exercise all powers and authority at their disposal to call off the widening of the Long Island Expressway in Queens and instruct the New York State Department of Transportation to develop new policy tools for meeting the transportation and quality of life needs of Queens, New York City and the metropolitan region."