

Queens Civic Congress testimony  
on  
The Mayor's Proposed Budget (FY 2002)  
to the  
Queens Delegation City Council  
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presented by  
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Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to address the Queens delegation of the City Council on the Mayor's proposed budget.

**The Queens Civic Congress** is a coalition of almost 100 civic and neighborhood associations representing thousands of Queens' families living in every corner of the borough.

This year, as in years past, our number one priority is education. Some of the city's finest schools are in Queens; some of the city's worst schools are in the borough as well. Every child deserves the best possible education. Driving down class size, restoring art and music to the curriculum, enhancing building maintenance, rebuilding sports and athletic facilities, and continuing to build new schools are integral to giving every child a quality education.

Our obligation to our children does not end at the schoolhouse door. Restoring funds for after school programs; street outreach services, summer youth employment programs and other youth services and discretionary programs are among our highest priorities.

Regional Beacons, opening more schools after hours, at night and on weekends for youth programs would enrich our children's lives and stabilize neighborhoods.

Restoring funds for our libraries is another priority. In Queens, our libraries serve youth, immigrants learning the ways of a new country; the elderly and families. Curtailing hours, cutting back on purchases and services sends a terrible message to the community. Additionally, many older libraries need to be replaced with larger facilities designed to serve the needs of the new Queens. An example is the almost forty-year-old Kew Gardens Hills branch that is bursting at the seams. That community has been asking for a new facility that the civic estimates will cost about \$3 million for most of the last decade.

Our cultural institutions require introduction of new programs and services for Queens' growing multicultural communities. Praising the borough's diversity without supporting its cultures is a hollow gesture indeed. The Council needs to restore and enhance funding for these critically needed institutions.

Playgrounds, parks and recreational facilities provide a welcome respite from the strains of urban life. They are also among the first city services to feel the pain of budget cuts. Restoring funding for these essential services should be at the top of the Council's priority list.

Parks is not just playing. The borough's thousands of trees are in desperate need of regular maintenance and pruning.

In a few months Fresh Kills will close and with it an era of cheap garbage disposal. The city must move forward with waste reduction programs and a long-term cost-effective waste disposal methods.

A major challenge is reforming the Buildings Department. Building collapses, structural defects in buildings under construction and serious life threatening injuries suffered by construction workers point to the ongoing lack of enforcement. Additional inspectors for the Department of Housing Preservation and Development the Department of Buildings must be hired to ensure proper enforcement of building and housing codes and the Zoning Resolution. Funding for follow-up enforcement and coordination with the Environmental Control Board is overdue. Funding is available from permit fees and other fees to accomplish these tasks.

Many Queens' neighborhoods have experienced tremendous growth over the past decade. These neighborhoods are in desperate need of traffic studies to determine how traffic mitigations can enhance residents' quality of life. DOT needs funding to improve street and road repair; sign replacement is non-existent in many neighborhoods. As an aside, let this be the year for the Council to examine the private bus companies' franchises.

The New York City Police Department has made our city one of the safest in America. We congratulate the men and women of the department.

Queens needs its fair share of manpower. Queens gets 1/5 of the uniformed service to look after 1/4 of the city's crime. Budget negotiations must address this disparity.

Queens again experienced the highest response time this year. Failure to respond in a timely manner to crime reports undermines confidence in the police. Improving precinct staffing and improving manning of RMPS will mitigate this. This problem may be the result of oversized precincts. Some of our Queens precincts are the size of small cities and residents believe the precinct lines should be redrawn.

Community policing—perhaps with a new name—must be reintroduced. Nothing makes people feel safer than a familiar cop on the beat. Police visibility is the most effective element in crime prevention. Efforts to keep police doing police work must continue.

Queens' members have provided the impetus that made possible the creation of an effective City Council over the past decade. With the guidance of Speaker Vallone, the Council has created itself as a genuine legislature. We are proud that Queens members led committees and task forces that have put a permanent stamp on New York. As New Yorkers, we thank you; as Queens residents, we congratulate you.