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Community Headlines

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Water Tax Increase Headlines UFCA Meet

Latest Proposal Is Opposed

story and photo by Ralph Mancini

At their Thursday, Nov. 8 meeting, members of the United Forties Civic Association were paid a visit by the newly-elected president of the Queens Civic Congress, Corey Bearak, who stated his opposition to a recently proposed 18.5 percent water tax rate hike for city homeowners.

“No” to water rate hike

Bearak told community members congregated at Woodside’s St. Teresa’s Parish Center that the latest “rate boost” represents a further renunciation on the part of City Hall when it comes to securing the support New York City should expect from both the state and federal governments.



Corey Bearak, president of the Queens Civic Congress, addresses a variety of concerns including a proposed tax rate increase issued by the New York City Water Board. Also pictured are United Forties Civic Association President Cathryn Keeshan (seated at far left) and UFCA Vice President Kathleen Histon.

“I feel we should go after the Feds to give us the dollars to help us meet these mandates,” he said in reference to the federal government’s requirement for the city to build sewage treatment plants throughout the city and a filtration plant in Bronx’s Van Cortlandt Park.

The civic leader recounted how he joined the chorus of legislators arguing that money could be saved by purchasing land in Putnam, Westchester and Dutchess counties around the watershed which would be cheaper than building a plant.

The latest hike comes on the heels of an 11.5 percent raise approved July 1 by the City Council and the mayor’s office.

It was previously reported that the increase would be needed to make up for lower-than-expected revenue collections during this year’s late-summer and early-autumn months.

Bearak took issue with the system currently being used by the NYC Water Board to determine the timing and the amount by which the water taxes are being bumped up.

Board members, according to the attorney, typically schedule hearings and set water rates during late April and early May—two months before the adoption of the city budget.

During his time as the chief of staff for Council Member Sheldon Leffler and chair of the Environmental Protection Committee in the '80s and '90s, Bearak reported that he helped draft legislation to modify the method in which increases are applied.

“I drafted this legislation and [Mayor Rudolph] Giuliani is vetoing it,” he recalled. “We negotiated the bill. It was politically upsetting.”

Furthermore, a resolution prohibiting the board from holding their hearings and compiling their surveys before budget approval was rescinded in December 1998, said Bearak.

The Bellerose resident went on to say that New Yorkers can no longer bear the brunt of another tax hike while City Hall lets Washington and New York State off the hook.

“The city needs to put more money into mass transit.”

In a published statement, Bearak likens the tax-hike plan to the recent 22-percent property tax increase endured by homeowners—many of whom are seniors living on fixed incomes, he points out.

One local resident couldn't come to terms with the reasoning behind the rate surge and said, “What's the logic behind raising our water taxes? ... Because of the deadbeats who don't pay their taxes?”

City Council Member James Gennaro, who currently chairs the Council's Environmental Protection Committee, recently told the Times Newsweek that the proposed rate increase was unnecessary given that the Water Board “pocketed” \$60 million during the last fiscal year and is projected to gain an additional \$76 million by the end of the 2008 fiscal year next June.

That funding, claimed the Council member, was funneled to the city's General Fund in lieu of water and sewer maintenance and improvement projects.

Bearak on property tax reform

The QCC president briefly weighed in on property taxes, calling for a more equitable system of tax payment for home owners of \$200,000 properties, as well as for proprietors of million-dollar estates.

“Why do so many people with so many assets not proportionally pay their fair share?” he said.

He continued by stating that businesses should be taxed at higher rates and not as if they were one-family homes.

In addition, Bearak noted that property owners that own homes that they just invest in, but don't occupy should be taxed on a different scale.

Q&A on illegal conversions

When asked by a member of the audience what to do in a case where a two-family home has four families living in it, Bearak advised everyone to call 311 and then report their complaint to their local community board.

“A lot of getting things done [requires] repetition,” he observed while also reminding people that “the squeaky wheel gets the grease.”

Updates/Correspondence

UFCA President Cathryn Keeshan informed civic members that both she and Secretary Catherine McNamara would be representing them at the Queens Civic Congress’s 10th annual legislative reception to be held on Sunday, Dec. 2 at the Douglaston Club in Bellerose Manor.

Tickets are \$20 for the two-hour ceremony, which begins at 1 p.m.

During the correspondence portion of the meeting, Keeshan notified the audience of two letters sent to her by State Sen. Serphin Maltese.

One was a reminder that the Lawn Litter Bill is in the books as a law, but isn’t being enforced yet due to the fact that the amended chapter of the measure applying to multi-family dwellings hasn’t yet been approved by State Assembly although it has already been passed by the Senate.

The Lawn Litter Bill aims to empower homeowners by giving them the right to display signs on their front doors prohibiting the placement of unwanted flyers, newspapers and other materials on their front stoops and doorsteps.

A spokesperson for Maltese told the Times Newsweekly that supermarkets are now offering to send customers their circulars at bulk rate instead of dropping them off on their doorsteps.

In another notice, Maltese stated his decision to join the New York State Senate Majority delegation in an effort to urge the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to withdraw its plan to raise fares and tolls in 2008, 2010 and every two years thereafter. The senator has posted an online petition for those who disagree with the MTA.

The United Forties Civic Association has scheduled a Christmas party to be held at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 13 in lieu of their regular meeting. The event will take place at St. Teresa’s Parish Center located at 50-22 44th Street in Woodside.