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## **Civics call for concessions review**

BY **NICK BROWN**

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The Queens Civic Congress (QCC) has announced a proposal to amend rules pertaining to oversight of major concessions in New York City.

Concessions, defined as private uses of city property for the purpose of making a profit, are reviewed by the City Council's Parks and Recreation Committee up to three times per year, said Council and Parks Committee member Joseph Addabbo. To members of QCC, however, the committee isn't doing enough.

In her testimony to the Parks Committee during a Wednesday, October 24 hearing, QCC Executive Vice President Patricia Dolan presented QCC's platform, which would make marinas, parking lots, new buildings, and restaurants of at least 150 seats subject to full public review under the city's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP). Currently, major concessions are subject to review.

Addabbo did not offer a specific definition of a major concession, but said the Council's Parks Committee deems a concession major or minor depending on size, location and budget.

Whatever the definition of a major concession, said Dolan, it needs to be more specific and broadened.

"The current rules allow too many concessions a bypass of review without any opportunity for public comment," said Dolan in her testimony. "[QCC] identifies the need to legislate meaningful thresholds for public review and oversight by the City Council."

QCC President Corey Bearak called public review "an absolute good thing,"

and said it was necessary to ensure the protection of consumers and city residents. Bearak noted the Douglaston Golf Course as an example.

“There have been complaints of balls ending up in backyards and whatnot,” said Bearak. “Maybe the answer is to put up netting. In Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, there are not enough bathrooms, and there is a need for more. But right now, people don’t have any place to take these ideas, these complaints. Without public review, it’s dependent essentially on getting the Mayor to tell the head of his agencies what he wants. That’s hard to do.”

Instead, Bearak explained, local elected officials must have more authority to call for oversight.

Addabbo, though, says the Parks Committee does exercise oversight. Not only does the committee meet to discuss concessions at least once a year, but discussions about concession rules often come up in the City Council’s bi-annual budget meetings, yielding at least three yearly meetings in which concession rules are addressed. Still, Addabbo conceded that his committee could do more.

“I don’t think anything has been done wrong,” he said. “It’s just a question of, ‘How do we do it better?’”

One way, said Addabbo, would be to allow the New York City Parks Department - the agency charged with licensing concessionaires - to keep the profits raised by concessions, rather than funneling profits into the general city budget, as is currently the procedure. Though he acknowledged that Mayor Bloomberg would be unlikely to support the idea, he said it “sends a message: if you give the Parks Department more incentive, they’ll bring in higher-quality concessionaires.”

But, while Addabbo’s plan addresses concerns for the future, the QCC seems firm in its belief that reform must come now.

“[We] value the integrity of our parks,” said Dolan. “It is incumbent upon elected officials to guard against efforts by bean counters in government...to put ‘For Sale’ signs on them.”