

Makes Sense:
If they shun fines and do not cure violations,
should not the city bar their ability to build

Some Civic leaders comment on the recent report that the City apparently does not act vigorously to collect penalties on building violations and often allows those who violate to build elsewhere. We look forward to change here. Building Commissioner LiMandri speaks to Queens Civic Congress April 20 and we look forward to a dialogue

-Corey Bearak, President, Queens Civic Congress

Not only have we been saying it, but it was in QCC's Platform for years, and there was a Council Intro on it: "Mandate the Buildings Department to require applicants to cure all outstanding violations before approval of any new-building permit, alteration permit or C. of O.(see Intro. #232)."

- Rich Hellenbrecht, Chair, Queens Community Board 13; Vice President, Queens Civic Congress (and chair of the committee that drafted the aforementioned platform

I find it amazing that there is not legislation similar to what Councilman [James] Vacca proposes on the books now....In addition to the fact that it is the right thing to do, we are at a stage where all the government entities look to raise taxes, through increased fees, property taxes, tolls, fare increases etc. They somehow feel we are an endless supply of money. Well there is an old adage "Be as aggressive with them as they are with you". So maybe it is time to fight back.

- Frank Toner, President, Rocky Hill Civic Association

The amazing thing is the ordinary Joe homeowner had to toe the line every time or he's in trouble while these developers & landlords who are political contributors get away with almost everything. How many times has a civic association been more diligent than the city inspectors? Too many times.

- Bernard Aquilino, Past President, Rocky Hill Civic Association

Not only have the civics been saying this to each other for years, but we have been saying it to the DOB and our elected officials for as long as I can remember.

-Bob Friedrich, President, Glen Oaks Village

Isn't this what we civic leaders and activists have been saying for years?

- Angela Augugliaro, President Queens Colony Civic Association

Makes sense

- Rick Duskiwicz, President, Creedmoor Civic Association

http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/2009/02/15/2009-02-15_city_councilman_james_vacca_calls_for_ci.html

City Councilman James Vacca calls for city to crack whip on deadbeats

It's ludicrous," said [City Councilman James Vacca \(D-Bronx\)](#), who is pushing for what he calls "bad actors" legislation to curtail the practice.

"We're in such a financial crisis," he said. "The city should say, 'Wait a minute. You want to put a building in Middletown Road? You owe us money here. No permit until you pay. You have to be in good standing with the city.'"

The Daily News reported [Sunday](#) that hundreds of thousands of deadbeats owe the city more than \$2 billion in unpaid taxes, parking tickets and overdue fines for violations like dangerous construction sites or dirty sidewalks.

That's roughly half of the money that [Mayor Bloomberg](#) wants to raise through layoffs and tax increases. The mayor also is launching an effort to more aggressively pursue scofflaws.

Vacca, upset over a building owner in his district who got permits on a new condo tower while owing roughly \$300,000 on other properties, says the city should focus collection efforts on people who need something like new permits from the city.

"What good is enacting legislation increasing fines when we can't collect what we've levied?" he asked.

An audit last month by city [Controller William Thompson](#) called for a similar crackdown.

The audit found 75,000 unpaid building code violations totaling \$202 million and little effort to bar the scofflaws from future projects.

Some violations have been outstanding for as many as 10 years.

"Talk about a system set up to fail," [Deputy Controller John Graham](#) said at the time. "There's no real teeth in the city's enforcement abilities."

Bloomberg spokesman [Marc La Vorgna](#) declined to comment on the potential legislation but insisted the city has scofflaws in its cross hairs.

"We are in development of a new program to compel payment," La Vorgna said.

The city hopes its beefed-up collection efforts will bring an additional \$25 million in the next fiscal year.

Better collections would be music to the ears of tenant leaders like [Tom Cayler](#).

He says the owner of his building on [Manhattan's](#) West Side was granted a construction permit while owners ignored fines for unsafe conditions, a broken elevator and a boiler that spewed carbon monoxide.

"My kids' school programs are being cut, teachers are going to be fired and scofflaws get a walk," he said. "This building has \$290,000 of back taxes on it, and as far as I can tell, there's no attempt to collect the stuff."

eeinhorn@nydailynews.com

http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/2009/02/15/2009-02-15_city_could_get_2_billion_if_they_just_co.html

City could get \$2 billion if they just collected unpaid taxes, parking tickets and overdue fines

BY [Erin Einhorn](#)
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Many of the dire layoffs and tax hikes [Mayor Bloomberg](#) wants the city to swallow wouldn't be necessary - if we made all the scofflaws pay up.

Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers owe the city more than \$2 billion in unpaid taxes, parking tickets and overdue fines - roughly half the money Bloomberg planned to raise through teacher layoffs and higher taxes.

"We're being asked to make cuts to services and raise people's taxes. We should start by asking those who owe the city money to pay," said [City Councilman David Weprin \(D-Queens\)](#), who heads the [Council's Finance Committee](#).

Consider this:

- A legendary numbers king owes for business taxes he has been fighting for years.
- A [Long Island](#) millionaire in prison for laundering bribes to a [California](#) congressman owes unpaid property taxes.
- [Arista Records](#), a major record label owned by [Sony BMG](#), is in the hole for ignoring hundreds of thousands of dollars in fines and penalties for papering city streets with illegal advertising.

It all adds up to a whopping sum: \$2,053,784,443.

The city collects more than \$23 billion in revenue annually, but collection can be complicated.

Some scofflaws have died, left town or can't be found. Others are out of business or possibly shell companies.

On top of that, sloppy or outdated records - including a \$1.2 million property tax debt on land that's apparently owned by a tax-exempt Catholic school, and \$1.3 million owed by a company listed as Express Fund in some records, and Empress Fund in others - means debtors can skirt detection for years.

The city Finance Department says it aggressively pursues scofflaws.

"We have a wide variety of enforcement tools at our disposal, and we intend to use every one to make sure that when a debt is owed, it will be resolved," said Finance Department spokesman [Owen Stone](#).

But the mayor's office says they can do better, and hopes to raise an extra \$25 million next fiscal year by centralizing collections and gathering more information on debtors.

"We will be issuing better bills," said [Carole Post](#), a top deputy in the mayor's office of operations.

Critics say the city should do more.

"Obviously, if they had done a better job of collecting revenue, the city wouldn't be in quite the fiscal situation it's in now," said [City Controller William Thompson](#), a mayoral candidate.

Bloomberg says he needs to slash the city workforce by 23,000 to balance the budget, including 14,000 teachers and 1,000 cops. He also wants to raise sales taxes, gut funding to public libraries and raise parking-meter rates.

Meanwhile, interest and penalties continue to mount up:

- \$694 million in business, hotel, sales and other corporate taxes.
- \$614 million in delinquent property taxes.
- \$454 million in fines, penalties and interest on parking tickets more than 60 days old, including \$18 million from foreign diplomats.
- \$292 million in long-overdue penalties for dangerous construction sites, dirty restaurants, loud parties, unleashed dogs and other code violations.

That doesn't include recent debt, but code violations adjudicated in the last few months would add another \$110 million to the tally, the city says.

There's also \$5 million in outstanding restitution from corrupt employees - the bulk of which is owed by two former officials in the medical examiner's office convicted of stealing money from a 9/11 victim identification fund.

And more than 100 people owe nearly \$3 million for violating campaign finance rules while running for office.

The Daily News tried to contact the alleged scofflaws named by the city as major debtors, but struggled to find addresses, phone numbers or up-to-date business records.

One reason is that large construction companies and major property owners often create smaller affiliates for each property they acquire or each job they do.

Federal prosecutors who indicted Long Island financier [Thomas Kontogiannis](#) for laundering bribes to California Rep. [Randy \(Duke\) Cunningham](#) tied him to at least 22 companies including Westshore 480 Development, which, the city says, owes \$751,708 in taxes on a waterfront property in [Brooklyn](#).

A lawyer for Kontogiannis denied his client owned Westshore 480 or owed money for its property taxes. "He has no ownership and no liability," lawyer [Robert Wolf](#) said. "It would not be accurate to report that he does."

Arista and [Sony](#) failed to return calls seeking comment.

Despite problems, many of the debtors say they plan to pay. A lawyer for the [Alex Figliola](#) company says the firm is negotiating over \$499,428 in fines it owes for violating the terms of a road construction permit.

A company called 575 Associates, which owns a West Side apartment building said it didn't know about its debt until The News called.

"We were unaware of these [debts] due to the city's failure to notify us and due to an internal staffing problem," said [Jeffrey Blum](#), an outside accountant for 575 Associates and its affiliate, [William Moses Co.](#)

Blum said the company had received property tax bills but was unaware of any other efforts to collect \$883,040 in taxes.

"There was no followup until your call," Blum told The News. "We are taking steps to immediately satisfy these [debts]."

eeinhorn@nydailynews.com

With Joe Jackson