

**June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009 Debate/Forum sponsored by  
New Yorkers for Parks/Queens Coalition for Parks and  
Green Spaces/Queens Civic Congress/  
Historic Districts Council**

**Council Candidates (from audience left to right)**

Isaac Sasson - **IS**  
Peter Koo - **PK**  
S. J. Jung - **SJ**  
Yen Chou - **YC**  
John Choe - **JC**  
Evergreen Chou - **EC**  
James Wu - **JW**

**Question #1:**

*The USTA wants to put up a retractable roof on the Arthur Ashe stadium. The USTA has not been the best neighbor; we also feel that the deal was not conducted in an upfront fashion. If the roof is constructed, should the lease be renegotiated?*

**IS** – The USTA deal was a sweetheart deal for the Tennis Center and they should not get anything in any renegotiation.

**PK** – There is a 99 year lease on the site. If the lease were to be renegotiated, I would demand higher rental fees. Also, we need to support a bigger park budget.

**SJ** – One of the most important issues in District 20 is that there is not enough open space (did not address the question directly).

**YC** – Any recreational facility that we have should be of the highest quality. Why can't Queens have our own Lincoln Center? As a member of the City Council, I will demand that the city provide us with the best quality – the same quality – as top venues in Manhattan.

**JC** – In terms of the USTA, the city government in general and specifically the Council have the right to renegotiate the leases if they have been broken or changed in any way.

**EC** – I am against the proposed roof, just as I'm against the corporate interests that run the USTA and lots of other places in New York City. It was a sweetheart deal to begin with, and there should be no extra givebacks at all. What are the givebacks that have actually been given to the community? I believe that a sliding scale fee should be instituted so that real coaching and free rackets for the kids are always available.

**JW** – The U.S. Tennis Stadium deal is the best stadium deal in the country. However, I think that they should have to renegotiate the lease if they want the roof as part of their overall package. After all, this isn't just about the professionals – it's about the community and their ability to use the facilities.

**Question #2:**

*Are you familiar with the Queens Civic Congress platform? Do you support those planks or portions of the Civic 2030 plan?*

**JW** – In general, I agree with most of the platform, particularly the parts having to do with land use. However, I disagree with the reduction of the recycling fines for offenders who don't recycle. I would also push for more trees – as many as possible. I see this as dovetailing with the PlaNYC 2030 Million Tree Plan.

**EC** – I don't disagree with anything on the platform. However, I think we should have more access to the Recreation Center (the space the forum was being held in).

**JC** – I am in complete agreement with the QCC platform.

**YC** – I have to admit that I don't know much about the QCC platform. You've given me homework study (describing the platform) that I need to learn more about. However, historical sites should play more of a role in our towns. As an educator, I believe that they have important cultural and historical meaning that we need our kids and the public to learn about. Also, how can we have more affordable housing? I want to join with the QCC to get these things done.

**SJ** – It is available online. Do I agree word for word? No. I have some questions. On some of the platform, I want to know more, particularly about other trends and ideas in the borough.

**PK** – I support most of the platform. In general, we have seen a tremendous influx of capital dollars for construction but not a corresponding amount for maintenance, which we desperately need.

**IS** – Holly Civic, which I am president of, is a member of the Queens Civic Congress. My main question is this: where do you get the funding from? We need to get funding – perhaps by the creation of some kind of Conservancy-type organization to get the money that we need.

(Isaac Sasson left the forum after the end of this question)

**Question #3:**

***Were you to be in the City Council, how will you protect and preserve the Parks Budget, which always gets cut?***

**EC** – Parks, social services, services for the poor - these are the first on the chopping block. We must save Main Street – public parks, libraries, schools, affordable housing, health care – this is where the plants and trees of our economy grow best. Progressive taxation, stock transfer tax, commuter tax – we had the money and we lost it. In reclaiming our government, we must go back to the beginning.

**JC** – There needs to be a percentage baselined into the City budget so that the Mayor or Council cannot remove percentages of the budget at will. I am also supportive of the Parks platform. We need fairness in the city budgets – in District 20, we don't get our fair share of the city recreational budget.

**YC** – As a city councilmember, I would monitor and anticipate careful distribution of the funding for Parks. We should get all of the resources that are allocated for our local community in Flushing. We should also search for additional resources to help our own community.

**SJ** – We have to fight against the budget cuts and make sure that Parks and Recreation get funded. We must make sure our neighborhood gets its fair share.

**PK** – I would prioritize the budget to make sure that Parks and other programs were preserved over staff and other fat in various programs. We also need to minimize budget cuts.

**JW** – Our parks don't get the same budget that Manhattan parks get – not even close. Parks are very important to our own community – if we're going to lose money due to budget cuts, we have to make sure that those cuts are balanced throughout the five boroughs. We have to lean on the civic associations in our neighborhoods to help maintain the parks, and we need to be more creative in making our parks work.

#### **Question #4:**

*The Kissena Corridor is actually home to a freshwater ecosystem, originally composed of a series of small lakes connected by a stream – its headwaters located near the Kissena Park Golf Course - that joined with the Flushing River to the west. During the past 50 years, all the lakes have been filled in except one; the stream has been largely covered over, and the headwaters have actually been severed and put into a storm sewer main. In many other major cities around the country – such as Providence, RI and Oakland, CA – streams have been “daylighted” or restored to ground level and lakes have been re-created or restored. In fact, Alley Pond in Douglaston, the original headwaters for Alley Creek – which had been obliterated by a ramp for the Long Island Expressway in the 1950s – was restored in the last decade and reconnected with the creek that bears its name, creating a healthy, intact freshwater ecosystem. As Councilperson, would you be in favor of restoring our much-abused and neglected ecosystem in the Kissena Park corridor? How would you achieve this?*

**JC** – I support a restoration of the ecosystem to the way it was prior to humans being there. A partial restoration of the Kissena Corridor should be based on developer fees paying for that restoration and allocate a certain percentage of that money to put aside for the restoration of the watershed. It would create a much cleaner environment – some of the smell would disappear under the Flushing River with clean water flowing into the Flushing Bay. While there are many things that we have done that we can't undo, I will do what can be done.

**YC** – Challenging question. Technological and technical support are needed in order for us to make this happen – other countries have cleaned up pieces of rivers, so it can be done. I'm not going to say that I will have the result, but you have to be responsible and I will try my best to bring the investment and interest to this project.

**SJ** – I fully support the restoration of the pond and streams in the Kissena watershed. However, it's a long-term project – it should be linked to reviving the Flushing River. It's really part of a bigger planning effort as to what kind of community that you want to live in the next twenty years in Flushing. The next twenty years must have a different vision.

**PK** – I support the basic principle of the plan but I have to look more at the details of this project. I also support greening Flushing and having more park space.

**JW** – Daylighting of bodies of water helps clean up the air and makes our city more livable. The stimulus dollars are there – there are only so many shovel-ready projects where the money is ready to be released. However, if a plan is submitted to the Federal government, we should be able to get the capital investment from the Federal Government. Our storm sewers are overleveraged as it is – having bodies of water that are putting clean water into sewers is making things much worse. Perhaps by daylighting the streams in Kissena Park, we will stop the storm sewer violations that have totaled over \$20 million dollars in State and Federal environmental fines. Let's not forget other collateral damage from over development, like cementing over yards and other destruction of property and overbuilding that exacerbates the problem. And, the Bloomberg administration just glosses over the issues, and ultimately rewards people that violate zoning codes by helping them to get around stricter zoning rules.

**EC** – I fully support green spaces in District 20. Daylighting the river will make that stagnant water once again flow. Obama talked about greening America – it's a green concept for tapping into the stimulus money. Our issues in the community are more development, more development, more development. We have to fight developers and we need to reclaim some of the open space. It should be part of the developer's cost.

## **Question #5:**

*In the 20<sup>th</sup> Council District, there are many individual buildings and several neighborhoods that warrant Landmark designation. Some have support from community members; some have opposition from property owners. Unfortunately, there have only been two landmark designations since 2001 in the 20<sup>th</sup> Council District. In the meantime, historically and architecturally important buildings have been demolished and replaced with, at best, bland boxes and, at worst, very unattractive development. Consequently, our neighborhoods are losing the very character that attracts individuals to them in the first place.*

*Two-part question: As Councilperson, 1) how will you help get neighborhoods and individual properties designated as New York City landmarks, especially ones that want it and do you support designation over owner opposition; and 2) how will you work to dispel negative myths (for example, it lowers property values/doesn't allow any development to occur) about landmarking in general?*

**SJ** – We need to focus on a smart-growth strategy, and solve our quality-of-life issues. I fully support designating landmarks in our neighborhoods. We need to pick ourselves off of the treadmill and start preserving the historic values of our neighborhoods, which cannot be valued in dollars.

**PK** – I support landmarking in our community to preserve historic sites. In the past I've helped pass resolutions at Community Board 7 to preserve our community. Overbuilding strains our sewer systems and schools – we have to fight to maintain the character of our neighborhoods.

**JW** – There should be balanced development for our neighborhoods. I support landmarking against owners approval regardless of sentiment of the property owners. We must look at the contexts of our zoning. I think that exemptions should be examined – we should remove the Board of Standards and Appeals from the equations of decision making. The Community Board should have more teeth and more involvement, particularly in terms of big box commercial development and residential McMansions. We have to scrutinize the way the Department of Buildings is or is not doing its job. Finally, we have to look at the context of new construction and see if it is out of character of the neighborhood.

**EC** – I support the preservation of landmarks, particularly for those who want it so that it is in an open, transparent process. We have the historic Freedom Mile. Why can't we have more theme-based historic trails? How do we make Flushing an Eco-friendly place? Generally, I'm against development, but sometimes you have to make a deal with developers. That equation includes preservation. We should, however, use eminent domain to preserve buildings to go against the wishes of the owner if its warranted.

**JC** – I have worked on preservation issues as John Liu's chief of staff. I will work to continue to preserve historic houses in Flushing. However, the city government doesn't allocate enough money to support historic buildings. We have to preserve our history to use it to move forward.

**YC** – When we talk about preservation, I have worked with the United Federation of Teachers. I have brought retired teachers to all of the historic sites in Flushing. This is about the history and preservation of our historic sites in Flushing. Unfortunately, the Landmarks Commission treats Queens as the stepchild. We need to use land properly.

**Question #6: - James Trikas**

***Why should we vote for you if you haven't been involved in what have been going on in the community?***

**YC** – I have been helping the immigrant parents and students with education. I want to work with you. I wasn't there before but now I will be there. This is also my community.

**SJ** – I have done my best to deliver services to the underserved and worked to help the underrepresented. I've always done my best to create a coalition in Flushing.

**PK** – I've been a CB7 member for 8 years and am involved with the Flushing Business Improvement District since its inception. I fought against the New York Hospital Center Queens hospital expansion. I've always looked after the community interests and fought against overdevelopment of our community.

**JW** – It's very clear that I've been involved in many things over the years in our community. When they rezoned the Kissena Park neighborhood, I was there fighting for the neighborhood. When Waldheim was rezoned, I toured the Armenian home site. Your memory has been very selective – don't make false accusations.

**EC** – The hospital taking over the parking lot was really messed up. Imagine if this were Central Park! I applaud the civic leaders who fought against it, but how do we rouse the rest of the community? There are very few protests, and fewer turnout when it comes to this kind of stuff. Now we're at the other end. It can't be that downtown Flushing gets sacrificed while the rest of the one and two-family areas are protected.

**JC** – People know me and that I will work with you for the community. I will cut through the bureaucracy and make things happen in Flushing.

## **Question #7:**

### ***Affordable Housing***

**PK** – How do we make affordable housing work in Flushing? We need a private/public partnership. We need to give them bonuses or other incentives. All aspects - the community, government and the developer - have to gain. I will always encourage winning, winning and winning.

**JW** – We need innovative solutions. Some ideas include tax-incentives and disincentives. 30 to 40% would provide taxes—penalties as well as give them bonuses – and make that apply to all new developments. In places like Greenpoint and Williamsburg, owners did not meet their obligations. We should create a benchmark of 30% affordable housing across the board.

**EC** – We need more affordable housing, as there's never enough. Mitchell-Lama, Starrett City, Coop-City - these large developments were built to create moderate and middle-income housing in the city. We need to preserve what we have. Then, we can create inclusionary zoning – make the developers build affordable housing on-site. Also, we need to define what is being set as affordable. We do not need the developers to create that agenda – we need to create it ourselves.

**JC** – We need to preserve the existing affordable housing in the city. Bland and Latimer Gardens are two of the best and most sought-after projects in the entire city. They are well-maintained and have the proper capital. There's 400 million dollars for renovation of public housing. And, with the Willets Point development – 35% affordable housing was demanded by community groups. These were pushed for CB7 to get some of those units created.

**YC** – We need to increase zoning. We have a variety of residential opportunities in Flushing. It's fundamental and key in order to preserve the neighborhood. For developers, making money means more than building quality housing. I have visited all city housing projects. We must push for energy efficiency. I will work with the city agencies to make it all work.

**SJ** – We need to focus on Smart Growth – We are in a crisis, as 25% of the population in Flushing are spending more than 50% of their income to pay the rent. We have to make sure that Queens gets fair share of affordable housing – this economic downturn gives us a chance to revisit the issue carefully.

## **Closing comments**

**JW** – I have been working for this district as a District Leader. I am the creator of innovative solutions, such as new tax rates, to make Flushing and the city a better place. Most importantly, I will bridge the different interest groups in our community successfully.

**EC** – I will serve the people. People are suffering, and they need Universal Healthcare and jobs. We should create apprenticeship job training. Flushing needs the Green Party and we need a new direction.

**JC** – It was a pleasure to meet and have this dialogue with you. There is too much at stake for a novice to come back and represent you at City Hall. I am battle-tested – there's no learning curve for me, as I've worked for one of the best elected officials in the city. White, Black, Yellow or Brown – we are all the same and I will represent you all equally.

**YC** – Thank you for this forum. I want what you want: better schools; better jobs; and a more beautiful Flushing. If you dream the dream that I dream, then united we can, together we will.

**SJ** – Thanks. I will soon unveil my ambitious plan for affordable housing in our district. I have worked as a community organizer and business manager, and have worked in the grassroots for over 20 years. I am endorsed by the Working Families party and a number of unions. I will be the strong voice of community for Flushing.

**PK** – Thanks. Being a Councilmember means not being afraid and understanding business. We are in the worst economic situation in our history. It is having a devastating effect on the middle class. We need to create jobs and lower taxes. I have real solutions to our critical problems.