

Queens Civic Congress Joins Community Facilities News Conference

by Jim Trent

Queens Civic Congress joined a news conference to fight for reforming community facilities zoning in larger districts, Sunday, October 21st, 2007 at 2:00 p.m. outside NYU Law School's Furman Hall, northeast corner West 3rd Street and Sullivan Street. City Council Member Tony Avella, chair of the Council's Land Use Subcommittee on Zoning organized the event to highlight abuses allowed in higher density zones by abuse bulk bonuses allowed under the existing Community Facilities zoning text. Furman Hall, built out-of-scale due to the bonuses allowed for "community facilities," is some 200 feet tall in a neighborhood of buildings generally no taller than 6 stories.



[photo Caption: QCC Treasurer Jim Trent is at left; QCCer and Historic Districts Council President Paul Graziano is at right. Photo courtesy of Steve Garza]

In addition to Councilman Avella, the speakers were: Andrew Berman, Executive Director of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation; Simeon Bankoff, Executive Director of the Historic Districts Council; and James Trent, President of the Metropolitan Historic Structures Association, Treasurer of the Queens Civic Congress, and Chairman of the Four Boroughs Neighborhood Preservation Alliance Foundation. Also represented were the Juniper Park Civic Association and the Staten Island Preservation League. News media included the Queens edition of the Daily News and Christina Wilkinson representing the Juniper Berry and the Forum West news-weekly.



[photo Caption: QCCer and Historic Districts Council President Paul Graziano, Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation Executive Director Andrew Berman, and Councilman Tony Avella as Simeon Bankoff, Executive Director of the Historic Districts Council speaks. Photo courtesy of Steve Garza]

Council Member Avella proposes to reduce allowable bonuses by 75%. Beyond the smaller bonuses, community facilities would have to go through a permit process that would include a more transparent public discernment such as ULURP.

Another problem is that when an oversized building is permitted under current law and that building ceases to be used as a community facility, the building remains standing in violation of the context of the remaining neighborhood. This has led to the abuse of filing plans for oversized buildings by developers who say the intent is a community facility but after the building is completed, no community facility tenant is ever found for the building.

All principal speakers advocated a redefinition of a community facility since such things as faculty housing and dormitories are not facilities that are used by or benefit the local community.

This legislation may prove difficult to adopt. It is important to make sure all officials and other non civic interest that express public support, do not maneuver outside public view to kill or weaken it; this is not an unusual tact on issues involving real estate and municipal government.