



Queens Civic Congress

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QUEENS CIVIC CONGRESS URGES REVISED CONCESSION RULES Testimony to City Council Parks Committee October 24, 2007

Presented and Prepared by
Executive Vice President Patricia Dolan

Good morning. I am Patricia Dolan—the executive vice-president of the Queens Civic Congress, a coalition of more than 110 neighborhood based civic organizations representing co-op and condo owners, tenants and homeowners living in every part of Queens. The Queens Civic Congress – as advocated in our [CIVIC 2030](#) platform (available at www.QueensCivicCongress.org) – urges the City Council to adopt our proposal – outlined later in this testimony – to “[r]evis[e] Major Concessions Rules to include all significant private uses on public property (including parks) to community/borough review.” As a start, repeal (the City Planning Commission's) 1998 Rules for Major Concessions and create new criteria for public review and legislative oversight.

Queens civics value the integrity of our parks and have passionately supported neighborhood and regional parks and playgrounds in good times and bad. Parks remain a public trust; it is incumbent on elected officials to guard against efforts by bean counters in government and entrepreneurs in private business to put **FOR SALE** signs on them.

The current Rules encourage abuses by sponsors who wish to develop parkland as private businesses with little relation to any public benefit: for example the Randalls Island Water Park; the Ferry Point Park Golf Course and most recently a parking garage at Yankee Stadium. Earlier this year the Franchise and Concessions Committee changed its rules, further constraining the public's already limited access to information about concessions before a concession is granted.

Increases in concession fees occur with no public notification except to those who must pay—effectively pricing many New Yorkers out of their own parks. In Queens, for instance, parking fields in Flushing Meadows Corona Park are operated by concessionaires who, during the Tennis Open, charge what the market can bear; in the Bronx, the parking concessionaire at Yankee Stadium charged a Council Member as much as \$150 during the recent playoffs. Other concessionaires have made little investment in their businesses after opening day.

Concessions, when properly managed, add to the pleasure of a visit to a park. Unfortunately, little recourse exists for the public beyond a call to 311 about a mismanaged concession. Nor is there any public review or City Council oversight of decades-long tenures of some concessions. For instance, some concessionaires have operated their businesses in our parks for many years without any review of their performances.

As stated above, the Queens Civic Congress CIVIC 2030 [platform](#) advocates modification of current Rules for so-called *Major Concessions*. The current rules allows too many concessions a by-pass review without any opportunity for public comment or for the Council to provide oversight. Instead, the Queens Civic Congress identifies the need to legislate meaningful thresholds for public review and oversight by the City Council for large scale concessions. Certain concessions, because of their size or nature must be given full public review—including all elements of the city's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP).

CIVIC 2030 would subject the following uses to full public review under ULURP:

- Marinas;
- Parking lots of any size;
- New buildings of more than 10,000 square feet -- not in parks;
- New buildings of more than 5,000 square feet -- in parks;
- (Any) Open use in park -- 5,000 square feet;
- Restaurants -- 150 seats or more;
- One or more concession totaling 25% of one park.

A little more than a year ago, some friends of our public parks noticed an ominous trend taking root in our parks as existing concessions were transferred to new operators and proposals for new concessions began to appear—often with no notice to affected communities or neighborhoods.

As a result, the Queens Civic Congress and many QCC member-organizations joined **250 Friends of NYC Parks** in calling for greater transparency in awarding concessions by lowering the threshold for public review and City Council oversight and in assigning revenues raised from concessions to the park in which a concession operates. The Queens Coalition for Parks and Green Spaces, the parks partner of the Queens Civic Congress, shares our concerns and supports the [CIVIC 2030](#) concessions changes covered above.

The Queens Civic Congress urges the Committee to conduct an in depth review of how the Parks Department awards concessions and how it oversees them. Further, following that review, the Queens Civic Congress recommends the committee support new the Rules for Major Concessions as called for in CIVIC 2030 and initiates the adoption of the legislation necessary for their implementation. This much-needed reform will better serve the public that holds our parks so dear.

Thank you.

Queens Civic Congress Members

Association of Old Forest Hills ♦ Auburndale Improvement Association ♦ Bayside Civic Database ♦ Bayside Clear-Spring Council ♦ Bayside Hills Civic Association ♦ Bayswater Civic Association ♦ Bay Terrace Community Alliance, Inc. ♦ Bellaire-BellVill Civic Association ♦ Belle Harbor Property Owners Association ♦ Bellerose Commonwealth Civic Association ♦ Bellerose Hillside Civic Association ♦ Bell Park Manor Terrace Community Council ♦ Bowne Park Civic Association ♦ Briarwood Community Association ♦ Cambria Heights Civic Association ♦ Cherry Robinson Homeowners ♦ Civic Association of Utopia Estates ♦ C.O.M.E.T. (Communities of Maspeth-Elmhurst Together) ♦ Concerned Citizens of Laurelton ♦ Cornucopia Society ♦ Creedmoor Civic Association ♦ Deerfield Area Association ♦ Doug-Bay Manor Civic Association ♦ Douglas Manor Association ♦ Douglaston Civic Association ♦ Dutch Kills Civic Assn. of Long Island City ♦ East Flushing Civic Association ♦ Federated Block Associations of Laurelton ♦ Federation of Civic Associations of Southeast Queens ♦ Floral Park Community Council ♦ Flushing Heights Civic Association ♦ Flushing on the Hill Taxpayers Association ♦ Forest Hills Chamber of Commerce ♦ Forest Hills Crescents Association ♦ Forest Hills-Van Court Association ♦ Fresh Meadows Homeowners Association ♦ Georgetown Mews ♦ Glendale Civic Association of Queens ♦ Glen Oaks Village Owners, Inc. ♦ Greater Astoria Historical Society ♦ Greater Whitestone Taxpayers Civic Association ♦ Harding Heights Civic Association ♦ Hillcrest Estates Civic Association ♦ Hilltop Village Co-Op #1 ♦ Hilltop Village Co-Op #2 ♦ Hilltop Village Co-Op #3 ♦ Hilltop Village Co-Op #4 ♦ Hollis 11423 Block Association ♦ Hollis Hills Civic Association ♦ Holliswood Civic Association ♦ Hollis Park Gardens Civic Association ♦ Holly Civic Association ♦ Hunters Point Community Coalition ♦ Hyde Park Gardens Cooperative ♦ Jackson Heights Beautification Group ♦ Jamaica Estates Association ♦ Jamaica Hill Community Association ♦ Juniper Park Civic Association ♦ Kew Gardens Civic Association ♦ Kew Gardens Hills Homeowners Association ♦ Kissena Park Civic Association ♦ Little Neck Bay Civic Association ♦ Little Neck Pines ♦ Malba Civic Association ♦ Meadowlark Gardens Owners ♦ Middle Village Maspeth Civic Association ♦ Middle Village Property Owners Association ♦ Mitchell Linden Civic Association ♦ Neponsit Property Owners Association ♦ Newtown Civic Association ♦ North Bellerose Civic Association ♦ North Flushing Civic Association ♦ North Hills Estates Civic Association ♦ Northwest Clearview Homeowners Association ♦ Norwood Civic Association ♦ Oakland Terrace/ Gardens Community Council ♦ Off Broadway Homeowners Association ♦ Our Neighborhood Improvement Association ♦ Parkway Village Historical Society ♦ Queensboro Hill Neighborhood Association ♦ Queens Colony Civic Association ♦ Queens Community Civic Corp. ♦ Queens Village Civic Association ♦ Ramblersville-Hawtree Civic Association ♦ Richmond Hill Historical Society ♦ Ridgewood Property Owners and Civic Association ♦ Rockaway Park Homeowners/ Residents ♦ Rocky Hill Civic Association ♦ Rosedale Civic Association ♦ Royal Ranch Association. ♦ Southeast Queens Concerned Neighbors ♦ South Ozone Park West Civic Association ♦ Springfield/Rosedale Community Action Association ♦ Station Road Civic Assoc. of Auburndale ♦ Sunnyside Gardens/Harrison Place Homeowners ♦ Surrey Estates Civic Association ♦ Union Turnpike Merchants Association ♦ United Forties Civic Association ♦ United Neighbors Civic Association ♦ Waldheim Neighborhood Association ♦ Wayanda Civic Association ♦ West Cunningham Park Civic Association ♦ Westmoreland Association ♦ Woodside Community Council