

Queens Civic Congress continues to fight for real property tax reform. See page two for comments by President Corey Bearak and links to letters to City Hall

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Queens Council members pledge to fight rebate cut

By Nathan Duke

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City Council members from Queens said they would fight Mayor Michael Bloomberg if he continues his attempt to shelve the \$400 rebate checks for city property owners following a four-hour budget hearing this week.

Earlier this month the mayor had said he would halt the \$400 checks as part of a plan to save the city money amid budget deficits caused by a state and national economic downturn. The mayor had said that stopping the rebate checks for an estimated 600,000 city residents would save the city a total \$256 million.

But city Budget Director Mark Page said at Monday's hearing that the mayor would not be able to rescind the rebate checks without the City Council's approval, Council members said.

"We can't promise this rebate back in July and then take it away from them after they have already planned for it in their budget," Councilman Peter Vallone Jr. (D-Astoria) said. "The City Council will not allow the mayor to rescind these rebates."

Vallone said he believed the checks could be sent out within the next few weeks if an agreement is reached.

The checks, which city residents have received each year for the past four years, were originally initiated to offset an 18.5 percent property tax increase in 2002. The rebate checks are sent to owners of homes, condos and co-ops.

Council Speaker Christine Quinn (D-Manhattan) has even threatened to file suit if the checks are not sent out.

Councilman Tony Avella (D-Bayside) said his constituents have told him they are angry that they have not yet received their checks.

"We voted for it and it's in the budget, so the mayor should honor the agreement he made with the City Council," he said.

The mayor's office did not return calls for comment.

Corey Bearak, president of the Queens Civic Congress, said he had sent two letters to the mayor this fall, urging that property tax reform proposed by the group be considered.

He said his group's proposal identified a number of city absentee owner properties and others that were zoned residentially but were being used for commercial purposes. Bearak said the city could save an estimated \$5 billion if it taxed those properties based on their use.

But he said he had not received a response to his letters.

"Then, we wouldn't have to raise property taxes," he said. "It would put more money into our pockets."

Bearak said he was surprised when he did not receive his rebate check in October.

"In these tough times, it could have helped people out," he said. "It was a letdown."

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The letters to the Mayor may be viewed at www.queensciviccongress.org/media

[2008-11-06 Queens Civic Congress to Mayor Bloomberg: No Property Tax Hikes](#)

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