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QUEENS CIVIC COMMENTS ON CITY PRELIMINARY BUDGET

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In testimony presented today (Tuesday, February 3, 1998) to the Queens Borough Board, the Queens Civic Congress [QCC] called for a fair share of the City's budget for Parks to be allocated to Queens, weekly recycling pickups, additional building and housing inspectors, funding for traffic studies and sign replacement, routine staffing of community police beats, increased use of civilians in the NYPD, funding to increase school maintenance and keeping the Independent Budget Office.

The statement, prepared by QCC Strategic Planning Chair Anthony Avella and presented at Borough Hall by Economic Development Chair Chris Collette, follows:

Dear Borough President Shulman and Borough Board Members:

Thank you for affording the Queens Civic Congress the opportunity to comment on the City's Preliminary Expense and Capital Budget. As an umbrella group of 75 civic organizations, our membership represents almost every community in the borough.

One of the best attributes of our borough is our parks. Since Queens has the largest amount of parkland, it is important that Queens receive its fair share of the Department of Parks and recreation budget.

While private funding sources and workfare participants have had a positive impact on the conditions of our parks, much more needs to be done. A recent New York Times editorial pointed out that public funding for parks during the past decade has dropped by 31 percent. Funding must be allocated to restore park attendants. Having a park worker stationed in a park or playground not only provides better and more efficient maintenance, it improves security for parents and their children and helps to reduce vandalism and graffiti.

Tree pruning, dead trees and stump removal remain an important concern for homeowners. We support the Borough President's 1998 budget suggestion that tree pruning for the entire borough be put on a five-year schedule. In addition, a significant backlog exists for tree debris pickup following removal. Often tree trunks remain on the street or sidewalk for months.

Sanitation recycling must succeed to counter the closing of Fresh Kills landfill on Staten Island. However, to accomplish this goal it must be expanded to weekly pickups for the entire borough. This is an absolute necessity.

-next page-

Queens Civic Congress testimony on the City's Preliminary Budget, February 3, 1998, page two

Recent television and newspaper accounts of building collapses and structural weaknesses only point to a lack of proper enforcement and supervision. Additional building inspectors for both the Departments of Buildings and Housing Preservation and Development must be hired immediately to ensure that our housing stocks and new construction meet all codes.

While installation of traffic lights increased over the past year, funding for traffic studies still needs to be increased to ensure prompt turn around time for dangerous locations. Sign replacement is almost non-existent.

The Police Department deserves our congratulations for achieving significant reductions in crime. However, one area needs to be strengthened. The Community Policing Program, formerly known as C-POP, needs to be re-instituted. Nothing reduces crime more than a beat officer. Many quality of life concerns could be addressed by the presence of a foot patrol officer.

We also would like to suggest a study to review the effectiveness of precincts in the larger community board districts. Many residents feel some districts are too large to ensure prompt response time. Civilianization of the Police Department, which has been woefully neglected, should be revisited.

Education in our borough is an example of what can be done when teachers, parents and children work together. Overall education funding needs to continue at a level necessary to ensure that our children are receiving the best education possible. Funding for new books, Project Smart Schools, restoration of SWAT teams for school maintenance and total elimination of coal-fired furnaces are a high priority.

Our cultural institutions, youth and seniors all require the continuation and strengthening of their respective programs.

Finally, the Mayor's Financial Plan notes the City's objective to eliminate funding for the Independent Budget Office. We strongly oppose this move. An independent budget analysis is key to an informed public and crucial to hearings such as this one.

Thank you for your time and consideration.