

NEWS ADVISORY

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**QUEENS CIVIC CONGRESS TO CITY HALL:
FIX AS-OF-RIGHT WHEN WRONG
Stop Illegal/ Inappropriate/ Non-contextual Development**

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A Queens Civic Congress [QCC] forum on Illegal Construction and Ill-advised Development sent a clear message to City Hall to deal with over-development, inappropriate alterations, out of context housing and expansions, and an acquiescent Buildings Department that threaten the look and character of many neighborhoods, announced President Sean M. Walsh. The Monday, September 27 meeting at the Kew Gardens Community Center, attended by over 70 leaders representing the diversity of the Borough of Queens, also featured the installation of new officers of the Congress by Assembly Member Nettie Mayersohn, according to Congress Vice President Patricia Dolan, who arranged the program.. The coalition of more than 90 civic and community organizations which span the borough of Queens also attracted attention from elected officials,” noted Vice President for Public Affairs Corey Bearak. “Council Member Helen Marshall attended and indicated our support for our program, including efforts to prevent the imposition of dormitories calculated to attract non-New York City residents to Queens College. Elected Officials represented included Borough President Claire Shulman, Member of Congress Anthony Weiner, State Senators Serphin Maltese and Daniel Hevesi, Assembly Member Michael Cohen and Councilman Morton Povman

“Contractors, developers and rapacious owners exploit new ways to develop by razing houses on corner and large interior lots and building structures out of context with their neighbors,” explained Ms. Dolan who chairs the Congress’ Zoning Committee. “Other builders exploit communities where inappropriate zoning invites abuse.”

Assembly Member Mayersohn, who works closely with the Congress, particularly on the Queens College matter, installed re-elected President Sean M. Walsh (Douglaston), new Executive Vice Presidents Corey B. Bearak (North Bellerose) and Patricia Dolan (Kew Gardens Hills), re-elected Treasurer James Trent (Creedmoor) and Secretary Seymour Schwartz (Briarwood), re-elected Vice Presidents Paul Kerzner (Ridgewood), Chris Collett (Forest Hills Chamber), Kenneth Cohen (Flushing Suburban), John Liu (North Flushing) and Ed Westley (Jackson Heights), and new Vice President Margo Hill (South Ozone Park).

“Our program – *When As-of-Right is Wrong: Illegal/ Inappropriate/ Non-contextual Development* – included a panel of civic leaders: Ruth Duberry (Jamaica) Janet Fash (Rockaway), Paul Graziano (Flushing), Jim Jaffe (Kew Gardens Hills), Paul Kerzner (Ridgewood), Hing Wah Lai (Kew Gardens), Fran Lieu (Jamaica Estates and Ed Westley (Jackson Heights) and Hugh Weinberg, Counsel to the Queens Borough President Claire Shulman,” added Mr. Walsh of the discussion which covered *When Too Big is Too Much: Challenging a Department of Buildings Permit; Doing It Yourself – Neighborhoods Rezoning Neighborhoods; When a Neighborhood's Zoning Fails: Landmarking; Special Districting & New Zoning amendments; Advancing Legislation: Enacting the (State) Pheffer Bill and Int. 363 (City); and When All Else Fails: The Article 78 Approach.*” Ms. Dolan reported that several people had called to say the meeting was one of the better civic meetings they ever attended.

QUEENS CIVIC CONGRESS TO CITY HALL: FIX AS-OF-RIGHT WHEN WRONG, page Two

Mrs. DuBerry from the United Neighbors Civic described how her South Ozone Park community has become aware over the past two to three years of increased instances of conversions of one- and two-family homes to multi- use. She explained how people in community recognize and express concern over the negative effects on the community, including the. loss of physical character and overburdened city services.

Jim Jaffe of the Kew Gardens Hills Homeowners Civic spoke of his experience with a neighbor who attempted to make a basement apartment without a permit. Jaffe obtained a Department of Buildings inspection by filing a complaint with Community Board 8 with follow up with Buildings and support from Councilman Povman's office. Jaffe emphasized importance of making a "paper trail" and also shared to much laughter his success in inspiring neighbors to 'shape up' by awarding those who "maintain" their homes in sloppy condition special certificates for "being second class pigs."

Paul Graziano, from the Waldheim Association in Flushing described his plan for a 250 block rezoning of much of Flushing.

Ed Westley of the Jackson Heights Beautification Group explained that his group's landmarking effort eliminated illegal building but failed to dissuade Brooklyn-Queens Cable from placing ugly green boxes on Jackson Heights and East Elmhurst streets. His group with the Borough President's support got the boxes removed from the landmarked streets. They continue to work to have boxes removed from other Community Board 3 streets.

Hing Wah Lai of the Kew Forest Neighbors Assoc delivered an impassioned defense of his neighborhood, under attack by a developer building a 6+ storey mixed use structure amid a neighborhood of one family homes. Lai pleaded with Queens civics to guard against the zoning errors that resulted in the mis-zoning that caused his neighborhood to be put at risk. He briefly described the activities of realtors who urge quick sales, using the impending construction motivation to get out before things get worse..

Fran Lieu of the Jamaica Estates Association reported her difficulties with the Department of Buildings when builders demolish and then rebuild houses that they contend are too big.

Paul Kerzner, counsel to the Ridgewood Property and Home Owners, described the complaint process including filing with Community board, the Department of Buildings and the limited ability of the Environmental Control Board to render decisions that result in compliance. He also spoke of the need for passage of pending City Council Intro 363, but with a provision requiring the provision of access to Buildings Inspectors, and the Pheffer bill, state legislation that would convert ECB judgements into civil liens. He noted a November 19 hearing on Intro 363 at City Hall.