



# Queens Civic Congress

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## QUEENS CIVIC CONGRESS STATEMENT TO NEW YORK CITY CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION

Queens Borough Hall  
July 17, 2003

Prepared and delivered by Patricia Dolan, Executive-Vice President

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposals before the Commission. I am Patricia Dolan and I serve as executive vice president of the Queens Civic Congress. The Congress, a coalition of 105 civic and community organizations represents neighborhoods across the Borough of Queens.

The Queens Civic Congress expresses no confidence in a commission solely designated for one assigned purpose--before it even convened, to put before the voters so-called non-partisan elections. No reason even exists to convene a Charter Commission for such an issue; indeed, any such changes could be made by an individual referendum call or by legislative act (including the City Council placing a referendum of that kind on the ballot). The Queens Civic Congress joins other good government groups in urging the Commission to take more time to allow the people to have say in your deliberations. After all, your staff asserts that so-called non-partisan elections would broaden participation. Frankly, more important matters require Charter reform -- I will outline them below -- and ought to get your consideration before changes in process, such as so-called non-partisan elections.

There exists no demonstrable need to place any such proposal for non-partisan elections on the ballot this fall and there remains insufficient time for the electorate to consider such a serious, far-reaching proposal this year. The 1989 Commission, whose proposals also included changes in City governance were as important, had numerous public discussions over a nine month period that afforded the public ample opportunity to comment and the commission sufficient opportunity to incorporate changes in its final proposals. Your sound alternative: Make no recommendation this year.

Rather than focus on non-partisan elections, **it makes more sense to consider how to make the city work better for its residents.** This Charter Commission achieves this by looking at how to structure city government to make wise decisions on allocating resources and services. New York City's tax policies wrongly subsidize extra illegal occupancies that crowd schools and overburden services. The City similarly fails to collect appropriate taxes from the illegal

commercial uses of these homes. Citywide, these failures cost New Yorkers at least one billion dollars in lost services and fractured infrastructure. Think of the affordable housing those billion dollars could build.

Recognize New York City as a region; recognize the boroughs and local communities offer more effective entities for making decisions where many services ought to go. Set up a mechanism that devolves resources and service delivery to the appropriate borough or local level. The office of the Borough President, as an institution, remains inextricably bound to the future role of the boroughs as discrete entities, each one with a distinct identity. The Queens Civic Congress urges a greater role for the borough presidents in land use planning for their boroughs, allocation of agency resources within the boroughs, overseeing local implementation of the capital budget and oversight of delivery of local services. Finally, correct the 1989 mistakes that removed legislative review of decisions of the Board of Standards and Appeals, by empowering the Council to BSA review dispositions that now cost communities thousands of dollars, and the failure to include rules for major concessions.

Give New Yorkers a municipal structure that would allow us to compete with the localities to the east, west and north for residents and businesses. No one will make a decision to stay or move to New York City based on whether we have non-partisan elections.

People do make these decisions based on how attractive a neighborhood is compared to other locales; how well local services are delivered and how fair the tax structure is.

Demonstrate you care about our city; focus on what will make the city work.

Our one hundred and five member coalition will hold a public forum later in the early fall at which time the Queens Civic Congress will make public its recommendation regarding regarding this year's charter revision proposals.

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#### **Queens Civic Congress Members**

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