



City of New York

Community Board #1, Queens

American Museum of Moving Image
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NEEDS STATEMENT FY 2012

INTRODUCTION

Community Board 1, Queens' District covers the area bounded by Bowery Bay on the north, on the south by Queens Plaza North, Northern Boulevard and the LIRR Tracks, on the west by the East River, and on the east along the west bound curve of the Brooklyn Queens Expressway to the Grand Central Parkway and 82nd St. We service the communities of Astoria and portions of Long Island City, Woodside and Jackson Heights.

Our zoning is mixed with residential, manufacturing and commercial areas. There are two Industrial Business Zones (IBZ) within our boundaries. The District abuts LaGuardia Airport, along with several major roads that provide access through our community to and from Riker's Island. District 1 is home to the largest number of energy power plants that provide electricity to New York City.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population in the Community Board 1 District had increased from 188,549 in 1990 to 211,220 in 2000. An even greater increase in population is anticipated when all is tallied for the 2010 census. The District's population is one of the most ethnically diverse in Queens County.

Our community has many desirable qualities, including a beautiful waterfront, cultural establishments such as the Museum of the Moving Image, the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park. A replica of an ancient Greek Amphitheater at Athens Square Park is the site of numerous ethnic entertainment events. We are also home to the Kaufman Astoria Studios, one of the largest film and television production centers on the east coast.

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Our cultural diversity provides an epicurean delight for the multitude of diners that live in and visit our District.

In the past three years two major rezonings have been established within our District. In the Dutch Kills community, roughly bounded by 36th Ave./40th Ave./23rd St./Northern Blvd., the area was primarily zoned manufacturing thus prohibiting the development of residential properties. The new zoning has created a mixed-use district which permits the development of both manufacturing and residential uses. In addition, a portion of our District in Astoria bounded by: Broadway/20th Ave./Steinway St./Vernon Blvd. was primarily zoned R5 and R6. This zoning permitted a higher density of development than what existed on many blocks. In recent years, many new developments were built to the extent of the permitted zoning and very often were out of character with the existing structures on a block. The intent and result of the new zoning is to maintain the existing character of the blocks.

Department for the Aging

Many seniors depend on subsidized transportation programs as their only affordable means of travel to and from doctor appointments and for shopping. Our District is experiencing a growing population of homebound seniors who depend on the Meals-On-Wheels program, home health care and visiting nurse services. Home care for our frail and elderly is less costly to our City and more desirable to many in need. These services must continue and should be expanded.

Community Board 1, Q recognizes and supports the development of affordable housing for seniors and the physically disabled living within our District.

Buildings

The need for affordable housing in our District has produced a market for illegal apartment conversion. It has long been our Board's opinion that legislation should be considered to legalize apartments that meet all safety regulations. This will provide safe, affordable housing and add to the City's tax base. Conversely, more inspectors are needed and stiffer fines must be levied to those who violate their building permits and Certificates of Occupancy.

Consumer Affairs

Our District has the greatest number of licensed and unlicensed Unenclosed Sidewalk Cafes in Queens. While the Board appreciates the ambiance that these cafes bring to our community, we realize that the quality-of-life of our residents must be maintained. We stress the need for Enforcement Agents, specifically in the evening and on weekends, to monitor the licensing codes and padlocking of habitual violators.

District Attorney

The blight that graffiti puts on a community, along with the cost of graffiti vandalism to City and private property owners, is great. Our Board asks that the Queens District Attorney's office continue to prosecute graffiti vandals to the fullest extent of the law.

We also ask for increased funding for graffiti cleanups sponsored by the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit.

Economic Development

The District 1 commercial/manufacturing/industrial areas play an important role in the stability of our community. Two Industrial Business Zones have been designated within our manufacturing/industrial areas.

Our primary shopping areas are located on Steinway Street, Ditmars Boulevard, Broadway, 30th and 36th Avenues. These commercial strips have experienced an increase in vacancies due primarily to the economy, a rise in property taxes and unaffordable rents. The maintenance of our streetscapes must be maintained, e.g.: curb and sidewalk repairs and tree stump removal. Most importantly, additional parking is required and critical to preserving our commercial areas that are crucial to the well being of our entire community. Tax incentives are required to ensure that jobs are maintained and taxes are not lost to the City.

Environmental Protection

New development has put a strain on our infrastructure, particularly on our combined sewer and storm systems. Multi-family dwellings are now being built where one and two family homes previously existed. Our current infrastructure cannot handle this increased population. The City must plan for the increase in higher density development.

Along with hosting the greatest number of power plants in the City, our District abuts LaGuardia Airport, the Grand Central Parkway, the Brooklyn Queens Expressway and the Robert F Kennedy (RFK) and Queensborough Bridges. Exhaust and air fuel fumes have contributed to our District's reputation as one of the highest rated respiratory distress related areas in New York City. Therefore, monitoring of our air quality is essential to our health and well-being.

Housing

Our District has five New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments. They are: Astoria, Queensbridge North and South, Ravenswood and the Woodside Houses. Funding from Federal/State/City sources for after school and senior citizen programs must be increased to address the large population of both resident groups in these housing units.

Parks & Recreation

Our increased population has created a greater need for the development of our open spaces. Our Board is pleased to note that Council Member Peter Vallone, Jr. has provided funding for the much anticipated Skate Board Park to be located in Astoria Park. The development of bicycle paths along the waterfront, through our Parks, will offer a safe and beautiful route for cyclist while providing a splendid view of the Manhattan skyline.

Our Board strongly supports the hiring of additional personnel to maintain the City's investment in our recreational spaces.

Fire

Due to our close proximity to Manhattan, the Bronx and Roosevelt Island our Fire resources are stretched to supplement fire protection to the residential and business communities in those areas. In addition, the new development of high-rise and multi-family dwellings where 1 and 2 family homes existed has created an even greater demand on our fire resources. A decade ago, our District lost Engine Company 261 due to the City's budget constraints. Just this year, we were faced with the possibility that Ladder Company 116, which shared the 261 house, was being considered for closing. We must be vigilant in our support of our current Fire resources and our "Bravest" who put their lives on the line each time they respond to an emergency.

Forestry

We applaud the Mayor's Million Tree Initiative which seeks to plant a million trees in the City over the next decade. Currently, Queens County has the greatest number of trees New York City. The removal of dead trees and large tree stumps must be given a priority in the City's budget. The pruning of our street trees, every 10 years, is insufficient for the benefit of the trees and safety of our streets. More frequent maintenance will save our City from the many lawsuits resulting from falling branches.

Police

The 114th Precinct is located on Astoria Boulevard, which is a main thoroughfare through our District. Astoria Boulevard also serves as the service road between the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge and the Brooklyn Queens Expressway. Parking along the boulevard is limited and our Board has, for years, requested the construction of a parking lot over the Grand Central Parkway to accommodate Police Department vehicles, as well as, the increasing number of commuter vehicles.

We urge the enforcement of regulations pertaining to cabarets and bars i.e.: excessive noise, drugs and serving alcohol to minors. The MARCH Program (Multi Agency Response to Club Hotspots) has been very effective in monitoring those establishments that violate the law. This program must continue. More Police are needed on our streets.

Sanitation

Our Board has supported the relocation or expansion of the existing QW-1 Sanitation garage. The facility was built in the 1930's and our community's needs and population have changed drastically since that time. Additional space is needed to meet an increase in the size and number of vehicles utilized at this site .

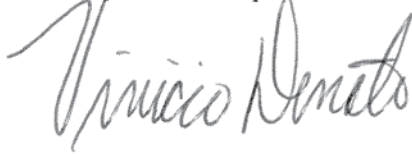
More litter baskets are required on our commercial strips. Also, we need greater enforcement of littering laws. Merchants and property owners bear the burden of being ticketed for litter that is indiscriminately dropped by pedestrians or motorists.

Transportation

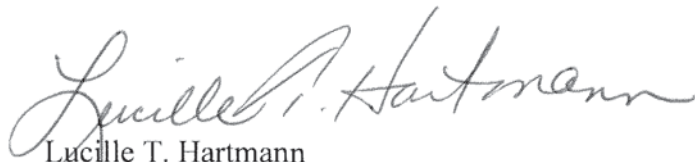
Community Board 1 acknowledges the need for safe passage of cyclists through the City. We applaud the plans to provide access through our community along Vernon Boulevard via our shore line, to connect riders to our parkland along the East River. However, we have serious concerns regarding the elimination of parking on the west side of Vernon Boulevard. This action has created a hardship for businesses along the boulevard; it has created excessive difficulty for the residential community and has also disenfranchised handicapped drivers who can no longer park safely to access open spaces along Vernon Boulevard. We must implement a plan that will incorporate parking and bicycle paths in our District.

The traffic hub at the intersection of Astoria Blvd./Hoyt Ave., east and west of 31st St. has long been considered one of the most dangerous crossings, nationwide, for pedestrian and vehicles. At this location there are pedestrians, as well as, local, bridge and highway traffic that enters/exits both the Grand Central Parkway and the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge. A recent traffic study of this hub has resulted in several changes in the traffic pattern and signals. As of this writing, these changes are in the process of being implemented. We are very hopeful that the changes will “calm” the traffic making this hub a safer place to transverse for all.

We are also in need of additional cars on our subways during rush hour and more buses on our routes, to accommodate the increase in our population and encourage utilization of public transportation.



Vinicio Donato
Chairperson



Lucille T. Hartmann
District Manager