

Community Board 1, Queens – Board Meeting Minutes

April 16, 2019

Meeting Opens with Chairperson, Marie Torniali at 6:30 p.m. – Pledge of Allegiance followed.

Chair, Marie Torniali introduced and welcomed the New Board Members:

- Joel Lock – Mr. Lock introduced himself and shared that he works at the City Parks Foundation in the Youth Development Department. He stated that does a lot of college access in youth development all over the city.
- Jeffrey Martin – Mr. Martin introduced himself and said he works with the NYC Parks Department and said he is a Landscape Architect who is interested in public space.
- Dino Panagoulas – Mr. Panagoulas introduced himself and shared that he works for the NYC Department of Education for 20 years. He thanked everyone for having him.
- Mitchell Waxman - Mr. Waxman introduced himself and shared that he is a Historian with the Newtown Creek Alliance and is a photographer.

Presentation:

Matthew McWhirr, Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration – Department of Treasury

Presentation on IRS Scams, Impersonation Scams (*Provided a handout*) – He started by sharing that \$60 million to date has been lost with scams. Internal Affairs handles these threats, he will share information, and scam starts with audit from 2014 through 2016. They will ask for you to pay by gift cards which the IRS would never do. They are also impersonating social security, “say no”, and tell them to mail you the information. You should tell them that you know this is a scam, I will call and report to the police and you should immediately call them. Tell them to send it in the mail, never engage in conversation. Social security seems to be the new go to, they say, “we are going to seize your social security check”. He said they try to educate the public and use public service announcements. No matter what age you are, young or elderly, no one is immune to scams. He shared a story about a victim that got scammed through “match.com”, while dating they were scammed. Be suspicious of people who ask for money, do not open your wallet. People always ask, “Can you get my money back? A lot of times no, we try but a lot of times it is spent. Mr. McWhirr said to be very careful and that you may call him for assistance. His direct line is: 917-408-5650 or email him. He shared that when the money goes overseas, the money is gone/spent. He advised not disclose your social security number to anyone. They are scammers and good at what they do. He said the IRS will never ask for payment over the phone and will never threaten arrest. Reminded everyone not to use iTunes cards and no gift cards to make payment or to buy them on the internet. Mr. McWhirr said they sell a card with the value of \$500 for \$375 on internet. Please be careful and aware.

Tom Ryan – He mentioned he is a CPA and stated that he gets emails notices that look official from the IRS. Mr. Ryan mentioned there was an article in a paper recently, “No more robocalls/IRS”. He said it is a scam because there is no “Tax Crimes Investigations Unit”, beware.

Chair, Marie Torniali – Notified the Board Members of the Gel Pens that are secure which were provided in their folders.

Elected Officials/Representatives:

Honorable Jessica Ramos, State Senator – Stated she has been in office for 4 months and just passed the first budget and her first two bills passed. She shared that she has been home sick and glad to back for spring break as a former Community Board 3 member for several years. She stated that she is grateful for what you do as Board Members.

Senator Ramos said that on the Federal level there is a lack of oversight in term of homeownership lending scams with the Senior Citizens, more so on the East Elmhurst part of the district some on the Astoria side as well. In the first 4 months we had a very productive senate session in passing voter reform, banning conversion therapy and

passed the Dream Act. Looking to trying to be inclusive of everyone, it is how communities work and no one knows that better than Queens. She stated, "Queens is the future because of the way we love."

The Senator said she just wanted to come by and say hello and would be happy to answer any questions you may have things going on at the State level. It has been a privilege to serve in the State Senate for this first half of the first session. Wanted to come back and say thank you to all of those that have been supportive but also to those who have added to the conversation around the things happening in the neighborhood. The neighborhood is largely changing. I participated in CBI in different ways, specifically with the labor movements around the discussion of Astoria Cove, very good to be back. She said she would be happy to take any questions if you have any.

Q & A:

George Alexiou, Board Member – What area do you cover?

Senator Ramos responded that she covers Senate District 13, which is largely all of Corona, Jackson Heights, East Elmhurst and Northern most part of Astoria, North of 23rd/24th Avenues and Ditmars Boulevard, Woodside Houses and North of Northern Boulevard and a little part of Elmhurst as well.

George Alexiou, Board Member – Were you for or against Amazon?

Senator Jessica Ramos – I was very much against Amazon. One was precedent. The Senator said there was a lot of issues with a public review process that gives unilateral authority to a Governor and/or Mayor around an economic development decision. She shared that she won a majority of the vote in the democratic election and said she is trying to do a good job for the constituents. The Senator said regarding Amazon, when it comes to circumventing a land use review process especially when it circumvents the community board in a land review process whoever the Governor and/or Mayor are at the time they should not have a unilateral power around the decision making of what happens to a piece of land in a community without any community input that is one. Two, she still has a very personal issue with all of the limelight that was focused around the H2Q that was going into Long Island City, which is Senator Gianaris' district and not hers. She said her district also includes a warehouse for a distribution center that was coming to the Eastern side of the BQE on Booty Street, she has a large concern about the types of jobs that will come there for her community because if the Staten Island warehouse center is any indicator of what those jobs will be like, there are a lot of different, especially health and safety protections that we need. She added, especially right now at a time that the unemployment rate is so low, I think it is an opportune time to make sure we are fighting for good jobs!

Rod Townsend, Board Member – A lot happened in the state budget process this year, but a lot did not happen, sounds like a lot to be pushed to a later date, a little bit unusual. Asked, can you tell us what we have to look forward to for the second half of this legislative session?

Senator Ramos responded that she thinks her personal expectation is that they will legislate. Albany traditionally has legislated largely through the budget process because the budget process is so flawed and rigged towards the Governor, he ends up holding a lot around, a lot of the stuff we do. The senate puts out its one house budget proposal the assembly puts its one house budget proposal and then they each negotiate with the Governor and come to an agreement on different things. She said she was particularly disappointed in her first budget process around what is called Campaign for Fiscal Equity Funding which is funding from a lawsuit/an education formula that a judge said that the state should adopt in order to allocate funding for every school and unfortunately despite both legislative houses allocating slightly more than \$1 billion for our public schools, the Governor gave us only \$618 million which is the same thing the republicans were given last year. It is very frustrating but nevertheless, it was a lesson in how the budget process works and how much more of a democracy we need to bring to this state government to ensure that the people vote for us. We are supposed to go to Albany and voice the concerns for the neighborhood so if the majority of legislators are asking for something for New Yorkers and the Governor says no than there is some break in communication. Congestion Pricing as controversial as it may or may not be, it is a real, and it is a revenue generator for the MTA which is sorely needed. She stated that as a river front community we have to understand there is the pricing part of it but we also need to ask people to drive less. An individual stated that we have a big problem in this neighborhood because we are on the river side which is a major problem. The Senator said it already is a very big problem. In the rest of the district they get it too, all around

the 7 line. We have seen that happening for a very long time. We can't argue that as a community we care about the environment without admitting that carbon emissions are largely coming from cars and buildings themselves. People who drive to work and are able to take public transportation should and the people who have to drive are the ones who should drive. Now in the budget we are talking about Congestion Pricing which has created a Commission in order to determine what the car routes should be and really hopes they are responsible ones and as few as possible and logical as possible too. We have to seriously think of our mode of transportation and consider our planet.

Katerina Duarte, Board Member – Shared that she payed 2.75 to get on the train but could not get on it because we have stations that are closed right now so she took a cab to a meeting which cost \$44 so, we are being impacted a bit more in Astoria. She said she is a member of her PTA in a charter school. A parent mentioned that Senator Ramos does not support charter schools. Having had her son in a non-charter school and then transferring him was life changing not only for herself but for other parents as well. They are underfunded as charter schools to the point that she is now doing fundraising for the school besides raising two kids, running her own business and on the Board of CB1. She wants to know what her stand is.

Senator Jessica Ramos – Shared that she is a single mother and has two children as well who are 5 years old (in kindergarten) and 7 years old (in 2nd grade) both at P.S. 69 in Jackson Heights. During her campaign and now, she said, she will never take a dime from the Charter School Lobby. I have a serious issue with funding taken away from public schools for charter schools, specifically and mostly for for-profit charter schools and this is the distinction that she mentioned at her Town Hall last month. Goals are different from a lot of local community charter schools. She comes from a family that attended the Renaissance Charter School in Jackson Heights, the teachers are unionized and they do not receive funding from places like Walmart. Great to offer parents' choice and is not against that. Our World Neighborhood (OWN) is not specifically in her district but it does serve a lot of the families that are her neighbors but nevertheless, right now the public school system specifically in NYC is owed \$1.1 billion, which is where her focus is.

Bob Piazza, Board Member – He stated that it makes him upset when people come in and tell the community to stop driving your cars and take public transportation when we have the N train which is not reliable that is over 100 years old and not working all the time. People can't get on it due to overcrowding and we asked for a bus line to supplement it and told we were told "No" by the MTA. We don't have transportation like in Manhattan and other areas of Queens so in the meantime, we cannot get rid of our cars. Do you think we are going to have a problem with Congestion Pricing with thousands of cars circling in Astoria in all of Northern Queens there is no transportation. It will be a nightmare not just with parking but in crossing the streets and all of the additional problems that come with more cars on the road. Congestion Pricing is making it worse and not fixing the problem.

Senator Jessica Ramos – This is one of the chicken and egg things, has never known what the right answer is with what should come first but the fact of the matter is that the MTA has served like an ATM for a lot of economic development around the state for a long time. Funds have been diverted from the MTA traditionally from the Executive Branch in order to save ski resorts and build three golf courses in the last budget. Fact of the matter is that we need to raise money for the MTA in a way that is sustainable. If there is a legislative mechanism that allows us to have a lockbox for the MTA. We need people to drive less. She supports car voucher for senior citizens, for people with disabilities and people who really do need to drive to get around. We need to put pressure on, for it to actually work.

Kathleen Warnock, Board Member – You are addressing the future but what about today? So, of the things that people are suggesting not sure you know or if you have been to Hoboken, they have residential permits that says only people from the neighborhood can park – residential parking.

Senator Jessica Ramos – Suggested that if this is what is needed then speak to your local councilmember to get it done, it is a municipal issue. There has been a lot of talk around residential parking at the city level to figure out permitting dealing with it specifically around LaGuardia Airport.

Eddie Cadiz, Board Member – We heard this story before with the Lotto, what did they do after 3 years? The same thing will happen with Congestion Pricing.

Senator Ramos - That is the point of the lockbox for Congestion Pricing.

Richard Khuzami, Board Member – You could use your influence to somehow to bridge between the City and the State to have free transfers to the MTA from the ferry, it would be a large help.

Senator Ramos responded that she will try to help, “Anything that will help to get more people to use public transportation.”

Tom Ryan, Board Member – Cars “Rite of Passage”, pick up the kids and grocery shopping, we need cars for that but what we don’t need are yellow cars, green cars, black cars and Uber. There are too many cars, not for use. Sensibly they all take parking, they should not be allowed to park on the streets.

Senator Jessica Ramos – Very interesting point because when she was working for City Hall a couple of years ago before running for office, they did a study on “for hire” vehicles whether they impacted Congestion Pricing, the study was paid for by “for hire” vehicles, the conclusion was that they do not contribute to congestion. She shared that she used Lyft that evening because it was quicker and easier from Jackson Heights to get to Astoria. There is a big economy that is happening, whether we like it or not. We really need to have these conversations as a community to figure out how it is going to work. She is a sponsor to a Bill in the State Senate in order to help level the insurance payments between medallions green/yellow cabs and “for hire” vehicles, that disparity has led to suicides. She agrees largely and agreed to do more research and talk to people and all stakeholders involved.

Mitchell Waxman, Board Member – Activist group, Access Queens in CB 2 they are discussing dedicated bus lanes particularly wide streets like 31st Street, Northern Boulevard and Astoria Boulevard. The commuter routes, basically the subways, are at capacity, according to MTA we are all standing in 1 square meter of space and we are not touching each other, this is not a reality. The number of people riding the buses daily commute, the numbers stagger. The only thing holding people back from taking the buses is that they are often late. A suggestion was made for a dedicated lane which could speed the buses.

Senator Jessica Ramos – There is a new bus schedule for Queens coming, our bus map has not been updated in a long time. If she had her way, she would have a special bus rapid transit system along Astoria Boulevard and at Northern Boulevard, to get people places without causing congestion, it is a goal for her.

Constituent (Did not state name) – Shared a complaint that she has. She has a special needs daughter. When the train is under repair she cannot get her upstairs to the train station to fill the MetroCard. People look like she is crazy. She does not use the machine. The Token Booth attendant will not allow her to fill the card because her photo is not on the card, it is her daughter’s photo and the daughter is downstairs. She requires assistance, what can she do?

Senator Ramos – Stated she has been advocating for car vouchers for people with disabilities and senior citizens. Suggested they need to debate what the car vouchers are. She needs the constituent’s advocacy over the next few weeks and months to make sure it is protected.

Rudy Sarchese, Board Member – I never heard anyone here in the community from the elected say they were against Amazon, only her and Senator Gianaris. He would have liked to know if they went out in the community to any meetings and asked how they felt. He also mentioned Rent Control – 4,000 apartments.

Senator Jessica Ramos – Said she spoke to Queens Neighborhoods United and many organizations in her district and to please remember HQ2 is not in her district, in protecting the interests in her district. Largely, two reasons against Amazon was not setting a precedent where the executive has a unilateral power over land use that circumvents the community boards power and two, no matter if we were getting it or not, my district is still getting a distribution center with not great jobs. Largely, a discussion on how we define growth for the city. Do we continue to provide tax breaks for corporations that go against immigrant entrepreneurship? Commercial rent is very high, how are small businesses able to compete. If we don’t have rent control a lot of people would not be able to live in the communities where they are born and raised.

Chairperson, Marie Torniali thanked the Senator.

Chair Torniali requested a motion to adopt the March Minutes.

Motioned by Ed Babor; Seconded by Jean Marie D'Alleva

Chair Report:

Chairperson Marie Torniali spoke about the MTA Bus network redesign that will happen soon. With public input according to the MTA they are redesigning all of the networks in every borough to see where we need bus lines tweaked and where they need to be eliminated. Florence will have the MTA make a presentation. Their goal is to have public workshops. If we want to have input we have to attend. Florence will share dates and locations. The idea of having a simultaneous bus route with a bike lane came up at the Borough Board because some sections of Queens have designated bus lanes which are not utilized many hours of the day. Will hear from the MTA for Public workshops. They will have Public Hearings in October and November.

District Manager Report:

District Manager, Florence Koulouris announced that Melanie La Rocca is being honored on May 2nd and added that she has been an attribute to the community and congratulations to her. Briefed on the meetings she attended over the last month and stated that if anyone has any questions please ask her. She attended the Borough Cabinet, went to Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's grand opening of her Jackson Heights office and also attend the Women's History Month Breakfast hosted by Assemblywoman Cathy Nolan and Assemblywoman Aravela Simotas at Queens College and also attended a Women's History Month celebration at Kaufman Astoria Studios. She also shared that the Land Use and Zoning meeting took place in early April which Liz and Gerry will go over later. She added that during April the Parks Committee met at the board office. She said the LIC BID Board had a meeting as well. She wished all a wonderful month and that she looks forward to seeing everyone next month. She reminded the Board to start thinking about the Capital and Expense Budget, ideas, old/new items, keeping things the same or changing them.

Elected Officials:

Daniel Banthius, Scheduler for Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez – Announced updates. He said April District recess just started this week, she will be around the district and attending events for the next two weeks in Queens and in the Bronx. Tomorrow night, National Nurses United hosting a Town Hall from 6-8 p.m. in the Bronx at P.S. 83, focus will be the VA, it is open to the public, opening doors for the Veterans at 4:30 pm, all others 5:15 p.m. Hosting our own community Town Hall in Elmhurst on April 27th, 5-7 p.m. at Elmcors in Elmhurst. There are no flyers yet, sharing details through their newsletter. Newsletter distributing their first one next week and you can sign up online on their Website: <https://ocasio-cortez.house.gov/> He has paper sign-up sheets with him. Follow Congressional Facebook account for regular updates. Additionally, you can stop by the new office in Jackson Heights at 74-09 37th Avenue or call: # 718-662-5970. Office can assist with any federal government issues includes immigration, social security, housing and any other concerns, case workers are available 9-5 p.m., 5 days a week for walk ins and can submit requests via website as well. He shared that he is transitioning to join the New York team and being assigned to cover the CB1 Full Board meetings, will see him on a monthly basis. He will no longer be the scheduler. Has Flyers for Congressional Art Competition which was extended to April 26th.

Committee Reports:

RoseMarie Poveromo, Chair, Airport Committee – Shared that she and Ed Babor attended the FAA informational meeting to discuss the controversial fixed route connections, referred to LaGuardia's Improvement Project, LaGuardia's Air Tram transfer station at LaGuardia Terminals B/C and passenger service in 2023 and Port Authority new people mover system. The Environmental Impact Studies (EIS) potential noise time table was of concern. Structured impact such as Pile driving concerns have arisen. The nearby residents and homeowners, addressing their valid concerns, have been already suffering with the reconstruction of the airport and the \$8 billion dollars the Governor has put into it.

Ed Babor, Airport Committee Member – The New York Community Aviation Roundtable (NYCAR) – LGA Airport Committee at Vaughn College in March. The key discussion was the Air Train pros/cons to LaGuardia

issues such as noise, environmental concerns, the costs, benefits and impact on the community. The FAA starting on an environmental impact statement issued by June 17, 2019.

Rod Townsend, Co-Chair, Community & Economic Development – May 7/8 possible next meeting with Hornblower and NYC Economic Development Corporation to help businesses using ferry service.

Andy Aujla, Chair, Consumer Affairs Committee – Welcomed the new members and gave them a briefing on what the committee does. Mr. Aujla requested the review of the spreadsheet of the list of Liquor Licenses reviewed in the last month and which is included in the folders and said a motion is required.

Motion to Approve by Amy Hau; Seconded by George Kalergios

Show of hands. None against - Unanimous

Antonella Di Saverio, Chair, Environmental Protection Committee – No Report

Judy Trilivas, Health & Human Services – No Report.

Evie Hantzopoulos, Chair, Housing Committee – They met last week they had Representatives from Assembly Member Brian Barnwell's office discussed the pending legislation around housing issues particularly tenants' rights MCI's etc. The letter went out to the elected officials. Next meeting is on June 3rd, will have as guests: Councilman Costa Constantinides and Jacqueline Simone from the Coalition for the Homeless. Will be inviting Senator Ramos in the fall.

Elizabeth Erion, Co-Chair, Land Use & Zoning – Up to date on a ULURP item that was disapproved, 47-15 34th Avenue it went through the review process through City Planning and they approved it and made modifications they acknowledged a few of the statements you made in the letter and reasons why it was opposed. One of them was the scale of building, the Commission acknowledged/agreed with it because of the close proximity to the existing development. Reduced the zone from 7X to 7D which provides only a height of 11 stories as opposed to 14 stories, the second was the reducing the extent of the commercial overlay going into the midblock so it didn't go adjacent to residential uses, they did not agree with that. They thought by reducing the commercial overlay it would limit uses from the ground floor, such as cars and show room or parking which is what they wanted to accommodate. The third was they requested that 35% of the floor area be set aside for affordable housing the Commission disagreed that this was not part of the scope of the application, they will review it, they were not going to tinker with the MIH procedure and regulations at this point with respect to this application and lastly requested that they use Option 1 so that the rents for the affordable units would meet the lower income tiers, the threshold incomes would be lower than in Option 2, did not agree on that. One of the Commissioners in her statement said she hopes through the process in the City Council there will be an Option 1 of level income affixed to this approval.

Antonio Meloni, Co-Chair, Public Safety – Has been in contact with the local Battalion 49, Fire Department with what's happening with traffic on Astoria Boulevard. There is a definite issue, he saw a fire engine drive 5 blocks on the wrong side of the street, with so much traffic backed up this is a normal occurrence on Saturdays and Sundays. DOT/Traffic needs to put more agents especially on 21st Street, a whole lane closed and 31st Street will be closed every weekend for a very long time due to construction.

Robert Piazza, Co-Chair, Transportation – Attended a meeting with group regarding Sunnyside Yards. Interesting what their time frame is, they said, 15-20 years.

Old/New Business - None

Public Session:

Neil Herdan, Co-Chair Whitey Ford Field – First, he thanked Marie and to the supporters and advertisers clean up event last Saturday featured in the Queens Chronicle and Richard's group for advertising in their newsletter and social media featured in the Green Shores newsletter. Approximately 20 volunteers and supported by a few members from Astoria Park Alliance.

David Burgoa, Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) – Announced they assist with issues with their mortgage and they have a Foreclosure Prevention Program. He said thanks to our legislative branch in the Senate and thanks to Senator Jessica Ramos we saved the program for the next year. They continue preventing foreclosures for seniors and for mortgage assistance programs. They are going to have two sessions, one in English on May 8th and one in Spanish on the 23rd. They have a lot of job openings at LaGuardia Airport and they are opening their Career Center in the next few weeks but they are operational right now. They can help someone in need of a job and if they would like to apply for something at the airport. They have placed people recently in customer service positions.

Aviram Cohen – Urging the community to attend a Public Hearing on Tuesday, May 14th at 11am at the Department of Transportation, 47-40 21st Street, Room 834 regarding the #6 Fuel Oils. He stated it is for the DEC about the Astoria generator plan regulation. The regulations caps the amount nitrogen oxide that their plant emits during ozone season and it is very important that the power from this plant be replaced with renewable energy and battery storage. It is also critical that the plan to cope with any job loss or tax loss from these plants the Astoria generating station as you know the Board wrote a letter of recommendation for these regulations if we don't show up to support it at the May 14th hearing then the people who are paid to show up by the company will be there. Stats: It burns 3,039,000 gallons of #6 fuel oil a year this oil blend is considered one of the most polluting energy sources in the world. Ravenswood generating station burns another 3,264,000 gallons per year and was ranked as the state's largest carbon polluter in 2014. The NYS Department of Health found higher air pollution levels in Astoria and LIC than the rest of the borough or city according to the city's most recent community health report. Urging people to sign a petition and also email with comments or even write letters. He mentioned that he left flyers on the table.

Dominic Stiller – Stated he thought Council Member Costa Constantinides had a successful bill passed to eliminate #6 Fuel Oil. Will those plants ever switch over to #2 Fuel Oil?

Individual (Did not state name) – Said it takes about 3 years before it is in effect. They will switch over partially.

Gail Fitzer, Represents “Dare to Run” a non-profit that trains and empowers women to run for elected office. They have a lot of great events coming up including a seminar on fundraising that costs \$15 to attend, you will hear from two Councilwomen, an Assemblywoman, a former candidate for NYS Senate and fundraising professionals on April 30th. Last month they had a great seminar with various speakers, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and several other candidates on how to diversify pool of candidates running for elected office. Announced they have a mailing list to receive all their information. They are starting a course/curriculum to teach women in 3 nights a week on how women can run for elected office, which includes seminars, messaging, public speaking, fundraising, branding and get out the vote efforts.

Susan Shin, Bike NY - Announced the 5 Borough Bike Tour that will take place on May 5th and there will be some street closures in the community. She stated it is the largest charitable bike ride in the US with 32,000 participants. She said it is city wide, starts in lower Manhattan crosses all 5 boroughs and ends in Staten Island. Proceeds from the tour go to Fine Arts, year round free public programming happens during bike education programs in all 5 boroughs. Closest Bike Education Center to CB1 is in East Harlem, Roosevelt Island, Flushing and Williamsburg encourage to look them up on their Website: www.bike.nyc Please email or call their office should you have any questions. She left flyers with information.

Ronnie King Minor started by sharing that he grew up in Astoria Houses and lived there since 1967. He shared that he is there to discuss the 33 story towers project that was started with the comprehensive plan which they have not forgotten. He said the jobs belong to the people that live there. Under the recommendations for the Halletts Cove Astoria application the Development of a Youth Center similar to the Variety Boys and Girls Club at 27-17 30th Road in Astoria with an indoor multiuse facility.

Chair, Marie Torniali Motioned to Adjourn.

Motioned by Helen Ho; Seconded by George Kalergios

Meeting Adjourned: 8:15 p.m.