

HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

AND THE LEAGUE OF PRESERVATION VOTERS IN THE 30TH COUNCIL DISTRICT

November 2008 Voter Guide

Coalition Members:

- Queens Civic Congress
- Glendale Civic Association
- Glendale Property Owners Association
- Juniper Park Civic Association
- Liberty Park Homeowners Association
- Newtown Historical Society
- Richmond Hill Historical Society
- Ridgewood Property Owners & Civic Association
- Ridgewood Reservoir Education & Preservation Project
- Woodhaven Cultural & Historical Society



St. Saviour's Church,
Maspeth



Richmond Hill



Woodhaven



Glendale



Middle Village



Ridgewood



LEAGUE OF PRESERVATION VOTERS

New York City Council District 30 Candidate Questionnaire

Council District 30 includes a great number of historic neighborhoods and buildings, as well as a special sense of place that local residents are fighting to preserve. The undersigned community-based organizations are all concerned about preservation and development issues that affect the neighborhoods of Glendale, Maspeth, Middle Village, Richmond Hill, Ridgewood and Woodhaven. Out-of-scale development is destroying the fragile historic resources that make each community unique, and the pressures are only increasing. This coalition believes that it is imperative that our elected officials commit to helping preserve our neighborhoods before it is too late.

This coalition believes that an understanding and appreciation of these issues is critical. All candidates for the 30th Council District November 2008 election were sent the following questionnaire dealing with preservation and development in the 30th District. Candidates who responded to this questionnaire are listed alphabetically as such: **Anthony Como** and **Elizabeth Crowley**.

The League of Preservation Voters hopes that its efforts have made a difference in the way that the candidates understand preservation and development issues. We strongly believe that, whichever candidate is elected to office, they will be more fully educated to serve their diverse constituency in the 30th District as a result of this coalition's efforts. If you have any questions regarding the voters' guide/candidate questionnaire, please contact the Historic Districts Council at 212-614-9107 or preservationvoters@hdc.org.

Sincerely,
Historic Districts Council
Queens Civic Congress
Glendale Civic Association
Glendale Property Owners Association
Juniper Park Civic Association
Liberty Park Homeowners Association
Newtown Historical Society
Richmond Hill Historical Society
Ridgewood Property Owners and Civic Association
Ridgewood Reservoir Education & Preservation Project
Woodhaven Cultural and Historical Society



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
DISTRICT 30 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

BACKGROUND

I. DO YOU BELIEVE IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION? TO WHAT EXTENT IS IT NECESSARY FOR THE CONSERVATION OF LOCAL NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER? WHERE WITHIN DISTRICT 30TH DO YOU FEEL PRESERVATION SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED?

COMO: I feel that everyone should believe in historical preservation because it is vitally important that we protect our heritage and history. Each neighborhood has its unique origin and distinctive character that should be preserved for future generations. No one borough should have a monopoly on historical designations and we all know that Queens has been grossly ignored by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I affirm that historic preservation has many intrinsic benefits. We should not make the mistake of measuring historic preservation based solely upon economics. The aesthetic, educational, cultural, political and environmental benefits outweigh any economic opposition. As Councilman, I have met with the landmarks Preservation Commissioner to discuss several locations in my district that deserve to be recognized by the commission. Those areas included but were not limited to Ridgewood, Woodhaven, Richmond Hill and Maspeth. I discussed with Commissioner Tierney that it is important that any building or area that has an historical significance within the 30th district should be considered for a landmarks designation. Moving forward, there should be an open dialogue between elected officials, community board members, civic associations, residents and the LPC to identify historical sites. As a community we should work together to create a healthy balance between development and preservation and I pledge that I continue to fight to ensure that Queens gets the consideration it deserves.

CROWLEY: I believe strongly in historic preservation, so much so that I have studied, practiced and promoted forms of preservation in my daily life. I have a bachelor's degree in preservation and restoration from SUNY Fashion Institute of Technology and have completed graduate level course in historic preservation from Pratt Institute where I hold a Masters of Science in City and Regional Planning. Professionally, I have utilized my preservation skills on historic landmarks which include Radio City Music Hall, Times Square Empire Theater and the historic Central Synagogue. There are many areas of the 30th district in which preservation should be emphasized. The 30th district has many historic locations that contribute to the unique character of our neighborhoods. There are locations in each neighborhood of the district: Glendale, Maspeth, Middle Village, Richmond Hill, Ridgewood and Woodhaven.

2. HOW DO YOU DEFINE PRESERVATION AND HOW CAN GOVERNMENT HELP FOSTER IT? HAVE YOU SPECIFICALLY BEEN INVOLVED IN ANY COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PROJECTS INSIDE OR OUTSIDE THE DISTRICT? WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE IN TERMS OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE DISTRICT?

COMO: Preservation is the safeguarding of our valued history and providing future generations a physical representation of their neighborhood's rich history. The government should assist the community in identifying sites that meet the criterion for historical preservation and offer reasonable and attractive financial incentives to promote conservation of our past. As Councilman, I have met with local preservation groups, including the Historic Districts Council to discuss their landmark and historic district projects. These meetings were extremely helpful and informative. These groups have conducted extensive research to identify buildings and areas that should be considered for designation. I look forward to continuing the dialogue and working with local preservation groups to assist them in achieving their preservation goals.

Prior to be elected to the City Council, I volunteered my own time and donated personal money to help create the Newtown Historical Society. As you are aware, the Newtown Historical Society has become a powerful champion of the preservation movement and was instrumental in saving St Saviour's Church. In addition, I worked with local groups on issues ranging from public safety to education, preservation to over-development and senior issues to youth services. My involvement in the community has been extensive and my dedication to the residents of the 30th District existing long before my political aspirations.

CROWLEY: Preservation is the process of protecting significant original works in the forms of objects and places. This work can be linked to an historical event, person, or place. Historic preservation is necessary to preserve local character. Regulation of rehabilitation work and the material design integrity of rehabilitation is a necessity. When certain buildings are completely out of character, it degrades the entire community. This is a problem in the 30th district, and we must work together to retain neighborhood character.



PRESERVATION

SOME NEIGHBORHOODS IN DISTRICT 30 HAVE BEEN WORKING TO BECOME HISTORIC DISTRICTS FOR MANY YEARS, YET THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION HAS NOT ACTED. DO YOU PROMISE THAT, IF ELECTED, YOU WILL BE AN AGGRESSIVE ADVOCATE FOR THE DESIGNATION OF THESE NEIGHBORHOODS AS HISTORIC DISTRICTS? HOW WOULD YOU DEPLOY YOUR POSITION ON THE COUNCIL TO ENSURE THAT THE LANDMARKS PROCESS PROCEEDS EXPEDITIOUSLY TO FINAL HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION?

CROWLEY: I support historic districts, and as a council representative I will be an active advocate for the designation of areas within the council district. I hope to serve on the Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses Subcommittee of the City Council's Land Use Committee.

I. RICHMOND HILL, ONE OF QUEENS FIRST PLANNED NEIGHBORHOODS, IS KNOWN FOR ITS COLLECTION OF QUEEN ANNE-STYLE HOMES AND SEVERAL CIVIC BUILDINGS. YET TODAY, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ONE BUILDING, THE NEIGHBORHOOD HAS NO PROTECTION FROM DEMOLITIONS AND INAPPROPRIATE CHANGES AND HISTORIC PROPERTIES CONTINUE TO BE DEMOLISHED. HOW WOULD YOU HELP SAVE THIS NEIGHBORHOOD?

COMO: We need to identify these areas, contact property owners, hold public debate and present a comprehensive proposal to the LPC. We must demand that the LPC conducts their research, comments and decides on requests in a timely manner. In addition, there should be an appeal process if the LPC decides to deny a request for landmarking or if it takes an unreasonably long time to act upon proposal.

A: WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ON THE CURRENT STATE OF THE RICHMOND HILL REPUBLICAN CLUB BUILDING? WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT "DEMOLITION BY NEGLECT"?

COMO: Recently, I met with the LPC and Department of Buildings to express my concern regarding the current conditions of the Richmond Hill Republican Club and the construction work being conducted on the adjacent property. Both agencies have assured my office that they are continuously monitoring the situation to make certain that no damage is done to the Republican Club.

Prior to being elected, I worked with elected officials, community leaders and residents on getting the Richmond Hill Republican Club its landmark designation. The Richmond Hill Republican Club served as an important political club and a cornerstone of the neighborhood where parades, public lectures and community gathers were held. It is a shame that the building lays in a state of "demolition by neglect" after all the hard work to preserve the Richmond Hill Republican Club. As Councilman and former prosecutor, I believe that demolition by neglect is congruent to criminal neglect. Some unscrupulous landowners use this tactic in hopes that the building will deteriorate beyond being saved resulting in the loss of a precious landmark. If proven, those individuals using demolition my neglect should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

CROWLEY: Demolition by neglect is an unfortunate situation and one that I will work tirelessly to prevent. We need to establish public private partnerships to ensure that buildings such as the Richmond Hill Republican Club building can be preserved and continue to be a part of our community. When historic buildings fall into disrepair due to neglect, we lose an important park of our history.



2. RIDGEWOOD HAS 2,982 BUILDINGS ON THE STATE AND NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES. HOWEVER, THIS LISTING IS LARGELY HONORIFIC AND DOES NOT PROTECT PROPERTIES FROM DEMOLITION OR ALTERATION. ONLY ONE SMALL BLOCK, STOCKHOLM STREET, IS LOCALLY LANDMARKED, AND THIS IS LOCATED WITHIN COUNCIL DISTRICT 34. HOW WOULD YOU HELP GET THIS LARGE SECTION OF PROPERTIES CONSIDERED AND ACTED UPON BY THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION?

COMO: As Councilman, I met with Commissioner Tierney to discuss the Ridgewood historic district and land marking proposal. As a result of the meeting and the hard work conducted by the Ridgewood Property Owners, Greater Ridgewood Restoration Corp and the LPC a portion of Ridgewood properties will be designated. Although, LPC has committed to designate this small portion, I made it clear that is the first step in ensuring that other qualified locations should be done in the future. Hopefully, this is the first step in getting all the 2,982 buildings their designation. We all know that Queens deserves the same consideration as the borough of Manhattan and I will work with organizations throughout my district to ensure that we get to preserve our historical significance. In addition, we must demand that the Landmarks Preservation Commission gives Queens the respect and consideration that Manhattan has enjoyed for many years when it comes to landmarks and historic districts. As I stated earlier there should be an appeal process if the LPC decides to deny a request for land marking or if it takes an unreasonably long time to act upon proposal.

CROWLEY: As a city council member, I will work with the Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses Subcommittee of the City Council's Land Use Committee to ensure that these properties are considered and acted upon by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

-
3. THERE ARE MANY SIGNIFICANT BUILDINGS THROUGHOUT THE 30TH DISTRICT. SOME HAVE BEEN NEEDLESSLY DEMOLISHED LIKE NIEDERSTEIN'S RESTAURANT IN MIDDLE VILLAGE. HOW WOULD YOU WORK TO SAVE BUILDINGS, ESPECIALLY THOSE THAT MAY BE ENDANGERED LIKE THE RIDGEWOOD THEATER, THE BETTY SMITH HOUSE IN WOODHAVEN, THE OAK RIDGE BUILDING IN FOREST PARK, OR THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY IN RICHMOND HILL? WHAT FORMAL PROCESS DO YOU PROPOSE TO IDENTIFY PROPERTY TO BE PRESERVED?

COMO: No one knows the historical significance of a neighborhood or buildings better than the residents, borough historians and involved preservationists. I would encourage these individuals to create a list of historically significant locations before the threat of the wrecking ball looms in the shadows. Too many times, we have to scramble during the 11th hour to save properties from being demolished, therefore, I would like to have a list of areas in the 30th District that meet preservation standards long before the threat of having it lost forever. So we can be proactive and not reactive.

CROWLEY: Buildings like the Ridgewood Theater, the Betty Smith House in Woodhaven, the Oak Ridge Building in Forest Park, or the Carnegie Library in Richmond Hill are community treasures that need to be preserved. These buildings should be landmarked. By working with community organizations to establish a broad coalition in support of landmarking these buildings, we can come together to ensure these buildings are designated as that they will continue to be a part of our community.



4. **ST. SAVIOUR'S CHURCH IN MASPETH IS A NOTED GOTHIC STYLE CHURCH, BUILT IN 1847 AND DESIGNED BY PROMINENT ARCHITECT RICHARD UPJOHN. THE COMMUNITY HAS CAMPAIGNED TO SAVE THE CHURCH FROM DEMOLITION FOR MORE THAN TWO YEARS AND, IN EARLY APRIL 2008, CONVINCED THE DEVELOPER TO SPARE THE CHURCH AND ALLOW IT TO BE MOVED TO ALL FAITHS CEMETERY. STILL, MUCH FUNDING AND ASSISTANCE IS NEEDED TO MAKE THIS MOVE A REALITY. HOW WOULD YOU HELP FIND FUNDING FOR THIS PROJECT?**

COMO: Saving St Saviour's is a great victory for the Newtown Historical Society and the community but work still needs to be done to raise the money necessary to relocate the church to All Faith's Cemetery. During these fiscally challenging times it may be difficult to procure money for the rebuilding of St. Saviour's Church. However, as Councilman, I would do everything to assist in raising money for the cost of the relocation. In addition, I would meet with preservationists, civic leaders and residents to discuss fundraising options and offer my assistance to the extent the law allows.

CROWLEY: An important first step is to help in the work of the St. Saviour's Church historic society. This society should continue to work with the existing community groups to lobby for funding. Members of the proposed historic society should work with organizations such as the Historic Districts Council, the Municipal Art Society, the Society for the Architecture of the City, and the New York Landmarks Conservancy to apply for grants to pay for this important move and reconstruction.

-
5. **PARKS, CEMETERIES AND OTHER OPEN SPACES ARE AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE 30TH DISTRICT.**

- A. **DO YOU SUPPORT THE PROPOSAL OUTLINED IN PLANYC 2030 TO ALTER THE RIDGEWOOD RESERVOIR FOR RECREATIONAL USE?**

COMO: I fully support a plan that will preserve the natural beauty of the Ridgewood Reservoir. The reservoir is an ecological treasure and every effort should be made to keep the entire reservoir intact. A learning center should be created so that NYC residents young and old can learn about the wildlife that call the reservoir home, the many different species of plant life and enjoy nature in their own city and not have to travel miles outside of the city. In addition, money should be spent on renovating existing ballfields and ensuring that existing recreational space is safe and functional. I have met with the Mayor's office, NYC Parks Departments and Community Board 5 Pars committee and stated my position. The Ridgewood Reservoir presents the city with a wonderful opportunity to ensure that there will be vast green space that will provide generations of New Yorkers with a natural preserve right in their own backyard.

CROWLEY: No, I do not support the proposal outlined in PlaNYC 2030 to alter the Ridgewood Reservoir for recreational use. Instead, I strongly support the Ridgewood Reservoir Education and Preservation Project's efforts to make the Reservoir an environmental educational facility.

-
- B. **WOULD YOU SUPPORT THE SCENIC LANDMARK DESIGNATION OF FOREST PARK, INCLUDING ITS NOTED CAROUSEL AND BANDSHELL? WHAT STEPS WOULD YOU TAKE TO SEE THAT THE DESIGNATION IS SUCCESSFUL?**

COMO: I support the scenic landmark designation of Forest Park, including the carousel and bandshell. For generations, Forest Park and its valued attractions have brought great pleasure to the residents of the entire borough of Queens. As councilman, I met with the LPC to discuss the interior landmarking of the carousel and bandshell. In addition, I secured funding for the replacement of the bandshell benches so residents can enjoy concerts in comfort. I will continue to meet with all parties involved to ensure that this beloved scenic park its carousel and bandshell does not get ignored and is given the designation it deserves.

CROWLEY: Yes, I support the scenic landmark designation of Forest Park, including the carousel and bandshell. I would work to form a Forest Park Historical Society which can help raise awareness and build private support.



C. MAYOR BLOOMBERG'S PLAN NYC 2030 AIMS TO ENHANCE NEW YORK CITY FOR THE FUTURE BY FOCUSING ON SUSTAINABLE GOALS FOR ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE. WHAT IS THE BEST PART OF THE PLAN?

COMO: The best part of PlaNYC 2030 is the preservation of land, the creation of greenspace, the beautification of our streets and the attempt to make New York City an ecological model for other large cities to follow.

CROWLEY: I applaud PlaNYC 2030 for including a focus on the environment. The plan to plant one million trees is an important goal, and the action already taken towards that goal is a step in the right direction. I am dedicated to efforts to protect our environment, and in my role as the chair of the Green Committee of the Glendale Civic Association, I have worked with members of the community on environmental conservation efforts.

D. WHAT IS THE WORST PART OF PLAN NYC 2030?

COMO: The worst part of PlaNYC 2030 is that it is an extremely vast plan and therefore it is important to implement the plan carefully. A comprehensive step by step approach should be taken in order to ensure that it would work properly and does not lack emphasis.

CROWLEY: Calling for 20 acres of land in the Ridgewood Reservoir to be altered for recreational use is an example of how PlaNYC 2030 does not always take into account community needs.

6. APPROPRIATE LEGISLATION IS A VERY IMPORTANT PART OF THE PRESERVATION PROCESS. WHAT KIND OF LEGISLATION WOULD YOU SPONSOR OR SUPPORT TO TEMPORARILY DELAY DEMOLITION OR HALT THE ISSUANCE OF DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS PERMITS SO THAT THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION COULD CONSIDER DESIGNATING IMPORTANT HISTORIC PROPERTIES BEFORE THEY ARE DEMOLISHED?

COMO: Legislation should be enacted that would help delay demolition permits issued by the Department of Buildings where the historic significance is clearly evident. As stated before, I feel that it is equally important we create a list of historically significant locations before the threat of the wrecking ball looms in the shadows. Too many times, we have to scramble during the 11th hour to save properties after demolition permits are issued by the DOB. As a community we need to do everything to identify areas to be preserved far in advance of any permits being issued.

CROWLEY: As a member of the city council, I will support legislation that would temporarily delay demolition or halt the issuance of Department of Buildings permit so that the Landmarks Preservation Commission could consider designating important historic properties before they are demolished.



DEVELOPMENT

7. MUCH OF DISTRICT 30 HAS ALREADY BEEN APPROPRIATELY REZONED TO PROTECT THE CHARACTER OF THE COMMUNITY. HOWEVER, WOODHAVEN, AND PARTS OF GLENDALE, MIDDLE VILLAGE AND MASPETH ARE STILL ZONED IN A WAY THAT THREATENS THEIR HISTORIC RESOURCES. HOW WOULD YOU WORK TO HAVE THESE AREAS REZONED TO HELP PRESERVE THEIR HISTORIC CHARACTER?

COMO: City Planning should work to complete rezoning projects in a timely manner. There is no excuse for a rezoning application to take years to complete. Overdevelopment is a serious problem in our area and is placing increased burdens on our infrastructure, schools, city services and quality of life. This is why I met with the Mayor's office and City Planning to work together to move forward with the scheduled down zoning of areas in our district. It is imperative that we move quickly and save the many one-family residential homes from falling victim to greedy developers who seek to replace them with multi-dwelling structures. Additionally, I feel that penalties and fines should be increased to those individuals who violate the law. Moreover, I will continuously work with City Planning to find ways to down zone appropriate areas throughout my district. In addition, I would propose that each rezoning adopt an historical district component to ensure that these areas are not overlooked or ignored.

CROWLEY: I would work with the Department of City Planning to downzone the remaining areas of District 30 to ensure the quality of life and preserve the character of the neighborhood.

8. WHAT IS YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE SELF-CERTIFICATION PROCESS FOR ARCHITECTS? WOULD YOU DESCRIBE IT AS EFFICIENT? FLAWED? ARE THERE WAYS IN WHICH YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE THIS PROCESS REVISED? IF YOU BELIEVE SELF-CERTIFICATION NEEDS TO BE ELIMINATED, WHAT DO YOU PROPOSE SHOULD REPLACE IT? IF SELF-CERTIFICATION NEEDS TO BE RETAINED, WHAT SHOULD BE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR A FLAWED (FRAUDULENT) CERTIFICATION?

COMO: Self-certification was implemented to take some of the workload off of DOB inspectors so that they could perform vital safety and compliance site visits. Unfortunately, the self-certification process has been abused and taken advantage of by unscrupulous developers and architects. I believe that self-certification could work if we implemented severe fines, criminal proceedings, suspensions and the revocation of licenses of those individuals found guilty of abusing the self-certification process.

CROWLEY: The self-certification process for architects is flawed. Ways in which this process could be revised include that any architect or engineer that self-certifies a plan that is not in building code should be penalized and their self-certification status should be taken away. There is need for better oversight, such as audits of a certain percentage of those that utilize self-certification. The majority of blueprints are designed through the computer program CAD – plans should be able to electronically submit to the Department of buildings, which would streamline the process. The current submissions process should be reviewed and revised to incorporate updates in technology. I do not think self-certification needs to be eliminated, but reviewed and revised.

9. MANY PROPERTIES IN THE DISTRICT 30 AREA ARE FORMER INDUSTRIAL SITES THAT ARE ZONED MI-I (LIGHT MANUFACTURING). IF ELECTED TO THE CITY COUNCIL, HOW WOULD YOU UTILIZE YOUR RESOURCES TO ENSURE THAT UNUSED MI-I ZONED PROPERTIES ARE UTILIZED IN WAYS THAT ARE IN THE INTEREST ON COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE DISTRICT?

COMO: As City Councilman, I am encouraging public debate regarding the use of under-utilized MI sites. I am a firm believer that the community is the expert when it comes to what it needs to preserve its quality of life and promote economic growth. Consequently, I will continue to fight alongside my neighbors against projects that would adversely impact our neighborhoods.

CROWLEY: There is a need to find a balanced use of manufacturing spaces that provide the hardworking people in this community jobs as well as creatively utilizes safe unused space for community centers and schools.



10. ANOTHER PROBLEM IN THE DISTRICT IS THE PREVALENCE OF HOMEOWNERS PAVING OVER FRONT YARDS AND INSTALLING ILLEGAL CURB CUTS. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ENFORCE THE PROPER REGULATION OF FRONT YARDS, DRIVEWAYS AND PARKING PADS? IF PAVING OVER FRONT YARDS IS INDEED A PROBLEM, SHOULD THE PROPERTY OWNER BE REQUIRED TO REMOVE THE PAVING AT HIS OR HER OWN EXPENSE?

COMO: The city council recently passed legislation regulating yards for residential developments. As you are aware, previously, front yards were not required to be incorporated in the construction plan. Consequently, front yards in many new developments were completely paved to provide space for parking and driveways. The approved text requires a minimum percentage of planting in front yards in RI – R5 Districts, based upon street frontage, ranging from 20% for narrow lots (less than 20' wide) to 50% for lots 60 feet wide or greater. In addition, it requires a 30-foot open area behind every building segment (rowhouse) to ensure a useable rear yard, whether or not a rear yard is required. This legislation should be implemented for homeowner's seeking to pave over existing front yards as well. I believe these amendments promote better site planning by ensuring that all residential developments are adequately served by sufficient yards and open space. Homeowners who violate this law or illegally create driveways or parking pads should be made to correct this violation at their own cost.

CROWLEY: I support the New York City Council's Green Yards Rezoning plan, which promotes greener streetscapes in all five boroughs. The rule calls for owners to retain 20-50% of their front yards as green space. Paving over front yards poses a great problem for our already overburdened sewer system, as rainwater runoff enters the sewers instead of our lawns. We must conserve as much green space as possible in our urban metropolis.

11. HOW WOULD YOU PUSH FOR AGGRESSIVE ENFORCEMENT OF THE CURRENT BUILDING AND ZONING LAWS TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF ILLEGAL CONVERSIONS?

COMO: As you aware, overdevelopment and the proliferation of illegally converted apartments are placing a tremendous burden on the Department of Buildings and their inspectors. However, this is no excuse not to immediately respond to complaints regarding illegal apartments. Illegal apartments can be unsafe to occupants as well as neighbors. Too often, unscrupulous building owners take advantage of the shortage of affordable housing and a prospective renter's financial situation. They circumvent Building codes and ignore tenant's rights. It is the responsibility of the DOB to address these situations quickly so that neighborhoods like Ridgewood do not become transient neighborhoods. I have met with Queens DOB Commissioner Derek Lee and provided with a list of problematic sites that was either illegally converted apartments or operating as single room occupancies. I encourage the community to contact my office if they have a location that has a suspected illegally converted apartment. There should also be an effective reporting mechanism between utility companies and the DOB so they can report illegal conversions while conducting service calls. My office will contact the DOB to ensure that an inspector visits the sites, that proper violations are issued and that the property owner is forced to remedy the situation. In addition, I would like to enact legislation that would increase fines and penalties levied on property owners who knowingly operate and profit from illegal apartments.

CROWLEY: Illegal conversions of properties in our neighborhoods take away from the unique neighborhood character within the community of the 30th district. And it is often an unsafe living space as well. I will work with the Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses Subcommittee of the City Council's Land Use Committee to ensure there is an aggressive enforcement of current building and zoning laws.

12. WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON EMINENT DOMAIN? IN WHAT INSTANCES, IF ANY, SHOULD PUBLIC SEIZURE OF PROPERTY BE USED FOR PRIVATE INTERESTS?

COMO: Eminent Domain should be used only when the interest of the public is clearly evident. Eminent Domain should not be used as a loophole or a smokescreen for developers to seize land for their own financial benefit. The acquisition of KeySpan site for the creation of a community park is a perfect example how eminent domain can work for the public good. We should refrain from using eminent domain when the distinction between the public good and private profits is not clear.

CROWLEY: Eminent domain should be used sparingly, and specifically for the greatest common good.



PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

I3. HOW WOULD YOU COMMIT TO FOSTERING GREATER TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF BUILDINGS, DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING AND THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION IN DISTRICT 30?

COMO: There needs to be transparency in government in order to foster the public trust and confidence. I believe that public hearings, neighborhood meetings and community access to their elected officials are essential to effective government. Therefore, as Councilman I continue to coordinate and promote open dialogue with City Planning, Landmarks Preservation Commission and the Department of Buildings on a consistent basis. I also requested monthly reports from each agency on everything involving the 30th Council District. I encourage local community leaders and residents to contact my office whenever problems arise or their requests are not being handled adequately by city agencies. I actively attend community board, civic association and property group meetings to listen to neighborhood concerns. Currently, my open door policy is being utilized by residents to have their problems addressed and voices heard. I look forward to continue serving in the City Council and representing the hard-working people of the 30th Council District.

CROWLEY: I believe there is a need for transparency and greater accountability from the Department of Buildings, Department of City Planning and the Landmarks Preservation Commission in District 30 as well as across the city. Information regarding preservation status, timelines in which preservation and landmark status will be considered, and other information should be available online for community residents. Further, each department should have a staff person who is responsible for community relations work.

I4. IF ELECTED, HOW WOULD YOU COMMIT TO CONVENING A REGULAR MEETING OR TASKFORCE TO FOCUS ON PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES? IF NOT ELECTED, HOW CAN THE COMMUNITY STILL COUNT ON YOU TO REMAIN INVOLVED IN CIVIC ISSUES TO IMPROVE OUR COMMUNITY?

CROWLEY: Regardless of whether I am elected, I will continue to work for the preservation of historic buildings in our district and to ensure that all development is responsible development. Further, if I am elected, I will hold meetings to focus on the important issues of preservation and development.