

Eastern Queens Alliance White Paper:
A Comprehensive Plan--
Maximizing Quality of Life in Southeast Queens

(Final Draft January 15, 2006)

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Eastern Queens Alliance, Inc.

A Federation of Civic Associations in Southeast Queens

The *Eastern Queens Alliance* was formed for the purposes of educating, heightening awareness, mobilizing energies and generating community involvement in developing solutions to issues that cut across neighborhoods or community boundaries within Southeast Queens, including issues related to the environment, health, culture, public safety and other quality-of-life concerns. In furtherance of these charitable and educational purposes, the Alliance :

- (a) promote s use of public and private funds for programs which support a clean environment, help provide solutions to health and safety concerns and preserve the unique culture and quality of life of local communities;
- (b) encourages voluntary efforts among individuals, organizations, institutions and businesses in support of these activities;
- (c) heightens public awareness of the conditions surrounding identified problems and the remedies to improve such conditions; and
- (d) conducts any and all lawful activities which may be useful in accomplishing the foregoing purposes.

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This whitepaper is the result of a year and a half of conversations with community leaders at Eastern Queens Alliance Roundtables about a variety of issues that affect our communities. What was quite evident during these roundtables is that many of our concerns cut across neighborhoods, affecting large numbers of residents in Southeast Queens communities. Whether it was Brookville, Jamaica, Laurelton, Queens Village, Rosedale, Springfield Gardens, South Ozone Park, etc. we spoke with one voice. What was equally evident as we attempted to focus on possible solutions was that there was real consensus about the kinds of actions that we believed might serve as true remedies. This whitepaper is a compilation of all of the identified issues and concerns as well as our recommendations for combating them. The purpose of this whitepaper is to start a dialogue with our elected officials and our governmental agencies to begin to design a real comprehensive plan for Southeast Queens. We want to thank all of those community leaders who gave of their time and knowledge of their communities, and who were willing to stay the course and hammer out possible solutions to make Southeast Queens a place of which we are all proud.

*Barbara E. Brown,
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“We need stronger local communities and an improved local quality of life. Streets where parents feel safe to let their children walk to school. Where people want to use the parks. Where graffiti, vandalism, litter and dereliction is not tolerated. Where the environment in which we live fosters rather than alienates a sense of local community and mutual responsibility.”

(Prime Minister, Croydon, April 2001)

QUALITY OF LIFE DEFINED

What is *Quality of Life*? For purposes of this paper, *Quality of Life* (QOL) refers to living conditions, living environment, infrastructure and public service provisions. It also refers to the social order, safety, and communications. "Quality of Life is the product of the interplay among social, health, economic and environmental conditions which affect human and social development." Generally speaking, aspects contributing to urban *Quality of Life* can be broadly classified into economic, housing, environment, infrastructure, social and political issues.

Economic --Some indicators used to measure economic performance include environment for doing business, unemployment rate, inflation, etc.

Housing and Living Environment--Indicators used for measuring housing and living environment include housing affordability, level of congestion, quality of houses, provision of open space, community facilities, etc.

Environment--Apart from traditional indicators such as air, noise and water quality, a clean and sustainable environment is essential for the health and well-being of the people. The indicators used for environmental aspects are mainly related to air and water quality, noise, biodiversity, waste generation and energy consumption.

Infrastructure-- Good infrastructure development is essential for good QOL. The infrastructure development includes public transportation system, road and rail networks, information and communications technologies, sewage system, etc.

Social-- Social aspects relate to education, health, culture, recreation, safety, social welfare system and community participation.

Political--Factors related to Quality of Life may include level of freedom and level of participation in the policy-making process.

(Adapted from : Working Paper No. 11: Quality of Life

http://www.info.gov.hk/hk2030/hk2030content/wpapers/wpaper_11/e_wpaper11.htm)

All of these aspects of quality of life in Southeast Queens are discussed in this *Eastern Queens Alliance Whitepaper: A Comprehensive Plan for Maximizing Quality of Life in Southeast Queens*.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

In the summer of 2004, the results of a study looking at citizen satisfaction noted the following ratings*:

	New York	The US
Public transportation	2.9	3.3
Fire protection	3.3	3.8
Police protection	3.0	3.4
Public libraries	3.0	3.6
Parks and recreation	2.8	3.4
Garbage pick up	2.7	3.5
Police-community relations	2.6	3.2
Street cleanliness	2.6	3.3
Public schools (k-12)	2.2	3.3
Roads maintenance	2.2	2.9
Ease of car travel	2.1	3.4

1= Poor 2=Fair 3=Good 4=Very good 5=Excellent

* eTownPanel.com
www.etownpanel.com/newyork.htm#Evaluation%20of%key20public%20services

In all areas of this study New York City was rated lower than the rest of the US. In fact, the rating was just *fair* in all of the categories except police protection, fire protection and libraries, which fell into the *good* category. All indications are that when we look at Southeast Queens the situation deteriorates even further in many categories.

Sections on **Transportation, Police Protection, Police-Community Relations, Roads Maintenance** are covered under the section on *Infrastructure* later in this paper. **Environmental Equity** is covered under the section on *Environment and Health*. Below is a discussion of the areas surveyed that fall under the headings *Economic, Education, Political* and *Social* issues. All of these impact on the quality of life of residents in Southeast Queens.

Public Libraries—There is an insufficient number of public libraries in our communities that are accessible to our residents. The reading achievement levels

among many of our young people are low. There is a need to instill a love of reading. While libraries are located on or near main thoroughfares such as Merrick and Linden Boulevards, library services are not within walking distance for many who live in the community. Those who can't easily reach libraries don't use them.

Garbage Pick-up—Residents complain about irregular pick-up in some of our neighborhoods particularly regarding recycling. Streets are never swept. Garbage cans and covers are thrown on the sidewalks after pick-up, left to roll back into the street and blow away in the wind. Garbage dropped by the sanitation workers is left on the sidewalk or road. In addition, where there is dumping along many of our roadways, particularly in and around our parks and highways, the garbage is left to pile up due to failure to address the situation by the NYC Department of Sanitation.

Public Schools—Our schools are overcrowded, particularly in areas experiencing mushrooming population growth. This results in the temporary responses of using hallways, bathrooms and trailers for extra classroom space. Classes are too large for the individualized attention that children need. Most classes have at least 25 students. Thirty or more is often the norm. When you consider that classes in the suburbs often have fewer than twenty students, you can begin to appreciate the gravity of the situation.

Instruction emphasizes rote learning and fails to develop the critical thinking skills that an educated citizenry needs. Our children are not being trained to be the “movers and shakers” in this society. They are failing miserably in our schools. The high school graduation rates, scores on achievement tests, number of regents diplomas all underscore this.

At-Risk Youth—A sizeable number of our youth face overwhelming challenges with no forum for guidance. There is a sense of powerlessness, a lack of self-esteem, and a lack of direction. Participation in sports and popular music videos are perceived as the only way out of their situations. This can be attributed to a wide variety of societal ills including poor parenting, lack of supervision in homes where both parents work, lack of parental involvement in our children's education, a breakdown of family values, as well as the prejudice, discrimination and low expectations that are often found among the educators who “end up” working with minority children. We do not have the multisystemic community centers or facilities in our neighborhoods to enable us to begin to combat these problems.

Senior Citizen Services—There is a growing number of senior citizens in the United States as a result of improved health care and the aging of baby boomers. Experts on aging believe that this trend threatens to overwhelm the system unless comprehensive plans for this population are made now. Deborah Howe, in a paper entitled *Aging and Smart Growth: Building Aging-Sensitive Communities* maintains that "It is in our collective best interest, as individuals and as a society, to aggressively transform our communities so that they are aging-sensitive, thereby enabling older people to maintain their independence and ensuring efficiencies in providing services to lessen the strain on caregivers." (p. 2)

The senior population in Queens has increased significantly in the last ten years. This is true for Southeast Queens. In Queens 16% of the elderly are black, which is up from 13% in 1990. 13% are Hispanic, up from 9 Percent. Most of the Black population lives in Southeast Queens. A sizeable number of Hispanics also live there. Many seniors live in the one family homes where they have raised their families and would, given a choice, prefer to age in place. Others are in two-family dwellings, many of which are "mother/daughter" type environments. Others, of course, live in the high-rises such as Rochdale Village or housing projects.

Many seniors who live in their own homes are struggling on small pensions to maintain their homes, doing necessary repairs, paying for utilities, and having sufficient funds to provide the basics of everyday living. Others who have the means often don't know how or where to obtain services. Some become victims of unscrupulous businesses such as home improvement establishments. There is a lack of coordination of services for seniors and those that exist are so spread out geographically that it becomes very difficult for seniors to avail themselves of them. Inadequate transportation compounds this problem and Access-a-Ride is not often senior-sensitive, which makes the problem worse.

At least some of our communities qualify as horizontal NORCS, Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities, where a concentration of social, medical and mental health services are easily accessible to seniors who live within an immediate geographic area. NORCs need to be seen as a viable option for our senior population.

Recreational and Cultural Services—There is a dearth of recreational and cultural facilities in our communities. There are few if any theatres, cinemas, sports

complexes, and other places for leisure time activities. Residents must travel quite a distance to reach those that do exist such as the Roy Wilkins' Complex, Jamaica Arts Center, and the Magic Johnson Theater. While those along Jamaica Avenue are reachable by one bus for many residents, those on Merrick may require that residents take several buses if they don't drive, which points back to the inadequate transportation system in Southeast Queens.

How Did We Get Here?

Population Density--An increased population caused a demand for more housing. This resulted in a new house, usually a two family, being built on every available lot. Others have built dormers to convert their houses into legal two-families. In addition, the population explosion has caused a need for affordable housing leading to illegal rentals. Illegal basement apartments have been created in many houses; some even rent rooms within their homes. In fact, builders of new houses give people the impression that the cellars are rentable. An inspection of new homes and inadequate enforcement of building violations have allowed this to happen. Thus the population explosion! Census figures do not begin to accurately reflect the population living in Southeast Queens because those who rent basements, rooms, etc. often go uncounted.

This population explosion has caused a drain on already limited services—police, fire, sanitation, sewer, transportation, etc., Schools are overcrowded and there is something as simple as a severe reduction in available parking on many of our local streets. Population growth also affects water use and waste disposal. An increase in disposable materials like packaging, new and hazardous products have entered the waste stream. Such expendable items as telephones, personal computers, premature destruction of houses and other buildings, put wood, plastics, concrete and other materials, some hazardous or often not biodegradable, into the waste disposal system.

Education--Rising costs of living force parents to work longer/harder hours in order to survive, leaving children to fend for themselves. Cultural differences in parental roles regarding education, parenting styles, language barriers and communication styles, etc. result in a disconnect between school and home. There has been an increase in the disengagement of young people in our schools. Many of our youth seem to lack the incentive to achieve, graduate from high school and enroll in higher education programs. There is a lack of college-bound programs and

programs that motivate our young people to do well in school. Many have no idea about the wide variety of career options that might be open to them if they acquire the appropriate skills.

Community Involvement--There is an appalling lack of significant community participation in block, civic and parent associations. There is a failure of the powers-that-be to involve communities in policy and other decisions that impact on their very quality of life. There is also a failure among community residents to proactively participate in finding solutions to community problems. Many do not seem to understand the importance of such participation. The long hours that residents work and the fact that many are returning home after 7:00 PM to do all of the chores that go along with running a household mitigate against such involvement. Also, a "you can't fight city hall" mentality permeates our communities often rendering people impotent in the face of the powers that be. This is reinforced by the fact that governmental agencies and policy makers habitually ignore the wishes of the very communities about which they are making critical decisions. In addition, residents frequently fail to file complaints or follow-up on issues and concerns. They are reactive instead of proactive. This encourages the placement of NIMBY facilities and projects in Southeast Queens because the area is perceived as a path-of-least-resistance.

Budget/Finance—It costs money to run a city and keep the infrastructure in operating order. City revenues never seem to be sufficient to maintain investment in infrastructure projects and routine maintenance. Over the last several years the city, state and Federal governments claim to be operating at a deficit, at least as far as quality of life issues are concerned. Funds are often diverted to the current priority of the day, affecting the maintenance of "dams" that are not yet bursting. Political as well as practical restraints often seem to preclude raising taxes or business fees and fines.

Recommendations:

1. Proper planning is needed to predict infrastructure needs. Survey each community for specific needs around each of the aspects of Quality of Life so that an informed comprehensive plan for Southeast Queens can be developed.
2. Assess the current services and compare the level of services to the actual needs of each of the Southeast Queens neighborhoods, taking community growth and expansion into account.

3. Plan, design and implement multisystemic, intergenerational neighborhood centers to provide not only recreational programs, including the arts as well as sports, but family services, psychological and career counseling, job training, tutoring, mentoring, parenting classes, etc.
4. Establish horizontal NORCS in communities with a critical population of senior citizens in existing private houses to help seniors maintain a high quality of life, with the necessary services as they age gracefully in place.
5. Establish adopt-a-school programs whereby corporations invest in local schools.
6. Insure that each community has a library that is accessible to all. Implement a libraries-on-wheels program for areas in which this is not possible.
7. Provide financial incentives for local and small businesses to mentor, provide internships for, and hire youth in our communities.
8. Increase the number of funded summer youth programs.
9. Restore sufficient funding of youth employment programs in each of our communities.
10. Open the lines of communication between neighborhoods and real estate brokers to make sure brokers are informed about the quality of life, type of environment, values, etc. that communities wish to maintain.
11. Take required action to encourage elected officials and agencies to ensure the enforcement of all of our quality of life regulations and codes, giving us a more stable community with better schools. Do this without compromising our ability to encourage, strengthen and expand the local economy.
12. Reinstigate the commuter tax on the thousands of people from outside of the city who earn their salaries in New York City while impacting, but not contributing to the infrastructure.
13. Offer bonuses to city workers for innovative suggestions that result in cost savings or lifetime improvements in the agencies in which they work.
14. Increase city revenues through taxes, fines and fees carefully directed towards those most able to pay.
15. Maximize Federal and state funding through available grants, offsets and other mechanisms. Seek reimbursement for city costs in implementing any state or federal mandates.
16. Make timely capital investments with long term, low maintenance construction.

CROWDING, AESTHETICS, ZONING, AND CONTROL

Southeast Queens, like many areas of Queens has become overcrowded and has experienced significant changes in density and design with the ongoing population explosion. While we see miniscule Manhattan apartments selling for over one million dollars, it is understandable that modest houses with reasonable commutes, back yards and city taxes would increase in value. The boom results in maximizing existing housing, replacing outmoded houses and building on every available lot.

As a result of this overdevelopment, the community is left with several problems including overcrowding, loss of open space and incompatible housing styles. These problems can be devastating to residents who have invested heavily in their community and have enjoyed a quiet suburban lifestyle for many years. In addressing what to do about these issues it is valuable to understand more deeply what the issues are and how we got here.

Today's Situation

Crowding - Neighborhoods are zoned to accommodate many factors, including available space, nearby job centers, transportation options and infrastructure such as schools, parking capacity, parks, water supply and sewage capacity. It is senseless, for example, to build high rise apartment buildings where there is little mass transit. Typically, apartment buildings have grown up near subways, bus routes and shopping and are generally closer to the central business districts. In low rise areas, parking and schools become major considerations. Although the city was planned to accommodate approximately double the current population, the modern reality of multiple car households would make such population grossly uncomfortable.

The relative affordability of Southeast Queens has resulted in an increasing population and, recently has contributed to a more affluent population with more available capital and greater demands on the environment. One after another in many neighborhoods, small houses are being expanded, or even torn down and replaced with more massive structures. Often these buildings are much larger and higher than the neighboring houses. Rear yards become overwhelmed and side yards seem to disappear. Front yards are often paved over to reduce maintenance or provide additional parking. Without grass and vegetation, the resulting rainwater runoff drowns neighbors' lawns and sometimes floods basements nearby.

Greedy developers increasingly pressure owners of oversized lots to sell and then they cram the most possible dwelling units on the property.

Socio-economic issues are driving these changes. Increases in immigration, and particularly from certain cultures fuel size and style of new and replacement houses. The rapid increase of non-traditional and single parent families has comparably increased the demand for apartments. Divorce and separation rates have increased. People unexpectedly single often can't handle the mortgage or rent on one income. Furthermore, the exploding costs of purchasing a house and crippling costs of "keeping up with the Joneses" tempts owners to subdivide or create an apartment, legal or illegal.

Aesthetics - New structures and massive modifications to older buildings usually don't look like the surrounding homes and they are occasionally in violation of existing zoning regulations. The size and shape, colors and finishes, high columns and porticos look unnatural and overbearing compared to the surrounding cape cods, colonials and tudors in these long established communities. Older detached one-family houses on large lots suddenly become semi-detached. The structures to which they are attached are usually two-family boxlike structures that look nothing like the houses to which they are joined. Often, driveways are bounded by huge, ornate fences and figurines. New York City zoning and building regulations offer no restrictions on house styles, colors and textures - some say "there's no accounting for taste." But the result is sometimes a visual cacophony, disturbing to the eyes and demoralizing to the spirit. This cacophony tends to turn our communities into communities of renters because buyers intend to use their newly acquired properties as rental properties only. This is leading to the "ghettoization" of some of our neighborhoods in which the people who live there don't have a vested interest in preserving the community.

Zoning and Neighborhood Preservation - There are some options available to communities in New York City to help curb overdevelopment, including more appropriate zoning, stricter enforcement of zoning, vigilance and reporting violations and education and communication of laws and enforcement options. Finally, there are an increasing number of communities throughout the country that have passed legislation creating neighborhood preservation districts - neighborhoods that are not worthy of landmarking, but deserving of protection and preservation. Ironically, most of these options are no cost/low cost implementations with no long term maintenance expenses.

Barriers to Community Control - Greedy owners and developers are anxious to enrich themselves by overbuilding. Regulations on examination of permit applications were relaxed in the mid-1990's, allowing architects and engineers to certify their own applications, leading to often questionable construction. When building applications are filed in the traditional manner, examiners responsible for reviewing them often seem untrained and not in tune with the principles or specifics of zoning regulations. They pay more attention to building code, sacrificing control of compatibility, size and open space rules designed to protect the community. Field inspections are lax, to say the least. Developers or contractors are able to file for minor modifications and then massively expand the building. Plans are not readily available to interested community members and information available on-line is often not relevant to the major zoning controls - such as *Floor Area Ratio*, height, open space and yard requirements, etc.

With so much building going on and so few inspectors, it is possible to exceed the approved permit and not get caught. Buildings inspectors do not even check plans when visiting a site. Inspectors might check that plans are on site, but do not bring or consult an official set to ensure conformance of the construction with the approved plans.

Available Options

Zoning Options - New York City's zoning code dates back to 1961, with modest changes occurring frequently. The last major residential zoning change was in 1989 with the inclusion of several "contextual" zones intended to more accurately describe the as-built character of communities throughout the city so that future development would closely match what's in place. But a lengthy and staff intensive process called ULURP is necessary to "rezone" areas to the most appropriate contextual zone. However, first it takes a civic group or community board to press the issue. Throughout the 1990's there was much demand for rezoning, but little action. Finally, in the last two or three years, there is a recognition that residential communities must be saved in order to keep high-income and professional families in the city. A new zone, R2A, was recently created to salvage neighborhoods of modest single-family, free-standing houses. The tools are now here, communities must be educated and aggressively pursue better zoning and stricter enforcement.

Enforcement Options - It seems that the Buildings Inspector position is one of the few in government that more than pays for itself through fines and fees. But equally important, inspectors provide a vital public service by ensuring safety and community continuity. An obvious option is to increase the number of examiners. Examiners and inspectors should be paid sufficiently to attract and retain highly qualified professionals. Rigorous construction inspections, as performed in Nassau and most other jurisdictions, must be implemented to inspect foundations, framing, electrical and plumbing rough-in, carefully confirming the approved plans. Inspectors have no right of access. Rules should be implemented requiring inspection access up to twelve months after the completion of any permitted construction work.

In addition to intense training in building code, these staff should attend a comprehensive zoning orientation, lead by City Planning Department planners with mandatory semi-annual refresher training. Self Certification must be cancelled or severely curtailed. Applicants can put down an incorrect zone, file a building non-conforming to the current zoning, receive a permit and construct with little possibility of the Department of Buildings catching the error. Responses to examiners' objections are being routinely "self certified." Furthermore professionally certified applications are not submitted to the Department of Environmental Protection or other review agencies, leading to potential violations or unsafe conditions.

The Department of Buildings' power to interpret the actions of the City Planning Commission must be subjected to Department of City Planning concurrence by a joint panel of planners and Buildings staff, with oversight by a community advisory board.

The Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA) currently have the *de facto* power to modify zoning by allowing exceptions, or variances, to the established zoning, due to "financial hardship" and other relatively subjective excuses. The BSA must more closely enforce existing zoning and hold applicants to stricter standards before granting variances. The BSA does not consider acquisition of a property to construct a non-conforming building, to be a problem. The Board regularly grants variances when an appellant knowingly purchased property that could not be developed legally. Zoning must be taken more seriously and more rigorously enforced.

Community Outreach and Activism - Homeowners and home buyers must be more aware of the binding zoning requirements. Most buyers rely on the advice of a real estate broker. In search of a sale and commission, some brokers may convince the buyer that income potential from an illegal apartment will easily meet the heavy mortgage payments. Disreputable contractors quickly agree, or even suggest, modifications that could easily provide tenancy options - legal or not. Civic associations and umbrella groups can help educate their members through outreach at monthly meetings. Buyers and sellers at closing should be required to sign an affidavit clearly expounding the existing zone and its principal restrictions - especially existing and allowable dwelling units', size, bulk and use. The affidavit should also detail the building's current status and include a promise to continue to comply with the established zoning requirements. Finally, Buildings and City Planning must provide ready access to understandable language explanations of zoning and building processes.

Zoning code is literally indecipherable by even seasoned civic activists. The organization of the code makes a complete review of a specific zone, such as R2, nearly impossible. Then you must consider interpretations that may have been made by the Buildings Department, which may not be documented and not readily available. Exceptions by the Board of Standards and Appeals would require significant effort and research to locate. An authoritative and readily available zoning document must be created, including all impacting decisions.

Recommendations:

1. Strengthen the review and enforcement arms of the Buildings Department.
2. Mandate hard copy or computerized information with inspectors in the field.
3. Implement mandatory inspection of all permitted work for one year after completion.
4. Make permit calculations on key zoning controls available on line.
5. Ease the rezoning effort and time requirements.
6. Clarify zoning regulations and compile all zoning issues by zone (eg R2, R4-1, etc.)
7. Place the Zoning Resolution on-line through nyc.gov and index the resolution to more easily locate references to items such as overhangs, which are difficult to find.

8. Make Buildings Department interpretations of zoning issues subject to mandatory review and concurrence by the Department of City Planning and oversight by a community advisory board.
9. Train buildings examiners and inspectors in specific zoning requirements and mandatory refresher training.
10. Eliminate Professional Certification (Self-Certification) or significantly curtail the use.
11. Require DOB intake procedures to review at least key zoning criteria before automatic granting a Professionally Certified permit.
12. Deny Self Certified responses to objections in any circumstances
13. Make BSA decisions subject to review by City Council.
14. Buyers must exercise due-diligence, ie do the necessary research, and financial hardships should not automatically create an exception.
15. BSA Decisions must be placed on-line for ready reference by neighbors and community boards.
16. Strengthen laws regulating real estate brokers, developers and contractors to require knowledge of zoning and building rules.
17. Require at closing a seller's affidavit that the property complies with zoning or is grandfathered and the buyer understands the key zoning regulations and promises to abide thereby.
18. That the city pass a law to create neighborhood preservation districts to give communities the where-with-all to preserve the quality and character of their neighborhoods.

INFRASTRUCTURE, PUBLIC SAFETY AND GROUP RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES

During the 1970s and 1980s New York City and much of the country was faced with a significant recession and severe fiscal crises. Like many other municipalities, the City dealt with this problem by postponing maintenance, reducing staff wherever possible and reducing costs overall. Roads, bridges, tunnels, subways, buses, parks, hospitals and schools all suffered tremendous damage by the deferred maintenance. If kept up to date constantly, these facilities can be maintained, but if left alone, wear-and-tear and abuse can increase costs dramatically and reduce safety for users.

Subways and, more so outside of Manhattan, buses, provide mobility and access to jobs, education, shopping and recreation. The Long Island Rail Road has great potential but is an expensive replacement for many. The Subways spent many years covered with graffiti and looking like no one took care of them. They also are a long ride from most SEQ residents. Due to limited parking near the subway hubs, buses are the only alternative to get to the subways. Yet buses have suffered from maintenance problems and there are chronic complaints of our areas being underserved. Some bus lines are not owned by the City and have been very poorly maintained. Privately owned vans have filled the gap and by many accounts are quite convenient, but at a cost of having dozens of vans parked, often with engines running, loitering and littering and disturbing neighborhood peace and quiet.

During the same time period, the fiscal crisis resulted in staff reductions in police, fire and emergency services. This is due to reduced staffing levels, compounded with growing crime problems related to expanding drug use, particularly crack cocaine. For some time crime seemed to be out of control and people often walked the streets or rode subways in fear; many considered or did leave the city. Fire companies were closed or staffing was reduced and investment in fire fighting technologies and research was curtailed.

Water is the most precious of all commodities. New York City can live only with a constant clean water supply as well as the removal of waste water and storm water. Two water tunnels from the Delaware and Catskill Watersheds feed our demand, but they are nearly a century old and serious leaks have been reported. There is a

desperate need for additional water sources in the event of a catastrophic tunnel collapse or terrorist attack affecting current supply.

In the 1960s and 1970s a process called deinstitutionalization changed forever the way the mentally retarded, mentally ill, substance abusers and homeless people were cared for. Previously, these people were institutionalized in massive hospitals, such as Creedmoor State Psychiatric Center right in our district. In an effort to increase the individualization and restore human dignity to these patients, they were released into society, sometimes to assisted living quarters, group homes or half-way houses, but often just released with little or no support. Many of these mentally ill people landed in transitional shelters where they live temporarily and impersonally or in family shelters.

Today's Situation

Roads and Bridges - Thankfully, the recession did not last long enough to cause permanent damage to the infrastructure. Massive and time-consuming construction and repair projects have returned most of our facilities and roads to usable - if not good condition. In many cases patrons have been inconvenienced, sometimes for years at a time. The Brooklyn and Williamsburg Bridges have been reconstructed with massive infusions of money, closed lanes and with diversion of subway routes on the Williamsburg Bridge. Transportation agencies have been playing catch up over the last two decades to reconstruct roadways.

Roads Maintenance—Many of the streets and roads within our Southeast Queens communities are in disrepair. Potholes, sink holes, areas where there is persistent ponding during inclement weather are found throughout many of our neighborhoods. Potholes and craters damage vehicles resulting in high repair costs to drivers and lost productivity. They are also a serious hazard to pedestrians. Curbs are crumbling and disappearing in many neighborhoods. Illegal truck traffic has undermined the foundation of roads not constructed for commercial use. The NYCDOT does not respond in a timely fashion to these problems.

Subways and Buses - Subway cars have been repaired or replaced over the past decade and graffiti has become a rare occurrence. Some subway stations have been rebuilt or redesigned. Numerous initiatives have been designed to expand service to central areas of the City, particularly the extension of the #7 line to the Javit's Center, the Second Avenue Subway and additional service to Grand

Central Terminal. But the incredible cost of underground construction and political considerations have confounded these projects. None of the proposed projects will directly impact residence of Southeast Queens, but as we saw early this year, much of the technologies and equipment of the system are so old that even a minor fire can cause major disruption affecting riders from throughout the City. New technologies must be integrated into the system and expansion must support population shifts and job centers. Since we enjoy our peace and quiet in the low density residential neighborhoods of Southeast Queens, no one is calling for direct subway access to our area, but public bus service must remain available and convenient.

Residents in Southeast Queens must rely on bus service currently provided by the MTA and several privately owned bus companies. The service is erratic. Schedules are not honored and buses are sometimes rerouted without adequate notification of passengers. Vans have proliferated to take up the slack, but there are questions about their safety. In addition, there is an assumption that all passengers are going to the hubs to take the subway. Therefore, to travel in and around Queens by bus can take well over an hour when, by car, one can make the trip in ten or fifteen minutes. If you live and work in Queens and depend on public transportation, getting to and from work is very difficult.

While there is express bus service to Manhattan from Rochdale Village and at the eastern end of Rosedale, most of our communities do not have access to these buses, even though, in some cases the run-off routes run through them, i.e., the Brookville community. Bus service to the LIRR is generally not available, so that residents who wish to take the railroad must either walk long distances, drive to the railroad or take a car service.

Taxi service (yellow cabs) is not available within our communities. Residents must rely on car services even around the subway hubs if they do not want to take buses late at night for safety reasons. In some cases, citizens take the chance of getting into livery cars at the Jamaica Center without benefit of an official car service.

Finally, bus shelters do not exist throughout most of our communities. The width of the sidewalk is cited as an explanation, but shelters come in all sizes and shapes and you see examples of them across the country.

Water Resources, Water Treatment and Sewers - Currently our water situation is quite acceptable. Several years have passed since a drought has seriously impacted Queens neighborhoods. The Jamaica Water Supply company has been abandoned and most areas receive surface water or surface water blended by up to 20 percent of aquifer water. However many residents still do trust the quality and purity of the water and chose to purchase bottled water. The Third Water Tunnel is partially operating and will be completed in the next two decades. A new aqueduct is planned to bring water directly to Queens and serve as back up. A plan is being investigated to pump water from the new aqueduct into the aquifer beneath eastern Queens during periods of adequate water supply to be drawn in the event of a serious drought.

Water treatment facilities are sufficiently handling our needs. Sewers are being maintained and improved. Over the past few years and during this decade major sewer systems are being installed in Springfield Gardens and Rosedale and a new sanitary and storm sewer system will be installed in the Meadowmere and Warnerville sections of Rosedale beginning in 2006.

There is concern about continuing watermain breaks disrupting travel, damaging private property and wasting precious water. Occasionally breaks are due to construction accidents, but often they are just old pipes, subject to rupture, particularly with the punishing abuse of heavy trucks and buses and increasing automobile traffic. In addition, there are frequent complaints of dirty water. The Department of Environmental Protection claims that these are caused by old pipes whose insides are now flaking. Initial response is usually just to purge the system through local fire hydrants, but mid-term options are to insert plastic pipe liners and the long term option is to replace the old pipes over many years.

Public Safety, Police, Fire and Ambulance Service - These public safety services require constant budget for staffing, increased technology research and investment and close coordination in emergency situations. The attack on the United States stressed the first responders and their ability to communicate and coordinate. Southeastern Queens seems well served by fire companies. Many complaints have been received about police services, however. Increasing crime has led to Impact Zones covering parts of the area with increased police presence.

The community constantly complains about the level of services and poor response time of the precincts covering our area. At a recent meeting with the Police

Commissioner, community leaders complained bitterly about the lack of responsiveness in the 113th. In the 105 precinct's catchment, for over 30 years, those living in Community Board 13 have been asking for a second precinct. This is the second largest precinct in the city, extending from the Grand Central Parkway to the north to Rockaway Boulevard to the south. Their pleas have fallen on deaf ears. In addition, residents complain that there is insufficient policing in our communities since community policing, as we knew it, has been virtually eliminated. Community policing is perceived by the community as a desirable practice because it gives the officers who serve within our neighborhoods the opportunity to get to know the residents in the community; it fosters better communication between community and police.

Police-Community Relations--Residents are complaining about the harassment of black male youth in *quality of life sweeps* within our communities. Minority males in particular complain that they are constantly disrespected by the police. This has not changed over the years. There is a need to renew the emphasis on "courtesy, professionalism and respect" within the NYPD in Southeast Queens.

Community Facility, Group Homes and Shelters - All the evidence proves that Southeast Queens has been more impacted by group homes and shelters than any other part of Queens, possibly the entire City. The two largest family shelters in the City are in the Springfield Gardens areas of Community Boards 12 and 13 and they are surrounded by several other smaller shelters. Failing hotels in the JFK area seem to be fair game for the location of homeless shelters. Numerous complaints have been received about each of these shelters, particularly the Carlton House, which is immediately surrounded by a residential community. Carlton House clients congregate outside and often have visitors blocking the streets and making noise. It has recently been reported that aggregate family shelter populations are decreasing city-wide as a result of new preventive program initiatives. We have yet to discern any appreciable reduction to our shelter populations.

Community Boards 13 and 12 rank number one and two, respectively, in number of group homes in Queens and many of the more disruptive group homes, such as juvenile delinquents, dependent/delinquents and persons in need of supervision are located here.

Fair Share Equity-- Social service agencies seek homes in the area because prices are comparatively lower than those in other parts of the borough. These facilities strain the already taxed city services—education, police, fire, transportation, sanitation, sewage—in Southeast Queens neighborhoods. Saturation of such services negatively impacts on the community's quality of life. Despite community objections, the city approves these BSA items almost without exception.

Available Options

Roads and Bridges - The current situation is not dire, but it is proven that continuous maintenance and repair must be done. Bridges, roads and highways must continue to be rebuilt and maintained.

Subways and Buses - An interesting new bus program, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), has been proposed to provide up to 30 express bus routes servicing areas such as ours for people destined to job centers and other popular destinations. The services will be very fast, comfortable, well marked and travel in separate or specially marked lanes. We urge continuation and expansion of bus service and ways to increase utilization of Long Island Rail Road stations, through additional bus service to the stations and making parking available. The recent initiative of special weekend rates for city stations has been very successful and should be made permanent.

Bus routes must be developed to connect communities. Often these routes will not attract the number of travelers needed to justify full-sized buses. We suggest instead that mini-buses or Jitneys be used for such routes with operations only during hours of highest demand.

Vans may be a necessary evil of budget pressures and increased populations in our areas. Legislation has provided some control on van operators, requiring registration, insurance and community approval of routing. More work is required to enforce routing, protect riders, eliminate littering and loitering, eliminate rushed u-turns, and reduce competition with public bus routes.

Water Resources, Water Treatment and Sewers - Completion of the third water tunnel and the proposed aqueduct from Kensico Dam in Westchester are important investments to ensure continued water supply to Queens. Water supply

pipes must be kept in good repair, pipe liners inserted in areas experiencing frequent tainted water and a prioritized plan must be established to replace aging water mains.

Public Safety, Police, Fire and Ambulance Service -

Parts of southeast Queens do not have adequate police presence and are more susceptible to crime than most other areas. Community members in the 105th Precinct area have requested a new precinct to provide close police presence and officer supervision. So far these demands have been ignored.

Also, elected officials under the leadership of State Senator Malcolm Smith have formed Operation Safe Southeast Queens, meeting monthly with precinct commanders and community leaders to develop and monitor strategies to track crime and focus police attention on crime spikes, remove guns from the street and encourage youth activities. This is an initiative that needs to be expanded.

Community Facility, Group Homes and Shelters- In light of reported reductions of families seeking shelter we must keep pressure on the responsible agencies to freeze and reduce the populations at our shelters and eliminate shelters as quickly as possible. We must closely monitor city-wide group home populations, particularly the least desirable types such as PINS, juvenile delinquent, dependent delinquent, substance abuser and secure detainee. We must resist further increases in facilities as long as our group home populations are disproportionate with other parts of Queens and the City.

Recommendations

1. Encourage continuous maintenance of key infrastructure facilities even in difficult budget times.
2. Lobby for Bus Rapid Transit routes serving Southeast Queens
3. Seek ways to increase utilization of Long Island Rail Road facilities in Southeast Queens
4. Increase public bus services instead of encouraging independent van operators
5. Seek additional controls on van services to reduce direct competition with bus services and reduce objectionable activity of van drivers
6. Identify and request intercommunity bus routes to service our area
7. Install bus shelters throughout Southeast Queens.

8. Support the installation and improvement of water mains throughout our area
9. Continue to track and encourage long term water supply alternatives like Kensico Dam Aquaduct
10. Demand new precinct in the southern part of 105th Precinct
11. Continue to participate and expand in Operation Safe Southeast Queens
12. Monitor shelter and group home populations and trends throughout Queens and resist disproportionate development or expansion of such facilities.
13. Reinstate regularly scheduled community/police dialogs to reduce the tensions between the community and the police.
14. Monitor and give stiffer fines to truckers and trucking companies whose drivers illegally drive off truck routes, damaging our streets, pulling down power lines and other cables.
15. Boot trucks that are parked illegally in residential areas.

ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

Eight Principles of a Sustainable Environment Charter*

1. Stewardship—Stewardship of our environment must take a long-term and integrated view of resource management, recognizing the dependent relationship of humans on the environment and that environmental health is fundamental to economic and human health.
2. Sustainability—Resources should not be used beyond their capacity to be naturally replenished, both in quality and quantity, for the well-being of future generations.
3. Precautionary Principle—The onus of proof should be on parties proposing actions which could cause serious or irreversible damage to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that no damage will be caused.
4. Pollution Prevention—Reduction or elimination of pollutants should be at their source. This contrasts with 'end-of-pipe- controls on waste generated after the damage has been done.
5. User Pays—Users of environmental resources should pay fair value for the use of this natural capital, and should exercise this privilege with care and consideration for other living beings. The user pay principle places the responsibility for sound environmental stewardship of products on industry, from the point of manufacturing to the point of final disposal.
6. Environmental Equity—All species—plant, animal and human—have an intrinsic right to a healthy environment, and this right extends beyond the present generation to the future generations. No segment of these populations should bear disproportionately high adverse effects.
7. Shared Responsibility—Full participation and commitment of all societal groups fosters a smoother transition to sustainability than would be possible if these groups worked independently.
8. Enforcement—Environmental regulations will be strictly enforced with tough penalties and public accountability.”

*Proposed by Glen Clark, http://www.earthfuture.com/econews/back_issues/96-06.htm

The Eastern Queens Alliance strongly recommends that these eight principles be adopted as the guiding principles by which the city, state, and Federal governments operate to insure a sustainable environment in Southeast Queens.

Environmental Equity— The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' document entitled *Not in My Backyard: Executive Order 12,898 and Title VI as Tools for Achieving Environmental Justice* reports, "Increasingly throughout the nation, low-income residents and people of color are disproportionately exposed to a variety of environmental toxins in their respective neighborhoods, schools, homes or workplaces." They tell us that, due in significant part to substandard air quality, asthma is emerging as an epidemic among people of color in the United States. A CDC report on asthma rates in 2000-2001 found that African Americans were four percent more likely to have been diagnosed with asthma than whites,. African Americans have an asthma death rate 200 percent higher than whites.

The following findings were reported in the above-referenced U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' document: Studies have confirmed that race and ethnicity were the most significant factors in deciding where to place waste facilities, landfills, and other environmental hazards with African Americans and Hispanics exposed to the highest levels of risk. "Zoning practices and decisions that, on their face are race neutral, routinely allow communities of color and poor communities to be zoned "industrial" and significantly contribute to the disproportionate placement of hazardous and toxic industries in these neighborhoods. ... Areas zoned industrial have greater environmental burdens and health risks than areas only zoned for residential use. ...As the presence of industry increases, property values decrease, community members are slowly displaced and these areas become increasingly undesirable. " (p. 15) These problems are compounded by the fact that communities often lack ready access to scientific and technical data. As a result, environmental groups are advocating for more detailed studies analyzing the varieties and levels of exposure to environmental hazards and more technical assistance grants. It is acknowledged that the goal of protecting human health is more effectively reached when communities are involved in research and data collection.

Unfortunately, when negative impact projects are proposed, the promise of jobs is often dangled before minority communities, but "data reflect that when better paying, skilled jobs are created they often require skills not present in the workers from the immediate community." (p. 23) "For the jobs that are created, local residents are not given the right of first refusal or guaranteed access to training to prepare them for available jobs." (p. 24) The promise of jobs places communities in the position of choosing between their health and the hope of economic opportunity.

The proximity of communities in Southeast Queens to JFK Airport places them under the threat of constant expansion of airport-related businesses. As it is, the neighborhood streets are overrun with diesel trucks going to and from airfreight establishments both within and outside of the airport, trying to avoid congestion on truck routes. The city recently sold off parcels of ecologically valuable land along Rockaway Boulevard.

Proposed projects for the area only serve to increase air and water pollution, keeping in mind that the communities adjacent to JFK are already well within the airport's poison circle and wetlands and ground water are already being polluted by surface runoff. These proposed and approved projects, therefore, threaten to gobble up the remaining open space in Southeast Queens, not only increasing traffic congestion and air pollution, but threatening the adjacent wetlands and Thurston Basin, both of which are vital ecological areas to the New York/New Jersey Harbor Estuary. Added to all of this is the fact that the Nassau Expressway seems to be mapped to go right through Idlewild Park, not only destroying large tracts of wetland and upland areas within the park, but bringing traffic that much closer to the Brookville, Springfield Gardens and Rosedale Communities.

It is important to note that the incidence of asthma has risen in Southeast Queens. These environmental issues raise serious questions of environmental justice. It appears that other communities in the vicinity of the airport, are not contending with many of the issues that the largely African-American/African-Caribbean, Southeast Queens Communities are.

Recommendations:

It is strongly recommended that the following policies outlined in the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' document entitled *Not in My Backyard: Executive Order 12,898 and Title VI as Tools for Achieving Environmental Justice* be adopted by city and state agencies for making decisions that affect land use and quality of life in Southeast Queens:

1. Insure government's commitment to environmental policies that ensure that communities of color and poor communities are not disproportionately burdened with toxic facilities, waste sites, landfills, noise, lead paint, diesel emissions, noxious odors and other environmental hazards. To do this, there also must be a policy on cumulative risk that considers social, economic and

behavioral factors. Cumulative risk assessments consider all environmental and social factors.

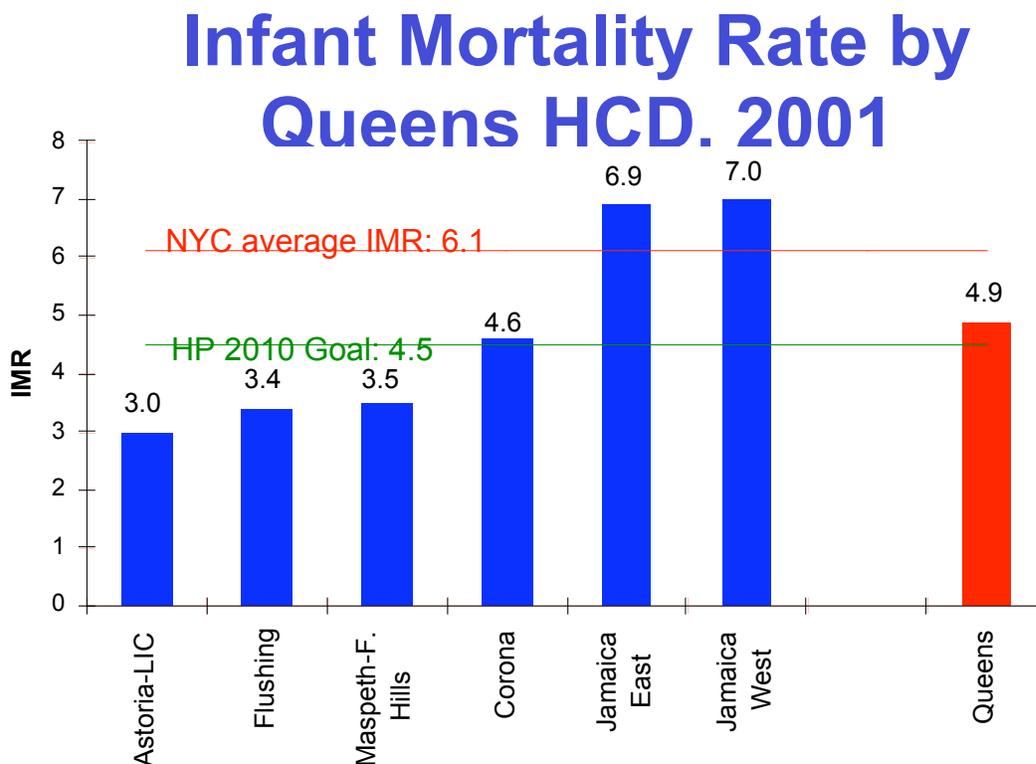
2. Enforce environmental equity, environmental justice, and fair share policies equally across the city. Make environmental justice a part of the mission of city agencies by evaluating the effects of their programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations. To do this agencies need to improve research and data collection, ensure public participation and track environmental resources and consumption patterns.
3. Adopt formal cumulative impact standards to assess the risk to human health from exposure to multiple pollutants and chemicals from multiple sources. As noted by the US Commission on Civil Rights, "*This piling-on of exposures should be given great weight when assessing the health risk associated with placing yet another facility in a neighborhood.*" (p. 22) To date, this is not being done in Southeast Queens.
4. Presume that exposure to multiple hazards has an adverse health impact.
5. Consider the totality of a community's exposure risks and use cumulative risk assessments that consider all environmental and social factors.
6. Collect and disaggregate data on exposures to environmental and human health risks borne by populations by race, ethnicity, gender, age, income and geographic location.
7. Establish criteria for identifying disproportionately high and disproportionately adverse health and environmental effects on minority and low-income communities.
8. Conduct a disparate impact analysis by comparing the racial characteristics of the affected population with those of non-affected populations to determine significance of the disparity. For example, how many pounds of toxic air pollutant releases such as diesel emissions are residents of Southeast Queens exposed to vs. the average resident in Queens or NYC?

Health and Environment in Southeast Queens

Today's Situation

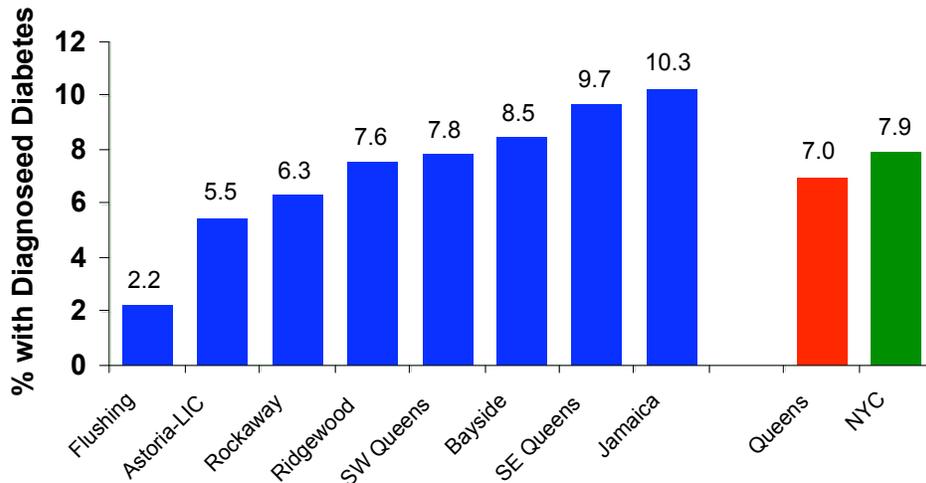
Health Statistics suggest that Southeastern Queens is a healthy community on par with similar neighborhoods in the city; however the well-being of the community is jeopardized by the lack of appropriate services necessary for the maintenance of a healthy community. The community is in close proximity and in the prevailing winds from JFK airport. Particulates and other potentially toxic materials are a serious concern to the community. Depending on weather conditions aviation fuel odors permeate the community. Jet fuels are routinely discharged over the communities adjacent to the airport. Particulates from the aircraft and vehicular traffic emissions are a concern. An examination of the current situation and recommendations to correct are included in this document.

- The infant mortality rate in the community is the highest in Queens (6.9/7.0) NYC DOH Data.



The percentage of individuals with chronic health conditions exceeds the city averages and is among the highest in the Queens area.

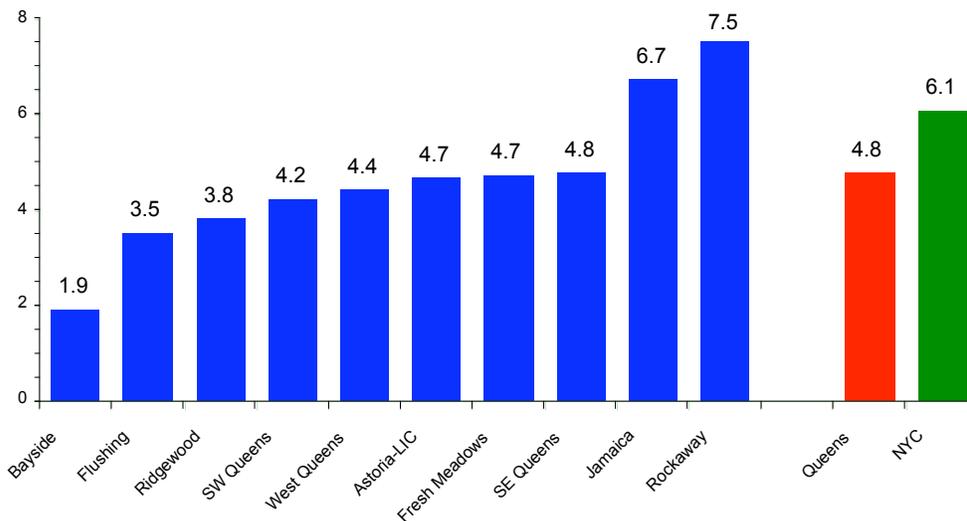
Percent of Queens Residents with Diaonosed Diabetes



The percentage of individuals with diabetes is highest in the Southeast Queens' neighborhoods with levels that are significantly higher than the borough of Queens and the city in general.

Asthma Hospitalizations in Queens

Hospitalization rate of children under age 15, per 1,000 population, by UHF neighborhood



- The asthma hospitalizations in the community, though lower than the city averages, when viewed with the other communities in close proximity to the airport do suggest there is cause for concern.

Community Health Education--A healthy community will ultimately lead to a wealthy community. In reality our community has a wealth of medical resources of varying quality, yet these resources are not targeted towards the needs of the community, but are better suited to a smaller segment of the more affluent, or that portion of the community with quality private insurance. In the roundtable discussions leading up to this document it became quite clear that our community members prefer to access health care service in the neighboring communities of Long Island. This is believed to be the result of a lack of required high quality care being easily available in the neighborhood.

A community education program within a community health center is required to educate our community on health practices employed in the management of chronic health conditions, ie. High blood pressure, diabetes, and asthma. Government/privately funded and affordable quality family health clinic(s) that provide this basic health screening and education will have a positive impact on the health of the community. Screening and early diagnosis of these diseases is key to greater health in the community.

The targeted needs include primary care and care-giver education for the following:

- Hypertension
- Diabetes care and education
- Asthma primary care education
- Geriatric care services

2. Prenatal care education and counseling

There is a need to breakout the demographics on infant mortality to determine which segments of the population are most at risk. Community health facilities must focus on reducing the high infant mortality rate found in Southeast Queens through analysis, outreach and education.

3. Health Care Services - Residents need to be informed about the range of current available services within the community. Many don't know what's there. Health care facilities targeted towards community needs are not easily accessible.

Facilities should be located on or near bus routes to facilitate access to these services. Better intercommunity transportation services are critical. Services must be seen as part of a comprehensive health system

4. Legislative Relief from the Environmental Impact of Overdevelopment.

The transportation related industries targeted for the undeveloped industrial tracts of the community further stress the environmental quality of the community. The community already stressed by the particulates and other pollutants from JFK can be decimated by industries that add further to these pollutants. Industrial development is probably necessary to maintain the tax base of the city, but should be accomplished in a manner so as to preserve the health quality of the community. Environmental justice principles must be adhered to. Refer back to the *Eight Principles of a Sustainable Environment Charter* on P. 29 of this document.

Regular monitoring of the Hazardous Air pollutants in the Southeast queens' area is recommended. On-going monitoring must be mandated. The particulate pollution monitors do not truly reflect the conditions local to the area. The Health Department needs to focus on respiratory illness in areas in close proximity to major industrial pollution sources.

5. Waste Transfer Stations sited in close proximity to our residential communities further negatively affect the health of residents. Strict regulation of these and other garbage facilities are required.

6. Illegal Dumping continues to be a problem in and around vacant lands, parks, and along the highways in the community. Vigilance by the community is effective in helping to control this problem. However, greater and more effective response by the authorities is necessary. Sanitation services must be improved

7. Live poultry markets in our community are regulated not by the NYC Department of Health but by State agriculture regulations that do not take into consideration the higher population densities and zoning required by city living. Legislation and city regulations are needed to allow the NYC City Department of Health to set regulations that are more relevant to the NYC environment.

Available Options

- Infant mortality results from several factors, including teen pregnancy, poverty, lack of health insurance and inaccessible public health care facilities. Teen pregnancy reduction programs and accessible teen prenatal care programs are essential to address the problem. Affordable health care or some form of universal health insurance would help reduce the infant mortality rate.
- Improved comprehensive sex education in the schools and at home starting at the elementary school age.
- Chronic conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure prevail in these communities. Ongoing education on the diagnosis management and control of these diseases is required to prevent the progression into kidney failure and heart disease. Affordable, accessible, high quality community health care facilities must be available to community residents.
- Asthma is most often related to the environment, in particular to airborne emissions and particulates. Severe asthma episodes can be reduced by reductions in air pollutants. It is important that we closely monitor and reduce the sources of air pollutants in the area.
- Regulations aimed at encouraging efficient and less polluting vehicles in the area are required. The city can play a role in that. Companies with less polluting vehicles should be given preference when government economic aid is being provided, such as federal transportation assistance programs. We urge the city and transportation agencies to introduce natural gas and/or hybrid vehicles for passenger vehicles, buses and trucks throughout the area.
- Provide community based health care to address the identified needs of the community. More focused care is required, the infant death rate screams out the need for prenatal care for significant segments of the population. Facilities are necessary that will provide this at costs the community can afford.
- Health care facilities catering to adolescents and geriatrics need to be sited along bus routes, or bus routes need to be adjusted to allow easy access to the communities.
- Federal laws must require less-polluting upgrades on aircraft frequently flying into non-attainment areas like Kennedy and LaGuardia, especially in close proximity to residential areas.

- Regulation and close monitoring by the community of illegal dumping is a necessity. Drop off points for household bulk garbage will encourage proper disposal of light construction debris instead of dumping it illegally. The current high fines imposed on illegal dumpers are somewhat a deterrent but most individuals are too scared to report incidents. Anonymous reports should be encouraged with even harsher penalties for dumpers.
- Establish community-based air and water quality monitoring throughout the community.

Recommendations:

1. Make high quality health care readily available and target health resources be towards the needs of the community,
2. Establish a community education program within a community health center to educate our community on health practices employed in the management of chronic health conditions, i.e. hypertension, diabetes, and asthma,
3. Establish government funded family health clinic(s) that provide basic health screening and education with a focus on hypertension, diabetes, asthma care and geriatrics.
4. Analyze the demographics on infant mortality for our communities to determine which segments of the population are most at risk
5. Establish affordable community health care facilities that target the reduction of the high infant mortality rate by providing quality prenatal care in Southeast Queens.
6. Offer improved comprehensive sex education in the schools and at home starting at the elementary school age.
7. Inform residents about the range of current available services within the community.
8. Make accessible health care facilities targeted towards community needs, locating such facilities on or near bus routes to
9. Establish necessary intercommunity transportation services to facilitate the movement of residents between and among local communities to access needed health care services
10. Accomplish any needed industrial development in a manner that preserves the health quality of the community. Environmental justice principles must be adhered to. Refer back to the *Eight Principles of a Sustainable Environment Charter* on P. 25 of this document.

11. Mandate regular, on-going monitoring of the Hazardous Air pollutants in the Southeast Queens' area and make every effort to reduce the sources of air pollutants in our communities.
12. Establish and strictly enforce regulations aimed at encouraging efficient and less polluting vehicles in the area.
13. Pass Federal laws that require less-polluting upgrades on aircraft frequently flying into non-attainment areas like Kennedy and LaGuardia.
14. That NYC and appropriate transportation agencies introduce the use of natural gas and/or hybrid vehicles for passenger vehicles, buses and trucks throughout the commercial and industrial areas.
15. That the Health Department focus on the causes and prevention of respiratory illness in areas in close proximity to major industrial pollution sources.
16. Require strict regulation of Waste Transfer Stations and other garbage facilities sited in close proximity to our residential communities , which negatively affect the health of residents,.
17. That there be greater and more effective response by the authorities to illegal dumping in and around vacant lands, parks, and along the highways in the community.
18. Establish more conveniently located drop off points for household bulk garbage. Establish that Sanitation will make local pick ups of discarded tires on a quarterly basis to discourage improper disposal.
19. Improve general sanitation services, insuring regularity of services and enforcement of the law.
20. Require that live poultry markets in our community be regulated by the NYC Department of Health, and that they take into consideration the higher population densities and zoning required by city living.
21. Pass legislation and city regulations to allow the NYC City Department of Health to set regulations that are more relevant to the NYC environment.
22. Establish on-going community-based air and water quality monitoring throughout the community.

OPEN SPACE, PARKS AND RECREATION

"On the land, we suffer from a sense of ecological disconnection."

www.earthfuture.com/econews/back_issues/96-06.htm

"(T)he ecosystem is still seen as an obstacle to profit, not a partner."

Ibid. --earthfuture.com

"As development moves further and further to the metropolitan fringe it competes with open space habitat. Loss of open space impacts the environment in multiple ways. First, we lose many of the natural landscape features we value--forests, wetlands, etc. Second we lose the functions that these features provide--runoff control, wildlife migration, etc. ... Smart growth enables communities to pursue open space protection and development objectives through the clustering of development activity away from sensitive natural areas. "

Smart Growth Network

Why parks, green spaces and green infrastructures?

Parks...

- "act to define the shape and feel of a city and its neighborhoods.
- "provide a sense of place and offer essential life-enhancing qualities that aid community and individual well-being.
- "are also a source of positive economic benefits. They enhance property values, increase, municipal revenue, bring in homebuyers and workers, and attract retirees.
- "can protect biological diversity and preserve essential ecological functions while serving as a place for recreation and civic engagement.
- "can motivate young people to learn through the natural environment, bringing environmental education into the mainstream of state-mandated instructional programs...enhancing academic achievement..
- "can also provide measurable health benefits, from providing direct contact with nature and a cleaner environment, to opportunities for physical activity and societal interaction.

Green spaces...

- "have been shown to create neighborhoods with fewer violent and property crimes where neighbors tend to support and protect one another.

- "support frequent, casual contact among neighbors. This leads to the formation of neighborhood social ties, the building blocks of strong, secure neighborhoods where people tend to support, care about, and protect one another.

Green infrastructure, the interconnected system of green spaces, ...

- "conserves natural ecosystem values and functions, sustains clear air and water, and provides a wide array of benefits to people and wildlife.
- "can reduce flood control and storm water management costs."

From: *City Parks Forum Briefing Papers*,
American Planning Association

Today's Situation

Open space, parks and other recreational land use do not seem to be priorities in Southeast Queens. Originally, that which we know as Southeast Queens was developed on filled in land--wetlands, natural streams, and springs. Acres and acres of natural landscape, including valuable wetland areas, were lost through this development. As recent as the early seventies, former wetland areas within Southeast Queens, particularly those in Idlewild Park were still being used as landfill sites for construction waste debris. Today much of this remaining landfill as well as ecologically sensitive remaining wetlands seem to be targeted for further industrial development. The press for industrial space gobbles up open space within our communities, particularly near the airport and other industrial locations. In addition, the demand for affordable housing has drastically reduced the number of open space sites within Southeast Queens communities thereby increasing population density. Thus the press for economic development and housing has taken precedence over the human need for open space, parks and recreation.

Today, the NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and the City Administration Services own tracts of land just north of JFK airport, immediately adjacent to Thurstin Basin and Idlewild Park that are earmarked for industrial uses instead of open space, parkland and recreational waterfront. In addition, there are many privately owned properties immediately adjacent to wetlands that contractors are constantly trying to acquire and develop. Much of this property is either wetlands or within 150 feet of wetlands. To add insult to injury, there is the continued existence of a state plan for the Nassau Expressway, which, if built,

would cut through Idlewild Park destroying valuable uplands and wetlands. Neither the city nor the state seems to protecting these lands.

Southeast Queens communities do not have the same type of access to its natural areas, waterfront and water front resources as other communities do. Indeed, in the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Center and the increased emphasis on the prevention of terrorism, water front areas adjacent to JFK airport are under increased scrutiny and access is being denied in previously open areas in the name of *National Security*. This seems not to be the case among those communities in Southwest Queens or those border communities in Nassau County. Additionally, many in our community are not aware of the value of these ecological areas. These regulations therefore go unchallenged. For Southeast Queens environmental equity is a myth.

Parks, playgrounds and sports fields need to be better maintained, but we constantly hear that there are citywide budget restraints. Thus our recreational areas deteriorate. Playground equipment goes unprepared or is outdated, the lawns are unkempt and strewn with weeds, the lakes, ponds and streams are often not cleaned so that debris pollutes them and, in some instances, blocks the flow of water so that we end up with stagnant pools, ripe for the breeding of mosquitoes. Algae cover many of these bodies of water in summer months because of neglect. Only a community outcry brings attention to them. The periphery of many of our parks are strewn with litter and garbage dumped by individuals and industrial sources. This is particularly the case where roads or highways cut through our parks. The Department of Sanitation does not clean these areas on any kind of consistent basis. Dumping begets dumping and so the situation mushrooms.

In addition, the services of the Urban Park Rangers and Playground Associates, or other staff are not available to parks in Southeast Queens due to a supposed shortage and budget restraints. In fact, preference for ranger and other positions seems to be given to the "Flagship Parks," none of which are in Southeast Queens. Parks need a sufficient budget to employ regular workers rather than using WEP workers who are neither trained nor invested in stewardship to perform vital maintenance services. This smacks of *slave labor* in exchange for a welfare checks. Why not train and employ them?

How Did We Get Here?

Government seems not to place value on parks, open space and natural areas. Prior to 1970's there was no recognition of the value of wetlands and many acres of wetlands were filled in. In fact, approximately 80 percent of the wetlands in the New York/New Jersey Harbor Estuary were lost prior to that time. Historically, JFK airport is a good example of this. As Idlewild Airport, now JFK Airport, was developed, many acres of wetlands were destroyed, leaving only the approximately 224 acres of the current Idlewild Park. The wetlands within our communities are valuable components of the remaining twenty percent of the Jamaica Bay ecological system.

Parks seem to be viewed as available space that can be alienated whenever government deems it necessary. In the vicinity of Idlewild Park, NYC seems to view many of the adjacent city-owned properties as fodder for economic and industrial development. The city, operating purely from a financial perspective, continuously seeks to expand industrial uses for properties immediately adjacent to the airport and other industrial zones without regard to environmental impact or impact to the residential communities. There is no requirement for industrial sites to incorporate open space to buffer the negative effects of their industry.

When the city experiences fiscal insolvency and they must cut the budget, the budget for NYC Department of Parks and Recreation is one of the first to be cut.

Many community residents do not know the true value of our open spaces, parks, wetlands, waterfront and water resources and, therefore, do not press for access, preservation, restoration and development.

Available Options:

- Require macro-environmental impact statements that address the total impact of all projects planned within a community within a five or ten year window.
- Turn all city-owned waterfront properties over to the NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation
- Grant conservation easements to privately owned waterfront properties to encourage the use of these properties for parks, recreation and waterfront access.
- Educate the community about the value of these areas.

- Provide for the allocation of funds for the establishment of an Idlewild Park Environmental Science Learning Center as proposed by the Eastern Queens Alliance to educate current and future generations about the importance of the environment and the protection of what we have.
- Increase allocation of funds for maintenance, preservation, restoration and development of parks in our communities, including the renovation of playgrounds and sports fields.
- Allocate appropriate staff, including Urban Park Rangers, to Southeast Queens' parks, natural and water front areas.
- Design and develop waterfront esplanades near Thurstin and Bergen Basins,
- Design and develop canoe/kayak/rowboat launches to provide recreational use of the Idlewild Park wetlands and access routes to Jamaica Bay.
- Create greenstreets on concrete islands and squares to enhance the "greening-up" our open spaces. Enlist community support for stewardship of these public spaces.

Recommendations:

1. That the city and state require long-range (5-10 years) environmental impact assessments for all areas/zones in which development/improvement is anticipated or considered desirable.
2. That all industrial projects within close proximity to residential areas be required to incorporate open landscaped areas to serve as buffers and environmental "mitigators"
3. That the city and state enforce wetland regulations, preventing development within the protected zone of wetlands.
4. That city-owned waterfront properties in Southeast Queens be turned over to NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation
5. That conservation easements be granted to privately owned waterfront properties and those in or adjacent to wetland areas to make impossible unscrupulous development.
6. That the focus be the development and implementation of plans for recreational access to waterfront in vicinity of Rockaway Blvd. and Brookville Boulevards instead of the proposed commercial/industrial use for land currently under control EDC.
7. That sufficient funding be allocated for restoration of wetlands in Idlewild Park and the development of an Idlewild Park Environmental Science Learning Center.
8. That there be an increase in the budget of the NYC Dept. of Parks and

Recreation to provide for the upkeep and development of our community parks as well as the personnel to service them.

9. Allocate funds for the creation of greenstreets on concrete public medians and squares throughout our communities.
10. Pass legislation that all revenues from investments in approved green projects be tax-free.
11. Promote environmental awareness across all sectors of society.
12. Allocate sufficient appropriate staff to the parks in Southeast Queens.

A Call to Collaborative Action

The Eastern Queens Alliance, in response to the situation outlined within this whitepaper, recognizes that the proposed solutions will require the active participation of the community along with the commitment of its elected officials to assiduously work to effectuate agreed upon solutions. The EQA, through its member organizations, accepts the role and challenge to help to educate our community in an effort to achieve the cooperation necessary for the success of the implementation of the proposed solutions. We call on all officials and agencies who represent us to use the power of their offices and work collaboratively to bring these recommendations to fruition!