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## The Public Ought to Know: City must give better notice for hearings

By Corey Bearak

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Corey Bearak

Last week, the mayor's Charter Revision Commission came to Queens and I could not attend.

When I served the previous Bronx borough president, my responsibilities included following Charter Revision Commissions and proposals advanced by then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani. I also followed charter revision during my City Council days. My 1985 Queens Bar Journal article supported transfer of much of the former Board of Estimate's powers to the City Council.

No employer or client required my attendance on March 7 at Queens Borough Hall and the inadequate notice this mayor's commission provided resulted in my commitment to attend a meeting of one of the not-for-profit boards on which I serve.

Had I received sufficient notice, I likely would have been able to keep the date open. I actually requested a meeting of the Flushing Meadows Corona Park Conservancy (<http://www.fmcpcconservancy.org>) scheduled for the following night be moved back from March 8 to March 7. I requested the move to accommodate fellow board member Richard Hellenbrecht, who also chairs Queens Community Board 13 (<http://www.cb13q.org>) on which I also serve.

We wanted to attend the hearing of the Port Authority Advisory Board chaired by Councilman James Sander set for March 8 at St. Peters Church in Rosedale. Of course, it got snowstormed out. Bottom line, we would have tried for another date had we received early enough notice. Hellenbrecht advised us of the Port Authority hearing on its Queens airport leases and the amenity projects proposed on Feb. 20; our president, Patricia Dolan, changed the meeting date to March 7 - a date I proposed.

After two e-mails advising Conservancy board members of the new date, I received a City Charter Commission notice via regular mail advising of a hearing barely a week later and hearings that run through April 4. That may be fine for an elected official, maybe even for someone (privately) paid to follow the commission's doing. In addition, a public expert forum of the commission precedes each hearing, scheduled for 6 p.m. Folks who work for a living and may want to comment - and should certainly be encouraged to comment - in person, likely luck out.

What really proves irksome is the inability of civics and others concerned about charter revisions to get word out timely to their members.

A Dec. 3 Queens Civic Congress e-mail, "From Queens Civic Congress: NYC Charter Revision Public Meetings (not hearings)," provided information to members. The topics - fiscal stability, administrative law reform and administrative reform and operations efficiency - covered previously here do not lend themselves to encouraging public attendance beyond a few so-called individuals from "goo-goos" (good government groups) like the Citizens Union's Sally Goodgold; she told me at a Jewish Community Relations Council Congressional Breakfast the Sunday prior to the hearing how Harlem Councilman Bill Perkins was one of the few to attend the last meeting.

As Newsday's Bill Murphy documented in a story that appeared the day of the March 7 commission meeting, the Charter Commission' Web site, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/charter/html/home/home.shtml>, failed to include an electronic posting of the hearing notice I received in the mail until March 3. I had actually scanned the hearing notice so I could e-mail it to the Queens Civic Congress list. But when the e-version appeared, it enabled me to copy and paste the information in an e-mail sent early afternoon on March 4. No ability existed to mail the notice to those members without e-mail or who

check their e-mail less frequently.

Open government certainly ought to include early notice and early and frequent attempts to engage public comment. Perhaps, I need to add this as a requirement for the commission to consider when I meet with them later this month. I also expect to cover topics in the Queens Civic Congress platform (<http://www.queensciviccongress.org/Platform/final2004Platform-forvote.pdf>) that may merit implementation by City Charter reform rather than local law. I appreciate the opportunity to meet and hope to make the time worth their while. It really makes sense to make the average city resident feel their voice matters. The process followed to date, appears to suggest otherwise.

Memo to Mayor Bloomberg: Direct your commission to schedule more hearings, at later hours, maybe even weekends, with early enough notice for community groups to notify their members.

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