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The Public Ought to Know: CB 13 must demand 2nd precinct for 105th

By Corey Bearak

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Interesting things happen in mayoral election years (even in years leading up to them). Property tax rebate checks will arrive not too soon before election day.

Some lower density neighborhoods zoned for greater development got downzoned. Staten Island became a lower density growth management area to limit development out of character and scale with existing communities. Election year goodies include the Police Department. A March 13 Daily News headline stated: "4th police precinct for S.I. comes in an election year." Other communities might argue: Why not us?

Over three decades, neighborhoods in Community Board 13, which stretches nearly 13 miles from Kennedy Airport to North Shore Towers covering northeast and southeast Queens, have coveted a second police precinct.

When the Dinkins administration proposed a second precinct for Washington Heights, the statistics strongly supported carving up the 105th Precinct that services all of Community Board 13 and Kennedy Airport. Community Board 13's longstanding chief capital project priority is the 116th Precinct, which would be built and staffed to served the community district's southern half.

The request, more often than not, got ignored. Staten Island's new precinct raises the level of advocacy for this need ignored by mayors going back to the days of Edward Koch. On March 20 Council members Leroy Comrie, James Sanders and David Weprin stood outside the 105th Precinct to advocate the 116th Precinct.

I worked on 1991 Local Law 89, which requires the Police Department to report their response times to crimes by tour, precinct and patrol borough. One must credit Weprin's predecessor, Sheldon Leffler, for this legislation, which allowed neighborhoods citywide to compare their police service levels. The Police Department follows the letter of the law and provides raw data to the City Council, which makes the information public.

We can use that data now to weigh the relative merits of a new precinct in one borough and, for the moment, not another. Mayor Bloomberg should require Local Law 89's information to be published on the city's Web site.

The city currently only provides response times to critical crimes on a community/precinct basis. This more limited indicator shows the Police Department relatively proficient at responding to serious crimes; no New Yorker ever doubted that. The missing, more inclusive response time to all crimes indicator may show what continues to grate on many New Yorkers: The NYPD still needs to ramp up its response times to less serious complaints.

Sunlight on response times, more frequently reported according to the department's segmenting of calls, would highlight areas that need more attention. The Council should amend Local Law 89 to require NYPD to report 911 response times to crimes in progress, segmented by critical, serious, non-critical and overall responses by borough and precinct, to borough boards and community boards. This core information made available by tour, precinct and patrol borough focuses attention on precinct and borough staffing. It empowers the public to press for change and makes the police, the city and elected officials accountable.

Community Board 13 Chairman Richard Hellenbrecht told me that many CB 13Q residents discussed a new precinct for the 105th at Commissioner Kelly's March 7 community meeting. "We all agree that the 105th Precinct is in desperate need of a new precinct," he e-mailed. "It was pointed out that at 7.7 minutes the response time in the precinct is 10 percent worse than the

Patrol Borough Queens South average and despite averaging 18 percent of the PBQS crime, we received only 6 percent of the officers from the new class."

According to the 2000 census, the combined population of the three Staten Island precincts totals 443,688. CB 13 at 196,284 still involves one precinct with 44 percent of the population of a borough soon to be served by four precincts. Size matters.

The three Staten Island precincts -120, 121 and 123 - run 9,052, 13,496 and 14,575 acres for a total of 37,125 acres. The 105th Precinct is 8,231 acres but is also responsible for the 4,930 acres of JFK Airport, a total of 13,161, or 35 percent of an area now to be covered by four precincts.

According to CompStat data found at the NYPD Web site, total crime in the 105th through last month (345) increased 10 percent over the same period last year (313); for the same period in Staten Island, crime decreased almost 2 percent (from 531 to 521). From 1993 through 2003, total crime decreased 67.54 percent in the 105th (7,264 to 2,358) compared to 72.89 percent for Staten Island (12,663 to 3,433).

CB 13 residents ought to be dialing 311 and demanding a second precinct.

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