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## The Public Ought to Know: People deserve share in City Charter Review

By Corey Bearak

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When the mayor's Charter Revision Commission met in Queens last month, almost no one came. A shame. Some suggest that only few care when the matters before the commission appear less controversial.

Queens Borough President Helen Marshall did testify and did note the under-resourcing of offices of the borough presidents. Perhaps fewer people attended due to the lack of notice. Whether civic leaders and residents attend, they should follow the commission's work and weigh in before a final product gets proposed and possibly placed on the November 2005 ballot.

Residents and community leaders should also share their views on charter revision with their elected representatives. If things continue as present, proposals may develop with little public input. The commission's Web site includes minutes of its meetings and hearings and welcomes the public to sign up for updates. Go to

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/charter/html/home/home.shtml>. If you lack

modern technology in your home, visit your public library.

The citywide elections and the debate over the Far West Side Stadium may overshadow the commission's activities and divert public and media attention, something that shouldn't happen. Perhaps working hard to produce a state budget on time diverted the attention of state lawmakers as will the all-consuming city budget process.

Continued inattention could mean potential charter changes passing in November and taking effect next year. These could affect how newly elected and re-elected city officials get to their jobs, particularly in the fiscal realm. The good news: The commission has many more meetings and its chairman and executive director promised to ensure better notice for the next visit(s) to Queens.

On Wednesday, March 23, I met with commission Chairwoman Esther Fuchs and Executive Director Terri Matthews. In addition to the issues in the Queens Civic Congress platform and policy matters I personally worked on and advocate, I discussed process and notice concerns. They agreed to provide six to eight weeks' notice on the next set of hearings on the draft proposals the commission recommends. This should occur in May or June. In anticipation of this timetable, the civic congress committed to sending out e-mail and regular mail notices of commission hearings to its members. I also recommended against summertime hearings.

The Queens Civic Congress proposals included:

- \* Recognizing New York City as a region and its boroughs and local communities as more effective entities for making decisions where many services ought to go (borough and community budgeting).
- \* Creating a greater role for borough presidents in borough land use planning, agency resource allocation, capital budget oversight and implementation and service delivery.
- \* Correct two 1989 mistakes: Restore legislative review of Board of Standards and Appeals decisions by empowering the Council to review BSA dispositions that now cost communities thousands of dollars; and empower the council rather than the City Planning Commission to set rules governing major concessions (private uses of public spaces), especially in

parks.

\* Empower the Civilian Complaint Review Board as the independent police oversight board recommended by the Mollen commission appointed by former Mayor David Dinkins to review police corruption and misconduct. Former Mayor Rudy Giuliani successfully sued to block the independent monitor law passed over his veto by then-City Council Speaker Peter Vallone. A re-engineered, fully independent CCRB with each member's appointment subject to council confirmation and a budget a percent of the NYPD's, would study and recommend practices of the NYPD that affect members of the public, including tracking systemic patterns of abuse and oversight and, most importantly, periodic reviews to ensure that the NYPD appropriately trains and supervises its police officers.

\* Empowering the Independent Budget Office to prepare the Mayor's Management Report.

The debate over funding the West Side Stadium and related projects through so-called off-budget revenues not subject to City Council and public review led to personal recommendations to clearly place "Payments in Lieu of Taxes ("PILOTs") within the budget process and make them subject to City Council approval. This includes expenditures by city authorities such as Economic Development Corporation and Industrial Development Authority. An alternative could be a voter referendum, as done with State Bond acts, on any PILOT expenditures outside the city budget. Also, why not limit the political use of Charter Revision Commissions by either subjecting a mayor's appointment of a commission to City Council approval or allow a mayor to appoint only one commission during a four-year term?

Corey Bearak is an attorney and adviser on government, community and public affairs. He is also active in Queens civic and political circles. He can be reached via e-mail at [Bearak@aol.com](mailto:Bearak@aol.com). Visit his web site at [CoreyBearak.com](http://CoreyBearak.com).

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