

AUGUST, 1990

news



from City Councilman Sheldon S. Leffler

Two offices to serve you:

COMMUNITY OFFICE:

205 07 Hillside Avenue, Suite 25
Hollis, New York 11423
Open weekdays: 9:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.
Telephone: (718) 465-8202

CITY HALL OFFICE:

250 Broadway, 23rd Floor
New York, New York 10007
Open weekdays: 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.
Telephone: (212) 566-3748

Dear friend and neighbor,

In January, I assumed my new responsibilities as Chairman of the Council's Public Safety Committee. Almost immediately, I was called upon to respond to a tragedy that took 87 lives — the Happyland Social Club fire. The City Council responded swiftly. My Committee elicited testimony from the Police, Fire, and Buildings commissioners that better enforcement of existing laws might have prevented these deaths.

However, in order to better protect public safety, I drafted legislation to shut down illegal social clubs, sweat shops, and other unsafe commercial and industrial structures. Local Law 23 of 1990 grants unmistakable authority to the Buildings and Fire Commissioners to immediately and securely close unsafe premises. It drastically increases criminal and civil penalties for life-threatening violations, including a fine of \$1 million for violations resulting in death or serious injury. It also created a commission to facilitate compliance with fire and building codes. With these safeguards in place, the likelihood of another social club tragedy has been substantially reduced.

In May, the Public Safety Committee reviewed a proposed merger of the City's three police forces. While merger is useful for its potential to improve police response, an obstacle appears to be the cost of equalizing the Transit Police pension with that of the New York Police Department. This issue is expected to resurface as the Transit Police union continues to press for merger and the Mayor completes examination of a report formulated by Police Commissioner Brown.

I continue to press for passage of legislation to protect our environment. My proposals to ban styrofoam packaging and control in-place asbestos are under active consideration by the Council's Environmental Protection Committee.

During the budget negotiations, I helped secure funding to improve police protection, strengthen the district attorneys' offices, implement capital programs and provide social services in eastern Queens. Details on these initiatives are provided in this newsletter.

As always, my staff, Ruth Bennick, Corey Bearak, Mindy Siegel, Marylen Daly, and Bernice Siegal, and I, remain ready to serve you.

Sincerely,

Sheldon S. Leffler
Sheldon S. Leffler

PUBLIC SAFETY

As Chairman of the Public Safety Committee, Councilman Leffler conducted oversight hearings on city agencies charged with protecting public safety. These hearings focused on agency budgets and highlighted key problems confronting our criminal justice system and fire protection services.

Police — Commissioner Brown has committed to civilianizing

284 positions in the department in order to free officers for patrol. The Commissioner also indicated that the Court Affidavit Preparation System (CAPS), which has been implemented by the Queens District Attorney, is the best system for streamlining the arrest-to-arraignment process and reducing police overtime. Last year, the CAPS program saved the Police Department \$1.35 million in overtime.

District Attorneys — Testimony by the district attorneys revealed that expansion of asset forfeiture programs would be cost-effective. The district attorneys voiced concern about their need for additional narcotics prosecution resources. They also acknowledged the need to boost complaint room staffing, in order to decrease police officer waiting time.

Fire — Testimony by Commissioner Rivera revealed that department services have been sheared to the bone. While the City Council was able to restore funds for three fire companies and a fire battalion that were to be eliminated in the Mayor's Executive Budget, the future of the fire marshals remains uncertain. Sixty-eight of these fire prevention and investigation professionals are slated to go by way of attrition by 1993.



Mayor Dinkins signs into law Councilman Leffler's legislation to shut down unsafe commercial premises.

Probation — The State is withholding \$11.4 million from the City Probation Department until the City meets a probationer-supervisor caseload ratio of 150:1 and other improved performance standards. The Office of Management and Budget asserts that Probation can meet this target within existing resources as the ratio is now approximately 160:1, down from 178:1, for the first four months of the past fiscal year. Given the troubled population Probation serves, it is important that caseloads be lowered in order to improve supervision, protect public safety and combat recidivism.

Correction — Commissioner Sielaff has committed to reducing overtime from approximately \$107 million in Fiscal Year 1990 to \$44 million in Fiscal Year 1991. These large overtime figures illustrate the burden taxpayers must bear as the cost of expanding and staffing our prison system escalates. As our jails have been operating at well over 100% of capacity, the city is trying to develop and expand safe, cost-effective alternatives to incarceration (ATI) for non-violent offenders, such as drug treatment, home detention, and electronic monitoring.

These and other ATI strategies would relieve overcrowded prisons and save taxpayers money that would pay for more jails and Corrections officers. They would ensure that adequate jail space exists for more violent criminals, including those awaiting trial. As Chairman of the Council's Public Safety Committee, Councilman Leffler is a member of the City ATI Advisory Board.



Newly-appointed Police Commissioner Lee Brown testified before Councilman Leffler's Committee on Public Safety with Chief of Department Robert J. Johnston and Chief of Patrol David Scott (seated). The Police Commissioner promised to expand community policing and assign more police officers to patrol. (Photo by Hudson Meyer).

THE BUDGET

City Hall couldn't complete its budget until it knew what Albany was doing, and by the time the State approved its budget — seven weeks late — the City had to rush to meet its June 30th budget deadline, so as not to adversely affect its credit rating. This delay

foreclosed the City's policy options. A decade of Federal cutbacks in real assistance to cities has shifted many burdens onto New York City. Our local economy, like the rest of the northeast's, is no longer growing robustly and there has been a sharp drop in the City's anticipated revenues. As a result, tax increases became necessary in order to maintain basic services. The City Council acted responsibly in the face of a budget deficit approaching \$2 billion and exercised its budget powers to restore fundamental services — police, fire, sanitation, education, libraries, and parks.

By identifying waste and less essential expenditures, the Council allocated \$8.2 million to hire 500 police officers beyond those called for in the Mayor's budget to replace officers expected to be lost through attrition. The Council targeted \$1.15 million to expand and improve district attorney asset forfeiture programs. An additional \$300,000 in capital funds were added for the Queens District Attorney's Court Affidavit Preparation Program, to buy PC computers in order to reduce police overtime costs and get more cops on the beat. Queens senior programs were preserved. Funds were provided for Queens tree planting and pruning and arterial highway cleaning equipment. The Mayor and the Council also agreed to restore \$6 million for the Clean Team, \$7 million for education, \$2.5 million for parks maintenance and \$2.58 million for public libraries.

The following capital programs were included in the adopted budget for Fiscal Year 1991 (which began July 1, 1990): \$5 million for resurfacing of Queens streets; \$7,956,714 for reconstruction of Francis Lewis Boulevard between Hillside Avenue and Grand Central Parkway (HW-242); reconstruction of 212th Street, between Hillside and Jamaica Avenues (HW-599) in Fiscal Year 1992; \$800,000 in Fiscal Year 1991 for sewer work at 234th Street and 39th Avenue, near P.S. 98 in Douglaston; \$1.6 million for the Alley Pond Park reconstruction; \$523,000 for sewer work on 53rd Avenue, between 210th and 213th Streets; \$300,000 for reconstruction of Cross Island Park in Fiscal Year 1991; \$105,000 for sewer repair work at Nassau Boulevard and 260th Street; repair of Tudor Road; \$343,000 in Fiscal Year 1992 and \$9,293,000 in Fiscal Year 1993 for SE-687, for the construction of sewers at Springfield Boulevard and 56th Avenue and \$13,242,900 in Fiscal Year 1992 for the companion project, SE-588; \$500,000 for Queens County Farm Museum road reconstruction; \$79,000 for final design of Cloverdale Boulevard (HW-819); \$100,000 for Oakland Lake and Ravine environmental study; \$100,000 for Alley Pond Environmental Center improvements; \$115,000 for Fresh Meadows Library site acquisition; and \$300,000 for construction of the King Manor Visitors Center.

Councilman Leffler was able to restore funding and secure additional monies for several community-based organizations, including:

Seniors — Samuel Field YM YWHA \$20,000; Pride of Judea Senior Transportation \$4,950; Services Now for Adult Persons \$19,000; Samaritan SNAP satellite program \$12,000; Project TACO \$28,000.

Youth — Little Neck-Douglaston Youth Club \$10,000; Our Lady of Lourdes Youth Program \$6,225; New York Youth Symphony \$3,000; Pride of Judea Teen Suicide Prevention Program \$20,000.

Evening Youth Programs — P.S. 18 \$2,500; P.S. 186 \$9,000; J.H.S. 158 \$4,500.

Afterschool Youth Programs — P.S. 205 \$5,071; P.S. 178 \$6,000; J.H.S. 109 \$7,000.

Cultural — Queens Colonial Farmhouse \$48,500; Bayside Historical Society \$20,050; Alley Pond Environmental Center \$117,000.

Social Service — Visions \$1,100; Queensboro Council for Social Welfare \$36,384; Greater Jamaica Development Corporation — Minority and Women's Small Business Program \$25,000 (plus matching State funds).

ENVIRONMENTAL UPDATE

Legislation sponsored by Councilman Leffler and Assemblyman Weprin and Senator Padavan in the State Legislature, created a Soil and Water Conservation District in New York City. Leffler first proposed the initiative at the suggestion of northeast Queens environmentalist Virginia Dent. This law enables the City to access federal and state government conservation resources. It also allocates \$10,000 annually to New York City for comprehensive planning for environmentally safe use of soil and water resources.

A merchant will no longer be his brother's sweeper. A new Leffler law makes permanent and extends city-wide, the Sanitation Department's Enforcement Routing Program. Sanitation Enforcement Agents are now required to limit their ticketing for dirty sidewalks and violations of the "18 inch" law to two one-hour periods each day in designated commercial areas.

The existence of asbestos in many New York City buildings creates a danger to the public. On July 12, the Environmental Protection Committee considered Councilman Leffler's revised bill to require the identification and, when appropriate, removal or enclosure of in-place asbestos. *Int. No. 453-A* provides for: the establishment of rules to require inspection and sampling of buildings to determine the presence of in-place asbestos-containing material; requires the development and implementation of an operations and maintenance plan for each building found to contain in-place asbestos; requires a comprehensive management

plan for such buildings; and requires the implementation of appropriate response actions with respect to in-place asbestos-containing materials found to exist in New York City buildings.

Like asbestos, smoking poses serious health risks, especially among our children. Each day, 3,000 American children



The City Club honored Councilman Leffler with its Earth Day award for environmental advocacy. City Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Albert Appleton, former Conservation Chair of the New York City Audubon Society, presented the award to Leffler, who chaired the Council's Environmental Protection Committee from 1986 through 1989. (Photo by Chase Roe).



Councilman Leffler and Schools Chancellor Joseph A. Fernandez discuss education issues during a meeting at City Hall. At right is Council Member Priscilla Wooten. (Photo by Hudson Meyer).

start this dangerous habit. The City Council has acted aggressively to prevent tobacco products from reaching our youngest and most vulnerable citizens. Councilman Leffler's bill, *Int. No. 13-A*, would ban cigarette vending machines in all places accessible to minors. Leffler, who has worked closely with anti-smoking activist Joe Cherner, is a co-sponsor of *Int. No. 401-A*, which bans the free or below cost distribution of tobacco products in public places where young people might obtain them.

COMMUNITY MATTERS

Legislation — Councilman Leffler co-sponsored Local Law 1 of 1990, which extends the Senior Citizen Property Tax Exemption to seniors whose income does not exceed \$15,625. The Council projects that the exemption program extension will save eligible seniors \$1.2 million in property taxes.

A law proposed by Leffler and enacted by the State strengthens enforcement against illegal conversions of one and two family houses to larger dwellings. Shifting adjudication of these illegal housing conversion violations from criminal court to the Environmental Control Board, will enable the City to speed enforcement and impose tough fines. Councilman Leffler thanked Assembly Ways and Means Chairman Saul Weprin for sponsoring the bill.

Traffic Safety — As part of continuing efforts to improve traffic safety, Leffler reports the installation of "Stop" signs on Thornhill

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Avenue at Browvale and Morenci Lanes and "All-way Stop" signs at Underhill Avenue and Pidgeon Meadow Road. Following a fatal accident at 86th Avenue and Bell Boulevard, the Councilman, who had been pressing for safety conditions there to be addressed, secured a Traffic Bureau commitment for an expedited traffic light installation.

Intervention by Councilman Leffler prompted crack-downs against illegal gypsy cabs and commuter vans by joint task forces, including Police, Transit Police, and Taxi and Limousine Commissioner personnel in the vicinity of 179th Street and Hillside Avenue, where a young mother died after being struck by a car. The Councilman also proposed legislation, Int. No. 243, to give New York City jurisdiction over unlicensed commuter vans. Leffler continues to pressure the Department of Transportation to institute measures to make hazardous intersections safe. Contact Councilman Leffler's community office for the status of any traffic study or to report a new problem location.

Tracking the Political Process

For information about upcoming hearings, the Council has established a hotline: (212) 566-3917. Details about topics, locations, dates and times will be available every Friday for the following week. To confirm any meeting, call (212) 566-5852 the day before, Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Councilman Leffler will continue his monthly City Council updates, which WNYC AM (830) broadcasts on the first Thursday of each month at 9:35 a.m.

"THANK YOU'S"

"I contacted you in reference to a problem I was having with a storm drain which was installed in the middle of my driveway...the drain was modified so that it fit the curb in my driveway. I would like to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to assist me in correcting my problem."
—Miroslav Vapenik, Bellerose

"...thank you for all your efforts to help us attain the best quality of life we possibly can...your most recent efforts...in trapping the wild dogs roaming our streets, have been most effective."

Miriam Rosenblatt, President,
Jamaica Estates Association

"The taxpayers of 45th Road want to send you their sincere thanks for supporting us in the fight against the establishment of an H.R.A. home

AN UPDATE ON THE ACTIVITIES OF Sheldon S. Leffler YOUR CITY COUNCILMAN



SUITE 25, 206-07 HILLSIDE AVENUE
HOLLIS, NEW YORK 11423

on our block. You were the first politician to truly represent us. You did what we expect every elected office holder to do..."

—Mildred Sporutto, Bayside

"Your presentation was excellent. It was an extremely enlightening summary of the major environmental issues in Queens...we are grateful to have such a thoughtful and committed Councilman."

—Charlotte Schwartz, Executive Director,
American Lung Association of Queens



The United States Environmental Protection Agency recently honored Councilman Leffler. Presenting its "Environmental Quality" award is EPA Regional Administrator Constantine Sidamon-Eristoff (center) while Russel Train, the first EPA administrator, looks on. The USEPA stated: "As Chair of the Environmental Protection Committee of the New York City Council, Councilman Leffler has been instrumental in drafting and enacting a substantial number of environmental laws, such as The New York City Recycling Law and the Illegal Dumping Bounty Law. In addition to these laws, he has also introduced bills such as the Styrofoam Packaging Ban and a Non-Recyclable Packaging Ban, both of which are currently pending."