

SEPTEMBER, 1991

news



from City Councilman Sheldon S. Leffler

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Dear friend and neighbor,

Our city faces a difficult period. Times like these require us all to do our part to preserve what makes New York, and northeast Queens in particular, an attractive place in which to live and work.

The support of concerned residents like you helped me convince my Council colleagues to halve the mayor's proposed property tax increase and make his "doomsday" budget a little less painful.

More can be done. With your continued support, I will maintain my advocacy of cost-effective approaches to municipal government. If any good can result from our City's current fiscal crisis, it is the growth of support throughout our city for change. More and more New Yorkers share our view that the policies and practices of the past warrant reform. Our leaders in City Hall and Albany must commit to developing and implementing long-term, cost-effective strategies to ensure New York City's future.

I've tried to take this approach with environmental and public safety issues as chair of the Council's Environmental Protection Committee from 1986 through 1989 and the Public Safety Committee since 1990. Over time, these and similar cost-effective strategies should take root throughout our City government.

In addition to fighting to preserve recycling, which offers our city a key part of the solution to the imminent loss of our landfill for trash disposal, my recent work on the environment includes enactment of the law mandating that the City switch to vehicles which operate on non-polluting fuels such as natural gas.

In public safety, I sit on an inter-agency committee that considers alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders, in order to reduce the need to build more jails. I have been working to reduce arrest to arraignment time so cops can return to our streets sooner and the accused awaiting arraignment do not take up valuable prison space. My law established an "Anti-Graffiti Task Force", using existing personnel, to develop a coordinated effort to eradicate this blight.

In this newsletter, I will update you on how the City budget affects us, on my recent public safety and quality of life initiatives and on other items of interest.

As a result of the increase in Council Members and redistricting, called for by the new City Charter, my district's population will decline from 212,000 in 1982 to 142,300 in 1992. Accordingly, this will be my last newsletter to long-time constituents living in Jamaica, Jamaica Estates, Auburndale, Fresh Meadows north of the Long Island Expressway, north Bayside, Little Neck and Douglaston north of Northern Boulevard and Queens Village south of Jamaica Avenue. I opposed this increase in the number of Council Members, believing that 35 are enough and that the City could better use its money. I am happy to have represented you for the past fourteen years and regret that some constituents will no longer be in my district.

As always, my staff — Corey Bearak, Ruth Bennick, Mindy Ohringer, Marylen Daly and Bernice Siegal — and I will continue to serve you.

Sincerely,

Sheldon S. Leffler
Sheldon S. Leffler



Councilman Leffler is joined by Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. of the Natural Resources Defense Council at a program concerning efforts to protect New York City's water supply.

(photo courtesy of NRDC)

THE CITY BUDGET

Once again a State budget delay, coupled with the depressed local economy, triggered revenue shortfalls and foreclosed many policy options for our city. However, the Council did its best to prevent this budget from being balanced on the backs of middle class and poor New Yorkers. Despite political pressure, we eliminated some governmental waste and blunted the impact of the worst service cuts.

Property tax bills reflect the previously enacted expansion of the City's police force ("Safe Streets, Safe City"), equalization of property values required by State law and assessment increases done administratively.

Libraries—Councilman Leffler received thousands of letters regarding the budget for the Queens Borough Public Library. As a staunch supporter of this indispensable community resource, Leffler strongly opposed the Mayor's proposed cuts. Due to a concerted effort by the Queens delegation, the Council restored \$4.2 million to our libraries, preventing branch closings and layoffs.

School Crossing Guards—\$2.3 million was restored to the budget to assure that high priority crossing guard posts are maintained. Leffler will work with schools and parents to try to ensure that hazardous eastern Queens locations are safely covered.

Recycling Saved—During the budget negotiations, Leffler was able to restore \$11.4 million to continue recycling (scaled back) through December. Mayor Dinkins, whose proposed budget had eliminated it, had not recognized the costs of suspending recycling and then re-starting it later. While Leffler fought to fully restore funding for the recycling program, the Speaker has assured him that the Council will use its best efforts to continue recycling beyond 1991.

Councilman Leffler Supports Essential Local Programs

Councilman Leffler directed \$226,214 in funding to essential local programs. The Councilman, together with colleagues Julia Harrison and Morton Povman, allocated \$30,000 to Community School District 26 to support direct services to students in up to five schools. Leffler, together with colleague Archie Spigner, directed \$20,000 to assist the Hollis Chamber of Commerce to stabilize housing and commercial areas.

Senior Programs—SNAP, \$58,000, including \$15,000 to help ensure the continued operation of SNAP's Queens Village Center, \$24,000 to help maintain its level of services in Floral Park and \$19,000 to provide a caseworker at a satellite office in Bell Park Manor-Terrace; Samuel Field YM YWHA, \$18,000 to help maintain its "CAPE" Community Advisory Program for the Elderly; and The Pride of Judea Mental Health Center, \$4,500, to support its senior transportation program.



Councilman Leffler chairs Public Safety Committee hearing on the bill to ban military-style assault weapons. Also pictured (left to right) are Councilman Victor Robles, committee counsel Richard Dachs, Councilman Sal Albanese and Leffler counsel/chief of staff Corey Bearak. (photo by Don Lohman)

Youth Programs—Alley Pond Environmental Center, \$23,000; Rocky Hill Civic Association (P.S. 18, Queens Village, and P.S. 186, Glen Oaks), \$10,350; Little Neck Douglaston Youth Club (Cardozo and Bayside High Schools, J.H.S. 67 and P.S. 205 (Windsor Park), \$14,464; Whittoff Civic Association (J.S. 109, Queens Village), \$6,300; Pomonok Neighborhood Center (P.S. 178, Hollis), \$5,400; Queens Village Catholic Youth Center (Our Lady of Lourdes Church), \$5,000; 111th Precinct Community Council (J.H.S. 158, Bayside), \$4,050; Mid Queens Boys and Girls Club, \$8,550; Pride of Judea Teen Suicide Program, \$14,000; Our Lady of Blessed Sacrament (Bayside High School), \$3,600; and New York Youth Symphony, \$1,000.

Capital Projects

The City finances capital projects, such as road reconstructions, through bond sales. Unlike expense budget programs which must be fully paid for by current revenues, the City covers capital project costs by repaying the bonds over the useful life of the project. During a fiscal crisis, declining revenues impact most dramatically on agency operating costs, which the expense budget funds. This means that capital programs, especially playgrounds and other low cost improvements such as \$400,000 for video equipment for the Queens District Attorney (to assist in case processing and investigations), remain feasible, despite economically troubled times.

Flood Relief—SE-687, to alleviate flooding in Bayside Hills, \$8,924,000; sewer and/or seepage installations at 77th Crescent at 247th Street and 76th Avenue, P.S. 98 at 234th Street and 39th Avenue, 53rd Avenue from 210th to 213th Streets, and Dunton Street at Keno Avenue; and drainage studies to determine remedies for flooding on 252nd Street from 82nd to 83rd Avenues, 212th Street from 93rd to 94th Avenues, 211th Street from Hillside to Jamaica Avenues, 91st Avenue at 212th Street and 198th Street from 90th to Jamaica Avenues.

Playgrounds—Memorial Field (230th Street and 57th Avenue), \$563,000; the Bellerose (P.S. 133) playground, \$500,000; P. Pond in Hollis Hills, \$500,000; McLaughlin Playground in Holliswood, \$473,000; and Alley Pond-Athletic (south of the Grand Central Parkway), \$200,000.

Street Repairs—91st Avenue in Queens Village (HW-254), \$1,155,000 for design this fiscal year and construction the following year; 64th Avenue in Bayside (HW-705), \$1,495,000; \$10,000,000 for street resurfacing in Queens (write my community office for information on your street); and \$500,000 for sidewalk and curb repairs.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Council Bans Military-Style Assault Weapons

Under Councilman Leffler's leadership, the Council passed a law to ban military-style assault weapons. The law, sponsored by Councilman Joseph Lisa at Mayor Dinkins' request, generally defines "assault weapons" and authorizes the Police Commissioner, by regulation, to identify them by make, model and manufacturer. Owners must surrender or remove them from the City or face fines up to \$5,000 (the maximum criminal penalty

"Councilman Sheldon Leffler, who skipped only two of 95 meetings, had the council's best attendance rate."

—New York Post, July 6, 1991

possible by local law) for their illegal possession. Licensed owners whose assault weapons will be covered by this Police regulation are to be notified directly by the Department and receive 90 days in which to legally dispose of their firearms or take them outside New York City. The regulation must be the subject of a public hearing and comments for 60 days, before it becomes effective. The law permits owners to retain assault weapons rendered permanently inoperable.

Leffler believes that enactment of this law will lead to the removal of some of these weapons from our City. It will also send a necessary message to New York State, other state governments and Washington, D.C. To make this firearms ban more effective, we need State and Federal laws which would make it difficult to circumvent this tough new local law by secreting these high-powered guns in a vehicle elsewhere and driving into our City.

In attempting to fashion a sensible and fair assault weapons ban, the Public Safety Committee had to make a reasonable assessment of the risk posed by the continued possession of assault weapons by licensed owners, and whether that risk was acceptable or not. Registered owners use these guns for target-shooting, competition, hunting, protection of their homes, or as collectibles. The Committee had testimony from the NRA, rifle and pistol clubs and gun owners that licensed assault weapons holders have not committed crimes and posed a negligible risk. It asked to review Police Department data which states that, in 1990, there were 22 crimes involving licensed owners using their weapons and that 645 owners of licensed "long guns" (including assault weapons) were arrested and charged with crimes. About a third (224 owners) were charged with very serious crimes: 11 murders, 26 robberies, 93 assaults, 21 menacings and 73 illegal weapon possessions.

Revoking a privilege of law-abiding citizens is not something to be done lightly. Registered owners have been a generally law-abiding group. However, there is an overriding greater good in banning these weapons. Their presence in our urban environment is too great a threat to life.

Councilman Leffler Attacks Graffiti Vandalism

Councilman Leffler developed legislation to strengthen existing anti-graffiti laws. The City's Anti-Graffiti Task Force, established at the beginning of this year by Leffler's law, meets periodically and Leffler has attended all its meetings. Perhaps its major accomplishment has been the implementation of a computer code entered at the time of any arrest for graffiti. This facilitates notification of the "victim" of graffiti who can appear in court at arraignment and seek tough handling of the case, as City agencies now regularly do.

The Anti-Graffiti Task Force is currently reviewing measures sponsored by Leffler which, if approved, would be taken up by the Public Safety Committee thereafter. Int. No. 712 would empower police to issue a summons and enforce the existing ban against the sale to minors of graffiti tools, such as broad-tipped markers and spray paint. Since the current ban only authorizes civil enforcement, police officers must follow a cumbersome procedure.

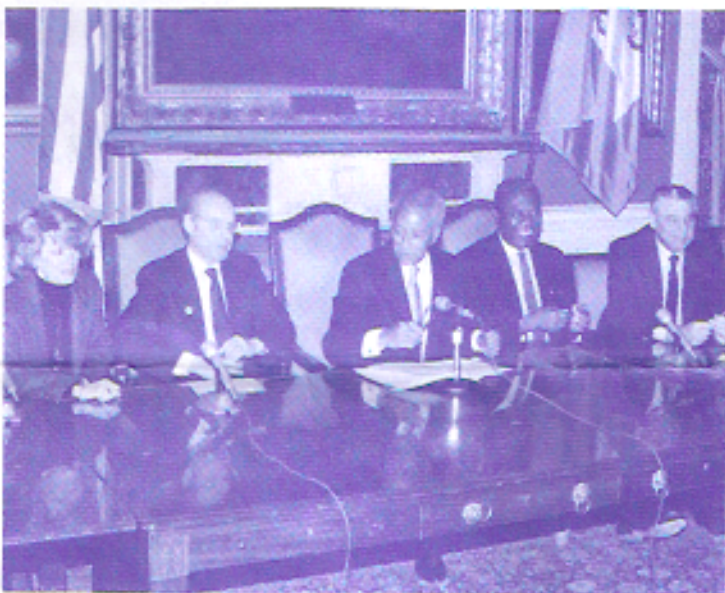
Int. No. 713 would authorize rewards for information leading to the arrest and conviction of graffiti vandals. Leffler also advocates state legislation to empower the courts to suspend the driver's license of any individual found guilty of graffiti vandalism.

Auto Theft — Because auto theft is often regarded as a virtual-

ly victimless crime, it is treated as a low-priority by our criminal justice system. The dramatic escalation in auto crime in our city requires earmarking of funds to ensure that criminal justice resources are directed at this problem. The Public Safety Committee held a hearing in April on a proposal Leffler made with colleague Sal Albanese, to create a New York State Auto Theft Prevention Authority. This initiative, which requires State legislation, is modeled after a Michigan State Authority which funds local law enforcement, prosecutors and local groups in fighting auto theft and implementing theft-prevention programs. Funds are garnered by a one dollar assessment on each private passenger automobile insurance policy.

Unfortunately, the New York state legislature was not able to agree on a bill before it adjourned. A key unresolved component of New York's plan is to whom earmarked funds should be disbursed. You can help by contacting our state legislators and urging their support for the establishment of a New York State Auto Theft Prevention Authority which targets funds earmarked for anti-auto theft activities.

911 Bill — At a hearing last May, the Police Department and the Mayor agreed to work with Leffler to pass a bill which requires the reporting of police response times to crimes in progress. Int. No. 515-A will improve Police Department accountability by providing the Council and the public with a better measure of the department's performance. Currently, the NYPD only discloses the time elapsed between a 911 operator's receipt of a call and the dispatch of police personnel. These reports are intended to serve as managerial tools—enabling concerned New Yorkers to evaluate whether adequate police protection is being provided in their neighborhoods.



Councilman Leffler, who as chair of the Public Safety Committee, pressed for an effective plan to increase the City's police forces and strengthen its other criminal justice agencies, watches as Mayor Dinkins signs the City law providing for a Department of over 31,300 officers. Also pictured right to left are Councilmen Jerry Crispino and Archie Spigner and Councilwoman June Fiskland. (photo by Dan Lehman)

Police Expansion Means More Cops for Eastern Queens

Community policing, the NYPD's new crime prevention initiative based on the C-POP program, will mean regular foot

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



SUITE 25, 205-07 HILL SIDE AVENUE
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and/or scooter patrols for each eastern Queens neighborhood, once all the officers funded through a special state-city plan are hired, trained and assigned. The plan will dramatically increase the size of the Police Department over the next four years. When fully implemented, eastern Queens precincts will gain several hundred new police officers. The 103rd-111 officers; 105th-118; 107th-66; 109th-87; 111th-64.

"You are one of the outstanding members of the City Council. Keep it up!"

—Edward I. Koch
February 20, 1991

LEGISLATION AND ADVOCACY

Law to Aid Fight Against Illegal Twos and Threes

Leffler's law, co-sponsored by Councilman Archie Spigner, would enable the Buildings Department to more readily identify dwellings where illegal units have been created. The local law amends sections 27-3018 of the City's administrative code, which concerns applications to the Buildings Department for inspection certificates. It prohibits the department from accepting any application, or issuing a certificate, for electrical inspection, when one or more additional meters have been installed in a building, if the added meter or meters would cause the total number of meters to exceed the number of dwelling units specified in its certificate of occupancy.

The Department will also reject requests for electrical inspections and certifications where the building lacks a certificate of occupancy or the number of dwelling units exceeds that allowed in the zoning resolution. A one-family house can have only one electrical meter and a two or three family house is allowed one meter for each unit plus one more for the common areas.

Illegal units place unwarranted stress on already overtaxed municipal services and infrastructure and lead to a deterioration in the quality of life of nearby residents.

Traffic Safety—The City's Transportation Department

installed a traffic light at 86th Avenue and Bell Boulevard. The City will also install traffic lights at the intersections of Springfield Boulevard at Braddock and Spencer Avenues and Hillside Avenue at 179th Street and at the Winchester Boulevard entrance to Creedmoor Psychiatric Center.

Locals Honored—At the request of community groups, Leffler sponsored local laws to name the triangle in Floral Park, bounded by 79th Avenue, Union Turnpike and 259th Street, "The Rev. Henry T. McCormack Triangle"; the triangle bounded by Union Turnpike, Surrey Place and 179th Street, "Judge Hockert Triangle"; and Douglaston Park, "Catharine T. Richardson Park".



Mayor Dinkins signs into law Councilman Leffler's bill to ban the installation of electrical meters in illegal housing as Council lawyer Paula Kay and Buildings Department officials look on. (photo by Dan Lohman)