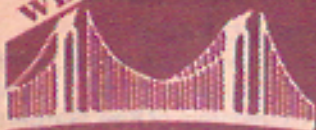


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Page 4 The Queens Courier May 17, 1990

GUEST EDITORIAL

We Can Fight Graffiti

Following is a guest editorial by Corey Bearak, an attorney, who serves on Community Board 26 and is active in the North Bellerose and Lost Community Civic Associations. Mr. Bearak is also counsel and chief of staff for Councilman Sheldon Leffler.

At meetings of community organizations, including PTAs and civics, members continue to raise concerns about the apparent proliferation of graffiti in the community. Indeed, despite increasing indignation citywide, graffiti continues to proliferate throughout the five boroughs.

Concerned about the gradual encroachment of graffiti in our neighborhoods, individuals and various civic, parent and other community organizations already seek solutions to prevent the defacement of monuments and bridges and public and private structures. They recognize that graffiti, if left unaddressed, often symbolizes the beginning of a neighborhood's decay.

"We can curb graffiti through a concerted effort of citizens, members of the Police Dept. and other agencies and local officials to educate our young and enforce the law," explains City Councilman Sheldon Leffler who has called for a citywide Anti-Graffiti Task Force. The City Council already bans the sale of graffiti "tools of the trade," broad tipped "magic" markers and aerosol spray (paint) cans, to minors. Local Law 34 of 1985 also requires merchants to keep markers and spray paint in "locked" cabinets to prevent any theft of these graffiti tools.

Last summer then-Mayor Koch announced an anti-graffiti program that does not go as far as Councilman Leffler's proposal. The Koch initiative included a special police squad and police hotline (212-374-5914) to report acts of graffiti vandalism, as well as civil lawsuits against the parents of offenders. One such lawsuit sought \$2,500 in damages from a graffiti vandal and his parents.

In addition, each precinct has a Community Police Officer on Patrol Program (C-POP) which covers many locations throughout each precinct. C-POP officers, who can adjust their hours to meet specific neighborhood needs, work with the communities they patrol.

Councilman Leffler and Councilman Jerome X. O'Donovan introduced legislation to authorize the posting of signs warning against graffiti vandalism and stating the penalties for such violations. Mr. Leffler will also introduce legislation to establish the Anti-Graffiti Task Force discussed above. Mr. Leffler opted to mandate the Task Force by local law since neither former Mayor Koch or Mayor Dinkins has not yet chosen to set it up — as it can be done by mayoral executive order.

More can be done in our local schools — public, parochial or private. I'll raise this with my Community School Board and the Board of Education. Parents of children attending local parochial or private schools and community members should also raise this issue with the administrations and boards of these schools. Efforts can also be made through youth programs, often funded by government, to encourage our youth to be more responsible when it comes to graffiti.

In the meantime, residents can bring incidents of graffiti vandalism to the attention of the proper city agencies for clean-up. The Department of General Services maintains most city-owned buildings; the Department of Transportation maintains bridges and tunnels, streets, highway overpasses and abutments and street lights and traffic signals; the Department of Parks and Recreation has a unit devoted to cleaning and removing graffiti from monuments, statues, buildings and other structures under its jurisdiction. We Care About New York, Inc., (212) 686-1001, has assisted community groups interested in setting up an anti-graffiti effort. Residents interested in working on a civic committee in this regard should urge their civics and PTAs to take up the cause where these groups are involved in fighting graffiti, join them and support their efforts.