Peninsula fear of health crisis packs hearing

BY STEVE MOSCO

Hundreds of Rockaway residents sickened by the closure of Peninsula Hospital aimed their ire directly at the city Department of Health at a public hearing last week.

“This is a human being issue. People are going to die,” said Linda Ruscillo, a Rockaway resident at the hearing, at a packed Knights of Columbus Hall, at 333 Beach 90th St.

Residents expressed concern that lives will be in danger as an influx of visitors flood the Rockaways during the summer months.

Bernie Feuer, who operates a parking lot during the summer in Jacob Riis Park, said bridge gridlock will block any ambulances that are diverted to other hospitals.

“What will happen when time is of the essence?” he asked.

“If an ambulance is diverted off the peninsula during a traffic jam, they are not going to get out of Rockaway. Now is the time for leaders to step up and do what is right.”

Continued on Page 20

Soil toxic at Police Academy site

CB 7 wants tainted earth removed from project in College Point Corporate Park

BY JOE ANUTA

Construction crews are currently working on the College Point Police Academy project near the Whitestone Expressway, but civic leaders said the city has not lived up to promises about handling contaminated soil on the site.

The NYPD’s new digs will eventually consolidate many training facilities from around the city into an 1.8-million-square-foot academy in the College Point Corporate Park.

A consultant for the city has determined that the soil at the project site is made up of contaminated fill material further tainted by petroleum spills.

The city and its contractors are following state regulations to reuse some of that contaminated soil as fill material on the site, but members of Community Board 7 contend they were told all the contaminated soil would be removed.

The NYPD disputed that claim, saying that no specific measures were discussed prior to CB 7 giving the green light.

In a 2009 environmental impact study on the site, a consulting firm hired by the city confirmed the widespread presence of metals, including arsenic, incinerator waste and semi-volatile compounds. Lead, PCBs and other toxic compounds were found in isolated areas along with contaminants accumulated from nearly 100 years of dumping leftover construction debris on the site, which is roughly between College Point Boulevard, Ulmer Street and 28th Avenue.

CB 7 unanimously approved the project in 2009, but

Continued on Page 20

Jamaica wants stop-frisk to end

BY RICH BOCKMANN

Southeast Queens community leaders are planning a number of town-hall meetings after a report released last week found the overwhelming majority of people stopped by the NYPD in the 103rd Precinct last year were innocent blacks and Latinos.

But as they prepared to meet, Manhattan Federal Judge Shira Scheindlin agreed to reclassify a lawsuit challenging stop-and-frisk practices as a class action suit against the city. The suit, which contends blacks and Latinos are discriminated against by the NYPD’s use of the tactic, was filed in 2008.

According to a New York Civil Liberties Union report, of the more than 17,000 individuals who were counted in the NYPD’s stop-and-frisk program in the 103rd Precinct in 2011, nearly 91 percent were blacks and Latinos and 88.7 percent of people stopped were neither issued a summons

Continued on Page 20
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City Councilman Peter Koo (D-Flushing) has been stirring up an international controversy with his plans to honor Asian women forced into prostitution by Japan during World War II.

Koo has plans for a Flushing memorial to honor the so-called “comfort women” from countries including Korea and China who were kept as sex slaves for the Japanese military.

But citizens of the island nation of Japan do not share Koo’s enthusiasm and started a letter-writing campaign targeting his fellow Council members.

“We Japanese are profoundly concerned about his political activities,” a letter signed by a man from Tokyo said.

Dozens of the letters came pouring into the offices of Councilmen Dan Halloran (R-Whitestone) and Mark Weprin (D-Oakland Gardens) after a story in a Flushing-based Korean newspaper was picked up in Japan, according to Koo’s office.

The letters, which feature the same text but are all signed by different people, accused Koo of propagating false information and pandering to his Korean base, a charge a spokesman for the Shanghai native firmly denied.

“Councilman Koo has actually met comfort women who are still alive and who have told their stories,” said James McClelland, referring to an event last year in conjunction with the Kupferberg Holocaust Center at Queensborough Community College, where several comfort women recounted horror stories of their internment.

Koo began advocating for the memorial, which may eventually include a street renaming or memorial plaque, after speaking with some Korean groups in the area.

“Councilman Koo, he really showed an interest in supporting this,” said Chejin Park, of the Korean American Voters’ Council.

The council, a Flushing-based nonprofit, also advocated for a federal resolution recognizing the existence of comfort women that was passed in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2007.

According to Park, there is often argument over how many comfort women existed. The numbers vary between 20,000 and 200,000 depending on the source.

But he said finding an exact total is irrelevant.

“It doesn’t matter. Even if only one woman was victimized by a government, it is still a big problem,” said Park, whose group also helped put up a memorial in New Jersey in 2009.

The councilmen denied that the atrocities occurred, but did not change the minds of the recipients, who both support Koo.

“I was a little stunned by them,” said Weprin. “It seems logical to me to give the women some type of memorial or recognition of what they went through.”

And Halloran said while the numbers might be debatable, there is no doubt it happened.

“I’ll air on the side of caution and say history is never as clear as we like it to be,” he said. “But there is no difference between this and saying the Holocaust didn’t exist.”

Capt. Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger speaks out against a waste transfer station near LaGuardia Airport in a new radio ad.

Elected officials also joined the fight against the waste station, with state Assemblywoman Grace Meng (D-Flushing) calling on the city and the Port Authority to halt plans for the facility.

She said the station, set for completion in 2013, poses an extreme hazard to both air travelers and residents on the ground. According to the assemblywoman, the Federal Aviation Administration has raised concerns about this project on numerous occasions over the last 10 years.

“It is plainly unreasonable that the city would plan to build a waste facility so close to LaGuardia Airport,” she said. “Our goal is to protect Queens families. People are worried about the Sully incident happening again and remember — too vividly — the devastating air tragedy in Queens from 2001. My bill in the Assembly will prohibit building waste transfer stations near airports in heavily populated New York City.”

Meng referred to the 2001 tragedy involving American Airlines Flight 587, which crashed into Belle Harbor shortly after takeoff and resulted in 280 fatalities on board and five on the ground.
Cancer survivor Steve Lavin tells nearly 3,000 to never stop learning or be afraid to seek advice

BY JOE ANUTA

Jumping into the job pool is all about overcoming challenges, St. John’s University head basketball Coach Steve Lavin told graduates at the university’s commencement speech Sunday, and tackling adversity is something he knows a thing or two about.

Lavin was diagnosed with prostate cancer last year and went under the knife in October before battling his way back to the bench early this year.

As he stood before about 3,000 graduates Sunday, he imparted some life lessons he brought back from his fight with the deadly disease.

“Now I stand here, May 13, cancer-free and able to share some thoughts with you as you move forward on your journey and your path,” Lavin said to cheers from the audience. “But the takeaway is that life is precious. Life is fragile.”

Lavin initially returned to coaching a little more than a month after his surgery, bucking the advice of his doctors.

The stress proved too much, Lavin said in several reports, and he instead took a behind-the-scenes role for a few months. The season was his first year coaching at St. John’s, where the men’s team went to its first NCAA tournament since 2002. Lavin previously coached at UCLA before getting the ax and ending up at ESPN, where he was a broadcaster and commentator.

Lavin’s journey to St. John’s and his eventual acquiescence to his doctors exemplified a central piece of advice he imparted to the students gathered on the lawn: Always be willing to learn.

“Seek out mentors, surround yourself with what I call your own Mr. Miyagis — some wise old owls who blazed a trail with wisdom from a long life,” Lavin said, referring to the martial art master from the “Karate Kid” movies.

Lavin also told the students to develop a resiliency that allows for a quick rebound from unexpected setbacks.

But a group of 20 graduates would not have been sweating in the sun along with the sea of students clad in red and black polyester gowns without already possessing a little bit of resolve.

Members of The Advantage Academy were homeless when they started the St. John’s program, according to program director Kim Toro.

The goal is to keep the students out of shelters, and so far it has been successful, she said.

Last year the first group who graduated from the program all went on to either find jobs or take further schooling, but either way they got the jump-start needed to make a new life for themselves, according to Toro.

Sabrina Garcia plans to go back to school at CUNY now that she earned a business associate degree and was ready to walk across the stage.

“I’m super excited,” she said. “I didn’t expect to be in college at 35 getting my degree.”

Garcia, like most students in the program, was homeless and had a family to take care of before joining the program.

Reach reporter Joe Anuta by e-mail at januta@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4566.
Police search for driver in Liberty Ave. hit-run

BY JOE ANUTA

The family of a Guyanese immigrant was making funeral arrangements this week after police said a car slammed into the 47-year-old father of two while he was crossing Liberty Avenue in Richmond Hill Sunday morning and then fled the scene.

Police could not confirm the make or model of the car, but surveillance footage from a nearby store shows a two-door, dark sedan hitting Rohan Singh so hard that the Woodhaven man flew into the air and landed in a heap on the sidewalk near the corner of 108th Street.

According to witnesses, Singh was walking from a nearby bar to a corner store when he was struck.

Police received the call at about 3:15 a.m. Emergency personnel took Singh to Jamaica Hospital, where he was pronounced dead, according to the NYPD.

Later Sunday, Singh’s family came to the scene of the accident and put up a small memorial.

“It’s not right. They hit him and leave him to die in the street,” said Chateram Singh one of the man’s seven siblings. “I can cope with it, but for my mother it is very hard.”

Singh has a wife and two teenage children living in Guyana, his brother said.

According to shop owner Mike Ficco, Singh often came into his store to buy a beer.

“He was a nice guy,” Ficco said as he fielded questions and accommodated a crowd of reporters and neighbors. “I wouldn’t be doing all this if he wasn’t.”

Ficco played surveillance footage of the accident for horrified family members and neighbors.

Singh’s family is currently attempting to get a visa for the slain man’s wife to come to the country.

His brother asked anyone with information to contact the police.

Reach reporter Joe Anuta by e-mail at januta@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4566.

Photo by Joe Anuta

Chateram Singh weeps while kneeling near a makeshift memorial for his brother Rohan.

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Adored ride gets operator

City Parks says Forest Park Carousel will reopen by Memorial Day

BY STEVE MOSCO

A long-shuttered feature of Forest Park will spin again.

The city Parks Department has selected a new operator for the Forest Park Carousel in Woodhaven and the famed attraction will be welcoming riders again by Memorial Day, according to the Woodhaven Resident’s Block Association.

“The carousel is part of our community’s identity,” said WRBA President Ed Wendell. “We couldn’t be happier that the Parks Department has done the right thing — something we’ve requested for years and gotten a deal done so that our community can enjoy it again.”

New York Carousel Entertainment, which was also chosen by Parks to run the Flushing Meadows Corona Park Carousel, could not be reached for comment.

Final terms of the licensing agreement have not yet been finalized, but the company has a work permit to begin cleaning the carousel recently purchased by the city. The carousel has not been cleaned since it closed in 2010.

The historic carousel dates back to more than 100 years ago when its colorful menagerie was hand-carved by artist Daniel Carl Muller. Originally situated in Dracut, Mass., the carousel was moved to Forest Park in 1972. The carousel in Flushing Meadows was originally designed for the 1964 World’s Fair and was created by Marcus Charles Illions.

The block association took on the task of rallying to save the carousel after it closed when the former operator, New York One, let its contract with Parks expire. Since then the association has engaged in letter-writing campaigns organized rallies with elected officials to make the carousel operational again.

“The ride is a beautiful work of art, a historic specimen that embodies our community’s heritage, and a form of entertainment that has amused generations of Woodhaven residents,” said Wendell. “We’re overjoyed to have it back.”

Maria Thomson, executive director of the Greater Woodhaven Development Corp., said the carousel deserves much better than the treatment it has received over the last few years.

“Finally, we have a concessionaire who promises to restore it to its former glory,” Thomson said.

The hand-carved works of a renowned artist are set to resume rotating after city Parks announced an operator for the Forest Park Carousel.
Jamaica tenants accuse super of slurring gays

BY REBECCA HENELY

City Councilmen James Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows) and Daniel Dromm (D-Jackson Heights) visited a Jamaica apartment complex Friday in an effort to help two longtime tenants who say their superintendent has made violent and homophobic threats to them.

“They want Amy [Anderson] and myself out of the building,” said Sergio Gonzalez, who is openly gay and has lived at 88-22 Parsons Blvd. for 39 years.

Gonzalez and Anderson, the tenant representative, had formerly had their landlords sued by the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development, alleging the owners have allowed intolerable living conditions to continue in the building. Gonzalez and Anderson said in response to the complaints the landlords hired John Alba to be super at the end of 2010.

The tenants claim Alba has continuously harassed them, pushed them and damaged their property out of revenge on behalf of the landlords. Gonzalez said Alba has also used anti-gay slurs and spit at him.

“This is not a friendly, happy building,” Gennaro said. “This is their home. Their home should be a place of peace and repose.”

Gennaro, whose district encompasses the building, held a rally Friday with Dromm, who is openly gay, as well as groups that advocate for LGBTs and other minorities. While they condemned the alleged harassment, Alba recorded and took pictures of the rally from his window.

When reporters approached Alba after the rally was over, he closed the curtains, making an obscene hand gesture as he did so.

The landlords, known as either New York Affordable Housing Association III LLC Parsons or Colonial Management LLC, said they had no comment on the dispute.

But Alba did have a defender in Thornton Hubbard, who claimed to be the vice president of a tenant association for the building. Hubbard said before Alba was hired, the building never had a super living on the premises and people used to smoke crack in the halls.

He said Alba installed cameras on every floor and the building has been safer.

“He’s slandering the super’s name,” Hubbard said of Gonzalez.

In response, Gonzalez said Hubbard was lying and was not the vice president of any tenant association.

Some of Gonzalez and Anderson’s complaints include leaky roofs, loss of heat and sewer lines backing up. Gonzalez said he had to use a wastebasket to relieve himself after his toilet was broken and backed up with dirty water for days.

Gonzalez showed pictures with evidence of Alba’s alleged harassment. These included cracks in Gonzalez’s door after Alba allegedly kicked it and tore off pictures of Gonzalez’s dog. Another photo showed a pink lawn chair pressed up against the window, which Gonzalez said Alba or a compatriot of his used to spy on him.

Other photos showed pictures posted up on the walls that said “Perjure-Perjury. To deliberately [sic] testify falsely under oath spell’s [sic] jail time.”

Sergio Gonzalez (c.) speaks of the harassment he has allegedly received at the hands of his Jamaica apartment’s super. Councilmen James Gennaro (l.) and Daniel Dromm (fourth from r.) and advocates from Make the Road New York and other groups joined him. Photo by Rebecca Henely
Breast cancer survivors row on Flushing Bay to heal

The Empire Dragon Boat Team hosts cleanup in waters where they practice racing once a week.

BY JOE ANUTA

The members of an all-women’s rowing team who gathered at the World’s Fair Marina Saturday have already been through the fight of their lives, but winning the battle against cancer does not make tidying up Flushing Bay any easier.

The Empire Dragon Boat Team, made up entirely of breast cancer survivors, hosted a cleanup where volunteers pulled shopping carts, syringes, old tires and even an engine block out of the waters where they practice racing once a week.

The idea for the cleanup was started by Jennifer Merendino, who co-founded the team along with a nurse from the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan, where the Ohio native turned New Yorker received treatment after her diagnosis with breast cancer in 2008.

But Merendino was not there Saturday. Despite the mental and physical strength she gained from racing, her cancer metastasized. The team’s ranks have steadily grown to 50 women since its inception, but in December they shrank by one.

Now the cleanup is in Merendino’s honor, according to her husband Angelo. “It’s amazing to see everyone out here,” he said. “She would be so proud.”

Merendino conceived of the idea when she was going through chemo and physical therapy. Her arms were weak and racked by pain, but she happened to see a video of another team of cancer survivors.

Dragon boat teams consist of rowers who sit side by side and use paddles, as opposed to the attached oars of a crew team, to propel a slender craft through the water. The boats have a drummer in front to keep the time and a coach in back and are proceeded by the head of a dragon. The sport comes from a traditional Chinese holiday, but has gained widespread popularity.

Merendino was struck by the teamwork involved, all the women paddling in unison through the water. Friends and family can track her inspiration because her thoughts are preserved in writing.

In fact, her struggle with the disease was extensively documented by her husband.

Five months after they married, Merendino was diagnosed and Angelo began taking photos to document the slow deterioration of his wife at the website mywifesfightwithbreastcancer.com, which he designed.

Some of the earlier photos show an almost defiant woman shaving her head in the mirror, but the images also hint at the grim realities of chemotherapy — hailing a cab with a cane, the sidelong looks as a bald woman strolls past a sidewalk cafe. Eventually the scenery is confined to hospitals.

But her struggle did not stop her teammates from moving forward.

Donna Wilson, Merendino’s nurse and co-founder of the group, took the front seat in one of the team’s boats and spent the day barking orders at young Boy Scouts and volunteers in order to whip them into shape while the rowers looked on.

Alex Herzan was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2009 and cannot say exactly why she decided to try out dragon boat racing, since she is not a fan of swimming, water or boats.

“I said, ‘Are you kidding? Flushing Bay at 8 a.m. on Saturday?’” Herzan recalled. “I still say to myself in the middle of paddling, ‘Why am I doing this?’”

Members of the Empire Dragon Boat Team cheer after posing for their team portrait. Photo by Joe Anuta.

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Bayside BID debates firing former director

BY PHIL CORSO

It was a look into the past, present and future of the Bayside Village Business Improvement District packed into the same meeting last week, and although confrontational at times, the conversation had shifted by the meeting’s end to the core message of bettering local business.

“The goal is to leave this room with a healthier Bayside,” said Gregg Sullivan, ousted executive director of the Bayside Village BID.

For the first time since Sullivan’s firing in December, BID members gathered inside All Saints Episcopal Church, at 214-35 40th Ave., May 8 for a business and property owners summit to publicly smooth over various issues concerning the business group.

Those in attendance included Sullivan, BID Chairman Jim Riso, Uncle Jack’s Steakhouse CEO William Degel, City Councilman Dan Halloran (R-Whitestone), newly appointed BID Executive Director Lyle Sclair and members of the city Small Business Administration.

The meeting was held partly in response to an initial gathering Sullivan and Degel helped launch last month, when Bell Boulevard business owners and residents called on the BID to respond to claims made by Sullivan of inactivity and a lack of transparency since Sullivan’s firing.

“Nobody denies that we did face a huge setback,” Riso said in his opening address at the May 8 meeting. “The last thing I wanted to do was fire Gregg.”

Riso said Sullivan’s termination was a board decision and not his alone. The firing came in light of behavior that Riso said included Sullivan’s conducting business without the board’s approval.

But according to Degel, one of the BID’s biggest problems in recent months has been keeping business owners and residents informed as to where their taxpayer money was going.

Sullivan said he tried to rebut claims made by the board about his performance at the meeting, but infighting made it difficult for him to get his point across.

“I want this to be one truth,” Sullivan said.

Dominick Brucoleri, owner of Pappazio restaurant, was on the board that voted to terminate Sullivan and said his biggest issue was acting without speaking to the board.

He said Sullivan had charged different fees to different businesses on Bell Boulevard and signed contracts even though executive directors were not given that responsibility.

“We’re doing damage control now,” Brucoleri said. “We could not get anything done with him in charge.”

Arguments over the decision to fire Sullivan and his actions became heated at times, as members of the board sparred with the former executive director over different aspects of his tenure. The tension became so intense that at one point Halloran jumped out of his seat to put an end to the squabbling.

“You’re all killing me,” Halloran told the suddenly quiet room. “There needs to be more input with the business owners. What I would like to see is for everyone to move forward.”

The meeting shifted focus after Halloran spoke out and Sclair took the microphone to talk about the BID’s future with him at the helm.

“I think we have a lot of opportunity going forward,” Sclair said. “Once I understand our challenges, we can match our collective strengths to face them. It’s my job to make you money.”

Elizabeth De Leon, deputy commissioner of the Neighborhood Development Division at Small Business Services, said she was impressed and not discouraged by the emotional and heated conversation at the meeting. She said of the 67 city BIDs she oversees, the most passionate are the ones that thrive.

“It’s amazing to see a community come together so much,” De Leon said. “You guys are headed in the right direction.”

Since the meeting, Sullivan had both publicly and privately said he would help Sclair with his new position however possible.
City Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott took a victory lap around the Queens High School for the Sciences at York College Monday morning after the Jamaica school was recognized as one of the best in the country by U.S. News & World Report last week.

“This is good news and we want to sing about it,” Walcott said as he toured several classrooms early in the morning with Principal David Marmor.

Citing near-perfect proficiency levels on math and English exams, the magazine awarded the school a gold medal, ranking it the fourth best in the city, seventh best in the state and 52nd best in the nation, out of nearly 22,000 evaluated.

Some 87 percent of the school’s 415 students, 90 percent of whom are minorities, graduate college-ready, according to the report.

On state English Regents Exams, 99 percent of students tested proficient—a figure that was bested by students on Math Regents Exams with 100 percent testing proficient.

The school, at 94-50 159th St., is a specialized high school that requires applicants to take an entrance exam and draws students from across the city.

It outranked prestigious high schools such as Stuyvesant in Manhattan and Bronx Science, although Marmor said it was still a struggle to compete with those schools when attracting the city’s brightest.

“I’m trying my best to make us more well-known,” he said.

Assistant Principal Lenneen Gibson, who worked as a teacher when the school opened 10 years ago, credited the school’s recognition to its “rigorous curriculum,” with most students taking college-level and AP classes. U.S. News & World Report cited the AP participation rate at 97 percent.

As he popped in and out of early morning classrooms, Walcott said he observed “great leadership, committed teachers and students who are engaged and expressing themselves.”

Teacher Pamela Aucoin was a bit surprised when the city Department of Education head stepped into her 10th-grade history classroom as she and her pupils discussed the causes leading up to China’s Tiananmen Square student protests.

When asked why the country’s one-party system would seem so unfair to some 100,000 students who were protesting for governmental reform, sophomore Joseph DeRege recited the adage that “absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

During a visit to Queens High School for the Sciences at York College, city Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott greets students Stephanie Anciro (l.) and Olajumoke Akinsulure, who is slated to attend Brown University.

Photo by Christina Santucci
BY PHIL CORSO

A business meeting turned deadly last week when one man opened fire on another before turning the weapon on himself in an apparent murder-suicide at a hotel near John F. Kennedy International Airport, authorities said.

According to police, Gary Zalevsky, 47, of Sunny Isles Beach, Fla., was sitting in a private room with five other men last Thursday near the Hilton Garden Inn lobby, at 148-18 134th St., before he stood up and fired five shots into the head of Brian Weiss, 31, of Davie, Fla.

He then turned the stolen .380-caliber Beretta pistol on himself, police said.

Queens District Attorney Richard Brown said authorities were investigating what may have led to the dispute between the men, but Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly told The New York Times they may have been linked by an Internet vitamin or food supplement business project.

Police said they have not found any relation between Weiss’ shooting and his professional standing. Weiss worked as a top officer for FWM Laboratories, a southern Florida company that marketed health supplements online, The Times reported.

The state’s Better Business Bureau collected more than 4,000 complaints against Weiss’ company in 2009, according to the Florida attorney general’s office.

One hotel worker said he noticed several suspicious, European-looking men meeting in a cafe near the lobby and speaking another language before hearing the shots. The worker said one of the men had asked where the bathroom was and left the room seconds before the shots were fired.

“It was as if he knew,” the worker said. “Something suspicious was going on.”

A photo of the scene showed what appeared to be Weiss lying face-up in a pool of blood with what looked like Zalevsky hunched over a nearby chair after the DA said he used the gun to shoot himself.

Police said the other four men at the table immediately fled the room when the shots were fired, but were apprehended soon after.

Ramon Sterling, 42, was on his way home after working his shift at the nearby Do & Co. catering, at 149-32 132nd St., when he saw officers from the 106th Precinct put the four men on the ground in handcuffs. He said they appeared to be in their mid-30s and European.

“The cops had them all on their stomachs,” Sterling said. “It didn’t look like they cooperated too much.”

Although police have not arrested the other men sitting at the table, NYPD Chief spokesman Paul J. Browne said their attempts to flee raised skepticism among investigators.

According to police, the four men asked for lawyers and were not cooperative upon their questioning.

When asked about the possibility of the men’s connection to Russian organized crime, Kelly said it was unclear, but police were not ruling anything out. Brown would also not comment on any potential links.
Willets Pt. wants aid after city’s eminent domain fails

BY JOE ANUTA

In the wake of a city decision to drop its eminent domain proceedings, property owners from Willets Point called on the city Department of Transportation to repair the streets of their neighborhood at Monday’s Community Board 7 meeting and had a unique guest speaker to help make their case.

Ralph Paterno, who owns property where the city wanted to build the first phase of a $3 billion redevelopment project for the area, took to the podium flanked by large posters of the pothole-strewn streets.

“The city will not be in the position to actually develop Willets Point anytime soon or perhaps ever,” he said. “So I and other Willets Point property owners are here tonight to publicly ask Community Board 7 to please help us put pressure on DOT to repair and maintain the Willets Point streets.”

The mayor’s office recently dropped the bid to condemn property in the 20-acre Phase 1 section of the plan, but without providing any details said the redevelopment project is still moving forward.

Sources with knowledge of a city-issued request for proposals said that Related Co. and Sterling Equities, run by the Wilpon family, were awarded a contract to build a 12-acre mall across from Citi Field.

But that was not on the minds of the property owners who spoke at the meeting, saying that while they paid taxes to the city, they were not getting the requisite services in return.

“Would you tolerate conditions in front of your house that looked like this?” Paterno asked before turning to CB 7 Chairman Gene Kelty. “Mr. Kelty, back in 2008 you actually chastised the people of Willets Point for not being vocal enough in demanding city services.”

A young man who came to the meeting then activated a CD player and Kelty’s voice from 2008 was immediately audible.

“I can tell you this — if someone was taking taxes from me and I wasn’t getting my services, I certainly wouldn’t be paying my taxes,” Kelty said on tape.

DOT said in a statement it already repairs potholes in the Willets Point area on an ongoing basis. DOT replaced 100 potholes within the last year, according to the department, but due to ongoing sewer work and potential infrastructure work in the future, cannot begin a widespread paving campaign.

Earlier in the meeting, the board passed a resolution stating that community boards around the city should have a role in deciding whether to close a school like Flushing High School, which is set to be shuttered and reopened under the name Rupert B. Thomas Academy at the Flushing Campus.

Budget cuts on the city level are also threatening after-school programs for the area’s youth, according to Al Stark, who works with the Beacon Program and urged the board and community to show their outrage at the proposed cuts, which would force many after-school programs out of existence.

The Coppola family of College Point also called on the city to be more vigilant in preventing the West Nile Virus after Francis Coppola’s mother died from the disease earlier this year, a case the city Department of Health is looking into.

Reach reporter Joe Anuta by e-mail at januta@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4566.
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Koslowitz rips Rockaway rail revival as bad idea

BY STEVE MOSCO

Community Board 6 convened for its monthly meeting last week with two topics dominating the majority of the conversation: the possible revival of the Rockaway line of the Long Island Rail Road and a planned four-story development on 102nd Street in Rego Park.

City Councilwoman Karen Koslowitz (D-Forst Hills) railed May 9 against the proposed revival of the Rockaway line, arguing the commuter rail that bisects parts of Forest Hills would be disruptive to residents who have built homes in the area since the line shut down more than 50 years ago.

“It will affect the neighborhood in an extremely negative way,” said Koslowitz. “The train will burden residents who have built their homes close to those tracks. We cannot allow another train to come through our neighborhood.”

“It’s an intrusion on private property,” she said.

The Regional Rail Working Group Rockaway Subcommittee, a transit advocacy group, released options for the line in February. The options include a plan that would build two stations at Rego Park and Aqueduct Race Track.

The revived railroad line could potentially be used to shuttle passengers from Penn Station to Resorts World Casino and a proposed convention center at Aqueduct in South Ozone Park.

“The city is closing schools and shutting down after-school programs,” Koslowitz said. “I would like to know where the money is coming from to rebuild this railway.”

Koslowitz said she plans to fight “tooth and nail” against the reopening of the railway and pledged to “bring it up at Council meetings.” Prior to Koslowitz, representatives of Caliendo Architects spoke to the board about demolishing an existing building, at 65-39 102nd St., and rebuilding it as a four-story residential building with ground-level space for a medical office.

“The building has been vacant for a number of years, plus the office space is obsolete,” said Jerry Caliendo, adding the new medical office will sit on the ground level below three new residential dwellings.

“The building will be built with the existing character of the neighborhood in mind.”

Neighborhood characteristics were not the chief concern of Emanuel Alayev, who lives close to the proposed development, and parking problems is just one issue he foresees with the new structure.

“Besides the parking problems, this building will look directly into mine and my neighbors’ yards and windows,” he said. “It will destroy our privacy.”

Even with complaints from Alayev, the board’s Planning and Zoning Committee voted to approve the application for the building.

The board also voted to approve a street activity permit for the Forest Hills Greenmarket to operate between 69th Road and 70th Avenue Sundays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. starting in July and running through November.

Reach reporter Steve Mosco by e-mail at smosco@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4546.

Ridgewood touts artistic sensibility during gallery crawl

Walking tour highlights uniquely Queens characteristics and increasing demand for real estate

BY JOE ANUTA

The Queens Museum of Art wanted to make sure everyone on a recent gallery crawl knew which borough they were in.

The event was called “Vere, Ridgewood Est,” which translates from Latin to “Actually, it’s Ridgewood.”

Many of the galleries along the neighborhood walking tour might have been mistaken for venues in Brooklyn.

“That’s why we called it that,” said Tom Finkelpearl, executive director of the museum.

To highlight the burgeoning art scene in western Queens, the museum partnered with several galleries in the area to provide an overview of some of the venues.

The tour kicked off with hotdogs and beer at the historic Vander-Ende Onderdonk House, which sits near a border that once caused violent disputes between the largely Dutch population in Brooklyn and the predominately British population in what is now Queens.

The artists hanging out at some of the six stops along the walking tour seemed more intent on bringing the borough together.

At the enormous industrial building, at 17-17 Troutman St., which Finkelpearl touted as the epicenter of the growing art community, one gallery was called “Regina Rex,” which boasts the Latin words for “queen” and “king,” symbolizing a unity between the boroughs.

Inside, four large paintings were on display and the artists who created them were on hand to discuss their work.

Later, participants filtered over to the Bushwick Print Shop in the same building to get the event’s logo printed onto shirts and bags by artist Ray Cross before heading up to a roof deck for a beer and to admire the skyline view of Manhattan.

Groups of gallery-goers then wandered through the row houses and corner stores of the neighborhood, noses buried in a map of the six-stop route. One of those stops was a DIY gallery called Small Black Door run by Matthew Mahler and Jonathan Terranova out of the basement of a house.

The growing presence of artists in Queens is mostly a matter of real estate, according to Mahler.

“It’s a direct extension from the spillover from Bushwick,” he said, referring to the Brooklyn neighborhood across the border.

Finkelpearl said the neighborhood, made up of homeowners rather than renters who might be pushed out by waves of gentrification, has largely welcomed the new crowd.

But not everyone owns a home, according to one gallery owner along the way who was concerned about the influx.

“The rent is going to go up,” said Fred Valentine, who nevertheless said the crawl was a success and had his small gallery packed with curious patrons all day.

The last stop of the day was Gotscheer Hall, a bar where a Ridgewood artist collective hosted a series of events.

After a public forum about the connection between artists spaces and the community hosted by members of Silent Barn, a music and artist venue that operated in the neighborhood for years before thieves ransacked their space and the city subsequently kicked them out due to building violations, the gallery crawlers were treated to an evening of drinks, prizes and music to cap the museum’s first foray into the Queens neighborhood.

Reach reporter Joe Anuta by e-mail at januta@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4566.
St. John’s graduation is sea of red

St. John’s University held its 142nd commencement exercises Sunday afternoon. (Clockwise from top l.) officials estimated that including students, staff, family and friends about 19,000 were in attendance; Dan Bart, who received a master’s degree in accounting, gels like Tim Tebow; one student sports sandals; Bradley Jacques (r.) of Richmond Hill reaches over to hug his grandmother Marie Fortunat Sr. after he received his diploma; (l.-r.) Imran Khan, Shaban Khan (c.) and Sherizan Khan cross the stage; Albert Chen Tseng (l.) adjusts his daughter Wan Chen Tseng’s cap; and Angela Eyer (l.) and Angela Sihn catch Sophia Petrillo after she returned to the student procession area.

Photos by Christina Santucci
BY REBECCA HENELY

Sunnyside resident Angela Cuervo became a baker after watching a cooking show when she was 19. Six years later, she won one.

Cuervo, who works with her parents at Mario’s Restaurant and operates her own cake baking business through the website makingthatcake.com, became one of the few recipients of the $10,000 grand prize on the Food Network’s “Sweet Genius.”

Each week on the show, four contestants go through three rounds of making different types of desserts. These sweets must be based on whimsical “inspirations,” like a unicorn or a hot air balloon, and include two mandatory ingredients, which can be common items like Italian maraschino cherries or unconventional items like spinach.

The baker with the worst creation is eliminated after each round and the last baker standing is named a Sweet Genius.

The competition is hosted by Manhattan cake baker Ron Ben-Israel, whose bald head and tendency to announce difficult challenges with a sadistic glee in his thick Israeli accent have earned him comparisons to James Bond villains by journalists and TV critics.

But Cuervo, who met Ben-Israel at a baking event in the city before the competition, said he is not as sinister as he appears.

“He’s a really nice guy” Cuervo said. “He’s a funny guy, but he’s critiquing other people’s work, so you have to be truthful.”

In a first, Cuervo competed against her mother, Lynn Chauca, a father and son from Oneida, N.Y., for the episode “Relative Genius,” which debuted May 3. Chauca, a Manhattan native who moved to the Sunnyside-Woodside area when she was 16, said she has baked since she was 8 years old, and through self-teaching began doing it professionally after she and her husband, chef Carlos Chauca, opened Mario’s, at 43-04 47th Ave., together 26 years ago.

“We started very young not knowing, but it all worked out,” Lynn Chauca said.

Cuervo began working at Mario’s in her teens, but a cooking show inspired her to become a baker. She was trained at the Institute of Culinary Education in Manhattan.

Cuervo and Lynn Chauca had thought they would be baking as a team and were shocked to find out when they went in for filming in January that they would have to face each other. Nevertheless, Cuervo got encouragement from her mother to go through with it.

“She kind of talked me through it and said, ‘This is what you do,'” Cuervo said.

Some writers online have criticized Cuervo for the chocolate dessert she made in the first round: a chocolate molten cake made with spinach and cherry sauce with passion fruit, since Lynn Chauca made the cherry sauce. Cuervo said since she added the passion fruit, she made it her own.

“If that was cheating, I would never have done it,” Cuervo said. “I knew the rules.”

**Angela Cuervo and mom Lynn Chauca of Mario’s Restaurant show dessert smarts on Food Network**

**BY REBECCA HENELY**

Let the filming begin!

Less than a week after U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) asked the National Park Service to nix another review of Kaufman Astoria Studios’ plans to create an outdoor movie lot in Astoria, the federal agency switched gears and gave the project, and by extension potential films and television shows, the green light last week.

“We can finally say, ‘Action,’” Schumer said in a statement. “With National Park’s sign-off, the project can move forward on schedule and begin competing for major productions with places like Los Angeles and Toronto.”

A $2 million expansion has been in the works for Kaufman Astoria Studios, at 34-12 36th St. The studio, which dates back to the silent film era, has been hoping to close down 36th Street between 34th and 35th avenues to create an outdoor lot, the first one in New York City.

Since the studio is on National Park Service land deeded to the city specifically for film purposes, the project has required the approval of the federal agency.

Through the city’s Uniform Land Use Review Procedure, the outdoor studio lot already has received approval from the city Landmarks Preservation Commission and the state Historic Preservation Office. Both organizations gave the OK to closing the street and allowing construction of the studio lot, although the city Public Design Commission requested that an entrance gate be located on 35th Avenue be redesigned.

Because of the change, the National Park Service requested another review.

Schumer visited the Astoria studio and wrote a letter to National Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis May 3, urging him to cancel the review. The senator contended it could take another three months and potentially cause the studio to miss out on film projects for the 2013 summer filming season.

On May 9, Schumer announced that Jarvis had acquiesced to Schumer’s request and waived the additional review.

The senator said this will prevent the city from losing jobs that could have gone to other cities.

“I want to thank the National Park Service for responding to our concerns so promptly and for understanding that the only thing that needed to be cut from this production was the red tape,” Schumer said.

Plans for the studio entrance, which will abut Kaufman Astoria Studios and the Museum of the Moving Image, include a silver gated structure with a spiral staircase and walkway that looks like it is made up of steel beams and a security booth outside.

On top of the walkway a sign reads “Kaufman Astoria Studios” in large blue letters. The studio’s logo is also on the gate.
Police shot and killed an enraged, knife-wielding man last Thursday night after he used the weapon to stab both himself and his wife, the NYPD said.

According to police, officers responded to a 911 call around 8:30 p.m. from a married couple’s 17-year-old daughter that her father stabbed himself in the neck and collapsed. When they arrived at their apartment, at 61-47 223rd Place, near Cardozo High School in Oakland Gardens, police said they saw that Samuel Rivers, 50, had used a knife on both himself and his wife Sharon Rivers, 51, and was standing outside the home.

After refusing to drop the weapon in an outdoor confrontation near the courtyard outside the apartment, officers shot Samuel Rivers in the neck and chest, killing him, police said.

Police said there was no evidence of any previous criminal history for either Samuel Rivers or his wife.

Both were taken to North Shore-LIJ Hospital in Manhasset, L.I., where the husband was pronounced dead on arrival and his wife was listed in critical condition with stab wounds to her chest and neck, police said.

It was unclear whether Samuel Rivers died from the gunshots or self-inflicted knife wounds, police said.

Police recovered the knife from the scene.

Crime tape and spattered blood were still visible at the scene Friday morning as cops said they were still investigating and looking for evidence involving an apparent domestic dispute.

Danny Park, 48, has lived with his family in the upstairs apartment for four years. According to Park, Sharon Rivers lived with her 17-year-old daughter in the downstairs apartment for almost 20 years. He said his neighbors were quiet and all of his passing encounters were friendly.

“I would say ‘hi’ to them all the time,” Park said. “They were always quiet and nice. They never had any problems with us.”

A nearby neighbor who lives on the other side of the courtyard said she heard what sounded like a firecracker early last Thursday night, but did not think it was a gunshot. She said children often play in the area and she never would have guessed that there was a violent dispute across the courtyard.

After hearing the news of what had happened, the neighbor said she was caught off-guard and never suspected such violence so close to home.

“I was devastated to hear the news,” the neighbor said. “I’m thinking this was an isolated incident in this neighborhood. But timing is of the essence. If a kid might have seen that, it could be terrifying to them.”

Reach reporter Phil Corso by e-mail at pcorso@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4573.

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New names unveiled for Queens schools slated to close

BY REBECCA HENELY

The seven Queens schools that the city Panel for Educational Policy voted to close were given new names last week, but two western Queens legislators said they were more concerned with the future results of the closure.

“I understand the symbolic importance of changing the names of these schools, but it doesn’t make what happened any less frustrating or disappointing,” state Sen. Jose Peralta (D-East Elmhurst) said in a statement.

In late April, the panel voted to shut multiple high schools across the city that had been classified as persistently lowest-achieving, which is defined as having graduation rates of less than 60 percent in previous years. In the closure, or “turnaround” model, the schools will be closed at the end of the 2011-12 school year with at least 50 percent new staff and a new name.

City Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott announced those names for the schools last Thursday. In western Queens, Long Island City High School, at 14-30 Broadway in Astoria, is now Global Scholars Academies of Long Island City; William Cullen Bryant HS, at 48-10 31st Ave. in Astoria, has had its name changed to Academy of Humanities and Applied Science at the William Cullen Bryant Campus; and Newtown HS, at 48-01 90th St. in Elmhurst, is now College and Career Academies HS at Newtown Campus.

Walcott said in a statement the new names, chosen by the institutions, honor the schools’ histories and a potential better future.

“This is an exciting day for thousands of students and their school communities, turning a page and looking ahead to a fresh start next fall,” Walcott said.

But state Assemblywoman Aravella Simotas (D-Astoria), an alumna of Bryant HS who has both that school and the former Long Island City HS in her district, said the new names are the least pressing concern in the radical remake of the schools.

“The things that we should be focused on are the teachers that are going to be teaching at these schools and the feeling among students,” Simotas said.

The assemblywoman said it remains to be seen whether the closure will result in better test or graduation results. She also said the students have been hurt by the classification that they were attending a failing school.

“You can see the emotional strain that it has taken on them this school year,” Simotas said.

The new names for the borough’s other closed schools include the Future Leaders HS at the John Adams Campus, in Ozone Park; School of Opportunities at the August Martin Campus, in Jamaica; the 21st Century School of Richmond Hill; and the Rupert B. Thomas Academy at the Flushing Campus.

Reach reporter Rebecca Henely by e-mail at rhenely@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4564.
Queens’ gay community salutes Obama

BY REBECCA HENELY

The western Queens LGBT community and their allies sent a giant postcard to the White House last Thursday, thanking President Barack Obama for coming out in support of same-sex marriage.

“I never thought in my life that I would have ever see a sitting president support marriage equality,” said City Councilman Daniel Dromm (D-Jackson Heights), who is openly gay.

Coming on the heels of a proposed amendment to North Carolina’s constitution which passed with 61 percent of the vote and decreed a marriage between one man and one woman to be the only domestic legal union recognized in the state, Obama announced in an interview with ABC that he was in support of same-sex marriage.

Previously, the president had said he was personally against same-sex marriage, although he was in support of civil unions for same-sex couples. He credited his family, friends and Vice President Joe Biden, who had announced his endorsement of marriage equality May 6, with changing his mind.

New York became the sixth state in the country to recognize same-sex marriage in July 2011. Queens’ other openly gay councilman, Jimmy Van Bramer (D-Sunnyside), who is planning to be married to his longtime partner Dan Hendrick in July, said in a statement he was moved by the president’s support.

“I remember shedding a tear the night President Obama was elected, as so many of us were filled with hope for him and our country,” Van Bramer said. “Today, that promise of hope is fulfilled yet again for so many in such a profound way.”

Dromm arranged a news conference to send Obama a giant thank you postcard last week at the Jackson Heights post office, at 78-02 37th Ave. While some have credited Obama’s change of heart to political reasons or have criticized him for not supporting what many see as a civil rights issue earlier, Dromm said what was important was that he had done the right thing.

“[People] can evolve on this issue and they can change their mind on this issue,” Dromm said.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg made a speech in support of same-sex marriage and criticized North Carolina’s amendment Sunday after the vote at the University of North Carolina’s commencement speech. The university administration addressed his address with applause.

Gary Paul Gilbert, of the Empire State Pride Agenda, said that while New York state’s marriage laws give same-sex couples 1,324 protections, they are barred from 1,188 additional federal rights.

“[Obama] has recognized that only civil marriage can give same-sex couples the same rights and protections as every couple,” Gilbert said.

Electeds pen bill to protect abused immigrants

BY JOE ANUTA

There are currently two competing versions of a women’s rights bill extension on the federal level, but Queens lawmakers are not waiting for a resolution and have introduced state legislation to protect the anonymity of victims’ immigration status when they report domestic violence.

State Assemblywoman Grace Meng (D-Flushing) and state Sen. Toby Stavisky (D-Whitestone) announced The New York State Violence Against Women Act at Queens Borough Hall last Thursday.

Both the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives have legislative proposals that would extend the federal Violence Against Women Act, first passed in 1994 and renewed twice with bipartisan support. The federal law protects women against violence, sexual or otherwise, and increases penalties for certain types of rapes.

But Congress and the U.S. Senate differ on what should be included in the latest iteration.

A House subcommittee passed a version that took out provisions protecting illegal immigrants, which is what prompted the outcry from the Queens lawmakers.

“For Congress to even consider tweaking this law is really ridiculous and offensive to women,” said Meng, who is running for Congress, but insists the bill has nothing to do with her bid.

To compensate should the bill pass the full House and Senate, Meng and Stavisky’s legislation would also allow a judge to consider if an abuser attempted to silence a victim by threatening to reveal that victim’s immigration status.

But the proposed state bill could not remedy two aspects of the federal version.

First, the federal bill up for renewal provided temporary visas to illegal immigrants who were being abused by the same people sponsoring their quest for citizenship. The bill also opened up a different path to citizenship for some victims.

But the act has been tweaked as well by Democrats.

The U.S. Senate’s version has also come under fire for what some have called political additions designed to create controversy in an election year.

Along with protecting the immigration status of victims of domestic violence, the U.S. Senate version would hand out more temporary visas. In previous years, 10,000 visas were given out. This year, the U.S. Senate bill would add 5,000 more.

The bill would also extend protection to victims of domestic violence on Indian reservations and to same-sex couples, which rankled Republicans, who said the obvious partisan issues will allow Democrats to conveniently declare a “war on women” in an election cycle.

But Stavisky disputed that claim in a statement.

“There are some on the other side of the aisle who say that Democrats have manufactured a phoney ‘war on women.’ There’s nothing phony about federal legislatures trying to remove critically important rights and protections,” she said. “We should be making it easier for women who need police help to seek it.”
BY PHIL CORSO

The newest advertisements showed children with clocks covering their eyes below the slogan, “It’s 9 a.m. Do you know where your kids are?”

Keeping kids in school was the primary message last week when Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg launched a new $9 million city ad campaign at PS 91 Richard Arkwright School, at 68-10 Central Ave. in Glendale to fight what he called chronic absenteeism and truancy in schools.

It was the start of the largest effort in the nation to inform parents that students who routinely miss school are more likely to fail, the mayor said.

“When the students miss school, it jeopardizes their ability to keep up in school,” Bloomberg said. “It is a child’s first step down the wrong path in life.”

The campaign was introduced last Thursday with support from AT&T and the private, nonprofit Ad Council to target parents and guardians to reinforce the consequences of missing school to students.

New advertisements will be seen on city subways, newsstands, buses, bus stations and MetroCards, Bloomberg said.

It was a campaign that John Feinblatt, the mayor’s chief policy adviser, said is aimed at reminding New Yorkers about the campaign’s simple message: Every Student, Every Day.

“National research tells us that three out of four sixth-graders who are chronically absent will not graduate,” Feinblatt said. “Of juveniles arrested in New York City, 79 percent had been chronically absent prior to their arrest. This campaign will help amplify the message that getting our kids to school every day is critical to their success.”

The ads will encourage New Yorkers to call 311 or text “school” to 30364 for prompts on how to log on to the new Truancy and Absenteeism Help Center through schooleverydaynyc.org.

According to Bloomberg, students who miss 20 days or more in a single year have a drastically reduced chance of graduating.

“The numbers are not surprising,” Bloomberg said. “If you’re not in school, you can’t learn.”

The mayor also announced new resources to connect parents with support to address their child’s needs as part of the initiatives of his Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Chronic Absenteeism and School Engagement.

Bloomberg said the task force’s strategies were active in 50 pilot schools across the city, which included 31,000 students. Of those students, 4,000 were assigned mentors to reduce absenteeism and work together to improve personal behavior.

Fifth-grader Quinn Corcino Jr. spoke in support of the mayor’s plans to promote attendance through the use of mentors and positive influence.

“I used to be out a lot. I missed 29 days last year, but only three so far this year and no more,” Quinn said. “I got lots of awards this year because of that, which feels so great. My success mentor is the reason I will never miss school.”

Reach reporter Phil Corso by e-mail at pcorso@cnnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4573.
Academy

Continued from Page 1

according to board members they were told by the NYPD that all excavated contaminated material would be taken away.

“They promised the community that all contaminated material would be removed,” said James Cervino, an environmental expert and board member, who spoke on behalf of CB 7. “They told us at the meetings that they were going to remove the material.”

But a 2010 plan drawn up by the city Department of Design and Construction indicates that much of the soil dug up at the site will instead be stored in large piles and then reused on the site, unless it exceeds a certain level of toxicity. Eventually, the entire site will be capped with 2 feet of clean soil or an impermeable medium like asphalt or concrete, according to the plan.

Inspector Terrence Riley, of the NYPD, said he was at all the meetings and never heard mention that all contaminated material would be removed from the site.

“It was never specifically discussed and we are certainly doing whatever is necessary for the safety of the community as well as the employees,” said Riley, who added that he had reached out to CB 7 after hearing from TimesLedger Newspapers.

Contaminated soil removed from construction sites in New York state may be subject to regulations surrounding solid waste, but the soils can be exempt from those regulations if they have a beneficial use on site, according to state regulations.

In this case, that beneficial use is to reuse the fill by putting it back into foundation holes, which would minimize truck traffic and in a sense recycle the soil, which is what Turner/STV, the contractor hired by the city, is planning to do, according to the DDC plan.

But board members said that is not what they signed up for and want the offending earth removed.

“On other residential or commercial jobs, they would get in trouble,” Cervino said. “It’s shocking. They promised the community that what comes out of the hole will be removed.”

The academy site will eventually include classrooms, dorms, training facilities, a museum and parking for cadets.

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Stop-frisk

Continued from Page 1

nor arrested.

The 103rd, which covers Hollis and downtown Jamaica, ranked eighth in the city in terms of the total number of stops and the number of those who were innocent, according to the New York Civil Liberties Union report.

Leroy Gadsden, president of the Jamaica branch of the NAACP, said the Police Department has failed to provide evidence that the increase in stop-and-frisk numbers have caused a decrease in crime.

“If you stop me, not because you have a reasonable suspicion, but because I’m a black man, that’s illegal and discriminatory and does not lead to a stop in crime,” he said. “In order to have a reduced crime rate, you need a positive relationship between the police in the community.”

Gadsden is planning a town hall meeting to discuss the recent numbers May 22 at the Mt. Olivet Baptist Church in Hollis, 202-03 Hollis Ave.

The NAACP is also organizing a bus to carry protesters from the Jamaica branch, 189-26 Linden Blvd., to noon at Manhattan for a Father’s Day silent march June 17 down Fifth Avenue.

The NYCLU’s analysis found that while the number of stop-and-frisk incidents throughout the city has increased nearly sevenfold since 2003, the number of guns found has not kept pace.

In 2003, the NYPD recovered one gun for every 266 people stopped, compared to one firearm recovered for every 2,962 additional people stopped last year, according to the NYCLU.

“The NYPD’s own data undermine many of the Bloomberg administration’s justifications for the stop-and-frisk program,” said NYCLU Executive Director Donna Lieberman.

“Contrary to the mayor and police commissioner’s assertions, the massive spike in the number of stops has done little to remove firearms from the streets. Instead, it has violated the constitutional rights of millions of people and corroded the ability of communities of color to trust and respect the police.”

City Councilman Leroy Comrie (D-St. Albans) said he believed more transparency would open a dialogue between the NYPD and neighborhoods so community members feel they are not being unfairly targeted.

“They should be reporting and in consultation with the community at meetings once a month on how they’re doing and why they’re doing what they’re doing,” he said.

The councilman said he would be co-hosting a town hall meeting with state Assemblyman William Scarborough (D-Jamaica) June 7 at the Robert Ross Johnson Family Life Center on Linden Boulevard to discuss the city Public Advocate Bill de Blasio’s plan to reform the NYPD program.

“One reason [NYPD Commissioner Ray] Kelly is doing this is because he’s lost so many police personnel,” Comrie said.

Tactics such as increasing police presence and targeted sweeps, the councilman said, are more effective in removing guns from streets.

State Sen. Shirley Huntley (D-Jamaica) has also planned a town hall meeting for May 19, 11 a.m., at the Springfield Community Church, 177-06 129th Ave.

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Blocks

Continued from Page 1

Of the 10 most costly blocks in Queens, areas in Douglaston and Oakland Gardens made up almost half, according to a report by propertyshark.com, a real estate search engine and research site.

Marketing analyst Laura Gatea from propertyshark.com said the higher prices in the area might be related to its proximity to Long Island.

“The northern part of the borough seems to be a little bit more pricey than the rest of eastern Queens,” Gatea said. “Houses are higher in value there and reside in wealthier areas.”

But Gatea said the staff at propertyshark.com was surprised to have learned that the most expensive block in Queens was actually far into the opposite direction.

According to the report, the priciest block in the borough was located in Belle Harbor/Neponsit in the Rockaways, where the median sale price on the beachfront block, between 145th Street and Beach 146th Street, was $2.5 million.

“We found that the area there is actually very small and in a community that has been well taken care of,” Gatea said.

For the study, propertyshark.com used median sale prices for all of the blocks in Queens with at least three home sales since 2010.

Out of the top 10, Forest Hills blocks took the second, third and fourth spots in a community Gatea said was well-known for pricey homes and well-heeled residents. On those blocks, she said, prices ranged from $1.35 million to $1.66 million. The most expensive sale on those blocks was a single-family home at 98 Ascan Ave., which went for $1.7 million, according to the report.

Other areas in the latter half of the list included pricey blocks in Douglaston, Oakland Gardens and Jamaica Estates.

The priciest blocks in Douglaston included one boxed between Depew Avenue and Poplar Street as well as 240th Street and 243rd Street. Another piece of property between Leeks Road and Thornhill Avenue also made the list.

In Oakland Gardens, top-ranking blocks were found near the corner of East Hampton Boulevard and 56th Road as well as the properties boxed between 54th Avenue, 231st Street and 230th Street.

Gatea said areas in Whitestone and Murray Hill were not far behind, ranking just outside the top 10 list with high price values.

Blocks throughout southeast Queens, including Jamaica, St. Albans and Cambria Heights, Gatea said, had some of the lowest values in the borough.

“I think it’s good for Queens residents to see so many blocks doing so well in their area,” Gatea said. “It shows there are really nice communities out there that some people outside of the borough might not realize.”

Hospital

Continued from Page 1

Peninsula Hospital in Far Rockaway closed its doors in April, close to 104 years after it first opened in the beach community. The shuttering of the 173-bed facility, which employed about 1,000 people, leaves one hospital on the peninsula: St. John’s Episcopal in Far Rockaway.

City Health Commissioner Nirav Shah was on the receiving end of much of the criticism from both residents and elected officials last Thursday, many of whom said the public hearing should have been held before the hospital shut its doors in April.

Before abruptly leaving at 5 p.m. — a full two hours before the scheduled end of the hearing — Shah said the peninsula has suffered from a lack of health care for too long.

“I wish there was a silver bullet that could solve the health care issues of this peninsula,” he said. “We are doing all that we can to ensure proper health care for this community.”

Shah’s comments were not well-received — especially when attendees realized the commissioner slipped out of the hearing without making his exit public.

“I’m disappointed that Mr. Shah did not see fit to stay past 5 p.m. In my opinion, four hours is not too much to ask when you are a public servant,” said City Councilman Eric Ulrich (R-Ozone Park). “He is the commissioner, he is a public servant. He works for us, we do not work for him.”

Ulrich said many of his constituents used Peninsula Hospital as their primary care facility. He said he fears many will not make it to other area hospitals when their lives are on the line in an emergency situation.

“Closing Peninsula adds critical minutes to every ambulance ride,” he said. “The fact that the hospital remains shuttered with no emergency room and no plan that we know of is reprehensible and unacceptable. And the fact that we don’t have a plan coming from the Department of Health is inexcusable.”

The hearing was convened in accordance with the Hospital Closure Act, which requires a community meeting hosted by the Health Department. A report will be generated based on the public comments.

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