

**Queens Civic Congress Report for the New York City Districting Commission**  
**Proposed Districting Revisions for the Borough of Queens**

Every decade, the various districts of the City Council must undergo boundary changes based on the overall change in population. Most of the time, these changes are relatively minor, though they can be of import to the neighborhoods that are affected. This is particularly true when neighborhoods are divided amongst two or more Councilmembers; oftentimes, rather than those neighborhoods having the attention of two or more representatives, they are in danger of being ignored by both as they are usually located on the fringe of their respective districts, in essence becoming "orphaned" communities with diminished representation. Another extremely important factor in effective representation tends to be the make up of a geographical area, whether pertaining to ethnic origin, population density or physical character.

At the request of many of our numerous constituent member organizations, including civic and homeowners associations located across Queens, the Queens Civic Congress analyzed the proposed districts across the borough. While we agree with several of the changes that have been proposed by the Districting Commission, we believe that further changes are warranted and necessary in order to best serve the overall interests of the residents of Queens.

Several proposed Council Districts in each section of Queens interact significantly with each other at the margins: in central western Queens, portions of the 26th, 28th, 29th, 30th and 32nd Council Districts; in northeast Queens, portions of the 19th, 20th, 23rd and 24th Council Districts; and in southeast Queens, portions of the 27th, 28th and 31st Council Districts all have proposed boundaries that cross and divide neighborhoods in a way that will either decrease their ability to have fair representation or otherwise affect them negatively. Additionally, there are small sections of the 22nd Council District that interact with the 21st and the 26th Council Districts that are important to review; and an 11-block area between the 24th and 27th Council Districts that needs to be resolved. While each of these districts proposed by the Districting Commission fairly represents a substantial number of communities in their entirety, there are reasonable changes that would benefit certain divided neighborhoods being placed either in one Council District or another, as per the N.Y. City Charter, ch. 2-A, 52(1)(b)(2004).

These changes can occur with minimal alterations to total population counts, population density and population diversity, i.e. making sure that required representation is not significantly altered in a way that it would negatively impact the voting rights of various population groups within the parameters as described in the City Charter. In reality, the district by district population and demographic shifts based upon the Queens Civic Congress proposed changes will only vary slightly (see *Council Districts - District Populations and Demographics* Chart) with many of these areas having significant diversity by area and often by block, often already creating neighborhoods of very mixed ethnicity with no particular plurality. Additionally, those areas that have a concentration of one ethnic group have had their percentages altered significantly.

The QCC proposed changes would, however, change the map in several locations, with a final outcome being Council Districts that are significantly less gerrymandered, with more straight lines using natural and man-made boundaries (such as the Flushing River or Long Island Expressway) and encompassing entire neighborhoods - or most of a particular neighborhood if maximum / minimum population thresholds have been reached

- rather than dividing them between two or more Council Districts, thereby keeping these neighborhoods intact as they are clearly "communities with established ties of common interest and association." Or communities are defined by those boundaries, which are often-based on centuries-old towns and villages as well as planned communities designed over 100 years ago; and, just as importantly, areas of common zoning, particularly in the lower-density neighborhoods which have a high level of homeownership. Making sure our neighborhoods remain united and cohesive for fair representation is critical for our constituent member organizations in order for them to have reasonable influence over their own communities' destiny.

### ***Methodology - Census 2010 Population Change and its Effects on Council Districts***

According to the City Charter, each Council District should optimally contain a population of 160,710 based upon the 2010 Census. The districts can have plus or minus 5% of that optimum population and can therefore contain as few as 152,675 or as many as 168,745.

The 2010 census showed a small increase in population for the borough of Queens - approximately 31,000 persons. If that were divided equally between the 14.5 Council Districts (including the portion of the 34th Council District which includes Ridgewood) that are located in Queens, each district would have approximately 2,138 additional residents - an increase of just 1.3% of the average city district size of 160,710 persons.

While most of the Council Districts currently have a population within the + or - 5% deviation of optimum population as described above, there are five districts that are either above or below the maximum deviation: the 21st (+), 22nd (-), 23rd (-), 28th (-) and 29th (-). The draft Commission plan has all Council Districts complying by population; the proposed QCC plan does as well, but our results differ by attempting to keep traditional town and neighborhood boundaries intact and/or maintain straight lines on major roadways or natural boundaries.

Most importantly, many neighborhoods that are currently divided - or are proposed to be divided by the Commission - by Council Districts are placed in a single district as often as is possible.

The full list of Population Change for all Council Districts in Queens are listed under *Council Districts - Total Population and Deviations* and are divided into three groups: Existing, Proposed Commission and Proposed Queens Civic Congress (QCC). Each group is divided into three columns: population, deviation from optimum population and deviation as a percentage.

Below is a neighborhood by neighborhood summary describing the Commission's proposed changes and the areas that QCC believe should either be A) reversed; or B) retained. Another category includes the areas that QCC believes should be C) added. A comprehensive list of areas being proposed by both the Districting Commission and the QCC with population and demographic statistics that reference this language can be found in the section *Proposed District Changes - Districting Commission and QCC Comparison* with each proposed area broken down by number of blocks, population and demographics. Short summaries pertaining to each of those areas are listed below.

## **19th / 20th / 23rd Council Districts**

### ***Whitestone / North Flushing***

The Commission has proposed that six blocks of the Mitchell-Linden apartment complex, six-story buildings located west of Union Street, should be removed from the 20th Council District and placed into the 19th (Figures 1 and 2). These blocks - which represents only about half of the *Mitchell-Linden Civic Association* area - were curiously carved out of the 20th, seemingly with no context; not only did it divide a previously united neighborhood, it is surrounded on three sides by the 20th, with its only connection to the 19th adjacent to the Whitestone Expressway on the west, across from the College Point Corporate Park.

Based on conversations with the *Mitchell-Linden Civic Association*, the *Queens Civic Congress* believes that these six blocks should revert back into the 20th Council District. An appropriate addition to the 19th from the 20th would be the portion of North Flushing located in the 20th (Figure 3) - both in terms of comparable population (Figure 7) - as the remainder of this area is already in the 19th.

The North Flushing area - approximately 38 blocks, or 25%, of the primarily detached single-family, low-density R1/R2 residential neighborhood (Figures 4, 5 and 6) north of Northern Boulevard that stretches between Union Street and Francis Lewis Boulevard - is currently located in the 20th Council District. It has no relation to the adjacent areas of high-density downtown Flushing to the south or the Mitchell-Linden Cooperative apartment buildings to the west, but is consistent and has a "common interest" with the rest of North Flushing to the east and should be placed entirely within the 19th Council District. *QCC's* recommendation is supported by the *North Flushing Civic Association*, which represents the immediate area, as well as the adjacent organizations to the east: *Broadway-Flushing Homeowners Association*, *Bowne Park Civic Association*, *Auburndale Improvement Association* and the *North East Flushing Civic Association*. This "district swap" has also been endorsed by the *Mitchell-Linden Civic Association*.

In addition, two blocks should be added to the 20th from the 19th: a single block of garden apartments in Whitestone at 20th Avenue and Parsons Boulevard; and a block filled with six-story apartments at Northern Boulevard between Murray and 153rd Streets. These changes would generate less gerrymandered district lines as well as including higher density in District 20 where it is more in keeping with other similar areas.

### ***Auburndale / Station Road / St. Kevin's***

The Commission has proposed that five blocks of Auburndale in the St. Kevin's neighborhood be moved from the 20th to the 19th. While the *Auburndale Improvement Association* and *QCC* agree that these blocks should be retained in the 19th, we also believe that the rest of the blocks north of 46th/48th Avenue between 166th to 196th streets should also be added to the 19th from the 20th.

The area between 166th Street and Utopia Parkway - the Station Road area in Auburndale - is currently divided between the 19th and 20th Council Districts. The well-defined

neighborhood, almost entirely located in a detached single-family zone (Figures 4, 5 and 6), from the Long Island Railroad to 46th Avenue. The portion to the north of Northern Boulevard and two individual blocks to the south are located in the 19th, with the remainder located in the 20th. The *Station Road Civic Association*, which also represents the area, has stated that it is against the current split between two Council Districts.

To the west lies East Flushing, with significantly higher zoning and population density, while to the east is the St. Kevin's neighborhood which has a preponderance of one and two-family detached houses. Additionally, the blocks immediately south of St. Kevin's Church are several blocks of one-family rowhouses; half of those houses are in the 19th, while half are in the 20th. Overall, the St. Kevin's neighborhood is evenly split between the 19th and 20th Council Districts presently. *QCC* believes that these 28 blocks, along with the 5 already proposed by the Commission, should be added to the 19th as they have similar zoning, neighborhood character and demographics (Figure 8).

### ***Auburndale / Francis Lewis Boulevard***

The Francis Lewis Boulevard corridor from the Long Island Expressway to 48th Avenue is a politically confusing area, with jagged lines unnaturally dividing the area. The *Auburndale Improvement Association* and *QCC* believe that the Council District lines should reflect the major boundaries of the area - Francis Lewis Boulevard and 48th Avenue, which are both major roads - in dividing the area between the 19th, 20th and 23rd Council Districts. In total 10 blocks would be added to the 20th Council District from the 19th and 23rd; and 5 blocks would be added to the 23rd from the 19th, better delineating the already defined portions of the neighborhood (Figure 8).

### ***Bayside / Clear Spring / Bayside Hills***

The Commission has proposed that five blocks south of 48th Avenue between the Clearview Expressway and 210th Street be moved from the 19th to the 23rd Council District.

While *QCC* supports this particular change, we are adamantly opposed to the proposed move of 28 blocks of the Bayside Hills neighborhood from the 19th to 23rd Council District. Before the 2000 census, all of Bayside Hills - which has had specifically demarcated boundaries since its founding in 1936 (210th Street, 48th Avenue, Springfield Boulevard and the Horace Harding / Long Island Expressway) - was located in the 19th. After the 2000 census, 11 blocks adjacent to the Long Island Expressway were moved into the 23rd. The goal of the *Bayside Hills Civic Association*, which has represented the neighborhood since its founding more than 75 years ago, was to move those 11 blocks back to the 19th with the remainder of Bayside Hills (Figure 9). *QCC* supports *Bayside Hills Civic Association* in their push for the reversal of the Commission's proposed move of 28 blocks from the 19th to the 23rd; furthermore, we support maintaining the unity of Bayside Hills by requesting that the Districting Commission move those 11 blocks adjacent to the Long Island Expressway back into the 19th Council District.

## **23rd / 24th Council Districts**

### ***Fresh Meadows / Jamaica Estates***

The Commission has proposed that 52 blocks located in Fresh Meadows bounded by the Long Island Expressway (Figures 1, 2 and 3), Utopia Parkway and Union Turnpike be moved from the 24th to the 23rd Council District. This overall neighborhood, comprised entirely of detached single-family houses (Figures 4, 5 and 6), is represented by the *Fresh Meadows Homeowners Association*, *Utopia Estates Civic Association* and the *West Cunningham Park Civic Association*. QCC supports this shift, as the entirety of this area has been divided into two Council Districts for decades. We also support the move of a single block west of 188th Street in Jamaica Estates be moved from the 23rd to the 24th Council District which had inexplicably been carved out and placed in the 23rd Council District in the 2000 census.

## **27th / 28th / 31st Council Districts**

### ***Cambria Heights***

The Commission has proposed that 52 blocks located in southern portion of Cambria Heights (Figure 11) be moved from the 27th Council District to the 31st. *Concerned Citizens of Laurelton*, the civic organization that represents the adjacent blocks immediately to the south, has voiced their opposition as has the Cambria Heights Civic Association, which is strongly in favor of retaining these 52 blocks in the 27th Council District. The boundary between Cambria Heights and Laurelton has been well established for over a century as the north end of Montefiore Cemetery and 121st Avenue. By moving approximately 1/3 of Cambria Heights into the 31st Council District, the Commission is splitting this well-defined community and weakening its political representation. QCC believes that the Commission should reverse this proposed redistricting and keep all of Cambria Heights in the 27th Council District.

### ***Springfield Gardens***

Significant portions of Springfield Gardens have been proposed by the Commission to be removed from the 31st Council District and placed in the 27th and 28th Council Districts (Figure 11). In particular, the 23 blocks of Springfield Gardens north of the Belt Parkway between Baisley Pond Park and Guy Brewer Boulevard proposed by the Commission should be retained in any new plan. Otherwise, QCC agrees with relatively few of these proposed Commission changes and believes that significant areas should revert back to their existing districts (Figure 12).

Area civics do not agree with the Commission's plans to move 32 blocks south of the Belt Parkway that are being proposed by the Commission to be moved to the 28th Council District from the 31st. The Belt Parkway acts as a major dividing line between these sections of Springfield Gardens; they are essentially two separate neighborhoods (Figure 13). Placing half of the area south of the Belt Parkway into a separate Council District will significantly weaken the ability for this area to have fair political representation and,

frankly, cause an area already isolated due to its immediate proximity to Kennedy Airport and surrounding industrial areas to be even more marginalized.

Similarly, two other discrete areas of Springfield Gardens - a 24 block area just west of Springfield Boulevard south of Merrick Boulevard; and a 25 block area south of Rochdale Village (Figure 13) - should remain in the 31st Council District for similar reasons, as they do not relate to other areas adjacent to them and have more "common interests" with the neighborhoods to the east. QCC believes that the Commission should reverse these proposed changes and have these blocks remain within the 31st Council District.

### **21st / 22nd / 26th Council Districts**

#### ***Ditmars / Astoria***

The Commission has proposed moving a geographically large portion of the present 22nd Council District - including Rikers Island and LaGuardia Airport - into the 21st. These changes, while fairly significant, do not affect the residents of the 21st or 22nd Council Districts. However, a six-block portion of Ditmars near the Rikers Island Bridge and LaGuardia Airport has also been proposed to move from the 22nd Council District to the 21st. The QCC opposes this seemingly arbitrary move, which isolates a small portion of Ditmars from the rest of the neighborhood.

#### ***Woodside***

The Commission has proposed moving several areas in Woodside from the 26th Council District to the 22nd. While QCC agrees with many of these changes, an 8 block area adjacent to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway near Broadway should be retained in the 26th Council District, as it is an immediate continuation of the neighborhood to the south.

### **26th / 28th / 29th / 30th / 32nd Council Districts**

#### ***Maspeth***

The Commission has proposed to radically alter the 30th Council District on both its northerly and southerly boundaries. This includes moving approximately 40% of Maspeth from the 30th Council District to the 26th (Figures 14, 15 and 16).

Prior to the 2000 census, Maspeth was divided between three Council Districts: the 26th, 29th and 30th. When the area was redistricted in 2003, a successful effort was undertaken by the *Juniper Park Civic Association*, which represents Maspeth and Middle Village, to unite 90% of Maspeth into one Council District - the 30th (Figure 17). The Commission's proposed redistricting will undo this previous work and once again divide Maspeth. The QCC proposal supports *Juniper Park Civic Association* in its appeal to keep Maspeth mostly intact within the 30th Council District.

The geography and street grid of Maspeth are unique in that the Long Island Expressway literally plows through the center of the Maspeth commercial district, dividing the southern portion of Grand Avenue from the northern portion. However, the lines that the Commission are proposing use Grand Avenue itself as a significant dividing line, even south of the Long Island Expressway. Dividing Maspeth in this fashion will only complicate the ability of the community to get fair representation, as significant coordination will have to occur between elected officials, civic organizations and business groups in order to have any action taken on a particular issue.

The *Juniper Park Civic Association* and *QCC* have devised an alternate plan (Figure 15) that would remove less than 20% of Maspeth from the 30th Council District - keeping 62 blocks within the 30th and moving 52 blocks to the 26th - while guaranteeing that the commercial district along Grand Avenue on both sides of the Long Island Expressway remains primarily within one Council District.

### ***Woodhaven / Richmond Hill / Kew Gardens***

The Commission has proposed a wholesale shift in Council District representation for Woodhaven, Richmond Hill and parts of Kew Gardens, moving well over 200 blocks between the 28th, 29th 30th and 32nd Council Districts. The area is divided into five neighborhoods (Figure 17): Woodhaven, Woodhaven North, Richmond Hill, Richmond Hill North and Kew Gardens. All of Woodhaven and 1/3 of Woodhaven North is presently located in the 32nd Council District, while the rest of Woodhaven North, Richmond Hill North portions of Richmond Hill and Kew Gardens are located in the 30th. The rest of Kew Gardens and a portion of Richmond Hill are in the 29th, and the remainder of Richmond Hill is located in the 28th (Figure 14).

The Council District boundaries proposed by the Commission (Figure 15) represents a significant change in representation in what QCC believes to be not in the best interests of these important areas of Queens. The character of these neighborhoods is rather specific: Woodhaven North is comprised mostly of two-family detached houses, while the remainder of Woodhaven is more typically a mix of detached houses, rowhouses and small apartment buildings; Richmond Hill North is comprised mostly of one-family detached houses, while the remainder of the area is also similar mix to Woodhaven. Kew Gardens is largely split between areas containing large single-family houses, two-family rowhouses and six-story apartment buildings.

Richmond Hill North and Kew Gardens also have the distinction of being the first suburban planned communities in Queens County, developed by the Man family between 1870 and 1930. These neighborhoods, which have tenacious civic organizations including the *Kew Gardens Civic Association* and the *Richmond Hill Historical Society*, are adamant about not being split between several Council Districts, and the *Queens Civic Congress* agrees with them.

The main natural and manmade boundaries in these neighborhoods are quite prominent and obvious: The Brooklyn-Queens County line on the west; the Long Island Railroad trestle between Woodhaven and Richmond Hill in the center; and the Van Wyck Expressway on the east.

From north to south, the boundaries are Forest Park and the Jackie Robinson Parkway; Jamaica Avenue, which acts as both a commercial center and a visual dividing line (including in housing type) due to the elevated subway; and Atlantic Avenue on the south. Additionally, Richmond Hill North and Kew Gardens have a specific boundary line delineated when the areas were developed over a century ago.

*QCC* has proposed certain common sense boundary adjustments based upon the geography and natural boundaries of these neighborhoods (Figure 16) which will cause decreased disruption to the shape and content of the current Council Districts. We believe that, for the most part, Jamaica Avenue should act as the boundary between the 30th and 32nd Council Districts as it is being proposed between the 28th and 29th Council Districts; the only exception to this is a section between the Long Island Railroad trestle and 111th Street that would continue south to Atlantic Avenue, which would remain in the 30th Council District (which represents most of that area presently).

Additionally, the *QCC* proposes that a section of Woodhaven between Woodhaven Boulevard and the Long Island Railroad from Jamaica to Atlantic avenues would be moved to the 32nd Council District, as would an area of South Richmond Hill south of Atlantic Avenue and east of the Long Island Railroad trestle (Figure 16).

The 29th and 30th Council District lines between Richmond Hill North and Kew Gardens would also be shifted to reflect the actual boundary between these two discrete neighborhoods.

### **Report Summary**

The *Queens Civic Congress* believes that our proposal herein describes specific changes to the proposed Council District maps based on our constituent member organization's wishes. Our proposed district lines hew closely to actual neighborhood boundaries in a rational, reasonable and logical manner, without violating the spirit or intent of the City Charter directives. We believe that *QCC*'s proposed lines should be used in the final design proposed by the Districting Commission. For communities to be fairly represented, it is imperative that district lines actually encompass entire neighborhoods unless its absolutely impossible to do so. This is paramount in a democracy.

The *QCC*'s only objective, as a non-partisan umbrella organization, is to ensure the continued social and economic vitality of the neighborhoods of Queens County. Our member organizations, many mentioned herein, are the stewards of their large and ethnically diverse neighborhoods. *QCC* member civics and their hundreds of thousands of members actively participate in the civic and political life of these "areas of common interest" that define them. We present herein a common vision of district boundaries that better describe our members' common interest and we urge the Districting Commission to adopt these proposed Council District lines in order to benefit the residents of Queens.