



Bellerose Commonwealth Civic Association

# *action news*

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## Thursday, June 5, 2014, 8:00 pm *Block Captain Appreciation*

**Holy Trinity Church Basement, Corner 87th Avenue and Commonwealth Blvd.  
Next Meeting: September 4, 2014 at 8:00pm  
Visit Our Website: [www.bccaqueens.org](http://www.bccaqueens.org)**

### **President's Gavel**

Dear Bellerose Neighbors,

I hope everyone enjoyed Memorial Day and thanked those who serve or served and remembered those who died for our freedoms. During Fleet Week one of our Bellerose residents, Roy Me, who resides in QCCA civic invited civics in the area to tour the USS Oak Hill. It was a real treat to see how these ships operate and all the equipment they have on board. Maybe next year we can have this opportunity for other residents to enjoy. We want to thank him for reaching out to us and giving us that opportunity.

We have been working with Roseann Reinhardt a Bellerose resident who also works at PS 133 to have the Bellerose Park remodeled and updated. She began the movement by participating in the participatory budget which our Council Member Mark Weprin has been part of for the past two years. Unfortunately, the Reading garden she proposed did not win but we are continuing with our efforts to have the parks department fund the new playground and the reading garden.

**We will be having a meeting June 16,th at P.S. 133 at 7pm**, please come to discuss any thoughts or ideas you may have to make our playground a better place for all Bellerose resi-

dents to enjoy. We need your support to make this happen . We hope you can come to our next meeting on June 5th, where we have block captain appreciation night.

Lourdes Hartrick, Pres.

### **Citizenship Medals**

Citizenship medals will be awarded to a boy and girl graduating from St. Gregory the Great School and from P.S. 133. The winners will also be presented with a Citizenship certificate and a check at their graduation ceremony. The winners are chosen by their school.

The Bellerose Commonwealth Civic Association has been presenting the awards for over thirty-five years. The winners will be announced in our September newsletter. We congratulate all the graduates and wish them all the best.

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## Legalizing Illegal Basement Apartments? My Opinion, R. Hellenbrecht

There is a proposal in New York City to address the lack of affordable housing in the city by legalizing illegal apartments in basements. BCCA does not participate in political discussion, but it is critical to consider the potential ramifications of this drastic measure for middle income, low density neighborhoods like Bellerose. There are relatively few communities in the city that provide an alternative to the suburbs of Nassau and Suffolk for families seeking a peaceful and quiet area to raise a family. Bellerose is an excellent example of such a neighborhood: attractive, safe, uncongested and convenient to downtown.

Most of Bellerose consists of single family homes, with a sprinkling of legal two-family homes. Make no mistake there are some illegal apartments in our area, but they are relatively few and we believe it is crucial to keep it that way. There are several issues to consider in order to understand why this is so important to us:

**Zoning and Legal Issues:** Bellerose was rezoned in July 2013 as single family only after years of hard work by BCCA and our neighboring civic associations. Existing legal apartments are grandfathered, but apartments that are not documented, i.e. on the Certificate of Occupancy, are not and can not be legal under current laws. Most of our homes have cellars, not basements. Zoning and Building codes prohibit living accommodations in cellars, so if this limitation holds we may not be subject to legalization— but that’s a big if. Areas outside of Bellerose that are zoned for two or more families already provide for legal basement apartments—as long as the owner has obtained the required permits. Therefore, there is no need for any action on the part of the city other than enforcing existing rules. Owners of undeclared apartments in legal basements in appropriate zones should only file necessary permits, meet building codes and update the C of O. All are necessary and appropriate steps and doable with some investment.

**Infrastructure:** Zoning was generally established based on existing infrastructure. For example, areas with a subway stop would generally have denser occupancy including multifamily buildings and apartment buildings, while less convenient commute areas, like ours, generally have lower zoning. Water, sewage, electric and gas supplies, etc. are very costly to replace or enlarge, thus limiting density. Availability of school seats are also not easily expanded. Classrooms have been placed in trailers and in bathrooms when population exceeds available school infrastructure. Imagine if schools are at capacity and dozens or hundreds of apartments suddenly come on the market.

**Congestion:** Bellerose and similar areas are pretty lucky when it comes to parking. While there seems to be an explosion of cars on the street recently, most of us can park in front of our homes or very close. Again, imagine numerous new apartments becoming available. Like so many areas of the city, you might end up circling the block or walking blocks to park your car. Congestion also brings more turnover and less familiarity of who should be on a property. Crime often follows increase in congestion and you may be less secure.

**Safety:** Safety may be the least obvious, but most important consideration regarding legalization. Houses in our area were built in the 1930’s to 1950’s. Base wiring in the houses are now nearly 80 years old, put in at a time when the furnace and refrigerator were the biggest draw and not sufficient for the types of appliances, computers and air conditioners we have now with one family. Again, imagine if those wires were loaded with another apartment and not completely upgraded—as many illegal apartments likely would not be. How often have you heard of home fires starting in a basement? Too many deadly fires start in basement apartments—legal or otherwise. Aside from fire tragedies, there are inherent dangers of carbon monoxide from furnaces, water heaters, etc. The lack of sufficient air circulation and, most importantly, the lack of alternate emergency egress and FDNY access make basements and cellars especially dangerous living spaces.

Arguments in favor of legalizing such apartments rely on increasing income for the owner, possibly allow owners to buy bigger, more expensive houses. “Affordable housing” is a difficult term to quantify and enforce. Affordability is subjective - safety and quality of life are absolutes.

BCCA would like your opinion. Please take a moment to let us know what you think by writing to [info@bccaqueens.org](mailto:info@bccaqueens.org). SHOULD ILLEGAL APARTMENTS IN OUR AREA BE ELIGIBLE FOR LEGALIZATION?

### BCCA Officers:

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 Juan Zubizarreta, Vice President  
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Bellerose Commonwealth Civic Assn.  
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## Bellerose Playground

Bellerose Playground, a one acre park which is adjacent to P.S.133, opened in 1950 and was “restored” in the mid-1980s. NYC Parks & Recreation (NYCPR) has been reminded of the current need for work at the playground and is willing to upgrade the facility. But, as usual, funding is the issue, meaning help will be needed from our elected officials and concerted community activism will be necessary to bring this important project to reality.

**A community meeting to discuss the playground will be held at P.S.133 on Monday, June 16<sup>th</sup>, at 7PM.** A park advocate as well as local civic and Community Board representatives will be present. The meeting was set-up after a site visit on May 8<sup>th</sup> by the District Manager of CB13, the Principal of P.S. 133, a representative of Councilman Weprin’s office, local civic leaders and members of the community. Everyone is welcome to come to the special community meeting on June 16<sup>th</sup>, especially those who use the playground, as we look forward to your input.

## St. Gregory’s Festival

St Gregory's Festival will take place from June 19 to June 29 2014, opening nightly from 7PM to 11PM. The festival features amusement rides, live bands, ethnic foods from Ireland, Poland, Germany, Italy and Asia will be served on special evenings. Carnival games and games of chance provide fun for all ages and there will be bands with singing and dancing on the ethnic food nights. Don’t miss the Zeppole! You will wait on line, but it’ll be worth the wait for these delicious treats.

The festival is a critical fund raiser for St. Gregory the Great School. Bellerose residents are encouraged to make several visits. It is advertised throughout Queens, Nassau and Suffolk. We only ask that visitors respect local residents. We urge visitors to have a great time, but don’t block driveways, litter or make loud noises late at night.

## Participatory Budgeting Results

If you are curious about the voting results for the participatory budget (PB) here are the results.

Winning Projects

1- Smart Boards at 5 schools within the Council District- (PS 33Q, IS 109Q, PS/IS 266Q, Cardozo HS, Queens HS of Teaching)

Total costs 450,000, number of votes 1166

2- Fitness Walk and Exercise Loop at Cunningham Park / Total cost 200,000, number of votes 875

3- Portable Security Cameras /Total cost 105,000, number of votes 718

4- Technology Upgrade at 2 schools within the District (PS 135Q and PS 18Q) Total Cost 85,785, number of votes 699

5- Security Upgrades for 3 Libraries (Fresh Meadows, Hollis and Windsor Park) Total Cost 265,000, number of votes 671.

1,888 votes were cast, that is a significant increase over the last year. Hopefully we will have more Bellerose residents get out there and vote. All who participate truly make a difference. Consider participating next year. By all means, please consider identifying a project to submit to the PB process

## Bellerose Library Reopening

We understand that sometime in June there will be a “soft” opening of the Bellerose Library after several months of upgrading and sprucing up. We should have a specific date by the evening of our meeting. We are working with Queens Public Library staff to arrange a Grand Opening Ceremony several weeks later. We will do our best to notify the community and hope you can come. Library staff and elected officials who were responsible for getting the funding will cut the ribbon. Meanwhile Bellerose Library will be open for business with automated check-in/check-out and many new features. Watch our website, [bccaqueens.org](http://bccaqueens.org), for further info.