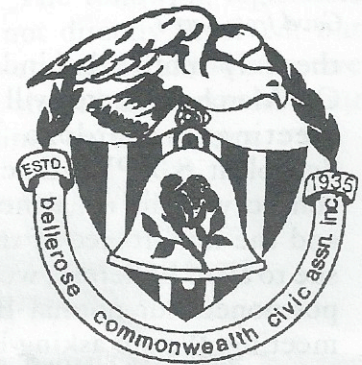


action news



Volume 20 No. 3

MARCH 1994

President's Gavel

By: Joseph Byrne, President

The February meeting was fairly well attended. There were some new faces and old familiar ones. Before I go any further about the meeting, I wanted to inform you about a very pressing and controversial issue. Recently a study was begun to *possibly* realign our school district: District 26. One of the possible boundary lines would be Hillside Avenue. What this would mean is that all homes south of Hillside Avenue would be located within District 29. District 29 schools, for whatever reason, have not achieved the scholastic levels that our schools have. These levels are really not issues for our community to have to deal with since we have a super school board and tremendous parent involvement. District 26 arrived at this position through hard work and dedication. This is not something that can be legislated or redirected by boundary adjustments.

The goal of raising reading and math scores should not be attained by moving students into different school districts. Politics seem to be

School District Issues

By: R.C. Hellenbrecht

Based on a 1969 state law, there are 32 school districts in New York City, each required to be no fewer than 15,000 students. The law also requires that redistricting occur every ten years. Although demographic changes since 1969

have resulted in underutilization of at least eight of these districts, waivers by the state legislature allows current district boundaries to remain in effect.

In the most recent waiver, granted in 1992, the legislators and the governor stipulated that they would grant no further waivers after it expires on January 1, 1995. To meet its obligation to redistrict, the New York City Board of Education recently appointed a special committee to assist in

redrawing the school district boundaries throughout the city.

School Districts

A school district in New York City is a geographic area consisting of no less than 15,000 pupils in pre-K through 9th grade. (High schools are directly controlled by the central Board.)

March Meeting Change

Special Date
School Board
Redistricting
March 10, 1994
House of Hope Church
8:00 PM
Cor. 248th St. & 85th Ave

Gavel from page 1

the only motive behind this. On March 3, there will be a meeting at Cardozo High School at 8:00PM. Due to a conflict with our usual meeting and the importance of this issue to all of Bellerose, we have postponed our normal BCCA meeting. We are asking Bellerose residents to attend this important meeting at Cardozo. In addition, we expect the support of all district 26 schools.

I am asking members to write to the governor, mayor and legislators (see sample letter and addresses inside). I know many people were very upset when they awoke one day a few years ago to find that their congressional district was changed. More recently, most of us were very disturbed to discover our state assembly district moved. An attempt now to remove Bellerose from the premier school district of New York City seems to be almost a calculated attack on this great neighborhood. Please remember that even though you may not have children in any of the local public schools you will still be affected. Our community has always been a prime location and maintained its value mainly due to our school district.

I attended a meeting on February 8 at P.S. 18 regarding this issue. There were many neighbors and teachers from the elementary and middle schools. They too are very concerned. One interesting item was brought to light: we are already gladly accepting children from school district 29, and that will continue. We never want to refuse our standard and level of education to children.

During the February BCCA meeting we spoke with Community Police Officer Peter Toth as well as some young people that "hang out" in the P.S. 133 school yard. Recently there has been an increase in destruction in and around the park. Two trees were broken in half and one was burned. The slide and swings were damaged as well. This park cost \$500,000 to renovate and was completed just a few months ago. Everyone knows that this type of capital improvement is hard to come by. Worse than that, the folks who live near the park can no longer enjoy peaceful evenings. There are fires in the park, loud noises, bottles broken and drugs being used nightly.

The 105th Precinct has offered to enforce a "Zero Tolerance" effort. This would mean arrests, summonses and confiscation of vehicles in order to correct the condition and improve the quality of life. We are looking into this, but the question is - if these conditions exist in the dead of winter, what will summer be like? These are our kids in the park and it appears that some will be arrested if the sweeps are done.

We are looking for some solutions, including night centers in the school. The young people were very receptive and offered to help paint the park. I am hopeful that we will succeed, but our success will never come without cooperation.

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Lenten Services

Once again, Pastor Brunjes has found some of the people involved in the ministry of Jesus to speak to the congregation from their vantage point, about this remarkable man and what He meant to them.

At the 8 pm Wednesday night services, those who will share with us are: March 2 -- a member of the Sanhedren; 9th -- Peter; 16th -- the Roman Soldier; 25th -- Thomas.

These services are open to the community as well as members of Holy Trinity. Why not invite a friend to come with you to hear what biblical characters had to say about Jesus and His ministry.

As in the past, services are preceded by soup supper which begins at 6:30 pm. If you wish to attend, please contact the church office at (718)347-0278 as reservations are necessary.

Holy Week

Holy Thursday (3/31) will be observed by a Seder meal at which Holy Communion will be offered. Make reservations.

Good Friday (4/1) a service, with Holy Communion, will be held at 1:30 pm. At 8 pm a Tenebrae services is scheduled.

Easter (4/3) services will be held at 7:30 am and 10:30 am. There will be a coffee hour between services. All welcome.

Where to Write

Below is a sample letter that we suggest should be written to all of the following officials. Phone numbers are listed also because all contacts with their offices will be very influential. Better yet - do both! We urge you to send a letter as soon as possible. I hope you will use that sample only as a sample. Write your own words, add your emotions and priorities concerning the educational welfare of our students, well being of our community and the value of our property.

Hon. Mario Cuomo, Governor
The State of New York
2 World Trade Center - 57th Floor
New York, NY 10047

Hon. Rudolph Giuliani, Mayor
The City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Hon. Ramon Cortinez, Chancellor
The New York City Board of Education
110 Livingston Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Hon. Carol Gresser, President
The New York City Board of Education
110 Livingston Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

The following legislators are not directly involved, but are very powerful and effective and should be aware of your feelings on this matter.

Hon. Frank Padavan
New York State Senate
89-39 Gettysburg Street
Bellerose, NY 11426

Hon. Barbara M. Clark
New York State Assembly
97-01 Springfield Boulevard
Queens Village, NY 11429

Hon. Sheldon Leffler
New York City Council
205-07 Hillside Avenue
Hollis, NY 11423

Sample Letter

Dear (Governor, Mayor, etc.):

This letter is to advise you of my deep concern about recent demands to redistrict the school districts of New York City. As part of Community School District 26, we in Bellerose and the other neighborhoods of this eastern Queens area work very hard to develop and maintain quality education. This district works well together and should serve as a model for the rest of the city's districts. It is our concern in eastern Queens that government will take ill conceived steps to meet serious needs of some school districts by destroying others.

I urge you to be fair and rational in leading school district changes. Please carefully assess the strengths of the best school districts support them and emulate these characteristics city-wide. This can not be done in an abbreviated schedule. The current plan to hire a consultant, study redistricting, hold public hearings during summer break/vacation period and carve the city up differently in the middle of a school year, by January 1995, is unrealistic and dangerous. A rushed and poorly conceived redistricting will surely destroy rather than build on success.

The present success of our students is the future success of our city. Educational excellence cannot be legislated, demanded or even created - it evolves carefully, slowly and methodically with good plans, parent involvement and highly motivated teachers and administrators.

In reforming education in New York City you must seek better education and improved opportunities for all students. This effort must NOT be influenced by political opportunism. In addition, you must first consider and pursue the reorganization of the Board of Education as proposed by Borough Presidents Shulman and Messenger, before turning the City's entire educational systems upside down.

Each district is managed by a Community School Board consisting of nine members elected every three years. The CSBs are responsible for oversight of their respective schools, review and control of budget, selection of principals, district superintendents and other district administrators. CSBs have limited authority over curricula in their districts. The Rainbow curricula fight last year highlighted the influence of local school boards.

The central Board of Education, however, is extremely powerful, wielding power over most meaningful issues in City schools. Allocation of budget and human resources, union agreements, setting curricula standards, controlling maintenance scheduling, distributing funding for special programs and the power to suspend the authority of the local boards. The central Board has evolved an immense bureaucracy in performing its tasks.

Our District

Our district public school population is currently 14,400. If the new districts are drawn just to numerically balance school districts, there may be no ill effect in redistricting. Our Board has already stated that it would embrace addition of one or more nearby schools from neighboring districts. However, remappings are often impacted by other political and social interests, sometimes to the detriment of areas such as Bellerose and Floral Park. One such fear is that redistricting may be used for racial balancing or spread-

ing higher reading and math scores to districts with lower achievement levels.

The composition of the Redistricting Advisory Board contributes to this concern about politicizing the redistricting process. None of the seven members of the RAB, appointed by the Board of Education, are directly involved in the city school system. In addition, they are under extremely tight time pressure.

According to the current schedule, initial recommendations for January's new boundaries for the entire system are due on April 15. Following internal review, the Board of Education will seek public comment during July and August (*does that sound like vacation time to you?!),* make final modifications and submit the plan to the Justice Department on November 1.

A major argument against the current rush to redistrict the City's school districts surrounds a recent proposal by Queens BP Shulman and Manhattan BP Messenger. The proposal calls for a major reorganization of the Board of Education, including a thorough decentralization into independent Borough Boards. The proposal also revises the arcane "proportional" method of electing school board members, replacing it with more familiar election process and November election date used for all other city voting. In light of the significance of these proposals, the legislators and central Board should focus on supporting or refuting decentralization before redistricting.

Zoning Issues

by: Richard Hellenbrecht

Last month I provided a primer on residential zoning. I received several favorable comments on that article and I promised to further explore specific rights and restrictions in our R-2 zone. Due to the importance and timeliness of the School Board issue, I decided to postpone the next zoning article until April.

In the last edition I asked for anyone with specific concerns about illegal conversions or occupancies to write to our post office box. I was delighted to receive our first "concerned citizen" letter. Our Land Use committee will be pursuing this location and we hope to receive more.

Postal Zip Codes

We received a complaint about the Post Office's exclusive use of Jamaica instead of our town. We know that one of the distinctions of living in Queens is that we have a great identification with our towns. We get pleasure having our mail addressed to Bellerose.

The post office has been shifting all automated databases to the respective General Post Office name, rather than local office name. Therefore we are increasingly seeing Jamaica on mass mailings, billings, etc. Many businesses will overwrite the town at your request.

We would like to pursue this issue with Congressman Flake so that our town and others will continue to be identified and ensure that this is not an effort to eventually eliminate the town designations of local post offices.

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Community Board Vote

Last month the BCCA voted to support a recommendation made by the North Bellerose Civic Association to reduce the size of Community Board 13Q.

As we've said before, a community board is an official city office located in each of 51 community districts of NYC for the purpose of coordinating city services, making recommendations on zoning/land use issues and proposing budget allocations.

Our current community board lines stretch from the Grand Central Parkway to Kennedy Airport. Many have often argued that this huge board is just too big and

has too many issues to be appropriately managed with the limited resources provided by the City.

Also, in our instance, the local precinct lines coincide with the Community Board lines. This too results in an imbalance when adjacent areas have higher priority needs. Neither our area, nor the southern part of the district has been well served by the size of our precinct.

Under the proposal, our district would more closely follow the boundaries of the Eastern Queens Civic Council, going only as far south as the LIRR tracks.

BCCA Dues

The BCCA dues year is coming to an end. The mailing returns came in very well and most of our block captains have turned in large percentages of their blocks. We would like to wrap up the 1994 collection in April, so mail your dues to the P.O. Box below, or bring them to a BCCA meeting by early April.



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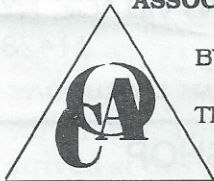
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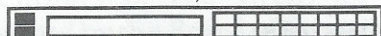
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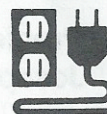
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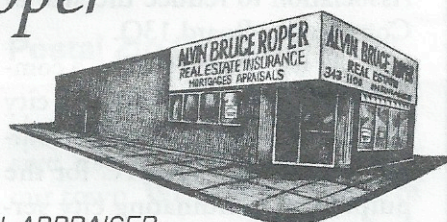
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