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## The Public Ought to Know: City charter revisions must have public input

By Corey Bearak

**Where did all the time go?" sang Rusty Young on Poco's brand new DVD/CD "Keeping the legend alive," recorded live in Nashville. The sentiment reflects my own feeling after I reviewed Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Charter Revision Commission meeting notice.**



Corey Bearak

I expected the commission to reach out to the public and solicit some ideas. After all, the mayor needed no charter referendum to block a November ballot initiative he opposed. Might the plan be a pre-emptive strike against a possible Far West Side stadium referendum in the heat of the 2005 mayoral election?

Rather than parade high-ranking Bloomberg administration officials before his commission - the current scheme - our mayor should advise his charter commissioners appointed last August to go directly to the public for good ideas to improve our city.

A few weeks ago (Dec. 3 to be exact), I e-mailed fellow Queens Civic Congress members after receiving my notice in the mail from the mayor's commission. The envelope addressed me not in my civic, but in another community capacity. But at least the notice reached me. By the time you read today's commentary, just over two weeks will have passed since the charter commission met, not to take our testimony, but to hear an administration official deliver "expert testimony" on a set topic.

The commission would serve good government by proposing a change in how mayors can appoint such bodies. The political use of these commissions - proposing measures a mayor can get by convincing the City Council to pass a local law - to block ballot initiatives over two

administrations demonstrates a need to reform that process. Why not subject a mayor's appointment of a commission to City Council approval? Another alternative would limit a mayor to appoint only one commission during a four-year term.

None of the three scheduled hearings offer any opportunity for members of the public to testify. According to the Web site and a mailing I received from the commission, "the public will have the opportunity to observe but not to testify."

Here's the administration plan: At each of the three scheduled public meetings, a different senior member of Mayor Bloomberg's administration presents "expert testimony." In addition to the "advertised" topic that "will be the main subject of (each) public meeting, commission business will not necessarily be limited to that topic. The commission may also consider other topics related to its review of the City Charter." (See NYC Charter Revision Commission Web site, [www.nyc.gov/html/charter/html/home/home.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/charter/html/home/home.shtml).)

City Budget Director Mark Page addressed fiscal stability on Dec. 8 at Hunter College in Manhattan. Writing several days later, I've noticed that not a single line on that event, or the two other evenings with an administration expert that remain, have been mentioned.

Deputy Mayor for Legal Affairs Carol Robles-Roman is to address administrative law reform at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 19, at Spector Hall near City Hall at the City Planning Commission offices, 22 Reade St., between Broadway and Centre Street. And Susan Kupferman, director of the Mayor's Office of Operations, will address administrative reform and operations efficiency at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 9, at John Jay College, 445 West 59th St., Multipurpose room, between 9th and 10th avenues on Manhattan's Far West Side.

At an executive committee meeting prior to its Annual Legislative Reception this month at the Douglaston Club, the Queens Civic Congress officers voted to share a copy of its platform with the commission and recommend the many reform measures it contains. Many civic proposals address topics including entire platform sections on city budget, fiscal policy and city governance. (See [www.queensciviccongress.org/Platform/final2004Platform-forvote.pdf](http://www.queensciviccongress.org/Platform/final2004Platform-forvote.pdf).)

You may have your own ideas. You might like the civic reforms and may wish to communicate your support. Either way, contact the commission by telephone at 212-676-2060 or write a letter to New York City Charter Revision Commission, 2 Lafayette St., 14th Floor, New York, NY 10007. Though not on the Web site, the mailing did note an e-mail address: [charter2004@dcas.nyc.gov](mailto:charter2004@dcas.nyc.gov). Sign up for e-mail updates of upcoming commission meetings, as well as other commission related news at [www.nyc.gov/charter/signup](http://www.nyc.gov/charter/signup). I did.

Also demand public hearings to solicit public input for reform before the commission issues recommendations. Whether I submitted sound reforms while in government or as a civic leader, my submissions offered alternatives after previous charter commissions already determined its proposals. At its December meeting, commission Chair Ester Fuchs announced plans for one hearing in each borough beginning next March.

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