



Old Astoria Neighborhood Association (OANA)
www.OANA-NY.org

April 11, 2021

Community Boards: “Reflect the Community”

Equitable representation of New York City’s diverse communities is a goal we should all strive toward. This is especially true when it comes to our most basic levels of City government, Community Boards. Community Boards consist of 50 members that live or work in the Districts they represent, and make important decisions regarding a variety of topics from quality of life issues, land use and development, and consumer affairs. Periodically, there are attempts to realign the membership so it does reflect said community. Recently in Queens there have been great strides by our current Borough President.

However, the system is inherently defective. Because appointments are made by elected officials, there is potential for political motives, rather than proper representation to play a role.

In certain cases, Community Boards end up representing the Elected Officials and City Agencies, not the Community. There is also a tendency for these elected officials to appoint staff members of political officials and also employees of city agencies. This creates more conflicts of interest. It also serves to defuse the efforts of local activists, as they do not receive the support they require to make changes. The Community Boards tend to support the status quo, not reforms.

Even if we have a responsible elected official, we cannot be assured that the next BP or Councilperson will also act responsibly. And the only solution is to remove the power to appoint members from the elected officials and transfer it to the community members. However, if we were to elect 25 members annually for 2-year terms, it would be extremely cumbersome. It would be impossible for citizens to do the proper research on each candidate, so they would start to rely on the political parties to make these decisions (This is an issue today on how we elect Judges: Everyone relies on the Party Choice). We would end up again with the political parties and politicians controlling the elections.

We at OANA would like to offer a possible solution. The data collected from the 2020 Census shows that Queens has grown in population size by 7.8%, slightly more than the City, which still grew a whopping 7.7% since 2010. Additionally, the Census advises government on demographics and population when it comes to creating governmental districts at the City and State levels. We could easily apply the geographic subgroups of the Census to create “Neighborhood” districts where Community Board members can be directly elected by the neighbors they will represent.



Old Astoria Neighborhood Association (OANA)
www.OANA-NY.org

Districts comprised of several Census Tracts, Block Groups, or Blocks can ensure that Board members represent community organizations such as the hospitals, schools, small business associations, civic associations, etc. We also suggest that these elections be non-partisan, to try and

By only voting for 1 seat, the voting public will be able to do the research to elect those who truly represent their local interest and points of view. Because the various districts cover the entire Community Board, the local diversity and varied points of view should be assured. No community can be left out! We will not need the periodic “Fixes” we currently try and apply.

Establishment of these “Neighborhood Districts” can also be the blueprint for other initiatives. Micro sustainable energy grids, independent of major energy infrastructure (Therefore immune to cyber-attacks), come to mind. Such districts could be used to administer such micro-initiatives. They might also be helpful in assuring government programs reach those in need, with “Eyes on the Ground” that would confirm these programs are reaching intended recipients.

There would indeed be some major operational hurdles. These Districts may not be a seamless fit with the overall Community District. You would have to group them to ensure an even distribution of population. Also, frequency of elections would have to be determined, to fit with other elections. Would it be 25 members elected every year? Or all 50 every 2 years to correspond with the State Elections? (We can be assured a better turnout). And lastly, this would take a change in the City Charter.

If there is support for this concept, these operational hurdles can be overcome. We understand that many elected officials may not support this concept, because it takes power away from them and moves it directly to their constituents. But we need to let them know that this is the only solution that would assure proper representation of all members of the Community District.

And we are looking for those courageous officials that will support this initiative.

Richard Khuzami

President