



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Tony Avella

Release: Senator Avella Protests Parks Department Refusing to Acknowledge Resident Complaints

TONY AVELLA May 12, 2014

| ISSUE: **CONSTITUENTS CORNER**



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Agency refused to accept a detailed survey from constituent, forwarded by Senator Avella

(Bayside, Queens) On Friday, May 9th, State Senator Tony Avella was joined by Queens Village residents to protest Parks Department's unwillingness to accept an extensive survey, submitted by a constituent, which detailed locations of dead trees, uplifted sidewalks and stumps in need of removal throughout the area.

Ms. Janice Derr, who resides on Davenport Avenue in Queens Village, has lived in the area since 1972 and took it upon herself to walk around the neighborhood, jotting down hazardous tree, stumps, and sidewalks complaints. The entire process, she states, took her over two hours.

Ms. Derr sent the survey to Senator Avella, who in turn sent the survey to the Department of Parks and Recreation earlier this year. The Parks Department responded weeks later, stating that the constituent has to call 311 with every individual location and refused the information that the constituent provided. After following up with the Mayor's office, Senator Avella received a second response from the Parks Department, re-iterating that Ms. Derr has to report every complaint to 311.

"Janice did a wonderful thing for her own neighborhood by going out and surveying the entire community for tree related issues," stated Senator Avella. "She basically went out on her own to do the job that the City should be doing in identifying these problems. And the City had the audacity to completely dismiss all the work she had done by referring her to the unreliable 311 system. This response is disgraceful. Anyone who has ever called 311 knows that it can take up to 20 minutes to finish reporting even one complaint. Janice surveyed a total of 69 locations. Does the City expect her to stay on the phone with 311 for hours on end? The City should be ashamed by their response."

Ms. Derr stated, "I am just trying to help my neighbors and myself and to make my neighborhood look presentable. But the City seems to have the upper hand and whatever they say is the dictation of how it's going to be handled. I am so glad that Senator Avella has taken an interest in the problems here that I am sure other neighborhoods have as well. This is not just new problems, these tree issues are just getting worse and I said you know what, I'll make a survey. Out of 69, 53 were stumps that need to be removed, some that have been here for decades but the City will not take out stumps based on lack of funding and will take it out if you request a new tree. So I went around the entire neighborhood once more to let everyone know how they can expedite the stump removal in front of their home. How can you plant a million trees when you don't take care of the trees that are already here?"

Mr. Nagassar Ramgarib, former President of the Queens Village Civic Association, stated, "This is an ongoing problem in Queens Village. This is something that we have had a lot of problems with and I was also personally affected because my sidewalk was raised by tree roots. After reporting it to the City, I was told to either wait or hire a private contractor and get reimbursement through my insurance. As homeowners, we are at the mercy of the City because they are not doing their job and I believe that there is money in the budget that can be used for Parks complaints, especially for pruning and tree removals."

Senator Avella concluded, "The main reason we are here today is to say that the City's response is an insult to this community and to Janice. The agency should be able to accept complaints from an elected official's office, especially since we often work and know the issues better than 311 does! Obviously, this list is lengthy and it is a lot of complaints but to demand that every location be called into 311 is absurd. It's about time that the City recognizes – you have to take care of these trees. They are City trees on City property that homeowners are not allowed to take care of. I am calling upon Parks to immediately accept this survey, come out here, look at every single situation Janice noted and address them."

