



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael Gianaris

Senate Deputy Leader Gianaris Announces \$1 Million For Queens' First Planetarium, Located At The Variety Boys And Girls Club

MICHAEL GIANARIS September 23, 2022

| ISSUE: **ASTORIA PLANETARIUM, VARIETY BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB, ASTORIA, QUEENS, NASA**



ASTORIA, N.Y. – Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris announced \$1 million in state funding for first-ever planetarium located in the Borough of Queens. Housed at the Variety Boys and Girls Club of Queens (VBGCQ), the planetarium will serve between 8,000 and 10,000 young people every year. Deputy Leader Gianaris made the announcement today standing alongside the VBGCQ's Executive Director Costa Constantinides and NASA Headquarters program executive Amy Kaminski, Ph.D. Deputy Leader Gianaris secured \$1 million in state funding. Renderings of the project are [available here](#). Event photos are available [Here](#) and event video [Here](#).

“If we want our kids to reach for the stars, they must see them first. This project will make science more accessible to the children of our neighborhoods and open their minds to exciting new possibilities for their futures,” said **Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris**. “With this first-of-its-kind planetarium, Queens will not only be the world’s borough but the universe’s.”

Costa Constantinides, CEO of the Variety Boys and Girls Club of Queens said “We are excited to announce this allocation from Senator Gianaris to support our new planetarium right here at the Variety Boys and Girls Club of Queens. This space will allow our children to explore the galaxy right here in Queens further training the scientists of the 21st century for the challenges of the 21st century. When opened in 2026, we expect this planetarium to serve over 10,000 young people every year giving them the platform to reach for the stars. Thank you to Senator Gianaris for investing in our children and providing the funding to make this plan to shoot for the moon bringing a planetarium to Queens a reality.”

Amy Kaminiski, Ph.D., Program Executive for Prizes, Challenges, and Crowdsourcing at the Space Technology Mission Directorate at NASA Headquarters said, “A planetarium is a ticket to building curiosity and knowledge, and these are the real keys to success in STEM fields. It is so fortunate that the Queens community has this planetarium now. It will be exciting to hear about the next generation of scientists, engineers, and space explorers it may help to cultivate.”

About the Variety Boys and Girls Club of Queens Redevelopment

VBGCQ sits between the underserved communities of Queensbridge, Ravenswood, and Astoria Houses as well as the new developments going up across western Queens. Given the quality of the Club’s programs, and that most are offered free or low-cost, there is great demand with local families. In 2019, over 200 children were on the waitlist due to limited space at the Clubhouse. Capacity isn't the only concern: Since 2015, the Club has spent over \$300,000 on repairs. The antiquated boiler requires constant repairs while the water and sewage pipes, built into concrete floors, have collapsed and are prone to flooding. Electrical lines can't handle modern appliances and the building's design has created challenges keeping up with building, fire, and accessibility regulation.

The Club, currently serving 4,000 kids annually across 6 sites will expand to serve approximately 16,000 kids. A new state-of-the-art Clubhouse spanning 5 stories and approximately 116,000 square feet will also include approximately 229 100% affordable housing units with a portion of the housing units set aside for youth aging out of the foster care system. The new Clubhouse’s features will include a 1,000 seat basketball arena, a regulation size swimming pool, BioBus

Base & Research center – 1,000 square foot laboratory and research facility as a loading dock for the BioBus, Arts studios for visual arts, music, dance, audio production, and career and technical training, a Tech Center + Makerspace for robotics, research, and STEM training, the new planetarium with 65 seats for STEM, Earth and planetary programs, dozens of fully-equipped education rooms, a Community Theatre space with 175 seats, a teaching kitchen, rooftop with solar panels, a garden, greenhouse, STEAM project area, and play areas