

# *The Culver El Project: A Lesson in Perseverance* **Senator Simcha Felder**

**(2005) Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg** - "Today the city is committing land, a scarce and valuable resource in Borough Park, towards two critical community needs. Through the sale of land... and the rezoning of the Culver El, we will create much needed housing in a community where opportunities for residential development are restricted....To complement this effort we will also be selling an underutilized lot to Hatzolah of Boro Park....

I thank Councilmember Simcha Felder for working closely with the administration

**Senator Felder:** "The date above is not a typo. Back then, the lack of affordable housing was already a problem. People were feeling the crunch; young couples and families were moving out of the neighborhood, not because they wanted to, they simply had no choice.

"I noticed that a sizeable tract of land on 37th Street between 12th and 14th Avenues where the City tore down the freight rail tracks at the Culver El presented prime real estate, but had become little more than a litter-strewn eyesore. My office did some investigating and found precedents for residential development in the airspace above the tracks. We knew it would be a monumental project- and a formidable undertaking- but considering the growing needs of the community, we knew we had to get the ball rolling. The wheels of government turn slowly, so in my office we like to remind each other, 'You are not expected to complete the task, but neither are you free to avoid it.'

"In NYC, land is a scarce resource and the Culver El space was in high demand. In 2002, as a NYC Councilman, I began discussions with Mayor Michael Bloomberg to ensure that all of the Culver El land

would fill community needs. Families needed affordable housing, Hatzalah of Boro Park needed a garage, and Yeshivas were busting at the seams for space to expand. The mayor told me, 'It will have to be your number one priority to get this done.'

"For the next few years, I lived and breathed that project. It was more than a priority; it was a three-headed monster. I was on call around the clock to problem solve, mediate or just keep pushing. You cannot imagine the time, effort and aggravation involved in getting that many government agencies to agree on a proposal and keep working to make it happen.

"This was a great lesson in perseverance! So many times, it seemed like we hit a brick wall. There were times I was ready to give up. We persisted, we stuck with it and with G-d's help, we got it done!

"What kept me going was the comforting hope that one day many young families would be able to afford housing right here in their neighborhood, close to their families and everything they know. Now, 20 years later, with G-d's help, I'm enjoying the fruits of my labor."

