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COUNCIL VOTES ON GROUNDBREAKING CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

Also votes to simplify and modernize City's building code for the first time since 1968

City Hall, June 27, 2007 – City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn and members of the City Council will vote today on landmark legislation to reform and strengthen New York City's campaign finance system. The Council will also vote to simplify and modernize the City's 39 year old building code for the 21st century. Additionally, to monitor street furniture and ease restrictions on small businesses, the Council will vote to provide the Department of Sanitation with an enforcement mechanism to remove publicly accessible clothing collection bins and to exempt businesses with fewer than three billiards tables from billiard room licensing requirements.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

The Council will vote on groundbreaking campaign finance legislation introduced earlier this month. The bill offers sweeping reforms of the city's campaign finance system, including extending the corporate contribution ban to cover partnerships, LLCs and other businesses, and limiting contributions of individuals who do business with the City. It also provides an incentive for smaller contributions by lowering the public-matching fund level to contributions under \$175.

The legislation further encourages candidate participation by establishing firm audit deadlines and standards, creating a due process procedure for board hearings, and by clarifying rules around spending. Additionally, there are provisions to reduce waste in public funds in non-competitive elections.

"Today, by passing this historic campaign finance law, we are creating the strongest campaign finance system in the nation," said **Speaker Quinn**. "The more we eliminate the perception of undue influence, the more we encourage people to participate in the democratic process. I want to thank my colleagues in the Council, especially Simcha Felder, for all their hard work, and the Administration for making this critical reform a priority."

"This is the people's Campaign Finance bill," said **Governmental Operations Committee Chair Simcha Felder**. "Today it comes one key step closer to becoming a law. I'm proud to stand with my colleagues and Speaker Quinn in passing this legislation."

Efforts to end the perception of undue influence include capping contribution limits for individuals who do business with the city, including contract holders and bidders, land use applicants, economic development recipients, and lobbyists, to \$250, \$320 and \$400 for Council, borough-wide and citywide races, respectively. The City would be required to create databases of individuals in the capped categories, which CFB will administer. The caps will go into effect once each database is available.

The bill also widens the existing ban on business donations by eliminating campaign contributions from LLCs, LLPs. The legislation offers a list of how privately raised funds can be used and how they cannot, an issue the current law is silent about. To address the ongoing concern of public funds going to non-competitive races, the legislation establishes clear and strong criteria for what qualifies as a competitive race.

This effort will encourage candidate participation in the public finance system and provide clarity in the law by:

- Establishing basic “due process” standards for CFB hearings;
- Imposing audit time limits of 8 months for draft audits and 14 months for final audits for Council and borough-wide races, and 10 months and 16 months for citywide races. In cases of fraud or criminality, the Board would be permitted to extend these deadlines;
- Allowing candidates to confirm certainty in the written advice offered by candidate service liaisons; and
- Establishing candidate personal liability for repayment of misspent public funds when there is no credible documentation and lack of adequate controls to track spending.

MODERNIZED BUILDING CODES

For the first time since 1968, the New York City building code will undergo a comprehensive overhaul, bringing the statutes for construction into the 21st Century. The new codes, which will go into effect July 1, 2008, will improve building and construction safety, lower the cost of development and open up new and innovative measures for construction.

“Having safe homes and work places is critical,” said **Speaker Quinn**. “It’s long past time the city improved its Building Code. This new legislation offers enhanced safety regulations for new residences and for the people who work on construction job sites around the city. It also calls for more sustainable development and promises to be a valuable tool in the greening of our city. Mayor Bloomberg and his Administration, Housing and Buildings Chair Erik Martin Dilan and the rest of my Council Colleagues should be proud of accomplishing something that our government has not addressed for nearly 40 years.”

“With the adoption of this bill, we are literally putting the New York City Build Code into the 21st Century,” said **Housing and Buildings Chair, Erik Martin Dilan**. “For 40 years, developers and contractors have been using these outdated codes. This bill finds the perfect balance in mandating safer and more sustainable buildings, while protecting the construction workers who risk their lives everyday on the job. It also takes advantage of the technological advances by mandating the use of better, and often cheaper, materials.”

The new safety code covers both residential and commercial properties. Some of the featured improvements require:

- Sprinkler systems to be installed in new residential buildings with 3 or more units and in 1 and 2 family homes that are over 3 stories;
- Better-equipped and better-placed smoke detectors in new buildings;
- Improved safety standards for high-rise residential buildings;
- Student dorms to be classified similar to hotels to better protect occupants with fire protection features, including sprinklers and fire alarm systems; and

Additionally, the new code has measures in place to lower the cost of development, by offering contractors more cost effective alternatives, more flexible parameters and elimination of redundancies.

To increase sustainability, the city, under the authority of the Department of Buildings, will offer rebates on permit fees if a building is in compliance with the United States Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system. Rebates would also be provided for other sustainability measures, including the use of:

- Renewable energy;

- Energy use reduction;
- Water conservation systems;
- Redevelopment, remediation and reuse of contaminated properties known as brownfields;
- Recycling construction and demolition waste; and
- Bicycle storage facilities.

Under this new proposal, the Council would be able to review the new codes every three years, to see which aspects are working and which measures need to be improved.

CLOTHING BIN REGULATIONS

To improve quality of life on city streets, the Council will vote to provide the Department of Sanitation with an enforcement mechanism to remove publicly accessible clothing collection containers illegally placed on public and private properties. Currently, there are several companies that use clothing drop-off bins to collect clothes to give away, to sell to raise money for charities, or to sell for profit. This legislation would prohibit collection bins from being placed on public property and would require companies to obtain permission from private property owners. Additionally, companies using collection bins will also be required to display contact information on the exterior of the containers. Businesses in violation of these regulations would have their containers removed by the Department of Sanitation.

“I am very pleased that this piece of legislation will be voted on in today’s full Council meeting,” said **Sanitation Committee Chair Michael McMahon**. “This bill will give the City the authority to remove illegally placed collection bins that have become an eyesore and a nuisance in communities across New York.”

POOL TABLE LICENSING

To ease restrictions on small businesses, the Council will vote to amend the Administrative Code to exempt businesses with fewer than three pool tables from billiard room licensing requirements. Currently, the law specifies no minimum number of pool tables for the licensing requirement. When the billiard room licensing law was first implemented, a pool or billiard room was simply defined as any room in which billiards are played or which includes billiard tables.

“Billiards is a small but vital part of the city’s tourism engine. Restaurants and other businesses that want to offer billiard play as a complimentary feature shouldn’t be held to the same licensing standards as pool halls,” said **Consumer Affairs Committee Chair Leroy Comrie**. “This legislation is simply making a long overdue correction in the law, as it relates to billiard room licensing. I believe it is the job of government to help streamline the process for our City’s small businesses to flourish and this bill does that.”

BEACON HIGH SCHOOL

Beacon High School, an 850 seat high performing learning institution in Manhattan, is facing the end of its lease in 2010. Today, the Council is authorizing the purchase of the existing site, ending any further threat of losing this facility.

“I am thrilled that the Department of Education is moving to purchase the building currently under lease to the Beacon School,” said **Council member Gail Brewer**. “Beacon is one of our city’s finest public high schools, and I have argued for years that it deserves and needs a permanent home. I’m glad that the Department of Education has come to the same conclusion, and I fully support their decision to acquire the building by whatever means are necessary.”

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