

INTRO

Good afternoon, da jia hao, annyeonghaseyo!

My name is Sandra Ung, and I have the distinct honor of representing this community in the City Council for a second term!

THANKS

Let me start by thanking Glow Community Center for again graciously hosting this event for the second year, as well as the Korean Traditional Music and Dance Center and the New York Guqin Center for their beautiful performances. These artists are proof that Flushing is quickly becoming one of the art and cultural centers of New York!

SECOND YEAR IN OFFICE

During the second year of my first term, I continued to hear from thousands of constituents who came to us with their concerns and issues, both big and small.

We assisted people on cases as substantial as helping senior citizens secure property tax exemptions to something as small, but no less important, as getting a trash can on a busy street corner.

During year two, I also expanded the services and resources we provide to residents of District 20.

I continued to fund pro-bono legal services, including attorneys from CUNY Law School, New York Legal Assistance Group, and Queens Legal Services. For the second year in a row, legal experts from CUNY Citizenship Now were in my office every Wednesday assisting people with their immigration and citizenship issues.

I allocated funding to Quincy Asian Resources, Inc., who have representatives in my office twice a month helping people apply for critical government assistance programs. From SNAP benefits to free or low-cost internet, hundreds of people are now getting the benefits and resources they not only need, but are entitled to.

And we brought city government to Flushing. The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs helped people renew or apply for a coveted IDNYC card. When I hosted the popular IDNYC van right here outside Glow last spring, over 100 people applied for and received a new card.

Representatives from Housing Preservation and Development were in my office for three months straight advising people on housing issues or helping them apply for affordable housing.

The Department of Buildings, Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings, and Department of Small Business Services all brought their agency's services directly to the people of District 20 this past year.

Hard-working entrepreneurs and business owners are the backbone of our local economy, and supporting them has been a priority of mine since taking office. I am proud of my partnership with the Queens Chamber of Commerce, which gives our small business owners access to a specialist from the Small Business Resource Network in my office twice a month.

Small businesses have an invaluable opportunity to meet one-on-one and get individualized advice on everything from accessing financing and loans to growing their online presence.

More importantly, we delivered all of these services in multiple languages, including Mandarin, Korean, Spanish and Bengali to better serve our immigrant community.

In May, I invited the Department of Citywide Administrative Services to host a Hiring Hall at Tangram Mall, where they interviewed and even hired local residents on the spot to fill vacancies for quality, well-paying city jobs. At the time, the Flushing event attracted more job seekers than any previous Hiring Hall hosted by the city.

I believe that expanding access to local government goes hand-in-hand with inspiring civic participation in our immigrant communities.

There is a wealth of untapped talent in our immigrant communities. New York City thrives on its diversity, and an immigrant's background brings a wealth of perspectives that can enhance the services we provide to our city's residents. Moreover, we need more bilingual and culturally competent people in city government fostering communication and understanding across different communities.

In an immigrant community like ours, people too often neglect regular medical checkups, so I partnered with several local organizations to provide free health services throughout the year.

We hosted free prostate screenings, devoted an entire day in Kissena Park to wellness, invited the Mammogram Bus to Flushing to provide free breast cancer screenings, and distributed free flu and Covid vaccines in my district office.

And I met with many of you out in the community where you work and live.

At events throughout the year, we distributed 200 rain barrels, gave away hundreds of pounds of city compost, and provided rain barriers to help homeowners in flood-prone areas. We welcomed thousands of you to the always-popular Fall Festival, and we enjoyed movies and live music together in our parks.

In November, we worked with local sponsors to distribute hundreds of turkeys to people and families in need.

2023 was an amazing year, and I am looking forward to what 2024 brings.

But before we look ahead, let's look back at some of the challenges I outlined in my first State of the District speech and how we tried to meet them head on.

WATER BREAK

SIDEWALK CONGESTION

Since taking office two years ago, I have spoken with many of you regarding a long-running issue in our district – sidewalk congestion.

Individuals who use wheelchairs, elderly residents with walkers, and parents with strollers have all approached me to express their frustration.

When I first took office, street vendor enforcement was the responsibility of the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, which was given the authority through what I believe was an ill-fated decision by then-Mayor Bill de Blasio.

DCWP was woefully understaffed and ill-equipped to perform this important role, so after months of advocacy on the part of myself and my staff and discussions with the current administration, enforcement was transferred from DCWP to the Department of Sanitation, which has a dedicated staff of uniformed officers who have years of experience enforcing and keeping our streets clean.

At a recent City Council hearing, I was pleased to learn from the commissioner of DSNY that every borough now has a dedicated team of agents focused solely on enforcing street vending rules and regulations.

However, I still believe the men and women of the Police Department have an important role to play. I continue to urge the NYPD to work with DSNY to address this issue, and I look forward to working with the new commanding officer of the 109th Precinct to continue the progress we have already made.

And there has been real progress. When I took office, there were hundreds of vendors on Main Street, and thanks to increased enforcement, that number has been brought down considerably.

While there is still work to do, I believe that we have laid the groundwork toward a lasting solution to this issue.

I have also worked closely with DSNY to address store and business owners in downtown Flushing who use our public sidewalks to display their merchandise, impeding the safe and

seamless flow of pedestrians. The work of DSNY inspectors has resulted in tens of thousands of dollars in fines and, in some cases, the confiscation of goods.

I have also introduced a bill that would dramatically increase fines for littering or obstructing sidewalks by commercial businesses. In the coming session, I hope to bring it before the full City Council for vote and finally hold bad actors accountable for clogging our sidewalks.

Our sidewalks are vital arteries that serve as conduits for community interaction, and they should be navigable by everyone.

PUBLIC SAFETY

At this time last year, Flushing was in the midst of a public safety crisis, with crimes increasing at one of the highest rates in New York City. I argued that the main factor driving this surge in crime was a shortage of police officers at the 109th Precinct.

The same week I delivered my first State of the District address, I wrote a letter to Mayor Eric Adams requesting more officers and resources for the 109th Precinct. He listened, and over the past year we have received approximately 50 new officers, with many of them assigned to foot patrols in downtown Flushing.

It has paid off, as over the past year, we have seen a steady decrease in crime. And while it is the responsibility of police officers to keep us safe, we in the city government can always do more to provide the tools and resources they need to do this critical work.

In the last budget, I secured \$312,000 to purchase new Argus cameras that will be deployed throughout the 109th Precinct to deter crime and help detectives solve them when they do occur.

Again, I look forward to working with the new commanding officer of the 109th Precinct, Deputy Inspector Kevin Coleman, over the coming year to build on the gains we have made in addressing crime in our neighborhoods.

KISSENA PARK FLOODING

Another challenge facing our community is the persistent flooding in the neighborhoods around Kissena Park.

Just before I was elected to office in 2021, severe flooding around Kissena Park not only caused extensive property damage, it tragically took the lives of a family of three who were unable to escape as the water rushed into their basement apartment on Peck Avenue.

Since then, we have been reminded on several occasions of the devastating impacts that extreme weather events caused by climate change can have on our community as they become more and more frequent.

I have been working with the Department of Environmental Protection to address the chronic flooding with both short- and long-term solutions.

I am happy to say that Kissena Park was selected to receive several cloudburst management projects aimed at managing stormwater during periods of intense rain.

These projects will include two large rain gardens, one of which is under construction at Booth Memorial Avenue and Kissena Boulevard, and another that will be built near Queens Botanical Garden,

Other flood-management initiatives will include porous concrete to absorb stormwater, underground retention to store water until it can be safely discharged into the sewer system, and other forms of groundbreaking technology to capture stormwater.

These short-term projects will protect residents in the near future as we continue to work toward long-term solutions that will result in a more sustainable and resilient community.

While these projects will help, we also have to be realistic that some neighborhoods and homes will always be susceptible to flooding.

In May, I sent a letter to Mayor Eric Adams urging him to launch a government program to purchase the homes of owners who are interested in relocating from flood-prone areas like Peck Avenue. The city has since allocated \$1 million in federal Ida funding to lay the groundwork for a planned launch of just such a program in 2025.

But I know that residents need to hear directly from the city on what steps are being taken to protect them and their homes. I have been in talks with DEP to schedule a second town hall in the coming months so they can share updates on their plans and progress. I hope to be able to share details in the new year.

WATER BREAK

BUDGET

One question I often get asked is “What is the biggest responsibility of a City Councilmember?”

That’s a hard question to answer. Councilmembers play a number of roles in our community, but one of the areas where we have the most influence is in passing a city budget.

I am extremely proud to announce that Speaker Adrienne Adams named me to the City Council’s Budget Negotiating Team last week.

The Budget Negotiating Team is made up of a few Councilmembers who negotiate the City's \$110 billion budget with the Mayor.

We all know the city is currently dealing with a difficult fiscal situation. But we still need the city to deliver for our residents. As a member of the BNT, I will be fighting for us.

However, the local projects matter just as much. I am proud that during my first two years in office I have been able to secure over \$30 million for capital improvements to our schools, expansion of our open spaces, and vital services the people of District 20 rely on.

PARKS

During the pandemic, we learned how vital our open spaces are to both our physical and mental health.

In the last budget cycle, I was able to secure \$6 million to fund the completion of two more segments of the Eastern Queens Greenway, which when fully complete will seamlessly connect all of the great parks we have in northeast Queens, from Flushing Meadows to Alley Pond.

This is in addition to the \$6.25 million I allocated to the project during my first year in office, which means nearly the entire stretch of the greenway that runs through our district is fully funded.

In our neighborhoods, we recently reopened a reconstructed Maple Playground. I look forward to welcoming the public back to a reimagined Bland Playground sometime in the coming year, and I am excited for the Parks Department to begin the design phase for a new Weeping Beech Playground.

EDUCATION

At the start of the school year, I made an effort to visit as many of the schools in my district as possible and meet with the principals, staff, teachers, and students. Impressed by their dedication to delivering a quality education to our children, it is no accident the schools in our district are some of the most sought-after in the city.

This year our district had two National Blue Ribbon Schools in PS 242 and PS 244. In 2023, there were only 335 schools nationwide that earned this distinction, so to have two in District 20 is an amazing accomplishment.

Speaking of PS 244, I worked with Principal Robert Groff and his team in conjunction with the Asian American Education Project to bring an AAPI history curriculum to the school to teach students about the important contributions Asian Americans have made to this country.

Last February, I worked with NYC Kids RISE and Flushing Bank to provide a \$5,000 contribution to the Community Scholarship Accounts for first and second graders at my former grade school, PS 22. I hope to be able to make a similar announcement at another school in Flushing in the coming months.

In August and again in October, I partnered with School District 25 to distribute thousands of books to school children at two incredibly popular events in Kissena Park.

And I am excited to announce that District 20 is getting a new school.

Just last month, the City Council gave the final approval for the School Construction Authority to acquire land and build a new 696-seat elementary school on 45th Avenue near Kissena Park. I look forward to its opening in September of 2027.

Ensuring that our schools have the resources they need to succeed is paramount, and I am proud to have been able to fund nearly every principal's top priority for the last two years. This year, I was able to secure \$4.5 million dollars for our schools, including nearly \$1.5 million dollars for auditorium upgrades at PS 24, JHS 189, and PS 214, \$680,000 dollars for technology upgrades at six elementary schools, and \$500,000 dollars for much needed security cameras at PS 20.

SANITATION

Flushing is the busiest bus-to-train transfer point in the entire city. Main Street and Roosevelt Avenue is the third busiest intersection in New York behind Time Square and Union Square. In 2023, Flushing Main Street had the most MetroCard swipes of any station in the entire subway system.

The tens of thousands of people passing through Flushing every day makes for vibrant streets, but it also makes keeping those streets clean an immense challenge. Securing money in the budget for those services is paramount.

I was able to secure \$146,000 for the Flushing BID to provide additional cleaning services and graffiti removal, and another \$134,000 for the Department of Sanitation to provide mobile litter patrols to target illegal dumping across the district.

INITIATIVE FUNDING

Finally, working with the speaker's office, I was able to secure over \$2.2 million dollars to provide resources and programming for the people of District 20. That includes \$150,000 dollars for youth programs, \$150,000 dollars to support our community's older adults, \$340,000 dollars for after-school programs, and \$133,000 to support survivors of domestic violence.

WATER BREAK

LEGISLATION

However, bringing resources back to the district is just one of my responsibilities as your City Council representative.

During my first year in office, I focused on passing bills to make city government more accessible to our largely immigrant communities by requiring the city to provide services and information in more of the languages spoken by everyday New Yorkers.

That priority was informed by my own experiences growing up as the daughter of two Asian parents with limited English proficiency. Even as a child, it fell to me to serve as their interpreter as they communicated with government agencies or even their doctor.

My focus on expanding language access continued into my second year in office. I passed a bill to redesign the ballot for elections that use ranked-choice voting to make it easier for voters with limited English proficiency to understand.

I also passed a bill that would require the city to translate materials and decisions on summons, as well as report on the languages spoken by inspectors, to ensure that our hardworking, immigrant small business owners understand their rights and responsibilities.

I also introduced a bill that would require the city to translate the 311 mobile app into the designated citywide languages, and a resolution calling on the city to translate bus and subway announcements into the four most commonly spoken languages in New York City.

This year, I also turned my attention to the quality-of-life issues affecting our communities. I introduced requiring the Department of Transportation to inspect a site for safety concerns when a business applies for or renews a stoop line stand. After hearing from many constituents, I introduced a bill to ban char broilers on mobile food vending carts.

Too many residents are forced to live with the smoke and harmful pollutants created by these char broilers infiltrating their homes. Residents, including vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly, deserve to live in an environment free from unnecessary health risks.

I introduced a bill that would prohibit smoking on sidewalks directly adjacent to public parks after I heard from parents about people smoking marijuana next to playgrounds filled with young children.

We all see the buses parked on streets throughout downtown as drivers take breaks or change shifts before they resume their routes. We are lucky to have a robust set of transit options in Flushing, but that also comes with its own set of issues, like the traffic congestion caused in part by these buses.

I passed legislation requiring the city to create a task force to find a suitable location for a bus transit center in Flushing. It will be a place where buses can park, riders can wait for a bus protected from the elements, and drivers can take their breaks in dignity.

This is an idea that has been around since the 1960s, the time has come to make it a reality.

And this year I passed a resolution calling on the federal government to finally recognize the important contributions of Asian Americans to the United States by finally making Lunar New Year a federal holiday.

Both New York City and New York State have taken this historic step to recognize the most important holiday on the calendar for the Asian community, but only federal recognition will ensure it is treated with the same importance as other major holidays throughout the year.

We have accomplished a lot over the past two years, but I know there is still much to do.

I will be closely monitoring an e-scooter sharing program the Department of Transportation plans to bring to Flushing this year. We are working to alleviate congestion, and I don't believe that adding hundreds of e-scooters to our streets and parked in corrals on our sidewalks will help us accomplish that goal.

People want to live in clean and graffiti-free neighborhoods, and dirty streets and sidewalks are some of the most frequent complaints I get in my office. Ensuring the cleanliness of our community will continue to be a top priority, as will continue to address the unlicensed vending in downtown Flushing.

We are going to continue to drive down crime, and create communities where people feel safe on the street and our small businesses can grow and thrive.

And I will continue to fight for more affordable housing, especially for our seniors, so they can remain in our community and age in place with dignity.

WATER BREAK

2024

Last week, the City Council started a new session with new assignments for Councilmembers. In addition to being named chair of the Committee on Standards and Ethics, I am honored to be one of eight Councilmembers and the only Asian American who will be joining Speaker Adrienne Adams' Leadership Team.

I was also appointed to the Budget Negotiation Team, which works with the Mayor's Office to make sure the City Council's priorities are part of the city's \$109 billion dollar budget before it is passed.

Passing a fiscally responsible budget that also delivers essential services that everyday New Yorkers rely on is one of the most important and challenging roles the City Council plays, and I am excited to be an integral part of that process.

It is important that we have a voice at the table when important decisions are being made that will directly affect our community. I look forward to being that voice and a bridge between our immigrant communities and city government.

As a member of the Budget Negotiation Team, I will fight to ensure that agencies have the resources they need to do their jobs. It's not enough to pass a law requiring an agency to do something, we need to fund it so they can allocate the necessary resources. One example is Sanitation, which formed its vendor enforcement unit. But without the resources to assign officers, the unit will be unable to address the proliferation of unlicensed vending on our public sidewalks.

Moreover, the Budget Negotiating Team is charged with determining the allocation of the City Council's many initiatives. These initiatives fund nonprofits that provide critical services to some of our most disadvantaged communities. As part of the Budget Negotiation Team, I will fight to ensure that our nonprofit organizations and other community groups aren't overlooked in the city's budget.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who went to the polls in November and voted to give me a second term in office. As I stand before you, I am reminded of the dreams my parents had for my brother and I when they brought us to this country as young kids fleeing genocide in Cambodia.

They were in search of a better future, and through their hard work and determination, I believe they accomplished that.

In this new term, I will continue to champion policies that break down barriers, create pathways to success, and foster an inclusive environment where hard work is met with genuine opportunity.

As I look out into the crowd, I see so many dedicated and committed community leaders, and I know that together we can meet any challenges that come before us. I am excited about the work ahead and the positive impact we can create together.

I promise you that over the next two years I will work to justify the continued trust that you have placed in me to be your representative in the New York City Council.

Thank you and a very Happy Lunar New Year to everyone.

