



June 18, 2017

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you can enjoy time with family on this Father's Day. This week's letter discusses the City Budget, the future of Greater Kennedy Plaza and good government reforms.

Last Monday, members of the public testified about the City budget presented by the administration. Minutes later, the Finance Committee made changes that none of the public previously knew about. It is too bad that the order of these two events could not have been reversed, so that the public could comment on the actual budget that the City Council voted on. Thankfully, the changes were relatively modest (creating new programs for traffic calming and relief for late tax payments); however, the pattern of keeping the budget under wraps until the last minute remains a chronic source of public distrust. The City Council gave initial approval of the City budget at its meeting last Thursday, June 15 and will consider second passage at a special meeting on Monday, June 19.

At last Thursday's meeting, the City Council also voted to override the Mayor's veto of an ordinance creating a no-smoking zone in a portion of the City's downtown. The City Council majority explained their vote in terms of promoting public health, while the Mayor's veto message emphasized the harshness of the ban on the people who use the area. I saw problems with both sides, and worked to develop a compromise. First, I introduced alternative legislation that, if passed, will cause the smoking ban to be temporary, expiring on October 1, 2017. Second, I worked with Joseph Paolino, Jr., the Chair of the Downtown Improvement District, to send a [Letter](#) to the Mayor and the City Council stating his intention to develop a partnership with the City to improve and maintain the Greater Kennedy Plaza area along the lines of New York City's [Bryant Park](#). Bryant Park is a publicly owned, inclusive public space managed by a nonprofit corporation supported with voluntary contributions from local businesses. It is a tourist magnet that welcomes the entire public every day, staging numerous public events without charging any admission fee while serving as a jewel of that city's park system. In this way, I am hopeful that years from now the temporary smoking ban will prove to be a transitional part of a the transformation of the Kennedy Plaza area, reviving the neighborhood in the way that Bryan Park has changed the face of that part of New York City over the past three decades.

Tomorrow (Monday, June 19) the City Council will meet to vote on second passage to the budget, after which the Rules Committee will consider a proposal I submitted on matters referred to committee. The proposal would allow committees six months to review legislation, but return the ordinance to the City Council for a vote if the committee fails to act within that time. The purpose of committees is to review and improve legislation, not to bury it, but unfortunately, the current rules permit exactly that to happen. For this reason, 102 constituents signed a petition to require a public hearing on resolutions I introduced to require the City Council to post the campaign finance statements and Ethics Commission annual reports of Council members on its website. I am mystified that this legislation has been buried, but I need your help to attend the public hearing to tell my colleagues you support open government. It will take place on **Tuesday, June 27 at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall (Third Floor)**. Please mark your calendars and try to come. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,