

Stated Meeting: Clerk Battle and Food Allergies

by Courtney Gross

Friday, February 27, 2009 12:00 AM

In a borough against borough battle over a well-paid political patronage position at City Hall Thursday, Queens won when the City Council approved the appointment of a Woodside resident to the post of [city clerk](#) .

Freshly minted clerk Michael McSweeney had been deputy clerk since 2004 and was acting clerk since the summer.

In addition, the council also approved several bills requiring allergy warnings be posted in restaurants' kitchens, street fair generators use ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel and developers receive the proper permits for any construction near city wetlands.

A Political Post

For [hours Thursday](#) afternoon, 48 council members milled about the corridors of City Hall waiting for a 1:30 meeting to start. The delay: Ruminations and debate over the [political ramifications](#) of the city clerk appointment, all of which occurred behind closed doors.

The council finally voted at around 5 p.m., elevating McSweeney to the position by a vote of 32 to 16. Fifteen of the opposing votes were from Brooklyn council members. Councilmember Helen Foster of the Bronx also opposed the appointment.

Charged with overseeing the city's marriage bureau, the registration of lobbyists and city records, the city clerk is an oft-thought political position usually awarded to a borough of the City Council speaker's choice with the blessing of county party leaders.

This time the speaker chose Queens.

McSweeney replaced [Hector Diaz](#) , who was only appointed a year ago and stepped down for a job at a nonprofit. Diaz was from the Bronx.

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Typically, the position, which comes with a \$185,700 salary, rotates from borough to borough, keeping political leaders happy. This time around, Brooklyn was unsatisfied.

Those that dissented all agreed their opposition had nothing to do with the qualifications of McSweeney. It had to do with process mostly, and, in one case, that the position did not go to a minority. McSweeney is white.

"This is about politics and process," said Councilmember Lewis Fidler, who lamented the fact that the vote was not publicly advertised. Fidler said the vote should have been delayed to allow for public input.

Quinn said she chose to hold the vote Thursday so they could fill the position sooner rather than later with a well-qualified, competent candidate.

Allergy Warnings

There are about 300,000 New Yorkers with food allergies and about 20,000 restaurants. To ensure New Yorkers are not put at risk, the City Council approved legislation to require restaurants display posters in their kitchens with information on food allergies.

The bill ([Intro 818](#)), sponsored by Councilmember Jessica Lappin, was approved by a vote of 46 to 2. Council members Jimmy Oddo and Vincent Ignizio, both Republicans from Staten Island, voted against the bill.

Eight foods, milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat and soybeans, cover 90 percent of food allergies. According to a study from Mount Sinai School of Medicine, Lappin said, 42 percent of restaurant workers do not receive food allergy training.

"You go out to dinner and you order a cup of coffee. You ask for decaf. They give you regular, and at 2 in the morning, you're up cursing the restaurant," said Lappin. "A similar mistake like that for someone who has a food allergy could literally prove fatal."

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Any restaurant that does not post allergy information in their kitchens would get a \$100 fine. The posters will be in Chinese, English, Korean, Russian and Spanish.

Clean Fuel for Street Fairs

The hum of a generator powering a food cart at a summer street fair or one lighting a trailer on a street movie set is commonplace on the streets of New York.

Now, the City Council wants to regulate how clean that power is.

A bill ([Intro 684](#)) approved unanimously by the City Council will require any diesel-fueled generator operating under a permit issued by the city only use ultra-low sulfur diesel fuel or an alternative fuel.

Citywide, there are 25,000 camera shooting days, according to the council, and 330 street fairs. Councilmember Alan Gerson, the bill's lead sponsor, said the law will reduce sulfur output by 90 percent.

Councilmember Jim Gennaro, the chair of the council's Environmental Protection Committee, said the legislation was part of the city's "war on sulfur."

Protection Wetlands

Gennaro said there are 15 square miles of wetlands in New York City, and the City Council wants to do a better job at protecting them.

Under legislation ([Intro 919](#)) approved unanimously by the council, the Department of Buildings would require any wetlands permit issued by the state Department of Environmental Conservation or the federal government be submitted to the city before development could occur in the five boroughs. The bill was sponsored by Councilmember Al Vann.

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The law will help the city better coordinate with state officials who issue these types of permits, city officials said.