

## Debating Who Can Best Preserve Northeast Queens

by Cindy Gorenstein

Monday, August 24, 2009 12:00 AM

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Photo (cc) [Vidiot](#) An aerial view of College Point and Shea Stadium



District 19 in northeast Queens lies within the city limits, but parts of it feels suburban with tree-lined streets and single-family homes. Now those streets are changing, altered by the mushrooming of McMansions and an increase in multifamily homes.



[Tony Avella](#)

For eight years, the 19th district has been represented by [Tony Avella](#), a man whose tenure on the City Council and current run for mayor have been marked by critiques of development. And development issues also have dominated the race to succeed him.

The seven candidates base their platforms on preserving the character of the district's tree lined streets.



Paul Vallone

Paul Vallone, son of the former City Council speaker and brother of Councilmember [Peter Vallone](#),

and

[Jerry Iannece](#)

, lawyer and chairman of Community Board 11, face

[Kevin Kim](#)

, who works for a U.S. Rep.

[Gary Ackerman](#)

, but is a first time candidate himself;

[Steve Behar](#)

, a lawyer who worked for the Securities and Exchange Commission during the Clinton administration;

[Debra Markell](#)

, district manager of Community Board 2 and

[Thomas Cooke](#)

, who was paralyzed in an accident when he was 19 and now is active in and well as disability

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rights organizations, also are running in the Sept. 15 Democratic primary.

Whoever wins that contest will square off against Republican hopeful [Dan Halloran](#) in the Nov. 3 general election. Although Republicans generally face long odds in City Council elections, this district was represented by the GOP's Mike Abel for a number of years. Hallorn is also running as a Libertarian.

### Zoning for Less

The changes in the 19th are most apparent in the Auburndale, Broadway-Flushing and College Point sections of the district. Residents charge that the McMansions and multifamily homes are out of place.



Steve Behar

Behar is a lawyer with his own practice, recalls riding his bicycle in Bayside as a child. Today, he said, "It still looks the same. That's what we're fighting for."

To address this, Vallone, Iannece, Behar and Kim advocate rezoning the area to allow less development, a process known as downzoning. However, Vallone warns it can be difficult to get an area downzoned. He thinks his endorsements from Mayor Michael Bloomberg, City Councilmember and city comptroller candidate Melinda Katz and others indicate he has the political know-how to move his initiatives forward. Vallone has experience in city government as an attorney on the New York Board of Corrections writing laws setting minimum standards for detainees and inmates.



Jerry Iannece

Iannece, who ran for City Council twice before, dates his fight against overdevelopment back to 2004 when Bayside residents sought downzoning. In 2006, as chair of Community Board 11, he supported legislation downzoning the district's easternmost neighborhoods, Douglaston and Little Neck.

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Kim believes that the economic downturn has put the brakes on development that was out of control. He thinks the city should take advantage of this and downzone neighborhoods before developers return. Kim also wants the Department of Buildings to do a better job of enforcing zoning restrictions.

Cooke wants the Department of Buildings to hire more inspectors and to charge hefty fines to deter zoning violations. With these fines, he said, the plan would pay for itself, bringing in money to pay for the added inspectors.



Tom Cooke

Overdevelopment "creates increased density on our community," said Cooke. "More people mean more noise, more traffic, more pollution. The problem with rezoning is that it's only as good as the enforcement."

Behar's focus is on faster enactment of downzoning legislation. As things stand now, he said, developers can often make major changes to neighborhoods before zoning restrictions go through.

### Paths to Protection

Several of the candidates support using landmarks law to preserve neighborhood character. Vallone said he has discussed the Broadway-Flushing Homeowners Association's application for landmark status with Bloomberg. Kim and Behar also support making the area a landmarks district.

Residents have been trying to get landmarks protection for their neighborhood of single family homes built in the early 20th century. The city has [rebuffed](#) their efforts. In the meantime, some of the older homes have been razed and replaced by McMansions which residents disparage as being in the "Home Depot Moderne" style.



Kevin Kim

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Other proposals on development abound. In addition to downzoning, Kim wants to address problems by improving infrastructure in areas already burdened by overdevelopment. In addressing the specific needs of communities most affected by overdevelopment, Kim and Behar call for improving the infrastructure in College Point, where development has strained the area's roads and sewer system.

Markell would work with the city agencies that regulate construction permits, project planning and landmarks. For example, the Department of Buildings would ensure that developers adhere to zoning restrictions while the Department of City Planning would be expected to stop projects that do not benefit the community. As the only candidate with full-time experience in city government, Markell, also the only woman in the race, said she is proficient in getting results from city agencies.

On his web site, Iannece cites concern about McMansions but also about "illegal occupations" -- the use of single-family homes as multi family dwellings -- and "the seemingly unrestricted invasion of our neighborhoods by community facilities, which keep saturating our communities." In particular he advocates a public hearing and review process to consider any proposed community facilities.

### **Agreement and Disagreement**

On other issues, the candidates agree that the mayor should remain in charge of schools but want parents to have more of a voice in education policy. Markell stated School Chancellor Joel Klein, a lawyer, should be replaced by an educator, a view Iannece supports. Cooke expressed concerns about the concept of mayoral control because, he said, it would cause education policy to change every time a new mayor was elected.

All the candidates believe the mayor and City Council should not have extended term limits -- from two four-year terms to three -- without a referendum. Calling the change "undemocratic," Kim said he went to City Hall and waited three hours to personally express his opposition to Bloomberg.

Cooke vowed to introduce legislation to repeal the extension of term limits. However, he Vallone and Behar do not necessarily oppose a third term but object to the way the change was made. Iannece supports term limits because he believes incumbents have too much of an advantage in elections.

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### Money and Endorsements

In the fundraising race, Kim has far exceeded his opponents, garnering \$266,632.

Vallone raised \$144,256 for his campaign, followed by Iannece with \$71,465, Markell with \$40,921, Behar with \$27,333 and Cooke with \$21,059.

On the endorsements front, Iannece has the backing of the Queens County Democratic Party and United Federation of Teachers. The district's present councilmember, Tony Avella, has endorsed Behar.

Vallone has endorsements from [Mark Green](#), the former city public advocate, who is seeking the post again, and former Mayor [Ed Koch](#), as well as Bloomberg. The current mayor's backing [angered](#) some Queens Republicans who think Bloomberg -- who is running for re-election on the GOP line -- should back Halloran.

Some, though, have questioned Vallone's ties to this district -- and not to an area several miles away. Vallone continued to vote in the Astoria district represented by his father and then brother for almost a decade after he moved to the 19th district. During that time, he has [said](#), he worked in the Astoria district and lived in both neighborhoods.

"It shows this district hasn't been his primary concern," Behar told the Daily News. "He's running here simply out of convenience." But Vallone has countered that he has "been working to help people in both communities for years."

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