

# An Open Letter From Local Community Leaders

The purpose of this letter is to identify some factual inaccuracies in the letter entitled "**ICCC Cares About Its Community**," which appeared in the December 1 – 7 edition of the Little Neck Ledger. ICCC has made the statements below (printed in bold) in previous letters. In trying to avoid an unproductive back and forth in the press community leaders chose to let the inaccuracies drop. However, it is apparent that, unchallenged such statements will appear accurate. We hope this letter sheds some light on the factual issues

Statements by ICCC:

**"We created the ICCC, a nonprofit organization, to provide the community with affordable senior housing, a community center and open space."** The Indian Cultural and Community Center Bylaws dated June 18, 2003 states in section 1.01 only that the Corporation "is organized to establish a center that will cater to the needs of the Member." The sole Member of the corporation, by the way, is the American Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Inc., according to Section 2.01.

The corporation's Certificate of Incorporation dated July 3, 2002, states "...to establish a community center that will cater to the South Asian community. The purpose of the center will be to carry on meetings that will explain the South Asian culture, history, and tradition to its members. This center will help adults gain a better understanding and appreciation of the South Asian community." This section also refers to activities related to promotion and assistance of the Indian American community and its cultural and civic institutions, and promises to be "...a forum to encourage education and cultural awareness by providing a means of community outreach."

The organization's Charities Registration Statement, filed with the State of New York, speaks about the same issues as the Certificate of Incorporation but adds carrying on meetings that will explain the South Asian culture, history and traditions to its members. Part two of the document entitled "Activities and Operational Information," talks about the planned community center, courses and seminars to be conducted, adult learning center programs for youths sporting and games. It mentions that they are looking for space to accommodate the center's activity.

Nothing, whatsoever, is mentioned about the development of any type of housing facilities in any of the ICCC's originating documents. We question, therefore, that the organization was created to provide housing, since their originating documents mention everything else but.

**"We approached the civic associations before we filed the BSA application."** The first of several meetings with members of the community was held on May 25, 2011 at the Triple Crown diner in Bellerose with two presidents of local civic associations and their spouses along with several members of the ICCC. According to New York City Department of Buildings records the application for the subject project was filed on April 3, 2011 and objections were issued by the department disapproving the application on April 27. Several photographs included in the organization's submission were dated February 2011. Clearly design and planning for the building long preceded the filing with the Buildings Department. The filing with the Board of Standards and Appeals was dated May 27, 2011, a day or two after the first meeting with two leaders, but what is more relevant is the filing with the Buildings Department, since, if approved by Buildings, the project would have moved immediately forward. Discussions with the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA) had already begun long before May 27 as evidenced by a letter of support from an outside organization to the chairperson of the BSA dated May 4.

**"We have made it clear that we are building affordable senior housing and community center. We have never made any public statement to the contrary."** Local community leaders and elected officials have publicly disputed this statement. In addition, the originating documents cited above make no mention whatsoever of housing of any sort. Assemblymember Barbara Clark stated at a Community Board 13 meeting that she knew nothing of any housing development proposed for this property as late as April of this year. Members of the ICCC met several times with members of the community in 2006 prior to the legislation to convey the property to the ICCC. Again in those meetings the only project referred to was for a community center in a one-story building, a parking lot and an athletic field. Assemblyman David Weprin in a July 6, 2011 letter to the chair of the Board of Standards and Appeals wrote: "the ICCC's initial project plan was to construct a one-story building that would serve as a community-based cultural/recreational facility with parking spaces and an athletic field. Abruptly it has come to our attention that the ICCC has submitted a variance request to erect on the above stated space, 'two – nine story' buildings to serve as a residential complex." The Dormitory Authority of the State of New York, the agency responsible for the property, issued an Environmental Quality Review (EQR) dated February 2007, which referred specifically and exclusively to the project consisting of the one-story community center, parking area and athletic field. To our knowledge no amendment or addendum was ever made to the EQR to evaluate the potentially significant impacts of the two 9-story residential towers.

**"It is a lie to say that our plans changed daily"**. Including the word "daily" was an exaggeration. However, as stated elsewhere the project evolved as follows:

- In 2006 the project was the one-story community center with parking and athletic facilities.
- In May of 2011 this project became two 9 story apartment towers with 126 condominium or co-op apartments to accommodate seniors and their families, including the original parking and athletic facilities.
- While we were looking into the towers proposal, we learned that ICCC was in within days of getting legislative approval to nearly double their acreage on the Creedmoor facility without having provided any notice to the community, and with no evident plan for use of this additional land.
- Finally, at the community board 13's public hearing on September 20, 2011 the athletic field was suddenly removed, the parking greatly reduced and replaced by a three-story "community facility" building (with no particular tenant) and additional 10 to 15 residential townhouse units. This removes literally any open space on the project. This change came exactly one week after the community board's land use committee meeting where the project was discussed in detail with no mention of reducing the parking and eliminating the athletic field.

**Master Plans issued by the Borough President of Queens dated June 1999 made certain references, including: "Private light industrial/commercial facility," and a telephone truck parking facility. The ICCC asks "Would local residents preferred to have this in their backyard?"** The overarching requirement of the master plans was stated on page 20, in two bulleted paragraphs:

- "require new construction to conform in scale, architecture, density and use with the surrounding community."
- And "require new developments to be compatible with each other, economically feasible, environmentally sensitive and appropriately located." These are basic community criteria that the community will insist on for any project is proposed for Creedmoor property.

In fact members of the community withdrew an invitation to house proposed university technology facilities on Creedmoor when it became clear they would not conform to the character of the adjacent communities.

The reference to light industrial and parking uses in the master plans cited by ICCC referred to descriptions of types of uses that are permitted as-of-right, but do not necessarily reflect uses the civics, the Queens Civic Congress or the Borough President would prefer to see.

**"Creedmoor has many senior- focused organizations such as Services Now for Adult Persons and the Father Reder Senior Apartments."** The local communities and civics are pleased that Creedmoor has several senior focused organizations on the property. In fact the local civic associations are active supporters of these organizations and facilities. We fought very hard to get these projects approved. Members of local civic association serve on corporate boards and advisory boards for these organizations. We are extremely supportive of services and projects that benefit senior citizens as well as other disadvantaged and disabled groups, such as the ICL Milestone Home (homeless mentally ill and multiply diagnosed men and women), Bernard Fineson Center (developmentally disabled), United Cerebral Palsy Center, the Father Reder Senior Houses, Services Now for Adult Persons (SNAP) and many others. We were particularly active in establishing the Father Reder Senior Houses, which is completely compatible with the surrounding housing and has been welcomed into the community. We are especially proud that SNAP has recently been cited as providing exceptional services to the South Asian community in a citywide study.

**"The impact on the land and maximizing the amount of green space."** We find it most interesting that in a letter addressed to "Dear friends and neighbors" dated September 6, 2011 the Indian Cultural and Community Center states that "upon completion of the project the area will be fully cleaned and landscaped with new and retainable old trees." In a walking tour of the site with members of Community Board 13's Land Use Committee, ICCC's leaders stated that the project would retain most of the trees. ICCC's north parcel area has a full canopy of trees, yet the project plan presented on June 20 shows only a few small areas with minimal grass and a few trees and shrubs.

We hope this puts to rest some of the statements ICCC has made.

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**Angela Augugliaro**, President, Queens Colony Civic Association

**Jerry Wind**, President, Bellerose Hillside Civic Association

**Michael O'Keefe**, President, Creedmoor Civic Association

**Bruno DeFranceschi**, President, North Bellerose Civic Association

**Frank Toner**, President, Rocky Hill Civic Association

**Oscar Berenberg**, President, Lost Community Civic Association