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THE CITY OF NEW YORK

**STATE OF THE BOROUGH ADDRESS**

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*(Remarks as prepared for delivery)*

Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Allan, for that gracious introduction. Allan is an incredible man who has devoted his life to his faith, his family and to giving back to others, especially to young people. The work he does with fathers, mentors and entrepreneurs is truly inspirational. I thank you, Allan, for your dedication and for your partnership.

And let's give it up for our MC, the inspiring, hilarious, energetic, talented Dr. Stacie N.C. Grant.

I'd also like to acknowledge our citywide elected officials here with us today, City Comptroller Scott Stringer and Public Advocate Letitia James.

Welcome, to what is, believe it or not, my last State of the Borough of my first term. Yes, it has already been three years. It is so good to see so many of you who have traveled this road with me – through the good and the bad.

Preparing for this address wasn't easy for us at Borough Hall. I have to admit, I started getting a little nostalgic trying to lay out the successes and the challenges of the past few years. But it was an opportunity for us to really analyze where we were as a borough when we first started together and how far we have come in just a few years.

We have been through some extraordinary changes. And I am not delivering this State of the Borough just to talk about the accomplishments of my office. We've all come too far together. This is truly going to be a "State of the Borough". We will take note of where we are, how that fits in with the rest of this City... and touch upon where I believe we need to be headed. Think about this. And listen closely because I am moving.

Our Queens skyline along the East River waterfront is completely transformed. The color of the New York State Pavilion is now back to its original brilliance of "American Cheese Yellow". There's a brand new, state-of-the-art roof over the USTA's Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Our borough has a Queens Marathon. Government has invested hundreds of millions of dollars into Jamaica. We have the NYPD's citywide training facility that opened in College Point a year ago to train our NYPD Blue. Our hometown Mets won the pennant.

We now have a Satellite Office in Queens Borough Hall for Veterans Affairs so our veterans don't have to travel to Downtown Manhattan for benefits. Thank you Commissioner Loree Sutton and Councilmember Eric Ulrich. We now have our ferry landings in Queens – Astoria, Long Island City, Hunters Point South and the Rockaways – included in the first phase of the new, five-borough Citywide Ferry Service. We now have 39 free Wi-Fi kiosks that line Queens streets. Everyone in the City of New York can now obtain a municipal ID to enter buildings. Every single four-year-old now has free, full-day pre-K. And our nation has a new President.

But while our crime rates went down, significantly hitting record lows, and community policing was reinstated by the NYPD, the City has also lost six of our Finest in the line of duty. We're joined today by our Commanding Officers and their men and women. Let's show our appreciation for their sacrifice and devotion to the safety of all our families.

While our firemen and women worked around the clock to rescue us from burning buildings, and while overall fire casualties are at record lows, the City also lost 36 more of our Bravest in the past three years due to 9/11-related illnesses, and their names have been added to the FDNY World Trade Center Memorial Wall. We must care for ALL those who continue to suffer illness as a result of that attack on our country and continue to acknowledge their sacrifices. We know our members of Congress have worked tirelessly on their behalf – including the Chair of the Democratic Caucus Joe Crowley and Congressman Gregory Meeks, who are here with us today.

While we rely on our Strongest to keep our streets clear every single day, even with the record-hitting feet of snow we've seen in the last few years, they've also managed to be there for our communities long after Sandy, long after the storm. They were there because we needed them, and they never let us down.

So how do we put all those changes of my first term into one short speech?

First, you pick the best staff in the world, and you can't get better than my team at Borough Hall. Please help me thank them.

Second, you coordinate with partners in the community, including not-for-profits, civic leaders, Community Boards and stakeholders.

Third, to succeed, you create the best policies and maximize resources, because the best policies and intentions don't mean a thing if the resources aren't there to implement it. Much of what we're going to talk about today, like free full day pre-K seats and removing classroom trailers, are thanks to our state legislators because, let's be honest, they're the ones who paid for it. Let's take this chance to give them the credit they deserve.

When they say, “Queens is on the move,” that’s no understatement. So let’s look at how we all got here together, where we are, and how we continue to be THE borough of growth and THE borough of families.

We’ll start with some hard numbers of the most recent milestones.

Population-wise, New York City reached a record high of 8.5 million people. This is a 4.6 percent increase since 2010, and the most robust rate of growth since the 1920s. But guess who had the largest increase last year? We did.

In jobs, we’ve seen a five percent increase since 2013. We hosted 44 job fairs at Borough Hall in the last three years, connecting nearly 900 job seekers to real jobs.

In tourism, New York City has surged in recent years, and Queens continues to enjoy a healthy share of that surge, even surpassing all boroughs outside of Manhattan. In 2015, for example, the economic impact of both international and domestic visitors to Queens was \$8.3 billion, second only to Manhattan. That generated over \$1 billion in tax revenues for the city and the state, as well as 87,000 tourism-related jobs in Queens.

Hospitality has also surged to meet demand from the borough’s tourism boom. 18 new hotels in the last three years and 34 more are in the pipeline. And occupancy rates are going up.

We are even growing more trees! 8,000 new trees since the last tree census in 2006. (Yes, there is such a thing as a tree census). That makes us the borough with the most street trees in all of New York City. I’m very competitive.

And how do we get all those visitors and their money here? Through our airports, mostly, the key drivers of our region’s economy and where demand grows every single year. Transportation is the borough’s second largest employment industry, second to healthcare.

Look at both our airports from five years ago. Combined, they served 72 million passengers then, and over 88 million passengers now. \$45 billion in economic activity then, \$60 billion now. 327,000 jobs then, over 414,000 jobs now.

To keep up, complete overhauls of our airport gateways will make all the difference between keeping, not just Queens, but our entire region globally competitive.

There is now a \$4 billion construction project well underway at LaGuardia Airport, thanks to Governor Andrew Cuomo’s vision and leadership. It’s the first complete rebuild of any airport nationwide in over 20 years. We broke ground last June with Vice President Joe Biden on this accelerated, five-year capital project: 1.3 million new square feet, 35 gates, one terminal from four, and a new 3,000-space garage. And it’s all going to be done by 2021. At least, that’s what they tell me. Isn’t that’s right, Pat Foye.

But LaGuardia is not alone.

Just last month, I was with Governor Cuomo, again at JFK, breaking ground on the historic TWA Flight Center Hotel. The magic of the Jet Age will soon be relived in one of the world's most famous mid-century historic icons. It's a \$265 million hotel, creating 40,000 square feet of meeting space, 3,700 jobs, 505-room hotel – right here in Queens.

And just a couple weeks ago, the Governor unveiled his bold, ambitious, \$10 billion plan to overhaul JFK, while still accounting for its impact, by the way, on surrounding communities. It's a new day for infrastructure in Queens, and we're all on our way to creating best-in-class entry portals befitting of the international capital of the world. And with that, comes jobs.

But as we continue to be the borough of growth, we can't forget that we are – at our core – still the borough of families. Someone once said, "Our responsibility to our children is to leave the world a better place than we inherited." And I think that's right. We're not building here just for the sake of growth. We're not creating jobs just for the sake of working. We're not making money just for the sake of wealth.

At the end of the day, it's for the sake of our families, however and whichever way you define "family". Whether that's your chosen families – your friends, your significant other, the community you belong to at your place of worship, the folks at the senior center who watch out for one another. Or your children, your partner, your parents, your grandparents.

And as we grow, we need to make sure we don't lose sight of why that growth is important. It's the families of Queens that have been at the heart of my administration from Day 1. That is why in a borough like ours, growth is a lot more than just about the numbers.

Along with growth come the challenges of that growth. Growth in a borough like ours requires a comprehensive approach that aims to strengthen and uplift entire communities. We need to guide it... to sustain it. Make sure we have the infrastructure for our families to age gracefully and for our children to thrive. We can't forget the first rule: If it's good for families, it's good for Queens.

Our families are growing, and they're growing fast and strong. And just who are we in Queens today, exactly? We are over 2.3 million people. 781,000 households. 477,000 kids. 323,000 seniors. And 50,000 veterans.

By the way, Queens is home to more veterans than any other borough. And soon, Elmhurst Park will be the home to Queens' very first, borough-wide, Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I funded it years ago, and it will finally be real.

And with all these people, what are the needs of our families?

The first thing any parent asks about a neighborhood is, "How are the schools?"

Queens has some of the best schools and school districts in the State of New York. That's in large part due to Queens parents who are some of the most engaged parents in the city.

Take our Queens Parent Advisory Board. While maybe 30 members came to my very first meeting three years ago, that membership has now grown to over 1,000. We meet together every other month to collaborate and form a partnership on things that affect the direction of our children's futures, like the common problems of Common Core (you all know how much I love that), and the inconsistencies and shortfalls in the city's C-30 hiring process for school principals.

Two of our public high schools ranked among the Top 10 in New York State by U.S. News and World Report in 2016: Townsend Harris High School, and Queens High School for the Sciences right here at York College. And 42 of our Queens schools were identified by New York State as Reward Schools, the most of any borough. Yeah, we kinda crushed it.

But also highest out of all five boroughs: School overcrowding. Queens still has the highest overcrowding rate, with 119 percent capacity in our elementary schools and 111 percent capacity in our high schools.

So naturally, to stay competitive and meet the growing demand, we've been pretty busy building up our schools.

While in 2013 we had over 273,000 students enrolled in Queens schools, we now have over 285,000. For them, 11 brand new schools were created, and six existing schools expanded.

As for pre-K seats, we went from 3600 in 2013, to 20,000. Yes, a 461 percent increase in pre-K. And those "Temporary Classroom Units". You know, like the ones that were there for over 30 years? In 2013, we had 152 classroom trailers in Queens schools, we now have 109.

We got rid of 43 in the last three years, which means 2,600 kids are now learning inside their school's buildings. And another 46 trailers are already scheduled to be removed.

Space is great. But we also need to keep up with the technology. That's why I have allocated \$10 million for new tech in the classrooms. By the end of my first term this year, all 290 elementary and middle schools will have the resources to be equipped with new laptops or SMART Boards. And to continue our education, my office has invested over \$12 million for new construction and upgrades at the five CUNY colleges located here in the borough.

And that's not all we're doing for our families' education. At our treasured Queens Library, we've held 14 ground breakings, ribbon-cuttings and grand openings in just the last three years. At the same time, I've issued a total of \$27 million for capital upgrades and renovations across 20 libraries, and that is in addition to the millions of dollars from the New York City Council and the Mayor. And what's more is the fact that libraries are now

open six days a week. Let's thank the Councilmembers, they made it happen, including our Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer and Karen Koslowitz, Chair of the Queens Delegation.

And to serve over 11 million people a year, it takes not only money but also great leadership. I'd like to thank the Queens Library President and CEO, Southeast Queens' own Dennis Walcott, who took the helm last May. It also takes great governance, and I'd like to thank Assemblymember Jeffrion Aubry and Senator Michael Gianaris for sponsoring the legislation that reformed the Library's Board three years ago.

When I became the Borough President, folks said to me, "Melinda! Create jobs! Increase tourism! Spur growth! Oh, and by the way, Melinda: keep it affordable!"

We've been working on that with all of my colleagues, but I have to admit it's been tough, especially since the 421-a tax abatement program expired last year. As it stands now, Queens rents are outpacing both Manhattan and Brooklyn, and are expected to rise quickly. It is without question that we must increase affordable housing inventory.

We in Queens are anxious to build, but not at the expense of M/WBE participation, or Project Labor Agreements that ensure projects are built and operated by skilled labor, and in compliance with prevailing wage. I know the legislature will fight for these issues so that we may move forward.

In Queens parks, every community's backyard, we've held 31 ground breakings, ribbon-cuttings and grand openings in just three years. I've issued \$57 million for upgrades across 57 public parks throughout the borough. And that's not even what's also been invested by Queens City Councilmembers in partnership for these great parks. Let's again thank them and acknowledge the great work of our Parks Department including Commissioner Mitchell Silver, who is here with us today.

And let's talk for a second about the need for government to respond to the specific needs of over 120 countries and over 135 languages of the "World's Borough".

We're 2.3 million people, half of whom were born abroad. There are tremendous uncertainties and fears about the future, especially in light of the new administration's latest executive orders.

But we are, and continue to be, and are proud to be, a nation of immigrants, built on the backs of immigrants' labor. Queens is about all of our families' futures.

That's why in close partnership with the NYPD and Queens District Attorney Richard Brown, who's with us today, Queens has been unequivocally committed to combating any and all hate crimes.

That's why with our partners, we've held an annual Immigration Resource Fair with a free, on-site, walk-in Legal Clinic for one-stop access to service and government agencies.

That's why Congressman Meeks and I have strongly urged the federal government to reopen the Queens Field Office for citizenship and immigration. It was displaced two years ago from Queens, and we need it back here in the World's Borough.

Our diversity is why in close partnership with Mayor de Blasio and City Councilmember Daniel Dromm, we reaffirm our promise to all who signed up for the Muni ID – including the 324,000 Queens residents who enrolled – to keep their identities safe.

And as your Borough President, I assure all immigrants, unequivocally, who chose to put faith in our Borough and in our country: Queens has your back.

Our borough's trademark diversity is an asset. And we know that's a cause for celebration. At Borough Hall, we host 22 official special events of culture and heritage every year. Nine of them are relatively new, introduced in these past three years, including Lunar New Year, Diwali, Kwanzaa, Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month, Guyanese Independence Day, Haitian Independence Day, Indian Independence Day, and even a Clergy Breakfast.

I've been proud to carry on my esteemed predecessor's legacy of making Borough Hall, "The Peoples' House". So proud, in fact, that last September, we dedicated the 11,000 square foot, multi-use event space newly opened at Borough Hall, in her honor. It is now officially called the "Helen Marshall Cultural Center."

Just two weeks ago at the Helen Marshall Cultural Center, and in partnership with LIFE Camp's Erica Ford, we hosted their annual "Forgiveness Dinner" to kick off Peace Week, and in honor of Dr. King's legacy of non-violence. The annual "Forgiveness Dinner" is for family members who have lost their children to gun violence, whether as a victim or through incarceration.... It's for the survivors on both sides of the gun. It's an incredibly powerful effort toward solidarity and healing. And it exemplifies why we need strong gun control. And this year's "Forgiveness Dinner" just so happened to fall on the same week as the passing of NYPD Detective Steven McDonald, a beloved Queens Village native who himself championed the seemingly impossible: forgiveness.

Queens is a big place. 108.1 square miles, to be exact. We are, literally, the biggest borough.

And despite our enormous growth, we're still the borough of families, and a borough of neighborhoods. You remember, "Auburndale, NY", "Maspeth, NY", "Forest Hills, NY". Each is so unique in its needs, in its challenges, and in its growth. And we work together to leverage our assets and opportunities. We, as the borough of growth, can do all of this while still remaining the borough of families.

Take Long Island City.

Everyone is vying to invest there. No one can deny it. Citibank got in early. JetBlue, our hometown airline and our prime sponsor for today's event – thank you, JetBlue! – their national headquarters are now there. New restaurants and bars, new growth incubators,

investments along the waterfront, expansions of R&D in the life sciences, over 19,000 new residential units in the past ten years, and another 22,000 in the pipeline.

The skyline is practically unrecognizable from a decade ago. This kind of growth compels government to provide the infrastructure to support the emerging neighborhoods. And so we have.

In partnership once again with Councilmember Van Bramer, we cut the ribbon in July 2014 on the new \$6 million Queensbridge Park Seawall, and broke ground in May 2015 on the new \$38 million Hunters Point Library. In August 2015, CitiBike opened its first docking stations on Center Boulevard. Last June, Councilmember Costa Constantinidis cut the ribbon on the brand new \$1.6 million Paul Raimonda Playground.

And at our urging two years ago, the SCA finally added LIC into its new five-year capital plan to begin building for the imminent need for more schools. Now underway are two new elementary schools with 1,200 new school seats, in addition to the 970 new high school seats being constructed at the “Academy of American Studies”.

As for transit, the W subway line made a comeback last November as the MTA recognized the growing needs and reactivated it for the first time since 2010. And when the Citywide Ferry Service launches this summer, both the LIC and Hunters Point ferry landings will be part of it. Shout out to the Mayor and the EDC for making this, the Five Borough Ferry Plan, a priority.

Let’s jump east for a moment to another neighborhood that’s seen lots of changes: Flushing.

We cut the ribbon on 143 units of affordable, run by the Macedonia A.M.E. Church. We broke ground on the “One Flushing” project, where all 232 housing units will be affordable.

We’re adding hundreds of new school seats, including pre-K, and getting rid of a lot of classroom trailers in Flushing as well. At P.S. 120, we partnered with Councilmember Peter Koo and the Chinese American Parents Association to save their after-school tutoring program. And we will soon break ground on renovations to their schoolyard so that it’s ready by this fall.

Councilmember Vallone and I broke ground on a \$1.5 million renovation to Bowne Park Playground in October. The Queensboro Hill Library finally re-opened after a million dollar renovation.

Flushing Library, which has the highest circulation in the nation, is undergoing substantial renovations, including the new children’s center we’ll unveil this Spring, and a much-needed, brand new elevator by 2020, funded by my office.

Asian American seniors happen to be the fastest growing segment of the seniors in New York City. Last month, we unveiled two new food delivery vehicles for Korean Community Services, serving tens of thousands of meals a year to seniors.

Programs like these are critical for meeting the growing demand, as well as matching cultural and linguistic needs.

For transit, work on the \$25 million upgrade to the Main Street-Flushing LIRR Station finally started last summer. Upgrades for this busy station – including making it ADA compliant – have been a long time coming, and is already a tremendous win thanks to the leading advocacy to one of my predecessors, the Honorable and fearless Claire Shulman, as well as the local elected officials in that community.

And since launching in November 2015, the Q44 Select Bus Service serves over 27,000 daily riders, connecting Flushing to major commercial hubs in the Bronx and in Jamaica.

Which brings us to Southeast Queens.

We launched the \$153 million Jamaica NOW Action Plan two years ago with the Mayor's administration. The implementation of the 26 strategic action items is overseen by the 37-member Leadership Council of local stakeholders. The Plan takes an aggressive, community-driven approach to the revitalization and smart growth of Jamaica's downtown core.

Not to be outdone, Jamaica also won the \$10 million competitive grant last year under Governor Cuomo's Downtown Revitalization Initiative. And in his \$10 billion renovation plan for JFK, Governor Cuomo also included the MTA's Jamaica Station in it for significant enhancements for mass transit riders.

It's a pretty good place to be when you have the Governor and the Mayor duking it out to spend more money in your borough.

Already, Jamaica's seen changes to its landscape in just the past three years. 18 free LinkNYC Wi-Fi kiosks along the Downtown Jamaica Corridor. The launch of "Jamaica FEASTS", a new culinary pre-accelerator program for aspiring entrepreneurs. Brand new Digital Archives of the Queens Library's Central Branch. The groundbreaking of a \$2 million restoration of Rufus King Park. The groundbreaking of Gotham Greens, a 60,000 square foot greenhouse. A new NYPD 116th Precinct in the works for Southeast Queens – Councilmember Donovan Richards, we love that – to better serve the growing communities of Laurelton, Rosedale, Brookville and Springfield Gardens.

And in our schools, over 2,300 new classroom seats across several schools, not just in Jamaica but also in St. Albans, Hollis and Cambria Heights. Plus 450 new pre-K seats. Plus the removal of 12 classroom trailers, with seven more on their way out.

We're focused on families in other ways as well. Full funding by my office for a multi-million dollar expansion at Baisley Park Library, and upgrades at Edward Byrne Park and St. Albans Library. And, in those necessary partnerships I mentioned before, upgrades at South Hollis Library and Roy Wilkins Park with Councilmember I. Daneek Miller. Upgrades at Bellerose Playground with Councilmember Barry Grodenchik. Upgrades at

Baisley Pond Park and Norelli Hargreaves Park with Councilmember Ruben Wills. Upgrades at Queens Hospital Center with Councilmember Rory Lancman. Upgrades at Idlewild Park and Laurelton Playground with Councilmember Richards.

The city's Transportation Department has also been working closely with us on a number of projects, and they've delivered. For the young players of the Rosedale Little League and their families, new pedestrian safety measures were installed between the game fields. For our veterans at VFW Post 5298, we fulfilled their long-standing request for a flagpole at the Veterans Memorial Triangle in Laurelton. Truthfully, I was ready to go put up that flagpole all by myself in the middle of the night.

And for the streets and curbs in Laurelton, full street reconstructions are also fully underway thanks to both DOT and DEP.

As our population ages, we need to make sure Southeast Queens remains a place where our families can grow, in place, gracefully. Part of that means we need multi-generational affordable housing.

That's why in November, we broke ground on a \$28 million project, creating 67 units of affordable run by the Presbyterian Church of St. Albans. And in September, 53 units of affordable run by the Calvary Baptist Church.

It also means investing in care, and in September, we broke ground on a \$1 million renovation of Jamaica Hospital's hospice care unit – the Ferrara Family Center for Hospice Care – so that our elders will receive the highest quality of life care possible in their final days.

You can't talk about attractions that can't be found anywhere else in the city without talking about the Rockaway Peninsula, which is fast becoming the city's worst-kept secret. 6.2 million visitors came in 2016 to enjoy the Rockaway beaches. That number has nowhere to go but up, especially now that new shuttle buses and the new "Deckelman's Landing" ferry stop will connect the Rockaways to the Citywide Ferry Service at the beginning of this summer, right EDC?

In other open spaces, we've cut the ribbon on the new Beach Channel Playground, the Beach 109th Street Roller Hockey Rink, and the new Cardozo Playground.

We've opened sections of the new Boardwalk along Rockaway Beach every year since the \$342 million rebuilding project first began in April 2014. By this Memorial Day, for the first time since Sandy, the entire five miles of a better, stronger and more resilient Boardwalk will finally be open to the public. The rebuilding was made possible by \$480 million from FEMA. With the Boardwalk nearly restored, Mayor de Blasio has committed all remaining funds solely to Rockaway resiliency projects. The city is actively working on identifying projects with the community, including those on my Hurricane Relief Task Force.

But the road to recovery in Sandy's wake has been long. The Rockaways was one of the places worst hit by the Superstorm. Actual rebuilding in our neighborhoods didn't even begin until 2014, and many people are still rebuilding today. As of last month, of the 3,600 Queens residents eligible for Build it Back assistance, 87 percent have had their home reconstruction started or received reimbursement checks. There's still work to be done.

The Peninsula Library was also badly damaged by this Superstorm. In 2015, families along the Peninsula cheered its grand re-opening after a \$3.6 million reconstruction. And the Far Rockaway Library, too, is well on its way.

In Far Rockaway, there have also been significant investments in its potential. The City has allocated \$91 million to revitalize Downtown Far Rockaway, including retail corridors and affordable housing. Thank you to the EDC and Councilmember Richards for driving this plan into fruition.

The planned expansion of the Joseph P. Addabbo Family Health Center in Arverne is now underway with the successful sale of a long-vacant, City-owned lot in November. And at St. John's Episcopal Hospital in Far Rockaway, the 257-bed community teaching hospital is the only hospital currently in operation on the Rockaway Peninsula. I've allocated funds toward the expansion and redevelopment of its Labor and Delivery Unit, and look forward to continuing my support.

Now, I could talk about how and why Astoria and Bayside made it on "NYC's Top 10 Hottest Neighborhoods in 2017". Or how and why the Jackson Heights Symphony, since its genesis five years ago, is garnering quite the growing audience over at St. Mark's Church. Or how Elmhurst is poppin' so fast that we're reopening the LIRR station for the first time since it was shut down in 1985. Or how and why the New York Families for Autistic Children in Howard Beach is constructing a brand new, 3,800 square foot gymnasium.

But if I went through all that and more, it would mean you'd have to sit here listening to me for at least another three hours.

And who are we kidding, I know you all came here just to see each other. I mean, I'm just happy to be the excuse.

But I also know I'm going to get thousands of calls and texts and emails as soon as we finish about how I didn't mention your neighborhood. So, just to be sure they know we've got love for them, too, allow me to at least name drop the remaining 66 neighborhoods that make up the great borough of Queens. Here goes: Astoria Heights, Bay Terrace, Bayswater, Beechhurst, Bellaire, Belle Harbor, Bellerose... I was just kidding. Here they all are.

We've covered a lot of the milestones of the last few years today. Our borough has enjoyed a lot of growth. But with that growth has come its share of challenges.

We've already talked about education. But what about transportation, housing and senior services?

Queens is a transit desert. Our subways reach only a third of the borough. The subways and buses we do have are overflowing due to ever increasing ridership. While I commend the Governor and the Mayor for putting forth ambitious transportation agendas, those individual projects shouldn't be done in individual vacuums. They should be part of a comprehensive plan with a macro view, a citywide, coordinated transportation agenda for tomorrow that also addresses the unique challenges of each borough.

This includes our bike lanes. Instead of solely approaching each bike lane in a vacuum, in its current segmented fashion, we also need a borough-wide plan. The bike lanes in our neighborhoods can't just end in the middle of some street – they need to go somewhere and connect throughout a larger system. I ask again for DOT to issue a thorough, borough-wide, suggested bike lanes proposal on which communities can comment.

A citywide coordinated agenda should also include our transportation: the ferries; the subways, express and Select Bus Services; an AirTrain to LaGuardia; Councilmember Liz Crowley's light rail from Jamaica, through Glendale, and into Manhattan; and even City Hall's \$3 billion proposal to create the BQX. I like QBX.

In all seriousness, on BQX, we need to consider extending its route to LGA Airport, and we need assurance that the final BQX route will be within easy reach to the families living in the NYCHA developments in the area, including Astoria, Ravenswood and Queensbridge Houses.

Regardless, these may be great ideas, but the city and the state need to figure out a way to coordinate all these projects, existing and new, so they make sense and work together.

Queens' rents are rising, and families need real affordable options to stay. And they need it fast. The dearth of options has brought our citywide homeless population to crisis levels, hitting record highs. At last count, there are over 100,000 schoolkids who are homeless citywide. 60,000 people live in city shelters. 24,000 of them are children. Many of whom are from Queens.

The City has a legal and moral obligation to find shelter for whoever truly needs it. And the current crisis requires all of three approaches: measures to prevent more families from becoming homeless; measures to expand shelter capacities to temporarily place those already homeless; and measures to get people back into permanent housing.

With the sharp rise in citywide homelessness, the City has increasingly resorted to using hotels – sometimes entire hotels – to house people, while giving little or no notice to the existing communities. The impact of this in Queens has been substantial. Homeless Services has committed to notifying communities before hotel rooms are rented out, and I do expect that they will live up to that commitment.

In addition, we should also require a special permit to place hotels, which we don't currently have. This would mean a mandated public review through ULURP, help

guarantee community input and allow government to better monitor all hotel growth, citywide.

As for placing homeless families into permanent housing, there are thousands of vacant apartments in NYCHA, identified in Comptroller Stringer's audit, and we should activate them swiftly.

For homeless prevention, Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi has proposed a strong statewide plan to keep folks in their homes while saving taxpayer money. It is pragmatic, and I support it.

Queens' senior population is growing, and they need housing, services and centers, because their quality of life is important. I've spent the last few years focusing on toddler parks and making them safer and more active for our children. But wouldn't it be a good thing if there were equipment in our public parks specially designed for our aging population as well? In places like Hyde Park in England and Sanford, Florida, the cities have built areas – an active space for seniors, if you will – with low-impact exercise equipment specifically designed for seniors to STAY active. With 7,300 acres of parkland, Queens has ample access to beautiful parks and open space. There's no reason we can't create Senior Park areas here in Queens to help our elders maintain their independence, dignity and health. And we intend to fund that in this year's budget.

Growth in the World's Borough will only continue. More and more families want to live in Queens, want to stay in Queens.

And don't get me wrong: the challenges that come with our growth are good problems to have, so long as we have a VISION and we rise to the occasion. So long as we expand the capacity of our infrastructure to support and sustain this growth. And a big part of that is by attracting more visitors and more investments.

One example: Resorts World Casino at Aqueduct Racetrack. They're proposing a \$400 million expansion that will include a 400-room hotel, a spa resort and convention space. And truthfully, here is that competitive edge again: we have the first and only casino in the City of New York, and it's located here in Queens. In its five years of operations, Resorts World has proven to be an exemplary neighbor to the surrounding community. With the potential for more good-paying jobs and attracting even more visitors, I believe the expansion of Resorts World is a good partnership for this borough.

Our borough's cultural and tourist attractions have expanded in recent years also thanks to strong investments, especially in Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

With funding secured by my office, along with the Mayor and the City Council, we expanded the Queens Museum to double its original size, and completed a major restoration of Meadow Lake. The popular International Night Market that launched two years ago now averages over 8,000 visitors each Saturday evening to the Hall of Science in the summer months. The for-profit music and concert industries have been eagerly

knocking on the door, wanting to hold large-scale paid-admission events in the park. While you know I don't like the idea of closing down public access to our parks for for-profit organizations, but it's a good sign that these businesses want to come here. And I mean really want to come here.

And those investments are being made because of a recognition in our borough's growth and the continuation of demand.

Growth begets growth. But it's hard to talk about Flushing Meadows without addressing nearby Willets Point.

I get the fact that there is a plan. I was the original sponsor of the urban renewal plan nearly ten years ago, and Councilmember Julissa Ferreras-Copeland, our great Chair of Finance, continued to show leadership in the area.

Since then, the City has allocated \$400 million dollars and spent \$300 million on demolishing and moving its businesses. Yet to this day, it's still.... a blight. When we hosted the World Series at CitiField, that's the Queens that folks saw from all over the country.

New York City's land is not limitless, and with the projected growth in our borough, this highly coveted area of Willets Point needs to be remediated and prepped for a cleaner future. Like the New York State Pavilion, we have been talking about cleaning up Willets Point for generations. At the bare minimum, clean it up.

At the same time, as we await the outcome of the lawsuit, let's ponder additional options.

Flushing Meadows and Willets Point are in the center of this borough, and with all their sports facilities and culturals, it is world-renowned. We should be unafraid to think bigger, bolder, and more comprehensively. We need to review positioning ourselves for success by thinking creatively about further options that address our changing borough's needs – like a new school, an eco-recreation center, more parking to accommodate simultaneous events, because all those big events that we have now are wreaking havoc on the soccer fields and grass in Flushing Meadows for parking.

And to help pay for it and attract more visitors? How about a hockey and soccer stadium? Just imagine if we, the World's Borough, hosted the World Cup, or the Stanley Cup.

Willets Point is 62 acres. The market and the constituencies ARE here, we have needs, and there is inherent demand. So why not? When building the vision for our borough, let's be brave.

So we are where we are, and we got here together.

Today, we've taken a look at just how far we've come, and how Queens has become the borough of growth, in just a few short years. Some of that growth was organic, some of it

may not have been as self-evident but all of it has had to be managed, and all of it has required partnerships.

And if our borough had a GPS, it's telling us we have nowhere to go but up. We are where folks want to invest, where folks want to stay, where people want to build, and the crux of the matter is, they want to build their futures here.

I wonder every day whether my parents would take pride in the Queens that we have guided and built today. It's important to me that they would. Because I know how vested my parents were in Queens. And so am I. As a family, you might say, we have been all in when it comes to this borough.

And now, I put Carter and Hunter to bed every night wondering what Queens will look like by the time they come of age. I put them to bed imagining what I want it to look like for them. But I realize the greatest hope is that whatever it is, it will be right for them within the world they are living. We are on the right track.

We've taken stock of our challenges, but we've also recognized that in every challenge, with the right vision, there is opportunity. And there is no limit for better. Especially when it comes to leaving the world a better place for our children than we inherited.

So we can't stop thinking about tomorrow. It'll soon be here, and what's clear for Queens, is that it'll be better than before.

It has been my deep honor to serve as the President of this great borough in my first term. It has also been my distinct honor to work with all of you to see this borough through this incredible period of growth. Thank you for your confidence, and thank you for the privilege.

And so with that, I'd like to extend a personal thanks, to each and every one of you, for all that you've done and continue to do to make Queens the borough of growth, and the borough of families.

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