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THE CITY OF NEW YORK

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(Remarks as prepared for delivery)

Good morning, thank you.

Let's first give it up for our Master of Ceremonies, Branden Wellington of none other than our Amazin' New York Mets!

And wasn't that a spectacular rendition of our National Anthem? Thank you to one of New York's Bravest, Regina Wilson.

Also, thank you to the students of the Edge School of the Arts for that wonderful performance.

And thank you QPTV for keeping public access television programming alive and our borough informed.

Of course we must thank Queens College, its President Dr. Félix Matos Rodriguez and his amazing staff, who somehow graciously agreed to have us back this year. Thank you Queens College for your partnership and support.

I'd also like to extend a special thanks to our sponsor JetBlue, New York's Hometown Airline. Like me, JetBlue is a proud Queens native, and no matter how far they go, they never seem to forget where they came from. A lot of planning and logistics go into even a small event like this, and this year's State of the Borough would not have been possible without them. We appreciate you JetBlue for your partnership in increasing tourism for our borough and for supporting today's event. Thank you.

The Chairs, District Managers and Members of the 14 Queens Community Boards, and the members of my Immigration Task Force and General Assembly, many of whom are up here as well, all continue to do an extraordinary job for the people of the World's Borough. Please give them a very warm welcome.

My cohorts citywide who probably traveled the furthest this morning to join us here today, Public Advocate Letitia James, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. Deputy Borough President Diana Reyna is here representing Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, who wished he could be with us today but is out of town. Not just outside Brooklyn, but actually out of town.

Another extraordinary public servant who is with us today and who has taught me how to get things done, none other than a Queens giant, former Borough President Claire Shulman.

I'd like to also thank our Deputy Borough President of Queens, Melva Miller, for her dedication and commitment for the future of Queens. Let's also thank my great team of staff, who all deserve the credit for anything good that comes out of Borough Hall. Led by Jay Bond, my Chief of Staff, they happen to be some of the finest public servants I've worked with in my 20 years in elected office. Please help me thank them.

We're also joined by some very distinguished and dedicated folks this morning, including all the clergy and faith leaders who are an integral part of our borough's families.

A special shout-out to my own rabbi, Rabbi Gerald Skolnik of the Forest Hills Jewish Center. Thank you for coming this morning.

And of course, thank you to our sign language interpreter Gloria Vargas, who will be on stage here alongside me. Gloria, this speech will be within 60 minutes long, but for everyone's benefit and especially yours, I'll keep this as short as possible.

As I begin the second half of my term, I am mindful of the remarkable time underway here in the largest borough of the City of New York.

There's a distinct character about our borough. A certain attitude, a global identity. They say Queens is a personality, and you know it when you see it.

Together, we've embarked upon a *new* chapter of Queens' identity, and we are the place to be. Folks increasingly want to visit here, build here, spend their money here. In fact, some say Queens has become almost "too hot"...

Eric and I spoke the other day, and thank goodness he's got a great sense of humor.

In Queens, we are still a borough of families, in every sense of the word.

And our families have a lot of needs, needs that may be tough for government to meet. But we are leading the way in turning our challenges into opportunities.

Because what is **Only in Queens** today, I believe, is the norm for the future of our country. And we are creating an unbelievable template.

For us, 2015 was a year filled with progress and movement: boosts in tourism as the #1 destination in the United States; reforms and capital improvements at our treasured public libraries; ridding our schools of classroom trailers that are clearly past their lifespan; launching visionary initiatives in Jamaica; breaking ground in Hunters Point; post-Sandy re-openings in the Rockaways; and, of course, bringing the World Series back to the World's Borough.

With all of our international features that give us great pride, we have become a hub of innovation, both by necessity and by design.

With our beaches and parks, world-class museums and stadiums, and neighborhoods of over 135 languages, anyone in-the-know will tell you: you really haven't seen New York until you've experienced Queens.

2015 was a big year for our borough as we became increasingly recognized as a destination, from being dubbed "NYC's Coolest Borough" by *Condé Nast Traveler*, to ranking #1 on *Lonely Planet's* "Best in the U.S." to *MSNMoney's* Top 15 "Hottest American Cities".

Over 12 million people visit Queens every year, and indeed, visitors from around the globe flocked to Queens in 2015, affirming the borough's status as a top international destination, both of choice and, just as significantly, in its own right.

Because **Only in Queens** will you find the most diverse place on this planet.

Only in Queens will you find mail addressed to specific neighborhoods like "Laurelton, NY", "Sunnyside, NY", "Elmhurst, NY". Not necessarily just "Queens, NY".

Only in Queens will you find the vibrant celebrations of heritage and culture that you won't necessarily find along Manhattan's Fifth Avenue, from the birthday procession for Lord Ganesha, to the Colombian Independence Day Parade, to the Ecuadorian Parade, to the Bolivian Parade, and the Festival de las Flores.

It is here, you will find the true international media capital of the world, including 9 newspapers focused solely on Queens, over 5 newspapers and broadcasts in Spanish, over 7 in Chinese, over 7 in Korean, over 5 in Bengali and Urdu, and that doesn't even cover the blogs.

Only in Queens will you find the U.S. Open, which just celebrated its 100th anniversary in our borough and remains one of the strongest drivers of our economic engine, attracting folks from all over the world. It's not easy hosting all those people. Let's give a warm welcome to Danny Zausner, Chief Operating Officer of the USTA.

And **Only in Queens** will you find the home of our very own New York Mets, the National League Champions who, in an Amazin' display of true grit, determination and heart, brought the World Series back to the World's Borough, back in the City of New York.

In fact, there is no shortage of attractions and features that boost tourism in the World's Borough. In 2015, some were new, some were recurring.

All were driven by the breadth of over 200 cultural programs that shape the character of Queens.

From the Queens Museum to the Thalia Spanish Theatre, the Jessica Lang Dance Company to the Louis Armstrong House, nowhere else will you find such an array of performing arts and educational programming.

And our Borough has become the soft launch testing grounds for some of the newest citywide cultural programs.

Lincoln Center, for example, recently launched their neighborhood program called "Boro-Linc". It's their big effort to extend premier arts programs to the boroughs other than Manhattan. Their first stop? Why Jamaica, Queens, of course, in partnership with the Jamaica Center for the Arts and Learning. It may not have been **Only in Queens**, but it happened here first.

NYC Restaurant Week, the previously Manhattan-centric, semi-annual promotion of fine dining at affordable prices, finally picked up on what we knew all along about our cuisines. For the first time ever, and with a little help from me, of course, this year's NYC Restaurant Week will feature several restaurants that are **Solamente en Queens**.

And **Only in Queens** will you find the Queens International Night Market, modeled after the popular open-air night markets of Asia, which debuted here last year. Give it up for John Wang, founder of the Queens International Night Market.

With all the innovative attractions and talent, 2015 had visitors coming back for more.

The Kupferberg Center for the Arts held its second annual Louis Armstrong's Wonderful World Festival, a free tribute to the jazz legend that attracted over 20,000 people last summer.

And New York's annual, family-friendly Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival, with Host Committee Chairman Henry Wan, just celebrated its 25th year in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park.

Thousands also enjoyed the summer-long Katz Concert Series, which, in its first year, brought over a dozen artists to perform Reggae, American Blues, Motown and more across our neighborhood parks.

And the Borough named its new Poet Laureate, Maria Lisella, who attributes the inspiration for her prose to the human movement found where? **Only in Queens**. Please welcome Maria Lisella.

Queens also continues to be a mainstay of the TV and movie industries.

Location scouts regularly call my office for ideas and access to sites, ranging from meeting rooms for courtroom dramas, to swimming pools that – I kid you not – could submerge an entire Cadillac.

And there are a number of major studios and full-service production facilities that make movie magic in Queens, including Kaufman Astoria, Silvercup in Long Island City and Broadway Stages which has newly expanded to Queens.

The industries come to Queens because they find things here that they can't find anywhere else in the city. So when you tune in this season, look out for scenes of Queens, like the corners of Ridgewood on CBS's new show, "Limitless", the streets of Richmond Hill on the new NBC show "Shades of Blue", the buildings of Long Island City on CBS's "Madam Secretary", parts of Middle Village on ShowTime's "Billions", or the Redbird on the new Netflix original, "The Get Down".

We are a destination of choice, but I never forget that we are, at the end of the day, still a borough of families.

And whether you're 1st or 5th generation, what Queens offers as a top choice for growing families, is *education*.

We have some of the best school districts in the city. In fact, three of our public high schools ranked among the Top 10 in New York State and Top 50 nationwide in 2015 by *U.S. News and World Report*.

We have the principals of the three schools here with us today: Lenneen Gibson of Queens High School for the Sciences at York College, Kelly Johnson of the Baccalaureate School for Global Education, and Anthony Barbeta of Townsend Harris High School at Queens College. Let's give a big round of applause to the principals, their faculty and staff for all that they do for our kids.

I'd also like to thank the members of the New York City Panel for Educational Policy, whose charge it is to vote on policy issues for education. It's a tough place. Speaking up for our kids at this Panel is not always an easy battle. Please thank our Queens representative, Deborah Dillingham, who works so hard for our future.

Also, let's acknowledge the importance of adding Eid and Lunar New Year to the official school calendar. It's not just about having a holiday, it's a matter of respect and, in itself, educational. And it's a template for the rest of our changing nation.

With education, just as for our families, there's no limit for better. You know. Remember? If it's good for families, it's... ["good for Queens."] And if we're building a template for the future, innovation matters.

So this is where we've become especially experimental as of late.

Queens hosts some of the more innovative and successful "Early College High Schools".

Bard College, for example, operates a public high school in Long Island City. They have over 500 students in grades 9-12. Here, students earn both high school and college credits within four years through one curriculum and one set of faculty, a seamless college immersion experience, if you will.

When students graduate in four years, they're armed with not only a high school diploma, but a jump start on college with an Associate's degree and up to 60 transferrable college credits, all completely free of charge.

We have the Principal of Bard High School Early College here with us this morning. Please give a round of applause to Dr. Valeri Thomson.

This model is also underway in other major cities across the country. It's quickly proving to be one of the best and most competitive head starts toward college readiness that we as a city can give to our kids, and it's happening right here.

In the 21st century, a top-rate education requires investments in technology.

We have 263 public elementary and middle schools here in our borough.

So last year I allocated millions of dollars necessary to provide brand new SMART Boards and laptop computers to half of those schools. In this year's budget, I will allocate the capital for the remaining half so that all 263 schools can be equipped with these up-to-date instructional tech tools in the classroom.

Of course, we couldn't forget about CUNY in our capital priorities.

CUNY has a long history of providing quality, competitive and affordable higher education. Thank you, CUNY, for producing job-ready graduates with respected academic credentials. So in our capital priorities, I also allocated \$5 million to the borough's five CUNY institutions of higher learning. This capital will provide new construction and upgrades to enhance the students' experience.

Our capital needs are no greater than in our schools, especially as demand for school seats continue to grow.

While many of our schools may be high-performing, we also have some of the most overcrowded.

Take P.S. 19 in Corona, for instance. The largest elementary school in the entire city and one of the most overcrowded in Queens. Yet it continually marks as an “A Grade” school, meeting or exceeding all of its student performance targets.

The six classroom trailers there had always been intended to be a temporary fix. But it ended up remaining in use for decades, housing up to 600 schoolkids at a time.

Working with the leaders in the area including Councilmember Julissa Ferreras, Assemblymembers Michael DenDekker and Francisco Moya, Senator Jose Peralta and Congressman Joseph Crowley, we pressed hard for a solution.

The trailers at P.S. 19 are now slated for removal by the end of *this* year.

And, by the way, P.S. 19 is not the only one.

In my first two years, together with my colleagues in government, 15 classroom trailers have been removed from 6 different elementary schools.

And this year, we have 59 more classroom trailers on the docket for removal across 20 different schools throughout the borough.

It’s not an easy process, but together we can do it.

Most of you know of the issues Queens parents have long raised about Common Core, which has been more like a common problem.

I personally know the issues all too well. You may even remember us talking about it this time last year, right in this very room.

Every night for the past few years, I’ve worked with my now-7-year-old on his Common Core homework. And every day, I’ve said to anyone who would listen that there was something wrong with the curriculum.

Just take a look at a page of the curriculum used right now. It is remarkable that given what we have to work with, our teachers and principals have managed to do so well. But we need to do better for our schools.

We need standards. No one’s arguing that we don’t. But, ladies and gentlemen, sometimes 5×2 is just 10. Whether you fill out a graph or color in the figures 10 times, sometimes 5×2 is just 10.

In September, the Governor convened a 15-member task force including our own Assemblymember Cathy Nolan to take a closer look at Common Core. And within just a few months, the task force issued a set of 21 concrete recommendations to completely overhaul it.

We've also found demand growing for full-day pre-k programs right in our own neighborhoods.

Enrollment in Queens increased nearly four fold in just two years, from 3,653 in FY14 to 19,870 this year.

And this is where Queens' innovation kicked in again: what's a better place to have pre-k than at your local library?

Queens Library launched its very first pre-k program at the Woodhaven Library in 2014, with resounding success. They just graduated their first class last spring.

So with its first success, and their demonstrated commitment to meet the citywide need, Queens Library began preparations to operate a brand-new, full-day pre-K site at its library and family literacy center in the NYCHA Ravenswood Houses.

But they ran into some speedbumps along the way.

Although they had received approval from the city years before, they found themselves short of funds to complete the necessary capital upgrades.

When the Library brought the issue to my attention last May, I quickly allocated emergency funding to ensure the on-time completion of the project. And a few months later, we cut the ribbon on this new pre-K site, just in time for the school year.

Talk about a perfect match.

Clearly, a tremendous part of our kids' education is inherent in our beloved Queens libraries. From pre-K through the Golden Years, the libraries serve as a community hub of learning, literacy and culture for millions.

And as an institution, the Queens Library has come a long way since its dark saga of 2014, when a series of disturbing revelations emerged about prior years of questionable spending practices by the Library's higher-ups.

As you know, in the wake of the revelations, I called upon the reform and restructuring of the Board.

And thanks to prompt state legislation carried by Assemblymember Jeffrion Aubry and Senator Michael Gianaris, we cleaned up shop.

Since then, and especially in the past year, the Library has refocused full energy back to where it matters most: our families, especially children and seniors who rely on its services and deserve nothing less than a world-class library system.

And to repair the reputational harm endured and to restore faith in its management, the Board of Trustees worked very hard this past year. They took into account the recommendations issued in the audit by City Comptroller Scott Stringer.

The Trustees have done an excellent job of implementing several best practice governance measures to ensure the highest standards of fiscal accountability.

Although its precious resources are not unlimited, these actions and more, have yielded significant deliverables for the Queens Library system this past year. A special shout-out to the City Council, especially Majority Leader Jimmy van Bramer, for securing resources to extend the library hours to six days a week.

In sum, the actions of the reformed Board have helped restore precious faith in the direction of the Library. And I was pleased to allocate over \$13 million last year in capital investments across a dozen branches throughout the borough, including the long-awaited second elevator at the Flushing Library, in partnership with Councilmember Peter Koo.

I'd like to thank our esteemed Board of Trustees, including Board Chair Carl S. Koerner and Vice Chair Judy Bergtraum, for the progress they've made in just one year.

Also, let's give a special round of applause to the over 1,200 dedicated staff and volunteers of our beloved libraries. On behalf of the World's Borough, we again thank you. Day-in and day-out, *you* are what make our libraries good for families and therefore...? ["Good for Queens!"]

Another trademark of what defines the quality of life here in Queens is our parks.

For 2.3 million residents, parks are the jewels of our neighborhoods. With 7,273 acres of parkland, Queens has ample access to beautiful public parks and open space.

That's why I've allocated nearly \$44.5 million across 44 parks in my first two years as your Borough President. We've prioritized construction projects, renovations and upgrades.

We've seen a number of projects come to fruition, many of which were made possible due to years of significant capital allocations by my great predecessor, former Borough President Helen Marshall, as well as all 14 Queens City Councilmembers. Please thank them.

Another major ongoing public works project has been the restoration efforts of the New York State Pavilion in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park.

This iconic, architectural marvel had fallen into disrepair due to decades of neglect. Some even dismissively referred to it as "The Ruins".

For years, even when no one else wanted anything to do with it, volunteers of the New York State Pavilion Painting Project did their best to upkeep at least the base of the Pavilion. Let's extend a round of applause to John Piro and Mitchell Silverstein for their perseverance and keeping the dream alive.

When I first began my term two years ago, I made the commitment to save the Pavilion.

We began hosting commemorations of the 1939 and 1964 World's Fairs, celebrations that you will find **Only in Queens** and that attract over 100,000 people annually.

Since then, we've successfully secured over \$10 million to-date toward important electrical and structural improvements on the Towers. Please thank Mayor de Blasio, Governor Cuomo, the Regional Economic Development Council and City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito for their continued commitment to this project.

Some of you may be familiar with the new Seven Wonders of the World: Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, the Great Wall of China, Machu Picchu, the Pyramid in Yucatan Peninsula, the Taj Mahal, the City of Petra, and the Roman Colosseum.

In another milestone, the Pavilion became the *latest* addition to the new World Wonders.

Ok, that might have been premature, but we're getting closer to it, especially with the coat of paint last summer on the Tent of Tomorrow, the first since the World's Fair.

This was no ordinary paint job.

The estimated value of the project was \$3.25 million, but the painting was done *entirely* by 30 apprentices of DC 9 in 8,000 hours under the hot sun, armed with 1,600 gallons of paint in the original "American Cheese" yellow, all gratis, in the true spirit of service and shared vision.

Some of the DC 9 painters along with former Business Manager Joe Ramaglia are here with us this morning, both on-stage and in the audience. Let's give a big round of applause to them and current Business Manager Joe Azzopardi, our partners from Painters District Council 9 Local 806.

I'd also like to give a special thanks to Timothy Ahern of the New York Structural Steel Painting Contractors Association for his foresight and tremendous generosity. Mr. Ahern was one of the earlier supporters of the idea to save the Pavilion, and provided the 1,600 gallons of paint and *all* the other equipment and supplies for this project.

Mr. Ahern announced the project together with us and the Parks Department last year on-site. Sadly, he passed away in the summer before the project's completion, but his son Kieran, who is now head of the Association, is with us here today in his father's stead. Please join me in expressing our deep appreciation.

Some of you may recall the original grace of the Pavilion, and how it lit up against the night sky. We'd like to bring that back.

So we're working with the Parks Department on illuminating the Pavilion with permanent external lights, funded by my office and the fellow elected officials mentioned earlier.

I'm told that the design will be finalized this fall, and it will be lit up next year. Special thanks to Parks Commissioner Mitchell Silver and Queens Commissioner Dorothy Lewandowski for their tremendous work in prioritizing this project.

And so yes, this national treasure in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park is well on its way to being restored into a *visible* icon. And it will befit "The World's Borough" for generations of families and visitors to enjoy.

There is no doubt: Queens has increasingly become a premier destination for entertainment, culture and tourism.

So much so that several big-name, for-profit companies recently filed applications to shut down major portions of Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in order to accommodate paid-admission, large-scale, multi-day events this summer.

Now let me be clear. Events of any scale that enhance our borough are encouraged.

But public policy ought not be preceded by approving individual applications. Public policy needs to come first. We need input by the communities in our borough and standards by which we pick and choose applicants.

I, along with many civic associations and Community Boards, all shared our deep concerns with the Mayor.

Accordingly, the city last week denied the multi-day proposals from for-profit companies for *this* summer in the Borough of Queens. It was the right thing to do, and we look forward to further open discussions.

As we grow as a destination, demand and value also rise in Queens. The strong and continuous growth is a testament to the borough's appeal, especially to families.

And the growth is necessary and encouraged.

But the challenge for government will be to meet the ever-growing demand for affordable housing stock, while *preserving* affordability for those who already call the neighborhood "home".

We at Borough Hall are seriously committed to this. So committed, in fact, that we've rolled up our sleeves and put our own sweat equity into building affordable housing. That's really them.

Especially for our seniors, we need to keep them close in the communities they've known for decades, and we need to help make that an affordable option. Because I've said it before, and I'll say it again: it's not only the right and moral thing to do, it's economically prudent.

So this is where we turn a challenge into an opportunity. And now work is at hand.

Please thank our partners in building affordable housing and their leadership in our communities, including: Reverend Richard McEachern of the Macedonia A.M.E. Church, Reverend Victor Hall of Calvary Baptist and the Chair of the Deacon Board, Kent Garrett, Evangeline Douris, and John Kaiteris, Chair and CEO of HANAC, respectively, and Reverend Dr. Edward Davis of the Presbyterian Church of St. Albans, who are all here with us this morning.

When it comes to affordable housing, it is truly a family issue, and we're working on more, because for our future, the need for affordable housing is certain.

When we do, however, it must be done right.

There is a set of citywide zoning proposals soon to be under consideration in front of the City Council.

And I have concerns about certain provisions. To name a few: it would allow building apartments with less parking spots, senior housing would not be permanent, and downzonings worked on by dozens of neighborhoods would be changed.

And I would like to see skilled labor commitments, which would assure quality, durability and safety of construction. We have to figure out a way to make union labor, including the trades, work for this proposal and for all future Queens projects.

One of the borough's major, innovative and most exciting economic development initiatives underway is the "Jamaica Now Action Plan".

It's aggressive. It's holistic. It's the first of its kind. And it's designed to stimulate *smart* growth and *improve* livability in Jamaica's downtown core.

And it's a *focused* commitment, crafted and driven by an *extensive* community engagement process, backed by real city resources.

We unveiled the Plan last spring with Mayor de Blasio's administration. The 26 strategic actions, 16 of which will launch within three years, represent approximately \$153 million in current public funding.

Among those listed is free public Wi-Fi. Yes, by the end of July, the Downtown Jamaica Corridor will have it, and it will be the very first area in Queens to host LinkNYC, the largest and fastest free Wi-Fi system in the world.

And as we work on the remaining Jamaica Now action items, our success in reaching any milestones will hinge upon continued engagement from all those involved.

As such, the Plan's rollout is overseen by its 37-member Leadership Council, appointed and convened to ensure that the community's interests remain the priority. Please join me in thanking the members of the Jamaica Now Leadership Council – including its co-Chairs Adrienne Adams and Ian Harris who have joined me up here.

A bit north of Jamaica, there's another development initiative, and that's Flushing West.

The aim is to tap the area's potential for new affordable housing, development, and public access to the waterfront for passive and recreational uses.

The proposal is now slated for public review as early as this summer.

To the west, we've had the incredible transformation of Long Island City into a new community, especially for young families. And now right on its heels is an emerging neighborhood called Hunters Point South.

With the planned 5,000 housing units, Hunters Point South will be the largest new affordable housing complex to be built here in the City of New York in nearly 40 years. We were just trying to give Manhattan a better view than they give us.

More importantly, once fully built out, 60 percent of the 5,000 units will be affordable. That's 3,000 brand new units of affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families. And the RFP for the next phase is expected to hit the street later this year.

And we can't talk about large-scale neighborhood development in Queens without mentioning Willets Point. It's been too long, we've come too far, and the City has invested too much money not to see this blighted area of Queens revitalized.

As I stand here, no remediation, demolition or construction is taking place. And that's just wrong. Willets Point needs to be cleaned up. If we, hopefully, have another World Series here in Queens, we should be proud of what our visitors will see.

And I am willing to bring people from all sectors – public, private, non-profit, labor, whoever – to the table to get this done.

When talking about growing the borough for families and businesses and promoting all that Queens has to offer, you can't do it without acknowledging how crucial our airports are to the equation of success.

Only in Queens will you find LaGuardia Airport and JFK International, New York City's aviation gateways. Because to land in New York, you gotta first come through Queens. And then we get to decide whether we're gonna let you out of our borough. Just kidding.

Thanks to the work of Governor Cuomo's Airport Advisory Panel, on which I have had the privilege of serving, there will be a comprehensive vision for redeveloping both airports for the 21st century.

We can't plan for pre-dated technology. We must plan for infrastructure and technology of the future.

It will require innovative thinking, but must also be a vision that takes into account the communities.

Having a seat at the table for this historic undertaking has given me the ability to voice the hardships faced by the neighborhoods around both airports, and that includes noise, lack of parking, increased traffic and pollution.

That is why the Panel included – in its recommendations for the LaGuardia re-design – and accessible cell phone lot, adequate parking capacity on airport grounds, and consolidation of rental car companies in and around the neighborhood into a single facility on the airport.

Last year, Vice President Joe Biden and Governor Cuomo unveiled the plans for the new LaGuardia.

But I'll share with you a little secret: the true mastermind behind the plan was right here in Queens all along. Hunter Katz, ladies and gentlemen.

As excited as I am to see these airports transform, I am also committed to keeping the communities around the airports from being unlivable.

That is why I strongly support the federal Quiet Skies Caucus, which includes our members of Congress Joe Crowley, Steve Israel, Greg Meeks and Grace Meng in their quest to mandate community engagement *before* the FAA makes decisions on new flight paths. And I endorse their position to change the noise metric from 65 to 55.

In addition, and just to be clear, I stand firm with Assemblymember Ed Braunstein, Senator Tony Avella and many other electeds in the insistence that there can't be any changes to the Perimeter Rule in place at LaGuardia without a full environmental impact study on the noise and health impacts to the surrounding communities.

I'd also like to thank those who worked with the New York Community Aviation Roundtable, especially Barbara Brown from Eastern Queens Alliance, Warren Schreiber from Community Board 7 and Richard Hellenbrecht from Community Board 13.

And as the borough grows, developers build, investors invest and businesses move to our borough, we want to make sure residents are connected to quality job opportunities in their own backyards.

It makes economic sense for these workers and all others who call Queens home that we have a phased-in statewide wage increase to \$15 an hour. Pay has continued to lag behind the cost of living, with even the federal minimum wage failing to keep up with inflation. This increase will help New York families climb out of poverty and elevate New York as a leader in the fight for fair wages. And it needs to happen.

We've also turned Borough Hall into job fair central, holding dozens of job fairs in the past two years and connecting thousands to real opportunities.

Partnering with 22 workforce development partners and direct employers, we welcomed over 2,200 job seekers and linked them to opportunities in the aviation, transportation, construction trades, hospitality and retail industries.

To-date, over 600 applicants have heard those two magic words: "You're Hired!"

Much of our borough's economic development agenda also includes coming up with innovative ways to *rebuild* better, stronger and more resilient.

Never has our ability to do so been more tested in the Rockaways, Howard Beach and so many neighborhoods of Queens, than in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy.

When I became Borough President in 2014, it had been a little over a year after the storm. Turns out there are a whole lotta folks involved when you're rebuilding entire neighborhoods.

So I formed a Hurricane Relief Task Force to bring everyone to one table – local, state and federal agencies, elected officials, civic leaders, you name it – to tackle the roadblocks together and stay coordinated in the recovery efforts.

While many in the communities damaged by Sandy had long given up by then, our message was simple: "We have not given up on you."

Our mission? To make it *easier* to Build It Back.

And from this Task Force came the proposal for the Citywide Flood Resilience Text Amendment, which basically lifts the heavy red-tape that had burdened entire neighborhoods and prevented homes from fully rebuilding after Sandy.

Under the Build it Back program to-date, 575 homes in Queens and 1,427 homes citywide have now been restored. And also under the Build it Back program, \$109 million dollars have been paid out in reimbursement checks to Sandy victims.

We still have a lot more to go. But for our progress, let's thank those who do the incredible work for our entire City's recovery and resiliency, including Amy Peterson, Commissioner Rick Chandler, Queens Commissioner Nicole Garcia, and the city agencies on our Task Force.

And a special shout-out to the folks from the communities who came all the way to Borough Hall to make sure we were getting it right. You know who you are.

2015 also saw much progress in the restoration of the Rockaway Boardwalk.

Only in Queens will you find the only legal surfing beach in the entire city, right here along the breathtaking shores of the Rockaways.

And so as promised, Phases 1 and 2 of the Boardwalk were rebuilt and opened to the public last year, just in time for the summer.

And with the projected completion of other construction phases by Memorial Day, this summer, for the first time since Superstorm Sandy, our community can once again look forward to having full access to the entire stretch of the Rockaway Boardwalk, from Beach 9th Street all the way to Beach 126th Street.

Queens is unique in many ways that are great.

But one of the downsides of our borough is the limited public transit options that allow folks to go to work, get their kids to school or travel to other parts of the city. Once in a while, we may want to leave our four corners of Queens.

On the ground, we've been paying special attention to pedestrian safety, so we broke ground on significant investments last year.

From a brand new signal and crosswalk between the Rosedale Little League's game fields, to a \$100 million overhaul project of turning Queens Boulevard into a "Boulevard of Life", we are closer to making our streets safer for our children, seniors and families.

Much of it has been the direct result of people in the communities pressing and working with government.

For years, the straight stretch of 147th Avenue between the game fields in Rosedale was prone to vehicles whizzing by well above the speed limit. After a child was hit, DOT agreed to take another look, and they are to be commended.

But the installed safety measures would not have been possible without the families of the community and people like Bernie Brown, President of the Rosedale Little League, who persisted and refused to take no for an answer until the safety installments were made. Let's thank Coach Brown and Councilmember Donovan Richards for not giving up.

Our Borough's growth and mobility depends on more reliable, affordable and efficient mass transit. That is why we are thankful that the MTA is taking notice in its Five Year Capital Plan.

In it, the MTA included projects like the full reconstruction of the Jamaica Bus Depot thanks to the advocacy of Councilmember Miller, signal modernization for the E, F, M and R lines along Queens Boulevard, and complete renovations of 16 Queens subway stations.

But since only a third of our borough is covered by subways, the MTA is investing in our above-ground Long Island Rail Road. In the same capital plan, the MTA is renovating the LIRR stations at Hunters Point in Queens West and Murray Hill in Flushing.

And that's not all. They've announced that there will indeed be two new LIRR stations in Elmhurst and Sunnyside.

We also look forward to the Five-Borough Ferry Plan which will begin implementation in 2017. This will be done citywide in two phases. The ferry will stop in Hunters Point South, Long Island City, Astoria and yes..... the Rockaways. Just so you know, ALL of the ferry stops in Queens will be up and running in the first phase by 2017. This will be a great step forward in making transportation in the City of New York a first-rate system.

In the first half of my term, one of my priorities has been on Constituent Services.

We've averaged 1,000 constituent cases a year from all corners of the borough in the first half of my term.

Borough Hall, or "The Peoples' House" as I like to call it, has become a central hub for government services in Queens.

For all residents, some form of official identification is necessary.

The IDNYC Municipal ID program, which has been up and running for one year now, has been a helpful tool for many, from picking up prescriptions to visiting your child in school. The citywide ID program would not have been possible without Councilmember Danny Dromm, so let's give him a round of applause.

To help meet the demand for appointments to sign-up in its first year, we opened a temporary pop-up enrollment center last summer at Borough Hall. Originally scheduled to be there for just two weeks, we ended up extending its run to *six* weeks due to the high volume. During that time, over 1,000 New Yorkers enrolled for their ID card at Borough Hall.

Another critical element of constituent services is the ongoing fight against domestic violence.

To this end, my office, DA Brown and Safe Horizon have been receiving funds since 1997 from the Justice Department's Office of Violence Against Women. These funds enabled the establishment of specialized domestic violence courts and a dedicated DV Bureau within DA Brown's office.

Under his leadership, his office has earned an extraordinary reputation as one of the finest prosecutor's offices in the State of New York. Queens has the *highest* DV conviction rate and the *lowest* dismissal rate in the City. Please give a round of applause to our District Attorney, Judge Brown.

Locally, our constituent services division has also prioritized the servicing of veterans.

More vets call Queens home than in any other borough, and it is my firm belief that they should not have to cross a bridge or a tunnel to access government services. They and their families served our country and protected our freedoms, and caring for their well-being is our shared responsibility.

So to better service our veterans and the military community, we're opening a satellite office for the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs in "The Peoples' House" of Queens. And we look forward to its opening this March at Borough Hall.

Also, thanks to legislation authored by the City Council's Veterans Committee Chair Eric Ulrich, Mayor de Blasio recently announced the elevation of his Veterans Affairs office into full departmental status. Let's congratulate them both, as well as Veterans Affairs Commissioner Loree Sutton on a job well done.

We appreciate the service and sacrifices our veterans have made, just as we appreciate the men and women of our City's uniformed services, including police, firefighters, sanitation and corrections.

Last May we mourned the death of Detective Brian Moore of the 105th Precinct, who was shot to death while on plainclothes duty in Queens Village. Detective Moore was one of four members of the NYPD who were shot and killed in the line of duty during a tough 12-month period for the Department.

We mourn also the deaths of Detectives Rafael Ramos, Wenjian Liu and Raymond Holder.

Their deaths, along with the shootings in Charleston, San Bernadino and elsewhere, illustrate the need for the sensible actions undertaken by President Obama that work toward keeping guns out of the hands of those who want to do us harm.

It's our shared responsibility to make peace real.

Last week was the kick-off of the 6th Annual Peace Week in New York City, and I ask everyone in this room to sign the pledge for peace by logging on to PeaceWeekNYC.com. A special thanks to Erica Ford of LIFE Camp and all the other groups working together with the NYPD to keep our communities safe.

We must also thank Chief Diana Pizzuti of SATCOM Queens North, Chief David Barrere of SATCOM Queens South and our Finest men and women under their command for all they do to keep everyone in our borough and our City safe.

2015 was also a banner year for fire safety in the City, with the number of fire deaths falling 17 percent to a near record low. That decline was due to our Fire Department, which responded to a record 1.7 million emergency calls throughout the City in 2015.

Our hats go off to all the men and women of New York's Bravest, who are represented here today by the Queens Borough Commander, Chief Edward Baggott.

We also thank our men and women of New York's Strongest, who keep our streets clean and cleared. We are joined today by officials of the Department of Sanitation, including Queens East Deputy Chief Michael Moss and Queens West Deputy Chief Iggy Azzara.

In closing, the idea of service is very near and dear to me. It's personal. It's where I find my roots. It was instilled in me by my *own* parents who were such unwavering believers in the potential of this great borough we get to call home.

And it's remarkable that even 47 years after the passing of Jeanne Dale Katz, founder of the Queens Council on the Arts, and even 28 years after the passing of David Katz, founder of the Queens Symphony Orchestra, their vision and passions live in me still.

Because even back then, they too saw the evolving landscape of Queens, the "new" growth, the "new" needs, the "new" demands. And even way back *then*, they had the foresight to see those challenges as opportunities.

Perhaps it's because they both lived and breathed the international language, that is music and the arts.

But they were both able to see that even with all of our borough's trademark diversity, we still have that much more in common than we do different.

It's an asset not just for Queens but for all New Yorkers, because with it, is the inherent opportunity – by both necessity and design – to meet challenges with *more* creativity, *more* perspectives, and *more* innovation.

And what may be **Only in Queens** today sets the template for our country of tomorrow.

Meeting the challenges won't be easy. But they never are.

Just like getting rid of decades-old classroom trailers wasn't easy. And getting 1,600 gallons of paint onto a towering steel structure under the scorching hot sun, wasn't easy. And passing citywide policy to cut massive red-tape so survivors could rebuild wasn't easy. And revitalizing whole neighborhoods into New York's hottest markets wasn't easy.

It wasn't easy. Especially, *especially* when they all said it couldn't be done.

But here in Queens, we've heard that before. Just ask the New York Mets.

You remember. Before last season even started, all the so-called experts and pundits said the Mets were not going anywhere.

They said their payroll was too small. They said their pitchers were too young. They said their line-up was this, and their fielding was that.

But game after game, the team continued to Amaze, playing smart and with everything they had.

And they made it *all* the way to the National League Championship, *captured* that Pennant, and brought the World Series *back* to the World's Borough, and back to New York.

They're a New York Team.

But that spectacular display of true grit, determination and heart?

That's *all* Queens – and it put *all* of New York City back on top.

So join me in standing, together, and let's give a warm welcome and thank our hometown heroes who reminded us what it means to believe.

Please welcome New York Mets General Manager Sandy Alderson, former player Edgardo Alfonzo, and the one who led us into the World Series, Mets Manager Terry Collins.

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