



NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL, 24TH DISTRICT
CHAIR, COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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PRESS RELEASE

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Gennaro celebrates victory for Queens' endangered wetlands, announces task force recommendations

***Wetlands Transfer Task Force recommends 82 sites for Transfer, 111 for 'special review'
but Gennaro and Task force call for more comprehensive plan***

Councilman James F. Gennaro, chair of the Council's Committee on Environmental Protection, stood with Councilman Joseph Addabbo and environmentalists Thursday, Nov. 1 to proudly announce the Wetlands Transfer Taskforce's victorious recommendations regarding oversight of city-owned properties containing wetlands.

The seven-member Taskforce – created in 2005 by Local Law 83, authored by Councilman Gennaro – released its findings earlier this month and testified at the Environmental Protection Committee's oversight hearing Oct. 19. The Taskforce, made up of four members chosen by the Bloomberg Administration and three by the City Council, was charged with surveying City-owned wetlands and reviewing the economical, environmental, legal and technological feasibility of transferring control over them to the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR).

The Taskforce reviewed 1,020 properties containing tidal or freshwater wetlands, and recommended 82 (approximately 225 acres) for transfer to DPR, and 111 for "Special Review." These sites were previously owned by 12 different agencies, including the Departments of Environmental Protection (DEP), Small Business Services and Citywide Administrative Services.

"Sadly, throughout the last century New York Harbor has lost 86 square miles of coastal wetlands that once fringed its edges," Councilman Gennaro said. "Hundreds of acres of freshwater wetlands have been filled with or replaced by drains, gutters and pipes. We cannot recover these vanished ecosystems, but we can and must work to protect and restore those that remain. This Taskforce, with full cooperation of the Bloomberg Administration, has taken the first steps in a long process to preserve our wetlands, which greatly serve our City and our citizens."

Wetlands prevent flooding, reduce storm surges, improve downstream water quality, nurture fish and wildlife, and serve multiple aesthetic, educational and recreational uses. Councilman Gennaro urges the Bloomberg Administration to remember and consider these facts as it reviews the Taskforce's transfer recommendations.

Councilman Gennaro thanked the administration and DPR for already accepting one City-owned property into its jurisdiction: that of the 70-acre salt marsh, Arlington Marsh – a major wetlands area on the northwest corner of Staten Island. Arlington Marsh is one of the last major tidal wetland complexes still in existence in New York City and serves as both a wildlife sanctuary and community amenity.

The Taskforce's recommendations are a tremendous victory for New York City, and especially for Queens, where 68 of the 82 recommended properties (more than 85 percent) are located. An additional 111 properties (35 in Queens) were recommended for special review and eventual transfer to DPR, and 76 properties were recommended for transfer to DEP.

Councilman Gennaro commended the Taskforce for its actions and the administration for its cooperation. He also urged the administration to quickly review and accept the Taskforce's recommendations. Councilman Gennaro has also called for a more comprehensive New York City policy for developing publicly and privately-owned wetlands in the City, because State and Federal wetlands protections do not cover all vulnerable wetlands, and he has written legislation to create this policy. This legislation is under discussion with the Bloomberg Administration.

"I have full confidence that the Parks Department is the right agency to protect the wetlands," Councilman Addabbo said.

"The actions proposed by the Task Force will protect hundreds of critically important wetlands in New York City, ensuring that they continue to protect habitat, water quality, and private property," Robert Pirani, Director of Environmental Programs at Regional Plan Association and Co-Chair of the Wetlands Transfer Task Force, said. "We trust that the Mayor and Council will continue to work together to implement our recommendations. I would like to thank Councilman Gennaro for creating the Task Force and his leadership on this important issue."

American Littoral Society's New York Chapter Director Don Riepe said: "Our remaining wetlands are vital to the ecological health of NYC harbor waters. Transferring these city-owned lands to NYC Parks will ensure their protection. I applaud Councilman Gennaro for his leading role in enacting legislation such as Local Law 83, which created the wetland taskforce, and for his leadership in caring for New York City's threatened environments."

"The publication of the Wetlands Transfer Taskforce Report is a landmark for the City's vital wetland remnants. The recommendations comprise a unique consensus of city agencies and wetland advocates, and as such should be implemented with all due haste," New York City Audubon Executive Director Glenn Phillips said. "On behalf of NYC Audubon's nearly 10,000 members, I would like to thank the City Council and Councilman Gennaro for creating the Taskforce and the Mayor and [DPR] Commissioner [Adrian] Benepe for moving rapidly to transfer the Arlington Marsh Cover to the management of the Parks Department."

"The importance of protecting our wetlands cannot be emphasized enough. These imperiled habitats play a crucial role in protecting New York City's ecology and wildlife," Marcia Bystryn, executive director of the New York League of Conservation Voters, said. "We salute Councilman Gennaro for his leadership in safeguarding our natural resources, and look forward to the implementation of the Wetlands Transfer Taskforce's recommendations."

"New York Harbor is our last wilderness and wetlands are its kidneys, which is why we must preserve and then restore them," NY/NJ Baykeeper Andrew Willner said. "The release of the Wetlands Transfer Taskforce Report is an important first step in preserving New York's remnant and re-emergent ecological habitat, and bringing nature into the neighborhoods of the region. We commend the Bloomberg Administration, the City Council, Councilman Gennaro and the Taskforce for acting quickly to preserve these natural systems."

"I wish to thank the council, particularly the Committee on Environmental Protection, for working cooperatively to recognize the importance of wetlands and the need to define and protect them," Eugenia Flatow of the NYC Soil and Water Conservation District said. "Nowhere is this more important than in Jamaica Bay, where the community has worked so tirelessly and effectively."