



# FDNY Budgets Cuts Would Hurt All

By Councilmember Elizabeth Crowley

**T**he evening of Sunday May 23, while most New Yorkers were eating dinner, watching TV or walking the dog, 250 of our city's Bravest were risking their lives in Rego Park, rescuing the Ohr Natan Synagogue and a nearby animal clinic from a raging four-alarm fire.

The firefighters saved a community house of worship and many animals – and also prevented hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages to the buildings.

That's one example of the hidden value that makes the Fire Department one of the best investments New York City can make.

As negotiations proceed on next year's spending, New Yorkers deserve to know that the city's budget will keep them safe, which means keeping open the 20 fire companies now on the chopping block.

The value provided by the FDNY far exceeds its cost to the city. Always the first to respond to fires or medical emergencies, building collapses, gas leaks or terrorist attacks, our fire companies save homes, businesses and lives.

Last year, Columbia University collaborated with the FDNY on a study to produce a conservative estimate of how much the department saves homeowners, businesses and residents each year. The low-end finding for how much property New York's Bravest saved lasted year was \$3.1 billion.

And the study only focused on structural damage – leaving out the economic impact of lost possessions, the costs of relocating burned-out businesses and even the impact of deaths on families. It also assumed property costs of only \$100 per square foot – a mere fraction of real values across the city.

To prevent that \$3.1 billion in damage, the city spent just \$1.5 billion on the department's operating budget. In other words, New Yorkers get a 2-to-1 return on their investment in the FDNY.

That \$3.1 billion breaks down to about \$15.6 million in property saved for each of the city's 198 engine companies. Closing 20 companies may not mean an added \$313 million in damage, but it won't mean zero, either.

Then there's the losses you can't put a dollar figure on: In the first quarter of this year, the FDNY rescued 12,092 New Yorkers. Closing 20 companies will raise response times - putting both the firefighters who risk their lives for our safety and the lives of New Yorkers on the line.

The FDNY is now the only city service trained to respond to time-critical medical emergencies – and a cardiac-arrest victim has just five minutes before suffering irreversible brain damage or death.

Finally, our city remains the world's top terrorist target. That's why the federal and city governments have invested hundreds of millions since 9/11 in equipping, preparing and formulating new FDNY units to respond to future attacks.

The NYPD certainly deserved credit for its swift action during the May 1 Times Square bomb scare, but the FDNY also earned our thanks for being first on the scene and realizing that the smoke emitting from the car in fact indicated a bomb.

Today's reality demands that we be prepared to respond to the worst. Yet we're headed toward closing fire companies – compromising our safety and our security.

Whether it's saving a synagogue in Rego Park or addressing a terror attack in Times Square, the FDNY is always the first to respond. With a 2-to-1 return on the public's investment, it's the best deal in city government.

We owe it to our seniors, our children and our future to keep our city safe and to let Mayor Bloomberg know that emergencies don't care about budgets.

*Councilmember Elizabeth Crowley represents District 30 in Queens and is the Chair of the Fire Committee in the Council.*



Councilmember Elizabeth Crowley

# Protecting The Rights Of Small Business

By Christine Quinn, Karen Koslowitz and Diana Reyna

**I**t's often said that small businesses are the backbone of our economy. These mom and pop companies invest in our communities, put our neighbors to work, and provide the innovation that fuels economic growth. Now more than ever, local government needs to support and engage these businesses and help them to propel us out of the recession. But instead of helping, we too often find ourselves getting in their way.

To address this problem, the City Council and the Bloomberg Administration have engaged in a comprehensive regulatory review process. Over the past year we've spoken to small business owners in all five boroughs, and examined the ways that City Agencies create and enforce rules on small businesses.

One of the biggest complaints we heard is that our rules are enforced in a way that's unfair and inconsistent. Many complain that inspectors are looking for any excuse to give them a ticket – and they get different results each time a new inspector walks through the door.

Here's a story we heard from a small business owner in Brooklyn. One inspector told him his license was posted in the wrong place and made

him move it. The next inspector gave him a ticket and told him to move it back to the original spot.

Hard working New Yorkers think we'd rather nickel and dime them to death than help them identify and fix real problems. They deserve better. They deserve inspections that are consistent and transparent, that protect both the safety of consumers and the future of neighborhood businesses.

So this month, the City Council unanimously passed legislation to create a Business Owner's Bill of Rights. It will outline important protections that business owners have when undergoing an inspection.

For example, business owners have a right to an inspector who behaves in a professional manner, with knowledge of applicable rules and regulations, and who can answer reasonable questions relating to the inspection. They are entitled to consistent enforcement. And if business owners



Christine Quinn

feel they've been treated unfairly, they have the right to contest a violation, or file a complaint about an inspector.

The Mayor's Office of Operations will develop a plan to distribute the Bill of Rights to all relevant business owners. By posting it online, and providing it to business owners who are being inspected, we'll make sure everyone has the information they need to know if they're being treated fairly.

Now agency inspections are far from the only challenge business owners face. Though the City is slowly pulling itself out of the recession, small businesses are still buried under the financial and credit

crisis.

A recent National Association of Independent Business survey found that 60 percent of small businesses couldn't get all the credit they needed, and 5 percent didn't even seek credit because they thought it was unavailable.

So the City Council convened a banking summit of city and financial leaders - including Rep. Nydia Velazquez, U.S. Senator Charles Schumer, the New York Bankers Association and the New York Business Development Corporation - to see how they could best help small businesses.

At the summit, we announced "Credit for Success: Second Look," a program that literally gives small businesses a second chance at loans. "Second Look" will create a pool of money specifically for businesses that have been denied more traditional lines of credit. Loan amounts range from \$25,000 to \$150,000, and are accompanied by small business counseling and support.

We want to empower small businesses to better protect themselves, and make sure every business owner has a fair chance to succeed here in the five boroughs. It's one of the most important ways we can help create more jobs and strengthen our economy. And it sends a clear message to new entrepreneurs, that New York City is a place where small businesses can thrive.

*Quinn is the Speaker of the New York City Council, Koslowitz Chairs the Council's Consumer Affairs Committee, and Reyna Chairs the Council's Small Business Committee*