



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael Gianaris

Gianaris, Constantinides Call On Mayor To Shelve Plans To Shutter Newly-Renovated Astoria Houses Senior Center

ASTORIA HOUSES SENIOR CENTER, ONE OF MANY SLATED FOR REDEMPTION May 9, 2019

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ASTORIA, N.Y. – Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris and City Council Member Costa Constantinides are calling on Mayor Bill de Blasio to keep open the Astoria Houses Senior Center. The center is one of more than a dozen across the city the administration has slated for closure in the Mayor’s latest budget proposal. Recently, the center underwent a \$500,000 renovation and is slated to reopen in the coming weeks. Standing outside the center and

joined by community members, the two elected officials held a news conference and released a letter they sent to the Mayor urging him to preserve the center.

“Seniors rely on this center for hot meals and recreation but even more importantly to foster a sense of community we cannot put a price on,” said **Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris**. “I urge the administration to do the right thing by our seniors and revisit this proposal so we can keep the doors open.”

“Astoria Houses seniors’ excitement about moving into an upgraded center quickly turned into despair over these proposed budget cuts,” said **Council Member Costa Constantinides**. “Instead of paying for buses to another center almost two miles away, I ask the administration keep this center open to not disrupt the daily lives of Astoria Houses seniors.”

The Astoria Houses Senior Center is a vital resource for aging men and women throughout the NYCHA development located directly on the East River. In 2014, Council Member Constantinides secured \$500,000 in city funding to renovate the center. Work will be completed in the coming weeks.

“About 55 years ago, some local residents came together without funds but with the need and desire for a senior gathering space and started a senior social club. The board of directors of the St. Martin de Porres community sponsored by Catholic Charities designated the room to the group. Until this day, through ups and downs, we have sustained this service. Some years, with our own outreach and funds. After all of these years it is devastating to hear that someone that does not know our struggles or needs suggests taking it away from us. The need is greater now than ever. Just when a space has been provided by our City Council

Member Costa Constantindes that gives us room to serve a needed segment of our community. We say think again,” said **Claudia Coger, Astoria Houses Tenants Association President.**

Photos from today’s press conference are available here: <https://bit.ly/2JoSrBo>.

The full letter that Senator Gianaris and Council Member Constantinides sent to the Mayor appears below:

May 9, 2019

Hon. Bill de Blasio, Mayor
City Hall
New York, New York 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

We write with serious concerns about a recently announced executive budget plan to close more than a dozen senior centers serving NYCHA residents throughout the City of New York. Of particular concern is the senior center at Astoria Houses, located at 4-05 Astoria Boulevard in Queens. This proposal is not only of detrimental impact to seniors in our community but indicative of a larger disinvestment from NYCHA at a time when New York’s public housing requires more, not fewer, resources.

The Astoria Houses senior center has recently undergone renovation, funded by a capital grant from the New York City Council. Work is expected to wrap up next month, and seniors were elated to leave the cramped space they occupied for too long. To require them to operate in a small area during construction and then claim the center must close because of low turnout is a mischaracterization. This was a major project the resources of which would be wasted if this plan is realized. Additionally, program participants would be relocated to a senior center at the Queensbridge Houses in Long Island City. While that site does excellent work, busing these seniors nearly two miles each way will disrupt their lives and waste their time. It is also baffling that the city can pay for buses, which pollute our air, but cannot find the money to keep this center afloat.

What is most distressing about this closure, beyond the obvious impact to seniors in our community, is the ongoing divestment of services from NYCHA communities. We cannot let these individuals feel abandoned by their government. NYCHA residents deserve more, not fewer, services than they currently receive.

We urge you to preserve this center and the others currently slated for closure. Their services are critical to the communities they serve. We stand ready to support this effort however necessary.

Sincerely,

Michael Gianaris, New York State Senate

Costa Constantinides, New York City Council