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## SBS' Walsh Meets With Local Chamber On Blackout

BY THOMAS COGAN

"What a week it's been," was city Department of Small Business Services Commissioner Robert Walsh's opening line at yesterday's meeting to address the problems of small business owners affected by the power outage. The meeting, held at Dazies Restaurant on Queens Boulevard in Sunnyside, was part of a series of meetings being held in several parts of Northwest Queens while Con Edison tries to complete its restoration of the electrical power that was lost starting when feeder cable began to fail on Monday, July 17. Before the meeting was over, Walsh was promising to hold as many meetings as might be necessary to resolve the situation the store owners and business persons found themselves in.

There may be many such meetings to come, because several businesses were damaged by a power failure that proved to be peculiar to Sunnyside, Woodside, Astoria, Hunters Point and Long Island City. The meeting at Dazies was attended by those largely from Sunnyside and Woodside, but their frustration could surely be found in other parts of the area also. Anger and bitterness erupted and threatened to overcome the air of sympathy for the afflicted and determination to aid them that the meeting was meant to establish.

At the meeting, Sunnyside Chamber of Commerce President John Vogt and Community Board 2 Chairman Joseph Conley introduced City Councilmember Eric Gioia and Assemblymember Catherine Nolan, both of whom took aim at Con Edison. "Con Ed owes us," Gioia said, adding that the power company misled citizens after the electrical failure by underestimating the severity of the situation. Nolan referred to a localized power failure in Washington Heights in 1999, saying that Con Ed wasn't held sufficiently responsible on that occasion but would have to be this time. Vogt even had to request, somewhat rhetorically, that people not take their frustration out on the Con Edison workers on the local streets. Their presence was greatly increased after several days of low and no power.

The meeting began and ended with appreciation of the work that Commissioner Walsh has been doing during the crisis; it was the part in

between that got a little heated. Walsh, a former small business owner and first president of the Union Square Business Improvement District (BID), has spent every day of the crisis in Queens, trying to set up aid and compensation to affected businesses. In an exchange with Anthony Lodati of Lowery Wine & Liquors, 40-14 Queens Blvd. he had to bear Lodati's angry claim that ultimately the agency will let local businesses down and then had to calm the fury of the owner of Las Americas Meat Market, 45-12 Greenpoint Ave., who said he had lost \$20,000 and faces the likelihood that after a little time has passed and the officials' fine words of determination can no longer be heard, he and other business owners will find themselves stranded. Walsh said that SBS and other affected agencies have to deal with relatively easy cases first, then the more difficult, then the truly complicated. All of this, however must be done quickly and every business, be the case easy or difficult, must know at all times that it is being looked after.

Conley said Con Edison seeks a storefront in Sunnyside where it can deal with business people and residents. Walsh said SBS seeks to set up offices all over Northwest Queens for the same reason. Joyce Moy of La Guardia Community College said students would be on the street distributing information about loans for distressed business owners. Businesses and residents were urged by all officials to fill out the forms Con Edison has distributed, that they might at least get some compensation for losses, and quickly. The questions of adequacy of compensation and how much Con Ed must ultimately pay are to be dealt with in further meetings, the next of which was scheduled for Wednesday, July 26 in Woodside. At the Tuesday meeting, Tom Ryan of Woodside on the Move was calling for a class-action suit against Con Ed, and Marc Epstein, a lawyer in Sunnyside, also tried to bring up the matter of legal action in quest of compensation. But both Conley and Walsh refused to let the meeting get bogged down in questions of litigation.

At meeting's end, nothing was resolved but the spirit of resolution remained.

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