

Elected officials alert public about groper

Incidents in Sunnyside and Woodside have law enforcement on high alert

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by Jason Pafundi, Chronicle Contributor |

Councilman Jimmy Van Bramer (D-Sunnyside), joined by Rep. Joe Crowley (D-Bronx and Queens), City Council Speaker Christine Quinn and state Sen. Mike Gianaris (D-Astoria), held a press conference on Monday to alert the public about a man who has been groping women in Sunnyside and Woodside.

The suspect, described as a Hispanic male between the ages of 30 and 40, has been seen riding a black mountain bike, sneaking up behind the women and then grabbing them inappropriately before fleeing.

According to reports, he has been striking the same general area within a few blocks of each other. The most recent incident happened on Oct. 7 at 39th Avenue and 46th Street.

"Sunnyside and Woodside are safe neighborhoods, but one assault against women is one too many," Van Bramer said. "We must be vigilant as a community."

These incidents come on the heels of the recent arrest of two men authorities say are responsible for a string of attacks in Brooklyn.

"The women of our community should not have to walk through our neighborhoods in fear of being attacked," Crowley said. "This is a time when our community can work together to help ensure our family, friends and neighbors are safe."

In addition to allegedly groping women, the man is accused of inappropriately touching a 12-year-old girl.

Gianaris, who recently introduced legislation to make groping a child a felony requiring mandatory jail time, said "we must band together as a community to keep our streets safe and free from sexual predators."

In July and August, groping incidents were reported in both Astoria and Jackson Heights.

The Astoria groper was alleged to ride up from behind the women on a bicycle, fondle them and ride away. And despite the similarity in method of attack, the description of the perpetrators are different.

The alleged Astoria groper was described as a Hispanic male in his mid- 20s, not between 30 and 40 like the Sunnyside/Woodside groper.

At the 90th Street. 7 train station along Roosevelt Avenue in Jackson Heights, several women reported that men wait to look up women's skirts when they climb the stairs.

Along with alerting the public, elected officials agree that the residents need to continue to educate themselves on the dangers of being sexually assaulted and ways to minimize the risks of it happening.

According to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, there are several precautions a person can take: being aware of surroundings, avoiding isolated areas, trusting one's instincts, keeping one's cell phone on at all times and avoiding putting headphones in both ears.

Van Bramer is working with the 108th Precinct to support the investigation to capture the suspect as soon as possible.

Despite the recent occurrences, elected officials want to make sure residents know that their neighborhoods are safe.

“We are not going to allow this predator to make women feel afraid in these or any other sections of Queens,” Quinn said. “We are asking for the public’s help.”

Anyone with information is asked to call Crime Stoppers at 1 (800) 577-TIPS (8477). The public can also submit tips by logging onto nypdcrimestoppers.com, or by texting 274637 (CRIMES), then entering TIP577. All tips are strictly confidential.