

# Rezoning Plan Presented To Dutch Kills Civic Association

BY THOMAS COGAN

John Young and Joy Chen of the Department of City Planning made another visit to the Dutch Kills Civic Association at its May meeting, to display maps and maintain a discussion about the final draft for the proposed Dutch Kills Subdistrict. But though the document describing the zoning plan was labeled "final draft", Young told his audience that it contains recommendations that can be changed, but he seemed confident the actual final look of the plan would be about the same.

The proposed subdistrict is a 40-block area, contained roughly between 41st and 36th Avenues and 23rd and 37th Streets, though it is not nearly square and has a sharp angle along Northern Boulevard. Currently the entire area is zoned M1-3D and has been since 1989. Slightly more than half of the area as rezoned would be mixed use residential. Building of the highest density, classified as M1-3R7X, would be permitted along Northern Boulevard. Land for such construction is currently either vacant or contains low-level structures that could be replaced by buildings with a floor-area ratio (FAR) of 5. Such buildings would be at their highest 125 feet (10 to 14 stories) with a street wall height between 60 and 85 feet. Land parallel to the Astoria elevated train line, running in the one-stop stretch between 39th

and 36th Avenues and in a wide territory on either side of the tracks, is classified M1-2/R6A. With such zoning, buildings could be 3 FAR with a maximum height of 70 feet (five to seven stories) and a street wall height between 40 and 60 feet. A similar land strip would run between 23rd and 29th Streets and about halfway between 41st Avenue and 40th Road. Running north of that, a series of strips would be zoned to allow buildings with maximum height of either 33 feet or three stories (M1-2/R5B; 1.65 FAR) or 40 feet and four to five stories (M1-2/R5D; 2 FAR). Parking provisions are mandatory for two-thirds of the apartments in an M1-2R5D building, and each such building has a single drop curb for the purpose of parking. All this, Young contended, would ultimately yield "a vibrant mix of industry and residences". (That might even extend in some instances to building residential quarters above manufacturing. That is allowable, though having residential and manufacturing quarters on the same level is not.)

One of Young's many questioners was a woman residing on 28th Street amidst the proposed M1-2/R5B and M1-2/R5D zones. She said she and her husband had renovated their house, in the process enduring several years of dealing with the city and its restrictions and regulations,

particularly regarding building height. Was she now, she wondered, going to see neighboring buildings growing taller around her, leaving her house in the shadows? Young said that according to proposals, that shouldn't happen. He specified that M1-2/R5D zoning, allowing taller (40-foot-high) buildings, was limited to avenues; to be exact, 40th and 39th Avenues. But a skeptical man later said, "If somebody can build six stories on the corner and I'm restricted to 30 feet, it makes no sense." He favored, fatalistically perhaps, the status quo, or M1-3D zoning. Another skeptic said that the restrictive floor-area ratios would only bring about small-scale, expensive housing. He said that on the basis of what he knew about current prices in the area, it would not be feasible to build housing that did not turn out to be beyond the range of the affordability level that City Planning has been talking about. Young replied that a socioeconomic statement would accompany the environmental impact statement that would eventually be issued. He cited the success of a comparable building plan in Williamsburg as precedent. A more optimistic homeowner said that prices might be uncertain and there might be a rush to finish foundations before new zoning changes were in effect, but such risks were worth taking. He welcomed new zoning, confident that when everything was all shaken out it would be generally advantageous to Dutch Kills. He was sure that property values would rise, but he said he

envisioned no speculative plans for his own property.

Property rights, Young said, would "continue to flow" under existing zoning until new zoning has been passed by the City Council, completing the long approval process. He had to admit that this would bring into play the "completed foundation" provision, meaning that developers building under current zoning would be able to continue such construction after new zoning was in force if the foundation to any building was already completed at the moment the new zoning was approved. As for conversion of loft space to residential space, he did not respond to the contention by DKCA member George Stamatiades that loft converters were under no obligation to provide any parking for tenants. He did say, however, that loft conversion is unrestricted by the proposed zoning.

In a final tribute to the new zoning plan, Gloria Moloney, treasurer of DKCA, said she and her late father first began working on it in the 1970s. She said the plan as it now stands is close to what he would have wanted. The community must now wait for the next phase.

The board and attendees waited for a few minutes after the meeting until City Councilmember Eric Gioia arrived, delayed a bit by attendance at another function, a black tie dinner at the Make A Wish Foundation. He was accompanied by his wife, Lisa; the two will soon be parents for the first time.

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