

# Funds Ready To Rebuild Queens Plaza, Job to Start In 2007

BY JOHN TOSCANO

There is \$22 million in the bank to complete the long-awaited renovation of Queens Plaza, which will transform the once-blighted area into a welcoming gateway to Queens. Construction is set to commence next year.

In making the announcement last week, Congressmember Carolyn Maloney declared: "The redevelopment of Queens Plaza will complete the rebirth of Long Island City. Everywhere you look, exciting new projects are either breaking ground or being completed. The redevelopment will be a huge benefit for businesses, residents and commuters alike.

"Queens Plaza has become known for rusty elevated tracks, traffic snarls and take-your-life-in-your-hands crosswalks, but all that is about to change. Queens Plaza will soon become the welcoming gateway that the residents of Long Island City deserve."

Maloney made the announcement in the plaza last Friday. She was joined by Borough President Helen Marshall, Department of City Planning Director Amanda Burden, City Councilmember Eric Gioia, a representative of Assemblymember Catherine Nolan, Community Board 2 Chairman Joseph Conley, and Long Island City Business Development Corporation President Gayle Baron.

The huge project, Maloney (D-Queens/Manhattan) explained, will beautify the huge expanse of property at the foot of the Queensboro Bridge by creating a new 1.5-acre, landscaped open space at Queens Plaza East, widened landscaped medians and an overall plan for new lighting, tree planting and directional signs throughout the area.

Traffic lanes will also be reconfigured. A new, dedicated bike lane will create a more pedestrian and bike-friendly environment, thereby reducing traffic congestion, improving air quality and encouraging mass transit usage.

Burden said the huge makeover project would create a magnificent public open space for the first time in nearly 100 years. She credited Maloney with being an invaluable partner in obtaining funding for a project that will help Long Island City "reach its potential as one of the great business districts of our city".

Burden said it was expected that the planned transformation would further catalyze investment in a district she called "dynamic, transit rich and culturally distinct" that is a key



(L. to r.): Amanda Burden, Department of City Planning director, Joseph Conley, Community Board 2 chairman, Long Island City Business Development Corporation President Gayle Baron, Borough President Helen Marshall and City Councilmember Eric Gioia listen as Congressmember Carolyn Maloney (at lectern) outlines plans for Queens Plaza development. An architect's rendering of the proposed Queens Plaza landscaping.



component of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's five-borough economic development strategy.

Shortly after taking office in 2001, the mayor launched his Long Island City plan, enacting major zoning changes that attracted many new

businesses which created hundreds of jobs.

Nolan (D-Ridgewood) noted, "Long Island City is a great place to live and work, and this major effort will make it even better," while Gioia (D-Long Island City) declared that

the new project "is yet another sign that Long Island City is truly in the midst of a renaissance."

Gioia continued: "With unparalleled views of Manhattan, easy access to public transportation and an amazing array of cultural institutions, Long Island City is already a great neighborhood.

"Yet what has happened today is but a precursor to the improvements yet to come. From recapturing the waterfront to platforming the

Sunnyside Yards and creating brand new neighborhoods, Long Island City has more potential than anywhere else in this city."

Recognizing the importance of the Queens Plaza redevelopment project, Maloney, working with other members of the Queens congressional delegation, began securing funds for the job which eventually added up to \$19.05 million. The city will add \$3 million more. The project is expected to begin late next year.

## Plan To Make 351-Year-Old House Part Of Nat'l PK. System

BY JOHN TOSCANO

Congressmembers Carolyn Maloney and Joseph Crowley announced last week that the National Park Service is conducting a three-step process to determine if a 351-year-old house in Astoria, oldest house still being used as a home in New York City, might be eligible for favorable consideration as part of the National Parks System.

The house in question is the Lent-Riker-Smith Homestead, which was built around 1655 and has been the residence of Michael Smith and his wife, Marion, for the past 25 years. For all of that time, The Smiths have worked to restore it.

Maloney (D-Queens/Manhattan) stated that the house, built over 100 years before the American Revolution, offers New Yorkers a priceless opportunity to experience the nation's history.

Crowley described the house as "a great historical treasure that helps trace

back the multiethnic foundation of Queens and the United States".

Crowley added, "It was built before the birth of our nation, when so many people who had migrated to these shores in search of a new life were settling in this area. Almost four centuries later, this home remains emblematic of the founding of our nation by immigrants whose legacy is still celebrated in Queens' rich cultural and ethnic diversity.

"This house also has great significance for Irish Americans, who remain an important part of this borough's ethnic fabric, as a few early prominent Irish settlers are buried in the property's cemetery. Preserving the Lent-Riker-Smith Homestead would ensure that this magnificent historic link to our remarkable past will remain for future generations."

The first step by the National Park Service (NPS) will be a preliminary reconnaissance study, the lawmakers

explained. If the results of the preliminary study are positive, Crowley and Maloney will initiate the second step by introducing federal legislation to authorize a detailed study of the 350-year-old farm house and property.

Once that detailed study is completed, Maloney and Crowley will then begin the third and final step to bring the homestead into the National Park System by introducing an Act of Congress that would include the homestead in the Park System.

The homestead was built around 1655 by Dutch immigrant Abraham Riker, a member of a prominent family that owned property throughout the New York region and for whom Rikers Island is named.

The one-acre site includes a cemetery with 132 marked graves. Among the individuals buried there are Ann Tone, wife of Wolfe Tone, a leader of an Irish revolt in 1798. Another is exiled Irish Catholic patriot Dr. William J.



Mac Neven, who married into the Riker family. A third person interred on the site is Abraham Riker, who was killed at Valley Forge in 1778.

For more information on the study process and criteria applied by the NPS in evaluating new park proposals, visit [www.ups.gov/legacy/criteria.html](http://www.ups.gov/legacy/criteria.html).