

BY THOMAS COGAN

A visit from the Department of Transportation and the reception it got made for striking moments at the last meeting of Community Board 3 before the summer break. At the Louis Armstrong Middle School (I.S. 227) on Junction Boulevard in Corona, the city Department of Transportation (DOT) delineated a plan for alleviating traffic congestion in the heart of Jackson Heights, resembling a plan it had advanced in 1998. That old proposal was eventually rejected by the board and never went into effect. After hearing the new plan explained to the meeting by one of her officials, and noting the scorn it elicited, DOT Commissioner for Queens Maura McCarthy noted that there was no one from the local area speaking in its favor—an understatement—and so perhaps it was just as well there would be no vote taken on it that evening. There were other matters: consideration of a housing rehabilitation project by Acorn Housing Co. and some applications for license renewals that also led to a little excitement. Four board members were awarded long-term service certificates.

Nahim Rashid, the DOT official who explained the new version of the street plan, said it addresses issues in an area bounded by the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway to the west, 34th Avenue to the north, 82nd Street to the east and 41st Avenue to the south. He said that Jackson Heights is attracting more shoppers than ever before, some of them even coming from New Jersey. One possible alteration, he said, was to make 37th Road, a short two-way street north of Roosevelt Avenue, a one-way eastbound street. Groans and catcalls had already been arising from the audience, but they increased greatly at that suggestion. The possible virtues of making 35th

## Board 3 Rejects Traffic Plan, Approves Three Restaurants

and 37th Avenues one-way were resurrected and promptly derided.

The first person in the audience granted time to address the meeting was Will Sweeney of the Western Jackson Heights Alliance, who said that any one-way plan for 35th and 37th Avenues was as invalid now as it was in 1998. The traffic running north-south was more of a problem than that running east-west. As far as the latter was concerned, the one-way proposal was an idea whose time had gone, he said, proclaiming, "Cities throughout the world are switching back from one-way to two-way streets." Some of the other critics in the audience, not sure at first who Sweeney was, applauded him as an ally. Daniel Karatzas of the Jackson Heights Beautification Group said that making 35th and 37th Avenues one-way would merely make them highways for those moving between the Grand Central Parkway and the BQE. Others, including City Councilmember Hiram Monserrate (who said he was speaking both as a politician and a local resident), thanked the DOT persons for their effort, but concluded that their proposals were wrong-headed.

Ismene Speliotis of Acorn Housing Co. delivered an updated version of her January report about rehabilitating a small apartment house at 37-60 98th St. and to ask for the board's approval. As she had previously explained, rehabilitation would entail emptying the building (which is perhaps 90 years old) of tenants and working on a dilapidated interior. The nominal nine apartments now there (five of which are unoccupied because they are

unsafe) would become six when work was done, to comply with current housing laws pertaining to size. Tenants in the four occupied apartments are being relocated, at Acorn's expense, for the year or so that the rebuilding project will last; they then can be moved back. They and tenants of the other two apartments would not have to spend more than 30 percent of their household income on rent. Some questions about parking and other details were asked, but the board was largely approving and a motion to back the Acorn plan was carried unanimously.

Three limousine companies, Mexicana Car Service, Continental Radio Dispatch and Dominicana, all sought approval of their license renewal applications and one of the three applied to relocate offices nearby. Their applications were recommended to be approved by board vote. More controversial were applications for liquor or beer and wine licenses, since several members of the board and some people in the community expressed worries about their proliferation. While eight applications were presented, only three applicants present: Mystic Planet, 84-07 Northern Blvd., Papa's Empanadas II, 84-17 Northern Blvd and Maya Café, 86-01 Northern Blvd. Daniel Karatzas inquired from the general audience if anyone was taking account of the number of eating and drinking establishments in Jackson Heights and Corona, implying that applications by such establishments were being approved or reapproved unthinkingly. District Manager Giovanna Reid said the board was cognizant of their number and submits notices of liquor license approval to

the police department. But Martha Leverton, a board member, said she has personally surveyed the placement of many food-and-drink establishments and concluded that there are too many crowded together in relatively small spaces, such as Northern Boulevard in the 80s and 90s. There had been similar grumbles about such establishments at the April meeting, when representatives from Papa's Empanadas and three other restaurants had been scheduled to appear but did not, causing Leverton and some other board members to say their applications should be summarily disapproved. That caused some other people present to suggest a growing anti-Hispanic trend, provoking heated denials.

When Manuel Rodriguez of Maya Café, Diana and Indira Narvaez of Mystic Planet and Patricia Burke of Papa's Empanadas made their appearances, they were told about drunken behavior and unsightly trash disposal in the vicinity of their establishments, forcing them to insist that they were neither cabarets nor mere bars. Burke said she had grown up and gone to school in Jackson Heights and that she was only applying for a beer and wine license for her restaurant. Board Member Arturo Sanchez said he could recall when the problem on Northern Boulevard and elsewhere was one of empty storefronts and business desertion, which situation has since been remedied by "hard working entrepreneurs" such as the applicants in attendance. Karatzas said a point was being missed: a saturation point with food-and-drink emporiums. The applications of all three establishments were recommended for approval by wide margins, though Mystic Planet drew six negative votes. Leverton voted against all three.

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