



Letters to the Editor

numerous neighborhoods in the boroughs of Manhattan, Brooklyn, Bronx and Queens. As part of the franchise agreement which owners had to sign, City Hall had direct control over the fare structure. For a period of time, owners actually make a profit with a five-cent fare. After several decades passed with no fare increase (contrast that with more recent history), the costs of salaries, maintenance, power, supplies and equipment would pressure owners to ask City Hall for permission to raise the fares. This additional revenue was needed to keep up with maintaining a good state of repair, increase the frequency of service, purchase new subway cars, pay employee salary increases and support planned system expansion. Politicians more interested in the next reelection (and subscribing to the old Roman philosophy of free bread and circuses) refused this request each year for well over a decade. As a result, in order to survive owners of both systems began looking elsewhere to reduce costs and stay in business. They started curtailing basic maintenance, delayed purchases of new subway cars, postponed salary increases for employees, canceled any plans for system expansion and cut corners to survive.

In the 1930s, NYC began building and financing construction of the new IND (Independent Subway-today's A,C,E,F & G lines). This new municipal system subsidized by taxpayers' dollars would provide direct competition to both the IRT and BMT. Municipal government forced them into economic ruin by denying them fare increases that would have provided access to additional badly needed revenues. Big Brother, just like the

Godfather, eventually made them an offer they couldn't refuse. The owners folded and sold out to City Hall.

In 1953, the old NYC Board of Transportation passed on control of the municipal subway system, including all its assets to the newly created New York City Transit Authority via a Master Lease and Operating agreement. Under late Governor Nelson Rockefeller in the '60s, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority was created. The Governor appointed four board members. Likewise, the Mayor four more and the rest by suburban County Executives. No one elected official controlled a majority of the votes. As a result, elected officials have historically taken credit when the MTA or any operating subsidiary such as New York City Transit would do a good job. When operational problems occurred or fare increases were needed, everyone could put up their hands. Don't blame me, I'm only a minority within the Board. Decade after decade, NYC Mayors, Comptrollers, Public Advocates, City Council [Speakers], Borough Presidents and City Councilmembers would all play the same sad song-- if only we had majority control of the Board, things would be different. All have long forgotten that buried within the 1953 master lease and operating agreement between the City of New York and New York City Transit is an escape clause. NYC has the legal right at any time to take back control of its assets, which includes the subway and most of the bus system as well. Actions speak louder than words. If municipal elected officials feel they could do a better job running the nations largest subway and bus system, why not step up to the plate now and regain control of your destiny? You have to admire the brave private sector entrepreneurs who operate the remaining handful of bus, commuter van, ferry and pedicabs who somehow survive in today's anti-free market transportation provider environment.

Sincerely,
Larry Penner
Great Neck

Zoning Plan Has Flaws

To The Editor:

Two weeks ago, even as the City Council continued to consider its vote on the massive 368-block Jamaica Rezoning Plan, real estate brokers and speculators were visiting property owners in areas proposed for upzoning seeking to put together parcels for development.

Jamaica residents, civic leaders, busi-

ness owners and planners have known for years that the key to rebuilding Downtown Jamaica was revising the decades-old zoning designations that have been a brake on revitalizing the Downtown Jamaica core.

The Queens Civic Congress supports the Jamaica Plan rezoning proposal for Downtown Jamaica. This part of the Jamaica Plan would create opportunities for greater concentration of business and residential growth in the Special District (Gateway Area), [the] Downtown area of Jamaica.

When the Jamaica Plan turns to lower density residential neighborhoods--some of them miles from Jamaica Center--it promotes continued out of context overdevelopment that has burdened so many residential neighborhoods of Jamaica in recent years. The Jamaica Plan fails to extend to these communities the same kind of lower density contextual zoning relief the Department of City Planning has applied to neighborhoods like Fresh Meadows, Cambria Heights, Bayside and Whitestone and more recently to St Albans and parts of Hollis.

The up-zoning of Merrick Boulevard, Hillside Avenue and Jamaica Avenue--far away from Downtown Jamaica--will foster construction of thousands of new housing units that will further overload already overburdened transit, public health facilities, schools and other public infrastructure. The proposed upzoning of much of Hillside Avenue especially, based on last year's rezoning of Brooklyn's Fourth Avenue, is a model for similar inappropriate zoning along other major avenues throughout Queens and sets the scene for future planning battles across the borough. Assurances to local residents that the city will play catch up with services and infrastructure do not convince long-time residents who have been hearing such promises for decades.

The Jamaica Plan missed the opportunity to effectively correct zoning that encourages more waste transfer stations that have blighted too many Jamaica neighborhoods. Instead, planners "tweaked" zoning and decided on a designation that may limit further proliferation of these neighborhood-killing facilities, but not remove them from Jamaica.

Throughout the planning process, a group of passionately dedicated Jamaica residents, appointed by Community Board 12 Chair Gloria Black, worked with planners who encouraged the group, and indeed, agreed with many of their objec-

tions, especially those concerning density's impact on services and infrastructure. These residents, with the Queens Civic Congress, formed an alternate plan for Jamaica that would have eliminated many of the problems the final version of the Jamaica Plan encourages.

The Department of City Planning's promise to "correct" zoning in some Jamaica neighborhoods after the City Council approves the Jamaica Plan, should not persuade anyone to support the deeply flawed Jamaica Plan.

The Queens Civic Congress, a coalition of more than 115 neighborhood based community groups and the only borough-wide civic organization in New York City, urges the City Council to vote down the Jamaica Plan on September 10.

Sincerely,
Patricia Dolan
Executive Vice President
Queens Civic Congress

Pass FIT Kids Act

To The Editor:

As our children head back to school, we shouldn't have to wonder if they're being challenged both physically and mentally. While it's important to focus on core subjects like science and math, we can't forget the need to have comprehensive physical education (PE) programs in our schools. Not only will PE help combat the childhood obesity epidemic, it will stimulate the mind and motivate children to learn.

So as Congress moves forward with the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), we should encourage lawmakers to support the Fitness Integrated with Teaching Kids Act (FIT Kids), federal legislation that would better integrate PE into NCLB. The bill would encourage schools to have quality PE programs and provide more detailed information and training to parents about supporting kids' healthy lifestyles.

We're facing an obesity epidemic that puts our children at greater risk of developing heart disease as adults. Over nine million children and adolescents ages six to 19 are considered overweight and the numbers will likely increase unless we educate them about healthy lifestyles. We need to find ways to incorporate more quality PE and activity into our children's lives. The FIT Kids Act would help us achieve that goal.

Sincerely,
Paul Hartman
American Heart Association
Senior Director of Advocacy, New York

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