

BY THOMAS COGAN

Several text amendments from the Department of City Planning, dealing with a plan for increasing the number of trees citywide and moving automobiles off the streets and into garages; a reply to the congestion pricing plan; other news from City Planning concerning such matters as a subway station improvement that might just have a conflict with landmark status; committee reports on such matters as film crews in the city and a vote on a bagel shop, and the election of board officers for the next year, were some of the concerns to come before Community Board 2 at its October meeting.

Mandy Ikert of the Department of City Planning was on hand to talk about the tree text and yard requirement text amendments before the board took a vote on each of them. The tree initiative is designed to effect a transformation of the greenery scene in the city, far beyond the term of the current mayoral administration. Grand figures are quoted by various sources, who predict installation of 10,000 street trees per year and a total of about 250,000 trees in streets and parks in the coming decade—which would be only the beginning. The yard initiative would apply to residential areas from R-1 through R-5 (Board 2 holds areas zoned mainly between R-3 and R-5). It entails a complicated plan aimed at increasing green space where concrete now prevails. The many points in the plan include requiring one side yard to be green and at least 20 feet wide on corner lots. Use of rear yard garages would be encouraged by increasing the floor area bonus for them to 300 square feet from 100 square feet. A proposal about widening curb cuts to ensure better access to driveways caused some discussion. A board member said the proposal would cut down on curbside parking, and such a lessening of space would make it difficult

Trees, Zoning, Parking Concern Community Board 2

for any visitors to arrive by car. When the time came for the board to vote, approval was contingent on the condition that the garage and driveway plan were altered considerably, with the 300-square-foot bonus scrapped. The street tree initiative raised few or no objections.

Vincent Petraro, an attorney and head of the group Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free, addressed the meeting with a challenge to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's plan to charge fees to persons driving their cars into Manhattan via the bridges and tunnels or into any point below 86th Street. Petraro began by saying that Manhattan's traffic congestion is not as great as that of several metropolitan area counties, including Queens and Suffolk; and that the people driving cars into Manhattan are not typically rich folk in BMWs and the like, but persons earning, on average, \$43,000 annually. If they become priced out of entry into Manhattan, he said, one result may be significant increases in the number of vehicles parked in the other boroughs and New Jersey as drivers try to get as close as they can; and also a great increase in mass transit ridership, which sounds good until the burden on an overused system is considered. (Petraro said that fully half the drivers coming into the congestion zone come from Manhattan anyway, so the northern part of the island would face parking congestion also.) He pointed out that taxicabs expend 13 percent of all vehicle miles below 86th Street in Manhattan, so the number of taxi stands should be greatly increased, since traffic density would be decreased by cutting down on taxi cruising. A sum-

mary of his objections could be stated thus: the city's plan would punish many who must drive into Manhattan for work or business; would have heavy infrastructure costs, more than the city would admit to, and would lead to job losses within the affected congestion zone. Petraro's reply to those who say the plan is working in London, whence it originated, by saying simply that it is not: that the original congestion tax of \$10 (or its equivalent) has gone since to \$16, incorporating many of the attendant difficulties he predicts for New York. In addition to promoting the increase in taxi stands, Keep NYC Congestion Tax Free's measures to lessen congestion would include: value pricing for curbside parking in the congestion zone; radical reformation of the racket in parking placards, 20,000 of which are phony, according to Petraro; variable pricing on tolled crossings into any part of Manhattan, and resumption of enforcement of "Don't Block the Box" intersection control, which has dissipated in recent years.

The City Planning report, delivered by Penny Lee, began with the latest news about Citibank's obligation to construct a covered connection between the Court Square subway station and the 45th Road elevated station. Citibank is obligated to do the construction as a result of certain allowances granted it in the building of its second, smaller tower, which was opened in late October. Various complications have dogged the construction plan, the latest of which appears to be a matter of landmark preservation. The elevated No. 7 line was added to the National Registry of

Landmarks a few years ago, so alterations to any of its 15 elevated stations might have to go through a landmark procedure, whatever that might entail. Work on Jackson Avenue, beginning at Queensboro Plaza, is to begin in 2008, she reported. It will be disruptive to traffic, but the grand improvement plan for the area will have begun.

Committee reports included one from Patrick O'Brien, head of the city services committee, who said that there have been some grumbles about film crews when they set up in various parts of the district. According to the Mayor's Office of Film, Theatre and Broadcasting, the big vans that are characteristic of a film crew's presence have a legitimate right to take up the considerable space they do, but staff cars connected to the enterprise do not. O'Brien also reported instances where the State Liquor Authority has actually exhibited concern for what community boards might think about the effect of bar/restaurants in their neighborhoods, evoking murmurs of surprise or skepticism. Carol Terrano of the health and human services committee, said a recent tour of New York Hospital Queens, formerly known as Booth Memorial Hospital impressed her greatly—which, she said, isn't easy to do since she is a registered nurse with a highly critical attitude toward the healthcare industry. A final vote was taken on a land use committee motion concerning Bagels Plus, which is located where Woodside Avenue, 58th Street and Roosevelt Avenue meet. Ownership problems and other concerns have for some time curtailed business, but according to committee head Lisa Ann Deller, the current owner has the place in a state deserving public operation and the board's approval, so the board promptly approved.

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