

BY THOMAS COGAN

Two men named Eric spoke at the April meeting of the Dutch Kills Civic Association. One was brought there by the demands of his constituents; the other imposed himself on it, as he has since February and promises to continue doing, not in the interest of a constituency but a clientele and a cause.

City Councilmember Eric Gioia told the audience at St. Patrick's school that two deputy mayors had assured him certification of the proposed new zoning would be concluded in May. Joy Chen of the Department of City Planning added that an environmental impact statement for the proposed zoning area is 80 percent completed and can be expected in May; then, the public review process can begin. Eric Palatnik, a lawyer representing Dutch Kills small industrialists, said he knows that the process is unstoppable, yet he believes amendments to the new zoning can be made, to recover at least partially for his people the functional ability he believes they are losing with the new zoning proposals.

Palatnik contends that the zoning process has gone on these past few years without notification of the local industrialists and that they have only recently looked up aghast to see the way their livelihoods are officially being restricted unto ruination. A decade ago, the attorney told the meeting, Dutch Kills property was cheap and a manufacturer seeking to expand could often move horizontally, buying adjacent property.

Within a few years property was rarer and dearer, so manufacturers, looking to expand

Dutch Kills Civic Association Debates Zoning Issues

vertically, discovered that the time to do so was running out. The future-minded ones among them found that a long-term plan could be nullified by impending new zoning, which would reduce the floor-area ratio, or FAR, from 5 to 2. In that case, those who could build quickly, before zoning changed, did. But many who did were not local manufacturers but outside developers, most prominently evident as hotel builders. Palatnik said "anti-hotel zeal" further inflamed Dutch Kills residents to press for downzoning, thus prodding the Department of City Planning to devise zoning that would allow homeowners greater freedom to expand by taking it away from manufacturers. He said that manufacturers have come to realize their difficult position only in the past 10 months. Recently he argued on their behalf before John Young, Queens director of city planning. He said Young has admitted that manufacturers were dealt with harshly, but at the same time the director adamantly refused to delay the progress of the new zoning plan. Having previously said that the zoning plans and maps he brings with him to meetings can be altered

in several ways, Palatnik displayed new ones at the April meeting. Their main goal, he said, is to protect blocks of Dutch Kills that are predominantly or entirely industrial. If City Planning's zoning plan is final, it can nevertheless be altered on behalf of manufacturers with an amendment or two.

Perhaps the most contentious moment of the evening came when Palatnik, who had earlier warned homeowners that they might have to conclude they'd won a dubious victory as they confronted restrictions they hadn't anticipated, specified that according to zoning regulations, they would have to provide eight feet of side yard space when rebuilding, which for some of them would require shrinking the already precious frontage on their houses. An infuriated George Stamatziades interrupted Palatnik to charge that what he said wasn't true and that he was irresponsible to say it. Joy Chen of City Planning was called upon to clarify the issue. She said a "small lot" needn't provide side yard space if it is not detached, but if it is, it must. Palatnik said he had been hearing confusing versions. By evening's end, confu-

sion remained about what is required for detached and semi-detached houses. Gioia, who said it would be "a terrible thing to discover" that one's house might have to be shrunk in order to be repaired, said he should look for City Council funding to provide the Dutch Kills homeowners with a lawyer.

What is especially irritating to some homeowners is the rapacity of some manufacturers located next door, who are able to build as of right to their property lines and do, even when it means coming within inches of an adjacent house. One woman said she has been so impinged upon she no longer has room to put air conditioners in her windows. Such manufacturers are what Jerry Walsh, DKCA president, called "bad neighbors". Walsh said one reason for rezoning is to quell such bad neighborliness. Another is to allow growth in Dutch Kills without needing to have high-rise apartments. The neighborhood is underpopulated, he said, pointing out the fact that the meeting was being held in the cafeteria of a school that is no longer operational. Dutch Kills is seeking a way to retain its status as a low-rise neighborhood and also revitalize it. The hotels are viewed as a distortion of what is a bad idea anyway, bringing high-rises but only transient residents.

Eric Gioia spoke some of the last words of the evening when he said: "Get this zoning done so everyone in this room can be comfortable with it." That might be too much to hope for, though perhaps some small adjustments could have large results. As for Eric Palatnik, DKCA shall see more of him, perhaps as soon as next month.

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