

## Elmhurst Project's Impact Is Debated, Board 4 Worries About Local Traffic

by Ralph Mancini

[http://www.timesnewsweekly.com/news/2011-01-20/Front\\_Page/Elmhurst\\_Projects\\_Impact\\_Is\\_Debated.html](http://www.timesnewsweekly.com/news/2011-01-20/Front_Page/Elmhurst_Projects_Impact_Is_Debated.html)

Attorney Eric Palatnik informed Community Board 4 members of plans to build a commercial edifice on Queens Boulevard at the group's January session. (photo: Ralph Mancini) *Concerns over the impact of a proposed commercial building on Elmhurst traffic highlighted Community Board 4's Jan. 11 meeting at Elks Lodge 878 in Elmhurst.*

City Council Member Daniel Dromm, along with local residents, peppered attorney Eric Palatnik with questions regarding the proposed construction of a two-story commercial edifice on a vacant site at 85-15 Queens Blvd. adjacent to Broadway and residential Reeder Street.

Palatnik—who spoke on behalf of James Pi, the property developer— explained that the building's primary pedestrian entrance will be on Broadway, but acknowledged that it would “make sense” to add another access point on Queens Boulevard. He also conceded that there would be at least a minimal presence of delivery trucks along the adjoining Reeder Street.

The prospect of backing up large vehicles on the adjacent main arteries, Palatnik added, wouldn't be feasible.

The attorney also assured the audience that a residential back corner piece of land in the adjacent Wendy's parking lot would not be used as a loading site.

Residents were informed of developments announced at a recent hearing in front of the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA) in which it was decided that the building would have to be reduced from three stories down to two, giving it a floor area of approximately 64,000 sq. ft.

Pi, according to Palatnik, recognized the community's need for additional parking and asked the board for a variance to include 250 spaces with the two floors. The request was only partially satisfied, as BSA members submitted their approval for 100 spaces.

In response to questions about adding a residential component to the structure, the attorney replied that there isn't a market for it.

Asked about the kind of tenants that would occupy the building, Palatnik surmised, “You're not talking about a Walmart or anything of that size. You're dealing with small shops.”

Attendees, such as Newtown Civic Association Treasurer Robert Valdes-Clausell, supported the endeavor by referencing the architect's solid track record in the neighborhood.

"Anyone living in this community has seen what an eyesore this property has been. We need the right developers. The architect is well known and [the developer] will have to comply with all of the requirements of the BSA," he said. "We do want better things to service this community. A Barnes and Noble would be nice, restaurants that we do not have...a residential nightlife similar to what they have in Astoria that we do not have. We'd rather not have a furniture store or anything that would entail a lot of deliveries."

Palatnik told the crowd that he would be open to all suggestions and promised to bring them to the attention of the developer.

In the end, Board 4 members endorsed the request to have the building constructed as-of-right (according to existing zoning laws for the site) with reduced parking.

### **Dromm on construction accident**

Council Member Dromm addressed a fatal incident at a property on Queens Boulevard off Grand Avenue in Elmhurst the day before the meeting, Monday, Jan. 10, in which a collapsing cinder block wall killed a 26-year-old construction worker and seriously injured three other workers. Dromm publicly calling out the property's owner, whom he charged is responsible for the weak concrete structure.

"Tommy Huang has been a terrible, terrible developer. We are all aware of his record. We will have the situation thoroughly investigated. We're looking to see why the foundation was being laid," he stated.

The lawmaker went on to mention that Huang has abused any privileges he's ever had.

Board 4 member Thomas McKenzie went further than just asking for an investigation: "We had a warrant out on this site. I want him declared an undesirable and get him deported."

### **Snow business**

The after-Christmas snowstorm of 2010 was still on the minds of many at the January meeting, as Dromm noted that his office received upwards of 150 calls regarding the area's impassable side streets in the days following the blizzard.

The unplowed roadways, he said, prevented fire engines from extinguishing fires and ambulances from tending to sick individuals that resulted in the death of a local woman.

"People were being pulled on sleds into [Elmhurst] Hospital. The mayor's office was very contrite, but it took a very long time to get that way," he stated, referencing last Monday's hearing in which City Council members reportedly interrogated representatives of the Bloomberg administration.

“In the past, this hasn’t been a problem, but something went terribly wrong,” the legislator added. “What was the line of command? No one at the hearing was able to tell us that.”

Dromm’s questioning of the line of command stemmed from reports that Bloomberg and his deputy mayor, Stephen Goldsmith, were both out of town in the hours before the blizzard hit on Dec. 26.

Board 4 Chairperson Anthony Moreno was “mesmerized” at how well the City Council hearing went and advised fellow board members to attend a follow-up meeting concerning local snow removal at noon on Friday, Jan. 21 at Queens Borough Hall in Kew Gardens.

“It’s the first time that they’re coming to us to ask us how something is affecting us and affecting our lives. I encouraged you all to attend,” he said.

### **Board members honored**

Yoselin Genao, Council Member Julissa Ferreras’ deputy chief of staff, thanked Board 4 and Lions Club members Judith D’Andrea, Joseph DiMartino, Albert Perna and Patricia Terranova for supplying funds to pay for the burial of baby who perished in her district in the aftermath of the December snowstorm. Genao reported that 230 people were forced to abandon their homes in the areas of Corona, East Elmhurst and Jackson Heights due to power outages during the heavy snowfall.

### **Transportation**

The board recommended the conversion of Granger Street into a oneway road westbound from Horace Harding Expressway to Westside Avenue in Corona. It is believed that the change would make the area safer for students attending the High School for Arts and Business (HSAB).

Last year, according to HSAB Principal Anna Sambrano, a student was killed by a vehicle traveling against the flow of traffic.

Favorable votes were also rendered for the license renewal requested by Santo Domingo Car Service and for a request made by a local South Asian club to hold a street festival from 11 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Sunday, June 12.

### **Consumer Affairs report**

Consumer Affairs Chairperson Lucy Schilero informed board members that her group had voted against a renewal application submitted by E&P International Grocery, located at 41-36 Junction Blvd. in Corona, due to three outstanding violations.

Similarly, the request for an alteration by Shin Best Choice, located at 40-12 82nd St. in Corona was denied by the committee because of unsettled issues with the Department of Buildings (DOB).

### **Preaching economic justice**

Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project (NEDAP) spokesperson Luis Caridad was on hand to tell listeners about his organization's mission to help struggling homeowners who can't fulfill their mortgage payments.

Caridad spoke of options that are available that would convince banks to reduce monthly payments in order for people to hold on to their property.

He warned against heeding the advice of scam artists that assure people that their homes will be saved by asking them to put up a large upfront fee.

"They will come knock at your door...they're very aggressive. They usually take the money and run," he said of the fly-by-night swindlers.

*Community Board 4 regularly meets on the first Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. at various location in Corona and Elmhurst. For further details on the February meeting, call: 1-718-760-3141.*

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