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09/13/2007

Civic Congress urges no vote on Jamaica Plan

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, business 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), 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 upzoning 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 objections, 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 boroughwide civic organization in New York City, urges the City Council to vote down the Jamaica Plan on Sept. 10.

Patricia Dolan
Executive Vice President
Queens Civic Congress