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Seek to tear down 'illegal' Maspeth building

BY CHRISTINA SANTUCCI

Maspeth residents continue to call upon the city's Department of Buildings (DOB) to force a builder to tear down a four-story home that does not comply with area zoning.

At a press conference on Sunday, December 2, the Juniper Park Civic Association (JPCA), along with Councilmember Tony Avella, demanded that the home, located at 57-39 Mazeau Street, be demolished because it does not fit with the R4-1 zoning and encroaches on the adjoining lot.

"You have builders that are destroying the whole block then leaving them," said JPCA President Robert Holden on Monday, December 3. The group has been asking that the owner, Tommy Huang, stop construction and remove the home since last year.

However, Huang tore down a home on a nearby property located at 57-37 Mazeau Street instead, according to JPCA.

"If [Huang] gets to circumvent the rules, it is tantamount to a declaration of open season on our residential communities. This cannot be," said Queens Civic Congress Vice President Harbachan Singh, who also attended the press conference.

In addition, the community group complained that the owner of another property on Mazeau Street converted a garage into a home without the proper permits and now is trying to sell the garage for \$600,000. According to the DOB's website, five complaints about the property have been made so far in 2007, and the property owner was hit with a work without a permit violation in May and a \$2,500 fine.

"This immediate area has two properties right across from one another and one around the corner that carries most of the block that seems to really signify the problems that communities are facing with over development," Holden said.

In response, a DOB spokesperson wrote in a statement that the agency is pressuring Huang to remove one-and-one-half-stories from the building.

“Once the work is completed, the building will comply with the city’s zoning regulations,” the statement read. “The Buildings Department is closely reviewing the plans and will continue to monitor any future work to ensure compliance with all laws.”

According to the DOB, a stop work order for the property remains in effect, and Huang is working out a permit for the deconstruction with the agency.

Still, his work will be under close review by the DOB, and 14 of his properties throughout the borough currently have stop work orders in place.

“Under its Special Enforcement Plan announced by Mayor Bloomberg in July, the Buildings Department is paying extra attention to repeat offenders, and Tommy Huang has proven himself to be worthy of increased oversight,” the DOB’s statement read.

Holden also questioned whether the property’s Floor-Area-Ratio (FAR) would be in compliance to zoning if the top one-and-one-half floors of the building were removed, and a DOB spokesperson said that it would meet requirements.

“Huang should be given no consideration. He should be made to abide by the zoning regulations and should not be allowed to exceed the FAR for an R4-1 zoning district,” Holden said.