

**DAILY NEWS**

**Mayor Bloomberg signs Westchester Square Business Improvement District into law to help shopping hub**

**BID is the borough's ninth**

By **Daniel Beekman** / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

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*Jeanne Noonan for New York Daily News  
Mayor Bloomberg signs a bill at City Hall for the development of Westchester Square BID in the Bronx.*

The stroke of a pen at City Hall could trigger the revitalization of an East Bronx neighborhood.

Mayor Bloomberg signed the new Westchester Square Business Improvement District into law Wednesday, paving the way for local property

owners and merchants to clean up and advertise the commercial crossroads.

The borough now boasts nine BIDs, from Kingsbridge in the West Bronx to Southern Blvd. in the South Bronx. Funded by landlords and shopkeepers who pay a special property tax assessment to the city, BIDs preen, patrol and promote shopping corridors.

The push to organize a Westchester Square BID began four years ago, said merchant leader John Bonizio, who owns an eyewear store in the nabe. It took time because the district included 86 landlords and 145 businesses, he said.

"We feel great," Bonizio said. "But now the real work starts."

The new BID will name a board of directors and hire an executive director by July, he said.

He or she will draw from an annual budget of \$320,000 to implement a clean streets program, host outdoor concerts and improve local transportation.

The BID could offer free shuttle service between Westchester Square and several nearby institutions, including the Hutchinson Metro Center office complex, Albert Einstein College of Medicine and Calvary Hospital.

"People who work at Hutch Metro Center and Einstein and Calvary will be able to jump on a shuttle bus to Westchester Square for lunch," said Bonizio.

Decades ago, Westchester Square was the thriving commercial hub of the East Bronx, with the No. 6 subway line and numerous bus routes stopping there.

But the introduction of express bus service from Throggs Neck to Manhattan and the closure of the local Woolworth's five-and-dime in the 1990s triggered its decline.

The new BID will build on the work of a merchants association established in 2007, said Bonizio. The group has lured new stores to the neighborhood and sponsored community art fairs.

"The Square is ready for business, poised for a comeback," said City Councilman James Vacca.

The City Council voted 58-0 to approve the BID.

Bonizio said a goal of the BID will be to increase foot traffic near local shops, noting the renovation of Owen Dolen Recreation Center in the heart of Westchester Square could help.

The renovation is currently underway and slated to be complete by next spring, when the BID hopes to stage open-air concerts.

The BID will pay for new security cameras, snow removal and a team of uniformed streets cleaners and will "run Westchester Square like a well-oiled machine," vowed Bonizio.

The city now includes 67 BIDs, all managed by the Department of Small Business Services. Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens boast more BIDs than the Bronx. But the Bronx Chamber of Commerce plans to organize additional BIDs soon in neighborhoods such as Castle Hill and Parkchester, said Lenny Caro, Chamber president.