

**COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8 BRONX
MINUTES OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE HELD
JANUARY 20, 2010**

BOARD MEMBERS: Robert Fanuzzi Committee Chair, Steven Froot, Ari Goldman, Maria Khury, Sergio Marquez, Herbert Young

GENERAL PUBLIC/REPRESENTATIVES: John Bindela, Katherine Broihier Kingsbridge BID, Maria Clark Riverdale Press, Vasco Da Silva Sotheby's, Chris Dorian Small Business Services, Shannon Godson KRVDC, John McKeon, Robert Press, Andrew Sandler rep. Councilman Oliver Koppell, Howard Ring, Petr Stand KRVDC,

Meeting commenced at 7:30 pm.

I. Chair's Report

- A. There are two shopping districts that could benefit from enrolling in the NYC Small Business Service's Clean Streets Program: 242nd Street and Broadway, on the west side, and Broadway at 225th, on the east side. To get the extra clean-up services, merchants enroll in the program, which provides the service free of charge for a year. The chair will query the merchants.
- B. Economic Development Committee member Ari Goldman is the new chair of the Technology Committee. This committee will be looking at the website to see if we can add links to local business, non-profits and cultural institutions. We are just in the beginning stages of this project.
- C. Jaybars, a locally owned gourmet deli will be opening on Riverdale Avenue on Saturday, January 23rd.
- D. In January, the Executive Board of the Kingsbridge BID met to consider expanding its area to include 238th Street and Broadway. It will further discuss the matter at its full January board meeting. The BID would need to apply for an Avenue NYC grant to fund the BID expansion process, so the process could take two years to complete. The chair urged expansion and offered help.
- E. According to Dara Nussbaum-Vasquez, of the NYC Economic Development Corporation, the Broadway mall negotiations with Ceruzzi are still on-going. She could not offer details on the site, but held out hope that a deal could be reached.

II. Guest Speaker, Chris Dorian from the Small Business Services (“SBS”)

Mr. Dorian described the services of SB: it helps businesses to form, do business, and grow by providing direct assistance to business owners, fostering neighborhood development in commercial districts, and linking employers to a skilled and qualified workforce. Mr. Dorian stated that there are a lot of programs out there and it is a very complex process. SBS is there to help people find the programs they qualify. SBS has helped both large (like Whole Foods) and small scale projects. Mr. Dorian recommended that local merchants speak with the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation (“BOEDC”) to see how Riverdale Avenue (and other parts of CB8) can be improved. BOEDC has worked with SBS before so it would be easier to receive funding from the SBS if the BOEDC is involved. Mr. Dorian recommended that the merchants should come together and decide what is best for the area instead of having each merchant work by themselves to improve the overall area.

R. Fanuzzi will be contacting BOEDC to find out what part of their organization works with merchant organizing and what interest it has in working with our local development corporation on an Avenue NYC grant.

A key service of SBS is Avenue NYC, which provides funding for non-profit economic development organizations (local development corporations, merchants associations, BIDs) in all five boroughs to carry out commercial revitalization activities in the districts they serve. These funds could be used by an organization like the Kingsbridge Riverdale Van Cortlandt Development Corporation (KRVCDC) to start a merchant organization, generate a marketing plan, or do a larger strategic plan that would plot future growth and identify successful business possibilities, given the demographics of the area. Avenue NYC also funds “placemaking” for commercial districts, which would involve design and promotions. The chair of KRVCDC, Petr Stand, expressed great interest in getting his organization into the Avenue NYC process in the hope of developing a street plan for Riverdale Avenue.

III. Old Business

A. Riverdale Avenue

1. Future Growth

Vasco Da Silva, commercial agent for Sotheby’s discussed develop concerning Riverdale Avenue. Mr. Da Silva stated that Jay from Jaybars

intends to get the merchants together to form a merchant association. Mr. Da Silva said that Riverdale Avenue is what Johnson Avenue used to be like five years ago. Then two brand name tenants, Halstead and Starbucks, occupied stores on Johnson Avenue. Mr. Da Silva feels that this brought a lot more foot traffic and recognition to Johnson Avenue. Mr. Da Silva believes that Riverdale needs a brand name tenant (like a Dunkin Donuts) to increase Riverdale Avenue's foot traffic, which would then bring more retailers to the area.

Several members of the committee expressed their differences with this plan for commercial development of Riverdale Avenue, especially with the opening of the Papa John's pizza franchise. Petr Stand spoke against the "mallification" of a distinctive New York City neighborhood; R. Fanuzzi spoke of the role of merchant organizations in other neighborhoods in recruiting and planning for local businesses that serve community needs. Howard Ring suggested that a DVD should be created about Riverdale Avenue and used as a marketing tool to plan strategically, and to bring retailers that people want into the area; Mr. Stand and R. Fanuzzi both endorsed the idea of a street plan for Riverdale Avenue.

John Bindela, owner of Jasper's Pizza stated that there are already too many pizzerias serving the Riverdale market and Papa John's is going to significantly hurt his business. He has been in business in Riverdale for over twenty years and has seen the number of his competitors rise exponentially: there are now 29 pizza parlors. The proliferation of pizza parlors, the downgrading of restaurant quality, and the lack of real choice for local residents were all cited as reasons why a marketing plan is necessary.

Mr. Dorian of SBS said that money for business development projects can sometimes come from the city budget, at the request of the local councilman. Mr. Fanuzzi said that it would cost \$5,000 to create a promotional DVD and \$15,000 to create a street plan. The committee agreed that first, a local merchant organization should form, and that second, in cooperation with the local development corporation or BOEDC, that we should try to get the funds to create this marketing plans/outreach from Avenue NYC and/or the city budget to get these funds. Andrew Sandler of Councilman Koppell's office pledged the councilman's support and will be participating in any future discussions about street improvements.

2. Vacancies

Mr. Da Silva described the landholding pattern on Riverdale Avenue. Several are open to commercial tenants, but Mr. Da Silva stated that one of the landlord's (who owns four vacant storefronts) is only offering five year leases and no retailers would sign only a five year term (need at least ten years). Mr. Da Silva and R. Fanuzzi recommended that a non-profit might be a good fit for one of these storefronts since the non-profit would not necessarily hold out for a long term lease. Mr. Da Silva also stated that maybe the community can pressure the landlord to try to be more accommodating to potential tenants. He also stated that the Latitude Buildings, located on Riverdale Avenue, just received their Temporary Certificate of Occupancy, and that families were moving in: good news for Riverdale Avenue merchants.

3. Transportation

John, owner of John's Botany Bay, complained about the city ticketing practices, which drives customers away, especially on the busiest day of his year, Mother's Day. He suggested that the community board ask the city to install bike racks to enable local residents to do their shopping without needing to park.

IV. New Business

A. Stella-Dora Factory

R. Fanuzzi reported that the owners of the site, Brynwood, are now open to offers for the property, and, according to their real estate agent, would be open for a manufacturing business. The committee supports the idea of a mixed economy in the district in order to secure a higher wage for employees and therefore will investigate industrial incentives and recruitment services on both the city and state level.

B. FRESH

R. Fanuzzi reported on the Food Retail Expansion for Supporting Health (FRESH), which provides zoning changes and financial incentives for the establishment of neighborhood grocery stores in underserved communities in Northern Manhattan, the South Bronx, Central Brooklyn and Jamaica, Queens. The program is open to grocery store operators renovating existing retail space, or developers seeking to construct or renovate retail space that will be leased by a full-line grocery store operator. Only Community Boards 1 – 7 qualify for the zoning portion of this program. CB8 might be qualified for the financial incentives. CB8 and

Councilman Koppell should write a joint letter to the major's office concerning FRESH. Also, we should find out why we do not qualify for the zoning part of this program, given that many parts of the district do not have adequate supply of grocery stores and could be considered underserved. R. Fanuzzi, in close contact with Food Systems Network, thought that a study of our local "food system" could be commissioned and a case be made for FRESH eligibility.

C. Miscellaneous

Howard Ring noted the dearth of a discount brokerage house in CB8 and suggested that a commercial leasing agent pursue a discount brokerage house for Riverdale Avenue.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Ari Goldman
Economic Development Committee

Robert Fanuzzi
Chairman
Economic Development Committee