



The City of New York

Queens Community Board 11

Serving the Communities of Auburndale, Bayside, Douglaston, Hollis Hills
Little Neck and Oakland Gardens

Christine L. Haider Chairperson / **Susan Seinfeld** District Manager

To: Board Members
From: Laura James & Alim Gafar, Education Committee Co- Chairs
Christine L. Haider, East Flushing/North Bayside Zoning Committee Chair
Re: CB 11 Education & Zoning Joint Committee Report
Date: October 30, 2015

The Community Board 11 Education Committee and East Flushing/North Bayside Zoning Committee held a joint meeting on October 27, 2015 in order to review with the School Construction Authority's proposed site acquisition for a new high school at 203-05 32 Avenue, Block 6030 Lot 40, currently the Bayside Jewish Center. In attendance at the meeting were: Laura James and Alim Gafar, Co-Chairs, Christine L. Haider, Board & Zoning Committee Chair, Eileen Miller, 3rd Vice Chair, Henry Euler, Roy Giusetti, Jessica Sin, Melvin Meer, Mohan Jethwani, Mario Ferazzoli, Sila Asa, Robert Liatto, Mary Donahue, Paul DiBenedetto, Steve Pivawer; community members, David Solano and Dina Quandamatteo and District Manager, Susan Seinfeld. Also attending were 34 residents, Michael Athy, the Bayside High School principal and representatives from the offices of Councilman Vallone, Assemblyman Braunstein and Senator Avella.

Melanie LaRocca, Chief of Staff of the School Construction Authority (SCA), presented the proposal to build a new high school facility for approximately 739 students. The site is approximately 54,000 sq ft (1.24) acres. The SCA was given the task of finding a site for a high school in this geographic area due to the increasing enrollment numbers and sustained overcrowding at the three local high schools. The Jewish center was publicly made available for sale. The SCA has entered a contract with BJC but closing on the property depends on approval by the City Council and the Mayor. In the DOE five year plan, 5,604 high school seats have been identified as needed in Queens. There is funding for 2,802 seats. \$114 million has been dedicated to fund this school.

Board members asked questions about the studies that SCA has to conduct to evaluate new sites. Ms. LaRocca explained that consultants conduct a prescribed environmental impact study which includes evaluation of the groundwater, soil conditions, traffic patterns and public transportation. This study is underway and takes some months. There is no design for a building until the site is fully approved.

Reference was made to a site in Whitestone that was identified but rejected by SCA. Ms. LaRocca explained that the site has no sewers, water or power. SCA did not have the funding to install infrastructure, which is very expensive. It would also delay construction when they have opportunity to build elsewhere sooner.

Questions were raised and extensive discussion ensued about over-enrollment in the local high schools. Members stated that the DOE Office of Enrollment was assigning too many students to the three high schools in the district from areas far from the schools. Ms. LaRocca stated that of the 9th graders in District 26, 63% zoned students choose FLHS, 60% choose Cardozo and 68% choose BHS. Mr. Solano contested these figures based on his research and familiarity with student placement. Ms. LaRocca reiterated that SCA has an obligation to find sites due to tremendous need throughout the City and borough. Local students in large numbers go to other schools by choice, i.e. specialized schools and students come to these high performing schools from elsewhere. Mr. Morissey explained that there are many factors involved in placement of students to schools. He will bring back to DOE any suggestions made by the community about the use of a new school.

Ms. LaRocca discussed the potential use and type of school that the DOE could consider. There is the Beacon School model, as in Manhattan, or a specialized school program. Other programming suggested has been an annex for BHS and the move of the School of World Journalism to the site from IS 25. She suggested that the community could make suggestions of a type of school to the DOE to keep students here in the area. She also indicated that there may be a D75 special education component in the school.

Parking in the area of the proposed school was discussed and whether or not onsite parking would be provided. SCA does not usually design buildings with parking but if this is a concern of the community then it will be looked at in the design of this building. SCA was asked if they would use eminent domain to take property. Ms. LaRocca said they do not use eminent domain to displace residents or businesses. Other possible sites were mentioned; the Bulova property in East Elmhurst and vacant NYS Creedmoor property. The Bulova property was looked at by SCA but had minimal transportation available. SCA was told that NYS had not made more property available.

Residents asked questions and made statements about the high cost for construction, lack of transparency by SCA, the proximity of the site to two other elementary school, traffic problems caused by current area schools, potential overcrowding of this school also, parking concerns due to the large number of teachers, school zoning for current high schools, request to build schools in southeast Queens and in underutilized facilities, the use of schools belonging to the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens.

Ms. LaRocca explained that they cannot find many available sites or sites that are ideal; it is expensive to build in NYC, the bidding process is transparent and all contractors are vetted. High school students travel by city bus and SCA will work with the Dept. of Transportation to improve traffic conditions and install new controls as necessary.

She also indicated that many former Catholic school buildings are being used by the City. The SCA has built in D. 30, D. 24 and D. 29, but have not built in this general area which needs additional seats.

The owner of house immediately behind school asked about construction noise, vibrations and the effect on his property. Mr. Mirasola explained that all property owners are visited by the SCA beforehand, pre-construction photos are taken of the homes, monitors are placed at the homes and residents advised of all progress.

Ms. LaRocca stated that the SCA has been participating in community meetings and they are listening and committed to working with the community to accommodate a school with the type of programs desired. However, she understands that many oppose the building of the school.

Laura James made a motion which was seconded by Mel Meer, to approve the School Construction Authority proposal to build a new high school of approximately 739 seats in School District 26, located at 203-05 32nd Avenue, Block 6030, Lot 40, Bayside.

There was some discussion on the motion. Mel Meer discussed the Whitestone site and the role Council Member Vallone played in opposing that site but supporting this site. Other area elected officials have opposed this site. In his opinion, Queens may need seats but Bayside does not need seats and that the DOE must have quality schools in other areas so students do not have to travel to this area. He believes that there will be no parking on-site and it will be an annex of Bayside High School. Laura James stated that there should be continued community engagement with the SCA even if the Community Board disapproves the site. David Solano stated that he had presented information to SCA and DOE about why the seats are not needed in this area but has not received an answer. He said that the SCA has not provided the information that is required to prove the need for more seats. Ms. Larocca stated that the need is determined with the DOE Blue Book (a new one will be published soon) which looks at the percentages that are over or under target school utilization rates and current capacities.

The joint committees voted on the motion which was unanimously defeated.