

Community Board 1, Meeting Minutes

January 17th, 2017

Board Member Attendees – List Attached

OPENING: 6:30pm

- Chairman Joseph Risi greeted attendees, and asked for people to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The pledge was recited.
- Mr. Risi then introduced, and turned to floor over to the Borough President, Melinda Katz.

STATEMENTS BY BOROUGH PRESIDENT MELINDA KATZ

- Borough President Melinda Katz attended the meeting to touch base with the Board and discuss the current state of Queens and the District.
- Borough President Katz offered belated happy holiday wishes and proceeded to thank Chairman Risi, the entire Executive Board, and District Manager Florence Koulouris. She also acknowledged Ms. RoseMarie Poveromo for honoring the Borough President at a recent event.
- Borough President Katz acknowledged the job the Community Board is tasked with is not easy, and that the Board does a significant amount of work. The Borough President then thanked all Members for their efforts.
- Borough President Katz announced that Queens is an extremely active area, and tourism has experienced significant growth.
- As highlighted by the Borough President, Queens is a borough of neighborhoods, and while it is important to promote growth and tourism for investment purposes, it is also critical to keep the focus on the families who have established roots in the community. Borough President Katz asserted that Queens must focus on growing smart.
- There are many developments on the horizon in the Borough, and in Astoria specifically. One in particular is the BQX. There are a number of details that must be finalized and factors that must be considered with regard to this project, including the route and access to areas underserved by the current transit system.
- The State of the Borough would be held on 1/27/17 at 10am.
- The Borough President reminded Community Board Members that applications for their positions would be due on 1/20, and that there would be upcoming trainings.
- The Borough President concluded by highlighting the fact that Astoria is a very safe community, and thanked all Board Members.
- Chairman Risi thanked the Borough President and called for the representative for the applications with the Board of Standards and Appeals to take the floor.

BOARD OF STANDARDS AND APPEALS

- Hilary Atzrott, Esq. attended the meeting as a representative for both applications.
- Ms. Atzrott informed the Board that she attended the recent Land Use and Zoning meeting to provide a presentation on the applications, and that additional information was given to all Board Members [in their folders].

1. **BSA App. No. 2016-4467 BZ 69-25 Astoria Boulevard; this variance application is to authorize for the continued use of an existing, indirectly illuminated outdoor advertising sign at 69-25 Astoria Boulevard. The outdoor advertising sign has existed at the property for nearly 78 years.**
 - a. This site is located between 70th Street and Hazen Street on Astoria Blvd. North.
 - b. This location contains a two faced advertising sign that has been blacked out for DOB compliance purposes.
 - c. The site been in current configuration since 1938.
 - d. This lot is the smallest in a 400 foot radius and has an irregular lot line, making as of right development infeasible. This is an R4 zoning district (which only permits residential or community facility use as of right), and development for these purposes is not possible due to practical and financial limitations.
 - e. Any development would require a variance.
 - f. The larger face which is exposed to 70th street is proposed to be reduced in size.

 2. **BSA App. No. 2016-4469 BZ 49-23 Astoria Boulevard; this variance application is to authorize for the continued use of an indirectly illuminated advertising sign at 49-23 Astoria Boulevard. The advertising sign has existed on the property for nearly 79 years.**
 - a. This lot is the third smallest in a 400 foot radius.
 - b. The lot is located at the corner of Astoria Blvd. North and Hazen Street.
 - c. Development for residential or commercial uses is infeasible at this site for practical and financial reasons.
- Ms. Atzrott continued her presentation on both applications by stating that the Land Use and Zoning Committee had concerns about the lighting on premises, and clarified that these signs are lit indirectly (unlike many highway signs), and that while there have been no complaints from residents, her clients are willing to install light protectors to ensure the light is only directed towards the signs themselves, and not towards neighboring residential properties.
 - Ms. Atzrott reviewed the presentation included in Board Members' folders, including evidence that the signs have been in their current configuration since the 1960s. Copies of permits from 1937 and 1938 were also included in this presentation.
 - These signs have been blacked out since July 2012 (69-25) and September 2013 (49-23). However, as later disclosed, there was a brief period of non-compliance in 2016, which was documented via a photograph in the presentation provided to the Board. This discrepancy was highlighted by Board Member questioning later in the meeting. Advertisements are not permitted as of right per zoning regulations in residential communities.
 - Chairman Risi questioned the representative, resulting in the following clarifications:
 - Dialogue took place between Mr. Risi and the representative regarding whether the premises on which the signs are located are required to sell whatever the sign advertises. Ms. Atzrott noted that while this may be true for accessory signs, the signs in question were, not nor had they ever been, accessory signs.
 - The representative did not believe there were any content based restrictions due to constitutional protections. These signs have most frequently hosted adverts for lawyers or TV shows. The owner of the signs are a nationwide company with a good reputation according to Ms. Atzrott.
 - Chairman Risi requested a guarantee that should these matters receive approval, the signs would not include explicit promotion of adult entertainment. Ms. Atzrott promised the signs would not advertise any such content.

- Mr. Risi turned the floor over to Land Use and Zoning Chair Elizabeth Erion.
- Land Use and Zoning Chair Elizabeth Erion asked Ms. Atzrott to describe the circumstances occurring since 1961 that resulted in restrictions on advertising in residential neighborhoods, as well as asking why the signs continued to be used until recently.
 - Ms. Atzrott described the historical context for the Board. 1961 saw the creation of the first comprehensive zoning regulations. These regulations divided the city in to residential, commercial and manufacturing zones. At that time, this area of Astoria was converted to a strictly residential district. These regulations had a sunset provision; advertising signs such as the ones on the agenda at this meeting were required to be removed within 10 years. However, subsequent court action resulted in stays throughout the city, which in turn resulted in signs remaining for longer. Once the stays expired (around 2012), the Department of Buildings adopted a local law that any advertising signs in a residential district had to register with the DOB. If registration didn't occur, the signs (including these two) were removed to avoid penalties. These regulations have required the applicant to request variances for these sites.
- Ms. Erion opened the meeting up for additional questions from Board Members. The Board Members questioned the representative, resulting in the following clarifications:
 - The lot at 69-25 Astoria Blvd. is 790 square feet. The lot at 49-23 is 2552 square feet. Both are zoned as R4. Discussion turned to lot dimensions, which are irregular. These along with additional lot features are prohibitive with regard to development feasibility.
 - While advertising would be removed in the event the Board voted against the variances, the structures would likely remain.
 - Discussion turned to discrepancies in Ms. Atzrott's verbal and paper presentations with regard to the duration of time that advertisement was presented and blacked out. Specifically, there was an instance documented in the paper presentation of advertisements in the year 2016. Ms. Atzrott explained that there was a brief period (2 months) of non-compliance in 2016, but that advertisement has since been removed, and that there were no other periods of non-compliance.
 - Neighbors within a 400 foot radius were notified of the variance requests.
 - There was no change in property ownership, but there was a corporate name change in 1982.
 - The land and the signs are owned by the same individual.
 - There is a requirement by the DOB that there must be identification of the sign owner included on advertising signs.
- Chairman Risi called for public comments. No requests were heard.
- Mr. Risi noted there would be a vote after a breakout session later in the meeting.
- Chairman Risi announced a change in the order of the agenda, and proceeded to discuss the business portion of the meeting.

BUSINESS

A) Approval of Minutes

- Chairman Risi called for a motion to approve the minutes.
- **MOTION to approve minutes made by Jean Marie D'Alleva.**
- **MOTION SECONDED by Vanessa Jones-Hall.**
- **Motion to approve minutes passed.**
- Mr. Risi called for the District Manager's report.

B) District Manager's Report: Florence Koulouris:

- District Manager Florence Koulouris wished attendees a Happy New Year, and discussed the multitude of events and meetings she attended throughout the month. Ms. Koulouris mentioned that Ms. RoseMarie Poveromo may have additional information about housing from the Department of Finance (related to packets left on the table for Board Members), and would elaborate on the matter.

C) Committee Reports:

- **Access and Disability:** No Report.
- **Airport:** Chair RoseMarie Poveromo wished attendees a Happy New Year.
- **Capital/Expense & Budget/Planning:** Chair Norma Nieves-Blas announced that the Committee is awaiting the Mayor's response to the budget that the Board submitted in 2016.
- **Community & Economic Development:** Chair Thomas Ryan wished attendees a Happy New Year.
- **Consumer Affairs:** No Report.
- **Education/Library:** No Report.
- **Environmental Protection:** Chair Antonella Di Saverio wished attendees a Happy New Year.
- **Health/Senior Services:** Chair Judy Trilivas wished attendees a Happy New Year.
- **Housing:** Chair RoseMarie Poveromo indicated she did not have a presentation on the information from the Department of Finance to discuss as the District Manager suggested, but did state that she hoped to have a report for the following month.
- **Office Staff:** No Report.
- **Parks/Recreation & Cultural Services:** Chair Richard Khuzami announced the latest meeting regarding the Anchor Park program renovations to Astoria Park, which would be held at Bohemian Hall on 1/25/17. Additionally, Mr. Khuzami announced he served on the Queens Council for the Arts Council Grant Panel again this year.
- **Public Relations:** No Report.
- **Public Safety:** Chair Antonio Meloni informed the Board that the 114th Precinct has new recruits who have started at the precinct, and also shared that 2016 had a significant decrease in all crime with the exception of robberies. Mr. Meloni wished attendees a Happy New Year.
 - i. Chairman Risi acknowledged officers from the 114th Precinct who were in attendance at the meeting.
 - ii. Mr. Risi also acknowledged Mr. Joseph Nocerino (Community Coordinator from the Borough President's office), Matthew Wallace from Councilmember Van Bramer's office, and Damaris Moné (who works for Senator Peralta).
- Ms. Elizabeth Erion inquired whether she should make her Land Use and Zoning report during committee reports. Mr. Risi clarified that the report should be given later.
- **Transportation:** No Report.

- **Youth Services:** Chair Jose Batista announced that DYCD is having an advisory board meeting, and will be having public forums in different neighborhoods throughout the year to obtain community input. Astoria's will be held on November 4th, 2017 at the Ravenswood Community Center.
- **Street Festivals:** Chair Ann Bruno stated that while the Street Festivals/Special Events committee did hold a meeting, there was no resolution developed and the issues discussed were tabled. There are new changes proposed for certain street festivals.
- **Land Use and Zoning:** Chair Elizabeth Erion announced that the Land Use and Zoning Committee has been engaged in efforts to learn more about the Ravenswood neighborhood (i.e. "the context" and the "land use" in the neighborhood), given there have been a lot of as of right developments, and there are several large scale projects proposed for the area. Ravenswood has not undergone any rezoning since 1961. The Land Use and Zoning Committee took time during January to drive through the neighborhood to get a better sense of the current landscape. Additionally, Ms. Erion announced that the Committee would like engage in similar efforts in other parts of the district that have not been rezoned since 1961.
- Chairman Risi called for public discussion.

PUBLIC DISCUSSION:

- Samy Fahmy spoke in opposition to Doha, as well as expressing the concerns of St. George Greek Orthodox Church regarding the matter. Mr. Fahmy indicated that the church has collected approximately 500 signatures against approval of the location's pending cabaret license.
 - Chairman Risi requested a clarification regarding the application, specifically whether Doha had their application delayed with the SLA. Consumer Affairs Committee Assistant Chair Pauline Jannelli answered affirmatively.
- Mr. Bernard Callegari from Build Up New York offered an update on Alma Realty's work on the Astoria Cove development. Mr. Callegari announced that work is being conducted in the absence of appropriate permitting. Permits were denied, according to the representative, because of failure to pay fines related to mismanagement of asbestos remediation. Mr. Callegari also provided statistics regarding construction site deaths and concerns that many developers are not taking appropriate steps to protect employees.
- Board Member Frances Luhmann-McDonald asked the representative for St. George's Church what time services are held. Mr. Fahmy answered that there are midnight services. Mr. Risi told Ms. Luhmann-McDonald she would receive an invitation to the Consumer Affairs Committee meeting where she should express concerns.
- Mr. Risi called for a breakout session to permit the Land Use and Zoning Committee to meet to discuss the two applications with the Board of Standards and Appeals.

----- BREAKOUT SESSION - 7:15PM -----

----- MEETING RESUMED - 7:30PM -----

- Chairman Risi called the meeting back to order.
- Prior to going to a decision from the Land Use and Zoning Committee on matters from the Board of Standards and Appeals, Mr. Risi asked to make two introductions to the Board.
- Mr. Risi introduced Police Officer Gabe Tovar, who is the new Crime Prevention Officer for the 114th Precinct.
 - Police Officer Tovar introduced himself and spoke briefly, offering to answer community questions.
- Chairman Risi introduced representatives from P.S. 166Q, including Ms. Melissa Lee, Mr. Freddie Mac, and two students, who thanked the Board for their efforts that enabled the school to open a new play street. The initiative has been successful and students are enjoying the amenity.
- Mr. Risi thanked the representatives from P.S.166Q for their statements, and called for a decision from the Land Use and Zoning Committee.

DECISIONS ON BOARD OF STANDARDS AND APPEALS APPLICATIONS

- Committee Chair Elizabeth Erion announced that the committee voted to separate the items and vote individually on each application, as a result of the dialogue regarding the matters.
1. **BSA App. No. 2016-4467 BZ 69-25 Astoria Boulevard.**
 - On the matter of BSA Application number 2016-4467 BZ 69-25 (the 790 square foot lot), the Committee voted for conditional approval with several stipulations:
 - The advertising will remain in print form and will not be digitalized or electronic in any form,
 - Lighting will be minimized and directed away from residential properties,
 - Signage will be reduced in size by a certain date,
 - The content of advertisements shall not promote adult entertainment venues or services.
 - **MOTION to conditionally approve the application [with stipulations] made by Vanessa Jones-Hall.**
 - **MOTION SECONDED by Rose Anne Alafogiannis.**
 - Chairman Risi called for discussion on the matter.
 - Questioning by and discussion with Mr. Daniel Aliberti led to the clarification that failure to approve the applications would lead to the signs being blacked out, but remaining onsite.
 - Concern about the site becoming a lure for graffiti in the event that the signs remained empty was raised by Mr. Edwin Cadiz, but Ms. Erion didn't find the scenario likely due to the elevation of the signs.
 - Ms. Antonella Di Saverio asked for a description of the residential housing in the area. Committee Chair Elizabeth Erion described the area as including detached and semi-detached three story multi-family homes. Residences front on Ditmars Blvd. and side streets. While the rear of the properties do have exposure to the signs, given the signs are not active, it is difficult to determine whether lighting would pose a nuisance for the neighboring residents.
 - Mr. Risi reiterated that there was a motion for conditional approval, and asked for Roll Call to be taken.
 - Ms. Jean Marie D'Alleva took roll call.
 - **MOTION PASSED, 32 in favor, 8 opposed.**
 2. **BSA App. No. 2016-4469 BZ 49-23 Astoria Boulevard.**

- Committee Chair Elizabeth Erion announced that the Land Use and Zoning Committee also voted for conditional approval of the second application with the same stipulations as the previous item (print form only (no digitizing), mandate that lighting be focused away from residences, requiring sign size be reduced by a certain date, and no risqué advertising content).
- **MOTION MADE by Edward Babor to conditionally approve the application.**
- **MOTION SECONDED by Antonio Meloni.**
- Ms. Jean Marie D'Alleva took Roll Call.
- **MOTION PASSED, 31 in favor, 9 opposed.**
- Chairman Risi called for elections to begin, and introduced the Chair of the Legal, Legislation & Parliamentary Committee, Mr. John Katsanos.

BUSINESS

D) New/Old Business:

- *Election of Officers [Executive Board Elections], Specifically:*
 - Chairperson, Joseph Risi*
 - 1st Vice Chair, Norma Nieves-Blas*
 - 2nd Vice Chair, Jean Marie D'Alleva*
 - 3rd Vice Chair, Richard Khuzami*
 - Executive Secretary, Edward Babor*
 - Sergeant-at-Arms, Thomas Ryan*
- Mr. Katsanos described the voting process to Board Members. Open ballot forms were placed in the Board Members' folders. These ballots contained three columns; if the Board Member sought to re-elect the incumbent, they would indicate so in the second column. If not, they would have to nominate a different Board Member in the third column. Signatures were required at the bottom of the page.
- Discussion ensued between the Board, clarifying the procedure by which voting would take place.
- **MOTION by John Katsanos to either elect the current Executive Board or substitute alternative Board Member names (to vote for individual positions) by use of the open ballot form.**
- **MOTION SECONDED by Rose Anne Alafogiannis.**
- Mr. Thomas Ryan collected paper ballots.
- Mr. Katsanos announced the work on amending the Bylaws was ongoing and changes would be sent to Board Members for review shortly.
- Mr. Thomas Ryan, Mr. John Katsanos, Mr. George Alexiou, and Mr. Rod Townsend left the room to count the votes.
- While votes were being counted, additional new business was discussed:
 - Mr. Antonio Meloni announced that, for the first year in many years, there have been no shootings or murders in the Queensbridge Houses.
 - Mr. Cadiz announced an event celebrating the milestone.
 - Mr. Risi called for old business. No calls to discuss old business were heard.
 - Mr. Risi reminded the Board Members that work was still being conducted on amending the Board Bylaws, and that a proposal would be sent to all Board Members for commentary once complete. A meeting will also be held (and

arranged by Mr. Katsanos) to discuss the matter. These Bylaws will need to be voted on.

- iv. The District Manager reviewed the packet of information provided to Board Members by the Department of Finance.
- Mr. Katsanos, Mr. Alexiou, Mr. Townsend, and Mr. Ryan returned at 8:03pm with votes.
 - i. Mr. Katsanos gave the open ballots to District Manager Koulouris.
 - ii. Mr. Katsanos shared the results of the election. **ALL EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS WERE RE-ELECTED.**
 1. All positions received unanimous support with the exception of the Third Vice Chair Position, which received one vote for Mr. Daniel Aliberti.
 - iii. Chairman Risi made an announcement to the Board on behalf of himself and the entire Executive Board, stating it is an honor to represent the Board and the entire community in doing the important work that the Community Board does.
 - iv. Mr. Risi asked whether there were any other comments.
 1. Ms. Silverman congratulated the Executive Board on their re-election. Ms. Silverman then discussed her satisfaction with the approval of the play street as P.S. 166Q, stating she believed had the previous administration been tasked with making a determination on the matter, the issue would not have received approval. Ms. Silverman indicated she believed it was Mr. Risi's leadership that enabled the matter to be approved.
 2. Mr. Risi thanked Ms. Silverman for her comment, and indicated he believed the Board had made a determination that was in the best interest of the children.

E) Adjournment:

Mr. Risi called for a motion to close.

- **Motion made by Edward Babor.**
- **Seconded by Jean Marie D'Alleva.**

Meeting Adjourned at 8:10pm