

Community Board 1
SEPTEMBER 11, 2012

Mr. Vinicio Donato, Chairperson of Community Board 1, commenced at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Donato opened the meeting by asking everyone to stand for a moment of silence in memory of 9/11,

Mr. Donato then went on to the public hearing item from the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA). Mr. John Carusone, Chair of the Zoning and Variance Committee, read item # 173-99-BZ – Premises 43-60 Ditmars Blvd. (Matrix Fitness Center). An application for an extension of term of a Special Permit for an existing Physical Culture Establishment. Mr. Eric Palatnik, Attorney, he stated that the premise is located in the shopping center on the lower level. It is accessible by stairs and elevators. The special permit had expired in March of 2011 and they are now requesting a minor change. They would like to enlarge the facility by 2,800 sq. ft. He provided various illustrations of the proposed enlargement of the facility and placement of equipment. Mr. Carusone asked if they are in compliance. Mr. Palatnik replied “Yes”. Mr. Carusone asked if there were any additional changes outside of the proposed enlargement. Mr. Palatnik replied no, everything is the same. Mr. Carusone asked what the additional space will be used for. Mr. Palatnik stated that it will be additional gym space. There are no violations and the hours of operation are Monday to Friday from 5am to 1am and Saturday and Sunday from 7am to 9pm. The expansion will not impact the neighbors. Mr. Donato asked if there was anyone on the Board who had questions for the applicant. Ms. France McDonald asked if they are leasing the additional space. Mr. Palatnik replied “Yes”. Ms. McDonald asked what the space was being used for. Mr. Palatnik stated that the space was being used for storage space by the supermarket. Ms. McDonald asked how long will this permit be extended until. Mr. Palatnik stated that it will be extended to 2021. Mr. Donato asked if there was anyone in the audience who wanted to speak for or against this application. Seeing no one. Item closed.

Mr. Joseph Risi, Chair of the Consumer Affairs Committee, read the next item from the Department of Consumer Affairs #1441294 – Premises 32-07 30th Avenue. (Sweet Athens Café). An application to establish an Unenclosed Sidewalk Café with 36 tables and 116 seats. Ms. Kathleen Stathopoulos, Attorney, and George Sporakos, owner came up on behalf of the application. Mr. Risi asked if they could explain why this is a new application. Mr. Stathopoulos stated that it is no longer the Athens Café, her clients purchased Athens Café from the previous owners and it is a corporation now called the Sweet Athens Café. Mr. Risi asked what the hours of operation are and what they serve. Mr. Sporakos stated that the hours are from 8am to 1am, 7 days a week. They serve regular food and a variety of pastries and coffee. Mr. Risi asked if they have an on premise liquor license and would they be serving liquor outside. Mr. Sporakos replied “Yes”. Mr. Risi stated that the main concern is the number of tables and seats that they are applying for. Ms. Stathopoulos stated that they were in a rush and their illustration for the outdoor café was done by an architect who wanted to fit the most tables and seats in the area. When the café was purchased they assumed that there was an operating letter that would come along permitting them to operate the café throughout the summer. Due to unforeseen events, that did not happen. They are willing to downsize the number of table and seats. Mr. Risi asked if they would be willing to reduce the number of tables on 30th Avenue, 13 tables and 24 seats, leaving 23 tables and 92 seats. That would be 13 tables and 52 seats on 30th Avenue and 10 tables (9 tables with 4 seats and 1 table with 2 seats) on 32nd Avenue. Ms. Stathopoulos replied that they agree. Mr. Donato asked if there was anyone on the Board who had a question for the applicant. Ms. McDonald asked how many tables and seats the previous owner had. Ms. Stathopoulos stated that the DCA said that there were about 90 seats. Mr. Khuzami asked if the 1:00 am closing is for the outdoor cafe. Ms. Stathopoulos stated that the 1am closing is for the whole restaurant. Ms. Linda Perno asked if that will be the same on the weekend. Ms. Stathopoulos replied “Yes”. Mr. Mullarkey asked if this will turn into a sports bar. Ms. Stathopoulos replied “No”. Mr. Donato asked if there was anyone in the audience who wanted to speak for or against this application. Mr. George Kitsios, Greek Homeowners Association, stated that he and the association are in support of the application. He knows the new owners and this is a landmark in the community. Mr. Frank Arcabascio, President of the 30th Avenue Business Association, stated that the Athens Café is a landmark in the area and there are no merchants that have any opposition. They are in support of expediting this application and making the street look good. No further discussion. Item closed.

The next item Pedestrian Plaza Proposal – A request to consider the installation of a Pedestrian Plaza on Newtown Ave. from 30th Ave. to mid-block. Ms. Maura McCarthy, Queens Borough Commissioner for the City Department of Transportation, stated that the last time she attended a full Board meeting it was about safety improvements along Hoyt Avenue by 31st Street and 29th Street. It was contentious but she thinks that everyone has benefited in the neighborhood and she would very much appreciate everyone’s opinions for the project they are about to present. She then introduced Mr. Vaidila Kungys who stated the proposal for the Pedestrian Plaza at Newtown Avenue and 30th Avenue is to make a safer place. He stated that they have two options 1) they can close part of the Newtown Avenue to make a pedestrian plaza or 2) extend the sidewalks to create a safer intersection and allow

traffic to go through onto Newtown Avenue. He presented a PowerPoint illustration of what is being proposed and how it would affect the neighborhood. They (DOT) try to place public plazas on active transportation corridors, places where a lot of people go through. This location has 14,000 transit riders pass through every day. They like active retail corridors because it makes sense that when people shop they would like to take a break and a plaza is a perfect place to do so. It's a nice place to meet before going to dinner or after dinner. It can be a place outdoors to sit and read or other activities instead of standing on the sidewalks. They like this location because there is a constant flux of people walking through. He then turned to two additional points 1) lack of open space and 2) safety. Astoria is one of the areas with the least amount of open space. There are parks in the area, but the community is lacking public open space. Mr. Kungys went on to the safety factor at the intersection. There have been many crashes at this location and went on to illustrate why this location is problematic. One being that the crosswalks about 90' long and is uncontrolled. There is a 12' separation of the curb line leaving pedestrians out of view and causing a problem for the 5 way intersection. He illustrated the hazards of various types of intersections. The DOT did a report for School Safety and there are 135 priority locations throughout the City which was based on the schools with the most accidents nearby. PS17 was identified as one of the top three intersections with the most accidents. Their proposal is to create curb extensions to decrease the 90' crosswalk to about 45' and on 30th Avenue making safer for people. He illustrated the flow of traffic and people and added that there would not be any loss of parking spaces. The other option would allow them to create a neighborhood plaza in the center of Astoria that would be 4,700 sq. He guaranteed that business would not be hindered by the plaza and every building gets whatever delivery that they need. Emergency vehicles would be able to come through the Plaza; structures would not be permanent and would be moveable. There would be a loss of 6 parking spaces on Newtown Avenue. He went on to describe how the overall loss of parking would only be 4 parking spaces. Since the sidewalk on 30th Avenue would be extended and it would create parking for 2 additional cars. He then stated that there are 166 vehicles during the busiest time of the day and at the same time there are 534 pedestrians. This means that there are 3 times as much pedestrian's utilizing that intersection than cars. They did a test to see how long it would take to travel with the plaza in place by using cars with GPS and their results stated that the fastest option was to take 33rd Street and it was 25 seconds for the 40% of the cars that would take Newtown Avenue. A one day plaza allowed them to test the Newtown Avenue Plaza and also allowed them to take a survey of the pedestrians and get their feedback on the plaza. He read the questions on the survey and then reviewed the summary of the results. He then went on to the next few slide of what the plaza may look like by showing other locations that already have plazas. DOT does not have the money or resources to maintain the space they are maintained by not-for-profit groups who are not compensated. They look for partners within the community who have an interest and a stake in the community. In this case, Central Astoria LDC has expressed a willingness to explore this and committed to figuring out how to do it. They would be in charge of maintaining the plaza, picking up trash, watering the plants, cleaning the tables, storing the tables and chairs at night and when it snows they have to shovel a path for people to walk. He stated that there are two options; the Board has an opportunity to create a neighborhood destination in Astoria or to just make the crossing safer by extending the sidewalks. Mr. Donato asked if there was anyone on the board who had a question for the applicant. Ms Mary O'Hara stated that there is a medical building slated on Newtown Ave. at the corner of 31st Street. Access a rides and taxis bringing people for testing etc. How would they accommodate them? Ms. McCarthy stated that they spoke to the medical facility earlier in the day and they would access via 32nd Street and would have access to their building at all times. It would be a diversion from their regular path. Ms. O'Hara asked if patients would be dropped at the door. Ms McCarthy replied "Yes". Mr. Khuzami asked if they could clarify the parking on Newtown Avenue. Mr. Kungys stated that Newtown Avenue would stay one way except for the small segment between the plaza and 32nd Street that will be a two way. Mr. Kevin Mullarkey asked if there will be on street handicapped parking. Ms. McCarthy stated no, the City does not put on street handicapped parking but people can receive NYC handicapped parking permits through their office or by an examination by a Department of Health physician. Mr. Robert Piazza stated that the building will be filled with medical offices and there is a new oncology office moving in. He has seen how the patients are dropped off and most of them are senior citizen and half of them are on walkers or crutches. How will they be able to do a two way street? Mr. Kungys stated that that street will not be a two way except for the small section by the plaza and they would have to come up 32nd Street to drop off patients at the medical building. Mr. Piazza stated that there is a lot of congestion on 30th Avenue. Ms. McCarthy stated that for a building has a lot of loading and unloading activity they can go to DOT and ask for a loading and unloading zone. They meet will meet with the facility and analyze the need. She is unable to comment on this location since the facility is not open, at this time. Mr. Carusone asked how they would be able to make a u-turn in the two way section on Newtown Avenue. Ms. McCarthy stated that they created a two way street, just like this one at another location and the first few day's people are confused. Soon they know that it is a dead end street. During a change like this DOT people are on site. Mr. Gus Prentzas stated that according to the safety proposal there would not be any parking spaces lost. But, by extending the curb they would be creating additional parking. Ms. McCarthy stated that the space created would be less than 20' with a fire hydrant. There is not enough room to park. Mr. Prentzas stated that they need to look at the flow of traffic as it goes up Newtown Avenue, 32nd Street and 30th Avenue and referred to a request for Newtown to be a two way. He asked how many accidents actually happened on Newtown Avenue

versus 33rd Street. Mr. Kungys stated that the improvement that they are doing involves a 5 way intersections to make it safer. There are a few accidents, but not many on Newtown Avenue. Mr. George Alexiou asked how this plaza would affect the businesses in the area. Mr. Kungys stated that they spoke to a few merchants and the merchant's association; some said they support the idea and some did not say. Mr. Daniel Aliberti asked if they did a traffic study including the plaza and how it would impact Astoria. How many accidents were there for the plaza area and how many do they expect there to be. Mr. Kungys stated that they did the traffic for the street and around the area of the plaza but they did not do all of Astoria. They can get the information he is requesting, just let them know what he wants. This data includes 1998 to 2000 there were 49 accidents in this area. That includes all types of accidents. Last year a 91 year old woman was killed, that was the most recent incident. Ms. McDonald read a statement regarding the proposed plaza for the Board and the applicant. She added that those involved with this project removed themselves from the vote. Everyone received a study of 280 pages that had responses that were neither scientific nor complete. The photos provided with the study show the same people sitting at the same table in the day and the night. The extent of accidents in time frame in years has not been provided. She went on to say that she attend a meeting last month to discuss this issue and the overall anti-automobile administration. Ms. Rosemarie Poveromo stated that Newtown Avenue is main quick route for EMS to Mt. Sinai Hospital. The Board should think carefully before voting to close this street. Mr. Kungys stated that Mt. Sinai is South of 30th Avenue, it would be a 1000' longer if you took Newtown Avenue. Mr. John Zedonis stated that the survey was done on a Saturday why wasn't the study done during the week. Mr. Kungys stated that they put down automatic recorders on the street to collect data for 2 weeks at 15 minute intervals. They did an analysis of the heaviest traffic time which was Saturday at noon. Mr. Zedonis asked if they survey people in the area as opposed to people outside of a 10 block area. It seems that most of the people surveyed were out of the area. Mr. Kungys stated that they had a booth up at the plaza and wanted to get feedback from everyone that came by whether they stayed or not. Mr. Zedonis asked if they reached out to the people in the immediate area. Ms. McCarthy stated that they distributed flyers to the businesses and to the residents in the neighborhood they also placed it in the newspaper and submitted it to the Community Board. They did not do a mailing to everyone. Mr. Zedonis asked what consideration was given to other areas in the community that may need this type of plaza. Ms. McCarthy stated that she came before the board approximately a year ago and regarding the 31st Street / Hoyt Avenue N and S intersect and gave an example of how the installation of concrete on Hoyt Avenue just east of 31st Street along with a few trees to make a bigger crossing area. There was new stripping and speed bumps where put in as well. Ms. Hantzapoulos asked what businesses will this affect, can people still get there and she was not sure how this will have a negative outcome. Mr. Kungys stated please do not assume this will be bad for business. Mr. Demetrios Demetrios stated that it currently takes him 15 to 20 minutes to find a parking space and asked if perpendicular parking could be installed. Mr. Risi asked what would happen if the sponsor was unable to service the plaza. Ms. McCarthy stated that they would have to sign a legal document stating that they will provide services. Mr. Stamatiades stated that he spoke on behalf of the Central Astoria LDC and whatever is good for the community is good for Central Astoria LDC. Mr. Donato asked for a show of hands of who was for and who was against the proposed plaza. Mr. Donato asked if there was anyone in the audience who wanted to speak for or against this application. Mr. Arcabascio stated that the consensus of the merchants in the area is to extend the curb with a modified plaza. Ms. McCarthy stated that they cannot do a modified plan. It is either extended curb or closed plaza. Mr. Tom Hanson, Owner KeyFood, stated KeyFood has been an anchor and employs hundreds in the area. Closing the street would have a negative effect and would hinder access to their store. This can also be a magnate for undesirables. He is favor of curb extension. A (signature not legible) resident on 33rd Street stated that the cars race down the street and she does not think the plaza is needed. There are enough places to sit. She is against the proposal. Mr. Michael Haks, 16 year resident, stated that he has chosen to stay in Astoria and has felt safe and welcomed in the space. He spoke in favor of the application. Mr. Stewart, resident, stated that taxpayer's money will be paying for this proposal. A plaza is flexible and moveable furniture and paint and it could be modified or changed. Curb extensions are permanent and cannot be changed. He and his wife were there for the one day plaza. He is favor of the plaza proposal. Mr. Eddie Hernandez, resident, stated he has a petition of those who are in favor of the plaza. They created Friends of Newtown Plaza, a group of people who would like to have the plaza. They asked people, young and old, if they would like to have the plaza and within 2 hours they received hundreds of signatures in favor of the plaza to be submitted to the Board. He asked that the Board please support the resident of Astoria. Ms. Sophia Valiotis stated that emergency service vehicles will not be able to access this building. They will need to drive through the plaza and fire trucks would be unable to make the turn on 32nd Street. There will be no access for garbage pick-up, for taxis or traffic flow and for deliveries. They would not be able to plow when it snows. There are several parks within walking distance. She is not opposed to open space in Astoria. She feels that the DOT is not being open about this and she has a petition opposing the application. Mr. Brad Beckstrum, Mt. Sinai Hospital, stated that his concern is that all the facts about this project are not known. Mt. Sinai is in the final stages of opening a new clinic at 31-19 Newton Avenue and they will be opening a cancer clinic later this year or early next year. They have many concerns about patient access to the building. There are many things that have not been answered yet and DOT has expressed the willingness to meet with them to work with them to answer those questions. He asked that they not make a decision until all the facts

are in. We want to make sure what is done is for the good of the whole community. Ms Jill Galipuli, resident, stated that she lives 5 blocks away and has two small children who attend an after school program a few blocks away. She stated that the intersection is very dangerous for pedestrians and car. The plaza is a safer option for this intersection. If you have small children you are not going to sit at a café with your children. Astoria Park is not a short walk. Ms. Sheila Morris stated that in the interest of full disclosure. When she came to page 15 of 57 on the website. She stated that is stated that the application was put in 2009 by the Hellenic Orthodox Community Astoria of St. Demetrios. She then went over to the letter s of support which was from the 30th Avenue Business Association along with a letter from Community Board 1. Ms. Morris opposed the plaza. Mr. Prentzas stated for the record on behalf of the 30th Avenue Business Association that the plaza noted was for a small plaza with the street remaining open. Mr. Joe Vacollis, a merchant, expressed concerns regarding the plowing of snow. He recommended disapproval of the application. Mr. Patrick J. Guilly, Manager of KeyFood, stated that they have a petition of over a 1,000 of their neighbors who oppose the plaza for the Board. Mr. Alex Barkley, resident, stated that he walks past this intersection everyday and went to the one day plaza. It was amazing to sit and enjoy being outside. He recommended approval of the application. Mr. Koukoumelis stated his business is open 24 hours and he is not sure what is going on but closing the road will be a big mistake. Please think about this before you make a decision. This will hurt business. Mr. Yanis Stroumbakis, Manager of Alma Bank, stated that they have a signed petition with over 100 signatures from customers and residents in his building. Personally, they would be willing to compromise, such as a smaller park and keep the street open. The reason being Newtown Avenue works as a relief route off of 30th Avenue and 33rd Street which are very busy streets. We are losing parking spaces. He also expressed concern that the area would provide for derelicts. Frank (eligible), a resident, stated that he would like to know who are these undesirables, who are going to overtake this park. Sidewalks are being used by merchants looking to put seats outside their establishment. He is not sure what people are having a problem with this proposal. He was in favor. Ms. Nancy Silverman, resident, stated that she spent some time at the one day plaza. She lives in zip code 11101, a few blocks away and she goes through that area while shopping and took some time to sit in the plaza with a friend. She then continued shopping and returned to the plaza to meet a friend and visited a nearby store for iced coffee. She wanted to know if she was one of the undesirables. She is in favor of the plaza. A resident and business owner stated that there are flaws in their study. They didn't do a thorough analysis of the traffic in the neighborhood and how it would affect the businesses in the area. He is opposed to the proposal. Ms. Anna Bank, resident, stated that she is strongly opposed to the plaza for many reasons, a lot of them have already been discuss tonight. The one thing that she wanted to point out is that when you closed out a part of Newtown Avenue and make 32nd Street a two way it will create a problem since there is not enough room for two cars. When it snows it cause a problem. Ms. Hantzopolous stated that 32nd Street will remain a one way according to the proposal. Commissioner McCarthy stated that 32nd Street will remain one way going north bound, Newtown Avenue for just the portion between 30th Avenue and 32nd Street will be two way only for that little piece to allow for people who live in the apartment building to access their building. Mr. Joe Ferrante, resident, stated that he has lived in Astoria since 1963 and he does use this intersection every day. He pointed out that the number of accidents, as per a Google search on the Queens Gazette website, there were 49 accidents reported at the intersection of Newtown Avenue and 30th Avenue from 2006 to 2010. He thinks that this is too many and is for the plaza and is pro-business. He feels that this would be a good place for patients after their appointment to sit outside at the plaza. There is a difference from sitting down at a café, than at a public plaza and having to buy a coffee. Ms. Joanna Hennessy, resident for 17 years, stated that she is a cancer survivor and the last thing you want to do after therapy is to go sit outside and be surrounded by traffic fumes. This is what it would be with the traffic going by on 30th Avenue. She wanted to know how many people who were applauding actually live within a 5 block radius of the area. There are many other options in Astoria such as Astoria Park, Athens Park and other facilities. There is a need to get to the hospital, the building, and to provide emergency services residents of Newtown Avenue. There was no further discussion. Item closed.

VOTING SESSION:

Mr. Carusone reiterated the public hearing item from the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA). Mr. John Carusone, Chair of the Zoning and Variance Committee, read item # 173-99-BZ – Premises 43-60 Ditmars Blvd. (Matrix Fitness Center). An application for an extension of term of a Special Permit for an existing Physical Culture Establishment. Mr. Carusone stated that the committee met and recommends the approval of the application, seconded by Mary O'Hara. There was no further discussion. Mr. Donato called for a vote. Motion called and carried with 1 Against and 1 Abstentions for Legal Cause.

Mr. Joseph Risi, Chair of the Consumer Affairs Committee, read the next item from the Department of Consumer Affairs #1441294 – Premises 32-07 30th Avenue. (Sweet Athens Café). An application to establish an Unenclosed Sidewalk Café with 36 tables and 116 seats. Mr. Risi said the committee met and recommends approval of the application with the reduction of 13 tables and 26 seats on the outside row on 30th Avenue leaving 23 tables and 90 seats, seconded by Mr. Gus Prentzas. No further discussion. Mr. Donato called for a vote. Motion called and carried with 1 Against.

Mr. Robert Piazza reiterated the next item Pedestrian Plaza Proposal – A request to consider the installation of a Pedestrian Plaza on Newtown Ave. from 30th Ave. to mid-block. Mr. Piazza stated that the vote will have to be up to the Board since there was a 50/50 vote, by the committee, on this application. Mr. Pizze stated that the committee has no recommendation for the application. Mr. Donato called for a vote. Mr. Donato asked all those in favor of the application to raise their hand and then he asked all those against the application to raise their hand. The recommendation passed was to deny the plaza by a vote of 7 in favor, 25 against and 0 abstentions.

GENERAL DISCUSSION:

No Speakers

BUSINESS SESSION

Mr. Donato motioned to accept the minutes of June's Board meeting. Motion seconded by Mr. Stamatiades. Motion called and carried unanimously

Ms. Lucille Hartmann, District Manager, reported that she received a call regarding the Eastside Access Project. On September 12, they will start removing the train tracks that have not been in used for many years and have been a problem for motorists on 43th Street between Northern Blvd and 37th Avenue. This will permit the paving of the complete street at the end of the project.

Ms. Joan Asselin, Chair of Environmental Protection Committee, reported that the committee met with the Astoria Generating Company yesterday. From what she could gather they are going to file permanent restatement for the boilers. Boiler #40 had a fire last year and they might revive it. At this time there is no construction required.

Ms. Mary O'Hara, Chair of Housing Committee, reported that the at Northern Blvd and 54th Street they are calendared to get a countdown light at that six cornered intersection. This is a battle that started on March 27, 2006. Hopefully it will be installed this year.

Mr. Richard Khuzami, Chair of Parks & Recreation/Cultural Affairs/OTB Committee, reported that committee will be holding a meeting on Thursday, October 4th to go over recommendations for the Capital/ Expense Budget and to review their parks consultation he will be attending with Ms. Hartmann.

Mr. Antonio Meloni, Chair of Public Safety Committee, reported that there will be a cleanup on Shore Blvd. September 15th at 10am. He also reported, on September 19th at Immaculate Conception school they will be having a women's crime prevention seminar from 7-9pm. All are welcomed young and old. It will be hosted by the 114th Pct., CERT and Ready NY.

Mr. Joseph Risi, Chair of Consumer Affairs Committee, reported that the committee met with a new applicant that is applying for liquor license. The entity is called Racks at 19-26 Steinway Street. The committee met the owners and their attorney. They intend to operate a Bikini bar with 15-30 bikini dancers and waitresses. He asked them if they would be willing to sign a stipulation where they would agree not to have topless or any other adult entertainment. They refused, adamantly. They would not sign any stipulation. The committee's recommendation to the Board is to send a letter to the SLA asking to deny their application for an on premise liquor license. No further discussion. Mr. Donato called for a vote on the committee's recommendation. Motion called and carried.

Mr. John Carusone, Chair of the Zoning and Variance Committee, reported that they met with Council Member Van Bramer in regard a rezoning study of the area south of Broadway, Dutch Kill from Shore Blvd to Northern Blvd. After they presented their case, Councilman Van Bramer supports our request for a study. He stated that a letter was sent to the City Planning Commission requesting the study.

NEW/OLD BUSINESS:

Ms. Elizabeth Erion stated that the meeting Capital/Expense Budget will be held at the Board's office on October 9th at 6:30pm to prioritize the recommendation for the FY2014 Capitol/Expense Budget to be presented to the full Board.

There was no further business before the Board; Mr. Khuzami motioned to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Prentzas. Motion called and carried unanimously.