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Anatole Ashraf
Chairperson

Debra Markell Kleinert
District Manager

June 16, 2025

Joint- Land Use & Housing Committee; Arts and Cultural Affairs Committee Meeting **Minutes**

This meeting was held in person and teleconferenced on Zoom

Land Use & Housing Committee Members – Present

Christine Hunter, Prameet Kumar, Ann Marie Baranowski, Karesia Batan, Nicholas Berkowitz (PV), Danielle Brecker(PV), Tannia Chavez (PV), Stephen Cooper, Morry Galonoy (PV), Kenneth Greenberg, Diana Kichler, Bradford Leibin (PV), Lauren Springer, Michael Zoorob (PV), Patrick Martinez (PV)

Land Use & Housing Committee Members – Absent

Lisa Deller, Sheila Lewandowski

Arts and Cultural Affairs Committee Members – Present

Karesia Batan, Eric Narburgh, Anatole Ashraf (PV), Ann Marie Baranowski, Stephen Cooper, Kenneth Greenberg, Pia Rahman (PV)

Arts and Cultural Affairs Committee Members – Absent

Lisa Charles, Ryan Smith, Akello Thomas

Arts and Cultural Affairs Committee Public Members – Present

Edward Joseph Wheeler

Community Board 2 Board Members - Present

Jolly Patel

Tech- Present

Patrick Martinez

Community Board 2 Staff

Debra Markell Kleinert, District Manager

MaryAnn Gurrado, Community Coordinator

Department of City Planning

Katie Crawford (PV), Lara Merida (PV), Hye-Kyung-Yang (PV)

Guests

Alfonso Lopez, DEP (PV), Tara Deighan, DEP (PV), Terrell Estes, DEP (PV), Roy Tysvaer, DEP (PV), David Lee, DEP (PV), Lin Chiu, Richard Bass, Justin Martinez, Angel Gil Orrios, Mahbubur Rahman, Nick Liberis, Susan Wu

Christine Hunter welcomed everyone to the joint meeting of the Land Use and Housing Committee and the Arts and Cultural Affairs Committee.

Representatives from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) gave a presentation on the Newtown Creek Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Storage Tunnel Project. The representatives shared the following:

- The project was initiated in response to the Clean Water Act, under a Consent Order with New York State.
- In 2018, a Long-Term Control Plan was developed and approved to control the four largest CSO outfalls.
- Newtown Creek is a designated federal Superfund site. The EPA reviewed the project and the LTCP and found that the CSO aspect of the project addressed the needs of the Superfund program. The project is being done under the Superfund program and the Clean Water Act.
- There are 14 wastewater plants in New York City. These plants are sized for the areas they serve and are designed to handle a certain amount of flow during dry weather and at least twice that flow during wet weather. When a storm is larger than what the plant can handle, the system backs up, and the excess flow that the plant can't handle is discharged into the nearest body of water.
- The project seeks to capture CSO events and store them until they can be treated at wastewater plants.
- The storage tunnel is a bit over three miles long and 22 feet in diameter. Flows will be diverted into the storage tunnel from the heads of the major tributaries: Maspeth Creek, Dutch Kills, and Newtown Creek.
- The proposed project requires site selection and property acquisition, with ULURP actions identified, including full acquisitions and easement acquisitions.
- DEP representatives explained the ULURP process and noted that the DEIS is expected to be completed in September 2025.

Representatives from the Department of Environmental Protection answered questions from committee members and shared the following:

- Much of the property DEP wants to acquire for the project is privately owned, including some MTA property and some city-owned parcels. City-owned parcels would require subterranean tunnel easements. The vast majority of the easements would be below ground. The tunnel would be about 80 feet below the surface and reach 150 feet at the dewatering pump station in Greenpoint. DEP representatives noted that these easements would not affect surface uses and said they hope it will be a relatively straightforward process to secure them.
- DEP explained that certain locations would require surface facilities and that those properties would need to be acquired, in most cases, permanently. There are a couple of sites needed only for construction.
- DEP noted that because they are under a court order, if they are unable to negotiate with a property owner, they would use eminent domain.
- The entire project is estimated at over \$3 billion and will be funded with capital funds.
- A committee member requested that DEP include an analysis of areas of impact in the DEIS for the project, including open space possibilities and consideration of how the construction timeline may affect a potential rezoning timeline within the same area.
- DEP noted that they are considering whether any of the property acquisitions might provide opportunities for open space at grade level, such as recreational uses. They said they are mindful of including some public benefit and use, if possible, but that it is too early in the process to have specifics or to speak with certainty about what will be possible.

Lin Chiu provided a presentation on a Landmarks application for a one-story rear extension at 21-49 45th Avenue in Long Island City. Ms. Chiu shared the following:

- In the historic district, there are 28 buildings, with 23 facing 45th Avenue and 5 facing 23rd Street. Of these, 18 have a rear extension.
- The proposed rear extension will match the adjacent building at 21-47, with a depth of 19.8 feet and the same height.

Prameet Kumar made a motion not to oppose the Landmarks application. All were in favor of the motion with none opposed and no abstentions.

Richard Bass, an attorney from APL LLP, presented a potential development project at 39-50 Skillman Avenue. Mr. Bass shared the following:

- The current building at this location is a one-story above-grade structure.
 - The developer recently began discussions with City Planning.
 - The PowerPoint presentation used by the attorney provided information on the development project. The rezoning would change the site from an M1-1 district to an R8A/C2-4 zoning district. The proposed action would include 533,700 zoning square feet, 705,460 gross square feet, 547 dwelling units, and 137 permanently affordable units. A school and supermarket are being considered in the proposed development.
 - The developer's PowerPoint presentation included drawings of the tax lot, building footprint, and a longitudinal section of the project.
 - The school's and residential entrances would be located on Skillman Avenue.
 - The developer is working on the Reasonable Worst-Case memo, which will be shared with the Community Board once it is available.
 - The developer is proposing a 14-story building.
 - The site will include the capacity to park 150 to 200 cars inside the building.
- Christine Hunter requested Mr. Bass to have the architect consider design schemes with more modulation and additional setbacks along Skillman Avenue.
 - Karesia Batan requested the developer include a 2,500-square-foot space for arts and cultural use within the school design plan.

Laura Rothrock and Charles Yu from the Long Island City Partnership provided a presentation on the Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) Grant. They shared the following points:

- The grant application requires Community Board support through a resolution.
- The grant was announced in May 2025, and applications are due in July 2025. It funds a planning study.
- If the application is successful, the Long Island City Partnership will be notified in January 2026, and funding will not be received until next summer.
- The program began with the purpose of helping communities with significant contamination develop community plans to remediate sites and reinvest in areas that have been overlooked.
- There are not enough opportunities for planning funds, and it's valuable to have a firm study an area and examine what is feasible through a community process. When developers express interest in a site, there will be a plan that reflects what the community has developed together.

- Designated BOAs have a steering committee. The state encourages the community to work with its Community Board to establish a steering committee and also encourages elected officials and city agencies be a part of it. The process focuses on analyzing existing conditions, vacancy rates, and the surrounding area, and includes engagement with community stakeholders.
- A consultant who completed the Harlem River BOA, which focused on public open space and access to the river, said the program is flexible in terms of what communities want to focus on.
- Generally, BOA grants range between \$100,000 and \$300,000.
- The proposed study area for the BOA Grant is focused on the IBZ because there are many contaminated sites. From the ONELIC process, there is anecdotal evidence about what might be possible in the IBZ, but no formal study of what could be developed there. The proposed study area extends north of 44th Drive up to the edge of the IBZ and includes Queens Community Board 1.
- LIC Partnership would like to include Community Board 1 if they would like to participate in the BOA study. She noted that if Community Board 1 wants to be involved, she could return in September to present the application to Community Board 1.

Committee members shared their feedback on the BOA Grant application, and the following comments were made:

- Christine Hunter said she would like the whole IBZ area north of Queensbridge and to the east to be added to the BOA study area, since that area is much less studied and there is a need for integrated open space. She encouraged the Long Island City Partnership to enlarge the proposed BOA study area.
- Karesia Batan said that compared to the south, there are already many studies and money being poured into the proposed BOA grant study area. While acknowledging the potential of the IBZ and the precedent of other BOAs, she emphasized that the area farther south has a lot of potential to be studied. She suggested completely shifting the focus of the study to that part of LIC, which would address a long-standing need for the community and present an opportunity to invest in that area.
- Committee members suggested that LIC Partnership consider focusing this cycles BOA grant application on the area south of the initial proposed study area. They noted that the initially proposed area could potentially be the focus for next year's BOA application, which would allow more time to involve Community Board 1 in the process.

The committee adopted a resolution to support the LIC Partnership's BOA grant application.

Nick Liberis from Archimaera and his client, Susan Wu, the property manager of ZD Jasper, discussed plans for the Bliss Theater. They shared the following:

- They had preliminary discussions with the Department of City Planning to consider options for the site. The site is situated in the nexus of two commercial strips. Although the area is not currently busy, it is expected to experience strong growth in the future, with two nearby sites planned for development.
 - The area is well served by transportation options, including the 7 train and buses running along Queens Boulevard.
 - When they engaged with the Department of City Planning, the developer presented different zoning options, including R7X, R7A, R8A, and R8X. The developer indicated that R7 zoning seemed the most appropriate, but noted that, given the site's significant program, he would look to include some of the programming (arts and culture accommodations, including an auditorium) in a new development.
 - They provided a presentation with illustrative R8A massing for the site. The proposed massing along Greenpoint Avenue and 48th Street would include modulated heights at the top of the building, enabling light onto the street.
 - The developer plans to include residential units and retail space including a grocery store.
 - There would be a proposed 80 to 90 foot-long sunken auditorium with approximately 500 seats, with interior dimensions of 60 feet in width by 80 feet in depth (including the stage), and a 30-foot clear ceiling height. On the north side of the auditorium, there would be approximately 20 feet for a potential backstage area.
 - Beneath the building's residential lobby, there would be approximately 4,000 square feet for classrooms and support spaces.
 - Access would wrap around the back, entering a double-height atrium that could include an outdoor courtyard.
- Christine Hunter noted that there is a pavilion entry structure with Art Deco detailing on the Bliss Theater along Greenpoint Avenue and asked if it could be preserved. Mr. Liberis responded that while they considered preserving the pavilion entry structure, it was unfeasible because it is at the front and may serve as the primary point of entry; preserving it would require significant money and complicate the construction process. Mr. Liberis noted that it might be possible to dismantle the Art Deco structure, recreate it, and then display it elsewhere.
 - Karesia Batan said that she wants to know what the financials would look like for a nonprofit arts organization in the district to operate and sustain the proposed square footage.

- Morry Galonoy noted that it would be helpful to understand what the housing would look like on the proposed site and whether there is potential for a green roof or other forms of environmental features.
- Christine Hunter discussed the massing along 45th Street and Greenpoint Avenue, which was shown in a presentation slide. She requested that the developer consider setting back the portion of the building on 45th Street by about 5 feet and adding greenery in front to modulate the massing. She suggested that some of the Art Deco elements from the pavilion structure entry be displayed outdoors on site so people can remember the Bliss Theater.
- Eric Narburgh noted that the Historic Districts Council has designated Sunnyside as one of its “Six to Celebrate” program recipients. As a result, Sunnyside will receive support over the next year to gather information about what the community wants to preserve and focus on. Through this process, community members may express interest in preserving the theater. The information gathered might also help inform the development process, particularly elements related to the design and character of the neighborhood.

Department of City Planning

Katie Crawford shared the following updates:

- The Industrial plan survey is still accepting responses.
- There is a traditional private application at 63-12 Broadway, which is expected to be certified before the end of June 2025. Since the application will be certified before CB2’s summer break, the review period will be extended, and the committee will have until October 6, 2025, to share its recommendation. She noted that the applicant’s team should reach out soon to CB2 to present.
- Christine Hunter shared that she spoke to Katie Crawford about a timeline and confirmed that although the CB2 Board Meeting is on October 9, 2025, the portal will remain open until October 10, 2025, so CB2’s recommendation can be accepted.
- For the June 26, 2025, Queens Borough President’s meeting, Anatole Ashraf, announced Christine Hunter will testify on behalf of CB2. He also noted that board members may testify on their own but should indicate that they are not speaking on behalf of the board.
- Anatole Ashraf thanked everyone for their contributions to the rezoning process and shared that there is a community benefits process in the works.

- The committee discussed the June 18, 2025, Special Board Meeting.

The committee meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by,

Rafael Nava