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The City of New York
Borough of Queens

Community Board 8

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District Manager, Marie Adam-Ovide

Zoning Committee Meeting

Jamaica Neighborhood Plan.

DATE: April 29, 2025

Committee Members Present: Hersh Parekh, Zoning Committee Chair, Edward Chung, and Doretha McFadden

Committee Members Absent: Kenneth Cohen, II, Maria DeInnocentiis, Armando Echeverry, Howard A. Fried, Mohammed Islam "Delwar", David Mordukhaev, Jesse Rosenbaum, Seymour Schwartz and Douglas Sherman

Others in attendance: Lin Zeng, Shristi Bajracharya, Galina Novikova, Jasmin Tepale, Sola Olosunde, Olivia Ovide, CB8 Staff Member, Soleil Griffin

Zoning Committee Chairperson Hersh Parekh called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

The zoning Chairperson introduced himself and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Hersh Parekh – We are here for a presentation about the Jamaica Neighborhood Plan by the Department of City Planning (DCP). I would like to note that this plan has a limited impact on our community district. The majority of the impact of the zoning changes will be in CB12, which is the south of us. With that, I will turn it over to DCP.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

There will be no zoning changes north of Hillside Avenue. We have been developing this plan for the past two years. The Jamaica Neighborhood Plan is planning for the next fifteen years. DCP is not developing or building anything. Zoning is the rule that says how tall, wide, what can/cannot go on a piece of land.

Hersh Parekh – This is not tied to any development project; it is just a neighborhood plan?

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – Correct.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

The Department of Housing Preservation and Development has city-owned land that they want to develop. DCP is looking at how the zoning rules are not working today and how we can change them. Currently, we are in the formal process called the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP). We submitted a formal application to change zoning rules. Community Boards 8 and 12 can review the proposal and write a recommendation to approve, disapprove, and add conditions.

Hersh Parekh – We will be considering this at our next full board meeting on May 14th.

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – Exactly.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

DCP submitted the ULURP application on March 20th. Community Boards have a sixty-day period to submit recommendations. ULURP is a seven-month process, we are at the start of it. The Community Board has the first review of it and then it will go to the Queens Borough President. The Queens Borough President's office will also hold hearings in which you can make suggestions. Once the community board and borough president review the proposal, it goes to the City Planning Commission. If the City Planning Commission approves the proposal, it goes to the City Council. The City Council has the final vote before it goes to the mayor.

Hersh Parekh – Has Community Board 12 acted yet? Are they still pending action as well?

Answer [Lin Zeng] – May 21st is their full board meeting. We expect them to vote then.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

The population has grown for our entire study area by about thirteen/fourteen percent. Housing production has grown by nine/ten percent. There are a lot more people coming to Jamaica and not a lot of homes. There are not a lot of vacant units in Queens.

Edward Chung – Why do people gravitate to Jamaica?

Answer [Lin Zeng] – Jamaica reflects different enclaves of cultural groups. People come to be with their friends and families.

Edward Chung – This could lead to several families in an apartment.

Answer [Lin Zeng] – That is because there is not enough housing.

Hersh Parekh – Jamaica also has good access to public transportation.

Response [Jasmin Tepale] – Yes. When we first started this project, we asked people what they loved about Jamaica. It was between the diversity of the area and the transit access.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

Two years ago, we held a workshop to identify the vision for the neighborhood plan. The vision that was created highlighted diversity and opportunities for wealth building. There are a set of six *goals that were created. To achieve the goals, some actions need to take place. The following are the actions to be taken.

- Zoning Map Amendment – DCP submitted an application to change some of the neighborhoods in the district.
- Zoning Text Amendment – Jamaica has a special district which means there are special rules for Jamaica only. The goal is to create special rules to include more space for schools.
- Urban Development Action Area Project (UDAAP)/Disposition – There is city owned land on Guy R. Brewer Boulevard that is under HPD. The city needs this action to develop the land.
- City Map Amendment (De-mapping) – The Department of Transportation and the Economic Development Corporation want to build a public plaza next to the LIRR located across the street from Archer Avenue.

Hersh Parekh – Do you have a map that shows where the plaza will go?

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – Yes.

Hersh Parekh – That is the area that has the Jamaica Avenue bus way.

Answer [Lin Zeng] – You are thinking of Archer Avenue.

Hersh Parekh – No. It is on Jamaica. If you go north away from the LIRR station on Sutphin Blvd., Jamaica Avenue has a bus way.

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – It is on Archer.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

If you build today, there is no requirement for you to build affordable housing. Developers can build market rate housing. Through the changes that are being proposed, it would be a requirement to set a percentage for affordable housing.

Edward Chung – What is the percentage of the building that needs to be affordable housing?

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – 25%

Edward Chung – Is that more than before?

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – Before we had zero.

Answer [Lin Zeng] – In Jamaica, new buildings that are going up now would likely not have affordable housing.

Edward Chung – The City of Yes has no affordable housing. It goes wherever the market goes.

Answer [Lin Zeng] – For the City of Yes, it is optional.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

The proposed changes, over the course of fifteen years, are projected to create over 12,000 new homes. Around 4,000 of the homes would have to be income restricted. There will also be commercial and community facilities (i.e. schools, clinics, community centers, and hospitals); which create jobs.

Edward Chung – What kind of jobs?

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – We do not know since we can not mandate for there to be a Trader Joe's or Home Depot.

Edward Chung – Do you use analytics to figure these out? There are many variables (i.e. people coming in and people leaving). There are a lot of people I know from Queens who moved to Long Island.

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – We had an environmental impacts study.

Edward Chung – Do they use mathematical ideas or analytics?

Answer [Hersh Parekh] – It is not analytics it is the planning process. They just project what could happen. It is more of an art than a science.

Answer [Lin Zeng] – Yes. This includes jobs such as construction and what community facilities could have per square foot. It gives you a sense of the magnitude of this plan.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

There are a few strategies for the zoning map amendment on how to change the zoning. We want to make sure that what we are doing has to include affordable housing. We can do that through mandatory inclusionary housing. We have major commercial corridors. One of them being Hillside Avenue. Any future businesses should be active on the ground floor to build up the commercial area. As we look at the zoning today, there is no requirement for affordable housing. It restricts space for commercial businesses to grow.

For CD8, we call the area the North Core. The boundary of the area includes a small portion of Queens Boulevard going up to 86th Avenue, then it goes down to Hillside Avenue towards 172nd Street. The zoning rule today allows for eight to eleven story buildings. The proposed zoning can allow for ten to fourteen stories which can include affordable housing. Our urban designers created an illustrative view of what this could look like. The illustration shows an active ground floor for a fresh market, and community center.

Lin Zeng - Right now, the zoning is not enough to incentivize developers to build since it is outdated. They may not be able to build high enough.

Hersh Parekh – Would these zoning changes bar any future car dealerships? If one previously closed down, would another car dealership be able to take its place or would it have to be something else?

Response [Lin Zeng] – I do not think it bars car dealerships. We want to make sure that people find better use for the land.

Edward Chung – Are there places in New York City or other cities that these developments were successfully done? Like how they want to rebuild Detroit.

Answer [Hersh Parekh] – The fact is that we have one percent vacancy in Queens.

Response [Lin Zeng] – There is a difference between Detroit and New York.

Hersh Parekh – Will developers still need to seek a zoning approval from the boards? Or will they be able to build this automatically with these changes?

Answer [Lin Zeng] – They will be able to build as-of-right.

Hersh Parekh – So they can build a fourteen story as-of-right?

Answer [Lin Zeng] – Correct.

Edward Chung – Would it create a shadow over people's homes?

Answer [Hersh Parekh] – Yes, there will be a shadow. This is the price you have to pay to build more housing.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

Today, that area is an R7A/C2-4. This means that developers can build between eight to eleven stories and do not need the board's approval or go to city planning. Through the City of Yes, there is an optional program called UAP ** (Universal Affordability Preference). If the Jamaica Plan does not pass, then developers would have an option to build affordable housing. We are proposing a C4-4D which would allow developers to build up to fourteen stories. This would include mandatory inclusionary housing.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

We added the rest of the proposal that included CD 12. For Sutphin Boulevard, today's zoning can go to thirteen stories. Going south, we have Guy R. Brewer, Merrick, Sutphin Boulevard and Liberty which can build four stories. The industrial area such as Liberty Avenue can go up to about three stories. We are thinking about opportunities for industrial jobs.

The next proposal is the zoning text amendment. Jamaica has a special district and Hillside Avenue is covered by it. We are expanding it to make sure the rules are throughout the entire study area. A new rule that we are trying to implement is the public-school exemption. This exemption would exempt the FAR for schools. They won't count the floor area, and the developer can build on top of it as long as they can fit within the height. This encourages more school space since they still get to keep the community floor area. If developers do not have this exemption, they would have to choose between building a school or community center. Today, there is no encouragement to build a school.

Edward Chung – Are there other locations that have done the same thing? Have a community center in the same building?

Answer [Lin Zeng] – There are mixed use buildings in the city. The examples are more dense areas like downtown Brooklyn and Manhattan where you have the first six stories for the school and above are residential units.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

There is an open space bonus for developers. We cannot force developers to create open spaces, but we know how important it is for the community. If there is new development and they provide open spaces, in exchange, they get to build a little bit more.

Hersh Parekh – Would the open space be a park? Who would manage the open space?

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – It would get managed by the property manager or building owner.

Hersh Parekh – Would it be an atrium space?

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – Yes.

Response [Lin Zeng] – We are hoping that this would be more of a public outdoor space. For instance, in Manhattan, you would see a public park between two buildings.

Hersh Parekh – Usually those are gated off.

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – They should not be gated off.

Hersh Parekh – There was a big story in the press about how they should not be gated off, but they are. It is not clear to the public that it is publicly accessible. It would need to be promoted so that people know that it is publicly accessible.

Answer [Shristi Bajracharya] – Downtown Rockaway is a good example of publicly accessible outdoor space.

Answer [Lin Zeng] – It is not like park land, it more like a public plaza.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

As previously mentioned, there are two city agencies that are working with us. The locations are not in Community District 8. The first one, HPD, owns land on Guy R Brewer Boulevard. The second one, DOT, will build a station plaza on Sutphin Boulevard and Archer Avenue. The station plaza would have space to add trees, benches, and spaces for people to walk through.

When we do this process, especially when it is large like the neighborhood plan, we have to go through a rigorous environmental impact study. Our consultant studies what the impact could potentially be. That has to be disclosed to the public. There are eighteen topics that they study. Out of the eighteen there were seven categories that would be impacted. They include community facilities and services, open space, shadows, history & cultural resources, air quality (mobile source), transportation (traffic, transit, and pedestrians), and construction. The impact on open space meant that there may be a lack of open space compared to how many people might be coming in the next fifteen years.

Another thing that we have to do as part of the application process is create a racial equity report. The report lays out potential displacement risk. There is risk in Jamaica because of low access to housing, there are people who have lower income compared to other areas in Queens.

Hersh Parekh – Does the map show the displacement risk after you do the zoning changes or is it the current risk.

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – The map shows the current risk. The rezoning is projecting here.

Hersh Parekh – Would the rezoning improve this so it would not be as high?

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – It is the intent. We are always looking to think through what a better strategy is.

Jasmin Tepale representing DCP

We have a website called jamaicaplan.nyc. There are a lot of materials that will help you with your review. I can now take questions.

Hersh Parekh – Would there be any requirement for developers to spend money to improve the subway station? Just to make the station a nicer experience.

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – There used to be a standalone rule that we would be able to add to neighborhood plans. Now it is a citywide rule. The rule states that if a person is a developer and is building near a subway station, they can contribute to a fund to upgrade the station. They usually focus on accessibility projects such as elevators, and in return be able to build more.

Hersh Parekh – We currently do not have elevators at the 169th Street and Sutphin Boulevard stops.

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – It is a citywide rule that they can tap into today.

Hersh Parekh – They can but they are not required to?

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – Correct. It is an option not a requirement.

Hersh Parekh – Do you see that developers commonly participate in it?

Answer [Lin Zeng] – We can not say that it is common. The first one that took place in Queens was at Queens Plaza which had just opened. The developers built the area over there in exchange for some additional floor area.

Hersh Parekh – You mentioned that the plan to do the plazas are a DOT/EDC project, is that something that is already in the works? If this gets approved, will it commence next year or is it still in development.

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – The plaza has been in the works since year 2007. In 2007, they went to get the design approved because they would have to change the structure of the road. What they are doing now is changing the lines in their design. They have to get another approval. They want to start the construction as soon as possible.

Dortha McFadden – My concern is having an area for the children to play, usually we do not see that. The structure does not have an area for mothers to walk the babies. There has to be space in the back or the side, but I do not see that in the planning.

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – What you are describing is a building amenity to make sure there is space for a playground or walking areas. Zoning does a little bit with amenities, but it is not strict on developers to provide certain spaces.

Answer [Lin Zeng] – The open space bonus would hopefully provide a space for people to relax outside. We cannot dictate the specific type of uses, we can only say what is allowed.

Hersh Parekh – The open space bonus is critical.

Edward Chung – How would the sewage not have any impact from all the buildings being built?

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – The environmental review studies a very specific thing when it comes to the sewage and infrastructure. We have heard that the infrastructure in the area needs support. The study reviewed a very narrow scope. There is a sewage treatment plant in south Jamaica. That plant treats the entire service area. Though you are concerned about the individual pipes. The environmental review study did not study individual pipes, it studied the impact of the sewage treatment plants.

Hersh Parekh – Was the MTA engaged in the planning process?

Answer [Jasmin Tepale] – They were engaged with us; however, there were some challenges since they are a state agency. They have their priorities.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by,
Soleil Griffin, CB8 Staff
May 13, 2025

*** Goals**

1. Improve quality of life in the neighborhood for current & future residents.
2. Foster a thriving local economy & help residents prosper.
3. Create a climate-resilient & environmentally just Jamaica
4. Achieve equitable health & safety outcomes for current and future residents
5. Maintain cultural diversity & nurture inclusivity in Jamaica.
6. Preserve & bolster Jamaica's rich multicultural history.

** **UAP** – Allows buildings to include at least 20% more housing if the additional homes are permanently affordable.