

Stated Meeting: Preserving Neighborhoods

by {ga=cgross}

Tuesday, October 30, 2007 12:00 AM

Residents of two very different neighborhoods can look to the City Council this week with either appreciation or dismay after it approved a landmark designation for the private courts and row houses of Sunnyside Gardens and a rezoning for the brownstones of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn.

At its stated meeting on Monday, the council unanimously approved both proposals in order to preserve the character, density and novelty of the two neighborhoods. The council also approved an expansion of the Fire Department's Pension Medical Board, which has faced an influx of applications following the World Trade Center attacks of September 11, 2001.

Sunnyside Gardens Preservation

Comprising 55 acres of row houses, apartments and co-ops all adjoined by private gardens, the Sunnyside Gardens housing development was constructed more than 80 years ago as one of the city's first planned communities. The landmark designation faced considerable [community opposition](#)

and was approved by the council by a vote of 49 to 0. It requires that renovations or exterior home improvement projects be reviewed by the Landmarks Preservation Commission "from changes to the private gardens to work conducted on building facades.

Though some residents opposed the designation, contending the commission's review process would be time consuming and costly, a plethora of others lobbied the city to title Sunnyside Gardens a historic district, specifically the [Sunnyside Gardens Preservation Alliance](#) - a group of residents.

The area already has some protection. During the 1970s, the neighborhood was named as a Special Planned Community Preservation District, but that only protected the size of buildings and the character of the neighborhood's acclaimed open space. The historic district goes a step further.

City officials said the designation represents a growing trend to landmark neighborhoods outside of Manhattan "which had typically contained most of the city's historic districts.

Stated Meeting: Preserving Neighborhoods

by {ga=cgross}

Tuesday, October 30, 2007 12:00 AM

" You don't have to have a mansion for it to be landmarked," said Councilmember Eric Gioia, who represents the neighborhood. "Middle class neighborhoods can be preserved as well. When you walk around Sunnyside Gardens what you see is a place where the middle class cannot only survive, but actually thrive."

Some Sunnyside Gardens residents fear the historic district will weed out the area's classically moderate-income population. City officials disagree, contending the district designation will protect its middle class occupants.

The development was constructed from [1924 through 1928](#) in response to a lack of affordable housing in the city following World War I. The area comprises about 16 blocks and 624 residential buildings. It is the largest historic district in Queens.

Bed-Stuy Rezoning

In response to growing development in Bedford-Stuyvesant, the City Council also approved a rezoning for 206 blocks in the southern portion of the neighborhood. The zoning revisions were approved by a vote of 49 to 0.

As more developers eye the brownstone blocks of Bed-Stuy, both residents and city officials called for a rezoning to preserve the character, density and height of the neighborhood. The new zoning will also preserve existing commercial uses and provide incentives to develop vacant lots.

Councilmember Al Vann, who represents part of the area, said the rezoning is meant to stifle the rush of unscrupulous developers in some areas and promote mid-rise apartment construction in others.

" As you all know Bed-Stuy has been discovered - you know like Columbus discovered America," said Vann. "The rush is on."

The rezoning area is bounded by Lafayette Avenue and Quincy Street to the north, Classon Avenue to the west, Saratoga Avenue and Broadway to the east and Atlantic Avenue to the

Stated Meeting: Preserving Neighborhoods

by {ga=cgross}

Tuesday, October 30, 2007 12:00 AM

south. It will [also provide incentives](#) to construct affordable housing, which city officials predict could reach 400 units.

Vann said this rezoning is only a first step. The city is now working on a plan to address development occurring in the northern section of the neighborhood.

Fire Department Disability

Since the September 11th attacks, an increasing number of firefighters are applying for disability retirement. Because the Fire Department's Pension Medical Board has a limited capacity to review applications, the City Council approved an expansion of the board by a vote of 49 to 0.

The board is currently comprised of three physicians. Under the bill ([Intro 369-A](#)), which was proposed at the request of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the board, the commissioner of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the commissioner of the Department of Citywide Administrative Services could each appoint an additional three alternate physicians, who could also review applications when needed.

" We wish there weren't so many disability applications coming forward from September 11th," said Council Speaker Christine Quinn. "But the reality is there has been a large number, and (with) the board in its present, more limited configuration, there are only a few people that can sit and review them."

Under the current system, city officials said, an application can take more than a year to process. Quinn could not estimate by how much the process would be expedited with the board's expansion. In 1999, only 404 applications were before the board. In 2003, that grew to 719 applications, and in the first four months of 2007 there were 240 applications.Â