Stated Meeting: First Steps for Building Revisions

by Courtney Gross
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Moving on the first pieces of legislation since a package of proposals was introduced last week, the City Council unanimously approved a bill requiring the city publish construction fatalities on its web site and notify the state of disciplinary action against industry professionals.

At its stated meeting Thursday, the City Council also, in an unprecedented move, rejected a land use application for a 100-unit development in College Point, Queens after the area's representative left the meeting early.

Buildings Legislation Moves Forward

A week after the package was announced , the council approved the first pieces of legislation taking aim at safety and the Department of Buildings since this year's crane accidents.

The first (Intro 511), introduced by Councilmember Letitia James, requires the city notify the state Department of Education when industry professionals, from architects to engineers, receive disciplinary action from the Department of Buildings. The legislation passed unanimously.

While the city can fine professionals for misconduct, it is the state that issues them licenses. Upping communication, James said, will increase safety in the city.

The council also unanimously approved legislation (Intro 754) requiring the Department of Buildings post the number of accidents and fatalities that occur in the five boroughs on its web site, which would be updated monthly. The list will include the contractor, the site, the work being performed and who was given violations.

The list would include fatalities and accidents for the previous five years.

Easing Congestion

The council passed two home rule messages urging Albany to pass legislation that would increase fines for blocking intersections and allow the city to implement a bus lane camera program.

The first bill would increase fines for “blocking the box” â€“ or the intersection â€“ from $50 to $110 and was approved by a vote of 40 to 7. Members voting against the legislation did so, some said, because they did not see increasing fines as a deterrent.

The second bill would create a camera program for bus rapid transit lanes that would give the city the authority to fine drivers who enter bus lanes on certain routes. Fines will be given from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

That message was approved by a vote of 40 to 7, with opponents raising questions about the use of cameras to monitor traffic violations.

Park Funding

The council unanimously approved legislation (Intro 699) requiring an annual report on the private funding of parks, which is an increasing trend .

Because private groups are increasingly taking over park funding, some advocates say parks in impoverished communities, especially in the outer boroughs, are losing out. The bill’s sponsor, Councilmember Helen Foster of the Bronx, said the reports will enable the council to see where all of the funding goes, so they can better allocate public funding.

“Not every park has a conservancy,” said Foster. “We need to have the full set of facts.”

College Point

In a surprise move, the council defeated a land use application for a 100-unit market rate development in College Point. Some attributed the proposal’s defeat to politics, because the application is in Councilmember Tony Avella’s district, who left early and has gained some enemies at the council. The measure was defeated by 25 to 20.

Members said they voted against the proposal, because it did not include affordable housing. At least a dozen members changed their votes when Avella left the meeting early. Â