

Request to Down Zone Bedford Park Comes Amid Race to Stymie Evictions

By DANIELA BEASLEY

After learning of the recent down zoning of a portion of streets in the neighborhood of Woodlawn, the Fordham Bedford Housing Corporation (FBHC) is now fighting even more for portions of Bedford Park to receive the same outcome.

A request was put into the New York City Department of City Planning (NYCDPC) to down zone 202nd and 203rd streets five years back when other areas of Bedford Park underwent rezoning. The request called for R5B or R7B zones to be adopted on these narrow streets, mandating developers to put up structures at the same height as the century-old houses that make up the suburban look of the neighborhood.

John Reilly, executive director of FBHC, is heading the campaign, having stopped by the recent Bedford Mosholu Community Association gathering to explain recent developments. In a letter sent to Carol Samol, Bronx commissioner for NYCDPC, Reilly said he feels his efforts have been ignored. The lack of zoning, he notes, has caused one developer to begin evicting tenants at a building on 202nd Street off Briggs Avenue. Reilly wrote “developers are now trying to evict some of my neighbors so they can squeeze a way oversized building onto our narrow street.” The developers were identified as Jac Zadrima and Peter Fine, who are not listed as owners of the property, according to a lawyer representing tenants.

The home is divided into six units. Families were sent eviction notices giving them 30 days to leave, resulting in a separate court case demanding repairs be made.

Andrew Darcy, an attorney representing the tenants, told the Norwood News Fine “has proceeded to harass [tenants] by sending men to the building claiming to be the super, flying drones above the block to intrusively take pictures, and doing drilling without a permit in the driveway next to the building to test the concrete. This is an example of the displacement that may be coming to the Bronx.”

“This is a guy who’s made a lot of money,” said Reilly of Fine. “He’s been building 30 million dollar homes in Florida and he comes back to the Bronx after being away

for about five years to put up huge buildings on my block?”

Reilly and the Fordham Bedford Housing Corporation have begun circulating petitions against the development of the areas that these developers have recently acquired as well as petitions calling upon

elected officials to stand up for the tenants who are being forced out of their homes. FBHC worries political ties these developers seem to have could impact efforts to rezone these areas.

“Our goal in all cases is to be a good neighbor,” said a representa-

tive for Fine. “We are still considering our options for the property so it’s premature to discuss our plans. But in all cases we respect the law and that including honoring legal leases.

Additional reporting by David Cruz.



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PRESERVING BEDFORD PARK

Band of residents demand city reconsider zoning status in neighborhood



Photo by Adi Talwar

STAYING PUT. LONGTIME tenants of at 267 E. 202nd St., including (l-r) Marisol Jimenez, her parents Millie and Adali, Olga Ross, Carlos Ross and Nina Archeval are facing eviction by a developer who intends to erect a taller building as per current zoning rules. Bedford Park neighbors look to have those rules changed.

By DAVID CRUZ

It's a fight that's been brewing for more than six years, once arriving with a mountain of momentum only to be put on the back burner. Until now.

This time, residents along several square blocks of Bedford Park intend to harangue the city into changing zoning rules they say could stave off further development, reflect most of the zoning standards

across Bedford Park, and save the handful of two- and three-story private homes within the neighborhood.

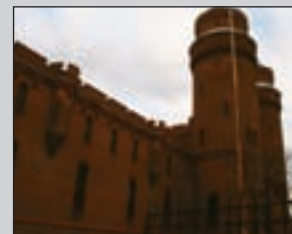
The request stood at the center of a pointed Community Board 7 Land Use/Housing Committee meeting on May 18, where residents heard a presentation from Shawn Brede, deputy commissioner for the Bronx office for the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP). The agency is

tasked to determine the context and appearance of neighborhoods through zoning. The result became a lesson on zoning, an arcane process that had many questioning DCP's methods.

But the conclusion came: downzoning that portion of Bedford Park is unlikely. Therefore, further development may occur in an already tight neighborhood.

The neighborhood in ques-

tion, whose perimeter includes Grand Concourse, East 204th Street, East Mosholu Parkway, Briggs Avenue, and East 201st Street, comprises of narrow streets, a hodgepodge of three-story homes and mostly six-story residences. It's classified as an R8 district, a 55-year designation that allows buildings up to 10 stories. While other areas of Bedford Park are considered an R5B District, a lower *(continued on page 15)*



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Preserving Look of Bedford Park

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zoning category, the neighborhood studied does not.

“There’s a reason behind all these rules,” said Brede. “They’re meant to meet a specific context in a community.”

With the majority of the buildings following current zoning rules, a downzoning would put a large percentage of the neighborhood, mostly the six-story buildings, “out of compliance,” a label that carries no penalties but limits homeowners from making any significant property alterations in the future. A downzoning request is honored if the zoning rule largely matches the existing layout of a neighborhood.

The community has been down this road before. In 2010, John Reilly, a resident familiar with housing matters, sent a letter to DCP asking the surrounding neighborhood be changed to an R5B District to prevent “monstrosities” from being built.

“The construction of 12- and 14-story buildings on such narrow streets will destroy the quality of life and block out virtually all sunlight,” wrote Reilly. “It will overtax our limited sewer system and electrical grid.”

Staving Off Development

Neighbors were motivated to bring their concerns to DCP after a sliver of neighboring Woodlawn, which bears some characteristics to Bedford Park, was downzoned. The downzoning runs counter to the current policy by the de Blasio Administration, whose housing agenda looks to build up neighborhoods, given the affordable housing crunch impacting the city.

But Brede emphasized that the two neighborhoods are indeed different since the newly downzoned area of Woodlawn, specifically East 236th Street near Webster Avenue, abutted a large swath of detached single-family homes, an area categorized as an R4A. Brede characterized the downzoning as a correction since the area closely matched the surrounding R4A distinction. Whether an intended or unintended consequence, the new zoning halted the development of a larger building on East 236th Street and Webster Avenue.

The request to downzone Bedford Park is a pressing one for residents attempting to thwart a developer’s evictions of neighbors at one building. The developer, Peter Fine, is still not the official owner of 267 E. 202nd St., an aging two-story residence with an

adjoining parking lot, though he sent neighbors notices on behalf of the existing owner demanding they vacate the building within 30 days.

“I don’t want to be forced out,” said Nina Archeval, one of several residents living in the building.

Marisol Jimenez, another tenant, said the family “went nuts” when they heard about the eviction. “My mother’s started becoming hysterical,” said Jimenez.

For now, Briggs Towers LLC owns the property. The building itself has been largely neglected by the owner, according to neighbors, who pointed to uneven ceilings, traces of lead, and layers of rust on bathtubs.

Briggs Towers LLC contracts management duties to Genesis Realty. There have long been plans to erect a 10-story building at the same property, according to an image rendering found on the management company’s website.

Andrew Darcy, an attorney representing the tenants, has asked a judge to order a swell of repairs made in the building and rescind evictions. Darcy cited that since there are six units in the property, it qualifies tenants for rent stabilization protection, a status that makes it tougher to issue evictions.

With the property falling in an R8 district, developers such as Fine are en-

titled to build an “as of right” residence whose look is dependent on how far back it would go from the street, and whether it would block the sun.

Brede, who stood neutral over the eviction matter, noted that rezoning is not a tool to stop construction of a building but to keep the features of a neighborhood uniformly intact. “We don’t do spot zoning,” said Brede, referring to changing the zoning status of one particular lot to prevent construction. “We can’t go in and rezone a couple of people’s houses on the block. There has to be some rationale behind it.”

Barbara Stronczer, a Bedford Park resident and Community Board 7 member attending the meeting, said that the mixed zoning has thrown off the neighborhood. “How you can leave two sides of Mosholu Parkway in two different zonings is beyond me,” said Stronczer.

For now, Bedford Park’s motley character remains, though existing zoning could inspire more to build a neighborhood crammed with large buildings and scant space.

“There’s no room to build,” said Andrew Laiosa, a Community Board 7 member attending the meeting.

“They’re going to squeeze as much as they can,” said Jean Hill, committee chair.

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Residents, Holding to Bedford Park Home, Plug Away

By DAVID CRUZ

For the past six months, the small band of tenants at 267 E. 202nd St., a 2-story apartment building, have dealt with an uncertainty that hasn't quite been resolved: are they staying or going?

It's a question that's been on the minds of these tenants who've built lives there for as long as 30 years.

"Everybody's been living in that building for so long," said Cynthia Garcia, a tenant and single mother of two children. "Everybody's like family."

The piece of property, resting at the tip of Briggs Avenue in a sleepy part of Bedford Park, remains a source of attention for a lawyer looking to keep tenants in their homes, a lawmaker who's kept an eye on developments, and housing advocates who balk at the ongoing urbanization of the neighborhood.

Together they've all set their sights on the new owner, Peter Fine, a housing developer who spent some years building homes in wealthy parts of Florida state. He's since been taken to court, propagating a situation that, at its core, is arguing the future look of Bedford Park. It's since inspired petitions demanding lawmakers downzone the district.

Fine is now answering a lawsuit originally filed against Genesis Realty, which had sent 30-day eviction notices to tenants in February. The original suit, filed by the tenants' attorney, Andrew Darcy, demanded repairs inside the building be made. The suit doubled as insurance to



Photo by David Cruz

RESIDENTS OF 267 E. 202nd St. hold a tenants association meeting on June 20 at West Bronx Housing.

keep the tenants in their homes. The two sides are expected in court in July to conference with the court over repairs.

For tenants, their fears seem rooted with one conclusion: Fine wants to clear the building so it could be bulldozed, making way for new housing. Just what kind of housing remains unclear.

The building occupies an R8 zone, a designation allowing any developer to build as high as eight stories or more. Should Fine succeed in acquiring the building, Fine could build even higher, thanks to the increase in the lot's available square footage.

Double-Edge Sword

With adequate living conditions waning, tenants such as Nina Archeval, one of the more outspoken tenants against Fine, have given up. In the last week of June, Archeval accepted a buyout to relocate, leaving the remaining tenants to fight eviction.

"It's crazy that Nina just took the buyout like

that," said Garcia. "She was the first one to say, 'okay, this is what we're doing, we're going to file' and you're the first one to jump ship, it's like 'wow.' We thought we were tighter than that."

Leadership duties have since gone to tenant Marisol Jimenez, who routinely sends out updated emails on any hints of harassment. Those include a claim that employee vehicles continually block an emergency exit by Jimenez's apartment. Jimenez grew so fed up over cars blocking her entrance, she had a vehicle ticketed. Meantime, unsanitary conditions gone uncorrected by management include a layer of rust that covers her bathtub's ground space and the existence of mold. Jimenez has so far stayed positive even in the face of uncertainty.

A check on the New York City Housing Preservation and Development agency's website shows 146 violations have been filed against the building. Seven of those are considered C viola-

tions, the most heinous, ranging from lead paint to no window guards.

Who is Peter Fine?

The son of immigrants, Fine was born in Queens, spending his early years living in public housing. After working in the non-profit sector in the early part of his career, Fine formed the Atlantic Development Group with partner Marc Alheim. Created in 1996, the company focused squarely on affordable housing development throughout the city. He also owns luxury properties in Miami, Florida.

An article by the *Norwood News* pointed to Fine's pattern of campaign contributions to political candidates and legislators as a method of garnering influence and clout. When former Governor George Pataki, a Republican, was in office, Fine and his spouse, gave \$65,341 towards his 2004 campaign. New York governors have executive privilege to appoint members to the state Housing Finance Agency, which offers financing to affordable and Mitchell Lama housing.

In the last few years, those contributions to

local politicians, which at one point had been in the thousands of dollars, have waned. A look at campaign finance records shows that Fine has donated a mere \$250, quite a low figure, to Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. In 2015, he donated heavily to "We the People, Not Washington," a super PAC that donates to Republican races.

For now, no legislator has stood on the side of Fine. Councilman Andrew Cohen, whose 11th Council District covers the neighborhood, told the *Norwood News*, "We are prepared to do whatever it takes to preserve the scale and character of Bedford Park."

In a response to questions from the *Norwood News*, a spokesman for Fine was not clear over whether Fine would ultimately seek to tear down the property in favor of a high-rise. Fine, through his company, To Better Days Development, admitted he is "considering options to develop the vacant portion but it's too soon to provide specifics."

Editor's Note: An expanded article on this story can be found on www.norwoodnews.org.





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**BRONX PRIMARIES
PREVIEW | PG. 5**

BEDFORD PARK TENANTS DISPLACED

City housing agency looks to keep building owner on hook for repairs



Photos by Google Maps/Daniela Beasley

BEFORE AND AFTER images of 267 E. 202nd St. left vacant after a fire tore through the home. Tenants at the property were in the middle of suing their landlord, Peter Fine.

By DAVID CRUZ

The tenants of 267 E. 202nd St. no longer call that address home. At least not for now.

It didn't come as a result of their ongoing legal dispute with their landlord, Peter Fine, who long sought to aggressively evict tenants while apparently eyeing the property for high-rise redevelopment, but an overnight fire that tore through the en-

tire two-story home, displacing four families and complicating their lawsuit.

But Fine, a multimillionaire and real estate magnate whose portfolio includes Boricua Village in the Melrose section of the Bronx and several luxury homes in Florida, may still be on the hook for restoring the condemned property to pre-fire conditions. The latest adds another layer of delay

for possible redevelopment of the space.

The legal effort by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) complements a Housing Court lawsuit filed by MFY Legal Services on behalf of tenants seeking repairs to the home as a way to stem eviction. Currently, the building has 178 open violations logged through HPD— one class I,

32 class A, 10 class C, considered the most pressing and in need of immediate repair, and 135 class B infractions. So far, HPD charged \$2,682.75 in inspection fees and emergency repairs.

Waiting Game

The wheels of justice, however, have languished in delays, testing tenants' patience. For some tenants,

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Bedford Park Tenants Displaced

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it was their last straw.

Cinthya Garcia, a mother of two forced to relocate to a dingy homeless shelter in Queens, is among the newly scattered tenants. She eventually moved out of that shelter to another shelter in the South Bronx and is now awaiting news from the New York City Human Resources Administration, a city agency that's now finding a place for her.

"As of right now, I'm sitting in a shelter that is not a place for my kids," Garcia said. "And if I could get a place that we could lay peacefully and not be around junkies and bugs and rodents, I would take that over anything."

Garcia would be the second tenant to move on. Still, the shrinking list of tenants does not weaken their case against Fine.

Carrying On

Community residents are still keeping the cause alive, for the sake of its tenants and the preservation of that sleepy portion of Bedford Park. It's for that reason neighborhood activists have opposed Fine's proposal to build a high-rise apartment building. The neighborhood is currently zoned as an R8, which allows for buildings 10 stories or higher.

Uproar over Fine's intentions has since ensued, with many seeing Fine's idea as further congesting the narrow neighborhood. It also inspired a petition that blamed the neighborhood's decades old zoning laws for making high-rise construction easy in the neighborhood.

Fine effectively inherited the building's problems that happened under Genesis Realty, the previ-

ous owner and management company. Early this year, Genesis sent eviction notices on Fine's behalf demanding tenants to leave within 30 days. Tenants suspected the evictions were part of an elaborate scheme to force tenants out so developers can bulldoze the building, thereby increasing the lot space, and allow for a higher building.

There were also instances of harassment including late-night visits from Fine himself, according to previous claims from tenants.

"The tenants need to be treated right, which they haven't throughout all this," John Reilly, a Bedford Park resident and expert on affordable housing, said. Reilly suggested tenants should receive some punitive damages to make them "whole again."

Fire

The fire occurred at 2 a.m. on Aug. 11, with flames tearing through the second floor, waking tenants.

"The minute I open my front door, it was like hell had just met me at the door," Garcia said. "The whole hallway was so hot. I don't know how a fire got so hot so quickly."

One resident had escaped by leaping from the second floor, landing on a car 12 feet from his apartment and suffering injuries. Families have since set up a GoFundMe page asking for donations to pay for the victim's hospital bills.

Marisol Jimenez, another tenant, was in her basement apartment as a firefighter attempted to rescue her and her elderly parents. "My father had to be pushed out of the way by a fireman; fire and debris threatened to fall

on him," Jimenez recalled. Jimenez and her parents are currently living with her brother elsewhere.

Six other residents and three firefighters sustained injuries.

Its timing led community leaders to consider a variety of ways the fire began, including the possibility it may have been set intentionally. A spokesman for Fine, Michael McKeon, criticized the notion of foul play as "outrageous, reckless and not supported by any facts."

A FDNY investigation would later determine the blaze was an accidental electrical fire caused by a faulty air conditioner.

"Even in the most generous scenario, this fire is indisputably gross negligence," Councilman Andrew Cohen, who represents Bedford Park, said.

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COMMUNITY BD. ROLE | PG. 4**



**SEE PICTURES:
HALLOWEEN IN NORWOOD | PG. 8**

SHAPING LOOK OF BEDFORD PARK

CB7 seeks input in determining community character



Photo by Adi Talwar

PRESERVING THIS SECTION of Bedford Park is the subject of an independent study by Community Board 7. Here, an apartment building at East 205th Street and Steuben Avenue is feet from a private home.

By DAVID CRUZ

Two neighborhoods falling within Community Board 7 will be the subject of an independent rezoning study by the board, in a move that revisits a request community stakeholders made years ago when rezoning efforts were happening in other parts of the district.

But the New York City Department of City Planning

(DCP), the agency tasked to devise the overall makeup of neighborhoods, will likely reject any plans to down-zone, a request community stakeholders have long sought.

The board has now scheduled a brainstorming forum for Nov. 16 to gauge residents on how sections of Kingsbridge Heights and Bedford Park, home to a sliver of private homes settled among the

droves of high-rise apartment buildings that largely circle the landscape, can remain that way. With a push to resolve the affordable housing crisis, the de Blasio administration is pressing for more development, a move many believe will further congest the already narrow neighborhoods, according to residents.

“The mayor’s office has a mandate to build as much

affordable housing as possible,” Sally Dunford, executive director of West Bronx Housing, a nonprofit housing resource group and Norwood resident, said. “They believe - and rightly so - that the largest cause of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing. I basically agree with the mayor’s office on this. But there has to be some common

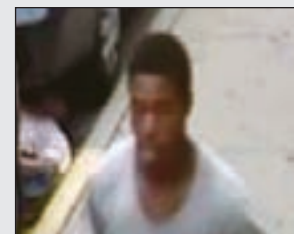
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Parking Spaces | pg 5**



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CB7 Launches Independent Study of Bedford Park Neighborhood, Wants Input

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sense along with it -- and these streets are just way too narrow to support tall buildings.”

Working on the independent study is Paula Luria Caplan, CEO of The Collective for Community Culture and Environment (CCCE), an urban planning firm. Caplan, hired by the board at a total cost of \$25,000, had worked as deputy director of planning and development for the Bronx borough president and was a registered lobbyist for Boyle Auto Wreckers in 2009.

“[W]e will be looking at how to suggest fine tuning the zoning map so that it reflects the desires of the community,” said Caplan, attending the Oct. 18 Community Board 7 meeting that confirmed her hiring. “The recommendation that we make will be what we think City Planning will do and then they do their own study, but our objective is to give you something that will be ‘good for you.’”

Studying Bedford Park

The Bedford Park area studied stretches from East 201st to East 204th streets, a section zoned as an R8, a distinction that allows apartment buildings 10 to 12 stories high. Longtime

neighbors have pressed upon the city to down-zone the neighborhood to an R5B, seeing it as impossible for high-rise buildings to re-occupy spaces given the narrow streets that would toughen the search for parking, pack the overly burdened schools and stretch public transportation.

The purchase of 267 E. 202nd St. in Bedford Park by a developer intending to build an apartment building maximizing the neighborhood’s current zoning laws became a jumping off point for community stakeholders to broach the subject of downzoning once again.

“The push from the mayor is build, build, build,” Barbara Stronczer, president of the Bedford Mosholu Community Association (BMCA) and Community Board 7 member, said at a recent BMCA meeting. “When you live in a community where you have certain character, you don’t want to lose that either.”

Sheila Sanchez, a community activist attending the BMCA meeting on Nov. 2, noted that the plan to build more housing doesn’t appear aligned with the need to increase demand for “more schools, more supermarkets, more everything.” For schools, the

prospect of more students will indeed pose a problem. Bedford Park and Kingsbridge Heights fall within School District 10, one of the more overcrowded school districts in the Bronx. A briefing compiled by the New York City Council in March 2016 showed the School Construction Authority would have to build a total 5,192 seats to fix the overcrowding issue, which may be years in the making. Within the Norwood, Bedford Park and Kingsbridge Heights neighborhoods, a total of 3,384 are currently needed.

An increased population in Bedford Park and Kingsbridge Heights can also strain the already crowded subway system. A report by the Straphangers Campaign, a rider advocacy group, pegged the 2, 4, and 5 trains, subway lines that are within walking distance of Bedford Park and Kingsbridge Heights, as some of the most crowded. Passengers riding the B and D, train lines that fall between both neighborhoods, have a higher chance of getting a seat, according to the report.

And should more development come to the neighborhoods, developers are not obligated to build in-house garages, a stipulation nixed follow-

ing the passage of new zoning amendments under the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing and Zoning for Quality and Affordability.

In a statement to the *Norwood News*, Joe Marzulli, a DCP spokesman, said while “community efforts inform our work,” downzoning is not an option for Bedford Park. “The agency has examined the Bedford Park area and found that the mixed development that already exists in the area would not support a planning rationale for a downzoning. This has been communicated to CB7 on multiple occasions, most recently in May 2016,” Marzulli wrote. Much of that decision is driven by the overwhelming number of apartment buildings matching the zoning distinction. “However, DCP is available to advise on issues that would be appropriately addressed through zoning changes and issues that would be better addressed through other means.”

Editor’s Note: *The brainstorming forum is scheduled for Nov. 16 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Sister Annunciate Bethell Senior Center, 243 E. 204th St. For more information, call (718) 933-5650.*

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POST-ELECTION THOUGHTS | PG. 4



SPECIAL: JEROME-GUN HILL BID
MARKS 20TH ANNIVERSARY | PGS. 11-15

ENVISIONING BEDFORD PARK

Residents brainstorm visions of Bedford Park and Kingsbridge Heights



Photo by David Cruz

RESIDENTS TAKE PART in roundtable discussions on the future of Bedford Park and Kingsbridge Heights, in a highly-publicized meeting serving as a jumping off point towards downzoning the two neighborhoods.

By DEBORAH CRUZ

Paula Caplan sat in the Sister Annunciata Bethell Senior Center in Bedford Park, surrounded by a group of concerned community members as they listed gripes for overdevelopment. She listened and watched as her colleague jotted down a vision residents have carved for their neighborhood.

As CEO of the Collective

for Community, Culture, and Environment (CCCE) and hired by Community Board 7 at a rate of \$25,000 to make a compelling argument for neighborhood preservation, Caplan is tasked to argue for what the residents want. She's expected to take her findings to the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP) and residents are relying on her.

Caplan heard these suggestions at this forum organized by CB 7. The Nov. 16 discussion represented the larger goal of warding off any overdevelopment and gentrification within pockets of Bedford Park and Kingsbridge Heights. It's a vision that clashes with New York City, now in building mode, thanks to the de Blasio administration's plan to build

or preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing. Maps of the targeted zones and lists were posted on the center's walls to begin the review of the neighborhoods.

In the last several years, developers have eyed sections of Bedford Park, zoned as R8, and certain sections of Kingsbridge Heights, zoned as R6, for construc-

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Transplant on Mosholu Pkwy. | pg 5



Anna Rogovin, of Norwood, Passes Away | pg 6



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Envisioning Bedford Park

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tion, exploiting the community's current zoning designations. Residents at the forum proposed downzoning the neighborhood, citing narrow streets already burdened by the current residential landscape. The neighborhood, along with sections of Kingsbridge Heights, is a mixture of co-ops, private homes, and rented apartments. Some sections in the Bronx have already been able to successfully downzone, the most recent happening in one section of Woodlawn early this year.

For Bedford Park, the promise of reexamining the neighborhood for downzoning has been in the works for nearly a decade when talk of rezoning a large portion of Webster Avenue, a street running along Bedford Park and Norwood, was in the works. While Webster Avenue was later rezoned in 2011, Bedford Park was never reassessed for zoning, leaving many residents to think the city had broken its promise.

"This is the city's attempt to finish what they started five years ago," said Anthony Riviuccio, former Community Board member, referring to the 2011 rezoning of Webster Avenue. Only 10 percent of Mosholu Parkway was included, according to Riviuccio. "I am very happy they are considering the rezoning of Kingsbridge Heights, but I would like it if they also considered the rest of Mosholu Parkway that is not zoned as R5," he said.

A prevalent argument against high-rise apartments in Bedford Park was the replacement of single-family private home with an apartment complex that would subsequently bring in an abundance of people. Meaning, a house that would hold one family would be replaced with an apartment complex that could hold 100 families, further congesting nearby subways and schools.

It'll also congest streets. New zoning laws exempt affordable housing developers from building indoor parking spaces should they build within a so-called Transit Zone, areas where public transportation is in abundance. With Community

Board 7 falling in a Transit Zone, finding a public parking spot will be even more problematic.

"The city is in desperate need for affordable housing and we aren't against it, but they have to pick the right place," said Sally Dunford, executive director of West Bronx Housing, a tenant advocacy group, referring to the overcrowding issue.

Fears of displacement similar to what has happened to many residents in different parts of New York have trickled their way up to the borough in recent years, stoking anxiety among Bronx residents. According to a 2013 census review on Governing.com, a data analyzing website, gentrification has increased 29.8 percent in New York City since 2000. Currently, there are plans to rezone southern sections of Jerome Avenue, leaving many residents anxious over possible displacement.

For Bedford Park and Kingsbridge Heights residents, the meeting proved somewhat useful.

"This was a good start," said Fernando Tirado, a former district manager of CB 7 who attended the meeting. "Not sure it will make a difference with the current [de Blasio] administration." Like him, many share the same thought that it is inevitable for change to happen.

If Bedford Park will actually stay downzoned, it is up to DCP to execute that change. The agency is unlikely to honor the community's request given their previous statement that downzoning Bedford Park was not an option.

"It was a really helpful meeting. It clarified what we were all thinking, that we are all on the same page," said Dunford. "I even learned something from it."

Many considered the forum as progressive and helpful. However there is a long way to go to prevent any change. CCCE will formally present its findings and community input to DCP to take into consideration when making its decision. When asked if the plans were just delaying the inevitable Dunford said, "When people come together they have power, they are hard to ignore."



Photo courtesy Jason Caraballo

RESIDENTS HEAR A presentation on how engaged the community of Norwood is.

Community Engagement Report Says Norwood Disengaged; Locals Disagree

By **DEBORAH CRUZ**

Things got heated at a Community Engagement Forum where the results of a two-month study on Norwood were unveiled. The findings were surprising, but its presentation irked community stakeholders already aware of its problems.

The study by the Public Agenda, a civic engagement think tank commissioned by the de Blasio administration, sparked much debate between the study's investigator, Nicole Hewitt, and guests who found the study pointless. "We don't need people to come and tell us what the problems are. We know what they are. We need solutions," said Sheila Sanchez, president of Friends of Williamsbridge Oval.

Hewitt reviewed the neighborhood's qualities and conflicts, but underscored a lack of communication among residents. "It took some time to set up these interviews. We even offered incentives, but on the day of the interviews, around 20 people only showed up," Hewitt said in her presentation.

She emphasized the lack of communication between Community Board 7, the civic body that represents Norwood, and residents, angering guests. "There is a communication with the board and the people of the community, but even if an event is thrown, not many people come," yelled an audience member.

Many of the people believed that the information Hewitt presented was a rehash of what they already knew. "It

just seemed condescending. She should have done her research properly," said Sally Dunford, a longtime resident and executive director of West Bronx Housing, on Hewitt's lack of knowledge to what the community already knew. "It just seemed condescending. You don't come to a meeting without having done your research well." Dunford didn't stick around for the whole meeting. Fed up, she stormed out.

Some of the people stated that one of the biggest contributors to stability and prominence in Norwood is Montefiore Hospital and it was an insult not to have mentioned that at all in the 40-minute presentation. Hewitt explained in her presentation that because it was such a polarized subject with all the interviewees, she thought it best to leave it out of the presentation. "It was a very sensitive topic, and yes it is a huge factor for this neighborhood but people had strong opinions for it and against it," Hewitt stated, defending herself against the audience's backlash.

"This presentation was a wasted opportunity because it was poorly done," Dunford said. Hewitt stated that Public Agenda had worked in many different states to help citizens navigate complex issues to help find solutions. "I was looking for an outline to a solution and it was not presented," Anthony Riviuccio, founder of Northwest Bronx Democrats and community activist, told the *Norwood News*. "It was just two people getting paid to do nothing."

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Bedford Park Tenants Fought the Good Fight, and Left Scattered

December 31, 2016

By DAVID CRUZ

For the four families who once lived at 267 E. 202nd St., the year of turmoil is over.

After living through a year where they were nearly evicted from their home, battled their new landlord in court over repairs as a way to delay eviction proceedings, and ultimately forced out following a devastating three-alarm fire, the tenants have found new lodgings. They've also happened to settle their case against their landlord, Peter Fine.

Fine, who was in the middle of being sued when the home broke out in flames over the summer, settled the cases with tenants for an undisclosed sum of money. The tenants are now scattered, living outside the Bronx and relying on public assistance to get by. Many declined to discuss the terms of the settlement, fearing they would be taken away.

In many ways, the tenants were glad the days of shuffling to Housing Court every other week were over. Andrew Darcy, the pro bono attorney representing the families through MFY Legal Services, said his clients had little interest in moving back in anyway.

“It’s not that there was necessarily a connection with the building. It was affordable in a neighborhood that they liked,” Darcy said. But it wasn’t well-maintained. For years, I think they had been living with issues.”

Still, the news opens the door for Fine to likely demolish the building, opting instead to construct a 20-unit property that exploits the neighborhood’s current zoning laws. It was a move many suspected was in the works the moment Fine, an affordable and luxury housing developer, purchased the property, which abuts a parking lot. The tenants will miss the aftermath: a further congested Bedford Park that chips away at its suburban quality.

“This is one example that may be occurring in many neighborhoods, including

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neighborhoods close to Bedford Park, this is one little dot of a big painting that's taken place over the last year," Darcy said.

Darcy is aware of the double-edge sword. By helping his clients, Fine, who has not filed for any building permits, can build a much taller building.

"I know that's going to anger a lot of people, especially knowing their history with Peter Fine," Darcy said. "However, you know that couldn't affect our representation of these individuals."

Fine's purchase of the property continues the construction boom blanketing the Bronx. The trend is favored by the de Blasio administration, which, in attempting to fix the affordable housing and homelessness crisis simultaneously, has created a pro-building atmosphere for developers.

John Reilly, a resident who helped get tenants housing thanks to his background in affordable housing, said the city has now taken other considerations to encourage mindful development.

"Efforts to create some mixed income housing as well as community needs such as transportation, parking, education and recreation space and other public and community facilities are now getting more consideration," Reilly said. Fine has been in the real estate business since the 1990s, having founded Atlantic Development Group with partner Marc Alheim. He has built luxury housing in Florida, and has since eyed Bedford Park for development.

He may not get the warmest reception following the year of change for the tenants and the community at large.

A spokesman for Fine was unavailable for comment.