

Queens Borough President Recommendation

APPLICATION: ULURP # N180281 ZRQ

COMMUNITY BOARD: Q11

DOCKET DESCRIPTION

IN THE MATTER OF an application submitted by Akerman, LLP on behalf of 241-15 Northern LLC and North Shore Realty Group Corp., pursuant to Sections 197-c and 201 of the NYC Charter for a zoning text amendment to Appendix F of the NYC Zoning Resolution to designate the Project Area a Mandatory Inclusionary Housing Designated Area (MIHA), Borough of Queens, Community District 11, as shown on a diagram (for illustrative purposes only) dated August 20, 2018, and subject to the conditions of CEQR Declaration E-494. (Related item: ULURP #C060432 ZMQ)

PUBLIC HEARING

A Public Hearing was held in the Borough President's Conference Room at 120-55 Queens Boulevard on November 15, 2018 at 10:30 A.M. pursuant to Section 82(5) of the New York City Charter and was duly advertised in the manner specified in Section 197-c (i) of the New York City Charter. The applicant made a presentation. There were fourteen (14) speakers against and twelve (12) speakers in favor of the application. The hearing was closed.

CONSIDERATION

Subsequent to review of the application and consideration of testimony received at the public hearing, the following issues and impacts have been identified:

- The applicant is proposing a text amendment to Appendix F of the NYC Zoning Resolution to designate the Project Area a Mandatory Inclusionary Housing Designated Area (MIHA);
- In a related application (ULURP #060432 ZMQ), the applicant is requesting a zoning map amendment to change the Project Area to be rezoned from R1-2 to an R6A district and an R6A/C1-2 district to facilitate development of two underutilized lots in the Project Area;
- The Project Area includes Block 8092, Lots 5 & 39 and portions of Lots 25, 28, 33, 205. The Project Area begins at the northwest corner of the intersection of Northern Boulevard and Douglaston Parkway extending 702 feet from the intersection with irregular depths ranging from 166 feet and 170 feet. Tax lots 5, 205, 28 and 33 are currently improved with 6- to 7-story multiple dwelling buildings. Lot 25 (Development Site 1) is an approximately 50' X 218' vacant lot with frontage on Douglaston Parkway that is located between Lot 5 to the north and Lot 28 to the south. Lot 39 (Development Site 2) is located at the northwest corner of intersection of Northern Boulevard and Douglaston Parkway. It is improved with a small one-story structure and used as a parking lot for a nearby restaurant.
- The proposed R6A District allows 3.9 FAR for development of Affordable Independent Residences for Seniors (AIRS) units. The maximum base height is 65 feet and maximum height up to 85 feet, and 35% maximum lot coverage. The existing 6- to 7-story buildings within the Project Area are developed with legal non-conforming, non-complying medium sized multiple dwellings which pre-date the current zoning or built pursuant to BSA variances. The proposed rezoning will bring the existing buildings closer to compliance;
- The two development sites are owned by two different owners. Development Site 1 (Lot 25) is an 8,615 sf mid-block vacant lot with steep downward slope towards the rear of the site. The owner is proposing to develop the site with an 8-story, 34,000 sf multiple dwelling building. Approximately 30% of the floor area will be dedicated to AIRS units to satisfy the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) requirement. The building will consist of 24 dwelling units which include 14 AIRS units at 80% AMI and approximately 1,400 sf community room space for seniors. The building will provide 19 parking spaces on cellar and sub-cellar levels instead of the 6 parking spaces required by zoning. Development Site 2 (Lot 39) is a 14,517 sf corner lot. The owner is proposing to develop a 55,380 sf, 5-story mixed-use building. The building will contain 59 senior housing units including 20 AIRS units at 80% AMI, 692 sf community space for seniors and 12,675 sf commercial space on the ground floor. The proposed building will provide 89 valet parking spaces on cellar and sub-cellar levels instead of the 63 parking spaces required pursuant to zoning;
- Alley Pond Park surrounds the Project Area to the north and west. There is an existing 6-story residential building to the south across Northern Boulevard. There is a two-story commercial building with several stores located at the northeast corner of Northern Boulevard and Douglaston Parkway. The areas further to the north and south of the site are primarily developed with low-density residential buildings mixed with a few 6-story multiple buildings. This section of Northern Boulevard is developed with a mix of commercial, residential and institutional uses including Zion Episcopal Church, Alley Pond Park, Alley Pond Golf Center and Udall's Cove Park. A protected bike lane is installed along Northern Boulevard;

- The Community Board 11 (CB 11) Land Use Committee made a motion to approve the application that was disapproved by the full board by a vote of twenty-four (24) against, none (0) in favor and two (2) abstaining at a special public hearing held on October 22, 2018. CB11's reasons for disapproval were existing traffic congestion and safety issues at that intersection would be exacerbated, and concerns about increased development pressure along this portion of Northern Boulevard and in the neighborhood which will may lead to other rezoning applications for increased development;
- At the Queens Borough President Land Use Public Hearing, the applicant stated that they are willing to consider lowering the height of the proposed 8-story building on Lot 25. The applicant also stated that the Hellenic American Neighborhood Action Committee (HANAC) would be a partner in the development to provide services and programs for seniors. Representatives from the Douglaston Civic Association, Auburndale Improvement Association, Princeton Owners' Corporation, and area residents spoke against the proposed rezoning and development. They expressed concerns about the lack of parking spaces, traffic congestion and safety issues at the intersection which will be exacerbated by the proposed development. They commented that the recent installation of the protected bike lane and red light camera contributed to more traffic congestion and increased traffic accidents involving pedestrians and vehicles. The proposed development will only aggravate the current situation. Some of the speakers also stated that the proposed rezoning will be a precedent for higher density development along Northern Boulevard in the Douglaston area. Representatives from 32BJ, Dioceses of Brooklyn, Queens Chamber of Commerce and some area residents spoke in favor of the proposed development stating the needs for affordable senior housing in the area and the city. Numerous phone calls, written testimonies and e-mails were received in opposition of the application. In addition, a petition through Change.org with approximately 700 signatures in opposition was submitted.

RECOMMENDATION

The City is going through a housing crisis that especially affects many seniors who are having difficulty finding affordable housing with appropriate services on their limited fixed incomes. A recently developed senior affordable housing project in Queens received approximately 34,000 applications for 64 available units which demonstrates the great need and scarcity of affordable senior housing throughout the city.


The creation of affordable housing units is of great importance to our borough's future livability and the fact that many of these units will be available to seniors is significant.

The Project Area with the exception of Lots 25 & 39 are already developed with 6- to 7-story buildings. There are no other areas in this vicinity that have a similar context of existing 6- to 7-story buildings on the surrounding blocks.

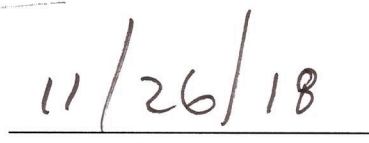
And, it has been reported that there are existing traffic safety and parking issues at the intersection of northern Boulevard and Douglaston Parkway that should be carefully examined.

Based on the above consideration, I hereby recommend approval of this application with the following conditions:

- While there is an acute need in Queens for affordable housing particularly for seniors, there are concerns about the impact of the existing and proposed buildings in the area to be rezoned upon the built character of the greater Douglaston neighborhood. The proposed 8-story building on Lot 25 would be the tallest building in most of Douglaston;
- The applicant should lower the height of the proposed 8-story building on Lot 25 so that the height will match the adjacent buildings. Also, a legally binding restriction on potential building heights above 7-stories on Lot 25 and 5-stories on Lot 39 should be executed and filed. Additionally, there should be a commitment to marketing the apartments to persons aged 55 and over.
- The applicant should coordinate with the Department of Transportation to mitigate the traffic impact during the construction period and after the completion. NYC DOT should study the safety for pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles at the intersection of Northern Boulevard and Douglaston Parkway and appropriate measures to address these findings should be implemented to alleviate all traffic safety and congestion issues.



PRESIDENT, BOROUGH OF QUEENS



DATE