



CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

July 12, 2006/Calendar No.10

N 060096 NPM

IN THE MATTER OF a plan submitted by Manhattan Community Board 8 concerning the open spaces, parks and waterfront access in the Queensboro Bridge area of Community District 8, for consideration pursuant to Section 197-a of the New York City Charter. The proposed plan for adoption is called “The Manhattan Community Board 8 197-a Plan for the Queensboro Bridge Area”.

BACKGROUND

In 2002 Manhattan Community Board 8 began an extensive public outreach process to develop its vision for the Queensboro Bridge area in a targeted plan called the *197-a Plan for the Queensboro Bridge Area*. Following a public hearing on March 9, 2005, the Board voted unanimously to approve the plan for review pursuant to Section 197-a of the New York City Charter. The plan was submitted to the Department of City Planning on August 23, 2005, in accordance with the City Planning Commission’s *Rules for the Processing of Plans Pursuant to Charter Section 197-a* (197-a rules).

PLAN DESCRIPTION

The 197-a plan is intended to serve as a guide for the coordinated revitalization of the area around the Queensboro Bridge. The plan has recommendations for open space and waterfront access in the L-shaped area generally bounded by the East River, East 59th Street, Second Avenue, and the mid-block line between East 60th and East 61st streets. The area also includes blocks bounded by York Avenue from East 60th to East 63rd streets, and East 63rd Street from York Avenue to the East River. This area is dominated by the Queensboro Bridge, the Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) Drive and the Roosevelt Island Tram. Near these transportation features are a number of small open spaces ranging from well-used active recreation areas to underutilized

parks lacking amenities. Community District 8 is the most densely populated district in New York City and has a ratio of parkland per person well below the City average. The lack of parkland and open space is especially acute in the eastern and southern parts of the district which are relatively far from Central Park and have limited access to the East River waterfront. In the last 15 years, new residential and commercial development near the Queensboro Bridge area has intensified the need for public open space. Additional similar development is expected in the future.

Goals

The plan's stated goals are to:

- Improve waterfront access, including links with the East River Esplanade;
- Provide improved connections between existing open space areas;
- Provide more street greenery with overall streetscape improvements;
- Create more open space, including dedicated park space and passive recreational facilities;
- Preserve views to and from the Queensboro Bridge and the waterfront; and
- Promote outreach and coordination with New York City agencies concerning the plan.

Recommendations

New Waterfront Park

- Create a new waterfront park in the area of the former heliport and Department of Sanitation (DOS) building on the East River between East 60th and East 63rd streets.
- Extend the East River Esplanade through the new park.
- Provide additional space for a variety of uses that could include a children's playground, landscaped seating areas, a seasonal cafe, and a restroom.
- Rehabilitate the former DOS building at East 60th Street, the roof of which is currently used for Pavilion Park, to allow for a variety of park-related uses.

- Utilize and improve the existing vehicular ramp/sidewalk at East 60th Street and York Avenue for pedestrian access to the park and limited vehicular access.

The plan notes that the former heliport site and the DOS building are currently being utilized for FDR reconstruction activities and that once reconstruction is completed, the area will be available for parkland. The New York City Economic Development Corporation, which currently owns the site, has made a commitment to make the site available for park use and to transfer jurisdiction to New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.

Existing Open Spaces

- Improve Tramway Park, 14 Honey Locust Park and Pavilion Park through the provision of additional amenities, landscaping and enhanced designs.

Both Tramway Park and 14 Honey Locust Park are already slated for renovation by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.

Streetscapes

- Provide decorative paving, street furniture, light posts and signage.
- Plant street trees at close intervals.
- Light the Queensboro Bridge to draw attention to the significant architectural elements.

Community Board 8 revised some of its original recommendations in response to concerns expressed by City Planning staff based on comments received from affected city agencies. On May 11, 2006 Community Board 8 deleted three recommendations: the relocation of the trolley kiosk on Bridge Plaza, the landscaping of Bridge Plaza and the landscaping alternative for the ramp from 14 Honey Locust Park to the Queensboro Bridge. Community Board 8 also provided five clarifications related to the location of facilities at Pavilion Park and the new waterfront

park; sidewalks adjacent to DOT property; decorative paving materials; railings; and the ramp treatment for the ramp from 14 Honey Locust Park to the Queensboro Bridge (see page 5A in the plan).

THRESHOLD REVIEW AND DETERMINATION

Pursuant to Section 3.010 of the 197-a rules, Department staff conducted a threshold review of the plan's consistency with standards for form, content and sound planning policy. On November 14, 2005, the City Planning Commission determined that *The Manhattan Community Board 8 197-a Plan for the Queensboro Bridge Area* complied with threshold standards for form, content and sound planning policy as set forth in Article 4 of the *Rules for Processing 197-a Plans*.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This application (N 060096 NPM) was reviewed pursuant to the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), and the SEQRA regulations set forth in Volume 6 of the New York Code of Rules and Regulations, Section 617.00 et. seq. and the City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Rules of Procedure of 1991 and Executive Order No. 91 of 1977. The designated CEQR number is 06DCP063M. The lead is the City Planning Commission.

After a review of the potential environmental impact of the proposed action, a Negative Declaration was issued on January 9, 2006. It was determined that the 197-a plan would not, in itself, result in construction, funding, or approval of projects or changes in regulations by city

agencies nor does the 197-a plan advance or effectuate any change or activity that would trigger environmental impacts.

On January 9, 2006, the plan was duly referred to Manhattan Community Board 8 and the Manhattan Borough President for review and comment, in accordance with Article 6 of the *Rules for the Processing of Plan Pursuant to Charter Section 197-a*.

WATERFRONT REVITALIZATION PROGRAM CONSISTENCY

This application (N 060096 NPM) was reviewed by the Department of City Planning for consistency with the policies of the New York City Waterfront Revitalization Program (WRP), as amended, approved by the New York City Council on October 13, 1999 and by the New York State Department of State on May 28, 2002, pursuant to the New York State Waterfront Revitalization and Coastal Resources Act of 1981 (New York State Executive Law, Section 910 et. seq.) The designated WRP number is 06-001.

This action was determined to be consistent with the policies of the New York City Waterfront Revitalization Program.

COMMUNITY BOARD PUBLIC HEARING

Community Board 8 waived a public hearing on the application, considering a prior public hearing, recommending approval of the plan, was held on March 9, 2005. A sponsor community board may waive their public hearing if one was held before the plan was filed, in accordance with Article 6, Section 6.020 of the *Rules for Processing 197-a Plans*.

BOROUGH PRESIDENT RECOMMENDATION

This application (N 060096 NPM) was considered by the Manhattan Borough President, who issued a recommendation approving the application on April 19, 2006. The Borough President strongly supported the plan, stating that, “By planning carefully for a manageable area, Community Board 8 has focused its planning energy where it is likely to be able to have a tangible and immediate impact. This plan serves as a fine example for long-range planning that other communities can follow.”

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING

On May 24, 2006 (Calendar No. 1), the City Planning Commission scheduled June 7, 2006, for a public hearing on this application (N 060096 NPM). The hearing was duly held on June 7, 2006 (Calendar No. 15). There were three speakers, all in favor of the 197-a plan.

The co-chairperson of the Community Board 8 197-a Plan Committee reviewed the purpose and major components of the plan, highlighting the unique opportunity to create new waterfront open space and extend the East River Esplanade. It was also mentioned that work had already begun on implementing the various recommendations of the plan through meetings with the involved City agencies, and that these meetings will continue.

A representative for the New York State Assemblyman of the 65th District endorsed the plan, supporting the need to add usable green space and waterfront access to Community District 8 and applauding the Community Board for their hard work.

The Director of Land Use for the Borough President praised the targeted recommendations of the plan, noting that the plan was manageable and achievable. The speaker echoed the Borough President's recommendation, saying that the plan was a model for other 197-a plans to follow and that the Borough President would continue to work with the community to ensure the successful implementation of the plan.

Written testimony was received from the Councilmember from the Fifth District, who strongly supported the plan. The Councilmember noted the need to increase the quantity and quality of open space and street greenery in Community District 8 and the area surrounding the Queensboro Bridge in particular.

CONSIDERATION

The Commission has carefully reviewed and considered the *Manhattan Community Board 8 197-a Plan for the Queensboro Bridge Area* as originally submitted by Manhattan Community Board 8 on August 23, 2005, and as modified by the Board on May 11, 2006. The Commission applauds the efforts of Community Board 8 in producing a well-written, carefully considered targeted plan, in coordinating closely with affected city agencies, and in reaching a consensus within the community on an approach to public open spaces. The Commission believes that the plan will provide a sound policy framework to guide future planning, design and implementation efforts in keeping with the purpose and intent of 197-a plans. The Commission notes the Board's successful efforts to work collaboratively with involved city agencies, identify funding and obtain necessary commitments, evaluate the feasibility of specific components of the plan, and to develop detailed design alternatives.

The Commission agrees with the plan's goals for creating substantial new waterfront open space at the site of the former heliport and DOS building. The proposed waterfront park reflects objectives identified in the Department's Greenway Plan for New York City and the New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan by extending the East River Esplanade south to East 60th Street. The creation of a new waterfront park would provide a needed public waterfront destination in the southern portion of Community District 8 and has the potential to invigorate the entire area surrounding the Queensboro Bridge.

The Commission finds the 197-a plan noteworthy in that elements of it are already being advanced. Portions of the plan – the renovation of Tramway Park – have already begun, while other parts of the plan – the rehabilitation of 14 Honey Locust Park – have funding in place and will be rehabilitated in consultation with the Community Board. In addition, the New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC) has agreed to make the former heliport site available for park use after completion of the FDR reconstruction, an essential step toward making the proposed waterfront park a reality.

With respect to the feasibility of specific design proposals in the plan, the Commission notes that Community Board 8 recognizes that the design proposals in its plan are intended to be representative, and actual plans will evolve as detailed planning and design work moves forward.

The Commission notes that on May 11, 2006, in response to comments received from interested city agencies, Community Board 8 revised its plan to provide further clarification and remove untenable recommendations. Specifically, in response to Department of Transportation's

objections to three recommendations (the relocation of the trolley kiosk on Bridge Plaza, the landscaping of Bridge Plaza and the landscaping alternative for the ramp from 14 Honey Locust Park to the Queensboro Bridge), CB 8 has deleted these recommendations from the plan. The Commission believes the revisions do not impact the goals or objectives embodied in the plan.

RESOLUTION

RESOLVED, that the City Planning Commission finds that the action described herein will have no significant effect on the environment; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the City Planning Commission, in its capacity as the City Coastal Commission, has reviewed the waterfront aspects of this application and finds that the proposed action will be consistent with WRP policies, and be it further

RESOLVED, by the City Planning Commission, pursuant to Section 197-a of the New York City Charter, that the 197-a plan, *The Manhattan Community Board 8 197-a Plan for the Queensboro Bridge Area*, submitted by Manhattan Community Board 8, is approved.

The above resolution (N 060096 NPM), duly adopted by the City Planning Commission on July 12, 2006 (Calendar No. 10), is filed with the Office of the Speaker, City Council, and the Borough President in accordance with the requirements of Section 197-d of the New York City Charter.

AMANDA M. BURDEN, AICP Chair

KENNETH J. KNUCKLES, Esq., Vice Chairman

**ANGELA M. BATTAGLIA, IRWIN G. CANTOR, P.E., ANGELA R. CAVALUZZI, R.A.,
ALFRED C. CERULLO, III, JANE D. GOL, LISA A. GOMEZ, CHRISTOPHER KUI, JOHN
MEROLO, DOLLY WILLIAMS, Commissioners**