



CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

April 9, 2007/Calendar No. 2

C 070135 PPK

IN THE MATTER OF an application submitted by the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), pursuant to Section 197-c of the New York City Charter, for the disposition of one (1) city-owned property located at 136 Wythe Avenue (Block 2309, Lot 22) pursuant to zoning, Borough of Brooklyn, Community District 1.

*Section 197-d, b (2) eligible

The application for the disposition of city-owned property was filed by the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), Division of Real Estate Services (DRES) on October 4th, 2006.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), Division of Real Estate Services (DRES) submitted an application for the disposition of one (1) City-owned property, located at 136 Wythe Avenue (Block 2309, Lot 22) in the Greenpoint-Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn. The property is located on the western side of Wythe Avenue between North 8th and North 9th streets in an M1-2/R6A zoning district within the Special MX-8 Mixed Use District. The property has an area of 2,500 square feet and is occupied by a 3-story, 6,000-square foot vacant firehouse. The firehouse housed former Engine Company 212, which was closed in May, 2003 for budgetary reasons.

Three firehouses now respond to calls formally made to Engine 212. They are Engine Company 229 located at 75 Richardson Street, Engine Company 221 at 161 South Second Street and Engine Company 238 located at 205 Greenpoint Avenue. All three facilities are located within 0.83 miles of 136 Wythe Avenue.

Adjacent properties include a vacant four-story loft building and a one-story garage building. Other lots on Wythe Avenue between North 8th and North 9th streets are occupied by a 4-story residential loft building, and 3- to 4-story rowhouses with some ground floor retail uses. To the west, south, and east of the property to be disposed, land uses include a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial, and to the north, land use is predominantly industrial and commercial. The property is within the area rezoned in the 2005 Greenpoint-Williamsburg Rezoning, which rezoned the property from M3-1 to its current designation.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This application (C 070135 PPK) 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 lead agency is the Department of Citywide Administrative Services.

This application was determined to be a Type II action which requires no further environmental review.

UNIFORM LAND USE REVIEW

This application (C 070135 PPK) was certified as complete by the Department of City Planning on November 13, 2006, and was duly referred to Community Board 1 and the Borough

President, in accordance with Article 3 of the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) rules.

Community Board Public Hearing

Community Board 1 held a public hearing on this application on December 5, 2006, and on January 9, 2007, by a vote of 40 to 0 with 0 abstentions, adopted a resolution recommending disapproval of the application. The recommendation gave the following reasons for disapproval:

1. The need for increased fire and EMS service in Greenpoint and Williamsburg is growing, not diminishing;
2. In order to properly serve the existing population and projected influx of new residents and high rises, fire service should be restored at 136 Wythe Avenue or at a new location nearby;
3. Engine Company 212 should not be auctioned off to the highest bidder;
4. The community, through the Community Board, should play a meaningful role in determining the best use for this property;
5. 136 Wythe Avenue should continue to serve a public service as a community facility, affordable housing or both, as determined through community input;
6. Known to many as the People's Firehouse, 136 Wythe Avenue is a significant part of Williamsburg's and Greenpoint's history, and should be preserved and designated an NYC Landmark.

Borough President Recommendation

This application was considered by the Borough President, who issued a recommendation disapproving the application. In his recommendation the Borough President stated:

The Borough President feels it would do the community a disservice to dispose of this property to the highest bidder... The historical ties between this firehouse and its community are truly a rarity. Rather the city should work with CB1, the People's Firehouse, Inc, and NAG [Neighbors Allied for Good Growth] to develop a community response plan for the property's use. One such possibility is for community space with another possibility being affordable housing.

The Borough President further recommended that "the City should reinstate Engine Company

212 in a new, state-of-the-art facility within a site in the Williamsburg and Greenpoint waterfront neighborhood.”

City Planning Commission Public Hearing

On February 7, 2007 (Calendar No. 3), the City Planning Commission scheduled February 28, 2007 for a public hearing on this application (C 070135 PPK). The hearing was duly held on February 28, 2007 (Calendar No. 23). There were two speakers in favor of the application and eight speakers opposed.

Those speaking in favor of the application included a Deputy Commissioner of DCAS and the Chief of Operations for the Fire Department (FDNY). The Deputy Commissioner from DCAS noted that a hold had been put on this property at the request of the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) which would preclude its being sold while the hold remained in effect. She also read a statement from the Deputy Mayor’s Office that described establishment of a Community Steering Committee to develop plans for the site to ensure that future uses fit the needs of the community in which it is located. The steering committee would include representatives of the Mayor’s Office, the local City Council Member, city agencies, the Borough President and the Community Board. The committee would be chaired by the Mayor’s Office and Vice Chaired by the local City Council Member and would have a goal of achieving consensus on an adaptive reuse vision and disposition strategy within six months of committee

establishment.

The FDNY Chief of Operations stated that Engine 212 was closed due to budgetary reasons and only after a study of workload and response times in surrounding units. When it was closed, Engine 212 had the lightest workload of any firehouse in the city and the companies that now respond to calls formally answered by Engine 212 have response times lower than the city-wide average and have fewer calls than that received by over half the active firehouses in the city.

Those speaking in opposition to the application included the Borough President, City Council members representing Districts 33 and 39, a representative of the Council member for District 34, and four residents.

The Borough President expressed pleasure with the formation of a steering committee, but reiterated his opposition to the sale of the firehouse and asked that a new firehouse be established in the neighborhood where needed. He further stated that any reuse of the building should be responsive to the needs of the community. The City Council members supported the establishment of the Community Steering Committee, but stated that increased response times in the surrounding firehouses are unacceptable for their communities, especially considering recent and future developments in the area and the impacts they would have on population and traffic.

The representative of the Council Member for District 34 had similar comments to those of the Council members.

The other speakers mentioned a lack of community space in Greenpoint and Williamsburg that the property could fill and stated that there is great interest among local non-profits to use the property for community uses. It was also suggested that the Community Steering Committee contain more community representation.

There were no other speakers and the hearing was closed.

CONSIDERATION

The Commission believes that the disposition of one City-owned property located at 136 Wythe Avenue (Block 2309, Lot 22), is appropriate.

The Commission notes that Engine Company 212 was closed in May of 2003 due to budgetary concerns after an analysis of workload and response times. The Commission notes that response times in the area formerly served by Engine Company 212 have remained below the city average, that there are four engine companies within 1-mile of 136 Wythe Avenue and four more within 1.5 miles, that the three engine companies that now respond to calls formerly answered by Engine Company 212 have among the lowest workloads in the city, and that they have safely absorbed those calls.

The Commission further notes that HPD has requested a hold on the subject property, and that DCAS has granted the hold. This will preclude the sale of the site while the hold remains in effect.

The Commission is pleased that a steering committee has been established that includes the Mayor's office, the local Council Members, the Borough President, the Community Board and city agencies. The committee's goal is to achieve consensus on an adaptive reuse vision and disposition strategy for the site within six months of its establishment. There have been two meetings of the steering committee and several options for reuse of the site have been suggested including affordable housing, space for community organizations and small industrial uses. The Commission believes that it would be inappropriate to place any restrictions on the sale and future use of the property while the committee continues to meet. In concert with the hold on the property placed by DCAS, the Commission is confident that an appropriate future use for the site will be found.

RESOLUTION

RESOLVED, by the City Planning Commission, pursuant to Section 197-c of the New York City Charter, that the disposition of one (1) City-owned property located at 136 Wythe Avenue (Block 2309, Lot 22) in the Borough of Brooklyn, Community District 1, proposed in an application by the Department of Citywide Administrative Services, dated October 4, 2006, is approved.

The above resolution (C 070135 PPK), duly adopted by the City Planning Commission, on April 9, 2007 (Calendar No. 2), 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, RICHARD W. EADDY, LISA A. GOMEZ,

DOLLY WILLIAMS, Commissioners

BETTY Y.CHEN, NATHAN LEVENTHAL, Commissioners, ABSTAINING