



## CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

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November 4, 2009 / Calendar No. 2

N 100104 HKQ

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**IN THE MATTER OF** a communication dated September 24, 2009 from the Executive Director of the Landmarks Preservation Commission regarding the landmark designation of Ridgewood North Historic District, designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission on September 15, 2009 (List No. 417, LP No.2319). The District boundaries are: bounded by a line beginning at the northwest corner of Fairview Avenue and Woodbine Street, extending northeasterly along the western curblines of Woodbine Street to the western curblines of Forest Avenue, northerly along the western curblines of Forest Avenue to the eastern curblines of Gates Avenue, southwesterly along the eastern curblines of Gates Avenue to the southern curblines of Grandview Avenue, northwesterly across Gates Avenue and along the southern curblines of Grandview Avenue to the eastern curblines of Linden Street, southwesterly along the eastern curblines of Linden Street to a point extending northwesterly from the southern (rear) property line of 652 Grandview Avenue, southeasterly along said line and the southern (rear) property lines of 652, 654, 656 and 658 Grandview Avenue to the western (rear) property line of 2055 Gates Avenue, southwesterly along said line and the western (rear) property lines of 2053 to 2027 Gates Avenue to the northern curblines of Fairview Avenue, and southeasterly along the northern curblines of Fairview Avenue to the point of beginning, Community District 5, Borough of Queens.

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Pursuant to Section 3020.8(a) and (b) of the City Charter, the City Planning Commission shall submit to the City Council a report with respect to the relation of the designation by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, whether of a historic district or a landmark, to the Zoning Resolution, projected public improvements, and any plans for the development, growth, improvement or renewal of the area involved.

The Ridgewood North Historic District is significant as an intact grouping of structures that reflect the development of model tenements in Ridgewood in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A contiguous district in both typology and style, it is composed of 96 buildings, primarily three-story brick tenements, that encompass all or portions of four blocks in the Ridgewood neighborhood of Community District 5, Queens. The district is roughly bounded by Forest Avenue to the north, Fairview Avenue to the south, Linden Street to the west, and Woodbine Street to the east. The tenements were constructed between 1908 and 1914, mainly by the G.X. Mathews Company. Known as “Mathews Model Flats,” these “new law” tenements had larger rooms and more adequate sanitary facilities than their 19th-century predecessors. Built in long

rows of repeated designs that create a sense of place, the facades retain a high degree of integrity and are distinguished by their buff- and amber-colored brick facades, carved-stone details, ornate pressed metal cornices, and stoop and areaway ironwork.

Transportation improvements and the consolidation of Greater New York City at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century contributed to the development of Ridgewood, which was characterized by open farmland and several amusement parks earlier in the 1800's. Denser building activity had begun with the coming of the electric trolley in 1894. Ridgewood became an ideal location for upwardly mobile German-Americans to relocate, away from the overcrowding and more recent immigrants inhabiting Bushwick and Williamsburg, as well as the Lower East Side. Corresponding with the construction of the buildings in the proposed historic district, urbanization was triggered by the opening of the elevated train around the turn of the century. Providing rapid and dependable rail service, the "El" was extended from its original terminus at Myrtle and Wyckoff Avenues to Fresh Pond Road and 67th Avenue in 1915.

German immigrant Gustave X. Mathews began building in Bushwick and Ridgewood in the first decade of the 20th century. Using wider lots, large air shafts, private bathrooms, and limiting occupancy to two families per floor, Mathews' "cold-water flats" were a radical improvement to the overcrowded tenement houses of Williamsburg and the Lower East Side. By creating improved living quarters and controlling costs so that the apartments could be affordable to families of modest income, Mathews found a niche in the real estate market and met with immediate success. He built and sold over 300 tenements in Ridgewood between 1909 and 1912, receiving 25% of the tenement house permits issued in Queens in 1911. As testament to their

improved design, the “Mathews Model Flats” were exhibited by the New York City Tenement House Department at the Panama-Pacific Fair in San Francisco in 1915. The buildings in this district were among the first that Mathews built featuring his innovative floor plans, and are the earliest examples of fully developed Mathews Flats in Ridgewood, which became standards for later tenement house construction.

In addition to being innovative in plan, the tenements are striking in appearance. Built after 1905 when fire codes in Ridgewood began requiring masonry construction for attached row houses, the buildings have load-bearing masonry walls constructed of light-colored Kreisler brick. Using mainly buff- and amber-colored brick, the buildings have fine detailing in the Romanesque- and Renaissance-Revival styles, including corbelled, projecting, contrasting and geometric patterned brickwork, brick pilasters, and contrasting brick or stone string coursing. With mainly flat facades, the mid-block buildings are recessed from the street wall of the corner buildings, adding further interest to the row, while 66-22 to 66-42 Forest Avenue feature angled projecting bays. Some buildings, like those on Grandview Avenue and Palmetto Street have Romanesque Revival-style round and segmental arches of contrasting brick, while others feature carved-stone door and window lintels. Other handsome details include Classically-inspired carved-stone entablatures and friezes, pressed metal cornices and original ironwork at the stoop and areaway. The buildings facing Fairview and Grandview Avenues have commercial storefronts at the first floor and apartments on the second and third floors, while those on the side streets are completely residential. A cohesive collection of speculative urban architecture, the tenements in the Ridgewood North Historic District retain extremely high levels of architectural integrity and represent an important part of the development of housing in New York City.

The Historic District lies within an R6B zoning district. The R6B District permits all residential and community facility uses at a maximum floor are ratio (FAR) of 2.0 and a maximum building height of 50 feet. There are C1-4 commercial overlay districts are mapped at an average depth of 100 feet. along portions of Grandview Avenue and Forest Avenue within the Ridgewood North Historic District.

Pursuant to Section 74-79 of the Zoning Resolution, no transfer of development rights is permitted from any structure within an historic district. All landmark buildings or buildings within Historic Districts are eligible to apply for use and bulk waivers pursuant to Section 74-711 of the Zoning Resolution.

#### **CITY PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING**

Pursuant to Section 3020.8(a) of the City Charter, the City Planning Commission held a public hearing on October 21, 2009, (Calendar No. 14). There were no speakers and the hearing was closed.

#### **CONSIDERATION**

The City Planning Commission has evaluated the Ridgewood North Historic District in relation to the Zoning Resolution, projected public improvements and plans for the development, growth and improvements in the vicinity of the area involved. The historic district designation does not conflict with the Zoning Resolution, projected public improvements or any plans for development, growth, improvement, or renewal within the historic district or surrounding area.

**ALFRED C. CERULLO, III, Vice Chairman,  
RAYANNE BESSER, IRWIN G. CANTOR, P.E.,  
BETTY Y. CHEN, MARIA M. DEL TORO,  
RICHARD W. EADDY, NATHAN LEVENTHAL, ANNA HAYES LEVIN  
SHIRLEY A. MCRAE, Commissioners**