

From: Sally Goldenberg [<mailto:sally.goldenberg@gmail.com>]
Sent: Tuesday, March 01, 2016 2:42 PM
To: Mayor's Press Office
Subject: First pool report; 1 more TK

Mayor Bill de Blasio visited his old neighborhood Tuesday in the late morning/early afternoon to pitch his two-pronged zoning plan to citizens at the Park Slope Center for Successful Aging. (If it matters, it is located near the intersection of 7th Street and 7th Avenue.)

He was joined by City Councilman Brad Lander, who represents Park Slope, and several staffers from City Hall and various agencies. He spoke about his proposals and took questions from the several dozen people in attendance, who were seated at several tables in a large meeting room.

He arrived a few minutes after 11:30 a.m. and stayed for about one hour.

He began his remarks by reminiscing about his time representing Park Slope in the City Council for eight years and said he still owns his home a few blocks away.

"I pass by all the time," one woman called out.

"You pass by all the time? And I miss it all the time. That's why I come back to the neighborhood all the time," the mayor replied.

"Everyone understands how much we love our neighborhood," he added.

He said one of the things he misses most about his home on 11th Street is watching his children grow up in that house; he said he remembers "every moment along the way."

He then segued into how other New Yorkers who love their neighborhoods feel threatened by gentrification.

"What's happening all over the city is people are worried that they won't be able to stay in their neighborhood. They're worried that they'll be priced out. They're worried they'll be forced out. And this I hear everywhere I go and I hear it with such passion and urgency. People are worried that this is not going to be a city for them anymore. ... And I hear that especially among seniors," he said.

He referenced seniors who are on fixed incomes, want to stay in their neighborhoods and want to live near their existing senior centers.

Then he went over the basics of Mandatory Inclusionary Housing and Zoning for Quality and Affordability, which he said will be voted on in the City Council in the coming weeks.

"The key word is mandatory because it says it's not a choice for real estate developers," he said.

Because housing prices are ever increasing in New York City, he said developers will always do well, he said. But when developers have the right to do that they would be required to do affordable housing. (The rule would only apply to rezoned areas.)

Zoning for Quality and Affordability would allow the city to create more affordable housing by changing outdated laws, he said. "We have outdated laws that keep us from creating the affordable housing that seniors need. ... There are places where I'm required to put lots and lots of parking in when that's not what seniors are telling me they want. They need a place to live. They need an apartment they can afford.

He then told people in attendance, "I need your help." He said Lander understands these issues and is an ally on this matter, but it's important that all Council members understand why these changes are important--without them seniors will stay on waiting lists for apartments, he said.

"We have to move with urgency," he added.

Then he plugged AARP as "one of our strongest supporters of this plan. They believe in these two bills because they know it will help seniors."

He also said the city is providing free lawyers for people threatened with illegal evictions and boasted the first-ever rent freeze. "We're proud of the fact that we knew that was the right thing to do," he said.

Then he returned to asking the seniors for help in getting these zoning text amendments passed.

"I'm asking you to tell your Council member, to tell your friends, to tell your neighbors to tell their Council member that we need to pass this legislation so we can get a lot more affordable housing right now in this city, particularly for our seniors."

Then he concluded by saying he was trying to help his elderly mother who lived to be nearly 90 years old and had health care issues in the last few years of her life. At that time he was already living in Park Slope with his family. His mother lived elsewhere.

"My mother was a very strong woman and a very independent woman and she did not want to leave her own apartment but at a certain point it was really tough for her. So I said Mom come live near us." It was closer, she could see Chiara and Dante, etc.

They got her a house a block away in Park Slope and put in a ramp so she could use her wheelchair, "and she saw her grandchildren literally every single day and it was a wonderful time in her life. It was also wonderful for my children to have that time with her. That's what every family deserves."

Then he introduced Lander, the Park Slope councilman.

A woman then called out that she misses de Blasio in the Democratic club and he said he misses her too.

Lander then said the mayor "gets it," thanked him and asked audience to applaud him. They obliged.

Lander then referenced an incident in the neighborhood in which 130 senior citizens were booted out of a residence so the developer could turn it into condos, "motivated by nothing but greed," he said.

"Change isn't always easy," Lander said. "Change can be hard and when people see new development they think that might not be for me. And so there's been some resistance to these plans but I have to tell you we have to get them done."

Then he talked about the Bishop Boardman apartments that has a parking lot behind it.

"Are there any cars in that parking lot?" he asked.

People replied that no, there are not. Lander concurred.

"Now what do we need more? An empty parking lot or a new building that would have affordable housing for seniors that people in this community would get half the units for?"

He asked for a show of hands. No one raised his/her hand for the parking lot preference and people laughed. Most hands went up for the second option and several people applauded.

"That is the question facing the Council for Zoning for Quality and Affordability and as long as the Council votes as you just voted we're going to be great. But we need your help because I think people are nervous."

He said the owner of Bishop Boardman, Catholic Charities, wants to build more affordable housing for seniors instead of the parking lot.

"We have to get it across the finish line," he said.

He also talked about the Gowanus Canal where there is "a lot of space" where city can get mixed-income development.

He took another poll, asking people whether they want to let developers build and choose whether to do affordable or be required by the city to do it in Gowanus. The show of hands fell in favor of the mayor's plans. More applause.

The mayor then took questions will be coming in Pool Report, The Sequel.

###