

Auburndale Improvement Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 580331, Station A
Flushing, NY 11358

August 9, 2009

To:

Candidates for City Council, 19th District:

Steve Behar, Tom Cooke, Dan Halloran, Jerry Iannece, Kevin Kim, Debra Markell, Paul Vallone;

Candidates for City Council, 20th District:

John Choe, Evergreen Chou, Yen C. Chou, S.J. Jung, Constantine Kavadas, Peter Koo, Isaac Sasson, James Wu;

Candidates for City Council, 23rd District:

Bob Friedrich, Swaranjit Singh, Mark Weprin

As you are no doubt aware, the contextual rezoning study for central and southern Auburndale, which will also include the communities of Station Road, Kissena Park, Oakland Gardens and Hollis Hills is finally nearing completion by the New York City Department of City Planning. Our community has lobbied for several years to be rezoned. We have stood by as surrounding communities in Flushing, Bayside and Whitestone were rezoned. Unfortunately, this made Auburndale and the other communities not rezoned the target of those who took advantage and developed our community in inappropriate ways. We are not against development per se, however, we expect new development to compliment our community and fit in with the character of those homes already present.

Some preliminary plans for the rezoning have been put forward by the Department of City Planning and some discussion meetings have already been held by Councilman Tony Avella and Community Board 11 in concert with local civic groups. We expect Community Board 7 to become involved shortly.

The plans look promising, however, there are still several major issues that need to be addressed from my point of view as a vice president and zoning and housing chair of the Auburndale Improvement Association Inc., one of the oldest civic organizations in the city. The issues include:

A) There is an area in the Station Road neighborhood currently designated as a manufacturing zone. The auto service dealerships that have been operating there for an extended period of time have not been good neighbors to the surrounding residents and my colleagues at the Station Road Civic Association along with other community leaders would like to see this manufacturing zone replaced with a residential designation. That would mean that as these businesses leave the area or go out of business, they could be replaced by new single and two family homes that should match the residential character of that community. A manufacturing zone does not belong in the middle of a residential area like the Station Road community. Other even more undesirable businesses could locate there, creating even more problems for the area. It needs to be changed.

B) Another issue that has been raised by civic associations for decades is the concern that single family attached homes do not have an appropriate zoning designation among all of the designations in the City Planning arsenal of zones. In Auburndale, as in many areas of Queens, there are many blocks of beautiful, attached single family residences that merit their own special, protective designation. Designations that City Planning are currently using for these areas, like R3-2 and R4, do not fit the characteristics of those areas. Those designations apply to many types of housing including multi family ones and encourage higher density development. Many civic leaders across the borough have been urging a new “rowhouse” designation for years, however, none has been forthcoming. Isn’t it about time that a designation is developed and adopted for this type of residential use?

C) A third concern with the preliminary rezoning plan is that certain recommendations made by City Planning could be improved upon to ensure that discrete areas are correctly zoned based on the preponderance of housing stock in those areas. The Auburndale Improvement Association and other civic groups will insist that all areas be zoned to ensure that neighborhoods receive as much protection as possible to preserve neighborhood integrity and stability. In particular:

1) The large area comprised of some 1100 properties west of Francis Lewis Blvd. and north of the Long Island Expressway currently zoned R3-2 is proposed to be changed to R3X by the Department of City Planning. Since almost 75% of the homes in this area are single family detached homes, our organization feels that R2A would be the correct and more desirable designation.

2) Rezone the northwest corner of 166th Street and 45th Avenue (as per Rickert-Finlay covenants) to R2A. Rezone the southeast corner of 172nd Street and 45th Avenue to R2A to match the north side of the avenue.

3) Rezone 46th Avenue between 189th and 192nd Streets from R3-2 to R4-1.

4) Rezone the northwest corner of 47th Avenue and 194th Street from R3-2 to R2A.

5) Adjust zoning line to include the property and empty lot at 40-38 191st Street into the proposed R3X zone and out of the proposed R4 zone.

D) A final major concern are commercial overlays along major thoroughfares like Northern Blvd. Approximately one mile of Northern Blvd. in the Auburndale and Station Road areas have no commercial overlays and we would like to keep it that way. Civic groups and others feel it would be in the best interests of the community to leave the variances that currently control the businesses in those areas. This would afford more community input into how these businesses would be allowed to operate, especially as these variances come up for renewal at the Board of Standards and Appeals. Additionally, protective covenants that affect parts of the area prohibit commercial overlays. We also feel that the R2 designation should be kept along Northern Blvd. in the Rickert-Finlay covenant areas, not R5B as currently proposed by the Department of City Planning.

The Auburndale Improvement Association as well as neighboring civic and community groups will continue to fight to ensure that the proposed rezoning of Auburndale and the other communities involved in the plan (Station Road, Kissena Park, Oakland Gardens, and Hollis Hills) are rezoned fairly and correctly based on each individual neighborhood. We want this plan enacted as soon as possible in order to curb inappropriate development and overdevelopment in our communities.

As a candidate for City Council, we want your written pledge that you will support the zoning concerns discussed in this letter, and if elected to the City Council, that you will work for the early enactment of this plan with the above modifications.

I also want you to be aware that there are certain areas of Auburndale and Western Bayside, that my organization represents, that merit landmark designation. If you should be elected to the City Council, I hope to work with you on making those designations a reality.

Thank you for your anticipated response.

Sincerely,
/s/ Henry Euler
First Vice President and Zoning and Housing Chair
Auburndale Improvement Association, Inc.

cc: Mayor Michael Bloomberg
Councilman Tony Avella
Comptroller William Thompson
Borough President Helen Marshall
Queens Civic Congress
Historic Districts Council
Station Road Civic Association
Terri Pouymari, President, Auburndale Improvement Association, Inc.