

April 14, 2014

Beep 'razes' ruckus Bldg.-protect bill

By LEONARD GREENE

Older buildings in New York slated for demolition would be subject to a 30-day landmarks-preservation review under a proposed bill that critics say would grind development across the city to a halt.

The bill, which will be introduced in the City Council on behalf of Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, would target buildings more than 50 years old.

But in a city where so many buildings were built decades ago, the legislation would include up to 80 percent of the city's structures, and more than 90 percent of the buildings in Manhattan alone, according to a report.

Democrat Brewer's proposal has angered powerful developers, construction unions and affordable-housing advocates, according to Crain's New York Business.

"Generally, replacement buildings are an improvement," Richard Anderson, president of the New York Building Congress, told Crain's.

"But if an existing structure should be considered a landmark, we have a process for that. To put everything under a blanket review — I don't see

the basis to do that."

Brewer's bill was prompted by the scheduled demolition of the iconic Rizzoli bookstore, which is housed in a 109-year-old building on West 57th Street. The bookstore lost a bid for landmark preservation protection, but Brewer said the process showcased the need for reform.

"We must avoid more Rizzoli-like ambushes on our history," Brewer said. "Without a lively streetscape and diversity within our commercial districts, we will lose what makes Manhattan Manhattan."

Brewer said she might be flexible on the language and target older buildings than the current plan would.

But even extending the threshold age to 80 years would still let the law cover more than half of the city's buildings.

And the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission doesn't have the staff to enforce the bill, a commission spokeswoman said.

There are more than 31,000 landmark properties in New York City, most of which are located in 109 historic districts and 20 historic district extensions in all five boroughs.

leonard.greene@nypost.com