

# Town & Village

Stuyvesant Town, Peter Cooper Village, Waterside, Gramercy Park, Union Square, East Midtown Plaza and Kips Bay

69TH YEAR, No. 29

Thursday, August 3, 2017

\$1.00

## Council committees support East Midtown Rezoning plan

By Sabina Mollot

On Thursday, Council Member Dan Garodnick and a few other elected officials celebrated another step in bringing East Midtown rezoning closer to reality. Earlier in the day, a revised plan for rezoning, a project that's been in the works since the Bloomberg administration, was approved by the Council's Zoning & Franchises Sub-Committee. Later, the Land Use Committee would also give the plan its blessing as would the mayor. The full Council

is expected to vote on the plan in August.

Takeaways of the plan include mandating that any developer looking to take advantage of building bigger and higher than what is currently allowed have 75 feet of building frontage. Any building that has more than 30,000 square feet must have open space accessible to the public, also known as POPS (privately owns public spaces). Additionally, before a building can even be occupied, the

Continued on Page 13



Photo by Sabina Mollot

Council Member Dan Garodnick discusses how current zoning regulations have stunted commercial growth in East Midtown. (Pictured) Assembly Member Dan Quart, Garodnick, Council Member David Greenfield, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen

## Council committees support East Midtown Rezoning plan

Continued from Page 1

developer will have to first make an assigned infrastructural transit improvement in the district.

The plan also calls for making it easier for landmarks to sell development or air rights. Normally, these rights would only be allowed to be transferred to nearby properties (a near impossibility in the densely packed East Midtown area). However, under the proposed zoning, they could go anywhere else in the district. Twenty percent of the sale price of the air rights or \$61.49 per square foot would go into a fund for public improvements in East Midtown. Projected revenue from the landmark fund over time is \$350 million.

The \$61.49 figure was lowered from a previous price of \$78 that the city had come up with after a study. After another study conducted by the project stakeholders, Garodnick said the latter amount seemed to make more sense.

"We think it will allow developers to proceed and

not deprive the public of what they are owed," he said.

Stakeholders in this process include local elected officials, the City Council, Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, the City Planning Commission and Community Boards 5 and 6.

As for the infrastructural improvements, they could include widening subway stairways and platforms and building new ground level entrances. Commuters won't have to wait until deals are made to start seeing improvements though, since the city has committed to funding \$50 million in seed money. The deals are expected to generate half a billion dollars in upgrades for local subway stations.

Once the changes go into effect, Garodnick said he expected to see 16 new buildings over the next 20 years in the area, where, he also noted, there have only been five new buildings constructed since 2000.

The rezoning also envisions 43rd Street between

Third and Lexington Avenues as a "shared street" with public space that would include tables and chairs. This is in addition to a public plaza

**'It really is important to maintain our global competitiveness... and keep our skyline fresh.'**

Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen

on the west side of Grand Central station that's already been planned as part of the Vanderbilt Avenue Rezoning.

Excluded from the plan will be three blocks along Third Avenue, due to concerns that have been raised from Turtle Bay residents. The Greater East Midtown area has 78 blocks running from 39th Street to 57th Street and between Fifth and Madison Avenues on the west side to east of Third Avenue on the

east side, with one additional and a few omitted blocks.

At the steps of City Hall, Garodnick, Brewer and Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen insisted the plan was needed to spur development in a district with badly outdated zoning regulations, while also pointing out the suffering of the city's straphangers.

City Council Member David Greenfield, who chairs the Council's Land Use Committee, made reference to the "summer of hell" for subway riders. Recent well-publicized adventures underground include major delays and a couple of derailed trains.

Garodnick also argued that today's commercial renters are "looking for new layouts and amenities that are getting harder to find in the district" where the average building age is 75. "Our city can't succeed unless East Midtown succeeds," he added.

Glen agreed, saying despite ongoing skepticism, the changes are needed to keep the area and the city competitive.

"It really is important to maintain our global competitiveness... and keep our skyline fresh," she said.

Not surprisingly, responses to the latest round of proposals have been mixed.

John Banks, president of the Real Estate Board of New York, blasted it as a "step backwards" in the process.

"The agreement between the mayor's office and the City Council's Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises regarding the Greater East Midtown Rezoning proposal is a step backwards in the ongoing effort to ensure Midtown Manhattan's position as a premier global office district," Banks said.

"The rezoning of Greater East Midtown has been premised on the strategy that new commercial development should help pay for much needed public improvements. Today's agreement is a missed opportunity to ensure more, rather than less, commercial development. As a result, it is less likely that the public improvements that are needed

in Greater East Midtown will be achieved."

The New York Building Congress, however, cheered the plan, saying it "will pave the way for a new generation of signature office towers" while at the same time investing in nearby transit and public spaces.

Community Board 5, one of the aforementioned stakeholders, warily praised the plan, noting its focus on public spaces.

"While the city's priorities for the rezoning of East Midtown were never ones with which we fully agreed, we applaud and deeply appreciate the efforts of our Council Member, Dan Garodnick, and Borough President Gale Brewer to make it a better plan," said Vicki Barbero, chair of Community Board 5. "They successfully fought for more public space and for a more attractive and pedestrian-friendly environment for the tens of thousands of workers who will spend their days around and within these new towers."