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City Council Approves Far Rockaway Rezoning Plan

The City Council's vote will usher in nearly $300 million in state and federal investment as well as the rezoning of about 23 blocks in Downtown Far Rockaway.

The rezoning plan will help foster new affordable housing as well as new public plazas in Downtown Far Rockaway, Queens.

BY JOHN JORDAN

NEW YORK CITY—The de Blasio administration secured its second major neighborhood rezoning plan on Thursday as the New York City Council approved the redevelopment plan for Downtown Far Rockaway in Queens.

The City Council's vote will usher in nearly $300 million in state and federal investment as well as the rezoning of about 23 blocks in Downtown Far Rockaway. The redevelopment plan is expected to fuel a

net increase of more than 3,100 new housing units, nearly 165,000 square feet of retail space and about 81,000 square feet of community facility space.

Last month, the City Council put its stamp of approval on the **East Midtown rezoning plan** that could spark as much as 6.5 million square feet of development in an around Grand Central Station in the next 20 years.

A total of $288 million in investment is targeted for Downtown Far Rockaway, including $126 million in funding commitments from the City of New York. The plan's approval marks the first rezoning of the area since 1961 and the plan and new investment are expected to fuel the development of new commercial space and affordable housing, as well as small business support, open space, new connectivity to transit, improved infrastructure, and new community facilities for the area.

"Today, we begin the journey of building on the progress we have made over the past four years, by infusing hundreds of millions of dollars into infrastructure, quality jobs, parks, streetscape, transit improvements, and both community facility and open space," says Council Member Donovan Richards, whose district includes Far Rockaway. "These investments will ensure that Far Rockaway benefits from the amenities that so many other communities in our city enjoy."

"The de Blasio Administration is investing big in Downtown Far Rockaway," adds New York City Economic Development Corp. president and CEO James Patchett. "After hearing the community's vision for their neighborhood, city agencies and local elected officials came together to deliver a transformative plan that's going to drive economic opportunity, create affordable housing, unlock open space, improve infrastructure, and make Downtown Far Rockaway a better place to live."

Some of the highlights of the plan include: the construction of a new park on the site of a vacant, city-owned lot and a new Queens Public Library branch at the corner of Mott and Central avenues, the upgrade of sewer infrastructure, expanded sidewalks, and new public plazas in Downtown Far Rockaway. The plan also requires 100% of new housing built on public land to be affordable and the set aside of new units that could be created on the Urban Renewal Area for extremely low and very low income households.

Marisa Lago, chair of the City Planning Commission, says the initiative will bring much-needed affordable housing, economic development and city resources to Downtown Far Rockaway that has suffered from disinvestment for many, many years. "While the fortunes of this community have gone up and down over the decades, I'm confident that with the City Council's approval, Downtown Far Rockaway will once again be on the rise," she says.

"Working across agencies, in lockstep with the community, we've created a blueprint for the future of Downtown Far Rockaway as a dynamic hub for the region, with strategies to develop and safeguard affordable housing, protect tenants, improve infrastructure, and grow the local economy," says Housing Preservation and Development commissioner Maria Torres-Springer.

Other benefits include the investment of $10 million for upgrades to existing schools' playgrounds, libraries, auditoriums, and science labs, and securing a portion of the Urban Renewal Area for the School Construction Authority to provide a new school if needed. In addition, the plan calls for launching a ferry service shuttle from Downtown Far Rockaway to the current New York City ferry landing at Beach 108th Street and free legal services for Rockaway residents facing unlawful evictions and tenant harassment.

The plan also got a ringing endorsement from the New York Building Congress. "The successful rezoning of Far Rockaway is a big win for the local community, which will benefit from hundreds of millions of

dollars in public and private sector investments in infrastructure, new public spaces and housing for all income levels. Thanks to the vision and leadership of Mayor Bill de Blasio and City Council Member Donovan Richards, Far Rockaway will serve as a model for urban renewal and job creation throughout the five boroughs," says Carlo A. Scissura, president and CEO of the New York Building Congress.

The plan involved input from the community as well as from the New York City Economic Development Corporation; Department of Housing Preservation and Development; Department of Transportation; Department of Small Business Services; Department of City Planning; Department of Parks and Recreation; Department of Cultural Affairs and Department of Environmental Protection.

The City Council's action was the final necessary vote of the city's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure process.