



Old Astoria Neighborhood Association (OANA)  
www.OANA-NY.org

**OANA minutes  
February 8, 2016**

The February meeting commenced with Richard Khuzami addressing a few items of interest, ones of which was showing progress of the OANA website (still under construction & funded by Aki and Brett from Aki Development), including pictures, news, history of the neighborhood, etc, wanting to including forums and interaction for people to get involved. The history will include both general and specific landmarks.

The special guest of the meeting was council member Costa Constantinides, who brought us up to speed with the updates or improvements happening in Astoria. He addressed the issue that was happening at the Astoria pool diving complex, where it was discovered that the sewage from the bathrooms and pool complex was going into the river. This is something that has to get fixed as soon as possible, building a new sewage line all the way towards 19<sup>th</sup> street sewer lines. So far, the council member says that he is talking with the parks department on how they will be dealing with this project. Joe Vaccaro suggested an eco-friendly sewage tank that would be a viable solution to this and would not cost as much as building a new sewage line, to which Costa said that he'd look into this. Because of this, he pointed out that we have a lot of infrastructure that is very old and have to make a reinvestment. He is proposing a 15 million dollars or more capital projects for Astoria Park.

Secondly, he spoke about doubling the 750 thousand dollars in the budget for erosion control at Astoria park, stating that some of the pathways were in bad shape. Next, he spoke about the wading pool next to Charybdis Playground, which was not really used often. Costa informed that he has been speaking to the parks department and community board about separating the wading pool out of the pool complex and converting it into a brand new spray shower for the kids at Charybdis playground. The cost of the spray shower along with the renovation that would happen on the playground is about 4 million dollars. Richard asked if that included the comfort station, to which Costa answered that this was not part of this estimate, which would be an additional of 1.3 million dollars. The bathroom and the locker rooms in the pool area would be 2.5 million dollars. Next, Costa talked about plans in converting the center of Astoria Park track into a soccer field, a 100x50 sized regulation-sized field in the middle of the running track. This would provide a safe, active area for the kids and adults to play. Lastly, because of cost estimates that greatly exceed available funds, phase one of the Performance Space can only



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be partially completed. He would like to raise funds to complete both phase one and two of the conversion of the Diving Pool to a performance venue.

It was also announced out that an anonymous private donor donated money to renovate all 14 tennis courts in Astoria Park. Costa pointed out that because this was a private donation to the city parks foundation, this would be processed quicker, meaning the renovation should take about a year or so to complete, encouraging such donations to other individuals or agencies so that things could be completed at a more reasonable pace. Someone questioned whether or not people would be able to run around the track at the park or do workouts, to which Costa said yes, this will still allow for them to do so and will be subjected to the design of the community. Another person asked if the field would be fenced in, to which he replied that this is possible but that other parks don't have a fence and it works out fine.

Costa added on that he funded in this year's budget for a full time maintenance worker for Astoria Park, starting March 1<sup>st</sup> through June 30<sup>th</sup>, in which the city budget goes through June 30<sup>th</sup>. This will keep up with the overflowed trashcan, keeping the park clean, etc. Additional funds are still needed for more maintenance workers for the park upkeep. Richard Khuzami pointed out that two things that were suggested was not to have the interior of the running track specifically a soccer field, instead just a sports field to incorporate multiple sports; Costa did say that it was possible to have both but that once the funding's were in place that they can look at it. The other thing Richard said was that some people wanted the permitting process to allow for soccer events/tournaments, but the main concern would be regarding the mess that would most likely occur after the games. As long as someone is accountable for the cleanup process, there should be no other issue in having such events.

Moving on, Costa spoke about the mayor's proposal for the Brooklyn-Queens connector streetcars, which would connect the waterfront in Astoria all the way to Redhook. Several questions are still surrounding this as it is still a relatively new proposition. He also briefly mentioned the ferry that is set for 2017, and lastly that he is doing a participatory budgeting starting March 28<sup>th</sup> through April 3<sup>rd</sup>. There will a number of location in which you can vote. The ballot will be announced in two week. They include a number of parks related issues, and issues relating to schools in this area; this will all be finalized by the end of February. Last year's participatory budgeting included the dog run which was one of the big winners, tech upgrades at several schools, I.S.126 turning its parking lot into a playground. Some propositions this year



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include removing a lane on Hoyt Avenue, making 20<sup>th</sup> Ave less wide so that it's not as easy to drag race down this street, this will also make it easier for the kids to cross the street on 20<sup>th</sup> avenue, among several other things. Someone questioned that this will create more parking issues but Costa replied that people had to find their own parking as long as it didn't create any safety violations. With this, Costa concluded his presentation before heading out. Richard made a brief statement about wanting to reserve the .NYC url for the OANA if 25 people sign a sheet, which people did.

The second and final guest for the night was Garrison Buxton from the Welling Court Mural Project; most of these murals can be seen throughout the neighborhood. Garrison stated that these projects began in 2009/2010, and has grown tremendously throughout the years. If anyone is interested in having murals done on their property, they have various artists that range in specialty and experience. They have created several positive works through the power of art throughout the area and would like to become more engaged with entities within the community, such as schools, workshop involving kids, citywide intuitive groups that do work with youth, etc. He showed some of the art/murals that had been created in the past within the community, along with some of the more known artists. Every year, there is a block party debuting some of the art on Welling Court, this year it will be held on Saturday June 11<sup>th</sup>; including music, food, etc. Diane questioned how is it that the same wall in a certain area was changed or painted over old work, in which Garrison responded that it is understood that the art can change as quickly as a day and that is part of the job. Someone else questioned what was the procedure in getting a work done by them, Garrison answering that all you need is permission from the property owner and have them sign some papers. Another person asked what was their selection process and what do they provide in terms of an organization. Garrison responded that they have had some money donated, but most goes towards supplies such as paint, which has been one of the challenges. The basic guidelines include nothing offense, racist, etc; as space comes onboard, they would put artist onto that spot, the artists all ranging from local to international. An additional question was asked regarding whether or not the property owner can request a particular type of art, like a baseball theme or flowers. Garrison answered that the artists typically do their own free styles; any form of requested type of art would require a much higher priced custom-made order. They normally give the artist creative control because not all of them do everything— some do color abstract or have their



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own preference. Garrison also provided his contact number for any further questions or information, (917) 602-2153.

Richard concluded the meeting by showing a surveillance video of an incident that occurred a few weeks ago regarding Tex Cruikshank's wife, who was walking their dog when a car nearly ran them over and fleeing the scene. Luckily no one was hurt, but the suspect has yet to be identified. The OANA sent a letter to D.O.T commissioner in Queens regarding this incident, urging it to place a stop sign on both the east bound and west bound corners of Astoria park south and 14<sup>th</sup> street, where automobiles have a tendency to speed. This also enforces the importance in having video cameras on properties, for security measures and to determine liability. Video cameras can bring to light incidents and issues that normally might only be addressed if injury or death occurred.