



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

Meeting
May 7th, 2019

Ravenswood Rezoning meeting

Richard welcomed everyone for attending this special meeting. He allowed everyone to introduced themselves. The food and space were provided by Renaissance Event hall.

Richard introduced John Young and Alexis Wheeler who would be discussing the Northwest Ravenswood Mixed-use Coordination strategy.

The mixed-use strategy is being implemented to create areas where both people work and live. The geographic region is between Long Island City and Astoria proper. The eastern portion is the home of the Ravenswood NYCHA Campus .

This area has not been rezoned since 1961. Most is currently zoned residential low density, (R5), This is non-compliant with the existing uses.

The actual uses in this area are industrial lots at 45%, residential at 25%, and public facilities 15%. Unfortunately commercial use is only 2%..

Industrial and Manufacturing:

Most facilities utilize fewer than 5000 square feet (25%), 5K-10K sf amounts at 17%, while 10k-15k sf totals 9%, 15-20k sf at 2% and 16% have a usage of 20K sf or greater.

The top 5 sectors of jobs in this zone are as follows: A total of 1982 jobs in construction (38%), 520 administrative support positions (10%), 346 information technology positions (7%) 345 other services positions (7%) and 91 wholesale trade jobs (2%).

These commercial spaces could be developed for creative technical uses. Also Development of mixed use commercial space with residential housing is possible in the zone. Since 2008, 7 such developments have been established in the area.

The median household income of residents is 28370 (31% AMI)

Resiliency Affected Area



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The zone is located in a floodplain. There will be a need to be watchful in this current condition. Developing flood resistant construction to protect these sites from flooding is vital to the growth and success of this area. Possible solutions are:

1. A wet floor plan allows the water to enter the building but the occupied space is elevated. Usually parking would occupy the ground floor.
2. In contrast, the dry floor plan would not allow any water into the building.

Both plans provide a solution to the problem of flooding. The wet floor plan would allow water to be redirected through the building so that it may be directed through the building and out through the water stream. Residences would be located on upper levels and the risk of water damage would be greatly decreased. Under the dry floor plan, there would be reinforcements that would ensure that there would be no water damage to enter the residences and water would be deflected around the building. The external and internal access into the buildings are contingent on the plan selected.

The goals of the rezoning project are to create opportunities for mixed use development on large sites. Additionally, support for retrofits of the industrial buildings are required job supportive use. This will allow for new mixes in income from residential opportunities. This should include support toward affordable housing developments for very low-income households. “Fresh” zoning incentives should bring green fresh produce grocery stores into the neighborhood providing variety for the residents.

Mr. Young summarized the strategy of the mixed used zoning plan. There could be space for contractors, offices as well as film and health issue productions. We must be mindful, if we increase the zoning, the new policy would be subject to Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) meaning 20-30% residential square footage would be permanent affordable.

Richard opened the floor to questions from those in attendance.

Alex inquired, “How does this zoning reflect what they wanted done?”



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Mr. Young stated that if anyone wants to give their feedback on the plans, they could forward this info to city planning. OANA could act as a conduit.

George Rivera inquired, “What is the timeframe that it will take place?”

Mr. Young stated while they are not sponsoring a rezoning, typically, plans take two years to become implemented on average from the initial discussion to rezone. The process usually begins 18 months to two years after discussions have occurred.

City Planning is currently trying to take the pulse of the neighborhood to see what uses would be appropriate, and they would utilize these when deciding whether to approve any upcoming zoning changes.

Richard inquired, “Where can pressure be applied to have a total area rezoning done?”

Mr. Young stated it doesn’t start with the agency. There are overall limits on resources allotted for rezoning. This would have to be addressed through the City Council and Mayor’s Office.

Diane Kantzoglou inquired, “What are current limitations on zoning?”

John stated they have some areas that are within an industrial business zones (IBZ) that are limited to manufacturing uses. Direct market pressures would apply elsewhere. Tech and other business can be located in industrial business zones (IBZ).

Kevin Hernandez asked what existing businesses could do as of right if they had expansion needs.

Mr. Young stated that they are currently limited to the R5 category that currently exists. They would need to request a zoning change in order to become compliant as manufacturing or commercial.

George Rivera stated that the streets are narrow, this becomes a challenge for loading docks and deliveries. He inquired, “How can this rezoning benefit the current businesses?”

Alexis Wheeler from city planning stated would have to take into account street width and streetscapes to make decisions as to what type of structures would be appropriate.

George Rivera inquired, “What would Cornell Tech look for in a possible new rezoning?”

Jane Swanson stated that at Cornell Tech they have had over 50 successful startups. What their students are looking for is mixed use incorporating both residential and commercial/light manufacturing within the same development where they can live nearby and not have to commute. They are looking



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for inexpensive space. (So far Cornell Tech has had 650 students, but looks forward to a significant expansion of the student body in the coming years)

Joe Vacaro inquired, “What tax incentives would you get for mixed use residential and office space? Will these properties qualify for both?”

Alexis stated they cannot answer that right now but will look into attaining the information.

John Young stated as planning occurs with higher density, parks, schools, and other areas need to be considered with this planning.

Alexis Wheeler stated they are trying to formulate a robust plan to address infrastructure challenges.

John stated another role of city planning is to plan for infrastructure improvements such as schools, utilities, sewage, sanitation, etc. New permits would have to be approved by the appropriate agencies such as the DEP and the School Construction Authority.

Richard inquired, “Are there any thoughts to incentivize developers to create green energy efficient construction?” Also, perhaps internal on-site power generation and sewage systems?

John stated that he totally agrees. City Planning’s green zoning initiative should help developers create these needed sustainable structures, minimizing any negative impacts on the neighborhood.

Carol Williams inquired, “How high are these buildings going to be?”

John stated when looking at 35th Ave. the buildings would have a maximum of eight stories. They are using that as a guideline.

Richard inquired if anyone else had any questions for City Planning regarding the rezoning of Ravenswood.

Claudia Coger inquired, “From those of us in NYCHA Residences, we ask that the top priority should be the infrastructure development”

John Young stated that they agreed with her. Also the flood risk is so high. Zoning needs to be updated to reflect the flood risk. There should be appropriate zoning changes.

Richard Khuzami commented that this sustainability issue is another reason to have a complete neighborhood rezoning, instead of the current piece meal system.



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Richard thanked Theresa Lisson of the Renaissance Event Space for use of the space and the food that was so generously provided.

The Eastern Mediterranean Business and Cultural Alliance in Manhattan will be hosting its next meeting next Tuesday evening on Design and Construction, and all are invited to attend.

Also, the next OANA General Meeting would feature the NYC EDC and Hornblower on the NYC Ferry System. They would be discussing the extension of the Astoria ferry Line to the upper east side of Manhattan.

There was a flyer with issues that are being discussed in the State Senate with the housing laws that are expiring rent laws. They want to remove the ability for landlords to arbitrarily raise rents.

Richard recommends everyone to send comments on the new rent regulations being discussed in Albany. Also, any comments on City Planning presentation should be sent to OANA, who would forward them to City Planning.

Richard thanked everyone for coming and he hopes to see everyone at the next meeting.