

FEATURE

Review Process Begins in the Rockaways for De Blasio's 2nd Neighborhood Rezoning



Some wonder whether Far Rockaway's difficult commute will get harder if new residents pour in. The city says it is adding to the area's transit options.

BY ABIGAIL SAVITCH-LEW

On January 30, the City Planning Commission (CPC) certified the de Blasio administration's rezoning application for downtown Far Rockaway. The city also quietly released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), a document describing the potential impacts of the proposal on a variety of categories, from business displacement to day care use.

Over the next seven months, the proposal will go through the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP, see page 2) with the City Council casting the ultimate vote. The rezoning recommendations are part of a larger plan for the neighborhood crafted by the Economic Development Corporation in response to recommendations from local Councilmember Donovan Richards and a team of neighborhood

organizations and that harnesses \$91 million in city revitalization investments.

The rezoning would increase allowable residential and commercial density in the area, with buildings as high as 15 stories at the center (see map on page 3) and shorter buildings in most of the area. The proposal would also create a special district to ensure the creation of new open spaces and active ground floor uses, and to adjust parking requirements.

Levels and depths of affordable housing are yet unknown, though based on market conditions, the city predicts that roughly half the housing would be rent-restricted. The rezoning would ensure all future housing development is subject to the city's mandatory inclusionary housing policy, which requires that 20 to 30 percent of units are rent-restricted. The city has

also proposed redeveloping two publicly owned sites with 100 percent rent restricted housing.

In addition, the city intends to create an Urban Renewal Area (URA), using negotiations or eminent domain to acquire and redevelop a large underutilized shopping center, a few adjacent storefronts and five adjacent residences.

At a September hearing, residents showed unanimous support for commercial revitalization, but some voiced objections to the more than 3,000 units of housing that the project could bring. There were calls for jobs for locals and investments in amenities and infrastructure. Stakeholders disagree about the affordability levels for the proposed housing, and some have voiced worries about gentrification and the use of eminent domain.

Asked by planning commissioners about the neighborhood's commuting challenges, City Planning's Brendan Pillar justified adding residential density to the area, noting that the MTA is considering ways to improve transit access, that EDC's is adding a new Rockaway ferry line, and that the rezoning area is outside of the 500-year flood zone.

The city does not expect the proposal will lead to significant displacement. According to the DEIS, Far Rockaway has a weak market, and a rezoning will first lead to the creation of a substantial amount of affordable housing.

The DEIS does note, however, that the rezoning could lead to a deficit of 11 acres of open space, stresses on traffic and transit, and shortage of 181 childcare seats. The city says it will try to address those problems, but might not succeed.

"Today was an important step, but now it is time to roll up our sleeves and look at how we can make this the most inclusive plan possible by including improvements for transportation, a reasonable amount of density, adequate parking, appropriately affordable units and additional school seats," Richards said via e-mail. **R**

Rezoning Under Review

The de Blasio administration is proposing to rezone several New York City neighborhoods, and is considering requests by local stakeholders to rezone several more. The map at right shows where these discussions have concluded or are taking place. With the exception of East New York, whose rezoning passed in April 2016, and Flushing—where the city has withdrawn its proposed rezoning—the rest are at various stages of consideration.

LEGEND

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| 1. JEROME AVENUE | 7. FLUSHING |
| 2. SOUTHERN BOULEVARD | 8. FAR ROCKAWAY |
| 3. INWOOD | 9. EAST NEW YORK |
| 4. EAST HARLEM | 10. BUSHWICK |
| 5. CHINATOWN | 11. GOWANUS |
| 6. LONG ISLAND CITY | 12. BAY STREET |



What is ULURP?

THE CITY DECIDES WHETHER TO DO A REZONING THROUGH ITS UNIFORM LAND-USE REVIEW PROCEDURE OR ULURP

1 BEFORE THE ULURP PROCESS BEGINS, the administration must launch a separate process of environmental review. Once the Environmental Assessment Statement is complete and, if warranted, a draft Environmental Impact Statement is prepared, ULURP can begin.

2 THE LOCAL COMMUNITY BOARD considers the plan first. It holds a public hearing and has 60 days to vote on the idea. The vote is only advisory.

3 THE BOROUGH PRESIDENT then has 30 days to render a recommendation—which, again, is only advisory.

4 NEXT, THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION—where most members are appointed by the mayor—takes up the plan. It has 30 days to vote on it. Even if the CPC votes no, the plan can still go to the Council under some circumstances.

5 THE CITY COUNCIL ACTS NEXT. First the Zoning Subcommittee, then the Land Use Committee and finally the full Council votes on the proposal. The Council can pass, reject or modify the plan. By custom, the member in whose district the proposal falls usually has decisive sway. The Council has 50 days to act.

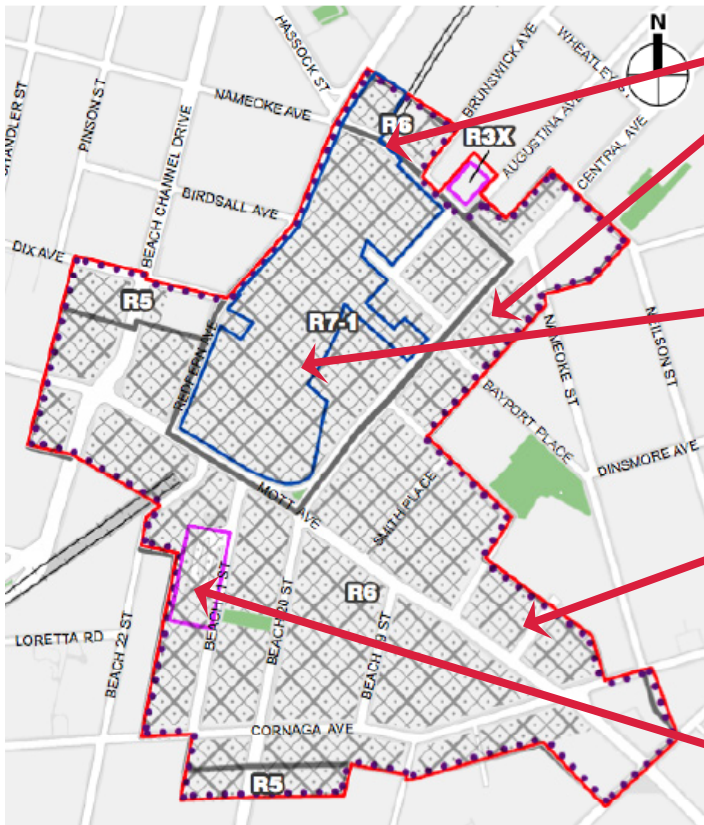
6 IF THE COUNCIL MODIFIES THE PROPOSAL, it goes back to the Planning Commission for 15

days to review and vote again—unless so much changes that ULURP has to start over.

7 NOW IT'S THE MAYOR'S TURN. He can accept or veto the Council's zoning decision. He has only five days to make the call.

8 IF THE MAYOR VETOES the Council's decision, the Council can override that veto with a two-thirds vote. It has 10 days to try.

What Does the City Want to Change in Your Neighborhood?



Currently, only manufacturing and automotive businesses are allowed here. New zoning would permit residential construction.

Currently a shopping mall and adjacent homes and storefronts; city hopes to designate an Urban Renewal Area and redevelop. New zoning would allow buildings of roughly 12-15 stories.

Current zoning allows buildings of about 3-4 stories. New zoning would allow roughly 6-9 story buildings in most of rezoning, with commercial overlays on major corridors.

Public land that the city proposes developing with 100 percent affordable housing.

REZONING AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mayor de Blasio is proposing neighborhood-wide rezonings as part of his plan to build or preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing in 10 years. He believes that by rezoning to permit more construction, the city will be able to grow without putting excess pressure on rents. He's imposed a new rule, called mandatory inclusionary housing, that requires builders in rezoned areas to create affordable housing when they create larger buildings. His Department of Housing Preservation and Development also pays developers to develop housing, some of it for very low-income households and some for middle-class families. Some critics believe that the affordable housing is too expensive and that the rezonings are likely to fuel gentrification and displacement.

[MORE AT ZONEIN.ORG](http://zonein.org)

WHAT IS ZONING? Zoning is a set of laws that govern how large buildings can be, how they are built and what they are used for. A rezoning changes those laws for a particular area to permit larger buildings, or to require that any new buildings be smaller than currently allowed, or to change the type of buildings permitted on

each parcel. Some rezonings do a combination of these. All rezonings primarily impact new buildings: The changes don't mean existing buildings have to be torn down by law, although building owners can decide to demolish and build something new.

TAKE ACTION CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

KEY CONTACTS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
<http://www.nycedc.com/project/downtown-far-rockaway>
 farrockaway@edc.nyc /212-312-3896

CITY COUNCILMEMBER DONOVAN RICHARDS
 drichards@council.nyc.gov
 District Office: 718-471-7014
 Legislative Office: 212-788-7216

QUEENS COMMUNITY BOARD 14
 cbrock14@nyc.rr.com
 718-471-7300

UPCOMING EVENTS

CB 14 LAND USE COMMITTEE DISCUSSION
 Monday March 6, 7 p.m.

LIKELY DATE FOR CB14 REZONING HEARING
 Wednesday March 29, 7 pm

Both events are at Bayswater Jewish Center,
 2355 Healy Avenue

IMPORTANT RESOURCES

See maps and read plans and other official documents related to the proposed rezoning and redevelopment plan at:
citylimits.org/rockdocs

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

We want to hear from you about your plans for, comments on or questions about the future of your neighborhood.

VISIT our website to comment on stories and get more info: zonein.org
 CALL us toll-free at 844-ZONE-NYC to leave a voice comment
 EMAIL us at zone@citylimits.org with criticisms, comments, story ideas or questions
 MAIL us at City Limits, 394 Broadway, 5th floor, New York, NY 10013 and tell us what's on your mind.

Neighborhood View: Farms for Far Rockaway

RESIDENT SAYS PLANNERS SHOULDN'T NEGLECT FOOD JUSTICE WHEN THINKING ABOUT HOW TO REDEVELOP THE NEIGHBORHOOD.



The redevelopment of Far Rockaway could establish ways for residents to grow their own food and create other opportunities to improve access to nutritious food. Or it could worsen existing food-access issues.

BY ALLISON F. JEFFREY

Pause for a moment and consider, “What is the most sacred thing to mankind after breathing?” It’s food (and water of course)! We must eat and drink in order to live. Now consider a people forced to consume unhealthy and dangerous foods. How might this impact their daily lives? How might his impact their education, finances, housing, access to health, access to resources? How might this impact their culture, how they treat each other, how they see themselves, and how they learn? Can this be considered trauma? After all, poverty is a form of trauma.

These questions can and must be applied to the more than 120,000 American citizens residing in the neighborhood known as Far Rockaway. Far Rock, as it’s affectionately called, is isolated from the rest of the five boroughs. Despite being surrounded on most of its sides by water, Far Rockaway is a notorious food desert.

According to the USDA, food deserts “are defined as parts of the country vapid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas. This is largely due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and healthy food providers.” According to RockawayRising.org, Far Rockaway, despite its beautiful beaches, “is a neighborhood which has the second highest density of public housing of all five boroughs.”

With 43 percent of its population living at or below the poverty line, Far Rockaway’s food desert is worsened by the copious fast food restaurants, particularly in the Downtown Far Rockaway area. Within a 10-block radius of the Mott Avenue and Beach 20th/Central Avenue intersection there’s a McDonald’s, three Popeyes, a Checkers, three Dunkin Donuts, multiple Crown Fried Chicken establishments, multiple corner bodegas, Chinese restaurants and pizzerias. This food desert is wors-

ened by substandard grocery stores and supermarkets in the neighborhood. The results are clear: Obesity and high-blood pressure are far higher in Far Rock than the rest of the borough and the rate of death from heart disease is 78 percent higher in the Rockaways than it is in Queens County overall.

How can we eliminate this food desert? We can start by empowering the residents with access to resources such as free, publicly owned land where they can grow their own food—food without pesticides and hormones, that’s not downtrodden and depressing in appearance, that’s organic. A community farm is needed in the Downtown Far Rockaway area since it is located more than 30 blocks from the closest community farm at Beach 41st Street.

The publicly owned land at the corner of Augustina Avenue and Nameoke Street is the best solution to this serious food epidemic. The land is currently owned by the Sanitation Department and has been unused for more than a decade. This land can easily be transferred to the Department of Parks and Recreation for maintenance, and access given to the residents of the area for farming, composting, or food co-op development. Instead, the city plans to sell the land for cheap to real estate investors that probably do not live in the area.

As the city moves toward rezoning Far Rockaway, there are many questions to be answered. One of the key ones is, if not through a community farm, how do you planners and elected officials propose to healthily feed approximately 52,000 impoverished Far Rockaway residents, given the poor health statistics and food desert? Other questions include:

How many acres of green space will the proposed rezoning set aside to address food and health needs?

Compared with concerns like housing, parking, recreation and libraries, what level of priority do you place on addressing the Far Rockaway food desert?

Given the environmental damage from Hurricane Sandy, what precautions will you take to reduce the impact this development/revitalization will have on the ecosystem? **R**

Do you think Far Rockaway is a food desert?
If so, how do you think it should be addressed?
Tell us at zone@citylimits.org.

Excited? Worried?
How do you feel about the
proposed rezoning of Far
Rockaway?

Tell us Today
zone@citylimits.org
844-ZONE-NYC