

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

August 28, 2019 / Calendar No. 17

N 190496 BDQ

IN THE MATTER OF an application submitted by the Department of Small Business Services on behalf of the Downtown Flushing Business Improvement District pursuant to Section 25-405(a) of Chapter 4 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, as amended, concerning amending of the Downtown Flushing Business Improvement District.

On May 30, 2019, on behalf of the Downtown Flushing Business Improvement District (BID) Steering Committee, the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) submitted an amended district plan for the Downtown Flushing BID, Borough of Queens, Community District 7.

BACKGROUND

SBS, on behalf of the BID, intends to expand the existing district in an Amended District Plan. The existing BID, known as the Downtown Flushing Transit Hub BID, was established in September 2003 (N 030498 BDQ) by property owners, businesses, residents and community stakeholders to create an organization serving all constituents in the district by offering services to business owners, including sanitation, holiday lighting and marketing. The activities of the BID are governed by a Board of Directors composed of property owners, businesses, residents, elected officials, and community stakeholders.

The proposal for a BID expansion in Downtown Flushing is the result of a 5-year process among the Steering Committee, the local community, the Flushing District Management Association (DMA), and the local council member. The services to be provided shall include street maintenance in the growing areas of the downtown (such as sweeping sidewalks and graffiti

removal), marketing, beautification services (such as landscaping and seasonal installations), traffic management to improve pedestrian experience and traffic congestion, administration and advocacy, as well as additional as-needed services. The DMA will provide most services during the first contract year of the BID.

The BID application was led by the Steering Committee, which contacted property owners, local businesses, and residents through approximately 5,000 bilingual information cards and flyers, a video, and an exhibit at the Flushing Library. The survey ballot for the BID expansion was mailed in June of 2016 and more than half of the commercial properties in number and assessed value showed support for the BID expansion. There was little documented opposition

The area served by the BID is generally bordered by Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Citi Field Stadium and the Flushing River. The BID is serviced by the MTA 7 train line, which runs from Main Street in Flushing to 34th Street and Hudson Yards on the west side of Manhattan. The Long Island Railroad Port Washington Line has a station on Main Street.

Since the BID was established in 2003, the neighborhood has grown dramatically and Downtown Flushing has expanded to adjacent corridors that have become part of the area's commercial core. This growth has resulted in concerns from local business owners and the community, including automobile and pedestrian traffic, cleanliness and security. Consequently, there is a greater need for services that aim to improve the overall experience in Downtown Flushing, as well as the quality of life for businesses, residents, and visitors.

The BID currently includes properties located primarily along Main Street, but the Amended District Plan would increase its service area by including properties along Main Street between Northern Boulevard and Franklin Avenue, and from College Point Boulevard to the west to Union Street to the east. The area surrounding Main Street and Roosevelt Avenue is a major transportation and retail hub in Northern Queens.

Today, Downtown Flushing serves as a vibrant commercial neighborhood for a rapidly growing Asian community, serving the commercial and retail needs of many diverse communities of Northern Queens. It continues to be a substantial transportation hub for the region and is home to many small businesses, chain stores, hotels, and department stores. It also has cultural institutions such as houses of worship and a regional branch of the Queens Borough Public Library. The area contains a number of office buildings with local and regional businesses, as well as numerous restaurants. The expanded BID would contain over 2,000 businesses, an increase of approximately 900 businesses from the current BID boundary. These businesses include restaurants, food courts, supermarkets, green grocers, clothiers, jewelers, pharmacies, salons, and a variety of convenience and specialty stores. The BID serves a predominantly low- to moderate- income population in central Flushing and Northern Queens. There are roughly 1,550 residential units in the BID expansion area and approximately 60 percent of the housing units in the local area are owner-occupied.

The budget for the current BID is \$380,000 and it has not increased since the BID was established in 2003. Since then, Downtown Flushing has grown significantly and the demand for services has increased. The expansion of the BID would allow for the expansion of services to new areas and augmentation of services in the existing area. The expansion would increase the budget by \$620,000, resulting in an increased first-year budget of \$1 million. The main source of financing for the BID is an assessment of the properties within the BID. Each individual assessment is calculated based on a formula applicable to the class of property defined in the Amended District Plan, summarized as follows:

- Class A – Commercial properties are assessed at a \$250 base fee, after which rates are calculated using both linear feet and assessed valuation.
- Class B – Residential properties are assessed at \$1.00 annually
- Class C – Not-for-profit and government properties are not assessed.
- Class D – Vacant properties, are assessed in the same manner as Class A properties.

The Amended District Plan proposes that, in the first year, 81 percent of the proposed BID's budget would be allocated to services such as supplemental sanitation (56.6%), pedestrian traffic management (17%), marketing (6%) and beautification (1.4%). The remaining 19 percent of the budget would be allocated for other administrative needs.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The district plan was reviewed pursuant to the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) and the SEQRA regulations set forth in Volume 6 of the New York State Code of Rules and Regulations, Section 617.00 et seq., and the New York City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Rules of Procedure of 1991 and Executive Order No. 91 of 1977. The designated CEQR number is 19SBS004Q. The lead agency is SBS.

After a study of the potential environmental impact of the proposed action, a Negative Declaration was issued on April 16, 2019.

WATERFRONT REVITALIZATION PROGRAM CONSISTENCY REVIEW

The original application (N 190496 BDQ) was reviewed by the Department of City Planning for consistency with the policies of the New York City Waterfront Revitalization Program (WRP), as amended, approved by the New York City Council on October 30, 2013 and by the New York State Department of State on February 3, 2016, pursuant to the New York State Waterfront Revitalization and Coastal Resources Act of 1981, (New York State Executive Law, Section 910 et seq.). The designated WRP number is 19-062. This action was determined to be consistent with the policies of the WRP.

PUBLIC REVIEW

On May 30, 2019, SBS submitted an amended district plan for the BID to the Department of

City Planning. The plan was then transmitted for review to the Office of the Mayor, Office of the Queens Borough President, City Council Speaker, Chair of the City Council Committee on Finance, City Council Member for Council District 20 and Queens Community Board 7.

Community Board Public Hearing

Queens Community Board 7 held a public hearing on June 17, 2019, and by a vote of 39 in favor, none opposed and two abstentions, adopted a resolution recommending approval of the proposed BID expansion.

City Planning Commission Public Hearing

On July 10, 2019 (Calendar No. 6), the Commission scheduled July 31, 2019 for a public hearing on the BID district plan. On July 31, 2019 (Calendar No. 32), the hearing was duly held.

There were three speakers in favor of the proposal and none in opposition. Those who testified included the Deputy Director for Neighborhood Development at SBS, Executive Director of the BID, and co-chair of the BID Steering Committee, who is also a property and business owner within the BID.

The SBS representative stated that the agency had provided technical support for the BID and noted that the expansion of the BID is integral to supporting businesses and community development, as well as to maintaining vibrant commercial corridors. He explained that, after extensive outreach, SBS determined that the documented support from relevant stakeholders was sufficient to advance the proposal.

The BID's Executive Director gave an explanation of how the current BID was organized and addressed the Steering Committee's efforts to gain the support of property owners within the boundaries of the BID's expansion. He discussed the details of the outreach efforts, which included several meetings with property and business owners, as well as a neighborhood needs survey.

The Chair of the BID Steering Committee noted that Downtown Flushing has seen substantial growth in the years since the establishment of the current BID, and that there is an increased need for comprehensive services within the expanded boundary. She highlighted that the community is working diligently to ensure that Downtown Flushing remains an economic hub and dining destination with diverse businesses. She also noted that supplemental sanitation, marketing and beautification projects will provide a greater quality of life in Downtown Flushing.

There were no other speakers and the hearing was closed.

CONSIDERATION

The Commission believes that the proposal to amend and expand the BID is appropriate.

The BID area is a unique Queens and New York City neighborhood with a cultural character that would benefit from additional economic development initiatives and supplemental maintenance services. According to the Amended BID Plan, the area contains over 2,000 businesses, including

new mixed-use buildings, businesses offices, and several government and not-for-profit facilities.

As Downtown Flushing has evolved, pedestrian activity and litter have increased. The BID will help address those changes by providing oversight and resources. There has also been increased vehicular traffic, causing congestion and parking issues. At some intersections, there are safety concerns due to conflicts between traffic and pedestrians. The Amended BID Plan can help the City monitor these issues by addressing traffic and pedestrian congestion with BID resources, proposing long-term solutions, and advocating for their implementation.

Once established, the expanded BID can also promote beautification, establish a better neighborhood brand, and advance a long-term plan for the area.

The Commission is concerned about the tight budget that is being proposed for the expanded BID. It hopes that in the future, SBS and other BID Board members will closely monitor the effectiveness of the BID in providing services. As Downtown Flushing continues to grow, the BID may need to consider both expanding its boundaries and increasing its services. If it is determined that the BID is struggling due to lack of funds, the Board may need to raise the assessment rate to ensure an effective operation.

The businesses in the expanded BID area provide important services that support the quality of life in Downtown Flushing, as well as in the entire Borough. The unique characters and vibrant commercial activity of the area enhance Queens and New York City not only as a place to live,

work and run a business, but also as a popular tourist destination. The expanded BID will be an advocate for Flushing, which may result in additional attention for this pedestrian-oriented, commercial shopping and service area.

The Commission has carefully reviewed the documents that the BID submitted regarding notification of stakeholders in the proposed BID expansion area as well as ballot results, and believes that these outreach efforts were satisfactory. The Commission believes that the BID made a reasonable outreach effort and contacted as many property owners, residents and businesses as reasonably possible.

BIDs are important to the City because they promote healthy economic development for the communities that they serve and help retain and attract businesses to the BID. The Amended District Plan for the BID will help manage this existing business area and provide guidance for growth in the future.

RESOLUTION

The Commission supports the Amended District Plan for the BID and has adopted the following resolution:

RESOLVED, that the City Planning Commission certifies its unqualified approval of the Amended District Plan for the BID.

The above resolution duly adopted by the City Planning Commission on August 28, 2019 (Calendar No. 17) is filed with the City Council and the City Clerk pursuant to Section 25-405 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York.

MARISA LAGO, *Chairman*

KENNETH J. KNUCKLES, *Esq.*, *Vice Chairman*

DAVID J. BURNEY, ALFRED C. CERULLO, III, JOSEPH DOUEK,

RICHARD W. EADDY, HOPE KNIGHT, ANNA HAYES LEVIN,

ORLANDO MARIN, RAJ RAMPERSHAD, *Commissioners*