

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ZONING AND FRANCHISES

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Wednesday, October 19, 2022

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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: HONORABLE KEVIN C. RILEY,  
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Vice President  
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Jay Martin  
Partner  
BedRock Real Estate Partners

Brian Collins  
Director of Development  
Silverstein Properties

Jameson Duvall  
Silverstein Properties

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Local 79

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Local 79

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Member  
Local 79

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Local 79

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Queens Economic Development Corporation

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Astoria Resident

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Public Policy Director  
Association for a Better New York

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Astoria Not For Sale

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Duluch Nayim  
Interpreter  
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Member  
New York District Council 9

Costas Diamantis  
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New York District Council 9

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Business Representative  
New York District Council 9, Local 20

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Astoria Resident

Onindita Sarker Onadi  
Astoria Membership Organizer  
CAA AV

Fierduce Begum  
Astoria Resident

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Former Council Member  
New York City Council, District 38

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Local 79

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Astoria Resident

Nazish Asa Tisha

Organizer

CAA AV

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Director of Government and External Relations

New York Building Congress

Marino Frost

Business Owner and

Resident

Astoria

Eric Benaim

Owner

Modern Spaces

Charles Yu

Senior Director of Business Assistance

Long Island City Partnership

Miles Grant

Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

Gyro Nuñez  
Member  
Woodside on the Move

John Bahia  
Community Affairs Associate  
Woodside on the Move and  
Member  
Queens Community Board 2

Niquia George  
Community Advocate  
Woodside

Fagr Abadaca  
Student  
Astoria Resident



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Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

Evie Hantzopoulos  
Astoria Resident

Zulecka Valencia  
Astoria Resident

Christian Marrow  
Astoria Resident

Ayeska Baez  
Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

Isadora Zanen  
Astoria Resident

Kadir Garrab  
Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

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Party for Socialism and Liberation

Farriah Akhtar  
Lead Organizer  
CAA AV

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Astoria Resident

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Old Astoria Neighborhood Association

Silas Levitt  
Housing Development Coordinator  
HANAC

Tony Barsamian  
Publisher  
Queens Gazette

Rebecca Bratsbees  
Professor  
CUNY School of Law and  
Astoria Resident

Roque Rodriguez  
Astoria Resident

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New York Housing Conference

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Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

Allayah Tahada  
Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

R. V. Dougherty  
Representative of Katie Riley  
Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

Zoey Lubenfosa  
Astoria Resident

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Vertical Urban Factory and  
Professor  
Parsons School of Design

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Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

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Astoria Resident

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Sunny Side Resident

Kate Willet

Nora Guzman  
Astoria Resident

SERGEANT LUGO: Good morning. This a microphone check for the Committee on Zoning and Franchises. Today's date is October 19, 2022, located in the Chambers. Recording done by Pedro Lugo.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Our Zoom hosts, please start the webinar. Good afternoon and welcome to today's hybrid New York City Council hearing for the Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises. To minimize disruptions, online and in person, please place all electronic devices to vibrate or silent mode. Any private conversations, please take outside to the rotunda.

If you'd like to submit testimony, if you miss your turn to speak, you can submit testimony for up to 72 hours at [landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov). Again, that is [landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov). Thank you for your cooperation. Chair Riley, we are ready to begin.

[GAVEL]

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Good afternoon, and welcome to the meeting of, of the Subcommittee of Zoning and Franchises. I am Council Member Kevin Riley, Chair of this Subcommittee. This afternoon, I am joined by Council Members Louis, Bottcher, Schulman, Abreu,

Hanks, Carr, and Council Member Won. And we are also joined remotely by Council Member Moya.

Today we will hold a public hearing for a rezoning proposal in Queens known as Innovation QNS. Before we begin, I recognize the Subcommittee Counsel to review the hearing procedures.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Thank you, Chair Riley. I am Angelina Martinez, (INAUDIBLE) Counsel to the Subcommittee. I have a lot of announcements for the hearing today, so just bear with me. This meeting is being held in hybrid format. Members of the Subcommittee are required to meet in person. Members of the public who wish to testify, may testify in person or via Zoom. Members of the public wishing to testify remotely were asked to register for today's hearing.

As part of the registration process for today's hearing, Council Staff have made efforts to facilitate translation services to those who request such services. We ask that all speakers bear with us as we work to ensure that everyone has their opportunity to testify. If you wish to testify and have not already registered, please do so now by visiting the New York City Council website at

[www.council.nyc.gov/landuse](http://www.council.nyc.gov/landuse) to sign up or for those of you here in Chambers, as you heard the Sergeant say, please see one of them to prepare and submit a speaker card.

Members of the public may also view a livestream broadcast of this meeting at the Council's website. For those members of the public viewing this meeting, the Council is providing multi-lingual livestream viewing options available through the Council's website at [council.nyc.gov](http://council.nyc.gov) with audio translation in Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, and Bengali. In addition, we're also providing card captions. Um, once again, these options can be found on one the Council's main website at [www.Council.nyc.gov](http://www.Council.nyc.gov). if you need an accessible version of any of the presentations shown today, please send an email request to [landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov).

When called to testify, individuals appearing before the Subcommittee will remain muted until recognized by the Chair or I to speak. Applicant teams will be recognized as a group and called first, followed by members of the public. When the Chair or I recognize you, if you are joining us remotely, your microphone will be unmuted. Please take a moment to



check your device and confirm that your mic is on before you begin speaking.

Public testimony will be limited to two minutes per witness. If you have additional testimony you would like the Subcommittee to consider, or if you have written testimony you would like to submit instead of appearing here before the Subcommittee, you may email it to us at [landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov). Please indicate the LU number and/or project name in the subject line of your email.

Witnesses joining us remotely are requested to remain in the meeting until excused by the Chair as Council Members may have questions for you.

Finally, um, there will be pauses over the course of this hybrid meeting for various technical issues and we ask that you please be patient as we work through any issues. Chair Riley will now continue with today's agenda items.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Counsel. And before I begin, I just want to put a disclaimer out there. Um, everyone will have the opportunity to share their perspective on this project. Uh, we just want to make sure that everyone's showing respect to anyone who is

going to be testifying up here, okay? Uh, with that being said, we will continue with today's proceedings.

I will now open up the public hearing on LUs 126 through 134 relating to the Innovation QNS rezoning and LSGD proposal in Council Member Won's District in Queens. This application seeks a zoning map amendment to rezone an existing M1-1 and C4-2A zoning district to an M1-4/R7X, M1-4/R7-3, M1-4/R9, and M1-5/R9-1 zoning districts, a related zoning text amendment to map an MIH program area to establish a new, special mixed-use district, MX-24, a large scale, general development, bulk special permit and other related special permits applicable to large scale, general development to modify various parking, loading, signage, and large retail use regulations, all to facilitate a new five block mixed-use development.

For anyone wishing to testify on this item remotely, if you have not already done so, you must register online and you may do that now by visiting the Council's website at [council.nyc.gov/landuse](http://council.nyc.gov/landuse). And once again, for anyone with us in person, please see one of the Sergeant at Arms to prepare, Sergeant at Arms to prepare and submit a speaker's card.

I would now like to yield my time to Council Member Won to give her opening statement.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you so much, Chair Riley. Good afternoon. My name is Julie Won and I'm the Council Member representing Long Island City, Sunnyside, Woodside, and Astoria where the project area Innovation QNS resides. Astoria, warmly known as Actoria, by many of the artists or for many of, I see the artists out there, um, anywhere from the City, people recognize it from Steinway where you be smoking some hookah, or Little Egypt, Little Bangladesh, Little Brazil. We know that there are so many different communities that are represented in the heart of Astoria.

Astoria has and always will continue to be a landing pad for immigrants. It is where the Irish, Italian, Greek immigrants first started, where the Korean immigrants like my family came, where Chinese immigrants, Bangladeshi immigrants, or Tibetan immigrants found their place in Queens and the outer Boroughs because Manhattan was always too expensive for us, but close enough for us to commute to work.

Innovation QNS would be a majority unaffordable luxury development in the middle of a working class,

immigrant neighborhood. The immediate project area is one of the last corners of Astoria in western Queens where rents are low enough for new immigrants and working-class New Yorkers. If this project were to move forward, market rate apartments would be completely out of reach for my neighbors in the immediate project area as unlike the last, the five blocks surrounding it that will highest impacted from secondary displacement, where the median rent currently is \$1,800, but even then we know that 30% of our constituents are heavily rent burdened, and, and more than that, there are 50% of my constituents who live in the immediate project area that say that they are rent burdened. They are spending more than 50% of their rent, income on rent.

A market rate two-bedroom apartment in Innovation QNS would, hypothetically, cost \$4,000 a month or more, if it were open today. And affordable, that means it's only affordable to families making over \$158,000 a year. That is two times the median income for that area. That is more than double the local median income and that is totally inaccessible to nearly most of those who live there now.

Even worse, many of the affordable units in Innovation QNS would be unattainable for local residents because the very definition of affordability laid out by the proposal is problematic. Apartments set aside at 90% AMI would target, target families with incomes over \$100,000, yet they're accounted in what the developers consider affordable. While clearly unaffordable for this area in Astoria, these units comprised 10% of Innovation QNS' most affordable units and unless Innovation QNS offers adequate affordability, this development will both displace families that live there now and price out new immigrants and working class families of the future that make this neighborhood and community so beautiful, amazing, and everything we love and that everybody wants to covet the land for.

Innovation QNS has been in discussion in our community for over four years and the community has been consistently clear about their most critical need, true, deep affordability. Throughout the process, the Innovation QNS team has had every opportunity to engage in these discussions, but they have failed to do so adequately as the community has, has cried out. There was no additional affordability

offered when Community Board 1 voted the project down 24 to 8 with no conditions. And only when we are up in the run to the final are we discussing the additional affordability.

I don't need to see a crystal ball to see into the future. We all agree in this room that we need more affordable housing, and we are in a housing crisis. My community has already witnessed first-hand the effects of gentrification, the displacement of luxury development. In Hunter's Point, Long Island City, we've seen massive development, more than 25,000 units since 2010. My District is the second most developed in all of New York City.

And just, and an over, we've seen an over 43% increase in rent since then, since 2010, far outpacing the City as a whole, and in comparison to Woodside, which has not seen the same rate of luxury development since 2010, we only saw a 7% rate, rent increase, less than the City average.

So, continuing to allow developers to build luxury market rate apartments without proper set asides for affordability, has and will raise rents in my neighborhood and in all of our neighborhoods. I strongly disagree with the idea that somehow the

working class will benefit from the construction of unaffordable apartments, that we have the time during this affordability crisis, and housing crisis, for this to trickle down for working class New Yorkers. We don't have time wait. We have to build affordable housing and my community is asking for 55% affordable from the Innovation QNS project because we've seen what happens when we don't. and I believe that the solution to our affordable housing crisis is simple, build more affordable housing.

We, as a City, should no longer allow luxury developments to outpace the construction of affordable housing. And to be clear, I am pro development. I have now built more than, I have approved more than 800 units to be built, 200 which are affordable, and I have approved every single ULURP that has come across my desk. If we want to build this project together, both labor, the working class that we are fighting for, one has to be committed with project labor agreements so that we know that it is, that we save the permanent jobs for our 32BJ. And we also have real jobs, not open bidding, for our build and trades.

Now, we can both win. We're going to save the, prevent displacement for our working-class renters because my District is 88% renters, and we will also get those jobs if we continue to push together. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Council Member Won. Counsel, please call the first panel for this item.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Chair, the panel for this item is Tracy Capune, Jameson Duvall (SP?), Jesse Masyr (SP?), Jay Martin, and Brian Collins.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Counsel, please administer the affirmation.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: The applicant panel, can you please raise your right hand and answer the following question into the mic? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, both in your testimony before the Subcommittee and in your answers to all Council Member questions?

APPLICANT PANEL: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. For the viewing public, if you need an accessible version of this presentation, please send an email request to [landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov). And now the



applicant team may begin. Panelists, as you begin, I'll just ask that you please reinstate your name and organization for the record. You may begin.

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: Does everyone have the presentation? Okay. Good afternoon, Chairman Riley, Council Member Won, and Committee Members. My name is Tracy Capune and I'm with Kaufman Astoria studios. Joining me are my partners Jay Martin with BedRock Real Estate Partners, Brian Collins and Jameson Duvall with Silverstein Properties.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Excuse me, Tracey, just one second. Do you, are you supposed to have it up there?

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay. Can you get that up there for her please?

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: And then Tracy, if you could just, um, for our Zoom team, if you could just let us know when you want them to flip the slide.

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: Will do. Thank you. The last member of the team is Jesse Masyr, our Land Use Counsel.

So, Kaufman Astoria Studios has been in this neighborhood for over 100 years, and we have long

supported civic and cultural organizations in Queens. We've always viewed Innovation QNS as something that needs to build on the good in the existing neighborhood and we're fortunate to have partners in project that share our commitment. Next slide, please.

Innovation QNS is an unprecedented opportunity at this scale. We are proposing to build over 1,100 affordable homes on sites that are currently used as private surface parking or for big box retail. Next slide, please. Next slide, please. Next slide, please.

Our sites are currently occupied by almost no housing. Residents living in the six on-site units will either return or be offered relocation assistance. Next slide, please. Next slide, please. Oh, there it is. Good.

Our sites are located near public transportation, both subway and bus lines with bike lanes and access to bike share stations. It is an appropriate location to propose a mixed-use development that can help sustain and grow the economic development of the area. Next slide, please.

So, this is a view of Block A, the first of the five city blocks. And that is the, uh, movie theater that will be relocated into the new development. Next slide, please.

This is Block B, looking south across the P.C. Richard parking lot to the P.C. Richard store. Next slide, please.

On Block C, this is the surface parking that surrounds the existing playground 35. Next slide, please.

Block D. Next slide, please.

And Block E. Next slide, please.

Innovation QNS with the help of community partners and local stakeholders, has engaged in a robust community outreach effort over the last five years including focus groups, online surveys, phone surveys, multilingual door to door canvassing, multilingual street and subway station canvassing, neighborhood event and small business canvassing, public town hall, public workshops, presentations to over 100 civic and non-profit organizations and a multilingual online platform. This outreach has resulted in substantial modifications to the plan to reflect community feedback. 8,700 letters of support

and supporter cards, 25,000 website visits, 1,500 comments on the web platform and earning the support of Queens Borough President Donovan Richards. Next slide, please.

You may not know, but Astoria ranks near last for open space in New York City, 53<sup>rd</sup> out of 59 New York City neighborhoods. ODA, our master plan architect built the proposed plan around creating ground floor open spaces that connect the five city blocks. These spaces totaling over two acres, will be built and maintained by us but will be open to the public. They are thoughtfully designed to serve a variety of outdoor uses from a field and playscape, for active recreation, to a large civic park built around the existing playground 35, to a covered arcade that can host farmer's markets and holiday bazaars. Next slide, please.

Innovation QNS is proud of its very accomplished and impressive group of community partners. They are of the existing community and provide a diverse array of needed services and programming. Innovation QNS is an opportunity for these partners to expand their work here in the neighborhood. The Museum of the Moving Image would have a new digital gallery space

which would allow them to expand their digital arts education programming. Hanac would create and manage new senior affordable housing and programming for seniors and Hanac will also act as the affordable housing administering agent.

The floating hospital would establish a second free clinic with a wide range of services, from medical to dentistry, to mental health and wellness, to an on-site daycare facility. And it's creating a community innovation hub, anchored by the LGBT Network's Q Center which provides healthcare services in partnership with Mount Sinai Queens, would create a business incubator and shared workspace for emerging entrepreneurs and youth dedicated space for its Leadership Academy program, along with the Queens Public Library which would establish a Tech Lab that offers tech-centered skill-building workshops, a full calendar of all age maker programs, and soft skill and entry level job training.

Urban Upbound for creating entrepreneurship programs that help folks grow an idea into a viable business plan and teach them how to get access to capital. And there's Jacob Riis neighborhood settlement, long time in the neighborhood providing

ESOL classes and after school care programming that features STEAM, artistic enrichment, and recreational activities for ages five through 12.

Plus, this community innovation hub offers space for other organizations that aren't in the neighborhood, but they would like to have classroom space or event space that can be used. It can be a true gathering space. And last, but definitely least, our labor partners, DC9, Local 79, and 32BJ.

And with that, I'll turn it over to Jameson and ask you to skip forward one or two slides. Thank, thank you. There you go.

MR. DUVAL: Thank you, Tracy. We are proposing to create a vibrant, 24/7 mixed use district that will provide sustainable housing and grow the economic activity of the neighborhood.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Can you just introduce yourself for the record, please?

MR. DUVAL: Sorry. Jameson Duvall, Silverstein Properties. Innovation QNS will bring over 2,800 homes to Astoria, 1,100 of those homes will be permanently affordable. That's 40%. This is an unprecedented scale of affordable housing in a private development. We are proposing 100,000 square

feet of community facility space, which includes a 60,000 square foot community innovation hub that Tracy just mentioned with partners like Jacob Riis, Queens Public Library, Urban Upbound, and the LGBT Network, to name a few. Additionally, there's space for the floating hospitals, healthcare, and day care, as well as the Museum of Moving Image and a new digital gallery.

We are proposing 230,000 square feet of commercial office space that will be split into two locations. There will be 200,000 square feet of retail space including the relocated cinema, a supermarket, and other smaller locations for local retail. As mentioned earlier, this proposal includes over two acres of public open space. That's permanently public open space with community amenities like large open lawns, a playground, and a small soccer field.

Lastly, we are proposing 950 parking spaces in underground garages which was reduced approximately 450 spaces from our previous proposal, now down to the minimum allowed by zoning. Next slide, please.

Innovation QNS is committed to sustainably moving our City forward. We will implement development-wide

criteria to ensure all buildings are positioned to help reduce our City's greenhouse gas emissions into the future. This means things like constructing all electric buildings and looking for ways to produce renewable energy on site. To that end, we are currently participating in a NYSERDA study, feasibility study to explore district-wide geothermal energy solutions across all five blocks.

Greenhouse gas emissions are not the only issue we face. More and more severe weather continues to pass over our City. Innovation QNS will dramatically reduce the amount of stormwater that enters our sewers. Our two acres of open space, green roof systems, storm water retention and reuse programs will keep water out of the sewers and recycle it for irrigation on site.

In addition to reducing the current amounts of stormwater going into the sewer, Innovation QNS will also bring brand new utility infrastructure into the neighborhood. If approved, Innovation QNS will be replacing a network of century old and over capacity water sewer pipes in the surrounding area. Now, let me turn it over to Jesse Masyr, our Land Use Counsel to go through the zoning actions.



COUNSEL MASYR: Good afternoon. My name is Jesse Masyr. I am a member of the Law Firm of Fox Rothschild, and I am Land Use Counsel to the applicant. Good afternoon, Chairman Riley, Councilwoman Won, and Committee Members. Uh, my task today and we'll get to the next slide if we can, is to take you through the zoning actions that we are requesting and also to, next slide, that we could highlight to you changes that we have made since certification.

So, I'll be very brief, and as Chair already has recited, uh, there are a number of land use actions today before your consideration. Starting in, with the zoning map amendment to change existing M1 and C4-2 Districts to variety of mixed use M1 and residential districts that will be detailed, uh, in your submission and in your presentation before you.

There are additional zoning text amendments. First, and primarily the most important, is to create the Mandatory Inclusion Housing area option one, which would lead to the creation with our, this applicant's commitment to over 1,100 affordable units to be created in this district.

In addition, the text amendment to create the MX district and an amendment to modify the large-scale permit which will allow reduction in loading berths applicable in new MX districts.

And finally, Innovation QNS seeks a series of special permits alluded to by the Chair which would modify bulk use parking, loading, and signs to achieve this project and to allow us to deliver on the 1,100 affordable homes and the other public benefits that have already been outlined. Next slide, please. Next slide.

Innovation QNS has been in the planning for four years and during this time there has been extensive community engagement including and continuing during the public review process. And I'm going to outline the changes that have occurred since the project was certified in April of 2022. And these changes are based on comments that are a result of Community Board interaction, town halls involving community, workshops, and other engagement efforts. Next slide, please.

So, what we have is a significant reduction in heights along 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue, including the elimination of a 16-story tower and a redistribution of bulk

along the wide Northern Boulevard, away from the residential blocks of 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue. And I think the next slide will show that, rather dramatically. As you see that building has disappeared, and it is, its bulk has been redistributed and you can see that it has been redistributed primarily moving towards the wide street of Northern Boulevard.

We've also, as part of this application, withdrawn two of our special permit requests for Block A and Block C with regarding large scale retail. This project has never been about large scale retail. The only reason that this permit was even actually filed was for two very important community purposes. One was to be able to provide a food store, in great need here, and the second was to be able to accommodate the existing retail tenant that is in our property, namely P.C. Richards. And so, we have identified blocks that we think would be appropriate and have removed the requests for blocks that are not appropriate.

In addition, we have consolidated and created by, because of a significant community input, a recreation space, an active recreation space of a half-acre on the southern end of Block A. Uh, this is

addition to the open space that's provided throughout the project, all totaling over two acres.

And finally, as, as been testified previously, we have reduced our parking to the only amount required by zoning, to the absolute minimum as a further commitment, uh, to sustainability. So, could we show the next slide, please?

This is the open space at the end of Block A. And this is a active open space that we have projected to be a small soccer field, but we would be looking forward to and, and in talks with Community Board, the Council Member, and other engaged groups as to what may be alternative programming for this active open space. The critical thing to need to know is that in this neighborhood, this is a sorely needed, uh, use and this will be fully financed and paid for by the developer. And with that, next slide, please, I'm going to turn it over to Jay Martin to discuss the issue of affordability and of course we'll be prepared to answer questions on the zoning actions at your pleasure.

PARTNER MARTIN: Thank you, Jesse. I'm Jay Martin, a partner with BedRock Real Estate Partners. Thank you, Chairman Riley, Members of the Committee, uh,

Council, uh, Woman Won. Uh, we appreciate, uh, you giving us an opportunity to present the project and the opportunity it offers the City to address the affordable housing crisis.

Uh, you've heard the word unprecedented, uh, a few times today. Uh, the development team's commitment to set aside 40% of the housing, uh, in this project as affordable housing is simply unprecedented in this City. It's 1,100, over 1,100 new affordable homes that will be brought to this community. When you put it in the perspective of the amount of affordable housing that's been created in this community district in the last eight years, uh, it nearly triples the amount of affordable housing that will be, uh, brought to this community, and at much more deeply affordable levels than what we have seen in the past.

In fact, our current proposal, which is subject to ongoing negotiations, is to deliver 500 deeply affordable homes for, uh, vulnerable New Yorkers, uh, with AMI, with, uh, incomes of \$28,000 a year, that's a 30% AMI level, as well as formerly homeless, uh, New Yorkers.

In comparison, in that same eight-year period that I mentioned, only 102, uh, deeply affordable homes had been created in this community district. Oh, I apologize. Um, if you could advance the slide, please, I'd appreciate it. I got rolling a little too soon. Uh, now we can advance one further slide.

No recent rezoning that's come before this Committee and Council has offered the breadth and depth of affordability that Innovation QNS does. In terms of the total number of units, or total number of new homes this new project will deliver, at 1,137, uh, as well as at the most deeply affordable levels of 30% AMI and 60% AMI, you'll see, uh, a tremendous amount of affordable housing that this project represents in this community. So, advance to the next slide, please.

I want to put this in the context of the actual project sites that we're talking about. These, as Tracy walked you through the five blocks, are currently comprised of surface parking lots, big box retail, a, a cinder block clad, one story movie theater, uh, as well as, um, warehouses and auto body shops. There's virtually no housing on these, uh, these project sites. In fact, there are six

apartments, not apartment buildings, but apartments on the project sites. All of these residents will be allowed to return, uh, or be relocated at their preference.

But when we look at the surrounding community, uh, beyond the actual project sites, the half mile radius of the project area, uh, you'll find that 69% of residents are either currently rent protected under rent stabilization or some form of income restriction, or they're owner occupied homes. Uh, we take very seriously the issue of displacement and secondary displacement that Council Member Won has noted. Uh, we equally share, uh, the desire to be very sensitive to it. But with this context and given the current uses of the sites and the opportunity to deliver over 1,100 new affordable homes to this community, we believe the issues of housing insecurity are frankly, um, aided by the creation of housing where we propose it. So, advancing to the next slide, please.

This shows the affordable housing production in this community district, uh, in the last eight year. And what you'll note, as I mentioned before, this project will triple, uh, the amount of affordable

housing created in, uh, this community district, uh, from 475 units to over 1,600, uh, units of affordable housing. But what's really interesting, was in, if you look at the actual, uh, income levels that the affordable housing that has been built in this community district, um, you'll note that a large portion of it is actually over 120% AMI. Uh, the deeply affordable housing as I noted before, uh, that's been delivered in the last eight years, is only 102 units. We're proposing 500, again, subject to ongoing negotiations.

So, we can go to the next slide which sort of highlights a geographic phenomenon that I think you all will understand in the City, which is that affordable housing, uh, production, is largely concentrated in certain parts of the City. What you'll see in this map, is that Community Board 1 in Queens is not one of the places where you'll find a lot of affordable housing that's been created. And there's a reason for this, land cost. And so, what you have in this development team, is a development team that has taken its MIH option 1, 711 units, and taken an additional 426 market rate units and converted them to affordable housing to build in



partnership with the City, something that quite frankly, the City wouldn't have the opportunity to do because of land costs in this district.

And so, this development team has real skin in the game, not only in the MIH, the 711 MIH units, but also in the additional 426 we propose to build in part, in a public private partnership with the City. The affordable housing crisis is not going to be solved by the public sector alone, or the non-profit sector alone. Uh, the private sector needs to be a part, and this development team is committed to be a part of the solution. So, I'll turn it over to Brian Collins at Silverstein Properties.

DIRECTOR COLLINS: Thank you, Jay. Uh, my name is Brian Collins. I run development at Silverstein. Um, I'm here to kind of sum up our presentation. So, we think, oh, I'm sorry, uh, yeah, we're on the right slide. So, um, we think Innovation QNS is, is good for the neighborhood, good for the community, and good for the City. Innovation QNS will deliver over 2,800 homes. That's a massive number in a City that is certainly housing starved. Of that 2,800, over 1,100 will be permanently affordable, including 500 that will be deeply affordable.

We'll deliver jobs. We believe that our, our economic projections are that we'll deliver 1,700 permanent jobs compared to the roughly 170 that exist today. We'll deliver open space for the community, over two acres of open space in a community that is, that is crying out for more open space. And we heard many, many times in our public hearings and our meetings with local stakeholders, that open space was a high priority. We are committed to, uh, a community center and an innovation hub, so that local not for profits, local stakeholders can, can have space that they can utilize to help benefit the local residents.

We're committed to sustainability and enhancing the infrastructure. As Jameson noted earlier, we will be rebuilding the water and the sewer infrastructure that's over a century old. We'll be upgrading the electric. We will be building all electric building. We will be going beyond Local Law 97, which is the most far-reaching legislation in the country with regard to sustainability.

And finally, we'll be delivering through additional economic activity, a projected \$475 million of additional tax revenue to the City of New York. In a city that is looking at, at, at looming

deficits, that kind of activity is only going to benefit the City. So, Chair Riley, with that, we conclude our presentation.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Uh, just for the record I want to say thank you to everyone who has been respectful either if you're against it or opposing it, uh, within the Chambers, you are doing an amazing job right now. Uh, with that being said, can you explain the origins of this proposal? When did you first begin working on a proposal to redevelop these blocks and how did you decide on proposing density, height, and mixture of uses?

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: Thank you for your question. Um, we started, Kaufman Astoria Studios and BedRock Real Estate Partners were talking about rezoning Blocks A and B, where the movie theater are and the P.C. Richard are. At the same time, we learned that Silverstein was considering the three blocks across Steinway and we all realized that joining forces, we would have a tremendous opportunity to create something truly extraordinary for this neighborhood.

Um, at the outset of this, it was, I think Marty Burger, the CEO of Silverstein noted earlier this

week that it would, it will be five years ago next month that we started talking with City Planning about this. And there have been a number of focus groups and online surveys and community outreach before we started drawing and working with City Planning to come up with a variety of densities and mixed-use districts that would meet City Planning's, uh, economic and other goals for the neighborhood, as well as what we saw as a vision here.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. How does the proposed amount and the depth of affordability, affordable units, excuse me, you are offering at this project compared to the amount and depth of affordable housing built in the area in recent years.

PARTNER MARTIN: Thank you for the question, Chairman Riley. Uh, since 2014, this community district has produced 475 new construction affordable units. Uh, our project alone will take that figure from 475 to over 1,600, tripling, uh, the number of affordable, the amount of affordable housing created. But, in comparison, it's widely different because we are offering much more deeply affordable housing than what you see in the 475 units that were produced in the last eight years.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Is this project going to benefit from any state or local tax benefits?

PARTNER MARTIN: Yes, we will, uh, utilize the tax abatement for the, uh, construction of multi-family housing if it ever comes back. And, as I mentioned in our presentation, uh, the additional 426 affordable homes that we, that we are proposing to build, we would do in partnership with the City under existing programs.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. You spoke about playground 35. Can you describe how the modifications at the City Planning commission affected the shadows on playground 35?

MISTER DUVALL: Sure, thank you for that question. We removed a tower on Block D that was east of playground 35, which did dramatically reduce the shadows on playground 35.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Can you explain the infrastructure investments that you are proposing for the project area?

MISTER DUVALL: Yes, the construction of each building will require a study in conjunction with the Department of Buildings and Department of Environmental Protection to ensure that the size of

the buildings provided replace any water and sewer intellectual infrastructure necessary to serve it.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Are you committed to offering relocation assistance? I know you spoke about that there are some residents still there. Are you, can you just describe that process? How are you going to relocate them? Where are you going to relocate them to? Um, I'm pretty sure they, do any of them have children in the area. Do they go to school in the area? Are you relocating them further from the, um, community?

PARTNER MARTIN: Uh, our commitment, thank you for the, uh, question, Chairman Riley. Uh, our commitment is to work with the six apartment, uh, households on addressing whatever their priorities are. So, we've had, uh, discussions with all, uh, but as the project, uh, is constructed to identify whether they prefer to relocate within the project or elsewhere.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Where will they be temporarily?

PARTNER MARTIN: Um, in, until the project, they, uh, during, sort of, yeah, um, we would offer temporary accommodations in the neighborhood if that's where they wish to be.

CHAIRPERSON RILES: Okay. Thank you. How will you seek to ensure a diverse workforce and local employment opportunities at any future commercial uses IN this project?

MISTER DUVALL: So, we have committed to, to constructing, uh, this project with 30%, uh, MWBE and 30% local hiring. We've also partnered with organizations like Urban Upbound, Queens Public Library, um, and others to develop workforce initiatives for training, uh, for both construction jobs and permanent jobs on site.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The EI, excuse me, the EIS for this project shows potential significant impacts on childcare and public libraries. Is there any childcare facilities proposed for this project? And how are you proposing to partner with the Queens Public Library?

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: So, the floating hospital in a very unique model incorporates a daycare facility into its free clinic, so that will be available to the public as well. And the Queens Public Library is part of our community innovation hub. They are going to expand a program they have called, uh, Tech Lab. Currently, they have an outpost

at Queens Bridge Houses and the Tech Lab would provide training at all levels into different forms of technology as well as soft skills and entry level skills.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay. I'm going to ask one more question, then I'm going to yield my time to Council Member Won. Then I'll come back. Um, we've been joined also by Council Member Williams. If this rezoning were not approved, what would be, what did the, what would the developers do with the site under the current M1-1 zoning?

PARTNER MARTIN: Thank you for the question, Chairman Riley. This development team has held on to these sites for five years. It's been quite challenging, to be frank with you, um. The reality is, is that the alternative to this project is not a different iteration of the same project. Uh, the project sites which are owned by 12 different landowners would fall back into the hands of those 12 disparate landowners, each with their own agendas and priorities. It could be 20 years before anything happens on these sites. It could remain the same. Or each of these 12 individual landowners might do



whatever they're permitted to do. And I'll turn it over to Jesse Masyr who can speak to that.

COUNSEL MASYR: Uh, thank you, Jay. Uh, Mister Chairman, as you know, the districts are predominantly M1, which are 1FAR manufacturing districts that permit no residential development whatsoever except on a small portion along Steinway Street. I think it is reasonable to assume, as Jay said, that one of two things are likely to occur. One is that nothing will occur, and the same underused, underutilized sites will continue, not benefitting jobs or any other purpose. And the other alternative, which would seem more likely, would be trucking and warehousing would take place on the site, which is permitted as of right, would be allowed to happen without any regard to traffic, and would be probably the highest and best use for the existing zoning.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. I'm going to allow Council Member Won to ask her questions, then I'll come back for a second round. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you so much, Chair Riley. Thank you so much for your thoughtful presentation. I have a few questions and then I'm going to turn it over to my colleagues because I know

that they also have to leave and then I'll come back and finish my questions.

The first question that I have is, there's been a very frequent use of the amount \$2 billion for this development. How did you arrive at the \$2 billion? Is that the cost of the project that you're forecasting or is that the value of the project and how did you get to that number?

DIRECTOR COLLINS: Thank you for the question. So, that is a projection, uh, based on our experience as developers of the hard cost, soft cost, land cost, community benefits, the various, all the costs. It has nothing to do with value. It's the cost that need the, the use of funds necessary to build the project as conceived and and shown on the renderings.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you. And what is the projected profit or your forecast in revenue or return on investment for this project?

DIRECTOR COLLINS: So, we currently are at exactly a, like a 5.0 return on cost. Return on cost is an un-trended, um, un-trended number, so, it's, it's the total, it's the net operating income, NOI, divided by the total cost of the project.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you. I'm going to now turn it over to community engagement. So, for the last five years, there's been extensive community engagement according to page 12 of your document. For the phone surveys, since the last two years were during COVID-19 and, uh, traditional, in-person engagement was not allowed, could you help me understand the contact rate that you had in your phone surveys?

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: I will have to get you the exact percentage on the contact rate. But I will also say that the phone surveys were supplemented with a multilingual canvassing program during 2020 through 2022 as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: And do you know what the contact rate was for door to door canvassing?

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: I don't recall off the top of my head, but we can follow up with you and get the statistics to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: What was the attendance rate for the public workshop?

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: Do we know that number of?

PARTNER MARTIN: The, the town hall was 175 people. The workshops were less. We had two separate

workshops to accommodate people with evening schedules or with weekend schedules and they were, frankly, a little bit more sparsely attended than the town hall which had about 200.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: So, how many people attended the workshop, each, for each one?

PARTNER MARTIN: Council Member Won, I honestly don't know the answer. I know it was far less than the town hall.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Less than 50 is what people have estimated. I want to confirm with you if that's true.

PARTNER MARTIN: I personally don't know if that's correct. Uh, I went to, uh, the, both workshops. That could be correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Community organizations Woodside on the Move, CAAAV, and Astoria Tenants Union spent the last weekend canvassing the immediate project area as well as the secondary displacement project area surrounding the five blocks. And they have surveyed, and they said that more than 95% of neighbors are completely unaware of this project, just so that you're informed. I'm going to allow my

colleagues to ask their questions, and then I'll come back and finish my questioning.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Council Member Won. Uh, I will now turn it over to my colleagues to ask any questions. Uh, we're going to begin with Council Member Bottcher, then Council Member Schulman, then Council Member Abreu. Council Member Bottcher?

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Good afternoon. Car traffic has been a huge problem in New York for a long time and it's gotten worse over the last few years, and, uh, traffic violence has been a huge problem. In the past 12 months, over 54,000 people have been injured and 283 people have died in traffic violence in our City. Uh, this project would include quite a few parking spaces. I saw that the latest number is, is 949 spots. Is that right? Is that parking going to be underground, above ground?

PARTNER MARTIN: The parking is proposed to be underground.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: What have your, uh, studies shown about the impact that would have on traffic conditions?

PARTNER MARTIN: I'll turn that over to our consultants at AKRF to respond to the traffic study.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: We would just have to swear you in, so you can. No, you can go over there.

COUNSEL MASYR: Councilman, before.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yeah, you can go over there.

COUNSEL MASYR: Councilman, before our experts testify, I'd like to respond a little bit to the traffic issue before you get the technical answer. I can tell you that some of the problems one encounters in doing this kind of analysis. In, in order to project traffic demand, as an example, we are required by the rules of the City to assume that the movie is occupied virtually 100%, 100% of the time. So, there's a sort of disconnect in that. And with that, I will turn it over to Alex, who is our environmental expert.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHE: Depends on what movies are showing, I guess.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Before the consultant can answer, if you can state your name for the record and I'm going to have to swear you in.

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR LIEBER: Thank you. My name is Alex Lieber. I am a technical director with AKRF. We are the, uh, environmental consultant to the applicant.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: And can you please raise your right hand, um, and respond to the following question? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before the Subcommittee and in your answer to all Council Member questions?

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR LIEBER: I do.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Thank you.

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR LIEBER: Thank you. Uh, for the question to the, uh, from the, uh, Committee. I will point to the, um, results of the, uh, final environmental impact statement that was prepared for this project, um, in consultation with Department of City Planning and the, uh, Department of Transportation specifically, uh, with regards to transportation impacts.

Uh, the project did identify, it was an extensive, uh, study of, uh, traffic, potential traffic impacts. I believe it was a study of about 42, uh, intersections in the study area and surrounding, uh, our project site. Um, and it did identify significant adverse impacts at, um, mainly at these intersections. Um, and the, uh, results were, uh, of the 42, there would be significant

adverse impacts at, uh, about 23, uh, during the peak hours, at one or more peak hours.

And so, uh, as outlined in the EIS, there is a mitigation proposed for those impacts that would address a majority of those significant adverse impacts. Um, and in addition to that, um, the applicant, uh, it will be, uh, performing, uh, a traffic, um, uh, excuse me. A, um, monitoring plan in consultation with DOT. There will be, uh, in the future as the, uh, development in this area is built out which will determine, uh, specifically which mitigation is needed. And again, that will all be determined, uh, in consultation with the Department of Transportation.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: How many parking spots were originally envisioned?

MISTER DUVALL: So, um, originally the environmental analysis yields a, uh, a demand study which was in excess of 1,700 parking spaces which we felt was extremely high. And so, through the process we had proposed less than that, uh, and then later in the process, in consultation with City Planning, City Planning Commission, we reduced it down to the zoning minimum, uh, 950.



But to, to also to respond to your question about safety, um, part of the, the plan does include the, uh, reduction or, um, really combining loading docks and loading spaces to reduce the amount of truck traffic and curb cuts going from the street into sidewalks. And also, we've, you know, we're very pro alternative forms of transportation and so, bike share stations, bike parking, and things of that nature, even though the zoning requires us to provide what is, quite frankly, a lot of parking spaces, we are, uh, going to be providing alternative transportation methods.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: So, because of the law, you can't reduce these parking space any more than you already have?

MISTER DUVALL: Yeah, my understanding is the zoning minimum is what we're at now.

COUNSEL MASYSR: At, at current, there would, we did seek any amendment to zoning that would allow a reduction in required parking. Uh, so we are, we are at the absolute required amount of parking.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Could you apply for a reduction for a waiver?

COUNSEL MASYR: In theory, I could have probably sought a text change. It would probably have been, need to actually change the zoning text. But we were considered about the impact issue. As it is, we are way below what we, what, what SEQR said was our impact, although we don't believe, as I explained to you before about the anomaly of the way we count traffic with movie theaters, creates a false demand. Uh, we don't think it would be advisable to be below this number and we did not seek to amend the zoning resolution to allow that grant.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: But if you, if you sought that text change, you'd have to start the whole process over. Is that right?

COUNSEL MASYR: Yes. For the, for that text change, it would be a new process, correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: You said that there was parking on the site currently. How many parking spots?

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: It's not public parking. It's surface parking for ancillary businesses.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Council Member Bottcher. Council Member Schulman?

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. Thank you very much and thank you for this hearing today. Um, can you describe, for the 15% subsidies, can you describe the qualifying incomes? I see in the materials it says extremely low income, very low income, but can you actually describe the actual income levels for the, for the affordable housing piece?

PARTNER MARTIN: Uh, thank you for the question, uh, Council Member. Uh, it's a very good one. Uh, we expect fully to have a, we've had ongoing negotiations and discussions regarding the programs under which the additional 426 new homes will be delivered, and that will affect the AMI levels. So, as an example, we're looking at the extremely low-income term sheet, uh, that, um, HPD has, the SARA term sheet, the Supportive Housing Term sheets. Uh, it's an ongoing negotiation that we seek to have with Council, uh, to determine what this community needs so that, um, we can address those needs as best we can. But all of them, all of those programs that I just mentioned, uh, largely, uh, involve deeply affordable housing.

DIRECTOR COLLINS: Jay, Jay, maybe you could mention our proposal, go through those numbers again.

PARTNER MARTIN: Sure. Uh, our current proposal, uh, includes 500 new affordable homes at 30% AMI or under so that also includes, uh, formerly homeless, uh, New Yorkers, within that 500, uh, proposal. Uh, beyond that, our current proposal, uh, includes income tiers at the 47%, 57%, 67%, all the way up at the maximum at 90%, which is part of our MIH program. So, you have everything from formerly homeless to 90% AMI. But the bulk of the units are being delivered, or are proposed to be delivered, um, at deeply affordable income levels.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. I think it would be very helpful at some point to have those income levels because to say 30% all, that's all well and good, but we really need to have what those income levels.

PARTNER MARTIN: Oh, I can answer the, what, so, 30% AMI for an individual is someone earning \$28,000 a year, a family of four, 30% AMI is \$40,000 a year. And I can go through all the tiers, if you wish.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: No, no, that, that's fine. If you can, when, when you have that commitment available to the Committee, it would be great to have that. Um, I, my other question is, are there

affordable units set aside for seniors? And if so, how many?

PARTNER MARTIN: So, this is part of the ongoing negotiations. Uh, it's certainly part of the, uh, sort of a potential mix of, uh, additional affordable housing that would be under the SARA program. Uh, but it's not been finalized, and, and we frankly seek to continue to have negotiations with, uh, City Council to determine which programs are appropriate.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Alright. And senior housing is very important. You know there is a growing senior population and particularly in Queens, so that's very important. I want to know how you're memorializing conversations with HPD and any other conversations you're having with Agencies in the Mayor's Office with regard to this project?

PARTNER MARTIN: Yeah, so, this development team's commitment to set aside 40% of the housing in this project as affordable housing is rock solid. We welcome the opportunity to memorialize it in whatever way Council and the administration wishes. Uh, our commitment is sincere, and we intend to follow through on it, and just lead us to the way you would like it memorialized.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Chair, can I just ask one more question? Are you planning to negotiate a community benefit agreement?

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: And when will that letter be finalized?

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: Prior to the vote.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Council Member Abreu? No? Okay. Okay. I'm going to start my second round of questions. Uh, will the full project be built in phases? How many years do you anticipate it will take to be fully completed?

MISTER DUVALL: The project will be built continuously over the course of around 10 years, from start to finish. All, all five blocks will not be under construction at the same time. It will be one continuous sequence.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: That was my next question. Okay.

PARTNER MARTIN: And Chairman Riley, in answer to a prior question that relates to that question you just asked, um, the, all of the residential housing,

the six apartments that exist on the project sites today, are all on what we call Block A. the first phase of construction is blocks, or the first buildings that will roll out will be on Blocks C and D. So, it's very likely that we won't even need to temporarily relocate people. They, it may work out timing wise that the people on Block A, the six apartments, can move to Blocks C and D when completed.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Ideally, okay. How do the affordability levels, the incomes that will be served you are proposing relating to the incomes and the needs of the local residents in the Astoria area?

PARTNER MARTIN: So, our racial equity report found, and I should note that when the racial equity report was, uh, performed, uh, the AMI levels that we were proposing as a part of our MIH were actually higher. They were 40, 60, and 100. Uh, we're now 30, 60, and 90.

Uh, at that time, the racial equity report found that 81% of households, uh, in the area would qualify for the affordable housing or have incomes above the affordable housing. That's not to deny that there's, uh, you know, 19% that it didn't cover, but what I

would note, uh, is that now that we've dropped the AMI bands, uh, within the MIH component alone to 30, 60, and 90, uh, that figure should be higher in terms of people that either qualify for the affordable housing or have incomes in excess of the qualification requirements.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Do you expect unionized labor to be a part of the construction and operation of the proposed project? Are any agreements already in place? Um, I know you spoke about 32BJ, uh, District 9, and Local 79. But are there any other unions that you are, uh, currently negotiating with?

MR. DUVAL: Yes, we are currently negotiating with, uh, a number of other trades to come to similar agreements.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Do you have a plan in place to ensure local hiring and MWBE participation during the construction?

MR. DUVAL: Yes, we do. We are looking, we have committed to 30% of local hiring and 30% MWBE.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Is there room for negotiation for more, of local hiring?

MR. DUVAL: Uh, yes, there's room for negotiation for many things.



CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay. What's sustainability or resiliency measures are incorporated into the buildings' design and construction, such as incorporating blue and green, white roof treatment, passive house, rain gardens, solar panels, and/or wind turbines.

MR. DUVALL: So, our, our two plus acres of open space will include green space and hardscape, um, which will act as green roofs. Throughout the buildings themselves, we will also design green roofs. We are doing a feasibility study with NYSERDA to look at geothermal energies, so renewable energy developed on site across all five blocks.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: A project of this scale could be a good candidate for geothermal heating and cooling. Is this something being considered for this project design, and do you plan to try to achieve a LEED rating?

MR. DUVALL: Yes, we are pursuing geothermal energy, uh, and we have talked about many different sustainability programs, not just LEED. Um, so we will be reviewing all of those.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Do you plan to use green infrastructure to manage the stormwater in the proposed development?

MR. DUVALL: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Can you describe the evolution of the proposed active open space on Block A from potential school site to indoor recreation to outdoor recreation?

COUNSEL MASYR: Thank you, Mr. chairman. Uh, when we started this project nearly five years ago as we were reminded, uh, it, it was a principle of the project planning principles that we would provide a site to the School Construction Authority for a school to be built on, on our property, which we would then turn over for free. During that time, the calculations by the School Construction Authority, as we all know from reading about enrollment issues, has determined that they did believe that a school would be, uh, justified on the site.

So, that, now we were faced with this property that we had previously thought would be used for a school and to find out what it's, us to figure out what was the most appropriate use for this property. This happened simultaneously with the community

pointing out that while we had provided a lot of passive open space throughout this project which is unique for this District as previously testified how deficient this area is, there was an issue of active open space. Our most, our most, our open space to this point had been passive.

So, what we did was reprogrammed the space that was originally intended for the school that we thought we would donate for the school, uh, now and to make it a, that we would build, maintain, and support an active recreation space on the site.

At the same time, we've also believed that there's a need and a use for, to provide indoor recreation, uh, that's active, but, but nonetheless, indoor, and we believe that we will be able to provide that in the area of a comparable size to the outdoor open space somewhere within our community space near the park. So, I hope that answers your question, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Um, and my last question, if this project was approved, how would you envision continuing community outreach and participation throughout the development process?

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: So, uh, there will be a designated representative assigned so that folks in the community can reach out with any concerns or questions regarding the development. And we are open to other suggestions. Council Member Won, if you would like to offer suggestions, we'd love to hear them.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. I'm going to turn it over to Council Member Bottcher for a second round and then Council Member Won.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Thank you.

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: I'm sorry. Really quickly, I forgot. We have agreed with the Borough President that there will be a community advisory board, so, I, I neglected to mention that. That will also be in place.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay.

VICE PRESIDENT CAPUNE: Sorry.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Council Member Bottcher?

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Thank you. In September, you detailed numerous commitments to sustainability, relocation assistance, local and MWBE participation and community facilities and open space. What

mechanism will hold you accountable to fulfill these commitments in a timely manner?

COUNSEL MASYR: There's a whole bunch of different answers to that. In regarding the open space, there's actually commitments to provide and, and maintain the open spaces pursuant to the special permit. And, as you know, and I don't have to lecture you, you could lecture me, the special permit becomes the controlling mechanism of which the most important thing to any developer is once commencing a project, is to be able to finish the project, we get a certificate of occupancy. There are requirements in the special permit memorialized in part and restricted declaration that certain open spaces be finished prior to being able to receive certificates of occupancy for the buildings. So, that is probably the most effective enforcement mechanism that you can imagine.

Uh, with regard to other commitments, uh, it goes to the issue of, we, of, of the affordability memorialization. We can memorialize that within the community benefits agreement or memorialize it, where appropriate, uh, Council Member, to some conditions within the special permit, if you will. Some may fit

better than others. Behavioral issues probably fit better in a community benefits agreement. Physical issues probably fit better in the special permits. But we're open to, to mixing and blending those issues.

COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHER: Thank you.

COUNSEL MASYR: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Council Member Won?

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you so much, Chair Riley and Council Member Bottcher. Let's talk about the affordable housing or affordability levels. So, we've seen multiple iterations of your charts now for affordability and as, uh, you just stated, these are, quote, "ongoing discussions/negotiations," quote, quote, "as an example," quote. So, I just wanted to make sure that it's on the public record that it is, right now these are scenarios that are projected to help us get to the affordability levels that we, we are semi in agreement with. We want more, but this is an, a step in the right direction.

So, can you help me understand now, since this chart does not have the breakdown between the 15% affordable from the City subsidy and 25% from the development team, what, what the numbers look like.

So, what are you looking for? You were mentioning SARA, then you were mentioning ELLA. So, what are the, what does the breakdown actually look like? And can you help me understand what commitments you have from HPD because they cancelled their meeting with me on Monday and I do not have any written commitments, or even verbal commitments from them.

PARTNER MARTIN: Uh, thank you for the question, Council Member Won. Um, there's no commitment currently, uh, from HPD. I want to be clear. This development team is committed to deliver 40% affordable housing. That is rock solid. We are in, the reason why you see some variability in the numbers is because the discussions are very active and ongoing, occurring with you last week and with, uh, uh, the City even as recently as this morning. Um, and we expect them to continue until Council vote to hopefully reach a resolution that the Council embraces and that the community, that's good for the community.

Um, the numbers that you see in front of you, are based essentially on the current proposal. I'm sorry, the, the proposal that we, um, have made that is not

final, but it reflects, uh, some SARA and some ELLA, uh, programs.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Right. So, let's talk about the unit breakdown. I know that there was another one that is not in our printout today that I saw floating around yesterday from Members. So, can you help us understand, for the 1,137 units that you are projecting in this scenario, uh, if we were able to get the 15% from HPD, can you help me understand what, how many units are from you all, from the development team, and how many units are from the HPD projections per AMI band level? So, let's go through those numbers.

PARTNER MARTIN: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Starting with zero to 30% AMI.

PARTNER MARTIN: Uh, I won't be able to, to break it down on the fly, uh, in that matter, but I can tell you that 2/3 of the affordable housing, 711 units will be privately financed. They are the development team's commitment outside of anything relating to the City. The 426 units beyond MIH Option 1, um, depends on the program. Uh, ELLA blends to a 53% to a 54% AMI so it typically has 15% formerly



homeless and then begins with 30% AMI, 40% AMI, all the way up to approximately 70% to 80% AMI. That's ELLA.

SARA program, generally, it has a 30% formerly homeless set aside. And then typically you have 30 to 40 and sometimes 50% AMI units within that program. Separately, we've also looked at Supportive Housing which has its own AMI mix, uh, that I frankly don't know off the top of my head, but I know it involves a significant number, uh, of currently homeless and/or formerly homeless.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you, Jay. For a prior question you said yourself how 80% qualify for affordable housing right now, in CB1. That is, this is purely a working-class community that we're talking about. And right now, I have more than 20, more than 20, homeless shelters in my District. That means that, on average, if each housing shelter, hotel shelter has 250 to 300 people, I have more than 5,000 unhoused folks in the community.

So, we all know, and I know that you all are trying to do your best, too, to support the community and how dire this housing crisis is. So, we need to have more affordable units and, than 711. So, in the

worst-case scenario, if HPD is unable to provide subsidy, what is your backup plan? What is your plan B, to get to 40%?

PARTNER MARTIN: We, we're not, the extra 426 units that you're referring to, we will wait to build them when the resources are there in a public-private partnership to do so. We are committed. We're not going to build those 426, uh, as market rate. We are committed to them being affordable. And we believe there will be resources, uh, to make it happen.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Have you had verbal commitments from HPD for the subsidies?

PARTNER MARTIN: No, no, we're, uh, uh, we're in very active discussions, but no final commitments.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you. I just wanted to make sure that was on the record. And for the density, could we talk about how the, we see that you are making modifications in density and shifting them around, but has there been any decreases in density as the Community Board has asked for? Or is it net neutral?

PARTNER MARTIN: We have addressed the, there is consensus around one issue at the Community Board and community level frankly, which is on the heights of

the buildings and that issue we have addressed by shifting, uh, towers, eliminating buildings along 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue and moving them towards Northern Boulevard. As it relates to density, the proposal, uh, has remained the same, uh, but the, there's not a consensus on density. There is a consensus that there should not be tall buildings along 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue, so we eliminated the 16-story building and on three of the other blocks, we reduced heights to address that community input.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you. When did you first approach HPD about a subsidy for, to have more affordable units in your project?

PARTNER MARTIN: I don't recall specifically, but it probably was the spring.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Of this year?

PARTNER MARTIN: Of this year. Maybe it was earlier, but I, I'm not recalling specifically.

MR. DUVAL: And to be clear, Jay, our conversations with HPD started initially, um, you know, around our MIH Options, too, so there's multiple conversations about multiple pieces. It's not necessarily 100% related to the 426.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Yes. So, since this is going to be a public-private partnership with HPD and not going through a typical RFP process, will you commit to, if you are awarded the HPD subsidy, are you committed to going back to the Community Board since there won't be a community visioning process, but at least to go back, um, before the loan, to say any sort of feedback on the HPD subsidy site?

PARTNER MARTIN: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you.

PARTNER MARTIN: And, and I just would reiterate that the opportunity for HPD to build housing in this particular Community Board, uh, on land that's, that's quite expensive, is something that is meaningful, um, and, and we believe will make a difference for the community.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: For the proposal that you've presented, uh, a majority remains still at market rate for the apartments. What are the expected rents for market rate units in the development? And can you break that down by the number of units as well?

PARTNER MARTIN: Sure, uh, so we performed as a part of our, um, uh, FEIS, an analysis of buildings built since 2010, so basically new construction

buildings in this area, uh, that sort of reflect what the market is, and studios are roughly \$2,400, one bedrooms roughly \$3,000, uh, two bedrooms, roughly \$4,000, and three bedrooms roughly \$5,000. And we are, again, taking 40% of the housing in this project off the table and dedicating it to much lower rent, so taking as an example 30% AMI units, a studio will be \$514, a one bedroom will be \$652. A two bedroom will be \$770 a month and a three bedroom will be \$878 a month. What we have proposed is 500 of those apartments, those new apartments, at, all at monthly rents below \$1,000.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: The current immediate project area as well as the secondary displacement area is composed of mostly inter, by multi-generational immigrant families. How did you come to create your scenario that we currently have with the HPD subsidies and for market rate of what the unit breakdowns are going to be? Why is there such a low number of three-bedroom apartments and subsequently of two-bedroom apartments?

PARTNER MARTIN: So, 40% of the project is either two bedroom or three bedroom. We actually did, you know, created that unit mix because we wanted to

address the need for family sized housing, especially family sized, uh, affordable housing. And I just would like to note, my wife is a immigrant and, uh, so I am very sensitive to, uh, the concerns that you have, uh, Council Member Won, about the issues of recent immigrants.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Uh, my final question for affordability is would you consider increasing proportions of apartments with HPD as well as your privately financed for subsidy and for market rate to reach the goals that the community has asked for in terms of affordability?

PARTNER MARTIN: Uh, so, our objective is to have this rezoning approved in a form that we can actually build the project. And we are aligned with you on the desire to maximize affordability as far as we can push it and still ensure that the project can be built. We believe that figure is 40% of the project. Um, as it, as it relates to the portion that's privately financed, we are happy if you wish, to go to MIH Option 2 and privately finance 30% of the project and then have the remaining 10%, uh, in the public-private partnership with the City.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Okay. So, you're answer in short for the public record, is no.

PARTNER MARTIN: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you. I do not have any more questions, so we can move to testimony.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much, Council Member Won. There being no further question, the applicant panel is excused. Counsel, are there any members of the public who wish to testify on the Innovation QNS proposal in person or remotely?

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Chair, we do have quite a few members of the public here to testify. Um, I know all of you have been patiently waiting. So, um, I'm going to make an announcement and we're going to get to the testimony. And we're going to try to get to as many of you here in Chambers first, um, and then we're going to go also some remote testimony.

So, for members of the public here to testify, please note that witnesses will generally be called in panels of four. If you are a member of the public signed up to testify on the proposal, please stand by when you hear your name being called and prepare speak when the Chair or I say that you can speak. So,

when we, we'll start announcing the panel so that you guys can join us up here, uh, where the applicant was.

Um, please note that once all panelists in your group have completed their testimony, you will be removed from the meeting, or in this case, you will be seated, um, you will be removed to a meeting, um, as a group, and the next group of speaker will be introduced. Once removed, participants may continue to view the livestream broadcast of this hearing on the Council website. Of course, that announcement is for those of you who are online. Chair, you can continue.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Counsel. Members of the public will be given two minutes to speak. Um, we have a lot of people today, so we're going to be sticking to the two minutes. Uh, please do not begin until the Sergeant at Arms has started the clock. Uh, the first panel we'll call, just give me one second.

The first panel we're going to call in person is Queens Borough President Donovan Richards. You may begin.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And let me first acknowledge, uh, the Committee. It feels



different being on this side of the table, uh, being that I used to sit in your chair. So, congratulations on becoming the Chairman of this Committee. Of course, the Council Members Abreu, Bottcher, Carr, Hanks, Louis, Moya, and Schulman, and of course, I want to acknowledge, uh, all of the work that Council Member Won has done, uh, at this moment. It's great to see my little sister Council Member Williams here as well.

Uh, my name is Donovan Richards and I have the distinct and great honor of representing the Borough of Queens. I'd like to thank the Committee, uh, the Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises for this opportunity to testify on the Innovation QNS ULURP application.

You know, I, I had a lot of testimony written, but I think the presentation showed you everything you needed to see. We are in the midst of a housing crisis in Queens County. And I'll be damned if we're going to settle on parking lots and (INAUDIBLE) lots in Queens County during a housing crisis. Let me clear, to get to my approval, I told the development team and I know I took no prisoners on them, that I wanted 50% of the total project to be affordable with

500 units set aside at 30% of the A, of the Average Median Income, or AMI. Right now, what you see at this site is all parking lots, uh, for those who don't know these sites. It's parking lots. Folks need housings.

We, we're talking about migrants who are coming and 5,000 of our brothers and sisters have come into Queens County. This week alone I've gotten three shelter notifications and where are they putting the shelters? In Jamaica, Queens. We want to ensure that we are building permanently affordable housing for residents in every neighborhood in Queens. And as I sat in your chair, Mr. Chairman, there's no one who built more affordable housing in Queens than I, 10,000 units alone in the Rockaways.

Uh, at the time of negotiations, I did not get the commitment that I wanted and therefore, I disapproved the application. It was not an easy decision. I worked extremely hard with Council Member Won on my decision and we arrived at the conclusion that we should push for 50%. There's a new number, 55% out there, but at the end of the day, as you know sitting in your chair, everything's a negotiation. The developers are building a project of great scale

with good jobs. There's a lot of infrastructure needs as we see on the site. There's a lot of community benefits, which they did get right.

What they did wrong, however, was as, as I've said to them privately, and I will say it publicly, is the engagement, the public engagement could have been much better. It could have been more robust. Uh, in our, in Queens, we represent 190 countries, 350 languages and dialects spoken. So, there, so, Council Member Won was totally correct in that observation and so was the community. But we have to move forward now.

Uh, over the last few months, I'm proud to say that we did get to this 40% number and it's no accident that the administration is at the table. Uh, we pushed City Hall to put subsidy into this project. Why? Because communities like Western Queens have historically not seen subsidy put in their communities. Everything that has been built over the course of the last decade has been bare minimum MIH.

And I've been clear to developers that when they come to Queens County, we are setting the bar high. And the, the floor will be MIH. The ceiling will not be MIH as we move forward. And this project is a

clear and prime example of that. This is a historic moment where normally you would see City Hall putting subsidy into communities like Far Rockaway, Jamaica over and over and over again, but never entertaining communities like Long Island City, never entertaining communities like Astoria. And that is going to change on our watch.

So, this 40% is nothing to sneeze at. For those who say it's just 500 units of 30% AMI, well, you go into the shelter system and go speak to my folks in the shelter system who need a unit. You go speak to the migrants. Because guess what? Every day at my desk and on my watch, I have to go speak to those individuals who are looking for permanent housing. So, no one should sneeze at 500 units of 30% AMI as if it is nothing. We can always do more.

I support the Council Woman in her push and the community for more, but at the end of the day, the rubber has to meet the road. We have to make a decision. We are in a state of emergency, my friends. Um, I will end in also saying that some other things in closing. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for giving me more time. Um, I acknowledge that being in

your chair, uh, that we also negotiated some other things in lieu of the affordability.

We negotiated commitments for discounted rents to small businesses within the development. We negotiated for a community development fund that would support local nonprofits and CBOs throughout Community Board 1. We negotiated for a community advisory board that would act as a watchdog and sounding board to meet on a quarterly basis and ensure that the non-profit space, local hiring open space, and other amenities are on track as well, uh, to be, that they're, all of those commitments are honored.

We negotiated for a minimum of 30% local hiring from Community Board 1 and 30% MWBE, uh, uh, for contractors with a reporting mechanism because it's not just about trusting. It's about verifying. We also negotiated for robust culturally and competent outreach to fill the 50% set aside units for Community Board 1 residents through the HPD housing lottery and perhaps some of the organizations who I, who I have, have no objections or, or challenges with. I agree that we need to push for more. But perhaps, CAAAV and some of these organizations can be

at the table to help us orchestrate the lottery process so we can, can ensure that our immigrant communities are getting into this project.

In closing, I look forward to working with both the development team and the City to make sure other environmental factors are properly addressed. You heard them mention geothermal. That was my idea to, to the developers. I did the first geothermal and the largest geothermal affordable housing in the City and country in Far Rockaway. So, people can look that up and Google it and find out about that. That's how we got to this conversation.

We also look forward to working with the developers on subway crowd and pedestrian crossing and bike ways and other community benefits such as libraries and childcare centers in which you heard them eloquently speak on.

In closing, I feel I must remind folks once again that we are in a state of a housing emergency right now. Between 2020 and '21, approximately 200,000 Queens residents applied for that same HPD housing lottery with the majority of them earning extremely low to low-income wages. Only 10% of those Queens

residents were invited to confirm their eligibility for available units.

According to a 2022 report, the average rental price for a two-bedroom home in Astoria is \$3,425, up \$200 since June and about \$800 more than any other nearby Queens neighborhood. Simply, it's a question of supply and demand, my friends. Every housing expert is saying the same thing. If you don't have enough supply, that drives up, drives up the rents. Rents do not go down.

As I speak, hundreds of asylum seekers are stepping off buses in, in the Port Authority. They deserve better than to wait indefinitely in a shelter or a tent as we pretend that talking about affordability is more than actually building it.

To say no to Innovation QNS at this point, and I'm not saying that the Council should not negotiate more, but that's within your role. But to say no to this scale of level of affordability that we have negotiated would be devastating and quite frankly, irresponsible. I ask the Subcommittee to vote, uh, yes on this project as you continue in your, your negotiations. But the answer has to be to get to a yes. With that being said, Mr. Chairman, I'm heading

back to Queens. God bless you all. Let's get to a yes. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Uh, Borough President, one second, one second, one second. Um, excuse, excuse me, excuse me, excuse me everyone.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: And the people booing have homes.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Excuse me, everyone. Excuse me. Please.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: They have homes. Don't, we're.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: No, no, no problem, Borough President.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: We're here to fight for people who don't.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: With all due respect, everybody, please, please, please.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Shhh. Thank you. Thank you, everyone. Um, Council Member Won has a question for this panel.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Yeah, thank you so much Borough President Richards. You know how much I value your partnership with us and Queens. I do want to



push back with all due respect, but we can't oversimplify supply and demand and believe that trickle down economy is going to bring affordable housing for working class people. Because if that was the answer, since Bloomberg and DeBlasio, when we built more than 25,000 units in Long Island City, we would see a difference in rent, instead of 45% increases in that.

So, I just want to make sure that we're saying that we can't, we can't, when we talk about macroeconomics, we have to acknowledge that the, the markets are leveled and we're talking about a completely different subset in a market when we talk about luxury apartments and affordable units, which I know that you and I are aligned on. So, I just wanted to make that clarity.

My question for you today is, in your very own recommendation as my fellow Queens, Queens affordable housing advocate that you always have been, your application, you had said, word for word, quote, "the applicant must commit to 50% of their residential floor area become permanently affordable as well as expanding the lowest affordable income band to our individual families at 30% AMI."

So, why did you feel that 50% is no longer essential to stabilizing our neighborhood? Because I would, I know that our community, um, really appreciated your harsh, um, hard stand with us with a no with conditions, but I also hear you, that we want to get to a yes, and we want to work with the community to get there as well as the developers. So, please.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: So, and I appreciate, uh, uh, your explanation and all of the facts you laid out there. And I, and I just want to start with the premise of something you started, uh, when you testified earlier. You said you approved 800 units of housing, uh, which I presume were market and out of those 800, 200 were affordable, correct? So that, it means, you approved 25% affordable within your time span right here, uh, as the Council Member. This project has 40% affordable attached to it.

And let me also add, we didn't arrive at this 40% number because I, I, you see, I am the Borough President of this Borough, and I am an, I, I, I am an integral person. And you and I spoke on 40%. You agreed on the 40% number and if somebody wants me to put it on the record, I can clearly do it right now,

but of course, when you are negotiating a housing deal, you don't negotiate down. You would put 60%. You can put 50% knowing that you'll get to, god willing, a sweet spot.

When a Borough President normally does an application or does a zoning application and has to give an approval as you know or, I know you're new here, uh, normally the Borough President wouldn't get everything he wants up front. Normally, they would leave a little bit of skin on the bone for the Council to go further. So, uh, so, my recommendation was 50%. Um, we got to 40% which I think is an outstanding number. You just approved a project up the block, Halletts Point, for 30%. So, why wouldn't we approve a project.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: That was not my project.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: The City Council just approved the project at Halletts Point and which I believe every Council Member on this stand voted yes for, so why would we not go with a 40% project if we just approved a 30% project? And not only the difference between that project, it's a mere 200 something odd units of housing which is important of affordable, but on this project, we're talking 500

units of 30% AMI, 1,100 total units with a different scale, uh.

As the first person to do the SARA program in Queens, Far Rockaway was the first place to have the SARA, um, program, so I can definitely, I definitely understand the mechanics of the different programs that they're speaking of and especially in my former capacity as the Zoning and Franchises Chair. So, yes, the Sara and mix and match and ELLA programs are all great programs that can get some of our formerly homeless folks into housing and people who really do need affordable housing as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: May I respond because I have another question? So, again, I deeply respect all the fighting that you have done with us and for our City. For our conversation that you want to put on the record, as I have said publicly on the record, 40% affordability would be great if it came from the private developers. And if they want to, if we're able to get the 15% from the City, that would be amazing. But right now, that is not where our conversations stand. Hopefully, a week from now or a month from now, you and I can both celebrate getting 15%. But I also want to share that on August 20<sup>th</sup>,

our last conversation was developers came back with 40% AMI commitment. We left off at 275 at 30% AMI, et cetera. You can push them more for 30% more units and probably secure more. Talk later.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: Right. And you got to 500.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: So, so, we, we are.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: After that conversation.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Both in agreement.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: I agree, we're aligned.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: That we want to continue to push, as you said, leaving more fat on the bones.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: So, you have done an amazing job advocating and I am doing my job advocating and continuing on, especially because we have an immigrant crisis and we know that those asylum seekers and refugees will never even qualify for these affordable units.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: And I, and I just want to put on the record that I absolutely support your efforts in getting more. I would never say, uh, don't push for more. But at the end of the day, uh, no can't be an option here.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: So, we will continue to push and hopefully we can all celebrate in a few weeks from now. And hopefully we can get to a place that the community is in agreement with, in addition to all of our friends in labor as well as our developers. Thank you so much.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: I have the utmost confidence in you and the City Council that we will arrive at a yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you so much, Borough President Richards.

PRESIDENT RICHARDS: Because Queens is not going to be the Borough of truck depots. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Queens Borough President. Thank you, Council Member Won. Uh, this applicant panel is now excused. Please, please, please, please, please go back to the thumbs up and thumbs down. Thank you, everyone. Thumbs up, thumbs down. That's all we want to hear today. Alright?

The next applicant panel we're going to call is online. We have Assembly Member Jessica González-Rojas and. Okay. Alright. We're going to call the Assembly Member, uh, first, and then we're going go,

uh, to everyone that's here. Okay. Assembly Member Rojas?

ASSEMBLY MEMBER GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: Hi, everyone. Can, uh, I'm trying to turn my video on. Can my video be turned on? It's not letting me do so. Alright. Well, I'll, I'll, uh, make my remarks here. Um, there we go. Alright. Hi, everyone. Good morning, Chairperson Riley, uh, Members of the Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises. I am Assembly Member Jessica González-Rojas and I testify today to urge you and the Council to vote no on the current proposal for Innovation QNS.

As public servants, we were elected by our constituents to represent their needs. It is with this in mind, that I urge you today to vote no against the Innovation QNS project as, as it stands right now. Next year, I will represent part of Astoria and the residents of Astoria have made it crystal clear that they oppose this project. Hundreds have shown up to Community Board meetings, have protested, have signed petitions against, and I'm asking for the Community Board, Borough President, and this Council to oppose this project in its current form.

I, too, care deeply about increasing our affordable housing stock. I want to prevent evictions. I want every single New Yorker to go to bed at night in a dignified home. But 25% of affordable units offered by the developers is simply not enough. There's nothing innovative about the bare minimum. 50 or 55% is innovative. This is a working class, immigrant community. We do not solve the housing crisis with market rate luxury condos. There is a reason why these developers cannot, there is no reason why these developers cannot commit to that amount of affordable units without the taxpayer subsidies. Again, subsidies on top of that would be amazing. Um, but we believe that they can, we can get them, uh, to at least 50, 40%, um, with additional subsidies.

Um, local residents and community organizations such as CAAAV, uh, Woodside on the Move, the New York, uh, Muslim Organizing Collective, and Astoria's Not For Sale have made their pleas known. I know that they are in the room and so many of our residents in the room. It is time for you to decide. I stand with Council Member Won.

SERGEANT AT ARMS 2: Time is expired.



ASSEMBLY MEMBER GONZÁLEZ-ROJAS: And my colleague, Assembly Member Mamdani. Please stand with them, too, and vote no on Innovation QNS as it stands right now. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Assembly Member. Uh, the next panel we're going to call up is Pilar DeJesus and please excuse me if I butcher anyone's names. Uh, Maria Laris (SP?), Doreen Mohammed, or Poreen Mohammed, Popeen Mohammed. Doreen, sorry Doreen. Um, and Jeremy Estrada. So, we have Jeremy Estrada, Doreen Mohammed, Maria Laris, and Pilar DeJesus.

The next panel I will call up, so you can just get ready, is Jerrell (SP?) McKey (SP?), Robert Winn (SP?), Cassan (SP?) Allah, and I can't read the first name, but the middle initial is a P and the last name is Montago. Okay.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: I also want to note that while we are waiting for people to set up, if any of you will be needing assistance from an interpreter, just please let us know so that we can arrange for that as we, um, start setting everyone up. I think some of you have, um, indicated that in the slips, but if not, it's okay if you just let us

know before you testify if you need the assistance of an interpreter.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay. Um, so we're going to begin with Pilar DeJesus. Pilar, you may begin.

VICE PRESIDENT DEJESUS: Hi. Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you Council Members and everyone who's here taking this time cause it's going to be a long day, it seems. Um, my name is Pilar DeJesus. I wear a couple of different hats, not literally, but, um, I am a, I am a Latina, born and raised in El Barrio, the Ayala District. I am also Vice President of East Harlem Preservation, and I am also the Tenant, um, Senior Advocacy Coordinator at TakeRoot Justice. But I'm mostly here just speaking for myself as a person of color who's been in a district that has been rezoned and have fought it as an advocate.

Um, I'd just like to say to BedRock and a lot of the agencies that I hear in favor of rezoning. I'd like to say, in my almost 10 years of experience of working with tenants and working with the community members, your plans to do not work. And it's unfortunate that our government, even us sometimes, get caught up in these words. You kind of create this illusion with the word affordable. And I know that

has to do with law and, and word lingos, but it's not real.

And I also would like for us to start thinking about outside of the many issues you're going to hear why this a problem. I don't know that much about environment or islands, but I'm starting to become concerned about our soil, our water, and our air quality because of all the over-development that's been happening, especially since DeBlasio took place and especially this goal to, to handle the homeless crisis, which the numbers will show, it's not working. There's still hundreds of thousands of homeless people.

There is, we're in court with the court, the court can't even handle the eviction cases that are being brought in front of us. We got homeless people that are not being counted and yet, there are so many development, and I'm going to end with one more thing.

There's so much, these developments. And in my community, a lot of them are vacant. We've had people who lost their jobs during COVID. So, at the end of the day I think you're harming not only the people that have built this community, lived in the

community, but the actual land. And you're disrespecting the land that, the earth. We need the green. We need the soil. I want the legislators to remember how important our soil is to us.

Not only the water sewers that you, you say that you're going to help. What about the air quality? In my neighborhood there's constant buildings. It's, it's just, it's a problem. And I'd rather that land go to the people and let the people decide how or what they want to do with it. And then you give them the money to do it. You don't need to be the one in charge.

And I'll end there because I know there's a lot of folks here. But I have so much more to say, but my bigger thing is, this is a serious environmental issue and it's a mental health issue. It's a crisis actually. If you think the pandemic is bad, what do you think you have going now? We have. Lots of, lots of homeless. This is why you see the mental health at the place it is.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank, thank you, Pilar. And we'll take the rest of your testimony online. And is, I'm only cutting you off because we have a lot of people and I just want to be respectful of everyone's

time. Thank you. Uh, the next one we'll have is Maria Laris. Did I pronounce that right? Thank you. Go ahead, Maria. Alright. Go ahead.

MS. LARIS: Can you, you can hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yeah, we can hear you, Maria.

MS. LARIS: Okay. Thank you, City Council, for hearing everyone out today. My name is Maris Laris. I am a retired nurse, New York Professional Nursing Union nurse, and live down the street from the proposed development, and came today at the urging of my school age child who is also very concerned about the future of our neighborhood in Astoria. No one is against progress. That's not what this is about.

We see on the news everyday housing shortages, homeless shelters almost full, thousands of asylum seekers pouring into New York with nowhere to stay. We get it. The pressure you are all facing to do something as fast as possible is enormous. But the devil is in the details. Once you vote yes, it's hard to enforce and clarify everything afterwards.

Again, I know the pressure you're all facing is enormous to do something. I get it. But approving more high rent luxury towers will not help. It will hurt. If you really want to help solve the New York

City housing shortage for the majority of New Yorkers, you have the power right now to make any further approvals contingent on greater guarantees of affordable housing with more realistic income levels than what Innovation QNS is currently proposing.

Many of us remember attending informational meetings years ago, excited about some of the new buildings going up in the area and the possibility of living there. Glossy brochures were given out, but as the presentation went on, we realized that the rents and income levels for what was called affordable was actually far above what most area residents were paying. Rents everywhere went up. So, forgive us for being a little wary. New York City has seen this movie before.

Buildings like what Innovation QNS is proposing are really for Manhattanites, paying \$5,000 a month who will gladly come to Queens to pay \$4,000 a month. Again, figures way beyond what the average New Yorker can pay. Do we really want to drive out more people? And Innovation QNS, we know you want to feel more welcomed and supported, okay. We appreciate, so many of us appreciate already. We do love and need the Kaufman Movie Theater, the Museum of the Moving

Image, and all you have already brought to this neighborhood.

Some developments in Astoria have tweaked their original plans to allow much more truly affordable housing than what is currently stated. You can, too, and still do well, and there still be jobs for fellow union members who I see here.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank, thank you, Maria.

MS. LARIS: Council, please without more solid enforceable agreements, you must vote no on the proposal as it stands. You can lead New York City development the right way. You have the power.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Maria.

MS. LARIS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Next, we will have Doreen Mohammed.

DIRECTOR MOHAMMED: Hello, everyone. My name is Doreen Mohammed. I am on Queens Community Board 1. I'm also a proud member of Astoria Not For Sale. Um, if President Donovan Richards got to speak longer than the allotted time, we all deserve that chance. And I want to debunk a lot of the false narrative that he portrayed. I think that's important.

So, for context, NYC has like a 12.5% vacancy rate. We have 62,000 plus rent stabilized units being kept off the market. Most of these migrants, uh, as someone that's first generation American, my parents are immigrants from Bangladesh, like, they can't afford \$3,000 closet size studios, \$4,000 one bedrooms. Most of these apartments in Innovation QNS are not made to be family friendly. It is extremely bad faith to portray anything as that and to weaponize the refugee crisis in New York City right now. It costs four times more to house people in shelters than to give them actual housing. So, let's just put that out there.

Also, like, 70% of New Yorkers make under \$60K or less. Like, we can't afford \$4,000 apartments. Like, just, let's just put that out there. Also, they have, Innovation QNS has not committed to 40% affordability. The 15% would have to be subsidized by the government which has already been made clear that HPD has not committed to that.

And for billionaire developers, there's no reason we should be accepting anything less than 100% deeply affordable housing at 30% AMI rents and less. This area is slated on the NYC Equitable Data Development



Tool as 50% very low to low income. People are working class. There is an intermediate to high risk of displacement.

Luxury market rate housing will not solve the housing crisis in New York City. We need a moratorium on luxury market rate units. We need deeply affordable housing. We need public housing. We need community land trusts and community-controlled housing, not Innovation QNS. They have acted in bad faith. They have blocked me on Twitter in the past for calling out their stuff. This is the kind of decorum that we're talking about from a Community Board Member. They went back and forth with the Land Use Committee about 12 times. Like, they do not operate in good faith and that's why we voted no on the Community Board. It was 24 to eight, you know, and like, we just really don't need this type of project.

There is a pressure for the infrastructure there with the MTA subways. Like, you know, you would need to put, an influx of 7,000 residents, you need add an additional two trains during rush hour. The MTA has said maybe they can add one. Obviously, this project is not meeting the needs of the community. There's

been so many opposition. We've had, like, 3,000 plus people sign against this, against their 800. We've had 20,000 plus people send emails and organize around this. We just had press conference that had a big group of community members, so many Bangladeshi immigrants and other working-class folks speaking against this.

We've seen the rent of DESI BBQ and other working class business skyrocket from like \$6,000 to \$4,000 based on the speculation of Innovation QNS alone. This is not what our community needs. We, I urge you to vote no and to reject this rezoning, Innovation QNS, as well as any other luxury, market rate rezonings. It's not what we need. And if you want any of our follow up or discussions, you can reach out to me. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: I didn't cut you off. You good? Alright. Next one we have is Jeremy Estrada. Jeremy, go ahead.

MR. ESTRADA: Hello, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Jeremy Estrada. I am not a union member, and I am not a politician, but I am someone who lives in Astoria who will most likely be affected by this. I was displaced three times, before I say this, so

anyways. The (INAUDIBLE) me are outstanding and it happens right in our back yard.

It has me questioning a few things that unfortunately, I already know the answer to. I know that the people in our community will not be able to afford these. The average person only makes \$20,000 to \$30,000. These buildings that are going up for us, they're going to be for those who do not represent our community. They are going to be for elitists that make \$100,000 plus and can afford \$4,000 rents. The percentage for accountability, affordability, forgive me, is incredibly low. Even then, the luxury buildings that are going up are not going to be remotely affordable. \$4,000 for, I believe it's a one or two bedroom, forgive me, because numbers are scrambled in my head, is not affordable, not even for normal people like me and you.

So, please, I humbly ask for you guys to vote not and please to remember, in general, Astoria is not for sale. I heard that this would be helpful for those who are homeless, and I can ensure that it cannot because I have family and friends that were homeless and thankfully for Congresswoman Lydia Vazquez in the '90s, they found help and shelter. But

it was a very tough road for them. I urge you, please vote no.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Jeremy. Do you have any questions for this panel? Okay. This panel is excused. Thank you so much. Uh, the next panel is Cassan Allah, Robert Winn, Jerrell McKey, and Lyvia (SP?) Montago. I'm so sorry if I mess your name up. The, the following panel that we will be calling is Roque Rodriguez, Joseph Bogovich (SP?), Rena Grossman, and Akhtar (SP?) Hassam (SP?).

Okay. Um, Lyvia, you can start. How do you pronounce your name? I'm sorry. Lyvia. Alright. Go ahead, go ahead.

MS. MONTAGO: Okay. (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE).

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: One, one second, one second.

MS. MONTAGO: Oh, you need it in English (INAUDIBLE)? I have English, too.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Lyvia, you want to, uh, deliver your testimony en espanol, correct?

MS. MONTAGO: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay.

MS. MONTAGO: I have it in English, too.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Alright. So,  
(SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE). So, we need the  
Spanish interpreter.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Just one second. Thank you.

MS. MONTAGO: I have it here in English.

INTERPRETOR: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE).

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE).

INTERPRETOR: Uh, she says.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Alright.

INTERPRETOR: That she has her testimony in  
English written down, uh.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Lyvia, it's okay.  
(SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, however you want to do  
it.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: (SPEAKING IN  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MS. MONTAGO: Okay, okay.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: So, if you have,  
if you want to deliver your testimony in Spanish, you  
just need to make small pauses for him to translate  
into English.

MS. MONTAGO: Okay.

INTERPRETOR: She would, she would like to do it in Spanish to represent the community.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Perfect, yeah. You can do it in Spanish, just give pauses for him to say it. And you'll have four minutes cause you're using the help of an interpreter.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay, can, um, the gentleman next to you, one, one second. The gentleman, can you just slide your microphone over real quick so he can use both of them. Thank you.

INTERPRETER: Thank you very much.

MS. MONTAGO: Okay. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: You may begin.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Okay.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Uh, good morning, and thank you for this opportunity.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: My name is Lyvia Montago.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I am a member of Local 79 and I live in District 26 in Queens.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I am here to support the union jobs in Innovation QNS.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I am originally from Columbia.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: When I moved to Queens, initially I worked at several restaurants and offices.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Even though I had a license to work in informatics, it was very difficult for me to find a stable job.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: At the time, my English wasn't very good.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: When my daughter was born, I had the necessity to find different income, better income and there weren't enough jobs available, uh, that were able to hire me and to keep the cover, the medical coverage. It was very difficult.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Finally, I had an opportunity with Local 79.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: It didn't matter where I come or my language. They made me comfortable in an industry with a majority of men.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: They taught me everything I needed to do the job.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I wasn't paid less than anybody else and I was treated as equal.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Local 79 is my family and I have been a member for the past 14 years.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: We need to take care of, uh, the laboring class in our community.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Especially immigrant, uh, workers that work in construction.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: We need to make sure that they go back home in, uh, good health and, uh, that they



have, um, sorry. Uh, disculpe? And that they have good jobs in the community.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Projects like Innovation QNS are going to support the workers in my community.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: My neighbors need the same opportunity that I had with Local 79.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Sometimes I hear that people who support a project are against the community, but that is not the truth.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I am the community, too.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: The workers are the community.

MS. MONTAGO: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Please respect my opinion the same way you respect others' opinions.

MS. MONTAGO: Gracias.

INTERPRETER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The next one will, uh, applicant that we'll call up is Cassan Allah. Excuse me, testimony.

MR. ALLAH: Cassan Allah.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Cassan, sorry.

MR. ALLAH: Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Cassan Allah. I'm a proud laborers Local 79 member. I grew up in Astoria Houses and I currently reside in Ravenswood House. I feel this would be a great project because I grew up in NYCHA, which is all about affordable housing. 40% affordable housing would be great in Astoria because nobody could afford to live in Astoria. I know a lot of people from Astoria Houses, Ravenswood, Queens Bridge, currently in shelters would love to come back home. They can't. a lot of them are in Local 79 like me. We work in the construction field. So much construction going on in Astoria, Long Island City, they don't look like me, because they're non-union.

This is unprecedented where a big developer like this is going to hire union workers, 30% coming from the community. That's unprecedented. I would love to work in my neighborhood, build that neighborhood, build them buildings, and then have the opportunity to actually live in it cause I could afford it. So, I definitely support Innovation QNS and I'm here to

represent from Local 79 and those that come from, grew up with me in public housing in NYCHA, Astoria Houses, Ravenswood Houses. I'm here to support you all. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next, we'll call up Robert Winn.

MR. WINN: Good afternoon. My name is Robert Winn. I'm currently a Woodside resident and a Local 79 member. I'm here to support Innovation QNS. Okay. I'm going to tell you a little bit about myself. I grew up in Woodside Queens. I grew up in housing, in the housing project and I just want you to know that the area that you're developing right now that Innovation wants to develop, that was one of my first jobs. But I started there as a milk helper in the milk plant that was there. Okay. It was Queens Borough Farms that was there. There was at least 10 milk companies there, alright. And on the property that Innovation wants to develop. So, that was one of my first jobs.

Then I became a milk man as a union milk man because my father was pro union. So, I've had union jobs. I've been in three, four, maybe five unions in my lifetime. And I have ended up in Local 79 which is one of the best in my life. Okay. Local 79 has

changed my life so that's why I advocate, in my neighborhood, union jobs for the guys who live there.

And if Innovation QNS, if this developer is willing to do this for the people in the neighborhood in Astoria, which, I live right, right down there. I used to have problems just walking to work. As a young man, walking, I used to walk from my house down to the milk company and I would have problems because of course, I'm, I didn't live right there and I was, of course, a different color. So, you know, we went through a lot of problems to get, just to get to work. Alright. That area now? They're going to change it. They're going to make it different for everyone, for all races, you know.

And, I mean, I really believe that with them bringing the union jobs and them building union, because you don't get a lot of developers that do that, alright, and they're willing to hire from the neighborhood, so yes, Innovation QNS, we should push for that to go through.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next one we'll call up is Jerrell McKey.

MR. MCKEY: McKey, McKey.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: McKey, sorry about that.

MR. MCKEY: That's alright. No problem. Um, good evening. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Jerrell McKey. I'm a resident of Woodside Houses, a member of the Local 79. I'm here to express the support the Innovation QNS project which could create a lot of affordable housing and thousands, thousands of jobs for unioners in my community.

Growing up in Woodside Houses, I witnessed overcrowding of the apartment development. As a child, you don't realize why, but as an adult, you realize so many people live there because they have no choice or financial stability.

Um, you realize the overcrowding is a sign of hardship especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Um, I never used to think about the, the lack of, um, wages from the houses, I mean, from job wages in my community until I joined the union. Then I learned how important opportunity this is to change the lives of many young people and working families like mine.

79 gave me a chance and a career when nobody would. Innovation QNS can change and get a lot of young generation and career jobs on a path with lifelong benefits and get them in a driving path to become, uh, fully stable New Yorkers. This project

can get them off, get them off the streets and on job sites and fair wages and health benefits. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. I believe Council Member Won has a question for this panel.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: It's so good to see you all. Thank you so much for your time. It's good to see you, Robert. I just wanted to make a clarification. As you heard from the panel just before, from the developers, the only guarantee right now for affordability that we have is 25%. Right now, the extra 15 to get them to 40 is still in discussion.

So, I am with you. I want you to have union jobs. So, let's keep on fighting together for deeper affordability and your advocacy is really, really important to the developers to hear that from you, also, as working-class people that we fight for working class people to be part of this project holistically. And for Local 79, let's continue to fight and push for a project labor agreement, not open bidding, open shop, so that we can guarantee you those jobs, the same way we want to guarantee the affordable units. We are in this fight together, so thank you so much for your time.

MR. ALLAH: Thank you.

MR. WINN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The next panel we'll call up is Roque Rodriguez, oh, oh, I'm so sorry. One second, one second. We're going to go online real quick, but the next panel that's going to be up here is going to be Roque Rodriguez, Joseph, uh, Bogovich, Akhtar Hassam, and Rena Grossman. Just give us one second. We're going to online real quick. Uh, we're going to call up Congress Member Velázquez and Brian Romeo online. Congress Member Velázquez, you may begin.

CONGRESSWOMAN VELÁZQUEZ: Thank you. Thank you. Good afternoon, everyone, Chairman Riley, uh, Councilwoman Won and all the Members of the City Council. I want to, uh, be crystal clear. I am not against development, but pro sound and fair community development. I have seen too many broken promises. There are valid, meaningful concerns being raised by residents and community groups in Astoria about this Innovation QNS rezoning application.

What assurances do we have that the project will not further drive up rents and ultimately displace long-time community members in favor of accelerating gentrification? None. I have seen the effects of up-

zoning in my District, Inness (SP?) New York, Cypress Field, and elsewhere. I have had multiple conversations with community residents, activities, and stakeholders who are now struggling, and their views should not be cast aside and ignored in the interest of expediting an enormous, enormous private rezoning. We should be engaging the community and ensure any path forward is fair, transparent, inclusive, and equitable. That has not happened here.

We should also be clear, this rezoning application is not adequate in providing affordable housing, real affordable housing. I, and let me just say this to the previous, uh, previous panel, I hear you. We're all fighting for good paying jobs, but I am also fighting to have the kind of affordable housing that will allow residents.

SERGEANT AT ARMS 2: Time is expired.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: You may continue, uh, Congressman.

CONGRESSWOMAN VELÁZQUEZ: that will allow for public, uh, residents, uh, residents from public housing to be able to go and live in those developments.



So, Council Member Julie Won and other have called for at least 50 to 55 affordable housing as a minimum starting point. In response, there is an additional 15% affordable housing units now promised. But this 15% falls short and is misleading. Where is it coming from? It comes not from the pockets of the developers, but from the taxpayers. Why should public tax dollars be invested to make a private developer's project look better? (INAUDIBLE) misleads us here using our public tax dollars shorts us elsewhere. HPD subsidy can be more effectively used for 100% affordable housing in area projects on publicly owned land such as (INAUDIBLE) Bay nearby, (INAUDIBLE). The developer can do more than the minimum mandatory inclusionary housing they're offering.

Let's be clear, this rezoning proposal is not about maximizing affordable housing or jobs. It's about maximizing profits. What is innovative about marble and glass towers? The site is a mixed-use area with light industry including auto mechanics, food truck repair shops, machine shops, laundry services, food production for (INAUDIBLE), building materials and finishing companies from house suppliers to lumber and woodworkers. Just by listening to some of

the, uh, previous speakers, they may sound like no one lives here, there is no businesses here. That is not true. The people who work here are skilled and unskilled, local and new immigrants and rely on those local places to work. Where do they fit in the equation? Where will these workers go?

I recommend to the developers, please go back and work with local communities and elected officials on real planning for the area. The City should play a central role going forward and take a holistic view, broadly reexamining the economic environment and commit to a long-term that embraces real jobs and affordable housing and offers equitable economic opportunity for residents and area small businesses. Thank you for the opportunity, uh, to testify. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Congress Member. Uh, next person we're going to call up is Brian Romeo. Brian, you may begin.

MR. ROMEO: Uh, uh, okay. Sorry. This is Brian Romeo. Good afternoon, Chair Riley, Council Member Won, and Members of the Committee. I testify today to urge you and the Council to vote no against Innovation QNS, if we do not get to a real proposal

of affordability for as many New Yorkers as possible. As an Astoria for many years and someone whose family has been homeless due to high rents, I know the difference between having a home and not having a home.

This project is unlike any of its time, but despite its size, the developers have not given us any more details on the other units of affordability beyond the units they had said will be at 30% AMI. They have not provided us with income bracket or how much of the housing will be provided to older adults. For months, we discussed this project in Queens Community Board 1. We asked the developers to do more and provide us with more units. They did not. They say they may do so now, but only with tax, taxpayer subsidies. Additionally, while I appreciate our elected officials' goals, if we had an actual community engagement process from the start, we would probably have heard from the community itself that their goal is 50% to 75% affordability.

Here's what we know. We can and must do better. We all want union jobs, and we all want housing. But if this Council does not draw a line in the sand and show the real estate lobby that it will demand more

of them for New Yorkers, then they will always give us the bare minimum as New Yorkers are unable to live here.

CB1 heard from hundreds of our neighbors. It's why we voted no as a majority against this project. Our Borough President also voted no on this project, stating, and I quote, "for a development proposal this massive in scope, the commitments or lack thereof, on affordability just weren't good enough." That hasn't changed. This proposal is still not good enough in its current form.

Many of us do want to get to yes because we recognize our housing crisis. But this vote is about more than just Astoria. This vote will set a precedent. Will this Council stand with its colleagues and trust that they know what is best for their communities? We all want innovation, but there is nothing innovative about this proposal as it stands. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Brian. Come on, man, thumbs up. Alright. The next panel we're going to call in person is Rena Grossman, um, Akhtar Hassam, I'm so sorry if I'm messing up your name, uh,

Joseph Bogovich, and Roque Rodriguez. He's online now?

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Let us check. Give, give us just one second.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: The following panel that we're going to be calling so you can get ready is Seth Bornstein, Carl Osten, Adis Kolenovic, and Aaron Sanders. Um, we're going to start with Joseph Bogovich. I'm so sorry. You may begin, Joseph.

MR. BOGOVICH: Hello. Uh, Joseph Bogovich. I'm a, uh, actually a landlord in the area. So, uh, when we're talking about this project, we're actually talking about a very specific area. Uh, in terms of displacement, uh, uh, there are approximately about six families that will be displaced, uh, and, um, compensated in different ways. And probably about, not more than 30 workers that are currently working. Uh, a one, one story, um, uh, commercial buildings, if you will.

Uh, so what you have there is, um, it, it's not very pleasant looking place. It's, there's rats running around and there's garbage filing, uh, piling up if you, uh, walk through that area. Uh, so, um, and the other thing is, you know, how many people

here, you know, will take \$2 billion of their own money and, um, try to improve a place? Not many, right? Uh, so, so, so without, without \$2 billion, uh, at the worst-case scenario, you have 25, uh, percent, uh, of that, of the housing units will be, uh, affordable. And then we're talking an additional possible 15%. So, that's something, right? So, this is, from the investor point of view, this is not a slam dunk, you know, guarantee that they're going to make money and it's all going to be wonderful. You know, you are all assuming that, but that's not the case.

Um, the other thing is that the rents in the area, uh, are multi-dwelling families, uh, buildings, um, and those are all rent stabilized within a two-block radius of that, uh, two block radius from, from the development project. So, uh, so it's not necessarily true that, uh, the rents will be increased because they're rent stabilized.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Joseph. You can, uh, submit the rest of your testimony, uh, to us online. The next person I am going to call is Rena Grossman. Rena, you may begin.

MS. GROSSMAN: It's Rena.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: It's Rena.

MS. GROSSMAN: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Sorry, Rena.

MS. GROSSMAN: Hi, my name is Rena Grossman. I'm a native Queens resident and I've lived in Astoria for 14 years. I live with my partner, Fabian Fernandez, who turns 61 next week, who has lived in our apartment for 37 years. We are both disabled. It is really painful to sit here today. But I am here in solidarity with the people I love who make Queens what it is. This is our home.

Over 20 years, we have already felt the squeeze of change. We witnessed this in the small homes and apartment buildings being renovated or converted into bigger, more expensive rentals. We've witnessed our rent, our neighbors change from generational long residents to a single demographic, young. And none of them stick around. We feel it in the changing grocery stores and the cost of laundry. We can anticipate this and more pressure from property owners.

We already know what it's like to live in an apartment building that is empty because our landlord wants to sell. We know what it is like to be surveilled by cameras to prove that we are not

disabled so we could lose our housing protection. We know what it is like to experience a landlord illegally take the other units in our building out of stabilization, but not being able to organize at the risk of putting our own home in jeopardy.

This is no way to live. We survive and thrive in community. Yes, we need housing. We need intergenerational housing where we feel secure knowing that the cost of living won't displace us and that we can age in place with dignity. Make this possible.

Start by supporting the community that is already here. We know what it takes to take care of us. If you want innovation, look to CLTs and other models, look to participatory planning and democratic community ownership of those plans. We already have the model in our community and more. There are communities in Brooklyn who are working on urban agricultural programs and food production in order to fix broken systems.

Build housing and create opportunities for communities to build generational wealth. This isn't just about housing. This is about environmental and economic justice. You know that there are



alternatives to our current housing proposed by the developers. We already know how this goes when we rely on the same billionaires who have starved our City so we can't do our job. Please vote no in its current status.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Uh, the next person we'll have is Akhtar Hassam. Are you going to translate for him?

HASSAM SUPPORT: No.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: No, you're just, okay. Support? Okay.

MR. HASSAM: Hi, all the Councilmen and Queens Borough President. Thanks for here and I appreciate that. I came in this country 1992 since I'm in Astoria. And it is close to my workplace, like, I drive in Manhattan. But and I have a two daughter. Um, one is graduated. Another one is in Columbia. It's all of my work hard and is, this is a, in the, Astoria is a multi-cultural (INAUDIBLE), and there's so many Bangladeshi people living there, almost six to 10,000 and is very, and that is a big community, a nice community.

But now, what is going to be happen? Now, when I came in this country, I was in a apartment. It's

called, it was rent, \$800. Now, it's a one-bedroom apartment, \$3,000, \$2,000. So, how we going to afford and if that is a mechanic shop, all those gone. And how many people are going to be jobless? And those people have a family, kids, how they going to go? What they going to go? So, I am not supporting this Innovation of Queens. That's all I can say.

That's not for our middle class or working people (INAUDIBLE). We do not have the apartment there, they, they're not assuring how much housing we're going to get. I am 65 years old. If I walk, get out from there, after few years, few months, I'm going to homeless because of those kind of high (INAUDIBLE) building? I don't think so. So, I need justice. And I think it's not for all immigrants or the work, hard working people's project. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The next person we're going to call up is Roque Rodriguez who we have online right now. Roque, you may begin. You're not excused yet, Joseph. Joseph, you're not excused yet. Alright. Roque, you may begin. Roque, can you hear us? Okay. We'll come back to Roque. Um, if somebody's here that knows him, you can just text him. Oh, here we go. Go ahead, Mr. Rodriguez.

MR. RODRIGUEZ: My name is Roque Rodriguez. I am now a resident and a renter in Woodside and Sunny Side (INAUDIBLE) owned by two brick and mortar, uh, build, uh, businesses for about six years and I am here to urge the Council to vote no on Innovation QNS. Uh, the only thing innovative about Innovation QNS (INAUDIBLE) year after year. (INAUDIBLE).

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Mr. Rodriguez, you're coming in very. Mr. Rodriguez, we can barely hear you. Uh, do you want to try back again? Okay. We'll try again Mr. Rodriguez, uh, back again. Okay. Um, this panel is now excused. Thank you so much.

The next panel we're going to call up is Seth Bornstein, Carl Osten, Adis Kolenovic, and Aaron Sanders. Okay, um, we're going to mute Mr. Rodriguez and try to get him back, okay? Alright.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: And Chair, while they're setting up, I can make an announcement. I know some of you have asked cause they have to leave, but if you want to, if you need to leave and want to get a Zoom link, you can just go to our website, [www.council.nyc.gov/landuse](http://www.council.nyc.gov/landuse). And you can register so that you can get a Zoom link if you want to

participate online at your convenience while we have this hearing.

And as I said before, we can take your testimony. If you have to leave and want to submit it to us in writing, we'll take it and review it at [landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:landusetestimony@council.nyc.gov). Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Counsel. Uh, the first person to begin is Seth Bornstein.

DIRECTOR BORNSTEIN: Thank you. Uh, good afternoon. My name is Seth Bornstein. I'm the Director of the Queens Economic Development Corporation. I've been involved in neighbor development for, for over four decades, 1979. I believe Innovation QNS is an important project. Other speakers have discussed why, why they believe it's beneficial, so rather than repeat what has been said, I want to discuss something that happened four decades ago, which I think is a good illustration of how we could work together.

In 1979, my first project was to attract a quality drug store to Southeast Queens. That was there when nobody wanted to development in the Borough of Queens, especially minority neighborhoods. Working with community-based organizations, we

hatched to plan to assemble five plots of land, relocate tenants in subsid (SP?) housing, find a developer, engage an architect, and find local businesses including a drug store. The (INAUDIBLE) 15,000 square foot site that we envisioned. It took eight years. We were getting very close. The exception was we could not find a locally owned business. Only national chains would commit to the site. This caused a major schism in the community.

Once I had agreed to move ahead, the other side would not budge including the elected who would, who would, who was representing the area to agree to a crucial zoning change. We knew if no compromise was made, the project would die. With it, much needed services to help with local employment and new businesses that would pay taxes. After a very late-night session, I think in this room, a deal was struck finally. The project was opening two years later. The local economy had tanked, but we still opened the shopping center with a national drug store and just one locally based business, it was a compromise.

Despite the desire for all businesses to be local, the project was a resounding success. It took

vacant, unutilized pieces of land replaced it with needed services and gave local people jobs. And of course, the elected who was the most opposed to the development took full credit.

I know the scale of a small shopping center pales in comparison to Innovation QNS, but the concept is similar. Striking a compromise is the only way we can receive results. So, I support this project. It is an opportunity not to be squandered. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next person I'm going to call up is Carl Osten. Carl's not here? Is Carl online? Alright. We'll check in. Next person is Adis Kolenovic. Thank you. You can begin. You can press the button right there.

MR. KOLENOVIC: Hello. My name is Adis Kolenovic. Thank you, guys, for having me today. I am a native, an actual native of Astoria. I've been there almost 30 years, somewhere around 25 to be exact. Um, I went to PS 84, IS 141, William Cullen Bryant. There are a lot of people that are speaking for a neighborhood that I grew up in all my life and I don't recognize their faces. Um, I am for Innovation QNS and I'll explain why.

They bring up the term gentrification. Um, I am from immigrant parents. Uh, I came here five years old from Slovenia as a war refugee. I grew up in Astoria, movie theater on Steinway Street and 30<sup>th</sup> Avenue. That's how far back, the papaya hot dog place on Steinway and 30<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I'm a real native resident. My point being is Astoria is already gentrified. Pushing this development away does not save, uh, the neighborhood, uh. It's already gentrified.

So, I'll give you some addresses and you guys can write this down. 3077 Vernon Boulevard has one bedrooms up to \$4,900. You can StreetEasy that, streeteasy.com. check it out. They have two bedrooms up to \$6,800. This is live, active on StreetEasy right now. 2121 31<sup>st</sup> Street has sold one-bedroom apartments, it's called the Rowan for \$1 million. This is already closed and sold. They have sold two bedrooms for \$1.5 million. Ditmars in, uh, I believe 49<sup>th</sup> Street, I believe the address is 6904 Ditmars Boulevard. Listen to this. This is a brick, attached house, single family. It is on the market right now for \$3.5 million, a single-family house.

We are talking about pushing away a developer that's going to give 40% affordable housing? They're bringing 500 affordable units to Astoria. Astoria has only got 100 in the past, of deeply affordable, in the past eight years. This one project's going to bring 500.

So, I don't want to push this developer away. Me, as a native, I want them to come in. You guys can negotiate a number. They've been very generous. They're using their own money. And I think that they should be welcomed with open arms because in the last eight years, 100 affordable housing units, deeply affordable, have been brought to you by these developers.

So, if Innovation QNS leaves, you will be left with those developers that are building right now in Astoria and they're barely doing, uh, deeply affordable housing. So, don't push these guys away. Let them come in just work on a good number.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank, thank you. Next person we'll have is Aaron Sanders. Aaron, go ahead.

DIRECTOR SANDERS: Good afternoon, Chair Riley, Members of the Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises. My name is Aaron Sanders, and I am the Public Policy



Director at the Association for a Better New York.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of ABNY.

On August 10<sup>th</sup> this year, we delivered testimony to the City Planning Commission in support of this project. Today I stand in front of you to reiterate its importance. ABNY is a nonprofit organization representing community stakeholders including corporations, nonprofits, unions, government authorities, and educational, cultural, and health institutions dedicated to the advancement and support of New York City's people, communities, and businesses.

Our mission is to promote connections between the public and private sectors to make, to make New York a better place to live, visit, and work for all. As New York City strives to recover from the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for our City to rebound through job creation, the addition of affordable housing, and contributions to the City's (INAUDIBLE). This is particularly important as policy makers prioritize communities that have historically faced longstanding and systemic challenges of unemployment and housing

insecurity while addressing the changing needs of workers, residents, and businesses stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the height of the pandemic, unemployment rates for Astoria were alarmingly high. 30% of its residents were unemployed, many of whom were people of color. The Innovation QNS project will directly address these challenges. The multi-use development project will increase employment exponentially with an additional 5,400 jobs, ten times the number of jobs that are currently within a five-block radius.

Lastly, this development will support local businesses that are vitally important to the economic sustainability of the neighborhood. Many businesses were negatively impacted by the pandemic, particularly small minority and women owned businesses, and this development would generate additional support for Astoria businesses with a projected, uh, uh, revenue spending of \$50 million.

As Astoria pivots to a post-pandemic recovery, investments in the City's growth like Innovation QNS project is crucial for our neighborhood recovery. Uh, in the interest of time, I'll truncate my testimony and submit it online. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much. This panel is now excused. Thank you. The next panel we'll call up is Mark Suffman (SP?), Carolina Quarf (SP?), Karen Pavich, and Joanna Carpenter. Once again, we have Joanna Carpenter, Karen Pavich, Carolina Quarf, and Mark Suffman. Sorry if I butcher your name. The first one that can begin is Carolina Quarf.

CO-FOUNDER QUARF: Good afternoon. My name is Carolina Quarf. I'm a 16-year resident of Astoria, a proud union member, and a co-founder of Astoria Not For Sale. I urge you to vote no on Innovation QNS as it is being presented.

I live just four blocks from the proposed development site, and I know my community very well. Since the state (INAUDIBLE), the three census tracks on or adjacent to development sites show an average of over 24% of residents below the federal poverty line, which is based on annual income. It is significantly lower than our City's poverty line. And over 55% of residents are minorities. Building a five-block mega development that is a majority luxury in this community is an absolute affront to racial and housing justice.

Silverstein, BedRock, and now Kaufman, by virtue of their new real estate investment owners, are billion dollar companies, yet they won't offer more than the legally required affordable units without taxpayers footing the bill. It's deplorable. We need to stop letting developers make windfall profits off our backs. How is it that we would be the ones subsidizing their outsized profits, especially in housing, a literal human necessity?

We need the Members of the City Council to have the political courage and will to change the system. We need housing. We want housing. We want union jobs. But what we need in this part of Astoria, and really the rest of the City, is a development that is a majority affordable, not luxury.

Thank you Julie Won for your commendable courage for this fight and I'm going to add this cause I have the time. Too many electeds in our City, you need to get revenue money out of your campaign pockets and do the right thing for the residents of the City. Straight up.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Come on, we were doing so good with the thumbs, you all.

CO-FOUNDER QUARF: Sorry, I had to say it. It had to be said.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Alright.

CO-FOUNDER QUARF: It has to be said. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next, we're going to have Karen Povich. Karen's not here.

CO-FOUNDER QUARF: She would be online.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay. We'll, we'll call online. We're going to get to online. We're trying to get everybody in here. Uh, Joanna Carpenter.

MS. CARPENTER: Hi. Thank you so much for the time. I know it's been a long day. Um, I am Joanna Carpenter. I am an artist and a freelancer. I have lived in Astoria for over 13 years. Um, a decade of that was actually spent on 41<sup>st</sup> Street and 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue, so right adjacent to the proposed project.

Um, we do have dire housing and affordability issues that cannot and will not be solved by billionaire developers just plopping in shiny, homogenized high rises. Full stop. Um, I would actually invite the Council to consider the target market, the real target market for Innovation QNS, regardless of flashy buzz words being thrown around about amenities. Uh, without Council Member Won's

proposed minimum of 55% deeply affordable units, deeply being the key word, um, and yes, they absolutely should be built by local union labor, um, the real target market becomes those blessed people who are making over six figures annually, which cuts out the vast majority of this neighborhood that these people say that they're here to build for.

I agree that we are indeed in a housing crisis, but a project that takes a full decade to complete as was stated earlier, is not going to help the refugee emergency that we are currently facing. Um, so, I would love for us to just not capitalize on the plight of migrants as it stands right now and focus on the reason we're having this hearing.

Uh, the math just doesn't math. Our community of immigrants and artists and working families and small businesses deserve better. Without the commitment to the 55% minimum, um, I ask the Council to vote no on Innovation QNS. Thank you so much.

CHAIPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next, we're going to have Mark Suffman.

MR. SUFFMAN: Um, good day, um, Chair Riley, thank you, uh, Council Member Won, nice to see you, sort

of, um. My name is Mark Suffman. I reside in Astoria for about 22 years, and I am, I'm deaf blind.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Take your time.

MR. SUFFMAN: You must reject Innovation QNS because of the lack of accessibility. The Innovation QNS website is not accessible for screen readers. Um, Innovation QNS failed on two separate occasions to provide the speech to text service that I require. Card, real time speech and text translation. Um, Tracy, um, they've discriminated against me. And, uh, their outreach, they're discriminating against people who might have hearing or vision and mobility issues. Uh, they are not reaching out to our community.

It's very hard for people who are deaf blind who are trapped in our homes because of the City does not help us. You're looking the other way and tolerating discrimination against people who need assistance just to live independent lives life. It's disgraceful that this project goes forward, and it's built with a lack of accessibility features, built in.

I, the third event that finally had, uh, card available, and I ended up at a table talking to Chuck Berman of BedRock Real Estate Partners. Mr. Berman clearly has been involved in the real estate industry

for many, many years. This man asked me to explain to him what accessible means. That sort of ignorance is unacceptable in 2022.

New York City, you, the Council cannot look the other way. You're embracing discrimination as a matter of policy and it's wrong. And you need to tell them to start from square one, design an accessible website, make sure that they're making real efforts to reach out to the disabled communities. You know, like if we walked into this hearing right now, if I were deaf and needed ASL, what am I going to do? You know, you're not accommodating people like me and it's disgusting that you keep making decisions without taking this into consideration. It's, it's, it's just, you know, it's not effective. So, even once you look beyond the lack of accessibility and outreach, this project is completely, it's like planting a giant swastika in Jerusalem. This project is unaffordable. They're not making real concessions.

Uh, Kaufman Studios, you know, when the part is for, uh, Innovation QNS, they're owned by Square Mile (INAUDIBLE) which has 8 billion under assets. Silverstein Partners has 4 billion under assets. Why are we even considering offering subsidies to these



billionaires? These are sophisticated real estate entities. They do not deserve money from taxpayers. That money can be better spent helping the deaf blind with a co-navigator program so that we can live independently. We can participate in the City like everyone else. That's all we want to do is be treated with dignity and respect and the City just looks the other way.

Our Mayor, you know, I was at an event for (INAUDIBLE) on Friday and our Mayor discriminated against Commissioner Curry, and although she left the meeting, you know, she walked into the meeting and says, "Where are the interpreters?" The Mayor did have the interpreters. He did not take the time to understand our community to make the accommodation to allow us to focus on, you know, living, enjoying this wonderful City. So, please vote this no and send them back to square one. They need to develop these projects accessible. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Mark. Alright. This panel is now excused. Thank you so much. The next panel we're going to call up is John Tritt, Felix Figuerero (SP?), Tiara Williams, and Thomas Grech.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: And then I'll just make a brief announcement. For those of you in the Zoom with your hands up, we're going to get to you. We're trying to get to as many, many of you that are here in person first and we'll start calling on Zoom panels. So, we're going to have staff lower your hands, but we'll get to you as soon as we can.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: We'll begin first with John, John Tritt. John, you may begin.

DEPUTY POLITICAL DIRECTOR TRITT: Great, thanks. Good afternoon, Chair Riley, Council Member Won, Members of the Subcommittee. My name is John Tritt and I'm the Deputy Political Director at SEIU 32BJ, covering New York City and state. I am happy to be here, appearing before this Committee, once again, today to be speaking in strong support of the Innovation QNS project.

In addition to be, to being here representing our union, on a personal note until moving within the last year, I lived in Astoria for about 14 years. The vast majority of that time on 30<sup>th</sup> Street between 30<sup>th</sup> Ave and 30<sup>th</sup> Drive. It never gets old saying that. The community was my long-time home, and it is a community that I continue to care about deeply.

Our union supports this project for several important reasons. First of all, as a City, we need to be creating more affordable housing. Many working families, including 32BJ members are finding it increasingly difficult to find housing that they can afford.

As had been mentioned already at length today and will be continued to be discussed as the afternoon goes on, this project will create over 1,000 new affordable units including 500 deeply affordable units. This is vitally important for Western Queens and truly for our entire City.

In addition to this new housing that's going to be created, this project will also, will also create, um, we estimate around 50, at least, um, permanent building service jobs. Importantly, the developer affiliated with the, this project, Silverstein Properties, has given a strong commitment to ensuring that these will be family-sustaining, prevailing wage jobs. So, what this means is that these jobs will have benefits like family health insurance and living, and livable wages.

So, I'll keep my remarks brief because I believe the merits of the project are clear. This, this

project will create good jobs and the vital, affordable housing on a scale that we need. On behalf of the 85,000 members of 32BJ in New York, we strongly encourage this Committee and the entire Council to approve this rezoning. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next, we'll call up Felix Figuerero.

MR. FIGUERERO: Uh, good afternoon, Chair Riley and Committee Board Members. My name is Felix Figuerero. I am pleased to be here today to express my support for the Innovation QNS project on behalf of Local 32BJ. I lived in Sunny Side Queens for 28 years in a residential building workers for 34 years. I know how important this project will be to the community. The demand to live in City, in the City in the great Borough of Queens, has pushed up rent for workers' families. We need more housing to keep up with this demand including more affordable, more affordable, uh, housing for the, for the, for the working class.

This project will create 1,100 affordable housing units including 500 deeply affordable units. This will mean a thousand of people will have the chance to call our community home. The project will also

mean an opportunity for workers. When done, the building, the buildings will employ around 55 permanent building service workers. Importantly, the developers affiliated with the project, Silverstein Property, have given a strong commitment to ensure that there will be living wages, good jobs.

This means, this means jobs with good wages and meaningful benefits like many families will have insurance. They are two parts of our City's housing affiliated crisis that needs to be addressed, rent and wages. This project developer on both of these, more than 11, more than 1,000 new affordable housing, affordable units, uh, affordable units that will otherwise be, uh, built and strong, uh, wages, and will increase years for the permanent workers who will serve to maintain the buildings dedicated to come.

For, from day one, workers at these buildings will receive the same quality benefits rates as workers at any other (INAUDIBLE) wages in the City. I strongly recommend for the 85,000 workers, we support this project. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next person we'll call up is Tiara Williams.

MS. WILLIAMS: Good day, everyone. Uh, my name is Tiara Williams. I'm an organizer and a member, a proud member of Local 79, and I'm also the organizer that's been on the Innovation QNS project for the majority of this year.

And a lot of times, a lot of times, we keep hearing that, um, a lot of people haven't engaged in community. I have two bags of over 3,000 handwritten petitions to where I have engaged the community in English and in Spanish and I will continue to do so, because not just as a Local 79 member, um, and not as a member of community, but as a person that's a human being because I feel like everybody in the community voices should be heard. And I am going to read a testimony for someone of the community that has been petitioning with me Monday through Friday, day and night and on the weekends as well. His name is Steven Boffa (SP?).

Good morning. My name is Steven Boffa. I have asked for this testimony to be read on my behalf. I live in District 26 in Queens with my husband. At my job, I help workers maintain stable employment especially while they navigate the immigration process. The culture of diversity and acceptance of

this area makes it a place people seek out. While we have Astoria Park, community members still need more green space. It's also been hard to find good, quality apartments as gentrification has already affected New York City. My husband migrated to the US, and I have been in his community and our neighbors struggle with low wages and having to rent whatever is available to them, regardless of the conditions of the apartments or having to move often because it's always a battle to get anything fixed. Some people can't find a job that pays fair wages, so they start their own businesses, and some may not be so successful like my mother-in-law.

This is why I'm excited for the opportunities at Innovation QNS, quality, affordable apartments, living wages, careers for workers, local hire for community members, green spaces, help with small businesses in having a small space, having spaces where community groups can operate. I never heard of any development being inclusive of all these things until now. Community members will be able to apply to thousands of new, affordable homes regardless of their status.

He says, thank you for your time and I'm sorry he could not be here in person, and he could not take off, but he wanted to, his opinion to be heard and considered. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Ms. Williams. The next person we'll call up is Thomas Grech.

PRESIDENT GRECH: Good afternoon. My name is Thomas.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: You could, uh, press the button, Thomas.

PRESIDENT GRECH: Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Tom Grech. I'm the President and CEO of the Queens Chamber of Commerce. Today on behalf of our 1,400 members representing over 150,000 Queens-based employees, we fully and completely Innovation QNS. I want to, uh, do a shout out and a thank you to Council Member Won for her tenacity in this effort. It's truly, truly admirable. Now is the time to say yes.

Innovation QNS is an unprecedented opportunity to help address New York City's housing crisis. If approved, Innovation QNS would be the largest privately developed addition of affordable homes in the history of Queens. In both the overall number of



affordable homes and the number of homes that will be deeply affordable at 30% AMI, Innovation QNS dwarfs all other recently approved rezonings, including Halletts Point in the same community with 365 affordable homes.

Both Mayor Adams and Borough President Richards that we heard today have both voiced their strong support for this following this commitment to creating 1,100 affordable units and 500 deeply affordable. If Innovation QNS is not approved, the alternative is not a smaller, mixed-use development. The site will, will truly fall back into the hands of several individual property owners who can only build within the current industrial zoning. We cannot let this opportunity pass us by.

In context, New York City needs a quarter of a million homes just to meet its current short fall and will need another half a million by 2030 according to studies commissioned by AKRF. While addressing the housing crisis requires an all of the above approach, there is no way to solve it without building more housing and lots of it. Approving Innovation QNS is the best way to slow gentrification and rent increases which were underway in Astoria long before

the project was approved. Further, 69% of the households in the area of Innovation QNS are rent protected or owner occupied and therefore, not vulnerable to secondary displacement. Thank you very much for this opportunity. I am grateful.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. This panel is now excused. Thank you. The next panel I'll call up is Duluc (SP?) Nayim (SP?), Davon Lomax, Roy, Ronny Luna, Costas Diamantis. Sorry. And Brent Robles. Because I was doing this one. This one was in favor. I didn't want to mix the other one.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Oh, okay.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: (INAUDIBLE)

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Yeah, that was two, that was non-supporting, and this was another supporting panel.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yeah. And then we're going to do two oppositions.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Got you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: We're doing two oppositions after this. We will begin with Duluc Nayim.

MR. NAYIM: Hi. Thank you for giving me this time to speak. My name is Duluc. Uh, I am an interpreter

on behalf of CAAAV. I'm a Bengali interpreter and today I wasn't even planning to come here and speak or give a testimony but seeing the energy of the people that have come to fight that have worked for this hard that have taken time out of their lives, that have risked everything coming here, speaking, and testifying. That energy, that spirit, made me want to come up here and give my opinion on this.

I'm sure the numbers have been, uh, the numbers have been discussed. You know what the, what the data is, what the projections are, but I mainly want to address the people that are advocating for Innovation QNS. A lot of them say that this will lead to more union jobs, that this will lead to more affordable housing, that affordable housing that apparently doesn't exist, and it will introduce that housing and it will reduce the number of homeless people.

This isn't the first project like that, obviously. I'm sure there have been multiple projects over the decades that have been proposed like this that have promised more affordable housing mainly in places like Manhattan, uh, for example. Did that happen? No. We still have homeless people in

Manhattan. We still don't have affordable housing in so many places that are proposed.

And even if it does, uh, introduce new jobs, it's going to be temporary jobs. If you were, more people would be losing their jobs, their businesses, their livelihoods, because they just can't afford to live there. In the short term, there might not be as big of an effect, but over the long term, when you have a bigger, when you have people that can afford to live here in these luxury apartments moving in, they attract bigger corporations like Walmart or other more expensive, um, stores and businesses. When they come in, the businesses that are already there, they have no chance to survive.

And even though Innovation QNS is offering all these, um, open spaces and theatre clubs, and workshops that could definitely improve the community, and I completely agree with those, but why does it have to come with the luxury apartments?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank, thank you so much.

MR. NAYIM: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Uh, you could give the rest of your testimony to us online. Next person up is Davon Lomax. Davon, go ahead.

POLITICAL DIRECTOR LOMAX: Thank you, Council Member. Thank you, uh, the rest of the City Council Members. My name is Davon Lomax. I'm the Political Director for District Council 9, Painters and Allied Trades. Um, you know, everyone has good points. You know, a lot has been said about the project, pros and cons, uh, you know, for it and against it. But really, I, I just want to really reiterate, uh, the word opportunity, right, and this project gives opportunity on many fronts, but mainly, uh, to get jobs, right.

We're coming out of a pandemic. Uh, many of our workers built these temporary hospitals, temporary facilities, uh, and some were laid off, a lot were laid off. Uh, and projects like this give them an opportunity to go to work. You know, our members, you know, it's like this rhetoric of, of, you know, uh, union members versus community. Well, our members are in the community. But guess what? Our members also work for Silverstein. They build their buildings. They maintain their buildings. They have a standard, a standard. Silverstein has a standard and their track record working with union labor should speak

for itself when you talk about, uh, building and constructing their projects.

So, um, I say that to say, you know, we're here to, uh, to support the project and do whatever we can, um, to make sure that it gets through. Um, you know, everyone has a lot to say about unions, uh, but again, I just want to reiterate, our members are in the community. We are the community, and we support this project. So, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The next one up is Ronny Luna.

MR. LUNA: Good afternoon, everyone. Uh, thank you for allowing to have this opportunity to speak here today. As I said, uh, well, I haven't said it yet, but my name is Ronny Luna. I'm from District Council 9. I'm currently a, um, an instructor for District Council 9. I've been doing this since 2006 and I've seen a lot of growth within our community and with our members who have come into the apprenticeship program to learn, and get a better life and get a better wages, hence this guy right next to me on my left hand side.

Um, like I said, I just want to express my support today for this project. I believe that this

project will generate jobs that will provide decent wages and provide, and benefits and, to, to Queens workers and their families.

Uh, just wanted to kind of say about myself, I am a second-generation union painter. Growing up, I was able to see firsthand the benefits of my father's working a good fair wage job. And now I have been able to provide those same benefits to my own family and I am forever grateful for everything my union job has afforded me.

That is, that is the reason why I support project Innovation QNS. I believe Innovation QNS will benefit the community by providing jobs to workers as well as by creating affordable housing for residents. This initiative will be an opportunity to revitalize the neighborhood. And I strongly believe that. And improve the local economy in Astoria and for the community at large. And I thank you very much for your time.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next person we'll have is Costas Diamantis.

DIRECTOR DIAMANTIS: Hi, good afternoon. Uh, my Costas Diamantis. Uh, I live in Woodside, um, and word in Long Island City. I have many family and

friends that, um, and apprentices, uh, that reside in Astoria and surrounding areas. Um, I'm here today in, in support of the Innovation QNS project.

Um, you know, running the apprentice program, uh, you know, it's just something building onto, uh, construction and painters, tapers, uh, glaziers through DC9 and, and, um, you know, it's just an opportunity to get more people out there working, more people from the community, uh, bring more people into the apprentice program, train, uh, for this middle-income life.

Uh, I've been, you know, lived here for over 23 years and know that, you know, projects of this size and scope are pretty rare in Queens. Uh, and it comes at a time that we need this investment in our community, uh, adding these jobs to get these apprentices and journey workers and people out working. Uh, and you know the, the permanent jobs that will be resulting, uh, after it's built.

Uh, there's going to be much needed green spaces. I know a lot of people talked about it, but really, you know, living, growing up around or near Astoria, always in Astoria myself. I'm, you know, you need those green spaces. Astoria Park is pretty much, uh,



the only site and there's little parks here and there. Uh, but, but, you know, the green space in here is going to, that, that's going to be created is, is much needed for the whole community, uh, as well as the community spaces.

They were talking about an engagement, uh, some place where we can do career fairs, where we can do things, uh, to grow and, and reach out into the community, uh, get people interested in, in knowing the, you know, what's available and what's out there. Um, and then, finally, a tremendous amount of, of the affordable housing, um, itself that's going to be built, should be enough to move it forward without any issues. Uh, and there shouldn't be any delays, uh, especially as New York City and Queens need these union jobs, permanent careers, as well as affordable housing created, uh, too soon, to, to ease as much of the pressure on these, uh, markets as possible. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you and the next person we'll have Brett Robles.

BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE ROBLES: Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to testify before you all today. My name is Brent Robles. I'm a former

apprentice and journeyman painter and I'm currently the business representative for Local 20, the painter's local out of Queens. We're under and we form part of District Council 9. Uh, the reason I'm standing before you all today is to show support for Innovation QNS. Um, there's a saying, home is where the heart is. You don't just let anyone inside your home, nor do you just trust anyone with your home.

That's why I'm advocating for Innovation QNS. They're not strangers to Queens nor its residents. They have been reaching out periodically throughout the past weeks and months to the community to help give affordable housing not only to its senior citizens but to other people in the community who would not be able to afford otherwise, uh, homes and rental apartments in the area.

By creating job opportunities for union labor, giving young residents a chance at unionized careers and giving current union membership an opportunity to be a part of the project, such as members of District Council 9. DC9 overall has transformed my life and speaking to the membership who live in the area and throughout the City, I know the opportunities that have been granted to us through the union, and I know

what Innovation QNS could do with not our union, what other unions can do for our memberships.

I know how grateful we are again, and this project is not only going to help the Astoria community itself, but it will help individually affect each household of every worker, union and workers who will be continuing to work on the project itself when it's completed who get on site and it will continue to help their families. Let us all invite Innovation QNS with open hearts into our home. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Um, I believe Council Member Won and Council Member Hanks have questions for this applicant panel. Council Member Won?

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you so much, Chair Riley. Thank you everybody for testifying. Good to see you again, Lomax. I hear you and I see you and I appreciate all DC9 members coming out this morning, staying all day to testify. I just had a question about what the latest status is for the DC9. Um, do you have, with the development for Innovation QNS, do you have a project labor agreement or are you still at an MOU, cause I know that there are updates from

another union saying that they are close to a project labor agreement?

POLITICAL DIRECTOR LOMAX: I can only speak for DC9. Uh, we do have a MOU with the developer. And again, I think that when we talk about standards, you know, that's what we do. It's called collective bargaining, right. if this project doesn't end up getting approved, we don't even get a chance to do that. So, again, I think that our relationship with Silverstein throughout the years has been strong. Um, you know, we, like I said, we have the MOU. I can only speak for DC9, uh, but that's our current status.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Okay. Thank you. I just wanted to check if there were any changes from the MOU. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Council Member Hanks?

COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Thank you very much. Um, uh, this question could be for the developer or for Mr. Lomax. Is there a, uh, workforce development, um, component attached to this project to create, uh, more union jobs?

POLITICAL DIRECTOR LOMAX: I mean, I could that. Um, you know, our training facility is actually in the District. Um, you know, we, we continue our facility's here, we do tons of workforce development, uh, career fairs, and things like that. We've had, we've, every, everywhere we go around New York City and Long Island and everywhere else, uh, we're always committed to doing local hiring, uh, going into areas and doing recruitments. You know, we've had three recruitments this year itself. Um, and, and this project is no different. You know, we're committed to bringing in local, uh, residents in, in, in the zip codes that, that need it. And, um, that's, you know, I could speak on that part. So, thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Thank you very much. One more question, kind of like a piggyback off of that one. Uh, how successful has this partnership been in bringing, um, folks to union jobs and, and getting great, and good paying jobs as a result of this partnership?

POLITICAL DIRECTOR LOMAX: Yeah, I mean, like, like I said, you know, Silverstein has always built 100% union. Um, you know, you could look down the street and see their towers. Um, and I can't tell you

the tremendous amount of, of opportunity that had came from projects like that. Um, I'm an example. Everyone here has all been apprentices here, uh, at one point or another. Uh, so it's always great to just, you know, have, be a part of something bigger.

You know, I always say that, you know, our diplomas don't hang on the wall, right. Our diplomas, our college degrees is when we're driving over a bridge and we're saying we built this. We did that. We painted this. Um, and that's what we're proud of and projects like this is the reason why we're able to say those kinds of things.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANKS: Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much. Uh, this panel is excused. Thank you everyone for being so patient. Uh, we're trying to get to everyone as soon as possible. Uh, the next panel we're going to call up is Kit (SP?) Lee (SP?), Shaheena (SP?) Child-Hurry (SP?), uh, Bilkis (SP?) Ara (SP?) Begum (SP?), Osama (SP?) Child-Hurry, and Nazreen Banuu. I'm sorry if I messed up your name. Once again, Nazreen Banuu, Osama Child-Hurry, Bilkis Ara Begum, Shaheena Child-Hurry, and Kit Lee. Okay.

ORGANIZER ONADI: Hello. My name is.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: One second. One second. I just want to wait for everyone to set up. Alright. Thank you. Uh, we'll begin first with Kit Lee. Kit, you may begin.

MS. LEE: Hi. Sorry. Uh, hi, everyone, um, and hello, uh, Committee Members. Um, I just want to say that I think it's really, really sad that this \$2 billion project is pitting working class people against each other. I think, um, as much as it's, uh, right for workers to like advocate for union jobs and for their, the right to secure their livelihood, like, I don't think that's actually very different from what we're trying to do here as people who are trying to protect our neighborhoods from, uh, billionaire development.

And, I mean, I'm not here to convince you all because I, I think that you know, you're end game is clear, but I don't think, like, I'm hearing a lot of people say, many people who aren't even from the neighborhood say, like, I'm here to get my job and go. And, and the impact of that is the people who have to live here, um, in the neighborhood who are going to be impacted and displaced and I also live in Astoria. And I consider it my home, and, you know,

home is like, not just the physical place you reside in. it's like home because of the community you build with, um, the restaurants you frequent, the laundromat uncle you know on a first name basis. All those places and people become your compass of how you orient yourself in the world.

So, that's what Innovation QNS will destroy with its proposal. And I want to be explicit because the developers keep obstructing what we know will happen. Rent will go up. Cost of living will increase. Our neighbors of decades and beloved establishments will be priced out, and this happens every single time with luxury development. Show me, I think we lost, ask them, you know, show us a luxury development that has increased affordable housing and they were silent. And I don't think there's a real answer here and until that's, until they can provide us with something material, like we are not going to budge. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next, we'll have Shaheena Child-Hurry.

ORGANIZER ONADI: Hello. My name is Onindita Sarker Onadi. I am the Astoria membership organizer



for CAAAV and I will be reading, um, a thing left by Shaheena cause she had to leave earlier.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: You can go ahead.

ORGANIZER ONDITA: Um, my name is Shaheena. My daughter has lived in Astoria for the past 12 years. We're all CAAAV leaders and we want to keep the livelihood of our community alive. We came here today to fight for our right to live in Astoria. Bengalis have lived in Astoria for the past 35 years. We are 6,000 working class Bengalis in this area that have created a community. This community lets me, my daughter, and my husband live full lives.

We don't want any developments here that happen without us. You want money, you want another Manhattan, but we built our homes here after leaving our countries. This is the only piece of home we have left. Either you guys will give us 75% of affordable housing, or you will take over this land over our bodies. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Uh, you do have Ozment Child-Hurry's testimony, too? No? Okay. Ozment? Yeah. Okay. Um, we'll call Bilkis Ara Begam next.

MS. TISHA: Hello. My name is Tisha. I am speaking for Bilkis because she has to leave earlier. My name is Bilkis. I have been living in Astoria for six years. I know I've, I'm not alone. Hundreds of family has to leave this area if this, if this development is passed. These people are trying to take our lands like pirates. Whoever is talking in favor of this development are saying about their work. But tell me, any of these people, will they get to live here? This work are temporary, but this development will effect our society, our community permanently.

Innovation QNS will, uh, will decide who can live here and who cannot because it will rise our rents and it has all, and our.

ORGANIZER TISHA: You can read it Bengali. Thank you.

MS. TISHA: Okay. I'll say in Bengali because my English is not that good.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: One second.

MS. TISHA: Yeah, my colleague will interpret for me.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: One second. Let me just make sure that's okay.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: You guys read, but you provided testimony for somebody else, right? you read for somebody else.

MS. TISHA: Yeah, it's in Bengali. I'm trying to translate it in English. It's taking a lot of time because I can't.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Okay, then. Go ahead, keep going.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: That's fine. Go ahead.

MS. TISHA: Okay. (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: But is Queens only for the rich? Who built these roads, stores, and streets?

MS. TISHA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: Who decides the character of Astoria? Immigrants.

MS. TISHA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: I am once again stating that we want 75% affordable housing. My monthly income is \$3,000 and \$2,000 of that goes into my rent. Um, if, for these 200 or so units, we would have to fight with thousands of families. I want truly affordable housing for Astoria's communities. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next person, the last we'll call up is Nazreen Banuu. Is Nazreen up here?

ORGANIZER TISHA: Uh, I have, uh, Ozment.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: If you can, for the sake of time, because I'm not sure who else is here, um, if you could just, uh, submit that online. Um, and if Nazreen is not up here, we'll go to the next panel.

ORGANIZER TISHA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE).  
Okay.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Uh, yeah, just a reminder that if any of you need the interpreter, we have the interpreters available in the next room. We just need to know in advance so we can get them in the room.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay.

ORGANIZER TISHA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE).  
Okay. My name is Nazreen. I've been living in Astoria for the past six years. We have had no gas in our house since May. I don't know what the landlord wants. The rent is already a burden. At this stage, it's hard to live like this. We have low income and can't afford rent hikes that Innovation QNS will

bring to this neighborhood. I don't remember any developer ever reaching out to me, and I strongly oppose this mega-project. I urge City Council to say no Innovation QNS project.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Thank you to this applicant panel. You are now excused. Thank you so much. The next panel we'll call up is, the next panel we'll call up is Former Council Member Carlos Menchaca. Um, while we get him on the screen, we're going to ask Amanda Birch Bruton to come up here, um, Fierduce (SP?), the last, uh, name, I can't read it, but it starts with a B. I think it's.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Fierduce Begum (SP?).

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Oh, she's coming. Alright. Thank you. Uh, the next one is Mose (SP?) Ditar (SP?). Next one will be Lovely Nichat (SP?) Akhtar (SP?). While we wait for them to come up, we're going to ask Former Council Member Carlos Menchaca to go ahead.

FORMER COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Thank you. Uh, thank you to Chair Riley, uh, Council Member Hanks, and, uh, Council Member Julie Won for your devotion to listening to all the incredible constituents here in front of you. I'm Carlos Menchaca, Former Council

Member for District 38 in Sunset Park, Red Hook, in Brooklyn, and I'm here as a private citizen to support the incredible work that has happened out of this, uh, uh, diverse coalition of voices.

I have heard testimony after testimony, really supporting the affordability of any project, uh, specifically this one, and jobs and I want to just usher in the reality that the burden of proof for this private application comes from the developer. They have to convince the City Council, specifically Julie Won and her team and the coalition that this is good for the community.

I have heard incredible arguments, uh, to why I do not support this project, and I hope that the City Council hears these and all the messages. One, because this is a private application, uh, this is, uh, void of any real opportunity for the City to bring in a robust community planning process, a neighborhood rezoning. I've heard and read that the City Council Member, Julie Won, wants to start a new process. I support that. This is a legacy project from the past Council and administration, and this gives the opportunity for the City and the

neighborhood to create a new threshold of affordability.

The Council Member has put at 50, 55% where she wants it to be met and if that can happen, then every ounce of effort from every Council Member and elected official needs to support her.

Second, I just heard a union panel talk about each of their own individual relationships with this developer. What prevents the, the unions from coming together and creating a larger collective, bargaining opportunity for every.

SERGEANT AT ARMS 2: Time is expired.

FORMER COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Trade to have access to jobs. If we're talking about jobs, we, we don't meet the standard. If we're talking about affordability, we don't meet it. This is a, the last point I want to make is that this is, this is a question about who gets to live in Astoria. This is a question about who gets to work in Astoria. This is also a question about who gets to decide the future of Astoria. And that lands with you, the City Council. Thank you, Julie Won, for your incredible leadership.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Carlos.

FORMER COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Um, we're going to get our translator to help, uh, translate right here. Um, so if we could get our Bangladesh, uh, translator inside here, please.

ORGANIZER ONADI: Um, I'm really sorry, but, um, for Fierduce, like, we have a relationship and it's much better if I could interpret for her.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: That's fine.

ORGANIZER ONADI: Would that be okay?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Alright. You can call them off.

ORGANIZER ONADI: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: That's all right. That's all right. You could go ahead. Go ahead, no problem.

MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Um, I ask if we could just slow down and. Alright.

MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: My name is Fierduce Begum. I've been living in Astoria for the past five years. The thing that I love the most in this area is going to parks and different public places and talking to different Bengalis in the neighborhood.



MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: Um, there are a lot of people here with many different lives, but our struggles are often similar. Um, all I want to say is, we all came here today because we want to fight for our house.

MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: Um, I wholeheartedly believe that the City Council would vote in our favor because they wouldn't be able to buy their, like our solidarity and community with their billions of dollars.

MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: Everyone who's taken the time to show up today, I am very grateful to them.

MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: Um, I strongly oppose this project.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Thank you. You may begin.

MS. BRUTON: Hi. My name is Amanda Bruton and I first moved to Astoria in 2001. Oh, thank you so much for the microphone. I'm an actor and a writer. I am an artist. I am a member of the unions SAG-AFTRA and Actor's Equity. I am pro-union and union jobs,

always. I have spent a good part of my life, like I said, I'm an artist, living paycheck to paycheck and I need an affordable apartment. I understand that Innovation QNS sounds like a sweet deal for non-profits, artists, for people who need jobs and a place to live, but oh no, I've seen this one before. I've seen this movie. I've seen this TV show where the billionaire developers with no accountability and where the community gets screwed. And I smell bullshit. Don't know if I'm allowed to curse, but I'm going to do it.

This is Queens. This isn't Brooklyn. We don't need luxury housing. We need affordability, more affordability, real affordability. I am not anti-development. Neighborhoods evolve and we want them to evolve in a way that supports the people and businesses in that neighborhood. We need to invest in our neighborhood and our community.

Innovation QNS will further contribute to the pain of New York City's housing crisis. You are distracting us and saying you're going to fix that pain and build, build, build, and meanwhile, you're contributing to the pain tenfold. You couldn't even engage the community to give us information. 95% of

local residents didn't know this is happening. Is that a joke? You're going to have to do better than that. You're billionaires, maybe spend a little bit more on outreach next time. We want change, intentional change, change that supports people's ability to thrive. We want our community to thrive, not be pushed out and displaced by some billionaire developer. Innovation QNS is unconscionable, unethical, unacceptable. Vote no. Astoria is not for sale. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Amanda. Hey, hey, thumbs you all, thumbs. Thank you. Uh, this panel is now excused. Thank you, so, hold on one minute. Hold on. Hold on one second. We have three more, uh, names on this panel, uh, Nichat Akhtar, Lovely and Mose Dit, the last name starts with a D but I can't pronounce the last name.

ORGANIZER TISHA: Yeah, unfortunately, a lot of our folks had to go because of work. They weren't able to stay. Um, and we have Nichat Akhtar's, uh, mother who was able to stay for her.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: No problem.

ORGANIZER TISHA: She had to go to class.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay. You may begin.

MOTHER OF MS. AKHTAR: Hi, everyone. I am mother Niche Akhtar. I was leaving Astoria 29 years ago, uh, 10 years I leave Astoria, because, okay. (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER TISHA: I, I've lived in America for 31 years.

MOTHER OF MS. AKHTAR: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER TISHA: I have two daughters.

MOTHER OF MS. AKHTAR: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER TISHA: I lived in Astoria for 10 years, but I wasn't able to stay because of the cost of rent.

MOTHER OF MS. AKHTAR: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER TISHA: My friends and family live in Astoria and I don't want them to suffer like I did.

MOTHER OF MS. AKHTAR: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER TISHA: We weren't able to stay but I don't want others to be displaced. I have family and friends and community there. Our Bangladeshi culture

is able to thrive there, and we don't want that to be displaced.

MOTHER OF MS. AKHTAR: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE). Please help the people, working people please.

ORGANIZER TISHA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MOTHER OF MS. AKHTAR: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER TISHA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MOTHER OF MS. AKHTAR: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER TISHA: But with our community.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you.

MOTHER OF MS. AKHTAR: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Uh, Mom, I'm just going to have you fill out the paper right here real quick, okay? Alright. Thank you. You, you can fill it out at your seat and then the Sergeant will come back and get it from you. This applicant panel is excused. Thank you so much.

The next panel I'm going to call up, we'll need a Spanish interpreter. Uh, the next panel I will call up is Alvaro, Alvaro Gonzalez. She went already. Edwin Mendoza, and Holger Ortega. And can we please

get a Spanish interpreter, please? Thank you. You may begin.

INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Can you just state your name before you begin? Sorry.

INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: My name is Edwin Mendoza.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I live in District 26 in Queens.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I am a member of, uh, Local 79 and I am the President of the Hispanic Front of Local 79 and the Committee of Members, of Latin Members in our union.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: As the President of the organization, Hispanic Front, I deal with people that are in union and without a union.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: To help the people of the community that work in the industry of construction, first, we must have jobs.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I have a saying that I like to say.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: The more unions jobs, the more members. This is equal to more power to fight for the people.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Innovation QNS will bring, uh, a big quantity of good jobs to the area.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: But at least 30% of the workers that will be hired to work in the project, must be from the area.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: This, uh, job quantity means prosperity for the lives of the workers of this project.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Several groups of immigrants that call Astoria their home, also call Local 79 their home.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Local 79 has fought for their rights and better job conditions.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Workers will get dignifying wages and will also receive benefits, crucial benefits, for them and their families.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: This project doesn't, not only means work, construction works, but also presents the opportunity for more homes and to be able to move small businesses.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Using the space that is going to be designated.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: As an organization that is dedicated to help the people, you can appreciate the fact that they're going to include a space for community groups.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Thank you very much for listening, uh, my testimony in favor of Innovation QNS.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The next person we'll call up is Holger Ortega.

PRESIDENT MENDOZA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)



CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Holger, just give the interpreter one second, one second.

INTERPRETER: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Holger Ortega.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I am a member of Local 79 and I live in District 26 in Queens.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I'm here to support the project Innovation QNS. This type of project mean protection and advancement, economical advancement for the workers in the area.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: As a construction worker myself, I have seen the bad working conditions in a lot of projects that are without a union.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: They made a compromise in here. They want to use Local 79. It is the same Local that has changed my life.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: By agreeing to use Local 79, they are compromised, they want to give us better wages to live a better life for the workers like myself.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Better working, uh, better, um, working conditions at the construction site for me and my coworkers.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And a dignifying future so we can retire. Uh, when Local 79 is included in the projects, you know that you really, uh, are in an inclusive workforce and the people that live in the area.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: This project will, will also create more options of living in the area and by using Housing Connect, it will be possible to apply no matter your immigration status.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: This project will include the space for small businesses.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And community groups.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: It is something necessary because there's always new people that need assistance.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: To bring better jobs, better futures, and more homes, it is essential for my community.

MR. ORTEGA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next person is Alvaro Gonzalez.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: Good afternoon. Good afternoon. My name is Alvaro Gonzalez. I'm a Local 79, oh, I'm a Local 79 Organizer and I'm going to read on behalf of a Queens native, Sebastian Chapman. And I'm going to read it in Spanish cause that was his instructions and he's a student right now, so he had a test, so he couldn't come in person. (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Greetings and thank you for this opportunity. My name is Sebastian Chapman and I'm a resident of District 26 in Queens, um. I, I have, I have asked, uh, for my testimony to be read.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I am a student and I work part-time.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Today, I call Astoria my home.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: It has accepted me and my husband.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Astoria is a diverse and inclusive area that welcomes every group of people with no discrimination.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I'm originally from Venezuela.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And as many other people in the community, I, I fought my own fight, uh, against the immigration system requesting residency.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: During that time that I've been living in Queens, I've moved several times because of the quality of the apartments.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: In several buildings, there is not a good, um, maintenance system.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: To me, Innovation QNS means more quality apartments where people can have quality of life.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Together with good construction jobs and maintenance.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Gentrification has already risen prices in New York.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: By having apartments that are less than \$1,000, um, it is, um, it is a great help for the community.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: The project will create three times more affordable homes. It is more than the ones that we have seen in Astoria in the past couple of years.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: It is possible to apply for apartments no matter your origin.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: The space will also help businesses to survive in the area.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And when I heard that they're going to preserve a space so the community groups can operate, that made me very happy.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Thank you for listening to my testimony in favor of Innovation QNS.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. This panel is now excused. Thank you.

ORGANIZER GONZALEZ: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay.

ORGANIZER GONZALES: Gracias.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: We have a lot more people signed up to testify, but if they are not here, we're going to ask that they please just submit their testimony online, or they could, uh, sign up for the Zoom link as well.

Alright. The next people we have to testify is Mose (SP?) Cubra (SP?), Fah (SP?) Mira (SP?), Parvess (SP?) Hassan (SP?), Nazish Asa (SP?) Tisha. Are any of those individuals here? Nazish Asa Tisha, Parvess Hassan, Fah Mira, and Mose Cubra.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Third name.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: The third name was, I, I'll read all of them again. Mose Cubra, Fah Mira, Parvess Hassan, and Nazish Asa Tisha.

And just for the record, we do have an interpreter, but I do understand that they are comfortable with you being their interpreter, so we're just going to allow that for this hearing, okay? Alright. Um, you may begin. Uh, just state her

name for the record, so we know who's actually testifying.

ORGANIZER ONADI: Um, this Cubra.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: You, you may begin, Ms. Cubra.

MS. CUBRA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MS. CUBRA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: Um, she said that like, yes, I do want development, but it has to be for us because in this state, we have high rents, we have really bad electricity in our house. There's a bunch of pests and like, this wouldn't help.

MS. CUBRA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: We haven't been able to pay our rent because it's so high.

MS. CUBRA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: It's been very hard for us.

MS. CUBRA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MS. CUBRA: Okay.

ORGANIZER ONADI: Okay. Um, she is for this project.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: She is opposed to the project?

MS. CUBRA: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)



ORGANIZER ONADI: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you.

ORGANIZER ONADI: Of course.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Uh, we will have the next, uh, person testify. If you could just state your name for the record, please.

MR. HASSAN: My name is Parvess Hassan. (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes.

MR. RESAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: My name is Parvess Hassan. I don't really speak English, but I have my organizer next to me and she will speak for me.

MR. HASSAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: Thank you, everyone.

MR. HASSAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: I am primarily here so that this big project doesn't get, um, approved.

MR. HASSAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: There are many reasons behind that.

MR. HASSAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: Many people have said many things, but we all know the reality of the situation.

MR. HASSAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: I don't have much to say but what I can say is like, projects of this scale cannot make people happy in these kinds of areas.

MR. HASSAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: Um, that is all I have to say.

Thank you.

MR. HASSAN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, so much, Mr. Hassan. Uh, the next person is Fah Mira.

ORGANIZER ONADI: She had to leave earlier.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay. Our next person we have is Nazish Asa Tisha. And just for the record, Fah Mira was also in opposed to the project. Go ahead.

ORGANIZER TISHA: Hello, my name is Nazish Asa Tisha. I'm an organizer. I organize Bengali people in Astoria. I see that there is written up above that our government of the people, by the people, for the people. But when I organize my Bengali people, all I hear is they have been ignored, no maintenance is done for them, nothing is for them. They always say they don't feel heard.

When I started organizing them, they say that nobody has done anything for them, and even they

haven't heard about this mega development. So, when I told them, can you afford like, a \$4,000 one-bedroom apartment, they said they can't. Most of our people already had to leave Astoria. They're also leaving, they are in process of leaving.

I think this area is going to get gentrified by this mega-development and I don't want my folks to leave. And I want my community intact. That's why I'm opposing this mega-development. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much. We appreciate your testimony. This panel is now excused. Thank you. The next panel we'll call up is Charles Yu, Marino Frost, Kate Cunningham, and Eric Benaim, Benaim. I'm sorry. Benaim. The first person that may begin is Kate Cunningham, and shhhhh.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Quiet down.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Shhhhh. Thank you, everyone. Kate Cunningham, you may begin.

DIRECTOR CUNNINGHAM: Good afternoon. My name is Kate Cunningham. I'm the Director of Government and External Relations at the New York Building Congress, and I'll be testifying today on behalf of our President and CEO, Carlo A. Scissura.

The, the New York Building Congress is a membership organization committed to promoting the growth and success of the building industry in New York City. We represent the interests of over 550 constituent organizations comprising of more than 250,000 skilled tradespeople and professionals and are here today to testify in support of the Innovation QNS project.

As stated previously, at the height of the pandemic, unemployment reached 30% in Astoria. The Innovation QNS project will create 5,400 much needed jobs for the community, including 3,700 jobs during construction and 1,700 permanent, most of which will be well-paying union jobs. That's 10 times the number of jobs currently available in the immediate area.

Queens Community District 1 is 51<sup>st</sup> out of the City's 59 Community Districts in terms of access to parks. Some 42% of residents are not within walking distance of public, open space. Innovation QNS will add over two acres of public, open space to the neighborhood, accounting for more than a quarter of the project site.

The project will also help to alleviate the upward pressure on housing costs. Studies indicate we

must build a quarter of a million new homes to meet the demand of current and future New Yorkers and achieve a healthy market. The undersupply of homes has led to skyrocketing rents, especially in lower income, communities of color, and immigrant communities like Astoria where median asking rent has increased by nearly 20% in the last year alone.

The Innovation QNS project will build 2,845 new units of housing for an estimated 8,000 New Yorkers. 1,100 of those homes, or 40%, will remain permanently affordable, will be permanently affordable and senior apartments. More than 500 of which will be reserved for extremely low-income New Yorkers who make less than 30% of the AMI. That's five times the amount of deeply affordable homes Queens Community District 1 has seen since 2014.

This development is a historic project that will bring thousands of new jobs and homes to Astoria for a diverse group of New Yorkers. For that reason, we urge you to support the Innovation QNS project. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Kate. The next person is Marino Frost. You can press the button, Marino.

MR. FROST: Oh, alright. Uh, hello to you all. Uh, my name is Marino Frost. I am the only person in Astoria who has everything at stake here. I've been living as a tenant at the ground zero of the Block A for more than 30 years. I built my recording studio there which is my source of income. Uh, my apartment is there, and I run a beautiful artistic non-profit organization Mission of Love from there.

When I heard about this project that's supposed to demolish literally all I have and prevent me from my future artistic work, I was simply crushed. It immediately became the worst problem I ever had in my life without any comparison. None of the paid protectors of the community called, and no one ever offered me any help. None of these local non-profit organizations, not any politician ever called. No one cared while now all of them act as the saviors of the community. What a pathetic joke.

I walked around like a zombie in a trance for three weeks and then suddenly my phone rang. And who called? The developers. But who, uh, two top executives. They were nice and polite people who asked me if I want to meet with them. Hmmm. And I advised them to visit me in my recording studio. And

who showed up? Four top executives who run the company, not some deputies or secretaries or whoever, top four executives. And they were great. They offered me to relocate all I have. We reached an agreement, and now all of us are happy. That's what we should do here today.

Uh, so, my enemies become my saviors and my best friends. I love them dearly. What is wrong with that kind of, uh, solution, where we agree? I don't know anybody in those five blocks who is against, but everybody I know there is in favor of this project. Yet no one ever asked us what we think. What a coincidence.

So, Julie Won, if you truly advocate on behalf of, uh, your constituents, as you say, then you should ask us who live in those five blocks what we think about it. Uh, and, and we stand for it. All of us. And we should vote yes. There are numerous benefits that this project can bring to the whole community very soon and even more in the future.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Mr. Frost. You can.

MR. FROST: Just, just one sentence.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: No, I, I, I have a lot more people to testify. So, alright?

MR. FROST: I know. A lot of people testified who don't even live in this community.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: No, I totally understand.

MR. FROST: And I live at the ground zero.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Totally understand.

MR. FROST: And no one ever called me.

MR. BENAİM: He can take 10 seconds of my time.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: You want 10? Alright. Go ahead, Mr. Frost.

MR. RILEY: You see? It is easy to destroy but how many can create? What moves the world, uh, forward and towards progress is love and construction and not hate and destruction. I love you all.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much. The next person we'll have is Eric Benaim. Eric, you got a minute and 50 seconds. Go ahead.

MR. BENAİM: That's alright. Thank you, Council, uh, for having us here today, long day. Uh, my name is Eric Benaim. I'm a Queens born, uh, resident. I've lived in Queens my entire life, almost 45 years. Uh, I'm a child of, uh, immigrants. Uh, my family has been here since 1968. I, I lived, I've lived in Astoria, and I live in Long Island City. I raise my family, two kids, a six-year-old and a three-year-old



in Long Island City currently. I also own a company called Modern Spaces which is work, working with the developer.

Uh, I'd like to say that, uh, yes, we are in a housing crisis. Uh, we're also in a economic crisis and we're also in an inflation crisis. So, hearing that the developer has been holding this land for five years, uh, it's getting less and less worth it for them to, to continue the project. Uh, so, for them to offer 1,100 units, I think is very generous. Also, if I was a politician, I'd rather be known as a person who helped and saved 1,100 units rather than losing 1,100 units.

Uh, I saw a beautiful rendering of a, uh, soccer field. Uh, my kids play soccer. I would love to be able to take my kids to play soccer over there, rather than have them give back the property to the existing owners, uh, and then be warehouses with trucks going all over the place. Uh, I'm here to show my support for Innovation QNS. Uh, so please, uh, approve this project. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next person we'll have is Charles Yu.

SENIOR DIRECTOR YU: Uh, good afternoon, Chair Riley. Good afternoon, Council Member Won. My name is Charles Yu, Senior Director of Business Assistance at the Long Island City Partnership and I'm here to speak in support of the Innovation QNS project, which I think will benefit our community.

Our neighborhood has emerged as a vibrant, mixed-use community which has proven to be an important attribute that enables us to better withstand and recover from the pandemic compared to other areas. The proposed development will reinforce and add to this strength by delivering several much-needed benefits that the community at large has been requesting for a long time.

People are moving to this great neighborhood, as the Labor Census has shown, but space is becoming more limited. Responding to the feedback from some of the most robust community engagement that we have seen around developments, the proposed project would create approximately 1,100 permanently affordable units on City blocks that could be better utilized. 500 of these units will be available at 30% AMI.

More than two acres of public open space with greeneries, playgrounds, performance space, and a dog

park for the community and 60,000 square foot community hub for organizations with deep local roots to expand their much-needed services will also be delivered to our community.

The project will create many jobs and create, uh, and career pathways during construction and permanently for local job seekers. Existing small businesses, many of which are part of the dynamic fabric of this neighborhood, will benefit, too, when new residents and visitors shop locally. If this project does not move forward, it will be a real missed opportunity to expand access to affordable housing, create more public open space and community space, hire local job seekers who are ready, willing, and able to work in their community, and bring more customers to the neighborhood, uh, businesses. For these reasons, we hope City Council will give a strong consideration to support the Innovation QNS project put forth by this proposal.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. I believe Council Member Won has a question for this panel.

COUNCIL MEMBER WON: Thank you so much, Charles and everyone from the community. I just want to make sure that we put on the record that as of today, we

don't have 1,100 permanently affordable units because there is no commitment from HPD. That means that 400 something units of them are up in the air, as you just heard from the team that testified, that because there's no guarantee if, and there is no plan B. So, I want to make sure because everyone is sworn in to testify on the record to tell the truth, so I want to make sure that there isn't false information continuing to be (INAUDIBLE) around. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. This panel is now excused. Thank you. The next panel we'll call up is Nassir (SP?) Uden (SP?), Sitara (SP?) Begum (SP?), Mary Ford, Miles Grant. Once again, that is Miles Grant, Mary Ford, Sitara Begum, and Nassir Uden. We can begin with Miles Grant.

MR. GRANT: Hi, everyone. My name is Miles Grant. I am an Astoria renter. I have been displaced before by a project similar to this and I don't want it to happen again, therefore, I am asking you to please vote no on this nonsense.

Now that that's out of the way, we can get to the fun part, uh. The first bit that I'm hearing over and over again is the word affordable. Uh, the bit that's really wild to me is that an apartment that's

designed for someone making \$80,000 a year is considered affordable. I think anyone who is saying that those apartments are affordable is lying and they know they're lying and not even they believe it. Uh, I've seen a lot of the suits behind us, a lot of those seats are empty. They didn't even bother staying the entire afternoon to listen to all of us explain why we don't want this luxury project in our non-luxury neighborhood. You know, I think all the suits should give a cheer if they spent more than 24 hours consecutively in Astoria. Yeah. I think that speaks for itself.

Uh, these people are not who's there right now. When you're constructing new buildings and when you're deciding which building should be built, what matters is who you're building for, and what you decide is who is this building going to be for. Those 500 units that are deeply affordable, I think they're great. A lot of people think they're great. I think most of here think they're great. It's the rest of the building that's the problem. It's the rest of the building that's for people who do not live in Astoria, who would never live in Astoria unless this

building was built, and that's the people that we got to worry about.

And that's the people behind me in the suits. And I don't think that any of them would be in Astoria right now. I think they would be in this new building. And I think you have a decision to make of who we're going to build for. What type of people do we want to live in this new building? And I think if you pick your constituents, the people who elected you, and who you currently represent, I think that that's better than if you represent a bunch of rich people who look like they came out of a Soviet cartoon about greedy capitalists.

It's up to you, whoever you want to have in Astoria, you have the decision based on which building you built. We all want more housing, but what type housing and for who is the question. And this building, Innovation QNS is for the rich and the for the Uber-rich. Anyone who is spending \$4,000 a month on a studio apartment is not somebody who I think should be in Astoria. It's not who the people of Astoria think should be in Astoria.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Miles. Next person that will speak is Mary Ford. Okay. Next person.

Okay, we'll, we'll get to her on Zoom, then. The next person to speak is Sitara Begum.

MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

My name is Sitara Begum. Um, I am thankful for this opportunity to speak. I've been living in Astoria for the past two years and I have three kids that I am the sole provider for.

MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: Even though my elderly parents do live near me, I cannot live with them or live close to them during these hard times.

MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: Innovation QNS is trying, um, I'm sorry. Innovation QNS is trying to renovate this area because they want to make high rise buildings. They say that they want, um, development, but who is this development for?

MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: They only want innovation for a few rich people, and these are all plots to get us out of here.

MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: Astoria is not just for old immigrants, it's also for our families and new immigrants that come with us.

MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: We saw the same kind of strong, chaotic force in LIC, and we don't want to make the same mistake in Astoria.

MS. BEGUM: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

ORGANIZER ONADI: I will continue to fight for my children and for my community. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The last person we'll have is Nassir Uden.

MR. UDEN: Hi, my name is Abdeem (SP?) Nassir Uden. My 2009, December, I come here. (INAUDIBLE) I live in Astoria, 29<sup>th</sup> Street, 36<sup>th</sup> Avenue because my long time (INAUDIBLE) my everyday job, my rent right now \$1,500, my seven days are still working on (INAUDIBLE) right now maybe 200, two bedroom because one bedroom (INAUDIBLE) no pay. How come, uh, with 200 bedroom? Right now, nine years, everyday job, everyday job. My son have college, my daughter, my wife right now living very one bedroom, big problem. How come my (INAUDIBLE) 200 bedroom, 200 bedroom right now 250. My income, no have 250.



How come more than a high-rise building? How come pay me? I don't know. (INAUDIBLE) I don't know. My seven years of citizenship, but every year somebody give me the board (INAUDIBLE) everybody I don't know. I, I know, but me every time job, job. One bedroom, all the rent go (INAUDIBLE) the money. How come, uh, high-rise building repay? Where do you go? I don't know what happen. Why come, uh, give me the, give me the lottery, discount my, right now, in the district. That's why (INAUDIBLE) is really bad. I am upset (INAUDIBLE) everybody, uh, high-rise building no come. Me no (INAUDIBLE). Everything (INAUDIBLE) can do, I don't know.

Uh, I am very sad, uh, the association. Thank you. (INAUDIBLE) English. I don't know, so thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much. I just have one question for this panel. Mr. Gary (SP?), uh, you stated that you were displaced by a project similar to Innovation QNS. Um, can you state what project that was? Miles, yeah.

MR. GRANT: Uh, sorry. Yeah, my last name is not Gary.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Oh.

MR. GRANT: My handwriting's bad. It's okay.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Sorry about that.

MR. GRANT: Uh, it was in Brooklyn Heights, some of the towers that went up around downtown Brooklyn.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much. Uh, this panel is now excused. Thank you. The next panel we'll call up is Terry Gallart (SP?), Naheed (SP?) Akhtar (SP?), Kimba (SP?) Wiggins, and Somdut (SP?) Harsadg (SP?). Excuse me if I butcher your name. Somdut Harsadg, Kimba Wiggins, Naheed Akhtar, Terry Gallart. Okay. You said Kim is not available? Thank you. Uh, Terry?

MS. GALLART: Terry, yeah. My name is Terry Gallart. Thank you for this valuable opportunity to speak today. Um, considering the time, uh, uh, limit for speaking, I sent two emails to, uh, the Council, the Committee, and I'll, uh, resubmit them to the, uh, land use website.

Um, stating the reasons to earnestly support Innovation QNS, I urge this Committee to vote in favor of approving this construction project. The members of Innovation QNS team I have been fortunate enough to meet are absolutely terrific. They have been proactive in addressing the concerns of the

necessity of additional affordable units as well as various multiple other components. Because some of the groups opposing this project are from other areas, they are not aware that the people who actually live in the planned construction area support this project. The woman who mentioned 95% of the people being unaware, I'm questioning that statement.

Um, Innovation QNS members have personally contacted the businesses still operating in the area as well as the residents of the only six currently existing homes, and they have established relocation plans. I'm not aware in what capacity the elected officials have reached out to attempt to ascertain how people directly affected by this construction feel about it.

Additionally, the groups opposing this project have not seen the dismal rat-infested conditions that exist here and how crucial how this desperately needed renovation is. Adding these apartments where almost none exist will be an incredible asset to Queens. These few blocks are perfectly suited for this construction and will undoubtedly enhance the surrounding neighborhoods in numerous ways.

Until today, I was not aware these construction plans include upgrades of, uh, regarding electricity and water and sewer infrastructures, ancient sewers, and, um, leaving the zoning in commercial state as it stands now will be beneficial to our community anyway. Um, these 500 apartments are feasible because of the other more expensive apartments. We're not going to be able to solve our economic problems or our housing problems, but it's a step in the right direction. And also, uh, Innovation QNS, thank you for the union jobs.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next person we'll have up, can you just state your name for the record?

MS. AKHTAR: Yes, hello. My name is Naheed Akhtar. I am, um, I am Asian, Pakistani mostly. Me and my family strongly support Innovation QNS. We have been living at one of six residential houses, A Block, second floor in Astoria for over 30 years. And I live with my, my husband and son and my entire family fully support the project. We need affordable homes. We need homes for the people who have lived in Astoria for years and want to stay in Astoria and Innovation QNS will bring so many homes for people like me.

I have never seen anything like this since living in Astoria. This is the most amount of homes, homes being developed for people like me and will triple the number of affordable homes created in Queens Community Board 1 since 2014. This project will also be good for my son. This project is going to provide jobs. It will provide skills trainings. It will provide creative spaces and so much more that my son and his friends can use and will be helpful to them for their future. I fully support Innovation QNS. Thank you so much, sir.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you.

MS. AKHTAR: You're welcome.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: This panel is now excused. Thank you. The next panel we'll call up is Amira (AP?) Ismael (SP?), Gyro (SP?) Nuñez, Maria Segura, John Bahia (SP?), and John Bahia. So, we have John Bahia, Maria Segura, Amira Ismael, and Gyro Nuñez. Excuse me if I mispronounce your name. Amira, you may begin.

MS. ISMAEL: Hi, I would like to say my name is Amira Ismael.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you.

MS. ISMAEL: Uh, yeah. Thank you. Um, I just want to note that I am 16 years old. Um, I'm the youngest in this room right now, so I want that to keep, to be noted. You know, I'm missing school just to be here, just to testify, that this cannot happen in our community. I see a bunch of people here. You all don't live in Astoria. You all don't spend a day in Astoria. Everything you all just said is cap, and cap, for everyone that says, means that you're lying. I'll keep it appropriate, but, but I'm just saying.

So, you all need to go to Astoria. Go to Little Egypt. Go see all the communities that are there. Go see all the small businesses because you all aren't there. You all aren't on the ground seeing us, right? Exactly. I don't hear any voices saying otherwise. So, I need you all to say no to Innovation QNS because you are not only displacing people, first of all, it's not even an innovation, it's displacing. So, displacing, so displacing Queens, you are not only displacing people, but you are doing it without their knowledge. We want canvassing, and no one's said that they knew this was happening. All of our neighbors were like, "I don't know that this is happening." And that's the problem. You guys say

that, you guys have billions of dollars. Go and tell people that you're displacing them. But you're not. You're not. Simply put, you're saying you're displacing them but they, without their knowledge. Even if they have stabilized rent, it is going to go up. Their rent is going to go up regardless, without their knowledge. Is that fair? No, it's not. Thank you very much and that is my testimony.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you and we know what cap means. Next person we're going to call up is Gyro Nuñez.

MR. NUÑEZ: Hi. My name is Gyro Nunez, and I'm a current member of Woodside on the Move. Like many others, I have come here to oppose Innovation QNS and strongly believe that this project will increase gentrification in the area and displace our community.

The major speakers are willing to sell out working class communities for little crumbs from these big real estate developers. We must fight back and our leaders, they must listen to our community. New York is going through a housing crisis and a project like this would displace more and more members of our communities. Innovation QNS will bring

luxury to our District, but this luxury will not be for us. I support the initiative of our Council Member Julie Won to look at the terms of this project and work with the City Council to negotiate in favor of our community or otherwise shut it down.

Now, I'm going to tell you a little bit about myself. My family, my wife and I, live in Woodside, Queens and we have two elderly parents that we have to support. They have no income, except for a bit of help from the government. We apply to the Housing Connect housing lottery, and I'll tell you, I have a horror story with them. This is a, a project that is designed to discourage people from getting those apartments. The only people that I understand get those apartments are people who are getting like one studio or one bedroom apartment.

I read in the news that there were over 26 million people who apply for this, uh, lottery, and yet they said that they could not find enough people that qualify for those apartments. I tell you the information that they requested from me was endless. Hundreds and hundreds of documents that I had to either send through a fax or I had to take it to, uh,



to get notarized at a high cost for me. They rejected me twice.

They, they, they, I had to appeal twice to them until I finally got to a complaint which was supposed to go through an agency called HTP or something like that. This agency came back to me with a notice saying that it was up to the developers, the, the building managers to decide whether I qualify for, you know, that they could look into the complaint. But I don't think that's fair. Uh, I'm going to talk to Julie.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yeah.

MR. NUÑEZ: Because that's another problem, not just, it doesn't, uh, it doesn't end with the developers. It also goes through with the housing lottery. That's a big problem. I'm, I'm going to show you, I'm going to show her when I get the, the opportunity, all the documentation that I had to send to them, a year and a half wasted. With all this documentation, they said that I went over the threshold, \$2,000. You know what those \$2,000 are? My wife gets Medicare because of a disability. That \$2,000 was the money that was paying for her Part B Medicare.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Mr. Nuñez.

MR. NUÑEZ: They did not consider any of that.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Mr. Nuñez.

MR. NUÑEZ: Alright. (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: The next person I'll have is John Bahia.

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS ASSOCIATE BAHIA: Uh, yes, Bahia. Uh, good afternoon, Members of the Subcommittee and to the Chair. Uh, my name is John Bahia, Community Affairs Associate from Woodside on the Move where we provide tenant and housing services, serving up to a thousand of Queens residents every year. I'm also a Queens Community Board 2 Member and a proud resident of Woodside, which neighbors the beautiful and vibrant community of Astoria.

Woodside on the Move stands in solidarity with Council Member Julie Won, the Astoria Not For Sale Coalition, our neighbors and the working and immigrant families of Astoria, in strongly opposing mega luxury development, Innovation QNS. Yes, we are in a housing crisis. That's why we need strong tenant protections like good cause eviction. That's why we need to start creating affordable, green, social

housing. This City needs to start putting people over profit.

A non-guaranteed 40% affordability, sorry, technically 25%, is simply not going to cut it. I, too, have seen the renderings. I, too, saw the Gucci, Chanel, and Dolce and Gabbana in their renderings. And we urge for this Committee to vote against Innovation QNS. Astoria is not for sale. Queens is not for sale. Solidarity forever. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. This panel is now excused. The next panel I'm going to call up is Niquia (SP?) George, Rena (SP?) Abel (SP?) Hamed (SP?), Fagr (SP?) Abadaca (SP?), sorry you all, and Tracy Devendictus (SP?). Once again, that is Tracy Devendictus, Niquia George, Rena Abel Hamed, and Farg Abadaca. F-A-G-R, oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm trying. Ara is on Zoom. You mean Rena, Rana? Rana? Alright. We'll get to her on Zoom, okay, but we are trying to get everybody here, um, in person, alright? Niquia, you may begin.

COMMUNITY ADVOCATE GEORGE: Hello. My name is Niquia George. I am here to represent Woodside Queens. I am a Community Advocate for Woodside. Every year I give back to my community and I support the

children in the community. I have lived in Woodside for 30 plus years. Um, I've been in full support of Innovation QNS. Innovation QNS has been life changing for me and I ask that everyone give them a chance and develop their own relationship with Innovation QNS.

This situation is very personal to me because I have seen the good that this project has brought. I've been in Astoria. I've walked down the streets. I've attended William Cullen Bryant High School. This is a very personal situation for me. And I ask that everyone come out of their ego and really look at the unity it would bring to our community.

Innovation QNS is one of the largest affordable housing developments in the history of Queens. It is literally unprecedented. Innovation QNS will create 1,100 affordable homes, 500 deeply affordable homes for New Yorkers ranging between \$28,000 to \$40,000 for a family of four. Rents starting around \$515 for a studio and \$875 for a three bedroom. Innovation QNS will triple the number of affordable homes created in Queens Community Boards since 2014.

Queens Community Board 1 has added just 102 deeply affordable homes at 30% AMI since 2014. Innovation QNS will add five times that number in one

shot. Saying yes to Innovation QNS is the best way to prevent displacement and slow gentrification in Astoria. Rents in Astoria were on the rise long before Innovation QNS was proposed. I vote, I am for Innovation QNS, and I am for us to grow. Everyone who's thumb is down would like to stay a baby and I would like to become an adult and grow. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Alright. Thank you. Thank you. The next person we'll have is Tracy Devendictus. I'm sorry, Tracy. Devendictus.

MS. DEVENDICTUS: Devendictus.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Devendictus.

MS. DEVENDICTUS: Hi. My name is Tracy Devendictus. Um, I have lived across the street from the proposed development of Innovation QNS for 17 years. And my husband and I are raising our two children in the neighborhood that we love. I am attending here today for them and for my many neighbors who were unable to attend this hearing today because they cannot afford to lose a full day of work in order to testify at this hearing.

I have listened to the developers throughout this process, even the Borough President described my neighborhood, my home, as a wasteland, when I know it

to be a busy and vibrant community with businesses, shops, and a playground. I have listened to the developers lie under oath as they said they engaged with the community about this project. We are the residents who will be displaced and driven out of our homes by the extremely high rents that will result from this luxury development, and I can tell you that no one from the development team has called or spoken to me or knocked on doors or engaged with us directly in any way. Many of my neighbors have not even heard of this project.

I would like to echo the testimony of others who have said that the affordability is not real. The people that need housing the most will be competing against each other for a few hundred apartments in a lengthy, personally invasive, and difficult housing lottery process where up to 25,000 applicants compete for a few hundred apartments.

It is without question that affordable housing is desperately needed in Queens, but this project, with nothing more than promises of 25% affordability is not the answer. Telling residents that we are anti-housing if we don't support our own displacement is downright twisted. Funding that displacement with

City subsidies and the very tax dollars that residents have paid to the City is even more twisted and wrong. Any future development should contain nothing less than 100% affordable housing through a new process that is built by and for the communities that live there. As elected officials, you have the opportunity to do the right thing and vote against this project.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Can you pronounce your name before you begin?

MS. ABADACA: Yes. Hello. My name is Fagr Abadaca.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Fagr Abadaca. Thank you.

MS. ABADACA: I am a 17-year-old Egyptian and a first generation American. I am a local resident to Astoria and here to tell you that I want you to say no and vote in opposition against Innovation QNS. I have lived in Queens since I was born, and I can attest to its incredibly diverse community. It's home to Little Egypt, a neighborhood of north African shops built by people. It's home to immigrants all around the world and small shops started decades ago, and the working class who has struggled through the American dream to bring opportunity to their families. These same opportunities they have worked

so hard for are taken away daily with projects like these, pitting the working class against one another with low-income people of color wanting jobs and low-income people of color wanting a place of affordability to live.

From pre-K to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I went to school in Astoria, sat in seats next to Arabs, African Americans, Latinos, and Asians. We bonded over being first generation Americans that were dreamers, too. Continuing and building off of our people's fight for equality and equity. I have sacrificed my education today to come out here and fight, to fight for the preservation of our communities, to fight for the parents and families who cannot afford the rent raises, to fight for my future.

As a 17-year-old high school student that could be at school right now, I need to be here to tell you that if you actually and effectively ask the people of Astoria, they will find nothing innovative about this. They will find it hypocritical. The American dream embodying parents like my own finding a safe haven in communities like Astoria and then being forced out. It is not vacant. So, please don't wipe



the souls off of these streets. Do not wipe the souls off of these streets. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much. I am so proud of the youth coming here today testifying. We need more youth testifying. So, regardless of what side you're on, shhhhh, regardless of what side you're on, the fact that you all are participating, we truly appreciate it. So, thank you so much for being here. Uh, this panel is excused.

The next panel we're going to call is Selene Carr, uh, Evie Hantzopoulos, Chelsea Patheacus (SP?), and Mason Van Gieson. I'm going to repeat that again, Mason Van Gieson, Chelsea Patheacus, Evie Hantzopoulos, and Selene Carr. I'm sorry. I'm trying. So sorry. Please for the record, uh, correct me and pronounce your name before you begin. Um, and you may begin. You can begin. Just state your name for the record, please.

MS. PATHEACUS: Hi. My name is Chelsea Patheacus. Um, I moved to Astoria eight years ago to be a part of the neighborhood, not to replace it, not to use it. I live in Astoria because of families and friends, many of them lifelong residents and working-class New Yorkers that I get to live alongside and

build a community with. The burden of living costs and the commodification of living spaces is abhorrent. Innovation QNS will not only displace me, my family, and friends, it will destroy this vibrant immigrant and working community of families and individuals who made this place beautiful and safe. Innovation QNS will not be an improvement. It will be a violence against people of color, low income, and hard-working New Yorkers that can, and that cannot be allowed to happen.

I live across the street from the site. 40% affordable units is a slap in the face to those of us who are already struggling to afford the inflation of rent in the immediate area, and will only result in more displacement, because remember, that's 60% at market rate. The promises the development board made were not enough, given a promise, 10 years of noise and air pollution.

They lied when they claimed they did community outreach. 95% of the neighborhood doesn't know what's going on. A few flyers tossed on the floor of our vestibules isn't a conversation. This isn't innovation. It's gentrification, classicism, and racism. Please vote no on Innovation QNS.

MS. VAN GIESON: Hi. My name is Mason Van Gieson. I'm an Astoria resident and artist. I'm urging you to oppose Innovation QNS as the proposal stands. We've heard a lot today about supply and demand and how to house more, we need to build more. However, the issue isn't that we aren't building enough, but that we aren't building projects that meet the needs of the vast majority of New Yorkers. In the last decade, a whopping 92% of new builds in Astoria have been market rate.

And the idea that Astoria hasn't experienced enough new building is a fallacy. I can count at least four, five new developments within a five-block radius of my own apartment, every single one of them luxury. And often, these units then sit empty. Apartments \$2,300 a month and up in New York have an almost 13% vacancy rate. It's clear that we already have a lot of luxury housing we don't need and not enough truly affordable housing. Innovation QNS is emblematic of this issue.

The developers have repeatedly demonstrated a complete disinterest in and disdain for the needs of the community in pursuing this project. They have no real plan to support the infrastructural elements,

schools, transit, traffic, that they plan to overburden. And they have no plan to meet the community's call for truly affordable housing.

Their community outreach and engagement efforts, we've heard so many times today, right, it's been negligible. They refuse to include affordable units above the legally mandated minimum unless the taxpayers subsidize it. And we just heard them try to dress that up as a commitment to affordability. And even those units would be out of reach for most Astorians including my family because of prohibitive income requirements.

They expect our neighborhood to bear the weight of the construction of this project but to reap none of the benefits in favor of wealthy new residents instead. This project exemplifies all the harms of gentrification. It will, it will displace people from the Astoria that they've helped to build, and it cannot be our answer to an affordable housing crisis. Nothing about this project is innovative. It's the same playbook we're all too familiar with, of billionaires exploiting everyday people to line their own pockets. We can and we must demand better. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you.

MS. HANTZOPOULOS: Hi. My name is Evie Hantzapolous. Thank you so much, Chair and Council Member Won, uh, for having us here today. Um, I am an Astoria resident. I have lived there since 1999. I'm the mom of three whose kids all went to the public schools. I've been a community organizer and also a member of Community Board 1 for 12 years. So, I have seen this project from its inception, well, actually not from its inception, from when it was first presented to the Community Board. And I, I threw out my testimony for now cause I actually want to debunk some of the things that have been stated here today, um, by people in support.

Um, one is that Astoria doesn't want housing, doesn't want development. And that is absolutely not true. This is not you're either against housing or for housing. We all want housing. There has been a 12% increase in housing production in Community Board 1 and 2. We have increased our housing there while our population has gone down. In every single MIH rezoning that has been presented in Community Board 1 has passed the City Council and not one MIH unit under that zoning text amendment has been built yet.

Those properties are sitting there. They are being speculated on. They are being flipped, including Silverstein who bought one of the rezoned properties, which is just outside the Innovation QNS mapping area.

What does that mean? This is not just about that project. And the fact that the levels of affordable housing and the percentages are not enough for what this community needs because especially in this area it is majority minority. This is one of the last areas of Astoria that is truly working-class immigrant, where you're having over 50% of the people who are low to very low income as compared to even Community Board 1 which is still at 47%.

This is about what happens, not just with Innovation QNS, but what happens after that. Because we already know because we know this community, we are door knocking, we are hearing from people, that already people are being told, sell your home to me. Sell me your small, rent stabilized building. What happens next? Already there is a land grab going on. It is going to go beyond that, so we need to make sure if this is going to happen, it cannot be at 25%. It cannot be at 40%. It needs to be majority

affordable housing and truly affordable housing because if you are going to tip the scales that much, have so many wealthy people coming in, it will displace people who are working class and immigrants who are struggling for their lives here. And it will have a ripple effect in those surrounding blocks. We're already seeing it happen and we've seen it happen before. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you for your testimony. This panel is excused. The next test, uh, panel I'm going to call up is Christian Marrow (SP?), Jonice (SP?) Greeniolli (SP?), Shegou (SP?) Seroski (SP?), and Zulecka (SP?) Valencia. Once again, that's Zulecka Valencia, Shegou Seroski, Jonice Greeniolli, and Christian Marrow. I'm sorry if I messed up your name again. Uh, just for the record, just state your name and you may begin. We'll start with you.

MS. VALENCIA: Uh, good afternoon. Buenas tardes. My name is Zulecka Valencia. Um, I am 26 years old, and I was born, raised, and currently still live in Astoria, Queens. Innovation QNS, AKA displacement Queens hits on a very personal level. My mother immigrated to America from Bolivia and has been proud to call Astoria her home for over 35 years. Over 35

years of hard work and contribution to the community, and I can with 100% certainty tell you that my mom cannot afford any of these quote, unquote affordable units. And this is the case for so many families in Astoria. I find the audacity of Kaufman, Silverstein, and BedRock to even use the word affordable disgusting. It's incredibly misleading and a flat out lie to the people. And they're being greedy, and it shows.

Over the years, I have seen friends, neighbors be displaced from Astoria due to the effects of gentrification, rising rents, increase of the cost of living and the saddest one of them all, flat out feeling like you no longer belong. Displacement is not going to be limited to this five-block radius or to these six apartments like they make it out to be. Displacement is a wave that's going to spread through the community and to the surrounding communities.

And this is exactly what Innovation QNS is going to do. It's going to force working class residents that have worked towards a better life to consider relocation, and that's not fair. Those from any gentrified community in New York City can say that



that's how it works because we've seen it and we've lived it.

I want to also for a moment, speak about how the youth is impacted. Like I said, I'm 26 years old. I still live at home with my mom. I went to college. I have a corporate job. And I cannot afford to live in my own community on my own without a roommate or a significant other to help with costs. That's ridiculous. There's a whole generation of young New Yorkers who cannot afford to move out and start a life of their own.

The average millennial salary in New York City is about \$45,000. They cannot afford Innovation QNS. I ask the Council to vote no for the people of Astoria and for all working-class New Yorkers. Make it known that any New York City community and its people should always and will always take precedence over big money. Don't put profits over people. Any of all affordable housing should come straight from the pockets of these billionaires. Their profits will be immense no matter what. The use of any taxpayer money to subsidize these affordable units I would consider a straight up misappropriation of taxpayer funds. And I say to vote no to Innovation QNS. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. You may go next, just state your name for the record.

MS. GREENIOLLI: Hello, my name is (INAUDIBLE). Oh, hi. My name is Jonice Greeniolli. I've lived on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in Astoria, Long Island City in a three-story apartment building for more than 19 years. My apartment is a block away from where Innovation QNS proposes to build a 17-story residential tower. No one from Innovation QNS has reached out to me or anyone in my building or on my block about a building that would plunge my entire block into the shadows.

When the City planted new trees on my block more than six years ago, I planted native flowers in the tree beds. Nearly every day someone on the block tells me how much they like the flowers. Those flowers need sun to grow and thrive, and so do my neighbors and me. When the Queens Borough President says my neighborhood is full of parking lots, it is not. PC Richards has a big parking lot and so does the grocery store, Food Bazaar. Both businesses provide essential services for my community. Innovation QNS says my neighborhood is blighted. It is not. It is a thriving, ethnically diverse neighbor, uh, community full of people of all ages.

This project will destroy the Astoria I know and love.

Right now, my neighbors and I pay modest rent, but if this project goes through, our rents will skyrocket. My neighbors, many of whom are elderly will be displaced. This project is too big, and all of those high-priced high rises will displace hard working people like me. It is a travesty to require taxpayers to subsidize a developer whose luxury project will displace us. Even if all the affordable apartments proposed get built, there is no chance that me and my neighbors would get one.

I support building more housing, but not at this scale. I ask the City Council to vote no on this rezoning. Please do not destroy a thriving, stable community with high rises that only rich people can afford. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Um, Christian, before you go, the person representing Silvaski (SP?) Stephanie, are you, are you here? No? okay. Christian, you may go ahead.

MR. MARROW: Hi. Uh, my name is Christian Marrow. Um, I'm a 19-year-old college student in New York City. I've always lived in Astoria for all my life,

basically, and everything's changing, but the thing is that rent is going to go higher because of this, if this happens. I know because I still live with my mom and I know for a fact that, that rent is already raising, uh, more, at a much higher scale still at the time, at this time. And that, um, I actually help her pay for the rent because I have a job and it's not much to, not much but I still try to help her out at times. And knowing what's going to happen is that with, with this, this neighborhood is alive. It's basically, I've been, I've seen everything change and I don't want this to happen.

With one other reason which would be that, what would, what, you have to realize what's going to happen next after, if they build this. The rent's going to up for the stores on Steinway Street, right? So, then put, these stores are going to be out of business. Making sure that these, these, uh, the people who own these, the new Innovation QNS, are going to try to buy those buildings because they have an opportunity to basically own this. And it's going to, they're just going to build more stuff at this time, too. If they basically are going to displace all of these neighborhoods.

And then they're going to, my, my neighborhood, I basically live right across from where the site is, too. I know her at, because she's one of my neighbors as well. So, I'm just saying that I really hope this doesn't happen and it's going to destroy the neighborhood as we know it if this happens. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you for being here, Christian.

MR. MARROW: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Uh, just for the record, the person representing Silvaski Stephanie was in opposition to this project. Uh, this panel is excused. The next panel I'm going to call up is Kate Willet, Dina Hathound, Meloch Hassine, and Connie Murray. Once again, that's Connie Murray, Meloch Hassine. Connie is right here. Dina Hathound, Kate Willet. Okay. I'm going to call up also Kadir (SP?) Garrab (SP?), Ayeska (SP?) Baez (SP?), Daniella Hamillo Cardanno, and Isadora Zenan (SP?). Thank you so much. Uh, just state your name for the record and you may begin. (INAUDIBLE).

MS. BAEZ: Okay. Ayeska Baez.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: I'm sorry. I, we can't.

MS. BAEZ: Ayeska Baez.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay. You may begin.

MS. BAEZ: Um, thank you for your time. So, this entire time, I've been trying to think of how to approach this. Um, I'm lifelong born and raised in Queens. Uh, should I hold it? Perfect. Is this better?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes.

MS. BAEZ: Awesome. So, Queens kid born and raised. Um, I actually went to Long Island City High School down Broadway. Um, I currently live about, I want to say three or four blocks away from where the, where the construction's supposed to happen, right near the movie theater.

Um, I, I have so much to appreciate in Astoria. It's a beautiful community. You know, we have so many diverse neighbors from all over the place. Uh, we know our neighbors. We know their kids. And it, it's not like what people are saying, you know. It, it's a beautiful, thriving community. It's not a wasteland. Um, earlier I heard during the presentation, the Innovation QNS developers said there's no supermarket, and all I could think is, "There's a giant, 24/7 Food Bazaar that occupies an entire chunk

of Northern Boulevard right up from where they're going to, where they'd like construct." Um, and I know this because sometimes at three in the morning, you know, we go, we drive, park in their parking lot. And I've, you know, I've cooked random things at random times. Uh, but the point is, that's possible. There's a reason why that supermarket's there. There's a reason why, um, it's open those hours. There's a reason why there are people in the area, right. It's not a wasteland. Um, I understand everyone's coming here, you know, you think you're going to get all these apartments, all these jobs, and the reality is, they're not thinking about us.

Uh, my partner and I could afford to pay market rate. We would not want to. Not only would we not want to, because it's, you're not going to have a community. It's just going to be different people cycling in and out. They won't care about the neighborhood. The area is going to be, have like this, you know, walled garden where, yes, it's available to the public if you look the right way and you act the right way. Um, and even then, maybe not.

I'm saying, in short, um, I'm against this project. I think the community deserves more,

deserves better. Um, even at 50%, that's not enough especially when you think about the impact for everyone. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next person we'll have is Connie.

MS. MURRAY: My name is Connie Murray. I am a native New Yorker, and I am a 25 year, uh, resident in the same rent stabilized apartment that is right next to the Innovation QNS site. My community, which is filled with a lot of people like me, I'm, I'm a spring chicken compared to the people in my building like the 100-year-old lady who has been in our building for 40 years.

We have been described as weirdos by the Queens Borough President, and that we are accused of living in an industrial wasteland. and I do hope that we have proven today, we're still here. our rally was larger than the paid, union guys. We're not paid. We're kids taking time off from school. Some of us are lucky enough to be able to be here today for the whole day. It is my pleasure to be here.

Our community is wondering why more housing has not been developed, and one of the reasons is because the developers have been hoarding and speculating



their properties, not even, uh, renting out the commercial properties. That's one reason why we have not had any new development.

I appreciate that they saved Marino Frost, but they did not save no one else. Thank you very much. And saving one person doesn't mean saving everybody. Today we've had grown men in tears almost up here. That's what the stakes are for our community. A city of yes is starting to sound like a dynamic where you can't say no to something that isn't good. And that is an abusive dynamic. We're not here because we're baby brained and we're mentally ill and we're wealthy homeowners. We're here because we are long term residents in our vibrant, thriving community. We want to build on that. We ask the developers to do better. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Um, sir, just one second. You can go next, just state your name for the record.

MS. ZANEN: Hi. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes.

MS. ZANEN: Hi. My name is Isadora Zanen. Um, I've been living in Astoria since I was seven years old when my, my mom and I immigrated from Brazil, and I

urge you to vote no on the Innovation QNS rezoning as it stands.

This is my third or fourth time attending a public hearing to testify against Innovation QNS, and I have been testifying against this project over and over again, and each time I come, Tracy Capune and the other developers tout out the same script, that they have talked to the community and they have made adjustments to their project in accordance to community needs. And I think it's been clear by all the people who actually came out from the community, that this is not true. If it were actually true, I and hundreds of other Astorians would not be coming out each and every time that one of these hearings happen.

What we have been saying, what we have been saying over and over again is that this project is not affordable and will not meet the actual needs of the community. And in return, we have been told by the developers that what we need is dog parks and 75% market rate housing and a food hall to display the multicultural community.

Clearly, these developers have not spent any time in Astoria. Otherwise, they would know that we

already have multicultural food in the area. We have a Brazilian supermarket, Bangladeshi groceries, and restaurants from all over the world. There are, these are small businesses run by the immigrant working class families that built this Borough up. Innovation QNS is gentrification Queens. It will raze down these communities in favor of the people who are always privileged in, in these projects, the wealthier class who have already had their choice in housing in Manhattan and elsewhere.

And I would say that a government of the people, by the people, for the people, we the people of Astoria have come out again, and again, and again, to plead with our elected officials to side with us instead of siding with billionaires who have a killing profit. They are profiteering off our communities, off of our hard work, off of our backs, off of our working class. Sorry. I plead with you to vote against this project. We deserve your attention. We deserve housing that's actually affordable for us instead of to be the gravel for the privileged communities that can afford four, five, \$6,000 rents. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Uh, next one will be Kadir.

MR. GARRAB: Um, I disapprove of the rezoning because it, one, there's already an affordable housing issue in New York City and Astoria is already expensive and this problem will only exacerbate the issue of affordable housing in New York City. and not only that, it will, it will probably cause the development in Woodside, Sunny Side, and it will also force these residents in, deeper into Queens. And it'll also cause them further commutes if they want to go on to Manhattan on the train.

So, I disapprove it, um, and I think also the residents should decided how, how the, how their neighborhood should be built, not the developers, because they live there, not them.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much. And just for the record, Daniella Hamillo Cardanno is not here but she was, she represents Western Queens Community Land Trust, and she was in opposition, uh, to this project as well.

Thank you. This panel is now excused. The next panel I'm going to call up is Onidita Sarker, uh, Sasha Wajaronte (SP?), Farriah (SP?) Akhtar (SP?),

Tahia (SP?) Islam (SP?). Okay. Jenny Dubnau. Tahia Islam was in opposition just for the record. Caroline Yeow, Gabrilla Silva, and Tahita (SP?) Amman (SP?). This will be the last in person panel.

Yes, Edwin DeJesus, sorry. You can come up too as well. Come on. Okay. Uh, Edwin, could you start for us please? You're a part of this panel as well? Okay. Um, alright. We'll figure it out. Don't worry. Edwin, you may begin.

MR. DEJESUS: Hi, everyone. My name is Edwin DeJesus. I am a former independent candidate for New York City Council's 22<sup>nd</sup> District and a lifelong resident of Astoria for 25 years. I attended PS2, IS141, et cetera, et cetera. Our neighborhood does not look anything like it did before. Pizza Palace, gone. Key Food, gone. Best yet, gone. Mike's Diner, gone. These are hallmarks of Astoria and now it's becoming completely homogenized and taken over by a bunch of YIMBY outsiders, for lack of a better term.

So, when someone like Mayor Adams had a press conference this morning and was against, uh, or supporting Innovation QNS because he says that he supports jobs, I don't think that's true. I think that's gaslighting. If the Mayor cared about these

jobs, he wouldn't have fired thousands of workers last year over the mandates. So, let's talk about jobs because the more we corporatize the neighborhood, the bigger retail giants and corporate chain stores that we put in there, the more jobs we will lose in the long run as they become automated away. When you walk into a pharmacy for example and do self-checkout, that's a loss of jobs and that's going to continue to keep happening if we allow stuff like Innovation QNS to be green lit.

If you look at the price of a bacon, egg, and cheese, historically, on a roll has been \$3.50. It is now up to \$5. Astoria cannot be like Williamsburg. This is starving the people. These are people who are working starvation wages. So, when we approve things like the Halletts Point rezoning, we're throwing NYCHA under the bus. When we do things like approving the Hoyt Avenue, 31<sup>st</sup> Street rezoning, which the Astoria Council Member promised not to do, but then in her first week of office, did such that, shows that power corrupts, and greed corrupts. And that's why we want to codify member deference, so that when someone like Julie Won's, uh, goes against this project, all of her peers will be forced to listen by

law. If we codify member deference, then we can actually have a bigger say in the community.

And the last thing I want to say really quick, is President, uh, Queens Borough President Donovan Richards, who at the very last-minute flip flopped on this issue, I think it's because that speaks volumes, that he is controlled and owned by the big real estate developers and the system of greed that is perpetuated by the two parties.

So, when you go and vote this November, keep that in mind that every time you vote down ballot for the same candidates over and over again, you're really being complicit in the rape of Astoria.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Can we go to the next person please? Please state your name for the record.

MS. YEOW: Hi. My name is Caroline Yeow. I'm a born and raised in Queens and I'm an organizer with the PSL party for socialism and liberation. Uh, I live on 37<sup>th</sup> Street and 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue, which is right in the zone where, uh, Innovation QNS would be. I, I urge the City Council to say no. Um, but we should take the City funds that we have and create

affordable, quality housing and jobs. That is possible.

Uh, Innovation QNS claims to be, speak for the people, but we know it's a plan by the billionaires for the billionaires. And the developers behind this project say that they're adding housing, adding jobs, but, um, you know, these are all things that we do desperately need. But let's be clear here. Their plan is not the solution to the crisis that we're going through. They're taking advantage of the crisis.

If we zoom out, Innovation QNS wants to make Astoria a neighborhood where the average rent is \$4,000 for a one bedroom. I can't afford that. I can't even imagine affording that. Um, we shouldn't have to compete for the limited amount of affordable units that are on the table right now. And the rent will go up, because I don't hear the City passing rent control. I don't hear that happening at all.

So, that's money from our pockets to the real estate companies and landlords. And Innovation QNS is the biggest opportunity for them and not us. And like so many already said, our issue isn't with jobs. It's not with training. It's not with arts programs. Our issue is that thousands of us will be displaced by



the time the project already gets going. It's real to us and that's why we're here.

For housing, um, it's true that we need housing and jobs and revamped public spaces, but what, what we really need is a people's plan, not a billionaire's plan. And what does a people's plan look like? For housing, it means 100% affordable housing across the City. we're not housing starved, like, you know, they said before. Our housing is being gate kept by the very sponsors of Innovation QNS.

And for jobs, the City can create jobs overnight on public infrastructure, union jobs, living wage jobs, jobs at NYCHA, jobs on housing repairs that NYCHA owes to, owes to its residents, jobs, and schools. Um, I would love to connect with the workers, the union workers that came out today because today, we're testifying for our neighborhood and tomorrow we're standing with, with unions for higher wages.

So, let's make jobs and expand affordable housing without bargaining with these developers that always turn their backs on us when the green light, when they get that green light. Take the money from the

inflated police and the military budget and put it towards this people's plan for housing, for jobs, and tax the billionaires. Period. But also, the ones that made soaring profits this entire pandemic. That was our money in the first place. And so, this is what a people's plan for economic development should be like and developers, if you're in our way, City Council, if you're in our way, we're just going to have to keep pushing past you. And Astoria is not for sale. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Uh, you can go next, and just state your name for the record.

MS. DUBNAU: My name is Jenny Dubnau, um, I've lived in Queens for over 20 years, a native New Yorker. I'm also a member of the Western Queens Community Land Trust standing in opposition to Innovation QNS, thanking Julie for her courageous leadership on this issue.

I wanted to talk about speculation. You know, I, I heard some of the pro development people complaining about land value. They are driving up the land value. That is part of the reason that we have a nightmarish housing crisis in the City. And I am respectfully begging the City Council to be strong

and come up with a different way. We need a whole different way to provide deeply affordable housing on a massive scale. It does not include luxury housing that is, you know, if, if you want to keep MIH, how about flipping the ratio? It should be at least 75% affordable and then they're getting plenty of profit.

If you up-zone industrial land, you are increasing the value of that land by so many orders of magnitude. They are getting to build 27 stories instead of one. So, on that same footprint of land, think of all the extra rents they are getting. They are also flipping the use from manufacturing, which by the way, we need, it was not an empty wasteland. That was a bustling, uh, site of jobs, small restaurants, and goods that the community. Those were good jobs and that, that land was purposely kept vacant. It was speculation. They were looking for this up-zoning and if the City Council gives it to them, you are continuing this cycle of land speculation where working class individuals can't afford to keep their homes and people get priced out over and over again. You know, instead of granting, you know, accepting a few crumbs of affordability that isn't even affordable from billionaire develops

and giving them a gift of building higher and getting maximum profit, why can't we take the 60,000 apartments that are being warehoused right now and put them on the market? There are many other ways that we can get deeply affordable housing that do not include frankly, transferring money from the 99% to the 1%, because that is what this is. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Um, Mr. DeJesus, can you just allow this, um, lady to sit right there so she could testify next please. Uh, just state your name for the record and you may begin. Thank you, Mr. DeJesus.

ORGANIZER SILVA: My name Gabriella Silva. I'm an organizer with the Party for Socialism and Liberation, and I'm a tenant in Woodside. I live in a rent stabilized unit. It's clear that the works who have spoken today agree that our City needs more affordable housing and local union jobs. I share the opinion that Innovation QNS is not a stable or reliable path to what we want and urge the City Council to vote no. we need real innovation. We need real solutions to our shared problems.

I want to echo the demands of millions of working tenants and name alternative actions that our City

government can take instead of Innovation QNS and projects like it. Fund public infrastructure projects and create local union jobs. Our existing housing, housing, roads, and public transportation are in shambles. People are literally dying from unsafe living conditions. Let's invest in and improve infrastructure that's in desperate need of work.

Surveys from last year show that there's an overall decrease in the quality and upkeep of all units in New York City, rent regulated, market rate, and public housing. Fully fund and renovate NYCHA through public funding and repeal the Faircloth amendment to expand the construction of public housing. In this way, we have more affordable housing and local union jobs.

Enact rent control. Enforce a cap on rent to ensure that poor and working-class people aren't spending the majority of their income on rent or getting priced out and displaced of their homes or our City altogether. Expropriate and end all apartment vacancies. Do not let the rich hoard housing that we desperately need. House homeless people in affordable, permanent housing. Shift away from temporary options to permanent solutions. Stop

giving our hard-earned tax dollars to corporations. Cut out these companies and invest our taxes in affordable housing and other infrastructure that we need. Raise the taxes on developers, bankers, and Wall Street who may super profits and use the money that we can from them, take back from them to fund our needs.

True innovation means creating a system that actually works for millions of working-class New Yorkers. We don't want to hear lies about a housing shortage or scarcity. This is not a problem of supply and demand. Data show that there is more housing in this City to house the entire population, but the problem is, developers and landlords are allowed to keep units vacant, uh, let apartments become completely dilapidated and unlivable and price rent so high that the vast majority of New Yorkers can't afford it.

I'll end with this, that you have a choice to make. You can either do the bidding of billionaire developers, or you can side and represent the interests of the vast majorities of, of New Yorkers who make up this economy, who make this City what it is. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Um, you may go next.  
Who are you representing?

LEAD ORGANIZER AKHTAR: Uh, my name is Farriah Akhtar.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Oh, you're, you're, oh. It's your turn now. Alright. Go ahead. No, you was up here and you (CROSSTALK).

LEAD ORGANIZER AKHTAR: Right. no, I hear you. I, I can see why that is confusing.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: No, don't, go ahead.

LEAD ORGANIZER AKHTAR: Okay. My name is Farriah Akhtar and I'm CAAAV's lead organizer in Astoria. I have been organizing and building power with working class people of color for the past eight or nine years. And this is a personal issue for me. My family lived in a basement apartment on 31<sup>st</sup> Street and it was on those blocks that I have my earliest memories. They immigrated from Bangladesh, my parents, in the 1990s and this community has long been a place for brown, black and brown immigrants, and it still is.

The reality is, yes, rent prices have gone up and a lot of people have been displaced. And yet, there is still thousands upon thousands of people who call this neighborhood home, who are clinging on despite

dealing with disrepair, despite dealing with overcrowding. And when we talk about Innovation QNS, we should be very clear, that this is a billionaire's project. Silverstein, BedRock, Kaufman that's been bought by Hackman Capital and Square Mile Capital are all billionaire firms. When we think about where we are getting our information, we should be very clear, Donovan Richards and Mayor, Mayor Eric Adams have been bankrolled by real estate. And so, when they say that this not about black and brown people, this is not about working-class people, who are they actually representing?

City Council and Land Use Committee, you have the, a chance to make a real difference in how gentrification happens in New York City. are we going to let billionaires and developers do our bidding? Or are you actually going to represent your constituents. Council Member Won has taken a brave position and she is not alone in that. There are dozens upon dozens of community organizations who are behind her. Moreover, uh, every level of elected has come out, uh, in favor of supporting Julie Won and us against Innovation QNS. So, you heard from Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez. We've heard from our



State Senator, Mike Gianaris. We've heard from our Assembly Members, and we've also heard from other City Council Members who are willing to stand with her.

I want to make one other thing very clear that the levels of vacancy that are most needed are under \$1,500. Not a single one of those apartments would be a part of this project, and this is a scale of a neighborhood rezoning. The scale and impact is disproportionate and it should not be within this purview. Just because they initiated, doesn't mean that we have to continue down this road. There are over 60,000 vacant apartments that are rent stabilized, and even the rent stabilized apartments are not safe. Developers are buying up those buildings and can apply to have them demolished and are doing so.

I organize thousands of tenants who are dealing with issues in rent stabilized buildings and not. Just because they have these so-called legal protections doesn't mean that they're actually happening. There are hundreds and hundreds of people who could not be here today because of work, because of childcare. There is language access issues. There

is disability access issues. But those people are real. Those are black and brown immigrant people who make this community what it is. And so, I urge all of City Council to vote with Council Member Julie Won and with working class New Yorkers. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you.

ORGANIZER ONADI: Um, hello. My name is Onindita and I am the Astoria Membership Organizer for CAAAV. Um, I think one thing that I can put a very good perspective on, is like how much outreach has actually been done. We've been doing outreach in this community since the day we found out about this project, just going around asking anyone and everyone if they've heard anything about this. And they hadn't.

There was this one point where Innovation QNS was literally giving out bread in front of NYCHA to get people to sign up to their petitions. These are very, very, very terrible ways of manipulating people that are going through pandemic and like food scarcity. One of the buildings, three of the buildings we organized, one of them hasn't had gas in a month. One of them hasn't had gas since May and they're all going to disrepair under new maintenance because we

believe that their landlords are waiting to sell. And when we sent letters and when we're asking for repairs, we're getting told that it's not a big enough issue.

On the other side of this is Innovation QNS is a large-scale development that decides who's going to live in Astoria and what the character of Astoria is going to be. Something of this nature, like, in this area, hasn't happened. And when you let these expensive buildings into an area that's low income and doesn't have money, people are going to be affected. We go out every day and we hear sad stories about people's families having to live apart from them, people's communities having to live apart or move out after 20 years, 10 years in a building because of disrepair, because of the lack of maintenance, because of the high pricings. These people don't want to go to Buffalo. They don't want to go to Michigan or Albany. They want to live in their communities, the communities they've helped build. The communities that they thrive in and the people that they love and feel safe around and why shouldn't they get to? Is it because they don't have

money? But, yeah, I, I strongly oppose this project.  
Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much. Um, and just for the record, Sasha Wajaronte was in opposition to this project. And Tahita Amman was in opposition to this project. That concludes, before I conclude, there's, um, you're excused. Is there anybody in the Chambers who did not testify who waited here to testify and that didn't testify already, uh, who's waiting here to testify? Okay. Kimba Wiggins is in favor. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you everyone who was patient, uh, who came down here to testify. We are going to transition to our online, uh, testimonies right now.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL 2: Uh, Chair, the first panel of remote witnesses will include Candra (SP?) Cruise, George Stematias (SP?) Richard Khuzami, Silas Levitt, and Tony Barsamian. We will begin with Candra Cruise, who will be followed by George Stematias. Candra Cruise.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, we can hear you.

MS. CRUISE: Hi. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, we can hear you.

MS. CRUISE: Hello. My name is Candra Nojomari (SP?) Cruise Guerros (SP?) and I have had the privilege of calling 41<sup>st</sup> Street my home for the 23 years of my life after my parents immigrated from Venezuela. I went to elementary school at PS166 on 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue. For Middle School, I attended Most Precious Blood between Broadway and 34<sup>th</sup> and for high school, I attended the infamous William Cullen Bryant High School on 46<sup>th</sup> Street. I am now an academic getting my PhD in Biological anthropology at NYU. Therefore, I can say that I actually know a bit about humans, our history, and our cultures.

When I attended my first national conference, that was the first time that I was faced with the beauty of what it was to be raised in a place like Astoria, Queens. Diversity was the norm for me. I was raised among distinct communities of immigrants all fighting to attain their individual views of happiness and success. This diversity and acceptance is not readily available in other parts of the City, State, or Country. I grew up learning how to say I love you in Arabic, attending Greek Easter watching my friend's grandma roast an entire lamb, learned how to curse in Albanian, and craving a hefty (INAUDIBLE)

after a night of dancing to Bombay and (INAUDIBLE) wine.

I connected with individuals from all different Latino communities, Columbianos (SP?), (INAUDIBLE), Brasilero (SP?), Nicaraguan, (INAUDIBLE), always laughing at how our Spanish is slightly different in each country. When I look around my community, I do not see the individuals making at least \$70 to \$90K required for the, required for the eligibility to apply for affordable housing in Astoria. Also, 1,000 apartments of unknown size are not enough to house all of my neighbors between 41<sup>st</sup> Street and Northern. Not to mention, it is a lottery that will not even prioritize those directly affected.

When I look around my community, I see my friend's mother who worked as a babysitter to help her husband meet rent at the end of the month. I see my friends whose parents work in kitchens or that clean luxury apartments that have appeared throughout the City. I see my mother who scrubbed floors with her hands to make \$20 a day or my dad who has worked in the same parking lot for over a decade.

SEARGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time is expired.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you.

MS. CRUISE: And I am opposed to this project.

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL 2: Next, we'll hear from George Stematias, to be followed by Richard Khuzami. Do we have George Stematias? George, if you can hear me, you need to accept the unmute request in order to begin your testimony. Okay. We will come back to George and try Richard Khuzami. Richard Khuzami.

PRESIDENT KHUZAMI: Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes.

PRESIDENT KHUZAMI: Perfect. Okay. Okay. Thank you. Okay. I am Richard Khuzami. I am the President of the Old Astoria Neighborhood. Sorry, I'm hearing somebody.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, Richard, we can hear you.

PRESIDENT KHUZAMI: Is it okay to start?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, we can hear you.

PRESIDENT KHUZAMI: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Continue.

PRESIDENT KHUZAMI: Okay. I am Richard Khuzami, President of the Old Astoria Neighborhood Association

and Member of the Land Use Committee of CB1. I am speaking as a member of Old Astoria. We are in support of the project for the following reasons. One, supply and demand. The validity of this in reducing, uh, market rate rents was evident during the pandemic. Uh, there was a huge reduction in market rate rents, uh, when supply exceeded demand because so many residents left the City. As soon as people returned, rents immediately started to increase. CB1 has approved approximately seven major developments over the past 12 years, and out of approximately 12 towers that were to be built, only one has been completed. In order to increase supply of both market and affordable housing, it's imperative that we make sure that all projects are financially feasible so funding can be acquired, especially when dealing with private land.

The local retail business environment needs assistance also. The project would increase the local customer base dramatically and the new commercial retail and the development itself would help make the eastern end of Steinway Street a destination. While much has been made, uh, about protecting existing lower density residential buildings west of 35<sup>th</sup>



Avenue. However, these structures will soon have to be retrofitted or much more likely replaced for sustainability as they do not come close to meeting standards. Um, they all burn fossil fuels and they, none of them really are insulated. Uh, we should not base our development decisions on preserving housing that has a finite lifespan.

However, there is a big need for rezoning the entire area, uh, between the 2010 Northern Astoria rezoning and the Dutch Kills Special District. This, we need a holistic look at how we want to live, not isolated developments that have no context upon which to make decisions. Also, uh, these could help protect the area west of 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue, so no new structures, um.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time is expired.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Richard. You can submit the rest of your testimony to us online. Thank you.

PRESIDENT KHUZAMI: Okay.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL 2: Next, we will hear from Silas, Silas Levitt, who will be followed by Tony Barsamian. Silas Levitt.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Silas, if you can hear us, you may begin.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL 2: I think we're having some technical difficulties with Silas Levitt. Tony Barsamian.

PUBLISHER BARSAMIAN: Yes, I'm ready. Hi. Shall I start?

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL 2: Please.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes.

PUBLISHER BARSAMIAN: Hi, everyone. My name is Tony Barsamian and I have lived and worked in Queens for more than 44 years and my office is around the block from the development. I am active member of the community. I'm a publisher of the Queens Gazette Newspaper. And I dutifully serve as Chair above the Steinway Business Improvement District known at the Steinway Astoria Partnership and Innovation LDC. Innovation LDC is a not for profit formed by a wide variety of stakeholders in the Astoria community with the mission to negotiate and ultimately enter community benefits agreement with the developers of Innovation QNS.

Innovation LDC is made up of members representing a holistic viewpoint of the community. Our members

herald from organizations including but not limited to The Astoria Film Festival, Jobs Plus, Zone 126, Variety Boys and Girls Club, Astoria Houses, Queens Bridge Houses, and Ravenswood Houses. Together for more than year, we've been working to ensure that this development brings tangible and meaningful benefits to our community.

Since the inception, we devised subcommittees on housing, transportation, arts, culture, education, environment, jobs, each and every subcommittee has worked painstakingly and diligently to formulate lists of comprehensive demands solely in an effort to benefit the community.

Our asks have ranged from workforce development programs such as green job training, apprenticeship local hiring measures, the establishment of various funds for local hiring and training, the opportunity for NYCHA residents, MWBEs and disabled workers, sustainability, resiliency measures such as sustainable building design, measures to reduce the heat island effect, using renewable energy sources to the extent possible, and mitigating air pollution during construction, establishing waste reduction

management systems, flood resiliency, which now make a big difference.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time is expired.

PUBLISHER BARSAMIAN: Open space. I just want to end by saying that this program I am testify for in support of the development. It has the potential to be great. We need the City Council's approval, and we will get great benefits for the community, and I will personally follow up.

CHAIRPEROSN RILEY: Thank you, Tony.

PUBLISHER BARSAMIAN: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Tony.

PUBLISHER BARSAMIAN: And George Stematiatitis is available. I saw his name, so you know.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL 2: Thank you

PUBLISHER BARSAMIAN: There he is.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL 2: Thank you. Uh.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thanks.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL 2: So, we just heard that George Stematiatitis is unavailable. Do we have Silas Levitt? Silas Levitt?

MR. STEMATIATIS: Hello. I am available.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Oh, there you go, George.

Okay.

COORDINATOR LEVITT: George is here.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Silas, give me one second.

George, you may begin.

MR. STEMATIATIS: Thank you very much for this opportunity. First, I hate to use the word I, but I must. I've been part, since 1973 living a few blocks away. I've been working with others and other groups to stop the prostitution in our community and to stop state takeover of, um, Rykers Island. So, I've been in the trenches.

This is not an issue of billionaires or people of color. This is an issue of the continued growth in Astoria that everybody seems to love but forgets what it took for us to get here. Innovation QNS is the organic fertilizer for the future of Astoria. That amount of people coming into the community of all races, of all incomes, don't keep their hands in their pocket. They're going to go out, they're going to buy shoes. They're going to need a salesman. They're going to want to eat. They're going to need a waiter. They're going to need an accountant. They're going to need a lawyer. They're going to need

everything that has made Astoria grow throughout the years.

Support this project. It's the future of Astoria. I am proud that our community has reached a point where we got a big organization like this one to think that we're worthy and the four or five blocks that they're going to destroy have been in your way at the quality of life at that end of Astoria for years. I am very emotional about this. This is my community. I've been here since 1973 and have fought all the fights for a better, better quality of life for everyone. Every single person. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, George.

COORDINATOR LEVITT: God bless you. Vote yes if you care about Astoria.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, George. Silas, uh, if you can hear me, you can begin.

COORDINATOR LEVITT: My name is Silas Levitt and I'm the Housing Development Coordinator for HANAC. Uh, I would just like to thank you all for hearing my testimony today regarding the Innovation QNS project. Uh, Innovation, uh, HANAC is a nonprofit founded in 1972 in Astoria and is a city-based social service

and affordable housing development organization. Uh, for the past 20 years, we've played an ever-expanding role as a social services provider and affordable housing developer and currently the organization serves over 30,000 New Yorkers annually through our social services and in our housing.

Uh, we provide a wide range of programs, youth and adults, and currently provide affordable housing to over, or approximately 1,000 seniors. Uh, we first met with the Innovation QNS team in the spring of 2020, when the project partners reached out to us to hear our feedback on their proposal and to learn more about the services we provide to seniors. Shortly after that, HANAC and Innovation QNS team formed a partnership and as both parties felt that HANAC's decades of experience operating senior affordable housing in Astoria, it made us the ideal organization to work towards their, uh, Innovation QNS, uh, affordable housing efforts.

Uh, for this project we will be working as the MIH administering agent overseeing the lease up of the affordable units. Uh, HANAC is an HPD certified administrative agent for the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing program, and we have extensions, extensive

experience in the marketing and we set all affordable units to the HPD Housing Connect lottery process. We would also be involved in the supportive social services and management of any dedicated senior housing that comes about as part of the project.

The need for housing and especially senior housing in New York City and in Queens. It's high and poised to go even higher. Currently the wait list for senior housing is approximately five and a half years, uh. When our most recent building, the HANAC Corona Senior Residence delivered in 2018 at Corona, there was 50,000 applications through the HPD Housing Connect lottery process for only 68 units.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has expired.

COORDINATOR LEVITT: Alright. Thank you very much. Uh, this, we need this proejct.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you.

COORDINATOR LEVITT: We need more affordable housing in our community. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL 2: Chair, before we call the next panel, I just want to make an announcement for those registered online and waiting to testify. We



have a large number of speakers signed up to testify on this item. And we have a relatively small staff of people working to ensure that everyone has their opportunity to speak. I'm going to ask that everyone please be patient and in particular, to please refrain from using the raise hand button. We are unable to provide individual assistance. If you have successfully logged into the hearing, and are, uh, logged in with us, we simply ask, we will get to you, and we ask that you please continue to be patient while others are testifying. We will get to everyone in turn.

And now, I will call the next panel which will include Roque Rodriguez, Rebecca Bratsbees (SP?), Rana Abdel Hammid, and Kat Bride. Roque Rodriguez, apologies for pronunciation, to be followed by Rebecca Bratsbees.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Mr. Rodriguez, if you can hear us, you may begin. Roque Rodriguez, if you can hear us, you may begin. Okay. We don't have Mr. Rodriguez. We can move to Rebecca.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL 2: Rebecca Bratsbees. Oh. Is that Roque Rodriguez?

PROFESSOR BRATSBEEES: Hello. Um, my name is Rebecca Bratsbees. And forgive me, I'm walking home from work. Um, I'm a professor at CUNY School of Law where I run the Center for Open Environmental Reform. I also am a longtime Astoria resident. And I'm writing to, I'm urging City Council to reject Innovation QNS' proposal.

Astoria is not for sale. We need investment in our community, so it supports and expands the incredible, vibrant community we already have, that makes it more sustainable, more affordable, more welcoming to a wide array of people. The Innovation QNS proposal is just about the polar opposite of what need. We welcome sensible development, but this is not sensible. Rezoning dramatically increases the value of property held by private owners. That's not a reason not to rezone, but it is a reason to think carefully about the public is getting in exchange for conveying that value.

Under that lens, it is clear that this massive rezoning request should be denied. This proposal is a predatory attempt to extract value and wealth from the people and neighborhood of Astoria in exchange for virtually nothing. It's a giveaway. A gift to a

real estate developer who cares nothing for us and cares nothing for maintaining Astoria as the special place that is it.

This is a heavily rent burdened area as you've hearing over and over again. An area at high risk of displacement. Innovation QNS' new apartment building, new apartments will be priced at a level that is inaccessible to virtually all the current residents in this neighborhood. This is true for all of the so-called affordable apartments as well as the \$4,000 per month market rate ones that are out of reach for virtually everyone. This project will drive gentrification and displacement. And we don't need it. What we need is affordable housing. What we need is housing for families. What we need is housing for seniors on fixed incomes.

This development provided nothing of what we actually need more of in Astoria. Instead of meeting the needs this neighborhood actually has, this project would instead replace it.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time is expired.

PROFESSOR BRATSBEES: Lucrative.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Rebecca.

PROFESSOR BRATSBEE: Astoria is not for sale. I am opposed to this.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Uh, do we have Roque Rodriguez?

MR. RODRIGUEZ: Hi, yes. Okay.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes. Mr. Rodriguez, you may begin.

MR. RODRIGUEZ: Uh, thank you. Uh, my name is Roque Rodriguez. I am a resident of Sunny Side. I've lived here for, uh, 12 years. I've lived in Sunny Side and Woodside. I've owned a business in Sunny Side for six years and I'm opening another next month. And just this summer, my wife and I, we had, uh, had to, we were, we were displaced from our apartment, and we found it almost impossible to find an apartment. We were rejected from like five different apartments who wouldn't take our application because of our credit score. And I, and I am here to oppose, uh, Innovation QNS, because I, I feel that that the, this development's going to lead to more of that, to people who love the neighborhood, who work in the neighborhood, who open businesses in the neighborhood, not being able to, to afford to

live in the neighborhood that they work in and they open businesses that they support.

I, I, the relationship that the City Council and politicians in New York in general have with the, uh, REBNY or all of us have with Real Estate Board New York, it feels like it's a bully sitting on your chest, slapping you in the face with both of your hands, asking you why you're hitting yourself. You know, it's, it's an abusive relationship. We have people like Donovan Richards telling us that yes, this is going to happen, no matter what, it's going to happen. We have to say yes. And, and, and starting from, I reject that premise.

Starting from that viewpoint is why people get displaced from their neighborhood. What is we start from the viewpoint that yes, what's going to happen is we're going to build 100% affordable housing for everybody. And not affordable housing, low-income housing, I don't know why we're afraid to say that we say deeply affordable. Low income, we need housing for people with low income. That is what I'm here to advocate for, no to Innovation QNS. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next, uh, person to testify is Rana Abdel Hammid. Rena Abdel Hammid, if you can hear me, please unmute.

MS. HAMMID: Yeah, hello. Hello, I'm here. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, we can hear you, Rana.

MS. HAMMID: Great. Hi. My name is Rana Abdel Hammid, and I am born and raised in Astoria. I spent my life in Astoria. My parents live in Astoria. My community is in Astoria, and I actually come from a north African, working-class neighborhood known as Little Egypt. We have small businesses that are just blocks away from where the rezoning is meant to take place. I live today just blocks away from where the rezoning is meant to take place.

And for months, community organizations have, have been organizing to fight for truly affordable housing and a proposal that reflects the needs of our community. And so far, what we've been given has been crumbs. There have, they have not budged, the developers have not budged at all from their initial proposal. They're still reaping the same profits that they initially had proposed, and our community are not going to be able to have access to the truly

affordable housing that we deserve. I spent my whole life watching members of my community be displaced from Astoria. My own family experienced housing insecurity in Astoria, and I know that we need affordable housing, and we could do better.

And I'm, I'm going, and I ask the council Members to vote no on Innovation QNS because we deserve better than this and we will not settle for this. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next person we have is Kat Bride. Kat, if you can hear me, please unmute and you may begin.

MS. BRIDE: Okay. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, we can hear you.

MS. BRIDE: Thank you so much. I'd like to thank the, uh, Julie Won, and the City Council and those, uh, pro and con who are speaking today and those who are still listening. My name is Kat Bride and I've lived for 18 years at 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, 10 feet from the development zone in areas D and E. I work in the service industry, and rent stabilization is the reason I can afford to live in New York City. My opposition to the project is not based on housing which everyone in our neighborhood and in this

hearing agrees we all need. My opposition to the project is in its current form. In his opinion piece published in yesterday's Daily News, Queens Borough President Donovan Richards acknowledged this plan is far from perfect and developers made significant missteps and failed to conduct community outreach. I would like to know why Donovan Richards and other supporters think that something far from perfect is good enough for me and my neighbors. What's so hard about making it better?

And as someone who lives so close to the development, I want to tell you I never received a flyer in the mail, a knock on my door, or an email, or a phone call to introduce this project and I take umbrage that the marketing materials make it sound like this replaces only garages and empty lots while concealing the fact that residences will be razed, and people displaced.

Similarly, developers have promised housing and jobs to residents of the Queens Bridge NYCHA houses, but I don't know how these promises can be fulfilled when only union labor will manage construction and the future allocations of units is a mystery.

Innovation QNS asks a lot our neighbors, five or more



years of construction, dust, noise, street closures, disruptions to gas, electric, and water lines and an increase of 6,000 people for two bus lines and one subway station. The project will also steal my block's sunshine with a 20-story building which will obscure the eastern light to the surrounding blocks of three-story apartment buildings.

I think it's fair and right for us in Astoria to ask a lot of Innovation QNS to deliver more for us. If developers can meet Council Member Julie Won's demands of 55% affordable apartments and preference for local residents, I would support the project. But as it stands now, it's not good enough for me and my neighbors. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The next panel we're going to call up is Brendan Cheney, Carl Osten, and John Melatiadis (SP?). The first person we'll have speak is Brendan Cheney. Brendan, if you can hear me, uh, please unmute and you may begin. Brendan Cheney, are you ready to begin?

DIRECTOR CHENEY: Yes, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, we can hear you. You may begin.

DIRECTOR CHENEY: Alright. Good afternoon. My name is Brendan Cheney. I am Director of Policy and Communications at the New York Housing Conference. I would like to thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify. Every neighborhood must say yes to more housing, including more affordable housing if we are going to make progress fighting the affordable housing crisis. Today the Subcommittee is considering a proposal for mixed-use housing in Astoria, Queens called Innovation QNS, including more than 1,100 affordable apartments with more than 500 extremely low income roughly for households earning \$36,000 per year.

New York City has an affordable housing crisis that affects every neighborhood. Nearly one million households are rent burdened, paying more than 30% of their income on rent and more than 68,000 people are homeless in New York City. When every neighborhood is feeling this crisis and every City Council District needs more affordable housing including Council District 26 where the project is located. In this District, 12.6% of households live below the poverty level and 44.2% of renters are rent burdened while 815 New Yorkers who were in a City shelter at the end

of 2021 last lived in one of two overlapping Community Boards.

Mixed with residents with real housing needs is a high cost, higher income district where the medium income is \$71,500. This District needs affordable housing as much as anywhere else in the City. While this District was among the top producers of new affordable housing over the past eight years, receiving 2,700 units, they've developed less deeply affordable housing than the Citywide average, just 170 units of extremely low-income housing. Instead, more than half of the new housing was for incomes of \$144,000 or more, including 48% for households making almost \$200,000.

Today's proposal acknowledges the need for more deeply affordable housing. This one project could add almost three times as much deeply affordable housing to the District than was added in total during the last eight years.

Communities and their elected officials should push for as much affordable housing and deeply affordable housing as they can get in each project. Negotiations should always be with the goal of getting to yes. The need is too great to let

opportunities with affordable housing pass by. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank, thank you, Brendan. Uh, next person we'll call up is Carl Osten. Carl, if you can hear me, please unmute and you may begin.

MR. OSTEN: Am I there?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: You're here.

MR. OSTEN: I'm here. Uh, good, good afternoon, every, everyone, everyone. My name is Carl Osten. In 1959, I was born in Queens Bridge Houses. In, in 1966, I went to a brand-new school, PS76. A few years after that I went to Junior High School 204 which is right around the area that, uh, that a lot of the Bangladesian people live in, live, live now. My kids went to Charter School, which is right by Kaufman, which is right by Kaufman Studios, (INAUDIBLE) Charter School, and I support this project because we need new life in our area.

We need jobs. We need affordable housing. Uh, we can't expect the developer to solve the whole housing crisis in New York City. But trust me, 700 or 1,100 is not a drop in the bucket. It's definitely some substantial housing. And who knows? If we treat them right, maybe they might put one in Brooklyn, in

Manhattan, in Queens. But I think when we have somebody coming into our house, and wanting to do right by us, we should try to support them. And I'm sure we have naysayers, and anybody has their reason for not wanting it, whatever the reason may be.

But we need to sit down and figure this thing out. We can't be like the Democrats and the Republicans, they can't along. They can't do that. We need to sit down, and we need Julie Won to actually come to the all the, all the developments, all the housing developments, maybe call a town hall, and hear our voice. See what the people in Queens Bridge have to say. See what the people in Astoria Houses have to say. See what the people in Woodside Houses have to say. See what the people in Ravenswood Houses have to say. And let's, let's try to come up with a solution to get thing done and maybe, maybe, they will build some more stuff cause we know that we needs jobs and it's a fact, it's a fact that New York City needs housing. And with that being said, I support this project and I appreciate you guys giving me the time to speak my piece.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thanks, Carl. The next person we'll have is John Melatiadis. John, if you can hear me.

MR. MELATIADIS: Thank you so much for having me. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, we can hear you. Sorry if I mispronounced your name. You may begin.

MR. MELATIADIS: No, Melatiadis. It's fine. It's a long, Greek name and everyone does it. Don't worry at all. Uh, I'm with Carl on this one. Um, I was, I agree with everything you just said. You know, I'm the son of, uh, Greek immigrants. Um, they came here with \$17. I don't know who comes here with \$17 anymore, but \$17 in their pockets. And, uh, settled here on 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Been there for 50 years, so, I think we're, you know, our family has some, some right to speak about what's happened there, uh, right on, um, 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, right, right down the block. I went to PS 166, uh, right down the block for K through 6, uh, and in the public schools. My wife is a public-school teacher in the, in the neighborhood. Um, I'm a, I'm in a nonprofit and university (INAUDIBLE) right across from you right now.

And, um, I grew up there, and, and 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue was, was a very dangerous place to live on. It was the fringes of Astoria. It was dangerous. There were gun shots. Uh, there were robbings. I saw my father get assaulted right in front when I was six years old and I wanted to run out and try to help him. We invested in the neighborhood early and what we saw was, we saw, um, uh, Kaufman Studios come in and the realty just reinvigorate the area and we, we, we applauded it. We applauded it and it did wonders for the neighborhood. And that's why we're so thrilled to see Kaufman Studios try to take it to the next level. You know, I take the N and W line, um, every single day. I can you that, uh, yes, it's crowded but the R line has capacity, uh, and, and the NW line has capacity, um, after Queens Borough Plaza, the stop right after it.

Um, I think it's really interesting because we're, we would be creating space for people who live in housing projects, um, green space that they can go to. You know, the closest green space is really either Rainey Park or Astoria Park. And Rainey Park's not, not too much to look at. It's not very well organized and it's kind of run down. And Astoria Park

is very far. So, uh, I think we'd all like to see that. Um, I believe in the project. It's well organized. I think it will beautify the neighborhood. I think we have a very deep recession worldwide coming and.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Time is expired.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you.

MR. MELATIADIS: Okay, well, you know, overall, I just am in, in deep support of the project, and I hope you, uh, vote in favor for it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The next panel we're going to call up is Susan Lema (SP?), Allayah (SP?) Tahada (SP?), Caylin (SP?) Potami (SP?), Eric Dalmun (SP?). That's Susan Lema, Allayah Tahada, Caylin Potami, Eric Dalmun. First person I'll call to speak is Susan Lema. Susan, if you can hear me, please unmute and you may begin.

MS. LEMA: Yeah, give me one second. I'm just having some technical difficulties. Okay. Can you guys hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes. Do you want me to make someone else go first, or?

MS. LEMA: Uh, no, I'm pretty good now to go.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay. Alright. Go ahead.



MS. LEMA: Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for your time. My name is Susan and like many others in this audience, I've had the privilege to grow up in Astoria since I immigrated to the United States when I was five years old. And I'm disgusted to hear that my neighborhood's being described as a wasteland. I guess it does when these, when these plots of land is not meeting the profit ratio you need for executives to get their yearly bonuses.

Um, I've, I've grown, and I've seen what's been happening here in Astoria. And it's not because all these billionaires, developments want to come in, and, you know, invest in the community. It's because of me, it's because of my family, it's because my neighbors who we've always, um, lived here throughout the years. We've seen what we've been able to, uh, being able to contribute. Um, I understand that, you know, we're going to be providing jobs, we're going to be providing housing. But it's not going to be accessible to me. I'm currently a college graduate. I graduated 10 years from Baruch College and I can't afford my own place in Astoria.

And it feels disgusting because when I tell people that I'm from Astoria and they see that I'm,

I'm a brown person, I'm, I'm Ecuadorean, by the way. They are surprised to see that because they're like, "What? You live there? How? Why? Like, how can you?" And I have to explain to them it's because I've been living here for 25 years and I'm very grateful that I have a lease, um, (INAUDIBLE) I had been threatened by my landlord to be evicted from here because, you know, they know the value of this apartment.

And that's one reason why I still live with my parents and like many others, um, if these, this, if this Innovation or in other words that they're saying, um, um, comes through, it's, it's going to be a disaster for everybody, for the working class, for the immigrant community here and I oppose Innovation QNS. And I hope that our representatives who are listening to everybody in this, uh, panels, understands the effects that this is going to happen. And I hope that you guys consider what's going on right now with this neighborhood.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Time is expired.

MS. LEMA: Yeah, and I just want to say one more time, thank you for, again, and everybody who keeps saying that, you know, they want to grown Queens and stuff, like you guys are lying a-holes and I hope you

guys consider everything you've been saying. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Susan. And the next person we're going to call is Allayah Tahada.

MS. TAHADA: Hi. My name is Allayah Tahada. I am a born and raised New Yorker, a Queens girl, my childhood in Flushing, and now I live in Astoria in Julia Won's District. In fact, I have worked in Astoria for over five years, and I want you to vote no.

We talk about affordable housing, but who defines affordable? I've seen my family members from other Boroughs get priced out because landlords increase rent as the neighborhood invites more luxury complexes. I only got my apartment in Astoria due to the price drop during the pandemic. I'm a 27-year-old born and raised New Yorker with my own apartment and a non-profit salary, but I am not the rule. I am very much the rare exception.

Prior to, I played the New York City's Affordable Housing lottery game to no available, to no avail. Tens of thousands of applicants submitting for a few apartments and never getting accepted. Will people in the existing community have preference to live in

this development? Let us please not act as if this development is supporting the existing community. There are 60,000 vacant stabilized, rent stabilized apartments in New York City and very much near Innovation, Innovation QNS. This development will lead to displacing more people in Queens as rents increase at other properties. This will not solve the housing crisis, but, but create more displacement.

It will also bring more unaffordable businesses like expensive grocery stores and such. Food deserts can exist when no one can afford the food. Donovan Richards says that this is going to supply housing for the homeless. I find that very unrealistic. The goal of Innovation QNS and its developers was not for the community but for profit.

For the sake of my fellow New Yorkers who want to stay living in the City we were raised in, for the sake of my fellow Queens people who want to stay in the diverse, in the diverse Borough that we love, please vote no to Innovation QNS. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Next person we'll call on is Caylin Potami. Caylin, if you can hear me, you can unmute, and you may begin.

MS. POTAMI: Great. Thank you very much. Um, good evening. My name is Caylin Potami. I have lived in Astoria for a few years, fewer than a lot of people here, but I've been really thankful to be welcomed into such a vibrant community. Um, and I am here today to urge you to vote no to the Innovation QNS project.

Um, prior to living in Astoria, I worked in housing and homelessness in a different city in Arizona where I saw many similar development projects that purported to value affordable housing just to fail the community again and again and again in this regard. They used the same tactics, very similar projects, um, and ultimately, they don't solve the crisis, uh, for housing and homelessness.

If Innovation QNS were truly prioritizing community needs over their own interests, then the community would have been involved from day one. And as we've heard here tonight, even many of the people who are closest to the development have not been involved. If they were valuing affordability, then this development would include more than the meager percentage allotted of affordable units.

These developments not only displace people directly but indirectly by increasing rent prices in the area and food prices. Um, so many people are struggling with homelessness and eviction right now because of this type of reckless zoning and development. And it would be really shameful to prioritize, um, these developments with high priced luxury apartments which also tend to bring in more policing and more criminalization in our community while pushing out my neighbors who have been here for generations out of their homes and onto the streets. Um, we deserve better, and I really, truly believe that better is possible. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The last person on this panel is Eric Dalmun. Eric, if you can hear me, please unmute and you may begin.

MR. DALMUN: Hello. So, as you said, my name is Eric Dalmun. I've been living in Astoria for many years now and actually right across the street from one of the parts of the developments. Uh, Innovation QNS is promising to give much affordable housing into the area but is unable to guarantee any of their claims of any actual affordability or deep affordability as they're promising. Likewise, this

development's addition of luxury housing in the neighborhood does not exist in a vacuum. If it was just one neighborhood and it didn't affect, or just one block, two blocks, and affected no one else, I may be for it.

However, even these neighborhoods and housing that comes directly across these areas, our landlords are starting to drag their feet further to stop any type of repairs. I've had to fix my own water ducts, hoping that they can kick us all out eventually, go for newer, higher rents as the property values go up, or sell and demolish these buildings (INAUDIBLE).

For the sake of time, I'll keep my discussion short. But please, unless if there can be better proof of equity, vote against Innovation QNS. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The next panel we're going to call up is going to be James Bassey (SP?), Katie Riley, that's my daughter's name, Katie Riley, Rikki Baker Keusch, and Carlos Cruz. James Bassey, if you can hear me, please unmute and you may begin. Do we have James Bassey online? No? Then we're going to move to Katie Riley. Katie, if you can hear me, you may begin.

MS. DOUGHERTY: Hello. Uh, my name is R.V. Dougherty and I'm calling in on behalf of Katie Riley, who's, um, my friend and not able to join right now. Um, but as many others have, um, addressed the question of affordability, I'm going to share Katie's concerns. Um, and she's focusing her comments on, um, the actual issue of public outreach to residents in the immediate vicinity of the new development.

Uh, Katie has lived in Astoria for the last nine years, um, and for the last four and half years has lived, um, on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street between 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Broadway which is one block up from the northeast corner of the proposed site. Um, the view out of her window will look very different if Innovation QNS is built. Um, she first learned about Innovation QNS because of a targeted advertisement on Instagram promoting more public green space and a dog park in Astoria.

Sounds great, right? um, she'd love to see a new dog park and so she initially signed up to support it and only after doing her own research, did she learn that supporting a dog park meant supporting 2,800 luxury apartments that would only fuel the housing



crisis that has directly impacted her friends and neighbors.

Um, she has since made the effort to attend town halls like these, um, and engage with the process, but has received no such effort on outreach from the development team to make sure that, uh, folks were aware, um, as someone who lives nearby. Um, at one point, Katie even called folks from the Innovation, uh, Queens team on the phone. Um, and the person she spoke with shared that they had been out in the community canvassing and speaking face to face with anyone within a half mile radius of the site.

Innovation QNS has prided itself on having the support of Astorians, but those who live closest to the site don't know about the project? Or like Katie have been left to do their own research.

Um, Katie works from home and spends most of her day in the neighborhood and has never seen someone from Innovation QNS on the block, never received a phone call, never seen a flyer in, in her mailbox, um, and has spoken with her neighbors who have not received any of that outreach as well.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Time is expired.

MS. DOUGHERTY: Very real housing crisis. But this is not the solution. Please vote no.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The next, uh, panelist to come up is Rikki Baker Keusch. Ricky, if you can hear me, please unmute and you may begin.

MS. KEUSCH: Great. Uh, my name is Rikki Baker Keusch and I'm testifying against Innovation QNS. I live four blocks away in a rent stabilized apartment. I'm a union member, and I'm at risk of displacement. The corporate real estate developers who spoke claim 1,100 of the units will be affordable, although they can actually only promise 687. But affordable for whom? Anne Clark, a Vulture reporter living close to the development has researched other, quote/unquote, affordable luxury apartments in the area, apartments with their actual rents listed not what they promised months before approval. Many studios start at \$2,350 per month, 25% more than my rent for a one bedroom. Like many in south Astoria, I am already rent burdened.

I'm a fourth-generation renter in Queens and when I moved out of my parents' apartment in central Queens, I couldn't find a place I could afford in the neighborhood I grew up in. The luxury buildings that

went up during my youth pushed up the average rent in the area and resulted in the deregulation and demolition of many rent regulated units.

But luxury development didn't only affect housing and rent costs. Our greengrocer was priced out and the chain supermarkets hiked prices as more well to do residents moved into luxury apartments. As a result, my dad, at 60 years old, has to walk 30 minutes both ways to purchase my parents' groceries. What will happen to the predominantly immigrant-owned small businesses on Steinway? Do we want New York to be a playground for the rich? Do we want the displacement we witnessed in LIC, Williamsburg, Washington Heights to happen everywhere in New York?

How many New Yorkers, especially black and brown New Yorkers, immigrant New Yorkers, disabled New Yorkers, working class New Yorkers have to be priced out of our neighborhoods before we say enough is enough? As the most progressive City Council in New York's history, I'm counting on you. I'm counting on you to reimagine what the solution to our affordable housing crisis is. We need more deeply affordable housing, more supportive housing, more public

housing, and we need all that to be fully union built so that workers get good jobs and good homes.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. Time is expired.

MS. QUECH: We are the, we are the City that successfully fought Walmart, Amazon, and fossil fuel plants.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Rikki.

MS. QUECH: I refuse to believe that our City has to accept the bare minimum (INAUDIBLE) real estate.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Rikki. Uh, the next panelist we're going to call up is Carlos Cruz. Uh, Carlos, if you can hear us, uh, please unmute yourself and you may begin.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Good, yeah.

INTERPRETER: Señor Carlos, (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE). Carlos?

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: I think, star, star, tell him to star nine.

INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MR. CRUZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MR. CRUZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE) Uh, I want to do it, uh, part by part because, you know,

like the, the, the sound is like muffled. I'm going to try to do my best (INAUDIBLE). (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MR. CRUZ: Okay. (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: My name is Carlos Cruz.

MR. CRUZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: My name is Carlos Cruz. Uh, I've been living here for (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE).

MR. CRUZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: For 29 years.

MR. CRUZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: For 29 years. (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MR. CRUZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Okay. And I do not support this project, nor do my neighbors who live, uh, in my block and around the area because what this project is going to do is to increase the prices all around the area. Si.

MR. CRUZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE) And, of course, what's going to happen is that the landlords are going to increase the rent in the area. And most of the people that live here are essential

workers. So, they used us during the pandemic and then they are going to displace us if they approve this project. And that's what they want to do.

MR. CRUZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Okay.

MR. CRUZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Okay.

MR. CRUZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And of course, uh, one thing that I forgot to translate before is that, um, these people are, are making salaries of, uh, \$15, \$17 an hour. Now, um, an average apartment in this new project is going to cost \$4,000 a month, and of course what's going to happen once these buildings are, are built, they're going to oversaturate the schools and there's not going to be parking spots. So, everything is going to be oversaturated.

MR. CRUZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And I say no to the project. Thank you for everything.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Gracias, Carlos. The next panel I'll be calling up is Nancy Silverman, Zoey Lubenfosa (SP?), Nina Rappaport, and Mary Ford. The first panelist I would like to speak is Nancy

Silverman. Nancy, if you can hear me, please unmute and you may begin.

MS. SILVERMAN: Thank you. Um, I'm here to ask the City Council to vote no, um, on Innovation QNS. I live a half a block from the site, and I don't want to repeat what all my, um, what other people have said who have spoken in opposition. Sorry. Should I continue?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, you may continue. Go ahead.

MS. SILVERMAN: Okay. Um, I have been living in my apartment on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street between 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue, a half a block from the site, for about 20 years. I am aging in this neighborhood and plan on staying here. I am a CUNY employee, a middle-class person, and I know that if Innovation, um, QNS is allowed to build, that I, that me and my neighbors will be impacted in so many ways.

The, the, the development is out of scale for our neighborhood. Discussions about affordability and displacement have to be paid attention to. Other people have talked a lot about that. And I want to thank Council Member Won for holding fast and

demanding real affordability. Please vote no on Innovation QNS. Um, thank you, bye.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: I'm sorry, Nancy. You could complete your statement.

MS. SILVERMAN: Um, I, I don't know where we, where we got cut off. So, I'm, I'm not going to take any more time because people have been waiting for so long. Please vote no. True affordability is important, um, and thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Nancy. Next person I'm going to call up is Nina Rappaport. Nina, I see that you're calling in. Please press star nine and you may begin. Nina, if you can hear me, please press star nine and you may begin.

DIRECTOR RAPPAPORT: Yes, I did. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, we can hear you.

DIRECTOR RAPPAPORT: Great. Uh, thank you so much for the opportunity to testify, even by phone. Uh, my name is Nina Rappaport, and I am the Director of Vertical Urban Factory, a research nonprofit on urban manufacturing and I'm also a professor at Parsons School of Design. I am testifying today with a focus on jobs and affordable workspace against the Innovation QNS project that will overwhelm a



neighborhood that is now a mixed-use area with plenty of job opportunities, spaces to make things, and light industry.

Today the area of the proposed development is filled with auto mechanics related to automobile sales show rooms on Northern Boulevard. There are food truck repair shops, wood and metal workers, construction businesses, building supply companies, and food related businesses. The neighborhood is not.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: I believe.

DIRECTOR RAPPAPORT: Interest in local economies, and a short supply chain. What instead should be proposed is a mix of light industry with other uses. The City could take the initiative and be proactive and create a new kind of mixed-use zoning that I call mandatory inclusionary manufacturing, that would require new projects to include light industry with affordable housing.

In 2016, I even presented this idea to a, uh, City Council Land Use Committee hearing on industrial areas. And some liked the idea enough for City Planning to conduct a study of the potential. We could have a fabrication zone, or makers' spaces, and light manufacturing zones here.

Today, manufacturing is not smoke spewing, but clean, green, quiet, and light. Imagine the future of a truly innovative Queens where entrepreneurs can continue to make things and train workers for the future and workshop spaces that are affordable along with deeply affordable housing. This creates an equitable city.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Time is expired.

DIRECTOR RAPPAPORT: Or neighborhoods. Okay. This creates an equitable city where neighborhoods, not only developers, can thrive. Thank you so much for your attention. I urge you vote no.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Nina. The next person we're going to call is Zoey Lubenfosha. Zoey, if you can hear me, please unmute yourself and you may begin.

MS. LUBENFOSHA: Thank you. My name is Zoey Lubenfosha. I'm a lifelong resident of Queens. Um, raised in Jackson Heights, living in Astoria. I'm here today to vote, voice strong opposition against the rezoning of Astoria and strong opposition against Innovation QNS and I'll tell you why.

Nearly 50% of luxury units in New York City are unoccupied. This is largely due to lack of

affordability, lack of practicality and wage disparity. These buildings aren't necessarily built to be occupied, and that's not the only way developers make money. They are bought and sold among real estate corporations for millions in profit every few years. The, their utility is to these corporations and wealthy individuals, not the neighborhood.

The so-called affordability Innovation QNS is offering is unrealistic. Beyond raising rent in the neighborhood, only 25% of affordable units from the developers, um, is, is subsidized by the developers, and that's not affordable. 60% of the units will not be affordable. Studios at \$2,400, which is the baseline, is not affordable, especially in a housing crisis and as we head into a recession. I'm concerned that if Kaufman sells this property, the affordable units will, um, the affordable units will increase their rent. And it really shouldn't be necessary to rezone five blocks of a neighborhood to create affordable housing. And that's quite excessive.

Um, at best, Innovation QNS is looking at the issue through rose-colored glasses and with delusion, um, and thinks that luxury apartments can solve the

housing crisis. At worst, and I think this is more likely, um, Innovation QNS is using our City's need for affordable housing as a Trojan Horse for their profit at the expense of the working class Astorians. Please do not enable this and vote no against Innovation QNS. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. The next person to testify is Mary Ford. Mary, if you can hear me, please unmute and you may begin.

MS. FORD: Hi. It's a pleasure to speak with you. I was in the Council, um, hall earlier. I had to run home and so now I'm here. I'm grateful to be able to speak. I live two blocks away from the proposed site and I'm asking you to please listen to the long time Astoria residents, not the people who own real estate in the area and who will, who will make a windfall profit from this, but the real residents of Astoria and vote no on Innovation QNS. We can do better than this project and we must do better.

My husband is a north African immigrant in Astoria for 30 years and a proud member of the vibrant Arab and Muslim community of Astoria, a community which will be displaced if this project goes through. I, myself, have lived in Astoria for 20

years. We have raised our children here alongside other immigrant and blended families like my own and that's why I love my community. I, Astoria has made our family possible, made my husband's small business of 20 years in Astoria possible, and I want to keep Astoria a community where immigrants and working-class families can continue to live, raise their children, have small businesses, and struggle through and to reach the New York dream, not just the American dream.

I want to keep, uh, Astoria affordable. And this affordable housing that they're offering is not truly affordable if it's paid by the taxpayers and not the billionaire developers. Kaufman has been bought by billionaire hedge funds. They are not rooted in the community. They know nothing about our community. And the, the majority of my neighbors will not even qualify for these few crumbs of affordable apartments that they are offering. The billionaire developers, Silverstein Properties, the hedge funds that own Kaufman, do not have my community at heart, and I really pray and hope that you will take, uh, our testimony, the testimony of so many people.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Time is expired.

MS. FORD: My husband can't be here to speak today, my husband can't be here to speak today like so many other immigrants, but I hope that you hear the people who have spoken today. Thank you so much. Please vote no.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much, Mary. The next panel I'm going to call up is Tyler Herald, Craig Brown, Karen Pavich, Colin White, Farrah Salaam. Tyler Herald, if you can hear me, please unmute and you may begin.

MR. HERALD: Hey, everybody. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, we can.

MR. HERALD: Okay. Great. Thank you so much, um. My name is Tyler Herald. And I'm a resident of Woodside here in Queens and I am opposed to the Innovation QNS rezoning. Um, you know, one of the few questions that I, I like to ask myself when I talk about this issue is, who is this housing for, right? it's a very simple question. When I ask this question, who is this housing for? You know, looking at half the folks in this area who have low to very low-income levels and intermediate to high risk levels of displacement, that housing isn't for them, right.

You know, we talk about affordability. You know, we get really granular about it, but the reality is that the majority of these units are going to be luxury apartments, right, \$3,000 starting for a studio. I know that I can't afford that. You know, you all, the apartment that I am Zooming in from tonight is a three bedroom in Woodside that has a combined rent less than that, um, that they're asking for a studio. Um, that's definitely not for me. That's not for my friends. That's not for my neighbors. Um, that's not for a lot of folks in this area, right.

You know, we have an affordability crisis in this City. Um, you know, I know that we can't afford this and, you know, I ran into somebody who is a staunch supporter, um, of this project over the weekend, um, who works in housing. And when I asked him if he could afford this, he couldn't even answer me, right. I think that speaks a lot.

Um, I do want to reiterate, you know, something that I, a few folks have brought up is that, you know, we shouldn't be pitting working class folks against one another, you know. In these conversations we hear a lot about jobs. Jobs are good. Unions are

great. I am in one myself. I support them. But why are we settling for less? Why are we pitting ourselves against each other, each other? Why are we choosing between a limited job engagement versus a lifetime of displacement, reshaping entire communities? And for those reasons, I urge the Council to vote no on Innovation QNS. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Tyler. Craig Brown, you may go next. Please unmute yourself, Mr. Brown, and you may begin. Craig Brown, if you can hear me, please unmute yourself and you may begin. We'll come back to Mr. Brown. Karen Pavich, if you can hear me, unmute yourself and you may begin.

MS. PAVICH: Good afternoon, Subcommittee. Thank you for taking the time to hear our concerns. thank you Council Member Julie Won for your leadership and representing the residents of Astoria today. I'm here to urge you to vote no to Innovation QNS.

I've been an Astoria resident for nearly 20 years. My husband's parents immigrated here in the 1960s from Croatia, which at the time was Communist Yugoslavia. He and his sister went to school at Most Precious Blood, a block away from this development,



um, the proposed development. His family's still here. We have chosen to raise our children in this vibrant, culturally diverse working-class neighborhood. My three kids go to PS166 on 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 34<sup>th</sup> Street. Our public school receives Title I funds because more than half of the students qualify for free lunch. I'm here to speak up for those families and our school that will be displaced by these billionaires, for my children's classmates that will have to leave the neighborhood that they and their parents have known as home since arriving in the US.

The gentleman from Silverstein Properties said (INAUDIBLE) during the testimony, the tax dollars will only benefit the City. None of the aspects of this project benefit our neighborhood. Anything that they are claiming that is to improve the lives of folks who are currently living in Astoria is a thinly veiled mirage just to pad their pockets. None of the proposed amenities are for our community but for the gentrifiers that this project intends to attract. Our neighborhood is not a playground for rich folks. Astoria is not for sale.

These apartments and retail stores will drive the cost-of-living way up for everyone they claim to be helping. We don't need five, 950 parking spaces, we don't need \$4,000 per month apartments. What we do need is more affordable apartments. We need more housing for our elderly residents and given the tax dollars that are involved in this project, I know that a more equitable deal can be made for our neighborhood. We need truly affordable homes and for folks that call Astoria home.

And, uh, yeah, so, I had to actually leave today to go pick up my kids at PS166 and now I'm at the Boys and Girls Club.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Time has expired.

MS. PAVICH: Listening to AOC. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Karen. The next person to speak is Colin White. Colin, if you can hear me, please unmute yourself and you may begin.

MR. WHITE: Oh, hi there. My video stopped. Hold on. Hi, can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yeah, we can hear you, Colin.

MR. WHITE: Great. Hi, my name is Colin White. I am an Astoria resident. I am urging you to oppose this project for many of the same reasons that you've

heard today. The large number of luxury market rate units proposed by this project will lead to increases in taxes and area rents that will be untenable for the people who have been here and invested their lives in this area.

We have seen evidence of the effects of similar kinds of developments right next door in Long Island City. According to a recent study by RentHop, the developments around Queens Borough Plaza have led to a 28.6% increase in area rent and the area around the 36<sup>th</sup> Street EMR station has faced a 29.6% increase. The billionaires behind this project have only bindingly promised the legal minimum of what they call affordable units that will be subsidized by taxpayer money, but the minimum income requirements for most of their proposed affordable units preclude those who need housing the most from having access.

They have no adequate plan to bolster our already over-taxed infrastructure to handle the increase in pedestrian and driver traffic. They have no adequate plan to make our sewer, water, and other utility systems ready to handle such a massive influx of use. And as we heard today, their propositions regarding union labor have been vague and non-binding.

We must not settle for the bare minimum positive impact at such a monumental cost. Look at their horrendous Environmental Impact Statement. Think of the immigrant and working-class businesses that face being displaced without compensation or adequate communication or outreach. Think of the quite literal massive shadows that these 20 plus story luxury high rises will cast on the homes and businesses forced to be at their feet. Please stand up for the residents of my neighborhood and oppose Innovation QNS. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Colin. Next person to speak is Farrah Salaam. Salaam, excuse me. Farrah, if you can hear me, please unmute yourself and you may begin. Farrah, are you there?

MS. SALAAM: Hi. Sorry. Um, can you all hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, we can hear you, Farrah.

MS. SALAAM: Alright. Um, apologies. I'm currently in a café. Um, but, uh, good evening, good evening, Chair Riley. My name is Farah Salaam Rafman, and I am a part of this Bangladeshi community who is going to be affected by this project. I'm against this project as this harms my community and those other communities surrounding the area. To hear people put

this luxury development above my community and other working-class communities such as the Latinx, Arab, and other immigrant communities, to bring in other folks who can afford these apartments, is frustrating and insulting. To hear that this project is, right now, majority luxury will run my community out of our neighborhood and possibly out of the City and out of the state.

Astoria is known for being one of the first Bangladeshi communities here in New York City. We, along with my sister communities, brings so much vibrancy, life, and camaraderie to this neighborhood. To lose it to a luxury development would take away the culture that makes Astoria unique.

I moved to this neighborhood specifically to be closer to the Bangladeshi community as I did not grow up in my community. I find joy working within my community, speaking and hearing Bangla regularly. I am fighting to raise my family in this diverse neighborhood where I want my children to have a multi-cultural worldview and upbringing as opposed to my own upbringing.

To all my brothers and sisters who work in unions, I'm not against you and I do support union

work, but I do not appreciate how this luxury development, it's pitting our working-class communities against each other, and I do not recognize, or, and that they do not recognize that this luxury development will not benefit any of our communities should this project be completed.

Thank you, Chair Riley and Members of the Committee for taking the time to hear me out. Have a wonderful evening.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much. Uh, last call for Craig Brown. Craig Brown, if you're on the call, please unmute yourself and you may begin. If anyone else wants to testify, uh, this is the last call. This is the last call. You may register and you will get the opportunity to give your perspective on this project. We're going to stand at hold till we see if there's anyone else signed up to testify.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Chair, I believe we have Anna Contrerras (SP?) on the call. Anna, if you're there, can you unmute yourself?

MS. CONTRERRAS: (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Anna?

MS. CONTRERRAS: Hi. Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, we can hear you. You may begin.

MS. CONTRERRAS: Hi. Good afternoon. Uh, my name is Anna. Thank you for giving us the opportunity, um, to give out our opinions. Um, I live in this neighborhood, and I, I love this neighborhood so much. And what I would like for this neighborhood is to see it improve, and, and have more opportunities for the local people.

And I, I am, um, I do support this, this Innovation because it will give the opportunity to local entrepreneurs to keep growing. Um, it will, it will create space for youth, uh, for LGBTQ around the neighborhood and I do think that, um, the, the affordable housing, um, is, is, is a great, um, number that they came up with, um, compared to other, um, projects around the City. I think that it's very impressive that they were able to come up with that number. And I do, uh, support this innovation because I do want to see this neighborhood, um, improve and open the doors to the people who want to come in. So, thank you. Thank you for the opportunity.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Okay. Thank you so much, uh, Anna.

MS. CONTRERRAS: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Uh, once again, this is the last call. If there's anybody that wants to testify, you may register online and you have the opportunity to give your perspective on this project. We will stand at ease for a couple of seconds. Thank you.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: If there's anyone in the Zoom that hasn't testified and would like to do so, if you could just do the raise hand function in Zoom so we can identify you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: We have, uh, somebody else testifying. We're just waiting for them to sign back on. We will be calling Emily Sharp to testify. Emily, if you can hear me, uh, please unmute yourself and you may begin. Emily, please press star nine, uh, to unmute yourself, and you may begin.

MS. SHARP: Hi. How, how are you? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: You can go ahead, Emily.

MS. SHARP: Okay. Thank you. Um, okay. I'm here. Can you hear me? Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yes, we can hear you.

MS. SHARP: Okay. Great. Um, yes, so my name is Emily Sharp. I am a Sunny Side resident of 25 years. I live across, literally across the train tracks from



where this development, um, is planned to be, uh, taking place. Uh, spent lots of time other there, uh, with my family going to the movie theater and shopping at PC Richards and so, I know the area very well. Um, so, I really am opposed to this project. Um, I know that it's going to destroy the area. Um, it's going to displace people like I've seen happened with Long Island City for the past, um, 15 years. Um, I'm worried for the rents, rent increases everywhere, and the immigrant families and communities that we're going to lose.

Um, it's such a vibrant area and we need it to attract people. City people love it here, like, everybody loves it here, and, and if people just listen to the testimony from everyone today, you'll see how important it is to everyone. Um, so, yes, I'm opposed to it.

Um, I see this project as just a way for Silverstein to use it for investment purposes. Um, it's truly not a project they (INAUDIBLE) money back on. Um, I know they do this sort of thing with Cantor Fitzgerald, and like Tampa, Florida, other areas of the country. Um, this is a way for them to get their foot in the door in an area that's up and coming.

This is an opportunity zone, so I know that, um, you know, this is a, a big opportunity for them and we shouldn't have to pay the price. We need to keep our, uh, community together. Uh, that's very important so please, City Council, vote no on Innovation QNS. And thank you, Julie Won. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Emily. Uh, the next person to testify is Kim Willet. Kim, if you can hear me, I'm so sorry. It is Kate Willet. Kate, if you can hear me, please unmute yourself and you may begin.

MS. WILLET: Hello. Hi. Um, I am here to testify against Innovation QNS, uh, in solidarity with the working class and immigrant families that will be displaced by this project. Um, there's absolutely no guarantee, uh, that the 40% affordability threshold will be met. Um, it is, the, in its current form, it is definitely, there definitely aren't enough affordable units to offset the displacement that this project will cause. Uh, I know that we're all being told lately that, you know, that these, uh, these units don't actually cause displacement. But we've all had the experience of.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Kate?

MS. WILLET: Hello?

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Yeah, go ahead Kate.

MS. WILLET: Oh, oh, did you not hear any of that?  
I'm sorry. I guess I was muted.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: No, we did. You can continue.

MS. WILLET: Okay, anyway, no, no on this project.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you, Kate. The next person we're going to call is Nora Guzman. Nora, if you can hear me, please unmute and you may begin. Nora Guzman, if you can hear me, please unmute and you may begin. Nora, you press star nine to unmute if you're calling over the phone.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Nora, (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MS. GUZMAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MS. GUZMAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Okay. (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MS. GUZMAN: Okay.

INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MS. GUZMAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

MS. GUZMAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Okay. I'm calling, uh, regarding this project that they're going to build, uh, in, um, 30, um, 35<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

MS. GUZMAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I've been living there for 30 years.

MS. GUZMAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And I spoke to, uh, 47 families that also live in the area and, uh, we are all opposed to the project because this is going to increase costs for us.

MS. GUZMAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And.

MS. GUZMAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And I plead the Council to vote no, uh, to not support the project, to not approve the construction.

MS. GUZMAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: That's the reason why I'm calling. I do not agree with this project.

MS. GUZMAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: In representation of all the Hispanics that live in this area, we're all the families of, uh, low resources and I say no. I do not agree with this project.

MS. GUZMAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: No to Innovation QNS. No.

MS. GUZMAN: (SPEAKING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you so much. If anybody else would like to testify on Innovation QNS, you can sign up online and you'll have an opportunity to give a, your perspective on this project. We'll stand at ease for a couple of seconds.

MS. GUZMAN: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Counsel, is there anyone else signed up to testify?

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL MARTINEZ: Chair, there doesn't appear to be anyone else, um, so, we can go ahead and close the hearing.

CHAIRPERSON RILEY: Thank you. There being no other members of the public who wish to testify on LUs 126 through 134 relating to the Innovation QNS rezoning and the LSGD proposal, the public hearing is now closed. And the items are laid over.

I would like to thank my colleagues, uh, who attended today, especially Council Member Won who is still here. That concludes today's business. I would like to thank the members of the public, my

colleagues, Subcommittee Counsel, Land Use and other Council staff and, especially, the Sergeant at Arms for participating in today's hearing. This meeting is hereby adjourned.

[GAVEL]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date November 2, 2022