

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON ZONING AND FRANCHISES

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January 26, 2010  
Start: 9:58am  
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HELD AT: Council Chambers  
City Hall

B E F O R E:  
MARK S. WEPRIN  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Leroy G. Comrie, Jr.  
Daniel R. Garodnick  
Vincent M. Ignizio  
Robert Jackson  
Jessica S. Lappin  
James S. Oddo  
Diana Reyna  
Joel Rivera  
Deborah L. Rose  
Larry B. Seabrook  
James Vacca

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Ronald Schulman  
Member, Webster Commons, LLC  
Principal Owner, Best Development Group

Rand Rosenbaum  
Architect  
Rosenbaum Design Group

Alex Zablocki  
Representative  
Office of State Senator Andrew Lanza

Theresa Herring  
Resident, Sandy Ground  
Member, Rossville AME Zion Church  
Member, Sandy Ground Civic Association

Yvonne Taylor  
Member and Trustee  
Rossville AME Zion Church

Elmore Taylor  
Member  
Rossville African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

William Tucson Owens, Jr.  
Member, resident  
Sandy Ground

Janet H. Hones  
Reverend/Pastor  
Rossville AME Zion Church

Dee Vandenburg  
President  
Staten Island Taxpayers Association

Dennis Dell'Angelo  
President  
Pleasant Plains/Princess Bay/Richmond Valley Civic  
Association

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Will Nichols  
President  
Staten Island Council of Churches

Melinda Bjorkman  
Pastor  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church

Sharon Valentin  
Co-Chair  
Castleton Park Tennis Association

Frank Jordan  
Husband of Yvette Jordan  
Member of Rossville AME Church and resident of Staten  
Island

Deborah Santuli-Barron  
Parishioner  
Rossville AME Zion Church

CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: --good to be at our first meeting. So I apologize in advance for any glitches we might have, but we're going to try to run as smoothly as possible. And I am delighted to be here and to be joined by the members of the Committee who are here: Council Member Leroy Comrie, Council Member Vinnie Ignizio to my right, Council Member Dan Garodnick, Council Member Robert Jackson, Council Member Larry Seabrook--wait your turn, Larry--Council Member Diana Reyna, Council Member Joel Rivera is here, he's over there, yes, okay good. And then we're also joined by two non-Committee members--I said Ignizio. So many critics, I'll tell you. And then we're joined by two non-Committee members from Richmond County, Debbie Rose, Deborah Rose, and Jimmy Oddo, who are here. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. We are going to get started with our first item. Are the first Preconsidered LU, Webster Avenue rezoning, number C 090397 ZMX. It's a Bronx 3 zoning issue. Okay, now we call up the applicants, Ronald Shulman, Best Development Group. Good morning, push that mic button, push that button on there. No?

1  
2 Testing. Okay.

3 MR. RONALD SHULMAN: Okay. Good  
4 morning, Mr. Chair, Committee Members. My name is  
5 Ron Shulman, I'm a member of Webster Commons, LLC,  
6 and principal owner of Best Development Group,  
7 affordable housing development company. We're the  
8 sponsor of Webster Commons Development in The  
9 Bronx. Webster Commons is the new construction of  
10 a four building, 393 unit, affordable housing  
11 development at 3556 Webster Avenue in the Norwood  
12 section of The Bronx, just north of Gun Hill Road.  
13 Webster Avenue is a four lane major north/south  
14 street in The Bronx. Subject zoning is being  
15 respectfully requested to be increased from R6 to  
16 R7X. The increase in the zoning will allow for  
17 the construction of an additional 125 affordable  
18 housing units on this site. The subject site  
19 encompasses land that has never been developed and  
20 that was privately purchased in December 2008 from  
21 the Woodland Cemetery, which is across the street.  
22 The Webster Commons Project will include the  
23 following mix of housing in four buildings: 148  
24 apartments for families at 60 percent of the area  
25 median income, or less; 54 units for independent

1 senior citizen households with median incomes  
2 between 40 to 50 percent; and 191 units for  
3 families earning between 80 to 130 percent of the  
4 area median income. There will also be a 10,000  
5 square foot daycare center built on site, and  
6 there's underground parking in each of the four  
7 buildings. The site is accessible to New York  
8 City subways, busses, Metro North railroad and all  
9 major roads. From an income and rent perspective,  
10 the apartments of Webster Commons will offer rents  
11 ranging from a low of \$461 per month for the  
12 seniors, to a high of \$1,875 for a family of four  
13 in a three bedroom, two bath, 1,250 square foot  
14 apartment. Annual household incomes will range in  
15 the whole development between \$20,000 to \$100,000.  
16 Overall, there are housing opportunities here for  
17 a wide variety of New York City residents.

18 Project will be financed by the New York City  
19 Housing Development Corporation and New York City  
20 HPD, where the financing applications are  
21 presently being processed. The estimate of  
22 closings for these four buildings will take place  
23 in late 2010 and go into the middle of 2011. The  
24 whole development will take between 24 to 30  
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1  
2 months to build. Construction should be complete  
3 for occupancy beginning in the middle of 2012  
4 through 2013. Webster Commons Project we feel is  
5 an excellent example where an increase in zoning  
6 can help to create much needed affordable and  
7 middle income housing in The Bronx and New York  
8 City. The development will be a mixed income and  
9 mixed generational community. There will be  
10 housing available for a host of families, and all  
11 the housing is built to the HPD and DOB  
12 specifications. Project will also achieve a green  
13 silver lead certification. We appreciate your  
14 support this morning, and we invite any questions  
15 that the community members may have. Thank you  
16 very much.

17 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you very  
18 much. Being that the project is Council Member  
19 Seabrook's district, Council Member do you have  
20 any comments you want to make at this time?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Thank  
22 you, Mr. Chairman, and it's indeed a pleasure to  
23 come here and talk about a project that will  
24 certainly serve the community. I've been abreast  
25 of the project since its inception, and the

1  
2 community board, and all of the community leaders  
3 have endorsed this project. This is something  
4 that will certainly serve a community that is  
5 diverse, as well in ethnicity as well its  
6 financial stability. And this project serves all  
7 of those entities in terms of seniors, in terms of  
8 middle income, and those who could pay a little  
9 more. So this is a fantastic project, they have  
10 done a fantastic job in putting together something  
11 that's aesthetically beautiful for the community,  
12 and a reflection of that community. And it is  
13 very interesting that they purchased this land  
14 from Woodlawn Cemetery, and a good reflection of  
15 one of New York's best mayors, LaGuardia, who is  
16 also buried in that cemetery, as well along with  
17 Miles Davis and a number of other distinguished  
18 dignitaries. So, they're in good company, and  
19 rest assured that the people who have the  
20 underground condominiums will look at the people  
21 who have the above ground condominiums and say,  
22 "Thank god." [laughter] So this project has my  
23 full support, and they have worked diligently with  
24 all of the community. We asked that a daycare  
25 center, and they saw fit to put a daycare center

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2 in the facility to community use. And this is  
3 really cooperation from the private sector, with  
4 public dollars as well, doing good for community  
5 benefits, and they need to do more. So I  
6 recommend this program and I urge you to vote yes  
7 on this project.

8 RONALD SHULMAN: Thank you, Council  
9 Member. Do any other members of the Committee or  
10 any other members want to make any comments on  
11 this project? Very well, I think you're  
12 aesthetically pleasing, too, by the way, Council  
13 Member, alright? [laughter] But, thank you very  
14 much. I don't think there's anyone else scheduled  
15 to testify on this project. So, we will move to  
16 close the hearing on this item.

17 MALE VOICE: Second.

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you very  
19 much.

20 RONALD SHULMAN: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay, we're  
22 going to move on now to Preconsidered LU, the  
23 Amboy Road text amendment, which is N 090176 ZRR,  
24 on Staten Island. On behalf of the applicant,  
25 Rand Rosenbaum, architect for the project. Mr.

1  
2 Rosenbaum.

3                   RAND ROSENBAUM: Mr. Chair. Ladies  
4 and gentlemen, I'm Rand Rosenbaum, from Rosenbaum  
5 Design Group, we're the architects for, on behalf  
6 of Brookside Amboy, LLC. Our presence today is on  
7 behalf of two text amendments, the first having to  
8 do with a setback that we have requested being  
9 modified; and the second having to do with the  
10 accessory parking lot of 101 spaces, which will  
11 be, according to what we been advised, the first  
12 of the brand new zoning parking layout  
13 configurations. In other words, with all the  
14 bioswales and the islands and the landscaping,  
15 which Mayor Mike should be very happy about. The  
16 first image I have here will show you the existing  
17 conditions that are there. We have a, this is the  
18 site in this delineation here--I'm sorry, it's not  
19 on a board officially, but--and there is a four  
20 story bank building there. And what our intention  
21 is, is to raise this building and put a commercial  
22 one story, two small one story buildings. One  
23 will be a bank and one will be a drugstore. The  
24 remainder of the lot, which is in proximity of  
25 where the parking lot is now, will remain a

1 parking lot. The point that we're making about  
2 this imaginary line, this first text amendment, is  
3 that we've been asked to create a 20 foot setback  
4 from the lot line, so that the new construction  
5 would have to start from that line on. If you'll  
6 see in this photograph, and we have other images,  
7 the buildings on both sides of this, of Richmond  
8 Avenue, do not have a 20 foot setback; in fact  
9 they have a zero setback. And in fact the  
10 practicalities of having a 20 are not possible,  
11 mostly or partially because there's a train track  
12 about a block away, and that train track has a  
13 trellis with concrete stanchions, which would cost  
14 a substantial amount of cost to setback and then  
15 create a brand new 20 foot setback. So what we're  
16 doing is keeping in the nature and the appearance  
17 of the streetscape, on Richmond Avenue, and  
18 keeping a zero lot line. These other shots, I'm  
19 sorry, they're just a series of shots showing the  
20 neighborhood and the community, and how we've  
21 taken all that into consideration on the design.  
22 The text amendment, the zoning. Here we go, this  
23 is a better shot that I'll show you. This is the,  
24 this is a line that shows you the extent of the  
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1  
2 yellow here, in this drawing, which shows you that  
3 20 foot setback that we're talking about. In  
4 other words everything else is a zero lot line on  
5 both sides of this, so it's not like we're  
6 changing the nature of the scale or the scope or  
7 the character of the neighborhood. And what we're  
8 going to be doing on that, which is the prettier  
9 picture. By the way it's a C11 zone, which is the  
10 most restrictive of the commercial. So, we're not  
11 asking for a parking or change in that. The  
12 layout of the site itself will be that along  
13 Richmond Avenue, we have our buildings, and we are  
14 trying to create a little greenscape and a little  
15 streetscape. There's a bus stop there, we're  
16 creating a space there to preempt the pedestrians  
17 and community, the shopping and the, and use the,  
18 that portion of the property. And the rest of it  
19 is the parking lot, which would, included with the  
20 bioswales and the layout that we were talking  
21 about. There is a bank identity on the site now,  
22 that bank wants to stay on the property. So, that  
23 bank will be there. And so it's not a lost  
24 community. And if anything, it's a brand new,  
25 spanking new drugstore that'll take its place, so

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2 that you don't have a vacant lot. The appearance  
3 of it is as such, this is what it would look like  
4 on a parking lot, this is what it would look like  
5 from along Amboy Road, and this is what it would  
6 look like along Richmond Ave. This is the  
7 adjacent retailers that we're lining up with, so  
8 it's again, trying to keep up with it, the  
9 streetscape and all brick and masonry and  
10 permanent materials. When I say permanent, I mean  
11 durable materials, it's not like somebody going to  
12 put a plastic finish on it. This is another  
13 drawing just to show that we're aligned with the  
14 other buildings there, and here's a nice big  
15 rendering showing you the state of the art.  
16 Handsome building. Or so we think. The second,  
17 as I said there were two text amendments, one is  
18 to move that 20 foot line, and the second is the  
19 authorization for this parking lot of 101 spaces.  
20 Mr. Chair, I'm available for any questions if  
21 there are any.

22 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Mr.  
23 Rosenbaum. The project is in Council Member  
24 Ignizio's district, so if you can give us a little  
25 background, Mr. Ignizio.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Yes, thank  
3 you very much, Mr. Chairman. Allow me to be the  
4 first to congratulate you on your first hearing in  
5 front of your Committee. We're glad to have you.  
6 [applause] I just want to say this project is one  
7 which has been worked on very closely with the  
8 Borough President and myself. I grew up not two  
9 blocks from this. And it's a great accoutrement,  
10 and we appreciate you willing to work with both  
11 the Borough President and myself in creating the  
12 open space that we want to see, and we hope it  
13 continues amongst other developers who want to  
14 develop the other corners, 'cause it will allow  
15 for both a better traffic flow and a better  
16 project in the end of the day. So, it meets with  
17 my full support. Thank you very much.

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you.  
19 Thank you, Council Member. Do any of the other  
20 members of the Committee or any members who are  
21 here want to make a comment, statement on this?  
22 Hearing none, thank you very much. We do have--

23 RAND ROSENBAUM: Thank you, Mr.  
24 Chair.

25 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: --other people

1  
2 testifying on this project. We're going to call,  
3 we have three people testifying against this  
4 project. We'd like to call them all up at once,  
5 if they don't mind, as a panel. They are William  
6 Owens, sorry if I can't read this well; Sharon  
7 Valentin; and Elmore Taylor. No? Is that Sandy  
8 Ground? You made me look bad there. They wrote  
9 the wrong number, that's what happened. Alright.  
10 So do we have any for this one?

11 MALE VOICE: No.

12 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Alright, look  
13 at that. Sorry about that. I want to warn, I  
14 want to--

15 MALE VOICE: I was all set!

16 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: There you go.  
17 You got nervous, didn't you? [laughter]

18 MALE VOICE: I was all set, Mr.  
19 Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Alright, well  
21 thank you very much. The motion to close this  
22 hearing, this hearing is now closed, and we thank  
23 you very much. And I apologize for that little  
24 number confusion. We had two Richmond County  
25 projects, I guess that's where some of the

1  
2 confusion is. I do want to let you know that once  
3 the applicant testifies, anyone testifying either  
4 in support or opposition, we're going to give them  
5 three minutes each to testify, so if you can keep  
6 your remarks within those three minutes, that  
7 would be great. Okay, we're going to move on.

8 Got the right numbers, and we're going to go on to  
9 the third project. This is Preconsidered LU for--  
10 where are we here? We're here? Preconsidered LU  
11 for the Sandy Ground rezoning, C 090041 ZMR, in  
12 Richmond County. On behalf of the applicant, we'd  
13 like to call up Alex Zablocki and Theresa Herring.  
14 And heeere they are. In favor, okay. Alright,  
15 so now we have how many again? - -

16 [pause, background noise]

17 ALEX ZABLOCKI: Do you mind if I go  
18 first?

19 THERESA HERRING: Yeah, go first.

20 ALEX ZABLOCKI: Thank you,  
21 Chairman, for having us. Thank you to Councilman  
22 Leroy Comrie, the Land Use Chair, for holding this  
23 meeting today, as well as the Subcommittee Chair,  
24 Councilman Mark Weprin, and congratulations on  
25 your first hearing here at 250. And thank you,

1  
2 too, Councilman Vincent Ignizio, for his support  
3 in recent years on Land Use matters, and working  
4 hand-in-hand with State Senator Lanza on so many  
5 issues, fighting over development in our  
6 community. My name is Alex Zablocki, I'm here to  
7 represent State Senator Andrew Lanza, one of the  
8 applicants for this rezoning application presented  
9 before you today. I'm here in support of the  
10 application. This plan recognizes the unique  
11 neighborhood character and other physical  
12 attributes of the area. To prevent future out of  
13 character overdevelopment of these neighborhoods,  
14 this rezoning would prevent and preserve the  
15 existing character of the neighborhood by  
16 encouraging construction of new homes that reflect  
17 and preserve historical character, help prevent  
18 the demolition of older homes and the construction  
19 of out of character new attached homes and  
20 apartments with small lots, maintain the density  
21 of the area as not to create an undue burden on  
22 existing infrastructure and facilities, and to  
23 prevent the loss of yards and individual character  
24 of each home, which contributes greatly to the  
25 environment and quality of life in the areas

1  
2 involved, including the preservation of open  
3 space. It was over two years ago that the Civic  
4 Association of the Sandy Ground area came to our  
5 office to ask for help regarding their community.  
6 What they saw on the horizon was possible  
7 continuation of overdevelopment of the Rossville  
8 section that has no firehouses, no police, no city  
9 sewers, barely any sidewalks and limited school  
10 seats. So we started a comprehensive zoning study  
11 of the area, and on July 21<sup>st</sup> of 2008 we submitted  
12 a ULURP application to the City Planning  
13 Commission, to rezone approximately 1,500 lots, 37  
14 blocks or 155 acres in the Rossville section of  
15 Staten Island, from R32, which as you can see from  
16 this diagram, would allow apartment buildings,  
17 townhouses, detached houses or semi-attached  
18 houses; and rezone it to R31, which would prevent  
19 attached houses such as townhouses and garden  
20 apartments. The Commissioner, Commissioner  
21 Burden, from City Planning, personally visited the  
22 site in 2009, and in September of 2009 this  
23 application was certified. It went to the City  
24 Community Board, Community Board Three, and was  
25 unanimously passed with no opposition. At the

1 public hearing at the City Planning Commission,  
2 nobody spoke in opposition of this application,  
3 and it was also passed unanimously by the Planning  
4 Commission. And it is of course here before you  
5 today. This application is important for the  
6 residents of this community, and it's important  
7 for the future growth of this community that it be  
8 rezoned and approved so that all future  
9 development is consistent with what already exists  
10 in the community, and so that infrastructure and  
11 transit lines and all of those vital services that  
12 we see across the City, that just don't exist  
13 here, have time to make its way here so that  
14 development could happen at the right pace. So,  
15 State Senator Andrew Lanza asks for your support,  
16 and we are grateful for you having this hearing  
17 today. Thank you very much.

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19 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [off mic]

20 Thank you.

21 THERESA HERRING: Good morning,  
22 thank you, Chairman, and all Council Members. My  
23 name is Theresa Herring. I am a descendant of  
24 Sandy Ground. I am a member of the Rossville AME  
25 Zion Church. I am also a member of the Civic

1 Association of the Sandy Ground area, also known  
2 as Casa. And I reside in the Sandy Ground  
3 community. Today, Council Members, I am here to  
4 ask your support for the rezoning application of  
5 the Sandy Ground area. Through the years, I have  
6 seen construction in the Sandy Ground area, that  
7 has not maintained the character of the community,  
8 and this has to stop. Sandy Ground has a very  
9 rich history. Sandy Ground is the oldest  
10 surviving free black community in the United  
11 States. Sandy Ground became a gateway to freedom,  
12 and the Rossville AME Zion Church has been a  
13 beacon of the community. These church grounds  
14 were always the center of the community, until the  
15 appointment of the present church leadership. The  
16 church structure on Bloomingdale and Clay Pit  
17 Road, was constructed in 1897, 113 years ago.  
18 This church should be revered, not desecrated by  
19 construction engulfing it. Sandy Ground has  
20 always been a multiethnic and multicultural  
21 community. My street, Clay Pit Road, we have  
22 African-Americans, Italian-Americans, Asian-  
23 Americans, Indian-Americans, Russian-Americans,  
24 Christians, Jews and Muslims. We all live in  
25

1  
2 peace and we all help each other. I am now  
3 beginning to hear the word "racism" and "ageism"  
4 referring to my community. This is insulting,  
5 this is dangerous, and not right to cry racism  
6 when you encounter obstacles because a project you  
7 support is not a good one. My forefathers were  
8 always concerned about preserving the history of  
9 the Sandy Ground area. The area's motto was "Help  
10 Us Save Our Roots and Trees." Council Members,  
11 please help us save our roots and trees today.  
12 Support the presented rezoning application as  
13 filed. Thank you very much.

14 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you both  
15 very much. I'm going to turn over for a statement  
16 to Vincent Ignizio again, who happens to be the  
17 Council Member for the project.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Thank you  
19 very much. I want to thank the applicants, Casa,  
20 and Senator Lanza who has worked with my office  
21 and every elected official who represents the  
22 areas in support. It's important to recognize  
23 that this down zoning is not about one projects,  
24 this is about an entire area which compliance  
25 rates for the current zone is in excess of 87

1 percent. So while other, my colleagues may be  
2 thinking what's, you know, this is not about one  
3 projects, the church project here, which is one I  
4 believe would only exasperate the problem of  
5 overdevelopment, is but one developer, if you  
6 will, like any other developer over the eight down  
7 zoning applications done in my community. That  
8 bears adherence and listening to what I just said.  
9 We, nobody picked this community because we, going  
10 against them or to fight one project. This is  
11 among a series of down zonings going on in my  
12 community, this is the eighth project that we've  
13 done. The compliance rates in this community is  
14 87 percent. And that's why the zone's changing to  
15 reflect that, so that you can't have a  
16 continuation of overdevelopment. It's gone on  
17 throughout the City, and this is yet another  
18 example of such. So, I implore my colleagues to  
19 support my decision in supporting this project,  
20 and I'm looking forward to a conversation that we  
21 go from here on. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you,  
24 Council Member. Do any of the other Council  
25 Members? Anyone have a question first for the

1  
2 members of the panel? Not yet, no, she didn't  
3 make--Go ahead, Mr. Oddo.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: Let me just  
5 start by saying, Mr. Chairman, you're a very good  
6 looking man. [laughter] And I hear very witty  
7 and very charming. Very good looking.

8 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Alright that's  
9 enough. [laughter

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: I might have  
11 an application coming before the Chairman, soon.  
12 I just wanted, I had a question for Alex. Council  
13 Member Ignizio referenced eight previous down  
14 zonings. I know you have been personally involved  
15 in many of them, and you've helped my office. How  
16 many down zonings have you been involved with and  
17 Senator Lanza when he was a councilman and as a  
18 state senator?

19 ALEX ZABLOCKI: Personally--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: How big of an  
21 area would you say has been down zoned or rezoned  
22 as a result of your work?

23 ALEX ZABLOCKI: Personally, our  
24 office has submitted eight rezoning applications,  
25 one which would make nine, was in with your

1 office, in Oakwood Beach. That included text  
2 amendments. We created, actually, a senior  
3 housing zone on the south shore of Staten Island  
4 that would allow higher density senior housing.  
5 We created a large lot area, which was a brand new  
6 zone for the south shore of Staten Island. It  
7 ranges in size, probably the size of Manhattan,  
8 for the area that we've rezoned it's tens of  
9 thousands of lots, preventing attached houses and  
10 the tear downs of older homes that of course have  
11 plagued much of Staten Island. But personally our  
12 office has rezoned areas all the way from Oakwood  
13 Beach, if you know Staten Island, all the way to  
14 Tottenville. And we've worked alongside  
15 Councilman Ignizio when he was in the State  
16 Assembly to do so when he was working for  
17 Councilman Lanza at the time, as well.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: Thank you.  
19 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Any other  
21 questions or comments from the panel? Mr. Comrie.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Right.  
23 Alex, you mentioned that you have no amenities in  
24 this area at all, no city services. There's no  
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school in the area, you said? Is that correct?

ALEX ZABLOCKI: Well, there's lack of city services. There is a school in the area that's busting at the seams like most schools on Staten Island, and I guess throughout the City.

COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Well, then, can you just restate that, what you meant by no city services?

ALEX ZABLOCKI: Lack of city services? Meaning police coverage, Staten Island is getting a fourth police precinct after a decade's fight. Lack of fire coverage. City sewers, most of the development in this rezoning area is on private pumping stations, with lack of city sewers, meaning that to put it bluntly, if you flush your toilet and everyone did it at the same time, I know as people have suggested, some pumping stations would back up in the area. They don't connect to the main city lines. Lack of roads, roads that are ten feet wide, sidewalks that don't exist. Bus stops that don't exist, or bus, lack of bus routes in the area. Lack of shopping. The contiguous roads don't exist. Roads dead end in the middle of nowhere. Highways

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2 stop in the middle of nowhere. Service roads dead  
3 end and do not continue. That is the Rossville  
4 section of Staten Island, that is most of the  
5 southern end of Staten Island. The forgotten  
6 borough, the forgotten of New York City, and  
7 that's what we're dealing with here. And it's  
8 slowly catching up to itself over the last decade,  
9 a lot has been done to make inroads in that  
10 respect, to bring these services to this area.  
11 But we're not there yet.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: And are  
13 there any grocery stores in the area?

14 ALEX ZABLOCKI: There's one grocery  
15 store in the area.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Uh-huh.  
17 And--

18 ALEX ZABLOCKI: It's nothing  
19 walking distance, the train is at least a mile  
20 away.

21 THERESA HERRING: The bus is a mile  
22 away.

23 ALEX ZABLOCKI: And the grocery  
24 stores--what's that? It is a mile away?

25 THERESA HERRING: Mmhm.

1  
2 ALEX ZABLOCKI: And the grocery  
3 store, the nearest one would be Waldbaum's on  
4 Amboy Road. It's further than the train, no  
5 direct bus service. Pretty sure of that, I don't  
6 know--

7 THERESA HERRING: They started a  
8 temporary bus service for school children.

9 ALEX ZABLOCKI: Okay, for school to  
10 Tottenville High School.

11 THERESA HERRING: That--yeah.

12 ALEX ZABLOCKI: But no regional bus  
13 service.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: And you  
15 said you'd--how come City Planning is not bringing  
16 these applications? Did you do all eight  
17 rezonings yourself, without--

18 ALEX ZABLOCKI: We did. City  
19 Planning, like much of government, is bogged down  
20 with bureaucracy. And if we ask for a rezoning  
21 from City Planning, it's not going to be rezoned.  
22 And while Rome burns, we will watch it, and we  
23 won't get the result that we need and want,  
24 especially on Staten Island. So, we took matters  
25 into our own hands and we figured out how to put a

1  
2 study together, put an environmental assessment  
3 together, environmental assessment statement  
4 together, and get these rezonings to the finish  
5 line. In the right way, in the way that it's  
6 supposed to be done, and the City Charter allows  
7 community organizations like civic associations  
8 and taxpayers, to file land use applications  
9 before yourself or the City Planning Commission,  
10 because of that reason. So, we have done a lot of  
11 the legwork for City Planning with a lot of these  
12 rezoning applications, and they've assisted us as  
13 well as we've assisted them.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Mr.

15 Chairman, if I may? If I may in regards to that.

16 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Yes, you may.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Thank you.

18 The City Planning Commission, when we first  
19 approached them in 2001, when then Councilman  
20 Lanza was first elected, we said we wanted to do a  
21 sweeping down zoning throughout the entire south  
22 shore. And their response to us was, "Good luck,  
23 we don't have the resources for that." And that's  
24 when, in the sense, in the center, then Councilman  
25 said to me, and to Alex saying, "Can you guys

1  
2 figure this out?" And Alex has been a cornerstone  
3 of coming through with working on these down  
4 zoning applications as I said. It's been ongoing  
5 since 2001, and here we are eight years later and  
6 the south shore has been just about totally  
7 rezoned to a proper zoning. But City Planning was  
8 reluctant to be involved in such a huge process  
9 because they just didn't have the manpower or the  
10 resources.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Have they  
12 looked at this particular plan?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Yes, they  
14 looked at it, they support it, and they endorsed  
15 it unanimously at City Planning Commission, as had  
16 the Community Board, as has the Borough President.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Okay.  
18 Alright, I don't have any other questions for him.  
19 Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Do any other  
21 members have any questions or comments? Alright,  
22 thank you very much, for the applicant. We have a  
23 number of people in opposition, and two people--  
24 [background noise] After the--thank you, thank  
25 you, Council Member. We have, so we have a number

1 of people in opposition, two people in favor.  
2 We're going to bring them up, the opposition in  
3 two separate panels, but we're going to alternate  
4 between the opposition and those in favor. So  
5 we're going to call up--we're going to have a  
6 little tight squeeze up there, Sergeant-at-Arms,  
7 but four people on the first panel, who all happen  
8 to be with the church, I believe. Reverend Janet  
9 Jones, Reverend, are you here? Yvonne Taylor,  
10 William Owens, and Elmore Taylor, those names  
11 sound familiar to me. But, have them come up. I  
12 would advise the panel that we're going to put a  
13 three minute clock on everybody from here on in  
14 order to try to get, you know, be as--expedite  
15 this as quickly as possible. And then after this,  
16 we'll bring up the panel of people in favor, two  
17 people, and then the final three in opposition  
18 will come up as a separate panel after that.  
19 Thank you very much. [pause, background noise]  
20 Sure. Okay. We ready with the clock and the  
21 first speaker, Reverend, are you going to start?  
22 Who's going to--? Okay, alright. Okay, can we  
23 have quiet, please?

24  
25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: [off mic] Quiet,

1  
2 please.

3 [background noise]

4 YVONNE TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr.  
5 Chairman, and members of the Committee, for giving  
6 me the opportunity to speak in opposition to this  
7 down zoning proposal, which is before you. My  
8 name is Yvonne Taylor, and I am a member and  
9 trustee of the Rossville AME Zion Church, which is  
10 located at 584 Bloomingdale Island, Staten Island,  
11 New York. This section of Staten Island was  
12 settled by free blacks in the early 1800s, and is  
13 considered to be the oldest settlement of African-  
14 Americans in this country, which is still home to  
15 some of the descendants of those early settlers.  
16 I am one of seven generations of my family who  
17 have resided there. If this down zoning proposal  
18 were to be approved, it would have a negative  
19 impact on the plan that my church has to provide  
20 affordable housing for senior citizens. In the  
21 publication, and I quote, "Community District  
22 Needs, Fiscal Year 2008, Community Board Three  
23 stated there is truly a need for senior citizen  
24 housing on the south shore." We want to fill that  
25 need. Our plan is to build two buildings of

1  
2 affordable senior housing for those who are 62  
3 years of age or older, on property which we own.  
4 50 percent of these units would be set aside for  
5 South Shore Staten Island residents. This process  
6 began more than five years ago. We explored the  
7 possibility of development, entered into an  
8 agreement with a developer who had built several  
9 developments of this nature before. And then we  
10 proceeded from there to do all that was required  
11 to do in order to go forward with this  
12 development. Since we were building, as a right,  
13 we were confident that the process would smoothly.  
14 But we soon discovered that what should have been  
15 a smooth ride, quickly became a rocky and bumpy  
16 one. We have met obstacles along the way, not due  
17 to either our own or the developer's failure to  
18 adhere to the requirements and regulations, but  
19 because of the bureaucratic and governmental  
20 hurdles which we have had to navigate. Initially,  
21 we thought we had the support of our elected  
22 officials. In 2005, according to an article which  
23 appeared in the Staten Island Advance, then  
24 Councilman Lanza stated that he would back up  
25 zoning in his district which would lead to the

1 building of affordable houses. When we sought  
2 additional funding to downsize our development, we  
3 were told by him that he thought there was a good  
4 possibility he would be able to secure funding for  
5 us. This funding never materialized. And here we  
6 are today because Senator Lanza, State Senator  
7 Lanza, has submitted this down zoning application.  
8 When our application finally reached the office of  
9 City Planning after years of delay, it was not  
10 given final approval because we have to require,  
11 we were required to have another archeological  
12 study. In addition, we have encountered community  
13 opposition unparalleled in my lifetime, and I  
14 would venture the early settlers didn't encounter  
15 it either. I ask you to please help us to fulfill  
16 our mission as a church for 159 years when we have  
17 been trying to serve the needs of the public.

18  
19 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you very  
20 much. Next speaker, before we get to--

21 ELMORE TAYLOR: My name is Elmore  
22 Taylor, and I'm a member of the--Oh. My name is  
23 Elmore Taylor, oh. Mr. Comrie, Chairman and  
24 Member of the Land Use Committee, thank you for  
25 the opportunity to speak before you in opposition

1  
2 to the down zoning proposal before you. My name  
3 is Elmore Taylor, and I'm a member of the  
4 Rossville African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church,  
5 located at 584 Bloomingdale Road, Staten Island,  
6 New York 10309. Upon deciding to build in the  
7 area, we applied for tax exemption 501(c)(3), and  
8 received same. Then we applied to the New York  
9 City real estate tax for exemption and was turned  
10 down because there was nothing on our vacant land.  
11 So then since the need for the senior citizen  
12 housing in the area, it was expressed, which was  
13 expressed by Community Board Three, the church met  
14 and voted to build senior housing. This was  
15 approved by the total membership. We retained a  
16 developer, and he put things in motion to build.  
17 After a period of time, it was learned that State  
18 Senator Andrew Lanza had submitted a down zoning  
19 application to down zone the area in which the  
20 building was to be done. We respectfully request  
21 that you disapprove the down zoning as it is  
22 written, in his application. In addition to that,  
23 and I didn't write this out, but the church itself  
24 has a public school in the building. We've got no  
25 remuneration from anyone for having that school in

1  
2 the church. We provide them with the water, heat,  
3 electricity, and any other needs that they desire  
4 in the church. In addition to that, AA meets at  
5 the church, and this is all in providing the  
6 community with community needs in the church that  
7 we have always proclaimed that we do. Thank you  
8 for your listening to me, and I respectfully  
9 request that you not approve it as it is. There  
10 are a few other things, if I have three minutes, I  
11 guess I got a little more time.

12 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: We don't want  
13 to encourage everyone to use their three minutes  
14 [laughter] but certainly you may continue.

15 ELMORE TAYLOR: Yeah, but, the  
16 powers that be, like I lived in Sandy Ground for a  
17 few years, and I, there was a house at the top of  
18 Woodrow Road which was not supposed to be built,  
19 but they approved that house to be built, and that  
20 cut off, if you come out 440 Expressway, Woodrow  
21 Road is the primary access to come off in Sandy  
22 Ground. And that road was cut off by that  
23 building that they allowed to be built. Not only  
24 that, the street is a private street now. So a  
25 primary, to enter the area through that particular

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route, has been curtailed and is no longer there.

CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you very much.

ELMORE TAYLOR: The powers that be let that happen.

CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, you only have 99 minutes left I see. No. [laughter] We'll start the clock. Next speaker. I did set the time on the three minutes, someone said I could do it at two minutes; I wanted to make sure people got heard, but we don't necessarily have to hit the three minute mark. But thank you.

ELMORE TAYLOR: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Next speaker. But thank you, sir.

WILLIAM TUCSON OWENS, JR.: Good morning, Council, thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is William Tucson Owens, Jr. I am a volunteer in the community of outreach, I'm a member of the NAACP, Urban League, National Council of Negro Women. And in my 40 years of outreach to the community, I find that what this project means is that we need to serve our seniors. I am disabled, I'm 61 years old, I would

1  
2 like to see this project built. I not only speak  
3 for myself, I speak for my community of Staten  
4 Island. When I travel across the pond to Staten  
5 Island from Manhattan, to see my many doctors that  
6 take care of my health, there's a sign that says,  
7 "We are the borough of parks." I would like us to  
8 also be the borough of caring about our seniors  
9 and our disabled. I thank you for this  
10 opportunity.

11 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you,  
12 sir. Reverend.

13 JANET JONES: My name is Reverend  
14 Janet H. Hones, I have served as pastor of the  
15 Rossville AME Zion Church since June of 2003.  
16 After a few months there, I had a conversation  
17 with some people and asked "You own a lot of  
18 property here. And much of it is vacant, what are  
19 the plans for this property? For this land." And  
20 I learned that they had discussed various ways of  
21 developing that land, from having a preschool  
22 there to building houses and selling them and/or  
23 renting them, or whatever. So, we, on a series of  
24 meetings, we met, "What is the purpose of our being  
25 here in this community?" And we looked at "What

1  
2 is the future of this congregation in this  
3 community?" And how do we use the resources that  
4 the church has to serve the community, and to  
5 ensure the future viability of the congregation.  
6 So the congregation decided that the, with the  
7 great need for senior housing on Staten Island and  
8 no affordable senior housing in the South Shore,  
9 that that would be the way to go, to meet both  
10 objectives. So, we found a developer, it was a  
11 developer that had been to the church before,  
12 they'd had discussions with them long before I  
13 came. And on February 23<sup>rd</sup> of 2005, we met with  
14 then Councilman Lanza to review what our proposal  
15 was. And we talked about the pros and cons, and  
16 many of the cons were also things shared by  
17 members of the congregation, who voted to proceed  
18 with this development. And as a result of that  
19 conversation, we agreed to downsize the size of  
20 the development. And as was said, Councilman  
21 Lanza said he could get some funds that would  
22 cover the funding gap that would be created by  
23 reducing the size of the development. There were  
24 a series of meetings, but nothing, after a while,  
25 communication just kind of broke down. There was

1  
2 no communication for months between the church and  
3 the Councilman's office. So, at one point, I  
4 directed the developer, "So we will submit the  
5 plans as we originally had them, since we aren't  
6 getting the cooperation that we desired." We met  
7 with the Community Board representatives from then  
8 Councilman Ignizio's office, then Senator Lanza's  
9 office, the Borough President's office. And we  
10 thought we had some kind of agreement on how to  
11 proceed. And we never got the, it never worked.

12 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [off mic] Just  
13 finish up if you want to.

14 JANET JONES: Okay. And I'm here  
15 to say, I've--to urge you not to vote for this  
16 down zoning, and to express my concern about the  
17 hypocrisy of this process. Everyone agrees that  
18 the need for senior housing is so great. And  
19 senior housing is going up all over Staten Island,  
20 but it doesn't meet the needs of people who need  
21 it the most. And as a church, that's the need  
22 that we seek to fulfill. The people we seek to  
23 serve are moderate to low income people, not  
24 people who can afford to pay \$2,000 or \$3,000 a  
25 month.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you,  
3 Reverend. Do any members of the panel want to ask  
4 a question of this group? Yes--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Yeah.

6 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Mr. Seabrook.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Yeah,  
8 just a question, in reference to the church  
9 building. Prior to that, this, if we voted for  
10 this, you said that you have a right to build this  
11 housing now?

12 JANET JONES: Yes, as, because of  
13 the length of this process and all the obstacles  
14 that were encountered. And once we got approval,  
15 City Planning said we had to do the archeological  
16 survey, we had done one, it wasn't deemed  
17 acceptable. We did another. And the findings  
18 were the same, the conclusions were different.  
19 The conclusion now was these items may have  
20 historical significance, which required a more  
21 extensive dig, and thousands of thousands of more  
22 dollars. And at that point our developer sais,  
23 "This has been the most expensive project we've  
24 done in 20 years and we are not going to put any  
25 more money into it." And the church did not have

1  
2 \$70,000 to complete the archeological survey. So  
3 we've been having conversations with other  
4 developers and we have not done anything since  
5 then.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: So what  
7 is the proposed size of what you're trying to  
8 build now?

9 JANET JONES: The proposed size is  
10 two buildings that, they are four story buildings,  
11 there would be three-and-a-half stories, or 35  
12 feet above ground. A total of 119 units, one- and  
13 two-bedroom units. One building would have 200  
14 square feet of community space. There would be  
15 amenities for the residents there, you know,  
16 reading room--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

18 JANET JONES: --and all that kind  
19 of health stuff. And all parking is off the  
20 street. Actually the plan has more parking than  
21 is required by regulation.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: And just  
23 one other question, in reference, with this down  
24 sizing, that if it takes place, what would it  
25 limit you to?

1  
2 JANET JONES: It would limit us to  
3 not doing this. On some lots, it would limit us  
4 to putting one house on each lot. And the other  
5 lot, I'm not sure how many houses would fit there,  
6 but it would not--it would virtually stop the  
7 church from being able to provide any kind of  
8 affordable housing for seniors that is meaningful.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Thank  
10 you, Mr. Chairman.

11 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Mr.  
12 Seabrook. Anyone else have any questions? Mr.  
13 Comrie.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: You've  
15 spoken to a few issues here. Have you--when was  
16 your last communication with the State Senator or  
17 the Councilmember, before this date?

18 JANET JONES: My one conversation  
19 with Councilman Ignizio was shortly after he got  
20 into office, and that conversation, in that  
21 conversation he expressed concern about the  
22 opposition. And the concern that there might not  
23 be enough people in this constituency to, who  
24 would be eligible for the kind of housing that we  
25 were proposing. He asked that we supply him with

1  
2 statistics to show the need; however, before we  
3 got those statistics to him, letters were  
4 disseminated within the community with his  
5 signature, and Assemblyman Tobacco's signature,  
6 stating their opposition to the development. So,  
7 there's been no further communication.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Mr.  
9 Chairman, if I may.

10 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Yes. Sorry,  
11 Mr. Comrie's still got questions, sorry.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Right.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Okay.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: And has  
15 there been an assessment on, from you, exactly  
16 what could be built there at this particular  
17 point? How many lots do you have?

18 JANET JONES: We have three lots  
19 that are part of this development.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: And how  
21 many vacant, how much vacant space do you have  
22 altogether?

23 JANET JONES: It's approximately,  
24 it's a little over two acres.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: And how big

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are the--two acres all together, or are they all consecutive?

JANET JONES: No, they're not contiguous. There is a corner lot, which is about 28,000 square feet, I think, off the top of my head.

MALE VOICE: [off mic] 3,000.

JANET JONES: Three--

MALE VOICE: [off mic] 3,000 square feet.

JANET JONES: It's got to more than 3,000. This--

MALE VOICE: 30,000, I'm sorry, 30,000.

JANET JONES: Alright. [laughter]

MALE VOICE: I'm sorry.

JANET JONES: And the other lots are, that were a part of the development, were a total of about 38,000.

COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: And--

JANET JONES: All three of those lots.

COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Was there any opportunity to come in and submit a--why did

1  
2 no one speak at the community board meeting or  
3 the--or any other meeting in opposition to the  
4 plan?

5 JANET JONES: Well, I can tell you  
6 why I didn't speak. One, I think I was suffering  
7 from post-traumatic stress syndrome, from the  
8 first meeting we had with the community there.  
9 And it was very difficult to speak in an  
10 environment where I know I'm not being heard. It  
11 was not from a lack of concern, 'cause I struggled  
12 with it, and--but we were not being heard. And it  
13 may not have been the best decision to make, but  
14 that was the decision of why I did not speak at  
15 those meetings.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: And how  
17 long did you know that this was on the agenda for  
18 today's meeting?

19 JANET JONES: Two days ago, three  
20 days ago.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Okay.

22 JANET JONES: I--okay.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: No further  
24 questions.

25 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Mr. Ignizio.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Yeah, I  
3 just wanted to say on the record, regards to the  
4 letter that Council--Assemblyman Tobacco and I  
5 wrote. That letter was actually encouraging the  
6 community to support a reduction of the amount  
7 that, for the density in that, my belief, and it  
8 substantiated by the Buildings Department, that a  
9 four story building cannot be built in South  
10 Richmond under the current zone. And that a, the  
11 original plan of 119-120 units was completely out  
12 of character with the community, and that we would  
13 be seeking a reduction in the amounts. I just  
14 wanted to clarify that for the record. Thank you,  
15 Mr. Chairman.

16 [crosstalk]

17 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: No, I'm sorry,  
18 does anyone else on the panel have any question--  
19 I'm sorry, sir, we don't, it doesn't become--Mr.  
20 Jackson wants to state something.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: With  
22 respect to, with all respects to Council Member  
23 Ignizio, if in fact a statement was made by  
24 Council Member Ignizio that, I believe that the  
25 panelists want to respond to, I personally as a

1  
2 Member of the City Council, would like to hear the  
3 response. I think it's appropriate to get a  
4 totality. I have questions and concerns because I  
5 was curious as to what the response was to Council  
6 Member Ignizio, that's number one. And then I  
7 have some questions of the panelists that I would  
8 like to ask.

9 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Council  
10 Member, you're certainly welcome to ask a question  
11 of the panel to explain anything they might want  
12 to say. So, do you want to direct it towards  
13 anyone in particular?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Well, from  
15 a process point of view, Mr. Chair, more so than  
16 directing the question, I think that if the  
17 panelists had a response, and I understand that  
18 this is not a continuous back and forth, but  
19 obviously, as you can see, this is an issue where  
20 all sides don't agree. And I think it's  
21 appropriate to hear the response from the  
22 panelists. More so than me asking the panelists  
23 for a response. That's a difference, sir.

24 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Yes, there is  
25 a difference there, Mr. Jackson. I'm just afraid

1  
2 that if we open that door of having cross-  
3 conversations, we might end up with a little  
4 disorganization there. So, if you wanted to ask  
5 them to do the response, I'd be happy to allow  
6 that.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: And I  
8 truly understand that. But it seems as though  
9 that my colleagues, when they ask questions, and  
10 panelists responded, on a continuous basis,  
11 Council Member Ignizio responded to those  
12 particular matters, with respects to not out of  
13 asking the questions panelists, but in responding  
14 to Council Members and/or panelists, as to what  
15 they said. So, if in fact there's a protocol as  
16 far as responses and questions, then I really  
17 would like to know what it is.

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Don't want to  
19 belabor this, but I mean--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: And I  
21 don't either.

22 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: --Council  
23 Members obviously are on the panel, or on the  
24 Committee, are allowed to speak on the bill, I  
25 mean on the application, and comments that are

1  
2 made. And certainly as a Member of the Committee,  
3 you're allowed to speak, Mr. Jackson. Say  
4 anything you want.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Thank you.  
6 Yes, then--

7 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: But--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Then I'll  
9 ask the question to the panelists with respects to  
10 the comments made by Council Member Ignizio, did  
11 you have a response to what he had to say?

12 JANET JONES: During the process of  
13 getting this application ready to be submitted to  
14 City Planning, prior to that our zoning attorney  
15 worked with the Staten Island office, and the  
16 application had to go through the New York City  
17 Fire Department, Staten Island New York Fire  
18 Department, Police Department--no, the Fire  
19 Department, Department of Transportation and the  
20 Department of the Buildings, prior to the  
21 application being submitted to City Planning for  
22 certification.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Okay, now  
24 I heard, Reverend, that you mentioned that you did  
25 not testify at the community board meeting when

1  
2 this was I guess discussed and voted upon. And my  
3 question is, did anyone of the trustees or other  
4 officers of the church, did they speak to the  
5 community board, 'cause a board consists of 50  
6 members of the community. Was the opinion of your  
7 church expressed there by recognized  
8 representatives of your church to the community  
9 board? And whatever pros and cons that the church  
10 opinions were, were they discussed to the  
11 community board prior to the community board  
12 voting upon this?

13 JANET JONES: It was a very large  
14 meeting of the Land Use Committee of Community  
15 Board Three. And at that time, yes, members of  
16 the church and of the community spoke on this  
17 project, on behalf of the church.

18 WILLIAM TUCSON OWENS, JR.: But  
19 last week, the lawyer--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: I'm sorry,  
21 sir, can you please speak into the mic, if you  
22 could speak from - -

23 WILLIAM TUCSON OWENS, JR.: Oh, I  
24 think our attorney, Mr. Plednick [phonetic] he--He  
25 spoke at that meeting, also. And he's our

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attorney.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Okay, so you did have, in essence what you're telling me is that your church's position was presented at the Community Board.

WILLIAM TUCSON OWENS, JR.: Yes, it was, it was.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: And not by the Reverend, but by the attorneys representing you.

WILLIAM TUCSON OWENS, JR.: Yes, yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Is that correct?

WILLIAM TUCSON OWENS, JR.: Of course.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Okay. Now--

WILLIAM TUCSON OWENS, JR.: And there, one other person, too, my daughter, she's a teacher, but she spoke also.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Okay. So, and I got the impression that your church's position was not put forward, but in essence it

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has been put forward, is that correct?

WILLIAM TUCSON OWENS, JR.: Yes, it has, it has.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Let me just ask the question. This begs a question, because I heard the words "racism" and ageism" being brought into the picture. And so--

WILLIAM TUCSON OWENS, JR.: Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: --my question to you is: Has the church or representatives of the church, raised the issue of racism and ageism into this particular process?

JANET JONES: No.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Okay. Do you know if anywhere, why this is being raised at this hearing?

JANET JONES: In the very beginning of this process, back in 2005 or around there, a reporter came to visit me at the church, and interviewed me. And she asked that question, if I thought it was racism, and I said, "If anything it might be ageism." That is the only time that term was ever used. And that was not quoted in the

1  
2 paper. It was quoted as I said I thought that  
3 racism was involved, but that indeed was not the  
4 case.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Thank you,  
6 Mr. Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Mr.  
8 Jackson. Any other people on the panel want to  
9 make a question or statement.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: [off mic]  
11 Well, yeah.

12 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Mr. Seabrook.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Yeah,  
14 just a question. I think it, in light of trying  
15 to move forward in the discussion at this, the  
16 church seemed to have been moving and progressing  
17 and working with the elected officials. And  
18 perhaps that the elected officials and the church  
19 could sit--This isn't a plan that's coming from  
20 the Planning Commission, this is a plan that's  
21 proposed and approved by. And so, I think that  
22 there needs to be some level of discussion as to  
23 how to work out a compromise that would benefit  
24 all parties. This is--and 'cause I've always had  
25 questions and concerns about the level of

1 downsizing and everything else, 'cause we have to  
2 be very, very careful, 'cause I have lived in a  
3 time in America where we didn't have open  
4 communities, and a very segregated type of  
5 community, and keeping segregated communities.  
6 And we have to be very, very careful about our  
7 approach as to how we approach this, and to deal  
8 with this. And I think that we have here people  
9 who are intelligent enough on both sides of this  
10 argument to come and have a compromise that could  
11 be worked out, that would be satisfying all of  
12 these interests, and looking at this, and dealing  
13 with this particular issue as we relate to a  
14 serious housing crisis within our City. And so I  
15 would hope that we can address this, that we can  
16 look at this, and come to a compromise that would  
17 be beneficial to all parties involved, and  
18 hopefully that this can be worked out in such a  
19 way, because it's driven in a political sense.  
20 And I think that, you know, and so we need to  
21 understand that, and how best to address that  
22 particular issue. This is not the City Planning.  
23 I understand everybody can say about the  
24 bureaucracies and everything else, but this is  
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1  
2 politically driven. And so I think that we need  
3 to have some discussion because politics is the  
4 art of compromise. And that's what we need to  
5 take a look at, and how we have to address this  
6 issue, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

7 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Mr.  
8 Seabrook. We do have a number of other people  
9 waiting to testify, so let's move ahead and we  
10 will now call, as together as a panel, the two  
11 people in favor of this proposal: Dennis  
12 Dell'Angelo, sorry if mispronunciation; and Dee  
13 Vandenburg. [pause, background noise]

14 DEE VANDENBURG: Do you need my  
15 copies? [pause]

16 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Go first?

17 DEE VANDENBURG: What?

18 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Want to go  
19 first?

20 DEE VANDENBURG: Yeah, I'd like to  
21 answer Mr. Seabrook.

22 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Good morning.  
23 Please introduce yourself and start, yes, thank  
24 you, a little quiet, please.

25 DEE VANDENBURG: My name is Dee

1 Vandenburg, I am the President of the Staten  
2 Island Taxpayers Association. We are an island-  
3 wide organization that assists civic associations  
4 across Staten Island. I have submitted my 15  
5 copies, and I'd like to thank you for allowing us  
6 to speak. I'm going to read something very short,  
7 I promise, I'll probably be under two minutes.

8 However, I would like to address what Mr. Seabrook  
9 said. This down zoning application is constituent  
10 and community driven. It was not politically  
11 driven. In fact, we begged to get something done,  
12 and now I'm going to upset the apple cart. And I  
13 apologize, Mr. Oddo, and Mr. Ignizio, but I'm  
14 going to tell you the dirty little Staten Island  
15 secret right now. To Chairman Weprin and Council  
16 Committee Members, Staten Island is often referred  
17 to as the forgotten borough, sorely lacking in  
18 infrastructure to support high density  
19 developments. Many areas, including the Sandy  
20 Ground area, lack even sanitary sewers, not to  
21 mention storm sewers, of which the applicant at  
22 the time, not that this is what we're here for,  
23 when I asked him where his storm water was going,  
24 he said into the storm sewers. And I said, "Good  
25

1  
2 luck with that." The two sewer treatment plants  
3 that we have on Staten Island are now past their  
4 35 years span. According to the New York State  
5 Department of Environmental Conservation Speedys  
6 Permits, for Port Richmond and Oakwood Beach  
7 facilities are over and close to capacity,  
8 respectively. The City of New York has  
9 approximately 15, throughout the whole City,  
10 private sewer pumping stations. About twelve of  
11 those are in Staten Island, and the majority of  
12 them are in this area of Sandy Ground. These are  
13 paid for by the homeowners through HOA fees at  
14 ConEd commercial rates on a 24/7 basis. The  
15 Staten Island Taxpayers Association has been  
16 against these private pump stations for years. We  
17 were incorporated in 1933 by the way. We are  
18 constantly testifying about our lack of basics.  
19 We realize that the City can little afford to give  
20 us these things, especially now. Our only  
21 recourse, with so little infrastructure in these  
22 areas, is down zoning. We ask that this Committee  
23 help us help ourselves and approve this ULURP.  
24 Thank you.

25 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you very

1  
2 much. Sir?

3 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: My name is  
4 Dennis Dell'Angelo, I'm a resident of Staten  
5 Island. I'm President of the Pleasant  
6 Plains/Princess Bay/Richmond Valley Civic  
7 Association. Those are the three towns just to  
8 the south of Sandy Ground. We are a co-applicant  
9 in this application. Our civic association was  
10 involved in one of the larger rezonings in the  
11 area, over ten years ago. We were incorporated in  
12 1963. The issue here has been on Staten Island,  
13 density, over density, and out of character  
14 development. The growth management taskforce that  
15 was created for Staten island is just that, to  
16 manage the growth of Staten Island as we build out  
17 whatever is left; trying to get infrastructure.  
18 The lack of infrastructure on the South Shore has  
19 been endemic. We just got two new schools built  
20 because the builders couldn't build without school  
21 seats, it's in the zoning. That's why we got our  
22 two new schools. The issue of density in this  
23 particular area can be addressed by looking at the  
24 vacant land on these maps that were submitted.  
25 There are several large, undeveloped parcels. All

1 of these would require pumping stations, none of  
2 them has sanitary stores or storm sewers. It is  
3 not just for this one project. I've been involved  
4 with this since the beginning, and I understand  
5 the opposition, it's a single project, and I would  
6 like to bring the council's attention to the fact  
7 that senior housing is a problem, citywide, and on  
8 Staten Island, and that the community has been  
9 trying to address these problems with the  
10 Department of City Planning, and our elected  
11 officials over the last 20-some odd years. Some  
12 of you may have been on board with the Charleston  
13 Retail Center. It was 140 acres of city owned  
14 land, the last city owned land on the South Shore  
15 of Staten Island; everything else had been sold  
16 off by the previous administration. They wanted  
17 to put big box stores on public land, EDC. We  
18 fought them, we fought them for a long time, and  
19 we managed to get ten acres set aside for senior  
20 housing at the Charleston site, along with ball  
21 fields, a site for a school, and a site for a  
22 park. We have identified senior housing upzoning,  
23 at Mt. Loretto, which was referred to. If anyone  
24 wants to step into Mt. Loretto, they can go to an  
25

1  
2 R32 zoning, we downzoned it to R3X, to protect the  
3 community, but with the proviso that if senior  
4 housing wanted to be built there, they could go to  
5 the R32 density. We are not negligent in  
6 recognizing the need for senior housing. We want  
7 our communities to develop, however, with a  
8 contextual arrangement which has been protected by  
9 zoning, and we expect that the Council will  
10 support us in this, in this application. Every  
11 time senior housing comes up, they just avoid the  
12 areas that the community identified for senior  
13 housing, which has transportation, stores,  
14 amenities, restaurants, places where seniors can  
15 enjoy the rest of their lives. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you.

17 Anybody on the panel have any questions or  
18 comments of this panel? Mr. Jackson.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Thank you.

20 Good morning. Good morning.

21 DEE VANDENBURG: [laughs]

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: With  
23 respects to the, you know, as I don't live on the  
24 South Shore, I don't live on Staten Island. I  
25 live in an apartment building in Manhattan, so

1  
2 forgive me if I don't know. You talked about, in  
3 your statement, Ms. Vandenburg, about the fact  
4 that these private pumping stations--the  
5 homeowners have to pay for that, is that correct,  
6 by an assessment or tax?

7 DEE VANDENBURG: Oh, it's called a  
8 Homeowners Association Fee, and what happens is,  
9 is ConEd recognizes they're on file with the State  
10 Attorney General's office, and part of that fee is  
11 to pay the electric to make those pump stations  
12 work. Because of the topography of Staten Island,  
13 there is somebody at DEP that would love to say,  
14 "positive flow" and "positive flow" but there are  
15 areas you can't get positive flow. So it's a  
16 private pumping station that the homeowners in the  
17 development themselves are responsible for that  
18 bill. What we have had in the past, in particular  
19 in one pump station, outside of this area, the  
20 homeowners association decided not to pay their  
21 ConEd bill. And thank goodness a Councilman  
22 stepped in and helped working something out with  
23 ConEd so they wouldn't shut it down. We don't  
24 have sanitary sewers, and our sewer treatment  
25 plants are in despicable shape right now as we

1  
2 speak.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: I was  
4 curious as to, you know, what's the cost factor to  
5 the homeowners as far as the homeowners  
6 association to run these pumping stations.

7 DEE VANDENBURG: I am unaware of  
8 that. Perhaps the Councilman could answer that.  
9 I'm not sure what the cost is to the homeowner.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: [off mic]  
11 Depends on the private condo development.

12 DEE VANDENBURG: Develop, how big  
13 the development is, I would imagine, and the  
14 capacity.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Okay.

16 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, Mr.  
17 Oddo.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Well, so,  
19 sir you talked about the fact that when the City  
20 was trying to build these big box stores, and the  
21 community fought back, and basically, I  
22 understand, some schools were built, some senior  
23 housing was built. Is that in the same  
24 geographical area that we're talking about, the  
25 South Shore?

1  
2 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Yes,  
3 Councilman, schools were built, because on Staten  
4 Island a developer cannot build a residence unless  
5 there are school seats certified in a school.

6 DEE VANDENBURG: On our shore.

7 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: The South  
8 Shore. No senior housing of this type has been  
9 built. And as I said, recognizing that need over  
10 15 years ago when this retail center came up, we  
11 set aside ten acres, which is still city owned.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: For senior  
13 housing.

14 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: For senior  
15 housing.

16 DEE VANDENBURG: Yes.

17 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Obviously  
18 affordable senior housing. No one stepped up to  
19 the plate since then. We also set aside, when we  
20 were down zoning Mt. Loretta, which is 340 acres  
21 in the middle of our communities, the Catholic  
22 Church did not like the idea of down zoning its  
23 property. It felt that it's property was more  
24 valuable not being down zoned. We got the down  
25 zoning through, on the proviso, working again with

1  
2 our elected officials, Councilman Lanza at the  
3 time, and we managed to work out a deal where by  
4 if the church on its property wanted to build  
5 affordable senior housing, and they have 134  
6 acres, we would acquiesce to going to the higher  
7 density R32 zoning, which would allow condominiums  
8 and apartment style homes. Again, this was 20  
9 years ago. Nothing has been done.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: The  
11 Catholic Church has not built anything. And what  
12 about for the ten acres that you were saying that  
13 were part of City land that--Has any senior  
14 housing been built on that?

15 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: I think our, I  
16 believe our borough president, and our Councilman,  
17 have been working on that. But as the church  
18 members noted, they went out and looked for a  
19 private developer. And what happens there is the  
20 private developer then runs the operation, and  
21 whatever comes back to whoever owns the property.  
22 We feel that the City of New York should be doing  
23 this. Staten Island does not have a public  
24 hospital, Staten Island does not have a lot of  
25 public amenity. We just got sewers in my

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community of Pleasant Plains eight years ago.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: You just got what? Sewers.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Sewers. Sanitary sewers. We had no sewers, we all had to pay for our own septic tanks and whatever. So the infrastructure does not support out of character development, which we believe this particular development that was mentioned by the church, is.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: And so, with respects to, I believe you're representing the Civic Association?

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Yes, I am.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: So, the Civic Association, I assume based on what you've been saying, spoke at the Community Board on this particular matter. And was opposed to it based on what you've said?

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: The Civic Association's in favor of this application, of the down zoning.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: The down zoning, yeah, but I guess, against--

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: What the

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church is trying to do?

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Yeah,  
yeah.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: The issue of  
the church's development has been there from the  
beginning, it's not something that's been ignored.

COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Okay.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: But it has not  
been brought up in public venues, as was pointed  
out, for whatever reasons, at the community board  
level, at the full community board level. At the  
City Planning level, this is the first time that  
we've actually heard in public what we have known  
all along, that the church doesn't like the idea,  
the church is against it, the church has a  
developer, the developer pulled out, it can't be  
done. You know. And the other side saying,  
"There's no amenities, there's no shopping, it's a  
bad place for seniors, we set aside ten acres, we  
tried to do this." The community has been  
following this venue of proper planning. We have  
been going along with everything that comes, we're  
very attuned to the zoning, because zoning seems  
to be the control in our quality of life. And the

1  
2 fact that we've been addressing this issue of  
3 senior house, and it seems like every time someone  
4 does come along, it's anywhere else but. We had a  
5 developer that they've been buying, this is the  
6 new thing now, they buy up manufacturing land on  
7 Staten Island, for a dollar, and then they try and  
8 convert into senior housing. There, you know, in  
9 the middle of nowhere, with no sewers, with no  
10 shops, with no anything, because senior housing is  
11 something that everybody isn't going to go  
12 against, you're not going to be against it.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: And that's  
14 what the board also set as a priority, so forth  
15 and so on.

16 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Exactly.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: But you're  
18 saying, what I'm hearing you saying, is that  
19 you're not against senior housing.

20 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Of course not.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: But--

22 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: It's the wrong  
23 location, it's a wrong site. Unfortunately, it's  
24 the only site they own.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Right.

1  
2 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: It's  
3 unfortunate, very unfortunate, that it's a bad set  
4 of circumstances.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: So, you  
6 had said that, and I'm going to end, Mr. Chair,  
7 but just let me ask this one question.

8 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Please.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: You had  
10 said that this is the first time that, in a public  
11 forum, whether it's a community board or City  
12 Planning, that you're really hearing all of, I  
13 guess, the discussion on this particular matter.

14 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Officially on  
15 the record.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON:  
17 Officially.

18 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: I was  
19 unofficially, I've been attending all the  
20 meetings, and the church people have been there  
21 and - -

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON:  
23 [interposing] But I mean the Community Board is on  
24 the record, also. That was discussed--

25 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: At the Land

1  
2 Use, yeah, at the Land Use meeting of the  
3 Community Board, there were representatives there.  
4 Mr. Plotnick [phonetic] was there.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Right.

6 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Their  
7 representative, their lawyer, whatever. He really  
8 did not represent the way they are representing.  
9 In other words, obviously they speak better for  
10 themselves--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Right.

12 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: --than the  
13 people that they've been asking to represent them.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Okay.

15 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Unfortunately,  
16 a lot of the folks in the church may not reside in  
17 the area. I know a lot of them do, but my  
18 representation is for communities that have been  
19 in this area. We were established in '63, but the  
20 fact is that we, the zoning issue has been  
21 something that has been stuck in our throat since  
22 I've been active, that's 35-40 years.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Okay,  
24 thank you, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

25 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you.

1  
2 Well, I think Mr. Comrie had a question first,  
3 unless you want to yield to Mr. Seabrook.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: I'll yield.

5 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Okay, Mr.  
6 Seabrook.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Just a  
8 question, sir, you raised the issue about, that  
9 there had been a previous down zoning; and that  
10 the Catholic Church that you talked about; and  
11 that there was a compromise that was worked out  
12 with the church, in reference to that. What, how  
13 was that, and that was City Planning that put  
14 that, that wasn't--

15 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: No, that was,  
16 that was us.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: But that  
18 was you all that put the zoning.

19 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Our Council  
20 Member--

21 DEE VANDENBURG: Community Board.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Council  
23 Member.

24 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Now our  
25 state's--Councilman Lanza at the time.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right,  
right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: And Mr.  
Zablocki and Mr. Ignizio.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.  
So what happened with that?

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: What happened  
there is that we had filed for a down zoning of  
our entire area.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Which is one  
of the largest geographical civic associations in  
the City.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: The Catholic  
Church owned one lot, 134 acres.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Didn't like  
the idea for down zoning. The Mayor at the time  
didn't like the idea of down zoning, and the  
Borough President at the time didn't like the idea  
of down zoning.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: When we got a

1  
2 new Mayor, our Councilman then had some pull, we  
3 got somebody new in City Planning, from the old  
4 City Planning. And we sat down and we said that  
5 we have no objection to development.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

7 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: But to just  
8 let them loose with R32, with 134 acres, would be  
9 defeating everything we're trying to do in our  
10 community. And what we came up with was rezoning  
11 their land, R3X, which was detached one-and-two-  
12 family. If they wanted to sell it to a developer,  
13 he would be limited to the R3X zoning, lower  
14 density. However, if someone came in and wanted  
15 to put proprietary senior housing, real senior  
16 housing.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

18 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: On that Mt.  
19 Loretto property--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

21 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: --which has a  
22 friendship club, which has a church, which has  
23 meeting halls, has a beautiful state park across  
24 the street.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

1  
2 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: We would then  
3 go to the R32 density, we would actually up zone  
4 it. And it's in the zoning resolution.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

6 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: That they  
7 would be able to develop as the church is saying,  
8 because anything lower than that, these developers  
9 don't want to get involved.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

11 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Less than four  
12 story they don't want to hear it.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

14 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: They want to  
15 make their money. We would go along with it.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

17 [background noise]

18 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: And there it  
19 sits. The only senior housing we get is \$4-  
20 500,000 condos. That's--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

22 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: You know,  
23 that's--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: No, I  
25 understand, but I'm just saying that there was a

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zoning proposal that was submitted by you all--

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: --about down zoning, but there was also within it, room for compromise if there is senior housing that's to be built by the church, that would reach that certain level.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Recognizing both the need for senior housing--

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: --and the appropriate location--

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right, right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: --for senior housing.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: So what I'm saying is, that there is potential for some compromise to be worked out with the church. If that was, if there was down zoning that you all, the initial point was down zoning, and it was; but then there is a clause that allows, because you had down zoning, but you also have a clause that's within that says that you can revert to senior

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housing based, if you do thus and so.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: For that particular location.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: For that location, right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: I will say this, Council Member.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: The locations we chose have shopping, transportation, sewers, storm sewers, sanitary sewers, sidewalks.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Okay? There's a big difference in the location.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Oh, no, I understand that, but I'm saying that possibly to do that there you would have to have sewers, if you're going to have a building, don't you got to have sewers. So somebody's got to provide the sewers, you got to have sewers.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: What I would say, Council Member, compromise with this particular lot owner--

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

1  
2 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: There are  
3 other things that could be done for the community.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Okay.

5 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Daycare is  
6 also a pressing need in the community.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.  
8 Okay.

9 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Daycare by its  
10 nature closes down in the evening.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

12 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Doesn't have  
13 as much parking, the kids don't drive too much.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

15 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: It's  
16 something, I mean, talk about a compromise, fine,  
17 no one's every approached us on this, as far as,  
18 you know, what can we do. We realize that the  
19 church has this property.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

21 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: And it's their  
22 asset.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

24 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: And we're not  
25 saying, "You can't develop your assets."

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COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Of course some people would say that's what zoning does, it stops you from doing what you want to do.

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Maybe some things shouldn't be done, that the community has an overriding need--

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: --that you just can't do, that's why we have zoning. Now--

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Well, there are other reasons why people have zoning, too.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Yeah, four story, high density--

COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Okay.

DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: --senior housing at this location, the church's location, bad idea, goes contrary to what the community and elected officials and City Planning has been moving towards over the last 20 years of my experience. And the fact that we identified areas in the community--You know, senior housing at that

1  
2 density is just something at that location that's  
3 not a good idea. We have a problem on the South  
4 Shore with fast ferries, we need fast ferries. We  
5 don't have any. Zero, we're on an island.  
6 Somebody comes up with an idea several years ago  
7 to bring a fast ferry into the local yacht club,  
8 into the Red Kills Harbor.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

10 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Great idea,  
11 fast ferry.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Right.

13 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: Bad location.  
14 Didn't go.

15 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Let's try not  
16 to get too far afield, here, okay.

17 COUNCIL PERSON ODDO: Mr. Chairman,  
18 if I may make a brief statement in regard to what  
19 Larry's saying, and my colleagues, I recognize the  
20 need to deal with both senior housing and what  
21 will go at this site, where and when it will go,  
22 and how it will go. And this community loves this  
23 church, as well. This is not the church versus  
24 the community, or the community versus the church.  
25 The question here, my friends, is about the

1  
2 appropriateness of a four story building which is  
3 not, despite what was said, not permissible in my  
4 community because of special South Richmond. I  
5 pledge to you all that my intention is to work  
6 with the church. Whether that be, and I've  
7 mentioned this before, a conservation easement,  
8 which would allow for us to in a sense pay for,  
9 you know, allocate funds for the church so that  
10 they can preserve that land, they can have the  
11 money needed to continue their operation, but it  
12 would be the church grounds as it currently  
13 stands. Whether that be a land swap, as Senator  
14 Lanza had approached them with several years ago,  
15 or any other edification of what should go there  
16 that's an appropriate development. But I believe  
17 that those discussions are best left to the  
18 Council Member in the district, all due respect to  
19 my colleagues, and I'm interested in engaging that  
20 conversation with anybody from the church who  
21 wants to talk to me, and anybody else who wants to  
22 be involved on this Council. Thank you.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Well, I  
24 had no question about that--

25 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: I recognize

1  
2 that, but I'm just--

3 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: [off mic]  
4 - - because I had, this is the first time I heard  
5 of it in the discussion, and I felt that there  
6 should be a meeting. I understand and respect  
7 that what you're saying. I have no problem with  
8 that at all.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: Right, I  
10 recognize that, thank you, Larry, appreciate it.

11 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you,  
12 gentlemen. Mr. Comrie had a question, he's been  
13 very patient.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: I just have  
15 one question: Who maintains the sewers? You said  
16 that you have to pay a HOA, but does the DEP  
17 maintain the sewers?

18 DEE VANDENBURG: The, no, DEP has  
19 nothing to do with it. The Homeowners  
20 Associations have to pay these fees. That--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: And so it's  
22 private companies that maintain the sewer lines?

23 DEE VANDENBURG: Yes. And until  
24 such time that that hookup reaches a city owned  
25 line.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: And your  
3 new area, do you have to have pumping stations put  
4 in new sewers that were built in your area?

5 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: No, our area  
6 is down by the beach, we're at the lowland. We  
7 have regular gravity fed sewers, but we only got  
8 them a few years ago. We had no sanitary sewer--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: But you  
10 don't have the hills that, at any part of your  
11 island.

12 DENNIS DELL'ANGELO: They're sort  
13 of at the bottom of the hills, everything comes  
14 down to us.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Right.  
16 [laughter] Okay. Alright, I would just say,  
17 coming from--

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Shh, quiet,  
19 please.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: --I  
21 represent Southeast Queens, and I would hope that  
22 you maintain your private companies, 'cause DEP is  
23 no panacea at providing sewage, so--[laughter] You  
24 know, I think that--

25 DEE VANDENBURG: Thank you. We

1  
2 already knew that, but they're not being  
3 maintained, some of them, is what, is why we're  
4 concerned. We don't want private pump stations.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: I mean, I  
6 know it's off topic, but I would just encourage  
7 you, and encourage the members to find a way to  
8 get DEP to provide some maintenance support, but  
9 not to eliminate the opportunity to maintain and  
10 upgrade those sewers within the community. But to  
11 turn 'em over to DEP is going to be a bigger mess.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: [off mic] I  
13 have a bill that does that.

14 DEE VANDENBURG: Yes, he does.

15 [laughs]

16 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: I'll sign  
17 it as soon as you resubmit. [laughter]

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: [off mic]  
20 Let's meet!

21 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: [off mic]  
22 Alright.

23 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Mr. Oddo.  
24 Okay, move on. Anyone else have any questions for  
25 this panel? I'm used to it, already, Feffa.

1 [phonetic] Thank you very much, we appreciate you  
2 taking the time. We actually have five speakers  
3 left in opposition, we're going break them up into  
4 three and two, if you don't mind. Oh, I also was  
5 remiss earlier, we were joined earlier by James  
6 Vacca from The Bronx and Jessica Lappin from  
7 Manhattan, who are here, Council Members on the  
8 Committee. The Reverend Will Nichols, please,  
9 from the Staten Island Council of Churches, Pastor  
10 Melinda Bjorkman, and Sharon Valentin, if you  
11 could all come together, and then we have two more  
12 speakers after that. Again, feel free not to use  
13 your full three minutes if you feel so inclined.  
14 Thank you. [pause, background noise] Thank you,  
15 please start.

17 WILL NICHOLS: I am the Reverend  
18 Will Nichols, President of the Staten Island  
19 Council of Churches, an ecumenical group made up  
20 of protestant, Catholic, orthodox and Anglican  
21 congregations on Staten Island. I'm also a 27  
22 years resident of the South Shore of Staten  
23 Island. As a church council, our three stated  
24 social witness priorities are affordable housing,  
25 healthcare and bias. So the Staten Island Council

1  
2 of Churches is deeply concerned about this down  
3 zoning application, and ask that it be put on hold  
4 if not outright rejected until the Rossville AME  
5 Zion Church senior housing development is allowed  
6 to come to completion. It is a relatively small  
7 development providing just over 100 affordable  
8 apartments for persons of moderate income, age 62  
9 and over. To quote from an article in Cranes,  
10 which is actually quoting Councilman Oddo, where  
11 the Councilman says "There is a critical need for  
12 senior housing in Staten Island. The choices they  
13 have now," this is the councilman speaking, "the  
14 choices they have now are to move south to New  
15 Jersey to wait and move north to their maker." He  
16 continued, "In 2000, there were roughly 52,000  
17 people over age 62 on the island. Between 2010  
18 and 2020, the elderly population is projected to  
19 increase by 26.9 percent, and in the subsequent  
20 decade it is expected to increase by 33.5  
21 percent." There's an extreme lack of senior  
22 housing on Staten Island of any kind, and  
23 especially on the South Shore. If the arguments  
24 applied against the church plans are applied in  
25 the same way to all other proposals, then there

1 will never be any affordable senior housing built  
2 on the South Shore. However, it seems upscale  
3 senior housing is welcome, for instance the Tides  
4 of Charleston and other examples. There seems to  
5 be a bias against people of moderate income due to  
6 certain stereotypes about what that might imply.  
7 The worst part of this attempt to down zone is  
8 that it seems on the face of it to be an abuse of  
9 the down zoning process. It is directed at this  
10 particular proposal by the church, or it can  
11 certainly be seen that way, and not to promote the  
12 general good of our community, which needs  
13 affordable senior housing. The Advance, this  
14 local newspaper, frequently characterizes this  
15 situation in this way, with regard to State  
16 Senator Lanza, saying, "State Senator Andrew Lanza  
17 is asking the City to change zoning rules across a  
18 good chunk of Rossville, in a final attempt to  
19 prevent a church from building apartments for  
20 senior citizens there. This is the advance.  
21 Lanza's surprise down zoning application, which  
22 was filed with the City last week," at the date of  
23 this article, "covers 37 blocks and could prevent  
24 Rossville Church from its housing plan. Lanza  
25

1  
2 said the down zoning request is not specific to  
3 AME Zion, but was prompted by the church's  
4 proposal. The church has struggled for over five  
5 years to construct much needed affordable housing,  
6 on vacant land that it already owns, is entitled  
7 to build on as a right. They have done everything  
8 by the book and have complied with every  
9 reasonable request. From my own experience as  
10 pastor on the South Shore, this is much needed.  
11 In order to keep the Land Use process from the  
12 appearance of being used and abused for political  
13 gain, on behalf of the Staten Island Council of  
14 Churches, I ask that this Committee reject this  
15 down zoning application or delay it until the  
16 church can develop its plan, or out of fairness  
17 exempt the church property from the application.  
18 Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you,  
20 Reverend. When the bell goes off, I'm happy to  
21 let you finish, but please try to wrap it up as  
22 quickly as possible. Thank you, Reverend. Pastor  
23 Bjorkman.

24 MELINDA BJORKMAN: Hello, I'm  
25 Pastor Melinda Bjorkman, I am the Pastor of

1  
2 Emmanuel Lutheran Church on Staten Island. We are  
3 located slightly north of Rossville, we're  
4 actually in Councilman Oddo's district. And hello  
5 to you Councilman Oddo.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ODDO: Oh, might  
7 make me nervous saying Congressman. [laughter]

8 MELINDA BJORKMAN: Hey, it could  
9 happen. Councilman Oddo, Councilman Ignizio,  
10 pleasure to see you again, Council Member Rose,  
11 I'm very happy to see you, too. Out of respect  
12 for my colleague, Pastor Jones, who has asked us  
13 to behave in a way that would make Jesus smile  
14 [laughter] I will characterize this action as  
15 disingenuous. This seems like, as Will said, a  
16 last ditch effort to put the kibosh on this  
17 project. And frankly, as a pastor of yet another  
18 small protestant church, which dos not have by any  
19 means imaginable the resources of the Catholic  
20 Church in New York City, I'm wondering what we're  
21 ever going to be able to do when it comes to the  
22 mission of the church; which by the way is not to  
23 look cute and quaint on our existing property, but  
24 to serve the poor, the needy, those who are in  
25 pain, those are need help in the community. And

1  
2 if we can't do that, are you saying that there's  
3 no need for the churches in this community, or  
4 that there's no need for the small churches that  
5 can do the political work that needs to be done?  
6 Because that's starting to seem what's going on  
7 here. And as an individual and as a resident of  
8 Staten Island, I'm very concerned. As a  
9 representative of a congregation on Staten Island  
10 I'm very concerned. And as a New Yorker, I'm very  
11 concerned about what seems to be a trend of  
12 bashing church projects because it can be done.  
13 Pastor Jones, as you saw, is a very quiet, very  
14 gentle, very learned person, but she does not have  
15 the political knowhow to run through the maze  
16 that's been made with this process. I mean, this  
17 is the City of New York, after all, it's quite the  
18 bureaucratic process. The church has done  
19 everything they have been told to do in order to  
20 make sure that this project goes through. And now  
21 at this last minute they're being told "You can't  
22 build anything at all on your property. We'll  
23 help you out with something to maybe keep it the  
24 way it's always been, so it stays cute and  
25 quaint." It's really not going to work. Thank

1  
2 you.

3 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [off mic]

4 Thank you.

5 SHARON VALENTIN: Yes, hi, good  
6 morning everyone. My name is Sharon Valentin, I'm  
7 the Co-Chair of Castleton Park Tennis Association.  
8 I live in a Mitchell-Lama development in St.  
9 George in Staten Island. I know very well how  
10 hard and how difficult it is to save affordable  
11 housing, because we have 454 units that is in  
12 jeopardy of losing at this point with the  
13 developer who wants to buy us. A Rossville church  
14 wants to develop a project that would help the  
15 seniors and the disabled in their community, and  
16 members of Staten Island, I'm all in support of  
17 that. We know how desperately in need Staten  
18 Islanders need some place to go. Because of the  
19 Rossville Community, they have been able to allow  
20 many others to come into the community. I mean,  
21 the, come into the community, and enjoy the  
22 wonderful place that Rossville had with the  
23 settlers coming to their community, that nobody  
24 wanted to live at. It's important to us to keep a  
25 place for seniors to be. It's very important for

1  
2 the church to have a hand in that process. I know  
3 very well that there are many of members of my  
4 family, through my in-laws, that are part of the  
5 settlers from Sandy Ground, who built that  
6 community, and without them no one would be  
7 fighting for that valuable, valuable land. But  
8 it's very, very important to protect the seniors  
9 and the elderly, 'cause they have no place to go.  
10 And what happens to the homeowners, rather, I'm  
11 sorry, that have, may have hardships, and can no  
12 longer live in their homes, where will they live?  
13 And if they can no longer support the homes that  
14 they own, won't they want to be in a secure place  
15 of affordable housing, in a senior development,  
16 and won't they want to stay in their community.  
17 So I support Rossville continuing with their  
18 project of building the affordable housing project  
19 on their land. Thank you very much.

20 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you. We  
21 have two more people in opposition. Does the  
22 panel want to ask any questions of this particular  
23 panel? Nobody? Okay. Thank you all very much.  
24 Pastor, I'm sure Jesus is smiling still. Don't  
25 worry.

1  
2 MELINDA BJORKMAN: Thank you,  
3 Pastor Jones - -

4 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [laughs] I'd  
5 like to call on Frank Jordan and Deborah Santuli-  
6 Barron [phonetic]. And these, if there's anyone  
7 else here who's going to want to speak they should  
8 tell the Sergeant-at-Arms right away. [pause,  
9 background noise] Okay, thank you, you may start  
10 when you're ready.

11 FRANK JORDAN: Well, I'm here  
12 representing my wife, Yvette Jordan, and who grew  
13 up on Staten Island.

14 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [off mic] If  
15 you could speak to the mic - -

16 FRANK JORDAN: Okay. Dear Sirs and  
17 Madam: Please forgive my absence from this  
18 hearing. I am a high school teacher who is  
19 administering a final exam to my students as this  
20 hearing is taking place. I am a member of  
21 Rossville AME Zion Church, and have been a  
22 resident of Staten Island for nearly 50 years. My  
23 ancestors were original settlers to the Sandy  
24 Ground community. I know this area well. Prior  
25 to my current profession as a educator, I was a

1 youth coordinator with Community Board Three on  
2 Staten Island, and was a mayoral appointee in the  
3 1990s. As such, I am acutely aware of what has  
4 been the identity, what has been identified as a  
5 need of the area in question for the past 25 plus  
6 years. The Rossville AME Zion Church has  
7 recognized this need and developed a way to  
8 address it. By developing our property to build  
9 affordable housing, we can meet the need.  
10

11 Clearly, one cannot question that our desire to  
12 serve our community and meet the needs of the  
13 seniors is a laudable goal. Why question these  
14 goals? For those of you who are no familiar with  
15 this area, Rossville sits on the South Shore in  
16 the national historical landmark area. As a  
17 history teacher, I believe that teaching about the  
18 Sandy Ground area should be infused in the  
19 curriculum, so that everyone is aware of our rich  
20 heritage. The development of our property will  
21 not stop this from happening. I trust that you  
22 will not be influenced by those who may be, may  
23 have interests that are not in keeping with the  
24 Sandy Ground area or the mission of our church,  
25 and will vote in support of our proposal. Thank

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you for your consideration. Yvette Jordan.

CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: [off mic]

Thank you.

DEBORAH SANTULI-BARRON: Hi, I'm Deborah Santuli-Barron. I am a parishioner of the Rossville AME Zion Church. I brought my children there years ago to teach them not to be prejudiced, because just to tell a child not to be prejudiced doesn't mean anything at all. So, I've been on both sides of the fence. I've been the parties where I've heard, you know, people freaking out because senior housing will be built there, and "Oh my god, there's going to be so many blacks in the neighborhood." Get over it, if it's logistics, let's compromise; if it has to do with color, get over it, 'cause it doesn't matter. You know, my mother's 81, how long is she going to stay alone and live alone? She needs to find senior housing. And in the neighborhood it would be great. My sister's going to be 61, she'll be looking sooner or later. I only have eight years, nine years, who knows, right? I might have to find senior housing. Again, I say I understand the logistics might not be correct, and it might

1  
2 not be approved; then compromise. Because let's  
3 face it, senior housing is going to be built. It  
4 just depends who does it, who gets approved, why  
5 did they get approved? It's going to be done on  
6 the South Shore. This has been in the works for  
7 years, all I can say is be open to it. Think  
8 about it. If you have suggestions, and you want  
9 us to compromise, fine. Talk to us. Don't just  
10 tear it down. It's a dream, we're trying to help  
11 everybody. Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you very  
13 much. Your mom did a good job. Mr. Jackson.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Thank you,  
15 sir. Good afternoon. Or still good morning.  
16 Good morning. You know, I'm listening to the  
17 discussion on both sides, and you know, as you  
18 know, I've asked several questions myself here.  
19 Here's a question that I raise to you: Okay, and  
20 I agree with you, eventually senior housing is  
21 going to be built on the South Shore. It's a matter  
22 of where and who builds it, so forth and so on.  
23 And obviously everything has to be done according  
24 to whatever law, rules or regulations that exist.  
25 But my question to you is, one of the panelists

1  
2 spoke before about the fact that there is ten  
3 acres of City land that has been set aside for  
4 senior housing. And I ask the question as to how  
5 far is that land, the ten acres, from where the  
6 church sits? Someone says it's maybe about ten  
7 miles away or something like that. [background  
8 noise] I'm sorry. Somebody, does anybody know,  
9 Mr. Chair? [background noise]

10 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: How far?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: One mile?  
12 So--one mile, okay. That's a huge diff--Okay, so  
13 the question that I have is, okay--

14 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Shh, can we  
15 have quiet, please, so--

16 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Quiet, please!

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Mr. Chair,  
18 I'm just, I'm wondering whether or not, and I  
19 don't know, I'm, I don't, like I said, I haven't  
20 been involved in the discussions at all, on either  
21 side. Can the church then build senior housing on  
22 that City land? And run that senior housing  
23 there? Since that is set aside for senior  
24 housing, and is only one mile away? As a  
25 compromise. Has that been discussed? I just

1  
2 raise that as an issue, Mr. Chair, with respects  
3 to the community overall. Because one of the  
4 things that I advocate, that you said, sorry--

5 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Shh, can we  
6 have quiet, please.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: That you  
8 said, we are all human beings. We are all people  
9 of this human race, whether we're black, white,  
10 whatever religion and as someone said earlier,  
11 there's all type of people that live on the South  
12 Floor. And our blood, if it's A-positive and what  
13 have you and so forth, it doesn't matter who you  
14 are, you can use it. So, can we find a  
15 compromise, for example, where maybe the church  
16 can build senior housing on that City property,  
17 and run it as they deem fit according to whatever  
18 rules and regulations? You know, I just, I beg  
19 the question to be asked, and I ask the question,  
20 for food for thought. Thank you.

21 DEBORAH SANTULI-BARRON: Well, I  
22 think only the representatives of the church  
23 could--

24 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you,  
25 Councilman. Scuze me one second, I stop paying

1  
2 attention for a second, it turned into "Who Wants  
3 to be a Millionaire" for a second, we decided to  
4 poll the audience. But I apologize. Thank you,  
5 Mr. Jackson. Does anyone else have a comment? I  
6 know Ms. Rose has a statement she'd like to make,  
7 and I think we'll do that at this time. Council  
8 Member Rose, are you ready to make that--Okay.  
9 Thank you.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Is it on?

11 Okay. I really want to congratulate, you know, my  
12 fellow newbie.

13 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: You did good.

15 You know?

16 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: More fun than

17 I imagined.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: [laughs] I'm

19 sure. I just want to enter into the record how  
20 significant, historically significant, Sandy  
21 Ground is. And the value that it has and it holds  
22 for the community of Staten Island. Mr. Chairman,  
23 Council Members of the Subcommittee, my name is  
24 Deborah Rose and I am the Council Member for the  
25 North Shore of Staten Island. I thank the

1 Chairman for this opportunity to testify about a  
2 rich and historic community within the African-  
3 American experience in New York: the Sandy Ground  
4 community, which was previously designated as the  
5 oldest continuously settled free black community  
6 in the United States, and at its zenith boasted  
7 155 black families. Sandy Ground is a community  
8 within the neighborhood of Rossville on the  
9 Borough of Staten Island, New York, located west  
10 of Princess Bay on Staten Island's South Shore.  
11 The area is represented by Councilman Vinnie  
12 Ignizio, Vincent Ignizio--[voice off mic: Vinnie  
13 - -] Okay, a distinguished member of this  
14 Subcommittee. And I would like to take the  
15 opportunity to recognize the Councilman. When  
16 slavery was abolished in New York State on July 4,  
17 1827, a massive celebration was staged on Staten  
18 Island at the Swan Hotel on Richmond Terrace. The  
19 two day event in West Brighton featured speeches,  
20 picnics, pageants and fireworks to mark the  
21 momentous milestone in New York State's history.  
22 Eight months later, on February 23, 1828, another  
23 milestone would be recorded when Captain John  
24 Jackson purchased land in Westfield, now  
25

1 Rossville. Captain Jackson's purchase was the  
2 first recorded purchase of land by a black man in  
3 Richmond County, and the first purchase of land in  
4 the area we know today as Sandy Ground. By the  
5 1830s, freed men and women from all over New York  
6 State, as well as from areas as far away as  
7 Maryland and Virginia, followed Jackson's lead,  
8 traveling to Staten Island as an important stop on  
9 the underground railroad, and settling in the  
10 Sandy Ground area as an oasis from the vicious  
11 persecution of slavery still being waged in the  
12 southern states. As a matter of industry, these  
13 early settlers were tremendously skilled in the  
14 oystering trade. Oyster harvesting was a major  
15 business on Staten Island during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century,  
16 and was mainly conducted on Staten Island's South  
17 Shore. The area of Princess Bay was the main hub  
18 of the industry and was within walking distance  
19 from Sandy Ground, allowing for the new Freedman  
20 to flourish economically. In the midst of this  
21 thriving community, which became the center of  
22 economic and social life for free blacks living on  
23 the United States eastern seaboard, the Zion,  
24 African Methodist Episcopal Zion church, was  
25

1  
2 formed on December 5, 1850 in the Rossville home  
3 of William H. Pitts. Annual camp meetings were  
4 held at the site in those early years, with people  
5 coming from as far away as Connecticut and  
6 Virginia, to celebrate living a free life. The  
7 first church was built in 1854 off Bloomingdale  
8 Road, and it was later destroyed by fire, and  
9 replaced by the current building, which was  
10 occupied on December 19, 1897; although some  
11 sources state 1870 as the date of this structure's  
12 completion. Although remnants of the original  
13 settlement still exist, most of the original homes  
14 were destroyed in the devastating Rossville fire  
15 in 1963. The Sandy Ground Historical Society,  
16 which preserves the history and physical  
17 surroundings of Sandy Ground, and maintains a  
18 museum and library, were organized on February 28,  
19 1980, and it is an integral part of preserving the  
20 rich legacy of this community. As a matter of  
21 historical awareness and pride, for that which led  
22 the way of our forefathers, my forefathers, on  
23 Staten Island, I am here today to bring awareness  
24 to the significance and the weight of any issues  
25 surrounding this community, and ensure that any

1  
2 and all matters taken into consideration with  
3 respect to changes in the area, give due deference  
4 to the legacy and spirit of this community, and  
5 its place in the larger history of the African-  
6 American experience. Moreover, I also desire that  
7 any considerations be balanced with the needs of  
8 the ageing community at large. I appreciate the  
9 Chairman's graciousness in allowing me to be heard  
10 on this matter, and I'll take any questions. And  
11 I just, I want the record to reflect that this is  
12 a very significant, historically significant piece  
13 of property for the communities of color on Staten  
14 Island.

15 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you very  
16 much, Council Member Rose, and we appreciate your  
17 patience sitting through this whole meeting. Does  
18 anyone else on the panel have a comment or  
19 question? Seeing none, I'm going to move to close  
20 this hearing. Thank you very much for testifying.  
21 And we're going to move to a vote. We're going to  
22 couple the three items together. So we are going  
23 to coup--Shh, can I have quiet please. We are  
24 going to couple the Webster Avenue rezoning, C  
25 090397 ZMX; we are going to couple that with the

1  
2 Amboy Road text amendment, number N 090176 ZRR;  
3 and then the aforementioned Sandy Ground rezoning,  
4 C 090042 ZMR. I'm going to ask the, the Chair  
5 recommends an aye vote on all the coupled matters.  
6 I'm going to ask the Counsel to please call the  
7 roll, please.

8 COUNSEL: Christian Hilton, Counsel  
9 to the committee. Chair Weprin.

10 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Aye on all.

11 COUNSEL: Council Member Rivera.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RIVERA: I vote aye  
13 on all.

14 COUNSEL: Council Member Reyna.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNA: I vote aye.

16 COUNSEL: Council Member Comrie.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: Permission  
18 to explain my vote?

19 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Councilman  
20 Comrie to explain his vote.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER COMRIE: I'm voting  
22 aye on all. I want to appreciate the historical  
23 significance of Sandy Ground. I want to  
24 congratulate the Webster Avenue complex. I want  
25 to also acknowledge that my concern with this

1 project is to make sure that there is a better  
2 level of communication, understanding that the  
3 need for infrastructure, the need for amenities,  
4 the need for resources. And I have a 91 year old  
5 mother, and I know that she, god bless her, can  
6 still drive, she's totally independent. She hates  
7 when I call her three times a day. But that's not  
8 the norm for a 91 year old. You know, a senior  
9 needs to have an opportunity to have amenities,  
10 services, transportation, an opportunity to be  
11 able to walk to a location to get service, an  
12 opportunity to be able to interact and socialize;  
13 even more so with a friendly environment. And I  
14 think that with that, those considerations in  
15 mind, I think that there needs to be an  
16 opportunity to try to make the church be the  
17 developer of a senior property in that one mile  
18 area that's close to the project. And where we  
19 have transportation, where you have amenities,  
20 where you have shopping, where you have a  
21 community that wants to embrace the constituents  
22 in that community. I hope that that happens. I  
23 pledge to work with all of the parties to make it  
24 happen. I've enjoyed all of the conversations  
25

1  
2 that we've had getting to this point. And I think  
3 that it's been an illuminating opportunity for  
4 everyone. I would hope that we can make sure that  
5 there's a high level of positive communication to  
6 make that happen. Again, I vote aye on all.

7 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you.

8 COUNSEL: Council Member Jackson.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Mr. Chair,  
10 may I be excused to explain my vote?

11 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Yes, Mr.  
12 Jackson, to explain his vote.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JACKSON: Thank you.  
14 Let me just say that I appreciate--First of all  
15 congratulations on chairing your first Zoning and  
16 land Subcommittee meeting, and obviously this is  
17 an example of the type of Zoning Committee  
18 hearings that you will have in the future. And  
19 one of the things that I've said as a member of  
20 the Zoning Committee is that I wish I knew that it  
21 was only going to take an hour or hour-and-a-half  
22 so I can map my schedule out for the day. And one  
23 of the things I have learned during the course of  
24 my tenure on the Zoning Subcommittee is there's no  
25 telling if it's going to take an hour or four

1  
2 hours. And that's a problem that I have. But let  
3 me just say that I appreciate the discussion,  
4 especially on the Sandy Ground's, with the, that's  
5 the church and its I guess desire to build senior  
6 affordable housing there. Obviously, we've heard  
7 from both sides on this particular matter. And I  
8 have - - respect for my college of, our former  
9 colleague, Senator Andrew Lanza, who was a City  
10 Council Member representing the area. Him and I  
11 were very close, along with my colleagues Vincent  
12 Ignizio, and our minority leader Jimmy Oddo. And  
13 as I've said, I don't live on Staten Island, I  
14 don't live on the South Shore, I don't know what  
15 it is to live there every single day and go  
16 through the trials and tribulations as a  
17 homeowner. And I don't know what it goes through  
18 at the trials and tribulations as an African-  
19 American living there. But what I've heard today  
20 clearly indicates to me, rightfully or wrongfully,  
21 that there should've been some more dialogue here.  
22 And I do think though that if the church is not  
23 able to build actually on the site where it owns  
24 the land, as I raised the question before, that  
25 ten acres of land that has been set aside for

1  
2 senior housing, which someone had indicated was  
3 ten miles, but I've been corrected, is one mile  
4 away, should be an appropriate location as our  
5 colleague Leroy Comrie, the Chair of the Land Use  
6 Committee said, should be appropriate location in  
7 order for seniors to live and enjoy in their years  
8 towards retirement. So with that, I vote aye on  
9 all. Thank you for the discussion and  
10 conversation on this particular matter.

11 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you.

12 COUNSEL: Council Member Seabrook.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Mr.  
14 Chair, to explain my vote.

15 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Mr. Seabrook  
16 to explain his vote.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER SEABROOK: Yeah,  
18 first of all, this is something that we've been  
19 wrestling with for a long time as it relates to  
20 zoning, and I've always had my opinion about it,  
21 and I will continue to do that. As to how and  
22 what needs to be in this down zoning that's  
23 actually taking place. And I think that there  
24 needs to be a citywide discussion with City  
25 Planning as it relates to dealing with this down

1 zoning issue, as it relates to issues of concerns,  
2 of covenants and a number of other things that  
3 historically has been a means of keeping areas the  
4 way they are. This is not the case, but in much  
5 down zoning it is the case. This situation here,  
6 after talking, listening to everybody here, I  
7 think it's very important to understand the  
8 historical dynamics of the church, the role and  
9 responsibility of the church, and the services in  
10 which the church is supposed to render. And so,  
11 don't be ashamed to provide housing and service,  
12 because that's the role of the church, and that's  
13 the purpose of the church. And I think that  
14 there's a good opportunity to do good out of this.  
15 And to allow the development for senior housing  
16 because in a few years I'll be there myself  
17 [laughter] looking for a place to stay. But I  
18 think that in talking with the Councilman, and I  
19 know that what his intent of working with the  
20 church, to do some of the things that needs to be  
21 done, and his assurance that that will happen.  
22 And I have faith in him, and I have faith in the  
23 church, that they can work together to pull this  
24 together, and that the entire community of Staten  
25

1  
2 Island could do this and build senior housing on  
3 city owned property, as well. And so I don't  
4 usually vote against a person's district, 'cause  
5 they are the person that's elected from their  
6 district, and they're duly there, and so whatever  
7 they say that they want in their district, I will  
8 do. But I have confidence in the councilman that  
9 he indicated that there is going to be working  
10 together to do what is best and provide senior  
11 housing for that community, and he's assured me of  
12 that. So, I'll vote aye on this resolution.

13 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you.

14 COUNSEL: Council Member Garodnick.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Thank  
16 you, I vote aye, and congratulations to our new  
17 chair.

18 COUNSEL: Council Member Lappin.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LAPPIN: Thank you.  
20 May I be excused to explain my vote?

21 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Ms. Lappin to  
22 explain her vote.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LAPPIN: Thank you,  
24 Mr. Chair. I first of all want to thank everybody  
25 who came here today to testify in the middle of

1  
2 what is a workday. It is incredibly helpful and  
3 important for us to hear directly from you, and a  
4 really critical piece of the democratic process.  
5 And most of the discussion today in regards to the  
6 Sandy Grounds item has revolved around this church  
7 project and the affordable housing. And I'm going  
8 to vote in favor of it because I know that the  
9 rezoning is about more than just that, and it's  
10 about a longstanding effort by Council Member  
11 Ignizio and former Council Member Lanza and others  
12 to down zone parts of Staten Island. But I'm only  
13 doing that because I know that, or I understand  
14 that Council Member Ignizio is going to work very  
15 hard to try and make this project happen. And I  
16 think he's going to talk more about that. So, I  
17 vote aye on all.

18 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you.

19 COUNSEL: Council Member Vacca.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER VACCA: I vote aye  
21 on all.

22 COUNSEL: Council Member Ignizio.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER IGNIZIO: Yes, thank  
24 you, Mr. Chairman, if I can sum up by explaining  
25 my vote and I apologize to everybody who's taken

1  
2 so long. But what we saw today was people of  
3 diverging groups speaking their hearts. The one  
4 thing I wanted to be clear is where we all agree.  
5 Everyone in this room agrees that there is a  
6 church in need of help--everyone in the community,  
7 everyone in need here. And my hope is to reach  
8 out to groups like Casa, to reach out to groups  
9 like the church, and bring people together, and  
10 quite frankly create a scenario whereby the reason  
11 why the church engaged in this originally, as was  
12 told to me, was because they were in dire  
13 financial straits. And I am reaching not only  
14 across the aisle, but across the island, to my  
15 friend Debbie Rose, who is--everybody has been  
16 above board and had great conversation throughout  
17 this whole process. There is nobody that is  
18 wearing a black hat or a white hat, quite frankly.  
19 We're all here to try to save this church and  
20 create the better project. For me, this was about  
21 density, it was about an overdeveloped project in  
22 this district that I did not support. The letter  
23 that was referenced was one that said I was in  
24 favor of a reduced project, and the issue then  
25 became it would have to be, you know, seek \$3.5

1 million in funding, which I quite frankly couldn't  
2 come up with, and I don't think Senator Lanza  
3 could as well. But what we have here is a church  
4 in need of help, in need of financial assistance,  
5 and hopefully we can negotiate some of the things  
6 that were mentioned here today, and able to assure  
7 that the church will be here long after I'm gone,  
8 anybody in this room. So I appreciate the  
9 dialogue we all had, and I look forward to  
10 continued conversation, and I vote aye on all.

12 COUNSEL: By a vote of ten in the  
13 affirmative, none in the negative, no abstentions,  
14 Preconsidered LU C 090397 ZMX, the Webster Avenue  
15 rezoning; Preconsidered N 090176 ZRR Amboy Road  
16 text amendment; and Preconsidered LU 090042 ZMR,  
17 Sand Ground rezoning, are approved and referred to  
18 the Land Use Committee.

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Hearing's not  
20 over, folks, please - - quiet. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON WEPRIN: Thank you, I  
22 want to echo Council Member Lappin's words about  
23 thanking people for coming and testifying here  
24 today. We will now adjourn this Subcommittee  
25 until the next meeting of this group. Thank you

1

2

very much.

3

[background noise]

4

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, JOHN DAVID TONG certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John David Tong". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date February 3, 2010