

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION
ULURP APPLICATION NO: C 170150 ZMX
Watson Avenue Rezoning

DOCKET DESCRIPTION

IN THE MATTER OF an application submitted by Azimuth Development Group LLC pursuant to Sections 197-c and 201 of the New York City Charter for an amendment of the Zoning Map, Section Nos. 3d and 4b:

1. Eliminating from an existing R5 district a C1-2 District bounded by Watson Avenue, Rosedale Avenue, a line 300 feet northerly of Watson Avenue, and Commonwealth Avenue;
2. Changing from an R5 District to an R7A District property bounded by Watson Avenue, Rosedale Avenue, a line 310 feet northerly of Watson Avenue, and Commonwealth Avenue; and
3. Establishing within the proposed R7A District a C1-4 District bounded by Watson Avenue, Rosedale Avenue, a line 310 feet northerly of Watson Avenue, and Commonwealth Avenue;

Borough of Bronx, Community District #9, as shown on a diagram (for illustrative purposes only) dated December 12, 2016, and subject to the conditions of CEQR Declaration E-403.

BACKGROUND

Approval of this application would amend the Zoning Map, Section Nos. 3d and 4b (Block 3751, Lot 1) by changing an existing R5 District to the proposed R7A District. This site is located on the Northern Side of Watson Avenue, with 198 feet of frontage, between Commonwealth Avenue and Rosedale Avenue. This lot has a depth of 325 feet, yielding 63,525 square feet. The site is currently occupied by a one-story, 12,240 square feet church called the Bronx Pentecostal Deliverance Center. They would be the co-developer and non-profit partner of the proposed development.

Lot 1 would become a R7A District on Block 3751. The remaining lots on Block 3751 would remain within the R5 Zoning District.

This proposed R7A District would facilitate the construction of a mixed-use development project consisting of 4 attached buildings containing residential, community facility, and retail uses. The proposed development would include 284,606 square feet of space. Highlights include

- 320 dwelling units
- 125 parking spaces
- 146 bicycle parking spaces

The proposed development would be built with a total of approximately 4.6 FAR, under Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH).

This proposed development would include the existing Bronx Pentecostal Deliverance Center which would be housed in a newly reconstructed three-story church building with approximately 10,407 square feet. The total scope of development includes:

BUILDING A

- Front on Rosedale Avenue
- Proposed nine-story residential building
- 124 units
 - 12 studio apartments
 - 44 one-bedroom apartments
 - 40 two-bedroom apartments
 - 28 three-bedroom apartments
- Approximately 107,459 square feet

BUILDING B

- Entire block front of Watson Avenue between Rosedale Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue
- Proposed eight-story mixed-use building
- 116 units
 - 12 studio apartments
 - 42 one-bedroom apartments
 - 40 two-bedroom apartments
 - 22 three-bedroom apartments
- Approximately 16,592 square feet of ground floor retail and 101,434 square feet of residential

BUILDING C

- Front on Commonwealth Avenue
- Proposed nine-story senior housing space stepped down to X-stories heading north on Commonwealth Avenue
- 80 units
 - 40 studio apartments
 - 40 one-bedroom apartments
- Approximately 48,713 square feet

Bronx Pentecostal Deliverance Center (Building D)

- Front on Commonwealth Avenue
- Proposed three-story reconstruction adding 10,407 square feet to the existing structure consisting of 12,240 square feet.
- Approximate total = 22,647 square feet

Residential Access on Watson Avenue

As proposed, 1755 Watson Avenue would offer 320 dwelling units, including:

- 64 studio apartments, averaging 400 square feet, 20 percent of the total units
- 126 one bedroom apartments, averaging 550 square feet, 40 percent of the total units
- 80 two bedroom apartments, averaging 700 square feet, 25 percent of the total units
- 50 three bedroom apartments, averaging 925 square feet, 15 percent of the total units

Of these 320 dwelling units, approximately 80 apartments (40 studio, 40 1 bedroom) would be set aside for Senior Housing.

Based on the Average Median Income (AMI) of the 320 dwelling units to be constructed

- 32 units at 30 percent of AMI, 10 percent of the total units
- 48 units at 40 percent of AMI, 15 percent of the total units
- 48 units at 50 percent of AMI, 15 percent of the total units
- 128 units at 60 percent of AMI, 40 percent of the total units
- 64 units at 80 percent of AMI, 20 percent of the total units

Amenities to be offered to the residents of 1755 Watson Avenue

- Each building would have a 1,500 square feet community room
- 3,300 square feet of recreational space over the parking lot
- 125 parking spaces
- 146 bicycle storage spaces
- Day Care Center

Existing residential development in the area include three-story multifamily row housing on Rosedale Avenue. Further south there is the Justice Sotomayor Houses (seven-story buildings with approximately 1,497 units) owned by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). The Blessed Sacrament school is located on 1160 Beach Avenue approximately two blocks west of the proposed development. MTA access in this area includes the IRT 6 train and a walking distance to the BX4, 4A (Westchester Avenue); 7, 8, 9 (Bruckner Boulevard); 11 (Bronx River Parkway/Boston Road); 27(Rosedale Avenue); 36 & 39 (White Plains Road) buses.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND ULURP CERTIFICATION

This application has been reviewed pursuant to CEQR and SEQRA and received a Negative Declaration, meaning this project poses no threat to the environment. The City Planning Commission certified this application as complete on December 12, 2016.

COMMUNITY BOARD PUBLIC HEARING

Bronx Community Board #9 held a public hearing on January 24, 2017. A vote recommending approval of this application was 25 in favor zero against, zero abstaining.

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S PUBLIC HEARING

The Borough President convened a public hearing on this application on March 9, 2017. Representatives of the applicant were present and spoke in favor of this application. Representatives of SEIU Local 32BJ were also present and offered a written statement which was read at the hearing. A copy of this statement is attached to this recommendation.

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION

The Bronx has experienced a surge in affordable housing developments throughout the borough over the last two decades. It continues to emphasize the need for income-based affordability in the city that would allow for comfortable living at moderate prices. The projected development at 1755 Watson Avenue would continue this trend and I am pleased it would offer 320 units of affordable housing. Approximately 80 of those units would be for senior living which is a prominent issue in our community. The distribution of two and three bedroom apartments within this development makes up over half of the total number of apartments.

However, as I have noted in previous applications, the size of these apartments is not consistent with an appropriate living standard. According to the development group:

- Studio apartments would be approximately 400 square feet
- One-bedroom apartments would be approximately 550 square feet
- Two-bedroom apartments would be approximately 700 square feet
- Three-bedroom apartments would be approximately 925 square feet

This is simply unacceptable. The amount of apartments constructed should NOT surpass the need for apartments that offer comfortable living. Quantity of apartments should not compromise quality of the living space. A three-bedroom apartment at approximately 925 square feet is rather small if there are about four to five people in residence. I understand that these smaller sized units are approved by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). I believe it is my obligation to recommend larger units be incorporated in HPD projects. While developers may argue that HPD is forcing their hand toward smaller units, it is incumbent upon them to negotiate in providing adequate-sized living quarters that accommodates mid-size to large families that live in The Bronx. Yes, there is a dire need for more affordable housing, but The Bronx will not be a testing ground for a numbers game the City is struggling to win.

The developer is providing units for our working professionals by offering 20 percent of units at 80 percent of AMI. I believe they should increase the percentage of units at 80 percent AMI to at least 30 percent in order to improve the availability of these apartments to middle-class families.

The Bronx has seen a lack of apartments for working middle-class residents. I, therefore, believe a higher percentage of 80 percent of AMI units will allow for the inclusion of middle-class residents and not just low-income residents. It is indeed ironic that the children of many Bronx residents whose incomes are expected to rise over time are being forced out of the Bronx because either they earn too much to qualify for the type of the development proposed here or they earn too little to afford a market rate rent.

I am satisfied with the expansion of the church building and the amount of parking spaces that would be available in this development. I again urge the developer to reevaluate the proposed development to provide larger units and greater diversify incomes. I understand the City has made a shift in policy to stack smaller units in developments, causing developers to scramble in accommodating these stringent and arbitrary requirements, but future applications that do not meet my criteria listed above will be more deeply scrutinized and unlikely to gain my approval.

Nonetheless, in this instance to redevelop a long-underutilized parcel and provide a new home for the church is a worthy endeavor. The developer also made accommodations at the request of this office to adjust the massing of the development to have less impact on the small homes lining Commonwealth Avenue. I recommend approval of this application.



Testimony of Greg Murray, SEIU 32BJ Member
Testifying In Opposition to the Watson Avenue Rezoning
Bronx Borough President Hearing, March 9, 2017

Good morning, my name is Greg Murray. I am a Bronx resident and SEIU 32BJ member. I am here today testifying on behalf of my union. 32BJ is the largest property service workers union in the country. 32BJ represents 70,000 building service workers in New York City. Over 33,000 of us work in residential buildings like the one Azimuth is proposing to develop. Over 4,000 of us live in CD9, where the proposed development would be located.

I am here to tell you just how important it is that Azimuth commit to creating high quality jobs at 1755 Watson Avenue. My union job provides wages and benefits that allow me to live and support a family in this City. I know that this is increasingly difficult for many working people. That's why my union strongly supports building more affordable housing in the Bronx. But, we know we can't build our way out of the affordable housing crisis. As long as hardworking people are paid poverty wages, they will struggle to make ends meet in this City.

The community board recognized how important good jobs are in its recommendations. At its vote on this development, board members insisted that the developer commit to creating good jobs that pay the industry standard wage and benefits for similar jobs in the Bronx before this project moves forward. My union is calling on the Borough President to formally adopt this recommendation.

This is an important step towards ensuring that new developments in the Bronx truly benefit the neighborhood by creating high quality permanent jobs.