

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION
ULURP APPLICATION NO: C 080129 ZMX
3500 PARK AVENUE REZONING
8/9/10

DOCKET DESCRIPTION

CD#3-ULURP APPLICATION NO: C 080129 ZMX-IN THE MATTER OF AN application submitted by 3500 Park Avenue LLC, pursuant to Sections 197-c and 201 of the New York City Charter for an amendment of the Zoning Map, Section No. 3d:

1. Changing from an M1-1 District to an R7-1 District property bounded by East 168th Street, a line midway between Park Avenue and Washington Avenue, a line 100 feet southwesterly of East 168th Street, and Park Avenue; and
2. Establishing within an existing and proposed R7-1 District a C2-4 District, bounded by East 168th Street, Washington Avenue, a line 100 feet southwesterly of East 168th Street, and Park Avenue;

Borough of the Bronx, Community District #3, as shown on a diagram (for illustrative purposes only) dated June 7, 2010, and subject to the conditions of CEQR Declaration E-259.

BACKGROUND

The proposed rezoning would extend an existing R7-1 zone along East 168th Street between Park and Washington Avenues over an existing M1-1 zone at East 168th Street and Park Avenue, as well as institute a C2-4 overlay along the entire stretch of East 168th Street on said block. The impetus for this rezoning is to develop a 61-unit residential development affordable to households earning between 40-60 percent of Area Median Income, and to allow for greater flexibility of commercial uses. Fifteen additional units can be developed on a lot located at Block 2389, Lot 28 on the corner of East 168th Street and Washington Avenue.

The proposed development will be eight stories in height, contain 5,500 square feet of retail space in two commercial units, a 1,500 square feet community room, and 20 parking spaces. The building will contain green elements, such as high efficiency ventilation, Energy Star appliances, and motion sensor lighting, but the applicant has not yet committed to certification through LEED or Enterprise Green Communities. The unit breakdown will be as such:

- Ten Studios- 450 SF
- 19 One-bedrooms- 750 SF
- 27 Two-bedrooms- 900-950 SF
- Five Three-bedrooms- 1,100 SF

The site currently serves as a parking lot and is surrounded by Claremont Village, a public housing project and Morgan Playground to the north; residential, institutional, automobile and industrial uses and Rev. Lena Irons Unity Park to the east, an African wholesale market, church and vacant lot to the south, and the Metro-North rail cut to the west.

The site is served by bus public transit with the BX38 running along East 168th Street, BX41 along Webster Avenue, and the BX15 and BX55 along Third Avenue. It is poorly-served by rail public transit, with the nearest Metro-North station approximately 2/3 mile away at Melrose, and the nearest subway station almost ¾ mile away at the IND B & D 167th Station. It is also poorly-served by vehicular transportation with the Major Deegan Expressway being the closest highway at over 1 ½ miles away.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND ULURP CERTIFICATION

This application was reviewed pursuant to SEQRA and CEQR. An Environmental Assessment Statement was prepared for this application and designated as an Unlisted action. The City Planning Commission certified this application as complete on June 7th, 2010.

COMMUNITY BOARD PUBLIC HEARING

Bronx Community Board #3 held a public hearing and approved this application on July 9th, 2010 with a vote of 5 in favor, 0 against, and 0 abstaining.

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S PUBLIC HEARING

The Bronx Borough President held a public hearing on this application on July 30th, 2010. Representatives of the applicants were present and spoke in favor of this application. No members of the public were present.

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION

This rezoning will allow the development of 61 units of affordable housing in an area that has rapidly transformed into a more residential community over the last seven years due to the establishment of the Morrisania Mixed-Use District. The proposed project has an attractive design that is modern, but complimentary to the neighborhood. The apartment sizes are ample for this type of development. I am pleased to see that ground floor retail is provided.

I do have some concerns regarding the project. The first is the encroachment of residential development into an existing manufacturing zone. One benefit of the creation of the Morrisania Mixed-Use District was that certain areas were given flexibility in terms of use, while others maintained their industrial character completely. There are still many viable industrial businesses with skilled labor jobs along Park Avenue, and they should not feel pressured to be pushed out. I strongly recommend the developer consider partnering with the African wholesale market next door to utilize some of the retail space, or a similar use, to blend the industrial character and context of the historical use groups of the neighborhood.

Second, while I am pleased that the building will incorporate green features, part of my support is based on the developer's due diligence in obtaining a formal green certification.

Third, I encourage the developer to "Buy Bronx," echoing Bronx Community Board #3's call to hire locally.

Finally, as a general note, I am concerned about the overdevelopment of the Third Avenue corridor without viable rail transit access. While the number of units in this development is relatively modest, projects containing hundreds of units each have been developed in the surrounding area. As I mentioned above, I am concerned about manufacturing being pushed out of the neighborhood in favor of residential uses. The overdevelopment of The Bronx during the early to mid-twentieth century helped lead to its decline, as amenities, such as rail access and open space, became few and far between. In the long term, I call on the City and State to consider subway or commuter rail options for areas around the Third Avenue corridor. In the short term, I ask that Select Bus Service be implemented along either Webster or Third Avenues, and that both the Departments of City Planning and Housing Preservation and Development take a balanced approach to development in this currently transit-isolated area of The Bronx.

I recommend approval of this application with the aforementioned conditions.