

**BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION
ULURP APPLICATION NOS: 150303 ZSX, C 150306 HAX
May 20, 2015**

DOCKET DESCRIPTION

C 150303 ZSX

IN THE MATTER OF application submitted by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) pursuant to Sections 197-c and 201 of the New York City Charter for the grant of a special permit pursuant to Section 74-681 of the Zoning Resolution to allow that portion of the right-of-way or yard where a railroad or transit use has been permanently discontinued or terminated to be included in the lot area, in connection with a proposed mixed-use development, on property located on Elton Avenue between East 162nd Street and East 163rd Street (Block 2384, Lots 20, 25, 28, 32, 33, 34, 38, 48 8900, 8901, ARO Lot 23, and portion of demapped Brook Avenue, Melrose Crescent and East 162nd Street), in R8 and R8/C1-4 Districts, within the Melrose Commons (Urban Renewal Area), Borough of The Bronx, Community District #3.

Plans for this proposal are on file with the City Planning Commission and may be seen in Room 3N, 22 Reade Street, New York. N.Y. 10007.

C 150306 HAX

IN THE MATTER OF an application submitted by the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD):

- 1) Pursuant to Article 16 of the General Municipal Law of New York State for:
 - a) The designation of property located at Elton Avenue between East 162nd Street and East 163rd Street (Block 2384, Lots 20, 25, 28, 32, 33, 34, 48, 8900, and 8901, ARO Lot 23, the demapped street-beds of Brook Avenue, between East 163rd Street and Elton Avenue and a portion of Melrose Crescent, as an Urban Development Action Area; and
 - b) An Urban Development Action Area Project for such area; and
- 2) Pursuant to Section 197-c of the New York City Charter for the disposition of such property to a developer to be selected by HPD;

To facilitate development of a 12 story mixed-use building with approximately 277 units of affordable housing, 23,390 square feet of community facility space, and 26,700 square feet of ground-floor retail space, Borough of The Bronx, Community District #3.

BACKGROUND

Approving these applications will facilitate construction of a mixed-use building composed of residential units, community facility space and venues for retail activity. The entire site for this development includes 125,127 square feet of property situated on Block 2384, Lots 20, 25, 28, 32, 33, 34, 38, 48, 8900, 801, ARO Lot 23, and portion of the demapped Brook Avenue, Melrose Crescent and East 162nd Street) Known as **Melrose Commons North, Site B**, it is bounded by East 162nd Street on the south, East 163rd Street and Washington Avenue on the north, Melrose Avenue on the west and Elton Avenue on the south-east corner of the site. This site is zoned R8 and R8/C1-4, Bronx Community District #3.

Associated with the development of the Block and Lots these applications are changes to the City Map (ULURP Application C 120323 MMX) which was approved by the City Council on March 11, 2015. These changes include:

- The elimination and closing of Melrose Crescent between East 163rd Street and Elton Avenue;
- The establishment and continuation of East 163rd Street, west of Brook Avenue;
- The establishment and continuation of East 162nd Street, west of Elton Avenue.

ULURP Application C 150303 ZSX which is currently proposed, if approved would grant a special permit made necessary given that a portion of the site identified for development includes the right-of-way of an abandoned railroad bed. This single track bed was taken out of service by CSX Railroad approximately 10 years ago.

Highlights of the proposed development of Melrose Commons North Site B includes

- A mixed use building composed of 12 stories;
- A residential structure offering providing 277 units of housing for low and moderate income households plus one additional unit for the superintendent;
- The proposed building will offer:
 - 328,296 square feet of residential space
 - 26,700 square feet of retail space
 - 15,166 square feet of community facility space
 - 10,224 square feet of rooftop space for the inclusion of a greenhouse.

The 277 units include:

- 31- Studio units composed of 450-513 square feet*
- 45- One bedroom units composed of 628-737 square feet*
- 192- Two bedroom units composed of 780-945 square feet*
- 9- Three bedroom units composed of 1,169-1,200 square feet*

*Unit size varies based on the specific apartment layout.

Two community use facilities are planned for this proposed development, including:

- 10,000 square feet set aside for a rooftop greenhouse. This greenhouse will provide residents horticultural options including the planting of fruit and vegetables. Residents will be afforded an opportunity to grow produce for local distribution within the surrounding community.
- 15,100 square feet for the Bronx Music Heritage Center (BMHC). Included in this space will be a full-functional auditorium providing seats for 250 guests, a recording studio and classroom space. Also envisioned is a café.

Retail space composed of 26,700 square feet will front onto East 163rd Street.

A public plaza will be situated at Washington Avenue at the East 163rd Street junction. A feature of this plaza will be an amphitheater designed to passive recreation, outdoor concerts and public gatherings. From this plaza access to either the BMHC or retail location will be provided

By way of encouraging local artists to visit and participate in the variety of programs to be based at the BMHC, at the entrance to this center the building's wall will offer artists a canvas for artistic expression. Such exhibits will vary from season to season. After dark a comprehensive series of LED lighting will illuminate the artwork and thereby draw attention to the entrance used by BMHC.

Underground parking for 36 vehicles and parking for 139 bicycles is to be provided.

Sustainable feature highlights include:

- LEED Gold, Energy Star and National Green Building Standards
- Micro combined heat and power cogeneration providing 100% of the domestic hot water supply
- USB charging outlets in each room
- LED light fixtures throughout the building
- 100% smoke-free

Existing development of the surrounding community includes the Boricua College campus, recently constructed high-rise residential buildings and mid-rise residences. Retail activity is available on East 161st Street, East 163rd Street and on Washington Avenue. Situated approximately one block south of this site is the Pyramid Center (formally a YMCA) that provides shelter for homeless men pursuant to an agreement between the center's owner and the city's Department of Homeless Services (DHS).

Mass transportation via bus is available on East 161st Street, East 163rd Street and on 3rd Avenue. There are no subway services located within a five block radius of the site. Metro North Commuter Railroad's Harlem Division's services are accessible five blocks east of the site at the Melrose Station.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND ULURP CERTIFICATION

These applications were reviewed pursuant to CEQR and SEQRA and received a Negative Declaration, meaning that the proposed development will have no impact on the surrounding environment. The City Planning Commission certified these applications as complete on March 30, 2015.

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD PUBLIC HEARING

Bronx Community Board #3 held a public hearing on April 14, 2015. A vote recommending approval of these applications was 24 in favor, six opposed and zero abstaining.

BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S PUBLIC HEARING

A public hearing was convened by the Borough President on May 7, 2015. Representatives of the applicant were present and spoke in favor of these applications. No other members of the public were in attendance and the hearing was closed.

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION

During my tenure as Borough President numerous plans to develop affordable housing throughout The Bronx have been presented to me for comment. All are appreciated and most are well conceived. Even so, there are those plans that are exceptional and in so many ways, set a new benchmark for all future development. This is just such a proposal, as it brings together a comprehensive vision for residential, commercial and cultural functions.

Known as Bronx Commons, this project will include 277 units of affordable housing, which we all acknowledge is urgently needed throughout our city. What I especially appreciate, however, is that this project also recognizes a community's need for artistic expression and a shared space where both resident and neighbor can enjoy what our local talent is able to create. Consequently, I welcome the news that the Bronx Music Heritage Center (BMHC) will be based here. To that end, a theater accommodating 250 people, a sound-proof recording studio, rehearsal and classroom space will be an integral part of this project. Thanks to a well-designed outdoor "amphitheater" neighbors will be able to enjoy outdoor performances. I am intrigued by the idea that graphic artists will be encouraged to express their perspectives on a "wall canvass," which at night will be illuminated to further attract attention and make this site an evening community-destination, something that is sorely lacking in this area of The Bronx.

Not to be outdone by similar projects, Bronx Commons will offer a roof-top greenhouse approximating 10,000 square feet. Here, not only will residents be able to grow produce for themselves, but as planned a good deal of what will be farmed will also be distributed to nearby retail outlets. As you may be aware due to a lack of fresh produce and access to healthy food options, this community is considered a "food desert." Therefore it is not only good environmental policy to encourage local fruit and vegetable farming, but as a result of this

greenhouse, those who reside nearby will be able to take advantage of what will be grown on the roof of this complex.

As for employment and job creation, the construction of Bronx Commons will create 150 construction jobs and 60 permanent jobs. This project includes 26,750 square feet of retail space and I have been assured that it will be commercial venues that will occupy this space. Finally, a LEED Gold rating indicates that this complex will satisfy some of our city's most stringent environmental provisions.

I conclude my enthusiastic support for this project by noting those affiliated with this project have a proven track record in The Bronx. WHEDCO offers a host of programs designed specifically to assist women in need, be they battered and homeless or seeking to simply improve their future prospects by taking advantage of the many training programs available. Blue Sea also represents one of our borough's most accomplished developers, as for upwards of twenty years this firm has played a major role in the development of Melrose Commons.

As I recommend approval of these applications I do so knowing that this development and the adjacent Melrose Commons Site C essentially represent the full build-out of Melrose Commons pursuant to the Melrose Common Urban Renewal Plan adopted in 1994. This milestone is also a tribute to all associated with Melrose Commons and especially the late Yolanda Garcia, founder of Nos Quedamos.