

**BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION**  
**ULURP APPLICATION NO: C 160335 PCX**  
**July 28, 2016**  
**Westchester Square Branch Library**

**DOCKET DESCRIPTION**

**IN THE MATTER OF** an application submitted by the New York Public Library and the Department of Citywide Administrative Services, pursuant to Section 197-c of the New York City Charter, for the site selection and acquisition of property located at 9 Westchester Square (Block 3981, p/o Lot 2) for use as a library.

**BACKGROUND**

Approval of this application will facilitate the purchase by the New York Public Library (the applicant) of a privately owned, irregularly shaped lot, located at 9 Westchester Square (Block 3981, p/o Lot 2). This site is currently owned by the Huntington Free Library, located in Bronx Community District #10 and is zoned R6/C1-4. The site consists of 9,335 square feet and is bounded by Overing Street on the west, Westchester Avenue on the south, and Lane Avenue on the east. Located on this site are two buildings: The Van Schaick Free Reading Room and the Huntington Free Library. The Van Schaick building was constructed around the year 1880 and designated as a landmark in 1994. This historic structure remains in use. The second building constructed in 1930 is known as the Annex building. It is situated on the south side of the Van Shaick Building and is now vacant. An enclosed corridor connects the two structures. Neither building exceeds three stories.

The proposed development plan at 9 Westchester Square includes the demolition of the Annex Building, including the connector that currently exists between this building and the Van Shaick Building. The demolition of this corridor will require approval by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

The applicant is proposing to construct a new, two story facility consisting of 12,000 square feet. This new building will serve as a replacement for the applicant's current facility, located at 2521 Glebe Avenue. Opened in 1956, the Glebe Avenue location is approximately 0.2 miles from the proposed site of the new building. The Van Schaik Building will remain under the ownership of the Huntington Free Library. Both libraries will operate as independent facilities.

It is intended that this new library at Westchester Square will be operated by the New York Public Library and satisfy all ADA requirements. It is also anticipated that the bold, glass design of the new facility will allow it to be very energy efficient. The interior design of this library building will facilitate easy circulation and access to the variety of services and available resources. The most up-to-date access for computer usage will be available, as will ample space be made for children's books and programming.

Pending approval of this application, the New York Public Library will commence construction of the new Westchester Square facility in 2017. Completion is expected in 2019.

Existing development of the surrounding community is typified by mid-rise residences and one-story retail accommodations. St. Peter's Episcopal Church, a historic church and cemetery are located within a two block radius of the library site. This area is also very well served by an extensive listing of bus routes which terminate at Westchester Square and/or operate on East Tremont Avenue, one block north of the proposed site. Additionally, subway service via the #6 Lexington Avenue subway is accessible at East Tremont Avenue.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND ULURP CERTIFICATION**

This application was reviewed pursuant to SEQR and CEQR and received a Negative Declaration, meaning the proposed project will have no impact on the environment. The City Planning Commission certified this application was complete on June 20, 2016.

## **BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD PUBLIC HEARING**

Bronx Community Board #10 held a public hearing on this application on June 27, 2016. A vote recommending approval of this application was 29 in favor, two opposed and zero abstaining.

## **BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S PUBLIC HEARING**

The Bronx Borough President convened a public hearing on this application on July 26, 2016. Representatives of the applicant were in attendance and spoke in favor of this application. No other members of the public offered comment, and the hearing on this matter was closed.

## **BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION**

The measure of a great city is its public library system. There can be no question that the greatness of the City of New York is the New York Public Library system. I also recognize that, for over a century, the Westchester Square community has also been the beneficiary of the Huntington Free Library. Together, these two library systems offer exceptional access to knowledge and programming for all our East Bronx citizens.

Therefore, it is with much enthusiasm that I support this application and the anticipated construction of a new and fully equipped library to be constructed at 9 Westchester Square. I am also very pleased that the architects of this new building have opted to create a low-rise, structure composed almost entirely of glass. Consequently, during the day this new building will not appear to conflict with the adjacent historic structure that is to be preserved and operated by the Huntington Free Library. At night, the new facility will illuminate the surrounding area, much the way knowledge illuminates the mind and spirit.

I recommend approval of this application.

