

**BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION  
ULURP APPLICATION NOS: C 170353 MMX, C170438 ZMX  
BLONDELL COMMONS**

**DOCKET DESCRIPTION**

**C 170353 MMX:**

**IN THE MATTER OF** an application submitted by Blondell Equities LLC pursuant to Sections 197-c and 199 of the New York City Charter and Section 5-430 *et seq.* of the New York City Administrative Code for an amendment to the City Map involving:

- The elimination, discontinuance and closing of Fink Avenue between Blondell Avenue and Waters Avenue; and
- The adjustment of grades necessitated thereby;

Including authorization for any acquisition or disposition of real property related thereto, in Community District #11, Borough of The Bronx, in accordance with Map No. 13141 dated December 13, 2017 and signed by the Borough President.

**C 170438 ZMX:**

**IN THE MATTER OF** an application submitted by Blondell Equities LLC pursuant to Sections 197-c and 201 of the New York City Charter for an amendment of the Zoning Map, Section No. 4b:

1. Changing from an M1-1 District to an R7A District property bounded by Ponton Avenue, a line 230 feet northeasterly of Blondell Avenue Westchester Avenue, and Blondell Avenue; and
2. Establishing within the proposed R7A District a C2-4 District bounded by Ponton Avenue, a line 230 feet northeasterly of Blondell Avenue, Westchester Avenue and Blondell Avenue;

Borough of The Bronx, Community District #11, as shown on a diagram (for illustrative purposes only) dated October 15, 2018, and subject to the condition of CEQR Declaration E-505.

**BACKGROUND**

Approving these applications will:

1. Demap and close Fink Avenue, between Blondell Avenue and Waters Avenue
2. Amend the Zoning Map by eliminating an M1-1 District and establish an R7A District while also establishing a C2-4 commercial overlay within the R7A District.

This “rezoning area” is composed of ten properties, the overall boundaries of which are Ponton Avenue to the north, Blondell Avenue to the west, Westchester Avenue to the south and a line 230 feet east of Westchester Avenue. These boundaries include Block 4133, Lots 1, 2, 8, 10, 12, 61-63 and Block 4134, Lot 1 and Lot 14. The specific locations include:

Block 4133, Lot 1: Is composed of 5,750 square feet; a single story building offering 1,075 square feet is on this lot.

Block 4133, Lot 2: Is composed of 11,250 square feet. A warehouse composed of 24,900 square feet is on this lot.

Block 4133, Lot 8: This lot is utilized as a street right-of-way known as Cooper Avenue and Grant Street. The paved portion of this dead-end stub is used for parking. This street area is to be eliminated as part of the proposed demapping application.

Block 4133, Lot 10: Is composed of 4,950 square feet. A legally non-conforming, noncomplying two-story mixed use building composed of 13,230 square feet is located on this lot.

Block 4133, Lot 12: Is composed of 3,000 square feet. This Lot is vacant used as an off-street parking lot.

Block 4133, Lot 61: Is composed of 1,642 square feet with a two-story commercial building totaling 3,-4- square feet.

Block 4133, Lot 62: Is composed of 2,500 square feet. A single story building measuring 2,000 square feet is located on this lot.

Block 4133, Lot 63: Is composed of 11,646 square feet. A single story warehouse composed of 1,200 square feet is located on this lot.

Block 4134, Lot 1: This lot consists of former lots (1, 2, 4, 62, 63 and 70) This combined lot is composed of 46,380 square feet and accommodates a building consisting of 6,210 gross square feet of floor area.

Block 4134, Lot 14: This lot accommodates a New York City Transit Authority right-of-way and maintenance yard.

The “development site” which are those lots on which the applicant proposes to construct a residential building with retail access, includes Block 4133, Lot 12 and Block 4134, Lot 1. This site is bounded by Ponton Avenue to the north, Blondell Avenue on the west, privately owned right-of-ways known as Grant Street and Cooper Avenue. (Block 4133, lot 8) to the south, and on the east is the New York City Transit Authority train yard. It is proposed that this development site would be merged into a zoning lot known as 1340-1346 Blondell Avenue. It

will consist of 46,380 square feet of lot area, with approximately 155 feet of frontage on Ponton Avenue and 205 feet of frontage on Blondell Avenue. This site includes a one-story industrial building and two small accessory structures. Blondell, Fink (which will be demapped) and Ponton Avenue are all a maximum of sixty feet wide, classifying them as “narrow streets.”

The applicant is proposing to construct a 9-story mixed use building composed of 211,500 square feet with a total unit count of 228 dwelling units. This building will offer:

51 Studio units:	450 gross square feet
80, 1-bedroom units:	620 gross square feet
57, 2-bedroom units:	870 gross square feet
40, 3-bedroom units:	1,200 gross square feet

Income distribution for this development include;

69 units:	30% AMI
69 units:	60% AMI
17 units:	90% AMI
73 units:	120% AMI

On-site amenities include

- On-site parking able to accommodate 225 vehicles (cellar level)
- On-site parking for 114 bicycles
- Community facility space compose of 2,024 square feet
- Interior recreation room on 2<sup>nd</sup> story composed of 3,407 square feet
- Interior recreation room on 3<sup>rd</sup> story composed of 2,250 square feet
- Outdoor passive recreation area composed of 3,000 square feet
- Laundry room facilities composed of 1,157 square feet

This proposed development will satisfy Enterprise Green Communities requirements.

Retail/commercial space consisting of 19,668 square feet will be accessible via Blondell Avenue. The applicant intends to lease this space as one retail venue. There will no off-street provision made for deliveries.

Total development cost for this project is \$115 million.

Existing development of the surrounding community is typified by one-story industrial type buildings, many of which offer a variety of services for mechanical and auto functions. Residential development includes one and two story homes, some of which include two residences, with a handful of four to six-story apartment buildings peppered throughout the neighborhood. Retail activity is located on Westchester Avenue, on Williamsbridge Road and on East Tremont Avenue. Mass transportation via the #6 train is available at the Westchester Square station approximately three blocks southeast of the proposed development site. Bus transit operates on East Tremont Avenue and on Williamsbridge Road, with numerous routes

terminating at Westchester Square. These include the, BX4, BX4A BX 8, BX21, BX24, BX31, BX 40, and BX 42. The site is also readily accessible to the Hutchison River Parkway three blocks northeast at Waters Place off of Westchester Avenue.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND ULURP CERTIFICATION**

These applications were reviewed pursuant to CEQR and SEQR and both received a Negative Declaration. The City Planning Commission certified both applications as complete on October 15, 2018.

### **BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD PUBLIC HEARING**

A public hearing was called to order by Bronx Community Board #11 on December 20, 2018. A vote recommending these applications be disapproved was, seven in favor of approving this application, 16 recommending this application be disapproved, and two abstaining.

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

The Bronx Borough President convened a public hearing on December 27, 2018, to consider these applications. Representatives of the applicant were present and spoke in favor of these applications. Ten members of the public were also in attendance. All those speaking spoke against approving these applications. Written testimony was also submitted, all of which are in opposition to approving these applications. All those wishing to testify did so and the hearing was closed.

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

The anticipated development initiating this rezoning would provide much-needed affordable housing with retail. While the design and program of this building are well thought out and meet many of my requirements for support, there are some concerns that I will address later in my recommendation. I am pleased to see that the building's exterior features a variation of brick textures and colors. As this would be the first residential development to be constructed within the proposed R7A zone, it is critical that this building set a standard which future development will emulate. Based on what was presented at my public hearing, this building meets that standard.

The location of the proposed rezoning is adjacent to a transit hub at Westchester Square, which provides access to the IRT 6 train and eight bus connections. It is also a few blocks from the Hutchison River Parkway, providing significant highway access. The fact that approximately 43% of the total number of units to be constructed will offer two and three bedroom options, does much to satisfy my condition that families are accommodated. The inclusion of ample space for passive recreation is to be commended. The provision of approximately 19,668 square feet for commercial or community use will provide ambient light to encourage pedestrian activity along Blondell Avenue thereby making this community more desirable and safe.

The project provides 225 parking spaces, which is significantly more than zoning requires. This was offered to satisfy the needs of the Westchester Square Business Improvement District and neighborhood residents. East Bronx communities often note that proposed developments do not provide sufficient parking, given available resources and the general low-density nature of the surrounding neighborhoods. While I believe this is a transit-oriented area that does not require significant amounts of parking, I understand both the BID and community desires as it relates to the need for parking options.

Ironically, the parking and its accessibility has become a point of contention. Blondell Avenue is a 60-foot wide, northwest-bound, one-way street. Testimony provided by community residents noted that while most of Blondell Avenue is industrial in character, it is utilized as a pass-through around the busy intersection of Westchester Square itself, as well as East Tremont Avenue and Williamsbridge Road. This may be something not readily picked up by the Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS), but I believe must be considered more carefully. In the current proposal, Blondell Avenue is the only in-out access point for the garage. This potentially creates a bottleneck on Blondell Avenue with cars utilizing it as a bypass route.

By way of addressing these concerns, I believe there is an existing option to alleviate traffic for the garage. There are two unmapped streets that run through the proposed rezoned area, Cooper and Fink (formerly known as Grant Street) Avenues. Both are narrow, 40-foot wide side streets that in reality are a zoning lot known as Block 4133, Lot 8. After extensive searches, it was found that no entity, public nor private, own this lot, and has by default been used as streets. The New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) even has installed street signs for each.

It must be noted that the Fink Avenue, formerly known as Grant Street, that is part of Block 4133, Lot 8 is different than the paper street demapping of Fink Avenue proposed as a part of this rezoning. What is officially proposed in this rezoning is the demapping of a theoretical Fink Avenue that was never built out, but remained on the City map.

After the hearing, my office discussed the possibility of utilizing Cooper Avenue for alternate access to the parking garage with the applicant. The applicant has agreed to provide secondary entrance and exit access via Cooper Avenue. While I find this to be a satisfactory solution, there are two main obstacles in achieving this. First, there is an elevated train stanchion located at the primary access point to Cooper Avenue at Westchester Avenue. Traffic calming and safety measures would need to be implemented to assure that the stanchion is not impacted. Second, as there is no indication of ownership of Block 4133, Lot 8, and as it is currently utilized as Cooper and Fink (formerly known as Grant Street) Avenues, that New York City take over ownership by adverse possession and maintain the roadbed. NYCDOT already acknowledges both roadways with street signs. It provides benefit to multiple parties that the City officially designate them City streets.

Once these concerns are rectified, an access plan can be created that could make Cooper Avenue a two-way street in its entirety, with parking on one side of the street, or that Cooper Avenue can provide northwest-bound, one-way access up to Fink (formerly known as Grant Street) Avenue,

then two-way access in and out of the garage thereon. This second option would have those entering the garage drive down Cooper Avenue, and those exiting the garage turning onto Fink (formerly known as Grant Street) Avenue to connect to either Blondell or East Tremont Avenues. This proposal will disperse traffic flow throughout the immediate six-block area.

My other concern is that I wish to be assured that this will be the extent of rezoning along Blondell Avenue. The rest of Blondell Avenue is industrial and automotive in character, and I believe it should remain that way. My reason for considering this proposal is its immediate proximity to Westchester Square train station and bus routes. I believe it is appropriate to provide this kind of housing within reasonable walking distance to the station. Furthermore, future considerations should respect the surrounding character of already existing residential side streets. The Westchester Square rezoning adopted in 2006 aimed to do this. Development in neighborhoods like this should only occur at transit-rich nodes, where medium-density is appropriate in an otherwise low-density area.

Two other concerns raised by the community were related to the retail use provided. There is concern that this space may result in unwelcome truck traffic for deliveries along a narrow street. Furthermore, a concern was raised regarding school capacity in the surrounding area. The 19,668 square feet for retail is not sufficient for consideration of a public school, but could be utilized for a small charter school. I have spoken with the applicants about this option, and they intend to investigate this as a viable option. I am having them work with my office's Department of Education and Youth to assure an adequate tenant is found.

Finally, at my public hearing there were comments offered pertaining to the likelihood that this site is heavily polluted. The applicant has informed me that this site has been included in the New York State Brownfield Remediation Program, which would assure that any contaminants will be safely removed from the site.

I recommend approval of these applications with conditions as included herein.