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240-BLOCK REZONING PROPOSAL FOR ASTORIA BEGINS PUBLIC REVIEW

Rezoning would prevent out-of-scale development, provide incentives for affordable housing and allow for predictable growth

January 25, 2010 – City Planning Commissioner Amanda M. Burden today announced the beginning of public review for a proposed nearly 240-block rezoning in the vibrant Astoria neighborhood in Queens. The proposal would prevent out-of-scale development by replacing decades-old zoning with new contextual zones and firm building height limits, extend commercial zoning to support business opportunities along primary corridors and transit hubs, and provide zoning incentives for affordable housing through the Inclusionary Housing Program. The plan was developed at the request of and with extensive input from Council Member Peter F. Vallone, Jr. and local community groups, in response to concerns about out-of-character development in the area.

“Since 2002, City Planning has been replacing old zoning in Queens with fine-grained plans that are tailored to fit each unique neighborhood, and we have rezoned almost 4,500 blocks in the borough in that manner,” said City Planning Commissioner Amanda M. Burden. “Astoria is renowned for its ties to the Greek heritage of many of its residents, and it is a culturally rich shopping and dining mecca. We have worked extensively with the community to craft a comprehensive new zoning plan so the neighborhood will no longer be threatened by out-of-scale new developments. This rezoning is designed to preserve and strengthen the diverse and distinctive character of the community, promote affordable housing through the Inclusionary Housing Program, and channel growth where appropriate to wide streets well served by public transit.”

“After five years of hard work with the Department of City Planning and members of the community, I am very pleased with the proposed rezoning plan, which addresses the needs of an evolving neighborhood and preserves its unique history,” said Council Member Peter F. Vallone, Jr. “We have now created an opportunity for homeowners to improve and expand their property in context with the surrounding area while preventing the creation of out-of-character buildings.”

The rezoning proposal area is bounded by 20th Avenue on the north, Steinway Street on the east, Broadway on the south, and Vernon Boulevard, 8th Street, 14th Street and the East River to the west. The proposal builds upon the success of three previously-adopted contextual rezonings in Astoria, including the Broadway (2001), Steinway Street (1998), and West Astoria (1989) rezonings, each of which were more limited in scope. At present, Astoria is served by nine bus lines and the N and W trains running on the elevated line above 31st Street, with four stops in the rezoning area, including the terminal station near Ditmars Boulevard.

Currently much of the rezoning area is covered by two expansive residential zoning districts (R5 and R6). In the portion north of the Grand Central Parkway, R5 zoning allows taller and bulkier buildings than the two- or three-story structures typically found here, and new buildings or enlargements do not have to be aligned with the front walls of neighboring buildings. South of the Grand Central Parkway, high rise buildings of up to 20 stories tall have been constructed in areas zoned R6 located either east of 21st Street or west of 12th Street to Vernon Boulevard since this zone lacks firm height limits and street wall line-up requirements. Updating these zoning districts with new contextual zoning would provide greater predictability for future development and complement Astoria’s built character. The rezoning would:

- Reinforce established development patterns and ensure more predictable growth along wide streets with new contextual zones and height limits applied on a fine-grained basis, including the following changes:
 - R5 zoning north of the Grand Central Parkway would generally be replaced with
 - R5B zoning on many residential side streets to limit building heights to a maximum of 33 feet (three stories)
 - R5D zoning on wide, primary corridors, including Steinway Street and 23rd and 24th Avenues to limit building heights to 40 feet (four stories)
 - R6A and C4-2A zoning at 31st Street and Ditmars Boulevard to limit building heights to 70 feet (seven stories)
 - R6 zoning south of the Grand Central Parkway would generally be replaced with
 - R5B, R5D and R6B zoning on side streets to limit building heights to 33 feet, 40 feet or 50 feet respectively

R6A and C4-2A zoning on primary corridors, including Steinway and Crescent Streets, Broadway and 30th Avenue, to limit building heights to 70 feet

- R7A and C4-4A zoning on portions of 21st Street, Vernon Boulevard and Newtown Avenue to limit building heights to 80 feet .
- Update commercial overlays and provide new commercial zones to reflect existing commercial development and provide opportunities for new businesses to open to serve residents, while reducing the depth of overlays to prevent commercial uses from encroaching onto residential blocks, and
- Encourage the creation and preservation of affordable housing through the Inclusionary Housing Program – the first time the program has been used in the neighborhood – on 21st Street between 28th Avenue and Broadway; on Vernon Boulevard between Welling Court and 31st Drive; and on block fronts in a commercial district at the intersection of Newtown Avenue and 31st Street.

The community board now has 60 days to review the proposal, after which it will go to the Borough President, the City Planning Commission and the City Council as part of the City's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP). For specifics of the zoning proposal or more details on the ULURP time line, please visit [the DCP website](#).

Department of City Planning

The Department of City Planning (DCP) promotes strategic growth and development in the City, in part, by initiating comprehensive, consensus-based planning and zoning changes for individual neighborhoods and business districts. It supports the City Planning Commission and each year reviews more than 500 land use applications for actions such as zoning changes and disposition of City property. The Department assists both government agencies and the public by providing policy analysis and technical assistance relating to housing, transportation, community facilities, demography and public space.