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March 4th, 2009

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PUBLIC REVIEW BEGINS TO PROTECT ROW HOUSE CHARACTER OF 175-BLOCKS IN GREENPOINT AND WILLIAMSBURG, BROOKLYN

Proposal Would Establish Height Limits and Opportunities for Affordable Housing Fulfills Commitment Made During 2005 Comprehensive Rezoning of Greenpoint and Williamsburg

March 4, 2009 – City Planning Commissioner Amanda M. Burden announced the beginning of public review for a rezoning that would preserve the existing low-scale built character of Greenpoint and Williamsburg in Brooklyn and create opportunities for affordable housing. Undertaken at the request of Community Board 1 and local elected officials, the 175-block rezoning would establish height limits for the first time, provide predictability and preserve neighborhood scale, key components of the Bloomberg Administration’s sustainable planning strategy. The proposal would also augment the Mayor’s affordable housing plan by encouraging permanently affordable housing in limited areas of these neighborhoods. The proposal addresses the residential areas east of the City’s 2005 Greenpoint and Williamsburg Comprehensive rezoning.

“Working closely with the community and Council Members Reyna and Yassky, City Planning has crafted a rezoning proposal to protect the unique low-scale row house character of Greenpoint and Williamsburg and create opportunities for new affordable housing where appropriate” said City Planning Commissioner Amanda M. Burden. “This initiative will ensure that out-of-scale development will no longer threaten the unique character of these extraordinarily beautiful neighborhoods.”

“This week’s announcement is an important step towards preserving the character of our community while continuing the development that, if done right, should reinvigorate our neighborhoods,” said Council Member David Yassky. “We must do everything within our power to both spur economic development and safeguard the qualities that make Brooklyn’s neighborhoods dynamic and unique.”

“The proposed rezoning will preserve neighborhood character by limiting the heights of new developments, creating opportunities and incentives for affordable housing through inclusionary zoning which support local retail corridors and protect the residential character of the community” said Council Member Diana Reyna. “I was pleased to co-sponsor two well attended public forums in the District on the proposed rezoning and I look forward to hearing comments throughout the ULURP process.”

The 175-block rezoning area encompasses residential blocks from Clay Street in the north to Scholes and Maujer Streets in the south. It is bounded on the west by the area rezoned by the 2005 Greenpoint-Williamsburg rezoning area and on the east by the manufacturing zones in Eastern Greenpoint and (more) Williamsburg. The existing built character within the rezoning area primarily consists of two-to-four story wood-frame attached row houses and apartment buildings like those found in central Williamsburg, with some rising to five and six stories. In addition, neat rows of brick and masonry row houses can also be seen in Greenpoint east of Monsignor McGolrick Park. The Greenpoint Historic District, designated in 1982 is also included in the rezoning area and features distinctive 19th century brick row houses commissioned by business owners, foremen, and professionals who had worked on the nearby waterfront. Many buildings along the area’s commercial corridors of Manhattan, Driggs, Nassau, Graham and Metropolitan Avenues, and Grand and Franklin Streets include ground floor retail.

Current zoning has been in place since 1961 and is predominantly R6, a residential zoning district. R6 district has no height limits, resulting in buildings of 12 to 13 stories that are significantly taller than the low- to mid-rise scale of the neighborhood. This type of development is inconsistent with, and disruptive of, the existing scale and context of the Greenpoint and Williamsburg neighborhoods. Approximately 15 blocks are designated C4-3 which allows for commercial, residential and community facility uses and six blocks are designated C8-2 permitting commercial and community facility uses including heavy commercial uses such as automobile repair. C8-2 does not permit residential uses.

City Planning’s proposal, which reflects continuing consultation with Community Board 1, community groups and elected officials, fulfills a key commitment made by the Bloomberg Administration at the adoption of the City’s 2005 Greenpoint and Williamsburg rezoning.

The 175-block rezoning would:

- Protect the established low scale built character of the each neighborhood's residential side streets and prevent future out-of-context development by establishing height limits for the first time in 48 years. Contextual zoning designations (R6B, R6A, R7A, C4-3A and C4-4A) would generally permit four to five story buildings on narrow side streets and six to seven story buildings on wide, commercial corridors. Where appropriate, eight-story buildings would be permitted with incentives for affordable housing.
- Require buildings to line up with adjacent structures to maintain a consistent streetwall.
- Update commercial zoning designations to allow for a wider range of local retail and service establishments. New commercial overlay zoning would be established along Graham, Metropolitan, Greenpoint, Driggs Avenues and Franklin and Grand Streets where there are existing ground floor businesses. To reinforce existing land use patterns, commercial zoning would be removed from residential properties.
- Extend the City's acclaimed inclusionary housing program, creating further opportunities for the development and preservation of affordable housing for the neighborhoods of Greenpoint and Williamsburg while maintaining contextual height limits throughout the rezoning area. Under the Inclusionary housing program, developers are only able to build the maximum allowable residential floor area if they provide permanently affordable housing and will be subject to the same height limits for the respective zoning district. Since the program's establishment in 2005 approximately 1,800 permanently affordable units are either in construction or recently completed. Over 800 of these units are in Greenpoint and Williamsburg. Tax abatements and public financing provide an added incentive for use of the inclusionary program. In addition, a city-wide zoning text recently entered public review that introduces a brand new affordable home ownership option for inclusionary zoning. These incentives would apply along the area's widest streets and major transit or commercial corridors. These include: portions of McGuinness Boulevard, Metropolitan, Union, Manhattan and Bushwick Avenues and Grand Street. These streets would be mapped with R7A and C4-4A districts which cap building height at 80 feet.

Contextual zoning has been used successfully by the Bloomberg Administration in many neighborhoods throughout Brooklyn to preserve neighborhood character. Since 2002, in Brooklyn, 12 City Planning (more) initiated rezonings have been adopted covering more than 1100 blocks to protect neighborhood character. In addition, three rezonings covering over 300 blocks are currently in public review. The Department will continue its ambitious work plan to preserve the scale of residential communities throughout the borough while catalyzing new and affordable housing where appropriate.

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 timeline](#), please visit the DCP website.

Department of City Planning

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