

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**CITY PLANNING BEGINS REZONING ALONG 161st STREET AND RIVER AVENUES
TO SPUR NEW HOUSING, OFFICE AND YEAR-ROUND RETAIL DEVELOPMENT IN TRANSIT-RICH BRONX CIVIC
CENTER**

New Development Will Catalyze 1,350 Office and Retail Jobs

March 30, 2009 – City Planning Commissioner Amanda M. Burden today announced the beginning of public review for a targeted rezoning of key stretches along 161st Street and River Avenues in The Bronx to promote new mixed income housing, office buildings, hotels and year round retail activity. The proposed zoning will strengthen the civic center of The Bronx, an area noted mainly for its courthouses and the nearby Yankee Stadium. An important component of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's South Bronx Initiative, it would encourage the redevelopment of underutilized lots along the corridors. It would also facilitate some 900 units of new and affordable housing, using inclusionary zoning incentives for creation or preservation of permanently affordable housing. The rezoning aims unify the 161st Street and River Avenue civic corridors, from Yankee Stadium and the Gateway Center to the west, to Melrose Commons residential community to the east.

Commissioner Burden said, "The City's carefully tailored 161st Street/River Avenue rezoning is an example of the Bloomberg administration's sustainable planning strategy to shape and encourage new development near mass transit. These targeted zoning changes will help 161st Street and River Avenue evolve into vibrant corridors with affordable housing, new office buildings and jobs, a greater variety of local retail, and widened sidewalks to accommodate civic center employees, residents, visitors, and baseball fans."

The 161st Street /River Avenue rezoning is located in Community District 4, and covers 1 full block and parts of eight blocks within an area generally bounded by River Avenue on the west, East 162nd Street to the north, Park Avenue to the east, and East 153rd Street to the south. The L-shaped corridor is served by two Metro North stations, the 4, B and D subway lines and multiple inter-borough bus routes. Current zoning that has been in place since 1961 has not fostered the type of reinvestment that is appropriate for a borough civic hub with excellent mass transit access.

The 161st Street/River Avenue rezoning is projected to provide more than 553,000 square feet of commercial office space, more than 113,000 square feet of new retail and some 900 units of housing of which 140 would be permanently affordable.

The permanently affordable housing would be facilitated by the [Inclusionary Housing program](#), furthering Mayor Bloomberg's New Housing Marketplace Plan goal of creating over 165,000 units of affordable housing. Under the Inclusionary Housing program, developers may build the maximum allowable residential floor area only if they provide 20 percent of the residential floor area in the development as permanently affordable housing for low or moderate income households. The affordable housing may either be on site or off site in new or existing buildings, and must comply with bulk regulations of each zoning district. Tax abatements and public financing provide an added incentive for use of the inclusionary program. In addition, the City has developed a brand new affordable home ownership option for inclusionary zoning that is currently undergoing public review.

The rezoning aims to build on the strengths and characteristics of three distinct areas, which are, from west to east: the transit node, the civic node and the residential node.

Transit Node

The physical presence of the elevated 4 train on River Avenue near 161st Street has discouraged new development. In addition, across from Heritage Field (former Yankee Stadium site) the current semi-industrial zoning limits commercial uses and prohibits housing. Low scale, sports bars and souvenir shops that close after baseball season predominate under the el.

To overcome these constraints, City Planning has created a new zoning district (C6-3D) with special design controls to facilitate higher density slender tower development with appropriate setback requirements on lots fronting the elevated train to maximize light and air. Based on the size of the lots and the permitted density, slender towers in this area could rise to 20-30 stories. [For further details, view the [C6-3D massing diagram](#).]

The new C6-3D zoning would be mapped along portions of three block-fronts along the east side of River Avenue south of East 161st Street and north of East 153rd Street. It would also be applied to one block on the north side of East 161st Street and two blocks on its south side between River and Walton Avenues.

The C6-3D district would allow a mix of residential, commercial, and community facility uses. Commercial and community facility uses would be permitted up to 9.0 FAR. With the application of the Inclusionary Housing program in the 161st Street/River Avenue rezoning, residential uses would be allowed up to 7.52 FAR, but could be increased up to 10 FAR with the provision of permanently affordable housing.

On corner sites that front the River Avenue elevated train, at 161st and 158th Streets, buildings must set back from the corners to create wider sidewalks for pedestrians. New developments adjacent to a subway entrance would be required to relocate the subway entrance inside the building. Sidewalk widening requirements would apply along both River Avenue and 161st Street.

Civic Node

Current zoning doesn't allow sufficient density for office development despite the demand for these uses near the courts. To update the zoning and facilitate development of office space at densities appropriate to the civic center as well as retail uses, the plan would apply C6-2 zoning in the areas of 161st Street surrounding the Bronx Hall of Justice and Criminal and Family courthouses. It would also permit residential development and community facility use. The blocks to be rezoned to C6-2 include a portion of one block along the south side of East 161st Street between Concourse Village West and Concourse Village East; a portion of the block at the northeast corner of East 161st Street and Sheridan Avenue; and a portion of the block at the southeast corner of 161st Street and Concourse Village West.

The heights of buildings in this district could range from six to 14 stories depending on the size of the lots.

Residential Node

In an area adjoining the successful and growing Melrose Commons residential neighborhood, the existing R7-2 zoning has not spurred housing development, nor are there incentives for much needed affordable housing. There are currently no height limits or requirements for buildings to line up at the street. Moreover the existing zoning does not provide for continuous ground floor retail to serve a growing community.

In order to facilitate new residential development and expand retail uses on the full block bounded by East 161st Street, Morris Avenue, Park Avenue/Teller Avenue and East 162nd Street, the plan calls for R8A zoning and an extension of the C2-4 commercial overlay. The R8A zoning designation would allow higher-density development with height limits and building forms that would match residential buildings in the Melrose Commons area.

Inclusionary Housing, which would also be applied in this area, would limit the R8A base residential FAR to 5.4, with a maximum FAR of 7.2 for those developments providing affordable housing. The base height of the building at the street must be between 60 to 85 feet and the building then must set back from the street before rising to a maximum building height of 120 feet. The proposed R8A would allow community facility uses up to a maximum FAR of 6.5.

South Bronx Initiative

As part of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's five-borough economic development strategy, the City has undertaken several development and infrastructure projects in the South Bronx to attract private investment and promote the development of affordable housing, retail, and office space. In 2006, the Mayor announced the "South Bronx Initiative" in an effort to sustain the positive effects of these projects and guide future land use changes and capital investments in the area. An interagency team led by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development has worked with multiple local stakeholders to hone in on community priorities and create an economic development strategy that addresses community concerns.

In addition to the 161st Street/River Avenue rezoning, the South Bronx Initiative focuses on Melrose Commons as well as a rezoning of the Lower Grand Concourse, already in public review, that is intended to foster a mix of office, retail, and residential development and reclaim the waterfront at this important gateway to the borough.

Public Review

The 161st Street/River Avenue rezoning will now be reviewed by Bronx Community Board 4, 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

The Department of City Planning is responsible for the City's physical and socioeconomic planning, including land use and environmental review; preparation of plans and policies; and provision of technical assistance and planning

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