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CITY PLANNING UNVEILS STRONGER ZONING PROTECTION FOR NATURAL FEATURES IN STATEN ISLAND AND THE BRONX

Public Review Begins for Text Amending Regulation of Proposed Development in Natural Areas

September 20, 2004 – The Department of City Planning (DCP) today unveiled new, stronger protections for natural features including steep slopes, ponds and wooded areas in Staten Island and the Bronx, officially beginning the public review of the proposed zoning changes, DCP Director Amanda M. Burden announced. The proposed text amendments affect Special Natural Area Districts (SNAD) in Staten Island and Riverdale in the Bronx, originally established in 1975 primarily to guide development on vacant lots. The proposed changes would both simplify and strengthen the rules, focusing City Planning Commission (CPC) review on proposals to develop or modify lots with important natural features and allowing development on small lots without such features to proceed without CPC oversight.

"City Planning's new regulations will be more effective in preserving the extraordinary natural resources in these areas, said Ms. Burden. "The rules will provide clear requirements for safeguarding the hills, rocks, trees and streams that make these areas so special. This proposal complements the Bloomberg administration's zoning initiatives for preserving neighborhood character."

The proposed zoning amendments would:

- Add stronger steep slope, tree and vegetation preservation measures adapted from Staten Island's Special Hillside Preservation District, including stricter lot coverage controls and private road design standards.
- Replace the existing grandfather provision, which exempts from review most lots that were already developed with homes when the rules were originally adopted, with regulations that apply equally to developed and vacant lots to preserve significant natural features. This would extend protection to roughly 1,700 lots -- more than half the residential lots in these districts -- which may now significantly alter natural features without CPC review.
- On small lots with no significant natural features, allow as-of-right development guided by new performance standards
- Modify review procedures by adding clear performance standards and by easing certain administrative requirements to allow for greater flexibility in designing sites for maximum protection of natural features.

Natural Area Districts are characterized by natural features such as steep slopes, rock outcroppings, forests, wetlands, ponds and streams, which the special zoning regulations are designed to protect. The districts are mapped in mostly low-density residential districts with detached, attached and mid-rise development, community facilities on large parcels such as hospitals, senior care, educational and religious institutions as well as parkland and open space. The largest Natural Area District covers much of the Staten Island greenbelt; others are mapped in Shore Acres in Staten Island, in Riverdale, The Bronx as well as the government-owned Fort Totten, Queens area.

The new rules were developed following public outreach with the Staten Island Special Natural Area Task Force and Bronx Community Board 8. The proposal will be reviewed by the affected community boards and borough presidents, after which it will come to the City Planning Commission for a hearing and vote, followed by final review at the City Council as part of the City's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure. More details on the [proposal](#) and [public review process](#) are available on the City Planning web site.

About 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 information to government agencies, public officials, and community boards.