



## AirTrain Area Streetscape Text Amendment - **Approved!**

### Update April 9, 2013:

On April 9, 2013 the City Council adopted the AirTrain Area Streetscape Text Amendment. The zoning text changes are now in effect.  [View the adopted text amendment.](#)

### **Introduction**

The New York City Department of City Planning proposes a zoning text amendment to modify bulk and streetscape rules in a portion of the Special Downtown Jamaica District in Queens Community District 12. The proposal aims to improve the urban design framework by applying urban design rules more consistently and supporting a broad mix of uses and building footprint sizes. These changes will ensure that future developments will continue to reinforce streetscapes and surrounding contexts with distinctive bulk controls along Sutphin Boulevard and adjoining narrow side streets.

[The Jamaica Plan](#) was approved by the City Council on September 10, 2007. This comprehensive set of land use actions was design to foster development in Downtown Jamaica while protecting the character of medium- and low-density neighborhoods surrounding the downtown core. The Jamaica Plan identified opportunities for redevelopment and transformation in the area near the AirTrain terminal and Jamaica Station.



Aerial View

 [View a larger image.](#)

The proposed amendment would build on the Jamaica Plan by fine-tuning building wall and envelope rules in the AirTrain area. The amendment would not alter the original intent of the Special Downtown Jamaica District, or change allowable floor area or the range of permitted uses. Instead, it would accommodate smaller developments more reasonably and apply curb cut, sidewalk, and [street wall](#) rules consistently throughout the Special District.

### **Neighborhood Context**

The Special Downtown Jamaica District is a 71-block area encompassing the downtown core, the AirTrain area, the industrial area to the south of the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) right-of-way, and major retail corridors including Hillside Avenue, Jamaica Avenue, Atlantic Avenue, and Sutphin Boulevard.

The proposed text amendment focuses on Sutphin Boulevard between Archer and Liberty Avenues. This area includes a mix of one- and two-family detached and semi-detached residential buildings, two-story attached masonry mixed-use buildings, warehouses, car and truck repair garages, and vacant land. The heart of the neighborhood is the rail transportation complex on the west side of Sutphin Boulevard between Archer and 94th Avenues that includes the AirTrain Terminal and LIRR's Jamaica Station, with connections to the E, J, and Z subway lines at Archer Avenue.

In addition to these rail connections, the area is connected to southern and eastern Queens by several bus lines. The Van Wyck Expressway, a major north-south highway, is less than 1,000 feet from the western edge of the affected area. Sutphin Boulevard is a major north-south thoroughfare connecting Downtown Jamaica to South Jamaica.

### **Proposed Amendment**

Upon studying the special bulk rules of the Special Downtown Jamaica District in the context of realistic future development, the Queens Borough Office identified three shortcomings of the existing regulations:

- *The special bulk regulations that were devised as part of the Special District to facilitate large buildings complicate development of buildings with smaller footprints.* Mandatory sidewalk widenings detract from the size of floor plates, which introduces unnecessary complications. Also, some site-specific bulk rules allowing buildings to rise without setback no longer make sense due to changed or abandoned development plans. The proposal would support a broad mix of uses and building types.
- *Existing rules would have a negative effect on the pedestrian environment.* Prohibitions on curb cuts are applied inconsistently, allowing loading docks or garage entrances on portions of Sutphin Boulevard while prohibiting them

on more appropriate side streets. Currently, sidewalk widening rules are not applied to some narrow, 10-foot-wide sidewalks, while others are required to be widened to as much as 33 feet. The proposal would ensure adequate pedestrian circulation space by requiring very narrow sidewalks on side streets to be widened to at least 12 feet. The sidewalks on Sutphin Boulevard, currently at least 16 feet wide, would no longer be subject to widening requirements.



Map of 2007 Sidewalk Widening Requirements

[View a larger image.](#)



Map of Proposed Sidewalk Widening Requirements

[View a larger image.](#)

- *Development sites are burdened by unnecessarily rigid street wall requirements.* Some rules were designed to facilitate large, boxy buildings with 100% of their street wall at the street line, even on sites that sit across from medium-density residential districts. In most of the Special District, 70% of the street wall is required to be placed at the street line. The proposal would make the AirTrain Area more consistent with the rest of the Special District by maintaining the 100% street wall requirement for block fronts on Sutphin Boulevard, while relaxing regulations on side streets to the 70% standard.

The rules under consideration are found in the following sections of the Zoning Resolution:

- 115-13 (Ground Floor Use, Frontage, and Major Building Entrance Regulations in C4-5X and C6 Districts);
- 115-14 (Transparency Requirement in C4-5X and C6 Districts);
- 115-232 (Street Wall Location);
- 115-233 (Street Wall Height); and
- 115-31 (Sidewalk Widening).

The [adopted amendment](#) consists primarily of changes to the maps indicating applicability of the above noted sections.

### **Public Review**

The proposed text amendment was referred on November 26, 2012 to Queens Community Board 12 and the Queens Borough President for a 60-day review period. On February 6, 2013, the City Planning Commission held a public hearing. On March 6, the CPC voted unanimously to approve the text amendment. [Read the CPC report.](#) On April 9, 2013, the City Council adopted the zoning changes, and they now are in effect.

For more information about this proposal please contact the Queens Office of the Department of City Planning at (718) 286-3170.

## Related Notes

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-  Items accompanied by this symbol require the [free Adobe Acrobat Reader](#).
- Brief explanations of terms in *green italics* can be viewed by [visiting glossary page](#). Words and phrases followed by an asterisk (\*) are defined terms in the Zoning Resolution, primarily in Section 12-10. Consult the Zoning Resolution for the official and legally binding definitions of these words and phrases.