

James G. Clynes
Chairman

Latha Thompson
District Manager



505 Park Avenue, Suite
New York, N.Y. 10022-1106
(212) 758-4340
(212) 758-4616 (Fax)
www.cb8m.com - Website
info@cb8m.com - E-Mail

The City of New York Manhattan Community Board 8

91st Street Demapping Task Force
Office of New York City Council Member Ben Kallos
244 East 93rd Street
Thursday, December 10, 2015, 9:30AM

Present: Council Member Ben Kallos, Jesse Towson, Chief of Staff; Margaret Forgione, Manhattan Borough Commissioner (DOT); Emily Weidenhof, NYC Plaza Program Director, Division of Traffic and Planning (DOT); Robert Vaccarello, President, R-Y Management; Rita Popper and David Rosenstein, co-chairs, 91st St. Demapping Task Force (CB8M).

Background:

CB8M voted 43-0-1 (one abstention for cause) to urge our elected officials to seek the best way to permanently close East 91st St. (the "Closed Street") between Second and Third Avenues to vehicular traffic. That section of 91st Street has been closed since the development of the Ruppert Brewery Urban Renewal Site in 1973, when the block was paved with Z-shaped bricks, lined with benches and protected by gates and bollards at each end.

CB8M Resolution of September 2014:

This action was deemed necessary as the Closed Street, while maintained in part by the NYC Dep't. of Transportation (DOT) as to lighting, has no formal designation as a closed street. With the development of the Marine Transport Station further east on 91st Street and the prospect of hundreds of public and private carting trucks leaving that facility daily, formalizing the vehicle-free status of the Closed Street became a higher priority.

The December 10, 2015 Meeting: The New York City Plaza Program

Council Member Kallos, and independently the Task Force co-chairs, ascertained that DOT would oppose any demapping of the Closed Street and a ULURP opposed by DOT would be necessary, and unlikely to make it through the ULURP process.

Commissioner Forgione proposed a meeting, which Ben Kallos' office arranged, to discuss an alternative: the "NYC Plaza Program, a community-based program that creates new neighborhood plazas throughout New York City by transforming underused streets into accessible public spaces and walkable destinations. A "plaza" is considered to be an area designated by DOT for use as a plaza located within the bed of a roadway, which may contain benches, tables or other facilities for pedestrian use" (taken from the 2015-plaza-program-guidelines, found at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/downloads/pdf/2015-plaza-program-guidelines.pdf>).

The next round of applications, for 2016, is expected to have the same criteria as in 2015. The NYC Plaza Program is open to all nonprofit organizations in any area of the City. Applicants must be:

- Nonprofit organizations operating in New York City, e.g. Civitas
- Incorporated in New York State and compliant with annual State and Federal filing requirements for nonprofit organizations
- Certified tax exempt under Internal Revenue Service Code § 501 (c) 3
- Located near the proposed plaza

While the designation of a Public Plaza lacks the permanence of demapping, it is achievable and appears to be the best option to protect this protected space. The DOT program covers three types of plazas, "One-Day," "Interim Materials Plazas" and "Permanent Materials Plazas," which the City, in cooperation with DOT and other agencies, will fund, design and build and which the Partner will manage, operate, and maintain. Only the latter would provide some assurance of a long-term commitment by the city to respect the closed status of the street.

By applying to the Plaza Program, each applicant is requesting: 1) to have City funds invested in their community in the form of a plaza; 2) to garner community support and participate in the design process; and 3) to manage, maintain, program, and operate the proposed plaza once construction is complete and an agreement is signed.

Next Steps:

Identifying a not-for-profit partner; clarifying the relationship of, and financial contribution of the adjoining property owners and related parties; securing the support of residents on the closed street. This is important because under the DOT Plaza Program:

To make the plaza a vibrant center of activity and a neighborhood destination, the Partner will be responsible for programming activities and events at the site. These may include holiday events, food or craft markets, temporary public art installations or exhibits, and music and dancing. The Partner will be expected to program the plaza throughout the year.

This is a material change from the passive role the long-closed street has played for more than 40 years. Council Member Kallos suggested the sloping hill might hold summer film shows or concerts that would be acceptable to neighboring residents and obtaining bales of hay as safety barricades when the hilly street is snow covered, to add a safety back stop for sleds at the lower Second Ave. end.

Finally, DOT requires Community Board approval, which would be sought when plans are developed.

Background: The First Meeting: An initial meeting called by Phillip Montgomery, Dep't. of City Planning, was held on February 2, 2015, brought together representatives of City Planning, Parks & Recreation, CB8M, Civitas, the Borough President's Office, and elected officials or their representatives from Ben Kallos', Dan Quart's, Dan Garodnick's offices and the two organizations with ownership rights on the block, Joel Burris of Brown Harris Stevens, representing the condo owners of Ruppert and Yorkville Towers and Robert Vaccarello, president of R-Y Management, representing the DeMatteis Organization, the builder of the three towers: Ruppert, Yorkville and Knickerbocker Plaza.

At that initial meeting, it was agreed by all that formalizing the closed status of the Street was appropriate and should have been done long ago. While demapping was the ideal goal, it became clear that this would require the support of DOT; that clarity as to Sanitation's intentions for truck routing would be helpful albeit not necessary if DOT agreed; and that a public or private partner would be needed to maintain the property once DOT relinquished control. The Parks representative, Ms. Colleen Alderson noted that Parks could not bring the closed street into adjacent Ruppert Park as its regulations required all parks to be closed at night, not an option for a pedestrian thoroughfare between Second and Third Avenues.

**Rita Popper and David Rosenstein
Co-Chairs 91st Street Demapping Task Force**