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Summer Special

News From Chuck Lesnick

June 27, 2008

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Quick Links

With the budget and regular Council business concluded for this legislative session, the Real Estate Committee of the City Council will accelerate its meetings this summer to continue reviewing the Environmental Impact Statement with regard to the SFC downtown development proposal.

In addition to the regular Tuesday meetings, the next of which is at 6 p.m. on July 1, we will hold another meeting on Monday, June 30 at 5:30 p.m. Please note that all meetings are open to the public and are televised on Channel 78.

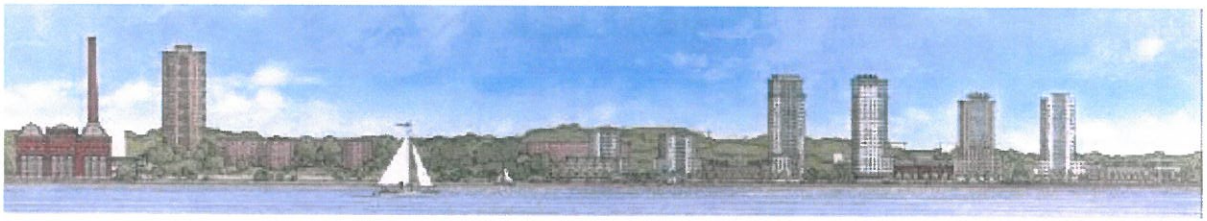
There are still many points to deliberate in dealing with a proposal of this scope. Next up is the socioeconomic benefits of the development, such as the creation of new jobs.

Then there are issues of design such as building height, layout and the study of how people will circulate throughout the downtown in terms of access and egress in to and out of buildings and storefronts.

Another important deliberation is what the projects will look and feel like at the street level.

Our goal is to finalize the environmental review as efficiently and as quickly as possible so that we can get to the final stage of approvals (the findings) where we negotiate with the developer on priorities for the community.

New Waterfront Plan on Alexander Street



Last week, America Holdings Inc. presented their $900 million Point Street waterfront project to the Community Development Agency and then made a public presentation at the Yonkers Riverfront Library that Wednesday evening.

The project calls for the development of 1,124 housing units in four high-rise buildings and a number of townhouse units.

The four towers would stand 33, 26, 39 and 26 stories tall. Included will be 54,000 sf of office space, 40,000 sf of retail space, 142 marina wet slips, 230 marina dry slips, parking for 1,830 vehicles, and four acres of accessible public space.

Project for Public Spaces, a nonprofit urban planning and design organization, has been engaged to plan and program the open spaces.

We are hoping that Yonkers will soon take its place among the great waterfronts of the world listed in their latest newsletter.

The developer also plans to build LEEDS (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified energy efficient buildings in conjunction with the US Green Building Council.

Additionally, Robert Altman of Altman Lighting Company presented a re-development plan for his property.

The next CDA meeting will be called in mid-July. Call 377-6150 for more details.

Character Building Pays Off

Congresswoman Nita Lowey (D-Westchester/Rockland) and Congressman Eliot Engel (D-Bronx/Westchester/Rockland) just announced that Yonkers Public Schools will receive a $309,422 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to advance achievement in the classroom through character education.

The grant is expected to continue for a total of four years and can accumulate to almost $1.25 million over four years.

Funds from this grant, which will be

provided through the Federal Partnerships in Character Education Program, must support initiatives integrated into regular classroom instruction that comply with state standards.

Character education bolsters achievement, creates a healthier learning environment, and teaches students the values of respect, responsibility, a positive attitude, and civic participation. Increased parental and community involvement are key to the program's success.

Nita and Eliot told me that they are very excited about the program and will visit schools to see how it is going in the fall.

Lowey and Eliot Support Middle Class Tax Relief

With the support of congress members, the House of Representatives this week passed legislation to provide millions of middle-class families with tax cuts without increasing the national debt.

The Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) Relief Act of 2008 would provide relief from the AMT to more than 25 million families, helping to ease the strain of rising gas and food prices.

Originally intended as a tax on high-income households already eligible for many tax benefits, the AMT has become a crippling and unfair tax on the middle class.

Nowhere is this phenomenon more evident than in our communities. The 18th district in New York has the highest percentage of population impacted by the AMT in the nation. Without this legislation, over 98,000 in the lower Hudson Valley could be impacted by the AMT in 2008.

More Good News for Yonkers Schools

Yonkers Partners in Education (YPIE), a non- profit organization responsible for fundraising for our schools, has received initial funding to open a College and Career Access Center in two Yonkers high schools

beginning in the fall.

With a ratio of 375 students to one guidance counselor, students do not receive the support and guidance necessary to successfully navigate college and the career process.

These centers will be physical spaces in each high school, equipped with computer banks, software and staff to guide students as they consider their futures.

Other services provided by through these centers include organizing college visits to the high school, financial aid workshops, scholarship information and bus trips to visit colleges and other workshops such as resume writing, essay writing, and interviewing.

They can now hire a part-time program director and two part-time college counselors until funding allows for full-time. All positions require a masters in counseling as well as experience working with an inner- city student population. If you know anyone who would be interested, please contact Wendy Nadal.

Yonkers Receives Increase in Tax Credits

In the final hours of the 2008 Legislative Session, the New York State Assembly and Senate passed legislation that not only improves New York State's Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit programs but directly benefits Yonkers by adding dozens of properties to the list of potentials.

The goal of the initiative is to stimulate downtown and neighborhood revitalization in municipalities like Yonkers that need meaningful economic development tools.

Changes will include the following:

- Rehabilitation of Historic Properties Credit (Commercial):
- Credit percentage increases from 6% to 10% (50% of the federal credit rate)
- Credit cap increases from $100,000 to $5 million
- Establishes transferability among business partnerships

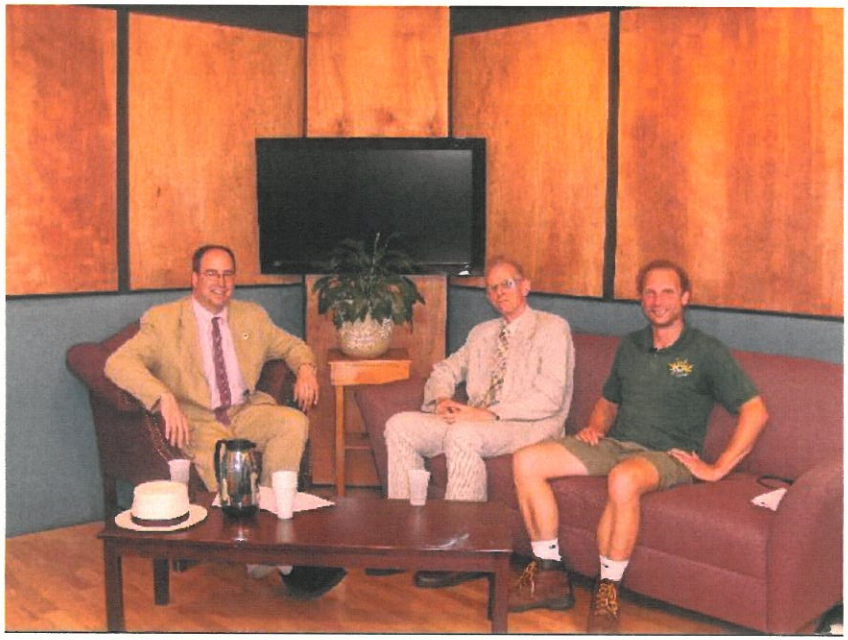
Historic Homeownership Rehabilitation Credit:
- Credit cap increases from $25,000 to $50,000
- Qualifies historic housing in census tracts at or below 90% SMFI (State Median Family Income)
- Eliminates the need for municipal resolution
- Increases income level qualified for rebate provision from $40,000 to $60,000

These credits are so important to the process of providing incentives to revitalize cities through historic rehabilitation especially in this economic downturn.

I urge Governor Paterson to sign this important piece of legislation and ask you to do the same by emailing his office h ere.

Tell him that commercial and residential historic tax credits are a recognized economic catalyst in many states and that this will help homeowners, businesspeople and developers give new life to our historic and older properties.

Spotlight on Yonkers



Spotlight on Yonkers is starting to develop a voice in the community.

Thanks to all who called and emailed with support and encouragement as we continue to develop the program on Channel 78.

In the next month, look forward to learning about adult volunteer programs in our city with 55 Plus and the Jewish Council of Yonkers. Also hear from residents who enjoy their jobs as literacy volunteers through those programs and see how you can become a part of this growing movement of involved citizenry.

Next, we will take you on a tour of Yonkers first geothermal building -- a luxury residential building at 66 Main Street-- and then over to Sarah Lawrence College where the first LEEDS certified building exists and where Yonkers first green roof will soon be built.

Please email Laura Fahrenthold or call her at 914-377-6060 with any story ideas or interesting questions.

Photo: Last week's show on Glenwood Power Station with architect Steve Tilly and green builder Rob Hothan.

Sweet Surrender

Yonkers lost a great woman this week, long-time bakery owner and local celebrity Anna Puma Artuso.

She died at 86 of complications from a stroke and worked up until Mother's Day when she fell ill.

For 42 years, she was a lovable fixture at Anna Artuso's Pastry Shop on 969 McLean Ave. where young and old alike enjoyed her warm compassionate personality as much as her cookies and cakes which she also sent to soldiers at war, donated to food pantries, and happily gave out to customers as a way of saying thanks for their business.

She will be greatly missed but her son, Ralph Puma, will take over the business to keep her legacy (and recipes) alive.

Calling hours are as follows:

Visiting Sat. June 27 and Sun. June 28, 2-4 p.m. and 7-9 p.m. at F. Ruggiero and Sons Funeral Home, 732 Yonkers Ave. Telephone inquiry at 914-375-1400.

The funeral mass is at 10:45 a.m. Monday at St. Barnabas Church on 241St. and Martha Ave. in the Woodlawn Section of the Bronx.

Photo: Courtesy Journal News

Long-Time Yonkes Pediatrician Retires

After 38 years, a beloved Yonkers pediatrician, Dr. Robert J. Brittis, will be retiring in July.

His wife, Mary Brittis, a registered nurse who received her degree from the Cochran School of Nursing, will stay with the practice their family so lovingly built together, one that was started 50 years ago by Robert's brother and sister-in-law, Drs. Dante and Nance Brittis.

Dr. Brittis' partner and friend, Dr. Oliver Cartano, will continue in their North Broadway practice, as will Dr. Veronica Williams and Nurse Practitioner Elisabeth Christian.

Yonkers wishes Dr. Brittis the very best and will miss him as he embarks on a new and exciting chapter in his life.

Waah!

Life's Lessons

Last week, I had the pleasure

of addressing graduates at the Andalusia School of Yonkers at their commencement ceremony. The challenge was finding material that would appeal to a wide audience of parents with graduating kindergartners, 5th and 8th graders. I found universal truth in Robert Fulghum's Guide for Global Leadership called, "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten."

Here is his list. See what you think.

· Share everything.
· Play fair.
· Don't hit people.
· Put things back where you found them.
· Clean up your own mess.
· Don't take things that aren't yours.
· Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.
· Wash your hands before you eat.
· Flush.
· Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.
· Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.
· Take a nap every afternoon.
· When you go out in the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together.
· Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: the roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.
· Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup - they all die. So do we.

New Crime Hotline

While Yonkers schools rank very low on crime, we realize it only takes one incident to change the way we view the world around us.

With that, the City joined a national program called Operation Speak Up whereby kids can

safely and anonymously report violence or danger in their schools and neighborhood by calling 1-866-SPEAK UP or 1-866-773-2587 starting in September. This, of course, does not replace 911.

Ready, Set, Swing

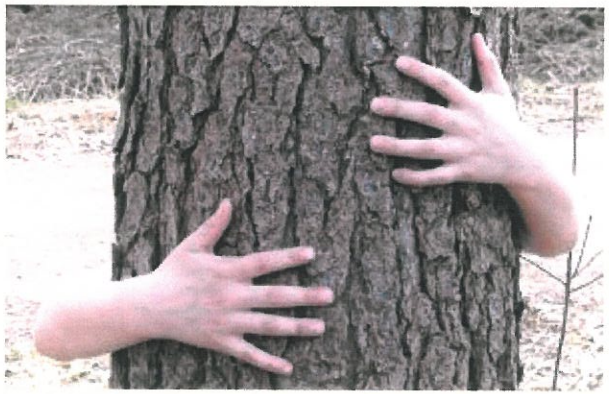
Westhab, a group that provides housing and community development assistance to the residents of southwest Yonkers, held a ribbon cutting ceremony this month to unveil a beautiful new playground in Nodine Hill.

The Tot Lot adds a splash of color, life, and excitement to the area, featuring a small lot decorated with fluorescent gates, plastic playground equipment, a checker table, and a woodchip floor-- all designed with child safety in mind.

This project, the newest of Westhab's many community outreach programs, is just another sign of the progress that's putting Yonkers in national headlines.

Read on...

Save (and Hug) a Tree



The Saw Mill River Free-A-Tree volunteers are joining an Eagle Scout project in Yonkers on Saturday and Sunday, June 28, and 29, from 9 am to 3 pm to cut deadly vines from our indigenous trees.

Meet at Tuckahoe Road by the bridge near Dunkin Donuts, Quiznos, & Enterprise Rent-a-Car are located in Yonkers.

The clean up area is along the South County Trailway starting at Tuckahoe Road and going up to Odell.

Bring: hat, sunscreen, water, loppers and gloves if you have them. Wear sturdy shoes (NO

FLIP-FLOPS!) We'll provide loppers, gloves, picker-uppers, garbage bags, and water.

For Information, contact Groundwork Yonkers/Saw Mill River Coalition, (914) 375-2151 or cell: (914) 815-5872.

Read on...

Yonkers Bike Club Fundraiser

The Yonkers Bike Club is growing strong with more and more cycling enthusiasts joining our club. We have about 100 riders now who enjoy weekend rides on the South County Trailway, the Saw Mill and Bronx River Parkways, and other locations. The club is taking a July 6th ride into the city as well. Everyone is welcome!

To help with basic operating costs, Shelley Mayer and Lee Smith have offered to host a low-cost July 4th fundraiser pool party and BBQ at their Yonkers home from 5-9 p.m.

Please feel free to join us and bring new people into the group. RSVP here.

Read on...

4th of July Fireworks

The City's 4th of July fireworks display will be on the downtown waterfront pier starting at 9 p.m.

Hope to see you there!

Read on...

History Buffs Unite

Please join me in Mt. Vernon at the St. Paul's Church National Historic Site at 10:30 am on Friday, July 4, for an Independence Day Celebration that I have rarely missed in 25 years.

It features music, speeches, refreshments, and best of all a reading of the Declaration of Independence by a descendant of one of its original signers. We also toll the 250-year- old St. Paul's church bell 13 times to represent each of the colonies.

St. Paul's Church helps to tell the story of the development of colonial society and the road to the American Revolution. It consists of an 18th century stone church that was used as a Revolutionary War hospital, a cemetery with burial stones dating to 1704, and the remnant of a Village Green that was the scene of the famous Election of 1733 which raised issues of Freedom of Religion and the Press.

In 1733, John Peter Zenger began the New York Weekly Journal and published an account of a controversial election that was held in front of the church, outlining the misdeeds of certain officials. He continued to publish satirical articles about corrupt officials and was eventually tried for libel in 1735.

Zenger's lawyer, Andrew Hamilton, argued that Zenger could not be found guilty of libel because he had published the truth. The jury agreed and found him innocent, and this ruling was the basis for the First Amendment, adopted in 1791, after the American Revolution, to guarantee freedom of the press. The Bill of Rights Museum, in the former parish hall, has exhibits on the Zenger trial, the First Amendment, and church history. Information Courtesy National Park Service

Read on...

Written by Laura Fahrenthold

email: chuck.lesnick@yonkersny.gov

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