

**TESTIMONY BY BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT MARTY MARKOWITZ
TO THE CITY COUNCIL
REGARDING THE FOURTH AVENUE SPECIAL ENHANCED COMMERCIAL DISTRICT
NOVEMBER 16, 2011**

I WANT TO THANK COMMITTEE CHAIR MARK WEPRIN AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL LAND USE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ZONING AND FRANCHISES FOR ALLOWING ME TO TESTIFY TODAY ON THE SPECIAL FOURTH AVENUE ENHANCED COMMERCIAL DISTRICT.

BEFORE I DISCUSS MY VIEWS ON 4TH AVENUE, I'D LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME TO MENTION ANOTHER ITEM ON YOUR AGENDA, ADMIRAL'S ROW PLAZA.

THIS PROJECT RESPECTS THE HISTORIC CHARACTER OF THE AREA, WHILE ALSO PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH.

IT WOULD PROVIDE INDUSTRIAL AND RETAIL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, AND ALSO PROVIDE ACCESS TO FRESH AND AFFORDABLE FOODS IN A NEIGHBORHOOD THAT IS UNDERSERVED.

THIS IS A GREAT PROJECT, ONE THAT DESERVES TO BE APPROVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL.

AND I HOPE THE COUNCIL ALSO JOINS ME IN APPEALING TO THE MTA TO EVALUATE THE FUTURE OF WEEKEND SERVICE ON THE B69 BUS, TO PROVIDE BETTER ACCESS TO ADMIRAL'S ROW PLAZA FOR RESIDENTS OF FORT GREENE AND CLINTON HILL.

AS FOR FOURTH AVENUE, I FEEL STRONGLY THAT A PERCENTAGE OF GROUND FLOOR SPACE ON ALL FUTURE BUILDINGS ALONG THE STREET SHOULD INCLUDE RETAIL, AN IDEA THAT I FIRST SHARED WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING EARLIER THIS YEAR.

THIS REQUIREMENT WOULD FOSTER LIVELY MIXED-USE NEIGHBORHOODS AND A POSITIVE STREETScape EXPERIENCE FOR PEDESTRIANS, AND PREVENT FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS FROM ADDING TO THE AVENUE'S UNATTRACTIVE CORRIDOR OF BLANK MASONRY WALLS.

THE RESULT WOULD BE A KEY COMPONENT IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF FOURTH AVENUE INTO A VIBRANT "BROOKLYN BOULEVARD" STRETCHING FROM ATLANTIC AVENUE TO THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, A GRAND THOROUGHFARE WORTHY OF THE UNIQUE NEIGHBORHOODS IT TRAVERSES.

THIS SUMMER, AT BOROUGH HALL, I HOSTED A LONG-TERM PLANNING MEETING REGARDING THE TRANSFORMATION OF FOURTH AVENUE, SOMETHING I FIRST PROPOSED IN MY 2009 STATE OF THE BOROUGH ADDRESS.

WE ANNOUNCED THE FORMATION OF A TASK FORCE, CHAIRED BY MY SENIOR ADVISOR, CARLO SCISSURA, TO OVERSEE THE DETAILS OF THE PROJECT — INCLUDING TREE PLANTING AND THE USE OF A NEWLY EXPANDED TIMES PLAZA (THE INTERSECTION OF FOURTH AVENUE, ATLANTIC AVENUE, AND FLATBUSH AVENUE).

WE HAVE ALSO ALLOCATED TWO MILLION DOLLARS IN CAPITAL FUNDING TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARD THE EFFORT TO RESTORE THE HISTORIC FAÇADE OF THE FOURTH AVENUE/NINTH STREET SUBWAY, RE-OPEN AN ENTRANCE TO THE STATION THAT HAS BEEN CLOSED FOR DECADES, AND OPEN RETAIL SPACE.

IN FACT, LAST NIGHT THE TASK FORCE CONVENED ITS FIRST TOWN HALL MEETING — AT WHICH MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC PRESENTED THEIR IDEAS REGARDING WHAT THE SUBWAY STATION SHOULD LOOK LIKE.

THESE SUGGESTIONS WILL BE VERY VALUABLE AS WE MOVE FORWARD.

THE CREATION OF THE SPECIAL ENHANCED COMMERCIAL DISTRICT WILL GO A LONG WAY TOWARD HELPING OUR TASK FORCE TAKE WHAT IS NOW JUST A PLAN ON PAPER, AND TRANSFORM IT INTO AN EXCITING NEW REALITY FOR THE FUTURE OF FOURTH AVENUE AND ALL OF BROOKLYN.

BY GUARANTEEING MORE RETAIL — AND REQUIRING DEVELOPERS TO INCORPORATE ENHANCED STREETSCAPES AND LANDSCAPING WITH EACH NEW PROJECT, WE ARE BRINGING TOGETHER ALL OF THE ELEMENTS NEEDED TO MAKE FOURTH AVENUE WHAT IT WAS ALWAYS INTENDED TO BE: A MAJESTIC, USER-FRIENDLY, ECONOMICALLY VIABLE AND SAFE THOROUGHFARE FOR ALL BROOKLYNITES, NEW YORKERS, AND VISITORS TO ENJOY.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO GATHERING CREATIVE IDEAS AND APPROACHES FROM ALL INTERESTED PARTIES.

I URGE THE CITY COUNCIL TO ADOPT THE PROPOSAL BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING AS AMENDED BY THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION, AS PART OF THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE OVERALL PLAN.

THERE WERE TWO CHANGES THAT I HAD RECOMMENDED BASED ON THE APPLICATION FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING.

FOR ONE OF MY RECOMMENDATIONS, I AM PLEASED THAT THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION AGREED WITH ME THAT WE SHOULD TAKE A PAGE FROM THE SPECIAL DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN DISTRICT, AND REQUIRE THAT THE MAXIMUM SILL HEIGHT OF TRANSPARENT “SHOW” WINDOWS BE TWO-AND-A-HALF FEET ABOVE THE CURB, RATHER THAN FOUR FEET, THAT WAS PART OF CITY PLANNING’S PROPOSAL.

I NOW SEEK FOR THE CITY COUNCIL TO EMBRACE THE COMMISSION’S SUPPORT FOR MY RECOMMENDATION THAT HAVING A SILLHEIGHT OF NOT MORE THAN TWO-AND-A-HALF FEET WOULD ALLOW BETTER VIEWS OF MERCHANDISE FOR PEDESTRIANS WALKING DOWN THE AVENUE, RESULTING IN A MORE ENGAGING EXPERIENCE.

OUR OTHER RECOMMENDATION WAS TO PROHIBIT TRADE SCHOOLS, BUSINESS SCHOOLS, AND MEDICAL AND DENTAL LABS FROM BEING LOCATED WITHIN THE MANDATORY COMMERCIAL USE PORTION OF THE GROUND FLOOR LEVEL.

WE BELIEVE THESE USES DON’T LEND THEMSELVES TO A LIVELY AND ENGAGING ENVIRONMENT — AND ARE NOT NECESSARILY EVEN PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY.

UNFORTUNATELY THE PLANNING COMMISSION REPORTED THAT SUCH A MODIFICATION IS NOT IN SCOPE, THOUGH THE COMMISSION DID NOT EMBRACE SUCH A RECOMMENDATION BECAUSE IT THOUGHT IT WOULD BE TOO RESTRICTIVE FOR THE PROPERTY OWNER.

I STRONGLY DISAGREE WITH THE COMMISSION AND THUS BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE CITY COUNCIL TO SEND A MESSAGE, EVEN IF A MERE TECHNICALITY PRECLUDES EXCLUSION OF THESE USES AT THIS TIME.

IN DOING SO, THE COUNCIL COULD SET THE GROUND RULES FOR EXPECTATIONS OF WHAT WE SHOULD OBTAIN FOR OUR CONSTITUENTS WHEN WE ARE ABLE TO SECURE FOLLOW-UP ZONING ANALYSIS.

SUGGESTIONS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- 1). BRINGING A RESIDENTIAL ZONING PROPOSAL FOR SECTIONS OF THE WEST SIDE OF FOURTH AVENUE BETWEEN DOUGLASS AND SIXTH STREETS, AND SOUTH OF THE PROSPECT EXPRESSWAY TO 24TH STREET;

- 2). BRINGING INCENTIVES FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING FEATURING, INCLUSIONARY ZONING, TO THE SECTION NORTH OF 15TH STREET;

AND 3). SUFFICIENT PARKING REQUIREMENTS WITHIN THE ENHANCED COMMERCIAL DISTRICT.

BY ENDORSING THESE RECOMMENDATIONS, I AM CONFIDENT THAT THE COUNCIL WILL FOSTER AN EVEN BETTER ENVIRONMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT.

ENACTING THE SPECIAL ENHANCED COMMERCIAL DISTRICT ALONG WITH THE OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CITY — INCLUDING IMPROVING LANDSCAPING, SUBWAY GRATES, AND ENHANCED PAVEMENT PLANS THAT WILL REQUIRE ADDITIONAL PLANTINGS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS — WILL TAKE GIANT STRIDES TOWARD ACHIEVING THIS COMPREHENSIVE VISION.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO THIS COMMITTEE HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY TO WEIGH IN ON THESE PROPOSALS.

AS THE COUNCIL BRINGS US ONE STEP CLOSER TOWARD ESTABLISHING BROOKLYN'S FIRST ENHANCED COMMERCIAL DISTRICT, WE ALSO LOOK FORWARD TO ADAPTING THIS MANDATORY RETAIL MODEL TO SEVERAL OTHER SHOPPING CORRIDORS IN BROOKLYN AND THROUGHOUT THE CITY —

SINCE WE ARE CERTAIN THAT CONSTITUENTS IN YOUR DISTRICTS WOULD BELIEVE IT WILL PRESERVE AND ENHANCE THE RETAIL STREETS YOU REPRESENT.

ONCE AGAIN, THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THIS UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE A STREET ONCE KNOWN PRIMARILY FOR GAS STATIONS, AUTO BODY AND REPAIR SHOPS, TIRE STORES, GAS STATIONS, AND EMPTY LOTS, AND TURN IT INTO THE KIND OF GRAND BOULEVARD WORTHY OF BROOKLYN.