Officials want music back at West Side club

BY STEVE MOSCO

Acoustics at an iconic tennis stadium in Forest Hills might carry sound once again.

Rumors began swirling last week that operators of the West Side Tennis Stadium were inspecting the structure's integrity for the possible return of concerts and other events to the venerable venue.

Now a neighborhood preservationist says those inspections did happen and a return of the stadium's glory days is on the horizon.

"The rumors that have been circulating are true," said Michael Perlman, chairman of the Rego-Forest Preservation Council. "The West Side Tennis Club is closely exploring the idea about opening up the stadium to accommodate a small quantity of classical and modern music concerts which respect the club and the surrounding community as well as tennis and ice skating."

Perlman said based on his conversations with tennis club President Roland Meier, a gradual restoration for the stadium is going to smoke," she said at her store, Hilltop Grocery, at the corner of Hillside Avenue and Parsons Boulevard.

Hussain said although she sympathizes with the proposal's purpose to reduce the number of teen smokers, she said she always cards young patrons and does not sell to people under 18. She said a more effective way to reduce smoking rates among teenagers would be if police officers would ask for identification from those smokers they suspect of being underage or if the city targeted people who sell tobacco to youngsters.

As for the proposal's effect on her store?

"Business will go down," she said.

She said smokers would go elsewhere to buy cigarettes if they could not see them displayed, perhaps thinking her store did not sell them.

The mayor's initiative would allow retailers to advertise that they sell cigarettes in their stores, however.

But another former Queens bodega clerk, Abdul Houue, said that may not matter. He said business would take a hit because many people in the city do not speak English and rely on visuals and pointing to request items.

Boro bodegas rip cigarette ban

Mayor's plan to hide butts behind counter draws black smoke from business

BY KAREN FRANTZ

Ann Hussain, a manager at a Jamaica Hills grocery store, said she thinks a proposal from Mayor Michael Bloomberg that would require most retailers to keep cigarettes and other tobacco products out of sight is a bad idea.

"Whoever is going to smoke," she said at her store, Hilltop Grocery, at the corner of Hillside Avenue and Parsons Boulevard.

Hussain said although she sympathizes with the proposal's purpose to reduce the number of teen smokers, she said she always cards young patrons and does not sell to people under 18. She said a more effective way to reduce smoking rates among teenagers would be if police officers would ask for identification from those smokers they suspect of being underage or if the city targeted people who sell tobacco to youngsters.

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Dancers Terry Chu (l.) and Brandon Liang from Universal Studios perform during a lunar new year celebration of the New York Hakka Association at Queens Crossing in Flushing. City Comptroller John Liu visited the event on a daylong campaign kickoff for his mayoral bid.

Queens homes saved by loans

BY RICH BOCKMANN

Like so many in southeast Queens, Juanita Olivia’s family used their home to make a better future for themselves.

By 1983, Olivia’s mother had paid off her mortgage on the house on a quiet street in Addisleigh Park.

“It’s a lovely home on a dead end,” Olivia said. “She owned it free and clear. She was an incredibly giving person and her sister had a son who wanted to attend the Valley Forge Military Academy, so my mother made arrangements with her sister where, if she took out a second mortgage on the home, her sister would pay the monthly payments.”

Olivia took responsibility for the mortgage when her mother died five years ago, and when her
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Van Bramer demands traffic study for Thomson Avenue

BY REBECCA HENELY

City Councilman Jimmy Van Bramer (D-Sunnyside) called for the city Department of Transportation to do a traffic safety study of Thomson Avenue last week in light of a car crash that killed a 16-year-old boy and injured four LaGuardia Community College students.

“We are here to offer condolences to the family and friends of Tenzin Drudak, but also to say, ‘Never again,’” Van Bramer said.

Tenzin, a Tibetan teenager who lived in Woodside and attended Applied Communications High School, was hit by a 2002 maroon Dodge Charger traveling eastbound on Thomson Avenue March 11. Tenzin later died at Elmhurst Hospital Center that day. The minivan also struck four LaGuardia Community College students, who were listed at the hospital in stable condition.

The Wall Street Journal said the driver was 36-year-old Mohamed Keita, of Charlotte, N.C. He received a summons for driving without insurance, police said.

The accident occurred across from 20-30 Thomson Ave. in Long Island City, a LaGuardia building that also is home to several schools, including Applied Communications. Community Board 2 Chairman Joseph Conley and several students of LaGuardia as well as the nearby high schools joined Van Bramer in demanding the DOT improve safety along Thomson Avenue from Skillman Avenue to Van Dam Street.

“Every day we cross that street, we feel threatened by the cars,” said Shah Amanat, president of the LaGuardia student government.

DOT spokesman Scott Gastel said in an e-mail the agency has been working with the college to improve safety as the college plans an expansion. He said one plan under consideration is installing sidewalk extensions at the intersection, which would increase the sidewalk at the end of the block and encourage traffic to go slower.

Gastel also said the fatal crash this month had been the first at that intersection in the last decade and in 2011 there was one crash that caused an injury.

But Van Bramer said with the intersection so close to the Ed Koch-Queensborough Bridge and the Queens-Midtown Tunnel, many motorists speed on Thomson Avenue while coming from Manhattan.

“It is impossible to spend any amount of time here and not conclude that it could be made safer,” he said.

The DOT announced Monday that pedestrian fatalities are up due to speeding. In Albany, the state legislature is considering a law to test speed cameras in the city. Van Bramer introduced a City Council resolution which passed the legislature to pass the bill and Police Commissioner Ray Kelly has written to Gov. Andrew Cuomo and other legislators advocating for it.

Van Bramer and the students requested the DOT do a comprehensive study of the area, install more of the barriers along Thomson Avenue, look at the timing of the lights along Thomson Avenue at Van Dam Street and put more traffic agents near LaGuardia.

“No one should have to fear being hit by a car on the way to school or work,” he said.

Students had left flowers and notes for Tenzin on the tree that the minivan hit.

Reach reporter Rebecca Henely by e-mail at henely@cnglocal.com or by phone at 718-260-4564.

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Willets plan starts legislative approval process

BY JOE ANUTA

The companies behind the Willets Point Redevelopment project hope to have a shovel in the ground by early next year following the city’s certification of their zoning application Monday.

The City Planning Commission greenlighted the public review process for the $3 billion mixed-use development, meaning the proposal will start wending its way through various levels of government scrutiny and, if ultimately approved, could lead to the start of construction by February next year, according to the developers.

“This is an important step because it begins the process of public review and is probably the single best hope for economic viability to fulfill the wishes of planning for Willets Point,” said Jesse Masyr, a land use attorney working for the Queens Development Group. “And it starts, most importantly, with the cleanup of 23 contaminated acres.”

The development group is comprised of real estate magnate Stephen Ross’ Related Cos. and the owners of the New York Mets’ development arm, Sterling Equities, a partnership which won a bidding process with the city last year.

The application will first head to Community Board 7, probably next month, then to the borough president’s desk before landing back at the City Planning Commission — all for an advisory opinion.

Then the developers project the application will be brought before the City Council in the fall, which will have the deciding say on whether to grant several zoning changes to the Willets Point Special District to allow the project to break ground.

The application already went through the public review process before it was approved by the City Council in 2008, but because several changes were made by the development partners in their winning proposal, including the addition of a 1.4 million-square-foot mall proposed for the Citi Field parking lot, which is technically parkland, the modified plan must go through the process again.

Michael Rikon is an environmental lawyer for Willets Point United, a group opposed to the project and the use of eminent domain — a process whereby the city takes land by legal edict for the public good.

Rikon, who disagrees with the city and a Supreme Court ruling that economic development projects like the Willets Point Redevelopment constitute a public good, said the review process will shape up to be contentious.

“Today’s announcement means we have another battle on our hands,” he said.

That fight is apparent in a document called an environmental impact statement posted online by the city Economic Development Corp., which shows 130 comments, mostly negative criticisms, that were raised at a public hearing and subsequent public comment period in the fall. The comments deal with issues including developing the project on parkland and traffic concerns, and each is paired with a response from the EDC, though the corporation only answered questions that dealt specifically with how the project would affect the environment, and declined to address many other gripes.

“This marks a critical step towards beginning the long-needed cleanup of toxic land in Willets Point that for years has damaged the waterfront and been a blight on the community,” EDC said in a statement. “Investing in infrastructure and laying the groundwork for private investment have been a signature of Mayor Bloomberg’s economic development strategy — bringing jobs and investment to all five boroughs.”

The development partnership rolled out a new website Monday, newwilletspointqueens.com, which associates the environmental cleanup and jobs with the project.

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Memories of genocide dim

Flushing centenarians struggle to recall Armenian mass murder

BY JOE ANUTA

Within the walls of the New York Armenian Home for the Aged in Flushing, the last accounts of a nearly century-old genocide are fading away.

The home, near the corner of 45th Avenue and Colden Street, is the only assisted-living facility on the East Coast that exclusively houses those from the Eurasian country.

Each year, residents sit down and tell their personal accounts of living through the Armenian Genocide, which occurred between 1915 and 1923 under the waning Ottoman Empire. Anywhere from 600,000 to 2 million Armenian people were murdered, depending on various accounts, and some of those who lived through the bloody period following World War I found themselves scattered in diasporas across the world, including in New York.

At its peak, the quaint Flushing building housed 71 Armenians, 21 of whom were genocide survivors. Now there are 34 residents and only four are survivors.

“It’s about culture, tradition and trying to keep those who suffered through the genocide together,” said Aggie Ellian, executive director of the house.

But that is proving harder to do as the residents age.

Perouze Kalousdian was born in 1909 and recently celebrated her 103rd birthday. On Tuesday, she was wheeled into the front room of the Home for the Aged.

Although Kalousdian is still spry and articulate, she was only 6 when the genocide began. By last Tuesday she had lived 37,682 days, and understandably had some trouble sifting through all those memories.

She still recalls members of the Young Turks regime coming to her village, tying up the men and taking them away. Her mother cried, but would not say what was happening, Kalousdian said.

“After that, I don’t know what happened to us,” she said. “Time passed, and I forgot.”

Recollections lost in the fog might actually provide some reprieve for Kalousdian, who said she hates thinking about the war.

But Ellian and others active in the Armenian community know that preserving their stories is important.

“These are the living survivors. Once they go, it will be the ‘alleged’ genocide,” she said.

The house, and the Armenian community in general, now faces the loss of living history.

FAA reps take heat at plane noise meet

BY PHIL CORSO

Avella said he already met twice with FAA officials alongside state Assemblyman Ed Braunstein (D-Bayside) at its headquarters in Jamaica, and last Thursday’s town hall mostly reiterated information he already had heard. But what was important, elected officials said, was getting the agency on the record with the residents of northeast Queens.

“What they were showing us was not new,” Braunstein said. “I think what we did do was put pressure on the FAA to find out why they didn’t make efforts to communicate with the community and lay the groundwork for legal action.”

An entire class of CUNY law students, under the guidance of professor Rebecca Bratspies, attended the meeting because it has undertaken the FAA fight as its spring project.

When addressing FAA reps, Bratspies raised the same suspicion that Avella, Braunstein and several others had, suggesting the noise stemmed from the airline industry’s influence on increasing traffic and profits. FAA reps, including Eastern Regional Administrator Carmine Gallo, consistently denied that claim and said the ultimate goal was to reduce delays and fuel costs.
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aunt died she found herself paying $1,200 a month on the remainder of the mortgage.

“Unfortunately, I got laid off in February 2012, almost at the end of paying off the mortgage,” she said.

Olivia could not keep her head above water with her part-time job alone, but after being awarded a $25,000 loan from a city program she was left with just $689 to pay off the mortgage.

“I was so shocked. It was an incredible journey this past year,” she said. “To be so concerned about losing your family’s home when you’re so close to paying it off and to find this incredible support system out there, that’s an incredible blessing.”

At a news conference last Friday, the group called on the city Landmarks Preservation Commission to move swiftly to designate the Douglaston Historic District Extension, which includes several properties and the farmhouse, as a historic landmark.

Douglaston

Continued from Page 1

At a news conference last Friday, the group called on the city Landmarks Preservation Commission to move swiftly to designate the Douglaston Historic District Extension, which includes several properties and the farmhouse, as a historic landmark.

“Douglaston is one of those unique neighborhoods that has existed for a long, long time and should be preserved,” state Sen. Tony Avella (D-Bayside) said at the conference, held in front of the house, at 38-60 Douglaston Pkwy.

Foreclosure

Continued from Page 1

they want to purchase.

“If people not see, how are people going to buy?” he said.

His friend, Mohammed Ali, a clerk at Evergreen Deli and Grocery, at 159-16 Hillside Ave., agreed.

“Give me this, give me that,” he said is the way many people ask to buy things at his store.

City Councilman Dan Halloran (R-Whitestone) was also opposed to the mayor’s proposal due to what his spokesman said was an infringement of free speech and a potential blow to small business.

“[It’s] another case of the nanny-state obsession with controlling people’s lives,” the spokesman, Kevin Ryan, said.

But City Councilman James Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows) is in favor of the proposal, speaking to its benefits alongside the mayor at a news conference at Queens Hospital Center Monday.
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