



August 9, 2017 / Calendar No. 27

N 170440 BDX

IN THE MATTER OF an application submitted by the Department of Small Business Services on behalf of the Morris Park BID Steering Committee pursuant to Section 25-405(a) of Chapter 4 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, as amended, concerning the establishment of the Morris Park Business Improvement District, Borough of the Bronx, Community District 11.

On May 30, 2017, on behalf of the Morris Park BID Steering Committee, the Department of Small Business Services submitted a district plan for the Morris Park Business Improvement District (BID), Borough of The Bronx, Community District 11.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Small Business Services (SBS), on behalf of the Morris Park BID Steering Committee, submitted an application to establish the Morris Park BID. The BID area would be located along Morris Park Avenue in the Morris Park neighborhood of the Bronx.

The BID is being established to serve all constituents in the district. Its organizers plan to work with stakeholders to focus on the needs and concerns of the diverse group of residents and businesses in the district.

Morris Park, located in the central Bronx, occupies land that once included a horse racing course, an airfield and a racecar track. The neighborhood was named after John A. Morris, the founder of the Morris Park Racecourse. The proposed district comprises 188 properties along both sides of Morris Park Avenue, bounded by Unionport Road to the west and Williamsbridge Road to the east, for a length of 1.06 miles. The proposed BID area is a low-density, pedestrian-friendly commercial corridor providing neighborhood-scale retail, services and entertainment.

Morris Park Avenue is surrounded by R4 and R5 low-density residential neighborhoods with C1 and C2 commercial overlays. The commercial overlays permit Morris Park Avenue to be lined with restaurants, boutiques and other specialized retail; health, legal, real estate and financial institutions; and beauty, hair and nail salons. There are also several houses of worship, some cleaners/laundromats, government offices and a public library. Most of the commercial space in the area is on the ground floor, with some buildings containing office and community facilities on the second floor. Some buildings on the Avenue are mixed buildings with commercial uses on the bottom and residential units above. There are a few vacant lots or stores within the proposed BID area. Of the area's 188 properties, 152 are partially or wholly commercial properties. The vacancy rate for commercial tenancy is low.

The proposal to establish a BID along Morris Park Avenue began in January 2013 with the creation of the Morris Park Alliance. Initial funding for organization efforts were provided by a local City Councilmember. Later, a steering committee of stakeholders, including 11 property owners, 10 commercial tenants and two residential tenants was established by the Westchester Square Business Improvement District (WSBID). This group, at the request of the Councilmember, finalized the application and concluded outreach efforts for the creation of the district. These outreach efforts included 24 area mailings and email blasts; 20 newsletters; 2000 one-on-one meetings, phone calls or emails with business owners, residents and commercial tenants; and two public meetings.

The BID sponsor sent a survey soliciting support for the formation of the BID to property owners, businesses, and residents in the area. About 54 percent of the property owners responded to the survey. Of the total assessed value property owners who responded, 52 percent expressed support for the formation of the BID. Of the assessed value commercial property owners who responded, 46 percent expressed support for the formation of the BID. Lastly, 47 percent of commercial tenants who responded to the survey expressed support for the formation of the BID. None of the surveyed commercial tenants opposed the BID formation.

The BID projects a first-year budget of \$390,000. The assessed contribution is based on linear lot front footage. According to the BID sponsor, it is projected that in the first year of BID operation commercial and mixed-use lots would be assessed at an approximate rate of \$42.50 per front foot per year, plus an additional \$300 fee if the parcel occupies a corner. Residential lots would be assessed a flat fee of \$1.00 per lot. Vacant parcels zoned for commercial or mixed-use would be assessed fee of \$300 per lot. However, if the lot is on a corner, then an additional fee of \$300 would be assessed, for a total fee of \$600 per corner lot. Government- and not-for-profit-owned property devoted solely to public or not-for-profit use would be exempt from an assessment.

According to the Steering Committee, the estimated highest assessment amount would be about \$14,882.67; the estimated minimum about \$499.98; and the average estimated assessment would be about \$2,565.63.

In its first year of operation, the BID proposes to provide services such as:

- maintenance and sanitation services supplementary to municipal sanitation services (38 percent of budget); including graffiti removal, street and sidewalk cleaning and emptying of pedestrian trash receptacles;
- marketing and special events services (28 percent of budget) including joint advertising, web site design and promotion, special events, festivals, holiday lighting and seasonal decorations, and publications;

- beautification (seven percent of budget) including landscaping, seasonal plant purchasing, installation and maintenance, and maintenance of tree pits, planters and hanging baskets;
- public safety (three percent of budget) including unarmed patrol of the BID area, closed circuit surveillance, creation or support of a Neighborhood Watch group, or safety education programs; and
- administration and advocacy (24 percent of budget) comprising a salaried staff, including an Executive Director, a community liaison, clerical and bookkeeping support, and other special staff or consultants.

In the future, the BID could propose improvements such as plaques identifying the district, trash receptacles, benches, and wayfinding signage.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The district plan was reviewed pursuant to the New York State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) and the SEQRA regulations set forth in Volume 6 of the New York State Code of Rules and Regulations, Section 617.00 et seq., and the New York City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) Rules of Procedure of 1991 and Executive Order No. 91 of 1977. The designated CEQR number is 17SBS002X. The lead agency is the Department of Small Business Services.

After a study of the potential environmental impact of the proposed action, a Negative Declaration was issued on March 21, 2017.

PUBLIC REVIEW

On May 30, 2017, SBS submitted a district plan for Morris Park BID to the Department of City Planning. The plan was then transmitted for review to the Office of the Mayor, Office of the Bronx Borough President, the City Council Speaker, the City Council Members for Council Districts 13 and 15, and Bronx Community Board 11.

Community Board Public Hearing

Bronx Community Board 11 did not hold a public hearing or submit a recommendation for this application.

City Planning Commission Public Hearing

On June 21, 2017 (Calendar No. 5), the Commission scheduled July 12, 2017 for a public hearing on the BID district plan. On July 12, 2017 (Calendar No. 22), the hearing was duly held.

There were four speakers in favor of the proposal and none in opposition. Those who testified included the Deputy Commissioner for Neighborhood Development at SBS, the chair of the BID Steering Committee, the staff consultant from the WSBID who helped organize the proposed BID, and a resident member of the Steering Committee.

The Deputy Commissioner for Neighborhood Development at SBS said that the agency had provided technical support for the BID organizing effort. He stated that the Steering Committee met their standards for outreach efforts and that the level of support garnered for the BID was in line with other recently approved BIDs.

The WSBID consultant explained how the proposed BID would be organized and addressed the Steering Committee's efforts to gain the support of property owners within the proposed BID's boundaries. He described the formation of the Steering Committee from its inception to the present. He stated that the Committee conducted a survey of needs, which demonstrated a clear need for the formation of the BID. He further stated that the BID would provide funds for at least one full-time staff person, which he said was key for a successful operation. He described the budget and formulation of the assessment fees to fund the BID and the potential to seek additional grants to supplement the budget and services. Finally, he discussed the details of the outreach effort.

The Chair of the BID Steering Committee provided a historical perspective of the neighborhood and spoke of the need for the formation of the BID. He stated that the BID was necessary to ensure the commercial viability of the businesses that remain on Morris Park Avenue in the face of increased competition from online retail and growth of big box stores. He said that he expected that the proposed BID would increase business activity on Morris Park Avenue.

A Morris Park resident and Steering Committee member discussed the adequacy of the budget and potential burden of the assessment fees on the relatively small businesses within the district. He described how the assessment charges are divided per lot and per business. He stated that there are often two businesses per lot, with the fee divided between them, and that the assessment could be considered a small amount to pay to invest in their business and business community.

There were no other speakers and the hearing was closed.

CONSIDERATION

The Commission believes that the proposal to establish the Morris Park Business Improvement

District (N 170440 BDX) is appropriate.

The Morris Park BID area is a unique Bronx and New York City neighborhood with historical character that would benefit from additional economic development initiatives. According to the BID plan, the area proposed for the Morris Park BID has about 152 commercial and mixed-use properties. There are eight government- and not-for-profit owned properties, about 25 residential properties and three vacant lots. The neighborhood has few commercial vacancies. Once established, the BID would promote beautification, establish a better neighborhood brand, and advance a long-term plan for the area.

The businesses in the BID area provide important services that support the quality of life in the Morris Park neighborhood, as well as in the entire Borough. Morris Park businesses are an important source of jobs and entrepreneurship. The commercial activity of the area enhances the Bronx and New York City as a place to live, work and run a business. The proposed BID will be an advocate for Morris Park, which may result in more City resources and public attention for this pedestrian-oriented commercial shopping and service area.

The Commission has carefully reviewed the documents that the BID sponsor submitted regarding notification of stakeholders on the proposed BID and believes that these outreach efforts were satisfactory. The Commission believes that the BID sponsors made a reasonable outreach effort and contacted as many property owners, residents and businesses as reasonably possible. The Commission is satisfied that the proposed budget is adequate to fund the necessary staff.

BIDs are important to the City because they promote healthy economic development for the communities they serve and help retain and attract businesses to the district. The proposed Morris Park BID will help manage this existing business area and provide guidance for growth in the future.

RESOLUTION

The Commission supports the proposed BID plan and has adopted the following resolution:

RESOLVED, that the City Planning Commission certifies its unqualified approval of the district plan for the Morris Park Business Improvement District.

The above resolution duly adopted by the City Planning Commission on August 9, 2017 (Calendar No. 27) is filed with the City Council and the City Clerk pursuant to Section 25-405 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York.

MARISA LAGO, *Chair*

RAYANN BESSER, IRWIN G. CANTOR, P.E., ALFRED C. CERULLO, III,

MICHELLE R. DE LA UZ, JOSEPH I. DOUEK, RICHARD W. EADDY,

CHERYL COHEN EFFORN, HOPE KNIGHT, ANNA HAYES LEVIN,

ORLANDO MARIN, LARISA ORTIZ, *Commissioners*