

Briarwood Action Network (BAN) Meeting

Meeting Date: August 14, 2013
Scheduled Start: 7:00 p.m.
Scheduled End: 9:00 p.m
Location:
Samaritan Village
138-02 Queens Blvd
2nd Floor
Briarwood, NY 11435

Meeting Type:
General Community Meeting

BAN Board Members Present: Crystal Courts, Jose Gonzalez, Janet Harmeyer, Eugene Leon, Larry Sherman, Sylvia Sherman, Aida Vernon, Zina Zimmerman
Invited Guests Present: Philip Trapani, Project Engineer and Assistant Vice President, Greenman-Pedersen
Invited Guests Absent: Kew Gardens Interchange Project Community Liaison Henry Chiang

Approximately (50) fifty members of the community were present in the audience

Minutes

Agenda item: Welcome Presenter: Aida Vernon

Discussion:

Aida Vernon welcomed guests and introduced the speaker. The meeting protocols were also reviewed.

Agenda item: Kew Gardens Interchange Infrastructure and Improvement Project Presenter: Philip Trapani

Discussion:

Philip Trapani showed slides and discussed various aspects of the Project.

PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Project limits:

The contract limits for the current work is the Van Wyck Expressway from 82nd Ave to Hillside Ave and Queens Blvd from the area of the exit ramp from the Van Wyck Expressway to Main Street. This is the area under the Project's responsibility.

Project goals:

Overall purpose of the project is to widen the Van Wyck Expressway

- o Picture slides of the Van Wyck Expressway in its current and planned post-project states were shown.

Five area bridges will be replaced

One area bridge will be reconstructed

The pedestrian tunnel will be rebuilt

- o A slide with an aerial shot of Queens Blvd Bridge over the Van Wyck was shown. The bridge was described as very large and one of the bridges currently being worked on. This bridge is being replaced.
- o A slide with an aerial shot of Main Street Bridge, Queens Blvd over Main Street, was shown. This bridge is being replaced
- o A slide of Van Wyck Bridge over Southbound Main Street was shown. That bridge was widened and is pretty much done.

Queens Blvd will largely be as it was with three lanes of traffic in either direction. The changes will be:

- o Park-like pedestrian plazas will be created in the area along Queens Boulevard and the Van Wyck Expressway
- o There will be a turning lane for traffic going from Queens Blvd to the Van Wyck Expressway southbound.

A pedestrian elevator will be added to the main Briarwood Van Wyck subway entrance

- o Picture slides of what the planned completed main subway entrance and elevator will look like were shown.

Timeframe and Status:

The Project started in July 2010. Right now, the Project is a little more than half way complete and is scheduled to be completed in early 2016.

Hoover Avenue portion is 50% done. The north side has been rebuilt and the south side is now being worked on.

Pedestrian bridge. – Expected to be done in the summer of 2015

Hoover Avenue – Should be done next spring or early summer

Queens Blvd. – Will be working on Queens Blvd, in this stage, until next winter.

Main subway entrance – Should be open by December of this year.

ADDRESS OF COMMUNITY CONCERNS:

Informational variable message (VMS) signs were put up to notify drivers of changes in the traffic pattern.

Countdown clock was added at Queens Blvd crossing

Shortened proposed length of traffic barriers to retain access to local stores

Slowed down the traffic lights across Queens Blvd at Main St to give adequate pedestrian crossing time

Added curb cutouts for handicapped access

Added extra street lighting in area of construction. City standard is 120 ft apart from street light to street light. The street lights in the construction area are between 40 ft to 80 ft apart from street light to street light.

BAN member Marshall Sidman described a video he had created which highlighted the problem of the pedestrian crosswalk that goes across the southbound Van Wyck Expressway service road at the eastbound side of Queens Blvd. This video was not shown at the meeting. Marshall described a blind spot at that location and how dangerous it was for pedestrians crossing there. Marshall described the need for a pedestrian signal at that location.

Response by Philip Trapani: Mr. Trapani stated that the New York City Department of Transportation makes the decision of whether or not to have a pedestrian signal at that location. Mr. Trapani said that he agreed that a pedestrian signal was needed and that he had made that point to the NYC DOT. The NYC DOT disagreed and said that a pedestrian signal was not needed at that location.

Agenda item: Audience Question & Answer

Audience Question: The walkway going towards the subway is too narrow, has poor drainage and becomes flooded when it rains. There is excessive garbage at and around the subway entrance. How are these issues being addressed? Is there a plan for replanting and maintaining trees in the project area?

Response by Philip Trapani: The width of the walkway is appropriate as determined by the city and as wide as space permits. There are some unavoidable sacrifices that have to be made during construction. There should be fewer people using that entrance once the main subway entrance reopens by the end of this year.

He wasn't aware of a water/drainage issue and will have to look into it. There was a drain that clogged and the contractor unclogged it. He will have them make a bigger drain.

Garbage is cleared up every two to three weeks. **Members of the audience noted that this was not sufficient and that the excessive trash was very detrimental to the neighborhood.** Mr. Trapani stated that he will request that the area be cleaned more often.

The Parks Department is responsible for the care and maintenance of the trees once they are planted.

Audience Question: Project Community Liaison Henry Chiang was contacted about a seven or eight inch hole that needed to be repaired. A superintendant at ECCO (Project contractors) stated that the repairs were made, but the hole is still there.

Response by Philip Trapani: He will have to confirm that the issue is inside the project field and is their responsibility.

Audience Question: Is the construction in the area of the park at Hoover Ave and Queens Blvd part of the scope of the project? Will that park be restored to its previous condition with all the amount of land it had before?

Response by Philip Trapani: It will be restored to the way it was. Official District Attorney and police cars that have started parking there are not under the control of the Project engineers or supervisors.

Audience Question: There has been no work on the Hoover Ave Bridge in the last month or so. Why has worked stopped?

Response by Philip Trapani: The work delay is due to one Verizon conduit that needs to be pulled. It is leased to a private company and the Project is waiting for that conduit to be moved. It will not delay the whole project. Progress should resume by next week.

Audience Question: Why is the sidewalk so narrow at the Hoover Ave Bridge?

Response by Philip Trapani: That width is temporary during the construction. The sidewalk will be double its current width once the other part is opened and area construction is completed.

Audience Question: How long will current night construction work continue and are there plans for future night construction work projects?

Response by Philip Trapani: Current night construction work will probably continue for another month and a half to two months.

Audience Question: Was an environmental impact study done on the effects of this night work on neighborhood residents?

Response by Philip Trapani: An impact study was done, but was not available at the meeting.

Audience Question: Why, when the repair work was done on the sidewalk on the north side of Queens Blvd from Main St to 84th Rd, was the sidewalk not flat; but repaired leaving a dangerous rise in the sidewalk. People have tripped on that rise.

Response by Philip Trapani: That work was not a part of the Project and not done by Project workers. That was pipe being replaced by National Grid.

Audience Question: Whenever traffic changes occur, a lot of erratic and dangerous driving is done due to the confusion.

Response by Philip Trapani: Signs are put up to try to alleviate the confusion. They try to do whatever they can to notify drivers of the changes.

Audience Question: Is it possible to have the tactile markers on the road to alert driver's of new lane changes?

Response by Philip Trapani: All of the roadwork is done according to the MUTCD (Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices). Those tactile strips are not usually used in construction areas, but he will look into the feasibility of using them.

BAN President Aida Vernon noted that an ongoing issue raised to BAN by Briarwood residents was that there needed to be better communication to the community in general about the Project. Aida further noted that it would be ideal if Briarwood residents were notified of major traffic changes well in advance.

Audience Question: When is the Project scheduled to be completed?

Response by Philip Trapani: Mr. Trapani reiterated that the Project is scheduled to be completed in early 2016.

Audience Question: Why does the project take so long? *The Hoover Dam took five years to build, why will this project take at least six?*

Response by Philip Trapani: A large part of the reason for the Project’s length is the fact that multiple agencies are involved. Mr. Trapani explained that this project calls for the coordination of input and services from the Project engineers and construction workers, NYC Department of Transportation, NYS Department of Transportation, The Parks Department, Con Edison, Verizon, MTA, and the NYPD.

BAN President Aida Vernon thanked Philip Trapani for coming. Aida asked BAN members in good standing to remain briefly for the reading of a proposed amendment to the BAN Constitution & Bylaws. Aida advised that anyone who wished to stay was welcome and thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Agenda item: Proposed Amendment to BAN Constitution & Bylaws Presenter: Aida Vernon

Discussion:

In accordance with Article XVI of the Briarwood Action Network’s Constitution and Bylaws, the following amendment was proposed:

Proposed Amendment to BAN Constitution and Bylaws. This Amendment adds a new category of membership and is to be designated as an addition to section 1.1 of Article III.

“Supporting membership” is available to individuals, businesses, schools, houses of worship, or other institutions that live or operate outside of Briarwood. Supporting members are nonvoting members of the Organization.”

Aida Vernon described the reason for the proposed amendment and the proposed amendment was read aloud by board secretary Crystal Courts. This satisfies Sections 1, 2, and 2.1 of the Article XVI amendment process.

Twenty-four residents who were BAN members as of August 14, 2013 were present at the meeting and received a printed copy of the proposed amendment.

Agenda item: August 17 tour Rufus King Manor Museum and Park Presenter: Sylvia Sherman

Discussion:

Sylvia Sherman described BAN's upcoming summer outing to Rufus King Manor Museum and Park in Jamaica on August 17 and invited everyone to attend.

Agenda item: Closing Remarks Presenter: Aida Vernon

Aida Vernon, again, thanked everyone for coming.

Meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:30
