

Mixed Use

By Patrick Hedlund

Chrystie ‘gold standard’?

A city plan to add a pair of bike lanes along Chrystie St. on the Lower East Side to improve access to and from the Manhattan Bridge got the thumbs up from Community Board 3 at Tuesday night’s full board meeting.

The city Department of Transportation proposal, part of a three-year initiative to install 200 miles of new bike lanes throughout the city, seeks to add buffered lanes to either side of Chrystie St. by eliminating a lane of parking, or about 50 spaces, on the street’s east side between Canal and E. Houston Sts.

The plan also includes the addition of bike lanes along E. Broadway roughly between the Manhattan Bridge and Grand St., and along Canal St. between Chrystie St. and E. Broadway. D.O.T.’s Manhattan Bridge Bicycle Access Network overall initiative also features pedestrian “refuge islands” along Chrystie St. and left-turn bays to improve traffic flow.

Board 3’s Transportation, Environment and Public Safety Committee voted unanimously on May 14 to support the plan, insisting that the lanes include parking-protected partitions similar to the Ninth Ave. bike lane in Chelsea, rather than just a painted divider.

The loss of 50 spaces “is a very small price to pay for the number of safety improvements it will bring in their place,” according to a statement from bike advocacy group Transportation Alternatives.

T.A. Bicycle Campaign Coordinator Caroline Samponaro told Mixed Use that compared to 2005, there’s been a 90.3 increase in daily trips over the Manhattan Bridge.

“This is something they want in their neighborhood,” she said of the community’s demand not only for painted lanes, but for protected lanes like the “Ninth Avenue gold standard,” as she put it.

Empty office space

The vacancy rate for Class A office space in Manhattan jumped to 6.3 percent in April from 5.7 percent in March, the biggest monthly climb since April-May 2002, according to a report from brokerage Colliers ABR.

Downtown showed the largest increase in vacancy, settling at 5.9 percent in April after posting a 4.4 percent rate in March, the report stated.

This marks Manhattan’s highest Class A vacancy rate since a 6.5 percent figure in late 2006, and vacancy in all office classes (A, B, C) rose by half a percentage point across the borough month over month.

Vacancy rates for Class B and C office space also increased Downtown, with the total office rate for April at 8.1 percent after coming in at 7 percent in March.

The overall average asking rent for top-class office space dipped slightly, to \$86.53 per square foot in April from \$87.38 in March. In Downtown, however, the average Class A rent went up, to \$58.68 per square foot in April from \$58 in March.

‘Endangered’ L.E.S.

The Lower East Side received a dubious distinction last week when it was named to this year’s list of “America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places” by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The list, which includes historic properties ranging in size from a Kansas elementary school to California’s entire state park system, specifically notes the threat development poses to the L.E.S.’s surviving historic structures. These include “houses

of worship, historic theaters, schools and the tenement, a unique architectural type which, by the sheer numbers who lived in such a building, had an impact on more Americans than any other form of urban housing.”

Local preservationists have long criticized the rapid development of the neighborhood, the rezoning of which, including 111 blocks of the L.E.S. and East Village, is now formally underway in the ULURP public-review phase. The Washington, D.C.-based National Trust for Historic Preservation agreed, stating that “[a]s this building trend shows no sign of abating, it threatens to erode the fabric of the community and wipe away the collective memory of generations of immigrant families.

“Slapdash and haphazard renovations have led to the destruction of architectural detail,” the report continued, “while modern additions to historic buildings sharply contrast with the neighborhood’s scale and character.”

Mitchell Moss, professor of urban policy and planning at N.Y.U.’s Wagner School of Public Service, countered the National Trust’s call for an all-encompassing historic district in an opinion piece in last week’s New York Post. Moss claimed that an overarching historic designation would only limit new housing and development on the L.E.S. that “the city so desperately needs.”

“If New York City is to accommodate the population growth projected over the next quarter century, neighborhood change is inevitable,” Moss wrote. “This is not a city that stands still. It is always evolving.”

Breaking down Downtown

Village residents have the city’s oldest housing stock, highest median monthly rents and one of its lowest vacant land rates, according to the State of New York City’s Housing and Neighborhoods 2007, a recent report released by N.Y.U.’s Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy.

In the study covering almost 50 individual categories, the Village — which also was variously lumped in with parts of Soho and the Financial District in the report — ranked second highest in the city for median household income, as well as third lowest for number of residents under age 18 living in area households. Additionally, the Village had the fourth-highest rates of felony crimes, residents who live alone and residents living in group quarters (including dormitories and group/senior homes). The neighborhood ranked the fifth lowest for total travel time to work.

The Lower East Side/Chinatown area ranked second in the city for both population density and racial diversity, as well as fifth highest for its poverty rate for residents 65 and older. The neighborhoods came in fifth lowest for having households with kids under age 18.

The Stuyvesant Town/Turtle Bay study area included high rankings for total housing units (No. 3 overall), residents who live alone (No. 2), median monthly rent (No. 3), population density (No. 4) and median household income (No. 4). It ranked second-to-last for kids under age 18 and work travel time, as well as fourth lowest for racial diversity.

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