LR Item 3 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

INTRODUCTION

Revised October 23, 2020

MEDREP Associates, LLC (the "Applicant"), the owner of the Proposed Development Site (Block 595, Lots 19, 26, and 27) in the Astoria neighborhood of Queens Community District 1, requests approval of several actions (the "Proposed Actions") from the New York City Planning Commission (the "CPC"), including:

1) Zoning map amendment from an existing C4-4A district to a C4-4D zoning district on the Project Area (Block 595, Lots 19, 26, 27, portion of Lot 10);
2) A zoning text amendment to Appendix F to establish the Project Area as a Mandatory Inclusionary Housing ("MIH") Area.

The Proposed Actions would facilitate the development of a new mixed-use 11-story building containing approximately 111,822 zsf (7.19 FAR), including approximately 101,392 zsf of residential floor area (approximately 104 dwelling units), 8,400 zsf of ground floor retail, a 99-seat black box theater including 2,031 zsf of community facility to be occupied by the Astoria Performing Arts Center (APAC), and 30 attended parking spaces (the "Proposed Development"). Pursuant to the requirements of the MIH program, the Proposed Development would provide either 26 permanently affordable units pursuant to Option 1 or 31 permanently affordable units pursuant to Option 2.

BACKGROUND

In 2010, an approximately 238-block area of Astoria, including the Project Area, was rezoned as part of the Astoria Rezoning (C100199ZMQ), which was intended to preserve the existing scale and character of the area while also allowing a modest increase in residential and commercial density in limited locations. The Astoria Rezoning rezoned the Project Area from an R6 to a C4-4A district in an Inclusionary Housing area due to its location along a wide street and close proximity to public transportation, including the elevated N/W subway lines at 30th Avenue and 31st Street.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SURROUNDING AREA

Land Uses

The area within a 600-foot radius of the Project Area ("the Surrounding Area") is characterized by mostly residential, commercial, and mixed-use residential and commercial buildings. Land uses within the Surrounding Area include a mix of multi-family, and single-family housing buildings, public facilities and institutions, commercial and office buildings, and open space. Directly north of the Project Area, some of these land uses include mixed-residential and commercial buildings, public facilities and institutions, vacant land, one and two family residential buildings, and multi-family residential buildings. The prevailing built form varies with a range of low-rise buildings ranging from two to three stories in height and mid-rise buildings ranging from six to seven stories in height. To the east of the Project Area along 31st Street and Newtown Avenue are several commercial and mixed use buildings with ground-floor retail that serve local needs and include uses such as restaurants, apparel stores, banks, and laundromats. Buildings to the east range in height from one- and two-story buildings along 31st Street to a high-rise 10-story building with a height of 120 feet on Newtown Avenue (Block 619, Lot 14) one block from the Project Area. This building was constructed in 2011 and includes commercial and office uses. The area to the west of the Project Area across 30th Street is predominantly residential and includes a five-story multifamily building, and several three and four-story residential buildings. Also to the west of the Project Area across 30th Street is the Park at Athens Square. This .93-acre park was restored in 1990 as a locus for neighborhood gatherings. It includes an amphitheater where various performances are held. The Surrounding Area is well-served by public transportation, including the 30th Avenue N/W subway station on the same block as the Project Area at the intersection of 30th Avenue and 31st Street, as well as the Q18 and Q102 bus routes along 30th Avenue, one block south of the Project Area.

Other notable uses in the Surrounding Area include public facilities, such as P.S. 17 (Henry David Thoreau) on 29th Street between 30th Avenue and Newtown Avenue, P.S. 234 located on 29th Street between 30th Drive and 30th Avenue, and I.S. 235 (Academy for New Americans) located on 29th Street between 30th Drive and 30th Avenue.

Zoning

The Surrounding Area is mapped with residential and commercial zoning districts of varying density including R6B, R6A, C4-2A, C4-3 and C4-4A. R6B districts are mapped along narrower side streets and midblock areas including 29th Street, 30th Street and 28th Road as a transition away from the higher density commercial corridors within the area. R6A districts are mapped to the west of the Project Area along wider streets including Newtown and 30th Avenues. South of the Project Area along 30th Avenue, the area is mapped with a C4-2A zoning district. North of the Project Area along 31st Street, the area is mapped C4-3. The Project Area is currently zoned C4-4A and is located within the Astoria voluntary Inclusionary Housing designated area.

R6A and R6B

R6A and R6B are medium-density contextual residential districts. Both districts generally allow residential (Use Group 1 and 2) and community facility (Use Group 3 and 4) uses. No commercial or industrial/manufacturing uses are permitted. In R6A and R6B districts within inclusionary housing designated areas, the maximum permitted FAR is 3.6 and 2.2 for residential uses and 3.0 and 2.0 FAR for community facility uses, respectively. Any new buildings must be constructed pursuant to Quality Housing regulations. In R6A and R6B districts, Quality Housing buildings typically range in height from seven to eight stories and four to five stories, respectively. Within inclusionary housing designated areas, Quality Housing regulations mandate maximum base heights of 65 feet and 45 feet and maximum building heights of 85 feet and 55 feet in R6A and R6B districts, respectively. In both districts, accessory parking is required for 50% of dwelling units and for 25% of income-restricted housing units and may be waived if it's located in the Transit Zone.

C4-2A, C4-4A, and C4-3

C4 districts are general commercial districts mapped in regional centers located outside of central business districts where uses serve a larger region than neighborhood shopping areas. All C4 districts generally allow residential (Use Group 1 and 2), community facility (Use Group 3 and 4), and commercial (Use Group 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 12) uses. No manufacturing uses are permitted. C4-2A (R6A equivalent) and C4-4A (R7A equivalent) are contextual districts that allow a maximum commercial FAR of 3.0 and 4.0, respectively. C4-3 has an R6 residential district equivalent and allows a maximum commercial FAR of 3.4. In C4-2A and C4-4A districts within inclusionary housing designated areas, Quality Housing regulations mandate maximum base heights of 65 feet and 75 feet and maximum building heights of 85 feet and 95 feet, respectively. Developments in C4-3 districts can be constructed pursuant to height factor or Quality Housing regulations. In C4-2A and C4-3 districts, accessory parking for commercial uses is generally required at a rate of 1 space per 400 square feet of floor area. No accessory parking is required for commercial uses in C4-4A districts where zoning lots are less than 10,000 square feet in size or fewer than 15 spaces are required.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT AREA/DEVELOPMENT SITE

In addition to the Applicant-owned Development Site (Block 595, Lots 19, 26, and 27), the Project Area includes a portion of Lot 10 on Block 595, which is owned by Verizon. In total, the Project Area has an area of approximately 15,825 square feet and is located within a C4-4A commercial zoning district. The Project Area has frontage on 30th Street, a one-way narrow street to the west, Newtown Avenue, a two-way narrow street to the north, and 31st Street, a two-way wide street and commercial thoroughfare to the east with the elevated N/W subway line above.

The Development Site is currently improved with a two-story commercial building with approximately 27,000 gross square feet of floor area. There is a wholesale tire distributor and service shop on the ground floor and second-story offices. The Development Site has 76 feet of

frontage along 30th Street, combined frontage of 220 feet along Newtown Avenue and 61 feet of frontage along 31st Street. Two large curb cuts on Newtown Avenue and one curb cut on 30th Street provide vehicular access to the tire service shop. At street-level, the Newtown Avenue and 30th Street frontages are predominantly windowless brick walls interrupted by steel roll-down double garage doors. Large display windows are located along 31st Street and the eastern portion of Newtown Avenue where the office entrance is located.

A small approximately 296 square foot portion of Block 595, Lot 10, is located within the Project Area. Lot 10 is improved with the Telephone Exchange Building, a three-story utility building owned by Verizon with 198 feet of frontage on 30th Street. Lot 10 has approximately 18,612 square feet of lot area and approximately 55,836 gross square feet of floor area.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The Proposed Development entails the construction of a new 11-story building with approximately 111,822 zsf of total floor area including 101,392 zsf of residential floor area (104 dwelling units), approximately 8,400 zsf of ground floor retail, approximately 2,031 square feet of community facility space for a 99-seat black box theater for APAC, and approximately 30 attended parking spaces. The total FAR for the Proposed Development is 7.19, which is below the maximum permitted FAR of 7.20 for a C4-4D zoning district. No parking spaces would be provided for the affordable units, given the Project Area's location within a Transit Zone. The Proposed Development would provide either 26 permanently affordable units pursuant to MIH Option 1 or 31 permanently affordable units pursuant to MIH Option 2.

The Proposed Development would rise to a height of 11 stories at the intersection of 31st Street and Newtown Avenue, two commercial corridors, before stepping down to six stories at the intersection of Newtown Avenue and 30th Street, a height that is consistent with the existing context along 30th Street. The 30 attended cellar parking spaces would be accessed from a new 12 foot curb cut on 30th Street and would comprise approximately 8,872 square feet. In addition to parking, the cellar would include a 3,663 square-foot, 99-seat theater for APAC which includes space for a wardrobe room, dressing rooms and a stage manager’s office. The cellar is not included in floor area calculations. The ground floor would have the residential lobby, residential recreational space, retail spaces that would activate the frontage along Newtown Avenue, and the 2,031 square feet of community space for the lobby and ticketing office for APAC. Floors 2-11 would contain residential dwelling units.

ACTIONS NECESSARY TO FACILITATE THE PROJECT

Zoning Map Amendment

The proposed zoning map amendment to sectional map 9a would map the Project Area with a C4-4D zoning district. The Project Area is currently zoned C4-4A (R7A equivalent) and is located within an inclusionary housing designated area where the maximum permitted FAR is 4.6 for residential (Use Group 1 and 2) uses and 4.0 for community facility (Use Group 3 and 4) uses. Compared to existing zoning, the proposed C4-4D (R8A equivalent) district would not allow any new uses within the Project Area, but would allow higher density residential (maximum 7.20 FAR) and community facility (maximum 6.50 FAR) uses. Any new buildings within C4-4D must be constructed pursuant to Quality Housing regulations. In C4-4D districts within inclusionary housing designated areas, Quality Housing regulations mandate a maximum base height of 105 feet and a maximum building height 145 feet. Accessory parking is required for 40% of dwelling units, but due to the Project Area's location within the Transit Zone, no parking is required for income-restricted housing units. For commercial uses, parking is generally required at a rate of 1 space per 1,000 square feet of floor area.

The proposed C4-4D zoning district is appropriate as the Project Area is located in an area that is well served by public transportation and well equipped to handle the proposed increase in density. The Project Area is adjacent to 31st Street, a wide street that can support the increased density, and is located immediately adjacent to the N/W subway lines at 30th Avenue and 31st Street as well as the Q18 and Q102 bus lines along 30th Avenue.

The proposed C4-4D zoning district would be consistent with existing land use and zoning patterns within the surrounding area. C4-4D zoning would allow a bulk and density that is generally consistent with what is currently permitted in the Surrounding Area, including the 10-story, 120 foot tall commercial building at 31-19 Newtown Avenue (Block 619, Lot 14) one block east of the Project Area. The proposed increase in density would also facilitate the construction of a new community theater space for APAC, a local not-for-profit organization in need of space within the Astoria neighborhood. The proposed ground-floor retail uses would mirror what is currently permitted throughout most portions of the Surrounding Area and provide much needed services and amenities to existing and future residents of the area. Additionally, the proposed ground-floor retail uses would activate the streetscape along Newtown Avenue and improve the pedestrian experience.

Zoning Text Amendment

The proposed zoning text amendment to Appendix F of the Zoning Resolution is requested to designate the Project Area as an MIH area. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 39.2 percent of area households in Queens Community District 1 are rent burdened and there is a strong need for affordable housing that reaches a broad range of incomes.[1]

The MIH program requires that permanently affordable housing be provided within new residential developments, enlargements, and conversions from non-residential to residential use within the mapped MIH areas. Within this MIH area, all housing developments, enlargements and conversions that meet the criteria set forth in the MIH program must comply with the requirements of either Option 1 or Option 2 described below.

- Option 1: 25 percent of the residential floor area shall be provided as housing affordable to households at an average of 60 percent of the Income Index (AMI), with no unit targeted at a level exceeding 130 percent of AMI.
- Option 2: 30 percent of the residential floor area shall be provided as housing affordable to households at an average of 80 percent of the Income Index (AMI), with no unit targeted at a level exceeding 130 percent of AMI.

The Applicant proposes to comply with either MIH Option 1 or Option 2, where either 25% or 30% of residential floor area, approximately 26 or 31 dwelling units, would be affordable housing and rented to tenants with an income at or below 60% or 80% of AMI. Under the existing voluntary Inclusionary Housing program, only 20% of residential floor area is required to be permanently affordable. Therefore, the proposed zoning text amendment would facilitate the construction of a higher number of permanently affordable housing units.

CONCLUSION

The proposed zoning map and zoning text amendments are consistent with existing land uses and zoning conditions within the surrounding area, while furthering the objectives of the City's Mandatory Inclusionary Housing policy. The Proposed Actions would facilitate the construction of much-needed housing, including between approximately 26 and 31 units of permanently affordable housing, and commercial space in close proximity to public transportation. The Proposed Development would provide much needed services and amenities to the existing and future residents of the area, enlivening the neighborhood and creating a more vibrant streetscape that would complement the ongoing community development and enrichment of the Astoria neighborhood.

[1] Based on American Community Survey 2012-2016 5-Year Estimates for PUMA 4101, which is an approximation of Queens Community District 1, available at:
https://communityprofiles.planning.nyc.gov/queens/1