**PLG Confronts a Great Divide**

**Neighbors Clash on Rezoning and Development; Anew about Affordability and Displacement**

by Milford Prewitt

T he seemingly innocuous and benign need to update Prospect Lefferts Garden’s zoning codes, upgrade its infrastructure, and protect the local environment is dividing community leaders and activists—both of whom have the neighborhood’s best interests at heart.

PLG’s gentrification, the housing affordability challenge, and the small businesses and residents by rent hikes, are tangentially related to whether or not a rezoning study can help ease the neighborhood’s growing pains. But many view such a study as too late.

The issue pits neighbor against neighbor and has hamstrung local Community Board No. 9—the entity most responsible for green-lighting a rezoning study—for nearly two years, and the organization shows little sign of passing a resolution anytime soon. Although CB9 asked the Department of City Planning in 2014 to study the neighborhood’s rezoning needs, it has struggled to pass a resolution to finalize the project due to internal discord among members, a series of voting failures, and bungled public hearing notices. Even now, CB9 is without a chairman as a result of the resignation of the short-tenured Demetrius Lawrence (due to demands of a new job), the third chairman in less than three years. The internal dysfunction of CB9 was pounced upon and publicized by CB9’s most vocal antagonist to rezoning, Alicia Boyd, founder of the Movement to Protect the People (MTPP).

Boyd, who has recently acquitted by a jury of obstructing governmental administration, resisting arrest and disorderly conduct following a fiery shooting match at a CB9 meeting in May of last year, charges that rezoning is a prelude to the wholesale construction of high-rise towers throughout the neighborhood and the beginning of the end of its unique architectural and historical residential character. She claims all of PLG is in peril of being overdeveloped. Her perspective is as someone whose Sterling I back yard abuts Empire Boulevard—one of the many and expensive home improvement projects that can take a big bite out of a homeowner’s budget.

So you go to a bank to inquire about a home equity loan only to find you don’t qualify or the rates are too high. Then again, you might empathize with and wonder how to help a cash-strapped, elderly neighbor on a fixed income whose home is becoming an eyesore.

To come to the rescue is the City of New York with a network of local non-profit housing partners that are offering a variety of low-income home repair and improvement loans to low and moderate-income homeowners. 

Sensible citizen homeowners are the target beneficiaries of The NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and The Patrodeck Foundation. The two have partnered up in the Senior Citizens Homeowner Assistance Program (SCHAP). The loans help seniors make necessary home repairs. A maximum of $40,000 is available for single-family homes. (For homeowners of two- to four-family homes, a maximum of $50,000 per dwelling unit is available).

**How SCHAP Works**

To qualify, the owner must be at least 65 years old and have been an owner-occupant of a one- to four-family home for at least two years. Homes must have property and liability insurance currently in force. The applicant’s annual household income cannot exceed $76,245 for a one-person household, $92,200 for a two-person household or $118,975 for a three-person household. Income adjustments are made for large households.

Depending on the homeowner’s circumstances, terms will vary from a no-interest deferred loan to a fully amortizing 3% loan. All loans are payable upon the sale of the house or if the owner moves out of the house or dies.

If there is someone on the deed who is under 60 years of age, all of the owners would sign the mortgage (to enable HPD’s recapture of public funds at death of the primary applicant, sale of home, or transfer of title) and the senior would sign both the mortgage and the deed. The those with very low incomes, can pay taxes, and get a lien on property for the

By A ssembly.

Dr. Lamuel Arnold Stanislaus, Co-Founder of the West Indian American Day Carnival Association, Stanislaus and his wife, put him in the spotlight at a number of international conferences that led to his appointment as the Grenadian ambassador to the UN. Stanislaus became involved organizationally with the Caribbean and Latin American nations that were trying to break the UN.

He gave several trenchant and piercing addresses at the UN about Stanislaus expanded his role to become a voice for all small

Dr. Lamuel Arnold Stanislaus, Co-Founder of West Indian Day Parade, Dies at 95

The Honorable “be” Lamuel Arnold Stanislaus, who was widely acknowledged as one of the three founders of the West Indian Day Parade in Brooklyn, has died at the age of 95.

A dentist, diplomat, internationally recognized human rights activist, advocate for Caribbean Islands freedom and top-ranking activist, was recognized under Grenada National Hero’s legislation and its published by The Lefferts Manor Association. Please send comments or article ideas to editor Milford Prewitt at milfordprewitt@aol.com. The Echo reserves the right to edit or omit article submissions. We thank the contributing writers, photographers, graphic designer Ken Diamond, and copy editor Jaime van Matren for their help creating this issue.©2016 Lefferts Manor Association.

Dr. Lamuel Arnold Stanislaus addressing the General Assembly of the United Nations in the late 1990s.

Stanislaus lived on Rutland Road in Brooklyn with many of his family members at this side. He walked with him in the parade.

When the former Beryl Ross, who would bear him five children, who, in turn, would go on to produce eight grandchildren. Beryl and he celebrated his 80th birthday in August. Beryl and he celebrated his 80th birthday in August. Karen, Eugenie and John; seven grandchildren; three siblings and a sister-in-law.

He was born in 1921 in Grenada, West Indies and moved to the U.S. to attend college at Howard University in Washington, D.C. where he earned a bachelor degree in 1949, graduating magna cum laude. In 1951 he earned a Doctor of Dental Surgery degree and practiced dentistry for 30 years.

In 1931, he married the love of his life, the former Beryl Ross, who would bear him five children, who, in turn, would go on to produce eight grandchildren. Beryl and he celebrated his 80th birthday in August. Beryl and he celebrated his 80th birthday in August. Karen, Eugenie and John; seven grandchildren; three siblings and a sister-in-law.

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She says upzoning for high-rise construction is only done in neighborhoods that are largely occupied by people of color, that white middle-to-upper income communities are rarely upzoned.

“This is the densest area in Brooklyn,” she says, “and it’s predominantly black. They only do these kinds of studies in black communities where they want to upzone. Can you imagine the pressures on our infrastructure if in the next few years 100,000 people move here?”

[City census figures say PLG is the third-most dense.]

“The Prospect Park subway platform during the morning rush is already packed now. Can you imagine what that will look like in the future?” she added.

While he did not address Boyd’s racial allegation directly, Winstone Van Engle, director of the Brooklyn Office of the DCP, implied that a community’s desire for zoning changes and not its racial composition, informs where the agency conducts its studies.

“The decision whether or not to change the zoning of a neighborhood depends on the goals of the local community and is at the discretion of the local community board, Borough President, City Planning Commission and the City Council member,” he insists.

**How It Began**

The touchstone to all of this agitation was the sudden and unimpeded permits, rapid construction (just two years in the making) and now leasing of the 24-story Parkline luxury apartment tower at 62 Flatbush, the first residential high-rise to be built in PLG in decades.

Although neighborhood groups and community activists condemned the building’s
Vi was active at Bed-Stuy’s Shiloh Baptist Church. Frank, who is Catholic, frequently worshiped with Vi at Shiloh. A congregant who followed in her footsteps, she earned a reputation as a loving mentor to young women on matters of dress, comportment around men, and what it means to be a woman. She also took on volunteer roles assisting the pastor. Dozens of fellow churchgoers, neighbors, family and friends spoke lovingly of her at Vi’s wake.

Over their many years together, Frank became Vi’s personal techie. “She was not very comfortable with computers,” he chuckles. “So I became her secretary.”

Vi served five years on the LMAI board, and was given a community service award by former Borough President Marty Markowitz upon her resignation. Frank says disconnecting the machines that kept her alive was the toughest decision he has ever made. His advice to others facing the same crossroads: talk to as many people as possible.

“My advice is to talk with everyone,” he says, “doctors, pastors, family and get what they have to say and be sure to have a prognosis for the future.”

“If it is not possible, then you are going to have to make a tough decision. It was four years later, and I had to make that decision.”

But Frank admits hope often stayed his hand.

“I thought the day would come when she would wake up and be her old self,” he says. “I mean, I visited her at the hospital nearly every day and she didn’t look sick or incapacitated.”

Vi was buried in Green-Wood Cemetery in a verdant and luscious setting. I attended her burial and the weather that day was as beautiful as it was when I saw her joking and smiling on her stoop so many years ago.

The President and First Lady Salute Neighbor Vera Biddle’s 100th Birthday

By Ray Bowman

Born September 3, 1912 in Grenada, B.W.I., Vera is a cultured pearl of the community, a dynamic personality much admired by her neighbors, and beloved for her quick community involvement and perseverance.

“Ms.—as many neighbors and friends affectionately call her—lived in the Brooklyn neighborhood known as the Hosten(s). She became a nurse in Grenada and dreamed of taking her medical education as far as she could take her with her.

She came to the United States in 1931 at the age of 3. Although she didn’t have any children, she had an uncanny ability to connect with young children and even youngsters new to the neighborhood as if she were one of them. Her kinship with children was a special bond that fueled her passion for helping others and shaped her professional life as a nurse and midwife.

“I helped a lot of children come into this world, but I didn’t have any of my own,” she says.

She met Philadelphia native Walter Biddle on Long Island, they married in 1954 and moved to Rutland II in 1956. She believes she was the first person of Caribbean heritage on her block at the time.

Neighbors say she is always eager to impart her wisdom to those who ask for it. Easily recognized for the many fashionable hats she wears to church, Ms. Vera has worshipped at Church of the Evangel about as long as she has lived in the neighborhood. On Sunday, September 4, the congregation honored her for her years of support and devotion to the church and her faith. She was joined by a host of friends and family, some of whom travelled internationally to celebrate the occasion.

Two weeks later, the Rutland II Block Association celebrated Ms. Vera and her centennial at their annual block party. Ms. Vera, who still cooks, presented some of her dishes at the affair, delighting her neighbors.

The highlight of the party was seeing the thrill in her eyes when Borough President Eric Adams presented a proclamation recognizing her centennial lap around the sun as “Vera Biddle’s 100th Birthday Celebration Day in Brooklyn, U.S.A.”

Ms. Vera is sound of mind, quick-witted and didn’t need her glasses to read out aloud BP Adams’ proclamation. But she got misty-eyed when a young boy who she didn’t know blessed her at the street party and wished her more years to come.

Ms. Vera says she is crazy about crossword puzzles and often stays up until two or three in the morning completing them. Having outived a husband, her siblings and other family members of her generation, she is not so sure why she has lived to such an exalted age.

“I guess it was God,” she says. “Having faith helps,” adding, “If there are little kids in your life, you are truly blessed. Be thankful.”
Determined Sisters
Set Taqueria El Patron
Mexican Grill on Growth Track

The naysayers predicted that Taqueria El Patron Mexican Grill was going to be a short-lived enterprise that probably wouldn’t make it through a year. As a result, El Patron Mexican Grill was going to be a short-lived enterprise that probably wouldn’t make it through a year. El Patron was a funny and savvy server during the Enduro days, but she fell out of favor with management and was let go. Castellanos says she and her sister had been looking for a small space to open a restaurant together and were determined to find a spot in PLG. After learning of the vacancy, they contacted the landlord—the same one who many had blamed for the closings of Lincoln Park Tavern and R&D Dog & Dive Buggs, both big favorites of neighborhood at the time.

“We were looking for a new home and spot to open the business with the landlord called and asked us to meet her here one morning,” Castellanos says, “and it just happened. We got a decent lease and this past July, we got our liquor license, a little more than a year after we opened. And the landlord has been great with us. We have no complaints.” Prince says she has no ill feelings toward Mamary and doesn’t see Beefy Mexicanos as a competitor despite serving the same kind of food.

“I wouldn’t say his food is better than mine or mine is better than his,” she says. “Our food is different. We both are part of this great neighborhood and we both want to do a good job.”

She says she is looking forward to renovating the establishment, but that will probably occur after she gives birth to her son, due this November.

The restaurant serves nearly 30 different kinds of burritos and soft- and hard-shell tacos. There are another dozen or so enchiladas on the menu and a variety of salads.

The full bar features a vast assortment of margaritas and beers. A signature house drink this summer was the Bulldog, a plain margarita served in a jelly jar with a miniature bottle of Corona beer turned upside-down inside of it.

PLG’s Vinyl Music Lovers Can Go Old-School at Record City

I n Clark doesn’t consider himself ahead of a trend or worry about being behind the times. What he does know is that in the month since he opened his vintage record store, Record City, on the corner of Fenimore Street and Flatbush, his timing couldn’t be better for PLGers who want to hear their music old-school, on a turntable.

At a point in history when it’s possible that folks under the age of 30 have never seen a long-playing vinyl record or a 45 rpm outside of a movie—let alone a turntable, also known as a record player—Record City is attracting music lovers of all generations.

Nielsen Research shows that Clark is on to something. Record purchases have been rebounding for the past several years and sales of turntables are inching up, too. In 2017, new record purchases reached 11.5 million units in the U.S., up nearly 30 percent year-over-year. And while CD album sales are off 15 percent and digital album sales are down 3 percent, those formats together are still ten times larger than vinyl transactions.

But those numbers do not faze Clark. “More vinyl is being made all the time,” he says. “They are pressing more and more records and there is a backlog at the pressing plants. The infrastructure just can’t keep up with demand.”

From Record City’s vantage point, Clark argues that young adults and teenagers are spearheading much of that demand.

“I can’t begin to tell you how many times in the course of a week 15-year-olds, 19-year-olds or 25-year-olds—people who grew up in the so-called Digital Age—shop in here,” he says, “and they have turned table turned 15 percent.

“More people are getting turned on to records and I think the reason why is that in the age of digital music there is a lack of connection with the physical object that tells you what you are listening to or who the musicians are,” he says. "Handheld digital devices and cellphones don’t give you that kind of connectivity to the artists."

He says the other factor that may be boosting record sales is that many people believe vinyl has a “smoother, warmer” sound.

Clark has been buying and selling vintage records for nearly 20 years. He is also a DJ and owner of the reggae record label, DKR, whose office is located at Empire Boulevard and Rogers Avenue.

Record City opened in early September in the space formerly used as a lounge by 6Fen, the wine store. It’s a spare, minimalist atmosphere whose walls are covered with packed record bins and wall-mounted record covers of prized collectors’ items are both inventory and decor elements. He says he and Michael Campbell, 6Fen’s owner, are planning to do a wine tastings and music pairing event in the near future.

Clark, who confesses his favorite kind of music is reggae and considers himself an expert in the genre, breaks down his current inventory this way: about 20 percent is reggae; 15 percent is soul and R&B; 15 percent is jazz; and the balance is rock, world music and hip hop.

A Flatbush resident, Clark says he travels near and far to look at people’s collections, usually along the East Coast. The store does not close while he is on the road. Collaborates fill in for him.

“I look at what people have and break it down into different piles of what I think I can sell it for and make a cash offer on the spot.”

He says he once paid a couple of thousand dollars for a reggae collection.

He says less than pristine record jackets will not kill a deal so long as the vinyl inside is decent. He points to a prized album by the Afrobeat superstar Fela that he is selling for $15. The jacket is a bit chewed, but the vinyl is close to mint condition.

“It’s a cool album that’s hard to find,” he says. “That rarity makes it valuable.”

But in most cases, he adds, it’s rare for the vinyl to be in great shape while the jacket is damaged.

What about scratches?

“Well, it’s the same thing,” he says. “If it is a particular record that a lot of people want, then I can make a deal and price it down accordingly. But if it’s a standard record that is pretty widely held, I don’t buy those.”

Several years ago, Clark paid $450 for a record-cleaning machine. It does not remove scratches, but it does clean well enough to improve the sound quality of vinyl. Clark says he enjoys what he does for a living, working for himself in a business he loves.

“I guess my own business is scary,” he says. “There are always cash flow issues and days that are longer and harder than others,” he admits. “It’s not always straightforward. But I would take this over an office job any time.”

Record City is open every day from noon to 8 p.m.
Lefferts Manor

A Great Divide

of-out-character height, the developers succeeded only because PLG’s zoning codes do not have kept up with the times. Unlike Park Slope, Windsor Terrace or Ditmas Park which also border Prospect Park, PLG does not have contextual zoning which limits its new construction roughly to the predominate building heights in the neighborhood.

In an interview with the Echo a year ago, Van Engel said the developers of the Parkline did nothing shady or underhanded in its construction. He said they had a right under the zoning to move trees, stories, but he also complimented the community board for listening to its constituents and coming to the decision to ask the DCP to conduct a land use study to prevent future buildings of the Parkline’s size.

Mayor de Blasio’s campaign to build or restore 200,000 units of affordable housing and Borough President Eric Adams’s vow to support the mayor in that effort also influence how DCP goes about its duties, Van Engel admitted.

But Boyd remains suspicious. She asserts the city’s reasoning studies and affordable housing goals will ultimately be to the detriment of local residents, particularly when it comes to assuring that local infrastructure—sewer lines, transportation, schools, train stations—is strengthened to accommodate the needs of an increasing population.

“They will start out saying we will listen to you that our role is completely advisory but in the end they do what they want,” she says. “And the environmental and infrastructure assessment doesn’t occur until after the people move in.”

Looking at the rapid affluence of Williamsburg as a case in point, Boyd says that the area’s main subway line, the L train, will go out of service for a year and a half starting in 2019 because city planners failed to anticipate the huge surge in population. The MTA says the closing is due to rehabilitating needed because of damage from Superstorm Sandy.

Helping the Community

Some residents say the activists who are fighting CB9 may be hurting the community and are blind to the emerging economic realities of life in New York City today.

Alex Ely, a sales strategist for an Internet company and a co-op owner on Lefferts for 12 years, has been monitoring the rezoning bonanza closely. He says opponents of rezoning would reconsider their positions.

“Activists should help direct resources, not reject them,” Ely says. “And as it relates to upzoning of neighbor- hoods, it’s happening all over the city.”

As a cautionary tale, Ely pointed to what happened in Washington Heights earlier this year when activists succeeded in getting a City Council decision to reject a rezoning plan for a particular lot of land. As a result of blocking the rezoning, the developer actually acquired more leeway to build a 25-unit building with no affordable housing. Had the new zoning passed, the developer would have had to include affordable units in a larger building.

But Boyd says she has no interest in working in the system, let alone joining CB9.

“There are some people who work in the system and those who work outside,” she says. “I work outside ‘cause it gives me more freedom to challenge people who are being dishonest.”

Boyd dismissed criticisms that some of her advocacy is self-serving, given that her backyard abuts Empire Boulevard—one of the main corridors she says is slated for upzoning.

“There’s nothing wrong with someone protecting their backyard,” she says. “But my position goes further. I was pushed out of a gentrified neighborhood years ago [Boerum Hill]. I watched it change. I saw what happened to friends and family and I don’t want to go through that again.”

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New Census Numbers Spotlight

Who Owns, Who Rents in PLG

The recently opened Parkline apartment building at 626 Flatbush is the first high-rise residential tower to open in Prospect Lefferts Gardens in decades. Boyd contacted the community groups and homeowners who opposed the project’s 24-story height in a neighborhood dominated by four-to-six story buildings, the Parkline brings 254 new housing units to the market.

With one-bedroom units costing nearly $2,800 a month on the 7th floor—making it as a monthly mortgage for a $660,000 home—the project’s affordability has ranked poorly. However, there are also 50 units designated as affordable.

But new U.S. Census Bureau numbers on housing in Prospect Lefferts Gardens shows that PLG’s rezoning plan has been a winner. In 2000, 36,488 households were counted, down 1 percent from the 2010 Census. Of that number, 12,647 households were rental units and 2,452 were owner occupied.

Hispanic households rented 1,252 apartments and were owner-occupants of 146 homes. Asians made up 340 rentals and 58 homeowner households. People who identified as mixed race or two or more races, or identified as Native American made up the balance.

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