

Atlantic Currents

fall 2009, vol 9, no 3

Atlantic Avenue Betterment Association Newsletter

www.atlanticavenuebkny.org

Actions for Small Businesses

AABA was invited to testify at a joint State Senate and Assembly hearing—"Retail Diversity and Neighborhood Health"—on September 18th. Chaired by State Senator Daniel Squadron, the hearing was organized to identify policies that New York State could adopt to revitalize and preserve retail diversity in urban neighborhoods.

AABA President Sandy Balboza testified that funding from local elected officials to non-profit organizations, like AABA, is crucial to support beautification, marketing, façade and signage improvements—vital for the development of a local retail strip. Barbara Clurman, **Silk Road Antiques** (313 Atlantic), and an AABA board member—stating that some of the factors that make it difficult for small businesses to survive are high rents, high taxes on small mixed-use buildings, and unreasonable fines and fees—proposed that landlords be given a tax rebate for a small business tenant to keep the rent affordable.

Unnecessary and Burdensome

In addition AABA recommended that the State review and adjust Department

of Consumer Affairs and other agency fees and fines, which are often unnecessary and burdensome. Coordination between government agencies was cited for review: merchants, trying to open new businesses, are often delayed for months due to the incomprehensible maze of agencies issuing licenses or certifications to open. And creating a small business insurance network would reduce property and liability rates for small businesses.

Less Government Waste

Further AABA pointed out that in this bad economy, corporations, banks and insurance companies have received unprecedented bailouts while small businesses have had to fend for themselves. Large developers, getting subsidies from the City and State, often receive tax abatements for decades; this tax relief fuels rising taxes (for small mixed-use commercial buildings), the burden of which is passed along to small retailers in the form of higher rents.

Finally, Balboza called for less government waste to free up existing funds, which could then be redirected to programs to help small businesses prosper.

A Public Voice for a Public Park

"Real Park for Everybody"—that's the mission of The Campaign for Brooklyn Bridge Park (The Campaign), a new citizens advocacy group comprised of community organizations and individuals throughout the City and region, and especially surrounding the Brooklyn Bridge Park (BBP) that runs along the waterfront from the foot of Atlantic Avenue to Vinegar Hill. AABA is a founding member.

Threw Out Community Plan

The new group advocates that Brooklyn Bridge Park (BBP) be financed in the same way parks have always been financed. In 2004, NY State's development agency Empire State Development Corp. (ESDC) threw out the community plan,

which did not include housing. Focusing on making the entire site "self-sustaining," including future capitol costs, ESDC planned for 1,200 units of private high-rise luxury housing in the park, thus limiting public parkland and recreational uses.

Now the luxury housing bubble has burst, mandating the need for a new funding plan to maintain the park and to revise the park design. It's time to reinstitute an open public process. The Campaign intends to re-awaken the public will by advocating strenuously and lobbying our elected officials to provide the capital funds necessary to create and maintain the best possible public park to serve the entire city.

For more information, log on to www.campaignforbrooklynbridgepark.org.

BID Balloting Begins

Balloting has begun in the process to form a Business Improvement District (BID) for Atlantic Avenue. It is important that everybody vote. Local input and support are crucial.

During September, the BID steering committee held six information sessions on the proposed BID. Topics included services provided, the assessment formula, budget, BID management, and the overall benefits that a sustainable organization will provide. Meetings took place at: **The Moxie Spot** (81 Atlantic), **Clover's Fine Art Gallery** (338) and **Linger Café & Lounge** (533).

The Next Step

A public meeting will take place before the end of the year. Business and property owners will hear about the district plan in detail and have the opportunity to ask questions and get answers about the benefits of the BID structure.

For more information, please contact Ariana MacPherson, Atlantic Avenue BID Project Manager at aabidsteeringcommittee@gmail.com or 201/394.3491. Or contact members of the steering committee: Co-chairs Frances Carroll, Barbara Clurman or Elizabeth Crowell, or any of the following members: Sandy Balboza, Vyt Bakaitis, Jennifer Baron, Nancy Cogen, Rico Espinet, Rachel Leibowicz, Laurie Maurer, Wayne Miles, Nat Rubin, Charlie Sahadi, Lisa Shimamura, Kurt Sippel, Sue Wolfe, and Charles Wolfson.

At the Atlantic Antic...



... Develop Don't Destroy Brooklyn raising money for lawsuits against the Atlantic Yards project ...



... Stephen Levin (center), new City Councilman for District 33, with AABA's Sandy Balboza and Tony Manheim, a founding member of The Campaign for Brooklyn Bridge Park, raising awareness for the park.

Activist and Longtime AABA Advisory Board Member...

Bernard Ehrlich passed away this summer at the age of 87. Bernie was a world-renowned architect, who always found time to advocate for his community. He worked with AABA on many complex and thorny issues, including the Brooklyn House of Detention and the Brooklyn Bridge Park. He developed the first model for the Hoyt/Schermerhorn urban renewal sites—now being developed. As a tireless member of AABA's zoning committee, Bernie met with individual developers to represent AABA's interests.

We thank Bernie for his generosity, creativity, guidance, and advice. His friendship and distinctive sense of humor will be deeply missed.

New Treasures Found on Atlantic Avenue

Linger Café & Lounge, 533 Atlantic Ave., Tu-Th 8am-10pm, F 8am-1am, Sa 10am-1am, Su 10am-6pm, 347/689.4813; www.lingercafelounge.com ❖ Jessica Pichardo wants people “to just linger and not feel rushed.” And she makes it easy—with tasty home-cooked food (made on site); her sustainable kitchen (“one of few food service establishments in NYC to run a minimal waste kitchen”); comfy furniture (purchased locally); Brooklyn and greater NY beers, Long Island wines; locally made CuS soda; and Intelligensia coffee. If that isn’t enough, there’s cozy ambience, free wifi, and weekend music showcasing Brooklyn artists. (Photo: Linger Café & Lounge)

Anwaar Co., 450 & 428 Atlantic Ave., 7 days: 9am-8:30pm, 718/875.3792, www.anwaarco.com ❖ A little advice from Nfansu Wally, one of two brothers running this family business: don’t leave his soaps floating in water. With no preservatives, the bars will disintegrate. Only natural essential oils, shea butter and plant extracts go into these certified organic soaps. The brothers make their soaps and organic cosmetics in the U.S. Their one retail outlet is on Atlantic, so enjoy the luxury of choice—browsing the well-stocked shelves or shopping online.



Loretta’s Coffee & Tea, 407 Atlantic Ave., 7 days: 7am-9pm, 718/237.8448 ❖ “The craft of coffee” is something Melissa Azulai has cared about for the past 16 years; her new cafe is the result of her passion. Aside from serving Ozzie’s (roasted in Brooklyn) coffee and a diverse selection of loose teas; creamy oatmeal; pastries (made in house or by local Brooklyn artisans); sandwiches (including “fun stuff like nutella and banana”); and all natural sodas, the ambience is warm and friendly (with an inviting backyard), the seating is comfortable, and the wifi is free.

MiniMax Toys & Cuts, 152 Atlantic Av., 7 days: 10:30am-7pm (haircuts 11am-6pm), 718/222.8697,

www.minimaxnyc.com ❖ Four local moms started this store with “eclectic” toys “for kids aged 1 month old to 100 years young” and haircuts (10% discount for siblings/50% for twins). Kids select a cape (princess or superhero) and entertainment (cartoons or movie) for haircuts. Toys are mostly educational and environmentally friendly with a few “whacky novelties.” Free story times: Mon.-1pm, Tues.-10am; and arts and crafts: Sat.-10 am. Artist Alex Beard will read from his book, *The Jungle Grapevine*, on Tues., Nov. 10.

WMA Karate, 67 Atlantic Ave., 718/938.5278, wmakekarate.com ❖ Howard Latting began teaching karate in Carol Gardens in the 1990s; today he runs his own center on Atlantic with classes for youth (5 to 7 years old), juniors (8 to 12), teens, and adults. His assistant instructors are students he’s “been teaching for at least 10 years.” His “traditional non-contact approach,” allows “families to train together in safety and respect.” Visit the web site for information on fall classes, an after-school program, and more activities, including birthday parties.

Making Waves Along the Avenue

Have books will travel. **Silk Road Antiques** (313 Atlantic) has novel ideas—a 19thc traveling bookcase for scholars and a barber’s workbench.

Yummy! **Downtown Atlantic Restaurant** (364 Atlantic), **Soul Spot** (302), and **Peter’s Waterfront Ale House** (155) made “Brooklyn Eats 2009” extra delicious (sponsored by the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce).

You’ll be “whistling while you toil,” says *TimeOut New York* about home office accessories at **Johnathan Adler** (378 Atlantic).

Celebrating cooks! **A Cook’s Companion** (197 Atlantic) marked 12 years with 12% off storewide sale and raffle on Oct. 24/25.

New hot items...innovative entrepreneurs continue to open along Atlantic Ave. Discover the latest original and exciting ventures in AABA’s **Fall/winter 2009/10 Atlantic Avenue Shopping Guide**.

“Favorite Brooklyn shop”...that’s what an Ikea product design strategist called **Darr** (369 Atlantic) in October *New York Times Sunday Design Fall 2009*.

This newsletter is made possible by public funds provided by City Council member David Yassky, State Senator Velmanette Montgomery and AABA membership dues. Newsletter Editor: Betsy Kissam, bkissam@mindspring.com

By last summer Michelle Zuniga had earned enough points in an after-school program, Project ReGeneration of Bedford Stuyvesant, to start on a paid internship. And this summer she became one of AABA’s interns, choosing to work in **Floral Heights** (107 Atlantic Avenue) with the flower shop’s owner Charlotte D’Costa Taylor. The internship program is made possible with State funds provided through State Senator Montgomery.

I Learned A Lot

On her first day at **Floral Heights**, a nervous Michelle had little to say other than “This is my first job,” but after three months, a confident Michelle reported: “I learned a lot.” She knows how to take care of flowers and plants, greet customers, answer the phone and take on a myriad of other small and big tasks. In July, she also participated in AABA’s beautification project helping to prepare tree pits and plant flowers along Atlantic Avenue.

Now Michelle, a senior at Frederick Douglass Academy 7, is applying to colleges to enter into the medical field. In the meantime, Charlotte contacts her to help out during busy times in the store — and Michelle is happy to make some extra money.

The Court Rules ...

Four Lawsuits Under Review: Abuse by two New York State public authorities, the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) and the Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC), is at the heart of four lawsuits against the floundering Atlantic Yards mega development project. AABA has signed onto two of the lawsuits; in these, AABA along with other plaintiffs claim that the ESDC has underrepresented the environmental impacts of the project. The other lawsuits concern eminent domain abuse and the MTA sweetheart deal to Developer Bruce Ratner. For more information, visit nolandgrab.org; dddabd.net; and atlanticyardsreport.com.

AABA continues to support the Unity Plan, the community-based proposal (unityplan.com), for developing Atlantic Yards.

Brooklyn House of Detention: AABA and other petitions were granted permission to examine all City Department of Corrections (DOC) documents relating to the reopening and expansion of the Brooklyn jail, including a deposition of former Commissioner Martin Horn. It is assumed that the documents would show that the DOC never intended to reopen the jail without expanding it.

Already the Courts have determined that if the DOC wants to expand the jail, it would have to go through first a Fair Share Analysis, second the ULURP (Uniformed Land Use Review Procedure), and finally an Environmental Impact Statement. The City has agreed to this ruling.