

Plan to turn courthouse into luxury apartments

BY KAREN JAMES

kjames@queenscourier.com

Despite reservations about several key terms, Community Board 12 unanimously approved a plan to turn the former Queens Family Courthouse, located on the southwest corner of Parsons Boulevard and 89th Avenue, into a luxury apartment building at its monthly meeting held on Wednesday, November 15.

The proposal, which will create 350 new units consisting of studios, along with one- and two-bedroom apartments in a full-service, doorman building with an on-site gym and an underground garage passed with a 31-0 vote with three abstentions.

Yet despite overall support for the project, backed by local politicians including City Councilmembers Leroy Comrie and James Gennaro, the board cited reservations to the developer, The Dermot Company, Inc., and the New York City Economic Development Corporation. The board stated that its approval contained the stipulation that issues concerning parking and traffic, hiring goals, an environmental impact study and communication flow to the board be resolved to its satisfaction as the project moves forward.

Dermot Company president, Steven Benjamin, clarified the project's hiring terms, explaining that Dermot would seek to fill 25 percent of the jobs created by the project through women- and minority-owned businesses. Although he said the number was five percent higher than usual

within the industry, the audience was not impressed.

Additionally, he told the audience that Dermot's financial partner in the project is a union-affiliated pension fund that mandates that only union members may be employed on the project. Benjamin estimated the redevelopment could generate up to 700 construction jobs and up to 200 permanent jobs after construction. Board and audience members alike remarked that few, if any, in its community belong to unions.

Housing stock in the new building will be broken into four categories, Benjamin explained. Of the 280 rental units available, 40 percent will be set at market value, 40 percent will be designated for middle-income families and 20 percent will be allocated as low-income. Sixty-nine apartments will be sold through the New York City Housing Development Corporation's affordable co-op program.

While Benjamin referred to the low- and middle-income units as "affordable," another tense moment came when a woman in the audience challenged him to define the word. "I know what I mean by affordable," she challenged. "What does your company mean by affordable?"

In urging a vote to approve the project, Comrie acknowledged the board's concerns saying, "I don't want to bundle the frustrations of the Community Board to eliminate a project that I think can bring a positive housing opportunity and a positive retail opportunity to the community."