



Wednesday, May 12, 2010

Developers eye old meat market site

BY MICHAEL FIACCO

Jamaica is one step closer to seeing revitalization on a lot that has been marked as a hotspot for development ever since the previous business there closed down 30 years ago.

The former site of the Merkel Meat Market, which closed in the late 1970s, is currently being bid over by potential developers. Property owner Rita Stark, who holds some of the largest swaths of real estate in Queens, recently brought in Shopco Properties, LLC, to interview interested developers.

Shopco operates as a real estate consultant to bring land owners and developers together, and has consulted with such real estate giants as Tishman Speyer.

Despite having been out of use for decades, development on the site, on Sutphin Boulevard between 94th and 95th Streets, had been hindered by antiquated zoning codes regulating the lot, which allowed for only another one-story manufacturing building to be constructed there.

After a lengthy rezoning process, the 60,000 square foot lot was finally rezoned to better fit the nature of the neighborhood in late 2007, allowing for the construction of a multi-story commercial or residential building. After this, the call for development took off.

While there is currently no concrete plan for the redevelopment of the site, the project is actively in its pre-development stage, with zoning having been cleared and traffic renovations underway.

As developers consider the various ways the land could be utilized, community leaders are offering their own opinions as to how the lot should be used.

"Our concept for the whole area is an airport village," said Carlisle Towery, president of the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation, a non-profit organization.

"We would like to see activities developed there that would be hooked to the airport (John F. Kennedy International) by the AirTrain. The airport itself has about 40,000

people working for it, which is the population of Hartford, Connecticut. There are many things housed in the airport that don't need to be there. We could build offices in Jamaica, and workers could travel to and from them by AirTrain. That's our vision for it, and what we're planning for and promoting."

In addition, Towery noted that the lot is bordered by several sites that are attractive for hotel construction, which would fit well with the airport village proposal.

As for where the project stands now, Towery could only say that it's being worked on. "It (the project) has got legs. We have a very cooperative pre-development relationship with all of the interests, but development, per say, is not underway yet."