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Rezoning Plan for Jamaica Wins Approval of Council

By JO CRAVEN McGINTY

A plan to convert Jamaica, Queens, into a vibrant commercial center while also attempting to preserve the area's low-rise residential character was overwhelmingly approved yesterday by the City Council.

Less than three weeks after winning committee approval, the Council, as expected, approved the plan by a 45-to-3 vote. The plan, which covers 368 blocks, is the single largest rezoning of the Bloomberg administration.

It is expected to pave the way for 3 million square feet of commercial space, 9,500 jobs and 5,200 residential units, including 780 subsidized units, according to Councilwoman Melinda R. Katz, chairwoman of the Land Use Committee.

Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn praised the project for maximizing the area's commercial potential while protecting neighborhoods characterized by one- and two-family homes. For example, the low-rise character of the neighborhoods near Hollis and St. Albans will be preserved, she said, to keep the "flavor and beauty of the area."

"This zoning will make sure that important low-rise one- and two-family homes in Queens, those neighborhoods get to stay low-rise and one- and two-family residential communities," Ms. Quinn said. "It also takes

steps to support the business community and the business area in the Jamaica part of Queens, taking steps and in part through a small up-zoning, to make that business district a really thriving business district.”

Jamaica, home to the AirTrain transit hub, is minutes from Kennedy International Airport, a feature the city expects will increase its appeal as a regional business center and foster commercial enterprises that will attract and serve longtime residents. “We tried to promote development around the transit hubs,” Ms. Katz said.

Councilman Leroy G. Comrie Jr., who represents portions of the area, welcomed the rezoning as a potential boon to residents of Queens, who, he said, citing recent United States Census data, include more than 250,000 residents who are living below the poverty line.

The Bloomberg administration and Council worked for four years to resolve community concerns, but critics, particularly residents of some portions of Hillside Avenue, objected to zoning that would, as initially proposed, allow the construction of buildings as tall as 12 stories. Under the approved plan, buildings are restricted to eight stories, but that compromise did not satisfy everyone.

Councilman David I. Weprin, who along with Councilmen Tony Avella and James F. Gennaro voted against the plan, called the increase in development for parts of Hillside Avenue overaggressive and said the infrastructure was incapable of supporting it.