

AVELLA SUPPORT PUSHES DOUGLASTON HISTORIC DISTRICT EXTENSION DESIGNATION ONE STEP CLOSER

City Councilman Tony Avella (D) testified in favor of the proposed Douglaston Historic District Extension at a Landmarks Preservation Commission hearing last week, moving designation of the 20 building section one step closer to reality.

Avella, the first speaker in the hour and a half long hearing, told the Commission that he endorsed the proposed Extension despite some vocal homeowner opposition that has emerged in the past two months.

Avella testified that two opponents of designation had "muddied the waters" regarding opposition to the proposed Extension. Avella singled out by name brothers Roger and Franklin White who own two houses in the proposed Extension. He testified at the June 24th hearing that the Whites have waged a campaign of intimidation and misinformation, and scared some of their neighbors—several of whom are elderly—into opposing the proposal.

More than 80 supporters of the proposed Extension filled the small hearing room at the Commission's headquarters at 1 Centre Street in Manhattan and waved day glo orange placards that read "Designate the Douglaston Extension!!" The group broke into enthusiastic applause at Avella's statement. More than 20 people spoke in favor of the proposed Extension.

During the hearing, several supporters agreed with Avella and stated that the Whites had lied about what landmark designation would mean to homeowners. The proposed Extension includes 17 private houses, a public elementary school, a church and a 31-unit cooperative apartment building. The Community Church of Douglaston and the Manor Apartments co-op have endorsed the district.

The Commission is expected to vote this month. The City Planning Commission and the City Council will also vote on the proposed Extension.

Franklin White started his comments at the hearing by barking at the Commissioners, who were seated at a large conference table, "Which one of you is Tierney!" referring to the Chair, Robert Tierney, who had stepped out of the room. White then asked the Commissioners to identify themselves. He was told by a Commission staff person that they were seated around the table and to begin his comments. White refused until Tierney returned, his actions reinforcing Avella's characterization of White just a few moments earlier as aggressive and intimidating.

Opponents testified that their reasons ranged from the belief that designation was a

form of eminent domain to not wanting designation "forced" on them by a government agency. White told the story of how his family's home was seized by the City in 1969 in eminent domain proceedings for construction of a road that was never built.

His said his family rented the house at 38-80 Douglaston Parkway from the City until 2006, when they bought it back at a radically reduced rate as compensation for taking it nearly four decades earlier. The City sold the house to White and his brother Roger for \$290,000, a fraction of its \$1 million market value, according to City records. The Whites also own a house at 39-04 Douglaston Parkway, adjacent to the house they bought back from the City. In 2006 the Whites sold a building lot behind the house at 39-04 Douglaston Parkway for \$900,000, City records show. Franklin White told State Senator Frank Padavan (R) that he and his brother want to combine their properties, which are 200 feet deep lots, to sell to a developer, the Senator said during a public meeting this spring. Senator Padavan is also a supporter of the designation of the Extension.

One resident of the proposed Extension, Stephen Boutis of 10 Cherry Street, testified that he didn't want landmarking because he didn't want people trespassing in his driveway or LIRR commuters parking in front of his house. Other opponents also cited reasons during their testimony that are unrelated to issues pertaining to landmark designation.

None disputed the fact that the proposed Extension contains some of the oldest intact buildings in New York City, or that the 20 building section is worthy of landmarks designation. Among the buildings in the proposed Extension are a group of five farmhouses dating from 1854 to 1910 on Douglaston Parkway, and several "high style" suburban houses from the early 20th century on Willow Drive and Cherry Street, all intact and well cared for.

Another resident of the proposed Extension, Lette Greaney, of 39-15 Douglaston Parkway, told the Commission that the area being considered for the Extension is a "unique place."

"My grandmother bought the house I live in more than 85 years ago. My mother was married from this house, I was married from this house, I raised my five children in this house, and now a fifth generation is being raised here. This is a wonderful place for kids. My husband Thom and I want to see the extension of the Douglaston Historic District.

"In areas of Little Neck, Bayside, and Douglaston that are not landmarked, historic

houses are demolished and replaced by chrome and marble monoliths, some of which look as if they would accommodate a moat," Greaney said in a statement read for her by one of her neighbors, because she was unable to attend the hearing. "Please extend the district and preserve this special place—for future generations."

Many civic and historic preservation groups joined the chorus of supporters who spoke at the hearing who live in the adjoining Douglaston Historic District and the Douglaston Hill Historic District, which include 630 and 31 homes, respectively.

Organizations that support the Extension that either sent a speaker or submitted testimony for the hearing include: the Municipal Art Society, the Historic Districts Council, the Society for the Architecture of the City, the Douglaston Civic Association, the Douglas Manor Association, the Bayside Historical Society, the Four Borough Neighborhood Preservation Alliance, the Queens Historical Society, the Queensborough Preservation League and the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities (SPLIA).

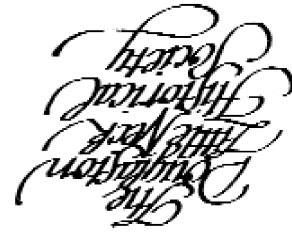
SPLIA's testimony stated: *"... the proposed Extension includes late 19th and early 20th century houses that tell the story of Douglaston's transformation at the turn of the last century, from an agrarian place to a planned commuter suburb of New York City. The steep hillsides of Cherry Street and Willow Drive contain eclectic style sub-urban houses built between 1900 to 1915, vividly demonstrating this next phase of development, as the rail line that is today's Long Island Rail Road made this area accessible to commuters to Manhattan.*

"The proposed Douglaston Extension speaks to both aspects of Long Island history, and in doing so provides an extraordinary window into the history of Long Island and New York City simultaneously."

The Douglaston & Little Neck Historical Society first proposed that the 20 buildings should be designated in 1989, when the group began lobbying for a Douglaston Historic District. When the Douglaston Historic District was designated in 1997, the area was left out. The Commission identified the proposed Extension during a survey of historic neighborhoods in Queens in 2006. Last year the Historical Society formally requested the Commission consider the area for an Extension.

"The part that was left out in 1997 is not a separate neighborhood," said Julia Schoeck, president of the Historical Society. "Those 20 buildings are part of the bigger picture, and they are an integral part of the larger historic Douglaston community."

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DOUGLSTON HISTORIC DISTRICT EXTENSION
JUNE 24 LANDMARKS COMMISSION HEARING



Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society
328 MANOR ROAD
DOUGLAS MANOR, NY 11363
718-225-4403
WWW.DLNHS.ORG

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