

# THE DOUGLASTON AND LITTLE NECK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Preserving and protecting the historical significance of Douglaston and Little Neck and adjacent nature preserves.*



*A photo taken in 1940 at the northeast corner of Little Neck Parkway and Northern Boulevard*



*The same buildings as those in the photo on the left as they appear today*

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## ***Say "No!" to The City of Yes*** **An Editorial by Carole Cox**

City of Yes is a one-size-fits-all proposal to alter zoning regulations across all five boroughs of New York City. It consists of three separate sections: Carbon Neutrality which was approved by the City Council last year, and Economic Opportunity and Housing Opportunity which are coming before the City Council this year. This article discusses Economic Opportunity scheduled for a vote this spring.

The goal of the Economic Opportunity section of the City of Yes is to modify zoning in commercial areas as well as in residential neighborhoods. One key zoning change involves expanding the footprint and the height of existing mixed-use buildings, thus allowing for the construction of two to three additional floors of commercial and residential space above them. **Light manufacturing** would also be permitted. The rationale for these changes is the following: vacant stores would be rented if they were larger and more appealing, more affordable housing would become available, and the city's economy would be stimulated by having larger stores and by the growth of light manufacturing where it was not previously allowed.

In short, our historic commercial districts, which serve as mini-downtowns for the surrounding neighborhoods, will be destroyed. These changes are not needed in Douglaston and Little Neck whose historic buildings house small businesses which serve the

## *Remembering Mike Gannon (1950-2023)*

### *Environmentalism, Preservationist, and Community Activist*



Mike Gannon was a longtime historic preservationist, environmentalist, and community advocate. He was known for his many years of volunteer service, his interest in local history, and his dedication to community causes.

As a fifth generation Douglastonian, his roots here went back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Both sides of his family--the Gannons and the Mortimers--arrived in Douglaston when the area was still largely rural farmland. One set of grandparents owned a small hotel on the south side of the Douglaston LIRR station at the turn of the 19th century. His other grandfather was a volunteer fireman in the early 20th century, until Douglaston's volunteer fire company was disbanded in 1929.

Mike grew up with his three siblings, Anne, Susan and Phillip, in the Douglaston Hill neighborhood where his forbears had settled. His family's 1890's era house on Pine Street was within steps of Mortimer and Gannon aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. He attended St. Anastasia Elementary School and Bayside High School, and he was a graduate of Fordham University.

In the 1990s Mike took over the family homestead on Pine Street and became involved in the Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society (DLNHS) when the movement began to create a landmark district in the Hill neighborhood. He and several neighbors spearheaded the effort, bringing it to fruition with the City's designation of the Douglaston Hill Historic District in 2004.

In the early 2000s, Mike and his wife, Lisa Mueller, moved from Pine Street to Lisa's family's house in Douglas Manor. They renovated the house, and Mike began developing the landscape there with native plantings, creating an informal and beautifully wild garden over time. Not one to yield to traditional stereotypes, he joined the Douglaston Garden Club, historically all women. Mike was known to its members simply as "The Man," and often hosted the Garden Club's annual plant sale at his house. In addition to being a board member of DLNHS, Mike was also a board member of the Douglaston Civic Association, and the Douglas Manor Environmental Association (DMEA). Each spring during mating season, he posted a "Just Flip 'Em" sign at the Douglaston Dock, so residents would right struggling horseshoe crabs that ended up on their backs and would otherwise die. He also started the annual horseshoe crab count sponsored by the DMEA, and he was on Little Neck Bay each summer in a boat with officials doing water quality testing. Mike's real flowering, however, was serving on the board and as President of the Douglas Manor Association for two terms--a total of 6 years--between 2010 and 2020.

After Hurricane Sandy in 2012, he helped the Save Our Dock Committee get the Douglaston Dock rebuilt, and ensured that it got prettier in the process, too. On the Shore Road Reconstruction Committee, Mike helped guide what started as a repair of two road collapses, to become a \$10 million, mile long reconstruction of the entire roadway from the tip of the Point, south to West Drive, that also included seawall stabilization. His years as a legislative representative for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers came in handy for the Shore Road project--he was great at negotiating with Department of Transportation officials and politicians, both. More recently, he used his subtle talents for negotiating to ensure that every road in Douglas Manor got repaved. He had underused teak benches at the Dock reinstalled along Shore Road, and restarted a dormant donor bench program to buy more. Views of Little Neck Bay could be enjoyed from along the entirety of the peninsula's mile long shoreline. The Dock was one of his favorite places. In addition to kayaking, Mike liked to swim out to the outermost swimming float, shoo away the aggressive seagulls, and catch up with various friends on civic and local history topics. When Lisa suggested that they light up the 200 foot long Dock for the holidays, Mike was all in. They bought multi-colored lights and strung them up themselves, a surprise, beat-back-the-darkest-days-of-winter gift that delighted locals as well as motorists on the Cross Island Parkway.

In 2022 New York State Senator John Liu recognized his many community accomplishments with a special proclamation honoring Mike for "Exemplary Service to His Community and State."

Mike died on October 21, 2023, after a 13 year-long battle with leukemia. He is buried in the historic Zion Episcopal Church Cemetery, in the shadow of a magnificent pin oak, and in full view of Zion's elegant, white shingled church. His final resting place is where he said he always wanted to be--in Douglaston, forever.



## *The History Of 902 Shore Road, Douglas Manor*

The year was 1906. The Rickert-Finlay Realty Company had just purchased the 188-acre Douglas Estate and rechristened it Douglas Manor. Almost immediately, it began selling lots.

And just as quickly, one of the first houses went up: 902 Shore Road. An Arts & Crafts-influenced Colonial Revival, its classical elements were pared-down to fit the sensibilities of the times. Unlike the fanciful Queen Annes of a decade earlier, its turret blended quietly into the roofline; no frilly Victorian trim competing with its stolid Tuscan columns.

The architect was Wilbur S. Knowles, age 50, who had already enjoyed a 20-year architectural career by 1906 (and would go on to enjoy 30 more). One of his claims to fame was his acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Edison, for whom he provided renovation plans for both their New Jersey mansion and Florida summer cottage. An example of his work is 384 Field Point Road in Greenwich. Note the classical columns, single turret, steep roof with dormer windows, and stately stone chimneys, all common elements of 902 Shore.

902 Shore Road had Douglas Manor all to itself for the better part of a year, as a half dozen other houses neared completion in 1907. By 1910 there were five more houses on Shore Road, with about 20 additional houses sprinkled throughout the Manor. Perhaps 902's most distinguishing feature is its glass conservatory. Although it appears original to the house, it was not added until 1916. It was designed by Lord & Burnham, the famed greenhouse company that also designed the Haupt Conservatory at the Bronx Botanical Garden.

The original owner, Solomon Mayer, was a wholesale silk salesman. As of 1920, he and his wife Amelia shared the home with their 11-year-old daughter Katherine and multiple servants including a gardener, cook, and governess. By 1940, Sol and Amelia were the only residents. A photo from 1939-41 shows a well-manicured lawn and well-maintained home. By then the porch had been enclosed

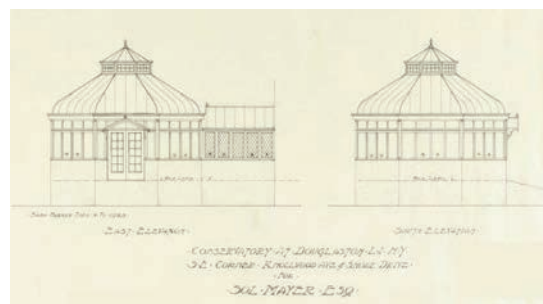
By the 1980s, the house had been painted white, as it remains now. At some point the porch windows were replaced with contemporary windows that did not match the architecture. Fortunately, the current renovation has returned the porch to its original, open state.

The current owner purchased the house several years ago from a friend whose father—the owner at the time—had recently passed away. Despite living in Queens his entire life, this is the new owner's first home in the Manor. A major challenge was the conservatory, whose curved glass roof panes proved difficult to replicate. It was nonetheless successfully renovated and will serve as a sunny dining area adjacent to the new swimming pool.

When asked what he loves most about the house, the new owner replied, "Everything." From its perch overlooking Little Neck Bay, 902 Shore Road looks better than ever, and is ready for its next 120 years!



**384 Field Point Rd, Greenwich, Ct.**



**Glass conservatory at 902 Shore Road**



**Photo of 902 Shore Road circa 1939-1941**



**902 Shore Road as it appears today**

## ***DLNHS Cleans up and Beautifies Glenwood Landing Park***

On Saturday, November 4th, 2024 a beautiful fall day, members of the Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society in partnership with the Westmoreland Civic Association, and parents and students from PS 94 and MS 67, gathered for the semi-annual cleanup and planting at Glenwood Landing Park. Kristofer Doerfler, a Douglaston resident who has studied indigenous plants in our area, guided the group on how to plant them in Glenwood Landing Park.

Following a general cleanup of the park, Mr. Doerfler, explained how these native plants evolved. Following a brief talk, he led the group in planting daffodil bulbs, blue stemmed goldenrod, and woodland stonecrop, all of which will continue to support the sustainability of the park. All expenses were paid for by a grant from Con Edison.

It was a lovely day for all, both as an educational experience and community activity, and of course we shouldn't forget the refreshments which were also enjoyed! DLNHS looks forward to again participating in this event this fall!



*Pam Broderick welcomes everyone*



*Volunteers take a break*

## ***DLNHS Participates in the Douglaston Winter Festival***

Thanks to a grant from Con Edison, and the hard work of Board members, Carole Cox, Mary O'Byrne, Peter Reinharz, and Maura Wrynn, and some extra help from Helmut Beron, the participation of the Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society in the Douglaston Winter Festival on Saturday, December 9, 2024, was a great success, and, fun for the participants. It was a perfect late fall day, and sales were brisk for the hot chocolate, cookies, and other items sold that day. The highlight for many was the free bird feeder ornaments children constructed using pine cones and peanut butter; all materials were supplied by Con Edison. Adults and children were busy during the entire day making these environmentally friendly ornaments!



*Maura Wrynn greets everyone!*



*Carole Cox, Maura Wrynn and Mary O'Byrne sell cookies and hot chocolate*



*Making an environmentally friendly bird feeder*



## *A Message from the President, Peter Reinhartz*

As the winter season comes to a close, we are looking to the warmth of spring and a new season filled with activities and learning with the Douglaston and Little Neck Historical Society. After four years as our President, Pam Broderick has stepped down to spend more time with her family. We all thank Pam for her years of hard work and dedication to the DLNHS. She is a tough act to follow. As Pam's first Vice-President, I am taking over as interim President until elections at our Annual Meeting scheduled for June 1st.

I am unfortunately the bearer of very sad news. Late last year, Mike Gannon, a long-time trustee and officer of the DLNHS, passed away. Mike, a resident of Douglas Manor, was a virtual encyclopedia about the history of our community. Mike could always regale you with tidbits of historical information about virtually every block in the Little Neck and Douglaston community. Mike also knew so many of the residents of our area, that he often knew the history of their houses, and even facts about previous owners! Kevin Wolfe has written a moving tribute to Mike in this newsletter, so please take the time to read about one of our community's greatest resources who was a special person.

For those of you who have not yet joined DLNHS, please take a moment to go to our website and become a member. We are a local historical society dedicated to preserving the history of this area, as well as to teaching you and your children about the history of our neighborhoods. By teaching our history, we learn from our past successes and our mistakes. As politicians propose changes to our community, I believe it is our organization that will be here to remind them of the importance of that history and how it shapes the future of this community.

I hope you can attend the June 1st Annual Meeting as we discuss the importance of preserving our community's history, architecture, and culture. A guest speaker will be announced soon. I hope to meet many of you then.

## *OHNY at the Douglaston Club Brings France to Our Distant Shores!*

If you've been on any of the Open House New York (OHNY) tours that happen all over the city every October--including the one in Douglaston--you know that the participants are usually a diverse grab bag of New York City residents from all of the five boroughs. Most, however, have never been to Douglaston before.

But last October, as guests toured the historic Douglaston Club in an OHNY tour sponsored by DLNHS with the Douglaston House Trust, one visitor among the newbies especially stood out. The hearty band of New Yorkers were quite taken with the charms of the recently restored Club's historic interiors. But they were riveted when one guest asked a question in the charming accent of a native Parisian.

And in fact, she explained, she was a resident of Paris, visiting Manhattan for a week-long holiday. Despite the siren call of the Big City, and her limited time, this young woman chose instead to spend most of a day with us in the wilds of Queens.

When asked how she decided to sign up for the Douglaston Club tour, she responded that she "wanted to do something different." She said she had scoped out the many offerings on the OHNY website--there were more than 330 tours--from her perch in Paris. She threw her name in the hat for the Club tour--tickets are distributed to the 25,000 visitors by internet lottery--after checking out the location of the Club. Even for many native New Yorkers, this part of Queens can seem like the very ends of the earth.

She said she also wanted to see something that Americans consider "old," like the 1819 Douglas mansion that was converted from a private house to a Club more than a century ago.

"I wondered what it might be like here," she said.

Was it what she expected? If she was disappointed, our charming Parisian didn't show it. She fraternized effortlessly with the other 25 guests (all New Yorkers) over refreshments in the Club's restored Presidential Room, and stayed until the very end.

She was last seen heading across the front lawn of the Club toward the Dock, explaining before she left that she wanted to see the lovely Douglas Manor waterfront that another guest described to her, as she walked back to the LIRR station. Au revoir!

## Say “No” to the City of Yes

*cont'd from page 1*

local community. There are no vacant stores on Northern Boulevard, eliminating the need to fill them. Moreover, the apartments above these stores are examples of affordable housing for the community; why destroy housing that is already fulfilling a need? This proposal also begs the question, “Is it structurally safe to enlarge these turn-of-the-century buildings?” Or will they just be torn down and replaced? The Economic Opportunity section will also change the character of neighborhood commercial districts with their early 20th century, mixed-use commercial/ residential buildings. This is a real tragedy because they will probably be replaced by unsightly strip malls like the one in the picture below.



*These functional, historic buildings on Northern Boulevard could disappear and ...*



*be replaced by larger strip malls like this one on Northern Boulevard in the commercial district of Little Neck*

After attending several public meetings held by the New York City Department of City Planning, this author learned of an additional provision of the Economic Opportunity section that could drastically change the entire historical nature of our neighborhoods and have citywide quality of life impacts. This zoning amendment would allow for the manufacture of clothing, one example given, and the preparation and cooking of baked goods and other foods, in private homes and apartments. Aside from the fire hazards, and sanitation issues, trucks will be hauling goods in and out of residential areas, creating congestion, pollution, and additional noise. Goods cannot be sold from private homes.

Defeating the City of Yes for Economic Opportunity must be a priority; it will be coming before the City Council this spring. Zoning amendments like these will not work in a city where there is an infinite variety of neighborhoods. One size does not fit all in New York City! Our commercial sectors with their historical buildings should not be destroyed, but should be preserved and beautified because they are an integral part of our history. Commercial bakeries and sweatshops do not belong in private homes or apartments; these uses create fire hazards, congestion, noise, and pollution. Manufacturing in private homes will forever change the historical character of so many New York City residential, family-oriented neighborhoods which have always been so much a part of our city.

Therefore, say, “NO!” to the City of Yes! It’s up to you to tell your elected representatives so that it is not passed by the City Council!

## ***The Flushing Remonstrance*** ***Our neighborhood’s contribution to religious freedom***

Walking around the Little Neck-Douglaston community today, the free exercise of religion is an evident part of the physical landscape. There are several synagogues and many churches – of various denominations – along with mosques and Sikh temples in bordering neighborhoods. Most of us take these symbols of religious freedom for granted, but more than 100 years before the Bill of Rights was ratified in 1791, the people of our community fought hard against the government of New Netherland to ensure religious freedom for all residents. We must remember these struggles.

*Continued on page 8*

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## *A Forgotten Hero Is Remembered*

If you happen to walk by, or go in to sample the delicious confections at the former Whistle Stop Deli, now the Fern and Aurora Dessert Shop, at 39-02 Little Neck Parkway, please stop for a minute on the side of the store. You will notice a small granite plaque affixed to the wall, partly hidden by the rail for the security gates. The inscription on the plaque reads, "In Memory of Sgt. E. F. Fichtl, Jr." Who placed the plaque there is a mystery, but we do have some information about Sgt. Fichtl.

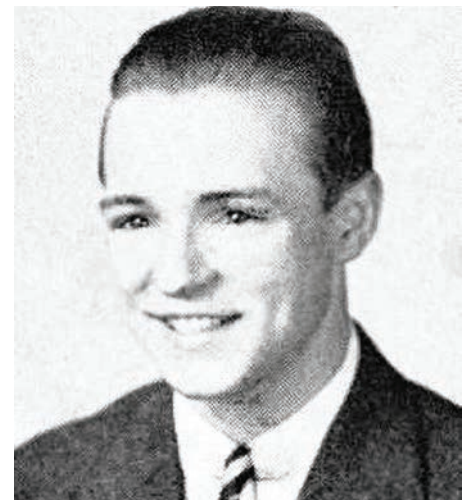
Sergeant Ernest Francis Fichtl was born in Flushing on September 20, 1924, and grew up in Little Neck. He lived with his parents at 20 Old House Landing Road (later 1564 Little Neck Parkway). His father was an Austrian immigrant who came to the United States with his parents as a little boy. His mother was born here. Ernest was their first child, and they had a daughter, Jane.

Sergeant Fichtl fought in World War II, in A Company, 36th Tank Battalion, 8th Armored Division. He died fighting with his comrades in Rheinberg, Germany, on March 5, 1945, at the age of 20. He received the Purple Heart for "the ultimate sacrifice," and he is buried in the Netherlands American Cemetery, in Margraten, the Netherlands.

Perhaps his parents knew the owner of the building and felt that putting the plaque there would be a more permanent memorial for a son who died and is buried so far from home. Maybe they were hoping that because of this plaque, we would always remember the young man that they lost at such a young age!



*Sergeant Fichtl's Memorial Plaque*



*Sergeant Ernest Francis Fichtl*



**DOUGLASTON AND LITTLE NECK  
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*Flushing Remonstrance Continued from page 6*

In 1645, William Kieft, the Netherland Governor, conveyed a land grant to English colonists resettling from New England. The grant allowed them to take residence in the newly established town of Vlissingen (referred to as “Vlissingh” by residents), now known as Flushing. The English were offered the same freedom of religion that was allowed for all citizens of New Netherland. At the time, the Dutch were considered among the most religiously tolerant societies in Europe, although that was soon to change.

In 1656, the new Governor, Peter Stuyvesant had a different view of religious liberty when he issued an ordinance prohibiting all religious practices that were outside those of the Dutch Reformed Church. Despite the Dutch reputation for religious tolerance, Stuyvesant's ordinance sent a strong message across all New Netherland; religious meetings, including those congregations at Quaker meeting houses, were forbidden!

As Stuyvesant continued his religious persecutions across the colony, a group of Dutch citizens became incensed by the governor's campaign of oppression. On December 27, 1657, these brave Dutch citizens, along with several Anglican residents, drafted a document, now known as the Flushing Remonstrance. The document was in protest of the restrictive ordinance and objected to the governor's enforcement of its discriminatory mandates.

In 1662, John Bowne, a Flushing resident and convert to Quakerism, refused to abide by the governor's edicts and began hosting Quaker meetings in his home. Bowne was arrested and banished from New Netherland, but in 1664 he returned to continue practicing his Quaker faith.

That same year, however, Great Britain took control of New Netherland. Suddenly Bowne and the other Quakers were residents of New York, and free to practice their religious faiths. However, The Flushing Remonstrance is a critical piece of American history that was born in our own backyard. Some of the signatories to the document, such as Phillip Udall, were residents of what is now the Little Neck-Douglaston region. We need to remember and respect the courage of our community's founders who stood up to religious tyranny and discrimination – even when they were not the targets of that injustice.



*Old Quaker House Flushing*