



Housing Is a Human Right!

Photo Courtesy of Groundswell Community Mural Project

On a beautiful September day in 2007, hundreds of neighbors turned out to express our hope for the future of the Sunset Park community. We spoke out about our concerns that our families would be displaced by rising rents and irresponsible development. We also shared many great ideas about what Sunset Park might look like in years to come. We are now pleased to present you with the results of the 1st Sunset Park Summit.

2nd Sunset Park Neighborhood Summit

Sunday, January 20, 2008

Trinity Lutheran Church

Sunset Park, Brooklyn

GET INVOLVED!

For more information: e-mail: spanbrooklyn@yahoo.com

2nd Sunset Park Neighborhood Summit

Introduction

On September 23, 2007, the Sunset Park Alliance of Neighbors (SPAN) organized a meeting where community residents came together at a Sunset Park Neighborhood Summit to work on principles of unity that would serve as a guide for future development of our community.

Although it was a beautiful, sunny, Sunday afternoon, nearly 200 Sunset Park residents went to PS 24, spending about 5 hours of their time to come together and show their love and share their concerns for our community. To date, there has yet to be an event comparable in attendance with a focus on rezoning in our community. We attribute this to the numerous hours of door knocking, telephone outreach, emails, letter writing, and personal commitment of those who organized the Summit. This document is the outcome of the first Sunset Park Neighborhood Summit.

The Summit filled a huge void in the community at a critical turning point. Sunset Park is undergoing a rezoning study to determine the feasibility and the need of a community-wide rezoning. This document is the result of work conducted by a group of neighbors who love their community of Sunset Park, Brooklyn. It is the offspring of over two hundred hours of volunteer time; two community-wide meetings attended by nearly 200 individuals; eight months of consensus building; and finally; one community facing many issues and concerns including the loss of low-income housing, displacement and rapid demolition of buildings in our community.

We would like to thank many of our community partners and Summit attendees: La Union Latina, FAC, Neighbors Helping Neighbors, UPROSE, Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Michael's RC Church, Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez, State Senator Velmanette Montgomery, State Assemblyman Felix Ortiz, the Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation, Friends of Sunset Park; Community Board 7, PS 24, Groundswell Community Mural Project, Northstar Fund, and Johnny's Pizzeria.

We are also grateful to have established an important relationship with the Chinese Staff and Workers Association, a leader in protecting and promoting the rights of Asian Americans in our community. We look forward to working, building and creating a neighborhood that is particularly respectful and inclusive of the needs and desires of the two largest yet most marginalized segments of our community: Our Asian and Latino working families. Of course, we want to give a very special thanks to all our neighbors for making the Summit and this report possible.

History of SPAN

The Sunset Park Alliance of Neighbors (SPAN) is an independent, grassroots civic membership organization. Our membership is a diverse, intergenerational alliance of neighbors working together to create unity while strengthening the power of the

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community. When a proposed 12-story building on 42nd Street threatened to destroy the quality of life and the historic low-rise nature of Sunset Park, a group of neighbors and allies organized an historic effort to stop it -- we called ourselves the Sunset Park Alliance of Neighbors (SPAN). After several well attended community meetings, protests, calls and letters to elected officials, a petition drive, community board meetings and press conferences, the developer agreed to cut the building in half! With that battle won, however, the real struggle began: We wanted the WHOLE neighborhood to be protected from similar irresponsible development. So, once again, SPAN volunteers worked night and day to get the Community Board to support and eventually the NYC Department of City Planning to commit to a rezoning study.

SPAN believes that any change in the zoning laws in a community has the ability to preserve or dramatically alter the characteristics of that community. Once the City agreed to rezone Sunset Park, SPAN decided to take on the role of facilitating a process by which community members could feel empowered to voice their opinions, concerns, hopes and dreams for their community. We reached out to community members, business owners and allies over several months and gathered momentum that sparked the interests of community groups, organizers, city, state and federal elected officials, universities, urban planners and city agencies. SPAN has been steadfast in remaining an independent vehicle of the community that has been successful in making city agencies and elected officials responsive and accountable to our community.

Neighborhood Action Meeting

SPAN organized over a period of several months to get the community to think critically about the future of our southwest Brooklyn waterfront working class community. Our hope was for Sunset Park residents to become educated in the rezoning process and voice their concerns. SPAN organized a two-part process that we believed would maximize community input, provide time and a welcome space to educate our neighbors on the rezoning process, allow SPAN members to gather questions, concerns and responses for neighbors, create alliances and neighborhood momentum for maximum participation.

About fifty residents attended a Neighborhood Action Meeting on August 4th 2007. This meeting was meant to begin the conversation around issues related to development and to air and capture the concerns of residents for the upcoming rezoning of Sunset Park. This meeting also provided the foundation for the upcoming Sunset Park Neighborhood Summit.

Having reached consensus around the areas of concern, SPAN realized the concerns voiced by community residents were vast. Overwhelmingly however, Sunset Park residents were most concerned that new development would lead to the loss of affordable housing for low income Sunset Park residents. This information would guide the focus of the upcoming Neighborhood Summit and guide the discussion.

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Sunset Park Neighborhood Summit – what was the process?

SPAN had two goals for the Summit, one was to educate the community on the rezoning process and the other was to discuss what was at stake. The Summit program planning committee worked fiercely for weeks to design a process that would provide maximum participation with minimal confusion. Uncertain of the number of participants, SPAN was prepared for the unknown. Nearly 200 participants were present at the Summit and our childcare room was full with 18 children and 4 childcare providers.

As Summit participants entered PS 24, they walked about the lobby to view posters and poster boards with visuals of current zoning restrictions, pictures of buildings being constructed in the neighborhood and they received a welcome packet complete with the day's agenda and room assignments. The Summit opened with a welcome and award ceremony for Rev. Samuel Cruz and Fr. Patrick Burns, two leaders in Sunset Park that mobilized their parishioners when receiving calls from community members regarding rampant, irresponsible development. Rosten Woo, from the Center of Urban Pedagogy, then gave a presentation on the history of zoning, zoning laws, zoning options and height restrictions for current zoning. Participants were then led to one of 10 facilitation rooms. The discussion in two rooms was led completely in Spanish. .

In an effort to connect the concerns of community residents aired at the Neighborhood Action Meeting to the rezoning process, SPAN provided six focus areas to guide the discussion in the facilitation summit. They were:

- Affordable housing in Sunset Park
- New development in Sunset Park
- Displacement of current residents in Sunset Park
- Overcrowding and unsafe housing in our neighborhood
- Architecture and historic character of Sunset Park
- Manufacturing and small businesses in our neighborhood

Sunset Park Neighborhood Summit Points of Unity

We are members of the beautiful mixed income, multiethnic, multilingual, intergenerational, multicultural Sunset Park community. We have a vision for the future of our community and are coming together to make sure that the diverse voices of our community members are heard in the process of rezoning Sunset Park. We understand that the issues of development, displacement of current residents, preserving affordable housing and sustaining small businesses in our community are linked and cannot be separated. These are crucial issues for Sunset Park and must all be addressed in the discussions and decisions about the rezoning of our community.

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As a community, we are united around the following principles:

- The community must be actively involved in creating the rezoning plan for Sunset Park.
- The people who have made Sunset Park are the fabric of this neighborhood and city. Our labor and contributions are essential and we need an affordable place to live and to continue to raise our children.
- We want a plan that addresses the needs of the people most vulnerable to displacement due to low incomes or lack of documentation.
- We want to insure the preservation of existing affordable housing in this community, and an increase in the amount of supportive housing, Section 8 housing, and rent stabilized apartments.
- We do not want ANY demolition of sound housing stock.
- We want legal provisions that prohibit harassment of current residents/tenants and that work to provide better services to current residents/tenants.
- The creation of new, permanently affordable housing must be included in any new development in Sunset Park.
- The definition of affordable housing in Sunset Park must be determined by the current income levels in this community and should include both rental and homeownership opportunities.
- The height of any new development should preserve the views from Sunset Park and otherwise be contextual with surrounding structures.
- New developments should follow "green" (environmentally-friendly) building practices and developers should hire workers from the community.
- We want to see all applicable safety and health laws at construction sites enforced and encourage a ban on all developers with a history of unsafe practices, who don't pay a living wage, and engage in other "irresponsible" behavior.
- We want to see small, independent "mom and pop" businesses and services flourish on 4th, 5th and 8th Avenues and the protection of manufacturing jobs and industry west of 3rd Avenue.
- We want to see a study that looks at the economic and environmental impact of any new development on the community and the infrastructure demands that would go hand in hand with upzoning our avenues.

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