



Old Astoria Neighborhood Association (OANA)
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OANA Minutes
November 17, 2016

Richard Khuzami welcomed the attendees and thanked Teresa Lisson from Renaissance Hall in Astoria for providing the refreshments for the meeting.

Richard introduced the presenters from the New York City Economic Development Corporation to talk about the Brooklyn Queens Connector (BQX) proposal. He mentioned that if the Astoria to Brooklyn tech corridor goes ahead it will produce economic opportunities; however, we need to make sure that there isn't a negative impact on local residents.

Emma Pfohman of NYCEDC brought the OANA meeting up-to-date on the progress of BQX. The preliminary analysis has estimated that the project is feasible, and it's moving onto the next stage. Only 2% of the design phase is completed, and at this point the EDC (Economic Development Corporation) really wants to get our feedback and hear the concerns of people living in the neighborhood.

The meeting was given some information on why the EDC believes that the Connector would be a positive for New York: too many residents are living more than half-a-mile from a subway stop, currently residents have to travel via Manhattan to go from Astoria to Brooklyn, the Connector would improve connectivity to bus lines, ferries and Citi Bike stations, the Connector would improve access to jobs and would boost local small businesses, the Connector would be a green transit option.

Emma referred to other concerns that had been raised about the BQX Connector: for instance, how will it be coordinated with street cleaning, truck deliveries, etc.? How will the BQX traverse the Gowanus Canal and Newtown Creek? How accessible will the Connector be for people with mobility issues?

Emma discussed options for possible Connector routes. One option would be to run along 27th Avenue to serve the Halletts Point neighborhood and then go along Vernon Blvd. However, Vernon Blvd. is



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comparatively narrow and there would be difficulty getting exclusive rights of way. There is also an existing greenway plan in place, and there are not many people living on Vernon Blvd. 21st Street is wide and has a high level of residential population, as does Crescent Street.

21st Street to Jackson Avenue is another possible route: it would be challenging but has good connectivity. An 11th Street route is also possible. Another scenario could be a 50th Avenue to Borden Avenue route but that would need a new bridge. Emma mentioned the timeline for the next phase: the preliminary analysis is scheduled to be completed by early 2017. The ULURP process could start by 2018.

Claudia Coger said that she had attended five BQX Connector meetings but had not heard that Vernon Blvd. was one of the proposed routes. If the BQX were to enter Queens Plaza, are there some alternatives? Emma went over some alternatives. Claudia asked if there was another option for the BQX to come deeper into Astoria than Vernon Blvd? for instance, along Hoyt Avenue to the Astoria Houses? Richard wondered 27th Avenue was structurally sound enough for the BQX, and if a route along 30th Avenue to the waterfront might be a better option?

Dominique Perrault mentioned that the impact of construction on 21st Street, if it's the chosen route, and the disruption to drivers and pedestrians, would be major. She wondered why the city could not improve the existing bus system and, for instance, run buses every 3 minutes. Having lived in Toronto, her opinion was that street cars were not good for traffic. How, she wondered, would major construction affect the traffic on 21st St if it's true that the current rate of traffic is 1,000 cars per hour?

Emma responded that EDC is aware of these concerns and the project will go through an EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) that will include a traffic study.

Neil Harden compared the BQX proposal to the situation in Minneapolis, which has a 16-mile street car. His opinion was that in order to keep the BQX solvent, it would be a good to extend it to La Guardia Airport, and public demand will pay for it. He was concerned that in the event of another storm like Sandy, BQX tracks on Vernon Blvd. would be washed out by the storm and that would add to the cost of the project. Emma said that EDC was aware of resiliency concerns, and mentioned that (?) street cars were more resilient than subways. She added that La Guardia was not on the corridor that EDC was



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given to study for the BQX project. It is not impossible that the Connector may be extended to the airport in the future but it is not within the scope of the proposal at the present.

Diane Kantzoglou asked if street cars always load in the center of the street, and if so, would that be very disruptive? She also thought that a street car in the center of the street could be a safety concern. Richard said that utilities are on the side of the street, and that if the utilities are damaged by the side of the chosen route, that would be a big problem. Emma said that center of the street loading of street cars works well in Toronto.

Zack asked if the city had thought about extending the air link to other parts of the city, and added that he thought that the air link's design was superior because it was not affected by snow. Emma reminded the meeting that since the MTA is not a New York City agency, extending the subway routes was not part of the EDC's study brief.

The meeting addressed the suitability of 21st St as a street car route. Randy mentioned that under current conditions the city seems to have difficulty keeping 21st St blacktopped and pothole-free, and that in his opinion there were too many businesses along 21st St to make it feasible, Richard added that since 21st is a main commercial corridor, the city needs to offer an alternative to truck drivers. Dominique advised that New Yorkers' unique temperament (quite different to those of Toronto or Tokyo residents) needed to be factored into the design. Arthur thought that the BQX would cost more than the \$2 billion budgeted for the project. He referred to the "tech corridor" referenced in the Bloomberg Administration's PlaNYC and that if the BQX wants to connect with a tech corridor, reaching the Astoria Houses should be considered, especially in the context of jobs. Arthur did not think that 21st St is a possible route—Vernon Blvd. is less trafficked and could connect to a "tech corridor" --and mentioned that putting extra buses on the proposed route in advance of construction would be a good test (?) Claudia discussed what she sees as the inevitability of change coming to NW Queens because with continued growth, there will be more people needing service. "Don't take away the hay from a horse without giving him something else to eat," was her advice.

Richard thanked the representatives from NYCEDC for coming to the meeting and asked attendees to please send in any additional questions to OANA, who will forward them to NYCEDC.



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The 114th Precinct NCOs for Sector David (which includes OANA's area) then introduced themselves. (see tape) Joe Esposito outlined the function of the NCOs, which is to address ongoing problems and conditions, the sorts of issues that you wouldn't normally call 911 for. The NCO program is new and the officers look forward to working with the community.

Claudia asked if the officers are permanently in Sector David? Joe Esposito explained that, yes, except in the case of an extreme emergency, or if they have court duties, the officers will remain in the sector full-time. Clare Doyle mentioned that her organization, Green Shores NYC, was discussing how to advise parks volunteers to deal with racial bias incidents if they witness these in Astoria parks, and what advice the NCOs might offer. Joe advised that the organization should reach out to individual NCOs for advice in the New Year, after they had completed their mediation training. The meeting discussed the circumstances under which one should call 911 rather than the NCOs (for instance, if you are a victim of violence or witness drug dealing going on outside your house).

Richard suggested that OANA could work with the NCOs if they have recommendations to make; this could and should be a partnership. He added that the neighborhood is going through changes, some of which could have unforeseen consequences (for instance, the new ferry site, due to open in 2017, doesn't have adequate lighting), so it's important to keep the NCOs informed about potential problems before they arise. Dominique praised the NCO program which she thinks is a wonderful addition.

Richard updated the attendees on the recent community visioning meeting to gather feedback on spending the \$30 million allocated to turn Astoria Park into an "anchor park" and the kinds of suggestions that were made (a soccer pitch, erosion control, better lighting, etc.). He then thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting.