

82nd Street group in Jax Hts. receives grant for new signage



City Small Business Services Commissioner Robert Walsh (l.) talks to Seth Taylor, executive director of the 82nd Street Partnership, about improvements that can be made to the Jackson Heights section of the commercial strip. Photo by Rebecca Henely

By Rebecca Henely

The 82nd Street Partnership recently received a \$50,000 grant to renovate store signs within its borders, giving the leadership another tool in its ongoing revitalization of the once-neglected business improvement district.

“It would be good for a business owner and it would be good for the block,” said City Small Business Services Commissioner Robert Walsh.

The organization’s goal is to improve the commercial strip that runs along 82nd Street from 37th to Baxter avenues in Jackson Heights and Elmhurst. After its previous executive director, Sharada Devi, was fired for incompetence, the commission has been working closely with the organization to turn it around.

The grant is specifically for the block between 37th and Roosevelt avenues, which is part of the Jackson Heights Historic District. The city Landmarks Preservation Commission lists several rules for what signage is allowed in the district, such as like backlit pin-mounted letters or signs painted on awnings, but Walsh said a fair amount of businesses on the strip try to circumvent landmark rules by hanging up temporary plastic signs with rope.

A storefront on the northeast corner of 82nd Street and Roosevelt Avenue, which fronts a stairway to the No. 7 train, has several of these.

“This is people’s first impression when they come down from the subway station,” said Seth Taylor, executive director of the 82nd Street Partnership.

The 82nd Street Partnership recently became one of seven BIDs and the only Queens BID to win a contest within the Small Business Services Commission called the BID Challenge. To get a grant, the various city BIDs needed to identify unique projects that they had wanted to do to improve their commercial strips but did not have the funds.

Taylor said he expects the one-year, \$50,000 contract will be able to help three to six businesses change their signs. He said for a matching grant of an amount yet to be determined the partnership will pay for the design and offer technical assistance for the new signs.

The contract will be finalized by the start of the next year. Taylor said they will be tapping architecture firms with expertise in historic districts to help the business owners.

Walsh said many of the larger chain businesses on the block, like Bank of America and The Children’s Place, have attractive signs compliant with the historical district and having more of such signs would make the commercial strip beautiful.

“Other areas in the city would love such character,” he said.