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New Queens BID would target crime

A proposal to create a business improvement district along a stretch of Roosevelt Avenue in the Jackson Heights and Corona sections of Queens would cost property owners an average of \$2,000 a year. But proponents say the investment is worth it.

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Councilwoman Julissa Ferreras hosted a town hall meeting June 19 to build community support for creating a Jackson Heights-Corona Business Improvement District in Queens. Part of the BID's mission would be to bolster local businesses against the looming development of a 1.4-million-square-foot mall at nearby Willets Point.

"We need to get organized to ensure we provide the best services now because we might have competition right down the block," Ms. Ferreras said.

The proposed BID, stretching along Roosevelt Avenue from 82nd Street down to Flushing-Meadows Corona Park, would have an annual budget of \$1.1 million and cost local property owners along the route an average of \$2,000 per year, though the fees have yet to be finalized.

In exchange, businesses would get improved services, such as sanitation, graffiti removal and sidewalk upkeep. The BID would also provide advocacy within city agencies and local marketing to promote the district's interests, including shopping and restaurant guides.

There are 67 BIDs in New York City, with annual budgets as small as \$53,000 to as large as \$16 million. BIDs provide services that supplement those of city government, such as increased trash collection and improved streetscapes. The Times Square Alliance collects trash nearly 15 times a day, which would cost the city, with its unionized workforce, substantially more money.

The proposed Jackson Heights-Corona BID would be the longest in the city, covering nearly 1.4-million-square feet. "It's terrific, it's ambitious, it's big," said Seth Bornstein, executive director of the Queens Economic Development Corp., which last year helped implement the 103rd Street Corona pedestrian plaza, which would fold into the new BID.

Business owners say the BID would seek to transform the troubled retail corridor that runs under elevated train tracks. According to police statistics, grand larceny and assault crime in the 110th precinct—which covers the south side of Roosevelt Avenue—have risen this year, though burglary and robbery have fallen. Total crime in the 110th precinct is down 1.66% since last year but up 6% compared to two years ago.

The 115th precinct, which patrols the north side of Roosevelt Avenue, has seen a 0.56% increase in crime year over year, and in the last month crime spiked by nearly 10% over the previous month.



Courtesy of the 82nd Street Partnership

A map of the proposed Jackson Heights-Corona business improvement district.

Roosevelt Avenue business and property owners and residents gathered at P.S. 19 in Corona to voice questions, concerns and a fair amount of support. They joined local politicians and city administrators, including Elizabeth de León Bhargava, deputy commissioner of the Neighborhood Development Division.

Local business owner Karla Alfano, who is on the steering committee for the planned BID, said the organization will better connect businesses with city resources. When Ms. Alfano began working with Alfano Plumbing Parts in the 1980s, city agencies would quickly answer her requests. Today, she struggles to get any response and said that a united front will bring much needed resources to the area.

Kevin Gernon, a security guard for Plaza Garibaldi, a restaurant and bar, worried that the BID may not be able to stem the tide of rising crime. He noted that this week he confiscated two knives and a gun from patrons. The area is rife with drugs, weapons and people selling illegal identification, Mr. Gernon said.

"If everyone goes into it, you might put a damper in the crime," Mr. Gernon said.

Seth Taylor, the director of the 82nd Street Partnership, a two-block BID that would become part of the larger district if approved, is in favor of creating the bigger BID. He says it could replicate some of the Partnership's successes, which include building a pedestrian plaza and hosting events that drive shoppers to the area.

After engaging the community, the Jackson Heights-Corona BID proposal must conduct a survey of all business owners along the route before seeking approval from the City Council's finance committee. If approved, the BID would take effect after all the blanketed businesses pay their fee.



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