

Op-ed: Making a BID for the Jackson Heights-Corona commercial corridor

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In Queens, we take tremendous pride in where we live, work and play. Whether we are in Corona, Elmhurst, Flushing or Jackson Heights, each community is unique with distinctive charms. Each neighborhood's face is its commercial shopping district, where we buy goods, dine, stroll, and meet friends. It's like going into "town" whether it's around the corner from home or a bus ride away. The best commercial corridors are places we want to frequent; they are clean, safe and attractive and provide the goods and services we seek. We are fortunate that our borough has more than 100 of these strips.

The ones that really stand out are the Business Improvement Districts – or BIDs. These areas have distinct advantages; they allow local businesses to take control and make decisions to keep them cleaner, safer and more inviting. In Queens, there are BIDs in Astoria, Bayside, Flushing, Jamaica, Long Island City, Ridgewood Sunnyside and Woodhaven. All have enlivened their communities, benefiting businesses, residents and shoppers. Without exception these corridors are better places to do business now than they were prior to the BID designations. Just look at the cleaner streets, fewer retail vacancies and increased property values.

Under the direction of members, BIDs enhance and improve the look, feel and ambiance of the street. And in every single instance, the BIDs in Queens have proved their worth. They are bargains, too. Fees are based on property size, and the average cost per store owner is \$37.50 per month. Considering what shopkeepers pay for sanitation tickets and holiday lights, this is a real savings. Other benefits include staffers who advocate for the business community.

The proposed Jackson Heights-Corona BID will tie together the Roosevelt Avenue commercial corridor. One of the borough's most important, this long shopping strip under the No. 7 train is certainly worthy of a BID. Between 82nd Street and Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, there are over 1,000 small businesses that are vital to the area's economic well-being. In the last few years, the 82nd Street Partnership has increased services, adding cleaning, marketing and promotional programs. The Queens Economic Development Corporation is proud to have helped transform Corona Plaza at 103rd Street into a pedestrian paradise that has been heralded as one of the best public spaces in the city. (My prediction: It will get even better!) But to maintain these improvements and enhance the entire commercial strip, a BID is crucial.

Change is sometimes daunting. But BIDs throughout the city have created stable and exciting commercial districts. I invite any skeptic to walk with me through any borough BID and witness their vibrancy, cleanliness and diversity.

Seth Bornstein is the Executive Director of the Queens Economic Development Corporation and has helped establish many BIDs in the borough.