

A new plan for a new Roosevelt Ave.

Over a million going to lighting, trash, zoning, cameras, task force



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by Josey Bartlett, Editor

A month from now Roosevelt Avenue from 82nd to 114th Street will be “brighter, safer, cleaner,” Commissioner Robert Walsh of the Department of Small Business Services said.

Councilwoman Julissa Ferreras (D-Corona) announced a plan, called the New Deal, at a meeting on Tuesday morning to increase sanitation services, brighten the area with lights and paint, create a business improvement district, install more police cameras, update zoning,

continue programming at Corona Plaza and create a task force for the bustling thoroughfare.

“If you walk down Roosevelt Avenue there is no denying that a change needs to be made,” Ferreras said.

The councilwoman has allocated more than a million dollars in her discretionary funding to the project that is a joint effort with the departments of sanitation and transportation; Small Business Services; Queens Borough President Helen Marshall; Councilman Danny Dromm (D-Jackson Heights), whose district encompasses the avenue above 82nd Street; Mayor Bloomberg’s office; the NYPD and Rep. Joe Crowley (D-Queens, Bronx).

On Roosevelt Avenue trash cans overflow and spill onto the sidewalk and at night the No. 7 train tracks overhead have provided cover for criminals. Bars often violate the State Liquor Authority law keeping them 500 feet apart and in some cases operate past closing hours. The avenue has also been a haven for fake identification manufacturers and sex trafficking.

There is pending legislation by state Sen. Jose Peralta (D-East Elmhurst) and Assemblyman Francisco Moya (D-Jackson Heights) addressing those issues.

The New Deal adds to the efforts to clean up the bustling avenue.

Ferreras allocated \$14,085, which added to funding from the Department of Sanitation, to increase trash pickup throughout the community from six times a week to 14. In addition to the pickups the councilwoman used \$21,000 to buy 14 public trash cans to line the avenue.

“It was a nightmare what this place was like. Maybe we weren’t working as hard and need to pay a little more attention,” Department of Sanitation Commissioner John Doherty said, adding “these litter baskets are just for litter.”

He said many residents use the public cans for their household trash, and that only adds to the problem.

Three more tiers of the seven-point plan address safety. The councilwoman allocated \$500,000 to the Department of Transportation to install lighting from 82nd to 111th Street as well as another half million to the Police Department for cameras. A task force of politicians, merchants and community members will be created to act as a forum to discuss the avenue’s blights.

Next in the plan, in late spring of this year the south side of Roosevelt Avenue from 90th to 114th Street will be rezoned from residential to commercial, Ferreras said.

“Businesses that try to make improvements are told 50 years later they aren’t supposed to be there,” Ferreras said. “This right-zones Roosevelt Avenue.”

Another prong of the plan that will help businesses is expanding the 82nd Street Partnership down the avenue to 114th Street. The organization will create a Jackson Heights Corona Business Improvement District, through which it can access grants.

“We are going to replicate 82nd Street at every corner all the way down,” Walsh said.

The 82nd Street Partnership has used grants to address landmark preservation issues on the block between Roosevelt Avenue and 37th Avenue and cleaned up and added to Dunningham Triangle on the other side of Roosevelt Avenue. The organization helped bring the food festival Viva Comida to the street as well as recently obtained 12 bike parking spots through the DOT.

The new improvement district already has \$350,000 in funding.

The last step of this expansive revitalization project is to continue public events at Corona Plaza, a one-block stretch of 41st Avenue that runs between National and 104th streets.

Pedestrian plazas have outraged business owners in Astoria and on 78th Street in Jackson Heights, who say they will deter business, take away parking and in some cases attract vagrancy, but in Corona the DOT plaza program has been a success.

The Queens Museum of Art has sponsored dancing and in the future aims to bring Zumba to the plaza. In September a survey of plaza businesses and people sitting in the city-provided seats yielded only thumbs up.

In years past the block was used as an unofficial parking lot for Mudanza, a moving van company, which angered community members.

Double parking and lack of regular parking has long plagued the avenue.

Two weeks ago Dromm held a Jackson Heights traffic forum. About 100 residents attended. Their main concerns were double parking, enforcement at crosswalks and delivery cyclists who use the sidewalks as a quick way to bypass traffic.

A package of bills passed last October will take effect April 1. The measures allow DOT officials to respond to 311 complaints about delivery bikes, which now can only be enforced by the NYPD. They also set civil penalties of \$100 for businesses that do not furnish their riders with helmets and reflective vests; or that fail to offer proper training or identification for their riders.