

Northern Queens seeks opt-out on green infrastructure

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Homeowners in northern Queens are now being offered options when it comes to the city's water-trapping bioswales, but they still want the ability to say "no" to the green infrastructure.

The NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced it would offer homeowners two additional options if it is determined that a rain garden is appropriate for the sidewalk in front of their home. The bioswales, part of the city agency's Green Infrastructure Program, are large planted areas installed by a street curb designed to trap and absorb rainwater.

A "green strip" and a "porous sidewalk" option will now also be made available to homeowners, according to a letter written by Vincent Sapienza, acting commissioner of the DEP. Both structures function as a rain garden below but lack the tree guard and fencing of the initial design — preserving the original surface of the sidewalk.

Additionally, any property owner with a disabled license plate or parking placard may "fully opt out" of any type of green infrastructure in front of their home, Sapienza writes. However, the city agency will not grant a full opt-out option for all homeowners.

"Working closely with the mayor's office, we firmly believe that these alternatives address the legit-

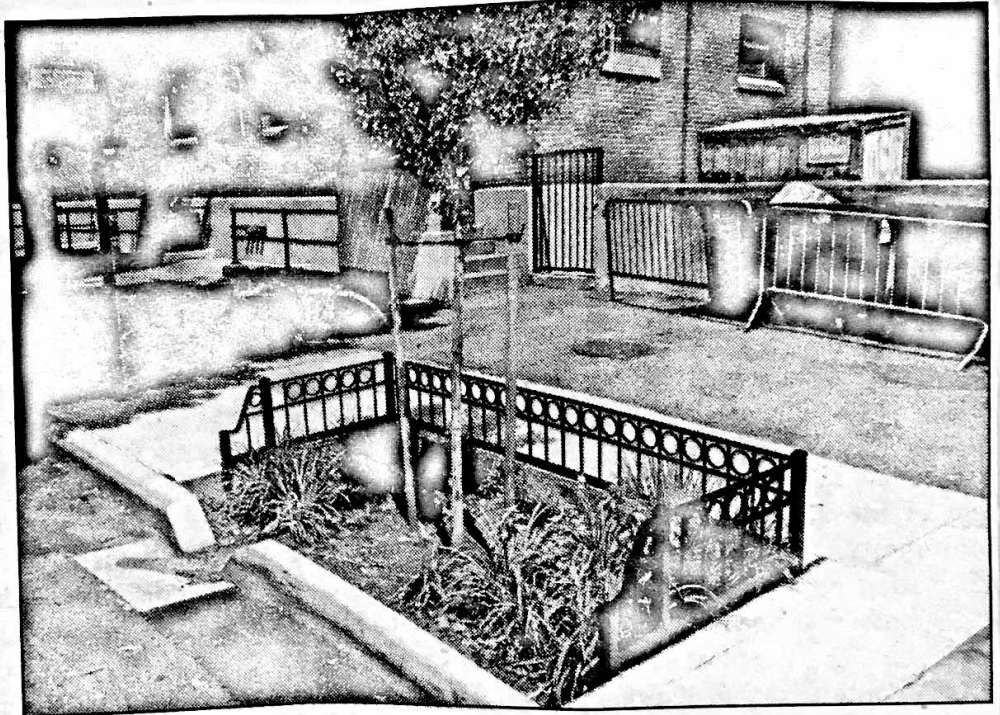


Photo via Flickr/ChrisHamby

A photo of a bioswale installed in Elmhurst.

imate concerns raised by members of the community," Sapienza said. "Therefore, DEP will not be providing a full 'opt-out' of green infrastructure in the city's right-of-way sidewalk."

Sapienza's letter was distributed to the area's community groups, according to a DEP spokesperson.

Days later, residents and lawmakers continued the call for a full opt-out at a rally in Bayside.

"Queens has spoken: they have spoken fervently, and they have spoken frequently, so I'm not quite sure why DEP and the mayor refuse to listen to us," state Senator Tony Avella said at a Feb. 17 press conference.

"We're not asking for a lot: we are simply asking that they give the community options and that they install bioswales in front of the homes of people who would like one."

The state senator previously held a press conference — also in Bayside — with the Friends of Fort Totten Park and other residents to urge the mayor and city agencies to seek homeowner authorization before installing the bioswales. The lawmaker also wrote to city Transportation Commissioner Polly Trottenburg last August, stating some Bayside residents would like the option to opt out of having the units installed in front of their homes due to parking concerns.



Photo courtesy of Councilman Costa Constantinides

Councilman Costa Constantinides is asking for public input on a new public gathering space on Steinway Street.

Astoria councilman: let's fix Steinway

BY ANGELA MATUA
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Bustling Steinway Street in Astoria needs safety improvements and a public gathering space, and one local legislator is asking area residents for their help in achieving these goals.

On Feb. 24, Councilman Costa Constantinides announced the new initiative along with state Senator Michael Gianaris and Assembly members Aravella Simotas and Brian Barnwell.

Constantinides first proposed changes to the street in his State of the District address in January. Steinway Street is considered Astoria's main thoroughfare, home to many businesses and eating establishments.

It has also been the site of hundreds of traffic accidents - there have been 249 traffic-related injuries and 95 pedestrian injuries in the past five years. This high number of injuries is due to the configuration of each block. The blocks along the street are long, and many times pedestrians will cross in the middle of the street to reach a store instead of walking to the end to reach a crosswalk.

"That's why I am calling for the Department of Transportation to place mid-block crosswalks along Steinway Street," Constantinides said in his speech. "I also believe that there are other traffic safety measures, including leading pedestrian intervals or LPIs, which need to be considered. These allow for a few extra seconds for pedestrians to cross before vehicles are cleared to go."

The plan also includes curb extensions and a way-finding system that would map out public transit routes and points of interest in the neighborhood.

Additionally, the councilman outlined plans for a public gathering space, where residents could sit down, enjoy a cup of coffee or take a break from shopping.

Astoria residents are encouraged to submit suggestions for the location and design of the space to Steinway@council.nyc.gov. In the spring, the councilman will form a community working group to discuss specifics for the space.

"Steinway Street has long been the commercial heart of Astoria," he said. "Yet, business along the thoroughfare has been in transition for a few years. Many great shopping areas around our city have measures to mitigate traffic and dedicated spaces for public gathering. We have the opportunity to turn Steinway Street into something similar."

The changes, Constantinides argued, would "improve pedestrian safety, create an anchor space to draw in shoppers, increase economic activity and encourage community togetherness."

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Bayside Village BID seeks new director

The Bayside Village Business Improvement District (BID) is looking for a new executive director to lead the area's bustling business community.

The BID — which covers properties on Bell Boulevard from Northern Boulevard to 35th Avenue, as well as 41st Avenue from 213th Street to 214th Place — works to promote and provide services to the businesses along the busy venue. Lyle Sclair previously served as the BID executive director, but moved on to another opportunity earlier this year.

The paid position entails a combination of administrative, marketing and management tasks. Among these are overseeing BID finances, representing the BID to outside stakeholders and planning and executing all special events, including the BID's annual Sunday Stroll and Children's Holiday Parade and Lighting.

Interested applicants should email their resume, along with a cover letter and salary requirements, to recruitment@baysidevillagebid.com.

Suzanne Monteverdi

No 7 line in LIC during March

The MTA has slowly been working to improve the congested and often unreliable 7 train with new technology, and to continue that work, the agency will stop service to Manhattan for four consecutive weekends in March.

Work includes the replacement of underground and elevated tracks and replacement of the decades-old fixed-block signal system. The new signal system will permit the MTA to use Communications-Based Train Control (CBTC), which allows for the agency to operate more trains closer together. With the implementation of CBTC, the MTA hopes to accommodate the growing population along the line.

To test previously installed CBTC equipment there will be no service from Queensboro Plaza in Long Island City to 34th St-Hudson Yards on March 3 through March 6; March 10 through March 13; March 17 through March 20; and March 24 through March 27. This schedule is subject to change due to inclement weather.

As an alternative, the MTA will be operating free shuttle bus service in Queens making stops at the Queensboro Plaza, Queens Plaza, Court Square, Hunters Point Av and Vernon Blvd-Jackson Av stations. Those heading to and from Manhattan can take the N or W train at Queensboro Plaza; the W train, which normally runs on weekdays, will operate on weekends when the 7 line is shut down.

Angela Matua

Bill aims to protect undocumented crime victims

At a time when the federal government is cracking down on undocumented immigrants, those who are victims of crimes may not come forward for fear of deportation.

Assemblywoman Aravella Simotas hopes to help change that — she wants to make it illegal for suspects to use someone's immigration status as a threat.

Simotas wants to add an amendment to the penal code that would punish those who report the immigration status of a victim or someone who is seeking protective order in family court as an intimidation tactic.

"The president's recent executive orders and Homeland Security directives have caused so much fear and confusion, that the Federal government has handed abusers and other criminals a weapon to harass, intimidate and silence fearful victims," Simotas said. "If predatory criminals can turn in their victims to immigration authorities, our communities become less safe because undocumented victims and witnesses will simply not report crimes."

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