

Civic News

The Newsletter of the Park Slope Civic Council | www.parkslopeciviccouncil.org

Fall 2011



SPECIAL ISSUE

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*Take a **new** look at your community's
advocates and get involved!*

Coming Together for the Community

A while back, a few Park Slope Civic Council trustees had the idea to devote an upcoming issue of *Civic News* to the question, “What is the Park Slope Civic Council?” No doubt many of you who are reading this publication know what the Civic Council is, but it never ceases to surprise me that many others around the community do not. In this editorial, I embrace the opportunity to reach out, to talk about what we are and what we do, and to take stock of ourselves. One could well ask not only “What is the Park Slope Civic Council?” but also “What is Park Slope?”

The Civic Council has been around a long time, starting life in 1896 as the South Brooklyn Board of Trade, a body that functioned much as a chamber of commerce. *South Brooklyn*, a useful term even today, referred to the many

communities south of Downtown Brooklyn, including Park Slope. After several waves of change for South Brooklyn, by the 1950s the Board of Trade had become “repurposed” as an advocacy organization called the Park Slope Civic Council. By

1959, the Civic Council had organized the first Park Slope House Tour, the first step on its new mission to preserve and restore Park Slope.

Look all around the neighborhood, and you’ll see evidence of the Civic Council’s work. Perhaps most obvious are the thousands of “No Flyers” signs here (and, I’m pleased to say, in neighboring communities). The Halloween Parade is a safe activity for children in our community, fun for all ages, and run by our volunteers. The twice-yearly Civic Sweep gives people the tools and motivation to clean up around the neighborhood, plant flowers, and more — and this is run by Civic Council volunteers, with the generosity of local businesses. Toys for Tots provides presents for needy children every year — and this is run by volunteers of the Civic Council, with assistance from local businesses and institutions. In May 2012, we will have the 53rd annual House Tour, run by legions of Civic Council volunteers. We provide scholarships for local high school students and grants to community organizations. We pushed long and hard for the reopening of a long-closed subway entrance on Fourth Avenue between Ninth and Tenth Streets; by the end of 2011, that will be a reality.

The Civic Council is also involved in issue advocacy, from calmer streets to Atlantic Yards to being out in front of changes along Fourth Avenue. We are organizing a community round-

table to propose locations for the city’s upcoming bicycle-share program. We are forming a business advisory council to bring the Civic Council and local businesses together, to see how we might help each other, all for the benefit of the community. And more is on the way, all run — you guessed it — by volunteers who comprise the Civic Council.

Today’s Park Slope Civic Council looks to build community throughout the area sloping westward from Prospect Park. Civic Council Trustee Lyn Hill remembers a long-ago House Tour that was considered revolutionary because it included houses south of Ninth Street. We have come a long way from that, actively engaging the whole Park Slope community and its amazing diversity of people and businesses. We are not content to sit back and watch the change that occurs in our community every day, in plain sight. We are part of shaping that change. Our September 2011 “season opener” meeting welcomed new members and welcomed back longtime ones. More than a few new members came up to me amazed at all that the volunteers who comprise the Civic Council do. I had to say that what they heard that night only scratched the surface.

This is the first time that *Civic News* has been devoted to one topic. In this issue, you will hear many voices, long-timers and new arrivals, people from all walks of life, talking about what we are. I hope you like what you see. Be part of what the Civic Council and the community will be. Join the Park Slope Civic Council. **n**

— Michael Cairl is president of the Park Slope Civic Council.

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The newsletter of the  PARK SLOPE CIVIC COUNCIL

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Thanks to our supersponsor for supporting the Park Slope Civic Council:



Improving Our Public Spaces

In March 2006, the Park Slope Civic Council devoted its annual community forum to issues of traffic and transportation. More than 200 audience members gathered in the Old First Reformed Church's sanctuary to listen to panelists discuss traffic calming and placemaking, residential parking permits and Atlantic Yards, and more. Given a chance to weigh in on the challenges they found on local streets, residents cited Grand Army Plaza's inaccessibility and speeding on Prospect Park West as two of Park Slope's most pressing transportation-related problems.

Before the night had ended, the wheels of positive and potentially life-saving change were already in motion. After the event officially ended, a group of newly energized Brooklynites sat down in Old First's pews and started battling ideas back and forth. Before they left, the outlines of the Grand Army Plaza Coalition (GAPCO) were born, with the Civic Council as a charter member.

Two months later, members of the nascent GAPCO took to the plaza to survey traffic, pedestrian, and cycling conditions, noting what worked and what didn't. The next spring, GAPCO convened a workshop at the Brooklyn Public Library, overlooking the plaza. More than 50 residents, local activists, elected officials, and transportation experts brainstormed ways to make the space more inviting and safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers.

Those efforts quickly bore fruit. Just six months later, the New York City Department of Transportation (NYCDOT) announced several improvements to Grand Army Plaza, including the conversion of more than 10,000 square feet of asphalt into raised pedestrian islands, marked crosswalks, and a protected bike path facilitating connections with the existing Plaza Street East bike lane. The enhancements were a direct outgrowth of GAPCO's work — and were just a preview of things to come.

Last April, NYCDOT announced the next phase in the ongoing effort to remake Grand Army Plaza. Those startling — and widely welcomed — changes, implemented by NYCDOT this summer, have greatly advanced GAPCO's goal of transforming Grand Army Plaza from a traffic maelstrom into one of Brooklyn's — and the world's — great public spaces.

The new design has remade the intersection of Flatbush and Vanderbilt Avenues to the north into a vastly more pedestrian-friendly space. It has added a new curb and signal for vehicles bound toward Prospect Park West and Union Street, simplifying what was a breakneck merge across six lanes of traffic. It has added several large pedestrian islands and crosswalks on the southern end of the plaza, and expanded and physically protected the area



Input from the community and GAPCO has made a big difference in how people get around Grand Army Plaza.

devoted to the Greenmarket. The redesign also added several new bike routes that make cycling through the plaza easier and safer.

A similar process, with similar results, has played out on Prospect Park West. Community Board 6 told NYCDOT in June 2007 that the roadway needed serious traffic calming, suggesting that one of three vehicular travel lanes could be replaced with a two-way protected bike path. Local advocacy group Park Slope Neighbors picked up the ball in March 2009, sending NYCDOT 1,300 signatures on a petition asking for much the same thing. The agency responded not long after, presenting a plan removing excess capacity and adding the bike route that is there today. Over the next year, the plan was refined, then implemented in June 2010. Almost overnight, the changes had the intended traffic-calming effect, reducing speeding by 75%; soon, the amount of bike traffic more than doubled, while the presence of bikes on Prospect Park West's sidewalks dropped by 90%.

Like the newly accessible Grand Army Plaza, the new Prospect Park West is just one more example that a little vision and a lot of community engagement can make a complete street out of chaos.

Also arising from the 2006 forum was the Livable Streets Committee, which has initiated a broad spectrum of events and projects that focus on street life — from the way pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists interact to the semi-annual Civic Sweep (see page 5).

The committee has been included in important conversations on larger initiatives, most recently with NYCDOT's exciting Bike Share program, which will launch next year. Bike sharing will benefit local businesses and institutions like schools and hospitals. Similar programs are already up and running in some 200 cities worldwide including, in North America, Montreal; the University of California campus in Irvine; Miami Beach; Washington, D.C.; and Mexico City.

In our own communities, where so many locals ride bikes and storage is always a premium, we expect a high demand for Bike Share. On Oct. 1, the Civic Council co-sponsored a Bike Share demonstration by NYCDOT at Grand Army Plaza. We are pleased to join in this exercise in community engagement; no less important, we want to open up a dialogue with our local business improvement districts and other business and community leaders on where share stations might be sensibly located. (NYCDOT has posted an interactive map, at www.nyc.gov/bikeshare, where visitors can suggest where bike-share stations might go.) By working together and thinking

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NYCDOT demonstrated the new Bike Share program on Oct. 1 in an event cosponsored by the Civic Council.



Helping Students Succeed

Five years ago, I became chair of the Civic Council's Scholarship for Community Service Committee. The role offered me the special opportunity to work again with our public-school students, stepping away from my current career as a psychologist and returning to my first 25 years as a school guidance counselor.

This committee grants a \$1,000 financial award to one graduate of each of the three secondary schools housed in the John Jay High School building who were accepted to college, and who could demonstrate community service while in high school. The scholarships are awarded every June at the Civic Council's year-end meeting, and school staff, parents, and family are invited to share in this proud event.

Committee members have been totally welcomed and comfortably accepted by all the school staff and students. It feels great to be forging a relationship between our neighborhood and our local high school, which has existed here for decades but still feels like an unknown entity in Park Slope.

Perhaps more meaningfully, we have come to know what kind of students are coming to our high school. We are impressed with our scholarship applicants' backgrounds, life stories, and unbelievable motivation to succeed, not to mention their desire to volunteer and help others.

We've also learned about these students' support networks, and as a result have discovered things that don't really appear on their applications. Their stories are often dramatic.

Many of these students are still struggling to get their immigration status in order. They are born in countries in South and Central America, West Indies, or Africa, and are brought or sent here by parents whose sacrifices for their children are inspiring and at times heart-aching. Some of our applicants come to join their parents after many years



apart; others are sent here to live with relatives, and do not see their parents for decades. The impressive students that we meet have overcome these obstacles, honoring the tradition of sacrificing a comfortable lifestyle in the present for a stronger well-being for themselves and their families in the future.

For me, these family stories are a reminder of my grandparents who came over with very little on the boat from Russia. This historical connection helps me understand my emotional reaction every time I see the Statue of Liberty.

This year, the Civic Council is giving even greater attention to the scholarship program. Our goal is to really make an impact on the financial needs faced by our winners, especially since many of these outstanding students don't legally qualify for college aid. We are starting a fundraising program to increase the scholarship awards; we are also looking to keep a connection with our awardees as they progress through college, inviting them back to our June meetings to share tales of their higher-educational journeys. We are also planning ways to share some of these stories so our neighbors will know who these students are.

It's been a pleasure and honor for our committee to be working with these youngsters, and wonderfully rewarding to watch our Civic Council dedicate itself to ensuring these scholarships remain one of our main missions.

E-mail me at scholarships@parkslopeciviccouncil.org if you'd like to learn more about this program.

— Joan Emerson chairs the Scholarship Committee.

Photos: bottom, Gilly Youner; others, David Herman

Scaring Up Halloween Fun in BOOklyn!

The annual Park Slope Civic Council Halloween Parade is set for Mon., Oct. 31, which means you have an entire weekend before the big day to work on your phantasmagoric booklyn-themed costume. How scary can you get? Building on 25 years of community creativity, we'll be looking for lots of Brooklyn's ghostly history, alluring apparitions and Park Slope phantasms, along with a heavy dose of skeletons and other creatures that go bump-in-the-night.

The Civic Council's Halloween Parade has been a part of neighborhood life since 1986. The route brings together the many parts of Park Slope, connecting Seventh and Fifth Avenues. The phantom march starts at 14th Street and Seventh Avenue at 6:30 p.m., moves north on Seventh Avenue, makes a left turn (west) on Third Street toward Fifth Avenue, and ends at the big field at Washington Park between Fourth and



Fifth Avenue, with the great dance music of Hearts of Steel and Paprika until 8:30 p.m.

Cosponsoring the festivities will be the Park Slope Fifth Avenue Business Improvement District and the Park Slope Chamber of Commerce.

So organize that stoop party, order in your dinner, and get ready for those trick-or-treaters. Be on the look-out for parade emcee Gersh Kuntzman, editor of *The Brooklyn Paper*, leading an exciting, family-friendly pack of ghouls and ghosts through the neighborhood. Then be sure to join in at the end of the parade for Park Slope's greatest neighborhood celebration of the year.

Want to help with the parade? E-mail halloween@parkslopeciviccouncil.org. There's also more information at parkslopeciviccouncil.org/halloween-parade.

— Old Stone House Executive Director Kim Maier is organizing this year's spooky festivities.



Working for a Greener Slope

Park Slope should be a model community for sustainability and responsible stewardship. Meaningful action on climate change and other global issues will have to be taken at the state, national, and international levels, of course, but as concerned citizens, every action we take is important as a message to others. And we can influence our elected leaders' decisions as well.

To this end, the Civic Council focused its 2008 annual forum on sustainability. The Sustainability Committee was formed some two years later. We advocate for responsible use of natural resources in our community and promote better practices for the environment. Our goals are to provide information on sustainability issues, such as reducing energy usage and practical "green" building techniques; encourage practices that reduce waste and increase recycling; raise awareness of sustainability and carbon-footprint issues in our selection of food and other goods; and work with other groups, and provide them with publicity and assistance.

One of our largest activities is the Civic Sweep, held in the fall and spring. This year's Fall Civic Sweep took place on Sun., Oct. 16. Volunteers focused on Seventh Avenue, picking up litter, mulching trees, and weeding tree pits. We gave away daffodil bulbs and a limited supply of block clean-up kits. The Lower East Side Ecology Center collected electronics for recycling, Transportation Alternatives offered bicycle light sets for \$5, and we all enjoyed bluegrass by Vincent Cross and Good Company. We thank this year's sponsors — supersponsor New York Methodist Hospital; Astoria Federal Savings; Brooklyn Properties of Seventh Avenue; Brown Harris Stevens; Brownstone Real Estate LLC; Garfield Realty; Leopoldi

Hardware; Orrichio Anderson Realty; Park Slope Copy Center; Park Slope Food Coop; Slope Realty Co.; Tarzian Hardware; Universal Mortgage, Inc.; and Warren Lewis Realty — and invite more local businesses to help us by sponsoring future Sweeps. (The next Civic Sweep will be in April.)

To help reduce use of plastic bags, we have produced a tote bag as a substitute, paid for by funds from New York Methodist Hospital, to be offered at events and to new members. We are interested in how other cities have introduced a plastic-bag fee, which reduces use and funds municipal projects, with the intent of doing something similar in New York City.

The committee also keeps an eye on the new trees recently planted on Seventh Avenue by MillionTreesNYC, following a Civic Council request two years ago. Over the summer, we enlisted volunteers to water these new trees in times of drought. Seven merchants and one church have signed up thus far. Sustainability Committee members have participated in MillionTreesNYC Tree Care workshops at a 10th Street block party and in Manhattan earlier this summer.

Also, in January, the Civic Council cosponsors the local Mulchfest Christmas tree recycling program with the Prospect Park Alliance.

Another Sustainability initiative involves the lot at Fourth Avenue and Sackett Street. For many years now, GreenSpace, Community Board 6, and the Department of Environmental Protection, supported by the Civic Council, have worked to create a public garden on this long-vacant lot, which provides access to the city's Third Water Tunnel. We hope that this garden will soon become a reality. GreenSpace envisions a native-plantings garden and a site for community events. Judy Janda, a founding member of GreenSpace and a member of the Sustainability Committee, is our liaison on this project.

The committee would also like to get the word out regarding hydrofracking, a serious environmental threat to our drinking water. Last year, the committee composed a letter for Civic Council trustees opposing the practice to send to the governor, the commissioner of the state Department of Environmental Conservation, and elected officials. We are now finalizing a fact sheet on hydrofracking, as well as an updated letter on its dangers to be sent to other Brooklyn Brownstone civic associations for distribution to their membership.

Next year, we hope to help promote the new Bike Share Program (see page 3), educate our community about solar voltaic panels, and help reduce energy consumption through energy audits and installation of energy-efficiency measures.

We are always seeking new members who want to get involved and help the community live more sustainable lives. E-mail us at sustainable@parkslopeciviccouncil.org.
— Bob Gilbert and Chandru Murthi founded and currently cochair the Sustainability Committee.



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Preserving Local History

Many residents assume Park Slope to be fully landmark-protected, with its large expanse of 19th-century brownstones, apartment buildings, carriage houses, and frame buildings. In reality, only about a quarter of the neighborhood is landmarked. Outside the boundaries of the Park Slope Historic District, buildings can be demolished, altered in inappropriate ways, or stripped of their architectural features without constraint.

The Civic Council is committed to redressing this oversight by getting protection extended to the many blocks that meet the criteria for historically and architecturally significant buildings and districts.

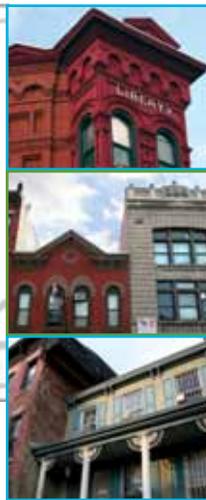
The current Park Slope Historic District was established in the early 1970s. The Civic Council was the driving force behind this initiative, which galvanized the revival of the neighborhood.

The current effort began in 2007, when a group of Civic Council trustees and members took action after growing concerned about the assaults on the neighborhood's historical and architectural integrity, both real and threatened. These dangers stemmed from Atlantic Yards, the upzoning of Fourth Avenue and of Park Slope's two major commercial thoroughfares, and new developments springing up like weeds in the South Slope. Seemingly in the blink of an eye, the solidity of our streetscape, embodied in bricks and brownstone, seemed fragile and ephemeral. Is that hyperbole? Just take a look at Greenpoint, Williamsburg, and neighborhoods throughout the city to witness their transformation in the last decade.

The Civic Council championed the expansion effort at our 2009 annual forum. Under the auspices of the Historic Dis-



The first phase of the historic district's expansion (in red) is imminent, and will preserve nearly 600 structures.



trict Expansion Committee, we submitted a proposed master plan in May 2009 to the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) outlining a multiphase expansion of the district.

The designation of nearly 600 buildings in the South Slope outlined in the first phase is imminent. As this issue goes to press, the LPC is preparing the voluminous designation report that will be the basis for its upcoming vote. This phase will protect blocks starting at the Park Slope Armory

on 14th Street and Seventh Street, encompassing both sides of Seventh Avenue, and extending to the existing historic district just east of Eighth Avenue. The entrance to Park Slope at Bartel Pritchard Square will also be protected.

As the second phase of the district's expansion, the Civic Council has set its sights on protecting another 600–800 buildings in the North Slope. Buildings north of Carroll Street and above Fifth Avenue and extending north to near Flatbush Avenue would be included. This is the original part of Park Slope to be developed, but it's also expected to change dramatically from Atlantic Yards.

In recent months, volunteers have fanned out to inform owners of these buildings and solicit their support. We anticipate that the LPC will launch a formal review of this phase next year, and will invite the owners to hear about what it means to be in a historic district. At that meeting, LPC officials will present their proposed boundaries of this expansion and answer questions. Subsequent expansion phases will focus on protecting the blocks above Fifth Avenue extending from near Carroll Street to blocks in the South Slope. In addition to retaining the small scale of our Seventh Avenue commercial strip, it will protect the unbroken streetscapes of many side streets and Sixth Avenue.



The next phase will focus on the North Slope (in green, current district boundaries in black).

The Historic District Expansion Committee meets regularly to discuss our strategies for expansion and to enlist volunteers in our outreach efforts. These volunteers include homeowners and tenants, and hail from the South, Central, and North Slope. Our efforts require considerable volunteer help.

Find out how you can get involved: E-mail us at historic.district@parkslopeciviccouncil.org.

— Peter Bray chairs the Civic Council's Historic District Expansion Committee.

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Moving Fourth Forward

Development along Fourth Avenue is in a state of flux right now. The reprieve in new construction along the thoroughfare due to the contraction of financial markets has handed our community a golden opportunity to reflect and take action, and tie new development into a well-thought-out plan for the avenue's future.

FORTHonFourth, a subcommittee of the Livable Streets Committee (see page 3), seeks out opportunities to get involved now, at this inflection point of growth along the avenue, and help contribute to its future. Stemming from the Council's successful 2010 community forum on "The Future of Fourth Avenue," ours is a grassroots working group with a diverse mix of people who live near, work on, commute or travel on, or invest in Park Slope's portion of the avenue.

Our mission is to promote prosperity, safety, and greater vitality along Fourth Avenue. Early on, we established several objectives to guide us in our efforts:

- Improve safety and seek a greener, cleaner streetscape and a more vibrant pedestrian experience along Fourth Avenue.
- Enhance the aesthetics and strengthen the relationship of the buildings on the avenue with street-level activity.
- Promote greater economic vitality for retail and commercial businesses.
- Improve the quality of life for pedestrians, cyclists, commuters, drivers, and residents.
- Advocate for a greater diversity of housing options on or near Fourth Avenue.

In early meetings, group participants identified five primary areas that would inform our discussions: green space, streetscape, real-estate development, zoning, and land use; parking, traffic, biking, and pedestrian safety, including public transportation involving MTA subway and bus; retail, commercial, and small business; housing and schooling; and sewage, drainage, water treatment, and other public utilities.

Even though we now focus on the avenue from Prospect Avenue to Flatbush, we intend to coordinate as much as possible with other community groups and civic organizations.

One example of a recent early success for our group is the petitioning of the city's Department of City Planning to address the zoning regulations now in place along Fourth that have allowed for oversized, poorly planned, and inappropriately designed residential developments. Many of these structures feature air vents or grates, parking lots, empty or blank walls, or residential apartments at street level instead of colorful, community-enriching retail shops, restaurants, cafes, stores, or other needed service outlets.

This June, after several meetings and much discussion with City Planning, the department proposed a zoning amendment that will require developers to include street-level retail frontage in their plans, among other improvements. These proposals already have passed three community boards that front Fourth Avenue, and the City Council will vote on them soon. Details can be

found at nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/fourth/index.shtml.

Our group is actively participating in another exciting project: the new Brooklyn Borough President's Fourth Avenue Task Force, which will focus on furthering and even buttressing our efforts to effect positive change along the avenue. The Task force will initially have five primary focus groups:

- Plant sidewalk trees along the avenue's entire length, from Flatbush Avenue to Shore Road.
- Design use of newly expanded Times Plaza at the intersection of Fourth, Atlantic, and Flatbush Avenues.
- Ensure safety for all users.
- Enhance subway median vents with artwork/plantings.
- Explore the co-naming of Fourth Avenue.

This project clearly dovetails very nicely with our own efforts. More information is available at brooklyn-usa.org/press/2011/aug10b_MA.htm.

FORTHonFourth meets the third Thursday of every month at 8 a.m. at the Brooklyn Lyceum, 227 Fourth Ave. (corner of President Street). Meetings are open to *all* residents, community members, business owners, real-estate developers, Fourth Avenue commuters, and any other stakeholders. We also communicate via internal message board almost daily.

Feel free to get involved! Reach out to us anytime at fofa@parkslopeciviccouncil.org!

— *Josh Levy chairs the FORTHonFourth group.*



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Photos: David Herman

Granting Local 'Wishes'

There's more to the Civic Council's work than just the initiatives approved by our trustees and members. Every year, we also provide up to \$10,000 in grants to local nonprofits and noncommercial organizations that have an impact on the quality of life in our neighborhood.

The Civic Council is currently accepting applications for the 2011–12 grant cycle. The application deadline is Nov. 5, 2011, and grants will be awarded in early 2012. The program is funded by the Council's annual House Tour (see next page).

The grants — which are awarded to community groups for projects in the arts, education, youth programs, and

Making Holidays Happier

For the last 16 winters, the Civic Council has organized a Toys for Tots gift collection drive to help children and families in need. And every year, Park Slope shows its true community spirit by brightening their holidays with hundreds of donated toys and books.

Last year's program resulted in a record-breaking 1,100 toys, almost twice the amount of any year past. The generous nature of our neighbors and friends in the Park Slope area is wonderful to witness. Businesses and organizations showed an extraordinary amount of cooperation to help gather and distribute donations.

If you'd like to donate for the 17th annual drive, the Civic Council collects new and gently used unwrapped gifts for children ages 12 and under, from Thanksgiving until Little Christmas on Jan. 6, at several locations in the Slope. All the toys collected are given to local organizations that work with families in need. Visit us in the upcoming weeks at parkslopeciviccouncil.org/toysfortots for locations and exact dates.

Want to volunteer for the drive or have your business serve as a drop-off point for toys? Please e-mail us at toys4tots@parkslopeciviccouncil.org.

— *Tom Miskel, former Civic Council president, heads the Toys for Tots program.*



civic improvements that are open to residents of Park Slope — certainly make a difference to these groups. The awards range from about \$500 to a single annual Community Builder grant of \$2,000. Sometimes, these funds can fully cover an applicant's project. Our grants can also provide seed money for initiatives, and give organizations the credibility they may need to help leverage larger awards from more-traditional funders.

Recipients for 2010–11 were the P.S. 39 Parents Association (a Community Builder grant), GALLOP Horse Show, BRIC Arts | Media | Bklyn, Chocolate Chip Chamber Music, Park Slope Parents for Climate Protection, BAX/Brooklyn Arts Exchange, P.S. 321 School Garden, and Friends of Douglass/Greene Park, Inc.

To download an application, find more about the program, or read about previous recipients, visit parkslopeciviccouncil.org/Grants or e-mail grants@parkslopeciviccouncil.org.

— *Greg Sutton chairs the Grants Committee.*

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Showing Off Homes, Guiding through History

Every third Sunday in May, the Civic Council hosts a self-guided walking tour of lovely and interesting homes in Park Slope, a new section every year. Ticket-holders get a handsome illustrated brochure describing the history and interior of each home, along with a suggested route. In recent years, a talk or panel discussion on issues of interest to the community has followed the tour. Funds raised by the House Tours are returned to our community in the form of grants to local institutions (see previous page).

The process to make this happen begins in January, as Civic Council trustees, former trustees, and members search for homes; recruit and organize sitters, photograph tour homes; design the poster, ticket, brochure map, and street banner; arrange online ticket sales; write and edit the brochure; arrange for flowers; and send press releases. We are very thankful for their hard work. We are also grateful to merchants and realtors who sell tickets and, of course, to the gracious homeowners who make their beautiful homes available.

Beginning in 1959, the Civic Council and the Park Slope Garden Club hosted springtime visits to Park Slope gardens. In 1962, under the leadership of Robert Makla, the event became a tour of Park Slope homes. Participants who joined in the 1962 tour were asked to donate \$1.50. The Civic Council used those funds to “brighten our streets with window boxes and flowers.”

Everett and the late Evelyn Ortner, longtime Park Slope preservationists, went on the 1963 House Tour; as a result, they decided to purchase a Park Slope brownstone.

Early tours were of 10 or so homes on one or two blocks. By 1976, the House Tour expanded to multiple blocks. In 1979, Peter Altschuler and ROSAS (Revitalization of the Southern Area of the Slope) hosted the first tour south of Eighth Street. Posters made by local students, with Park Slope history as their theme, were posted along the tour route. John Muir and Carl Kaiserman gave a South Slope walking tour the day before to generate interest.

The Park Slope of that era was run down, and crime was an issue. Today, of course, House Tour visitors see a much different Slope, a community that the American Planning Association called “one of the 10 Great Neighborhoods in America.”

Candace Woodward, a Civic Council trustee from 2000 through 2010, chaired the House Tour Committee during that period. “I first became involved in the House Tour in the late 1990s, when I assisted Gail Harvey, then–House Tour chair, with publicity. I was interested in the House Tour because it benefits many and accomplishes a great deal. Homeowners proudly show off their treasures and their renovations. Local architects, engineers, landscapers, interior decorators, and artists gain publicity. Ticket-holders view beautiful homes of all types, from

traditional brownstones to wood-frame homes to contemporary lofts. And of course, the House Tour funds the Civic Council grants program.”

Darryl Cook, a new trustee, will work with Woodward this year to prepare for taking over as committee chair. “My first visit to Park Slope was in 1999, when I ventured out of Manhattan to see some friends who lived on Fifth Avenue. I remember how beautiful and inviting the streetscape was, and how surprised I was to find this amazing neighborhood here in Brooklyn. Within a year, I was calling Park Slope my home.

“As an architect, I knew I wanted very much to be more involved in the tour for its exposure to the history and culture of Park Slope,” Cook said. “Now this year, I will get the opportunity and look forward to being a part of it moving forward.”

You, too, can get involved in the House Tour. E-mail us at housetour@parkslopeciviccouncil.org.
— *House Tour Committee Chairs Candace Woodward and Darryl Cook thank former trustee Carl Kaiserman for historical information.*



Tour announcements from 1962 (left) and 2011.



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You, too, can become a member or renew at any level. See the back page or visit parkslopeciviccouncil.org/joinus.

GAPCo + Livable Streets from page 3

"out of the box," we could recommend some smartly situated stations in our communities.

Livable Streets is always open to recommendations and issues affecting our neighbors and neighborhood! It's our goal to keep Park Slope beautiful, calm, and clean! To learn more, including notifications of upcoming meetings, e-mail livable@parkslopeciviccouncil.org.

— Eric McClure is co-founder of Park Slope Neighbors; Judith Lief is the chair of the Civic Council's Livable Streets Committee.

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Keeping an Eye on a Megaproject

If you've been past the corner of Flatbush and Atlantic Avenues during the last 18 months, you have seen the Barclays Center arena taking shape. Whatever your views about it, the arena's existence is now certain. With its opening less than 12 months away, concerns about the challenges of locating an arena amid residential neighborhoods — and at the nexus of three police precincts — grow, and the impacts have moved from the realm of academic discussion to day-to-day reality. The threat of thousands more cars converging on Brooklyn's most congested intersection becomes more real as plans affecting traffic are revealed. And the biggest question of all still remains: What will become of the rest of the 22-acre site, and when?



One thing that has not changed is the utter lack of voice given the surrounding communities in how this project progresses. Unlike other large, publicly financed projects, New York's Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC) has delegated decision-making authority at Atlantic Yards to developer Forest City Ratner (FCR), circumventing community boards and local elected officials. Much is at stake, not just for the neighborhoods of Park Slope, Prospect Heights, Boerum Hill, Brooklyn Heights, Fort Greene, and Clinton Hill but for the entire borough as well. That's why in 2006 the Park Slope Civic Council partnered with other neighborhood civic associations, affordable housing organizations, merchant groups, and citywide planning and transportation advocates in an initiative known as BrooklynSpeaks.

The BrooklynSpeaks sponsors advocate for principled development of the site and for transparency and account-

ability in FCR's relationship with the project. In 2007, BrooklynSpeaks published a roadmap for reform of Atlantic Yards oversight that provides formal roles for local legislators, community boards, and civic organizations. Decisions would be made through a board of directors that would include independent members appointed in conjunction with local elected officials.

This roadmap for reform has been praised by project supporters and critics alike, but it requires state legislation to gain traction. BrooklynSpeaks sponsors continue to meet with local legislators to build consensus and move this forward. The first bill targeting reform of Atlantic Yards governance was introduced in June 2008 by Assemblymembers Jeffries, Brennan, and Millman, and cosponsored by State Senator Montgomery; the legislation passed the Assembly in June 2011, over the intense lobbying of FCR.

BrooklynSpeaks sponsors also took a stand against ESDC's secretly renegotiated concession in 2009 to allow FCR 25 years or more to complete construction of Atlantic Yards. That additional 15 years of construction would blight our neighborhoods. The benefits of affordable housing and job creation under which public funds for Atlantic Yards were justified would be pushed off for decades, if not forever. Several BrooklynSpeaks sponsors, including the Park Slope Civic Council, filed suit against ESDC and FCR, challenging the 2009 plan's legality.

Here again, persistence and partnership have paid off. This July, the court ruled that ESDC acted illegally when it approved the 2009 plan, and ordered the agency to perform supplemental environmental analyses and reconsider the plan. Both ESDC and FCR have appealed the court's ruling.

BrooklynSpeaks sponsors have accomplished together what our organizations could not have done individually. Together, our roadmap for oversight and the court decision in our favor have opened a path for Governor Cuomo's ESDC to restructure development of the site to deliver the promised jobs and affordable housing *now*, not decades from now. Working in part-



nership, the BrooklynSpeaks sponsors have demonstrated the commitment of our communities to sensible, sustainable, and fiscally responsible development at Atlantic Yards with representative public input. We'll continue to speak up until Atlantic Yards truly works for Brooklyn.

— *Gib Veconi is a member of the board of the Prospect Heights Neighborhood Development Council; Jo Anne Simon is the 52nd Assembly District's Democratic district leader; and Lauri Schindler is the Civic Council's first vice president.*

Photos: David Heriman

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