

Meeting Summary

The purpose of the meeting was to explore ideas for changes in policy and how our local city council members can, acting both as our representatives and as part of a larger body, help move City agencies to implement policies based on community-identified needs on Fourth Avenue.

Councilmembers Stephen Levin and Brad Lander each spoke briefly at the beginning of the meeting and came prepared with answers to questions that came up in the survey. Their frank observations and candid responses contributed greatly to the positive tone of the meeting.

Discussion Notes by Topic

For review purposes, issues discussed at the meeting are organized along general topic areas (not chronologically when they were raised in the meeting). Italics are used to indicate areas where Council members agreed to follow up on specific issues.

Pedestrian Safety and Traffic Changes

Despite general satisfaction with the DOT traffic calming project completed this past fall, several attendees voiced ongoing concern about pedestrian safety, speeding and enforcement.

Councilmember Levin noted that enforcement is a key component and encouraged residents to get involved with their local precincts. *During his opening remarks, he also suggested that state and federal support be tapped for capital funding to make Fourth Avenue road changes permanent.*

Councilmember Lander invited attendees to pause for a moment to tweet support for #VisionZero (which was done).

A suggestion was made that Fourth Avenue be added to Mayor DeBlasio's list of fifty traffic intersections/corridor to be reviewed under Vision Zero and *both council members agreed to follow-up.*

In response to concerns about walking-to-school hazards (created by businesses along Fourth Avenue extending activities into the sidewalks, as well as intersections where there is consistent failure to yield to pedestrians) *Councilmember Lander agreed to follow up with parent groups and explore with DOT how to develop "Safety Routes" to schools that look at the Fourth Avenue corridor rather than the area around a specific school. This plan builds on work he has begun with parents at a local school.*

An attendee from Community Board 7 stated that there are new signs directing truck traffic to Fourth Avenue and suggested that the Council members find out if there are changes planned for Fourth Avenue as it may relate to the BQE. *Councilman Lander indicated that in his experience, getting information from the Federal Highway Administration was, at best, difficult, but he would pursue the question.*

In reference to comments about continued congestion at the north end of Fourth, both Council members referenced the (Sam Schwartz) congestion pricing proposal related to the free bridges, and suggested that people unfamiliar with it read it, noting that they will be following the progress of the plan in the Council and in Albany.

In response to a question about the impact of recent DOT changes on Fourth, Chris Hrones (DOT) noted that the project will be evaluated at the end of one year, in order to allow adequate time to observe changes.

Flooding and Green Infrastructure

In response to comments about street flooding issues, Councilmember Lander reminded the audience that money has been allocated for a DEP High Level Storm Sewer project on 3rd Avenue. *Because of the unclear start date (probably two years out) he expressed interest in “taking another look” as DEP starts to prepare plans for phase two and seeing if the project can be moved up.* Lander also referenced current work his office was doing on the “Bridging Gowanus” project and urged people to get involved with it.

Additionally, Lander observed that Park Slope is part of the Gowanus watershed and is one of the first pilot zones for the DOT green infrastructure plan which called for bioswales, street trees and green roofs. For example, there is a proposal on the table now to redo Fourth Street next to the Old Stone House with permeable pavement.

One attendee raised a general concern about the age of infrastructure along Fourth Avenue, including the current housing stock and the subway, and asked if resources were available for support of infrastructure.

Another question was asked about keeping the storm sewer grates clean, as a way of avoiding flooding. The Councilmembers observed that there is a scheduled maintenance program for grates and perhaps it could be reviewed in high flooding areas.

On the topic of subways, Councilmember Lander explained that the delay in completing the 4th Avenue and 9th Street station is due to the fact that contractor for the job defaulted in the spring and, while the MTA continued to negotiate with him for some time, they are now attempting to complete the remaining work by communicating directly with his subcontractors. The MTA’s construction management group estimates that there is two months of work remaining which, by the time new agreements are in place, should be completed by July of this year.

With respect to the question of greening and improvements in roadways with a subway, an attendee suggested that it would be worthwhile to take a close look at the recent changes on Houston Street as an example of coordination between city agencies as well as the MTA. These changes on Houston Street included the renovation of the Broadway-Lafayette station, new water tunnel and planted medians. *Both*

Councilmembers said they could contact their Council counter-part to explore how this was done.

FOFA has already started to put planters in the medians and we are looking forward to the new sidewalk trees and tree guards that are coming this year.

Landmarks/Preservation

The status of two local "landmark" worthy buildings, the Pacific Branch library and the Church of the Redeemer, both scheduled for sale and demolition was discussed. Councilmember Levin has supported efforts to have the Church of the Redeemer landmarked and repurposed. According to Levin, conversations with the Diocese have not been positive but the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) has a stated appetite to landmark the Church. The outcome remains uncertain.

The Pacific Branch Library was formerly in Levin's district (who supported landmarking) but due to City Council redistricting changes, the library is now in Lander's district. Councilmember Lander observed that public officials were, in the past, "lousy stewards of the library systems", but he is hopeful that under the new De Blasio administration that stewardship will improve. He said he is eager to save the Pacific Street branch but does not believe landmarking will be a panacea. Instead, he felt that BPL needs a comprehensive plan to address the system's current and future needs. He stated he is not supporting demolition, but is not tied to the real estate footprint of the Pacific Branch.

He acknowledged that his position on the library is not popular with the local community. A comment from the audience on the success of renovating the landmarked Brooklyn Museum as a model for the Pacific Branch received enthusiastic applause. Councilmember Lander responded (and Levin agreed) and said that both sides have been defensive and the conversation is stalemated. Lander wants to see all parties back at the table.

Affordable Housing

In their opening remarks, both council members identified the loss of affordable housing as one of the biggest challenges city-wide. Councilmember Levin observed that Fourth Avenue was a "missed opportunity for comprehensive community-based zoning" and expressed a willingness to go back with this new administration to explore Fourth Avenue improvements through various zoning mechanisms. Councilmember Lander also commented on rezoning under the development pressures of the Bloomberg administration and proposed going back and exploring a mandatory inclusionary housing rezoning, retroactively to Fourth Avenue. This type of zoning functions as a disincentive to demolish rent stabilized units in an up-zoned area and also requires 20% of all new units to be affordable.

Several attendees spoke specifically to the problem of being "priced out and pushed out" of the Fourth Avenue corridor.

Given a broad negative reaction to the architectural consequences of the Fourth Avenue up-zoning, the Councilmembers were asked if the City Council Land Use committee could conduct a study on the economic/housing consequences of the up-zoning of Fourth Avenue. Elizabeth Ernish from the Borough President's office responded and suggested that their Land Use office might be able to conduct such a study. *(FOFA will follow up.)*

Active/Welcoming Street Life

Community Board 6 District Manager Craig Hammerman, observing that the Marathon brings millions of dollars into the City and that a quarter of the race is run through Brooklyn, suggested that the Councilmembers initiate a conversation with New York Road Runners to find a way to harness some of this economic infusion in our neighborhood. *The Councilmembers agreed to write a joint letter to New York Road Runners.*

Councilmember Levin answered a question about the status of the vacant KFC site on Warren Street and *agreed to follow up with the Department of Buildings to identify the current owners.* He noted that he is working on a bill to incentivize owners of sites that are not in use or vacant to allow temporary uses such as a community gardens or possibly "pop-up" stores.

One attendee raised a concern that while there has been an increase in commercial activity at the north end of Fourth Avenue, the majority of the new businesses were bars.

An artist observed that there is a rich arts community in Gowanus and demand for space to showcase their work (speaking to the issue of vacant storefronts). There was a brief follow up discussion about connecting with arts organizations, such as Arts Gowanus and the Bay Ridge BID's Street Art Walk (SAW) program.