

# WRBA Opposes Both Track Plans

The Woodhaven Residents' Block Association wants the abandoned railroad tracks in their backyard to remain that way.

After a packed town hall meeting on Sept. 29, WRBA debated internally whether they should support a proposal that would turn a stretch of railroad tracks from Rego Park to Ozone Park into a "Queensway" akin to Manhattan's High Line or back a long-shot plan to reactivate the tracks. Until 1962, the Long Island Rail Road's Rockaway Beach Branch thrummed through Queens, connecting riders from the Rockaways to mainland Queens and continuing into Manhattan.

The block association decided that due to the noise and privacy concerns of Woodhaven residents who live near the tracks that pass near 98th Street, it would not endorse either proposal.

"The Block Association would like to note that among our neighbors, there is very strong opposition to an active railroad," WRBA

said in a statement. "Many residents have raised numerous valid concerns about how their homes and their daily lives would be adversely affected by having trains run along this passage."

Public transportation advocates see the abandoned rail line as a unique opportunity for Queens to solve many of its traffic and transit woes. Lacking a north-south train artery, Queens is home to notorious traffic jams on the Van Wyck Expressway and Woodhaven Boulevard. With the arrival of a race-track casino in South Ozone Park, Assemblyman Phil Goldfeder (D-Howard Beach) has strongly endorsed a rail line revival as a way to bring more patrons to the racino, Resorts World, and also a possible convention center in the same neighborhood.

However, the convention center idea, at least temporarily, was scuttled and the cash-strapped Metropolitan Transportation Authority (which does not own the tracks) is unlikely to provide any

funds for the reactivation of the rail line. The tracks are owned by the City but similar budget constraints make any revival unlikely.

Backed by Community Board 9 Chair Andrea Crawford, the Queensway plan is a less expensive alternative. Other cities have undertaken similar projects to beautify derelict stretches of old railroads or highways for pedes-

trian use. Residents at the Sept. 29 meeting worried that people walking on the tracks would be able to peer into windows and backyards.

"...we urge those who are disappointed by our position not to cast aside our neighbors' concerns as mere selfishness or "NIMBYism," WRBA stated. NIMBY is short for "not in my backyard." "Any change

to the rail line, especially reactivating it, could have a considerable negative impact on many residents."

WRBA said they hoped the City would take responsibility for cleaning up the trash-covered tracks.

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