

Reclaiming the Streets

COMMUNITIES WORK FOR LIVABLE STREETS

ACROSS THE FIVE BOROUGHS, New Yorkers are expressing a common vision for our streets and public space: they want people to be the priority, not vehicles. This growing call was heralded in Mayor Bloomberg's long-term sustainability plan, *PlaNYC*, which includes the goal to construct new public squares and pedestrian safety measures in all fifty-nine Community Boards. Soon, the streets renaissance will be coming to every neighborhood in New York City.

Over the winter and spring, the NYC Streets Renaissance Campaign (NYCSR) worked overtime with communities throughout the boroughs to develop community-driven plans for livable streets improvements. Guided by community interest, Transportation Alternatives and our NYCSR partners, Project for Public Spaces and The Open Planning Project, consult with local leaders and work with them on initiatives to reclaim roadways and public space for people.

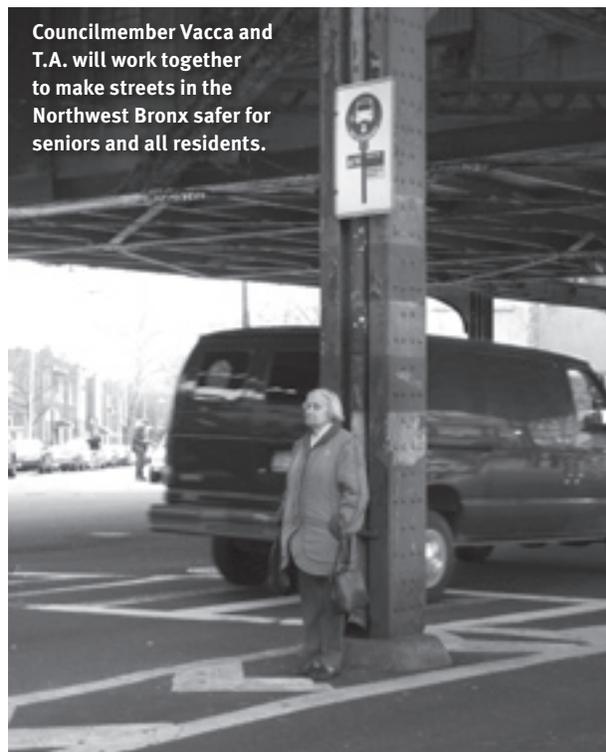
IN BROOKLYN, THE NYCSR IS WORKING with the Grand Army Plaza Coalition to develop a community vision for the plaza, and the NYC Department of Transportation has heeded the call. In March, the agency unveiled a plan for much-needed bicycle and pedestrian improvements that will help reshape Grand Army Plaza into the world class destination that Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux originally designed in 1867. The DOT plan includes a protected bike path between Prospect Park and Eastern Parkway, five new crosswalks to improve access to Prospect Park and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Arch and 2,300 square feet of new green space. In addition to these improvements, the DOT plans to close unused roads during weekend hours and eliminate a travel lane on Eastern Parkway and on the east side of the Arch. The Grand Army Plaza Coalition continues to build grassroots support and, this spring, held a design workshop for the communities around the plaza.

MEANWHILE, THE WESTERN Jackson Heights Alliance in Queens is working tirelessly to bring attention to massive traffic congestion in their community. Despite the fact that 62% of this neighborhood households are car-free, residents are suffering from air and noise



Brooklyn residents come together to create a new plan for safer access around Grand Army Plaza.

ETHAN KENT



Councilmember Vacca and T.A. will work together to make streets in the Northwest Bronx safer for seniors and all residents.

BROOKE DUBOSE

pollution and dangerous pedestrian conditions. Within a recent two-week period two residents were hit and killed in the area. The Alliance is calling on the City to implement a sustainable transportation plan that includes the community in the process and develops better parking management, pedestrian safety measures and increased traffic enforcement—all of which will benefit residents, merchants and visitors alike. The Alliance has had great success building interest and support from local residents through a series of community workshops and savvy press work.

At a spring meeting at the Jewish Center

of Jackson Heights, over 100 residents gathered to hear the MTA discuss its new hybrid bus fleet, T.A. present pedestrian safety and traffic calming measures, and Environmental Defense explain the health effects of truck idling and diesel emissions in the neighborhood. As residents learn about these environ-

mental and public health problems and their solutions, they are better equipped to articulate their needs to the DOT and their elected officials. The City should work with this smart and committed neighborhood group to develop transportation improvements in this dynamic neighborhood.

IN THE BRONX, CITY Councilmember James Vacca asked the NYCSR to redesign intersections and roadways around key community destinations to make them safer and more attractive for pedestrians. Councilmember Vacca should be commended for his progressive thinking, as these projects are the first of their kind for the northeast Bronx, prioritizing the safety and comfort of pedestrians over vehicular traffic. After our initial site visits in the early spring, preliminary plans were drafted and presented to Councilmember Vacca by our in-house planning staff. Plans include roadway treatments such as narrowing lanes and building a raised pedestrian refuge along the centerline of Tremont Avenue surrounding Lehman High School, which will increase motorists' awareness that they are

entering a school zone and slow speeding drivers. The NYCSR and Councilmember Vacca are also reaching out to local merchants and residents around Keane Square on Westchester Avenue to develop a community design for a pedestrian-oriented plaza with better amenities for visitors and shoppers, including benches, tables, chairs and trees. Next steps will include community forums hosted by the Community Board and Councilmember Vacca in the early summer to discuss the proposals and gather public input for street redesigns around Lehman High School and for a street closure adjacent to Keane Square. □