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For Immediate Press Release

*South Avenue Retail Development Project (BJs strip mall)
Is Not Yet a Done Deal!*

Community Board #1 votes to reject the renewal of the permit.

Graniteville, Staten Island: The May 10th, 2022,

Community Board 1 met and in an unusual move, the full board voted to deny the motion to approve the application submitted for the renewal of the special permit, 534 South Ave. The vote was 26 in favor of denying the renewal of special permit, to 5 in favor of the renewal.

Before the vote was taken, one of the Board members commented to the group, “*you could make a vote more depending on morality than the facts, if that would be your decision.*”

A second motion was then introduced for Community Board 1 “*to request both the city and state officials to consider the acquisition of the site for the purpose of stormwater mitigation and environmental protection. And in response to City Planning, would be to ask them to be cognizant of the DEC pending litigation and to withhold any action until that litigation runs its course.*” This motion was also overwhelmingly approved by 28 votes with 3 votes opposed.

The vote was unusual because on May 3rd, **one week prior**, **Community Board 1 Land Use subcommittee** came together to vote on the renewal of the City Planning permit granted to the developer, Josif A LLC. The permit was awarded in 2017 and had recently expired. In her testimony, Gabriella Velardi-Ward requested that the renewal of the permit be tabled until after the litigation brought by her, representing the Coalition for Wetlands and Forests CWF, is completed. After a long discussion on the issue of delaying the approval of the permit, the vote was 7 to approve the permit to a vote of 3 to table the issue.

Ms. Ward’s testimony was instrumental in giving the Land Use subcommittee some important information regarding the pending lawsuit against the DEC, as well as information regarding the first-time severe flooding that occurred in the area of the former forested wetland during Hurricane Ida.

By the time the full Community Board met on May 10th, there was time to reconsider what impact the approval of the permit would have on the Graniteville community. This showed in the resultant vote.

Additional information:

- This is an Environmental Justice community where 60% to 70% of the residents are of color.
- There is no other open green space in this community.
- There is air pollution coming from the adjacent SI Expressway, Newark Airport and the petroleum refineries in nearby Bayway NJ.
- Without the forest of 1800 mature trees, the incidence of COPD, asthma and cancer will increase in this community
- Nearby communities have lost the ability to keep summer temperatures lower. and will experience a “heat island” effect.
- The animals that were present in this wetland, have now lost this habitat.
- And life has again lost the ability to sequester carbon in the trees, roots and soil.
- Most residents of Graniteville do not have flood insurance because the area was never flooded before.

The *Coalition for Wetlands and Forests* has been working for 5 years to prevent this disaster, which is now endangering Graniteville residents.

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