



# Tall buildings, big problems

## Sunset Park: size matters

**O**N ONE BLOCK, THE ROW HOUSES line up in neat rectangles of alternating yellow or chocolate brick, with lace curtains peeking through glass-paneled doors. On another, most of the century-old brownstones have benches out front — inviting people to visit with their neighbors.

Along side street after side street, it's got the polished look of some fancy neighborhood — but it's Brooklyn's immigrant melting pot, Sunset Park.

But a threat looms for this historic neighborhood, and proud homeowners are rallying to oppose it.

Construction fences are sprouting up in the neighborhood. What's taking shape behind them will be too tall or too bulky for their liking, and probably covered with rows of Fedders air-conditioners, like many new residential buildings in other Brooklyn nabes.

"It takes away from the beauty of the blocks," argued Fred Xuereb, 57, a retired Department of Buses supervisor, Community Board 7 member and nearly life-long resident of Sunset Park.

He collected almost 1,000 signatures on a petition demanding a zoning change to stop this type of development in the southern end of the neighborhood, from 55th St. down to the border of Bay Ridge.

"People are fighting the 'Fedders buildings,'" said Jeremy Laufer, district manager of Community Board 7, in whose territory Sunset Park sits.

In response to their petition, the board passed a unanimous resolution in June urging the City Planning Commission to consider the downzoning they want. And their City Council rep, Sara Gonzalez, supports them. She has met with the planning commission and the council's land-use committee, and she's working with a community task force.

Out-of-scale development — which riddles blocks of single- and two-family homes with bigger multi-family construction — is a consequence of the red-hot housing market. It threatens residential sections of Staten Island, the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn.

The construction of bigger buildings among the row houses drives neighborhoods toward overcrowding that could strain public services and infrastructure, residents said. And they fear it threatens to undercut the value of existing homes, which partly depends on an area's character and quality of life.

Other places have fought this type of development. Now it's Sunset Park's turn. Downzoning has taken effect in neighboring Park Slope and Bay Ridge, making Sunset Park the next square on the checkerboard for oversized home-building.

"It seems everyone is jumping into it," said Johnny Chan, who's developing a five-story, five-apartment building at 625 49th St., on a block of two-story houses. Chan makes no apologies

BY LORE CROGHAN  
DAILY NEWS BUSINESS WRITER

about his desire to build.

On Seventh Avenue, between 58th and 59th streets — where the buildings are three or four stories tall — work is under way on a seven-story building with 28 apartments and a day-care center, according to city Buildings Department records. At 415 36th St., a five-story, 12-unit condo building is rising next door to two-story row houses.

Residents who took good care of their homes when Sunset Park wasn't a hot area are seeing property values appreciate — and want them to stay high.

"They don't want anyone else to mess things up," said broker Jesus Benitez of ERA Real Estate Professionals.

Two-family houses that sold for \$100,000 to \$125,000 three years ago now command more than \$600,000, he said. They can even fetch more than \$700,000 if newly renovated.

Some of the demand is coming from buyers who can't afford Park Slope's \$2.5 million to \$3.5 million townhouses.

Many Sunset Park homeowners fear development will overburden their neighborhood, which they say already is crowded.

The lower schools are packed, and it's one of the only places in town without a public high school, said Laufer of Community Board 7. Though the population's growing, the police force has been cut back and a firehouse has been closed. Streets that are in bad shape will suffer added wear and tear if over-development proliferates, residents said.

But some are taking action to block that from happening.

Joseph DeTommaso, an 80-year-old retiree, signed the petition calling for downzoning, and collected signatures from other residents of 62nd St., between Second and Third avenues.

DeTommaso makes a point of looking after the block where he's lived for 52 years. He gave his neighbors American flags after 9/11, and many are still flying them. He goes out with a broom and bucket to tidy up before the street-sweeping machine comes. He warns mothers to guard their children from cars and trucks that come barreling down the otherwise charming, tree-lined street.

"We need to protect the neighborhood," he said. [yourmoney@nailynews.com](mailto:yourmoney@nailynews.com)



Five-story building under construction dwarfs surrounding houses on 49th St.

**"It takes away from the beauty of the blocks."**

Fred Xuereb, Sunset Park resident



**TOMORROW:** Bolstered by a hot market, real estate in Crown Heights has emerged from the shadows of its own past.

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SCOTT BERMAN

# BIZ NEWS

DOW +60.59  
10,683.74

NASDAQ +22.77  
2,218.15

S&P +8.77  
1,244.12

## ATM systems security shy

BY FAILING to scan security codes in the magnetic strips on ATM and debit cards, many banks are letting thieves get away with an increasingly common fraud at a cost of several billion dollars a year.

That's the findings of Gartner, a technology analyst firm that estimates three million consumers were victims of ATM and debit-card fraud in the past year.

Gartner estimates that annual losses from ATM fraud total \$2.75 billion, or \$900 per incident.

"It's not negligence," Gartner analyst Avivah Litan said. "It's just kind of being asleep at the wheel when business is running smoothly, and then you get hit."

Most of that is covered by the financial institutions that issued the hacked cards, but consumers sometimes have to struggle with bounced checks and other inconveniences when a criminal raids a bank account.

The fraud most commonly begins when a criminal engages in "phishing" — sending a legitimate-seeming E-mail with a link to a phony Web site that appears to belong to a consumer's bank, Litan believes.

The E-mail recipients are asked to give their account information, including PIN numbers.

With that information "harvested," fraudsters can make their own cards for ATMs and withdraw huge sums.

This should be easily preventable, because the magnetic strips on cards contain multiple tracks.

One track has data such as the user's name and account number. A second track contains special security codes that card users don't know, and this information can't be squeezed out of them in a phishing attack.

Surprisingly, Litan said, perhaps half of financial institutions have not programmed their ATM systems to check the security codes.

Con artists specifically "seek out customers of banks that do not validate the second track on the strip," she said.

Litan believes many banks simply didn't know about the vulnerability. Others may have once scanned the codes but stopped because using the codes requires that customers go to a bank and have an ATM card rewritten whenever they want to change their PINs.

The Associated Press

## Strong econ numbers push stocks higher

WALL STREET surged higher yesterday as investors welcomed encouraging economic data and more double-digit corporate profit growth.

The Dow rose 60.59 to 10,683.74, while the Nasdaq and S&P 500 indexes hit their best closing levels in more than four years. The Nasdaq was up 22.77 to 2,218.15 and the S&P 500 hit a new four-year high for the sixth time since July 14 with a gain of 8.77 to 1,244.12.

Investors embraced the Commerce Department's report that consumer spending rose 0.8% in June, the largest increase since April. Incomes also grew at a nice clip.

Another Commerce Department report showed orders at factories rose 1% in June, in line with expectations.

Strong corporate earnings again drove stock prices. Earnings are on track to grow 10.74% for the second quarter, which would be the 13th straight three-month period of double-digit earnings growth.

Since the early July start of earnings season, the market has gained 3.7%, reversing the 1.7% loss for the first half of the year, according to S&P data.

Crude oil prices, one of Wall Street's persistent worries this summer, closed higher. A barrel of light crude settled at \$61.89, up 32 cents, on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

Manufacturing conglomerate Tyco International slid \$2.96 to \$27.86 after lowering the bar on Wall Street profit targets for the fourth quarter and full year. Banc of America, Merrill Lynch and Wachovia all downgraded the stock.

Dow component GM fell 33 cents to \$36.53 after it decided to extend a discount plan that gives customers a chance to buy cars at the prices its employees pay through Sept. 6.

The move reverses an earlier GM decision to end its program and matches moves by Ford and DaimlerChrysler, which rose \$1.37 to \$50.74 after reporting a 25% gain in U.S. sales. Ford rose 3 cents to \$10.88.

The Associated Press

### REAL ESTATE RIPPLES

Chronicling the effects the hot housing market is having on people's lives.

THIRD OF FIVE PARTS



Seeking to preserve the "beauty of the blocks" are Fred Xuereb (top) and Josephine and Joseph DeTommaso, (L) who reside on 62nd St.