

## **A NEW Newark Avenue? Redevelopment plan considered; neighbors want more info**

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There are plans to put the NEW into a section of Newark Avenue.

The City Council at its meeting on Nov. 7 passed a resolution for a swath between Newark Avenue and Christopher Columbus Drive from Grove Street to Jersey Avenue to be studied for redevelopment or rehabilitation by the Jersey City Planning Board.

Someday, the streetscape could include bike racks, trees, historic lighting, new businesses and apartments, and improved cross-walks.

The resolution was introduced by Councilman Steven Fulop, who represents the area to be studied.

Fulop said he put forward the resolution after meeting recently with business owners and representatives of the Historic Downtown Special Improvement District to discuss upgrading the streetscape on Newark Avenue and bringing in new businesses.

By law, an area designated for redevelopment can have its zoning changed, and the city can use the power of eminent domain to transform the area.

Presently, the section of the street in question includes a McDonald's, a pizzeria, pet and hardware stores, and a small city park.

Fulop said last week that he expects to see the Planning Department present the findings of their investigation sometime between January and March.

"In my mind, it is a very positive thing to pursue improving this side of Newark Avenue," said Fulop.  
What is the plan?

Fulop wants zoning changed for the area (which is zoned Neighborhood Commercial) to see the large retail spaces on Newark Avenue be split into two spaces to allow for more businesses on Christopher Columbus Drive, and bring more life to an area that is currently dominated by a mural painting.

"The spaces on Newark Avenue are too large for one retail store, and I would like to help create a streetscape where the mural is currently located," said Fulop. "We need visible storefronts on Christopher Columbus Drive, as it is not an inviting atmosphere for people seeing the gates down."

Thus, the idea of pushing for a study of "an area in need of rehabilitation."

Fulop said he has in mind a "streetscape and conceptual plan," something that is also described on his website ([www.stevenfulop.com](http://www.stevenfulop.com)). The streetscape element would include bike racks, trees, historic lighting, and improved cross-walks, to promote a more pedestrian friendly area to shop and sightsee.

Also, the streetscape plan includes elements are LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified to be environmentally friendly and allowing grants to be pursued.

Fulop said his plan came out of looking at what already exists in the area. There is a streetscape on the north side of Newark Avenue spanning from the intersection at Christopher Columbus Drive to Barrow Street. The streetscape includes several buildings with a brickface façade and a street-based clock stationed at the corner of Barrow and Newark.

He also has looked at the new businesses and new developments that have opened on Newark Avenue. He cites the examples of the It's Greek To Me restaurant on the northwest corner of Jersey and Newark avenues, and the construction of the Grove Pointe, a 29-story building on Columbus Drive near Newark Avenue that will consist of 67 condominiums and 458 rental apartments. The developers are revamping a one-block section of Newark Avenue and the triangular park area at the entrance to the Grove Street PATH station.

Fulop's plan for revitalizing Newark Avenue is another of a number of initiatives that he has pursued since coming into office last year, such as a "Restaurant Row" ordinance that has extended hours for alcohol to be served at restaurants and other establishments.

"I think we're pushing the process," said Fulop. "By the end of my first term in 2009, I want to see a thoroughfare filled with restaurants."

### **But what does the public think?**

When the resolution sponsored by Fulop was passed at the previous meeting, there was no public speaking since it is not permitted during the approval of resolutions.

But some in the public weighed in on Fulop's plans last week.

Dan Levin, a Third Street resident who lives only blocks from the Newark Avenue area, said he only learned about Fulop's proposal by reading about it in the Nov. 12 Jersey City Reporter. He has hoped that Fulop would have spoken to residents before any resolution was passed.

"A powerful redevelopment plan can take property through eminent domain, as business owners have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars," said Levin. "You don't need a redevelopment plan to do streetscape improvement."

Fulop said he did not intentionally avoid informing the public, and noted that he deals with 13 neighborhood associations. After the interview, Fulop posted information on his website including renderings of how Jersey Avenue and Newark Avenue could look if the area undergoes the transformation.

Fulop also presented his ideas to the Harsimus Cove Neighborhood Association Wednesday night.

Valerio Luccio, the outgoing president of the association, said he was on board with Fulop's proposal.

"My understanding is what Steve is doing is an ongoing process and he was doing a little bit of both upgrades and changing the zoning to really promote Columbus Drive and Newark Avenue," said Luccio. "We need more forceful action besides aesthetics."

Luccio also said there has been talk about doing streetscape upgrades for years, but Fulop's plan is first in a long time that is close to reality.

Business owners in the area said they welcome any upgrade project.

Steve Kalcanides, owner of longtime Newark Avenue business Helen's Pizza, said last week Fulop has spoken to him about upgrade ideas.

"There has been a couple of years passed since the city did a facade program on the north side of the Newark Avenue, but grant money ran out to do any work on the south side," said Kalcanides. "I look forward to seeing it happen. Steve Fulop is really taking bull by the horns."

Wilson Kim, owner of Nature's House at 159 Newark Ave. for 10 years, said he likes Fulop's ideas and hopes to see other initiatives.

"I hope they can create parking on a slant, because a lot of customers don't shop on Newark Avenue because there's not enough parking," said Kim.

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