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SOHO ALLIANCE

A VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY GROUP
22 Wooster Street New York, N.Y. 10013 Telephone: (212) 353-8466



SoHo Zoning

"If It Ain't Broke, Don't Fix It."

The SoHo Alliance has been working to maintain SoHo's current, successful zoning. Some city planners want to disturb the delicate balance that has existed since the 1970's. Our special zoning maintains SoHo's manufacturing base, yet assures a permanent home for artists who are classified as manufacturers under the zoning. Unique in New York City, this zoning resolution allows for controlled development and at the same time permits SoHo's artist population to continue to thrive.

Community Review Threatened

One essential feature of the zoning is the requirement for a special permit from the Department of City Planning for conversion from manufacturing/wholesale usage to commercial/retail usage for any ground-floor space in the M1-5B section of SoHo (roughly speaking, the area east of Mercer Street and the area south of Broome Street), or for any ground-floor space over 3500 square feet in the M1-5A section (roughly, west of Mercer Street and north of Broome Street).

This special permit requires community review for any such conversion. Some developers and city planners want to eliminate the special permit requirement which would therefore exclude the important community review process. This

would result in unbridled commercial development, which we do not want for our neighborhood. The SoHo Alliance has supported the issuance of these special permits when appropriate. We will continue to fight to maintain the special permit requirement.

SoHo and NoHo Join in Lawsuit

Along these lines, the SoHo Alliance, in conjunction with the NoHo Neighborhood Association, has filed a legal appeal with the Board of Standards and Appeals to overturn a recent bizarre decision by the Department of Buildings which would eliminate the ground-floor special permit requirement for all one-story buildings and vacant lots in SoHo and NoHo. What this means is that any developer could convert these spaces to commercial use *carte blanche*, by-passing the special permit requirement, thereby excluding community review.

Experience has shown us that these one-story buildings are converted primarily to night clubs, illegal sidewalk cafes or late-night bistros which have a negative effect on neighborhoods. We will not let this happen. This legal appeal is expensive. Your financial help is needed (see page 5).



Illegal Sidewalk Cafes



Several restaurant owners are seeking to change a provision of our zoning which prohibits cafe tables on SoHo's sidewalks. At first glance, sidewalk cafes can be looked at as a harmless amenity. However, when questioned, most people would not want to live near one, let alone five or six. As the warm weather approaches, SoHo residents living near illegal sidewalk cafes, which are proliferating throughout SoHo, are again being plagued by the nightly noise of crowds partying on the sidewalks, taxi cabs honking and motorcycles revving into the early hours of the morning. During the day pedestrians find the sidewalks congested and in many cases impassible. Low-rise, cast-iron buildings with old wooden windows are particularly vulnerable to street noise. The intersection of Grand Street and West Broadway exemplifies what could be in store for the rest of SoHo.

The SoHo Alliance is active in maintaining the integrity of our zoning laws which have worked so well for both residents and businesses.

A group of restaurant owners have joined together in an effort to legalize sidewalk cafes on West Broadway. This requires a change in the zoning. The SoHo Alliance is opposed to this change. As it is, there is no enforcement of this illegal street activity. Should these restaurants have the right to permanently usurp the public sidewalk when there is so little of it? What is to prevent our neighborhood from becoming a district of night spots and bars? What are you going to do when a noisy cafe opens up under your windows? More and more, SoHo is becoming inundated with unwanted street activity (illegal peddlers, sidewalk cafes, amplified music, traffic and motorcycles, requests for street fairs) that is turning our community into a circus. Remember: once we lose the protections afforded by the zoning, there is no going back.

As a result of numerous complaints, a meeting was held at Community Board 2 with community residents, the restaurant owners and their attorney. It was suggested to the owners (who seem determined to duplicate a European cafe scene) that they should pull back tables and chairs in a spirit of cooperation and not take over the entire sidewalk. Restaurant owners have not cooperated and have shown arrogant disregard for their neighbors and no sensitivity to the uniqueness of SoHo's Historic District. We are working with Councilmember Kathryn Freed, Assemblymember Deborah Glick, State Senator Manfred Ohrenstein, the Departments of Transportation, Buildings and Consumer Affairs, the 1st and 5th Precincts, and Community Board 2 to enforce the existing laws against egregious violators.

An option now available to the community is the right to object to the issuance of a new liquor license if three licensed establishments already exist within 500 feet of the applicant. The SoHo Alliance has been successful in obtaining a public hearing at the New York State Liquor Authority for an application for yet another licensed premise at West Broadway and Grand. This corner now has some twenty licensed premises within 500 feet! A decision is imminent. (As we go to press, a new bar is opening on the corner of Thompson and Grand Streets with the entire front opening out onto the sidewalk).

We are urging residents and businesses to support us and fill out the enclosed survey (mailing list only), preferably with your name and address, so that we may demonstrate the feelings of community members.

We'd like to hear from the people on Prince and Sullivan Streets who also have serious noise and congestion problems from numerous unlicensed sidewalk cafes in this heavily residential section.

**Community Policing Unit
CALL!**

**1st Precinct 334-0604
5th Precinct 334-0715**

➤ *On Being Run Over... Again* ➤

Holland Tunnel Traffic Jams Remain a Political Football

In October 1993 Senator D'Amato pushed through an amendment to the Federal Transportation Bill, which mandates the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (TBTA) to continue to collect a double toll for vehicles heading west on the Staten Island Verrazano Bridge and no toll for vehicles heading east. This results in horrendous traffic jams and pollution in our community and Brooklyn Heights as trucks and tractor trailers use the Holland Tunnel to head west to New Jersey toll-free, avoiding the double toll westbound in Staten Island. This conniving tactic by D'Amato to gain votes from Staten Island residents results in Federal intrusion in a decision that should be a local issue.

D'Amato's political maneuvering contributes to the failure of New York City to meet the standards of the Federal Clean Air Legislation. Politicians do not calculate the value of lives and limbs lost to speeding trucks nor the loss of sleep. Their decisions are about where votes are to be gained and who owes a political favor. In the meantime, New York City loses an estimated \$7.8 million dollars each year in uncollected tolls at a time when the city is making drastic cutbacks in City services to balance the budget.

Senator D'Amato's chief architect in perpetuating this folly is New Jersey Senator Frank Lautenberg, who is up for re-election. Unfortunately for us, Lautenberg is the chairman of the Transportation Subcommittee where, behind closed doors, the details of the Federal Transportation Bill are hammered out.

In 1993 the two senators encountered significant opposition from the New York City Congressional delegation led by Congressman Jerrold Nadler and Congressman Ed Towne. Joining in the opposition were Councilmember Kathryn Freed, Assemblymember Deborah Glick, Mayor David Dinkins, Community Board members and the Brooklyn and Manhattan Borough Presidents, as well as the SoHo Alliance.

In a charade to placate Manhattan residents, the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority has commissioned three Environmental Impact Studies in the eight years since the inception of the one way toll, each followed by public hearings in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Staten Island. What the studies have done is to document the problems on Staten Island very clearly, while glossing over far more serious problems in lower Manhattan. At the most recent hearing in June 1993, the panel from the Metropolitan Transit Authority and the TBTA heard a large turnout of articulate lower Manhattan residents describe the problems caused by the one-way toll. Despite the appearance of the democratic process at work, the hearings have been nothing but a farce, encouraging the community to participate yet denying the community any relief. The D'Amato amendment gives the TBTA license to do nothing to assist us.

Perhaps the time has come for lower Manhattan to consider hiring its own counsel, rather than accept being run over by D'Amato and his forces. If you or your co-op are interested in exploring the possibilities of a new lawsuit, please call the SoHo Alliance.

Call the SoHo Alliance at 353-8466

Community Council Meetings

You can address your concerns regarding Police services directly to the police brass at the Precinct Community Council meetings which are held monthly.

1st precinct: The last Tuesday of each month at St. Anthony's Gym
143 Thompson Street 7:30 P.M. Call 925-8248

5th precinct: The last Wednesday of the month at the 5th Precinct house
Elizabeth and Canal Streets 8 P.M. Call 334-0711

Important Information about your neighborhood inside.

- SoHo Zoning Threatened
- Illegal Sidewalk Cafes Multiplying
- Holland Tunnel Traffic Outrage
- SoHo Park Closer to Reality
- Canal Street Landmarking

**Spring
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