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Board Backs Development of Site on Lower East Side With Housing

By [CARA BUCKLEY](#)

After sitting fallow for 43 years as the Lower East Side's popularity soared, a desolate stretch of parking lots along Delancey Street is closer than ever to being transformed into housing and shops, marking the end of a long and bitter stalemate over the future of the sites.

On Tuesday night, [Community Board 3](#) voted unanimously in favor of [guidelines](#) to develop the five parcels, collectively known as the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area.

Under the guidelines, the properties would become the site of about 1,000 housing units — roughly half of which would be allocated to middle- and low-income earners — along with retail shops, green space and, potentially, a school.

On Monday, after a subcommittee approved the guidelines, the State Assembly speaker, [Sheldon Silver](#), whose district includes the land, gave the plan crucial support. “The final guidelines that were approved by the committee tonight strike an appropriate balance between the needs and concerns of all stakeholders,” Mr. Silver said in a statement, “and will result in a development that will ensure our neighborhood continues to thrive.”

The parcels [have sat undeveloped](#) since 1967, when the city razed 14 tenement buildings on them and displaced their 2,000 residents in the name of urban renewal. Various development plans were [paralyzed by deep disagreements](#) over what the sites ought to become.

Some residents argued that they should be reserved for low-income families to preserve the neighborhood's flavor and recapture people forced out by Manhattan's nosebleed rents. Nearby property owners said the neighborhood had more than its fair share of low-rent apartments.

“For 40 years, it has divided this community,” said David McWater, chairman of the task force.

Few local residents like the parking lots; one has called them “psychological and physical barriers” isolating the neighborhood. Community leaders began tackling the development issue anew in 2008, having won a rezoning campaign to restrict the height of buildings in a 110-block area of the Lower East Side.

At a public hearing that preceded the vote, community members and advocates affirmed their hope that the housing be allocated solely for low- and middle-income families, a concept that others described as economically unfeasible. According to Mr. McWater, the site would house 1,500 low- and middle-income earners and create jobs for up to 700 people. The [Essex Street Market](#) sits on one of the sites, and could be moved as the parcels are developed, a prospect greeted with much local dismay.

The plan will now go to various city agencies for approval.

State Senator [Daniel L. Squadron](#), whose district includes the site, said it would probably be a year and a half before the City Council would vote on the plan. He also cited a milestone, saying “a unanimous vote on the Lower East Side may be a first.”