

# Queens Borough President Recommendation

**APPLICATION: ULURP #210459 ZSQ**

**COMMUNITY BOARD: Q01**

## DOCKET DESCRIPTION

IN THE MATTER OF an application submitted by WF Industrial IV LLC pursuant to Sections 197-c and 201 of the New York City Charter for the grant of a special permit pursuant to Section 62-837 of the Zoning Resolution to modify the height and setback, maximum width of walls facing shoreline and the ground floor streetscape requirements of Section 62-341 (Development on Land and Platforms), in connection with the construction of an approximately 495,000 square-foot motion picture studio, on property located at 1 Steinway Place a.k.a. 36-01 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue (Block 814, Lots 1 and 10) in an M3-1 District, Borough of Queens, Community District 1.

Plans for this proposal are on file with the City Planning Commission and may be seen at 120 Broadway, 31<sup>st</sup> Floor, New York, NY, 10271. (Related ULURP # 210457 ZAQ, 210458 ZAQ, 210460 ZCQ, 210461 LDQ);

## PUBLIC HEARING

A hybrid Public Hearing was held by the Borough President at 120-55 Queens Boulevard and via Zoom webinar livestreamed on [www.queensbp.org](http://www.queensbp.org) on Thursday, July 1, 2021 at 9:30 A.M. pursuant to Section 82(5) of the New York City Charter and was duly advertised in the manner specified in Section 197-c (i) of the New York City Charter. The applicant made a presentation. There were no other speakers. The hearing was closed.

## CONSIDERATION

Subsequent to a review of the application and consideration of testimony received at the public hearing, the following issues and impacts have been identified:

- This application is for a special permit which proposes a bulk modification to change minimum setback and maximum base height requirements ( Zoning Resolution Sections 62-341(a)(2) and 62-341(c)(1)) to allow a 135 foot building to rise without setbacks as well as modification of required maximum length of walls facing the shoreline in ZR Section 62-341(c)(5) to allow walls to exceed 100 feet by 320 feet on one side of the building and by 25 feet on the adjacent wall. The proposed actions would facilitate development of a 495,000 SF media production studio at 35-15 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue, containing 11 sound stages and accessory facilities, with publicly accessible areas along 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Luyster Creek;
- ULURP #N210457 ZAQ concurrently filed with this application seeks a modification to change the required shore public walkway area in an M3-1 District from 15% of the site floor area to 7% and a modification to change the average width of supplemental publicly-accessible area (PAA) from 25 feet to 22 feet;
- ULURP #N210458 ZAQ concurrently filed with this application seeks a modification of design requirements within the Waterfront PAA and supplemental PAA to facilitate restoration of habitat, natural shoreline, and native plantings while still providing sufficient public access;
- ULURP #N210460 ZCQ seeks certification to confirm the site plan for the proposed project complies with ZR 62-50 and 62-60 as modified even with no visual corridors on site;
- ULURP #N210461 LDQ for a legal document from Steinway, Inc. (adjacent property owner) acknowledging the Wildflower Studio applications and stating ownership of 42,244 SF (Block 814, p/o Lot 1) that is included in the proposed project area;
- The proposed development is a 7-story, 495,000 SF media production studio with 11 sound stages vertically stacked two levels above one story of accessory off-street parking and loading space. Due to industry standards, each sound stage will each be roughly 18,000 SF. The building's core would house all accessory uses and approximately 33 freight elevators that directly connect each sound stage to loading berths. The ground floor would contain two lobbies, reception areas, and parking and loading spaces. Most of the ground floor would be wet flood-proofed except for the lobbies which would be dry flood-proofed. In total, there will be 310 parking spaces and 26 loading berths. Additionally, there would be two vehicular access points, both allowing ingress and egress to the site, on 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue: a 60 foot wide curb cut located 480 feet west of Steinway Place and a 30 foot wide curb cut located 360 feet west of Steinway Place. A shuttle bus traveling to and from the Ditmars Boulevard Station to the proposed building's main entrance would run every 20 minutes during morning and evening rush hours plus additional times determined by demand. The application received an E-designation (E-627) for air quality and therefore will undergo remediation before any construction begins;
- There would be two publicly accessible areas (PAA) with a total area of 34,800 SF. An approximately 16 foot setback from the 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue sidewalk would contain a 4,200 SF Sidewalk PAA with paved pathway, 1,910 SF of plantings, and a seating area. The 30,600 SF Waterfront PAA is an approximately 40 foot wide walkway between the Luyster Creek waterfront and proposed building and includes 19,415 SF of planted area, an overlook of the creek, seating, bioswales, and educational signage;
- The project site is located within an existing M3-1 District and is bounded by Luyster Creek to the west, Bowery Bay to the north and east, and Berrian Boulevard and 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue to the south. It is comprised of

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two tax lots (Block 814 Lot 1 and 10) in a single zoning lot with a total area of 491,612 SF. The applicant owns Lot 10 which has an area of 228,693 SF and is currently unimproved. Lot 10 has ~435 feet of frontage along 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 475 feet of frontage along Luyster Creek. Lot 1 is instead owned by Steinway Inc. and has an area of 262,919 SF. It is improved with one to five-story buildings, including Steinway Piano Factory. There is 350 feet of frontage along 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 590 feet along Steinway Place. The applicant intends to acquire 42,244 SF of floor area from Steinway Inc. to use for the project. Steinway Inc. submitted a letter to Community Board 1 (CB 1) stating that Wildflower does not have the right to utilize that floor area unless Steinway Inc. agrees to its purchase and the closing of such acquisition has occurred. The existing site is situated both within the Steinway Industrial Business Zone (IBZ) and the 1% annual chance flood plain;

- The surrounding area within a 400 foot radius consists of a mix of industrial and manufacturing buildings ranging one to two stories. The area one block south of the development site, comprised of 238 blocks, underwent a rezoning in 2010. Nearby facilities include the Astoria Energy Power Plant north of the site, DEP Bowery Bay Wastewater Plant to the northeast, and approximately 8 acres of private soccer and baseball fields to the south. The site is situated close to the Q101 and Q100 bus stops and a mile from the N and W lines at Ditmars Station;
- Community Board 1's (CB 1) Land Use Committee (LUC) approved the application by a vote of eight (8) in favor, one (1) against, and none (0) abstaining on June 2, 2021. At their monthly meeting held on June 15, 2021, CB 1 approved the application with thirty-five (35) in favor, one (1) opposed, and one (1) abstaining. CB 1 stated they would like to work with the developers to coordinate waterfront cleanup and beautification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue sidewalk;
- In December 2020, the City Council approved a DSNY proposal to construct a new garage and salt shed across from the project site on the opposite side of Luyster Creek. CB 1 had requested that DSNY create publicly accessible area along the waterfront. Waterfront access is scarce in Community District 1 and therefore they would like to see both Wildflowers Studio and DSNY work together to create one connected waterfront pathway;
- At the Borough President's Land Use Public Hearing, the Borough President brought up questions regarding waterfront access, jobs, and community outreach. The Wildflowers Studio team stated they had previously met with DSNY. Although funding for DSNY's portion of the waterfront had been uncertain at their last meeting, Wildflowers remains ready and willing to work with DSNY, other city agencies, and CB 1 to join their waterfront areas. The Borough President stated that he would follow up with the agencies about getting funding in place for the waterfront access;
- The applicant team also estimated the creation of 600 construction jobs, and between 1000 to 1200 predominantly union employees per day once the building was fully operational. Regarding outreach to local community-based organizations, the applicant has already reached out to tenant groups in nearby NYCHA housing, Girls and Boys Club, Urban Upbound, as well as LaGuardia Community College and Frank Sinatra High School for the Arts to discuss potential internship opportunities. The Borough President invited Wildflowers to use events such as the Borough President's Office Virtual Queens Jobs Recruitment Fair to spread word of employment opportunities. The Borough President also recommended connecting with local restaurants and other nearby small business. Wildflowers Studio acknowledged and embraces their proximity to diverse food and amenities in Astoria and would strongly encourage employees to eat locally. They have already contacted United Community Civic Association to introduce them to local business owners;
- Council Member Constantinides submitted a letter to the Chair of Community Board 1 expressing his support for the project;

**RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the above consideration, I hereby recommend approval of this application with the following conditions:

- There should be a minimum goal of 30% for local hiring and use of MWBE businesses in the construction and development of this project. There should also be quarterly reporting on the numbers of people hired and if the 30% is reached. The applicant has stated they will seek union labor and have already begun to work towards these goals and should continue to follow through with the agreements as they make further progress;
- Motion picture and television production together with all the ancillary support services are robust industries that are an important growing segment of the Queens and NYC economy. Wildflower Studios should offer internship opportunities for local public school and college students to assure that Queens and NYC residents study and are prepared with the skills and knowledge required to have careers in all aspects of motion picture and television production.



**PRESIDENT, BOROUGH OF QUEENS**

**July 29, 2021**

**DATE**