



Jackson Heights Green Alliance

May 5, 2020

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

We write today in response to NYC DOT's invitation to propose an Open Streets program in Jackson Heights in response to the demands on open space that have been further exacerbated by the Coronavirus (COVID19) crisis.

Jackson Heights and adjacent neighborhoods are at the epicenter of the city's Coronavirus crisis. With limited options for outdoor activity during the PAUSE order, and the inevitable over-crowding of the neighborhood's single tiny park, there is no neighborhood in the city where more people have a greater need for access to open space than Jackson Heights. In fact, despite our high density and now having one of the highest rates of COVID19 in NYC, Jackson Heights ranks one of *the lowest* in the city when it comes to public open space. The need for open streets for our community could not be more urgent.

We are, however, aware of this administration's announcement today of street closures in Jackson Heights on 34th Avenue from 69th street to 77th street. This proposal is completely unacceptable to our community. Not only does it not address the great needs of our neighborhood or reflect our input, it does not even align with this administration's stated objectives of providing more open space equity for communities like ours who need it the most--especially at this moment in time. We are a neighborhood of frontline workers, the overwhelming majority of whom are low-income immigrants and are the most vulnerable to, and most impacted by, this pandemic. Nine blocks of closed streets for a neighborhood at the epicenter of this crisis shows an utter lack of empathy for what our community is experiencing right now. It is shockingly inadequate. And it raises serious questions about this administration's commitment to this program, its intentions behind implementing it, and which parts of the city it has designed this initiative for.

We demand that City Hall rescind this proposal in full and instead implement our community-based proposal, detailed here, that truly addresses our public health and pedestrian safety needs right now. Our ambitious plan, when instituted as part of the Open Streets program, will help address the glaring inequities faced by the residents of Jackson Heights and surrounding neighborhoods every day, and which have been exacerbated by the COVID19 crisis.

In response to the need for open space created by this global public health pandemic, we propose that the DOT create a series of four pedestrian-priority, shared street “Superblocks” in Jackson Heights. This plan will maximize the utility of the Open Streets program by creating continuous stretches of multi-block pedestrianized space. It will also minimize the potential for pedestrian-vehicular interactions and reduce the need for staffing by eliminating the number of through-traffic streets that must cross pedestrianized streets.

The [Jackson Heights Green Alliance](#) (JHGA) is a community-based organization founded in 2007, dedicated to increasing and improving open space access in our neighborhood. In 2008 JHGA worked with the support of local elected officials to create the Jackson Heights Play Street on 78th Street, a city block closed to car traffic to create more pedestrian access. We later became the first CBO in the city to operate a public plaza, the 78th Street Plaza, in the same location partnering with the DOT Plaza Program. Initiating many other efforts to increase access to public space in our dense, diverse and park-starved neighborhood, JHGA is well-positioned to work with the DOT to create the Jackson Heights portion of the Open Streets program at this critical time.

We recognize that this is an ambitious proposal. The Coronavirus’ impact on our neighborhood, however, has been devastating. Only these kinds of ambitious approaches will be effective in slowing the devastation that this pandemic has caused in intensely crowded neighborhoods such as ours, by vastly increasing the possibility of safe social distancing. This is a time for bold and decisive action that will help tip the balance of inequities and risks faced by the residents of Jackson Heights and the rest of the city.

This plan can be accomplished by pedestrianizing the following streets to create four car-free Superblocks:

Superblock 1:

Pedestrianize 70th St from 35th Ave. to Northern Blvd.

Pedestrianize Leverich St. from 37th Ave to 35th Ave.

Pedestrianize 71st St from 35th Ave. to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 72nd St from 37th Ave. to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 37th Ave from Leverich to 72nd St.
Pedestrianize 35th Ave from 70th St to 72nd St. (except for buses)
Pedestrianize 34th Ave from 70th St. to 72nd St.

Superblock 2:

Pedestrianize 77th St. from Roosevelt Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 78th St. from Roosevelt Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 79th St. from Roosevelt Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 80th St. from Roosevelt Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 81st St. from Roosevelt Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 37th Ave. from 77th St. to 81st St.
Pedestrianize 35th Ave. from 77th St. to 81st St. (except for buses)
Pedestrianize 34th Ave. from 77th St. to 81st St.

Superblock 3:

Pedestrianize 84th St. from Roosevelt Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 85th St. from Roosevelt Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 86th St. from Roosevelt Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 87th St. from Roosevelt Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 88th St. from Roosevelt Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 89th St. from Roosevelt Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 37th Ave. from 84th St. to 89th St.
Pedestrianize 35th Ave. from 84th St. to 89th St. (except for buses)
Pedestrianize 34th Ave. from 84th St. to 89th St.

Superblock 4:

Pedestrianize 91st St. from 37th Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 92nd St. from 37th Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 93rd St. from 37th Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 94th St. from 37th Ave to Northern Blvd.
Pedestrianize 37th Ave. from 91st St. to 94th St.
Pedestrianize 35th Ave. from 91st St. to 94th St. (except for buses)
Pedestrianize 34th Ave. from 91st St. to 94th St.

Please see the attached map to see how the plan would divert all non-local and through traffic to existing major arterials like Northern Boulevard, Roosevelt Avenue, and existing bus routes. Some bus routes, such as those along 35th Avenue, should be

made bus-only, similar to the city's initiative on 14th Street in Manhattan. All other streets, as listed above, should become pedestrianized streets with limited vehicle access allowing only resident access, drop-offs, pick-ups and local deliveries, at a suggested 6 mph.

We look forward to hearing from you, and are certain that JHGA can work together with DOT to establish a successful Open Streets plan for Jackson Heights, ensuring safer social distancing for neighborhood residents.

Sincerely,



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cc: City Council Member Daniel Dromm
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