

## Parking lot eyed for new senior affordable housing

By Shant Shahbrigian

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The senior care industry is eyeing a property in Riverdale for new development as the mayor is seeking passage of zoning measures aimed at encouraging affordable housing.

A report from LiveOn NY, a coalition of senior centers and other groups, cited the parking lot at 2973 Independence Ave., owned by Schervier Nursing Care Center, as one of 39 parking lots around the city that are “feasible for new senior housing development.”

A spokeswoman for Schervier said she was unaware of the report, called “Paving the Way for New Senior Housing,” and could not comment. Schervier’s CEO Carlos Beato declined an interview request.

LiveOn NY said a shortage of housing for seniors prompted it to look for underutilized parking lots at existing residences that have participated in a federal financing program known as HUD 202. “Paving the Way for New Senior Housing” cited a city government report that found car ownership was low among elderly people living at HUD 202 housing — five cars per 100 residents in areas near public transit, and 11 cars per 100 people at sites further away from transit.

The May report said building at the 2973 Independence Ave. parking lot, steps away from Schervier’s 14-story senior residence at 2995 Independence Ave., “may require a zoning change.”

Schervier Nursing Care Center, whose owner is seeking to sell the site to another organization, is on a lot zoned as R1 — which mostly restricts development to detached single-family homes. The parking lot discussed in LiveOn NY’s report appears to fall under the same zoning category.

Among other measures, Mayor Bill de Blasio’s Zoning for Quality and Affordability (ZQA) text amendment would allow sites known as continuing care retirement communities to apply for exemptions to height and other restrictions without going through the usual review process.

Local critics have viewed that measure as designed to enable the Hebrew Home at Riverdale, located on an R1 lot, to build four mid-size towers.

But Community Board (CB) 8 member Robert Press speculated that if the Hebrew Home gets permission to expand, the same thing could happen at 2973 Independence Ave.

“If it is passed for the Hebrew Home, there’s no reason they couldn’t do it for Schervier,” said Mr. Press, who brought LiveOn NY’s report to the attention of The Press and noted he was not speaking in his capacity as a CB 8 member.

Along with ZQA, which would raise building height lim-



its and ease parking requirements for new buildings, Mr. de Blasio is seeking to encourage affordable housing construction through the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing proposal, which calls for 25 to 30 percent of new apartments in some neighborhoods to go to low-income households.

Earlier this month, CB 8 joined community boards throughout the Bronx in voting to reject the two proposals. Among a litany of objections, CB 8 members took exception with reducing the amount of parking spaces developers would have to build at new senior housing sites, with some saying ZQA smacked of ageism.

However, Andrea Cianfrani, LiveOn NY’s deputy director of public policy, pointed to data showing low levels of car ownership among seniors living in affordable housing.

“The reality today is those parking lots are sitting empty,” she said. “They’re very underutilized. While they are sitting there, there’s this growing list for housing [but] no waiting list for parking.”

CB 8’s Land Use Committee Chairman voiced skepticism about developing the lot at 2973 Independence Ave.

“I have some concerns as to whether this is something that makes sense in terms of planning, but it is something that in the first instance ought to be considered by the Aging Committee together with or in conjunction with the Land Use Committee,” he said.

While Schervier’s spokeswoman Laura Amerman said she did not know of LiveOn NY’s report or any plans by Schervier to build on its parking lot, she added that a request for proposals for a new owner for the nursing care center has been issued.

Asked why new ownership is being sought for Schervier, which is currently run by the Bon Secours New York Health System, Ms. Amerman said, “Challenges in the New York health care environment. The health care in New York is evolving rapidly. In order to continue to do what we do, this is what we have to do.”

She added that several providers are under consideration to buy Schervier, but could not provide a timeline for a final deal.

# Opinion

## Parking lot cannot be developed

To the editor,

*The Riverdale Press* ran an article on Nov. 26 about the parking lot owned by Schervier Nursing Home at the corner of West 231st Street and Independence Avenue ("Parking lot eyed for new affordable housing"). Schervier, based on a letter sent to the immediate neighbors in August 2015, seems to be in the process of looking for buyers for the Home, new partners and/or new investors.

As many Riverdale residents are aware, the City Council is considering the mayor's efforts to rezone the city. That proposal is known as Zoning for Quality and affordability (ZQA) and the City Council will be voting on it soon. Community Board 8 voted against the plan, as did most of the community boards around the city. However, because this bill would itself allow higher density in low-density neighborhoods, the parking lot has taken on greater significance as a possible location for a large building project which would terribly choke our sec-

tion of Spuyten Duyvil, which is already woefully short of street parking and has no public garages at all (which we are certainly not advocating for now).

*The Press* article was working under the assumption that the parking lot was for the senior residents of Schervier who show "low levels of car ownership" and that Schervier could — if the ZQA passed, deal with the property in an unencumbered fashion.

There are two errors in those assumptions. The first is that the Schervier parking lot is used by the residents. That parking lot is primarily for the employees of Schervier and is used 24 hours a day. That lot prevents additional street parking congestion by providing parking for some employees, as there is space for over 30 cars. The second false assumption is that Schervier, as the owner of the property, can legally build on that lot if the zoning does change. That brings us to the Along-the Hudson Homeowners' Covenant written wisely

in 1919 to maintain our area of private homes as low-density housing. The association has been forced into litigation several times and has always prevailed. Indeed, Bob Berk litigated just that issue, with association support, with Schervier in 1971 and at no time did Schervier (and The Sisters of the Poor St. Francis), ever contest the validity of the Covenant over that land now occupied by the parking lot.

All of this information was communicated to Carlos Beato, CEO of Schervier, in a certified, return-receipt letter on Jan. 12. Receipt of the letter was confirmed, but no communication from Schervier has been received.

As we watch areas of Riverdale being overbuilt and the greenery disappearing, it is nice to contemplate the original covenanters who have saved this area from destruction.

**SURA JESELSON**  
President

**Along the Hudson  
Homeowners' Association**

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Association of Riverdale  
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P.O. Box 630-033  
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Dear Stephen J. Budihas,

As Board Members of the Linden House Cooperative, we represent our shareholders (over 150 residents) in expressing concern about the rezoning issues on our doorstep. We join with our neighbors in the townhouses and other coop buildings along Independence Avenue bordering on the Shervier Health Care property, in raising our voice to oppose the rezoning and further densification of our neighborhood.

Anyone who has driven through Independence Avenue from Kappock St. to 231<sup>st</sup> Street knows the traffic congestion that already exists. We have a narrow two-lane street that must accommodate a heavy flow of constant cars, delivery trucks, livery and taxi services, ambulances and ambulettes, and Access-a-Ride vehicles from several nearby senior residences, a day care center and home for developmentally disabled people. On days when there is a traffic incident (construction or obstruction) on the Henry Hudson Parkway service road, all buses (city, Manhattan Express and Metro North shuttles) are diverted down our stretch of Independence Avenue. There are parts of this roadway that have no paved sidewalk. Many pedestrians, including, parents pushing baby strollers, developmentally disabled people and seniors in wheelchairs or walkers, are forced to walk in the street and compete with the onslaught of vehicular traffic. On the south end of this section of Independence Avenue, near the Kappock Street underpass, there is a treacherous intersection of 5 feeder streets where long buses make wide-angle turns into narrow streets blocked by ambulettes that are double-parked. The northern end of this section, at 232nd St. and Independence Avenue, is equally dangerous and very difficult for all travelers to transverse. This is not a neighborhood picture that invites further density or traffic.

Needless to say, parking is very limited. We have heard of the feasibility studies that report a large percentage of seniors living in residences do not own cars and will not compound the traffic and parking crisis. We have seen otherwise. Living on a street with senior apartments, a nursing home a day care center and a home for developmentally disabled people, we feel the impact of the visitors, the service people, the ambulettes, ambulances, taxis, and deliveries. Can we handle more?

Riverdale is a section of the city that has always been known for its treasured green space. Year by year our light and open space is diminished by the rapid and unplanned growth in this area. Is building higher and wider the answer? We shout a definitive "No".

We stand with all who oppose these new proposals and we urge our representatives to exert an energetic and consistent refusal to go down this path of ecological and life quality disaster.

Sincerely, 

Walter M. Higley  
President, Board of Directors  
Linden House Cooperative



**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL MEMBER**

**ANDREW COHEN**

**11<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT, BRONX**



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Dear Neighbor,

On Wednesday, March 23rd *The Riverdale Press* published an op-ed I wrote titled "Why I voted Against ZQA." Below is text from the original [article](#).

### **Why I Voted Against ZQA**

By: Council Member Andrew Cohen

I support community based zoning.

Community based zoning is a process where city officials and community stakeholders work together to create zoning that reflects the character of a community.

Zoning for Quality and Affordability (ZQA) is not community based zoning; it is a top-down, one-size-fits-all, city-wide zoning. Community based zoning would best serve our growing City, a melting pot of diverse neighborhoods, not just culturally, but residentially, commercially, and geographically. What is good for one neighborhood may not be good for all. It is local residents who know their neighborhood best and community members should lead the way on the zoning of their district.

Packaged together, the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) and ZQA proposals comprise over 500 pages of highly technical zoning text, which community volunteers were asked to review in expert detail, in a short amount of time. These proposals should have been divided into separate distinct proposals, with individual timelines to allow for a comprehensive review.

As applied to the 11th Council District, ZQA undermines the 197-A zoning plan created and adopted by Community Board 8 ten years ago. It was due to my advocacy and the advocacy of community residents, that the City Planning Commission amended the critical component of Continuing Care Retirement Communities in R-1/R-2 zones. The issue of long-term care facilities being permitted as-of-right on 10-acre lots was remedied

and now requires application through the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP).

Additionally, through my advocacy, the transit zone north of Broadway and West 242nd Street was altered to reflect the substantial need for parking. Although these changes are positive developments, based on this top-down approach, I cannot support ZQA.

I do, however, support MIH. This proposal will potentially create greater permanent affordable housing in specifically designated areas. The changes the Council implemented, gaining deeper levels of affordability, including the new fourth option at 40% average median income, are significant improvements. Beyond the specifics of MIH, I support this proposal, as opposed to ZQA, because the provisions of MIH can be triggered only through ULURP, which is community based zoning.

Furthermore, the Council successfully reined in the authority of the Board of Standards and Appeals, thereby allowing for more oversight than was included in the original proposal.

As your Council Member, I have been thoroughly engaged and represented your interests at City Hall throughout this process. For over a year now, my office has had an open door policy; many of you seized this opportunity to sit with me one-on-one to discuss the proposals. I have reiterated these concerns tirelessly to my colleagues at the Council.

The Council held its own two-day hearing in February. In these sessions, for over twenty hours, I listened and questioned both the Administration and those of you (and your fellow New Yorkers) who came to provide testimony. I have even spoken with Mayor de Blasio directly about his plans and our community.

While my opposition was well-known, by the time you read this, both the MIH and ZQA proposals are likely to have passed, subject to Council changes. Despite this I remain steadfast in representing your interests. My job as your Council Member is to listen to your concerns and represent you in city government. I stated months ago that ZQA was not appropriate for our community and that remains true today.