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Businesses fight Jax Hts BID plan

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Photo by Steven Malecki

Protesters speak out against a proposed business improvement district in Corona and Jackson Heights. Photo by Steven Malecki

By Philip Newman

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Some 20 people rallied earlier this month to protest a plan for a Corona-Jackson Heights business improvement district, which they say would drive out small businesses.

"I have been running my business for 11 years," said Freddy Castiblanco, owner of Terraza 7, a bar and olive juice place in Elmhurst. "And today along with other small business owners, we are leading a campaign against raising rents along Roosevelt Avenue. Our concern is that the BID will put small businesses at a disadvantage to corporate chain stores and that we'll get displaced."

City Councilman Julissa Ferraras' (D-East Elmhurst) plan for a BID would expand an existing two-block BID at 82nd Street to be one of the city's largest BIDs from 81st to 114th streets along Roosevelt Avenue, while incorporating retail hubs along Junction Boulevard, Corona Plaza and National Street.

Opponents say BIDs have proved to be devastating for local economies, raising land values and the cost of doing business, and are designed to bring in chain stores.

But Ferraras, who has launched an ambitious program to improve conditions in the ethnically diverse business area, said "the current problems on Roosevelt Avenue hurt everyone."

In a statement released in response to criticism of her BID proposal, she said: "This is why I believe a business improvement district is a solution to this problem."

The rally in Corona Plaza also brought music by La Cumbiamba NY and poetry by Poetas Nueva York. Some of those at the rally danced to the music or, along with others, held up signs saying "No Immigrant Revival" and "BID Excludes Us."

In the background participants chanted, "No to the BID."

Proponents of the BID argue that if property owners agree to start paying a special assessment fee, the BID can deliver supplemental services such as sanitation, maintenance, public safety, marketing and branding, beautification and capital improvements to the area.

But Ruben Pena, a business owner and community leader in Corona, said the BID proposal could not have come at a worse time.

"The economic situation now is very critical, with high real estate taxes and high unemployment," he said. "The rent for the businesses and residents is extremely out of hand, so how can a BID operate under those conditions?"

The proposal for the BID is scheduled to come before the Council later this month.

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