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Housing for homeless plan stalls

BY DANIEL BECKMAN

A HISTORIC Bronx neighborhood where George Washington fought has driven off a proposed development to house the formerly homeless who have mental health issues.

But Kingsbridge Heights residents are still manning the barricades.

Although Urban Pathways has suspended its proposal for the facility at 3969 Cannon Place because it has yet to snag city funds, the developer remains determined to build, said City Councilman Oliver Koppell (D-Riverdale).

And Urban Pathways Executive Director Frederick Shack said the developer merely needs to check a retaining wall at the vacant lot.

"No one feels like the pressure is off," said Ayelet Yoies of Cannon Place, named after cannonballs unearthed when homes were being built there. The shot was thought to be from Washington's Revolutionary-era Fort Independence.

The development for formerly homeless people with substance abuse or mental health problems and low-income tenants has fueled debate since Urban Pathways approached Community Board 8 last year.

Lately, it has pitted neighbors and Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz against Koppell, who says the development is needed.

Koppell told neighbors he wouldn't push for Kingsbridge Heights to become a historic district unless Urban Pathways was welcomed. When he discovered that the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development had yet to okay the development, Koppell asked for a delay.

"I suggested we hold off," he said. "Not that the development should be abandoned."

Petitions signed by more than 1,000 neighbors describe the development as "too big." Urban Pathways originally proposed 90 units for Cannon Place.

Some neighbors harbor safety concerns related to the development's would-be tenants. But Shack said the tenants would pose no danger, noting that Urban Pathways has shrunk the proposal and agreed to add parking to appease neighbors.

Locals have also questioned the development's \$25 million price tag. "Half a million dollars for each itchy-bitsy apartment?" Dinowitz (D-Riverdale) said. "It makes no sense."

Street homeless people cost taxpayers more, Shack countered. Even so, Board 8 was ready to oppose the development.

"They ought to close the book on this one," said Board 8's Charles Moerdler.

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