

CB 1 supports Willowbrook deli

By David Bjelke

Community Board 1 voted to support a Willowbrook deli's request for a variance in a tightly debated discussion last Tuesday at All Saints Episcopal Church, Willowbrook. The board's decision overturns the Land Use Committee's recommendation on March 7, not to support the deli.

The owners of Miggy's Deli, at 2241 Victory Blvd., are seeking a permit to demolish two pre-existing structures and build a larger store on the lot and an adjacent lot purchased last year. The owner's plan is to construct a building with approximately 3,600 square feet, an increase of 2,000 square feet over the existing store. The other structure on the lot is a refrigeration unit, away from the main store.

The deli is located on the corner of Victory Blvd. and O'Connor Ave., next to a church and across from a strip mall. Many board members felt a variance was not necessary, but said the owners should seek a zone change. But board member James Grieco disagreed, responding, "A zone change is not the way to go. The variance mechanism is a way of saying we have control."

The deli is in an area zoned for residential structures, not a commercial buildings. But because the store has been in existence for 40 years, it was protected under a "grandfather clause."

Board member Mark Herman said a zone change would set a precedent to destroy residential communities. He said a decision such as this, is a "done deal forever."

In passing the resolution, 21 to 15, many board members expressed a wish to help the "small businessman." One board member said, "We have to be careful about coming down hard on the little guy."

"I represent the community," said board member Charles Langere. "If the community is in favor of it, I must be in favor. If it is to be knocked down, let BSA [Board of Standards and Appeals] do it." During the public session, Thomas Beyar, owner of the deli, presented the board with a petition in favor of his plans, containing the signatures of hundreds of area residents.

Board member Jerry Cammarata said he has never seen such enormous community support for a business and that the board must make statements of support to entrepreneurs in this "economically tough" time. "This board must put out a clear message to people who want to do well and service their community," he said.

In applying for the variance, Beyar was claiming an economic hardship, saying the store must be expanded to compete in today's market. Some board members said the financial hardship was "self-imposed," because he bought the adjacent lot with the intention of expanding.

During the March 7 committee meeting, residents of the area expressed displeasure with only some of the proposed plan: the height of the proposed new structure; location of the garbage dumpster; increased traffic flow

on O'Connor Ave. and extended hours. Beyar had agreed to lower the height from 30 feet to 18 feet, six inches, relocate the dumpster and said the deli would not be operated for 24 hours a day.

Many board members in support of the expansion noted Beyar's willingness to comply with the wishes of the community.

Only one area resident came out to speak against the expansion of the deli. She noted seven problems she said would be magnified by the expansion: traffic congestion; truck traffic; garbage build-up and private garbage haulers; litter; rats and area teens using the parking lot as a hang-out.

She said, "Miggy's Deli has failed to show a financial hardship; the lot was bought last year with the expansion in mind. Too much has been done in this area. It is up to us, the residents, to keep the quality of life."