

WEST MIDWOOD NEWS

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City of Yes: A Brief Recap *By Joe Enright & Kirsti Jutila*



The City of Yes (CoY) proposal by the Mayor to increase housing across NYC has West Midwood abuzz.

Under the sweeping changes proposed to the city's zoning regulations, West Midwood (WM) will be defined as a low density Transit Oriented Development (TOD) area because it is currently zoned R-2 (primarily private homes) within a half-mile of public transit (in our case, the Brighton line). In such neighborhoods (excluding all Landmarked Districts), CoY would permit 3-to-5-story apartment buildings on lots of 5,000 square feet or greater but only if they were also:

1) Built on wide streets. Foster, Glenwood, and Avenue H are defined as "wide streets" by the Department of City Planning (DCP) - more than 75 feet wide measured from the private property line on the north side to the private property line on the south side. OR:

2) Built on the "short end of a block." That's DCP's phrase; it's complicated, but only the corner lots on DeKoven meet this definition. Such new apartment houses would have to be recessed on the 4th and 5th floors, but they would also fill more of the lot, leaving only a five foot side yard.

As with any monumental change, the devil is in the details, some of which are not entirely clear. Our map shows the 28 WM private house lots colored in red that appear to meet the threshold for a CoY apartment house. But unlike medium and high-density development, the CoY "Universal Affordability Preference" is not applicable in low-density neighborhoods such as ours. Therefore, any new units could be rented as apartments or sold as condos at or above market value. The profitability of building a small apartment

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COMING EVENTS CALENDAR

West Midwood Calendar

- June 8 WMCA Progressive Dinner (Rain Date June 9)
- June 11 6:30 pm Public Hearing on City of Yes
at CB14 offices 810 East 16th St
- June 12 7:00 pm WMCA General Meeting
at the Mormon Church, Corner of Argyle and Glenwood

Editor's Note

It's hard to decide which season is the most wonderful in West Midwood, so I guess the best attitude is to be grateful we have four distinct seasons. Early summer is definitely at the top of my list of favorites: Warm enough to spend hours on the porch, reading and watching the world go by, but not yet hot and sticky, and the mosquitoes have not yet taken over.

We are lucky to live in this idyllic little corner of Brooklyn, with a strong sense of community and neighborhood. But we are also part of a large and complicated city, with all the benefits, services, infrastructure, frustrations, and problems of urban living. Both of those things -- small town vibe/big city living -- make West Midwood a unique and valuable place. Trying to find the balance between those two facets of our reality is sometimes hard, and takes careful thought and clear thinking. And we cannot simply take either of them for granted. We are citizens of both our neighborhood and our City, and we need to understand how the needs of those two entities intersect.

New York City needs housing, and there is a proposal, called City of Yes coming before the City Council that is intended to address that issue. A laudable goal; but every proposal has implications, and this one is no exception. The cover of this issue of West Midwood News explains the City of Yes proposal and some of its possible impact on our corner of Brooklyn. The West Midwood Community Association and CB14 are holding a series of meetings to help West Midwood residents understand the intended purposes and perhaps the unintended consequences of this proposal. I urge you to attend one or both of these meetings to become better informed about the City of Yes, ask questions, and respond.

Sometimes being a good citizen is as simple as saying hello to your neighbor. Sometimes it means picking up the trash instead of waiting for someone else to do it. But sometimes, it simply means showing up. This time, I encourage you to show up. Have a great summer.

—**Tori Rosen**

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President's Message Summer 2024



Dear Neighbors,

We have so many community events happening this spring / early summer -- there is ample opportunity for everyone to get out, get involved, and be seen. In our own West Midwood we have our annual Progressive Dinner happening on June 8, and the West Midwood Community Association's General Meeting on June 12 @7:00 PM at the church on Argyle / Glenwood.

Our Community Board 14, and hyper-local groups led by several WM residents continue to meet about and grapple with the Mayor's City of Yes Rezoning Proposal. Much information can be found online about this transformative proposal and its potential impact on WM as well as larger New York City. While tempers are sure to flare over the details, no one can doubt the need for grand new ideas to tackle housing and economic issues in our metropolis.

Many of us recently attended the 49th birthday gala for Flatbush Development Corporation -- a hyperlocal organization dedicated to protecting Victorian Flatbush, as well as numerous other endeavors and programs which benefit our community, local schools and the like. FDC was formed in 1975 by a group of homeowners and tenants who were concerned about growing signs of deterioration and the practice of "redlining" in the neighborhood. The organization has since morphed and grown to serve numerous interests. It was fantastic to see a large WM turnout at the gala event, which was also attended by Congressperson Yvette Clarke, who joined in celebrating a \$575,000 Federal grant awarded to FDC for Newkirk Plaza improvements.

Please consider donating your time, money, ideas and efforts to any of the above causes or organizations. If you don't see or find something you like, join with others to form a new group to further lift and support our community and its residents. Have fun out there!

—**Eric Goldberg**

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The Stories Your House Could Tell: 745 Rugby Road

by Joe Enright

745 Rugby Road has been the home for seven families during its 120 year history. The first owners were John S. Berry & Elsie Van Winkle, a young couple descended from Dutch settlers. They married in Park Slope in March 1904 and set up house in John's spacious digs at the (then) luxurious St. George Hotel in Brooklyn Heights. Six months later they purchased 745 Rugby from its builder, the John R. Corbin Company, and sold it within nine months. It's possible John Berry bought the house as an investment property – it was not uncommon at that time – and Berry was something of a wheeler and dealer in the coal industry. In fact, in 1907 John and Elsie moved to Cincinnati where John served as the treasurer of the Smokeless Fuel Company, an international firm selling anthracite coal (burns slowly, producing a short, blue, smokeless flame, used on ships) with branch offices in Manhattan and London. But Elsie smelled something fishy about the operation and left her husband, returning to Brooklyn. A few years later, their divorce was front page news in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, as was the Federal indictment of Smokeless Fuel and its Cincinnati president in the Southern District of New York for price rigging.

The second owners would stay a while longer than the Berrys, sticking around from the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt through to Richard Nixon. Walter G. Read, born 1865 in the East End of England, was a commercial painter and illustrator (he signed his work "W.G. Read"). He grew up in Ontario, Canada, and emigrated to the U.S. in 1891 to work on the Columbia Exposition in Chicago. The following year he moved to Brooklyn and promptly married Elinor ("Nellie") Matthews in Trinity Episcopal Church in October 1892. Nine years younger than Walter, she lived with her widowed Irish mother in a small row house under the Fulton EL's approach to the nine-year old Brooklyn Bridge. After the wedding, they lived on the 2nd floor of 234 Adams Street, above Nellie's mother, aunt and two sisters.

Nellie owned a camera, and so a 1896 photo (among many collected in the Read Family Papers within the Brooklyn College Archives) shows Walter and Nellie hovering over a Christmas meal with her family in the Adams Street apartment. The



1905 (Nellie used a photo of the house to announce their move to friends)



Note the twin turrets on 745 Rugby. Turret is a French word derived from the Latin word for tower, *turris*. Thus, a turret is a small tower extending above the top story of a house. John Corbin was fond of turrets. The house he built for his family on Glenwood Road has one. His Victorian houses combined decorative elements from various architecture styles, including turrets, dormers, porches, bay windows, ornately carved eaves, and irregular floor plans. For more information, see <https://argyleheights.blogspot.com/2016/12/let-us-now-praise-less-than-famous.html>

1900 Census found the Reads still there, with a five-year old daughter, Viola, and Walter listed as a self-employed artist. One of his paintings, "Rough Riders," depicting Teddy Roosevelt's daring horseback charge up San Juan Hill in Cuba during the 1898 Spanish-American War, became quite popular as a lithograph, which Read also designed. Copies are still plentiful today, selling online for \$25. Perhaps it accounted for the Reads' ability to purchase 745 Rugby from the Berrys in June 1905, although they still needed a \$6,150 mortgage, representing 80% of the purchase price.



Soon after moving in, the Reads installed a large awning covering the entire front porch, as well as awnings for all the front windows on the 2nd and 3rd floors, perhaps in response to record-breaking



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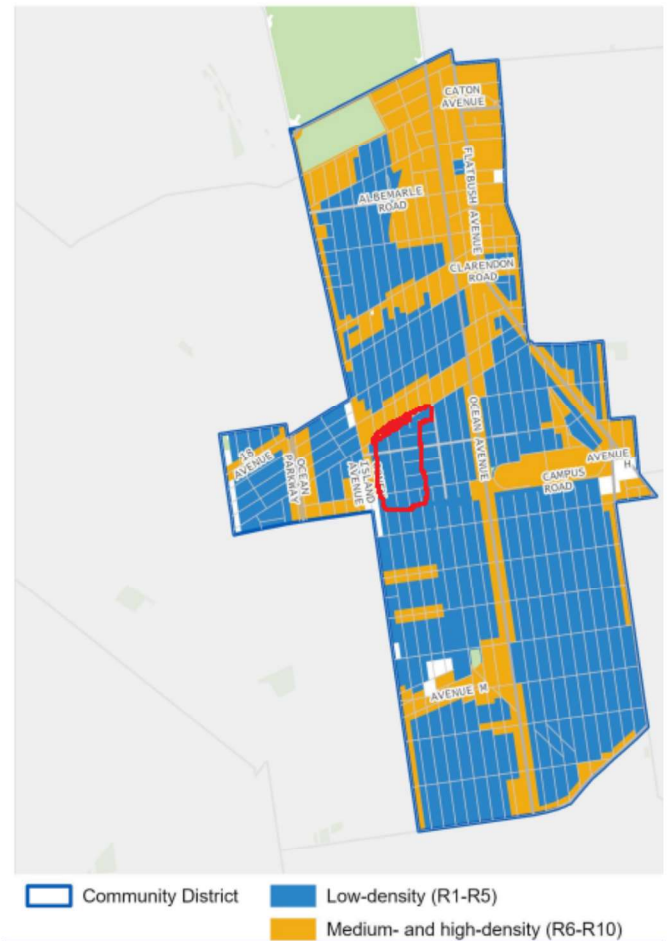
building on a multi-million dollar lot is questionable, although combining two lots to erect a five story condo building extending 200x80 feet may be.

WM homeowners would also be allowed to convert any one-family into a two-family home or convert their garage into an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) intended for relatives (some ADUs would even be permitted in Landmarked districts). Existing basement apartments could be legalized if other state and local laws were amended. Finally, the allowable Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of private houses would expand if a homeowner wanted to change “perimeter heights or yards,” and Citywide, any existing parking mandates would be eliminated for new buildings.

On Tuesday evening June 11th, Community Board 14 will hold a public hearing at the District Office (810 East 16th St.). Residents wishing to speak must register prior to 3pm at bit.ly/4bSUWFR where full details and links to the live YouTube session can be found. Comments and letters on CofY can also be directed to info@CB14Brooklyn.com. After deliberating, the full Board will formulate a recommendation to City Planning on June 17th at their last scheduled meeting before the summer recess. The West Midwood Community Association will also host a neighborhood meeting in the Mormon Church on June 12th. High on the agenda will be a discussion of CofY by members who have analyzed the proposal and by Community Board 14 District Manager Shawn Campbell.

Public hearings will be held by City Planning in July and they would likely vote to approve it in September 2024. Thereafter, the City Council would have 50 days to vote CoY up or down. If approved, the Mayor would sign it into law within 30 days. Throughout the review process, DCP and City Council may revise certain provisions based on response from the public, Community Boards, Borough Presidents and the crucial decision-makers here, the City Councilmembers.

Brooklyn CD 14



Alternate Side Parking Calendar



June 12-13 Wednesday-Thursday

Shavuot – 2 Days

June 17-18 Monday-Tuesday

Idul-Adha (Eid Al-Adha)

June 19 Wednesday

Juneteenth

July 4 Thur Independence Day

Major Legal Holiday

August 13 Tuesday

Tisha B'Av

August 15 Thursday

Feast of the Assumption

What Is West Midwood Online?

Want to ask folks in the neighborhood whether they have any recommendations for a plumber or roofer or such? Or maybe what local eateries or merchants they like? Perhaps you'd like to be in the know about issues affecting our area? Then join the West Midwood Online email discussion group, aka The Listserv.

Send an email to joe@enright.com with your street address, name, and the email address that you want to use to post and receive messages. He will add you to the group and send you the simple instructions. There are presently over 200 email subscribers representing about 125 households.

To join you must be a permanent resident of West Midwood and agree not to post messages of a religious, political, or spam nature. Insulting or crude language can also lead to revocation of the ability to post. Finally, new and existing members can also request a daily recap containing all of the activity within the previous 24 hours, rather than receive messages as they occur.

Hello all, and Happy Spring! Spring is the season that I think shows our neighborhood and its urban design to best advantage, with something always blooming throughout these lovely (and at least somewhat sunny) weeks from early April into late May, as our majestic London Planes fill in with leaves. Your columnist was on hiatus during the last issue; I'm back and excited to talk about windows. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it's not a stretch to say that windows were a complex, precision-engineered machine, representative of the technology and manufacturing capabilities of each era.

Have you ever wondered why the typical window style most common to our West Midwood Houses is called "double-hung"? Both the lower and upper sashes (that is, the rectangular, moveable elements comprised of glass set in a wood border) were set, or "hung", on chains or ropes, rather than being fixed or fastened in place. (Pedantic architectural historians will argue that the plural of "sash" is also "sash", but I prefer pluralizing "sash" as "sashes" for clarity's sake.) At the other end of these chains or ropes, which ran over steel pulleys set into the stationary outer frame, were iron counterweights. These counterweights were carefully calibrated to match the weight of the moving sash, so that windows could be easily opened but the sashes would also stay put where you left them. Prior to the invention of vertically-sliding sashes in the 17th century, windows were typically either fixed in place, or casement-style, meaning they were hinged along the side like miniature doors and opened outward. The casement window predated the hung window and was associated with medieval construction; however, it has stuck around and can be seen in the U.S. as a hallmark of the Gothic Revival architecture of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Why were hung sash windows considered an advancement? They permitted more freedom to increase total and operable window area, allowing for greater daylight and ventilation, while also retaining the ability to appear refined and elegant. A couple of columns ago,

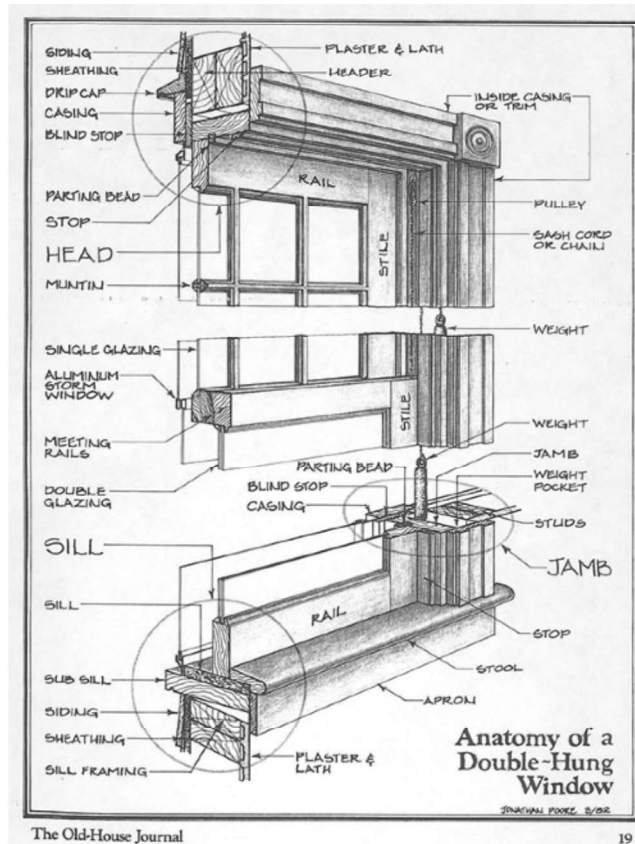
writing about how, in the era before air conditioning, our houses incorporated passive climate design strategies, I mentioned the lost art of ventilating using the double-hung windows: by opening the top and bottom sashes a few inches, a circulating effect could be created to exhaust stale air from a room and draw cooler fresh air in. Of course, this requires full-height insect screens, which most people no longer have. Additionally, many modern window retrofits are single-hung, as people lost interest in such passive ventilation strategies once AC was available.

(These days, a warming climate and increased humidity has made the outdoor air intolerable throughout most of July and August.)

But back to window elements and assemblies. Traditional windows are what we call "single-glazed" today, meaning that each visible zone of glass (each "lite") was composed of just a single pane of material. This thin pane was a surprisingly delicate interface between the outdoors and the home's interior. In terms of assembly, the pane would sit tightly against a rabbeted edge of wood on the interior side of the sash and be puttied in place from the exterior side. Break a pane, and a homeowner could easily re-putty a replacement into place.

And what about the size of lites? For centuries, up until the 1950s and the invention of the float glass industrial process, window glass was an expensive building material and

limited in its size. When we think of 18th century Colonial American architecture (and its offspring, Colonial Revival), we think of numerous small panes of glass in each wood sash, separated from each other by a grid of profiled wood dividers called "muntins." (Muntins were an advancement over the old lead "came" separating stained glass in the medieval era.) Colonial-style windows are described by the number of lites in the upper sash versus the lower sash, such as an "8-over-8" window. But in their original design, West Midwood homes bridge the Colonial Revival of the 20th century and the Victorian tastes of the 19th: the most prominent windows on the first and second floors of our homes were often "1-over-1", that is, no muntins to divide a single oversized pane of glass



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set into each sash. To our eyes today, accustomed as they are to romanticizing the small lites of the Colonial Revival aesthetic, the 1-over-1 window may appear plain and unadorned; to Victorian eyes, it was a matter of pride to show off glass of such a size (and your ability to afford it).

Hopefully, this primer helps explain how the aesthetics of traditional window design were inseparable from the functionality of each element. While traditional windows vary widely in style and operation, each component took its form through lessons honed over centuries, driven by the economy of defined purpose.

When we fast-forward to the modern era, today's retrofits, on the other hand, bring different kinds of questions. The introduction of modern materials such as aluminum, vinyl, and insulated glazing, which led to more budget-friendly and energy-efficient window options, brought new kinds of aesthetic dilemmas. Should these modern materials be employed to create an optimized, modern-looking window? Or, if character matters, should they be used to make a traditional-looking window, even if many aspects are vestigial?

Ideally, historic windows that are still intact should be repaired and restored if possible. If kept in reasonable repair, historic windows can last the life of the house. The technology is simple and easily fixed if something breaks. But if material condition, budget considerations, or energy performance lead you to retrofits, care should be taken to select a product with options and materials most sympathetic to the appearance of the original historic windows. Retaining a sense of the original character-defining features of our

homes helps to maintain the visual integrity of these structures and the neighborhood overall. Some change can always be accommodated, recognizing that we can't live in the past, but it's a careful balance. As the historic character of a place erodes, people forget why it was special in the first place.

In contrast with traditional windows, modern windows have superior energy performance through the use of good seals and insulated glazing (also known as "double-glazing"): a sandwich of two outer layers of glass enclosing a sealed gap of either air or argon gas. The need for exterior storm windows is eliminated. But the overall look can diverge quickly away from historic charm. The modern glass itself is mass-produced float-glass, free from the waviness and imperfections that gives historic glass its character. Our eyes are attuned to the traditional thickness and silhouette of the wood elements of traditional windows; the modern recreations in vinyl or aluminum can look alternately too thin or too chunky and unrefined. The simulated muntin grids of modern windows, often called "grilles" because they are an applique, are designed to recreate a traditional putty profile. But oftentimes these can read flat and unconvincing, or present a design never seen in West Midwood originally. And when

modern windows fail, as they will inevitably do in a few decades, it's important to remember that they are engineered as products – things to be replaced rather than repaired. Vinyl exposed to the sun deteriorates and cracks; seals and joints fail; aluminum coatings haze; and double-glazing fails, and condensation enters, creating a fogged appearance. Modern windows have important benefits, but nothing is without trade-offs.

In the next installment, I will talk about some modern window products on the market that offer good sightlines, as well as what historic window restoration involves.



William Kiefer Ost, helping to return misdelivered mail. A special service exclusive to West Midwood



heat which killed scores of New Yorkers on a single day in mid-July that year. Pictures of the family posing during costume parties abound, usually gathered around a magnificent fireplace of inlaid stone which survives today in all its glory. Read's artistic output provided a very comfortable living for the family, judging by their many extended summer vacations. For instance, in 1926, the Reads drove west, stopping in Dayton, Yellowstone, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Las Vegas and San Diego. W.G. wrote in his travel journal on September 26: "At Las Vegas we slept in our car and it developed into a very cold night with some rain....Albuquerque to Las Vegas, 139 miles." [Author's Note: Having recently driven that same distance in 575 miles, I am left to conclude that either W.G.'s odometer was broken or....space aliens.]

Meanwhile, their son Lloyd graduated Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1928 and launched a successful engineering career at Bethlehem Steel and other Pennsylvania companies. But Viola never left 745 Rugby and worked as a saleslady for a fabric wholesaler. The Reads were not immune from the Depression, forced to rent rooms in their home starting in the 1930s, which also coincided with Walter's retirement. A 75 word obituary in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle on November 9, 1945, was the only public notice of W.G.'s passing, although he was said to be "one of the pioneer artists [experimenting] in animated cartoons for motion pictures."

The 1950 Census indicates that Nellie and Viola were renting the first floor to Lindsey S. Perkins and Flora, his wife. Perkins, born in northern Florida, was a Brooklyn College professor who published works on the psychology of speech, and orators of the antebellum South. Widely respected, in 1952, he served as VP of the Eastern Communication Association. It seems likely he used his communication skills to arrange for the Read Family Papers to be donated to the Brooklyn College Archives. Upon the death of Nellie (1964) and Lloyd (1965, in Basking Ridge, NJ. Viola inherited the house. She sold the home in 1969 and 18 months later joined the Read family plot in Green-Wood Cemetery.

The third owners were Anthony G. Lipari and his wife, Erika Koster. They were married in 1962 and moved from a very narrow Sheepshead Bay house to West Midwood in November 1969. They departed in early 1972, selling to a 30-something Kensington couple,

Paul E. Wildstein and his wife of seven years, Jacqueline Schneider, who had a two year old boy, Allen. Not much is known about them, aside from Paul's 1955 graduation photo in the Lincoln HS yearbook, his eventual death in 1987 at the age of 49, Jacqueline's current address in Secaucus and Allen's in California. In 1976, Paul deeded the home to his wife, and she sold it in 1982 to Anthony Eppolito and his spouse of eight years, Cynthia Kean, who were renting on Westminster Road, off Beverly. The Eppolito's remained for 24 years, raising two daughters. Nora died of leukemia as a teenager and Allison now has a family of her own in Staten Island. Cynthia was an

Assistant District Attorney in Kings County for many years, eventually becoming a Bureau Chief overseeing all felony prosecutions in the southeast quadrant of Brooklyn. Tony was an illustrator, perhaps channeling the ghost of W.G., and had his own advertising firm for a while. He passed away in Bay Ridge in 2010. Cynthia now lives up in White Plains.

In 2006, they sold the property for \$925,000 to Andrew Weber, who lived nearby on Webster Avenue, and he sold the home for \$1,060,000 within a year, before the real estate bubble burst, to Amanda Wallace & Tamara Hartman who were renting an apartment in Carroll Gardens. Tamara and Amanda lived in the house and

raised their two adopted boys, Finn and Jet, until Covid hit and they relocated to Connecticut.

In January 2023, Amanda and Tamara sold to Tammy Tibbetts and her husband Michael Walters. Tammy, a Jersey gal, is the co-founder and CEO of a girls' education and empowerment organization called She's the First. She also wrote a book based on her experience in the nonprofit world, *Impact: A Step-by-Step Plan to Create the World You Want to Live In*. Michael, a native of Glasgow, Scotland, does startup scaling, most recently working in education technology, helping companies grow by focusing on purpose, people, and processes.

I asked them if their move here was prompted by their toddler Owen needing room to roam beyond their 5th floor Flatbush condo. "Not exactly," came the reply. "During the pandemic, we would take long walks and bike rides with our dog Wally from our Martense Street apartment to leafy green Prospect Park South and Beverly Square, and started to dream about living in one of these Victorian homes. On the way to the open house, we walked past Cortelyou Road, discovered West Midwood for the first time, and were hooked."



Above: Tammy Tibbetts shows off the unique stone fireplace.
Left: Michael Walters, Tammy Tibbetts and their son Allen.



Newkirk Plaza's Getting a Facelift

By WM News' Roving Reporter

On May 9th, during Flatbush Development Corporation's 49th anniversary gathering (on Flatbush Avenue, naturally), Congresswoman Yvette Clarke presented Robin Redmond and her busy staff with a large cardboard check, which I am told has a street value of \$575,000.

This Congressional Community Project Funding, approved as an Economic Development Initiative by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, is the result of tireless advocacy by FDC, which will use the money to implement a series of storefront improvements to the Plaza: repainting and repairing facades, updating signage and awnings, installing new lighting fixtures, repairing or replacing windows and doors, enhanced landscaping, etc.

Said a happy but tired Westminster Road alum, Lupe Ramsey, "We aim to create a more vibrant and visually appealing business district that will make it a destination for shopping, transportation and green space."



Lupe Ramsey, Robin Redmond & Rep. Clarke

In addition to Lupe, many West Midwood citizens have contributed their blood, sweat and tears to FDC. There at the beginning a half a century ago were Mike Weiss of Waldorf Court (first President) and Bill Schlansky of Argyle Road (first Treasurer), along with their wives, Ella and Susan, who helped raise funds, the lifeblood of any non-profit. Hopefully, this latest infusion will prime the



Newkirk Plaza Merchants & FDC

pump for inclusion of Newkirk Plaza in the NYC Plaza Program, eliminating the reliance on ad hoc funding for maintenance of this historic neighborhood space.

West Midwood Bookshelf — Joan Greenberg, librarian

Read any good books lately? Have a book recommendation for your neighbors? Please send them to Joan Greenberg at joandaveyg@gmail.com.



After Annie by Anna Quindlen

Submitted by Harriet Rhine

Annie, the mom of the family, has died. Annie's family members, the husband, the oldest daughter, and two younger siblings, and Annie's best friend, all try to cope and adapt. Annie's presence is still felt by all.

The Promised Party Kahlo, Basquiat and Me, by Jennifer Clement.

Submitted by Jan Castro
Clement's gripping memoir paints growing up in Mexico City in the '70s and living in



New York (to attend NYU) in the '80s as dangerous times. Her earlier books have been translated into 38 languages.
See Jenniferclement.com.

James by Percival Everett

Submitted by Andrea Freshman

James is a retelling, reimagining the story of Huck Finn from the point of view of enslaved James. It is exciting, daring and a page turner. The pain of the character is palpable but his intelligence, his creativity and heroism are inspirational. I give this book 5 stars!