

BRONX

Plans for Bronx high-rise lead a community garden to call for a halt

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WEST FARMS, The Bronx (PIX11) — Since 1981, the [population of the Bronx](#) has grown more than 18%, and in the last decade or so, parts of the borough have had some of the highest rates of new construction in the city.

Now, that rate of development has some residents of this central Bronx community calling for one part of their neighborhood to not be developed, in the interest of feeding the community and creating green space. They say that River Garden, a community garden operated by the NYC Parks Department, could be compromised by a proposed development right next door to the half-block-long space, which plays a key role in residents' well-being.

“This has actually given back to the community,” said Magda Mary Marcano, referring to the garden. “Whether it’s growing food, having events for the kids in here, and [for] adults.”



Marciano, who has lived around the corner from the garden since 1968, said that she knows first-hand that the garden has been an improvement to the neighborhood since the Parks Department created it from a neglected lot in 1978.

Next to the garden, on its south side, is an empty lot.

It was a gas station in the 1940s, and later became a car repair garage, until about six years ago. That is when developer Abingdon Square Partners cleared out the lot, and, said neighbors, discussed plans to build a 13-story residential tower there.



Longstanding community garden members, including Ariel Lucré, said that the building would compromise the garden’s mission.

“We would not have enough sunlight to grow things like tomatoes and peppers — all the beloved things that we have for the community,” she said.

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Laura James, the manager of the garden, explained further: “We give away food.”

From late spring well into the fall, she said, the garden gives away freshly picked produce to all residents who show up. The neighborhood has no grocery stores, she and Lucré said. It does have a variety of fast-food eateries, to which their garden is the only healthy alternative.



So now, residents like them are calling on the city to stop the next-door development. They pointed out that there is another high-rise under construction just fifty yards away from the community garden, as well as a recently completed high-rise a block past the one being built.

“This is two of seven,” said James, pointing to the nearly completed high rise closest to the garden. “There’s also going to be one there,” she said, pointing at a location catercorner from the garden, a few hundred yards away, “one across the street,” she continued. “There’ll be one up the block, and two more up the block.”

“So can we have this little space?”

She said that she and many other residents welcome the Central Bronx revitalization, particularly in recent years, but that more space has been filled with new buildings than with new parking space.

Because the city’s Parks Department created this community garden, she, as well as other community garden members, and the local Community Board want the department to try to buy the lot next door and expand the garden.

The lot’s owner, Abingdon Square Partners, has not yet responded to a request for comment from PIX11 News. It is also not clear if the developer is willing to sell, and even if it is, whether the city can afford the lot, for which Abingdon Square paid millions of dollars.

Still, community garden leaders said that growing produce in its space is a vital mission and that growing more of its space can be an important addition to that mission.

“It’s really important for the community to have sunlight,” said Lucré, “[and] for the river to maintain its health,” she said about the garden, which is bounded on the west by the Bronx River.

The Parks Department commented on the situation in a statement on Saturday.

“We are always seeking ways to enhance and expand our green spaces and community gardens,” the statement read, “including those along the Bronx River. We are reviewing the Community Board’s request regarding this site.”