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Queens rezoning boosts prospects

Rules allow higher density and create affordable units

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Officials are hoping for a surge in building applications following the City Council's approval of massive rezoning in Maspeth and Woodside, Queens. The new rules will let property owners in the 130 affected blocks build larger, higher-density buildings. The catch: Every four market-rate units built, rehabilitated or preserved must be matched by one affordable unit.

Developers are expected to begin filing plans as soon as this month, although the city's cooling housing market could push the timing back a bit. Construction could get under way next year, according to a spokesman for the City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

Such so-called inclusionary zoning rules, which permit greater density in return for creation of affordable units, have been applied in other boroughs--most notably in Greenpoint and Williamsburg, Brooklyn. This is the first time they have been implemented in Queens. They are part of the mayor's efforts to build or preserve a total of 165,000 affordable housing units by 2013.

The proposal to expand inclusionary zoning to Queens drew wide support in public hearings. "It seems clear that the market is aware of this need for affordable housing," says John Young, director of the Planning Department's Queens office. "We will continue to monitor [permit applications] to see what response we get."

A key aim of the rezoning is to increasing multifamily housing to help cope with the borough's rising population. Buildings of up to 12 stories will be allowed, as opposed to previous zone-specific caps ranging from one to seven stories. Affordable units must be within half a mile of the market-rate housing.

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