



BMNAR awarded placemaking grant

February 09, 2015 - Front Section

By Eliezer Rodriguez, Esq.

In early 2014, I attended a session sponsored by the National Association of Realtors where I learned of different grant programs available to assist communities in need of improvements. As a relatively new executive officer with the Bronx-Manhattan North Association of Realtors, I was excited about all the grants. I took careful notes on the various grants, did some additional research and put "apply for grants" on my to-do list for 2014.

Fast forwarding to September 2014, Kathy Zamechansky was sworn in as the 57th president to lead BMNAR's board of governors. At her first executive board meeting, Kathy emphasized working more with the community and building on the Borough president's theme of "The New Bronx" by turning something old and making it new. Hearing Kathy talk about the borough we both love, The Bronx, gave me the motivation I needed to pursue the grants I researched months before.

I decided to start small, learn the grant application process and if I succeed in getting one grant under my belt, then I will reach for the stars to seek additional grants to move forward Kathy's agenda. In line with my plan, I decided The Placemaking micro-grant was a good place to start.

The Placemaking micro-grants are awarded by the National Association of Realtors to local and state realtor associations to help them and their members make a community a better place to live and work by transforming unused public spaces into vibrant places. Imagine being able to turn an old parking lot into a new farmer's market. Imagine further, being able to turn an old vacant lot into a new playground.

According to Kathy Zamechansky, BMNAR's board president, "Realtors live, work and volunteer in their communities and take immense pride in working to improve them. Placemaking can help foster healthier, more social and economically viable communities. It creates places where people feel a strong stake in their neighborhoods and are committed to making things better. This grant will allow us to address areas in our community that are in need of improvement or redevelopment and create a place where friends and neighbors can come together."

The grant is intended to help realtor associations partner with others to plan, organize, implement and maintain placemaking activities in their communities. I read an article in The Bronx Chronicle about William Rivera becoming the new chairperson for Bronx Community Board 9. I met William years before when he was the campaign manager for now assemblyman Luis Sepulveda. I called William to congratulate him and to discuss my plan.

William introduced our plan to Bronx Community Board 9 and they voted to become stakeholders. William added to the list of stakeholders to include: Bronx Borough president Ruben Diaz, Jr.; Bronx Community Board 9; Youth Ministries of Peace & Justice; NYC DOT Plaza Program; councilmember Annabel Palma; assemblyman Marcos Crespo; senator Ruben Diaz, Sr.; and congressman Jose Serrano.

Within two weeks, an area was selected, the Placemaking project was defined and the grant application was submitted. If we receive the grant, it will be used to create a community mural adjacent to the Morrison Avenue Plaza Project. The Plaza will be the first of its kind in The Bronx. This types of plaza is mostly seen in Manhattan and it does transform underused streets into vibrant, social public spaces that promotes community engagement, cultural activities, and economic vibrancy. The mural will be painted by a famous artist from the neighborhood and it will reflect the culture and history of the Soundview neighborhood.

On December 5, 2014, we received the good news that our Placemaking Micro-grant was approved for \$2,200. As soon as the weather gets better, the artist will go to work and the transformation will begin thanks to the National Association of Realtors. BMNAR has begun forming partnerships to turn something old into something new. If you see yourself as a recognized leader in bringing about improvements to your community, then you need to have my information on speed dial.

Currently, I am batting 1000 in receiving grant awards (1 for 1). In the near future, I will be applying for more complex grants that will help change The Bronx landscape and increase the frequency of single family and cooperative apartment property sales, the leasing of commercial space and that will create a greater demand for BMNAR Realtors. BMNAR plans to enter the land use policy discussions at the outset to usher coveted business opportunities for our membership, establish robust relationships with local elected officials, and elevate the status of BMNAR as trusted advisors. \$2,200, not bad. Hip, hip...!

Eliezer Rodriguez, Esq. is the association executive of BMNAR, Bronx, N.Y.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540