

viva al frente

# SLEEPLESS IN EAST HARLEM

**N**OISY, TOXIC, SLEEPLESS nights may be in store for thousands of East Harlem residents come November when the East River Plaza shopping center opens its doors at 116th St. and FDR Drive.

Costco, which hopes to be its largest tenant, is requesting a modification to a permit that would allow them to make overnight stock deliveries between midnight and 5 a.m.

This means that nightly, within a five-hour span, some 15 semi trucks would parade along 116th St., from Third Ave. to Pleasant Ave.... and back. That's 30 window-rattling, fume-spewing trips on top of regular traffic that already includes a cross-town bus line and other large vehicles.

I live right smack in the middle of the parade route and I'm not cheering.

That's why last Thursday I went to a public hearing in a church basement called by Manhat-

tan Community Board 11, who will vote Tuesday on whether to recommend modifications to the permit to the City Planning Commission, which has the last word on this matter.

It was a strange event. Local elected officials were absent. The sound system was bad. But things perked up when about 50 swaggering workers made their grand entrance with as much huffing and puffing as a Kabuki dance or a professional wrestling smackdown.

It felt as if they were there to intimidate, to cast the proceedings into an "Us vs. Them" mold, staging a manly defense of the jobs Costco will bring to the community against the girly naysayers worrying about quality-of-life frivolities such as asthmatic children and peace and quiet.

This left most of the audience in the uncomfortable position of groveling between a rock and a hard place. Who can be against jobs in the middle of an economic meltdown?

The overall merits and disadvantages of the 485,000-square-foot East River Plaza, which hopes to also house Target, Best Buy and Marshalls, have been hashed and rehashed for over a decade.

It's now a done deal, and only time will tell whether the well-being of the people of East Harlem was worth the price of a few pieces of silver.

But allowing overnight deliveries will not be just an inconvenience, but a health hazard to thousands of residents.

To help mitigate this disaster, the developers are offering to install double-glazed windows and even air conditioners in buildings along a few blocks immediately adjacent to the loading areas.

That would leave the rest of us reaching for the Sominex and the earplugs.

Noise is detrimental to life, health and the restorative powers of a good night's sleep. Noise is a form of torture, denounced as such by the UN, Amnesty International and the Red Cross.

Constant noise affects your hearing, your heart, your nerves, your gastrointestinal system.

It stresses you out. It raises your blood pressure. It makes you mad as hell, and when you decide you're not going to take it anymore, you are ready to try anything to stop it.

Just the thought of thousands of noise-crazed, sleep-deprived, diesel-intoxicated people on the verge of a nervous breakdown storming East River Plaza in the middle of the night should give anyone pause.

Community Board 11 should vote "No." But... dream on. At a minimum, it must recommend that Costco reassesses its 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. hours of operation to allow for restocking within a more reasonable time frame, forbid trucks to idle on adjacent streets, and that EVERY building that needs it along the 116th St. truck route gets the noise/fumes mitigating window treatment.

As a 25-year resident, I'm fully aware that East Harlem has been a mostly silent dumping ground for unwanted projects and facilities that other neighborhoods would not tolerate.

But it's never too late to take quality-of-life issues for what they are — matters of life and death.

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