

Taming the Newsrack Monster

Madison Avenue's Business Improvement District is the latest BID to have demonstrated what a dramatic improvement can be made when the hodgepodge of filthy, dilapidated single newsracks is replaced by well-designed multitracks.

In addition, the Madison Avenue BID has joined with CIVITAS and others to form the New York City Newsrack Committee. Its members include the Fashion Center, Grand Central, 34th Street, Brooklyn Heights, Carroll Gardens, Columbus Avenue and Union Square BIDs, neighborhood groups in Queens, the Municipal Art Society, Transportation Alternatives, Landmark West, Murray Hill Neighborhood Association, East 86th Street Merchants & Residents Association, and Carnegie Hill Neighbors.

Across the country the newsrack problem is being successfully solved via legislation. Stronger newsrack laws and enforcement provisions are now in place in Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami Beach, San Francisco, Dallas, Houston, San Diego, Boston, Pasadena and Denver, among others. Each city has defined the sidewalk as a "Public Right of Way" with safety, function and aesthetics taken into consideration.

The Municipal Art Society's "Nasty Newsrack Photo Contest" in 2007 gleaned hundreds of entries that

clearly demonstrated how severe the newsrack problem is and how most newsrack owners in New York cannot be counted on to comply with ordinances about the placement and condition of their property. Some of the worst examples can be viewed on their website www.mas.org.

As the ever-increasing number of newsracks on New York's sidewalks continues to clog corners, impede access to bus stops and fire-hydrants, and collectively lend an unkempt look to our sidewalks, we are urging the City Council to crack down on the rack problem.

The New York City Newsrack Committee has suggested a newsrack legislation package that covers an application/registration process, fees to help finance enforcement, standardization, permanent placement, limits as to numbers/locations of newsracks, elimination of redundancy and provisions for abandonment, appearance/cleanliness, advertising parameters, streamlined enforcement procedures as well as the promotion of multitracks.

With other cities having paved the way, New Yorkers should have a good shot at taming the newsrack monster here, but Council Member Jessica Lappin (D-Upper East Side) has been asked by the Transportation Committee Chair, Council Member John Liu (D-

Flushing), to work on a provision that would limit the scope of newsrack action to merely prohibiting single newsracks within 300 feet of a multirack.

Most areas of the city do not have BIDs or multitracks, and the areas without them, in fact, have a noticeably worse problem with single newsracks. When a BID manages to rid itself of single newsracks, the publishers simply move their newsracks to the closest non-multirack area. As a result, more avenues and residential side streets in non-BID areas have been plagued with a larger influx of newsracks. In an area like 125th Street where residents and business leaders have been making such great strides to rejuvenate the district, it adds insult to injury when newsrack owners target the neighborhood as a convenient dumping ground for their excess newsracks and politicians look the other way.

All of New Yorkers should be able to enjoy attractive streetscapes and meaningful, citywide newsrack legislation is long overdue. If other cities have effectively dealt with the newsrack blight, there is no reason why we should not be able to do the same.

Rita Hirsch and Liberty Rees



Hodgepodge of newsracks looks tawdry and unkempt

Multitracks on Madison Avenue are a dramatic improvement

What you can do:

Call your City Council member. Call City Council Speaker Christine Quinn at 212-788-7210. Call or e-mail members of the Council Transportation Committee from the Council's website: <http://council.nyc.gov/html/committees/transportation.shtml> Call the Council Transportation Committee's Chair, Council Member John Liu 212-788-7022, or e-mail him at liu@council.nyc.ny.us