



# TMO NEWS

The Marino Organization Inc. 171 Madison Avenue, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor, NY, NY 10016 Phone (212) 889-0808 Fax (212) 889-2457

## OUR TOWN

*Upper East Side News & Community*

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### UN-CHAIN LOCAL STORES

Exploring support for small business owners

By Shannon Geis

Anyone tracking the closure of local, independent businesses and the proliferation of chains will tell you that constantly rising rents are largely to blame. According to the Real Estate Board of New York, retail rents rose 54 percent between 2001 and 2008. The board also reports that rents have not decreased significantly in response to the recession.



Council Member Dan Garodnick said he is particularly concerned about the proliferation of banks and chain drug stores on the Upper East Side.

To combat this, Council Member Dan Garodnick has been collaborating with the Pratt Center for Community Development, a community planning policy and advocacy organization based in Brooklyn, to find ways to protect local business owners. The Pratt Center has outlined some of the methods other cities have used to cope with chain-store proliferation, including zoning laws and restrictions against chain retailers, size caps on retail spaces, additional taxes for big box stores and “shop local” campaigns.

“We started looking at the strategies being used around the country,” said Vicki Weiner, who works on local retail improvement at the Pratt Center. “Strategies where the city has a hand in development will probably work best.”

Weiner said one idea that might work throughout the city is setting aside space for local retailers in new developments, a plan that has already been used in Harlem. Another approach Weiner is considering is finding ways to keep retail rents lower.

“I don’t think that rent control is a viable solution in New York City,” she said. “But we could provide incentives or benefits to a landlord for keeping rents low.”

Garodnick said he is particularly concerned about the proliferation of banks and chain drug stores popping up all over the Upper East Side.

“They are businesses people use and need, but we want to make sure that they aren’t crowding out our local retail as well,” he said.

One of the biggest problems Garodnick faces is finding a solution that is fair to both small, independent retailers and local property owners, who can make more money by renting to chain stores.

“It’s a balance. We need to protect our neighborhoods while also allowing our building owners to make a living,” he said. “New York is great because of the diversity of ground-level retail. We must protect it with the tools that are available to us.”

Weiner agrees, saying she doesn’t believe that there is anything wrong with national retailers, but thinks that mom-and-pops need assistance.

“Shoppers want a good bargain, but also really value character and supporting local businesses,” she said. “The thing to stress is that there isn’t one solution that is going to work for every condition. It is a combination of different tools because different neighborhoods have different needs.”

Garodnick said he is planning to work with the Department of City Planning and community boards to come up with a plan that will work best for New York. He may propose legislation in the Council once he explores the various available options.