

# The Brooklyn Paper

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## Not in their back yard!

By Ben Muessig

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A landlord's plan to build a two-story parking garage with a rooftop garden in the drab courtyard of the Riverside Apartments in parking-starved Brooklyn Heights has been soundly rejected by Community Board 2.

In two votes — a land-use committee meeting last Wednesday and an executive committee meeting on Monday — the board strongly sided with residents of the 118-year-old, red-brick housing complex.

“This plan goes against [builder] Alfred T. White’s whole idea that every resident is entitled to light and air,” CB2 member Nancy Wolf on Monday night, before joining the unanimous “no” vote.

The Pinnacle Group, which owns the 157-unit complex built by philanthropist White on the corner of Joralemon Street and Columbia Place, says the proposed 134-car garage and private rooftop garden is a blessing, not a bane.

“The renovation effort will transform a bleak, unattractive courtyard dominated by the 30-foot-high BQE wall into a relaxing oasis,” said Ken Fisher, a former City Councilman who represents the owner.

He also promised tenants parking “at a discounted rate.”

The courtyard has seen better days. When the city built the Brooklyn–Queens Expressway in the 1950s, it leveled half of the Riverside Apartments, taking with it half of the courtyard and leaving behind a towering wall.

In the 1990s, a landlord paved over much of the remaining open space, leaving just a narrow island of trees surrounded by asphalt. Some tenants took that landlord to court in 1997, freezing their rents until the courtyard returned to its original form.

Now residents fear that the proposed parking garage and garden is a way for the new landlord to unfreeze rents — and generate additional cash by renting out spots.

“He wants people to think that the tenants want the garage, but he’s not building it for them,” said Bill Ringler, chairperson of the Riverside Tenants Association. “He’s building it for money.”

“There is already a lot of noise back there from the BQE and the garage is only going to add more noise,” Ringler said.

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