

## More funding ends BCA headquarters delay

BY JAIME WILLIAMS

The total renovation of the future Bronx Council on the Arts headquarters in Westchester Square has been on hold for the past four years due to inadequate city funding.

The process began back in 2011, when Chase donated the former Washington Mutual Branch at 2700 E. Tremont Avenue to the BCA.

Councilman James Vacca, who has twice allocated money for the project along with Borough President Diaz, said the project is now expected to be completed over the next 18 to 24 months.

"This whole process has taken much too long," said Vacca.

The long wait time has been very disappointing for the neighborhood, said Lisa Sorin, director of the Westchester Square Business Improvement District.

The NYC Department of Design and Construction initially solicited bids for the project last year, but the bids came in above budget and an additional \$1.3 million had to be requested and allocated in the next fiscal year's budget, according to a spokeswoman for the department.

A total of \$5.1 million has now been earmarked towards the gut renovation.

That second round of bids opened on August 14 and the city is currently at the beginning of the pre-award process,

according to the DDC, and construction is estimated to begin in the spring of 2016.

Now that all the money is there, the city needs to move swiftly and spend it, said Vacca.

In the meantime, the Bronx Council on the Arts continues to offer programming in Westchester Square and at other locations.

"While we're waiting for the brick and mortar location, the relationship continues to grow," said Sorin.

But the BID is extremely eager for the addition of more arts and culture to the neighborhood that will come with the new headquarters.

"I know that once it's up and running in the district, it will shed a whole new light on the area," said Sorin.

BCA will be an important element of the overall revitalization of Westchester Square, said Vacca, which has included other projects he's funded like the renovation of Owen Dolen Park, and he's eager as well for its arrival.

"I'm looking forward to the city moving on this," said Vacca.

(Right) The former Washington Mutual branch at 2700 E. Tremont Avenue was donated to the Bronx Council on the Arts in 2011 to be the site of their future headquarters.

Community News Group / Jaime Williams

