

# A walk around the neighborhood with mom and pop

**Q.** I see that the proposed legislation to limit the size and type of retail stores on the Upper Westside is being proposed in other community board districts. Do you believe that this legislation will pass and, if so, how widespread do you think it will be?

**A.** I wrote about this proposed legislation a few weeks ago and, yes, the community board on the Upper West Side has approved legislation which will limit the frontage and square footage of certain types of retail businesses.

And, unfortunately, this proposal is spreading throughout Manhattan.

The rationale of supporters is that it will protect the "mom and pop" shops that give such character to the "streetscape".

The proposed legislation would limit the size of banks and limit the ability of large space users to create new stores. Banks would not be able to have a frontage of more than 25 feet and, in newly constructed buildings, the frontage of non-retail building lobbies would be limited to 15 feet in width.

*"We stopped in at the Donna Summer Platform Shoe Shop which thrived during the 1970s disco era. The "Save the Disco Era Act" preserved this shop."*

Come to think of it, preserving mom and pop shops, regardless of changes in market conditions, economic realities and technological advancements might just be a good idea.

I was thinking about this on a walk around my neighborhood this past weekend. I wondered what it would be like if legislation like this was passed decades ago. Just think how wonderful the city would be if zoning restrictions aimed at dictating what type of shops were protected or shunned, in certain areas, existed decades ago. Mom and pop shops would be all over the city and our streetscapes would be preserved.

In fact, it was so convenient to stop in this past weekend at Mom & Pop's Beta-max Shop to pick up some new movies to watch this weekend. They were happy to see me as I am



Cortlandt and Dey Streets were once a hub for new, fangled radio stores.

their only customer.

After concluding our transaction, mom and pop and I went for a walk in the neighborhood and decided to stop in at the buggy whip shop to see what new styles of buggy whips the shop was now selling. Unfortunately, they are still only selling (and not many of them) black and brown buggy whips because use of bright colors was banned by the "No Bright Colors in Retail Stores Act of 1932" passed by the city council back in those days.

The three of us then strolled over into the east 50s and 60s, east of Third Avenue. We enjoyed seeing all of the slaughterhouses that line the streets in this area that was considered a less desirable area when the elevated train used to run down Third Avenue.

Fortunately, these establishments were saved by the "Keep Fresh Meat in the Neighborhood Act" passed by local legislators decades ago.

It was a bit upsetting to walk among the carcasses on the sidewalk, so mom and pop and I decided it might be nice to listen to some uplifting music.

Unfortunately, my 8-track tape player was in the shop for repairs and the 8-track tape player repair shop was closed as the owners were on vacation. The same people owned the Walkman shop, so we couldn't buy those devices to enjoy some cassette tapes I happened to have in my pocket.

Oh well, no music for us today. "How about coffee?" mom suggested. We walked 20 blocks to the closest Starbucks and had some Grande Lattes. The walk was kind of long, but according to the "No Starbucks within 47 Blocks of Each Other Bill" these stores couldn't be any closer to each other than that.

After our coffee, we strolled west and pop decided he wanted a new pair of shoes. We stopped in at the Donna Summer Platform Shoe Shop which thrived during the 1970s disco era. The "Save the Disco Era Act" preserved this shop. They had a wide variety of colorfully psychedelic footwear because the shop was awarded a mysterious exemption from the "No Bright Colors in Retail Stores Act of 1932".

After trying on a few pairs of shoes, pop decided that wearing three inch platform shoes at his age was not wise. Mom agreed.

After a day walking around the neighborhood, mom and pop and I decided it was time for something to eat. We stopped in at a coincidentally named "Mom & Pop's Restaurant," one of the most successful dining establishments in the area. The restaurant was so successful in fact, that the patrons had to sit on long benches crammed right next to each other in long rows.

The owners, due to the success of their business, wanted to expand and take the vacant retail space next door, but due to the prohibition on the size of their store, created by yet another faulty piece of legislation, they were unable to do so. We thought it might be a good idea to write a letter to the head of the local community board to ask if they would consider giving Mom & Pop's Restaurant an exemption from the size restriction, so we stopped in at The Typewriter Store down the street.

Mom inserted two pieces of paper, separated by a sheet of carbon paper (we wanted to send a copy of the letter to the City Council Speaker), into one of the typewriters but the "S" and the "T" were broken, so we just decided to call it a day.



with Bob Knakal

All kidding aside, legislative control over size, use and type of business cannot lead to a good result.

If mom and pop have a great business, they will succeed. If enough people like their products or services, they will be able to compete with other new or national retailers and chains.

This experiment failed in the mid 1970s on the Upper East Side, why would it work today? If this type of control spreads, it simply does not serve the long-term best interests of New York City.