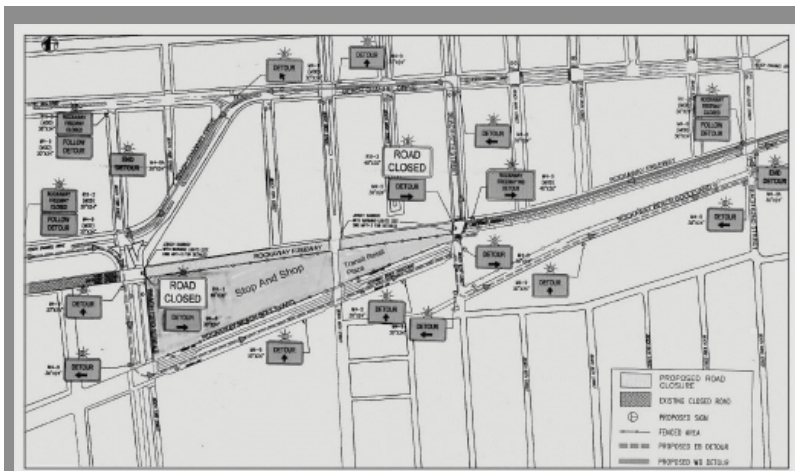


Section Of Rockaway Freeway Closing Next Month For ABTS Construction

By Nicholas Briano



A map of the area showing the section of Rockaway Freeway from Beach 73 Street to Beach 67 Street that will be eliminated to make room for the construction of a retail transit plaza, Stop and Shop and YMCA. Alternate routes include, Beach Channel Drive, the new Rockaway Beach Boulevard, and Beach Front Way.

The highly anticipated retail transit plaza, Stop and Shop and YMCA as agreed in part of the Arverne By The Sea development, will commence construction preparation starting next month, according to project officials.

Consequently, in mid-March, residents can say goodbye forever to the section of Rockaway Freeway between Beach 73 Street and Beach 67 Street to make way for construction.

According to Gerry Ronski, CEO for Benjamin/Beechwood LLC and Vice President of Construction for Arverne By The Sea, Omar Ventegeat said Rockaway Freeway may soon be gone, but the new extension to Shore Front Parkway, called "Beach Front Way," which currently extends from Beach 73 Street to Beach 67 Street, is now open and should help alleviate any traffic concerns.

Other options are the new Rockaway Beach Boulevard, which was opened last year and includes two lanes in both directions, as well as Beach Channel Drive. Ronski and Ventegeat, however, realize that it will take some getting used to the new traffic patterns, but are excited about breaking ground on the new amenities.

"It will be an exciting addition to Arverne By The Sea that will bring mixed use development here," Ventegeat said.

That mixed use development he added, will include a bank, pizza restaurant, pub and grill, as well as other professional spaces, such as a dentist or dry cleaners.

The retail transit plaza and specifically the Stop and Shop are aiming for a Thanksgiving 2009 opening and what is left of the former Rockaway Freeway in that section will be converted into parking for the two facilities, according to Ronski.

Ronski and Ventegeat say the YMCA is slated to begin construction shortly after the retail plaza and Stop and Shop. The last stages of preparation are currently being finalized with the Department of Housing and Preservation, who met with them this week to discuss the YMCA's future plans.

Those preparation plans, however, will include the original design and not the expanded six lane pool and enclosed gymnasium requested and fought for by the Community Board and ad-hoc committee for nearly two years. The original plans were put on hold to try to get \$6 million in additional funding from a Port Authority of NY/NJ fund aimed at development in air traffic affected areas.