

Residents Get Sinking Feeling

By CRAIG MCGUIRE

Despite a frustrating decade of watching the foundations of their streets and sewers erode, Woodside residents are finally getting some sorely needed relief.

"The Winwood Gardens reconstruction was postponed numerous times, but is scheduled to begin before the end of fiscal year 1995," said local Councilman Walter McCaffrey.

Residents of Winwood Gardens, a small Woodside residential community of one- and two-family homes built in the 1930's, began reporting street and home structural damage over a decade ago.

"This development was built on swampland filled in by the developer with construction debris," said Kevin Brady, assistant district manager of Community Board 2.

When the development was completed in 1937, buyers were able to secure city and federal financing for the houses, some of which sold for as low as \$7,000.

However, because the city's building codes were not enacted until 1938, and the developer is now out of business, it is unclear whether essential soil samples were taken.

According to New York City Buildings Department spokesman Vahe Tiryakiam, developers are required by law to contract a licensed engineer to test and approve soil samples before construction begins.

"Soil testing on all material, not just fill," said Tiryakiam, "is part of the modern building codes established in 1938."

However, residents believe the problem was compounded by the city.

"In 1980, a city contractor, who was replacing a water main, broke the sewer connections to over 20 homes on 61st street," said Winwood Gardens Homeowners Association Vice President Patricia Florio. "These connections, broken over 14 years ago, have still not been fixed and are causing more damage as a result."

Officially called the Tyler Boulevard project, the reconstruction will be headed by the Department of Transportation (DOT), which will handle street rehabilitation; with the cooperation of the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) restoration of the sewer system.

"We do not have a set cost for the project as of yet, or how long it will take to complete," said Frank Bocchichio, a DOT official, who did give a rough estimate of approximately \$9 million. Studies are still being conducted to outline the limits of the project.

According to DEP spokesperson John Melia, the sewers in Winwood Gardens were constructed on top of pylons driven into the earth. As a result the sewers remained

damaging house connections.

"The project includes putting in new sewers, water mains and the widening of foundations where the mains lay," said Melia. "While they are on private property, and usually the responsibility of the homeowner, the house connection will be replaced."

However, some homeowner believe this to be a small concession.

Said Florio, "More and more problems have been caused because of the lack of cooperation between the DOT and the DEP."

"It is not a question of cooperation," said Bocchichio. "While I don't know the specific circumstances from the beginning, there are many factors, like budgetary cutbacks, that delay projects."

"Myself and my neighbors, are keeping our fingers crossed," said Florio, "the city doesn't once again go back on its word."



Tribune Photo by Liz Goff

Cracked and broken streets like this one on 51st Avenue between 63rd and 64th streets have frustrated Winwood Gardens residents for years.

"While I can't think of any current projects in Queens other than this one," said Melia, "we encounter similar problems that require work frequently, especially in low lying areas."

Whereas Manhattan and the Bronx are areas largely constructed on bedrock, a significant portion of Queens and Long Island was built on landfill and softer ground.

In fact, the 55,000-seat Shea Stadium sits atop a landfill that created Flushing Meadows Park.

Other Queens sites built on fill include the United States Tennis Association Stadium, both La Guardia and Kennedy airports (including terminals and hotels), and numerous housing developments built along the shoreline.

Queens residents concerned with the structural safety of their home can contact the Buildings Department for a free inspection by calling 520-3402. However, while there is no cost to the owner, inspectors may issue violations, so