

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Reference: Danica Pagulayan, Mike Legaspi, Daniel Dunn**

**Email: [anakbayanny@gmail.com](mailto:anakbayanny@gmail.com)**

**Phone: 718.419.9219**

**October 12, 2017**

**Woodside Succeeds in Defending Against Megachurch in Larger Fight Against Gentrification and Displacement**

In September 2016, the Universal Church, on 69th Street and Roosevelt Avenue, had proposed to expand itself right in the heart of the Woodside community. The proposed structure of the “megachurch” would stand 70-feet high, taller than any surrounding building in the area. Not only would such a development be out-of-context in Woodside, but it would also break New York City building code that limits the height of building construction. It would set a dangerous precedent for commercialization and future development in the Woodside Community. And as a result would encourage gentrification and the displacement of residents especially working-class immigrant families. Organizations in New York City, such as Queens Anti-Gentrification Project (QAGP), Filipino American Democratic Club of New York, National Alliance of Filipino Concerns (NAFCON), and Anakbayan New York (ABNY) had convened with the Woodside community in response and strong opposition to this proposed development. In turn, these progressive community organizations and allies formed the *Coalition to Defend Little Manila*, dedicated to fight against the construction and expansion of this “megachurch” and its threats of gentrification of Woodside and displacement of its working-class migrant residents.

Woodside is an important neighborhood not only to its residents but to the larger New York City area and the Filipino diaspora. It has also been, for the majority of its history, a working-class immigrant neighborhood. With establishments like *Krystal's Cafe*, *Phil-Am Food Mart*, and many other Filipino businesses, Woodside has become an established home for the Filipino community of New York. As majority of the Filipino community are working-class immigrant families forced by economic pressures to leave our homeland, it's little surprise that Woodside—especially the “Little Manila” area—is so important to the diaspora. Residents interviewed throughout the campaign see the area as a piece of their homeland.

The immigrant population of Woodside is vulnerable to forces such as Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) that break into homes, workplaces, and schools to criminalize and deport community members, break up families, and ruin lives. The Philippines and countries across the world have been plundered by the United States for cheap labor and resources, while the people who inhabit these countries are left landless, jobless, and impoverished. Forced to leave their homes and countries behind, they come to the U.S. to find livelihood only to be made vulnerable by police and ICE but also real estate developers and other forces of gentrification and displacement.

On January 5th, Community Board 2 (CB2), representing the Woodside, Sunnyside, and Long Island City neighborhoods, held its regular meeting with the megachurch proposal on its agenda. At that time, ABNY mobilized its members alongside the Woodside community in a speakout and rally against the megachurch construction to emphasize that it is the community who will decide what happens in Woodside, and the megachurch proposal was pushed to February 3rd. On February 3rd, the Coalition alongside Woodside residents mobilized to voice their concerns and dissent against the megachurch, and CB2 unanimously voted against the proposal. The Universal Church had then submitted its application to the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA), asking for a variance to expand the church beyond the jurisdiction of CB2 and bypassing NYC zoning laws and building code. ABNY had successfully submitted a request to BSA dismissing the application on June 7, 2017, making it even harder for the Universal Church to continue forward in their development.

As a progressive Filipino youth organization fighting for national democracy in the Philippines, we in Anakbayan view any attack on our Woodside community as an attack on Filipinos abroad. This is why we stand against gentrification of our communities. We are also inspired by the work of other grassroots organizations such as Serve the People - Awaken Revolutionary Consciousness (SPARC), and are keenly interested in the development of Brooklyn Anti-Gentrification Network (BAN.) We are humbled by the support of the community in this fight. It was not CB2 nor the BSA that had defeated the megachurch development. It was the Woodside community, its residents and business owners, that had voiced their concerns by petitioning against it, by attending Community Board meetings, and sharing with members of the Coalition how they opposed such a development in their community. It was the community, and it is only ever the community, who can truly lead in its own defense, protection, and development. We understand that this small victory is but one step in a larger struggle against gentrification and displacement and that only with the support of the people can we achieve real victories in this fight.

Anakbayan New York calls on the community to continue to fight against gentrification of our neighborhoods and the displacement of our people. We can only do this by building unity and people power through community organizing. ###