

At Home in Brownsville Studio

A Plan for Transforming Public Housing

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INTRODUCTION





361
LIVONIA AVE

Mission Statement

The goal of the Brownsville public housing studio is to increase the livability of the public housing residents by addressing the physical environment and conditions and the economic, educational, cultural, health and safety needs.



Community Board 16



Map 1: Community Board 16



Image 1: Looking at East New York, Long Island Rail Road Stop

Introduction

Brownsville in Context

Brownsville is a unique neighborhood that has been an important part of New York City's history. In recent years, the neighborhood has been challenged by poverty and crime, and has long been considered one of New York City's most dangerous neighborhoods. Brownsville has remained untouched by the gentrification seen in so many other parts of Brooklyn, and New York City as whole, challenging the community to effectively manage whatever resources they have. With the largest concentration of public housing in the country, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) has the potential to drastically create better living conditions for its tenants, however, for Brownsville residents,

such public housing is at the center of issues affecting the whole community.

Overview of Report

This report will provide an overview of current socio-economic conditions, land use, and current transportation in the area. It will further provide recommendations that focus on neighborhood programs and services, streamlining effective public housing management in Brownsville, and improvements to the physical structure of public housing developments and the neighborhood.

Our recommendations are based on extensive background research, meetings with local community based

organizations—such as the Brownsville Partnership (BP) and the project team for the Municipal Arts Society's Brownsville project—the Brownsville Multiservice Center (BMS), the Van Dyke community Center, a New York City Housing Authority police officer, and interviews with approximately fifty local residents.

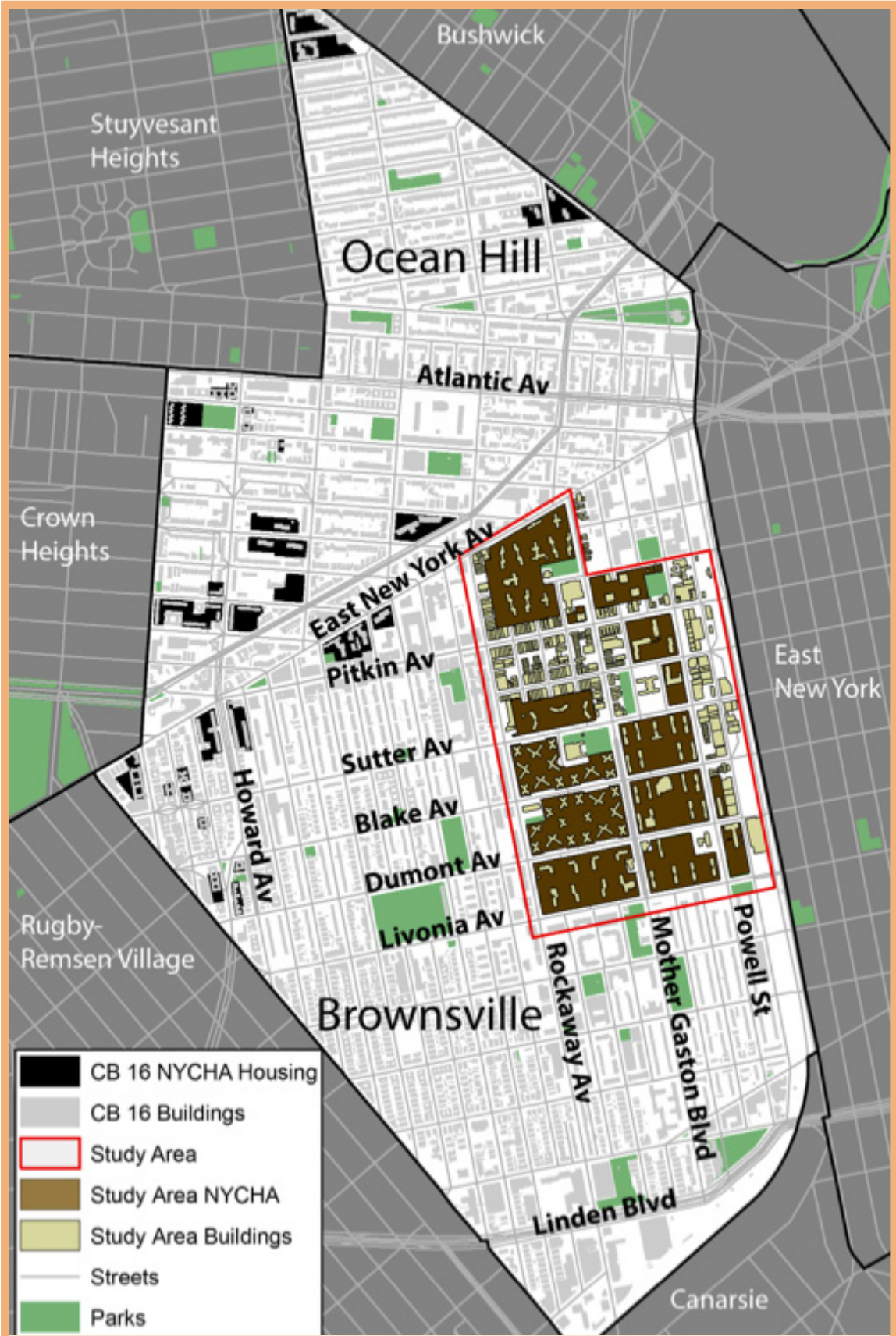


888 JUNK CARS

LOCATING BROWNSVILLE



Study Area



Map 2: Brownsville Study Area

Locating Brownsville

Study Area

The study area is located in the south east section of Brownsville. Together with Ocean Hill, Brownsville comprises Brooklyn Community District 16 (CB16) and encompasses almost two square miles in central Brooklyn. The neighborhood is bordered by Fulton Street and the neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant to the north, the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) freight line and East New York to the east, Linden Boulevard and the neighborhoods of Canarsie and Flatbush to the south, and East 98th Street and Crown-Heights to the west. Approximately 100,468 people call the neighborhood home.¹

The study area itself is bordered by Rockaway Avenue to the west, East New York Avenue to the north, Junius Street to the east, and Livonia Avenue to the south. We chose this area because of the high concentration of public housing in a geographically confined space. 3,789,139 square feet (or about 41 percent) out of our study area's 9,384,485 square feet is made up of NYCHA campuses: a significant proportion of the neighborhood.

NYCHA in our Study Area

We chose census tracts 906, 908, 910, and 912 as our focal point of study in Brownsville because the urban layout of large superblock designs typical of so many NYCHA developments overlap across shared census tract borders.

What is NYCHA?

The New York City Housing Authority mission is to increase opportunities for low and moderate-income New Yorkers by providing safe, affordable housing and facilitating access to so-

cial and community services across its 334 developments. NYCHA was founded in 1934 and opened its first development, First Houses in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, in 1935.²

Despite NYCHA's financial and management problems, it is arguably the best run housing authority in America. As rents increase dramatically across New York City, many view NYCHA as the last bastion of truly affordable housing. NYCHA is one of the few housing authorities in the country that has vowed to preserve its housing stock, rather than demolish and rebuild.

Nationwide, other public housing authorities have completely revamped their housing programs, and in many cases have demolished their original housing stock. Many authorities have abandoned the traditional "tower in the park" style of housing in favor for one-and-two family townhouses which yield less units overall.

As a result, NYCHA now has the largest public housing program in the country. As of 2013, 621,212 New Yorkers were served by NYCHA's Public Housing and Section 8 Programs, with 290,886 people still on the waiting lists for each.³

Brownsville History

Brownsville began as a farming community at the turn of the 19th century. Originally part of the larger territory of New Lots, farmers of diverse ethnicities—English, Irish, African-American, and Eastern-European Jewish immigrants—tilled the soil. Many of the immigrants were recent arrivals, and they were simultaneously repelled by the teeming streets of Manhattan and drawn to the area's fresh air. However, Brownsville was also the location of a landfill, construction supplier facilities,

bone-boiling plants, and the marshy land could be prone to flooding from the adjacent Jamaica Bay.⁴ Brownsville's origin as an immigrant destination was a result of a set of dynamic factors, such as cheap land, open space, speculative builders, and an immigrant population eager partake in the American dream. It was first subdivided into small lots by a real-estate speculator in 1858 and it quickly became a destination for working-class Jews who wanted to escape the congestion of the Lower East Side's crowded streets.⁵

The community of Brownsville began as a speculative project before there were even roads and a sewer system. Yet, it was the influx of immigrants that created the desire for factories and retail stores to locate in the area. Starting with the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883, and other transportation improvements, scores of Jewish, Italian, and Irish immigrants were drawn to the area. Residents packed themselves into the cheaply constructed tenement housing, swelling the population to over 100,000 people by 1920, including 253 African-Americans.⁶ Unfortunately, increased levels of crime and poverty soon followed the growth in population.

Although poor, Brownsville was devoted to social progress in the early 20th century. For instance, the neighborhood progressed the first birth control clinic in the United States, the first children's library in the world, as well as the first public pool in New York City. Due to congestion, the community actively lobbied for better housing conditions, opening the area's first public housing development in 1948, Brownsville Houses, shortly after NYCHA's founding in 1934. The Brownsville Houses opened with a white to black ratio of 52 to 48, and this immediately set Brownsville's housing apart from the rest of NYCHA's seg-

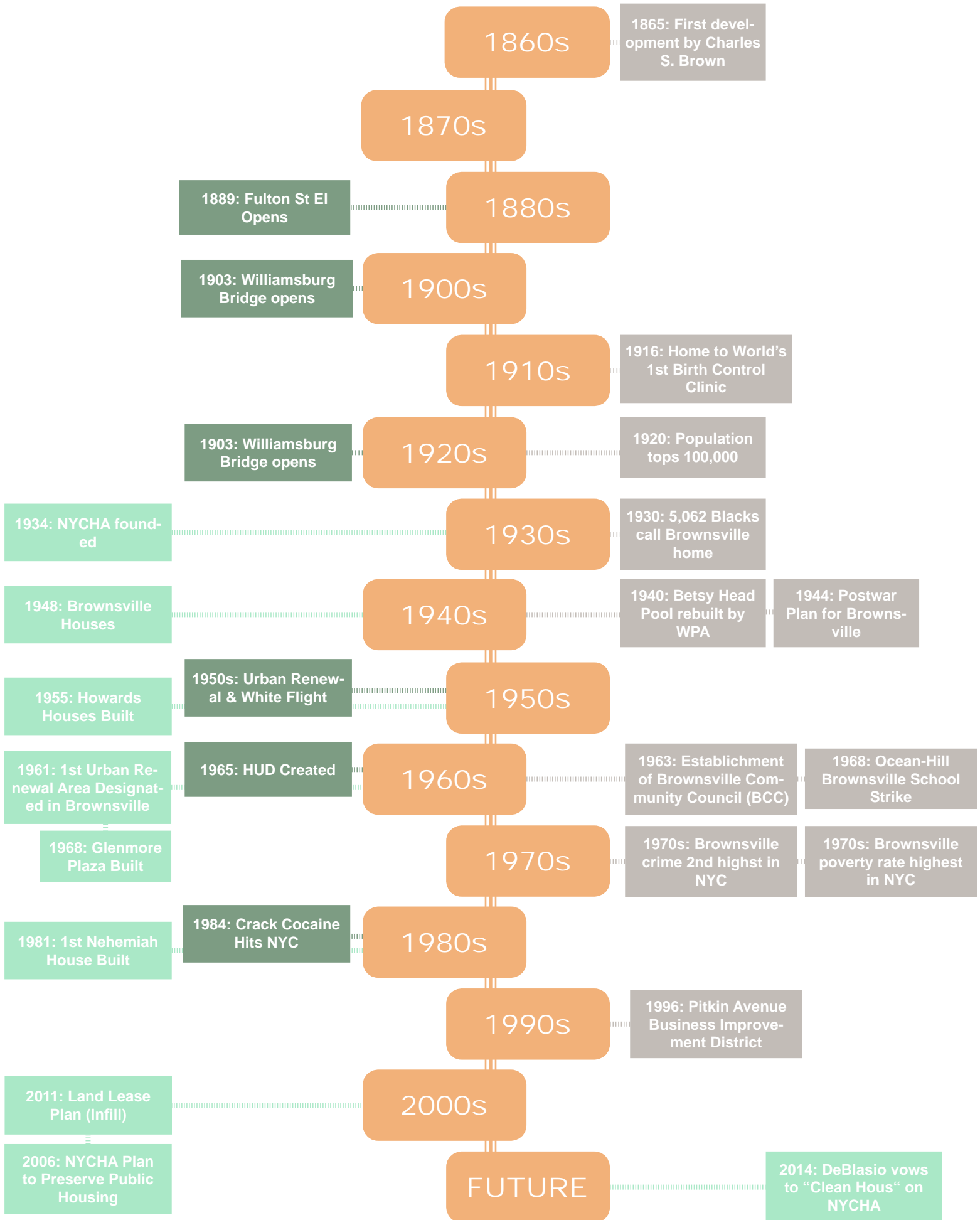
⁴ Pritchett, 11

⁵ Pritchett, 11

⁶ Pritchett, 13-14, 40

² NYCHA

³ NYCHA



regated developments.⁷ According to Wendell Pritchett's book *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto*, it was "from the commencement of the New York public housing program, [that] Brownsville leaders worked to secure a project for their own neighborhood".⁸ The progressive, Jewish population saw public housing as a way to stabilize the community, and they uniquely welcomed multiracial developments, which they expected to be models for interracial living.⁹

As a result of the white flight that occurred after World War II, poor minority residents became concentrated in urban areas, especially in public housing. Brownsville's original population was no different, and many middle class residents left for more affluent parts of the city and suburbs, being replaced by poor African Americans who were largely excluded from social mobility by racism, redlining, and a decline in entry level manufacturing jobs. Such practices were largely due to Robert Moses targeting "impoverished" areas as ideal locations for urban renewal projects.¹⁰ As Pritchett states, "to the east was Brownsville, a relatively open minded community with a somewhat upwardly mobile population and a large stock of deteriorating housing that no one wanted. Considering all the alternatives, Brownsville certainly presented the least contentious area for expansion of Brooklyn's black ghetto".¹¹ The availability of housing, no matter its condition, was appealing to newcomers who couldn't attain access to anything better.

Due to increased urban renewal projects, the neighborhood's black population swelled from 22 percent in 1950 to nearly 75 percent by 1962. Racial tensions and violence grew out of the rapid development of public housing and led to municipal neglect by NYCHA, New York City, and the police department.

Furthermore, the Van Dyke houses

⁷ Pritchett, 98

⁸ Pritchett, 62

⁹ Pritchett, 64

¹⁰ Pritchett, 121

¹¹ Pritchett, 99

declares the highest arrest rates of all Brownsville NYCHA developments, adding to an already present "ghetto" public image with gang violence and drug abuse restricting social mobility.

By 1963, the Beth-El Hospital strike of 1962 empowered members of the community to utilize federal funding to establish the Brownsville Community Council (BCC). The BCC sought to give residents the tools to solve the major problems hindering --economic development, housing, and access to arts and culture. The community's empowerment was exhibited when Mayor John Lindsay granted Ocean Hill-Brownsville residents the authority to form their own community-controlled school board. Under the creation of the new board, an illicit decision was made to fire teachers and administrators believed to be hindering the successful education of minority students in the community—the fired workers were primarily white and Jewish, further fueling racial tensions. Because of the dismissals, thousands of teachers in the NYC United Federation of Teachers went on strike at the start of the 1968 school year. The series of strikes occurring throughout 1968 were ended when the New York State Department of Education adopted a citywide school decentralization plan that divided the city into large school districts. The strikes served to be a major setback to the empowerment the community had garnered at the start of the 1960s.

By the start of the 1970s, Brownsville's once rapid momentum was on the decline. However, the New York City financial crisis of the 1970s aggravated the neighborhood's problems by dramatically reducing public services. Poverty ballooned to the highest rates in the city and crime rates followed closely behind. The once vibrant and prosperous commercial areas became less attractive because of the perceived lack of safety, lack of economic activity, and rioting. Because of the reduction of public services, the built environment crumbled, landlords became neglectful, and vacant properties increased. The city seized properties that were neglected

and by 1979 the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) reported that over 60 percent of the units in Ocean Hill-Brownsville were under city control or at risk of seizure.¹²

Projects like the Nehemiah Houses in the 1980s were born out of a grassroots movement to rebuild the community. The Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District (BID) has created a central business community within the neighborhood, while providing security, streetscape improvements and increased sanitation on the commercial strips. Brownsville, at once the only neighborhood in Brooklyn without a high school, now has three. Presently the positive developments in the community have grown out of organizations like the Brownsville Partnership, Made in Brownsville, Brooklyn Multi-Services, Brownsville Community Justice Center, and Medgar Evers College's collaboration with local community centers (Van Dyke, Seth Low Houses, Tilden, and Unity Plaza).¹³

Community Characteristics

Demographics

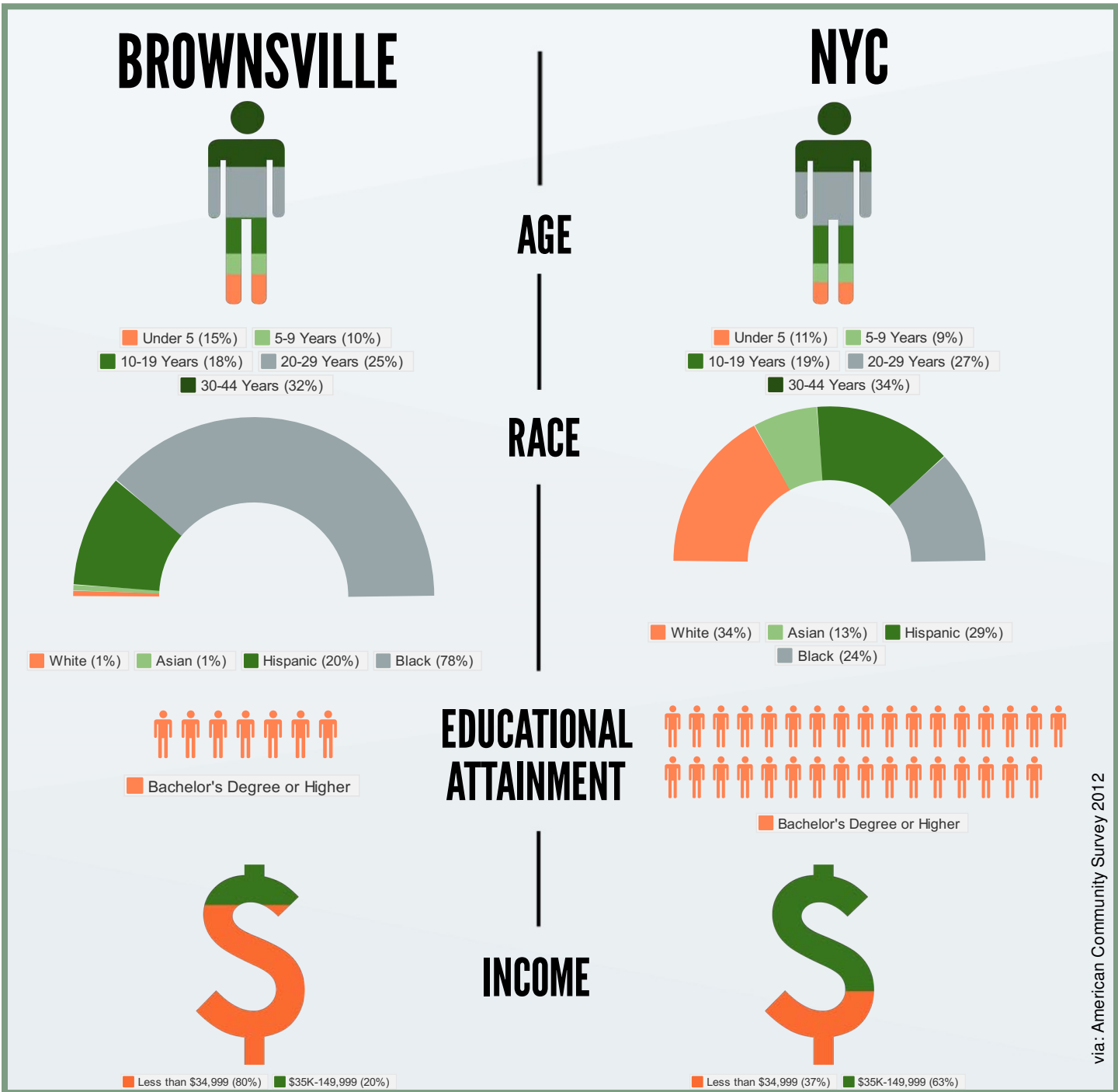
Brownsville has seen a steady decrease in population since its peak of 300,000 residents in 1925. By the 1970s, the population diminished to 122,589 and in 1980 the neighborhood was only home to 73,801 residents. Such decreases have increased vacancies and weakened the productivity of the few retail options that currently existing. However, since its low in the 1980s, the population has risen again to 86,376 today.¹⁴

Brownsville's population is primarily African-American, and represents 76 percent of the community. Hispanics make up 20 percent. Forty-five percent of households are headed by females in comparison to 18 percent of female headed households citywide. The median age is 18 years old com-

¹² Pritchett, 248

¹³ Brownsville Multi-Service Center

¹⁴ American Community Survey, 2012



via: American Community Survey 2012

Image 2: Demographics

pared to 36.5 years in New York City, and the population under 30 comprises 55 percent of Brownsville but only 42 percent in New York City. Nearly one-third of the population is without a high school diploma and only seven percent of Brownsville residents have attained a bachelor's degree--numbers much lower than Brooklyn and NYC. These factors contribute to an income per capita in Brownsville that is 45 percent less than the NYC average and 56 percent less than the NYC

median household income average.¹⁵

Safety

During our survey over half of respondents reported they felt unsafe in their community. Despite Brownsville accounting for only 0.6 percent of New York City's population, it ranks 2nd highest in prison admissions in the entire city at nearly 2,000 in 2012. Reported felony assaults in Brownsville are triple that of NYC and reported

15 American Community Survey, 2012

robberies in are nearly double that of NYC. Brownsville is policed by the 73rd precinct, and until recently, Police Service Area 2 (PSA-2, a part of the NYPD Housing Bureau). Based on NYPD CompStats, the New York City Police Department's accountability process and organizational management tool, crime has decreased dramatically in the neighborhood since 1990. However, residents in the community continue to fear the rising gang presence and increased neighborhood gun violence, proving that violence

and the threat of crime is still a major issue in the community. An estimated one out of twelve males between the ages of 16-24 living in Brownsville are imprisoned.¹⁶

Health

According to the Department of Health, Brownsville, caused by limited access to health care, few preventative and educational programs, and limited access to healthy food has the highest rates of infant deaths, cancer, heart disease, and obesity in NYC. 11.3 infant mortalities per 1,000 live births occurred in Brownsville compared to only 5.2 in NYC. Asthma hospitalizations in Brownsville/East New York are 137 percent more frequent than that of NYC,¹⁷ and despite the eight large-scale grocers in the neighborhood, approximately 41 percent of the survey respondents reported they were dissatisfied with the available grocery options in the study area because they are priced too high, lacking in quality, or both.

Civic Engagement

There are a host of existing programs in Brownsville offering different avenues for engagement. For example, community Board 16 and the NYCHA tenant associations have long advocated for community involvement and the rights of residents. Medgar Evers College, a public college in the City University of New York system, operates three community centers at the Van Dyke I, Tilden, and Seth Low developments, offering recreational space to all community members. In recent years, Brownsville has seen new stakeholders enter the community, such as MAS, an organization that has traditionally worked exclusively in Manhattan, which have created new civic engagement programs. Additionally, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Neighborhood Improvement Association, a joint collaborative between Hunter students and community residents, has worked to improve access to re-

sources for residents, visitors, and increase viability to businesses and institutions through focused based initiatives emphasizing preservation of the physical infrastructure, economic growth, educational attainment, social and cultural exposure, maintaining personal health, and sustaining the neighborhood environment.

Zoning and Existing Land Uses

In many ways, Brownsville's mid-20th century land use decisions reflects the neighborhood's origins as a physical hodge-podge of farmland and factories. Today, a variety of building heights, forms and styles create, at times, a visually disjointed neighborhood "feel." This uneven physical landscape is compounded by the Industrial Business Zone (IBZ) on the eastern edge of the neighborhood and the NYCHA superblocs that break up the neighborhood's continuity and flow.

Residential

Brownsville, including the study area, is predominantly zoned medium-density residential-R6 which is considered a non-contextual zoning district. According the New York City Department of City Planning (DCP) website, non-contextual districts are "generally mapped where there is a diverse mix of building types and no predominant context."¹⁸ Neighborhoods that are zoned R6 can include a mix of building types and heights. R6 includes two sets of bulk regulations, introduced with the 1961 zoning code, which developers can choose from. One regulation is guided by height factor restrictions which produce small multifamily buildings on small zoning lots. This housing type is common throughout Brownsville, most notable west of Rockaway Avenue.

Portions of Brownsville and the study area are zoned R6A and R7A. DCP describes contextual zoning districts as "regulat[ing] the height and bulk of

new buildings, their setback from the street line, and their width along the street frontage, to produce buildings that are consistent with existing neighborhood character."¹⁹ The letter suffix "A" distinguishes these zones where Quality Housing Regulations are mandatory.

The Quality Housing program encourages development consistent with the character of many established neighborhoods.

Its bulk regulations set height limits and allow high lot coverage buildings that are set at or near the street line, [and] also require amenities relating to interior space, recreation areas and landscaping."

This tends to produce high lot coverage with buildings near or at the street line.

R7A allows for a maximum FAR of 4.6 when 20 percent of the floor area is developed with affordable housing. For example, Mother Gaston Boulevard is 75 feet wide, much wider than Pitkin Avenue at 40 feet, thus the buildable FAR on blocks surrounding Mother Gaston Boulevard are greater than those surrounding Pitkin Avenue. The study area has a number of streets that were widened as blocks merged to form superblocs, which are noticeable across Rockaway Avenue and along Sutter Avenue, Blake Avenue, and Dumont Avenue.

The second set of bulk regulations is a result of the "tower-in-the-park" vision of urban planning popular in the 1950s. Tall buildings are set back from the street to allow more light and open space. This is the predominant housing type within the study area as NYCHA campuses were built with this style of planning in mind. The FAR range for NYCHA developments are 0.78-2.43 with a maximum of 13 stories. For a 13-story building, 81 percent of the lot would need to be open space. After 60 feet, the sky exposure plane governs the building height.

¹⁶ Youth Justice Board, 7

¹⁷ "Brooklyn Neighborhood Reports, Community District 16", Brooklyn Community Foundation

¹⁸ "Zoning Districts, Residence Districts", New York City Department of City Planning

¹⁹ "Zoning Districts, Residence Districts", New York City Department of City Planning

A sky exposure plane is a virtual sloping plane that begins at a specified height above the street line and rises inward over the zoning lot a ratio of vertical distance to horizontal distance set forth in district regulations. A building may not penetrate the sky exposure plane which is designed to provide light and air at street level, primarily in medium- and higher-density districts. (NYC DCP)

	Maximum Commercial FAR R6	Depth of Overlay District (ft)
EXISTING COMMERCIAL OVERLAY		
C1-2	2.0	150
C1-3	2.0	150
C2-3	2.0	150
C2-4	2.0	100

Manufacturing

The edge of Brownsville and the study area east of Powell Street include manufacturing - M1-1 and M1-4 zoning. Manufacturing - M1 tends to include light manufacturing such as storage or repair shops. According to the DCP website, “offices, hotels and most retail uses are permitted...and certain community facilities, such as hospitals, are allowed in M1 districts only by special permit, but houses of worship are allowed as-of-right.”²⁰ Also, new residential development is not allowed in M1-1 districts. Residences built before 1961 or before the zoning was changed to manufacturing would be allowed to remain.

The manufacturing zone is bisected by the Long Island Railroad freight rail, both used by heavy freight, as well as the MTA L-subway line. The East Brooklyn Industrial Park is located in the northeast corner of Brownsville and the study area, and is zoned M1-4. The M1-4 zoning encompasses the blocks east of Powell Street, south to Sutter Avenue. Examples of existing uses include Gershow Recycling (figure...), Lewis Hydraulic Maintenance, and Simtech Auto Repairs. There are a number of existing “non-manufacturing” uses, including the Bravo Supermarket on the corner of Junius Street and Sutter Avenue (figure...). The zoning is M1-1 within the study area, along Junius Street and south of Sutter Avenue. This section of the study

²⁰ “Zoning Districts, Manufacturing Districts”, New York City Department of City Planning

area is dominated by a Food Bazar and the subsequent parking lot. There are no parking requirements for M1-4 zoning and the FAR is 2.0, compared to M1-1 which has parking requirements that vary with type of use and size of establishment and an FAR of 1.0.

Commercial

The neighborhood and the study area consist of a number of C1 and C2 commercial overlays. A commercial overlay is a C1 or C2 district mapped within residential districts to serve local retail needs (grocery stores, dry cleaners, restaurants, for example).²¹ A C2-4 overlay exists on Livonia Avenue near the 3 train subway stations. Belmont Avenue, from Rockaway Avenue to Christopher Street, has a commercial overlay of C1-1, and Sutter Avenue, from Thatford Avenue to Mother Gaston Boulevard, has a C2-1 overlay.

Pitkin Avenue and Rockaway Avenue represent the commercial corridors and heart of the neighborhood. The intersection where they meet is zoned as commercial district C4-3. C4-3 designates a regional commercial center in a more densely built area, and offers the same residential floor area ratio (0.78 - 2.43) as a R6 zone.

The five most common active ground-floor uses along the commercial strips

²¹ “Zoning Glossary”, New York City Department of City Planning

in the study area were: appareal retailers (16.2 percent of storefronts); delis and small grocery stores (10.4 percent); beauty salons (8.5 percent); food service establishment (8.5 percent); and variety/discount stores (4.9 percent).²²

Community Facilities

The Brownsville community possesses diverse physical resources and institutions. There are community spaces owned by NYCHA but operated by the New York City Department of Youth and Cultural Development. There are three branches of the Brooklyn Public Library and upwards of eight ambulatory facilities and programs. The neighborhood also has emergency services provided by the 73rd precinct, Emergency Medical Services and the New York Fire Department Engine 290. Additionally, there are open space resources, civic organizations as well as religious, transportation, educational, and social service institutions serving Brownsville residents.

There are upwards of 100 institutional uses serving the community within a quarter mile radius of the study area. In Brownsville, there are K-12 facilities, three community centers, and libraries typically occupying larger lots—A large concentration of storefront churches may be found occupying smaller lots and additional insti-

²² “Brownsville Works! A Strategic Economic Development Plan”, 2012

tutions provide medical and security needs to the community. These facilities are in close proximity to NYCHA developments in the study area and support residents by providing access to education, recreational and community gathering spaces, job training and much needed technological resources.

expanded in 2013, adding lanes along Pitkin Avenue and Mother Gaston Boulevard, helping to connect an increasingly growing network of bike lanes across the five boroughs. There are still challenges to access these transportation facilities, which will be further discussed in the recommendations section.

Economic Development

In the 2011-2012 Brownsville Works! Studio, students found that there was no central advocate of economic development in the Brownsville-Ocean Hill area. Their recommendation for a community advocacy non-profit to coordinate economic strategies was the basis for the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Neighborhood Improvement Association. While this proves that progress is indeed possible in Brownsville, there are still many hindrances to economic development. As noted by the 2011-2012 Studio, there is a continued lack of investment in Brownsville as there are only a few federal, state, or local policies aimed at bolstering economic development. Further, they highlighted the small number of “homegrown” businesses found in their economic study, as there are few business owners who are Brownsville residents.²³ These existing challenges are compounded by barriers to literacy as well as physical and organizational access to jobs.

Access to Transportation

Brownsville is accessible by a number of trains, buses, and bike lanes. A major transportation hub is the Broadway Junction station in the northeast section of the district that connects the A, C, J, and L trains with the East New York station on the Long Island Railroad. The 3 train runs along Livonia Avenue at the southern end of the study area and the middle of the district. Buses run through or near the study area, including the B60 along Rockaway Avenue and the B14 which helps residents travel to Crown Heights or past the freight rail to East New York. The bike system recently

²³ “Brownsville Works! A Strategic Economic Development Plan”, 2012

Community

- College readiness and career programs for youth
- Integrating existing resources
- Safety and accessibility in community spaces

Brownsville Challenges and Recommendations

Brownsville has a progressive history and there is opportunity to foster new advancements in the community. In the next section of the report we review the challenges Brownsville faces in terms of the community engagement, NYCHA and the physical landscape. A review of the predominant challenges is displayed below. With these challenges we provide a vast scope of recommendations to improve the livability of Brownsville.



NYCHA

- Financial Deficit
- Inefficient Management and Structure
- Tenant Involvement

Physical Planning

- Connectivity Challenges
- Underutilized Land
- Continuity In Zoning





Community and Residence Challenges and Recommendations



“This is not just about blanket police work, this is about economic development and job creation... If you’re serious about crime, instead of building Yankee Stadium, build some youth centers in our neighborhood, fund our schools and teach science and culturally-relevant topics, build self-esteem.” - Charles Barron, a longtime Brownsville City Council



Image 3: Van Dyke Community Center

The following community recommendations focus on education, economic opportunity, civic engagement, safety, and health. The recommendations presented in this section are based on interviews and conversations held with community residents at various points over a six month period from January to May, 2014. A 33 question survey was created in order to engage the public and actively seek out solutions to the current state of NYCHA and Brownsville as a whole (Appendix-1). The survey sought to gain insight on resident’s feelings about safety, NYCHA responsiveness and building conditions, health care and retail options, civic engagement, and economic activity. Over 30 surveys were completed, primarily by residents of the Howard and Tilden houses.

Based on an analysis of publicly available data, meetings with locally involved organizations such as the Brownsville partnership and Municipal Art Society (MAS), and several inter-

views with community residents, we identified four main groups of challenges: Youth and Education, Civic Engagement and Place-Making, Safety, and Health.

Youth & Education

Challenges

Residents under 19 years of age comprise 36% of our study area population.²⁴ Brownsville currently faces challenges to provide adequate education and recreational resources for young people. Specific education challenges include: Low achieving elementary, middle, and high schools; a lack of quality structured programs; and poor career and college readiness programs. Brownsville public schools have not been efficient in providing quality education to their students, ill-preparing children to become academically, socially, and physically competitive and productive adults. It is widely documented that students from low-income and minority backgrounds are far more likely to attend poor performing schools, limiting college readiness, and failing to close the achievement gap.²⁵

²⁴ American Community Survey, 2012
²⁵ Kahlenberg, 2012

Recommendations

Collaboration with NYS to fund Community Schools in Brownsville

We recommend that community education stakeholders collaborate with Governor Andrew Cuomo’s New York State Community Schools Initiative to create a Community School in Brownsville.²⁶ Community Schools is a new statewide program that aims to transform schools in distressed communities into hubs for a wide range of support services for children and their families, including health care, counseling, nutrition, and job preparation services.²⁷

If implemented in Brownsville, Community Schools can empower families and communities to give students extra help through health care services, family counseling, and employment assistance. Social services readily accessible in a school can strengthen the neighborhood and give students in those areas additional support, both in and out of the classroom.

Community schools have been successful in NYC.

The Children Aid Society operates

²⁶ The Children’s Aid Society
²⁷ Ibid.

12 Community Schools in the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island based on the “developmental triangle.” It includes a strong and extended instructional program, extended learning opportunities through enrichment activities, and programs designed to remove barriers to student learning and healthy development.²⁸

Department of Youth & Community Development funded Beacon & Cornerstone programs for out of school time programs after school and on the weekends

Our recommendation is to expand the existing Beacon and NYCHA Cornerstone programs that collaborate with community-based organizations, such as Medgar Evers College, and the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development. Cornerstone Programs are located in New York City Housing Authority Community Centers and provide a wide variety of youth and adult programming throughout the year. There are currently three Cornerstone programs within our study area providing structured activities. Currently, The Van Dyke Community Center - Cornerstone Program requires that all participants follow a strict attendance code and are required to participate in at least two programs out of one sport, one academic enrichment activity, and one youth development or counseling activity. Beacon Programs are school-based programs for students aged 6 and older. In Brownsville, Beacons are operated by the Police Athletic League (PAL), CAMBA, Inc., and Medgar Evers College. Participants in a Beacon program are required to meet 216 hours per year and must participate in literacy enrichment, health and wellness, and life skills. Their programming has proven successful, and will serve as a model for the afterschool and out-of-school time programs.

Creation of a pilot Young Adult Internship program

Our third recommendation for youth in Brownsville is the creation of a Young Adult Internship program that will focus on the skills gap for disconnected

²⁸ Children’s Aid Society

Cornerstone and Beacon Program Offerings¹

Literacy and Enrichment Program: Financial Literacy, Homework Assistance/Academic Support, Computer Access, Home Economics, Project-based Learning

Cultural Studies and Activities: Arts and Crafts, Chess

Career Awareness and School to Work Transition Programs: High School/College Prep

Community and Civic Engagement Weekend/Summer Programs

Sports and Recreation: Dance and Cheerleading/Stepping, Martial Arts, Basketball, and Co-Ed Volleyball

¹ New York City Department of Youth and Community Development

youth in the community. Youths need the skills and positive adult role models that will help them forge a path to long-term employment and by providing a conduit for Brownsville residents to invest in their students, larger portions of productive citizens may result. To build on this recommendation, we suggest a poll of careers interests be undertaken in local schools and at recreational programs in order to match student interest with the work of local resident and affiliates.

Continuing Education & Employment

Currently, the Brownsville community suffers from a lack of “homegrown” businesses—many of the businesses in the area are owned by non-Brownsville residents. The lack of ownership creates a separation between residents and business owners, further accentuating any distrust in the community. Furthermore, the lack of commercial ownership in conjunction with low levels of educational attainment limits employment opportunities within the neighborhood.

Recommendations

Create more business education opportunities

To improve the business environment

of Brownsville, we recommend that our client actively pursue the recommendations made by the 2012 Hunter College “Brownsville Works!” studio. The studio highlighted poor job access in Brownsville, the lack of “homegrown” businesses, and inadequate policies for economic growth and provided recommendations for these challenges.

To further promote economic development, we also recommend creating pathways for business literacy through a business extension-incubator. New York City has been using incubator spaces in all five boroughs as a way to stimulate local economies and provide people with opportunities to experiment with and refine business strategies without the financial risk of opening their own stores.²⁹ The Brownsville Works! studio report has previously made recommendations to partner with the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC), which has already created 15 other incubators since 2011, to provide incubator space in Brownsville. We suggest strengthening that collaboration by involving Medgar Evers College, an educational institution with a vested interest in the area, who can potentially provide such space for residents to grow their skills and businesses.

BEST PRACTICE: THE ENTERPRISE CENTER

Founded in 1989 by the Wharton Small Business Development Center, The Enterprise Center (TEC) is a community incubator and community extension providing access to capital, building capacity, business education and economic development opportunities to high-potential, minority entrepreneurs. They work in the low-income areas of West Philadelphia.

An incubator-extension could:

- Consolidate workforce development activities in Brownsville to teach interview skills, resume writing and connect residents with job opportunities

²⁹ New York City Economic Development Corporation

- Provide opportunities for businesses to train and hire from within the community.
- Incentivize trade schools and skill building through community job placement and on-the-job training
- Widen the awareness of different employment industries.
- Promote avenues for continuing education in partnership with local universities.
- Promote economic empowerment and business opportunities for Brownsville residents.
- Provide credit-granting business classes through an extension education program
- Incentivize growth by providing space, networking, and education/professional development.
- Provide an accepting environment for residents returning to the community from incarceration so they may gain entrance into the workforce

Civic Engagement & Place Making

Challenges

The physical design of community spaces inhibits civic engagement. Existing community institutions and civic organizations often do not collaborate or communicate. As a result, there is excessive programming, duplication of services, and no strategies for collaboration, even though there are many programs in Brownville offering skills training and educational programs. Community Centers, after school programs, and libraries all offer similar services. Furthermore, existing programs are often in buildings that are hard to access and underutilized because of poor design.

Recommendations

Redesign physical spaces around civic buildings

We recommend a physical redesign of the spaces surrounding civic buildings. Brownsville has many programs such as Tenant Associations, the Commu-

nity Board, and community-based organizations that give residents an opportunity to actively participate in issues affecting their community. By addressing necessary design improvements to existing community facilities, residents have a place to better develop leadership skills, promote civic responsibility, and better engage residents. Redesigning these spaces will grant communities more usable space to gather and discuss how to further improve community conditions.

Promote cooperative planning between civic groups by establishing steering committees

We recommend that Community Board 16 establish community steering committees. These committees would strengthen community institutions and civic buildings to cooperatively communicate and plan platforms for open communication and secure civic participation. For example, an employment and development committee could provide support for existing institutions to connect Brownsville residents to needed resources in order to gain employment.

Maximize and democratize use of existing public resources e.g. school buildings

Elevate existing building to a civic center to provide space for community events and celebrations

We recommend the creation of a cultural district in Brownville, such as that in Downtown Brooklyn. Thriving communities many times retain cultural districts to support the existing concentration of established and emerging arts organizations, institutions, and facilities, encouraging economic and cultural development with new art space and streetscape enhancements. There are over 90 such communities throughout the United States promoting local growth through arts and culture, and while Brownsville may lack museums and performing arts centers, there is a great potential for a growing community of artists to flourish due to affordable housing, available space for art studios, and ac-

cessible transportation options.³⁰

Existing Community Facilities and Institutions in Brownsville

Libraries
High Schools
Community Centers
Studios and Performance Spaces
Gardens

Missing Communities Facilities and Institutions in Brownsville

Museums
Galleries
Music or Media production studios
College

In order to achieve more access to civic spaces and programs, we recommend enhancing partnerships with existing arts stakeholders in Brooklyn, such as the Brooklyn Arts Council, a borough wide arts council that provides grants, presents free and affordable arts events, trains artists and arts professionals, teaches students, incubates projects, and promotes artists and culture.³¹ The organization has begun to identify areas of cultural and artistic opportunities for residents to participate in. Additionally, the Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District has commissioned a series of murals to be completed over the next two years, further providing youth and artists with expressive ways to highlight community assets.³²

Community Safety

Challenges

Community safety, as well as the perception of safety, in Brownsville is continually regarded as one of the major impediments to lasting change. During our survey of the community, over half of the respondents reported

³⁰ Thornton, 45

³¹ Brooklyn Arts Council

³² Groundswell

that they felt generally unsafe in the neighborhood. Statistics from the New York City Police Department support such perceptions, ranking Brownsville 2nd highest in prison admissions in all of Brooklyn, with a rising gang presence and increased gun violence. An estimated 1 out of 12 males between 16-24 years old are imprisoned. Furthermore, NYCHA Housing police and those in the 73rd precinct are separated both physically and organizationally, impeding proper communication and coordination. Such lack of communication hinders efforts to create a safe environment for residents, further limiting the growth of the neighborhood.

Recommendations

Create safer streets through better policing and improving the rapport between police and residence

To create safer streets and improved resident safety—both real and perceived—we propose a three-level approach to address problems with police procedures. The first is to change the way policing is handled within the community. The second is to increase youth participation in the justice system, and the third is to address the neighborhood's cycle of violence.

Improve Policing

Through conversations with police officers and community residents, it was found that rookie cops arrive in Brownsville with little knowledge of the community and a fear of what they will encounter. We recommend pairing rookie cops with more experienced officers to provide proper on the job training in addition to the training received at the police academy. Further, combining both the Housing Police and 73rd precinct into one physical department will improve communication between the two parties and reduce avoidable mistakes. Lastly, a housing officer who chose to remain nameless suggested that officers are still expected to fill monthly arrest quotas despite the condemnation of such a practice. The existence of such a quota system combats any commu-

Cure Violence Model

Violence is a disease. The Cure Violence model developed by Gary Slutkin revolutionizes the perception and reduction of violence by promoting a public health and science-based perspective through the understanding that violence needs to be cured in order to stop the metastization. “Cure Violence” understands that violence persists despite external punishment or moral judgment. In order to effectively combat peaking societal violence, social norms must be targeted from the source. Looking at violence and crime through the a health lens, Cure Violence uses a three step approach:

- Interrupt transmission
- Identify and change the thinking of highest potential transmitters
- Change group norms

Through the program, members of community organizations act as mentors for individuals identified as high-risk for being potentially involved in violent or criminal activities.

Cure Violence has successfully reduced crime and violence in McElderry Park neighborhood in Baltimore where shootings and killings dropped nearly 34%, Chicago's Austin neighborhood and most recently in Red Hook, Brooklyn.¹

¹ Groundswell

nity cohesion between residents and officers who are there to protect and serve the community. Such a practice should be closely monitored and eliminated to enhance trust between officers and residents and reduce the perceived culture of violence that currently exists in Brownsville.

Youth Participation

An unfortunate practice by community

parents is to use the justice system as an alternative to disciplining their children, reporting minor domestic issues, and therefore increasing arrest records for their children. Officers continually mentioned such behavior as counterproductive to properly diffusing arguments and confrontations, but are required to comply with the parents' requests.³³ Parents, police officers, and youths should work to establish adequate rapport, only prompting arrest as a last resort, which can mitigate unnecessary stresses placed on the police force and community.

Additional approaches to increase public awareness and insight into the justice system would be for youth to participate in the Brownsville Community Justice Center (BCJC). The Justice Center is dedicated to building multiple avenues for young people who come into contact with the justice system by providing valuable educational, occupational, social, and health services at every stage of the judicial process.³⁴ Such participation would have the benefits of educating young people, as well as providing them with any necessary discipline and guidance. Furthermore, by increasing funding for programs in the BCJC, youths would be able to participate in the provided programs, such as, Alternatives to Incarceration, Probation, Youth Court, Fighting Gun Crime, Learning Lab, and Community Service.³⁵

Shift Group Norms

In order to have a permanent, long-lasting transition to non-violence, group norms must be altered. By achieving the previous safety recommendations, the prevailing mindsets towards violence in young adults, children, and residents will be challenged, shifting poor behavior into more productive actions. We propose using the “Cure Violence” model, developed by Doctor Gary Slutkin, a physician, epidemiologist, and infectious disease control specialist, to address the cul-

³³ Survey

³⁴ Center for Court Innovation, Brownsville Community Justice Center

³⁵ Center for Court Innovation

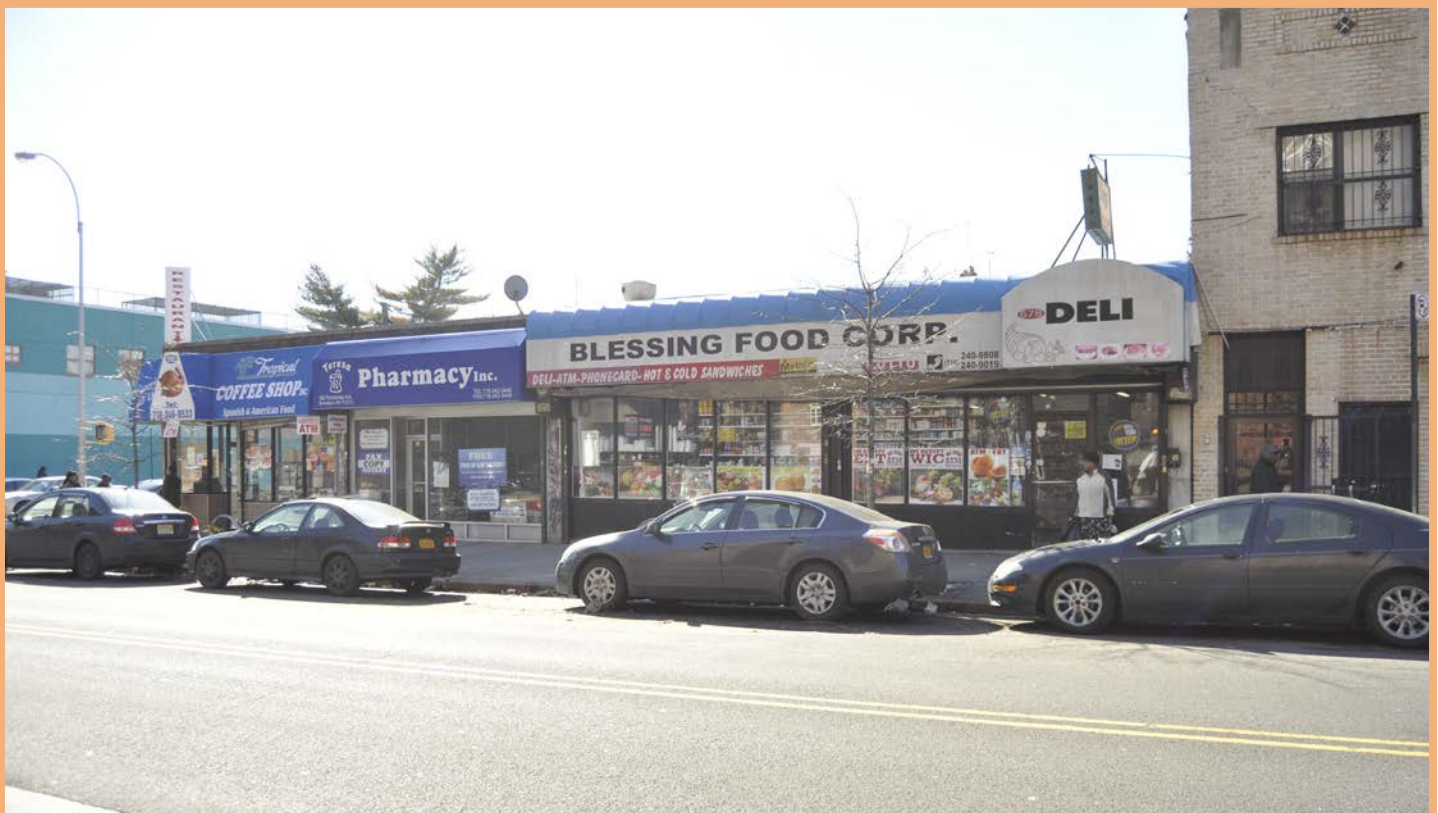


Image 4: Grocery Store (Blessing Food Corp.) on Rockaway Avenue

ture of violence present in the Brownsville.³⁶ The model has been successful in similarly burdened communities such as Crown Heights, Baltimore, and Chicago, reducing violence and crime once chosen as pilot programs. By implementing a similar approach in Brownsville, a safer, more hospitable environment can be created to foster less violence and more productive residents.

Health

Challenges

Health remains a continued challenge for residents of Brownsville. Compared to the rest of New York City, Brownsville has the highest rates of infant deaths, cancer, heart disease, and pre-pregnancy obesity. Poor health levels are a direct result of inadequate food options and recreational facilities. For instance, 41% of survey respondents reported they were dissatisfied with the grocery options in the study area, claiming high prices and lack of quality,

nutritional food.³⁷

Additionally, the Brownsville Multi-Service Center (BMS) remains one of Brownsville's only community assets. The center provides residents with much needed medical, dental, and social services. However, while BMS has the capacity to serve a large portion of the neighborhood's healthcare needs, many residents do not know how to properly navigate the healthcare system and continue to use local emergency rooms for basic, non-life threatening services. Such behavior congests a necessary facility for patients with more serious medical needs and is economically inefficient for the community as a whole. Brookdale Hospital has already been on the verge of closure due to financial stress, and improperly utilizing the emergency room further complicates those fiscal issues.

Recommendations

Build a Healthier Brownsville by supplying quality food

In order to achieve a healthier commu-

³⁷ Department of Health, 2009

nity, residents must be better equipped to make informed health care decisions and be able to easily access fresh quality food. Local grocers, such as Key Food, Food Bazaar and Supermarket Associated should apply for funding through the Reinvestment Fund for Healthy Food Financing, which offers grants to improve energy-efficiency, equipment, and leasing costs, and therefore, encourages better food supplies. More funding in conjunction with New York City's Food Retail Expansion to Support Health program, which provides zoning and financial incentives for businesses to create quality grocery stores in underserved communities, may help Brownsville counteract any issues with obtaining nutritional food options. Together, these grants and programs may help to lower costs associated with obtaining quality produce and food items.

Provide study area residents with tools to navigate healthcare system

We recommend that BMS, the Department of Health, and neighboring hospitals collaborate to conduct regular health care informational sessions and

36 Slutkin, Gary

provide opportunities for patients to be paired with primary care providers. Navigating the healthcare system is difficult, and by providing residents with pamphlets, informational sessions, and community outreach initiatives people will become more educated on how to properly utilize health care facilities. If outreach is supplemented with increased interactive preventative health education, Brownsville residents will have the tools and support needed to live healthier lives.



NYCHA Challenges and Recommendations



“Resource shortages aren’t the only thing we blame for the maintenance problems. There’s also a tendency to do quick fixes rather than real solutions—like painting over mold—and a staffing structure that leads to a lot of “that’s not my department” answers.” - Nyginer Brewer, Langston Hughes resident¹

¹ bkbureau.org

Introduction to NYCHA Challenges and Recommendations

As the neighborhood with the largest concentration of public housing in the country, Brownsville has a critical relationship with NYCHA, the country’s largest public housing authority. NYCHA is essential to any discussion of Brownsville, in part because the authority plays a myriad of roles for its residents. To achieve its goal of providing affordable housing and services to low and moderate income residents, NYCHA must serve as landlord, service provider, developer and employer. With such a large mandate, NYCHA inherently faces a number of challenges, and a steady decrease in funding has not made the problems any easier.

We have identified the agency’s most pressing challenges and offer a series of recommendations to address these issues. The main challenges that plague NYCHA are: a large budget deficiency, poor public perception, limited resident engagement and centralized management. These challenges have a wide range of implications for the residents that live in Brownsville and all of NYCHA’s developments. To address these challenges, we offer

recommendations to increase funding and efficiency, re-brand public housing, and decentralize the management structure.

We provide this analysis of NYCHA’s challenges and our suggested recommendations with the hopes that it can

serve as a tool for individuals who wish to start advocating for reform. While the challenges that NYCHA faces are large, we believe there are some possible alternatives that could have large implications for the residents of Brownsville and across the city.

Public Housing History

Municipal Service: 1934-1968

Public housing started in order to provide a municipal service to the working poor recovering from the Great Depression.¹ Federal laws passed in 1930s provided subsidies to local housing authorities, such as NYCHA, which quickly established itself as a strong advocate for tightly managed, high quality housing.² In New York, unlike other municipalities, initially the funding commitments of the city and state rivaled the federal, as substantial local funding streams were established. After World War II, policies such as the GI Bill encouraged returning (white) veterans to buy homes in the suburbs while preventing residents in urban (minority) areas from receiving mortgages or loans.³ As urban renewal projects were initiated, poorer minorities became concentrated in urban areas, especially in public housing.

Welfare State: 1968-1990

In the late 1960s, the role of public housing shifted. Under pressure from advocates, NYCHA relaxed its policies to admit more welfare tenants, federal policies lowered income ceilings for new tenants, and a new city policy gave housing priority to the homeless.⁴ Rental income decreased, and combined with a divestment of federal funding, aging infrastructure, high inflation, management problems, and increasing expenses, a large funding gap developed.⁵ Maintenance was deferred, while drug usage and violence dramatically increased in public housing during this time, further discouraging working class families from living there and leading to a greater budget deficit.⁶

In the early 1970s, the Nixon administration froze all federal housing programs, and there was a shift from “bricks and mortar” construction to the use of vouchers, such as Section 8, in the private market to provide subsidized housing.⁷ In the late 1970s, as a result of NYC’s fiscal crisis, 53 state and city-aided developments were transferred to federal management under the Authority Transfer Program (ATP).⁸ Since the 1980s, federal housing policy has consisted of small, scattered site developments and vouchers.⁹

Affordable Housing: 1990s- present

A major goal of NYCHA in the 1990s was to recruit more working class, middle-income families to live in the public housing communities.¹⁰ This mixed income model was a major policy departure from assisting only extremely low-income families. Public housing is now characterized as “affordable housing,” and the goals of this transformation were to correct NYCHA’s massive deficit; promote a **more permanent view of public housing; and to decrease concentrated poverty.**¹¹

¹ bkbureau.org

² Bloom, 2008

³ Stoloff

⁴ WNYC

⁵ Stoloff, 11

⁶ Stoloff, 10

⁷ Bloom, 2008

⁸ McCall, 1999

⁹ Bloom, 2008

¹⁰ Bloom, 2008

¹¹ Bloom, 2008

Public Housing History Continued

to the 2000s multiple plans to increase financial solvency and improve management were introduced—notably the Plan to Preserve Public Housing (2006) and the Land Lease Program (2011). In 2013, Public Advocate Bill de Blasio requested to review NYCHA’s extensive repair backlog, and he later released a report that publicly warned the agency against neglecting repairs. As Mayor, de Blasio has promised quicker repairs, the elimination of the repair backlog, and to improve the buildings’ environmental standards. He also promised to increase tenants in NYCHA’s workforce and increase tenant input into decision-making.¹²

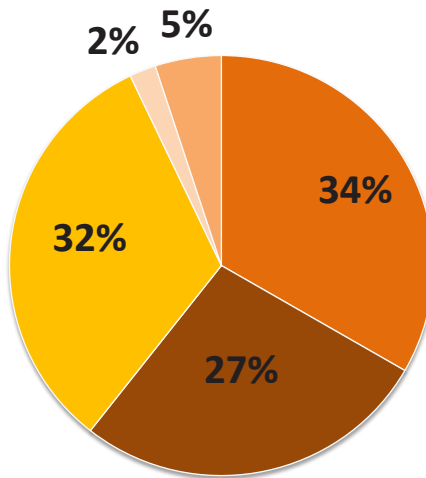
¹² “Safe, Affordable Homes for all New Yorkers”

NYCHA Budget

NYCHA’s most prominent challenge is their severe budget deficit. We believe that the \$469 million dollar deficit is the main contributor to NYCHA’s institutional management problems. The deficit has resulted in broken elevators, the closing of community centers, the scaling back of valuable resident services and growing complaints regarding vermin, mold and the long wait list for critical repairs.³⁸ If NYCHA’s budget is not balanced soon, the possibility of more cuts and deteriorating conditions could become a reality for the NYCHA residents of Brownsville.

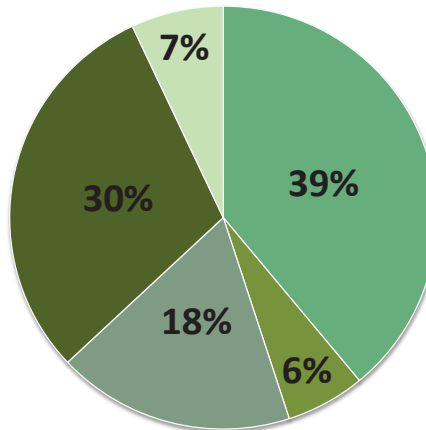
The New York City Housing Authority Operating and Capital Budgets fund the management, maintenance and construction of the 334 housing developments.³⁹ The Operating and Capital budgets are not part of the City of New York’s budget and the fiscal year runs concurrent with the calendar year totaling over \$2.5 billion dollars annually.

38 Smith, 2012
39 Hearing on the 2014 -2018 Operating and Capital Budget & the Fiscal 2014 Preliminary Mayor’s Management Report, 2014



- Tenant Revenue
- Federal Subsidies
- Section 8 Subsidies
- Section 8 Admin
- Other Revenue

Expenditures



- Salaries & Benefits
- Contracts
- Utilities
- Section 8 Payments
- Other Expenditures

Operating Budget

The majority of NYCHA’s revenue comes from the collection of tenant rent, Section 8 and federal subsidies. The majority of their expenditure goes towards employee salaries and benefits, followed closely by administering the Section 8 program.⁴⁰

NYCHA collects revenue from several sources, which totaled \$2.868 billion dollars in the 2014 fiscal year.⁴¹ Federal operating subsidies (27%), tenant revenue (33%) and Section 8 (32%) make up the majority of the revenue stream. The remaining 7% is com-

40 New York City Housing Authority Operating & Capital Plans, 16
41 New York City Housing Authority Operating & Capital Plans, 17

prised of ‘other revenue’ and Section 8 administrative costs.⁴² The 2014 Operating Budget totals at \$2.868 billion dollars and consists of three parts: the General Fund, Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program Fund and the Categorical Grants Fund.⁴³ The General Fund is comprised of frontline operations, central office and fieldwork support for NYCHA owned or controlled housing.⁴⁴ Frontline operations are staff based at individual NYCHA properties and borough offices. They include property managers, caretakers, maintenance workers, housing

42 New York City Housing Authority Operating & Capital Plans, 17
43 Hearing on the 2014 -2018 Operating and Capital Budget & the Fiscal 2014 Preliminary Mayor’s Management Report, 6
44 New York City Housing Authority Operating & Capital Plans, 16

staff and skilled trades. The majority of NYCHA's employees and expenses are within frontline operations.⁴⁵

The second is the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program Fund, which includes the administration of the Section 8 program. NYCHA administers the program by paying HUD subsidies to participating landlords on behalf of tenants. Program participants pay rent directly to the landlord while NYCHA pays the landlord the difference towards the approved rent on the apartment, referred to as the Housing Assistance Payment, or HAP. NYCHA earns an administrative fee from HUD for administration of the program. The HCV Program also contributes revenue to the General Fund in the form of program management fees and housing assistance payments (HAP) to Section 8 units that are owned and managed by NYCHA (referred to as Section 8 Phased Conversion).⁴⁶

NYCHA receives nominal funds from rent. Currently, NYCHA residents pay around 30% of their income towards rent with an average rent of \$414.90 per month. There are three types of rent structures, and NYCHA residents currently change their method of payment once a year (or more if there is a documented financial hardship).

The three types of rent structures offered by NYCHA are flat, ceiling, and income based rents. Flat rents are based on market rates, and therefore rental costs do not vary with income. The unit rent price reflects the price for comparable units on the private market. This structure serves to encourage tenants to achieve economic self-sufficiency because rent does not increase as incomes do. Ceiling rents are a cap on the amount of rent a family or individual can be charged, and they are cost-based rather than market based. Ceiling rents can be used to attract higher income families. Finally, income based rents are based on a certain percentage of a family's income, usually 30%, and therefore

rental costs fluctuate with income.

The fourth component of the operating budget is the Categorical Grants Fund, which is comprised of all other grant programs that NYCHA receives funding from. This includes federal, state, city and private sources. The City Council financially supports NYCHA discretionary funds, which are allocated to each Councilmember, as well as their Capital budget. The funds are used for operating and administering community development and benefits programs.⁴⁷

Capital Budget

Totaling at \$3.921 billion dollars, the 2014 Capital Budget consists of four parts: disaster recovery, federal funds, bond Issues, City funds and other. The Capital Plan includes a \$1.779 billion one time disaster recovery award to address the damage and re-fortification of NYCHA buildings located in Flood Zone A. The funding comes from a combination of grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and insurance payments.⁴⁸ In 2013, NYCHA generated about \$476 million in bonds to fund repairs to deteriorating building exteriors and utility systems at public housing developments citywide. Revenue from this bond issuance provided a dedicated stream of funds to address repairs needed to structural components of the building stock.

Budget Challenges: Lack of Federal Funding and Rising Costs

NYCHA's General Fund relies heavily on subsidies from the federal government, as the Authority does not receive predictable or consistent subsidies from the city or state. About 40% of the General Fund and 100% of the Section 8 Program comes from federal subsidies.⁴⁹ NYCHA cites in a

2013 report that, "federal resources to operate, maintain, and preserve public housing have failed to keep pace with increasing needs and rising inflationary costs, thereby placing the portfolio at risk".⁵⁰

Plan NYCHA, the Authority's 2011 "Roadmap to Preservation," states:

Since 2002, NYCHA has been deprived of approximately \$700 million in operating subsidies due to partial funding by Congress. This is in addition to the cumulative \$700 million deficit of NYCHA's recently federalized 21 developments during this time. More significantly, there is a \$13 billion dollar gap between what NYCHA will receive in capital funding and what its buildings and infrastructure needs are through 2015.⁵¹

According to the Independent Budget Office:

Because the city and state do not provide funds to independently support these developments, the federal funds intended to cover the 315 federal developments are being stretched to cover the costs to maintain all of NYCHA's developments. In addition, the developments are missing out on \$20 million in capital financing that they would receive were they federal developments".⁵²

From 2001 to 2013, annual federal capital subsidies have decreased 39%, from \$420 million to about \$250 million. Plan NYCHA cites ongoing structural operating deficits resulting from anticipated federal funding levels of approximately 92% of funding formula eligibility; providing NYCHA approximately \$80 million less operating subsidy than it is eligible for each year.

The Operating Plan specifies problems created by unsustainable spending on the budget, mainly the underfunding of public housing by the federal government and the increas-

& Capital Plans, 25

50 New York City Housing Authority Operating & Capital Plans, 5

51 Plan NYCHA, 5

52 IBO Web Blog, 2014

45 "Reshaping NYCHA's Central Support Functions", NYCHA

46 New York City Housing Authority Operating & Capital Plans, 15

47 New York City Housing Authority Operating & Capital Plans, 16

48 New York City Housing Authority Operating & Capital Plans, 5

49 New York City Housing Authority Operating

ing cost of employee entitlements (also referred to as “uncontrollable costs”). In 2012 NYCHA was informed by the New York City Employees’ Retirement System that a 26% increase (\$31 million dollars) in annual contributions was required to continue funding the program.⁵³ Combined with inflation, NYCHA cites that costs such as pension benefits, health insurance and workers’ compensation contribute to the adding instability of the budget. NYCHA predicts that these costs will rise 9% annually.⁵⁴

In addition to insufficient federal funding and rising employee costs, items such as utilities weigh heavy on NYCHA’s budget. In 2013, NYCHA spent 17% of the operating budget on electricity, water, gas, steam and fuel oil.⁵⁵ As the building stock ages and requires more upkeep, it also becomes less energy efficient. Plan NYCHA also states that the “combination of escalating energy expenses, along with boilers and ancillary heating systems that have exceeded their useful life, make it important that NYCHA invest in energy retrofit and upgrades. NYCHA spends approximately \$500 million a year on energy costs, which could be used elsewhere if we were to reduce our usage.”⁵⁶

In summary, NYCHA’s budget is a severe challenge that has wide-ranging implications for residents.

NYCHA Recommendation: Increase Funding

We recommend decreasing the budget deficiency by increasing funding opportunities. First, we recommend an increase in funding at the federal, state and city levels. Existing federal programs that specifically target low-income neighborhoods should be implemented, and state and city governments should resume paying for units under their jurisdiction. In addition,

53 New York City Housing Authority Operating & Capital Plans, 7

54 Five Year Operating Plan, 5

55 Five Year Operating Plan, 25

56 NYCHA News: NYCHA Joins Other City Agencies In Effort to Lower Energy Use, 2014

we recommend that the City Council authorize a dedicated funding stream for NYCHA’s operational costs, which would include funds for participatory budgeting. We are also proposing changes to the rent structures in order to provide more flexibility for tenants and consistency for NYCHA. Finally, we recommend that NYCHA end payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTs), which would save approximately \$100M annually.

Increase and Reorganize Federal Budget

We recommend that the federal government increase funding for public housing overall, and especially in highly concentrated areas like Brownsville. The federal contribution towards bricks and mortar housing developments must be increased to maintain proper living standards and ensure affordable housing is available to New York City’s residents. We believe that these funding changes would be possible in tandem with a public housing awareness campaign, which is discussed below in the Re-Branding Public Housing section of the report.

We also recommend that specific HUD programs, such as the Choice Neighborhoods Program, part of Obama’s Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, be implemented in Brownsville. The program focuses on replacing outdated housing with well-managed, mixed-income developments, while incentivizing investment to improve neighborhood amenities such as schools, safety, and commercial development. Selected communities are issued grants of \$200,000 and more to develop local “transformation plans,” or “comprehensive neighborhood revitalization plans,” ensuring that there is a high level of community engagement in the redevelopment process.⁵⁷

The Choice Neighborhood Program provides targeted investment in Brownsville’s youth, education, housing, and other neighborhood amenities. Choice Neighborhoods access

57 HUD

programs to support “cradle to career” education via the Department of Education; public safety programming via the Justice Department; and public health improvements via the Department of Health and Human Services. Overall, this contributes to a holistically healthier and more vibrant community.⁵⁸

Cradle to Career

The Department of Education’s Promise Neighborhoods program promotes “cradle to career” educational support in distressed neighborhoods. “The vision of the program is that all children and youth growing up in Promise Neighborhoods have access to great schools and strong systems of family and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and a career.”¹ The program aims to build a continuous support network of high performing schools, additional educational programs, and family involvement to foster children from birth to a fulfilling career.

1 Department of Education

Reinstate State and City Funding and Subsidies

City and state governments should financially support their housing units. However, state funding for public housing was eliminated in 1998.⁵⁹ New York State should contribute to providing affordable housing for its residents. Governor Cuomo recently agreed to fund statewide universal pre-k education using existing resources.⁶⁰ We recommend a similar proposal be devised to fund public housing repairs, renovations, and programming improvements.

There is no dedicated funding stream for NYCHA’s operational costs.⁶¹ We recommend that the City Council authorize a dedicated line item for

58 “Choice Neighborhoods”, HUD

59 Independent Budget Office, 2006

60 Kaplan, 2014

61 “Testimony for NYCHA Chair and CEO Shola Olatoye”, 2014

NYCHA's operating budget. By having a consistent funding stream, NYCHA will be able to continue to work through their repair backlog and improve the housing developments without having to worry about income variations from year to year. This Council funding should also include an allotment for participatory budgeting, discussed in more detail later in this report.

We recommend that NYCHA continue issuing bonds to support its aging infrastructure. The repair and replacement of building-wide utility systems aided in addressing the underlying conditions that can be the root cause of many of NYCHA's maintenance issues. These types of problems must be addressed before making investments in building components such as elevators, bathrooms, kitchens, intercoms, heating, plumbing and electrical systems.

Promote Various Rent Structures

Various rent structures should be

promoted by Community Board 16 to help increase NYCHA's overall funding. This would encourage timely rent payments, and offer more flexibility for tenants. We recommend that our client encourage the practice of using different rent structures to create mixed income community not only in NYCHA, but also in potential new affordable housing developments. By maintaining diverse rent structures, there is potential to create a more diverse mixed income community. This would foster economic stability for NYCHA, and more economic opportunities in general for the Brownsville community.

End Payments in Lieu of Taxes

We also recommend ending the payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTs) that NYCHA pays for police and sanitation. Mayor De Blasio has already eliminated the allotment for housing police, and we support eliminating the sanitation costs as well. We believe that an audit could expose similar redun-

dancies and save NYCHA even more money to put towards capital and operational expenses.⁶²

PILOTs are made to compensate a local government for some or all of the tax revenue that it loses because of the nature of the ownership or use of a particular piece of real property. NYCHA pays for police and sanitation services, despite the fact that these same NYPD and DSNY services are provided to private landlords and nonprofit housing providers for free.¹

¹ Jones, 2013

Increase Efficiency

NYCHA can increase its efficiency in three ways: decreasing contractual services, increasing energy efficiency, and conducting an extensive audit to uncover waste, inefficiencies redun-

⁶² Angotti, 24



Image 4: job advocates. Source: flickr.com

dancies. Some examples of NYCHA's inefficiencies that the Boston Consulting Group report uncovered include spending \$5M on a storage facility holding only \$10M worth of materials, and paying "anywhere from \$8 to \$28 per gallon for white paint, rather than finding the best deal." Additionally, the 2011 report offered multiple ways for NYCHA to cut expenses and increase revenues-- \$125M in all. They recommended \$20M in savings just from streamlining NYCHA's system of warehouses and storerooms.⁶³

Contractual Services

We recommend that NYCHA increase the number of tenant employees rather than relying on contractual services. By contracting with outside agencies, NYCHA sends funds outside of its community, while depriving tenants of training and experience that could assist them with gaining employment. By increasing tenant employees NYCHA will reduce expenditures, provide jobs and training to residents, and enable residents to increase their incomes.⁶⁴ We recommend that existing job training programs described in the Community and Residence Recommendations section of the report expand to serve more residents.

Energy Efficiency

We recommend that NYCHA take steps to increase the energy efficiency of its developments and grounds. Energy costs continue to climb, and energy efficiency is more important than ever in today's unpredictable climate. All of NYCHA's developments currently participate in Consolidated Edison's Multi-Family Low Income Program, which covers 100 percent of the cost of high efficiency boilers, furnaces, and other building weatherization measures.⁶⁵ Additional funding is needed in order to modernize all of the developments.

63 Smith, 2012

64 Angotti, 16

65 "Process Evaluation Report for Con Edison's Multi-Family Low Income Program"

We recommend that NYCHA issue a bond specifically for energy efficiency upgrades. While investing in high efficiency appliances and improving building weatherization has large up-front costs, NYCHA will save money on operational costs in the long term.

NYCHA should pursue additional funding through the NY State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). NYSERDA funding could outfit Brownsville developments with energy efficient measures. One example is Wireless Energy Modules, which were recently installed in the Castle Hill Houses in the Bronx. These monitor apartment temperatures, voltage, and energy demand. This project also created green construction jobs via NYCHA's Resident Employment Services program, an additional benefit of increasing energy efficiency.⁶⁶

BEST PRACTICES:

Wireless Energy Modules in Castle Hill Houses

In 2009, NYCHA selected Castle Hill Houses in the Bronx for a complete energy upgrade—eight energy efficient boilers, 14 instantaneous water heaters, 4,000 energy efficient florescent fixtures, and over 17,000 energy efficient light bulbs. The improvements will save each household \$112 annually and produce "green" jobs, of which 30 percent will be set aside for residents of Castle Hill.¹ The upgrade cost \$17.6M, but will save taxpayers an estimated \$1.4M and prevent over 5,000 tons of greenhouse gases from entering the atmosphere annually. A similar initiative could be undertaken in the Brownsville developments to improve energy efficiency and provide residents with employment opportunities.²

1 Beekman, 2009

2 DeMichele, 2010

Audit

We recommend that an audit of NYCHA's budget, programs, and management be undertaken to determine

66 DeMichele

where cost-saving measures could be taken, as well as the areas that would most benefit from targeted cash flow. City Comptroller Scott Stringer has initiated an audit and we welcome his findings, but we also believe that NYCHA should employ a Forensic Accountant to perform these services on a regular basis.

A Forensic Accountant is often retained to analyze, interpret, summarize and present complex financial and business issues in a manner that is understandable to the general public. Forensic Accountants can be engaged in public practice or employed by insurance companies, banks, government agencies and other organizations. These specialized accountants investigate and analyze financial evidence, develop different types of analysis in order to present findings in the form of reports and presentations.

The retention of a Forensic Accountant on staff at NYCHA may be able to assist in efficiency and other problem areas of NYCHA's budget. At Toronto Community Housing, a Chief Internal Auditor with a specialized background in forensic accounting sits on the Executive Leadership Team and assists in the most productive administration of the budget.

Re-Branding Public Housing

NYCHA's funding difficulties are closely related to public perceptions of public housing. As negative stereotypes, such that public housing residents are lazy and undeserving, pervade the news media and political debates,⁶⁷ there is little public support or political will to increase funding, despite the desperate need.

To address the issues of public perception, we recommend the development of an advocacy group to work to

67 Goodyear "Selling the Public on Public Housing"

re-brand public housing, which would serve to increase the funding to public housing. This would occur through a public relations campaign and also involve active lobbying. There are many successful hard-working people in public housing in NYC and Brownsville. A model story is in the box below. Neighborhood success stories need to be heard.⁶⁸

Neighborhood Highlight: Lori Booser was born and raised in Brownsville public housing. She attended Brooklyn public schools, earned an academic scholarship to Vassar College, and later attended Boston College Law School. During law school, Lori became engaged in public service and social justice issues and upon graduation pursued a career in public service. She accepted a judicial clerkship in the Superior Court of New Jersey—Criminal division in Newark, New Jersey. This opportunity to observe the criminal justice system in a low-income and underrepresented community inspired Lori to return home. Accordingly, Lori took a position as a Housing Specialist with the Urban Resource Institute, working with survivors of domestic violence and advocating on the city- and state-level for fair rent control laws. She now works Housing Court Answers, where she has helped countless families. In addition to her professional accomplishments, Lori has been an active member in her community and her church, serving as a strategic consultant for several Brownsville non-profits. She is currently running for public office.¹

¹ "Lori Booser Democrat for New York State Assembly 55th District" <http://www.loribooser.com/>

Creation of Non-Profit to Coordinate Re-branding Campaign

We recommend the development of a non-profit organization comprised of public housing residents and allies

⁶⁸ "Re-thinking Housing.", rethinkhousing.org

focused on a re-branding campaign for public housing. This group would work to highlight a new narrative about the individuals who live in public housing by developing and coordinating a public relations campaign. Advertisements, interviews, and videos could tell these stories and shift public perception. In particular, we think highlighting celebrities that have grown up in public housing could also help the public relations campaign. Campaigns like this have existed before, such as the Rethink campaign (see box to the right), which advertises the success stories from public housing. However, we think that an organization founded by public housing residents would be more effective.

BEST PRACTICE:

Public Housing PR Campaign

ReThink is a public awareness initiative that promotes the positive people and stories that result from the benefit of public housing. ReThink hopes to encourage support for public housing, families, communities, education and other programs that promote community stability. The organization partnered with celebrity spokesperson, singer-songwriter Jewel, who grew up in public housing, to act as their public face. Along with Jewel, ReThink features videos of the many successful people who grew up in, live and raise families in public housing. ReThink uses free media tools like Youtube, Facebook and Twitter to spread their message and makes their presence known at any housing related media events, Federal Housing lobby days and national conferences.

Actively Lobby for Increased Funding for NYCHA

While public perception of public housing is related to a lack of political will to increase funding, the lack of a strong public housing constituency to convince legislators that their needs deserve attention is also a problem. In addition to a public relations campaign, the newly formed organization needs to actively lobby for increased

funding for public housing residents. The organization should organize Brownsville residents to participate in public housing lobby days in Albany and Washington. Busloads of public housing residents speaking directly to legislators is an important way to build a constituency of public housing residents that will affect funding levels. Forging deeper relationships with elected officials, and holding public rallies, press conferences and other events to highlight the deteriorating conditions in NYCHA's properties would help to both engage NYCHA residents and bring residents needs into the political mainstream. Without an activated constituency to hold elected officials accountable, the political will to increase funding for public housing will never exist.

While we recommend that the organization start in Brownsville, we envision that it would ultimately work with groups from across the country to become a national organization. As a unified entity, this organization could more powerfully lobby for increased funding for public housing across the country and effectively coordinate a public relations campaign. Ultimately, this helps create sustainable funding levels for NYCHA and Brownsville.

NYCHA Challenge: Centralized Management

One of NYCHA main challenges is a highly centralized management structure. There is great variety in NYCHA's properties, as developments in Staten Island are distinct from those in East Harlem, both in physical form and in the populations served. While the majority of the buildings are home to a general population with a wide range of ages, there are also developments targeted for seniors who have distinct needs.⁶⁹ Thus, there is a diversity of needs from the various developments, yet we believe the management structure fails to adequately address this variety, which decreases operational efficiency and flexibility. We argue

⁶⁹ "Community Programs and Services: Senior Services", NYCHA http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/html/community/senior_services.shtml

that centralized management proves to be a particular challenge in relation to maintenance issues, application and eligibility processes, and programs and services offered to NYCHA residents. Furthermore, a centralized dual management system creates structural conflicts within the management. Finally, a centralized management system also produces a lack of meaningful tenant participation and control.⁷⁰

Maintenance: Centralized Repair Hotline with Long Wait Times

One of the main problems with a centralized management structure can be seen through issues with building maintenance. Problems that need repair in individual apartment units are handled through a centralized repair hotline.⁷¹ First, the reported condition from the centralized hotline has to be determined if it is an emergency, as different procedures exist for both emergency and non-emergency conditions. Non-emergencies require that NYCHA staff verify the condition in person, which not only reinforces distrust between management and residents, but also is inefficient. Some repairs require skilled labor, while others do not and skilled repairs can take over 100 days to be fixed, according to NYCHA,⁷² and much longer according to residents.⁷³ While this type of repair reporting system ensures a centralized record of all complaints, repairs are simply not being performed in an adequate period of time. As NYCHA's physical infrastructure is aging, repairs will continue to be a major issue, and it is imperative for NYCHA to establish effective protocols to quickly resolve maintenance concerns. The current centralized system for repairs is unsuccessful, as evidenced by long wait times for repairs and must be remedied.

70 "NYCHA Fact Sheet."

71 "Customer Contact Center."

72 "NYCHA Maintenance & Repair Backlog Action Plan."

73 NYCHA WatchList: Tracking Repairs in New York City Public Housing. Office of the Public Advocate.



Image 5: damage concrete. Source: marktregerforcouncil.com

Centralized Application Process and Eligibility

NYCHA's application process, eligibility and rent calculation regulations are standardized throughout the city, despite serving a widely diverse population. NYCHA's application process is available on-line, and computer kiosks are available in centralized locations for individuals who do not have computer access. Non-citizens are allowed to apply, but at least one member of the household must be either a citizen or a legal permanent resident. As of March 2014, the wait list for public housing has 247,262 families.⁷⁴ While there are regulations specifying priorities for certain groups of residents in dire situations such as victims of domestic violence or individuals displaced from government-ordered vacates,⁷⁵ even these individuals have been waiting for as long as a decade.⁷⁶ For all of NYCHA campuses, eligibility is set at \$47,000 for a single person and \$67,100 for a family four.⁷⁷ Applicants whose income falls below these amounts are required to have an eligibility interview. Once ap-

74 "NYCHA Fact Sheet."

75 "Applying for Public Housing: Priority Codes."

76 Goldensolhn, 2014

77 "Applying for Public Housing: Income Limits"

proved for eligibility, applicants select two borough preferences, but are not permitted to request any individual developments. The uniform application and eligibility procedures reduce flexibility for NYCHA.

Centralized Programs and Services

NYCHA's programs and services are also highly centralized. NYCHA funds various programs and services, most of which support the entire NYCHA community. NYCHA offers art programs, education programs, equal opportunity services for entry applications, family services, a fatherhood initiative, a garden program, health services, music programs, performing arts programs, recreation programs, the Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability (REES), Senior Services, sports programs and studio NYCHA, which hosts a variety of arts programs.⁷⁸ For a full list of the 55 programs and services offered by NYCHA please refer to item B in the appendix.⁷⁹

NYCHA's programs attempt to service

78 NYCHA

79 NYCHA

too many residents, and thereby service too few. Forty-three of the fifty-five programs offered are designed to service the entire NYCHA community collectively. For example, someone interested in getting involved in the Youth Chorus, would be competing with the all other 8-21-year-olds in NYCHA for a spot.⁸⁰ Furthermore, entering the process for entering the Youth Chorus, along with other programs is not made clear. On top of this, the Youth Chorus, along with many other programs, meets in Manhattan.⁸¹ This decreases accessibility to NYCHA residents who live in outer boroughs as they will have longer commute times. In addition, the distance could be more burdensome for the elderly, and parents with unconventional work hours might not have time to bring their kids to these programs.

With about 80% of NYCHA's programs being offered to a population of 400,000, the services are not meeting their full potential. In trying to service everyone, these programs only service a few. Furthermore, entering, enrolling and traveling far distances to attend programs can be burdensome, especially for tenants living in the outer boroughs.

Centralized Dual Management Structure

Not only is NYCHA run in a centralized manner, it also has a dual management structure. The Chair of the Board of Directors is appointed by the Mayor and officially runs NYCHA, but the mayor also appoints a General Manager who is responsible for day-to-day activities.⁸² Unlike most city departments, which have one commissioner who oversees all operations, NYCHA has two parallel management structures. This creates inherent problems. While the Chair is in charge of policy, communications, and external affairs, all of the day-to-day operations report directly to the General Manager. Often, day-to-day operations and larger policy and political concerns are in

opposition. This creates structural problems as the Chair and General Managers are focused on potentially conflicting agendas.⁸³

Lack of Meaningful Tenant Control and Participation

NYCHA's centralized structure affects ability of residents to exert control over their surroundings due to the structure of the Board of Directors and also impacts the quality of tenant participation.

Undemocratic Control: Mayoral Appointees

The existing centralized management system is undemocratic and reduces already poor resident engagement. NYCHA's 7-member Board of Directors are all mayoral appointees, only three of whom are tenant representatives, yet their decisions affect over 400,000 residents.⁸⁴ While the board has seen significant change in the past two years, it still produces an undemocratic system of control since the mayor appoints all members. Since 1958 until last year, NYCHA had four board members, three of whom were full-time, and highly paid, which included the services of a chauffeur. In addition, there was one part-time volunteer tenant representative.⁸⁵ In 2012 then-Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer issued a report calling for reform to the NYCHA Board of Directors.⁸⁶ This action required state approval and in June 2013, the State Legislature passed a bill allowing the removal of the Authority's full-time board positions, and raised the number of commissioners to seven with three part-time members and three tenant representatives.⁸⁷ Thus, while the composition of the board is much improved as it now has three tenants on the board, the mayor still selects the members. As the Board has consider-

⁸³ Interview with NYCHA Staff, March 5, 2014

⁸⁴ "NYCHA Fact Sheet."

⁸⁵ Smith, 2013

⁸⁶ Manhattan Borough President Scott

Stringer. 2012

⁸⁷ Smith, 2013

able control over what occurs at all of the NYCHA developments throughout the city the undemocratic process of selection is problematic. Unlike other city agencies, NYCHA has a direct constituency, and for this reason we believe that an elected Board of Directors would be more appropriate.

Lack of Quality Resident Engagement

While there are various formal avenues for tenant participation, true resident engagement remains a problem in the NYCHA developments. A majority of developments have a Tenant Association, which works on local level issues that effect specific developments, such as advocating for security cameras. Each Tenant Association elects a President, who then must serve as a member of one of nine District Councils, who work on regional issues. Brownville is in the Brooklyn East District Council. Every District Council elects a President, who is also a member of the Citywide Council of Presidents (CCOP), which works with senior NYCHA staff on issues that affect all NYCHA developments, including city, state and federal issues. In addition to the CCOP, there is another citywide NYCHA tenant group, the Resident Advisory Board (RAB). The RAB consists of all nine members of the CCOP, plus 81 additional members elected from the District Councils. The RAB advises on NYCHA's Annual and Five-Year Capital plans.⁸⁸ These formal structures are important for residents to have a voice in their communities, yet true resident engagement remains a problem.⁸⁹ Most of the individuals involved in the various tenant groups are seniors, and many others feel left out of the system. NYCHA must work to improve participation from a wider range of individuals to have more meaningful resident engagement. Structures for participation are not the problem, but the quality of engagement must be a priority.

NYCHA's centralized management

⁸⁸ "Residents' Corner. Resources: Tenant Associations.", NYCHA

⁸⁹ Villano & Youdelman, 2010

⁸⁰ NYCHA

⁸¹ NYCHA

⁸² "NYCHA Organizational Chart"

system hurts the residents and ignores the individualized needs of public housing residents.

Recommendations: NYCHA Decentralization

We recommend that NYCHA devolve the landlord and community organizer roles to local branches; this will increase management efficiency by reducing the bureaucratic nature of NYCHA. NYCHA's new "headquarters" role should shift to focus more on policy, increasing funding and supporting local offices. The suggested changes are expected to improve the quality of housing and reduce the amount of labor needed to manage NYCHA. Furthermore, these changes are expected to increase local engagement in public housing issues. These expectations are based on the experience of devolved housing authorities nationally and internationally.

NYCHA Local Offices

We recommend that NYCHA create local offices for individual or groups of NYCHA developments. Each local office will be responsible for operational

management including but not limited to, resident recruitment, eligibility, selection, move-in logistics, residency, rent collection, building maintenance, and human resources.⁹⁰ Local offices should also be responsible for providing space for community programming. We recommend local offices increase resident engagement by hiring from their tenant base, and making a portion of their budget available for participatory budgeting.

Operational Management-Building Maintenance, Occupancy and Rent Collection

Devolution of operational management can increase efficiency. According to the Boston Consulting Group's report on NYCHA, the more successful public housing authorities (PHAs) have more localized management, including the management of property, resident relation issues, rent collection, and re-certification. Furthermore, best practice PHAs tend to localize maintenance issues such as apartment inspections, scheduling, resource deployment, first line maintenance, preventive maintenance, and apartment turnovers. This type of management has a 3-5% rent de-

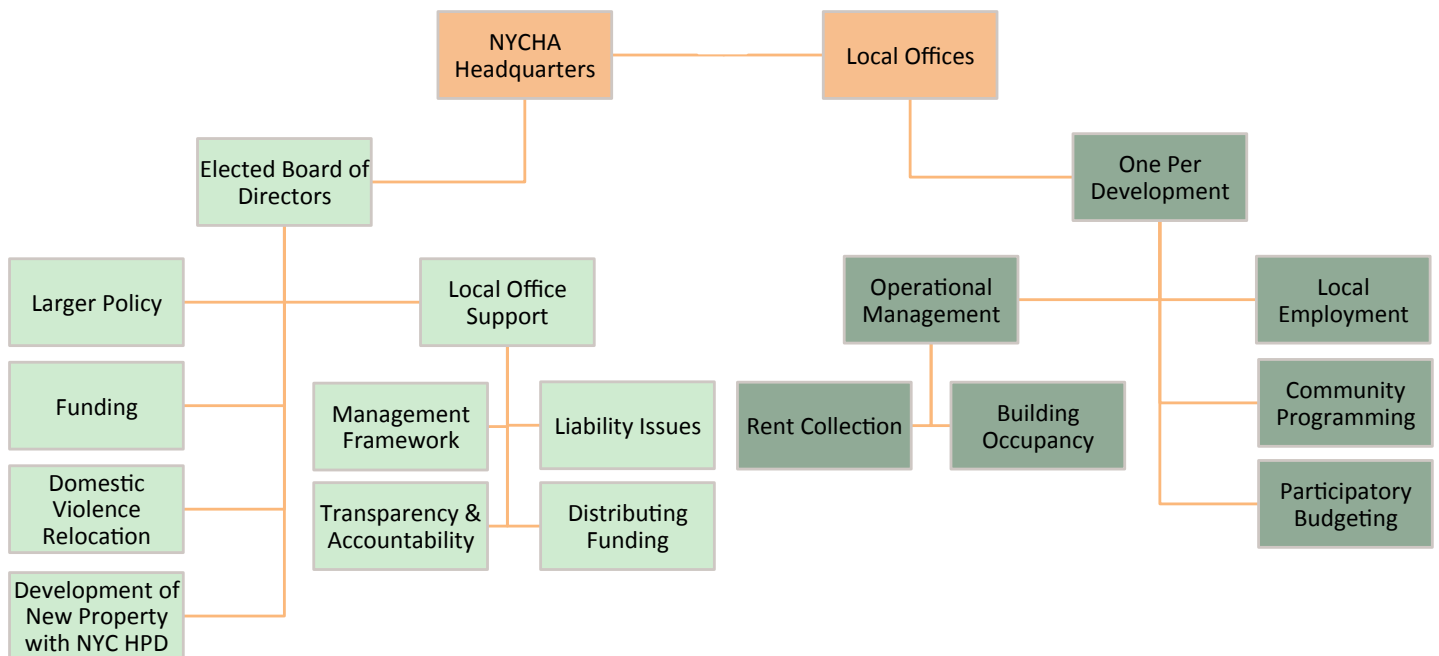
linquency rate compared to NYCHA's 11%. At the same time, these housing authorities have comparable bad debt hovering around 1%.⁹¹ Similar to the Boston Consulting, we suggest NYCHA decentralize "property-level ownership and decision-making."⁹²

A decentralized management structure would aid the efficiency of building repairs and reduce wait times. While the current system assures a central record of all necessary repairs, the execution of the repairs is severely slow and inefficient. If, instead, each development was responsible for their repairs, tracking repairs could be streamlined, and travel times would be reduced. PHA's that manage locally have no backlog for maintenance and repair, and tend to address issues between 7-24 days compared to NYCHA's 100 plus days.⁹³

Locally managed housing can increase community engagement. In Ontario, Canada, devolution enabled local service providers the opportunity to "develop better policy and operational practices."⁹⁴ The local servers were able to customize the needs

91 Boston Consulting Group, 33
 92 Boston Consulting Group, 33
 93 Boston Consulting Group, 33
 94 Schuk, 17

90 Metropolitan Planning Council



of their specific neighborhood. In the case of Ontario, devolution enabled stronger leverage of community resources.⁹⁵ This is especially important for a neighborhood like Brownsville, which would benefit from more community ownership and participation. NYCHA's one-size fits all approach do not consider the unique circumstance of largely varying communities in NYC.

Community Programming

To reconnect programs with the community, we recommend that programming be developed at local offices. Programming decision should be decided by local offices with community input. In the case of Brownsville, suggested programming is described throughout the Community and Residence Recommendations section of the report. Local offices should include provision of community spaces in their property management. The space made available should be reflective of community needs and requests. To ensure a constant stream of communication between local offices and the tenant community, we suggest local offices employ from their tenant base, and portion of funding be available for participatory budgeting.

Employing From Tenant Base

Employing from a tenant base increases tenant participation and can even increase management efficiency.⁹⁶ While the success of tenant management to increase resident engagement has been debated,⁹⁷ hiring residents offers opportunities for employment, economic mobility, and potentially also well-managed buildings.

Tenant management has a precedent of success in the US. In the past, federal funding made tenant management programs popular. However, the tenant management programs were "not promoted vigorously" and fizzled out during the Clinton administration.⁹⁸ While generally successful, these programs do require increased funding for initial training, but lead to well-

95 Schuk, 17

96 Etek, 6-7

97 Peterman, 487

98 Peterman, 477

managed buildings. During annual inspections public housing managed by tenants performed well with resident move-outs, maintenance, maintenance staffing, operating costs, and tenants perceived quality of life.⁹⁹ Tenant management needs to be brought back to the forefront of public housing policy. NYCHA headquarters needs to set aside funding to reinvigorate this initiative.

In the United Kingdom, tenant management continues to see support in the government. In Southwark, London residents can apply for different grants that provide consultants who serves as advisors to support tenant involvement. An advisor can "identify local issues, provide training and explain empowerment options."¹⁰⁰ Alternatively, advisors can train residents for tenant management. Advisors can also support tenant managers during their new position. While we are not suggesting tenant management in the same format as in the UK, (where tenants are the sole managers), we are suggesting that tenants be hired by NYCHA to manage and support local development office functions. In this scenario, similar grants for job training would still be applicable.

Participatory Budgeting

We believe that the NYCHA Capital budget should allocate a sizeable annual contribution to go towards participatory budgeting to empower residents and address a wide range of needs within each NYCHA development. Participatory budgeting was first undertaken in Brazil but has become popular in cities across the world as a way for residents to engage directly in allocating money and setting priorities for projects that deserve financial investment.¹⁰¹ Precedent for participatory budgeting exists in the New York City Council as several Council Members have used their discretionary funding for participatory budgeting.¹⁰² Not only is there local precedent, but Toronto Public Housing has also been a successful model for participatory

99 Etek, 6-7

100 Southwark Council

101 Cabannes, 2004

102 "Participatory Budgeting in New York City."

budgeting, as \$5 million is apportioned for their 58,500 families to determine where these funds will be directed.¹⁰³

The first step of any participatory budget process is to hold meetings to identify various projects that the funds could go towards. After a series of meetings, organized residents of the developments would vote to direct funds to projects they felt were most pressing. Not only would this work to improve resident engagement and empowerment in every development, it also addresses the most urgent issues facing NYCHA's aging infrastructure as identified by residents.

NYCHA Headquarters

Decentralization of local housing management will free up NYCHA headquarters to focus on larger policy issues, domestic violence relocation and funding. Furthermore the headquarters will act as a support system for local offices by creating a management framework, hiring headquarters employees and handling any liability issues. To ensure accountability, benchmarks with rewards should be set in place for local offices. These recommendations are based on the success and failures of other public housing internationally.

A Unified Entity

One division in NYCHA headquarters will focus on larger public housing issues. First there should be a unit that focuses on larger policy needs. Policy issues should consider eviction, fair wage, procurement, tenant transfer, as well as human rights, harassment and fair access. We suggest this based off of the types of policies devised by the Toronto Community Housing Corporation.¹⁰⁴ Second, there should continue to be a unit that focuses on domestic violence relocation. We are recommending that this function stay centralized. This way headquarters can act as liaison between different local offices, and therefore relocate tenants

103 Participatory Budgeting (PB), Toronto Community Housing

104 Toronto Community Housing Corporation

outside of their existing community district. Lastly, NYCHA should focus on increasing funding, and efficiency as outlined in the funding section of this report. Furthermore, they should devise a plan for funding distribution to local offices. We recommend that this be done based on the number of tenants a local office has, the number and size of apartment units, and the existing conditions of the buildings. With a division focused on larger public housing issues, another division can focus on supporting the local offices.

While the Chair of the Board of Directors would continue to oversee NYCHA headquarters, the need for a General Manager would be eliminated, as these functions would be taken care of at the local level, and the Chair would ultimately oversee all of the local offices. While local offices should report to members of headquarters, the decentralization of the entire agency would eliminate the dual management structure.

Another function that NYCHA headquarters should perform is administering tenant election to vote for a Board of Directors. While the Mayor could still appoint a Commissioner, as occurs in every other city agency, the Board of Directors should be an elected body, determined by NYCHA residents. This will increase resident engagement and provide for more democratic means of control.

A Support System for Local Offices

A second division at NYCHA should focus on supporting local offices. First, NYCHA should have a unit that creates and maintains a management framework for local offices. This will act as a set of management guidelines, and should include minimum requirements for local offices to follow. Management guidelines should ease the transition to local office management, and act as a reference point for local offices. The requirements and guidelines should be based off work and research done by their policy analysis unit described above. Second, there should be a unit that is responsible for liability and indemnity to maintain the finan-

cial capabilities of local offices. These recommendations are based on the strengths and weakness found with the decentralization of public housing in Ontario.¹⁰⁵ Placing liability issues in the hands of headquarters could lead to accountability issues. For this reason we recommend the creation of a transparency and accountability unit at NYCHA headquarters.

A Demonstrator of Transparency and Accountability

To maintain accountability, local offices should report data to the NYCHA headquarters and be rewarded on meeting benchmarks set by headquarters. Local offices must collect data and publicly publish information online through a database established by NYCHA headquarters, on a bi-monthly basis. This creates a strong incentive for effective performance.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, we suggest that payments or bonuses be explicitly tied to the achievement of measurable performance targets.¹⁰⁷ These payments or bonuses could be based on short term and long-term benchmarks.

Short-term benchmarks should be met between one and five years and include a multitude of topics. The first benchmarks could be made for the preservation, expansion and supply of quality housing. This can be demonstrated by the number of units built or rehabilitated, number of units improved or upgraded and the share of new units affordable for very low, low-, and moderate-income households. The second benchmarks should be set for making housing more affordable and readily available. This can be shown by: the number of vouchers issued; share of available vouchers utilized; and number of households relocating with housing search assistance. Promoting racial and economic diversity is the third opportunity for benchmarking. This can be marked by the share of new units in both low-poverty and non-minority neighborhoods. This can be marked by: the share of

¹⁰⁵ Schuk

¹⁰⁶ Osborne and Plastrik, 2000; Osborne and Gaebler 1991

¹⁰⁷ Osborne and Plastrik, 2000; Osborne and Gaebler 1991; Boston Consulting Group, 33

voucher recipients moving to low-poverty and non-minority neighborhoods, as well as racial and economic mix of assisted developments. The fourth opportunity for benchmarking is a local offices ability to help households build wealth. This can include the number of tenants that become homeowners. The fifth opportunity for benchmarking is the ability to strengthen families, which could be marked by the number of families reunifying. It could also be recognized by the number of assisted households moving from welfare to work. A sixth opportunity for benchmarking is the local offices opportunity to link housing with essential supportive services, including the number of units with transitional services, or the number of nonprofits serving special needs-populations.¹⁰⁸

Long-term benchmarks should be achieved between five to twenty years. Benchmarking categories would be the same as short-term benchmarks, however the expectations would be different.¹⁰⁹ Quantitative expectations should be decided relative to quantitative numbers found during the first or second benchmarking period.

NYCHA's Future Housing Projects and HPD

We recommend NYCHA work with NYC's Housing Preservation and Development agency to develop future property. Under Mayor Bill De Blasio, NYCHA and HPD are working together to develop 6,000 new affordable units on NYCHA property.¹¹⁰ We encourage this type of partnership, and believe that HPD should be given more opportunity to work towards developing new units for low-income residents. This is because HPD's role and experience as an agency is to develop and preserve housing. In the past, HPD developed multibillion-dollar plans, including over 100,000 units of affordable housing¹¹¹ Looking at the last published statement from NYCHA in July 2011 on "projects in construction" NYCHA was developing about

¹⁰⁸ Katz, 104

¹⁰⁹ Katz, 104

¹¹⁰ NYCHA

¹¹¹ HPD

1,100 units.¹¹² A stronger partnership will enable HPD to work on what their best at: development. This will enable NYCHA to focus more on policy, funding, property maintenance and tenants needs.

NYCHA's Transition to Decentralization

We are suggesting that the transition to local offices start as a pilot program in Brownsville. NYCHA Headquarters should offer guidance to local offices during the transition to decentralization. For this reason, we suggest that local offices meet regularly with NYCHA headquarters to discuss challenges and gain information and feedback. The need for meetings was common request amongst new management after the decentralization of public housing in Ontario.¹¹³ For this reason we highly suggest open communication between the two divisions.

A large city like NYC, with diverse neighborhoods and communities, needs to devolve management to end the one size fits all approach. In Ontario, devolution of public housing gave “the potential for greater freedom to administer social housing programs in ways best suited to local needs.”¹¹⁴ Localizing NYCHA's operational management and programming allows for site-specific management tuned to local housing markets and programs tuned to local tenants. Furthermore, we recommend local offices hire from there tenant base. This inherently increases resident participation, and offers new employment opportunities. To further empower residents, we also recommend a portion of local office budgets be dedicated to participatory budgeting.¹¹⁵

112 NYCHA Department of Development

113 Schuk

114 Schuk, 17

115 NYCHA Department of Development



Physical Planning Challenges and Recommendations



“A public housing project would bring new blood to Brownsville - people, it is true, who could only afford to pay small rents, but who would pay those rents. And they would face the future with a new courage resulting from the stimulating new environment and new opportunities for happiness.” - Milton J, Goell, *Brooklyn Must Have Better Public Housing*, p.29

This section addresses the physical problems within NYCHA developments in Brownsville. We aim for these recommendations to enhance community resources and create more opportunities for community and civic health. The following recommendations for solutions to improve Brownsville’s neighborhood layout aim to strengthen the area’s community feel, neighborhood programming, and are intended to be used as a tool by community residents to come together. These observations on how to improve the physical characteristics will have to be further discussed with the community at large and in the specific context of a fully participatory planning process.

Connectivity in Brownsville

Challenges

Brownsville once consisted of a street grid pattern with uniform blocks. Today, it is dominated by the NYCHA superblock layout. This layout creates a challenge for pedestrian circulation through a lack of connectivity within

the NYCHA campuses, a disconnect between NYCHA campuses and the rest of Brownsville, and difficulty in accessing transportation options that connect Brownsville with the rest of the city.

The paths that wind throughout NYCHA form a disorienting network, inhibiting connectivity, and pose a constant challenge to securely walk from block to block. These paths can make the journey to and from a point of interest, such as the commercial corridors along Pitkin, Belmont, or Rockaway Avenues, schools, libraries or the subway, a difficult endeavor. The Center for Court Innovation reported that “While public and non-public housing residents do not statistically differ in their feelings of safety in local parks or going to and from the subway, public housing residents did feel less safe on the street (38 percent compared to 51 percent).”¹¹⁶

Fencing, scaffolding, or the NYCHA buildings themselves often obscure the sightline on these paths. According to the Center for Court Innovation, 11 percent of Public housing residents, compared to 21 percent who lived in privately owned co-ops, apartments, or houses, were significantly less likely to feel that the quality of life was good or very good.¹¹⁷ Fostering a continuous and open atmosphere can significantly address the perception of a low quality of life.

In addition to the superblocks, the streetscape itself can act as an isolating factor towards residents. For example, Mother Gaston Boulevard is a wide thoroughfare with a narrow concrete central median. Public Housing developments line both sides of the street from Livonia to Sutter Avenues, and the fencing that surrounds the houses combined with a lack of first floor retail, can create a dreary, uninhabited feel. Additionally, the Boulevard is lit almost exclusively for cars and it is a dark passageway to walk on at night.

¹¹⁶ Hynynen, 2011

¹¹⁷ Ibid

Recommendations

Build Upon Existing Connectivity Initiatives

The community of Brownsville has already initiated advocacy efforts to foster healthy and helpful connectivity measures. Due to the lobbying efforts of Bettie Kollock-Wallace, the Chairperson of CB 16, and neighborhood residents, the Department of Transportation painted bike lanes on Pitkin Avenue and Mother Gaston Boulevard in the spring of 2013.¹¹⁸ In reference to bicyclist safety, Bettie was quoted saying, “If we had the bike lane you could easily follow the route. You could be safe.”¹¹⁹ Such advocacy has the potential to transform public space in Brownsville, and attention to connectivity issues within the community and NYCHA campuses should continue to be advanced.

Furthermore, the Brownsville Partnership (BP) has instituted select initiatives to improve the physical challenges of NYCHA campuses. Temporary way-finding measures, such as guide signs, use photos and statements of residents as markers to identify where one was in the campus within some of the NYCHA developments. Rasmia Kirmani-Frye, the Partnership’s Director, calls these measures “visible interruptions in a community that change the way people interact with their space.”¹²⁰ BP also impacted senior mobility by organizing a walking group to encourage safe exercise in numbers. Small initiatives such as these have the potential to transform neighborhood livability, and as such, we recommend that NYCHA work with BP and other concerned organizations to further foster and expand collaborative approaches to create better connectivity.

Fostering Connectivity

We recommend removing any unnecessary obstructions, such as fencing and scaffolding, adding more lighting and seating, establishing way-finding

¹¹⁸ Kazis, 2011

¹¹⁹ Ibid

¹²⁰ Urban Omnibus, 2014

informational and directional signs throughout the neighborhood and the NYCHA campuses, and making streetscape improvements on Mother Gaston Boulevard. This will improve sightlines throughout the campuses, establish better access to open space, and create a more pleasant, safe, and walkable neighborhood.

Last year, the Municipal Art Society and BP organized the “Brownsville Hope Summit” on neighborhood safety and community development.¹ Some of the comments that emerged from a collaborative charrette centered around how Brownsville’s safety would improve “if people felt more comfortable walking around the streets and had pleasant outside areas to sit around. Beautification is a general concern in the neighborhood...Remove the scaffolding around NYCHA properties and replacing them with gardening that residents can claim ownership for.”²

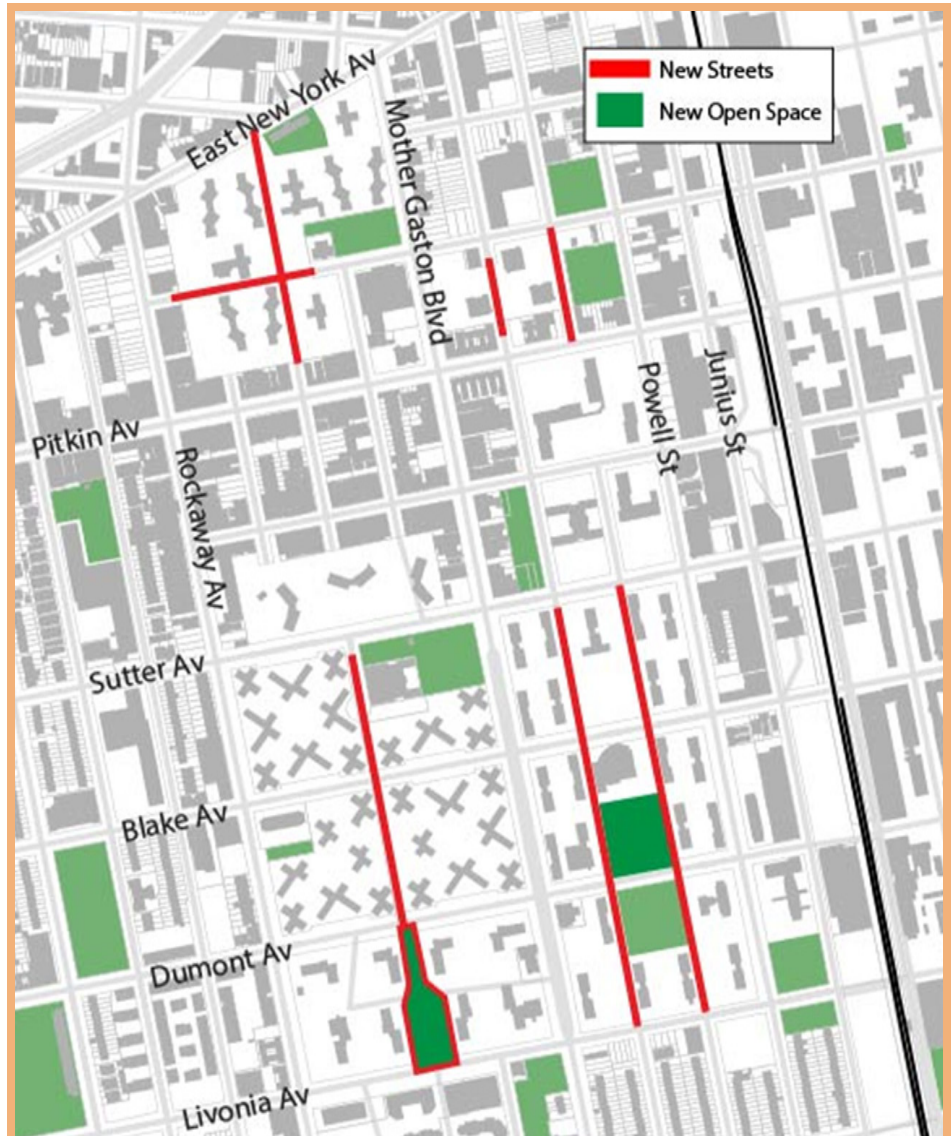
1 The Municipal Art Society of New York, 2013

2 Brownsville Partnership, 14

Neighborhood Street Connectivity

Connecting the superblocks to the rest of the neighborhood will better enhance visibility, strengthening the perception of community safety and walkability with more eyes on the street in the NYCHA campuses. It may also create more options of pedestrian flow to the commercial corridors and cross streets, which will bolster the local retail economy. In order to better connect the study area with the rest of Brownsville, we recommend reestablishing the street grid wherever possible without demolishing any infrastructure. Map 3 provides an example of what this could look like with Osborn Street running through the Brownsville housing development.

Re-mapping the street infrastructure would address BP sense of isolation within the NYCHA campuses and would help create a more accessible



Map 3: Street Connectivity

atmosphere for visitors. Reestablishing the street grid will also allow for more public space with two new parks established at the southern end of the study area (one in the Tilden developments and the other behind the Van Dyke Community Center).

Access to Transportation Challenges

Challenges

Subways

CD16 and Brownsville are accessible by four trains, running express and local stops. The A, C, and J trains enter through the northern section of the community district, the L train along the eastern section, and the 3 train

runs through the southern section, adjacent to the study area. These trains connect via the Broadway Junction transportation hub in addition to the East New York station on the Long Island Rail Road.

Due to many express trains and proximate location to Manhattan, it takes anywhere between fifteen to twenty minutes to travel to Downtown Brooklyn, twenty five minutes to Downtown Manhattan, thirty-five minutes to Midtown Manhattan, thirty minutes to Long Island City, twenty minutes to Jamaica, Queens, thirty minutes to JFK Airport, and roughly one hour to Coney Island. The prevalence of subways allow commuters to travel throughout the five boroughs relatively efficiently, however, there are a num-

BEST PRACTICE: Neighborhood Street Connectivity

A NYCHA development, the *St. Nicholas Houses in Harlem, Manhattan* offer a case study of an implemented re-mapped street through an existing superblock development. Frederick Douglass Blvd was reconnected with Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd. With the re-mapped street, in-fill development occurred in the form of a new school. For more information visit http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/html/about/HCZ_SaintNicholas.shtml.



Image 6: St. Nicholas Houses in Harlem, NYC. http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/html/about/HCZ_SaintNicholas.shtml.

ber of obstacles in getting to these stations for NYCHA and other residents in the study area, as will be discussed in the physical planning recommendations.

Buses

The bus system in Brooklyn is extensive, with many lines running through

or near Brownsville. A few of the major lines include the B60 along Rockaway Avenue, the B7 along Boyland Street and Saratoga Avenue, the B25 along Atlantic Avenue, and the B14, which runs along Pitkin Avenue and turns down Mother Gaston Boulevard. The B14 is the only bus line that runs through the study area, helping residents travel to East New York. None

of the buses directly connect the study area to the Broadway Junction transit hub, again, making it difficult to get there. Additionally, it might be quicker for many residents to walk through the study area rather than taking the B14 because of its relatively short route.

Bike Lanes

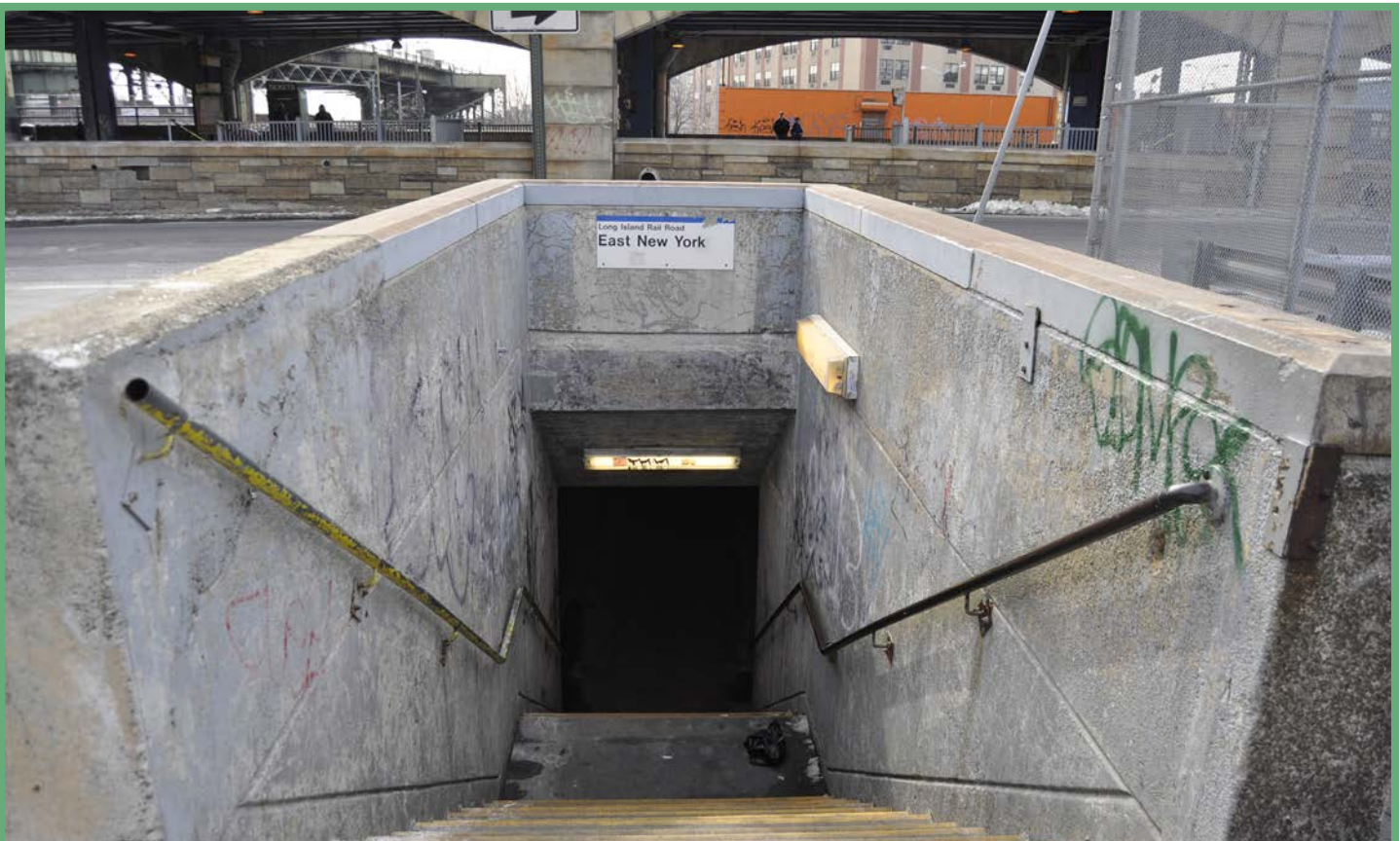


Image 6: Atlantic Avenue Tunnel

Existing Transportation



Map 4: Existing Transportation



Image 7: Rockaway Avenue Elevated Station (3 Train)

The bike network serves Brownsville relatively well, linking local streets to larger arterial streets. The bike system recently expanded in 2013, adding lanes along Pitkin Avenue and Mother Gaston Boulevard. The growing network added to already existing facilities on East New York Avenue, Atlantic Avenue, Bergen Street, Pacific Street, St. Marks Avenue, Liberty Street, and New Lots Avenue. Additionally, Rockaway Parkway has a facility that runs adjacent to the study area's southwestern boundary.

It would take roughly half an hour for a cyclist to travel from Mother Gaston Boulevard to Downtown Brooklyn via Atlantic Avenue, and about forty-five minutes to travel into Manhattan. Although the network is growing, the southern portion of the district is still underserved, allowing few connections to the neighborhoods in southern Brooklyn and Queens. Most lanes lead towards Downtown Brooklyn or

the areas close to the East River.

While the study area is fairly well served by transportation, access to the Broadway Junction subway station requires walking through an uninviting tunnel beneath Atlantic Avenue (figure 3). The tunnel is poorly lit and poses safety risks, particularly at night. Furthermore, the elevated Junius Street and Rockaway Avenue subway stops on the 3 train, as well as the connection between the 3 train and L train, are not ADA compliant. This makes getting up to train platforms difficult or inaccessible to people with some physical disability. The Brownsville Hope Summit exemplifies this sentiment through resident responses. They see transportation in the neighborhood as an asset. Having major train lines run through the neighborhood allows residents to travel to other parts of the city and vice versa. However, accessibility to the elevated train track is hard for

people with impaired mobility.¹²¹

Additional concerns from the Hope Summit write up regarding Livonia Avenue, which is related to streetscape and street life infrastructure, were: Better lighting to make Livonia a brighter street at night; requiring station elevators to be spatially organized, visible, and safe; and exhibiting art on elevated train columns.¹²²

Recommendations

We recommend the subway stations, including the connection between the 3 and L train, be made ADA compliant. We also suggest the tunnel connection to Broadway Junction be improved with better aesthetics, including new paint, improved entrances, and exits. Furthermore, adding lights and cameras can help create a safer environ-

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Ibid

ment for people who must use the tunnel. Lighting should be added at both ends, and within the tunnel. Additionally, lighting should also be installed underneath the elevated subways, specifically along Livonia Avenue.

Zoning

Challenges

The current overall zoning in CD 16 does not completely reflect the current land use of the neighborhood. For example the current predominant R6 zoning for CD 16 is composed mostly of low-density one to two family homes. Also, commercial overlays west of Rockaway Avenue specifically along Sutter Avenue have no existing commercial land uses. At the same time, the zoning limits the potential for creating new building opportunities on vacant land. Additionally, the current retail corridor along Pitkin Avenue and Rockaway Avenue is not continuous because both the NYCHA superblocs and smaller private residential developments break up the retail continuity. Commercial corridors offer a wealth of benefits to struggling communities including jobs, increased tax revenue, increased safety, more access to vital services such as retail shopping, dining establishments, banks, and other professional services.

The R6 residential zoning is problematic for the NYCHA superbloc developments because achieving the maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 2.43 requires a large amount of open space, encouraging “tower in the park” styles of development. Meanwhile, the manufacturing zone along the edge of the Brownsville Industrial Business Zone does not take into account the residential community across the street, posing problems of land uses being located too close together. Overall, the relatively low FAR allowed under current zoning hampers any potential future plans for community-based development.

Vacant Land

The amount of underutilized land is

a significant challenge to create a livable, flourishing community. The vacant land is both privately and publically owed, creating a problem of ownership and delegation. In our study area, almost 30,000 square feet of vacant land is owned by both the Department of City-wide Administrative Services (DCAS) and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD).¹²³ Additionally, there is a total of about 350,000 square feet of under-utilized NYCHA parking.¹²⁴ Such conflicts in ownership create obstacles in developing land for better use, particularly in a timely manner; however, there also exists the potential for positive, community-based planning to enact grassroots change.

Recommendations: Rezoning

The current zoning does not allow the neighborhood of Brownsville to reach its full potential for a healthy physical environment. The following zoning recommendations are given with the idea to preserve the unique neighborhood character Brownsville retains, while creating two new zoning districts to address the neighborhood’s challenging circumstances.

Infill

Infill is a complicated issue that has to be considered in the context of each particular situation. Thus, we recommend a thorough analysis of the current conditions before any formal plans are made. With the help of local government, instituting infill development programs have the potential to enhance the quality of life in established neighborhoods, making better use of vacant and underutilized lots. Encouraging infill development increases access of people to jobs, reduces environmental pollution associated with commuting, strengthens property values and the real estate market, makes better use of existing infrastructure, replaces brownfields, and adds socioeconomic diversity of

under-utilized parking lots, vacant lots, and other available spaces.¹²⁵ Infill development is a way to both address the desolate pockets of underutilized land while bringing in new, vibrant possibilities to the neighborhood. Through a planning process that encourages full community participation, Brownsville can take control of the wide variety of residential mixes and preclude the possibility of inappropriately built and poorly planned market rate housing.

Residential

We recommend the rezoning of Brownsville to increase the density along wide streets. For example, we suggest increased density on Mother Gaston Boulevard with a rezoning of R7A. R7A would increase the FAR to 4.0 (4.6 with an inclusionary housing bonus) and also has a maximum

building height of 80 feet on a wide street.¹²⁶ R6A increases the overall density to an FAR of 3.6 with inclusionary housing located along newly created streets through NYCHA superblocs.¹²⁷ Such a boost of transit-oriented development could bring in a more diverse socio-economic mix of residents without displacing the current residents.

Inside the NYCHA campuses we recommend a rezoning of R6B, which would reduce the allowable density from an FAR of 2.43 to 2.0. The aim is to allow for additional options to develop land if the community decides to pursue an infill development plan in the future. We recommend that all of the residential rezoning include provisions for Inclusionary Zoning so that new, permanent, affordable housing options can be built. The Inclusionary Housing Program incentivizes the creation or preservation of affordable housing to developers by offering an optional floor area bonus in exchange for less market rate development.

We propose a new a R7L district, with

¹²⁵ Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Infill Development Program

¹²⁶ Zoning Districts, Residential, New York

City Department of City Planning

¹²⁷ Ibid

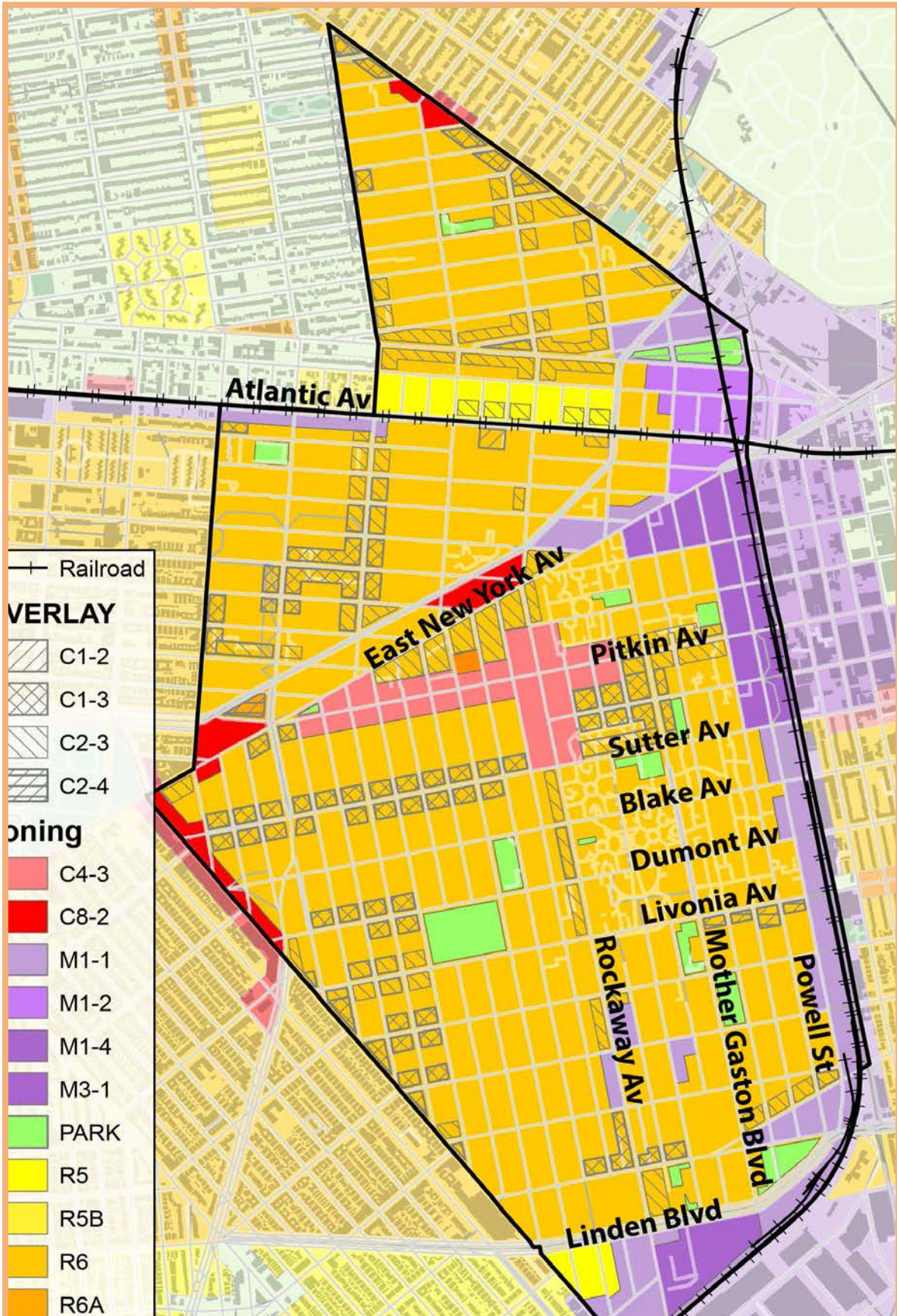
¹²³ Department of Finance, 2014

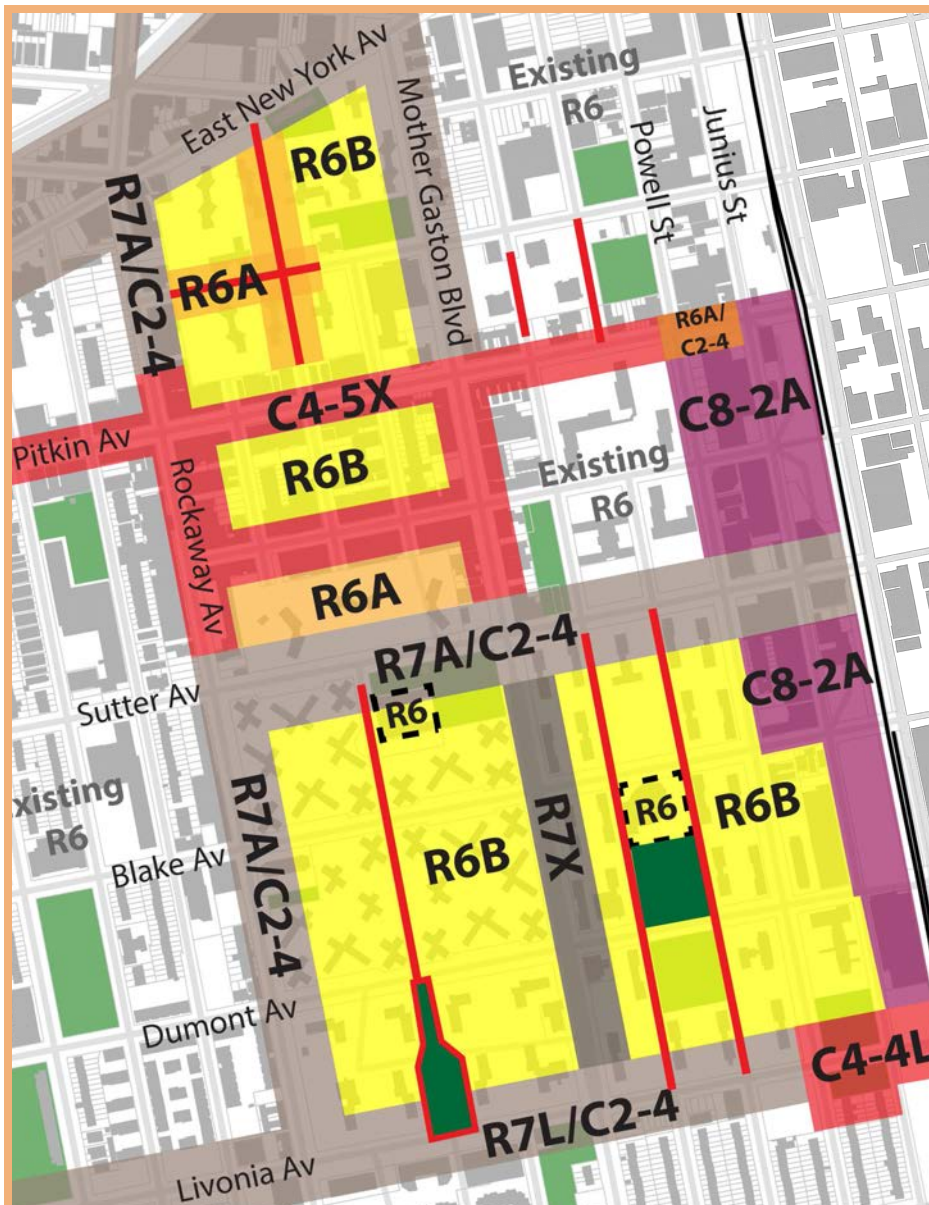
¹²⁴ Ibid

Vacant Lots



Map 5: Rockaway Avenue Elevated Station (3 Train)





Map 7: Proposed zoning

a C2-4 commercial overlay district, along Livonia Avenue beside the 3 train. The rezoning would establish bulk regulations below the elevated train similar to the C4-4L district that was introduced to the Bedford Stuyvesant North Rezoning in 2012.¹²⁸ The maximum base height of development is proposed to be 60 feet, while the maximum building height is 100 feet. The maximum FAR is proposed to be 3.45, or 4.6 with Inclusionary Housing. R7L buildings also must have a 5 foot setback at the street line. The new R7L zoning would allow for growth along the Livonia Avenue while imposing height restrictions so that

¹²⁸ Bedford-Stuyvesant North Rezoning, New York City Department of City Planning

light can filter down to the street. Additionally, with the C2-4 overlay, Livonia Avenue receives more foot traffic through first floor retail provided by the R7L zoning.¹²⁹

Affordable Housing

During the 2013 Hope Summit, many residents explained that the “NYCHA buildings are important features in Brownsville [and that they are interested] in preserving them [while] the surroundings improved.” However, landscaping improvement and building maintenance are not all that was

¹²⁹ Zoning Districts, Residential, New York City Department of City Planning

called for. Brownsville residents said they “would [also] like to add variety to the housing possibilities, like housing for singles or small families.”¹³⁰ Our residential rezoning recommendation would allow such variety of housing possibilities to enter to neighborhood.

There is the potential for up to 4,736 additional housing units to be created if our rezoning recommendations are followed. Please look in the appendix, item C to see how new units would be distributed. These additional housing units would be comprehensively planned with additional services including schools, community centers, and health care facilities. Furthermore, increased neighborhood open space and additional retail options would improve the overall physical environment of the neighborhood. However, increasing additional housing units should a full participatory planning process, implemented with extreme consideration of community members concerns of demolishing any existing buildings.

Commercial Corridors

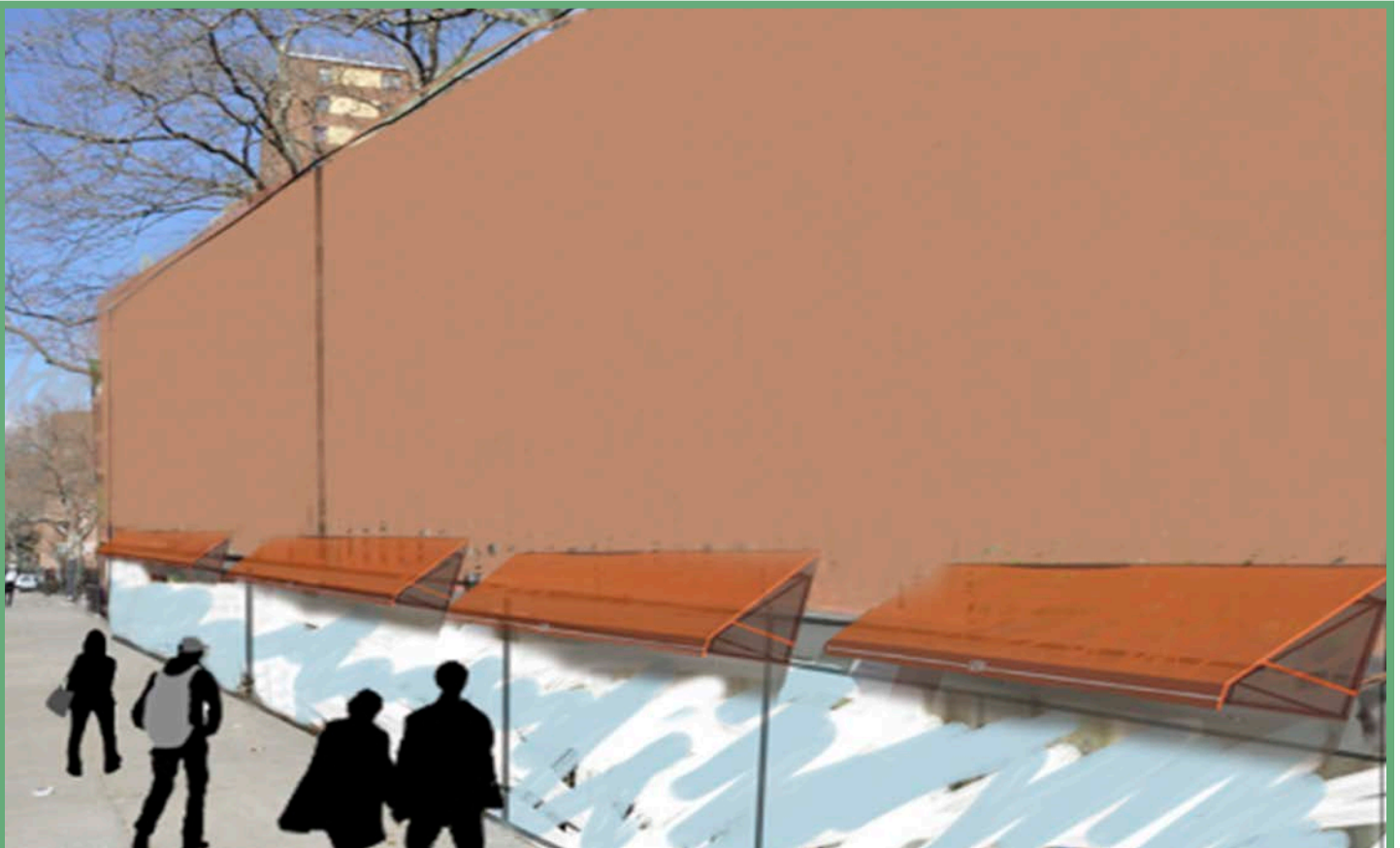
We recommend contextual districts be created along Rockaway and Sutter Avenue by placing C2-4 commercial overlays over the existing zoning. The proposed commercial zoning and overlays may also attract new customers, allowing the retail corridor to revitalize. For example, the NYCHA parking lot adjacent to Rockaway Avenue, near the subway stop, can be developed to create a continuous commercial corridor with an appropriate street-wall, while also providing for more affordable housing (see rendering on p. 61).

We also propose C4-5X zoning along Pitkin Avenue, an established commercial corridor, which could benefit from added retail options without the restrictions attributed to a commercial overlay, such as, placing limitations on certain commercial uses and ground floor retail.

Lastly, we recommend the industrial
¹³⁰ Hope Summit Report, 14



Rockaway Avenue and Livonia Avenue before infill development



Rockaway Avenue and Livonia Avenue after infill development

zone be changed to C8-2A, running along Junius Street. This rezoning provides an opportunity to bring larger retail store option into the neighborhood if desired at some point in the future. The C8-2A zoning would allow for a wide variety of commercial uses with specially established urban design provisions to protect the residential NYCHA campuses.

Conclusion

The recommendations proposed in this section are intended to be a tool for the community. They may be used as a starting point for residents, local officials, or Brownsville community stakeholders to engage in a discussion about the potential solutions for challenges within Brownsville's physical environment. The recommendations may also be used as preliminary ideas when engaging city agencies, such as Department of Citywide Administrative Service (DCAS), the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), the Department of Transportation (DOT), or NYCHA. It is imperative to remedy the physical challenges plaguing the NYCHA properties and the community's infrastructure while maintaining the Brownsville neighborhood's rich history and sense of deep-rooted pride in the community.

Due to the current affordable housing shortage in New York City, proper solution to existing problems within NYCHA's physical structure may significantly improve the lives of public housing residents in Brownsville. The proposed recommendations highlight the importance of addressing problems within the physical environment, providing good affordable housing, and community resources to all residents in a comprehensive manner. By looking at public housing and community issues holistically, a path for a more equitable future can be created, benefitting both residents and all of New York City, and making people, at last, feel at home in Brownsville.



NO PARKING
ANYTIME
ON THIS STREET

NO PARKING

APPENDIX



Item A: Questionnaire

Hunter College Department of Urban Affairs and Planning
Spring 2014 - Planning Studio
Public Housing in Brownsville

Community Survey

Thank you for taking our survey. This is part of an on-going project of the Economic Development Committee of your local community board and the Graduate Urban Planning Department at CUNY Hunter College. This survey should take 5-7 minutes to complete. Please note, your participation is voluntary. You may choose to end this survey at any time.

COMMUNITY

1. Are you a NYCHA resident?

Yes

No (skip to question 7)

2. What development do you live in?

Number of Bedrooms? _____

Number of people in your apartment? _____

3. How long have you lived there? _____

4. On a scale of 1-3, how will you rate physical conditions in your building? (1=worst, 3=best)

1

2

3

5. On a scale of 1-3, how would you rate the physical conditions in your community? (1=worst, 3=best)

1

2

3

6. In your opinion, what is NYCHA's biggest problem in Brownsville? (Select all that apply).

Safety	Cleanliness	Residents
Location	Open Space	Recreation
Walkability	Support for Youth	Support for the elderly
Amenities (laundry, gym)		Ground Maintenance
Staff		Communication
Apartment Maintenance		Lack of response from NYCHA management
Other:		

7. Are you currently employed?

Yes

No

8. If you had the means, would you leave Brownsville?

Yes

No

If yes, where would you go? _____

JUSTICE AND SAFETY

9. How responsive is NYCHA management to your maintenance request? (Select one)

They never respond.
They respond sometimes.

They always respond.
Not Applicable / Don't know

10. Rate your level of confidence in the 73rd Precinct? (Select one)

Good
Bad

Neutral
Don't know

11. How safe do you feel walking around...

your community?

Very safe

Somewhat safe

Not safe at all

At night?

Very safe

Somewhat safe

Not safe at all

Alone?

Very safe

Somewhat safe

Not safe at all

LIVABILITY

12. When you want fresh air, where do you go? _____

13. Do you commute outside of Brownsville daily?

Yes

No

14. Choice your daily modes of transportation? (Choose all that apply)

- Biking
- Walking
- Train
- Bus
- Car

15. If you had \$1 million, what would you change in Brownsville? _____

16. What do you love about Brownsville?

YOUTH

17. Please mark how much of an problem each of these issues is in the Brownsville Community

	Big Problem	Minor Problem	Not a Problem	Don' Know
Drug Selling/Use				
Fighting				
Gang Activity				
Truancy/Dropping Out				
Underage Drinking				
Experiencing sexual assault/rape				
Teenage pregnancy				
Bullying				
Unemployment				
Lack of GED programs				
Lack of educational/training opportunities				
Lack of structured recreational activities				

Supplementary Questions

1. What is your...?

Race/Ethnicity _____ Gender _____ Age _____

2. Are you happy with the health care in your neighborhood?

Yes

No

3. Are you happy with the education institutions in your neighborhood?

Yes

No

4. Are you happy with the retail options in your neighborhood?

Yes

No

5. Are you happy with the cultural/social options in your neighborhood?

Yes

No

6. Are you happy with the parks and recreations space in your neighborhood?

Yes

No

7. Are you happy with the public safety system in your neighborhood?

Yes

No

8. Are you happy with the grocery stores in your neighborhood?

Yes

No

9. Are you happy with the banking options in your neighborhood?

Yes

No

10. Are you happy with your currently home environment?

Yes

No

Item B: Existing NYCHA Programming

	Throughout NYCHA	Brownsville	Other
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	Throughout NYCHA	Brownsville	Other
Art Programs			
Residential Arts Show	X		
Visual Arts Show	X		
Education Programs			
Broadband Technology Opportunities Program		X	
Digital Vans			X
ATTAIN Computer Labs			X
BRIDGES			X
Chess			X
I Have a Dream			X
New York City Early Literacy Learning		X	
Symantec Partnership	X		
The Write Girls Program			X

<i>Equal Opportunity</i>	X		
Family Services			
Supportive Outreach Services (SOS)	X		
Emergency Transfer Program	X		
Witness Relocation Program	X		
Furniture Distribution Program	X		
Mediation Program (SafeHorizon)	X		
Anonymous Resident Referral for NYCHA Social Services	X		
Domestic Violence Aftercare Program	X		
Domestic Violence Intervention, Education and Prevention Program (DVIEP)			X
<i>Fatherhood Initiative</i>			X
<i>Garden Program</i>	X		
Health Services			
Shape Up NYC		X	
Immunization Outreach Program	X		
Health Stat Program	X		
Music Programs			
Youth Chorus	X		
Senior Chorus	X		
Performing Arts			
Senior Festival	X		
Teen Musical Theatre Program	X		
Annual Holiday Show	X		
Talent Search Competition	X		

Recreation Programs			
Gateway Overnight Camping Program	X		
Summer Fishing Contest	X		
Summer Carnival	X		
Kids Walk	X		
Therapeutic Horseback Riding Program	X		
<i>REES- Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability</i>	X		
<i>Senior Services</i>	X		
Sports Programs			
Education Through Sports Day	X		
Education Through Sports Unit Program	X		
Basketball	X		
Bowling	X		
Flag Football	X		
Karate/Tai Chi	X		
Lacrosse	X		
Netball	X		
NFL-NYCHA Officiating Academy	X		
Soccer	X		
Softball	X		
Track & Field	X		
STUDIO NYCHA			
Photography Exhibit	X		
NYCHA Symphony Orchestra	X		

Item C: Additional Housing from to Proposed Rezoning

NYCHA project name	Built FAR	Existing Units	Additional inclusionary housing units after rezoning
Brownsville Houses	1.42	1337	852
Tilden Houses	2.13	998	805
Van Dyke I+II	1.71	1714	1151
Hughes Apartments	2.02	509	406
Glenmore Plaza	2.62	438	0
Howard Houses	1.16	813	1404
Seth Low Houses	2.26	535	109
Woodson	1.76	407	44



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Brooklyn
Public
Library

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PARKING
EXCEPT
AS SHOWN
HEREIN

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