

Brownsville Planning Process: What we heard at Workshop 2

The second public workshop for the Brownsville Neighborhood Planning Process was held at the Oasis Beacon Center on Thursday, September 29, 2016. Over 90 community participants engaged in interactive activities, led by community leaders together with staff from 10 different agencies, to discuss their vision for Brownsville’s future and dive deeper into improvements that could be made to the Pitkin/Belmont and Livonia corridors. To see the presentation and maps from the event, visit courbanize.com/brownsville and click on the info tab.



“What is your Vision for Brownsville in 2030?”

The top five major themes identified during the visioning warm up activity include:

- 1. Opportunities for empowerment and skill-building** for adults and, especially, young people to be creative, productive, and entrepreneurial
- 2. Access to health**, including organic, fresh, affordable foods from local agriculture and food cooperatives
- 3. New spaces and business** that are family- and activity-oriented (e.g., sit-down restaurants and entertainment spaces such as movie theaters, bowling alleys, museums, etc.)
- 4. Affordable housing for a range of incomes**, including homeownership opportunities and opportunities for those in shelters to transition into permanent housing
- 5. A sense of pride and ownership in Brownsville**, through people coming together to build the community and celebrate its history and diverse cultures

Pitkin / Belmont Corridor

- **Types of community facilities desired for HPD-owned sites:**
 - o Recreation and/or cultural center that also offers general resources and information and helps make the area more family-friendly (e.g., YMCA, Boys and Girls Club)
 - o Education-focused hub that provides skill building and alternatives for families to support kids, and space for young people to build on passions (e.g., STEM center, trades school, and other centers for social services)
 - o Holistic health center, spa, prenatal center, recovery or rehab center, or 12 Steps program host site

- **Types of businesses desired for HPD-owned sites:**

- o Food co-op, store with fresh produce, or Trader Joe's, as supermarkets in the area are of poor quality, lack variety, are not dependable, and vary in price
- o Some type of entertainment activity

- **Improvements to Pitkin and Belmont desired:**

- o Belmont: could be vibrant again and filled with shops with quality products, clothing, coffee shops, benches, boutiques, and even a fashion corridor where local designers have a chance to start; other cooperatives with a more community-oriented feel
- o Pitkin: could use a wider variety of services, such as a stationary store, fresh and affordable food, and others so people do not have to leave the community for shopping and entertainment (Non-Brownsville shopping is currently done at Gateway Mall, Fulton Street, Target, and online)
- o More local businesses, but some feel that bigger name stores can make a difference in how the corridor is perceived
- o More businesses that stay open later – Pitkin shuts down in the evening and is very dark
- o WalkNYC signs and wi-fi kiosks along Pitkin and Belmont, especially near sit-down businesses that may not have them
- o The BID could create uniform, attractive, and welcoming signage, as well as more potted plants and benches to improve image of Pitkin and Belmont
- o Supermarkets and businesses could take down posters from windows to make them more inviting and transparent and to help make the streets feel safer
- o More garbage cans, more frequent street cleanings, and enforcement of illegal dumping to help attract new businesses
- o Businesses to connect with youth empowerment centers to provide employment opportunities for local youth

- **Infrastructure and street improvements desired:**

- o Dangerous intersections that could use pedestrian safety measures include Mother Gaston/Pitkin and Howard/Pitkin
- o Additional parking is needed near site on Christopher Ave. for teachers who drive to work
- o Improvements to the B14 and B16 bus services are needed, especially around rush hour



Livonia Corridor



- **Types of businesses desired on HPD-owned sites:**

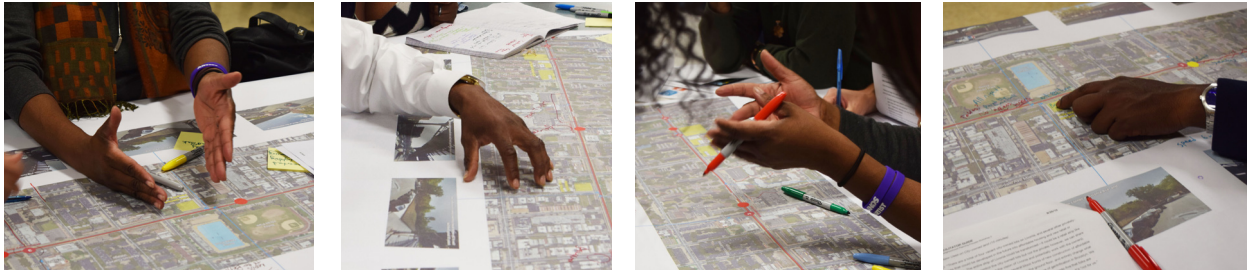
- o Affordable, organic healthy food store such as Trader Joe's or a food co-op
- o Entertainment amenities, especially for teens and young adults, that are open late (e.g., skating rinks, bowling alleys, movie theaters)
- o Family-friendly sit-down restaurants with healthy food options
- o Bank or credit union that stays open late and does not discriminate
- o Laundromat/dry cleaner and other small businesses that provide convenience (e.g., barber shop, doctors'/dentists' offices, pharmacy, etc.)
- o Local businesses to build the economic base of the community and hire local residents

- **Types of community facilities desired on HPD-owned sites:**

- o Educational and arts/performance space and center that acts as a focal point for the community (e.g., Restoration Plaza in Bed Stuy); perhaps a multipurpose recreation center such as a YMCA that is open late and can also provide trainings, dance classes, parenting classes, intergenerational space (particularly on sites near train stations)
- o Could include more open space, playgrounds, and gardens (especially on the site closest to the Powell Street Garden), and even a dog park
- o Trade school, tech center, co-working space, or youth business incubator
- o Community center with exercise facilities, healthy meals, health education, and/or farmers market space (particularly on the site across from Betsy Head Park)

- **Other features desired on HPD-owned sites:**

- o Promote community ownership of the land, cooperatives, and other homeownership opportunities like rent-to-own programs
- o Bring green technology and infrastructure into buildings, including composting programs, gardening, and other educational programs
- o Beautification, such as hanging gardens, landscaping, and art that promotes local residents' creativity



- **Infrastructure and street improvements desired:**

- o Lighting throughout Livonia, especially at subway station entrances, intersections, and dead spaces; decorative lighting could be on the elevated structure and serve to beautify and promote safety
- o More pedestrian activity and “eyes on the street” by adding places to go, well-maintained stores, police/call boxes, auxiliary patrol, security cameras, and even murals to add vibrancy
- o Lighting at other dark locations: Junius and Powell Streets between Livonia, Dumont, and Newport Ave, around Marcus Garvey Village, east of Rockaway Ave., and the area around the Heritage House
- o Pedestrian safety measures (such as stop signs, yield signs, and speed bumps) at dangerous intersections along Livonia at East 98th St., Rockaway Ave., Junius St., and Powell St. (where pedestrians often cross mid-block toward station entrances or from housing complexes)
- o Covering potholes, cracks, and better lighting would help protect people from icy holes, bumps, and other dangers
- o Stricter parking rules that stop drivers from parking right up to the corner, preventing pedestrians from seeing approaching cars and other vehicles
- o Benches, wi-fi kiosks, and other interactive elements to activate and beautify blank spaces, such as at Rockaway Ave. by Livonia Ave. and along 98th St.
- o More bike lanes, but not on Livonia as street is too narrow and may add congestion
- o Collaborate with NYCHA on trash pick-up, as trash is set out on street and spills out of bags

- **Park improvements desired:**

- o Lighting at night and beautification strategies at Betsy Head Park on Livonia (e.g. commission local artists to paint the courts or decorate the fences); wall could be removed to add a more transparent edge, open space, and/or offer interaction with the environment and invite people to the street
- o Betsy Head Park needs: new bathrooms and improved track, fencing, grass, better benches, more outdoor exercise stations, better accessibility for seniors, more points of entry, and better connectivity through the park between Dumont and Livonia
- o More interactive features at Livonia Park (e.g. wi-fi, aquarium/pond with fish, public sculpture, etc.) and provide a grounding and reason for the community to gather

General Comments

- **Workforce and economic development:**

- o Skill-building, resources, and proactive outreach to prepare residents for opportunities emerging in the neighborhood and build economic integrity of community (e.g., entrepreneurship courses, trade skills, green technology skills, IT skills, organizational and leadership skills, culinary education, and loans/resources that traditional banks often do not offer, etc.)
- o Hire locally in construction and permanent jobs as well as in new businesses
- o More accessible and culturally sensitive workforce development resources; participants currently go to Van Dyke Center and Workforce1 Center in downtown Brooklyn for workforce resources, but some shared difficulty in accessing services that are in NYCHA buildings if not residents of the building

- **Improving outreach of existing programs:**

- o Kiosks placed throughout the park and at train station entrances as a source of centralized information on resources, services, and events in Brownsville—participants traditionally hear about youth and workforce development programs from flyers in businesses, notices from schools, postings in NYCHA buildings, tenant associations, senior or recreation centers, churches, some social media, and primarily word of mouth
- o Desire to see elected officials helping to fund mailings on information around these services and block ambassadors to help distribute information

- **More art and support for artists throughout the neighborhood:**

- o Promotion of art that reflects the current neighborhood, its different cultures, and its history (e.g., interactive kiosks, murals, and sculptures featuring Brownsville historical figures, a Brownsville Walk of Fame, etc.)
- o More art celebrating Brownsville history and culture on infrastructure and blank spaces
- o Promote artwork by people who grew up in Brownsville and create an artist mentoring program
- o More spaces with vendor markets run by residents, such as MGB Pops, and gathering spaces to share art (e.g., spoken word, theaters)

