



# **NEXT GENERATION NYCHA**

## **A COMMUNITY VISION FOR VAN DYKE HOUSES**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Resident Associations

Elected Officials

Community Partners

Community Voices Heard

NYCC

Citywide Council of Presidents

State and City Legislative Affairs

NYCHA Departments:

- Development Department
- Community Programs and Development:
  - Bronx Community Operations
  - Brooklyn Community Operations
  - Resident Engagement
- Department of Communications
- Operations
  - Brooklyn Property Management
  - Bronx Property Management

Robin Hood’s Housing Advisory Board

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# Executive Summary

Van Dyke Houses in Brownsville, Brooklyn, is among NYCHA's 334 communities. Completed in 1964, it includes 1,714 apartments, which are home to 1,702 families.

Van Dyke Houses was selected to be part of NextGeneration NYCHA, an initiative aimed at organizing and convening residents to develop a long-term vision for their communities.

NextGeneration NYCHA is a multi-faceted, long term strategic investment and planning process that will explore creative ways to sustain public housing for the next generation of New Yorkers. It is an inclusive process that will gather input from NYCHA residents, administrators and managers, and community partners and residents to address how NYCHA looks, operates, and is financed.

The initiative started with an organizing effort that included door-to-door canvassing as well as building- and community-wide meetings. The effort involved 710 Van Dyke residents and identified six topics of importance to residents:

- Affordable Housing
- Security
- Job Training

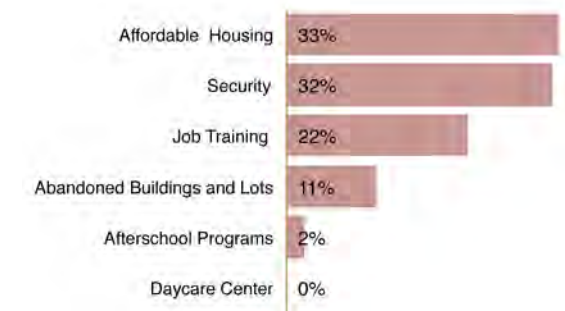
- Abandoned Buildings and Lots
- Afterschool Programs
- Daycare Center

Vision sessions consisted of three workshops held at the Van Dyke Community Center on September 10, 13, and 15, 2014. A total of 186 Van Dyke residents participated in the workshops, some of them participating more than once, along with 18 Brownsville residents. Numerous elected officials and other key stakeholders were invited as observers. Workshop participants were asked to envision how their community could change for the better, map places in the neighborhood that are unique in a positive way and those that are not, and vote on community priorities. Those ideas were gathered and used to develop vision statements, goals, and next steps.

When asked, workshop participants prioritized Affordable Housing (33%) and Security (32%) as the highest priorities in Van Dyke followed by Job Training and Abandoned Buildings and Lots in a tie (11%). Expanding Afterschool Programs and building a Daycare Center in Van Dyke received lower priorities, perhaps a reflection of the older age of vision session's participants.

Residents strongly support the creation of truly af-

Which of the six topics should be implemented more urgently?



\*This chart shows preferences expressed by meeting participants. The report includes results for all six topics, independently of their ranking.

ordable new housing in the neighborhood to enable families to expand and relocate and to bring additional retail stores and services to the area. They are cautious, however, about adding new buildings on Van Dyke property for fear that the area's density will increase while opportunities for open space will decrease. This is a critical trade-off that needs to be evaluated as the vision moves into implementation.

Security comments focused on maintaining functioning entrance door locks and intercoms and on reducing loitering inside lobbies, stairwells, and in front of buildings. They also addressed the overall security of the neighborhood, which is affected by abandoned buildings, empty lots, and poor lighting. Establishing a positive rapport with law enforcement and increasing their presence was also a big part of the conversation

## PROFILE OF VAN DYKE

### PLACE

Located in Brownsville, Brooklyn, Van Dyke I Houses consists of three large superblocks bound by Sutter Avenue, Powell Street, Livonia Avenue, and Mother Gaston Boulevard. Blake and Dumont Avenues intersect the three blocks. The community contains 23 residential buildings, including one senior building known as Van Dyke II, as well as a freestanding community center located along Blake Avenue. Van Dyke I (1955) has 1,603 apartments; Van Dyke II (1964) has 111 units. The NYC Departments of Parks and Recreation manages the Van Dyke Playground (1.4 acres) located along Dumont Avenue.

### NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

In the last two decades, Brownsville, within the boundaries of Brooklyn Community District 16 (CD16), has seen significant expansion in the number of affordable housing units, along with a large infusion of capital by the City for development of affordable, subsidized housing. NYCHA houses 21,000 people or almost 20% of the CD's population.

Van Dyke Houses is within the most impoverished census tract in New York City. In 2010, the Brownsville Partnership was created to address community issues including unemployment, homelessness and crime prevention. This organization draws on the participation of more than 25 different local groups.

### AT-A-GLANCE (FALL 2014)

#### Apartments

- 1,714 apartments (1,603 at Van Dyke I and 111 at Van Dyke II)
- 0.875% vacant rate

#### Residents

- 4,196 residents (4,068 at Van Dyke I and 128 at Van Dyke II)



Above, an aerial view of the Van Dyke Houses.

- 461 families with household heads 62 years and over (353 at Van Dyke I and 108 at Van Dyke II)
- 274 persons 62 years plus (403 at Van Dyke I and 123 at Van Dyke II) 12.5% as percentage of population
- 19 years average tenure in public housing is for Van Dyke I households, 14.7 years for Van Dyke II households
- 277 welfare families (276 at Van Dyke I and 1 at Van Dyke II); 16% of total households
- \$22,314 average gross income at Van Dyke I and \$14,034 average gross income at Van Dyke II
- \$434 average gross rent at Van Dyke I and \$321 average gross rent at Van Dyke II

#### Income

- 874 families with one or more employed; 54.6% of all families (12.7% unemployment in CD16)

#### Building Needs

- \$172 Million 5-Year Physical Needs Assessment
- \$10.8 Million 5-Year Capital Plan:

on security.

Expanding job training opportunities is key for residents to be able to compete and qualify for current and future jobs. As jobs are scarce in Brownsville, residents supported expanding jobs available locally and promoting small business creation and entrepreneurship.

Residents are clear about the fact that abandoned buildings and lots dramatically affect the security and appearance of the neighborhood. They are poorly lit and unsupervised spaces. Residents strongly favor redeveloping them as an opportunity to add affordable housing and services outside of Van Dyke and as a tool to beautify the community and expand opportunities for open space and recreation.

Participants recommended adding afterschool programs as a way to provide safe and focused activities for children and young adults and building a daycare center inside Van Dyke as a way to enable young parents to seek and maintain employment.

In all, there are 35 recommended steps to bring Van Dyke's community vision to fruition. Some will have an immediate impact on the community's quality of life. Others will take longer to be implemented. Implementing the vision is nonetheless a complex undertaking that will require an unprecedented collaborative effort involving NYCHA, the public sector, community partners, and especially residents.

# 1. Introduction

**This report summarizes the results of the Van Dyke Houses' community vision. It identifies critical needs and desirable solutions for that community. As a community driven process, it is built entirely upon the ideas, desires, and expectations presented by participants.**

## Structure of the Report

The Van Dyke Houses' community vision report is divided in three sections.

Following this introduction, **Section 2: The Community Vision** describes goals, issues, and solutions for each of the six topics address by the vision process.

**Section 3: Implementation** provides an overview of how the vision can be implemented.

## Background on NextGeneration NYCHA

The Van Dyke Houses' vision is one of three pilot community vision programs developed as part of NextGeneration NYCHA, a citywide effort to ensure the sustainability of NYCHA's communities for the next generation. The three communities are the Van Dyke Houses and the Ingersoll Houses in Brooklyn, and the Mill Brook Houses in the Bronx.

## Organizing and Facilitation

NYCHA partnered with Gianni Longo and Associates (GLA) to design and facilitate the vision sessions, and identify the long-term goals and short-term actions

that reflect the community's vision. NYCHA also partnered with New York Communities for Change (NYCC) and Community Voices Heard (CVH) to canvass the three communities, organize residents, and recruit participants to the vision sessions. Robin Hood Foundation's Housing Advisory Board provided philanthropic support for the initiative.

*“NYCHA’s mission is to increase opportunities for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers by providing safe, affordable housing and facilitating access to social and community services.”*

FROM [WWW.NYC.GOV/NYCHA](http://WWW.NYC.GOV/NYCHA)



## 2. The Community Vision

The goals and actions listed below provide a snapshot of Van Dyke Houses' potential. They reveal residents' commitment to improve the quality of their lives and of their community, despite day-to-day hardships and pressing needs.

### Structure of this Section

This section is divided into six parts, one for each of the vision topics:

- Affordable Housing
- Security
- Job Training
- Abandoned Buildings and Lots
- Afterschool Programs
- Daycare Center

The topics were identified during the organizing and canvassing activities conducted throughout the summer of 2014. They represent priority issues for residents of Van Dyke.

The topics are listed in the order prioritized by meeting participants. Each topic includes a summary of issues as reported by participants, a vision statement, goals, and implementation steps.

### Topic 1: Affordable Housing

*"Rents are going up while paychecks are not."*

*"'Affordable' doesn't pertain to the people in the community."*

*Must be affordable for us."*

#### MEETING PARTICIPANTS

#### ISSUES

Residents argue that HUD's affordable housing thresholds based on the AMI (area median income) are too high and do not reflect the economic conditions in Brownsville. They see the need for new truly affordable housing to be built in the neighborhood as a way to enable families to expand and relocate to new homes, while remaining in the same neighborhood. They also see the construction of truly affordable housing as a tool to bring retail stores and services to the neighborhood, to open opportunities for small businesses, and to create additional jobs for residents. They are cautious about adding new development inside Van Dyke for fear

that it would increase the area's density and preclude the development of open space. They also see affordable housing as a strategy to address the issue of the abandoned buildings and lots, discussed in Topic #4.

#### VISION

Truly affordable, suitably-sized apartments are available to individuals, seniors, and families living in the community.

#### GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Develop new housing that is affordable to Van Dyke residents
- Introduce shops and services to improve quality of life and create job opportunities
- Keep rents stable

#### IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Identify suitable location for affordable housing both in Van Dyke and in the surrounding neighborhood
- Evaluate the pros, cons, and trade offs of adding new affordable housing on the Van Dyke campus
- Identify the types of buildings and the mix of shopping, services and programs that best fit Van Dyke's community vision
- Base rental levels for the new units to match the economic profile of Van Dyke and Brownsville residents
- Seek funding sources and partners to invest and build affordable housing in the neighborhood
- Identify incentives and programs to attract retail,

## A COMMUNITY DRIVEN PROCESS

Van Dyke's goals and actions stem from a variety of sources. The six topics were identified during the canvassing phase conducted by NYCC. The actions resulted from ideas collected from brainstorming sessions, mapping of strong and weak places, open mike sessions, questionnaires, and polling using keypad technology.

### CANVASSING THE COMMUNITY

The Van Dyke Houses NextGeneration NYCHA vision started in the summer of 2014 with a program of extensive canvassing of the community's residents by NYCC. They surveyed residents in individual buildings, conducted community-wide meetings, identified major topics of importance for the community, and identified a cadre of resident-leaders willing to advocate for them. They also met with elected and community leaders representing the larger Brownsville area.

### THE VISION PROCESS

The vision process consisted of three sessions held at the Van Dyke Community Center on September 10, 13, and 15, 2014.

The sessions were structured as follows:

- In the first session, participants were randomly assigned to one of the topics identified during the canvassing phase. They were asked to imagine how the community would change for the better, in the long term, if their assigned topics were addressed. They were also asked to suggest short-term actions to improve the quality of life in the community. These long-term visions and short-term actions were later summarized and presented back to residents at the second session.
- In the second session, participants were asked to define the characteristics of the top strong and weak places

in Van Dyke and its surroundings, and to suggest how to transform weak places into strong places.

- In the third and final session, participants reviewed and prioritized the results of the first two sessions.

All three sessions included an open mike session to provide residents with an opportunity to voice additional concerns and opinions and to reflect on the vision itself.

A total of 186 Van Dyke residents and an additional 18 Brownsville residents attended the three vision sessions. Of those, several came to more than one session.

The majority of participants were older residents. 76% were over the age of 45. 27% were seniors over the age of 64. 76% were female. Of all the participants, the majority, 61%, had lived in the Van Dyke and Brownsville area for a minimum of 30 years. 13% had lived in the area for 50 years or more. Just 11% had lived in the area for less than 4 years. They know their community well, and had seen the changes it has gone through.





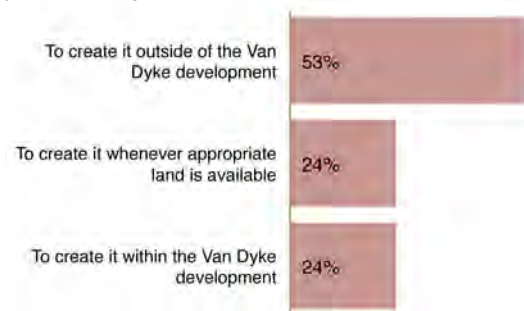
small business, and services to the neighborhood

### PRIORITIES

53% of residents prefer new affordable housing to be created outside of the Van Dyke Houses, while 24% would like to see them created in Van Dyke. 38% declare that new housing should be given to Van Dyke residents first. The majority (85%) stated that new affordable housing should incorporate shopping, services and programs for residents.

### Topic 2: Security

If new affordable housing is created in this area, which is preferable to you...



*The police are not doing the job they are required to do.”*  
*“Keep the doors locked, give everyone a key, stop shooting, and find things for the kids to do.”*

MEETING PARTICIPANT

### ISSUES

Participants expressed strong concerns about the safety of the Van Dyke Houses and the Brownsville area. Specifically they made reference to building-related issues such as broken lobby door locks, intercom systems that do not work effectively, broken lights in hallways and staircases, and loitering inside and in front of buildings. They also identified poor lighting of community grounds as an additional issue with an impact on the community’s security. Finally, they pointed to the lack of security in the areas adjacent to the community where a combination of abandoned buildings and lots, poor lighting (particularly near the Livonia Subway station), and gang and drug-related activities contribute to making the community unsafe.

### VISION

Individual apartments, building hallways and common areas are well lit, well maintained, safe, and secure for residents’ use and enjoyment.

### GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Monitor and control access to individual buildings
- Establish a strong and positive relationship with NYPD
- Improve lighting conditions in Van Dyke Houses and surrounding neighborhood

### IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Quantify cost of repairing, improving, or installing new security devices in every building and pursue available funding sources
- Provide residents with additional lobby door keys at an affordable price
- Identify high crime areas in the community and in the neighborhood, and make site-specific recommendations to increase the safety of those areas
- Work with law enforcement at improving respect and trust between residents and the police
- Consider reintroducing police foot patrols in the community
- Identify and adopt anti-violence programs that are suitable to Van Dyke’s conditions
- Organize individual buildings to address safety and quality of life issues
- Focus on the subway stations that serve the community to improve access and lighting and increase police presence

## PLACE MATTERS: STRONG PLACES

Participants in the second visioning workshop engaged in a mapping exercise to identify strong and weak places within the Van Dyke Houses and Brownsville neighborhood. Participants did so by placing green dots representing strong places, and red dots representing weak places on a map.

### STRONG PLACES

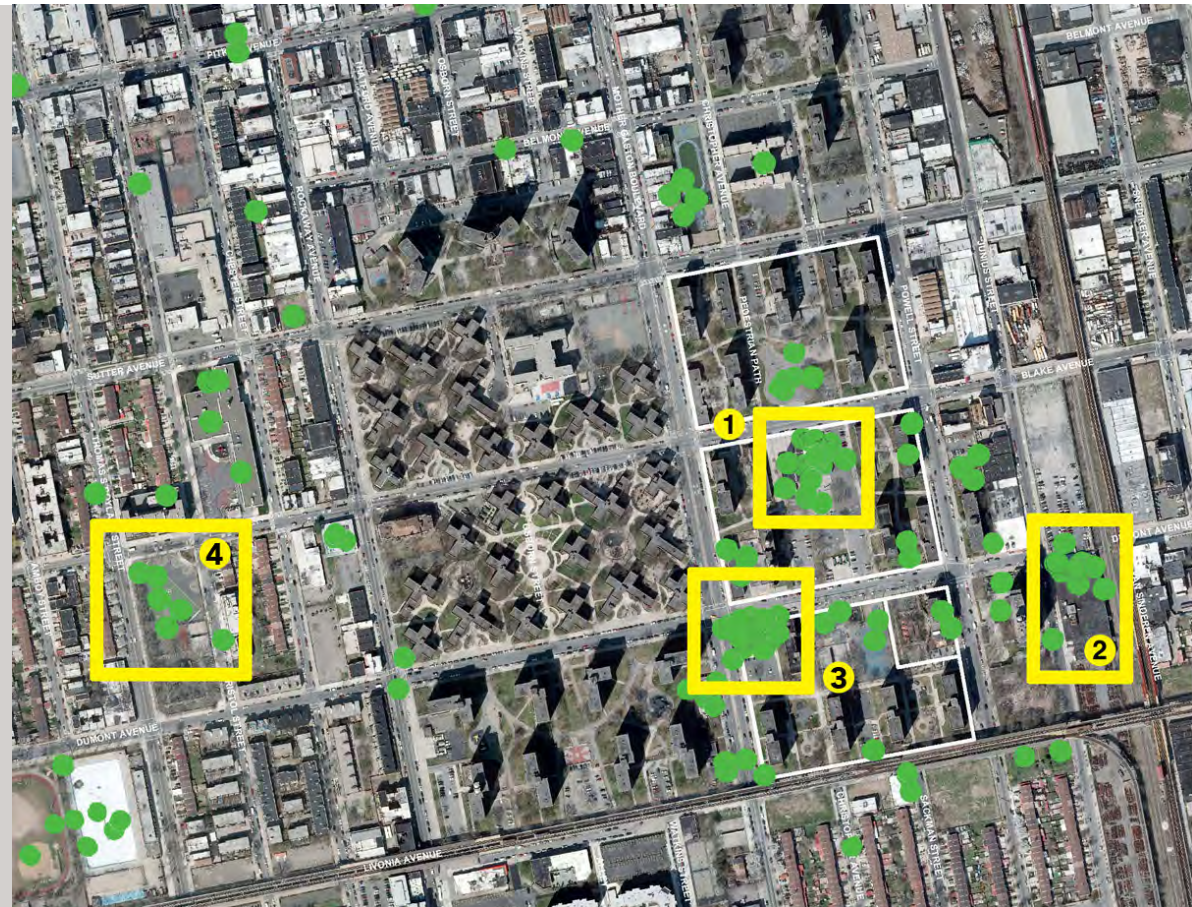
Strong places are attractive, desirable to visit, and unique in a positive way.

### COMMUNITY SPACES

Strong places including the Van Dyke Community Center on Blake Avenue (#1 on map). This space has good operating hours, recreational and fitness facilities, services for children and teenagers, and building security. Residents can also rent out spaces within the center for events.

### IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Strong places within Brownsville span from great retail like the Food Bazaar at Junius Street and Dumont Avenue (#2 on map), to the Brooklyn Public Library at Dumont Avenue and Mother Gaston Boulevard (#3 on map), to the Teacher's Preparatory High School at Thomas Boyland Street and Blake Avenue (#4 on map). The Food Bazaar offers an affordable variety of groceries, is in close proximity to Van Dyke, and accessible to mass transit. The Library has a variety of multicultural activities and classes for youth to engage in, and is con-



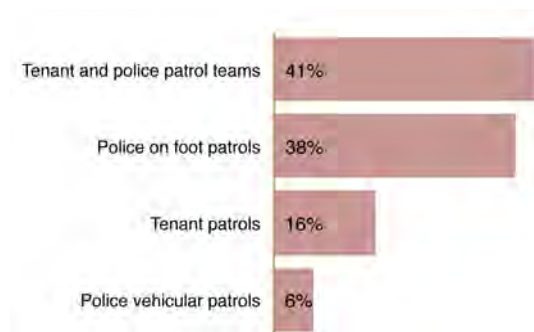
This map shows the totality of strong places identified for the Van Dyke Houses and the neighborhood immediately surrounding it. The areas highlighted in yellow and numbered identify the top two strong places in the neighborhood.

sidered a safe space. Teacher's Prep has afterschool recreational activities, is clean, and well maintained.

## PRIORITIES

41% of residents support creating tenant and NYPD patrol teams to help keep Van Dyke safe, followed by implementing on-foot NYPD patrols of the grounds (38%). When asked to prioritize physical improvements to the neighborhood, 68% selected repairing building door locks and intercoms while 20% preferred repairing common areas, open spaces, and playgrounds. 12% chose providing better lighting to make the neighborhood safer.

Which would make the community more secure...



## Topic 3: Job Training

*“Lack of employment leads to welfare, crime, illiteracy.”*

MEETING PARTICIPANT

### ISSUES

Participants’ comments focused on two issues: the lack of available job training programs and the limited types of jobs for which they can qualify. Expanding job training is key for residents. The integration of affordable housing with retail stores and services, discussed in Topic 1: Affordable Housing, presents an opportunity to expand job opportunities locally and to promote small business creation. NYCHA’s Job-Plus Program is expanding to include Van Dyke and is scheduled to open in November 2014.

### VISION

Effective job training and placement programs prepare youth and adults for the jobs and skills needed to succeed.

### GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Train residents to qualify for current and emerging jobs
- Focus on job readiness, resume writing, interview skills, and money management
- Expand opportunities for small-business creation and start-ups

## IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Identify and prioritize Van Dyke’s residents’ job training needs
- Identify job training programs offered by community partners that best meet those needs
- Initiate mentoring program aimed at young adults and focused on job readiness
- Identify incentives, programs, and resources to attract new small businesses and nurture local ones
- Consider designating a manufacturing zone in the neighborhood to increase job opportunities

## Topic 4: Abandoned Buildings and Lots

*“Abandoned lots seem to not be a priority”*

*“Involve the community in the planning process; ideas for new development must come from community.”*

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

### ISSUES

Residents understand that many abandoned buildings in Brownsville are a big community-wide issue and pose a danger to the neighborhood, as they are poorly lit and unsupervised spaces. Redeveloping them presents an opportunity to add affordable housing and services

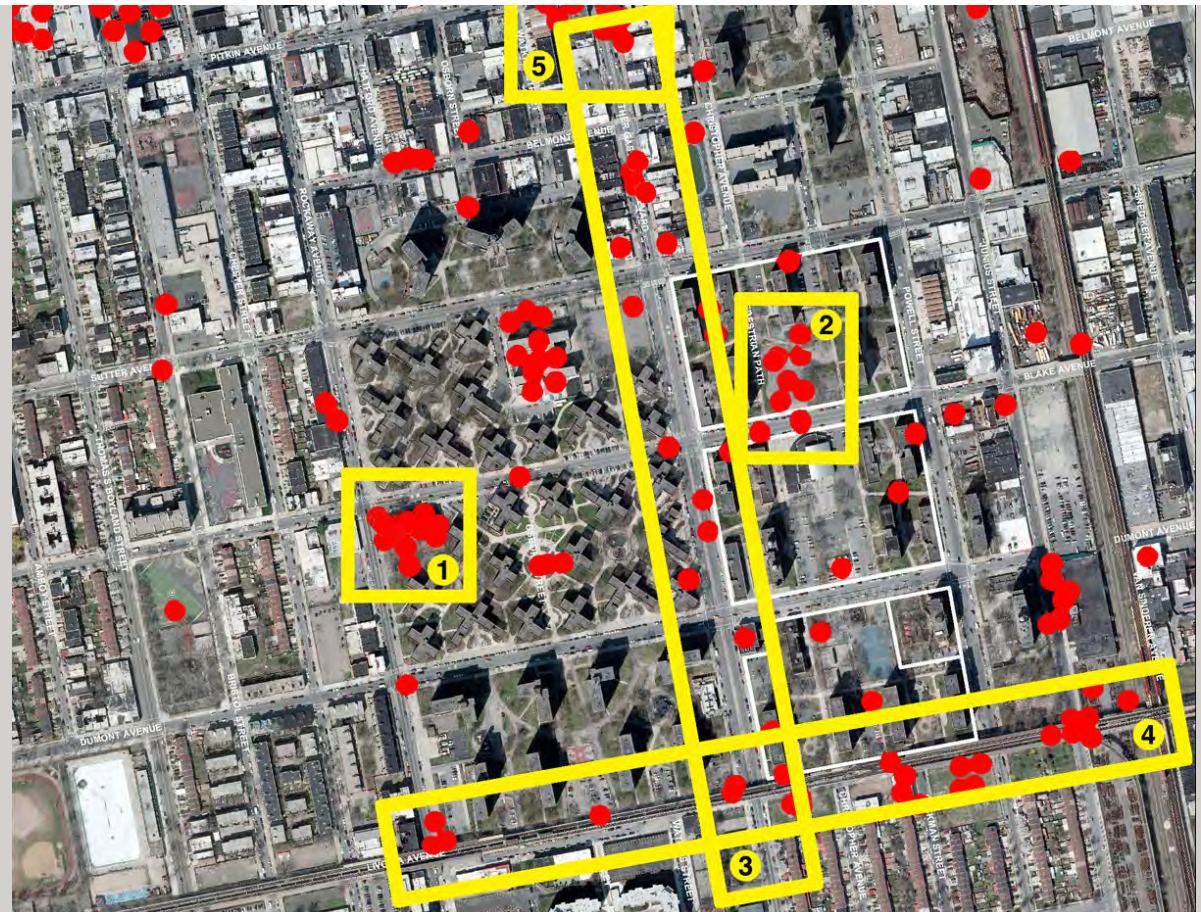
## PLACE MATTERS: WEAK PLACES

### WEAK PLACES

Weak places are blighted and unsafe places that are undesirable to visit and reflect poorly on the community.

### AROUND BROWNSVILLE

The abandoned school at Blake Avenue and Rockaway Avenue (#1 on map) has sat vacant for nearly 40 years according to residents. It has become a location for criminal activity and rodent and bird infestation and is poorly lit. . Public spaces in Brownsville and Van Dyke including the area facing the Community Center (#2 on map), Mother Gaston Boulevard (#3 on map), and Livonia Avenue (#4 on map) are plagued with drug and gang activity, poor lighting, lack of police patrolling, vacant storefronts, and litter. The abandoned Chase Bank on Mother Gaston Boulevard and Pitkin Avenue attracts homeless people (#5 on the map).



This map shows the totality of weak places identified for the Van Dyke Houses and the neighborhood immediately surrounding it. The areas highlighted in yellow and numbered identify the top four weak places in the neighborhood. Notice that there is some overlap between strong places (previous map) and weak places.

outside of the limits of Van Dyke and an opportunity to beautify the community and expand open space and recreation.

### VISION

Formerly abandoned and vacant buildings and lots are repurposed, cleaned up, or demolished and redeveloped to enhance the neighborhood, and expand goods and services available to residents.

### GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Use redevelopment to create affordable housing, retail stores, and services
- Encourage outside investors and developers to consider Brownsville
- Clean and beautify the neighborhood

### IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Inventory and evaluate the suitability for redevelopment of vacant buildings and abandoned lots throughout the community
- Define the type of development and the appropriate mix of uses best suited for Van Dyke and the surrounding community
- Join forces with neighborhood and resident associations in Brownsville and in other adjacent NYCHA communities
- Work with community partners and identify incen-

tives for attracting redevelopment to Brownsville

- Identify appropriate tools to create redevelopment including the use of eminent domain
- Improve the community's appearance with beautification programs, gardening, landscaping, and murals by community
- Engage community in cleaning and beautifying the surrounding neighborhood
- Identify and designate places for community gardens

### PRIORITIES

The majority of participants (78%) believe that improvements to vacant buildings and lots must require active participation from residents. When asked to prioritize physical improvements that would make the neighborhood safer, 68% selected repairing building door locks and intercoms, 20% preferred repairing common areas, open spaces, and playgrounds, and 12% chose providing better lighting.

If we redevelop abandoned buildings and lots, should the improvements...



Given capital improvement funding gaps, what's more important...



### Topic 5: After-School Programs

*“Current programs are bad. They offer no school help.”*

MEETING PARTICIPANT

#### ISSUES

Residents indicated that current afterschool programs do not meet the needs of the Van Dyke community children (aged 5+) and young adults (up to age 23). They provide little academic assistance or age-appropriate recreational programs.

#### VISION

Free, structured, safe afterschool programs which target the needs and interests of children and young adults, including those with special needs.

#### GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Expand available programs to include academics, recreation, life skills, and creativity

#### IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

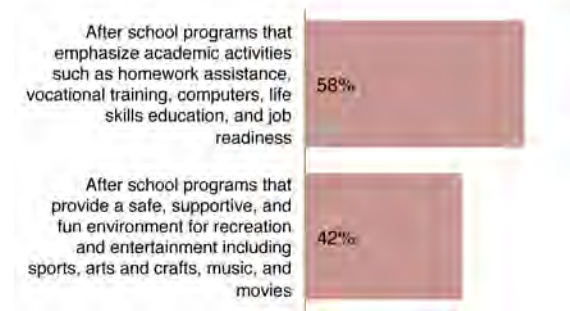
- Work with community partners to identify and implement afterschool programs that meet the need of the Van Dyke community school age population
- Promote and expand the use of recreational and sport facilities available in the neighborhood

- Expand programs and hours of operation at the Van Dyke Community Center specifically to provide services over the age of 16 residents
- Identify and promote internship opportunities with local businesses

#### PRIORITIES

58% of participants indicated that after-school programs must emphasize academic activities such as homework assistance, vocational training, computer skills, life skills education, and job readiness.

Which you believe would work better for our community...



### Topic 6: Daycare Center

*“Redevelop open spaces into recreation spaces, don’t take the spaces away from the children.”*

MEETING PARTICIPANT

#### ISSUES

Participants identified the need to establish a daycare facility in Van Dyke that accepts very young children, and that offers extended hours of operation to help young families and parents find suitable work.

#### VISION

An affordable daycare center provides a healthy, safe, and fun environment for young children.

#### GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Locate a daycare center in Van Dyke to serve children throughout the neighborhood

#### IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Identify optimal location and determine the cost of building a daycare center in Van Dyke
- Identify funding sources and partners to build the center
- Work with city agencies and community partners to address the center’s programmatic, health, and nutritional aspects
- Promote parent involvement and create opportunities for seniors to interact with youngest residents

## 3. Implementation

The Van Dyke Houses' community vision is far reaching. It recommends 35 implementation steps. Some of the steps can be implemented right away and will have an immediate impact on the community's quality of life. Others will take longer to be realized. All will require a cooperative effort engaging NYCHA, community partners, and residents over time. The role of key implementation players is briefly described below.

### NYCHA

As the landlord of Van Dyke Houses, NYCHA is responsible for implementing those elements of the vision that focus on the physical conditions of individual apartments, buildings, and grounds including: streamlining repairs, improving maintenance, installing security cameras, fixing locks and intercoms, and improving lighting throughout the community. As a landowner, NYCHA can also help create additional affordable and senior housing within Van Dyke campus.

### Community Partners

Community partners can help with implementation steps that go beyond NYCHA's responsibilities. Partners include agencies such as the New York City Police Department, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the Economic Development Corporation, and the Department of Small Businesses Services. These agencies can play a role in building new affordable housing, improving security in the neighborhood, and expanding economic opportunities.

Community partners also include community-based organizations that can oversee job training, afterschool programs, and childcare activities.

### Residents

Residents have perhaps the most important role in ensuring implementation of the vision. They are motivated, understand best what works and what does not work in the community, and have expressed readiness to champion the vision. Residents can engage NYCHA, identify and work with the appropriate community partners, and set priorities. They can also address area-wide issues by reaching out to residents of Brownsville and other nearby NYCHA communities. Residents can also address compliance with safety rules and quality of life issues by organizing within buildings.

*“Once people are involved, they can be active, and hold other people accountable. We deserve a strong quality of life.”*

COMMUNITY PARTICIPANT