

Chinatown's Tenement Fire Analysis

Team 4: Peter, Ella, Cole, Melanie

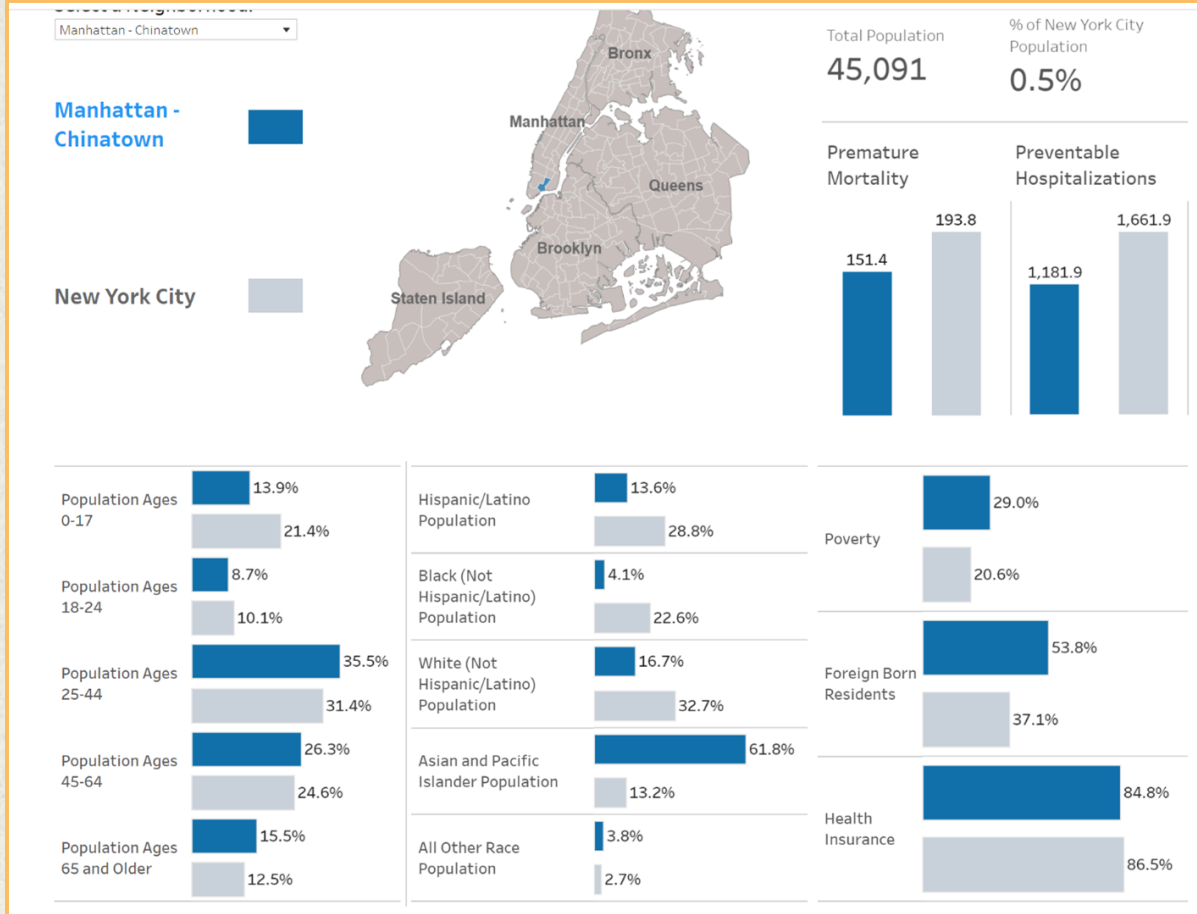


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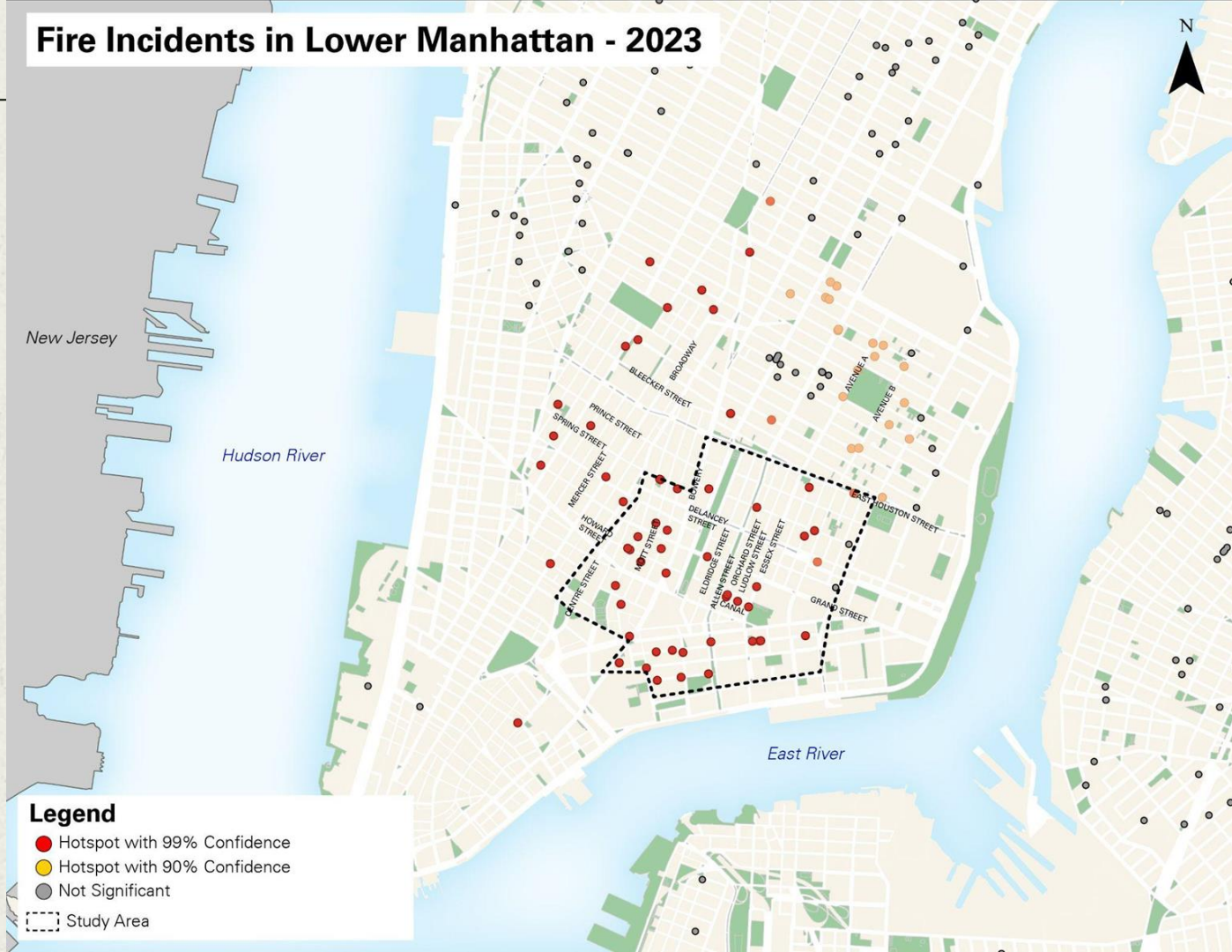


Who Lives in Chinatown?



Source: NYC
Neighborhood Health
Atlas - NYC Health

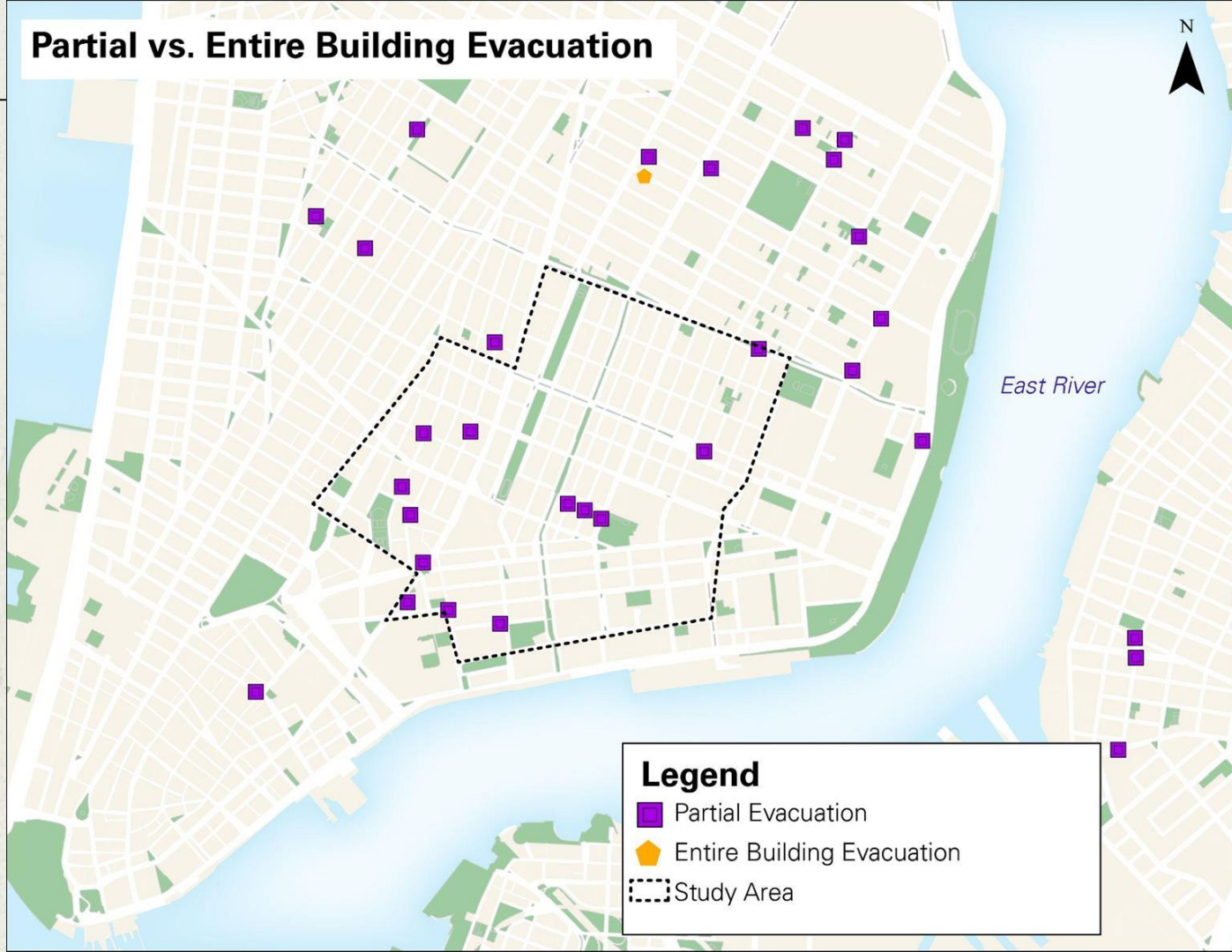
Fire Incidents in Lower Manhattan - 2023






Legend

- Hotspot with 99% Confidence
- Hotspot with 90% Confidence
- Not Significant
- Study Area

Partial vs. Entire Building Evacuation



Legend

-  Partial Evacuation
-  Entire Building Evacuation
-  Study Area

Stakeholder Engagement Process

- Vic Lee, **Welcome to Chinatown**
- Simon Ressler, **FDNY (retired)**
- David Maggiotto, **DOB Office of the Press Secretary**
- John Alter, **HPD Office of Asset & Property Management**
- John Shapiro, **Pratt Institute**
- Staff at **Chinese American Planning Council Community Centers** and at **VNS Health**
- **Councilmember Marte's office** (Caitlin, Chief-of-Staff, and Max, Legislative Director)
- **Senator Kavanagh's office** (Naomi, Legislative Analyst, and Dan, Community Affairs)



The Survey!

- Two surveys
 - English (21 responses)
 - Majority filled out online
 - Chinese (98 responses)
 - Majority filled out on paper
- Majority filled out by participants at Chinese-American Planning Council community centers (daycare, afterschool, and senior centers)
- Survey up for two weeks
- Intent to gauge community concern



Demographics and Differences

English Survey Responses:

- 57% live in Manhattan Chinatown
- 80% are Asian
- 43% are aged 35-44
 - 19% are aged 25-34
 - 19% are aged 55-64
- 80% primary language English
- 50% have a Bachelor's degree
 - 35% have a Masters degree
- 47% earn \$100k+
 - 21.1% earn \$60,000-\$99,999

Chinese Survey Responses:

- 60% live in Manhattan Chinatown
- 100% are Asian
- 39% are aged 75+
 - 29.6% are aged 65-74
 - 18.5% are aged 35-44
- 81% primary language Cantonese
- 44% have a High School degree
 - 39.7% have completed up to 12th grade
- 78% earn under \$30,000
 - 17.6% earn \$30,000-\$59,999

Our Target Audience? Yes!

English Survey Responses:

- 69% are tenants (renters)
- 61% live in a walk-up (no elevator)
- 72% have 4-6 floors in their building
- 33% have over 18 units in their building
- 76% have lived in Chinatown for 5+ years

Chinese Survey Responses:

- 76% are tenants (renters)
- 55% live in a walk-up (no elevator)
- 49% have 4-6 floors in their building
- 52% have over 18 units in their building
- 82% have lived in Chinatown for 5+ years

Personal Experience

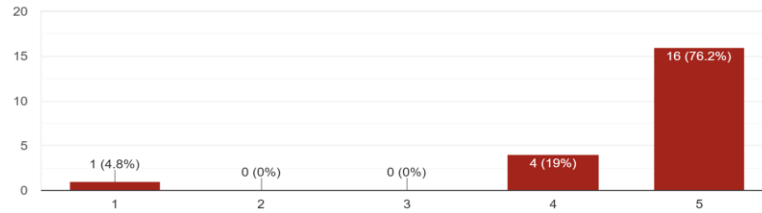
- 38% from English survey experienced a fire
 - 29% had access to resources
- 21 % from Chinese survey experienced a fire
 - 24% had access to resources



Awareness and Concern

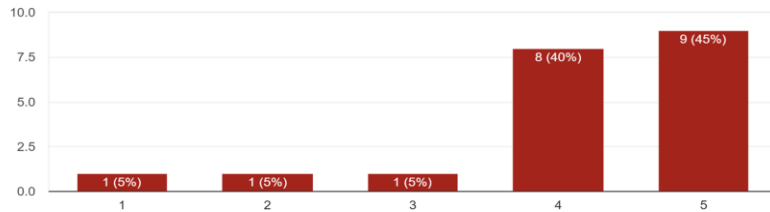
8 - To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Tenement fires are a threat to the Chinatown community?"

21 responses



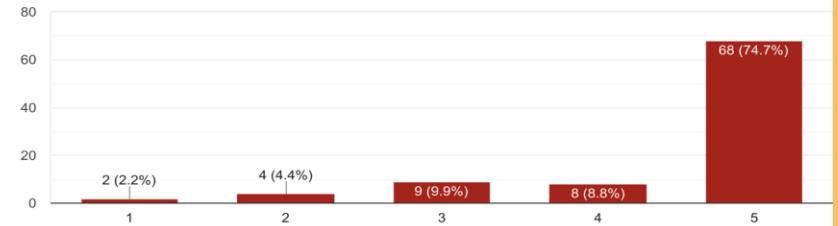
9 - To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Tenement fires affect Chinatown more than other NYC neighborhoods?"

20 responses



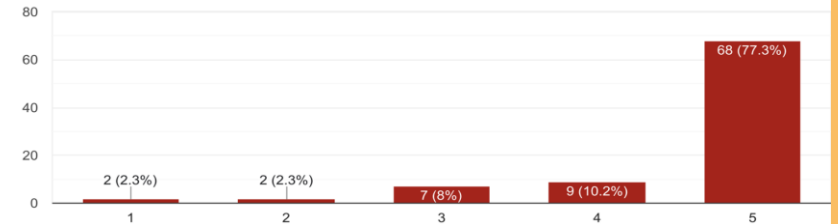
8) 您在多大程度上同意以下说法：“楼房火灾是对唐人街社区的威胁”

91 responses



9) 您在多大程度上同意以下说法：“楼房火灾对唐人街的影响比对纽约市其他街区更大”。

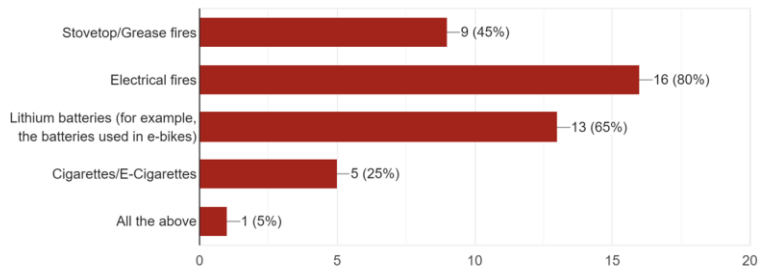
88 responses



Awareness and Concern

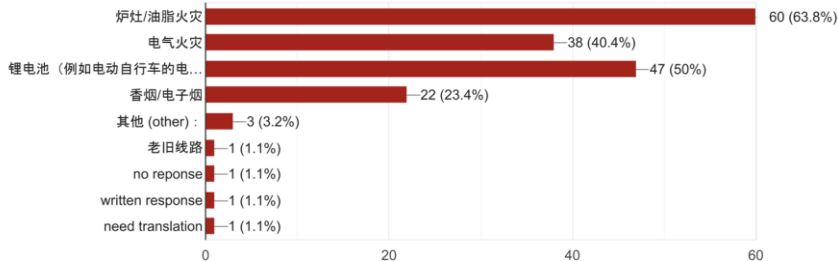
15 - In your opinion, what are the most threatening causes of fires?

20 responses



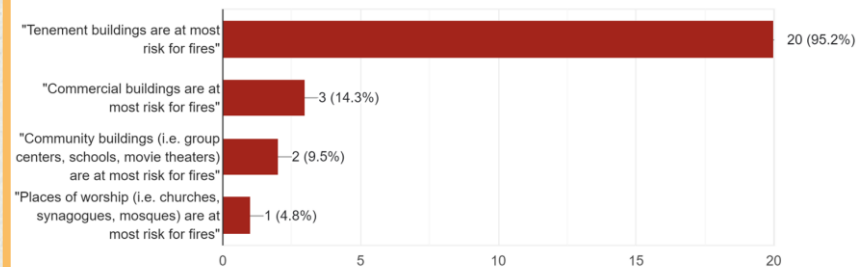
15) 在您看来，最有威胁的火灾原因是什么？

94 responses



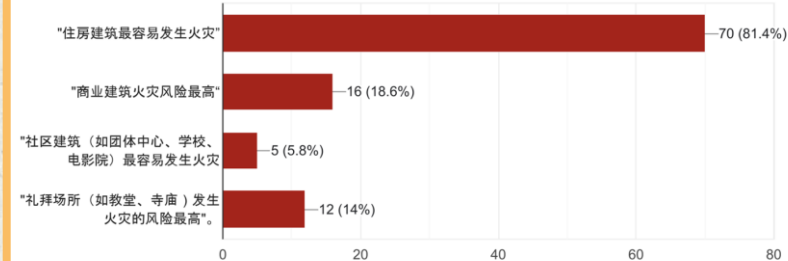
16 - Select the statement(s) you most agree with:

21 responses

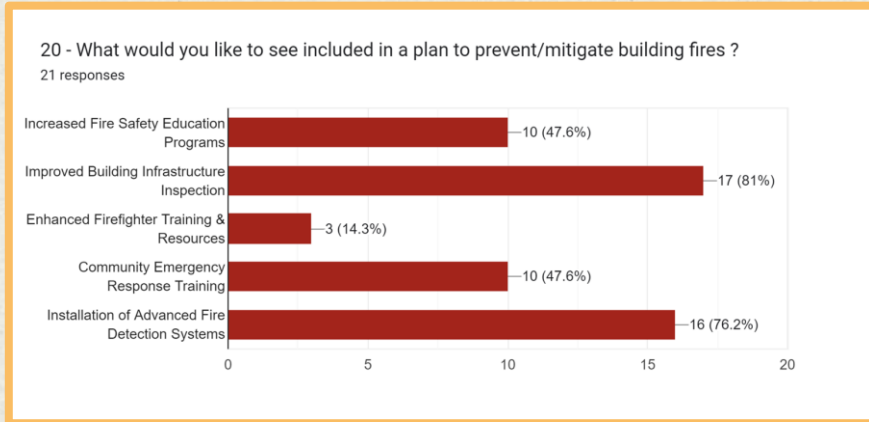


16) 请选择您最同意的说法：

86 responses



Fire Safety



1. Installation of Advanced Fire Detection Systems

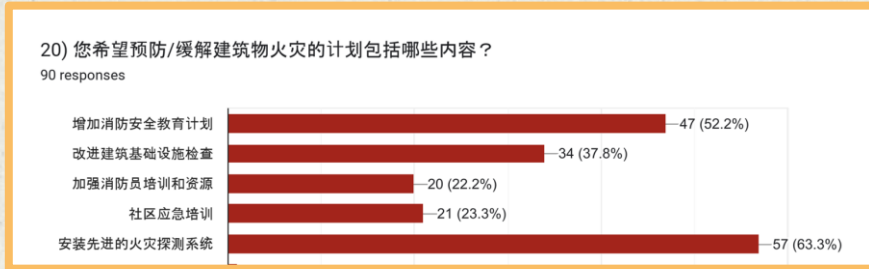
Feasible

1. Improved Building Infrastructure Inspections

More Feasible

1. Increased Fire Safety Education Programs

Incredibly Feasible!!!



Survey Takeaways!

- We reached our target audience!
 - Long-term Chinatown Residents (5+ years)
 - Older Residents Aged 65+
 - Renters
 - Tenement Building Tenants
- Clear Common Beliefs:
 - Buildings fires are more prominent in Chinatown
 - Buildings fires are a threat to Chinatown
 - Tenement buildings are at most risk
- Agreed upon actions to improve fire safety in Chinatown
 - Installation of Advanced Fire Detection Systems
 - Improved Building Infrastructure Inspection
 - Increased Fire Safety Education Programs



E-Bike Charging Hub Stations

- An e-bike charging hub proposal was rejected by Manhattan CB 1 in late March 2024
 - “diminishes this highly trafficked pedestrian space at this important civic site at City Hall”
- **Potential Spots: Dimes Square; Gotham Park; small underutilized park right behind Wu’s Wonton**
- Kiosks include charging cabinets for e-bikes and a mobile app to track charging process
- Working with NYC Street Deliveristas Hubs
- Implement license plate requirement to assist in tracking and data collection



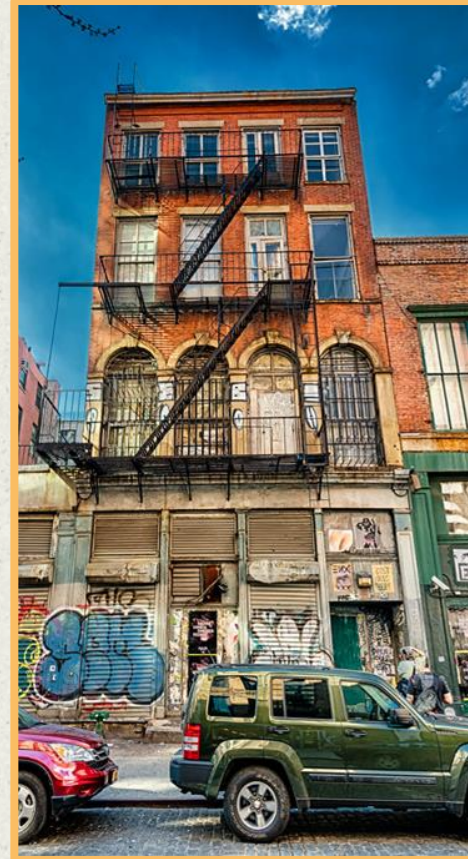
Vacate Orders

- 27-2139 *Power to order dwelling vacated. (a) Any dwelling or part thereof, which, because of a **structural or fire safety hazard**, defects in plumbing, sewage, drainage, or cleanliness, or any other violation of this code or any other applicable law, constitutes a **danger to the life, health, or safety of its occupants**, shall be deemed to be **unfit for human habitation**. (b) The department may order or cause any dwelling or part thereof which is unfit for human habitation to be vacated*
- *The order shall **require that the owner correct the conditions** which render the dwelling or part thereof unfit for human habitation within a period of time*



Full Vacate Orders

- Come from DOB or FDNY
 - Necessitates inspection on structural integrity
- On Landlord to secure the premises
- Building will be robbed within 24hrs of vacate order
- Vacate orders in place until repairs made
 - 3-5 years
- Residents displaced
- Unnecessary burden on city services



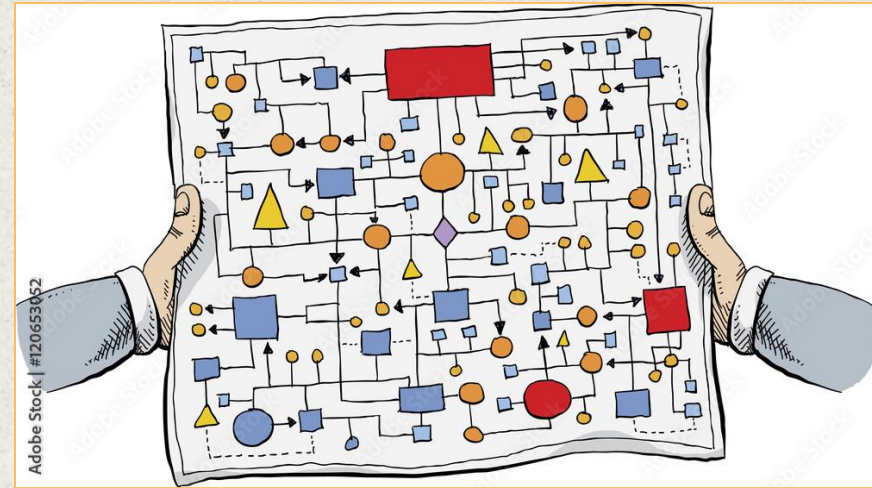
Partial Vacate Orders

- Only apply to affected apartments
 - One(s) that caught fire
 - Others affected by ensuing water damage
- Full Vacate → Partial Vacate
 - On Landlord
- Full lift of Vacate Orders
 - On Landlord
- Insurance company takes a while .
- Rent Stabilized
 - Landlords will drag their feet



A Difficult to Navigate System

- When a fire happens, where do people go?
 - First stop: Red Cross hotels program
 - After a short stay, the burden shifts
 - → tenants in need of shelter must navigate a reactive and complicated system - Emergency Housing Services (HPD)



An Interagency Fire Task Force

IDEA: DESIGNATED CONTACTS

DOB, HPD, Red Cross, landlords, tenants

Process of asking for help is:

- Long
- Difficult

Interagency meetings:

- Many players involved
- Chaotic
 - Especially a problem when there are so many units like Mulberry fire.

→ HPD to be more proactive.



Housing Preservation & Development



**American
Red Cross**



Buildings

Chinatown Community Collection/Fund

- Informal but efficient tactic of providing e-gift cards
 - Gives tenants the flexibility to buy their necessary items
- New and nimble organizations like “Welcome to Chinatown” are preferred
 - Skills in raising money and initiating community involvement - “an under tapped resource”
- Complete:
 - **Needs Assessments:** efficient distributions for individuals and families
 - **Partnerships for Provisions:** collaboration to find additional resources and allocation methods
 - **Case Monitoring:** track the outcomes of those receiving assistance, get feedback from tenants and making adjustments as needed



Advocacy & Legal Resources for Displaced Tenants

Tenants have a right to return to their unit, but have legitimate fears about pushing their landlords. What might help?

- Tenants rights education
- Connect tenants with lawyers early on
- Beyond this, advocacy and organizing support can make a critical difference – both for individuals and for collective solutions



Legislation in the Works



Proposed laws currently being discussed in the City Council would:

- create a fire emergency response guide (to be shared with fire victims)
- in the event of a vacate order,
 - support tenants with relocation
 - inform tenants of their rights (and landlords of their obligations)
 - allow displaced tenants to access shelter close to home

Next Steps

- Create an official plan/maps for e-bike charging hubs
- Interview HPD case managers and tenants that have interacted with HPD and Red Cross specifically
- Explore other avenues:
 - Incentivizing landlords to make repairs
 - A more nuanced approach to vacate orders

Thank you!
Questions?
