

Executive Summary

To: Manhattan Community Board 3

From: Mariana Rich, 2014 – 2015 FCNY Community Planning Fellow

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Re: Community Accessibility Executive Summary

1. Study Description and Goals

The study prepared for Manhattan Community Board 3 analyzes “*community accessibility for older adults and people with mobility disabilities*” in order to improve their quality of life and to address current and future accessibility issues. The study measures the accessibility of goods (e.g. fresh food access, grocery stores, pharmacies), services (e.g. recreation services, health assistance, friendly visiting), the public right of way (sidewalks and street crossings) and housing buildings (e.g. walk-up buildings, buildings with elevator services) in a selected geographic area of Community District 3 (CD3). The study also aims to create a model that can be used in other applicable areas of the community district.

2. Older Adults and People with Mobility Disabilities in CB3

According to the New York City Department for the Aging and the 2010 U.S. Census, approximately 15 percent of the total population in CD 3 is aged 65 and older. There are 12 community districts in Manhattan, and CD 3 ranks third in its percentage of the total population comprised of elderly residents. In first place is CD 8 (the Upper East Side) with 18 percent, followed by CD 7 (the Upper West Side) with 16 percent. A significant concern is that based on the NY Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) and federal poverty level data, 60 percent of the older adult population in CD 3 are below the poverty line¹ (Upper East and the Upper West Side have 15 and 27 percent, respectively). According to the 2008 – 2012 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates, 9 percent of the population in CD 3 lives with a mobility disability, wherein the highest concentrations are among senior residents where 33 percent of them reported having a mobility disability. Finally, 37 percent of the older adult population aged 65 and older are living in a one-person household² according to the ACS, and even higher rates are experienced by those 75 and older. Both the older adults and people with mobility disabilities in CD 3 are vulnerable populations that share similar challenges and needs, which Community Board 3 hopes to address.

¹ According to the Federal Reserve System in 2015 a 1 person household is under the poverty line when receives an annual income of \$11,770 and \$15, 930 for a couple. Retrieved from http://familiesusa.org/sites/default/files/product_documents/FPL-federal-register.pdf

² The U.S. Census Glossary household definition: a household includes all the people who occupy a housing unit as their usual place of residence

3. Selecting the Geographic Area of Study

Using GIS software and data from the U.S. Census, the criteria for selection was based on:

- High concentrations of older adult population (aged 75+).
- High concentrations of older adults (aged 65+) with low median household income.
- High concentrations of population with mobility difficulties (aged 75+).
- Good mix of walk up buildings and buildings with elevator services.
- Complicated intersections, wide roadways and high concentration of collisions.

Suggested Areas for Study



Source: NYC Department of City Planning



Census Tract 25 and 8
 Source: NYC Department of City Planning, 2013

4. Identifying accessibility gaps

An inventory of the four features (goods, services, the public right-of-way, and housing typologies) was studied for both availability and physical accessibility in Census Tract 8. Also two focus groups were conducted with elderly residents and residents with mobility difficulties, or staff members of organizations working with elderly and residents with mobility difficulties living within the study area boundaries. Physical accessibility was ranked as follows:

- **1 (Good Accessibility)** = no step at the entrance, could have a ramp or not, there is some degree of obstruction.
- **2 (Fair Accessibility)** = having one or two steps at the entrance, there is some degree of obstruction.
- **3 (Poor Accessibility)** = requires the use of stairs, usually second floor or underground stores.

Goods:

In an area of 54 acres, 237 businesses were found where 57 percent of them qualified in the field survey as having good accessibility,

The study found that:

- Cultural heritage is a very important component (many seniors prefer to do their shopping in Chinese stores).
- Two Asian supermarkets in the area act as full-service grocery stores for the residents; one is not ADA accessible.
- 20 out of 53 food stores receive food stamps, most of them are market and grocery stores and just one supermarket.
- The food stores that had some type of inaccessibility usually were because they showed to have some type of obstruction or a few steps at the entrance.
- 17 percent of retail space is vacant on blocks with high concentrations of senior residents.
- Older adults reported having difficulties when doing the groceries shopping.
- Many businesses do not have signs or have signs in Chinese only, which makes it difficult to know what they are.

Services:

In field surveys, 36 percent of the sites qualified as having good accessibility. Services facilities were divided in two groups:

1. All Ages Facilities and Program Sites such as schools, social associations, religious organization, libraries, parks, plazas, and social services for children, among others.
2. Older Adult Related Facilities and Program Sites such as NNORCs, Senior Centers, Senior Services, Day Care facilities, and Nursing Homes.

The study found that:

- The Chatham Square Library is a space of reunion for seniors, but it is not fully accessible.
- Most civic and social organizations, religious organizations and personal care services have poor and fair accessibility, which are facilities that are frequently visited by seniors.
- Not all Entrances of parks and playgrounds are ADA accessible, and also bathrooms are not ADA compliant.
- The plaza at the east side of the Tanahey Playgrounds is a good example of quality public space for seniors and people with mobility disabilities.
- Professional services that are located on second floors with stairs as their only way of access present the most challenging accessibility.
- Staff members from University Settlement expressed that senior centers in the district serve at capacity.

Housing:

Findings suggest that 94 percent of the buildings in the study area are walk-up buildings and just 6 percent provide elevator services. Also, in field surveys 20 percent of the residential buildings in the area qualified as having good accessibility.

The study found that:

- High-rise buildings have good accessibility, except for 2 entrances of the Knickerbocker Villages at Monroe Street.
- The majority of walk-up buildings have fair or poor accessibility.
- In the study area, there are about 3,800 residential units and the Knickerbocker Village, providing 1,590 housing units where rents vary from \$600 to \$1,001.
- 885 residents aged 65 and over live in non-designated buildings for seniors.
- Project Home indicated rent control apartments could vary from \$200 to \$400.
- According to ACS estimates there are only 494 housing units which rents are less than \$500; with a low-income population in the study area, this could represent rent burden.

The Public Right-of-Way:

The field survey looked at the quality of sidewalks, crossings and t bus stops. Data from the NYC Department of Transportation where there was a 65-year and older person killed or severely injured (KSI) was very helpful for field surveys. The ranking system used for the previous categories did not apply to this one, so the study used 311 complaint classification criteria in a one year period.

The study found that:

- Bus stops have bus schedule and bus routes but no benches or shelters for passengers.
- There is frequent sidewalk obstruction caused by street vending, garbage, loading and unloading.
- At three different days and times, field surveys recorded obstruction at street crossings and sidewalks caused by a parked vehicle.
- Construction sites frequently impeded the pedestrian walkway.
- Broken sidewalks are frequently found at city properties and at construction sites.
- Time to cross streets is usually shorter in high vehicle volume traffic streets and in long crossings.
- There was only one countdown pedestrian light at Madison and Catherine Street.

5. Recommendations

The ADA along with the New York City Building Code requires that all new construction and renovations to existing buildings meet the requirements of the code along with accessibility provisions. However, most of the buildings in NYC and in the area of study are buildings built during the early 1900s and many have not been renovated after the 1990s. The ADA also requires “readily achievable barrier removal in existing buildings even if they are not being renovated” (King, Kleo; March 2015, MOPD). However, today there is no city agency in charge of monitoring the removal of barriers in existing buildings. Moreover, compliance with the law is enforced via complaints filed in federal district court or with the U.S. Department of Justice (United Spinal Association, 2011). In other words, a place becomes accessible only if someone asks for it. While the ADA provides regulations for barrier removal, the Human Rights Commission deals with the prosecution of complaints alleging violations (nyc.gov).

Recommendations for the Area of Study (for more recommendations please see the complete report available at CB3’s website):

a. Provide adequate access to businesses

In order to provide adequate access for seniors and people with physical disabilities, entrances need to be cleared. The Chinatown Partnership and community based organizations could raise awareness for maintaining clear entrances by delineating with stripes the area that has to be clear of obstruction at business entrances. This should be especially done for the typical food market stores found in Chinatown. Additionally, temporary ramps could be provided along with a sign in the entrances saying the business is ADA accessible and a bell or phone number at the front of the business so that when a customer with a physical disability needs to enter, the customer can let the employees know that they need to use the temporary ramp.

b. To expand the number of businesses on the food stamps program

Only twenty out of 53 food stores accept food stamps in the study area. Community-based organizations, such as Two Bridges Neighborhood Council and Cabriani Services, could provide information to businesses on how to qualify with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service division for accepting food stamps. Especially the NY Supermarket located at 79 Henry Street could benefit from this recommendation, as it is one of the few full-service grocery stores in the study area.

c. Inform senior residents about Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Currently only 50 percent of eligible seniors participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (Corrado, 2014). Cabriani Services, which are located close to the area of study at 139 Henry Street, assist with SNAP applications. Therefore, they could partner with the Chinatown NNORC, Knickerbocker Village NORC, and the Chatham Public Library to provide assistance in these facilities that are frequently visited by senior residents in the area.

d. Improve the physical accessibility of housing buildings

Only twenty percent of the residential buildings in the area have good accessibility. Today, “the Law requires the landlord to pay for an accommodation if it is deemed reasonable – that is architecturally and financially feasible” (nyc.gov). If an aging improvement district, along with a seniors and residents with mobility disabilities task force is established, these agencies could inform residents and homeowners about this law and about what a “reasonable accommodation” means. For example, landlords could provide ramps at the entrances of the buildings that qualified in field surveys as having fair accessibility, meaning that they have one or two steps at the entrance. These buildings accounted for 52 percent of the housing in the study area. For buildings that have stairs, non-slipping materials and handrails could be installed. Additional improvements could also be made to common spaces such as laundries that are usually located in the basement of a building, but further analysis is required.

e. Improve the quality of sidewalks and street crossings.

Community Board 3 in partnership with community organizations in the area could request o DOT to increase the time for pedestrians to cross streets at the intersections of:

- East Broadway and Catherine Street in the East Broadway crossing (KSI event, 25 seconds to cross 4 lanes).
- Division and Chatham Square in Chatham Square crossing (KSI event, 25 seconds to cross 6 lanes, no median).
- Pike Street and East Broadway in Pike Street crossing (KSI event, 30 seconds to cross 12 lanes, 2 medians).
- Monroe Street and Catherine Street in Catherine Street crossing (28 seconds to cross 5 lanes)

Additionally, Community Board 3 could request the installation of countdown lights that will let a pedestrian know how many seconds they have left to cross the street, as well as curb bulbs or extensions to narrow the distance a pedestrian has to cross, see figure 75 to 76.

f. Aging Improvement District and Residents Task Force

To make a community accessible to all people of all ages and with all type of abilities, it is necessary to address different elements of the urban context and to give continuity over time. An Aging Improvement District (AID) should be implemented in the study area to make improvements at the neighborhood level and enable seniors and residents with mobility disabilities to better interact with their environment The AID should establish a group of leaders from institutions in the study area, along with directors of senior service providers, to lead the initiative of the project. In the study area, there are many organizations and service providers that could come together to form the AID, and act as a point organization for the needs of seniors and residents with mobility disabilities. An AID could lead community consultations and implement change. An AID could also refer seniors and residents with mobility disabilities to existing organizations and services

providers according to their needs and concerns. For example, an AID could refer seniors and residents with mobility disabilities to banks, grocery stores, and housing that are accessible. Additionally, a task force comprised of residents (especially seniors and residents with mobility disabilities) could be established to implement change in the neighborhood.

Recommendations at the City Level:

a. Create tax incentives for accessible ground floor apartments

The Department of City Planning is working on the Quality and Affordability Text Amendment Proposal, that includes a goal of creating quality and affordable housing for seniors. Coupled with this aspect of the zoning text amendment, the Department of Housing and Preservation could also incorporate tax incentives for landlords to rent their ground floor units to seniors or people with mobility disabilities, especially in walk-up buildings located in residential streets.

b. Designate the Department of Buildings as the city agency responsible for monitoring the removal of ADA barriers in existing buildings

Today, there is no city agency responsible for monitoring the removal of ADA barriers in existing buildings. The Department of Buildings, however, is in charge of registering building violations such as construction violations, alterations, demolitions, land use and more, and this department could also be used to monitor compliance with ADA standards. Before such allocation of responsibility is implemented, building owners could be notified and be made aware of the tax incentives for complying with ADA standards. The Mayor's Office for the People with Disabilities (MOPD) and the Committee on Human Rights Commission are possible agencies that could be used for organizing conferences and workshops for educating stakeholders on incentives for complying with ADA standards as well as the consequences for not complying for building and businesses owners. Additionally the Department of Buildings could incorporate to the Building Code requirements beyond ADA standards such as the Inclusive Design Guidelines undertaken by the MOPD or even Universal Design principles.