

Gowanus:

A Framework for a Sustainable, Inclusive, Mixed-use Neighborhood

June 2018



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Gowanus EPA Community Advisory Group (CAG)

Gowanus Canal Conservancy

Gowanus Green

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Property Markets Group (PMG)

BRT Powerhouse

Riverkeeper

Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation (SBIDC)

The Gowanus Dredgers Canoe Club

Two Trees

The Old American Can Factory - XO Projects



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Preface

A thriving, inclusive and more resilient Gowanus

Gowanus: A Framework for a Sustainable, Inclusive, Mixed-use Neighborhood is a roadmap for potential goals and strategies, including recommended land use changes, to be developed and implemented as part of a Neighborhood Plan. The vision laid out below aims to foster a thriving, inclusive and more resilient Gowanus where existing and future residents and workers are able to participate in civic, cultural and economic activities and where a wholly unique resource – the canal – can thrive and play an active role in that equitable and sustainable growth.

Achieving this vision for Gowanus will require **collective action**. While some of the strategies outlined below can be achieved in the near future, others call for long term commitment.

The framework is the culmination of more than 100 hours of public outreach and community meetings to solicit input that have been held since the Gowanus PLACES Study launched in October 2016. It is informed by previous reports and studies, including *Bridging Gowanus*, and ongoing community efforts by government agencies and community stakeholders and organizations.

The framework is a product of all those voices and ideas, bringing them together in objectives and proposed strategies in seven categories of Sustainability and Resiliency, Environmental Remediation, Community and Cultural Resources, Housing, Economic and Job Development, Transportation, and Land Use and Urban Form.

Process and Next Steps

Through refinement and community feedback on the framework, a Neighborhood Plan and draft zoning proposal will be developed to begin implementing this collective vision (see timeline and process map on pages 16-17). The Neighborhood Plan will implement this vision by aligning community and government resources and effectuating zoning and land use changes through the City's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) process.

Executive Summary

Background

Gowanus is a neighborhood with a diverse mix of residents, workers, and businesses. **Its history is a microcosm** of land use, economic and demographic trends that have played out citywide and nationally over the past century.

Gowanus is a neighborhood with a diverse mix of residents, workers and businesses – a community that has overcome challenges while being a center for entrepreneurship, innovation and creative expression. It is surrounded by the thriving residential neighborhoods of Carroll Gardens, Boerum Hill and Park Slope, and is within walking distance of Downtown Brooklyn, a growing and emerging Central Business District.

Extending northward from the Gowanus Bay, the approximately 1.5-mile-long man-made waterway was transformed from a small creek and estuary into a canal after its dredging was completed in 1869 as one of the first planned industrial districts in the country. Following World War II, the Gowanus Canal was handling a fraction of its previous water-based freight volume. Several factors combined to lead to a decline in industrial activity along and around the Canal, leaving many properties inactive and underused. Due to a legacy of pollution and need for remediation, the Canal was designated a National Priorities List (Superfund) site in 2010. This area's history is a microcosm of land use, economic and demographic trends that have played out citywide and nationally over the past century.

Strong demand for housing citywide has played out locally by **pushing up prices and limiting housing that is affordable** for households at lower incomes. At the same time, the city has seen a **rapidly growing and diversifying economy**, and there are indications of growing demand for new office and other work spaces locally.

In line with citywide conditions and trends over the past three decades, interest in both working and living in the canal area has returned. However, the nature of activity along the canal has changed. Commercial businesses, offices and other uses that serve the surrounding residential communities have increased alongside longtime artists and industrial uses. Strong demand for housing citywide has played out locally by pushing up prices and limiting housing that is affordable for households at lower incomes. At the same time, the city has seen a rapidly growing and diversifying economy. The reinvestment in and reactivation of old, loft-style buildings for a variety of commercial office and artist spaces indicate a growing local demand for new office and other work spaces.

Years of environmental neglect and pollution from its industrial past, coupled with these economic and demographic changes, have led to numerous discussions by community members about how to reclaim contaminated sites and create a sustainable path and vision for the neighborhood's future, with a mix of new uses and activities, coupled with best practices for environmental quality.

The Canal's designation as a federal Superfund site in 2010 and Superstorm Sandy in 2012 brought particular attention and engagement on the potential to remediate and improve infrastructure in Gowanus. The designation furthered conversations around envisioning Gowanus's future and growth among members of the community, City Councilmembers, other elected representatives and City, State and federal agencies.

The conversations and questions being discussed today – *how should the area be cleaned up from past contamination, where should new mixed-use development be allowed and where should we plan for the necessary infrastructure to meet existing and future needs?* – are similar to those that began more than four decades ago when the community successively opposed a number of proposals to relocate the Fort Greene Meat Market to the Brooklyn Union Gas Site (Public Place) and a site at 3rd Street and 3rd Avenue.

While many questions remain the same, the perspectives have been both broadened and focused – *how do we design for flooding and impacts from climate change?* In addition, we now have new tools at our disposal. Planning for a neighborhood does not occur in isolation. It must consider how our actions (or inactions) contribute to a larger ecological, economic and social system that can have a local and global impact. These perspectives not only make planning more robust and comprehensive, they enrich discussions among community members around shared priorities, goals, objectives and strategies. They also allow for new relationships to take root and the resiliency of the overall neighborhood to increase. In practice, these efforts represent a critical opportunity to build an inclusive, unique and equitable neighborhood guided by a collaborative, community-based planning process.

In the face of growing challenges and opportunities, now is the time to act.

A broad cross-section of community voices articulated challenges and needs that Gowanus faces today and in the future, and generated ideas about policies and investments to achieve a thriving, more resilient neighborhood.

From this robust dialogue, the City and its partners have developed *Gowanus: A Framework for a Sustainable, Inclusive, Mixed-use Neighborhood*.

A broad cross-section of **community voices articulated challenges and needs** that Gowanus faces today and in the future, and generated ideas about policies and investments to achieve a thriving, more resilient neighborhood.



Sustainability and Resiliency Public Event at Wyckoff Gardens Community Center, December 2016

Gowanus: A Framework for a Sustainable, Inclusive, Mixed-use Neighborhood

The framework is a road map for Gowanus to become a sustainable, model green neighborhood where a wholly unique resource – the Canal – can thrive and play an active role in promoting equitable and sustainable growth.

The framework consists of proposed goals and strategies, which were derived from the Listen and Learn phase (see timeline process map on pages 16-17), to make Gowanus a cleaner, greener, inclusive neighborhood that can serve as a model of sustainability for New York City and beyond. Stitched together, the tapestry of policies and proposals aim to support the evolution of Gowanus into an eco-neighborhood where existing and future residents and workers can live, work and play with a minimal carbon footprint and impacts on climate change. Key strategies include:

- Promoting a more resilient future, where buildings and infrastructure are designed to manage flood risk today and into the future
- Increasing public open space that is green and resilient along the Canal and capitalizing on opportunities to green public spaces throughout the area
- Creating new job-generating space and fostering a mix of uses within the neighborhood so that residents can live, work, create, play and shop, and all users can reach their destinations by walking, bicycling or other means
- Promoting new, denser housing - creating and preserving affordable housing - and improving public housing near public transit will reduce energy use and carbon footprint
- Improving access to new jobs, training opportunities and other resources that support social, economic and environmental resiliency in the community
- Improving mobility and safety for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers on streets and public areas
- Planning for meeting the infrastructure and community resources needs of a growing neighborhood

The framework is a roadmap to **make Gowanus into an eco-neighborhood** that is inclusive and a model of sustainability for other neighborhoods and cities.

Framework Highlights

Promote a More Resilient and Sustainable Future for All

As clean-up progresses in the Canal, the community has worked toward a vision of a cleaner, greener and inclusive future. Through programs and actions led by local residents, City agencies, elected officials and others, the Gowanus community can address sustainability and resiliency challenges, which range from energy efficiency to environmental remediation to emergency response preparation. Gowanus can lead New York City as a model green and flood-resilient urban neighborhood.

- Support remediation of sites adjacent to the Canal through remediation requirements attached to redevelopment
- Assess current and future drainage issues and infrastructure needs, considering existing conditions, projected sea level rise, and potential growth and development
- Engage Gowanus community members in an emergency response planning process that leverages and continues community-led work to identify hazards, vulnerabilities, and resources

Support Affordable and Mixed-Income Housing

As the housing affordability crisis strains residents at a range of incomes - most of all, low-income residents - the City is taking action to protect the rights of tenants and prevent displacement, preserve existing affordable housing and build more affordable housing. The City is working to protect Gowanus residents by using all available tools, aggressively investigating complaints of harassment and taking action against unlawful landlords. Where the City owns land that can support new housing, it can promote greater levels of affordability. On privately owned land being rezoned to substantially increase housing capacity, the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) Program requires new developments to provide a share of permanently affordable housing.

The Gowanus community can address sustainability and resiliency challenges from energy efficiency to environmental remediation to emergency response preparation. Gowanus can lead New York City as a model green and flood-resilient urban neighborhood.

- Engage the community and update the vision for Public Place to create a mixed-use development that include affordable housing, community facilities, commercial retail and open space
- Implement the Certification of No Harassment pilot program and continue to work with the Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force to investigate and take action against landlords who harass tenants
- Implement MIH to require that new residential development include permanently affordable apartments
- The City will consider funding improvements to Gowanus Houses, Wyckoff Gardens, and Warren Street Houses during the rezoning process. Capital needs will be evaluated via an assessment of improvements needed in these developments, in the context of broader investments in NYCHA.

Encourage a Thriving and Diverse Local Economy

A central goal of the framework is to promote economic development, and increase access to jobs and training opportunities. This can be accomplished by applying land use strategies that balance a mix of uses while removing certain specific barriers in zoning that unnecessarily limit business expansion and growth, along with supportive infrastructure investments and business services and programs.

- Maintain the prohibition on residential use in certain areas, while promoting non-residential uses in new mixed-use developments where housing is appropriate
- Make off-street parking regulations more flexible, reduce unnecessarily high parking requirements and update bulk regulations
- Promote workforce development and job training opportunities for NYCHA and other neighborhood residents, particularly for City-sponsored projects
- Connect businesses, property owners and nonprofits with programs, grants and services that support entrepreneurship, business growth and revitalization projects
- Work with Industrial Business Zone (IBZ) stakeholders to identify potential additional interventions to assist businesses to grow and thrive in the IBZ

Plan for the Needs of a Growing Neighborhood

Targeted investments in infrastructure and the public realm can help improve quality of life and the business environment in Gowanus. Coordinated, proactive planning in Gowanus can advance the realization of the long-term vision of a mixed-use community in which development is supported by critical waterfront, transportation, educational and recreational investments.

- Create new community space and programming for NYCHA residents, and expand space for art and cultural uses
- Encourage retention and reuse of key loft buildings
- Recognize and celebrate themes in Gowanus's history through a coordinated interpretive plan
- Identify improvements that support businesses within the area
- Strengthen cross-canal connections, transit and regional linkages
- Assess existing school capacity and identify opportunities to meet future needs



Study Kickoff Event at P.S. 32, October 2016

Neighborhood Planning Process

Thousands of community stakeholders, residents, workers, business owners and elected officials participated in over 100 hours of meetings and workshops over the past year and a half, including four large public events and 26 working group meetings covering five broad topics. Coupled with the Department of City Planning's first pilot online public engagement platform (PlanGowanus.com), a broad cross-section of community members articulated challenges and needs that Gowanus faces today and in the future. They set goals and objectives, and generated ideas about policies and investments to achieve a thriving, more resilient neighborhood.

This framework is a product of all those voices and ideas, bringing them together in the objectives and proposed strategies for Sustainability and Resiliency, Environmental Remediation, Community and Cultural Resources (e.g. Arts, Education, Parks and Open Space), Housing, Economic and Job Development, Transportation, and Land Use and Urban Form.

On the following page is a summary of the extensive community outreach approach to date. DCP invites ongoing engagement as we collaboratively build upon the framework and develop a Neighborhood Plan (see Process and Next Steps).





First Housing Working Group Meeting at Fifth Avenue Committee, March 2017

Listen and Learn

Working Groups: DCP and relevant City agencies worked together with residents and other community stakeholders to develop specific recommendations focused on five broad topics: Arts and Culture, Housing, Industry and Economic Development, Public Realm, and Resiliency and Sustainability.

Each working group met approximately once a month from February to July 2017, culminating with a Working Group Summit held in July. Members committed 5-10 hours a month to participating in meetings, research assignments and occasional phone check-ins. Members supported productive and thoughtful exchanges of ideas and solutions. Working group members identified key issues and helped develop and refine proposals through an iterative consensus building process. Their work concluded with a set of mutually-prioritized recommendations to help inform the draft planning and land use framework.

NYCHA and Other Targeted Outreach: Along with the working group process, City agencies engaged residents and other community stakeholders on specific topics in order to share information, solicit feedback and develop recommendations. Targeted outreach included attending monthly NYCHA Tenant Association (TA) meetings and monthly Community Advisory Group (CAG) meetings, making presentations to Community Board 6, and holding a public meeting focusing on community resources (schools and transportation) at M.S. 51 William Alexander.

Public Events and Workshops: These larger public events included a study kick-off meeting followed by a resiliency and sustainability meeting held at NYCHA's Wyckoff Gardens. An all-day community visioning session held at P.S. 32 focused on different topics and sites throughout the study area in order to illustrate how different uses could be accommodated at different densities and to highlight key urban design challenges and opportunities. DCP, along with sister agencies, has also met with local business and property owners, and hosted a table at the Gowanus EXPO that was put on by the Gowanus Canal Conservancy and others.

Online Engagement Platform: In April 2017, DCP launched a pilot online engagement platform called *PlanGowanus* (PlanGowanus.com) to help broaden public participation in the study process and help disseminate information from and receive input to the working group process. Through interactive tools and a user-friendly interface, community members were able to provide input on a variety of topics on the website, which DCP and other City agencies used to help develop the draft planning and land use framework. As of May 2018, the site has received over 10,000 total page visits.



DCP at EXPO Gowanus, May 2017

Community Outreach

- 100+ hours of workshops and meetings
- 26 working group meetings
- Four large public events
- NYCHA campuses Tenant Association meetings

‘Plan Gowanus’ Online Engagement Platform

- 10,000 total page visits on PlanGowanus.com
- 30-35 average daily visitors
- 73 contributors placing 220 pins and comments on PlanGowanus Map



Land Use and Urban Design Public Workshop, March 2017

Gowanus Timeline and Process

LISTEN + LEARN



