



KEY COMMUNITY ISSUES + PRIORITIES

Throughout the many conversations held in the three-year planning process, community members voiced many concerns, values, and ideas. The following pages summarize what we heard and provide relevant data, when possible.

SOUTHERN BOULEVARD NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

The high costs of housing

Many residents expressed concern over the high cost of housing in the area for them today. Approximately 56% of all homes in Community District (CD) 2 and CD 3 are income-restricted affordable housing, such as NYCHA or privately-owned housing receiving government assistance. Despite this, 61% of all renter households in neighborhoods around Southern Boulevard are still rent burdened, meaning they pay more than 1/3 of their income toward rent and utilities.¹

Fear of gentrification and displacement

With increasing housing costs across the city, residents fear that their place in the neighborhood is at risk. More specifically, residents are worried about potential harassment and eviction. Residents also expressed fears that zoning changes that increase development could put them at greater risk of displacement. Many said that they are not against growth or development, but they are worried that new development would exclude them and their communities.

Negligent landlords and an aging housing stock result in poor housing quality

Housing deficiencies and neglect are a critical concern for renters. More than one in five homes in CDs 2 and 3 have three or more maintenance deficiencies, such as a lack of heat, rodents, cracks or holes in walls and ceilings, and water leakage.²

Housing quality and stability are key determinants of health, and these maintenance deficiencies contribute to inequitable health outcomes for neighborhood residents. Many residents believe that landlords are intentionally neglecting buildings to force them out of their homes.

Additionally, close to half of the buildings in the study area were built before 1947 and lack elevators and other accessibility features, making it challenging for seniors and people with physical disabilities to age in place or preserve their independence.³ Poor housing quality is also associated with increased energy costs, which contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, poor air quality, and potentially unsafe indoor temperatures.⁴

1 HPD Government Regulated and Assisted Housing Database (GRAHD), 2018. Unless otherwise indicated, data on the Southern Boulevard study area represents Bronx community districts 1,2,3, and 6.

2 NYC Housing and Vacancy Survey, 2017. US Census Bureau/NYC Dept of Housing Preservation and Development.

3 NYC Housing and Vacancy Survey, 2017. US Census Bureau/NYC Dept of Housing Preservation and Development.

4 <https://www.citylab.com/environment/2018/02/the-uneven-gains-of-energy-efficiency/552674/>

More job opportunity for area residents

Community members expressed concerns about the lack of opportunities and connections to good-paying, high-quality jobs, and the necessary training and skill-building opportunities to qualify for and attain them.

Small businesses face unique challenges

Small businesses, an essential resource in the communities along Southern Boulevard, face myriad challenges and need to constantly adapt to a changing business climate to survive and thrive.

Local merchants reported concerns about the affordability of their spaces and fears that neighborhood change might accelerate increases to their rent. The most commonly expressed needs of surveyed merchants in the Southern Boulevard Commercial District Needs Assessment (CDNA; see more on page 28) were marketing support, access to financing, and improvements to their spaces (of which, nearly 90% of the respondents rent), among others.

Community members also wanted to see more ways to support businesses, such as consulting services and loan programs, creating affordable commercial spaces, and supporting local entrepreneurs.

Local retail corridors can feel unsafe and unpleasant and may not meet the needs of the surrounding neighborhoods

Local residents often noted the absence of healthy, fresh food, sit-down restaurants, and entertainment options in the area. The lack of options means residents may have to spend more money on necessities, compromise on quality (such as healthy foods), or leave the neighborhood to get what they need.

Throughout the process, residents and stakeholders voiced concerns about the elevated train corridors in the area saying that noise, the lack of adequate lighting, safety concerns, and unsafe streets can make the pedestrian experience unpleasant and deter shopping.

Some community members expressed a desire for the portion of Southern Boulevard north of Westchester Avenue to serve as a neighborhood commercial district for the surrounding neighborhoods. At the same time, many highlighted how much they liked shopping “on the Boulevard” (Southern Boulevard between Westchester Avenue and 163rd Street) or at Cross Bronx Plaza. Others said they did not want to see self-storage facilities, hotels, or junkyard uses along the corridor.

Key Community Issues and Priorities (cont.)

Streets can feel unsafe, especially for pedestrians and bicyclists

The conditions on local streets can be dangerous for all users. Between 2012-2016, there were 323 crashes on Westchester Avenue, 19 of which involved someone being killed or seriously injured by a motorist, including ten motorists, six pedestrians, and three bicyclists (NYC DOT). Other dangerous intersections include Hunts Point Avenue, Bruckner Boulevard, 163rd Street, and Southern Boulevard; and 174th Street, Southern Boulevard, and Boston Road. These dangerous areas have been prioritized by NYC Department of Transportation for safety interventions as part of Vision Zero Priority Intersections, Corridors, and Areas.

It can be difficult to access existing parks

Local parks serve as important cultural and social spaces. Since 2014, the City has invested in many local parks, but others still need investment. Throughout the Southern Boulevard planning process, residents expressed three main park concerns: conditions, safety, and access.

Access to transit is a huge asset, but getting around the area itself can be difficult. The elevated corridor along Southern Boulevard and Westchester Avenue can feel dangerous for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. Getting to the newly renovated and expanded Starlight Park and Concrete Plant Park along the Bronx River is also challenging, although the new Sheridan Boulevard provides a much-needed connection. Parks in the area, especially Crotona Park, provide open green spaces for people to gather, relax, and play in, but many residents only use the portions of the park closest to their homes, and some perceive these public spaces as unsafe.

Public spaces could be improved with more opportunity for green space, community gathering, and activities for all

Community members said they view parks as “outdoor classrooms” and “living rooms,” places where they spend time with friends and neighbors and engage in community activities as well as recreation, exercise, and play. They also said they use parks for exercise, especially during the warmer months. Some are interested in dog parks, adult fitness equipment, and more events for all ages.

The uses along the Bronx River waterfront between Starlight and Concrete Plant Parks cut the community off from the river and are not consistent with the community’s vision for access to the river

The community has long advocated for reconnection to the Bronx River waterfront as first proposed in the 2006 Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance Community Plan and the 2013 City-led Sheridan-Hunts Point Land Use & Transportation Study. The latter plan advocated for transforming the Sheridan Expressway into a boulevard (a project recently completed by the State Department of Transportation) and the waterfront properties along the Sheridan Boulevard into a mixed-use area that encourages public access to the waterfront.

Community members embraced that vision, and drilled down on the need to ensure that the waterfront is welcoming and accessible to everyone, the river is easy to get to, safety is considered as part of design, and space is given to highlight and celebrate local art and culture.

Many residents cannot access resources to improve their health

The neighborhoods along Southern Boulevard face unacceptable inequities in health outcomes, compared to other neighborhoods in the Bronx and NYC. Residents especially noted concerns about lower life expectancy and higher asthma rates.

These health outcomes are exacerbated by the lack of healthy, affordable food options and fitness facilities, along with barriers to accessing quality health care. In addition, significantly fewer adults perceive the neighborhoods along Southern Boulevard as being safe from crime, compared to the perception of other NYC neighborhoods, which can cause stress, limit willingness to interact in public spaces, and further reduce opportunities to use health-promoting resources.¹

1. 2018 Community Health Profiles, NYC DOHMH. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/data/data-publications/profiles.page#bx>

There is a long legacy of community-initiated environmental justice action and there is still more work to do

From cleaning up the Bronx River, to closing toxic chemical plants, to lobbying governments for cleanup funds and infrastructure projects, the communities of the South Bronx have a long history of organizing around and combating the many environmental justice issues that were created by decades of failed government policies that negatively affected these lower-income communities of color.

A current environmental justice issue is high heat vulnerability. NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has developed a heat vulnerability index that measures accounts for daytime summer surface temperature, percent of green space, rates of poverty, percent of non-Latinx Black residents, and access to air-conditioning.² The South Bronx is very high on this risk index. In 2014, 20% of the Bronx's Heat Stress emergency room visits occurred in the Crotona Tremont area.³

² Heat Vulnerability Index, Frequently Asked Questions. NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. http://a816-dohbesc.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/EPHTPDF/HVI_FAQ.pdf

³ New York State Statewide Planning and Research Cooperative System (SPARCS) Deidentified Hospital Discharge Data. NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Environment & Health Data Portal. http://a816-dohbesc.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/VisualizationData.aspx?id=2075_4466a0_100.Summarize

It is important to retain the area's rich history, culture, and art heritage

The neighborhoods along Southern Boulevard have a strong connection to the important history of the area such as the historic theaters and salsa clubs on Southern Boulevard, the work of organizers in the 1970s, and graffiti art more recently. As the neighborhoods grow and change, residents fear losing connection to their artistic, musical, and cultural history.

Education and programming for youth are imperative to give young people the resources they need to succeed

Throughout the process, community members continually expressed desire for more or better educational, recreational, and other community resources and programming for area youth. In fact, Community Boards 2 and 3 indicated health care services, unemployment, and youth and children's services as their top three priorities for FY 2020.

Some important data to note is that the communities along Southern Boulevard have a higher percentage of youth population (age 0-24), over 40%, than NYC as a whole (30%).⁴ In addition, CDs 2 and 3 also have higher rates of absenteeism in elementary school and lower on-time graduation rates compared to other NYC neighborhoods.⁵

⁴ US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013-2017

⁵ 2018 Community Health Profiles, NYC DOHMH. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/data/data-publications/profiles.page#bx>

