



BENSONHURST BROOKLYN

Commercial District Needs Assessment



careers
businesses
neighborhoods



Brooklyn Chinese-American Association (BCA)
Federation of Italian American Organizations (FIAO)



ABOUT BENSONHURST

Avenue NYC is a competitive grant program created by the **NYC Department of Small Business Services** to fund and build the capacity of community-based development organizations to execute commercial revitalization initiatives. Avenue NYC is funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, which targets investments in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.

Avenue NYC Commercial Revitalization grants provide multi-year commitments aimed at building the capacity of partner organizations to better understand neighborhood needs, develop impactful programs and sustain their work in the community for at least three years.

The **Commercial District Needs Assessment (CDNA)** highlights a neighborhood's existing business landscape and consumer characteristics.

This CDNA features the commercial corridors of **Bath Avenue, Bay Parkway, 18th and 20th avenues, and 86th Street** in **Bensonhurst** and was conducted in partnership with the **Brooklyn Chinese-American Association** and the **Federation of Italian-American Organizations** between September 2022 and June 2023.

Key issues and opportunities identified through this assessment will help prioritize SBS-supported local investments, and serve as an informational and marketing resource for the neighborhood.

In This Report

Existing conditions, business data, and qualitative depictions of the neighborhood were gathered from more than **750 surveys** and various stakeholder meetings with neighborhood merchants, shoppers, workers, property owners, and residents.

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Background

Bensonhurst is a vibrant and diverse community located in southern Brooklyn. The neighborhood is surrounded by Dyker Heights to the northwest, Borough Park and Mapleton to the northeast, Bath Beach to the southwest, and Gravesend to the southeast.

Originally consisting of farmland that was a part of New Utrecht, Bensonhurst derives its name from the sale of the Benson family's farmland to a real estate developer in the mid-1880s. Marketed as a resort town Bensonhurst-by-the-Sea, including what is today Bath Beach, it soon developed into an Italian and Jewish enclave through the 20th century. Bensonhurst's population began to increase in 1885 when the Brooklyn, Bath and West End Railroad (whose route is now part of the New York City subway system) was built. With the extension of the 4th Avenue line (now the N and R trains) in 1915 running through the area, many working class Jewish and Italian families migrated from the Lower East Side to find affordable housing in Bensonhurst. By the 1980s, approximately 80% of the population was Italian.

With such a large Italian American population, Bensonhurst became a primary "Little Italy" of Brooklyn. Yet the neighborhood continued to attract new waves of immigrants. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, an influx of immigrants from China and the former Soviet Union began to arrive, and they settled below the subway line along 86th Street between 18th and Stillwell avenues. With convenient transit connections to Chinese communities in Manhattan and Sunset Park via the N and D trains, Bensonhurst became an emerging Chinatown.

Today many Chinese restaurants, clothing stores, and supermarkets can be found along 86th Street, 18th Avenue, and Bay Parkway, with most Chinese residents living between 18th and 25th avenues. 18th Avenue (also known as Cristoforo Colombo Boulevard) between Shore Parkway and 60th Street is still lined with small multigenerational Italian businesses. Bath Avenue is becoming a hub for Southeast Asian, Latin American, and Eastern European businesses and services. Even with an increasing population and demographic shifts, the neighborhood has maintained much of its history and today is referred to as Brooklyn's largest Chinatown and Little Italy. Served by the N and D trains, and seven bus routes, the neighborhood is accessible for residents aging in place and those looking to visit.

Neighborhood Demographics

See more on page 13

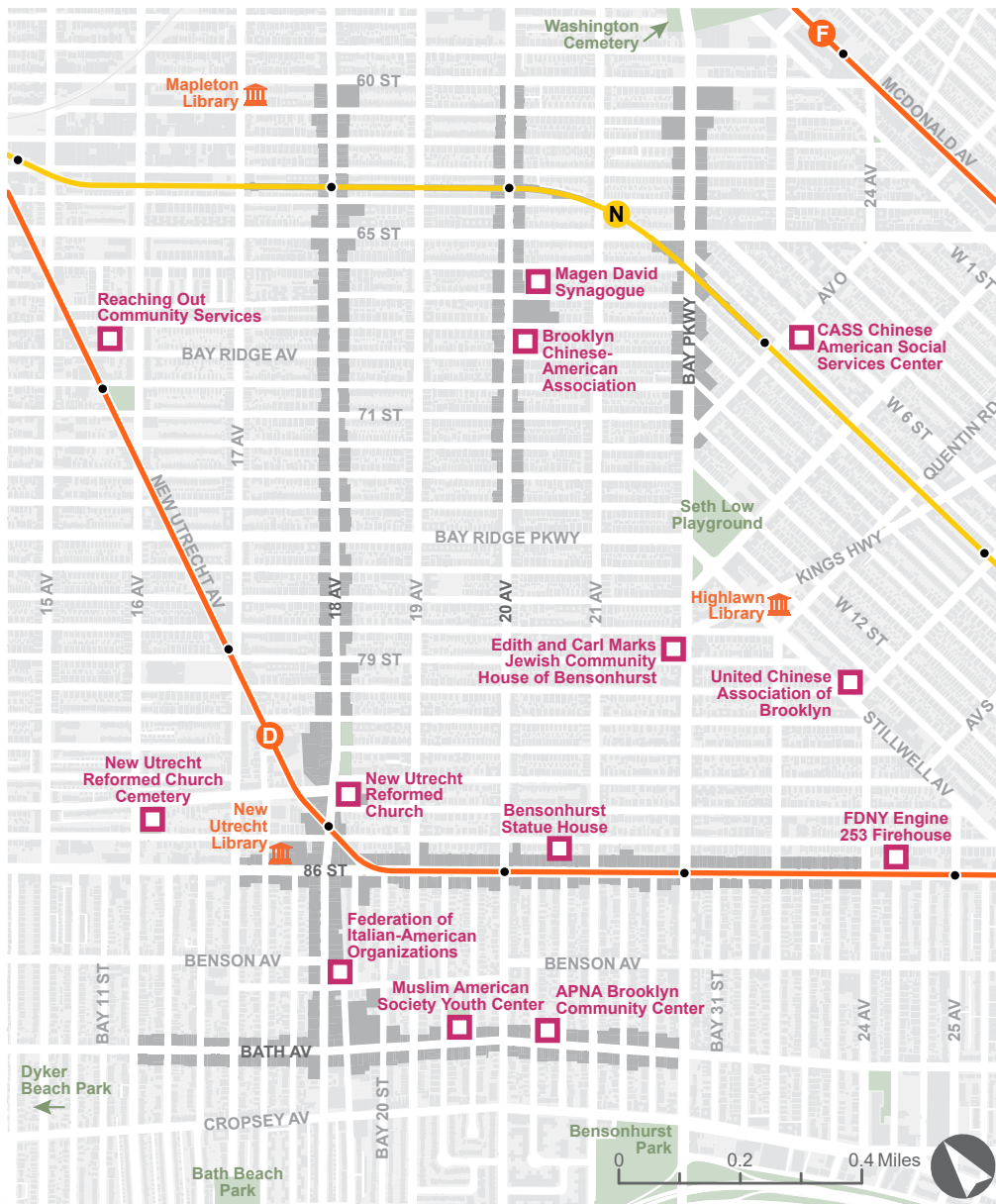
More than half of the 173,000 residents of Bensonhurst are foreign born. The racial makeup of the neighborhood is comprised of 41% White, 38% Asian, 17% Hispanic/Latinx, 3% two or more races, and 1% African American. In recent decades, the Asian population has increased by 57% and comprises the city's largest concentration of immigrants from Hong Kong and second largest Cantonese population.

Future Opportunities

See more on page 5

Bensonhurst is a safe, exciting, and inviting neighborhood that welcomes new residents while allowing long-standing residents to age in place. There are opportunities to leverage the neighborhood's rich culinary mix and highlight unique offerings like Korean-Uzbek fusion restaurants followed by a taste of classic Italian gelato. There are also opportunities for merchants to organize, support commercial revitalization efforts, and advocate for streetscape improvements along the commercial corridors. By organizing residents and merchants, the community can leverage their unique cultural framework and continue to grow economic opportunities in the neighborhood.

Bensonhurst



▲ Points of Interest

- Assessed Commercial Corridors
- Parks and Public Spaces
- Notable Places
- Public Facilities

Neighborhood Events

- 18th Avenue Bensonhurst Lunar New Year Parade
- 86th Street Outdoor Bensonhurst Festival
- Annual Columbus Day Parade
- The Feast of Santa Rosalia

Merchant & Community Groups

- American-Italian Coalition of Organizations (AMICO)
- APNA Brooklyn Community Center
- Bensonhurst Council of Jewish Organizations
- Brooklyn Chinese-American Association (BCA)
- Chinese American Social Services (CASS)
- Edith and Carl Marks Jewish Community House of Bensonhurst (JCC)
- Federation of Italian American Organizations (FIAO)
- Homecrest Community Services (HCS)
- Muslim American Society Youth Center
- United Chinese Association of Brooklyn

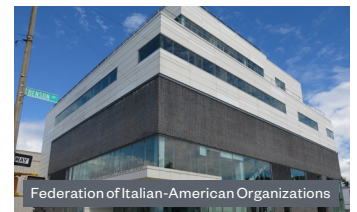
◀ Notable Places



Bensonhurst Statue House



FDNY Engine 253 Firehouse



Federation of Italian-American Organizations



Mapleton Library



Magen David Synagogue



Muslim American Society Youth Center



New Utrecht Reformed Church

KEY FINDINGS & OPPORTUNITIES

Strengths

- ▶ Diverse small businesses reflect the neighborhood's multitude of cultures and unique shopping needs. Residents can fulfill virtually all their shopping needs within the commercial corridors
- ▶ Concentration of Asian health services and retail stores serve a wide range of speakers of different languages and dialects
- ▶ Neighborhood has a rich history as home to multiple ethnic enclaves
- ▶ Accessible transportation options, including the N and D trains and multiple bus routes, connect residents and visitors to the area's commercial offerings
- ▶ Home to many long-standing and family-owned businesses that provide a sense of community for the neighborhood while attracting shoppers from outside the area
- ▶ Various community-based organizations provide services for residents aging in place and for newer families to Bensonhurst

Challenges

- ▶ Significant number of vacant storefronts on Bath Avenue (14%) and 20th Avenue (13%), disrupt the commercial continuity and contribute to safety concerns at night
- ▶ The elevated D train platform's shadow and noise from traffic congestion create an unpleasant and uninviting pedestrian experience along 86th Street
- ▶ Persistent sanitation issues, including overflowing litter baskets on 86th Street, create unsightly and unsanitary conditions along the corridor
- ▶ Lack of litter baskets on 20th Avenue contributes to trash collecting on streets and sidewalks
- ▶ Double parking on 18th Avenue and a lack of bike parking on 86th Street produce dangerous conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists
- ▶ Businesses are still coping with reduced foot traffic due to COVID-19 and anti-Asian hate incidents, which has negatively impacted the shopping experience and altered habits of both merchants and residents in the neighborhood
- ▶ 20th Avenue suffers from insufficient street lighting, contributing to reduced activity in the evening and leading businesses to close earlier





Opportunities

- ▶ Invest in supplemental sanitation to address litter problems in the neighborhood and improve the cleanliness of the commercial corridors
- ▶ Create opportunities for merchants to grow their businesses, such as connecting them to new marketing channels and trainings or support initiatives
- ▶ Develop creative lighting solutions to improve perceptions of safety on darker corridors and promote a vibrant sense of place
- ▶ Activate public spaces and temporarily close streets to vehicles to attract more foot traffic to the area
- ▶ Develop platforms for merchant collaboration and resource sharing to foster coordination among merchants, community organizations, and City agencies
- ▶ Attract new businesses to the neighborhood by working with property owners to market vacant spaces
- ▶ Work with City agencies to develop clear car and bike parking regulations and guidelines
- ▶ Advocate for street seating and develop a storefront beautification program to improve the pedestrian experience along the commercial corridors

What's Next?

To address these key findings and opportunities, Avenue NYC Grants have been awarded by SBS to nonprofit organizations.

For more information, visit: nyc.gov/avenuenyc

BUSINESS LANDSCAPE: BENSONHURST

Business Inventory

1,265

Total Number of Storefronts

11.7%

Storefront Vacancy*

*Note: In 2022, New York City's 76 Business Improvement Districts reported an average ground floor vacancy rate of 11.6% and median ground floor vacancy rate of 10.1% (SBS BIDs Trends Report, FY22).

Storefront & Retail Mix

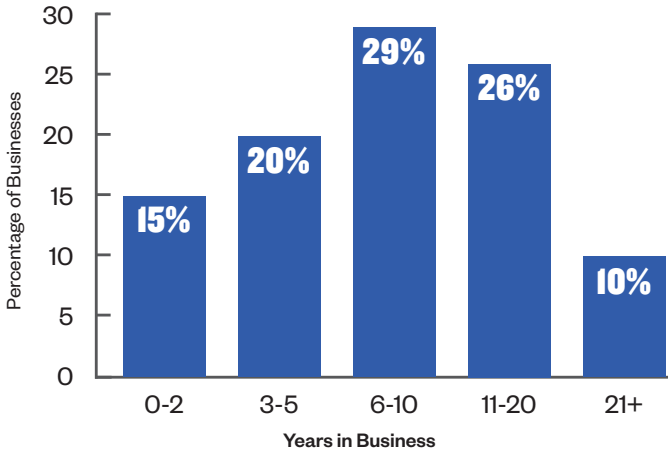
Professional & Medical Services	156
Vacant	148
Full Service Restaurants	86
Supermarkets & Grocery Stores	85
Beauty / Nail Salons & Barbershops	74
Limited Service Restaurants	72
Delis / Bodegas	69
Pharmacies, Optical Stores, & Health Services	69
Cell Phone & Electronics Stores	52
Hardware, Home Goods, Florists, & Furniture Stores	41
Specialty Food Stores	39
Clothing, Shoes, Jewlery, & Department Stores	38
Automotive Businesses	36
Laundromats & Dry Cleaners	35
General Merchandise Stores	34
Nonprofits, Houses of Worship, & Government Agency Offices	32
Construction, Manufacturing, & Delivery Services	30
Banks & Credit Unions	28
Coffee Shops, Cafes, & Bubble Tea	26
Schools & After School Programs	19
Adult Care Centers & Daycares	17
Smoke Shops & Tattoo Parlors	16
Martial Arts & Dance Studios	14
Liquor Stores, Bars, & Clubs	13
Check Cashing & Money Transfer Services	4
Other	32

Business inventory and retail mix data were gathered by the Brooklyn Chinese-American Association and the Federation of Italian-American Organizations through a comprehensive area inventory of storefront businesses located along Bath Avenue, Bay Parkway, 18th and 20th avenues, and 86th Street (October to December 2022).



What We've Heard from Bensonhurst Merchants

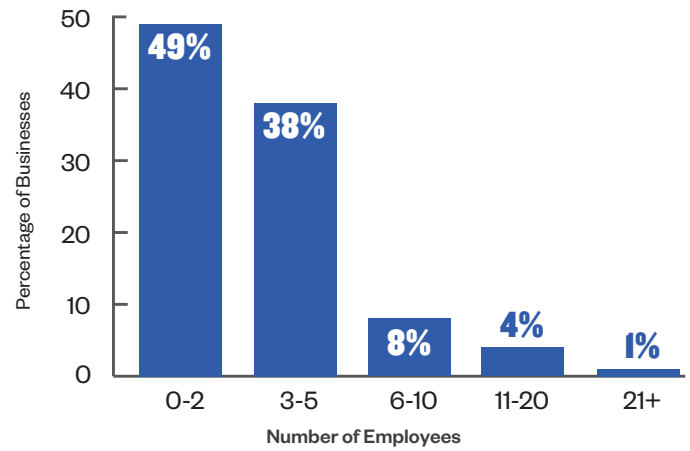
How many years have you been in business here?



8 Mean
5 Median
4,8 Mode

Note: The mean is the average of all responses, the median is the middle number when all responses are arranged in ascending order, and the mode is the most common response.

How many full-time employees do you have?



4 Mean
4 Median
2 Mode

Do you own or rent your property?

65% Rent
15% Own
20% No Response

Does your business currently use social media?

30% Yes
70% No

Are you a minority or woman-owned business?

38% Yes
62% No

Does your business currently have a website?

21% Yes
79% No

Over the past year, has your business improved, stayed the same, or decreased?

19% Improved
26% Stayed the Same
38% Decreased
17% N/A or No Response

If your business has a website, do you sell online (e-commerce)?

40% Yes
60% No

Source: Based on 289 merchant surveys conducted by the Brooklyn Chinese-American Association and the Federation of Italian-American Organizations between December 2022 and March 2023.

BUSINESS LANDSCAPE

What We've Heard from Bensonhurst Merchants & Shoppers

What do you like about the commercial district?

- "Most vibrant commercial business district and shopping area."
- "Safe, clean, nice neighbors."
- "Accessible public transportation."
- "A lot of restaurants and supermarkets that have been around for a long time."
- "I love that it is a busy location."
- "Loyal customers."
- "The people in the community are wonderful and diverse."

What makes the Bensonhurst commercial district unique?

- "Bustling commercial corridors."
- "Mixture of Chinese, Italian, and other cultures."
- "The density of businesses contributes to the vitality of the neighborhood."
- "Good transportation and nice people."
- "Shoppers and residents make the neighborhood."
- "Everything I need is here."
- "2-3 generations of families still here."

What changes need to occur in to attract more visitors/shoppers?

	% Merchant Response	% Consumer Response
▶ Safety	61%	34%
▶ Sanitation	57%	60%
▶ Landscaping/beautification	52%	46%
▶ Community events	29%	35%
▶ More open space	27%	40%
▶ Transportation improvements	20%	20%
▶ Graffiti removal	15%	11%
▶ Merchant collaboration	15%	14%
▶ Storefront improvements	15%	26%
▶ Street lighting	13%	26%
▶ Other	3%	4%

What changes would you like to see to improve the commercial district?

- "Clean up the area, install more trash cans."
- "More community events that help bring people to the neighborhood."
- "Increasing festival decorations."
- "More frequent garbage collection."
- "Lighting & decorations."
- "More merchant support for community events."
- "Better play spaces for kids."
- "More places to sit."

Source: Based on 289 merchant surveys and 468 consumer surveys conducted by the Brooklyn Chinese-American Association and the Federation of Italian-American Organizations between December 2022 and March 2023.

Bensonhurst Retail Demand

Residents spent

\$2.66B

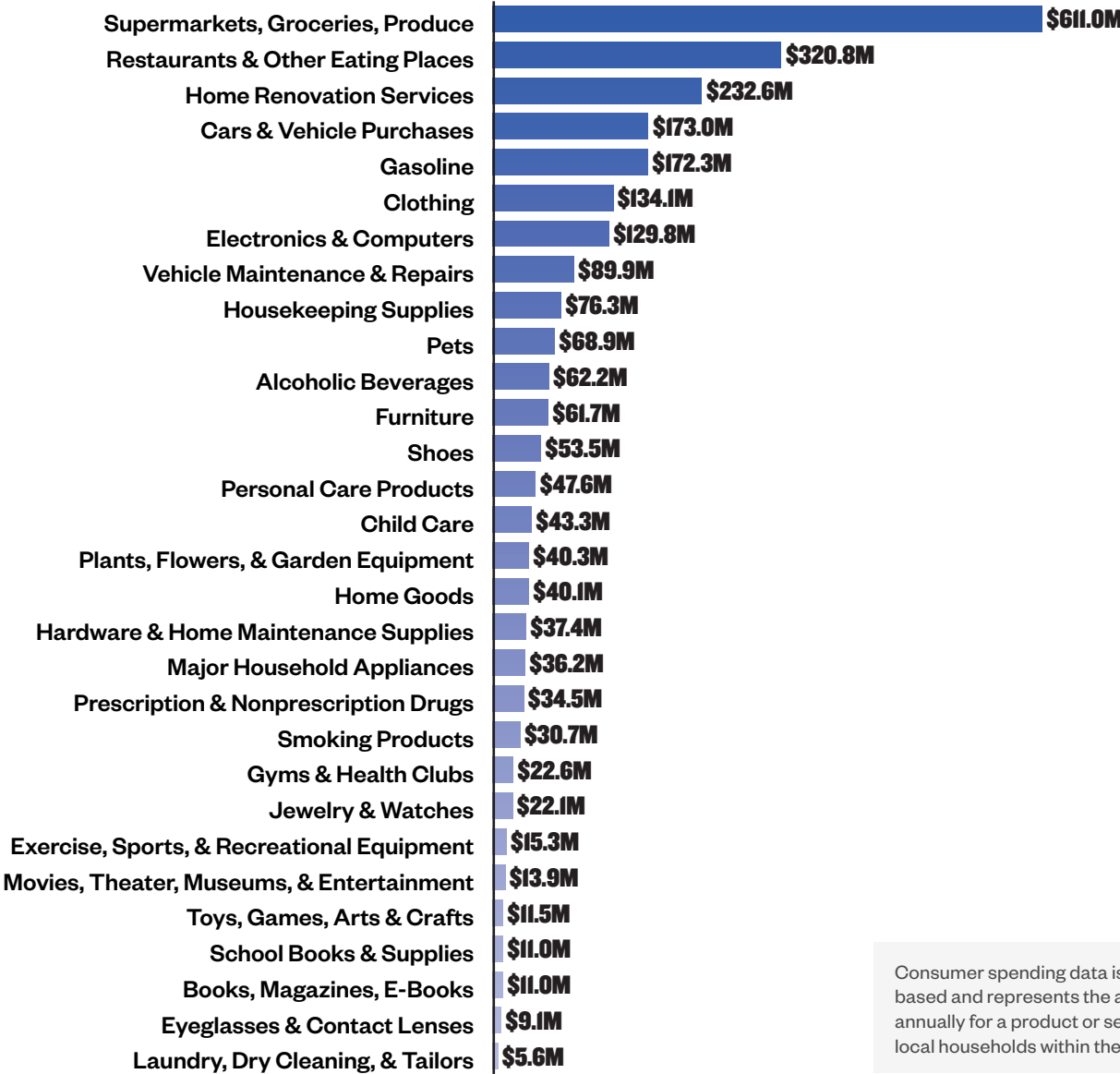
each year on retail goods and services in 2023

Residents will spend

\$2.97B

each year on retail goods and services by 2028

2023 Consumer Spending



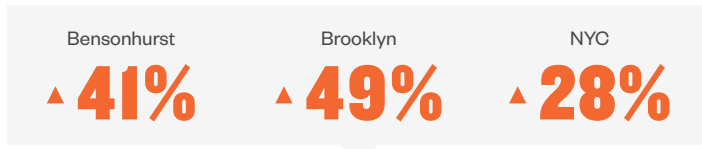
Consumer spending data is household-based and represents the amount spent annually for a product or service by all local households within the trade area.

Source: ESRI forecasts for 2023 and 2028; Consumer Spending data are derived from the 2019 and 2020 Consumer Expenditure Surveys, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

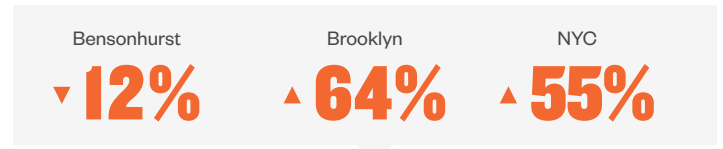
BUSINESS OUTLOOK

Business Trends

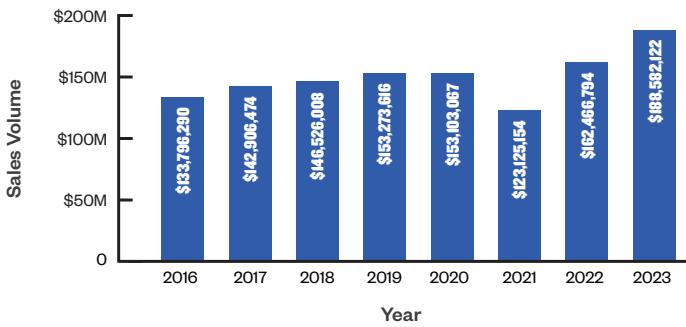
Change in Total Business Sales, 2016-2023



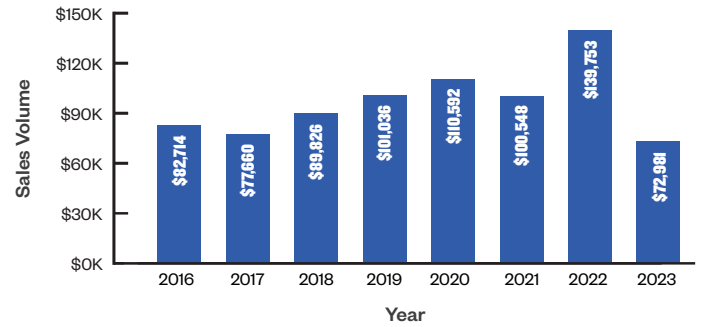
Change in Median Sales by Business, 2016-2023



Bensonhurst Total Business Sales



Bensonhurst Sales by Business



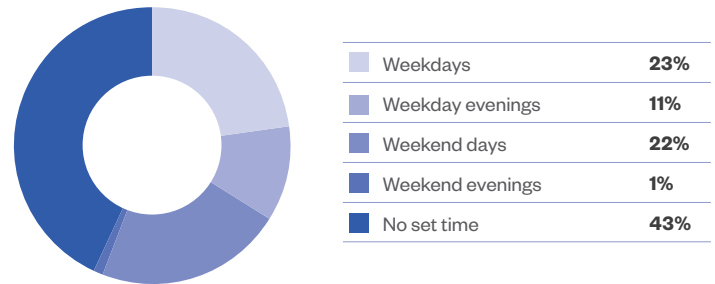
*Year 2023 reflects data gathered up until March 2023. Source: Division of Tax Policy, NYC Department of Finance

What We've Heard from Shoppers

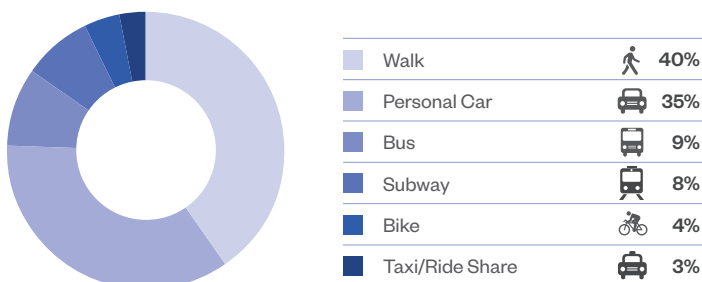
What additional types of businesses would you like to see in Bensonhurst?

- ▶ Entertainment & activities
- ▶ Flagship stores
- ▶ Restaurants
- ▶ Clothing stores
- ▶ Book stores

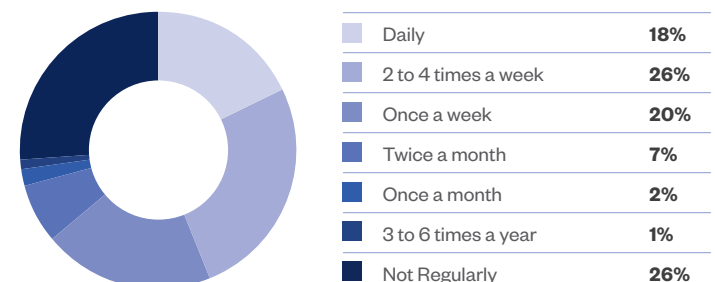
When do you usually shop in Bensonhurst?



How do you usually travel to Bensonhurst?



How often do you shop in Bensonhurst?



Source: Based on 468 consumer surveys conducted by the Brooklyn Chinese-American Association and the Federation of Italian-American Organizations between December 2022 and March 2023.

Storefront Vacancies



■ Vacant Lots ○ Vacant Storefronts ■ Parks & Community Gardens

An analysis of 1265 storefronts along Bath Avenue, Bay Parkway, 18th and 20th avenues, and 86th Street revealed that 29% of storefronts are in poor condition, 48% are in average condition, and 23% are in good condition.

Streetscape Observations

- ▶ The pedestrian experience underneath the elevated subway on 86th Street feels dirty, dark, and noisy.
- ▶ Lack of bike parking on 86th Street leads to sidewalk congestion.
- ▶ Poor roadway conditions on Bath Avenue cause rain to puddle and carry an unfavorable odor.
- ▶ Lack of litter baskets on 20th Avenue contributes to trash overflowing on streets and sidewalks.
- ▶ Litter is an issue along all the commercial corridors. Many sidewalks are dirty, with piles of leaves, trash, and discarded cardboard littering the area.

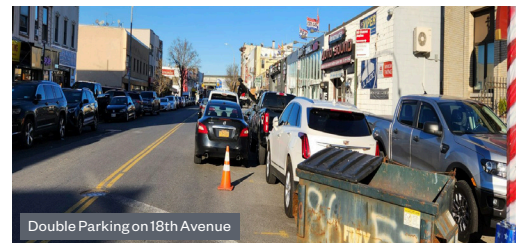
- ▶ Double parking is prevalent along 18th Avenue, creating an unsafe environment for pedestrians.
- ▶ Insufficient lighting due to vacant storefronts and lack of streetlights along 20th Avenue contributes to a poor sense of safety and an unfriendly pedestrian experience.
- ▶ Inadequate wayfinding makes it difficult for shoppers to locate businesses and neighborhood offerings.
- ▶ The installation of new benches and shelters throughout the neighborhood would protect people from the elements, aid older residents as they traverse the area, and encourage walking.



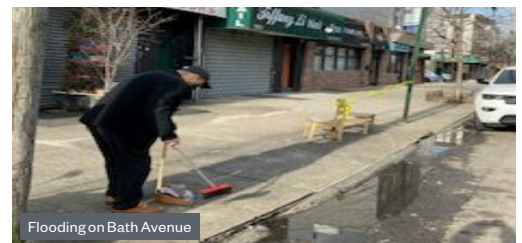
Garbage



Bike Parking



Double Parking on 18th Avenue



Flooding on Bath Avenue



Graffiti on Bay Parkway

DATA APPENDIX

Study Area Boundaries

Assessed Commercial Corridors

Primary data on Bensonhurst storefront businesses presented on pg. 6-8 was gathered along the following commercial corridors:

- ▶ 18th Avenue between 60th Street and Bath Avenue
- ▶ 20th Avenue between 60th and 74th streets
- ▶ 86th Street between 16th and 24th avenues
- ▶ Bath Avenue between 16th Avenue and Bay Parkway
- ▶ Bay Parkway between 60th and 72nd streets

Bensonhurst Context Area

Demographic and employment data on pg. 12-13 represents the population within the Bensonhurst neighborhood context area.

Trade Area

Consumer spending data on pg. 9 corresponds to the 0.75 mile trade area.



Area Demographics

Total Population

173,774	Bensonhurst
2,712,360	Brooklyn
8,736,047	New York City

Population Density (per square mile)

52,659	Bensonhurst
39,028	Brooklyn
28,893	New York City

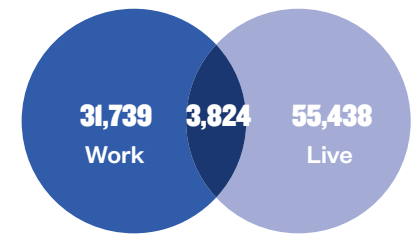
Average Household Size

3.04	Bensonhurst
2.71	Brooklyn
2.63	New York City

Car Ownership

59.0%	Bensonhurst
44.7%	Brooklyn
45.5%	New York City

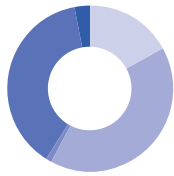
Commuting Patterns



31,739	Work in Bensonhurst, live elsewhere
3,824	Live & Work in Bensonhurst
55,438	Live in Bensonhurst, work elsewhere

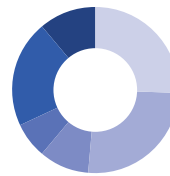
Area Demographics

Race/Background



	Bensonhurst	Brooklyn	NYC
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	17%	19%	29%
White alone	41%	37%	32%
Black or African American alone	1%	29%	21%
Asian alone	38%	12%	14%
Two or more races	3%	3%	3%
Some other race alone	0%	0%	1%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0%	0%	0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0%

Educational Attainment



	Bensonhurst	Brooklyn	NYC
12th Grade or Less, No Diploma	26%	16%	17%
High School Graduate	26%	25%	24%
Some College, No Degree	10%	13%	14%
Associate's Degree	7%	6%	7%
Bachelor's Degree	21%	24%	23%
Graduate or Professional Degree	11%	16%	17%

Population Age



	Bensonhurst	Brooklyn	NYC
Under 5 Years	7%	7%	6%
5-14 Years	12%	12%	11%
15-24 Years	11%	11%	12%
25-44 Years	28%	32%	31%
45-64 Years	26%	23%	25%
65+ Years	16%	15%	15%

Median Age

39	Bensonhurst
35.7	Brooklyn
37.3	New York City

Foreign-Born Population

53%	Bensonhurst
35%	Brooklyn
36%	New York City

Income

Median Household Income

\$59,756	Bensonhurst
\$67,753	Brooklyn
\$70,663	New York City

Pop. Below Poverty Line

18%	Bensonhurst
19%	Brooklyn
17%	New York City

Employment

Population in Labor Force

61%	Bensonhurst
64%	Brooklyn
63%	New York City

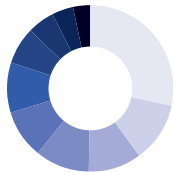
Unemployment*

4.3%	Bensonhurst
4.5%	Brooklyn
4.7%	New York City

*Note: As of May 2023, the unemployment rate is 5.4% for Brooklyn and 5.1% for New York City (NYSDOL); updated neighborhood-level data for Bensonhurst is not available.

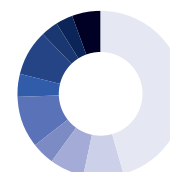
Local Jobs and Employment

Local Residents' Employment



Educational Services, Health Care, Social Assistance	27%
Professional, Scientific, Technical Services	11%
Accommodation, Food Services, Arts, Entertainment	10%
Construction	10%
Retail Trade	9%
Transportation, Warehousing, Utilities	9%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	7%
Other Services	5%
Manufacturing	4%
Public Administration	3%

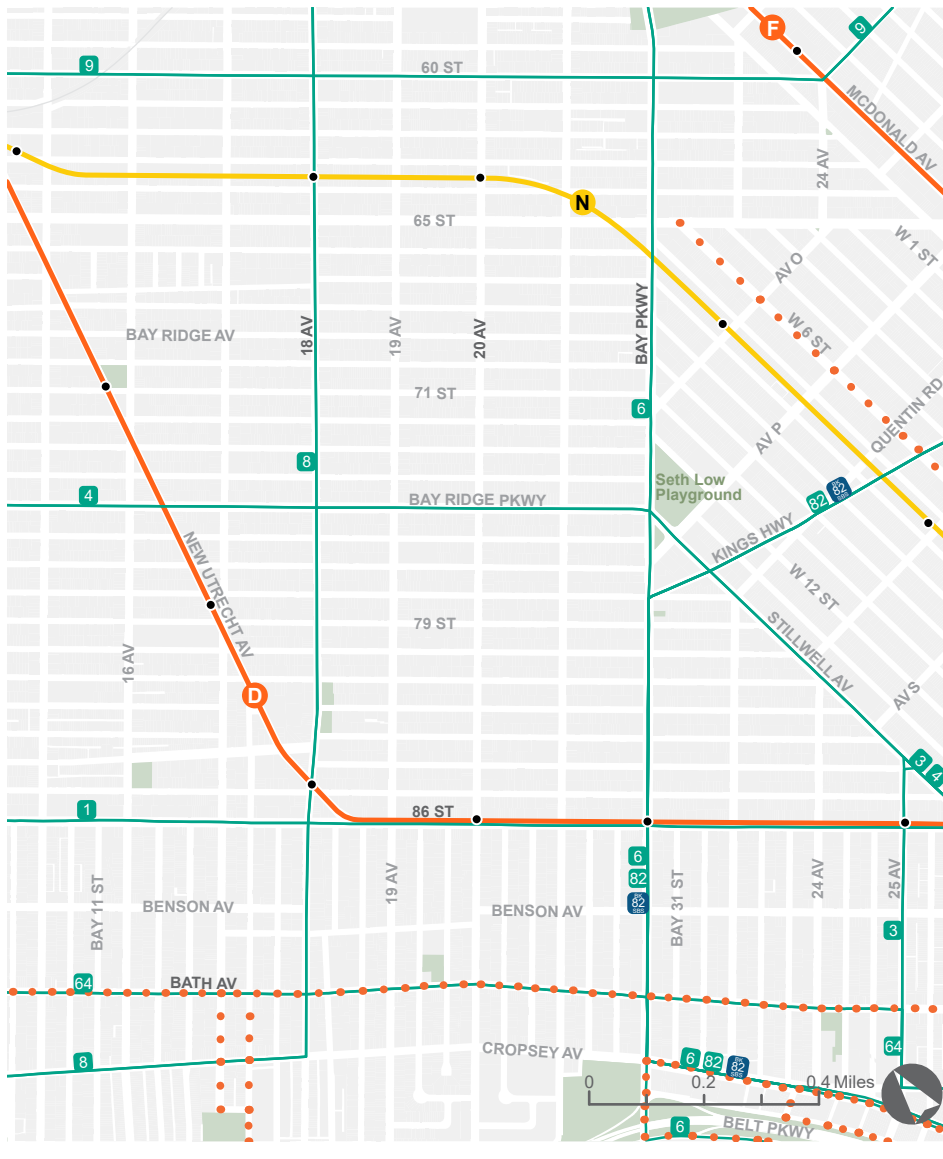
Jobs Located in Bensonhurst



Educational Services, Health Care, Social Assistance	41%
Professional, Scientific, Technical Services	7%
Accommodation, Food Services, Arts, Entertainment	6%
Construction	4%
Retail Trade	9%
Transportation, Warehousing, Utilities	4%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	8%
Other Services	3%
Manufacturing	3%
Public Administration	5%

DATA APPENDIX

Bensonhurst Transportation



▲ Bensonhurst Transportation



Average Weekday Subway Ridership (2022)

4,942	D	Bay Parkway
4,634	N	Bay Parkway
4,065	D	79 Street
3,949	D	18 Avenue
3,485	N	Kings Highway
3,404	N	18 Avenue
3,403	D N	New Utrecht Ave - 62 Street
3,276	D	20 Avenue
3,203	D	71 Street
2,776	D	25 Avenue
2,710	N	20 Avenue
1,891	F	Avenue N

Average Weekday Bus Ridership (2022)

11,741	B1
7,964	B3
4,176	B4
20,242	B6
11,532	B8
8,998	B9
3,536	B64
32,368	B82 SBS

Average Daily Vehicular Traffic (2019)

9,702	18th Avenue from 62nd to 54th streets	9,598	86th Street from New Utrecht Avenue to Bay Parkway
9,660	18th Avenue from 65th to 62nd streets	5,946	20th Avenue from 86th to 65th streets
9,738	18th Avenue from Cropsey Avenue to 65th Street	17,605	Bay Parkway from 86th to 67th streets
15,147	86th Street from 14th to New Utrecht avenues	8,936	Bath Avenue from Bay Parkway to 14th Avenue

Source: MTA 2022; NYS DOT, 2019 Annual Average Daily Traffic data.

Recent SBS Neighborhood Investments

- ▶ *Commercial Revitalization*, Avenue NYC multi-year grant of \$300,000 awarded to the Brooklyn Chinese-American Association, 2022-2025.
- ▶ *Commercial Revitalization*, Avenue NYC single-year grant of \$100,000 awarded to the Federation of Italian American Organizations, 2022.

Existing Plans & Studies

A Foodscape of Bay Ridge/Bensonhurst, NYC Food Policy Center at Hunter College, 2017.

Sources

ESRI and Consumer Expenditure Surveys, Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2023 ESRI Retail Demand Outlook.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 2022. Average Weekday Subway Ridership and Average Monthly Bus Ridership.

NYS Department of Labor. May 2023. Unemployment Rate Rankings by County.

NYS Department of Transportation. 2019 Annual Average Daily Traffic, using Traffic Data Viewer.

NYC Department of Finance, Division of Tax Policy, using data from NYS Department of Taxation and Finance. Business sales are reported by tax year, which runs from March 1st to February 28th. Sales data are compiled from sales tax returns, which are rolled up by tax filer within a year, excluding returns with negative sales amounts. For each year, each tax filer is reported according to the address listed on their latest return. Large outliers were removed from the analysis, and the top 5% of filers from Manhattan and the top 1% of filers from the outer boroughs by sales were removed.

NYC Department of Small Business Services. Fiscal Year 2022. Business Improvement Districts Trends Report.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2020. OnTheMap Application. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program.

U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, using NYC Population FactFinder. Canarsie Census Tracts: 254, 302, 244, 186, 188, 172, 168, 170, 174, 176, 190, 178, 180, 182, 184, 248, 242, 246, 250, 252, 256, 270, 258, 274, 260, 262, 264, 266, 268, 272, 276, 278, 280, 282, 284, 286, 288, 290, 292, 294, 296, 298, 300, 304, 430, 432, 434, 436, 446.

Photo Credits: © NYC & Company: Will Steacy. Wikimedia Commons: Marc A. Hermann/MTA; Jim.henderson; Smallbones. Flickr: Kenneth Dellaquila. Brooklyn Chinese-American Association. Federation of Italian-American Organizations. NYC SBS: Andrew Marcus, Eduardo Carmelo Dañobeytia

ABOUT SBS

The NYC Department of Small Business Services helps unlock economic potential and create economic security for all New Yorkers by connecting New Yorkers to good jobs, creating stronger businesses, and building a fairer economy in neighborhoods across the five boroughs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to recognize and thank the following individuals and organizations for their contributions to the development of the Bensonhurst Commercial District Needs Assessment:

Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso
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Bensonhurst Shoppers and Residents