



SURVIVE AND THRIVE



TOWARDS A JUSTICE-FOCUSED GOWANUS NEIGHBORHOOD



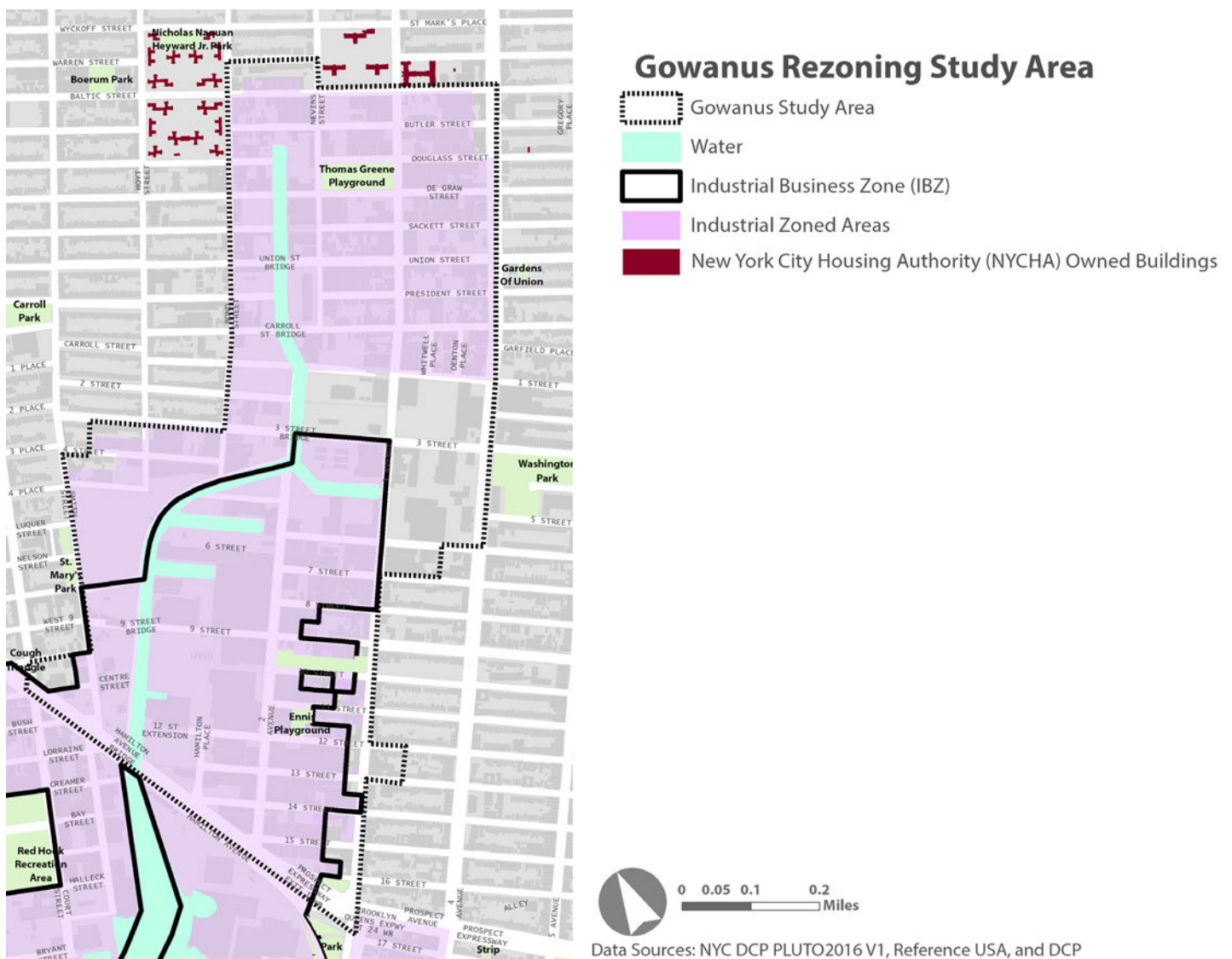
SURVIVE AND THRIVE: TOWARDS A JUSTICE-FOCUSED GOWANUS NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

Background

Gowanus' historical legacy as an industrial and manufacturing hub, surrounding a working canal, continues to shape the character of the neighborhood. Today it is also home to incubators, offices, small commercial businesses, an artist enclave, and a growing nightlife and indoor recreation destination. The neighborhood is also home to a vibrant residential community dominated by three New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) public housing campuses north and west of the canal, and residents living in rent-stabilized housing concentrated between Union and Carroll Streets, between Nevins Street and 4th Avenue. The Canal and the particular mix of uses in the neighborhood is what makes Gowanus distinct from the surrounding residential neighborhoods, yet this delicate balance is under siege. An aggressive real estate market threatens to displace longtime residents and businesses alike while further segregating the predominately low- and moderate-income NYCHA residents from their neighbors. Current neighborhood planning efforts in Gowanus present an opportunity to build on the unique nature of this mixed use community. Equally important, the efforts present the City and the community with an opportunity to curb destructive real estate forces and to combat negative trends that continue to further segregate the community, displace low- and moderate-income residents, and eliminate industrial and small commercial businesses.

The context of the Department of City Planning's (DCP) current neighborhood planning effort is critical. In the last two decades, Gowanus has undergone rapid transformation, the result of both private and public actions. The community has also been subject to decades of environmental abuse and neglect; the Gowanus Canal is Brooklyn's first Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Superfund site, and sewage back-ups and toxic flooding frequently make their way into the neighborhood. At the same time, loopholes in allowable uses in manufacturing zones have allowed incompatible or conflicting uses, such as hotels and nightclubs, to proliferate. Through its actions and inactions, the City has had a major impact on the area and has accelerated the displacement of existing low- and moderate-income residents and industrial businesses.

Although residents of Gowanus welcome long-overdue infrastructure investments and the environmental clean-up of the area, these changes also have the potential to unlock additional land value, creating stronger displacement pressures. The City must make concrete policy, funding, and infrastructure commitments that prevent displacement and address structural inequality. In order for a rezoning to serve the community in its entirety, local people and businesses who are most deeply impacted and vulnerable to displacement must actively shape land use decisions – not merely be “listened” to. **This document aims to elevate the voices of our community that have not yet been heard in the City’s planning process, and makes the case for a community plan based on principles of social, economic, and environmental justice for a just, inclusive, and resilient Gowanus neighborhood.**



Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice

The Gowanus¹ Neighborhood Coalition for Justice formed out of an understanding that City rezoning processes generally, and in our community specifically, privileged voices and real estate interests hold disproportionate power. The Coalition represents a concerted effort by local residents and stakeholders to promote social, economic, and environmental justice as the primary framework under which any rezoning, land use changes and/or public investments occur in Gowanus. The Coalition seeks to specifically elevate the priorities of low- and moderate-income residents, industrial firms and the neighborhood-based organizations and small businesses that serve them, in a crowded rezoning conversation where the survival of the existing community has not yet received serious attention. Our Coalition demands to be included directly and meaningfully in land use decisions that will impact our community.

The Coalition was convened by the Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC), which has engaged stakeholders and community members in anticipation of the City's most recent efforts to rezone the Gowanus neighborhood as part of the Mayor's affordable housing plan to build and preserve 200,000 units over 10 years. These conversations built upon the community planning framework developed from 2013-2015 through Bridging Gowanus, a neighborhood visioning and planning process facilitated through Council Member Brad Lander's office with other local elected officials. While Bridging Gowanus ambitiously sought out to understand and document the spectrum of opinions and needs of the various stakeholders and communities living in the neighborhood, some key constituencies were largely under-represented in the process, most notably low- and moderate-income residents, the majority of whom are Latin@ and African American.²

To ensure the community's comprehensive needs are met, including those most vulnerable to displacement in a rezoning, the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice has developed a set of five overarching principles that must be included in decision-making with regards to the rezoning and neighborhood planning efforts. Any rezoning, large land use action or public investment should affirmatively:

1. Advance racial and economic justice
2. Create real affordable housing and protect tenants from displacement
3. Promote environmental justice
4. Protect local businesses where we work and shop
5. Uplift the culture and community of long-time residents

Coalition Groups (List in Formation)

Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC), Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE), Gowanus Houses Resident Association, Gowanus Houses Arts Collective, Wyckoff Gardens Resident Association, Wyckoff Gardens Resident Watch, Warren Street Houses Residents Association, RAICES Spanish Speaking Elderly Council, VOCAL NY, Christian Help in Park Slope (CHiPS), St Lydia's Church, TRELLIS, Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary & St. Stephen Roman Catholic Church, Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation (SBIDC), Gowanus Alliance, Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC), South Brooklyn Local Development Corporation (SBLDC), Forth on Fourth (FOFA) a Committee of the Park Slope Civic Council.

1. Advance Racial and Economic Justice

Racial and economic justice, or the proactive actions that aim to ensure equal access to economic and educational opportunities and fair treatment of communities historically oppressed, must be at the center of any Gowanus neighborhood planning process. In our community, racial and economic justice include:

1. Economic opportunity through targeted workforce development, adult education and local hiring practices;
2. Public investments that support an inclusive and environmentally and socially resilient Gowanus;
3. Racial desegregation of our communities and schools;
4. Community policing strategies that prohibit racial profiling, uphold equality in public space and focus on building community relationships; and
5. Mechanisms that ensure inclusive decision making, transparency and accountability.

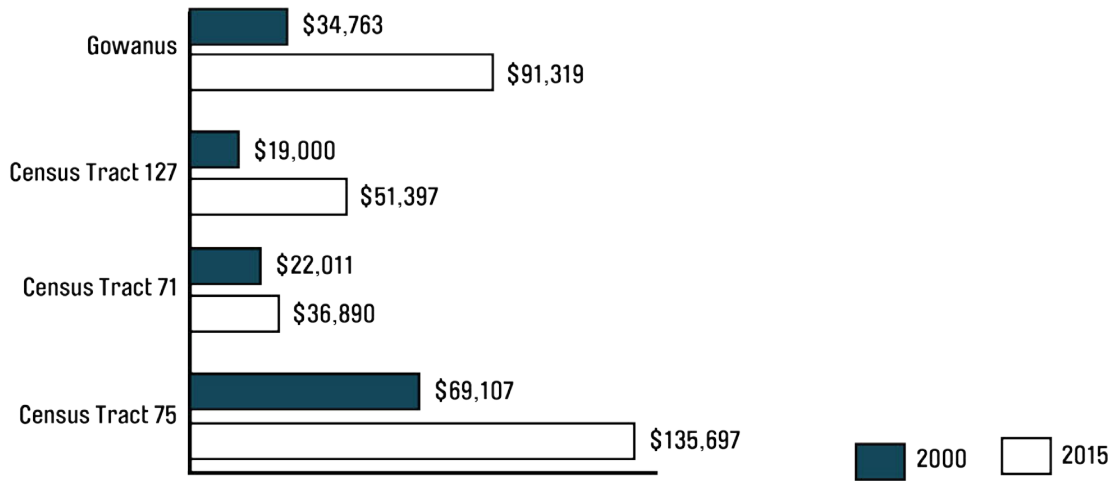
Economic Opportunity

Rising housing and rental prices are already contributing to growing income inequality in Gowanus, further deepening the existing racial and economic segregation. While neighborhood median income increased 162% between 2000 and 2015, economic growth has not benefited all residents.³ The growth in the gap between the lowest- and highest-income census tracts has significantly increased by 121% from 2000 to 2015. Additionally, the two lowest median-income census tracts in Gowanus (71 and 127) are the only ones composed of a majority people of color population. These census tracts are also home to the Gowanus Houses, Wyckoff

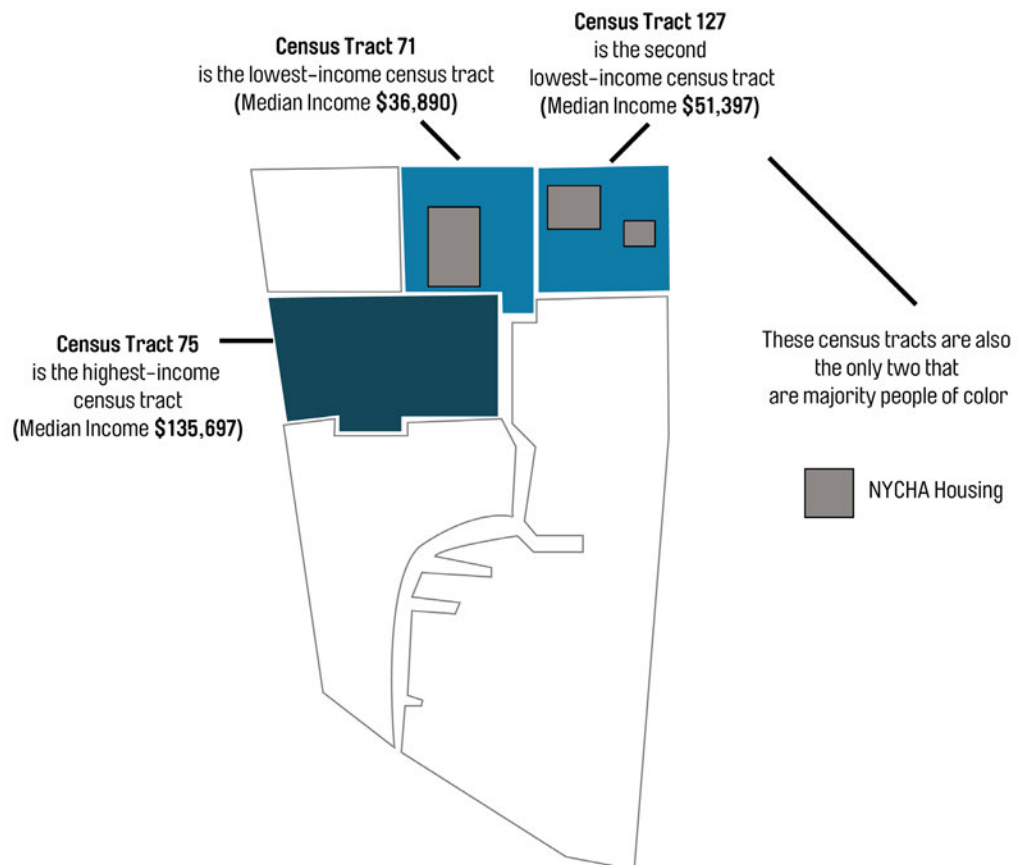
Gardens, and Warren Street public housing developments. As the Gowanus neighborhood continues to gentrify, increased economic activity will not necessarily mean economic gains for low- and moderate-income households. In particular, NYCHA residents are less likely to benefit from growing economic opportunities in the area without intentional and strategic planning and public investments.

A 2015 study by the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity found that NYCHA residents rarely benefit from the increased economic activity in their neighborhood, as new retail establishments fail to hire them.⁴ This neighborhood plan and rezoning is an opportunity to incentivize new and existing businesses to hire locally, and to ensure that new jobs – including those created from the construction and maintenance of new facilities and from environmental remediation – benefit local residents. There is also a critical need to make targeted workforce development, adult education, and local hiring investments to ensure that individuals with barriers to employment benefit from increased local economic activity and investment.

Median Incomes in Gowanus

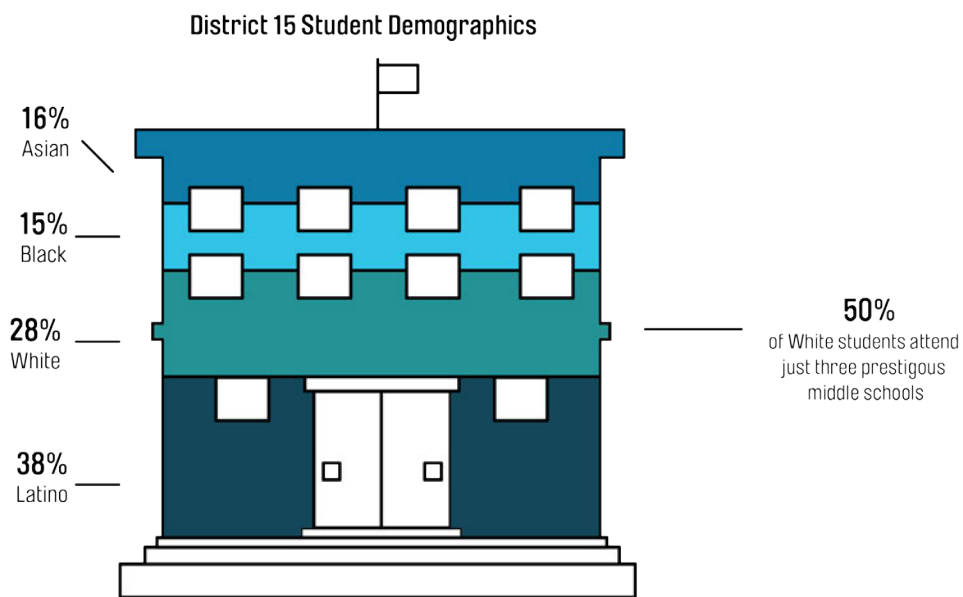


Highest- and Lowest-Income Areas in Gowanus



School Desegregation

Racial and economic segregation plague schools citywide; in Gowanus however, this issue is even more pronounced.⁵ In District 15, where students from Gowanus, Red Hook, Park Slope, Carroll Gardens, and Sunset Park attend school, White students in the district comprise 28 percent of the student body while over 50 percent of the White middle school student population attend three of the District's most selective schools.⁶ School overcrowding is a persistent problem for District 15, with an average classroom utilization rate of 111.5 percent.⁷ The unprecedented development boom along 4th Avenue, in Gowanus, and in surrounding residential areas has already exacerbated existing problems. In the most recent 4 year period, citywide enrollment increased by 4% while enrollment increased by 13% for District 15.⁸ Other obvious areas where desegregation is deeply needed include housing and in community spaces, and each of these are addressed in more detail in later sections.



Community-Police Relations

All community members living in Gowanus deserve a safe and welcoming neighborhood. The New York Civil Liberties Union reported in 2013 that in 'immediately adjacent' Park Slope, where the population is 67% White, nearly 85% of the stops in 2012 were of Black and Latin@ people while 90% of people stopped were innocent.⁹ New York City has already begun to move towards important police reform measures, including halting the discriminatory practice of stop-and-frisk, and in 2016, citywide crime rates were down despite the reduction of stops.¹⁰ Notwithstanding this

improvement, people of color continue to be disproportionately impacted by policing policies. Neighborhood gentrification changes policing patterns and can increase the potential for longtime residents to be racially profiled and abused in public spaces, such as sidewalks, parks, courtyards, stores, public transit and train stations. This kind of racial profiling and harassment leads to distrust between many members of our community and the police. There must be a plan for preserving culturally-relevant and welcoming public spaces and ensuring that the influx of newer, whiter and wealthier residents does not result in the over-policing of the existing community.

At public housing developments, many safety issues are directly tied to poor housing conditions, including the need for lighting improvements, functioning front door locks, and reliable and safe elevators. Addressing safety concerns in Gowanus-area public housing requires a comprehensive strategy, including better partnership between NYCHA, public housing watch committees, residents overall, and the police department – as well as non-traditional partners such as the Department of Health and Mental Health – to tackle physical security, repair, infrastructure issues, and residents' needs at the developments.

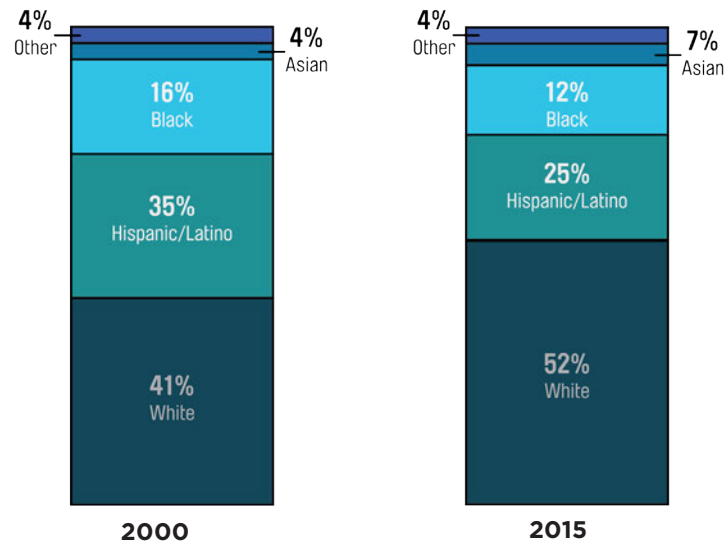
2. Create Real Affordable Housing and Protect Tenants from Displacement

Displacement and Neighborhood Exclusion

Past New York City policies and land use actions have failed to plan for the community as a whole and contributed to residential and business displacement. For example, the 2003 North Park Slope and 2007 South Park Slope rezonings along 4th Avenue, the eastern edge of Gowanus, significantly increased market-rate residential development without providing any affordable housing, displacement protections, or infrastructure upgrades to the existing community. Following the rezonings, longtime low- and moderate-income residents experienced landlord harassment and eviction, leading to the deregulation and demolition of rent stabilized buildings. The corridor has since seen a high-rise development boom, with luxury rentals and condos. None of these buildings include affordable housing units and there are no retail opportunities for small businesses due to parking garages located on the ground floors.

Rising land values from adjacent neighborhoods have spilled over to Gowanus, and have increased displacement pressures. From 2004 to 2012, property value assessments along the Gowanus Canal increased an average of 84 percent.¹¹ As a result, properties along the canal are breaking record sales. In 2016 an empty lot near the Gowanus Canal – the most densely populated EPA Superfund site in the country – sold for \$2,775,000 – or \$338 per buildable square foot!¹²

Race and Ethnic Demographic Change in Gowanus

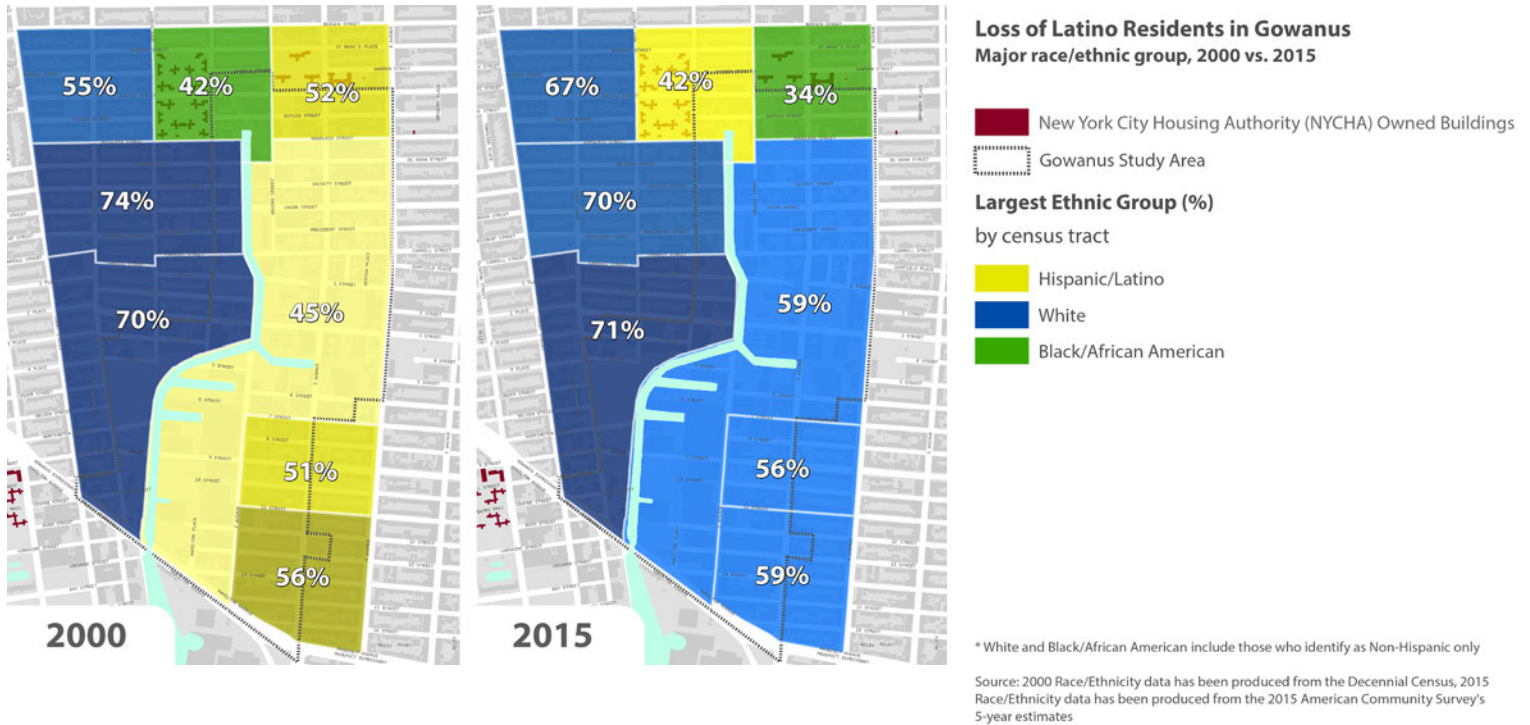


Median Rent in Gowanus



Since 2000, Gowanus has undergone rapid demographic change as low-and moderate-income residents, most of whom are Latin@ and Black, have been forced out due to harassment, rising rents, and the demolition of rent stabilized housing. In 2000, 5 of the 8 the census tracts that make up Gowanus were home to primarily Latin@ or Black households; in 2015, only 2 were (see map on page 11). From 2007 to 2014, Gowanus and the surrounding neighborhoods, including Boerum Hill, Carroll Gardens, and Park Slope¹³ saw a 22 percent net decrease in their rent stabilized¹⁴ housing stock (approximately 1,053 units), a much faster pace than the overall citywide net decrease of 6 percent.¹⁵ This rapid decline in rent stabilized housing and rapid growth in wealthier, White households go hand in hand. For example, the median rent in Gowanus rose from \$1,925 in 2010 to \$2,900 in 2016, and in 2016,¹⁶ median home sales prices jumped 68% from just the previous year.¹⁷ Without new protections and efforts to support the remaining rent stabilized tenants, long-time homeowners, and low- and moderate-income renters in unregulated housing, the cycle of harassment and resident displacement will continue.

Loss of Latin@ Residents in Gowanus Major racial/ethnic* groups, 2000 vs 2015



Real Affordability Needs

The community needs strategies to ensure the development and preservation of housing with deep affordability levels, specifically for households who make less than 40% of the area median income (AMI), or \$32,640 annually for a family of three. NYCHA residents are the largest population in Gowanus, with a median household income of about \$30,000.¹⁸ Unfortunately, the current Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) program largely fails to meet this need. The two Options the City may require under the MIH program mainly serve families at 60% or 80% AMI - up to \$65,250 for a family of three. Although MIH also includes a “Deep Affordability Option,” developers cannot be required to elect this option, and it only requires 20% of the rent-restricted units be made affordable to households making 40% AMI. This means that the vast majority of apartments created with MIH would be out of reach for a majority of NYCHA families, limiting their opportunities to move out of public housing yet remain in Gowanus. Gowanus is one of the few neighborhoods announced for a neighborhood plan so far where the market rate units could support affordability levels deeper than what MIH outlines. The City must provide new affordable housing that truly meets the needs of the entire community and provides the opportunity for NYCHA residents to move into other affordable housing locally.

Loss of Rent-Stabilized Housing, 2007 - 2014

22% decrease in rent-stabilized housing in Boerum Hill, Carroll Gardens, Gowanus, and Park Slope

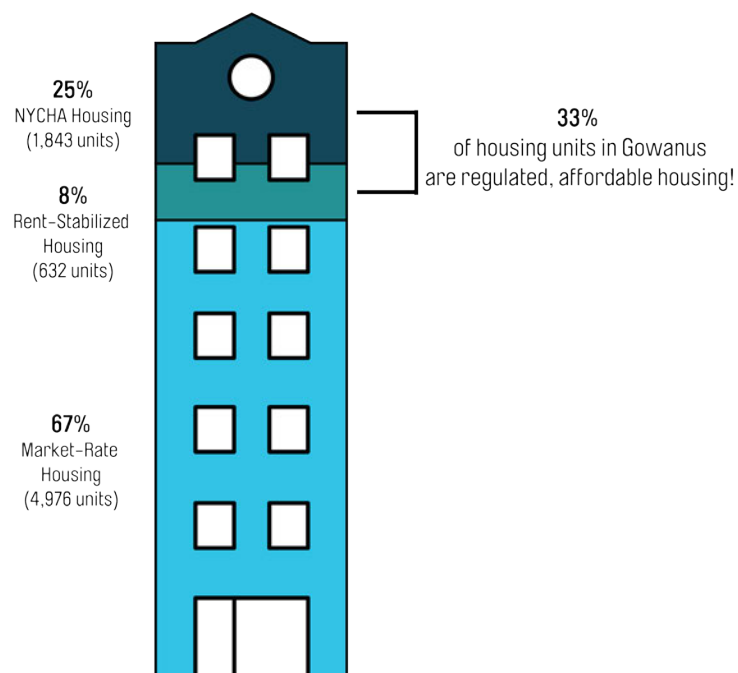


6% decrease in rent-stabilized housing across the city



In addition to threats to rent stabilized and unregulated tenants living in privately owned housing, any rezoning or major land use action must address the conditions in Gowanus-area public housing. There are nearly 2,000 units of NYCHA housing in our community, home to over 4,300 residents. Housing conditions in the NYCHA developments are among the worst in our community, the result of decades of neglect and made worse by Superstorm Sandy. Addressing Gowanus-area NYCHA repair needs, bringing all public housing apartments into compliance with the NYC housing code regulations and improving social resiliency must be a goal of this rezoning. Improving NYCHA housing fundamentally aligns with the Mayor's goal to preserve 120,000 units of affordable housing citywide. Residents of public housing are important members of our community and deserve to benefit from the rezoning and public investment in the neighborhood. The City has a responsibility to fully incorporate NYCHA into the planning process.

Affordable vs. Market-Rate Rental Housing in Gowanus, 2017



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Alfredo Rivera and Maria Rodriguez, Rent Stabilized Tenants at 140 4th Avenue



Starting in 2014, the tenants at 140 4th Avenue, an 8-unit rent stabilized building on the border of Park Slope and Gowanus, started to experience harassment from their landlord in the form of unsafe construction practices, interruptions in heat and hot water, dust and debris in the hallways and leaks in their apartments. Conditions got so bad that the building was placed in the Alternative Enforcement Program with the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). Although HPD monitored the building, placed multiple violations and got several Stop Work orders issued, this did little to change the landlord's behavior or the living conditions in the building. By the beginning of 2016, six of the eight families had left, exhausted by the relentless noise, debris, lack of repairs and overall lack of safety.

"I've been living at 140 4th Avenue since 1962 and the area's changed a lot," says Alfredo Rivera who lives in the building with his mother, Maria and adult daughter, Emily. They are one of just two families remaining at 140 4th Avenue. "The owner put two floors on top of ours. And the construction conditions, they affected me for a long time: the dust, the debris, all the cracking. We're just scared."

The landlord's tactics come in the context of the 2003 rezoning which incentivized the harassment and displacement of rent stabilized tenants. Specifically the rezoning allowed for greater building density along 4th Avenue -- with no additional protections to residents or requirement of inclusionary housing. This touched off a wave of harassment and displacement in rent stabilized buildings along 4th Avenue; over the

last 13 years many tenants in these buildings have come to Fifth Avenue Committee seeking help. Landlords using construction as a way to harass out the rent-stabilized tenants by making their apartments unlivable has emerged as a persistent tactic that continues to this day. In the case of 140 4th Avenue, the owner took advantage of the City's new zoning rules and decided to build two new floors on top of the existing building.

"When it rains, a lot of rain comes down from the ceiling from the roof," says Alfredo. Every day my mother wakes up early, she can't think, she can't concentrate. She can't go to sleep. I see her go through that and I'm going through it too."

"They offered us money to get out, but it wasn't enough money because the rents are so high," says Alfredo. "\$70,000, \$80,000 goes fast. That's peanuts."

In 2016, the two remaining families, with the help of Fifth Avenue Committee and South Brooklyn Legal Services, sued the landlord, resulting in a temporary relocation and repair agreement for the tenants while the landlord corrects more than 70 violations in their apartments and the building as a whole. Tenants and their advocates are hopeful that situation has turned a corner and that these two families are on their way to being restored to decent conditions and services. However not all tenants are able to prevail in these situations, such as the six families who left 140 4th Avenue under duress.

The 2003 rezoning of 4th Avenue offers a cautionary tale of what can happen to existing affordable housing and longtime tenants when the City does not adequately protect them. When the City changes development rules and spurs real estate speculation, it bears responsibility for the displacement that follows. The City must approach the rezoning of the Gowanus area differently and implement strong tenant protections.

"No one should we going through what we're going through," says Alfredo. "We didn't now this was going to happen. I didn't know and it's scary."

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

150- 158th 4th Ave



The subject buildings in 2007 (left) and luxury housing development 2010 (right)

In 2003 the North Park Slope rezoning allowed for developers to build taller buildings along 4th Avenue without requiring affordable housing. Shortly after the zoning change, the owner of 150, 152, 154, 156 and 158 4th Avenue began a tenant harassment campaign to remove stabilized tenants from their homes in order to sell to a luxury housing developer.

The primary method used by the owner to remove tenants was harassment in the form of building neglect and verbal abuse. Families suffered through no hot water or heat, flooding, mold and vermin. Trash and urine in the halls were a consequence of broken front doors. Despite hundreds of violations placed on the buildings through HP actions (tenant-initiated court cases to force landlords to make repairs) the City failed to move on code enforcement. By December 2006, the owner had successfully displaced 40 low/moderate income families and deregulated 40 rent stabilized units. The buildings were demolished and a luxury rental development was built in their place.

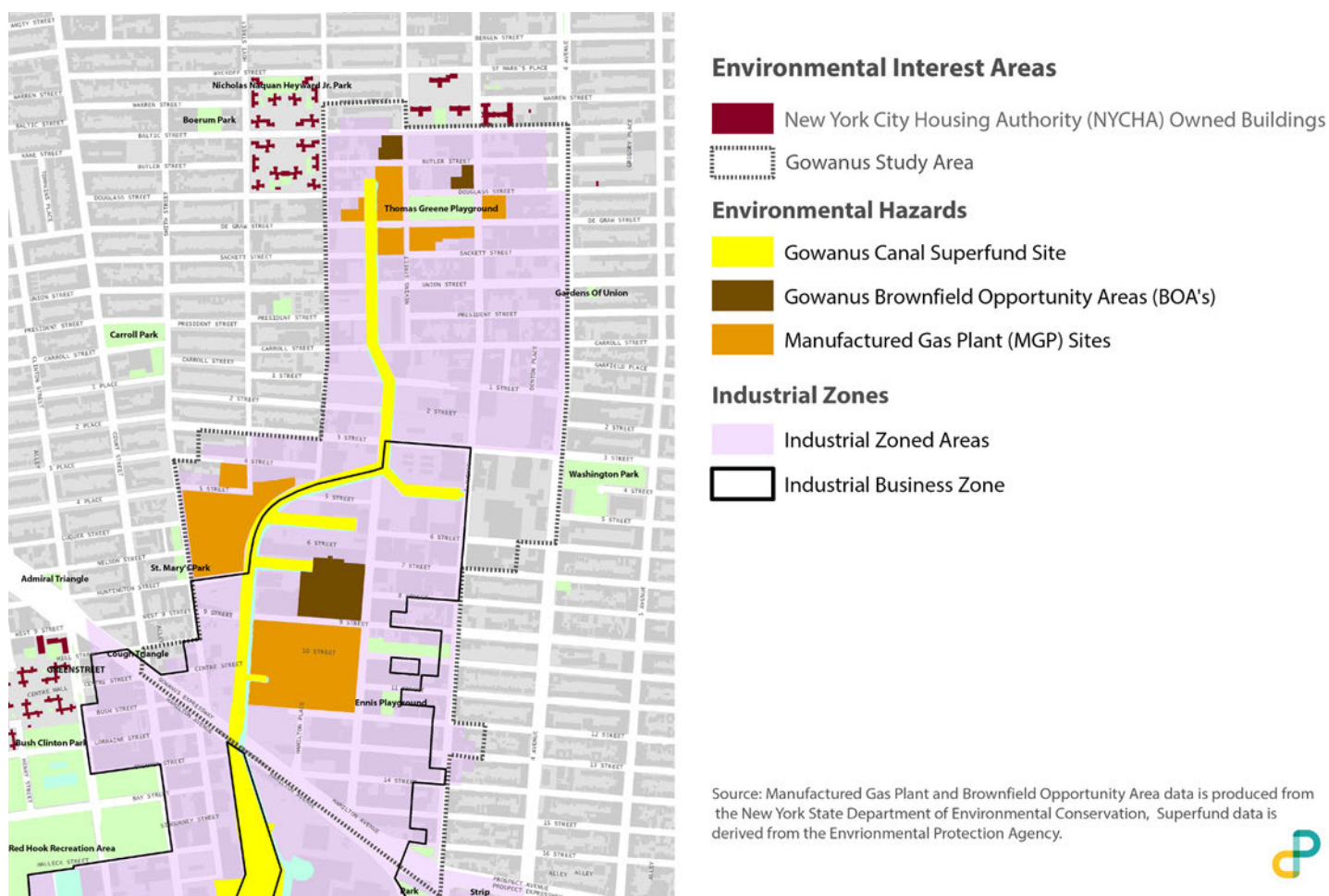
In 2014 the owner of the luxury building, 150 Fourth Avenue LLC, agreed to pay \$500,000 as part of a settlement for failing to deliver on a promise to pay building employees prevailing wages, but receiving a 421a tax break of \$300,000 to do so. The City and state cannot continue to reward unscrupulous landlords and developers who subject families and children to dangerous housing conditions and make a profit doing so. Tenant protections must be precursor to any rezoning or land use actions and government tax policy should be rational and be enforced in a timely manner.

3. Promote Environmental Justice

Disparate Impacts

In recent years, especially propelled by the Gowanus Canal EPA Superfund designation in 2010, the City has begun to focus on sustainable development and addressing environmental hazards in the Gowanus neighborhood. As the City, State, and Federal government moves forward with the implementation of other neighborhood-wide sustainability measures, Environmental Justice (EJ) must be at the center of decision-making with respect to remediation of contaminated sites and implementation of environmental policies. EJ requires that no community should bear the disproportionate burden of negative environmental, health, and climate impacts from private and government policies and activities. To achieve Environmental Justice, communities who have suffered from injustices must be at the forefront of decision-making with regard to environmental resolutions and policies.

As the clean-up of the Canal proceeds, our community is already experiencing disparate impacts. In addition to the Superfund clean-up and the remediation of the former Fulton Manufactured Gas Plant (MGP) site, one of two Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) multi-million-gallon retention tanks will be constructed near the Douglass and DeGraw (“Double D”) community pool. Disruptions to the Thomas



Greene Park and Double D Pool will potentially take both off-line for years. It remains undetermined how alternate facilities will be provided to the northern Gowanus community as a whole, and to public housing residents in particular, during these clean-ups that strip the area of the only park, public pool, and green space in the area.

Vulnerability to Climate Change

Three public housing sites, the Gowanus Houses, Wyckoff Gardens, and Warren Houses, are located adjacent to the Superfund site and/or near upland brownfield sites, areas that are already prone to flooding during normal rainfall. For decades, residents living in these NYCHA developments, as well as other locals, have had to contend with deplorable and inequitable conditions such as street flooding and toxic indoor housing conditions that include leaks, mold, lead, vermin, and sewage overflows. These conditions lead to and exacerbate physical and mental health problems, especially for children and seniors, and they heighten residents' vulnerability to climate change impacts, as witnessed during Superstorm Sandy and its aftermath. In October 2012, Superstorm Sandy left one fifth of the City's public housing units damaged by the storm, where people of color make up 80 percent of residents.¹⁹ At the Gowanus Houses 2,836 residents went without heat and electricity for 10 days when basement flooding destroyed boilers and shorted out electrical cables. Many residents, including the elderly and people with disabilities unable to use the stairs, were stranded in their upper floor apartments when elevators were out of operation. Similarly, affordable housing in Gowanus that is managed by Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC) was also impacted, with residents losing electricity and heat for days or weeks, depending on the property. Meanwhile, other residents in Gowanus and in the adjacent neighborhoods of Park Slope and Carroll Gardens saw their power and heat restored immediately or were not similarly impacted.

Beyond Sustainability: Developing a Resilient Community

As New York City's *One New York: The Plan for A Strong and Just City* recognizes, a justice-centered definition of resilience goes beyond the notion of 'bouncing back' and instead focuses on 'bouncing forward' to eradicate inequalities and the unsustainable resource use that is at the heart of the climate crisis.²⁰ Recovery after Superstorm Sandy has been painfully slow and six years after the disaster, NYCHA residents continue to wait for building restoration and reconstruction to repair the damage, while some local impacted building owners and businesses are just seeing Post-Sandy investment. Currently, NYC Economic Development Corporation's (EDC) investment in FAC's Gowanus Wi-Fi Mesh Network is in its first phase, and is a result of Post-Sandy FEMA funding. This will be an important community resource that must be expanded to encompass all of Gowanus, especially around NYCHA where many households lack access to the internet. The Gowanus Wi-Fi Mesh network seeks to

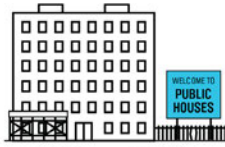
improve neighborhood resilience and connections and information sharing between local residents, businesses and organizations.

Research has found that neighborhoods lacking social cohesion, or trust in their neighbors, had a harder time recovering from Superstorm Sandy.²¹ We've been taught the importance of improving our neighborhood's infrastructure while also strengthening social networks and developing an emergency preparedness plan with multi-agency coordination. Where there is investment in sustainable physical infrastructure, there must also be investment in building social capital, measured by the trust, respect, and reliability within a community.²² Multi-agency coordination, as well as tapping into community knowledge, is needed to achieve social cohesion and develop a resilient neighborhood.

Leverage Existing Opportunities

The City has a responsibility to ensure that any ongoing and future investment leveraged by public agencies and through the rezoning process advances equity goals and directly improves the lives of NYCHA residents. Gowanus Houses, one of the NYCHA developments hit hardest by Superstorm Sandy, will be the recipient of millions of dollars of FEMA funds to address Sandy-related repairs. Meanwhile, Wyckoff Gardens is one of six developments across the City where public land at NYCHA will be leased to private developers to produce housing units that are 50% market-rate and 50% affordable. This is part of NYCHA's strategy to create new affordable housing and fund long-needed repairs. With the unprecedented multi-billion dollars of public and private investments planned in the neighborhood, the Department of City Planning (DCP) must work closely with NYCHA and other City agencies to ensure that residents see the economic benefits facilitated through this rezoning, including access to jobs created through new construction and new businesses. This includes ensuring the enforcement of Section 3 Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) hiring requirements for FEMA funds and applying similar local hiring requirements for all public investments. NYCHA's failure to actively enforce Section 3 hiring requirements and the City's reluctance to require local hiring more broadly when public investments are made continue to strip residents of potential job opportunities.

Selected Investments in Gowanus Area



Millions (TBD)

50/50 NYCHA infill development
at Wyckoff Gardens



\$1-2 Million

Participatory Budgeting



\$99 Million

FEMA Sandy Recovery
at Gowanus Houses



\$300+ Million

NYC Department of
Environmental Protection
for sewer and water
quality upgrades*

* Number estimated due to unknown projections of cost for the Superfund CSO retention tank construction projects.



\$500 Million

US EPA Gowanus
Canal Superfund
clean-up



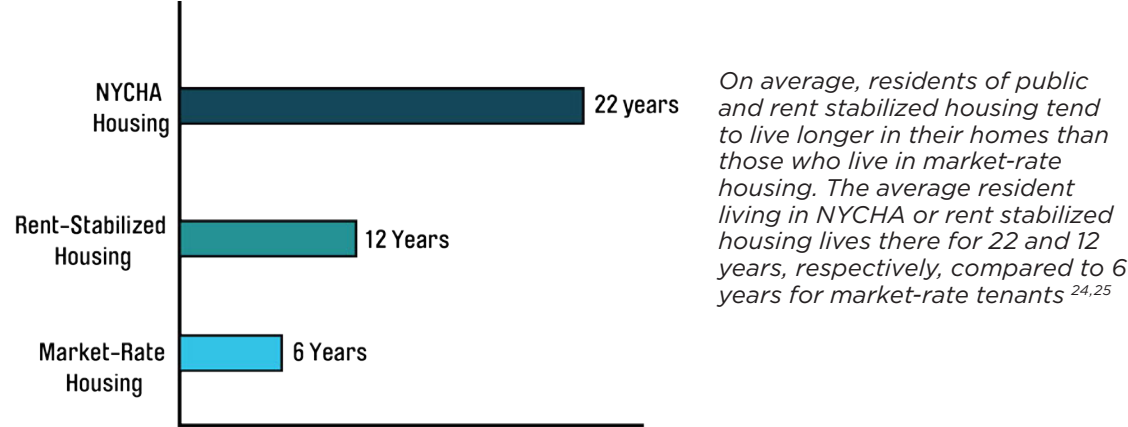
\$500+ Million

Manufactured Gas Plant
clean-ups for 3 sites

4. Uplift the Culture and Community of Longtime Residents

Longtime residents who have deep-seated roots in the community, particularly those who live in rent stabilized and public housing, deserve to experience the benefits of increased public and private investment coming into the neighborhood. In Gowanus, public housing and rent stabilized tenants comprise 33% of the renter-occupied population.²³ For decades these residents and the local organizations that serve them have remained invested in their community when others, including the City and developers, would not. Now these residents find their neighbors have been pushed out and their community centers and institutions are no longer able to stay.

NYCHA and Rent-Stabilized Tenants Have Long-Term Ties to the Community



The loss of important institutions and programs that serve as a resource to low- and moderate-income residents fundamentally impacts the quality of life for these residents and exacerbates existing problems. The City must support the availability and affordability of cultural and recreational opportunities for low-income residents, especially to combat some of the negative impacts of gentrification, including the feeling of isolation experienced by longtime residents from new establishments.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

The Gowanus Community Center



The Gowanus Community Center served as a crucial post-Sandy resource to meet the basic needs of NYCHA residents who lost heat, electricity and hot water. Though the Center had once served as an important hub for residents for job training, personal development and a space to celebrate cultural events, prior to Sandy it had remained mostly closed due to defunding by NYCHA.²⁶ Reopening the Gowanus Community Center to serve as a vital economic development and cultural resource for NYCHA residents should be a goal of the rezoning and can build upon past Participatory Budget commitments to the Center.

In addition to protecting and expanding the institutions and programs that are recognized as cultural and artistic hubs for the existing community, it is important that the City recognize and preserve those places where the art and culture of longtime community residents lives more informally and unprofessionally. For example our definition of such institutions can and should also include religious institutions, stores, restaurants, non-profit community-based organizations, athletic spaces and public spaces that have served low- and moderate-income residents. In general the City should protect institutions and spaces that are welcoming and culturally relevant for public housing residents, longstanding racial and ethnic communities including the African-American community, Italian-American community, multiple Latin@ communities, people of color, longtime residents, recent immigrants, young people, people with disabilities, the LGBTQ community, people with mental health issues and members of our community who are insufficiently housed or homeless.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Lifting Up Gowanus Culture



Ijaaza El-Nuwaubun, poet and Gowanus Houses resident

Ijaaza El-Nuwaubun has been a resident of the Gowanus Houses development for 15 years. Among her many talents, Ijaaza is a published poet who teaches poetry to residents both inside and outside of the neighborhood. In an interview with Fifth Avenue Committee, Ijaaza discusses the rich artistic community life and important small businesses in Gowanus.

Although she remembers drug trafficking and violence when she first moved to Gowanus, Ijaaza also recalls the neighborhood businesses as one of the most positive and welcoming aspects of the area. Now that crime is down and real estate speculation is up, there is a threat of displacement of the neighborhood businesses that Gowanus Houses residents rely on. “I’ve come to an understanding that a lot of people are losing their businesses because of the rezoning situation. I want to know what is going to happen to people that are actually in a low-income situation; how all this change is going to affect us....What is going to come and replace these things that we need most?”

Many residents in Gowanus Houses and elsewhere in the neighborhood, who are low- and moderate income artists, make their living outside of the arts. Some are informal entrepreneurs that provide services the community can’t always access, such as the neighbor who is an artist but also fixes computers on the side.

“He’s someone you would want to stay in the neighborhood because he has his own Mom and Pop shop right there in his building, so he helps everybody in the whole neighborhood and he doesn’t charge a lot of money to help people, to keep their computers running. Because in most places you would have to pay hundreds and hundreds of dollars, and he charges much less...and he cares.”

There is also the need to make sure the rezoning supports the everyday artistic and cultural needs of the neighborhood, not just professional artists. “I feel that with the City and their rezoning they should play a part in allowing people...to be recognized for their talents. They should be able to give us a structure where we can set up major programs for people to be able to attend, to feel proud of, pertaining to our talents.” Ijaaza also speaks about the need to provide arts programming for young people as part of the rezoning. “I think the City should be coming in and doing something about our [community] centers”

Ijaaza also speaks of the importance of food and of culturally relevant restaurants as centers of culture. “We as Caribbeans love to eat our cultural food...there used to be a number of Caribbean restaurants around here but I don’t see too many of them (anymore).... I have to go very far to eat...they’re like in spots, it’s not in the neighborhood where you can just go...that’s what I miss most of all.”

Like many NYCHA residents, Ijaaza is looking for engagement from the City about a rezoning which stands to so drastically transform her neighborhood. “We know that this is a City thing and that NYCHA is a whole other entity, but they should be able to work with the Mayor to make things happen for us as low-income consumers.”

“What can they do to help us to begin an initiative for people with talents that have gone unnoticed? What can they do to give us an opportunity to express our talents? And do it in a professional way...because we all live in this neighborhood together and we should all be able to share, and they should give us an opportunity to do that.”

5. Protect Where We Shop and Work

Small Business Protection

Longtime commercial and retail businesses are part of the fabric of the community, yet in recent years important mom-and-pop establishments and even locally-owned franchises that provide affordable goods and services have closed due to rising commercial rents and new development. These important businesses—such as laundromats, bodegas, 99 cent stores, pharmacies, affordable “take-out” spots, and restaurants and supermarkets—serve the everyday needs of low-and moderate-income residents, including NYCHA tenants. They also contribute to the cultural heritage and identity of the community. Without mechanisms to help mom-and-pop stores thrive where low-income residents can shop, residents are forced to commute outside of their own neighborhood for basic goods and services. The City must actively promote and preserve retail and commercial spaces for affordable supermarkets and mom-and-pop stores and encourage local business ownership.

Before: Boerum Hill Met Foods closed in 2014, another affordable supermarket. ²⁴



After: Purchased for \$18 million in May 2014 by Jackson Group. ²⁵ Clothing chain store, TJMAXX, rumored to replace affordable supermarket.



Before: Bodega/market, laundromat, Chinese take-out restaurant closed in 2015. At 3rd Avenue at St. Mark's Place ²⁶



After: Developer Avery Hall Investments bought the site in 2013 for \$2.55 million, and then flipped it for \$5.65 million in April 2015. Slated for market rate housing.



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Coalition members talk about how losing small businesses and amenities impacts daily life



Ed Tyre
Resident Association President, Gowanus Houses

“When luxury buildings come in, not just to my community but all the communities I know of, it has a history of taking from, and not bringing benefit to, the community. The only ones that benefit are the ones that are moving in, and the people that live in the area lose vital things like drug stores, restaurants and laundromats and the other buildings that housed our neighbors are forced out. A lot of times, I have to travel out to Long Island to do my shopping, and I see some of my neighbors there as well, and that’s a shame. Also as far as check cashing places, most of them are gone, so we have to find time to find one that’s close enough to get to. A lot of the stuff that we used to have that made it convenient for us is gone.”



Ms. Harriet Hughes
Tenant Association President,
Warren Street Houses

“The pharmacy on Bergen Street was there for a very long time, maybe 60 years, and the locksmith on 4th Ave, and they took away the 99 cent store across on (Wyckoff) street. There used to be a KFC on 4th Ave and Warren Street and that got closed and that property has been empty for years. What is going to go there, more co-op’s? Every little space there is going to be a co-op or condo, it’s all about the money

making. We have a lot of elderly people who can’t get around. We need restaurants, markets, laundromats and pharmacies close by, you have to go so far for different things, you have to take the bus or Access a Ride.”



Sandra Garcia
Tenant Association Vice President, Warren Street Houses

Sandra Garcia has lived in the Gowanus neighborhood community for over 45 years, she moved into Warren Street houses public housing in 2010 after her previous landlord sold the building she was living in. Her husband is disabled and used to get his medicine from the nearby Walgreens on Atlantic and 3rd but since that store closed they have to travel further distances for his needs. In regards to the loss of the local pharmacies she says:

“It’s difficult to get things like medicine, especially when it’s needed right way. It’s a big loss, especially for the senior citizens in my building... sometimes they ask friends and family to go to the pharmacy to get their medication or to go wash clothes for them or to go to the supermarket and it’s a loss for everybody. There are many seniors in public housing who do not have home attendants and they rely on family and friends to take them to shop.”

Over the last 5 years there has been a remarkable loss of local businesses for low income residents and senior citizens to get their medicine and food. Sandra worries about the future of the area.

“The prices of the groceries are now so expensive we don’t know what to buy anymore. “What are we going to be left with if they take it down and rebuild, what’s gonna’ happen to all of us?”



Diana Felix, Warren Street Houses

Diana Felix, a resident of Warren Street houses, has seen all of the local businesses she relied on for her needs, the affordable restaurants, bodegas, 99 cent stores, hair salons, nearby laundromats and pharmacies disappear in the last 8 years.

“It makes it rough when everything you relied on is closed or has moved far way and we can’t afford to walk so far to get the things we need. The loss of the businesses is hard and we’ve lost connection to the people (and businesses) we know and the food is expensive now.”



Karen Blondel, Red Hook Houses West Resident and Environmental Justice Organizer at FAC

“Rezoning brings about issues to the people who are native to this community. Part of what is happening in this community of South Brooklyn is that a lot of the smaller stores that we all rely on are being priced out because of luxury rentals and properties going up in the area and that’s a problem for this community. We recently lost Pathmark and I was a regular customer of that store since the 80’s and went there because of the affordable pricing and the quality of the food. The closing of the supermarket put a stress on my diet, so I either have to buy less from one of the new expensive stores in the area or I have to eat a lower quality of food.”

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Local Family Businesses in Gowanus



Maria Baez, local resident and family business owner/worker

For 14 years, Maria Baez worked in a popular local laundromat on 3rd avenue near St. Mark's Place, across the street from Wyckoff Gardens and down the block from Warren Street Houses. The laundromat, along with its neighboring small businesses, a corner bodega/meat market, and a Chinese food take out restaurant, all closed in 2015 after the property owners who leased the business spaces sold the buildings to Developer Avery Hall Investments (AHI) for \$2.55 million. These affordable neighborhood ground floor businesses, as well as the low-income residential renters who lived above them were all displaced and AHI flipped the vacant buildings for \$5.65 million. The displaced bodega and meat market had been Maria's brother in-law's business for almost 30 years.

"I've known this corner for 20-something years. Everyone asks if we can put in another laundromat, but we can't because the rent is too much. The owner of the laundromat had to go back to his old job, he lost everything. It was too expensive to move the machines and for the Chinese food place too; they gave us nothing, only 3 months to move."

Once the family found out they were losing their business they signed a new shorter lease on another bodega across the street. Maria now works in her family's new bodega but the other businesses were not able to survive. Although she is thankful to be working in her family's new bodega, Maria fears she will lose her livelihood again because of the rising rents and speculation associated with the proposed Gowanus rezoning.

"It's hard to start again, but we had to do it. All the small businesses (are) going too, the 99 cent store has closed and the barbershop next door and the hair salon say their

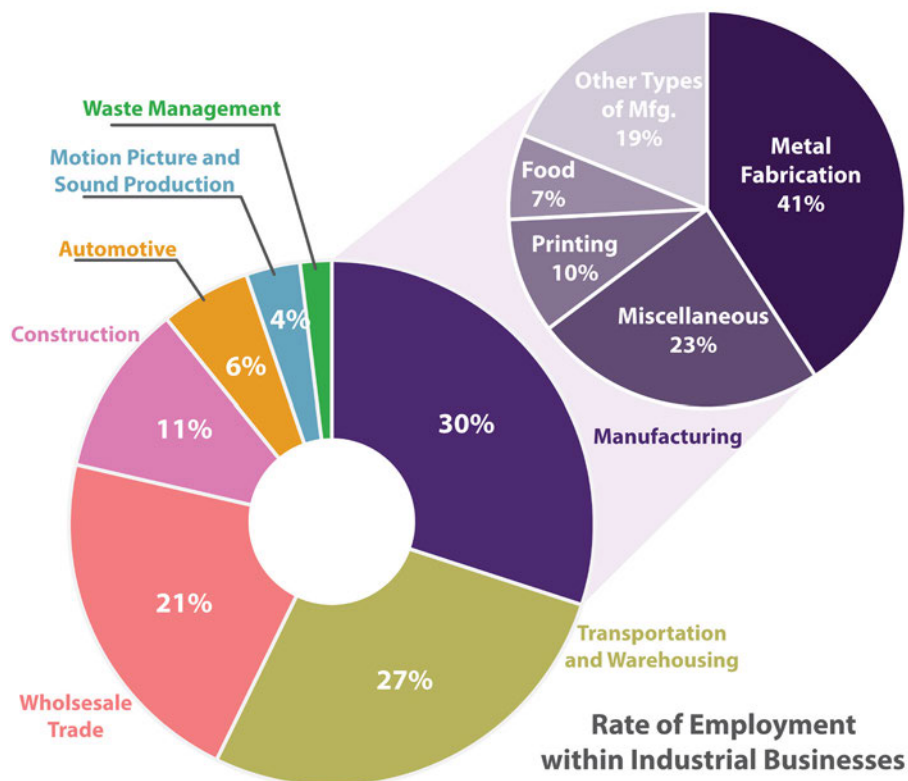
rent is going up too. They're all gonna disappear from this neighborhood. They're making big buildings and apartments, everything is going."

For many years her family lived in a rent stabilized apartment just a few blocks away on Baltic Street between 3rd and 4th Avenues. Reacting to the rising rents and new development associated with the 2003 rezoning, the landlord began pushing out long time tenants. Although Maria got help from the Fifth Avenue Committee and could technically have stayed in her apartment, the pressure from the lack of repairs and battling with the landlord took its toll. When her family's name came up on the waiting list for public housing, they moved to a development in another neighborhood.

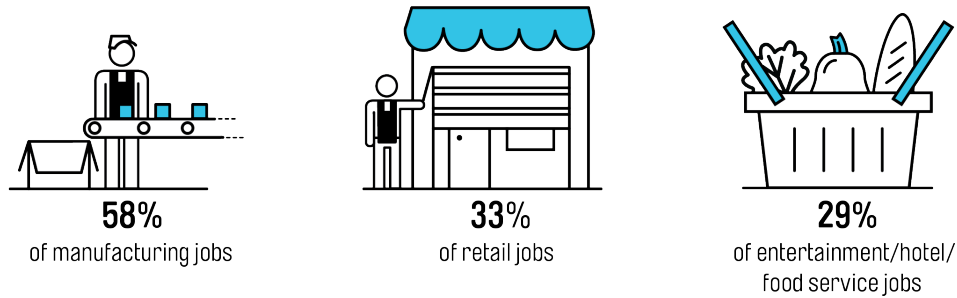
"The neighborhood needs help, it's too much money for rent and we need small businesses. Where are all the people from public housing going to go? It's unfair. We need a pharmacy and laundromat; sometimes we help seniors who don't walk so well and have to push their shopping carts for many blocks. In 10 years' time, I don't think we will be here."

Industrial Protection

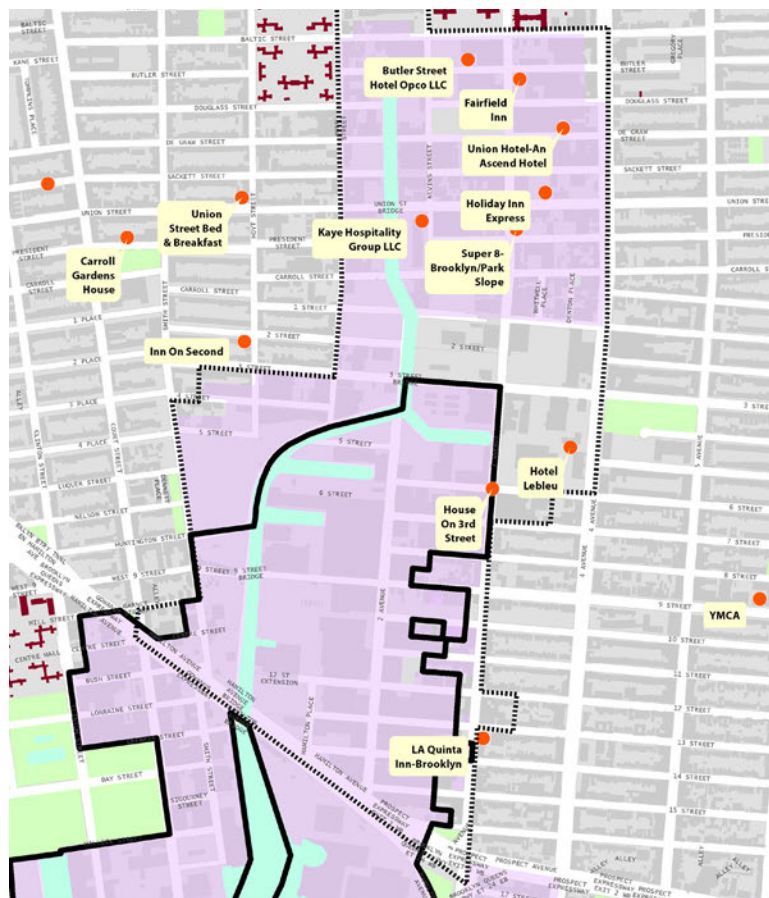
The industrial and manufacturing sector in Gowanus is a crucial component of the neighborhood's economic vitality and its character. Within the area that is being considered for rezoning, there is an Industrial Business Zone (IBZ) as well as significant areas that are zoned for manufacturing that are outside the IBZ. Neither the IBZ nor the manufacturing areas outside the IBZ have protections that ensure that manufacturing uses will predominate in the area. In fact, there have been such significant changes to these areas in recent years under the existing zoning that one of the major goals that the community coalesced around in Bridging Gowanus is to institute stronger protections for manufacturing within the IBZ as a precursor to changing zoning designations. After these protections have been secured, Bridging Gowanus calls on the City to create and employ real mechanisms in the areas outside the IBZ for achieving a balance of manufacturing with new uses such as housing or commercial uses. Protecting industries that provide quality-paying jobs, especially for people with modest educational attainment or other barriers to employment, should be a priority for the City if it seeks to truly create an equitable city and housing that is affordable for its people; by obvious logic, solving the housing affordability crisis also requires planning for the creation and preservation of quality-paying jobs.



NYC Jobs Paying More than \$30,000 per year



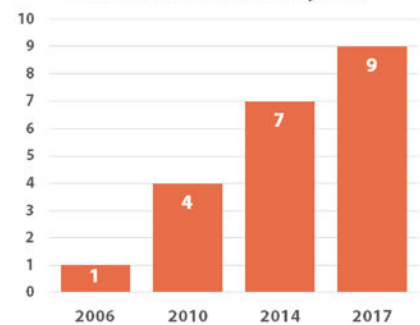
Industries are at risk of displacement due to a number of factors related to the cost of real estate. Currently allowed non-industrial “as-of-right” uses, such as hotels, self-storage operations, nightclubs, and other entertainment uses that can generate higher revenues are proliferating in the area, threatening to displace existing manufacturers and to change the character of the area, making it more difficult for surviving manufacturing businesses to operate. Hotels, in particular, are dramatically more lucrative enterprises than the industrial uses and manufacturing start-up incubators that need increasingly scarce affordable space. Because hotel and residential development brings visitors and residents to the area who have expectations about surrounding uses (limited noise and truck traffic, proximity to commercial amenities), they impact daily operations for surrounding industrial businesses. The explosive rate of hotel development in the area is a major threat to the future of the Gowanus neighborhood. The map below shows the proliferation of hotel uses in manufacturing areas.



Location of Hotels in and around Industrial Areas

- Present Hotel Locations
- ▬ Bridging Gowanus Area of Interest
- New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Owned Buildings
- Industrial Zones**
- ▭ Industrial Business Zone (IBZ)
- Industrial Zoned Areas

Hotels in Gowanus Study Area



0 0.05 0.1 0.2
Miles

Data Sources: NYC DCP PLUTO2016 V1, Reference USA



Industry in Gowanus is already under siege because of real estate speculation and as-of-right non-industrial uses. Action is needed to control current trends. Most businesses in Gowanus rent and are therefore vulnerable to displacement once their lease is up. In some cases, landlords can terminate a lease in the event of a rezoning due to lease provisions. As a result of this uncertainty and lack of protections, business owners hesitate to make capital investments in their work spaces, a pattern which can lead to depressed job offerings. When the time comes to expand, business owners who feel uncertain about the City's commitment to protecting industrial businesses will relocate outside the city, taking away with them quality- paying jobs from New Yorkers.

Previous proposals for "mixed use" in other rezoning areas have employed the "MX" designation which allows for developers to choose either manufacturing or residential uses for their sites. This has been shown to be a wildly ineffective mechanism, heralding the almost unbridled large-scale conversion of MX zones to residential – making them mixed use only in name.²⁷ There are limited examples of "vertical" mixed use (housing and manufacturing in the same building) and there are ways to achieve "horizontal" mixed use (housing and manufacturing both across a given area). To date, with exception of the 25 Kent Avenue rezoning, the Department of City Planning has been vehemently resistant to innovating and implementing large-scale balanced mixed use models, and all mixed use proposals have suffered from the lack of an adequate enforcement mechanism to ensure that manufacturing is actually created. The unique character of Gowanus and the significance of industry to its economy requires that an innovative, well-enforced balanced mixed use zoning is created and implemented outside the IBZ.

Without proper policy protections, changing the zoning in Gowanus' industrial areas for housing will accelerate loss of industrial business and well-paying jobs and may not lead to affordable housing being built, given the lot size of some parcels. Any change in use from manufacturing to residential, regardless of the total square footage in the new development, should trigger MIH. The City must commit the financial and political resources to enforce the regulatory structure that balances industrial and commercial uses, including policies proposed in the Mayor's 10-Point Industrial Action Plan.

Conclusion

The Gowanus neighborhood is slated for significant land use actions and public investment by the City of New York that will change our community and impact surrounding neighborhoods for decades to come. These changes have the potential to address long standing challenges and problems in our neighborhood or to significantly increase the displacement of longterm residents and businesses and deepen existing inequality. No community should be expected to tolerate a rezoning that fails to address issues of displacement and other critical needs of the people that already live there.

We affirm and demand that the City must include the people most deeply impacted by these changes in decision making – not merely “listen” to our concerns. In the coming months we look forward to developing concrete proposals within our community to address the issues identified in this report. We similarly look forward to sharing these proposals with the City and securing from DCP, the Mayor, and our local elected officials support for implementation, funding, and infrastructure commitments that will ensure that all stakeholders in our community can survive and thrive.

Endnotes

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GOWANUS NEIGHBORHOOD COALITION FOR JUSTICE

WHO WE ARE Coalition Groups (List in Formation)

Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC), Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE), Gowanus Houses Resident Association, Gowanus Houses Arts Collective, Wyckoff Gardens Resident Association, Wyckoff Gardens Resident Watch, Warren Street Houses Residents Association, RAICES Spanish Speaking Elderly Council, VOCAL NY, Christian Help in Park Slope (CHiPS), St Lydia's Church, TRELLIS, Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary & St. Stephen Roman Catholic Church, Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation (SBIDC), Gowanus Alliance, Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC), South Brooklyn Local Development Corporation (SBLDC), Forth on Fourth (FOFA) a Committee of the Park Slope Civic Council.

With Support From



Fifth Avenue Committee
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