

Heights Planning Initiative

A survey of Washington Heights and Morningside Heights in Manhattan, New York City.

Convened by:
Community League of the Heights

Report Prepared by:



JANUARY 2005



Copies of the executive summary (English/Spanish), the report, or other information can be requested from:

Copias del resumen ejecutivo en español pueden ser solicitadas a la Community League of the Heights (Asociación Comunitaria de la Zona Heights en el alto Manhattan).

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FORWARD

Avenues of Opportunity

This past November at City College, I was privileged to bring together a group of community leaders to review work-in-progress by landscape architecture students in their first design studio. The students' projects were for sites of their choosing along the length of West 155th Street from the Harlem River to the Hudson. Having invited the distinguished guests myself, I was more nervous than the students—and it wasn't even my class. Here were the heads of two major community development corporations, the Chair of Community Board 9, a representative from Board 12, the head of planning for New York State's Harlem Community Development Corporation, and a writer and historian with whom I had collaborated on previous projects. Arrayed before them were the students' drawings, a 20-ft. long, somewhat ragtag model of the two-block wide swath of Manhattan centered on 155th Street, and an equally long, composite drawing showing a cross-section through the street with its undulating ground plane, subterranean tunnels, and buildings fronting on it. Surrounding this abstraction of the physical space of the street, students had collaged images and text of the people and places they had encountered in their explorations.

More than the model or the precise, measured drawings, the collage spoke to the complexity and texture of the neighborhoods traversed by this corridor. As the discussion progressed, many challenges emerged. While students expressed a desire to “make connections” east to west, their reviewers admonished them to consider connections across the corridor north to south as well; to be mindful of “realities” like residents' desire to maximize on-street parking; to consider what overarching strategies might tie their individual proposals together. Yet, despite these real-world cautions, the guests expressed delight at the chance to dream about what the street could be. Probably, if we could have kept our panel of experts in the room for a day or two, combining their collective experience, knowledge and influence with the raw energy and enthusiasm of the students—despite their lack of sleep—we could have solved any hurdles to making this vision a reality.

Watching it unfold over the past six months, I believe the neighborhood planning process initiated by Community League of the Heights (CLOTH) embraces just this type of optimism. It is born of a commitment to preserving and improving the well being of the community and a desire to see its people grow and prosper. This is the genuine product of a history of service and connection to the community it has served for decades. Yet, like in a family, this process reflects the need to occasionally reacquaint ourselves with those we have known the longest. Sometimes, we need to relearn what their interests are, their likes and dislikes, their hopes and aspirations. And in order to find these things out, we have to ask them.

Asking people what they think is where this planning initiative started. One can extrapolate from census data many indicators about the people who live here—or in any of New York City's varied neighborhoods. One can read in the newspaper and see the buildings being renovated to tell that, like many working-class neighborhoods throughout the city, Southern

Washington Heights and Hamilton Heights are undergoing rapid change in their physical and social make-up. Yet, Community League had the temerity to go out and seek their own information. Starting with the Building Conditions and Land-Use Survey, undertaken with support from the Enterprise Foundation, CLOTH and its consultants learned which blocks are run down and which are renovating. Likewise, their study of business activity conveys the level of goods and services provided in the neighborhoods' commercial strips. Set against this backdrop, the input from people within the neighborhood is what makes this study invaluable. Reported on here, the community survey captures the viewpoints of people on the street, analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, while the interviews with community leaders convey a range of long-term perspectives from individuals committed to working for the betterment of life for neighborhood residents.

Each of these elements paints part of the picture. One set of facts and figures is of value only in what it brings to our understanding of the other types of data. And one category of issues—housing, demographic trends, economic activity—is only potentially understood in the context of these other factors. The lesson is that clues to solving seemingly insurmountable problems in one sector may lie in data about another. If we can get our advocates from all these different sectors to look collectively at all the issues “on the wall,” as it were, the ideas will flow.

This report on the first phase of the Heights Planning Initiative offers, in its clarity and straightforwardness, a step in that direction. With the results of the community survey, one can scan between figures on housing (88% of respondents rent their apartments) and on unemployment (22% of respondents) and find cause for alarm. Yet, placing this data alongside the building conditions and land-use survey and responses from the community interviews regarding commercial activity, for instance, opens the door at least for strategies and solutions to emerge. As this process goes forward, linkages can be made with parallel, complementary efforts within the community, such as CB9's 197a Plan, mobilization of the Hamilton Heights Business Owners' Association, the Heritage Heights Village initiative and the work of Hamilton Heights-West Harlem Community Preservation Organization. The recent state designation of “The Heights Heritage Area” provides an opportunity to reflect on the community's long-term vision of itself.

Finally, in bridging over 155th Street, by reaching beyond neighborhood identities, community district lines or political boundaries, Community League's recruitment of a broad steering committee has been crucial the success of this process thus far. The resulting diversity of viewpoints represented is a notable accomplishment. Like thinking across sectors, communicating beyond boundaries acknowledges that the help you need may be found across town or across the street. By bringing people together with common concerns and compatible goals, this plan sheds light on a path for turning perceived divisions—programmatic, sectoral, organizational, or geographic—into avenues of opportunity.

Through such a process, we have a context for understanding, for instance, that creating amenities for neighborhood residents need not be incompatible with preserving housing affordability; that institutions and residents may share common interests in increasing the level of public services provided; that the presence of employers indirectly benefits neighborhoods—even when workers come from outside the community—by increasing the volume for local businesses and thereby supporting a greater range goods, services, and secondary job creation, available to residents. In many ways like these, this study illustrates the power unleashed by working across disciplines and district lines to examine difficult challenges. The next phase calls for wider participation to reflect on the data collected and to formulate strategies for addressing the concerns that have been raised. Going forward, this is where the real work and the greatest potential for impact begin.

Ethan Cohen
Director
City College Architectural Center
City College of New York/CUNY
January 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Responding to concerns raised by community-based organizations, community leaders and neighborhood residents of southern Washington Heights and Hamilton Heights, the Community League of the Heights (CLOTH) launched the Heights Planning Initiative (HPI) in the spring of 2004. HPI is a community-led effort to gather community members' ideas, concerns and aspirations, as identified and articulated by community members themselves, in order to create an inclusive framework for planning the neighborhood's development and growth.

This initiative is a process in three phases: first, to identify the strengths and needs of the community from community members' perspectives; second, to analyze and reflect on this data within the context of a neighborhood plan; and third, to implement the plan on a clear timeline towards concrete and measurable goals. This report presents areas of concerns and strengths identified in surveys and interviews with community stakeholders. CLOTH and Warnke Community Consulting, the project manager, then present a detailed plan for the continuing revitalization of the neighborhood.

HPI provides a community-based perspective that supplements and enhances other recent planning efforts in northern Manhattan, notably the 197-A plan recently completed by Manhattan Community Board 9; a report sponsored by a Columbia University Advisory Committee convened to assess the impact of Columbia's planned Manhattanville expansion; and three community forums led by Assembly Member Adriano Espaillat also addressing the Manhattanville expansion.

Methodology

The initial phase of HPI consisted of extensive data collection from June through October 2004. The data collection was undertaken through three principal means: 1) a Building Condition and Land Use Study directed by the Enterprise Foundation, 2) a Community Survey, and 3) one-on-one Community Interviews. 826 community surveys were collected, including demographic data as well as community attitudes and concerns. Interviews were conducted with 32 community stakeholders on their views of community strengths, needs and hopes for the future.

Findings and Analysis

HPI found a community that is ethnically diverse and strongly connected to the neighborhood. The community, as represented by survey respondents, has a substantial number of immigrants: nearly half of the community was born outside the United States. Many households are bilingual. Three quarters of respondents speak English at home; and well over half the community speaks Spanish at home. Survey respondents indicated their appreciation of the convenience and sense of community in the neighborhood, the proximity to friends and family, transportation and shopping. However, many, or more than two thirds of respondents, said community organizing and cooperation between local organizations, businesses and institutions was needed to realize the full potential of the community.

The HPI process identified both areas of strength and points of concern in the community. Community member’s responses showed a deep personal commitment to seeing their neighborhood flourish and revealed a firm belief in the ability and need for community residents to adopt and advance community-based solutions to the neighborhood’s problems.

HPI identified six areas of significant strength in the neighborhood, including:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Sense of community | 4. Convenience |
| 2. Strong community-based organizations | 5. Open space |
| 3. Presence of major institutions | 6. Quality & affordability of housing |

HPI also identified five primary areas of concern for community stakeholders:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Public Safety | 4. Employment |
| 2. Education | 5. Sanitation and Physical Conditions |
| 3. Affordable Housing | |

HPI offers strategies below for each area of concern as recommended first steps toward the community’s continuing revitalization.

1) PUBLIC SAFETY	The issue of public safety concerns residents and visitors to the Heights, due to the presence and/or perception of drugs, crime and violence.
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- Respondents indicated crime as the primary problem in the community. Over one third answered that increased safety is needed, and nearly 25% of respondents said that they did not feel safe walking home at night.
- Respondents acknowledged the heavy presence of drugs. Over half identified the elimination or reduction of drug trafficking and use as a pressing neighborhood need.
- With respect to the safety of children, respondents noted drugs (60%) and violence/crime (40%) as the major areas of concern.
- Residents and community leaders called for increased collaboration between police and community groups, as well as improved community relations and understanding.

Overall public safety strategies include:

- ⇒ Improve community coordination with the New York Police Department (NYPD) and elected officials;
- ⇒ Create and fund a taskforce to explore and implement alternative policing models and precepts; and
- ⇒ Increase community police activities and foot patrols.

Anti-drug presence strategies include:

- ⇒ Continue to work closely with NYPD, elected officials and the criminal justice system;
- ⇒ Explore the creation of a community or youth court and alternatives to incarceration; and
- ⇒ Develop recreational and employment opportunities for youth.

2) EDUCATION	Educational, vocational and other services in the community, and/or outreach about these services, are not at a satisfactory level for residents and providers in the area.
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- Almost half of the respondents said the neighborhood lacks adequate recreational opportunities for youth. Less than one third of parents in the survey thought that services were adequate for youth.
- A third responded that improving education is a pressing need in the neighborhood.
- Over half of the interviewees discussed education when asked about areas of need. Chronic overcrowding, inadequate funding for schools and after-school activities and a diminished neighborhood voice in educational policy were the leading issues.

Education strategies include:

- ⇒ Increase after-school and preschool program availability;
- ⇒ Increase community organizing activity to advocate for greater educational resources from public agencies;
- ⇒ Design model partnerships between schools, local institutions of higher learning, community based organizations and employers; and,
- ⇒ Develop more schools.

3) AFFORDABLE HOUSING	Safe, affordable housing opportunities exist, but aren't sufficient. Rising costs, overcrowding and substandard conditions persist.
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- Most residents in the community rent their homes (86%), and many are at high risk of homelessness: of the unemployed respondents, 90% are renters.
- Seven out of 10 respondents who earn \$30K or less endure unaffordable rent burdens (over one-third of their monthly income).
- One third of all survey respondents identified affordable housing as an issue of critical need, and half the interview participants stressed the importance of affordable housing development and preservation.

Affordable housing preservation strategies include:

- ⇒ Support organizations advocating for tenants' rights;
- ⇒ Increase building code enforcement; and
- ⇒ Provide low-cost building rehabilitation funding for owners.

Affordable housing creation strategies include:

- ⇒ Review upzoning possibilities along Broadway & Amsterdam Avenue;
- ⇒ Identify underutilized publicly-owned sites that offer development opportunities for affordable housing;
- ⇒ Provide low-cost acquisition funding to allow nonprofit affordable housing developers to acquire and hold development sites; and,
- ⇒ Use the HPI Building Condition and Land Use study as the basis for a database to identify building sites or preservation opportunities.

4) EMPLOYMENT	Unemployment in the neighborhood is much higher than in other parts of New York City. However, there is a talented workforce, and entrepreneurs are interested in investing in the community.
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- Twenty-two percent of respondents said that they were unemployed or looking for work, three times New York City’s overall rate of 7%.
- A vast majority (80%) of the unemployed have been seeking work for over a year.
- Half of interview participants said employment is an issue needing urgent attention, affecting not only individual lives but the community as a whole.

Employment strategies include:

- ⇒ Create or enhance employment and job training programs connected to major employers or businesses in the neighborhood;
- ⇒ Increase computer and job training programs, as well as English as a Second Language classes;
- ⇒ Increase loan and investment capital for local small businesses; and
- ⇒ Develop a Business Improvement District to increase advertising, promotions and technical assistance for small businesses on Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue.

5) SANITATION & PHYSICAL CONDITIONS	Poor sanitation and physical conditions are hindering economic development of the community and present quality of life concerns.
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- Respondents cited sanitation as an area of general concern in the neighborhood. A third called inadequate sanitation a detriment to the area.
- Forty-two percent said storefront appearance and 37% said better street appearance would help local businesses.
- Sanitation issues, such as rats, present immediate health concerns for residents, especially parents.
- Nearly a third of interview participants considered the physical condition of the neighborhood an obstacle to neighborhood revitalization efforts.
- Half of all survey respondents said that better sanitation would improve small businesses in the neighborhood.

Neighborhood Appearance Strategies include:

- ⇒ Enforce existing regulations;
- ⇒ Increase the frequency of garbage pick-ups and the number of trash cans;
- ⇒ Increase attention to the Broadway malls;
- ⇒ Develop a capital pool to allow business owners to upgrade facilities in order to bring them into compliance with regulations; and
- ⇒ Create and provide funding for implementation and staffing of a Business Improvement District charged with street cleaning and façade improvements, as well as marketing and other services to attract customers and business.

Next Steps: A blueprint for action

To approach these issues effectively, CLOTH and WCC recommend that the HPI follow these steps to carry the planning process forward:

1. Form a community advisory board to ensure community involvement during the implementation phase;
2. Develop and implement programs designed to address and improve community relations across divides of class, culture and race;
3. Create an “Anchor Institution Taskforce” bringing the areas’ major institutions together to focus on central issues of neighborhood development in a coordinated and comprehensive way; and,
4. Create planning taskforces for each area of critical need to:
 - a) State and address recommendations;
 - b) Assess development strategies, including mechanisms for evaluating options and priorities; and
 - c) Design implementation programs that have discrete and attainable goals, realistic timelines and budgets, and performance measures.

A Vision for the Future

It is easy to see southern Washington Heights and Hamilton Heights, with their neighbors on Manhattan’s northern Hudson ridge, as a “City on a Hill”. Set aside, by themselves, the communities of Morningside, Hamilton and Washington Heights would constitute a thriving city of nearly 300,000, rich with the history of the American Revolution, Coogan’s Bluff and Sugar Hill, thriving with new immigrants and blessed with cultural institutions like the Hispanic Society and Aaron Davis Hall. They would also form a city with renowned institutions of higher learning like City College, Yeshiva University, Boricua College and Columbia University and a distinguished hospital in Columbia New York Presbyterian Hospital. However, lost in the far larger communities of Manhattan and New York City, this promise of a cohesive whole has historically never held true. The institutions that could entertain, educate and employ community residents have all too often provided these opportunities to individuals from other neighborhoods, usually more affluent ones.

So why does the divide between the community and its institutions persist? How can the community and its institutions come together in a way that benefits both? There are, clearly, many answers to this history and many solutions for the future. Moving forward, community residents need to insist on two fundamental measures: one, greater participation on the part of the neighborhood’s major institutions in its schools and retail corridors including the development of employment opportunities; and two, greater involvement on the part of community-based organizations, city agencies and elected officials in exploring and identifying ways in which these institutions can fruitfully participate in neighborhood life.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The Heights Planning Initiative (“HPI”) is a community-based effort to gather the opinions, concerns and attitudes of the southern Washington Heights and Hamilton Heights neighborhood, as identified and articulated by community members themselves. In so doing, it is a means for community members to assess current priorities and plan strategically for the future. Southern Washington Heights and Hamilton Heights (“the Heights”) is a dynamic neighborhood with a diverse population representing many cultures and ethnicities. At the same time, it is a neighborhood that is among one of New York City’s poorest and most densely populated. The Heights is also undergoing a period of change and transition, in part due to gentrification pressures, demographic and other economic factors. As a result, a number of community-based organizations and community leaders have joined together to engage the neighborhood in a planning process so that community members can have direct input in planning for its future.

The initial phase of the Heights Planning Initiative consisted of extensive data collection from June through October 2004, staffed and facilitated by the firm of Warnke Community Consulting (“WCC”), with guidance from the Community League of the Heights (“CLOTH”), the lead community partner, as well as members of the Steering Committee representing community organizations, academic institutions, and elected officials. The data, both quantitative and qualitative, were collected by HPI staff members and student interns retained by WCC, CLOTH and the Enterprise Foundation. The data collection was undertaken through three principal means: 1) a Building Condition and Land Use Study directed by the Enterprise Foundation; 2) a Community Survey; 3) and one-on-one Community Interviews.

In early 2004, as CLOTH and others pointed towards the need to conduct a neighborhood planning process, CLOTH received a Strategic Neighborhoods Initiative grant from the Neighborhood Opportunities Fund (“NOF”). NOF is a unique partnership of the corporate, foundation and nonprofit intermediary sectors, including the Enterprise Foundation, the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation and the United Way of New York City. NOF funding provided CLOTH with the initial resources to begin this extensive neighborhood planning process.

Building Condition and Land Use Study

Spearheaded by the Enterprise Foundation, student interns used Palm Pilot technology to conduct a building condition and land use study of the neighborhood. During June and July 2004, interns assessed and catalogued over 1,600 parcels, representing 2,200 residential and commercial properties. The study area included both residential and commercial zones. The residential zone consisted of the area from 145th Street to the south and 175th Street to the north, from Riverside Drive to Edgecombe Avenue. The commercial zone consisted of the retail areas of Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue from 135th to 175th Streets, and St. Nicholas Avenue from 161st to 169th Streets.

Each physical building and site was ranked on a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 signifying the newest and best maintained properties. Other data collected include occupancy status, type of use and the existence of public amenities such as trash receptacles and streetlights. After the data were

collected, Enterprise worked in collaboration with the City College Architectural Center to analyze and map the information. A full report is available through the Enterprise Foundation.

Community Survey

The survey instrument was developed by WCC, in consultation with CLOTH and members of the Steering Committee. The survey, available in both English and Spanish, consists of two parts: I) Demographics; and II) Community Views. The Community Views includes sections on: 1) Attitudes, Concerns and Priorities; 2) Employment and Income Generation; 3) Housing; 4) Youth, Childcare and Seniors; 5) Health Care Services; 6) Recreational and Service Options; and 7) Retail Services.

Between June and September 2004, HPI interns collected 826 usable surveys. The majority of the surveys were conducted on neighborhood streets. Interns were posted in front of businesses in various neighborhood locations in the study area, from 135th to 175th Streets, in order to capture as wide a cross-section of the community as possible. For example, interns surveyed in front of Apple Bank at 159th and Broadway, Coogan's Restaurant at 168th and Broadway, GreenPoint Bank at 145th and Edgecombe Avenue, and HSBC Bank at 138th and Broadway. In addition, HPI staff coordinated with several local organizations and institutions such as Credit Where Credit is Due, Dominican Women's Development Corporation, 33rd Precinct of the New York City Police Department, New York Presbyterian Hospital, and Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation to distribute surveys at their events.

Community Interviews

Throughout the interview process, HPI staff and interns met with residents and community leaders to give them an opportunity to share their perceptions of the neighborhood. While the interviews focused on topics of importance to the interviewee, all interviews followed the same format and included the following questions: *What is your connection to this neighborhood?; What are the best resources of this neighborhood?; What are the most pressing needs of this neighborhood?; What challenges do you think are the least recognized in this neighborhood?; How could this neighborhood improve economically?; and What are your hopes for the future of this neighborhood?*

From July through October 2004, HPI staff and interns interviewed 32 individuals representing a wide cross-section of the community. Interviewees included long-time community residents, high school students, business owners and heads of nonprofit organizations. Each interview was then transcribed and organized by theme.

The Community Defined

For the purposes of this planning process, the Heights community was defined more by the participants' relationship to the community rather than by its geographic or physical boundaries. Both the Community Survey and Community Interview processes included people who had a connection to the community and were therefore considered interested stakeholders. Such individuals included those who live, work and or socialize in the Heights. By defining the community through its people, HPI endeavored to capture the diversity and dynamism of this community.

COMMUNITY SURVEY DATA

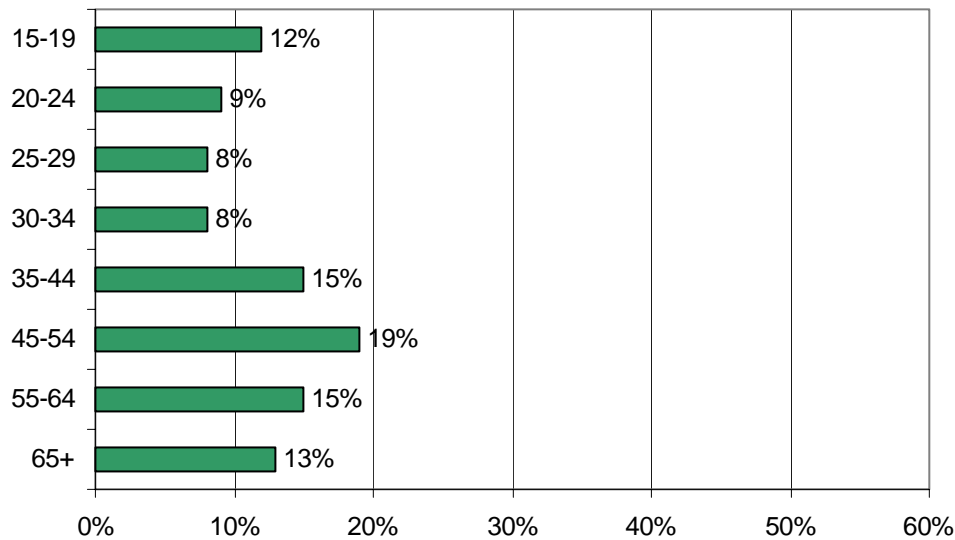
Demographics

Age and Gender

Survey respondents were fairly well distributed according to age, with 12% of respondents between the ages of 15 and 19; 9% between 20 and 24; 8% between 25 and 29; 8% between 30 and 34; 15% between 35 and 44; 19% between 45 and 54; 15% between 55 and 64; and 13% over 65 years of age. Twenty-one percent of those surveyed were between the ages of 15 and 24; and a full 37% were under the age of 35.

Figure 1. Age

Note: Among all respondents.



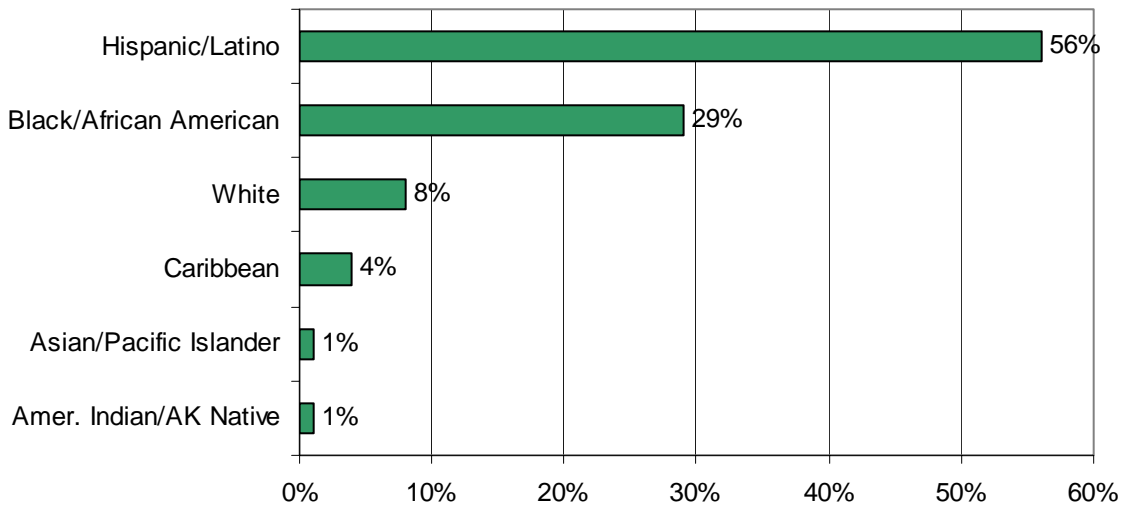
There were more female respondents than males, representing 58% and 42%, respectively, of the survey sample. The higher percentage of female respondents in this survey is similar to results in other community surveys, in that women generally participate in higher numbers in voluntary surveys of this nature.

Race and Ethnicity

The majority of survey respondents identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino (56%), followed by Black or African American (29%), White (8%), Caribbean (4%), and 1% each for American Indian or Alaskan Native, and Asian or Pacific Islander. Two percent of all respondents identified themselves in the 'Other, Please Specify' category, which includes persons who identified themselves as multi-racial or of mixed origin.

Figure 2. Self-identified race and ethnicity

Note: Among all respondents.



Of those respondents who identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino, 71% identified themselves as Dominican. Fifteen percent identified themselves as Puerto Rican, 6% identified as Caribbean, 4% as either Mexican or Central American, and 3% reported South American origins.

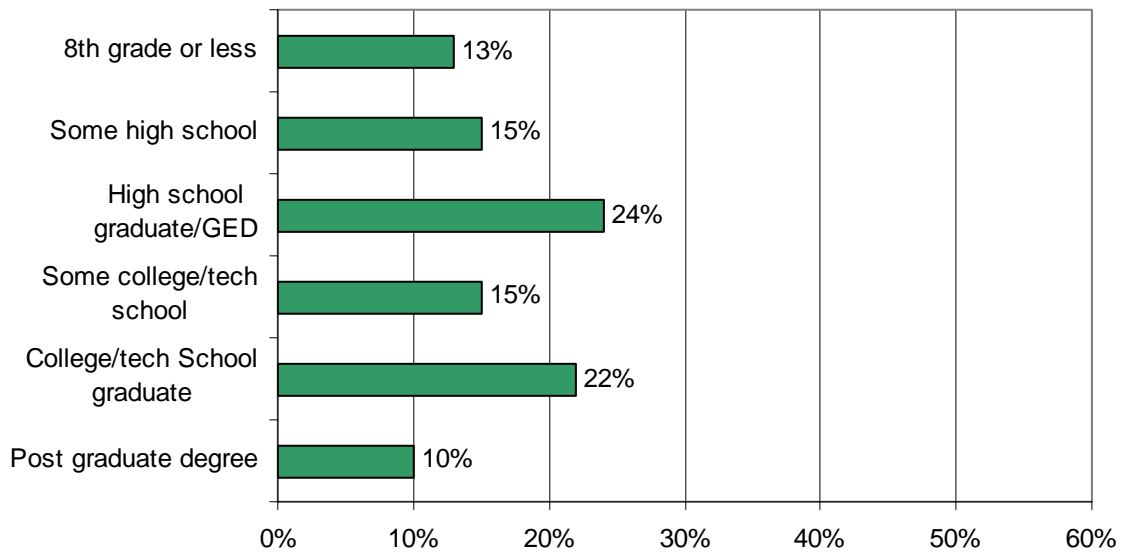
Education

Survey respondents had higher than expected levels of educational attainment, compared to Census statistics known for the area. Thirty-two percent responded that they had completed college, technical school, or post-graduate studies.

At the same time, 28% of all respondents indicated that they had less than a high school diploma, with 13% of respondents having completed the 8th grade or less and 15% with some high school experience. Twenty-four percent of respondents had a high school diploma or GED equivalent, and 15% indicated that they had some college or technical school background.

Figure 3. Education

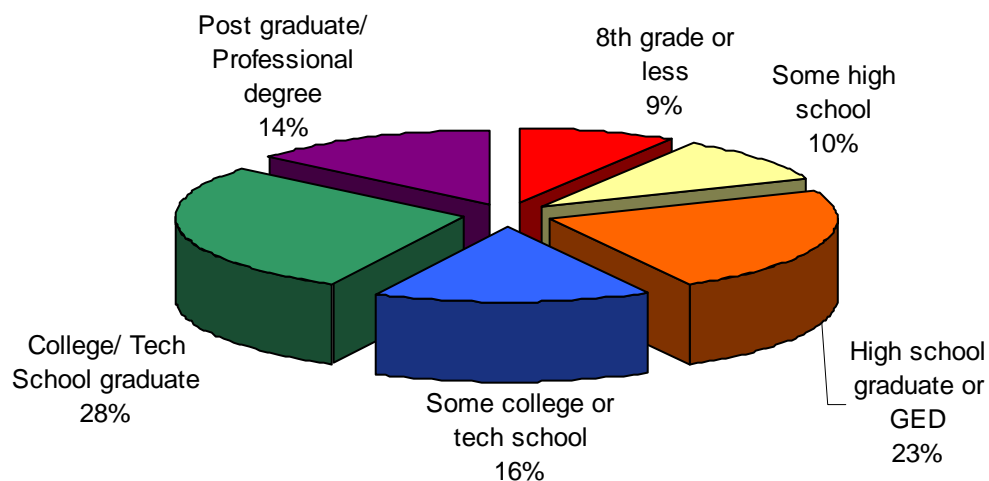
Note: Among all respondents.



Among working-age adults (ages 25-54) who responded to the survey, twenty eight percent reported having a college or technical degree and 14% reported post-graduate or professional degrees. Sixteen percent have some education in college or technical school, 23% have high school degrees or GED. There are substantially fewer working-age adults with some high school or less: 10% have some high school, 9% have completed 8th grade or less. By age categories, seniors represent a high proportion of those who did not finish high school, a statistic that suggests improved opportunities for the younger generations in the community.

Figure 4. Education Among Working-Age Adults

Note: Among respondents between 25-54 years of age.



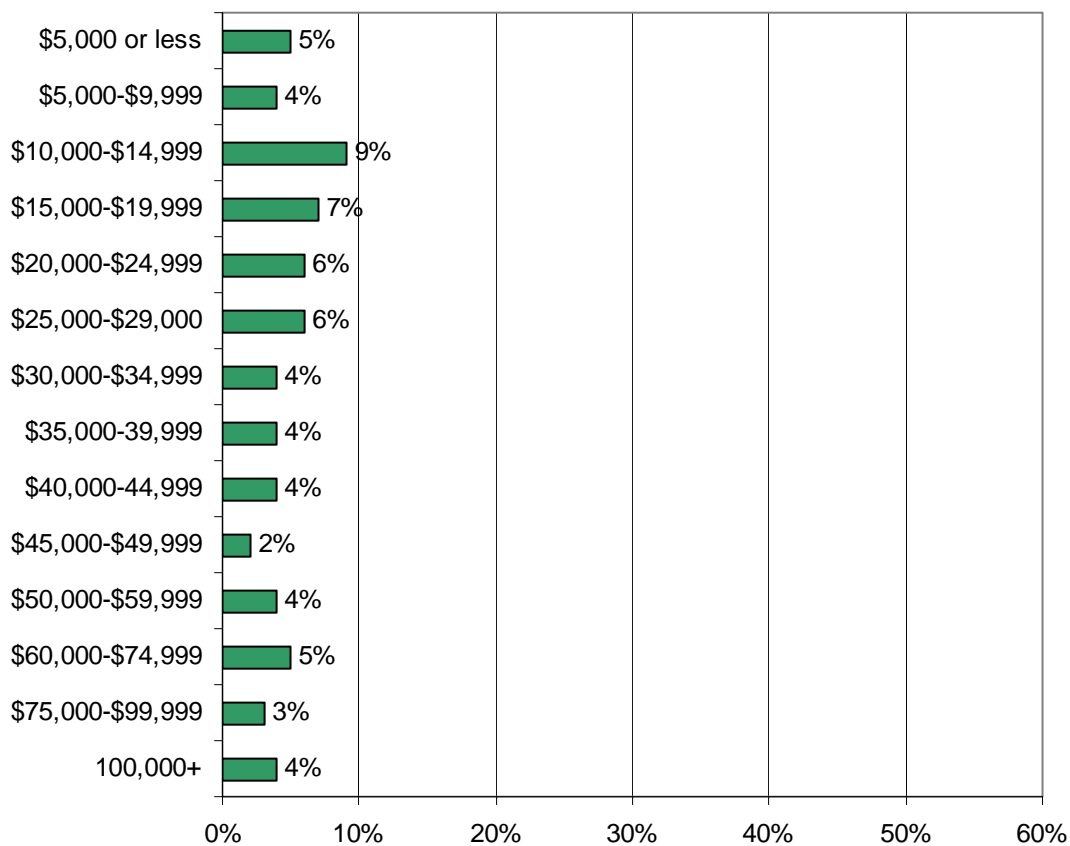
Income

Consistent with other voluntary community surveys, respondents were less likely to disclose their income status. As a result, fewer respondents completed this question, and it is likely that the survey results reflect less accuracy in reported income among those who did respond.

Incomes among survey respondents were generally low. Among those who completed this question, 9% indicated incomes under \$10,000 per year, while a total of 37% indicated incomes under \$30,000 per year. At the same time, 12% of respondents indicated annual incomes of \$60,000 or higher.

Figure 5. Income

Note: Among all respondents. 14% didn't know, 21% did not respond.



Household Status

The majority of respondents (55%) indicated that they are single, followed by 28% who are married, 8% who are divorced, and 4% who are widowed or separated, respectively. As noted above, a high percentage of respondents indicated that they are single, suggesting that many respondents answered this question according to the legal definition, but may in fact live with a significant other. This inference is supported by the fact that while 55% of respondents may

have indicated that they are single, just 23% of all respondents indicated that they live by themselves.

Forty-three percent of respondents replied that they are parents, followed by 17% who are spouses. Sixteen percent are children, 7% grandparents, and 1% guardians. Fully 13% checked the '*Other, Please Specify*' category, which included those who live in a roommate or non-married couple situation, or may live by themselves in a dormitory.

Respondents were fairly evenly split as to the number of persons residing in their household. Twenty-three percent of respondents indicated that they live by themselves; 22% indicated that they are part of a 2-person household; 20% a 3-person household; and 18% a 4-person household. Seventeen percent of respondents indicated that they live in a household with 5 or more people.

A quarter of respondents replied that they were part of a couple with children; 9% were part of a couple without children; 20% were single parents with children and 22% were single persons living alone. Six percent of respondents indicated that their household composition included two or more families sharing living quarters, and 7% replied that they lived with their extended family.

Language Spoken at Home

Three-quarters of all respondents (76%) replied that they speak English at home, followed by 59% who replied that they speak Spanish at home. Respondents were given the option to check all answer choices that apply, and as such, a significant portion of respondents indicated that they are bilingual.

US or Foreign Born

Respondents were evenly split as to whether they were born in the United States or another country. Forty-nine percent replied that they were born in the United States, and another 49% replied that they were born elsewhere.

Among those born elsewhere, a significant percentage of respondents are long-term residents of the United States, with 48% having lived here for 20 years or more. Twenty four percent of respondents have lived in the United States between 11 and 20 years; 12% between 6 and 10 years; and 14% have lived here for 5 years or less.

Voter Participation

Voter participation among respondents is relatively high, with 65% of respondents indicating that they are registered to vote in the United States. 32% of respondents indicated that they are not registered to vote in the United States.

The seemingly high percentage of respondents who are registered to vote may be indicative of a survey bias that is present in many voluntary surveys of this nature. Because respondents, for the most part, were approached on the street and were asked—not required—to complete

the survey, those who took the time to participate were likely to be more civic-minded than the larger population.

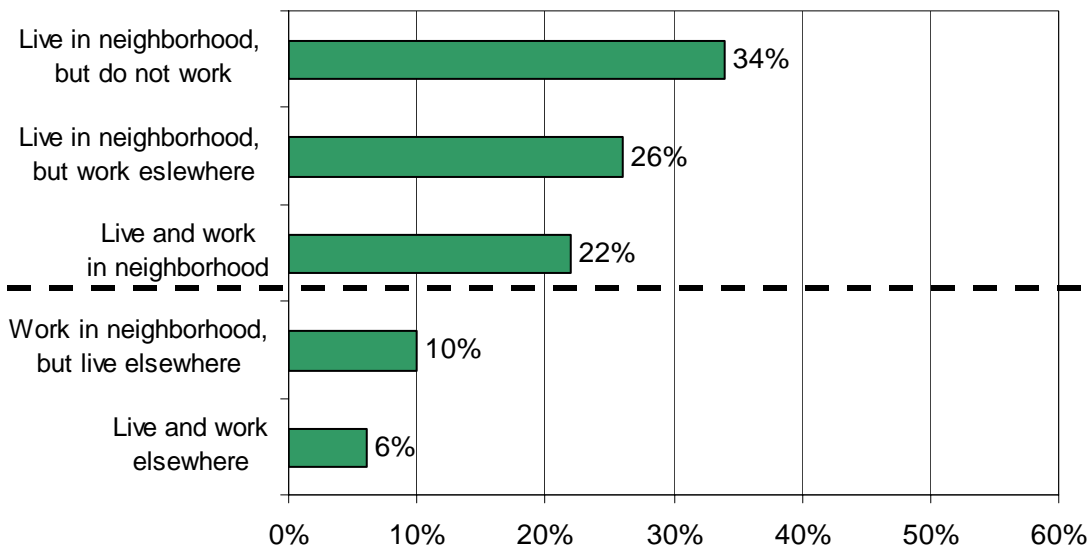
Of those respondents who indicated that they were registered to vote in the United States, 74% replied that they had voted in the last New York City elections. This question was included in the survey to gauge the level of active civic participation among survey respondents.

Connection to Community

The overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) indicated a connection to the Heights—they either live, work or live and work in the community. A third of respondents (34%) replied that they live in the Heights but do not work there. A quarter of respondents (26%) replied that they live in the community but work elsewhere. 22% of respondents replied that they both live and work in the Heights, and 10% replied that they work in the community but live elsewhere.

Figure 6. Connection to the neighborhood

Note: Among all respondents.

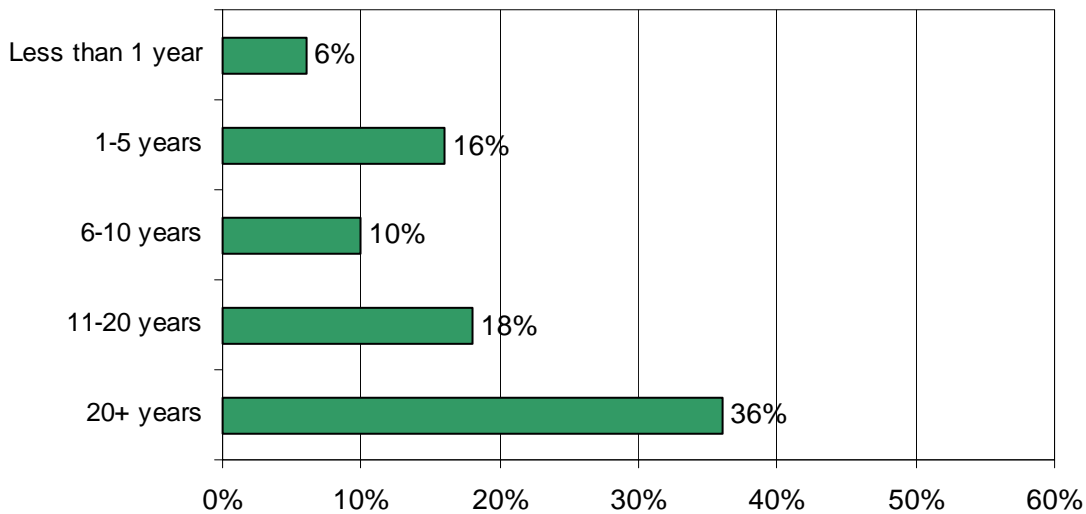


Of those who reported that they are residents but do not work, 25% are retired, 7% are homemakers, and 15% are students. However, a large percentage of non-working residents are unemployed or looking for work (42%).

Many respondents who live in the neighborhood are long-term residents of the community. 41% indicated that they have lived in the community for 20 years or more. 21% have lived in the community between 11 and 20 years; 11% between 6 and 10 years; 19% between 1 and 5 years; and only 7% for less than 1 year.

Figure 7. Length of residence in the neighborhood

Note: Among all respondents. 13% did not respond.



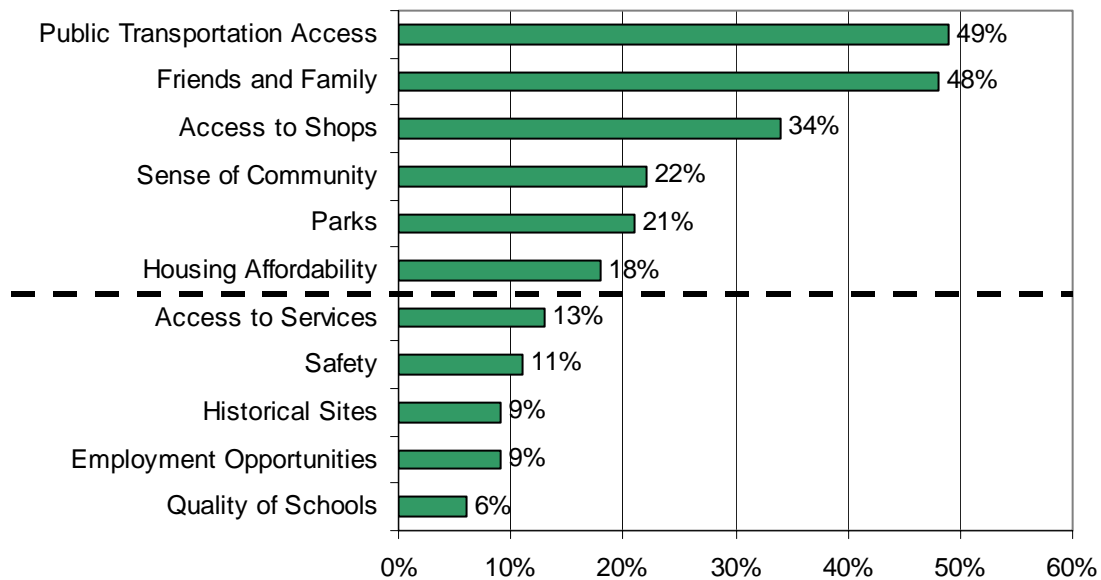
Attitudes, Concerns and Priorities

Likes

Respondents' answers to the question "What are the 3 things you like most about the neighborhood?" illustrate the fact that community members consider community and convenience, both quality of life issues, among the strengths of the neighborhood. Furthermore, respondents were definitive in naming both friends and family and access to public transportation as the things they like most about the neighborhood, with each response being chosen by at least 48% of all respondents. These responses were followed by access to shops (34%); sense of community (22%); and parks (21%).

Figure 8. What do you like most about the neighborhood?

Note: Among all respondents. Participants chose three.



Survey respondents expressed differences in opinions as to what they consider to be the top neighborhood attributes when grouped by length of residence. Those who have lived in the neighborhood for over 20 years ranked access to public transportation as the top attribute, while residents who have lived in the neighborhood between 6 to 20 years ranked friends and family as their top attribute. Newcomers, those residents who have lived in the neighborhood for 5 years or less, ranked access to public transportation as the top attribute.

Among survey respondents who identified themselves as White, housing affordability, public transportation and a sense of community were the top three neighborhood attributes. Friends and family was among the top neighborhood attributes cited by respondents who identified themselves as Black/African American or Hispanic/Latino.

In addition, survey respondents with higher levels of education, those with college, technical school or graduate degrees, cited access to public transportation as the top neighborhood

attribute. Meanwhile, respondents with less than a college or technical school degree, prioritized sense of community and family and friends as top attributes.

There was less distinction in answer choices when respondents were grouped according to their status as a community resident or non-resident. Resident and non-residents alike chose access to public transportation, friends and family, and access to shops as their top neighborhood attributes.

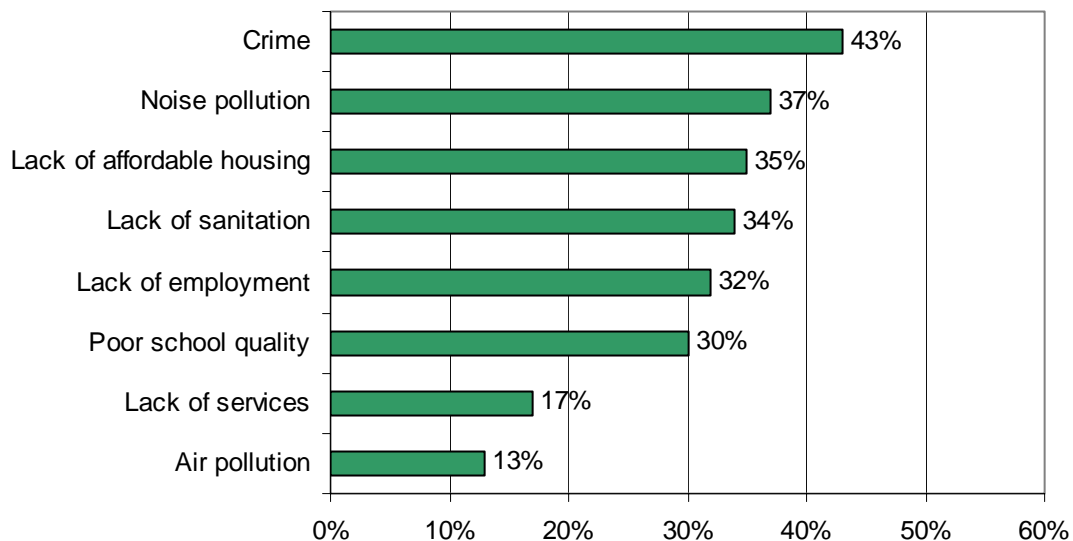
Dislikes

When asked to identify the three they like least about the neighborhood, survey respondents voiced strong opinions but pointed to a wide range of issues. The top things respondents like least about the neighborhood include crime (40%); followed by noise pollution (37%); lack of affordable housing (35%); lack of sanitation (33%); lack of employment opportunities (32%); poor quality of schools (30%). Fewer respondents chose lack of services (14%); air pollution (13%); and lack of public transportation.

Answer choices reflect the fact that respondents regard critical issues involving quality of life (crime, noise pollution), basic needs and services (housing, employment opportunities), or both (crime, sanitation) as areas of least satisfaction.

Figure 9. What do you like least about the neighborhood?

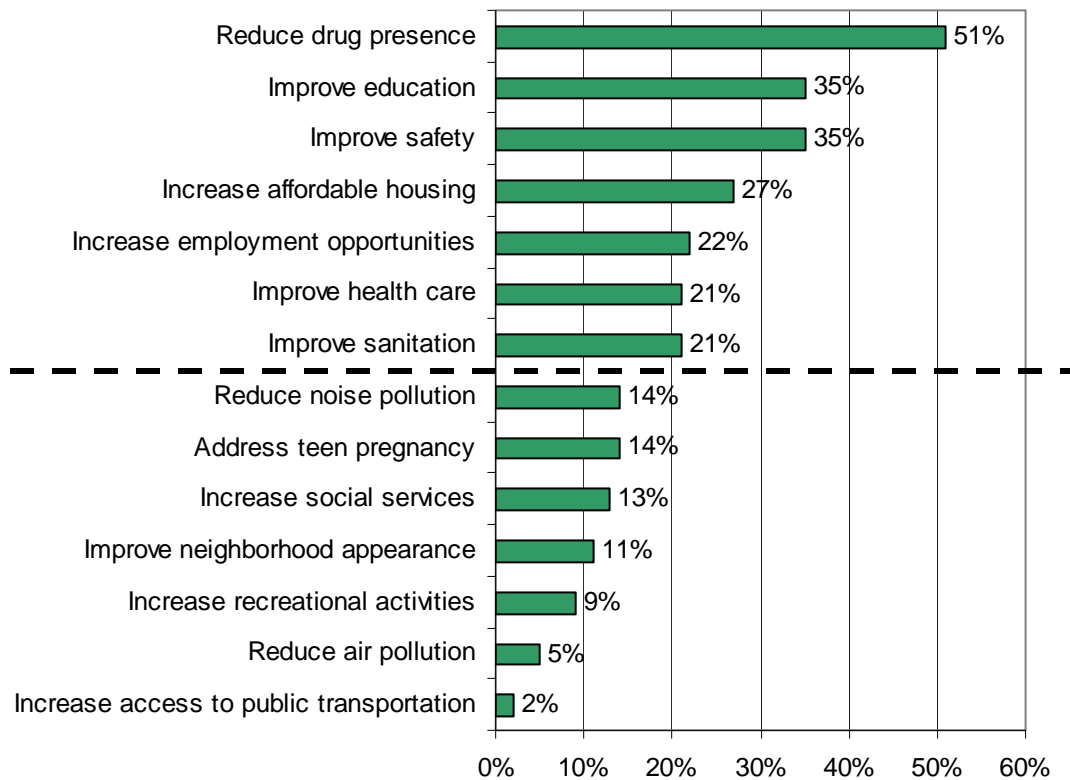
Note: Among all respondents. Participants chose three.



Needs

Survey respondents resoundingly pointed to reducing the local drug presence as the most pressing neighborhood need, as indicated by 51% of all respondents. Respondents then identified improving the quality of education (35%), improving safety (33%); increasing affordable housing (27%); increasing employment opportunities (21%); improving quality of health care (21%); and improving sanitation (20%) as other neighborhood needs.

Figure 10. What do you think are the most pressing needs of the neighborhood?
Note: Among all respondents. Participants chose three.



The most pressing neighborhood needs identified by survey respondents correspond with the things respondents like least about their community. Again, survey results reflect the fact that community members regard issues of quality of life and basic needs and services as areas of concern that must be prioritized.

Neighborhood: Better or worse

When survey respondents were asked to comment on whether the neighborhood is much better, somewhat better or worse as five years ago, respondents were fairly evenly split between much better (17%) and worse (20%). The greatest percentage of respondents replied that the neighborhood is somewhat better (37%).

Housing

Renters

An overwhelming majority of respondents (86%) replied that they rent their home. Low income and education levels and the limited opportunity for homeownership may explain the high number of renters. Of renters who are “low-income”¹, at least 69% pay more than one-third of their income on rent,² a statistic that points to a community with significant housing affordability issues.

Rent Subsidies

Among those respondents indicating that they rent their home, 29% responded that their rent is subsidized. Sixty percent stated that their rent is *not* subsidized; 2% stated that they are not sure; and 6% stated that they do not know if their rent is subsidized. The complexities of affordable rental subsidies in New York City may contribute both to confusion on this question and to underreporting of actual levels of subsidized rentals.

Long-term renters

Survey results indicate that renters tend to be long-term residents of the community. More than half of all renters (56%) have lived in the community for over 10 years, with 38% with residency of over 20 years; and 18% with residency between 11 and 20 years. Only 24% of renters have lived in the community for five years of less.

Unemployed renters

Additional survey results also indicate that many renters are precariously housed and at risk of homelessness: of those who reported that they are unemployed or looking for work, fully 90% also reported that they rent their home.

¹ “Low-income” is defined as 80% of Area Median Income. For the purposes of this calculation, we used \$30,000 annual household income as the threshold for those who are “low-income,” based on their self-reported income.

² The rent burden can only be roughly estimated due to data limitations on rent amount and income reports.

Employment and Income Generation

Work status

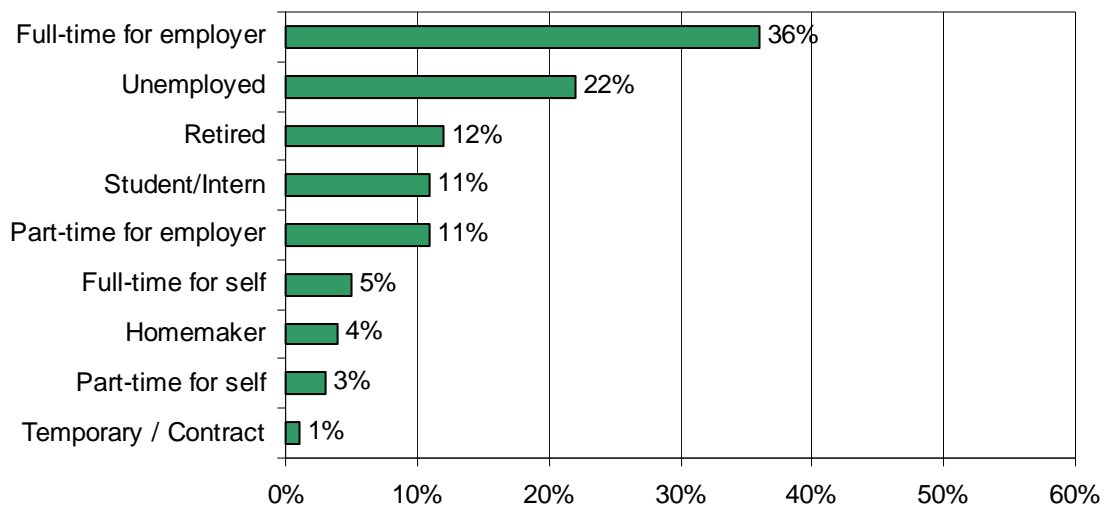
When asked to describe their current work situation, 41% of respondents indicated that they work full-time, with 36% stating that they work full-time for an employer and 5% for themselves. Another 14% of respondents indicated that they work part-time, with 11% stating that they work part-time for an employer and 3% for themselves.

In addition, 12% indicated that they are retired; 11% are students or interns; and 1% work in a temporary, contract or freelance situation.

On the other hand, fully 22% of all respondents indicated that they are unemployed or looking for work. In cases where the respondent is looking for work, he or she may currently be underemployed, in that they are working in some capacity, but are nonetheless looking for additional or full-time work.

Figure 11. Work status

Notes: Among all respondents.



Unemployment and length of time looking for work

Unemployment is affecting 25% of those who are residents in the neighborhood. In this group, 80% have been looking for work for over 12 months, 12% have been unemployed 6-12 months, 19% have been looking for work for less than 6 months.

Unemployment data analysis

The percentage of survey respondents (22%) who indicated that they are unemployed or looking for work is far higher than the 12.3% unemployment rate indicated by census tract data for the neighborhood; however, it is often the case that the census data represents an undercount of actual neighborhood statistics. In either case, the percentage of unemployed persons in this neighborhood is substantially higher than the city-wide average. According to the New York State Department of Labor statistics, the unemployment rate in New York City as of May 2004 was 7.0%.³

Finally, the 22% rate may also indicate a selection bias that reflects the nature of the survey itself. As noted elsewhere, the Community Survey was voluntary, and therefore persons who are currently unemployed may have had more time or inclination to participate. Also, the survey was mostly administered on weekdays during business hours, a time when those who are unemployed are more likely to be near home.

³ New York State Department of Labor website

Diverse work experience in community

Survey respondents indicated a wide range of work or volunteer experience. The greatest number of respondents indicated that they have work or volunteer experience in the following sectors: health and sciences (20%), education (16%), social services/nonprofit (15%), retail (14%), and food/hotel services (14%).

Figure 12. Work experience

Note: Some categories include a mix of skills. Those who answered “Other” and provided details have been re-categorized into appropriate sectors. For example, “Health & Sciences” include pharmacists and home care providers. “Food and Hotel Services” include restaurant workers as well as restaurant owners.

Work Sector	Percent of Respondents
Health & Sciences	20%
Education	16%
Social Services/Nonprofit	15%
Retail	14%
Food/Hotel Services	14%
Childcare	11%
Manufacturing	9%
Government	8%
Mech. Maintenance & Repair	6%
Legal/Medical	6%
Technology	5%
Finance/Insurance/Real Estate	4%
Construction	4%
Arts, Fashion, & Entertainment	3%
Journalism, Publishing, & Marketing	2%
Security	2%
Housekeeping/Cleaning Services	1%
Other	2%
Transportation	1%
Office and Administration	1%

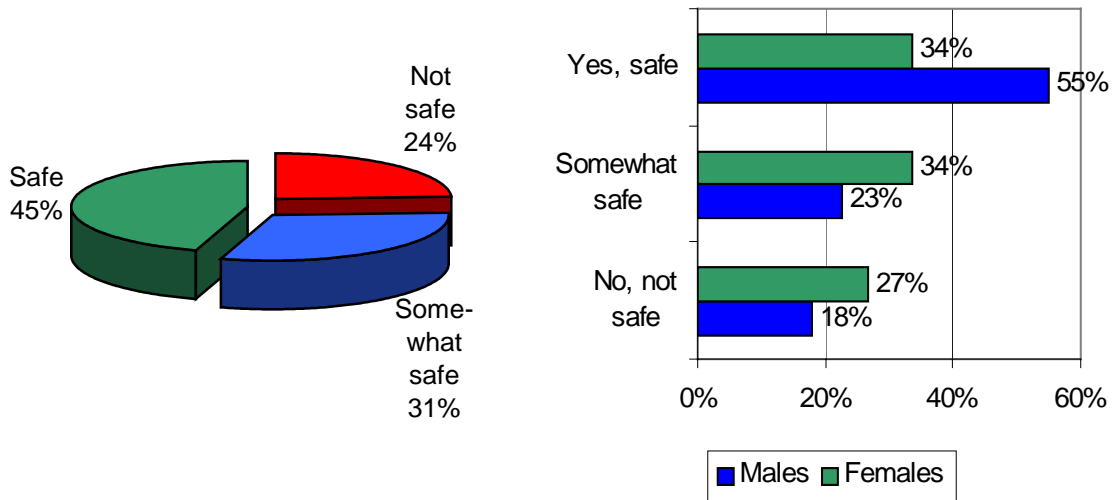
Crime and Safety

Pedestrian safety at night

Forty-three percent of survey respondents replied that they feel safe walking around the neighborhood at night, and another 29% replied that they feel 'somewhat safe'. On the other hand, nearly a quarter (23%) indicated that they do not feel safe walking around the neighborhood at night. Women are less likely to feel safe than men, where only 34% reported that they feel safe, compared to 55% of men.

Figure 13. Safety: Do you feel safe walking at night in this community?

Note: Among all respondents.

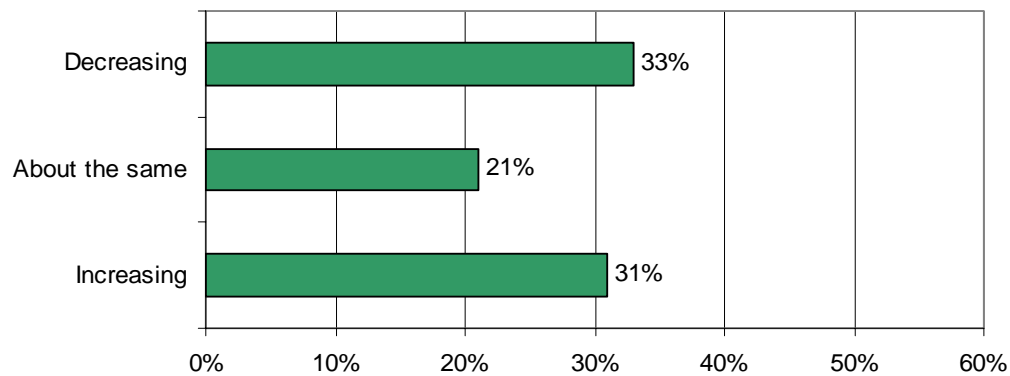


Perceptions of crime over time

Survey respondents were nearly evenly divided as to whether or not crime is increasing or decreasing within the community. Thirty-one percent replied that crime is increasing, while 33% replied that crime is decreasing. Another 21% stated that the level of crime is about same, and 12% replied that they do not know. Consistent with the earlier question about safety, women reported that they think crime is worse, at 30% for women and 23% for men. Women are less likely to think that crime is decreasing, at 19% versus 29% for men.

Figure 14. Is crime increasing or decreasing?

Note: Among all respondents. 12% didn't know.



Services for Children and Seniors

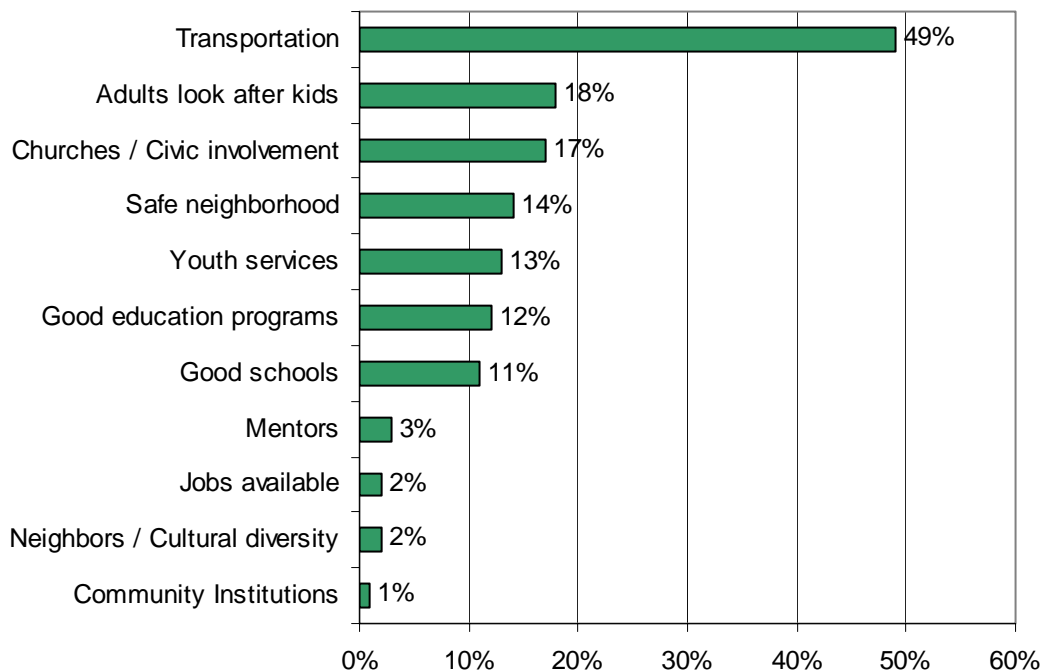
Good for children

Asked why the neighborhood is good for children, a significant portion of survey participants, or 38%, did not respond or did not know, suggesting that they disagreed with the basic premise. Among question respondents, good transportation (22%); adults looking after children (18%); and good churches and civic involvement (17%) were the top three reasons why they thought the neighborhood good for children. These responses are consistent with those given by respondents who identified themselves as parents, grandparents or guardians. Among this subgroup, good transportation (27%); good churches and civic involvement (21%); and adults looking after children (17%) ranked the highest.

Respondents' answers as to why this is a good neighborhood for children underscore the perception among survey respondents that convenience and community are among the strengths of this neighborhood.

Figure 15. Why is the neighborhood good for children?

Note: Among all respondents. 15% did not know, 23% did not respond.



Not good for children

When asked to provide reasons why this neighborhood is *not* a good neighborhood for children, top responses among all respondents included drugs (59%); violence and crime (40%); poor quality of education (36%); gangs (25%); and too few recreational facilities (20%). Again, these responses are fairly consistent with those given by parents, grandparents or guardians, who ranked drugs (63%); poor quality of education (44%); violence and crime

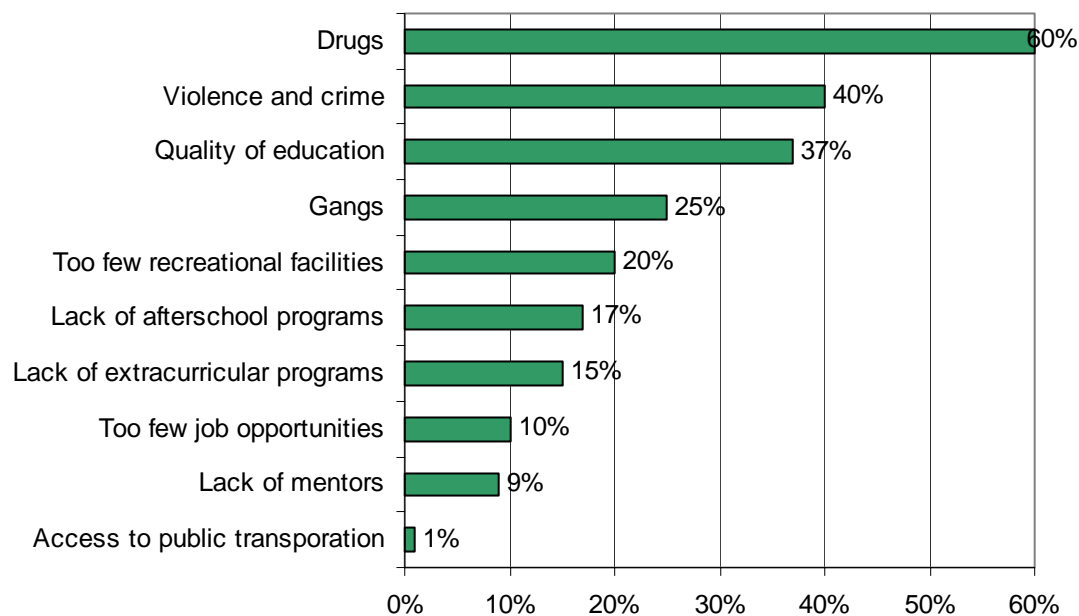
(41%); lack of after-school programs (25%); and too few recreational facilities (23%) as top reasons why this is *not* a good neighborhood for children.

These responses are similar to those given in response to the question regarding the things respondents like least about their neighborhood. In both cases, quality of life issues around basic safety—drugs, violence and crime—ranked among the top dislikes.

Only 13% of all respondents did not know or did not respond to this question, as opposed to 38% who did not know or did not answer when asked about the neighborhood’s positive attributes for children, an indication that respondents, overall, were more aware of the neighborhood’s negative influences.

Figure 16. Why is the neighborhood NOT good for children?

Note: Among all respondents. 7% did not know, 6% did not respond.



Recreational opportunities for youth

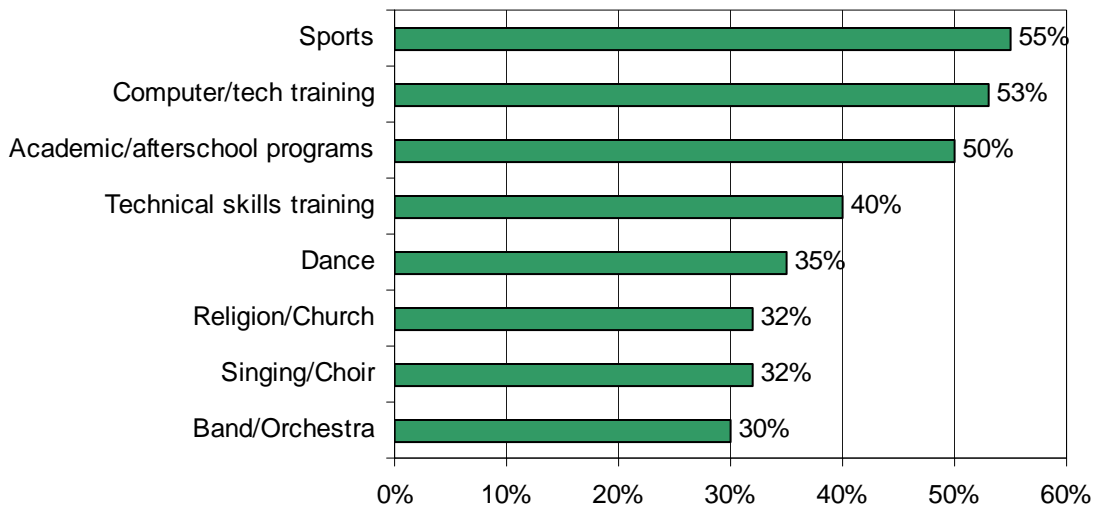
By almost a 2 to 1 margin, respondents indicating that the neighborhood lacks adequate recreational opportunities for youth outnumbered those who replied that opportunities are adequate. Forty-six percent of respondents stated that the neighborhood lacks adequate recreational opportunities, while 27% indicated that the neighborhood has adequate recreational opportunities.

When asked about the kinds of youth programs and activities that are needed in the neighborhood, respondents expressed a variety of opinions. Survey results also indicate that this topic is one about which many people have an opinion, regardless of whether or not they are parents, grandparents or guardians. Among those who responded to this question, more than half of all respondents (55%) replied that the neighborhood needed more sports programs, followed by computer and technology training (53%); academic enrichment or after-school

programs (50%); technical skills training (40%); dance instruction (35%); religious or church activities (32%); choral instruction (32%); and band or orchestra (30%).

Figure 17. Youth programs needed in the neighborhood

Note: Among all respondents. 24% did not respond.



On the other hand, survey results indicate that respondents are less informed about the level of child care services in the neighborhood. When asked if there are adequate child care services, 28% replied yes; 27% replied no; while the greatest number of respondents, 40%, replied that they do not know if there are adequate child care services.

Seniors

Survey results also indicate that respondents are not well informed about the level of senior services in the neighborhood. When asked if there are adequate services for people over 65 years of age, 31% replied yes; 26% replied no; yet 36% replied that they do not know about if there are adequate senior services.

In the same vein, the greatest number of respondents (43%) could not identify the types of senior services in the neighborhood. Twenty-six percent of respondents, however, indicated that there are medical programs in the neighborhood; 24% indicated food programs; 16% assisted living programs; 15% day programs; 10% recreational programs; and 2% intergenerational programs.

Respondents expressed more of an opinion when asked to list the types of services that seniors need. Fifty-five percent indicated medical services, followed by assisted living (53%); food programs (46%); recreational programs (43%); day programs (42%); and intergenerational programs (23%).

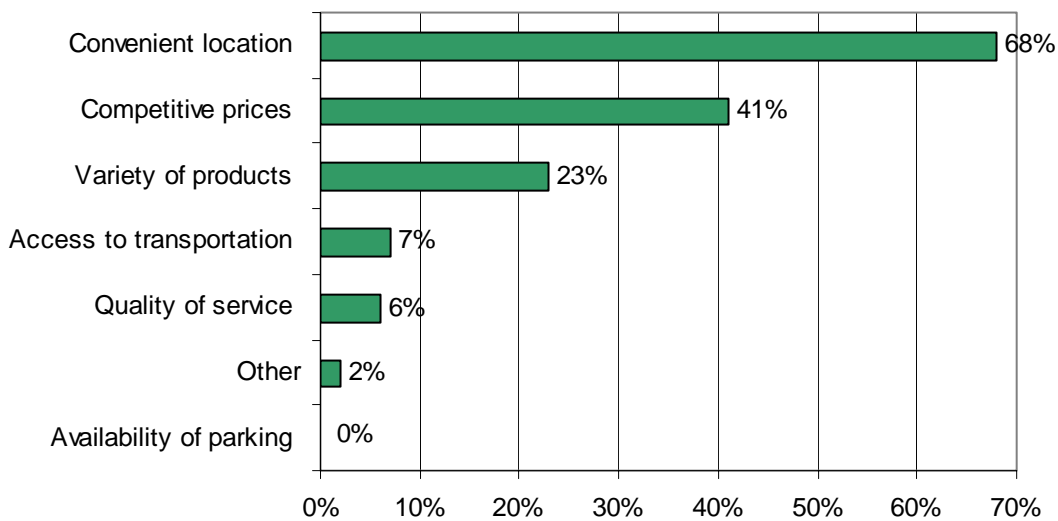
RETAIL SERVICES

Neighborhood connection and strengths

People are strongly connected to the area’s retail and economic activities. Over 85% of survey respondents shop in the neighborhood. Of survey respondents who also live in the community, over 87% also shop there. There are also visitors who do not work or live in the area but who come to the neighborhood for errands or shopping. The main reason why people like shopping in the neighborhood include issues of convenience and affordability, similar to the earlier questions about the strengths of the neighborhood. Convenient location ranked highest (68%); competitive prices ranked second (41%).

Figure 18. Reasons for shopping in the neighborhood

Note: Among all respondents. 16% did not respond.



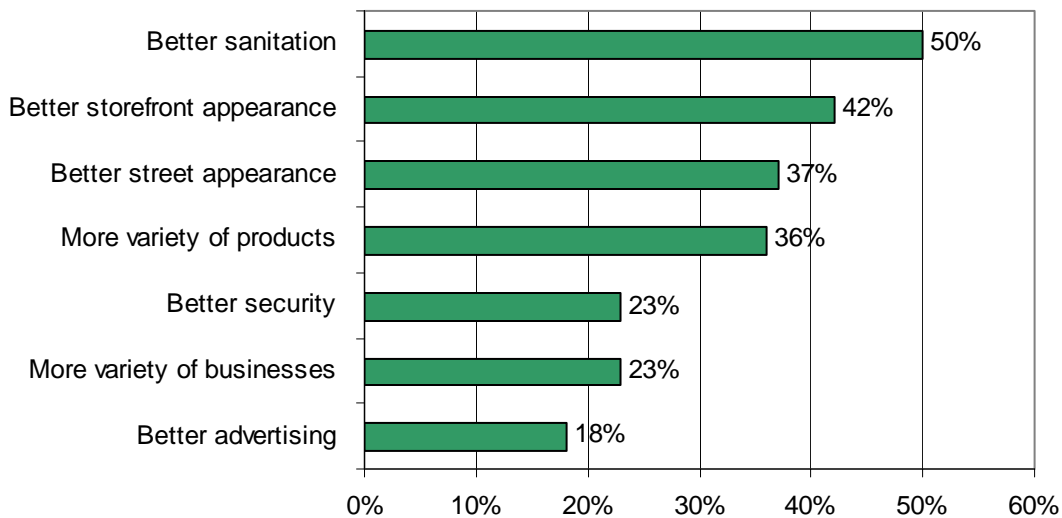
Two-thirds of survey respondents replied that the stores in the neighborhood are serving its customers better than or the same as the retail mix of five years ago. 34% of respondents replied that the current stores are better at serving the neighborhood, while 33% replied that the stores are serving the neighborhood the same as five years ago. On the other hand, 14% of respondents indicated that the current stores are worse at serving the neighborhood now, compared to five years ago.

Improvements to help businesses

Survey respondents had distinct opinions regarding improvements that would help local small businesses. For example, fully half of all respondents replied that better sanitation would help small businesses, followed by better storefront appearance (42%); better street appearance (37%); and more variety of goods and products (36%). Respondents indicated that more variety of businesses (23%), and better advertising (18%) would also help local small businesses.

Figure 19. Improvements needed for businesses

Note: Among all respondents. 5% did not know, 5% did not respond.



Additional retail services desired

Survey respondents had many opinions when asked “What types of additional retail services would you like to see in this neighborhood?” The top five retail services desired include: book store/stationary store (37%); sit-down restaurant/café (25%); grocery/supermarket (24%); clothing/shoe store (19%); music/video store (18%). Commentary surrounding the top request for book stores included people’s interest in having a Barnes & Nobles, a big-chain bookstore with café services. Respondents named their five interests, and the survey team reported that they heard common commentary that the neighborhood needed better produce (supermarkets) and a larger variety of eating establishments (restaurants).

Figure 19. Retail Services Desired

Note: Those who answered “Other” and provided details have provided information that has been recategorized into appropriate service sectors.

Services	Percent
Book store/Stationary store	37%
Sit-down Restaurant/Café	25%
Grocery/Supermarket	24%
Clothing Store/Shoe Store	19%
Music/video store	18%
Bakery	15%
Lawyer/Doctor	9%
Drug store/Pharmacy	9%
Pet Store	9%
Department stores	7%
Electronics and Computer	7%
Hardware Store	6%
Laundromat/dry-cleaning	6%
Furniture/houseware store	6%
Variety/Dollar Store	5%
Brand name stores/mall	5%
Deli/Corner Store	4%
Restaurant/Café (Take-out only)	4%
Tax/Accounting services	4%
Entertainment	4%
Beauty/nail salon	2%
Cell phone/Phone centers	2%
Travel agency	2%
Other	2%

COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS: ISSUES & VISIONS

The goal of the interview process was to identify what community resident and leaders view as the most important issues facing the community through in-depth, loosely structured conversations. Through interviews with 32 community leaders, residents, workers, and youths, several key issues emerged. Many of these issues supported views expressed in the community survey. However, in some key areas, survey respondents and interview participants had widely divergent perceptions (see Public Safety).

In addition, some interviewees saw challenges in areas where others identified strengths. For example, with respect to the major institutions in the area, certain interviewees focused on the positive aspects of those institutions, while others saw room for even greater involvement and collaborative action. In other situations, such as the balance of affordable housing with gentrification, interviewees disagreed entirely.

The following sections provide a brief look at what HPI interviewees view as the strengths and challenges of the community and, in their own words, what their hopes are for the future.

Strengths

Interview participants saw great strengths in the Heights, many of which they thought offered a strong base for the community's future. Top among these were:

- **a strong sense of community**
- **community based organizations**
- **presence of major institutions**
- **convenience**
- **recreational park space**
- **quality and affordability of housing**

When discussing challenges and visions for the neighborhood, participants often pointed to these qualities as untapped or underutilized resources that could contribute significantly to the community's revitalization.

Sense of Community

Citing residents' abilities and ambitions, their ability to work together, and cultural diversity, interviewees praised the sense of community above any other neighborhood attribute. Nearly half the participants talked about close personal connections, and some talked specifically about their proximity to friends and family. One resident noted, ***“a strong sense of community ensures a good support system and network of communication”***.

Similarly, many interviewees also praised the qualities of the people of the Heights and the potential they hold. These comments came from a mix of people, including professors, executives, directors of community organizations, residents, and students.

One interviewee, a community leader who grew up in Washington Heights and has continued to work in the neighborhood, said that people ***“stick by the community”*** and that people from all over the world bring great energy to the community.

Ethnic makeup and diversity

Speaking from nearly 30 years experience, one participant said, ***“I think one of the very best resources is the cultural diversity of the neighborhood. The opportunity up here to cross some of the racial and ethnic divides is present.”***

Well over half of those who discussed cultural diversity touched on the fact, supported by the community survey, that over 70% of the Hispanic community of southern Washington Heights is Dominican. ***“People are drawn to this neighborhood”***, said one interviewee, ***“because it is a good place to eat and shop. Washington Heights is known as a Dominican community and people from all over the city go there for cultural amenities.”*** At the same time, even those who are committed to the Dominican character of the area attest to its strong ethnic diversity.

Another discussed the Hispanic population and the time and economic resources they have invested in the community. ***“They have really helped [...] and encouraged people to stay in the community.”***

As nearly a quarter of the interviewees mentioned, the neighborhood benefits from a significant number of entrepreneurs, driven by the insular nature of immigrant communities and by the entrepreneurial spirit that in part defines the immigrant experience. In addition, some pointed out that the diverse ethnic groups bring a mix of perspectives that can inform and sustain future development.

Population Density

One respondent, having worked in the neighborhood for 30 years, said the population density brings people together – a boon for organizers: ***“In 15 or 20 blocks you can easily reach 40 to 50 thousand people.”*** While overcrowding is an undeniable challenge, nearly a quarter of the participants appreciated being near friends and family and having many opportunities for interaction with neighbors.

Community Based Organizations

Over one-third of all interviewees spoke of the neighborhood's "*many organizations covering a broad range of issues*" as a primary strength of the area.

Organizations like the Community League of the Heights, Alianza Dominicana, the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, and Broadway Housing Communities offer housing, supportive, social, recreational, training, and youth services. "*One of the best resources of this community is that they have a strong network of community-based providers that are really on top of those issues,*" said one respondent, echoing many others.

While a number of the leaders of these organizations made up part of the interviewee pool, most of the strongest words of appreciation came from those respondents not involved in the organizations.

One woman, a long-time resident and community volunteer, credited these organizations with her very survival, having been homeless and unemployed until one organization provided her with a home.

Need for more and in-language outreach

Another respondent noted, though, that while these organizations provide good and needed programs, "*people don't know about them, and most of the outreach is in English.*"

Major Institutions

Although survey respondents did not identify the presence of major institutions as a strength of the neighborhood, half of the interviewees did. "*They are anchors here,*" an interviewee said of institutions such as New York Presbyterian Medical Center, and City College, "*they provide jobs, technical skills, energy and weight in the larger, political context.*"

Major institutions mentioned by interviewees were Columbia University, Yeshiva University, New York Presbyterian Medical Center, Boricua College and City College. While they increase the availability of education and health resources, they were also looked to as a source of jobs, customers, community services and a cultural gateway for residents in the area. Two respondents mentioned the positive role these institutions play in community organizing due to the influence that comes with their success and size.

"They give the neighborhood a sort of economic stability, and it's in their best interest to help out the community," one resident said. Similarly, another said "*the hospitals and medical center really puts the neighborhood in a different category in comparison to other neighborhoods.*" One interviewee spoke about both the access to health services and economic opportunity available at NY Presbyterian Hospital, having personally found both emergency care and employment there.

Greater Potential

Many respondents also noted that the neighborhood's relationships with these and other institutions needed to be further developed. While the influence of these major institutions may be a strength, most interviewees felt that they could do more to benefit residents. The

head of a community organization crystallized these sentiments, saying, *“These institutions are willing to be committed and engaged in the neighborhood. It’s just that there needs to be an ongoing system of contribution.”*

Convenience

Half of the interviewees talked about access to services, transportation and shops as a leading strength of the neighborhood, corresponding with survey respondents’ emphasis on “convenience”.

Businesses and Shops

The Armory Track and Field Center, Coogan’s Restaurant and other small businesses were mentioned as significant strengths. Not only do they provide products and services of all sorts, proprietors are often leaders in community organizing and offer meeting and event space, financial resources, creativity and leadership.

“There’s new businesses opening,” said one interviewee, *“there are restaurants, a Staples, bookstores and some major retailers.”* Another person said a benefit of these businesses is *“keeping the money in the neighborhood, and helping support the community.”* One also said that the locally owned businesses bring character to the neighborhood, and another stated, *“our community is complete, we have every type of business imaginable.”*

Transportation

As many noted in the surveys, easy access to transportation was listed as a plus by approximately a quarter of interviewees. Again, some noted that challenges co-exist with this resource, but overall people said the system was a benefit, effective and accessible.

“Busses and trains can take you anywhere in a matter of minutes,” one interviewee said. Another said taking a job in any part of town was possible thanks to access to the subway. *“I can get to all five boroughs,”* said an interviewee, *“and we’ve got the bus to and from New Jersey. People underestimate how many people go to the malls in there.”*

Recreational Park Spaces and Landmarks

Nearly a quarter of interviewees specifically identified the area’s abundance of park space as a positive attribute of the Heights – indeed, one-third of the area is parkland.

“I like the parks during the day,” said an interviewee, noting that the parks let people of all ages play sports, read or spend time with friends. *“There’s good parks and playgrounds for kids to use all the time,”* said another.

Neighborhood History

Neighborhood history was mentioned as spurring local pride that, if developed, could create a sense of ownership of the neighborhood, as well as attractive tourist destinations. Several interviewees said that local history and historical institutions present an important resource for the community. Some locations mentioned were the Cloisters, Fort Tryon Park, Audobon Terrace, and Jumel Mansion. *“The American Revolution was fought here,”* said an

interviewee, *“people visiting New York really have to see [the Heights] as an extension of their visit to Manhattan.”*

Quality and Affordability of Housing

Several people spoke of the quality and affordability of the local housing stock as a benefit, although these comments were generally made with a fair amount of reservation. One interviewee called the area’s housing stock *“generally well preserved”*, but then also cited a need for affordable housing as a primary priority.

Another interviewee said that the local *“real estate is big; rents are cheaper than lower Manhattan, and the size is good for the price.”* She and others then noted, however, that this combination plus the area’s accessibility to transportation has created a gentrifying current that threatens existing families in the neighborhood.

Needs & Unmet Challenges

As stated in the previous section, many of the Heights's identified strengths also reappear in respondents' comments regarding the challenges facing the neighborhood. For some issues, this is attributable to varying levels of satisfaction among residents, but for others, there are more fundamental differences of perspective.

On the issue of housing affordability, for example, opinions ranged from there not being enough affordable housing in the area to the idea that the neighborhood's low cost of housing is a strength. But even among those who view the community's housing as being affordable, there is concern that this will only spur on gentrification.

The top needs and challenges talked about by interviewees are:

- **Community Unification / Organizing**
- **Lack of Services, Youth, Daycare and Other Neighborhood Services**
- **Education**
- **Affordable Housing**
- **Employment**
- **Small Business viability**
- **Sanitation and Physical Conditions**

Some of the challenges and neighborhood needs that interviewees identified were a surprising break from survey findings. For example, while nearly half of the survey respondents pointed to crime as a major problem area, only two interviewees mentioned it as such. Similarly, while over 35% of survey respondents cited noise pollution to be a major issue, only two interviewees did.

Below are further ideas about the challenges faced by the neighborhood, as well as interviewees' visions for development.

Community Unification / Organizing

A key concern of many interviewees was the need for community organizing, with two-thirds discussing the challenges in organizing and creating a unified community. For one-third of the interviewees, organizing was viewed as essential to the positive development of the neighborhood. These respondents discussed both the need for residents to be involved in shaping their community and the need for neighbors, CBOs, major institutions, businesses and government agencies to bridge ethnic and other divides within the community.

“People need to be part of the solution,” an interviewee said, ***“ instead of feeling negative [...] and teaching their children the same thing.”***

Additionally, bringing neighbors together will show people the possibilities for their quality of life. ***“That’s why we need to educate, because there are still people living in horrible conditions and they think ‘well, that’s just the way it is, because there’s nothing we can do.’”***

Another suggested that the neighborhood needs a ***“greater sense of connection and alliance [with other neighborhoods] in this part of upper Manhattan, seeing that they’re all dealing with the same forces.”*** Others noted the need for CBOs, businesses and agencies to work more closely together. ***“It’s difficult, though,”*** one person noted, ***“because you are faced with the everyday, basic support of your organization and you don’t have a chance to reflect on the larger scale.”***

Dealing with Ethnic and Racial Divides

Although many interviewees celebrate and cherish the ethnic diversity that characterizes the Heights, the reality is that this diversity also presents its own challenges of mistrust, antagonism and lack of communication between groups. Interviewees noted this as well.

One, a long time resident, stated that she feels comfortable in the neighborhood because she is Dominican, and she views her Dominican neighbors as her brothers and sisters. When asked about the increasing ethnic diversity, she said, ***“there are more Mexicans and Whites moving into the neighborhood. This threatens the sense of community.”***

This fear also dovetails with her fears of gentrification: ***“The Whites have more money and landlords are favoring them. In my building, there are vacant apartments. I think the landlord is holding on to them until someone comes in and offers more money for it.”***

Another resident, an African American woman, illustrated what she saw to be ethnic as well as class divides. ***“My building is mostly made up of African American and White residents, mostly college educated professionals. Some of my African American neighbors have said that they are moving into the area because they can ‘tolerate the Dominicans’. But when I look around, I don’t see a lot of interaction between the two groups.”***

These divides, in addition to damaging efforts to organize for better resources, threaten to poison the well-being of the neighborhood. They also have practical ramifications.

One seemingly innocuous example is that of loud music in the streets. While not a life-or-death issue, many – of all ethnicities – point to the loud music as a problem. One interviewee said, ***“This may be an issue of cultural understanding. [The immigrant Dominican community] is from a different culture. Loud music in public is not a problem to them – it is part of the way of life. Other people who live in the neighborhood may not have the same perspective on it, and people need to learn to respect one another and to obey regulations.”***

Community Vision

One respondent, a head of a local community organization, summed up the thoughts of many eloquently:

“We need to have some true, open dialogue when it comes to racism and the ethnic divide that’s in this neighborhood. I strongly believe that if people get to the point where they can put on the table what really bothers them about one another and we can talk through that, we can get to the next step.

But a lot of what ails us is that we’re not having honest dialogue about the very basic human things, feelings and prejudices that we have, and that really stalemates a lot of things. That’s the truth.

We need to look at the most common thread and use that as a way to have conversation around how to achieve a common goal, and work through prejudices through that process.”

Community Organizing: Getting People Involved

Many interviewees felt that the neighborhood needs to have a way of unifying the community behind common goals, and getting residents and stakeholders actively involved in advocating and working for their rights and aims.

Respondents pointed to several issues that need a coherent response from the community as a whole, and where the absence of such a response could hurt the neighborhood. These include gentrification and the expansion and development of large institutions.

Community Vision

One community leader said, ***“The greatest need is to have a cohesive community. Without a sense of unified community and planning, many people will just work to cut out their own pieces of the diminishing pie. So long as this continues to happen, the neighborhood will not go anywhere.”***

A interviewee with a community organizing experience said that her ***“goal is for community and political groups to work more closely together. With all the resources they have, they would make a powerful impact.”***

One neighborhood resident and volunteer expressed a concern for the involvement of all stakeholders, even those without legal status. ***“I tried to start a neighborhood group to speak out for our rights, and found that many people wanted to participate***

but were afraid that they would bring the INS down on them. We need to inform people without legal status that they have rights also, and should participate in civic life.”

Some stakeholders in the neighborhood are not residents, but they have a vested interest because they work there. One respondent said that she was not involved in the community in the Bronx that is her home, but is much more aware of the issues in the Heights, where she works. She encourages her staff to become more involved as well.

Organizing Around Relationships with Major Institutions

Many interviewees and survey participants identified the local presence of major institutions such as New York Presbyterian Medical Center as one of the major strengths in the neighborhood. Others – and sometimes the same people – also identified the community’s relationship with those institutions as an area of challenge or unrealized promise.

The planned expansion of Columbia University is a weighty issue facing the Heights, fraught with both potential for revitalization and the dangers of gentrification or outright disruption for the community.

A community resident who works at a local institution said, *“They’re thinking in the present, but Columbia’s plan will have a great effect in the neighborhood in 15-30 years, when we won’t have any apartments for our children or grandchildren.”* Voicing a similar concern, the head of a local organization mixed her comments with frustration: *“I fear that in 15 years, the Heights will be filled with students, rather than families...I’m not sure that the neighborhood has really effectively come together around the Columbia expansion.”*

The Columbia plan an issue that highlights a larger question – that of how to organize the community to maintain and continually improve its relationship with its institutional neighbors.

The head of a local community organization said, *“The Heights is primarily residential and institutional, and there is a divide between the two. Take Mother Cabrini Hospital, for example. It is a low-security correctional facility, and totally inappropriate for a residential neighborhood. But hopefully we can make places like Columbia and Yeshiva University our partners.”*

Community Vision

In dealing with the community’s anchor institutions, interviewees called for improved community organizing and greater unity, as well as a better understanding of the nature of the institutional relationship.

A community leader said, *“I think it’s the responsibility of the large institution to have a conscience when it comes to the communities that they’re in and to respect that community...but it is not their responsibility nor obligation to make the community make them be responsible. It is easy to blame the institution, but we, as the community, need to take action as well.”*

We have to be strategic. Columbia has a 30-year plan, which means that the community should have its own 30-year plan, and we need to see how Columbia fits into that plan, not the other way around.

In terms of specifics, large institutions like Columbia and others should contribute back to the communities they inhabit in significant ways. Another community leader said, ***“Starting or giving to a neighborhood fund is helpful, but it’s not sustained. What we need is for these institutions to contribute to community organizations with some sustained support to execute their respective missions – housing, childcare, immigration reform, legal and such. They should either be giving sustained financial support or offer some ongoing system of contributing to these activities.”***

Lack of Services: Youth, Daycare, and Other Neighborhood Services

Over half of the participants said that the neighborhood needs more in the way of social, youth, and daycare services. In their eyes, this need represents both a shortage of services and support for community-based organizations offering these services.

A local professional said, ***“Activists in this neighborhood are aware of the challenges and are addressing them... it’s a matter of them getting enough funding to do what they set out to do.”***

Need for Outreach

Moreover, as noted earlier, many interviewees also said that existing organizations need to do better in terms of reaching out to the community and marketing the available services.

One interviewee said, ***“Some of these groups – I don’t even know what they do. They seem a little exclusive sometimes.”***

Youth Services

In identifying “youth services” as a high-priority area of need, most interviewees pointed to the fact that many area young people seem disaffected, spending their time hanging out on street corners. Said one long time resident, ***“People do not see hanging out on the corner as a problem, but it is an indication of larger issues. The drug problem is bad. I work in the school, and I see how understaffed and overcrowded it is, I see how there are no recreational programs for the young people.”***

Another longtime resident makes the issue more explicit: ***“Young people aren’t getting any guidance. Many of them do not care about school or education. Parents at work think their kids are safe and busy with schoolwork, but instead, they’re in the street and maybe getting involved in illegal things. Parents need to be more involved, but the kids need other kinds of guidance and activities, too.”***

Community Vision

Most interviewees saw a need for both recreational and educational programs for youth, in and after school. (More on the education aspect of this need is detailed below, in the section entitled “Education”.)

A longtime resident and volunteer said, *“We need more GED programs, because many youths drop out of school, but we also need more after school assistance programs, to keep youths interested so they won’t drop out in the first place.”*

A community leader with educational experience also stressed the need for after school programs: *“If a 12 or 15 year old is standing in the street, it’s not because they want to be there, it’s because they have no options.”*

And a community organization leader said, *“We need to offer recreational and supportive services for youth, to deal with their other needs as well, such as health, sexual awareness, and life skills. We also need to incorporate various skill development pieces to our recreational programs, so that these programs are productive in addition to giving young people a place to be.”*

Daycare

A fifth of interviewees also identified daycare for children as a vital need. Most basically, as one respondent said, *“We need child care so that mothers can go to work and be gainfully employed knowing that their children are safe.”*

The community organization leader also added, *“Studies show that early child education and care have an impact on school performance and future employment. The trajectory of that individual child is so much better if early childhood opportunities are provided. But there’s more than a year’s waiting list to get subsidized childcare in this area.”*

Other Types of Services Needed

Small Business Assistance Despite the fact that many respondents saw the number of small businesses in the area to be a strength, many also said that local business owners need assistance, since a significant number fail. Other indicated that another area that needs improvement is outreach to local businesses about available support. One business owner said, *“A big chain nearby is doing well, and people perceive it as a better value. Local independent businesses need technical assistance in marketing and communication.”*

Language Training Several interviewees indicated that the language barrier is a significant hurdle to community unity and understanding. One local resident and volunteer said, *“We should provide English and Spanish language training to promote positive relations.”* She also noted that in her work with the neighborhood’s seniors, many are illiterate. *“Some of these people can’t write their own names. They can use literacy training, but we leave them out of the picture.”*

Education

Over half the participants discussed education as a crucial area of need. They talked about overcrowding, lack of funding for schools and after-school activities, and a diminished neighborhood voice in education policy. A high number of new immigrants are struggling to adapt to their new neighborhoods, schools and work. Too few resources for teachers, and large class sizes exacerbate the difficulties of adjustment, limiting students' success both in school and out.

One interviewee said that if they ***“had to identify the most glaring unmet need, that’s school reform.”*** Another – a local student – said: ***“Public school kids don’t seem to care about school,” he said, “and the public schools want you to do well, too, but they don’t seem to pay attention to your needs.”***

As noted earlier, young people are seen as a strong potential resource for the neighborhood, but the absence of quality education in the classrooms, adequate after school programs, and opportunities at the university level, sharply limit this potential. The lack of quality education and structured activities also increases loitering and drug use.

“If people are coming out with better education,” one person said, ***“the job opportunities open up to them.”***

“We have some great teachers, but they need help,” another said. ***“There are 35 students to a class. Children need individual attention.”*** Class size – and the overall population in the neighborhood – is projected to grow in the coming years, an interviewee said, due to new housing, immigration and people fleeing the higher rents in other parts of Manhattan.

While many communities prioritize the quality of education, a community leader with educational experience noted that, ***“Immigrant communities are particularly concerned with the quality of education for their children. Honestly, many in these communities focus on educating the children, because immigrant parents who come here often find becoming literate and proficient in English so difficult that they aim to position their children to succeed and hopefully one day support their families.”***

Community Vision

Some said they would like to see new schools in the area; some stressed the need for more efficient use of space that could be used for educational programs. Involving residents and institutions in educational improvements was also suggested as a means to amplify local calls for change and to secure additional financial support.

The responsibilities of improving education, many said, are not up to only public agencies and officials. They stressed the need for residents and CBOs to work together on concrete solutions. ***“It took the parents, school board, public officials and the community board [to prompt changes in the Department of Education’s 10-year plan]; one group alone can’t convince them, but collectively we can,”*** said an interviewee.

Affordable Housing

Nearly half the interview participants spoke strongly of the need for more affordable housing in the area.

The existing housing stock is in decent condition and is currently affordable, according to many interviewees, but others spoke of the threat of gentrification that these very characteristics foster.

“Real estate is big,” said an interviewee, ***“rents are cheaper than lower Manhattan, and the size is good for the price.”*** However, another warned, ***“folks that have been living in the Heights for decades can no longer afford it, let alone recent immigrants.”***

“Since most of the housing market is privately controlled, we must do everything we can to preserve the affordable housing stock,” a housing advocate said.

Overcrowding was at the forefront of many interviewees’ comments about housing. Faced with un- or underemployment, many families end up sharing apartments with friends or relatives. Interviewees told of multiple families forced to live in apartments suitable for one or two. ***“We’ve seen many families in circumstances that are living in conditions far worse than any shelter,”*** one person said.

“I hope there’s a way to balance the need for affordable housing with the housing needs of the newer population moving in,” said one interviewee. Another worried about their family: ***“I hope we don’t have to move, because rents and prices keep going up.”*** Recognizing that having a neighborhood of many immigrants creates a somewhat transitional atmosphere, one interviewee said, ***“I hope it can accommodate newcomers at all income levels.”***

And there are specific groups who suffer more acutely from the lack of affordable housing. ***“Parents who are youths themselves and youth aging out of foster care are in grave danger of homelessness because of the cost of housing,”*** the head of a local housing and services organization said.

Community Vision

When asked for solutions, interviewees included creating housing at prices people could afford, increased financial assistance to families, working closely with landlords to prevent harmful displacement, and encouraging homeownership.

Some of the mitigating tools to the housing crunch are ***“Section 8 vouchers and legal assistance to families in jeopardy of losing their housing, not to mention the building of more units”*** a housing advocate said. However, the Section 8 program has seen its funding threatened in recent months.

A number of other interviewees also advocated the promotion of homeownership to help stabilize rental costs. One resident and volunteer said, ***“I would like to see a bigger push in homeownership so that people will have a solid investment in the***

neighborhood, and will care for the dilapidated homes more than the absentee landlords who own much of the property.”

A community leader with educational experience added, *“The integration of the community depends on people becoming owners, creating neighborhood associations and creating a unity.”*

Employment

Nearly half the interviewees talked about the neighborhood’s low availability of employment as a major challenge. It is clear from both surveys and interviews that finding steady employment for residents is crucial to sustainable development in the neighborhood and tied closely to all other challenges that residents face.

Work Opportunities

A large portion of those discussing employment said that there is a need for more work opportunities in the Heights.

Unemployment is a serious and visible problem. One woman, a long time resident, said, *“There is too much unemployment. When I come out of my home at 2:00 in the afternoon, the streets are filled with men just hanging out.”*

Underemployment is also a serious issue. A community leader stated, *“Many people have jobs that only cover the basics of rent and food, but do not offer benefits or the ability to save and grow. They’re at risk, too.”*

Local youth feel the same frustrations about the local job market, only compounded by the fact that their age is another strike against them. One, a high school student, said, *“Me and a lot of my friends would like to work, but employers think that we’re not mature enough. It’s easier if you’re over 18, but even still, so many of the jobs that are available are also not really good. I’d rather have a job than not, but in general, there aren’t many good paying jobs in the neighborhood. All the work here is in stores, restaurants, and things like that.”*

Community Vision

Consistently, interviewees identified support for local small business as a major strategy to create work opportunities in the area.

“Local people working on local empowerment,” said an interviewee, *“could create jobs and increase the sense of investment in the community.”* Another talked about the impact of small businesses: *“A small business owner comes in and hires maybe three to five people, but he comes in and makes the community better, and I think that’s really critical.”*

Many comments in this direction focused on the creation of a Business Improvement District in the area.

Others said that the large institutions in the neighborhood could become better sources for jobs. One interviewee, a professional with economic development experience, said, ***“The hospital and universities could really make more of an effort to hire people from the area.”***

Finally, a community leader said that the Heights ***“could improve its attractiveness to larger chains and tourists”*** as a way of boosting the economy and job market.

Vocational Training

Many interviewees discussed the need for vocational and standard education to prepare youth and adults for entry- and mid-level careers. Many jobs are simply not available to people without college degrees or skills training, and those requiring high school education are in high demand. Additionally, these jobs often offer wages too low to support families. Vocational and educational training are seen as lacking in schools and CBOs.

Even fully employed people are in need of training to improve their salaries. ***“As rents are going up, people need to be making more and more [...] You can place someone in a job, but at five or six dollars an hour, they can’t afford a 1,000 dollar-a-month apartment.”***

Community Vision

Ideas for solutions were hopeful but measured. Language skills, including ESL classes, were top on interviewees’ lists. One resident said, ***“given the demographics here, we need to be providing vocational training programs that are tied to ESL instruction. And these programs need to be linked up with the local businesses, so that there is a real effect on employment here.”***

Business

Nearly half the interviewees talked about the need for business assistance. That support, they said, should come in three forms: financial (including lower rents), ongoing technical assistance, and encouragement of a diverse retail sector. Supporting local and attracting outside businesses were tightly linked to issues of employment and education.

At the same time, there is an understanding that economic improvement can be tricky. A community leader said, ***“Economic improvement is a delicate balancing act, because we need to try to increase the overall level of economic activity – which means, partially, encouraging outside investment – as well as to improve the economic level of the people who live here. A challenge is how to make an infusion of economic activity affect residents positively.”***

Community Vision

Business turnover is high in the community. One of the major factors of this is the cost of rent. A local business person said, ***“Rents have risen dramatically and everyone is moving out. But if the landlords were more involved in the community, they would not be so quick to raise the rent.”***

At the same time, many praised the entrepreneurial spirit of the community, and called for investment. A longtime resident, a professional at a local business, said, ***“There is a great entrepreneurial spirit, especially among women. We need to have resources and funding available to help these women establish businesses. The Empowerment Zone has to do a lot of heavy duty investment.”***

Technical Assistance

Local entrepreneurs need training. A local business person said, “It’s a shame that so many small businesses fail because the owners simply do not know what running a business actually entails. There has to be training and assistance for people who are interested in entrepreneurship.”

Encouragement of Economic Diversity

This discussion took two forms: that of the balance between assisting local and attracting outside businesses, and in supporting a diversity of types of businesses.

A neighborhood business leader said, ***“We should assist small business owners, but we also need to show that the Heights is a good neighborhood to conduct business, and attract more large-scale kinds of business that are not here, like Old Navy and Staples.”***

Several community residents and leaders said that they would like to see other types of businesses make an appearance. In fact, in a survey completed for the BID study, the largest number of respondents said that they would like to see a large bookstore in the neighborhood. The same study showed that the number of beauty salons and related ventures far outstripped any other business type. Several interviewees commented on this. One said, ***“There is a healthy level of economic activity, but it may be too much of the same”***.

She continued, ***“We need to help our community businesses be a part of economic growth and yet remain in the area so that the flavor of the community stays. We don’t need a Starbucks if Margot’s has nice coffee. So how do we help her? For example, if community groups and city agencies cooperated, we could have better sanitation so that a visitor will feel comfortable walking into Margot’s as opposed to Starbucks.”***

Street vendors are an issue. ***“These vendors set up shop on the street and especially at busy corners, blocking pedestrian traffic. Most of them are unlicensed, and create unfair competition for legitimate businesses. And they take a lot of our time in trying to get them to follow regulations,”*** another community leader said.

Some local entrepreneurs do not take the competition kindly, either. ***“They are an economic cancer that affect the real estate and the perception of the neighborhood. Why would anyone want to pay rent to do what you can do for free? It hurts the legitimate businesses,”*** said one.

At the same time, some found sympathy with the vendors, pointing out that they, too, are struggling to earn a living. A local business person commented, ***“We should find a way to***

accommodate they vendors so that they can do business somehow, but not make the neighborhood look messy.”

Business Improvement District (BID)

“Businesses have to learn to work together, to lose their fear of competitors, and to break through people’s ‘island mentalities’ to bring about economic expansion,” a community leader said.

Another interviewee with economic development experience said: *“Often, business owners don’t realize that they can more easily work out problems collectively. While the economic vitality of the neighborhood exists, it’s a matter of organizing and polishing it.”*

Indeed, many interviewees said that a higher level of coordination between businesses would be a powerful way of improving the local economy.

The establishment of a Business Improvement District (BID) is an idea that has generated a lot of excitement. A local resident said, *“Creating a BID will not only help the consumers, but also the business owners; it will encourage other businesses to invest in the neighborhood because it puts in place an organization to back them up.”*

Indeed, many see the BID as being a powerful way to improve the economy and the neighborhood as a whole. A local business person said, *“One of the clear hopes for the BID is to make the neighborhood more aesthetically pleasing, which will increase tourism and the economic base.”*

Sanitation & Physical Conditions

In keeping with survey respondents, who cited sanitation as a pressing need, nearly a third of interview participants considered the physical condition of neighborhood a challenge to improving the area. Garbage, building conditions, sidewalk crowding and pests were all mentioned.

The head of a local organization noted that, *“There’s a lot of deferred maintenance in the transit system, buildings, and streets and sidewalks.”*

A student put it even more poignantly: *“At my friends house, there’s holes in the doors, no door knobs...the stuff doesn’t get fixed.”*

Many respondents said the vacant lots and buildings not only look bad, but they invite drug activity and other problems. *“The physical environment of the neighborhood still looks depleted and forlorn, instead of showing off its strengths.”*

Poor sanitation is also a major issue – indeed, a full third of interviewees spoke at length on the subject. One resident noted that *“garbage piles up all the time, especially outside of businesses and restaurants, but it only gets picked up once a week.”*

Many complained of the infrequency of trash pick up, and one of the results of this lack of service is the presence of ***“Rats! The rats! It’s really, really bad with the garbage. You can stand on your stoop and actually see them cross the street, like the own the neighborhood. Rats as big as me!”*** said a decidedly human-sized resident.

Community Vision

Nearly a quarter of the interviewees described the neighborhood generally as culturally vibrant, comfortable, safe, and accessible to residents and visitors. Interviewees’ discussions of physical spaces suggest the potential that full community participation could bring.

A community leader said, ***“on any Saturday at 3 pm., you see trash cans just overflowing on the street. This is not the case in many parts of Manhattan. If we get the disposal services we need, we can really improve the economy and the quality of life in the neighborhood. People will feel safer and more comfortable shopping, doing business, and investing.”***

But perhaps a local student said it best: ***“Man, I just want a place where I can shop and spend time with my friends and walk home at night comfortably.”***

NEXT STEPS: A BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

Neighborhood Priorities

In its initial phase, the Heights Planning Initiative (HPI) sought to identify community priorities of greatest importance to the largest cross section of community residents and stakeholders, employing both quantitative indices captured through surveys and qualitative measures identified in interviews with community residents. In both survey results and interviews, several clear priorities emerged. Residents of Hamilton Heights and southern Washington Heights, despite many favorable attitudes regarding their community, have serious and abiding concerns in five primary areas:

- Public safety;
- Education;
- Affordable housing;
- Employment; and,
- Sanitation and physical conditions.

Residents' positive feelings remain notable, however, and highlight the feasibility and importance of organizing and implementing concrete, community-led responses to the problems that residents have identified. Residents pointed to a number of other issues in the community, including poor health care and noise pollution, as troubling. These issues are important but HPI may address them at a later date, choosing to focus current efforts on strategies to ameliorate conditions that have greater consensus among community residents and stakeholders.

Moving from Planning to Implementation

The HPI community planning process has generated significant enthusiasm among many residents and community leaders in the Heights. This interest comes from the plan itself but also from the sense of unity that the process has created and from an eagerness to see the planning move from the stage of assessment to actual implementation. As a consequence, it is important to capitalize on the current interest by developing an action agenda that has clear goals, timelines and responsibilities. It is also important to prioritize goals to achieve some immediate and measurable results. All planning carries the risk of inertia and failed hopes and expectations; in fact, most community plans, particularly in lower income communities, have to contend with histories of earlier plans gone awry or gone nowhere.

In order to carry the planning process forward, HPI should undertake the following:

1. Form a Community Advisory Board:

Expand the membership of the HPI Advisory Board to secure greater community involvement, so that the Board can become an effective and representative planning and implementation body during the implementation process. The Advisory Board must either include representatives from the large institutions in the Heights or create a formal method for regular communication with these entities.

2. Develop and Implement Programs Designed to Improve Community Relations across Divides of Class, Culture and Race:

The HPI Advisory Board must include a cross-section to model this goal, but it should also find other venues and mechanisms to promote greater harmony in the community.

3. Create an “Anchor Institution Taskforce”:

Bring the areas’ major institutions together to focus on central issues of neighborhood development in a coordinated and comprehensive way. The Heights is blessed with a number of organizations of enormous size and influence. These institutions have the potential, if not the obligation, to serve as anchors or linchpins for the community as a whole; as a consequence, the Advisory Board must involve these institutions in any implementation plan. They can and should be part of a model partnership.

4. Create Planning Taskforces:

HPI should create planning taskforces for each of the five priorities listed above. The taskforces should have representatives from the Community Advisory Board, community leaders and residents and leadership from other community-based organizations with particular expertise and experience in relevant areas. Staff from appropriate city agencies should also participate, ideally by staffing individual taskforces. The taskforces should address the following:

- *Stating and Addressing Recommendations:* The taskforces should affirm and address the recommendations that HPI has identified through its extensive community participatory processes;
- *Evaluating Development Strategies, including mechanisms for evaluating options and priorities:* The taskforces should assess several different alternatives for approaching each priority and define their selection criteria;
- *Designing Implementation Programs:* Unfortunately, not all plans get implemented. The reasons often include political or budgetary obstacles, but some simple techniques can improve the chances of success. The HPI taskforces must outline a clear implementation program that includes:
 - Discrete Goals, described in precise language and specifying who needs to do what;
 - Priorities and Timelines, delineating with real specificity what will get done, by whom and by when, with primary and secondary priorities identified separately from more distant goals. It is vital to define realistic goals that can be accomplished in the near term in order to maintain momentum and credibility;
 - Implementation budgets with projected sources and uses of funds and a plan to secure this funding;
 - Implementation Partners; and,
 - Evaluation measures.

It is important to note that community stakeholders must have ongoing and substantial responsibilities in both implementing and monitoring HPI recommendations. Making all goals

the responsibility of someone else, whether that party is the city, elected officials or some other entity, is a good way to doom any plan.

Options For Action Steps

Warnke Community Consulting and CLOTH submit the following development or programming options as possible strategies for addressing those issues and concerns raised during the planning process. These recommendations draw from the suggestions of HPI participants and from the insights of WCC staff and other individuals and organizations with relevant expertise in community planning processes and in different areas of community development.

Public Safety

Despite the dramatic reduction in crime across the city and in northern Manhattan, crime remains a central concern of community residents. In fact survey team members noted a reluctance among many survey participants to speak openly about crime. More than half of participants saw levels of crime as the same or increasing, and many participants remarked on the absence of an adequate police presence in the community.

Crime is a complicated, multi-faceted issue that reaches across most elements of the community, including crime victims and perpetrators, families of prisoners, community residents and ex-offenders, among others. The persistence of drug trafficking and the involvement of many people in the drug trade are also deeply troubling to many survey and interview participants, who continue to search for permanent solutions. For example, the survey underscored the absence of recreational and employment opportunities for young people.

It is important to note that community residents pointed to two separate issues: crime and drugs. While many may have used the two interchangeably, others certainly saw the two as distinct, each with its own set of issues.

Community stakeholders point to several strategies for improvement, targeting specific facets of Public Safety and Drugs:

1. Public Safety

Issues of public safety necessarily require extensive involvement and conversation with the Police Department and elected officials. The local precinct community councils are traditional forums for community/police department exchange, but some HPI participants noted the need to enhance the dialogue and level of understanding between community residents and the police.

Suggestions include:

- Creation of, and *funding for staffing*, a taskforce to explore alternative policing strategies;
- Increased attention to community policing precepts, included increased foot patrols and other means of increasing positive community/police interaction.

2. Drugs

As with public safety, issues of drug trafficking and drug use encompass the Police Department and elected officials; however, coordination with the broader elements of the criminal justice system is also necessary, including the Attorney General and the Department of Correction. Areas of focus for HPI include:

- Taskforce exploration of a community or youth court, alternatives to incarceration and other alternative sentencing programs.
- As noted above, development of recreational and employment opportunities for youth. Many of these programmatic initiatives are addressed below.

Education

Community residents pointed to the dearth of opportunities for quality public education as one of the most troubling aspects of life in southern Washington Heights and Hamilton Heights. Low-income, immigrant families have neither the resources to pay for private or even parochial schools nor the community knowledge, or time, to identify, visit and secure placements in charter or other higher quality public schools. For children for whom English is a second language, public schools with inadequate resources and crowded classrooms all too often mean early and persistent academic difficulties, with predictable and unfortunate consequences for later academic and professional success.

HPI participants saw several avenues for addressing this issue.

- Funding of an effort to organize community residents to advocate for improvements in local schools and for greater access to Department of Education officials and administrators.
- Increased after-school and preschool slots. HPI participants point to the scarcity of after-school programs as a serious problem for working parents or parents searching for employment or training opportunities.
- Model partnerships between schools, local institutions of higher learning, community based organizations and employers.
- More schools. These neighborhoods are some of the most densely populated in the entire city, and the existing schools simply cannot accommodate the number of young people.

Affordable Housing

Community residents saw housing as one of the most enduring problems in the neighborhood. Community surveys and interviews suggest two aspects to this issue: one, there is an insufficient portfolio of affordable housing units; two, the dual realities of unemployment, or underemployment, and gentrification mean that many residents face the imminent loss of their homes. More than 85% of survey respondents are renters, including 90% of those who are unemployed or looking for work.

HPI participants raised several issues in particular: one, the need to augment tenant protections and eviction prevention programs; and, two, the need for sharply increased affordable housing production.

1. Affordable Housing Preservation

In order to preserve affordable housing units and stabilize existing tenants, HPI findings suggested several strategies:

- Increase funding for organizations and programs supporting tenants' rights and eviction prevention strategies.
- Increase building inspections and code enforcement to ensure that buildings are code-compliant
- Create a pool of low-cost funding to provide rehabilitation loans for building owners.

2. Affordable Housing Creation

Strategies for increasing the production of affordable housing include:

- Review upzoning and inclusionary zoning possibilities along Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue.
- Identify underutilized publicly-owned sites that offer development opportunities for affordable housing.
- Create a pool of low-cost acquisition funding to allow nonprofit affordable housing developers to acquire and hold development sites, both vacant land and buildings, until they are able to secure all necessary development funding and permits.
- Use the HPI Building Condition and Land Use Survey as the basis of a database to identify building sites or preservation opportunities.

Employment

HPI surveys and interviews paint a portrait of a community where unemployment and underemployment affect many households. Almost 50% of survey respondents are immigrants, and almost 60% indicate that they speak Spanish at home. While language or immigration status may hinder long-term living wage employment, other obstacles are also prevalent, including the high number of respondents without high school or college degrees and the lack, whether perceived or real, of employment opportunities. Over 20% of respondents saw increasing employment opportunities as a pressing need in the neighborhood. HPI participants suggest several approaches to ameliorating this problem.

- Create or enhance employment and job training programs connected to major employers or businesses in the neighborhood, including Columbia University, Columbia Presbyterian Hospital and the Isabella Geriatric Center, among others.
- Increase funding for computer and job training programs, as well as English as a Second Language classes.
- Develop or increase loan and investment capital pools for small business owners and entrepreneurs.
- Develop and secure funding for staffing a Business Improvement District to increase advertising, promotions and technical assistance for small retail and service businesses on Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue.

Sanitation and Physical Conditions

Community residents saw sanitation and noise pollution as real problems affecting not only the quality of life in the neighborhood but the vitality of the community as both a retail and service district and a tourist destination.

Suggestions regarding sanitation and physical conditions include:

- Enforce existing regulations.
- Increase the frequency of garbage pick-ups and the number of trash cans.
- Increase attention to the Broadway malls.
- Develop a capital pool to allow business owners to upgrade facilities in order to bring them into compliance with sanitation regulations.
- Create and provide funding for implementation and staffing of a Business Improvement District charged with street cleaning and façade improvements, as well as the promotional and technical assistance activities noted above.

APPENDIX A. RELATED NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS

There are a number of efforts towards neighborhood planning. There are some planning efforts such the work on the East-West corridor of 155 Street that are currently work in progress, as mentioned in the forward by Professor Ethan Cohen. Listed below are summaries of planning efforts that have published reports available to us at the time of writing.

Columbia University Community Advisory Committee (CAC)

Manhattanville in West Harlem Campus Project:
Community Impact and Policy Recommendations
Summary of June 2004 Report

The Advisory Committee was convened by Columbia University to study the possible impacts of their planned campus expansion in West Harlem. It deals with the economic and social footprint of Columbia University in Community Boards 7, 9, 10 and 12. Community input and the policy recommendations came from the 40 member committee. Participants included university staff, public and elected officials, consultants, and civic, cultural and business leaders from the area.

The authors encourage “Columbia and Upper Manhattan residents to generate dialog and create mechanisms for social engagement and mutually beneficial economic opportunities” They recommend drafting a Community Benefits Agreement and a concrete action plan, with emphasis placed on creating new opportunities for historically disenfranchised working people, women, and people-of-color who live in proximity to the University.

There are five main areas of comment and recommendation:

- **Culture:** Social engagement across racial, class and other social barriers through cultural activities and operational space for non-profit organizations; Preservation of buildings and unique physical characteristics of the neighborhood; Development of small green spaces and streetscape development incorporating a diverse mix of art, craft and building, technology and small business.
- **Environment:** Construct and renovate buildings by green building standards, including both design and low-impact construction methods; Offer University resources to local environmental justice issues; Encourage sustainable transportation solutions through University and local policy; Establish a zero waste policy for University properties and offer relevant training to the community; Actively enhance open, green spaces in the neighborhood.
- **Housing:** Proactively support preservation and creation of affordable and low-income housing; Collaborate with local organizations involved in affordable housing; Facilitate policies that will stabilize the rental market; Replace housing of people directly displaced by expansion; Facilitate the establishment of a substantial Community Land Trust.

- **Economic Development:** Develop anti-displacement programs for local businesses including financial and real estate options; Incubate new businesses by working with local community members, especially women and minority owned businesses; align existing funding resources and stimulate the formation of new revenue streams; apply a percentage of the Manhattanville project toward community development; facilitate equity investment on behalf of community partners; recognize radial impact on surrounding communities and plan accordingly.
- **Employment:** Hire people from the community, including local business contractors; Work closely with non-profit employment organizations to fill University job openings; Meet and exceed minority hiring percentages, including faculty and administrative positions; Positively influence the academic performance of public schools in the area.

Community Board 9 Manhattan

197-a Plan

Summary of September 2004 Report

Community Board 9, situated directly south of Community Board 12 and incorporating parts of both Washington and Hamilton Heights, prepared this report summarizing the findings and recommendations related to a 197-a planning process. While all of CB 9 is included, the report focuses specifically on the Manhattanville area, slated for development by Columbia University. Input for the planning process came from over 10 years of review by Community Board 9 and various planning consultants, students and planners from Columbia University and Pratt Institute, and three public forums conducted during the summer of 2004.

The stated goal of plan is to encourage the development of a sustainable, culturally diverse community while protecting the area's current residents from displacement. The Community Board aims to reinvigorate the area in conjunction with future development. Emphasis is placed on encouraging development that provides opportunity for neighborhood stakeholders and avoids displacement of existing people, businesses and institutions.

The plan is arranged around seven main themes and recommendations:

- **Land Use / Zoning:** Establish a special purpose zoning district; explore options of contextual zoning; use inclusionary zoning to create affordable housing; study development of soft sites.
- **Urban Design:** Support the development of Harlem Piers; Provide trees, greenways and parks; Expand designations of landmarks and historic districts.
- **Transportation:** Improve mass transit options; Provide municipal parking; Develop a street traffic management plan; Establish a network of bike paths.

- **Economic Development:** Create a LDC; Support local business development; Study commercial development on 125th Street; Study alternatives to the Amsterdam Avenue bus depot; undertake economic and sectoral analysis.
- **Environment:** Establish strategies for waste and air and water pollution reduction; Convert MTA bus depot to natural gas facility; Establish green building design standards for new and rehab construction; Establish green space strategies.
- **Housing:** Enhance study and development of housing plans; Develop a Community Land Trust; Increase home ownership opportunities; Improve large scale housing sites and preserve affordable housing stock.
- **Community Facilities:** Identify sites for the creation of new public schools; Explore ways to improve availability of recreation centers, community centers and needed services.

APPENDIX B. COMMUNITY SURVEY DATA DETAILS

The survey instrument was developed by WCC, in consultation with CLOTH and members of the Steering Committee. The survey instrument is based on similar community surveys conducted in other neighborhood planning projects, such as the Rebuild Chinatown Initiative⁴ in New York City and other project sites in the United States. The survey developed for this project, was reviewed by the Steering Committee and attention was given to the relevance and sensitivity of the questions. The survey was available in both English and Spanish, consisting of two parts: I). Demographics; and II) Community Views. The Community Views section consisted of sections on: 1) Attitudes, Concerns and Priorities; 2) Employment and Income Generation; 3) Housing; 4) Youth, Childcare and Seniors; 5) Health Care Services; 6) Recreational and Service Options; and 7) Retail Services.

Between June and September 2004, HPI interns collected 826 usable surveys. The majority of the surveys were conducted on neighborhood streets, with the intern team administered the survey orally. Some respondents took the survey in written format. Our interns were posted in front of businesses in various neighborhood locations in the study area, from 135th to 175th Streets, in order to capture as wide a cross-section of pedestrians in the community as possible. For example, interns surveyed in front of Apple Bank at 159th and Broadway, Coogan's Restaurant at 168th and Broadway, GreenPoint Bank at 145th and Edgecombe Avenue, and HSBC Bank at 138th and Broadway. In addition, HPI staff coordinated with several local organizations and institutions such as Credit Where Credit is Due, Dominican Women's Development Corporation, 33rd Precinct of the New York City Police Department, New York Presbyterian Hospital, and Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation to distribute surveys at their events.

As with most voluntary surveys, the quality of responses varied depending the respondent's comfort level with the questions. For example, the analysis on the income data is limited because a large number of respondents did not answer the question. Other examples of limited data analysis include questions on health care. That section of the survey was analyzed but not presented in this report because the data sometimes had low response rates; in some instances, the answers to one health question were not consistent with answers to a similar question. However, valid data from this section will be used to inform CLOTH's internal needs assessment for health services for this community.

The data from the Community Survey is very rich and further analysis could be conducted. Depending on availability of resources, WCC would be able to provide further analysis.

⁴ Rebuild Chinatown Initiative: The Community Speaks (November 2002). Convened by Asian Americans for Equality. More information can be found on www.rebuildchinatown.org

Copies of the executive summary (English/Spanish), the report, or other information can be requested from:

Copias del resumen ejecutivo en español pueden ser solicitadas a la Community League of the Heights (Asociación Comunitaria de la Zona Heights en el alto Manhattan).

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