

# **BROWNSVILLE, BROOKLYN HEALTH IMPACT ASSESSMENT: Evaluating social entrepreneurship programs by recognizing and promoting local context**



Rose Jackson, Ernestine Hodges, Sang Cho, Maxine Dotson, and Andrea McCullough pictured above at HIA workshop



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Brownsville Health Impact Assessment (HIA) was a collaborative effort between Made in Brownsville, local Brownsville residents, local planning professionals and the parties whose projects are being evaluated. Special thanks go out to the following individuals who dedicated their time, expertise and knowledge to the success of this HIA:

## **Authors**

Sang Cho  
Alan Waxman

## **Contributors**

Quardean Lewis-Allen, Brownsville Resident, Made in Brownsville  
Maxine Dotson, Brownsville Resident  
Ernestine Hodges, Brownsville Resident  
Esmeralda Miller, Brownsville Resident  
Rose Jackson, Brownsville Resident  
Diane Waters, Brownsville Resident  
Lucas Denton, The Melting Pot Community Culinary Center  
Genese Morgan, Chair, Ocean Hill Resident, Economic Development Committee, CB 16  
Andrea McCullough, Brownsville Resident, OHBCYP  
Brenda Duchene, Brownsville Resident, Ladies of Elegance  
Tree Williams, Health Bucks  
Deron Johnston, Center for Court Innovation  
Erica Mateo, Brownsville Resident, Center for Court Innovation  
Danny Murphy, Pitkin BID  
Pernell Brice, Dream Big Foundation Entrepreneurship Lab

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nationwide, public health research shows that our health is made where we live, work, and play. In Brownsville, Brooklyn, our health is literally *made in Brownsville*. This health impact assessment is assembled as an accountable methodology by which to evaluate proposed development programs in Brownsville, Brooklyn. From July 2014 to January 2015, Made in Brownsville evaluated three proposed projects in Brownsville: The Melting Pot Community Culinary Center, Made in Brownsville Incubation Lab, and the Dream Big Foundation Entrepreneurship Lab. This HIA is intended to (I) analyze potential health impacts of proposed programs in the community, (II) research many factors that impact health existing in the community and (III) encourage local and regional stakeholders to continue building a healthier community.

I. Working with residents and civic leaders, MiB evaluated three proposed projects in terms of community context:

- **The Melting Pot Community Culinary Center**, which aims to teach culinary arts and provide fresh, healthy food at affordable prices.
- **The Made in Brownsville Incubation Lab**, which aims to engage at-risk youth to change the narrative and reality of violence through community organizing, planning, and design
- **The Dream Big Foundation**, which aims to transform communities by training, mentoring, and investing in community entrepreneurs.

II. Through interviews, surveys, historical research, and engagement workshops, the HIA team identified major patterns that define Brownsville's unique context. Structural inequalities and physical disinvestment is a persistent challenge to revitalization. Direct and indirect health impacts from crime and violence are a constant threat to residents' well-being, and despite Brownsville's long history of inclusion, people have continuously faced prejudice and exclusion from the norms of New York City. Negative perceptions of the community from the outside are adopted on the inside, and community narratives are frequently critical and reflexive. Change and the potential to imagine change has always been one of Brownsville's greatest exports. MiB identified three priority impacts that the proposed projects should address:

- **Social Cohesion:** Promoting opportunities for social interactions between community residents, businesses and nonprofit organizations;
- **Access to goods, services, and recreation:** Providing better access to local food sources and other opportunities for youth and families;

- **Community Safety:** Provide protective measures through architecture and landscape design principles as well as programs to enhance community safety by reducing exposure to crime and fear of crime.

III. From these priority impact areas, a number of programming, policy and regulatory recommendations were developed to help maximize healthy community design principles for future redevelopment in the Brownsville neighborhood:

1. Recognize the reality of inter-development rivalries (turfs) resulting in violence and engage youth in trans-generational, spatial programming.
2. Address the actions and perception of law enforcement and security personnel.
3. Create a positive relationship between residents, program officials, and law enforcement to allow participants from different housing developments to access programs.
4. Encourage and publicize walking groups to increase street access during periods of less pedestrian activity.
5. Address the divide between public and private housing through more joint programming and information exchange;
6. Recruit businesses open during different times of day throughout commercial corridors.
7. Recruit businesses that prioritize employing local residents.
8. Use transparent storefront windows that create a friendly and inviting atmosphere but cannot be damaged easily.
9. Create facilities that have commercial store frontage at ground level with housing above.
10. Maximize visibility for high risk areas with street lights.
11. Invest in community projects such as neighborhood parks and community gardens to encourage recreation and social interaction opportunities.
12. Fill the gap in published knowledge on Brownsville after 1970 by recording stories from current long time Brownsville residents.
13. Create a dynamic feedback mechanism for neighborhood information including qualitative and quantitative measures that help to evaluate proposed programs, infrastructures, and public spaces.
14. Integrate these processes into Brownsville so that this HIA methodology is an ordinary part of maintaining neighborhood health.

# 1.0 Introduction

## Health and the Built Environment

Nationwide, it is recognized that physical and social environments impact mental and physical health outcomes. Adequate housing, clean air, clean water, and quality food, are necessary for good health and these requirements need proper social cohesion to allow for safe use of spaces. Community design and land-use planning practices have the potential to work with residents and nonresidents across boundaries to effect perceptions of space and create long term changes in air quality, pedestrian injuries and fatality, mental illness, ground and surface water contamination, and housing. Understanding relationships between health and planning or policy decisions allow decision-makers to “gain better insight of outcomes, balance health against other policy considerations, appraise options, and improve the tradeoffs” (Kemmer, Parry 2004). Knowing more about the context and process by which health is made in urban spaces means more nuanced and comprehensive solutions to complex problems. It is therefore important to identify characteristics of environments just like Brownsville that are beneficial to human health.

## Health Impact Assessment

A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is defined as “a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, program or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population” (WHO, Gothenburg Consensus, 1999). Evidence of successful HIAs has been carried out in close collaboration with multiple sectors in various disciplines to discuss broad range of health impacts of a given policy or project. Because the complexity of health determinants makes it difficult for any single institution to deal with all public health issues (Marmot MG, Wilkinson RG.1999), there is a growing recognition of decisions to support public health decision making outside of the traditional health sector. Increasing collaboration between multiple groups can play a vital role in raising awareness to unique public health challenges as well as leading to creative methods of addressing these challenges.

This HIA process included six essential steps:

1. **screening** to determine whether an HIA could be useful to document health, safety, and community development needs in one place;
2. **scoping** to identify that social cohesion, safety, and access to resources were unifying elements that affect health outcomes;

3. **assessment** to identify the magnitude of existing health issues and to evaluate potential health impacts of proposed programs in affected population areas;
4. **recommendations** to set forth a path to mitigate adverse health effects;
5. **reporting** to present results to decision-makers and community stakeholders and;
6. **monitoring and evaluation** to review and actual health outcomes as a result of proposed programs.

**Summary of HIA Steps:**



Figure 1 Summary of HIA Steps

# Brownsville Health Impact Assessment

This report presents results of a rapid Health Impact Assessment (HIA). In August 2014 Brownsville stakeholders expressed interest for an HIA focused on three projects along Mother Gaston Boulevard, Pitkin Avenue, Rockaway Avenue, and Belmont Avenue in Brownsville, Brooklyn. This HIA report seeks to provide decision makers with recommendations to mitigate negative and maximize positive impacts based on the three redevelopment proposals currently underway.

In May 2014 Community Solutions contracted Made in Brownsville (MIB) to develop a methodology that articulates a shared vision for the future of Brownsville and recommends specific actions for sustainable development for on-going redevelopment proposals. The document resulted from 7 months of ongoing public process among Brownsville residents and civic leaders from both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors. The MIB team worked to refine the process through community visioning, urban design workshops, and local community participatory mapping workshops with the Brownsville community.

Although many aspects recommendation, reporting, and monitoring, have yet to be published, work present here includes interdisciplinary assessment of several of Brownsville’s commercial district corridors: Mother Gaston Boulevard, Pitkin Avenue, Rockaway Avenue, and Belmont Avenue. These streets are being evaluated in terms of their current businesses, recreational

uses, pedestrian activity, perception of space, and community safety. Throughout the community meetings residents frequently expressed concerns to improve public safety for all ages, build community efficacy, and improve access to goods and services.

Three programs, planned for development in the area, are being reviewed in regards to their plan to meet neighborhood needs. (1) The Melting Pot Community Culinary Center aims to teach culinary arts and provide fresh, healthy food at affordable prices, (2) Made in Brownsville Incubation Lab aims to engage at-risk youth to change the narrative and reality of violence through community organizing, planning, and design, and (3) The Dream Big Foundation aims to transform communities by training, mentoring, and investing in community entrepreneurs. This HIA document identifies the context that these programs may affect to minimize negative health outcomes and maximize positive health benefits.

## Current Initiatives in Brownsville

There are several on-going programs and initiatives associated that were important to consider relative to the on-going redevelopment and program initiatives in Brownsville cited in this Health Impact Assessment.

Mother Gaston Boulevard Pop-up market is a recent project initiated by the Brownsville Partnership to make a legitimate space for flexible entrepreneurship along Mother Gaston Boulevard. Made in Brownsville, the Brownsville Community Justice Center, and the architecture firm ORE partnered to design and build the market space. It opened in Fall of 2014. More than anything else, “MGB pops” is evidence that when the nonprofit community works together it is possible to make physical change in the neighborhood and activate spaces.

The Isabahlia Ladies of Elegance Foundation has a coalition of 12 community gardens around Brownsville. These gardens are run and managed entirely by community members. An increase of local food consumption in partnership with the proposed social programs in this HIA report could support wider awareness of the foundation’s goals for healthy eating and social capital.

## Health Status

The New York City Community Health Survey (CHS) is a telephone survey conducted annually by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), Division of Epidemiology, Bureau of Epidemiology Services. The CHS provides data on the health of New Yorkers, including both neighborhood and citywide estimates on a broad range of chronic diseases and behavioral risk factors. There are 42 UHF neighborhoods in NYC, each defined by adjoining zip codes.

New York City Boroughs

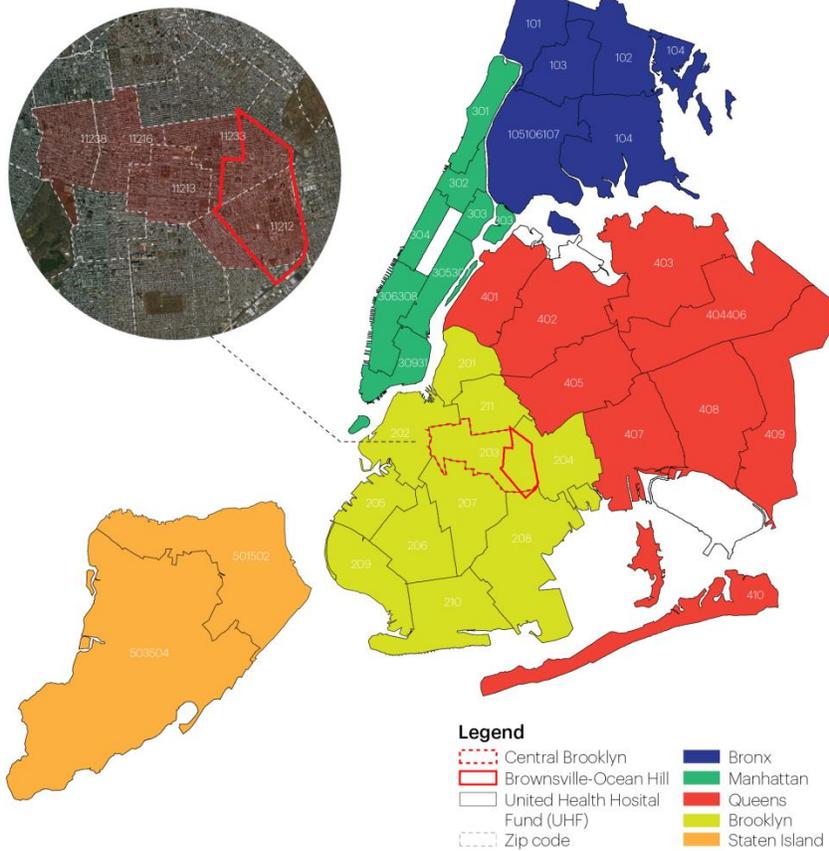


Figure 1.1: 2010 United Health Hospital Fund (UHF)

Altered by the author

(Sources: Geocommons, New York City Community Health Survey Atlas, NYC Open Data)

Exercise

Percent of adults who have participated in any physical activities or exercises, such as running, calisthenics, golf, gardening, or walking for exercise in the past 30 days.

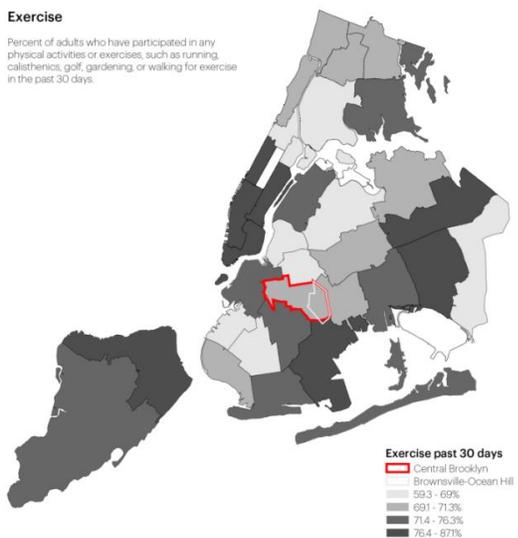


Figure 1.2: 2010 Percent of adults exercised in the past 30 days

Fruit & Vegetable Consumption

Percent of adults who ate no servings of fruit or vegetable the previous day. A serving would equal one medium apple, a handful of broccoli, or a cup of carrots.

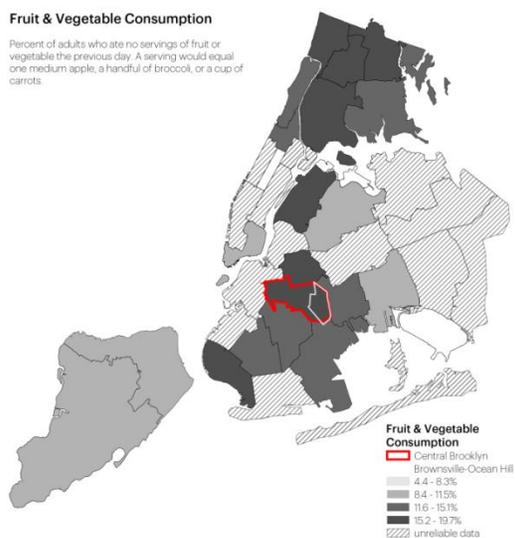


Fig 1.3: 2010 Fruit and vegetable consumption

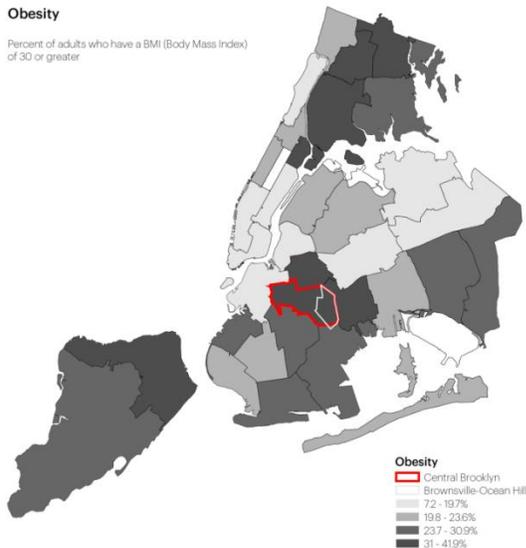


Fig 1.4: 2010 Adult obesity

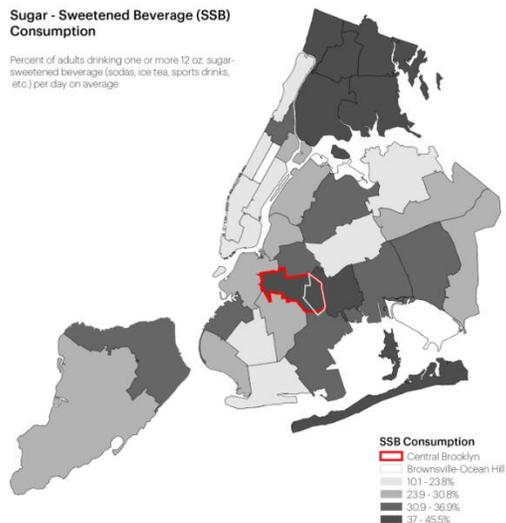


Fig 1.5: 2010 Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption

Fig 1.2-1.5 Altered by the author  
(Sources: Geocommons, New York City Community Health Survey Atlas, NYC Open Data)

Central Brooklyn UHF neighborhood that includes zip codes for 11212, 11213, 11216, 11233, 11238 have poor health status, chronic conditions, and accessing health care services. Wide disparities in chronic disease indicators are apparent across geography and race/ethnic groups in this neighborhood. The zip codes (11212 and 11233) where the redevelopment is taking place ranked the highest rate in chronic diseases such as diabetes in the NYC community districts (Epi Data Brief, 2013). In general, these geographic patterns in chronic disease mortality rates strongly overlap with geographic patterns of poverty and race and ethnicity compared to their white counterparts citywide. Although overall number of deaths in New York City is declined, mortality from diabetes-related deaths is increasing. Diabetes related mortality in the city doubled from 6% to 10.8% from 1990 to 2011. (Epi Data Brief, 2013)

# Sociodemographics

*"It has long been common knowledge among social and health workers that this section has been spawning anti-social elements entirely out of proportion to its population. The history of the community, its economic and social complexity, and its deplorable housing facilities, have all made for a concentration of anti-social factors which our society must now obliterate without hesitancy or delay, in self-defense, and for the physical, moral, and economic health of our city."*

- Milton Goell "Brownsville Must Have Public Housing" 1940

Brownsville, represented by Ocean Hill Brownsville Community Board 16, is located in Eastern Brooklyn between the current neighborhoods of East New York, Canarsie, East Flatbush, Crown Heights, Bedford Stuyvesant, and Bushwick. It is one of the oldest sections of Brooklyn, and has a unique and critical relationship to the rest of New York as a refuge for the under-served, a location of violence, and a hotbed for social innovation.

As New York City grew in the 1880s, Brownsville was constructed as an extension of the Lower East Side (Goell 1940) and Jews from Eastern Europe flocked to Brownsville (Sorin 1990). By 1925 Brownsville was the most densely populated district in Brooklyn and had a population of 169,906 Jews (Landesman 1969), roughly twice the total population today. Joblessness, poverty, and violence were rampant. When the Great Depression hit, "no neighborhood in Brooklyn, the Bronx or Queens had a higher percentage of families on relief" (McGill and Matthews the Youth of New York appendix table 6), 38% (McGill 1937). By 1925-1930, Brownsville was the most densely populated district in Brooklyn and together with East New York, formed the largest urban congregation of Jews in New York City, 285,521 (Landesman 1969). The 1924 immigration act severely restricted Jews from entering the US, imposing a quota of only a few thousand people allowed from Eastern European countries (Sixty-Eighth Congress 1924), down from millions who had come in the prior 30 years. In the following decades, the Holocaust nearly annihilated the Jewish population in Europe. Ethnic demographics in Brownsville shifted from Jewish to African American although trends of violence and poverty continued and even intensified.

Scholars (Sorin 1990, Glazer 1963) have argued that ethnic characteristics have contributed to the success of various ethnic groups in New York City, and to the disaster of others. Jews are often lumped as "skilled" and of "urban" origins because they had been restricted from owning land in Europe, while African Americans are considered "unskilled" and of "rural" origins despite similar restrictions on their owning land in America in recent history. By the late twentieth century even in the American South, African American culture is frequently called "urban" in comparison to white "country" culture. The vast majority of Jews in Brownsville came from small rural towns in the Russian Pale border region, a hyper rural frontier zone plagued by systemic violence. Jews here were actually restricted from living in large cities.

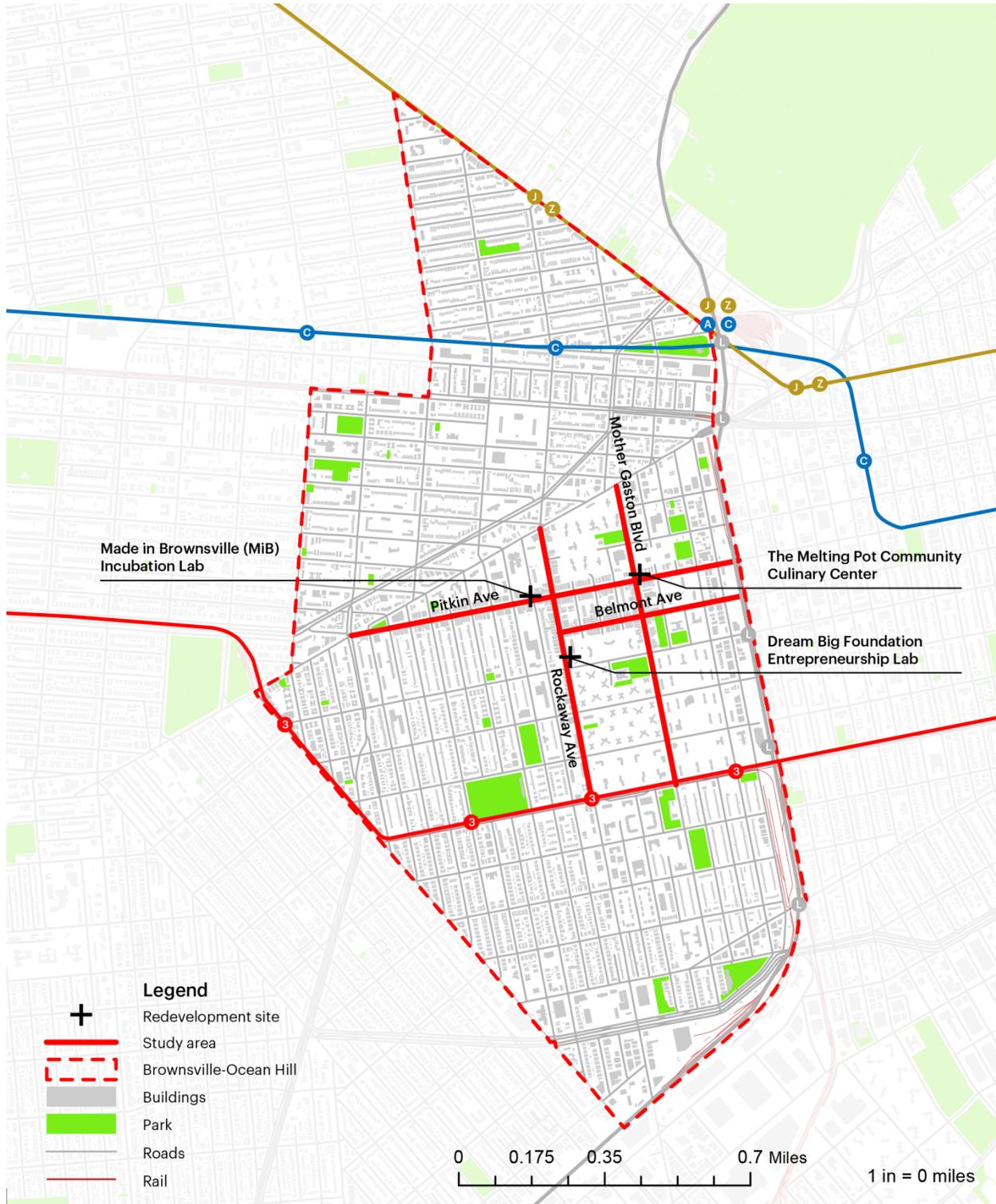


Fig 1.6: Transportation networks (Source: MapPLUTO V.13.1, NYC Open Data, NYC Department of City Planning)

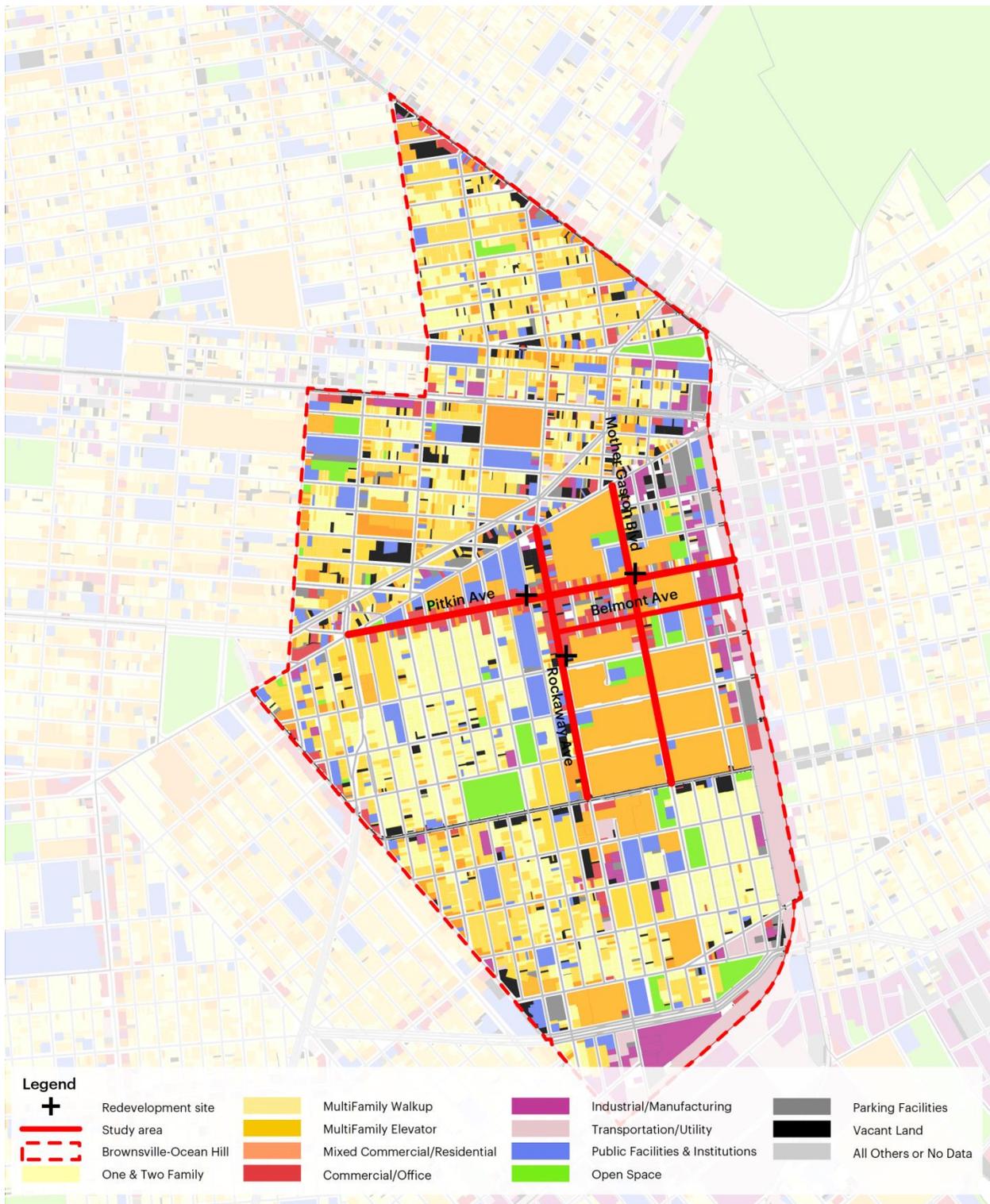


Fig 1.7: Brownsville-Ocean Hill Land Use  
 Altered by the author  
 (Source: MapPLUTO V.13.1, NYC Open Data, NYC Department of City Planning)

Even in bondage, many African Americans were responsible for maintaining all the services of a small city locally. It is likely that peculiar *similarities* between African Americans and Jews have contributed to their respective inhabitation of Brownsville. Cultural similarities, especially in reference to marginalization vis a vis global European enlightenment culture, have been documented (Philipson 2000) and may contribute to their occupation of the same space. In the early twentieth century, Jews were able to fulfill Brownsville’s niche within the larger urban context of New York City, but after WWII, the Holocaust, and shifts within the structure of white society, African Americans replaced Jews to fulfil Brownsville’s niche within the urban context.

Analysis of statistics of race, violence, and unemployment around CB16 (Brownsville) reveal that large urban patterns have a larger role to play in ethnic success than ethnic characteristics. When Glazer and Moynihan published their study on New York ethnic groups in 1963, violence and unemployment had plummeted from heights in the 1920s and 1930s to a nearly all time low in the 1950s, and had only begun to rise again by the late 1950s and 1960s. That rise seemed to correspond with post war success, assimilation, “flight” of Jews, and the arrival of African Americans and Puerto Ricans in the neighborhood. Yet, in another 50 years, by the late 1990s, crime and unemployment again had sunken, and the neighborhood was almost entirely African American.

Large economic cycles may have a role to play in these urban patterns (Grübler 1990) and certainly the vast expansion of suburbs created heightened disinvestment in areas like Brownsville in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Whatever the complex causes may be, recent years have been a period of relatively low violence and more prosperity. Only in the last two years has homicide begun to rise slightly in, Brownsville (NYPD). Could today, the mid 2010s, be analogous to the mid to late 1950s?

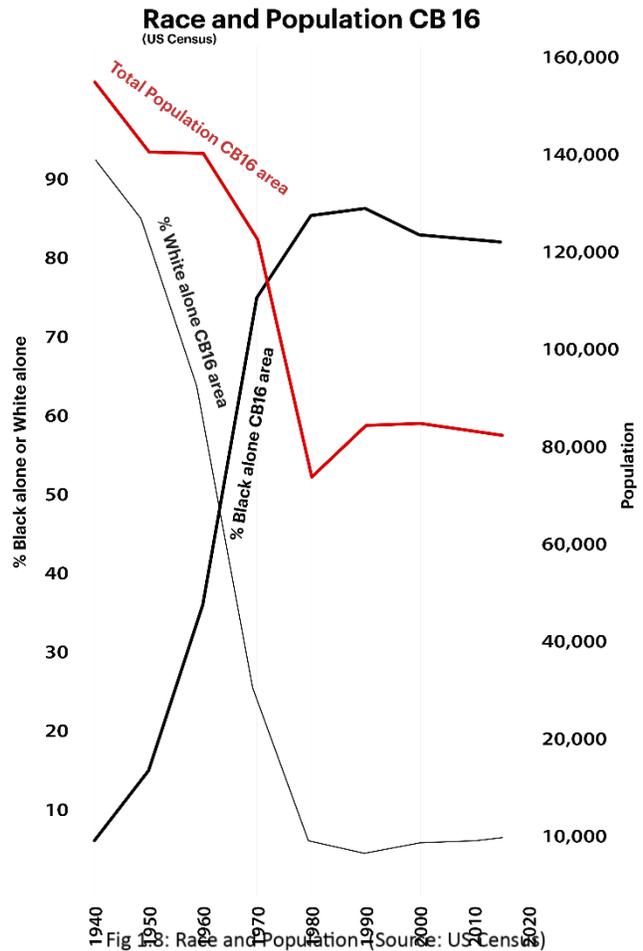


Fig. 18: Race and Population (Source: US Census)

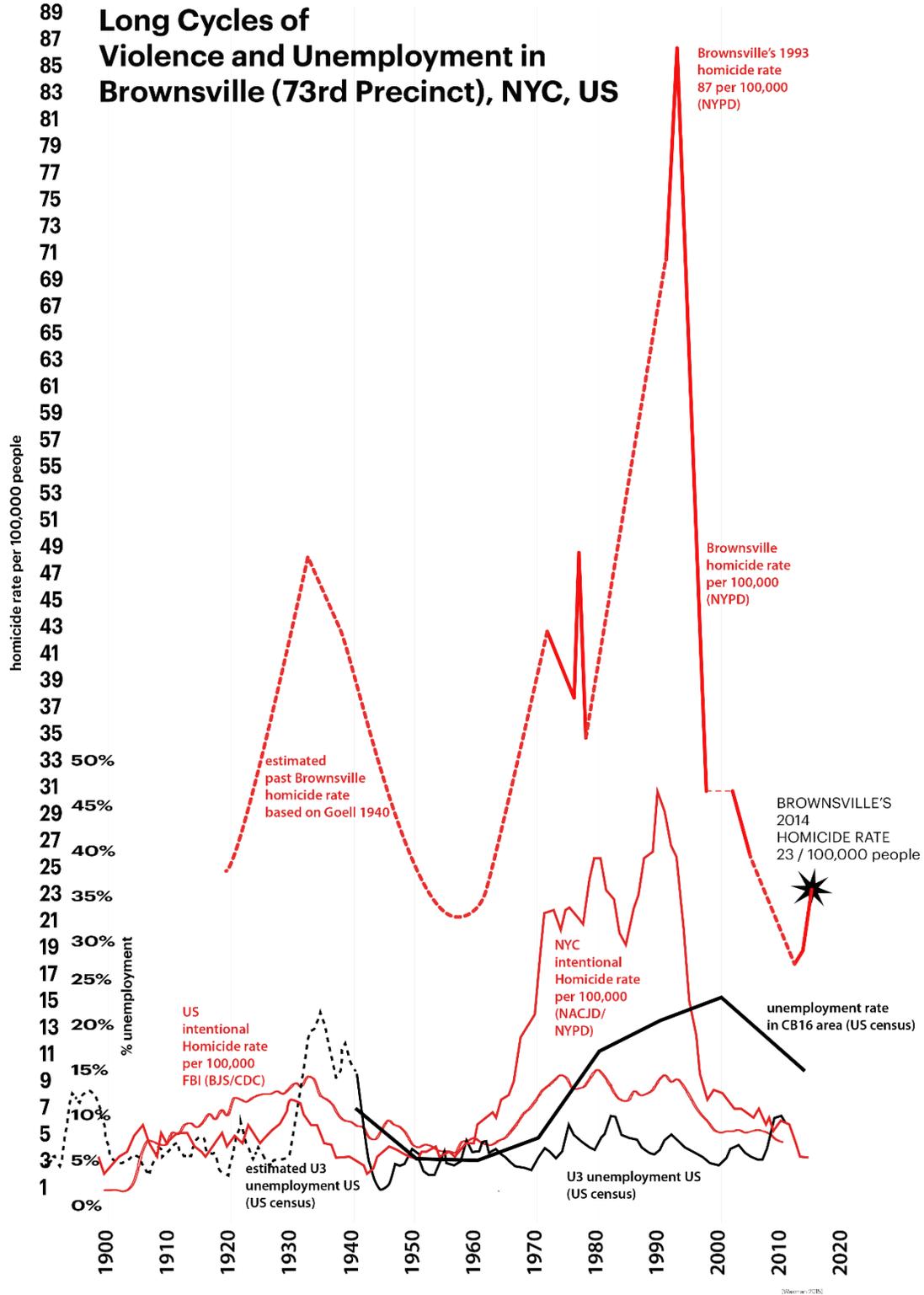


Fig 1.9: Long Cycles of Violence and Unemployment in Brownsville (73rd Precinct)  
 (Source: US Census, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Center for Disease Control, National Archive of Criminal Justice Data, New York Police Department, Goell 1940)

Violence and crime spiked at least twice in Brownsville's history, in the 1930s/ 1940s and then the 1970s/ 1980s/ 1990s. Periods of High employment, such as the early twentieth century, the 1950s/ 1960s, and the 2000s/ 2010s appear to be followed by breakdown of services and rise of crime. Early 20th century immigration and investment was followed by prohibition and Great Depression era Brownsville, characterized by the famous gangsters of Murder Inc. and nationwide notoriety. Later in the 20th century, migration, public housing construction, and low unemployment in the 1950s and 1960s was followed by a rise in unemployment and crime during the War on Drugs. In the 1990s, the Folk Nation gang achieved nationwide notoriety (US States Attorney's Office 2005, NYTimes 2013). In 1993, violence was among the highest rates anywhere, at 83 homicides/ 100,000 people (NYPD).

Brownsville based writers like Landesman, Pritchett, Kazin, and Sorin, have produced histories of pre 1970s Brownsville with detailed descriptions of gangs, poverty, and eventual economic empowerment that followed the period of deprivation. In-depth histories of the late twentieth century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century Brownsville have yet to be published. Over the course of just this HIA research, our team has encountered many important historical facts. It is our hope that narratives of the recent epoch may be honored publicly.

Analysis of the data on the preceding graphs shows that it was not ethnic change that led to or even correlated with rise in crime. Ethnic demographics changed most dramatically between periods of crisis and violence, not during them. There were two distinct periods of high crime, a predominantly Jewish period and a predominantly Black period.

A distinctive difference in the latter twentieth century was population shrinkage, eventually stabilizing at half the former population. Blacks became the majority in the early 1960s due to steady migration, but population in the CB16 area plummeted everywhere other than in the core NYCHA public housing area during this period. Public housing presented relative stability, keeping populations up and providing services. Brownsville was "dependent on government for nearly every basic need, from shelter to food, to medical care"(NYTimes May 6 1971) The government's focus on public housing, with its orientation to providing only the basics for the most impoverished, provided an incentive for those who succeeded economically to leave (Sorin 1990, author interviews 2014). Market housing was subject to abuse, and Brownsville may have had the "worst housing conditions *to be found anywhere,*' conditions promoting the attendant dangers of fire, rats, and vandalism. Tenement landlords including Jews and some West Indian blacks, provided few services to the poor and politically unorganized tenants... By 1970 more than seven hundred buildings had been completely deserted"(Sorin 1990).

The sanitation problem encountered during period describes both the scale of the breakdown of services and also the scale of innovative neighborhood response. To deal with uncollected garbage, eighteen hundred youths were employed with federal funds through the Neighborhood Youth Corps, to clean the neighborhood (Sorin 1990). Funding was cut and the garbage continued to pile up, attracting rats. Residents described rats "pecking in the garbage like chickens in the chicken yard" and families needed people to stay awake all night as "rat guards" to keep rats off sleeping children (NYTimes May 8 1971).



Fig 1.10: 2012 Population Density



Fig 1.11: 2012 Total Housing Unit

In 2012, the median income was \$26,988/ year in Ocean Hill Brownsville as a whole ( 2012) and \$13,834/ year in the NYCHA housing zone of Brownsville ( 2010) while for NYC as a whole, median income was over 50,000/year.



Fig 1.12: 2012 Median household income



Fig 1.13: 2012 Unemployment

Fig 1.10-1.13 (Sources: US Census Bureau, NYC Open Data)

Powerful local programs filled the void of services. The Brownsville Boys Club, founded by residents in the 1940s, had created a very successful and interracial model of youth engagement that continued through the 1960s (Sorin 1990). The Hebrew Educational Society offered programs in the first half of the twentieth century but they terminated their activities in Brownsville in 1965 due to demographic shift and others came in their place.

The Brownsville Community Council started a series of Total Action Programs in the late 1960s in which there would be a "celebration of the contributions of blacks to world culture... screening of movies and the presentation of plays and literature of African American and Latino interest... ethnic art exhibitions, voter registration drives, sports programs, and other types of entertainment"(Pritchett 2002) Within three years of its founding, the BCC had taken the role of a "comprehensive neighborhood social service institution" and had over a hundred full time staff and a \$2 million budget (Pritchett 2002).

Another program, the Brownsville Cadet Corps, was described as "a program for deprived young people which exploits the positive appeals of the quasi-military, and reduces to a minimum the social class and exclusion factors"(Pritchett 2002). In 1968, the Ocean Hill - Brownsville teacher's strike represented a successful effort at defining local control over education. Yet, despite the incredibly efforts of local organizers, conditions continued to crumble through the 1970s and 1980s before they began to turn around in the mid 1990s.

Brownsville today is at a point of relatively low violence, still the highest in New York City, but some of the lowest in its history. It remains economically marginalized, and the NYCHA public housing area remains the core representation of both its status as social refuge and its marginalization.

Like in the Brownsville of the 1950s and 1960s, there are a number of growing, innovative reform programs active today. The Brownsville Partnership, the Brownsville Community Justice Center, the Isabahlia Ladies of Elegance organization and the three programs evaluated in this Health Impact Assessment, are all promising examples, and there are others. By virtue of its unique position, Brownsville finds itself at this moment in time with a wealth of proposed innovative social programs. Considering the pattern of flux in which decades of relative stability are followed by decades of increased violence and poverty, it will do well for residents and stakeholders alike to seriously consider the neighborhood's past history of success and failure.

# Redevelopment Plan & Study Area

*“[D]wellings were of every variety and looked as though they had been dropped chaotically from the sky, while the business establishments gave a curious appearance of systematic arrangement; seven blocks of furniture stores on Rockaway Avenue...; five teeming, pungent blocks of pushcart, groceries, and “appetizing” stores on Belmont Avenue; men’s and women’s clothing and similar emporia on the ten busy blocks of Pitkin Avenue; a huge six block square of junk shops, tinsmithies, stables, garages, and miscellaneous small enterprises surrounded these main arteries . How it all rang and clattered and hammered and buzzed and smelled! There wasn’t a quiet square yard in the whole district.”*

- William Poster, “Twas a Dark Night in Brownsville,” 1950

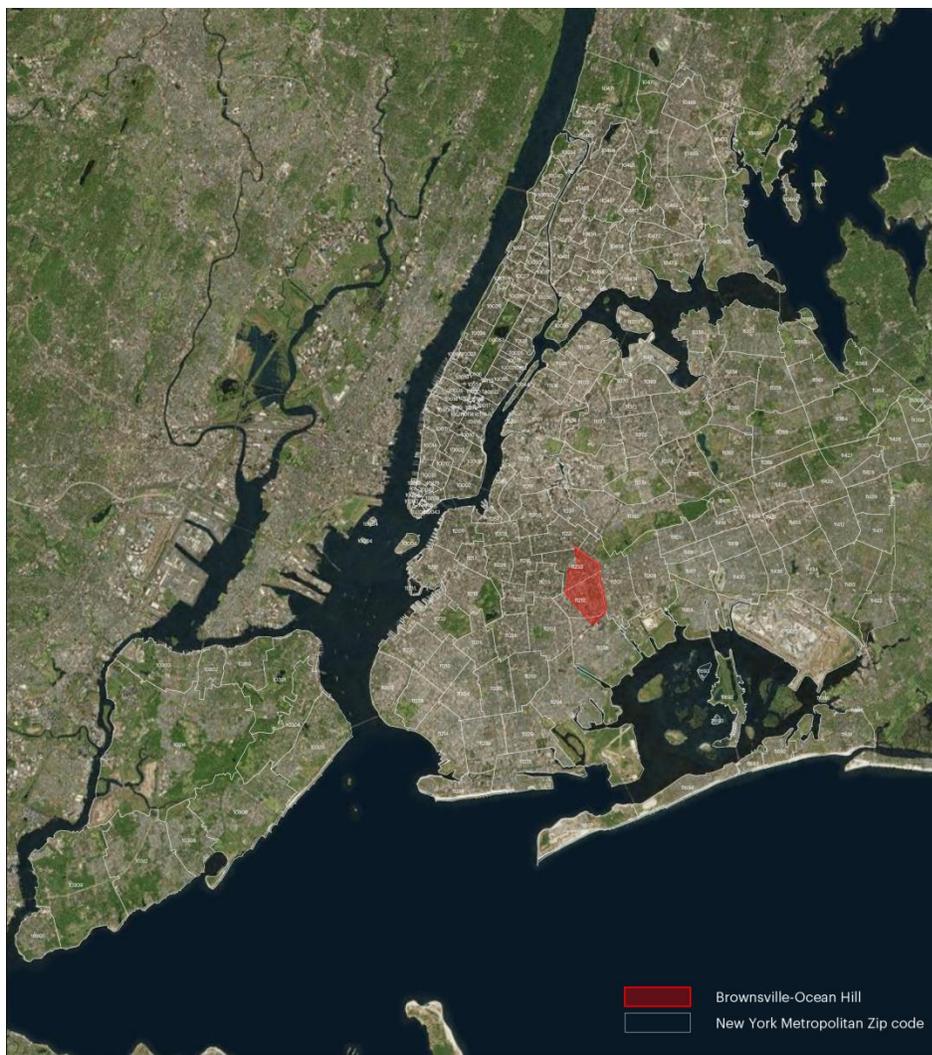


Fig 1.14: Aerial Map of Brownsville-Ocean Hill and New York Metropolitan Area Zip Code  
(Source: NYC Open Data, Bing Map)

The Brownsville HIA seeks to place ongoing redevelopment within a rich description of the neighborhood contexts in which they would operate. These programs may influence a wide arrange of health impacts including (a) the types of businesses to promote health behaviors (e.g. farmers markets, fitness centers, recreational centers for youth), (b) utilization of adjacent vacant lots which have the potential to be used for community gardens or playgrounds, (c) connections of sidewalks to existing pedestrian paths, and (d) street design characteristics to encourage pedestrian traffic (e.g., trees, crossing aids, traffic calming).

MiB invited outside stakeholders and community residents to evaluate three newly proposed projects located in four major commercial corridors in Brownsville (e.g. Mother Gaston Boulevard, Pitkin Avenue, Rockaway Avenue, and Belmont Avenue). This section provides an overview of the three proposed programs (e.g. The Melting Pot Community Culinary Center, Made in Brownsville Incubation Lab, Dream Big Foundation Entrepreneurship Lab) and their geographic locations that make up the HIA study area. Each is supported by a detailed survey of social and demographic characteristics of the commercial corridors that make up its context.



Fig 1.15: Brownsville-Ocean Hill Retail Environment Survey Area  
 Altered by the author  
 (Source: NYC Open Data, Brownsville Works!, Google Maps, authors' research)

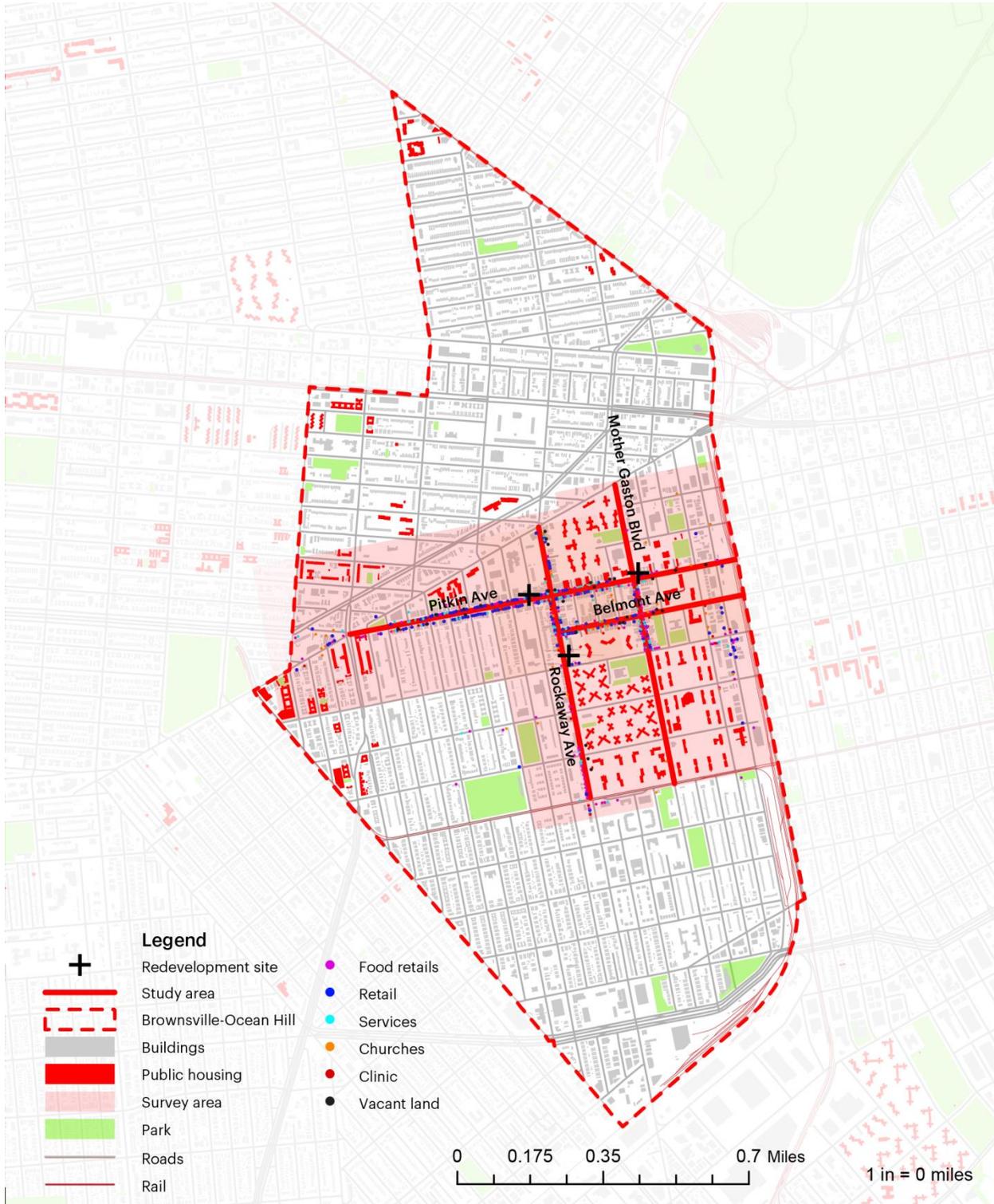


Fig 1.16: Brownsville-Ocean Hill Retail Environment Survey Area-Detail  
Altered by the author  
(Source: NYC Open Data, Brownsville Works!, Google Maps, authors' research)

## **Mother Gaston Boulevard**

*“It’s in the projects, what more can I say?”*

- *Anonymous Brownsville resident describing MGB to a friend on the phone*

More than any of the streets in this study, Mother Gaston is characterized by public housing. There are three zones of the street that we will describe. The northern public housing zone is .23 miles (1,200 ft) from East New York Avenue to Pitkin Avenue. The commercial zone is .19 miles (1,000 ft) from Pitkin Avenue to Sutter Avenue. The southern public housing zone is .32 miles (1,700 ft) from Sutter Avenue to Livonia Avenue. Because of this high incidence of public housing, Mother Gaston is a highly food oriented section.

### **Mother Gaston Boulevard Northern public housing zone**

The historic Chase Bank building is located in the northern district at the intersection of Pitkin Avenue and Mother Gaston Boulevard, which is the site of the intended development of the Melting Pot Foundation, is considered by residents a culturally significant building although its location has been described by residents where high incidence of crime may occur. The northern zone is defined by Howard Houses and to a lesser degree, the Glenmore Plaza development.

- The Howard Houses built in 1955 is home to 1,926 people in 814 apartment units with an average monthly rent of \$438 (NYCHA 2014)
- Glenmore Plaza built in 1968 is home to 822 people in 440 apartment units with an average monthly rent of \$432 (NYCHA 2014)

Interviews with residents of the housing developments in the southern part of Pitkin Avenue indicated that there was a strong resistance to going near the Howard Houses and statements describing the streets close to Howard as unsafe.

### **Mother Gaston Boulevard Commercial zone**

Of a total of 55 stores, the stretch has over 23 food stores, including one large supermarket. Many of the food options are available in small convenience stores. The majority of the shops are live work spaces, with residential units are behind or above the store. There are at least 14 service stores including barbers, nail salons, laundry, and insurance services. There are also at least 14 retail stores, including the recent experimental EDC and BP sponsored Mother Gaston Pops market which has several small retail and design shops between Game Star and East Ocean China King. On the street there is array of retail shops such as pawn shops, dollar stores, cell phone retail services, video game stores, and clinics and pharmacies. Large housing

developments are also adjacent to this commercial area. The western side of Mother Gaston area are the Langston Hughes apartments and to the east are the Seth Low Houses.

- Langston Hughes Apartments built in 1968 is home to 1,398 people in 513 apartment units with an average monthly rent of \$450 (NYCHA 2014)
- Seth Low Houses built in 1967 is home to 1,394 in 536 apartment units with an average monthly rent of is \$406 (NYCHA 2014)

Interviews with residents avoid this area due to the fear of crime.

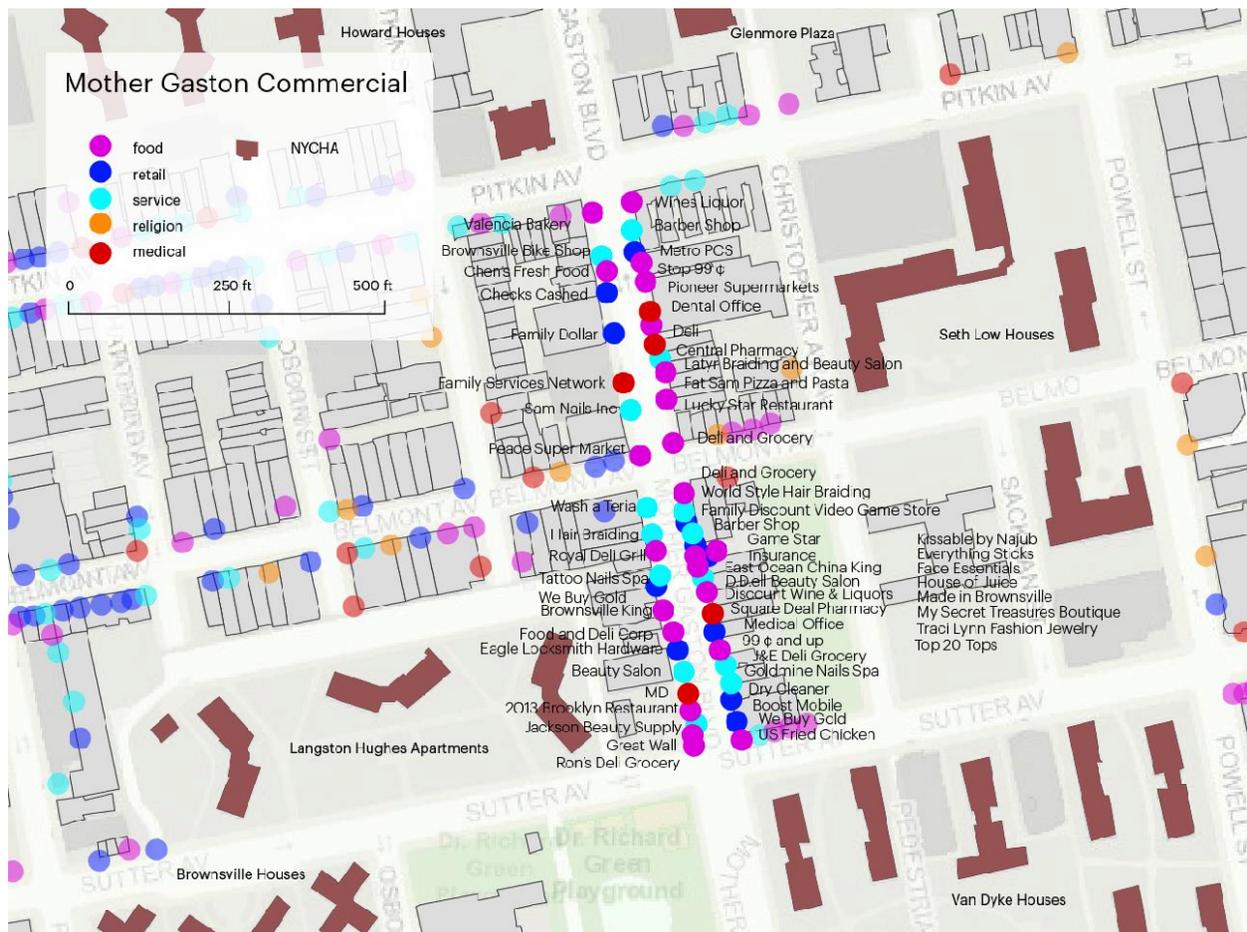


Fig 1.17: Brownsville-Ocean Hill Retail Environment Survey Area-Detail  
 Altered by the author  
 (Source: NYC Open Data, Google Maps, authors' research)

**Mother Gaston Boulevard Southern public housing zone**

From Sutter Avenue to Livonia, Mother Gaston Boulevard with its long commercial street, both sides are flanked with New York City Housing Authority developments. The Children’s Library on

Dumont, and the Brownsville Community Baptist church between Dumont and Livonia are the only non housing development buildings along the 1,700 ft commercial corridor.

On the Western side of Mother Gaston are the Brownsville Housing and the Tilden Housing.

- Brownsville Houses built in 1948 is home to 3,294 residents in its 1,338 apartment units with an average monthly rent of \$432 (NYCHA 2014)
- The Tilden Houses built in 1961 is home to 2,639 residents in its 998 apartment units with an average rent of \$436 (NYCHA 2014)

On the Eastern side of Mother Gaston are the Van Dyke Houses and just beyond them, the Woodson Houses.

- Van Dyke I, built in 1955 is home to 4,068 residents in its 1,603 apartment units with an average monthly rent of \$430. () Van Dyke II built in 1964 with one building unit houses 128 residents
- Woodson housing constructed in 1970 is home to 426 people in its 407 apartments.

### **The Melting Pot Community Culinary Center**

*“I want to share with you the idea that great taste is not just a source of joy, but also a matter of love and maybe an instrument to improve life.”*

- *Claus Meyer*

The Melting Pot U.S., founded in 2014 and based in Brooklyn, New York, is a subsidiary of Danish entity The Melting Pot Foundation, a commercial, nonprofit and charitable fund whose purposes, through activities that have food, food craft and entrepreneurship as recurring elements, enhance the quality of life and future opportunities among vulnerable and marginalized population groups. The target group is particularly but not exclusively children and young people with criminal backgrounds, refugees and immigrants. The company was founded by in 2012 by Claus Meyer, who has identified the need for community-sourced culinary solutions for the public health crisis in Brownsville, Brooklyn, New York.

The Brownsville Melting Pot Community Culinary Center will host a culinary education program, community cafeteria, and bakery staffed by Brownsville residents. The roughly 20,000 square foot complex will have kitchen space available for classes and local caterers and chef entrepreneurs as well as space designated for community education regarding public health and fitness. Participants in the education program will gain marketable skills while learning to make delicious, healthy, affordable food. Brownsville’s existing community garden network will be encouraged to expand to meet the needs of the large community kitchen and dining hall. The Melting Pot Community Culinary Center is expected to open in January 2016 on Pitkin Avenue and Mother Gaston Boulevard. (Melting Pot Foundation 2015)

### **Pitkin Avenue**

Pitkin Avenue is the retail core of the Brownsville and Ocean Hill area. It is home to the Pitkin Business Improvement District, which is the only entity oriented towards general business improvement in Brownsville, aside from the Community Board 16 Economic Development Committee. Along Pitkin Avenue, there are three major areas of significance: the 1.3 acre Zion Triangle, the western retail zone .5 miles (2,650 ft) between East New York Ave. and Rockaway, and the eastern mixed zone .44 miles (2,330 ft) east of Rockaway to the railway trench.

### **The Zion Triangle**

Created by the intersection of Pitkin Avenue, East New York Avenue, Howard Avenue, Lincoln Place, Grafton Street, and Legion Street the Zion Triangle forms a plaza of roughly 1.3 acres including street space. North of East New York, the plaza is a residential area with buildings comprised of four stories with few scattered several vacant lots and an auto shop. On the

south side of the plaza there are diversity of food stores including a supermarket and several restaurants. Near the Western end of the plaza are six churches, a large meat market, a health food store, a summer BBQ shop called "Should be Famous," a health food store, and several auto shops. Immediately south of the Zion Triangle, there is the Howard Avenue Houses.

- The Howard Avenue Houses was built in 1988 and is home to 380 residents in its 150 apartment units with an average rent of \$502 (NYCHA 2014)

Within a quarter mile both north and south of the Zion Triangle, there are several New York City Housing Authority properties.

- Howard Avenue Park Place was built in 1994 is home to 474 residents in its 156 apartment units with an average rent of \$545. (NYCHA 2014)
- The Ralph Avenue Rehab are five refurbished tenements built in 1986 is home to 244 residents in its 118 apartment units with an average rent of \$459. (NYCHA 2014)
- Sutter Avenue Union Street houses are tenements, refurbished in 1995 home to 265 residents in its 100 apartment units with an average rent of \$484. (NYCHA)

Compared to the zone east of Rockaway, the Zion Triangle area is less defined by public housing, with a small proportion of the overall population living in public housing.

At the Eastern end of the Zion Triangle plaza are mostly retail shops, medical clinics, and service industry shops as well as the Ascend Charter School in the old Lowes Pitkin Theater building. In the first floor of the Charter school is Deals, a low priced retail store.



North of this stretch of Pitkin Avenue are the Garvey Group A houses between Strauss and Thomas S. Boyland St. South of Pitkin the majority of housing is privately owned that began from the Nehemiah Houses program from 1983 until the present with incomes rates generally higher here, although density is low compared to the public housing units in Brownsville.

- Garvey Group A built in 1975 is home to 796 residents in its 321 apartment units with an average rent of \$397. (NYCHA 2014)



Fig 1.19: Brownsville-Ocean Hill Retail Environment Survey Area-Detail  
 Altered by the author  
 (Source: NYC Open Data, Google Maps, authors' research)

**Made in Brownsville (MiB) Incubation Lab**

“Brownsville is a place that measures all success by our skill in giving back to it”

- Quardean Lewis-Allen

In 2015, Made in Brownsville Incubation Lab plans to open between Pitkin Avenue and Chester Street. Created by Made in Brownsville in partnership with the Brownsville Community Justice Center and the Dream Big Entrepreneurship lab, the Made in Brownsville Incubation Lab engages at-risk youth to change the narrative and reality of violence and chronic disease through community organizing, planning, and design. The Innovation lab will produce spatial, temporal design, production, and planning programs to empower high risk youth in the

community. Participants will be paid stipends for design, production, and planning work and education. Mentorship and creative counsel will develop young designers' social and business enterprises to change the narrative and reality of violence and disinvestment in Brownsville.

Twelve to fifteen young adults will participate in a six month intensive programs, learning design and project development software on the job and through educational workshops. Programs will result in spatial interventions that blend Brownsville culture, music, and social criticism, with architectural and planning tactical urbanism. The first six months of the Incubation lab from, January 2015- June 2015, will produce a spatial intervention in Brownsville, in a location yet to be decided. Charrettes on neighborhood topics will engage participants with local stakeholders to tackle ongoing problem sets. The space, tentatively above KFC on Pitkin and Chester, is intended to have a storefront and gallery space, co-working stations, fabrication lab, and teaching space. (MiB 2015)

### **Pitkin Avenue eastern mixed zone**

Here, there are more service oriented business than in the western retail section of Pitkin Avenue. The east of Rockaway Avenue is affected by the large public housing developments to the north and south. There are 61 businesses along this stretch of Pitkin Avenue, only 20 of which are retail. 21 are service oriented businesses, 16 are food stores, 4 are medical businesses, and there is one church. The Howard houses, to the north, bear a heavy imprint on this area, and some residents of the more southerly housing developments will not eat at restaurants here.

- The Howard Houses built in 1955 is home to 1,926 people in its 814 apartments with an average monthly rent of \$438 (NYCHA 2014)

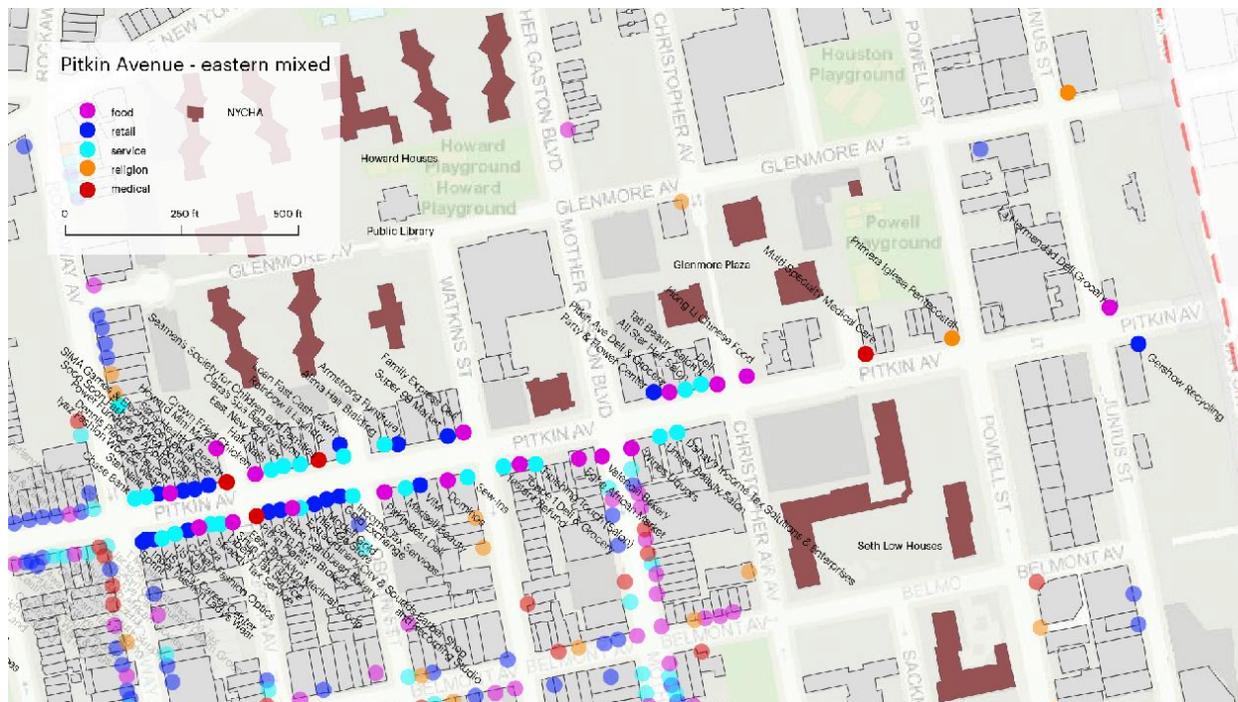


Fig 1.20: Brownsville-Ocean Hill Retail Environment Survey Area-Detail  
 Altered by the author  
 (Source: NYC Open Data, Google Maps, authors' research)

**Rockaway Avenue**

*“Get off at Rockaway and walk even if it takes more time... We need to know our surroundings; don’t take shortcuts or end up in the emergency room, end up very disappointed sometimes, don’t take shortcuts”*

- Esmeralda Miller

Rockaway Avenue is divided from the western section of Brownsville by a strip of municipal buildings between Bristol and Chester Streets. The Crossroad Juvenile Center between East New York and Pitkin, PS 327 between Pitkin and Sutter, and PS 323 between Sutter and Blake is divided by largely privately owned western section of Brownsville and the largely publicly owned eastern section of Brownsville. Rockaway Avenue lies just to the east of this divide, and therefore comes to be more clearly defined by New York City Housing Authority housing and the Marcus Garvey Village to its counterpart of the privately owned Nehemiah houses.

Nonetheless, the elevated 3 Train station at Rockaway and Livonia is the easiest point of entry to Brownsville’s core and Pitkin Avenue, making Rockaway a prime location for development. Rockaway Avenue is adjacent to the NYCHA housing developments of the Howard Houses, Brownsville Houses, and Tilden. It is within a quarter mile to Glenmore, Seth Low, and Van Dyke. These developments are described above.

The section of Rockaway closest to Pitkin Avenue and Belmont has 50 businesses between East New York Avenue and Sutter Avenue, 23 of which are retail, 13 are service, 8 are food, 5 are medical or care, and 5 are churches.

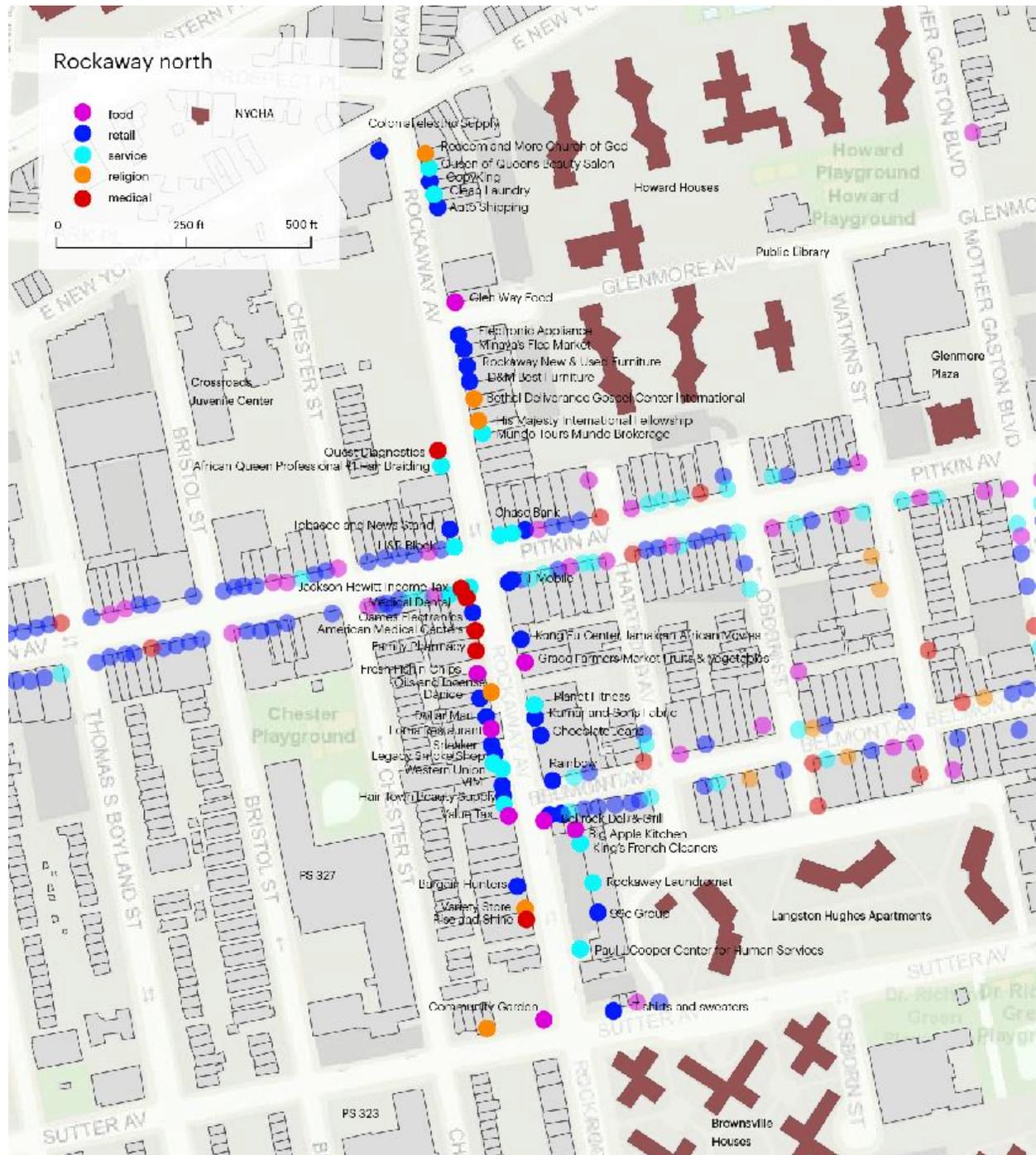


Fig 1.21: Brownsville-Ocean Hill Retail Environment Survey Area-Detail  
Altered by the author

(Source: NYC Open Data, Google Maps, authors' research)

Rockaway Avenue south of Sutter has much more of the retail character comparable to Mother Gaston Boulevard (e.g. Mother Gaston Boulevard 42% of stores are food outlets, and 55% of stores are food outlets in this area). Of a total of 33 businesses between Sutter and south of Livonia, there are 18 food outlets, 6 service stores, and 5 medical stores. There are three retail stores and there is one church.

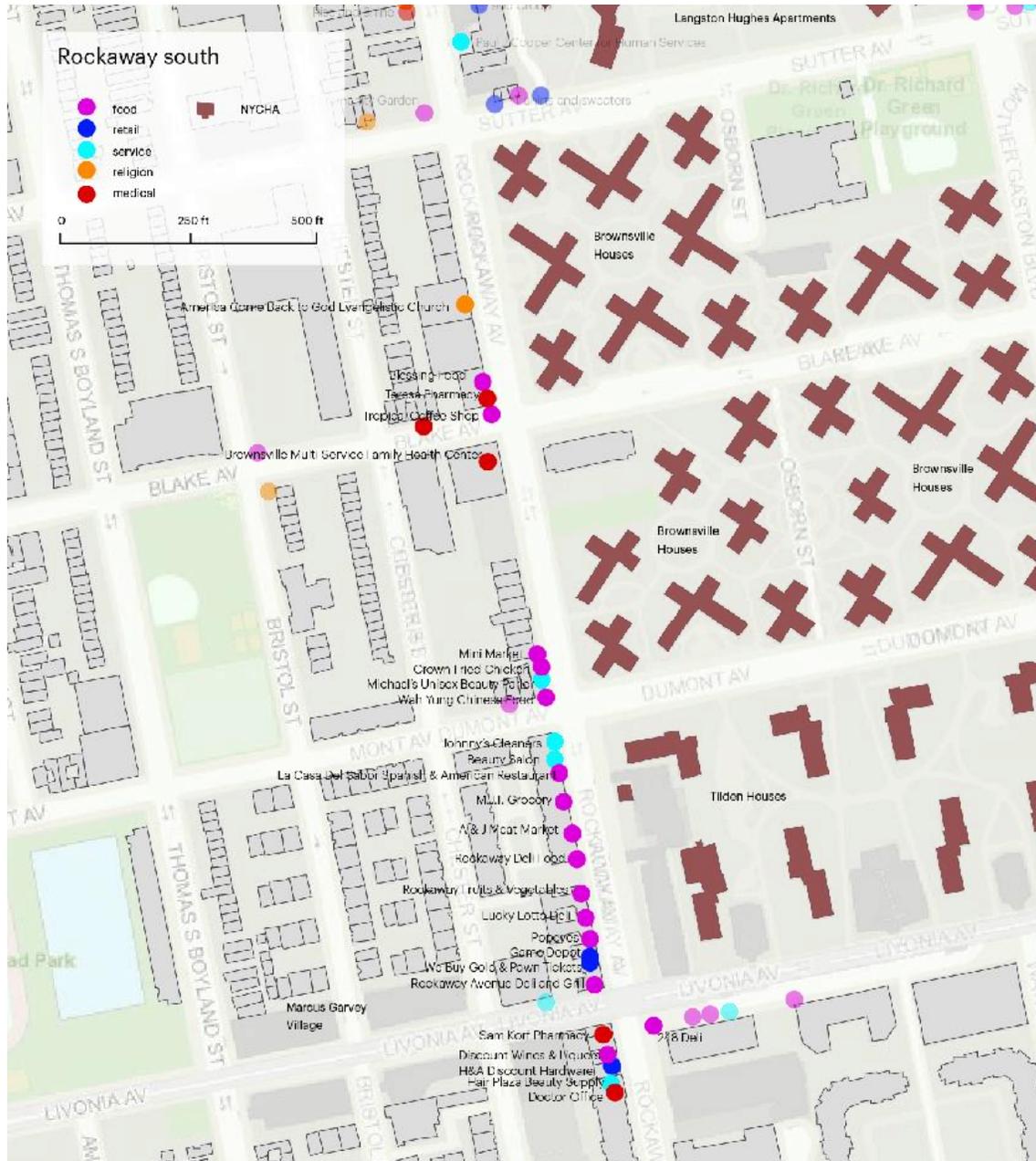


Fig 1.22: Brownsville-Ocean Hill Retail Environment Survey Area-Detail

Altered by the author

(Source: NYC Open Data, Google Maps, authors' research)

### **Dream Big Foundation Entrepreneurship Lab**

*“Elie Wiesel... tells this story. There was this place in the biblical times called Sodom... and there was this old man who lived on the hill and each day he would walk down into the square and say, ‘People, People you have got to change you can’t live this way’... And he would do this for about two months and this young kid comes up to him and says, ‘Old man I’ve been watching you , every day you come to this square and tell people, and can’t you see nobody will ever change?’ And he says, ‘Young man, I don’t come here to change you, it’s so you will never change me.”*

- Robert LoCascio

In 2015, the Dream Big Foundation Entrepreneurship lab is planning to tentatively open at 519 Rockaway Avenue, the ‘Paula Cooper’ building. The Dream Big Foundation aims to transform communities by training, mentoring, and investing in community entrepreneurs who have the passion and desire to launch and operate an enterprise within their community.

Founded by Robert LoCascio, Dream Big will provide training, mentorship, and investment for entrepreneurs. Five to ten Brownsville residents will be chosen as participants based on their vision, drive, and concrete plan to change their community. Businesses are to be launched and operated in Brownsville. In exchange for a portion of equity, Dream Big will provide the training, mentorship, and capital for entrepreneurs to realize their dreams. The Dream Big lab will tentatively operate in 519 Rockaway, the location for Brownsville Partnership of Community Solutions. A coffee shop will be one of the first entrepreneurial projects of the lab and will occupy the street front space of 519 Rockaway Avenue. Hours are expected to run from 7am to 7pm, eventually extended to 9pm. (Dream Big Foundation 2015)

### **Belmont Avenue**

*“Its a holy block!”*

- Esmeralda Miller

Belmont Avenue in Brownsville was once a fresh food pushcart market. As food preparation has drastically changed in the North America as a whole, Belmont too has changed. This wholesale transition to mostly packaged, processed food has led to a new character for Belmont's urban space which takes on a unique flavor from being amid the largest collection of public housing in New York. Once offering nutritional sustenance, the area now offers a mixture of medical and spiritual sustenance.

Belmont Avenue is now occupied by a variety of medical and pharmaceutical outlets, religious congregations, food outlets, and services.

- The public housing area within in the vicinity is .34 square miles, approximately 218 acres with a total population of 19,211 people. Of that, at least 84%, or 16,095, are residents of New York City Housing Authority public housing units.

Adjacent to Rockaway, Belmont is a fabric and clothing center with seven stores catering to this market: Virgo Fabrics, GM Tailoring & Embroidering, Yaffit Fashion, Silk Road Fabrics, Ba-Bella, and Excel Space African Boutique. Kumar and Sons Fabric, on nearby Rockaway, is essentially part of this cluster of stores. Thirteen food stores are on Belmont or immediately adjacent streets. However, six stores are on or near Mother Gaston Boulevard, which as discussed above, has a very high density of food stores. Several of Belmont's food outlets are large, such as the C-Town Supermarket. In addition People's Choice offers wholesale sizes at bargain prices. Across the street and under the same ownership as People's Choice, Belmont Fish & Seafood continues the tradition of Slavin's Fish Market which was a well known name here for years.

There are only 8 service stores on the street as compared to 21 on the same length of Pitkin Avenue immediately parallel to Belmont. On Belmont five of these are salons. Parallel on Pitkin, nine are salons. Six churches line Belmont. On adjacent side streets within 500 feet of Belmont, there are an additional eight churches. With a total of 14 churches, this makes the area one of the largest clusters in Brooklyn. There are also several spiritual stores, Botanica Altagracia on Belmont, and Variety Store nearby on Rockaway. Medical and care industry stores also proliferate, eight businesses in total. Brightside Academy caters to daycare for children, Fiesta Social Center next door caters to elder needs, and St. Jude Treatment Center offers drug treatment. Belmont Medical & Surgical Supply, Sherman Abrams Laboratories Patient Service Center, Medical Plaza urgent care center, Staywell Pharmacy, and Belmont Pharmacy can be found here.



Fig 1.23: Brownsville-Ocean Hill Retail Environment Survey Area-Detail  
 Altered by the author  
 (Source: NYC Open Data, Google Maps, authors' research)

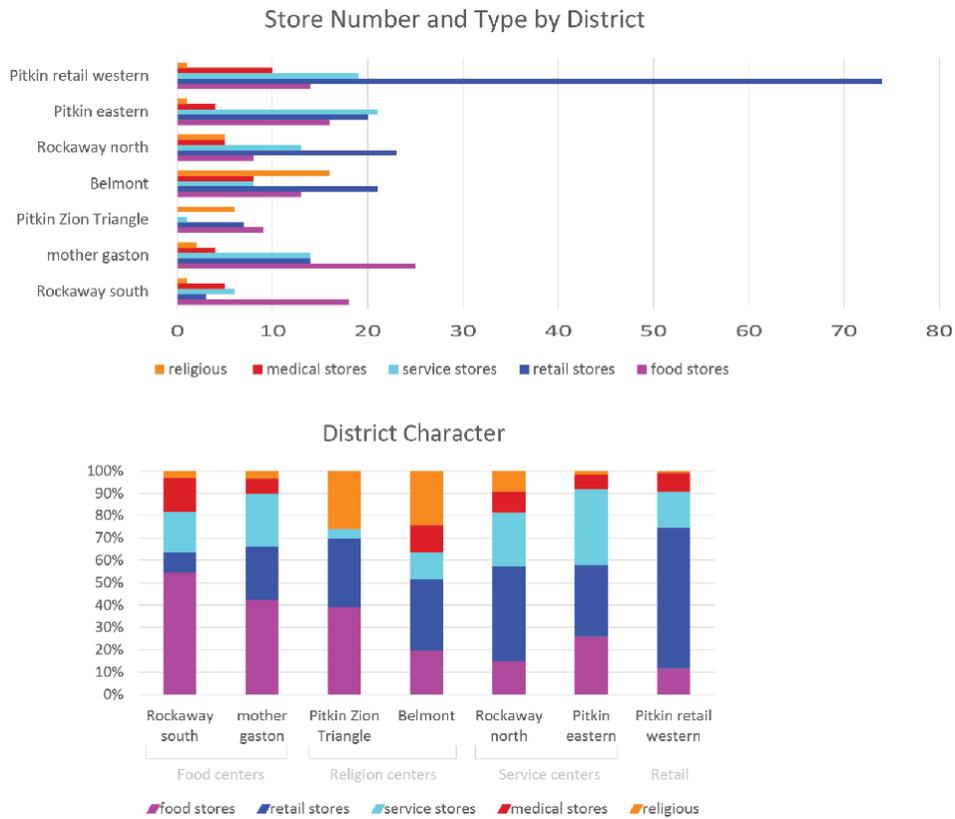


Fig 1.24: Retail environment of the surveyed area

## 2.0 HIA Methodology

There are six steps to conduct an HIA: **screening** to determine whether an HIA is appropriate or required; **scoping** to identify which health effects to consider; **assessment** to identify the magnitude of health impacts and the affected population; **recommendation**, make decisions to reach a set of final recommendations to mitigate adverse health effects; **reporting** to present results to decision-makers and community stakeholders, and; **monitoring and evaluation** to review the processes involved in the HIA and its impact and evaluate the actual health outcomes as a result of the project or policy. This section presents an overview of each of these steps.

### Screening

The screening phase assesses whether or not there is any value to conducting an HIA. In July 2014 an interdisciplinary group from planning and public health convened to discuss to assess the need to conduct an HIA. The Core Team decided to carry out the HIA for the following reasons:

#### **Added Value**

Knowledge of the potential health impacts of certain development/design considerations might allow for better planning in future redevelopment initiatives in the Belmont area and beyond. The redevelopment proposals up for evaluation address economic development and service disparities; however, there has not been sufficient research into health related effects and priorities. This HIA aims to address that need.

#### **Timing**

Redevelopment projects are in their planning phases; the Made in Brownsville Incubation Lab and Dream Big Foundation are intended to open in early 2015, and the Melting Pot Community Culinary Center in January 2016. This timing allowed a window of opportunity in which to carry out the four month Rapid Health Impact Assessment starting from July to November with time to influence future decisions.

#### **Technical Feasibility**

Brownsville Partnership provided funding to support the budget for the project. Multiple stakeholders provided existing data sources used primarily for the assessment. The HIA team worked with a consultant who provided expertise in carrying out the rapid HIA process.

## Scoping

The scoping phase involves planning and designing the HIA, identifying which health effects to consider, and developing a work plan. Throughout the eight meetings held from September to November 2014, the following scoping elements were developed:

### **Community Participation**

A critical part of scoping is public involvement, outreach, and education. Eight group meetings were held in September through November to solicit community input from local residents and experts with knowledge of the physical and social environmental aspects of the development. Throughout the meetings, representative residents and experts from Brownsville Partnership, Melting Pot Community Culinary Center, Economic Development Committee, Brownsville Multi-Family Health Services, Center for Court Innovation, Dream Big Foundation, and Made in Brownsville participated in the focus group sessions.

### **Geographic Boundaries of the affected population**

The geographic boundaries include the zip codes for 11212 and 11233. This area encompasses Brownsville and surrounding communities that may be impacted by the redevelopment.

### **Priority health impacts of the redevelopment**

Throughout the bi-weekly meeting, the Steering Committee identified three priority impacts of the redevelopment. Data from the assessment phase are organized around 3 priority impacts: community safety, social cohesion, and access to goods and services.

## Assessment

A variety of data sources were utilized to develop 1) a baseline data profile and summary of existing conditions from publicly available data sources (e.g., Center for Court Innovation Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, Social Explorer, NYC Open Data, Business Analyst, Interviews, Focus group meetings), 2) a summary of the scientific literature and evidence describing safety, social cohesion, and access to goods, services and recreation in the urban context, 3) recommendations were developed from combining data gathered to assess the likely hood of future health impacts .

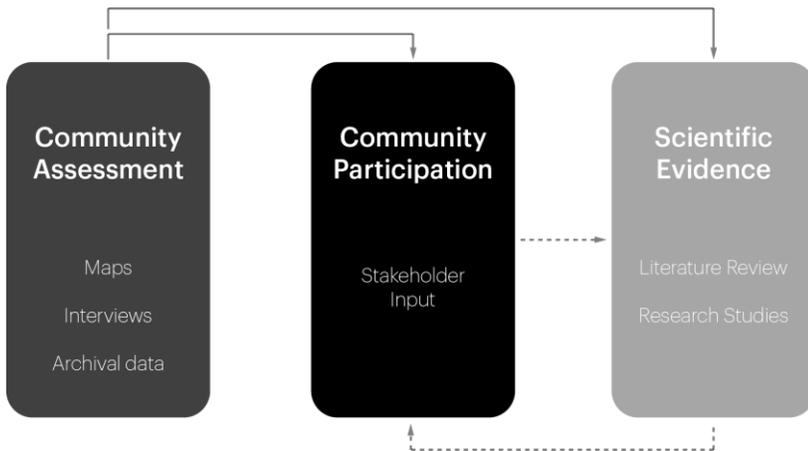


Fig 2.0: HIA Process and corresponding timeline

**Data**

The following chart describes how the data acquired and used throughout the assessment phase resulting in establishment of the HIA framework.

Community assessment
<p><b>Community Perception Survey: Center for Court Innovation (CCI)</b>            In 2010, researchers from the Center for Court Innovation surveyed 815 residents and people who work in Brownsville. The purpose of the survey was to assess and identify community needs for future planning initiatives to stakeholders. The survey is divided into four categories: perceptions of quality of life, safety, services, and youth issues.</p>
<p><b>Mapping</b>            ArcGIS network analysis was used to calculate the service area and distance from the study area. Street audit maps were co-produced by local residents, stakeholders, and core team members during four meetings in October 2014. American Community Survey data was used to map demographic block group data.</p>
<p><b>Focus Groups</b>            Focus group meetings involving residents and stakeholders were convened to provide local knowledge based on opportunities and challenges of the redevelopments may pose to Brownsville residents as well as local knowledge and planning expertise on the feasibility of sustaining small local businesses in the area.</p>
<p><b>Key Informant Interviews</b>            The purpose was to assess local and regional priorities concerning the ongoing redevelopment projects in Mother Gaston Boulevard, Pitkin Avenue, Rockaway Avenue, and Belmont Avenue.</p>
Scientific Evidence
<p>A systematic review of current literature of health was used to inform and predict health benefits and impacts from the redevelopments.</p>

# Reporting

Made in Brownsville and Brownsville partnership will share this Health Impact Assessment report with the community stakeholders (local residents, property owners, concurrent and future developers, NGOs in Brownsville through posting on the <http://madeinbrownsville.org/> website. Made in Brownsville and Brownsville partnership will use this HIA to inform its community plan to advice and educate the development community and the public in an effort to promote sustainable development in Brownsville.

# Evaluation & Monitoring

Made in Brownsville will use the results of this HIA to help education the general public and the development community to build civic capacity building through promoting health and sustainable development in Brownsville. Made in Brownsville will continue to work with current and future developers to monitor and evaluate how the recommendations in this report have or not been implemented as well as incorporating this process into dynamic mechanisms such that they become ordinary part of neighborhood practices.

# Process

The following diagram depicts the six major phases of an HIA along with a timeline of events and HIA research phases for this project.

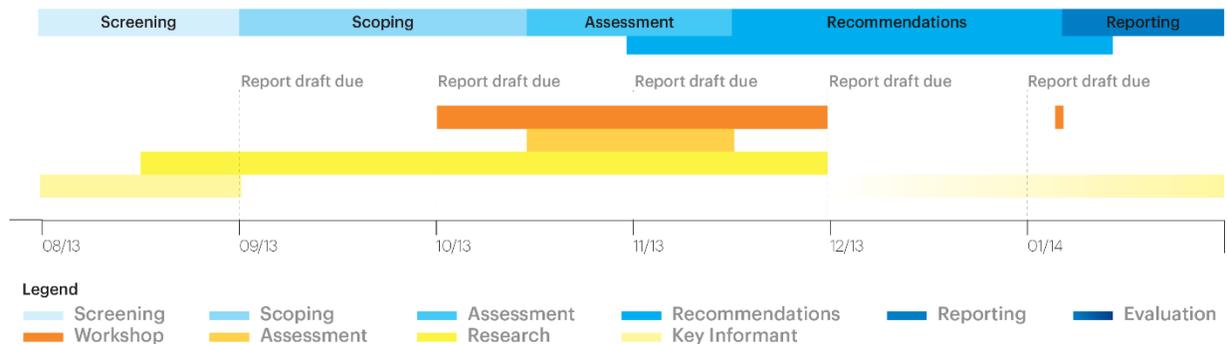


Fig 2.1: HIA Process and corresponding timeline

## 3.0 Findings

Brownsville HIA identified three priority impact areas based on information collected from community assessment, scientific review, and stakeholder input.

- **Social Cohesion:** Promoting opportunities for social interactions between community residents, businesses and nonprofit organizations;
- **Access to goods, services, and recreation:** Providing better access to local food sources and recreational opportunities for youth;
- **Community Safety:** Provide protective measures through architecture design principles and programs to enhance community safety to exposure to incidence of crime or reduce the fear of crime.

Each section documents (1) connection to health, (2) community assessment (e.g. Brownsville community survey, focus group meetings), (3) opportunities redevelopment presents, (4) recommendations for enhancing healthy community planning and design for each impact area.

### Community Safety

*“[Belmont,] that’s the den of the Lion. If you put your program there it’s like throwing a pebble at a tank. There are forces that are out of your control.”*

- Xio, former Brownsville resident

#### Connection to health

Exposure to crime and the fear of crime are a reality for many local residents. Studies show a perception of crime rate can have a negative impact on a range of health outcomes. In particular, vulnerable groups such as children are at risk to negative health consequences from exposure to violence and can develop poor physical and mental health (Boynton-Jarrett et al., 2008; Fowler et al., 2009). Fear of crime can also lead to indirect impact on mental and physical health. (Beatty et al., 2005; Chandola, 2001; Green et al., 2002; Roberts et al., 2012; Ross, 1993; Ross and Mirowsky, 2001; Stafford et al., 2007). Fear of crime can act as a barrier to engage in outdoor recreational activities such as walking and exercising which can likely result in health impacts from inactivity.

#### The Brownsville Community & Safety: CCI Survey

In the 2010 CCI community survey 80% of respondents identified guns, gangs, drug use, drug selling, and assault as the top community problems in Brownsville.

Public housing residents felt less safe on the street compared to non-public housing residents (38 percent compared to 51 percent).

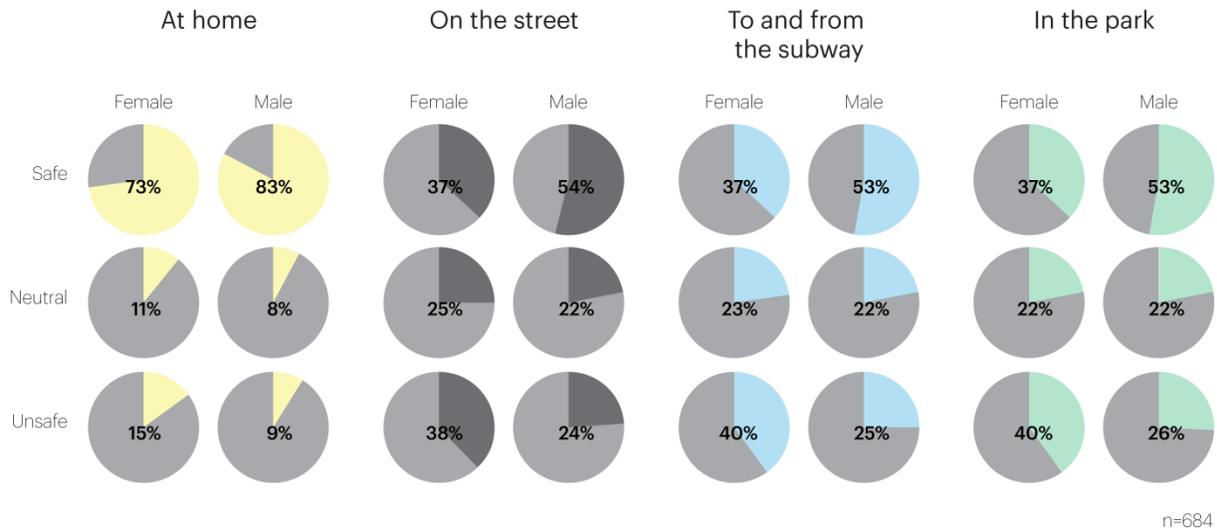


Fig 3.0: Feelings of safety in the community, by gender  
 Altered by the author  
 (Source: Center For Court Innovation)

Guns, gangs, drug use,  
 drug selling, and assaults

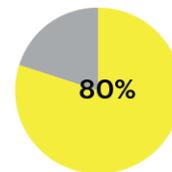
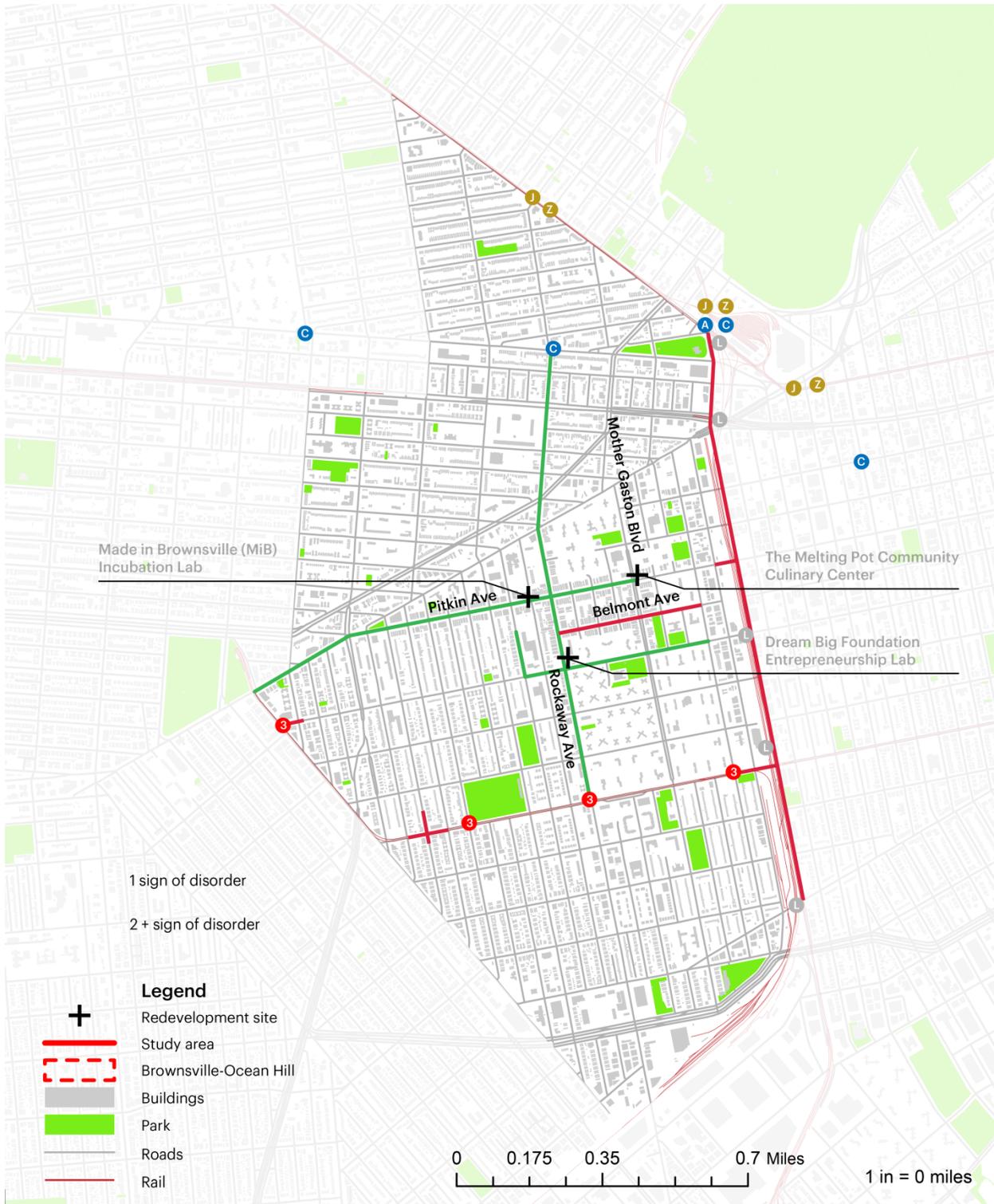


Fig 3.1: 2010 Problems in the Brownsville Community  
 80% of respondents identified guns, gangs, drug use, drug selling, and assault as the top community problem.  
 Altered by the author  
 (Source: Center For Court Innovation)

**Focus group interviews & meetings: Crime and Safety**

In the focus group discussions, residents expressed concern about their safety while walking on Mother Gaston Blvd, Belmont Ave, Rockaway Ave, and many other streets in the core area throughout the day. The area within the vicinity of the proposed redevelopment projects were considered by residents as hot spots for the informal economy and gang related crime activities.

Map / time zone



### Hourly use time zoning

In community interviews the authors used an hourly use time zoning method to understand constituency of the areas. They performed this research on several sites using images of the street. These diagrams will be published in a comprehensive study at a later date.

### Community Perceptions about its Relationship with the Police: CCI Survey

Based on the 2010 community survey (52 percent) of respondents felt that the relationship between police and the community was negative and (16 percent) responded that the relationship was positive, while (32 percent) were neutral.

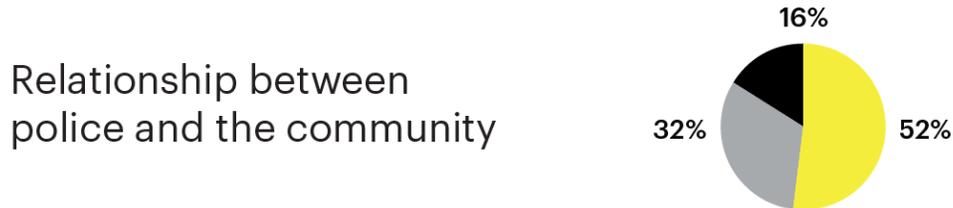


Fig 3.3: Relationship between the police and the community  
Yellow is % of respondents that felt the relationship was negative  
Grey is % of respondents that felt the relationship was neutral  
Black is % of respondents that felt the relationship was positive  
Altered by the author  
(Source: Center For Court Innovation)

### Focus group interviews & meetings: Relationship with the police and security

Residents expressed the need for increase in police patrols in hotspot areas, however, this was not without concern for the necessity to improve neighborhood relationships with the police. Residents also expressed the high presence of inexperienced police patrolling in Brownsville. To enhance safety, residents recommended improved police relationship with local community groups to establish and advocate experienced police on patrol.

### Opportunities the redevelopment presents

The redevelopment programs will attract diverse users and age groups to provide a higher degree of “eyes on the street” and increase opportunities for informal surveillance that is likely to reduce the number of isolated places where crime can occur. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) has been used in numerous urban settings to mitigate crime or the fear of crime. Although there are few conclusive studies that show how environmental design reduces the fear of crime (Lorenc et al., 2013,) a study supports how general environmental improvements has

shown indirect correlations to reduce the fear of crime in some neighborhoods (Cohen, Golinelli, Williamson, Sehgal, Marsh, McKenzie, 2009). Other research suggests that crime can be prevented in hotspot areas by assigning police patrols to deter offenders from taking opportunities to commit criminal acts. (Durlauf, Nagin 2011) According to interviews from stakeholders and residents, higher incidence of crime can occur between areas of distinct public housing developments, frequently due to gang rivalries and turf control. The geospatial nature of this violence makes it particularly relevant for further HIA study. Made in Brownsville Incubation Lab and Melting Pot Community Culinary Center are currently discussing allocating resources to research how to protect facilities and prevent opportunities for violence.

## 3.2 Social Cohesion

*“Those men may be addicts... they are having a party and they say hello; I say hello back. A group of young men, if they call me Mom, I think [they’re] concerned for my safety. Because [Belmont] is deserted, it has a bad rap.”*

- Maxine Dotson

### **Connection to health**

Substantial evidence of research suggests that social cohesion, a collective characteristic measured by the levels of trust and reciprocity, is an important factor in determining health. Studies show Individuals who lack social connections tend to suffer higher rates of mental illness, heart disease, and mortality (Berkman and Kawachi 2000; Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, Prothrow-Stith 1997). Research has shown residents socially engaged with others as well as participating with community affairs tend to be mentally and physically healthier (Cohen and Wills 1985). It is well documented that people who reside in clusters of low-income housing are at a higher risk of social isolation. The social environment is one aspect of a place that has an important influence on health and well-being. The built environment can also indirectly affect social cohesion (Quigley and Thornley 2011).

### **Community perception of youth problem & problems in the Brownsville Community: CCI Survey**

The 2010 community survey (77 percent) respondents said few adult role models as youth problems in Brownsville, and (72 percent) respondents said there was nothing to do after school, (67 percent) lack of education opportunities for youth 25 age and above. Problems in the Brownsville Community indicated garbage removal and littering (50 percent) from respondents and run down public space (48 percent) as a problem.

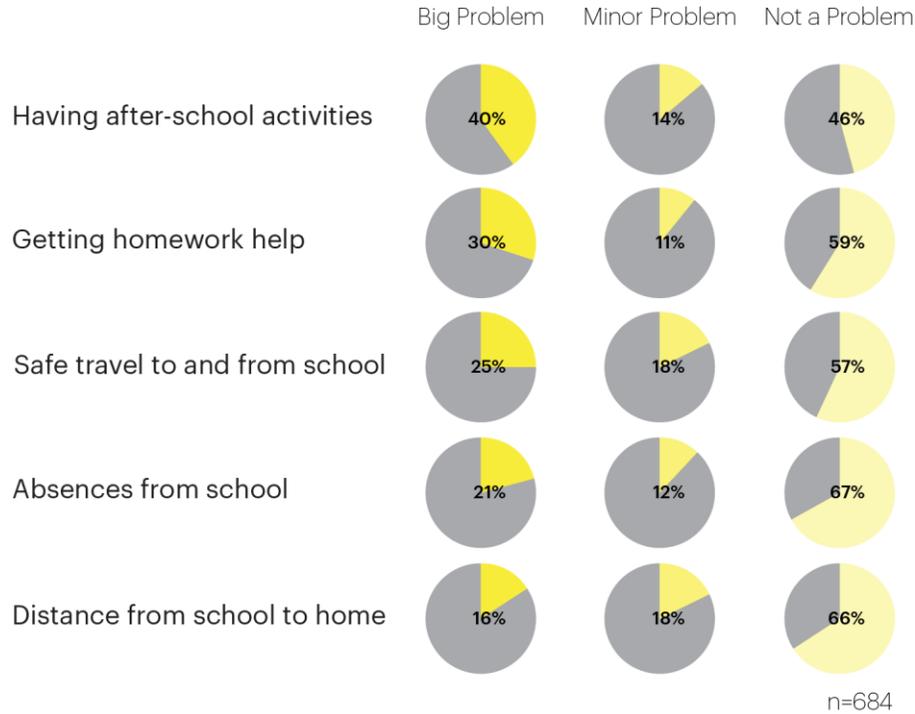


Fig 3.4: Community Perceptions of Problems Facing School-aged Children  
 Altered by the author  
 (Source: Center For Court Innovation)

**Focus group interviews & meeting: Physical Environment & Youth Problems**

In focus group meetings, participants discussed the need for increased local youth leadership programs to deter young adults from committing delinquent activities. Social programs to rehabilitate at risk youths are central to responding to this need. Residents also expressed the need to preserve the unique urban and cultural heritage which Brownsville has to offer to its residents. They advocated beautification projects throughout the neighborhood to enhance pride in the community and provide spaces for meaning community engagement.

**Opportunities the redevelopment presents**

The redevelopment projects, particularly the MiB Incubation Lab and the Melting Pot Culinary academy offer youth opportunities to strengthen social bonds to promote positive community capacity building. All three programs promote social bond and community building in the larger study area along with physical environmental improvements.

**Physical environment**

All three programs are committed to invest in the area to reverse physical indicators of disinvestment and crime (e.g. closed businesses, broken sidewalks, vacant lots, litter, etc) through urban design principles and policy. Research has shown that blighted urban

environments can cause mental illness such as isolation and depression (Latkin, Curry, Hua, Davey 2007). Environmental improvements and maintenance can likely provide settings for social engagement and greater community participation amongst residents. Made in Brownsville Incubation Lab, Dream Big Foundation, and the Melting Pot Community Culinary Center seeks to reuse currently vacant commercial retail spaces for mixed-use services, therefore adding to the continuity of services to reduce vacancy in the area.

### **After-school program**

After-school programs can foster children's engagement with the community. Research shows that after-school programs can provide settings for developmental growth for children and youth. Well-structured programs and adult support programs have been known to protect youth from risky behaviors that are detrimental to their physical and mental wellbeing. (Durlak and Weissberg, 2007; Mahoney, Stattin, & Lord, 2004). It is widely acknowledged that after school programs can likely promote community efficacy through engagement, leadership among youths from the support of the communities through well structured programs. Made in Brownsville Incubation Lab, Dream Big Foundation, Melting Pot Community Culinary Center mission is intended to decrease youth violence through engagement and mentorship. The redevelopment will likely contribute to the much needed youth programs for the purpose to train and mentor youths on a variety of social and entrepreneurial programs (e.g. healthy cooking, nutrition course, business and management, urban design and place making workshops).

## **3.3 Access to goods, services, and recreation**

*"Staying in Brownsville, if someone comes to do something we have to help them; stay here in the community, look at JC. Your yesterdays are not his tomorrows."*

- Maxine Dotson

### **Connection to health**

Accessibility is essential to achieving a healthy community. Health inequalities due to lack of access to goods and services such as quality schools, health care services, and other civic amenities in the neighborhood can exacerbate problems in already existing poor urban conditions. Quality health facilities, goods, and services must be attainable by everyone without discrimination to race or socioeconomic status, and must be reached from safe physical access to all people. A healthy neighborhood often promotes health by way of shared green spaces that can encourage physical activity and social cohesion, adequate housing for mixed income, transportation, and healthy food retail. Health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, heart

disease, mental and social health, and poor physical conditions are associated with the lack of access to neighborhood resources.

### **Healthy Food**

Research studies link food insecurities with higher risk of diabetes, mental illness, and chronic illness such as hypertension and various cardiovascular risk factors (Seligman, Laraia, and Kushel 2010). Access also refers to the convenient availability of healthy foods. A healthy diet is one that consists of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains and is low in fat, sugar, and salt. Healthy diets are recommended for prevention of cardiovascular disease (Morland et al., 2002). Studies have shown that unhealthy foods, or “energy-dense” foods with refined grains, added sugars, and added fats, cost less. Although there are many grocery stores and supermarkets throughout Brownsville, the study area has an abundance of these quickly digestible foods sold in retail. Public housing and non-public housing residents within the study areas are known to travel greater distance to access quality produce.

### **Youth Recreation**

Parks are an important component in urban areas. Safe and well maintained parks can provide opportunities for social engagement, and physical activity that can benefit for mental and physical health. A study suggest that NYC parks in lower-income and minority neighborhoods lacks recreational facilities to compared to wealthier areas (Maroko, Maantay, Sohler, Grady, Arno, 2009). Although there are many parks in the study area, access to diverse recreational facilities are a common problem in the area (see section 4.2 survey community perception of youth). More research is necessary to fully understand the diverse existing use of public green spaces in Brownsville and their implications for public health.

### **Community perception of youth: CCI Survey**

The 2010 Brownsville survey indicated (59 percent) few parks, recreational facilities or sports teams as youth problems.

### **Focus group interviews & meeting: Food**

During focus group meetings, residents expressed the need for affordable and quality fresh food stores in the study area. In addition the residents expressed concerns regarding the abundance of fast food restaurants and liquor stores. Concern was expressed considering the quality of produce and prices that may be increased due to high insurance costs and a cornered local market.

### **Focus group interviews & meeting: Recreational programs**

Residents acknowledge the abundance of faith based groups that promote youth recreational programs although the diversity of programs in Brownsville are limited to different age groups and interests.

**Opportunities the redevelopment presents**

Although the Melting Pot Community Culinary Center, and Made in Brownsville Incubation programs are geared towards youth training, developers are proposing ongoing public events that will likely generate recreation activities for students. The Melting Pot Community Culinary Center includes a 20,000 sq feet culinary school that will provide ongoing public healthy food events in Brownsville. The Made in Brownsville lab will engage youth to produce locally relevant marketing services and spatial activation programs. The Dream Big Foundation will provide mentorship to entrepreneurs who aim to start their business in Brownsville. While it is challenging to attract businesses in the study area developers are prioritizing long term mentorship and training opportunities to start their own business in Brownsville to provide services and amenities to the community. Other businesses requested by residents were family style restaurants, cafes, and movie theaters.

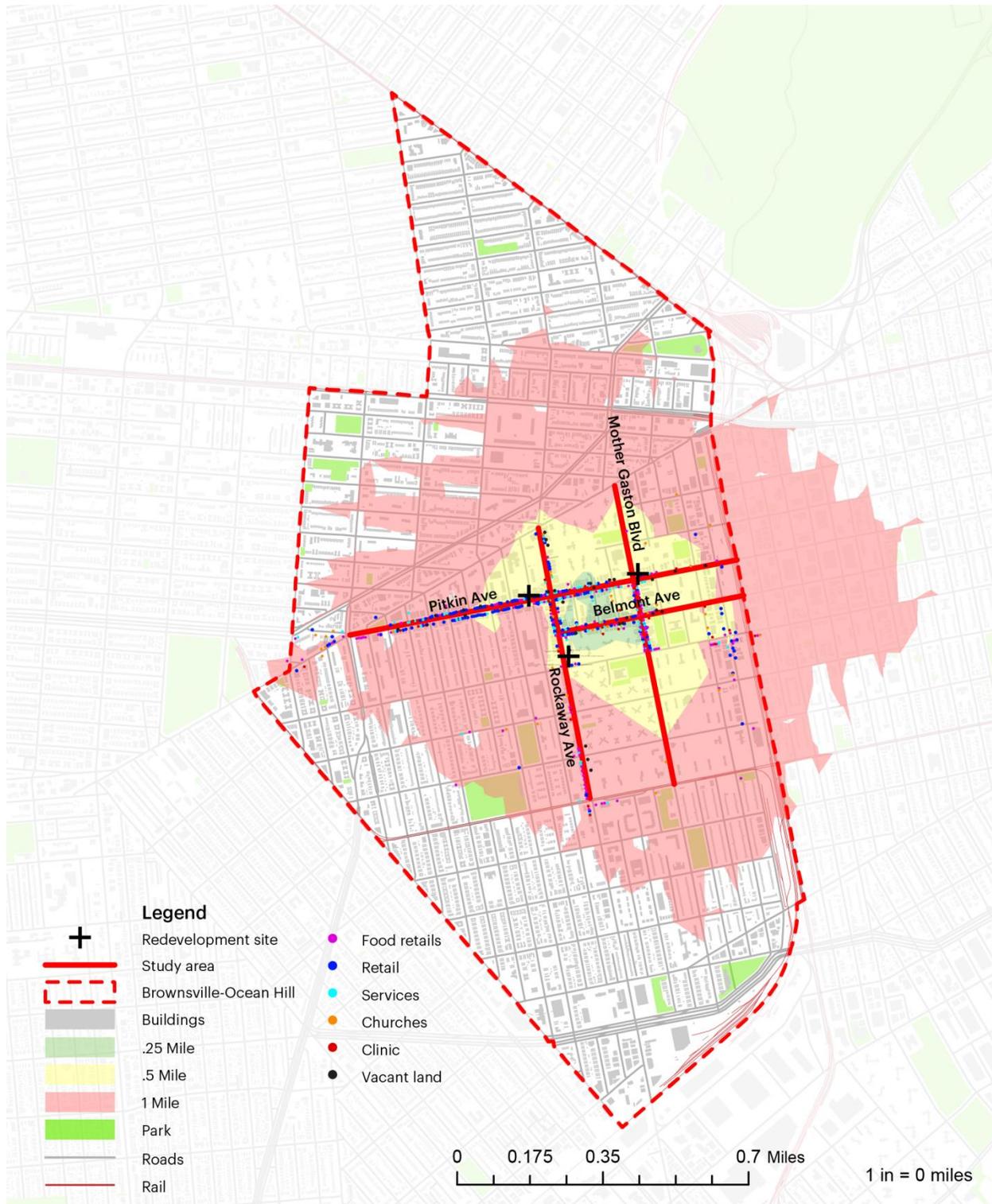


Fig 3.5: Distance between assets  
Source: NYC Open Data, Google Maps, authors research

# 4.0 Recommendations

Based on the research and literature reviews and combined with an in-depth analysis of the workshop results, scientific literature reviews, existing survey, site survey and interviews, the HIA process generated a number of key recommendations that should be taken into consideration for the three redevelopment proposals and future redevelopment initiatives.

## Program

- Recognize the reality of inter-development rivalries (turfs) resulting in violence and engage youth in trans-generational, spatial programming.
- Create a positive relationship between residents, program officials, and law enforcement to allow participants from different housing developments to access programs.
- Address the actions and perception of law enforcement and security personnel.
- Encourage and publicize walking groups to increase street access during periods of less pedestrian activity.
- Create a dynamic feedback mechanism for neighborhood information including qualitative and quantitative measures that help to evaluate proposed programs, infrastructures, and public spaces.
- Evaluate existing and newly proposed program based on HIA methodology as an ordinary part of maintaining public safety for young adults.
- Address the divide between public and private housing through more joint programming and information exchange;
- Fill the gap in published knowledge on Brownsville after 1970 by recording stories from current long time Brownsville residents.

## Policy

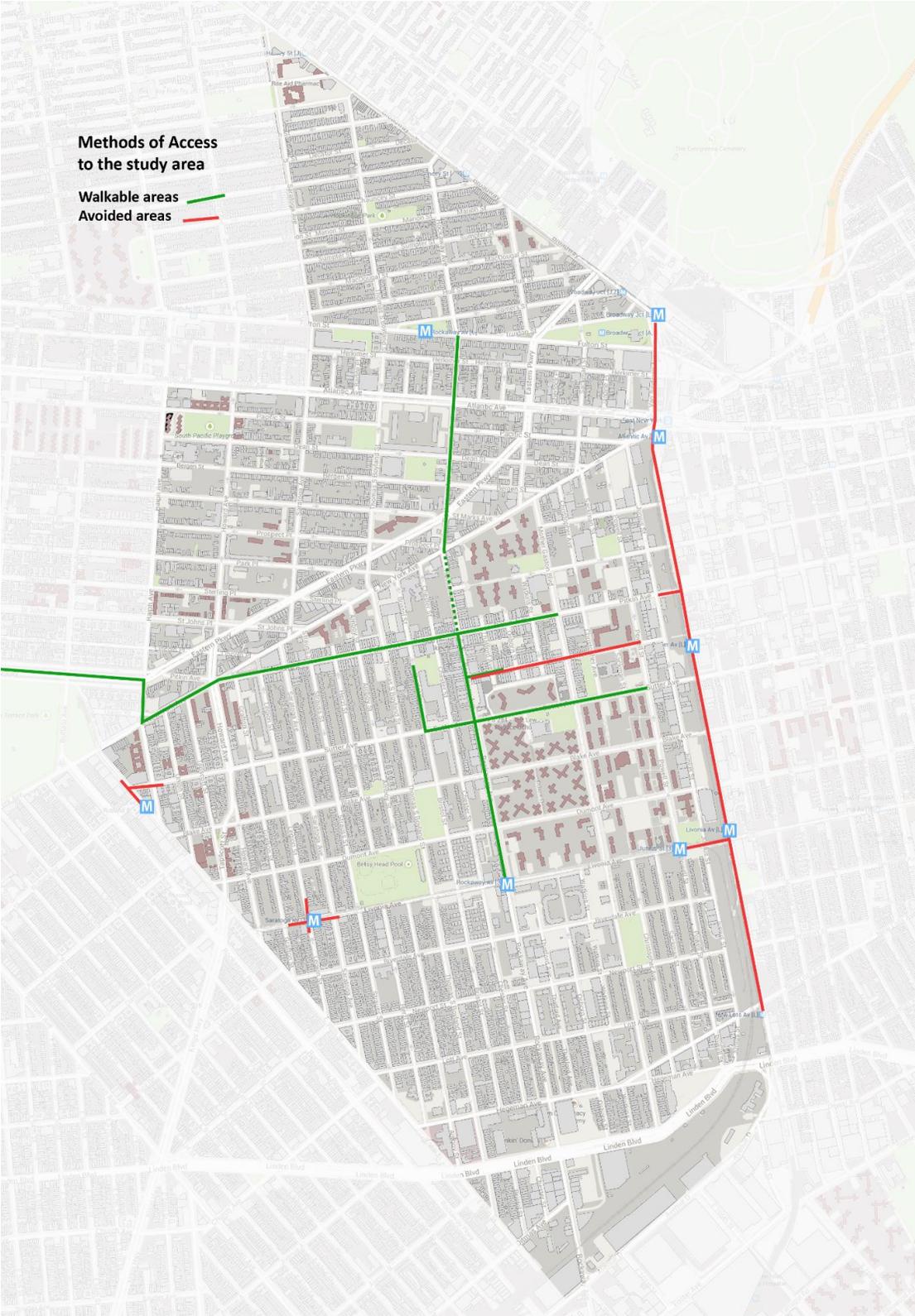
- Recruit businesses that prioritize employing local residents.
- Recruit businesses that are open different times of day.
- Provide security personnel inside and outside of buildings and in high risk locations.

## Design

- Create facilities that have commercial store frontage at ground level with housing above.
- Maximize visibility for high risk areas such as street lights.
- Invest in community projects such as neighborhood parks and community gardens to encourage recreation and social interaction opportunities.

Use transparent storefront windows that create a friendly and inviting atmosphere but cannot be damaged easily.

# Appendix



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