

Planning the Future of the Downtown Flushing Waterfront



A Community Survey Study conducted by
Queens College Urban Studies 220 E4M3 and 760.1 E4M2

Alex Doulaveris, Audra de Falco, Jean Kapkanoff
Sean M. Dalpiaz, Regina Fojas, SooJi Lim
Muneeba Talukder and Nataly Rojas

Professor Tarry Hum
Teaching Assistant Julianne Landkammer

In collaboration with
The MinKwon Center for Community Action

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I. INTRODUCTION

In Spring 2011, a Queens College Urban Studies class on Planning the Future of Flushing collaborated with the MinKwon Center for Community Action to conduct a study and survey of community awareness and attitudes regarding downtown Flushing neighborhood conditions and change, and new development specifically as outlined in the 2004 Downtown Flushing Framework. In particular, our collaboration focused on Flushing's waterfront. Comprised of a small but diverse



and dedicated student group invested in the future of Downtown Flushing, our class partnered with the MinKwon Center for Community Action to collect community needs data from Flushing's immigrant residents and small business

owners, and to educate the wider public on these findings. Our collaboration sought to better understand grassroots immigrant interests in order to better position advocacy organizations to ensure local community voice in the planning and development process.

The Flushing waterfront – situated along the polluted Flushing river and lined with parking lots, warehouses, and a few building materials supply and retail small businesses -- was rezoned in 1998 from a manufacturing zone to a residential and commercial zone. Since this site is the only large underdeveloped area in Flushing, its reuse and development will have a transformative impact on surrounding

Downtown Flushing. In 2009, the Flushing Willets Point Corona Local Development Corporation (FWCLDC) received a \$1.5 million Brownfield Opportunity Areas (BOA) planning grant to coordinate a masterplan for the reuse and redevelopment of the Flushing waterfront and to commence the preparation of a brownfield remediation plan.

Our collaboration with a community based organization sought to investigate what new waterfront development may mean for Flushing's Asian immigrant population, a community segment typically underrepresented in formal venues of planning and land use decision-making. Throughout the semester, we worked closely with MinKwon Center staff and organizers to learn about Flushing's diverse communities, develop survey instruments, conduct a door to door survey of downtown Flushing residents and small businesses, and prepare a powerpoint presentation summarizing our research activities and findings.

II. RESEARCH TASKS AND SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The research tasks undertaken by this class include (1) reviewing plans for the Flushing waterfront such as NYC Economic Development Corporation's 2004 Downtown Flushing Framework, NYC Department of City Planning's Vision 2020: The New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan, and FWCLDC's 2010 BOA Request for Proposal; (2) meetings with community stakeholders including journalist Sergey Kadinsky on January 31, 2011, S.J. Jung, President of the MinKwon Center on February 23, 2011, Nick Roberts, FWCLDC Project Manager on March 14, 2011, and Queens Community Board 7 District Manager Marilyn Bitterman and Land Use Committee Co-Chair Chuck Apelian on March 21, 2011, and Richard Lee, Asian Americans for Equality Policy Analyst also on March 21,

2011, (3) fieldwork at the Flushing waterfront including a walking tour and a land use survey, and (4) conducting a survey of downtown Flushing small businesses and residents.

The planning for this collaborative study of the Flushing waterfront began before the start of the Spring semester with two meetings in December and January 2011 with Professor Hum and the MinKwon Center staff to identify areas of collaboration, plan and develop the course curriculum, and ensure our goals and strategies aligned. In the first few weeks of the Spring 2011 semester, students met with MinKwon Center staff to learn about the community based organization and discuss the Flushing waterfront. During these meetings, students had an opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussion about the MinKwon Center's work in Flushing and learn more about their organizing model and community perspectives on neighborhood redevelopment. The students' introduction to the Flushing waterfront and related issues included a walking tour led by MinKwon Center's Board President S.J. Jung and Education and Communication Director, Ju-Bum Cha.

To assess the level of community awareness of the Flushing waterfront plans and to gather information about community needs and vision for a redeveloped waterfront, our class worked with MinKwon Center staff and interns to develop a survey for small businesses and residents (see attachments). In addition to general demographic information, the surveys asked questions related to neighborhood conditions and changes, pressing needs and concerns as a business owner or resident, survey respondents' views on what should be included in the Flushing waterfront redevelopment. Once the survey instruments were developed,

the MinKwon Center trained the students to conduct surveys, and developed an intensive community outreach and engagement campaign – involving door-knocking and surveying – targeting Asian American immigrant residents and small businesses in the downtown Flushing area.

MinKwon Center staff and interns, and QC students engaged in surveying efforts from March 29, 2011 through April 22, 2011 for three to four days a week from 4:00pm to 9:00pm. Students were paired with a MinKwon Center staff or intern and the teams were dispatched to specific streets and buildings to conduct the survey and record additional comments and observations regarding neighborhood conditions. A total of 151 resident surveys and 98 small business surveys were collected during this period.

III. FLUSHING WATERFRONT

a. History

The Flushing River waterfront is an integral site in the plans for the future redevelopment of Downtown Flushing due to increasing demand for public open space and the Bloomberg administration's commitment to the re-utilization of New York City's waterfronts. The Flushing River, now narrow and green and obscured from view by the streets and businesses of Downtown Flushing, is often overlooked by visitors and residents alike. Throughout its history, the Flushing River has been subject to recreational and manufacturing uses at different points in time. Now, though some businesses do remain along the waterfront, the waterfront is mostly desolate and polluted, blocked off visually and physically from the rest of Flushing by fences and dense commercial and residential development. According to a local journalist, Sergey Kadinsky, the main traffic along the river today is concrete

barges as building material industries are the main remnants of the manufacturing sector along the Flushing River. Many are unaware that Flushing even has a waterfront.

New York, especially under Mayor Bloomberg, has increasingly pushed for waterfront revitalization. With 578 miles of waterfront, it is hard to imagine that we have made so little use of our waterfront for public space and recreation. In Flushing, the view of the water is very limited and the waterfront is not inviting. However, Flushing is a thriving community and one of the neighborhood's most important assets is the waterfront and the river itself. The development of the Flushing waterfront, Downtown Flushing, and Willets Point area, has been shaped through years of change in the waterbeds that flow from the East River into the North Queens mainland. Through geological change and human use, our vision of Flushing's future and its relation to the waterbeds that surround it have changed over the last two centuries.

Flushing has always been a major settlement in Queens -- from its colonial days as a site for religious tolerance, to its business district that serves as a major regional economic center outside of Manhattan. Perhaps, most importantly, it is known as New York City's largest Chinatown. For such an important regional center, having a waterfront can be a major asset. The waterfront attracts businesses, it can be used recreationally, and it provides people a place to relax and possibly interact and meet new people. Since the Flushing River has always shaped Flushing then redeveloping its waterfront could transform the neighborhood completely.

Flushing River was originally formed before the last Ice Age. Its location was a prime spot for geological transformation. The waterways around Northeast and Central Queens include the Flushing River and many tributaries. All of these tributaries open to the Flushing River and let out by the Flushing Bay. Flushing Bay is a part of the connection between the Long Island Sound and the East River. The source of this river can no longer be found due to man-made structures covering it. The source is hidden under the many highways at the Kew Gardens interchange. These highways connect neighborhoods such as Kew Gardens Hills, Flushing, Queensboro Hill, Forest Hills, and Jamaica.

Robert Moses and the 1939 World Fair developments dramatically changed the look of this waterbed in Queens. One of the more apparent changes was the dredging of Flushing River. Flushing River had a definable flow from the larger East River straight into the center of Queens. Looking at a map now, one can see how the Flushing River which was once joined with other bodies of water in the area, had been cut off at certain points to accommodate new development including highways and lakes for the 1939 World Fair.

The river was dredged to make Meadow Lake and Willow Lake which are sandwiched between the Van Wyck Expressway and the Grand Central Parkway. Configuring the marshland into a Flushing Meadows Park gave way to a section of land not used in the park called Willets Point. This neighborhood has since been neglected and its primary use is dominated by small auto repair shops. One can argue that this piece of land, dubbed the Iron Triangle, has been neglected due to its lack of connections to the neighboring communities of Flushing and Corona.

Crossing the Flushing River before 1930 could be done in two ways. Drawbridges stood at the current Roosevelt Avenue Bridge and the Northern Boulevard Bridge. Historically, these were opened for boats to pass through to the Flushing River on the south side of Roosevelt Avenue. When the river was shortened to Roosevelt Avenue, the city decided to make the Roosevelt Avenue drawbridge a fixed bridge. The Northern Blvd. Bridge was also made fixed but made higher for boats and barges to pass through towards Roosevelt Avenue. However, walking over these bridges is not a very pedestrian friendly experience. The Roosevelt Avenue Bridge is hard to see because to get to it from College Point Blvd are two small, streets with small sidewalks. The streets are dirty and dangerous due to the lack of maintenance. The Northern Blvd. Bridge is a two lane Nascar-like road due to the high flow of traffic from Corona to Flushing. On one side of the bridge is a very small section for pedestrians. However, if we think it is bad now, back in the mid 1990's the only thing that separated someone from the bridge and the Flushing River grime that sat beneath it was a rope.¹

There have been several different uses for the Flushing River and the land surrounding it. The area on the Willets Point side of the river has been known as a dump for the Brooklyn Ash Removal Company around the late 19th century. Under the direction of Robert Moses, this ash dump would be filled in and landscaped to become the site of the 1939 World Fair. The heavy pollution of this site and the Flushing River before the World's Fair was famously commented upon by F. Scott Fitzgerald in The Great Gatsby as he described the Flushing River as "small" and "foul" and the scenery around it "dismal." Clearly, the quality of the Flushing River

¹ <http://www.mazeartist.com/flushwo.htm>

had been noticeably compromised by the presence of the dump and similarly today, Willets Point continues to be a source of pollution.

While the river had been used for recreational activities, it is solely dominated by industrial purposes today. Places of business such as U-Haul, a concrete plant, and an Asian supermarket crowd the entrances to the water on College Point Boulevard. With limited waterfront access, the river has been a long neglected part of Flushing's natural environment. Its continued importance in shaping Northeast Queens is evident in the redevelopment potential to improve the urban landscape and aesthetic, and to promote local commerce by developing a potential new destination site and regional economic outpost.

b. Current Conditions

To assess the current conditions of Flushing waterfronts, students were assigned sections of Flushing waterfront and asked to survey land uses and conditions. The following is the narrative from one of the students.

As I walked down from the intersection of Roosevelt Avenue and College Point Boulevard, I saw the area at a crossroads, both figuratively and literally. On one side, the new Muss development, Skyview Parc, was prominently visible (Fig. 1). Skyview Center, a mini-mall with an Old Navy, a BJ's Wholesale Club, and Five Guys' Burgers and Fries, among other brand name stores, is attached to the luxury condominiums on the upper floors of the buildings.

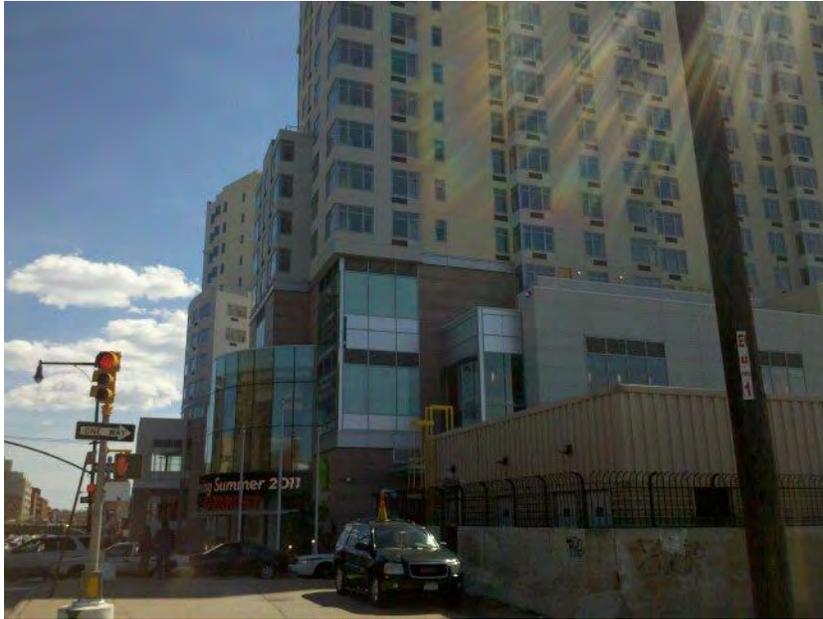


Fig. 1: Skyview Parc, which houses luxury condominiums, and Skyview Center, a mini mall located at 40-24 College Point Blvd.

The Bland Houses which are managed and owned by the New York City Housing Authority are on the other corner of this intersection (Fig. 2). This public housing complex is a stark contrast to the luxury housing located just across the street. A Mobil gas station, on the corner across from the Bland Houses, has three self-serve stations and a service center for auto repairs and state certifications.



Fig. 2: The Bland Houses on 40-05 College Point Blvd.

The remaining corner is fenced by wooden boards, and is currently contracted by Pane Stone Construction and owned by the Levitt Street LLC. I was able to peek through an opening to see stacks of wood planks and blocks. Many downtown Flushing property owners are Limited Liability Corporations (LLC). LLC's, as defined by the Internal Revenue Service, have limited personal liability for the debts and actions of the LLC and are usually veiled and anonymous.

As I walked down toward the waterfront, I reached Janet Place. This block included various auto repair shops and related industries. It is run down and can even be considered even an eyesore, with the grease stains on the ground, visible graffiti, and ripped up signage (Fig. 4 and 5).



Fig. 4: Auto shop at 132-01 Janet Place.



Fig. 5: The weather-beaten signage at 132-05 Janet Place.

One man spoke to me in Chinese, probably wondering what I was doing there, but unfortunately I wasn't able to communicate with him. I also saw two men, who looked of Spanish descent, sitting near a space heater inside the garage. Curiously, there was a Friendship Table Tennis Center on the second floor.

Also on my trek to the waterfront, I saw a bus stop for the Q48, which heads to LaGuardia Airport. I also observed some residences adjacent to the autobody shop on Janet Place, and further down, I could see Assi Plaza, a Korean supermarket. In the distance, I was able to make out the historically significant UHAUL clock tower.

Finally, I arrived at the barren wilderness that is 39-08 Janet Place. Although there are plans by the LEV Development Group to advance this deserted lot of over 1,000,000 square feet into a mixed-use development of 450 condominiums, office space, and retail, it currently operates as a dumping ground (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6: The site of future riverside development, owned by the LEV Group.

Broken glass, weeds, rocks, and industrial tin containers litter the site. It looks like a wasteland straight out of a Terminator movie. There is even a rusty abandoned tractor in one area (Fig. 7). If this site does get developed in the near future, a cleanup effort of huge proportions will be needed.



Fig. 7: Ancient construction memorabilia at 39-08 Janet Place.

According to their website, LEV Development, which owns the lot, has a team that specializes in finance, engineering, construction, architectural design and marketing. The group has many real estate projects around the world, which are similarly in the process of becoming a reality. Eddie Shapiro is the CEO and founder of the LEV Group, Yoram Barel is the Vice President and the Project Manager, Yudel Kahan is the co-founder, and Marquis Fraiser is the Assistant Vice President.

LEV Development is a partner of Nest Seekers International LLC, which specializes in real estate brokerage, and of Churchill Corporate Services, which focuses on extended stay hotels and corporate housing. Nest Seekers is a real estate firm that manages the sale and rental of condominiums, cooperative apartments, and townhouses in Manhattan, Long Island City, and New York City in general. It is a global corporation that has property listings in the Hamptons, South

Florida, Europe, and the Middle East. It appears to be a massive, possibly foreign conglomerate with a lot of ambition and money.

LEV Development seeks to develop the usual amenities, it seems, for the area. Luxury condominiums and retail and commercial buildings are slated to be built on the site, not unlike the recent developments like Queens Crossing or Skyview Parc. These renderings of the future growth in this area showcase three boxy glass high-rise buildings, as well as a shorter and wider version near the waterfront (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: LEV Development's River Park Place.

I stopped right at the Roosevelt Pedestrian Bridge, which has dilapidated and rocky sidewalks. The whole walkway was in need of repair – in fact, I was surprised enough to see a pedestrian crossing the bridge while I was conducting the survey that I took a picture (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8: The sidewalk leading up to the Roosevelt Pedestrian Bridge.

I counted as many as four airplanes flying above the area in the duration of my short survey. As expected, they were noisy and distracting. The Flushing River had the pungent odor of pollution. However, I was able to view Skyview Parc from Main Street, which indicates visual corridors leading up to the Waterfront. The surveyed area was largely vacant and devoid of pedestrian traffic.

Overall, the area from the intersection of College Point Blvd. and Roosevelt Avenue looked in a state of disrepair. It was easy to see why the City of New York was compelled to develop the area and upgrade its appearance. The region has much to benefit from the development of the Flushing's waterfront. It is important to ensure, however, that private businesses and stakeholders in the area remain intact during and after construction.

IV. CURRENT PLANS FOR THE WATERFRONT

a. Downtown Flushing Framework

Flushing has a thriving economy, encompasses a large growing and diverse population, and is considered the most frequently used transportation hub in Queens. However, Flushing has its fair share of problems, many of which come with being a major urban center. In 2004, the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and Department of City Planning (DCP) of New York City launched the Downtown Flushing Framework, which envisioned a large-scale improvement of Downtown Flushing's most pressing issues. This initiative was spearheaded by Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Deputy Mayor Daniel Doctoroff, and seems to be heavily driven by the economic interests of the City.

The Downtown Flushing Framework seeks to comprehensively plan and shape the future development of Flushing. It was partly the outcome of a series of charrettes in 2003 which included the participation of Queens Community Board 7 and a number of elected officials. In a notable two-day public charrette held at the Flushing Town Hall in February of that year, over 700 members of the public were invited to participate. These public meetings and planning sessions included the input of private landowners, residents, business owners, and developers, and were crucial in gauging both the public and the private sectors' interests.

Much research was conducted regarding the planning, design, and economic concerns of Downtown Flushing. Ultimately, the Framework called for more publically accessible open space, the development of high quality mixed-use buildings, manageable traffic, and increased parking opportunities. Its vision

included the redevelopment and revamping of three key areas: Municipal Lot #1 in Downtown Flushing, the Flushing Waterfront, and Willets Point.

Downtown Flushing

In the heart of Downtown Flushing, critical transformative development is set to begin shortly. Municipal Lot #1, a five-acre plot of land on Union Street and 39th Avenue, is currently utilized as a parking lot that provides over a thousand parking spaces for commuters and shoppers. In 2005, the City selected TDC Development and Construction, and the Rockefeller Group Development Corporation to develop the lot. Interestingly, TDC Development was also the force behind Queens Crossing, a mixed-use development adjacent to Municipal Lot #1. The developers are reportedly investing a total of \$850 million in the upcoming project, called Flushing Commons.

Flushing Commons will include mixed retail, residential, and commercial development. Parking for 1,600 cars will also be provided. It will accommodate the new location of the YMCA, and feature a town square with water fountains and greenery. One concern is the amount of parking that is to be offered on site. Approximately 600 residential condominiums are slated to be built, and it has been predicted that the available number of parking spaces will not be sufficient for both the residents and the public. In fact, the construction of Flushing Commons will significantly stress Flushing's already strained infrastructure.

Also, while this development sounds promising and certainly profitable to some, it has been the source of bitter contention for many. For the owners of small businesses that line Union Street, this new development can mean economic devastation. These shop owners will most likely undergo a period of financial

hardship during and after the construction of Flushing Commons. The main customer base for these businesses travels via automobile. Without a working parking lot or sufficient parking spaces near the area, it will become very difficult for these merchants to keep their clientele and their businesses running.

However, even with these legitimate concerns, the project was given the green light in 2010. After a seven-month approval process that began in the same year, the joint venture was subsequently approved by the City Council. There was only one opportunity, on March 22, for the public to discuss the proposed development and the significant loss of public property. This gave rise to concerns that the ULURP process did not serve its job adequately. In addition, there was an eleventh hour attempt at an intervention of Flushing Commons' construction by business owners on Union Street, which signals the community's lack of information regarding the proposed development ahead of time to make a serious dent in the project.

In addition, people have ambivalent feelings about the influx of generic businesses and the lack of authenticity that will characterize Flushing Commons. It will directly counter the unique and diverse mix of attractions presently in Flushing. When the project is completed, Flushing Commons can be expected to look like the nearby Skyview Parc, a mixed-use development with retail and luxury condominiums located at 40-24 College Point Boulevard, which has a mini-mall with an Applebee's, a Bed Bath & Beyond, and a Target.

This project also incensed residents of Queens who viewed the City and the Mayor as benefactors of the private sector, not the common people. Previously, the

property was secured through eminent domain for a public good. Now, it will be sold off to a politically favored developer for private profit.

Another issue is the fate of the luxury condominiums in Flushing Commons after they are built. TDC can prevent the disaster that is Skyview Parc, in which a vast majority of the luxury housing is vacant and presumably unprofitable. The relatively recent housing crisis coupled with the economic disaster has not been conducive for a prosperous real estate market. TDC should be flexible regarding the kind of residential housing they decide to build, and consider adding more units of affordable housing that the city desperately needs.

Flushing's Waterfront

Another principal aspect of the Downtown Flushing Framework is Flushing's Waterfront. The waterfront refers to the strip of land between College Point Boulevard and the Flushing River, as well as the land on Willets Point on the other side of the river. The Waterfront is proposed to serve as a link between Downtown Flushing and its closely located amenities, such as Flushing-Meadows Corona Park, Citifield, and the Queens Botanical Garden. It will also be a stepping-stone to Willets Point, which is a major component in this Framework as well. Currently, the FWCLDC led by Claire Shulman, is leading the planning for the Flushing waterfront remediation and development. In 2009, FWCLDC received a Brownfield Opportunity Areas Program (BOA) grant and is engaged in conducting a masterplan for a Special District next to Skyview Parc (between Northern Boulevard and Roosevelt Avenue, and between College Point Boulevard and the Flushing River). The zoning will allow for more commercial and residential development, and create smaller urban blocks appropriate to the scale of the area.

Rezoning from C4-2 to C4-4

The BOA area currently consists of three zoning districts, C4-2 (a combination of commercial mixed with residential and community uses), M1-1 (manufacturing and light industry uses), M3-1 (manufacturing and heavy industry). The FWCLDC stresses the importance of shifting from C4-2, M3-1, and M1-1 to a uniform C4-4 zoning. The LDC also supports establishing the area as a Special District. A switch in zoning and the establishment of the area as a Special District would bring about housing development improvements, wider streets, and more public open space. The rezoning would also potentially bolster development plans, including: the redevelopment of the waterfront, linking of the waterfront to surrounding areas—mainly along 37th and 39th avenues, mixed housing development, office space and hotel development, restaurants along the riverfront, establishment of height and density restrictions.

Along with more housing opportunities and commercial possibilities, the proposed project would enable waterfront access. Open space for the public would feature a promenade along the river. Future residents of Willets Point and Corona could access the waterfront esplanade and riverside park using a pedestrian bridge that will connect Downtown Flushing to the Waterfront and Willets Point. Using the bridge, people could walk or bike to the western edge of the River, which has wetlands and low elevated highways and ramps. They could enjoy an experience similar to the one at Fort Totten near Bay Terrace. Although the FWCLDC is advocating for large amounts of open space, the current artistic depictions of a redeveloped waterfront shows bulky buildings dominating the landscape and not much green space is visible.

After the waterfront is developed, ferry service to the area could be considered. This would be a much needed and welcome option for commuters to other boroughs. It would also highlight Flushing as a regional destination, where people would want to work, live, and visit. Also, the planned construction of an entrance to the #7 subway station on Prince Street would bring transit riders closer to the waterfront. College Point Boulevard can be redesigned to become more pedestrian friendly.

Willets Point

Willets Point, on the western shore of the River, is essential to the redevelopment of the area. Currently, Willets Point is the home of auto repair shops, junkyards, and related industrial businesses. The "Iron Triangle" does not have its own water sewage system or any paved roads. As a result, all of the pollutants from the industrial lot are flushed out into the Flushing River daily. Thus, any future development of the Flushing Waterfront must be considered in this context. Although critics condemn the undesirable appearance and the harmful environmental pollution produced by the district, it is important to note that it is actually the City's responsibility to provide these services.

River cleanup is a costly and laborious endeavor so the source of pollution must be stopped before it will even be considered. Willets Point must be developed prior to the waterfront to prevent re-contamination. Once that happens, dredging of the river will follow as well as any proposed development. The plan for Willets Point consists of a much grander vision with the construction of a whole new neighborhood, a convention center, a hotel, entertainment venues, open space, and

even a public school. Over 5,000 units of housing are proposed to be built on the 60-acre site with the inclusion of affordable housing.

Although the plan has some admirable qualities such as the attempt of certification by The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), Willets Point will not be redeveloped with unanimous approval. The City plans on using eminent domain, if necessary, to seize private property from small business owners in the Iron Triangle. The project is undoubtedly a forceful attempt at the gentrification of a neighborhood, and is hugely speculative. The predicted job creation, facilities, and overall amenities are not guaranteed. Real people will lose their jobs for a plan that may not come to fruition as promised. Also, some people maintain that the area is an employment venue that newly arrived immigrants depend on for income. Others protest the City's shutdown of thriving small businesses that have nowhere to go. Although NYC EDC stressed that the city offer free English language lessons and training for Willets Point's soon-to-be evicted, many of the immigrant workers cannot take advantage of the classes because they are already working long hours.

The Downtown Flushing Framework will undeniably change the landscape of Flushing. Within the next ten years, it will be apparent whether or not the benefits of the future projects in Downtown Flushing, the Waterfront, and Willets Point outweighed the significant public losses. In the meantime, one can only influence the direction of future growth by capturing the community's input regarding these crucial plans.

b. Vision 2020: The New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan

Vision 2020 is a comprehensive plan of the city of New York to develop the waterfronts of Queens, Brooklyn, Staten Island, The Bronx and Manhattan. The development of the waterfront has been in process since 1992 with the *New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan*, a plan that brought light to a resource that has not been explored by the city in the past century or so. While the waterways were an important source of transportation and industry in the city, this source of economic activity has deteriorated leaving behind an underutilized and decaying waterfront that is ignored by most of the population of the city. *Vision 2020* is an effort to follow-up with a Comprehensive Waterfront Plan that encourages citywide efforts to attract the public to the waterfront by offering recreation, housing and water access among many other amenities.

The plan is divided into eight goals that will promote the re-use and reintegration of the waterfront. Among NYC's waterfront sections that will be improved is the Queens waterfront which covers from the "North Shore of Queens from 20th Ave. in Astoria to the Flushing River, including Riker's Island"(p.140). Like most of the other areas being improved throughout the city, the eight goals will serve as a guide for the development of the Flushing waterfront to ensure public access, open space, as well as improvement of accessibility between the neighborhoods along the waterline, and maintenance of active industrial use in the waterfront (p.140). To further understand the city's comprehensive waterfront vision, let us explore the goals of *Vision 2020*.

A goal listed by the *Vision 2020* plan is to "(E)xpand public access to the waterfront and waterways on public and private property for all New Yorkers and

visitors alike” (p. 9). This part of the plan takes into consideration the importance of public and private involvement in the development and acknowledges that some rezoning will be necessary to achieve all the potential activities of the waterfront. Development will encourage “(E)splanades that let us stroll by the water. Parks with room to fly a kite. Piers where anglers can cast rods. Vistas of New York Harbor that open up from neighborhood streets. Publicly accessible spaces along the shoreline bring us into contact with the rivers, streams, inlets, and bays that border the city” (p.26). For Flushing, this will mean that there will be a “Study [of] hydrology and means of improving water circulation and siltation, Explore options for expanding mooring fields for recreational boats,[and] Improve maintenance of Flushing Bay Esplanade.”(p.140)

Another goal is to “Enliven the waterfront with a range of attractive uses integrated with adjacent upland communities”(p.9). This part of the plan acknowledges the advantages of having a waterfront. However in this case the commercial and housing uses take a main role. The acknowledgement that waterfront property has become very valuable is due to private developers looking to gain access to property even if it requires them to do some type of public service like cleaning contaminated areas or creating of Affordable housing. The main goal of the city is to develop the waterfront to be mix-use, while constructing much of the needed affordable housing, which will become essential as the city’s population continues to grow. To ensure a mix-use development the city will be rezoning some of the areas along the waterfront in alliance with different agencies that will ensure that the development happens as expected.

This goal of Vision 2020 will affect Flushing by “supporting and maintaining

active industrial uses of Flushing River north of Northern Blvd.”(p.140). With this, goal two as well as goal three which is to “Support economic development activity on the working waterfront.” (p.9) Will be working in conjunction as the development of housing as well as the development and conservation of industry will ensure that the areas affected will stay as diverse as they are now. Since a main element of the plan will be to connect neighborhoods, by the use of the water greenway and bicycle paths the flushing waterfront will be able to once again have access to some of the industries that continue to be there and have access to much needed affordable housing and open green space.

Improving water quality is another goal of Vision 2020. As stated in the plan, “Improve water quality through measures that benefit natural habitats, support public recreation, and enhance waterfront and upland communities” (p.9). The city’s intention of bringing attention to the water has contributed to efforts to clean the water and to accommodate activities such as swimming, fishing and boating. These changes have allowed for the water to be the cleanest in the last 100 years and make such activities a reality in 75% of the water (p.66). The city is continuing this process of detoxification until achieving completely accessible waters. For the area of Flushing, this means that there will be research conducted on the circulation of the water and special attention will be paid to the city’s plans for Willits Point where they seek to “(B)reak ground on sanitary sewers and outfall controls” (p.140) since much of the water development in the Flushing area depends on the Willets Point transformation.

Several additional goals are to “(R)estore degraded natural waterfront areas, and protect wetlands and shorefront habitats”(p.9) and “(E)nhance the public

experience of the waterways that surround New York—our Blue Network” (p.9). While these goals are different, they share an important concept which is to have full access to the water. The goals will ensure that the water continue to grow in ecological properties, and that people have access to a wide range of water-related activities. These two goals will be an important element in the conservation and improvement of the Flushing River which the city has deemed as an important source of animal life and possible recreational site once it is fully cleaned. The Flushing Bay will become a great attraction for its residents as well as tourists since people will be able connect to one of the city’s natural resources.

The ideas behind Vision 2020 will bring great responsibility to the city as indicated by the goal to “(I)mprove governmental regulation, coordination, and oversight of the waterfront and waterways” (p.9). This means the city will have to ensure that it is doing all it can to implement the necessary regulations to allow the plan to go forward. Part of this will require the city to “(I)dentify and pursue strategies to increase the city’s resilience to climate change and sea level rise” (p.9). These final elements of Vision 2020 represent a city wide effort to continue to improve the city beyond the re-use and construction of its waterfronts. The awareness of the city to take into consideration the governmental importance that it will play in the following years will hopefully be the difference that will set this development apart from many attempted in the past.

According to improvements proposed for Reach 11: Queens Upper Easter River of the *Vision 2020: The NYC Comprehensive Waterfront Plan*, the NYC Department of City Planning hopes to accomplish three goals on the Flushing River waterfront: 1. Support the process of the Brownfield Opportunity Area Program and

advocate for residential and mixed-use development; 2. Increase public access to the waterfront and enhance pedestrian and bicycle traffic across the Flushing River; and 3. Support and maintain the industrial use of the Flushing River north of Northern Boulevard.

Vision 2020 will be put into effect in the following years and it is expected to come to a conclusion in the next ten years as the funding and maintenance will be in the hands of different agencies and patrons. The citywide efforts will cross the lines of public and private to bring the people of New York a waterfront that is accessible to many who have never even seen their local waterfronts. This is in great part the case for Flushing where most residents have never been to Flushing River or have seen the Flushing Bay. The Vision 2020 plan represents the culmination of research and planning that corrects for the city's neglect of its waterfronts and surrounding water resources. Implementing its goals is bound to change New York City and offer new opportunities to connect New Yorkers to the natural environment both in and out of the water.

c. Flushing Willets Point Corona Local Development Corporation BOA

The FWCLDC's vision of the waterfront draws extensively from the Downtown Flushing Framework. The LDC recently received a New York State Brownfield Opportunity Area Grant to conduct a comprehensive planning and environmental study of the acre area along the eastern edge the Flushing River. Since receiving the grant approval, the FWCLDC will prepare a BOA Nomination/Master Plan and Draft Generic Environmental Impact Study in order to address possible environmental consequences of redeveloping this study area. A main goal of the LDC is to bridge the gap between Downtown Flushing, Willets Point, and Flushing

Meadows Corona Park through the Flushing River. The LDC is also looking for solutions to relieve pedestrian and vehicular traffic on Main Street and Roosevelt Avenue. Furthermore, the LDC plans to work on rerouting bus routes to the waterfront and thus, make the waterfront accessible by public transportation. The LDC would like to draw in more commercial and residential activity towards the waterfront and westward towards College Point Boulevard, which would transform this area into a high-quality retail, entertainment, and residential destination. Another proposed use of the Flushing River would be a ferry service or water taxi to Manhattan and/or LaGuardia Airport.

In order to carry out this development vision and related projects, there may be extensive rezoning or a renaming of the waterfront area as a special district. The existing zoning on the waterfront is a C4-3, M1-1, and M3-1 which impedes the development potential and activity in this area. FWCLDC is proposing a rezoning of the entire area into a C4-4 zone which would enable more residential housing and recreational activity. The FWCLDC would also like the waterfront to be rezoned as a Special District. The DCP assigns specific regulations that a Special District waterfront area's development must abide by and the FWCLDC believes its proposed plans will be beneficial for the future use of the Flushing River and its waterfront.

Synthesis

The major stakeholders who have had significant influence and impact in the Downtown Flushing Framework all share a similar vision. They would like to create more open space in the community, redevelop the waterfront and increase public access to it, and enhance the quality of the commercial and residential space in

Downtown Flushing. The DCP will play a major role in advocating and carrying out the procedures should there be a need to rezone any areas of development and the NYCEDC is at the forefront of the proposed development projects in the area.

FWCLDC continues to work with the NYCEDC and is currently focused on planning for the revitalization of the waterfront based on new commercial and residential activity. Community groups such as AAFE, Community Board 7, and the MinKwon Center are following the development of these projects to ensure they are meeting the actual needs and concerns of Flushing residents and other stakeholders.

Although it will take time for the full execution of the Downtown Flushing Framework, the participation of these governmental, commercial and residential stakeholders reflects the importance of a combined effort in addressing the development needs of this growing community.

V. Resident Survey Findings

a. Respondent Demographic Characteristics

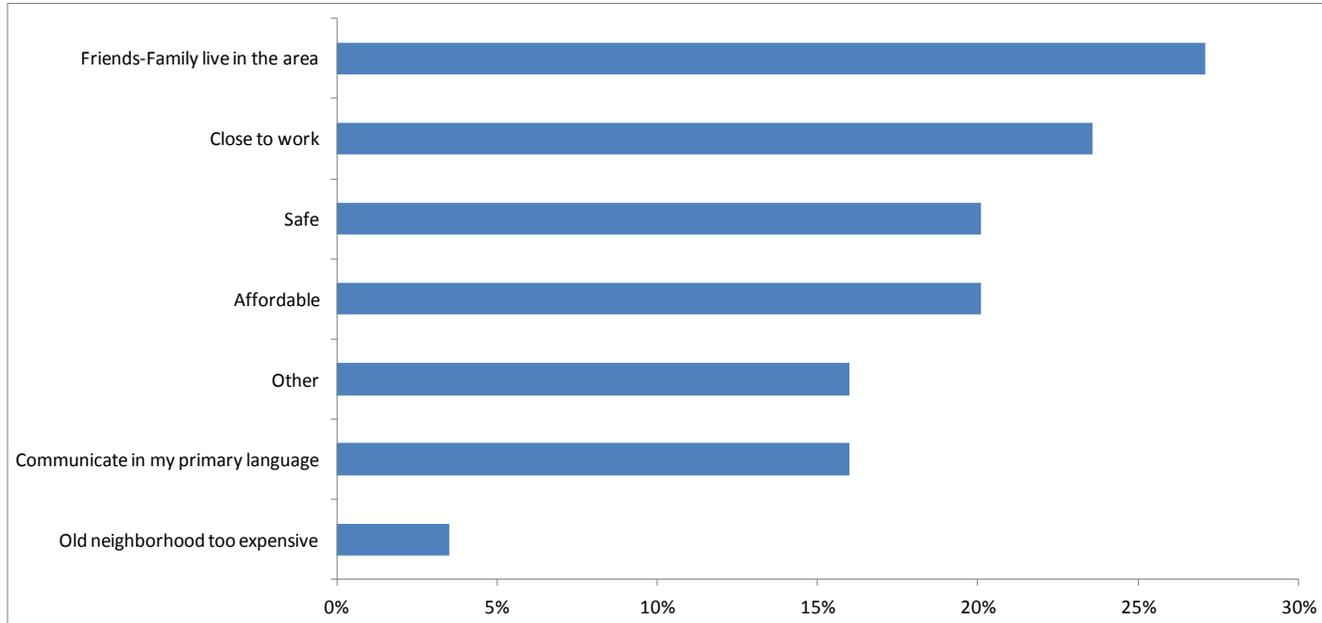
During a three week period between March 29, 2011 and April 22, 2011, QC Urban Studies students and MinKwon Center staff and interns surveyed approximately 200 Flushing residents and small business owners/managers. A total of 151 Flushing residents were surveyed. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the resident survey respondents. While a majority 60% of the resident surveys were conducted in English, surveys were also conducted in Chinese, Korean and Spanish. Nearly three in four residents surveyed are Asian with a majority 54% who are Chinese followed by Koreans at 25% of the resident survey respondents. Despite dominant perceptions of non-English speaking proficiency among Flushing's Asian population, a nominal 7% of the survey

respondents did not speak any English. While there is a range in the ages of survey respondents, the majority are working age. Reflecting the socioeconomic diversity of Flushing, there are clusters of respondents in low income as well as high income categories. Reflecting a seasoned immigrant population – nearly one in two survey respondents have been in the United States for sixteen years or more; and the great majority are US citizens or permanent residents.

Table 1			
Demographic Characteristics of Resident Survey Respondents			
Total Survey Respondents N= 151			
Race	148	Industry of Employment	142
Asian	74%	Service	23%
Latino	18%	Professional	18%
Black	4%	Retail	7%
White	3%	Food Service	6%
Other	2%	Construction	3%
Asian Ethnicity	104	Manufacturing	1%
Chinese	54%	Other Sector	29%
Korean	25%	Unemployed/Retired	8%
Asian Indian	8%		
Taiwanese	4%	Immigrant Status	144
Filipino	4%	US Citizen	65%
Other	6%	Permanent Resident	26%
English Speaking Ability	140	Non Immigrant Visa	7%
Not at all	7%	Undocumented	3%
A little	34%		
Fluently	51%	Years in the United States	144
Age Category	141	3 or less	10%
< 18 years	4%	4-7 years	16%
18-21 years	8%	8-11 years	15%
22-34 years	34%	12-15 years	11%
35-49 years	25%	16+ years	48%
50-61 years	15%		
62+ years	14%		
Household Income	134	Average Household Size	3.36
10k or less	11%		
10K-20K	19%	Survey Language	151
20K-25K	9%	English	60%
25K-30K	13%	Chinese	28%
30K-35K	5%	Korean	11%
35K-40K	5%	Spanish	1%
40K-50K	13%		
50K-60K	4%		
60K or more	21%		

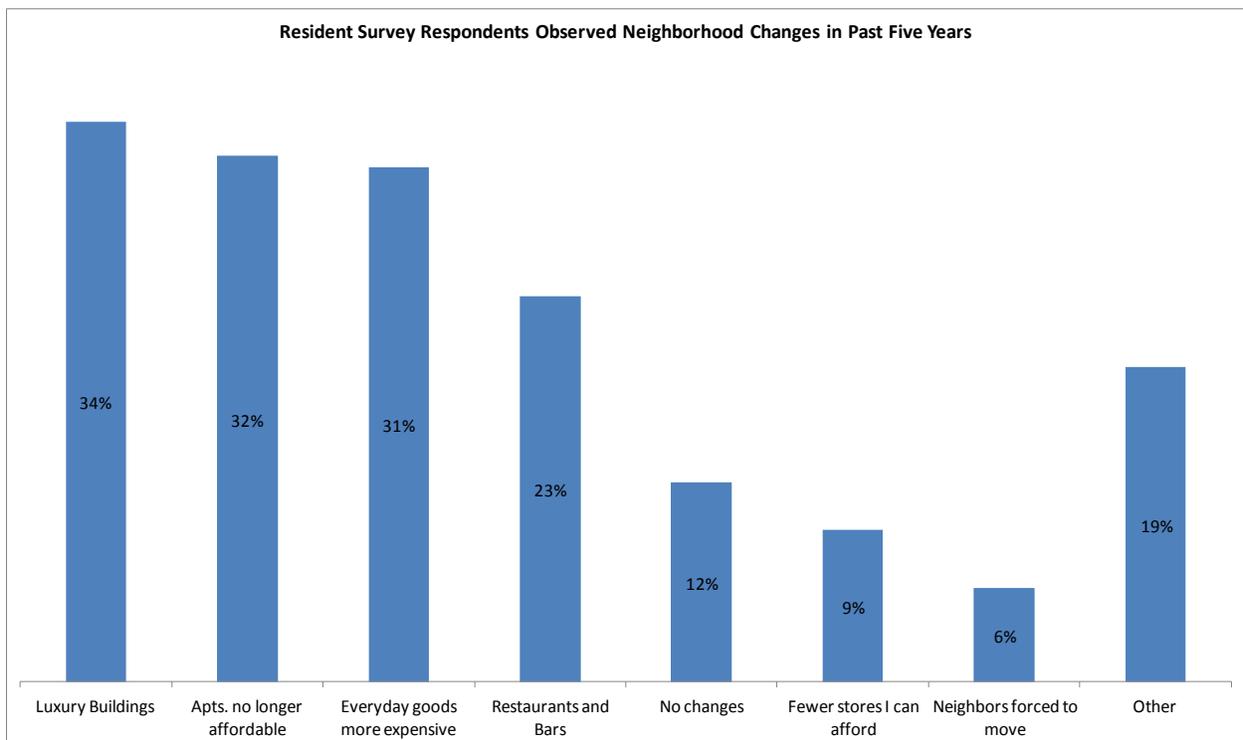
b. Reasons Survey Resident Respondents Moved to Flushing

When asked the reason why survey respondents located in Flushing, the most common response given was the proximity of friends and family followed by proximity to place of employment. Safety and affordability were also among the key reasons why survey respondents live in Flushing.



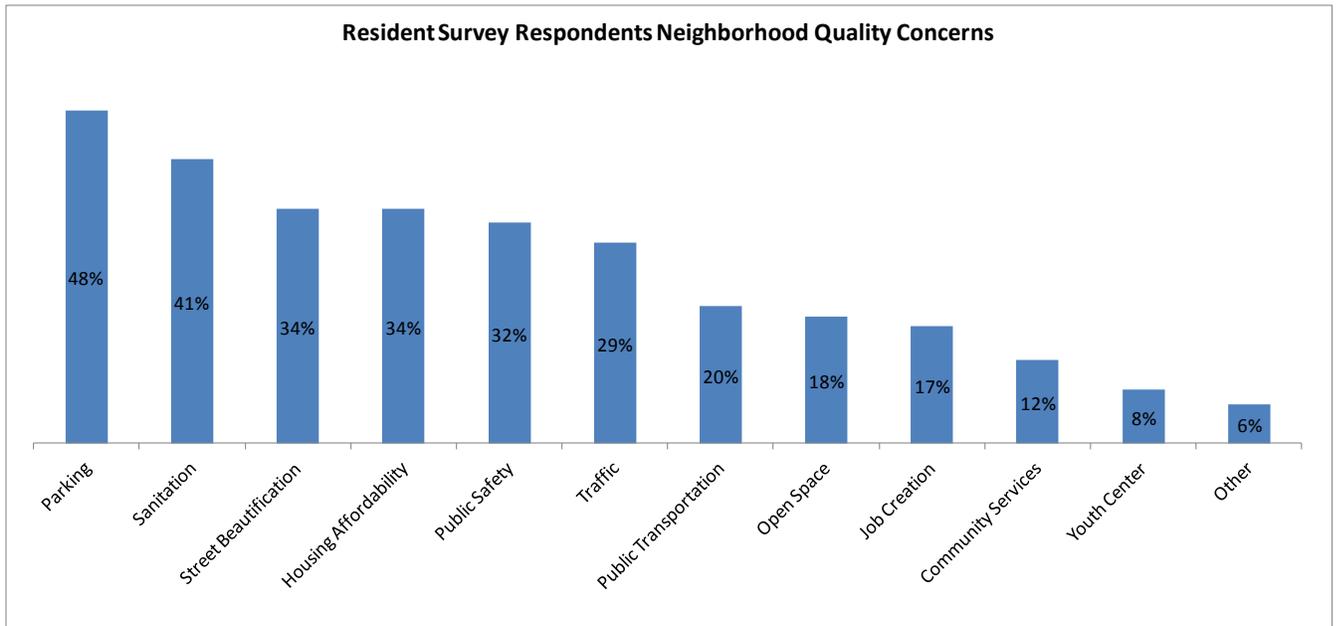
c. Resident Survey Respondents Observed Neighborhood Changes in Past Five Years

We were also interested in learning if Flushing residents observed changes in their neighborhood over the past five years. Only 12% of survey respondents noted that they did not observe any change in their neighborhood. A full third noted three important changes in the past five years – the increasing presence of luxury condominium buildings, the decline in affordable rental housing, and the price of everyday goods have risen. A smaller portion of survey respondents also noted the growing numbers of restaurants and bars. Other changes in Flushing in the past five years include greater population density and perceived overcrowdedness, increase in construction, and declining affordable housing and sanitation conditions.



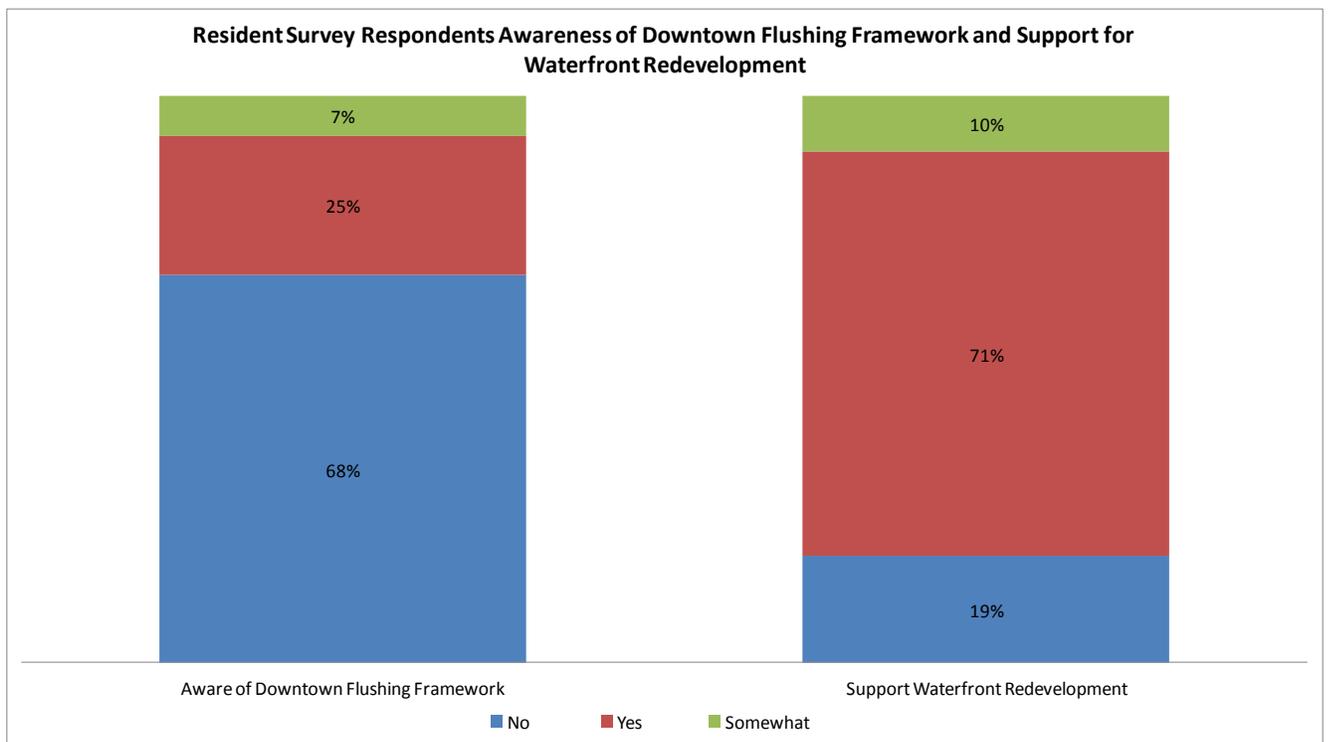
d. Resident Survey Respondents Neighborhood Quality Concerns

Nearly half of the survey respondents noted parking as a key concern regarding Flushing’s neighborhood quality. Comparably important are sanitation concerns. Clearly, these neighborhood quality indicators are related to Flushing’s dense downtown area. Street beautification, affordable housing, and public safety are also common neighborhood quality issues for resident survey respondents.



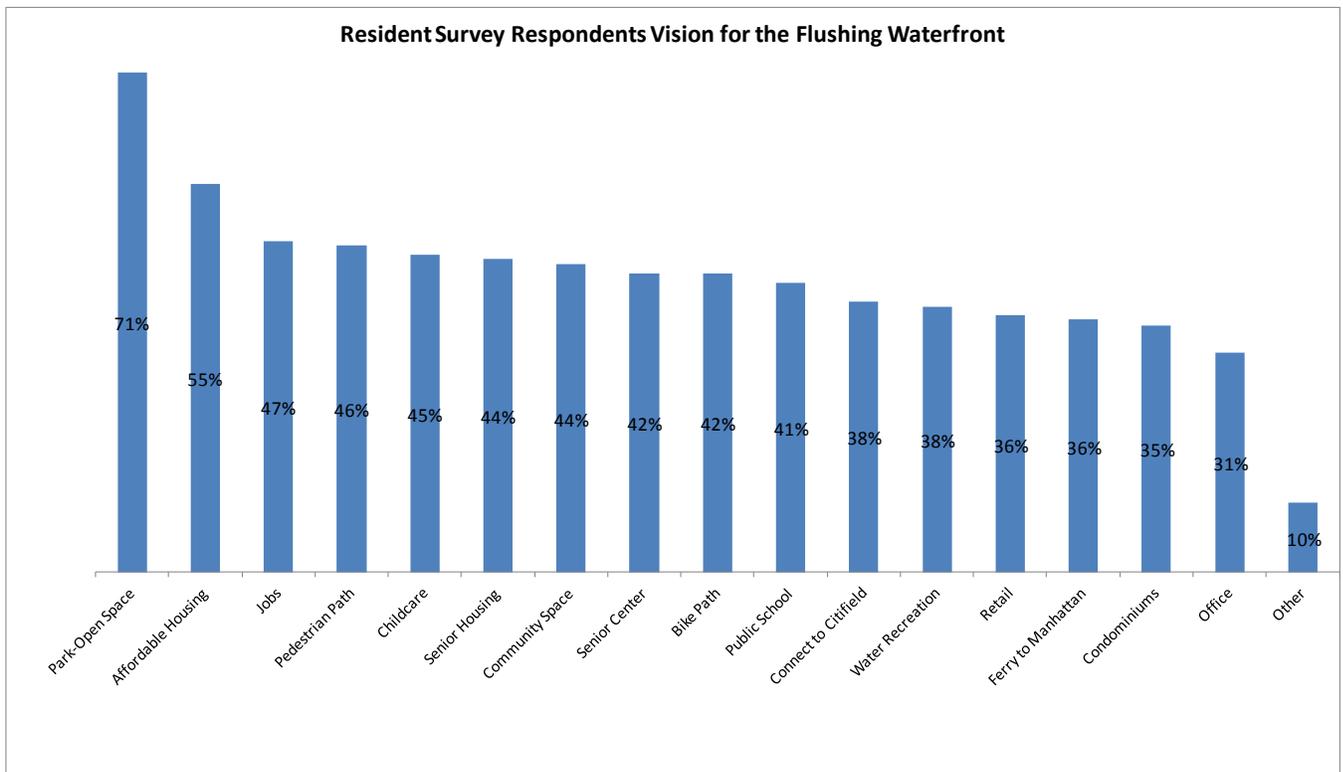
e. Resident Survey Respondents Awareness of Downtown Flushing Framework & Support for Waterfront Redevelopment

While an overwhelming majority of the surveyed Flushing residents are unaware of the NYC EDC’s Downtown Flushing Framework and related redevelopment proposals, nearly three-quarters of survey respondents favor the redevelopment of Flushing’s waterfront. The enthusiastic support for waterfront redevelopment was recorded in survey respondents’ comments that the “waterfront is now just wasted space” and “should be cleaned for people to enjoy”. Another respondent noted “waterfront needs to be cleaned; can be more friendly area for people”.



f. Resident Survey Respondents Vision for the Flushing Waterfront

When asked “How would you like to see the Flushing waterfront redeveloped?”, 71% of survey respondents indicated they would like to see open space or a park along the waterfront. In addition to green space, a majority of respondents also noted affordable housing should be included in the redeveloped waterfront. Nearly half of resident survey respondents also desired job creation on the waterfront. Social service needs including childcare, senior housing and center, and community space ranked high for survey respondents. Respondents also want a pedestrian and bike path along the waterfront.



VI. Small Business Survey

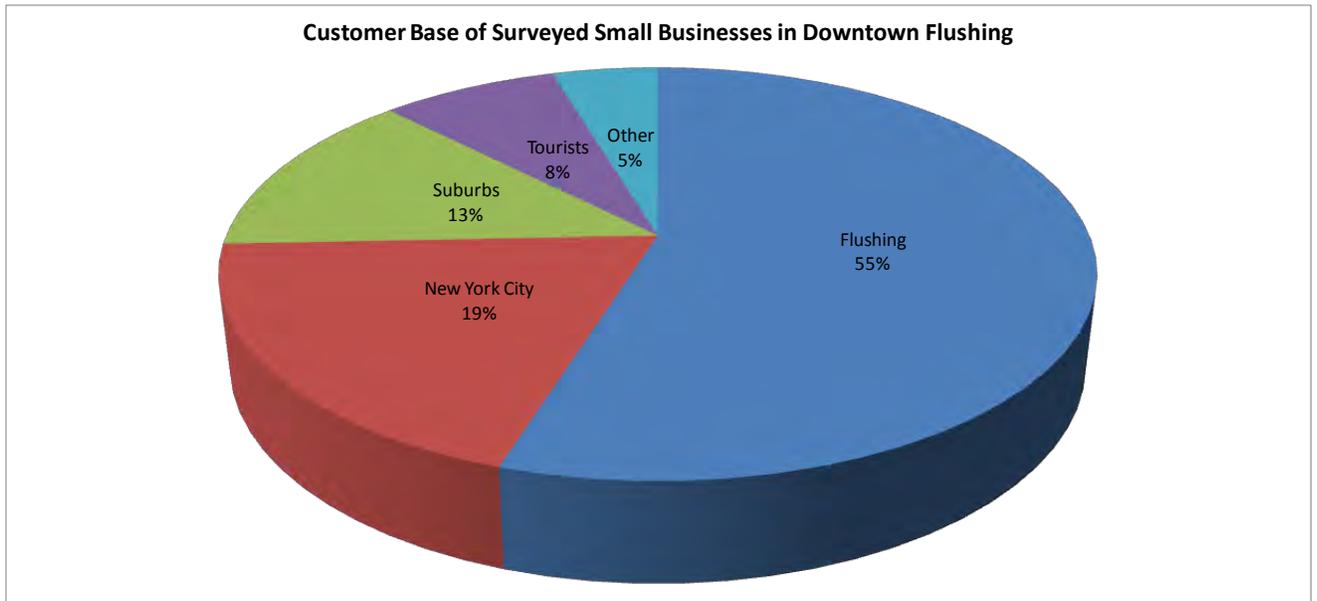
a. Respondent Demographic Characteristics

Just shy of 100, a total of 98 small business surveys were collected during the same three week period in March-April 2011. While the QC-MinKwon Center survey teams sought to interview the small business owner or manager, this was not possible in nearly one half of the surveys collected. Table 2 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the small business survey respondents. Among these respondents, virtually all are Asian with the majority who are Chinese followed by Koreans. A majority of small business survey respondents had limited proficiency in English. Interestingly, a robust 82% of small business survey respondents are also Flushing residents. Flushing businesses tend to be very small businesses and survey responses confirm this as the average number of employees is approximately five. Surveyed small businesses tend to be relatively new as the average number of years of operation is less than 10 years. Few of the small business respondents have received government assistance or are members of a formal trade or business association. Nearly all surveyed small businesses are renters which may account for the low response rate for Business Improvement District membership. In contrast to recent news coverage of Flushing's resilient local economy, a little more than half of the small business survey respondents noted the recession impacts in a worsening business climate.

Table 2	
Demographic Characteristics of Small Business Survey Respondents	
Total Survey Respondents = 98	
Race	98
Asian	97%
White	2%
Latino	1%
Asian Ethnicity	95
Chinese	66%
Korean	30%
Taiwanese	2%
Other	2%
English Speaking Ability	95
Not at all	5%
A little	66%
Fluently	28%
Flushing Resident	68
Yes	82%
Business Position	97
Owner/Manager	54%
Employee	46%
Average Number of Employees = 4.7 employees	
Average Years of Business Operation = 7.7 years	
Rents Business Location	87
Yes	93%
Business Climate	85
Better	6%
Worse	55%
About the same	39%
Government-Sponsored Business Assistance = 7%	
Member of BID, Chamber of Commerce, Business Association = 7%	

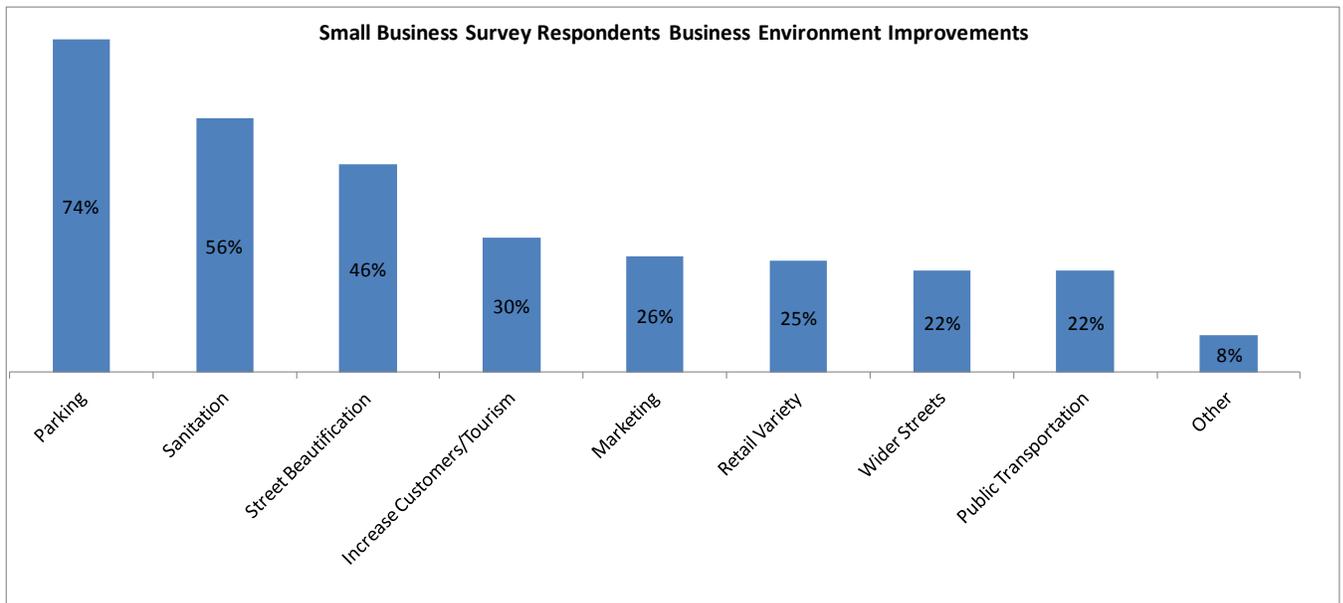
b. Flushing Business Market

While Flushing’s ethnic economy serves a regional market, more than half of the surveyed small businesses note their customer base is local. This finding coupled with the strong presence of Flushing residents among small business owners and employees suggests that Flushing’s ethnic economy is rooted in a local labor and consumer market.



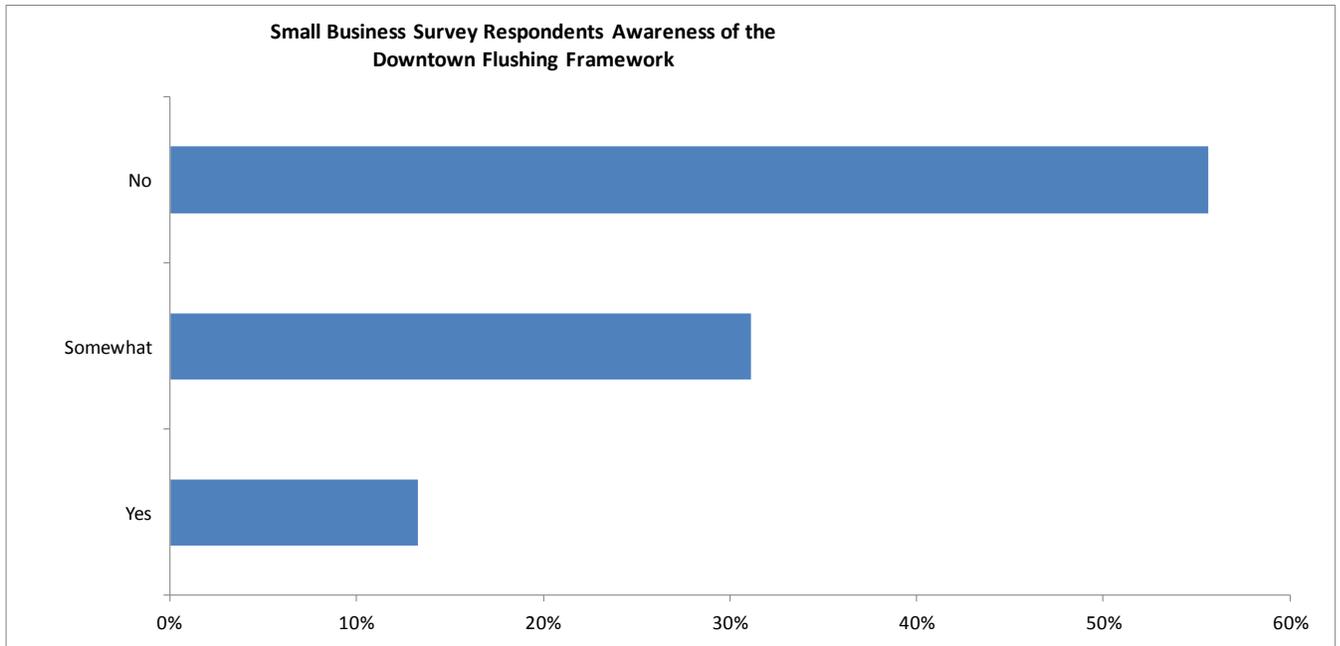
c. Small Business Improvements

It is notable that when asked how the Downtown Flushing business environment can be improved, the most common responses pertain to parking and sanitation. Improvements related to increasing tourism or customers and marketing did not resonate for most small business survey respondents. In addition to parking and sanitation improvements, nearly half of small business respondents noted street beautification.



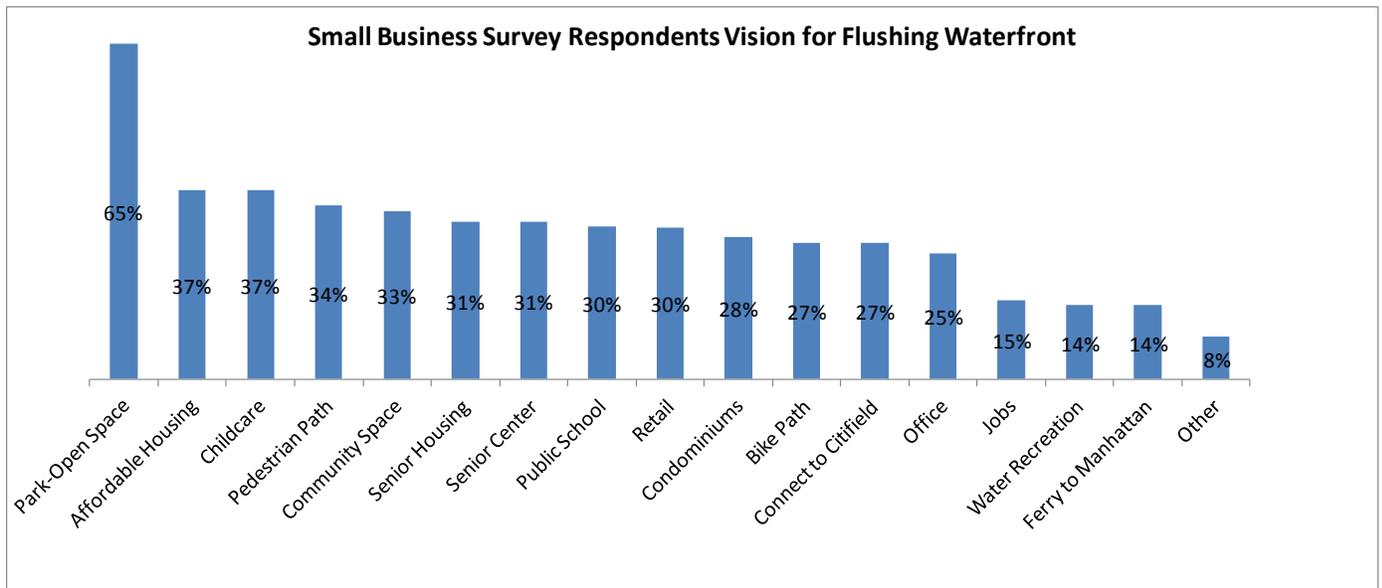
d. Small Business Awareness of Downtown Flushing Framework

Similar to resident survey respondents, the majority of small business respondents were not aware of the Downtown Flushing Framework or its related development proposals. However, it is notable nearly a third of small business respondents were somewhat aware of the NYCEDC plan.



e. Small Business Survey Respondents Vision for the Flushing Waterfront

The need for a park or open space along Flushing’s waterfront was similarly noted by small business survey respondents. The desire for green space in Flushing is not surprising in light of its dense urban environment. The strong consistency among both resident and small business survey respondents in their vision of a redeveloped Flushing waterfront that includes open space, affordable housing, and social services such as childcare , senior housing and senior center, and community space is notable.



VII. Conclusion

Our collaborative study of the Flushing waterfront found that the potential for this area to transform the neighborhood quality of Flushing and the relationship between the Downtown core, the river, and Willets Point is immense. While official plans such as the 2004 Downtown Flushing Framework lays out planning and development goals for this area, we found that Flushing’s Asian residents and small

business owners are generally unaware of these plans. Moreover, in surveying stakeholders, we found that the need for public access to a park or open space as well as the provision of affordable housing, jobs, and community services are central components of the community's vision for a redeveloped waterfront. To maximize community input and voice in waterfront planning, outreach and collaboration with community based organizations such as the MinKwon Center for Community Action is necessary.

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