

OFFICE OF THE  
BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT

VANESSA *L.* GIBSON



**Strategic Policy Statement**  
**September 2022**



Dear Neighbors,

In January, it was my honor and privilege to begin serving as the 14<sup>th</sup> Bronx Borough President. As the first African American and female to hold this important position, I am reminded each day of my purpose to serve the residents and families of Bronx County. I am committed and dedicated to serve and have been proud to lead The Bronx over these last several months. My team and I look forward to building relationships and creating access and opportunities for our youth and families. We are committed to ensuring that government invests in our borough as we build economic wealth for our working families together. In the eight months serving as your Borough President, I have traveled across the borough visiting many neighbors, talking to stakeholders, and attending meetings and events to hear firsthand from our constituents on important priorities and issues of concern.

This has not been an easy year so far. It began with a devastating fire at Twin Parks North West, which claimed the lives of 17 of our neighbors and left many more injured and displaced. We are facing economic uncertainty and the cost of living has grown significantly, placing burdens on already struggling families. And, through it all, we are still facing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is sickening thousands of our fellow New Yorkers every day.

Despite all of this, I still remain optimistic about the future of The Bronx. We are the birthplace of Hip Hop and El Condado de la Salsa. The Bronx is a mosaic of different cultures and ethnicities and a place of hope and opportunity for a better tomorrow. Our educators, essential workers, healthcare professionals, business leaders, parents, seniors, veterans, youth, and so many others contribute to making The Bronx a great place to live, work, and raise a family. We are so fortunate to have so many neighbors who are committed to improving our communities through hard work and building consensus to tackle the problems we face.

The New York City Charter requires each Borough President to release a Strategic Policy Statement every four years. This statement must discuss the long-term issues facing our borough, policy goals, and strategies to accomplish those goals. The following document represents the

fulfilment of that mandate for The Bronx over the next four years. However, it is more than that. It is a blueprint for tackling the most urgent challenges facing our borough.

These ideas arose from my history of public service, dating back to my time in the New York State Assembly and New York City Council and from conversations that my staff and I have had with stakeholders in our communities, from consultations with The Bronx's 12 community boards, and from feedback we received from our partners working on the ground.

This is my pledge to you: I will work diligently to enact the policies that I am proposing in this Strategic Policy Statement. I will do this in collaboration with anyone that wants to make The Bronx a better place to live, grow, and raise a family. I am committed to these goals and I hope you will join me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vanessa L. Gibson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vanessa L. Gibson

Bronx Borough President

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## **Executive Summary**

In accordance with the New York City Charter (Ch. 4 §82.14), the Office of the Borough President (the Office) is required to put out a Strategic Policy Statement every four years. This document fulfills this requirement for the 2022 cycle. The Charter requires the statement to be submitted to the Mayor, the City Council, and the Community Boards in the borough. The Statement must include a summary of the long-term issues faced by the borough, policy goals related to those issues, and proposed strategies for meeting those goals. Additionally, the Charter requires the Borough President to consult with the Community Boards in preparing this statement.

The long-term issues that face The Bronx are numerous and diverse. Our borough has many challenges in many different areas. However, they are all interconnected by the fact that The Bronx has seen decades of disinvestment, systemic racism, and entrenched poverty. But these issues are not so severe as to be irreparable. With the commitment of people all over The Bronx, change is possible to make The Bronx an ever-better place to live. The Borough President aims to stand at the forefront of that change, leading the way and proposing and enacting many of the policies proposed in this Strategic Policy Statement

Policy Goals and Proposed Strategies are interrelated – they are what we want to see and how we get there. All people who live in The Bronx have a different ideal for how their community should look. The Bronx is a borough of neighborhoods and the residents of the various neighborhoods are diverse. But all who live here share in the goal to make this borough the best it can be. Everyone shares a commitment to see our children safe, well-educated, and enjoying the greatest opportunities for success in the future. All Bronxites want their neighborhoods to be clean and free of violence, want local businesses to thrive and workers to be able to provide for their families, and want to live healthy in quality affordable housing.

How we accomplish this is more complicated. Simply put, The Bronx needs more. More services, more investment, more jobs, and more businesses. We also need better. Better healthcare, better education, better parks, and better emergency response. This Strategic Policy Statement lays out some of the precise ways in which these investments can be made to ensure that The Bronx is treated equitably with the other four boroughs. Bronxites deserve no less than this.

The policy recommendations in this Statement are divided into four broad categories. These categories contain the various issue domains that are relevant for understanding where we need to go as a borough.

The first section is “The Office of the Bronx Borough President,” which includes information about three of the major Units in the Office, namely Constituent Services, Budget and Capital Projects, and Community Boards. These three units help conduct many of the major activities that the Office does to support the public. The recommendations in these sections should help these units serve their purpose more effectively.

For Constituent Services, the Office’s Ombudsman Unit handles the issues that constituents need to have addressed. The recommendations in this section revolve around addressing some of the most common services that constituents need help accessing but that the city government is currently not optimally fulfilling. For Budget, the recommendations surround the capital budgeting process that the Office of the Borough President engages in on an annual basis. These recommendations would help recipients of the funding better able to access city funds. The recommendations regarding Community Boards involve improving the capacity and functioning of the boards as well as making the Office of the Borough President more efficient in dealing with issues that arise.

The second section is “The Bronx: Who We Are.” This section includes information about the various communities that make up The Bronx, with a focus on particularly vulnerable groups, including immigrants, the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, veterans, and young people. The proposed strategies in this section revolve around ensuring equity for the various communities that make up our borough.

For intercultural affairs and immigration, the recommendations include making the Office of the Bronx Borough President a place where all the communities in our borough can come to be supported and find resources. This includes through the support of the African Advisory and Inter-Faith Councils of the Office. Additionally, there must be better language access and anti-discrimination protections, particularly around employment.

For the LGBTQIA+ community, recommendations include improving healthcare access, including around HIV, sexual health, and Monkeypox. There are also recommendations about increases funding directed to the community and conducting more intersectional outreach. The community still faces discrimination when it comes to housing and employment as well, particularly among the Trans community.

For people with disabilities, the recommendations include improving city services. People with disabilities are very likely to consume government services, so we must ensure that the city is performing at its best when rendering services. There are also important recommendations around transit improvement and other transportation access, including Access-A-Ride.

Bronx veterans served our country and thus deserve all of the services that they are entitled to. In the Office, our veteran community is represented by the Veterans Advisory Council, and the Borough President will work towards strengthening this body. Additionally, the Borough President has recommended improving the Bronx Veterans Treatment Court and improving housing and mental health services for veterans.

These past few years have been a particularly difficult time to be a young person in our borough, due to the way that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted life and school. The recommendations regarding youth include centering youth voices, improving employment opportunities for young people, and expanding youth centers.

The third section of the report is “The Bronx: Where We Live.” This section includes recommendations surrounding land use, development, housing, fire safety, parks, and transportation.

There are many exciting opportunities when it comes to land use and development in The Bronx. There are many projects and rezonings occurring at the moment, and more will be coming in the future. The recommendations for land use and development include engaging in comprehensive neighborhood planning, supporting infrastructure planning, expanding community land trusts, and building out the Harlem River Greenway.

Housing has ranked among the most important issues to Bronxites. From residents of NYCHA, to rent stabilized units, to market-rate units, to homeowners, to Mitchell-Lama residents, ensuring affordable housing for all is essential to securing a prosperous future for The Bronx. The Borough President supports building and preserving affordable housing, in such a way that it means that Bronxites can continue to enjoy their homes and neighborhoods. Housing enforcement must be improved to ensure that everyone can live in a safe, well-maintained home. The Borough President supports acting now to ensure that NYCHA will be preserved for future generations. Homeownership opportunities are important to build generational wealth, and evictions must be prevented to avoid homelessness and other types of instability.

The Twin Parks North West fire on January 9 devastated our borough, leaving 17 of our neighbors dead. Newly sworn in, the Borough President quickly sprang into action to help the displaced survivors get the help that they needed to start to rebuild their lives. The Borough President has actively engaged with policy on this issue, including sponsoring legislation in the City Council. Some of her recommendations on the topic of fire safety and prevention include building inspections capacity, increasing penalties for heating and safety violations, increasing access to renters insurance, improving education, and providing more support to those affected by fires. No one should have to go through a devastating fire without sufficient support.

The Bronx's parks are some of our most beloved treasures. However, it is still true that our borough does not get equitable funding for parks as the other boroughs, especially accounting for private money as well as public. The Borough President has recommended achieving borough equity, engaging in capital improvements, supporting Friends of the Park groups and conservancies, and improving park cleanliness and safety as a way to tackle this disparity. The Borough President has also joined calls to achieve the One Million Trees Initiative and the expansion of recreation centers.

Transportation and the historical disinvestment of transportation access and alternatives have been long-standing and major issues affecting The Bronx. Many of our neighborhoods are transit deserts, with no subway or rail lines nearby. There are major improvements coming over the next few years that will help get The Bronx moving. These include four new Metro-North stops, Penn Station Access, and more bus and bicycle infrastructure. The Borough President has



also called for improving fare structures on the Metro-North, expanding the ferry system, and capping the Cross Bronx Expressway to fight air pollution and asthma. We must also end traffic violence to ensure that all pedestrians are safe on our streets and sidewalks.

The fourth section of the report is “The Bronx: How We Thrive.” This section of the Statement includes recommendations surrounding economic development, education, health, environmental justice, public safety, waste management, and digital equity.

There are many prime opportunities for economic development in The Bronx. Anchor projects such as the rehabilitation of Kingsbridge Armory are one of the major loci of development. Additionally, the Borough President is proud to support the Hunts Point Forward Plan, which will help funnel funding into the modernization and revitalization of the Hunts Point Market and the whole neighborhood. Other recommendations include supporting Business Improvement Districts, expanding tourism, expanding opportunities for MWBEs and LGBTQ+ business engagement, building more worker cooperatives, launching the nascent cannabis industry, and tackling the scaffolding that plagues the whole city.

Education is a key issue for the future of our borough. Young people are our greatest resource, and it is their vision that will transform The Bronx into all it can be. The education system is at the core of this. Making sure that our schools work for every student is essential to ensuring a bright future for The Bronx. Recommendations in this section include maintaining public school funding, expanding the number of community schools, training more teachers, expanding CTE and STEM offerings, creating more spots in Gifted and Talented programs and at specialized high schools, and bringing My Brother’s/Sister’s Keeper programs to all schools.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been renewed awareness about health inequities that plague our communities. However, this is nothing new for us in The Bronx. We have long experienced disproportionately negative health outcomes across many domains. This Statement tackles health issues across a broad array of areas, including maternal mortality, reproductive health, domestic and gender-based violence, mental health, opioids, asthma, diabetes, and food insecurity. The Borough President has created recommendations in each of these

domains. Additionally, the Borough President supports creating more school-based health programs and creating a real plan to tackle disparities.

On maternal health, the Borough President will support the Bronx Maternal Health Consortium, work towards creating a Bronx birthing center, and support local maternal health organizations. The Borough President will work to ensure that our reproductive health clinics have adequate funding to meet all demands. For issues related to domestic violence, the Borough President will partner with other advocates, healthcare organizations, the District Attorney, and others to ensure that we are able to end domestic and gender-based violence in The Bronx. This also includes combatting elder abuse.

The Borough President strongly supports expanding mental health response teams and the B-HEARD program to ensure that health emergencies have health responses. There are also recommendations surrounding suicide prevention. The opioid epidemic is a serious concern for many Bronxites, and more must be done to tackle the proliferation of drugs in our communities. The Borough President will work to ensure that all services in our borough are available and geared towards Bronxites who need them. The Borough President will push for more training for overdose prevention and the creation of an overdose prevention center in The Bronx.

Air quality is a long-standing concern in The Bronx, especially when it comes to asthma. This health concern is a historic and systemic issue that has long plagued the parts of the South Bronx known as “Asthma Alley.” The recommendations for dealing with asthma start with capping the Cross Bronx Expressway. The vehicles that pass through our borough on this highway on a daily basis spew pollution into the atmosphere, harming local residents. The Borough President also supports speeding electric vehicle conversions and improving access to asthma treatment.

Chronic illnesses like diabetes are a serious threat to the well-being of our communities. Closely tied to obesity and other health conditions like hypertension and heart disease, diabetes will be a major source of healthcare expenditure over the coming decades. The Borough President will conduct outreach among communities to ensure that all Bronxites know the best ways to protect their health and manage their chronic conditions like diabetes. Because diabetes is linked

with diet, the issue of food insecurity is closely related. The Borough President supports creating more local food connections, helping local retailers sell healthier options, and expanding healthy food options in our schools.

The Bronx is an environmental justice area that experiences disproportionate environmental harms. As mentioned above, air pollution is a serious issue. Beyond capping the Cross Bronx Expressway and transitions to electric vehicles, we can also act to close the peaker plants that burn fossil fuels spew toxins into communities. We must also protect and enable access to our waterways, prevent flooding, expand rooftop uses, and mitigate heat and noise. All of these are quality of life issues that also contribute to the cause of health issues and disparities.

Public safety is a major concern. All Bronxites deserve to feel safe in their communities, no matter where they live or who they are. The Borough President has developed several recommendations to ensure that we stamp out violence and crime in our neighborhoods. These include combatting violence in schools, cracking down on guns, increasing community engagement, improving mental health response, reducing recidivism, and supporting the crisis management system.

All Bronxites know that our city can do a better job managing the waste in our communities. When we see overflowing trash cans, garbage littering the streets, and our waterways clogged with junk, we know that things are not working as they should. The Borough President has created recommendations that will improve waste collection and storage, combat rats on our streets, expand recycling and compost, and engage in cleanup campaigns.

Lastly, the Borough President has issued recommendations surrounding digital equity. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, issues of digital, technology, and broadband access have become increasingly important. It was impossible for many of our students to transition to remote learning without either a computer or internet connection. The Borough President is committed to ensuring that broadband providers treat Bronxites as they are supposed to and will also support the expansion of the digital infrastructure including LinkNYC.

These recommendations are not an exhaustive list of policy ideas that should be implemented for The Bronx. There are many, many more ideas that the Borough President will

advocate for across all of these domains. Any Bronxite who has an idea is welcome to bring it up to the Office so it can be considered. No idea is too small or too outside of the box to think about. Making The Bronx the best it can be is the work of all of us, and we must begin this work together.

## **THE OFFICE OF THE BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT**

### **Constituent Services**

#### *Long-Term Issues*

One of the most important tasks that the Office of the Bronx Borough President undertakes is to assist constituents with their needs and address their issues and complaints. The Ombudsman Unit (the Unit) of the Office is responsible for providing case management services to Bronx residents seeking assistance with a variety of concerns. Case managers remain impartial, fair, and ethical throughout each interaction as they engage in conflict resolution and offer referrals and recommendations for resources. Although the primary function of the unit is to provide a link between government agencies and the public regarding government services, residents often require advocacy with landlords and other private entities.

The Ombudsman Unit connects residents to resources needed to improve their quality of life. During the pandemic office closure, the unit transitioned from in-person services to skillfully providing fully remote support to constituents. In 2020, the Office of the Borough President received 2,045 requests for assistance through email, phone calls, social media, and television broadcasts. The top five complaints were recorded as housing, municipal services, quality of life issues, health, and uniform services. In 2021, the same five categories remained the same, though in a slightly different order.

Common requests for assistance involve applications for Social Security and other public benefits such as housing assistance and legal services. The Ombudsman Unit also provides specialized services for Bronx seniors. The various government agencies can oftentimes be confusing and opaque for members of the public, and the Office of the Borough President is proudly committed to educating, advocating, and liaising on behalf of the public. There is often a direct link between the cases coming into the Office and new policy ideas that the Office generates. The Office will continue to hold bad actors accountable for the public goods and services provided in The Bronx.

As the first point of contact for Bronx residents, interactions with the Ombudsman unit can often shape how the public perceives the effectiveness of city services and response. Therefore, the Ombudsman Unit takes special care in responding to constituents experiencing difficulties

accessing crucial city services and support. The Borough President remains committed to advocating on behalf of all Bronxites to all levels of government, holding agencies and officials accountable, and providing public education about what services and supports are available. The Borough President knows that the best way to do this is to ensure that the Ombudsman Unit is functioning optimally.

On housing, the Ombudsman Unit deals with many issues regarding homelessness, evictions, and NYCHA, among others. For example, the Unit helps constituents gain access to one-shot deals through the Human Resources Administration (HRA), helps them with how to file electronic documentation for individuals without access to technology or internet, and handles complaints about issues in NYCHA and homeless shelters. Additionally, the Unit will often help intercede with private landlords, despite the city having no authority over them. Through building up good will with property managers and owners throughout The Bronx, the Office is able to bring people to the table and get concerns addressed in many cases.

When it comes to NYCHA, the Ombudsman Unit has heard many complaints regarding maintenance issues, failures to enact repairs and other customer service issues. While the Borough President is happy to have the Ombudsman Unit help act as intermediaries with NYCHA, it is not acceptable that NYCHA has failed to deal with tenant complaints in a timely manner without outside interference. The Ombudsman Unit will continue to cultivate the necessary relationships with various levels of NYCHA's administration in order to advocate on behalf of disenfranchised tenants. It is unconscionable for residents to go months without necessary repairs to walls, stoves, fridges, roofs, and more. As a champion for both equity and change, the Borough President will continue to advocate for better services at NYCHA.

Some of the other issues that Ombudsman Unit has heard relating to housing include dealing with pandemic-era rental arrears, outstanding repairs, housing court issues, securing rental assistance, and trouble with finding housing, especially for households with subsidies or vouchers.

Many of the cases that the Ombudsman Unit deals with come from seniors. Bronx seniors are very diverse when it comes to ethnicity, immigration status, disability, and education. Most seniors are retired or otherwise not working, and most receive some sort of public benefit such as Social Security. The Ombudsman Unit hosts many events for seniors, including lunchtime concert

series, sweetheart luncheons, grandparent luncheons, senior cancer survivor events, gospel concerts, and networking luncheons.

Not only will the Office of the Borough President continue to act as a social service provider for seniors, but we will continue to build non-profit social networks to continue to support Bronx elders, particularly those who are low-income. Many seniors are reliant on social service programs for daily meals, applications for public benefits, health education, and recreational support. The Ombudsman Unit interacts with a large number of aging residents who often lack the support needed to address a variety of concerns that include apartment and housing repairs and many more issues.

### *Policy Goals*

The Borough President's goal when it comes to handling constituent issues is that every constituent who comes to the Office has their case handled fully, in a timely manner, and to the best possible resolution for that individual. Not every case is something that the Office can handle, whether that is because it is beyond the scope of government to handle or that the complaint must be referred elsewhere. But it remains the overarching goal that every constituent is treated with respect and that their concerns are handled quickly and appropriately.

The complaints that come into the Ombudsman Unit help to inform the policy recommendations all throughout this report. The Borough President believes that policy should be grounded in the needs and wants of local Bronx residents. Buy-in from residents is essential in ensuring that enacted policies work as best as possible. The following proposed strategies are some of the most important that have arisen out of the work of the Ombudsman Unit, but constituent cases inform the recommendations all throughout this Strategic Policy Statement.

The Office of the Borough President will be installing a new constituent services response system for managing and storing constituent requests. This upgraded software will ensure that there is appropriate follow up and that cases are being tracked appropriately. Additionally, a new phone system will be installed as well. These changes will help ensure that the high demands of the Ombudsman Unit will be met.

## *Proposed Strategies*

**Improve the Housing Voucher System:** New York City has not always been the best actor when it comes to making timely payments for voucher holders. Sometimes, these tenants are taken to court for rental arrears that the city has agreed to pay. If tenants are expected to pay their landlords on time, then the city should be held to the same standard when entering these three-way agreements. Recertification is taking months to accomplish with little communication to the tenants. Relatedly, programs such as one-shot deals must be processed promptly to ensure that no one ends up being evicted when that could be avoided. The Borough President supports improving the timeliness of the city's housing support agencies processes.

**Hire More Housing Ambassadors:** There are insufficient housing ambassadors to provide for all of the local residents who are applying for housing through public applications each year. The housing ambassadors are based in community-based organizations and contracted through HPD and HDFC. There are only eight organizations that serve The Bronx, compared with up to 27 in Manhattan. This number must be increased to help Bronx residents gain equitable access to this help. Our residents require nothing less than the full support of the city government.

**Improve NYCHA Maintenance Response Times:** It is taking far too long for repairs and maintenance at NYCHA housing to get made. This has been a long-standing issue for many year, and the backlog still remains. There are many vacant positions that NYCHA must strive to fill and the backlog must be eliminated. There, however, can be no repeat of the past abuses in which residents were marked as not home when there was in fact no attempt made to stop by. Public housing residents need our full support to live safe and secure lives in the housing stock paid for by the public.

**Improve Technology Access for Seniors:** During the pandemic, many government agencies altered their procedures to allow for electronic applications for benefits. This included the Department of Finance application for the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE). However, the issue remains that many Bronxites, especially seniors, do not have access to the technology or broadband required to utilize these online applications. The Borough President will continue to advocate for senior services programming such as OATS that will provide computer training and support to the aging



population. The Ombudsman Unit will continue to advocate for these seniors and help them get their applications processed.

## **Budget and Capital Projects**

### *Overview of the Capital Budget Process*

One of the most important roles that the Borough President has is as a distributor of public capital funding. Under Sections 82, 211, 244, 245, and 249 of the New York City charter,<sup>1</sup> the Borough President participates in the budget process for the city government. In particular, the borough presidents collectively allocate a five percent of the city's capital budget each fiscal year. The amount of the funding for each borough president depends on the population of the borough, the area of the borough, and the size of the overall city capital budget, as determined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

During the capital budget process, the Borough President considers community, neighborhood, borough-wide, and citywide needs. The process begins each fall, when the community boards hold budget hearings with the city agencies to discuss capital and expense budget needs within their districts. They then submit statements of priorities and needs for the next fiscal year to the mayor's office for consideration. In January, the mayor releases the preliminary budget for the next fiscal year, as well as responses to the community board budget priorities. The boards then review the preliminary budget and submit a written response to the mayor.

The Borough President holds budget hearings allowing institutions, organizations, and the public to testify on the preliminary budget. The Borough President will then issue a set of recommendations to the Mayor and City Council for modifying the capital proposals in the form of a Borough Board Budget Priorities Report, which the Borough Board must approve.

Letters of interest for capital funding from the Borough President's office must be submitted by interested organizations by Martin Luther King Jr. Day. For non-city owned projects, the requesting organization must also submit documents from the online CapGrants application administered through OMB. The Borough President will consider the applications for funding based on a holistic assessment of both the individual project in question as well as how it fits in with the identified needs of The Bronx as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

After the Borough President decides which projects will be funded, the money will be allocated through the greater city budget, not directly through the Borough President's office. The funding will be inserted as a line item in the budget of the relevant city agency. Once the city's budget process is complete, the city sends an award letter to the agency, which will work with the awardee to distribute the money for project completion.

It is important to note that the Borough President only deals with capital funding and not operations or expense budgets. Capital funding generally involves the construction, renovation, acquisition, or installation of a physical public improvement with a value of \$50,000 or more and a useful life of at least five years. The minimum city contribution to a project involving real property (land or building) is \$500,000, and the minimum city contribution to a project involving moveable property is \$50,000.

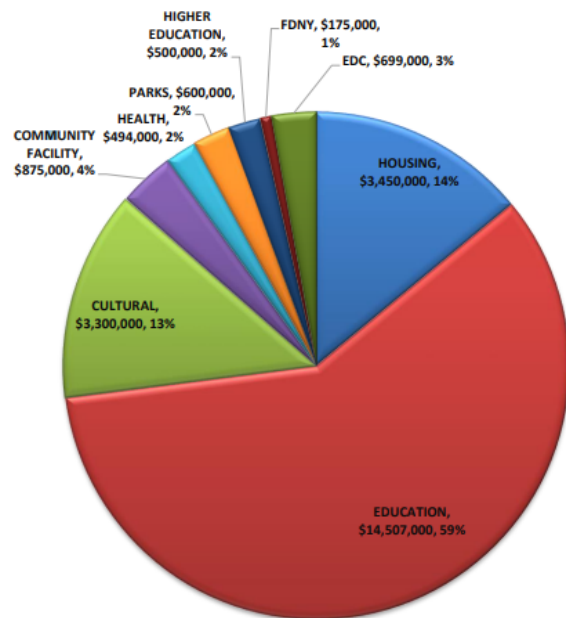
#### *Fiscal Year 2023 Overview and Notable Projects*

For Fiscal Year 2023, which began on July 1, the Borough President's office allocated \$24.6 million in capital funding to 119 organizations. The largest share of these allocations was to educational projects – 96 of 119 projects went to our local schools, representing \$14.5 million or 59 percent of the overall financial allocation. These projects included funding for building and upgrading STEM and computer labs in schools, providing students with technology such as laptop computers, funding Active Panels, Promethean Boards, White Boards, and Smart Boards, and building robotics and hydroponic science labs. The pandemic further exposed the profound education imbalances faced by Bronx students. With these funding allocations, the Borough President is taking a crucial step towards bringing educational and digital equity to Bronx students.

Additionally, the Borough President allocated funding to several large physical improvements in our schools. For example, the Borough President budgeted for the completion of the auditorium upgrade at MS 22, auditorium upgrades at JHS 80, and cafeteria renovations at IS 131 and PS 73.

The next largest category for projects funded was housing, accounting for \$3,450,000, or 14 percent of the total across seven projects. This money will help bring over 600 units of affordable supportive housing and homeownership opportunities, as well as the rehabilitation of 126 units. Cultural capital projects were the next largest category at \$3.3 million, or 13 percent of the total across six projects. This includes funding for the Universal Hip Hop Museum, the Bronx Zoo, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, the New York Botanical Garden, Pregones Theatre, and Wave Hill. These important cultural institutions are the anchors of our borough and must be fully supported.

The remaining funding was spread across health, economic development, community facilities, parks, and the FDNY. This funding includes money for Union Community Health Center, St. Barnabas Hospital, and the purchase of a new bariatric ambulance for the FDNY.



CATEGORY	PROJECT #	REQUEST TOTAL	% TOTAL
HOUSING	7	\$3,450,000	14%
EDUCATION	96	\$14,507,000	59%
CULTURAL	6	\$3,300,000	13%
COMMUNITY FACILITY	2	\$875,000	4%
HIGHER EDUCATION	1	\$500,000	2%
PARKS	1	\$600,000	2%
HEALTH	2	\$494,000	2%
EDC	3	\$699,000	3%
FDNY	1	\$175,000	1%
TOTAL	119	\$24,600,000	100.0%

### Middle School 22

The Borough President allocated \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2023 capital funding alongside Councilmember Althea Stevens who allocated an additional \$500,000. This capital allocation will complete the renovation of the school’s auditorium and transform the 2,700 square foot facility

into a state-of-the-art space. These funds will benefit the over 1,200 students currently enrolled at the campus and foster freedom of expression. The renovation will include new flooring, seating, and HVAC system, and curtains with rigging and lighting upgrades.

### Universal Hip Hop Museum

The Borough President allocated \$2,000,000 in Fiscal Year 2023 capital funding. This funding will support construction of the museum's Hall of Respect Theater, the crown jewel of the museum's new home at the Bronx Point. The UHHM broke ground in May 2021 and is now undergoing full construction of its 55,000 square foot space. The 260 seat Hall of Respect Theater at the Universal Hip Hop Museum will support live performances, educational forums, town hall meetings, movie premieres, and immersive experiences. The Hall of Respect will be Hip Hop's own space where the creative contributions of the culture's icons are immortalized forever and where this art form is celebrated.

### Throgs Neck Little League

The Borough President allocated \$600,000 in Fiscal Year 2023 capital funding, alongside an additional \$600,000 from Councilmember Marjorie Velazquez. This funding will go towards Phase 2 Installation of Green Infrastructure: the solar canopy project/Millennial Energy Project (MEP) Net Zero energy generation and electrical storage, which is critical to creating a net zero facility, reducing area pollution, and inspiring the community to pursue sustainable energy within their homes.

### Bronx Community College

The Borough President allocated \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2023 capital funding, alongside \$475,000 from Councilmember Pierina Sanchez and \$75,000 from Councilmember Eric Dinowitz.

This funding will go towards the final phase of the Gould Memorial Library Elevator installation, which will service the full building. A total of \$14 million in capital improvements have been made to the building. During the summer of 2019, construction began to restore the roof, dome, and windows and to create a new egress to the rotunda of the building. Out of that \$14 million, the members of the Bronx Delegation of the New York City Council allocated \$6.9 million.

### The Bronx Zoo

The Borough President allocated \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2023 capital funding, which will go to the restoration of the Pheasant Aviary, a popular and free exhibit that includes a long row of enclosures that house a large variety of bird species that include such beautiful birds as the Red-legged Seriema, Cabot's Tragopan, and the Red-billed Blue Magpie. The building and its outdoor exhibits opened in 1906 and are currently in need of restoration.

### Woodstock Terrace

The Borough President allocated \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2023 capital funding, alongside \$500,000 from Councilmember Althea Stevens. This capital allocation will modernize the balconies and fund the installation of a new roof. Woodstock Terrace Mutual Corporation is a Mitchell-Lama Cooperative and is organized under the Limited-Profit Housing Companies Law of the State of New York. It is operated under the supervision of the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) of the City of New York. The objective of the organization is to provide affordable accommodations for persons of moderate income in accordance with the cooperative principles. Woodstock Terrace has two buildings comprising 320 residential units located at 890 and 920 Trinity Avenue in The Bronx.

## *Policy Goals*

The goal of the Borough President and her office when it comes to the capital budget allocations is to ensure that our Bronx communities, organizations, and institutions get the funding that they deserve in order to best achieve their missions and serve The Bronx.

There remain several issues when it comes to organizations getting funding. There is often a lack of knowledge among CBOs and other entities when it comes to deadlines, paperwork, and other required steps in the process to applying for and receiving capital funding. One area of particular concern is the differing deadlines for submission of various documents to the Borough President's office, the City Council, and OMB. Additionally, organizations need to know what the appropriate size of their request should be, in dollar terms. These organizations need better training to ensure that they are able to submit their requests complete and in a timely manner.

When an organization submits an application with a defect, there should be ample opportunity for the organization to correct such defect. The Bronx is not well served if organizations lose out on funding they otherwise would have received because of technical or paperwork errors.

## *Proposed Strategies*

**Conduct Trainings for CBOs:** The Borough President's office will conduct trainings for CBOs during the fall months to ensure that they fully understand the process in advance of the deadlines in the beginning of the year. Currently, the city Department of Education and the School Construction Authority conduct training sessions with the schools. The Office of the Borough President will work to help other organizations get the same level of training so their requests can be fully considered. We will work with agencies like the Mayor's Office, OMB, and EDC to this end. The Office will work with the city agencies to improve technical assistance for applicants, especially the CBOs who do not have long experience applying for funding. The Office will promote the budget process, so groups and individuals know what funding and technical assistance is available.

**Improve Application Defect Correction Policies:** The Borough President will work with the Mayor’s office, the City Council, and other city agencies to advocate for them to adopt policies that more easily enable applicants for city funding, particularly nonprofits, to correct defects in their applications. The application process can often be labyrinthine and onerous, especially for small nonprofits, many of which are applying for city funding for the first time. Much of the essential service provision in our city is done by local organizations grounded in the communities they serve. We should do as much as possible to ensure that they are not missing out on funding for technical reasons. One of the major issues for organizations’ applications identified by the Office of the Borough President has been the organizations lacking the necessary documents that OMB requires or failure to respond to OMB requests in an allotted time frame. While there is a corrections period of up to four weeks, in many cases organizations are still not able to provide the needed documentation to ensure their applications are considered.

**Advocate for a Greater Share of the Capital Budget:** Currently, the five borough presidents split five percent of the discretionary portion of the capital budget that the mayor presents each year. The overall capital budget for fiscal year 2023 was \$14.82 billion.<sup>3</sup> This share should be increased. The borough presidents are on the ground, dealing with constituents every day and are better able to advocate for projects through a borough-wide lens than any other elected officials are. The Mayor should allocate a greater share of the budget to the borough presidents on a discretionary basis, and the Borough President will advocate for this with the Mayor’s office and OMB.

**Improve Funding Disbursement Backlog:** The Office of the Borough President has heard from organizations receiving city funding from multiple sponsors that there is a backlog in getting awarded funding disbursed. The city must speed up the process so that the organizations can get their new capital items up and running as quickly as possible. The Office will work with the Mayor’s office to fulfill the promises of the “Clear the Backlog” initiative.



## **Community Boards**

### *Long-Term Issues*

Bronx Community Boards consist of dedicated community members who volunteer their time to make their neighborhoods a better place. Assisted by diligent office staff, they help our communities prosper by carefully reviewing new housing and commercial developments, monitoring the delivery of city services, and participating in the formulation of budget priorities for the community.

With any new major housing or economic development project, community board staff is required to provide the necessary analysis for these projects to board members, conduct outreach to the local community, and provide board members with the information on the various projects. Many times, these projects are large and complicated, and the community boards do not have the professional expertise to analyze environmental impact statements, traffic studies, and zoning analysis that are prepared by professional consulting firms for these developers.

Community Board budgets are small compared to other city agencies and they are tasked with many different responsibilities. There needs to be a way for community boards to access professionals in these areas when reviewing these large projects. Developers have many consultants, attorneys and public relations professionals to get their message out to the community. The developers have an advantage when coming into communities that are not well versed in development policies and need assistance in providing them technical advice.

Each fall, the Office of the Bronx Borough President begins the community board application process. The office makes the application available as widely as possible, sending it out to community members through various channels, posting it on the website, and making physical copies available in the office.

Once an individual applies, the applicant has an interview with a member of the Borough President's community board team. The City Council members also make recommendations for appointment, and the council members meet with the Deputy Borough President to discuss their recommendations.

The Borough President will make appointments to the community boards based on the qualifications and experience of the applicants, while taking into account characteristics to ensure diversity on the board. These characteristics include race, age, gender, LGBTQ status, veteran status, disability, union membership, housing tenure, neighborhood residence, and professional background. The Community Boards should represent the full richness of the community, so it is critical to ensure that all community members see themselves represented on the boards. For members seeking reappointment, the Borough President will also consider attendance and performance over the past term.

According to the most recent demographic report that the Office of the Borough President is required to release on an annual basis,<sup>4</sup> there were 505 community board members at the time of the report, meaning that there were 95 vacancies needing to be filled. This is a large proportion of the overall board spaces that are going unfilled.

According to this report, there were only three members across all of the boards who were 16- or 17-years old and an additional seven who are between 18 and 24. This does not comport with the stated goals to appoint the youngest members of the community to have a voice in their neighborhoods' futures. Instead, two-thirds of the board members were over the age of 45, including more than a quarter who were over 65. While the voices of these individuals are very important to the vitality of our communities, more must be done to ensure that youth voices are heard as well.

Among board members, 45 percent were Black (including Caribbean-Americans), 34 percent were Latino, and 16 percent were white. According to the 2020 census, 56.4 percent of Bronxites identified as Hispanic or Latino,<sup>5</sup> so clearly more must be done to recruit board members from that community. About six percent of board members identified as veterans, and about five percent were disabled. LGBTQ community members accounted for 4.2 percent of board members, but this included only two transgender or gender-non-conforming individuals across all twelve boards.

The report shows that 38.2 percent of community board members live in private homes. This is far above The Bronx's homeownership rate, which the 2017 American Community Survey

put at 19.1 percent.<sup>6</sup> In addition, this 38.2 percent understates the problem since it does not include owners of apartments such as those in co-ops or condominiums. When a given population is significantly overrepresented on the boards, the boards tend to reflect their viewpoints disproportionately. While Borough President Gibson is committed to expanding homeownership opportunities in our borough in order to build intergenerational wealth, the community boards must reflect Bronx neighborhoods as they exist now, not as we hope they may exist in the future.

The Office of the Borough President has provided the community boards with technical assistance and guidance in a number of different areas, including Freedom of Information Law (FOIL), DOITT records retention, city social media policies, conflict of interest issues, and remote meeting issues, in conjunction with the state Committee on Open Government.

### *Policy Goals*

It is important that community board members are representative of the communities that they serve and that they know the many city procedures and policies falling within the scope of their duties. It is important that members understand their role as community board members, and we must provide the tools for them to be effective at their jobs.

The Borough President is committed to appointing a diverse and representative board in every community district. This goes beyond mere demographic diversity and includes characteristics such as ensuring that the boards include individuals who live in public housing and who are renters, in addition to the homeowners who are currently overrepresented on the boards. Additionally, the Borough President will work to ensure that 16- and 17-year-olds are represented as the youth members on the boards. The youth are the ones who will be responsible for the flourishing of our communities in the long-term, so they must have a voice in their local government starting from an early age.

It is important that the community boards accurately reflect the concerns and opinions of the whole communities that they represent, including those historically disengage from the process and who cannot attend meetings, not just the loudest voices or the few that come to meetings. The

board members must engage with their neighbors to ascertain what the people are the ground are truly thinking and take that message back to the boards. The boards must neither be a rubber stamp for whatever proposals come before them, nor be a persistent stumbling block in the way of new development or housing. The boards must review every project on their own merits, in accordance with the needs of the whole community.

### *Proposed Strategies*

**Expand Recruitment:** The Office of the Bronx Borough President will expand recruitment efforts for residents to apply and participate in the Bronx Community Boards. The office will increase opportunities for residents to learn about the role of the community boards and how best to become active in their communities. The Office of the Borough President will hold informational sessions for potential candidates (in-person and virtual) to describe the responsibilities of board membership. The Office will work with the New York City Department of Education to provide guidance and information to eligible students aged 16 and over in Bronx high schools to apply to the community boards. The voices of the youth are an important part of the deliberations on issues that affect their communities and their peers. The Office of the Borough President will expand its communications and marketing, including through an increased presence in Spanish language media and social media. Hispanic Bronxites are underrepresented on community boards, so this will be a priority.

**Improve the Application Process:** The Office of the Bronx Borough President will strive to make it easier to apply to become a member. In the past cycle, the application was available in Spanish for the first time. The Office will fully digitalize the application process to eliminate the need to download a paper application and mail it to the office. The Office will work to eliminate the need for a notary signature on the application by requiring an alternative means of proof of identity.

**Improve Training for Board Members:** Once an applicant has been selected to serve on the board, it is the office's responsibility to assure that members are properly trained to fulfill their responsibilities. It is important to provide training opportunities for board members and an

emphasis must be placed on working collaboratively with other members and how to conduct efficient and productive meetings. The Office will accomplish this by:

- Continuing our New Member Orientation, which provides an overview of land use, budget, and service delivery issues by city agencies and the Borough President's staff. It also provides presentations by the Conflict of Interest Board, the New York City Human Rights Commission, and the New York City Civic Engagement Commission.
- Holding expanded training sessions open to all boards members with various city agencies to refine the skills highlighted in the orientation. Past sessions have included trainings regarding conflicts of interest, parliamentary procedures, and land use, in conjunction with the City Planning Commission, and the Human Rights Commission.
- Continuing to work collaboratively with the Civic Engagement Commission to develop the types of trainings that would most benefit the community board members.

**Provide Expanded Technical Assistance to Boards:** At present, the Office of the Bronx Borough President provides assistance to the community boards when it comes to technical assistance and other advice. The office will continue to provide this assistance as needed to the community boards and its staff. Since the pandemic, community boards have been allowed to conduct meetings remotely and many have indicated that they wish to possibly continue to provide this accommodation to both board members and the public. The office will work with the community boards to assist them in obtaining the necessary tools and training in order to make the community board meeting more accessible to the community. The Office will also work with the community boards on the availability of webcasting or providing the ability to broadcast community board meetings for the public through the cable TV public broadcast channels. This includes helping to identify sources of funding for boards to purchase equipment and operate their systems. The Office will help share community board member feedback and concerns about the remote meetings policy with the Governor's office.

**Provide Planning Assistance to Community Boards:** Community Boards need to either employ a planner or have access to a planner through the Department of City Planning (DCP) or the Office of the Borough President that can provide an unbiased assessment of these proposals. DCP currently has planners who act as liaisons to each Community Board and that relationship needs

to continue to be fostered so Community Boards have a point person for their questions. The Office of the Borough President has a Planning and Development division, which works with the constituent services and community board divisions to address planning-related questions that come up within the community. Community Board members are volunteers and most do not have the professional background to review these projects without some assistance. They must make decisions on important projects that, while located in their districts, have borough-wide implications, and sometimes members have not received all of the information necessary to make the best decision. As many of these projects are introduced to the community, some of them will go through the formal ULURP review process or other discretionary processes that have Community Board referrals, such as a BSA or LPC projects. Others will be as-of-right projects that the Community Boards will want to review and make statements about. It is essential that the Community Boards, as the voice of local residents, be given the tools they need to be partners in the discussions on the development of projects within their communities.

## THE BRONX: WHO WE ARE

### Intercultural Affairs and Immigration

As of the 2020 census, New York City had a population of 8,804,109. The Bronx had reached a new population high of 1,472,654 residents, making up 16.7 percent of the city’s total population. The Bronx population increased by 87,546 residents, or 6.3 percent, from the 2010 census. For perspective, if The Bronx were an independent city, it would be the seventh largest city in America, between Philadelphia and San Antonio. Compared to the other New York City boroughs, it has the fourth-largest total population and area (42 square miles) and third-highest population density (35,063 people per square mile).

The largest racial group in The Bronx is the Hispanic/Latino community, which accounts for almost 55 percent of Bronx residents. Among the Hispanic population, the largest two populations are those with Dominican (332,000) and Puerto Rican (273,000) heritage. Black and African American individuals account for the next largest racial group, accounting for approximately 28.5 percent of Bronx residents. Many residents identify with both groups, accounting for a large Afro-Latino population.

Race	Total	Percent
Hispanic/Latino (of any race)	806,463	54.80%
White Non-Hispanic	130,796	8.90%
Black/African American	419,393	28.50%
Asian	67,766	4.60%
Some other race	19,866	1.30%
Non-Hispanic of two or more races	28,370	1.90%
<b>Total population</b>	<b>1,472,654</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

2020 Census Data

Foreign-Born Location	Number	Percentage
Europe	25,175	5.00%
Asia	39,253	7.80%
Africa	56,036	11.10%
Oceania	333	0.10%
Americas	491,828	76.10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>612,625</b>	

2015 to 2019 ACS Data

Of Bronx residents, approximately 822,000 or 57 percent were born in the United States with the remaining approximately 612,000 or 43 percent being foreign-born and immigrating to the United States and settling in The Bronx (including people from Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories or born abroad to American parents). The largest immigrant groups are those from the Dominican Republic (203,000), Puerto Rico (106,000), Jamaica (49,000), Mexico (39,000), Ghana (19,500), Ecuador (17,500), Honduras (13,000), and Guyana (12,000).

With the Bronx having such a diverse borough and history of immigration from Central American, South America, and Caribbean countries, the borough has more residents whose primary language is Spanish (635,000) than residents who only speak English (540,000). This concentration of Spanish-speaking residents highlights the diverse nature of the borough and has instilled a sense of pride for many who live here. While The Bronx is proud of its culture, this language gap has created some challenges, creating a barrier for the over 345,000 Bronx residents who speak English less than “very well,” as defined by the ACS.

One of the fastest growing groups in The Bronx is the African immigrant community. This community is growing all across the country, but The Bronx has one of the largest populations in any county nationally. There are unique burdens that African immigrants face here in The Bronx. These include language barriers, racism, housing, healthcare, and immigration status issues.

Many issues that affect Americans generally are particularly acute among immigrant communities. One issue this applies to is healthcare. Immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants, are far more likely to be uninsured than non-immigrants.<sup>7</sup> Immigrants make up a disproportionate share of gig workers, and thus often do not have access to employer-sponsored health insurance. This can lead immigrants to avoid medical care due to cost, which can result in negative health outcomes, such as diabetes and hypertension.

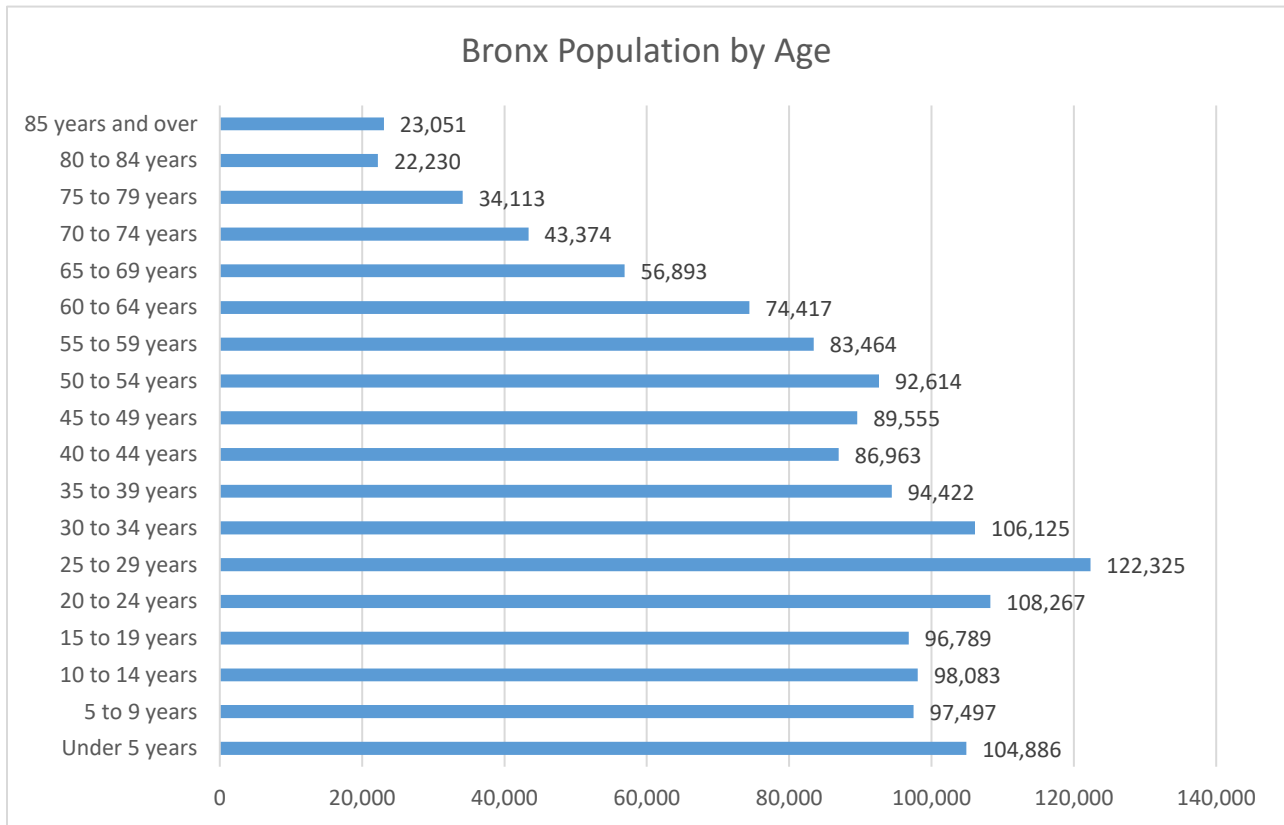
Immigration status issues are important to consider for immigrant communities. The immigration system is byzantine and can be overwhelming, especially for people who do not speak English well or at all. Many immigrants fear a change in status that could lead to deportation. Recent anti-immigrant policies under the previous presidential administration including increased ICE raids, family separations, and the public charge rule have also stoked concerns among immigrant populations and have disincentivized them from seeking government help or services. However, these policies have also often galvanized these communities and caused them to forcefully stand up for their rights and make their presence in our borough known.

Approximately 33 percent of immigrants to the United States have a bachelor’s degree or a higher level of education. Among immigrants from Africa, this number is even higher, at 41 percent.<sup>8</sup> This is a well-educated community, but these individuals are often underemployed for



their qualifications. More must be done to convince employers of the strength of foreign degrees, match individuals to job opportunities, and help immigrants obtain U.S. equivalents to their foreign qualifications.

The Bronx has a relatively stable population pyramid. Though it is important to acknowledge this data was collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unlikely that these projections have dramatically changed. While the pyramid is stable, The Bronx’s population is aging, and there is a significant senior population. This aging could soon result in greater demands on the borough’s healthcare infrastructure. While The Bronx is a leader in the healthcare industry with Montefiore providing more Bronx jobs than any other private employer, more housing and healthcare workers will be needed to continue supporting the growing senior population.<sup>9</sup>



## *Policy Goals*

The goal of the Borough President is for all people in The Bronx to consider the borough a safe and welcoming place to come and live. This applies to immigrants as well as those born in the United States.

The Office of the Borough President operates numerous community engagement councils in order to better engage these communities. Councils focused on the African community, veterans, people with disabilities, religious communities, and more all have a voice and place in our borough, and the Borough President wants to encourage those voices and for them to express their concerns openly.

We must address the systemic barriers that contribute to the inequalities that plague The Bronx – both in relation to the other boroughs and other places in the country, but also between different neighborhoods and communities within the borough. The Bronx is strongest when all Bronxites are able to come together and advocate for one another. We must rely on each other to amplify Bronx voices and uplift all of our communities.

Immigrating to a new country is already a daunting task. This is especially true for those who are coming to the U.S. while fleeing violence or oppression. The recent migrants arriving to New York from Texas are a prime example of individuals who we must work to welcome here. Coordinating service provision can help these individuals get on their feet, which is to the benefit of both the migrants themselves but also society as a whole.

Outreach to immigrant communities must be improved. This includes legal aid services and the provision of information about housing vouchers, low-cost health insurance options, and other essential services that immigrants should have the option of taking advantage of. Important information, especially health information, must be translated into all languages spoken in The Bronx. There is important information about COVID-19, Monkeypox, polio, and more that these communities need to hear. This information must also be presented in a culturally sensitive manner and grounded in the culture of the population it is geared towards. Only by being culturally responsive can the city be sure that this information is truly penetrating the communities who need it.

*Proposed Solutions:*

**Support the African Advisory Council and Inter-Faith Council:** The Borough President makes it a priority to hear from the various constituent groups within The Bronx. These two advisory councils help the Borough President hear from community members working on the ground to better their communities and to find ways to help support those efforts. The Borough president is committed to these bodies and will continue to support their work fully. This work includes the hosting of events including the African Nations' Soccer Tournament, African Film Festival, and African Heritage Month. These bodies will engage in data collection to better understand the needs of community members whose voices are not always heard.

**Improve Enforcement of Job Anti-Discrimination Laws:** One commonly reported issue is that employers discriminate against workers based on country of origin or language spoken. All workers deserve a fair chance at gainful employment without fear of discrimination. However, there are problems with enforcement since many immigrants are fearful of retaliation if they should make a complaint. The city must increase its engagement with these communities, particularly underrepresented immigrant communities like African ones, in order to improve enforcement against bad actors in the work sector.

**Improve Language Access:** The city government has made great strides towards achieving language equity, with translation available into multiple languages for most city documents, and ad hoc translation and interpretation available for other instances. However, these language translation services often miss smaller language communities, including African immigrant communities. While many of the Spanish-speaking immigrants and non-immigrants in our borough have access to appropriate language services, this is not always perfect. Smaller communities need the increased language support as well.

**Establish a Bronx Inter-Cultural Resource Welcome Center:** The Borough President will work to establish a Bronx Inter-Cultural Resource and Welcome Center. This will be a one-stop shop for new immigrants to help establish themselves here in The Bronx and for existing residents to help find services. This can include access to services, resources, language support, legal aid, adult literacy, and more. There is a constellation of organizations providing services to immigrant

communities, both from within those communities and more generally. Bringing those organizations under one umbrella can help limit the confusion and barriers that these new immigrants and existing residents can often face and help get them what they need quickly and efficiently. This will also include regular “Know Your Rights” trainings, so we can help reduce the threats of deportation and other immigration status changes.

## **Advocacy for the LGBTQIA+ Community**

### *Long-Term Issues*

The LGBTQIA+ community is an integral part of the fabric of The Bronx but is often underserved. In order to ensure the LGBTQIA+ community is adequately served, we must act with an understanding of the specific challenges and unique history to increase access to resources and ensure accessibility for our most vulnerable populations. Through education, engagement, and advocacy in healthcare, mental health, housing, and access to services, we can provide support to a community too often overlooked.

In The Bronx, the LGBTQIA+ community is no stranger to health challenges. During the 1980s and 1990s, the community was decimated by the HIV pandemic. At present, the current spread of the Monkeypox virus in the United States is indicative of these challenges. At present, Monkeypox is spreading almost exclusively among gay and bisexual men.<sup>10</sup> Both vaccinations and treatments exist for Monkeypox, but neither has been as readily available as they should have been. The federal government has failed to prepare for an outbreak such as this, and it is the gay community suffering with high rates of transmission and renewed social stigma. The FDA allowed vaccines to languish in a factory in Denmark, and the guidance to physicians regarding the provision of treatment has been wanting.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the federal government has not been willing to speak clearly about who is most at risk. While there is an effort from the federal government to avoid stigma towards the community, the risks that gay men will not take the outbreak as seriously as they otherwise would remain serious. We need clear and accurate guidance, focusing on the groups that are most at risk of contracting this virus.

Here in New York, both Governor Hochul and Mayor Adams, as well as the health departments they run, have taken the threat of Monkeypox very seriously. They have set up vaccination sites and have created plans to assist affected individuals find treatment. Additionally, the New York City DOHMH has been more willing to issue direct guidance about steps the gay community can take to reduce the risk of spread.

New outbreaks such as these require new and innovative ideas for how to deal with them. We must take the lessons about public health provision that we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and operationalize them to this new outbreak as well. All levels of government must take stronger steps regarding health literacy, including sexual health, prevention, and active surveillance of the outbreak. Vulnerable communities are counting on us to do this in a measured, understanding, and stigma-free way. We must act to stem this outbreak, but we cannot do this by alienating the community that it is effecting and opening them up to discrimination.

We must take what we have learned, not just from COVID-19, but from the HIV/AIDS epidemic as well. HIV is still a pressing issue here in The Bronx and across our city and state. According to the most recent HIV surveillance report issued by DOHMH, the majority of new HIV infections in the city are among men who have sex with men. The Bronx had 307 HIV diagnoses in 2020, the second most after Brooklyn. There were 31,230 people living with HIV in The Bronx as of the end of 2020.<sup>12</sup>

As we know from long experience, HIV is a complicated issue that spans more than just the health domain and is bound up with perceptions and stigmas that people both in and outside of the LGBTQ community experience. Despite all of the work that leaders in the community have done over the years, there is still lots of stigma against people who are HIV-positive. More must be done to fight this stigma and ensure that everyone is able to live healthy lives, regardless of their serostatus, able to take advantage of the various scientific advancements in treatment and prevention, including pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), which can prevent HIV infection.

The rate of PrEP use is still too low, leaving gay and bisexual men at risk of transmission. While 78 percent of New York City residents living with HIV are virally suppressed, this number is still too low as well. Furthermore, people living with HIV are more likely to be on government insurance programs<sup>13</sup> and are at risk of homelessness.<sup>14</sup>

Transgender New Yorkers are at particular risk for negative outcomes across many measures. Two such measures are risk of homelessness and risk of criminal justice involvement. According to one study, LGBT people were about three times as likely as straight cisgender individuals were to experience homelessness in their lifetimes, and this number was even higher

for transgender individuals.<sup>15</sup> When it comes to the criminal justice system, transwomen in particular were more likely to be incarcerated, with one study finding that up to 21 percent of transwomen will be incarcerated at some point during their lives, and that they are more likely to experience prison violence than cisgender individuals are.<sup>16</sup>

Healthcare for Trans people is under attack all across our country. Some states are trying to ban books that reference same-sex relationships or other mentions of LGBTQIA+ people. New York must serve as a safe haven for LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly young people who often do not have the power or resources to advocate for themselves in places hostile to them. New York must always remain a place where LGBTQIA+ individuals can live and thrive as their true selves.

The Bronx is home to Marsha's House, which is the city's only shelter for LGBTQIA+ adults, serving a population aged 18-30. Marsha's House is a strong step forward to creating a place where LGBTQIA+ New Yorkers can come to feel safe and remain housed. Too many young LGBTQIA+ New Yorkers are homeless, and this shelter can be a good way of helping this population. The Borough President is aware of the issues that have come to light at Marsha's House, including complaints of sexual assault, criminal activity, and bias incidents. The Office of the Borough President has been part of the oversight process for Marsha's House over the course of this year and has spoken multiple times with staff at Project Renewal, the organization that operates Marsha's House.

Over the past few years, New York has made significant progress in the protection of LGBTQIA+ rights, especially regarding the transgender community. The State Legislature has enacted the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA) and repealed the so-called "walking while trans" ban, and Governor Hochul has implemented gender-neutral identity markers ("Option X") on city and state documents. These are important steps towards achieving a New York for all.

The Bronx also saw the opening of SAGE's Crotona Pride House, which consists of 62 senior housing units as well as the SAGE Center, which offers SAGE's services for Bronx residents. They provide health services, cultural programming, meals, and a computer lab. This was an important milestone for The Bronx, with the Crotona Pride House being the first housing

development in the borough being geared towards serving the LGBT population (though the housing is open to all seniors, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity).<sup>17</sup>

The Borough President is proud to have a strong working relationship with Destination Tomorrow, which is the only LGBTQIA+ community center in The Bronx. Destination Tomorrow has been a powerful force in advocating for the LGBTQIA+ population of our borough. The Borough President looks forward to continuing to collaborate with Destination Tomorrow in the future to support building capacity among providers serving the LGBTQIA+ community, to promote HIV and Monkeypox awareness and testing, and to advocate for homeless youth, people living with HIV/AIDS, seniors, and the Trans community.

### *Policy Goals*

To better serve the LGBTQIA+ community, we must focus on the health and well-being of individuals in the community. Members of the community have health unique challenges, including facing disproportionate risks from viruses like HIV and now Monkeypox. Our public health leaders must act to tackle these challenges within the community, but they must do so in a way that maintains respect and does not contribute to stigma.

We must make sure that our institutions recognize LGBTQIA+ people as a unique population with unique healthcare and mental health needs. Agencies at the state and city levels must ensure that their employees and the contractors that they work with are trained in dealing with LGBTQIA+ individuals, including in corrections services and other aspects of the criminal justice system. We must maintain New York as a safe and welcoming place for LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly transgender individuals who are under attack around our country. New York must adopt policies that affirm Trans people and offer services without discrimination, bias, or stigmatization.

By working to create safe spaces of LGBTQIA+ individuals, we can encourage the community to access the services all Bronxites are entitled to and ensure that all Bronxites, regardless of how they identify, are treated with respect and dignity.



### *Proposed Strategies*

**Establish a Bronx Sexual Health Clinic:** The Borough President will advocate for a permanent sexual health clinic in The Bronx through Health and Hospitals. The HIV work being done at Gotham Health Morrisania is a strong start towards accomplishing this goal. The Borough President recognizes the hard work that the clinicians and other professionals undertake at this site and will advocate for its continuing funding. With the spread of Monkeypox in our city, there must be more locations for vaccine and treatment distribution, and a permanent sexual health clinic would be a good place to do this. Currently, the site at Lincoln Hospital is performing this function, but more must be done to ensure that everyone has access to the vaccine and that it does not simply go to people from other boroughs or even from out of New York City. We must work to fill the gaps to ensure quality services for residents that have been continually underserved.

**Raise Awareness of PrEP and Vaccination:** It is easier to prevent infection than to treat infection. This applies to both HIV and now Monkeypox. The Borough President is committed to raising awareness for the prevention of HIV infections through the use of PrEP and Monkeypox through the ongoing vaccination campaign among men who have sex with men. This must also include better connecting LGBTQIA+ individuals at risk with health providers who can prescribe and administer these preventative medications. The state DOH must ensure that healthcare professionals are well trained in provision of services to LGBTQIA+ people and the importance of recommending PrEP. The federal government must improve its guidance to healthcare professionals regarding the provision of vaccines and treatment for Monkeypox. The Borough President will continue to push the federal government to increase the supply of the Monkeypox vaccine, in addition to the letter sent to the CDC alongside the other borough presidents in July. When the state and city get the vaccines, an appropriate supply must come to The Bronx. Our residents cannot be underserved by our local health departments.

**Support the LGBTQIA+ Taskforce and the HIV Roundtable:** The Borough President is committed to the office's LGBTQIA+ Taskforce and HIV Roundtable. The LGBTQIA+ Taskforce will work to connect the LGBTQIA+ community here in The Bronx and enable the community to

promote events, workshops, social mixers, policy, and advocacy work being done throughout the borough. This work must be inclusive of all stakeholders, including places of worship, businesses, government, community based organizations, educational LGBTQIA+/straight alliances, and family support organizations such as PFLAG. Working alongside the Bronx End the Epidemic Committee through the state DOH AIDS Institute, the HIV Roundtable will work to improve connections between government, service providers, and community members and take robust actions towards understanding and combatting the HIV epidemic here in The Bronx. The Roundtable is committed to helping reduce stigma, promote services, and advocate for policies that will improve the lives of people living with HIV.

**Provide Funding for LGBTQIA+ Services:** In June, Mayor Adams announced a historic \$6.7 million investment in the LGBTQIA+ community. This includes the first-ever investment to build nonprofit capacity run by transgender and gender-non-conforming individuals and an investment in services for LGBTQIA+ homeless and runaway youth.<sup>18</sup> This is a strong step in the right direction when it comes to services for this extremely vulnerable population because, according to one study, more than 40 percent of homeless youth in our city identify as LGBT.<sup>19</sup> Connecting homeless youths with resources including permanent housing must be the priority. The Office of the Borough President has been involved in ensuring that facilities geared towards the LGBTQIA+ homeless population such as Marsha's House are operating as they should, with appropriate oversight, and that equitable investment is funneled to Bronx LGBTQIA+ institutions and service providers. In addition, Governor Hochul announced in April \$13.5 million in funding to support healthcare services for the LGBTQIA+ community.<sup>20</sup>

**Improve Intersectional Outreach:** The LGBTQIA+ community faces many of the same issues as the broader population when it comes to disparities, inequities, and systemic racism. The data for Monkeypox vaccinations has borne this out, with white gay men being overrepresented among people who got the vaccine compared with Black and Latino gay men. Outreach conducted to these groups must be intentional, intersectional, and done by credible messengers who are trusted by LGBTQIA+ people of color. In a broader sense, any organization who engaged with the LGBTQIA+ community must be culturally competent and able to engage with community members in an unbiased and effective manner.

## **Advocacy for People with Disabilities**

### *Long-Term Issues*

Communities more vulnerable to elevated health risks must have special consideration from public health officials. People with disabilities are more likely to have negative outcomes on all economic measures, especially when it comes to housing and employment. They often face persistent exclusion in all parts of our society. This stigmatization and exclusion of people with disabilities only exacerbates any health conditions that they may be facing.

We must recognize that disabilities can mean many conditions, both physical and mental. While many of the most visible accessibility aids for people with disabilities are those geared towards individuals using wheelchairs or who otherwise have conditions inhibiting movement, disabilities can include many limitations that may or may not be visible to other people. We must be cognizant of people who have sense impairments, chronic illnesses, developmental disorders, or mental health disorders such as PTSD.

Services geared towards people with disabilities are also underfunded and not working as well as they should. The city government must do more to ensure that people with disabilities have full access to the health, education, and transportation systems in our city.

The Access-a-Ride program is essential for people with disabilities to be able to get around our city. However, the program is beset by issues, including driver no-shows, delays, and customer complaints.<sup>21</sup> These problems have been persistent, especially since 2021, when the service measures got worse across all metrics.<sup>22</sup> The program must be improved and fulfill its mission to be a lifeline for the elderly and people with disabilities.

Most subway stations in the city are not ADA-accessible. While the MTA has made progress installing elevators in many stations, there are many stations across the system that will never be able to have elevators and will thus remain closed to people with disabilities. Borough President Gibson attended the unveiling of ADA upgrades at the 170<sup>th</sup> Street station in January 2022.<sup>23</sup> This is an example of what the MTA can do to make the system more accessible. Additionally, when escalators and elevators exist, they must be working well with minimal

downtime. The accessibility infrastructure is too often non-operational and sometimes takes days for MTA crews to repair them. The MTA must improve its response time to get these elevators restored as quickly as possible.

### *Policy Goals*

We must strive to make the city more accessible for people with disabilities. Our transportation infrastructure must be made more compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Access-a-Ride must operate better.

People with disabilities deserve the same access to housing and jobs as everyone else. The city must enforce landlords' compliance with all applicable laws when it comes to making apartments accessible for people with disabilities. The city must help people with disabilities access housing. Many people with disabilities cannot live in the walkup apartments found throughout the city, limiting their choices when it comes to housing. Additionally, housing must make accommodations for individuals with service animals that would otherwise be disallowed in certain buildings.

It is an important goal to connect families to community-based organizations that provide services to people with disabilities such as case management. These organizations will be able to help connect the individuals with government services and benefits. We must also work with our federal partners to reform the federal disability programs to ensure that people on disability are not forever trapped in poverty due to strict net worth requirements.

The Ombudsman unit at the Office of the Bronx Borough President will help support residents with disabilities. Staff there will help address needs, gather information, access services, and apply for benefits in the realms of housing, education, employment, and healthcare.

## *Proposed Strategies*

**Expand Disability Access in Transit:** The MTA must increase the accessibility of its subway stations to people with disabilities. Every stations where it is physically possible to have an elevator should have one. There is no reason that people using wheelchairs or who otherwise cannot use stairs should be denied access to our transit system. This would also benefit our seniors, many of whom are also unable to use stairs. The Borough President will continue to work with MTA to identify stations that are ripe for ADA upgrades and to see the projects to completion. Some stations where this could happen in the near future are Parkchester, Mosholu Parkway, 138<sup>th</sup> Street on the 6 line, and 149<sup>th</sup> Street. The MTA must ensure that the escalators and elevators are working and not beset by repeated outages that render this stations inaccessible for long periods.

**Improve Street Infrastructure for People with Disabilities:** Currently, the street infrastructure is not the safest or most accessible for people with disabilities. There have been many incidents of traffic crashes involving people with disabilities. Improving infrastructure such as pedestrian ramps, curb cuts, and crosswalks can help make streets safer and easier for use, particularly for people with limited mobility.

**Support the Disability Advisory Council:** The Office of the Bronx Borough President will convene a borough-wide council to hear the needs and concerns of residents living with visual, hearing, physical, cognitive, and developmental disabilities in the Bronx. This body will serve to bring community-level advocacy and access to city, state, and federal resources to individuals with disabilities. Earlier this year, the Office partnered with the organization Help On The Way to promote the Disability Advisory Council and celebrate June as Disability Pride Month. This event generated a lot of community interest, and the Office plans to partner with city and state agencies to align our strategies better to serve our community members with disabilities. We must further promote awareness and recognition for people with disabilities, including for “invisible” disabilities that are not obviously apparent. These disabilities are valid and must be handled in the equivalent way as more visible disabilities.

**Improve City Services for People with Disabilities:** The city can do a better job providing services to people living with disabilities. People with disabilities are more likely to struggle with

housing instability and less likely to be permanently employed. These areas are ripe for more and better intervention by city agencies. The city must work with employers both large and small to encourage them to hire more individuals with disabilities. The city must provide people with disabilities with appropriate job training to help them achieve the skills necessary to succeed in these positions. The city should use programs such as Workforce1 to connect people with disabilities with employers able to hire them. The city should reform the affordable housing system to help people with disabilities maintain support system. Sometimes the best scenario is for individuals to live together as roommates who are able to support one another. The city should introduce more flexibility in the affordable housing process to enable alternative arrangements such as roommates for people who could benefit from them. The city must also encourage the development of more supportive housing for people who could benefit from wraparound services.

## **Advocacy for Veterans**

According to census data, there are approximately 23,475 veterans living in The Bronx.<sup>24</sup> According to citywide data, these veterans are disproportionately male, white, and over the age of 55. They are more likely to have graduated high school than the general population but less likely to have a college degree. They are less likely to be employed but also less likely to live in poverty. They are more likely to have a disability. A plurality served during the Vietnam War era.<sup>25</sup>

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “the unemployment rate for veterans who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces at any time since September 2001 – a group referred to as Gulf War-era II veterans – declined to 4.6 percent in 2021. In August 2021, 44 percent of Gulf War-era II veterans had a service-connected disability, compared with 27 percent of all veterans.” The jobless rate for all veterans decreased to 4.4 percent in 2021.<sup>26</sup>

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, common conditions among veterans include addiction, depression, anxiety, trauma, PTSD, Bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and OCD. On July 16, 2022, the 988 suicide prevention hotline was launched nationwide. The hotline provides 24/7 free and confidential emotional support to those in mental health distress. The 988 line has a dedicated Veterans Crisis Line that can help connect veterans to immediate care as well as ongoing counseling and services.<sup>27</sup> Suicides among veterans are difficult to track. To this end, Governor Hochul signed a bill in December 2021 to better track these deaths so that the state can better serve our veterans in the future.<sup>28</sup>

Veterans often have difficulty accessing critical resources, including social service programs. There are at least 15 agencies here in The Bronx striving to support veterans. The Office of the Bronx Borough President works continually alongside these agencies and community-based organizations to provide support to veterans and veteran groups. However, gaps still remain. Many veterans travel to other boroughs to seek services that we should be able to provide for them right here in The Bronx. Until there are enough services in our borough, more must be done.

One of the major locations where veterans get services in The Bronx is the James J. Peters VA Medical Center in the Northwest Bronx. In March, the federal government released a plan that would shutter the VA facilities in Manhattan and Brooklyn.<sup>29</sup> While not directly affecting the

Bronx medical center, this could have created additional demand on the services provided in The Bronx through veterans coming from the other boroughs. Fortunately, thanks to leadership of officials such as Senator Chuck Schumer, Congress rejected the closure plan in June, meaning that the hospitals will stay open, at least for now.<sup>30</sup> However, due to the changing patterns of where veterans live across the country, we must be wary about future attempts to close VA hospitals in New York City.

New York City has made great strides in reducing veteran homelessness, with the number of homeless veterans dropping by 90 percent over the past decade. The federal government certified New York City as ending chronic veteran homelessness in 2015, which includes eliminating homelessness for the most vulnerable veterans. While we have made great strides, we have not yet hit “Functional Zero,” meaning that there have been no veterans entering the homeless system in the past 90 days.<sup>31</sup>

The Office of the Bronx Borough President operates a Veterans Advisory Council (VAC), which is a safe space for veterans to meet and discuss important and pressing issues affecting them and their families, as well as to find solutions to address these challenges. The ultimate goal is to ensure that Bronx veterans are able to access the services they need right here in the borough they call home. The Borough President seeks to build a Bronx where all veterans can get everything they need and are entitled to, in proper repayment of their service.

### *Policy Goals*

Bronx veterans deserve every benefit that they are entitled to and that we can give to them. We must work to ensure that the VA works for every veterans, especially when it comes to mental health support. The city must fully fund all community-based organizations that work with our veteran population.

Veterans must have their voices heard. This can be accomplished through the Borough President’s Veterans Advisory Council, which will be a place for veterans to meet and discuss the issues they are facing and to find solutions to pressing challenges. The Borough President fully



supports the work of the VAC and will provide sufficient resources for the body to grow to reach all veterans in The Bronx. The resources for our veterans are out there, but we must work to ensure that they can connect with them every time.

The city must fully commit to going the final mile to eliminate veteran homelessness by fully funding the veterans programming through the Department of Veterans' Services. These programs have proven success and must continue until every veteran has permanent housing, including the supportive housing that some of them might need. The Borough President supports including veterans housing in new developments in The Bronx and will push developers to include some veterans-priority housing as part of their affordable housing footprints.

### *Proposed Strategies*

**Reform the VA:** Over the past several years, there has been much attention drawn to the shortcomings of the VA and the services it provides. The Borough President will engage with partners, particularly on the federal level, to ensure that the VA becomes the best provider that it can be for our veterans. Congress must invest in the VA in order to hire the appropriate level and quality of personnel that can eliminate the waste, dysfunction, and incompetence that has often characterized the agency. Congress must commit to funding the appropriate level of VA centers over the long-term and commit to keeping the VA centers in Manhattan and Brooklyn open over the long run. The Bronx VA needs more resources to serve an aging population of veterans in our borough, so that none of them feels it necessary to go out of the borough or the system for their essential care that should be provided there. All backlogs must be eliminated to ensure that veterans are served as quickly as possible with minimal delays.

**Improve Local Services for Veterans:** Our city has the obligation to help returning veterans with the issues that they deal with as they return to civilian life. These include reintegrating into the workforce as well as handling mental health and addiction challenges. The Borough President is committed to working with the city's Department of Veterans Services to improve veterans' access to workforce development and employment trainings here locally in The Bronx. Programs such as Veteran Readiness and Employment, 55-c, VetConnectPro, EmpireVets, VRRAP and more are

strong programs geared towards improving veterans' employment outcomes, connecting veterans with jobs, and helping veterans improve their skills.<sup>32</sup> These programs should be expanded to ensure that any veteran can find a job that works for them and utilizes their skills. The city must be more cognizant of the effects of mental health issues such as PTSD and addiction on the well-being of veterans in our communities. We must act to ensure that veterans receive all the help necessary to manage their mental health, whether that is through the VA or not. The Borough President is committed to supporting veterans services through the Veterans Advisory Council in the Office and with partners in the community.

**Eliminate Veteran Homelessness:** While our city has made great strides, we must go the final mile to ensure that there are no veterans without permanent housing. The city must continue to support programs such as the Veteran Peer Coordinators, House-A-Veteran, Aftercare Assistance, and HUD-VASH Continuum. Additionally, many veterans require supportive housing. The Borough President looks more favorably on proposed development projects that include some units reserved to veterans, including supportive housing units. We not only need to ensure that every veteran has a home, but that it is the right home that works for that individual. Affordable housing that is reserved for or geared towards veterans is a strong way to ensure that every veteran has the opportunity for a stable, permanent home.

**Strengthen the Bronx Veterans Treatment Court:** The Bronx Veterans Treatment Court was established in our borough in 2013.<sup>33</sup> This court helps to provide veterans who have criminal justice involvement to receive help, services, and treatment for their issues instead of punitive measures. This court has a strong peer mentorship component as well. The Borough President fully supports the Bronx Veterans Treatment Court and will work with partners such as the VA, the District Attorney, and our local judges to ensure that it is functioning the best it can be. Every veteran who comes to the courts for low-level or non-violent crimes should have the ability to access this court. The Borough President will work to ensure sufficient funding for the mentorship program as well.

**Expand the Veterans Advisory Council:** The Borough President will expand the reach of the Veterans Advisory Council to better be able to refer veterans to services. The Council will conduct outreach to providers and veterans about what is working and what is not working in the services

they receive in order to make recommendations about how to optimize this service provision. The Council will be able to take feedback from its members and other veterans in order to help them gain access to resources and to make recommendations to change policies that will provide better help to this community.

**Conduct Veterans Outreach:** The Office of the Bronx Borough President will conduct outreach to and sponsor events for veterans, particularly around the issues of mental health and suicide prevention. The Borough President will advocate with local, state, and federal partners to provide more funding to community-based events and services that will help veterans on these issues. The Borough President will host a resource fair for veterans alongside other government and community-based organization partners to help connect underserved veterans to resources. The Veterans Advisory Council will continue existing outreach programs such as the Bronx Zoo Holiday Event for Veterans and Active Military Families.

## **Youth**

### *Long-Term Issues*

According to Measure of America, The Bronx has the highest rate of disconnected youth among the five boroughs, meaning that these young people are neither in school nor working.<sup>34</sup> At the neighborhood level, 35.6 percent of youth in the Melrose, Mott Haven, Port Morris, Longwood, and Hunts Point have the highest rate of youth disconnection. The existing exclusionary barriers to finding employment and educational opportunities have personal and societal effects, including social exclusion, employment gaps, mental health challenges, crime and incarceration, and intergenerational poverty, among other endless and devastating factors. These young adults need a platform to assume ownership of their future and lives.

JobsFirstNYC reported that the number of young adults out of school and unemployed surged during the pandemic. As a result, 27 percent of 18-to-24 year-olds, or roughly 184,000 young adult New Yorkers, were out of school and out of work (OSOW) in 2020. The Bronx had the highest levels of OSOW youth, at 37 percent, compared with between 23 and 25 percent in the other boroughs. The Mott Haven and Hunts Point sections of The Bronx are home to the most OSOW young adults.<sup>35</sup>

The Bronx lacks borough-wide youth centers. Youth Centers provide a safe, informal, and supervised environment for young people. They accommodate unstructured social interaction among different age groups and provide the space to offer more structured activities. In addition, they allow youth to participate in recreational and cultural activities or vocational counseling. These centers help youth develop their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive abilities and experience achievement, enjoyment, friendship, and recognition. With the increase in crime and violence throughout New York City, Bronx children and young adults need safe and nurturing environments and places where they can increase physical fitness levels, increase employment opportunities, and get involved in the community. These centers should be hubs where youth spend time with their peers in a non-judgmental environment, develop leadership skills, have their achievements recognized and celebrated, and have beneficial access to resources.

Some subsets of the youth population are at particular risk, and the city must take particular care to see that they get appropriate services. This includes young people who are homeless, in foster care, undocumented, criminal justice system involved, LGBTQIA+, or struggling with mental health challenges or addiction.

The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) encourages youth employment, which is important during the summer months when young people are out of school. Summer youth employment programs help youth to access positive early employment experiences. Early employment experiences can offer young adults vital opportunities for personal growth as well as a chance to establish foundational skills for the labor market. The SYEP experience increased participants' behavioral, employment, and educational skills and attitudes. Overall, summer youth participants develop skills and learn how to navigate a work environment, giving them more options for the future. Unfortunately, youth from low-income households are more likely to face challenges entering the labor market and to be unemployed than peers from higher-income households. Summer youth employment programs have the potential to improve the lives of Bronx young people in outcome areas as diverse as employment and earnings, criminal justice involvement, rates of arrest, arraignments, probability of conviction and incarceration, education, and youth development. It also decreases victimization and mortality outcomes. During the 2022 SYEP class, 22,160 Bronx young people participated in the program.

Additionally, the city offers the CareerReady Work, Learn & Grow program to help 16 to 19 year old youth in public schools connect with employment on a year-round basis, not just during the summers. This program helps young people build skills, prepare for college, explore career opportunities, and get a paid position.<sup>36</sup>

The city operates several programs that help achieve a robust coverage of afterschool and summer programming. These services include the Comprehensive After School System (COMPASS), School's Out New York City (SONYC), Beacon, Cornerstone, Saturday Night Lights and more. These programs are a strong effort to ensure that every young person has a safe place to go to after school hours and during the summer months. The city must move towards a universal afterschool model, in which every school and community center offers programming for its students after school hours. These programs can provide enrichment, empowerment, social-

emotional learning, and growth, as well as building skills and teamwork. These programs are important from the perspective of education, youth development, and public safety.

### *Policy Goals*

When it comes to our youth, our goal must be to keep them on the right path – in school, on track to graduate and either find employment or further educational opportunities, and out of the criminal justice system. A person’s life is heavily influenced by the trajectory they begin on in childhood, and we must help Bronx adolescents stay on the paths that will give them the best futures.

This is the work of families but also communities. We all have a vested interest in seeing our young people grow and thrive and make as much of their lives as they can. We have a collective responsibility to help steer young Bronxites into futures in which they will be able to provide for themselves and their families.

The city has taken many steps towards this goal through our public school system, youth employment programs, and other programs offered through the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). We must continue to strengthen our schools and these programs, ensuring that our young people have access to the services that they need to thrive.

The Borough President is committed to hiring young people at the high school and college levels for internships in the Office of the Borough President. The Office provides opportunities for these young people to learn, help plan events, and make substantive contributions to the work of the Office. The Borough President wants to see young Bronxites grow and thrive and will support the development of their skills through these internships.

## *Proposed Strategies*

**Centering Youth Voices:** It is essential to center youth voices to participate actively in their schools and communities. The Borough President's Youth Council will serve as a mechanism that enables youth to gain these skills while simultaneously changing their communities. Engaging young people at an early age will help them identify priorities, craft policies that support these priorities, and contribute to implementing these policies through public services. As a result, they can contribute to the development of employment programs, cultivate talents, develop and foster partnerships, and be active in their development. In addition, the Youth Council will highlight and increase the urgency to address the issues facing young people and develop a platform to enable them to have a voice. Improvement of youth lives is attainable through transformative policies. The Borough President has hosted a youth forum in the past, which included panels, workshops, and teambuilding activities. A future youth summit is a strong way to encourage youth voices as well-represented in our communities.

**Develop a Youth Employment Delivery System:** The Bronx needs a comprehensive and integrated youth employment service delivery system to connect youth with work opportunities strategically.<sup>37</sup> Many good programs, effective youth practitioners, and well-intentioned organizations are scattered throughout the borough. These providers are uncoordinated and operate independently, each acting independently for youth, providing a challenge for effective service coordination and provision. The Bronx community's sectors, systems, and resources must unite strategically to form a youth employment service delivery system of considerable comprehension and scale in order to best serve disconnected and other high-risk youth. To achieve this feat, stakeholders must pool their resources. Elected officials, city government agencies, corporations, community organizations, educational institutions, parents, and youth councils should convene to discuss administrative responsibilities, collaboration across systems' workforce preparation, employer engagement, and best practices. This system will be able to identify and amplify job, internship, fellowship, and mentorship opportunities, as well as highlight institutions that offer workforce training, career and technical education, entrepreneurship training, and continuing education.

**Create and Expand Youth Centers:** We must create Youth Centers throughout Bronx neighborhoods where students can come for a safe, supervised place to spend their time. These locations must become community hubs where all young people feel welcome. They must provide students with services and opportunities to uplift them and help guide them to a path to making the most of their lives. Community Board 10 called for the creation of a youth center for Co-Op City to provide wraparound, educational, and recreational services.

**Expand the Youth Employment Programs:** More funding is required to bring the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) to its full potential. Mayor Adams has made it a priority for 2022 to expand the opportunities for youth employment, but more must be done, particularly for Bronx young people. Youth living in low-income and disenfranchised Bronx communities should be given priority for employment. By successfully leveraging connections with local community organizations and businesses, youth can have access to learning and working opportunities in their communities. Work sites can pair interns with mentors. These on-the-job mentors can help the participants develop skills and training such as problem-solving, conflict-resolution, and other relevant workforce development skills. Further, the positive experiences can help them succeed and stay safe both during and beyond the summer program. Increasing the number of employed young adults would help reduce youth's initial contact with the criminal justice system minimizing and eliminating involvement with the court system. Participating in the SYEP program offers supplementary support, for instance, participants use their earnings to help support themselves and their families increasing the overall financial resource and stability of families. Community Board 3 also mentioned wanting to expand SYEP for young people in their community. The city should also expand Work, Learn & Grow to ensure that young people have more opportunities on a year-round basis.



## **THE BRONX: WHERE WE LIVE**

### **Land Use and Development**

New York City has always been at the forefront of planning. In 1916, the city passed the first Zoning Resolution in the United States, which was later superseded by the 1961 Zoning Resolution that forms the basis for all land use regulations that exist today. The Zoning Resolution provides zoning maps across the entire city defining what can be built. This includes the building envelope, as defined by the height and bulk that can be placed on a site as well as the use, which is typically broken down into residential, commercial, manufacturing, and community facility uses.

The Bronx is a borough of neighborhoods, with each area being defined by what came before it. In order to continue planning for the growth of the borough, and in order for The Bronx to thrive, The Bronx must continue to rethink what the future of the borough will be. This includes updating the zoning text regulations and changing the zoning districts through rezonings to allow the borough to grow strategically.

### Comprehensive Neighborhood Planning

For projects that require discretionary review, New York City's public review process, ULURP, is important to allow the community an opportunity to share their concerns or support for a project. This is different from as-of-right development where the current zoning rules dictate the building envelope (height and bulk) and which uses are permitted to be built across the city.

Comprehensive neighborhood studies, such as the Planning for Livability, Affordability, Community, Economic Opportunity, and Sustainability (PLACES<sup>38</sup>) studies allowed for a thorough examination and discussion of every aspect of how a neighborhood should be thinking about its future. It includes listening and learning sessions with residents and stakeholders, visioning sessions led by agencies to gather additional information, generating a plan that works

to achieve the generally agreed upon goals, and a public review process and implementation strategies to ensure the outcomes get accomplished.

The Jerome Avenue neighborhood plan<sup>39</sup> is a recent example that underwent a multi-year comprehensive neighborhood plan. It worked with community members, stakeholder, elected officials including Borough President Gibson who was then the City Councilmember for the area, and other agencies to come up with a number of solutions to complex problems and the city made numerous commitments to providing improvements that would allow the corridor to increase the density along an area with strong public transit. The study concluded with the following planning goals:

- Provide new opportunities for affordable housing development
- Preserve and invest in existing affordable housing
- Create opportunities for diverse retail and commercial opportunities
- Support the local economy and local workers
- Improve quality of life and health
- Ensure a safe, walkable Jerome Avenue underneath the elevated train
- Create new and improve existing parks
- Build new schools and support other community institutions

While there were certainly those skeptical or who opposed the proposal, there were also many who supported the long-term vision the plan created for the larger community, which ultimately led to the neighborhood study being released and a rezoning being approved. Today, the fruits of the rezoning are clearly taking place, with many buildings being built that are providing much needed affordable housing, parks being created, and infrastructure being improved.

This PLACES work is important for many reasons. During the Jerome Neighborhood Plan, the city engaged with people who lived within the local community and who had not seen their fair share of investment over the years and who had become disenfranchised or who had lost their trust in the city government. This relationship mending takes time and people need to know their voices are heard. This relationship mending is an important aspect of the process because it

changes residents' perception of the communities they live in. People become more optimistic that they will get the resources they need, and they see improvements occurring in their community.

The positive outcomes the Jerome Avenue plan is bringing to the community cannot be understated. Ideally, every community would go through a comprehensive planning process to analyze where growth should be occurring. This planning work needs to continue and expand to other neighborhoods in The Bronx. Some areas of the Bronx that need immediate attention include Boston Road, Broadway, Morrisania, Melrose (the parking lots around Yankee Stadium), and Harlem River North (Roberto Clemente State Park to River Plaza Shopping Center). Additionally, studies for decking over the Cross Bronx Expressway and transit-oriented development studies along the four new Metro-North Stations are currently occurring and can be vital for improving these areas and connecting communities.

In 2020, the Southern Boulevard<sup>40</sup> PLACES study work was put on pause after nearly four years of discussions with the local community, stakeholders, and elected officials. The Southern Boulevard neighborhood study work needs to continue and provide outcomes and commitments that will improve the lives of the local residents living there.

Another major benefit of neighborhood planning when there is a rezoning component is that upzonings for mid- to high-density housing requires Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) to be incorporated into the proposal. This MIH requirement means there will be a permanent 25 to 30 percent affordable housing component. While MIH was adopted in 2016 and is still a relatively new tool, it has long-term implications for continuing to maintain a level of affordability across the city as developments occur in those neighborhoods.

This long-term planning approach takes many years from the start of the process through project approval and even longer with fulfilling city commitments. It is important that the city work to hire and retain staff vital to this mission and planning work. To ensure this type of comprehensive planning continues, it is important that the city ensure agencies are funded and have enough staff to do this work. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many city agencies have struggled to retain quality staff, including the Department of City Planning (DCP), Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), and Small Business Services (SBS). The city must pursue

changes to the incentives for public employment in order to secure the best workforce possible going forward. When there are significant vacancies in the public sector workforce, there is important work that goes undone. This can create delays and backups for essential permissions and inspections that can delay projects from being undertaken or completed

One innovation to arise from the COVID-19 pandemic was the broad adoption of remote and hybrid hearings. This has enabled more people to get involved with the public feedback process, including people who had never historically been involved in the process before. This should continue going forward to keep these people engaged. Making public meetings more accessible helps to ensure that community feedback is truly representative and not simply reflective of those who are able to attend in-person meetings. To keep remote and hybrid meetings going, certain technology upgrades will need to occur at sites that hold public meetings, such as high-speed internet and Wi-Fi access, as well as the purchase of new sound systems and other AV equipment.

### Citywide Text Amendments

As part of Mayor Adams’s *Rebuild, Renew, Reinvent: A Blueprint for New York City’s Economic Recovery*<sup>41</sup> and “City of Yes,” three upcoming citywide text amendments<sup>42</sup> will look to amend the zoning resolution to support small businesses, create new housing, and to promote sustainability. Those three proposed text amendments are:

**Zoning for Economic Opportunity** will provide local businesses with the flexibility to repurpose their space for a post-pandemic city. The amendment will:

- Remove unnecessary geographic limitations on certain businesses, including life sciences, custom manufacturing, maker-retail, and nightlife
- Eliminate obstacles to repurposing space, allowing the city’s businesses and economy to evolve over time
- Create flexibility for local businesses to expand without relocation and without triggering needs for additional parking

**Zoning for Housing Opportunity** will encourage the creation of more housing in neighborhoods across the entire city. The amendment will:

- Expand opportunities for affordable and supportive homes for New Yorkers by increasing the floor area ratio of all types of affordable housing, similar to the allowance already afforded to affordable housing for seniors
- Broaden the acceptable variety of housing types and sizes, including studios, to accommodate a wider range of families and households
- Ease conversions of underutilized commercial buildings into homes
- Reduce unnecessary parking requirements that add cost and take up spaces in buildings that could be used for additional homes

**Zoning for Zero Carbon** will be critical step towards the city reaching its carbon reduction goals. The amendment would:

- Remove obstacles to deploying new clean energy storage and uses, including electric vehicle charging
- Facilitate building retrofits for sustainability, including allowing more rooftop coverage of solar panels
- Eliminate barriers to the electrification of building systems such as heat pumps or efficient HVAC systems

While all three citywide text amendments seem to state goals that are positive and important for The Bronx, the specifics of how these proposed text amendments are going to achieve their goals will be necessary before the Borough President can provide a recommendation over the coming several months. It is important that these text amendments work for Bronx residents.

## Selected Ongoing Land Use Projects

The Office of the Bronx Borough President is mindful of the multiple “signature” projects that are presently in the development stage that will be coming up for discussion over the next few years. These projects include:

- Kingsbridge Armory
- Universal Hip Hop Museum
- Bronx General Post Office
- Wakefield Village
- Fordham Landing and University Heights Waterfront
- Hutch Metro Center Expansion
- Metro-North Expansion
- Redevelopment of Hunts Point Market
- Paradise Theater
- Expansion of York Studios
- Stevenson Commons
- Redevelopment of parking lots near Yankee Stadium
- Harlem River Waterfront development
- La Peninsula

Each of the projects will have a major effect on the communities where they are located. Most of these projects will need infrastructure improvements for them to be successful and provide relief to the local communities. Some will provide new housing development and create new economic development opportunities. Engagement with the local communities through the community boards and other local CBOs will be necessary to provide the best opportunities for Bronx residents and businesses. As major projects, Hunts Point redevelopment and the Kingsbridge Armory are discussed in detail in the “economic development” section of this report.

In addition to these larger projects, there will continue to be discretionary approvals being sought for private developments. These projects will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and the Borough President will issue recommendations based on their merits. Projects that advance

policies stated in this report will typically be given more favorable recommendations. This includes the unit mix and size of units, that the proposed development has benefits for the existing community, and that the project will have a direct economic benefit to The Bronx, including the creation of living-wage jobs.

#### The General Post Office Building (Vacant below the roof level)

Located on the Grand Concourse at 149<sup>th</sup> Street, this landmark building consists of 175,000 square feet. It is served by the 2, 4, and 5 trains, is within a three-minute drive to the Major Deegan (Interstate 87), and is within 30 minutes of LaGuardia Airport and Grand Central Terminal. Lincoln Hospital and Hostos Community College are immediately nearby. Within the next four years, over 1,000 units of housing will open within walking distance of the Post Office. This site can provide significant economic opportunities for the South Bronx, and the Borough President will work to ensure the successful reuse of this building. Both the interior and exterior of this building are landmarked.

#### Lowe's Paradise Theater (Vacant)

Located on the Grand Concourse at East 187<sup>th</sup> Street, this is the last “wonder theater” to be designed by John Eberson and is often considered his best. The auditorium provides seating for 4,000 patrons making it one of the largest such rooms in New York City. Owing to the acoustic perfection of the auditorium, the Metropolitan Opera routinely performed here during the off-season. Both the interior and exterior of this building are landmarked.



Dollar Savings Bank Building (Vacant)

Located on the Grand Concourse one block north of East Fordham Road, the main floor of the building includes 10,000 square feet. This building also includes an office wing rising ten stories and includes a fifty-foot clock tower. This building was formerly the Dollar Savings Bank headquarters until they went bankrupt. The building interior and exterior are landmarked as well as being listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Bronx Waterfront

The Bronx has approximately 75 miles of the approximately 520 total miles of shoreline in New York City. This includes the Hudson River, Spuyten Duyvil Creek, Harlem River, Bronx Kill, Bronx River, East River, Westchester Creek, Pugsley Creek, Hutchinson River, Eastchester Bay, and Long Island Sound, as well as a number of other creeks and inlets that abut the Bronx.

According to the 2021 New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan, access to the waterfront can vary across the city, but more than 90 percent of Manhattan residents that live



within a half-mile of the waterfront can walk to open spaces on the water, whereas fewer than half of Bronx residents living within that same distance have pedestrian-accessible public access options.<sup>43</sup>

Access to the waterfront is a health, equity, and environmental justice issue that has significant long-term land use implications for many current and future Bronx residents. While improvements have been made, such as removing the Sheridan Expressway, which created an opportunity for access to the Bronx River as well as more direct access to Starlight Park and Concrete Plant Park, it is important that developments along these waterfronts continue to create waterfront connections that meet or exceed the requirements set by the zoning resolution.

Improving access and amenities where there is currently waterfront access is also important. One specific item that the Borough President's Office was able to assist in securing funding for, was the restoration of the Orchard Beach Pavilion. After the recent approval by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to approve the restoration, the renovations are planned to begin in 2022 with the planned reopened in 2024.

### Greenways

In 1993, Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer presented the City Council with a comprehensive plan designed to encourage bicycling. This plan identified 85 miles across The Bronx appropriate for establishing bike and pedestrian byways. Key to this plan was to link the borough's many parks, enabling cyclists and pedestrians to explore the borough's many different communities while passing through the parks. To celebrate this objective, in 1994 the first Tour de Bronx was established, using the Bronx Greenway Plan as its map for this event. It was also during the Ferrer administration that each Sunday the entire main roadway of the Grand Concourse was closed to traffic from Mosholu Parkway to East 161<sup>st</sup> Street.

The City of New York is continuing to delineate a citywide bike friendly network providing exclusive lanes for such activity. While The Bronx was the first borough to adopt a formal plan, it is now the borough with the fewest miles of protected bike lanes. Additionally, upon being elected

mayor, Rudy Giuliani immediately halted the Ferrer's weekly shutdown of traffic on the Grand Concourse. While such closings are in place elsewhere in New York City, the Grand Concourse closing has never been restored. Constructing separate bicycle lanes and closing the Grand Concourse require nothing more than following policy and plans the Borough President's office initially advanced over thirty years ago. The Boogie on the Boulevard program is a similar effort at a smaller scale. The annual event closes a couple of blocks of the Grand Concourse for a few hours. This year's event will take place on September 18 between 165<sup>th</sup> and 167<sup>th</sup> Streets.

Since Borough President Gibson has been in office, one of the most active advocacy groups has been the Harlem River Working Group. Working in coordination with other local stakeholders, such as Bronx Council for Environmental Quality (BCEQ) and South Bronx Unite, they have come up with goals for accessing the Harlem River Waterfront, including fully building out the Harlem River Greenway, the Putnam Greenway, advancing the daylighting of Tibbetts Brook, and expanding the Empire State Trail to make a contiguous connection from New York City through The Bronx to Albany and then to Canada.

Some specific examples include ensuring that the greenways are interconnected and contiguous along the entirety of the Harlem River by making connections where there are none today, such as north of Roberto Clemente State Park to 230th Street where the Harlem River Greenway would connect to the Putnam Greenway as part of the Tibbetts Brook daylighting. This would include access to the waterfront where it is limited today.

If the Greenway Master Plan legislation is enacted at City Council, the Bronx Borough President would continue to advocate for the city to implement and fund these long-planned greenway plans. These include working with developers to ensure the entirety of the Special Harlem River Waterfront District is built out as the waterfront continues to see new development and promoting projects that create on-water and on-land recreational access and activities such as bike lanes for cycling, rowing, and more.

## Community Centers

Community centers provide youth programming and recreational facilities and are extremely important resources to give young people alternatives. Keeping young people engaged and entertained can be a challenge, so these community centers offer recreational facilities allowing youth to get exercise, have fun, meet other people, and create friendships, while doing so in a structured setting. Many families do not have the ability or flexibility to always have someone home after school or during the summer when school is out, so these community centers provide alternatives to the local community, giving youth in the area these much-needed options. Many community centers also provide after-school tutoring and mentors who can be a role model to help give youth opportunities to succeed. It is important that community centers are found in every neighborhood and that they are funded with sufficient resources to fulfill their mission. Additionally community centers provide the same amenities for adults for a small fee. Community Centers play a vital role in a city where people have limited space within their homes for both adults and youth.

## *Policy Goals*

Infrastructure improvements are an important key to allowing the city to continue to grow. As previously noted, many communities in The Bronx have seen little investment and infrastructure improvements. Communities cannot grow if they cannot provide for the current residents, let alone any new ones.

While capital improvements cost money in the short-term, these improvements can increase the tax base and ultimately pay for themselves over time. Additionally, solving infrastructure issues can reduce issues such as flooding that has a recurring cost to the city, improve Wi-Fi/high-speed internet access to allow for additional economic development and educational opportunities, and provide opportunities for youth that will keep them out of trouble. If the city is going to be the “City of Yes,” we must ensure the infrastructure is capable of handling increases in density. The Mayor must dedicate resources to fixing these infrastructure problems across The

Bronx, especially those identified in Community District Needs statements, through PLACES or other studies, and as identified by city agencies and elected officials.

The Mayor should commit to investing in establishing a multi-agency task force that would work with Community Boards, local stakeholders, and community organizations where they would focus on creating a plan for how to fix existing infrastructure issues so new developments can occur without harming current residents. This would allow the city to resolve existing problems and avoid exacerbating them with additional development. The Mayor should also continue to add resources to the Neighborhood Development Fund, which had earmarked \$1 billion to building capacity in neighborhood infrastructure and facilities for PLACES studies.

Good planning is key to the future of The Bronx and the city needs to be at the forefront of planning and visioning rather than simply responding to private applicants seeking discretionary approval requests. Collaborating with city agencies, elected officials, stakeholder, advocates, and residents takes time but produces the best outcomes when people buy into the vision. Once the vision is established, zoning regulations can be written that allow for as-of-right development that meets these criteria so the building envelopes and uses accommodate the larger community's needs. This allows for all communities across The Bronx to be able to take on some additional density and grow in a way that meets the vision without requiring every developer to go through a discretionary approval process.

Investment in The Bronx must come both from outside the borough but also from people who already live and work here. One way to encourage local investment into existing communities is through community land trusts (CLTs). These trusts are an innovative way to preserve local power while still encouraging the development of local institutions. Community land trusts keep power in the community, encourage the development of small businesses and nonprofits, and help protect tenants and provide homeownership opportunities to those who may not otherwise be able to have them within reach. The city must help incentivize and promote the establishment of community land trusts in areas where investment from external sources is less likely to come. These land trusts can help provide an instrument for local investment by residents and businesses into their own communities. One example of a CLT currently operating in The Bronx is the Mott Haven-Port Morris CLT, which has been working to acquire the former Lincoln Recovery Center

in order to convert this vacant city-owned land into the Health, Education & the Arts (HEARTS) Community Center that will support the local community. The Borough President has proudly supported this project. While CLTs have challenges that range from determining what the best use of property should be to acquiring the property and financing the project, CLTs provide an option for local collaboration and community empowerment to occur.

### *Proposed Strategies*

**Engage in Comprehensive Neighborhood Planning:** The Jerome Avenue Rezoning was a strong example of what a comprehensive plan could look like. This project deeply engaged the community, residents, businesses, institutions, and elected leaders such as the Borough President who was a City Councilmember at the time. This process should be repeated in neighborhoods across the borough. Holistic neighborhood rezonings can look at the whole picture of a neighborhood and think about all aspects of the existing community while planning strategically for future development across the city and borough. Keeping with the ethos of deep community engagement will be important to maintain trust of residents who are worried about issues like gentrification and displacement. Building trust is essential to make these processes work. The Southern Boulevard study should continue to advance and there are a number of additional areas in The Bronx that should be analyzed for neighborhood planning studies. It is essential that, as these neighborhoods see new housing, that there is a mechanism to require permanent affordable housing. This was incorporated into the Jerome Avenue rezoning through MIH and is another reason that the Southern Boulevard study should continue to advance, so that MIH can be mapped and permanent affordable housing will be a required component in all new developments along this corridor.

**Support a Mayoral Agency Task Force on Infrastructure Planning:** As previously noted, this task force would work with community boards, local stakeholders, and community organizations where they would focus on creating a plan for how to fix existing infrastructure issues so new developments can occur without harming current residents. This would allow the city to resolve existing problems and avoid exacerbating them with additional development. For neighborhood

planning studies, the task force would provide guidance on city commitments to ensure proper long-term planning.

**Support Community Land Trusts (CLTs):** The Borough President strongly supports using CLTs to encourage local land use decisions and community-driven development. CLTs can help empower neighborhoods to decide the best use of local properties for themselves, within their own communities. The Borough President will work with the communities that want to set up CLTs or that already operate one.

**Fully Build Out the Harlem River Greenway:** Bronxites who live in the South and West Bronx deserve easy access to the Harlem River. The Greenway will run from Port Morris to near the confluence with the Hudson, enabling many diverse communities to enjoy this natural resource. The Borough President will work with stakeholders to ensure that this greenway is completed and that all our residents can have access to this route.

## Housing

### *Long-Term Issues*

The Bronx has a diverse housing stock consisting of approximately 530,000 total units, comprising approximately 15 percent of the total New York City housing stock. The primary housing typology is multi-family buildings, comprising 80 percent of all Bronx units (425,126 units). For comparison, the city as a whole is comprised of approximately 70.7 percent multi-family units.

Units in Structure	Bronx	Bronx	NYC	NYC
1-unit, detached	31,739	6.00%	319,613	9.10%
1-unit, attached	25,317	4.80%	242,216	6.90%
2 units	46,175	8.70%	456,977	13.10%
3 or 4 units	44,592	8.40%	329,158	9.40%
5 to 9 units	19,599	3.70%	229,644	6.60%
10 to 19 units	29,867	5.60%	220,697	6.30%
20 or more units	331,068	62.50%	1,689,508	48.40%
Mobile home	820	0.20%	4,706	0.10%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	619	0.10%	1,709	0.00%
<b>Total housing units</b>	<b>529,796</b>		<b>3,494,228</b>	

2015 to 2019 ACS Data

Much like the rest of the city, The Bronx has a relatively low vacancy rate with only approximately five percent of units vacant. It should be noted this data was collected prior to COVID, but in general, New York City and The Bronx consistently have vacancy rates below 10 percent. The Housing Vacancy Survey from 2022 found a much lower vacancy rate, though this was limited to the rental housing stock. This survey put the number at 0.78 percent, compared to 4.54 percent citywide.<sup>44</sup>

Total Housing Units	Bronx	Bronx	NYC	NYC
Occupied housing units	503,829	95.10%	3,167,034	90.60%
Vacant housing units	25,967	4.90%	327,194	9.40%
<b>Total housing units</b>	<b>529,796</b>		<b>3,494,228</b>	

2015 to 2019 ACS Data

The Bronx has a notably lower home-ownership rate than the rest of the city. Only 19.7 percent of all units in The Bronx were owner-occupied compared to over 32 percent citywide. This disparity in owner-occupancy comes at a great cost to Bronx residents because home ownership is one of the best ways to realize long-term financial security. Home ownership provides families with an incentive to advocate for their community’s needs, creates a place that can foster and sustain friendships, and incentivizes investments that yield better paying employment opportunities. In short, when people invest in a home, it provides them an opportunity to foster a community, and prosperity most often follows.

<b>Housing Tenure</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>NYC</b>	<b>NYC</b>
Owner-occupied	99,212	19.70%	1,034,637	32.70%
Renter-occupied	404,617	80.30%	2,132,397	67.30%
Total Occupied housing units	503,829		3,167,034	
2015 to 2019 ACS Data				

Affordable housing is another significant issue in The Bronx. Anyone that spends more than 30 percent of their income on housing is considered rent-burdened. Approximately 70 percent of Bronx residents (364,000), compared to 63% across all of New York City (1,635,007), spent at least 30 percent of their income on housing. This is a leading contributor to poverty. The poverty rate in The Bronx was nearly 25 percent compared to 14.6 percent for the whole city.

<b>Poverty Rates</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>NYC</b>	<b>NYC</b>
Below poverty	80,587	24.80%	275,647	14.60%
All families	325,361		1,888,017	
2015 to 2019 ACS Data				



<b>Gross Rent as a Percentage of Household Income (GRAPI)</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>NYC</b>	<b>NYC</b>
Less than 15.0 percent	37,993	9.90%	289,098	14.30%
15.0 to 19.9 percent	36,021	9.40%	229,489	11.30%
20.0 to 24.9 percent	38,334	10.00%	231,890	11.50%
25.0 to 29.9 percent	40,169	10.50%	210,771	10.40%
30.0 to 34.9 percent	37,521	9.80%	187,932	9.30%
35.0 percent or more	194,258	50.50%	874,982	43.20%
50.0 percent or more	131,818	34.30%	572,093	28.30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>516,114</b>		<b>2,596,255</b>	

2015 to 2019 ACS Data

<b>Gross Rent</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>NYC</b>	<b>NYC</b>
Less than \$500	59,898	15.20%	220,370	10.60%
\$500 to \$999	71,749	18.20%	302,350	14.60%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	158,576	40.20%	583,357	28.10%
\$1,500 to \$1,999	79,669	20.20%	459,000	22.10%
\$2,000 to \$2,499	19,415	4.90%	227,535	11.00%
\$2,500 to \$2,999	3,074	0.80%	115,817	5.60%
\$3,000 or more	1,866	0.50%	165,439	8.00%

2015 to 2019 ACS Data

A number of factors besides rent burden contribute to keeping families in poverty, but household income and rent burden are two of the most important factors. Because Bronx residents typically do not own their own homes, they are subject to rents that can fluctuate unless they are in a rent-stabilized unit. Looking at rents across The Bronx, they are typically lower than the rest of New York City, with the median rent in The Bronx before the pandemic being \$1,212 compared to \$1,443 for New York City as a whole. Since the pandemic, those numbers have increased to \$1,297 and \$1,650 respectively.<sup>45</sup> And yet, Bronx residents are still paying some of the highest percentages of their income toward rent. Community Board 6 in particular mentioned a high level of rent burden among the residents in their district.

Bronx residents earn significantly less than other New Yorkers do across the rest of the city, with The Bronx having the lowest median household income in the city at approximately \$40,000 compared to nearly \$64,000 for the city as a whole. This is approximately 38 percent lower than the median household income for the city.

<b>Household Income</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>Bronx</b>	<b>NYC</b>	<b>NYC</b>
Household income of less than \$10,000	68,098	13.50%	270,622	8.50%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	45,953	9.10%	183,889	5.80%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	64,226	12.70%	284,513	9.00%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	50,954	10.10%	249,242	7.90%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	63,792	12.70%	321,541	10.20%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	79,356	15.80%	452,816	14.30%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	48,942	9.70%	352,212	11.10%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	48,914	9.70%	453,716	14.30%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	18,653	3.70%	241,224	7.60%
\$200,000 or more	14,941	3.00%	357,259	11.30%
<b>Median household income (dollars)</b>	<b>\$40,088</b>		<b>\$63,998</b>	
2015 to 2019 ACS Data				

### Affordable Housing and Housing Quality

All New Yorkers should have access to housing that does not put them in financial distress. While the rent burden metric – that households should not pay more than 30 percent of their income on housing – may not be perfect, it does set a bar that New York City should aim for. This is especially true for residents that make less than the median household income because households that make less money pay a disproportionate amount of their income on rent. This takes away from their being able to afford other necessities, such as food, clothing, day care, health care, and many more. These necessities should not just be for the privileged but should be the baseline for all New Yorkers and Bronx residents.

Not only should all New Yorkers have a place to live that they can afford, but they should also have housing that meets a minimum quality standard. While not an exhaustive list, this includes housing that does not have mold or mildew, is not infested with bugs or rodents, meets heating standards, has legal windows, has running water, has electricity, does not expose residents to asbestos or lead paint, and has other general issues addressed by the building within a reasonable timeframe. All management companies and landlords should be held to the same standard and penalties should be levied against those with recurring violations.

While issuing building violations and fines has been the city's practice historically, issuing these building fines has not been very useful in changing behavior or getting better outcomes because bad owners simply accrue large fines and do not pay them or see them merely as the cost of doing business. The city has minimal leverage to require payments. When building owners do pay fines, that money does not go back into improving the buildings or remediating the problems the fines were levied for. Therefore, in order to further incentivize building improvements, there should also be a benefit for building owners to improve their properties for the benefit of tenants. As of now, building owners have little incentive to make improvements to buildings that are rent-stabilized because they cannot increase the rents to make up for these added costs. The Office of the Borough President has heard that some building owners are keeping rent stabilized units vacant hoping for state and city policy changes. Keeping affordable housing away from low-income renters is a losing proposition for the city because it further exacerbates the affordable housing crisis and necessitates more robust government response.

Much of the older housing stock is beginning to have issues with aging plumbing and electrical systems. Pipes are breaking in walls and causing serious flooding, and electrical issues are causing fires due to aging or faulty wiring, exacerbated by issues with 110 volt vs. 220 volt wiring systems, or fuse boxes needing to be upgraded to circuit breakers. These problems will lead to more fires and flooding and need to be addressed for many buildings holistically. However, without programs in place, individual buildings often do not have the resources to fully upgrade their buildings. If these issues are not addressed and problems continue to occur, they will ultimately cost more to address later because the required emergency repairs will often be very expensive and insurance premiums will increase. Worst of all, these issues may result in loss of life that could have been prevented.

### NYCHA

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is home to roughly 1 in 15 New Yorkers across 177,000 apartments within 335 housing developments, including over 350,000 residents in

conventional public housing program (Section 9), over 20,000 residents in developments converted to PACT/RAD, and over 75,000 families who get federal rent subsidies (Section 8)<sup>46</sup>.

There are specific programs already working to improve the city's existing public housing stock. The need to preserve and provide repairs is critically important and was addressed in a 2019 NYCHA RFQ report,<sup>47</sup> which was created out of the *NYCHA 2.0* and *NextGeneration NYCHA* plans to leverage HUD programs to preserve existing public housing stock via Section 8 conversion under NYCHA's preservation initiative called Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT). PACT includes Section 8 conversion mechanisms such as the Federal Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD), the Section 18 disposition process, and the Part 200 disposition process that is being used to turn on subsidies for NYCHA's "unfunded units." The PACT program is intended to preserve NYCHA's affordable housing stock and achieve the following goals:

- Financially stabilize the developments and establish new financing options for critically needed repairs and on-going operations by adding units to a Section 8 voucher platform
- Address the 20-year capital needs of developments in dire need of repairs
- Increase property management capacity
- Improve access to social services and community amenities for NYCHA residents

Funding these programs is critical to improve the quality of affordable housing that already exists in the city. The current projection to fully fund PACT is approximately \$40 billion. The Bronx is home to 75 Section 9 developments, which provide 41,931 units to 90,063 residents. The goal of converting all of these units to PACT/RAD developments will be an ongoing process.

The PACT/RAD program has already converted 18 developments from Section 9 housing for a total of 2,458 units and 5,517 residences and at a cost of approximately \$345 million. There are 26 other developments currently in-progress of conversion which will bring the total units to 8,033 for 16,824 residents. This includes funding allocated for the Edenwald Houses campus, which is the biggest NYCHA development in The Bronx and second largest in the city, behind only Queensbridge Houses. Once these 26 developments are completed in 2024, approximately 23.6 percent of all Section 9 housing will have been converted to the RAD/PACT program in The

Bronx. For context, the RAD/PACT program and Section 9 provide housing to approximately 6.5 percent of Bronx residents in approximately 8.4 percent of all housing units.

<b>RAD/PACT Sites (Completed - Bronx Only)</b>	<b>Total Units</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>Cost (in Millions)</b>
Baychester	441	684	116
Murphy	281	576	
Betances I	309	684	145
Betances II, 13	51	109	
Betances II, 18	78	216	
Betances II, 9A	46	99	
Betances III, 13	22	74	
Betances III, 18	19	38	
Betances III, 9A	26	88	
Betances IV	282	719	
Betances V	100	331	
Betances VI	155	341	
Franklin Avenue I Conventional	61	106	38
Franklin Avenue II Conventional	45	87	
Franklin Avenue III Conventional	15	39	
Highbridge Rehabs (Anderson Ave)	135	310	
Highbridge Rehabs (Nelson Ave)	80	184	
Twin Parks West (Sites 1&2)	312	832	46
<b>18 Development Totals</b>	<b>2,458</b>	<b>5,517</b>	<b>345</b>
nyc.gov/nycha; Feb 2022 dataset			

<b>RAD/PACT Sites (In Progress - Bronx Only)</b>	<b>Total Units</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>Cost (in Millions)</b>	<b>Planned Completion Year</b>
Edenwald	2,039	4,622	445	2023
Sack Wern	413	841	110	2023
Clason Point Gardens	401	856	81	2023
1010 East 178th St	220	432	31	2024
East 180th Street- Monterey Ave	239	512	38	2024
Twin Parks East (Site 9)	219	233	22	2024
Bailey Avenue - West 193rd St	233	441	40	2024
Fort Independence St - Heath Ave	344	714	50	2024
Harrison Ave Rehab (Group A)	34	72	5	2024
Harrison Ave Rehab (Group B)	150	325	21	2024
University Ave Rehab	230	486	52	2024
West Tremont Ave - Sedgwick Ave Area	148	155	18	2024
Boston Secor	538	1,268	76	2024
Boston Road Plaza	235	274	31	2024
Middletown Plaza	179	186	21	2024
Bryant Ave - East 174th St	72	146	9	2024
East 165th St - Bryant Ave	111	354	21	2024
East 173rd St - Vyse Ave	168	381	21	2024
Hoe Ave - East 173rd St	65	145	12	2024
Hunts Point Ave Rehab	131	318	34	2024
Longfellow Ave Rehab	75	244	15	2024
West Farms Road Rehab	208	428	32	2024
West Farms Square Conventional	20	43	4	2024
Eastchester Gardens	877	1,935	160	2024
East 152nd St- Courtlandt Ave	221	361	26	2024
Moore	463	1,052	75	2024
<b>26 Development Totals</b>	<b>8,033</b>	<b>16,824</b>	<b>1,449</b>	
nyc.gov/nycha; Feb 2022 dataset				

### Rent Stabilization

According to the housing vacancy survey, there were slightly over one million rent-stabilized units throughout New York City, nearly the same number as market-rate rental units. Rent stabilization provides one of the major ways that housing is affordable for working people in New York City. Rents for rent-stabilized units are about \$400 cheaper than that of market-rate rental units.<sup>48</sup>

In 2019, the state legislature enacted reforms to the rent stabilization law that provided strong benefits to residents of these units. The law limited rent increases due to major capital improvements and individual apartment improvements, protected preferential rents, made deregulating apartments much more difficult, and eliminated the vacancy bonus.<sup>49</sup> These reforms will help maintain a robust rent-stabilized housing stock for years to come.

### Mitchell-Lama

The Mitchell-Lama program was signed into law in 1955 to provide affordable rental and cooperative housing to moderate- and middle-income families. There are a total of 39 Mitchell-Lama developments in The Bronx for a total of 28,223 units, split between city and state supervised developments. New York City supervises 6,554 units within 22 developments, with 14 developments consisting of 3,025 co-op units and eight developments consisting of 3,529 rental units.

New York State supervises 21,669 total units within 17 developments in The Bronx. Thirteen of these developments are family-developments consisting of one 129-unit rental building and 20,803 co-op units, including Co-Op City, which comprises 15,372 units across 35 high-rise buildings in the Northeast Bronx. Co-Op City is the largest single residential development in the United States and the largest housing cooperative in the world. New York State also supervises three developments for seniors, totaling 737 units.

Programs such as Mitchell-Lama show how public-private partnerships can be successful and can provide a model for developments going through PACT/RAD by providing lower-income residents rental opportunities through a similar managing agent partnership. It is imperative that these Mitchell-Lama buildings continue to be supported by the city and state and are able to receive the financial assistance they need to meet all clean energy standards and upgrade their energy options.

NYC Bronx Co-Ops	Total Units
Adee Towers	292
Bronxwood Towers	108
Cannon Heights	170
Chatterton Terrace	132
Dennis Lane	280
Hutchinson Parkway Apartments	158
Kingsbridge Arms	105
LIND-RIC	171
Lindville	142
Rosedale Gardens	407
Scott Towers	351
Tilden Towers I	125
Tilden Towers II	265
Woodstock Terrace	319
<b>Total Units</b>	<b>3,025</b>

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/services/MLLIST.pdf>

NYC Bronx Rentals	Total Units
Carol Gardens	314
Evergreen Gardens	355
Keith Plaza	301
Kelly Towers	301
Mins Plaza	83
O.U.B. Houses	359
Stevenson Commons	947
Tracey Towers	869
<b>Total Units</b>	<b>3,529</b>

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/services/MLLIST.pdf>

NYS Units for Families	Total Units	Unit Type
Amalgamated Houses	1,486	Co-Op
Carnes McKinney	111	Co-Op
Concourse Village	1,883	Co-Op
Co-op City	15,372	Co-Op
Jamie Towers	620	Co-Op
Mayflower Terrace	120	Co-Op
Oak Towers	100	Co-Op
Orloff Towers	189	Co-Op
Park Reservoir Apartments	275	Co-Op
Parkside Apartments	167	Co-Op
Stratford Towers	129	Rental
Tower Gardens	209	Co-Op
Waldo Apartments	171	Co-Op
Woodlawn Apartments	100	Co-Op
<b>Total Units</b>	<b>20,932</b>	

[https://hcr.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/06/dhcr-mls\\_family-listing-for-website\\_6-9-2022.pdf](https://hcr.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/06/dhcr-mls_family-listing-for-website_6-9-2022.pdf)

NYS Units for Seniors	Total Units	Unit Type
Findlay House	227	Rental
Jonas Bronck Apartments	215	Rental
Kittay House	295	Rental
<b>Total Units</b>	<b>737</b>	

[https://hcr.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/06/dhcr-mls\\_senior-citizen-listing-for-website\\_6-9-2022.pdf](https://hcr.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2022/06/dhcr-mls_senior-citizen-listing-for-website_6-9-2022.pdf)



## Evictions

The COVID-19 pandemic caused severe disruption to the rental housing market and the ability of many low- to middle-income New Yorkers to pay their rent. The evictions crisis in our city long predates the pandemic, however. There have been far too many people evicted from their homes over the years.

Fortunately, the state and city have taken many steps to ameliorate the evictions crisis. During her time in the city council, Borough President Gibson was proud to join with now-Borough President Mark Levine to enact Right to Counsel into law. This program has resulted in thousands of New Yorkers attaining counsel in evictions proceedings when they would not have had access before. Having counsel in an eviction case is the surest way for tenants to be able to stay in their homes. According to city data, when a tenant has counsel in an evictions case, they are allowed to stay in their home 84 percent of the time.<sup>50</sup> This is an important step in the right direction when it comes to stopping the evictions crisis.

During the pandemic, the federal government provided funding for states to set up emergency rental assistance programs (ERAP). In New York, ERAP has provided funding for 182,536 households for a total of \$2.3 billion in rent and utility payments. There is an additional \$601 million outstanding to be paid as of June 30, 2022.<sup>51</sup> As of August 8, 2022, just in The Bronx, the state has paid out over \$532.6 million in rent payments to 45,449 households. This was the highest number of households and the second-highest amount paid, after Brooklyn.<sup>52</sup> This has made an enormous difference in the lives of low-income and rent-burdened New Yorkers. Governor Hochul provided additional funding for the ERAP program in her budget for fiscal year 2023. However, this money was quickly claimed and the program is no longer taking applications as of June 30. More funding will be required to stave off a wave of evictions. Community Board 4 called for more to be done to help individuals with rent arrears.

## Homeownership

There are many issues that hurt the ability of Bronx residents to gain access to homeownership opportunities. Modern-day redlining has resulted in many Bronxites, particularly Black and Hispanic residents, from being able to buy homes. Too many financial institutions deny access to the necessary financing for Bronxites to buy their own homes. Historical poverty and segregation persists to today because these individuals are unable to escape the cycles that have prevented the building of intergenerational wealth. Without access to financing and mortgages, Bronxites will be forever forced to maintain rentals. Community Board 5 mentioned wanting to increase the homeownership rate in their district.

However, when they are able to own their own homes, there are also challenges in maintaining their properties. One example of this is the ability to provide maintenance for the retaining walls on or abutting their properties. One issue with this is that homeowners sometimes do not know what their responsibilities are regarding the retaining walls. Furthermore, there is difficulty when there are retaining walls that abut multiple properties because the property owners are required to split the cost of the required inspections and maintenance. This can often lead to conflicts between property owners. The city must do more to help homeowners understand their responsibilities regarding the regular inspections and maintenance of these retaining walls as well as providing maintenance as needed.

## *Policy Goals*

### New Affordable Housing

Not only does existing affordable housing need to be preserved and improved, but new affordable housing also needs to be created. As new affordable housing is built, it is critically important that this housing becomes a long-term investment for The Bronx. This means building housing that emphasizes both quality and quantity. Borough President Gibson recognizes the importance of increasing the number of units available in the borough and the city as a whole, but

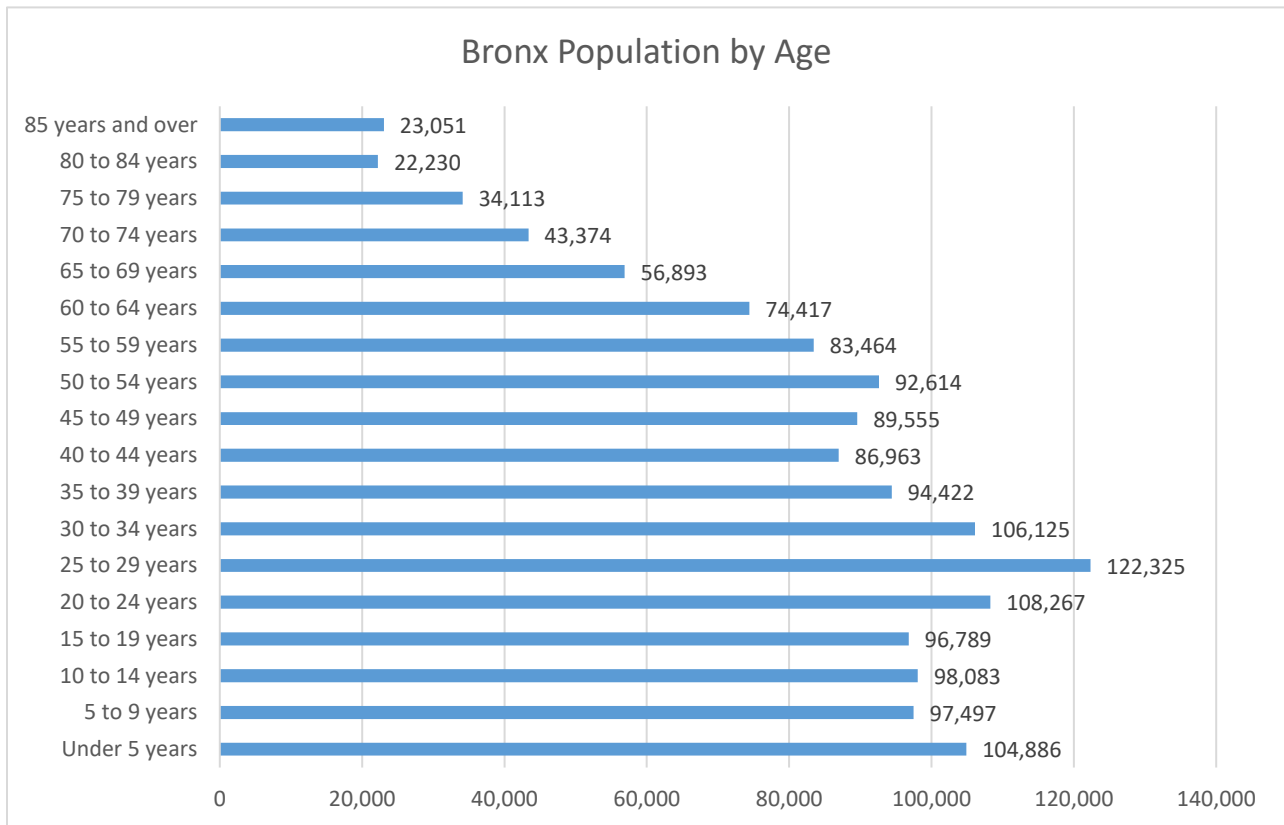
this must happen in a way that comports with the following parameters that will best serve the population of The Bronx, both those who live here now and those who will move here in the future.

When applicants for development come to the Office, minimum standards for getting the Borough President's support are already set, which include that all residential buildings have at least 30 percent of all non-senior units having at least two bedrooms and that all units, including senior housing, are built larger than HPD minimums. These two recommendations will help ensure families can grow and not have to move from the community that they have established themselves in. The Borough President recognizes that a higher quality of housing is built with the tradeoff of fewer units being built. However, the quality of the housing stock is just as important as the quantity of units. While the 30 percent of two bedrooms is a minimum threshold, it is important that three and four bedrooms are also included in the unit mix.

To expound on unit sizes, the Office of the Bronx Borough President is currently working on developing unit size standards that will be the baseline standard for developers to garner the Borough President's support. While there are currently HPD unit size thresholds, it is important to reevaluate these size thresholds to provide a range that more effectively allows families to remain in place rather than having to move when the family grows or children grow older. This includes housing for seniors because some recent developments have had proposed unit sizes as small as 360 square feet, which would start to negatively affect the quality of life for those seniors.

Additionally, the quality of the structure itself needs to be built with design and structural standards that will allow new buildings to be a part of the community and not stand out as affordable or supportive housing. These new buildings will become a part of the larger fabric of the community that residents want to live in. These buildings should meet good urban design practices, such as designing buildings with various building articulations to avoid sheer walls, challenge architects to come up with unique designs both within units and for the outside of the buildings, including coming up with unique or interesting building facades that may include unique brickwork, etc. It is important that new affordable and supportive housing does not look like traditional public housing, but housing that anyone would be proud to live in.

Providing housing to a range of needs is extremely important as well. With regards to senior housing, it is extremely important for seniors to have a range of options as they age. This includes everything from housing, to healthcare, to places designated to activities for seniors. Housing dedicated to senior care provides specialized amenities such as wellness checks, daily meals, and recreational and wellness activities, while providing a place where people can be social. While the population pyramid is relatively stable in The Bronx, there is a growing senior population that needs access to care and amenities that can be provided in housing designed specifically for seniors.<sup>53</sup>



Additionally, supporting our veterans is necessary because many veterans have sacrificed much for the freedoms we all enjoy today, and they should be given proper housing and treatment for any physical or mental health issues that they have endured while protecting our liberties.

Another key policy item with creating new housing is creating homeownership opportunities within neighborhoods. Homeownership helps to stabilize neighborhoods, helps build generational wealth, creates a pathway to the middle class, and generally leads to economic prosperity. Finding new pathways to home ownership is extremely important for the long-term

prosperity of Bronx residents. Projects that have home ownership will be a priority for getting financing and support.

With the historical neglect of The Bronx by banks through redlining and other illegal practices over the years, the requirements to qualify for a home loan can be challenging for low- to middle-income individuals. Federal loan policies and the financial tightening of loans after the 2008 recession have continued this trend with banks being more reluctant to provide loans. It is important for the city to continue stepping up with financing options to support low- to middle-income New Yorkers by providing options for first-time home loans for their primary residence. Programs such as the HPD *Open Door* program need to continue to be financed which will allow loans with as little as 5-percent down payment.

Every community in the Bronx needs to take on their fair share of new housing. While discussed further in the Land Use section, it is important for comprehensive neighborhood studies continue which will identify areas of growth while providing agreements to ensure these areas can handle and maintain that future growth. With 421-a having expired, it is critically important that future affordable housing continue to be financed by the city, state, and federal governments.

The city must better incentivize building improvements through tax breaks or other financial incentives that will not be directly passed on to the tenants. These tax breaks for certain building improvements would allow rents to remain stabilized while incentivizing building improvements and not putting all the costs onto the building owners. This would be a win for the city because it would open up more affordable housing that is not currently on the market. It would be a win for building owners, who will be able to make improvements without having to incur all of the building improvement costs. And most importantly, it would be a win for tenants who have been living in substandard housing conditions.

It is a priority that every project that comes through The Bronx works not just for the future residents of the borough, but for the current ones as well. Bronx residents that have lived here for decades and have lived through some of the worst conditions should not be displaced as the borough finally begins seeing capital improvements and investments that will improve the quality of life for those living here.

Almost all of the community boards in The Bronx focused on the lack of affordable housing and the high cost of housing as a serious issue affecting the borough. Multiple board mentioned the importance of considering changes to the Area Median Income (AMI) calculations to make the AMI levels for affordable housing fairer for Bronx residents and to ensure a greater mix of income levels in housing developments.

### Supportive Housing

Providing housing for formerly homeless, asylum seekers, and those with supportive service needs is also important. While all of these housing types have different needs, many residents who are trying to improve their lives need either active or passive support services. Bringing together people that need this assistance with programs that offer these services is a goal of the Borough President. Bronx-based organizations that show positive outcomes will continue to get the Borough President's support for new supportive housing.

No New Yorker should live on the streets, and providing housing to currently homeless will continue to be important for working to better the lives of those who do not have a home. Mayor Adams recently announced the Street Homelessness Advocacy Project (SHAP), which will engage and offer services to individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. SHAP is a step in the right direction for connecting homeless with finding shelter and providing services, but continued assistance is often needed, and it is imperative that the city continue to be a leader in providing this support for our most vulnerable populations.

### NYCHA

When it comes to NYCHA, our first goal must be to protect and preserve our public housing stock for current and future residents. Public housing fills a desperately needed gap in the housing market for low-income New Yorkers. We cannot give up on this important resource for our communities.

The Borough President will continue to advocate for NYCHA to get adequate capital funding for improvements to the developments in The Bronx. The NYCHA budget gap is growing, and it is likely that it will only be able to be closed by following an all-of-the-above strategy. This can include reforms such as PACT/RAD and raising funds through selling air rights and infill development. Community Board 8 mentioned the dire need for improvements and repairs at the NYCHA developments in their district, Fort Independence and Marble Hill Houses. Community Board 10 also mentioned needs relating to their developments at Middletown Plaza, Throggs Neck Houses, and Randall Balcom Houses.

However, it is unlikely that the budget needs will be met through local action alone. The Borough President will work with our federal partners to achieve the needed budget allocations from the federal government to close the gap. Since public housing is derived from a public subsidy, it has been historical federal disinvestment that has led NYCHA to this point. While President Biden and congressional Democrats originally proposed funding for public housing in the Build Back Better bill, this money did not survive in the final version of the Inflation Reduction Act. The federal government must live up to its commitments and fully fund NYCHA.

It is unacceptable that NYCHA continues to be in such a bad state of repair. In 2021, Public Advocate Jumaane Williams named NYCHA the worst landlord in the city for the fourth year running.<sup>54</sup> This state of affairs is a testament to years of neglect, mismanagement, and underinvestment. While we have been hearing for years about plans to improve, the gains are few and far between. The repairs backlog persists the capital deficit is only getting worse. The city must recommit to solving these issues, working in collaboration with NYCHA tenants represented by their chosen leaders.

### *Proposed Solutions*

**Build More Affordable Housing:** The Bronx needs more affordable housing for our residents. With spiking rents, we cannot risk people being priced out of their neighborhoods. We want to encourage development in our borough, but this cannot be allowed to lead to displacement. The best way to ensure this is to require affordable housing set asides that will enable local residents

to move into these units. This can be done while increasing the overall numbers of units in any given neighborhood. This must also be done throughout The Bronx, with every neighborhood taking on new housing to meet the need. The state should also consider legalizing accessory dwellings units (ADUs) in collaboration with local communities to ensure that this missing housing supply can become available.

**Ensure Housing Works for Bronx Families:** More affordable housing in The Bronx is a welcome way to help get all Bronxites into permanent homes. However, the Borough President is concerned that these units are often too small and have too few bedrooms to fully accommodate growing families in our borough. It is not useful when a family has an additional child and is forced to find a new residence because there are no longer enough rooms for all of the children. Larger units with three or more bedrooms are an underdeveloped part of the housing stock. Additionally, deeply affordable senior housing is an essential part of the housing landscape, but these units are often studios as small as 300-400 square feet. While seniors may not need as much space as growing families, it is unfair to ask a person to live healthily in such a small space.

**Expand Housing Enforcement:** Our tenants deserve safe, stable, and clean housing that is maintained and in a state of good repair. Too many landlords are not fulfilling their obligations to their tenants. It should not take months of fighting for necessary repairs to be made. There are too many vacancies in inspector positions at HPD. The city must act swiftly to ensure that these positions are filled by talented professionals who have the ability to issue the necessary fines and ensure that buildings are brought into compliance. If the current levels of fines are insufficient to bring about compliance, then the city should consider raising them to levels that will work.

**Build More Housing for Vulnerable Populations:** Veterans, seniors, and other vulnerable populations often require housing that has both affordable and supportive components. Those with serious health issues and trouble getting around deserve special attention to ensure that they remain safely housed. This supportive housing must also include housing for the homeless population. Homelessness is first and foremost a housing issue. While many homeless individuals and families simply need a helping hand to get situated, many more also require a supportive element. The city must ensure that everyone gets access to the help they need to remain housed and off the streets. The city must also provide more emergency shelters and permanent housing for people who are



fleeing domestic violence situations, runaway and homeless youth, youth aging out of foster care, and people with disabilities. HASA services for people living with HIV must also be fully operational so that everyone who lives with HIV can find affordable housing.

**Preserve NYCHA:** With NYCHA's ever-increasing capital budget needs, the city must pursue an all-of-the-above strategy to ensure that NYCHA remains financially able to provide for its residents. Too many of our NYCHA units and buildings have fallen into serious disrepair. We must act now to prevent this situation from worsening. This all-of-the-above strategy must include PACT/RAD, infill development, selling air rights, and any other strategy available. We owe it to the existing residents to keep them in their homes for the long-term. Additionally, the backlog of complaints and repairs is staggering. While NYCHA has been making progress to ameliorate the situation, more must be done. NYCHA cannot continue to be the worst landlord in the city. It is unconscionable that we are leaving our public housing tenants in such conditions, and the city must recommit to solving these issues. NYCHA must fill all vacant positions for caretakers, groundkeepers, and maintenance workers to ensure that regular upkeep is done and that all complaints are handled on a timely basis. NYCHA must also work with DSNY to ensure that all sanitation issues in and surrounding NYCHA buildings are dealt with quickly and efficiently.

**Expand Homeownership Opportunities:** Homeownership is the strongest way to build ties to a community and to build intergenerational wealth. However, homeownership is a mere dream for far too many Bronxites. We must pursue more alternatives to increase ownership opportunities. This includes incentivizing cooperative and condominium developments and through the use of community land trusts. New and innovative strategies will be required to help New Yorkers the financing that is required to buy a home. Too many of our financial institutions are unwilling to lend to our residents. This must change.

**Expand Evictions Protections:** The state should follow the lead of New York City and adopt a right-to-counsel law. Because the state is responsible for the regulation of the courts, they can adopt a policy that results in an adjournment if a tenant is unrepresented. This will prove the best guarantee of eviction-prevention. The state and city must provide enough funding to ensure that no person faces eviction without a lawyer at their side. No landlord would be willing to go to court without the aid of counsel, so no tenant should have to do the same. Furthermore, the city should

expand the right-to-counsel law to cover more people. Just because a household earns more than 200 percent of the poverty level, it does not mean that they are not at risk of eviction or can afford to hire a lawyer. Risk of homelessness is a problem for more than just the poorest New Yorkers. We must do all we can to keep people in their homes. Furthermore, the state should provide additional funding to the ERAP program. Governor Hochul's budget this year provided an influx of funds, but that money was quickly used up, necessitating additional funding to be added.

## **Fire Education, Safety, and Prevention**

### *Long-Term Issues*

On January 9, 2022, The Bronx experienced one of the most horrific fires in our borough's history. A five-alarm fire at Twin Parks North West claimed the fire of 17 of our neighbors, including eight children. This tragedy spurred a response from all levels of government and resulted in people coming together from all across our country to provide aid to the injured, the bereaved, and the displaced.

The reason these 17 people are dead is simple. They were killed by neglect. This fire began in a unit that was too cold, leading the family to use a space heater that then malfunctioned. The resulting smoke spread throughout the building, causing these deaths, because multiple self-closing doors did not work properly. This only highlights the many inequities that Bronxites have historically faced with regards to housing. There is a lack of attention and accountability in addressing long-standing violations and a lack of prioritization in investing and conducting necessary repairs to ensure hospitable, safe, and adequate housing for our residents.

After the fire, the Borough President's office sprang into action to provide aid and support to the affected families. The office worked with our heroic first-responders like the FDNY, NYPD, OEM, and the American Red Cross who acted decisively to save as many lives as possible and provide immediate care in the aftermath. In the days, weeks, and months following the fire, the Borough President's office worked with the displaced families to help them find new permanent homes, receive aid, and apply for services at all levels of government. The office coordinated a massive distribution of aid at the Kingsbridge Armory, including food, toiletries, bedding, clothing, and more, to ensure that the displaced families were able to take as much as they need to get themselves back on their feet and start rebuilding their lives.

Twin Parks has been far from the only fire facing our borough this year. Dozens of people have been displaced and some killed in fires all across The Bronx and the city as a whole. We must do more to ensure that fires are prevented and that fire victims are taken care of properly.

In response to these fires, the New York City Council and the New York State Legislature enacted several bills to try to prevent similar occurrences in the future. These bills included new regulations relating to space heaters and self-closing doors. Borough President Gibson was proud to introduce two of these bills in the City Council alongside Council Member Oswald Feliz. These bills would strengthen the enforcement of the regulations concerning self-closing doors in buildings all across our city, increasing fines and reducing the time allowed for repairs to be made.

### *Policy Goals*

The most important priority when it comes to fire safety is prevention. And prevention starts with ensuring that the housing stock is safe, stable, and well maintained. No one should live in a house that is not heated well enough, that has broken or damaged features like self-closing doors, or that lacks appropriate emergency infrastructure like smoke detectors or fire escapes.

But until that goal is realized, we must also work to ensure that temporary solutions are safe and work well for our communities. This means that space heaters must be safe and not prone to cause fires, that smoke alarms work and only go off in true emergencies, and that our neighbors are educated about best practices to keep themselves and their families safe.

When a fire does occur, we must also work to have the best response possible for survivors. This means that the response from the city and the state must be coordinated, generous, and immediate. For New Yorkers who go through fires, we must help them find adequate replacement housing on both a temporary and permanent basis. We must help them rebuild their lives. We should also help New Yorkers plan for emergencies through education and planning. This includes providing information about fire prevention and safety, as well as information about the benefits of acquiring renters insurance.

## *Proposed Strategies*

**Build Inspections Capacity:** The state and city governments must build capacity to conduct inspections of the rental housing stock in the city, particularly in regulated housing such as those used by people with federal housing vouchers. There are currently not enough inspectors to meet the need to ensure that every person in the city is living in a safe and well-maintained apartment. There is backlog for dealing with complaints, and remediation is not always immediately done. The city Department of Housing Preservation and Development and the state Department of Housing and Community Renewal must ensure that they have enough personnel to keep inspections up to date. The state legislature and city council must commit to funding these departments to the needed level to keep these positions filled by trained inspectors. Mayor Adams signed an executive order on March 20, 2022 to improve coordination between HPD and FDNY to identify buildings with large numbers of fire safety violations for enhanced inspections.<sup>55</sup> This order is a strong step toward improving the inter-agency cooperation that can help prevent these disasters through better and more frequent inspections.

**Increase Penalties for Heating and Fire Safety Violations:** When a landlord is cited for having the temperature in their buildings too low or for fire safety violations such as broken self-closing doors or malfunctioning alarms, the penalties should be severe enough to actually deter this malfeasance. If the fines are merely a slap on the wrist that the landlord can simply write off as the cost of doing business, things will not change for the families who are at risk. The city council must ensure that the fines are at the appropriate level to deter landlord neglect.

**Enact Federal Legislation:** There are currently numerous proposed bills that Congress should pass to better administer federally regulated housing. These bills include H.R. 6528, the “Housing Temperature Safety Act of 2022”<sup>56</sup> and H.R. 6529, the “Twin Parks North West Fire Safety Act of 2022.”<sup>57</sup> These bills would increase federal regulation of low temperatures and self-closing doors in federally assisted apartments. By implementing federal mandates in addition to local ones, there will be more regulation and oversight of federally assisted housing that will better ensure the safety of these residents.

**Improve Access to Renters Insurance:** For individuals who rent in New York City, obtaining renters insurance is often recommended or required as part of a lease agreement. However, despite general low cost, many people in our communities do not have this insurance. The city should work to improve access to renters insurance through subsidies to the most economically needy. Furthermore, the state legislature should adopt legislation requiring that insurance companies offer a very low cost option for low-income New Yorkers. These are the people most at risk due to poor housing stock, as well as the least likely to be able to rebuild after a tragedy. The Borough President will advocate that the city and state ensure everyone in The Bronx is able to have the coverage and protection in case of a situation like a fire where people are displaced or lose their possessions.

**Increase Fire Safety Education:** The Borough President's office will work with other city agencies such as the FDNY and DOE to improve educational outreach to individuals regarding keeping their families safe from fire risk. This education will include information regarding self-closing doors and the importance of closing doors when evacuating, smoke detectors, stove knob covers, evacuation plans, and space heater safety. The Borough President will support the Red Cross's "Sound the Alarm" initiative to help install smoke alarms in residences across The Bronx. Residents must be made aware of the important of smoke alarms, not to disable them, and to regularly test them and change their batteries.

**Provide Sufficient Support to Those Affected by Fires:** The city government must do more to provide support to individuals who have been injured or displaced by fires. This must include housing support, assistance applying for government aid across all levels of government, physical and mental health support, and any other aid available. There should be a dedicated fund within the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City to offer relief to victims and to coordinate giving. When our neighbors are affected by fire, it is our responsibility as a city and community to come together to support them and ensure that they are able to find their footing to begin rebuilding their lives. This support should last over the long-term for displaced residents, continuing until residents are able to find new permanent housing.

**Develop a Fire Response Guide:** When a fire happens, the process for victims is often opaque, and people often do not know what their next steps could or should be. The city government should provide a clear step-by-step guide for victims, property owners, and everyone else involved in the

case of a fire. This guide should include resources available and answers to frequently asked questions. The Borough President will work with the Office of Emergency Management and any other city agency to help bring this to fruition.

## **Parks**

The phrase “a tale of two cities” aptly describes parks across New York City. Conservancies like those caring for Central Park, Prospect Park, and Bryant Park, are able to raise millions of dollars annually and are able to maintain these public spaces in superior condition. They ensure the trees are all pruned, the grass is cut, and the flowerbeds are bursting with seasonal colors. These parks are inviting to the wealthy New Yorkers who live and work in the areas surrounding them.

Where those living nearby earn modest wages, a neighborhood park is often their only access to green space and a reprieve from a hot New York summer. Indeed, the park is “the country” for the hundreds of young people whose families share what might be a modest patch of green. These folks often do not have any other options, whereas their wealthier counterparts in other boroughs may be able to afford getaways to places where their families can enjoy the outdoors in a non-urban setting. In short, for these families our city’s parks are not simply a place to look at, stroll through, or picnic in. For many New Yorkers, their local parks are communal backyards where barbeques are held adjacent to a modest sized tent to celebrate a birthday, where families can play, and where people linger late into the night simply to find a cool breeze that they cannot find in their apartments. The funding for these parks is entirely reliant on the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR).

We are not living up to our goals. When the New York City began establishing park spaces, one of the objectives was to make certain that, no matter where the park may be located, everyone would have access to the same amenities and green spaces. To be sure, some parks afforded more amenities than others did, but every park had water fountains that worked, every park had similar play equipment for those wanting to play on the swings, the benches all looked the same as did the lights that welcomed evening visitors, and more. If this ever really was an official city policy, it most certainly ended during the 1970s.

A key response to the virtual collapse of park maintenance that the fiscal crisis of the 1970s prompted was the creation of conservancies. Founded around 1982, the Central Park Conservancy is perhaps the best known and boasts an endowment of over \$200 million. In 1995, a less well-



known endeavor was the founding of “Partnership for Parks” which was initiated by the DPR. This program coordinates a host of functions shared between the DPR with local community groups responsible for maintaining a specific park. However, the city has not provided the sustained financial resources needed for the partnership’s longevity. The partnership works until it comes time to raise money in places where private money is lacking. Consequently, the disparity between those parks reliant on public dollars verses those parks able to benefit from significant endowments given by the city’s most well-off citizens is one legacy of the 1970s.

<b>Borough</b>	<b>Maintenance Funding</b>	<b>Designated Private Funding</b>	<b>Total Area of Parks (Acres)</b>	<b>Total Parks</b>
Bronx	\$7,479,011	\$149,977	7,227.91	387
Brooklyn	\$14,976,301	\$3,491,497	5,581.05	599
Manhattan	\$9,585,273	\$40,842,211	2,922.61	382
Queens	\$11,563,984	\$1,169,702	8,591.21	454
Staten Island	\$3,198,320	\$0	7,575.78	150
<b>NYC Totals</b>	<b>\$46,802,889</b>	<b>\$45,653,387</b>	<b>31,898.56</b>	<b>1972</b>

Data collected 8/30/22; <https://council.nyc.gov/public-advocate/parks/>

Capital funding is a challenge. The DPR has no comprehensive capital funding resource. Rather it relies on the benevolence of private sector support coupled with monies allocated for specific capital needs by local elected officials. Compounding this challenge is that 30 percent of a project’s total anticipated cost must be set aside for contingency costs. This requirement further inflates the cost of projects, given that this additional 30 percent financial requirement cannot be applied to the final budget for financing. Finally, before the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) will endorse a capital project, 100 percent of what may be required for the project must be committed in advance. Therefore, these policies often discourage the essential support made by elected officials because the projects may take many years to complete, if they are ever done.

There are exceptions to this challenge, the most obvious being the Community Park Initiative (CPI) adopted by then Commissioner Mitchell Silver. In this case, the de Blasio administration fully funded capital improvements made in many of the city’s smallest parks, noting the objective of placing a mapped park within five-blocks of every resident. Because of their modest size, broad support by elected officials to invest in these spaces would be difficult to coordinate. Another prime example was the complete reconstruction of the High Bridge linking

The Bronx with Manhattan. During the Bloomberg administration, \$65 million was committed to this project, which prior to this support remained closed, languishing for over fifty years.

The High Bridge is the city's oldest standing bridge. This is an important landmark connecting The Bronx to Washington Heights that all New Yorkers should come and experience. Earlier this year, Borough President Gibson joined with Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine to advocate for the High Bridge. Together, they pushed Mayor Adams to extend the hours of the High Bridge this summer to 10 pm.<sup>58</sup>



In 2016, the city announced the Anchor Parks program to upgrade one important park in each of the five boroughs. The park in The Bronx that the city selected was St. Mary's Park in Mott Haven.<sup>59</sup> St. Mary's Park received \$19.6 million in funding for renovations, which were completed in 2021.<sup>60</sup> This program helped to renovate these important community resources across the city, and Mayor Adams, the Council, and DPR should consider doing another round of anchor parks redevelopment.

The Trust for Public Land released a study called *Economic Benefits of Parks in New York City*<sup>61</sup> and found that 99 percent of New York City residents were within a 10-minute walk of a public park. The report found that the economic benefits from the NYC parks system included:

## Human Health

- \$9.1 billion in recreational value for residents, an average of \$17 per visit for the 527 million visits by residents alone, who use the parks for playing in playgrounds, walking, picnicking, running, relaxing, observing wildlife, biking, visiting beaches, and participating in fitness classes
- \$1.14 billion in health care savings for over one million residents who report using parks to meet CDC guidelines for physical activity, worth approximately \$1,330 annually for those who exercise for 150 minutes per week
- Reduced cost of heat stress illnesses due to parks' shrubs and tree canopies providing shade and lowering nearby ground temperatures, and avoiding the costs for associated emergency department visits or hospitalizations

## Environmental Benefits

- Up to \$2.43 billion in avoided stormwater treatment costs through runoff absorbed rather than discharged to sewers, streets, and waterways
- Avoided treatment costs for nitrogen in runoff, due to infiltration in parks rather than degrading water quality
- \$20.3 million through reduced fine particulate matter and \$6.2 million through reduced ground ozone, two air pollutants known to impact human health

## Economic Impact

- Over \$15.2 billion in increased property value and \$101 million in annual property tax revenues for homes within 500 feet of parks
- \$17.9 billion in tourism spending, including local and non-local domestic visits related to outdoor activity
- \$680 million annually spent on sports, recreation, and exercise equipment by residents attributed to the outdoor recreation economy, supporting at least 479 stores and 4,336 employees in New York City

There are not enough trees in our borough. As the climate changes and the summers get hotter and there is more flooding, we must take action to prevent negative effects from these changes. One such way is through the planting of trees.

The Bronx – the South Bronx in particular – experiences high levels of heat relative to the rest of the city. Black and elderly New Yorkers were disproportionately likely to suffer heat-related hospitalization and death. It is no surprise that decades of disinvestment in our neighborhoods has resulted in these inequitable outcomes.<sup>62</sup>

It is also not surprising that South Bronx communities are disproportionately likely to lack tree coverage. Four community districts in The Bronx (1, 2, 5, and 6) each have under 16 percent canopy coverage, and Community District 2 is the lowest at merely 8.4 percent coverage.<sup>63</sup> Areas with shade may be between 20 and 45 degrees cooler than areas in the sun during hot summer days.<sup>64</sup> The lack of trees in these neighborhoods directly leads to heat-related injury and death. This situation cannot remain without action being taken.

### *Policy Goals*

There are many policy goals when it comes to our parks, but, at the core, they are all boil down to one main point: Bronx residents deserve clean and safe parks that are maintained to the same standards as the parks in any other borough. The Bronx boasts over 6,000 acres of mapped parks. The city must also work with communities to ensure that they are able to take advantage of their local parks. The city should educate our young people as to the importance of our parks as part of the urban environment and as a place to get exercise and fresh air. Our parks should be places where people can celebrate life while nurturing the respect that comes from appreciating nature. Parks in New York City must be the bridges that cross social and economic divides rather than accentuate them.

## One City, One Standard

Investments in parks pay for themselves through the resulting economic and health benefits. The city must continue to increase capital funding with a goal of spending one percent of the capital budget on the parks system. This one percent goal is an important goal to ensure that our residents, and particularly our children, have equitable access to public spaces, no matter their ZIP code.

It is essential that the city allocate resources where the need for well-maintained parks is paramount. Knowing the median household income of a community is an immediate indicator of a community's reliance on that park. The lower the income, the more critical the need. As such, there should be no discernable difference in the maintenance the city provides to any of its parks, regardless of the median household income of the adjacent community.

A set of parks (or a specific park) should be maintained by the same staff with equipment designed for the topography and size of the selected parks. Staff members who routinely work on specific parks are best able to efficiently maintain their inventory of parks. The city must maintain the staffing level for those positions that perform routine maintenance across New York's parks.

## Sister Parks Across the Boroughs

New York City prides itself on being one of the most diverse urban environments on Earth. It is also one of the most segregated based on income. Establishing a program with the DPR in coordination with City Council representatives from the many neighborhoods making up New York, different parks from different communities can be linked in order that a bridge between these "sister parks" can facilitate inter-community activities. This will help ensure that the futures of parks in high-income areas and low-income areas are linked and that each will receive equitable funding.

## Million More Trees Initiative

The Borough President supports the “Million More Trees” initiative, which aims to rapidly expand the tree coverage in our city.<sup>65</sup> The goal of the initiative is to expand the number of trees by 200,000 on city streets, by 500,000 in parks and other public land, and by 300,000 on private land. This goal will have numerous effects including ameliorating the heat island effect, managing stormwater and flooding, reducing air pollution and capturing carbon emissions, and creating shade for New Yorkers on our streets.

The initiative also calls for the increase of the city parks budget to one percent of the overall budget, providing funding to maintain the urban tree canopy, help communities care the trees in their neighborhoods, prioritizing neighborhoods with inadequate canopy coverage and which face high heat burdens, and create career opportunities including job trainings.

We must also ensure that our street trees are adequately maintained and not subject to vandalism. There have been reports of trees going unwatered, being destroyed by local businesses, or being left unmaintained to be destroyed by natural means. Too many of our trees are not surviving over the long-term. It matters little if we plant all of these trees if they simply do not survive. This is why the tree maintained funding is so important in addition to just planting them. Community Board 12 also mentioned a desire to increase the cycle for street tree maintenance and pruning as well as increased attention to sidewalk damage from tree roots.

### *Proposed Strategies*

**Commit to the One Percent Goal:** The Borough President supports the goal of dedicating one percent of the overall city budget to our park system and will continue to advocate with the Mayor and City Council to reach that goal in future city budgets. While that goal was not met in this year’s budget, this goal can and should be achieved in the future. The parks in low-income communities such as those in The Bronx would stand the most to benefit from this goal. This funding should go to more staffing in the parks, including for Parks Enforcement Patrol officers

and seasonal workers during the warm months. Community Board 8 specifically mentioned more PEP officers as a priority for their district, in addition to support for the one percent goal.

**Achieve Borough Equity:** The current situation where parks in wealthy areas receive millions in extra funding through conservancies is unfair to low-income residents whose parks are comparatively neglected. Initiatives such as sister parks, Partnership for Parks, and CPI must be used to ensure that parks are equitably improved and maintained regardless of neighborhood or the economic status of the people living around the parks.

**Promote Friends of the Park Groups:** Friends of the Park groups bring together like-minded citizens who care about the parks in their communities. These groups are strong advocates for the maintenance and improvement of the parks they represent. Every park in The Bronx should have one of the groups to help push for the parks to become better resources for the community. Currently, DPR lists partnerships with the following groups: Bronx River Alliance, Friends of Crotona Park, Friends of Mosholu Parkland, Friends of Pelham Bay Park, Friends of Van Cortlandt Park, the New York Botanical Garden, and the Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy.<sup>66</sup>

**Engage in Small Capital Improvements:** General capital improvements are needed across many Bronx parks. This includes benches that need to be upgraded or replaced, bathrooms and comfort stations that need to be cleaned and maintained on a more regular basis, and ADA compliance upgrades. Parks with playgrounds should be upgraded to provide sensory play equipment for children with autism, which also helps non-autistic children develop skills such as balance and coordination. There should also be more support for amenities such as pools, skate parks, and dog parks, which are more readily available in the other boroughs. Community Board 10 specifically mentioned upgrades that will help children with disabilities.

**Support the One Million Trees Initiative:** Earlier this year, the five borough presidents joined together to support the initiative to plant one million trees in our city and achieve 35 percent canopy coverage by 2035. The addition of 15,000 acres of canopy coverage must be done in an equitable manner, ensuring that all neighborhoods receive new trees, according to need. This will not only have a positive effect on heat issues, but also on flood management, air pollution reduction, and energy savings.

**Maintain Park Cleanliness and Safety:** One of the enduring complaints regularly heard by the Office of the Borough President regarding the parks is issues surrounding cleanliness and safety. Additionally, this was something that the Office heard during the Community Board consultations for this statement. Community Board 1, for example, mentioned insufficient police presence in St. Mary's Park to prevent potential criminal activity. The city must ensure that the parks can be used by community residents, and this means providing adequate funding for the Parks and Police Departments to maintain their cleanliness and safety. Having equitable access to parks is not possible if local residents are unwilling or unable to use them. NYPD precincts should appoint specific officers who are responsible for each park. This way, the community will be able to go to one specific person to address any needs in the park.

**Improve Coordination of City Response with Community Needs:** DPR should better coordinate with local communities to ensure that their needs are being met. This can sometimes mean setting rules that forbid certain park uses when they conflict with others' enjoyment of parks, including the use of barbecues, which can often result in conflict between park users, damage to grass, trash accumulation, and attraction of rodents. Importantly, this must be done in a non-punitive manner. People should not become criminal justice-involved simply for using the parks. However, the NYPD must adequately enforce quality-of-life laws, which is oft-heard complaint from local residents about why they do not use the parks as much as they would like.

**Expand DPR Recreation Centers:** The Borough President supports the expansion and strengthening of recreation centers operated by the Department of Parks and Recreation or local community organizations. These centers can offer a variety of programs geared towards people of all ages, but they are especially beneficial to provide youth programming. These rec centers should receive an infusion of capital funding through the city government, including for new technology to provide more services for the community.



## **Transportation**

### *Long-Term Issues*

#### Metro-North Railroad

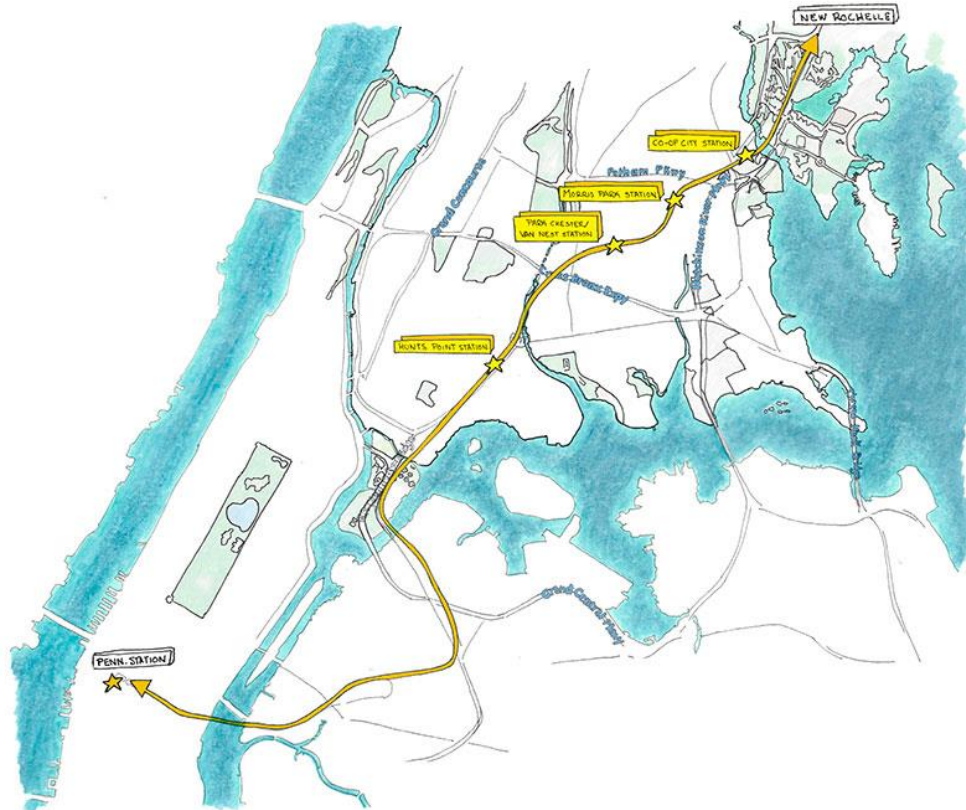
There are two major ongoing rail projects that will have significant effects on The Bronx. The first is the “East Side Access” project, which will bring rail access on the Long Island Railroad from Long Island terminating at Grand Central Station. Currently, the only rail terminus for LIRR trains in Manhattan is Penn Station on the west side, but this will bring an east side terminus as well. While this will not have direct effect on Bronx commuters, aside from additional traffic at Grand Central, there are proposed changes that were planned alongside the project that will have an effect. East Side Access is planned to go into effect in December 2022.

One of the proposed changes will result from rail slots opening at Penn Station from the transfer of trains to Grand Central Terminal. This will result in trains on the Metro-North Railroad passing through The Bronx to be routed to end at Penn Station instead of the usual Grand Central ending. This will allow trains on the New Haven Line to use Amtrak’s Hell Gate Line to route trains through Queens into Penn Station.

Additionally, there is a proposed new station for the LIRR at Sunnyside as part of the Sunnyside Yard Master Plan that would also be a possible stop for the Metro-North trains that use this line. This would provide the only direct rail access between The Bronx and Queens, which could significantly reduce travel time for many individuals who need to travel between these boroughs. Furthermore, in the future, this station could provide a one-stop location to transfer between the Metro-North and the LIRR without having to go into Manhattan.

Another major rail project affecting The Bronx is the construction of four new Metro-North stations along the New Haven Line. These stops would be located at Co-Op City, Morris Park, Parkchester/Van Nest, and Hunts Point. These stations will serve areas that are currently underserved by public transportation, especially Co-Op City, which is beyond the end of the 6-train line. These stations will further expand the transit options for Bronx residents commuting to Manhattan and points further north, but will also enable people from outside the borough to come

in to commercial areas of our borough, such as Hunts Point. These four new stations are planned to begin providing service in 2026-27 and will provide new rail access to the more than 500,000 Bronx residents who live within a half-mile of the stations. This will help reduce travel times to Midtown for residents by 45-90 minutes. This was an important stated priority for Community Board 11.



*A visualization of the four new stations and the Penn Station Access project<sup>67</sup>*

The city's planning and community outreach identified three key topic areas that were important for the creation of the four stations:<sup>68</sup>

- Planning and Building **Working Communities**: strengthening and growing job centers around the new stations, particularly Hunts Point and Morris Park; increasing regional access to jobs both to Manhattan and to points north; and, connecting Bronx residents to good jobs
- Growing **Vibrant Communities**: improving parks and other open spaces; providing community services such as schools; addressing health inequities and promoting healthy

food options; promoting arts, culture, and history; engaging immigrant communities; building equitable neighborhoods; and, creating new housing opportunities

- Creating **Connected Communities**: improving pedestrian infrastructure; improving vehicular circulation; building intermodal connections; and, creating a more connected region

There is \$2.8 billion of capital investment planned to build these four stations, and it is imperative that these neighborhoods get additional infrastructure investments from the city to support these neighborhoods as they continue to grow.

These new stations will enable economic development in the surrounding areas. This will come through more neighborhood residents coming to the areas immediately adjacent to the stations and spending their money at local businesses, as well as through people coming to the neighborhoods from outside of the communities using the new stations. This could lead to significant economic development because it will enable businesses to attract workers who will be more easily able to get to these areas. This is likely particularly true for Hunts Point, which is seeing large investments by the city and other stakeholders. Hunts Point will be a major economic driver in The Bronx for years to come, and the new Metro-North station there will help this along.

### Freedom Ticket

In October 2021, the MTA's Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee (PCAC) released a report calling on the MTA to expand the Atlantic Ticket program to all rail stops in New York City.<sup>69</sup> The Atlantic Rail program allows New York City residents who use the LIRR stops in Brooklyn and southern Queens to have discounted ticket prices when travelling between these stations. This does not apply for rides to stations outside this area, including to Penn Station. Despite 44 to 53 percent reductions in ticket prices, revenue derived from trips to these stations actually increased by 45 percent. Not only does improving access to our regional rail systems save local commuters money, it also improved revenue for the system. This is a win-win idea.

The CityTicket program has in the past allowed reduced intra-city rail access on the weekends for a \$5 fare. Earlier this year, the MTA expanded the CityTicket program to allow it to be used for all intra-city trips during off-peak hours. This expanded CityTicket, along with flat \$3 fares for intra-Bronx travel, has proven to be very popular with consumers.<sup>70</sup> This helps create faster transit options into Manhattan from The Bronx. The difference between these two programs is that the Atlantic Ticket is valid during peak hours as well as off-peak.

The CityTicket expansion has been part of the fare changes that the MTA has put into place as part of their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic first hit New York City, ridership on the MTA systems, including the Metro-North, declined precipitously. This decline in ridership has been partially – but not fully – reversed. An expansion in the Atlantic Ticket program to the rest of the LIRR and Metro-North stations in the city – those in The Bronx and northern Queens – as part of the “Freedom Ticket” program will help to increase the ridership on these rail systems and fill the many empty seats that remain due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to remote work.

### Transit: Subway and Bus

Ridership on the transit system has declined significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the city. During the period of August 9 to 18, 2022, ridership was between 58 to 61 percent of pre-pandemic ridership on weekdays and at 73 to 74 percent on the weekends. This clearly shows the impact of remote work, with people not commuting to the office any longer. Bus ridership did not show a weekday-weekend variation, with ridership during this same period remaining between 59 and 67 percent of pre-pandemic levels. On the other hand, the regional rail (LIRR and Metro-North) saw weekday levels between 51 and 63 percent of pre-pandemic ridership and weekend levels between 91 and 94 percent, showing the effect of loss of commuters. Access-A-Ride ridership was between 80 and 96 percent of pre-pandemic ridership.<sup>71</sup>

Conversely, the bridge and tunnel traffic was back to pre-pandemic levels, at between 96 and 99 percent on the weekdays and over 100 percent on weekends. This shows that there is an issue with individuals willing to come into the city by car but not by transit. Many of these trips

are likely pre-pandemic transit riders switching their mode of transit to cars, showing that there is work that must be done to convince these drivers to return to transit. One such strategy would be to decrease the wait between trains. In off peak hours and reverse commute directions, the gap between trains can be very high. This discourages system use and pushes people into other forms of transport such as cars.

One frequently heard complaint about the transit system is safety. According to city data through the Compstat system, transit crime is up over 50 percent year-over-year through August 14, 2022. This is a very large increase in grand larcenies, robberies, and felony assaults. When people do not feel safe taking the subway, then they will find alternative modes of transportation. This has put pressure on the financial stability of the system, which, as noted, has not recovered from the pandemic. Additionally, the health effects of the pandemic are still likely limiting subway ridership, with many people avoiding the subway for spaces that are less crowded or shared.

There are many opportunities for improvements in the subway system including in the stations. In addition to the coming expansion of Wi-Fi access throughout the system including in the tunnels, many stations can be upgraded for disability access and modernization more generally. Community Board 1 superficially addressed their desire for modernization at the Alexander Avenue, Brook Avenue, and Cypress Avenue stations.

Local buses are an essential part of the transit system. They provide local service within and between neighborhoods, they provide connection to subways and through that points beyond the borough, and they also provide critical east-west service that the subways do not. The subway system is designed on a “hub-and-spoke” model whereby the goal is to bring people from the outer parts of the city to the center of the city (Manhattan). However, this is not necessarily how many people use the transit system. This is where the buses can come in; they provide these critical connections along major road corridors, connecting the East Bronx to the western half of the borough.

In June 2022, the MTA rolled out the Bronx Bus Redesign. This redesign was the result of years of consultation, collaboration, and community engagement. The plan took a holistic look at how the bus system served Bronx riders and how it could be improved. The result eliminated many

stops along local lines while expanding service in some areas, including Co-Op City, along with redesigning lines and improving connectivity. The redesign was an important effort because buses in New York City were slower than the buses of pretty much anywhere else across the whole country, with average distance between stops the shortest among any major city in the country. The redesign has resulted in the average distance between stops increasing from 882 feet to 1,092 feet.<sup>72</sup> The Borough President was proud to work alongside the MTA and local Bronx stakeholders and residents to ensure that the bus redesign was created with robust community feedback and buy-in from Bronxites.<sup>73</sup>

Since the bus redesign went into effect in June, the Office of the Bronx Borough President has heard feedback from Bronxites regarding the changes. There has been both positive and negative feedback that the Office has communicated to the MTA. The MTA has also been engaged with taking the feedback into account and making alterations to the plan in response to what they have heard. This has included putting stops that were taken away back online when their removal caused significant unexpected disruption.

The MTA and the city DOT are expanding the number of dedicated bus lanes and busways across the city. In The Bronx, busways in the Soundview section went into effect in December along Story Avenue, White Plains Road, and Bronx River Avenue.<sup>74</sup> These new lanes will help speed up traffic for bus riders. Additionally, Mayor Adams has announced new bus lanes on Fordham Road, 207<sup>th</sup> Street, Gun Hill Road, University Avenue, and Westchester Avenue, as well as several other routes in the other boroughs. These routes coming online will help with bus speeds in the future, and hopefully draw more riders as speeds increase and travel times decrease.<sup>75</sup>

The MTA is currently in the process of phasing out the MetroCard and rolling out its replacement, OMNY. At the moment, OMNY is available on all buses and subway stations (as well as Staten Island Railway). The system will also rollout Access-A-Ride and to the Metro-North and Long Island Railroads, replacing current electronic ticket system. This will allow consumers to buy their tickets in one location.<sup>76</sup> The MetroCard will be phased out by the end of 2024, if the current planned timeframe is met.

Currently, the OMNY system only supports single-ride and not weekly or monthly tickets. However, the MTA has rolled out a fare-capping pilot that results in any swipes beyond 12 during a calendar week (Monday to Sunday) being free. This will be similar to a weekly unlimited MetroCard and limit weekly transit spending to \$33. This program is a pilot, and a determination will have to be made whether to continue this in the long-term.<sup>77</sup>

One problem that continues to plague the transit system is that of fare evasion. According to MTA Chair Janno Lieber, 12 percent of subway riders and a third of bus riders do not pay the fare to ride. This has significant financial effects on the system, with the MTA projecting a loss of \$450 million from fare evasion on just the bus and subway this year alone.<sup>78</sup> However, there has been pushback against these numbers, and some have claimed that these numbers are overinflated.

In the second quarter of 2022, the NYPD arrested 518 people for fare evasion, including 137 in The Bronx and issued 12,430 summons for fare evasions including 2,825 in The Bronx. The station with the most summons issued was 149<sup>th</sup> St.-Grand Concourse on the 2/4/5 lines with 266 summons, followed by Fordham Road on the 4 line with 220 summons. The vast majority of people arrested for fare evasion were Black and Hispanic at 478 out of 518. The summons numbers were still disproportionate but less so, with 8,504 out of 12,430 being Black or Hispanic.<sup>79</sup>

The city's Fair Fares program helps very low-income New Yorkers get easier access to MetroCards. According to city data, approximately 265,000 New Yorkers have enrolled in the program, which makes them eligible for half-price rides on subways, buses, and Access-A-Ride.<sup>80</sup> The eligibility for the program is limited to very low-income New Yorkers, with the cutoff being \$13,590 for a single person or \$27,750 for a family of four.<sup>81</sup> This very low cutoff excludes even people who work a full-time minimum wage job. These income thresholds are hardly at a living wage level. While the City Council passing this program was a strong step forward in terms of equity, it is missing a large proportion of the population that is low-income and reliant on the transit system to get to work.

## Ferry System

Increasing ferry access for Bronx residents is an additional way by which people can travel for recreational and professional purposes. Currently, the only ferry stops in The Bronx are Clason Point in Soundview and Ferry Point Park in Throgs Neck. Numerous other locations could become ferry stops, whether for the commuter ferry or for specialized ferry services that run on limited or seasonal schedules.

When EDC examined the ferry service for the previous round of expansion, they found most Bronx sites unsuitable for commuter ferry service. These sites included City Island/Orchard Beach, Yankee Stadium, Mott Haven, and Co-Op City.<sup>82</sup> One site that was not considered was Hunts Point. This area should be considered for ferry access as the Hunts Point development plans move forward. The area is right on the water, not too far from an existing ferry line, and is a center for jobs and industry.

However, even if these sites are not suitable for commuter ferry, they may be suitable for other types of ferry service. This could include seasonal ferry service to City Island and Orchard Beach during the summer months because these locations offer seasonal amenities such as access to the water.

Furthermore, the ferry system should consider offering routes that are outside of just transporting people to and from Manhattan. There are limited transit options that go between The Bronx and Queens, for example, and ferry service could be one solution to connect the two boroughs that are divided by the East River. This could create easier access to a place like LaGuardia Airport, for example, which currently takes a long time to get to from The Bronx.

## Road Infrastructure

One of the major issues regarding road infrastructure in The Bronx are the major highways that cross our borough. These roads include: the Cross Bronx Expressway, the New England Thruway, the Major Deegan Expressway, the Bruckner Expressway, The Throgs Neck



Expressway, the Sheridan Expressway, the Hutchinson River Parkway, Henry Hudson Parkway, Bronx River Parkway, Pelham Parkway, and Mosholu Parkway.

These highways were specifically designed to provide people rapid passage through The Bronx and not necessarily to The Bronx. Furthermore, they were designed to minimize travel time and tore right through existing neighborhoods as they existed. Many buildings had to be torn down to accommodate the construction of these highways, and neighborhoods were permanently divided and otherwise altered.

Most infamously, the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway authorized by Robert Moses resulted in the destruction of hundreds of homes and businesses in the East Tremont section. Additionally, this construction severed a section of Crotona Park from the rest of the park. This park issue can also be seen in Van Cortlandt Park, which has numerous highways cutting through it, including the Major Deegan.

These highways have proved to be an environmental catastrophe on the surrounding neighborhoods, with the air pollution from the trucks and other vehicles causing significant health effects such as high asthma rates. More information about this can be found in the “asthma” section of this report.

Fortunately, renewed attention has been paid to the negative effects that highways such as the Cross Bronx have had on surrounding communities. Thanks to the efforts of leaders in Washington, there has been increasing interest in capping the below grade portions of the Cross Bronx Expressway. This could have strong positive effects on the air quality in adjacent communities, leading to reductions in asthma and other respiratory illness.

Additional changes such as the recent change from the Sheridan Expressway to Sheridan Boulevard have the positive effect of returning the streets to the local communities. This has, for example, expanded access to Starlight Park for the people that live in the area, so the infrastructure no longer serves people simply passing through The Bronx. Changes to other highways are possible to improve community access. For example, improving the lighting and accessibility of the underpass under the Major Deegan over Exterior Street could improve access to Mill Pond Park, which is an underutilized green space on the bank of the Harlem River.

For our local streets, one of the most common complaints that the community boards have noted is issues surrounding parking. Our roadways must be shared spaces, but we cannot forget that the residents of many neighborhoods, especially the transit deserts of the East Bronx, rely on cars to get around. If they are unable to find parking, their quality of life decreases, which can help push them out of The Bronx.

### Pedestrians and Bicyclists

Our streets are shared spaces. Cars, trucks, taxis, bicycles, pedestrians, Open Streets, Open Restaurants, and many more need to share these spaces. Our streets cannot continue to be a place of traffic mayhem and death.

Last year was one of the deadliest years for traffic fatalities, with 273 people dying in traffic accidents in 2021. This includes 124 pedestrians and 19 cyclists. Arrests were only made in 23 percent of hit-and-runs last year.<sup>83</sup> So far in 2022, traffic deaths are down citywide from last year; however, The Bronx is bucking the trend. The Bronx has seen 28 traffic deaths through the end of June this year compared to 23 over that period last year.<sup>84</sup> The traffic violence on our streets is getting worse, and more must be done to crack down on these reckless drivers.

One illustrative example of the traffic violence that has become endemic in our city is the death of Bernice Schwartz, a 99-year-old Riverdale resident who was killed while crossing the street in a crosswalk in late July.<sup>85</sup> Bernice Schwartz was a community leader who was dedicated to making Riverdale and The Bronx a better place. Her death was unacceptable, and all Bronxites must recommit to eliminating the scourge of traffic deaths on our streets.

The Vision Zero initiative aims to eradicate traffic deaths completely in our city. Beginning in 2014, this all-agency initiative aims to make our streets as safe as they can possibly be. While traffic deaths hit an all-time low in 2018 with 202, they have been at higher levels over the past four years.<sup>86</sup> Recent initiatives such as 24/7 speed cameras may help mitigate the rise in dangerous driving on our streets. Community Board 2 mentioned wanting more attention paid to bicycle and pedestrian safety as well as keeping traffic flowing steadily but safely in the community.

Community Board 12 mentioned wanting more speed humps in order to tackle speeding in their community.

Recently policy changes has increased the number of residents who are using bicycles, including e-bikes, to get around. This includes the e-bike legislation that the state legislature enacted in the previous term and the expansion of Citi Bike into Phase 3, which includes large parts of the West Bronx and South Bronx by 2024. This expansion of bicycling has necessitated the expansion of bicycle infrastructure, including protected and non-protected bike lanes and Citi Bike docking locations.

The expansion of bicycle infrastructure has resulted in conflict in communities because the streets have only limited space. The most common complaint is regarding parking spaces being taken away to establish bike lanes. Other issues include disability access on sidewalks, where docking stations have limited the available width of some locations, though this is rare. Community Board 1 mentioned wanting a strategy for bicycle enforcement as well as the proliferation of street vendors along commercial corridors impeding sidewalk space.

### *Policy Goals*

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to making the transportation system in our city work for everyone. Rail, subways, buses, cars, bicycles, ferries, and pedestrian infrastructure will all be necessary to ensure that people can get around our city and region quickly and safely.

The regional rail systems, in particular the Metro-North Railroad, pass through The Bronx, but are not designed for Bronxites. They are based around the needs of suburban commuters coming into Manhattan for their jobs. However, Bronxites have commuting needs as well. It is not fair on Bronxites that these rail lines that pass right through their neighborhoods are inaccessible to them. The Metro-North is much faster for commuting into the central business district of Manhattan than any other mode of transport, whether by private car, subway, or express bus. More Bronxites would take advantage of the Metro-North if it was not significantly more expensive than the New York City Transit system. When the price of a ride on the bus and subway is \$2.75

compared to \$9.75 for a peak ticket between Bronx Metro-North stations and Grand Central, it makes limited financial sense for a Bronx commuter to take the railroad, especially when a transit ride will also likely be necessary.

Our transit system must work for everyone, regardless of income or ZIP code. The MTA and the city must work together to get ridership back up to levels that are financially sustainable. This will require innovative strategies to ensure that people feel that they can safely use the buses and subways. Additionally, the MTA should consider making additional changes to deter fare evasion. This should not be done solely through more policing, though this has a role when it can be done equitably, but through infrastructure adjustments. Adopting more physical and structural deterrents such as adjusting the subway gates, rearming alarms on emergency exits, and improving bus-boarding procedures through OMNY can all have an effect.

The transit system is essential for the growth of The Bronx. New development will more easily happen around transit, particularly around major stations such as those that intersect lines or which meet major roadways like Fordham Road. Transit-oriented development is part of the future of The Bronx, and the transit system must be fully functional for The Bronx over the long term.

The MTA must continue to monitor the adoption of OMNY throughout the system. Uptake of the new payment system is slow, with many people still preferring to use MetroCards or coins on the buses. This is especially true on the buses, where only 10 percent of payments have recently come through OMNY, compared with 40 percent on the subway.<sup>87</sup> As the phase-out of the MetroCard comes closer, we must be vigilant to ensure that all transit riders are prepared for the change over to the new system. We must utilize strategies like mobile vans to help people without smartphones get access to OMNY cards, especially bus riders who do not necessarily visit subway stations. We must help businesses that will sell these cards advertise when they are rolled out.

Bronx streets must work for Bronxites. The highways that crisscross our borough are not for the people who live here, although Bronx residents are the ones who bear the costs in terms of health, pollution, and noise. The federal government must get serious about capping the Cross Bronx and undoing the generations of harm inflicted on adjacent communities. Additionally,

mitigation efforts should be made for other highways where significant pollution effects are noted, such as the Hutchinson River Parkway and the Bruckner Expressway.

Local streets must be used for the benefits of the community, through consultations with the community. Streets are shared spaces, with cars, trucks, taxis, bikes, pedestrians, Open Streets, Open Restaurants, and more all vying for limited space. Communities must make their voices heard to determine what uses they deem most appropriate for their own neighborhoods. We must also act to prevent the traffic violence that is afflicting our borough. The Bronx is seeing increases in traffic-related deaths despite declines in other boroughs. We must do more to keep our residents safe from harm.

### *Proposed Strategies*

**Fully Implement the New Metro-North Stations:** The four new Metro-North stations and the Penn Station Access project will have significant positive impact for residents of the East Bronx. The plan is estimated to be completed in 2026-27. The Borough President will work to ensure that the MTA holds to this deadline and the budget that they have set out. Our residents deserve the access to the rail system that these new stations will provide. New business development in the areas near these stations such as at Hunts Point will also be an important benefit that must come to fruition as soon as possible. We must also examine further expansions of the rail infrastructure such as the Sunnyside Yard station, which would offer new connections between The Bronx and Queens.

**Implement Metro-North Fare Reductions:** The Borough President supports the expansion of the reduced fare Freedom Ticket pilot to Bronx stations of the Metro-North. The rail system is not affordable for Bronx residents, who instead use the cheaper subway and bus system with the tradeoff of longer trips. Giving Bronxites the benefits of the Metro-North reduced ticket prices similar to what the residents of Brooklyn and southern Queens currently enjoy will be a strong step towards ensuring that the rail system serves city residents and not just people who live in the suburbs.

**Monitor the Bronx Bus Redesign:** The Borough President will continue to monitor the implementation of the Bronx bus redesign as it moves past its first few months. As transit ridership continues to recover from the lows of the COVID-19 pandemic, this could affect ridership on the buses that will need to be taken into account. The Borough President will continue to engage with the MTA and relay feedback and suggestions for improving the bus network so that Bronx residents are able to get the most out of the bus system as possible.

**Create More Busways and Dedicated Bus Lanes:** The Bronx bus redesign is an opportunity to do more innovative strategies to increase bus speed and the number of riders who use the bus system. Increasing the number of busways and dedicated bus lanes can help accomplish this goal. Bus speeds in The Bronx are very low, particularly in the South Bronx and West Bronx. Additionally, bus speeds declined throughout the borough by an average of 6.3 percent between 2016 and 2018.<sup>88</sup> Mayor Adams’s recent announcement regarding the bus lanes is a strong step forward. The MTA should also consider other changes such as additional SBS lines. Existing lines such as the BX6 SBS are very successful, and that success can be replicated across other lines as well. Before the MTA and DOT can consider new busways, there must be increased enforcement of the existing dedicated bus lanes. There has been continuous obstruction of the bus lanes by cars that stay in the lanes unlawfully. There must be increased parking and traffic enforcement to keep the lanes clear and moving.

**Consider Bus Stop Redesigns:** The MTA and DOT must evaluate how buses actually use the street. On wide boulevards and avenues, the DOT should examine whether constructing boarding islands in the center of the street rather than using existing sidewalks and curbs for boarding would improve traffic flow. This could be viable on streets greater than 75 feet wide, for example, Webster Avenue, East Tremont Avenue, and University Avenue. This eliminates the traffic-conflict caused by buses re-entering traffic following each stop. A good example of this concept is located on East 161<sup>st</sup> Street at Sheridan Avenue. Another benefit realized is that by eliminating bus stops at sidewalks, the sixty feet provided for each stop could now allow for additional at-curb parking. On the Grand Concourse, buses could operate along a dedicated lane in the main roadway rather than in the service road as is currently done. Passengers would wait for bus arrivals along the boulevard’s “refuge islands” rather than on the sidewalk. Bus speeds increase, while accidents between buses and other vehicles may decrease.

**Expand OMNY Uptake:** The Borough President will work with the MTA to be sure that all residents are ready for the phase out of the MetroCard by the planned time frame of the end of 2024. The Office will engage the community to be sure that riders are moving to the new OMNY system. The MTA must monitor uptake of OMNY instead of MetroCard as we move towards the phase out. There could be serious problems as the phase out date approaches, and the MTA must be ready to respond to those problems as they arise.

**Examine Ferry Expansion Options:** DOT and EDC should examine the potential for the expansion of ferry service to other parts of The Bronx. In particular, EDC should look at the potential for season ferry service that would go to City Island and Orchard Beach during the summer months. These areas are Bronx treasures that are currently hard to get to through public transit, requiring taking the 6 train to the end and then switching to a bus. A one-seat ferry ride could significantly improve access to these areas. The Borough President will push more people to visit these areas, and ferry service could help that goal. Expanding ferry service should also consider west side access along the Harlem River, Highbridge, and University Heights communities. With proposed housing projects along the 207th St Bridge (Fordham Landing), we expect the population to grow, justifying expanded ferry service.

**Cap the Cross Bronx:** The Cross Bronx must be capped. This highway is an environmental catastrophe, and the below-grade sections of the highway are ripe for capping. More about this proposal is explained in the “asthma” and “environmental justice” sections of this report.

**Expand Bicycle Infrastructure:** Increasing the number of people who get around by bicycle can help get cars off the road, which can help keep traffic deaths to a minimum. Almost all traffic fatalities are caused by cars and not bikes. While we must adequately enforce the traffic laws against bikers in addition to drivers, bikers are much less likely to kill or severely injure pedestrians. New bicycle infrastructure must be installed in conjunction with local communities, who can help determine the best locations for their installation and alternatives for drivers who may lose out on parking spots. This ties into the policy noted in the “Land Use” section of this report to include additional bicycle infrastructure along the waterfront.

**End Traffic Violence:** The Borough President strongly supports the principles behind Vision Zero. Drivers who behave recklessly on our streets, whether through negligence, speeding, or other ways, should face serious consequences including prosecution where appropriate. When hundreds of New Yorkers are dying on our streets every day, we are clearly facing a crisis. Recent changes including 24/7 speed cameras and higher fines for leaving the scene of an accident will help.<sup>89</sup> In 2014, the Borough President supported the passage of Int. 466A which lowered the speed limit in the city to 25 miles per hour.<sup>90</sup> The DOT should continue to analyze the effects of this law to determine whether additional speed limit changes would help reduce deaths. All possible road configurations should be considered including those that prevent speeding and blind turns.

**Maintain Neighborhood Parking:** While large-scale parking is often not necessary in transit-rich areas, large parts of The Bronx are transit deserts where residents rely on cars. According to one poll, 38 percent of Bronx residents own a car and 66 percent of Bronxites are unsatisfied with the ability to park a car in their neighborhood.<sup>91</sup> Improving public transit and the bicycle infrastructure is important, but car owners cannot be alienated in the process. In communities that are more reliant on cars and car ownership, parking must be maintained for residents' quality of life. Innovative solutions must be explored including residential permitting systems, reforms to alternate side parking, improved enforcement of parking violations including double parking, and more. Community Board 10 mentioned wanting increased enforcement of illegal parking. There are no easy solutions, but collaboration within communities is possible.



## **THE BRONX: HOW WE THRIVE**

### **Economic Development**

#### *Long-Term Issues*

Over the past century, The Bronx has seen a shift in its residential and economic base. In the 1920s, The Bronx was undergoing great development – new buildings were being built, residents were moving in, and money was pouring into the borough. Government resources helped to catalyze this growth, including through roadway improvements, school construction, and park mapping. Their goal at that point was to advance The Bronx as a place where people want to live.

But as the decades progressed, times changed. By the 1970s, The Bronx was in decline. This was tied to changing residential patterns primarily affected by “white flight,” where many of the existing predominately-white residents moved into the suburbs and an increasingly large number of Black and Puerto Rican residents moved into the borough from other parts of the city and the island. The changes were also tied to the overall conditions of the city, including a financial crisis leaving the city near bankruptcy during the middle of the decade. Increasing crime and plummeting property values resulted in the plague of arsons and other fires that took place at this time. The overall housing stock in the borough declined by 60,000 units. The city responded with “planned shrinkage,” which reduced city services in places like The Bronx, exacerbating this cycle. The Bronx is still trying to recover from this disinvestment even today.

The challenge for The Bronx in 2022 is to encourage investment that translates into profitable economic development for the private and public sectors alike, while also maintaining affordability for longstanding residents. Realizing this objective for The Bronx is entirely possible, if we are deliberate, careful, and inclusive with our investments. Economic development is defined by the socioeconomic needs of our borough and must be inclusive of better paying jobs that create real pathways to the middle class and real investments in affordable housing for our families to grow, thrive, and stay in The Bronx.

The best way to achieve these objectives is to capitalize on the borough’s assets and it is the borough’s elected officials along with a rapidly growing private sector that are best positioned

to do this. The borough’s assets include its central location within the region, its real estate market which is less expensive compared to that of Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens, its mass transit infrastructure, its access to regional interstate highways, its shoreline and proximity to nearby ports, and most importantly, its hardworking and growing labor force.

<b>Employment by Industry in Bronx County, 2021 Preliminary Data</b>	<b>Total Employment</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average Wages</b>
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	21	0.01%	\$37,419
Construction	10,953	3.59%	\$83,823
Manufacturing	4,662	1.53%	\$59,543
Wholesale Trade	10,283	3.37%	\$74,269
Retail Trade	30,082	9.85%	\$37,312
Transportation and Warehousing	8,911	2.92%	\$49,618
Information	1,651	0.54%	\$89,602
Finance and Insurance	3,022	0.99%	\$67,337
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	9,343	3.06%	\$51,717
Professional and Technical Services	4,607	1.51%	\$71,384
Management of Companies and Enterprises	1,223	0.40%	\$103,162
Administrative and Waste Services	8,658	2.84%	\$49,646
Educational Services	16,577	5.43%	\$72,070
Health Care and Social Assistance	92,859	30.41%	\$61,887
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	3,063	1.00%	\$133,422
Accommodation and Food Services	14,445	4.73%	\$27,994
Other Services, Excludes Public Administration	8,330	2.73%	\$37,372
Unclassified	1,006	0.33%	\$30,601
Federal Government	3,845	1.26%	\$94,455
State Government	3,626	1.19%	\$110,955
Local Government	66,437	21.75%	\$81,311
Total, Private	231,488	75.21%	\$58,668
Total, All Government	73,908	24.20%	\$83,449
<b>Total, All Industries</b>	<b>305,396</b>	<b>99.41%</b>	<b>\$64,665</b>

Source: New York State Department of Labor, QCEW 2021 Preliminary Data

As shown in this chart above, the most common industry for employment for Bronx workers is the healthcare industry, with over 30 percent of working Bronxites employed in that field. The Bronx is home to many healthcare institutions, including major hospitals like Montefiore, BronxCare, St. Barnabas, and our public hospitals Lincoln, Jacobi, and North-Central Bronx. Healthcare institutions make up an important part of the economic landscape of our borough and strong engagement and coordination is necessary for their continued their growth and success. This sector drives The Bronx’s local economy today and will continue to do so in the future. As the aging population continues to grow in our borough, the healthcare industry will become even more important, as we need to take care of our elders. We must ensure that we are training sufficient

healthcare professionals to meet need and that we are recruiting them to come live and work in The Bronx. Our residents deserve the highest standards of care and that means training a recruiting the highest standard of professionals.

The average wage for Bronx workers in 2021 was \$64,665 across all industries, including the public sector. The largest category of employment was in the healthcare sector, accounting for over 30 percent of jobs. Government workers were the next largest category at about 24 percent, with retail workers in third at about 10 percent. Government workers on average were paid more than private-sector workers. Retail and food service workers were paid the lowest among all categories.

The unemployment rate in The Bronx has consistently been higher than city, state, and national averages. According to federal data, the Bronx unemployment rate peaked at 13.3 percent in December 2009 during the Great Recession. After this, there was a plateau until it started to decline in 2013. The Bronx unemployment rate reached a low of 4.4 percent in December 2019. Then the COVID-19 pandemic happened. The unemployment rate ballooned to 25.6 percent in May 2020 and has been falling ever since. The most recent data, from June 2022, puts the unemployment rate at 8.4 percent. While this is near the post-pandemic low, it is still elevated from the pre-pandemic low. More work must be done to drop this unemployment rate further.<sup>92</sup> Community Board 9 mentioned recovery from the economic impact of the pandemic as an important goal in their district. They specifically mentioned how the increasing number of small business closures and vacancies continuous to negatively affect their communities.

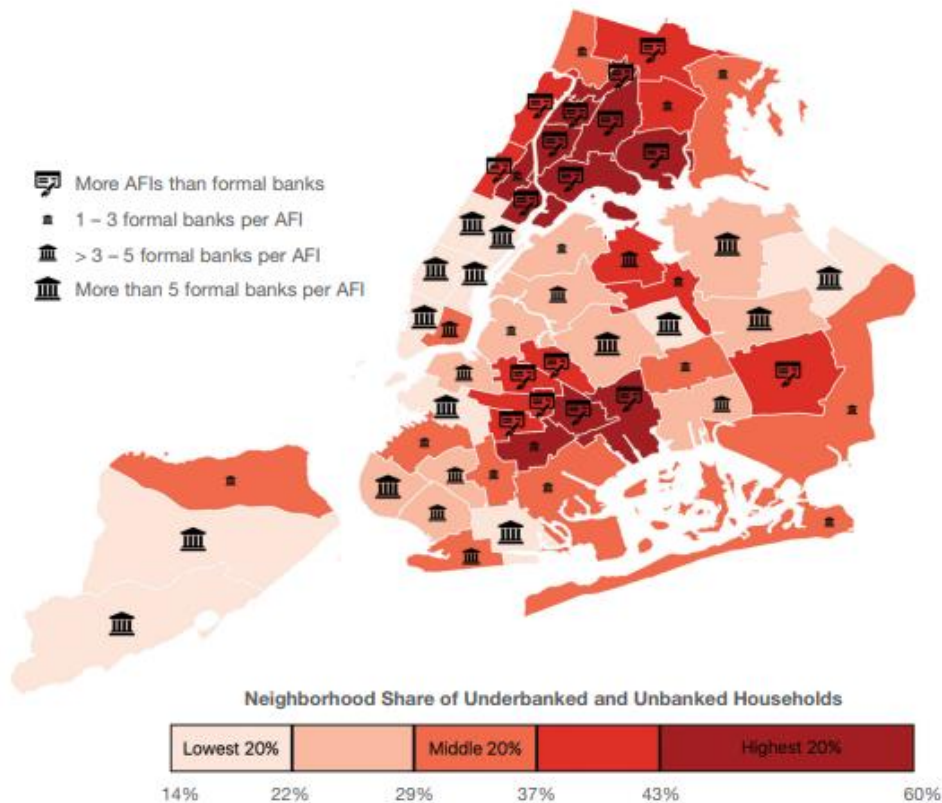
Median household income in The Bronx is lower than the citywide average. According to census data, the citywide median household income was \$67,046 while the median household income for The Bronx was only \$41,885.<sup>93</sup>

One of the major financial disadvantages that affects The Bronx is the growing share of the population without access to a bank account. According to data for 2017, while the share of New York City households without a bank account was 11.2 percent, that number was 19.3 percent in The Bronx – 97,200 households in our borough who did not have access to the banking system. Moreover, an additional 150,800 Bronx households were underbanked, meaning that they had a

bank account but also used alternative financial services like check cashing entities. This was an additional 29.9 percent compared to only 21.8 percent citywide. This means that a total of 49.2 percent of Bronx households were unbanked or underbanked.

Across the city, the neighborhoods with the most unbanked or underbanked households are disproportionately low-income and predominately Black or Latino. The majority of The Bronx was in the top 20 percent of neighborhoods for unbanked and underbanked households. In every community district in The Bronx there were more alternative financial institutions than formal banks except for community districts 8, 10, and 11. Alternative financial institutions charge more for their services than formal banks do. While they offer some benefits – immediate cash and no minimum balances, for example – they are a drain on the finances of low-income Bronxites. This creates a crippling financial cycle for our residents. Without proper resources and real pathways to financial freedom, an underbanked environment creates the perfect storm for deeper cycles of poverty. Bronx residents need more options when it comes to banking, and financial institutions such as formal banks, CDFIs, and municipal credit unions, must come to serve our borough.<sup>94</sup>

Unbanked and Underbanked Households and the Ratio of Banks and Credit Unions per Alternative Financial Institution



Mayor Adams' *Rebuild, Renew, Reinvent: A Blueprint for New York City's Economic Recovery*<sup>95</sup> plan, a blueprint for an intentional, equitable, and comprehensive economic recovery, centered on six core principles:

- Focusing on people, especially working people and families, and ensuring they remain at the center of all investments
- Building on existing strengths, while honestly confronting and improving upon our shortcomings and finding opportunities to grow
- Tapping into our innovators and our entrepreneurs, who are some of the most creative and brightest minds on the planet
- Breaking down government silos that have historically produced subpar service for inflated costs
- Promoting equity and economic opportunity at every turn, centering our plans and policies on and championing ideas from those that have historically been left behind and whose potential is too often untapped
- Asking all New Yorkers to do their part, calling on business, philanthropy, labor, community-based organizations, and others to work together in new ways

With online distribution having become an essential part of the economic landscape, there has been an increased need to provide faster delivery to customers. This has resulted in a number of large warehouses that hold significant inventory and require a constant influx of truck traffic to and from the facility. While these last mile distribution centers are primarily located in manufacturing areas, they are a relatively new business model and need to be studied to understand how they will affect the future of shopping. They will have a significant impact the local economy in a number of ways, and the city should be planning to accommodate these changes. We must also be wary of the effect that they will have brick-and-mortar stores, which took a big hit during the height of the pandemic, as people stayed home and ordered things online.

There are many organizations in The Bronx working to expand economic development. Among these are the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). A BID is “a geographical area where local stakeholders oversee and fund the maintenance, improvement, and promotion of their

commercial district.”<sup>96</sup> The Bronx currently has 12 BIDs across our borough, with the newest BID being created this year. These BIDs span all corners of our borough and include: 161<sup>st</sup> Street, Belmont, Fordham Road, Jerome-Gun Hill, Kingsbridge, Morris Park, Southern Boulevard, Third Avenue, Throggs Neck, Westchester Square, and White Plains Road, along with Castle Hill which was signed into law by the City Council and Mayor Adams in May.<sup>97</sup>

BIDs serve an important function in our commercial corridors. They help to maintain streets, provide public safety, promote their local areas, provide capital improvements, help businesses with development, and advocate for changes to their neighborhoods. It is important to understand that BID services ameliorate and do not replace city services and are funded primarily through a special levy on property owners in the district. There are many challenges in BID development and maintenance in the borough. While property owners and businesses benefit from the services that BIDs provide, not all are willing to fund the assessment necessary for a BID to operate. Furthermore, some of the smaller BIDs have trouble recruiting for their boards, which can prove a difficulty for managing the BID.

New York City has long desired to expand our manufacturing footprint. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we were stuck bringing in many of the emergency supplies from out of town. The administration at that time advocated bringing more manufacturing businesses to the city, so that we would be able to produce these essential items on our own in the future.

In 2006, the city created Industrial Business Zones (IBZ) in order to manage the industrial and manufacturing businesses in many of our neighborhoods. These IBZs are located in three boroughs: Brooklyn, Queens, and right here in The Bronx. The Bronx has five IBZs spread across the borough. These are Bathgate, Eastchester, Hunts Point, Port Morris, and Zerega.<sup>98</sup> These areas all provide services for businesses and jobs for local workers. Hunts Point in particular is one of the most important industrial areas in the borough, and its footprint is expanding.

Hunts Point is home to many industrial enterprises, most importantly the Hunts Point Produce Market and other food industry distribution centers. Hunts Point Food Distribution Center (FDC) distributes 4.5 billion pounds of food annually to 22 million people in the New York

metropolitan area. The FDC supports 8,300 direct jobs, most of which are unionized. The Hunts Point Produce Market alone provides a quarter of the city's produce.

However, the FDC and produce market in particular are in serious need of investment. There is a severe shortage in refrigerated space, forcing the use of over 1,000 diesel-operated Trailer Refrigeration Units to meet demand. These units are energy-wasters that contribute to the pollution in the area. Additionally, there is severe congestion from all of the traffic moving in and out of the area, also causing pollution. Improvements must be made.

The Hunts Point neighborhood, not just the Hunts Point Market, is in need of revitalization. Fortunately, the community has come together to support the "Hunts Point Forward" plan, which will create a shared vision for the future of Hunts Point over the next 15 years.<sup>99</sup> The plan will address job creation, environmental justice, access to healthy food, health issues, open space, transportation, and infrastructure. The Borough President was proud to stand with Mayor Adams and other local officials and community leaders for the formal announcement of the plan. Community Board 2 is also supportive of efforts to make the Hunts Point IBZ more modern and sustainable in the long-term.

The priority recommendations and 70 action items in this report include closing the Vernon C. Bain Center prison barge, expanding open spaces and parks, improving street infrastructure for better safety, improving job access for local residents, improving healthcare access, and increasing local access to health food. For too long, Bronxites have seen produce come into Hunts Point just to be shipped out to the other boroughs and the suburbs. This plan will help keep some of that healthy food right here in The Bronx.

The Hunts Point Forward plan will be a strong step towards bringing equity to an area starving for more development, jobs, and environmental justice. Beyond this plan and the \$140 million that the city is proudly investing into it, additional investments are needed.<sup>100</sup> This includes developing electric vehicle infrastructure, particularly to speed the transition to electric trucks. The polluting trucks that move goods to and from Hunts Point each day are key contributing factors in the rise of asthma cases and turning this area into what has been historically known as "Asthma

Alley.” Investing into electric vehicle infrastructure and producing cleaner, greener trucks will help prevent additional environmental and health disparities in the future.

Another major economic development project in The Bronx is the rehabilitation of Kingsbridge Armory. The Armory was completed in 1918 and served a military function until 1996. The building was landmarked in 1974 locally and in 1982 nationally. The Kingsbridge Armory is the largest armory in the world and it lives right here in The Bronx. There have been countless proposals for what to do with the Armory since 1996, none of which have come to fruition. Since then, the Armory has been used sporadically as a place for film and music production and as a supply and food distribution center in emergency and disaster situations, but these uses are not permanent. Currently the building stands vacant – a derelict reminder of the city’s inability to make any use of this historic site.

Among the many proposals for the use of the Armory have been as a school, a retail mall, an ice-skating venue, a sports, wellness, and entertainment center, a sustainable food industry center, and a film studio. None of these uses has been put into place, and there have been no substantive attempts at rehabilitation since the ice-skating proposal finally fell through in 2021, until recently. The New York City Economic Development Corporation recently announced the start of a neighborhood vision plan, in partnership with community partners and local elected officials that would shape the future of the Armory. The Borough President is committed to ensuring that the plan is rooted in community collaboration and serves as an economic engine for the Bronx.

The Armory building and site must serve the community through becoming an economic engine. The building is adjacent to public transit and is located immediately nearby Lehman College, several high schools, and the VA hospital. The Armory is a Bronx treasure, and it is a continuing travesty that it remains vacant and not in use for the benefit of the community.

New York City is the nation’s capital when it comes to scaffolding. Scaffoldings (also called sidewalk sheds) are put up when a building undergoes construction, renovation, maintenance, or inspection. This proliferation of sidewalk sheds is the result of New York City



government regulations that mandated these sheds after a series of deaths from falling debris from facades. Sidewalk sheds comprise an \$8 billion industry.<sup>101</sup>

These sidewalk sheds have become so normal because the regular inspections and the resulting façade repairs are expensive for property owners. In many cases, it becomes easier and cheaper to leave the sheds up indefinitely, delaying repairs for an undetermined period. So long as passerby are protected, they are meeting their obligations.

According to public data, there are over 1,400 permitted sidewalk sheds in The Bronx alone. There are many thousand in Manhattan, which has the most of any borough.<sup>102</sup> Additionally, this does not include those sheds that are not registered. While most sheds come down within a year, some of these sheds are even over a decade old.<sup>103</sup> Clearly, the current permitting regime is not cutting it if there has been such a proliferation of this scaffolding.

These sidewalk sheds are a public nuisance. They obstruct storefronts and reduce traffic to local businesses. They are dimly lit and block cameras and are thus a magnet for crime. They attract homeless individuals looking for a place to get out of the rain or snow. They prevent other use of the sidewalk such as Open Restaurants and access for people with movement disabilities.

### *Policy Goals:*

The Bronx has many challenges. Historically the Bronx has not had the same level of investment compared with the rest of the city. There are many for reasons for this, but, as the borough begins to see more private sector investment, the city must continue to invest in infrastructure improvements that will allow The Bronx to grow. A major priority will be improving access to Wi-Fi and high-speed internet, which allows economic activity to grow, provides educational opportunities for people trying to learn new skills, and allows for flexible workspaces.

There are three main components to success. First, we must provide educational opportunities that allow people to gain workforce skills. We must connect Bronx residents to Bronx Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) or trade schools so adults can learn specific skills

that will allow them to advance their career goals. These educational centers need to be supported and expanded to where residents will have access, so being near public transit is important.

Connecting Bronx residents to jobs is the second component. It is essential to partner with workforce centers to connect with people looking for careers with potential employers. This works to both provide jobs and to fill jobs because employers need skilled labor as well. It is important to get the message out that there are a number of options for connecting people to employment, such as through Workforce1, Small Business Services (SBS), Empire State Development, New York State Department of Labor, SoBro, and more. This includes assistance with resume writing and informing people who are looking for professional development opportunities, which skills are in high demand, creating real pathways to the middle class. The Bronx has a large and growing population of Spanish-language speakers, which presents both barriers and opportunities for this population of job seekers. Workforce centers should reimagine and prioritize language options and expand language access. This will give non-English speaking residents the ability to communicate and connect with non-English speaking employers. Community Board 3 called for more funding for workforce development and training programs such as Workforce1.

The third component is supporting the small business owners and entrepreneurs who are the lifeblood of The Bronx. This is important because starting a small business takes a lot of initial capital and risk. We must work collectively with the city and state to help connect these small business owners and entrepreneurs with organizations or agencies that can support them, provide them with guidance, assist with recruiting staff, and help them access capital. These agencies include the Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation (BOEDC), New York City SBS, New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC), and Empire State Development, to name a few.

Additionally, once small businesses are up and running, we must ensure that they continue to have the ability to grow and change with the ever-evolving economy right here in our borough. Currently the country is dealing with inflation, which is forcing some small businesses to close due to the cost of goods and increasing commercial rent. Many businesses cannot increase their return on investment enough to make up for these pressures. Additionally, finding employees is getting more difficult as there are not enough low or minimum wage laborers to meet the demand,

driving up the cost of employees as another cost burden on small business owners. We must therefore provide assistance to these small business owners so they can navigate these challenges.

When the city takes a long-term look at the future of neighborhoods, they must prepare for the development of new commercial corridors in order to best serve the growing population of our borough. Commercial corridors, both new and existing, should be considered for BID formation or the establishment of merchants' associations. Organizing the businesses in a certain area can help attract new businesses and development, which can set off a positive cycle for the community. The New York City Department of Small Business Services should carefully monitor the changing conditions in every neighborhood to ensure that local businesses are being equitably served.

We must take a holistic look at the economic development of our neighborhoods. Hunts Point is an example of a community that requires examination in its totality to help develop it for future and long-term use. The long-term goals of neighborhood revitalization plans can serve as a blueprint for the creation of new jobs and new businesses that will build up The Bronx for many years in the future.

The Bronx is ripe for promotion as a tourist destination as part of the greater New York City area. The Bronx has a lot to offer people who are coming to visit our city, in addition to local travelers from the other boroughs and the suburbs. These many destinations, both current and future, include: Arthur Avenue/Little Italy, the Botanical Gardens, the Bronx Children's Museum, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, the Bronx Zoo, City Island, Orchard Beach, parks such as Pelham Bay and Van Cortlandt, Poe Cottage, Pregones Theater, the Universal Hip Hop Museum, Wave Hill, Yankee Stadium, and many more.

There are many avenues for promoting The Bronx, both to local and national audiences. There are potential avenues for cooperation and collaboration with local organizations such as the Hospitality Alliance, our local BIDs, BOEDC, the Bronx Tourism Council, local institutions like our universities and hospitals, and the destinations in their own right such as the Bronx Zoo. The Borough President is in a strong position to bring these numerous stakeholders together to create a strong vision to increasing tourism in The Bronx.



*Proposed Strategies*

**Rehabilitate Kingsbridge Armory:** Kingsbridge Armory is one of the treasures of The Bronx and must be rehabilitated and put to use for the benefit of the community. It must become an economic engine that creates jobs and real economic benefit for the people in the surrounding neighborhood. It is one of the Borough President’s top priorities to see a plan for the Kingsbridge Armory decided upon and put into place. The Armory has stood vacant for far too long. It is time

that a community engagement process occurs to solicit feedback about what local residents want to see for the Armory.

**Support BIDs:** The 12 Business Improvement Districts in The Bronx make our borough's commercial corridors better place to visit, work, and shop. These BIDs work hard to promote their local communities. When issues arise, the BID directors must become more responsive to correcting these issues, under the supervision of the boards. The Borough President through her appointee on the boards will help provide guidance when appropriate to ensure that the BIDs are functioning well. BIDs should provide more transparency around their assessment and overall budget inclusive of expenses to ensure equitable distribution amongst programming and services. A major challenge with smaller BIDs is having trouble filling board seats. SBS must define alternatives for when there are too few board members to adequately run the board. The city should help support the development of new BIDs in areas that are determined to be ripe for greater commercial development. The Borough President and the Office will work with local stakeholders in areas where there is an interest in forming a BID or merchants' associations to help them along on the process, in conjunction with SBS. BIDs provide crucial support to the businesses in their areas as it relates to access to capital, grant, and loan opportunities and provide technical assistance.

**Expand Tourism in The Bronx:** The Borough President will leverage the visibility that the Office can provide to bring together stakeholders to enact a vision to expand tourism in The Bronx. The borough has many institutions that will benefit from an increased number of visitors and a higher level of tourism revenue. The Office of the Bronx Borough President and the Bronx Tourism Council will continue to conduct campaigns and events that promote The Bronx, such as Bronx Week, Savor the Bronx, and the Tour de Bronx each year. There is opportunity for marketing campaigns and leveraging social media to improve the visibility of our borough, especially to local visitors. Infrastructure improvements may be required because of the status of many Bronx neighborhoods as transit deserts, including shuttle buses and ferry service, particularly during the summer months. There are numerous trolley tours that send visitors to different areas of interest in The Bronx, with many more tours that have existed in the past.<sup>104</sup> Restoring these tours can help promote interest in visiting Bronx amenities.

**Enact the Hunts Point Forward Plan:** The Hunts Point community deserves the strong investment that the city has committed to through the enactment of the Hunts Point Forward plan. The Borough President is proud to support the investments that the city is making into this neighborhood, which has too long suffered the ill effects of the Food Distribution Center without reaping many of the benefits. The plan's inclusion of economic, environmental, and infrastructure development will go a long way towards making Hunts Point stronger. The Borough President will closely monitor the enactment of the plan to ensure that the promises made to the residents of Hunts Point and other nearby communities are fully kept.

**Expand MWBE Contracts:** The Borough President will continue to advocate for more contracts being given to minority and women-owned businesses. These businesses are still underrepresented in government contracts, despite their growth in the overall economy. The city should consider expanding the MWBE designation to include businesses owned by veterans, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ individuals, all of whom are underrepresented as entrepreneurs getting contracts. Additionally, the Borough President supports ensuring contracts go to locally owned businesses. New Yorkers' tax dollars should go to businesses owned by residents of our local communities, which employ people who live in these communities as well. This is especially true for small businesses in less affluent parts of the city, including many neighborhoods in The Bronx. All of these government contracts must include provisions that the businesses pay their employees a living wage and use union labor.

**Promote LGBTQ+ Business Engagement:** In July, the Borough President was part of the establishment of the Pride 365: LGBTQ+ Business Empowerment Program. This program is the first of its kind in New York City and will host training workshops, create an LGBTQ+ business directory, lead to investment in local business established by the LGBTQ+ community, and much more. The LGBTQ+ business community was hit hard by the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Investing in our borough's diverse business community only helps to strengthen the overall economic landscape of our borough. The Borough President will continue to support efforts to help LGBTQ+ run businesses establish themselves and grow in The Bronx.

**Make the Cannabis Industry Work for The Bronx:** In June, the Borough President hosted a forum on the budding cannabis industry that is emerging following the passage of the Marihuana



Legalization and Regulation Act (MRTA) in 2021. As this industry develops, it must do so in a way that works for The Bronx. Many Bronx residents have valid concerns about how the industry will operate in our borough, concerns ranging from who will get licenses, where dispensaries and consumption sites will be located, and how any lawful marijuana usage will affect the quality of life in their neighborhoods. The Borough President is committed to seeing the cannabis industry in The Bronx be truly local, with businesses owned and run by Bronxites, particularly those harmed under the previous prohibition scheme. In other states, legal marijuana markets have sometimes tended towards control by large or out-of-state businesses, perhaps with a local face. This cannot be what happens here in New York. Local New Yorkers deserve to benefit from the legal cannabis industry, and the Borough President will advocate with the state Cannabis Control Board to ensure that this part of the legalization legislation is being fully enacted. Furthermore, the Office of the Borough President will always be willing to take in feedback from local residents about how the legal cannabis industry is operating in the borough, in conjunction with the community boards.

**Tackle Scaffolding:** Sidewalk sheds have become a nuisance in The Bronx and across the city. They create public hazards despite being there to keep passerby safe. The system for their regulation must change if we are ever to escape from our streetscapes being covered by these sheds. For the scaffolding related to the regular maintenance and inspection cycles, there should be escalating fees that the city charges for keeping them up too long. If it becomes more expensive to keep the scaffolding up than to do the necessary repair work, then the property owners will eventually be forced to act and make the repairs. No one likes that our streets are covered by sidewalk sheds, so the city must take robust action to have property owners make necessary repairs as soon as possible and take down the scaffolds.

**Create More Worker Cooperatives:** The Borough President strongly supports worker cooperatives, businesses where the workers are the owners. This model allows local Bronx workers to gain a stake in the businesses that they work at, giving them real buy-in to the success of the enterprise. Creating these cooperatives can help generate wealth for the workers in ways that are not possible in a traditional employer-employee arrangement. The Bronx would benefit from more of these cooperatives.

## **Education**

### *Long-Term Issues*

The Bronx is home to 365 public schools, which provide 203,807 public school students with an education from Pre-K to grade 12. The borough is divided into six geographic districts for administration and provision of education services to the schools. In addition, charter and private schools are an important part of the Bronx educational landscape.

Bronx public school students are diverse and have varying needs.<sup>105</sup> Approximately 63 percent of Bronx students are Hispanic, 26 percent are Black, five percent are Asian American or Pacific Islander, four percent are white, and one percent are multiracial. About 17 percent of students are English language learners, 23 percent are students with disabilities, 88 percent are economically disadvantaged, 13 percent are homeless, and one percent are in foster care.

The graduation rate for Bronx public school students in 2021 was 77 percent. This included 23 percent who graduated with an advanced Regents diploma and 54 percent who graduated with a regular Regents diploma. Of the remaining students, about two-thirds are still enrolled in schools past their expected date of graduation, while the rest either dropped out or achieved their high-school equivalency. The graduation rate is higher for female students than for male students, lower for students with disabilities and English language learners, and higher for white and Asian American students compared with Black and Hispanic students. These gaps in the graduation rate are a persistent inequity in the outcomes produced by our public school system. The city Department of Education (DOE) must continue to act and produce new strategies to reduce these gaps.

One example of an ongoing strategy to boost graduation rates is the transition to community schools in our neighborhoods. Community schools incorporate social service provision in the school setting and become hubs for students and their families within the neighborhood. These schools have been shown to boost math scores, graduation rates, attendance, and other positive behaviors.<sup>106</sup> These schools partner with private organizations to provide programs and support that help grapple with economic, health, academic, and other disparities affecting Bronx families.<sup>107</sup> These schools must be the cornerstone of any strategy to improve



student outcomes at Bronx schools, and the city must commit to supporting and fully funding them. At present, there are 317 community schools citywide, with 97 of these being in The Bronx.

Many schools in the Bronx face distinct challenges stemming from high numbers of students in temporary housing, English language learners, students with special needs, and students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The influx of resources helps provide holistic support to specific communities and builds trust between school administration and families. Additional support such as campus pantries offering food and toiletries help maintain parent engagement and improve educational outcomes as parents and administrators work closely together.

As New York continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and The Bronx continues to see residents who are unemployed or underemployed battle food insecurity and poor health outcomes, these supports are vital and need to be expanded based on the demonstrated need. The partnership between schools and private organizations allows for administrators and organization staff to work together to respond to trends in the community quickly and with the appropriate resources.

The trust this fosters can help identify families who may be struggling and offer help before having to be referred to ACS, potentially reducing the number of cases. Bronx neighborhoods represented five of the top ten neighborhoods with the highest number of ACS consolidated abuse and neglect cases in 2021.<sup>108</sup>

There is a nationwide shortage of teachers. Many factors contribute to the lack of qualified candidates, including salary and benefits disparities and retirement. The deficit of teachers in the educational landscape burdens schools and the delivery of quality education. In New York City and The Bronx, the immediate crisis for the current year is not the overall shortage of teachers, but instead the shortage of teachers in certain specialties. We currently have a gap in teachers in Health and Fitness Education from Pre-K to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, Career and Technical Education (CTE) from 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, Science from 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, English Language Arts from 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, Literacy from Pre-K to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and special education from 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Other high-need areas are early childhood, STEM, and bilingual education as a second language.

Outcomes extend not just to graduation, but also beyond. According to the New York State <sup>109</sup>Department of Labor, The Bronx's unemployment rate during the pandemic peaked at 25 percent, the highest in the nation. In a June 2021 report by NYS Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli, The Bronx was hit the hardest during the COVID-19 pandemic and suffered the most significant economic losses of all the boroughs.<sup>110</sup> To further compound the problems, a large number of youth in The Bronx between the ages of 16 and 24 years of age are neither in school nor working. These disconnected teens and young adults find themselves isolated and adrift at society's margins. They experience difficulties earning educational credentials, gaining work experience, forging professional networks, building capacities for independent decision-making, and developing social and emotional skills that will make for productive and rewarding lives. The loss of skilled workers to fill the openings in industries is consequential to The Bronx. The New York metro area has the widest neighborhood gap in youth disconnection of America's largest cities. The Bronx has the highest youth disconnection rate among the five boroughs. Meaningful school-to-work technical programs are needed to enable them to be immediate earners and contributors to themselves and their families.

There are more job openings in the United States for trained scientists than there are people to fill them, and this gap is increasing over time. The median wage for New York City Region Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) occupations is \$95,250 annually, 63 percent higher than the median annual wage of \$58,260 for all regional workers. Workers educated and trained in STEM are in high demand, especially in fields like research, design, engineering, healthcare, and biotechnology. In 2014, the New York City Department of Design and Construction created a STEM initiatives program to engage youth and establish a diverse and inclusive avenue to careers in architecture, construction, and engineering. Through classroom instruction and hands-on field assignments, students gain valuable experience preparing for higher education and a broad range of STEM careers. Through the STEM MATTERS NYC program, the New York City DOE offers K-12 students a variety of STEM programs during spring and summer breaks. Despite such offerings, most Bronx students do not have access to year-round in-school STEM programs and are unaware of existing opportunities. Students in underserved urban communities such as The Bronx often lack access to educational opportunities in STEM. There is a disproportionate lack of STEM access in urban environments, affecting predominantly

impoverished neighborhoods the most. K-12 students in lower-income school districts are less likely to have STEM resources and experiences than their affluent counterparts are. As such, most Bronx students are at a disadvantage and face fewer prospects for prosperous and rewarding STEM careers.

In November 2014, the city issued a Career Pathways report that presented recommendations to reorient and transform workforce development services. One of the recommendations was to improve and expand CTE programs to better support students' long-term employment prospects. Starting with the 2015-16 school year, a mayoral initiative to strengthen and expand CTE sought to create new programs of study that aligned with in-demand occupations identified and recommended by the Career Pathways report. The initiative focused on expanding access to CTE programs through innovative CTE instruction delivery, upgrading existing offerings, and examining the availability of sector-specific programs across each borough. The initiative created 47 new CTE programs citywide, with nine of these being in The Bronx. During the 2017-18 school year, DOE offered 278 CTE programs to approximately 60,000 students at 124 high schools citywide.

High schools throughout the city offered 55 programs in information technology. One of these programs, Computer Systems Networking and Telecommunications, was offered at six high schools, one of which was in The Bronx. The Bronx school gave first priority to continuing eighth-graders, second priority to current district students or residents, third priority to Bronx students and residents, and last priority to residents citywide. Ninety-nine percent of offers to this program went to Bronx students.

Beyond outcomes, one of the longstanding issues facing our school system is the question of equity. Our school system is beset by segregation and has produced disparate outcomes for Black and Hispanic students, relative to their peers. Black and Hispanic students are less likely than their peers to graduate, less likely to go on to get a college degree, less likely to attend a specialized high school, and less likely to get placed in a Gifted and Talented (G&T) program.

G&T instruction offer accelerated instruction to elementary school students. There are no standardized curricula for G&T programs. The implementation across the 100 existing programs

varies and is dependent on the vision of the respective school leadership. G&T aims to offer a dynamic experience by teaching to standards above grade level, going into greater breadth and depth into learning standards at the grade level, or offering other learning opportunities throughout a gifted instructional practice. Currently, eligible students must be New York City residents enrolled in kindergarten first, second and third grades. The eligibility factors are based on the type of program a child attends, where the child currently attends a program or school, and the student's age or current grade. There are two distinct G&T programs. The existing type serves students throughout elementary school, which they enter during the kindergarten, first, second and third grades. Eligibility for this traditional version is by nominations and evaluations for kindergarteners and report grades for first through third-grade students. The new G&T programs serving third through fifth-grade students will begin in the fall of 2022. One newly created program will exist in every New York City school district. Admission criteria are contingent on report cards compared to other students at their current schools.

District	School Name	Entry Point	Seats
7	P.S. 049 Willis Avenue	K	25
8	P.S. 072 Dr. William Dorney	K	25
9	P.S. 199X - The Shakespeare School	K	25
10	Milton Fein School	K	25
10	P.S. 024 Spuyten Duyvil	K	25
11	P.S. 121 Throop	K	25
11	P.S. 153 Helen Keller	K	25
12	Samara Community School	K	25
7	P.S. 043 Jonas Bronck	3	32
7	Concourse Village Elementary School	3	32
8	P.S. 75 School of Research and Discovery	3	32
9	P.S. 204 Morris Heights	3	32
10	P.S. 340	3	32
11	P.S. 106 Parkchester	3	32
12	P.S. 214	3	32
12	Fairmont Neighborhood School	3	32

This chart shows the 16 current G&T programs in Bronx schools. This accounts for approximately 450 G&T seats in the borough.

In 2019, the School Diversity Advisory Group released a report that included recommendations regarding G&T programs.<sup>111</sup> The report noted that, despite making up 65 percent of kindergarteners, Black and Hispanic kindergarteners only made up 18 percent of those who received an offer to a G&T program. Both Mayor de Blasio at the time and Mayor Adams this year have made changes to the program in order to try to make the program more equitable and representative, but more must be done. The plan that Mayor Adams released in April added many more seats to the program and replaced the test with a screening process.

Under the new process, teachers evaluate and nominate Pre-K students to apply. Based on the recommendation, the New York City Department of Education sent a letter to the families inviting them to apply for the program from May 31 to June 13. After DOE assesses applicants' eligibility determination, candidates are considered for placement in the program. Placement to a G&T program is not guaranteed even to a well-qualified student. The factors determining acceptance into a program are applicant program choices, seat availability, admission priorities, and random assignment when there are more applicants than assigned seats using a lottery system. Admission priorities for the district G&T programs and all third-grade programs prioritize the program location and the district's residents. The first set of acceptance offers to siblings of students living in the school district. The second priority is for siblings of students living outside the district. The third choice is for applicants without siblings that reside within the district and finally for siblings that live outside without no sibling priority. There are five new city-wide G&T programs, and admissions are first given to siblings and then to non-siblings. Percentages of seats are allocated to Diversity of Allocation groups, for example, low-income students, English Language Learners, people with disability, students in temporary or low-income housing, and other categories prescribed by DOE regulations.

The specialized high schools are among the best that our city's public school system has to offer. These eight<sup>112</sup> high schools admit students based solely on the SHSAT, a single admissions test. However, we all know that the students getting into these schools are not reflective of the student population at large. Black and Hispanic students are significantly underrepresented with only nine percent of 2022 specialized high school offers going to those students.<sup>113</sup> This is despite the share of Black and Hispanic students rising to make up nearly half the SHSAT test-takers.

These persistent gaps highlight a space where reforms must be done in order to achieve equity in opportunities for all students, regardless of race or background.

My Brother's Keeper (MBK) focuses on closing and eliminating the opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color so that all young people have the chance to reach their full potential. The initiative seeks to change the marginalization of young men of color through empowering innovative opportunities and helping them to reach their full potential. In addition, the My Sister's Keeper program seeks to improve the lives and outcomes of young girls and women of color. Building a safe and supportive environment where girls feel valued will create clear pathways to opportunities. There are MBK programs in four Bronx high schools, 13 Bronx middle schools, and 22 Bronx elementary schools.

### *Policy Goals*

The goal of the education system must be to ensure that every child in New York City has access to a quality public education that provides pathways to graduation and into either the workforce or higher education. And every child must mean just that – no child should be denied as good an education as any other child because of race, background, socioeconomic status, disability, language, or any other factor. We must work as a city to fulfill the guarantee that every child has a right to a quality education.

Schools must become true community hubs in neighborhoods all across The Bronx. Students and their families deserve a place to go where they can get the help they need to ensure that their children are thriving and remain on a path to graduation. Service provision is an essential part of this goal. Students whose needs are not being met often struggle to succeed in school.

Our schools must train our students for the jobs of the future. This must be inclusive of students who go on to higher education and those who do not. New York City public schools must provide a pipeline into the trade through apprenticeships, internships, and other hands-on experiences. Additionally, for students who will go on to college, more opportunities are required for them to train their STEM skills, which will make them attractive candidates for top universities.

The economy of the future will be different than that of today, and we must work to prepare our children for it.

We must ensure that all students, no matter their backgrounds or ZIP codes, have the opportunity to thrive in our public schools. The city must do more to counter the ongoing segregation in our schools and the persistent racial gaps in admissions to top programs, in the graduation rate, and in the proportion of students who go on to attend college. An example of this is the Fatherhood Academy at CUNY, which helps young fathers achieve High School Equivalency diplomas and secure gainful employment. The Borough Presidents supports this program, which is currently offered through Hostos Community College in The Bronx.<sup>114</sup>

### *Proposed Strategies*

**Maintain Appropriate Levels of School Funding:** The State Constitution requires the funding of a free public education system in New York,<sup>115</sup> and the Court of Appeals has ruled that every student is entitled to a “sound basic education.”<sup>116</sup> In 2021, Governor Hochul announced that the state was committed to fully funding Foundation Aid going forward. This was a strong step towards ensuring appropriate resources for students in underserved communities. The city government must work to fully fund our schools for the existing enrollment level and avoid devastating cuts that will force programs to be cut and teachers to be laid off. Our students deserve no less.

**Speed the Transition to Community Schools:** The Borough President will work with DOE to help transition every Bronx school to a community school, working with the superintendents to identify communities where this transition should begin immediately. The Borough President will advocate for the appropriate level of funding for existing community schools as well as the funding for services and partner organization necessary to speed the transition. Baseline funding the city budget for nonprofits embeds essential wraparound services in community schools for families. For example, both government and public-private partnerships can help fund health clinics, mental health, and restorative justice programs, as well as provide for the recruitment of social workers and guidance counselors. In addition, through innovative partnerships, community schools can

serve as resource centers for adult continuing education programs, welcome centers for newly arrived immigrants, and a hub where parents and families can further strengthen familial bonds.

**Incentivize Teaching as a Career:** New York must prioritize the training of new teachers to remedy the persistent shortages in important fields such as literacy, STEM, English as a second language, and special education. We should incentivize college students to become teachers by promoting benefits for new college graduates to enter the profession. The Department of Education and all stakeholders should consider raising teachers' starting salaries and other strategies. We must provide teachers with sufficient resources to do their jobs effectively and create individualized development plans to maximize educators' competencies. We must eliminate the punitive evaluation systems that both penalize teachers for students' underperformance and do not fully capture what a teacher does in the classroom. If we cannot recruit and retain teachers for The Bronx and the city as a whole, it is the students who will suffer. We must include the teachers in the curricula writing in their area of specialty and create targeted professional development training to enhance the skill level of new teachers. Teachers who are continually trained and retrained will better serve the students with improved lessons and abilities. This also helps improve teacher morale, which improves retention rates. The Borough President supports initiatives like NYC Men Teach, which helps recruit men of color to become teachers in our city. They provide professional development, mentoring, and networking support to improve the number of men of color who are teachers in New York City, which currently stands at eight percent of the total.<sup>117</sup>

**Expand Career and Technical Education Opportunities:** The city and state should prioritize creating job opportunities that benefit Bronx youth – committing to and investing in Career and Technical Education programs. The DOE should reinvent and expand flexible educational models that pair classroom instruction with hands-on job experience, internships, and apprenticeships. In receiving these credentials, youth should have the aptitude and competency to enter the labor market and then later decide to pursue a higher degree if they so choose. The participating private sector entities can offset the cost through public-private partnerships and help to train and hire graduates. Furthermore, the offerings of the Bronx SUNY Workforce Equal Opportunity Center and the training and identification of employment opportunities through the local office of the Department of Labor must be expanded.



**Expand STEM and Technology Offerings in Every School:** All Bronx schools should be funded and equipped with 21<sup>st</sup>-century technologies to create and offer viable and competitive STEM programs. The city should make technological investments in schools across The Bronx and the whole city. We should explore public-private partnerships with companies and industries in The Bronx to help fund, create infrastructure and programs related to their industry, and open pipelines of internships and employment to Bronx graduates. Schools must hire qualified teachers with the knowledge to effectively teach STEM courses. Instructors should major, specialize, and be certified in the subjects they teach. In partnership with the Department of Education, Bronx schools should try to recruit scientists from different sectors with comparative industry-wide incentives and compensation. Interactive K-12 curricula should be integrated into the school day, tailoring lessons to engage all student levels from developmental to careers. School district superintendents should create a borough task force for information sharing, conferences, best practices, and provision of a comprehensive STEM delivery system. The Borough President has recognized the importance of STEM education and has accordingly made capital investments in many of our Bronx schools including science labs and other technology that will help our students get more and better STEM education. Community Boards 3 and 7 also called for the expansion of technology education and technology in the schools, in order to prepare students for college or other post-secondary credentials.

**Further Expand Gifted and Talented:** There must be more G&T programs at schools throughout the city, including in The Bronx. There also must be more slots at these schools because students who are qualified for the program are denied spots due to lack of space. An equitable system is vital to determining and identifying qualified applicants. Testing four-year-olds is not the correct solution, but it cannot be left solely to the teachers to decide. DOE must also expand the application period because low-income students are less likely to apply for G&T due to parents lacking networks of mutual support to fall back on. DOE must also prioritize helping students from disadvantaged schools and low-income backgrounds apply. School curricula should match the academic needs of all students. Given the opportunity to excel in an equitable arena, identified children should be challenged through heterogeneous curricula at the district level, uncapping their potential. Classroom curricula should match student needs, including for students who would benefit from an accelerated course of study.

**Expand Specialized High School Seats and Alter Admissions Criteria:** All students deserve the chance to study at the best high schools in our city. The data that the DOE releases every year clearly shows the persistent racial gaps in admission to these top schools. Mayor Adams has proposed building more specialized high schools across every borough with admissions criteria that go beyond just the SHSAT.<sup>118</sup> This would be a welcome benefit for The Bronx. Furthermore, the state legislature must authorize the city to allow admissions to the specialized high schools that already exist based on criteria that is more than just the test. Using only the SHSAT for admissions is not a valid way of judging a student's merit. Colleges and universities do not use only a test for admission, and neither should our city's public schools.

**Expand the My Brother's/Sister's Keeper Programs to All Bronx Schools:** The Borough President will advocate for the expansion of these programs to all schools in the borough. We must align the programs' focus to be on real-life issues affecting students in their schools and communities, giving them a voice to challenge ideas and inform policy and practice. These programs should be cultivated, supported, and continuously funded. These programs help cultivate leadership, academic achievement, peer support, and collaboration, as well as unlatch the full potential of every Bronx student.

## **Health**

### **Health and the Office of the Bronx Borough President: Tackling Disparities**

#### *Long-Term Issues*

By most metrics, The Bronx is the least healthy county in the state of New York, 62 out of 62. The Bronx scores worse than the state average on metrics such as premature deaths, poor mental and physical health days, low birthweight, smoking rate, obesity rate, physical inactivity, STIs, teen births, access to insurance and doctors, preventable hospital stays, mammography screenings, drug overdoses, insufficient sleep, and air pollution. However, The Bronx scores better than the state average on some metrics including those related to alcohol consumption, traffic deaths, and access to food and exercise opportunities.

It has long been a goal of elected and community leaders in The Bronx to improve these numbers and move The Bronx out of last place in the rankings. This has led to the creation of the #Not62 Steering Committee to coordinate the public health programs in the borough. The mission of #Not62 is to address social and economic conditions that affect the overall quality of life and to help improve health literacy, promote opportunities for healthier living, and improve environmental conditions.

The Health Division of the Office of the Bronx Borough President is the Borough President's liaison to the health providers in the borough, an engine for the development of health policy, a resource for constituents who have issues with major providers, and a forward-facing community partner.

The Bronx is beset by health disparities, and not just in comparison to the other boroughs and the counties of the rest of New York State. There are health inequities between disparate parts of The Bronx. Areas such as the South Bronx face disproportionate health concerns such as diabetes and asthma. The areas along major highways such as the Cross Bronx Expressway face high levels of air pollution. Areas like the Northeast Bronx have higher levels of maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity. Areas along our waterways like the Hutchinson, Bronx, and Harlem Rivers and Eastchester Bay face pollution in the waterways that can affect their lived

environments. Community Board 3 specifically mentioned poor health in their district relative to the rest of The Bronx, especially when it comes to obesity, diabetes, addiction, asthma, maternal care, and mental health.

These health challenges are both personal and communal. Historical disinvestment and neglect has resulted in a poorly built and maintained housing stock that often helps exacerbate health concerns such as through poor air quality, lead, and vermin infestations. Parks in The Bronx are relatively poorly maintained and receive smaller investments than parks in wealthier areas that have strong established conservancies. The health infrastructure in our borough is weaker than the other boroughs, with fewer doctors and dentists per capita, as well as a lower insurance rate.

One example of one health issue that disproportionately affects The Bronx is Legionnaires' disease. Over the past several years, there have been repeated clusters of Legionnaires' disease in The Bronx, including one cluster earlier this year in Highbridge. This outbreak sickened 24 and killed two of our neighbors.<sup>119</sup> While there are sporadic cases across the city, these outbreaks are more often located in The Bronx. Over the past several years, the city has adopted new policies to combat Legionnaires' and keep the Legionella bacteria out of the water supply. While the drinking water is completely safe regarding Legionnaire's, it is the cooling towers that can result in the spread of the disease. More surveillance must be implemented to ensure that the disproportionate effects of this disease are limited.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit The Bronx hard. The Bronx has had 33,266 cases per 100,000 people, which is third among the boroughs. However, the hospitalization rate of 2,659 per 100,000 and the death rate of 557 per 100,000 are both the highest among the boroughs. There are many reasons for these numbers, but they are likely due to the differences in economic characteristics among the boroughs, with Bronx residents more likely to be frontline and essential workers and less likely to be able to work from home. Especially during the height of the pandemic before the vaccine was available, this caused Bronx residents to face higher levels of risk from illness and death.

Bronxites are less likely to have been fully vaccinated than city residents are as a whole at 76 percent versus 79 for all New Yorkers. Bronxites are least likely among the residents of any

borough to have received a booster or additional dose at only 31 percent compared with 40 percent citywide and even 50 percent in Manhattan. This disparity is due to the persistent and historical disinvestment in our communities, which has resulted in Bronx residents not fully utilizing the healthcare options that we have available. We must work on building trust in these communities so the stunningly high death rate from COVID-19 will not reoccur in the future.

Our children are the future of The Bronx, so we must act to ensure that they are living healthy lives. This includes teaching them about healthy lifestyles such as eating right and exercising and, in the older grades, about sexual health and consent. Our school-based health clinics are a strong effort to build health capacity in the borough, in a safe, supportive place where children and families go most every day. These clinics are comprehensive and can provide health services on a range of issues for families that may not get this healthcare elsewhere for financial or other reasons. These clinics can help serve students' health needs regardless of finances, immigration status, or parental involvement when it comes to more sensitive issues surrounding reproductive and mental health issues.

One of the crucial areas where our children need more health support is regarding mental and behavioral health. Our schools are understaffed when it comes to mental health counsellors and social workers. Hiring more of these essential staff can help improve the mental resilience of our young people. This is especially important since the COVID-19 pandemic. Many children lost family members, their families experienced economic disruptions, and they suffered with social isolation while school was remote. These closures have left long-term mental health and socialization issues that have not fully been accounted for or understood. More mental health providers will help our youth heal from these recent traumatic events and develop the coping skills to move ahead and thrive.

This is not just true for our K-12 students, but our college students as well. Earlier in 2022, the Borough President supported the New Deal for CUNY, including its proposal for increased mental health professionals on CUNY campuses. CUNY is understaffed relative to nationally similar universities when it comes to mental health professionals and bringing this to parity will be beneficial to help our college students maintain their mental health.

## *Policy Goals*

The Borough President has committed to reducing these disparities and improving the health of residents in every Bronx neighborhood. The city must act to remedy the serious negative historical disinvestments into our communities. The long-stand policies of New York City have resulted in this situation, whereby The Bronx is significantly less healthy than the other boroughs. The Bronx is a mostly Black and Hispanic borough, so the city must work to correct the historical disparities in health outcomes that have persisted until today.

Our city's leaders must work collaboratively to create a health agenda that will work for The Bronx. Our borough does not receive its fair share when it comes to health resources and often gets resources after the other boroughs have been adequately served. Moreover, residents of the other boroughs and non-city residents come into the borough to use our limited resources. This was the case with COVID-19 vaccinations and more recently with Monkeypox vaccines as well. And when we do get resources, they must not serve to turn The Bronx into a place to put the undesirable programs that the other boroughs do not want to host.

In this new pandemic environment, the #Not62 steering committee must become a more responsive and proactive convener of health and community-based organizations, reaching deep into communities to better understand the decline in the social determinants of health. These are critical drivers of community and population health in The Bronx and taking concrete actions to make targeted improvements in social determinants of health will uplift lives of Bronxites all across the borough. All member organizations should recommit to launching unified, boroughwide campaigns to improve metrics of health outcomes where The Bronx underperforms other counties in the city and state. In this way, they could have a more significant impact on the overall health picture in the borough.

## *Proposed Strategies*

**Develop a #Not62 Strategic Plan:** The #Not62 steering committee will complete a strategic plan to address borough-wide community health challenges in conjunction with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) Bronx Team, Montefiore, the Bronx Health REACH, the Office of the Bronx Borough President, Essen Health, and other member organizations. This action was launched in summer 2022 to identify and address post-pandemic health needs in The Bronx, and recommendations outlined in the action plan will be implemented over a five-year period. The Borough President fully supports this effort to identify the major areas for investment into the overall health, wealth, and future development of our borough.

**Conduct a Social Determinants of Health Analysis:** A high priority of the Office is to identify which social determinants of health are creating the greatest negative pressures on health in The Bronx. Additionally, this analysis will examine the racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes, especially those were most negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from this health assessment and the Robert Wood Johnson County Health Rankings will be built into economic recovery planning and used to inform targeted support by city agencies. Systemic analysis of social determinants of health in The Bronx will inform how policy, projects, and partnerships can be used to promote targeted, high-yield improvements in quality of food, housing, air, socio-economic opportunities, and education in the borough.

**Build Stronger Community Partnerships:** The Office of the Bronx Borough President will continue to build enduring relationships with health partners and community-based organizations as part of its education and public outreach mission. A shared priority of the Borough President with the #Not62 Steering Committee is the expansion of this leadership team to broaden expertise, capacity, and breadth of long-term achievable goals. #Not62 must evolve from a social media campaign to a more enduring and influential conduit for health resources and information, supporting the community-based outreach organizations, schools, and federally qualified health centers that are firmly grounded in communities at the most local level.

**Launch a Bronx Health Matters Newsletter:** The Office of the Bronx Borough President is developing a quarterly health newsletter report to inform Bronxites how core elements of our plan

are being rolled out and to highlight the projects that are targeted to specific social determinants of health in The Bronx. As a counterpoint to the Borough President's social media outreach, this in-depth reporting to the public on emergent and ongoing health initiatives will be tailored to raise awareness and health literacy. With emerging health challenges such as Monkeypox and a resurgence of polio, this newsletter will be able to inform Bronxites about the resources they can access to protect themselves and their family, as well as to inform them about the steps they can take to live an overall healthier life.

**Improve Enforcement of Legionnaires' Policies:** The city has the policies in place to combat Legionnaires' outbreaks. Now, the city must actually enforce those policies and fine building owners when they fail to uphold their responsibilities under the law. The city must conduct the appropriate inspections on schedule and make sure that the cooling towers are not at risk of spreading the bacteria in the aerosolized water. Enhanced community outreach is needed to help residents learn about the symptoms that signal a potential outbreak. This can help detect and stem any broad spread of the illness and save the lives of residents with underlying health vulnerabilities.

**Expand School-Based Health Programs:** Borough President Gibson is committed to the expansion of health clinics to every school building. For this initiative, funding from every level of government is necessary to build out the necessary capacity. The Borough President will work with our health, government agency, and elected partners at all levels to help ensure this funding. These programs must include sexual and reproductive health counseling, vaccinations, and essential annual screenings. The drop in the teen pregnancy rate has been one of the major health and anti-poverty success over the past two decades, and that progress must continue. These free primary care and preventative health services must continue to be offered to K-12 students regardless of financial or immigration status. This represents a critical investment in their future well-being and that of the borough.



## **Maternal Health**

### *Long-Term Issues*

Maternal mortality is the death of a woman during pregnancy, childbirth, or within one year of the end of pregnancy.<sup>120</sup> Unlike other developed nations, maternal mortality in the United States has been increasing over the past thirty years, reaching its highest rate in recent history in 2020 with 23.8 deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>121</sup> In The Bronx, the statistics are even more alarming at 36.2 deaths per 100,000 live births. This is far higher than the New York City rate, which is 22.9 deaths per 100,000 live births, and one of the highest rates among the boroughs.<sup>122</sup> Recent data revealed that Black women in New York City (NYC) are more than three times more likely to die of a pregnancy-related cause than White women in the city are.<sup>123</sup> These statistics remain disparate even when accounting for education level attained and socioeconomic status, indicating that systemic racism plays a significant role in the health outcomes of Black mothers in New York City. Studies have found that most maternal deaths occurred among mothers who received delayed or no prenatal care, and Black and Latina women are less likely to receive prenatal care in their first trimester of pregnancy and to have more than five prenatal care visits total over the course of their pregnancy.<sup>124</sup>

In The Bronx, there are numerous factors influencing the significant racial disparities in maternal mortality. Historical redlining and oppression of communities of color have led to lasting residential segregation. This neglect and marginalization has allowed socioeconomic and environmental issues, including poor infrastructure, pollution, and poor housing conditions, to persist in the borough to this day. Burdened by these numerous social barriers to health, women of color in The Bronx struggle to access quality healthcare services and are at a significantly higher risk of pregnancy-related complications and death.

According to the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC), sixty percent of maternal deaths are preventable.<sup>125</sup> Steps must be taken to address this issue through the lens of health equity and social justice to promote maternal health among all Bronx mothers.

## *Policy Goals*

To address these complex barriers, it is essential to collaborate across medical, community, and governmental institutions to ensure there is a cohesive and comprehensive approach to improving maternal health in The Bronx. By coordinating with physicians, community-based organizations, and elected officials in the borough, the Office of the Bronx Borough President endeavors to draw on diverse perspectives and expertise to share resources and ideas on how to combat maternal mortality. Given the disproportionate impact of the maternal mortality crisis on Black mothers, there must be an emphasis on incorporating culturally competent care practices into new and changing maternal health programs and policies in the borough.

This includes involving more diverse health professionals into care delivery infrastructure in The Bronx, such as birth workers, doulas, and midwives who are trained to advocate for pregnant women and their unique medical, social, and cultural needs. Finally, it is essential to not only promote preventative care and strategies but also to increase public health campaigns and services for mothers during and especially after pregnancy. This includes promoting information regarding breastfeeding, providing affordable access to baby items such as diapers and formula, and other supportive resources to help mothers and their infants maintain healthy and happy lives. These additional resources will help mothers of all backgrounds equitably access the support they need during and after their pregnancy.

## *Proposed Strategies*

**Support the Bronx Maternal Health Consortium (BMHC):** The BMHC was formed in response to the recommendations of the Bronx Borough President’s Black Maternal Mortality Task Force in 2020 and 2021 to bring together representatives from every stakeholder and every provider organization involved in maternal health care in The Bronx to collaborate on combating maternal mortality and morbidity. Its primary mission is to reduce the incidence of death and injury to Bronx mothers during and after birth. The consortium consists of physicians, nurses, midwives, doulas, leaders of public and private hospitals and health systems, community-based organizations, policy experts, health insurance companies, community and faith-based leaders, and elected

officials. These representatives will sit on six initial committees to meet a variety of goals for improving maternal health as recommended by the Task Force’s report published in March of 2021. On March 21, 2022, Borough President Gibson met with the BMHC leadership team to build this borough-wide stakeholder community and to establish the first priorities of the Consortium. The priorities of this body include:

- Establishing a Bronx Maternal Mortality & Morbidity Review committee to assess annual progress in reducing the numbers
- Additional surveillance of annual Fetal & Infant Mortality Review
- New strategies for state and federal funding for maternal health programming
- Improve health coverage and access to care services and patient education
- Increase doula advocacy and access for Bronx mothers
- Address communication barriers within and between hospitals that hinder cohesive delivery of care across health facilities

**Create a Bronx Birthing Center:** Bronx doulas and midwives have organized under the auspices of the BMHC to expand access to doula and midwifery services to women of color and to establish a Culturally Competent Care Model to support Bronx mothers. This effort is part of a strategy to offer Bronx women the beneficial services of these birthing professionals at low or no cost. Doulas and midwives provide prenatal patient education, coaching during birth, and essential postpartum support to manage breastfeeding as well as mental and physical self-care for new mothers. Doulas can support mothers in hospital, at home births, or, ideally, in a birthing center that offers a variety of supportive birthing options. The Office of the Bronx Borough President is conducting ongoing research and outreach to gather feedback on birthing centers, and exploring the funding, operational models, and licensure processes of the existing free-standing birthing centers in New York. This work is designed to inform the public demand for such a center in our borough.

**Support Local Bronx Maternal Health Organizations:** The Bronx Health Link is working with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and other Bronx organizations to become a Bronx Birth Justice Defender Hub. This is part of a long-term strategy to become eligible for state and federal funding as the borough’s designated referral hub for maternal health services, and specifically to coordinate access to doula and lactation support

services for Medicaid recipients across the borough. The Bronx Health Link also provides cribs, diapers, and other essential supplies to Bronx mothers. Additionally, the Office of the Borough President will support other local organizations offering innovative doula-driven initiatives such as the WomBus, which provides perinatal education and brings this vital maternal health information out into the community. The Borough President will advocate with the state and city for greater funding and the expansion of doula pilot programs into The Bronx.

**Advocate for Local, State, and Federal Policies on Maternal Health:** The Borough President is committed to advocating for more effective and equitable policies at the borough, city, state, and federal levels that align with the borough-wide efforts to improve maternal health. The Borough President has promoted the passage of several bills in the New York City Council on health, hospitals, and gender equity, including one introduced with Public Advocate Jumaane Williams about informing women about the standards for respectful care at birth.<sup>126</sup> By building community support and coalitions, providing compelling testimony, and building momentum for support through the Women’s Caucus, the Borough President is dedicated to enacting policies at the city level that protect mothers in The Bronx and beyond. At the state level, the Borough President will support the expansion of state Medicaid coverage for doula services to mothers in underserved communities and the Chisolm Chance Act<sup>127</sup> that designates Northern Brooklyn and The Bronx as epicenters of Black Maternal Mortality and Morbidity and supports development of the hub model in our borough. Additionally the Borough President supports the passage of legislation at the state level that will enshrine standards for respectful care at birth into state law, as the city government has done. At the federal level, the Borough President supports the passage of the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act,<sup>128</sup> which will launch a multi-agency effort to improve maternal health all across the country, particularly focusing on women from vulnerable communities.

## **Reproductive Health**

### *Long-Term Issues*

Access to reproductive healthcare, including abortion, is an essential right. All people in The Bronx must have the right to decide for themselves what should happen with their bodies. The government must not stand in the way and prevent women from controlling their own reproductive choices. That is an unacceptable outcome, and Bronxites will not stand for it.

The Supreme Court's June decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson* overturning *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* is an unconscionable attack on the rights of women all across our country to control their bodies. This decision will have severe negative repercussions for women all across our country. While abortion will remain legal here in New York, women in other parts of the country will have this right stripped from them. This will disproportionately affect low-income women and women of color, many of whom will not have the ability to travel out of state to get abortion access.

Thanks to the efforts of our leaders in the state legislature, New York enacted the Reproductive Health Act in 2019, which enshrined strong protections for abortion into state law. Governor Hochul signed an additional package of legislation earlier this year in response to the Supreme Court decision.

### *Policy Goals*

New York must remain a leader in the protection of the right to access safe and legal abortion. New York must be a haven for women from all over the country to come here to access our healthcare system. We must commit to funding abortion providers who will serve not just New Yorkers, but women who come here to exercise their rights. Our reproductive health clinics such as Planned Parenthood do far more than provide abortion services. They provide a full range of health services and screenings that help keep New Yorkers healthy.

Both the state and city governments have passed additional legislation to protect abortion access and providers. The Borough President was proud to introduce Int 506 alongside Councilmember Carlina Rivera to educate New Yorkers about so-called “crisis pregnancy centers,” which are fake clinics that masquerade as abortion providers to trick women out of visiting legitimate healthcare clinics that offer a range of options for them to consider. The Borough President is committed to protecting the rights of women to control their own bodies, over the long-term, no matter whether they choose to continue a pregnancy or not.

### *Proposed Strategies*

**Enact Federal Protections for Abortion:** Congress must act to protect the right to abortion for all women everywhere in the country. If Congress fails to act, millions of women across the United States will continue to live without the protections that *Roe v. Wade* had previously given them. Many women will attempt illegal abortions, which are significantly more dangerous and will lead to many women dying.

**Enact Additional State Protections:** Governor Hochul signed a strong package of reproductive health bills earlier this year, but there are more bills pending to strengthen these protections further. Most prominently, the Legislature passed a constitutional amendment that would enshrine the right to an abortion into the state constitution. This amendment must be passed in an additional session of the Legislature then be voted on by the people of New York. Borough President Gibson will advocate for the passage of this amendment during the 2023-24 term and then as a ballot measure.

**Ensure Adequate Funding for Clinics:** All people should have access to reproductive healthcare, no matter their immigration status, insurance, or ability to pay. The city must adequately fund reproductive health clinics in our city so that every woman can make the choices that are best for her and her family. Clinics will likely see an increase in demand due to out-of-state travelers, so the funding must be sufficient to meet that increased demand. To support the women who have lost access, the Borough President will work with the Governor, Planned Parenthood of Greater New York, and other Bronx elected official to secure additional funding for women seeking care from out of state.

## **Domestic and Gender-Based Violence**

### *Long-Term Issues*

Domestic and gender-based violence is a scourge that is responsible for physical and mental trauma, the breakdown of families, and higher-levels of poverty, particularly among women and children. Borough President Gibson is committed to working towards the elimination of domestic and gender-based violence in The Bronx.

Between 2010 and 2020, there were 721 people killed in domestic violence incidents in New York City, accounting for 17.2% of all murders in that time period. Over this period, The Bronx had the highest number of incidents at 221, also having the highest rate at 1.38 domestic violence homicides per 100,000 residents. Over that decade, men accounted for 40 percent of domestic violence homicide victims, including about a quarter of fatal victims of intimate partner violence. This issue affects everyone, men as well as women, and we must take that into account when formulating strategies to solve the problem.<sup>129</sup>

Earlier this year, Borough President Gibson and the Bronx DA Darcel Clark's team held the first ever meeting of the Domestic and Gender Based Violence Advisory Council, which connected over 100 entities that are invested in advocacy for this cause and prevention at every point of intersectionality that adversely affects children, seniors, and the entire social network of survivors. The Office of the Borough President and the District Attorney's office have jointly applied for grant funding to continue the work of this council and to expand its reach to all corners of the borough.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative effect on domestic violence in our city. Calls to the domestic violence hotline and visits to in-person or online resources increased significantly in the year after the COVID-19 restrictions went into effect compared with the year before.<sup>130</sup> Going forward, we must still take into account how the new post-COVID-19 reality affects people's behavior when it comes to seeking resources and services.

## *Policy Goals*

Our overarching goal must be to eliminate domestic and gender-based violence from our city. No person should have to live in fear of violence from their intimate partners or other family members. We must expand the understanding of domestic violence from being a women's issue to being an issue that effects everyone in the family unit and the broader community. While women make up the majority of cases, men and children make up a significant portion of the victims as well.

We must ensure that every person leaving a domestic violence situation has a safe place to go. This means that there must be an adequate number of domestic violence shelters in every borough. We cannot allow individuals leaving dangerous and unstable situations to feel like they have no choice but to return to their abusers. There are not enough beds in women and family shelters, specifically those that are reserved for victims of domestic violence. Additionally, there are very few options for victims to take their pets, which is often a limiting factor that keeps individuals from leaving the abusive environment.

We must do more to educate young people about domestic and gender-based violence. The Early Relationship Abuse Prevention Program (RAPP) in our schools is a strong way to ensure that our young people get access to information about domestic violence that they will be able to use in the future if they find themselves in a violent situation.

We also must improve the criminal enforcement of domestic violence laws and violations of orders of protection. According to the NYPD, between 2010 and 2020, in 38.6 percent of intimate partner homicides had there been a previous police complaint involving the victim and perpetrator. In 12.3 percent of cases, there was an active order of protection in place at the time of the murder.<sup>131</sup>



## *Proposed Strategies*

**Build Long-Term Partnerships and Programs:** The Office of the Bronx Borough President will join the long-term social justice work done by Safe Horizons, VIP, Montefiore, and the leadership team of Monroe School of Criminal and Social Justice. Together we will be able to make a strong effort towards ending the scourge of domestic violence in our borough. Additionally, the Borough President will continue participating with the DiVA Talk: A 20-Year Retrospective is about raising awareness and prevention of domestic violence. As part of the Steering Committee for this outreach effort, the Office will collaborate with this organization to promote community awareness, working with schools, theater productions, authors, journalists, and prominent survivors.

**Engage in Public Education and Awareness Event Programming:** The Office of the Borough President will host events that bring vulnerable populations in contact with organizations and resources to understand what domestic violence is and how to get help. The Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Advisory Council will serve as a means to support the networking and promote the resources and events of public and private sector agencies and stakeholder organizations that work in this space.

**Support RAPP in Schools:** The RAPP program is a strong way of informing our young people about domestic and gender-based violence. DOE should work to bring RAPP programming to every middle and high school in the city. The focus should be on areas with high levels of domestic violence incidents, such as the South Bronx.

**Strengthen Criminal Penalties for Domestic Violence:** The penalties for domestic and gender-based violence must be increased to deter repeat offenses. Violating an order of protection must lead to stiffer penalties; victims of domestic violence have the right to feel safe in their homes and neighborhoods without having to deal with their abusers. The NYPD must prioritize enforcement of orders of protection and the investigation of domestic violence complaints.

**Expand Culturally Appropriate Programming:** The programming that the city and community-based organizations take to fight domestic and gender-based violence must be culturally appropriate, and sensitive to the needs of the populations that are being addressed. This must include

programming in multiple languages, especially those spoken locally here in The Bronx, as well as strong partnerships with religious organizations who have the trust of their communities. Programming and outreach must be tailored to individuals who identify as African American, West African, Latina, and Bengali, among others.

**Combat Elder Abuse:** The state Office for the Aging estimates that 300,000 elderly New Yorkers are at risk of being victimized each year. This can include physical, emotional, and financial abuse as well as neglect.<sup>132</sup> The Borough President stands strongly in favor of stronger programs to engage seniors to ensure that they have access to resources and services to protect themselves. The state must ensure that nursing homes and care facilities are fully engaged with preventing the abuse of their patients, particularly when it comes to elders with dementia. Programs such as PROTECT that is run through the city Department for the Aging (DFTA) are important ways to help elders get mental health treatment. The Elderly Crime Victims Resource Center can help protect our seniors from abuse and neglect.<sup>133</sup> These programs through DFTA must be fully supported and funded.

## **Mental Health**

### *Long-Term Issues*

One in ten adults and children face mental health challenges serious enough to affect their functioning in everyday life, and more than one in every five New Yorkers shows symptoms of a diagnosable mental disorder.<sup>134</sup> Half of all mental illness cases begin by early adolescence and three-fourths begin by the mid-twenties.<sup>135</sup> Social stigma surrounding mental health issues plays a significant role in deterring individuals from seeking care and has led to, on average, a nine-year delay in seeking treatment from when symptoms first begin. Left untreated, individuals with mental illnesses are at a disproportionately higher risk of dropping out of school, teen pregnancy, unemployment, suicide, homelessness, and violence. According to the New York State Office of Mental Health, lack of treatment for mental illnesses has led to an annual loss of \$200 billion in earnings.

Despite these alarming numbers, many individuals with mental health challenges do not have access to healthcare services. According to the New York City Mayor's Office of Community Mental Health (OCMH), New Yorkers with mental health needs received care half as often when they did not have health insurance compared to when they had coverage.<sup>136</sup> Racial disparities in mental health are similarly disparate. In New York, only 30.3 percent of Black individuals, 38.2 percent of Asian American and Pacific Islander individuals, and 39.3 percent of Latino individuals with depression receive mental health treatment, compared to the 58.3 percent of white individuals with depression who received care.

Access to mental healthcare also varies significantly across the city's neighborhoods. The neighborhoods with the lowest connection to mental healthcare are the Northeast Bronx (19.4 percent), Kingsbridge (20.7 percent), and some neighborhoods in Brooklyn.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, neighborhoods with the greatest rates of poverty, such as those in the South Bronx, have more than twice as many psychiatric hospitalizations per capita as the lowest poverty neighborhood in the city.<sup>138</sup> In fact, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reported that between 2015 and 2018, the population of seriously mentally ill homeless in New York City increased by 23 percent. The total financial burden of treating mental illness is overwhelming,

exceeding the cost of treating all cancers combined.<sup>139</sup> The data clearly establishes that mental health issues are significant and debilitating burdens on Bronx communities and highlights the dire need for greater interventions and policies in the borough. Community Board 1 specifically called for more funding for mental health services including developing a network of mental health providers in their community.

In the recent decades, though treatment options for mental health illnesses have advanced, there has been a significant reduction in inpatient psychiatric beds in New York City. Out of all inpatient psychiatric bed cuts made in New York State, 72 percent were in New York City alone. Between 2000 and 2019, 459 beds were cut across hospitals in the city. Currently, the three New York City Health and Hospitals in the Bronx – Lincoln, North Central Bronx, and Jacobi Hospitals – maintain the greatest number of beds in the borough, with 219 beds across their facilities.<sup>140</sup> Low Medicaid reimbursement for inpatient psychiatric care compared to medical and surgical care led many hospitals to cut their psychiatric bed capacity as part of cost-cutting measures.<sup>141</sup> Originally, such closures were coupled with increased funding for community-based health services and improved outpatient mental health care as part of the NYS Transformation Plan. However, as healthcare providers and advocates recently testified at New York Legislature hearings, “very little of the new money has been distributed, and that the increases, while valuable, will not go far enough to reverse decades of underfunding.”<sup>142</sup> Thousands of New York City residents, adults and children alike, are struggling to receive comprehensive long-term psychiatric care.

Without proper access to inpatient psychiatric care, most individuals and their families resort to calling law enforcement when they are faced with a psychiatric issue. Between 2015 and 2018 alone, the number of New York Police Department (NYPD) calls regarding emotionally disturbed persons (EDP) increased about 23 percent.<sup>143</sup> Research has shown that an overwhelming number of EDP calls in the city are concentrated in Black and Hispanic neighborhoods, which make up most of The Bronx.<sup>144</sup> In just The Bronx’s 44th Precinct, the number of these crisis calls increased by 35 percent between 2014 and 2019, and in a single year, they received close to 5,000 EDP calls, about 13 calls per day.<sup>145</sup> NYPD officers are often the first to respond to these calls though they often lack appropriate training to work with mentally ill individuals. These situations increase risk of escalation, unnecessary use of force, and incarceration of mentally ill individuals. The rate of serious mental illness among incarcerated individuals is higher than ever, at 15 percent

of the incarcerated population. Studies show that the average length of time in jail is increasing for individuals with any type of mental illness, with close to one in every five women and one in every ten men in city jails having a serious mental illness.<sup>146</sup> The poor systemic approach to treating psychiatric emergencies causes such individuals to cycle in and out of the corrections system and hospital emergency rooms. There is a critical need to restructure mental healthcare delivery to transition from punitive systems to an equitable treatment model with supportive care.

### *Policy Goals*

The first key step to addressing mental health issues in The Bronx is to establish a dedicated team in the public safety sector that addresses these complex issues at the intersection of mental health, emergency response, and criminal justice. Further steps should be taken in this direction to improve law enforcement's response strategy when handling mental health emergencies. This will help to prevent these tense situations from escalating and ending in violence or an arrest. It is also key to involve more healthcare providers who are trained to handle these emergencies so that individuals with serious mental health illnesses get evidence-based help and treatment. This would further reduce stigma around mental health treatment and counseling.

It is also essential to invest in the increase of inpatient psychiatric beds across public and private hospitals in The Bronx. By increasing beds and capacity, we can provide a space for both acute and long-term care for those who urgently need it and thus decrease the population of high-utilizer patients who repeatedly end up in the emergency room to get temporary fixes for their complex health issues. This systemic fix also necessitates mandatory continuity of care, coordinated with outpatient and community-based services where most patients can receive ongoing care and other support services to promote compliance with medications. Greater inpatient care will save many lives and resources.

## *Proposed Strategies*

**Expand Mental Health Response Teams:** The New York City Office of Community Mental Health (OCMH) recently met with Borough President Gibson to announce a new program coming to the South Bronx. The OMCH piloted the deployment of Mental Health Response Teams with EMT workers to respond to 911 calls that involve individuals with mental health problems. The Borough President is committed to supporting the program's goal to reduce NYPD involvement, violent encounters, and arrests. Individuals in need of mental health services will instead be assessed and treated in their communities, rather than punitive settings, to mitigate the risks when NYPD officers are involved in engagements with EDPs who have unpredictable behavioral outcomes.

**Promote the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** The 988 number is a new national dialing code that routes callers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Callers will connect with trained counselors who will assist in deescalating behavioral emergencies and help individuals in need of mental health services receive necessary care. Calling 988 instead of 911 will significantly change the landscape of how mental health crises are handled because these vulnerable individuals will get healthcare rather than criminal justice involvement. The Office of the Bronx Borough President will increase awareness of the 988 Lifeline across the borough through fliers, social media and website promotions, and including public service announcements in the office's weekly newsletter and the new Health newsletter that will debut in the summer of 2022.

**Support Behavioral Health Emergency Assistance Response Division (B-HEARD):** B-HEARD is a health-centered response to mental health calls that law enforcement receives, created through collaboration between FDNY/EMS, Health + Hospitals, DOHMH, NYPD, and OCMH. When NYPD receives calls about behavioral emergencies, FDNY EMTs and paramedics teamed with a mental health professional from Health + Hospitals will arrive on the scene first. This team of professionals is trained to handle issues such as suicidal ideation, substance misuse, and mental illness. If weapons are involved or there is imminent risk of physical harm, NYPD officers will respond as well. B-HEARD teams, in addition to deescalating emergencies, will provide referrals to DOHMH's Health Engagement and Assessment Teams (HEAT), who offer time-limited pre- and post-crisis case management services and support to people with behavioral health challenges.

As of June 2022, the 40th, 41st, 42nd, and 44th precincts in The Bronx have implemented B-HEARD. The Borough President endeavors to expand B-HEARD to all twelve Bronx NYPD precincts and to expand public awareness of the B-HEARD program, and will actively work with all stakeholders to make B-HEARD an integral part of emergency response strategies across The Bronx.

## **Opioid Crisis and Epidemic in The Bronx**

### *Long-Term Issues*

Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids like fentanyl, and legally prescribed pain relievers such as oxycodone, codeine, morphine, and others.<sup>147</sup> Biochemically, opioids interact with receptors on nerve cells in the body and brain, and cause pain relief and euphoria. They can be safely used medically for short lengths of time and when prescribed by a physician, but over-prescription can lead to dependence. Misuse of opioids – taking them in a different way than prescribed, consuming a larger quantity than prescribed, or taking them without a prescription – can lead to addiction, overdose, and death.<sup>148</sup>

The Bronx had the second highest opioid burden across New York State in 2019, with a crude opioid burden rate of 489.6 per 100,000 population.<sup>149</sup> This accounts for opioid overdose deaths, non-fatal outpatient emergency room visits, and non-fatal hospital discharges involving opioid overdose, abuse, dependence, and unspecified use.<sup>150</sup> The Bronx has consistently had among the highest age-adjusted rates of overdose deaths in New York State with 23.6 deaths per 100,000 population, the fifth highest in the state.<sup>151</sup> In 2021 alone, there were 80.6 outpatient emergency department visits and 42.9 hospitalizations for opioid overdoses per 100,000 population, double the rates of New York City overall.<sup>152</sup>

According to the Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York, “Black New Yorkers had the highest rate of overdose deaths, a shift from prior years that coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2018 and 2019, Latino New Yorkers outpaced other groups in drug fatalities. The Bronx is among the areas most affected by the opioid epidemic nationwide, particularly high poverty neighborhoods in the South Bronx, where overdose death rates are more than twice the NYC average.”<sup>153</sup> Studies now show that with the disproportionate trauma and isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic in minority populations, the number of overdose deaths within Black communities has only increased further.<sup>154</sup> The opioid crisis in The Bronx can partially be attributed to the recent rise in inexpensive heroin in Bronx neighborhoods where residents already have been struggling with addiction for a long time.<sup>155</sup> In fact, interviews of 200 city drug users by DOHMH found that a majority of users are not actively seeking fentanyl, but



this cheap heroin is often mixed with fentanyl, making it far more dangerous and fifty times more powerful than heroin without drug dealers and users knowing.<sup>156</sup> Fentanyl is a narcotic analgesic that is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine, and more lethal as well.<sup>157</sup> The surge in these harmful drugs leaves individuals with a history of substance use disorders vulnerable to relapsing. While naloxone administration is usually an effective way to reverse overdoses, use of fentanyl-infused heroin can be overwhelmingly lethal, causing many more preventable deaths.

Despite these overwhelming statistics, few individuals access comprehensive care to overcome their addiction long-term. Even though there are over 200 locations in The Bronx that provide some form of substance use disorder treatment or related service, including medication-assisted treatment, inpatient services, detoxification programs, counseling, transitional and long-term housing, and re-entry programs, individuals struggling with opioid use often do not know where to get help or are not sure where to start. Moreover, there is tremendous stigma surrounding receiving care for substance use disorders and using clean needle exchange programs. With persistent stigma towards individuals who use drugs, many individuals who are struggling with opioid use hesitate to get help out of concern that they will be judged and disrespected.<sup>158</sup>

Opioid abuse creates harms beyond those simply falling on the individual experiencing addiction. The neighborhoods with high levels of addiction in their communities see knock-on effects including higher levels of crime, homelessness, and waste. For example, Community Board 1 has reported a high level of drug use in St. Mary's Park, making the park less suitable for use by children and families.

### *Policy Goals*

Due to a general lack of awareness of what services are available in The Bronx, the Office of the Bronx Borough President is committed to increasing public awareness about where individuals who use opioids can receive care and counseling. Many of these clinics, organizations, and services have their own referral networks among themselves, with certain groups sending patients to other facilities and specific application processes to enter that network of services. It is

the Borough President's goal to make this information more transparently available so that Bronxites can learn where they can receive the best care for their situation and specific needs.

It is also a significant goal of the Borough President to establish effective new treatment centers where services are lacking. Services in The Bronx are often clustered in certain neighborhoods while leaving others lacking in care options, particularly those in the South Bronx. Creating new centers that can be a hub for receiving treatment, guidance, referrals, and additional supportive services will help to tie together the large network of services that exist in The Bronx and bring new services to areas that still have significant need.

However, we must ensure that the services in The Bronx are primarily serving local residents. Historically, services tailored for the whole city and beyond have been sited in The Bronx. This is unfair to the local residents who already shoulder a disproportionate burden due to poverty and historical discrimination such as redlining. Neighborhoods across our borough and our city must do their fair shares when it comes to provision of services for their residents.

Our veterans must have access to appropriate mental health and addiction treatment, whether through the VA or otherwise. According to one study, more than 10 percent of veterans have been diagnosed with a substance use disorder. Another study found that 30 percent of suicides among veterans involved drug or alcohol use.<sup>159</sup> These statistics are appalling and more must be done to ensure that veterans have all the access to resources that they need to stay healthy and safe.

### *Proposed Strategies*

**Create a Bronx Public Directory and Map of Treatment and Prevention Services:** We must increase public awareness about the network for treatment and prevention services available to individuals with opioid and substance use disorders. To that end, the Office of the Borough President will spearhead the creation of a directory and map that will be published on the Borough President's website that identifies all services available in The Bronx. The map will also indicate for each location who is eligible for services, what sorts of services are provided, and contact information. This initiative will create more transparency about what services are available and

will reduce stigma surrounding obtaining care. Moreover, the Office of the Bronx Borough President is collaborating with public health experts to conduct a cluster analysis study to understand whether certain neighborhoods of The Bronx are oversaturated with services while others do not have enough and to explore the impact of this geographical spread. This study will provide further empirical evidence to advocate for new treatment centers where they are lacking and to understand the costs that Bronx communities bear when it comes to both drugs and the treatment facilities in their neighborhoods.

**Establish a Bronx Overdose Prevention Center:** The Borough President will advocate for the establishment of a new overdose prevention center (OPC) in The Bronx, and in the South Bronx in particular. This site should be located centrally to neighborhoods with high rates of opioid use. Creating an OPC in the South Bronx will increase access to affordable and judgment-free care and can be a hub for connecting and collaborating with the existing services in adjacent neighborhoods. The first OPCs in the city opened earlier this year in northern Manhattan. They have proven to be a good model and should be expanded to more locations going forward.

**Expand Naloxone and Overdose Prevention Training:** More individuals across the city should be trained in the use of naloxone and other lifesaving treatments and tactics that can be performed in the event of an emergency overdose situation. This should include all staff in our schools as well as workers in restaurants, bars, and other nightlife venues. City workers should be encouraged to get this training, especially if they are frontline workers who engage with vulnerable populations. The city should work with the nonprofit organizations that conduct these trainings as well as provide more public trainings through FDNY EMS. The Borough President will encourage BIDs to partner with local organizations to get their employees and the employees of local businesses to get this training. This is especially important for nightlife businesses where it is more likely that there will be individuals present who have used opioids.

## **Asthma**

### *Long-Term Issues*

Asthma is a chronic condition in which the respiratory airways in the body narrow and swell, sometimes producing extra mucous. This condition makes breathing difficult and can cause coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath.<sup>160</sup> The clinical presentation of asthma can vary from minor symptoms to severe attacks. Asthma symptoms can be triggered by a variety of external factors including airborne allergens such as pollen and mold spores, respiratory infections, physical activity, cockroach particles, pet dander, cold air, air pollutants including tobacco smoke, and strong emotions and stress.<sup>161</sup> Asthma is associated with higher incidence of heart attacks, strokes, and respiratory diseases.<sup>162</sup>

The South Bronx and Northern Manhattan are the two most asthma-ridden neighborhoods in the country. In the South Bronx alone, an average of 11 to 13 percent of adults live with asthma, with the prevalence peaking at 17 percent in some neighborhoods. This is much higher than the average 10 percent of adults across New York City living with asthma, and the national asthma prevalence of 7.5 percent.<sup>163</sup> Mott Haven, which is known as “Asthma Alley” due to the high asthma prevalence rate, reports five times more asthma hospitalizations than the national average and 21 times more hospitalizations than other New York City neighborhoods. Even worse, the asthma-related death rate is 43 deaths per one million residents in The Bronx, more than four times the rate for New York State as a whole.<sup>164</sup>

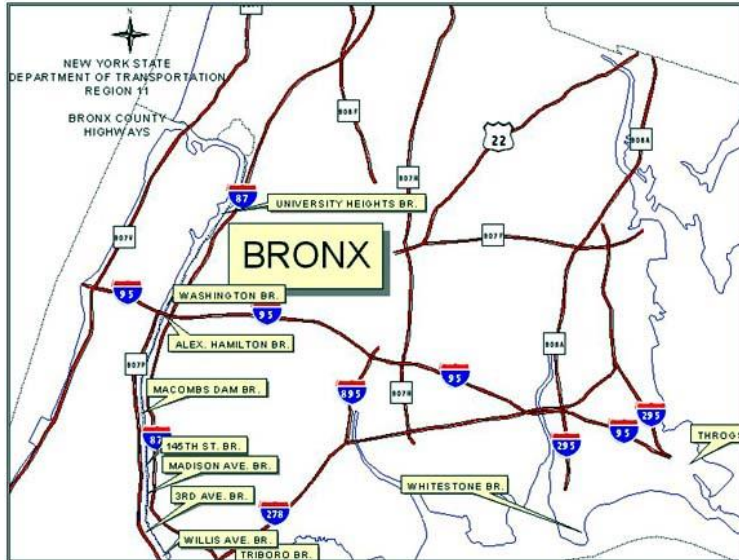
Asthma is highly prevalent among children, disproportionately so in The Bronx. Close to a quarter of Bronx children are diagnosed with asthma, with Mott Haven and Hunts Point having the highest child asthma hospitalizations in the borough and the city (73.1 to 119.2 hospitalizations per 100,000 children ages 0-12).<sup>165</sup> Even though asthma hospitalizations have been decreasing in every other borough, child asthma rates have remained the same in The Bronx, with asthma-related emergency room visits for children ages 5 to 17 actually increasing to 388.4 per 10,000 children by 2016, a more than 15 percent rise since 2006.<sup>166</sup>

These numbers are correlated with high pollution rates, primarily caused by vehicle emissions. Vehicles using fossil fuels release carbon dioxide, volatile organic compounds (VOCs),

and nitrous oxides.<sup>167</sup> In the summer, increased ultraviolet radiation combines with VOCs and nitrous oxides in the heat to produce ground level ozone, which is toxic to humans at high concentrations, putting individuals with asthma at great risk of health complications and death.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, particulate matter (PM) smaller than 2.5 micrometers, also emitted by vehicles, can be inhaled and reach the bloodstream, causing asthma, other respiratory issues, and potentially even cancer with long-term exposure.<sup>169</sup>

In New York City, there is significant pollution inequity, with The Bronx facing disproportionately higher levels of pollution. The opening of warehouses and newspaper printing presses in The Bronx has resulted in significantly higher vehicular pollution than in other boroughs, with hundreds of trucks traveling to and from these locations through The Bronx. “Hunts Point has the Hunts Point Produce Market which brings 15,000 diesel semi-trucks driving through the neighborhood to deliver food and contributes greatly to traffic congestion. Mott Haven has the Port Morris and many other sewage plants for the department of sanitation. The new FreshDirect building in Mott Haven also brings in about 1,000 FreshDirect diesel semi-trucks through Mott Haven.”<sup>170</sup> A study of a particular grocery warehouse that opened in 2018 concluded that after its opening, there was a significant increase in traffic at all sites of the warehouse studied, the highest being a 31.7 percent increase in truck flow from 9 pm to midnight.<sup>171</sup>

Beyond the negative health effects of the trucks, the services of these companies are not redounding to the benefit of Bronxites. Conversely, they tend to be enjoyed by relatively more affluent neighborhoods of Manhattan and Brooklyn, or even outside the five boroughs.<sup>172</sup> In fact, a study by the New York State Department of Transportation found that 57 percent of trucks traveling to Hunts Point meat and produce markets actually come from outside of the city, suggesting that Bronxites are being neglected and left to face the detrimental effects of industrialization.<sup>173</sup> This only adds to the fact that the South Bronx is wedged between the Major Deegan, the Bruckner, and the Cross Bronx Expressways, three major highways with constant traffic and massive pollutant emissions.<sup>174</sup> Together, locals know this area as the “island of pollution.”<sup>175</sup> This area is also home to many parks and public schools, leaving children and families vulnerable to high levels of air pollution on a daily basis.



The South Bronx faces significant pollution due to numerous major highways, making its neighborhoods highly prone to asthma and asthma-related hospitalizations.<sup>176</sup>

This environmental injustice only adds to deep racial inequity. In The Bronx, 43.8 percent of the population is Black, and 56.4 percent are Hispanic or Latino. In Mott Haven, 97 percent of the population is Black or Hispanic. Recent studies show that, “On average, non-Hispanic whites experience a ‘pollution advantage.’ They experience ~17% less air pollution exposure than is caused by their consumption. Blacks and Hispanics on average bear a “pollution burden” of 56% and 63% excess exposure, respectively, relative to the exposure caused by their consumption.”<sup>177</sup> Black people are three times more likely to die from asthma-related causes than white individuals are, revealing the high risk of mortality for Bronx residents.<sup>178</sup> Community Board 1 called for funding an environmental assessment of the air quality in their neighborhoods to mitigate the air quality issues plaguing the local population.

Poverty also plays a significant role in asthma levels. The Bronx has the lowest median income in the country and is home to the nation’s poorest congressional district. Individuals with asthma living in these high-poverty neighborhoods, who are often uninsured or cannot access medical care regularly, are unlikely to receive regular primary and secondary preventative care. This increases emergency room visits where they will instead receive acute care for each emergent asthma episode. This lack of continuity of care not only brings patients to the brink of life-threatening situations repeatedly, allowing their chronic disease to go unmanaged, but also strains hospitals’ financial and human resources. Furthermore, low-income residents of The Bronx often suffer from poor housing conditions, in both private and public housing, which increases risk of asthma. The Bronx has the highest proportion of homes with mold and pests, according to New

York City Housing and Vacancy Survey Data, in addition to the highest percentage of second-hand smoking.<sup>179</sup> In fact, a majority of the twelve neighborhoods with the highest prevalence of homes with maintenance problems also were among the highest with child asthma-related hospital visits. These maintenance problems include cracks and holes, mice or rats, cockroaches, and mold.<sup>180</sup> In 2017, Black and Latino families in public housing were more likely to have a maintenance problem than white families, demonstrating that racial inequity continues to persist across numerous factors contributing to asthma.<sup>181</sup>

### *Policy Goals*

With these significant issues surrounding asthma in The Bronx, it is vital that the borough take active steps to prevent and manage asthma among adults and children alike. This must be done through a variety of targeted programs and policies that address affordability and access to care, environmental burdens, and housing challenges for Bronxites.

The first step to preventing asthma in The Bronx is to reduce air pollution. Limiting the amount of air pollution from the major highways that reach Bronx communities will significantly improve air quality and will lessen incidence of asthma. The Office of the Bronx Borough President is also committed to reducing pollution from local roads by addressing the truck flow from warehouses and companies in The Bronx, with a particular focus on Hunts Point and Port Morris.

One of the most important contributors to vehicle-caused air pollution in the borough is the Cross Bronx Expressway. This highway cuts through the borough from east to west and has significant levels of truck and other vehicle traffic every day. This has resulted in much higher levels of air pollution in the surrounding neighborhoods. The Cross Bronx is a problem that must be dealt with, and this includes studying the feasibility of “capping” the highway at its below-grade portions. Keeping the pollution from flowing into nearby communities is essential to preserve their health.

Additionally, housing issues must be addressed in order to prevent asthma and to limit attacks among the children who are affected. When a home has issues such as mold, roaches, and other defects, this can precipitate asthma attacks when particles are inhaled. This must be mitigated through incentivizing maintenance and repairs with both the carrot and the stick. Bronx residents deserve safe and sanitary housing that does not cause them to experience these health issues.

### *Proposed Strategies*

**Cap the Cross Bronx:** The Cross Bronx is a major environmental catastrophe. The vehicles that pass through the Bronx on this highway, particularly, truck spew emissions all times of the day and night. This has a serious negative health impact on the surrounding neighborhoods, which are largely made up of Black and Latino and low-income populations. The Borough President strongly supports the efforts to cap the Cross Bronx Expressway, alongside our federal partners like Senator Chuck Schumer and Congressman Ritchie Torres, who were instrumental in getting funding for capping the Cross Bronx included in the bipartisan infrastructure bill. A Columbia University study that ran simulations of constructing deck parks over the below-grade parts of the Cross Bronx found that such capping saves lives and money. The study only adds to scientific literature that establishes the positive impact of capping the Cross Bronx.<sup>182</sup> “Most notably, they remove contact between pedestrians and automobiles. In doing so, they not only reduce accidents but they also encourage active, pollution-free transportation such as biking or jogging. Deck parks also place vehicles in a tunnel, thereby reducing noise and air pollution in surrounding neighborhoods. Finally, deck parks provide green space in which people can exercise and relax...They can also have positive impacts on property values.”<sup>183</sup> Beyond reducing incidence of asthma, capping the Cross Bronx has the potential to reduce incidence of diabetes, heart disease, mental illness, cancer, low birth weight, and accident-related injuries.<sup>184</sup>

**Support Electric Vehicle Conversions:** The Borough President will advocate for the conversion of delivery trucks to electric vehicles in control the overwhelming air pollution emitted by these vehicles in local areas of The Bronx, especially in Hunts Point, home to the largest food distribution center in New York City. Thanks to the recently passed Inflation Reduction Act at the



federal level and also state legislation, these electric vehicle conversions are more possible than ever before. The MTA has already committed to converting the bus fleet to all electric over the next decade plus. As this rolls out, The Bronx must have priority for these buses due to our borough's status as an environmental justice area. Our neighborhoods have long borne disproportionate burden of environmental impact and so should have the first opportunity to benefit from these mitigation efforts. A report by the Columbia University Sustainability Management program and ElectrifyNY found that if even 5 percent of outbound traffic made up of medium- and heavy-duty trucks, approximately 600 of 12,000 vehicles, were converted to electric vehicles, particulate matter 2.5 would decrease by 80 kilograms per year.<sup>185</sup> This would also cut costs tremendously, saving \$300,000 in social costs and \$2.2 million in fuel, operation, and maintenance costs.<sup>186</sup> The Borough President is dedicated to protecting Bronx communities by making these changes that will not only reduce asthma rates and hospitalizations, but will also improve Bronx environments and neighborhood infrastructure.

**Improve Access to Asthma Treatment:** Bronx residents are less likely to have primary care physicians, there are fewer doctors per capita in The Bronx than in other boroughs, and Bronx residents are less likely to have health insurance than other New Yorkers. The city must improve access for Bronx residents to treatment, especially asthma treatment for our children. One of the best ways to do this is through the schools. We must develop more school-based health clinics to deliver on-site primary care for this pervasive chronic illness, thus providing careful management and treatment for acute asthma cases that can keep children home from school or even land them in the hospital. Teachers must be trained to deal with asthma emergencies and to anticipate how and when to administer inhalers or other protocols. This will improve the lives of a significant segment of the K-12 population in The Bronx.

## **Diabetes**

### *Long-Term Issues*

Diabetes is a chronic health condition that has lasting and life-long consequences when left undiagnosed or untreated. The body of a person with diabetes is either not making enough insulin or is not able to use the insulin it produces as well as it should. Cells respond to insulin by picking up excess sugar from the blood and transporting it to within cells and organs that utilize sugar for energy. There is no cure for diabetes; however, losing weight, eating a healthy and balanced diet, taking medication, and self-care reduce the impact.<sup>187</sup>

The Bronx has one of the highest diabetes rates in the city,<sup>188</sup> posing significant limitations to quality of life. Food insecurity is higher among people with diabetes and the limited availability of safe and adequate food may affect diabetes management.<sup>189</sup> The healthcare system may not capture the lived experiences and day-to-day management of diabetes for a person affected by food insecurity. According to DOHMH, diabetes is one of the leading causes of death in New York City. Diabetes most often accompanies hypertension, obesity, and heart conditions that put people at high risk of death. The COVID-19 pandemic additionally showed how these underlying conditions could be lethal because those with diabetes were more likely to die of the coronavirus.

In the United States today, more than one in three adults have pre-diabetes, where the blood sugar levels are elevated, but not high enough for a diagnosis. Pre-diabetes increases a person's risk for Type 2 diabetes, stroke, and heart disease. However, 84 percent of people do not even know that they have pre-diabetes, a condition that can be reversed through lifestyle changes. Its prevalence is a significant challenge to population health, and the systemic costs of chronic care are astronomical.

### *Policy Goals*

The most important priority when it comes to diabetes is screening and prevention. Until the 2018-2019 Robert Wood Johnson County Health Rankings, there was a metric for surveillance

of Diabetes in the Medicaid/Medicare population; however, this outcome data is missing from the 2021-2022 rankings, an indicator of pandemic-related fiscal constraints. Many similar communities and environmental monitoring programs (including for asthma) were defunded, at least temporarily. The DOHMH and state Department of Health (DOH) funding projections for FY 2023 lack any funding allocation for diabetes, hypertension, and the cluster of chronic illnesses associated with these preventable conditions. In 2022, public health leaders must refocus efforts on the prevention and effective management of diabetes. Additionally, despite the relationship between food insecurity and diabetes, the social circumstances around the disease are not well expressed. The Office of the Borough President will explore policy approaches inclusive of people's lived experiences, which focus on improving outcomes for Type 2 diabetes through proactive partnerships with the DOHMH and community health partners that have established best practices.

Bronxites must be informed of the risk factors for diabetes and empowered to manage their health, diets, and lifestyles. Given the crisis-level prevalence of diabetes as a chronic illness in our borough, a systematic and evidence-based approach is necessary to reach deep into these Bronx communities to establish relationship-based outreach and collaborations with community provider organizations. The scope of this work will have to cover expansive health domains and require funding to develop patient centered resources, and effective community-based surveillance. Community Board 1 called for funding for combatting chronic illnesses, citing diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension as priorities.

### *Proposed Strategies*

**Establish a Diabetes Taskforce:** Solutions to address this urgent health issue must come from advocates and trusted messengers in our Bronx communities. As such, the Office of the Bronx Borough President is building a coalition of Bronx stakeholders and experts to establish best practices and collaborations. Borough President Gibson is joined in this effort by health advocacy leaders, including Chris Norwood from Health People and C. Virginia Fields of the National Black Leadership Commission on Health (Black Health), hospitals, federally qualified health centers

(FQHCs), food policy activists, CBOs, FBOs, and health educators. A key group for this effort is our insurance partners, particularly those that have already invested in improving health outcomes in the most underserved populations in The Bronx and that provided steadfast support during the pandemic, including by sponsoring health screenings, health fairs and community events, and donations of foods, services, and information to our constituents. Insurers have an essential insight into the needs of diabetes patients and the milestones that must be reached to prevent and reverse this illness. Highlighting the work of community health partners that have had notable success in reducing the incidence of diabetes through interventional programming will be instrumental in creating a cohesive and shared approach for this borough-wide initiative.

**Elevate Priority of Diabetes Prevention and Ongoing Public Health Surveillance:** The Borough President will push for funding to measure and report on diabetes and hypertension and to broaden diabetes surveillance. The Diabetes Task Force will be charged with creating a borough plan and conducting targeted outreach for high priority neighborhoods and at-risk populations. The neighborhoods with the most at-risk individuals include:<sup>190</sup>

- Belmont/East Tremont: 22%
- Morrisania/Crotona: 22%
- Hunts Point/Longwood: 20%
- Mott Haven/Melrose: 20%
- Kingsbridge/Bedford Park: 19%
- Concourse/Highbridge: 17%
- Parkchester/Soundview: 16%
- Fordham/University Heights: 16%
- Morris Park/Bronxdale: 14%

**Create Peer Programs for All Ages:** Peer support and education has been shown to effectively reduce risks of obesity and early onset diabetes. A high priority is to restore funding for this diabetes work, which had been redirected towards the emergency management of COVID-19 response and the aftermath of the pandemic. City and state funding must be reallocated to support preventative care and patient education. This must apply to all ages, particularly on educating our

young people about making lifelong healthy choices and our seniors who are at elevated risk of illness and death.

**Allocate Funding for Food as Medicine:** Bronx hospitals and clinics with nutrition or culinary medicine programs should collaborate with community-based experts to create innovative, accessible, insurance-supported, and life-altering nutritional programs for youth to adults. The Office of the Borough President will work with our hospital partners to connect them with the organizations that are doing this work.

**Conduct Community Outreach:** The office of the Borough President will conduct community outreach in conjunction with the Bronx Diabetes Task Force. The goal must be to increase diabetes screening and community awareness through robust social marketing and public health campaigns and strive to mitigate the trust issues of the health system to instill values of inclusiveness and self-empowerment. Successful clinical programs rely on effective peer support networks and developing trusted and knowledgeable peer educators as messengers, particularly in vulnerable communities. Stakeholders across healthcare provider professions will work in teams to develop unified messaging on the consequences of neglecting diabetic care through physical and digital media.

## **Food Insecurity**

### *Long-Term Issues*

The ability to access healthy and nutritious food is essential to health and well-being. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, food insecurity is the uncertainty or limited availability of safe and nutritionally appropriate food.<sup>191</sup> With economic uncertainty, shortages of goods, and soaring prices, the crises of food insecurity and food deserts where access to nutritious, unprocessed, fresh foods is limited, are now getting worse.

The Bronx has one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the country. More than 375,000 people in The Bronx experience food insecurity, meaning one in four residents report feeling food insecure. Benefit programs, food programs, and soup kitchens aim to make it easier for Bronxites to access the food they need. At the end of 2021, 27 percent of Bronxites were living below the poverty line and 20 percent of Bronx residents applied for SNAP benefits. Additionally, one in ten residents reported visiting a food pantry or soup kitchen in the previous month.<sup>192</sup>

According to the 2020 Food Metrics Report released by the city, there was a “meal gap” in 2018 of 42.5 million meals in The Bronx alone.<sup>193</sup> This means that individuals in The Bronx skipped that many meals over the course of that year.

In June, the Office of the Borough President participated in community listening sessions convened by Bronx Health REACH to gather feedback and recommendations for the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. Bronx Health REACH is a pioneer in addressing food insecurity and identifying steps to eliminate diet related diseases. From these sessions, the office gained valuable insight into the actionable steps that can be taken at a local, state, and federal level to resolve food insecurity.

Many neighborhoods in The Bronx are food deserts. This means that there are insufficient supermarkets and grocery stores in the neighborhood to meet the needs of the community. Many of these communities have large numbers bodegas, which are able to provide food but are quite often lacking in the fresh fruit and vegetables necessary for a balanced diet. Many of these

neighborhoods are also food swamps, areas where there are unhealthy food options such as fast food but which are lacking in healthy options.

Efforts have been made to help provide fresh fruit and vegetables to these neighborhoods. The city has pioneered the use of green markets on our city streets to provide more fresh produce to our communities. There are also an increasing number of farmers' markets and community gardens, which provide food in these neighborhoods.

Community gardens provide a valuable resource to local neighborhoods. These community gardens are on private land and each has its own rules for use and access, but those that have gardens often donate food to local food banks to support the local community. Other gardens are used for recreation or outdoor space to keep people active. Every community garden provides a value and it is important to continue to support these spaces. The Office of the Bronx Borough President is working to compile and map these spaces and provide contact information on the Office's website to promote these gardens to the local communities they serve. The Borough President fully supports the GreenThumb program in The Bronx's community gardens to produce food for local communities.

More than 30 million American students receive lunch through the National School Lunch Program. In addition, more than 14 million receive breakfast through the School Breakfast Program, administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Since students consume up to half of their calories at school, the federal and state governments have targeted schools as venues for offering kids healthy foods. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), research shows that students' health behaviors, including eating a healthy diet, are tied to academic achievement, affecting cognitive skills (such as concentration and memory), grades, attendance, and graduation rates. According to a new report from the office of Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, nearly 1.2 million schoolchildren in New York City are enrolled in the National School Lunch program.<sup>194</sup> During the pandemic, DOE served more than 90 million meals. Despite the commendable efforts of DOE during the pandemic, much more is required to improve the nutritional value of school food.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the schools became food distribution hubs. In prior years, the city adopted a program of free lunch for all students. During the height of the pandemic, the schools distributed meals as part of the Grab-and-Go program to ensure that no family was left behind or forgotten about. This proved to be a successful way of ensuring that the extreme challenges with food insecurity that ballooned during the pandemic were mitigated.

Serving children highly processed foods harms their health. Elevated cholesterol, childhood obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure are prevalent in New York City students. Nearly half of New York City elementary school children and Head Start children are at an unhealthy weight. These ailments are preventable diet-related diseases. However, DOE continues to serve processed foods saturated with high-fat content, sugars, salts, additives, and other preservatives that continue to increase the health disparities of Bronx students.<sup>195</sup>

New York City public schools offer vegan plant-based dishes every Friday to expose students to flavorful and different meals rich in protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Plant-powered Fridays are designed to encourage students to make healthy food choices that last a lifetime.<sup>196</sup> This summer, the office previewed the launch of the new vegan offerings piloted by the school food program. Offerings like Mediterranean Chickpea Wrap and Black Bean Salad will complement fresh fruits and milk. This is a strong step towards helping students make sustainable choices and building healthy lifelong habits.

As a member of the City Council, Borough President Gibson sponsored legislation that required the Mayor's Office of Food Policy (MOFP) to develop a 10-year food policy plan. The MOFP is required to engage the community and stakeholders regarding food policy, equity, justice, and security. The plan is required to set goals to reduce hunger, improve nutrition, increase access to healthy food, reduce food waste, develop food and farm economies, and increase urban agriculture and sustainability.<sup>197</sup> The Council passed this legislation unanimously in 2020, and the MOFP released its first plan in February 2021.<sup>198</sup> The Borough President is committed to seeing the recommendations of the report into completion over the coming years.



## *Policy Goals*

On food policy, we must start with a simple goal: every person in New York City deserves access to enough healthy food for themselves and their families. The city must enact policies to ensure that families can purchase the food they need and that students in our schools are given food that is both healthy and filling.

Nonprofits in our city that help families secure access to food deserve the necessary funding to accomplish that goal. The city must ensure that these organizations are able to operate to the best of their abilities so that no person in our city is left behind. This includes organizations that do direct food provision such as food banks and soup kitchens, but this also includes organizations that help connect individuals to benefits and services including SNAP and other government benefits.

The food industry operates numerous distribution sites in The Bronx, including at Hunts Point markets. These distributors must use local workers from right here in The Bronx, but they also must ensure that people all over The Bronx have access to the food that passes through these facilities. The Bronx cannot just be the distribution site for the other borough's produce. Our residents also deserve access to the healthy food that passes through the borough.

## *Proposed Strategies*

**Advocate for Nutrition Legislation:** The Borough President will work with Bronx Health REACH, City Council, and State Legislature to advance progressive nutrition legislation, with a focus on vulnerable populations including children, seniors, and homeless individuals to:

- Establish robust policy around the proliferation of fast-food establishments in vulnerable communities, and restoration of a community-based nutrition and food landscape.
- Work with CUNY Center for Food Policy on developing initiatives to improve school and institutional meals that align with the proposed ten-year food plan.

- Enact the model wellness policy bill, which would authorize the state to establish a model wellness policy and provide it to local governments including school districts.<sup>199</sup>
- Engage with the city DOE, Mayor’s office, and our superintendents and principals to ensure that Bronx schools comply with nutrition and fitness standards outlined by the CDC.

**Establish Hyperlocal Fresh Food Connections:** The Borough President will establish partnerships between farms, retail food outlets, food hubs, local providers, and community groups to ensure residents have access to fresh foods. The office will promote the use of the New York City food donation web portal, donateNYC. The portal connects excess food to nonprofits, businesses, and organizations who then redistribute the food in their respective communities. The Borough President supports and will advocate for the Health Bucks program to help low-income New Yorkers purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at local farmers markets.<sup>200</sup>

**Help Small Food Retailers Sell Healthy Options:** The city should continue to work with small food retailers like bodegas to promote the sale of healthy and fresh food options. Store layout is an underappreciated way to promote the purchase of healthy food. By working with stores to have fresh fruits and vegetables near the entrance to the store and healthy snacks near the counter, the city can help people take advantage of healthy food options already existing in their communities. The Borough President supports the Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH) program through EDC to help bring healthy food options to food desert communities through tax and zoning incentives. The areas of The Bronx that EDC says are most in need of supermarket investment are Co-Op City/Wakefield, Grand Concourse, Hunts Point, and Van Cortlandt Village.<sup>201</sup>

**Expand Food Security and Nutrition Research:** We can better understand the food environment in The Bronx by mapping the available food resources, including community gardens, farms, food banks, and fresh food retailers. This interactive map will be available on the Borough President’s website, promoted on social media, and widely shared with the officer’s partners and other community organizations. This will help visualize target areas in need of increased access and resources. We will work with our partners such as Bronx Health REACH and BronxWorks who have experience in these mapping projects. Furthermore, the office is actively involved in conducting evidence-based research on best practices to alleviate food insecurity and food waste in our city. The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute and the NYC Food Policy Center are vital

partners resourceful in understanding community level challenges and developing innovative solutions in addressing food insecurity. We will continue to research the food landscape and advocate for legislation and programs that provide solutions for the relationship between diet-related diseases and food insecurity.

**Ensure Healthy Food Options in Schools:** The DOE must commit to providing healthy meals, including fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as alternative food choices such as vegan options. Under Mayor Adams, the DOE has made strives to provide these healthy options, but there have been concerns raised about consistency, both over time and by school location. Schools in The Bronx are no less deserving of healthy food options than schools in more affluent ZIP codes. Our schools should expand the garden-to-cafe program with school-grown vegetables and fruits through public-private partnerships. We must collaborate with the Bronx health sector to teach students healthy eating habits and the importance of preventative care through food nutrition. DOE should contract with local vendors. The DOE should introduce technical programs such as food and nutrition, agriculture and food science, and dietary curricula, geared towards students interested in technical education.

**Establish a Food Advocacy Plan:** The Office of the Borough President will establish a Food Advocacy Plan and appoint a liaison to the network of community gardens, urban farms, affiliated pantries, greenmarkets, and all stakeholders in this network, including the activist community partners within New York Botanical Garden's Green Up Program, Hunts Point, and the Bronx Food Hub. The Borough President is committed to building enduring partnerships with all our health partners and community-based organizations to understand the specific health needs of our communities. We will build community awareness through a hyperlocal approach to address the social barriers residents face in meeting their food needs as well as the stigma around food insecurity, poverty, and related socioeconomic factors.

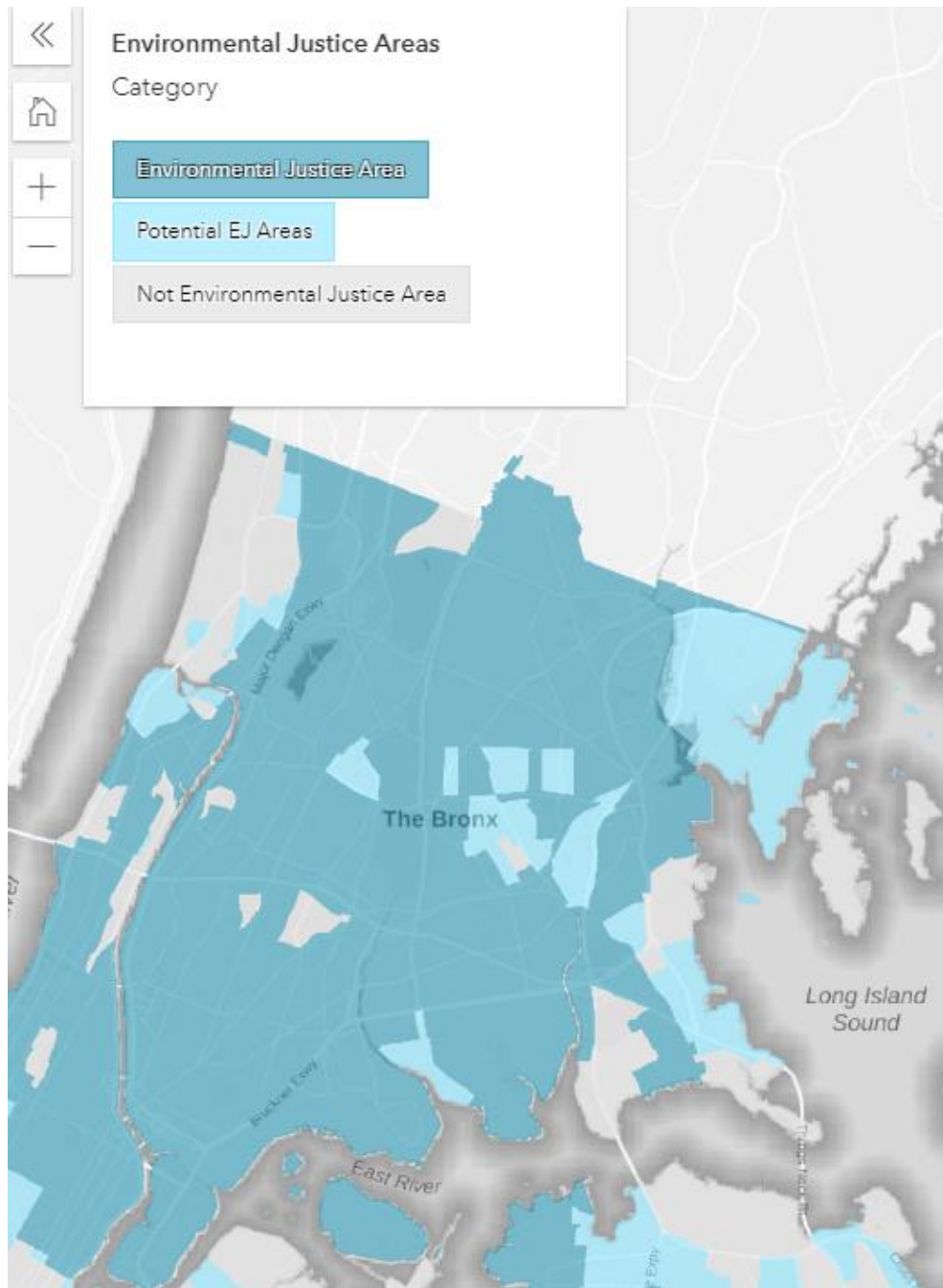
## **Environmental Justice**

### *Long-Term Issues*

The long history of disinvestment, poverty, and city policy choices has resulted in most of The Bronx facing serious environmental issues. These issues disproportionately affect Black and Latino communities as well as low-income populations. Among the environmental challenges that our communities face are flooding, air and water pollution, lack of access to natural resources, exposure to hazardous materials, high levels of noise, and high levels of heat during the summer months.<sup>202</sup>

In recognition of the severe environmental challenges facing New York City, the City Council ordered the city to develop an environmental justice plan to help tackle these challenges. One of the initiatives of the Mayor's Office and the Environmental Justice Advisory Board regarding this topic has been the designation of "environmental justice areas" as defined in the city's administrative code.<sup>203</sup> Almost the entire Bronx has been designated an environmental justice area due to high levels of populations that have faced historically disproportionate levels of environmental challenges.

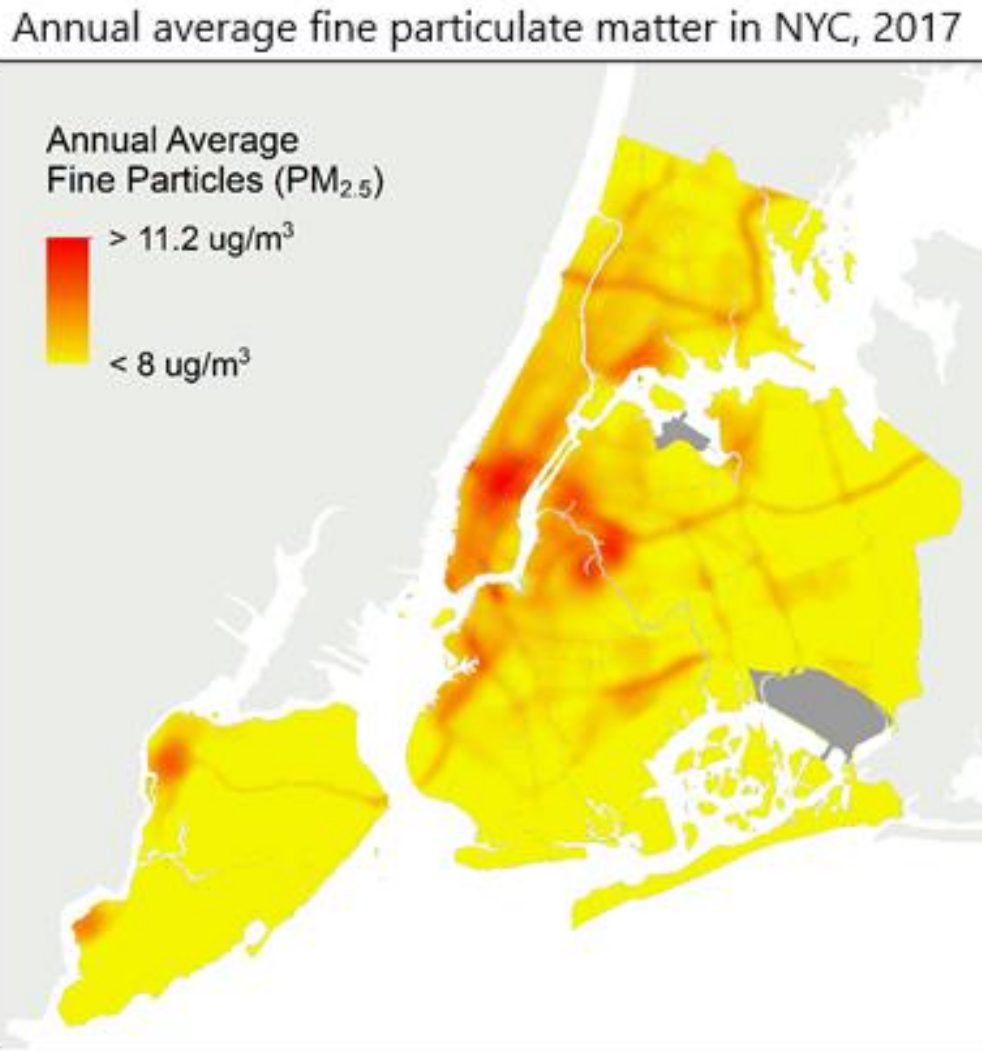
Many of these communities face higher levels of pollution, toxic exposures, and housing issues, along with worse infrastructure, which can cause serious health issues, especially among children. The city's resolve to tackle the issues in these areas is a welcome intervention on behalf of communities that have long been neglected.



A map of Environmental Justice Areas in The Bronx<sup>204</sup>

Air pollution is a major environmental harm inflicted on Bronx communities. Poor air quality has many sources, but the major ones that affect our borough are from housing and from traffic. As seen in the map below, the major highways that contribute to fine particulate matter pollution are the Cross Bronx Expressway and the Bruckner Expressway/New England Thruway. Additionally, the area around Port Morris and Hunts Point experiences high levels of air pollution

as well. These highways and areas have high levels of traffic volume, particularly among trucks that pass through the borough or stop in industrial areas like Hunts Point.



A map of air pollution, showing the high levels of near Bronx highways and Hunts Point<sup>205</sup>

Bronx waterways have historically faced high levels of pollution. It took decades for waterways such as the Bronx and Hutchinson Rivers to become dirty, polluted, and suffuse with raw sewage emanating from sources in both Westchester and here in The Bronx. Through the work of groups such as the Bronx River Alliance, dramatic improvements have occurred in the Bronx River. However, there has been much lower levels of investment in the Hutchinson River.

Raw sewage emanating from the combined sewer outflows from Mount Vernon, our neighbors to the north in Westchester. After many years of litigation and millions in state and

federal fines, Mount Vernon has finally begun to make the necessary repairs to address these problems with their sewer system. The federal government and the state Department of Environmental Conservation have granted millions of dollars to fund repairs. Mount Vernon Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard has been a strong partner to The Bronx on these fronts since she entered office. Improving the water quality in the Hutchinson River and other waterways is important, not just for health reasons but for access ones as well. Communities alongside these waterways deserve to be able to use these natural resources for recreation and enjoyment, like wealthier communities can do in other parts of the city.

Climate change is causing the average temperature to increase and heat waves to become more common. In the average year, 10 New Yorkers die from heat-stress, and 360 more die from heat exacerbating underlying conditions. The effects of this increase fall disproportionately on Black New Yorkers, who are twice as likely to die as white New Yorkers. Seniors and men also face increased likelihood of death. Additionally, lack of air conditioning in the home was a major factor in these deaths – no deaths were recorded among people who died at home who had a working air conditioner. Almost all of the heat-related deaths were among people with underlying conditions, including cardiovascular disease, mental health challenges, obesity, and diabetes.<sup>206</sup>

Lack of trees is also a significant contributor to high temperatures. As discussed in the Parks section of this report, many Bronx communities have significantly below average tree coverage compared to the rest of the city. The shade provided by tree coverage can significantly lower temperatures compared to streets that are exposed to direct sunlight. Bronxites deserve to have their streets be well shaded just as much as any other borough's residents.

According to city data, most of The Bronx is at the highest level of heat vulnerability, including the entirety of the South Bronx and parts of the Northeast Bronx. Much of the East Bronx is in the second-highest classification as well. This means that Bronxites are at elevated risk of heat-related injury and death.<sup>207</sup> More must be done to mitigate the heat dangers in these neighborhoods.

Flooding is a serious concern in many parts of The Bronx. During recent storms, there have been serious floods on roadways such as the Major Deegan Expressway that have impaired traffic

flow and damaged the infrastructure. Community Board 8 cited roadway flooding a major concern. Hurricane Ida in 2021 showed the vulnerability of low-lying areas to flooding. We saw numerous basements, including basement apartment units, flood, causing serious damage. A total of 17 people in New York State died from this storm alone, mostly in these basement apartments. The storm also caused flooding damage to mass transit, both the subways and regional rail systems, as well as causing power outages.<sup>208</sup> Climate change has exacerbated these storms and will likely result in more severe weather threats that threaten New York. Community Board 10 mentioned the threat of flooding in coastal areas of their district, including City Island, Throgs Neck, and Country Club.

Noise is also a longstanding environmental concern that many people do not think about. Noise can disturb sleep, result in worse mental health and higher levels of stress, and impair the enjoyment of neighborhoods. Noise issues can result from construction, traffic, nightlife, and general use of community spaces. Community Boards 4 and 12 mentioned noise as a major quality of life issue affecting their district. Additionally, there have long been complaints from the residents of City Island regarding the noise of the NYPD shooting range at Rodman's Neck that has exceeded federally establish noise level limits.

### *Policy Goals*

The Borough President is fighting for environmental justice in every neighborhood and will support efforts to tackle all environmental issues that arise. This includes in the areas of air pollution, water pollution, flooding, and noise. The Borough President will push for increased investments in The Bronx on environmental issues. The Bronx has been historically underserved, and the continued legacy of this disinvestment puts Bronx residents at increased risk of environmental harm.

All of our elected leaders must commit to fully tackling the air pollution that has beset our borough and has caused numerous health harms, particularly asthma, and particularly among children, as discussed in the asthma section of this report. Capping the Cross Bronx Expressway will be a major investment in the neighborhoods that abut this highway. The Cross Bronx is



responsible for serious air pollution from the traffic that traverses it every day. The funding to cap the below-grade sections of the highway must be allocated to relieve this burden.

Additionally, we must continue the transition to electric vehicles, which do not contribute to the local air pollution the same way that gas-powered internal combustion engine vehicles do. Thanks to our federal leaders like Senator Schumer, the Inflation Reduction Act will help speed the transition to electric vehicles. The Bronx deserves a strong investment in electric vehicles, particularly for the many trucks that traverse our borough every day, both on highways like the Cross Bronx and those that head towards industrial areas like Hunts Point. The MTA must also prioritize their rollout of electric buses for The Bronx and the depots that serve our borough. While the city, state, and federal governments consider congestion pricing, its implementation cannot shift burdens from Manhattan to The Bronx without mitigating any environmental harms. The Bronx is already an environmental justice area and so cannot face more harms.

Watershed funding is necessary to alleviate the long-term pollution on the segment of the Hutchinson River in The Bronx, in addition to the parts in Westchester that have already need provided for. The Bronx needs a comprehensive remediation strategy to restore our water quality and safe access to the waterfront. Infrastructure repair to sewer systems is only step one. Additionally, there must be pollution remediation in other waterways such as in Eastchester Bay off City Island. Projects like the City Island Oyster Reef will help with this goal.

The city and state must fund more green infrastructure, including catch basins and green/blue roofs to prevent runoff into our waterways. Innovative solutions can help mitigate problems before remediation becomes necessary.

As the climate changes and summer days become hotter and heat waves become more frequent, we must take action to help vulnerable populations stay safe and cool. As we saw in Europe this year, heat waves can result in hundreds of people dying. We must improve access to air conditioners, natural green shade, and public pools and other water sources.

As New York transitions to a clean energy economy, the Borough President will push to ensure that The Bronx gets its fair share of green energy jobs. The Bronx has long been an epicenter of environmental injustice, so the justice efforts must redound back on our communities. These

jobs of the future will be high paying and will often require STEM degrees. The city must ensure that our students are getting the STEM education in our schools that will prepare them for future careers in this industry.

### Renewable Energy

New York City is working to be at the forefront of creating a clean energy system that will allow the city to be carbon neutral by 2050. According to the Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice,<sup>209</sup> the city has committed to the following:

- 100% clean electricity for City government operations by 2025
- 100% clean electricity by 2040
- 500 MW energy storage citywide by 2025
- 1,000 MW solar installed citywide by 2030
- 100 MW solar installed on City-owned buildings by 2025

It is important that The Bronx be a leader in renewable energy and that The Bronx get sufficient resources from the city, state, and federal governments to support these goals. Achieving energy independence will lead to significant improvements to health because clean energy will reduce our dependence on fossil fuels that pollute the atmosphere and cause asthma. It will create economic opportunities, with new renewable energy jobs being created across a number of sectors, including manufacturing and construction, and it will create a system that will eventually pay for itself as the cost of fossil fuel will not be needed for heating and buildings will create systems that will be nearly self-sustaining for electricity use.

For existing buildings, one of the most underutilized spaces across the city and in The Bronx are the rooftops. The Bronx has a great opportunity for retrofitting as most multi-family housing have flat rooftops that could allow for solar panels for energy capture and green roofs for reducing the heat island effect. For retrofitting buildings, extensive roofs would be the best suited as they would require minimal upkeep and minimal additional weight. While there are still challenges with rooftop retrofitting, with electrical systems still needing to be upgraded to be able to connect to

solar power, these upgrades can all be done holistically with larger building improvements as discussed in the housing section of this report.

For new buildings, there are more options, as integrating solar energy systems will be far easier, green roofs and blue roofs can both be incorporated, which can be more intensive while providing additional options for water retention and “gray water” usage in a building. Additionally, geothermal technology can be incorporated which will allow buildings to heat up or cool down a building to the subsurface temperature for a minimal cost. It is important that all new buildings incorporate some form of renewable energy system.

### *Proposed Strategies*

**Reduce Traffic-Related Air Pollution:** As mentioned in the asthma section of this report, the Borough President supports the efforts to cap the Cross Bronx, which will have a positive impact on the health and well-being of Bronx residents who live near the highway. Additionally, the Borough President will advocate for investments into electric vehicles and the related infrastructure, particularly for the trucks that cross the borough and head to industrial areas like Hunts Point and Port Morris. The asthma levels in our borough are unacceptable high, and these actions will be strong steps to reduce the emitted particulate matter and other forms of air pollution. The MTA is currently introducing the Central Business District Tolling Program (CBDTP, known as congestion pricing) to require vehicles entering Manhattan south of 60<sup>th</sup> Street to pay a toll. This will have the effect of significantly reducing traffic entering Manhattan, thereby lowering air pollution in that area. The Borough President supports congestion pricing but only in a way that does not negatively affect air quality in The Bronx. The MTA’s study showed small increases in air pollution in the Bronx due to congestion pricing, specifically near the Cross Bronx Expressway. If CBDTP is to go into effect, more must be done to mitigate these harms or provide other measures to reduce air pollution in these areas. The Borough President will engage all stakeholders to ensure that congestion pricing is the best it can be for Bronx residents.

**Fund Watershed Cleanup:** We must invest in the cleanup of waterways like the Hutchinson River, which are highly polluted and cannot be used by their surrounding communities. Local

governments including New York City and Mount Vernon must make necessary repairs to their sewer systems and bring more green infrastructure online to prevent runoff from entering our waterways in the first place. The Borough President will advocate for spending from all levels of government to mitigate the harm that has already been done. Bronx communities deserve access to their local waterways just as much the residents of other boroughs.

**Fund Heat Mitigation Measures:** As climate change accelerates, environmental justice areas will face increased heat burden. The city must help fund heat mitigation measures for residents, both on an individual and communal level. The city and state must expand the giveaway of reduced price or free air conditioners. In 2020, the city launched an expanded giveaway due to cooling centers being closed for social distancing reasons. In normal times, seniors and NYCHA residents have better access to giveaways. The city should continue to help residents getting cooling systems, especially ones that are more environmentally friendly. The city must also continue to expand access to parks and to plant more trees. Creating more shade is a highly effective way to reduce heat effects, with temperatures being 20 up to 45 degrees cooler in the shade than in direct sunlight.<sup>210</sup>

**Mitigate Noise Issues:** The Borough President will work with the NYPD and DEP to help mitigate noise complaint issues in every neighborhood. The Borough President will advocate for best practices to tackle loud noises that come from neighborhood uses such as nightlife and Open Restaurants. The longstanding noise issues emanating from the NYPD's use of Rodman's Neck should be dealt with in collaboration with the affected community on City Island. There is pending state legislation to regulate noise from municipal gun range uses.<sup>211</sup>

**Expand Rooftop Uses:** The city should incentivize the use of rooftops for solar power and green and blue roof uses. Not only can this provide either clean energy or water runoff reduction, but rooftop uses also mitigate the heat that reaches the building, lowering the need to cool the buildings. It is a good investment for the people who live in buildings for property owners to invest in rooftop uses. The city should expand these uses for the buildings that it owns, including schools. It could make the learning environment better for our students if the buildings are cooler in May and June, in addition to potential cost savings.

**Close Peaker Plants:** According to the Peak Coalition Face Sheet, peaker plants are fossil fuel power plants that provide power when regular power plants cannot meet electricity demand. They are intended to be used on occasionally when energy demand is high, such as during heat waves or extreme cold weather. Because these plants use expensive fossil fuels, are used infrequently, and are costly to maintain and run, they are one of the most expensive and inefficient forms of energy generation, costing an estimated \$4.5 billion between 2010 and 2019 to produce energy output for only a few days per year. These peaker plants are also one of the greatest sources of pollution, sending harmful nitrogen and sulfur pollution into surrounding communities.<sup>212</sup> There are currently 16 peaker plants across New York City, with two in the Port Morris neighborhood here in The Bronx. With new forms of energy and energy storage being developed and put online, these peaker plants can be closed, significantly improving air quality and health for the entire city, as well as providing significant cost savings.

In March 2021 The Fossil Fuel End Game report was published which noted these key takeaways:<sup>213</sup>

- The energy services provided by New York City’s peaker plants can be replaced by the following development schedule:
  - 2.8 GW of rooftop solar by 2025, growing to 5.6 GW by 2030
  - 1.5 GW of offshore wind by 2025, growing to 3 GW by 2030
  - 4,100 gigawatt-hours (GWh) of energy efficiency by 2025, growing to 5,400 GWh by 2030
  - 2.4 GW of 4-hour duration energy storage (or equivalent) by 2025, growing to 4.2 GW of 8-hour duration storage (or equivalent) by 2030
- The majority of these resources are already required by the CLCPA, which establishes specific targets for clean energy development, including 6 GW of rooftop and community solar by 2025, 3 GW of energy storage by 2030, and 9 GW of offshore wind by 2035.
- The proposed retirement and replacement plan will save customers money, with the potential to save \$1 billion in energy market costs by 2035.
- Retirement of the city’s peaker plants would reduce annual emissions by 2.66 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub>, 1,655 tons of NO<sub>x</sub>, and 171 tons of SO<sub>2</sub>.

- Reduced environmental and health impacts from avoided emissions would be projected to create additional savings of more than \$1 billion by 2035.

**Advance Tibbetts Brook Daylighting:** The proposed daylighting of Tibbetts Brook is important not just for recreational and greenway connectivity reasons, but also to reduce combined sewer outflow (CSO) into the Harlem River. According to the 2021 New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan, Tibbetts Brook enters the Broadway sewer at a rate of four to five million gallons of water per day on a dry day. On days where it rains, the combination of sewage, street runoff, and water from the brook enters the combined sewer, bypassing the treatment plant, and flows directly into the Harlem River. This single CSO outfall generates more than half the CSO discharge entering the Harlem River. DEP will create a bypass to remove this streamflow from the sewer and direct it along a new path to the Harlem River, a development project that will significantly reduce CSO occurrences on the Harlem River.<sup>214</sup> The advancement of the daylighting of Tibbetts Brook is contingent on finalizing the sale of the property from CSX to the city. Community Board 8 also mentioned their support for the daylighting of Tibbetts Brook and the purchase of the CSX line to support the greenway development. The Borough President will continue to advocate for this important project to be completed, alongside the community.

## **Public Safety**

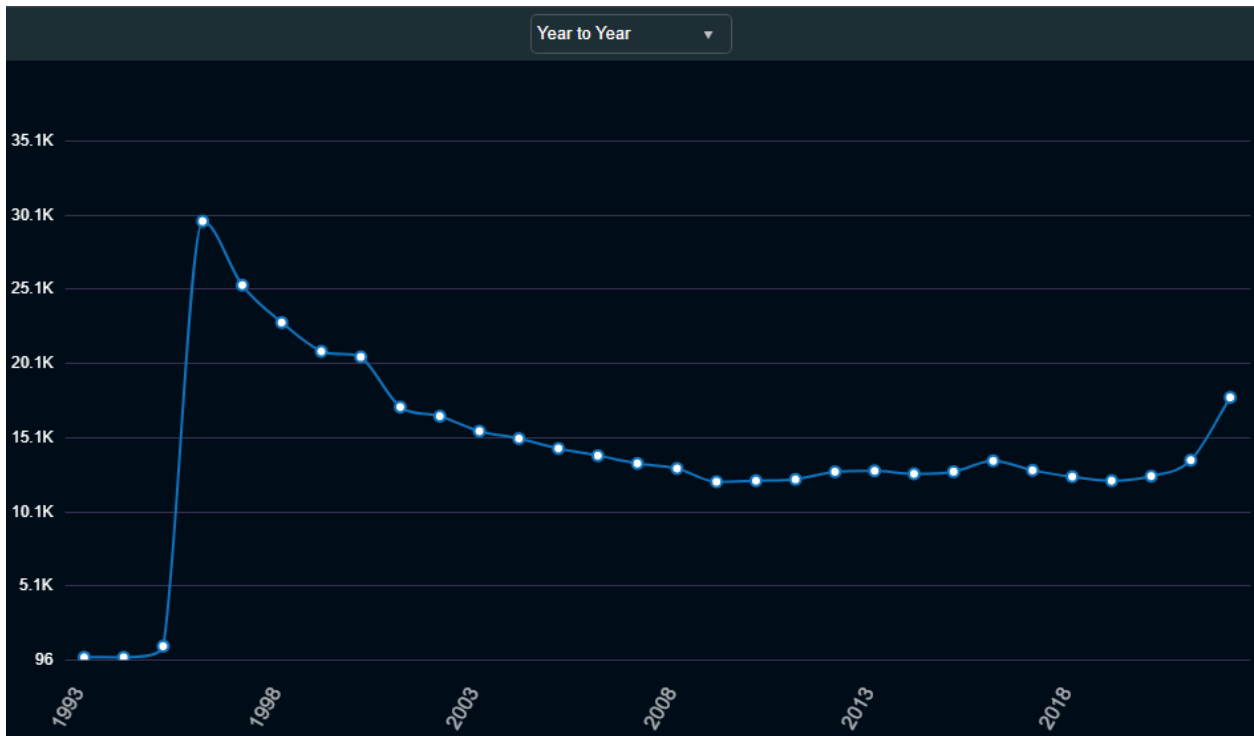
### *Long-Term Issues*

Public safety and crime are among the issues that Bronxites are most concerned about. The crime situation in The Bronx and the city as a whole has gotten worse this year and over the past few years. While many people have ascribed the rise in crime to pandemic-related disruptions or to changes in the law surrounding bail reform and other criminal justice processes, it is clear that the rise can be attributed to a multitude of factors, all working in concert to produce these negative results. Despite this, New York City remains one of the safest big cities in the country.

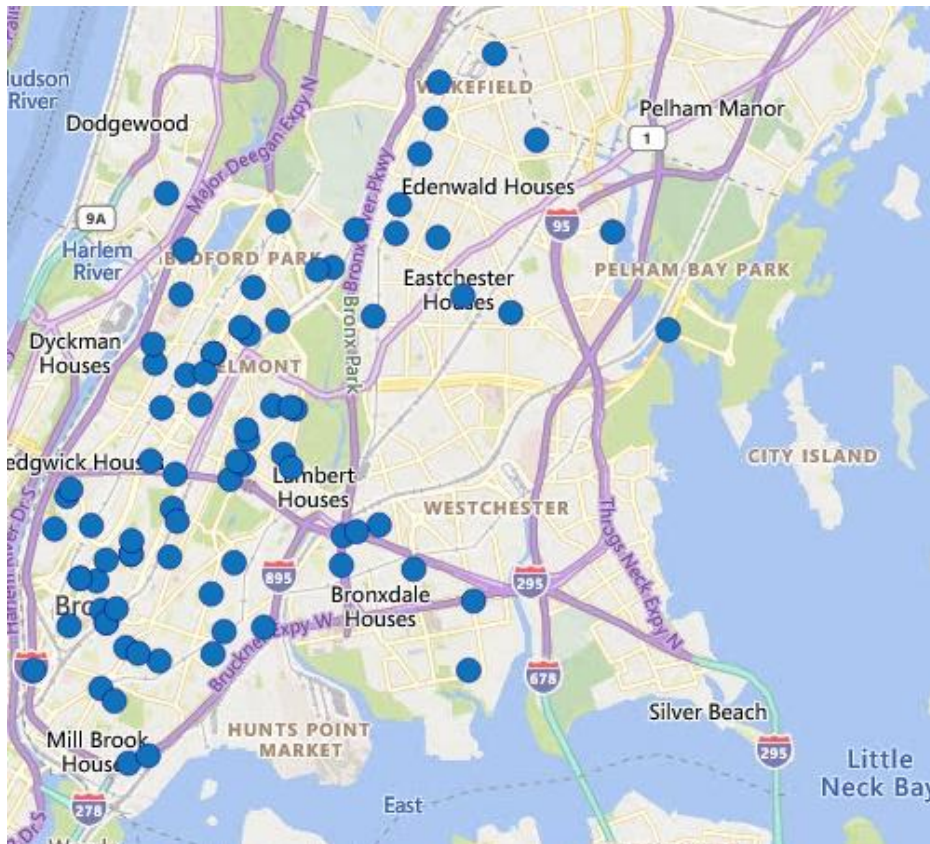
Crime reduces the quality of life of a community. Aside from physical injuries and loss of property, crime leaves psychological and social wounds. The Bronx has experienced an uptick in crime and community violence with a devastating effect on its residents. The escalation of the violence over the past few years has touched every sector of the borough, leaving residents helpless, traumatized, and victimized. In addition, the surge of criminal activities has left Bronx students unsafe in their school communities when walking to and from school. Gang recruitment is a reality faced daily by students. Recently children and young students have been attacked inside schools and gunned down while walking from school. People deserve to feel safe in their neighborhoods, no matter where they live.

Among the categories of crime that the NYPD tracks as part of its data collection, there are seven that are referred to as major crimes. These are murder, rape, felony assault, burglary, robbery, grand larceny, and grand larceny of an automobile. In 2022 through August 21, the number of crimes in each of these categories has gone up, with the sole exception of murder. Overall, there have been 17,769 of these seven major crimes committed in The Bronx so far this year, a 31.2 percent increase from last year. Only murders are down – from 93 during this time period last year to 86 during the same period this year.<sup>215</sup>

Shootings are also down over this period, from 328 last year to 291 this year. There have also been two fewer hate crimes. However, minor crimes like petit larceny and misdemeanor assault are up over this period, 47.9 percent and 21.0 percent respectively. More crimes in the transit system and public housing have been reported as well.



Total Major 7 Crimes year-over-year through August 21



A map of Bronx murders through August 21



These statistics reinforce the commonly held perception among Bronxites that crime is a serious issue. According to a June poll, 87 percent of Bronxites support adding more police officers to the subways, 62 percent want to see the NYPD budget increased, 73 percent feel less safe than they did before the pandemic, and 81 percent are concerned they could be the victim of a violent crime. On the other hand, 55 percent of Bronxites are satisfied with the level of police protection in their neighborhoods, though this is far lower than the 69 percent who say that citywide.<sup>216</sup>

When Mayor Adams came into office at the beginning of this year, he promised a focus on public safety. He has had the NYPD create “neighborhood safety teams,” crack down on ghost guns and gun crime more broadly, and has advocated for changes to state and federal law to make policing in New York City better. He and Governor Hochul have participated in the multi-state consortium to share intelligence and strategies to combat gun violence. Through August 24, the NYPD has made over 3,000 gun arrests and taken more than 4,700 guns off the streets.<sup>217</sup>

The effects of the recent Supreme Court decision in *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen* will not be known for some time. This decision struck down New York’s “may issue” law, which required people to show cause why they should get a concealed carry permit.<sup>218</sup> This ruling will likely make it easier for individuals to lawfully carry guns in New York. How this will affect the public’s safety is yet to be seen.

In response to this ruling, the State Legislature passed a package of gun control legislation. This package includes new laws to restrict guns from “sensitive areas,” improve information sharing between law enforcement agencies, require microstamping, eliminate grandfathering of large capacity ammunition feeding devices, ban body armor, strengthen the red flag law, and closing loopholes. These laws will hopefully reduce the ability of individuals who should not have a gun to get one.<sup>219</sup> Additionally, new federal rules regarding ghost guns went into effect on August 24 to clamp down on unregistered firearm kits.<sup>220</sup> Through June 14, the NYPD said they have recovered 175 ghost guns this year, accounting for nine percent of all guns recovered.

Borough President Gibson supported the passage of the criminal justice reforms in the State Legislature, including bail reform, raise the age, solitary confinement reform, and more. These policies must be continually examined and reformed if necessary. There is no silver bullet solution

that can solve these issues. We must work within Bronx communities to determine the optimal outcomes for the people who have to live in the neighborhoods that have the highest levels of violence and crime across New York City.

We must also recognize the hard work that criminal justice and policing reform advocates have put in over the years. The 2020 murder of George Floyd reinvigorated the movement to prevent police brutality and reform policing so it works for the whole community. But we must also remember that this movement has existed over the long-term. The 1999 killing of Amadou Diallo here in The Bronx continues to resound in our communities, particularly in the African immigrant community. The long history of advocacy and reform has resulted in many victories for reform, but we must not be complacent. There is still more work to be done, in collaboration with community members.

### *Policy Goals*

The Borough President's goal when it comes to public safety is to work collaboratively across government agencies and community organizations to combat crime, particularly when it comes to gun violence. Government agencies like the NYPD, FDNY/EMS, DOHMH, H+H, DHS, DSS, the Mayor's office, and more are all integral to creating a truly safe Bronx. So too are the organizations that directly work in the communities that directly combat violence such as violence interrupters but also those who indirectly work to reduce violence through education and anti-poverty efforts.

Borough President Gibson recognizes that quality of life issues are an important part of how the public can feel safe and secure in their neighborhoods. Reducing petty crime, street homelessness, open drug use, and lack of street and park cleanliness are all parts of helping people have confidence in the state of their neighborhoods. All agencies must collaborate effectively to respond to complaints and improve the quality of life for local residents. While these issues are minor when compared with serious crimes such as murder or shootings, they are an important part of how people perceive the places they live.

The NYPD's use of neighborhood community officers as liaisons to the local communities is a strong way to combat these smaller issues. Having a dedicated person in the precincts that can take on these complaints and respond effectively helps grow confidence in the police department's ability to maintain the overall quality of the neighborhood. While much of the effort of the NYPD must go to preventing and solving major crimes, minor issues must not be neglected.

Our public safety strategy must be preventative and not just reactive. It must get to root causes and not just deal with superficial ills. On the policing front, community outreach is a good way to accomplish these goals, through community policing policies. Various forms of community engagement, such as the precinct councils, the Explorers program, cadet recruitment, Neighborhood Coordination Officers, and Youth Coordination Officers, are strong ways to build community engagement and buy-in with the overall public safety strategy. Community Board 10 specifically mentioned Neighborhood Coordination Officers as important for improving community-police relationships.

As the borough-based jails are built and start operating and Rikers is finally closed, the city must commit to reducing violence and neglect in the city jails. The violence at Rikers is not acceptable and more must be done to keep incarcerated individuals safe and healthy. The Borough President will work with stakeholders to ensure safety in jail facilities for both incarcerated individuals and corrections officers. A balanced approach will enable both groups to engage respectfully and achieve optimal outcomes.

The Borough President will create a public safety division in the Office, which will help deal with the public safety issues affecting The Bronx. This unit will form relationships with the NYPD and other city agencies, anti-violence and anti-crime organizations on the ground such as violence interrupters, and other groups in the communities such as religious organizations.

Infrastructure improvements can also help to create better policing and crime prevention. As mentioned in the "economic development" section of this report, the high levels of scaffolding in the city can lead to poor lighting and blocking of security cameras. Community Board 1 mentioned wanting more street lighting in their district to deter crime. Community Board 5 wants upgrades to the 46<sup>th</sup> precinct station house, including better ADA-compliance.

Community Board 1 mentioned a series of steps that they believe will help improve public safety in their district. They called for a public safety plan for the district, an increase in police officers particularly in the commercial corridors, more oversight from the Department of Probation, more funding for youth development, investments in community centers and afterschool programs, and more employment opportunities.

### *Proposed Strategies*

**Combat Violence in Schools:** Collaborative engagement is vital to building trust and addressing the school violence epidemic. Stakeholders, elected officials, community leaders, law enforcement, educators, parents, students, and others must work together to find solutions. We must create and identify relevant youth afterschool programs to supplement in-class instruction. The city should expand afterschool programs enabling qualified students to earn income to help care for themselves and their families. We must expand community policing in high school areas and engage young adults to join community programs, for example, the Explorers program. The city must recruit and increase the number of school safety agents – compensation with better salaries equivalent to the police to attract recruits for the security of students.

**Continue the Crackdown on Guns:** Mayor Adams has made combatting gun violence a priority for his administration and the NYPD. And this has brought results, with thousands of guns taken off the streets and thousands arrested for gun crimes. This strong effort must continue and be expanded to every neighborhood in the city. The Borough President fully supports the expansion of the new Neighborhood Safety Teams that will help target violence where it is happening on the ground. NYPD's continuing crackdown on guns across the city is a strong effort that has made a measurable impact on gun violence this year. Eliminating ghost guns from our streets is an important priority as well. Residents in every Bronx community deserve to be able to live without fear of bullets flying.

**Increase Community Engagement:** Borough President Gibson has supported many efforts over the years to build relationships between law enforcement and the community. The Borough President has worked with the NYPD's community affairs units in the borough to help engage

with community members who have been affected by policing. Initiatives like National Night Out are a good example of how these relationships can continue to be built and thrive. The Borough President will increase engagement between the Office and the Precinct Councils. More young people should be engaged in these important bodies to help provide feedback about how policing is done in their communities. Young people are the future of The Bronx and also bear the brunt of police interactions. Their input is invaluable to improving policing. The Office's public safety unit will increase engagement with religious and civic organizations to help reach people on the ground who are at risk of entering criminal lifestyles or who are at risk of being crime victims.

**Improve Mental Health Response:** The use of programs like B-HEARD will be a strong way to improve the way that the city responds to people in mental health distress. By first sending medical professionals and mental health workers instead of police to someone who is in crisis and does not pose a threat, the city will be able to mitigate the threat of someone in that situation from ending up injured or worse. By having police only on standby, the mental health professionals can make a determination whether the situation can be handled without police intervention. This will result in people getting the help they need rather than criminal justice involvement.

**Support Alternatives to Incarceration:** The Borough President supports alternatives to incarceration or detention for low-level and non-violent crimes. Community courts are a way to accomplish this goal and avoid recidivism. These courts help combine criminal justice programs with services, which can help build relationships between offenders and communities.<sup>221</sup> The Bronx is home to Bronx Community Solutions through the Center for Court Innovation to help offenders avoid incarceration.<sup>222</sup> The Borough Presidents supports programs such as these to help keep at home with their families instead of in jail. The Borough President also supports the Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NeON), which can help provide services for people on probation to keep them out of trouble and on the right path towards avoiding future criminal justice involvement.

**Support the Crisis Management System:** The Borough President supports the work of the crisis management system and the violence interrupters and credible messengers that make it up. According to city data, the police precincts where the crisis management system operates has seen a greater than average reduction in violence.<sup>223</sup> It is important to tackle violence with a holistic

approach, providing wraparound services where appropriate. These services can include school conflict mediation, employment, mental health treatment, and legal services. The Borough Presidents supports fully funding the system to ensure that it operates into the future. The Office will work with partners on the ground including Bronx Connect/Urban Youth Alliance, Bronx Parent Housing Network, Good Shepherd Services/Bronx Raises Against Guns (BRAG), Osborne Association, Save Our Streets (SOS), Man Up, and our hospital partners including Stand Up Against Violence at Jacobi Hospital and Guns Down Life Up at Lincoln Hospital.

## **Waste Management**

### *Long-Term Issues*

One of the persistent issues that Bronx report to the Office of the Borough President is regarding trash, waste, and garbage in the streets and parks. These trash issues are the results of the city government's policy choices and administrative practices. Beyond reports of mere uncleanliness, unsightliness, and smell, these trash issues can have knock-on effects such as health issues and the proliferation of vermin, primarily rats.

Over the first six months of 2022, 311 complaints about trash on streets and sidewalks have increased 36 percent year-over-year. This has included increases in a majority of neighborhoods in The Bronx, with the biggest increases in ZIP codes 10451 and 10457.<sup>224</sup> Community Boards 1, 2, 7, and 12 called for increasing sanitation services, particularly on sidewalks and in commercial corridors.

One of the enduring problems with waste management is that residential and even some commercial waste in the city often ends up in bags simply laying on the street, waiting for sanitation workers to come and collect them. These bags attract rats. Instead of solving our rat problem, we are instead feeding them with our garbage. Though many proposals have been made to tackle the way we dispose of our garbage, none have made a significant impact.

Street trashcans are often broken or overflowing. They fail to serve their purpose when the city fails to replace and empty them. It is not acceptable for Bronxites to dump their trash on the streets because of the broken cans. The city should move to replace older trashcans with newer "bullet" style ones which are hardier and less likely to break.



A broken trash can (left) and a “bullet” trash can (right), both on 161<sup>st</sup> Street

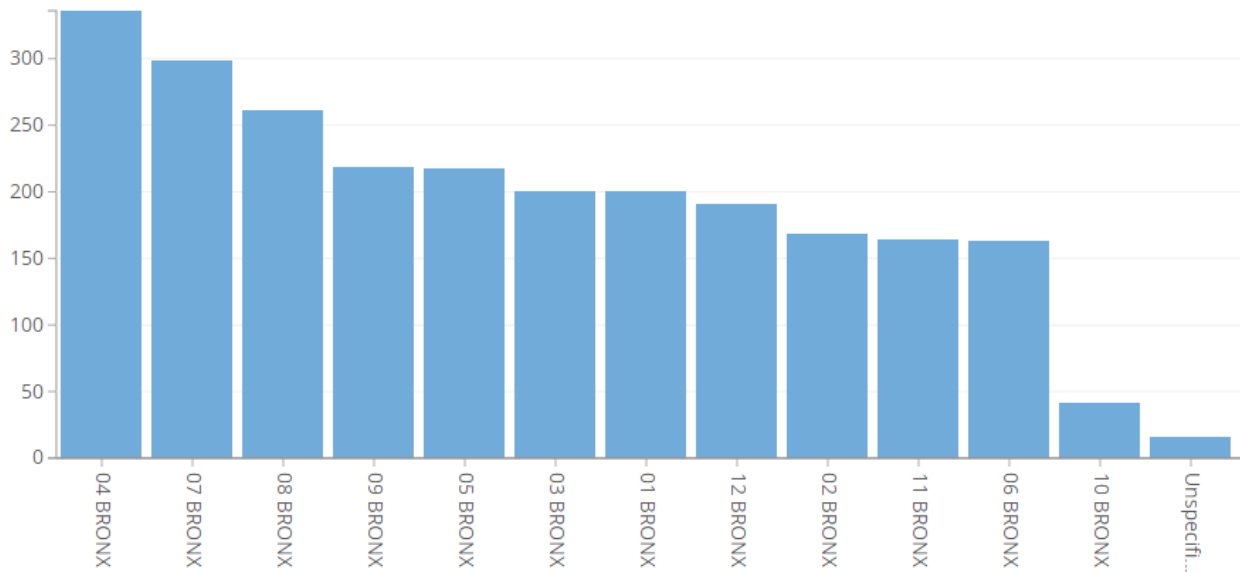
During the COVID-19 pandemic, restaurants were able to expand their outdoor footprint on the sidewalks and in the streets in order to better serve people and survive while indoor dining was restricted. This evolved into the Open Restaurants program, which will be a permanent part of the streetscape going forward. While the expansion of street and sidewalk dining has resulted in more and better options for restaurants and diners, it has also resulted in more trash on the streets, which attracts rats. The Office of the Bronx Borough President and many community boards including Board 1 have heard complaints of rats and trash associated with this program as well as dangerous and abandoned structures.

Earlier this year, Mayor Adams launched a pilot program to crack down on mounting piles of garbage. He announced a \$1.3 million program to begin to roll out trash containers in some of the Business Improvement District areas across the city. The first area to get the trash containers was Times Square.<sup>225</sup> Additionally, Mayor Adams announced he is considering changes to the sanitation rules to push back the time at which property owners and managers can put out their trash, pushing it back from 4 pm to 8 pm the night before collection.<sup>226</sup>



Between April 2019 and April 2022, there was a 60 percent increase in rat complaints to 311. Through July 22, there were 2,480 “rat sighting” complaints reported to 311 in The Bronx alone out of 15,456 total citywide. Among the neighborhoods in the borough, Community District 4 had the most complaints, followed by Community District 7.<sup>227</sup> The city operates a “rat portal” on its website that offers tips for residences and businesses to prevent rat issues.<sup>228</sup> There is also a map of all properties that includes information about rat inspections and mitigation efforts.<sup>229</sup>

The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene provides trainings regarding rat mitigation called Rat Academy. These trainings are geared towards the general public, including superintendents, property managers, neighborhood associations, community gardens, and local businesses. There are also advanced trainings for pest control professionals. These programs are a strong way to keep the public informed about rat mitigation strategies and ways to take action about rat prevention.



Rat complaints made to 311 between January 1 and July 22, 2022, by community district



An image from the Rat Portal map showing Community District 4, with sites demonstrating rat activity over the past six months shown in pink

Other existing problems with regards to waste management include recycling and composting. Recycling and composting rates are too low, despite the environmental benefits of these programs. Reducing the waste that we send to landfills helps to limit environmental harms. Compositing is a positive way of reusing organic waste that can then go back to use in the community. There are environmental groups in The Bronx that aim to expand waste disposal options that include sending organic waste to be used for compost in local community gardens. They are actively engaging with small businesses such as restaurants to help them reduce their waste footprint.

There have also been issues reported with regards to illegal dumping, especially in industrial areas. Community Board 2 has mentioned this as a concern that they have seen reported

in their community, particularly in Hunts Point. Community Board 8 mentioned illegal dumping as well.

### *Policy Goals*

The most important goal with regards to waste is to ensure that our neighborhoods are clean and sanitary. This means that the trash that piles up on the streets must be dealt with quickly and responsibly by both the nearby property owners and the city. This is especially true for the buildings that put out bags of trash on the street for collection that are not in containers.

The city must explore new and innovative options to solve the trash problem. The bags placed on the street to await collection attract rats at a prodigious rate. We cannot keep feeding the rats that plague our city. Solutions such as more containerization must be explored to see if it can work as a scalable solution for our neighborhoods.

The continued expansion of the Open Restaurants program must include accountability provisions so that restaurants have to maintain cleanliness of the streetscape and conduct mitigation for the rat problems in their area. These restaurants are gaining access to public spaces on streets and sidewalks and thus have the responsibility to use them without adding to the trash and rat problems.

Over the past few months, the City Council has introduced several pieces of legislation that constitute a “rat mitigation plan.” These bills include: Int 459 to establish “rat mitigation zones” and require large residential buildings to put out their trash not before 4 am on the day of collection during the summer collection schedule;<sup>230</sup> Int 460 to require rodent-proof trash containers in certain buildings;<sup>231</sup> Int 414 to require DOHMH to report on the progress of rat mitigation in rat mitigation zones;<sup>232</sup> and, Int 442 to require rat mitigation strategies to acquire a permit for construction projects in rat mitigation zones.<sup>233</sup> These bills will help crack down on the serious rat problems throughout our city.

In 2021, the Office of the Bronx Borough President helped re-launch the Bronx Solid Waste Advisory Board (SWAB). The SWAB provides guidance on solid waste management practices throughout the borough and advocates for policy changes to better manage our waste. They also look at ways that waste enters our environment, such as the many waterways surrounding The Bronx. The SWAB must be a strong body for the production of ideas and community-based outreach on these issues.

### *Potential Solutions*

**Explore Innovative Waste Management Solutions:** The city must consider new solutions to the way we dispose of our waste in this city. The piles of garbage, in and out of bags, that is piled up on our streets is not acceptable. The Borough President does not think so, and neither do Bronx residents in any neighborhood. We must consider ideas such as containerization that will help keep waste off the streets. These containers do take up sidewalk or street space, but that must be a sacrifice made to keep our streets clean and rat-free.

**Add, Empty, Repair, and Replace Street Trashcans:** Street trashcans are often broken or are overflowing with trash. The city must take better measures to keep these trashcans in a state of good repair and ensure that they are emptied regularly. Organizations such as BIDs cannot be solely responsible for the street waste collection in their catchment areas. They must be only supplementary, never replacements. The Borough Presidents supports the use of the “bullet” style trashcans and “big belly” trashcans instead of the wire ones, which often leak and break.

**Enact the Rat Mitigation Zones Legislation:** The City Council should immediately pass the rat mitigation zones package of legislation pending before them. These bills provide a strong basis that will help control the increasingly serious rat problem in our city. The Council should also provide appropriate funding to help small property owners purchase the required containers. The Borough President will push for the Department of Sanitation to include Bronx neighborhoods in the first round of rat mitigation zones declared, particularly Community Districts 4 and 7, which have the most complaints about rat sightings in the borough.

**Include Rat Mitigation Strategies in Open Restaurants:** Many Bronx residents have complained about the trash and rat problem arising from the Open Restaurants program. While these street and sidewalk restaurant seating areas are essential for the small businesses that help The Bronx to thrive, they must take into account the effect that they have on their neighborhoods in terms of trash. The Open Restaurants permitting program must include a requirement that businesses that make use of publicly owned spaces on streets and sidewalks have a trash collection strategy and rat mitigation strategy for their businesses. This is a small imposition that could make a big difference.

**Expand Recycling and Composting Programs:** The city should expand recycling and composting programs through education and incentives. Our schools are a prime place to educate young people about the importance of composting and recycling. The city should also adopt both positive and negative incentives for residential buildings to expand their recycling programs. The responsibility lies on all of us to ensure that we are separating our trash appropriately and not just throwing everything in the garbage. Composting programs should be expanded throughout the city. Not only will these programs help reduce the organic waste sent to landfills, but they can also help

**Support the SWAB:** The Office of the Bronx Borough President will support the work of the Bronx SWAB. The SWAB can act as a place where ideas and community outreach are generated regarding trash issues in the borough. The Office will work with the leadership of the SWAB to support their activities and ensure that they are able to operate to full effect.

**Engage in Cleanup Campaigns:** The Office of the Borough President will work with our community partners to create and promote cleanup campaigns across The Bronx. For example, the Office is partnering with the Sanitation Foundation, which hosted a series of six cleanups during summer 2022 across the borough.<sup>234</sup> The Office will continue to engage in these sorts of community activism events in the future.

## **Digital Equity**

### *Long-Term Issues*

Internet access is the infrastructure challenge of the early 21st century. Access to information and services is responsible for economic growth, job creation, education, and a better quality of life for all people. Unfortunately, large areas of The Bronx are "digital deserts," where many residents do not have access to the internet. Across the five boroughs, The Bronx has the lowest broadband usage, and this disparity is magnified in Bronxites' homes, negatively affecting how they learn, live, and work. Unfortunately, too many Bronxites cannot access a reliable internet connection or do not know how to use the technology, leaving them further and further behind in an increasingly digital world.

The COVID-19 pandemic magnified the digital divide in The Bronx. Despite the transition to virtual learning during the pandemic, many Bronx students did not possess the means or capacity to participate in online education. The digital gap affected students in the same schools, across districts, and the entire borough lowering the academic outcomes of low-income and underserved learners and districts. According to the Bronx Community Foundation, 38 percent of Bronx neighborhoods do not have broadband access. Households with children ages 6 to 17 and an annual income of less than \$30,000 do not have a high-speed connection.<sup>235</sup> Because of digital inequity, approximately one in five teens could not complete their homework.

During the pandemic, the city mobilized to hand out devices to people without them. The Borough President was proud to partner with organizations such as the Bronx Community Foundation and city agencies to ensure that everyone was able to get access to these devices.

However, we must not forget that a device does not mean access. Without an internet connection, many of those devices cannot be used to anywhere near their full potential. When the city or a public-private partnership provides tablets or other devices, they should also provide a minimum of a free six-month subscription to internet access. After that period, the providers should offer reduced or no-cost plans to low-income residents, depending on how they qualify.

This lack of technological and internet access provides serious gaps for Bronx residents. During the pandemic, many students missed out on remote lessons, leading to learning loss. But going beyond our students, adults including seniors can use these technologies to improve their well-being, including access to scheduling and remote medical appointments.

### *Policy Goals*

Internet and technology access is an essential part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century landscape. Ensuring that Bronx residents have equitable access to both the technology and the internet connection is critical to helping Bronx students, workers, and businesses thrive.

The Borough President is committed to working towards a reality in which every Bronx resident is able to get access to affordable internet connections. This must be a task for all levels of government. The federal ACP program, the city commitments to bringing broadband to every homeless shelter and NYCHA development, and the expansion of LinkNYC to more neighborhoods will help to achieve these goals.

We must partner with institutions such as schools and libraries to help our residents learn how to use this technology. There is often a gap in technological understanding, especially with our seniors. However, our seniors could benefit significantly from access to the internet, whether that is connections with friends and family, getting accesses to information about services, or managing appointments. Social isolation among seniors can be ameliorated through the use of technology, but we must act to make sure that it is available for them. Community Boards 2, 6, and 7 also mentioned their desire for better and cheaper Wi-Fi service, specifically for students who face connection challenges.

### *Potential Solutions*

**Hold Broadband Providers Accountable:** The city must hold broadband providers to their word when it comes to providing access. Promises were made regarding providing services in low-

income communities, and they must be kept. Bronx residents cannot be left disconnected while residents of the other boroughs have access. The city must push providers to meet their goals and get Bronx neighborhoods the promised connections.

**Expand the Digital Infrastructure:** We must provide more technology to our residents, particularly in schools and libraries. These public institutions can help spark the growth of our residents, both young and old, into adapting new technologies and processes that can help them grow into a 21<sup>st</sup> century future. Public-private partnerships will be essential in providing technology to our students. The private sector has a vested interest in growing a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, and we must use that to our advantage and that of our young people. We must also expand LinkNYC into more neighborhoods, in collaboration with local communities. LinkNYC can provide access to individuals who only need sporadic connections or for people visiting local businesses.



## **Conclusion**

This strategic policy statement is the Borough President’s blueprint for The Bronx and outlines the major priorities that will move the borough in a new direction by creating a more sustainable and vibrant community for our families. Investments in infrastructure, tech equity, patient-centered and culturally competent healthcare, affordable and permanent housing, environmental justice, fire safety, economic development, public-private partnerships, public safety, and support for historically underserved communities is the first step towards undoing the damage caused by years of disinvestment into our neighborhoods.

This blueprint highlights important recommendations that will encourage collaboration between government, our non-profit partners, the private sector, and community to enact transformative change that will usher in a new chapter for The Bronx. Although the borough continues to face many challenges, the future of The Bronx is exciting. The Bronx is more than the narrative others have created for it, and the best is yet to come.

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