

overgrow Undergrowth

Exploring Community Empowerment in East Flatbush, Brooklyn

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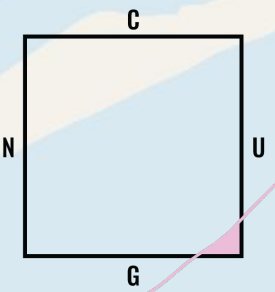
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Executive Summary

East Flatbush, a vibrant Caribbean-American community in Brooklyn, New York, is at a pivotal crossroads due to socio-economic and urban development pressures. This neighborhood boasts the second highest rate of Black homeownership in NYC, yet it faces challenges such as a significant decrease in homeownership rates, outdated zoning laws, and insufficient infrastructure to support a growing population.

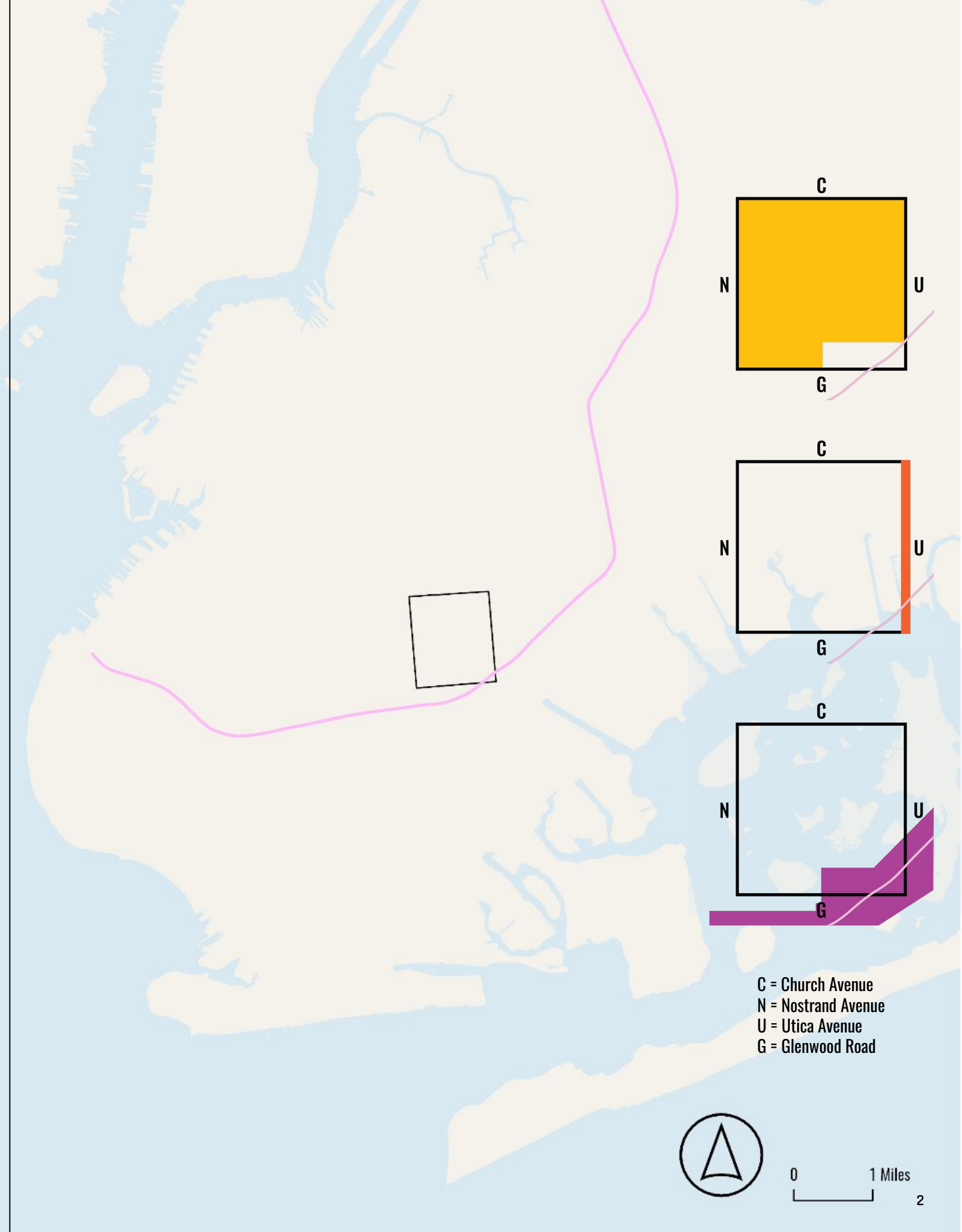
In addition, the impending introduction of the Interborough Express (IBX) light rail project has the potential to exacerbate existing challenges. However, the IBX also presents a critical opportunity to address these issues through comprehensive urban planning and community engagement. Our work relied on local organizations like Brooklyn Level Up to foster a community-led approach in managing a new wealth generating mechanism, reimagining a commercial corridor, and ensuring that the economic benefits of development are reinvested into the community with transit-oriented development (TOD) principles.

The Columbia GSAPP Spring 2024 Joint Studio has undertaken an in-depth exploration of East Flatbush to propose solutions centered on community empowerment and sustainable development. Our outcome centered around three student-led groups, focusing on different zoning areas within the neighborhood: residential, commercial, and manufacturing. By addressing the pressing needs of housing, economic development, and community engagement, this initiative aims to set a precedent for how urban areas facing similar challenges can evolve sustainably and inclusively.

Residential: The residential group focuses on the inner parts of the neighborhood bounded by Nostrand to the west, Church to the north, and Utica to the east, and Glenwood to the South. The team's primary goal is to enhance housing options while preserving the community's character and facilitating wealth generation for property owners. Initiatives include legalizing accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and adjusting zoning laws to facilitate community empowerment.

Commercial: The commercial group seeks to catalyze community-driven development along Utica Avenue, the commercial corridor that bounds our study area to the east, to support local businesses and meet community needs. Coupled with revitalizing the manufacturing district, the group looks to create job opportunities linking the new IBX line to the rest of East Flatbush. These efforts aim to boost local economic vitality and connectivity.

Manufacturing: By leveraging the future IBX station at the intersection of Utica Avenue and Glenwood Road as a catalyst for a vibrant public realm, the manufacturing group proposes a mixed-use development schematic. This includes green spaces, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, and mixed-use developments that serve both the light manufacturing district and the surrounding local economies.



Acknowledgements

This report was undertaken as part of an interdisciplinary urban planning studio research project at Columbia's graduate school of Architecture, Preservation, and Planning. The studio was lead by MS Urban Planning students, Otis Emslie, Marc-Eric Ernestus, Sojung Kim, Olivia McCloy, August Nastasi, Adrienne D Roberson, and Soo Jin Yim in collaboration with MS Architecture student, Danyel Hueyopan, MS Real Estate Development students, James Chu, Kyoungyeon Heather Kim, Sianne Lau, Kenny Ng, Jiaxin Pang, and Yi Sun, and MS Urban Design Students, Florentina Anastasia, Candelaria Gassiebayle, Chealsie Nalvarte, Karrthik Subram Subramanian Raamanathan, and Xueyuan Wang.

On behalf of the entire studio group, we would like to thank our professors, Calvin Brown and Adam Lubinsky for their unwavering support as we approached this interdisciplinary project. We would also like to thank Allyson Martinez, Yvette Mendes, Rachel Goodfriend, and the rest of Brooklyn Level Up for their guidance and for welcoming us into their community. Lastly, we would like to thank all the guest speakers we spoke with throughout the semester. None of this work would have been possible without the input of our experts in the field of urban planning, policy, and beyond.

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History of East Flatbush

As a predominantly Afro-Caribbean neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, East Flatbush is not just a place, but a vibrant cultural touchstone. It is a neighborhood committed to preserving its unique identity while embracing the opportunities the incoming Interborough Express may bring. This neighborhood's history is one of transformation, resilience, and cultural integration, a rich tapestry that reflects the broader urban trends and the unique socio-economic dynamics within New York City.

The journey began in the late 19th century when the area was predominantly rural, as a part of the greater Dutch colonial farmlands. The transition from agrarian landscapes to a bustling urban enclave started with the acquisition by the Germania Land Company in 1894, followed by its incorporation into Greater New York as Brooklyn became a borough in 1898. Thus, setting the stage for the neighborhood's integration into the expanding urban fabric of New York City.

As the 20th century unfolded, East Flatbush witnessed a residential boom driven by the extension of subway lines in the 1920s and 1930s. The construction of Victorian homes, which came to define the area's architectural character, marked this era. The neighborhood became a sought-after destination for wealthier white homeowners. The mid-20th century brought further demographic and structural changes. Post-World War II, East Flatbush emerged as a predominantly Jewish and Italian neighborhood, experiencing substantial growth.

However, the 1950s and 1960s introduced challenges such as 'white flight' and blockbusting, reshaping its demographic landscape amid broader national trends of urban migration and racial tension. East Flatbush quickly became a pillar of community resilience in the late 20th century as it became a sanctuary for Black and Caribbean communities, infusing the neighborhood with a vibrant Afro-Caribbean culture. The establishment of community organizations, like the Flatbush Community Development Corporation in 1975, marked a proactive stance against divisive real estate practices and fostered a spirit of community solidarity and cultural preservation.

Entering the 21st century, East Flatbush continued to evolve, balancing gentrification pressures with efforts to preserve its cultural heritage. Renovations and developments, such as those at Kings Theatre and Brooklyn College, highlighted ongoing transformations while raising concerns about the sustainability of community-oriented development.

This report seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of East Flatbush historical trajectory, offering insights into the forces that have shaped its community and landscape. It also looks forward to exploring potential pathways for future development in East Flatbush. It is a call to action, a roadmap for the community and its leaders to shape a future that respects the past while embracing the opportunities of the present.



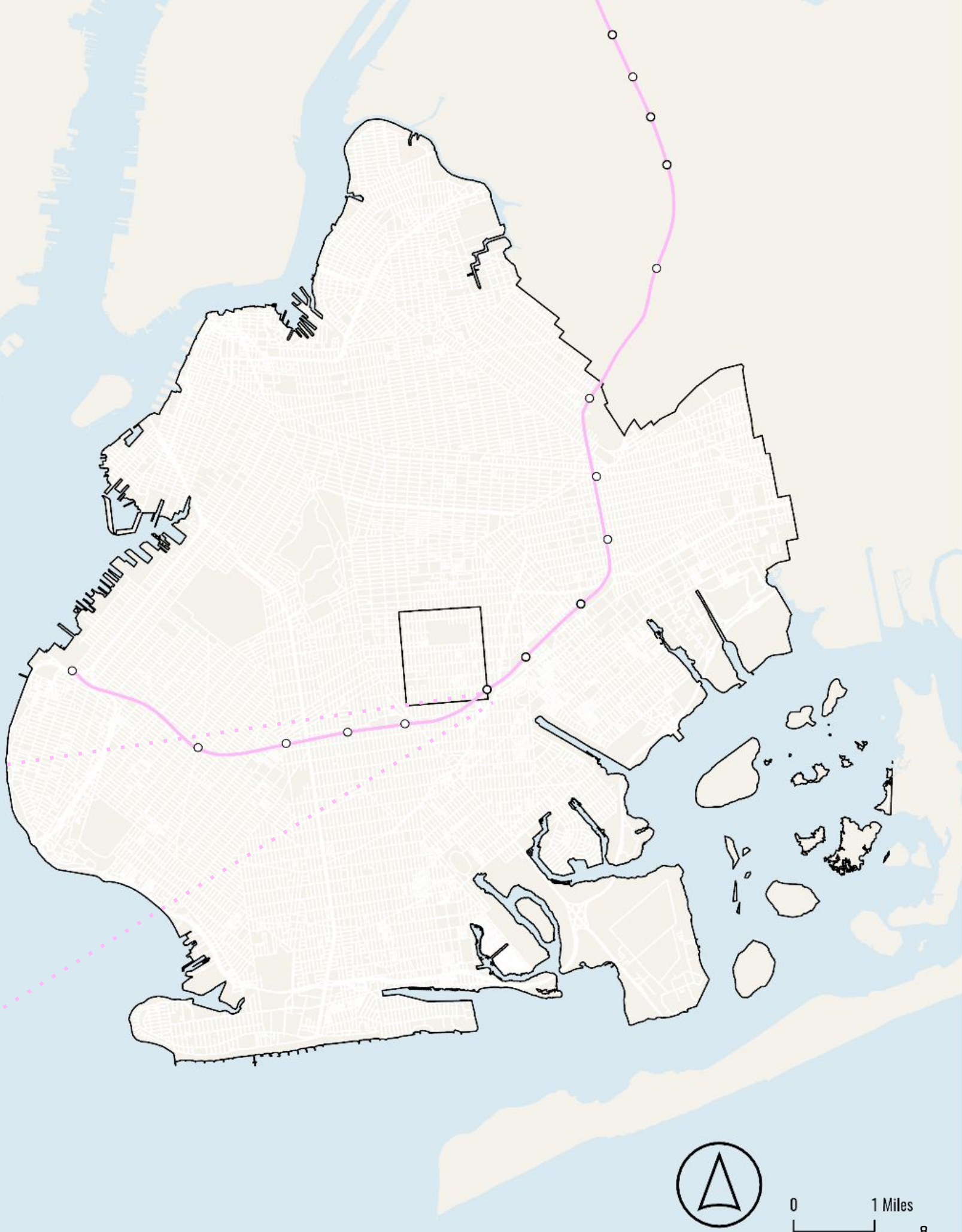
The Interborough Express

The Interborough Express is a proposed light rail project by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), designed to connect Bay Ridge in Brooklyn to Jackson Heights in Queens without passing through Manhattan. Spanning 14 miles, the IBX aims to transform the underutilized Bay Ridge Branch rail spur into a commuter-friendly route. This light rail expects to integrate with 17 existing subway lines, enhancing transit access in neighborhoods like Borough Park, Bensonhurst, and Canarsie. With an estimated cost of \$5.5 billion, the project forecasts 120,000 daily riders by 2045, aiming to substantially reduce commute times and congestion. Governor Kathy Hochul has highlighted the IBX as a critical infrastructure initiative, emphasizing its potential to link nearly 900,000 residents directly to broader transit options.

The Interborough Express is poised to impact the surrounding communities known as 'The Flats,' which includes East Flatbush. This innovative transit line, with a crucial station planned on Utica Avenue in East Flatbush, will bridge the gap between Brooklyn and Queens. For a neighborhood like East Flatbush, with its vibrant Caribbean heritage and cultural richness, the IBX is a significant opportunity. It offers a solution to the escalating housing costs and the constant threat of gentrification, providing a much-needed boost to the local economy and enhancing the quality of life for its residents.

Our research over the semester has centered on understanding how such urban developments influence local communities, especially in areas like East Flatbush, which reflect both the dynamism and challenges prevalent in many urban neighborhoods across New York and the broader United States. The introduction of the Interborough Express brings significant questions about community development and the potential repercussions for the residents.

As the Interborough Express project moves forward, it is crucial to involve the community in the decision-making process. We recognize the potential implications on the local job market, housing affordability, and the cultural fabric of the community. This report is not just a document; it's a platform for discussion and understanding. It aims to delve deep into these issues, offering insights and fostering discussions that respect and honor the rich heritage and needs of the East Flatbush community.



Our Client, Brooklyn Level UP

Brooklyn Level Up is a community development corporation and community land trust committed to fostering economic development and building wealth within Flatbush, East Flatbush, and Flatlands communities. By strengthening relationships and sharing knowledge, Brooklyn Level Up empowers residents to take charge of their community's future, ensuring that homes, businesses, and community spaces remain under local ownership and control. This approach counters the typical developer-driven model, instead prioritizing community needs and preventing displacement and loss of local character.

Community land trusts like Brooklyn Level Up work by holding land in community-owned fund,, ensuring affordable housing, and preventing market forces from causing displacement. In this model, the trust owns and leases the land to residents, which keeps housing and business costs manageable and community-focused. This structure stabilizes neighborhoods and ensures that development benefits are shared equitably among all residents.

With the support of organizations like Brooklyn Level Up, our research into the effectiveness of community land trusts in East Flatbush aims to reflect their mission and expand our understanding to broader areas. We anticipate that these models could similarly benefit other neighborhoods. Our findings will be shared with Brooklyn Level Up, echoing their goals and furthering their impact beyond the immediate community.

Community Land Trust advocacy in The Flats

Residential Business Support Mechanisms & Neighborhood commitment

Homeowner Resources & Community Development Mediators



Realm Focuses



Challenges & Opportunities:

Goals:

Residential

Challenges:

The residential area in East Flatbush faces the significant challenge of preserving its cultural character while maintaining sustainable housing options. The area, known for its high rate of Black homeownership, has seen a concerning 10% decrease in this demographic. This trend threatens the stability and wealth generation for property owners in the community and the cultural and social fabric that defines the neighborhood.

Opportunities:

Despite the challenges, the residential sector in East Flatbush demonstrates remarkable resilience. By harnessing its community-oriented ethos, the area can foster economic development and enhance neighborhood connectivity. These initiatives, rooted in the community's cultural needs, can create a harmonious environment where sustainable housing and economic opportunities coexist, thereby stabilizing and enriching the local area.



Preserve Character & Providing Sustainable Housing Options

Commercial

Challenges:

The commercial corridor of Utica Avenue will play an increasingly important role in the East Flatbush community as the IBX is introduced, serving as the connection between the IBX station and the neighborhood's existing commercial corridors. The current limitations on land use on Utica makes it difficult for the diversification of services and infrastructure necessary for the IBX to be successful and for the community to benefit.

Opportunities:

The commercial landscape of East Flatbush is ripe for innovation and growth. Through the strategic development of key spaces and rezoning efforts, the street can transform into a node of economic activity and that can fuel community financing. By expanding the ways the community can use Utica Avenue, the new commercial corridor can support the success of the IBX while directly addressing the needs of the community.



Enhance Neighborhood Economic Vitality & Connectivity

Manufacturing

Challenges:

In the area's manufacturing zone, sitting within an Industrial Business Zone (IBZ), has the challenge of linking the existing East Flatbush workforce with new job opportunities through rezoning and using mixed-use building typologies. A reimagined site analysis employing real estate and design strategies is crucial to align with the evolving industrial landscape and community economic development.

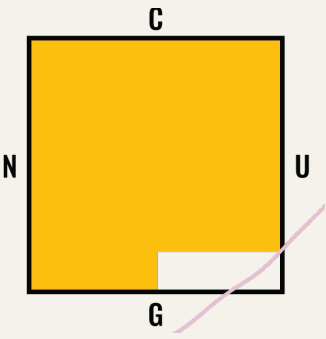
Opportunities:

There is a notable opportunity in the manufacturing sector to capitalize on vacant spaces for economic development. East Flatbush can create a more robust economic infrastructure by updating the manufacturing zones and enhancing their appeal to diverse businesses. This development will cater to the local workforce and attract external investors, potentially leading to sustained economic growth and community prosperity.



Reigamine Site & Create Job Additions

Residential Area



Residential Goals



The residential focus area in East Flatbush for our studio is bounded by Nostrand Avenue to the West, Church Avenue to the North, Utica Avenue to the East, and Glenwood Avenue to the South.

Site Context

The residential neighborhood of East Flatbush has undergone significant changes in recent years. Once characterized by low-lying, Victorian homes, the area now features numerous high-rise apartment buildings. This transformation can be traced back to a zoning misclassification from 1961. The neighborhood, which seemingly should have been designated as an R4 zone, has been designated the R6 zoning, granting properties a higher residential Floor Area Ratio (FAR). Developers, aware of this, have taken advantage of the situation to construct high-rise buildings that are out of character with the original neighborhood and have driven property values up, ultimately displacing the members of the community.

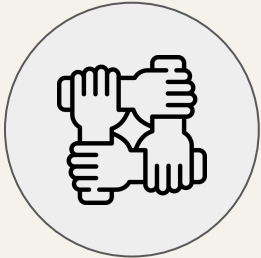
Goal Formulation

Our team is dedicated to preserving the unique character of East Flatbush amidst its rapid gentrification. We aim to provide sustainable housing solutions that respect and embrace the existing fabric of the neighborhood. Additionally, we are investigating the potential of establishing a Community Land Trust (CLT) as a means to empower residents and ensure community control over land use. Through the CLT, we seek to enable wealth generation for property owners, helping them to benefit from the neighborhood's development while maintaining its historical and cultural integrity. Our goal is to create a balanced approach that supports both growth and preservation, ensuring that East Flatbush remains a vibrant and inclusive community for all residents.

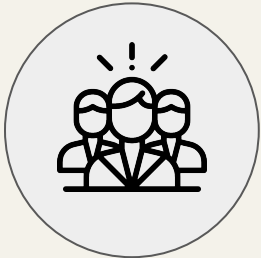
Strategy



Physical:
Preserve Neighborhood Character amidst the Rapid Gentrification of East Flatbush



Social:
Provide Sustainable Housing for the Community



Management:
Investigate How a Community Land Trust Can Help the Neighborhood



Financial:
Enable a Wealth Generation Mechanism for Property Owners

Residential Challenges

Outdated Zoning

Our studio understands that a lot of the ongoing change in the neighborhood can be traced back to a zoning misclassification from 1961. The neighborhood, which seemingly should have been designated as an R4 zone, has been designated the R6 zoning, granting properties a higher residential FAR. Developers, aware of this, have taken advantage of the situation to construct high-rise buildings as-of-right, meaning, they do not need any variances to build these out of place structures.

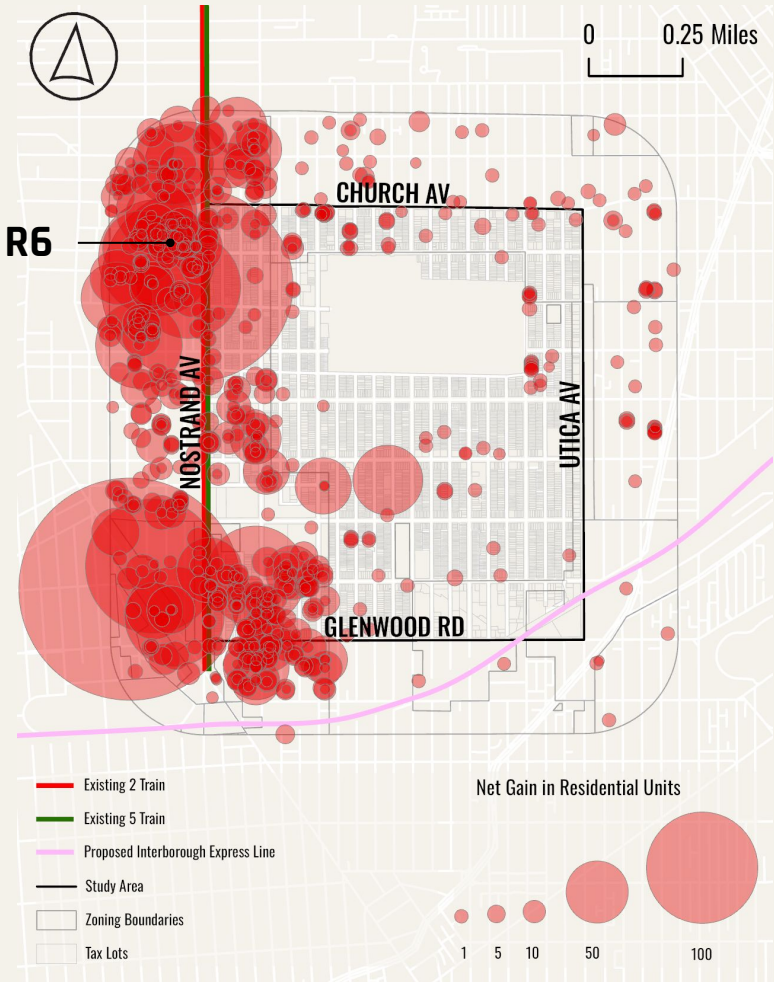
Loss of Black Homeownership

Our studio has learned that East Flatbush has the second highest rate of Black homeownership in New York City. However, East Flatbush has seen a 10% decrease in Black homeownership since 2010. This can be attributed to the out-of-character new developments in the neighborhood that are driving up property values and taxes. Ultimately, this is displacing members of the community, many of whom are on a fixed income, and cannot handle any additional financial burden.

Developers have been targeting the R6 Zoning District, demolishing smaller, Victorian homes and replacing them with out of character multi-family developments. The map on the right displays the “net gain” in residential units with the replacement of single and two-family homes with these new structures.

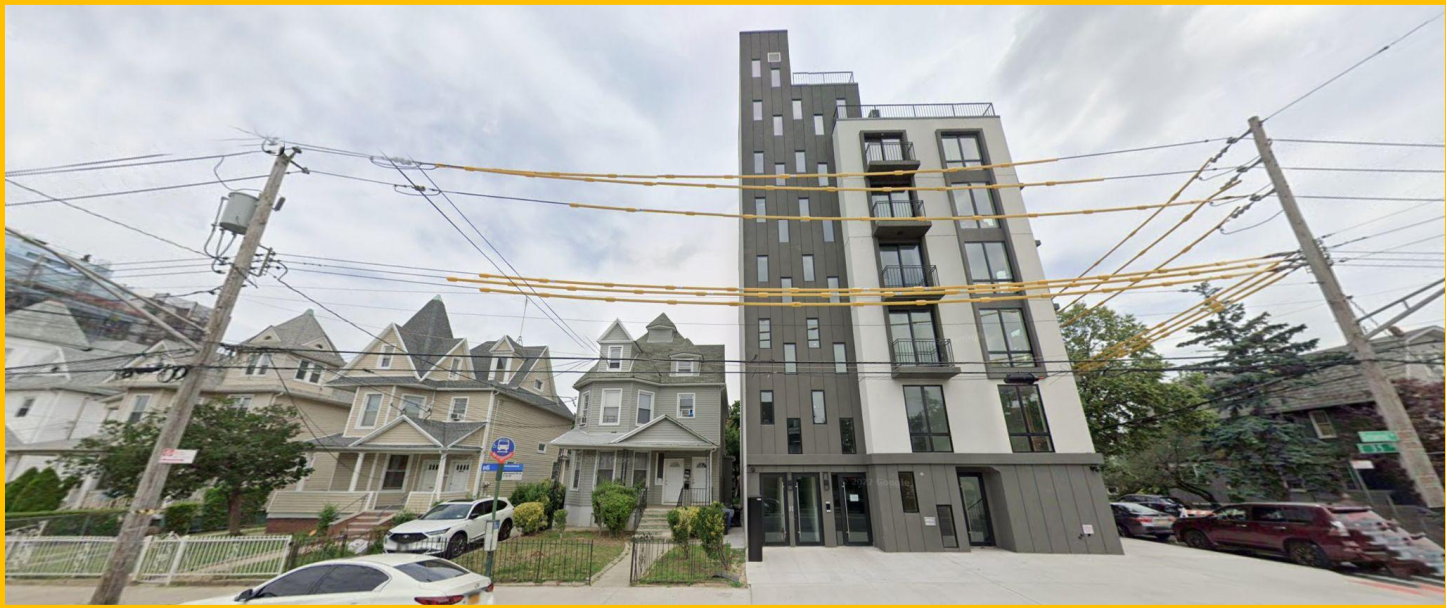
Change in Neighborhood Character

Unfortunately much of the change occurring in the residential areas of East Flatbush are not meeting the needs or desires of the community. These new residential developments appear extremely out of place built up to their respective lot lines, right next to the neighborhood’s classic low-rise, Victorian homes.



3417 Glenwood Road *Before* Redevelopment

3417 Glenwood Road *After* Redevelopment



Residential Opportunities

Preserve Neighborhood Character

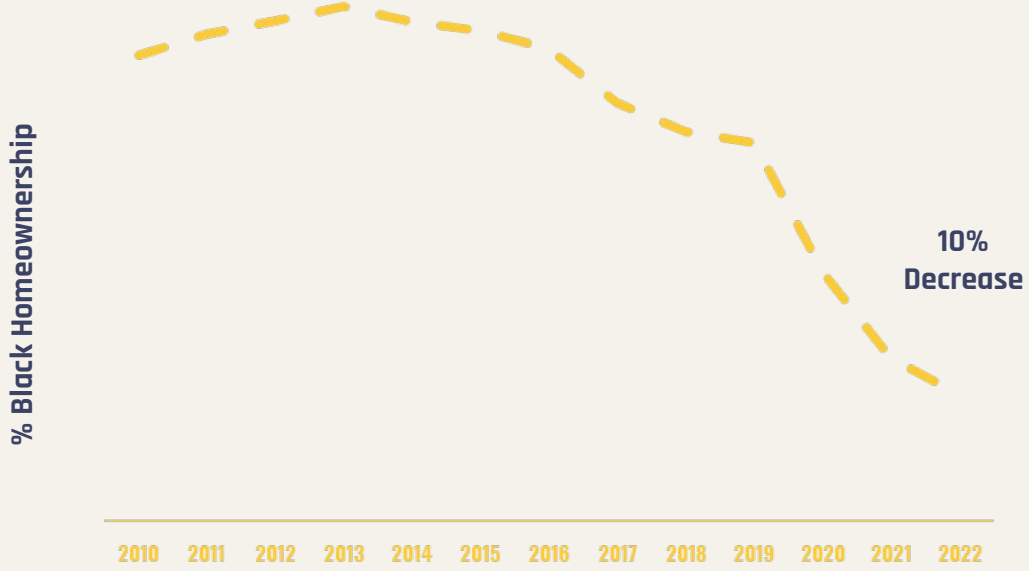
Due to the ongoing changes in the residential area of East Flatbush, our studio set out to uncover ways to preserve the physical and cultural character of the neighborhood. We understand that the Interborough Express will bring changes and connect areas that previously lacked access to public transit, but we want to do our best to ensure that those living in the community right now will not be displaced by this nexus of change.

Provide Sustainable Housing

Understanding that housing options in the neighborhood are dwindling as rents increase, our studio set out to investigate ways to provide sustainable housing to the community. We also acknowledge that with the looming arrival of the Interborough Express, the demand for housing in the area will increase, further exacerbating this disparity in housing. With this in mind, our studio looked to embrace the idea of “working with the existing fabric” of the neighborhood for new housing options, particularly focusing on garage conversions and ADU potential in the area.

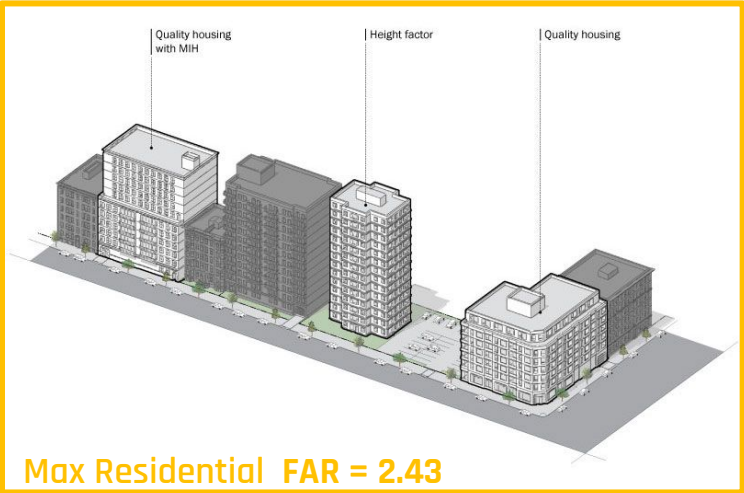
Income Generation for Property Owners

Our studio’s client, Brooklyn Level Up, informed us that out-of-character development in the neighborhood is driving up property values and taxes, displacing community members, many of whom are on a fixed income and cannot handle any additional financial burden. With this in mind, our studio set out to investigate ways to create an income-generating mechanism for property owners, specifically through Accessory Dwelling Units. Property owners can generate income by renting out an ADU to a tenant, save money by opening up their small business in an ADU, or even provide housing for a member of their multi-generational household.



East Flatbush has the Second Highest Rate of Black Homeownership in NYC, yet has seen a 10% decrease since 2010

R6



R4



Discrepancies in Maximum Residential FAR between the R6 and R4 Zoning Districts

Working with the Existing Fabric

What is an Accessory Dwelling Unit?*

Across the city, homeowners face challenges with rising costs, aging in place, and accommodating their families. Regulations limit what New Yorkers can do with their property, which means families have to move farther away from their grandparents or grandchildren, or are forced into uncomfortably cramped houses. Meanwhile, spaces like garages go unused when improvements could make them comfortable homes.

For seniors fighting to stay in the neighborhood on a fixed income or young people stretching to afford a first home, adding a small rental unit can be life-changing. City of Yes for Housing would allow "accessory dwelling units," or ADUs — which include backyard cottages, garage conversions, and basement apartments. Cities across the country have already legalized accessory dwelling units because they support homeowners and provide more space for multi-generational families without significantly changing the look and feel of a neighborhood.

ADUs also make it easier for younger generations or caregivers to live nearby. And they can deliver big benefits while fitting in with existing buildings.

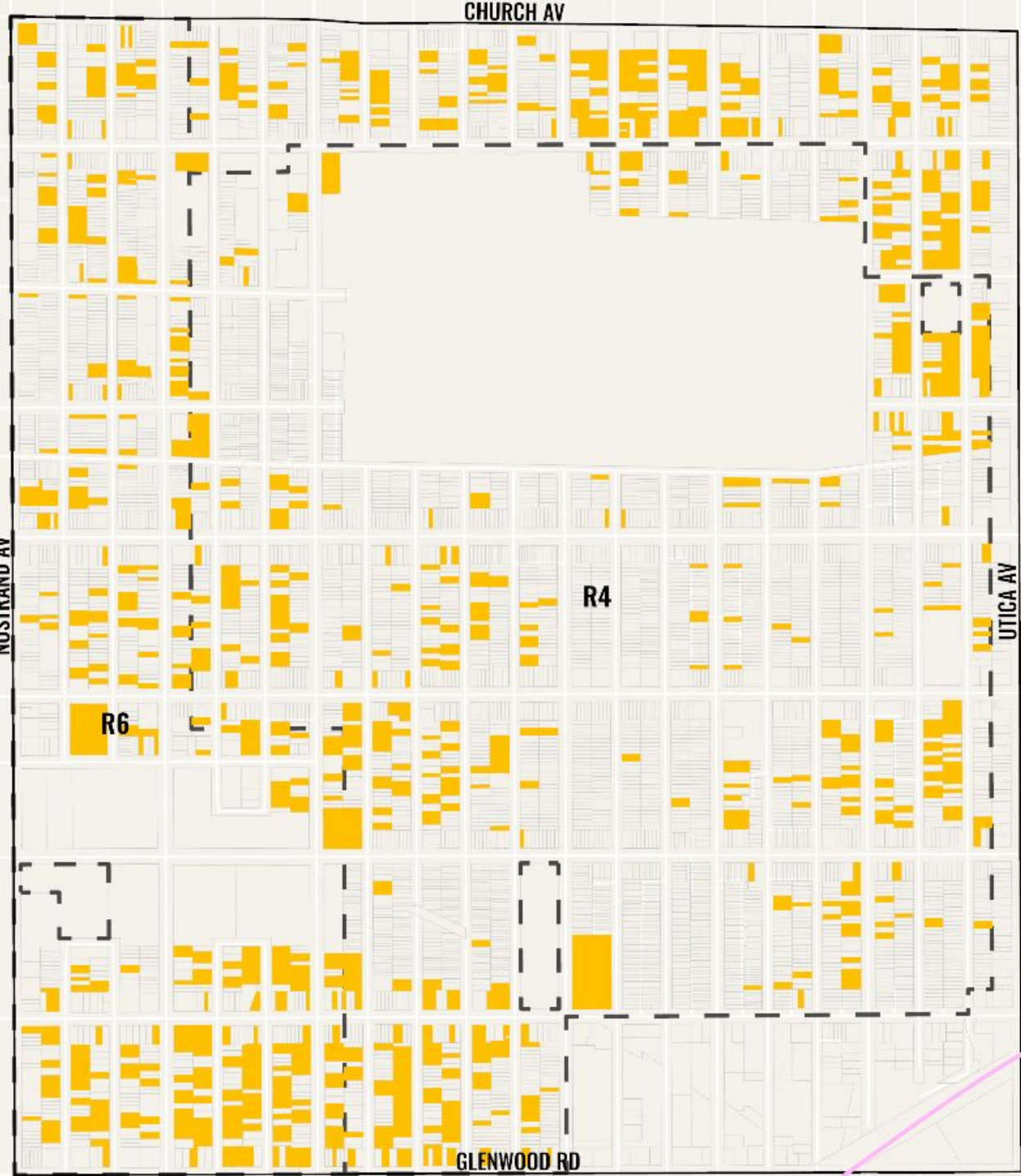
*Department of City Planning (DCP) Definition**

Accessory Dwelling Unit Potential

Our studio has learned that East Flatbush has great potential for accessory dwelling units. East Flatbush has over 3,000 lots with 2+ buildings, meaning there are close to 3,000 garages in the residential area. While many members of the East Flatbush community use these garages, as East Flatbush is pretty car-oriented, our studio tried to imagine what residential living could look like in East Flatbush as the neighborhood transitions away from cars and embraces public transportation with the arrival of the Interborough Express.

ADUs offer a sustainable alternative to these garage uses and can serve as a way for property owners to generate wealth. Property owners can rent out their ADUs to tenants, open small businesses in these spaces, or let a member of their multi-generational household stay in these spaces.

ADUs offer property owners flexibility, something that is currently missing in the existing housing market. This flexibility allows homeowners to adapt their properties to changing needs over time. For instance, a young couple might initially rent out an ADU to help cover their mortgage payments. As their family grows, they could use the ADU to accommodate aging parents or young adult children, fostering multi-generational living. Additionally, the ability to run a small business from an ADU provides economic opportunities and fosters entrepreneurship within the community. This adaptability not only helps individual property owners but also contributes to the overall resilience and sustainability of the neighborhood.



Lots that can Accommodate an 800 sf ADU*

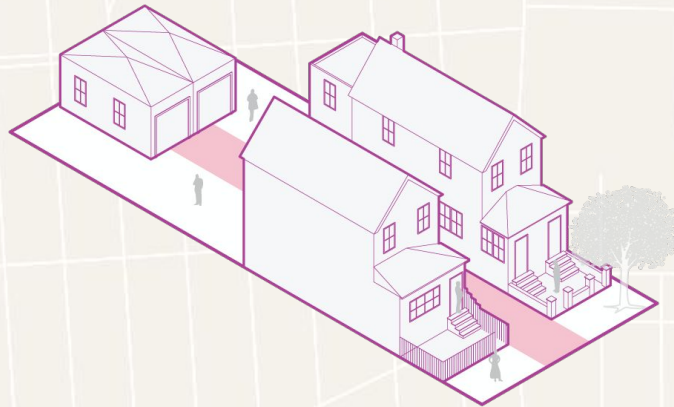


*Assuming that R4 Residential FAR has been upgraded to 1.0

Existing Neighborhood Built Conditions

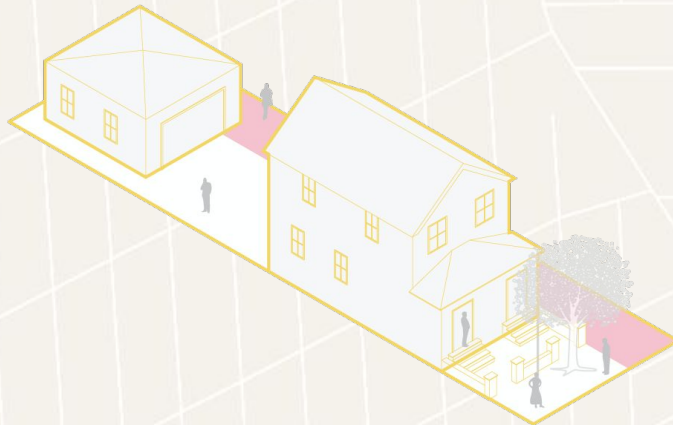
20' Wide Lots

Out of our study area's 6,555 Lots, 62% of them (4,064 lots) of them are 20' Wide. Lots of this description typically have semi-detached homes that share a party wall on their respective property lines, and have shared driveways that leads to a garage in the backyard. Out of these 4,064 lots, our studio learned that 15% of them (597 lots) can accommodate an 800 square feet ADU.



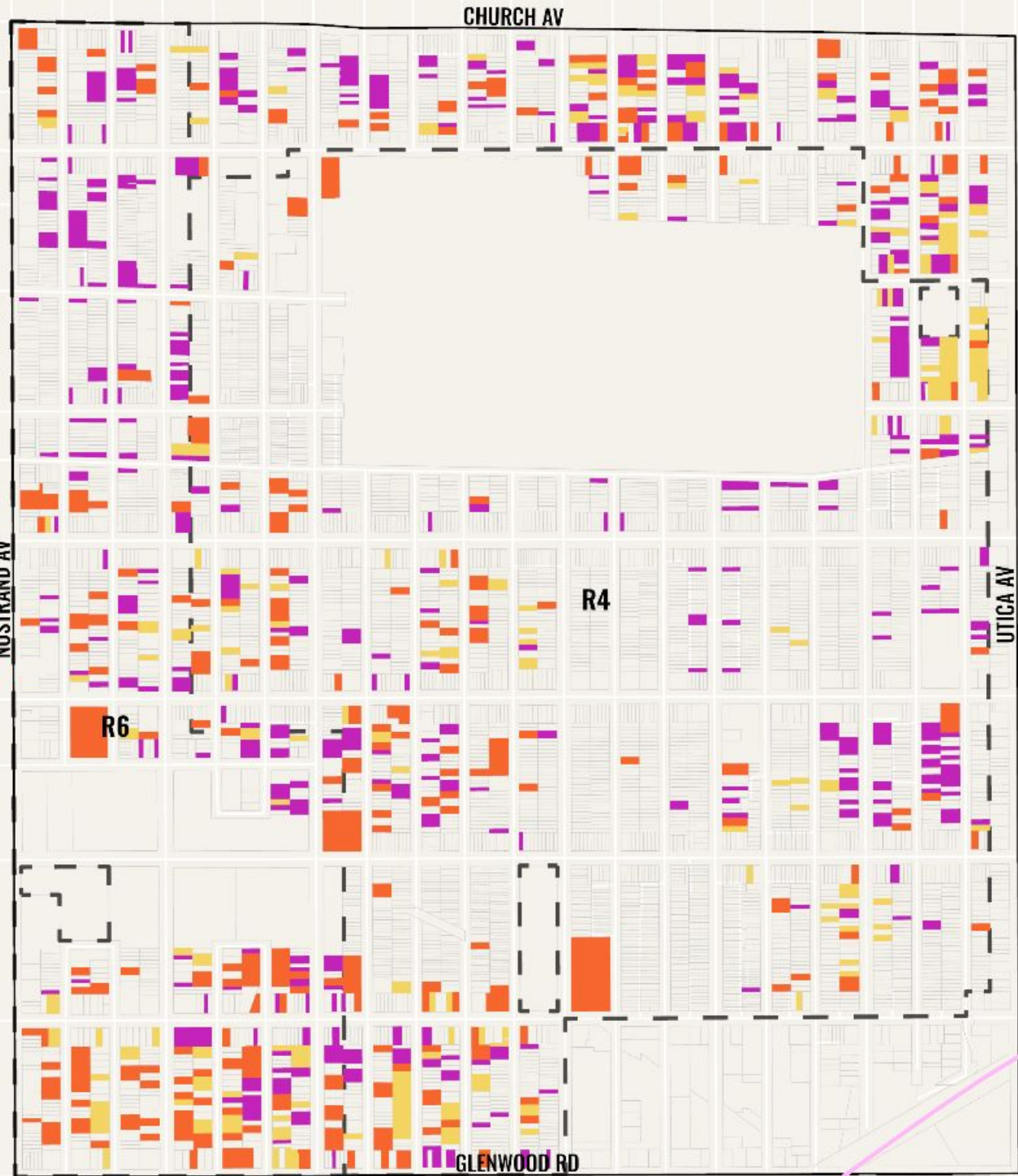
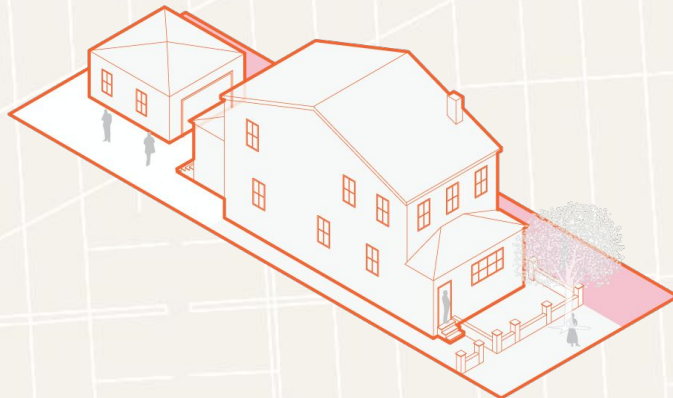
30' Wide Lots

Out of our study area's 6,555 Lots, 7% of them (487 lots) of them are 30' Wide. Lots of this description typically have detached homes and private driveways that leads to a garage in the backyard. Out of these 487 lots, our studio learned that 47% of them (228 lots) can accommodate an 800 square feet ADU.



40' Wide Lots

Out of our study area's 6,555 Lots, 12% of them (766 lots) of them are 40' Wide. Lots of this description typically have detached homes and private driveways that leads to a spacious backyard and garage. Out of these 766 lots, our studio learned that 39% of them (298 lots) can accommodate an 800 square feet ADU.



- 40' Lots that can Accommodate an 800 sf ADU*
- 30' Lots that can Accommodate an 800 sf ADU*
- 20' Lots that can Accommodate an 800 sf ADU*



0 0.1 Miles

*Assuming that R4 Residential FAR has been upgraded to 1.0

Accessory Dwelling Unit Use Cases

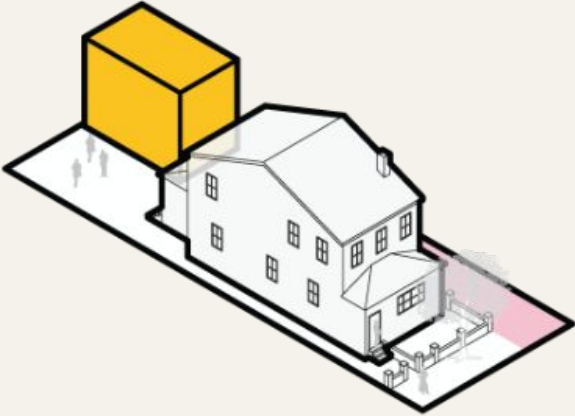
Small Business - Salon

Our studio set out to create a versatile series of plans for different uses that an ADU can accommodate. The first of these uses is a small business. Brooklyn Level Up informed us that as of right now, many community members already informally operate small businesses out of their homes. However, we learned that ADUs, through the City of Yes for Economic Opportunity, can be a means to formalize this way of business.

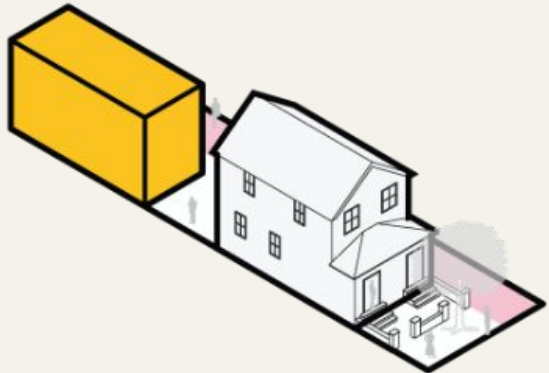
The residential team of designers investigated how the introduction of a small business in a backyard would look and feel in a typical 20' East Flatbush lot. Standing at 400 square feet, this ADU is set back 5' from the rear property line and 14' from the principal building, allowing breathing room for the rear neighbor and occupants of the main home.

Inside, this ADU has room for multiple clients and employees, and a small restroom.

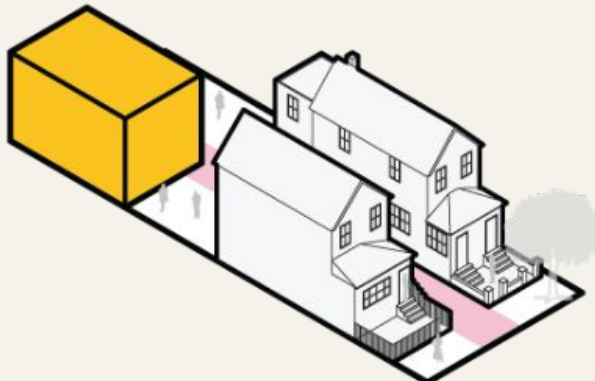
Our team understands that while many small businesses may be comfortable with the way they are currently situated, giving property owners the flexibility and option to operate out of their garage will give them enhanced opportunities for growth and empowerment. In one case, we learned that this can relieve the burden of paying for rent on a commercial main street, providing a more affordable and convenient solution for local entrepreneurs.



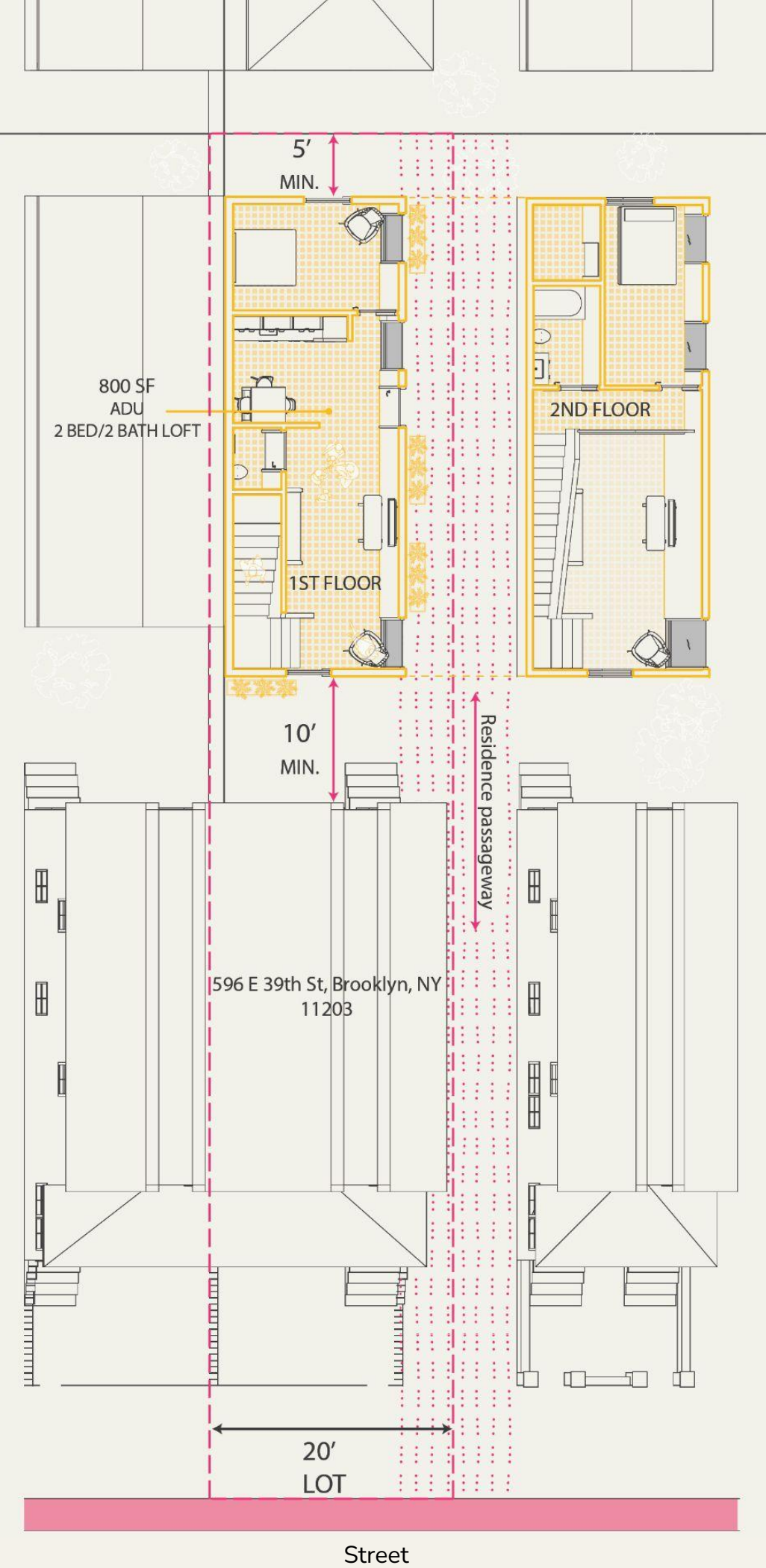
40' Lot ADU Massing



30' Lot ADU Massing



20' Lot ADU Massing



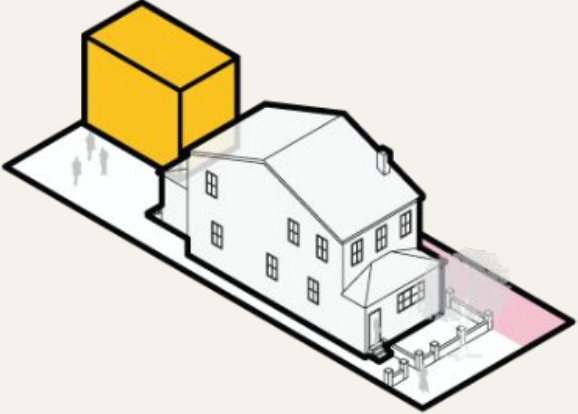
Accessory Dwelling Unit Use Cases

Multi-Generational Household

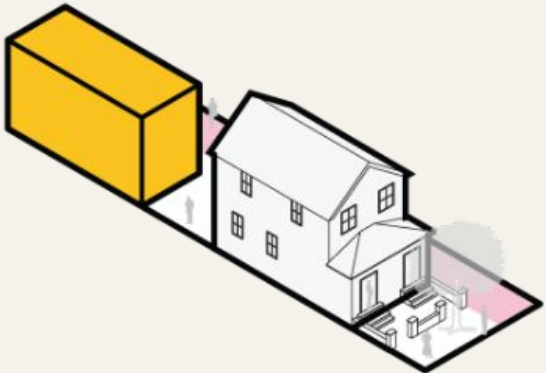
The second of the uses that our team investigated is a backyard cottage that can be occupied by a member of a multi-generational household. Through our research, we learned that East Flatbush has many multi-generational homes, so we sought to address the needs of these families.

Standing at 400 square feet, this single story ADU is set back 5' from the rear property line and 14' from the principal building, allowing breathing room for the rear neighbor and occupants of the main home.

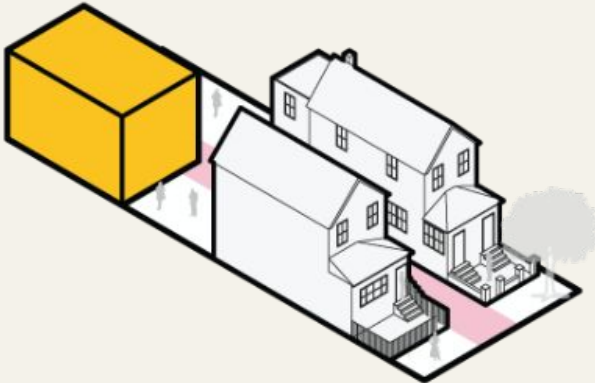
Inside, this ADU has a small kitchen, bathroom, living space, bedroom, & closet. Our team of designers, understanding that this space would be shared with the members of the primary residence (not to mention the grandparents, or college aged family members who would be occupying it), and viewed this structure as an extension of the home. For this reason, this typology is a bit more tight - and perhaps in some instances, our tenant apartment (on the following page) may be a more appropriate use for accessory living.



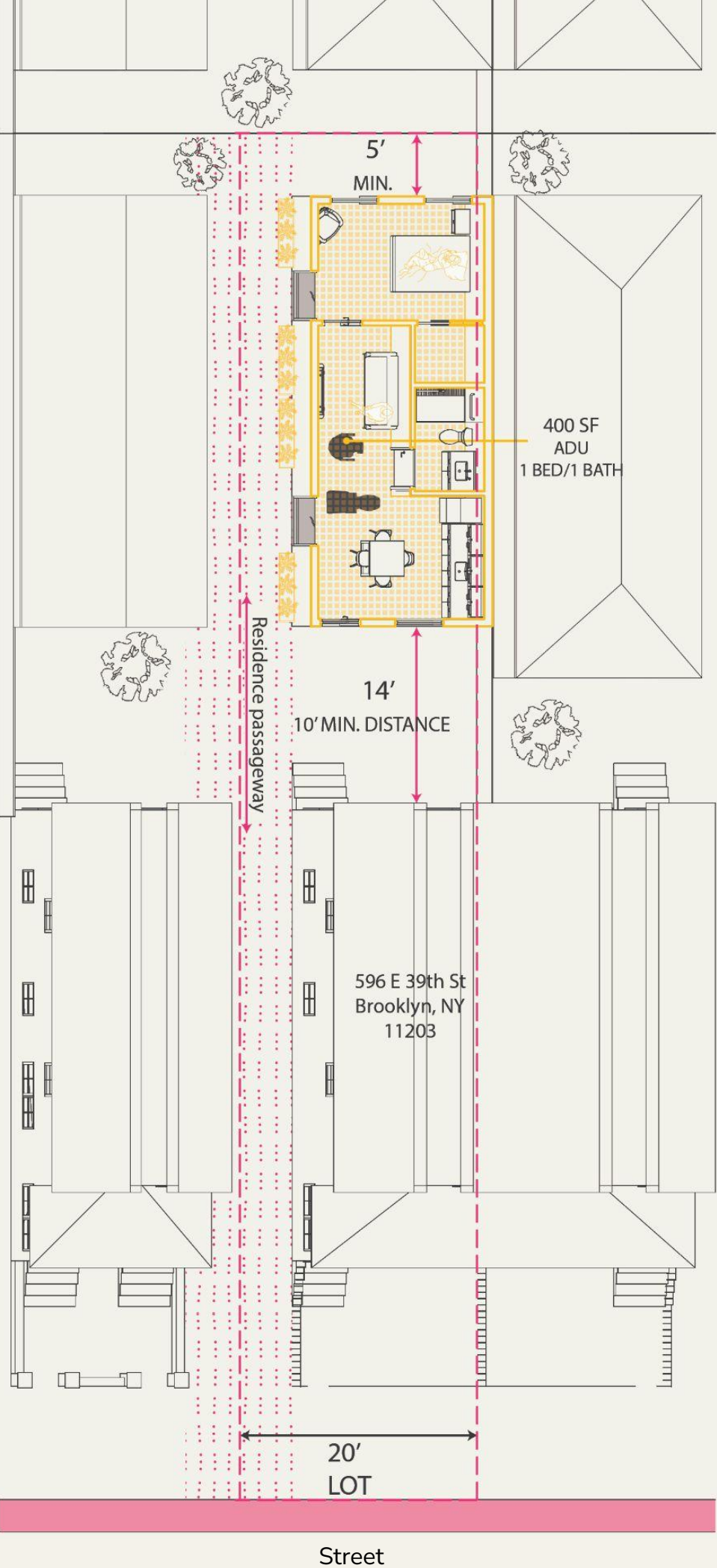
40' Lot ADU Massing



30' Lot ADU Massing



20' Lot ADU Massing



Accessory Dwelling Unit Use Cases

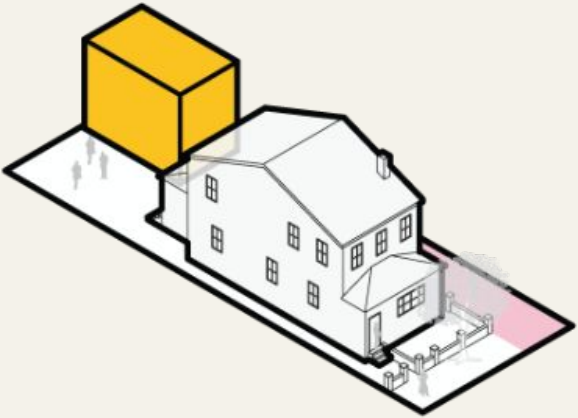
Tenant - Duplex

The third of these uses is an apartment that can be rented out to a tenant. While our team understands that the options to dedicate unused space to a small business or for a member of a multi-generational household is beneficial, we recognize that financially, renting out to a tenant may be the practical and lucrative option.

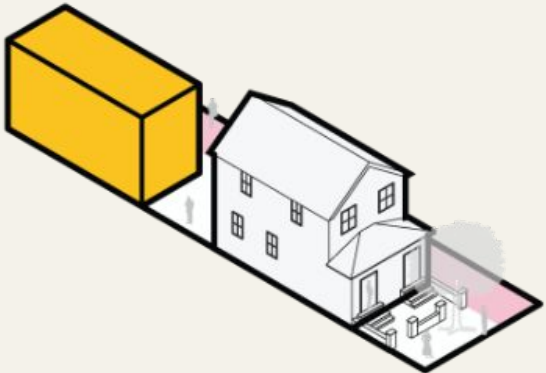
The residential team of designers investigated how the introduction of a duplex apartment would look and feel in a typical 20' East Flatbush lot. Standing with a 400 square foot footprint (800 gross square feet), this ADU is set back 5' from the rear property line and 14' from the principal building, allowing breathing room for the rear neighbor and occupants of the main home.

Inside, this ADU has two stories. The first floor contains a living space, kitchen, and small bedroom/office. The lofted second floor has a full bathroom, bedroom, and closet, and an open area that overlooks the living space below.

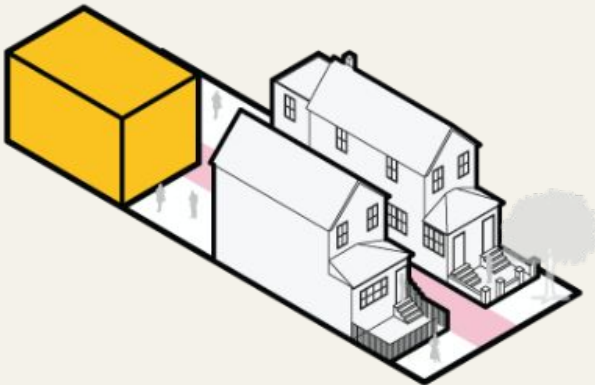
Our team wrestled with making this use work on a 20' lot and learned that the city's mandated 5' setback from every property line was a significant barrier to properly designing a living space that can be rented out. Ultimately, this restriction limits the ability of property owners to provide an extra source of income. This typology of ADU was the most difficult to design, and for reasons that will be expanded upon in our zoning recommendation section, we believe the city should reconsider their 5' setback rule.



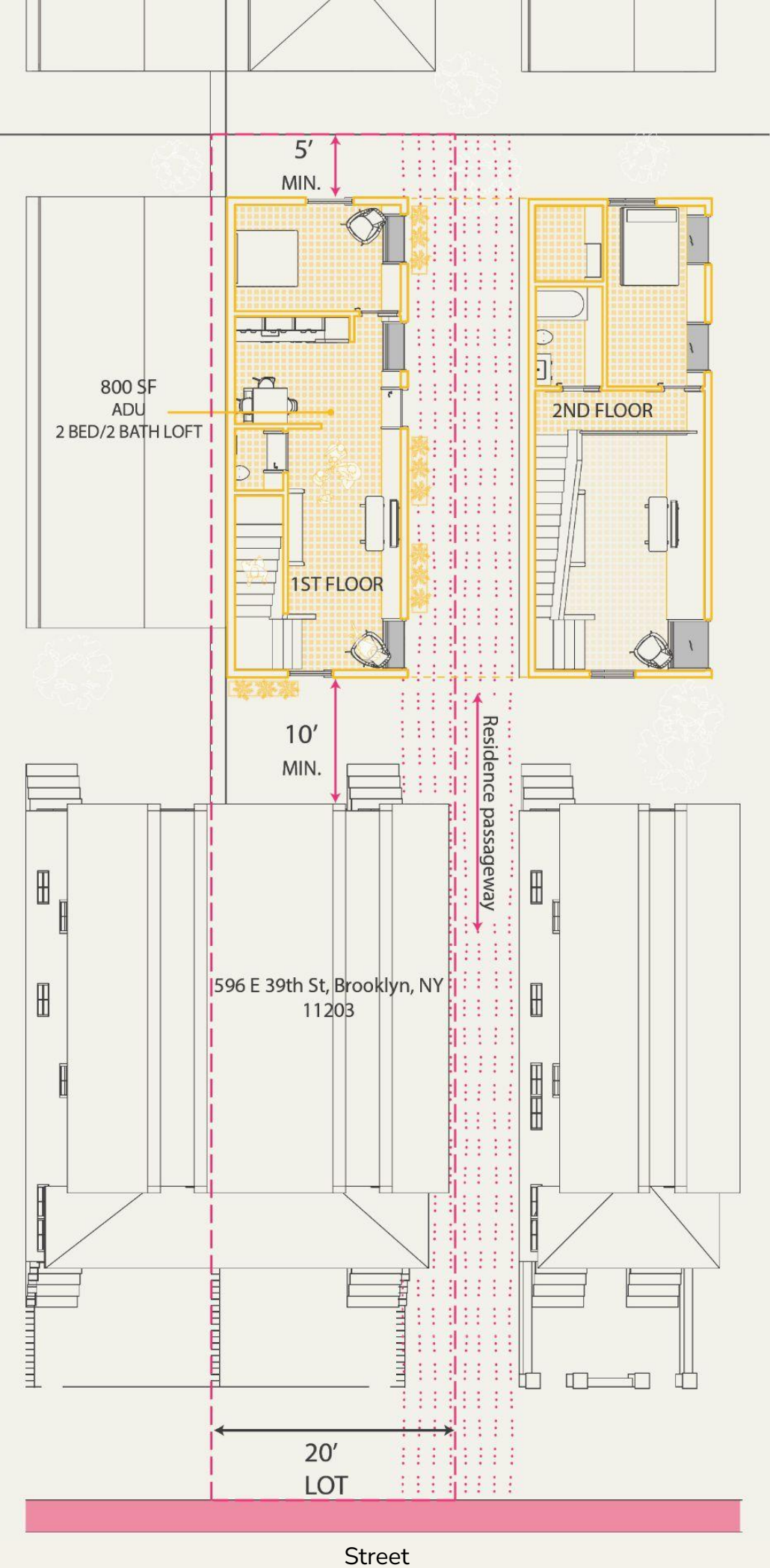
40' Lot ADU Massing



30' Lot ADU Massing



20' Lot ADU Massing



Zoning Recommendations

Abolish the 5' Setback on Property Lines

Our studio team has closely followed the City of Yes for Housing initiative as it explores what ADUs can look like in the context of New York City. The Department of City Planning has stated that ADUs will be limited to one per 1-2 family home, they must be 5' from the property's lot line, they must be built at a maximum of 800 square feet, and detached ADUs will have a height limit of 2 stories.

While our studio team understands the reasoning behind all of these proposed codes, we stand firm in our contention against the 5' setback. The reasoning behind our contention is that through our design iterations, we learned that the 5' setback severely limits design opportunities and financial possibilities for property owners who live on 20' wide lots. This setback does not appear to cause many problems for 30' or 40' lots, as they have much more room to build.

However, as mentioned in the "Existing Neighborhood Built Conditions" section, 20' wide lots make up 62% (4,058 lots) of East Flatbush. Additionally, lots less than 20' wide make up 19% of the total number of lots in East Flatbush—this code would severely limit their ADU potential as well.

For this reason, we propose that the Department of City Planning abolish, or limit the 5' setback to only 1 property line. If this change were to be implemented, ADUs would become more accessible to property owners as a means to generate wealth or create living and commercial spaces for their communities

Transition to 1.0 FAR in the R4 Zoning District

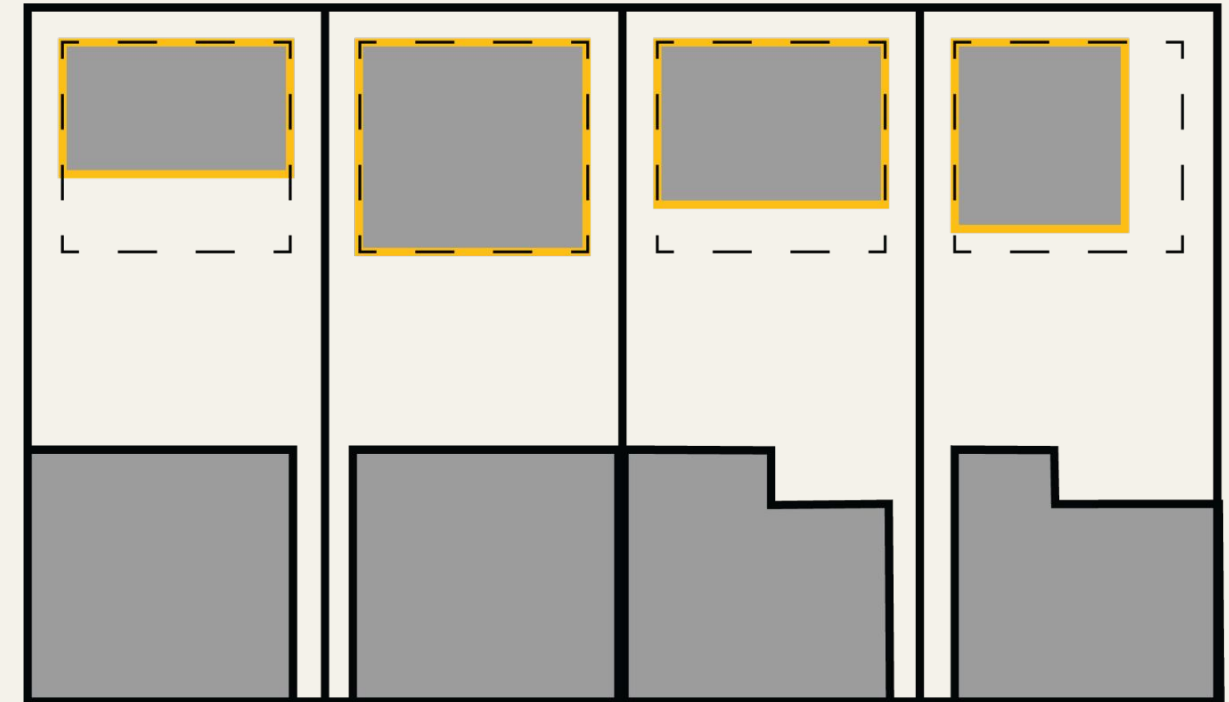
Our studio team had various meetings with stakeholders, one of them being our meeting with Veronica Brown at the Department of City Planning. In this meeting we learned that DCP is pushing to raise the residential FAR in the R4 Zoning District from .75 to 1.

Our studio supports this decision, as we have learned that it will open by accessibility for ADUs for residents in low lying neighborhoods. After running the numbers, our team learned that by raising the FAR from .75 to 1 to accommodate ADUs, the number of potential ADUs in our study area increases by 48% of the original count. This means that while originally 14% of lots in the neighborhood (943 lots) could once accommodate 800 square feet ADUs, 21% of lots (1,395 lots) can now accommodate 800 square feet ADUs with this recalibration.

While these numbers do not represent all of the lots that that can accommodate ADUs, this is because we have chosen to focus on the maximum footprint currently allowed by the Department of City Planning - again, by maximizing the footprint we believe property owners can maximize the return on their investment.

Lastly, while raising the FAR even higher than 1 may allow for more ADUs to be built, the Department of City Planning must remain sensitive to the fine line between too much FAR and just enough. If the Department of City Planning were to raise the FAR too much, there could be a repeat of what has happened in the R6 - over abundance of FAR that has allowed developers to come in and build-as-of-right, out of character developments.

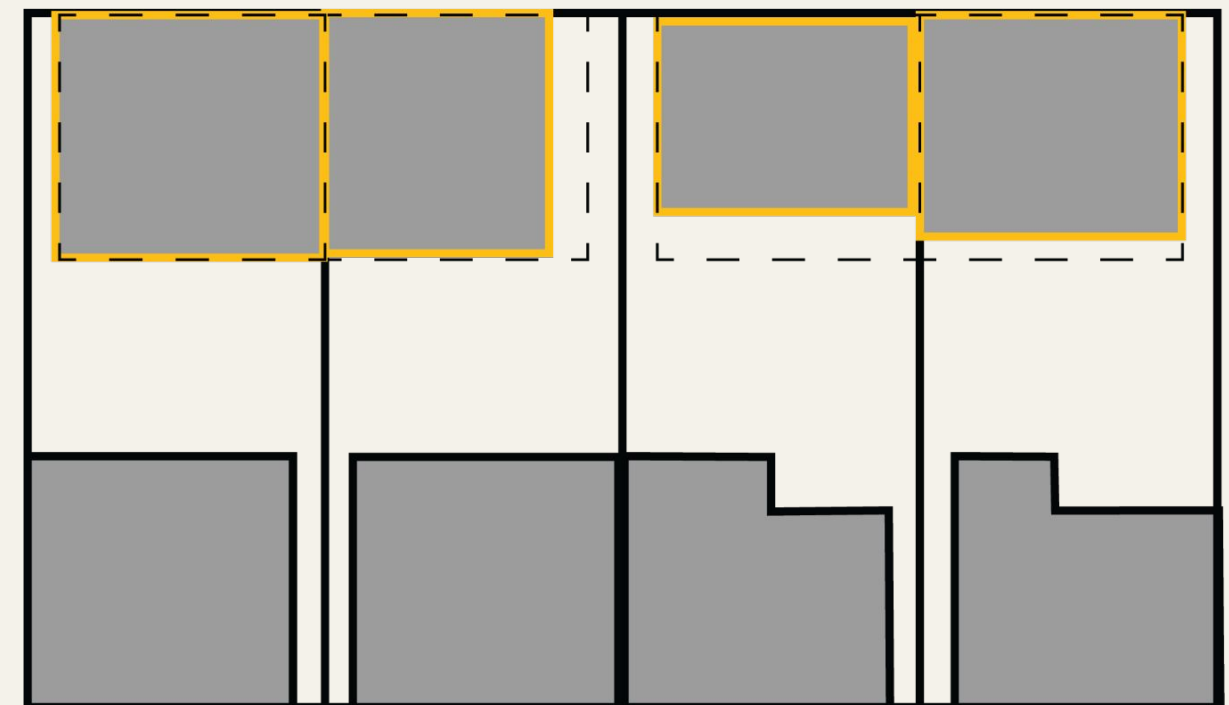
Existing Code:



Limitation of 5' Setback to only one property line



Recommended Code:



ADU Funding Mechanisms

Overview

Our studio explored various funding options for ADUs, recognizing that while ADUs provide significant benefits such as rental income, multi-generational living spaces, or areas for small businesses, the initial construction costs can be prohibitive for ordinary community members. Building an ADU requires a substantial investment, often necessitating homeowners to secure loans or other financing solutions. We aimed to identify and evaluate the most accessible and practical funding mechanisms to ensure that ADUs can become a viable housing solution for a broad range of property owners.

Community Land Trust

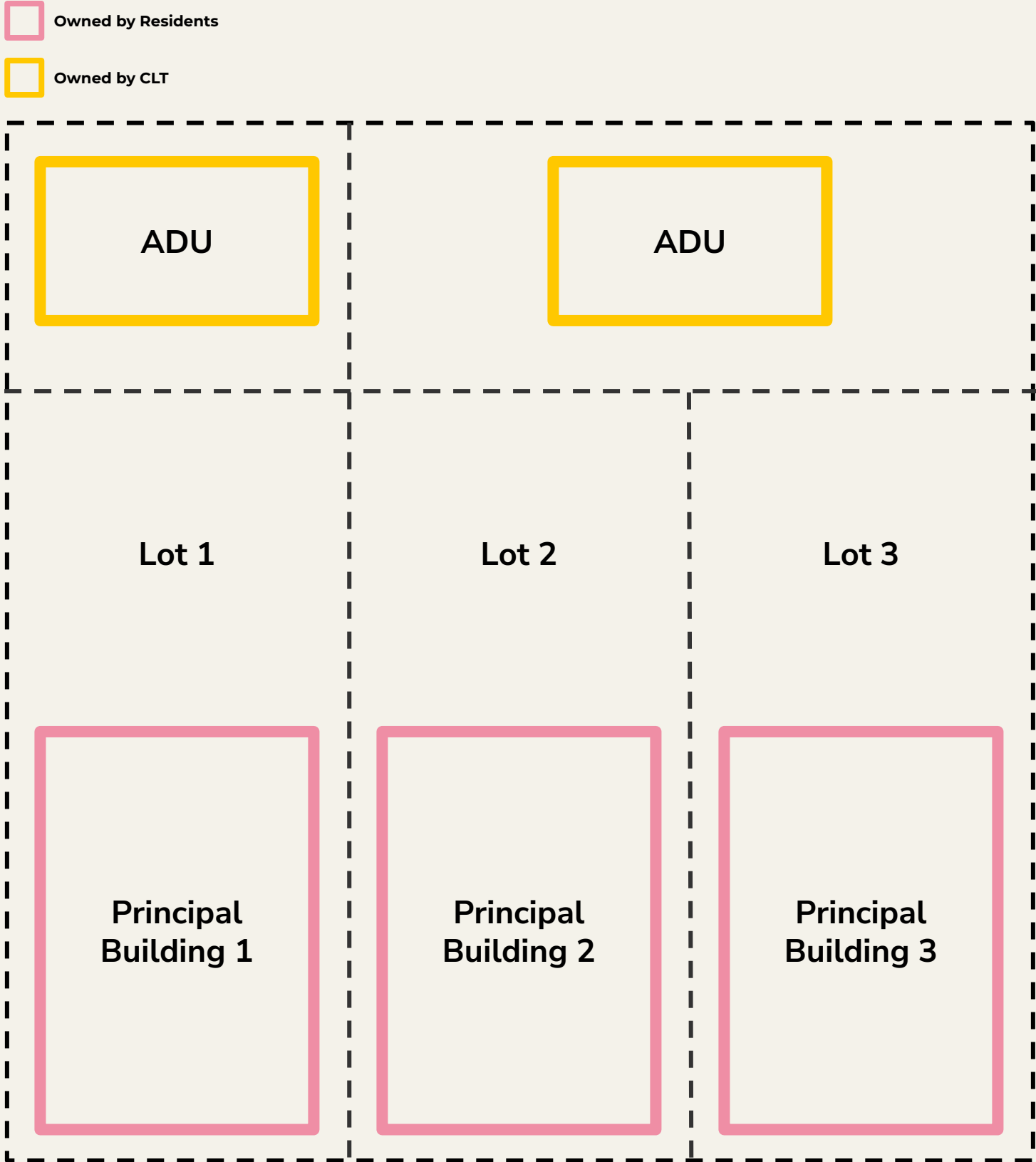
Community land trusts can play a pivotal role in making ADU development more accessible to homeowners. In this model, homeowners donate a portion of their land, such as the area where a garage is located, to the land trust. The CLT can then partner with residents to construct the ADU and lease it out to new tenants, reducing the financial burden on individual property owners. CLT owning the land also directly addresses ownership issues of structures situated across lot lines, like a two-car garage. This model is particularly beneficial in neighborhoods with a high percentage of low- and moderate-income residents who may not have the upfront capital or creditworthiness to secure traditional loans. Furthermore, CLTs help maintain long-term affordability by retaining ownership of the land, thereby preventing speculative increases in property values and ensuring that ADUs remain accessible to future generations.

ADU NY Pilot Plus Program

The Accessory Dwelling Unit NY Pilot Plus Program aims to help homeowners build accessory dwelling units on their properties. This program offers loans of up to \$220,000 with a fixed interest rate of 5% over a 15-year term, resulting in an approximate monthly payment of \$1,700. To qualify, homeowners must have an income up to 165% of the area median income and their properties must be free of any tax liens or arrears. The program provides financial assistance and technical support to simplify the construction and permitting process for ADUs.

Home Equity Line of Credit

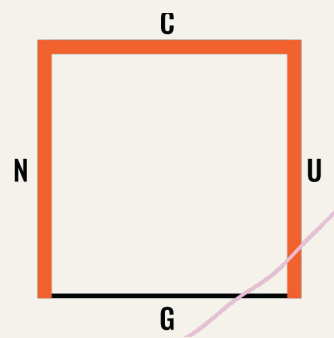
Home Equity Lines of Credit (HELOCs) are a flexible financing option for homeowners looking to build accessory dwelling units. Unlike traditional loans, a HELOC operates as a revolving line of credit, allowing homeowners to draw funds as needed and repay them over time, much like a credit card. The amount of credit available through a HELOC is typically based on the homeowner's equity in their property and their overall creditworthiness. This makes it an attractive option for those who have built up significant equity and have a strong credit history, but comes with a variable interest rate, which means the interest rate can fluctuate based on market conditions. While this can sometimes result in lower interest payments when market rates are favorable, it also introduces the risk of higher payments if rates increase. This type of financing offers flexibility and accessibility but requires careful planning and budgeting to ensure it remains a viable and cost-effective solution.



Residential Vision



Commercial Corridor



Commercial Goals



The commercial focus area explores the reimagination of the site-adjacent corridor of Utica Avenue, defined as the one mile stretch of road from the IBX station to Church Avenue

Site Context

The history of Utica Avenue is defined by the erosion of a former shopping corridor into a street for automotive uses. Our studio sought to activate Utica as a commercial corridor and open up the street for greater engagement with the East Flatbush community. The current zoning and land use conditions, established in 1961, limit the types of businesses and services allowed on the street. As the Interborough Express is introduced to the site, there is a need to allow for more flexibility in the permissible land use to expand how the community can interact with this critical corridor. Our work seeks to understand how this street can be reimagined as the missing link connecting the IBX to the rest of East Flatbush.

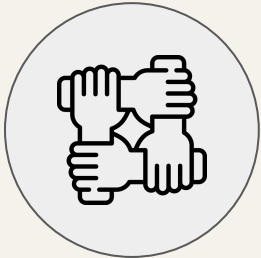
Goal Formulation

Our studio team sought to ensure that the strategic development of Utica would strengthen and address the needs of the East Flatbush community while meeting transit-oriented principles that will be critical to the success of the IBX line. Both the activation of Utica Avenue and the IBX line will increase property values within our site. Our team explored how financial mechanisms that employ land value capture (LVC) can fund community financing initiatives and ensure more equitable outcomes for future upzoning and transit efforts. We see land value capture as a methodology for Brooklyn Level Up and other community partners to directly benefit from and control the development of their neighborhood.

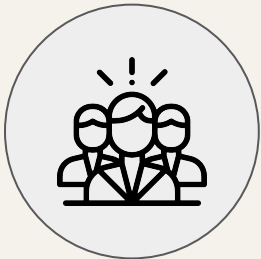
Strategy



Physical:
Activate the streetscape while providing pedestrian connectivity to the IBX station.



Social:
Revitalize a underutilized commercial corridor with expanded services and community-based facilities.



Equitable Development:
Ensure new development is suited to the needs of the East Flatbush neighborhood,



Community Financing:
Leverage increased property values from new development and the IBX opening to finance a East Flatbush community fund,

Community Needs Assessment

Exploring the current state of East Flatbush is key for understanding local community needs. This existing conditions research, with additional context provided by Brooklyn Level Up, have been the key drivers in the development of our vision, goals, and proposed recommendations.

People

East Flatbush is celebrated for its vibrant Afro-Caribbean culture and community. The community is over 78% black residents, however, demographic trends show an overall decrease in the number of black residents despite an increase in the total population. Along with the changes in racial demographics, the community has experienced a notable rise in the population aged 65 years and older, which has more than doubled since 2000. East Flatbush is also made up of residents with different educational attainment levels. According to the US Census Bureau, 26% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, while 60% have graduated high school.

Environment

The community experiences environmental vulnerabilities such as flooding and extreme heat, which are likely to intensify as the threats from climate change increase. According to the city of New York, Black, Non-Hispanic populations have experienced the highest average annual environment-related stress death rate in NYC. Furthermore, East Flatbush has been categorized with a heat vulnerability index of 5, which is the highest index score. The limited green infrastructure, such as street trees, also contributes to higher surface temperatures and heat vulnerability.

Transportation

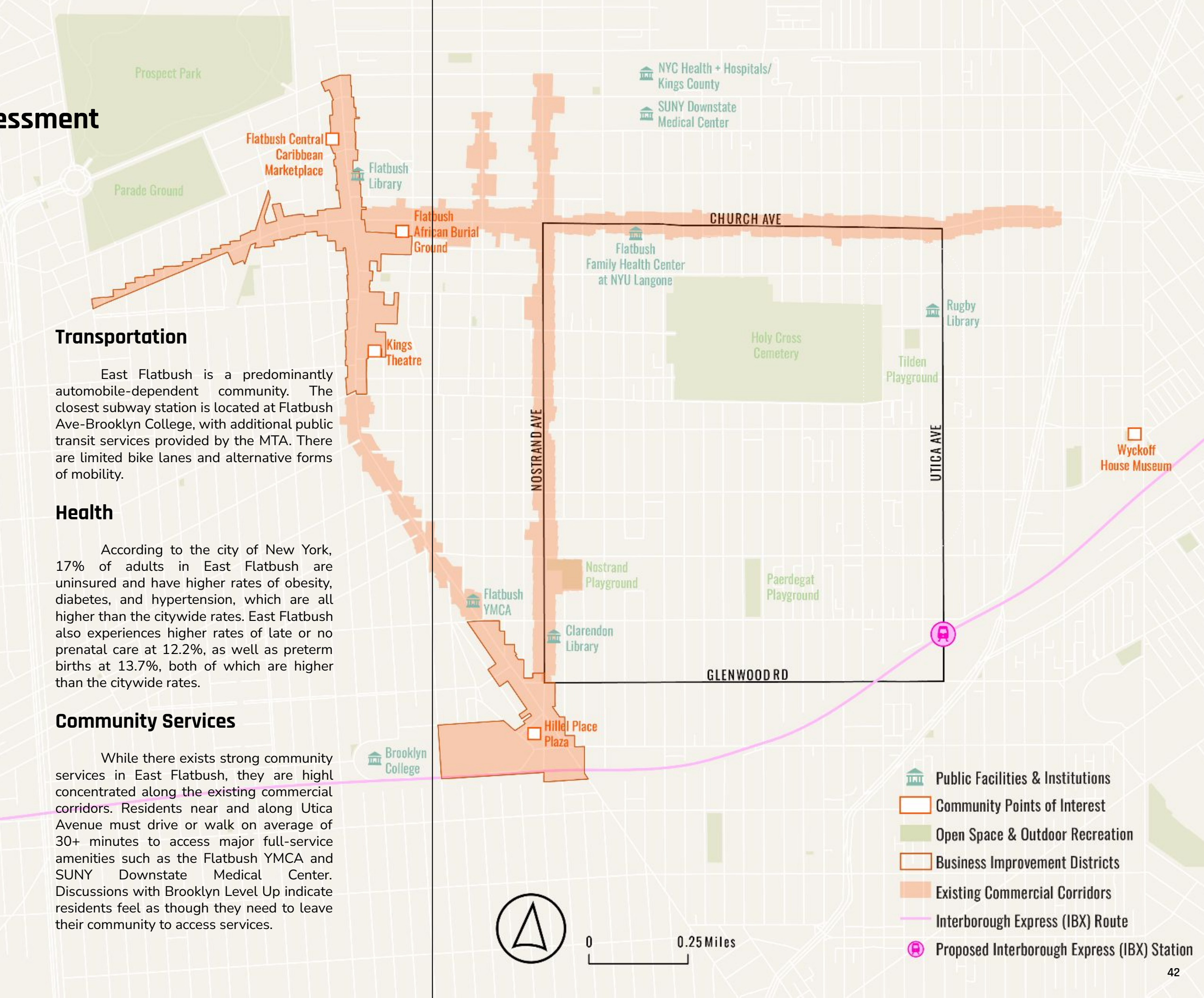
East Flatbush is a predominantly automobile-dependent community. The closest subway station is located at Flatbush Ave-Brooklyn College, with additional public transit services provided by the MTA. There are limited bike lanes and alternative forms of mobility.

Health

According to the city of New York, 17% of adults in East Flatbush are uninsured and have higher rates of obesity, diabetes, and hypertension, which are all higher than the citywide rates. East Flatbush also experiences higher rates of late or no prenatal care at 12.2%, as well as preterm births at 13.7%, both of which are higher than the citywide rates.

Community Services

While there exists strong community services in East Flatbush, they are high concentrated along the existing commercial corridors. Residents near and along Utica Avenue must drive or walk on average of 30+ minutes to access major full-service amenities such as the Flatbush YMCA and SUNY Downstate Medical Center. Discussions with Brooklyn Level Up indicate residents feel as though they need to leave their community to access services.



-  Public Facilities & Institutions
-  Community Points of Interest
-  Open Space & Outdoor Recreation
-  Business Improvement Districts
-  Existing Commercial Corridors
-  Interborough Express (IBX) Route
-  Proposed Interborough Express (IBX) Station



Commercial Challenges

Automobile-Oriented Streetscape

Auto salerooms and related services set up shop along Utica in the 1940s and early 1950s. Despite evidence in the late 1950s that the automotive industry was relocating out of this part of Brooklyn, the City of New York cemented Utica Avenue as a street for auto-related uses with a C8-1 designation in its 1961 zoning ordinance. Now, auto-related services makes up over 36% of the existing businesses on Utica Avenue, with vehicles occupying much of the available curbside. The unmanaged curb and sidewalk relegates pedestrians to the fringes of the street or into the road itself, creating a potentially dangerous experience. As the IBX opens and pedestrians increasingly move onto Utica, these conditions present a major challenge.

Low-Density Building Typology

Utica Avenue is a wide street, measuring 96 feet from street frontage to opposite street frontage. Wide streets with low-density building typologies can contribute to the urban heat island effect, where temperatures in urban areas are significantly higher than in surrounding rural areas due to the concentration of heat-absorbing materials like asphalt and concrete. In addition, denser building typologies are more suited to commercial activity and public transit stations, allowing for a community that can support a broader range of commercial services and a new transit line. The southern end of Utica Avenue, closest to the IBX, has the highest ratio of low density buildings, with auto and industrial uses accounting for over 86% of the lots from Farragut Road to Foster Avenue.

Inconsistent and Inactive Street Frontage

The interaction between the buildings and the street is essential when considering commercial corridors. Active street frontage, defined as continuous ground floor uses with windows and doors opening onto the street, creates interest and activity for pedestrians. Inactive street frontages create dead zones, or areas of disconnection within urban environments, that contribute to safety concerns without eyes on the street or pedestrian activity. In its current state, Utica Avenue has long blocks with building setbacks that create an unactivated streetscape. As Utica Avenue expands the range of uses available to the community, new businesses and services will need a street frontage that's conducive to non-auto related activities.

Limited Community Interaction

As a result of the C8-1 zoning designation, Utica is encouraged to be a street for automotive uses only. While restaurants and other uses are permitted under the C8-1, the current conditions would discourage a small businesses owner in the East Flatbush community that would want to open up a business on Utica to provide services to people moving to and from the station. In addition, residents within a half-mile boundary of Utica are significantly limited in the amount of services that are available within walking distance. Currently, residents within our site rely on Church, Nostrand, and Flatbush Avenue for their commercial needs, all over a thirty minute walk for residents near the future station.



Utica Avenue as the Missing Link

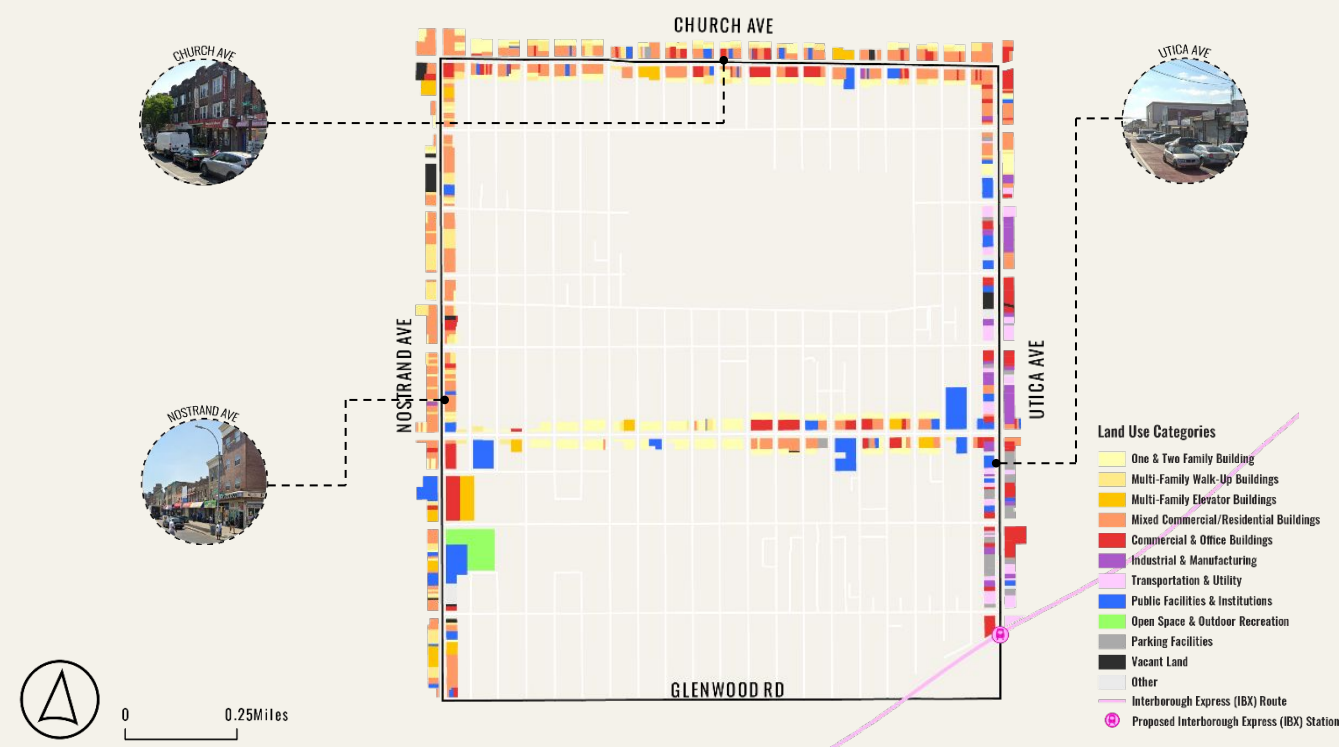
Land Use and Zoning

As our team sought a greater understanding of why the conditions on Utica were dramatically different from the successful commercial corridors of Church and Nostrand Avenue, our research led us to stark differences in land use and zoning along the major corridors within the context area.

The 1961 Zoning Resolution codified the low-rise, car-centric environment along Utica Avenue, which starts right before the intersection at Tilden Avenue and extends to the intersection at Foster Avenue. With this segment of Utica Avenue being delineated as a C8-1 zoning district, this corridor has been severely restricted to low-rise automotive and other heavy commercial uses that bridge commercial and industrial areas together.

The typical services that are allowed within a C8-1 zoning district include automobile showrooms and repair shops, warehouses, gas stations and car washes. Critically, housing is not permitted in C8-1 zoning and businesses are required to provide a substantial amount of parking. C8-1 does not allow for a diverse mix of commercial and residential uses, such as what can be found along Church and Nostrand Avenue.

Portions of Church and Nostrand Avenue are mapped with C1 and C2 commercial overlays, which aim to provide residential districts, such as R4, R5, and R6, with local retail needs such as grocery stores, dry cleaners, and restaurants. Part of this mixed-use commercial activity spills onto Utica Avenue, but tapers off as Utica Avenue transitions into the C8-1 zoning district.

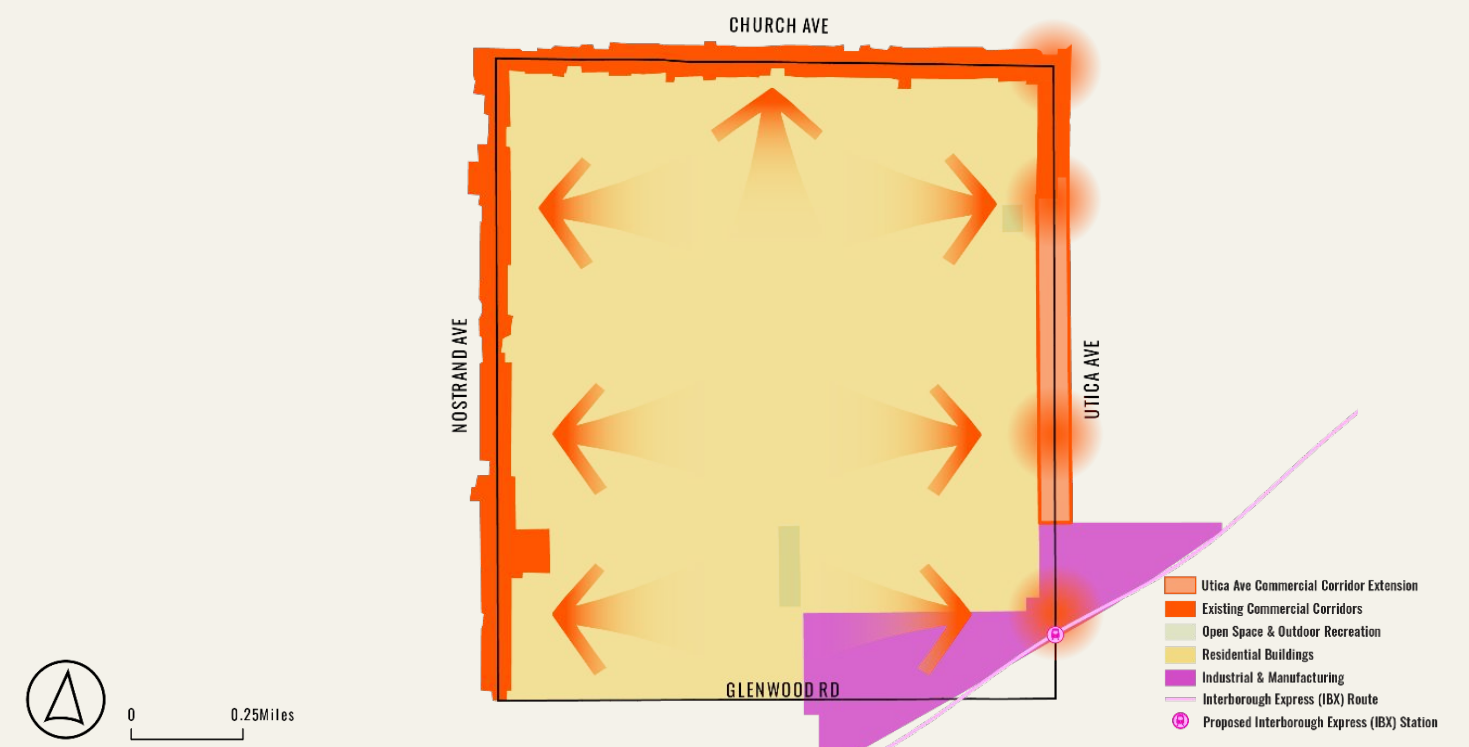


Activating Utica Avenue

With the incoming IBX station and its proximity to the C8-1 zoning along Utica Avenue, there is a need to address the underlying zoning regulations that ultimately dictate what can be developed in this area. With the increased pedestrian usage due to the IBX and the evolving economic landscape that will come with it, the land use along Utica Ave must have the capacity to meet future demands.

The unactivated C8-1 stretch of Utica Avenue is the critical connective link between the IBX station and the existing commercial areas within the site. As it stands currently, the residential areas within our site are bounded by mixed-used commercially active streets, Church and Nostrand Avenue, with this stretch of Utica Avenue unavailable for flexible community engagement.

Activating this stretch of Utica Avenue will open up a range of services for underserved residents who are not within walking distance of the existing commercial areas. It would take over a 30 minute walk for a resident of East Flatbush to reach either Nostrand or Church Avenue and the services those streets have to offer. The success of the IBX will depend on IBX users having easier access to crucial services.



Strategic Activation of Identified Nodes

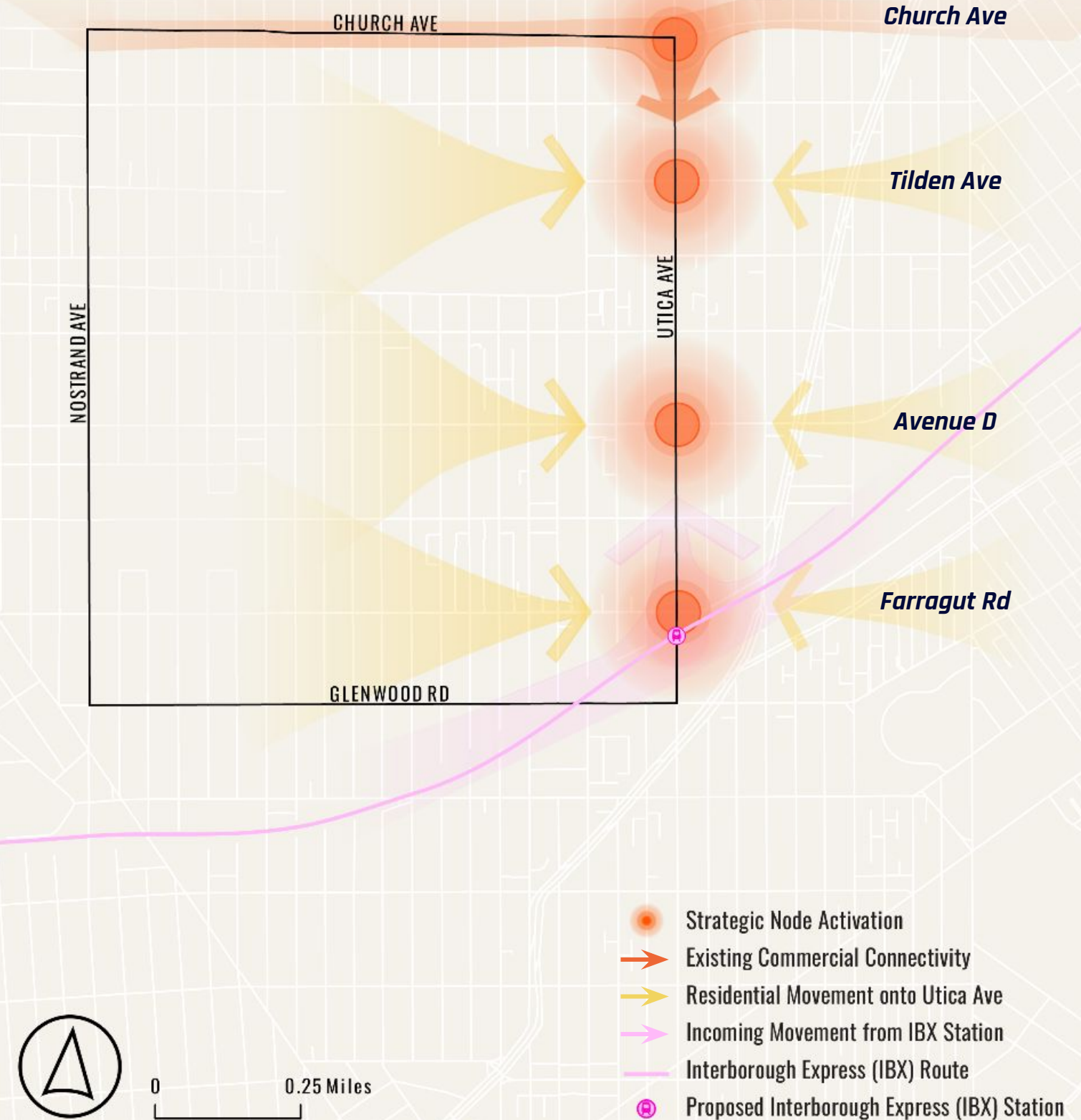
Overview

As the East Flatbush community is invited onto Utica Avenue with the opening of the IBX, resident movement will flow from the residential areas, along the streets, into intersections with Utica Avenue. Resident's first interaction with the street, whether it be for one of the eight bus stops or a commercial service, will take place at these intersections. By strategically developing these intersections in a manner conducive to the neighborhood context, Utica can respond to the opening of the IBX while ensuring that community needs are met. Rather than a broad upzoning that will invite out-of context development, the gradual transformation of Utica over several years will create the conditions for the wholesale growth of a commercial corridor.

These intersections, which our studio refers to as "nodes," play a crucial role the connection between the residential areas and Utica. These nodes are essential for facilitating connectivity to the IBX and provide an opportunity for contextual development that adds to the East Flatbush neighborhood. By using these nodes to activate Utica Avenue for the community, we can provide residents with a rich array of services, facilitating movement between transit, residential, and commercial areas. Concentrating development along these nodes ensures that residents can easily access incoming services and amenities that Utica can offer. Informed by our community needs assessment, our studio has envisioned how nodal development can bolster the East Flatbush community with a variety of potential services.

When determining which intersections were well-suited for nodal development, our studio examined existing services and land use conditions along each intersection. Our team chose four nodes: the intersections with Church Avenue, Tilden Avenue, Avenue D, and Farragut. Church Avenue was selected due to its importance as the connection between Utica and the existing commercial corridor along Church Avenue. Tilden was selected due to its proximity to the Rugby Library and the Tilden Playground, two important existing community uses. Avenue D has some existing mixed-use commercial activity along the site and already sees a higher level of community engagement. Finally, Farragut is the street closest to the incoming IBX station, positioning this node as the gateway to the East Flatbush community for people coming off the new train line.

Our studio chose to first identify the current services and facilities at each intersection in order to best develop a strategy for each node. Our research focused on the current conditions within a five minute walking distance (0.25 miles) of each node. Based on our community needs assessment coupled with the existing conditions at each intersection we developed a potential profile for each node. Finally, we explored the concept of land value capture to ensure East Flatbush residents benefit from the development of their community.



Nodes Meeting Community Needs

Church Ave: Business Node

Church Avenue has the highest distribution of existing commercial uses on Utica. Serving as a vital link between Utica Avenue and the established commercial corridors, Church Avenue serves as a vibrant nexus of economic activity and cultural exchange. Church's role as the connection between two different commercial areas presents an opportunity for a node focused on providing services and facilities for small and local businesses that lack the access to resources to help grow their businesses.

Recommended Uses Along Church Ave:

Commercial Spaces, Cultural Goods and Services, M/WBE Businesses, Space for Community Anchors

Tilden Ave: Community Node

The activation of Tilden Avenue is informed by the presence of the Rugby Public Library and the Tilden Playground. These community facilities present the opportunity to expand on Tilden Avenue as a community-centered node that complements and supports residents and community assets. The activation of Tilden can provide formalized spaces that meet the diverse needs of the local community.

Recommended Uses Along Tilden Ave:

Indoor Recreation, Community-Based Health and Wellness Center, Community Kitchen, Cooling Center, Cultural & Learning Center

Avenue D: Healthcare Node

Through our community needs assessment and discussions with Brooklyn Level Up, the need for a healthcare focused node was clear. Avenue D has existing pedestrian engagement with mixed-use building typologies toward Nostrand Avenue. A node focused on health care can address issues of maternal care, access to services, and other wellness areas. By concentrating healthcare services at this intersection, this node has the potential to support the healthcare needs of the local community.

Recommended Uses Along Avenue D:

Healthcare Services, Health and Wellness, Grocery and Fresh Food Options, Mixed-Use Development

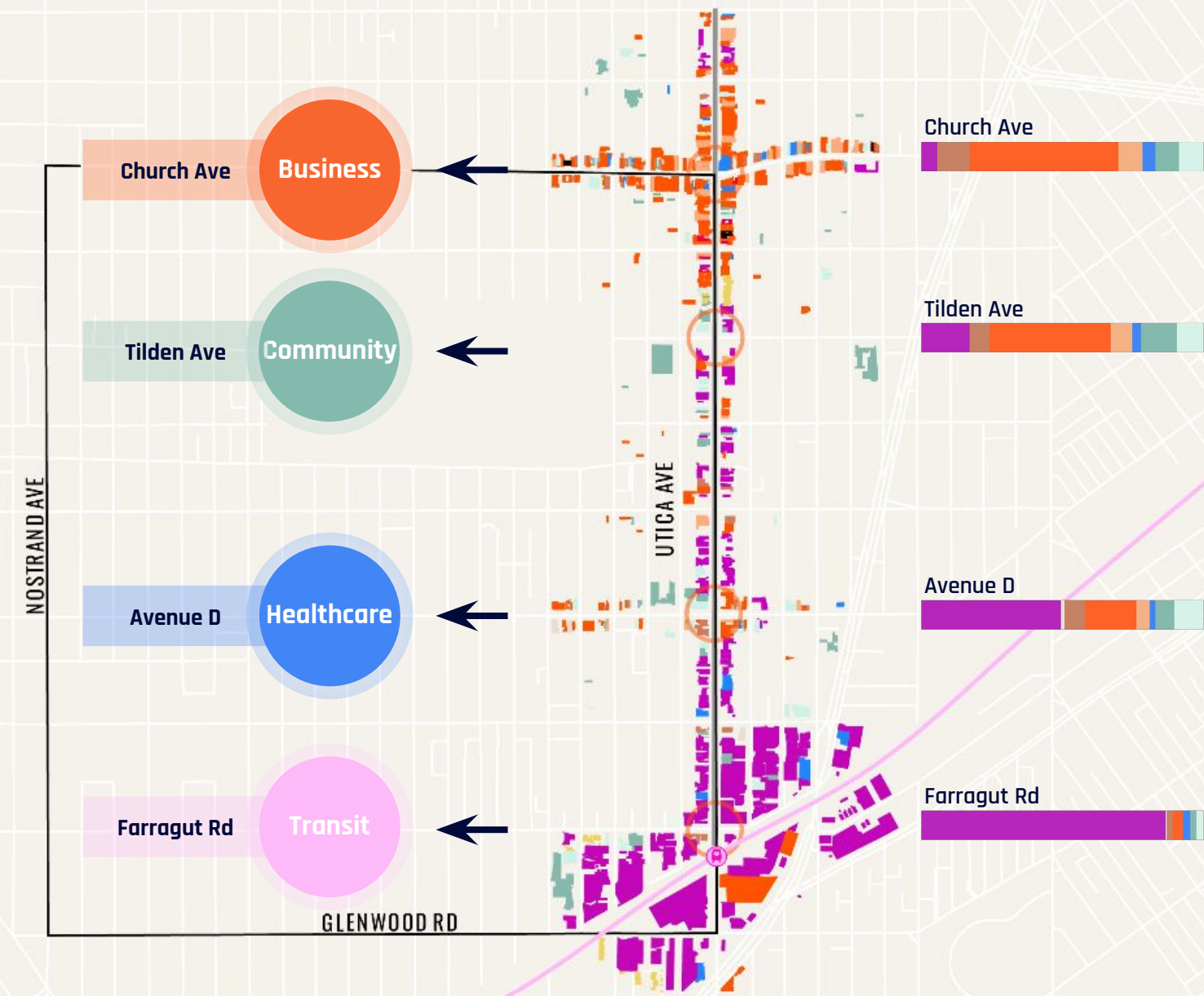
Farragut Rd: Transit Node

Farragut Road is anticipated to undergo significant transformation with the opening of the IBX. Positioned as the intersection adjacent to the new IBX station, Farragut is the future gateway to the Utica corridor. Farragut will be the focal point for transit and community-oriented development. The node has the potential to benefit from increased pedestrian and commuter traffic, expanded services, and businesses that will celebrate East Flatbush culture for people coming off the IBX.

Recommended Uses Along Avenue D:

Shopping Center, Pedestrian Mall, Grocery, Food Court, Cafe & Restaurants

Distribution of Existing Services Along Utica



0 0.25 Miles

Land Value Capture for Equitable Development

Overview

The strategy of activating Utica through a rezoning will encourage development that will increase land values. As the land is brought to its “highest and best use,” a rent gap can develop when the potential value of a property exceeds the amount realized through the current use, encouraging gentrification. In addition, as the IBX line increases the attractiveness of lots within walking distance to the station, land values will increase, potentially displacing residents and business owners. In order to ensure an equitable transition, our studio explored land value capture, a financial tool that allows communities to benefit from new development in their neighborhoods.

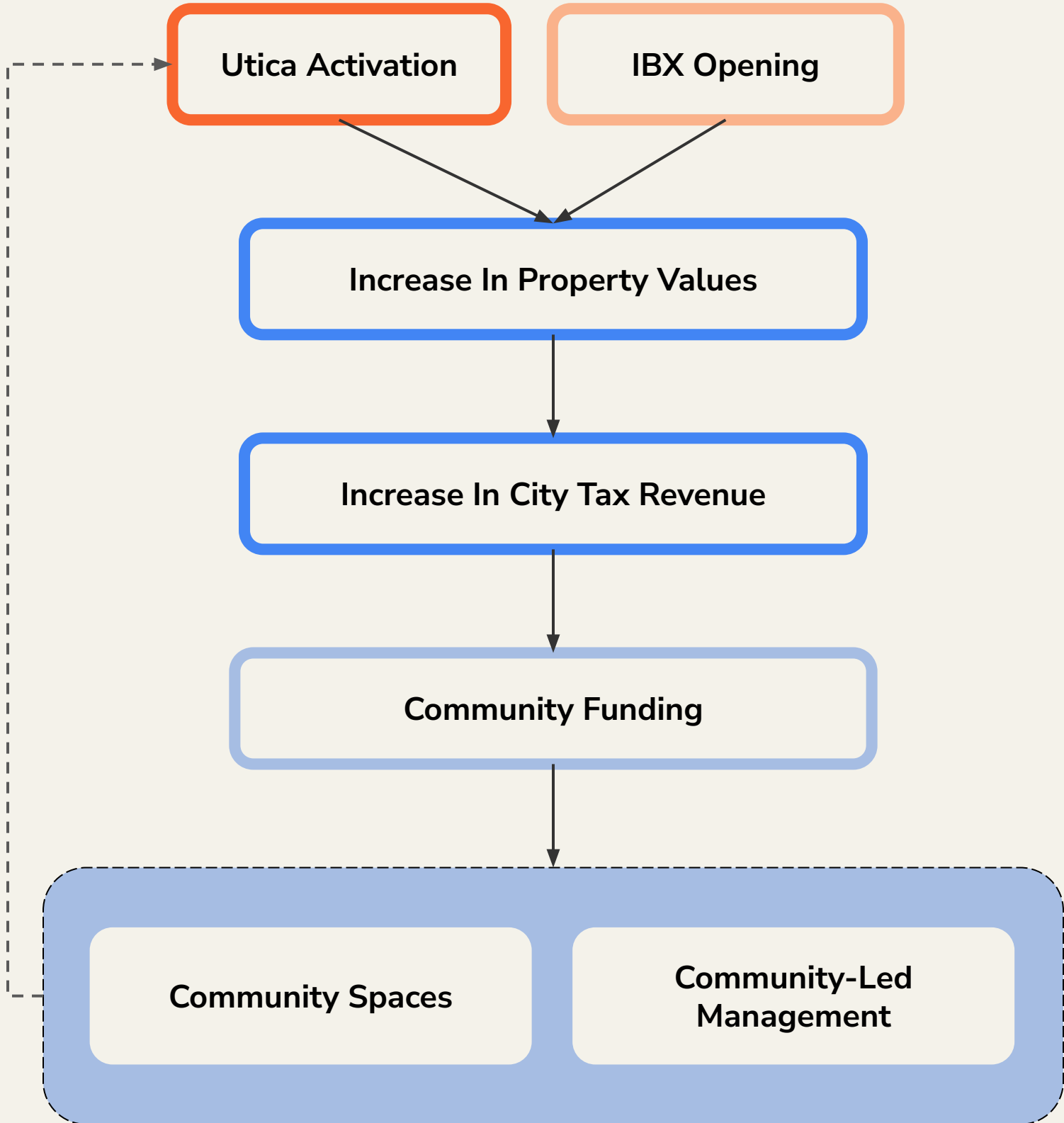
LVC is a concept used in urban planning and economics to describe a method of funding community and economic development by harnessing the increase in land value resulting from upzoning, public infrastructure improvements, or other changes in the surrounding area. As land values increase, governments can capture a portion of this increased value through various mechanisms, the most common being property taxes. The tax revenue generated from capturing the increased land value can be funnelled back in the community.

LVC can be applied in a variety of ways, including community infrastructure levies, profit-sharing arrangements, and community benefit agreements. In the case of East Flatbush, our studio chose to explore LVC via tax increment financing, a tool that we believe will give East Flatbush resident greater flexibility in how the captured value can be used.

Methodology

In order to calculate the net change in property value, and thus the increase in property taxes that would fund the tax increment financing mechanism, we first needed to calculate the current property value. We determined the land value capture boundary by calculating the total lot area, by current zoning designation, along the part of Utica that would require a new zoning designation. We then included the total lot area, by current zoning designation, of all lots within a half-mile radius of the new IBX station. Using a market analysis of recent developments within our site, we calculated the value per square foot for each zoning designation. Using the value per square foot and NYC’s FAR by zoning, we obtained the value per lot area for each zoning. The value per lot area, multiplied by the total lot area, gave us the current total land value of the value capture boundary.

Next, we needed to determine the total land value after the IBX opens and a rezoning occurs. To calculate the effect of the IBX on land values, we assumed value increases based on distance to the IBX station. The half-mile station boundary was divided into three equidistant radius and value increases were applied from comparable case studies. We calculated a new value per lot area based on the IBX value increases coupled with the new zoning designations and FAR of the M1 and C8-1, which allowed us to calculate the total net property value increase. The residential zones within the boundary were not assumed to undergo a rezoning and thus was only subject to the value increase based on distance to the station.



Tax Increment Financing Formula

Ensuring Financial Feasibility

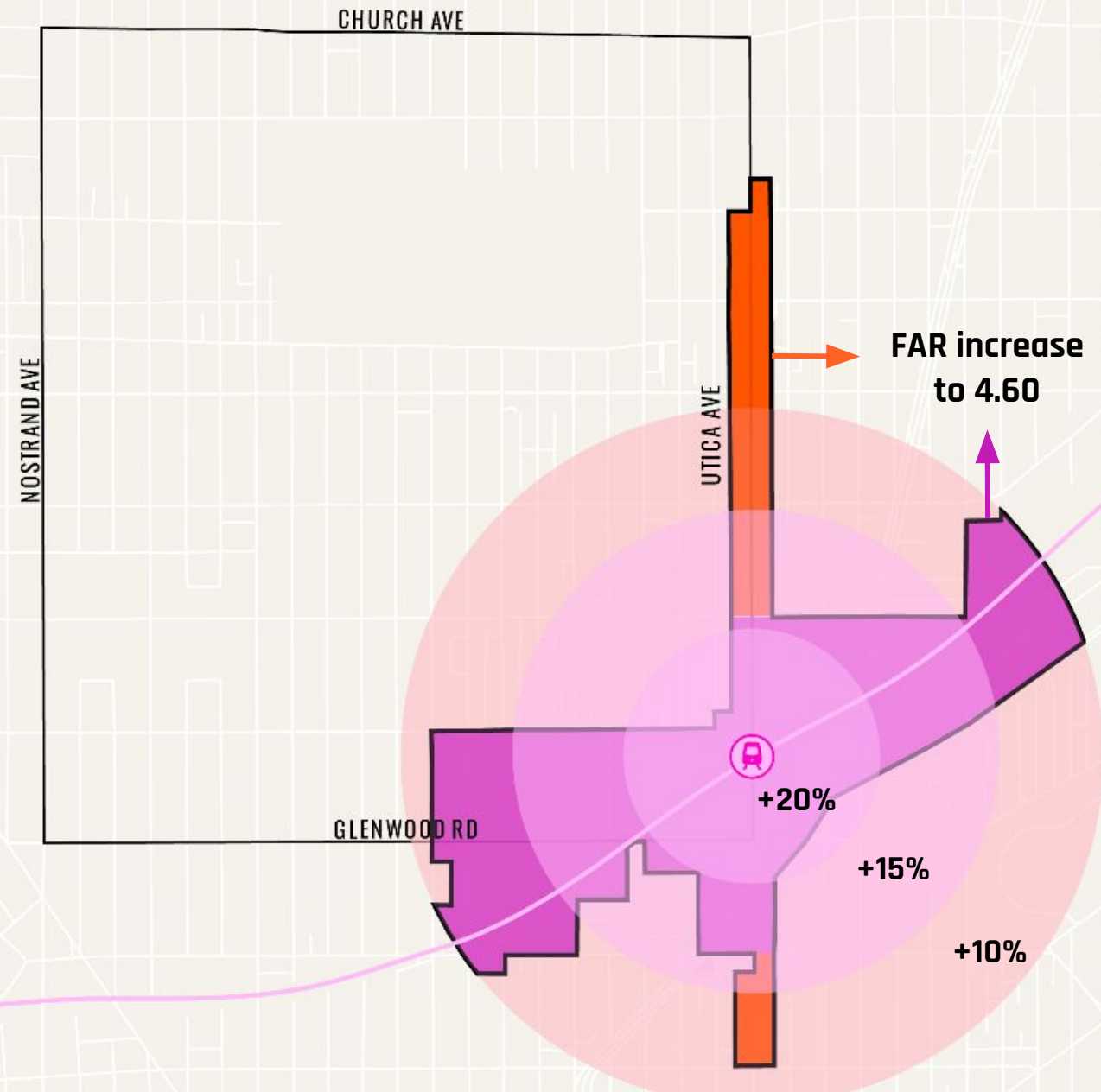
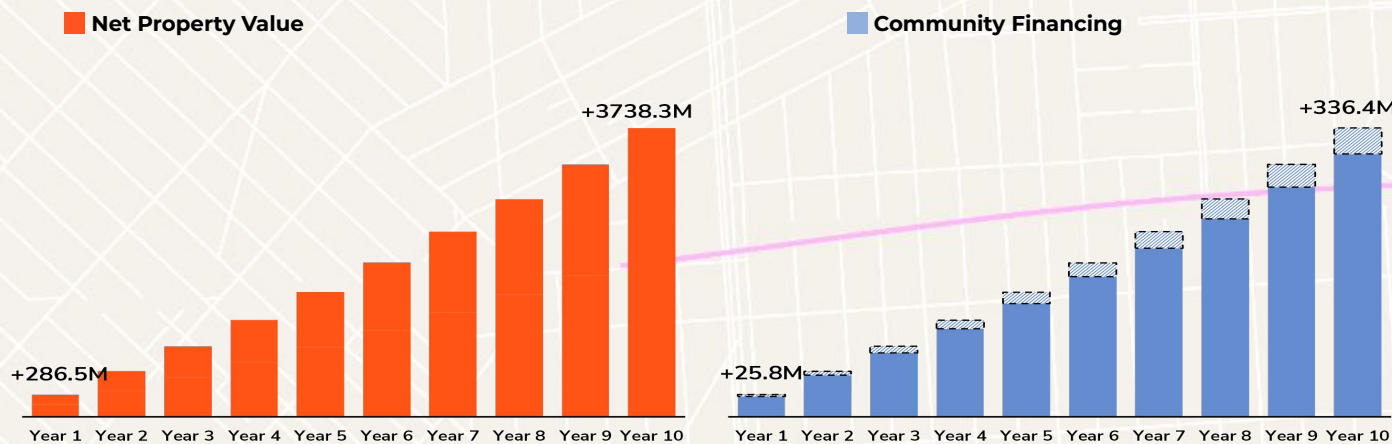
Net Property Value

The activation of Utica and the introduction of the IBX is estimated to create \$3.7 billion in net property value within our site area over a ten year period. Our land value calculation assumes a rezoning of the M-1 and C8-1 zones, increasing the FAR of both zones from 1.00 to 4.60, a FAR more suited for the zoning necessary to activate Utica. Value increase for lots within a 0.16 mile radius of the station was assumed at 20% and decreased as distance from the station increased. The FAR increase alone is responsible for over \$2 billion of property value creation within the M-1 and C8-1 zones. Once a net property value was determined, comparable developments were used to determine a reasonable rate of redevelopment of 8% annually. By year ten, 80% of the LVC boundary is assumed to be redeveloped. The activation of Utica will likely call for a special zoning distinct that ensures developers allocate space for potential community facilities in exchange for density bonuses, like NYC's FRESH program.

Community Financing

With a net property value increase of \$3.7 billion, and New York City's average property tax rate of 30%, we calculated an estimated \$1.1 billion of incremental property tax revenue for the city. Using tax increment financing, the city can issue a bond based on a percentage of these tax increases that can be managed by an East Flatbush local authority. Our model assumes that 30% of the new tax revenue will be allocated to a community fund, representing \$336 million of community financing over ten years. The financing from this fund can be used for placemaking and management of the Utica corridor, for further development of community facilities, and more.

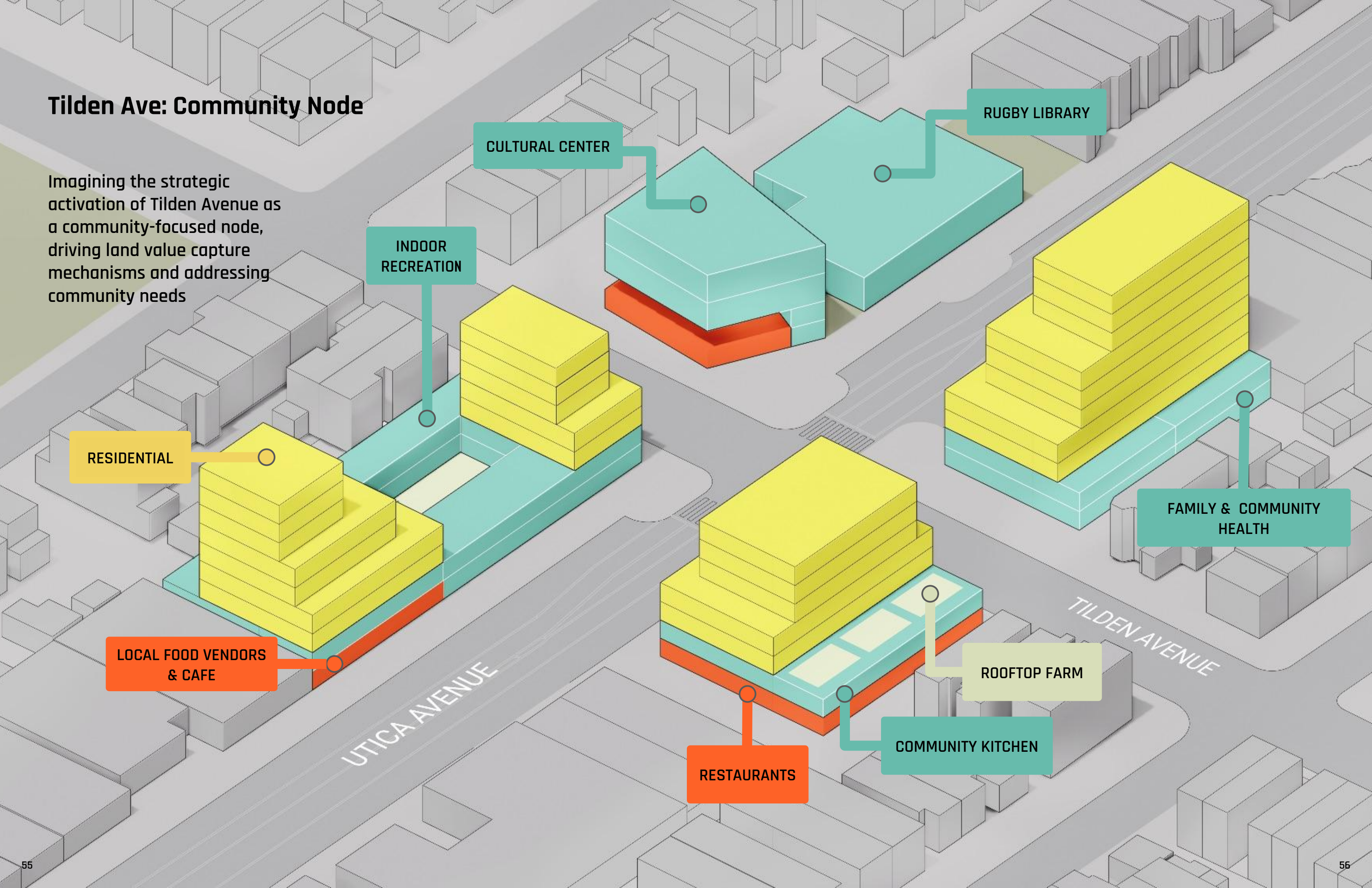
With the financing secured, next our studio sought to dive into more detail about what nodal development backed by LVC mechanisms could look like, as well as a range of community facilities inspired by our discussions with Brooklyn Level Up.



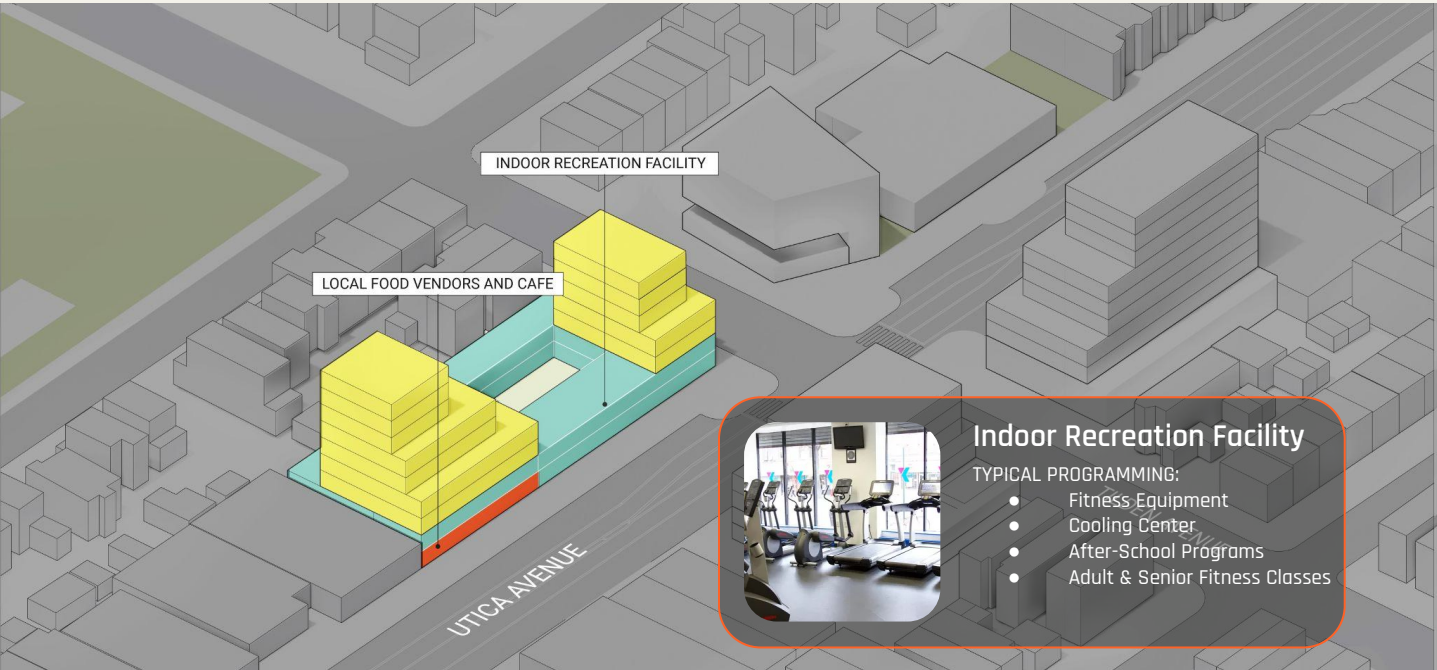
- IBX Value Radius
- ▭ Proposed Rezoning Boundary
- C8-1 Zoning District
- M1 Zoning District
- Interborough Express (IBX) Route
- ⊙ Proposed Interborough Express (IBX) Station

Tilden Ave: Community Node

Imagining the strategic activation of Tilden Avenue as a community-focused node, driving land value capture mechanisms and addressing community needs



Community Node Division of Uses



Indoor Recreation Facility

The proposed indoor recreational facility aims to serve as a dedicated local community space that accommodates different recreational activities and programs for all age ranges. Given the proximity to a few local senior centers, middle schools, and high schools, this facility will provide the community with a larger space to hold after-school programs, adult and senior fitness classes. A secondary purpose for this facility is to serve as a sanctuary during days with extreme heat. The only nearby cooling center identified by NYC Parks is Tilden Playground, therefore, an indoor cooling facility can help accommodate larger groups of residents seeking shelter from severe weather conditions.

Development Components and Estimated Costs:

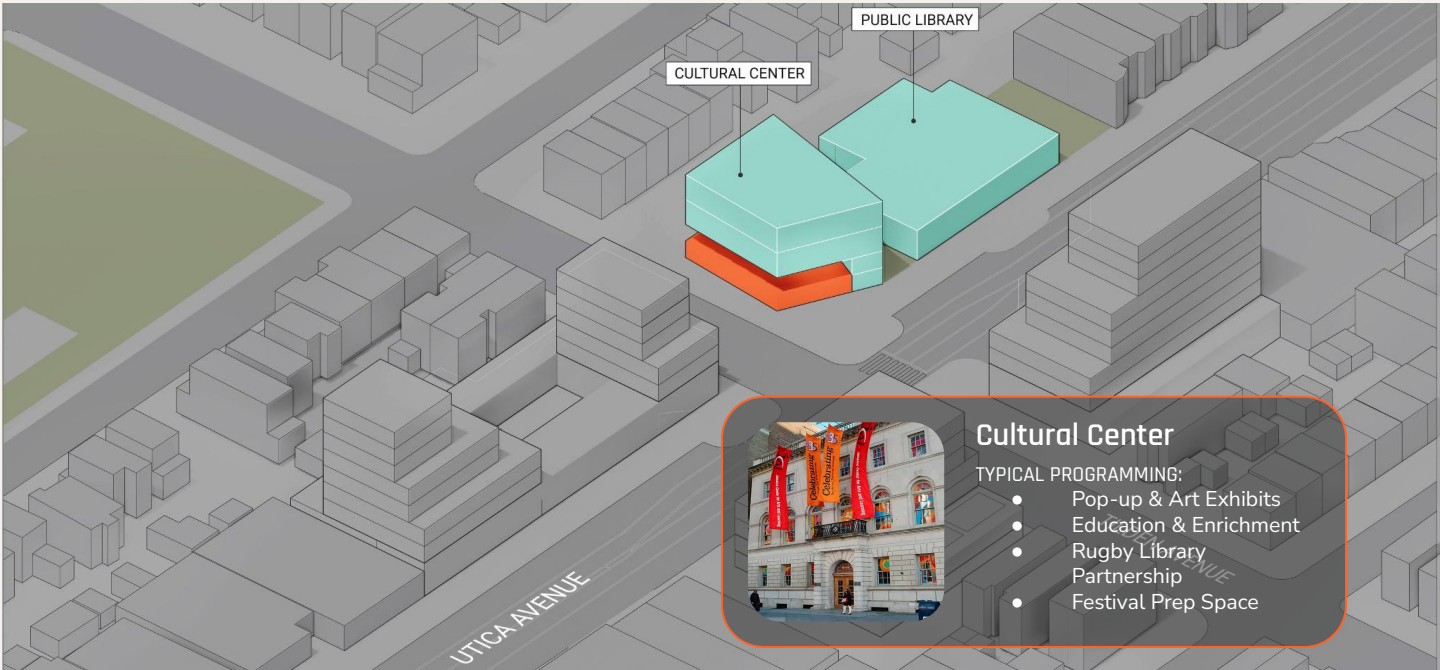
- Total sf: 32,613
- Cost per sf: \$236
- Estimated Cost: \$7,696,668

Precedent

Flatbush YMCA, a community-focused nonprofit located at 1401 Flatbush Ave, serves as a localized example of a full-service indoor recreation facility that assists the community’s diverse fitness and personal needs and goals. The facility provides youth and summer programs, teen leadership programs, seasonal events, and much more for youth, adults, and seniors. Further, Flatbush YMCA extends their assistance to Immigrants through their New Americans Initiative, which provides community members with support and services regarding immigration status and other related concerns.

Precedent Development Components:

- Lot sf: 19,755
- Total sf: 25, 545
- Community Facility: 25,545 sf
- Zoning: R5B with C2-4 overlay



Cultural Center

Given the vibrant and dynamic Afro-Caribbean culture of East Flatbush, this proposed cultural center will provide the community with a formalized space to learn, share, and strengthen cultural ties and ways of knowing. The proposed development will further complement the educational and cultural programs that the Rugby Library organizes. Currently, the community prepares for the West Indian Parade at across the street from Bracci Fence & Ironworks at an underutilized and vacant building. This cultural center can serve as an official designated space for the community to prepare and organize annual cultural events and festivals in closer proximity to neighboring residents along Utica Avenue.

Development Components and Estimated Costs:

- Total sf: 14,138
- Cost per sf: \$206
- Estimated Cost: \$2,912,428

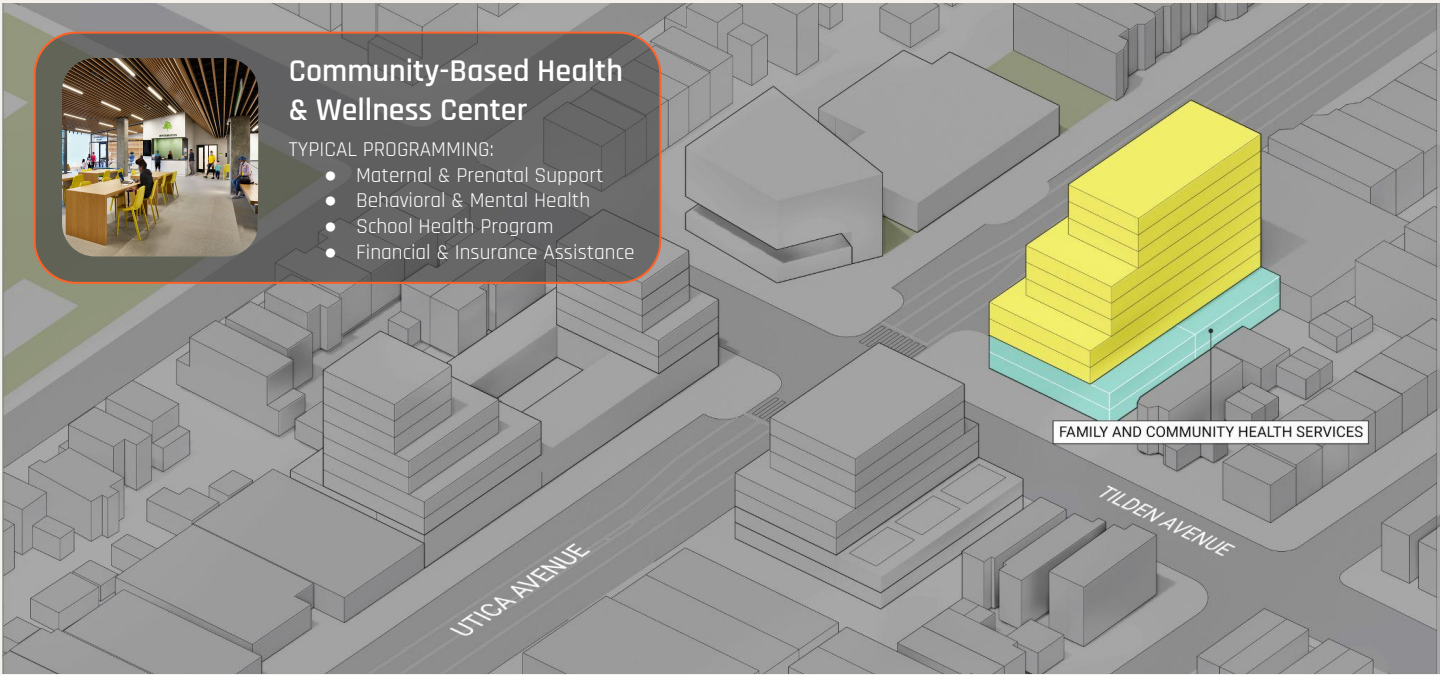
Precedent

The Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning (JCAL), located at 161-4 Jamaica Ave, is an example of an arts organization that has provided the Southeast Queens community with more than 50 years of cultural arts and learning. This multidisciplinary arts center offers accessible education programs, supports art and performance enrichment programs, and creates a welcoming environment for artists and performers to live, work, and play. Additionally, JCAL hosts and organizes cultural festivals, and also provides rental services and space for art galleries, rehearsal spaces, music practice rooms, and much more.

Precedent Development Components:

- Lot sf: 9,500
- Total sf: 10,500
- Community Facility: 10,500 sf
- Zoning: C6-3 and Special Downtown Jamaica District (DJ)

Community Node Division of Uses



Community-Health & Wellness

Brooklyn Level Up has found that the community often relies on services from Brookdale and Kings County, which are not in district. Therefore, the proposed community-based health and services has the opportunity to provide East Flatbush with a local full-service community-based facility with comprehensive care and support programs. Some important priorities for this service may include maternal and prenatal care, mental health and youth services, partnerships with local schools and organizations, as well as financial and insurance assistance. Providing well-rounded care for all age groups will be key to enhancing quality of life and community well-being.

Development Components and Estimated Costs:

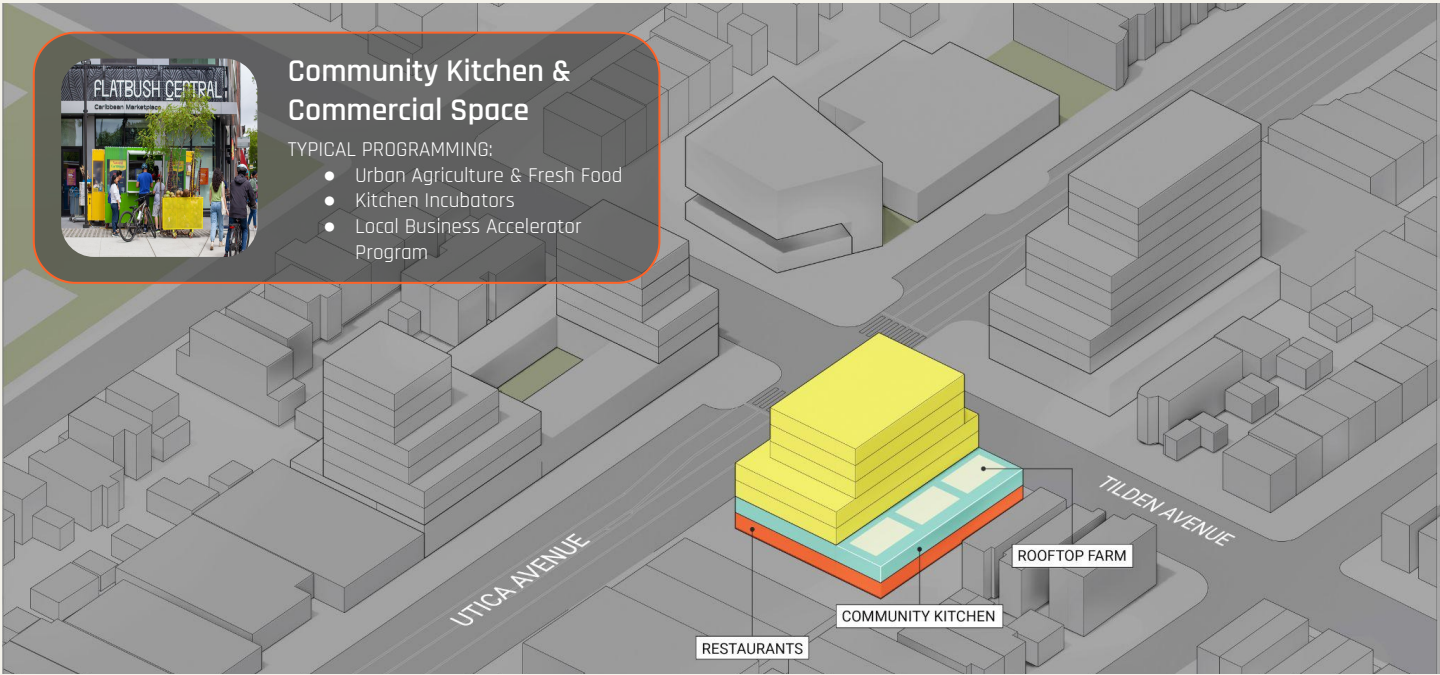
- Total sf: 20,321
- Cost per sf: \$236
- Estimated Cost: \$4,796,756

Precedent

The Cypress Hills East New York Community Center, located at 276 Chestnut Street, is a part of an affordable mixed-use residential building that was developed and operated by locally-based organizations that have a large presence in their community. The two-story community center includes workforce development training, community kitchens, college access counseling, and healthy food access. Although the proposed community-health and wellness center on Tilden Avenue is primarily focusing on health/wellness needs, the management structure of and diverse offered services is one that the proposed development on Tilden Ave can emulate and take inspiration from.

Precedent Development Components:

- Lot sf: 28,450
- Total sf: 250,853
- Community Facility: 25,545 sf
- Zoning: R5B with C2-4 overlay



Community Kitchen

The proposed community kitchen aims to provide additional space for local entrepreneurs and food businesses to accelerate their businesses. Finding a formalized space to expand on one's business can be costly and challenging, so this development intends to reduce business entry barriers, especially for M/WBEs. Further, the additional commercial space will include flexible commercial space that can accommodate long-term, short-term, and pop-up vendors. Lastly, the rooftop farming facilities will allow local businesses to grow the necessary fresh produce that they need, while also providing green infrastructure measures such as rainwater capture and reduce local heat index.

Development Components and Estimated Costs:

- Total sf: 10,239
- Cost per sf: \$212
- Estimated Cost: \$2,170,668

Precedent

Flatbush Central Caribbean Marketplace, located at 800 Flatbush Avenue, provides community space and is a part of the new Caton Flats mixed-use development that will provide 255 affordable homes. The Marketplace offers a space for the Afro-Caribbean community in Flatbush to explore and kick-start their entrepreneurial endeavours. The commercial facility includes a Caribbean food hall, shared commercial kitchen, bar and lounge, and affordable rental spaces for small, independent business owners. The community-based model and management of this space is also something that can help inspire the community kitchen and commercial space that is being proposed along Tilden Avenue.

Precedent Development Components:

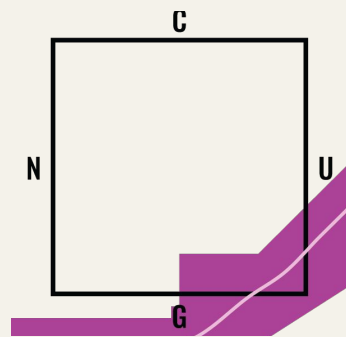
- Lot sf: 31,855
- Total sf: 260,807
- Community Facility: 20,000 sf
- Zoning: R7A with C2-4 overlay

Tilden Community View



Current Conditions

Manufacturing Zone



Manufacturing Zone Goals



The selected site is situated within the Flatlands Industrial Business Zone, intersected directly by the expected IBX light-rail line and positioned in a portion of the manufacturing zone slated for a station.

Site Context

The site is located in the southwestern portion of the Flatlands Industrial Business Zone (IBZ). It is bounded by Utica Avenue to the east, Glenwood Road to the south, East 46th Street to the west, and Farragut Road to the north. IBZs are part of a city-wide program to offer qualifying businesses tax credits to relocate to these areas, incentivizing investment within designated manufacturing zones. Despite a prohibition on residential development, the area may be zoned out of IBZ status, given the introduction of an IBX station.

Goal Formulation

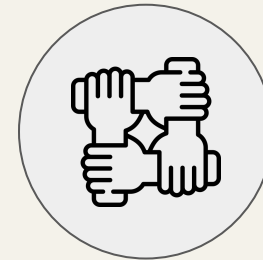
If transit-oriented development were to emerge around the IBX station, it could serve as a catalyst for community development. This potential inspired us to use Brooklyn Level Up's interests to define specific goals for our focus area. Three key narratives emerged: 1. The site has the capacity for a mix of updated uses, 2. There is an opportunity to retain and promote affordable residential and manufacturing space through a specialized strategy, 3. It is crucial to align new development with the skills and needs of the existing East Flatbush workforce.

Strategy



Physical:

Provide a vibrant development model that improves connectivity for pedestrians and balances diversity of uses and users.



Social:

Envision a gathering spot where community members can congregate at or walk to for work.



Management:

Propose a non-profit manufacturing center with a management structure allowing Brooklyn Level Up to facilitate a community say in tenanting.



Financial:

Propose a financing structure leveraging tax incentives, low income housing funds, and utilizing relationships with local resources to enhance financial feasibility of development project.

Current Site Conditions

A mix of light industrial uses primarily characterizes the area and has the potential to blossom into a vibrant economic node due to the upcoming IBX station. Presently, the job market in East Flatbush includes a variety of service industry roles, retail positions, and some manufacturing jobs. However, these are under pressure from rising real estate values and a changing urban landscape. There are several businesses in the zone that are long-time area staples, like Glenwood Masonry and several Caribbean-bound shipment providers, but there are also empty warehouses in which large amounts of space sit unused.

The potential for the area to become a vibrant economic node could inspire excitement and a sense of possibility amongst residents. For our client, this area opens up opportunities for sustainable manufacturing jobs. This development is not just about attracting new businesses and industries to the area, but also about fostering significant job creation.

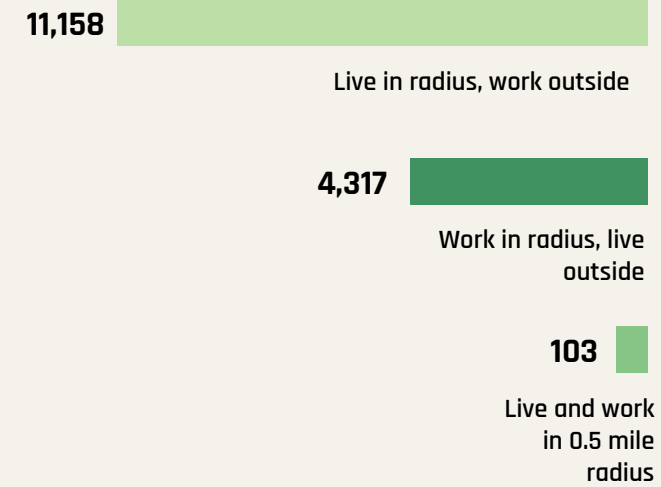
Opportunities for economic development are particularly significant, given the strategic position of the IBX station, which could transform the area into a critical transit and commercial hub. If we are to reimagine this site, one of the first challenges to address is the current FAR or floor area ratio. FAR is a zoning concept measuring the relationship between the total building floor area and the size of the land on which the building is constructed. It is calculated by dividing the total floor area of a building by the total area of the plot or lot. FAR indicates how high you can build on a given parcel of land.

Currently, our site area zoning regulations specify an FAR of either 1.0 or 5.0 for a plot of 10,000 square feet. This means the total floor area of all buildings on that plot cannot exceed either 10,000 or 50,000 square feet depending on the land parcel. A higher FAR allows for more building area, which typically translates into taller or more extensive structures. The potential new development of this area with the IBX station in mind may yield a higher FAR, with potential to add new employment opportunities relevant to the skills of the neighborhood's workforce.

An analysis of the area reveals significant underutilization. There are many parking lots, open storage for warehouses, and buildings limited to just one story. This underutilization is not just a missed opportunity, but a call to action for the community, potential investors, and urban planners to collaborate and unlock the area's full economic potential.

There are currently 816 jobs in this 113 acre portion of the manufacturing district. However, 25% of the area remains unbuilt, yielding much land to be developed and leased to community-based organizations.

Existing usage of the 0.5 mi radius around the manufacturing area:



Site Design

In envisioning the future of the manufacturing area, we prioritized accessibility and differentiating between dead-end and continuous roads, while considering the adjacency of residential and non-residential zones. A significant emphasis is also placed on incorporating green spaces, which are crucial for enhancing social interaction and improving environmental quality.

To create a connection to the IBX station, we suggest distinguishing one middle road as a pedestrian-centric thoroughfare. This road will serve as a division between land uses, with industrial applications delineated in purple on the left side of the road. The industrial area can be concentrated on dead-ended streets, optimized for truck loading and less pedestrian activity. A dedicated truck lane

is also proposed between the manufacturing zones to ensure efficient routing and reduce environmental impact. Conversely, the area towards Utica Avenue has more potential to be a commercially vibrant street—here we propose a mix of residential, commercial, and community uses that are inherently more pedestrian-friendly.

Connecting north and south lots via a pedestrian throughway mitigates the barriers imposed by the railway, promoting easier access across the sectors and enhancing the station's centrality. The site's reorganization separating different uses based on their proximity to the core manufacturing area and the revitalized Utica Avenue, helps to create an active plaza space around the station. Here we emphasize a concentration of trees and green space, where possible.

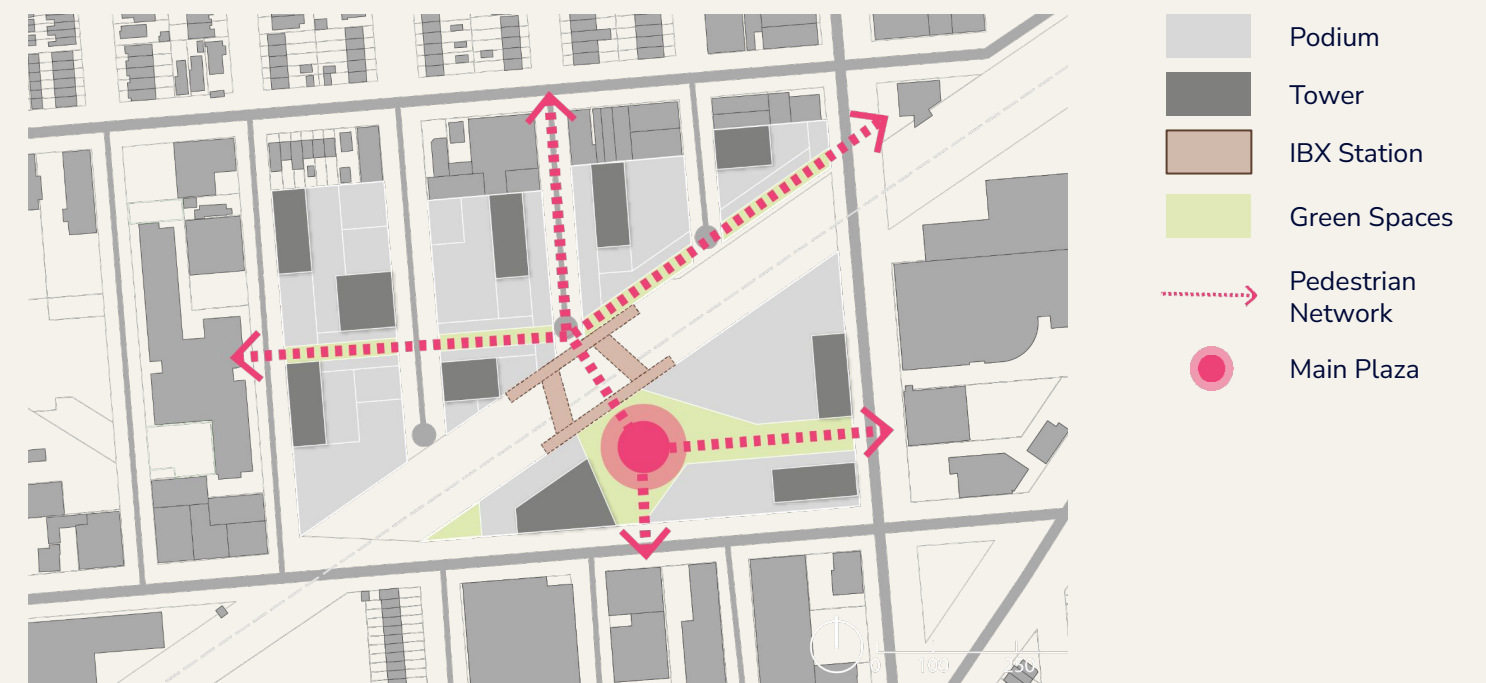


At the current site, pedestrians must navigate shared streets dominated by manufacturing activity, creating a challenging environment that often prompts residents to avoid the area altogether.

Site Uses and Accessibility



Pedestrian Network and Public Spaces



Division of Uses

Our reimagining of the current manufacturing area aims to maximize the buildable square footage and potential job additions, all while maintaining realistic financial feasibility. Maximizing the job potential demands the introduction of multi-level mixed-use buildings (a departure from the one-story, 1.0 FAR zoned buildings currently on site). Therefore, we considered several different building typologies that synergized with manufacturing, including a manufacturing/office combination (compatible with small entrepreneurs in industrial co-work space or scaling manufacturing businesses in need of flex office space). We also included building typologies where residential space is placed above manufacturing. This mix both contributes to East Flatbush's multifamily housing stock while retaining the area's light-manufacturing character and offers an investment opportunity attractive to local developers seeking to build and ultimately sell new apartment buildings.

It was also crucial to emphasize the inclusion of ample community space within the development, designed to serve various purposes such as religious or event gatherings, or to house workforce development centers that support innovative manufacturing industries. Our discussions with Brooklyn Level Up highlighted the current manufacturing area's lack of smooth integration with the surrounding community. Incorporating community space at the ground level proved to be financially viable and aligns with a primary objective for the site. By serving as a dynamic 'third space' where residents can congregate, it also supports job creation—particularly in sustainable industries—and addresses environmental concerns through the integration of new green spaces.

To estimate the number of job additions on site, we referenced precedents of workers per square foot across existing manufacturing districts in NYC. The common warehouse use of buildings currently on site typically accommodates approximately one worker for every 2,000 square feet of space, which can be reduced to one for 530 square feet for manufacturing-specific uses, or even one for 300 square feet for innovative manufacturing uses. Using the real square footage of the site, we worked backward from these data points to estimate the total jobs a manufacturing area with new uses could generate. We then divided the site by use, based on public interests and the spatial needs of each property type to ensure it generates sufficient rental income.

Residential - 52%

960 total apartment units: **615** affordable and **345** market rate

Office - 14%

Non-profit space, prefabrication office, global shipping logistics, life sciences

Commercial - 10%

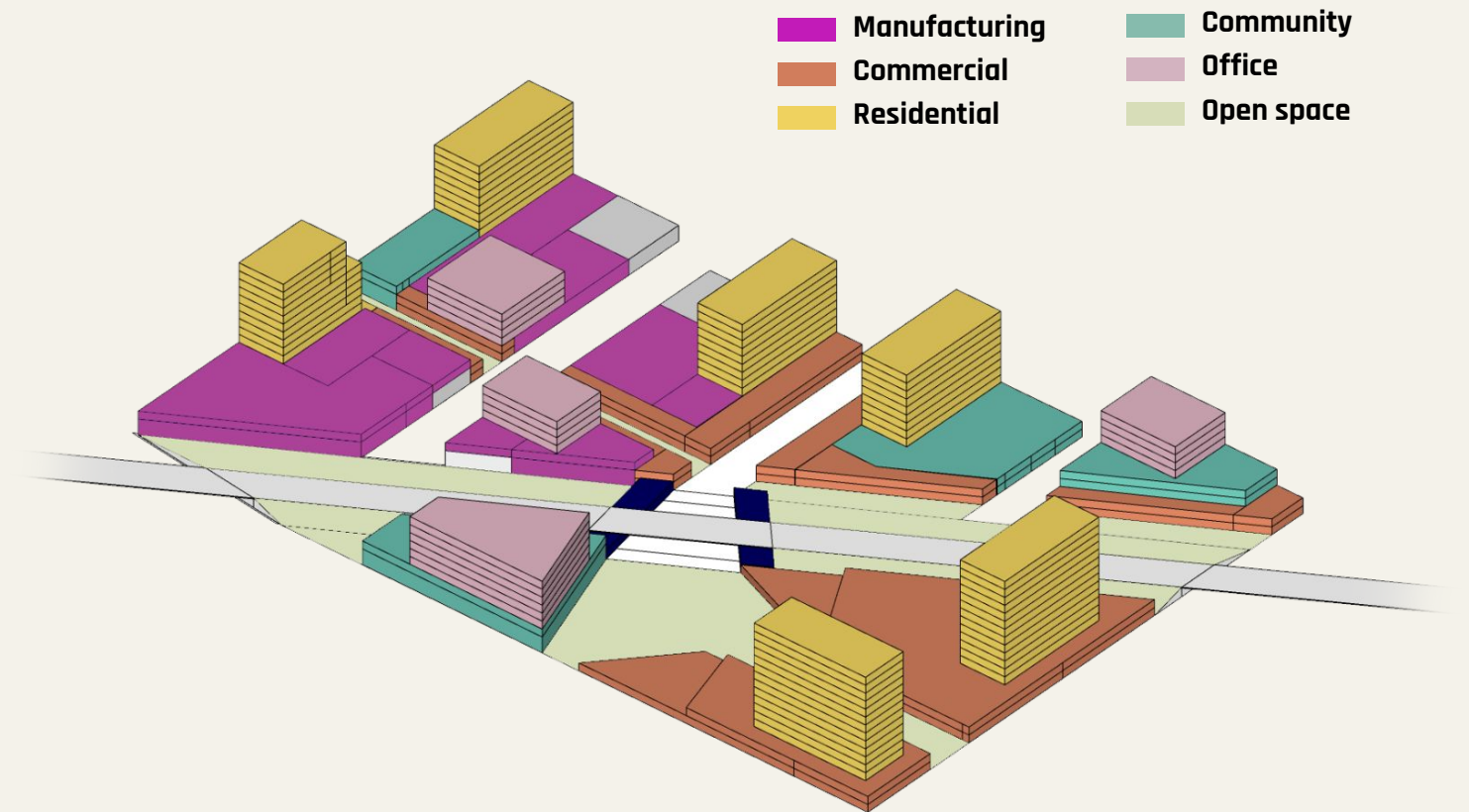
Anchored grocery, pharmacy, cafe, fast-casual dining

Community - 14%

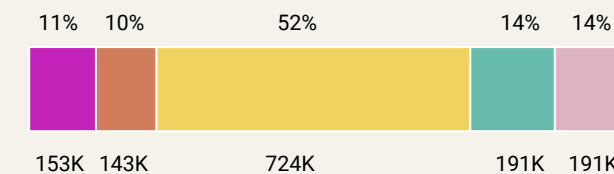
Green training manufacturing, dance venue, religious space

Manufacturing - 11%

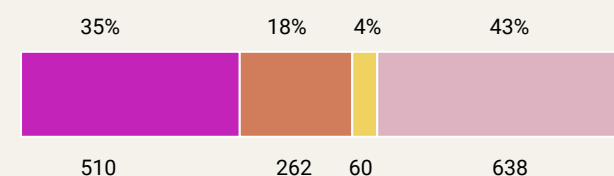
Light-manufacturing, industrial, wholesale supplies



Gross Floor Area: 1.4M sf



Number of Jobs: 1,470



Zoning:

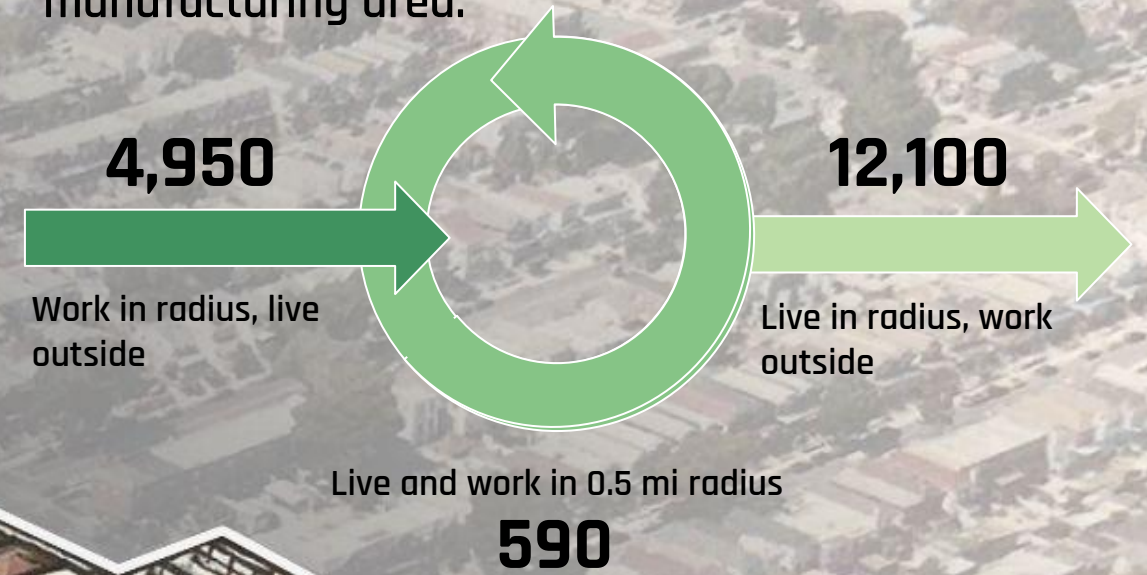
Building Coverage Ratio:	80% (365K sf)
Open Space Ratio:	20% (84K sf)
Assumed FAR:	3.1
Max. Building Height:	150 ft

Rent Value:

Market Rate Housing:	\$72 PSF
Commercial:	\$62 PSF
Office:	\$62 PSF
Affordable Housing:	\$44 PSF
Community:	\$39 PSF
Manufacturing Center:	\$21 PSF
Average:	\$50 PSF

In Perspective

Potential for the 0.5 mi radius around the manufacturing area:



LIGHT-MANUFACTURING SPACE

EVENT SPACES

615 AFFORDABLE UNITS
345 MARKET RATE UNITS

MANUFACTURING TRAINING CENTER

POTENTIAL IBX TRAIN STATION

1,470
Jobs on site

84,000 SF
Open Space

Glenwood Road

Utica Ave

Street Life



Division of Uses: Manufacturing

An interest for the site was to examine possibilities for “greening” manufacturing jobs and to explore options for workforce development in sustainable manufacturing sectors. Fortunately, this interest matches timely with the city’s focus on expanding the green jobs market.

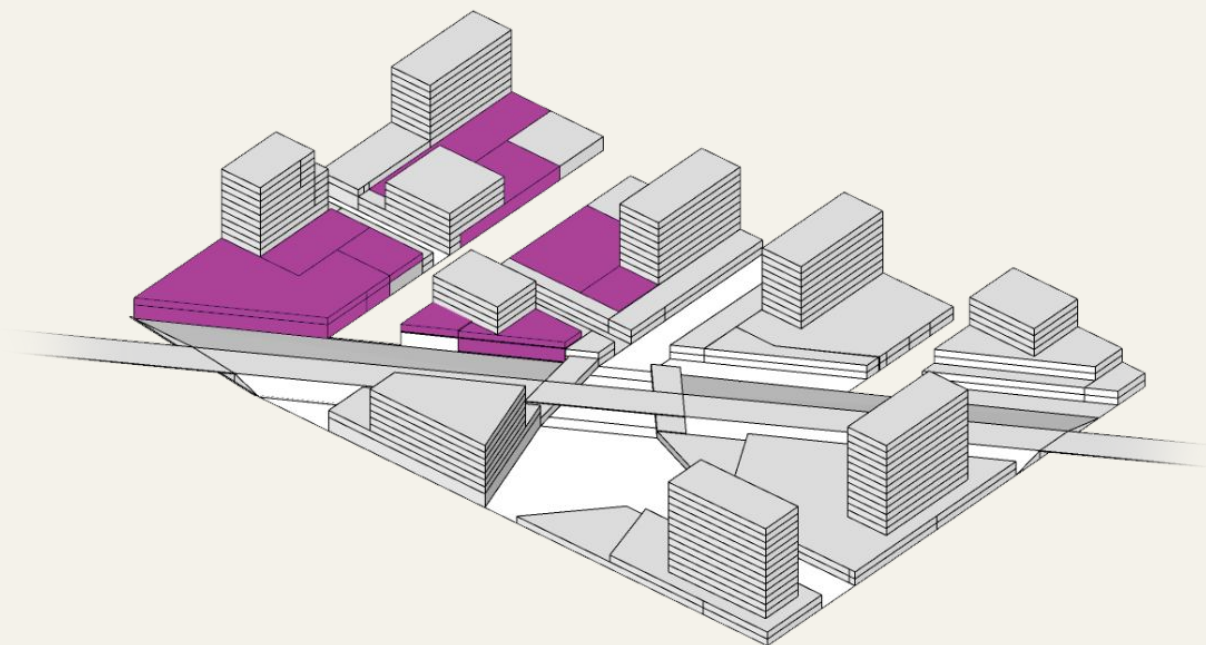
We referenced a recently released city report, The Green Economy Action Plan, which defines 21 “Focus Occupations” critical to the sustainable growth of the green economy. These focus occupations largely encompass existing trade jobs that provide middle-wage jobs at a lower barrier to entry, however, with an updated focus to integrate sustainable and/or reused construction materials into practice.

In our reimagining of the site, we researched possible new manufacturing uses that could add to the area. Below is a sample of either sustainable industries that could fit within a light manufacturing district, or those already compatible with the spatial requirements of small-scale mixed-use manufacturing buildings.

The following chart details possible manufacturing jobs that could be added or retained in a new manufacturing area. These focus occupations deemed relevant to the city’s future green economy were referenced against existing businesses observed in the Flatlands IBZ to maximize compatibility potential.

Possible Light-Manufacturing Uses

- Prefabricated ADU Construction
- Entrepreneurial Makerspace
- Material Upcycling
- Commercial/Commissary Kitchens
- Solar Technology Production
- Mixed-Use Production (light-manufacturing adjoined to office space)



Manufacturing Zone Compatible Jobs by Barriers to Entry

Focus Occupation	Median Wage (2023)	NYC Jobs (2023)	Most Common Educational Attainment (2023)	Projected Growth (2020 - 2030)
Construction Laborers	\$60,000	15,330	High school diploma or equivalent	23.2%
Solar Distributors/ Installers	\$62,500	N/A	High school diploma or equivalent	N/A
HVAC Mechanics/ Installers	\$77,780	7,280	High school diploma or equivalent	17.9%
Plumbers	\$81,200	10,380	High school diploma or equivalent	21.6%
Electricians	\$88,370	16,920	High school diploma or equivalent	28.4%
Facility Managers	\$103,630	3,720	High school diploma or equivalent	20.8%

A sample of ‘Focus Occupations’ from the Mayor’s Office of Talent and Workforce Development’s 2024 ‘Green Economy Action Plan’. These occupations are considered integral to the city’s green economy growth as they anticipate demand for decarbonized, green-specific expertise while offering economically stable careers for all New Yorkers.

Community Engaged Use: Manufacturing Center

Within the 191,000 square feet of proposed community space, we aimed to identify one anchor tenant that could exemplify community participation in a new manufacturing district. We propose an affordable manufacturing center with a green training center as a ground-floor tenant. We believe this recommendation is in line with three interests of a productive, equitable site: a center owned and operated by a non-profit can create high job density, hire locally, and ensure sustainable manufacturing processes. Furthermore, this space can actively engage the community, facilitating skill development and growth within a future “green” manufacturing area.

We referenced examples of existing manufacturing training programs in the city as precedents for the type of workforce training that could occur in a new community space. Several programs offer training in technical assistance among emerging sustainable industries like, for example, solar installation. Other programs work with existing manufacturing trades to promote decarbonized energy practices that cause less production waste.

The city aims to establish green training facilities in each borough, specifically to train the technical aspects of

the sustainable construction industry. This innovative training program, while unprecedented in its scope, could be proposed on-site.

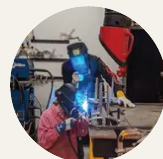
If the new zone were to include new, non-industrial uses, there is an opportunity to concentrate existing manufacturing businesses in a vertical mixed-use building, anchored by the ground floor green training facility. Existing city policy emphasizes the protection of affordable manufacturing space through “stewardship models” in which mission-driven non-profit owners manage an industrial center, leased at an affordable rate to local businesses or manufacturing entrepreneurs.

These centers typically have a board of directors, and we suggest a tenancing model in which an appointed tenant advisory committee made up of local representatives selects tenants to occupy affordable manufacturing space. The city is actively seeking to implement neighborhood referral networks to assist in its green jobs training plan. Within a tenant advisory model, Brooklyn Level Up could hold a position referring neighborhood representatives who select manufacturing tenants most relevant to the East Flatbush community.

Currently Operational, Compatible Training Programs



SolarOne, Sustainable Infrastructure Assembly



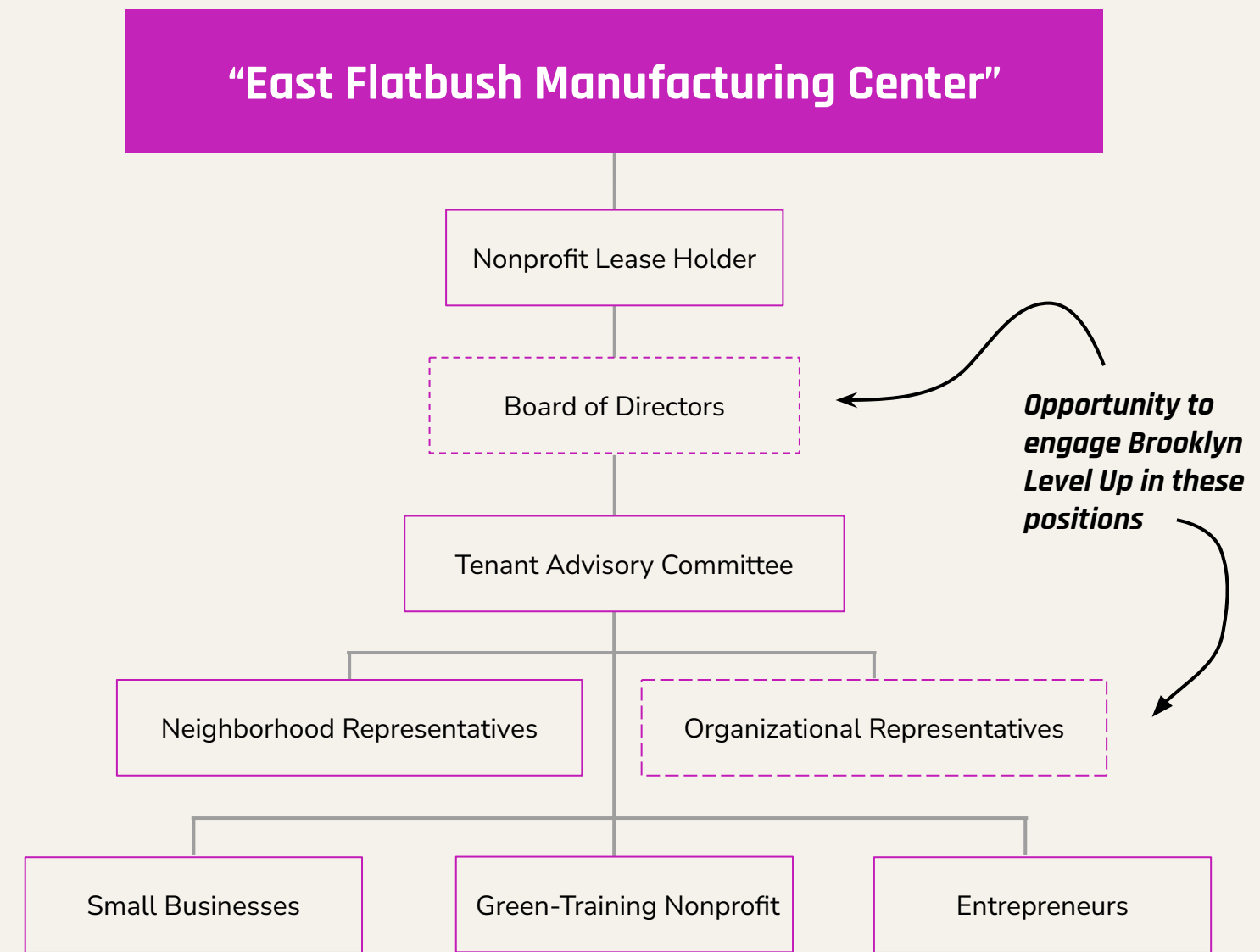
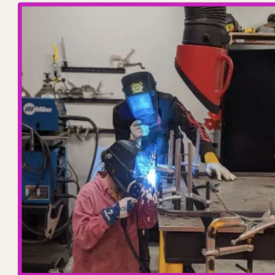
Makerspace NYC



BK NAVY YARD's CNC Operator Training



NYCHA Clean Energy Academy



Community Engaged Use: Manufacturing Center

Subsidization Strategy

The manufacturing site currently sits within the Flatlands Industrial Business Zone. These designated areas have been protected for manufacturing uses, prohibiting residential development. However, zones can lose their IBZ status—a possibility for this site if the city deems the area worthy of residential transit-oriented development around the IBX station. Recent studies reveal that 31% of all businesses in IBZs are “non-industrial”—those which take advantage of a loophole allowing non-manufacturing uses as long as they are not residential.

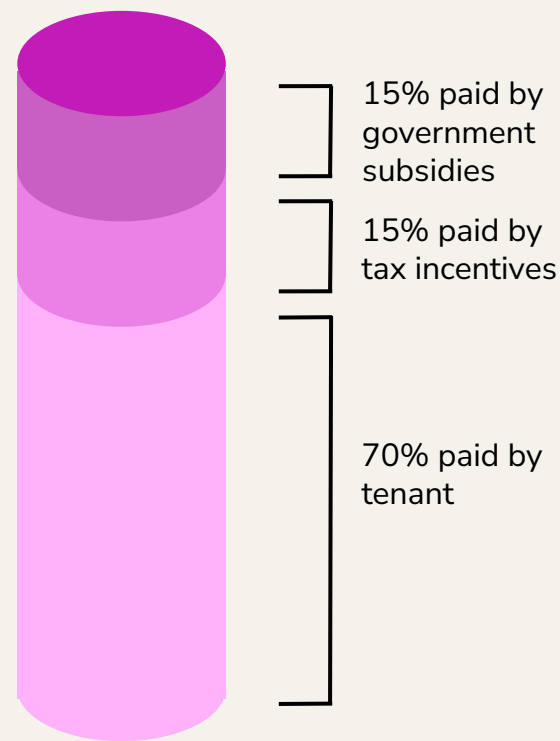
This large share of non-industrial uses raises questions about the effectiveness of the IBZ policy, which offered cash incentives to keep industrial businesses within zones to protect city manufacturing jobs and the middle-income wages at a low barrier that they provide.

In our financial modeling, manufacturing space is sustained through subsidy: in a potential rezoning, a developer would agree through the offer of tax incentives to subsidize affordable manufacturing space. Complemented by city funds for industrial development, these subsidies significantly reduce the rent cost for a local manufacturer while providing the opportunity for new residential housing as part of a rezoning.

Given spotty underutilization, the city does still encourage investment in revitalizing industrial real estate through the Industrial Development Fund. Intended to stimulate activity within manufacturing zones, this fund of more than \$150 million provides grants exclusive to non-profit developers that aid in creating affordable manufacturing space generating long-term, accessible employment opportunities.

Market rate rent for Manufacturing Center: \$30.28 per square foot

Affordable rate rent for Manufacturing Center: \$21.19 per square foot



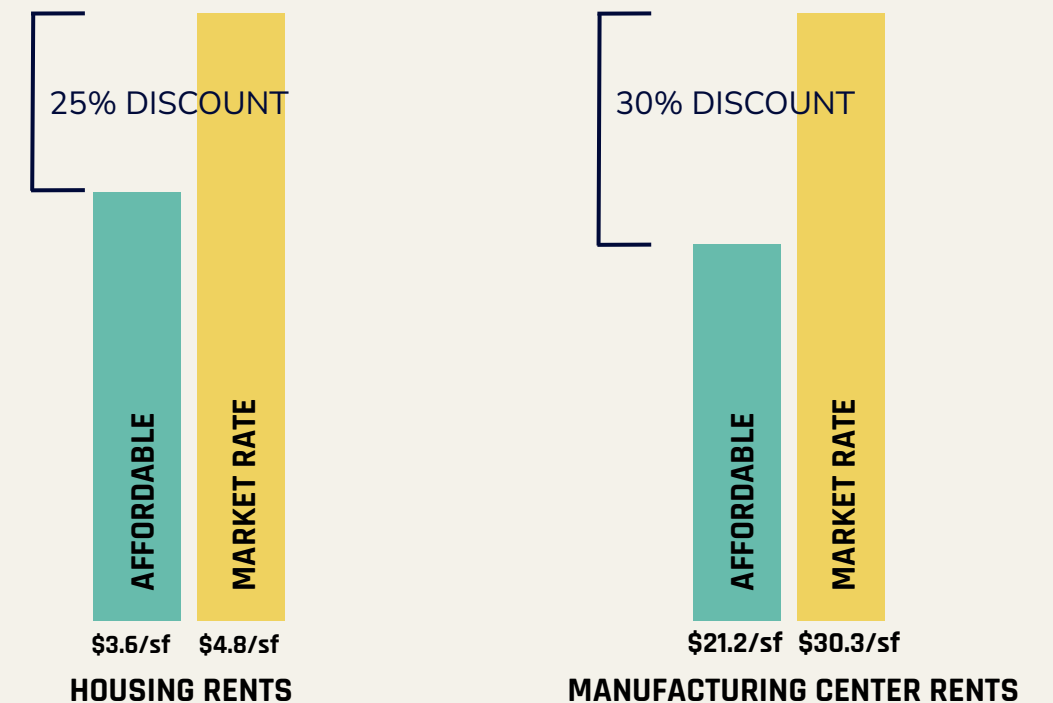
Affordable Manufacturing Space Rent Breakdown

Additional planning within the subsidization strategy conditions zoning requirements to include manufacturing in new mixed-use buildings. This generally includes requiring one FAR be designated for high-performance light industrial use groups, which in an updated manufacturing zone helps to replace most of the manufacturing space found on site, which is mostly zoned as “M-1-1” for 1.0 FAR.

We also highlight the significant role of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits in facilitating the development of 615 affordable apartments within the site. By leveraging LIHTC, we can ensure that these apartments help bolster the area as a live/work district for manufacturing workers.

This strategy was considered viable, as the 345 market rate units proposed on site at \$72 psf in rental value help balance the financial viability of the project from a development perspective.

As is being proposed at other mixed-use manufacturing with affordable housing projects in Brooklyn, developers can also leverage The New Markets Tax Credit Program. In exchange for federally administered tax credits, investments would be made through the NMTC Program to finance local businesses in the manufacturing center, with one particular focus in this program being to revitalize dormant manufacturing facilities.



Affordable manufacturing space, supported by a non-profit, and affordable housing financed by tax credits, maximize potential for individuals of many income levels to live and work near the potential new IBX Station on Utica Avenue.

Prototyping Overview

Prototyping in urban development is considered an innovative approach to city planning that incorporates real-time testing and gradual implementation of concepts before finalizing large-scale projects. This methodology has become increasingly relevant in complex urban ecosystems where traditional planning models may not sufficiently address the dynamic nature of modern cities.

The Interborough Express project exemplifies a compelling case study for the application of prototyping in urban development, particularly in the manufacturing districts along its potential route. The strategy focuses on creating a vibrant, mixed-use environment that pushes for more pedestrian connectivity and integrates various community functions - specifically manufacturing jobs. Prototyping amongst varying neighborhoods involves developing a shared set of goals.

By engaging with community organizations such as Brooklyn Level Up, the prototyping process ensures local input is integral to the development, tailoring solutions to meet the specific needs of East Flatbush and communities who value similar goals and shared cultural identities. Financial strategies that leverage tax incentives, including incremental tax benefits and potentially low-income housing funds, are considered to ensure the financial viability of the projects.

Residential Goals:

Establish wealth generating mechanism for homeowners and offer sustainable housing options

Commercial Goals:

Grow a healthy corridor where the community has a say in placemaking

Manufacturing Goals:

Plan for more sustainable manufacturing jobs while allowing for mixed uses



Prototyping Residential Opportunities

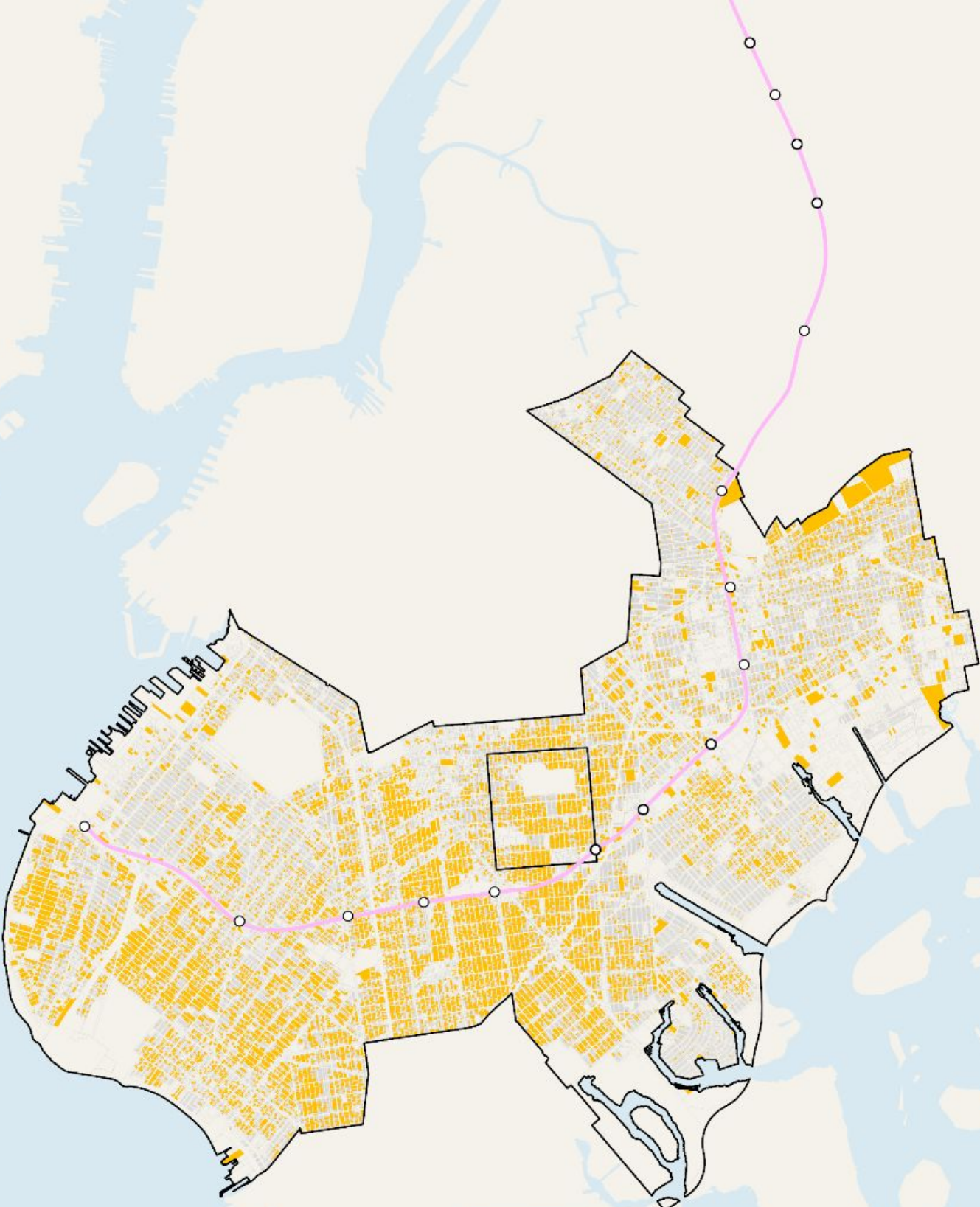
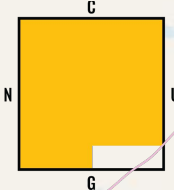
Potential for Accessory Living

Our studio's extensive work in East Flatbush has provided valuable insights into the potential of accessory dwelling units and the challenges of maintaining neighborhood character amid urban development pressures. These lessons can serve as a prototype for other community districts along the Interborough Express in Brooklyn. By understanding the specific needs and constraints of East Flatbush, we have developed a comprehensive approach that can be tailored and applied to similar neighborhoods facing comparable issues.

The physical characteristics of these community districts along the IBX reveal a substantial opportunity for ADU development. With approximately 43,000 lots featuring two buildings, these neighborhoods are replete with garages and other potential spaces for ADU conversion. This translates into the possibility of creating up to 43,000 new apartments, significantly enhancing housing availability. The presence of these garages provides a unique advantage, allowing for the seamless integration of ADUs without drastically altering the existing neighborhood fabric.

43,000 Lots with 2 Buildings!

Possibility for 43,000 new apartments



0 1 Miles

Prototyping Utica Avenue

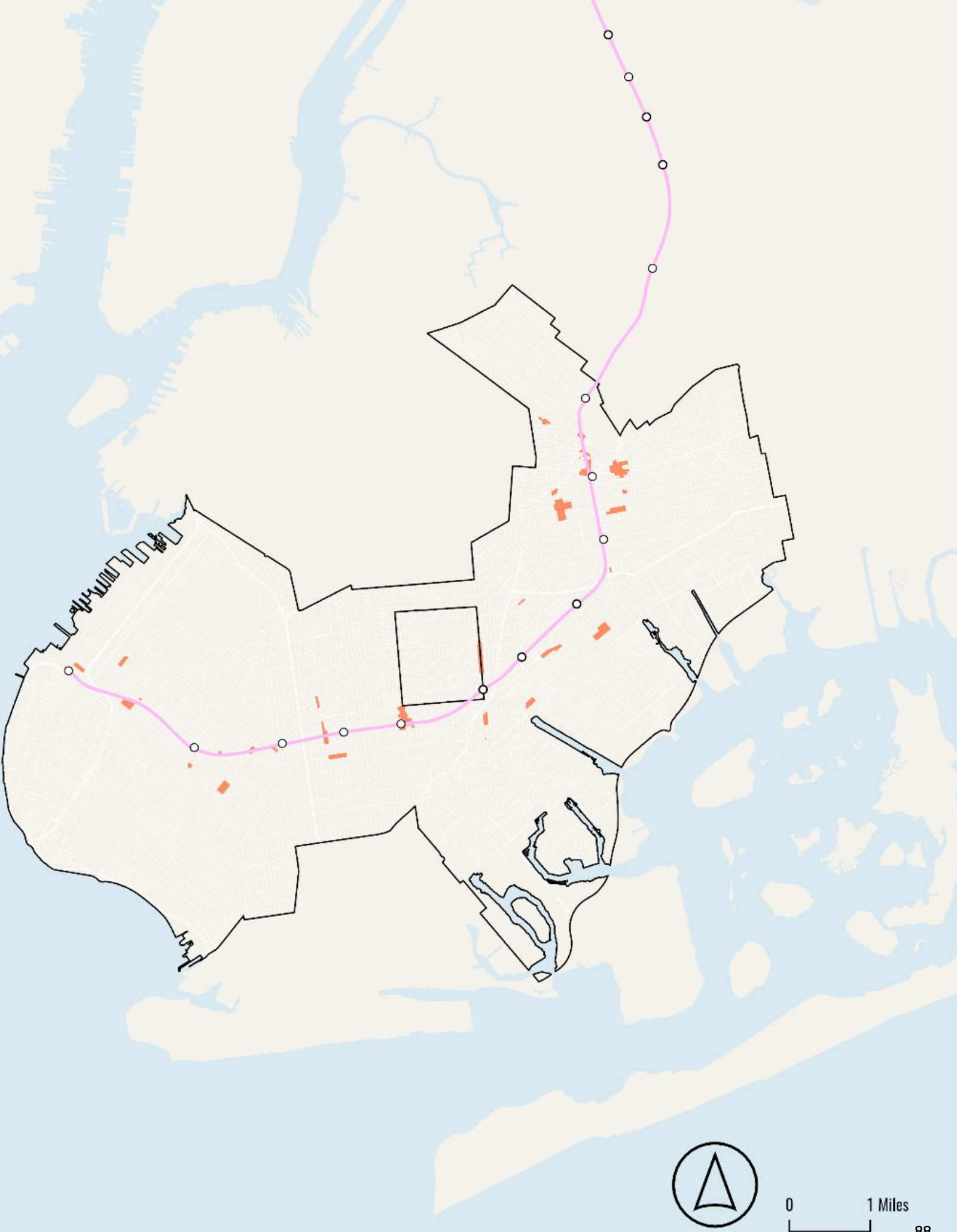
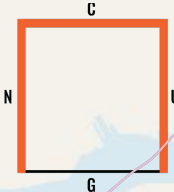
Potential for Community Financing

Our studio reimagined an underutilized commercial area with strategic development that promoted community-led development through land value capture mechanisms. We believe that the strategy employed along Utica Avenue could be applied to other underutilized commercial areas along the IBX route. It is crucial to the success of the IBX that streets within walking distance of future stations are in-line with transit-oriented principles. We believe that the strategy developed for Utica Avenue can serve as a model for transforming these areas in a way that serves the needs of the community.

There is over nine million square feet of commercial space with land use conditions similar to Utica within a half-mile radius of the incoming IBX line. Using our model's per square foot increase in value for the C8-1 land value capture, the commercial zones indicated here represent \$3.9 billion in potential community financing from capturing a portion of the increase in net property values. While we understand the limitations of this approach, we believe that this approximation illustrates the transformative potential of land value capture as a tool for equitable development.

Over 9 million square feet of commercial zones along the IBX!

Potential for \$3.9 billion in community financing from land value capture



Prototyping the Manufacturing District

Potential for Job Creation

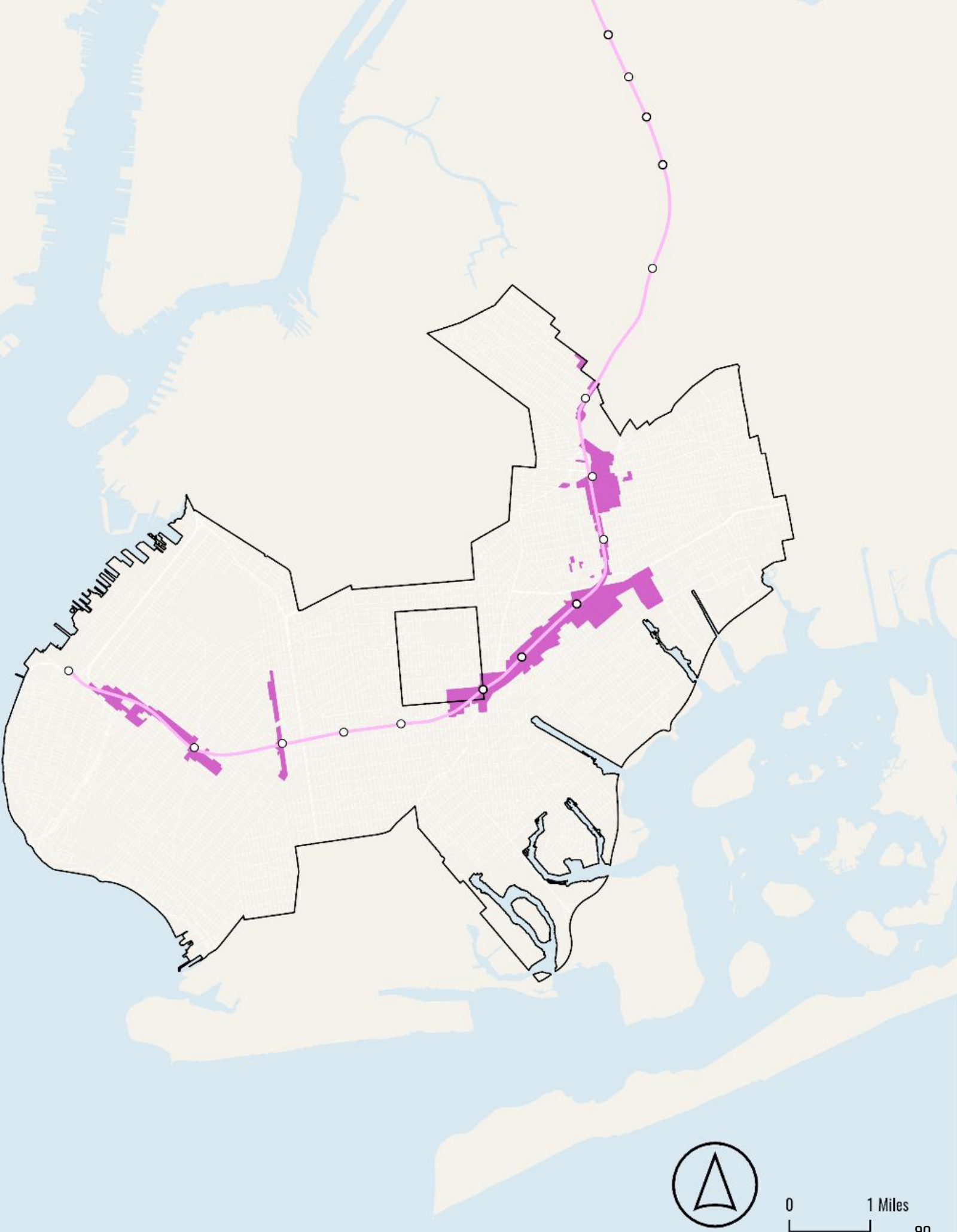
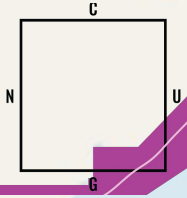
There are 57 million square feet of vacant industrial space along the zoned area that borders the IBX. This space has the potential to accommodate 60,000 jobs and can help create mixed-use environments that enhance pedestrian connectivity and integrate diverse community functions. Key initiatives include developing green manufacturing centers and training facilities that support the community's economic development while providing meaningful employment opportunities.

In addition, updated manufacturing districts can support residential and commercial areas at a symbiotic level of engagement. At the new manufacturing site, there is enough space for an accessory dwelling unit prefabrication workspace. Similarly, commercial corridors like Utica Avenue offer potential to develop more residential units that take pressure off other parts of the neighborhood and enhance connections between communities to IBX stations surrounded by manufacturing districts.

Other strategies used at the manufacturing zone have outside applicability when utilizing the prospective IBX arrival as a leveraging tool to achieve self-realized community development. The management structure of the proposed manufacturing center involves negotiating for private transit-oriented development permissions in exchange for commitments to affordable manufacturing and community spaces. This approach could be replicated along the light-rail line in Brooklyn and Queens, given community-based nonprofits, acting as an extension of community interests, are proactively integrated within the anticipatory stages of TOD.

**Over 57 million square feet
of manufacturing zone
space along IBX!**

**Space with potential to
accommodate
60,000 jobs**



Conclusion

Bracing for Change

As the surrounding neighborhood fabric of East Flatbush changes, community awareness and engagement is of utmost importance. This report is meant to be an informative, imaginative design of how the community could play a larger role in controlling the future development of East Flatbush. Our suggestions merely amalgamate what has worked in other cities with similar circumstances.

Neighborhood Commitment

The Overgrown Undergrowth studio report is a testament to our commitment to the East Flatbush community. In collaboration with organizations like Brooklyn Level Up, we believe that our work can significantly benefit the diverse stakeholders of East Flatbush. While the Interborough Express has a long way to go in terms of development, its impact will be profound and long-lasting. We believe that it is a shared responsibility of the community and its leaders to source sustainable solutions that will allow us to grow alongside the IBX.

Interdisciplinary approach

East Flatbush remains a strong Afro-Caribbean community with sound cultural values. By integrating an interdisciplinary approach such as this report, East Flatbush can remain loyal to its diverse urban fabric. By applying varying degrees of planning, design, and financial lenses, imaginative processes such as these can prepare communities for change. Rather than push change, we can welcome it.



Appendix: Case Studies

Anti-Displacement Policy Initiative. "Case Studies 2023."

Case Studies 2023

This collection of case studies explores effective strategies and initiatives aimed at combating displacement and fostering equitable community development.

Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation

An industrial park in Brooklyn that supports manufacturing and green businesses, providing a model for sustainable urban industrial development.

Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation.

CHENY Community Center

Focuses on community development initiatives in Cypress Hills, Brooklyn, including youth programs and local economic development.

Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center. GMDC.

GMDC focuses on acquiring and redeveloping industrial properties into sustainable manufacturing spaces. It aims to support small to medium-sized manufacturing enterprises by providing affordable, flexible spaces that foster job creation and economic growth within urban manufacturing sectors.

Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning

This center supports arts education and provides cultural programming to enhance community engagement in Jamaica, Queens.

Makerspace NYC

A community workspace where individuals can learn skills ranging from woodworking to 3D printing, promoting DIY culture and innovation.

New York City Council. Council Member Farah N. Louis.

Council District 45

Details the initiatives and focus areas of Council Member Farah Louis representing District 45, which includes East Flatbush and other neighborhoods.

New York City Department of City Planning. "City of Yes: Housing Opportunity."

This initiative by the NYC Department of City Planning aims to remove regulatory barriers and promote housing creation, focusing on affordability and accessibility to support the city's growth.

New York City Department of Housing Preservation & Development. "Plus One ADU Program."

Plus One ADU Program

The Plus One ADU Program is designed to help homeowners legally convert parts of their homes into additional dwelling units, enhancing the availability of affordable housing.

New York City Economic Development Corporation. "Flatbush Central."

Flatbush Central

A project aimed at revitalizing the central business district of Flatbush, enhancing its role as a commercial and cultural hub.

Purple Line Corridor Coalition

A development initiative focused on transit-oriented development and community benefits along Maryland's Purple Line light rail corridor.

16 Tech Community Corporation

An innovation district in Indianapolis that brings together business, research, and creative spaces to foster collaboration and economic development.

YMCA of Greater New York. "Flatbush YMCA."

Flatbush YMCA

Provides community programs and services that promote youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility in Flatbush.

Appendix: Image Credits

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Opaque Housing Image taken by Olivia McCloy. Page 11.

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Community Engagement Strategy Images sourced from: Makerspace NYC, SolarOne, Brooklyn Navy Yard, NYCHA Clean Energy Program. Page 79.

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Appendix: Sources

Consulted Professionals:

Allyson Martinez (Brooklyn Level Up)
Ahmed Tigani (Housing Preservation & Development))
Chessy Brady (RTD Denver)
Councilwoman Farrah Louis (NYC Community District 45)
Rachel Goodfriend (Brooklyn Level Up)
Ryan White (Jacobs Engineering)
Steve Brigham (Purple Line Coalition)
Veronica Brown (Department of City Planning)
Vikas Enti (Reframe Systems)
Yvette Mendes (Brooklyn Level Up)

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