



NEXT GENERATION NYCHA

A COMMUNITY VISION FOR MILL BROOK HOUSES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Resident Associations
- Elected Officials
- Community Partners
- Community Voices Heard
- NYCC
- Citywide Council of Presidents
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Executive Summary

Mill Brook Houses (including the Mill Brook Extension), in the Bronx, is among NYCHA's 334 communities. It was completed in 1962 and includes 1,377 apartments, which are home to 1,369 families.

Mill Brook Houses was selected to be part of NextGeneration NYCHA, an initiative aimed at organizing and convening residents to create a long-term vision for their community.

NextGeneration NYCHA is a multi-faceted, long-term strategic investment and planning process that will explore creative ways of how public housing can be sustained for the next generation of New Yorkers. It is an inclusive process that will incorporate input from NYCHA residents, administrators and managers, and community partners and residents. The plan will address how NYCHA looks, operates and is financed.

The initiative started as an organizing effort that involved door-to-door canvassing, as well as building- and community-wide meetings. In all, 778 residents were canvassed. The organizing effort identified six topics of importance to the residents:

- Policing Issues
- Affordable Housing
- Youth
- Maintenance

- Seniors
- Community Gardening

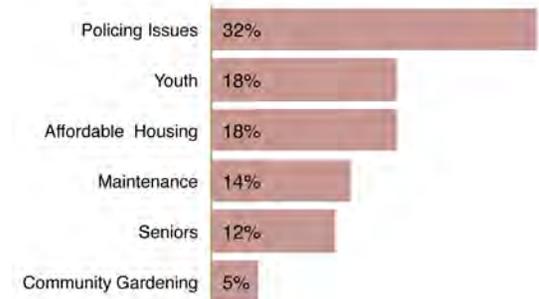
The six topics became the focus of three facilitated workshops held at the Mill Brook Community Center on September 16, 20, and 22, 2014. 293 residents attended multiple workshops along with 9 Mott Haven residents. Numerous elected officials and other key stakeholders were invited as observers.

At the workshops, participants were asked to envision how to improve the Mill Brook community, identify places in the neighborhood that worked and that did not, express ideas and concerns in open mike sessions, and vote on community priorities.

The Mill Brook community vision is built upon the totality of the ideas presented by participants to the workshops. Those ideas were gathered and used to establish vision statements, goals, and next steps.

When asked to prioritize the six topics, participants gave Policing Issues a significantly larger share of the total votes with 32%. Both Affordable Housing and Youth were tied each receiving 18% of the votes. The remaining topics were prioritized as follows: Maintenance received 14% of the votes, Seniors 12%, and Community Gardening 5%.

Which of the following goals is more important to the future of Mill Brook?



*This chart shows preferences expressed by meeting participants. The report includes results for all six topics, independently of their ranking.

Policing Issues: Comments focused on a lack of communication and transparency between residents and police officers and on ways to improve police/residents relations. They also focused on how to better address drug dealing and other criminal activities in Mill Brook and the neighborhood.

Affordable Housing: Residents are concerned about rents being too high and about the limited availability of truly affordable units in the Mott Haven neighborhood amid gradual gentrification. Overcrowding seems to be the only option. They are cautiously supportive of adding affordable housing within the community and the neighborhood that address their concerns and rent limits.

Youth: Residents focused on addressing the lack of services and opportunities for youth and young adults and discussed ways for youth to be integrated into local job forces.

PROFILE OF MILL BROOK

PLACE

Located in Mott Haven, Bronx, Mill Brook Houses consists of two large superblocks bound by East 137th Street, Cypress Street, East 135th Street and Brook Avenue, and bisected by St. Ann's Avenue. Built in 1959, the community contains nine buildings with 1,252 apartments. Mill Brook Extension (completed in 1962) is located on the eastern block of Mill Brook Houses at the northwest corner of East 135th and Cypress Streets. The NYC Department of Parks and Recreation operates the Mill Brook Playground (1.05 acres in size) fronting East 135th Street immediately east of Mill Brook Extension.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

The Mott Haven neighborhood located in the South Bronx is home to over 46,000 people; more than 17,000 live in communities owned by NYCHA. Mott Haven is one of the most impoverished areas of NY: residents are confronted with high crime rates, few retail options, and poor quality of housing.

In 2012, NYCHA received a \$300,000 Choice Neighborhood Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for work in Mott Haven. In partnership with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation NYC, NYCHA is now creating a plan for neighborhood revitalization: rehabilitation of Betances Houses, a deteriorated public housing development ten blocks north of Mill Brook and construction of new affordable housing at several sites, including Mill Brook Houses. The plan, due October 2014, will propose strategies to align education, economic opportunities, and health initiatives. The plan relies on leveraging multiple sources of financing and community partnerships to renovate and build housing and improve access to quality educational opportunities and neighborhood services.



An aerial view of the Mill Brook Houses.

AT-A-GLANCE (FALL 2014)

All data, unless otherwise specified, includes Mill Brook and Mill Brook Extension.

Apartments

- 1,377 apartments
- 0.5% vacancy rate

Residents

- 3,218 residents
- 437 families with household head 62 years or older
- 269 persons 62 years and over living alone
- 501 residents 62 years plus
- 939 minors under 18; 29% as percentage of population
- 21.7 years average tenure in public housing in Mill Brook

- 24.3 years average tenure in public housing in Mill Brook Extension

Income

- 620 families with one or more employed; 45.4% of all families
- 16% unemployment in Bronx Community District 1
- 168 welfare families
- \$19,030 average gross income at Mill Brook
- \$18,935 average gross income at Mill Brook Extension
- \$397 average gross rent at Mill Brook and
- \$400 average gross rent at Mill Brook Extension

Building Needs

- \$119 Million - 5-year Physical Needs Assessment
- \$8.9 Million - 5-year Capital Plan

Maintenance: The discussion focused on creating a more streamlined approach to community-wide repairs, grounds maintenance and cleanliness, and security.

Seniors: Comments focused on the need for affordable and handicap-accessible senior housing in Mill Brook. It also focused on expanding services for older residents.

Community Gardening: Residents focused on expanding the existing successful community gardening program to other areas of the community and the neighborhood.

There are 25 recommended steps to bring Mill Brook's community vision to fruition. Some of the steps represent longer-term initiatives that will require time to be implemented. Others will have a more immediate impact on the community's quality of life.

Implementing the vision is a complex undertaking that will require an unprecedented collaborative effort involving NYCHA, the public sector, community partners, and residents.

1. Introduction

This report summarizes the results of the Mill Brook Houses' community vision. It identifies critical needs and desirable solutions for that community. As a community driven process, it is built upon the ideas, desires, and expectations presented by participants.

Structure of the Report

The Mill Brook Houses' community vision report is divided in three sections.

Following this introduction, **Section 2: The Community Vision** describes goals, issues, solutions, and preferences for each of the six resident chosen topics addressed during the vision sessions.

Section 3: Implementation provides an overview of how the vision can be implemented.

Background on NextGeneration NYCHA

The Mill Brook Houses' community vision is one of three pilot community vision programs developed as part of NextGeneration NYCHA, a citywide effort to ensure the sustainability of NYCHA's 334 communities for the next generation. The three communities are the Van Dyke Houses and the Ingersoll Houses in Brooklyn and the Mill Brook Houses in the Bronx.

Organizing and Facilitation

NYCHA partnered with Gianni Longo and Associates (GLA) to design and facilitate the vision sessions and identify the long-term goals and short-term actions

that reflect the community's vision. NYCHA also partnered with New York Communities for Change (NYCC) and Community Voices Heard (CVH) to canvass the three communities, organize residents, and recruit participants to the vision sessions. Robin Hood Foundation's Housing Advisory Board provided philanthropic support for the initiative.

"NYCHA's mission is to increase opportunities for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers by providing safe, affordable housing and facilitating access to social and community services.

FROM WWW.NYC.GOV/NYCHA



2. The Community Vision

The goals and actions listed below provide a snapshot of Mill Brook’s potential. They reveal residents’ commitment to improve the quality of their lives and of their community, despite day-to-day hardships and pressing needs.

Structure of this Section

This section is divided into six parts, one of each of the vision topics:

- Policing Issues
- Affordable Housing
- Youth
- Maintenance
- Seniors
- Community Gardening

The topics had been identified during the organizing and canvassing activities conducted throughout the summer of 2014. They represent priority issues for residents of Mill Brook. Each topic includes a summary of issues identified by participants, a vision statement, and goals and next steps.

Topic 1: Policing Issues

“Police officers assigned to area have no way of relating to residents.”

MEETING PARTICIPANT

ISSUES

Drug dealing and mugging are frequent in the Mill Brook Houses and in the surrounding neighborhood. There is little communication and understanding between Mott Haven neighborhood residents and the police. Residents have indicated that they no longer know or can relate to the police officers patrolling their neighborhood. Security related repairs and maintenance of buildings and grounds are discussed in Topic # 4: Maintenance.

VISION

A strong, positive, and mutually respectful relationship with the NYPD makes Mott Haven safer.

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Improve communication between NYPD and Mott Haven residents
- Engage residents in addressing safety and quality

of life issues in individual buildings

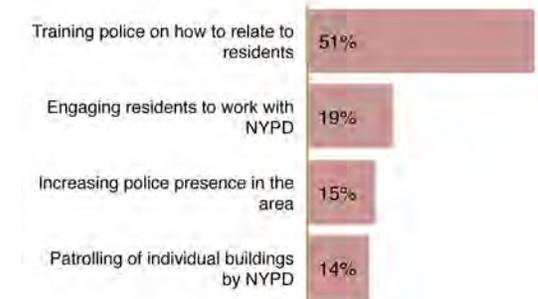
IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Schedule a meeting with NYPD to discuss community specific policing issues such as indoor patrolling of Mill Brook buildings, community policing with trained residents, and police/residents communications
- Focus efforts on areas where crime most occurs, i.e. the Bruckner Expressway Underpass
- Organize residents to address safety and quality of life issues
- Enforce and enhance existing safety rules and regulations

PRIORITIES

52% of participants rated “increasing police presence” as a priority to making Mill Brook and Mott Haven streets safer for the community. Participants also mentioned that “training police on how to relate to residents” is a priority for making the community safer.

To make Mott Haven and Mill Brook safer which of the following will have the biggest impact...



A COMMUNITY DRIVEN PROCESS

Mill Brook's goals and actions stem from a variety of sources. The six topics were identified during the canvassing phase conducted by CVH. The actions resulted from ideas collected during brainstorming sessions, mapping of strong and weak places, open mike sessions, questionnaires, and polling using keypad technology.

CANVASSING THE COMMUNITY

The Mill Brook Houses NextGeneration NYCHA vision started in the summer of 2014 with a program of extensive canvassing of the community's residents by CVH. CVH sent eight canvassers to knock on every single door within the Mill Brook Houses. Many of the canvassers were residents of Mill Brook or other NYCHA communities. Residents were first surveyed on their issues and needs at Mill Brook. Canvassers identified the resident leaders who seemed to be the most engaged and interested in their community issues. Following initial and follow-up contact, the head organizer conducted one-on-one follow up meetings with the identified resident leaders to prepare them for building-wide meetings. CVH conducted outreach throughout this process, up right until the meetings.

The building-wide meetings hosted by organizers and resident leaders provided residents with a chance to give their concerns on their issues. CVH hosted two rounds of building-wide meetings, while challenging residents to bring their families and neighbors to the second one. The second round of meetings focused on broader issues, and prepared the dialogue for the upcoming visioning workshops. An average of 30 residents attended the two rounds of building-wide meetings.

Following building-wide meetings, the first leadership meeting had 40 residents in attendance, held at the Mill Brook Community Center. In this meeting, residents focused more on the six issues to be emphasized at the visioning workshops. The selected

residential leaders formed the new CVH Mill Brook committee. The night before the first visioning workshop on September 15, canvassers phone banked the full list of residents who had either been identified as leaders or attending any of the initial building meetings, and also posted flyers on each floor of each building. Finally, on the day of the first visioning workshop on September 16, the canvass team conducted another round of calls, right up until the start of the meeting later that evening.

THE VISION PROCESS

The vision process consisted of three sessions held at the Mill Brook Community Center on September 16, 20, and 22, 2014.

The sessions were structured as follows:

- In the first session, participants were randomly assigned to one of the topics identified during the canvassing phase: policing issues, affordable housing, youth, maintenance, seniors and gardening. They were asked to imagine how the community would change for the better if their assigned topics were addressed. They were also asked to suggest short-term actions to improve the quality of life in the community. These long-term visions and short-term actions were later summarized and presented back to residents at the second session.
- In the second session, participants were asked to define the characteristics of the top strong and weak places in Mill Brook and its surroundings, and to suggest how to transform weak places into strong places.
- In the third and final session, participants reviewed and prioritized the results of the first two.

All three sessions included an open-mike session to provide residents with an opportunity to voice additional concerns and opinions and reflect on the vision itself.

A total of 293 Mill Brook residents and an additional 9 Mott Haven residents attended the three vision sessions. Of those, several

came to more than one session.

The majority of participants, 88%, were over the age of 35. 34% were seniors over the age of 65. 75% were female. Of all the participants, the majority, 68%, had lived in Mill Brook and Mott Haven for a minimum of 20 years. 16% had lived in the area for 50 years or more. Only 6% had lived in the area for less than 4 years. They know their community well and had seen the changes it has gone through.



Topic 2: Affordable Housing

“Affordable housing coming to the area now is not meeting the income needs of Mill Brook residents.”

MEETING PARTICIPANT

ISSUES

Residents have declared an affordable housing crisis in their community. They argue that 30% of income dedicated to rent is too high and they find it hard to meet their monthly obligations. Gentrification is slowly rising in Mott Haven. Residents, particularly young people, are unable to find housing they can afford elsewhere in the neighborhood should they need to move outside of the community. Affordable senior housing is also lacking, an issue discussed in Topic #5: Seniors.

VISION

Truly affordable new housing in a variety of sizes is introduced in Mill Brook and Mott Haven for individuals, families, and seniors.

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Create housing that is affordable to the incomes of the people who live in the Mill Brook Houses and Mott Haven
- Work to limit gentrification that is shifting the neighborhood’s character

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Identify and prioritize suitable locations for affordable housing within Mill Brook and in Mott Haven
- Prioritize the mix of apartment sizes, retail stores, and services offered by new buildings
- Seek funding sources and partners to build affordable housing that match Mill Brook’s community vision
- Set rent levels to meet the income profile of Mott Haven residents (rather than using borough-wide or citywide calculations) and review rents every two years
- Work with city agencies and community partners to attract affordable neighborhood retail stores and services

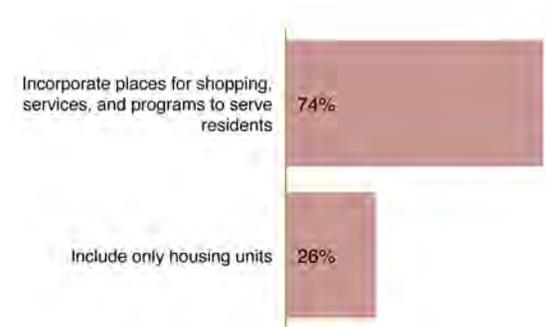
PRIORITIES

49% of residents desire affordable housing units to be created within the Mill Brook Houses. An overwhelming majority, 74%, support mixed-use affordable housing within Mill Brook that incorporates retail, services and programs to serve existing residents.

If new affordable housing is created, which is preferable to you...



If new affordable housing is created, should it...



PLACE MATTERS: STRONG PLACES

Participants in the second visioning workshop engaged in a mapping exercise that asked each individual to identify strong and weak places within the Mill Brook Houses and Mott Haven neighborhood. Participants placed green dots representing strong places and red dots representing weak places on a map of the neighborhood.

STRONG PLACES

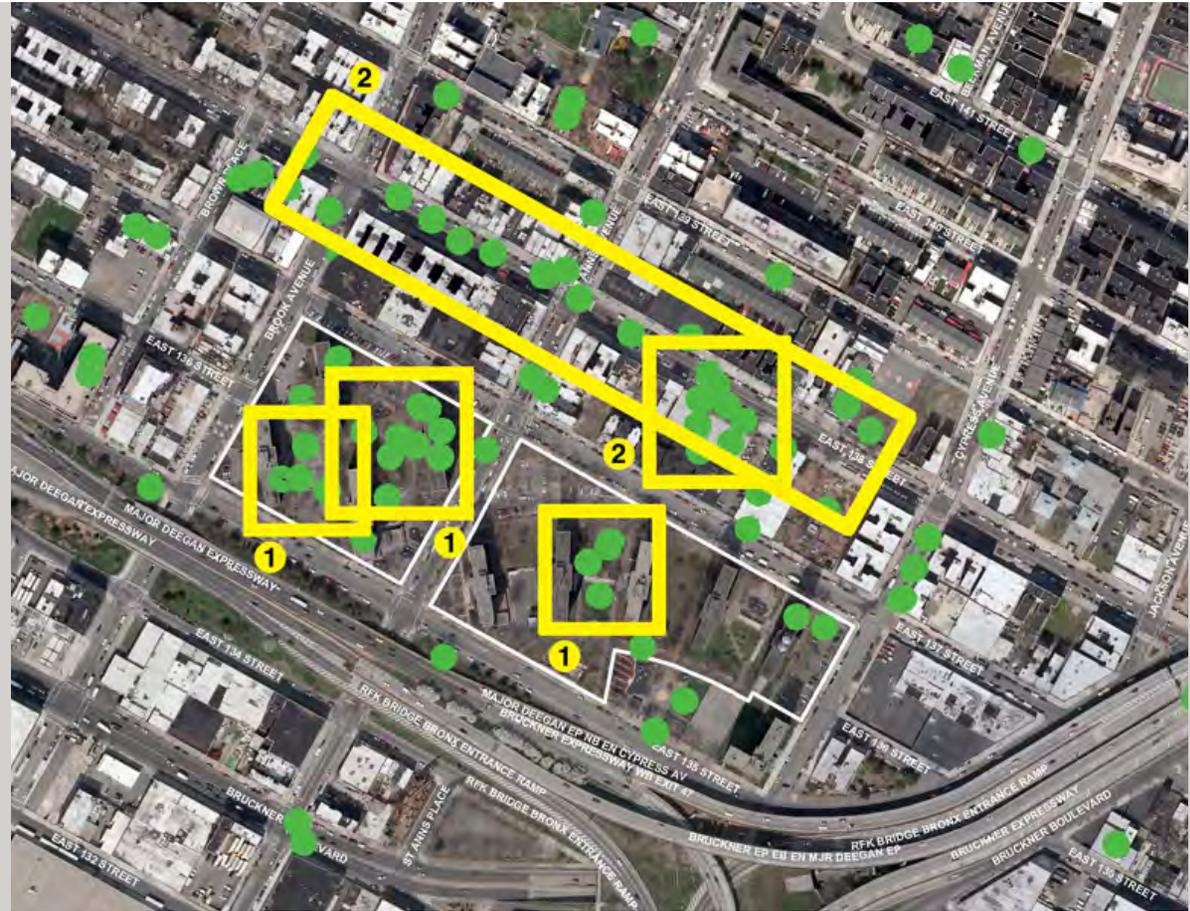
Strong places are attractive, desirable to visit, and unique in a positive way.

OPEN AND GREEN SPACES

Open and green spaces within Mill Brook Houses (including the Mill Brook Community Garden and the Mill Brook Park) are considered strong places by residents (#1 on the map). They provide activities and opportunities for children and teenagers and quiet spaces for seniors.

RETAIL SPACES

Shopping streets in the neighborhood, including 138th Street between Brook Avenue and Cypress Avenue (#2 on the map) are also perceived as strong places for Mill Brook residents. Shops service the community with affordable goods, are established neighborhood anchors, have friendly staff, are accessible by public transit, and are in close proximity to the Mill Brook Houses. Additionally, they are safe, clean, and handicap-accessible.



This map shows the totality of strong places identified for the Ingersoll Houses and the neighborhood immediately surrounding it. The areas highlighted in yellow and numbered identify the top two strong places in the neighborhood.

Topic 3: Youth

“Our youth are peer-pressured to just hang out, and not do work.”

MEETING PARTICIPANT

ISSUES

Residents are concerned about the Mill Brook community youth. They complain about loitering, gang activities, and intra-development violence, often involving young people. School dropout rates are high and services for youth are limited, especially those catering to job readiness programs. Residents see youth programs as a way to keep young people off the streets and to integrate them into the community and workforce.

VISION

Local programs including after-school and job readiness help young adults succeed.

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Develop educational and recreational programs that support youth in the classroom, in the community, and in the workforce
- Engage parents, local businesses, and educators to support Mill Brook’s youth

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Support the newly formed Mill Brook Youth Committee and encourage young people to join
- Identify funding sources and community partners

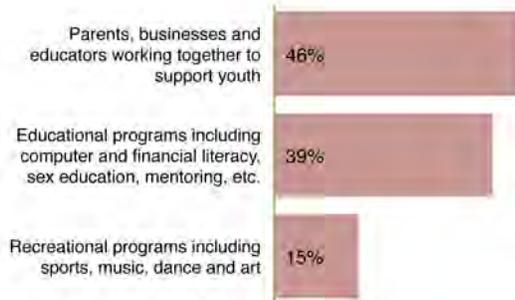
to expand existing and create new programs that focus on academics, recreational activities, and job preparation skills

- Initiate a mentoring program that brings together parents, businesses, and educators to address youth issues
- Seek internship opportunities with businesses in the community
- Expose young people to programs and activities outside of the neighborhood, i.e. field trips

PRIORITIES

When asked what will have the biggest impact for the youth of the community, 46% of participants suggested “parents, business, and educators working together to support the youth.” 39% believed that educational programs should include computer and financial literacy, sex education and mentoring programs. 15% stated that recreational programs should include sports, music, dance and art.

To help youth in the community which of the following will have the biggest impact...



Topic 4: Repairs and Maintenance

“Tickets are flawed, incomplete jobs sit for years.”

MEETING PARTICIPANT

ISSUES

Residents have indicated that the Mill Brook grounds, lobbies, and public places are not maintained and are littered with trash. Repairs take a long time and hired contractors do not perform adequate jobs. The security infrastructure including cameras, functioning lights, and working lobby door locks are in disrepair throughout the community. Extensive repairs are needed in individual apartments. Residents, however, spoke extensively about creating systemic maintenance changes rather than focus on individual maintenance issues and recognized they too have a responsibility in keeping their community clean.

VISION

Systemic changes are implemented that upgrade Mill Brook’s apartments, buildings, and grounds, and keeps them well maintained.

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Reevaluate repair and maintenance practices at Mill Brook Houses
- Increase active resident participation in keeping Mill Brook well maintained

PLACE MATTERS: WEAK PLACES

WEAK PLACES

Weak places are blighted and unsafe places that are undesirable to visit, unattractive, and reflect poorly on the community.

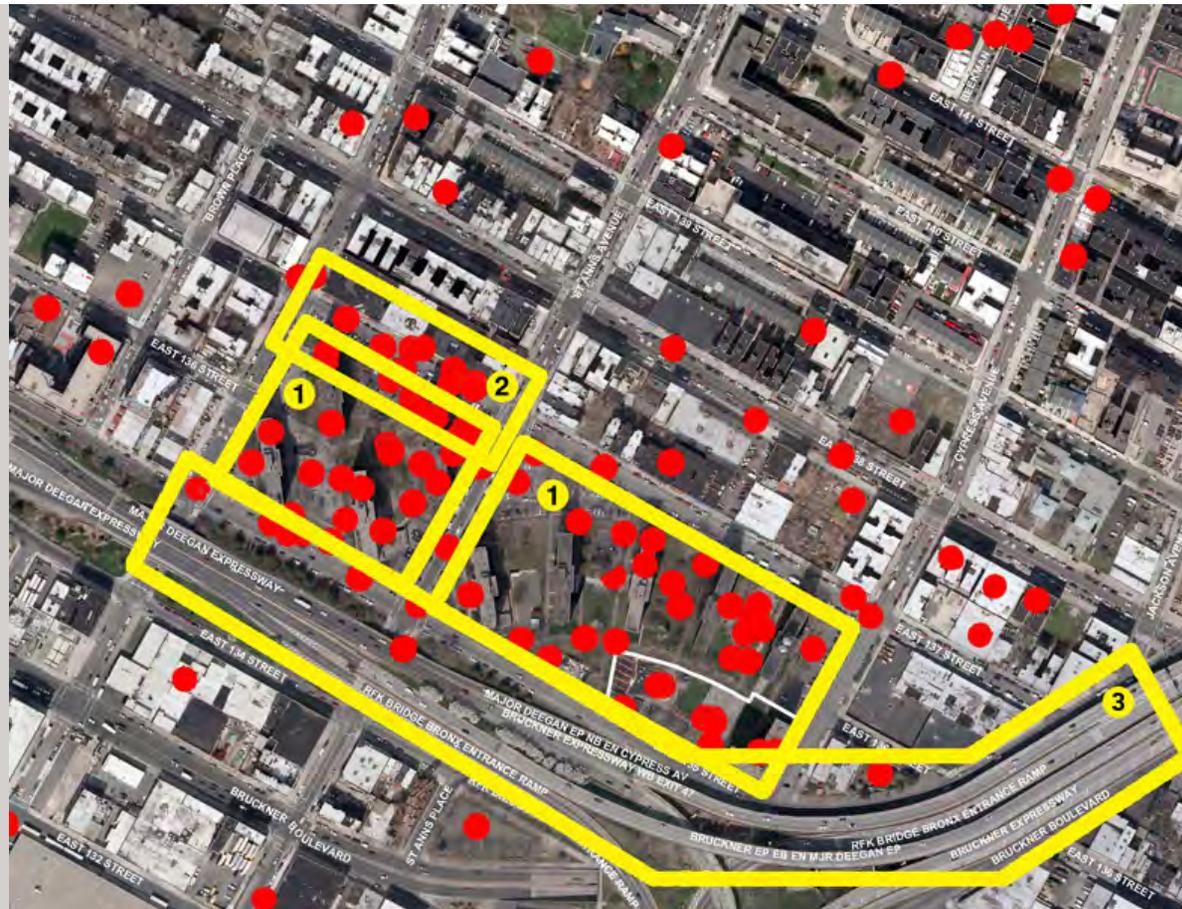
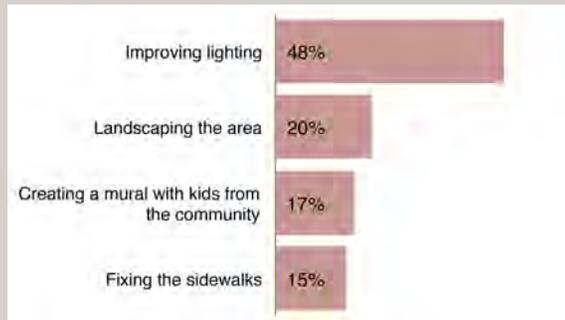
INSIDE MILL BROOK

Mill Brook's grounds (#1 on the map) are run down and poorly lit and maintained. They are often the stage for violence and criminal activity. Additionally, they lack places where residents, especially teenagers, can congregate safely. Residents have also indicated that there is a growing homeless population from neighborhood shelters that have full access the Mill Brook grounds.

OUTSIDE MILL BROOK

Residents perceive that the streets of Mott Haven are plagued with drugs, gang activity, robberies, shooting and other criminal activity, as well as poor lighting (#2 on the map).

What would make the biggest impact in turning the Bruckner Expressway Underpass into a positive community space?



This map shows the totality of weak places identified for the Ingersoll Houses and the neighborhood immediately surrounding it. The areas highlighted in yellow and numbered identify the top four weak places in the neighborhood. Notice that there is some overlap between strong places (previous map) and weak places.

They also mentioned that very similar conditions exist at the Bruckner Expressway Underpass, including limited police patrols in the area (#3 on the map).

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Evaluate how repairs are currently scheduled and completed at the community, and recommend improvements
- Establish comprehensive and transparent communications between residents and property management staff
- Quantify the cost of upgrading security systems: cameras, intercom and locks, and pursue funding sources
- Encourage residents to organize and participate in Clean-up Mill-Brook Day

PRIORITIES

49% of participants stated that “reevaluating NYCHA’s repair system” will have the biggest impact on repairs. 50% residents stated that “repairing building locks and intercoms to make them more secure” is the biggest priority for repairs. 36% stated that “cleaner places” would make them utilize Mill Brook’s grounds more.

To implement systemic changes in NYCHA maintenance, which of the following will have the biggest impact...



Topic 5: Seniors

“There needs to be protection for the many senior citizens of Mill Brook.”

MEETING PARTICIPANT

ISSUES

Seniors argue that Mill Brook Houses lack appropriate housing that is affordable for fixed incomes residents and that would enable them to stay in the neighborhood, if relocated or right-sized. Seniors also asked for better handicap accessible buildings, expanded fitness, health, and recreation activities, and services such as Access-A-Ride and Meals-On-Wheels.

VISION

Affordable, handicap-accessible senior housing and services are available in Mill Brook and Mott Haven.

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Locate affordable senior housing within or close to Mill Brook
- Expand services and programs for seniors

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Identify appropriate locations within the community to accommodate senior housing
- Determine the apartment types and the mix of services that best fit Mill Brook’s senior residents’ needs
- Identify funding sources and partners to build senior housing
- Work with city agencies and community partners to expand activities and services available to senior residents

Topic 6: Community Gardening

“There is a lack of fruit and vegetables in the neighborhood.”

MEETING PARTICIPANT

ISSUES

Volunteers have developed and built a successful community garden in Mill Brook. The garden is, in part, a response to the scarcity of stores that carry fresh fruit and vegetables in the vicinity of the community. It is also a way to engage youth and unemployed residents in activities that are rewarding and beautify the neigh-

borhood. Expanding the reach of community gardening to Mott Haven is a goal of residents.

VISION

Community gardens thrive throughout Mill Brook and Mott Haven and are a source of fresh fruit and vegetables for residents.

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Expand the community gardening program throughout Mott Haven
- Encourage residents involvement in community gardening
- Encourage residents to consume fresh fruits and vegetables they produce

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Identify under utilized vacant lots in Mott Haven that can transition into community gardens
- Encourage youth to get involved in the Mill Brook youth farming program, a growing initiative that includes constructing a solar powered greenhouse in the community
- Engage residents to support the Mill Brook gardening effort, and to volunteer to start and maintain gardens

3. Implementation

The Mill Brook Houses' community vision is far reaching. It recommends 25 implementation steps. Some of the steps can be implemented right away and will have an immediate impact on the community's quality of life. Others will take longer to be realized. All will require a cooperative effort engaging NYCHA, community partners, and residents. The role of key implementation players is briefly described below.

NYCHA

As the landlord of Mill Brook Houses, NYCHA is responsible for implementing those elements of the vision that focus on the physical conditions of individual apartments, buildings, and grounds including: streamlining repairs, improving maintenance, installing security cameras, fixing locks and intercoms, and improving lighting throughout the community. As a landowner, NYCHA can also create additional affordable senior housing within Mill Brook campus.

Community Partners

Community partners can help with implementation steps that go beyond NYCHA's responsibilities. Partners include, among others, agencies such as the New York City Police Department, the Department of City Planning, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, and the Department of Small Businesses Services. These agencies can play a role in improving security in the community, building new affordable housing, and expanding economic opportunities. Community

partners also include community-based organizations that can oversee job training, academic, and recreational programs for youth as well as programs and activities for seniors.

Residents

Residents have perhaps the most important role in ensuring implementation of the vision. They are motivated, understand best what works and what does not work in the community, and have expressed readiness to champion the vision. Residents can engage NYCHA, identify and work with the appropriate community partners, and set priorities. They can also address area-wide issues by reaching out to residents of Mott Haven and other nearby NYCHA communities. Residents can also address compliance with safety rules and quality of life issues by organizing within buildings.