

## Inspired by the South Bronx - Aspirational Staging of Vacant Space

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Earlier this week I had the distinct pleasure of speaking on a panel with my friend and colleague Kerry McLean at the annual conference of the New York State Neighborhood Preservation Coalition. Kerry is Director of Community Development at the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDco), a non-profit that builds 'green' affordable housing and offers innovative solutions to Bronx families. I've written about WHEDco's work before - but her most recent accomplishment really deserves mention. The district where Kerry works is one that has seen its fair share of troubles. When the Bronx was burning in the 1970's, Southern Boulevard in the South Bronx was ground zero. Remember that famous image of President Carter touring a destroyed urban neighborhood? Yup, that is exactly where we are talking about.

**Calling all restaurants, electronics and clothing stores!**  
Interested in finding out more about retail space on Southern Blvd?  
Join the retail trolley tour on Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>!  
For more info contact Kerry Mclean at [info@southernblvd.org](mailto:info@southernblvd.org)!



*Before: Vacant spaces along Southern Blvd, Bronx, NY*

After years of investment in new housing, education and programming - the organization turned its efforts to improving the retail offerings. But getting "retail ready" meant starting with the basics first. Working with local merchants to improve the overall safety and cleanliness of the street.

In 2010, WHEDco was a member of the first cohort to participate in the City of New York's award-winning Neighborhood Retail Leasing Program. As the program director during its inaugural year, I had the opportunity to see the "before" situation - new housing, some of it developed by WHEDCO, with long standing ground floor vacancies.

As you can tell from the "before" image. These spaces were clearly not showing well. The retail consultants we hired, JGSC Group, recommended improved staging, starting with the window displays. They encouraged Kerry to identify images of the kinds of retail the community wanted and could sustain (based on an assessment and market research) and fill the windows with images that not only improved the look and feel of the space (and district), but might also build interest from potential tenants. To our

knowledge, this is the first time that this strategy has been deployed by a non-profit.

While this particular space has not yet been leased, the "after" pictures are phenomenal improvement over what was there before.



*After: Staging of vacant spaces*

For those interested in replicating this great idea, be forewarned, it took a lot longer to execute than we originally thought. For those considering going this route, Kerry has a an important lesson learned....finding the images was the hardest part. Once the decision was made to fill the windows with images, WHEDco wanted images that not only reflected the retail uses they wanted, but also the demographics of the neighborhood. This meant that most stock images were not quite right. And when they finally did find images that they liked, they were too small to be blown up to the size needed without becoming pix elated.



*After: Staging of vacant spaces*

After month's of searching for the right images, the outcome speaks for itself! We'll keep tabs on the progress of this space for you. For more information on WHEDco's efforts, please visit the dedicated website at [www.southernblvd.org](http://www.southernblvd.org)