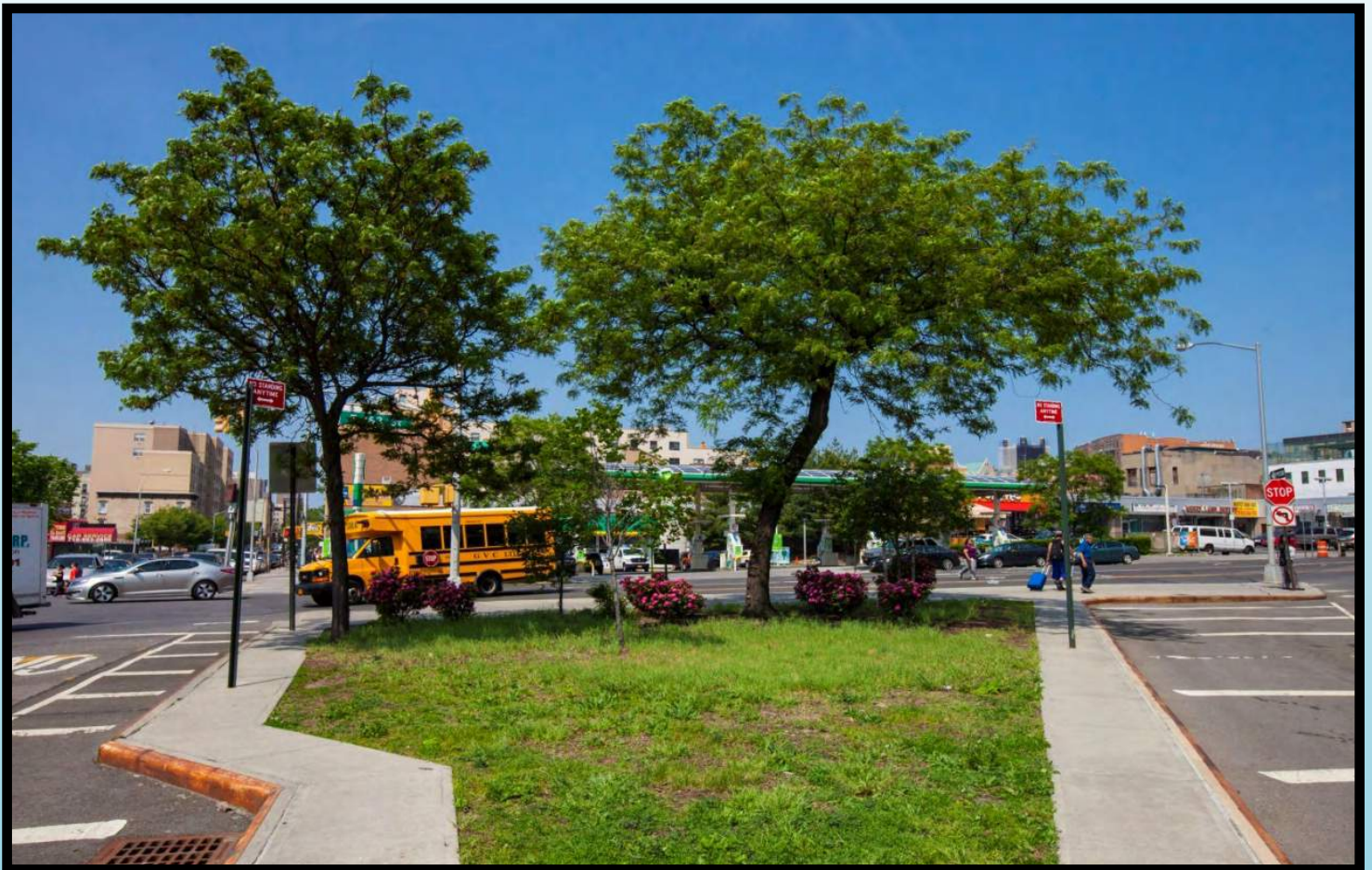




Melrose Community Needs & Actions Report November 2016



E. 163rd Street in Melrose. *Photo by Jared Gruenwald*

WHEDco's third affordable housing development in the Bronx will be in the Melrose neighborhood. To better understand and help meet the needs of the Melrose community, WHEDco conducted a community needs assessment. This report presents the findings of the assessment survey, their possible implications, as well as reflections on WHEDco's scope of work in Melrose.

INTRODUCTION

The **Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation** (WHEDco) works with families in the Bronx who aspire to a healthy, financially stable future, but who sometimes struggle with the multiple challenges that living in low income communities may present. WHEDco's mission is to give the Bronx greater access to resources that create beautiful and thriving communities—from sustainable and affordable homes, high-quality early education and after-school programs, and fresh, healthy food, to cultural programming and economic opportunity.

In 2016, WHEDco will break ground on its third development, located in the Melrose community of the South Bronx. Bronx Commons, a 426,000 square foot mixed-use development, will feature over 300 affordable apartments, a green roof, a restaurant/cafe and other commercial space, an outdoor plaza, and the Bronx Music Heritage Center (BMHC). The BMHC venue will feature flexible performance space that accommodates at least 250 seats (adaptable to music, dance, theater and film), classrooms, recording facilities, community space, and interactive exhibits.

In order to better understand and meet the needs of the community it serves, WHEDco joined with the Partnership for a Healthier Bronx at Bronx Health REACH to conduct the **Melrose Community Needs Assessment** from 2013 to 2014, and began implementing initiatives as a result in 2015. Together, we surveyed 1,000 people who live, work, or attend school within a one-mile radius of the Bronx Commons site. This one-mile radius (shown in Figure 1) will be referred to as the "Survey Area" throughout this report. When information for the one-mile radius around the site was un-

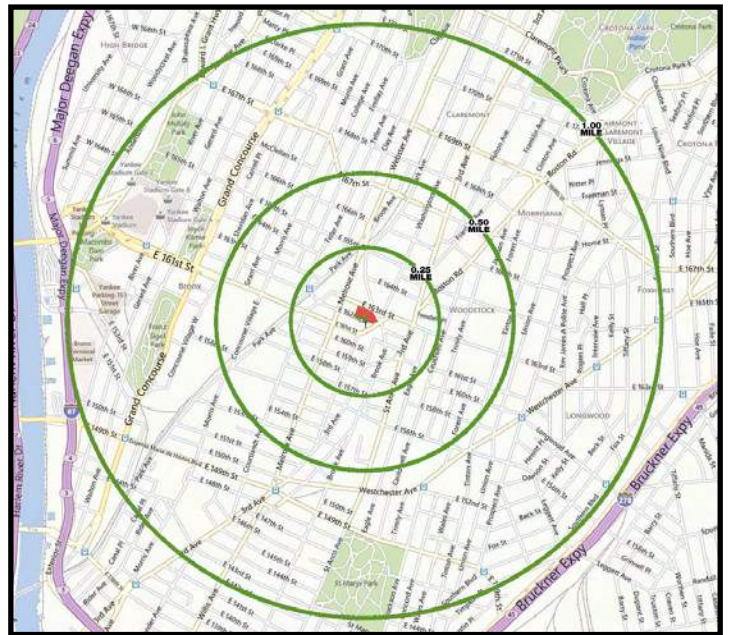


Figure 1: Melrose Survey Area (one mile radius)

available, data from Bronx Community Districts 1 and 3 were used.

The first section of this report provides some context on the Melrose neighborhood and discusses the needs assessment in further detail. The next segment summarizes the survey results: it describes the survey participants and discusses respondents' needs and interests as they relate to service and programming areas, and then addresses their feelings and desires for their neighborhood. The next section analyzes the potential implications of the findings in relation to WHEDco's community development efforts, which focus on youth, health, economic opportunity, housing, and quality of life. The report concludes with an overall reflection on WHEDco's work in Melrose.

"In 2016, WHEDco will break ground on its third development, located in the Melrose community of the South Bronx"

THE MELROSE NEIGHBORHOOD



Third Avenue in Melrose

Melrose is located in the southwestern section of the Bronx, within Community Districts 1 and 3. New York City school districts 7, 8, 9 and 12 encompass Melrose. The 40th and the 42nd police precincts serve this area. Melrose's city council districts include districts 16 and 17, and its designated zip codes include 10451, 10455, and 10456.

The Melrose neighborhood has experienced significant changes throughout its history. In the 1890s, the neighborhood received a large influx of new residents with the annexation of Melrose into New York City and the construction of elevated and mass transit. This time period overlapped with the construction of Yankee Stadium and the Bronx County Courthouse, which established this corridor as one of the most vital in the Bronx (NYC Department of City Planning, 2014). Third Avenue and Melrose Avenue were also at the center of retail and social activity, adding to the vibrancy of the area. Meanwhile, the diversity found in the Melrose community allowed for discovery and

innovation in music genres such as jazz, bebop, mambo, salsa, R&B, and hip hop over time.

But by the 1970s, the area underwent a demographic shift as middle class families moved to the suburbs, leaving behind a disproportionately low-income population, comprised largely of people of color. This shift led to a shrinking tax base and reduced resources to allot to public services. The South Bronx soon became a national symbol for urban decay, as vacant lots and fires littered the community.

Since the late 1980s, there has been significant investment from the government, the private sector and local community organizations into the Melrose community. This collaboration has led to new development and the transformation of large areas of Melrose. Although Melrose is a fast-growing neighborhood, accounting for a third of the borough's population growth and surpassing New York City's growth rate, socioeconomic challenges persist.

| | Melrose Study Area | The Bronx | New York City |
|---|--------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Population | 223,331 | 1,385,108 | 8,175,133 |
| Yearly Median Household Income | < \$22,000 | \$34,200 | \$52,700 |
| % Population Below Poverty Line | 40% | 31.5% | 18.7% |
| Unemployment Rate | 14% | 9.80% | 6.7% |
| % Population under age 18 | 30% | 27% | 22% |
| 4-Year High School Graduation Rate | 63% | 55% | 70.5% |
| High School Drop-out Rate | 14% | 14% | 9% |
| Population over 25 without High School Diploma or GED | 42% | 29.8% | 19.9% |

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, NYS Department of Education, NYC Department of Education

Table 1. Melrose statistics compared to The Bronx and New York City

The Survey Area -the one-mile radius around the Bronx Commons site- has a population of 223,331. Its median household income is under \$22,000 a year, which is lower than that of the Bronx and New York City (Larisa Ortiz Associates, 2015). In 2010, 40% of its residents were living below the poverty line, more than double New York City's rate of 18.7%. Meanwhile, 14% of the population is unemployed, a rate higher than the borough and the City. The population is also fairly young. In 2015, just over 30% of the Survey Area's residents were under the age of 18, compared to 27% in the Bronx and 22% in the City (Larisa Ortiz Associates, 2015). Sixty-three percent of these youths graduate high school within four years, with 14% dropping out of school during this period (SBRT, 2014). Moreover, 42% of residents 25 and older have yet to obtain their high school diploma or GED (WXY Architecture + Urban Design and BJH Advisors, 2012).

The area's residents also face challenges related to health and safety. The South Bronx is particularly affected by high asthma rates, HIV, and obesity-related diseases according to the New York State Department of Health. Cancer, heart disease, diabetes and AIDS are among the leading causes of premature death

(before age 75) in the borough (New York State Department of Health, 2014). While crime rates have been steadily declining in the Survey Area, safety continues to be a concern for the Bronx Commons area and for the Bronx as a whole (WXY Architecture + Urban Design and BJH Advisors, 2012).

"Amidst these challenges, community-based organizations such as WHEDco have an opportunity to improve the lives of residents through sustainable and interconnected efforts that integrate and engage the community."

THE ASSESSMENT

WHEDco has worked for more than 20 years to rebuild healthy, thriving communities in the South Bronx. WHEDco's efforts in the Melrose community are rooted in this mission. In 2016, WHEDco will break ground on Bronx Commons, a mixed-use development that not only seeks to meet the need for affordable and sustainable housing options in the area, but also to celebrate the rich musical heritage of the Bronx.

Along with providing approximately 300 affordable green homes, the Bronx Commons development will offer open space for recreation. Additionally, the Bronx Music Heritage Center will showcase the vibrant and varied cultural legacy of the Bronx, making Bronx Commons and Melrose a destination for the arts. WHEDco also seeks to provide support for the Melrose community through programming and services in education and youth development, small business development, and social services.

In order to provide a contextual foundation for the development of Bronx Commons, WHEDco initiated a community needs assessment of Melrose to ensure a development that is well-planned and responsive to the community's needs. Beginning in the summer of 2013, WHEDco and survey partner Bronx Health REACH initiated meetings with area community-based organizations to help

inform the development of a Melrose community survey. Between the fall of 2013 and the spring of 2014, WHEDco led a Melrose community survey to identify key concerns for residents as well as people who work or attend school in Melrose.

The brief survey was gathered from street intercepts (376), Melrose organizations/ meetings (279), Bronx Health REACH and WHEDco programs (199), Survey Monkey via email (113), and faith based organizations (33). The street surveys were conducted in person by WHEDco and Bronx Health REACH staff, with a majority of surveys administered during the workday, therefore capturing residents who were available during this time frame and who may be most in need of services and programming.

These in-person surveys served as a first step in reaching out to residents of the Melrose community. Findings from the survey are discussed in the next section of this report, and are being utilized to help WHEDco identify areas of need in the community and to allow for effective planning.

SURVEY FINDINGS

THE PARTICIPANTS



KR3T's hip-hop dancers lead a cypher at Bronx Music @ Melrose 2016 on E. 161st Street

Demographics

One thousand people who live, work, or go to school within the Survey Area —zip codes 10451, 10455, 10456—were surveyed between the Fall of 2013 and Spring of 2014. Of those 1,000 participants, 33% indicated they lived, worked, or went to school in 10451, 23% indicated 10455, 31% indicated 10456, and 13% did not specify their zip code but indicated that they lived, worked, or went to school in the area. Sixty-one percent of respondents were female and 39% were male. Forty-seven percent of respondents were Latino or Hispanic, 44% were African-American or Black, and the remaining respondents were Multiracial, White, American Indian, or Asian. In comparison to the Survey Area overall, African-American or Black residents are slightly overrepresented and Hispanic or Latino residents are slightly underrepresented in this survey

(WXY Architecture + Urban Design and BJH Advisors, 2012). The median age of respondents was 40 years old. All participants that were surveyed were 18 years of age or older, which accounts for the median age of respondents being higher than the median age of 31 in the Survey Area. (Larisa Ortiz Associates, 2015)

Household Composition

About 30% of the households surveyed included children under 18, with a quarter of these

HOUSEHOLDS

WITH CHILDREN

Melrose has a high proportion of households with children under 18 (42%); people with children under 18 represented 30% of respondents of the survey.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Melrose has a high proportion of Latino (65%) and Black (39%) residents, which the survey captured, though there was a higher representation by Black respondents (44%) and lower representation by Latino respondents (47%).

households having more than two children. This is lower than the 42% of households that included children in the Survey Area overall (Larisa Ortiz Associates, 2015). Thirteen percent of households surveyed had one or more seniors (65 and older), somewhat lower than the Survey Area's percentage of 21% (WXY Architecture + Urban Design and BJH Advisors, 2012).

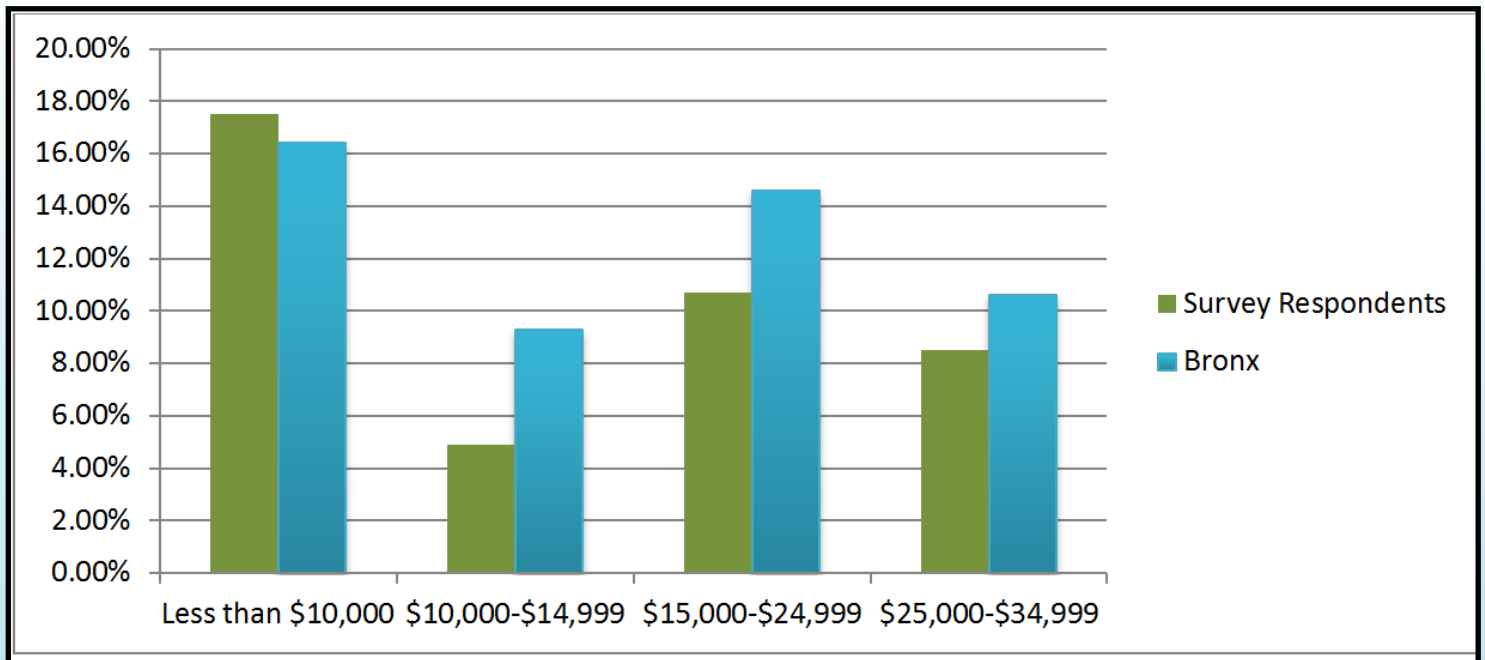


Figure 2: Annual Household Income Under the Median Household Income of \$35,000 in the Bronx

INCOME

The median household income in the survey area is \$21,494, far lower than the median household income of the Bronx which is \$35,000; about 42% of survey respondents had an income below \$35,000.

Household Income and Employment

The median household income for Bronx County is nearly \$35,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-2012). Forty-two percent (42%) of survey respondents reported a household annual income of less than \$35,000, while 18% reported an annual household income of less than \$10,000 (Figure 2). Forty-two percent (42%) of survey respondents reported employment as a primary source of household income.

According to the American Community Survey data, about 47% of residents in Bronx Community Districts 1 and 3 are employed (U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2008-2012), so survey respondents have a slightly lower rate of employment compared to the population in this area. Respondents between the ages of 25-44 were most likely to report employment as a primary source of household income, while those over 65 were the least likely. Black and Hispanic respondents were less likely than other groups to report employment as a main source of income. Although 64% of the population in the Survey Area receives some form of public assistance (WXY Architecture + Urban Design and BJH Advisors, 2012), only about 15% of respondents listed public benefits as a main source of annual income, with younger respondents more likely than older respondents to report this. Sixteen percent of respondents stated that pension/social security was their main source of income.

SURVEY FINDINGS

PROGRAMMING NEEDS & INTERESTS



BX Arts Factory artist Ralph Serrano and WHEDco after-school kids finish Melrose Building Materials mural on E. 163rd St. during WHEDco's ArtsFest, May 2016 . Photo credit: Jared Gruenwald

The strength of any community lies in its ability to provide and meet the needs of its residents. One aim of the survey is to allow residents to identify needs or barriers in their community. Their input is key to determining feasible solutions that WHEDco and its community partners can use to address the hopes of the neighborhood. Survey questions were framed by WHEDco's existing expertise in community development areas, including housing development, childcare and youth development, social services, commercial revitalization, health and the arts.

Child Care and Education

The findings reveal a need for quality childcare and youth education in the community. Twenty-three percent of respondents were interested in assistance with youth education. In addition, about one third of parents who have children in school (K-12) or after-school programs are not satisfied with the quality of their children's programs. In

one-fourth of New York City's schools, 90% of students fail to read or do math at grade level. These failing schools are concentrated in neighborhoods such as the South Bronx, where, in some districts, failing schools outnumber all other schools (Families for Excellent Schools, 2014). Additionally, one-third of parents in the Survey Area who have children younger than 5 years old and who have childcare are not satisfied with the quality of that care.

Apart from quality, there are also issues with availability, affordability and accessibility of youth services and programs. One-third of respondents stated that their children were not in an after-school program due to a lack of available space. Currently, New York City's Department of Education and the Department of Youth and Community Development provide 45,095 after-school program slots for middle-school youth, serving only one in four of the city's

224,279 middle schools students (Office of the Mayor, 2014). Also, half of respondents who have children younger than 5 years old do not have childcare, and of those with childcare, about 40% believe the childcare is neither affordable nor close to where they live or work. According to NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) early care and education providers (Group Child Care, Family Child Care, Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care, and Head Start) that serve low-income children have the capacity to serve only 27% of those eligible for subsidized care, with the unmet need far greater for infants and toddlers (NYC Children's Services, 2008).

CHILDCARE & EDUCATION

One-third of respondents who have children are not satisfied with the quality of K-12 schools, After-school programs, and Early Childhood Education programs.

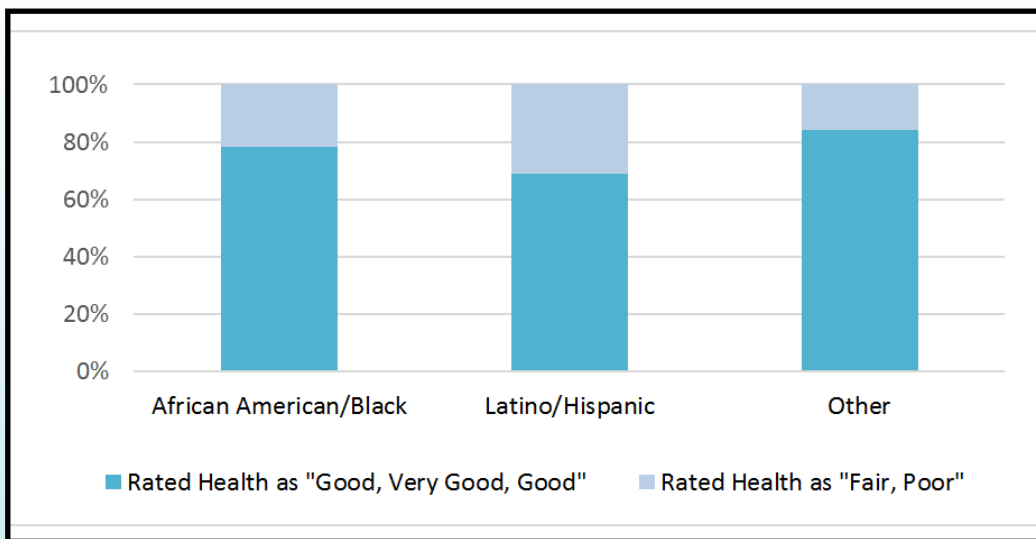


Figure 3: Health Rating by Respondent Race

HEALTH

Over 90% of respondents do not eat the recommended number of servings of fruits or vegetables per day.

Health

The survey findings also show a need for health services and resources in Melrose. The Bronx is the least healthy county in New York State, and the South Bronx suffers disproportionately from higher rates of obesity-related diseases and asthma (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2015). Given these health outcomes, survey participants were asked about their current health status and activity level, as well as their interest in smoke-free living. The survey reveals that 25% of respondents rated their own health as fair to poor, with Hispanic or Latino respondents significantly more likely to rate their health poorly (Figure 3). Moreover, 21% of respondents stated they do not have a main doctor, and of those who do, 35% do not visit the doctor at least once annually. Residents are particularly suffering from asthma and obesity-related illness, such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Alarmingly, almost half have not seen a specialist within the last 12 months for any of these

health issues (Figure 4).

A lack of exercise and sufficient fruit and vegetable consumption is another concern. One study of the South Bronx found that 4 in 10 adults do not exercise, and 9 in 10 adults eat fewer than 5 servings of fruit and vegetables per day (New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2007). Our survey results reflect these findings. Ninety-one percent of respondents stated they ate less than the recommended 5 servings of fruit and vegetables per day, with 10% reporting they ate none at all. Residents have also reported that they do not participate in enough physical

activity or exercise to combat unhealthy eating.

Almost one-third of respondents reported they had not participated in any physical activity or exercise within the past 30 days, even though 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic activity is recommended weekly (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). According to the Bronx District Public Health Office, residents in underserved communities such as the South Bronx often times lack opportunities for physical activity, access to healthy foods, and nutrition education (New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2007).

Indeed, only half of respondents agreed that they had access to healthy foods and to places to exercise in their neighborhood. Almost two-thirds of respondents also stated they do not live in a smoke-free building, with 74% of these respondents stating they would be interested in living in one.

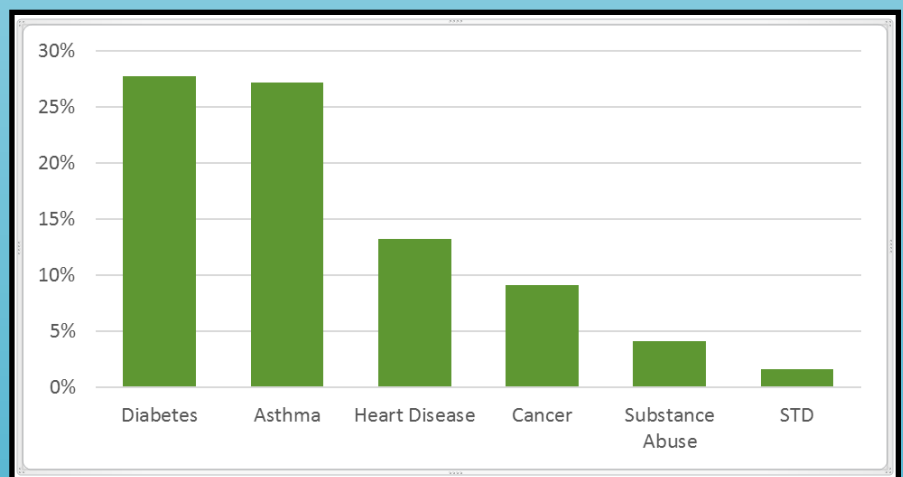


Figure 4: Health Issues of Respondents/Family

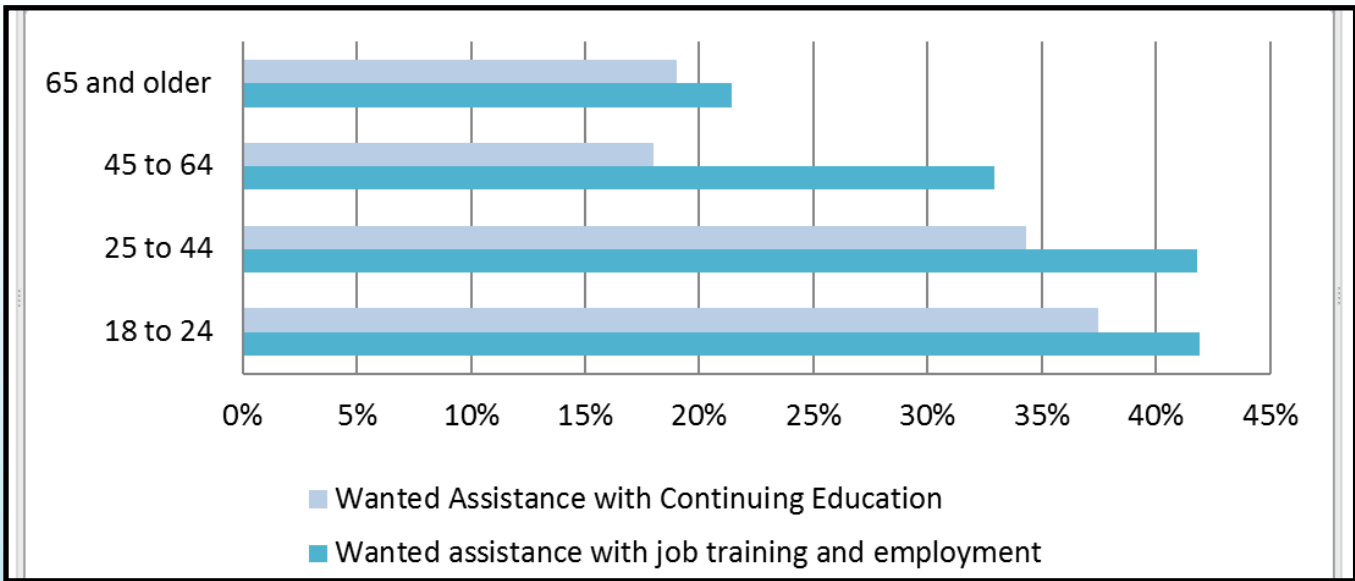


Figure 5: Respondents Breakdown by Age who wanted Assistance with Education and Training

| Needs | %Seeking Assistance |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Housing | 38.9% |
| Employment/Job Training | 36.8% |
| Computer Training | 28.9% |
| Continuing Education | 26.8% |
| Youth Education | 22.7% |
| Starting a Business/Business Training | 22.3% |
| Lowering Electricity/Heating Bills | 18.7% |
| Emergency Food | 17.5% |
| Counseling | 17.4% |
| Health/Dental Care | 17.4% |
| Banking & Credit | 17.1% |
| ESL/Literacy | 16.9% |
| Budgeting | 16.4% |
| Public Benefits | 16.4% |
| Creative/Multimedia Training | 15.7% |
| Debt Management | 15.1% |
| Immigration | 12.8% |
| Health/Dental Insurance | 12.4% |
| Child Welfare | 12.2% |
| Legal Issues | 11.9% |
| Domestic Violence | 11.0% |
| Re-entry from Prison/Incarceration | 10.2% |

Table 2: Social Services Needs Ranked by Respondent Interest

Social Services

Melrose residents indicated interest in receiving social services, especially with housing, employment/job training, computer training, continuing education, youth education, and starting a business/business training (Table 2). Respondents between the ages of 18 to 44 were more likely than older respondents to state they would like help with employment/job training, continuing education and starting a business/business training (Figure 5). Black and Hispanic respondents were more likely than other groups to state they needed help with computer training and youth education. Also, older respondents were more likely to express interest in assistance with computer training.

SOCIAL SERVICES

There is strong interest in services focused on housing, employment/job training, computer training, continuing education, youth education and starting businesses/business training.

SURVEY FINDINGS

PERSPECTIVES ON NEIGHBORHOOD

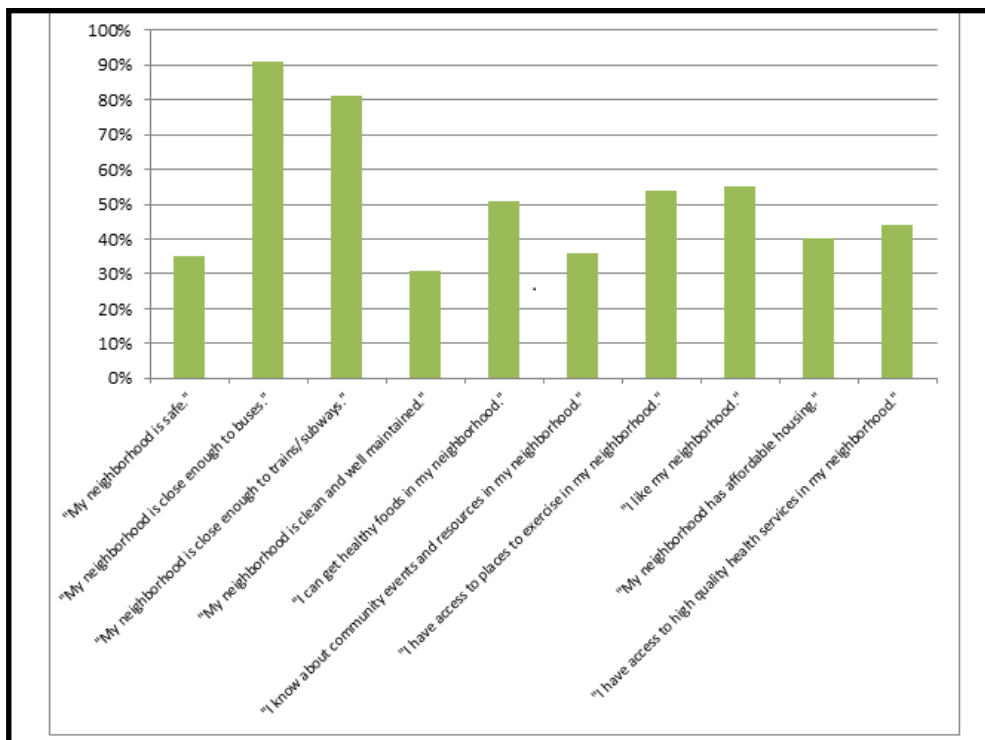


Figure 6: Percent of Residents Agreeing with Statement about their Neighborhood

The survey asked people how they felt about certain aspects of their neighborhood, including issues such as transportation, affordable housing, and access to healthy food and health services. WHEDco learned that perspectives on transportation in Melrose are quite nuanced. The majority of respondents felt that their neighborhood was accessible via public transportation, with 91% agreeing that their neighborhood was close enough to buses, and 81% agreeing that their neighborhood was close enough to trains/subways. However, further analysis of this data reveals that people who indicated they were from zip code 10456 were less likely than other respondents to agree that they were close enough to trains/subways, with just 62%

agreeing. During community meetings, many residents expressed concern about the difficulty of commuting into Manhattan from Melrose. In addition, there were consistent concerns raised about overcrowded buses, particularly in the areas where new developments have been built.

Respondents' feelings about other issues in their neighborhood were more varied. A little over half of respondents agreed that they could get healthy foods and that they had access to places to exercise in their neighborhood. Only about 40% of respondents felt that there was affordable housing and access to high quality health services. Housing affordability continues to be a problem in

the Bronx, with 29.1% of Bronx residents spending more than 50% of their incomes on housing, the highest rate amongst the boroughs. Housing production has trailed behind population growth, thus leaving a shortage of housing, especially affordable housing. Moreover, Bronx Community Districts 1 and 3 have experienced population growth, which has contributed to a high-density neighborhood (NYC Department of City Planning, 2013).

Only about a third of respondents agreed that their neighborhood was safe, clean and well-maintained, and that that they knew about community events and resources (Figure 6). Safety continues to be an issue for the Survey Area. Despite more than a 20% decrease in total crimes since 2001 in the areas served by the 40th and 42nd precincts, there are still sections of the community that experience crime, and the 40th precinct is one of the few areas of the City where homicides have persisted (NYC Department of City Planning, 2013; WXY Architecture + Urban Design and BJH Advisors, 2012; New York Times, 2016).

NEIGHBORHOOD PERSPECTIVE

Close to two-thirds of respondents do not think their neighborhood is clean or safe.

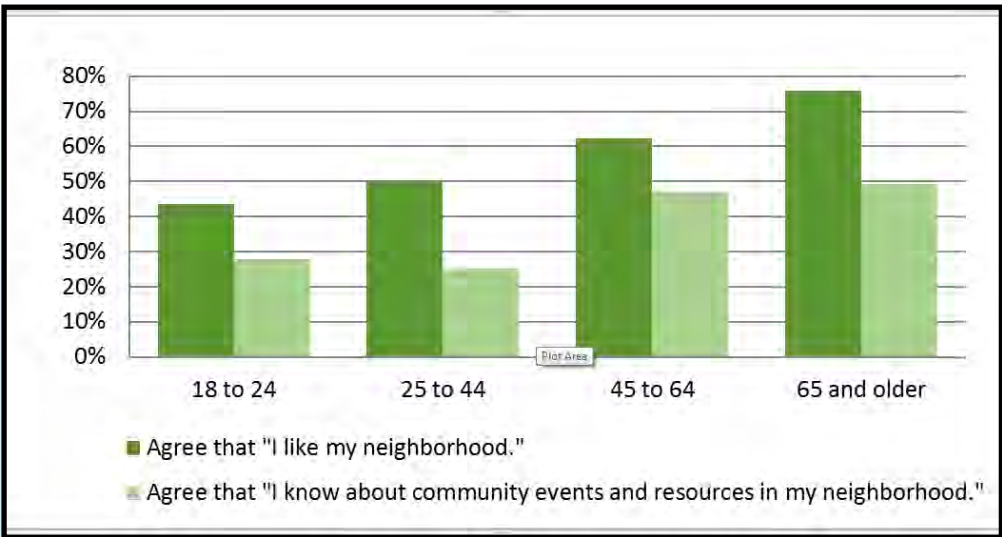


Figure 7: Feelings about Neighborhood by Respondent Age

BUSINESSES DESIRED

Respondents stated they would most like to see fruit and vegetable vendors, an entertainment facility and an indoor fitness facility .

Gender and age differences appear when examining residents' feelings about their neighborhood. As Figure 7 shows, younger respondents were significantly less likely than older respondents to agree that they like their neighborhood and to agree that they know about community events and resources in their neighborhood. These findings show a disconnection between younger residents and their neighborhood. Respondents between ages 25 and 44 were significantly less likely than other respondents to agree that their neighborhood was clean and well maintained or safe. Women were significantly less likely than men to agree that their neighborhood was clean and well maintained, and significantly less likely to agree that they had places to exercise in their neighborhood.

Melrose residents also conveyed their wishes for the types of businesses and organizations they would like to

see in their community. Respondents stated they would most like to see fruit and vegetable vendors, an entertainment facility and an indoor fitness facility. Cultural institutions, community centers, social service organizations, grocery stores and supermarkets were also common requests (Table 3). Respondents between the ages of 18 to 24 and respondents located in zip code 10455 were more likely to say they wanted an entertainment facility.

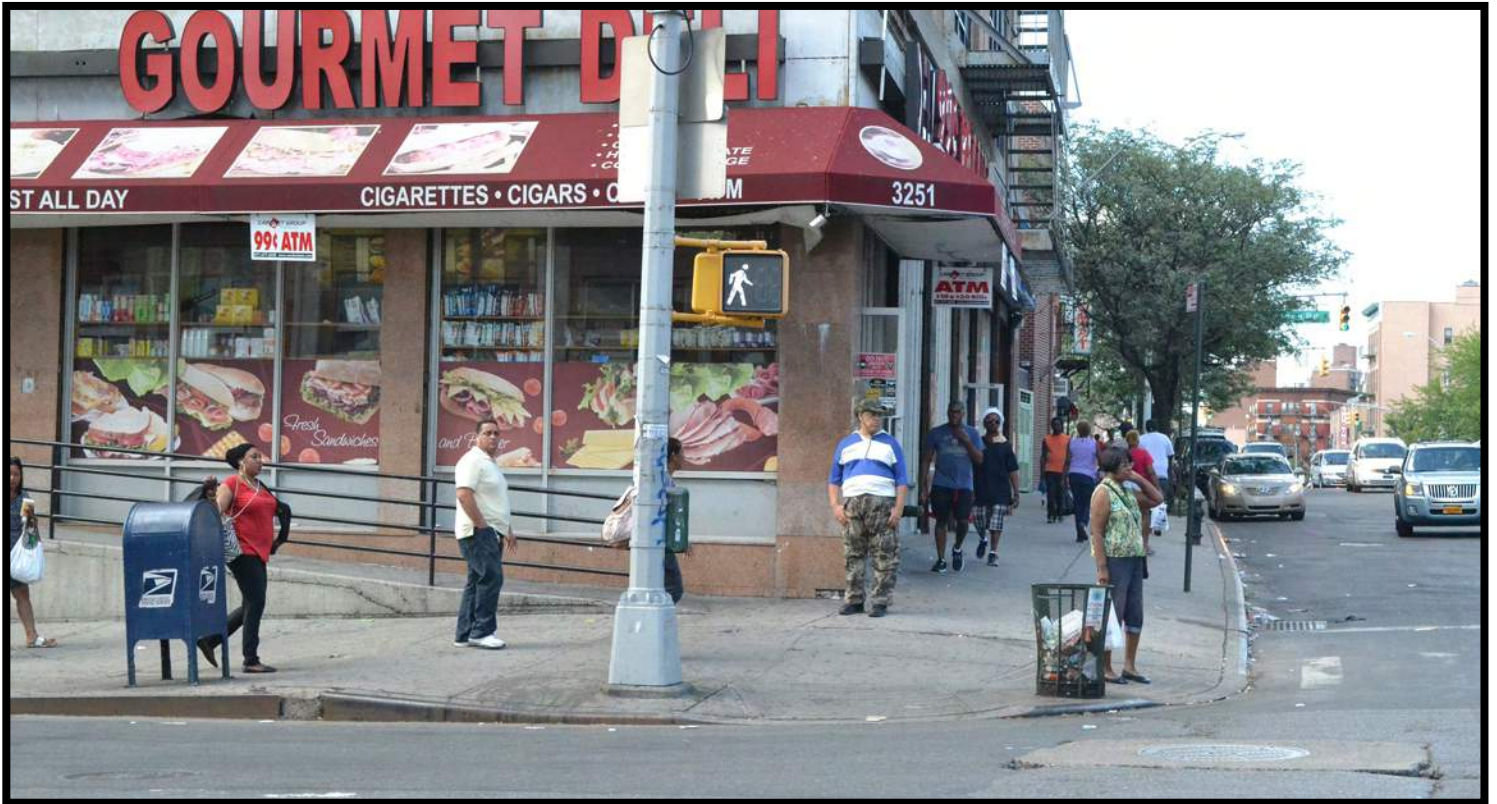
Respondents ranked entertainment, cultural institutions and community centers among the top 5 businesses/ organizations they'd most like to see.

| Business/Organization | % Wanting to See More |
|--|-----------------------|
| Fruit and Vegetable Vendor (Farmer's Market, Green Cart) | 30.1% |
| Entertainment (Movie Theatre, Arcade) | 26.7% |
| Indoor Fitness Facility or Gym | 24.8% |
| Cultural Institution(Performance Space, Museum) | 22.7% |
| Community Center or Social Service Organization | 22.5% |
| Grocery Store or Supermarket | 21.3% |
| Government Service (Library, Post Office) | 15.2% |
| Food Establishment (Restaurant, Bakery, Café) | 14.2% |
| Childcare Facility | 13.1% |
| Medical Facility (Health Center, Doctor's Office) | 12.9% |
| College, Technical School, or University | 12.6% |
| Police precinct or Fire Department | 11.5% |
| School (Elementary, Middle, High School) | 11.0% |
| Financial Service (Bank, Check Cashing, Tax Preparation) | 10.6% |
| Other Retail (Furniture, Shoes, Clothing) | 9.4% |
| Pharmacy | 8.8% |
| Other Service (Laundry, Salon, Medical, Travel) | 6.9% |
| Religious Establishment | 6.3% |
| Small Grocery, Deli or Convenience Store | 4.2% |

Table3: Businesses/Organizations Ranked by Respondent Interest

Younger respondents were also more likely than older respondents to express that they wanted an indoor fitness facility or gym. The need for indoor fitness or gym facilities is especially pertinent given the findings on health in the neighborhood and the low rates of exercise reported by survey respondents. However, it should be noted that several low-cost gyms (including Blink Fitness) have been established in Melrose toward the end or after survey collection, so there are now more fitness facilities in the neighborhood responding to this need.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WHEDco



Street View, E. 163rd St. in Melrose

This assessment provided an opportunity for residents to inform community development in Melrose and the planning process for WHEDco's Bronx Commons development. The following section briefly summarizes key findings and discusses possible ways that the needs of Melrose residents can be met through WHEDco's community development efforts and programming, as well as through partnerships.

IMPLICATIONS

YOUTH



Bronx Music @ Melrose: Día de los Muertos on Brook Avenue, October 2015

Children make up a considerable percentage (45%) of all households in the Survey Area, with this percentage expected to increase in the future based on census projections. Residents have expressed an overall concern with education and youth engagement in the neighborhood; the survey results show a particular need for available, affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare, after-school and K-12 education.

Youth Enrichment Programs and Services

Community development efforts in Melrose should consider addressing the needs of a growing youth population.

During community meetings, residents expressed a need for youth and parent engagement, more collaboration between organizations, and diversity in after-school programming. WHEDco could develop partnerships with neighborhood schools and groups which, along with its own after-school and enrichment programs, could be a vital resource to the Melrose community. Moreover, deepening WHEDco's training and small business development programs for childcare providers could help meet the needs for childcare in this community. Safe parks, recreation

spaces, entertainment and cultural institutions, or other types of businesses and organizations that cater to youth would also be welcomed in the Melrose neighborhood. Since the Bronx Commons outdoor space and the Bronx Music Heritage Center will potentially be of great interest to younger members of the community, incorporating youth input will be helpful to finalizing design plans. WHEDco has already engaged young people in Melrose through diverse community initiatives, including mural design with DreamYard and BX Arts Factory, and in outdoor events in partnership with the NYC Department of Transportation and NYC Department of Parks and Recreation.

Community development efforts in Melrose should consider addressing the needs of a growing youth population.

IMPLICATIONS

HEALTH



Attendees at WHEDco's Bronx Music @ Melrose: Salsa Street Festival participate in a free Zumba workout by Urban Health Plan, August 2015

Programming and community efforts should also seek to address the health needs of Melrose residents. Ninety-one percent (91%) of respondents expressed they did not eat the recommended servings of fruit and vegetables, while almost one-third of respondents had not participated in any physical activity within the previous 30 days.

Additionally, only about half of respondents felt they had access to healthy foods and places to exercise. Again, it should be noted that several gyms have been established in Melrose at the end/after the surveying process, so the availability and affordability of indoor fitness spaces may no

longer be as troublesome as the survey suggests.

In addition, less than half of respondents felt they had access to high quality health services. The health ratings and outcomes of residents reflect these findings. A quarter of respondents rated their health as fair to poor, with Latino respondents more likely than other groups to rate their health poorly.

Respondents are particularly dealing with asthma and obesity-related illnesses, with almost half stating that they had not seen a specialist within the past year for their health issues.

Healthy Eating and Living

The promotion of healthy eating and living is integral to improving the health of Melrose residents. Of note is that a new Food Bazaar supermarket, part of the NYC Economic Development Corporation's (NYCEDC) FRESH program, opened across the street from Bronx Commons on E. 163rd Street, which should increase access to healthy food options for the neighborhood.

WHEDco has also begun to assess the Melrose retail market to attract restaurants to Bronx Commons in order to meet the need for prepared foods and healthy eating options. The City is expected to transform a vacant parcel of land adjacent to the Bronx Commons site into green space for the community. Until then, WHEDco can help identify and articulate the community's hopes for the green space, and advocate with the City for these uses to be considered. Also, WHEDco's green open space and green roof can help diminish air pollution, which would help to mitigate the area's high asthma rates. WHEDco's partnership with local health organizations, such as Bronx Health REACH and BOOM!Health will also be crucial in ensuring that the health needs of the residents are being addressed.

IMPLICATIONS

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



Empty storefronts along the commercial corridor on E. 161st Street between Melrose and Elton Avenues

Employment

Employment is a concern for many residents of Melrose. Only about 40% of respondents reported employment as their main source of income, and 35% reported that they were not working. A little more than 40% of respondents are living below the median household income for the Bronx, and 18% have annual incomes of less than \$10,000.

Concerns about employment are evidenced by the fact that almost 40% of respondents requested assistance with employment/job training. Assistance with computer training, continuing education, youth education, and starting a business/business training was also requested.

The Bronx Commons development can generate direct employment opportunities for Bronx residents and musicians. Most of these employment opportunities will be associated with the residential development (construction, building operations, etc.) and the Bronx Music Heritage Center. These jobs may help residents increase their incomes and gain economic stability.

Furthermore, the Bronx Music Heritage Center—which will boast a performance venue, practice and recording studios, rehearsal rooms, space for event rentals and exhibition space—has the potential to create a new arts-based cluster, which will indirectly generate

jobs in the area. Finally, any businesses that operate in the commercial spaces available at Bronx Commons can also be a source of jobs for local residents.

Workforce Development

WHEDco does not have traditional workforce development programs, but instead focuses on providing sector-specific entrepreneurship opportunities to community members, as detailed further below.

Given the high unemployment rate in the area, it may prove helpful to connect more people to local resources like Bronx Business Solutions' Workforce 1 Center near the Fordham area, and Bronx Works' employment center. We could also invite other institutions with vocational training, employment and job skills resources to participate in WHEDco's community events in Melrose, through initiatives such as job fairs.

Bronx Commons can generate direct and indirect employment opportunities in the area.



Railroad Park on E. 161st Street

Entrepreneurship

Programs to support small businesses could focus on connecting residents to employment opportunities by offering business training, computer training and continuing education opportunities. Also, improving youth education and investing in after-school and youth development programs will help to support young residents in their academic development and search for career opportunities.

WHEDco has a long history of empowering Bronx residents to create their own economic opportunities by starting small businesses. WHEDco's home-based childcare training institute helps women to start and grow successful childcare businesses. WHEDco also helps individuals grow successful businesses in the food industry by providing affordable commercial kitchen space, and has assisted commu-

nity members in operating mobile Green Cart businesses that sell fresh fruits and vegetables during the NYC Department of Health's application period.

Commercial Corridor Revitalization

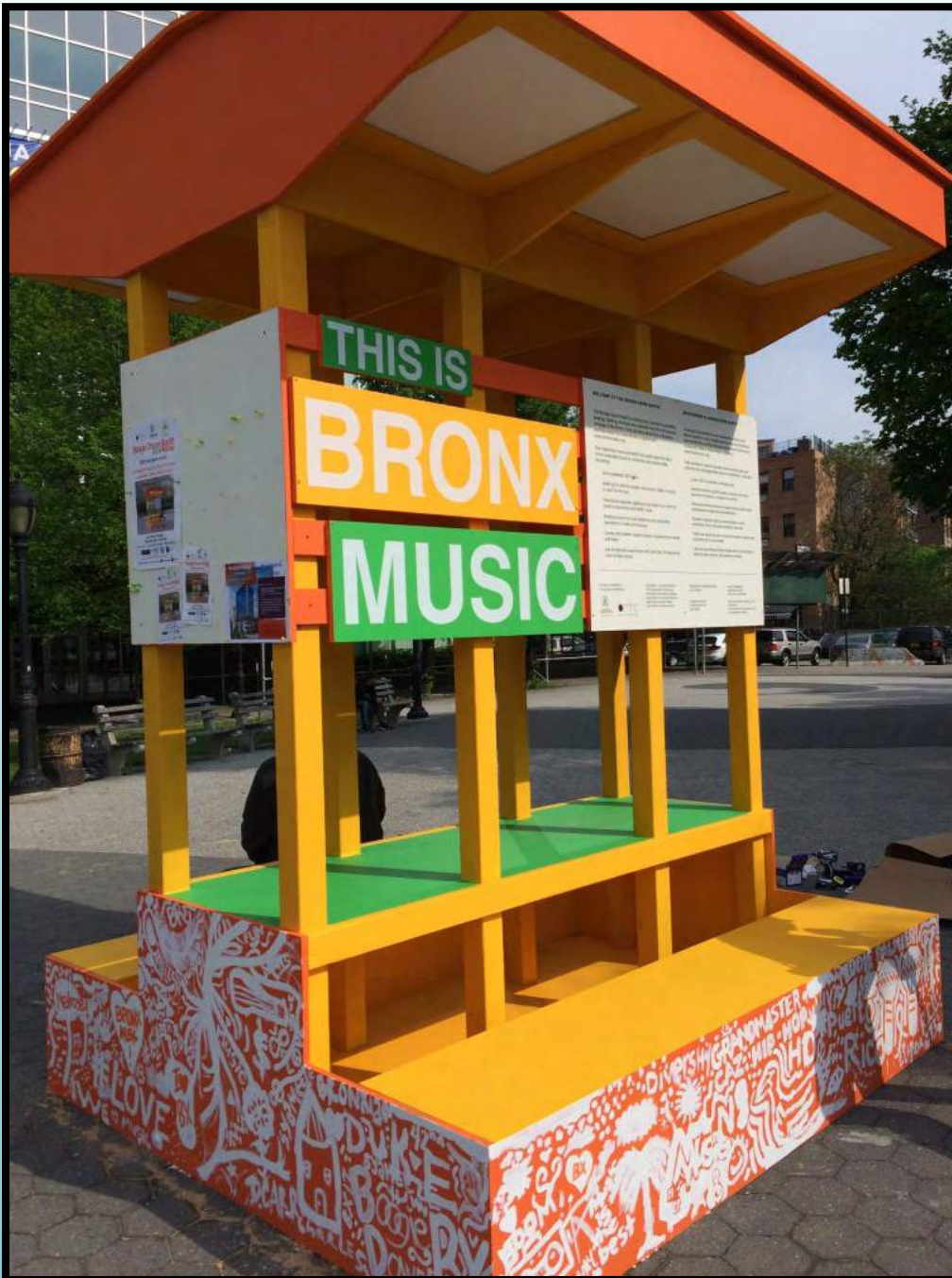
Attracting organizations or businesses that are committed to expanding local employment opportunities and that will meet the needs of the community could also prove beneficial to the Melrose neighborhood. WHEDco seeks to attract new businesses to the Melrose community based on identified retail needs.

Land use in the Survey Area does not yet reflect a bustling commercial hub: while 50 of 55 ground-floor establishments on the seven-block stretch of E. 161st and E. 163rd Streets, between Morris Avenue and Third Avenue are occupied, there is an overabundance of social services and inadequate retail. The com-

mercial space vacancy rate thus hovers around 10%. A lack of lighting, way-finding, and continuity in street level activity lead to the area feeling disconnected and inactive.

With support from the NYC Department of Small Business Services, WHEDco conducted a retail needs analysis in Melrose covering the half-mile radius around the Bronx Commons site. The findings showed that there are just not enough stores to respond to the retail demand of local residents. In fact, the total unmet consumer demand is \$224 million annually within that 0.5 mile radius.

WHEDco has begun to assess the Melrose market to attract new retailers as well as food establishments like restaurants to Melrose and the Bronx Commons development. This recent retail analysis also indicates potential for a general store, and stores that sell clothing, sporting goods, home furnishings/building supplies, and footwear (Larisa Ortiz Associates, 2015). These efforts can spur further economic growth job creation in the area. Furthermore, initiatives that activate street life and foot traffic—such as WHEDco's Boogie Down Booth and reinvigoration of Railroad Park—will further nourish business development and related job opportunities in the area.



The Boogie Down Booth#3 on Elton Avenue in Melrose

WHEDco's Boogie Down Booth is a one-year public art installation that aims to address community needs such as safety, while positively activating the public space with seating, lighting, and music derived from the rich musical heritage of the Bronx. It features solar-powered LED lights that help to illuminate the surrounding area at night, as well as solar-powered directional speakers that play music by Bronx artists in an effort to mask construction and traffic noise, and restore community pride in the borough's culture. The Booth also features a bulletin board, so local groups can share information and community members can learn about upcoming events. The third Boogie Down Booth was installed in May 2016 at O'Neill Triangle on 161st Street in Melrose.

IMPLICATIONS

HOUSING



Draft rendering of Bronx Commons, featuring the Bronx Music Heritage Center

The findings certainly show the need for affordable housing in the Melrose neighborhood, as 40% of survey respondents indicated they need assistance in finding and/or keeping affordable housing. Given the modest annual household incomes of respondents, efforts should focus on making affordable housing options available for residents.

According to American Community Survey data, the median gross rent in the Bronx in 2014 was \$1,080. More than 60% of households are rent burdened (defined as those

households who pay more than 30% of their income on rent). Further, more than half of renters in this area fall below 60% of Area Median Income (AMI), which suggests there is a need to provide adequate housing that will be affordable to lower income levels.

In response to this need, WHEDco's Bronx Commons will offer over 300 affordable rental apartments intended for low-and moderate incomes. Sixty percent (60%) of units will be

at 60% of AMI or below, and 40% of units at 70-90% of AMI; there will be a 10% set-aside of units for homeless families and individuals.

Importantly, WHEDco recognizes the need to balance development without perpetuating displacement. While there are large numbers of homeless families in New York City – approximately 60,000 people in shelters, plus a growing number on the streets (New York Times, February 8, 2016)—we must balance this with the reality that Melrose is a community with a high concentration of homeless shelters and related services.

Affordable housing and supportive services that address the complexity of issues in Melrose, including service for veterans, people overcoming substance abuse issues, mental health, and other challenges, while tapping into local assets and strengths, are necessary to help balance these multiple needs and concerns.

IMPLICATIONS

QUALITY OF LIFE



Crowded BX6 bus in Melrose

Understanding the range of feelings on quality of life in Melrose is paramount to supporting potential initiatives that may address some of the most pressing concerns, including transportation, safety, arts/entertainment, and sense of place.

Transportation

Although respondents felt that they were close to buses and subways, other residents expressed during community meetings that the NYC transit stations at 149th Street-Third Avenue and 161st Street-Yankee Stadium were, in fact, too far (15-minute walk) for regular use. The expected increase in visitors to the Survey Area (due to the Bronx Music Heritage Center and new retail), coupled with continued population growth, has enhanced residents' concerns about transportation. During community

meetings, residents expressed a need for more frequent and affordable Metro-North service at the Melrose station, as well as a need for more frequent bus service (especially the BX6) as overcrowding is already an issue and will only be exacerbated by new development in the area. Residents would also like better pedestrian access to the Melrose station and improved facilities for bus stops along E. 161st Street, which lack lighting, bus shelters and benches. The NYC Department of Transportation has recently installed more bus stops on the E. 161st Street corridor, which can help address some of the bus overcrowding issues. Community development efforts can focus on advocating for improvements to public transportation and connectivity in order to support new devel-

opment and population growth.

Safety

During community meetings, where a cross-section of community stakeholders were engaged, including tenants, business owners, homeowners, community based organizations and civic leaders, safety was a primary topic of discussion, reflecting the survey findings, where only one-third of respondents felt the neighborhood was safe, clean and well-maintained.

Residents have witnessed an increase in violence spurred by gang activity, and have stated that a lack of street lighting and the presence of desolate parking lots and vacant lots in the community have created hot spots for crime. Residents call for an improvement in police and community relations, and increased access to public safety information.

For example, in 2015, the quiet establishment of a Safe Haven shelter for minimally monitored single homeless men in the neighborhood by the NYC Department of Homeless Services caused considerable concern by community members, the local Community Board, and elected officials. The issue persists, but working with shelter administrators, WHEDco is helping to better connect their homeless residents to the community through public art, outdoor events and other initiatives.



Painting of mural on Melrose Building Materials fence to activate block of 163rd Street by WHEDco-BX Arts Factory, November 2015

In addition to spearheading cultural, retail, and community initiatives that activate the street with initiatives that can deter crime, WHEDco will continue to work with local police at the 42nd Precinct and government officials to encourage improvements in public safety. In order to foster community engagement and help create safe public places, WHEDco held several outdoor events in Melrose in 2015 and 2016, such as Bronx Music @ Melrose, in collaboration with the NYC Department of Transportation.

WHEDco also partnered with BX Arts Factory to paint unsightly fencing around an industrial cement factory. Painting the fences has transformed this area from a desolate industrial block to a more pedestrian-friendly and enlivened area where people often stop and take pictures. WHEDco's Boogie Down Booth on E. 161st St.

and the partnership with NYC Parks and community residents to revitalize Railroad Park are both contributing to positive foot traffic, which will hopefully lead to a safer and more engaged neighborhood.

Arts and Entertainment

The Bronx Commons development—which will be home to the 14,000 square foot state-of-the-art performance, exhibit, and community venue known as the Bronx Music Heritage Center (BMHC)—has the ability to entice businesses, organizations and consumers to the neighborhood.

Based on overall projections, including attendance at the temporary Bronx Music Heritage Center Lab in Crotona Park East, an estimated 25,000 people would be expected to visit the Bronx Music Heritage

Center each year. This establishment will serve as a cultural destination and site for music and dance, meeting the need for entertainment and cultural institutions in the neighborhood.

Sense of Place

Helping to foster pride of place is crucial, especially in young people, when we take into account that only about half of respondents expressed that they liked their neighborhood, with younger residents significantly less likely than other groups to agree with this statement.

The Bronx Music Heritage Center, local restaurants and green space located at Bronx Commons can also promote neighborhood cohesion and pride while acting as meeting places where residents, organizations and businesses can share information and interact.

These places also encourage pedestrian activity, which increases people's sense of safety, makes the community more welcoming to families, and invites visitors to walk in the area and connect to neighborhood stores, services and other anchors. Furthermore, having more pedestrians will mean more potential shoppers and appeal to more potential businesses, bolstering economic activity and making Melrose a place where more people want to work, live, and play.

Bronx Music
@ Melrose:
Sun Festival,
June 2016



BRONX MUSIC @ MELROSE EVENTS

In collaboration with the NYC Department of Transportation, WHEDco hosts the Bronx Music @ Melrose street festivals in order to create a fun, safe recreational space for the community, by closing off a New York City street block to traffic.

WHEDco invites local and citywide organizations to host engaging activities and connect area residents with resources that respond to community interests and needs. Featuring live music and entertainment, these events benefit local residents and merchants by activating the retail corridor and increasing foot traffic to the area.

WHEDco hosted Bronx Music @ Melrose; Salsa! In August 2015, celebrating Salsa month in the Bronx; Bronx Music @ Melrose: Día de los Muertos in October 2015, celebrating Mexican traditions; and Bronx Music @ Melrose: Sun Festival, celebrating the summer solstice over two days in June 2016.

CONCLUSION



El Coquí Community Garden in Melrose. *Photo by: Jared Gruenwald*

The needs assessment process has provided a wealth of information to help guide WHEDco's work in Melrose. In addition, the early work done with residents, community partners, organizations and City agencies has contributed to a Melrose that is a direct outgrowth of the needs assessment. There is a desire to create a cultural corridor in partnership with Dream-Yard. New businesses have recently opened or will open soon (including fitness centers and supermarkets), which may contribute to the retail landscape in the area. In addition to current partners, WHEDco is working to establish stronger relationships with elected officials in this district, as well as with retail brokers and more residents, including young people and people who are looking to engage in positive endeavors.

The realities of community development work, however, are constrained by internal challenges, such as funding and capacity, and the reality of external challenges including competing priorities, different visions and working with external partners. Nevertheless, WHEDco is committed to help respond to the findings of the needs assessment and help build an even greater Melrose.

REFERENCES

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Physical Activity*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/adults.html>.
- Families for Excellent Schools. (2014). *The Forgotten Fourth*. Retrieved from <http://www.familiesforexcellentschools.org/search>
- Hartzog, M., Vecchiotti, S., and Tarrant, K. (2008). *Charting the Course for Child Care and Head Start: community needs analysis of early care and education in New York City*. New York, NY: NYC Children's Services.
- Hu, Winnie. (2013). "Fighting the Image of the Burning Borough". *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/03/nyregion/the-bronx-struggles-to-shed-burning-borough-image.html?pagewanted=all>
- Larisa Ortiz Associates. (2015). *Melrose: Retail Market Update Study*.
- Matte, T., Ellis, J.A., Selenic, D., Young, C., and Deitcher D. (2007). *Obesity in the South Bronx: A look across generations*. New York, NY: New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.
- New York State Department of Health. (2014). *Leading Causes of Premature Death (Death before age 75), New York State, 2010-2012*. Retrieved from: http://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/leading-causes_death/pm_deaths_by_county.htm.
- New York Times* (February 8, 2016). "A Homeless Epidemic in New York?" Thousands Hit the Cold Streets to Find Out. Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/10/21/nyregion/new-york-homeless-people.html>
- New York Times* (February 19, 2016). "A Bronx Precinct Where Killings Persist". Retrieved from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/19/nyregion/in-a-bronx-police-precinct-homicides-persist-as-crime-drops-elsewhere.html>
- NYC Department of City Planning. (2013). *Community District Needs*. Retrieved from <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/pub/cdnd13.shtml>.
- NYC Department of City Planning. (2014). *Sustainable Communities in the Bronx: Leveraging Regional Rail for Access, Growth and Opportunity*.
- Office of the Mayor. (2014). *After-School Program for Middle School Students*. Retrieved from: http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/reports/2014/after_school_programs_white_paper.pdf
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2015). *County Health Rankings and Road Maps*. Retrieved from: http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/sites/default/files/state/downloads/CHR2015_NY_0.pdf
- U.S. Census Bureau. *2008-2012 American Community Survey*. Retrieved from: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>.
- WXY Architecture + Urban Design and BJH Advisors. (2012). *Bronx Commons Economic Impact Analysis*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Melrose Community Needs Assessment was headed by Kerry A. McLean, Vice President of Community Development and Nicole Lavan, Director of Research, Policy and Evaluation.

The report was prepared by Angelique Marcus, Research, Policy and Evaluation Associate (former), Nicole Lavan, Director of Research, Policy and Evaluation and Kerry A. McLean, Vice President of Community Development.

Survey collection was managed by Thomas Haskin, Program Manager (former). Survey entry and analysis was performed by Angelique Marcus, Research, Policy and Evaluation Associate (former).

Emma Rodgers of the Partnership for a Healthier Bronx at Bronx Health REACH and her team were key partners in developing the survey and assisting with survey collection.

We also want to acknowledge and thank the following people for assisting the needs assessment:

- ▶ Erin Burns-Maine, Program Manager (former) and Champo Mapulanga, Research, Policy and Evaluation Intern (former) for providing assistance in developing materials.
- ▶ Alix Fellman, Senior Program Manager, Yesmín Vega, Program Manager, Luz Lopez, Senior Program Manager, and Gabriela González, Marketing and Communications Manager for providing feedback and assistance on the report.
- ▶ All the WHEDco departments and staff who helped with survey collection.
- ▶ The following community groups who we met with to provide input that helped design the survey : Boricua College, Bronx Defenders, Bronx Works, Bronx Community Board 3, DreamYard, FECS, Melrose Houses Tenant Association, Montefiore Comprehensive Health Care Center, SoBro, and Transportation Alternatives.
- ▶ DreamYard and SoBro for hosting community forums.
- ▶ DreamYard co-founders/co-Executive Directors Jason Duchin and Tim Lord for their support, as well as sharing their experiences and helping us connect to Melrose youth and families.
- ▶ Ed García Conde for providing insight and helping getting the word out about the needs assessment survey.
- ▶ Cinco de Mayo restaurant for their insights on doing business in Melrose (plus their amazing food and meeting space).

And finally, we want to thank the Melrose community, especially the survey respondents and community forum participants, for sharing their feelings, perspectives, wishes, concerns, stories and neighborhood with us.

LEADERSHIP AT WHEDco

Board of Directors:

Hon. Analisa Torres, Chair

Justice
U.S. District Court, Southern District

Nancy Biberman, President

President & Founder
WHEDco

Linda Field, Treasurer

Real Estate Management &
Development Professional

Sara Kay, Secretary

Senior Fellow
Planned Parenthood Federation of America

Sara Horowitz

Founder & Executive Director
Freelancers Union

Russell Jackson

Chef/Restaurateur
Subculture Dining

Leisle Lin

Senior Vice President, Finance and Operations
The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation

Scott Martin, Esq.

Partner
Hausfeld Global Litigation Solutions

Tamika S. Mayes, Esq.

Senior Attorney, U.S. Tax Counsel Group
General Motors Company

Susan Saegert, PhD

Professor
CUNY Graduate Center

Pamela Sloan, Esq.

Partner
Aronson Mayefsky & Sloan, LLP

Sean Simmons

Senior VP, Community Reinvestment Analysis
Citi Community Development

Executive Team:

Nancy Biberman

President & Founder

Davon Russell

Executive Vice President

Jonathan Springer

Senior Vice President & COO

Rebecca Kramnick

Vice President & General Counsel

About our Staff:

Total Number of Employees: 354

Full-Time Staff: 165

Part-Time Staff: 189

*More than 70% of our staff is from or currently lives in the Bronx.

We invite you to invest in children and families in the South Bronx by supporting WHEDco. To make a tax-deductible donation or to get involved, visit whedco.org today!



Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation

50 East 168th Street, Bronx, NY 10452

Tel: 718.839.1100 | Fax: 718.839.1170



WHEDco



WHEDcoSpeaks