

NEXT GENERATION NYCHA: A COMMUNITY VISION FOR MILL BROOK HOUSES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This Executive Summary presents a condensed version the results of the Mill Brook Houses' community vision. It identifies critical needs and desirable solutions for the community. As a community-driven process, it is entirely built upon the ideas, desires, and expectations presented by participants.

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%.

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.

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. They 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. Implementing this vision will be a complex undertaking that will require an unprecedented collaborative effort involving NYCHA, the public sector, community partners, and residents. All the goals identified by the community and the proposed implementation steps are listed in the back.

Topic 1: Policing Issues

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

Topic 2: Affordable Housing

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

Topic 3: Youth

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

Topic 4: Repairs and Maintenance

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

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

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Evaluate how repairs are currently scheduled and completed 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

Topic 5: Seniors

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

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

The full version of the Mill Brook Houses' community vision report is available at NYC.NYCHA.gov