

NEXT GENERATION NYCHA: A VISION FOR VAN DYKE HOUSES CREATED FROM RESIDENTS' IDEAS AND INSIGHTS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This Executive Summary presents a condensed version the results of the Van Dyke 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.

Van Dyke Houses in Brownsville, Brooklyn, is among NYCHA's 334 communities. Completed in 1964, it includes 1,714 apartments, which are home to 1,702 families. Van Dyke Houses was selected to be part of NextGeneration NYCHA, an initiative aimed at organizing and convening residents to develop a long-term vision for their communities.

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

The initiative started with an organizing effort that included door-to-door canvassing as well as building- and community-wide meetings. The effort involved 710 Van Dyke residents and identified six topics of importance to residents:

- Affordable Housing
- Security
- Job Training
- Abandoned Buildings and Lots
- Afterschool Programs
- Daycare Center

Vision sessions consisted of three workshops held at the Van Dyke Community Center on September 10, 13, and 15, 2014. A total of 186 Van Dyke residents participated in the workshops, some of them participating more than once, along with 18 Brownsville residents. Numerous elected officials and other key stakeholders were invited as observers. Workshop participants were asked to envision how their community could change for the better, map places in the neighborhood that are unique in a positive way and those that are not, and vote on community priorities. Those ideas were gathered and used to develop vision statements, goals, and next steps.

When asked, workshop participants prioritized Affordable Housing (33%) and Security (32%) as the highest priorities in Van Dyke followed by Job Training and Abandoned Buildings and Lots in a tie (11%). Expanding Afterschool Programs and building a Daycare Center in Van Dyke received lower priorities, perhaps a reflection of the older age of vision session's participants.

Residents strongly support the creation of truly affordable new housing in the neighborhood to enable families to expand and relocate and to bring additional retail stores and services to the area. They are cautious, however, about adding new buildings on Van Dyke property for fear that the area's density will increase while opportunities for open space will decrease. This is a critical trade-off that needs to be evaluated as the vision moves into implementation.

Security comments focused on maintaining functioning entrance door locks and intercoms and on reducing loitering inside lobbies, stairwells, and in front of buildings. They also addressed the overall security of the neighborhood, which is affected by abandoned buildings, empty lots, and poor lighting. Establishing a positive rapport with law enforcement and increasing their presence was also a big part of the conversation on security.

Expanding job training opportunities is key for residents to be able to compete and qualify for current and future jobs. As jobs are scarce in Brownsville, residents supported expanding jobs available locally and promoting small business creation and entrepreneurship.

Residents are clear about the fact that abandoned buildings and lots dramatically affect the security and appearance of the neighborhood. They are poorly lit and unsupervised spaces. Residents strongly favor redeveloping them as an opportunity to add affordable housing and services outside of Van Dyke and as a tool to beautify the community and expand opportunities for open space and recreation.

Participants recommended adding afterschool programs as a way to provide safe and focused activities for children and young adults and building a daycare center inside Van Dyke as a way to enable young parents to seek and maintain employment.

In all, there are 35 recommended steps to bring Van Dyke's community vision to fruition. Some will have an immediate impact on the community's quality of life. Others will take longer to be implemented. Implementing the vision is nonetheless a complex undertaking that will require an unprecedented collaborative effort involving NYCHA, the public sector, community partners, and especially residents. All the goals identified by the community and the proposed next steps are listed in the back.

Topic 1: Affordable Housing

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Develop new housing that is affordable to Van Dyke residents
- Introduce shops and services to improve quality of life and create job opportunities
- Keep rents stable

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Identify suitable location for affordable housing both in Van Dyke and in the surrounding neighborhood
- Evaluate the pros, cons, and trade offs of adding new affordable housing on the Van Dyke campus
- Identify the types of buildings and the mix of shopping, services and programs that best fit Van Dyke's community vision
- Base rental levels for the new units to match the economic profile of Van Dyke and Brownsville residents
- Seek funding sources and partners to invest and build affordable housing in the neighborhood
- Identify incentives and programs to attract retail, small business, and services to the neighborhood

Topic 2: Security

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Monitor and control access to individual buildings
- Establish a strong and positive relationship with NYPD
- Improve lighting conditions in Van Dyke Houses and surrounding neighborhood

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Quantify cost of repairing, improving, or installing new security devices in every building and pursue available funding sources
- Provide residents with additional lobby door keys at an affordable price
- Identify high crime areas in the community and in the neighborhood, and make site-specific recommendations to increase the safety of those areas
- Work with law enforcement at improving respect and trust between residents and the police
- Consider reintroducing police foot patrols in the community
- Identify and adopt anti-violence programs that are suitable to Van Dyke's conditions
- Organize individual buildings to address safety and quality of life issues
- Focus on the subway stations that serve the community to improve access and lighting and increase police presence

Topic 3: Job Training

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Train residents to qualify for current and emerging jobs
- Focus on job readiness, resume writing, interview skills, and money management
- Expand opportunities for small-business creation and start-ups

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Identify and prioritize Van Dyke's residents' job training needs
- Identify job training programs offered by community partners that best meet those needs
- Initiate mentoring program aimed at young adults and focused on job readiness
- Identify incentives, programs, and resources to attract new small businesses and nurture local ones
- Consider designating a manufacturing zone in the neighborhood to

increase job opportunities

Topic 4: Abandoned Buildings and Lots

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Use redevelopment to create affordable housing, retail stores, and services
- Encourage outside investors and developers to consider Brownsville
- Clean and beautify the neighborhood

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Inventory and evaluate the suitability for redevelopment of vacant buildings and abandoned lots throughout the community
- Define the type of development and the appropriate mix of uses best suited for Van Dyke and the surrounding community
- Join forces with neighborhood and resident associations in Brownsville and in other adjacent NYCHA communities
- Work with community partners and identify incentives for attracting redevelopment to Brownsville
- Identify appropriate tools to create redevelopment including the use of eminent domain
- Improve the community's appearance with beautification programs, gardening, landscaping, and murals by community
- Engage community in cleaning and beautifying the surrounding neighborhood
- Identify and designate places for community gardens

Topic 5: Afterschool Programs

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Expand available programs to include academics, recreation, life skills, and creativity

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Work with community partners to identify and implement afterschool programs that meet the need of the Van Dyke community school age population
- Promote and expand the use of recreational and sport facilities available in the neighborhood
- Expand programs and hours of operation at the Van Dyke Community Center specifically to provide services over the age of 16 residents
- Identify and promote internship opportunities with local businesses

Topic 6: Daycare Center

GOALS IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

- Locate a daycare center in Van Dyke to serve children throughout the neighborhood

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

- Identify optimal location and determine the cost of building a daycare center in Van Dyke
- Identify funding sources and partners to build the center
- Work with city agencies and community partners to address the center's programmatic, health, and nutritional aspects
- Promote parent involvement and create opportunities for seniors to interact with youngest residents

The full version of the Van Dyke Houses' community vision report is available at nyc.gov/nycha