RETAIL ACTIVITY in NYC:
COVID Recovery Across 24 Neighborhoods

September 2020
Overview

As many businesses along local retail corridors began to reopen during the phased NY Forward program following shelter-in-place rules, the Department of City Planning conducted surveys of neighborhood retail corridors across the five boroughs.

The surveys documented the status of businesses in ground floor storefronts during July 2020, including whether they were open, closed, or vacant, and captured modifications that are occurring to safely operate during COVID-19.

As economic recovery progresses over the coming months, future surveys along the same corridors will help monitor business recovery and guide policy interventions.
In 2019, the Department of City Planning released a report analyzing retail trends and storefront vacancy rates in NYC.

The storefront vacancy study used data from the company Live XYZ to assess retail activity across 24 corridors, providing a rich dataset of pre-COVID conditions across the city.

To assess COVID impacts and recovery, DCP conducted surveys in July 2020 across the same 24 neighborhoods.
Pre-COVID Trends for Storefront Uses

- Due to changing consumer preferences and growth of e-commerce, employment in food and beverage has outpaced other storefront uses.
- Services have also grown significantly, led by personal care.
- Many types of dry retail have experienced a slight decline in employment within the last several years, most notably in clothing and accessory stores.

**Private, Payroll Employment in Storefront Sectors in NYC, 1995-2017**

*In Full-Service Restaurants, food is served to a customer’s table. In Limited-Service restaurants, customers pay before eating. (Both may offer carryout.) **Other Dry Retail Stores include dry retail other than Clothing & Accessory, Health & Personal Care, and General Merchandise – such as Electronics and Appliances, Building Materials and Garden Supply, and Furniture and Home Furnishing Stores. ***General Merchandise Stores sell a large variety of goods and include department stores and dollar stores. Source: NYS Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 1995-2017. (Single files, annual averages.)*
When were the surveys conducted?

**2018**

DCP’s Storefront Vacancy Assessment data collected

**2020**

DCP Survey data collected July 7 through July 17, weekdays (excluding Mondays) between noon to 5PM.

**NYC Phased Reopening**

**Phase One**
June 8
- Construction
- Manufacturing
- Wholesale
- Curbside Retail

**Phase Two**
June 22
- Outdoor Dining
- In-store Retail
- Offices
- Hair Salons

**Phase Three**
July 6
- Beauty Salons
- Nail Salons
- Spas
- Massage

**Phase Four**
July 20
- Outdoor Arts and Entertainment
- Film Production Schools

*Examples of businesses permitted to operate*
Where were surveys conducted?

Retail surveys were conducted in 24 neighborhoods across all five boroughs.

DCP revisited corridors studied in 2018. These 24 corridors represent a cross-section of neighborhood conditions and retail typologies, including demographics, transit access, and density. The study focused on continuous, pedestrian-oriented corridors and excluded shopping malls and auto-oriented corridors.

**Manhattan**
- 01. Inwood – Broadway, Dyckman St, 207th St
- 02. Hamilton Heights – Broadway
- 03. Upper West Side – Broadway, Columbus Ave
- 04. Upper East Side – 2nd Ave, Lexington Ave, 86th St
- 05. Flatiron/Union Square – 5th Ave, Broadway, Park Ave, Union Square West
- 06. West 14th Street
- 07. East 14th Street
- 08. SoHo/NoHo – Broadway, Spring St, West Broadway,
- 09. Canal Street

**Bronx**
- 10. Kingsbridge – Broadway, 231st St
- 11. Morris Park – Morris Park Ave
- 12. Longwood – Southern Blvd, Westchester Ave

**Brooklyn**
- 13. Williamsburg – Bedford Ave,
- 14. Fulton Mall
- 15. Bed-Stuy – Fulton St
- 16. Brownsville – Pitkin Ave
- 17. Cobble Hill – Smith St, Court St
- 18. Park Slope – 5th Ave,
- 19. Coney Island – Mermaid Ave

**Queens**
- 20. Astoria – Steinway, Broadway, 30th Ave
- 22. Laurelton – Merrick Blvd

**Staten Island**
- 23. Port Richmond – Port Richmond Ave
- 24. New Dorp – New Dorp Ln

Grand St
- 14. Fulton Mall
- 15. Bed-Stuy – Fulton St
- 16. Brownsville – Pitkin Ave
- 17. Cobble Hill – Smith St, Court St
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Grand St
How were businesses categorized?

**Storefront Businesses**

**Dry Retail**
- Clothing stores
- Hardware stores
- Office supplies
- Pharmacies
- Florists
- Book shops

**Food & Beverage**
- Restaurants
- Coffee shops
- Bars
- Caterers
- Butchers
- Supermarkets

**Services**
- Medical offices
- Salons
- Daycare
- Gyms
- Houses of worship
- Laundromats
How was the status of businesses captured?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Business operations are currently being performed, or signage suggests that the business is currently operating in some capacity (including online sales, takeout, and delivery).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>The business did not appear to be open when surveyed and there is no indication that the business is currently operating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
<td>There is no indication that a business is currently operating out of this space or has clear plans to return to the space.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What additional information was collected?

Outdoor Dining

Port Richmond, Staten Island

Other Business Modifications to Adapt to COVID

- Takeout or delivery only
- Appointment only
- Posted capacity limits
- Modified hours
- Temperature checks
- Additional ventilation

Upper East Side, Manhattan
Survey Findings
Locally-serving retail corridors such as Kingsbridge, Jackson Heights, and Hamilton Heights had a higher proportion of businesses that are open. Regional destinations and areas impacted by reduced commuting and tourism, such as Flatiron/Union Square, SoHo/NoHo, and Canal Street, had the lowest proportion of open businesses.

Note: Active businesses include those that surveyors noted as Open. Inactive businesses include those that surveyors noted as Closed, Vacant, or Unknown. The proportion of Unknown values ranged from 0.3% in the Upper East Side to 11% in Park Slope.
Reopening Status by Sector

- Services, such as salons and dry cleaners, were less likely to be open, while a greater proportion of dry retail and food and beverage businesses were open. Although most services were allowed to operate at the time of the survey, gyms and fitness studios were not yet permitted to open.

- Food and Beverage were the most commonly open businesses, potentially attributed to flexibility in operations, including outdoor dining and takeout services.

Note: Approximately 1,050 businesses were identified as vacant and 300 as unknown. While most storefront businesses were permitted to be open when the surveys were completed, gyms and fitness studios – within the services category – were required to remain closed.
Reopening by Zoning District

- The proportion of active storefront business was highest within commercial overlay districts and residential areas, pointing to the relative strength of locally-serving retail corridors compared with more auto-oriented districts and regional destinations.
Change In Inactive Storefronts by Corridor, 2018 to 2020

- Across all corridors, businesses categorized as inactive – including those which are closed, vacant, or unknown – grew from 13.6% in 2018 to 32% in 2020.
- Compared with 2018, all corridors saw a higher share of inactive businesses, ranging from 1% to 36% higher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corridor</th>
<th>Change 2018</th>
<th>Change 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canal Street</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SoHo/NoHo</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatiron/Union Square</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williamsburg</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. 14th St</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. 14th St</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Richmond</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bed-Stuy</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coney Island</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Dorp</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Slope</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longwood</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurelton</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper West Side</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper East Side</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownsville</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inwood</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulton Mall</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobble Hill</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris Park</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astoria</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton Heights</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson Heights</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingsbridge</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Active businesses include those that surveyors noted as Open. Inactive businesses include those that surveyors noted as Closed, Vacant, or Unknown.
The majority of storefronts that were vacant in 2018 remained vacant in July 2020.
Spaces occupied by dry retail businesses in 2018 were the most likely to be vacant during July 2020, suggesting a continued contraction of the dry retail sector.
Food and beverage businesses were more likely to maintain the same use, remain open, and least likely to become vacant.
Supplemental Analysis: open streets and open restaurants
Restaurants with Open Restaurant permits

- Outdoor dining varied significantly by corridor, with more than 40% of restaurants having Open Restaurant permits in some neighborhoods and less than 10% in others.
- There are likely many factors influencing participation in the program, including the proportion of full-service vs. limited-services restaurants and reduced pedestrian traffic in office-based districts, as well as access to a ground floor.

NOTE
Restaurants were identified by joining Open Restaurant Permits and restaurants that have received a letter grade with the survey corridors. A permit does not necessarily mean the business is open. Data is current as of August 3, 2020.
5% of businesses surveyed were located on Open Streets, which included portions of 13 of the 24 corridors. As of July, there was no meaningful different between the proportion of active businesses along Open Streets and active businesses not located along Open Streets. Future surveys may help evaluate impacts on business activity related to the Open Streets program.

Note: Open Street data as of July 29th, 2020. Active businesses include those that surveyors noted as Open. Inactive businesses include those that surveyors noted as Closed, Vacant, or Unknown.
Key Findings

• Locally-serving retail corridors had the highest proportion of businesses that were open, while regional destinations and areas impacted by reduced commuting and tourism had many fewer businesses open.

• Services, such as salons and dry cleaners, were less likely to be open, while a greater proportion of dry retail and food and beverage businesses were open. A portion of the reduction in activity in services is likely attributed to the fact that gyms were not permitted to operate at the time of the survey.

• Compared with 2018, all corridors saw a higher share of inactive businesses—including those that are closed or vacant—ranging from 1% to 36% higher.

• Spaces occupied by dry retail businesses in 2018 were slightly more likely to be vacant during July 2020, suggesting a continued contraction of the dry retail sector.

• Outdoor dining varied significantly by corridor, with more than 40% of restaurants having outdoor dining in some neighborhoods and less than 10% in others. There are likely many factors influencing participation in the program, including the proportion of full-service vs. limited-services restaurants and reduced pedestrian traffic in office-based districts.

• As of July, there was no meaningful difference between the proportion of active businesses along Open Streets and active businesses outside of Open Streets. Future surveys will assess impacts of Open Streets on business activity.
Astoria Survey Results

72% Active

- Open (673)
- Closed (89)
- Vacant (128)
- Unknown (39)

Bed-Stuy Survey Results

65% Active

- Open (226)
- Closed (25)
- Vacant (86)
- Unknown (11)

Brownsville Survey Results

71% Active

- Open (133)
- Closed (19)
- Vacant (32)
- Unknown (3)

Canal Street Survey Results

43% Active

- Open (56)
- Closed (25)
- Vacant (48)
- Unknown (1)

Cobble Hill Survey Results

72% Active

- Open (285)
- Closed (24)
- Vacant (69)
- Unknown (18)

66% Active

- Open (93)
- Closed (24)
- Vacant (17)
- Unknown (6)

Mermaid Ave.

East 14th Street Survey Results

62% Active

- Open (78)
- Closed (16)
- Vacant (20)
- Unknown (11)

Flatiron/Union Square Survey Results

53% Active

- Open (88)
- Closed (34)
- Vacant (38)
- Unknown (7)

72% Active

- Open (63)
- Closed (6)
- Vacant (13)
- Unknown (6)

Hamilton Heights Survey Results

73% Active

- Open (209)
- Closed (6)
- Vacant (52)
- Unknown (19)

Inwood Survey Results

72% Active

- Open (224)
- Closed (38)
- Vacant (25)
- Unknown (26)

Jackson Heights Survey Results

74% Active

- Open (338)
- Closed (46)
- Vacant (36)
- Unknown (34)

Kingsbridge Survey Results

83% Active

- Open (210)
- Closed (19)
- Vacant (12)
- Unknown (11)

Laurelton Survey Results

70% Active

- Open (147)
- Closed (36)
- Vacant (20)
- Unknown (6)

70% Active

- Open (225)
- Closed (43)
- Vacant (45)
- Unknown (10)

Morris Park Survey Results

72% Active

- Open (183)
- Closed (26)
- Vacant (25)
- Unknown (19)

New Dorp Survey Results

68% Active

Open (79)
Closed (19)
Vacant (7)
Unknown (12)

Park Slope Survey Results

68% Active

- Open (149)
- Closed (16)
- Vacant (31)
- Unknown (24)

64% Active

- Open (112)
- Closed (29)
- Vacant (34)
- Unknown (1)

SoHo/NoHo Survey Results

46% Active

- Open (186)
- Closed (120)
- Vacant (93)
- Unknown (2)

Upper East Side Survey Results

71% Active

- Open (210)
- Closed (21)
- Vacant (65)
- Unknown (1)

Upper West Side Survey Results

71% Active

- Open (200)
- Closed (31)
- Vacant (51)
- Unknown (1)

West 14th Street Survey Results

60% Active

- Open (119)
- Closed (25)
- Vacant (41)
- Unknown (14)

Williamsburg Survey Results

57% Active

- Open (176)
- Closed (56)
- Vacant (62)
- Unknown (14)

## Use Categorization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dry Retail</th>
<th>Food and Beverage</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apparel, accessories, luggage, and jewelry stores</td>
<td>Convenience store and bodega</td>
<td>Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty supplies, vitamin, and personal care store</td>
<td>Full-service restaurant, bar</td>
<td>Beauty salon, barber, spa, wellness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronics store and cell carriers</td>
<td>Limited service restaurant, coffee shop</td>
<td>Check cashing, other financial services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General merchandise, including discount and department store</td>
<td>Liquor store</td>
<td>Daycare (child or adult)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware, home center, and home improvement</td>
<td>Other food and beverage (caterers, etc.)</td>
<td>Education, training, learning center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home décor, furniture, florist, and framing</td>
<td>Specialty food store (produce, butcher, baker)</td>
<td>Entertainment, culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media (books, music, video)</td>
<td>Supermarket, full line grocery, wholesale club</td>
<td>Gym, fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office supplies, stationery, and gifts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Laundromat, dry cleaner, atailor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed dry retail</td>
<td></td>
<td>Medical, dental, optical office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pawn shop</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed services, offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pet supply</td>
<td></td>
<td>Printing, shipping, postal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Professional services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporting goods, toy, hobby, craft stores</td>
<td></td>
<td>Religious, community center</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

**NYC Department of City Planning**

**Leadership**
Marisa Lago, Director
Anita Laremont, Executive Director
Howard Slatkin, Deputy Executive Director for Strategic Planning
Jennifer Gravel, Director, Housing and Economic Development
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Jacquelyne Sunwoo, City Planner

**Surveyors**
38 staff members in Borough Offices, Urban Design Division, and Transportation Division at the Department of City Planning
• Businesses were identified using Live XYZ data from Summer 2018. Although efforts were made to survey all ground floor businesses along each corridor, geocoding errors in the source data could have omitted a limited number of storefront businesses in each corridor.

• Although the same 24 corridors studied in the 2019 storefront vacancy report were surveyed for this assessment, five of these corridors were reduced in size in order to be able to conduct the surveys quickly and within the same phase of recovery. These include SoHo/NoHo, Upper West Side, Upper East Side, Jackson Heights, and Park Slope. To compare effectively between the two surveys, the 2018 vacancy rate was recalculated based on the smaller geography.

• Of the more than 6,600 storefronts in the survey, 32 were identified to be demolished or under demolition - including 23 on development sites in Fulton Mall – and were excluded from all calculations in this document.