

Overview

The Department of City Planning (DCP), agency partners and community-based organizations convened two public roundtables on June 12th and June 18th, 2019, to speak with businesses, property owners and stakeholders on the future vision of the Industrial Business Zone (IBZ) in Gowanus. The roundtables are part of a broader engagement effort to develop a shared vision for the the southern part of Gowanus within the Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Business Zone (Southwest Brooklyn IBZ) and neighboring blocks.

During the first part of the event, DCP presented on the study's goals and area's existing conditions, followed by break-out groups where participants discussed:

- advantages and challenges of businesses locating in Gowanus;
- how land use and zoning could better align with a future vision for the area; and
- infrastructure and workforce development needs that support local businesses.

Break-out group discussions were guided by the following question prompts:

- Why did your business locate in Gowanus and what are the key advantages or neighborhood assets?
- What are some of the challenges of doing business in Gowanus?
- What is your vision on where and how to grow jobs?
- Are there specific barriers related to land use and zoning that limit the growth or expansion of your business or property?
- What neighborhood improvements

would you prioritize for your business or property?

Partnering agencies included the Departments of Environmental Protection (DEP), Small Business Services (SBS), and Transportation (DOT), and the NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC).

The following document contains a summary of comments or "what we heard" from each discussion group. In total, more than 50 people attended the roundtables.



Industrial Businesses

- “Industrial business are loud and smelly and need the space here to do this.”
- “Traffic slowdown measures for safety are a challenge for industrial trucking.”
- “Availability of industrial space is an asset, but there needs to be more opportunities for business growth.”
- “Rents for industrial businesses are moving closer to those of flex businesses or entertainment.”
- “Need better access for truck loading, truck parking, the ability to make noise, and no problems with workforce.”
- “Warehouse spaces are partitioning to host smaller companies, as Gowanus has adapted to current trends, but that does not leave large floor plate areas for users that might want them. Many businesses want to be able to grow from, say, 1000 sf to 5000 sf.”
- “The future of warehouses is vertical.”
- “Businesses need to be on the ground floor. Taking truck parking out of FAR would help a lot.”
- “Increase the FAR and height thresholds to allow for vertical warehousing. We can only go up, we cannot afford to buy more land.”
- “If trucks could be parked on the first floor for tax incentives, owners could then afford to install elevators to be able to load beyond the ground floor.”
- “The IBZ needs better and more tax incentives. Other places have training grants or even electricity credits. The IBZ needs better incentives for industrial businesses to stay here.”
- “Property taxes in the IBZ are rising fast even though there is no outlet to build for the demand.”

Zoning and Land Uses

- “The IBZ needs to grow to accommodate the industry leaving the area to the North.”
- “Gowanus is not hyper industrial, and is integrated with a regular community which is a perk. It is nice having families around with curious children.”
- “With growth in residential, 311 complaints come in about noisy industrial activity during nights and weekends. The presence of bars and restaurants nearby poses risk for patrons near industrial activities at night.”
- “Industrial and commercial space can provide jobs for people in the area. Heavy manufacturing is gone so an FAR increase to accommodate the demand would be welcome.”
- “There’s much more demand for upper level space compared to years past.”
- “If you build higher ceiling spaces, you will have interest from all sectors.”
- “We’re concerned about displacement as a result of a large rezoning in the area, especially given how many businesses likely have demolition clauses in their leases.”
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- “The IBZ is surrounded by expensive residential neighborhoods, which drives certain types of development or businesses. It is no surprise tech or entertainment businesses are taking over.”
- “The area doesn’t necessarily feel safe. There needs to be more commercial to add more eyes on the street.”
- “New office uses are welcome if there is added space. Offices should not take existing industrial space.”
- “The future of the IBZ needs to be geared more towards office space. There’s a change in tenant demographics towards less manufacturing and more office-based jobs.”

Challenges

- safety concern around industrial routes/bike lanes
- concern about increasing office uses/compatibility w/ industrial
- questionable BOT change to a specific intersection
- Traffic slowdown measures for safety = challenge for industrial
- increased congestion from new Manhattan competition pricing
- Customer accessibility (lack of customer parking/pick up zones)
- future BQE structure/construction
- BQE traffic makes cars/trucks drive to 300 Ave
- worst traffic morning into Manhattan 3-5PM in neighborhood
- need dedicated turn lane for getting from 300 Ave into neighborhood
- traffic/street conditions making it difficult for industrial biz in this area

challenges

- expensive surrounding residential - unaffordable for industrial without
- flooding + sewage, CSO - ongoing DEP project will help manage overflow
- Sandy flooding - more pinches had to rebuild
- 9th Street flooding
- Parking - nighttime residential only/obscured loading zone good
- difficult for worker to find park
- need more pub transit
- truck conflicts esp PSNV
- broadband coverage

Advantages continued

- work/live neighborhood
- diversity
- formerly affordable

Space Needs

- future of warehouse - vertical
- only way to grow is up → low prices
- concern about 2nd only job center comes behind industrial
- industrial biz are loud/smelly, etc. → need space to do their
- perception vs. reality of mixing industrial/manufacturing w/ retail/office uses
- loading challenges

Challenges Cont.

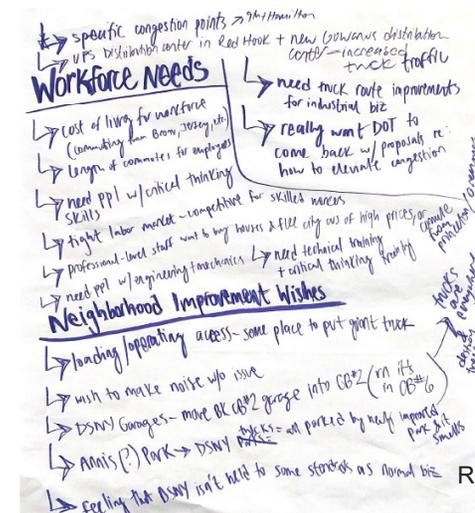
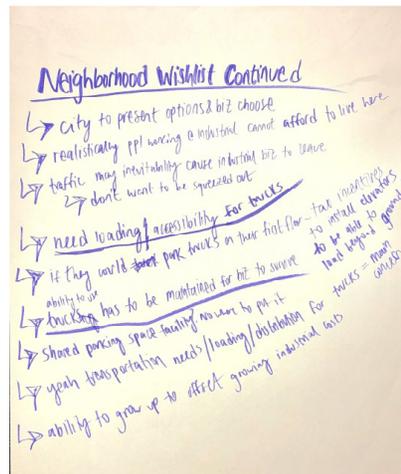
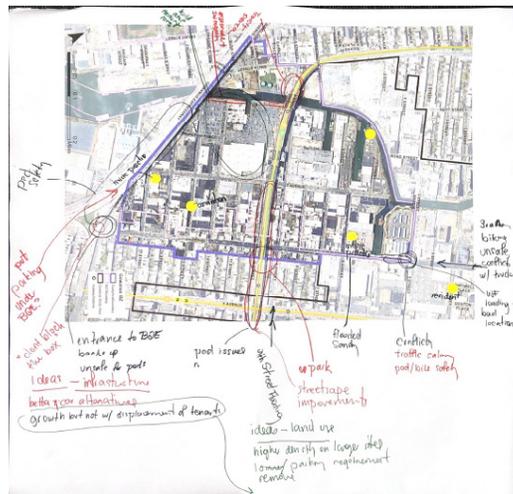
- nonconforming residential uses clinics
- changing real estate market
- complaints from residential? → increased residential density → traffic challenges → separate lane changes → bike lane
- parking/loading challenges

Transportation

- "In order to sustain an industrial zone, there needs to be good truck routes and parking."
- "Improve the roads to allow heavy trucks, and separate bike infrastructure. Maybe have narrower sidewalks on industrial side streets to reduce the problem of trucks parking on sidewalk."
- "All the trucks that can't come down the BOE come down through 3rd Ave. If they opened 4th Ave again it would help relieve the traffic."
- "The future closing of the BOE alongside congestion pricing will push everyone down 3rd Ave and make the neighborhood worse."
- "Co-locating a bike lane and truck route on 3rd Avenue is ill-conceived. Now that there is a bike lane on 4th Ave, perhaps we can revisit the one on 3rd."
- "The worst traffic is in the morning traveling into Manhattan or from 3 to 5pm within the neighborhood."
- "Without the option for trucks to pull up to the building they are forced to block the sidewalk. Street parking and narrow streets are an issue."
- "The waterway isn't used anymore. Depending on the cleanup, it could be a transportation resource."

Parking

- "Businesses tell customers and others to just park at Lowes if they can't find street parking nearby. There's a worry parking and subway capacity will get worse when new residential comes in through rezoning. Would like to see parking allowed under elevated rail tracks."
- "It seems cheaper for residents to park in Gowanus and get ticketed weekly, as opposed to paying for parking. One person in particular consistently blocks my loading zone."
- "Department of sanitation trucks take up a lot of parking, smell, and make navigating the streets challenging."
- "DOT has taken lots of on-street parking, resulting in more traffic on 8th Street. There's ticketing issues there because they are enforcing parking as if it was a residential area by focusing on double-parking, not cars blocking driveways."
- "Off street parking makes densities difficult and even impossible. It probably ought to be reduced, not removed."
- "It is hard to find parking for workers."
- "Double parking tickets should not be more expensive than bike tickets."
- "Space under the BOE has been vacated by construction vehicles, which might be an opportunity for new parking."



Jobs and Workforce Needs

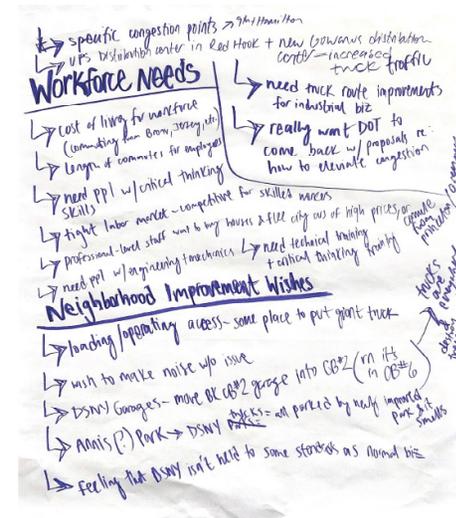
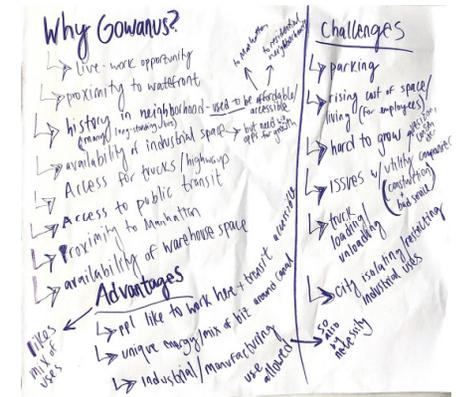
- "The cost to hire an employee, with cross-training and on-boarding, plus soft-skills, is high."
- "Difficult finding skilled mechanics."
- "Manufacturing has become way more specialized and requires more technical skills."
- "Connect job training programs for IBZ businesses to nearby NYCHA communities."
- "There needs to be more good jobs. Advocate for industrial or commercial uses to match demand."
- "It's more profitable to rent the building than to keep current employees."

Housing

- "People will live where they have affordable housing, can walk to the train, and can shop a little without a car."
- "The cost of living is too high for the workforce. They have to commute from the Bronx, Jersey, and elsewhere."
- "The surrounding residential area is unaffordable."

Resiliency, Sustainability, and Infrastructure

- "Increasing densities in the north and here are increasing issues with sewage outflows and flooding."
- "If the infrastructure could sustain parking, drainage, sewers, etc., I wouldn't have a problem with more people in the area."
- "Construction workers don't think the new pipes will be large enough to handle flooding."
- "The area isn't fully mapped out in terms of outflows, which is an important first step to understanding the issues."
- "Businesses are getting ticketed because of an uptick in litter and pedestrians. We were going to push our own trash receptacles, but DSNY won't pick them up. They don't have routes in the area because it's not residential."
- "Business owners are putting their own measures in place to avoid some effects of regular flooding, like backflow preventers, pumps, and elevated mezzanines for equipment."
- "There needs to be better infrastructure. Everytime it rains my building gets flooded and the toilets overflow."
- "Increasing density can lead to the modernization of buildings which could then offset some of these flooding issues."
- "Advocate for tunnels versus tanks [combined sewer overflow site]. Tunnels provide opportunity to expand in the future to accommodate whatever growth occurs, unlike tanks."
- "9th street is effectively closed off during heavy rains due to flooding."
- "Because of flooding from Sandy backflow mains were installed on 6th Street. Since that street still has cobblestones, City will likely be deterred from making repairs."



Roundtable Notes

Gowanus IBZ Visioning Study Business Roundtables, June 12 & 18, 2019

During each roundtable DCP presented on the goals of the study and existing conditions which was followed by group discussions with businesses, property owners, and various stakeholders.

