

BROWNSVILLE BROOKLYN

Commercial District Needs Assessment



Bill de Blasio
Mayor
Gregg Bishop
Commissioner



Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District



ABOUT BROWNSVILLE

Background

Avenue NYC is a competitive grant program created by the NYC Department of Small Business Services to fund and build the capacity of community-based development organizations to execute commercial revitalization initiatives. Avenue NYC is funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, which targets investments in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.

Avenue NYC Commercial Revitalization grants provide multi-year commitments aimed at building the capacity of partner organizations to better understand neighborhood needs, develop impactful programs, and sustain their work in the community for at least three years.

The **Commercial District Needs Assessment** (CDNA) highlights a neighborhood's existing business landscape and consumer characteristics.

This CDNA features the **Pitkin Avenue, Belmont Avenue, Rockaway Avenue, and Mother Gaston Boulevard** commercial corridors in **Brownsville**, and was conducted by the **Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District** between July and December 2018.

Key issues and opportunities identified through this assessment will help prioritize SBS - supported local investments, and serve as an informational and marketing resource for the neighborhood.

Brownsville is a dynamic neighborhood located in East Brooklyn and bordered by the communities of Ocean Hill, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, and East New York. The Brownsville commercial district is situated just south of Broadway Junction, a major transportation hub providing local and regional rail service throughout New York City and into Long Island. The East Brooklyn Industrial Business Zone, located just east of the district, offers significant economic opportunities for local businesses and jobseekers, and is one of the city's most innovative centers for light manufacturing.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, Brownsville was among the most densely populated areas in Brooklyn, home predominately to Russian Jewish immigrants. Pitkin Avenue thrived as the primary commercial corridor with brick and mortar shops in the area, while Belmont Avenue teemed with pushcart vendors selling fresh produce. In the decades following World War II, massive urban renewal projects reshaped the physical landscape, and an influx of working-class African Americans and Latinos reshaped the demographic makeup of the neighborhood. Disinvestment and social unrest in the second half of the century contributed to challenging conditions for shoppers and merchants alike, further reinforcing reduced economic opportunities. Today however, Brownsville's community members are leveraging new economic opportunities and an abundance of social capital and community spirit to overcome these challenges.

Today, Brownsville's commercial district consists of four unique corridors. The oldest and most well-known is Pitkin Avenue, characterized by its bustling energy, diverse retail environment, and wide tree-lined sidewalks. At Pitkin's western end lies Zion Triangle, a memorial park commemorating the neighborhood's Jewish past and its military history. Loew's Pitkin Theatre, an adaptively repurposed Art Deco building that houses the Brownsville Ascend Charter School, also sits at Pitkin's western end. Rockaway Avenue and Mother Gaston Boulevard run perpendicular to Pitkin. The former is a heavily-trafficked, two-way corridor that connects Brownsville to the neighborhoods of Ocean Hill and Bedford-Stuyvesant to the north and Canarsie to the south. The latter is a semi-residential corridor containing the Stone Avenue Library and the Brownsville Heritage House, a center for arts, culture, education, and history, founded by Rosetta "Mother" Gaston.

Parallel to Pitkin to the south, Belmont Avenue is a slower-paced, one-way corridor, reminiscent of an outdoor, pedestrian marketplace. Belmont Avenue is home to several innovative nonprofit organizations including the Brownsville Community Culinary Center, Made in Brownsville, and the Brownsville Community Justice Center. Belmont Avenue is also home to Osborn Plaza, a brightly painted pedestrian space and popular community gathering spot.

Neighborhood Demographics

See more on page 12

With more than 30,000 residents living in a 0.6 square-mile area, the neighborhood's population density is nearly double the citywide average. Most of the local population is African American (71%) and Latino (26%). Though Brownsville suffers from high poverty and unemployment rates, the neighborhood can be characterized best by its youth and optimism. Nearly 30% of the neighborhood's population is under the age of 18 (compared to 21% citywide), and many residents are part of multi-generational households with deep roots in the community.

Future Opportunities

See more on page 5

Brownsville is well positioned to secure investments and create opportunity through the coming years. In 2017, residents, local stakeholders, elected officials, and City agencies collaborated to produce the Brownsville Plan — a guide for equitable development in the neighborhood - that resulted in a commitment of more than \$1 billion in public and private funding to support housing, culture, entrepreneurship, park space, and much more. Together with a dedicated network of community-based organizations, the people of Brownsville are striving to create a brighter future for the next generation.

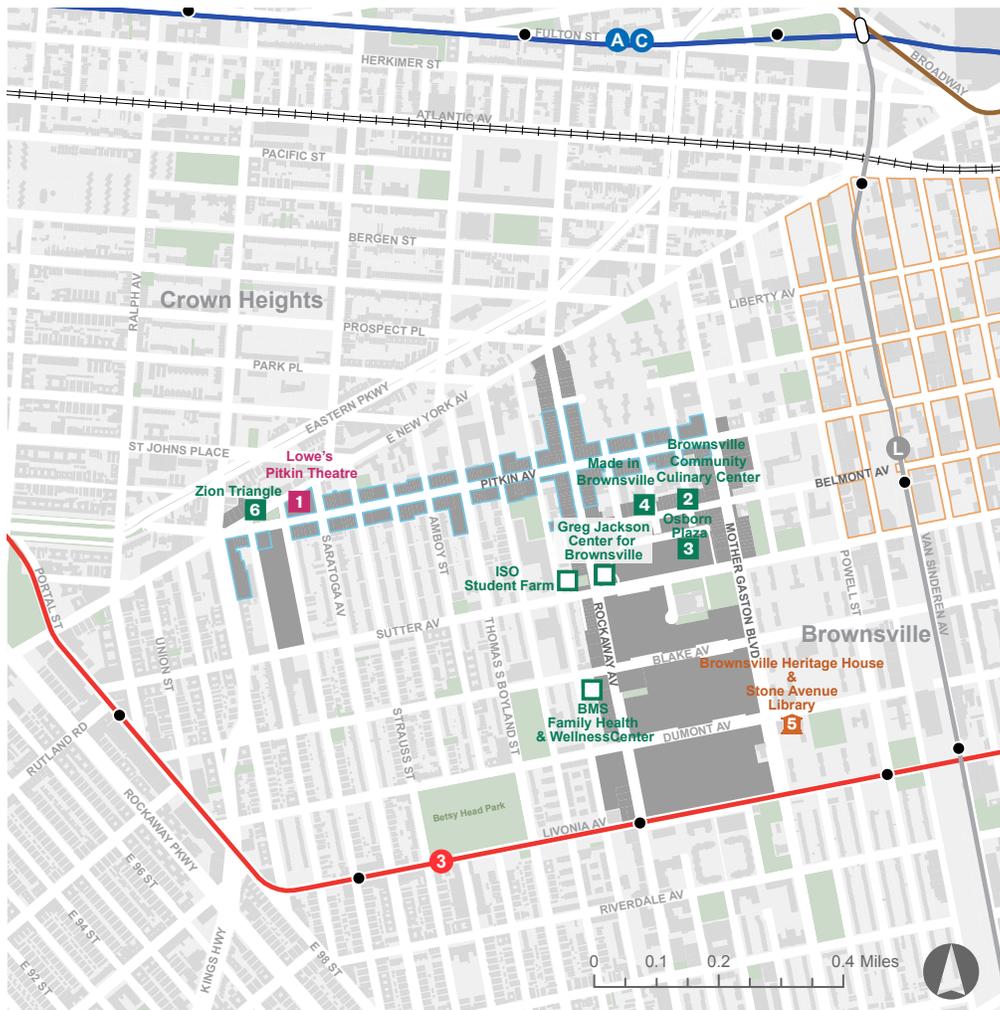
In This Report

Existing conditions, business data, and qualitative depictions of the neighborhood were gathered from more than **399 surveys** and various stakeholder meetings with neighborhood merchants, shoppers, workers, property owners, and residents.

Jump to...

Key Findings	4-5
Business Inventory	6
What Merchants Say	7-8
Business Outlook	9-10
What Shoppers Say	8, 10
Physical Environment	11
Data Appendix	12-14

Brownsville



Notable Places



Loew's Pitkin Theatre



Brownsville Community Culinary Center



Osborn Plaza



Made in Brownsville



Brownsville Heritage House & Stone Avenue Library



Zion Triangle War Memorial

Points of Interest

- Assessed Commercial Corridor
- Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District
- East Brooklyn Business Improvement District
- Historic Institutions
- Public Community Spaces
- Public Facilities

Merchant and Community Groups

- Brownsville Community Justice Center
- Camba-Brownsville In Violence Out
- Central Brooklyn Economic Development Corporation
- Community Solutions
- Pitkin Avenue Business Improvement District

Neighborhood Events

- Be on Belmont Street Festival
- BMS Summerfest
- Brownsville Hope Summit
- Brownsville National Night Out
- Brownsville Old Timer's Day
- Jump Into Summer Block Party — Brownsville
- Neighborhood Health Action Center
- Pitkin Avenue Easter Parade and Egg Hunt
- Pitkin Avenue Halloween Parade and Harvest Festival
- Pitkin Avenue Holiday Tree Lighting
- Pitkin Avenue Summer Plazas
- Summerstage at Betsy Head Park

KEY FINDINGS & OPPORTUNITIES

Strengths

- ▶ Pedestrian and commercial activity is supported by well-established, tree-lined corridors with wide sidewalks
- ▶ Culturally diverse and long-standing businesses maintain strong ties to the neighborhood and their customer base
- ▶ A growing network of community-based organizations provide apprenticeship programs for local youth
- ▶ Highly accessible through a variety of public transit options including bus, subway, and regional rail service
- ▶ Readily available and affordable commercial lease options contribute to a diverse retail mix
- ▶ Proximity to the East Brooklyn Industrial Business Zone supports opportunities for employment and business to business transaction

Challenges

- ▶ Unoccupied storefronts and poorly lit streets contribute to negative perceptions of safety, especially at night
- ▶ Significant repairs or improvements are needed to a number of storefronts and commercial buildings
- ▶ Early business closures limit commercial opportunities and reduce pedestrian activity in the evening
- ▶ Insufficient access to financial institutions, healthy food options, and other critical businesses
- ▶ More than one third of merchants indicated that their sales have decreased over the past year
- ▶ Illegal dumping and littering near commercial intersections detract from the overall cleanliness of the district
- ▶ Limited marketing expertise of merchants and entrepreneurs affects their ability to attract new clients and establish a digital presence





Pitkin Avenue Commercial Corridor



Brownsville Student Farm



Pitkin Avenue Summer Plazas



The Women of Brownsville: Telling Our Story

Opportunities

- ▶ Use local parks and public spaces to host events that celebrate the history, culture, and community of Brownsville
- ▶ Connect local merchants with resources needed to improve the security and sustainability of their businesses
- ▶ Improve trash management issues by developing a comprehensive sanitation strategy for the commercial district
- ▶ Showcase available commercial properties to attract new businesses that offer critical goods and services currently unavailable in the community
- ▶ Kick-start local innovation and activate underutilized space by enabling entrepreneurs to test their business ideas in vacant storefronts
- ▶ Foster a public art scene by establishing interactive art exhibitions
- ▶ Connect Brownsville's youth to professional development opportunities with local businesses
- ▶ Capitalize on the strength of merchant-consumer relationships by incentivizing mutually beneficial opportunities for patronage
- ▶ Invest in the repair of storefronts and commercial properties to improve the built environment

What's Next?
 To address these key findings and opportunities, Avenue NYC Grants have been awarded by SBS to nonprofit organizations.
 For more information, visit: nyc.gov/avenuenyc

BUSINESS LANDSCAPE

Business Inventory

375

Total Number of Storefronts

16%

Storefront Vacancy*

* Note: In 2018, New York City's 75 Business Improvement Districts reported an average ground floor vacancy rate of 8.9% and a median ground floor vacancy rate of 7.3% (SBS BIDs Trends Report, 2018).

Storefront & Retail Mix



The Pitkin Avenue Renaissance Program secured \$500,000 in funding for 2017 to 2020, to implement programs and projects to improve storefronts and reduce vacancies in the Brownsville community.

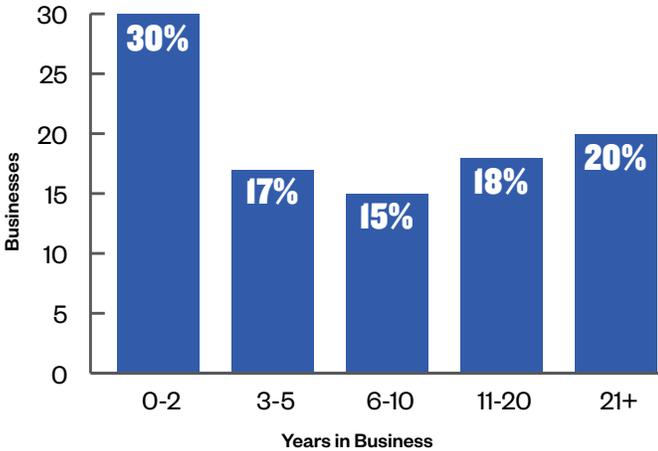
For more information, visit: pitkinavenue.nyc/initiatives

Business inventory and retail mix data were gathered by the Pitkin Avenue BID through a comprehensive area inventory of storefront businesses located along Pitkin Avenue, Belmont Avenue, Rockaway Avenue, and Mother Gaston Boulevard (Fall 2018).



What We've Heard from Brownsville Merchants

How many years have you been in business here?



12

Mean

6

Median

2

Mode

*Note: The mean is the average of all responses, the median is the middle number when all responses are arranged in ascending order, and the mode is the most common response.

Do you own or rent your property?

75%

Rent

21%

Own

4%

No Response

Over the past year, has your business improved, stayed the same, or decreased?

20%

Improved

30%

Stayed the Same

36%

Decreased

14%

N/A or No Response

In the coming year, do you plan to expand, stay, relocate, or close?

9%

Expand

83%

Stay

1%

Relocate

4%

Close

3%

No Response

What changes need to occur in Brownsville to attract more visitors/shoppers?

% Merchant Responses

▶ Safety	26%
▶ Storefront improvements	16%
▶ Parking	12%
▶ Community events	9%
▶ Landscaping/beautification	9%
▶ Merchant collaboration	8%
▶ Street lighting	8%
▶ Sanitation	6%
▶ Other	6%

What kinds of resources would help you grow your business?

% Merchant Responses

▶ Marketing support	27%
▶ Space improvements	25%
▶ Access to financing	20%
▶ Legal/lease support	11%
▶ New equipment	7%
▶ Assistance with regulatory compliance	6%
▶ Training for staff	3%
▶ Other services	1%

BUSINESS LANDSCAPE

What We've Heard from Brownsville Merchants

What changes would you suggest to improve the commercial district for residents, pedestrians, and shoppers?

"Businesses should stay open longer, everything shuts down too early."

"Create new places for the kids who hang out here."

"More foliage and grass could brighten up the area."

What makes this commercial district unique?

"The diversity in people, the hustler's spirit."

"Generations of families that have been here for years and transcend the neighborhood."

"Customer loyalty."

"The sense of pride from other merchants."

What would you say are the most pressing needs of businesses in this district?

"We need an increased police presence to prevent crime and ensure safety."

"The love that's exhibited in this community. Everyone is helpful to one another."

"Drug use and shoplifting can still be an issue."

What do you like about this commercial district?

"It's central and convenient to get to."

"Good foot traffic."

"We have beautiful street murals."

"There's so much hospitality. So much kindness. People help and give to one another."

"There's a sense of unity here."

"We have a great relationship with our customers; they're like family."

What We've Heard from Brownsville Shoppers

What changes would you suggest to improve the commercial district for residents, pedestrians, and shoppers?

"More cleaning and street lighting to improve safety."

"Bring in higher quality food and clothing stores."

"We need more businesses with child-friendly options and an affordable movie theater."

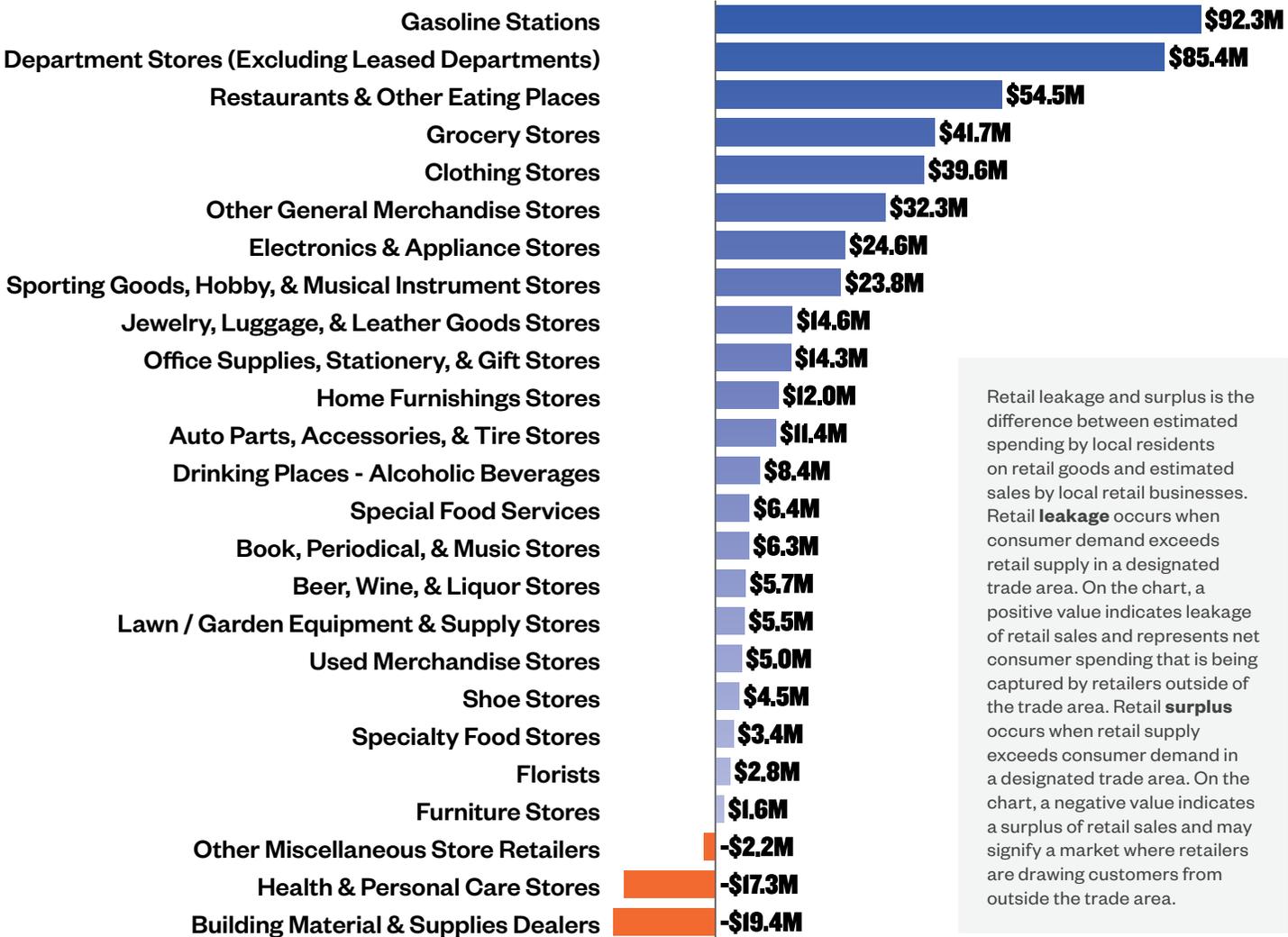
"More retail variety, longer business hours, and evening entertainment."

Brownsville Retail Opportunity

<p>Residents spend</p> <p>\$1.53B</p> <p>each year in goods and services</p>	<p>Local businesses make</p> <p>\$995M</p> <p>each year in retail sales</p>	<p>Every year,</p> <p>\$535M</p> <p>is spent outside the neighborhood</p>
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Retail Leakage & Surplus

← Surplus \$0 Leakage →



Retail leakage and surplus is the difference between estimated spending by local residents on retail goods and estimated sales by local retail businesses. Retail **leakage** occurs when consumer demand exceeds retail supply in a designated trade area. On the chart, a positive value indicates leakage of retail sales and represents net consumer spending that is being captured by retailers outside of the trade area. Retail **surplus** occurs when retail supply exceeds consumer demand in a designated trade area. On the chart, a negative value indicates a surplus of retail sales and may signify a market where retailers are drawing customers from outside the trade area.

Source: ESRI and Infogroup, January 2019.

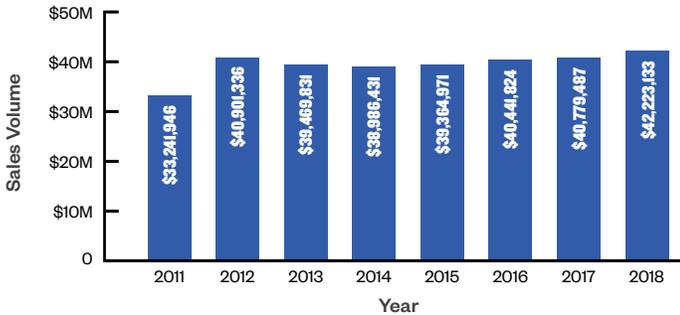
BUSINESS OUTLOOK

Business Trends

Change in Total Business Sales, 2011 - 2018



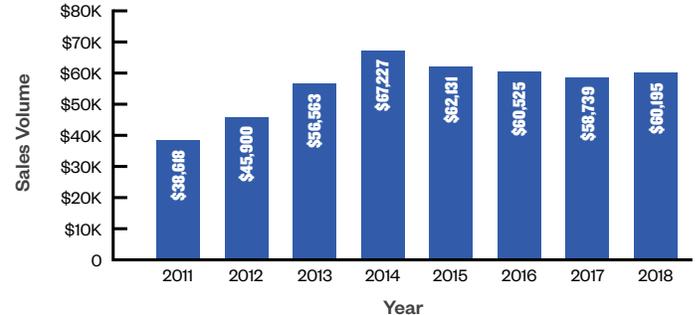
Brownsville Total Business Sales



Change in Median Sales by Business, 2011 - 2018



Brownsville Median Sales by Business



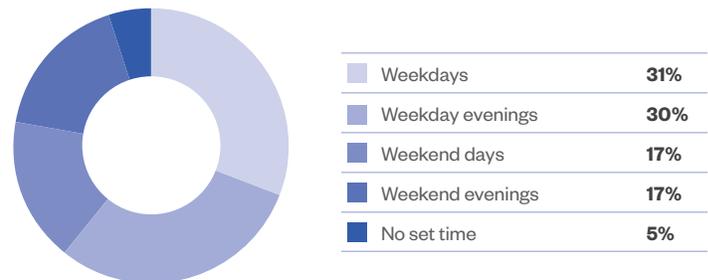
Source: Division of Tax Policy, NYC Department of Finance

What We've Heard from Shoppers

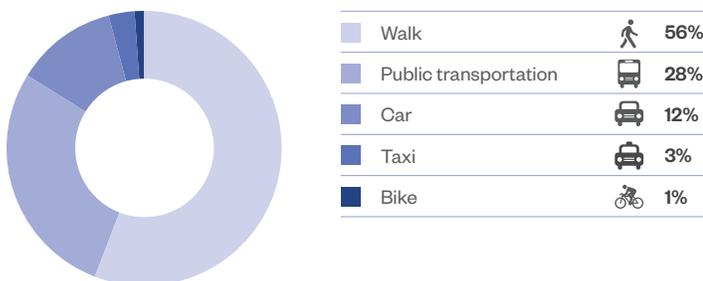
What additional types of businesses would you like to see in Brownsville?

- ▶ Healthy food options 
- ▶ Coffee shops and bakeries 
- ▶ Big box or anchor stores 
- ▶ Family-friendly restaurants 
- ▶ Banks 

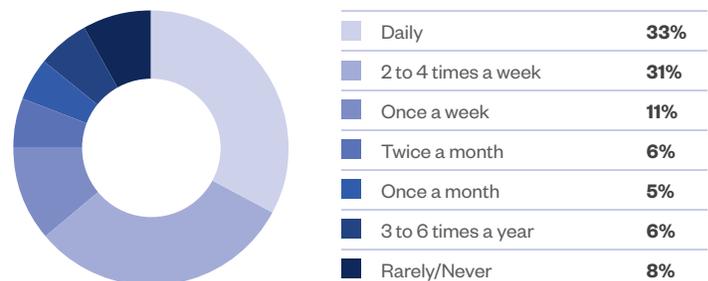
When do you usually shop in Brownsville?



How do you usually get to Brownsville?



How often do you shop in Brownsville?



Source: Based on 297 consumer surveys conducted by the Pitkin Avenue BID in Fall 2018.

Storefront Vacancies



An analysis of 375 storefronts along Pitkin Avenue, Belmont Avenue, Rockaway Avenue, and Mother Gaston Boulevard revealed that 39% of storefronts are in poor condition, 44% are in average condition, and 17% are in good condition.

Streetscape Observations

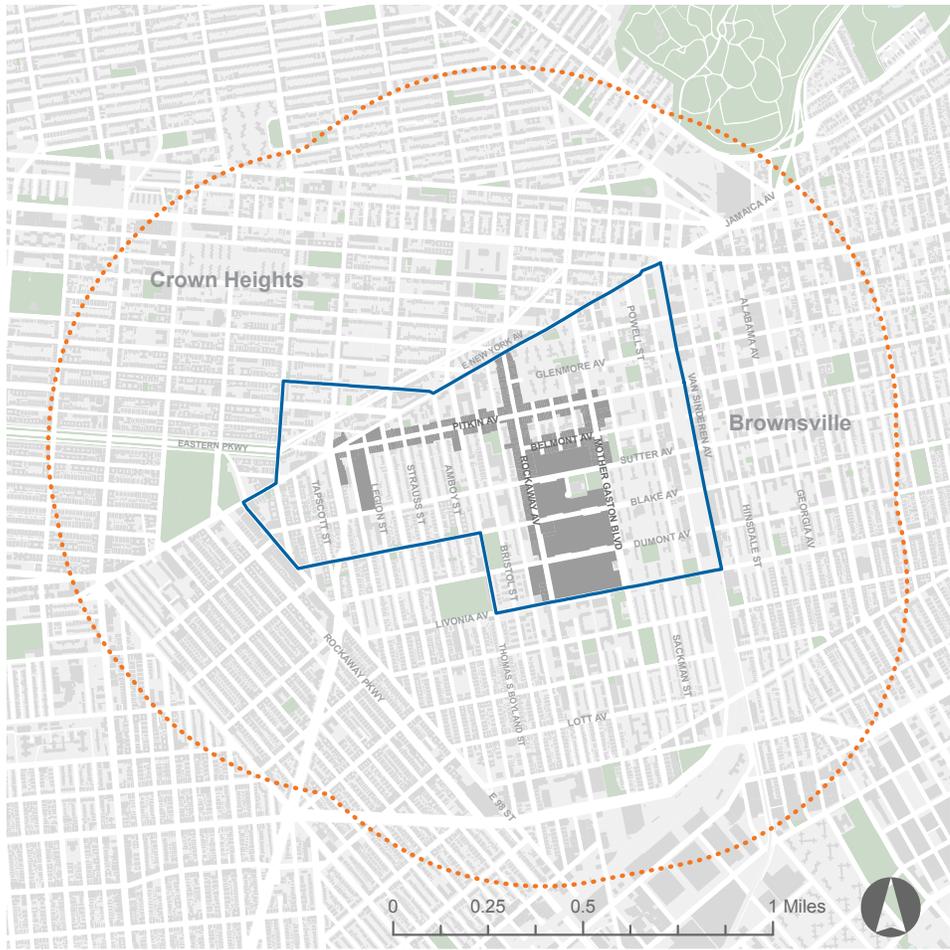
- ▶ Storefront conditions vary from store to store. New businesses generally have better quality signage.
- ▶ Illegal disposal of residential and commercial garbage coupled with high volumes of pedestrian traffic causes litter to pile up on corridor hotspots such as Pitkin Avenue and Thomas Boyland corner and Osborn Street and Pitkin Avenue corner.
- ▶ Many broken curbs due to heavy pedestrian traffic and truck loading.
- ▶ Traffic markers are worn down and require new paint and renovation.
- ▶ Existing street furniture is not well-maintained and adds to the unsightliness of certain sidewalks.
- ▶ Graffiti is frequently seen tagged on construction sites and storefront gates.



DATA APPENDIX

Study Area Boundaries

<p>■ Assessed Commercial Corridors</p>	<p>— Brownsville Context Area</p>	<p>⋯ Trade Area</p>
<p>Primary data on Brownsville storefront businesses presented on pg. 6-8 was gathered along Pitkin Avenue, Belmont Avenue, Rockaway Avenue, and Mother Gaston Boulevard.</p>	<p>Demographic and employment data on pg. 12-13 correspond to the Brownsville neighborhood context area.</p>	<p>Retail leakage, surplus, and retail opportunity data on pg. 9 correspond to the 0.75 mile trade area.</p>



Area Demographics

Total Population	
31,748	Brownsville
2,606,852	Brooklyn
8,461,961	New York City

Population Density (per square mile)	
55,204	Brownsville
37,510	Brooklyn
27,986	New York City

Average Household Size	
2.67	Brownsville
2.73	Brooklyn
2.65	New York City

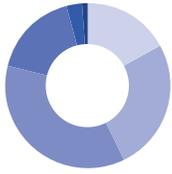
Commuting Patterns



Car Ownership	
22%	Brownsville
44%	Brooklyn
45%	New York City

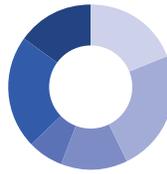
Area Demographics

Race / Background



	Brownsville	BK	NYC
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	26%	19%	29%
White alone	1%	36%	32%
Black or African American alone	71%	31%	22%
Asian alone	2%	12%	14%
Two or more races	0%	2%	2%
Some other race alone	0%	0%	1%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0%	0%	0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0%

Educational Attainment



	Brownsville	BK	NYC
12th Grade or Less, No Diploma	31%	20%	19%
High School Graduate	37%	26%	24%
Some College, No Degree	15%	14%	14%
Associate's Degree	7%	6%	7%
Bachelor's Degree	7%	21%	21%
Graduate or Professional Degree	3%	13%	15%

Population Age



	Brownsville	BK	NYC
Under 5 Years	9%	7%	6%
5-14 Years	16%	13%	11%
15-24 Years	15%	13%	13%
25-44 Years	30%	32%	32%
45-64 Years	21%	23%	25%
65+ Years	9%	12%	13%

Median Age

30.4	Brownsville
34.5	Brooklyn
35.9	New York City

Foreign-Born Population

25%	Brownsville
37%	Brooklyn
37%	New York City

Income

Median Household Income

\$22,268	Brownsville
\$50,640	Brooklyn
\$55,191	New York City

Pop. Below Poverty Line

45%	Brownsville
23%	Brooklyn
20%	New York City

Employment

Population in Labor Force

49%	Brownsville
64%	Brooklyn
64%	New York City

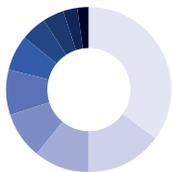
Unemployment*

15.4%	Brownsville
9.0%	Brooklyn
8.6%	New York City

*Note: Unemployment figures are based on data from 2012 - 2016. As of December 2018, the unemployment rate is 4% for Brooklyn and 3.9% for New York City (NYS DOL); updated neighborhood-level data for Brownsville is not available.

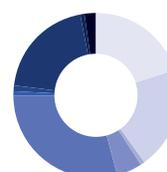
Local Jobs and Employment

Local Residents' Employment



Educational Services, Health Care, Social Assistance	35%
Retail Trade	15%
Transportation, Warehousing, Utilities	11%
Accommodation, Food Services, Arts, Entertainment	9%
Other Services	9%
Professional, Scientific, Technical Services	7%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	5%
Public Administration	4%
Construction	3%
Manufacturing	2%

Jobs Located in Brownsville



Educational Services, Health Care, Social Assistance	20%
Retail Trade	20%
Transportation, Warehousing, Utilities	1%
Accommodation, Food Services, Arts, Entertainment	5%
Other Services	29%
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	1%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	1%
Public Administration	20%
Construction	1%
Manufacturing	2%

DATA APPENDIX

Brownsville Transportation



▲ Brownsville Transportation



MTA Annual Bus Ridership (2017)

1.7M	B7
4.3M	B12
2.1M	B14
6.5M	B15
3.0M	B47
3.0M	B60

Average Weekday Subway Ridership (2017)

2,424	J Z	Alabama Avenue
1,821	L	Atlantic Avenue
8,681	A C J L Z	Broadway Junction
2,230	3	Junius Street
3,264	L	Livonia Avenue
5,936	C	Ralph Avenue
5,642	3	Rockaway Avenue
5,715	C	Rockaway Avenue
5,777	3	Saratoga Avenue
4,471	L	Sutter Avenue
3,449	3	Sutter Avenue - Rutland Road

Vehicular Traffic (2016)

37,191	Eastern Parkway between Howard Avenue and Rockaway Avenue
12,134	Pitkin Avenue between Eastern Parkway and Mother Gaston Boulevard
7,063	Sutter Avenue between East 98th Street and Mother Gaston Boulevard
22,443	Howard Avenue between Eastern Parkway and Blake Avenue
12,129	Rockaway Avenue between Eastern Parkway and Linden Boulevard
11,468	Mother Gaston Boulevard between Eastern Parkway and Linden Boulevard

Pedestrian Counts (2017)

Pitkin Avenue from Bristol Street to Hopkins Avenue (Thomas S. Boyland Street)	
807	Weekday Morning (7 - 9 a.m.)
2,445	Weekday Afternoon (4 - 7 p.m.)
2,582	Weekend (12 - 2 p.m.)

Sources: MTA 2017; NYC DOT, September 2017, Bi-Annual Pedestrian Counts; NYS DOT, 2015 Annual Average Daily Traffic data.

Recent SBS Investments in the Neighborhood

- ▶ *Commercial Revitalization*, Avenue NYC multi-year grant, awarded to the Pitkin Avenue BID, 2018-2020.
- ▶ *Business Attraction*, Avenue NYC grant of \$30,000 awarded to the Pitkin Avenue BID, 2018.
- ▶ *Pitkin Avenue Renaissance Program*, Avenue NYC façade improvement grant of \$30,000 awarded to the Pitkin Avenue BID, 2018.
- ▶ *Business Attraction*, Avenue NYC grant of \$30,000 awarded to the Pitkin Avenue BID, 2017.
- ▶ *Merchant Organizing*, Avenue NYC grant of \$30,000 awarded to the Center for Court Innovation, 2017.
- ▶ *Pitkin Avenue Renaissance Program*, Avenue NYC façade improvement grant of \$30,000 awarded to the Pitkin Avenue BID, 2017.
- ▶ *Be on Belmont*, Avenue NYC placemaking grant of \$25,000 awarded to the Center for Court Innovation, 2016.
- ▶ *Business Attraction*, Avenue NYC grant of \$20,000 awarded to the Pitkin Avenue BID, 2016.
- ▶ *Capacity Building*, Avenue NYC grant of \$20,000 awarded to Community Solutions, 2016.
- ▶ *Eat. Shop. Play. Brownsville.*, Avenue NYC placemaking grant of \$20,000 awarded to Community Solutions, 2016.
- ▶ *Neighborhood Challenge* grant of \$100,000 awarded to Made in Brownsville, 2016.

Current & Planned Developments

Betsy Head Park Reconstruction

- ▶ \$30M capital improvement project funded by the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation's Anchor Parks initiative
- ▶ Includes a skate park, synthetic turf fields, a rubberized track, fitness equipment, new bathrooms, and more
- ▶ Scheduled for completion in 2020

Marcus Garvey Apartments

- ▶ 100% affordable development with more than 800 residential units across seven buildings
- ▶ Includes more than 35,000 square feet of retail space and nearly 100,000 square feet of community space
- ▶ Scheduled for completion in 2024

The Brownsville Plan

- ▶ Will create more than 2,500 new affordable homes, representing more than \$1B of investment in housing in the neighborhood.

Existing Plans & Studies

The Brownsville Plan, NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development, 2017.

NextGeneration NYCHA: A Community Vision for Van Dyke Houses, NYC Housing Authority, 2015.

Brownsville Works!, Hunter Urban Policy & Planning at Hunter College, 2012.

Sources

Esri and Infogroup, Inc. 2019 Retail MarketPlace.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority. 2017. Average Weekday Subway Ridership.

NYS Department of Labor. December 2018. Unemployment Rate Rankings by County.

NYS Department of Transportation. 2015 Annual Average Daily Traffic, using Traffic Data Viewer.

NYC Department of Finance, Division of Tax Policy, using data from NYS Department of Taxation and Finance. Business sales are reported by tax year, which runs from March 1st to February 28th. Sales data are compiled from sales tax returns, which are rolled up by tax filer within a year, excluding returns with negative sales amounts. For each year, each tax filer is reported according to the address listed on their latest return. The top 1% of filers were removed from sales data.

NYC Department of Small Business Services. Fiscal Year 2018. Business Improvement Districts Trends Report.

NYC Department of Transportation. September 2017. Bi-Annual Pedestrian Counts.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2015. OnTheMap Application. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program.

U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2016 American Community Survey 4-Year Estimates, using NYC Census FactFinder. Brownsville Census Tracts: 361, 900, 902, 906, 908, 912, 924.

Photo Credits: Brownsville Community Justice Center; Brownsville Heritage House Inc; NYC Parks; Pitkin Avenue BID: Jesse Gericke and Daniel Murphy; NYC SBS: Christopher Freire.

ABOUT SBS

The NYC Department of Small Business Services helps unlock economic potential and create economic security for all New Yorkers by connecting New Yorkers to good jobs, creating stronger businesses, and building a fairer economy in neighborhoods across the five boroughs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to recognize and thank the following individuals and organizations for their contributions to the development of the Brownsville Commercial District Needs Assessment:

Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams
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Brooklyn Community Board 16
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Power of Two
Brownsville Merchants
Brownsville Shoppers and Residents