

Summary Findings

Community Engagement on Economic Empowerment & Career Development

YourLIC

The data summarized here come from community outreach activities conducted by the Your LIC team. These activities included meetings with the Tenant Associations of the Queensbridge, Ravenswood, Woodside and Astoria Houses, stories posted on the Your LIC Economic Empowerment and Career Development [site](#), and a meeting of approximately 120 community residents and interested people on November 21, 2019 at Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement in the Queensbridge Houses.

There were a range of attendees at the public workshop on November 21st. The largest group was comprised of NYCHA residents. There was also a group of students from Queens Technical High School, staff from local community-based organizations, local entrepreneurs, Queens advocacy organization representatives, and students in coding schools. There was a large contingent of senior citizens, but ages in the room ranged from adult to elementary school kids. The facilitated conversations at the tables of about 10 people each were lively, with each table discussing one specific topic.

The goal of the meeting was to focus on the kinds of actions that would create economic vitality and upward mobility, particularly through business ownership, entrepreneurship, and career development. This summary focuses primarily on what participants said regarding how to encourage economic empowerment and career development through development at the waterfront site. A briefer review of the other issues discussed is also presented.

This summary is divided into three main topics: **Strengthen Community, Build Vibrant Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs**, and **Intertwine Education, Skills Training and Economic Growth**. Each section begins with a synthesis of the aspirations expressed by the participants and is followed by a more detailed set of suggestions to achieve the aspirations. An appendix of all the notes follows the summary.

Next steps: The Your LIC team will use the aspirations and suggestions detailed in this report to inform economic empowerment, workforce, and career development strategies for the future waterfront development project.

I. Strengthen Community

“People need a chance. Not everyone goes to college or trade school. Even if you were locked up, people make mistakes. We need a place to walk in, explain your skills, where you can be hands-on.” Juanita, Your LIC story

Aspirations:

- Strengthen the sense of community
 - Hope that new development helps to heal the economic divide in the community.
 - Hope that new development incorporates strategies that connect long-time and newer residents.
- Provide affordability linked with economic empowerment
 - Hope that the new development incorporates a host of strategies to spur individual economic growth that allows people to be part of the changing community.
 - Hope that new development will provide multiple strategies for affordable beginnings for small businesses and entrepreneurs to grow and prosper.
- (and) Nostalgia for the past
 - Some expressed desire for no development, and a return to a time when one could walk barefoot in grass, make things with their hands, and reject technology.

Suggested Strategies:

A. Bring People Together

- Build multiple indoor and outdoor spaces that let people come together and share ideas, projects, work, and recreation (such as sports, arts, dance, computer science, music).
- Build space that is secure and makes people feel safe.
- Create community centers for a host of different programs; especially aim towards creating groups of connected individuals rather than large presentation space.
- Establish strategies to link community engagement with space, including subsidized rent for community-oriented uses.
- Explicitly develop spaces and strategies that connect and encourage people of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds in the community to work together and help each other grow Long Island City.
- Find ways to integrate across the mix of residents and businesses. Suggestions included places to invite CEOs to meet with community members, guest speakers from entrepreneur community, a continual job fair, and increasing sensitivity to different cultural backgrounds.
- Create space to centralize local information for news, community resources, upcoming events, and advocacy.
- One participant suggested creating a recognizable space, or design that is “eye popping but not fancy.”

B. Create a Mix of Spaces

- Build for a wide range of community participants, paying specific attention to accessibility and affordability. This is especially salient for the waterfront.
- Build for a mix of businesses and services, with special attention to health, food, technology, and coffee shops.
- Develop spaces that link the existing community with new development through strategies that provide jobs for local residents, communications strategies to notify long term residents about how they can be a part of the new development, perhaps thinking about naming or branding opportunities that connect specifically to Queensbridge Houses.
- Create spaces that allow for future growth, and a sense that the space and the community are all moving forward together.
- Work with the City to expand public transportation links to new community spaces created on the waterfront.
- Create space for youth that is able to host sports and recreation (basketball being frequently mentioned), as well as learn skills, and socialize safely away from school.
- Create flexible space that can serve many constituencies over time. For example, many little rooms that people can sign up to use for multiple purposes (store equipment, host meetings, practice theater, etc.).
- Create space for childcare services that are convenient to career services participants.
- Use community space as a place for art, for mental health services, and social interests (e.g. Thursday open galleries, different cultural exhibits).

II. Build Vibrant Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs

“The community needs to come together more. I went to business school and would like to find a way to use my skills to help people in the entire community, like start a food co-op. There has to be more opportunities for the entire community to become one and work together.” Danielle, LIC resident, 11.21.19 meeting

“NYCHA has incubators to help people start their own businesses, but it’s only for residents who are on a lease. We need to find a way to help those that live in housing but may not be on a lease get access to these opportunities.” April, Queensbridge Houses resident, 11.21.19 meeting

“Incentivizing employers and senior professionals to give back to the local community by helping newer professionals navigate the complexities of work is a needed mandatory intervention that will advance skill development and long-term employee retention.” Seema, Your LIC story

Aspirations:

- Attract and grow small businesses with new space which integrates support services and new levels of business-to-business networking and community engagement.

- Grow a more diverse business community from different sectors (food, health, the arts, maker space, child care, technology, etc.).
- Attract and grow more entrepreneurs by providing space that creates community, step-up space for growth, flexibility and shared services. Nurture community support, integration of training for entrepreneurs and their employees, and a trajectory of support from idea to success.
- (and) Some expressed skepticism about promises from developers and government to deliver on the potential of truly equitable economic empowerment strategies.

Suggested Strategies:

A. Create a Diverse Commercial Ecosystem

- Develop a range of affordability in rents and ownership (access to capital and manageable rents were identified as a barrier to business starts and growth).
- Develop a wide mix of commercial spaces to accommodate new and established small businesses, and growth over time.
- Develop a mix of specialized spaces for different businesses – such as studio and maker space, child care as a business and a service, technology companies, retail and service businesses, etc.

B. Support Entrepreneurs

- Build inviting entrepreneurship space, with attention to graduated sized spaces for growth, allowances for shared services, space to gather the entrepreneur community, and flexibility to move and change as the businesses change over time. Much interest in engaging the other community members with entrepreneurs such as bringing community members to workshops in incubator spaces, providing internships with entrepreneurs, and considering rent subsidies to entrepreneurs in exchange for their community service.
- Create space that helps new entrepreneurs' start-ups by thinking expansively about range of entrepreneurial endeavor (one participant is part of a \$250 million charity start-up). Specialized spaces might let individuals try something out for a week, or promote cross-industry collaboration, or exchange of ideas in incubator space, or create a mentorship programs for entrepreneurs. Consider including maker spaces and cooperative spaces.
- Create space for both step-up office/commercial space and step-up/pop-up market space needs.
- Link entrepreneurs with government and capital that can fund early stage small businesses and entrepreneurs.

C. Give Priority to Small Businesses

- Work with government to reconcile the different issues for small businesses vs. larger businesses around rent, insurance, staffing, sourcing, and related financial elements.
- Create initiatives to join small businesses and entrepreneurs with government services to assist with licensing, new business opportunities, access to material sources, and capital.
- Use physical space to create community around small businesses that can offer support.
- Create space that help small businesses and entrepreneurs spread the word about their goods and service through the community through shared spaces, co-location, atriums, etc.

- Establish policies, practices, and incentives for small business and incubators that help people from underprivileged backgrounds to enter tech fields
- Support small businesses to provide job training and quality internships.
- Create programs that integrate business resources into local classrooms.

III. Intertwine Education, Skills Training and Economic Growth

“... growing up in Ravenswood we use to have training or classes in the community center. I would like to see soft skills training for our young people today. I would like to see home economics, how to take care of the family.” Carol W., Your LIC story

“People need to know how they can start a business and take care of a family at the same time.” Daniel, Queensbridge resident, 11.21.19 meeting

“Particularly in tech, there are a lot of opportunities and career paths available that no one knows about and thus cannot pursue. Exposure to the diversity of opportunities that exist in tech as well as other industries helps career seekers find their fit and their unique path.” Julie, Your LIC story.

“.. in school I would get to explore different fields of work like engineering and Cisco which falls into programming. This ... leads me being into the job more and really getting my work done ... Some resources that have been missing is really the different career paths that could help me land a better job.” Edwin J., Your LIC story

Aspirations: Lift as We Climb¹

- Provide greater investment in the human infrastructure through education and training in order to link community-level economic development with individual economic empowerment.
- Calibrate education and training to different populations (youth, adult career, seniors), to different needs (basic education, specialized technical skills, advanced skills), and closely align with employer needs.
- Support life-long career development with a focus on integrating all sectors of the community into appropriate levels of employment. Support businesses and individuals to keep climbing the economic ladder by integrating government, public, and private sources of knowledge and funding, grounded in a belief that education and training could create a more equitable community with increased understanding of civics, financial literacy, and progressively advancing skills linked to employment opportunities with local employers.
- Strengthen connections among organizations and businesses by connecting education and government and the arts and business to create an eco-system of hyper local sustainability.

¹ Mary Church Terrell, 1896, President of the National Association of Colored Women, <https://womensmuseum.wordpress.com/2018/02/21/lifting-as-we-climb-the-story-of-americas-first-black-womens-club/>

Suggested Strategies:

- Create flexible training and educational space that is future-looking; people change careers a lot.
- Create spaces that are accessible to diverse constituents (by age, by race/ethnicity, by job status, by ability status).
- Integrate education and training across multiple sites within the built environment by creating spaces that are conducive to education and training within specific skills sets linked to local job opportunities (suggested areas include: entire range of technology skills, language skills, interpersonal and psychological well-being skills, health and science skills). Work in close coordination to local public schools and colleges, libraries, and governmental entities.
- Team up with unions on job and skill training.

YOUTH

- Work with existing institutions and organizations to ensure the community provides high school and post-secondary education with vocational training for a diverse population and provides space in the new development to lower the barriers to entry. Require that educational providers are given access to new space only if they provide job training focused on specific careers and employer-driven demand in the Long Island City development, with clear career trajectories and supportive professional skills. Examples suggested communication (oral and written), child care and education paraprofessionals, basic technology skills, and introduction to STEM fields.
- Ensure a range of life skills/soft skills training for young people on how to navigate social situations across multiple settings (office settings, subways, interviews), how to use soft skills (time management, etiquette, how to handle difficult situations, navigate different work environments, etc.), learn about personal finance, gain help with second languages, connect to the new businesses for mentoring, and obtain health information in open and flexible structures (one participant said, "A place where you can learn what you want to learn.")
- Prepare youth for new careers in environmental sustainability jobs, in technology, in entrepreneurship, in health care, and other growing fields. Particular interest was expressed in supporting women in technology. Use the new development to clarify the pathways that connect students to jobs, college, trades, internships, etc., with emphasis on integrating entrepreneurship learning early.
- Create robust relationships among the businesses in LIC to create meaningful Internships and career development activities and exploration opportunities.
- Ensure education and training in work-based certificates for the non-college bound in the trades -- construction, plumbing, logistics -- in addition to technology-focused programs.
- Create robust connections with career counselors and meaningful mentors to engage new and long-term community members in growing the community.
- Bring together business and government employers to support youth in learning personal financial management program including instruction in preparing tax returns, paying rent, managing credit cards, maintain checking and savings accounts, planning for the future, etc.
- Engage the LIC community in career days across different industries.

ADULTS

- Create a space for an adult learning center, to provide financial training and literacy, language training for second language speakers, computer training, coding and tech literacy for job changes and job advancement, with an emphasis on women and public housing residents entering the tech field.
- Create multi-functional classrooms and training centers that can also double as a place to network with other adults in the community who are doing skills training,
- Create a space for helping adults in transition, including helping students coming out of college, recently divorced adults, and adults who have separated from a job.
- Create a meeting space that connects people to people, with an understanding of the whole person and support services for life and mental health. People need to know how they can start a business and take care of a family at the same time. Social services can also draw in people who aren't normally drawn into the conversation.
- Create space to provide adults with access to entry-level and practical training in fields such as nursing, cooking, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), jobs that are environmentally sustainable, healthcare jobs, film and video production support and technical skills, construction, hotel management, and service.
- Establish satellite space for city agencies and city services — Small Business Services, Department of Education, Social Security, Department of Motor Vehicles, etc.
- Create spaces that connect adults to the small businesses and entrepreneurial centers to begin to grow the future employees of the fledgling businesses, and space to integrate the provision of childcare.
- Link government and workforce development providers to conduct thorough skills assessment and help adults plot a trajectory of skills advancement.

ELDERS

- Create spaces to teach new skills to community's elders, with the expectation that youth could act as both teachers and, once learned, the seniors could act as mentors and teachers to the youth. Educate and engage active older adults with training for employment, mentoring, and volunteering in specific areas in the community.
- Conduct workshops to prepare for elders' planning needs, including retirement and managing debt.