



Case Study 3.7: Bronx Coalition for a Community Vision: Policy Platform

Background on Organization and Issue

In May of 2014, the Mayor's office in New York City released a detailed housing plan with the goal to build and preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing over the next ten years. This would occur largely through the rezoning of 15 neighborhoods to facilitate construction of new housing. Later that year, it was announced that part of the South Bronx, along Jerome Avenue, had been selected as a neighborhood being studied for rezoning.

The area selected by the City is mostly industrial and commercially zoned land. It is also in the poorest urban congressional district in the country, where the average income for a family of 4 is \$25,000. Given the history of harassment and exploitation of tenants in this area and because most residents are severely rent burdened, many community members were concerned that rezoning and construction would lead to displacement.

Fearing displacement and loss of neighborhood identity and culture, community members and organizations came together over the next few months to form the Bronx Coalition for a Community Vision, in order to develop a platform for rezoning in the South Bronx that is led by community needs rather than by developers seeking profits. Through town halls, community visioning sessions, and surveying community members, the coalition involved over 1,500 community members who were able to give their input into the process. The Coalition came up with four principles to guide the rezoning process:

1. Strong anti-harassment & anti-displacement policies for residential and commercial tenants
2. Real affordable housing
3. Good jobs and local hire
4. Real community participation

The result of these efforts was the creation of a policy platform which outlines how the principles chosen by the community to guide the rezoning process could be translated into actionable mechanisms. This policy platform has helped mobilized community members to campaign for community-driven rezoning that would favor the needs of community members already living and working in the area to be rezoned.

Below is a description of the Bronx Coalition for a Community Vision's participatory action research and community engagement process based on the Participatory Action Research guiding framework (see Tools [2.1](#) and [2.2](#)).

WHAT...

Were the organizing goals connected to this research?

- Build a strong base of residents who will be affected by rezoning, and help develop leadership roles within the coalition's steering committee;



- Develop a community-driven vision for how rezoning in the South Bronx can be inclusive and transparent;
- Develop concrete policy recommendations related to the rezoning rooted in the needs and priorities of low-income Bronx residents;
- Ensure that those impacted by the rezoning have a voice in shaping the future of the community.

Overall questions did the Bronx Coalition want to answer through their research?

- What are the hopes, needs and concerns of residents and business owners in the Bronx?
- What do low-income people of color that live in the South Bronx want to see happen to their neighborhood?
- What are the principles that should guide rezoning according to community members in the Bronx?
- What are the mechanisms by which community residents can protect low-income people of color and ensure that neighborhood changes benefit these residents?

WHY...

Is this research useful or important for the Bronx Coalition for a Community Vision?

- Historically, rezoning processes in New York City have led to real estate speculation, displacement of long-time residents and gentrification. As the poorest urban congressional district in the country, low-income Bronx residents are particularly vulnerable to these forces. The research arms the coalition with concrete data and specific policy recommendations that they can use to organize and advocate for their community during and after the rezoning.

WHO...

Are the Stakeholders in this Issue?

- Low-income people of color, rent stabilized tenants, union workers, and small business owners in the South Bronx in danger of being pushed out of their neighborhood.

Is the Bronx Coalition for a Community Vision trying to influence?

- The Mayor's Office, specifically the Department of City Planning (DCP) and the City Planning Commission (CPC), the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) Bronx Community Boards 4 and 5, the Bronx Borough President, the City Council, particularly the City Council Speaker and Council Member Vanessa Gibson, all who have some degree of power into the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) process.

HOW...

Did the Bronx Coalition for a Community Vision gather information (what methods did they use)?

- A community forum and four community visioning sessions, each of which was attended by 100-150 community residents. Residents were able to give input and brainstorm solutions to problems in the community;
- Over 500 surveys were collected about people's concerns and hopes for rezoning;
- Surveys of auto workers that own and work in the area slated for rezoning;



- Background research about policy mechanisms and land use policy in other neighborhoods across NYC and across the country.

Did Research support the Bronx Coalition for a Community Vision's organizing efforts?

- The Policy Platform condensed the priorities and recommendations of the community;
- The visioning sessions and surveys educated and mobilized community members around the rezoning process;
- The platform was released at a large public forum with over 700 community members;
- Several items from the platform are being used to develop organizing campaigns to win concrete protections or improvements for community members.