

# RIGHT TO THE CITY

— NEW YORK CITY —

# POLICY PLATFORM

## 2009







**Right to the City (RTTC)** is a national alliance of base-building, community organizations from eight cities across the country as well as researchers, academics, lawyers, and other allies. The alliance formed in January 2007 to build a united response to gentrification and drastic changes imposed on our cities. We stand together under the notion of a Right to the City for all. We offer a vision for a City that meets the needs of working class people. We connect our fights against gentrification and displacement to other local and international struggles for human rights, land, and democracy. We are coming together under a common framework to increase the strength of our community organizations and to grow our collective power. Our goal is to build a national urban movement for housing, education, health, racial justice, and democracy.

**Right to the City NYC** is a local chapter of Right to the City national alliance. We came together in the summer of 2006 under the name of NYC Anti-Gentrification Network (NYCAGN) and formally became a part of the RTTC alliance in September 2007.

**RTTC-NYC Member groups include:**

**Steering Committee Organizations:** CAAAV/Chinatown Tenants Union; Community Voices Heard (CVH); Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment (FIERCE); Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE); Mothers on the Move (MOM); Picture the Homeless (PTH); Make the Road New York; New York City AIDS Housing Network (NYCAHN)/VOCAL Users Union

**General Member Organizations:** Center for Immigrant Families; Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC); Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES); Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ); Public Housing Residents of the Lower East Side (PHROLES); Queers for Economic Justice; Red Hook Initiative (RHI); St. Nicks CDC/UNO; Teachers Unite; and WE ACT.

**Resource groups and allies:** Community Development Project, Urban Justice Center (UJC); Center for Social Inclusion (CSI); NYU Gallatin School; Hunter School for Urban Planning, the Planners Network; CUNY graduate Center R2C Reading Group.

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# FOREWORD

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The right to the city is a cry and a demand that must be heard. It is also a cry around which demands can be formulated by all those who have, over the years, been excluded from the corridors of power. This platform articulates these demands.

The right to the city is not simply a demand for access to the immense treasure of public resources that comprise a city. It is also a demand for empowerment to create a new city in a different image, an image that is not restricted to the financiers, the developers, the well-heeled, and the billionaires who grease the wheels of political machines and who, over the last thirty years, have exercised an exclusive and exclusionary right to shape the city after their own desires.

The right to the city brings together a vast array of movements combating social and environmental injustice. Within this movement lies a revelatory recognition of connections that must be challenged. Gentrification and foreclosures displace entire populations. Inadequate provision of housing for displaced low-income populations gives rise to homelessness, which political power primarily approaches through criminalization. This then feeds a prison-industrial complex that, at enormous public expense, destroys human beings in both body and soul. The fight against gentrification and foreclosures is, therefore, a fight against criminalization and homelessness. The fight for decent and affordable housing for low-income populations is a fight against homelessness and the politics of incarceration.

The fight for open public space for all is a fight not only to be present in the spaces of the city without surveillance and police harassment, but also a right to new open spaces in which people may freely gather, socialize, and have their needs for health care and education appropriately met. The right to the city entails a right to a decent education along with meaningful and gainful employment in creating new wealth by whatever means - including in the home - as well as rebuilding the physical and social fabric of the city. The right to the city is a strategy for the revitalization and enrichment of every aspect of urban life.

Movements that recognize all these connections now make common cause. Together they realize they can accomplish more than the sum of their individual actions. Mutual aid and mutual support is their organizing principle and systematic change of daily life in the city to the benefit of the least privileged is their aim.

The right to the city is a collective right, collectively exercised. It is a universal right that connects all urban dwellers across the nation and the world. It calls for all social movements to engage in a common cause to take back what has been lost through more than thirty years of the pillaging of the public domain by private interests.

This naked class privilege to determine the character and meaning of urban life is what the Right to the City alliance directly contests. It contests the racializations and the discriminations based on gender and sexuality that still haunt us after so many years of struggle. It demands a more egalitarian and democratic form of governance that acts in the interest of the common people.

The Right to the City is a cry and demand that must be - and will - be heard.

**David Harvey**  
**City University of New York**

# BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

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In 2006, several grassroots, base-building, and resource organizations in New York City came together to form the New York City Anti-Gentrification Network. All of these groups worked to prevent the displacement of low-income people of color from their communities. With the goal of building political consciousness and, ultimately, the power to influence economic development policies, these organizations identified the need to bring together diverse, multi-generational communities to develop a unified analysis of the root causes and impacts of gentrification. In September 2007, these organizations officially became part of the national Right to the City alliance and took on the name Right to the City (RTTC) NYC.

In early 2007, Mayor Bloomberg released PlaNYC: A Greener, Greater, New York, a set of principles to guide long-term planning and economic development for the City. While this plan set goals to address many important policy concerns affecting New York City, including housing, open space, transportation congestion, and air quality, RTTC-NYC member organizations felt this plan did not adequately address many of the issues most pressing to low-income communities. In addition, PlaNYC did not include any significant role for communities to play in implementing these economic development plans.

To address the gaps in PlaNYC and to create a set of economic development principles rooted in community needs, RTTC-NYC developed this citywide, grassroots policy platform. This platform unifies the demands of the RTTC-NYC member groups related to community development, gentrification and displacement. The goal of the platform is to help build the power of low-income people of color in urban areas and to create urban policy that is central to the needs of low-income people. It is the result of an in-depth, collaborative, and participatory process, which included all the RTTC-NYC member-based organizations.

In the summer of 2008, a Platform Development committee was formed, comprised of representatives from the RTTC-NYC member groups. The committee began by surveying all of the RTTC-NYC member groups to identify their priorities and their public policy demands. Over the course of one year, the Platform Development committee collectively discussed and prioritized these issues and policies through a series of meetings and workshops. Simultaneously, resource organizations and allies helped to analyze PlaNYC and other relevant NYC plans to determine what policy areas were missing from the City's economic development agenda. In addition, RTTC-NYC examined other citywide policy platforms to determine where our work could intersect with ally organizations and coalitions. Each section of the platform was authored by a member group of RTTC-NYC and involved the participation of all base-building organizations. The resulting platform articulates principles and documents policy concerns which are critically important to low-income communities of color. This document was ratified by the membership of the Right to the City-NYC on May 8, 2009.

This platform has six sections, including: Federal Stimulus Funds; Community Decision-Making Power; Low-Income Housing; Environmental Justice & Public Health; Jobs & Workforce Development and Public Space. Each of the sections lays out the following:

-  **An analysis of the current political context in New York City;**
-  **A set of principles based on a grassroots vision for the future of New York City;**
-  **A series of policies that New York City should implement to create a more livable, sustainable, and democratic city for all New Yorkers.**

# THE RIGHT TO FEDERAL STIMULUS FUNDS

## Political Context

As American cities continue to suffer from the collapse of the financial and housing markets, the federal government has responded in part by passing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This law, signed by President Obama, seeks to give money to all 50 States to help address the economic crisis. This funding, commonly known as the “Stimulus Package,” totals \$787 Billion and marks one of the largest capital infusions by the federal government into U.S. cities since the New Deal.

In New York State, the Governor, along with various State agencies, will decide how to allocate \$26.7 billion in stimulus funds throughout the state. While some of the funding is governed by federal rules, other funding is flexible, giving significant discretion to the Governor, Mayor, and heads of State and City agencies in deciding how the funds will be spent.

New York City will receive approximately \$4-4.5 billion in expense funding and \$500 million in direct funding for capital projects over the next several years.<sup>1</sup> Capital projects - construction projects that will make improvements to the City's infrastructure - must be “shovel-ready,” meaning they must have already received all of the relevant permits and environmental reviews required to commence construction. NYC reports that it will prioritize “fix it first” projects that repair or maintain existing infrastructure and will focus on projects that are located in areas of the City that have already been targeted for economic development efforts. The Mayor's office, which has almost complete control over how money in New York City is spent, has indicated that the allocation of funds will fall into the following categories or “buckets”: Infrastructure; Health and Social Services; Budget Relief; Education; Economic & Workforce Development; Neighborhood Stabilization; Energy Efficiency; Public Safety and Criminal Justice. New York City will receive approximately \$50 million dollars in funds from the Community Development Block Grant. Each bucket of funds will be overseen by a Deputy Mayor. The Mayor will have complete discretion over how this money is spent. Additionally, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) will receive \$423 million dollars for capital improvements, which in turn could create potential jobs for public housing residents.<sup>2</sup>

The stimulus funding provides a unique opportunity for New York City to invest federal dollars into development projects that will benefit all New Yorkers, including low-income people of color. As ARRA funds are distributed in New York City, we aim to ensure that low-income communities of color play a central role in determining the allocation of the funds. These communities must have priority access to jobs created as a result of ARRA funding and should also be intimately involved in monitoring the allocation process.

### Stimulus Spending: Examples of Projects to be Funded in NYC

NYC Stimulus Project	NYC Bucket	Amount for Project
Elevator Replacement at King Towers Houses	Public Housing	\$8.27 million
Reconstruction of Coney Island Boardwalk	Infrastructure	\$15 million
Job training program for unemployed New Yorkers to become electricians	Economic & Workforce Development	\$ 343,000

# STIMULUS MONEY

## HOW MUCH IS THERE AND WHO CONTROLS IT?

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will total \$787 billion and will involve allocations to all 50 states.



New York State will get \$25 billion. Some of this funding is set by federal rules, but some is flexible and will be allocated by the Governor and State agencies.



Over the next two years, New York City expects to receive more than 5 billion in stimulus funds (much of it through the State).

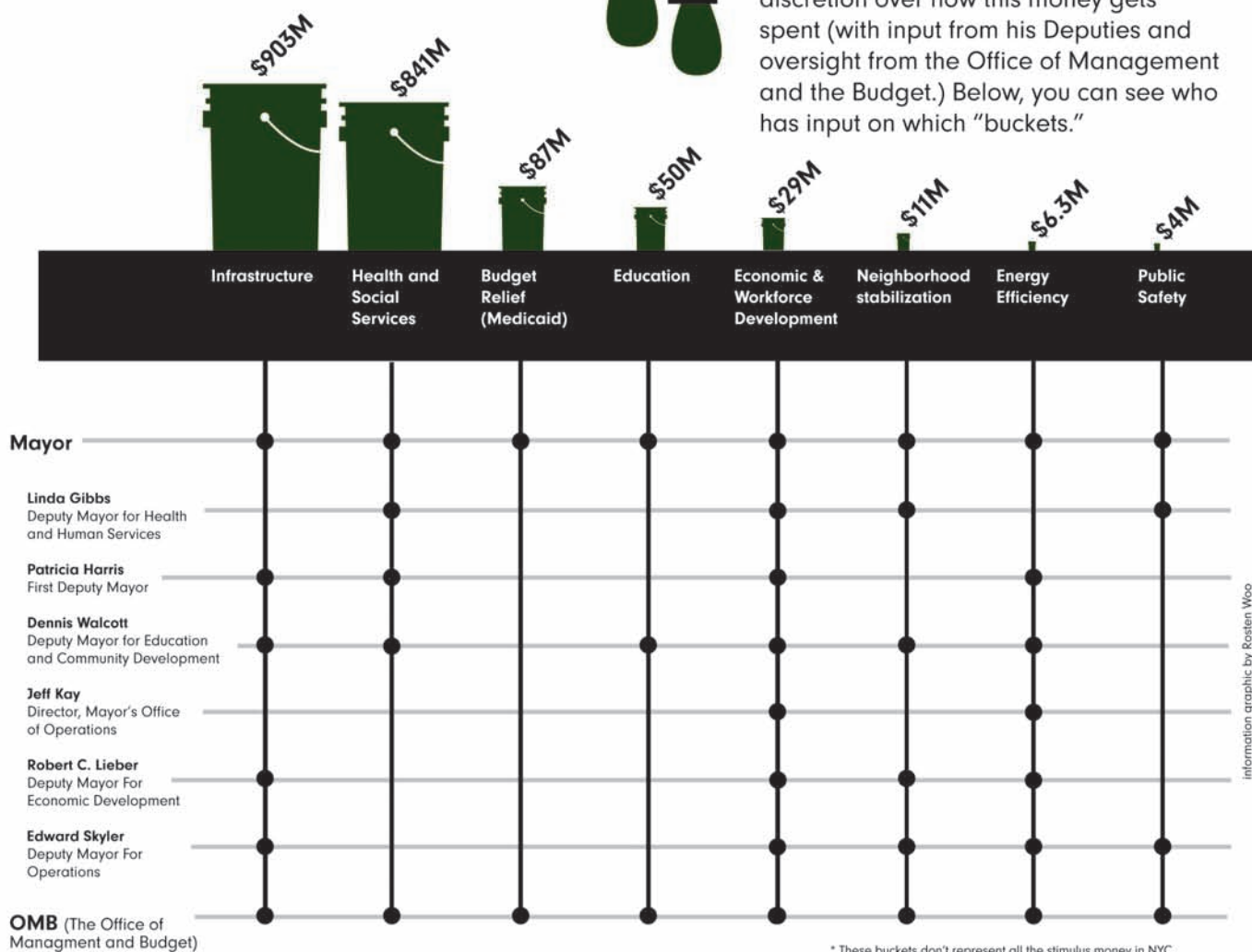
**SO FAR, THE MAYORS OFFICE HAS INDICATED THAT THE MONEY WILL BE ALLOCATED INTO THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES:**

The Money comes from

Competitive grants, formula grants, & state discretion.

**\$5 Billion**

The Mayor has almost complete discretion over how this money gets spent (with input from his Deputies and oversight from the Office of Management and the Budget.) Below, you can see who has input on which "buckets."







### Right to the City-NYC Principles

- » **TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY:** The spending of funds must be determined and monitored through a transparent process with adequate community involvement and oversight. All allocation and spending of funds should be thoroughly documented and accounted for.
- » **EQUITY:** Stimulus funds must be allocated to the communities in NYC that are the most in need, particularly areas with the highest poverty rate and/or unemployment rate. Low-income people most in need of employment and job training should have priority access to hiring for jobs created through stimulus-funded projects.
- » **INNOVATION:** Stimulus funding should not be used to rebuild the same unjust economy that existed before the current economic crisis. Instead, stimulus funds should be allocated to innovative projects and channeled through new mechanisms that will transform our economy and our communities into a more sustainable and equitable form.



### Right to the City-NYC Policy Demands

#### Community Decision-Making

- » Establish a City Stimulus Board with substantial representation of low-income, youth, immigrant, and homeless people. The Board will oversee the allocation, implementation, and monitoring of Federal Stimulus funds and other federal money allocated in New York City.

#### Shovel Ready Construction Projects and Hiring

- » The Mayor must ensure that a minimum of 30% of all new hires for each stimulus-funded construction project are low-income prior to their hire. Additionally, at least 30% of the people hired through these construction projects must be local residents. The mayor must also provide all people hired as a result of this requirement with adequate job training;
- » The Mayor must ensure that a minimum of 30% of the workforce in public housing construction projects are residents of public housing;
- » The Mayor must create a technical assistance unit to support community-union partnerships that connect low-income people with union apprenticeship programs and provide education and career ladder training for jobs created through the stimulus funds.

#### Community Development Block Grant

- » The Mayor must ensure that funds allocated through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) are allocated to projects and programs that have the greatest impact in communities with the highest levels of poverty. The mayor must establish a committee composed of representatives of CDBG-eligible communities to determine allocation and to monitor spending of CDBG funds.

#### Monitoring, Evaluation Environmental Impact

- » NYC must fund ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the Federal Stimulus projects to track the overall impact of stimulus funded projects and programs on low-income communities. This must include numbers, types, and wages/benefits of jobs created, units of affordable housing built or maintained, and environmental impact.





# THE RIGHT TO COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING POWER

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## **Political Context**

In New York City, most of the policy decisions that affect the lives of low-income people of color are made behind closed doors among the City's political and business elite. Community participation is rarely solicited in the decision-making process. When it is, elected officials often act in a manner opposed to the will of the people. One clear and current example is the extension of term limits for elected officials in New York City. Despite two public referendums that overwhelmingly indicated public support for the City's elected officials to serve no more than two terms, Mayor Bloomberg and a majority of the City Council decided to extend term limits to three terms.

Each year, City officials undertake a budgeting process to decide how public money will be spent. This process occurs largely behind closed doors, without the input of the people most affected by budgeting decisions. In recent years, this process has resulted in drastic cuts to critical services for low income communities of color in favor of public financing of projects benefiting higher income New Yorkers. For instance, elected officials prioritized \$1.37 billion in financing for the new Yankee stadium even while New York City Housing Authority is running a \$171 million deficit and services for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) youth are being cut.<sup>3</sup>

While official structures exist for people to take part in the decision-making process, the level of participation and power that communities have within these structures is limited. For example, Community Boards in New York City were created in 1951 and reformed in 1975 to provide a structure for community members to have representation in the decision-making process around land use and zoning decisions. However, Community Boards are appointed by Borough Presidents, which often produces a Board membership that is not truly reflective of the communities they represent in terms of race, gender, and class. Furthermore, appointed political bodies in New York State have very limited decision-making power which greatly restricts the ability of Community Boards to influence policy.

Another example, 197-A and C plans, are ostensibly set up to allow for community control over decision-making within NYC neighborhoods. The City Charter allows "neighborhood or civic groups," with the approval of a Community or Borough Board, to develop a community-driven development plan for any neighborhood in the City. However, 197-A plans only serve to "guide" development in the City; they are in no way binding. Although many communities have invested the time to produce 197-A plans, only 11 have actually been developed since their inception in 1989.

In the aftermath of an historic presidential election, which saw record levels of voter turnout and civic participation, it is especially important to examine the current level of community involvement in the decision-making process and to consider opportunities to increase participation in a substantive way. As huge sums of money come to New York City via the Federal Stimulus package, it is critical that systems and structures are in place to ensure that our communities take part in deciding how this and other money is spent and prioritized.<sup>4</sup>

# COMMUNITY DECISION MAKING IN NYC 1950-2010



## 1950s

- 12 “Community Planning Councils” are established

## 1970s

- Office of Neighborhood Government (ONG) established under Mayor Lindsay. Although Mayor Beame abolishes the ONG, voters establish by referendum community boards (CB's) with advisory powers on land use, budget and service delivery
- Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) mandates CB vote on all land use applications and grants CBs the power to create community master plans (now referred to as 197-a plans)

## 1990s

- The City Planning Commission establishes rules regulating an advisory, rather than legally binding, status to 197-a plans
- Giuliani administration “all but ignores” CB's in planning decisions
- The CB4 Chelsea 197-a plan from 1987 resubmitted for consideration after environmental documentation completed and approved with modifications
- Waterfront park & a Red Hook bank branch won by CB in Stuyvesant Cove

## 1960s

- “White flight” combined with demands for direct democracy by Black and Puerto Rican residents form a backdrop to the movement for city government decentralization
- Mayor Wagner establishes “Community Planning Boards” throughout the 5boroughs

## 1980s

- Manhattan CB4 submits the first 197-a plan 12 years after 197-a's were established. The Department of City Planning requires expensive environmental review of the plan which stalls implementation indefinitely
- 197-a plans review process is established giving CB's power previously held by the Department of City Planning to prepare and submit plans to the Planning Commission and City Council
- Responsibility for environmental reviews is shifted to the Department of City Planning, which uninstalls the 1987 CB4 Chelsea plan

## 2000s

- Community groups and individuals by-passed in rebuilding discussions for Lower Manhattan in the wake of the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks
- The Bloomberg administration implements the 311 helpline, reducing calls to community boards. The administration refuses to share 311 data with boards
- Brooklyn's CB 6 forced to establish a nonprofit fundraising group to raise money for Board activities
- Columbia University regularly sends paid lobbyists to present at Community Board 9 meetings in West Harlem, hoping to convince the Board to vote to allow it to take over parts of West Harlem
- Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields dismisses community board members in CB2 and CB1 as punishment for not supporting her mayoral campaign. She removes the individuals again after City Council reinstates them



### Right to the City-NYC Principles

- » **COMMUNITY:** A community includes all residents, families, businesses, and people who congregate socially within a given community, as well as all people who currently live, work, and/or socialize, or who have been displaced from living, working, and/or socializing, in a given neighborhood. Participation in decision-making processes should help strengthen communities.
- » **DEMOCRACY:** All City residents must have the right to participate in and have power over the decision-making processes that impact their lives and communities at all levels of the policy-making process, especially with the respect to determining needs and setting priorities. The allocation of resources within a community should be based on the needs and priorities of that community.
- » **ACCOUNTABILITY:** Government has a responsibility to create new mechanisms and offices to promote transparency and accountability in decision-making processes.
- » **EQUITY:** Those who are most impacted and most vulnerable in a community must have the most power over decision-making processes which affect their lives and communities. The allocation of resources within a community must be based on the needs and priorities of that community.
- » **INCLUSION:** All residents belonging to a given community have the right to decide how land and resources are used within that community, and what sort of development is allowed to take place.



### Right to the City-NYC Policy Demands

#### Enfranchisement

- » Expand voting rights for all local elections to all NYC residents age 16 and over, regardless of immigration status;
- » Lift all felony restrictions on voting to allow prisoners, convicted felons, and parolees to vote in local elections; this is currently provided for probationers at the state level.

#### Community Boards

- » The Mayor and the City Council must amend the City Charter to create elections for Community Board Members. The City Charter must be further amended to make all Community Board decisions binding;
- » The City Council must provide stipends for Community Board members to facilitate low-income participation;
- » New York State must establish a community structure to govern public education in New York City.

#### Participatory Budgeting

- » The New York City Housing Authority's Board must set aside 10% of NYCHA's budget to be allocated through a participatory budgeting process that involves public housing residents;
- » City Council members must set aside their discretionary funds (member items) for a participatory budgeting process for their City Council District.

# THE RIGHT TO QUALITY, LOW-INCOME HOUSING

## Political Context

In New York City, the current housing crisis has disproportionately displaced and affected low-income people of color, both homeowners and renters. For the past couple of decades, the City has been losing subsidized rental apartments at an alarming rate. Since 1990, the City has lost 29,831 units of state-subsidized Mitchell-Lama housing and 6,077 project-based apartments in the federal Section 8 program.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, rent regulated apartments are disappearing in the City at an increasing rate due to changes to the rent laws. Due to funding cuts at all levels of government, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is forced to operate with a deficit of \$171 million, severely limiting the Authority's ability to operate and maintain its housing stock. The loss of affordable housing programs causes low-income people of color to be displaced from neighborhoods where they have lived for generations.

Homeowners of color in NYC have been victims of predatory lending and predatory equity practices at a much higher rate than white borrowers. The foreclosure rate in low-income neighborhoods such as Bedford Stuyvesant and Bushwick more than doubled between 2005 and 2007 due to the high incidence of foreclosed homes, while the rate in many higher income areas of the City remained virtually the same.<sup>6</sup>

The City's response to increased need for permanent and deeply affordable housing has not created housing that is truly affordable to low income people. Mayor Bloomberg's *New Housing Marketplace Plan*, launched in 2004, aims to create and preserve 168,000 units of affordable housing by the end of 2012. However, the plan's definition of affordable is based on Area Median Income (AMI), which does not reflect the true levels of poverty in our City. The AMI in NYC is \$79,400 for a family of four and includes wealthier suburbs such as Westchester County in its calculation. By comparison, the Bronx, a low-income community in great need of affordable housing, has a median income of \$34,156. Because of its reliance on AMI, NYC builds housing that is not truly affordable for many low-income people. Furthermore, the City continues to ignore potential long-term housing solutions. A count of vacant properties conducted in Manhattan in 2006<sup>7</sup> found the existence of 2,200 vacant lots which could be used to create 24,000 apartments. This would provide homes for most homeless people in NYC.<sup>8</sup>

Public officials have previously acknowledged government's responsibility to provide everyone with an adequate home, such as in the Housing Act of 1949, which promised "a decent home in a suitable environment for all." Government must finally fulfill its promises and adhere to its responsibility while responding to New York's growing need for truly affordable housing. This can be accomplished by reinvesting in public sector programs and building permanent and truly affordable housing to ensure that all New Yorkers have a place to live.

## Right to the City-NYC Principles

- » **HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT:** Housing is much more than just a roof over one's head and should not be reduced to something only to be bought and sold.
- » **AFFORDABILITY:** We define the term "affordable" to mean that people pay no more than 25% of their income on rent; people must be able to pay for the cost of their housing without it interfering with the attainment of an adequate standard of living.
- » **FREEDOM FROM HARASSMENT & DISPLACEMENT:** All housing provided to communities must be high quality. All people should have adequate space which is free of any threats to their health, such as vermin, inclement weather, extreme temperatures, or any other hazard.
- » **DECENT & SAFE HOME:** All housing provided to our community must be of a quality standard.
- » **SAFE LOCATION:** Developers have a responsibility to ensure that current and future housing is built and operated in a manner that is conscious of environmental and public health concerns. Housing must be built and maintained in locations with access to transportation, employment options, schools, health care facilities, child care centers, and other social facilities.

## THE RIGHT TO QUALITY, LOW-INCOME HOUSING

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- » **NO DISCRIMINATION:** All people - regardless of their race, color, ethnicity, gender, abilities, religion, nationality, place of origin, citizenship status, sexual orientation, economic status, or HIV status - have a right to access housing and should not experience discrimination when applying for housing.
- » **COMMUNITY-BASED DEVELOPMENT:** All NYC housing policy must be based upon the idea that land belongs to the people who live in a community. We believe in the investment of alternative community-based housing forms, such as community land trusts, housing cooperatives, and mutual housing associations.
- » **DEFENDING ONE'S HOME:** All people facing eviction in NYC Housing Court must have a right to counsel, and a right to an interpreter, as needed. Residents have a right to withhold their rent and/or sue their landlord in court for violating their right to a habitable apartment without retribution.
- » **FILL VACANCIES:** No property, whether publicly or privately owned, should remain empty in communities with clear housing needs. All empty units must be filled by people from that community.
- » **MAINTAIN & CREATE NEW HOUSING:** NYC government must maintain all current affordable housing programs and must prioritize the creation of new affordable housing.

### ❗ Right to the City-NYC Policy Demands

- » The City must purchase vacant luxury condominiums and properties that are in or at risk of foreclosure and must develop these properties into affordable housing;
- » Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council must pass the Housing, Not Warehousing legislation to create a citywide census of vacant properties and fine landlords for warehousing their property;
- » Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council must fully fund the City built NYCHA developments, and NYCHA must fill all vacancies immediately. The City must stop payment by the Authority to the New York City Police Department and Sanitation Department;
- » Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council must halt foreclosures and evictions on homes financed through subprime loans;
- » The New York State Assembly and Senate must pass the Good Cause Eviction Bill and Clean Hands Bill to prevent the evicting of tenants without good reason;
- » Housing Court judges must address repair issues raised in non-payment cases, and all cases involving repairs must be monitored until conditions have been corrected.

# THE RIGHT TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & PUBLIC HEALTH

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## Political Context

Low-income communities of color make up the majority of those who are living in neighborhoods that include hazardous waste and polluting facilities and thus bear a disproportional amount of the burden of waste and pollution created in urban areas.<sup>9</sup> Facilities such as the New York Organic Fertilizer Company, a sewage plant located in the South Bronx, and the Astoria Generating Company, a power plant in Sunset Park, pose health risks for the people who live there. Research has shown that racial inequality and weak environmental standards often go hand in hand.<sup>10</sup>

City agencies that are set up to regulate pollution levels in New York City do little to address the inequitable burden placed on working class communities of color. The mainstream environmentalist movement, both locally and nationally, lacks an environmental justice outlook to their work, and often does not consider the consequence their campaigns might have on low-income communities of color.

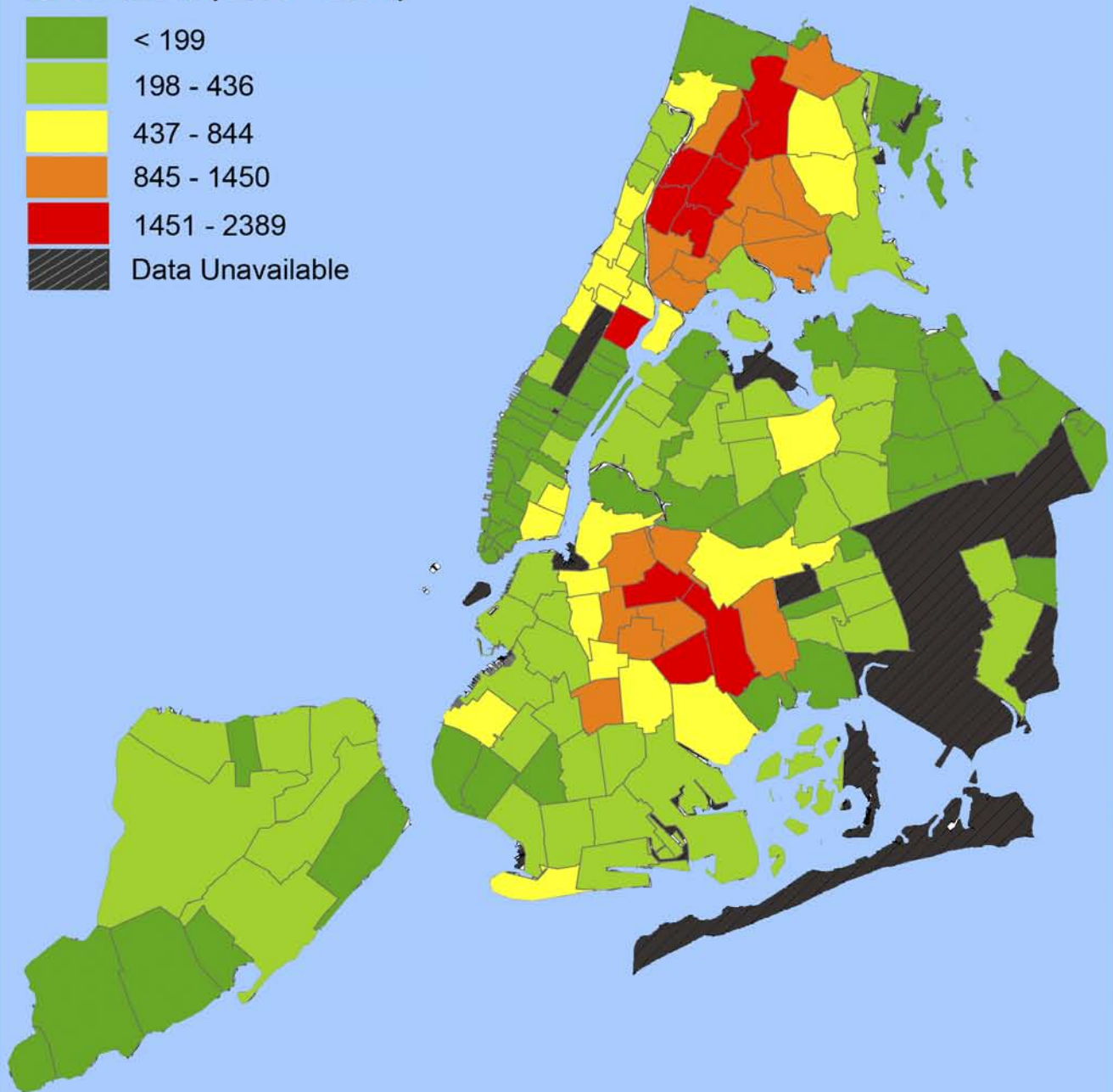
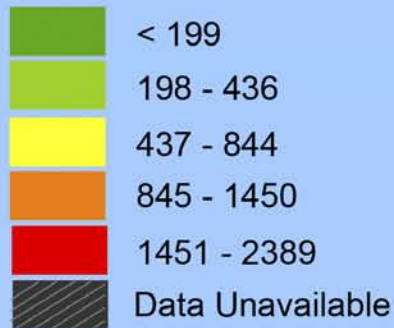
Low-income communities also are affected by a multitude of other public health and quality of life concerns due to environmental racism. As the corresponding map shows, people living in low-income neighborhoods endure unclean air and higher asthma levels than people living in high-income areas.<sup>11</sup> Compared with more affluent white neighborhoods, low-income communities of color lack quality green and open space as well as access to affordable, nutritious food. These trends contribute to the high rate of obesity in low-income communities of color.<sup>12</sup>

Currently, policy makers are discussing plans and directing resources toward rebuilding our economy through green projects and policies. The federal economic stimulus package will bring resources to cities to begin pushing for the creation of this green framework for economic development. However, low-income people of color are not being consulted about strategies for allocating funding and resources. On the local level, in 2007, Mayor Bloomberg unveiled PlaNYC, which is his plan for growing a "Greener, Greater New York." While PlaNYC includes some admirable environmental goals, such as working to reduce global warming emissions by 30%, the plan does not address the unjust burden placed on working class communities due to environmental racism within the City.

Any green economic plan that fails to account for the inequitable distribution of pollution and associated health concerns will also fail to bring about significant improvements in overall environmental conditions. Low-income communities of color must be involved in the planning discussions and resource allocation decisions. We must ensure that NYC's growing green economy will create meaningful jobs and healthier and safer communities. We must invest in ways to produce healthy, affordable, locally grown food by exploring alternative agriculture practices, such as community gardening and community supported agriculture. Since low-income communities and communities of color have been overburdened by our unsustainable economy, we must ensure that these communities are deeply engaged in defining and creating a just, equitable, green, sustainable economy that places emphasis on social and environmental well-being.



## Total Number of People Discharged from Hospital for Asthma (2005 - 2007)



This map shows that the highest rates of asthma exist in low-income communities of color in New York City. This is one indicator of the need for NYC to advance environmental justice and adopt the principles and demands of the Right to the City platform. The red and orange areas of the map indicate the neighborhoods with the highest asthma rates. These include the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn, which also have the highest poverty rates.



0 5,000 10,000 15,000 20,000 Feet



### Right to the City-NYC Principles

- » **SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT:** RTTC-NYC believes in working to reduce hazardous waste to ensure the sustainability of our environment.
- » **EQUITY:** No community should be overburdened by waste.
- » **COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING:** Low-income communities and communities impacted by environmental racism have the right to decision-making power over environmental policy in New York City.
- » **HEALTHY NEIGHBORHOODS:** All people have the right to clean air, affordable healthy food, green, open spaces, sustainable, healthy neighborhoods, and workplaces within their communities.
- » **GREEN ECONOMY:** We believe in a green economic initiative that creates a sustainable, equitable, and clean energy economy for a healthier and safer environment that promotes community-based land use planning and economic development which will bring quality jobs to low-income communities impacted by environmental racism
- » **FAIR REPRESENTATION:** Environmental justice communities must be represented on all city commissions and task forces, such as the Food Policy Task Force and other policy recommendations on food.

### Right to the City-NYC Policy Demands

- » The New York City Council and Mayor must prohibit the building of toxic facilities in low-income people of color communities, which are already overburdened by hazardous waste and polluting industries. A formal standard must be adopted to prevent the over-concentration of hazardous waste and polluting industries in low-income areas and ensure possibility of placement in under-concentrated areas;
- » The New York City Council and Mayor must offer grants to help small grocers stock and maintain affordable fresh fruits and vegetables, along with low-fat milk and real fruit juices. This should be coupled with policies that ensure healthy school lunches and improve student nutrition through initiatives such as the farm-to-school program;
- » The New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, along with the City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, must make community gardens permanent to ensure low-income communities access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables;
- » New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) must invest in energy efficient, green, and affordable housing for low and moderate income residents and families;
- » The City Council must ensure that new fast-food restaurants may not be built within a tenth of a mile of schools.



# THE RIGHT TO JOBS & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

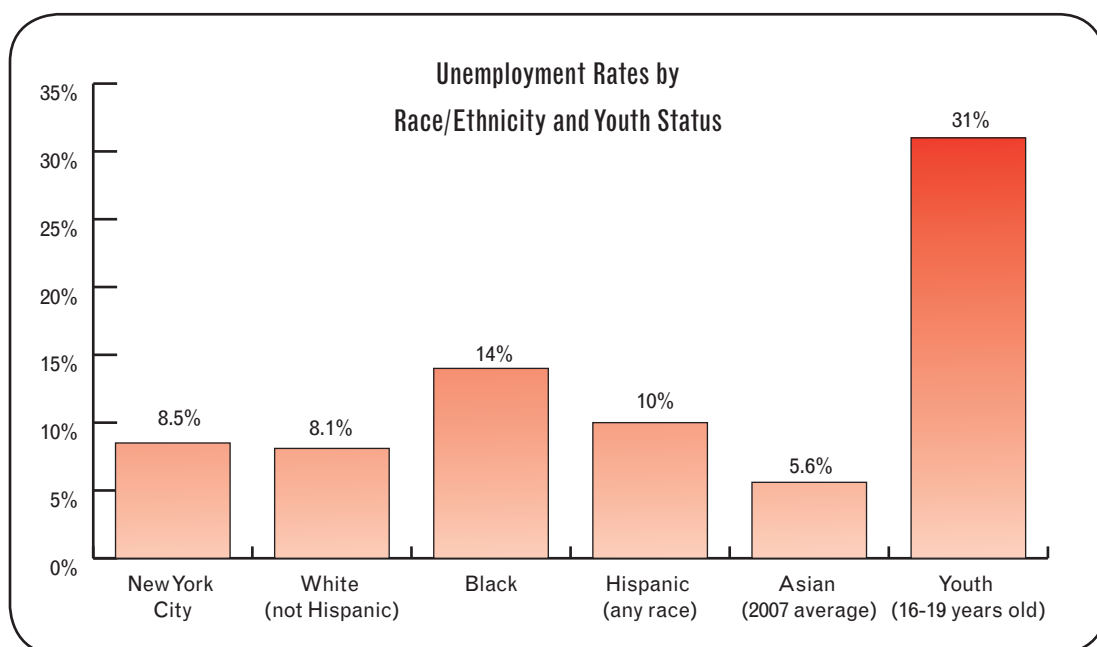
## Political Context

The recent collapse of the economy and rising unemployment rates has made it nearly impossible for low-income people of color to work, live in and enjoy New York City. The City's economy and workforce development policies keeps them out of work, underemployed, or working in dangerous and insecure situations.

As the corresponding graph shows unemployment is rising dramatically in the City.<sup>13</sup> Some reports show the rate in New York City will soon exceed 10%, a level of unemployment not seen in the City since the 1970s. Communities of color and youth are impacted even more intensely. Likewise, the current unemployment insurance system does not meet the needs of many low-wage workers, many of whom do not qualify for benefits because they worked only part-time or they frequently transitioned from one short-term job to the next. For those who do qualify, the system still proves inadequate. The maximum weekly benefit for unemployed New Yorkers is \$405, which is much lower than neighboring states with equivalent costs of living.

Rising unemployment is accompanied by an increased demand for public sector support at a time when public resources are severely limited. Currently, the welfare grant in New York City provides a family of three with only \$291 in benefits a month, a limit set in 1990. Those receiving public assistance who are unable to find work are often required to participate in the Work Experience Program (WEP), which is not only unpaid, but also fails to provide the education and training opportunities needed to move people into permanent, living-wage jobs. Undocumented workers, who lack access to public resources, endure vastly inadequate labor conditions, from violations of minimum wage laws and overtime regulations to trafficking and forced labor.

As the City attempts to rebuild its economy, we must ensure the inclusion of people with a history of subjugation in the workforce; low-income people, people of color, women, and all immigrants are part of the process. Our cities will soon be flushed with money through the Federal Stimulus package. However, without representation from the working-class in the process of allocating and monitoring these funds, we run the risk of rebuilding a workforce plagued by the same historic inequalities. Job creation efforts must focus on the full spectrum of people who are looking for and wanting to work: the unemployed, the underemployed, and the never employed. All people seeking employment must have the opportunity and dignity of earning a living wage.





### Right to the City-NYC Principles

- » **FULL EMPLOYMENT:** Our economy should fully employ all New Yorkers who are interested in and able to work.
- » **LIVING WAGE & GOOD BENEFITS:** All people should be paid living wages and earn good benefits. Wages must support the cost of all life needs, including adequate food, water, clothing, housing, medical care, education, and leisure. The public sector has a responsibility to realize the right to adequate welfare benefits for any and all those who are unable to work for any reason, including: age, illness, mental or physical disability.
- » **EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK:** All people have a right to be paid equally for equal work, and to be paid promptly for any work completed.
- » **JOB SECURITY:** All people are entitled to job security as long as they are willing and able to work. If, for any reason, people are laid off from their job, they should have a right to adequate unemployment insurance benefits, which enable them to continue living at an adequate standard of living.
- » **SECURITY OF EMPLOYMENT:** All people have the right to work in a safe environment free from any hazards that threaten the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of the worker.
- » **EDUCATION & TRAINING:** All people - employed or not - have the right to education and training to advance their skills and prepare them adequately for the workforce.
- » **UNIONS:** All people have a right to unionize.
- » **IMMIGRANT WORKERS' RIGHTS:** All workers' rights, whether established by law or described in this document, should be extended to all immigrant workers, regardless of documentation.
- » **GREEN JOBS:** Our emerging economy must work to revitalize working class and low-income communities through quality job creation, career ladder training, and healthy, sustainable economic development. Communities most impacted by poverty should be most empowered to shape the emerging green economy.



### Right to the City-NYC Policy Demands

- » Governor David Paterson and the incoming Commissioner of the New York State Department of Labor must index the maximum weekly insurance benefits that an unemployed worker can receive to the cost of living;
- » Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council should institute local hire and living wage requirements for any developer receiving public subsidies. Further, they should establish a wage and benefit floor that ensures an adequate standard of living for their employees;
- » Mayor Bloomberg and Commissioner Robert Doar of the Human Resources Administration must end the unpaid Work Experience Program and outlaw unpaid work. The paid transitional jobs program should replace all WEP activities;
- » Governor Paterson and Commissioner David Hansel of the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance must index welfare grants to cost of living to ensure that those who cannot work are able to maintain an adequate standard of living;
- » Undocumented workers should receive education and services that help them to enforce their legal right to minimum wage, prevailing wage, overtime, and workers' compensation.



# THE RIGHT TO PUBLIC SPACE

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## Political Context

Access to public, open space is a vital component of urban life. These are venues where urban residents share in the cultural and political life of their City. They enable recreation, exercise, and enjoyment of green, healthy environments. However, New York City ranks far below other high density cities in the average number of acres of park space per resident, with only 4.7 acres of park space available per 1000 residents.<sup>14</sup> Several trends indicate an increasing threat to public space in New York City: commercial development of public space by private developers, privatization of management of public spaces, and the criminalization of poor people and people of color in public spaces. As a result, low-income people of color with strong roots in New York City neighborhoods have increasingly been displaced from the public spaces in their communities.

Under Mayor Giuliani and now Bloomberg, private interests have taken over the management, maintenance, and development of many landmark Manhattan parks and public spaces, including Central Park, Union Square, Washington Square, Times Square, the East River Waterfront and Hudson River Park. The trend is moving into the outer boroughs, such as the planned development of Brooklyn's Atlantic Yards. Private interests have no structural accountability and little incentive to ensure that open, public spaces remain accessible, vital, and safe places where all New Yorkers can gather to relax, share, conduct political life, and build community. As private interests increasingly foot the bill to develop parks and other public spaces, the City's park budget shrinks. Consequently, wealthier New Yorkers lose their incentive to advocate on behalf of adequate City investment in parks, and smaller parks and public spaces in low-income communities of color continue to suffer from neglect and lack of resources.

As private interests take on the management of public space, policing of public spaces has increased in intensity and scale. In the 1990s, under Mayor Giuliani, prosecution for so-called "Quality of Life" offenses increased dramatically. During his tenure as mayor, Giuliani declared a "zero tolerance" policy against these low-level crimes. As a consequence, those who most depend on the limited amount of public space in New York City have been increasingly criminalized for utilizing it. For example, the homeless who must use public space to survive have been increasingly harassed for activities such as public urination and sleeping on park benches. LGBTQ youth, who for years have used the Hudson River Park's piers as a place where they can escape the violence they often encounter elsewhere, are now harassed and displaced as the park is developed by private interests. Communities of color have also been targeted for decades under the harsh sentencing of the 1973 Rockefeller Drug Laws, which until recently imposed mandatory prison time for people convicted of even low-level drug possession and selling.

Mayor Bloomberg hopes to expand his predecessor's policing tactics in severity and scope. In a recent address, Bloomberg proposed a new State law increasing the penalties for quality of life repeat offenders: "Very simply: commit six or more quality-of-life crimes within a year, and your next one would be a felony – and the revolving door would slam shut."<sup>15</sup> Additionally, under Mayor Bloomberg, the New York Police Department (NYPD) has more aggressively policed public housing and the public property surrounding public housing, arresting anyone found in these areas without photo identification demonstrating their residence in the housing project.

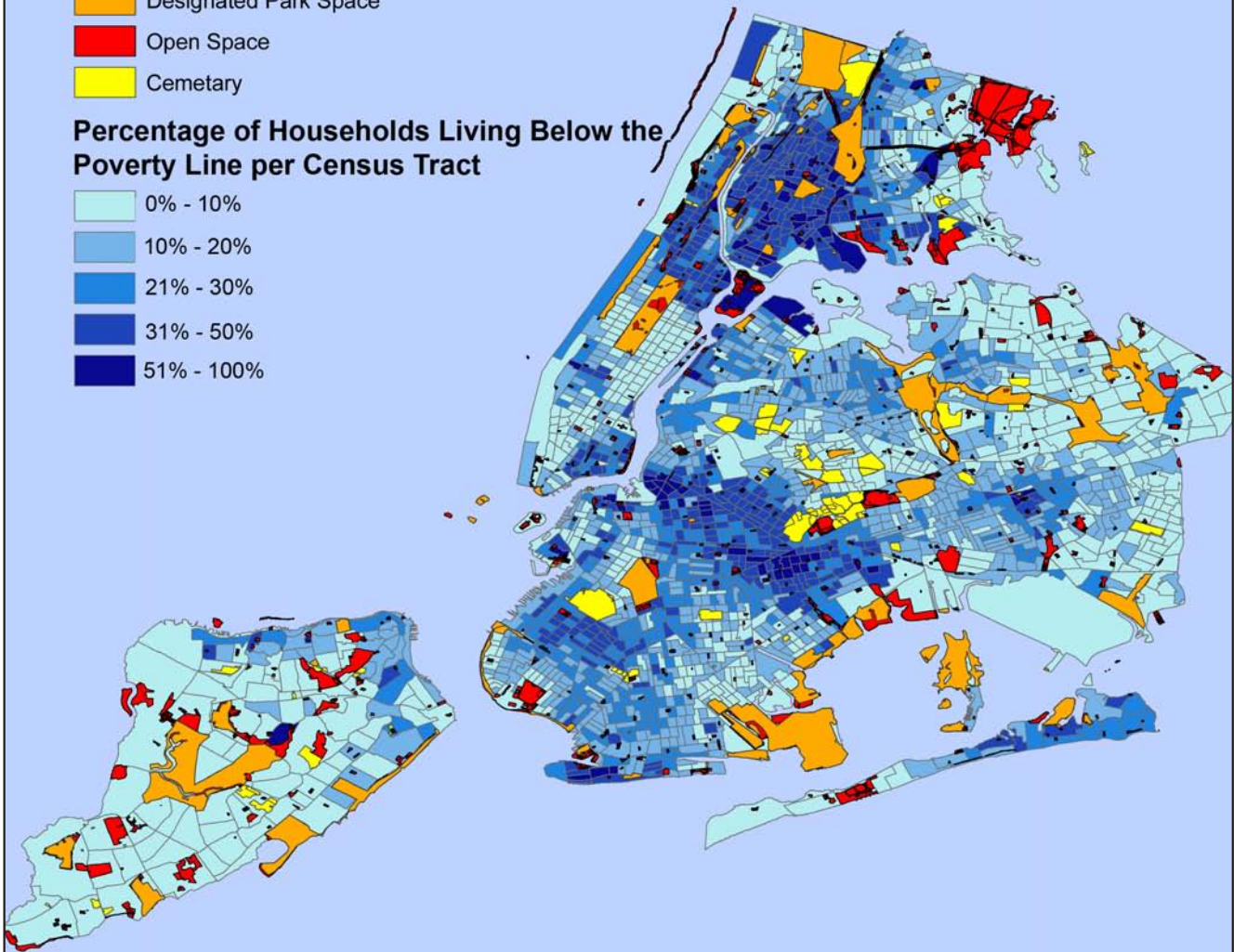
Increased policing and harassment of public housing residents, the homeless, youth, LGBTQ people and other communities of color leads to the displacement of these communities from the public spaces they once utilized. The criminalization of these communities has further increased the number of the incarcerated, despite evidence that current practices are ineffective at reducing crime and poverty within communities. Furthermore, investment in aggressive policing measures reduces resources available to maintain and develop public spaces in all of the City's neighborhoods.

## Access to Open Space: The Disparity Between High and Low Income Neighborhoods

- Designated Park Space
- Open Space
- Cemetery

### Percentage of Households Living Below the Poverty Line per Census Tract

- 0% - 10%
- 10% - 20%
- 21% - 30%
- 31% - 50%
- 51% - 100%



This map shows in orange the public park space that is available to New Yorkers and indicates that low-income communities of color lack adequate access to these spaces. This means that low-income people cannot exercise, recreate and enjoy green spaces to the same degree as higher income residents. The red areas show designated open spaces, which are not necessarily available for public use. The lowest income areas such as the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn, represented by dark blue, have the least amount of designated, public park space.



0 0.02 0.04 0.08 0.12 0.16 Decimal Degrees





### Right to the City-NYC Principles

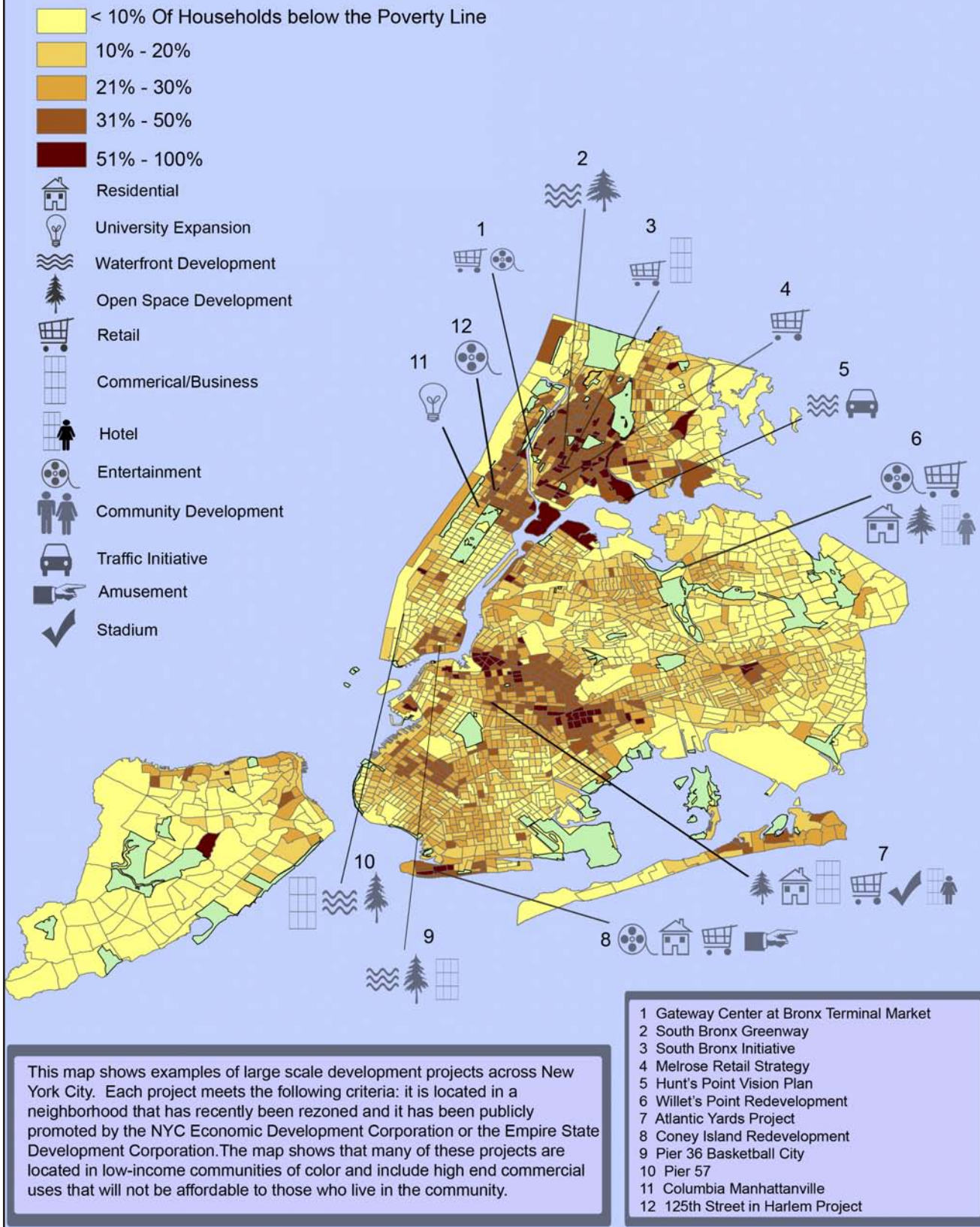
- » **PUBLIC SPACE:** RTTC-NYC defines the term “public space” to include any area that is publicly funded and/or frequently used for recreation and/or for living by the public. This includes: parks, public bathrooms, libraries, sidewalks, subways, public housing, community gardens, waterfronts, Penn Station, the Port Authority, etc.
- » **SAFE COMMUNITIES:** All people have a right to the city without fear of police harassment, which includes behavior such as police brutality, corruption, racial profiling, false arrest, and intimidation of the homeless, low-income people, people of color, LGBTQ people, youth, the disabled, the formerly incarcerated, the undocumented, and users of controlled substances.
- » **RIGHT TO ASSEMBLE:** All people have the right to assemble, hold political meetings and protest in public spaces without fear of police arrest or harassment and without the need of a permit.
- » **ACCESS TO PUBLIC SPACE:** Low-income people, youth, LGBTQ people and homeless people depend on access to public space for survival, day to day living, and recreation. The use of public space shouldn't be restricted. Public spaces should be accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We should be able to use public space for things such as needle exchanges and street vending.
- » **PUBLIC SPACE FOR SURVIVAL:** All people have a right to access public space as a means of survival. All people should have access to sanitary bathrooms in public spaces. In the absence of sanitary public bathrooms, nobody should be criminalized for public urination.
- » **INNOVATION:** RTTC-NYC opposes the “broken windows” approach to policing and cleaning-up our neighborhoods. New York City must invest in alternative, innovative approaches to criminal justice that do not result in the policing, criminalization and incarceration of low-income communities of color.
- » **KEEPING PUBLIC SPACES PUBLIC:** Public space must be developed with public resources. If private money is used, it needs to be structurally accountable to the community which uses the space. Private interests must not dictate how public space is used.
- » **COMMUNITY NEEDS:** Public space should be developed based on the community's input and priorities and should promote non-commercial uses.



### Right to the City-NYC Policy Demands

- » The New York City Council should ensure that all private entities and public/private partnerships that manage and develop public space in the City be accountable under the law to the public in their management of these spaces;
- » The New York City Council should make Quality of Life Citations non-arrestable, non-summonsable, and punishable by a fine of no more than \$50;
- » Certain behavior should not be punishable through quality of life citations, and these behaviors should be removed from the penal code;
- » New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg should end NYPD “vertical sweeps” in public housing.

## Location of Proposed Major Development Projects and Poverty in New York<sup>16</sup>





## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Testimony of Deputy Mayor Edward Skyler before the U.S. Congress, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, April 21, 2009, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/wtc/downloads/pdf/testimony/skyler-9182007.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation by Good Jobs New York on "The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in New York," presented at the New York Foundation, May 26, 2009.
- <sup>3</sup> David M. Halbfinger, "Yankee Stadium Subsidy Becomes Mayoral Campaign Issue," January 9, 2009, New York Times
- <sup>4</sup> Community Decision-Making Timeline sources include:  
Seth Forman, "Community Boards," September 20, 2000, Gotham Gazette, <http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/20000920/202/150>  
Municipal Art Society Planning Center on behalf of the Community-Based Planning Task Force, 2005, "Livable Neighborhoods for a Livable City: Policy Recommendations to Strengthen Community-Based Planning in New York City," [LivableNeighborhoodsReport2005.pdf](#)  
Municipal Art Society, 1998, "The State of 197a Planning," multiple pdfs at <http://mas.org/presscenter/publications/the-state-of-197-a-planning>  
Derek Alger, "Community-Based Planning," March 25, 2002, Gotham Gazette, <http://www.gothamgazette.com/iotw/communityboards/>  
Mark Berkey-Gerard, "Community Board Reform," March 6, 2006, Gotham Gazette, <http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/20060306/200/1779>  
Courtney Gross, "Endangered Community Boards," June 8, 2009, Gotham Gazette, <http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/20090608/200/2936>
- <sup>5</sup> Tom Waters, "As City Grows, Affordable Housing Shrinks," April 21, 2008, Gotham Gazette, <http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/sustainabilitywatch/20080421/210/2501>
- <sup>6</sup> The Furman Center for Real Estate & Urban Policy, State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods 2008
- <sup>7</sup> Study was conducted by grassroots group and RTTC-NYC member Picture the Homeless and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer
- <sup>8</sup> Jarret Murphy, "Vacant in Manhattan: Agitating for Land Reuse," City Limits, November 26, 2007, [http://citylimits.org/content/articles/viewarticle.cfm?article\\_id=3451](http://citylimits.org/content/articles/viewarticle.cfm?article_id=3451)
- <sup>9</sup> "MTA Bus Depots & PA Bus Terminals In Communities of Color," map prepared by West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. (WE ACT), <http://www.weact.org/Portals/7/Map%205.pdf>
- <sup>10</sup> Boyce, James K. "Inequality and Environmental Protection." Political Economy Research Working Paper Series, No. 52. (1993)
- <sup>11</sup> New York State Department of Health, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/wtc/downloads/pdf/testimony/skyler-9182007.pdf>  
Asthma rates are given as a number per 10,000 people, for purposes of comparison across zip codes of differing population sizes. They are calculated for each zip code by first finding an average asthma discharge rate. That rate, multiplied by 10,000, gives the final approximate number of asthma discharges per 10,000 people for the associated zip code.
- <sup>12</sup> Leslie Mikkelsen & Sana Chehimi, "The Links Between the Neighborhood Food Environment and Childhood Nutrition," Preventive Institute, Fall 2007, <http://www.preventioninstitute.org/pdf/FoodEnv11.07.pdf>
- <sup>13</sup> Sources for unemployment statistics and graph include:  
Projections for 4th quarter of 2009 by Fiscal Policy Institute report - Figure 7  
U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey (1-year estimates), Table S2301 & Table S1903: Employment Status for  
Geographic Area New York city, NY, New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA Metropolitan Statistical Area  
The Economic Justice Project of the Brennan Center for Justice [National Employment Law Project (NELP)], 2007.
- <sup>14</sup> As compared to an average of 6.1 acres in similar cities. Trust for Public Land FY 2007.
- <sup>15</sup> "Mayor Bloomberg Delivers 2009 State of the City Address," January 15, 2009, New York Times, [http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/nyregion/20090115\\_SOTC.pdf](http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/nyregion/20090115_SOTC.pdf)
- <sup>16</sup> Sources for Development map include:  
New York City Economic Development Corporation, <http://www.nycedc.com/Pages/HomePage.aspx>  
Empire State Development Corporation, <http://www.empire.state.ny.us/default.asp>  
US Census data, <http://www.census.gov>



[www.righttothecity.org](http://www.righttothecity.org)

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