

Making Willets Point

Work for New York

A plan for neighborhood success

Executive Summary

February 2008



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Principal Authors:

Elena Conte
Alyssa Katz
Brad Lander
Mercedes Narciso

Contributors:

Justin Kray
Patricia Voltolini
Vicki Weiner
Alex Zamudio

COLLABORATORS

This report was prepared by the Pratt Center for Community Development and is the result of extensive conversations over several months involving several hundred residents of the communities surrounding Willets Point (especially Corona, Flushing, Jackson Heights and East Elmhurst), workers and business owners from the site itself, and a wide range of community, housing, and labor organizations. Each section of this report contains a description of community input, as well as background information about the proposed project and the issue. The recommendations combine explicit community requests from the process along with best practices based on the Pratt Center’s knowledge of planning processes.

Its contents and recommendations have been reviewed and endorsed by:

Asian Americans for Equality	Habitat for Humanity
Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)	The New York Immigration Coalition
Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens	Pratt Center for Community Development
Centro Hispano Cuzcatlán	Queens Community House
Good Jobs New York	Queens Congregations United for Action
	Queens for Affordable Housing



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Executive Summary

In response to the New York City Economic Development Corporation's proposal to acquire and redevelop Willets Point, the Pratt Center for Community Development worked with Queens organizations and elected officials to facilitate a series of community workshops to elicit the concerns and priorities of area residents, workers, and business owners. These workshops generated the recommendations of this report.

Willet Point is an industrial area nestled between Corona and Flushing. The City intends to purchase or use eminent domain to acquire 61 acres of privately owned industrial businesses, including auto salvage shops and warehouse distributors — in all around 250 businesses, employing more than 1,300 workers. EDC plans to arrange for a single developer to build 5,500 units of housing, 1.7 million square feet of retail, commercial and entertainment space, a hotel and convention center, and a 650-seat K-8 school.

But who will benefit from the government-led leveling and rebuilding of Willets Point?

Currently, the City's proposal fails to address the most urgent concern of the businesses and workers set to be displaced: that they will lose their livelihoods. Meanwhile, the housing and economic development plans for Willets Points don't align with the needs for deeply affordable housing, good jobs that serve the local population and site uses that benefit, rather than burden the adjacent communities.

The proposed plan for Willets Point requires an extraordinary use of public authority, and should only proceed if it can fairly meet the goals described below. If the redevelopment cannot meet these goals, it is not worth the taxpayer money, public effort, nor the pain of displacement, and should not proceed. (See Map 1: Willets Point and Surrounding Area).

- 1. Do right by existing businesses and workers**
- 2. Make most of the housing affordable**
- 3. Guarantee good jobs with targeted local hiring**
- 4. Provide the necessary physical and social infrastructure**
- 5. Respect and connect surrounding neighborhoods**

Willets Point redevelopment should only proceed if it can meet these goals.
If the redevelopment cannot meet these goals, it is not worth the taxpayer money, public effort, nor the pain of displacement, and should not proceed.

Map 1: Willets Point and Surrounding Area



Table 1: Willets Point Projected Development

Use	Size
Residential	5,500,000 s.f. (approx. 5,500 units)
Retail	1.7 million sq ft (incl. 2,700 seat movie theater)
Office	500,000 sq ft
Convention Center	400,000 sq ft
Hotel	560,000 sq ft (approx. 700 rooms)
K – 8 School	100,000 sq ft (approx. 650 seats)
Community & Cultural Uses	150,000 sq ft
Open Space	8 acres

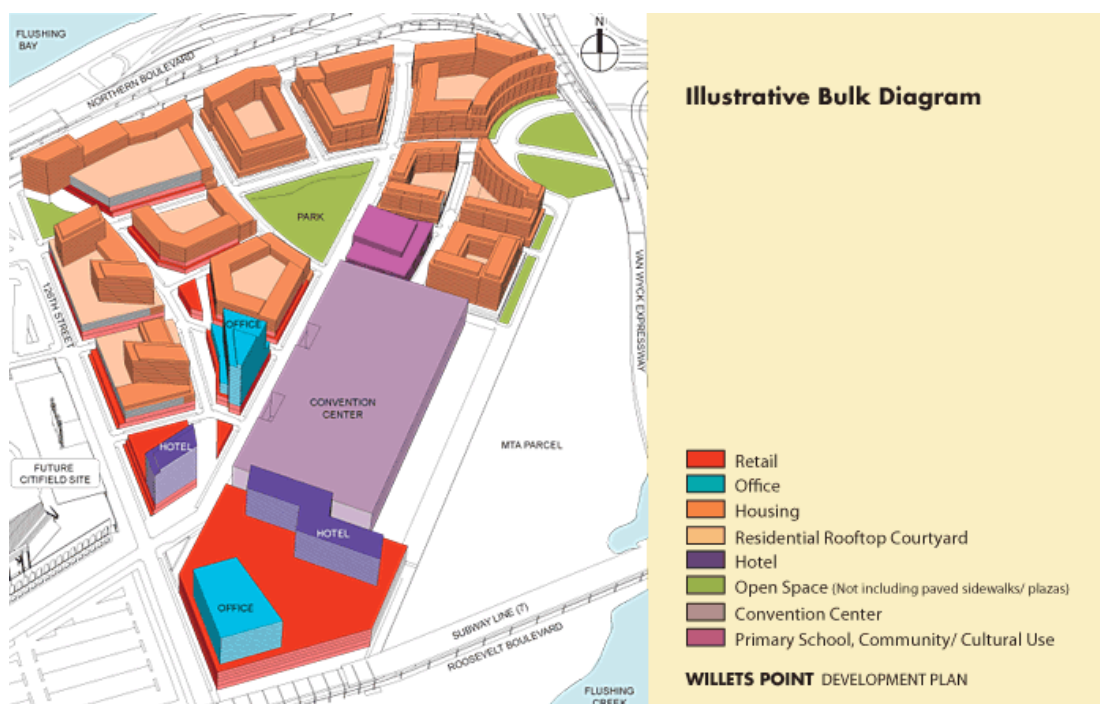
Figure 1: Willets Point Illustrative Bulk Diagram

Figure 2: Community Forum on June 19th, 2007 at St. Mark AME



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Do right by existing businesses and workers

- Businesses that depend on their relationships with neighboring businesses in Willets Point should be relocated together in clusters to a permanent home. If coordinated relocation is not possible, then some area should be reserved for existing businesses within the plans for Willets Point.
- Existing workers should be able to choose among a range of good options: such as 1) relocating with their existing employers (with relocation assistance) 2) City-funded job training and placement, in fields of their choosing 3) first priority placement in new jobs at Willets Point (with job and language training, as necessary, to help them prepare for these positions), in construction and permanent positions
- Additional efforts should be made to insure that the most vulnerable workers have the choices described above: City programs must serve the training and placement needs of a greater number of workers and all workers at Willets Point should be able to register as such in order to receive services, without being asked to reveal their immigration status.

The City's workforce assistance plan for the displaced workers **targets only 15% to 20%** of the current workforce at Willets Point



2. Make most of the housing affordable

- At least one-third of the units should be affordable to genuinely low-income families — households earning less than \$25,000 a year.
- At least one-third of the units should be affordable to low- to moderate- and middle-income families, using multiple income tiers to insure affordability at a range of incomes.
- Guarantee that the housing created is genuinely accessible to immigrant families.
- Include a dedicated senior housing component.
- Require that the units be affordable in perpetuity.



3. Guarantee good jobs with targeted local hiring

- Require that developers and employers pay prevailing wage and benefits packages for all jobs
- Ensure that both displaced workers and local residents are able to connect to the newly created jobs, and advance along career paths, by requiring developers, contractors, and employers to hire locally, and by investing in job placement and training programs.
- Establish a worker advancement center with the goal of helping workers at Willets Point to access all available programs and benefits, regardless of language spoken. The center should provide ongoing support to help workers advance up a career ladder.



4. Provide the necessary physical and social infrastructure

- The City must ensure that the environmental remediation of the site is thorough and meets the most protective standards and by developing a remediation plan that the developer and contractors will be required to follow. This plan should be made public before the onset of the land-use review process.
- Building design for housing, schools, and community uses should take into account the need to mitigate noise impacts from air traffic.
- Address the existing transit deficit for neighboring communities with a study and fully funded implementation plan; explore the creation of a Bus Rapid Transit line that connects communities to JFK airport, where many current residents are employed;
- Provide more schools, senior housing, and community centers such as senior centers, daycare facilities, health centers, and recreational facilities.

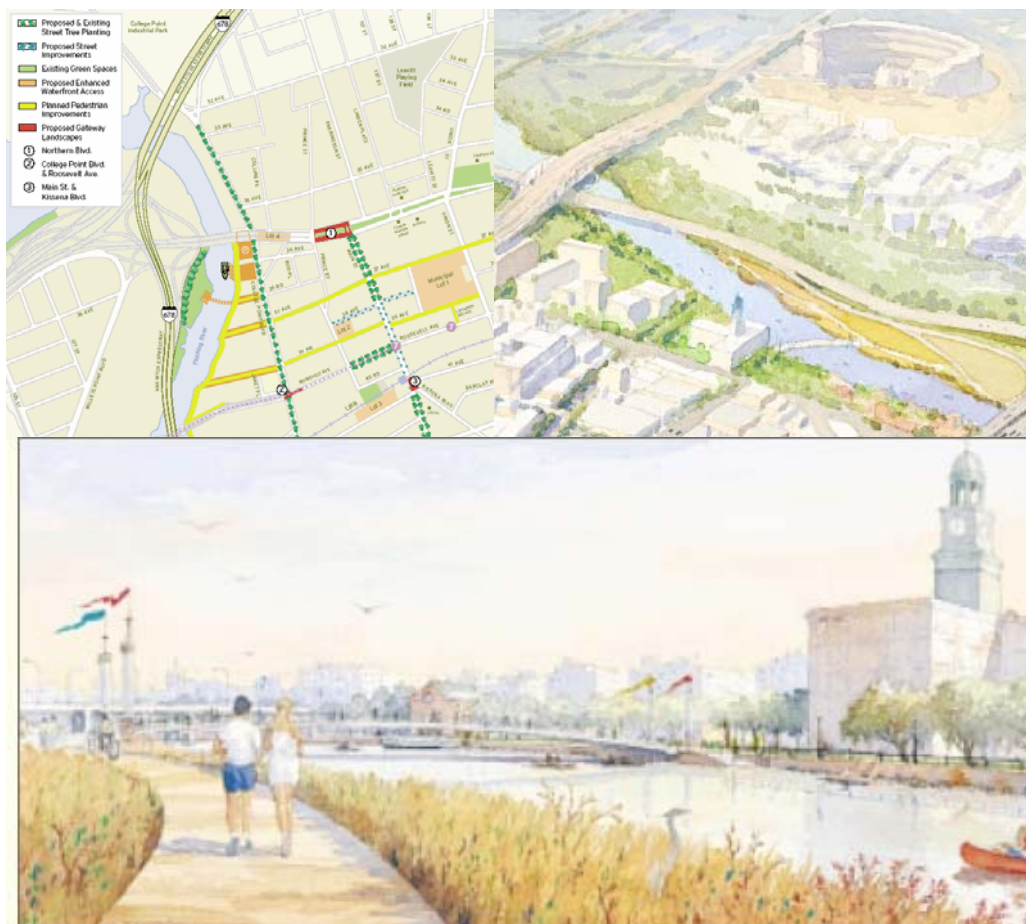
Map 2: Concentration of low-income residents with long commute times >1 hr



5. Respect and connect surrounding neighborhoods

- Develop pedestrian and bicycle connections, especially along the waterfront.
- Develop connections between Willets Point, the waterfront, and surrounding neighborhoods by making the physical design contextual to the street design of surrounding neighborhoods and develop the Willets Point waterfront as park and open space.
- Encourage small-scale, entrepreneurial retail and commercial businesses that extend the character of surrounding neighborhoods by considering a market of international products, featuring local entrepreneurs connected with nearby communities and providing incentives to local businesses seeking to expand.

Figure 3: Images from the Downtown Flushing Development Framework



ARTIST'S RENDERING OF A REVITALIZED FLUSHING RIVER WATERFRONT