Background: Community Engagement and Workshop Design

A three-part Visioning Tour in Mott Haven in the summer of 2013 drew more than 150 participants to identify the top needs of the neighborhood and the best approaches to meet those needs.

The Tour’s purpose was to gather guidance from community stakeholders for a Mott Haven Transformation Plan for the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative. The U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) a planning grant for Mott Haven to participate in the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative (CNI), a federal initiative to transform distressed public housing and their neighborhoods through community-led comprehensive neighborhood development. The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) has been contracted to coordinate planning in Mott Haven, and LISC brought in the consultants of the Collective for Community, Culture and the Environment (the Collective) to design and manage the Visioning Tour.

The engagement process was designed to ensure that the CNI planning effort in Mott Haven included substantive and substantial community input from both NYCHA and non-NYCHA residents. The goal was to develop and utilize a range of community organizing strategies to foster meaningful resident engagement, generate concrete resident input regarding the community’s challenges and potential solutions, and garner sustained resident involvement in planning and ultimately implementation of the CNI plan.

To achieve these goals, the Collective developed a participatory engagement process to involve residents and other participants in a way that tapped into their knowledge as community experts, while simultaneously equipping them with other forms of expertise that would empower them as citizen planners. It was also intended to create dialogue, facilitate exchange of information and perspective, and identify neighborhood priorities while recognizing that there are issues that still need to be resolved before genuine consensus is achieved.

The Visioning Tour, composed of three participatory community Visioning Workshops, brought together NYCHA and local residents, service providers, elected officials, educators, activists, and City agency representatives to focus on Mott Haven’s needs, assets, and opportunities, and to generate ideas for addressing the neighborhood’s challenges. The workshops revealed many shared concerns and innovative concepts, which will inform the development of the Mott Haven Choice Neighborhoods plan and provide a foundation for keeping community stakeholders engaged in creating neighborhood improvements.
The workshops took place during the early evening in three different community locations that were easily accessible by public transportation and in or near the target NYCHA developments and other residences: the Cornell Cooperative Extension office on East 149th Street, Borinquen Court Senior Center on East 138th Street, and Betances Community Center on St. Ann’s Avenue. Approximately 50-60 individuals attended each workshop, representing a broad spectrum of community stakeholders. Each workshop employed a unique method for identifying priorities and eliciting creative solutions.

**Health and Open Space.** The first workshop, focused on Health and Open Space, engaged participants using the “Design as Play” approach, through which Mott Haven stakeholders constructed a representation of their envisioned community solution using miscellaneous found objects. Sometimes whimsical, sometimes practical, participants’ creations tapped into their imagination, knowledge and creativity, but also pointed toward potential solutions. At this workshop, participants were also asked to begin thinking of the neighborhood in terms of assets, by filling out a “Wish Poem.” The Wish Poem template distributed had two columns, to be completed by participants: “I wish Mott Haven had...”; and “I’m glad Mott Haven has...”.

**Housing and Public Safety.** In the second workshop, focused on Housing and Public Safety, participants took one of several identified walking or driving tours through a part of Mott Haven, during which they observed assets and identified issues. They then posed potential solutions during the group discussion that followed the walking tours. This workshop was specifically designed to spur thinking about how to address neighborhood challenges by using an experiential approach.
**Education and Workforce Development.** The final workshop, focused on Education and Workforce Development, engaged participants in guided, in-depth discussions. The participants chose their initial groups based on their interest in a variety of themes. The facilitators then mixed the groups, in order to diversify the discussions. The workshop was designed to capture information both on existing resources that help Mott Haven youth and adults to thrive and obstacles to good life outcomes. A cross-generational approach facilitated a dialogue among young and old, and among service providers, parents, and neighborhood leaders.

Turnout for the workshops was robust, especially given the summertime schedule, and the potential for residents to have experienced a certain level of “planning fatigue,” as the South Bronx has a long history of community engagement in planning efforts. There was strong participation by NYCHA residents—an explicit goal of the initiative. The discussions were broad and were not dominated by any single issue or viewpoint. The workshops became a place for genuine dialogue between the residents of both public and private housing, young and old (this cross-generational dynamic became a running theme; see below), as well as with city agencies and local service providers. Despite the varied themes, the same issues surfaced at multiple workshops, possibly indicating that there is a certain level of consensus on what the community’s planning priorities should be. Overall, there was an expression of enthusiastic readiness to participate actively in creating change and taking action.

Participants were eager to know about the next steps in the process, how their input would be utilized, and what they could expect as an outcome of the planning process. That eagerness presents an opportunity to put the Working Committees into direct dialogue with participants, as participants would surely add value to the ongoing planning process, even into implementation stages.

The Education and Workforce Development workshop, in particular, demonstrated the value of a local forum for service providers and the users of their services to engage in a useful dialogue. The workshops as a whole were designed to elicit some specificity about resident-generated solutions to the problems they experience in their daily lives. Yet, as is fairly standard for community workshops, especially in neighborhoods where people do not feel as though they have ample opportunity for group interaction, people wanted to speak about the neighborhood in terms of what was not working. A lesson learned was that people really needed time for both open-ended discussion and opportunities to build knowledge and perspective that would help them to confidently generate solutions.
The enthusiasm for a community-based planning initiative that has an established neighborhood presence, organizational support, a network of stakeholders, and multiple targets for implementation funding is an excellent opportunity to establish a new entity: a Choice Neighborhoods Planning and Implementation Committee—to continue working with the community as the plan is developed, reviewed, finalized and implemented. This overarching committee could work to identify priorities, ensure that public agencies and elected officials commit resources to the plan, monitor plan progress to ensure that neighborhood-developed priorities are enacted, and provide an on-going conduit between the planning process and the community.

The following section describes each workshop in detail including common themes that surfaced and the recommendations for neighborhood improvements that came directly from residents.

**Health and Open Space**

**a. Overview**

Mott Haven’s population is overwhelmingly poor and young. Nearly half—45 percent—of Mott Haven/Hunts Point residents live in poverty (American Community Survey, 2009-11). Almost the same proportion (43 percent) of Mott Haven area residents and 47 percent of local NYCHA residents are younger than 25 years old, and one-third of Mott Haven/Hunts Point residents are children under the age of 18. Local NYCHA developments are home to high concentrations of women (68 percent) and seniors aged 65 and over (13 percent).

With higher rates of preventable diseases—including asthma, diabetes, and heart disease, as well as mental illness—in Mott Haven than in New York City overall, the neighborhood bears a disproportionate burden of poor health. More than four in ten Mott Haven/Hunts Point residents consider themselves to be in fair or poor health, which is twice the number that see themselves the same way in New York City overall (Community Health Profile: Hunts Point and Mott Haven, Take Care NY/NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, 2006). The prevalence of diabetes, in particular, and its impact on participants and/or their family or friends came up frequently in the workshops.

Useable, inviting, and well-designed open space presents the opportunity for physical activity, social gatherings, and even food production. In Mott Haven, the large and well-used St. Mary’s Park is accessible to many residents of NYCHA and other housing. Several other small parks and playgrounds, as well as an array of established, vibrant community gardens, are distributed throughout the neighborhood, providing reasonable access to open space in a range of physical condition.

**b. Themes and Examples**

Healthy eating and physical activity are crucial in preventing obesity-related chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. Perhaps because of a general awareness of the health challenges faced by neighborhood residents, combined with the personal and family frustration that many expressed about difficulty acquiring good food locally, participants in the workshops repeatedly identified the need for increased access to affordable, healthy food in Mott Haven as a priority.
Workshop participants identified as a priority the need for **preventive health education, services, and strategies**, particularly those aimed at addressing diabetes, asthma, and family planning. At least some participants emphasized how important it is for **health education to be culturally appropriate and, preferably, delivered by peers to be effective**. Though there are some local programs focused on nutrition education, residents indicated that these programs may be underutilized as a result of limited access to information about available services within the community.

Workshop participants also cited **concerns about trucking-intensive businesses** in the community as a factor contributing to Mott Haven’s persistently high asthma rate.

The very large youth population in Mott Haven underscored the **repeated expression of need for activities for youth and beyond that, for productive activities—recreation, education, and health programming—that bring together multiple generations, within families and in the broader community**. Cooking classes, farmers markets, community recreation centers (including a swimming pool) for all ages, and green infrastructure development that engages youth were just some of the options identified.

Despite the presence of accessible open space, from the large St. Mary’s Park to smaller parks, playgrounds, and other areas, **poor sanitation, including the accumulation and infrequent removal of trash and dog feces, was indicated as a key issue that deters some residents and their children from using the parks or from gathering to socialize in open space on NYCHA grounds**. **Cleaner streets and improved sanitation were cited as priorities.** In addition, participants discussed the need for **improvement in the physical condition of NYCHA buildings**, emphasizing the **persistent presence of mold that makes residents sick**. See additional discussion and recommendations under Housing and Public Safety, below.

c. **Recommendations**

1. Mott Haven is a community with a preponderance of unhealthy, inexpensive food options and few sources of decent quality, fresh, healthful food. Workshop participants presented some strategies that can be employed to **increase access to and consumption of healthy food**, by decreasing financial, distribution, or knowledge barriers, including:
   
   - Establish farmers’ markets with affordable healthy food and EBT capacity.
   - Create a community kitchen, where residents can prepare meals together or for each other.
   - Locate a supermarket in Mott Haven that promotes healthy eating and prevents diabetes by controlling portion size, selling healthy food, promoting fruits and vegetables, provides education about holistic medicine and organic foods, and sells healthy snacks.
   - Create a resident-led restaurant that could also be used as a Healthy Cooking education facility.
   - Create or expand community gardens that sell produce.
   - Establish a farm share, or community supported agriculture, project.
2. **Open space and traffic-related** recommendations include:
   - More green space and gardens, including those situated next to housing and on NYCHA building roofs.
   - Green space surrounding a new supermarket, to promote socializing.
   - Plant more trees.
   - Create a playground contiguous with an urban farm that has a greenhouse.
   - Integrate gardens with schools.
   - Natural water filtering to be used in gardens and health center.
   - Create waterfront access, including a natural environment, waterfront promenade park that includes recreation facilities (e.g., a baseball field, boat launch), education (school with a garden), and food access (upstate farm share).
   - Designate traffic paths where trucks are prohibited.
   - Slow car and truck traffic by installing speed bumps.
   - Create pedestrian median on 138th Street.
   - Increase street safety by installing solar powered security cameras.
   - Increase the number of trash containers and separate them physically from other uses. Install solar-powered trash compactors.
   - Enforce dog-curbing rules.

3. Several recommendations focused on **creating or expanding recreational facilities and space**, such as:
   - An accessible swimming pool.
   - Multi-generational, accessible community center that includes a gym and/or training facility, other recreation opportunities, education programs, community-building activities.
   - Playground for young children with climbing sculpture.
   - Waterfront baseball field and boat launch.
   - Designated bike lanes and pedestrian paths.

4. **Recommendations that focused on health services and facilities** include:
   - Expand health and wellness education, including establishing a center that provides primary health care, health education, and preventive care, including holistic health resources.
   - Focus on expanding diabetes education, prevention, and care and expanded education about living with disabilities.
   - Provide transportation shuttle to health center(s).

5. **Additional recommendations:**
   While access to healthy food is inadequate in Mott Haven, the neighborhood has a number of assets that can be mobilized to improve the food landscape and build on the concerns and recommendations cited by workshop participants.
• There are many vital and well-established community gardens in the neighborhood, several of which have “casitas” that serve as social gathering places for barbeques, cultural events, and community celebrations. Those gardens that are registered with GreenThumb, NYC Parks’ community gardening program, are required to open to the public for an established number of hours each week. **A loosely organized coalition or network of Mott Haven community gardens, each of which has at least a small core of dedicated gardeners, could collaboratively organize, publicize, and host a community-wide series of garden-based cooking demonstrations, nutrition workshops, outdoor and windowsill gardening instruction for all ages, and community dinners, which could also incorporate cultural activity.** Cornell Cooperative Extension, with its focus on improving nutrition, or one of the gardens with well established leadership, might be approached about doing the initial organizing to launch such a Mott Haven Community Garden Council. Workshops and classes could be led by groups already focused on health promotion and disease prevention in the community, including Health People’s diabetes peer educators.

• In a number of housing developments throughout New York City, **NYCHA has worked with tenants and others to establish vegetable gardens, some of which—such as the one-acre Red Hook Urban Farm created in partnership with Added Value and the Green City Force Clean Energy Corps— are sizeable enough to be considered urban farms. There is potential to do the same in Mott Haven**, in some of the underutilized and poorly maintained open spaces on NYCHA property. A site that is also accessible to the street would promote interaction between NYCHA and non-NYCHA residents and encourage foot traffic that connects NYCHA to the surrounding neighborhood. A skilled and enthusiastic gardener, identified through the existing community garden leadership, could work with NYCHA to mobilize NYCHA tenants and other residents in establishing a garden.

• Clearly, it is also important to **prioritize making fresh, nourishing, affordable food available for purchase in Mott Haven grocery stores, bodegas, and restaurants**. A number of existing non-profit organizations (Bronx Health REACH, City Harvest, GrowNYC, and others) and NYC efforts and resources—for example, Green Carts, Healthy Bodegas, Stellar Farmers Markets, and the FRESH initiative, which creates incentives for supermarkets to locate in high-need areas, including Mott Haven—are aimed at improving access to healthy food. LISC’s own Communities for Healthy Food NYC, established to improve access to healthy food in disadvantaged communities, may be able to provide leverage and valuable guidance from the lessons it has learned in the communities where it has been implemented. These opportunities should be explored fully for inclusion in the implementation plan. The opportunity to replicate models such as that developed by Brown’s Shop Rite stores, which—with public-private support similar to that available through the FRESH initiative—incorporate job creation for vulnerable populations, integrated community hubs and health facilities in their low-income Philadelphia neighborhood supermarkets, should be investigated.
• There may well be sufficient passion in the community to establish a Mott Haven Community Food Council that would carry forward implementation of local healthy food initiatives.

• Finally, the concern about truck traffic and its continuing impact on asthma incidence needs to be addressed as an integral consideration in any efforts made to support a vibrant local economy. Reducing truck traffic near residential areas, monitoring air quality to determine locations where pollutants are concentrated, and advocating for the use of alternative fuels and enforcement of fuel filter regulations by the Department of Environmental Protection are strategies that have been employed to mitigate the health impact of truck traffic in the Bronx, Harlem, and elsewhere, and should be pursued in Mott Haven. The Planning and Implementation Committee should also consider joining with other groups, such as the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance, to advocate for the implementation of New York City's Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP). The City passed the SWMP in 2006, estimating that it would lead to a reduction of more than 3.5 million vehicle miles traveled in NYC per year. However, because some of the plan's components, such as the opening of a marine transfer station on the Upper East Side, are controversial, the plan has yet to be fully implemented. The Planning and Implementation Committee should urge the city’s decision-makers to include residents in local siting decisions, and keep the public informed about large-scale projects that are likely to have significant local impacts.

Housing and Public Safety

a. Overview

The core of Mott Haven has a distinctly residential character. Multi-unit apartment buildings are interspersed with institutions and a network of parks, playgrounds, and community gardens. Retail uses are concentrated along 138th Street, 149th Street, and along Willis Avenue. Heavy industrial uses ring the residential core, primarily to the west and south.

Although the general sense is that Mott Haven housing remains affordable, 95 percent of the housing stock in the CNI area is renter-occupied, and 66 percent of those households are rent-burdened (paying more than 30 percent of their income toward rent). Almost 45 percent of unsubsidized renters in the South Bronx have a “severe rent burden” (meaning they pay more than 50 percent of their income toward rent).

The most recent statistics available (2007) show that rates of assault, felony, larceny, murder, property crime, robbery, and violent crime are higher in NYPD Precinct 40 (Mott Haven area) than in both the Bronx and in NYC as a whole. Rates of all these decreased between 2000 and 2007, except for larceny, which increased from 21 to 24/1,000 residents; and murder, which stayed the same at 0.2/1,000 residents. Felony rates and Violent Crime rates are particularly high in the Mott Haven area compared to the NYC average. (Felony = 42/1,000 residents in Precinct 40 vs. 25/1,000 residents in NYC; Violent Crime = 13/1,000 residents in Precinct 40 vs. 6/1,000 residents in NYC).
The Housing and Public Safety workshop was designed to be mobile, to help participants assess the strengths and weaknesses of specific neighborhood locations and to spur thinking about how to address challenges. Some participants took walking tours; others went by van. Each group was led by a guide, identified by LISC from stakeholders and staff, who was familiar with the area and its issues. Types of sites visited included community gardens, vacant lots, typical streetscapes, commercial strips, historic buildings, public housing, the waterfront, and an adaptive reuse project. Participants were asked to think about whether they saw these places as neighborhood strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats, or whether impressions varied by time of day and/or season. They were also asked to think about how to improve on the negative aspects, or build on the positive aspects.

In general, participants felt positive about the neighborhood’s diversity and good transportation access. Some felt a sense of community cohesion, while many others expressed a sense that neighbors no longer knew one another and that the neighborhood was rapidly transitioning, simultaneously gentrifying and becoming populated with new immigrants. Participants saw the potential of some of the vacant lots and underutilized buildings, but also sensed that the neighborhood was run down. There was a general concern about the incidence of crime and its impact on feelings of personal safety, particularly in areas known as gang hangouts and in areas where lighting was poor, or not maintained.

b. Themes and Examples
There is a high concentration of apartment buildings in the neighborhood, both NYCHA and privately operated. On 138th Street, businesses are closed at night and the street is dark. With the exception of the commercial corridors, there is little street-level commercial activity at all, and the medium-rise apartment buildings, built in the “tower-in-the-park” style typical of public housing, set back from the street, produce a reality and a perception that even in densely built parts of the neighborhood, there is little street life. People felt that they had to leave the neighborhood for basic purchases.

Participants noted that streets felt unwelcoming and that the vacant properties scattered throughout the neighborhood added to this sense and also attracted unwanted uses. Some of those residents who participated in the Housing and Public Safety workshop noted that, while they felt safe walking in the area in a group during daylight hours, they would not feel safe in the same areas at night. Participants described the factors that complicated the full enjoyment of the area’s public spaces, including sidewalks: lighting is poor and insufficient (this complaint was repeated many times); residents feel the need to have bars on their windows; criminal activity is apparent; residents feel that they don’t know one another; and that there is little reason to come out at night, given these conditions and the paucity of businesses that remain open. People also perceived that the neighborhood in general is run down—ball courts are not maintained, sidewalks are pitched and broken, trash accumulates in front of vacant property, and animal waste is left on the sidewalk. One participant noted the concentration of bars and liquor stores in particular areas leading to a feeling that those areas are unsafe. The inability to fully use public space has contributed to residents’ sense that the social and cultural fabric of the neighborhood has also broken down.

In terms of public housing, workshop participants echoed the complaints and concerns of NYCHA residents elsewhere in the city about the backlog of maintenance that has resulted in poorly kept
grounds, accumulations of trash and animal waste, and infrastructure that has become unusable through neglect. On the flip side, some people pointed to the fact that NYCHA has some degree of control over late night noise and activity. Some participants felt that public housing could be better utilized as a stabilizing force, by providing outlets for cultural events, cooking classes, and celebrations that would contribute to social cohesion.

Participants expressed the sense that new immigrants needed more assistance integrating into the neighborhood, especially in regard to establishing credit and gaining access to safe and affordable housing. Access to the formal economy was cited several times as an important gateway for immigrants, youth, and those lacking educational credentials.

A recurring theme was displacement, especially of people who are economically vulnerable and households earning under $30,000 annually. According to participants, rents are rising. Participants told stories of friends and neighbors being pressured to leave their homes, to make way for more affluent tenants. For example, one participant cited the recent Bruckner rezoning and a fear that more mixed-income housing would lead to further eviction and displacement.

Many participants brought up the issue of poor relations with police. The controversial stop-and-frisk policy has led to a sense that residents are being harassed, not protected, and that in some cases the police feel overwhelmed, or worse, uncaring and slow to respond. However, many participants expressed a desire to work with the police department locally to tailor solutions and improve relations.

c. Recommendations

1. Physical improvements:
   - Improve lighting, particularly in NYCHA developments and in commercial and residential areas.
   - Add stop lights and pedestrian crossings on 138th Street to improve pedestrian safety.
   - Convert vacant lots to active uses.
   - Improve lighting at bus and subway stops.
   - Proper trimming of trees and bushes.
   - Incentivize private property owners to add lighting.
   - Strategic placement of security cameras.
   - Improve functioning of intercoms at NYCHA buildings and promote awareness of NYCHA program to install phones in individual units that have a video component, allowing people to see who is in the hallway before buzzing them in.
   - Prioritize and expedite mold remediation in NYCHA housing.

2. Programmatic Improvements:
   - Regular, active forum for residents to discuss with agencies how well services such as police (especially), fire, and sanitation are responding to local need.
   - Financial literacy programs to manage household budget.
3. Additional Recommendations

- Working with residents and the working committee, identify an area in need of public space improvements, for example, the eastern street end of 140th Street that abuts the Willis playground, or the sidewalk area in front of La Finca Del Sur Community Garden. **Using a participatory, charrette-style process—an event that could be touted in local media—invite designers to recreate the space according to the needs and input of residents, ensuring that the design reflects local culture, enhances local assets, and focuses on design techniques to encourage social interaction.** Public agencies such as the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Department of Transportation and the Economic Development Corporation should be enjoined to provide funding and coordination for the effort. This approach was utilized in Queens, for the Corona Plaza Project, in conjunction with the Queens Museum.

- **Target resident-identified areas for improved lighting.** Residents cited several areas for improved lighting. The working committees and the proposed implementation committee could work together to urge that the Department of Transportation audit the lighting in all public spaces in the neighborhood and focus resources to improve lighting in high crime areas.

- Work with NYCHA to help connect residents to employment through the federal Section 3 program. The Section 3 program requires that recipients of certain HUD financial assistance, to the greatest extent possible, generate jobs, training, and contracting opportunities for public housing residents and low- or very-low income residents in connection with projects and activities in their neighborhoods. **Connect residents to jobs in the Mott Haven community triggered by Federal Section 3 regulations, including opportunities generated through Capital and other improvements anticipated during the Choice implementation phase. NYCHA’s Office of Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability (REES), a key partner in this effort, works with employers, job-seekers, local providers, and Resident Leaders to leverage NYCHA’s role as a direct employer and consumer to generate jobs and other economic opportunities for NYCHA residents through the Section 3 program and beyond.**

**Education and Workforce Development**

a. **Overview**

Incomes do not match basic needs in Mott Haven—this gap was noted by participants in various ways, and is also borne out by statistics. While workshop participants noted with a sense of pride the “human capital” of the neighborhood, Mott Haven is poor, and the local economy has not shown signs of the economic recovery apparent in other parts of the city. Forty-five percent of residents live in Bronx Community District 1 live below the poverty line, and the unemployment figure stands at 20 percent (according to a report published by the Furman Center in 2012). Residents cited good transportation and easy access to other parts of the city as a key neighborhood asset; however, transportation access is
only one part of job access, and on other key indicators, Mott Haven does not fare well. Educational attainment is low, comparatively; only one in 25 residents has a college degree.

Participants in the Education and Workforce Development workshop organized into small discussion groups based on the following areas of interest: education, youth programs, family services, job training/professional development, neighborhood businesses, and community services. Each group considered what constitutes “success” and the barriers to that success in Mott Haven, and proposed potential solutions and interventions to address these barriers.

b. Themes and Examples

**Education:** Participants identified a number of organizations that successfully provide educational services in the neighborhood, such as ESL classes and programs offered at Betances Community Center. Still, they identified the **high high school dropout rate**, as well as a **disconnect between skills taught in schools and continuing education programs and the types of jobs available in the neighborhood**, as major barriers to neighborhood success.

Workshop participants identified a **need for vocational training in the neighborhood**, as well as the need for youth to be exposed to a variety of career choices in school—preferably in middle school.

**Youth Programs:** Participants noted that Mott Haven does have resources for youth, including after school programs (such as at MASA), job training programs (such as those offered by BronxWorks), and other opportunities (such as the Youth Farm Project, which provides the opportunity for neighborhood youth to learn about agriculture).

Still, participants recognized the challenges for parents to encourage their children to stay in school, and to be prepared to enter the workforce later.

Participants identified a need for **more funding for youth programming** in the neighborhood generally, and more specifically for programming for youth with special needs, and programming that teaches students about neighborhood and cultural history, in order to instill a sense of pride.

**Family Services:** Understandably, discussion topics of the Education, Youth Programming, and Family Services groups overlapped quite a bit. The Family Services group also identified a number of local partners providing services for youth and families, such as HeadStart, BronxWorks, local community centers, and Planned Parenthood.

Participants identified youth involvement with drugs as a major issue for the neighborhood, and made a connection between lack of activities/safe and conveniently located spaces (such as Betances Community Center) with a rise in youth drug use and crime. They called for **more of these safe spaces**, as well as **drug counseling and support groups for entire families**. Participants also felt that, while **programming exists for youth, teens, and parents separately, very little programming exists in which families participate together.**
**Job Training/Professional Development:** Participants expressed the sense that, while job training resources are available in the neighborhood, those programs are not necessarily linked to actual job growth sectors. For example, participants called for *collaborations with local colleges such as CUNY for job training programs for new industries, such as high-tech.*

They also called for *improved access to information about where to go for job training that leads to job outcomes.* Some participants pointed to BronxWorks as an example of a successful job preparedness program, but others seemed not to know of it or other programs geared toward workforce development and job placement.

**Neighborhood Businesses:** In terms of local business, participants had a variety of perspectives. They expressed the perception that local business owners tended to hire from within their own, extended families and were not particularly interested in connecting more closely with the neighborhood. The handful of business operators who attended workshops, however, wished for more governmental support and for a functional network of business owners that they could plug into. There was a sense that *entrepreneurship was largely untapped in the neighborhood as a channel for jobs, and more could be done to connect local residents with opportunities.*

Regarding existing businesses, participants agreed that there were *too many truck-intensive businesses.* Much of the southern and western portions of Mott Haven are, in fact, zoned for medium and heavy industry, and little progress has been made to relieve Mott Haven of the traffic burdens imposed by the proximity of the Major Deegan Expressway, the Bruckner Expressway, and the feeder roads to several bridges, including the Triborough Bridge.

c. **Recommendations**

1. Participants recognized the complexity of meeting the educational and workforce needs of Mott Haven’s current population and called for a *comprehensive approach to addressing educational needs, joblessness, and unemployment.* Suggestions generated at the workshop included:

   - Strengthen family units by creating programming that entire families can take advantage of together, including children, teens, and parents. In particular, residents often mentioned programs, such as cooking classes or neighborhood clean-up days, that are connected directly to pride in community and culture.
   - Encourage safe spaces that provide after-school programming, including reading, math, and summer programs, with students from local colleges to teach and tutor. Ensure that needs of students with special needs are being met through these programs.
   - Encourage drug counseling programs, not only for those who struggle with drugs, but also for those who have family members who do.
   - Create linkages between educators (including both local public schools and career and technical education providers) and job providers, making sure that skill sets taught meet the needs of local businesses.
• Create awareness of available job training resources through a community website and/or Facebook page.
• Incentivize businesses to come to Mott Haven, and to create better-paying jobs, particularly those in growth centers, that are linked with training paths and have career ladders.
• Revisit local land uses via an inclusive planning process.

2. Additional recommendations

• There is need for further, deeper discussion of these issues to identify solutions tailored to Mott Haven. The third workshop was a glimpse into how a cross-disciplinary, cross-generational approach to helping residents attain educational and professional goals at every age might work. Residents became aware of job training programs by speaking directly to service providers; parents discovered activity-rich after-school programming by talking to staff; young people heard older people express genuine concern for their future and a willingness to listen and help, as opposed to scolding and disciplining. The leaders of the CNI should pull participants from the third workshop into the Working Committee, allow them to develop a set of targeted solutions to the issues identified, such as developing inter-generational programming and connecting residents to information about jobs. Other stakeholders to tap for this are local colleges and universities, as was expressed several times during the workshop.

• Some local businesses are eager to move forward as community actors by providing space and time to host local artists and cultural events. Providing a bridge between these businesses and local artists and arts groups is an effective way to boost local business and encourage residents to shop locally. Local entrepreneurship came up several times, and there may be ways to tap into both local culture and the availability of NYCHA facilities to help establish programs to support individual initiatives (see recommendations for Public Health, Wellness, and the Environment, above).

Conclusion

Overarching themes expressed by workshop participants

The workshops provided a unique opportunity for interaction between residents and local community-based organizations and other service providers. Several themes, not directly connected to the workshop topics, yet nonetheless priorities for participants, emerged and are detailed here.

• Representatives of these groups identified many existing programs and services in areas that address a number of the needs identified throughout the workshops, including health and healthy cooking, family planning, afterschool programs, and continuing education. Yet residents made it clear that finding information about existing programs and services is difficult, and a general lack of awareness leaves these programs and services underutilized. Many residents expressed that they would be more likely to take advantage of the programs and services available if there were a centralized resource, such as a community-oriented website and/or a
resource hub at NYCHA community centers, where information about them could be easily obtained.

- The representatives of community-based groups also identified funding as a major issue affecting their ability to deliver programs and services effectively. They cited a lack of coordination between local groups, resulting in the sense that they are competing for limited funding, rather than working together to capitalize on the funding that is available to better meet the neighborhood’s needs.

- Regarding municipal services in particular, residents identified a sense of disconnection between the services available and neighborhood needs. As mentioned above, residents identified an ongoing issue with a lack of sanitation services for the neighborhood on multiple occasions. In addition, many participants noted a rocky relationship between residents and the NYPD, and, as noted above, they expressed a preference for a community policing model that embeds officers in the area and in specific buildings.

- In general, residents identified a need for the community to organize itself, in order to better access decision-makers. This would create the opportunity for residents to advocate for community needs, including more and better programming and services that more closely address the issues that they have identified, more funding for community groups that provide this, and better municipal services.

- Throughout the workshops, residents identified the diversity of the Mott Haven community, as well as its active arts and cultural producers, among its greatest assets. However, as noted above, residents also said that public safety issues have contributed to a lack of cultural and social cohesion in the neighborhood. Adults who grew up in Mott Haven who now have children of their own remembered a time when they would play outside together, with a sense of safety encouraged by the fact that they knew their neighbors and someone was always watching out. Today, they said, they would never allow their children to play outside unsupervised as they once did, due to the real and perceived dangers of neighborhood violence, and to the fact that the social network they once had no longer persists. Within NYCHA in particular, residents noted that a lack of maintenance of the buildings and public spaces exacerbates public safety issues, and also leaves many public spaces, which would otherwise encourage social and cultural interaction, underutilized. Residents suggested that more culturally oriented programming, which would bring community members together, such as events focused on instilling neighborhood pride, would help address this issue. Improvements to NYCHA’s buildings and public spaces would also encourage resident interaction.

- Culture is also an important component in relation to service delivery for the community. Some residents cited the fact that messaging around local services and programs can be patronizing and/or unwelcoming if it is not done in a culturally sensitive way.

Recommendations to address themes that cut across issues
An often-repeated suggestion at the workshops was the creation of a community-oriented website and/or developing materials that can be accessed at community centers, where residents can go to find out about available programming and services. Such a resource is easily implementable, if the right partner can be identified. Bronx Bureau (http://www.bronxbureau.org/), a local website run by City Limits, is an example of a potential partner in this effort. Their page is already a resource for neighborhood news, and, in partnership with community-based organizations, could potentially also house a community calendar and contact information for local service providers. The CNI leadership could initiate this connection.

Younger participants in the workshops also advocated for creation of a Mott Haven Facebook page. This could be easily developed and managed as part of the Betances Community Center’s teen programming. The Facebook platform allows participation by both established community groups and individual users, which makes it a resource for sharing news, events, and other important information at the neighborhood level.

Workshop participants repeatedly expressed their desire for culturally oriented programming that would bring together generations of Mott Haven residents, instilling pride in the community and contributing to public safety and community empowerment. The CNI plan could include funding for, or the CNI leadership could assist in identifying resources to fund, a series of such events. Examples could include:

- Inter-generational food events (as described in the section on Health, Wellness, and the Environment) in which senior residents share traditional foods and recipes with younger residents;
- Storytelling events focused on the experience of residents of various ages growing up in the neighborhood; and
- Multi-genre music events that bring together traditional and contemporary music in the neighborhood. For example, PlaceMatters’ project From Mambo to Hip Hop included a number of sites in Mott Haven that are important in Latino music history, and focused on connecting residents to their shared past through music, using walking tours and concerts.

The workshops, as well as the Working Committees, have created a space for collaboration that has the potential to benefit the community if it continues both within and outside the Choice Neighborhood planning process. The CNI leadership is well-positioned to bring together local community-based organizations and service providers to form a coalition, which could be used to leverage access to both funding and political influence. For example, in North Brooklyn in 2004, as the neighborhood was faced with a proposal for a massive rezoning, seven local community-based organizations came together to form Mobilization Against Displacement, a coalition that works together to advocate for affordable housing and to raise funds for work that helps long-term tenants stay in their homes despite the ongoing pressures of gentrification. This group has successfully raised money for tenant organizing work, and has been influential with local elected officials such that representatives of both local council
members’ offices regularly attend the group’s monthly meetings, which are still taking place nine years later.

Such a coalition could begin by advocating for two main issues identified during the workshops: *improving sanitation in the neighborhood*, and *bridging the gap between residents and local law enforcement by determining strategies to work collaboratively to improve safety*. A coalition could begin to bridge the gap between residents and NYPD and determine ways that they could interact and/or work together. Both of these initiatives can be undertaken in partnership with the local community board and the local councilmember’s office. The community board in particular is an important partner for accessing political power, as this is the neighborhood’s first and most consistent point-of-contact with City agencies and elected officials. In particular, the coalition and the community board could ask the local councilmember for discretionary funding to support improved sanitation, such as solar-powered trash compactors. (Participatory budgeting, sponsored by Councilmember Melissa Mark-Viverito’s office and beginning its third year in Mott Haven this fall, may also provide an opportunity for this). The coalition could also apply for funding through the local council member’s office to implement an anti-litter campaign focused on promoting community pride.

As for the relationship with the local police, the coalition may begin by attending the local precinct’s community council meetings, and working with the community board and the council members’ offices to advocate for embedding a more responsive police presence in local development.

As this process moves forward, the CNI leadership and the Planning and Implementation Committee should take advantage of the public’s enthusiasm to remain involved and to participate along the way. Using the lists of workshop participants, the committee should regularly update participants on the work of the Working Committees and invite feedback. The committee should also present the first draft of the plan publicly, and specifically ensure that participants are invited to hear about and comment on the draft.

Throughout the workshops, the primary goals that participants identified were program-oriented, and representatives of local service providers and community-based organizations who participated expressed enthusiasm for promoting and expanding their work. The CNI plan can be used as a tool to support not only implementation of, but also publicity of, local programming related to health, strengthening families, and education and workforce development. This plan can help connect residents to existing programs and services, and can support organizations on the ground in developing new programs and services that match community need. Additionally, the CNI leadership can help to catalyze an effort that would ultimately increase community members’ capacity to advocate effectively for Mott Haven with City agencies, the NYPD, and other decision-makers. Finally, the Planning and Implementation Committee can take leadership in making improvements to the physical environment, helping the community become more green and working with the CNI leadership and residents to make targeted investments into physical improvements in areas that have the greatest potential for positive social interaction.