

The IBX Promise: How NYC can deliver development without displacement

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CENTER for NYC
NEIGHBORHOODS



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Introduction

During her “State of the State” in 2022, Governor Kathy Hochul announced her plan to move forward with a [decades-old proposal](#) to connect New York City’s outer boroughs via a single transit line – dubbed the Interborough Express ([IBX](#)). To the delight of many, the Governor embraced recommendations from an early [IBX proposal](#), which envisioned using existing rail lines, stations, and rights-of-way as a means to “eliminate some of the costs and community disruption associated with new transit infrastructure”.¹ As construction of the Second Avenue subway line on Manhattan’s east side showed, project timelines can run into the decades, and costs can be astronomical to construct new transit lines in the United States, especially when compared to other places in the world.²

At face value, the plan reads as a major step forward for outer-borough mobility, as if NYC could be on the verge of becoming a [fifteen-minute city](#) of its own. Although Hochul’s plan has evolved away from the original plan in significant ways, the future IBX line will still connect the Jackson Heights section of Queens to the Bay Ridge neighborhood in south Brooklyn.³ And, as one of the few rail lines in New York City that *will not* run through Manhattan, it promises to be nothing short of life-changing for countless New Yorkers living and working across these two boroughs. However, some remain rightfully skeptical of what such a development would mean for the residents and neighborhoods that straddle the track.

At the time of Hochul’s announcement, two things stood out to us at the Center for NYC Neighborhoods regarding the IBX.

For one, the route will be a tremendous boost in quality of life for those living in the outer boroughs, particularly those who must circuitously commute into Manhattan (from either Queens or Brooklyn) in order to travel to the neighboring borough, be it for personal, occupational, or essential needs. Past research has shown that daily commutes greater than half an hour can result in significant increases in a person’s anxiety level and a decrease in self-reported life satisfaction.⁴ The IBX will, indeed, reduce travel time for the 80,000 daily, weekday rides that take place between Queens and Brooklyn by at least thirty minutes, and will boast an end-to-end travel time of about 39-45 minutes.⁵

¹ MTA 2022, p. 3; see also Woods 2022

² Bliss 2021

³ The proposed IBX line will not connect to the Bronx due to a lack of capacity across the Hell Gate Bridge, where a future Metro-North line and Amtrak already heavily utilize that stretch of railway (MTA 2022, p. 4)

⁴ ONS 2014; see also Lyons and Chatterjee 2008 and Evans et al. 2002

⁵ MTA 2022; Nessen 2022

What's more, since the pandemic, both potential homeowners and renters have increasingly flocked to the outer boroughs in search of larger living spaces, more reasonable rents, and access to outdoor space.⁶ Market reports,⁷ including [our own from this year](#), have shown that those trends are here to stay. Meanwhile, hybrid office arrangements have [shown staying power](#),⁸ meaning the economic emphasis is no longer just about Manhattan's central business district but continues to include the City's outer neighborhoods and boroughs.⁹ Consequently, already overburdened sections of the City's transportation network, in Brooklyn and Queens, have grown more congested as newcomers settle into their new homes and lifestyles.¹⁰ The IBX could provide much-needed relief on that front.

The MTA's [interim report](#) in the weeks following Hochul's announcement outlined how the agency expects communities to be affected by the proposed line; but it also raised questions about how useful it is to analyze these neighborhoods from a bird's-eye view. A distant viewpoint fails to appreciate that each community in NYC is different, whereby the people who reside in one neighborhood, and the issues they face, can and often are completely removed from another neighborhood's. Thus, we saw the need for a more localized study of the IBX neighborhoods and set out to learn more about those who live in the areas immediately surrounding the route.

Existing research on transit-oriented development (TOD) and gentrification has keyed us into the fact that gentrification of neighborhoods, and resident displacement to an extent, have been linked in the past to infrastructure projects,¹¹ like the IBX would represent. Therefore, we hoped to circle in on what the communities along the line stood to gain, or lose, with the development of the IBX. Furthermore, we wanted to determine with this research how homeownership could be preserved in the respective neighborhoods along the IBX, how to ensure existing residents can remain in place, where new pathways to homeownership could be forged, and who could benefit most from additional information, tools, and resources to those ends.

⁶ McKeough 2021; Peters 2022a; Peters 2022b

⁷ Wickham 2022; Peters 2022b

⁸ As of May 2024, only 56 percent of Manhattan workers report daily attendance in the office. Well below the 78 percent pre-pandemic level.

⁹ Cherry 2021

¹⁰ Gold, Ley, and Thomas 2022; Penney 2021; see also Chung 2022, MTA 2024

¹¹ A half-mile distance has been shown to be where the most change occurs (in terms of property values, social composition, and further development) in the wake of transit projects (Bardaka et al. 2018; see also Ratner and Goetz 2013; Bhattacharjee and Gotez 2013; Mohammad et al. 2013; Cervero and Duncan 2002; Atkinson-Palombo 2010; Chapple 2009; Hess and Almeida 2007; Kahn 2007; Pollack et al. 2010)



Methodology

Our study of the IBX honed in on the 1 - 4 residences, co-ops, and condos within distance of the route's proposed stations. Using the [original proposal](#) and the [MTA's interim study](#) of the IBX as a guide, we recreated its route in QGIS and drew half-mile buffers¹² around the originally proposed stations. The IBX's half-mile buffer zones were then joined to [NYC's PLUTO map](#), which includes information about building classes. From there, we filtered for building classes that are associated with 1 - 4 unit residences, co-ops, and condos.

The half-mile buffer zones were also linked to census tract geographies in order to capture the socio-demographic characteristics of the residents who live proximate to the IBX's proposed stations. We included variables related to homeownership, specifically a breakdown of owner-occupants and renters in the study area, as well as the percentage of non-white (including Hispanic) homeowners, and mortgage status (by type and percentage). We also tried to paint a picture of community life within IBX's buffer zones by including data on the number of parks and trees (both of which have been linked in the literature to better health outcomes and general well-being¹³ and are a marker of social sustainability¹⁴), as well as included the number of libraries, schools, and childcare facilities within the half-mile radius.

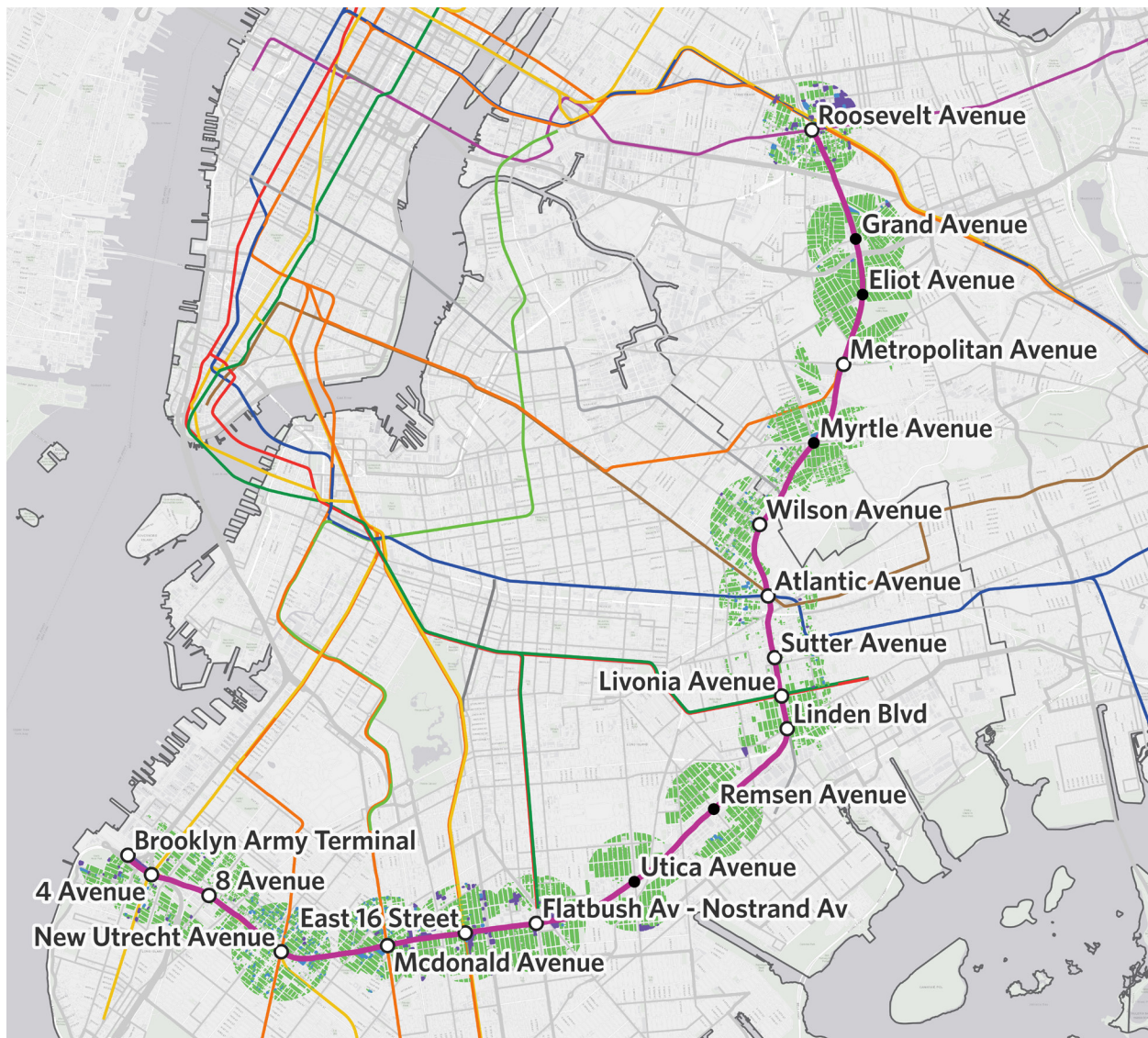
¹² Ibid.

¹³ Jiang et al. 2020

¹⁴ Opp 2017

Further, given the potential of vacant properties and lots to be converted into [social housing](#), and/or to be acquired by community land trusts (CLTs), which can lease to community residents or business owners at permanently affordable rates, we harnessed data from the [596 Acres Project](#) to calculate the number of vacant properties and lots owned by the City within each buffer zone.

Finally, to keep the vulnerability of IBX residents front of mind, we included the displacement risk score, as reported by HPD's [Equitable Development tool](#), for each of the associated neighborhoods of the IBX's originally proposed stations.¹⁵



¹⁵ The Displacement Risk score indicates the level of risk residents face of being unable to remain in their homes or neighborhoods. To learn more about the metrics behind the score and its methodology, see: <https://equitableexplorer.planning.nyc.gov/map/drm/nta>.

Findings and Recommendations

Neighborhoods in Focus

Our analysis revealed that there were four neighborhoods along the proposed IBX line that are at greatest risk of adverse impact. Underscoring that finding is the reality that the IBX will run through predominantly Black, Brown, and immigrant neighborhoods, which reflects the red flags raised by studies showing that gentrification is a “racialized process of class change.”¹⁶ Further, communities’ long-term ability to remain in place, in the face of new development and in-migration, is largely dependent on who calls the space, or neighborhood, home first.¹⁷ Meaning that if we’re to prevent displacement, we must work to ensure that the new spaces being created prioritize the community before the capital inflows and profiteering arrive.

However, along with this risk is a great opportunity to enact evergreen protections both for these neighborhoods and future neighborhoods in NYC that might again face the prospects of rapid change and large-scale developments.

Roosevelt Ave station: Jackson Heights is an already bustling area of New York City, and was once described by the New York Times as “[the most culturally diverse neighborhood in New York, if not on the planet.](#)” The half-mile area surrounding the proposed stop in Jackson Heights is approximately 44 percent Asian and 38 percent Hispanic, and boasts a high number of BIPOC homeowners: about eighty-two percent of the homeowners in the area are non-white. But the area is mostly home to a large community of renters, with nearly seventy-one percent of households identifying as such.

Grand Avenue station: This neighborhood in the Elmhurst section of Queens garnered our attention immediately. This area is home to the most 1 - 4 units of the study area, with approximately 76 percent of the residential population here being families. However, this neighborhood also has the “highest” potential for resident displacement according to HPD’s Equitable Development tool.

¹⁶ Rucks-Ahidiana 2020

¹⁷ Rucks-Ahidiana 2020; Hwang 2016a, 2020; Hwang and Sampson 2014; Owens 2012; Owens and Candipan 2019; Rucks-Ahidiana 2020; Sutton 2020; Timberlake and Johns-Wolfe 2016

Atlantic Avenue/Broadway Junction station: Multiple neighborhoods surround the proposed stop in this community, where the smallest number of 1 - 4 units in the study area exists. Rated between “high” and “highest” for resident displacement risk, it’s estimated that between 40-60 percent of residents have incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty rate. Recent [plans for a \\$500 million renovation](#) of the current MTA station and its immediate surrounding area have already been met with trepidation from community leaders.

Livonia Avenue station: This community scored the highest on indicators that portend vulnerability for displacement in the gentrification literature, and has the “highest” resident displacement risk according to HPD’s Equitable Development tool. But, with the most vacant lots and properties within the study area, the area surrounding the Livonia Ave station also holds as much promise for new affordable homeownership models as it does concern for speculative activity.

Policy Recommendation #1: Enact proactive anti-displacement protections

1. Cease-and-Desist zones (CDZs): With CDZs, homeowners opt in to a no-solicitation registry that is enforced by the New York Department of State and that prevents homeowners from receiving harassing calls, door knocks, and fliers from speculators seeking to purchase homes. Some CDZs have existed in parts of the Bronx and Queens since 2017, and between 2020 and 2022, portions of Brooklyn were added to the CDZ registry.

In June 2025, [a CDZ provision was signed into law](#) that requires the Department of State to provide public notice when it creates a new CDZ, thereby allowing residents to opt-in to avoid solicitations.¹⁸ However, with the specter of wide development looming, more must be done. Therefore, in addition to designating all of Brooklyn as a CDZ, vastly more Queens neighborhoods should be added to the no-solicitation registry - particularly any neighborhoods in Queens that will be impacted by the IBX. This measure must also be on an opt-out basis, i.e., an automatic “as-of-right” protection, that is buoyed by an aggressive governmental outreach and education campaign to allow residents to protect themselves from speculative and predatory actors alongside explicit enforcement mechanisms for violations.

¹⁸ NY Real Property Law § 442-h

2. Property tax exemptions and LOOPs: Property tax exemptions can greatly reduce a homeowner’s expenses and exempt the homeowner from potential inclusion in a tax lien sale. This is particularly important as [housing-related costs continue to rise](#), which have sent household costs through the roof.

In New York City, [such exemptions already exist for homeowners aged 65 years or older, people living with disabilities, veterans, and those on active military duty](#); although, our research does indicate that a large number of eligible New Yorkers either do not know about them, or have yet to apply for and utilize them.¹⁹ So, in addition to making it easier to sign up for tax exemptions through consistent messaging and direct outreach, we recommend the City’s Department of Finance widen the exemptions’ eligibility requirements so that more individuals can take advantage of their savings potential.²⁰

Moreover, we recommend the City establish something similar to the Longtime Owner Occupant Program (LOOP) the City of Philadelphia instituted for its vulnerable homeowners in 2014.²¹ Philadelphia’s LOOP works by limiting a home’s assessment increase to 50 percent, and locking in that assessment for as long as the homeowner is eligible - meaning your property’s assessed value each year is capped so that the amount of real estate tax you owe will not increase as your property assessment changes for as long as you remain in the program.²² To be eligible for LOOP, the homeowner must live in the house, have spent at least 10 years there, and be up-to-date on property taxes.²³ Since existing research has shown that property values can significantly increase in the wake of projects like the IBX, we feel a LOOP-like measure will allow the residents along the IBX route to actually remain and therefore enjoy the changes the transit project will inevitably bring to their neighborhood. Importantly, decreasing the chances of future increases to their property-tax burden also minimizes displacement pressures residents may face.

3. Anti-Speculation Tax: (frequently referred to as an anti-flipping tax): One way to reduce displacement pressures, not to mention the harassment endured by owner-occupants that accompany development and gentrification, is to implement anti-speculation measures, in particular an anti-speculation tax. An anti-speculation tax targets high-frequency speculation: homes bought and quickly resold within less than two years. (The proposal includes exemptions for owner-occupants as well as for homeowners who have to sell shortly after purchasing because of a change in their circumstances, without being punished.)

¹⁹ CNYCN 2017

²⁰ To learn more about the Center’s advocacy/position around property taxes, see this 2024 report from the Coalition for Affordable Homes: <https://www.coalitionforaffordablehomes.org/>

²¹ Blumgart 2018

²² City of Philadelphia 2022

²³ City of Philadelphia 2022; Blumgart 2018

4. Fund Homeowner Stability: For the highest risk neighborhoods along the IBX corridor, [an overall expansion of homeowner stabilization resources is necessary](#), both in terms of sizing program funding to meet community needs and easing access to stabilization services and funding. Across the city, predatory mortgage practices, cycles of gentrification and displacement, skyrocketing housing-related costs, and adverse financial impacts from deed theft, scams, and tax liens have continuously conspired to place homeowners a few steps away from financial distress and losing their homes. Therefore, it's imperative for the City and the State to further collaborate on the allocation of more funding to support existing stabilization programs as well as an evergreen capital pool for homeowner preservation programs. Increasing access and improving capacity for the delivery of estate planning services, mortgage assistance, home repair support, as well as deed theft education and outreach, are all critical in any effort to protect residents from the hazards associated with large developments.

Policy Recommendation #2: Expand affordable housing options

1. The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA): Plainly, [TOPA](#) would give tenants, tenant organizations, CLTs, and other qualified non-profits (i.e., those with a demonstrated commitment to democratic residential control, community engagement, and affordable housing) a first opportunity at purchasing rental properties that are going onto the market which would create new, affordable homeownership opportunities for New Yorkers.²⁴

Within the communities along IBX's route with a large number of renters, TOPA could keep tenants in place if the housing market there intensifies in the wake of the IBX's development. This makes TOPA's future passage an essential protection as the IBX project marches forward. As such, we are hopeful that state lawmakers will prioritize the passage of the TOPA legislation during the upcoming legislative session.

2. Community Opportunity to Purchase Act (COPA): Within East New York and beyond, [COPA](#) would expand homeownership opportunities similar to the way TOPA would, but specifically by allowing qualified non-profit housing developers, and/or CLTs, a three-month window of time to consider and prepare a purchase offer for any multi-family property going onto the market.

For neighborhoods along the IBX line, COPA can be a lifeline to permanently affordable housing. As COPA works to slow the speculative sales market and disrupt the cycles of eviction and displacement, it also has the potential to both stabilize those most vulnerable in the IBX corridor and increase the number of affordable homeownership units.

²⁴ New York State 2022

3. Government-Supported Financing and Public Land Use: City and state-supported funding play critical roles in bridging financing gaps, yet current programs require expansion and refinement. For example, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development’s (HPD) Open Door Program remains the primary tool to incentivize affordable homeownership. The New York State Department of Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) has its Affordable Homeownership Opportunity Program (AHOP), which also provides funding to encourage homeownership projects that will create opportunities for first-time buyers. However, programmatic constraints have limited the construction of new affordable homeownership units, particularly in light of declining homeownership rates across the City, especially in Black and Brown neighborhoods. Addressing these bottlenecks is imperative as this will support a more responsible approach to expanding affordable housing options. Through an as-of-right state tax exemption for new affordable homeownership construction (modeled on the Article XI tax exemption), increased allocations, streamlined procedures, and targeted developer support, New York will also create the knock-on effect of supporting local and small developers to get meaningfully involved as their neighborhoods change.

In addition, the disposition of city-owned land presents a significant opportunity to prioritize affordable homeownership. Leveraging land use actions within Requests for Proposals (RFPs) can create a pipeline of projects where public land functions as the critical subsidy. By explicitly prioritizing homeownership models, the city can shift from a rental-heavy pipeline to a more balanced portfolio of long-term affordable ownership opportunities.

4. Create Land Trust Lane: Take inspiration from the history books and look at the region holistically. Similar to what Boston did with the [Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative](#) in the 1980s, New York City, too, can consolidate all available public properties and vacant land into a single land trust, or series of land trusts, all along the proposed IBX line.

CLTs can provide permanently affordable housing, especially for groups vulnerable to displacement. But also, action at this scale gives residents, advocates, and government actors additional time to organize, collaborate, and determine what each neighborhood along IBX needs. All this increases the likelihood of property getting into the hands of folks who care about a neighborhood, including its existing residents, as well as organizations that are committed to deep affordability and keeping people in their communities.

Policy Recommendation #3: Support economic localism, small businesses, and the creation of affordable housing integrated with the local ecosystem

1. Equitable Ownership Requirement (EOR): The EOR requires that minority or women-owned businesses (M/WBE), or qualified nonprofit partners, hold a 25 percent ownership stake in any affordable housing project that is awarded on public land. This requirement could transform the vacant land and properties of the IBX’s communities into affordable housing opportunities for the community, while both incorporating and furthering the success of traditionally underrepresented groups in business and real-estate development. More specifically, if carried out in the spirit of the law in which it was written,²⁵ the EOR would grant the same people from a community where a development project is slated the ability to shape that development project themselves through their own work.²⁶

[The Norma](#), a development project that is currently underway in Bedford-Stuyvesant, showcases the transformative potential of EOR. There, our network partner, Bed-Stuy Restoration Corporation, and Almat Urban (both M/WBEs) have partnered to build “an 11-story mixed-use development that will bring 44 homeownership opportunities to...those [in the community] with low-to-moderate household incomes”.²⁷ Similarly, the [Vital Brooklyn](#) project targets Central Brooklyn’s local economy for investment and has exceeded the state’s requirements with 30 percent of M/WBE requirements on capital spending.

In the context of the Livonia Ave IBX community, we foresee the synergy of COPA and EOR as a guaranteed pathway for existing residents to enjoy the benefits of TOD, financially speaking, while their roots in the community remain firmly in place in terms of housing.

2. Supporting economic localism: From a broad perspective, policies that support economic localism can make neighborhood economies more inclusive and equitable, particularly those urban spaces that experienced disinvestment during the late twentieth century.²⁸ Put another way, the City’s HPD and Small Business Services departments could partner with the MTA now, during the development phase of the IBX, to ensure that local economies remain in community control, are funded, and are supported across all the IBX communities. Large plans, like the IBX, would only stand to benefit from deliberate integration with existing neighborhood plans and priorities, as well as from leveraging local institutions to support the local workforce and existing community-based organizations.

²⁵ City of New York 2020

²⁶ City of New York 2020; REW 2021; REW 2022

²⁷ REW 2022

²⁸ Austin 2014; Camou 2019; see also Sutton 2019

For example, the Steps at Saratoga is one of the five affordable housing developments envisioned in the community-led [Bedford-Stuyvesant Housing Plan](#), and it lays a foundation for development that supports the existing local ecosystem. The housing plan outlines a need to not just build affordable housing, but also promote healthy housing and support existing tenants and homeowners. Residents provided feedback and wanted to see a site that brought together community wellness, healing, food sovereignty, and security. Better yet, the development partnered with the RiseBoro Worker Co-op Development Program to support co-ops and micro-enterprises while also meeting HPD's equitable ownership requirements. If undertaken at scale, this type of effort would further community-based economic development all along the IBX route.

Wrapping Up Our IBX Study

Although only four communities along IBX's route were highlighted above, we believe that all New York City neighborhoods - not just those set to be impacted by the IBX route - could benefit from the policy solutions outlined herein.

The truth is, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for bolstering the homeownership of Black, Brown, low-to-middle-income, and immigrant New Yorkers, nor is there one for preserving existing residents' place within their communities.

Our organization is certain, however, that with careful and intentional planning as outlined above, we can move towards the strong, vibrant, affordable communities that we all want, and away from the continued cycles of gentrification and flipping, and displacement. What is more, in times marked by tremendous growth and potential, as is the case with the IBX proposal, we must take stock of who could be adversely affected by the change, uplift policies that could support them, as well as push harder for the passage of protective legislation, and work with intention, day in day out, to see that any and all supportive frameworks are accessed and implemented.

Fortunately, many policy frameworks are already in place, and promising legislation has already been introduced, but to ensure that New York City is a viable place to live for all New Yorkers, our collaboration and engagement must match the scale of this new development's potential for disruption. If these recommended measures are in place before construction begins, the IBX corridor can add new homes and buildings while protecting its residents and neighbors. Or put simply, we can have development without displacement. With this study, we hope to have laid the groundwork to do just that.

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