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50 Ideas

Center *for an*
Urban
Future

For a **stronger**
and **more equitable**

Brooklyn

BROOKLYN ORG

Center *for an* Urban Future

50 Ideas for a Stronger and More Equitable

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Center for an Urban Future (CUF) is a leading New York City-based think tank that generates smart and sustainable public policies to reduce inequality, increase economic mobility, and grow the economy.

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BROOKLYN ORG

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50 Ideas

For a **stronger** and
more equitable Brooklyn

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Introduction

IN MANY WAYS, BROOKLYN IS A SHINING STAR OF THE CITY'S POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY. SINCE the depths of 2020, Brooklyn's jobs rebound has outpaced every other borough, building on a two-decade period in which total employment nearly doubled. The borough is experiencing a sustained boom in new businesses, with bustling commercial corridors from Bedford-Stuyvesant to Bay Ridge. Meanwhile, Brooklyn's thriving tech sector and creative economy are growing at a faster rate even than Manhattan's. Many of Brooklyn's neighborhoods have bounced back strong, and several are among the city's leaders in developing open streets and other innovative placemaking strategies.

Despite all the progress, Brooklyn has significant work to do to ensure all of its residents can fully participate in the borough's growing prosperity—or even remain in a borough where rents are rising much faster than most incomes. Brooklyn is now among the nation's top 10 counties with the greatest income disparities, and the borough's racial wealth gap has only widened in recent years. The borough is home to a growing number of millionaires, but also more than 500,000 residents living below the poverty line—a sum larger than the total population of Atlanta. These challenges are compounded by persistent gaps in educational attainment that point to underlying inequalities: while 79 percent of Park Slope and Carroll Gardens residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, just 20 percent of residents do in East New York.

Once known for its high levels of Black homeownership, Brooklyn now has the highest home foreclosure rate in the city, and large numbers of low- and moderate-income residents have exited the borough for more affordable locales. Indeed, an alarming number of Brooklynites face grave affordability challenges, as well as gaps in access to health care, education, open space, technology, and financial services. And despite Brooklyn's depth of talent, too few residents are accessing the well-paying jobs being created in the borough and beyond.

Brooklyn is also grappling with a lot of the same crises felt throughout the city—from integrating asylum seekers into overstretched communities to providing resources that implement preventive solutions to mental health challenges, to delivering for residents facing a desperate shortage of affordable housing.

The borough also benefits from emerging opportunities that play to Brooklyn's strengths. The new reality of hybrid work is benefiting neighborhoods across the borough, as residents spend more weekdays closer to home. And new development is coming to neighborhoods, including the rezoning of Gowanus and clean-up of the Gowanus Canal, and East New York's 27-acre, 2,600 unit wellness-focused affordable housing development.

There is already broad agreement that addressing the borough's disparities, and laying the foundation for a stronger and more equitable borough, will require bold action and fresh ideas. But there is much less consensus on the specific actions that should be taken. This report aims to narrow that gap. The report—the second in a series of forthcoming reports by the Center for an Urban Future that set forth concrete ideas for bolstering each of the five boroughs—presents 50 bold policy ideas for what Mayor Adams, City Council members, Brooklyn Borough President Reynoso, and other city leaders can do to create a stronger, more equitable Brooklyn.

The 50 ideas in this report—a joint project between the Center for an Urban Future and Brooklyn Org, the borough's community-led philanthropic platform and its largest racial justice grantmaker—all emanate from leaders across Brooklyn. To generate fresh and achievable ideas for the borough's future, together we turned to a diverse mix of 50 exceptional Brooklynites who are all committed to building a stronger, more just, and equitable borough. Those contributing an idea to the report include community advocates, social entrepreneurs, heads of social service nonprofits, business owners, educators, economists, urban planners, artists, designers, public health experts, faith leaders, and more. We asked each of them to contribute a single policy idea that would help more Brooklyn residents get on the path to the middle class, strengthen social infrastructure, address the affordability crisis, close longstanding racial and ethnic opportunity gaps, improve the health of residents, and bolster neighborhoods across the borough. This report contains ideas both practical and visionary.

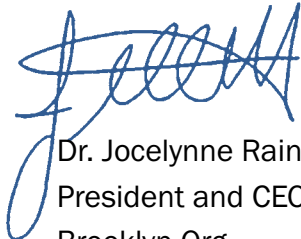
Foreword

Our goal at Brooklyn Org is to be the rallying point for the big ideas, people, and resources that will make all of the communities in our borough more just and equitable. With close to 3 million residents from diverse racial and socio-economic backgrounds we know that ideas that start in Brooklyn can serve as a model for real change across the country.

I am so grateful for the 50 remarkable Brooklynites who offered their ideas for this report and to Jonathan Bowles and his extraordinary team at the Center for an Urban Future for giving these ideas shape and substance.

As everyone who is fortunate enough to call Brooklyn home knows well, we live in the most creative, dynamic, and exhilarating place on the planet. Still, far too many of our neighbors are struggling in the face of significant challenges. I hope that the ideas in this report will spark new conversations and action to make sure Brooklyn is a place where everyone has the opportunity to be part of a stronger, more prosperous future.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jocelynne Rainey
President and CEO
Brooklyn Org

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The background is a vibrant green color. It features several abstract shapes: a yellow semi-circle in the top-left corner, a yellow rounded rectangle on the left side, a large yellow curved shape on the right side, a blue pentagon in the bottom-right corner, and a black triangle in the bottom-right corner overlapping the blue shape.

50 Ideas

1. Reimagine the brownstone to help address Brooklyn's housing crisis

Jonathan Marvel, Founding Principal, Marvel

Like the city overall, Brooklyn is facing an unprecedented housing crisis. Median rents in the borough recently hit \$3,950, foreclosures in neighborhoods from Bed Stuy to Mill Basin are on the rise, high rents have pushed many residents to flee the city, and the production of new housing has lagged well behind demand, whether from new immigrants or young professionals. But there is an opportunity to make a dent in this problem by reimagining Brooklyn's signature housing type: the brownstone. Brownstones have been central to the borough's unique identity and success, producing neighborhoods that are attractive, healthy, and safe. City leaders should use a modernized version of the brownstone to create higher-capacity, neighborhood-oriented residential buildings across Brooklyn. While historic brownstones often accommodate one to three families, a brownstone for today's tight housing market should house at least five to eight families. These new brownstones would also incorporate design features to maintain a human-scale streetscape, such as a setback at the 5th or 6th floors, and new sustainable technologies. To move this forward, the City Planning Department will need to rezone districts to accommodate greater height and Floor Area Ratio (FAR), and the Department of Buildings (DOB) should initiate a pilot in the borough to test the design's effectiveness and feasibility. Then, the mayor's office should create a task force, convening representatives from DOB, the Department of Transportation, the Fire Department, and other relevant agencies to make the regulatory and zoning changes needed to facilitate these new developments across the borough.

2. Provide free legal representation to the growing number of Brooklyn homeowners facing foreclosure

Lurie Daniel Favors, Executive Director, Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College

Central Brooklyn, home to some of the city's most vibrant Black and minority communities, is experiencing a wave of foreclosures that is eliminating generational wealth and causing countless families to flee the city. In the third quarter of 2023, Brooklyn had the highest number of foreclosures in the city, and the greatest concentration of pre-foreclosure cases were in communities of color, with majority-Black zip codes reporting an average of over 8 percent of homeowners behind in their mortgage payments.¹ In many cases, homeowners could prevail in retaining ownership of their homes against the predatory practices of lenders. But too often they are set up for failure simply because they aren't represented by a lawyer. In 2022, Center for Law and Justice and the New York State Foreclosure Defense Bar found that 40 percent of homeowners in foreclosure cases did not have access to legal representation. Unless this changes, many more New Yorkers of color will lose their homes, reducing the already low rate of Black homeownership, destabilizing communities, and exacerbating the borough's troubling wealth gap. To help Black communities preserve the intergenerational wealth that comes with owning a home, the City Council should fund free legal representation for homeowners, modeled on the city's Right-to-Counsel law, which provides legal representation to tenants who face eviction. This would ensure that homeowners who don't have the financial capital to hire a lawyer but don't qualify for public representation because of their home assets get the legal support they need in foreclosure cases.

3. Develop community-owned solar canopies over parking lots and warehouse rooftops in Sunset Park

Elizabeth Yeampierre, Executive Director, UPROSE

In the years ahead, New York will need to take bold steps to reduce carbon emissions and lay the groundwork for a more sustainable future. Few things will be more important than transitioning to renewable energy production. Fortunately, there is an opportunity to do so in Sunset Park that would also significantly reduce energy costs for the neighborhood's small businesses. Sunset Park is already a hub for a rapidly growing clean energy sector, but as one of the few places in the city with ample open space—in the form of expansive flat rooftops and parking lots—it offers a unique chance to revolutionize energy generation and ownership by developing cooperatively-owned community solar canopy farms. Instead of pavement absorbing the sun's rays, canopies built over the parking lots would do so. Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso should collaborate with local community based organizations to attract clean energy developers to establish solar canopies on Sunset Park's parking lots and roofs. Similar to the rooftop solar farm on the Brooklyn Army Terminal, where local residents can subscribe and enjoy a 15 percent reduction in their electricity bills, the majority of subscription slots for these new solar canopies would be set aside for local small businesses, who pay among the highest electricity rates in the nation. The project would expand the city's renewable energy footprint and reduce costs for local mom-and-pop shops, contributing to a more inclusive economic future.

4. Leverage major transportation projects planned for Brooklyn to strengthen low-income communities and prevent displacement

Michelle de la Uz, Executive Director, Fifth Avenue Committee

Brooklyn's transportation infrastructure is usually a source of deep frustration. But thanks to major new transportation investments coming to the borough, there is now a once in a generation opportunity to leverage the borough's transportation as a resource—not just for improving commutes, but for strengthening Brooklyn's low- and moderate-income communities. This will require local leaders and elected officials to get ahead of large-scale construction projects like the Interborough Express and BQE Cantilever and build equity into the process. For example, local leaders should push for the Interborough Express, a transit project that will connect underserved communities from Sunset Park to Jamaica, to protect communities along the route from property speculation and displacement. They can do so by embracing land banking, where the state would purchase hundreds of sites adjacent to the route and use them for affordable housing, schools, parks, and other community facilities. There is similar potential to think big about plans to fix the crumbling BQE Cantilever. Government officials should go beyond a short-term fix to the cantilever and instead eliminate the elevated highway along the entire BQE corridor. Doing so would have immensely positive health and economic impacts for many long-struggling communities along the highway. Finally, the MTA's plan to convert its buses to an all-electric fleet by 2040 creates an opportunity to rethink the borough's bus depots. With all zero emission vehicles, officials should build affordable housing on top of Sunset Park's massive Jackie Gleason Depot and other depots across the borough.

5. Turn empty storefronts into new public marketplaces for Brooklyn's micro-businesses

Gregg Bishop, Executive Director, Joe and Clara Tsai Foundation's Social Justice Fund

Brooklyn has seen an explosion in new businesses since the start of the pandemic, with the number of business formations increasing by 37 percent from 2019 to 2021. This entrepreneurial boom has resulted in an incredibly diverse mix of micro-businesses, creating new wealth and bolstering communities from Flatbush to Sunset Park. It's now critical to help ensure that Brooklyn's micro-businesses have the tools to survive and grow into larger businesses. In today's environment, this will require helping many of Brooklyn's micro-businesses access affordable spaces where they can build a customer base, test products, and build brand loyalty. Borough leaders should work with the city's Department of Small Business Services and philanthropic foundations to set up three new public marketplaces across Brooklyn that specifically cater to small-scale entrepreneurs selling products other than food. While there are currently a handful of markets that mainly cater to food vendors, similar spaces are needed for vendors selling health care and beauty products, clothing, crafts, knick-knacks, and other merchandise—and, perhaps, even for a hair salon with a single chair. Entrepreneurs would pay below-market rents for stalls, but the rent subsidies would only last for three years—enabling new entrepreneurs to cycle into these incubators—and participating micro-businesses would have to commit to enrolling in technical assistance programs to help ensure they are set up to succeed. SBS should take advantage of vacant storefronts to create these marketplaces, with city dollars subsidizing rent and philanthropic support covering technical assistance and marketing.

6. Revamp the affordable housing lottery to help long-time Brooklyn residents stay in their neighborhoods and build a larger constituency supporting new affordable housing developments

Vivian Liao, Principal and Co-Founder, Totem

Brooklyn was once a more affordable alternative to Manhattan. No longer. As a result, the borough desperately needs more affordable housing so that Brooklynites can stay in the neighborhoods they have called home for decades. Unfortunately, creating new affordable housing through ULURP, the city's land use review process, is anything but simple—or equitable. Communities often ask: affordable for whom? It's a good question. Income qualifications for those hoping to access newly built affordable units are set by the federal government and do not consider the wide range of income levels in many Brooklyn neighborhoods. Furthermore, the application itself is a Byzantine process that often disqualifies applicants for minor mistakes. Compounding these challenges is the way ULURP privileges the vocal few who show up at community board hearings but are often not the residents who would benefit directly if a project were approved. So how do we shine a light on those who would? The city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) should change the housing lottery to pre-qualify people even before an available project exists in their neighborhood, instead of the current system, which happens after the city approves a rezoning through ULURP. In addition, city and state lawmakers should help pre-qualify more people by funding monthly hands-on workshops in partnership with local housing administrators to coach people through the Housing Connect application. The result would reform the Squid Game-like test that is the current lottery process and help accurately assess which neighborhoods need more affordable housing.

7. Open mental health care centers designed to serve Brooklyn's recent arrivals

Lorena Kourousias, Executive Director, Mixteca

Brooklyn is home to nearly a million immigrants. Many arrive having made treacherous journeys and unspeakable sacrifices. Indeed, the World Health Organization notes that rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD tend to be higher among migrants and refugees who have faced adversity than among their host populations.² New York is famous for being a city of immigrants—and therapists—and yet public mental health resources that target recent arrivals are virtually nonexistent. As a result, many immigrants who arrive in Brooklyn are unable to participate fully and equally in society, and our culture and economy are the poorer for it. To make Brooklyn a truly vibrant and welcoming home for all, borough leaders should create free clinics that provide comprehensive mental health services tailored to the unique needs of recent arrivals. The City Council should allocate funding so that the city's Health Department can partner with Brooklyn's many community-based organizations to offer culturally sensitive counseling and therapy. These would provide safe havens where individuals could heal from their past traumas, address challenges of adjusting to a new environment, and develop resilience for the future. Additionally, these centers could partner with educational institutions to help facilitate language and vocational training programs that could take place in these spaces, promoting social integration and economic empowerment. By taking this approach and investing in mental health and healing spaces for recent arrivals, New York would demonstrate its commitment to the well-being and success of our diverse community.

8. Cap rent increases for small businesses that make capital improvements in their storefronts

Tayo Giwa and Cynthia Gordy Giwa, Co-Founders, Black-Owned Brooklyn

Small brick-and-mortar businesses are the heart and soul of Brooklyn's many diverse neighborhoods. The local bodega, the family-owned restaurant, the coffee shop that knows exactly how many sugars you like, these are the spaces that retain the cultural memories, practices, and identities of our communities. It is, therefore, vitally important to foster an environment that allows these businesses to thrive. And yet, as ever, they are under attack. While commercial rents plummeted in Manhattan during the pandemic, in Brooklyn, the storefront rent per square foot rose 23 percent from 2019 to 2021.³ Mom-and-pop shops often already survive on thin margins and seasonal variations, and increasing rent significantly can cause a business to shutter instantly. There is a simple solution, though, one that will encourage businesses to make necessary capital improvements with the knowledge that they will be able to stay in the storefronts in which they lovingly invest care and resources. Mayor Eric Adams and the City Council must develop a program to cap year-on-year rental increases on small business renters that make capital improvements to rental spaces, such as upgrades to HVAC systems, storefront windows, or other fixtures within the space. Capping rent increases in exchange for capital improvements will incentivize small businesses to invest in their rental spaces in a way that will mutually benefit landlords, businesses, and the communities they serve.

9. Launch a “Climate Jobs for Brooklyn” campaign

Tonya Gayle, Executive Director, Green City Force

Throughout New York City, there is so much untapped potential among young people. The unemployment rate for 16- to 24-year-olds is significantly higher than the city’s overall unemployment rate, and 15.3 percent of Black New Yorkers ages 20 to 24 are neither in school nor working.⁴ At the same time, there has been an incredible growth of career opportunities in the green energy sector. For instance, according to the State Comptroller, between 2015 and 2019, green energy jobs grew by 13 percent, outpacing the total job growth of 6 percent during the same period. The city’s elected officials must do more to expand opportunities for young people by connecting them to green energy jobs. In Brooklyn, borough leaders should launch a “Climate Jobs for Brooklyn” recruitment campaign and build out the city’s current Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) by creating a green economy focused division. With posters designed by Brooklyn-based artists, featuring Borough President Antonio Reynoso and Deputy Borough President Kim Council as Uncle Sam and Rosie the Riveter, this campaign would be a call to action to the borough’s next leading generation. These actions would create a centralized and organized database of available green energy jobs through SYEP and would connect young talent to viable career opportunities. In doing so, this campaign would feed the borough’s increasing demand for green energy career professionals and would help to fuel an economy that is increasingly focused on the environment and climate resilience.

10. Create Midnight Brooklyn Youth Sports Clubs to give young people late-night alternatives to the streets

Camara Jackson, Founder and CEO, Elite Learners, Inc.

Few things pose more of a problem for Brooklyn than the continued prevalence of gun violence, which leaves communities unsafe, stifles investment and job creation, and leaves the often-youthful offenders in a cycle of incarceration and poverty. Data shows that much of the violence happens in a relatively small window of time at night—between 6 p.m. and 2 a.m.—when young people have few places to go other than the streets, as schools and community programs are typically closed during these hours. To disrupt this problem, Brooklyn’s young people need other options for this momentous period of night—and specifically, more engaging spaces that are open to them during these hours. Borough President Reynoso and Mayor Adams should launch an effort to open local indoor school athletic facilities during late night hours. These Midnight Brooklyn Youth Sports Clubs would be open Friday to Monday from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. and would first be implemented in North and South Brooklyn, serving communities with some of the borough’s highest rates of gun violence. At times when many young people are more susceptible to engaging in potentially criminal activity, these spaces would use programming with indoor sports activities like basketball and volleyball to draw youth off the street. In turn, the clubs would provide them with a structured and safe environment, also serving as a hub for community-based organizations to offer services in academic enrichment, mental health counseling, and even job skills training.

11. Establish a residential parking permit program to ensure Brooklyn communities aren't negatively impacted from congestion pricing—with proceeds funding parks

[Matt Harrigan, Co-Founder and CEO, Company Ventures](#)

The imminent launch of congestion pricing will be a huge net positive for the city. But to ensure it also brings benefits—while limiting problems—to Brooklyn (and other boroughs), city leaders should roll out a complementary initiative to reform parking. Without this step, many Brooklyn communities will likely see significant new traffic from drivers looking to avoid the congestion charge and park for free in neighborhoods with a short subway ride to Manhattan (where it's already hard enough to find parking). To prevent this, city leaders should adopt a residential parking permit system like the one used in Washington, D.C. NYC DOT would establish residential parking zones. Car owners with proof of residency would pay a reasonable fee for a permit—perhaps \$100 a month or possibly calibrated by income—while non-residents could park in these zones only by paying an hourly rate via the ParkNYC app. This parking reform would discourage non-residents from using Brooklyn's neighborhoods as commuter parking lots, pushing them to transit instead. Brooklyn residents would get three major, quality-of-life enhancing outcomes: 1) Those who regularly use cars would get more parking availability. 2) Imposing a modest fee to use city space for parking should, in time, lower interest in having a car, leading to a greener city. 3) This proposal would bring in hundreds of millions in new revenue for the city, a portion of which should be dedicated to parks and transit projects in Brooklyn neighborhoods—benefiting everyone, car owners or not.

12. Make the suite of supports now provided to students in CUNY ASAP also available for young people participating in nonprofit job training programs

[Travis Fox, Head of Strategic Partnerships, The Marcy Lab School](#)

In Brooklyn, an alarming 1 in 7 young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are considered “disconnected,” meaning they are not in school and not working. And in historically underserved Brooklyn neighborhoods whose residents are predominantly Black and Brown, this number jumps to nearly 1 in 5. Most of these tens of thousands of young Brooklynites will be relegated to low-wage, dead-end jobs for the foreseeable future unless city policymakers can reconnect them into workforce training programs. This will require helping young adults overcome the financial and systemic barriers that too often force them to lose momentum while pursuing their educational and career training opportunities. For more than a decade now, CUNY ASAP has had remarkable success removing these barriers and keep its mostly low-income community college students on the path to graduation by providing a mix of financial supports and wraparound services. It's time to expand this successful model to nonprofit workforce training programs, many of which offer vital career pathways but too often lack the resources to provide the wraparound services that are so critical in keeping young adults engaged. Just as The Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity seeded ASAP, it should create a pilot that provides training organizations with resources to develop an ASAP-like model. Doing so would spark a ripple effect throughout the city, making for a much-needed structured and symbiotic pathway between education and the New York workforce, enabling our young adults to persist and thrive.

13. Establish a “Made in Brooklyn” digital platform for the borough’s artists and creative professionals

Desirée Gordon, Strategy and Programs Director, Brooklyn Arts Council

Creativity is what sets Brooklyn apart. While it boasts landmark cultural institutions like the Brooklyn Museum and Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), it is the borough’s dynamic population of working artists and unmatched network of nonprofit arts organizations that serves as the foundation for so much of the borough’s economic success. Yet since the pandemic, artists and cultural nonprofits have struggled to stay afloat and are competing over increasingly limited resources from public arts and cultural grants, like the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2021, organizations across the city, many of which are in Brooklyn, experienced a nearly \$1 billion loss of income compared to 2019. Although numbers have partially rebounded, there is still a glaring need for support. To address this, a consortium of Brooklyn arts organizations, Borough President Reynoso, and the Department of Cultural Affairs should work together to develop and publicize a digital platform which features Brooklyn-based artists and arts organizations, and serves as a point of connection for residents to creative communities. Through this platform, Brooklynites can become “citizen patrons” and engage with artists in their communities, donating funds to people or groups of their choosing. Additionally, this platform would provide residents with information about creative events in their neighborhoods, such as art installations, exhibits, and performances. In doing so, Brooklyn would become not just a hub of creative talent, but a place where civic engagement and art are deeply linked, strengthening the arts and cultural sector overall.

14. Bring large-scale one-stop-shop economic mobility hubs to the borough’s most challenged communities

Deron Johnston, Chief Program Officer, BRIC

Brooklyn’s most challenged communities are home to an array of nonprofit programs that help residents access social services and job training. But these communities lack one-stop-shop large-scale institutions for residents to acquire industry-ready skills, and within that same location, become employed (on site), wealth-building business owners, and entrepreneurs. Places like Brooklyn Navy Yard, Brooklyn Army Terminal, and Industry City combine training, employment, and entrepreneurship within one location, mitigating barriers and incubating pathways to investment and innovation. To expand access to economic mobility in the borough’s most distressed communities, city leaders should bring these hubs from the outskirts of the borough into its core to places like Brownsville and East New York. There are opportunities to create these hubs in these neighborhoods by combining the use of technology (the NYC Office of Environment Remediation’s Searchable Property Environmental Database) with the work of civic leaders and their legislative initiatives (such as the Economy Project’s Community Land Act) and develop the neglected lots and dilapidated manufacturing spaces. Too often, neglected spaces in our divested neighborhoods are stalled in bureaucracy or primed for private developers, and although those projects can lead to much-needed affordable housing, city officials should also create transformational developments that offer the type of economic opportunity that has been missing for too long in our communities. Doing so would put economic mobility within reach of at-risk Brooklyn residents and make it easier for people participating in neighborhood-based training programs to springboard into careers while establishing financial literacy and wealth-building pathways.

15. Launch a financial security campaign to educate and protect Central Brooklyn homeowners from deed theft

[Shelley Worrell, Founder and CEO, CaribBEING](#)

Property owners in Central Brooklyn, in particular those who are older adults of color, are being conned out of their homes by wealthy investors through an illegal practice known as deed theft. As Brooklyn's real estate market heats up—the median rent in the borough now nearly matches Manhattan's—predatory investors, often in the form of shell companies, are targeting residents at risk of foreclosure in gentrifying neighborhoods. Through bogus promises to buy mortgages and negotiate lower interest rates and, in some cases, through outright forgery, vulnerable Brooklynites who are asset-rich but cash poor are being scammed at alarming rates. According to the Office of the New York State's Attorney General, there have been 3,500 deed theft complaints in New York City since 2014, 42 percent of which were from Brooklyn. While legal changes on the state level are held up in the legislature, city leaders must do more to educate residents in gentrifying neighborhoods about the dangers of deed theft. The New York City Department of Finance should inaugurate a financial security campaign in partnership with community-based organizations that work with older adults of color. Focusing on neighborhoods that have experienced higher levels of deed theft, such as East Flatbush, Crown Heights, and Bedford-Stuyvesant, this program would serve as a widespread alert to property owners about predatory investors and shell companies and ultimately teach them how to protect their assets.

16. Create a ride-hailing app for older adults

[Lisette Sosa-Dickson, Executive Director, RAICES](#)

For many older adults in Brooklyn, where the 65-plus population has increased by over 100,000 in the last 10 years, affordable and accessible transportation is a lifeline.⁵ Following the pandemic, countless older adults find themselves significantly less included in community life, with many experiencing isolation, depression, and economic challenges. And while access to affordable transportation plays a key role in addressing these problems, only 30 of the 170 subway stations in the borough are in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Other transportation alternatives for older adults with mobility issues, such as the Access-A-Ride paratransit service, are riddled with delays and other problems. City elected officials should do more to make transportation for older adults more accessible and affordable so that this vital and growing segment of the city's population can enjoy productive and social lives. The city's elected officials should work with the MTA to implement a permanent, subsidized ride-hailing program for adults over 65. This program would allow older Brooklynites to utilize the city's already robust ride-hailing providers—like Uber, Lyft, and green taxis—at a reduced rate and would thus serve as a tool to engage older adults in community life, making our city's many pleasures and opportunities available to New Yorkers of every age.

17. Launch a universal climate literacy campaign

[Frances Bronet, President, Pratt Institute](#)

Every Brooklynite must be climate literate so that they can address the tremendous environmental challenges that confront us. Climate literacy starts with the understanding that we all share a planet and our humanity. It is both knowledge of the science, technology, and strategies we need to address climate change and the recognition that we must do so together—an understanding we desperately need now. Mayor Adams, the Schools Chancellors, and every school, cultural, community and faith-based organization must join in a campaign to build climate literacy. Confronting the climate crisis will require audacious actions, big

investments, and difficult policy changes that won't always be popular. In Brooklyn alone, this will likely involve major redesigns to waterfront neighborhoods such as Red Hook and Sheepshead Bay, increased space for electric vehicle charging, higher-density housing, and rethinking how freight is moved and packages delivered—as well as large scale infrastructure projects that take decades of planning. Little of this will be possible unless Brooklynites understand the urgency of climate change and the tradeoffs that are required. To get there, city leaders should launch a massive universal climate literacy campaign that engages all Brooklynites—from homeowners to renters, from bankers to builders—and fosters support for collective action. As a starting point, Mayor Adams and academic leaders should ensure that climate literacy is embedded in the curriculum at public schools, at CUNY and in all educational institutions. The next generation of New Yorkers must fully understand the risks and become advocates for change.

18. Help expand Open Streets to neighborhoods in Brooklyn that currently lack the resources to participate

Katherine Pangaro, Chair, Vanderbilt Avenue Open Streets Committee;
Gib Veconi, Chair, Prospect Heights Neighborhood Development Council

Since the pandemic, when local government and New York communities paired up to pioneer a citywide revitalization program to close street space to cars, the Open Streets initiative has successfully transformed a handful of Brooklyn neighborhoods. Still, many areas of the borough most in need of the program do not currently have the resources to participate. Perhaps one of the most successful sites is Vanderbilt Avenue, which saw a 20 percent increase in sales after the initiative began.⁶ From Friday through Sunday in the spring, summer, and early fall, the central artery of Prospect Heights is a fun, safe, family-friendly space for residents and tourists alike. Yet unlike Vanderbilt Avenue, which benefits from a local community organization to provide logistical support, even building a website, presence on X (formerly Twitter), and online sign-up form for volunteers, many other less affluent parts of Brooklyn—such as the areas around Franklin Avenue in Crown Heights and Rockaway Avenue in Brownsville—do not have the community structures needed to implement the project. To comprehensively expand on Open Streets' proven success, the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) must take on a more significant role. The DOT should provide not only funding but also the necessary logistical and management support to bring the initiative to all Brooklynites, regardless of where they live, thus developing more public space for residents, reducing vehicular traffic, and boosting weekend business for the local establishments that are especially in need of post-pandemic revitalization.

19. Establish small business assistance centers in immigrant communities that currently lack BIDs, LDCs, and other entrepreneurship services

Jo-Ann Yoo, Executive Director, Asian American Federation

The entrepreneurial spirit of immigrant communities has helped make Brooklyn the prosperous and vibrant borough it is today. Immigrants own a disproportionate share of Brooklyn's businesses, and immigrant-owned businesses are powering neighborhood economies across the borough—from Bensonhurst and Flatbush to Sunset Park and Sheepshead Bay. But too often, city-funded business assistance programs aren't reaching the borough's foreign-born entrepreneurs, a longstanding problem but one that is particularly problematic today as all small businesses struggle with challenges from inflation to e-commerce. For example, in many communities where immigrant entrepreneurs have helped create vibrant business districts, like 8th Avenue in Sunset Park and 18th Avenue in Bensonhurst, there are no business improvement districts (BIDs), local

development corporations, or other government-supported infrastructure that could help local businesses thrive. Without access to technical support and clear information on regulations affecting businesses, new immigrant entrepreneurs run the risk of getting slapped with unexpected fines or missing out on attractive financing options like the city's Small Business Opportunity Fund. And in a city like New York, where the cost of rent is high and turnover common, access to knowledge is key to business survival. To help these businesses, the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) should establish new assistance centers in neighborhoods with significant foreign-born populations that are currently lacking in business services. SBS should also introduce new grants for existing community organizations that have the trust of immigrants to develop small business assistance programs. Doing so will help strengthen communities across the borough.

20. Redevelop Restoration Plaza into a new center of innovation, economic mobility, and wealth creation

[Blondel Pinnock, President and CEO,
Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation](#)

Brooklyn is now home to more than 1,000 tech-enabled start-ups and an increasingly dynamic innovation ecosystem. But too few people of color across Brooklyn have been accessing the high-wage jobs that are being created in this rapidly growing part of the borough's economy. Fortunately, Brooklyn has an incomparable asset to help close the tech opportunity gap and build wealth for the borough's BIPOC residents: Restoration Plaza. A trusted community institution in the heart of Central Brooklyn, Restoration Plaza is already a center of commerce, culture, and community programming that boasts 300,000 square feet of mixed-use space. City leaders should build on Restoration's unmatched strengths and help transform it into a major new center of innovation and economic mobility for the innovation age. There are already proposals in various stage of advancement that would remake it into a campus that attracts employers big and small in the innovation economy as well as on-site training and education programs that create real pathways for young people from Brooklyn's communities of color into fields as diverse as wearable technology and graphic design to the green economy. With the right mix of incentives and support, the Adams administration could ensure that the proposed remake of Restoration Plaza goes forward and lives up to its full potential. The transformed campus would not only help Brooklynites acquire the skills and educational credential that today's employers need; it would provide ample opportunities for internships and entry-level jobs at companies that locate there.

21. Create a community tech corps to increase access to public benefits

[David Giles, Chief Strategy Officer, Brooklyn Public Library](#)

One underappreciated impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is the stress it placed on New Yorkers who lack internet access and the skills required to communicate and conduct business online. It is now expected that people communicate with their teachers via email, sign up for parent teacher conferences using Sign-up Genius, receive health care with Teladoc, and Zoom into meetings with colleagues, family, and educational providers. But 1.2 million New Yorkers—including hundreds of thousands across Brooklyn—still lack high speed broadband at home. Even more struggle with digital literacy. With additional funding and support from the city, New York's public libraries could launch and oversee a Community Tech Corps to help residents access federal broadband subsidies and learn how to use their devices to access critical educational, health, financial, and government services online. For generations, public libraries have been leveraging expertise in communities to solve social problems. In this case, instead of homework helpers, libraries would hire hundreds of young people, train them in customer service and technology skills, and put them to work helping

residents use their devices and apps. The cohorts would put on technology clinics in our most vulnerable communities, working not just in libraries but in NYCHA community rooms, community centers, senior centers, and more. A Community Tech Corps would help New Yorkers adapt to a rapidly changing ecosystem of technology-based services, and enable thousands of young digital natives to gain valuable job experience and training in a growing economic sector.

22. Harness the city's schools to connect children and families to social services

[Pastor Gary V. Simpson, Senior Pastor, the Concord Baptist Church of Christ](#)

In the wake of the pandemic, children and young people in Brooklyn are struggling with enormous challenges. A recent report found that children in Brooklyn face the second highest number of barriers to well-being of any county in the state.⁷ Mayor Adams and NYC Schools Chancellor David Banks should use the city's schools to empower youth and connect them and their families to social services. Of course, schools should work to supplement the learning gaps created by the pandemic. Still, as so much of crucial development is social, they also must devote resources to making children healthy and competent adults. To nurture the whole child, schools should train to teach conflict management and healthy communication and provide emotional outlets and avenues for artistic expression. Schools should be able to hire dedicated social workers who work both within the school and closely with the city to connect youth and their families with resources for healthcare and housing. COVID-19 has forced us to reconsider our society broadly, and as such, we must reconceive of the role schools play in our borough. Public schools are our city's best opportunity to connect with our children, and they must be central as we seek to fight this battle on many fronts to improve the general welfare of our youth.

23. Decentralize food distribution by retrofitting the borough's fallout shelters and vacant warehouses

[LaToya Meaders, CEO, CollectiveFare](#)

The current food distribution system in New York City is hyper-centralized. For small restaurants and caterers, access to wholesale food options like at the Hunts Point Cooperative Market in the Bronx is the most affordable and reliable option. But from Brooklyn, physically getting to the market is challenging, both in terms of the energy and time it consumes. During the pandemic, when the streets were emptied, it became clear just how much easier it would be to have a food distribution system that is not centered in the Bronx, which from Brooklyn, can take over two hours round trip during high traffic hours. To address the city's broken food distribution system, Brooklyn elected officials should work to decentralize wholesale food markets, bringing affordable food directly to the borough in the form of hubs and centers. Rather than constructing whole new facilities, however, the city, along with the cooperation of New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and U.S. Department of Agriculture, should retrofit the borough's abandoned fallout shelters and vacant warehouses. Many of these subterranean and vacant spaces have accessibility to the street; these untapped spaces could be turned into neighborhood refrigerators and storage centers, whereby wholesale food items could be stored and sold to small business owners operating in the community. In doing so, this would increase community access to affordable foods, alleviating a significant financial and logistical burden from small businesses.

24. Create new wellness programs in Brooklyn parks, open streets, and other public spaces

Amy Andrieux, Executive Director and Chief Curator,
Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA)

According to the American Psychological Association, feelings of loneliness and social isolation among Americans increased by 5 percent during the early stages of the pandemic. In Brooklyn specifically, where the early days of the pandemic were particularly brutal, residents lost physical access to their social networks and became isolated from their communities, exacerbating the borough's mental health crisis. Now, Brooklyn desperately needs new spaces for communal healing. While the borough already supports public spaces and events like open streets and food fairs, there is a noticeable absence of wellness-oriented spaces. Mayor Adams and the City Council should direct the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Cultural Affairs, and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to inaugurate a new inter-agency initiative to create more holistic wellness programming in public spaces in Brooklyn. Held in city spaces such as public parks and open streets, programming like meditation classes, tai chi lessons, and art workshops would be free and open to all borough residents. In doing so, the city government would create a borough that prioritizes its residents' emotional and psychological health, providing a foundation for healing and building a stronger sense of community.

25. Create a community-driven safety patrol in Bensonhurst to address rising incidents against Asian Americans

Ansen Tang, President, United Chinese Association of Brooklyn

Since the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, reports of anti-Asian hate crimes and harassment in New York City have increased seven-fold. Shocking as that is, this statistic probably underestimates the amount of harassment occurring in our streets, as these incidents often go unreported.⁸ As a result, older Asian adults often feel unsafe in their own neighborhoods; many report being fearful of taking public transportation and walking alone. While some neighborhoods like Flushing and Sunset Park have introduced community patrols to reduce crime and serve as points of contact between residents and public safety authorities, Bensonhurst, where Asians make up the highest share of the population, has not. To address this problem, the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes should convene local organizations based in Bensonhurst and create a community-driven safety patrol team. Collaborating with local NYPD precincts, this volunteer, unarmed, and multilingual community patrol would bolster safety by monitoring subway stations and bus stops, as well as providing escorts from transit hubs to people's homes at night. To effectively engage with the neighborhood's ethnically and linguistically diverse population, volunteers should be trained to use basic translation apps on their phones, while participating organizations will market the new program to their communities. This initiative would make the people of Bensonhurst active participants in crime prevention, empowering local communities and creating a neighborhood where even the most vulnerable residents can thrive.

26. Educate and empower Brooklyn residents to have a greater say in community decisions that could accelerate gentrification

Oma Holloway, COO, Bridge Street Development Corp.

Brooklyn is home to 5 of the 20 most rapidly gentrifying zip codes in the country.⁹ The fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated this process. According to USPS data, about 20,000 New Yorkers relocated from Manhattan to Brooklyn in the first year of the pandemic alone. One result is that Brooklynites of color often struggle to have a say in the many rapid changes occurring in their neighborhoods. Widespread participation in civic life is key to changing this. From participatory budgeting to community boards, the city has tried to engage New Yorkers in the political process. But to participate, citizens must understand how their government works. Little has been done to ensure that residents are familiar with the government structure—and how to navigate it as a citizen. There is a keen need for a program that would explain the fundamentals of city government. Brooklyn President Reynoso should work with the Civic Engagement Commission to ramp up its efforts to teach residents how to navigate New York City’s complex system of government through a borough-wide civic literacy campaign. This campaign would cover the various agencies that comprise city government, how to attend and participate in the public hearing process, and more. In doing so, Borough President Reynoso would be instrumental in empowering residents at risk of being victims of gentrification and ultimately create a borough that is more democratic.

27. Bolster Brooklyn’s commercial districts that do not have a BID

Randy Peers, President & CEO, Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce

A commercial corridor with an established BID or merchants association was equipped to handle the pandemic much better and is stronger today than those without an established organization. BIDs are responsible for safety and sanitation but also help promote the area and disseminate crucial information to businesses, which ranges from rules and regulations to access to capital and other programs. While there are 22 BIDs across Brooklyn today, several commercial corridors in communities of color do not have an established BID, including Canarsie, Prospect Lefferts Garden, Homecrest, Nostrand Avenue, Newkirk Avenue, Canarsie, Cortelyou Road, and Utica Avenue. Some districts without a BID receive help from a merchants association, but these volunteer-run entities have been difficult to sustain and too often lack the funding and bandwidth to provide effective and consistent support for local small businesses. Other districts don’t even have a merchants association. To his credit, Mayor Adams has increased funding for some of the city’s smallest BIDs. But Mayor Adams and Brooklyn Borough President Reynoso should also provide new funding to support merchants associations in communities that have no BID—funding could support a Community Development Needs Assessment (CDNA) study and a staffer to handle the day-to-day management. Not every community wants to establish a BID or has the financial capacity to do so, but the city should still provide a basic level of support for those districts. Doing so will provide a boost to entrepreneurs of color and lead to healthier and more resilient business districts across Brooklyn.

28. Help a lot more Brooklyn teens access mental health support

Mary T. An, Executive Director, Groundswell

Brooklyn’s adolescent population has never been in a more dire state. In 2021, 38 percent of New York City high school students reported feeling hopeless or depressed, with Black and Latino students struggling the

most. A shocking 9.2 percent of high schoolers reported attempting suicide over the previous year. But across Brooklyn, there is unequal access to mental health services. While wealthier families have the money and capacity to get mental health assistance when their children need it, many of Brooklyn's families do not. The Adams administration has already taken some important steps, rolling out a \$12 million telehealth program for children in March 2023 that will connect individuals with affordable mental health professionals, and more recently, launching TalkSpace, which provides free telehealth services for teens. But while these programs are a great start, city leaders will need to think even more innovatively to ensure that these promising efforts reach the young people in Brooklyn and across the city who need help. To ensure that these new programs are embraced by teens, the city should roll out a sophisticated and youth-oriented engagement campaign for the programs. By involving youth in creating marketing materials and collaborating with youth-oriented nonprofits in Brooklyn that have the trust of teens, the city can effectively reach the people who otherwise might get overlooked. This engagement campaign would lead to a better use of the city's dollars and more, importantly enhance and equalize access to mental health support in the borough.

29. Expand policy and education initiatives designed to reduce bias in AI

[Jelena Kovačević, Dean, NYU Tandon School of Engineering](#)

Artificial intelligence plays an ever-growing yet largely hidden role in our day-to-day lives, but we need to ensure that it is used equitably across all communities, regardless of socioeconomic status, education level, sexual orientation, or race. Both private sector companies and government agencies use AI today. But without policies for its use, there is clear potential for bias, especially in a borough whose population is 62 percent nonwhite. In 2021, the City Council passed Local Law 144, which requires employers using automated employment decision tools to commission independent bias audits, publish a summary of the results, notify applicants and employees of the tool's use, and let affected individuals know they may request an alternative selection process. This transparency over the use of AI in the hiring process is a good first step, but it does not go far enough. The City Council should craft a wide-reaching AI policy that governs everything from housing lotteries and loans to law enforcement, and also fund community programs that inform individuals of their rights and how government agencies use of AI may infringe upon them. The NYU Tandon Center for Responsible AI's partnership with the NYPL on the "We Are AI" curriculum is just one example of how we can teach the public about AI and its potential abuses. These courses—free of charge and available in public spaces—will create a borough informed about AI and give Brooklynites the tools to ask the right questions to fight for a more equitable city.

30. Expand the Fair Fares program so thousands more Brooklynites can benefit from discounted subway and bus rides

[Mayra Aldas-Deckert, Lead Organizer, Riders Alliance](#)

Opportunity in New York City is intrinsically linked to transit access. Brooklyn is a working borough, and for many, public transportation is the easiest and most practical method for commuting to work, personal travel, and more. Yet at \$2.90 a ride, regularly taking the subway and bus poses a financial challenge to residents of the borough. To their credit, Mayor Adams and the City Council instituted the "Fair Fares" program, which offers reduced bus and subway fares to those under the federal poverty line, which includes 19 percent (500,000) of Brooklynites.¹⁰ However, according to the most current data provided by the Department of Social Services, only 20 percent (100,000) of all Brooklyn residents who are eligible for Fair Fares are actually

enrolled. To create a borough that is more accessible through public transportation, Brooklyn should do more to inform its residents about the Fair Fares program and make buses and subways more affordable for its low-income residents. Specifically, Borough President Reynoso should work with community-based organizations to implement a Fair Fares outreach and signup campaign outside high traffic subway stations. Additionally, President Reynoso should leverage his influence by working with the Office of the Mayor and the City Council to revamp the eligibility criteria, by adjusting from 100 percent of the poverty line to 200 percent of the poverty line, making 470,000 more Brooklynites eligible for the program.

31. Create community-based digital equity hubs to provide access and training

Marco A. Carrión, Executive Director, El Punte

The internet and other technologies have become crucial contemporary tools for communities across Brooklyn, but the persistence of systemic inequalities disproportionately excludes low-income New Yorkers from the technological advancements present today. As a youth-led organization, we've witnessed how students have been especially impacted by a lack of access to the internet for their schoolwork and participation. These disparities were drastically exacerbated during the pandemic, creating barriers to easy transitions into digital work, learning, and training. To address this digital divide, the New York City Office of Technology and Innovation should work with community-based organizations to establish digital hubs throughout Brooklyn (and in each of the other boroughs) and sustain programs to help teach low-income New Yorkers how to build and maintain internet infrastructure. These digital hubs and training modules would create access to the internet and technology that is community-operated, owned, and used. Digital navigation courses in various languages should be a core component of this initiative, where community members can learn safe online practices and digital etiquette. Given that the internet and technology are basic necessities, low-income communities in Brooklyn deserve not just greater access, but also a sense of self-determination, ownership, and confidence when utilizing these tools. By involving local residents and organizations in the development and maintenance of a digital hub, it would strengthen communities' resilience, particularly during society-wide crises such as the pandemic and climate change driven natural disasters.

32. Require city agencies to share more data about how New Yorkers are accessing childcare and other vital services

David Harrington, Co-Director, United for Brownsville

Underserved communities and communities of color across the city intuitively know that services are not equitably accessible to them. However, without more data transparency, residents can neither quantify just how inequitable access is nor hold systems accountable for any improvements or decreases in access. Some data makes its way to the city's Open Data portal or is released upon City Council request, but the data are often late, and there are glaring omissions in crucial areas like childcare capacity and demand or participation in pediatric childcare (well visits). Making a lot more of this data publicly accessible will help individuals and families make informed decisions and create actionable change in their communities. To get there, all city agencies should be required to proactively and frequently share data with the public on how New Yorkers access or enroll in essential services across education, childcare, health/nutrition, benefits, and social services, disaggregated by race, neighborhood and age. Of all data sets, city agencies should prioritize sharing data pertaining to kids in the early childhood ages from 0 to 5 years old. These early childhood years are an important time for kids because development during this time impacts their development in the later stages of their life. Also, there are ripple effects for the resources that families cannot provide to their children. It's important to comprehend the gap between what families cannot provide and what resources the children are actually receiving.

33. Harness Prospect Park to improve the health of Brooklynites

Morgan Monaco, President, Prospect Park Alliance; and Park Administrator, Prospect Park

Three years ago, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed enormous disparities in access to healthcare across racial and socioeconomic lines. In poorer communities and communities of color, residents lack the resources to treat pre-existing conditions like asthma, diabetes, and high blood pressure. For example, in South Crown Heights and Prospect Lefferts Gardens, where a fifth of the population lives below the poverty line, rates of hypertension are 37 percent.¹¹ By contrast, just across Prospect Park, in Park Slope and Carroll Gardens, where a tenth of residents live in poverty, rates of hypertension are 15 percentage points lower.¹² These two areas share at least one thing in common; they both border Prospect Park. The city should leverage the resource that is the park to make it not just a space for recreation but one for healing. To do this, city leaders should take a two-pronged approach. First, Mayor Adams should direct Health + Hospitals and other healthcare providers to develop mobile clinics based in the park that specialize in a range of treatments and procedures, such as physical exams, mammograms, and immunizations, bringing high-quality care to all. Secondly, since poverty contributes to poor health, the city should coordinate with local nonprofits to organize public benefits pop-ups throughout the park, helping Brooklynites sign up for programs such as SNAP, public health insurance, and cash assistance (TANF). In doing so, the city can harness the hub that is Prospect Park to create a healthier, more equitable Brooklyn.

34. Establish a Brooklyn-based, service-oriented mentorship program for students from marginalized communities

Rabbi Avrohom Hecht, Executive Director, JCC Canarsie

A quarter of students in Brooklyn live below the poverty line, and more than a third are foreign-born. These students are at higher risk for lower academic achievement and dropout and have limited access to professional opportunities. Establishing a service-based mentorship program for these students will help ward off these risks by providing them with positive role models who can be exemplars of not just personal success but civic engagement. NYC Schools should partner with community leaders to identify mentors from similar backgrounds and now work in various professional fields, like law, finance, and medicine. Then, mentors and mentees should work together on giving back to their communities so that mentees can not only bond with their mentors but learn to see themselves as civic leaders. For example, mentors and mentees could regularly deliver fresh meals or produce to older people in their communities. Along the way, mentors would encourage and advise their mentees on obtaining a high school degree and pursuing higher education so that they can land higher-earning jobs. The goal would be for the program to self-perpetuate, with mentees eventually becoming mentors and pulling others out of the cycle of poverty, just as their mentors did for them. The City Council should fund this program, while the DOE should partner with Brooklyn-based grassroots nonprofit organizations to oversee it, as these groups best understand the cultural nuances of varied and diverse Brooklynites. Ultimately, this program would ensure that all young Brooklynites reach their potential and subsequently reinvest in their communities.

35. Provide access to sensory gyms and occupational therapists for all Brooklyn students with learning differences

Melisha Jackman, Executive Director, Brooklyn Kindergarten Society

The COVID-19 pandemic set all the borough's children back educationally, but it had an especially negative impact on students with learning differences. Nine months into the pandemic, only about half of the city's students with disabilities were receiving the full number of interventions specified in their individualized education programs.¹³ This was particularly harmful to early childhood learners, ages three to eight, who rely on structure and routine to solidify key skills. Sensory gyms and occupational therapists are essential to help these vulnerable students overcome pandemic-induced learning loss. Sensory gyms provide a safe and stimulating environment for children to engage in activities that support their sensory processing and motor development. These spaces are valuable for children with learning differences, as they help them build the skills they need to succeed in the classroom and beyond. Occupational therapists are also vitally important, as they work with children to develop customized plans that address their unique needs and challenges. These plans help children improve their fine and gross motor skills, sensory processing, and social-emotional development. City leaders should expand access to sensory gyms and occupational therapists, making these invaluable resources available to all Brooklynites who need them. The city should therefore increase funding for these services so that early childhood education students with learning differences can reach their full potential and build the skills they need to succeed in school and life regardless of parental income.

36. Divert low-income families from the child welfare system into a visiting case-management system that provides more support and fewer investigations

Julia Jean-Francois and Julie Brockway, Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

More than a quarter of children in Brooklyn face food insecurity, a tragedy that regularly results in students showing up at school hungry or not attending at all.¹⁴ This often prompts well-meaning teachers to call the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and report that students' families are failing to send children to school or to provide adequate nutrition. These ACS investigations rarely substantiate abuse and neglect, but they are traumatic and disruptive, do nothing to break the cycle of poverty, and only work to advance economic and racial discrimination in how the ACS identifies potential cases. Indeed, low-income families in New York City, who are predominantly Black and Hispanic, are continuously subjected to a disproportionately high rate of child welfare investigations and assessments. City leaders, including the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services ACS Commissioner, should work to change this discriminatory process. They should divert low-income families from the child welfare system and instead enroll them in a free, community-based home-visiting case management program that does not engage assessment of safety and risk as the main focus. The program should be designed to help families achieve economic and housing stability. Caseworkers should provide direct support with a variety of financial issues, like accompanying families to a hospital to dispute medical bills. This alternative approach would empower and sustain families who are struggling in poverty and allow them to break the cycle of economic insecurity.

37. Help more Brooklynites access tech careers by creating Zero Flatbush, a major new tech training and employment hub

Regina Myer, President, Downtown Brooklyn Partnership

Brooklyn has experienced faster growth in tech startups than nearly every other tech hub in the nation over the past decade, and its employment growth in tech has outpaced even New York City's rate of growth. But while this growth has brought huge benefits to Brooklyn, the borough has not made nearly enough progress in connecting Brooklynites of color to tech careers. City officials can help change this by pushing for Zero Flatbush, a major new development modeled after the recently opened Zero Irving, which is anchored by the tech training hub Civic Hall but also features numerous tech employers as tenants. There is an opportunity to bring this project to Downtown Brooklyn, already one of Brooklyn's key tech hubs and the borough's most accessible location for connecting residents to jobs and training opportunities. Earlier this year, the City Planning Department launched its "Eds and Meds" Framework to inform development plans in and around Long Island University and the Brooklyn Hospital Center. While plans for these Downtown Brooklyn sites currently focus on housing, healthcare institutions, and medical-related offices, city leaders should expand this to include a project like Zero Flatbush, creating a pre-eminent tech training and education hub for Brooklynites as well as offices for major tech employers. This project would not only help far more Brooklyn residents develop the skills needed for tech careers; it would enable participants to get internships and jobs with tech companies located in the building and surrounding community.

38. Build an Innovation Hub in East New York

Jessica Santana, Executive Director, America On Tech

Brooklyn is one of the nation's leading centers of innovation, home to the city's fastest growing cluster of tech start-ups and a dynamic innovation ecosystem that includes hubs like Newlab, DUMBO, and Industry City. But this success story has not been evenly felt across the borough. In neighborhoods like East New York, strikingly few local residents have been accessing the well-paying jobs growing in the innovation economy. Many do not even view these careers as a remote possibility. To change this, the area's City Council members, Sandy Nurse and Charles Barron, should push the Adams administration to create a state-of-the-art innovation hub in East New York. Implemented jointly by the Department of Youth and Community Development and the Department of Small Business Services, this innovation hub would serve as a designated space for career advancement. Alongside career counselors able to advise participating residents on their career advancement, the facility would provide space for people to develop and upgrade their skills, with amenities such as a podcasting studio, a presentation room, and a computer lab with free printing. Furthermore, recruiters from companies across the city could visit the hub and successfully source talent for open positions. This new hub would provide East New York with the necessary career advancement resources it so desperately deserves and would serve as a new talent pipeline for the neighborhood and surrounding area, connecting residents of this underserved community to careers in the borough's fast-growing innovation economy.

39. Introduce a stormwater fee and use some proceeds to support parks in underserved communities

Anastasia Cole Plakias, Co-Founder and Chief Impact Officer,
Brooklyn Grange

Urban green space improves public health and climate resilience and is critical in both reducing heat island effect and mitigating the stormwater overflow that has already contributed to catastrophic flooding in New York. Yet around 80 percent of the city is covered by impervious surfaces, with Brooklyn second only to Manhattan for its proportion of paved area. The green space we do have is distributed inequitably. While the city has increased incentives and even introduced requirements for developers to include stormwater managing features such as green infrastructure and retention tanks, too often builders circumvent these policies or neglect to pursue resources that currently exist, such as the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Green Infrastructure Stormwater Management program. Moreover, these policies generally don't help address existing structures. Borough President Reynoso and other Brooklyn-based elected officials should push the Adams administration to implement solutions to reduce the borough's high quantity of impervious surface by implementing a stormwater management fee—a step dozens of other cities have taken. By issuing stormwater fees proportional to the square footage of a building envelope's impervious surface, and offering credits for properties outfitted with green roofs or other mitigation measures, property owners would be incentivized to introduce water-capturing green elements. Moreover, the fees could support a fund that's used for the development of green space in underserved areas, contributing to climate justice and equity in Brooklyn and across New York.

40. Create a formal aid network in Kensington and Flatbush to better serve the most vulnerable immigrants during times of crisis

Mohammad Razvi, CEO, Council of Peoples Organization (COPPO)

At times of crisis and emergency, Brooklyn's immigrant communities struggle far more than others. In Kensington and Flatbush, which have two of the largest immigrant populations in the borough (Flatbush has the 4th largest, while Kensington has the 9th largest), the need during emergencies has stressed the neighborhoods' charitable and community-based organizations over the years. When Hurricane Sandy hit, many immigrant families in the two neighborhoods were displaced, leaving them to seek shelter with little direction from authorities before getting much needed help from Catholic Charities. And during COVID-19, when COPPO was handing out emergency resources, like food and diapers, there were long lines wrapped around the block, serving roughly 30,000 people on a weekly basis at the pandemic's height. Although community groups and religious charities have been able to help in piecemeal efforts during times of crisis, these organizations are not connected to each other formally, indicating that there is potential to do better. To address this, the city's Department of Emergency Management should convene CBOs, religious institutions, and other robust organizations trusted by the community, creating an embedded network of resources and people that can collectively respond to natural, medical, and other disasters. Building on the New York City Community Emergency Response Team, in which volunteers are trained to respond to emergency situations, the community-driven formal aid network would ensure that residents of Flatbush and Kensington get critical resources in times of need.

41. Create a hub to improve outcomes for Brooklyn’s young adults through collective action

Ramik Williams, Co-Executive Director, KAVI (Kings Against Violence Initiative)

In Brooklyn, young New Yorkers of color and those in public housing need more help to get on pathways to success. A staggering 62,000 young Brooklynites between 16 and 24 years old live in households that are under the federal poverty line, a greater number than any other borough. Across Brooklyn, there are also striking disparities for young people in academic performance and getting a job. To turn this around, a new coordinated stream of investments is needed. Right now, while Brooklyn boasts the second-greatest number (13,000) of nonprofits in the city, the borough only receives 7.6 percent of all philanthropic dollars citywide. Brooklyn Borough President Reynoso should gather the borough’s youth-focused organizations, charitable foundations, and private companies to develop a center that specifically advances projects that address the critical needs of young people, from education to youth programming and workforce development. Effectively bridging government, philanthropy, the private sector, and local community-based organizations (CBOs), this youth-oriented hub is essential to unlocking substantial investment on a community level. CBOs would be incentivized to participate through the disbursement of micro-grants, while the private sector would be more likely to collaborate and provide funding with the participation of philanthropic foundations. In doing so, this new office can collectively empower young people and ensure that Brooklyn’s future leaders get the support they need.

42. Establish a community coalition in Red Hook that empowers local residents to address pressing needs and mitigate the negative effects of gentrification

Gabriel Florenz, Founding Artistic Director, Pioneer Works

Red Hook is experiencing rapid change, with development and shifting demographics fundamentally altering the community. The neighborhood is home to the largest public housing development in Brooklyn, but as wealthier residents move in, the community faces increasing divisions between affluent and poor residents and is struggling with the negative consequences of gentrification. To create a more united and inclusive Red Hook, local officials, including local City Council Member Alexa Avilés, should bring together the neighborhood’s nonprofit organizations and form a new coalition representing the neighborhood’s diverse needs. Similar to a chamber of commerce, this coalition would include volunteering nonprofits like the Red Hook Community Justice Center, Red Hook Art Project, Red Hook Hub, and Pioneer Works, and would work to support the interests of its members and the community they’re a part of. Through regular meetings, coalition members could collectively address community needs, exert pressure on developers, collaborate with Community Board 6, and enhance communication with stakeholders. This proactive approach would empower Red Hook’s community to have a greater say in the changes happening around them, fostering a collaborative environment where developers and long-term residents find more common ground. Additionally, this coalition could pool resources and share information, providing opportunities like jobs, paid internships, and discounted community venues to residents. By working together, they can create a more inclusive and thriving neighborhood where progress aligns with the genuine needs and aspirations of local residents.

43. Invest in year-round employment for youth

Yvonne M. Brathwaite, Chief Program and Policy Officer, Red Hook Initiative

Young people in Brooklyn want to work, but the youth unemployment rate in the city was much higher than in the rest of the state (14.5 percent vs 11.4 percent). New York City's BIPOC youth in particular continue to face higher unemployment rates than their white counterparts and BIPOC youth in other parts of the state.¹⁵ Community-based organizations in Brooklyn understand that young people need meaningful opportunities to learn about careers, practice leadership and professionalism, learn critical financial management skills, and contribute to their family's income. While the city's Summer Youth Employment Program attempts to address this challenge, it only does so for six weeks during the summer. Moreover, although the city's Work, Learn, & Grow program provides school-year employment opportunities, it reaches a relatively small number of young people and doesn't include 14- and 15-year-olds. Local nonprofits are able to connect with young people and offer these opportunities at a neighborhood level. For example, the Red Hook Initiative (RHI) pays out approximately \$400,000 annually to high school students and young adults engaged in workforce development training, subsidized internships, and part-time afterschool and summer jobs, as well as our intensive RHI Fellowship Program. City Council and Mayor Adams should allocate more funds to invest in community organizations that pay youth year-round and couple these efforts with social-emotional support and other skills-development activities. This would allow us to reach even more young people, leading to better lifelong outcomes for Brooklyn's youth, a more robust workforce, and a stronger borough- and city-wide economy.

44. Create regular express subway service to Coney Island

Daniel Murphy, Executive Director, Alliance for Coney Island

Coney Island is arguably Brooklyn's most well-known and most important entertainment destination, attracting tourists and New Yorkers alike to its amusements, boardwalk, beaches, and baseball games. It employs thousands of borough residents and sustains numerous local businesses. But there is still so much untapped opportunity. The greatest challenge is getting tourists from Manhattan—and residents living outside of Brooklyn—to make the journey out to the attractions. A subway ride from Times Square to Coney typically takes more than an hour on weekends, stopping at 23 stations even on the Q, which runs express in Manhattan. To address this challenge and fully harness Coney Island's enormous potential as an economic engine, a premier tourist destination, and a local job generator, Borough President Reynoso and other Brooklyn leaders should urge the MTA to implement regular express subway service, similar to how the 7 line makes express stops to Queens' Citi Field. Consistent express service would make the ride significantly quicker and more convenient. Doing this would not require a new line, but rather an expansion of the D line that already sends passengers to Stillwell Avenue. A true express train would spark a major increase in visitors to Coney Island, foster economic growth in the surrounding area, and contribute to a more prosperous Brooklyn.

45. Establish a cultural and religious competence program to restore trust between Brooklyn’s Muslim community and the NYPD

[Bibi Esahack, Executive Director, Bay Ridge Development Corp](#)

Muslims in Brooklyn have experienced religious profiling and surveillance by the NYPD’s Intelligence Division, including stationing NYPD officers in vehicles outside mosques and taking pictures and videos of worshippers’ license plate numbers. This type of controversial surveillance has increased stigma and community fear toward Muslims. At the same time, these practices have led to a growing distrust of the NYPD among Muslim New Yorkers. Given how important the Muslim community will be to Brooklyn’s future—there are an estimated 154,120 Muslims living in the borough—city and borough leaders should establish a cultural and religious competence program to restore trust and bridge the gap between Muslim New Yorkers and the NYPD. This program would provide education and training to NYPD officers about the cultural and religious practices of the Muslim community in Brooklyn and beyond. It will also help officers understand the community’s values, norms, and beliefs, which can lead to more effective and respectful interactions with community members. The City Council should utilize its connections with the NYPD and bring together faith-based community-based organizations to build this program. Cultural and religious competence programs can also be expanded to other sectors, including healthcare and education. When there is trust between the Muslim community and the NYPD, Muslim-owned businesses feel more confident engaging with the local economy and investing in their communities, potentially leading to greater economic growth and job creation. Ultimately, these programs can help create a more inclusive and equitable society where all communities feel respected and valued.

46. Help Brooklyn’s underserved communities to establish BIDs by adjusting eligibility requirements

[Dale Charles, Executive Director, Bed-Stuy Gateway BID](#)

Brooklyn’s increasingly diverse mix of small businesses presents an incredible opportunity to close the troubling wealth gap and create a more equitable economy. But realizing this promise will require new investments and support that bolster the borough’s minority and immigrant small businesses, too many of which failed to survive or achieve meaningful growth before the pandemic. To strengthen these businesses, and set them up for growth, Brooklyn’s Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) will need to play a key role. BIDs already support local businesses and contribute to communities’ economic development and growth by increasing foot traffic and improving the overall quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Unfortunately, many communities with the greatest concentrations of minority-owned businesses do not currently have BIDs. This is partly because BIDs primarily fund themselves through assessments on properties, which are sometimes difficult for small and minority-owned businesses to afford. The eligibility should be adjusted to guarantee that communities striving to form BIDs receive equitable access to funding. Under new guidelines, the city should ensure that each BID receives proper funding based on size. By adjusting these requirements, more businesses, regardless of size or ownership, will have access to the resources provided by BIDs, which will, in turn, strengthen minority entrepreneurs and stimulate economic development in historically underinvested areas. With more diverse businesses participating in BIDs, local economies will see increased revenue, and Brooklynites all over the borough will experience an improved quality of life.

47. Redesign Atlantic Avenue to become a safer place for the borough's bikers and pedestrians

Kathy Park Price, Brooklyn Organizer, Transportation Alternatives

After Manhattan, Brooklyn is arguably the most walkable and bikeable borough in New York City. Yet Atlantic Avenue, which cuts through the heart of Brooklyn, is more than 80 percent filled by space for cars and trucks, leaving less than 20 percent for pedestrians, 0 percent for buses, and 0 percent for bicycles. With four to six lanes, it is essentially a highway in the middle of Brooklyn; and unsurprisingly, one of the most dangerous roadways in the borough. Naturally, it is not a place where cyclists and pedestrians feel safe. Instead of dividing communities, Atlantic Avenue has the potential to be a point of connection between neighborhoods along the thoroughfare from Flatbush to Nostrand Avenue. In the past, competing interests and a fragmented political landscape meant that tackling something as massive as Atlantic Ave was impossible. But now, there is the political will and leadership to reclaim one of Brooklyn's most significant corridors for residents, transforming the borough's urban landscape in the process. Borough President Reynoso should work to garner widespread support from the community and the city's Department of Transportation, and call for the redesign of Atlantic by transforming two of the lanes to install a central bike highway and dedicate additional pedestrian walkways along the thoroughfare. By making the roadway friendlier to pedestrians, cyclists, and public buses, Atlantic Ave can help propel Brooklyn into a more interconnected, healthier future.

48. Establish a faith-based reparations fund to redistribute the borough's wealth

Rabbi Rachel Timoner, Senior Rabbi, Congregation Beth Elohim

There is considerable untapped potential for economic growth in Brooklyn's Black communities. The number of Black-owned businesses across the borough grew by 17 percent in the most recent period for which data is available, from 2012 to 2017. This was a faster rate of growth than all but four other counties in the nation.¹⁶ Yet from Park Slope to Bed-Stuy, inequities rooted in systemic racism are still glaringly apparent. Black-owned businesses account for only 3.5 percent of all businesses citywide. And in Brooklyn, 20 percent of Black residents live in poverty, compared to 16 percent of their white neighbors. The city can work to close this wealth gap and invest in Black communities by harnessing the energy within communities of faith. With programmatic support from the Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development and funding from communities of faith in white neighborhoods, the city government and congregation leaders should create a reparations capital venture fund to cultivate career opportunities for local Black youth and generate wealth in Black communities. Through partnerships with Black faith spaces, this fund will be dedicated to both a workforce development and career training program that caters to local youth, and large investments in Black-owned businesses throughout the borough. Rooted in the relationships between communities of faith, this fund would stimulate the accumulation of wealth in the borough's vital yet under-resourced Black community.

49. Create a new sustainable revenue stream to help maintain North Brooklyn's overlooked parks and playgrounds

[Katie Denny Horowitz, Executive Director, North Brooklyn Parks Alliance](#)

In North Brooklyn, the 2005 waterfront rezoning of Williamsburg and Greenpoint included commitments to bring much-needed new open spaces. However, as the neighborhoods underwent development, disparities within the area widened, and this was mirrored in the expansion of parks and other public areas. While well-funded spaces like Domino Park and strong advocacy in spaces like Bushwick Inlet Park have received crucial financial and community support public spaces in less affluent parts of the neighborhood, such as Frost Playground, have struggled with essential upkeep and enhancements amid deep budget cuts to the city's Parks Department. To address these inequities, and ensure a standard for safe and high quality public spaces for all of the neighborhood's residents, city leaders should establish specialized public-private partnerships within the Mayor's Office of the Public Realm. Customized to the unique needs of each neighborhood, this would involve the creation of a local entity, akin to a Business Improvement District (BID), which would levy assessments on local businesses, generating resources for park maintenance. Beginning as a pilot initiative in North Brooklyn, a densely populated area historically impacted by industrial pollution, this partnership would secure sustainable revenue streams for parks and public spaces across the neighborhood, regardless of jurisdiction. This initiative would channel support to parks in North Brooklyn, ensuring that residents enjoy high-quality open spaces for a vibrant, healthy lifestyle. If proven successful, this approach could serve as a model for other neighborhoods across Brooklyn and citywide.

50. Fund halal food options in Brooklyn's food pantries to alleviate food insecurity in Muslim households

[Rawaa Nancy Albilal, Arab-American Family Support Center of New York](#)

With over 150,000 Muslims living in Brooklyn and a disproportionate number of Arab, Middle Eastern, North African, Muslim, and South Asian families experiencing food insecurity following the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a growing need for halal food options at food pantries in Brooklyn. Many Muslims who require food assistance keep a halal diet, and food pantries trying to meet this need face various challenges. Some of the complications they encounter are difficulty finding and buying halal food, inability to afford it, and lack of logistical capacity to serve it.¹⁷ As a result, Brooklyn Muslims in need often go hungry. To address this issue, Borough President Reynoso should push the City Council to allocate further funding to Brooklyn-based emergency food organizations and initiatives that reliably distribute halal food. The City Council should partner with state agencies to track, update, and release information on halal food distribution to food banks and pantries in Brooklyn so that Muslim families know where they can find appropriate food. Lastly, the City Council should expand emergency food assistance and SNAP benefits, as direct aid gives families agency and the ability to select culturally relevant food. Food is at the center of health, well-being, and identity, and the ability to eat food in accordance with your religion is a key aspect of human dignity. Brooklyn will only be truly equitable when conversations about food access highlight the voices of immigrant and refugee communities.

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