



# Nos Quedamos Melrose Commons

Equitable Neighborhood  
Development Action Plan

*Bronx, NY*

*Developed in partnership with*



# Mission

*We Stay/Nos Quedamos (NQ) is a South Bronx-based CDC committed to our collective self-determination. Our sustainable development work creates the conditions that maintain our health and culture.*

*Our work engages, empowers and transforms marginalized communities to remain and thrive — a vision that respects, supports and involves the existing community in the formulation of plans and policies addressing the issues of long term affordable housing, open space, community renewal and its sustainability.*

*This is vital for the continued growth of Melrose Commons, the Bronx and its role in the regional economy which fosters cohesion, growth, and responsible policies that respond to these issues.*

# Nos Quedamos Melrose Commons

## Equitable Neighborhood Development Action Plan

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# 01 | Introduction

## Organizational History

**Nos Quedamos (NQ) began its work in 1992**, when New York City proposed the Melrose Urban Commons Renewal Area, which designated 30 blocks in Melrose to be developed for middle-income New Yorkers. This site, however, was already home to roughly 6,000 low-income Melrose residents. Outraged by the injustice of their displacement, the local community banded together to create the We Stay/Nos Quedamos Committee in 1993.

This Committee drafted and passed an alternative proposal, the *Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Plan*, resulting in the development of affordable housing for Melrose families and seniors, including townhouses, multi-family rentals, co-ops, condominiums, and various commercial and community facility spaces, including a medical group, pharmacy, supermarket, and restaurant.

Empowered by its high-profile success, NQ has since served as a leader in community-driven development and a critical support hub for Melrose residents, assisting with a variety of economic and social issues. NQ has been successful in its mission, not only through physical redevelopment, but by preserving the culture and identity of those who remain in the South Bronx.

NQ is proud to have been an agent for change, with achievements including:

- **Affordable Housing** — Development of the South Bronx Land and Community Resource Trust (SBxL&CRT) to expand community engagement in the future development of their own neighborhoods, ensuring sustainable development, deep affordability, and community ownership. The SBxL&CRT will serve as a mechanism to build community power towards development policies and practices in Melrose that prioritize housing and environmental justice, deeply benefit the people of our neighborhoods, create and expand economic opportunities for residents, and further community resiliency and wellbeing
- **Affordable Housing** — The development of affordable housing for more than 4,000 families, in addition to a new 108-unit development for families and seniors completed in 2021
- **Housing Stabilization** — More than 400 new homeowners in the Melrose community since 1993
- **Commercial Stabilization** — The addition of nearly one million square feet of commercial real estate space within the Melrose footprint

- **Environmental Health** — Melrose Commons was awarded LEED Stage II Silver Certification — the first neighborhood in New York State to receive the honor — from the US Green Building Council for our team's commitment to pedestrian-oriented mixed-use, mixed-income development that maintains open space and sustainable design
- **Green Space** — Development of the 1.6 acre, \$6.6M Yolanda Garcia Park, which, in addition to providing new green space and playgrounds for Bronxites honors a true pillar of the community: Yolanda Garcia, a well-known and widely respected community activist and the founding member of Nos Quedamos, her contributions continue to make a lasting impact on the Bronx
- **Resilient Infrastructure** — Two recently awarded Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) grants to revitalize portions of the South Bronx by providing low-cost broadband access for the community of Melrose and increasing community resilience via the installation of photo-voltaic panels and stormwater runoff at 3 regional community gardens
- **Local Investment** — Over our history, NQ has attracted investments valuing over \$500,000,000 in housing, parks, infrastructure, and community resources to Melrose Commons



*"We are a multilingual, multicultural community with bustling commercial districts, creative energy, community institutions, and neighbors who support each other."*

*— Bronx-wide plan*

# 02 | About the Neighborhood

## **The Melrose Community: Where we've come from and where we are...**

Development policies and practices based on a history of structural racism and discrimination have created majority-black and brown neighborhoods with limited access to the resources that are necessary to promote healthy communities, including financial institutions, affordable housing, greenspace, supermarkets, and more.

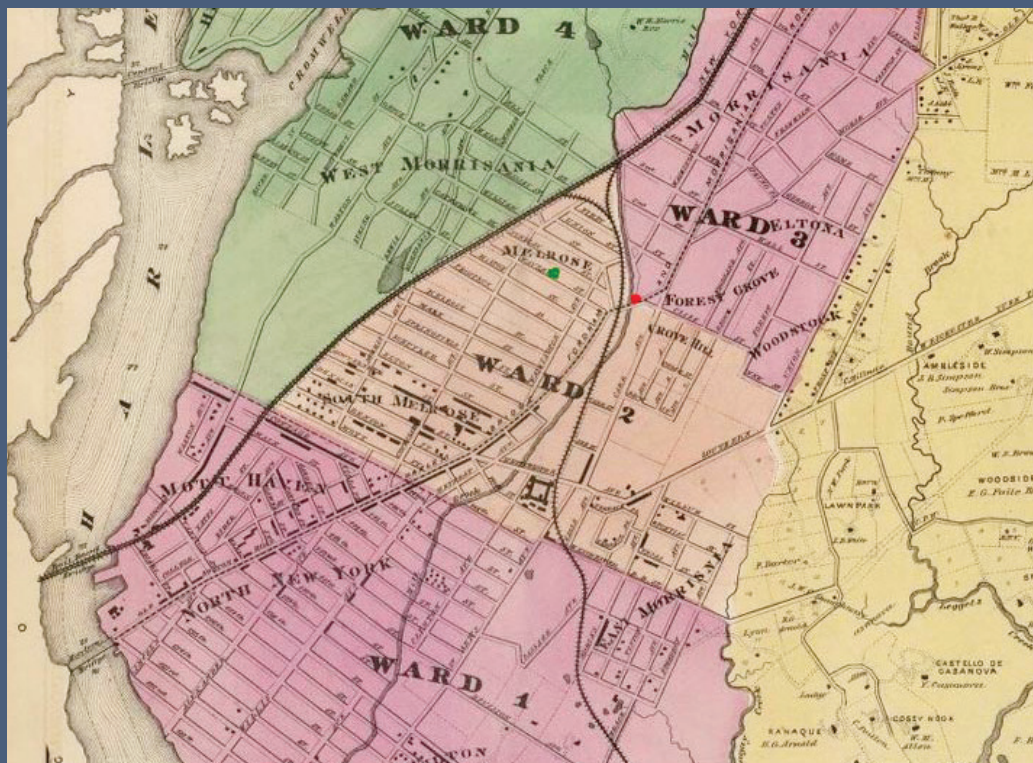
### **Community Health**

Community health is a critical issue for our communities. Living in high-poverty neighborhoods limits healthy options and makes it difficult to access quality services and resources that promote health. Melrose Commons is located in a food desert, and residents face higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic diseases reflective of a lack of fresh, nutritious, affordable food and sufficient health and nutrition education.

### **Environmental Justice**

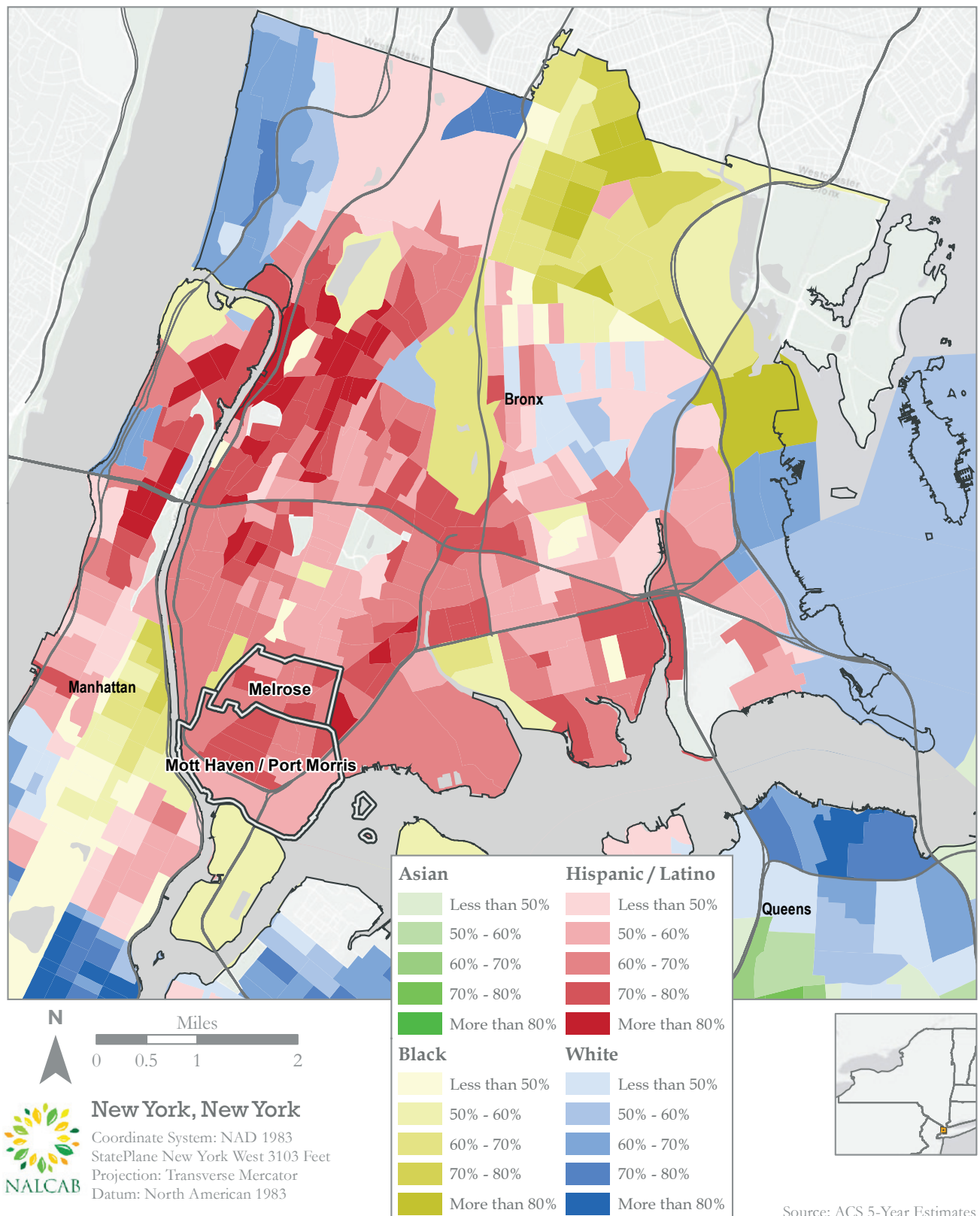
The South Bronx, in general, suffers from harsh environmental stressors that play a large role in creating the powerful social and economic determinants affecting the ability of residents to survive and thrive, and worsening challenges related to gentrification, displacement, and generational poverty. Large manufacturing zoned areas, a disproportionate share of waste transfer stations, and the Hunts Point food distribution center all cause heavy truck traffic that has polluted the air in our communities for many decades. As a result, the Bronx has some of the highest rates of asthma in the US and even has a place nicknamed “Asthma Alley,” where, during the height of the pandemic, asthma hospitalizations were 27 times higher than in the rest of the city.





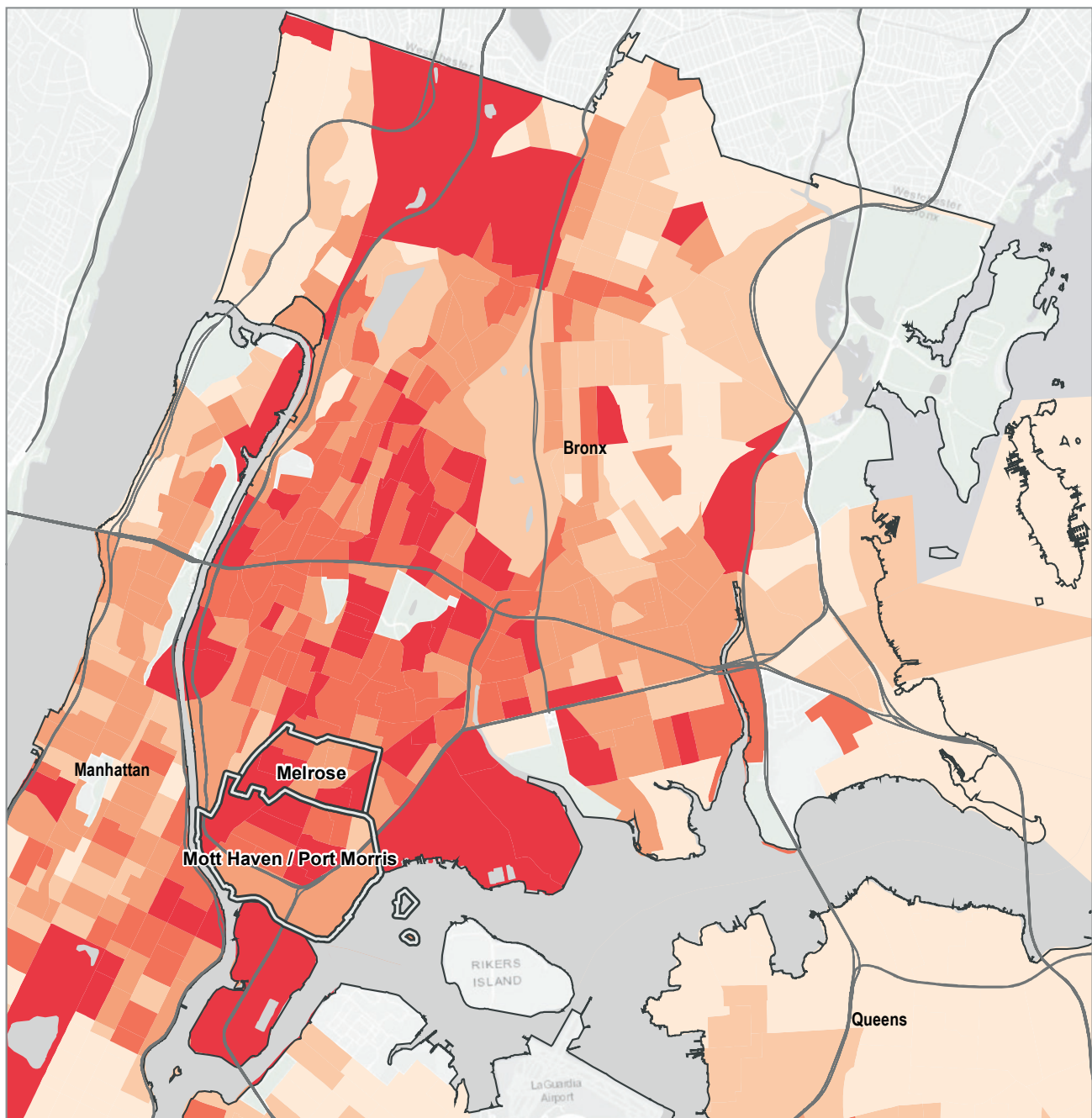
*Historic Melrose  
Community as  
depicted in 1868*

# Predominant Race/Ethnicity 2019





# Percent of Population Below Poverty Line 2019



Miles  
0 0.5 1 2



**New York, New York**

Coordinate System: NAD 1983  
StatePlane New York West 3103 Feet  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983

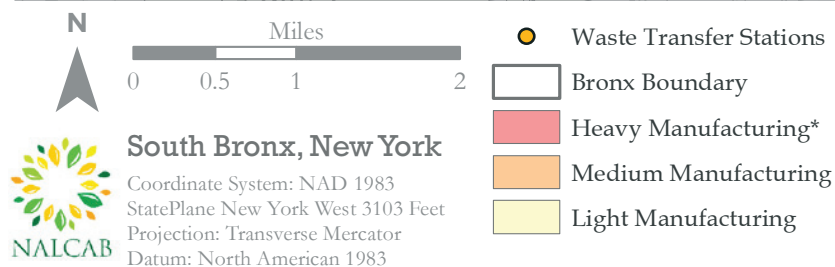
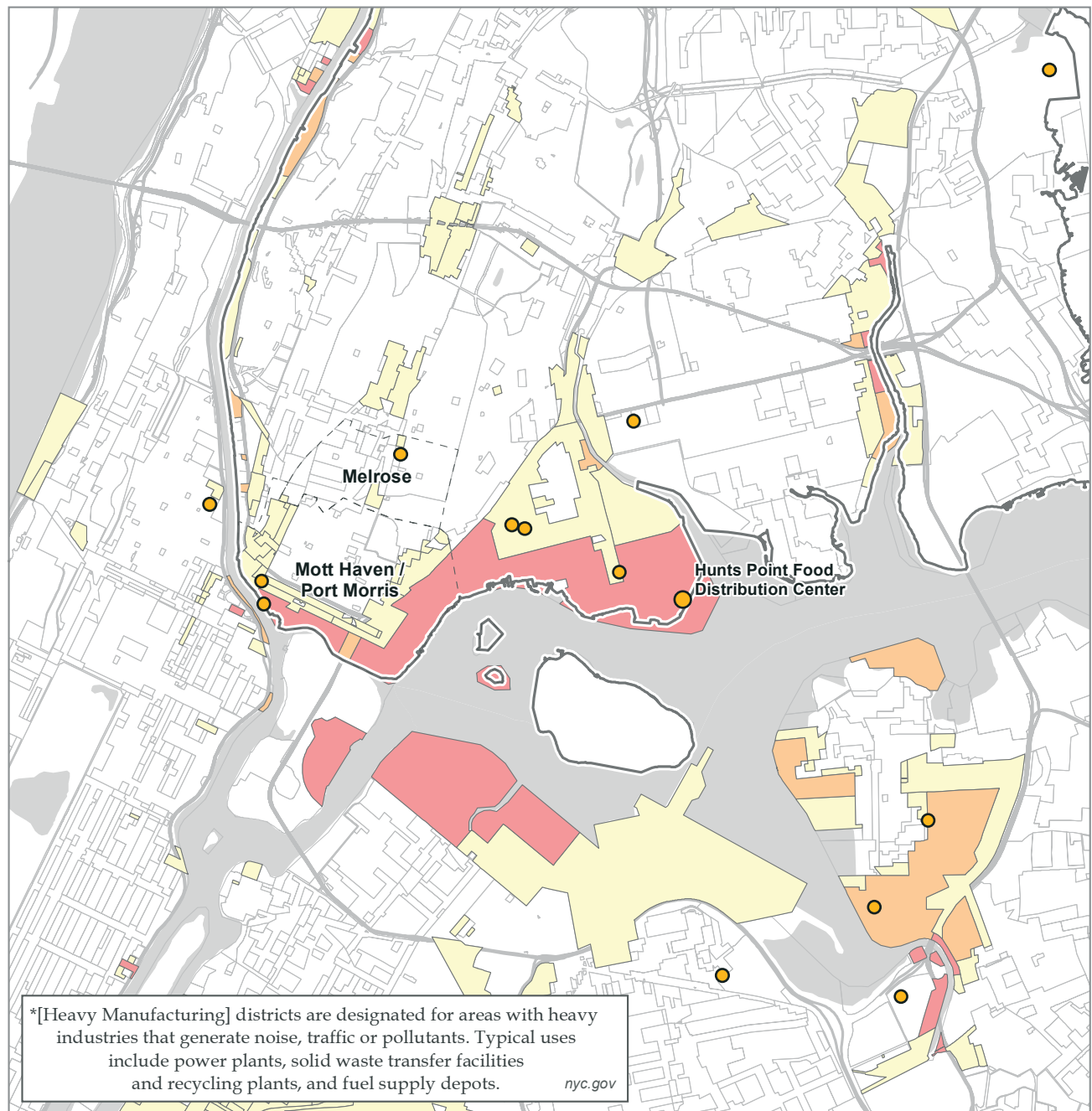
Percent Below Poverty Line

- 0% - 10%
- 10% - 20%
- 20% - 30%
- 30% - 40%
- More than 40%



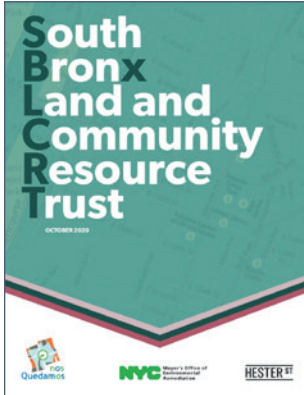
Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates

# Environmental Stressors 2021



Source: nyc.gov

## Community Planning and Ownership




Melrose Commons is now entering a critical phase that will define the next era of self-determination for our community. As a recent rapid uptick in local rezoning and upzoning efforts propagates unaffordable housing stock, increased development driven by outside forces

threatens our community resources, economic pressures leave our community's home-owners vulnerable to buy-outs. The equitable model and strong community network established by NQ through the *Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Plan* in the 1990's, which brought the "burning" South Bronx back from the brink and paved the way for revitalization, is now threatened by current development trends that do not require any community input or approval. But a valuable opportunity exists for the community to control and harness assets and resources in the Melrose Commons neighborhood through the emerging South Bronx Land and Community Resource Trust (SBxL&CRT), a community land trust that focuses on resident needs and supports resident participation in community planning and land use development to prioritize environmental justice, anti-displacement, and community ownership of land, utilities, and communications infrastructure.

## We Stay/Nos Quedamos and the COVID-19 Crisis

As the COVID crisis battered New York City, Bronx residents felt the impact of 30 years of public disinvestment, reduced community resiliency, and untenable health disparities. Since the start of the crisis, NQ has leveraged emergency grants from multiple private foundations and reallocated resources to serve vital needs in our community. It is critical that NQ continues to raise funds to ensure our most vulnerable families have the services they need for the duration of this crisis and beyond.

To that end, NQ contributed to the creation of the first "Bronx Community Foundation" and helped to launch the **Bronx Community Relief Effort**, born in the South Bronx immediately after COVID hit NYC. The effort aims to raise \$10M to support effective, on-the-ground operations that are focused on meeting the most essential needs of the Bronx community. The Relief Effort raised \$1M to support housing stability, in partnership with Bronx-based Housing Organizations (such as NQ, Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation, New Settlement, Phipps Neighborhoods, and others), as well as to ensure that social work, financial, and health supports were available for up to 2,500 Bronxites during the New York stay at home order.



*It is critical that Nos Quedamos continues to raise funds to ensure our most vulnerable families have the services they need for the duration of this crisis and beyond.*





## Emergency Support During COVID

With rampant job loss, school closures, and food bank closures due to COVID, food insecurity continues to be a growing problem for our community and we mobilized to provide critical direct support during the crisis, ramping up to meet increased need for food distribution and entitlement support services. NQ owns 19 residential buildings, housing 4,000 residents. The organization provides comprehensive case management services to tenants of our residential developments, in addition to about 1,000 walk-in

clients from the area annually. At the start of the crisis, record numbers of residents began reaching out for support and NQ immediately pivoted to meet emergency needs. From March 2020, we partnered with World Central Kitchen to deliver hot and cold meals to our residents in need. We also partnered with GROWN NYC to provide fresh produce to residents, so they would have more variety and possibilities for preparing their own meals. In total, we provided daily meal delivery to approximately 607 families through the height of the pandemic.



## Community Needs Assessment

NQ recently completed a Community Survey around emergent needs and challenges related to the pandemic. In the past, NQ has collected data related to social service provision, but its broader goals for community resilience in the wake of COVID necessitate that data is collected and analyzed on a larger scale, monitoring metrics around issues such as access to fresh affordable foods, opportunities for recreation, access to medical services, awareness of local environmental justice issues, and more. These metrics will allow identification of specific community needs and priorities that will inform strategies, activities, and ultimately determine neighborhood-wide recommendations for increased community resilience.

## Housing Security

NQ's advocacy efforts around housing security throughout the COVID crisis have been a key priority. Calls for a rent freeze in NYC have been complicated by jurisdictional disputes with the state. However, local legislators, with support from their constituencies, have continued to push the issue. In early April, Michael Gianaris, a representative of Queens, brought legislation to the floor of the State Senate to cancel rent for the duration of the pandemic. On April 17, 2020, Congresswoman Ilhan Omar introduced legislation to cancel rent and

mortgages nationwide for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic and provide a mechanism for landlords to apply for federal relief. Such a policy architecture lifts the bureaucratic burden from overworked, under-valued, and unemployed individuals. Banks and property managers with the resources and personnel to file claims would instead seek federal relief. Community organizations such as People's Action, Center for Popular Democracy, Citizen Action New York, Community Voices Heard, Housing Justice for All, and Churches United for Fair Housing have supported similar approaches, and Nos Quedamos has joined these groups to push for legislation that requires private purchasers to provide the benefits that much of nonprofit, community-based, and limited equity cooperative approaches to housing already provide, such as services that help address the needs of those experiencing chronic homelessness or housing instability — like access to healthcare, employment or education assistance, childcare, etc. In addition, it is worth noting that without addressing the structure of the real estate market, the long-term economic impacts of the pandemic will likely lead to massive declines in small businesses and further massive consolidation of real estate holdings by investment firms, driving up the long-term cost of housing. There remains a tremendous need for structural policy changes as the city seeks to recover from the impacts of COVID.



# 03 | Action Plan

***Our VISION:*** *The Melrose and South Bronx communities redefine community power, ownership, and resiliency by reclaiming community assets and by acting on community-driven solutions to create a safe, equitable, healthy, and resilient community.*

This Equitable Neighborhood Development Action Plan aims to harness NQ's decades of community-led sustainable development work and bring that legacy into the current moment to represent a growing, diverse population, cultivate their full engagement in self-determination, and meet the emerging challenges of a new generation of residents through a holistic, comprehensive plan of action that can be used to advance policy recommendations and galvanize the Melrose community.

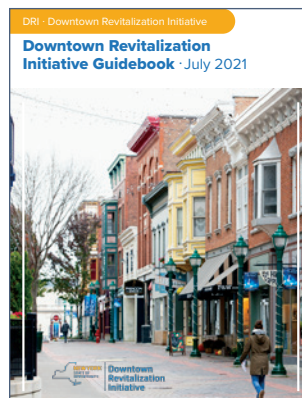
NQ's focused push for community self-determination and ownership is part of a larger strategy towards resiliency and community wealth building. This requires a community capacity to plan for, respond to, and recover from major disruptions in the neighborhood within the realms of health, prosperity, and equal access.

## GOAL 1: Sustainable Infrastructure Projects for Built Space resilience and efficiency

**Our ACTIONS:** Fully Implement Sustainable Infrastructure Projects while Cultivating the Emerging South Bronx Land and Community Resource Trust (SBxL&CRT).


### Community Broadband

In the South Bronx we will develop a holistic plan for a scaled-up “Eco-grid” in the Melrose Commons footprint. The Eco-grid will provide community access to broadband communications and solar power. The Eco-grid will democratize access to electricity and the internet, providing much needed infrastructure upgrades for our community and increasing neighborhood resilience.



NQ’s eventual implementation of a Community Broadband network will leverage capital funding from New York State’s Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI), which seeks to “transform communities ripe for development into vibrant neighborhoods where the

next generation of New Yorkers will want to live, work, and raise a family.” High-speed home internet access is an increasing necessity for individuals to participate in the 21st century economy. From housing to employment, education to health, finance to government, more and more services are available only online. Yet while most New Yorkers have access to mobile-based internet, many residents within the Melrose Commons Civic Center lack high-speed internet access at home due to cost constraints. Furthermore, even those Melrose



residents who do have access to high-speed internet are disproportionately vulnerable to shocks that might leave them without access (including not only storms, heat waves, and black-outs, but also economic hardship and unemployment), and so the Community Broadband network is envisioned as part of a larger matrix of vital back-up infrastructure that will fortify community resilience. The network would have three components:

1. Wi-fi access points installed in and around public spaces, including plazas, parks, and community gardens, offering free internet access for use by an estimated 25,000 people annually.
2. 7,000 residents within buildings with base towers would have free access to an internet-enabled local resources portal.
3. The same 7,000 residents would have an option to purchase internet access at a deeply discounted rate.

At this point it is vitally important that local residents and businesses are fully engaged in the development of the Community Broadband network in order to garner the

support and “community buy-in” that is necessary to the project’s success, and to ensure that the implementation of the network will best meet community needs. A small-scale survey of NQ tenants conducted in October 2021 indicated that there is a lack of awareness around the concept of a “resilient network” and what it could bring to Melrose, as well as the workforce development opportunities, job creation, and community ownership models that could add value for residents. Deep and aggressive outreach, education, and engagement is essential in order for community members to understand what the Community Broadband project is and why it’s important. At the same time, NQ must maintain a living dialogue with the community in order to ensure that the ultimate design and implementation of the network truly serves the community’s needs and represents their vision for their own neighborhoods.

#### **Key Activities:**

- Bi-monthly meeting with the South Bronx Digital Equity Task Force, convened at the beginning of 2021 with the goal of increasing digital access for South Bronx residents, as well as opportunities for



distance learning, remote healthcare, and other vital resources. The Task Force includes Nos Quedamos, Knowledge House, Per Scholas, The Point CDC, South Bronx Rising Together, WhedCo, and Dreamyard **(Current/Ongoing)**


- Community Outreach, Education, and Listening Sessions presented to a cross section of Melrose Commons residents, including youth, seniors, long-time residents, recent immigrants, non-English speaking residents, local business owners **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Community input collected during Community Outreach, Education, and Listening Sessions will be assessed, aggregated, and shared in a report with project partners and the wider community **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Focus Groups conducted with Listening Session attendees will collect deeper community feedback and identify individuals interested in becoming more deeply involved in our larger campaigns and advocacy work **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Install network equipment and base towers on building rooftops of 754 Melrose Avenue and 390 E. 158th Street **(1-3 years)**
- Install wi-fi access points in and around public spaces, including plazas, parks, and community gardens **(1-3 years)**

- Develop resource landing page that links local residents to resources and opportunities: telemedicine, online learning and training, NYC agencies, etc **(1-3 years)**

## Community Solar

Melrose Commons is the first neighborhood in New York State to receive LEED Stage II Silver Certification for Neighborhood Development by the U.S. Green Building Council. “LEED” stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a United States-based rating system that integrates the principles of smart growth, urbanism, and green building into a national system for neighborhood design. The community solar project aims to establish innovative energy development models that drive the uptake of community co-owned renewable energy infrastructure projects and community-led energy planning initiatives in the South Bronx. This project aims to help serve the energy burden needs of Bronx residents and dismantle existing hurdles in renewable energy generation that can be overcome by developing strong, equitable partnerships between grassroots organizations, public agencies, and other organizations.





With funding from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), Nos Quedamos is currently undertaking a pre-development process to add solar energy infrastructure to our portfolio of 19 residential buildings. In order to fully assess, analyze, and determine the best possible implementation plan for solar infrastructure integration, we are partnering with the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance (NYCEJA) and consultants from Urban Energy to accomplish a feasibility study that identifies a sequence and timeline for infrastructure installation, roof conditions for the potential for roof replacements, evaluates the pros and cons of third party financing vs. community ownership, explore possible financial partners, determines the degree of financing that would be most effective, and establishes the overall direction Nos Quedamos will pursue with our portfolio as it pertains to solar infrastructure and resiliency going forward.

**Key Activities:**

- Mobilize development and implementation partners, including Urban Energy and NYC Environmental Justice Alliance; leverage partner networks to organize a pre-development team **(Current/Ongoing)**

- Conduct site feasibility analysis **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Develop community ownership model **(1-3 years)**
- Communicate results of the pre-development exploratory process **(1-3 years)**
- Develop implementation plan **(1-3 years)**
- Solar retrofitting of housing stock **(3+ years)**

## **Melrose Commons Green Space and Community Resiliency Hubs**

NQ is currently developing Resiliency Hubs that will increase community power and our ability to anticipate, accommodate, and positively adapt to changing climate conditions, while addressing environmental justice disparities through climate change policy advocacy. The full infrastructure project includes:

- 1. Solar Panels:** Installation of mounted solar panels to improve lighting in and around community gardens or other open/green public spaces, making them more accessible at night, providing night-lighting of surrounding streets for safety, and providing a power source for small-scale community events and cell-phone charging stations within the gardens.

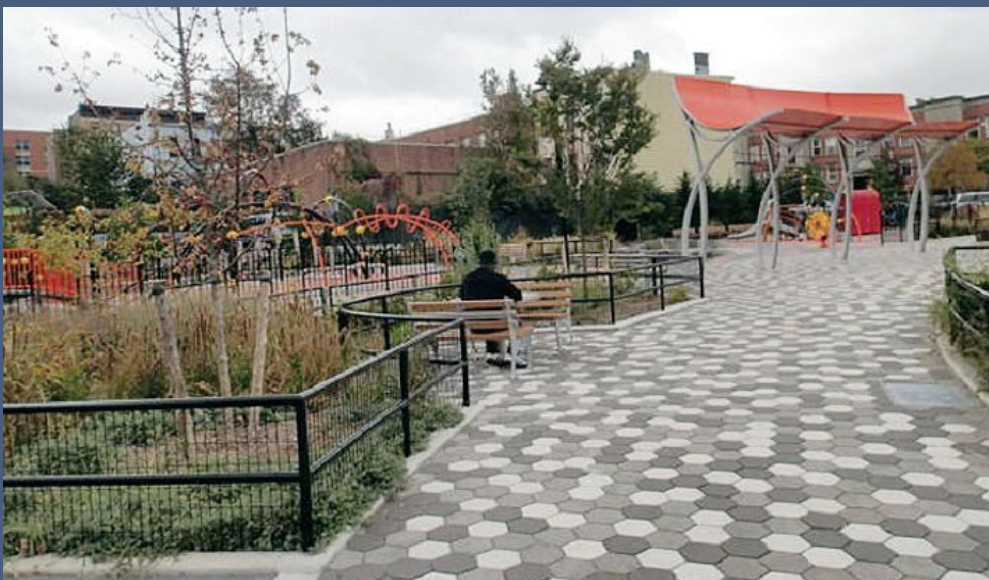
**2. Rainwater Harvesting:** Installation of rainwater harvesting systems, including catch basins and corresponding plumbing equipment to reduce runoff to the municipal system and provide an alternative source of water.

**3. Broadband Access:** Installation of wi-fi routers to enable internet connectivity at the Hub sites.

The Hubs will act as community-led crisis coordinating centers, providing access to freshwater and resources such as food, refrigeration, charging stations, basic medical supplies, and other necessities, while serving critical communication functions. The Hubs will be activated to educate community members about hazards; engage residents and businesses on steps they can take to respond before, during, and after hazardous events; connect members of the community to the resources necessary to prepare for and withstand the impacts from any hazard event; provide engagement and educational opportunities to enhance individual adaptive capacity; and increase energy and water efficiency of surrounding businesses and residences. The Hubs sit at the nexus of community resilience, emergency management, climate change mitigation, and social equity, providing opportunities for communities to become more self-determining, socially connected, and successful before, during, and after disruptions.

### Key Activities:

- NQ's Youth Organizing Team, including 2 Lead Organizers and a cohort of 10 Youth Organizers, plan and present a roster of community outreach and education events, including environmental walking tours of Melrose; public presentations at NQ's monthly open community meetings, and in collaboration with NQ's local and city-wide networks and coalitions; Public Events and Workshops around issues of climate and environmental justice impacting their neighborhood, and the intertwining social, economic, and racial inequalities that create systemic challenges for our community **(Current/Ongoing)**
- NQ Staff and Youth Leaders collaborate with our Partnership for Resilient Communities cohort to coordinate a shared learning event with up to 10 established resiliency hubs across the US **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Coordinate planning, development, and implementation activities with NYC Parks, NYC Green Thumb, and NYS Department of State, and other key agencies and stakeholders **(1-3 years)**
- Coordinate "Learning Circles" throughout the implementation and construction process to ensure community engagement and buy-in **(1-3 years)**



*Yolanda Garcia Park, named for founder and first Executive Director of We Stay/Nos Quedamos*

- Train Community Leaders to around Emergency Preparedness and maintenance of the Resiliency Hub systems **(1-3 years)**
- Activate the Hub sites as centers for community organizing and power-building, where residents gain the information, skills, and tools to advocate for community priorities and long-term climate justice **(3+ years)**

## GOAL 2: Increase Community-Driven Planning in Melrose

NQ's first major victory, the Melrose Urban Renewal Plan, was the result of citizen participation and community mobilization. While Melrose faces new challenges and opportunities, the source of community power remains the same: **organization, mobilization, advocacy, and ownership**. Knowing this, it is critical that NQ take strong action to achieve community priorities and advocate for policies that will advance community ownership and ensure an equitable future for our communities. Now is the moment for NQ to cultivate and activate our base and galvanize residents through community outreach, education, training, and leadership development. Melrose has changed dramatically since the early days of NQ. With new developments, residents came from all over the city, new residents who don't know about NQ's foundational role in the transformation of Melrose Commons. It is imperative for the sustainability

of our many accomplishments and the future of place-keeping in Melrose, that NQ returns to our roots of community organizing and build on our deep history to reinvigorate community power through the emerging SBxL&CRT.

### Our ACTIONS:

#### Cultivating Community Cohesiveness through Arts and Cultural Programming

To achieve this goal, it is essential that NQ reconnects with the Melrose community, cultivating community cohesiveness and introducing today's Melrose residents to our work. NQ has always known that preserving and strengthening the cultural presence of diverse South Bronx communities is essential to fighting displacement and building resilience and sustainability. Our cultural programming is developed in partnership with local organizations and community leaders — particularly youth — to promote multicultural collectivity, connect Melrose residents to each other and to our legacy of community-led change, and manifest resilience to ensure that the future of Melrose is driven by the people of Melrose.

NQ presents a variety of arts and cultural programs at public spaces throughout the Melrose footprint, to facilitate cultural exchange and promote celebration of tradition and heritage. Our partnerships with arts organizations such as Pregones Theater, YUCA Arts,

*The challenges our community faces are imposing, but the spirit of our people is stronger. Residents of the "Boogie down" are not defined by their hardships; they have triumphed over adversity before and they will do so again.*






and the Bronx Music Heritage Center allow us to implement a wide variety of programming for our neighbors. Many of these partnerships were formalized when we convened the Bronx Culture Collective in 2015 to lead a Bronx-wide initiative to serve the cultural needs of our communities. A roster of annual events that feature music, theater, film, dance, and more are planned around days of cultural significance for the traditionally Hispanic community, as well as new cultures that now call Melrose home.

#### **Key Activities:**

- We Are Melrose Festival: our annual week-long event that celebrates the increasingly diverse cultures represented by our residents, supports our local businesses, and engages our network of local partnerships with community based organizations, houses of worship, schools, community gardens, and more **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Winter Solstice “Parranda,” celebrating Puerto Rican culture with a parade that winds through



the neighborhood playing traditional music, presented in partnership with the Bronx Music Heritage Center **(Current/Ongoing)**

- Easter and Halloween celebrations at Yolanda Garcia Park **(Current/Ongoing)**
- “Stage, Garden, Rumba,” live performances by theater, music, dance, literary, and social change champs are broadcast on Pregones Theater social platforms and cable television **(Current/Ongoing)**

## Community Outreach, Engagement, and Leadership Development

Centering community revitalization around the core concept of resilience can move power into the hands of residents, local businesses, and community-based organizations without leading to displacement. It is essential that NQ cultivates an informed, organized neighborhood base in order to effectively act as a conduit for community power. Our current strategy focuses on bringing the young people of Melrose into our work, and empowering them to organize their friends, families, and neighbors to advance community development, empower local leadership, nurture families, strengthen economic development, and improve the overall quality of life for residents. In June 2021, NQ hired 2 Lead Youth Organizers, who received comprehensive training in community organizing and advocacy, environmental

justice and community resilience, and surveyed other recent youth-led movements. The Youth Leaders have since worked with NQ’s full-time Community Organizer (a Bronx native and former NQ intern herself) to create a framework for our first cohort of 10 Youth Organizers (including a team structure, goals and deliverables, and training timelines and content through the end of 2021). NQ’s youth team will be key to building community engagement around all of our resilience efforts, leading education and outreach efforts that provide target residents of Melrose with a deep understanding of community ownership, environmental justice, and anti-displacement initiatives, starting with the development of the Resiliency Hubs and eventually through the emerging South Bronx Land & Community Resource Trust. Through youth-led efforts, NQ aims to fully engage residents in the development of policy priorities and agendas that shape the future of community resilience in Melrose.

### Key Activities:

- Information sessions for residents, homeowners, community garden members, small business owners and entrepreneurs **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Targeted outreach (newsletter, email blasts, phone banking, canvassing) **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Community surveys, data collection, and analysis **(Current/Ongoing)**




- Monthly NQ open houses, community visioning sessions, and scoping meetings **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Creation and integration of Popular Education Materials on environmental justice, community mobilization, and more **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Community connectivity via partnerships and participation on key coalitions **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Pipeline for local leaders **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Collaboration with current Partnership for Resilient Communities cohort to coordinate a shared learning event with up to 10 established resiliency hubs across the US **(Current/Ongoing)**
- Environmental justice training modules **(1-3 years)**
- Development of Emergency Action Plan Trainings (CERT) **(1-3 years)**
- Creation of a toolkit for each garden site, for maintaining and activating the Hubs, including best practices, green job development, etc **(1-3 years)**
- Convening a Community Resilience Stewardship Committee that meets monthly **(1-3 years)**

## Activate community land trust and planning mechanisms to preserve housing, business, and culture and increase investment through special district designation

Beginning in 1949, federal law allowed cities across the country to declare that a piece of land was “blighted” — a subjective determination made by government agencies that often led to the displacement of low-income people of color. Cities could then acquire the “blighted” land, relocate the people living there, raze the homes and buildings that were already in place, and make way for new public and private development. Development in the plan areas sometimes happened, as with Lincoln Center, and sometimes didn’t, as with many still-vacant lots in East New York and Bushwick.

Many urban renewal plans remain active today, and where they exist, they set restrictions on what can be built in an area. NYC continues to create Urban Renewal Areas, which enable the government to force private owners to sell their property to the government. It is





critical for communities to build and maintain power to influence how Urban Renewal Plans are implemented to ensure that the existing community is prioritized. The planning process for the Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Area drew its strength from a shared vision of the city of New York, the borough of the Bronx, and the local community.

In New York, special districts respond to specific conditions and each special district designated by the Commission stipulates its zoning requirements and/or zoning incentives. These are tailored to preserve distinctive qualities that may not be protected in generalized zoning and standard development. Precedents for this in the Bronx include Hunts Point, the Jerome Avenue Corridor, and the Harlem River Waterfront. A Special District designation would empower NQ's work.

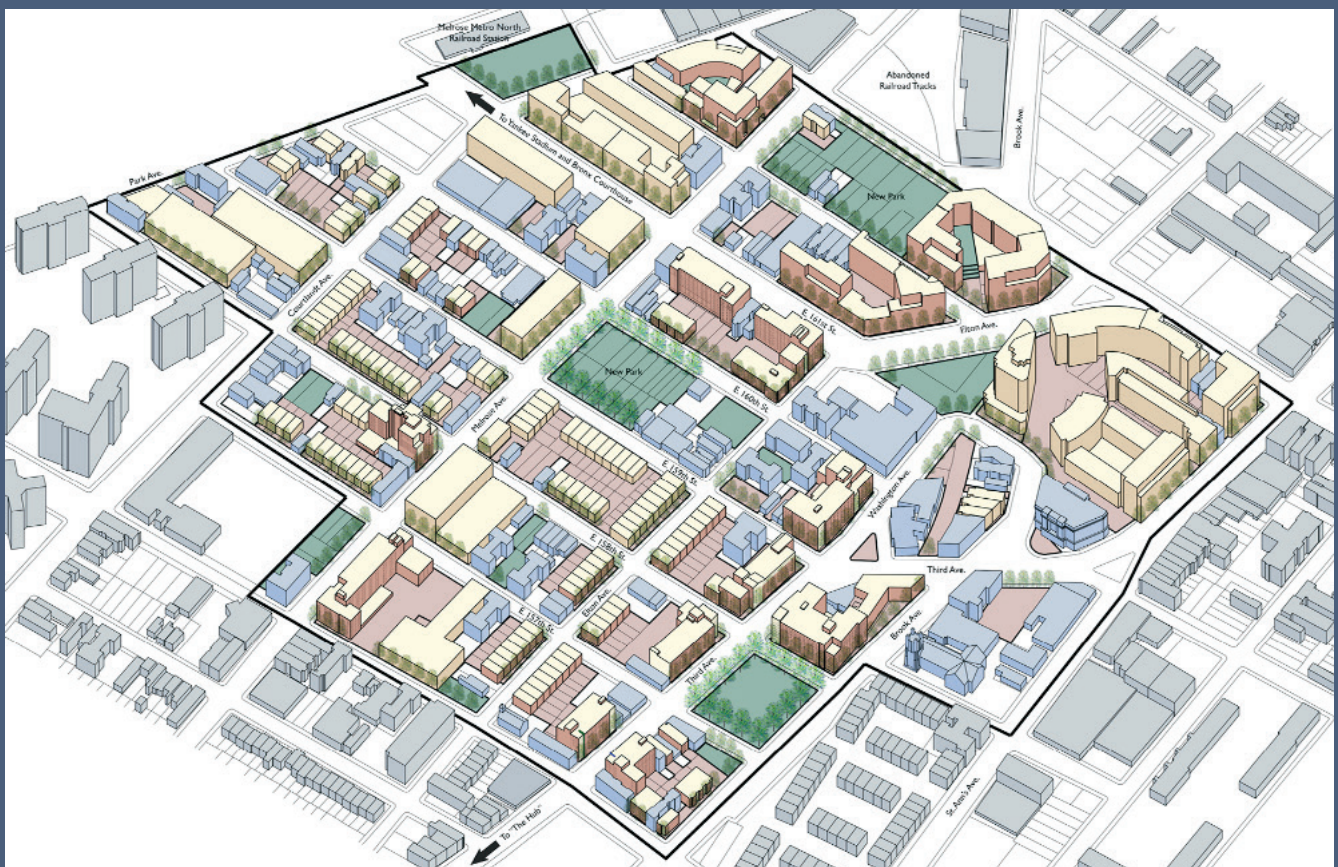
Our work to preserve housing, business, and culture of Melrose remains rooted in the following priorities for City plans and zoning decisions:

1. No involuntary displacement of the existing community.
2. Support a mixed income community and create a variety of ownership and rental housing.
3. Provide affordable housing at densities appropriate to an urban community.


4. Utilize architectural design guidelines that maximize the public investment by creating a visually desirable, urban environment that will encourage development.
5. Promote physical development that is both environmentally conscious and sustainable.
6. Integrate open space into a system that responds to the community's concerns around programming and security.
7. Provide for an appropriate distribution of commercial space and services and enable community residents and businesses to increase their earnings potential and expand their economic opportunities.
8. Support development that complements the existing infrastructure and the community's regional location and provides for future growth and evolution.

The *Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Plan*, drafted and passed through the efforts of the We Stay/Nos Quedamos Committee in 1993, was successful and resulted in the development of affordable housing for Melrose families and seniors, including townhouses, multi-family rentals, co-ops, condominiums, and various commercial and community facility spaces, including a medical group, pharmacy, supermarket, and restaurant. Any gardens displaced through development of new housing are required to be reestablished within the





*The Melrose Commons footprint, originally designated as the Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Area, will be presented for approval as a Special District*



footprint. With the final development project nearing completion, it is time for us to plot the next steps toward safeguarding our progress and ensuring a continuation of development in Melrose that deeply benefits the community. This requires community-led advocacy.

**Key Activities:**

- Develop urban renewal strategy with academic and community-based organizations and partners **(1-3 years)**
- Host community visioning and planning sessions in coordination with relevant city agencies **(1-3 years)**
- Host community mobilization and education sessions around Special District designation **(1-3 years)**

**Build and diversify sources of funding to support community-driven development and solutions in Melrose**

To best support the equitable solutions developed through this planning process, NQ will identify sources of social impact funding to support community development in Melrose Commons. Social impact funding is an investment strategy that aims to generate specific beneficial social or environmental effects in addition to financial gains. Still an emerging strategy and concept, NQ is exploring, for future research, a variety of approaches in this arena:

forging independent relationships with government entities; public and private investors around real estate and infrastructure projects; and leveraging its position within various groups and coalitions representing community interests.

**Key Activities:**

- Leverage Resiliency Planning funding **(3+ years)**
- Apply for funding through YOUR Home NYC, which supports the expansion of community ownership and shared equity housing and economic development models, including Community Land Trusts. Through this grant, the City is making a commitment to ongoing technical assistance and capacity building for community land trusts and other nonprofit corporations interested in growing their capacity to develop and steward affordable housing **(3+ years)**
- Fundraise for stipend support for Youth Organizers and Community Leaders **(3+ years)**
- Secure funding to develop a training program around resiliency technology and blue-green infrastructure installation and maintenance **(3+ years)**
- Leverage partnership with NALCAB to increase organizational capacity for effective policy advocacy **(3+ years)**

## We Stay/Nos Quedamos Target Impacts through this plan:

### Current/Ongoing

- Increased value of Melrose Commons properties
- Increased public space for the Melrose Community
- Increased opportunities for community programming
- Community gains a shared understanding of the Community Resilience and Resilient Infrastructure, and the multitude of potential benefits for Melrose
- Community gains a shared understanding of environmental justice priorities in the Bronx with a cultural lens and connection to available resources
- Community gains a better understanding of the scope of the South Bronx Community Land and Resource Trust (SBxLRT) and how it is a tool for community ownership
- Enhanced civic engagement and participation in Melrose through candidate forums, voter registration, and local campaigns

### 1-3 years

- Increased resilience and emergency preparedness for the South Bronx
- Increased security on public streets surrounding the Resiliency Hub sites
- A cadre of NQ's Youth Organizers and Community Leaders working to advance community priorities and build power behind community-led initiatives

- Community gains a better understanding of the changes needed in the Bronx and how to advocate for them
- City-level policy change to support community-led policy priorities and development that benefits the residents of Melrose
- Empowered residents work to reclaim Melrose assets and resources for community benefit

### 3+ years

- Improved air quality, reduced burden on existing sewer infrastructure, improved flood mitigation and urban heat island mitigation
- New local sources of food (through new and expanded food gardens and garden programs)
- Improved internet access in a community that relies disproportionately on mobile data plans, thereby enabling broader use of digital services, including for schoolwork, digital skills development, and job and benefits applications
- Reduced energy burden for Bronx residents and reduced hurdles in renewable energy generation
- New energy development models that drive the uptake of community co-owned renewable energy infrastructure projects and community-led energy planning initiatives in the South Bronx
- The Melrose and South Bronx communities increase community power, ownership, and resiliency by reclaiming community assets and acting on the community-driven solutions that allow for a safer, more equitable, and healthier community





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754 Melrose Ave  
Bronx, NY 10451

[www.nosquedamos.org](http://www.nosquedamos.org) • [info@nosquedamos.org](mailto:info@nosquedamos.org)