

## Restoring Safe Spaces

### Improving place, opportunity, and prosperity for residents of Castle Hill



*Castle Hill Houses*

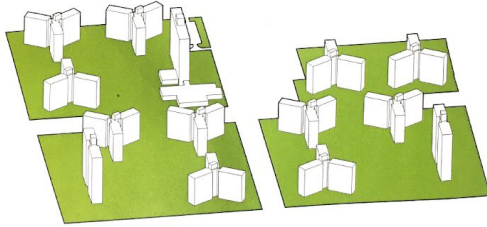
#### A. Background

Castle Hill Houses is one of the largest housing developments in New York City in terms of land mass and population. It is located in a high-density, urban community in the South East section of the Bronx and is bordered by Seward and Lacombe Avenues in the north and Olmstead and Havemeyer Avenues in the south. The development consists of 14 residential buildings with 2,025 apartments and has a present-day occupancy of approximately 4,975 residents. Today, Castle Hill Houses has a relatively diverse population and culture, primarily consisting of African American (29%) and Latin American (58%, mostly Puerto Rican) residents. According to recent figures, 62% of its residents are female and 38% are male. Nearly one out of every five households with children under the age of 18 is headed by a single parent. The median household income for Castle Hill residents is \$16,083.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Information provided from yet to be published NYCHA demographic report

## Castle Hill Houses



Year Built: 1960  
# of Buildings: 14  
# of Floors: 12-20  
Total Units: 2,025  
Population: 5,017

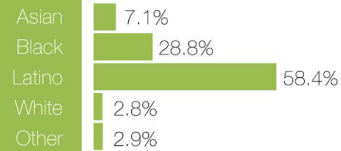
Illustration: NYCHAPEDIA

County: Bronx  
Community District (CD): 9  
Neighborhood: Soundview

### Resident Age



### Total Population by Race/Ethnicity (CD)

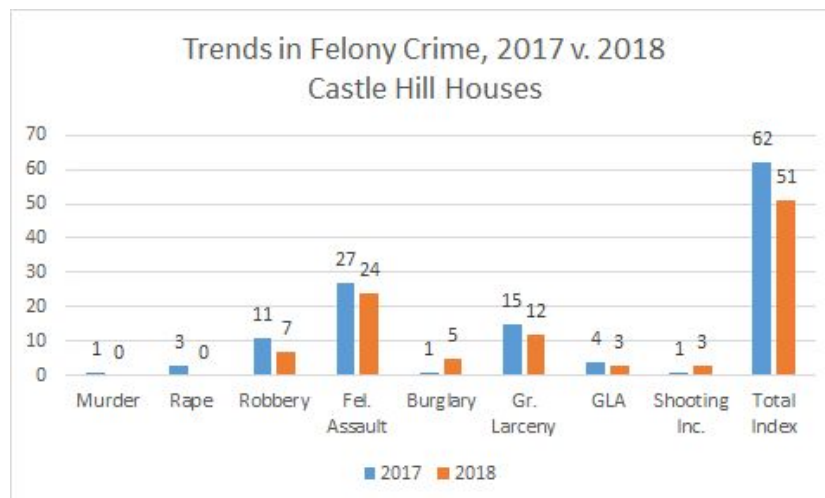


### Income Category



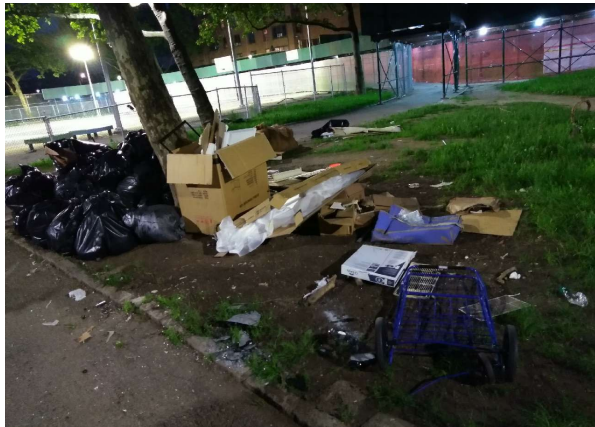
## B. Crime Overview | Trust | Justice

Castle Hill Houses experienced a decrease in index crime in Calendar Year (CY) 2018 compared to CY 2017.<sup>2</sup> Crime declined in six of the seven major crime categories. Specifically, there were fewer rapes (-3), fewer robberies (-4), fewer felony assaults (-3), fewer grand larcenies (-3), and fewer grand larceny autos (-1) in CY 2018. Crime increased in one major crime categories in CY 2018: burglary (+4). The number of shootings also increased (+2) in CY 2018. Index crime at Castle Hill Houses has declined substantially (-18) from 2014 when MAP began.



<sup>2</sup> Index crime, also known as “major crime” consists of the following crime categories: burglary, felony assault, grand larceny auto, grand larceny, murder, rape, and robbery.

## C. Priority Identification | Design | Infrastructure and Maintenance



Residents of Castle Hill are impacted by deteriorating building infrastructure and stewardship issues. Common problems include interruptions to heat and hot water, trash build-up, pest infestation, cracked or uneven pavement, elevators in need of repair, mold, and flooding.

Residents have identified several issues related to waste management disposal. Residents have observed garbage being thrown out of apartment windows. Some residents suspect that household trash from neighboring private property is being illegally dumped at the Castle Hill Houses. Residents also suspect that uncollected garbage contributes to rodent infestation and creates repugnant odors that more significantly impact residents who reside on lower floors or are outdoors. The odor from uncollected garbage is so severe that some residents refuse to open their windows during summer months. Additionally, dog waste is commonly found inside building hallways and on sidewalks throughout the development.

Castle Hill youth have limited outdoor space options to play because of the low quality of existing recreational spaces. In particular, the physical condition of the basketball courts behind 530 Olmstead Avenue (see above) is especially problematic. These neglected spaces have become gathering spaces for gang activity. Studies on gang territorialism on public spaces have shown how gang hangouts have become so established within the community “that residents, specifically youth, learn how to navigate through their neighborhood becoming adept at avoiding encounters with local gang members or their rivals in these dangerous areas.”<sup>3</sup>

### **How we can work together to improve infrastructure and maintenance:**

The Castle Hill Houses NeighborhoodStat team has taken the first steps towards identifying a potential strategy to improve infrastructure and maintenance issues. City agency partners are encouraged to develop their recommendations to resolve the issues that have been surfaced by the community. Resident suggestions include:

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322992665\\_Gangs\\_and\\_Space](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322992665_Gangs_and_Space)



## 1. Physical Space Improvements and Maintenance

**Challenge:** Public spaces within the development, such as the basketball courts and playgrounds, have been poorly maintained and remain underutilized. Walking paths are inadequately lit and cracked, which can be hazardous for the elderly and disabled. The combination of inadequate maintenance and underutilization of public spaces has increased the likelihood that these spaces be used for antisocial purposes, like drug use or gang activity. In addition, garbage is improperly discarded throughout the development.



Rendering of proposed basketball court improvements adjacent to 530 Olmstead.

An extensive body of research supports the connection between environmental neglect and reduced quality of life. Urban design has long touted the important relationship between quality public space and resident perceptions of safety and space utilization. In order to address this multi-layered issue, responsibility must be shared across maintenance staff, residents, and neighbors. While City maintenance efforts are essential for the upkeep of sanitary conditions in the development, residents also note the power of stewardship by neighbors in keeping the Castle Hill grounds clean.<sup>4</sup>

**Suggested Next Steps:** To improve the physical conditions around Castle Hill Houses, the NeighborhoodStat team seeks the following:

- Explore vermin control in individual units as well as common areas and continue to provide resident training around proper waste disposal and management.
- Survey and repair hazardous walkway conditions throughout development.
- Survey and repair the basketball court outside of 530 Olmstead.
- Create opportunities for residents to work in partnership with groundskeepers.
- Update signage, clarify proper dumping locations, and enlarge ground floor trash chutes to make trash disposal clearer and easier for residents. Take into consideration

<sup>4</sup> <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/83937579.pdf>

non-English speaking residents when designing signage and disseminating literature detailing proper garbage disposal practices.

- Improving coordination with DSNY to ensure that trash and bulk items are picked up efficiently and on time.
- Increase the frequency of garbage pick-up and coordination with DSNY.
- Create opportunities for residents to work in partnership with groundskeepers and engage local neighbors and businesses on appropriate garbage disposal practices.

#### **D. Priority Identification | Opportunity | Youth Development**

Many young Castle Hill residents have been traumatized by witnessing shootings and gang activity. Trauma can adversely impact a young person's behavior, educational achievement outcomes and upward mobility. Research shows that young people impacted by trauma can be more adversarial and may exhibit impulsive behavior.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, black and Latino males are disproportionately victims of violence, assault, and physical or sexual abuse, each of which can result in the development of traumatic symptoms. Compounding these issues, young men of color who experience trauma-related symptoms may be hesitant to seek help because they are not trusting of actors in the criminal justice, healthcare, and social service systems. Young men of color may not recognize potential symptoms of trauma, due to norm that stigmatize and discourage young men from seeking help.<sup>6</sup> Resources are needed to empower young people to address conflict in safe and constructive ways and to heal community members facing lasting distress from violence.

The NeighborhoodStat team believes that quality social programs are critical to positive youth development. In Castle Hill, nearly half of residents are under the age of 24, and 22% of youth between 16 and 24 are neither in school nor employed. According to the National Gang Center, disconnected residents between the ages of 13 to 35 have the greatest risk factors for becoming gang involved.<sup>7</sup> Bronx Community District 9, to which Castle Hill belongs, has among the highest percentage of disconnected youth (16-24 years old) in the city.<sup>8</sup>

Stakeholder team members have noted that young people in Castle Hill don't regularly connect with existing services. When taking a look at existing resources, the NeighborhoodStat team has identified several obstacles. For example, the Kips Bay Boys and Girls Club services youth

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.kaplanonline.org/barr-trauma-hinders-learning/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/RespondingToTraumaAmongYoungMenOfColor\\_Dec.23.pdf](https://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/RespondingToTraumaAmongYoungMenOfColor_Dec.23.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/>

<sup>8</sup> [Data2Go.NYC Castle Hill Disconnected Youth](#)

under 18 and seniors above the age of 60, but no one in between. The existing Next STEPS program, which services young people between 16 and 24, often operates at maximum capacity and cannot enroll new participants.

### **How we can work together to improve resident connections to youth and young adult programming:**

The Castle Hill Houses NeighborhoodStat team has taken the first steps towards identifying a potential strategy to connect youth and young adults to programming. The stakeholder team is seeking support from agency partners to expand the range and responsiveness of programming for youth and young adults in the following ways:

#### **1. Improve awareness and expand access to existing resources**

**Challenge:** Given the constantly changing demographics of the Castle Hill community, along with the needs of residents living within the development, specifically concerning immigration, domestic violence, unemployment, and conflict and violence, agencies and community-based organizations should be encouraged to adapt their programs for higher cultural competence. While community-based programs have existed for a number of years, the NeighborhoodStat believes that there need to be new ways of connecting youth and young adults to critical resources, with particular attention paid to the age group that is currently underserved and disconnected. Additionally, some resource partners serving young adults up to age 24 exist, but are not effectively connected to the Castle Hill resident population.

#### **Suggested Next Steps:**

- Develop a robust, creative marketing and promotions strategy to raise resident awareness of existing programming. Create visible marketing materials in multiple languages for existing programming.
- Determine gaps in services based on interests and needs, and address these gaps systematically.
- Verify existing resources that serve youth and young adults

#### **2. Crisis Intervention and Trauma Informed Care**

**Challenge:** As a result of recent fatal shootings in and around the Castle Hill development, particularly in neglected public space, residents live with trauma that not only acts as a barrier to well-being but also perpetuates a cycle of violence. As described above, witnessing community violence and gang activity within the development has severely impacted the lives of young residents..

**Suggested Next Steps:**

- Provide crisis intervention training and conflict resolution workshops to members of the Castle Hill community.
- Incorporate trauma-informed care into education and service provision.
- Ensure that trauma-informed care services are accessible to community members.