

Bridging Opportunity and Connection

Restoring a sense of community among residents of Queensbridge Houses



Queensbridge Houses

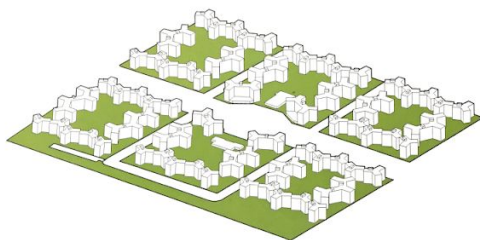
A. Background

Queensbridge Houses is the largest public housing development in North America. Located in Long Island City, the development, which is separated into two complexes -- Queensbridge North and Queensbridge South -- is bordered by the East River and 21st Street. The Queensboro Bridge, the namesake of the development, stands to the north. Queensbridge Houses has a total of 96 buildings and accommodates approximately 6,907 people. When it first opened in 1939, Queensbridge Houses was home to a mostly white working-class. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the demographics changed and Queensbridge Houses became home to a population that consisted mostly of African American and Latino families. Recently, the majority of Black (47%) and Hispanic (34%) residents has been offset by an increasingly large population of Asian and Bengali residents (approximately 9-10% of the current population). Almost one-third (27%)

of residents are under 18 and 11 percent are under the age of 24. One-third of residents (33%) are between the ages of 25 and 54. According to NYCHA, the median individual household income is \$24,190. Fifty-nine percent of households have a household income below \$20,000, and the average monthly rent is \$1,030. Women account for 57 percent of heads of households.

Queensbridge Houses

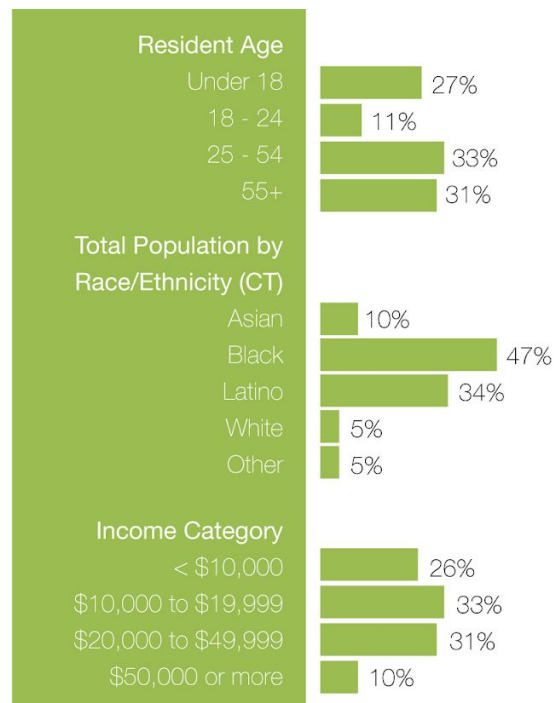
County: Queens
Census Tract: 85
Community District: 1
Neighborhood: Astoria



Queensbridge North
Year Built: 1940
of Buildings: 1
of Floors: 6
Total Units: 1,543
Population: 3,308

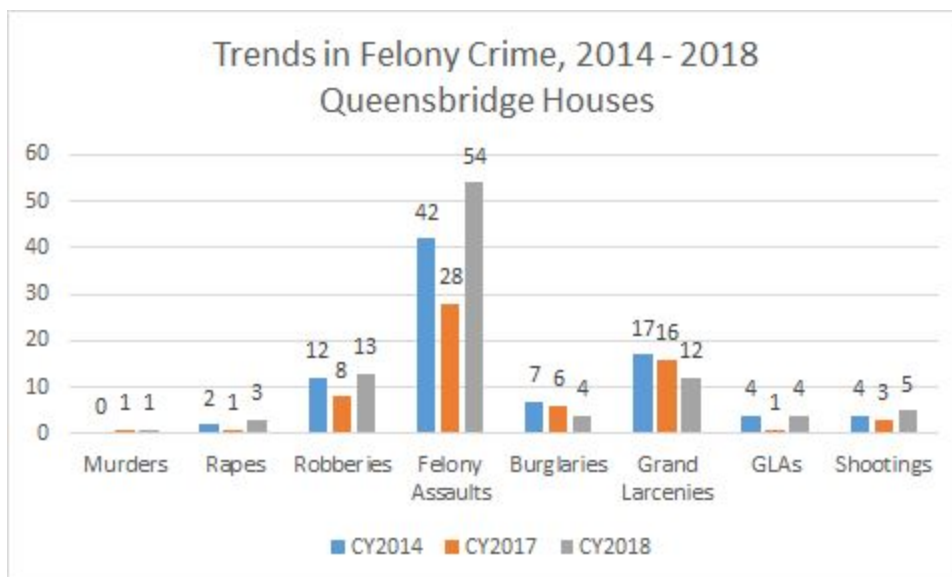
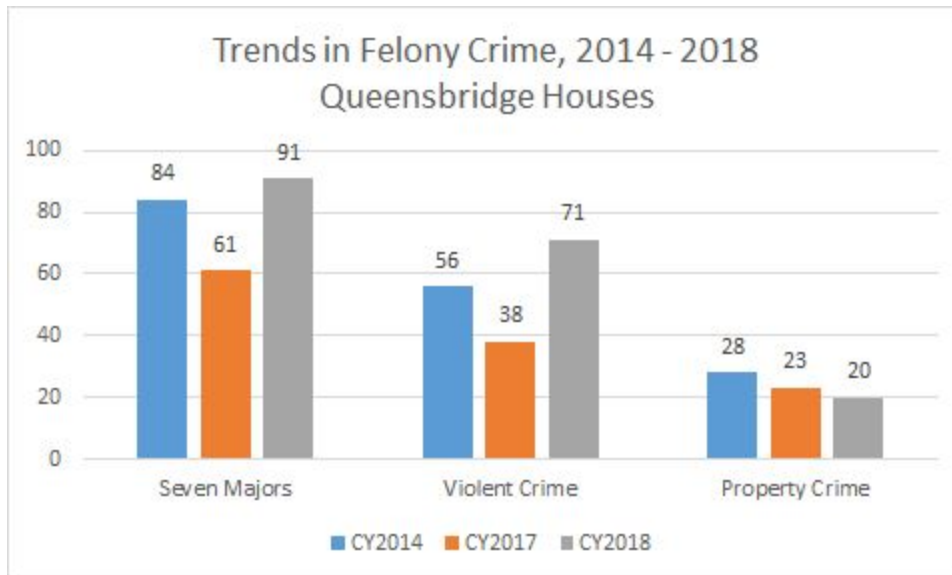
Queensbridge South
Year Built: 1940
of Buildings: 1
of Floors: 6
Total Units: 1,604
Population: 3,370

Illustration: NYCHAPEDIA



B. Crime Overview | [Trust](#) | Justice

Calendar Year (CY) 2017 at Queensbridge Houses had the lowest levels of major felony crime at the development since MAP began in 2014. While rates of property crime continued to decline at Queensbridge in CY 2018, dropping even below the 2017 numbers, violent crime in CY 2018 experienced a substantial increase, driven predominantly by a near-doubling in felony assault (+26), as well as increase in the number of rapes (+2) and robberies (+5). CY 2018 had the highest number of shootings at Queensbridge Houses since MAP began in 2014.



C. Priority Identification | **Design** | Stewardship and Maintenance

Neighborhood safety is closely connected to the quality of community settings and the pride that community members take in these shared spaces. At present, community spaces at Queensbridge Houses are poorly maintained by NYCHA and there is also a low degree of resident stewardship. Residents report that development repairs (both within apartments and externally in



common spaces) are not completed in a timely fashion. These physical space challenges leave residents feeling neglected by NYCHA and disconnected from each other. The community is littered with improperly discarded trash and dog waste. Similarly, community gardens are not appropriately registered with NYCHA, which makes identification of garden owners difficult. The lack of clarity over who is ultimately responsible for gardens has resulted in poor garden construction and maintenance.

Through the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety, new street lighting, new doors, and better security cameras were installed at Queensbridge Houses. While these improvements were needed and have improved residents' sense of safety, community disconnection still concerns residents. Members of the NeighborhoodStat stakeholder team believe that the existing lack of community pride and feelings of vulnerability are related to this social disconnection. One resident said, "People don't help each other or communicate anymore. Everyone does their own thing and keep[s] to themselves."

How we can work together to improve stewardship and maintenance:

1. Physical Conditions

Challenge: There is a need to improve the conditions of apartment units and common spaces within Queensbridge Houses. Boiler breakdowns occur commonly, leaving residents without heat or hot water and repairs are not completed quickly. According to the NYCHA's *2017 Physical Needs Assessment*, immediate needs for apartment repairs were estimated at \$231M for Queensbridge Houses. Types of repairs included in this estimate are repair, renovation, or replacements of bathrooms, kitchens and bathtubs; tiling; kitchen appliances; piping; and wall repairs due to water damage. NYCHA has also assessed that both Queensbridge North and South each require new passenger elevators at a total cost of \$76.8M. Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning replacements are also listed as immediate needs at a total cost to the development of \$5.2M.

While the Queensbridge maintenance teams work to respond to tickets within seven days, often tickets are escalated to specific tradesmen, like plumbers and electricians, which triggers the closure of the original ticket and generates a brand-new ticket. Many residents are unaware their closed ticket is reassigned and pending scheduling with the appropriate trade, leaving them to believe that their issue has gone unaddressed. Residents report that initiated repairs are not always completed properly, necessitating multiple and repeated work order requests to resolve originating issues. The number of open work orders at Queensbridge North doubled in January 2019 from one year before. Also, in January 2019, took an average of 50 days to complete work orders at Queensbridge North (the NYCHA target is 15 days). At Queensbridge South, the average time to completion of a work order was slightly better -- 43 days.

Suggested Next Steps:

- **Conduct a “Saturday Blitz”.** Through their “Saturday Blitz” initiative, NYCHA quickly performs repairs and engages and assists residents at the developments. Recently, over several Saturdays, a “Saturday Blitz” was initiated at Queensbridge South. However, the development needs these repairs to occur more frequently and consistently.
- **Complete prompt and thorough inspections of apartment conditions and continued communication regarding the status of repairs.** Better communication is also likely to improve the relationship between residents and NYCHA. Additionally, NYCHA can work with the NeighborhoodStat team to create educational campaign and materials to share the ticketing process and how to navigate the process with residents in multiple languages. This will provide residents with the appropriate follow up protocols to address their repairs. If tickets are closed because the issue is transferred to a trade, the new ticket order and timeline should be updated on NYCHAs app so that residents can see the progress of their repairs. If scheduled repair times are changed, the app should notify residents via push notification of the time change.
- **Develop effective support mechanisms to encourage resident behaviors that align with the beautification process and sanitation guidelines.** Since the MAP initiative has started, Queensbridge has gotten cleaner. With dog waste stations, more people have been cleaning up after their dogs. However more can be done to ensure a clean and well maintained environment. Maintaining and communicating consistent sanitation rules and best practices will improve resident adherence. Any new signage should be designed for multiple languages. Additionally, create incentives, like "Better Block" competitions, to encourage residents to be stewards of their development. Encourage Queensbridge residents to participate in the NeighborhoodStat action plan project to beautify Queensbridge Houses via letter campaign.
- **Use innovative technology wherever possible to help address maintenance conditions in the development.** These improvements should address the cataloging of work order issues and the technology to track the status of work orders and support the increase of licensed skilled workers at each development that would allow repairs to be done in a timely fashion. Technological innovation has expanded the ability of Property Management to address critical challenges in systems maintenance. Essentially, the technology can allow property managers use historical performance data to understand the pattern of systems failure allowing them to predict when maintenance is necessary for

building systems.¹ Efforts should be made to incorporate technology-based solutions to maximize the effectiveness of maintenance.

2. Wayfinding and Signage

Challenge: The few existing signs in the development do not provide enough information to support effective navigation within the development. This leads to confusion among new residents and visitors coming into the development. Additionally, welcome signs are outdated and illegible, raising the need for new ones in multiple languages. Multiple forms of written communication in the languages most commonly used by residents should be used to inform the community about proper garbage disposal practices.

Suggested Next Steps:

- **Make Queensbridge Houses easier to navigate by creating a legible wayfinding system.** Install adequate signs and maps that reflect community identity and help residents and visitors find their destination. Signage can contribute to a sense of community pride and beauty by highlighting the development's rich culture and heritage. In addition, the inclusion of diverse languages on signage serves to improve access to spaces and programs for all residents and supports community resilience.
- **Use innovative technology wherever possible to support wayfinding.** Technological innovation has expanded the ability for features in public space to both encourage social interaction and address critical challenges. Using interactive real-time wayfinding fixtures across the campus can provide updated and relevant information for residents throughout the day and night.² As interactive wayfinding tools support improved navigation they can also promote community based services and programs in real time. To encourage the creation of safe routes on the campus technology can be used to provide updated information and support safe connections to public transportation.³
- **Reinstate the Tenant Patol in each building.** The NeighborhoodStat CPTED Subcommittee will work with residents to reinstate the Tenant Patrol within each building. The NeighborhoodStat stakeholders also would like to put into place a meet-and-greet your neighbor initiative, designed to improve familiarity between residents and increase the ability of residents to act as the "eyes and ears" for common spaces. The team also intends to designate residents to a welcoming committee.

¹ <https://www.constructiondive.com/news/5-technologies-that-are-making-smart-buildings-smarter/429582/>

² <https://breakfastny.com/points>

³ <http://www.signsystem.com/the-future-of-wayfinding/>

3. Garden Maintenance

Challenge: NYCHA requires that all land usage for community gardens be registered within their offices for approval to cultivate that specific location. The majority of gardens throughout the Queensbridge Houses have not been registered, which makes garden ownership identification difficult, and generally results in neglected or poorly maintained gardens. Regardless of these issues of ownership, there are gardens on campus (registered and unregistered) that are overgrown with weeds, dead plants, rotted sticks, and debris. Gardens that have not been properly secured attract rodents and squirrels.

Suggested Next Steps:

- **Encourage garden registration throughout the campus.** NYCHA can work with the NeighborhoodStat team to identify garden owners and support them in the process of registering their gardens. The NeighborhoodStat team can also share gardening supplies that support maintenance and sustainability.
- **Provide garden-focused education and support to garden resident managers.** Green Thumb and Green City Force are two capable partners for this purpose. Furthermore, the establishment of effective garden partnerships can support continued education, maintenance, sustainability and upkeep.
- **Install flower gardens and welcome signs.** As an immediate next step, the NeighborhoodStat CPTED Subcommittee will be planting flower gardens and installing at least six new welcome signs in strategic areas around the development.

D. Priority Identification | Trust | Connection

The NeighborhoodStat stakeholders recall Queensbridge Houses as a once vibrant community where residents engaged one another and took an active role in community care and stewardship. Children were regularly monitored by neighbors and their activities were communicated to their parents. In the 1970s, the quality of life for Queensbridge residents declined dramatically because of criminal and drug activity. Opportunities for upward mobility diminished. In the 1980s, gun violence and drug use escalated, the local police station was removed, and residents became even less connected. Today, residents of Queensbridge Houses continue to feel disconnected from each other.

Gentrification in Long Island City is creating additional challenges for Queensbridge residents. Housing is becoming increasingly less affordable and residents feel like they are being slowly

pushed out. New retail services cater to the wealthier residents moving to Long Island City, and less to long-standing community members. These changes have weakened community ties and increased the financial insecurity and residential instability of Queensbridge residents.

How we can work together to improve connection:

1. Young Adult Programming

Challenge: Through audits, needs assessments, and community discussions, the NeighborhoodStat stakeholder team found a lack of programming for adults between the ages of 24 and 35, who constitute approximately 23 percent of the population. Young mothers lack local social supports that could ease the hardships of raising children alone. Residents report that most community members travel from home to work or school without engaging with each other or with local resources.

While afterschool programming for youth and senior programming is available at Jacob Riis Neighborhood Settlement House, there is a lack of programming available for young adults between the ages of 24 and 35. The Resident Association once hosted GED classes and Urban Upbound currently offers financial counseling and job readiness programming to the all residents of Queensbridge Houses. While residents desired these programs, ultimately these services were not well attended. In general, more programs are needed for young adults who do not qualify for existing youth and senior programs. Adults between the ages of 24 and 35 should be a part of the development of these programs to ensure that services brought to Queensbridge are attractive to residents.

Additionally, the NeighborhoodStat team found that residents are not aware of some services offered by our CBO partners in the community. Community events are often not well-attended, making it harder to connect with one's many neighbors. The separation of Queensbridge into North and South developments has further contributed to resident isolation. Most residents go to work or school and then come home and do not engage with other residents.

Suggested Next Steps:

- **Promote and raise awareness to available resources.** Create a consistent forum to share information and exchange resources in languages most accessible to Queensbridge residents. These resource exchange strategies should focus on raising awareness of and access to existing programming at the Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement, Queens Library, Urban Upbound, Tenant Association, and other local CBOs and agencies.
- **Analyze the needs of young adults.** Deeper analysis of the needs expressed by the 24 to 35 year old age group is essential. Organizations and agencies must engage this age

group in open dialogue about existing programs, outstanding needs and interests, and barriers to access for current resources.

- **Facilitate connections between Queensbridge residents and their neighbors.** For example, the city, NYCHA, local businesses, or cultural institutions could sponsor ongoing forums co-chaired by NYCHA residents and local business owners and community institutions around a shared neighborhood vision.
- **Ensure services, programs and resources are accessible to all Queensbridge residents.** Although there are several community assets provided by Jacob A. Riis, Urban Upbound, The Floating Hospital, and the Queens Library Tech Lab, advertisements for these resources should be available in multiple languages in order to improve awareness. A communications plan that takes into consideration the size of the development should be developed with residents. Consider working with residents when developing schedules to ensure participation and maximize effectiveness of programming.

2. Emotional Support and Counseling

Challenge: One in five adult New Yorkers is estimated to experience a mental health disorder annually. The distribution of mental illness throughout New York City varies strongly by income, race, and ethnicity. For example, serious mental illness is more than twice as common for adults who live below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) than for those who live about it. 78 percent of Queensbridge Houses residents live below 200 percent FPL.

Low housing quality and housing instability has been known to adversely impact health. Researchers from Boston College and Tufts University found that children who grow up in high poverty neighborhoods are more likely to experience behavioral health challenges, to have worsened school performance, and to live with parents who more likely to be affected by depression and anxiety.

Mental health is a stigmatized topic for residents, resulting in general unwillingness to discuss mental health issues or access supportive services. In the case of mental and emotional health, stigma is the internalization of negative stereotypes, either about oneself or about the treatments and services available. Where it exists, stigma is counterproductive and can worsen the overall outcomes of those who internalize certain stereotypes.

Suggested Next Steps:

- **Host conversations and workshops to educate residents about mental health and emotional wellbeing.** Introduce mental health workshops to residents in an effort to help

reduce the stigma. As individuals become more comfortable having conversations about mental and emotional wellbeing, the subject will become less stigmatized.

- **Enlist community-based organizations to support adequate mental healthcare.** Community-based partnerships, like NYC Thrive's Connections-2-Care, could assist with psychoeducation and help residents better understand mental health needs, their own symptoms, and reduce discomfort associated with seeking help. Community-based provides could also assist by referring residents for mental health screenings or conducting such screenings themselves and then referring residents for next steps.
- **Regularly provide mental health first aid training to Queensbridge residents.** Mental health first aid improves knowledge and attitudes about mental health conditions and promotes helping behavior towards individuals with symptoms. By supporting pervasive trainings in Mental Health First Aid, stigma about mental health conditions can be reduced and resident knowledge and attitudes about mental health conditions can be improved.