

Opportunities for a More Connected Tompkins Houses

Improving Public Safety through Youth Development, Public Space Enhancements, and Community Connection



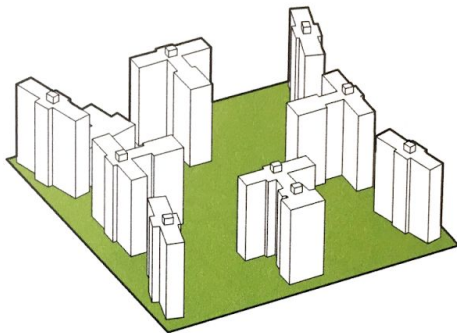
Tompkins Houses

A. Background

Located in the northern region of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, Tompkins Houses is home to approximately 2,846 residents who live in 1,046 apartments across eight buildings between 8 and 16 stories tall. Residents of Bed-Stuy identify as 53% Black/African American, 23% White, and 19% Latino. Approximately 25% of the residents are young adults between the ages of 15 and 29. The median household income is \$16,406, with 34% of residents acquiring an annual household income under \$10,000. The average monthly rent for an apartment at Tompkins Houses is \$555. At Tompkins Houses, the majority of households (55%) are headed by women. According to the Furman Center at New York University, Bedford-Stuyvesant is a gentrifying

neighborhood where from 1990 to 2014, average rent increased by 36%.¹ Since 2005, the number of households earning between \$100,000 - \$199,999 annually has tripled and the number of households earning more than \$200,000 over that same period has increased eightfold.

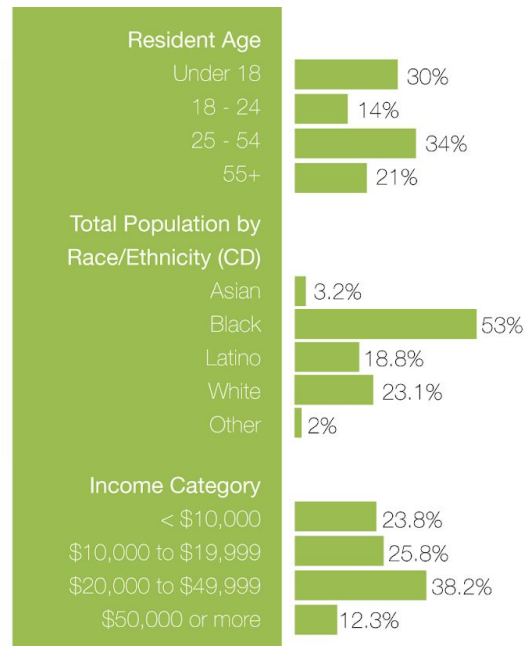
Tompkins Houses



Year Built: 1964
 # of Buildings: 8
 # of Floors: 8-16
 Total Units: 1,046
 Population: 2,846

County: Kings
 Community District (CD): 3
 Neighborhood: Bed-Stuy

Illustration: NYCHAPEDIA

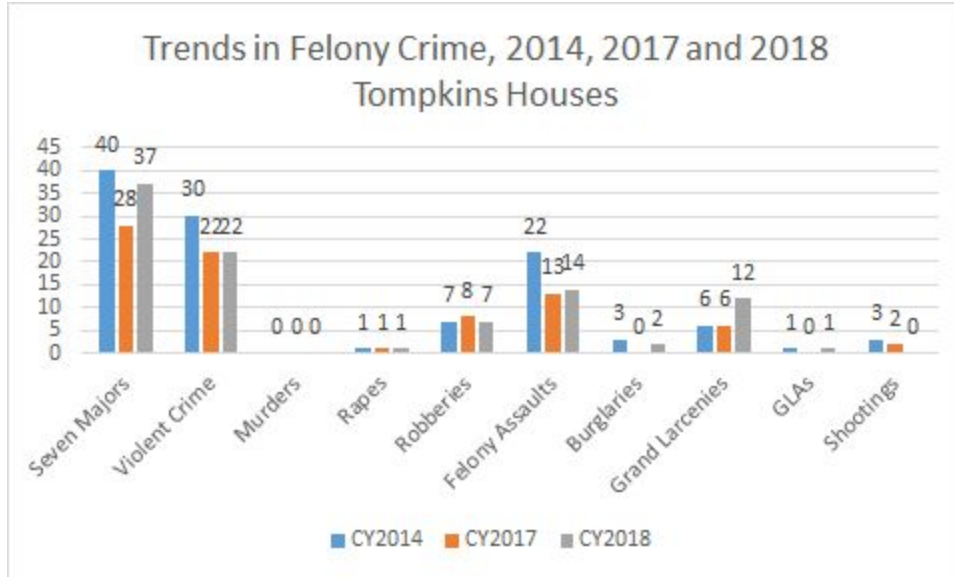


B. Crime Overview | Trust | Justice

Index crime at Tompkins Houses increased (+9) in Calendar Year (CY) 2018 compared to CY 2017, driven primarily by property crime offenses: burglaries increased (+2), grand larcenies increased (+6), and grand larceny autos (+1) increased.² Shooting incidents also decreased (-2) in CY 2018 compared to CY 2017. Index crime and violent crime are both down from 2014, when MAP began.

¹ Gentrifying neighborhoods are defined by the Furman Center at New York University as a sub-borough area that was low-income in 1990 and experienced rent growth above the median SBA rent growth between 1990 and 2010-2014.

² 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 | Opportunity | Youth Development

Approximately 25% of Tompkins Houses residents are between the ages of 15 and 29. In Community District (CD) 3, where Tompkins Houses is located, almost 20% of youth are between the ages of 16 - 24 are out of school and out of work. In Tompkins Houses, 39% of children under 18 live in households headed by single mothers or kinship caregivers.

High school graduation rates are lower than the citywide average in CD 3. These educational challenges likely have implications for future employment, and this is reflected in Bedford-Stuyvesant’s unemployment rate, which is also higher than the citywide average.³ Limited communal space and lack of relevant programming likely contribute to the higher levels of youth disengagement that are present at Tompkins Houses. Many youth reported that in addition to having limited gathering spaces, they also had limited access to vocational/job training, mentorship, or arts-based classes or workshops.

The Tompkins Community Center, which is operated by Grand Street Settlement, is a hub for community activity, serving residents of Tompkins, Sumner, and Marcy Houses. Some of the amenities of the community center include a computer room and gymnasium. The community center hosts an after-school program, evening programming for teens on a daily basis, meetings of the tenant association, workshops, financial literacy training, and education around intimate partner violence.

³ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/data/2018chp-bk3.pdf>

Programmatic spaces are in high-demand at the community center. On many occasions, these space limitations result in regularly scheduled programming being “bumped” or displaced to another, less ideal location. According to members of the Tompkins NeighborhoodStat team, the community center appears to prioritize community workshops for programmatic space above the regularly scheduled after-school programs. Resultantly, after-school participants are forced to utilize the gymnasium stage, instead of more suitable programmatic spaces for their activities. This displacement is also experienced by teens. If an evening meeting is scheduled at the same time as the teen hours, teens are forced to occupy the small community room.

For many community residents, especially the teenagers, the computer room within the community center is the only available space for teens to utilize while the gymnasium is occupied. Like the gymnasium, the computer room is also frequently obligated and doubles as a meeting space. However, the small room isn’t the ideal space to host community gatherings and cannot comfortably hold more than twenty individuals.

Given the competing demands for the limited space within the community center, there are circumstances where teens choose to remain outside of the community center or return home. Further complicating the issue of space availability is the general community sentiment that available youth programming is not ideal or desirable. Without programming that addresses the needs and interests of the youth in the community, the likelihood of long-standing, impactful, and sustainable youth engagement is diminished.

How we can work together to foster youth development:

The NeighborhoodStat team has taken the first steps toward identifying ways for residents to partner with the City to support youth development at the Tompkins Houses.

1. Remedy communal space limitations

Challenge: The Tompkins Community Center is a popular space for teens to congregate during evening hours. However, the lack of adequate spacing leads to overcrowding and displacement, limiting the number of youth being served at the community center. The Tompkins House Youth Council - a team of 10 teenagers from Tompkins Houses that convene monthly to identify and address issues relevant to Tompkins youth - has stated that more teens would attend the community center if more space and more relevant programming were available. When speaking to community teens about the community center, many stated that it is too small, there is no programming, and that there’s not much for them to do there. The gym itself has physical limitations that make playing basketball impossible. One youth stated, “The low ceiling is always playing defense.”

Suggested Next Steps:

- **Partner with NYCHA to review existing space limitations.** Determine if the operational needs that have resulted in the displacement of teens can be resolved. Sufficient safe spaces should be secured to ensure that both youth and seniors have access to programming at the times most needed.
- **Ensure that available programmatic spaces, like the Computer Lab, are not utilized for programming that does not require the utilization of the resources there.** Ensure prioritized access to the computer lab for residents, especially young adults, interested in using the computer equipment.
- **Work with agency partners such as NYCHA, DOE, HPD, DYCD, DFTA and local CBOs to identify spaces outside the community center for additional programming.** Spaces that support community events can foster interaction between community members, which has been shown to produce crime reduction in certain circumstances.⁴ One potential location is 760 Park Ave, where one unit is underutilized and is currently being used for plumbing storage. Currently, PS 270 supports the community center by providing additional spacing/programming every Friday night from 6 to 10 pm. Explore whether additional alternative spaces, like schools, can be used on other nights for programming.

2. Expand Youth Programming

Challenge: Research indicates that a young person’s likelihood of justice system involvement increases when they are not employed or engaged in structured educational, recreational or workforce development activities. According to available data, Tompkins youth between the ages of 14 and 24 are the most victimized and most arrested population at Tompkins Houses.

Residents within Tompkins Houses also firmly believe in the value and benefit of youth programming. The positive role modeling that is made available through both programming and mentorship is believed by residents to foster self-expression, healing, and skills development for personal growth and development.

Although many residents desire youth programming, many young people do not participate in the programming that’s available. Youth non-participation in the current programming may have many causes; there may not be enough space in a class or the subject matter of a class may not be appealing. According to the Tompkins Houses Youth Council, low teen engagement at the

⁴ Bellair, Paul E. “Social Interaction and Community Crime. Examining the Importance of Neighbor Networks.” 1995

community center is due to the sentiment that current programming is not relevant to them. When asked to describe programming that would appeal to them, youth reported that healthy cooking classes, professional development, college-readiness, intimate partner violence prevention, trauma-informed care, artistic/music development, and expanded opportunities for sports recreation were most attractive.

Improving programming for community youth requires an a strategy that improves upon existing programming, offers regular and consistent activities, and provides sufficient space to support the programming. There is currently no programming for teens during teen hours.

Suggested Next Steps:

- **Partner with the community center to optimize programming for youth and teens.** Grand Street Settlement is looking to update their programming at the end of the semester and The NeighborhoodStat team is currently working with Grand Street to discuss incorporating the guidelines from DYCD, while also making programming interesting for teens.
- **Partner with local CBOs and City agencies to develop new programming and/or support existing proposals for youth development programming.** The Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design subcommittee of the NeighborhoodStat team, in collaboration with Grand Street Settlement, CASES, and DOP, has submitted a proposal to establish a stipended music mentorship program and life coach program targeted at youth aged 16-24. Other recommended programs include healthy cooking classes, trauma-informed care and support groups, mental health support, peer support, college-readiness, artistic/music development, and expanded opportunities for sports recreation such as boxing.
- **Partner with city organizations to host personal development workshops.** Organizations like the Office to End Gender-Based and Domestic Violence (ENDGBV) and the Department for Youth and Community Development (DYCD) may be good partners to host workshops and programming for the youth.
- **Provide extensive workforce training and professional development opportunities to youth.** Develop relationships with local CBOs, such as Bed-Stuy Restoration and Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow, to provide OSHA 30 trainings, GED classes, vocational/job training, and extensive workforce development for the Bedford-Stuyvesant community, whose primary target audience are young adults. Connect residents to city agencies that support workforce development, such as the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development, and NYC Service.

- **Develop and execute diverse outreach strategies.** These strategies should aim to: connect with youth where they hang out; provide accessible, engaging activities in public spaces that are accessible accessible to teens; routinely and systematically distribute updated information to inform residents about existing young adult programs and enrollment requirements. Collaborate and/or provide support for the Tompkins Houses NeighborhoodStat public engagement events.
- **Help support the voice of resident youth by allowing teens to actively participate in deciding programming needs.** Integrate youth culture into programs, including in the text and design of outreach materials, and continuously work to ensure youth are given employment opportunities.

D. Priority Identification | Trust | Connection

Often attributed to long-standing interdevelopmental disputes with residents of Borinquen and Bushwick Houses, violence that occurs at Tompkins Houses is cyclical and disproportionately affects young adult male residents. In March 2017, Tompkins experienced a significant federal enforcement action that resulted in the arrest of several residents for fentanyl and heroin distribution. According to the office of the New York City Special Narcotics Prosecutor, this sweep catalyzed recent spikes in felony assaults, gang-related shootings, and narcotics distribution at Tompkins Houses.

Serious drug trafficking and developmental violence concern many Tompkins residents. While on-campus index crime decreased since last year, index crime in the areas surrounding the development increased. Residents from Tompkins do not feel safe in or around campus and are concerned about “hot spots”, which are small hubs of illegal and anti-social activity.

One such hotspot is an area adjacent to the basketball courts. Residents refer to this area as the “living room” because there is near constant loitering there. The area is concerning for more serious reasons as well: robberies, assaults and thefts often occur near the “living room” and residents avoid the area for that reason. Those loitering around the “living room” are often very noisy, too. Residents report that they play loud music, use profane language at high volumes, and ride motorbikes within the development. Residents also report that those spending time there frequently smoke marijuana and publicly consume alcohol. The excessive noise created in the area disrupts other residents who may be looking to spend time outdoors during warm summer months.

How we can work together to make a more connected Tompkins Houses:

Throughout the course of the NeighborhoodStat team's convening, collective efficacy and community building has always been central to their vision of a stronger and safer Tompkins Houses. The NeighborhoodStat team has taken the first steps toward identifying ways for residents to partner with the City to support improved connections at the Tompkins Houses.

1. Improve physical spaces to support communal gathering

Challenge: Studies show a strong connection between the physical conditions of a place and the strength of community connections there. People living in neighborhoods with abundant outdoor recreational spaces are more likely to report that their neighborhood is well-cared for and less likely to report concerns about neighbors. In addition, people who live in a place they perceive as beautiful are more likely to interact with their neighbors than those who do not perceive their neighborhoods that way.⁵

Outdoor activities were popular and well-attended at the Tompkins Houses from the 1990s to early 2000s. Residents were closely connected, too; if a resident fell on difficult financial times or faced eviction, others would host "rent parties" that would raise money for them. Similarly, residents competed with one another in basketball tournaments that no longer occur because the basketball courts are in poor condition. Frequent engagements amongst residents, interventions to assist residents who were facing extenuating circumstances - these events were evidence of the high collective efficacy that once existed at Tompkins Houses.

Lately, though, external conditions have reduced community cohesion and collective efficacy at Tompkins Houses. The basketball court backboards, nets, and bleachers are in need of renovation and the court itself is prone to flooding. Because disrepair leads to underutilization, the court has become a gathering space, where some residents consume marijuana or loiter, instead of a recreational space.

Suggested Next Steps:

- **Support plans to renovate the basketball spaces.** Members of the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) subcommittee of the Tompkins Houses NeighborhoodStat team have submitted, obtained approval for, and are in the process of implementing a proposal to renovate the basketball spaces. This renovation includes small-scale improvements (hoops, nets, bleachers) to the basketball court. (Note: additional city agency support is needed to remedy the flooding issue on the basketball court).

⁵ "Soul of the Community" Dataset. Findings compiled by Gallup Poll. Sponsored by the Knight Foundation. Note: 15,000 interviews across 26 U.S. Cities, compiled 2008-2010.

- **Restore programming at the basketball courts.** Resident coaches could host basketball tournaments to promote community engagement and these tournaments are also opportunities to create healthy interactions between residents of Tompkins, Bushwick and Borinquen Houses, where there have been long-standing issues. With the renovation of the basketball courts, the Tompkins residents will also be able to provide a variety of outdoor programming opportunities (e.g., outdoor movies, events for senior citizens, Shape Up classes) to promote collective efficacy.
- **Commit financial resources and partner with CBOs to improve the quality of physical space.** Continuous beautification efforts across Tompkins will not only help bring back a sense of pride amongst Tompkins residents, but will also give residents a sense of ownership over their community.
- **Ensure that communal spaces accommodate individuals with diverse backgrounds and interests.** Criminology experts stress the importance of bringing community groups together in neutral space and increasing opportunities for gathering to promote collective efficacy to reduce crime. Spaces should accommodate special populations, like seniors, and promote safe gathering for residents of all ages. The installation of more outdoor seating will allow for more youth, adult and senior residents to participate in community gatherings and events.
- **Initiate an Environmental Ambassadors/Recycling Campaign.** Partner with environmental organizations such as GrowNYC to educate and empower residents about the importance of recycling, proper garbage disposal, and the benefits of composting to reduce food waste from landfills. These engagements are intended to decrease the amount of littering within the green space of Tompkins, while also empowering residents to become stewards of communal space.
- **Utilize art to improve public space issues.** Local artists and cultural institutions can partner with the NeighborhoodStat team, residents and local CBOs, schools, and agency partners to improve the quality of outdoor spaces with art installations. These installations can serve practical purposes like sound dampening around the living room.
- **Provide trauma-informed care for community members impacted by violence.** The NeighborhoodStat team envisions a safer, more connected community. Through partnerships with local community-based organizations and city agency partners, the Tompkins Houses NeighborhoodStat team will work with agency partners and CBOs to provide trauma-informed care to residents and community members impacted by community violence and to prevent violent crime from occurring.