

From the Inside Out

Improving safety through wellness and environmental stewardship



Van Dyke Houses

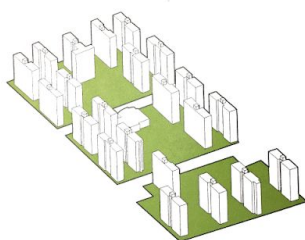
A. Background

Located in the heart of Brownsville, Van Dyke Houses is home to approximately 4,182 residents who live in 1,617 apartments across 24 buildings. The majority of the population identifies as Black/African American (74%) and Latino (21%). There are 1,455 young adults between the ages of 15 and 34, which accounts for 35% of residents. The median household income is \$19,455 and approximately 28% of residents have an annual household income below \$10,000. Women account for 49% of all heads of households and the average monthly rent for an apartment is \$434. Van Dyke residents have 72% less income than the average New Yorker and roughly 20% of Van Dyke residents are under or unemployed. In Brownsville, 37% of residents live below the Federal Poverty Level; it is the poorest neighborhood in Brooklyn and the

seventh-poorest neighborhood in New York City.

Van Dyke Houses

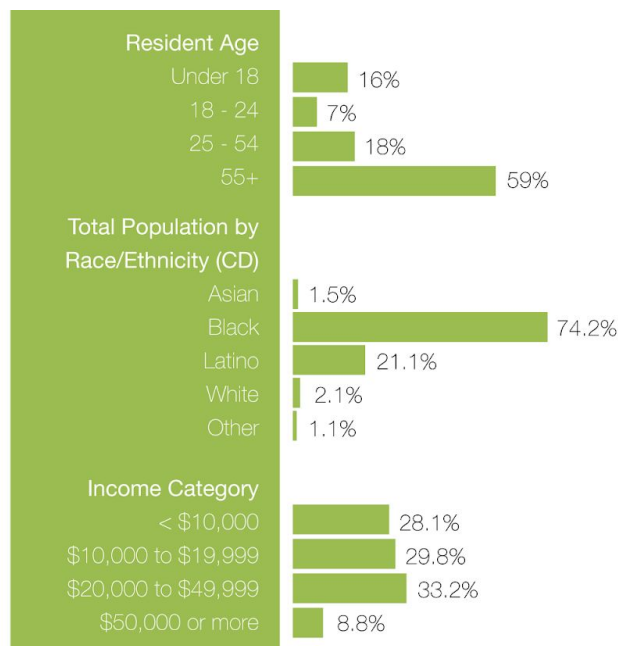
County: Kings
Community District (CD): 16
Neighborhood: Brownsville



Van Dyke I
Year Built: 1955
of Buildings: 23
of Floors: 3-14
Total Units: 1,603
Population: 4,053

Illustration: NYCHAPEDIA

Van Dyke II
Year Built: 1964
of Buildings: 1
of Floors: 14
Total Units: 112
Population: 129



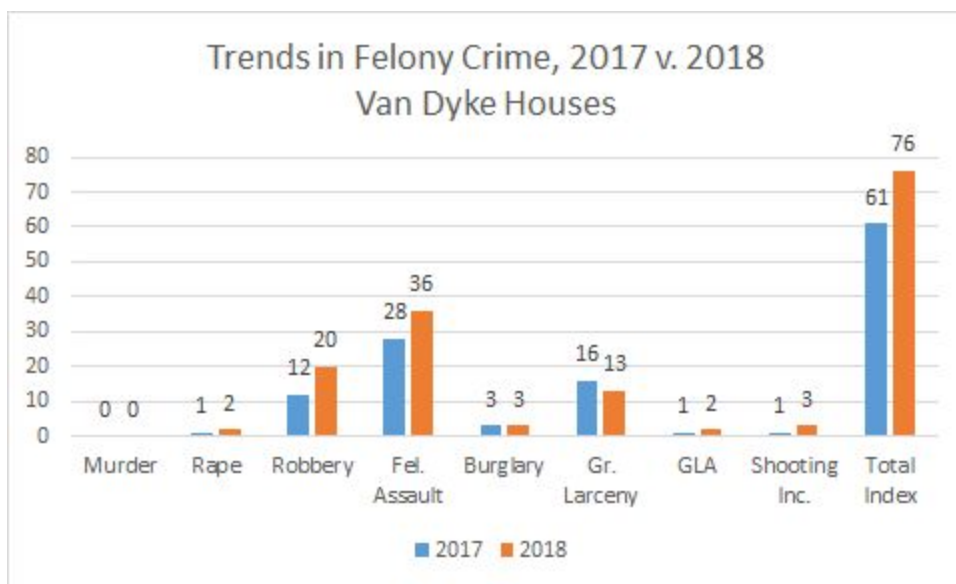
Residents report the existence of several active hotspots, which are hubs of antisocial and illegal activity, near the Van Dyke campus. These hotspots are typically located within or around outdoor spaces like neglected parks, bench areas, intersections, and buildings. Resident perception of safety is low and many residents are mistrustful of law enforcement. Despite the history of crime in the neighborhood, some residents are optimistic about the future of the development, show pride in the neighborhood's resiliency, and are eager to work toward a healthier, safer and more vibrant community. The Van Dyke NeighborhoodStat team envisions a safe and thriving community where progress is driven by resident leadership and the quality of life, health, and safety of residents steadily improves. The team believes that investing in initiatives that encourages health and wellbeing, connecting residents to services, and improving the built environment will support residents' quality of life, increase public safety, and encourage community building.

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

Between 2015 and 2018, Van Dyke residents witnessed large-scale drug raids, fraud busts, gang takedowns, and an officer-involved shooting. In the summer of 2018, 27 suspects were charged in connection with a major drug trafficking operation that distributed large quantities of powder and crack cocaine, heroin, and oxycodone pills. In the months preceding the takedown, residents

recalled escalating drug use and assaults within the development. In 2015, 12 alleged members of the Van Dyke Money Gang were arrested and charged with fraud, aggravated identity theft, and money order schemes. These white-collar crimes were only a portion of the crew’s illegal revenue-generating activities that were orchestrated from within Van Dyke Houses.

Van Dyke Houses was one of two MAP developments that experienced increases across all major crime categories - index, violent, DV crime and shootings - in 2018. Crime increases in CY 2018 were driven by more rapes (+1), more robberies (+8), more felony assaults (+8), and more grand larceny autos (+1). Shooting incidents also increased in CY 2018 (+2). In CY 2018, Van Dyke Houses had the most robberies across the 15 MAP sites. Notably, index crime has increased by 14 since 2014 when MAP began.



C. Priority Identification | Design | Infrastructure and Maintenance

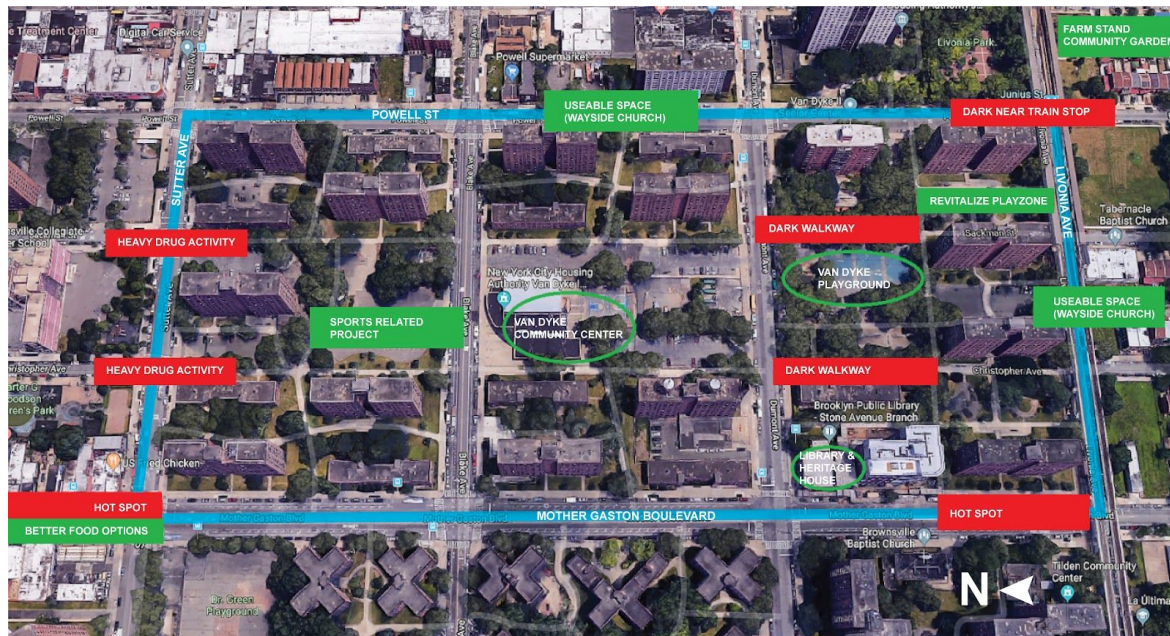
There are clear public safety benefits to incorporating healthy design strategies and green infrastructure into public spaces. A new body of evidence suggests that cities can reduce both property crime and violent crime by investing in the beautification, upkeep and maintenance of vacant and neglected spaces.¹ Research suggests that access to greens spaces, like gardens and parks, can reduce symptoms of depression and the incidence of asthma, obesity, and heart disease.² Well-kept green spaces encourage people to spend more time outside, which also provides informal surveillance. Well-designed public spaces promote community pride and neighborliness, which are both crime deterrents. Studies show that rates of violence are lower in neighborhoods that have strong “collective efficacy”, or trust between neighbors to work

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<https://www.citylab.com/solutions/2016/04/vacant-lots-green-space-crime-research-statistics/476040/>

² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0013935118303323>

together to maintain safety, order, and cleanliness. Community activities support people working together, by helping neighbors get to know each other, improving trust and therefore improving safety³. When you layer on public programs, public spaces can become sustained community assets that address underlying drivers of crime.



VAN DYKE HOUSES NSTAT | NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS & CHALLENGES

Neighborhood
STAT
Van Dyke Houses

How we can work together to improve infrastructure and maintenance:

The NeighborhoodStat team has taken the first steps toward identifying ways for residents to partner with the City to improve infrastructure and maintenance at Van Dyke Houses. The NeighborhoodStat team has identified several high impact investment areas at Van Dyke:

1. NYCHA Play Area and Green Space Improvements

Challenge: Play areas at Van Dyke Houses, which commonly include jungle gyms and play equipment, have not been renovated in recent memory. Play equipment is outdated and cracked; unlevel concrete creates tripping hazards. Across Van Dyke Houses, play areas intended for socializing and recreation now seem barren and isolated. In front of 361 Livonia Avenue and 385 Livonia Avenue, benches surrounding play areas are popular hangout spots for young adults who some residents feel harass neighbors and use or sell drugs. Play equipment within these neglected playgrounds obscures sightlines and lighting to create dim, hidden spaces that threaten neighborhood safety. In addition to the neglected play areas, there is a shortage of desirable open

³ Sampson, R. "Neighborhood Collective Efficacy Does Help Reduce Violence." National Institute for Justice. 1998

green spaces throughout the Van Dyke campus. Compared to the expertly landscaped public spaces on adjacent privately developed land, the absence of well-maintained spaces throughout the development increases residents' feelings of inequity and abandonment.

Suggested Next Steps

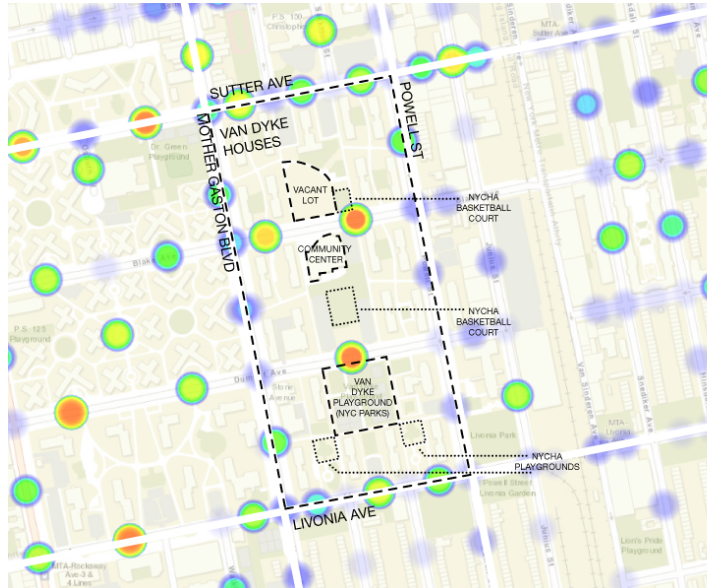
- Identify priority outdoor areas for improvement and maintenance by developing a maintenance plan that encourages partnerships between resident groups and the NYCHA Operations Unit.
- Provide and prioritize partnerships that support the acquisition of new play equipment, like slides and swings, and other features to activate open space (i.e., Uni Project, BPL, NYC Parks, Kaboom).
- Dedicate annual resources to support community-based revitalization projects that encourage intergenerational socializing, bolster community stewardship, and increase outdoor youth and family activity.
- Support greening and open space improvement projects (e.g., flower planting, vegetable gardens, bench repairs, ground markings, and murals) in non-play area locations; use these projects to educate residents on site maintenance and stewardship and encourage resident participation.

2. Van Dyke Playground

Challenge: The Van Dyke Playground, which is managed by the Department of Parks and Recreation, is nestled in the heart of Van Dyke Houses. Despite its central location, residents report that the park is underutilized. Many residents walk through the park during daytime hours, but few stay for recreation and leisure. The Van Dyke Playground has poor lighting, crooked, old basketball hoops, potholes, flooding conditions, a dirty handball court, broken chess tables, rats, overgrown tree branches that reportedly block the view of NYCHA security cameras, and no age-appropriate equipment for teens. While residents of all ages enjoy playing or watching basketball at Van Dyke Houses, outdoor basketball tournaments, which were once a part of the development's history, no longer occur. Additionally, a pop-up gym program last summer was popular but discontinued due to insufficient funding. At present, the playground has no exercise equipment available. The popularity of the pop-up gym indicates a need for adult residents to have access to equipment that supports physical activities within their local community park.

Suggested Next Steps

- Improve resident wellness and increase community connection by developing strategic partnerships and/or identifying financial resources to invest in the Van Dyke Playground.
- Invest in resident-led health and wellness programs, like basketball coaching, intramural leagues and fitness training to promote and sustain positive prosocial activities in the playground and community.
- Encourage active living through public art/design by contributing new public artwork developed and installed by local artists, in partnership with city agencies (i.e., DOHMH, Parks).
- Support plans of the Van Dyke CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) subcommittee to implement health education and programming that improve access to food options and open space.



Concentration of criminal complaints near Van Dyke Houses for Calendar Year 2018. (Items in red reflect greatest concentration of complaints)

3. Department of Environmental Protection

Challenge: Bioswales (also known as “rain gardens”) are meant to retain or reduce stormwater runoff and prevent flooding while also providing pleasing aesthetics. The bioswales around Brownsville are not well maintained; they are overgrown, filled with trash, and commonly overrun with rodents.

Suggested Next Steps

- Improve maintenance of bioswales to improve the cleanliness and condition of public spaces at Van Dyke, while providing the intended benefit of reducing flooding through rainwater retention.
- Implement information signage and public education program in partnership with DEP and/or the Mayor's Office of Resiliency. Many residents do not understand the function of the bioswales and information signage would help residents understand their purpose and utility.

D. Priority Identification | Opportunity | Health and Wellbeing

The recent *Undesign the Redline* exhibit hosted at the Brownsville Neighborhood Health Action Center illustrates a history of government and business practices (i.e., urban renewal, blockbusting, predatory banking, mass incarceration) that resulted in systemic disinvestment in Brownsville. Neighborhoods like Brownsville that were affected by redlining continue to experience adverse health impacts, higher rates of crime and incarceration, and limited access to community resources and healthy food.⁴ In addition, a history of government disinvestment and neglect may have undermined previous attempts to engender resident trust in government actors.

Community crime and violence can have serious short- and long-term effects on mental and physical health. In New York City, Brownsville ranks fourth in both alcohol- and drug-related hospitalizations.⁵ For some residents, excessive drug use has negatively impacted their experience in the development. Residents have reported open-air drug use inside and outside the development and some residents have observed strangers using drugs within building hallways. Drug use, and associated activities, are common at the intersection of Mother Gaston and Sutter Avenue to the northwest of the Van Dyke Houses. This location is close to schools, playgrounds, transportation and grocery stores and impacts the quality of life in the neighborhood.

Residents are also concerned about access to healthy food options. According to the 2015 DOHMH Community Health Profile, Brownsville has the highest incidence of sugary drink consumption in New York City. Brownsville is the 11th highest ranking community in New York City for rates of obesity, with 32% of adults reportedly obese and is the 6th highest ranking community in New York City for rates of diabetes, with 15% of adults reportedly diabetic.

⁴ <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/winter11/highlight2.html>

⁵ Drug- and/or alcohol-related hospitalizations reflect acute and chronic consequences of substance misuse.

1. Drug Use Prevention and Assistance

Challenge: Residents are witnessing growing opioid and intravenous drug use. In addition to street drugs, prescription drugs are seemingly growing in popularity. Brownsville has the fourth highest rate of drug-related hospitalizations in the city. High drug hospitalizations are correlated with acute and chronic consequences of substance misuse.

Suggested Next Steps

- Work with local public health partners to increase access and connection to interventions like clinical services or opioid replacement therapy.
- Increase education and awareness campaigns about the effects of opioids and other drugs, including those targeting friends and family of individuals affected by opioid abuse.
- Work with local rehabilitation centers and other partners to removing barriers to rehabilitation and treatment services, and distribute or increase access to naloxone, a powerful overdose antidote.
- Increase mental health outreach and homeless services around the development.
- Official designation of schools and playgrounds as drug free safe zones.

2. Healthy Food Options

Challenge: Residents in Brownsville have a strong interest in creating partnerships that will train residents for careers in the food industry and bring healthy produce closer to the community by activating unused spaces. The success and popularity of programs like the Brownsville Community Culinary Center (BCCC), a culinary training program and restaurant, demonstrates the high level of community interest in food-related careers.

However, Brownsville is marked by a lack of accessible healthy food venues. The absence of high quality food establishments is a missed opportunity to provide training and job opportunities for local young people. While Van Dyke residents identified Mother Gaston Boulevard at Sutter Avenue as a main food hub, the options there are generally limited to fried, sugar-filled, or highly processed foods. The few healthy choices in the neighborhood, like the Melting Pot/Brownsville Community Culinary Center (BCCC), are near crime hot spots and many Van Dyke residents are uncomfortable accessing them. The two main supermarkets in Brownsville -- Cherry Valley on Mother Gaston Boulevard and Food Bazaar on Junius Street -- and reportedly include sub-par food quality. Some residents travel to other neighborhoods to shop, sometimes favoring bulk stores like BJ's and Costco.

Suggested Next Steps

- Enhance partnerships with local growers and producers like Isabahlia Farms and Project Eats to improve community health and boost the Brownsville economy with new opportunities for commerce and employment.
- Expand access to fresh produce via farmers markets with a variety of acceptable payment methods (i.e., health bucks, WIC, SNAP).
- Connect Van Dyke residents to more food education programs like culinary classes and nutrition classes.