Bushwick, Brooklyn

OPEN SPACE INDEX
**BUSHWICK**

- Bushwick Study Area
- Newtown Creek
- Cemeteries
  - MTA L Subway
  - MTA M Subway
  - MTA J, Z Subways
  - MTA A, C Subways

**NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY DEVELOPMENTS**

**NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS**
(1 to 20 acres in size)

1. Bushwick Playground
2. Fermi Playground
3. Green Central Knoll
4. Heckscher Playground
5. Hope Ballfield
6. Irving Square Park
7. Maria Hernandez Park
8. Thomas Boyland Park

**POCKET PARKS**
(Less than 1 acre)

9. Arboleda de Niños/Children’s Grove
10. Beaver Noll Park
11. Evergreen Playground
12. Freedom Triangle
13. Garden Playground
14. Heisser Triangle
15. Know Waste Lands
16. Rudd Playground
17. Tiger Playground

**COMMUNITY GARDENS**

18. Aberdeen Street Community Garden
19. Concerned Citizens of Grove Street Community Garden
20. Contented Heart Garden
21. Cooper Street Block Buster Block Association
22. Cooper Street Community Garden
23. Decatur Street Community Garden
24. El Garden
25. Eldert Street Garden
26. Good Life Garden (Goodwin Gardens)
27. Granite Street Block Association
28. Infant Jesus Community Garden
29. La Finca Community Garden
30. Madison Square Garden Association
31. Madison Street Community Garden
32. Moffat Garden
33. People’s Garden
34. Woodbine Street Block Association Garden
Bushwick

Bushwick is a neighborhood in north Brooklyn on the Queens border. From its roots as a European residential neighborhood, to an industrial working-class Latinx and Black community, and now a booming real estate market for developers, this neighborhood is home to many community gardens. Its small open spaces are in need of investment to handle an increase in users as the neighborhood density grows.

Forty years ago, Bushwick was caught in the worst of New York City’s fiscal crisis. Owners burned buildings for insurance payouts, which displaced community members and left empty lots behind. The neighborhood has slowly recovered due to community resilience and considerable public investment. Starting in 2000, many empty lots were bought by developers, and new buildings were developed in the west, closer to Manhattan and transit connections. These developments quickly grew out of scale with the neighborhood character.

In 2014, community representatives started collaborating with local Council Members Espinal and Reynoso to design a local plan to preserve the community’s character, reduce the out-of-scale development, bring back industrial jobs, and create affordable housing. This process culminated in the 2018 Bushwick Community Plan, a comprehensive set of recommendations including housing, transportation, and open space, which was sent to the Department of City Planning (DCP) for consideration.

In April 2019, the City released its official rezoning plan for Bushwick: some parts align with the recommendations of the Bushwick Community Plan, but many local priorities were not included. The rezoning’s public process provides critical opportunities for Bushwick residents to advocate for the priorities articulated in the Plan, including for open space.

Bushwick Demographics

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>51%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 and under</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-64</td>
<td>70%</td>
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<tr>
<td>65 and older</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race and Ethnicity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Rosemary’s Playground
Open Space Goals and Local Results

For each Open Space Goal in the Index, NY4P staff gathered data from publicly available sources to answer the question, “Does Bushwick meet this goal?” Information on population comes from the US Census’ American Community Survey, and most open space amenity and acreage information comes from the New York City open data platform. Visit www.ny4p.org/data-and-research for methodology.

**AMOUNT OF OPEN SPACE**

**Total Open Space**

All acres of open space in the neighborhood that provide space for play, relaxation, and contact with nature

Citywide Goal: 2.5 acres per 1,000 people
Bushwick Result: 0.2 acres per 1,000 people

**Active Open Space**

All acres of playgrounds, fields, courts, rec centers, and other active open spaces

Citywide Goal: 1 acre per 1,000 people
Bushwick Result: 0.1 acres per 1,000 people

**Playgrounds**

Places for play with things like swings, climbing frames, water features, sand boxes, or other play areas

Citywide Goal: 2 acres per 1,250 kids
Bushwick Result: 2.3 acres per 1,250 kids

**Athletic Fields**

Fields for sports like soccer, football, cricket, baseball, rugby, and field hockey, as well as outdoor ice rinks

Citywide Goal: 1.5 per 10,000 people
Bushwick Result: 1 per 10,000 people

**Courts**

Courts for playing sports like basketball, handball, volleyball, tennis, and bocce

Citywide Goal: 5 per 10,000 people
Bushwick Result: 2.7 per 10,000 people

**Recreation Centers**

Indoor recreation centers operated by NYC Parks, and other indoor facilities with similar fees and public access

Citywide Goal: 0 per 10,000 people
Bushwick Result: 0 per 10,000 people

**Passive Open Space**

All acres of lawns, esplanades, plazas, beaches, natural areas, planted areas, and community gardens

Citywide Goal: 1.5 per 10,000 residents
Bushwick Result: 0.2 per 10,000 residents

**Community Gardens**

All GreenThumb gardens and other community gardens with public access

Citywide Goal: 1 per 20,000 residents
Bushwick Result: 1.6 per 20,000 residents
NY4P studied the area of Brooklyn within the Community Board 4 boundaries, which includes Bushwick.

### ACCESS TO OPEN SPACES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pocket Parks</th>
<th>Neighborhood Parks</th>
<th>Large Parks</th>
<th>Citywide Goal</th>
<th>Bushwick Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parks smaller than 1 acre in size</td>
<td>Parks larger than 1 acre but smaller than 20 acres in size</td>
<td>Parks larger than 20 acres in size</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PARK MAINTENANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cleanliness</th>
<th>Overall Condition</th>
<th>Citywide Goal</th>
<th>Bushwick Result</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NYC Parks’ Park Inspection Program rating based on the presence of litter, glass, graffiti, weeds, and ice</td>
<td>NYC Parks’ Park Inspection Program rating for overall park maintenance conditions</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban Tree Canopy</th>
<th>Citywide Goal</th>
<th>Bushwick Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The layer of tree leaves, branches, trunks, and stems, that cover the ground when viewed from above</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# Findings and Recommendations

## Findings

**ACCESS**

Bushwick is severely underserved in open space, with just 0.2 acres of open space for every 1,000 residents. No one in Bushwick lives within a ten-minute walk to a large park. There are many community gardens, but they are not well known. In the past, walking to and within local parks was considered dangerous: residents often avoided them. Open spaces are now safe, but as the neighborhood develops and residents are displaced from the western side of the neighborhood, they lose access to those improved open spaces. There is no wayfinding information to tell residents where open spaces are or the safest routes to get to them.

## Recommendations

1. To make existing open spaces more accessible and to create new open spaces, the Parks Without Borders treatment should be given to existing parks in Bushwick, such as Maria Hernandez Park, and public land adjacent to NYC Department of Education (DOE) and New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) properties should be made accessible to the public where possible.

2. New developments in the area should dedicate a portion of their floor area to public or private open space, to lessen the usership demand on existing open spaces.

3. To make navigating to open spaces easier, multilingual English and Spanish wayfinding signage should be established around the neighborhood. It should highlight open space hours and history, and show how to get to the closest large park, Highland Park. This could be carried out by NYC Department of Transportation (DOT) in collaboration with NYC Parks, GreenThumb, and local community- and arts-based organizations.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

The maintenance of Bushwick’s open spaces falls short of Index goals in NYC Parks’ own inspections and based on neighbor testimony gathered as part of NY4P’s research. Litter is rampant in open spaces and on the streets. While the 47 playgrounds in the neighborhood surpass the goal, residents report that there are not enough playgrounds to meet local demand. More people with pets now live in Bushwick, creating an unfilled need for more dog-runs. Longtime residents feel that open space improvements have been inequitable, catering to the developing and gentrifying western side of the neighborhood. There is also fear that an increased population will overwhelm existing park infrastructure.

1. To ensure equitable distribution of improvements and investments, projects to expand access and to create new open spaces should be extended to the eastern and northern portions of the neighborhood. Any plan should be informed by community members, reflecting their needs and culture. City agencies and developers should work together to create new public open spaces, new dog runs, and other amenities identified by the community.

2. To create waterfront access in Bushwick, community-based organizations, NYC Parks, and NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) should work together to enact Riverkeeper’s Newtown Creek Vision Plan.

3. To better maintain existing open spaces and green infrastructure, more consistent maintenance work should be a goal for the NYC Parks staff, the DEP bioswale staff, and community-based organizations that already steward parks and open spaces.
NY4P’s Findings and Recommendations are guided by the vision set forth in the 2017 *Public Realm Bill of Rights for New York City*. Visit ny4p.org/general/public-realm-bill-of-rights-for-new-york-city to learn more.

### HEALTH

While the amount of playgrounds in Bushwick exceed the citywide goal, there is too little open space for active recreation, contributing to negative health outcomes in the neighborhood. Bushwick children suffer from increased levels of asthma and obesity, and a lack of programming and active recreation amenities are contributing factors. The fields and courts that do exist are well-loved and heavily used, booked to capacity with formal leagues, which leaves no room for informal pick-up games. The neighborhood has no recreation center to serve indoor recreation needs.

### ENVIRONMENT

Bushwick has a robust community garden presence; there are 19 gardens spread across the neighborhood. These contribute to the overall greenery, culture, character, and resilience, but they alone do not provide sufficient permeability and biodiversity. Community members want more pervious surface in local open spaces. There are too few trees in Bushwick’s open spaces and along its streets, and tree canopy covers only 14% of the neighborhood despite the potential for 40% to be covered if trees were planted and stewarded in all available spaces. Furthermore, residents fear that new developments do not have plans to replace construction-damaged trees.

### FUNDING

Bushwick was one of the neighborhoods most affected by New York City’s fiscal crisis in the 1970s, meaning it has long borne the brunt of public and private disinvestment. This is reflected in the amount and quality of open space in the neighborhood. There has been a need for both maintenance and capital improvements, and residents feel that Bushwick is only receiving funding now that developers have begun to invest. Community organizations and volunteer groups have long been the main stewards of parks and community gardens. Most of their funding is self-raised.

| **1.** To empower Bushwick’s residents to better their health outcomes and build long-term habits around healthy nutrition and recreation, more programming and education should take place in existing open spaces and community centers. Community-based organizations should partner with NYC Parks, GreenThumb, the NYC Department of Health, and Partnerships for Parks to bring multilingual programming and engagement to the existing open spaces, and to create more awareness and education around the importance of cleaning up after pets. |
| **2.** To increase the amount of active recreation space, more athletic courts and fields should be constructed on public and private land in Bushwick. Multilingual signage at every existing open space should explain in clear terms how to book space and organize activities. To align with goals related to community empowerment, NYC Parks should partner with public agencies and private developers to create indoor and outdoor public recreation centers. |
| **3.** Trees in the neighborhood should be protected and replaced if taken down for any private or public development, and new developments should plant additional trees with a long-term maintenance plan for them. |
| **1.** To increase tree canopy coverage, reduce flooding, and improve the aesthetics and quality of existing open spaces, more cover should be added to open spaces and the public realm in the form of trees and their beds, grass fields, and bioswales. Green infrastructure enhancements should be built into community gardens in coordination with their stewards and into existing parks and open spaces by NYC DEP in collaboration with NYC Parks. |
| **2.** As NYC Parks received over $8 million in funding for gardens in FY 2020, Bushwick community gardens should receive proportionate funding for improvements. |
| **3.** Trees in the neighborhood should be protected and replaced if taken down for any private or public development, and new developments should plant additional trees with a long-term maintenance plan for them. |
| **1.** NYC Parks must ensure that Bushwick parks, open spaces, and community gardens feel the results of the FY 2020 $43 million increase in citywide funding for parks operations and maintenance. |
| **2.** More funding for parks and gardens will help them improve, stay clean, stay open, and engage more residents in healthy activity. The Mayor and City Council should work together to ensure more funding for NYC Parks and GreenThumb, as well as NYCHA, to ensure improvements to their public open spaces. |
| **3.** Existing volunteer groups should be given more support, resources, and opportunities to do bilingual programming and engage their neighbors. Groups should join the Brooklyn Parks & Open Space Coalition to be connected to each other and to other resources. Partnerships for Parks should also receive more support to boost grassroots groups in cleaning, maintaining, and advocating for Bushwick’s open spaces. |
New Yorkers for Parks is the citywide independent organization championing quality parks and open spaces for all New Yorkers in all neighborhoods. Parks are essential to the health of residents, the livability of neighborhoods, and the economic development of the city. Through an integrated approach of research, advocacy, and strategic partnerships, we drive immediate actions and long-term policies that protect and enhance the city’s vast network of parks, ensure equitable access to quality open spaces for all neighborhoods, and inform and empower communities throughout New York City.

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