

The Pratt Center Story

For 45 years, a group of planners, architects and organizers at the Pratt Institute have helped New Yorkers who have far more energy and commitment than money or political power come together to build better places to live.

In 1983, *The Village Voice's* Jack Newfield praised the organization's then two decades of advocacy, using words that could as easily apply today.

"They have been the voice of the voiceless inside the closed, elitist world of developers, bankers, lawyers, planners, and politicians," Newfield wrote. "They have been asking the question, *who will provide decent housing for poor people?*" while the rest of that closed, elitist world contemplated interest rates, luxury apartments, amenities, new parcels, and evictions."

Yet core to the organization's mission all along is also the premise that much, much more than decent housing goes into building livable neighborhoods. The Pratt project has been a story about building community: constructing playgrounds and day care centers; fostering community agriculture, greenways and green building; bringing diverse communities together around the table to find common purpose in planning. Here's a snapshot of the journey that took us there:

THE BEGINNING 1963 - 1966

The Pratt Center for Community Development was born out of the desire of urban planners and educators to inform and strengthen citizen participation in planning – and to use that power to address growing troubles for New York City neighborhoods hit hard by disinvestment and poverty.

Pratt Institute Department of City and Regional Planning chair George Raymond identified a need for more effective public education on city planning, after a community-supported urban improvement plan Raymond helped devise for Boerum Hill ran aground on opposition from an array of local groups. Rallying the plan's opponents (ironically, given what was to come): author Jane Jacobs.

Raymond concluded that the public needed to learn how urban planning, done right, can build better neighborhoods. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund committed \$94,000 to fund a Community Education Program at Pratt Institute to "help community groups in New York City obtain a basic understanding of planning theory and the political and

economic realities of housing and urban renewal programs, as well as achieve a realistic appraisal of what citizens can rightfully expect of government in these several fields." To this end, the Community Education Program published the *Pratt Planning, Housing and Urban Renewal Guide for New Yorkers*, a 300-page reference on city planning terms, agencies, and procedures.

Raymond and an architecture graduate and planning student named Ron Shiffman — a keen follower and later friend of Jane Jacobs' — began working with a group of ministers on a planning study of Bedford-Stuyvesant, anticipating a city urban renewal program planned for part of the area. The project quickly came to involve other community groups, chief among them the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, which had been working on juvenile delinquency issues.

This work was urgently needed, and timely. In July 1964, Bedford-Stuyvesant was engulfed in three days of rioting following the police shooting of a black teenager in Manhattan. Four

months later the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council, working closely with Pratt, convened hundreds of residents for a day-long War on Poverty Conference at a school in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

The Community Education Program provided research to support these planning and organizing efforts, publishing a report highlighting the strengths of "Stuyvesant Heights: A Good Neighborhood in Need of Help." Subsequent research in Bedford-Stuyvesant identified hundreds of vacant and abandoned properties in Bed-Stuy; based on those findings, the program proposed a program for vest pocket parks, and Pratt Institute architects and planners collaborated on designs for playgrounds. Local residents and institutions envisioned uses for the new spaces, including day care and community centers.

To further inform local work, Pratt and collaborating groups began tours of successful community renewal projects in New Haven and other cities. The following year, Raymond renamed the Community Education Program the Pratt Center for Community Improvement (PCCI), committed to a "participant education process" promoting community empowerment in city planning.

Shiffman and community partners proceeded to develop a comprehensive plan to rebuild Bed-Stuy by training and employing local residents in construction and in the operation of community-run day care centers and other needed social and economic development programs. They also developed



Pratt planners introduced Sen. Robert F. Kennedy to a historic collaboration for neighborhood renewal



Pratt worked with the Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council (meeting above) to develop a plan for Bedford Stuyvesant



which became Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation.

Paul Lipson
Founding Executive Director,
The Point Community Development Corporation, Bronx

"We were Bronx residents who worked at a community center that was closing down, and we wanted to keep doing what were doing. The only way to keep an organization serving kids up and running was to take over an old machine shop that in had been a warehouse for Bagel Nosh, which was vacant for eight years when we got there. It was an architect's dream project.

The Pratt Center figured out a cheap way to reglaze windows, because we couldn't afford glass or proper insulated materials. Joan Byron recommended Lexan, which is for greenhouses, and that's exactly what we ordered. It was beautiful, brilliant. The space was designed based on what materials we could get donated. We could get ceramic blocks, we could get glass blocks, so they incorporated that into the design.

The architects maintained the space's high ceilings. Their design used the height to spur kids' imaginations when you walk into the center. The ceiling height indicated opportunity and openness."

the idea of creating their own organization to carry out community planning and development, since government wasn't doing that work. A member of the City Planning Commission, Elinor Guggenheim, suggested they reach out to Senator Robert Kennedy, who was looking for new models to combat poverty.

That advice sparked a relationship that would change the face of New York and lead to a national movement for community development. Senator Kennedy's staff began visits to Bedford-Stuyvesant and discussing the area's development needs with CBCC leadership, including Elsie Richardson, Don Benjamin, and future Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm as well as Judge Thomas R. Jones. Pratt proceeded to serve as fiscal conduit for Ford and Astor foundation grants establishing the Bedford Stuyvesant Renewal and Rehabilitation Corporation,

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Ultimately, RFK visited Bed-Stuy, putting his power and prestige behind a collaborative effort to fight poverty in the area. PCCI collaborated with Central Brooklyn Coordinating Council and Kennedy's staff on strategies, and advised an integrated effort to increase capital investment and build a local infrastructure for education and social services. That model influenced Kennedy's creation of the Community Development Corporation and a new federal program to fund CDCs.

Soon afterward, Pratt Center and community volunteers established the Central Brooklyn Neighborhood College, involving volunteer faculty from Pratt Institute and other local institutions and teaching Bedford-Stuyvesant residents who would not otherwise have access to higher education. One student, returning veteran Rudolph Bryant, was working as a security guard at Long Island University while attending classes there. After Bryant emerged as a leader of the Central Brooklyn Neighborhood College, PCCI hired him, and Bryant would eventually become its Associate Director. Furthering Pratt Center's reach to the public was a new publication, *Community Information Bulletin*.

BRANCHING BEYOND BEDFORD-STUYVESANT 1967 - 1972

The astonishing success of the Community Development Corporation model gave the Pratt Center for Community Improvement a platform to begin advocating on policy issues – taking a leading role in successes including the expansion of the Model Cities program and the design and financing of more than 150 day care centers through the new NYC Agency for Child Development.

In 1968, Ron Shiffman became director of Pratt Center for Community Improvement. Reflecting growing engagement with work promoting clean air and water, recycling, and sustainability, the organization was soon renamed Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development, or PICCED.



The political tumult of the moment proved a challenge for the organization's operations, as architecture students went on strike. PICCED capitalized on student desires to effect social change by opening satellite offices in storefronts in Oceanhill-Brownsville, Williamsburg, Red Hook, and East Harlem.

Another tool of social change was *Street*, distributed primarily through community-based organizations. The illustrated magazine, put together by PICCED staff, Pratt Institute students, and volunteers, was a melange of planning policy, household environmental tips, psychedelic art, urban homesteading how-tos, consumer advice, and news reports about New York City community development. PICCED published *Street* until 1975, when it merged with the publications of the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development and the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board to become *City Limits*, an independent magazine focused on urban housing issues.

Architecture and planning support for community-based organizations remained at the heart of the organization's work. With PICCED's assistance, in 1972 residents of Red Hook successfully negotiated for an alternative to a massive port construction plan that would have demolished residences and businesses. Under the community's influence, the planned port shrunk from 53 to 26 acres and the City committed to the development of affordable housing and a waterfront park.



Projects connecting campus and community included (clockwise from top) a fair bringing Brooklynites to their neglected East River waterfront, a playground for Oceanhill-Brownsville, and *Street* magazine

Ana Aguirre
Executive Director,
United Community Centers Brooklyn

“Through Pratt's research, we learned that East New York had the largest number of undeveloped lots in the city, and also a large young population and large numbers of senior citizens. When we put all these pieces together, with Pratt helping with the mapping, identifying the blocks, and helping us move through the city agencies, that's when we thought we should try community gardening with the East New York farmer's market.”

Pratt was key in developing a proactive process. Instead of responding to RFPs and chasing the funding, first we asked: What do we want? What do we have? Perry Winston was the one calling for the meetings, contacting the different agencies, chasing us, taking minutes, developing the structure, not only assuming the responsibility but asking other people to assume responsibility for planning. He also brought in Cornell Cooperative Extension. Because of Pratt and Cornell, we had credibility with funders.”

Similarly, PICCED supported residents of Williamsburg fighting the City's planned condemnation of homes to make way for the expansion of S & S Corrugated Paper Machinery Company, which had planned to relocate to New Jersey. Unable to stop the demolition, planners help secure New York City's first mixed-use zoning, which made it possible to construct new housing for displaced residents while preserving industry and jobs. PICCED also helped develop a special relocation plan that changed the rules and amounts of urban renewal benefits and creatively applied Mitchell-Lama funds to the creation of new limited equity co-ops for the relocated families.

While the Central Brooklyn Neighborhood College closed, community education continued and took new directions. The Neighborhood College precipitated the founding of Medgar Evers College and other innovative entryways into higher education, with which PCCI remained involved. Planner Catherine Herman brought an urban environmental curriculum, including a video on water quality and series of environmental posters, to schools around the city, teaching elementary-school children about city planning and sustainable environmental practices.

The organization itself was growing. PICCED's office moved three times, from 21 St. James Place to 244 Vanderbilt Avenue and then to a carriage house at 240 Hall Street, eventually expanding into the neighboring building at 275 Washington Avenue.



Architects worked with groups rebuilding abandoned housing – among them an East Harlem street gang

REBUILDING NEW YORK'S NEIGHBORHOODS 1973 - 1980

The flight of population and investment from New York City that peaked in the early 1970s proved a crisis for the neighborhoods PICCED worked in and required the organization to seek innovative responses. One of the most urgent was to make sure the funding was there for community groups to do everything from rebuild abandoned housing to create employment and training opportunities. In 1973, Congress passed the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, or CETA, whose funds PICCED would use to hire architects, support construction training, and expand technical assistance to community organizations.

Through a conference and related outreach and advocacy, PICCED successfully led an effort to compel a near-bankrupt New York City government to spend federal Community Development Block Grant funds in designated neighborhoods, instead of putting the money into the city's general budget as planned. The conference became an annual event, the Pratt Conference on Community Development (later the Housing and Community Development Coalition).

PICCED found that its expertise in architecture was becoming especially valuable, as neighborhoods dealt with two simultaneous plagues. Landlords were abandoning apartment buildings, leaving tenants without services or with blighted vacant buildings on their blocks. Meanwhile, a foreclosure epidemic assaulted some neighborhoods, partially due to corruption in the FHA federal loan program that resulted in homes being sold at inflated prices to unqualified borrowers. PICCED advocated on behalf of tenants and neighbors of foreclosed homes, taking legal action to stop renters from being evicted and to prevent the dumping of derelict FHA homes back on the market.

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A growing staff – including, from left to right, Catherine Herman, Brian Sullivan, Rex Curry and Rudy Bryant – sought solutions for neighborhoods like Longwood (above)

Addressing the mounting problem of housing abandonment, PICCED and Pratt Institute established the Pratt Architectural Collaborative (later the Pratt Planning and Architectural Collaborative), enlisting the support of Pratt architectural faculty in a joint effort to work on housing rehabilitation efforts and to engage volunteer architects to assist community organizations working to rehabilitate apartment buildings abandoned by landlords. “Sweat equity” groups working with PICCED came to include Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association and People’s Development Corporation in the Bronx, Adopt-a-Building on the Lower East Side, and Renigades and Youth in Action, both in East Harlem. To make sure those sweat equity groups had funding, PICCED brought them together with state legislators to develop a program supporting building rehab. The result was the Neighborhood Preservation Companies Act, providing up to \$100,000 annually for a community development group’s administrative costs.



Meanwhile, PICCED extended its reach as an educator of student-activists to those enrolled in other institutions: Political science students from Brooklyn College, working under PICCED’s federally sponsored University Year in ACTION program, began investigating arson and helped City officials identify perpetrating landlords in Red Hook and other besieged Brooklyn neighborhoods.

With funds from the Astor Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Norman Foundation, and Ford Foundation, Pratt Center began work to promote economic development in low-income neighborhoods.

NEW REALITIES, NEW STRATEGIES 1981 - 1992

The Reagan Revolution presented intense new challenges for New York City’s neighborhoods. As federal agencies slashed budgets the organization had to cut back staff, even as it was working to identify how to continue financing community development and housing now that budgets for those programs were being cut as well.

PICCED began by assessing the likely impacts of the Reagan Administration’s planned switch from direct subsidies of affordable housing to new Section 8 vouchers. Frank DeGiovanni, Brian Sullivan, and others at PICCED also worked aggressively toward innovative solutions, advocating for new local financing of affordable housing. PICCED pressed the Koch Administration to adopt an inclusionary zoning program, using fees on new development to finance affordable housing. (That effort presaged the Pratt Center’s successful advocacy on inclusionary zoning two decades later.) It also identified more than \$200 million – most of it from fees and taxes already collected by city and state government on real estate transactions – that could be dedicated annually to an affordable housing trust fund. A 1983 conference, “New York City’s Housing Crisis: Private Development and Public Need,” described as “a working conference on the establishment of inclusionary zoning and a housing trust fund in New York City,” drew more than 250.

By 1985, PICCED’s research and advocacy helped prompt the Cuomo Administration and state legislature to create a New York State affordable housing trust fund. A PICCED



report calculated New York City’s housing gap – the number of additional units needed to house everyone living in New York adequately and allow a healthy vacancy rate – at 622,600 units.

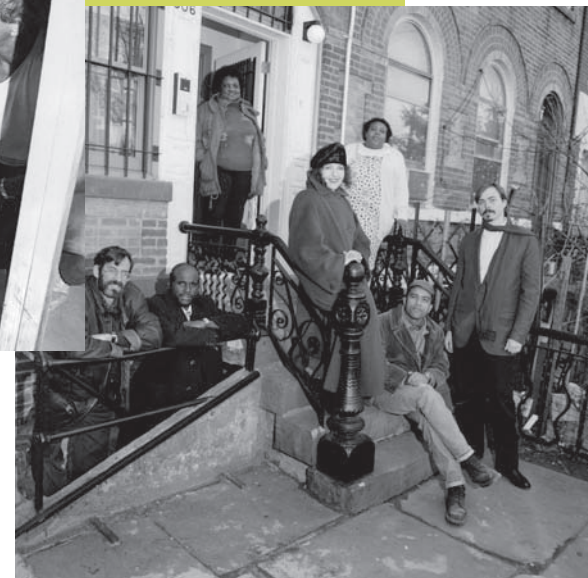
Its dual role in making policy and supporting community work made the organization increasingly visible in the public eye. In 1983, *Architectural Record* called PICCED “possibly the most influential community design center in the country,” citing projects that included a planning study emphasizing housing stabilization and community revitalization for East Flatbush; a design and funding strategy for rowhouses in Longwood; cost and design studies for a youth center in Chelsea; and design and restoration work for the historic homes of Weeksville.

Meanwhile, Jack Newfield of *The Village Voice* singled out PICCED and Ron Shiffman as “the conscience of the city in all public policy questions involving zoning, housing, and land use” as they launched the campaign for inclusionary zoning. Said Newfield of PICCED’s inclusionary zoning plan: “This is the only way to deal with the growing housing crisis without federal money, which does not exist.”

In this environment of fiscal austerity, PICCED began to train architects, planners and the staff of community organizations in how to create opportunities for the communities they work in. With the Development Training Institute, Pratt began offering a real estate development curriculum.



Pratt’s E. Perry Winston (below, on left) and Mercedes Narciso (below, standing on steps) helped East New York residents reconstruct their buildings



Staff roles evolved with the organization (clockwise from top): Sullivan housed the aged; architect Joan Byron led rebuilding; Shiffman sought international collaboration; Bryant launched training programs



Meanwhile, PICCED launched the Pratt Community Economic Development Internship, providing opportunities for staff from New York–region community-based organizations to develop projects under the tutelage of Pratt faculty, PICCED staff, and consultants. Hundreds of community development professionals received training through the internship.

Building on the strength of these educational programs, the PICCED architectural practice continued to grow. In 1987, PICCED negotiated an arrangement allowing squatters to take legal possession of 58 City-owned buildings in East New York and obtain \$2.7 million in public loans for their rehabilitation as mutual housing co-ops, organized by ACORN. Two years

later, a Lower East Side urban renewal plan gave rise to the People’s Mutual Housing Association of the Lower East Side, for which PICCED provided architectural and financial technical assistance resulting in several hundred units of affordable housing. PICCED’s technical assistance on housing finance proved equally important. Associate Director Brian Sullivan arranged financing for hundreds of units of senior housing, working with St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation and other community development groups.

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Colvin Grannum, Executive Director,
Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation
Brooklyn

“The Pratt Center is playing a similar role today that it played in the 1960s, in providing planning and data resources and practitioners to do the work more effectively. We’ve depended on the Pratt Center for the planning and data gathering, and to help us refine and develop our thinking. The planning and information-gathering has made a significant difference in our ability to collaborate with other organizations. The collaboration, the communication and the commitment to work together, is a shift in culture: to have groups be in conversation and do joint planning and goal-setting.”

SUSTAINABLE INNOVATIONS 1993 - 2002

During the 1990s, PICCED and its work benefited from the organization’s evolving network of relationships with community groups and within city government. In 1990, Mayor Dinkins appointed Director Ron Shiffman to the City Planning Commission for a six-year term. With funds from the Board of Education, PICCED architects began to create spaces for small “New Visions” schools as an alternative to massive high schools. PICCED was a co-sponsor, with Assemblyman Roger Greene, of the Benjamin Banneker Academy for Community Development in Crown Heights. PICCED subsequently helped El Puente, ACORN, and Cypress Hills Community Development Corporation secure and rehabilitate sites for their schools. Later, PICCED worked with Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition to propose redevelopment of Kingsbridge Armory into new schools.

HUD’s Community Outreach Partnership Centers program, an initiative connecting universities and communities, gave PICCED and Pratt Institute an opportunity to engage residents in East New York and Red Hook in comprehensive planning. Evaluators from the Urban Institute singled out Pratt Center as an example of an organization whose long years of relationship-building in communities enabled it to make an institute of higher learning a trusted and effective presence in community development. Continuing that community-based planning work, throughout the 1990s PICCED worked with community boards in Greenpoint/

In the 1980s and early 1990s, PICCED significantly advanced its planning work in the Bronx. Residents of a South Bronx neighborhood set to be displaced by urban renewal formed the organization Nos Quedamos, and with the support of PICCED and other collaborators, including Municipal Art Society, Banana Kelly, and the Bronx Borough President, defeated City urban renewal plans. Nos Quedamos subsequently generated its own plan for Melrose Commons, retaining existing buildings and residents. With the Bronx Borough President, PICCED facilitated a public planning process for the creation of a business, residential, and cultural heart for the Bronx as well as a comprehensive plan. PICCED also created a collaborative planning process to reuse the abandoned Morrisania Hospital in the Bronx, working first with parents at the Rafael Hernandez Elementary School and then with the Women’s Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDCo), which was able to reuse part of the hospital building for affordable housing and support services. Architectural Director Joan Byron, who started with PICCED as a student working on rehabilitation of Banana Kelly buildings, led the architectural work starting in 1989.

The organization continued to facilitate collaboration and innovation among planners and organizers. Marking PICCED’s 25th anniversary, a conference on “Uprooting Poverty” brought together 350 participants from across the country (and a panel offering views from abroad) to share multidisciplinary ideas for economic development, education, social services, and other building blocks of community success. PICCED also exchanged staff with community development organizations in Chile to promote cross-national sharing of ideas and practice.

During this period PICCED moved to 379 DeKalb Avenue, after Pratt Institute sold its former space.



Williamsburg, Red Hook, and Bedford-Stuyvesant to develop 197-a community plans.

The Pratt Planning and Architectural Collaborative grew in reach and sophistication. Joan Byron led a project to turn an abandoned bagel factory into a space for The Point Community Development Corporation, an arts and community development organization for the children of Hunts Point. Her colleague E. Perry Winston facilitated a community planning process in East New York, identifying new uses for vacant lots. Winston’s work culminated in East New York Farms!, an agricultural project and farmers market, for which PICCED provided architectural plans and help in fundraising and organizing. Lynn Gernert designed the collaborative’s first ground-up construction project: a 34,000-square-foot supportive housing facility for people with AIDS, built with East New York Urban Youth Corps and Housing Works.

In the mid 1990s, PICCED became an invaluable resource to New York City’s budding environmental justice movement. Using geographic information systems, PICCED helped groups map solid waste facilities, showing discriminatory patterns of siting and laying the groundwork for later reform of garbage disposal. Growing out of its work with South Bronx community groups on area comprehensive plans, PICCED began to help develop a proposal for replacing the Sheridan Expressway with a riverside park and creating a Bronx River greenway. While working on the ground with local groups, PICCED also

engaged them with funders, lawmakers, and other influentials in policy reform efforts. At the Rockefeller estate at Pocantico, PICCED convened stakeholders statewide for a summit to develop the beginnings of a brownfields-cleanup law for New York State. An international conference, “Beyond Brownfields: Visions of Equitable and Sustainable Development,” shared ideas on planning from the perspective of environmental justice.

PICCED also laid the groundwork for the effort to retain New York’s dwindling numbers of manufacturers. In 1997, it sponsored a conference, “Breaking New Ground,” which laid the foundation for what would become the New York Industrial Retention Network, in turn later instrumental in establishing the Mayor’s Office of Industrial and Manufacturing Businesses. With the Municipal Art Society, PICCED subsequently released a major report on manufacturing that calls for the creation of protected manufacturing zones.

September 11 posed grievous challenges to New York City. In its aftermath, PICCED convened planners and citizens to make sure that the civic vision for a new lower Manhattan, and for development in New York generally, flowed from public needs and not political opportunism. With the Civic Alliance to Rebuild New York, a coalition of planning organizations promoting a publicly accountable process to redevelop the World Trade Center site, PICCED helped organize “Listening to the City”, a public event at which 2,000 New Yorkers discussed and weighed in on plans for lower Manhattan. A PICCED study also examined the economic impact of 9/11 on low-income and immigrant New Yorkers. Under a grant from the German Marshall Fund, Pratt organized teams of New Yorkers involved in post-9/11 rebuilding to visit Berlin, Copenhagen, Barcelona and Italy to learn from European models of urban planning.



Three boroughs, three transformations (from left): Cement Plant Park on the Bronx River; rehab plans for the Lower East Side’s ABC No Rio; East New York Farms

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PLANNING AND ORGANIZING FOR A RESURGENT CITY 2003 - 2008

Ron Shiffman retired in 2002. Brad Lander — a graduate of the Pratt Community Economic Development Internship Program and Pratt’s Masters’ in City and Regional Planning, and director of the Fifth Avenue Committee, a Brooklyn CDC — became director of the organization, embarking on a strategic plan that led, in part, to renaming the organization the Pratt Center for Community Development. The strategic plan identified three initiatives for the Pratt Center — Helping Communities Build, Planning for Equitable Development, and Sustainability and Environmental Justice — all of which built on PICCED’s past work and advanced it in new directions.

Helping Communities Build continued the quest for innovative solutions to challenging community projects on limited budgets. Those included the Gratz Green Roof, planted on top of an industrial building in Long Island City; Maple Street School, a preschool created in a Flatbush subway station storefront; and a school created by parents and teachers in Cypress Hills.

Planning for Equitable Development continued the combination of on-the-ground planning work with research and policy advocacy supporting it. On the policy front, Pratt Center revisited its advocacy on inclusionary zoning and other local sources of subsidy for affordable housing. With PolicyLink, Pratt Center published “Increasing Housing Opportunity in New York City: The Case for Inclusionary Zoning,” which put a new affordable housing strategy into the mix. The Pratt Center’s research and advocacy on inclusionary zoning supported the political organizing that won its adoption in the Williamsburg-Greenpoint and Hudson Yards rezonings. The Center also played a key role in research and advocacy to persuade the Bloomberg Administration, City Council, and State Legislature to transform the City’s 421-a affordable housing tax abatement, including a significant expansion of the areas in which developers must provide affordable housing in order to receive the benefit. The report “Time for a Gut Rehab” assessed the Pataki Administration’s housing record and identified opportunities for the incoming Spitzer Administration to increase and target public money more effectively to create and preserve affordable housing. In his FY 2009 budget, Spitzer is proposing a new \$400 million for affordable housing units, and with the Pratt Center’s

support, 20-plus community organizations formed Queens for Affordable Housing Coalition, advocating a coordinated set of principles to promote the construction and preservation of affordable housing in the borough.

The Pratt Center pursued innovative opportunities to combine policy advocacy and neighborhood planning. In 2007, planners convened residents, workers, and leaders in and around Willets Point to develop principles and plans for the area, as the City Economic Development Corporation moved to raze an auto-repair district and build a new convention, hotel, retail and residential center. At the same time, neighborhood planning continued to be a core part of Pratt work. A series of community workshops in Sunset Park developed strategies for a waterfront greenway and other neighborhood amenities; subsequent work identified a range of visions for the future planning of the area and suggested opportunities to advance them. The Pratt Center advised Community Board 9 in Manhattan on its community plan for West Harlem, and assisted the community board in its negotiations with an expanding Columbia University.

Seeking to further the use of such innovative strategies in New York City, with NY Jobs with Justice and the Brennan Center for Justice the Pratt Center began a series of public

Pratt Center continues at the cutting edge: winning affordable housing for Williamsburg (top) and community influence on West Harlem development (middle); advancing green building technology in Long Island City



workshops on “Redefining Economic Development.” The project evolved into One City/One Future, a citywide coalition advocating for a development process responsive to community needs.

As development accelerated all over New York City, community groups turned to the Pratt Center for innovative strategies in historic preservation. The tenant association of Markham Gardens public housing in Staten Island approached the Pratt Center in response to the planned demolition of their homes to make way for a new, private, mixed-income development. A Pratt Center report determined that demolition was unnecessary and the structures, built to house ship

Michelle Neugebauer, Executive Director, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation Brooklyn

“The Pratt Center’s assistance helped us get off the ground and prove ourselves as a community-based organization that could do housing development. It helped us think about and create new models for small homes development that didn’t exist before in the neighborhoods or city, and it helped us pioneer a community-based model for small schools development.

Pratt Center is not just about this one project it’s working on. It’s about your community and preserving your community, meeting the development goals of your neighborhood. It’s a long term relationship, and they’re helping to help you with those other things too.”

workers during World War II, are historically significant. Although the redevelopment project is proceeding, tenant advocacy secured a meaningful right to return. Another project, a study of Brooklyn’s Fulton Street Mall, identified the strengths of this shopping district that must be preserved as the area experiences intense development pressure, including its role as a retail destination for shoppers all over Brooklyn and its historic buildings.

Sustainability and Environmental Justice, the third of the three initiatives, continued longstanding relationships with Bronx groups working to revive the Bronx River waterfront, resulting in a new park on the site of an abandoned cement plant and a proposal to demolish the Sheridan Expressway alongside it. The project expanded efforts to reduce private vehicle traffic and expand alternative options, through advocacy for a Cross-Harbor Freight Tunnel, congestion pricing, bus rapid transit, and other infrastructure improvements. It also began a program to increase energy efficiency in affordable housing. Fittingly, the Pratt Center prepared to move into a new, green building on Myrtle Avenue, scheduled to break ground in 2008.