

Equitable Community



Shopping at the Green Market

Photo Credit: Len Maniace

GOAL:

Build communication, understanding and respect across cultures and ensure future programs and development benefit the whole community, regardless of race, creed, sexual orientation, gender or economic status.



Photo Credit: Len Maniace

A Wealth of Community Institutions

Jackson Heights' residents celebrate their cultural diversity. It makes the community an interesting and vibrant place to live and visit. The often cited statistic that Jackson Heights is the most ethnically diverse area in New York City (with 63 percent of residents being foreign born, compared to 48 percent Queens-wide) engenders a sense of neighborhood pride reflected in parades, residents' active social lives and community events.¹ Nearly everyone who participated in the Green Agenda identified this diversity as a tremendous strength and called attention to the many religious organizations with interfaith programs, and the schools and cultural organizations that give life to this community and are working to bridge the divides of language and culture. However, we also heard that despite its great diversity, Jackson Heights has racial, language and economic divisions that leave some residents feeling alienated. In some cases, residents feel they've been left out of decision-making processes and local politics. In the worst instances, these divisions have resulted in bias crimes and discrimination.

Building an equitable community means distributing resources fairly, so that the benefits of future development are experienced by all. Residents feel Jackson Heights is not getting its fair share of services and facilities: though population growth in the district has been the highest in New York City, no new facilities have been added to accommodate new residents. Given this imbalance, it is not surprising that most residents in the area

feel there are not enough community centers, indoor recreation centers, multi-cultural community centers, employment centers, arts venues and libraries.² The need for day care is perceived as urgent, and overcrowding throughout the District's school system is also perceived as dramatic.³ During the 2004 - 2005 school year, over 75% of the 21 public schools in northwest Queens were beyond official capacity.⁴ The community has become a service hub for surrounding neighborhoods, placing further demands on services and facilities that are already failing to meet the needs of local residents.

Opportunities to build on programs, activities and events that can unite the community around sustainability issues and foster social change are identified in this document. Without coming together and presenting a united voice it will be impossible to achieve the positive change residents would like to see. The Green Agenda imagines a future where equity and environmental issues are considered together. Equity and fairness both for this generation and for the next must be infused into every initiative the community considers, recognizing that the fundamental needs of the underprivileged, needs that might be taken for granted by those better off and needs that often go unmet, must emerge as community priorities.

1 American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008

2 North West Queens Community Study, Pratt Center, 2006; Green Agenda Visioning Sessions

3 2010 Community District Needs Statement, Community Board 3

4 North West Queens Community Study, Pratt Center, 2006

Equitable Community



- 1. Provide Information in Many Languages.**
Publicize information on community events, environmental and social issues, political meetings, facilities and resources in multiple languages through as many media as possible including radio, internet, text message, community bulletin board, and public access television. Ensure information is accessible regardless of literacy skills.



Medium Term



Inexpensive



Community Groups



Local Businesses

- 2. Create More Public Gathering Spaces.**
Create public gathering spaces. Facilities currently lacking in the community, include daycare centers, a multi-ethnic community center, art venues, and a public pool.



Long Term



Funding Needed



Government

- 3. Facilities that Meet Our Needs.**
Assist community facilities in meeting cultural needs by employing multi-lingual staff, designating places for cultural practices, and engaging their users to self-determine their needs. Lobby local agencies to ensure the community has the schools, day care centers, recreational facilities, and social service organizations it requires to support its growing population.



Long Term



Funding Needed



Government

- 4. Celebrate Cross Cultural Connections.**
Use the arts to stimulate dialog around issues of cultural identity and diversity and explore the connection between these issues and other environmental themes. Possible programs include a cultural market place for food, textiles and music, and a community mural program.



Short Term



Inexpensive



Community Groups



5. Build Understanding and Respect.

Foster positive relations and respect across divides of race, religion and class through youth and adult programs that promote cultural awareness.



Short Term



Community Groups

6. Create Forums for Discussion.

Support and create opportunities for accessible and engaging public discussion of Jackson Heights' present and future, including informal meet-ups and workshops on the other actions enumerated in the Green Agenda.



Short Term



Community Groups

Next Steps

Initiative	Milestones for 2011
1 Provide Information in Many Languages	Make real time translation equipment available at community meetings. Host community board meetings in multiple languages.
2 Create More Public Gathering Spaces	Identify locations for new public gathering spaces, such as the former theater on 82 nd Street.
3 Provide Facilities that Meet Our Needs	Conduct a survey to identify the unmet needs of minority constituents for community facilities.
4 Celebrate Cross Cultural Connections	Initiate conversations among cultural organizations.
5 Build Understanding and Respect	Organize multi-identity discussion nights focused on specific neighborhood issues or concerns.
6 Create Forums for Discussion	Initiate conversations among cultural organizations.