

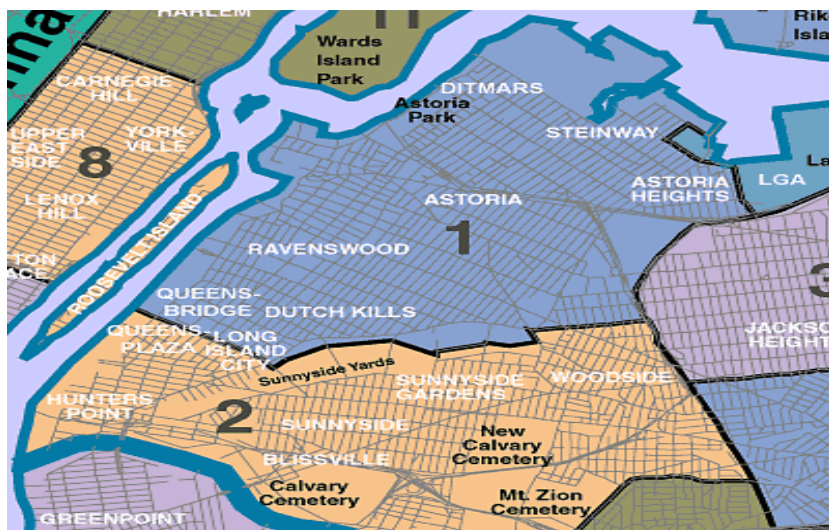
LIC;

Where Factories Meet Arts and Condos

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It wasn't too long ago when I actually started living in Long Island City. Some of my friends were living in this area and I used to visit them every week. That's how I encountered this vibrant neighborhood. Since September of 2009, I came back from Korea and decided to live in LIC near the waterfront. I was fascinated by the breathtaking view of Manhattan, beautiful Gantry Plaza State Park, and Luxury Condos. For my Urban Sociology class project, I had the opportunity to study, and introduce my neighborhood.

Long Island City, which is located in western Queens, consists of many different neighborhoods including Hunter's Point, Queens West, Queensbridge, Ravenswood, Dutch Kills, and Blissville. I live particularly in Queens West, right across the East River from Midtown Manhattan.



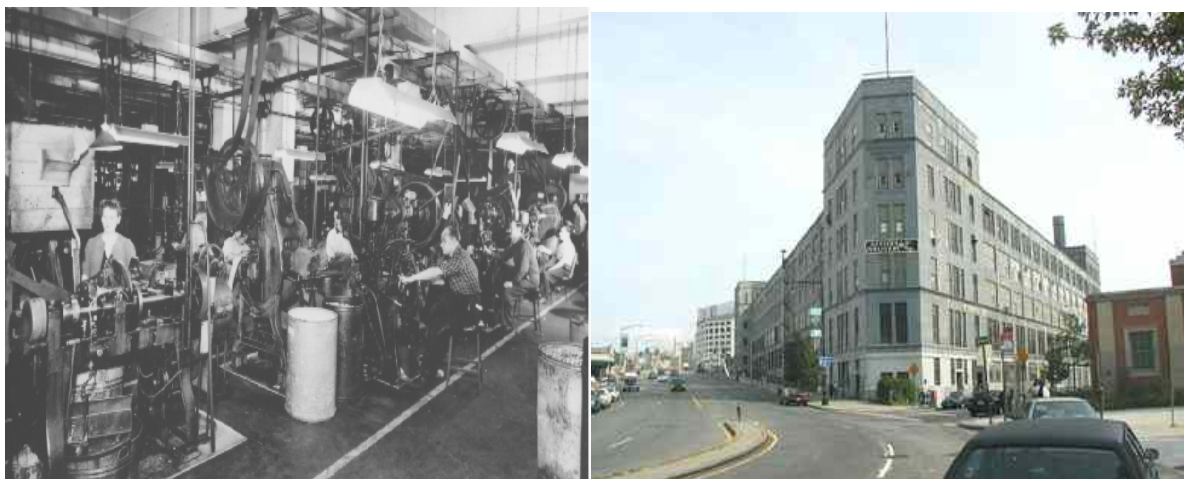
(Map of Long Island City Neighborhoods)

Long Island City keeps changing and its transformation is a perfect example of the "Cycle of Gentrification." Gentrification means a social/cultural change that high income group moves to the low income area in a massive amount of number. 300 years history of

LIC is simply repeating cycle of gentrification. ①Overcrowdness; As Manhattan was getting overcrowded, wealthy New Yorkers came to escape the city crowds and moved to Long Island City. ②Cheap land; Until the 19th century, Long Island City was mainly a farmland. Those migrated New Yorkers built mansions in this cheap area and the number of people moving into LIC started to increase. ③Transportation; Since 1800s, LIC gradually transformed from a cheap farmland into an industrial center as transportation was developed. Regular ferry service to Manhattan began and later the Long Island Rail Road opened in Hunter's Point. In the early 20th century, the Queensboro Bridge, the Hellgate Bridge and the subway tunnels were built. These important transportations encouraged further industrial growth in LIC by making it accessible to the rest of the city. ④Factories; As transportation was available, factories soon filled the area, especially near the East River Water front. These factories provided numerous jobs to people.



(View of factories and warehouses along the Thomson Avenue, 1920)



(Eagle Electric Company, 1945. workers operating their machines/ present-Thomson Avenue north of Jackson)

⑤Housing; As more people came here to work, the more houses and apartments were built for them to live. Now LIC became a “hotspot” and its land value significantly increased.

By the 1970s, Long Island City’s industry began to decline. Factories began to leave to suburbs and artists moved into the area instead for cheap rents. Abandoned warehouses and factories were used for art studios and theaters. For example, at Jackson Avenue at Crane Street and Davis Street, there is a whole block of a living collage of graffiti art covering warehouses full of artist studio. It is renowned as “5 Pointz.”



(5 Pointz)

Since the 1980s, new businesses and residents have slowly but increasingly moved to LIC. Nowadays, much of LIC shed industry for new residential and commercial development. High rise buildings, residential towers and condos have brought sky-high living to this neighborhood. Of course, the population is increasing as well as the real estate value.

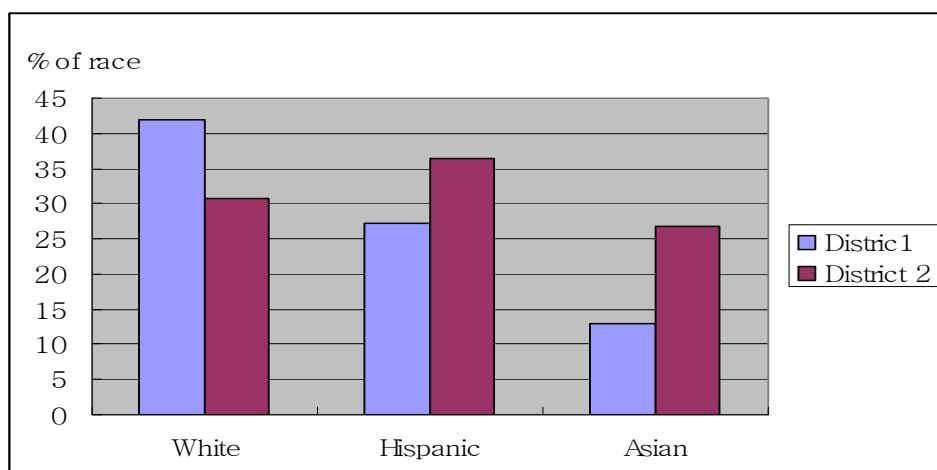


(The present view of Queens West)

In the past, most urban planning initiatives were about constructing bridges, subways, and factories. On the other hand, current urban development in LIC is mostly focused on turning the area into a “mixed-use community.” According to the New York Times article, “Cleaning the Grit off Long Island City,” by J. Alex Tarquinio, the city and the federal government plan to spend more than \$75 million for office, residential and retail development in LIC. Through streetscape projects, the city is planning to improve congested traffic pattern and to make the streets more pedestrian-friendly. Moreover, the city is planning to turn the center of Long Island City (junction between Jackson Avenue and Court Square and Queens

Plaza) into a modern business district including office buildings and commercial spaces. Although the article did not mention about the impact of this initiative on our neighborhood, construction of high valued business offices would affect the residential housing and the economic situation of the people in LIC. It's more likely that working class people will have difficulty finding houses or apartments to buy or rent because of the high land value.

In terms of demographics, White, Hispanic and Asians are dominant racial groups in both Queens Community District 1 and 2. According to the 2000 Census, in district 1, Whites are 41.9%, Hispanics are 27.3%, and Asians are 13%. In district 2, Hispanics have the ranked the highest percentage which is 36.4% following with 30.8% of Whites and 26.7% of Asians. My neighborhood, specifically Queens West, is part of the district 1 and these statistics actually match with what I have seen on my walk. I have seen many white people living in the neighborhood and as I travel toward to the east side, I saw more Hispanics and Asians and less Whites. Following maps from social explorer provide the image of demographic in those two districts:



To be civically active, I decided to attend one of the Community Board meetings in order to actually meet the neighbors and board members. I came to know that my neighborhood is part of Community Board 2, which represents the areas of Sunnyside, Woodside, Long Island City and a portion of Maspeth. The regular monthly meetings are held in the next neighborhood, Sunnyside which is located between Long Island City and Woodside on the first Thursday of every month. The one that I attended was scheduled for April 8th at 7:00pm. After school, I went straight to Sunnyside to find the meeting place and looked around the area little bit before the meeting started. Once I reached there, I asked people if they know where the Community Board meeting is being held tonight showing them the address. The first five people did not even know what I was talking about and next two people kind of knew where the location was. I finally found the meeting place after searching for it for over twenty minutes. It was not my first intention but I was able to get familiar with this neighborhood by being lost. Sunnyside was somewhat very different from Long Island City in terms of demographics and buildings.

When the time reached 7:00 pm, I went into the actual meeting room. It was at the cafeteria of Sunnyside Community Services Center. It seemed like this center normally serves for the elderly people. Few people including the board members were there setting up for the meeting. I also met my classmate, Andrew. The meeting did not start until 7:20pm and more people arrived during the meeting period. When the cafeteria was almost full, I began

observing the demographics of audience. The age range would be between 35 and 65 and there were only three students including me and Joshua. For gender, it was fairly half-half. In terms of race, although it was hard to tell their ethnicity, majority of them were whites and only few people were Asian or African American or Hispanic. This was contradicting to what I observed outside of the meeting. Most people who were living in Sunnyside seemed to be Hispanic and Asian but the actual board members and audience were mostly white.

The meeting started with the Pledge of Allegiance and we first had a public speaker from police department. The police officer came up and reported about the crimes and warned us to secure ourselves, our family and our neighborhood. He mentioned that rapes are an open target to young girls and murder and robbery occasionally happens around the area of Sunnyside and Woodside. According to him, there were even people who deceived the homeowner that they are policemen and committed burglaries.

Another interesting issue that was covered in the meeting was about the pipelines. An engineer named Bob Cortopassi gave us a presentation about the pipelines that transport fuels to our community and all over to NYC underground. He informed us that even though pipelines are the safest method of transporting fuels we rely on everyday, there are possibilities of pipeline releases. He told people that if a homeowner or farmer or a company need to dig on their property, they have to call the "811" hotline before to prevent excavation activities near underground pipeline which can result in dangerous accidents. His speech was

very informative and a lot of audience including me seemed to learn about the underground pipelines for the first time.

The Community Board meeting ended around 10:00 pm after having committee reports. The meeting was quite boring towards to the end, first because it was too long and secondly, there were not that many issues being discussed about the Long Island City where I live. Most of planning, services and news were related to mainly Sunnyside or Woodside but Long Island City and Maspeth seemed to be left out from the discussion. I got to interview with a lady who sat at the same table. She had lived in Manhattan for 32 years and moved to Hunter's Point a year ago. I was amazed when she said she feels like home in her new neighborhood than where she used to live. She attended this meeting because she wanted to communicate with neighbors and to find out good and bad things about community and to know what's going on in our neighborhood. She also commented that the meeting was too long and the board members should have managed the time more efficiently for audiences who have busy lives. After talking to her, I thought more people should attend the Community Board meeting and be aware of the problems in our community. I would not say that our Community Board meeting was totally helpful but I found out about unseen efforts and hard works of people who actually care about our neighborhood.

On that night, Jimmy Van Bramer came to the meeting to greet his neighbors. He is the democrat City Council member of District 26 which represents Woodside, Sunnyside,

Long Island City, Astoria, and Maspeth. He was elected to the New York City Council on November 3, 2009. Jimmy Van Bramer is a life long resident of West Queens and is currently living in Sunnyside Gardens. He involves in various committees including Civil Rights; Finance; General Welfare; Health; Lower Manhattan Redevelopment; Parks & Recreation; Transportation; Public Housing. He is also a chair of the Cultural Affairs and Libraries & International Intergroup Relations.

Jimmy Van Bramer works to protect and expand library services such as afterschool program, English language classes, new libraries with new technology. Due to the economic recession, the Queens Library is facing the budget cut by \$16.9 million, threatening our library service hours and more than 400 library staff jobs. Jimmy Van Bramer gathered 400 Queens Library supporters, trustees, friends of the library to fight and voice their concerns about the public libraries in Queens. During the rally, he emphasized, "Libraries are an essential part of our communities. These educational havens provide vital resources during such pressing times - now more than ever New Yorkers need libraries." He put efforts to save the public libraries which are important community services that provide people in different ages with educational programs.

Moreover, he works to develop our neighborhoods outside of his job, by serving as a member of Community Board 2 and its Land Use Committee. In May 26th 2010, Van Bramer hosted City Planning Officials and Community Board 2 with residents in order to discuss the

rezoning plan in Sunnyside and Woodside. This meeting encouraged open communication between the community and the agency on the rezoning and helped community members to understand the process of the proposed plan and express their questions and concerns. Van Bramer believes that the government should be “accessible, accountable and responsive” and he puts efforts to make this possible. He also introduced legislations to keep our neighborhood safe. For example, when the construction drilling ruptured a part of the Buckeye Pipeline causing jet fuel to leak into the street in Long Island City, Bramer introduced legislation which requires any drilling work near flammable materials such as oil and gas lines, to notice FDNY in advance to ensure the safety of New York City residents. After reviewing some of his work, I believe that he represents our community and I feel very proud that our council member is working diligently to improve the quality of residents’ life.



(Jimmy Van Bramer Sworn in before City Council on Jan. 1, 2010)

After carefully observing, studying and researching my neighborhood, I came to

enjoy living here even more. I appreciate the Community Board meetings, urban planning initiatives, and all those people that are working together to make our neighborhood a better place. Of course I also found some negative sides of the area but I have seen more positive movements in LIC. Personally, I believe in "City Beautiful Movement." My neighborhood is filled with stunning condos, apartments and parks, especially the Gantry Plaza State Park. I believe such environments can encourage civic pride and their responsibilities. My neighborhood motivated me to keep the area clean and beautiful, and it even carried me a dream that one day I will live in one of those luxury penthouses!

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