

WILLETS POINT LAND USE STUDY

By

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WILLETS POINT LAND USE STUDY

Introduction

This is a summary of findings from a study that was undertaken with support from City Council Member Hiram Monserrate through the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. The purpose of the study is to survey and map land use patterns and businesses in the Willets Point area of Queens, New York. Willets Point has been the subject of numerous recent proposals for redevelopment. The City's Economic Development Corporation released *Requests for Expressions of Interest* in November 2004 and recently qualified a small group of developers to present proposals for redevelopment of the area. The information and maps provided by this study will hopefully serve as background for discussions about the area. It was not within the scope of this study to evaluate existing proposals or develop alternative proposals. However, we have offered some preliminary assessments of current conditions and ideas that could serve as a foundation for more in-depth study of future opportunities.

During the fall of 2005, we undertook a door-to-door survey of Willets Point businesses, in English and Spanish, and a land use survey. Our team spent several days walking Willets Point and speaking with business owners and workers. The Willets Point Business Association helped facilitate access and encouraged participation by businesses. Also during the fall, seven groups of students in the Graduate Urban Planning program at Hunter College studied Willets Point and prepared reports recommending alternative approaches to development and preservation. These were presented in December of 2005 to members of the Willets Point Business Association at a session attended by representatives from the Economic Development Corporation, Queens Community Board 3, and Council Member Hiram Monserrate's office.

Contents

Summary of Findings

- I. LAND USE ANALYSIS
- II. SURVEY OF BUSINESSES
- III. A PLANNING FRAMEWORK: INNOVATIVE OPTIONS FOR AUTO-RELATED BUSINESS DISTRICTS

Appendix

Summary of Findings

- The Willets Point Triangle is an active business district with 225 firms and an estimated 1,400-1,800 jobs. Most of these jobs are concentrated in a small area and a small number of waste management businesses occupy large tracts of land.
- Willets Point is a unique business incubator that provides jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities to diverse new immigrant populations from surrounding neighborhoods. It also concentrates auto-related and waste facilities in an area that is relatively shielded and separate from the residential neighborhoods of Corona and Flushing.
- Willets Point is a unique regional destination for auto parts and repairs. There are very few areas like it that provide a variety of services concentrated in one area and accessible to highways.
- Willets Point businesses are thriving and vacancies are rare. The total assessed value of property in Willets Point is \$118 million, about \$24 million of which is privately owned land. The average assessed value per square foot for business firms is \$13.50; this is comparable to the average for industrial properties in Brooklyn, but lower than the Queens average.
- The majority of jobs are in auto-related businesses, and firms that rent instead of own property. These are also the firms that provide jobs for a mostly Spanish-speaking workforce from nearby Corona.
- Willets Point firms provide a wide range of auto-related services, have longstanding linkages with one another, and both compete and cooperate with one another. This is a rare community of businesses that would be difficult to replicate if they were to be displaced.
- Sixty-eight (68) percent of all firms have been in business for five or more years, more than half of them at their current location.
- About 90% of workers are full-time and three-fourths of all workers live in Queens.
- Due to high rents, there are many tax lots that have multiple small renters. Owners of these lots pay proportionately higher taxes per square foot. These lots tend to be concentrated along Willets Point Boulevard.

- The lack of sewers, paved streets and sidewalks is a major contributor to the negative public image of Willets Point. These are the responsibility of city government since streets in Willets Point are mapped and city-owned.
- Willets Point is surrounded by barriers that cut off pedestrian access to nearby communities and contribute to noise and air pollution. In addition, it is in the direct flight path of LaGuardia Airport. At the same time, the highways and train lines around Willets Point facilitate access to the area, providing a strong advantage to the auto-based, manufacturing, and distribution establishments located there.
- Official land use and business data on Willets Point is seriously deficient and undercounts businesses, workers, and investment. The City's EDC claims there are only 80 businesses in Willets Point.
- Over the last three decades all efforts by public authorities to displace businesses in favor of large-scale redevelopment schemes have failed.

The following steps should be taken to ensure a sustainable future for Willets Point as a center for jobs and small businesses:

- Future redevelopment proposals can easily incorporate existing businesses and the local workforce while at the same time accommodating new land uses and economic opportunities. Strategies for expanding manufacturing should be considered.
- Willets Point could become a model for sustainable, environmentally sound auto-related services in New York City. Local businesses and the city could learn from projects undertaken in other cities throughout the nation that involve new immigrant communities, including Latino communities, in cooperative community-based business development strategies.
- Establish a public-private planning partnership to include existing owners and renters in planning for the redevelopment of Willets Point.
- Promote community-based enterprise development.
- Refocus city policy towards auto-related businesses on pollution prevention, maximizing the environmental benefits of concentration, and establishing best management practices. The city should seek to improve the performance of waste industries.
- Develop training opportunities for auto maintenance workers.

I. LAND USE ANALYSIS

Willetts Point is encircled by infrastructure and facilities that serve as barriers that cut off pedestrian access from nearby residential neighborhoods and commercial centers (see Willetts Point & Surrounding Area Map). The expressways, Northern Boulevard, Roosevelt Avenue, Shea Stadium, and Flushing Creek are substantial physical barriers. However, with minimum investment, pedestrian connections with the Flushing Bay waterfront could be enhanced. A new Shea Stadium could be designed for better integration with Willetts Point (as well as Corona). There is already a good connection to Flushing Meadows Corona Park at the #7 train station, and connections to the residential parts of Corona can be greatly enhanced. But any connections to downtown Flushing will be difficult and costly because of the multiple barriers to be overcome.

The 142 tax lots on the 48 acres of Willetts Point are mostly occupied by industrial and auto-related services. The entire area is zoned M3-1 for heavy industry. The largest number and proportion of businesses are auto-related. There are three local food retail establishments and one residential unit. (See Maps on Detailed Land Use Patterns and Prevalence of Auto-Related Uses). Although the first impression of Willetts Point is that of a uniform pattern of land use there are actually several distinct types of land use:

- **Diverse auto services by multiple renters.** The area along Willetts Point Boulevard is the most densely developed and active. Property owners rent to multiple businesses, and these tend to be relatively small establishments, many less than 1,000 square feet. Individual brokers facilitate customer service. A large proportion of the renters are Spanish-speaking.



- **Large auto service establishments.** These businesses tend to be located in the northern and western sections of Willetts Point. They include auto parts and salvage businesses and several firms that have been in Willetts Point for decades.

- **House of Spices.** This single manufacturer and distributor of Indian foods is the largest employer in Willets Point, and is located near the largest concentration of auto services.



- **Waste management facilities.** These are mostly located on the northern and eastern sections of Willets Point, near Flushing Creek. However, some waste transfer sites are located adjacent to auto-related services.



Land Ownership and Assessed Values

New York City and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) are the two main public property owners in the area. The City owns the land under Shea Stadium, and the MTA owns the rail yards and adjacent parking lots.

Most land in Willets Point is privately owned, and there is very little vacant or unused land (see Ownership Map). The average parcel size in Willets Point is 15,000 square feet. However, there is a wide range of parcel sizes and

concentration of ownership. Some of the largest owners appear to be real estate firms. There are three major private landowners:

- Mina Family Limited Partnership owns eight lots
- Empire Group I Inc. owns five lots
- My Three Sons owns four lots

WilCor Realty's three parcels total 265,000 square feet, making them the largest single property owner. Their smallest lot is 53,000 square feet and the largest is 127,000 square feet. Most property owners (60) own only one parcel, 20 own two parcels each, and several own three parcels each.

The House of Spices owns the largest single parcel, 173,000 square feet.

Property values in Willets Point are comparable to values in other industrial areas in Brooklyn and Queens. The total assessed value of property in Willets Point was \$118 million in 2004. Private land accounts for about \$24 million of that total. Values of tax lots range from a low of \$17,550 to a high of \$2,025,000. The average assessed value was \$13.50 per square foot, and most property falls in the range between \$8 and \$18 per square foot. This can be compared to averages of \$17 per square foot for all Queens industrial properties and \$13 for Brooklyn. The high average in Queens most likely reflects dramatic increases in land values in Long Island City. (See Maps on Assessed Values).

In 2005, Willets Point businesses paid approximately \$1.1 million in city real estate taxes.

There are significant differences in assessed values within Willets Point. The most valuable lots are the largest ones, which tend to be located along Flushing Creek and in the northern and western sections of the area. However, the map of assessed value per square foot of land area shows that the tax burden is disproportionately borne by some landowners, and ultimately tenants, including those in the most densely developed core along Willets Point Boulevard.

II. SURVEY OF BUSINESSES

The door-to-door survey was conducted on several days in the fall of 2005 during normal business hours, in English and Spanish. The survey questionnaire was designed to include only the minimum and most important information in an effort to achieve maximum returns. (A copy of the questionnaire is included in the Appendix). Of the 225 active businesses identified in the survey, 100 responded to the questionnaire – a response rate of about 44%, which is quite large compared to most business surveys. Respondents included business owners and managers whenever present, and employees. The businesses surveyed follow a statistically similar locational pattern to the universe of establishments, providing a spatially representative sample. (See Maps on Concentration of Establishments and Surveyed Establishments).

The overall picture emerging from survey results is that this is an active business district with a variety of firms. Though most activity is auto-related, there are several large manufacturing and waste management firms. If we were to extrapolate from the total of 617 jobs found among the 100 businesses that responded to the questionnaire, there would be an estimated 1,390 jobs in the area. However, since some workers are not attached to a business address, and a few larger businesses did not respond, a realistic estimate could be as much as 1,800 or more.

Type of Business	No.	%
Auto Parts	6	6
Auto Glass	8	8
Auto Repair	41	41
Auto Body	9	9
Muffler	9	9
Junk Yard	6	6
Tires and Rims	2	2
Detailing and Car Wash	2	2
Auto Salvage	2	2
Auto Wrecking	1	1
Sales Used Cars	2	2
Subtotal Auto-Related	88	88%
Sales Work Safety Articles	1	1
Sales Security Products	1	1
Sales Indust. Safety Equipment	1	1
Construction	1	1
Manufacturing & Distribution	5	5
Distribution	2	2
Iron Shop	1	1
Total	100	100%

Table 1. Willets Point Businesses - Survey Respondents

A review of data from the 2000 Census Transportation Planning Package, suggests that the total number of jobs is even greater. In 2000, a total of 1,510 workers were counted, but this does not take into account workers with more than one job or absence from work on the day of the census. Using the Census Bureau's yardsticks for undercounting, the estimate for Willets Point would be 1,660. However, even this amount does not take into account the likelihood of significant undercounting of immigrant populations. Therefore, an estimate of as many as 1,800 jobs is not unreasonable, and the actual total may be higher. It is highly unlikely that the number of jobs declined between 2000 and 2005 when the local economy consistently grew, and given that there are now virtually no vacancies among Willets Point businesses the number may well have increased.

Among the businesses that responded 88% are auto-related. General auto repair is the largest category (41% of the total), and more specialized auto businesses include parts, body, glass, tires, muffler, salvage and sales. The overall picture is that of a large and diverse network of businesses with a wide range of specializations. In addition, there are dozens of individual brokers who normally stand on Willets Point Boulevard and arrange with car owners to have repairs done at a specialized shops. Auto parts suppliers in the area make access to parts economical and relatively swift. One large parts supplier provides parts from older cars, including antiques. The relations among the operators of auto-related businesses are often cooperative and mutually supportive, and they form a network that strengthens the attractiveness of the area as a specialized district.

There are also a number of businesses that manufacture and/or distribute steel products, oil & grease absorbents, utility pipes, safety and surveillance equipment, bakery supplies and ethnic foods. The largest employer in Willets Point is House of Spices (India), Inc., a manufacturer and distributor of Indian foods with 100 full-time employees. Several companies manage waste and construction materials: Crown Waste Corporation, Kelly Environmental, Evergreen Recycling of Corona, and Tully Environmental Inc. There are three local food retailers, a design studio, and a video and book distributor. There is one resident in Willets Point.

Most businesses are renters, about 82%.

While the predominance of renting creates a precarious situation for many business owners, there are other indications of long-term stability. Sixty-eight (68) percent of all firms have been in business for five or more years, more than half of them at their current location. Firms draw heavily from local labor markets and there appears to be a significant proportion of workers who walk to work. About 90% of workers are full-time and three-fourths of all workers live in Queens.

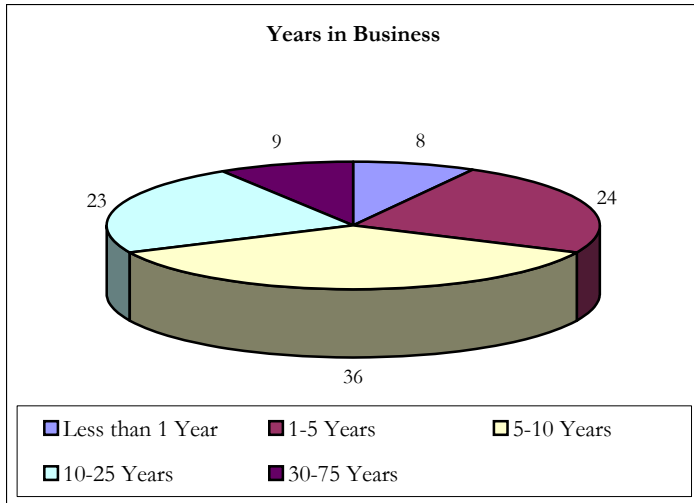


Figure 1. Years in Business – Willets Point Survey Respondents

The survey asked how much businesses pay in rent and taxes. All owners responded and the total of declared tax payments is some \$665,000 per year. 80% of renters responded to the question about rents, of which 62% say they pay between \$1,000 and \$4,000 a month. The rents appear to be comparable to many locations in surrounding neighborhoods for similar uses.

When asked what they thought the main advantage of a Willets Point location, almost all named access to customers and suppliers. Clearly, access to surrounding highways explains why many customers are said to come from as far away as Connecticut and Long Island. However, in some ways the area's main advantage is also a disadvantage if we consider the effect of noise and air pollution. Half of the respondents indicated that Willets Point is a safe area.

When asked what they thought the main disadvantage of a Willets Point location almost all respondents (88%) placed the lack of city services at the top of the list. Some complained that cable and DSL connections are not available. Others stated that police give tickets for parking on sidewalks even where there are no sidewalks. Some workers complained of dust from unpaved roads and odors from the waste transfer stations and recycling facilities. They claimed that stagnant water and the lack of sewers were health risks. Only a minority believe that there are currently opportunities for expansion in the area.

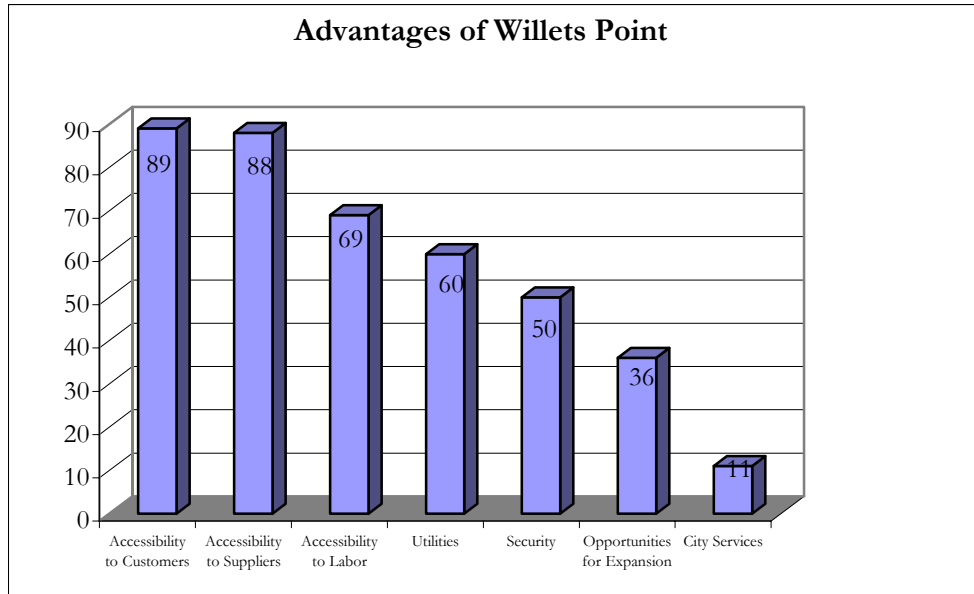


Figure 2. Advantages of Willets Point Location – Willets Point Survey

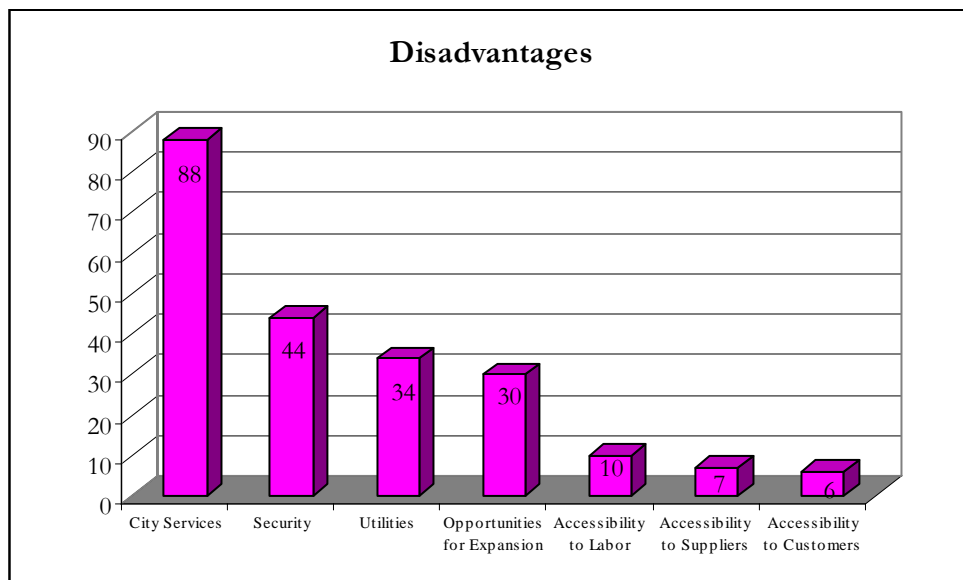


Figure 3. Disadvantages of Willets Point Location – Willets Point Survey

III. A PLANNING FRAMEWORK: INNOVATIVE OPTIONS FOR AUTO-RELATED BUSINESS DISTRICTS

While it is not within the scope of this study to make recommendations for development or preservation in Willets Point, an initial review of innovative approaches to auto-related business districts suggests that there are many creative ways the Willets Point Business Association and city government can address the problems in the area, help businesses grow, and create new development opportunities. We suggest that the points enumerated below serve as a basic framework for partnerships that can produce a detailed plan for Willets Point.

1. **Establish a Public-Private Planning Partnership.** Initiate a year-long planning process in which Willets Point businesses, workers and city agencies are equal partners. Each of the parties should have sufficient funds to hire independent professional advisors and undertake consultations in Spanish when needed. The planning process should include issues related to land use, zoning, environment, waste management, access to adjacent communities, and the role of Shea Stadium. Clearly there is room in Willets Point to accommodate existing businesses and promote new commercial and industrial development.
2. **Promote Community-based Enterprise Development.** Workers and small business owners in the auto-related industries can further develop their cooperative relations by creating cooperative enterprises that respect Latino culture and language, continue to serve as business incubators, and increase economic benefits to the Queens neighborhoods where most workers live. Two successful examples are:
 - *Esperanza Unida.* This non-profit in Milwaukee's Near South Side emphasizes service to the local Latino community. The organization operates a licensed used auto dealership where donated automobiles are repaired by mechanics and trainees. In addition to the auto department, the 58,000 square foot building renovated by Esperanza Unida houses other training programs and an alternative high school for "at-risk" youth.
 - *Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation.* This local non-profit in Roxbury (Boston) operates the Swifty Auto Mall, with four local auto service businesses occupying 5,000 square feet of space. According to Nuestra, approximately 90 percent of residents in the communities served are minorities.

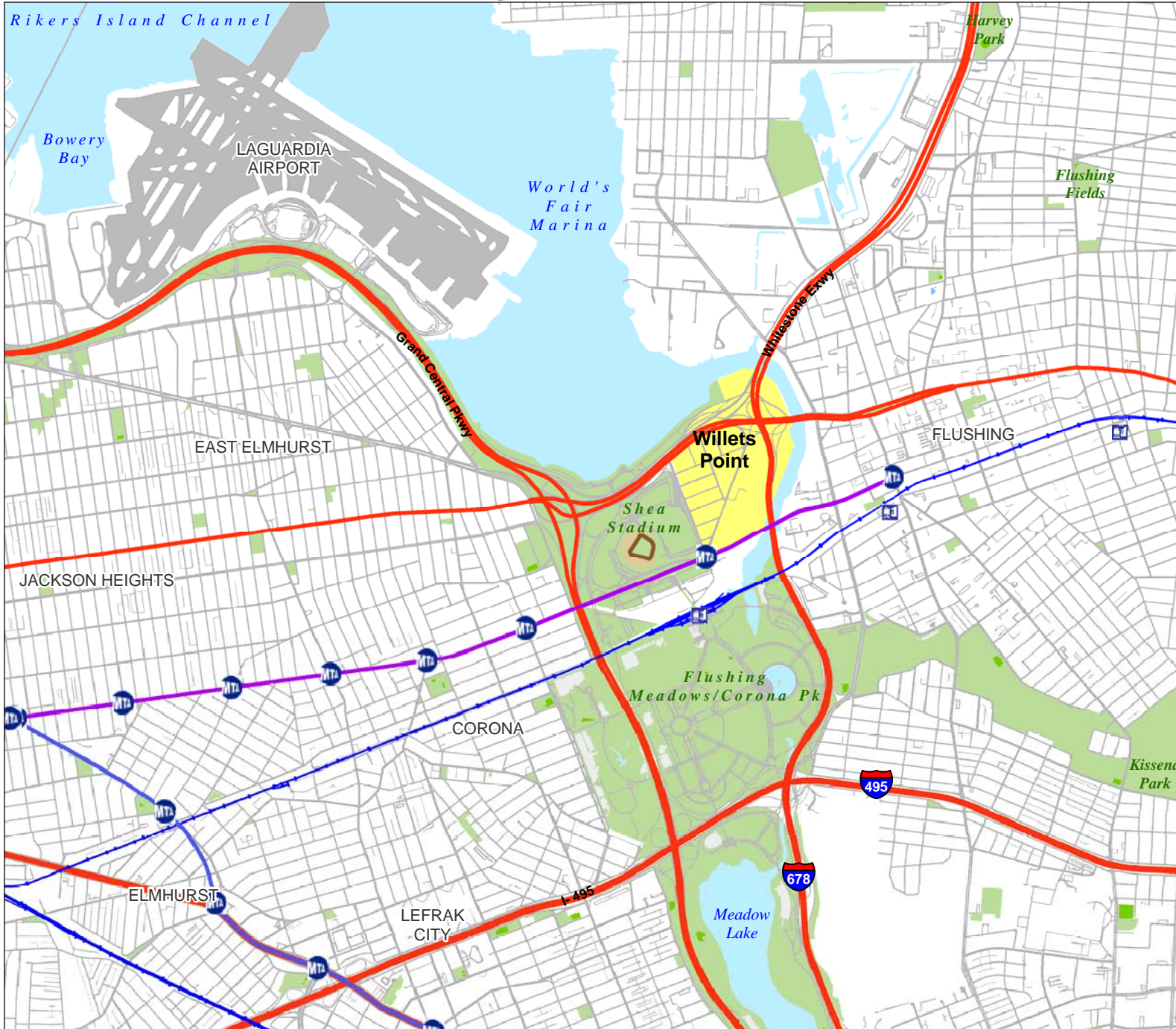
Please see Appendix for more information on these organizations.

3. **Refocus City Policy on Pollution Prevention.** New York City's Department of Environmental Protection provides technical assistance and training in pollution prevention. However, more efforts seem to be focused on compliance than prevention. It is impossible to adequately reach or regulate the tens of thousands of small auto-related businesses scattered throughout the city. Compliance strategies are generally punitive and hurt small businesses the most. The city should establish goals for environmental quality and measure its performance based on how well those goals are achieved. Other cities, such as Austin, Texas, provide targeted grants and loans to auto repair businesses.
4. **Establish Best Management Practices.** The city should establish best management practices for auto-related businesses in Willets Point and throughout the city. Other cities with best management practices include:
 - The City of Los Angeles Bureau of Sanitation has established best management practices for auto-related businesses.
 - Montgomery County, Maryland has a pollution prevention program for auto-related businesses.
 - Sonoma (California) Green Business Program. Since 1992, the municipality certifies auto shops that meet its criteria for best practices. Over one hundred repair shops are currently recognized.
 - Cleveland Heights, Ohio and Portland, Maine recognize individual family-run auto service centers for sustainable practices.
5. **Evaluate the Environmental Benefits of Concentration.** Concentration of auto-related businesses as in Willets Point provides many opportunities for economic efficiency, energy savings, storage and recycling of wastes, reduction of indoor air contamination and health risks to workers (from dust, and welding and point fumes, for example). In some places in the U.S. waste fuel oil (and waste cooking oil from local restaurants) are used to provide hot water. Currently the benefits of concentration are limited in Willets Point because small businesses lack stability, information, and technical assistance.
6. **Develop Training Opportunities for Auto Maintenance Workers.** For many auto workers, a job in Willets Point represents an entry into the labor force. Job training in partnership with local non-profits and schools can improve skills, performance, and upward mobility. One example of a successful job training program is:

- The New Community Corporation in Newark (NJ), a non-profit development corporation, established the Youth Automotive Training Center in partnership with Hillside Auto Mall, the city's largest auto dealer.

7. **Study Strategies for Improving the Performance of Waste Industries.** One of the frequent complaints of those surveyed was about odors, dust and pollution from waste management facilities, some of which are not fully enclosed. As part of the planning process, alternatives for improving the performance of these facilities should be considered.
8. **Study Strategies for Expanding Manufacturing.** The existing manufacturing businesses in Willets Point are very few but stable and thriving. With the decline of manufacturing in Long Island City, Willets Point could offer opportunities for redevelopment on some of the accessible M-zoned land.

Wilets Point and Surrounding Area



- Subway station
- LIRR stations
- Major parkways
- NYC Parks
- Willets Point study area

Willets Point Mapping Project

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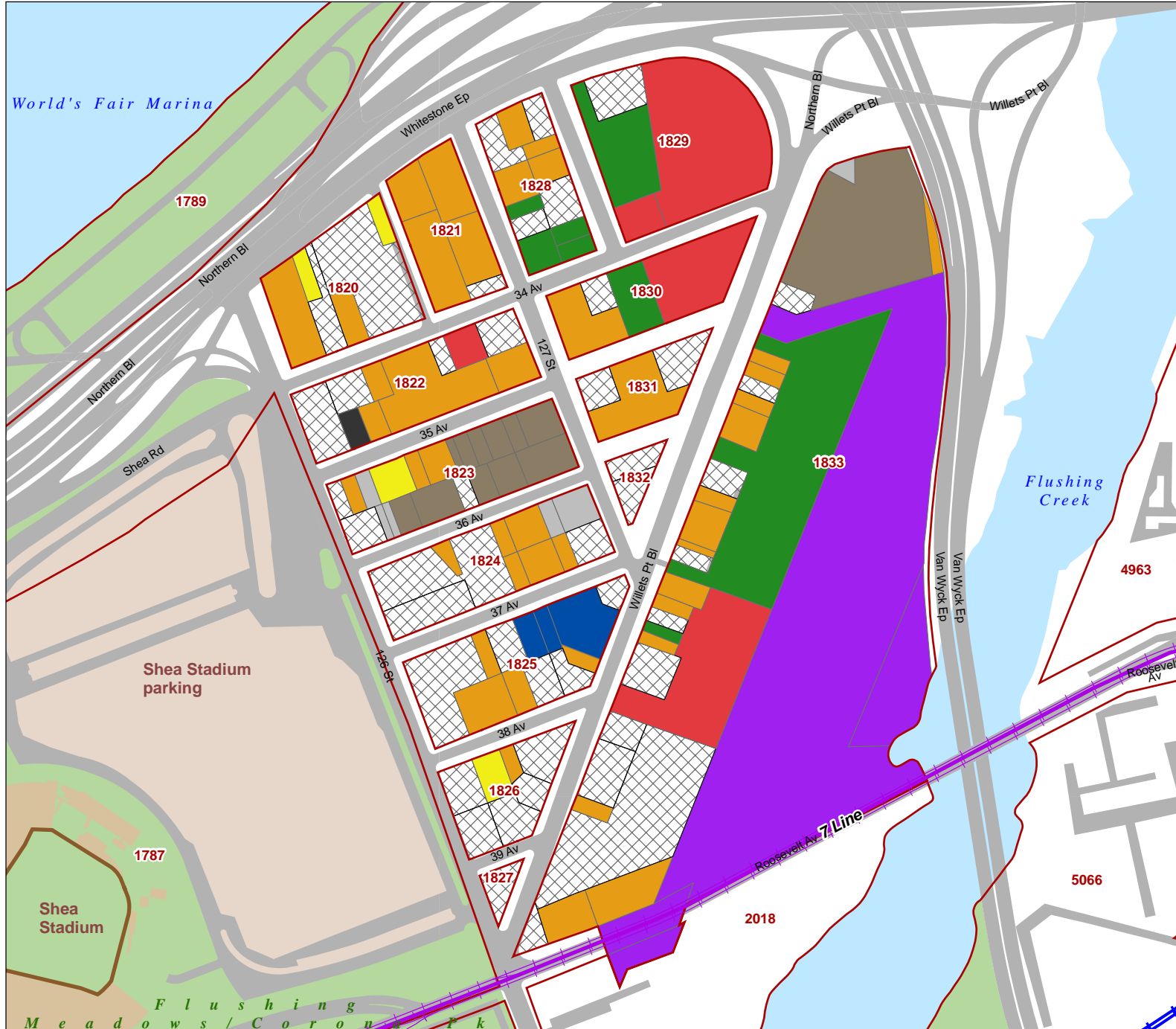
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0 0.125 0.25 0.5 Miles



Major land uses in Willets Point



Major land use types

-  Mixed use
-  Auto-related use
-  Construction Supplies
-  Distribution
-  Manufacturing
-  Other / miscellaneous
-  Parking facilities
-  Transportation/utilities
-  Vacant
-  Waste management

Tax blocks (labeled in red)



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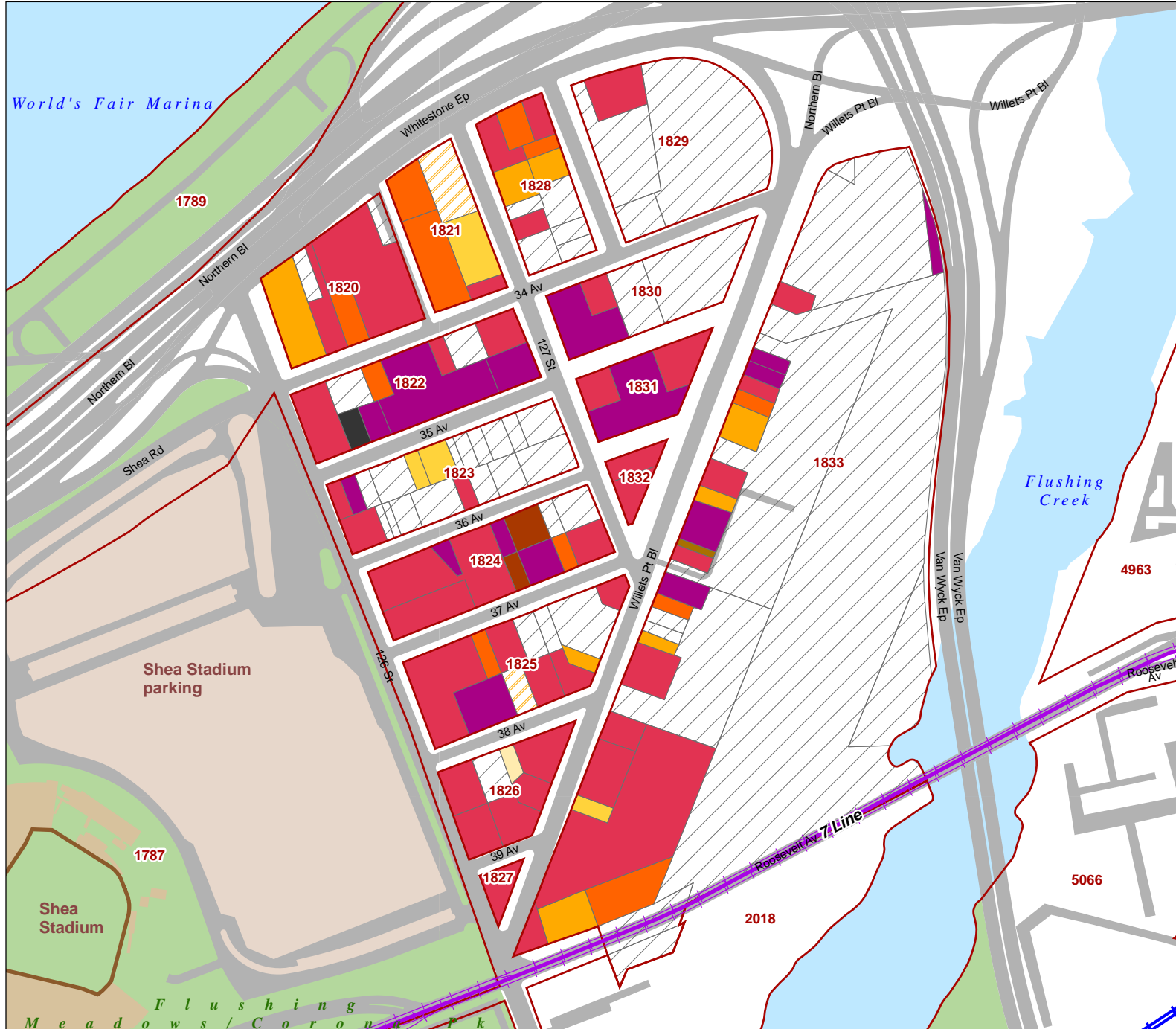
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0 95 190 380 Feet



Specific auto-related uses in Willets Point



Auto-related use

- Auto Body
- Auto Glass
- Auto Other (e.g. auto locksmith)
- Auto Parts
- Auto Repair/General Service
- Auto Sales
- Auto Tires
- Auto Wrecking / Salvage
- Mixed auto use
- Non-auto use
- Vacant

Tax blocks (labeled in red)



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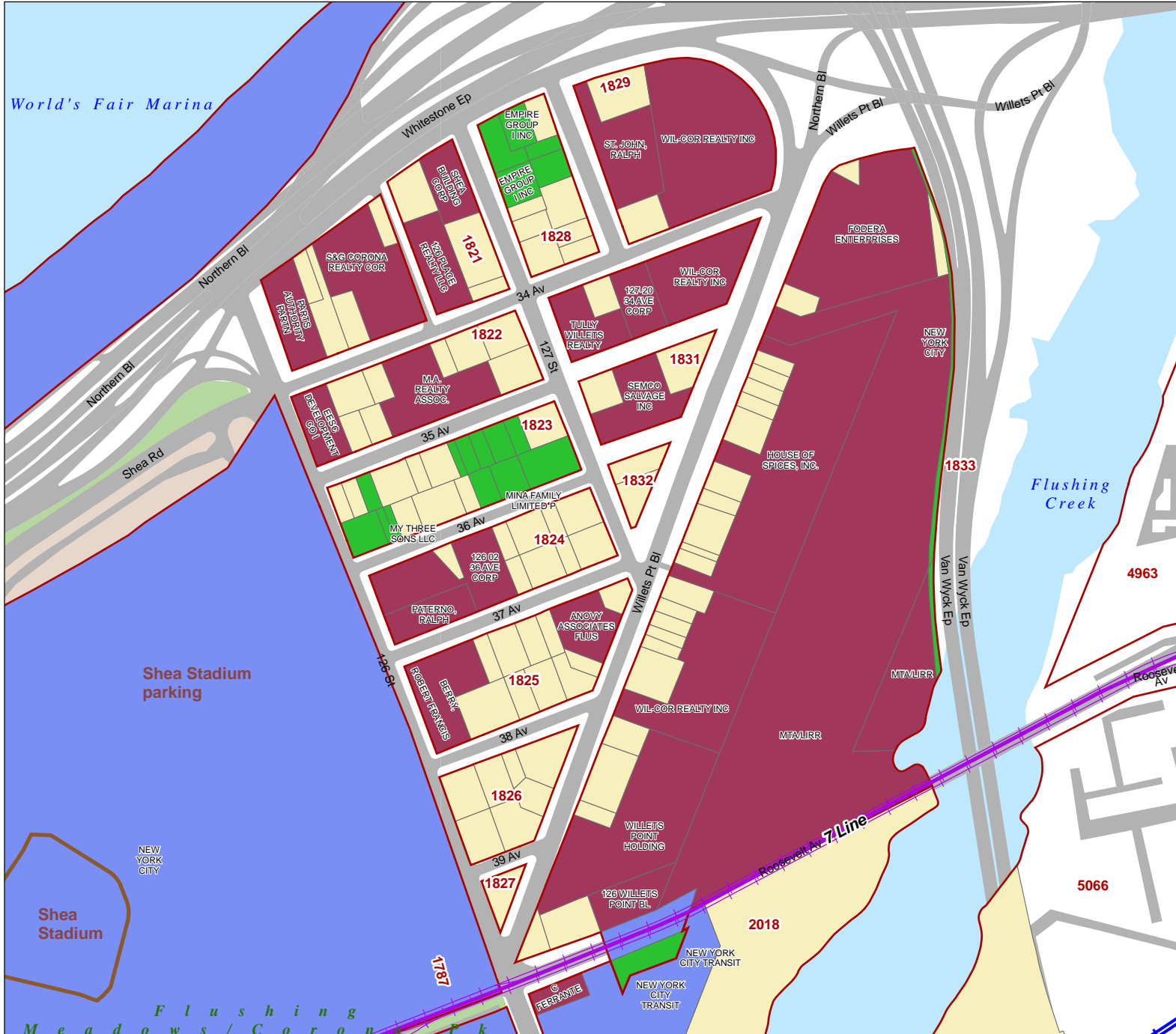
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0 95 190 380 Feet



Top real property owners in Willets Point



Major owner patterns

-  All other parcels
-  Parcels greater than 19,000 sq ft
-  Owner has 3 or more parcels
-  Owned by New York City

Tax blocks (labeled in red)



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Assessed values of properties in Willets Point



Assessed value (2004)

- \$17,550.00 - \$100,000.00
- \$100,000.01 - \$350,000.00
- \$350,000.01 - \$750,000.00
- \$750,000.01 - \$2,025,000.00
- Publicly owned

Tax blocks (labeled in red)

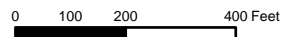
- (parcels labeled in black)

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Assessed property values per sq ft in Willets Point



Assessed value per square foot by tax parcel (2004) Tax blocks (labeled in red)
 (parcels labeled in black)

- \$3.08 - \$10.00
- \$10.01 - \$15.00
- \$15.01 - \$25.00
- \$25.01 - \$36.21
- Publicly owned

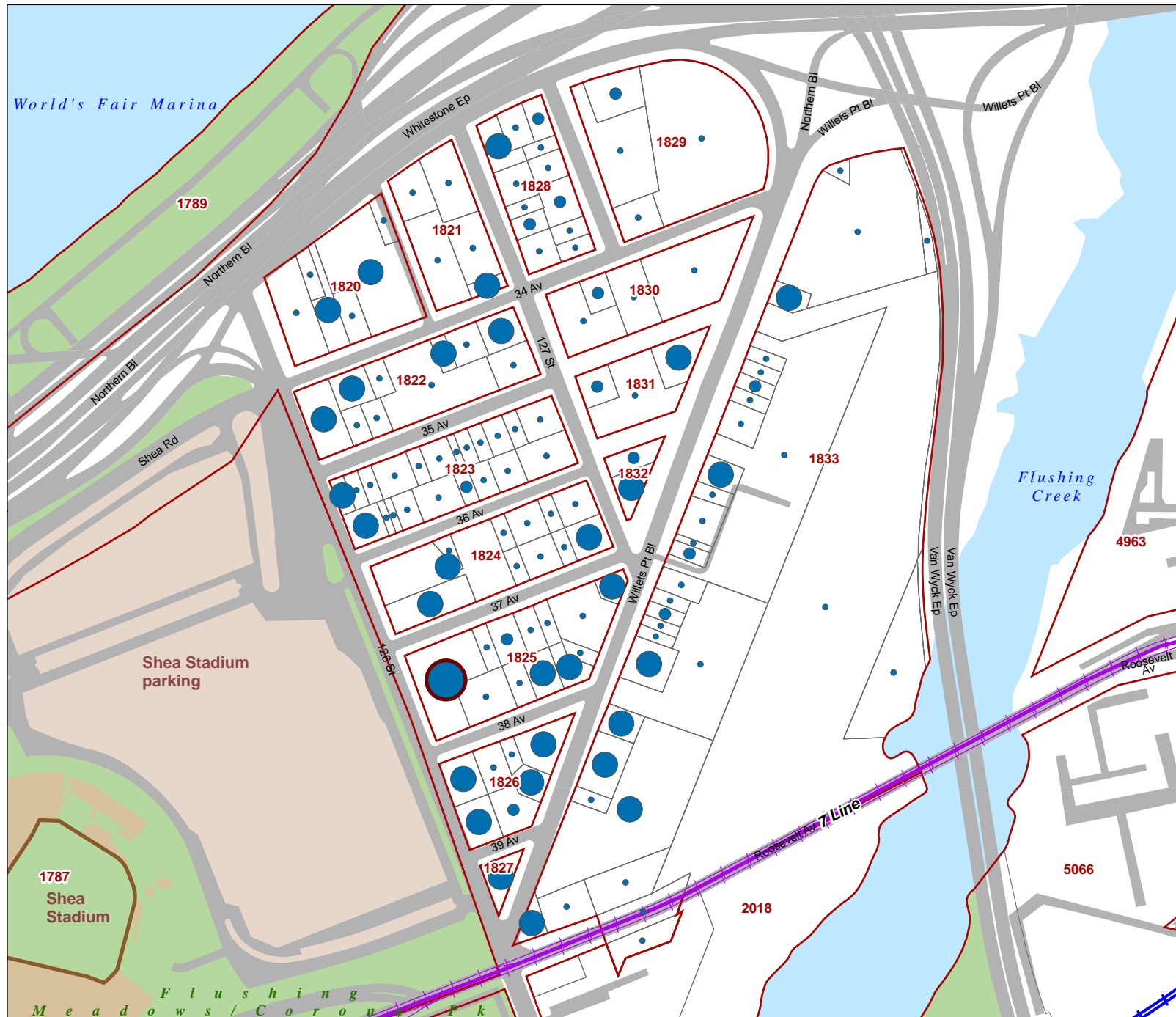
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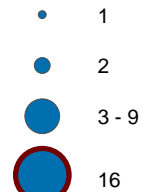
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Concentration of establishments in Willets Point



of establishments by tax parcel



Tax blocks (labeled in red)



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Data source: Hunter College survey, Fall 2005; updated March 2006.

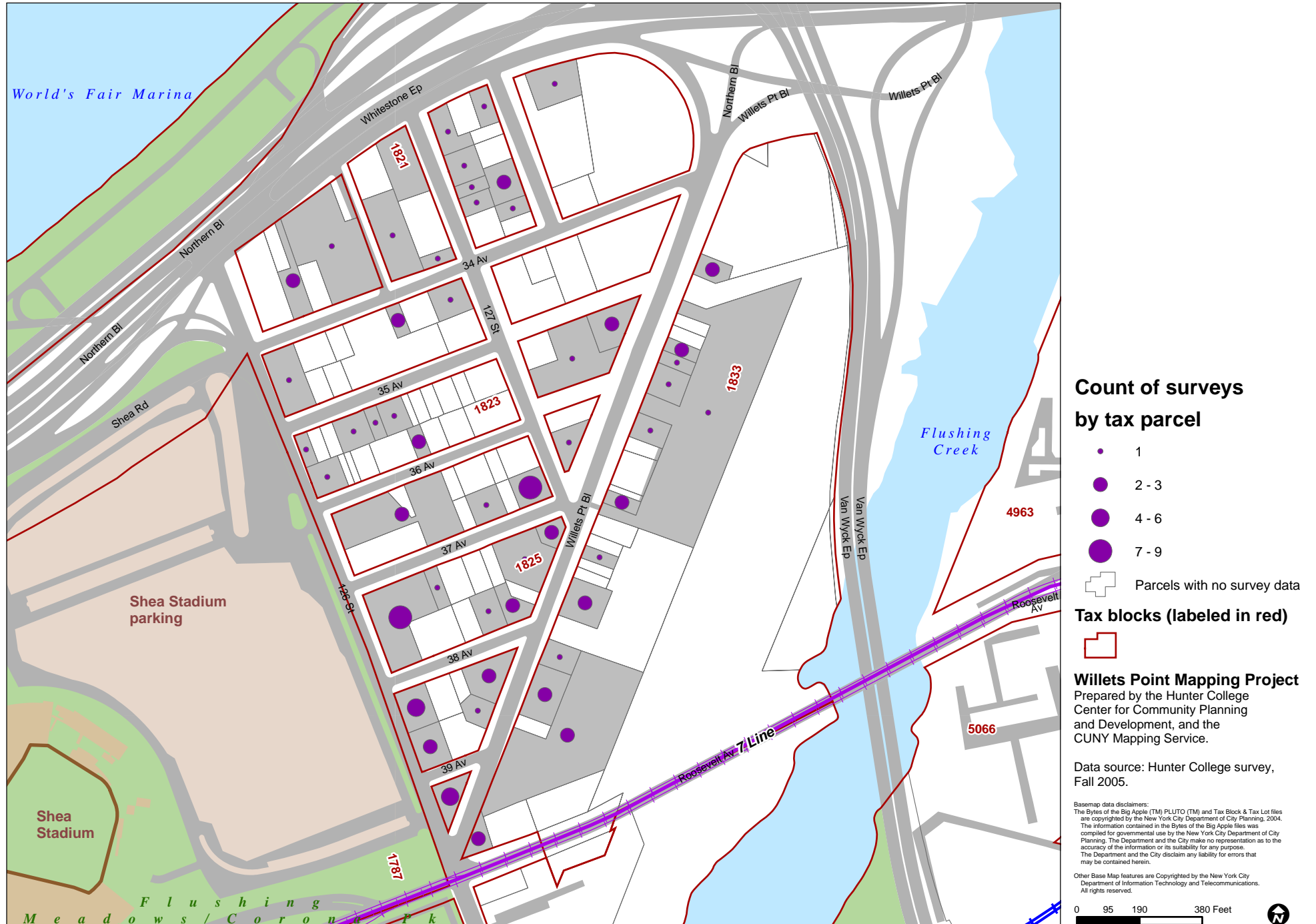
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0 85 170 340 Feet



Concentration of surveyed establishments in Willets Point



Appendix

Esperanza Unida

Contact Information:

Esperanza Unida
1329 W. National Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53204
(414) 671-0251

www.esperanzaunida.org

Esperanza Unida is a non-profit organization founded in 1971, located in Milwaukee's Near South Side. The non-profit serves the greater Milwaukee region, with a special emphasis on the social and economic concerns of the local Latino community, and low-income residents in the North, West, and South Side neighborhoods. Esperanza Unida holds that "job training, community empowerment, and economic development [are] the path to sustained future urban revitalization." The organization focuses on a "creative combination" of job training, apprenticeship, support services for families, economic renewal and urban development. Annually, Esperanza Unida is 50-70% self-supporting from its training businesses.

Since 1984, the Esperanza Unida Auto Department has trained minority and unemployed residents for jobs in the auto industry. The organization began with an auto body repair business that trained and employed low-income or unemployed workers in response to job crisis and deterioration of economic conditions in the surrounding area. As community and employment sector needs changed, the organization shifted to become a licensed used auto dealership where donated automobiles are repaired by mechanics and trainees. Uniquely, asserts Esperanza Unida, this scenario produces work for those who need it, revenues to support the program and low-cost automobiles for the local community.

Importantly, Esperanza Unida pioneered the nationally-known Training and Job Placement Business Model. Its auto repair/service program based on the model connects employers and trained employees, is free to those who qualify, and is offered in a bilingual (English/Spanish) environment. The organization offers a 97-page replication manual describing its Training Business Model. To order: http://www.esperanzaunida.org/training/esperanza_unida_replication_manu.htm The program allows minority and low-income or unemployed individuals to obtain job and life skills necessary to get jobs with a living wage, and maintain them. In addition to the auto department, the 58,000 square foot building renovated by Esperanza Unida in 1990 houses other training programs—

including child care, construction, customer service, printing, and welding-- and an alternative high school for at-risk youth.

Over the past two decades, nearly 2,500 workers have been trained in areas as diverse as auto repair and graphic arts. Just as the auto repair business became a used auto dealership to address changing needs, the organization has adapted to fill various niches and seek out opportunities.

For example, according to *@GRASS-ROOTS.ORG* journalist Robin Garr, when Esperanza found a market for both trained welders and large metal waste bins, it created a business to train workers to be welders while producing a highly desirable product. Similarly, Garr continues, when few women were involved with Esperanza Unida's programs, the organization created a day-care training program that helps women prepare to become licensed child care providers. "When this effort began in 1990, there were no Spanish-speaking family day-care facilities in Wisconsin; now there are well over 100," he writes.

In addition, the El Puente High School for Science, Math, and Technology is an innovative, alternative high school which opened in 1997. The school has a cooperative partnership with the organization, and skill-training components are integrated with the classroom curricula. According to the Esperanza Unida website, after the school's first year, there have been no fights, no graffiti, and an average attendance rate of 83%. Because of the positive results, Esperanza has integrated the school into its physical space and organizational framework. The relationship allows the organization to remain a resource to local youths growing up in the area.

Esperanza Unida is an exemplary, unique organization that employs an "holistic approach of identifying and addressing students' barriers to success." The organization's commitment to providing direct responses to community needs, and flexibility in terms of changing market opportunities, should be a model for Willets Point activists, workers, developers and planners. The benefits of innovative practices paired with community-based business models are long-term and comprehensive as the non-profit's programs and successes demonstrate. Esperanza Unida ("United Hope") is, in so many ways, true to its name. A wealth of additional information about the mission and goals of Esperanza Unida can be found on its website.

Information in this section was compiled from the Esperanza Unida website: <http://www.esperanzaunida.org>, and where cited, from a profile by Robin Garr, appearing on @GRASS-ROOTS.ORG. Website: <http://www.grass-roots.org/usa/esperanza.shtml>.

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Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation (“Nuestra”) is a non-profit organization located in Roxbury, Massachusetts. Nuestra focuses on community economic development through programs which support entrepreneurship, sustainability, job and life skills, and affordable housing. The organization holds that “Small business development involves community residents in the process of development by providing them with the opportunity to own and invest in their community.” Since 1981, the organization has been committed to serving residents and businesses in Roxbury and the surrounding neighborhoods of Boston; according to Nuestra, approximately 90 percent of residents in these communities are minorities.

Drawing on a “two-pronged” approach to economic development, Nuestra has successfully coordinated comprehensive projects and reached many people. The organization addresses both business incubation and business development. A primary example of business incubation efforts is the Swifty Auto Mall. Nuestra rehabilitated the 5,000 square foot commercial property on Blue Hill Avenue in Roxbury, and enhanced the space with state-of-the-art facilities. In addition, Nuestra made environmentally-sound business practices a priority. The area has a high concentration of auto businesses, with 35 businesses located within a one mile radius of the renovated building. The organization asserts rates of cancer, heart-related problems, and asthma in the Roxbury neighborhood near the site are among the highest in the city. Swifty Auto Mall opened in November of 2000 and houses four local auto service businesses.

In recent years, the organization was awarded funds for the Swifty Auto Mall Environmental Education and Prototype Project. Nuestra asserts the primary aim of the project is to “demonstrate that the auto service industry can be both environmentally-friendly and economically viable.” The project builds on the renovation of the auto repair facility that spear-headed the auto-related business incubation efforts of the organization. The project puts into practice a large-scale environmental education program that engages best management practices, and teaches pollution prevention to mechanics and others in the auto industry. In addition, Nuestra performs an analysis and review of the program to determine its feasibility, and whether the program should be replicated there or

elsewhere. Nuestra contends "The project will allow auto mechanics in the Roxbury and surrounding areas to understand relevant environmental laws, how to comply with the laws, and how to go beyond compliance and be both environmentally-friendly and economically viable."

Additional business incubation efforts include pushcarts for low-income residents to start their own small businesses selling plants, jewelry or other items; as well as a food vending add-on to the pushcart program, "Nuestra Culinary Ventures," which is an innovative project unique in Boston. Business development projects are significant and varied. They range from New Market Tax Credits which support a loan pool for local small businesses, to technical assistance and training, to help with marketing and providing access to a greater network for contracts and services.

Outreach activities are community-based, and range from home ownership services to community organizing. Nuestra has a proven track record of success, and the statistics are most impressive. Beyond the establishment of the Swifty Auto Mall, a profile of the organization lists significant achievements including: production of more than 300 units of affordable housing; training of approximately 1000 people in home-ownership; assistance to hundreds of families in buying their first home; technical assistance, training and \$3.9 million in loans to more than 1000 small businesses; property management that oversees 275 residential units and 32,220 square feet of commercial space; and provision of employment and tutoring for youths.

Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation's success showcases the value of integrative, environmentally-aware, and community-based economic development. The organization is a model for community development that could be adapted to Willets Point. (Please see Nuestra's economic development webpage for additional information on specific programs: www.nuestracdc.org/Economic%20Development.html)

Information in this section was compiled from the Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation website: <http://www.nuestracdc.org>, as well as from a profile of the organization found through the EPA's Environmental Justice grant list: <http://www.epa.gov/region1/ej/ejprofiles01.html>.