Morris Park Business Improvement District

Presentation for community feedback, March – April 2021

Morris Park and Van Nest
Commercial District Needs Assessment, preliminary results

Slide 1: Commercial District Needs Assessment – community presentation
The MPBID thanks you for reviewing the attached presentation that discusses our preliminary findings from the Morris Park and Van Nest Commercial District Needs Assessment (CDNA for short), part of our SBS-funded Avenue NYC Commercial Revitalization Grant

Slide 2: Agenda
These items will be covered during our presentation.

Slide 3: Avenue NYC Program Context
The Avenue NYC Commercial Revitalization Grant is funded by the NYC Department of Small Businesses Services to support community-based development organizations in carrying out programs targeting commercial districts in low- and moderate-income communities.
The first year of the program is focused on completing a Commercial District Needs Assessment (CDNA), which highlights the existing business landscape, consumer characteristics, physical environment, and unique character of the commercial corridors and local businesses that make up the identity of each neighborhood.
The CDNA will inform our visions for the future so that the types of projects we engage in for the next several years are realistic and will have the most positive impact for everyone. This presentation will go over all of the work we've done so far following the methodology required by our oversight agency (SBS), including all of the surveying and data collection (which was done in 3 different languages), stakeholder mapping and analyzing that took place over the past 8 months (July 2020- February 2021).

Slide 4: Photo Collage Slide
These are some pictures of the data collection process. We conducted direct data collection from 281 merchants and 561 individual consumers in all commercial corridors included in the project scope. A weekly fresh produce giveaway conducted between October 2020 and February 2021 was the perfect opportunity to engage with the community while also collecting the data we needed directly from shoppers and consumers.

Slide 5: Neighborhood Context
This slide provides you with some context of the neighborhood and the study area, which includes 4 unique commercial corridors and spans over 50+ blocks. Demographic information is presented on the slide.

Slide 6: Key Takeaways Slide
The main takeaways from our data collections are as follows:
- In all of the corridors, there are multi-generational businesses that have deep engagement roots in the community, which give all corridors a very community-oriented feel.

- Despite the close proximity of the different corridors, each commercial corridor is unique and serves a particular niche in the community.
- Lastly, both merchants and consumers think that community programming and public space activation would attract more people to the study area.

Slide 7: Business Inventory
As a part of the CDNA data collection, we took a full inventory of the businesses in all 4 corridors: 571 businesses (506 open at the time of the observation).

Slide 8: Retail Mix
We inventoried a total of 571 small businesses across the corridors and ranked the top 5 types of businesses in each corridor.
From the data collected, we can see that Morris Park and White Plains Road have the most businesses. There are differences in the retail mix amongst corridors. For example, in the White Plains Road corridor more clothing and electronic stores will be found, whereas in Morris Park you will find more professional services, beauty services and restaurants.
Regarding the vacancy rate, were found that 8.4% of all of the businesses inventoried were vacant, which is considered to be a healthy vacancy rate, and a particularly positive finding since the study was conducted during the first year of the COVID epidemic. There was minor variation across the corridors.

Slide 9: Storefront Observations
As a part of the business inventory, we also looked at the storefront conditions and found that 50% of the storefronts were in "very good" or "excellent" condition. This is a fairly sizable percentage. 30% of the storefronts surveyed were in "fair" or in "average" condition and only 20% needed improvement or were in poor conditions. Overall we can see that the majority of the storefronts in the study area are in good to great condition, which is a really strong attribute of the study area.

Slide 10: Streetscape Observations
Upon surveying the streetscapes in the area, we identified some areas of potential improvement. The photos show several locations with trash overflow from waste receptacles, or litter along specific sidewalks and streets, which can present itself as a hazard for pedestrian walking and even public health conditions.
There was ongoing construction at several locations creating locked off sidewalk corners, with scaffolding and some barricaded sections, which could also be a walking hazard for pedestrians.
We have also found significant graffiti along some commercial buildings as well as along public infrastructure, such as underneath the elevated train structures, etc., especially in areas not served by BIDs.
We also noted positive streetscape interventions such as the landscaped and maintained tree pits along Morris Park Avenue, funded by the MPBID in fall 2020.

Slide 11: Merchant Survey Takeaways
As a part of the CDNA methodology, we surveyed 281 merchants in the study area and obtained interesting statistics that really paint the picture of the commercial landscape of the neighborhood.
We found that roughly 75% of the businesses were in business for 5 years or more, with 25% of those businesses being in business for 21 years or more. Furthermore, half of the merchants in the study area actually live in the area, which really shows the localized and community-oriented nature of the local businesses. Key takeaways from interacting with the merchants on their top 3 challenges include: lack of parking/transit; burdening government regulations; and crime and safety.

Merchants surveyed indicated that more parking and access options, and increased safety and sanitation measures would attract more shoppers to the area.

Slide 12: Impact of COVID-19 On the Local Small Businesses
Our merchant surveys included questions to assess the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local small businesses within the study area.
75% of merchants stated they saw a decrease in sales and 18% of the businesses have not been able to meet rent in full. A bar graph included shows that half of our businesses applied for federal assistance, used their personal savings and/or used their drawn down cash reserves. Quotes are provided showing the wide spectrum of how these small businesses were affected and their realities.

Slide 13: Consumer Survey Highlights
Additional to the merchant surveys, we also surveyed 561 consumers in the area to understand their needs and get a better perspective on their shopping habits.
Of the 561 consumers surveyed, 87% of them live in the area, which is a high percentage that speaks to the local community and local demand sustaining the economy of these commercial corridors.
A graph included shows the difference in consumer behavior before and after the COVID-19 pandemic: 47% of consumers said they do less shopping since the pandemic and actually 22% said they actually go shopping more.

Slide 14: Consumer Survey Highlights
Quotes from some of the consumers that were surveyed are included. These quotes speak to some of the emerging themes we saw in the feedback, such as a sense of hominess or community, a sense of culture and diversity, and a value placed in the uniqueness of the area. Shoppers also spoke to the safety and pleasantness of the areas and personal mom and pop feel of local stores.

Slide 15: Strengths
Upon reflecting on this process and the data collected, we identified three key strengths of the study area:
● Commercial activity in Morris Park and Van Nest is based on small businesses having long-standing roots in the community, with an economy driven by the close-knit and engaging local residential population.
● The ethnically diverse population is mirrored by a growing diversity of culturally relevant small businesses.
● Pedestrian-friendly and comfortable shopping experience perceived by local consumers.

Slide 16: Challenges
The top three challenges identified include:
● Limited access to public transportation can make it difficult for non-local visitors to reach certain parts of the neighborhood.
● Insufficient accessible to public spaces and reliable anchor locations (plazas, open space) for community programming, which could enhance the shopping experience in the area.
● Perceptions of safety concerns, especially at night, in areas that have insufficient street lighting or nightly activity, especially underneath any of the train tracks especially on some blocks close to White Plains Road.

Slide 17: Opportunities
In conclusion, Morris Park and Van Nest are areas with a strong residential character, supported by vibrant local businesses, some new, some serving these neighborhoods for many years. There are a lot of exciting and impactful opportunities to enhance the experiences of the community in the study area, including:

- Developing shopping guides and wayfinding materials to attract more visitors from nearby highly visited institutions, such as the Bronx Zoo or the Botanical Garden, especially in light of forthcoming transportation developments (E-scooters pilot program, Metro North extension, etc.).
- Activate existing open spaces throughout the area for sustained community and cultural programming, and explore feasibility of creating more open spaces, in collaboration with relevant City agencies (NYC Planning, DOT, etc.).
- Developing marketing strategies that highlights the area's uniqueness and diversity and connecting better with the job centers in the neighborhood, especially the medical facilities at the Einstein, Montefiore, Jacobi medical centers.
- Insuring upgrades are being pursued in accessible ways and coordinating with relevant agencies to invest in technological interventions, such as LinkNYC kiosks, to insure public access to community updates and relevant local information.

Thank you!

Morris Park Business Improvement District

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