About Protect Our Working Waterfront Alliance

Protect Our Working Waterfront Alliance (POWWA) is a broad coalition of residents, businesses, labor, housing advocates, faith leaders, and others\(^1\). All are committed to preserving the industrial character of the Sunset Park waterfront to: protect and expand career-track manufacturing jobs, prevent the displacement of working-class residents and blue-collar businesses, and develop for climate adaptation and resilience.

Sunset Park is a large working-class community of color with a population of approximately 130,000 people. Nearly half of local residents are foreign-born. Educational attainment falls behind the rest of Brooklyn and New York City overall, with 36% lacking a high school diploma. At $43,100, the median household income is $9,400 below that of the city median. Moreover, these social and economic challenges are exacerbated by the concentration of environmental burdens, which are leading causes of public health risks and disparities in the community. NYU Lutheran is the largest employment center in the industrial area, providing over 6,000 jobs.

The Issue

The Sunset Park industrial waterfront is being threatened by land speculation, proposed rezonings, and high-end commercialization inconsistent with blue-collar manufacturing. The preservation and expansion of a blue-collar manufacturing base is crucial to the economic viability of a working-class community like Sunset Park. In many parts of the city, manufacturing jobs pay twice the wages of service sector jobs. The loss of blue-collar jobs and the displacement of working-class businesses and residents is a devastating narrative that has unfolded in other neighborhoods; it must not be allowed to occur in Sunset Park.

In summer 2013, Jamestown Properties purchased a large stake in Industry City, a sixteen-building, six-million square-foot industrial complex in the heart of the neighborhood’s manufacturing zone. Jamestown Properties, also the company behind Chelsea Market, has proposed rezoning their property to accommodate hotel development, high-end retail, and other commercial uses inconsistent with industrial businesses and local working-class needs. In August 2015, it was announced that NYU Lutheran would be leasing 29,000 square feet of administrative and training space at the property for roughly 140 employees.

Sunset Industrial Park, the second largest private industrial property in Sunset Park, was recently purchased by Savoy Group/601W Companies. The developer has proposed rezoning the waterfront industrial site to create a large-scale residential community. While this would potentially increase the site’s value by four or five times for the developer, it would also lead to land speculation in surrounding industrial sites, the displacement of blue-collar jobs, and increased rent pressure on working-class residents.

The Alternative

POWWA supports development in Sunset Park that directly benefits the local working-class community. Specifically, this means: ensuring community control over infrastructure and planning projects in Sunset Park; protecting the economic needs of long-time residents, workers and businesses; expanding blue-collar union, career-track jobs; promoting the development of maritime-dependent industrial uses; protecting land zoned for manufacturing; and incorporating climate adaptation and resiliency into waterfront development.

For more information, contact UPROSE at powwa@uprose.org or 718-492-9307.

\(^1\) To date, POWWA includes Teamsters, 32BJ, The Alliance for a Greater New York, The New York City Environmental Justice Alliance, Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, Pratt Center, Working Families Party, Neighbors Helping Neighbors, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, and numerous local residents, small businesses, artists, academics, and advocates.
About the Climate Justice and Community Resiliency Center (CJCRC)

Climate Justice is the knowledge that not all communities are going to be impacted equally by climate change. Low-income communities of color are the first and the hardest hit by increasing effects of climate change. Most of the deadliest natural disasters that has hit in recent years have devastated these regions. The typhoons in the Philippines and India, earthquakes in Chile and Haiti, heat waves, tornadoes (including three in Sunset Park), Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy have shown this to be true. Climate Justice is the struggle for fair share and preparing for the changing climate’s severe weather events and patterns.

For decades, UPROSE has been leading the charge in promoting the sustainability and resiliency of the Sunset Park community in Brooklyn through community organizing, education, leadership development, and advocacy. In the wake of Superstorm Sandy in fall 2012, it has intensified its focus on the adaptation of Sunset Park to the changing climate and to deepening its community resiliency. In 2013, UPROSE launched its Climate Justice & Community Resiliency Center (CJCRC) which came out of a Post Sandy Community Forum. This is the first block-by-block organizing effort in the United States to address climate change through mitigation, climate adaptation, and community resiliency.

CJCRC Goals

A core goal of the CJCRC is the inclusion of community residents and businesses in local planning processes, with strong emphasis on climate adaptation. This engagement and leadership development among community members and local businesses is done on a block-by-block, building-by-building, business-by-business level geared towards facilitating and managing a truly grassroots-led climate adaptation strategy.

Inherent to this goal is the acknowledgement that resilience is fostered when community, private interests, and public institutions come together to promote just development. Through the CJCRC, we have pushed to integrate and operationalize resiliency and adaptation measures into existing and forthcoming development proposals, and engage in the community in the decision-making process.

The CJCRC also works to build the capacity of Sunset Park’s indigenous leaders and local businesses to respond effectively to future severe weather events, including the possible release of harmful chemicals because of storm surge and flooding. Such capacity will enable the community to care for itself and to enter the future not as passive victim, but as active designer and agent.

Another goal of the CJCRC is the transition the Sunset Park manufacturing area from a traditional 19th and 20th century industrial model into a 21st century climate resilient and sustainable industrial area adapted to climate change. Such a transition will ensure the long-term availability of business development and employment opportunities for New York City’s largest walk-to-work community.

For more information, contact UPROSE at orozco@uprose.org or 718-492-9307.