Barton Blossoming
Growing Inclusive Public Space in Murray Hill, Queens

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UPM 609 - Lab Analysis of Public Space

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Agenda

1. Our Approach
2. The Neighborhood
3. Community Engagement
4. Guiding Insights
5. Visions for Barton Avenue
6. Next Steps
Our Approach
Throughout this semester, our class was tasked with exploring design and programming options for Barton Avenue Open Street in Murray Hill, Queens, in collaboration with the local small business community.

Our client, Asian American Federation (AAF), connected us to the neighborhood’s business owners who they have deep relationships with through their Murray Hill office.
Listening to the Place

Since our kickoff in early January, we have approached our work with the goal of gaining a **multi-layered understanding of the neighborhood**.

We knew it was essential to better understand the community’s **history**, its **triumphs**, its **challenges**, and the **aspirations** of people who call this place home.
Arc of Work

Our work was completed in stages to ensure that our understanding of the neighborhood grew as we moved forward.

❖ January + February: Desktop research, contextual analysis, & neighborhood observations
❖ March: Community engagement
❖ April: Forming recommendations
Area of Focus

15-min walking distance from Barton Ave & Murray Hill LIRR station

Why a 15-minute walk?

- To better understand the hyper-local context of Barton Ave & the adjacent plaza
- To include the 3 commercial corridors of Northern Boulevard, Food Alley (our focus), & 162nd Street

Source: ESRI 2023; MTA 2017
The Neighborhood
Immigration Patterns

- First inhabited by the Indigenous Matinecock and Munsee Lenape people, until being settled by Dutch and English colonies
- Subsequently settled by East Asian immigrants (particularly Korean in Murray Hill and Chinese in Flushing)
- Murray Hill’s population has become increasingly Chinese & Hispanic/Latinx, while its Korean population has decreased in the last two decades.
We observed **seven themes of public life** in Murray Hill:

**Seeing & Being Seen**
The built environment and gathering places of Murray Hill make for a place where Seeing and Being Seen is part of the neighborhood's fabric.

**Transitional**
Murray Hill is in a delicate Transitional period where demographics are changing rapidly to reveal gaps between generational, ethnic, language, and economic groups.

**Clustering**
Clustering of ethnic, generational, and other affinity groups, makes for a neighborhood with distinct pockets of social gathering.

**Small is Big**
In such a hyperlocal neighborhood, little changes go a long way, and small acts are immediately noticeable.

**Making Place**
Expressions of culture and care are visible throughout the neighborhood, as people Make Place with signage, intimate gardens, and other ways of personalizing their spaces.

**IYKYK**
Rich with culturally-specific cuisine and services, Murray Hill is a place of insider-knowledge, where If You Know You Know (IYKYK).

**DIY**
Visible in handmade additions to store frontages, makeshift parking signs, and the donated folding chairs, tables, and handmade planters.
We identified a cultural biorhythm present in the neighborhood, offering opportunities at specific hours:
Transportation Patterns

Murray Hill & Flushing, Queens
Macro scale

MOVEMENT

LEGEND:
- Private vehicles
- Public Transport
- Bicycles
- Pedestrians

Q44 SBS to The Bronx

Murray Hill LIRR Station
Greenery + Open Space

Murray Hill: Public Open Space

Focus Area (15-Minute Walk from Site)
7 Train Station
LIRR Stations
Parks
Street Trees

Murray Hill has only 2.8% of its land designated as parks. That's compared to 9.5% in Queens CD 7 and 8.9% in Queens as a whole.

Sources: NYC DCP 2020, DOT 2017, MTA 2017

Open space

Tree species

Green ash - 19.2%
Ginkgo - 17.3%
Pin oak - 13.5%
London planetree - 7.7%
Norway maple - 7.7%
Japanese flowering cherry - 5.8%
Northern red oak - 5.8%
Flowering dogwood - 3.8%
Littleleaf linden - 3.8%
Shingle oak - 3.8%
Black locust - 3.8%
Japanese pagoda tree - 1.9%
Japanese tree lilac - 1.9%
Sugar maple - 1.9%
Unknown - 1.9%
Community Engagement
Existing community engagement data

Our work with Murray Hill’s commercial areas build upon previous engagement conducted by other organizations, notably:

- A Commercial District Needs Assessment (CDNA) conducted by NYC Small Business Services between 2021 and 2022.

- A Public Space Workshop on Barton Avenue Open Street conducted by Street Lab in August 2022.

The insights gained from this data were supported by our own direct engagement strategies.
Direct community engagement methods

Our community engagement was undertaken using three methods:

1. **Community Survey**
   
   A brief Google Form aimed at individuals and small businesses.

2. **‘Tea Chats’**
   
   An in-depth 20-30 min discussion, aimed at community leaders who are familiar with the neighborhood.

3. **On-site Activities**
   
   Three on-site engagement activities on the Open Street and adjacent plaza, aimed at passersby and daily users of the plaza.

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**Profiles:**

- General community members: **48**, including:
  - 5 children
  - 4 teens
- Community orgs: **2**
- Public sector reps: **2**
- Business owners: **1**
- Artists: **1**

**Total no. of people reached: ** **54**

- Survey: **4**
- Tea Chats: **6**
- On-site Activities: **44**
Survey

- Our short Google Form survey was intended for community members (such as small business owners and local residents).
- Circulating the survey proved to be challenging, and responses were fewer than planned.
- Despite this, we gained insight into some of the community’s perceptions of the neighborhood.

- "It feels like a secret spot that only locals would venture out to."
- "I don’t visit Barton Avenue that often because I don’t drive which makes it a tiny bit difficult to get here."
Tea Chats

Our ‘tea chats’ proved to be one of our most successful engagement strategies, and provided us with valuable insight into the neighborhood’s hugely diverse social environment.

These chats involved **20-30 min conversations with community leaders** who are familiar with the neighborhood.

We had tea chats with representatives from:

- The local private sector (including **local small businesses** and the **Murray Hill Merchants Association**)
- The public sector (including **NYC Department of Small Business Services**)
- Local non-profits (including **YWCA Queens** and the **Queens Historical Society**)
- Local artists and **cultural organizations**

“**Let’s Eat Alley. We’ve all heard about that.**”

“We’d always go to Flushing on the weekends too, and I think this is like a very familiar experience for all kind of Asian American kids growing up in East Queens, or just Queens in general.”

“But now it’s like, you know, you don’t go to Flushing anymore. I don’t think the Korean American community really seeks out Flushing to do those mundane things anymore, unfortunately.”
On-Site Engagement Event

On Sunday, April 23 we created three activity stations in the Open Street and LIRR plaza, including:

- **Bucket Toss**: passersby were asked to throw a hacky sack towards their design/programmatic preference
- **Chalk Draw**: passersby to freely draw images in chalk on the pavement of what they want to see in the space.
- **Your Art Here**: large blank posters with colored markers attached. Passersby were asked to draw what they want to see in the space.
On-Site Engagement continued
On-Site Engagement **Findings**

- The results from the Bucket Toss showed preference for **seating, games, performances, art, & greenery**.
- The drawing activities (Chalk Draw & Your Art Here) indicated a significant interest in **greenery, recreation (dog walking & sports), and food enjoyment**.
- Our conversations with members of the public shed light on the huge **social** role of the plaza (especially for the local elderly), and **play** for children.
Guiding Insights
5 Key Insights Guided our Recommendations
From contextual research, previous community engagement, and our community engagement

1. **Clearing pathways, building bridges.** Barton Avenue can serve as a vital site to create connections across cultures and age groups.

2. **How can Barton Avenue be more welcoming towards women and children?** Some women we spoke with expressed apprehension at spending time in Barton Avenue due to the space being dominated by men.

3. **A place in transition; a neighborhood in transition.** Murray Hill is in a transitional period where demographics are changing rapidly. The neighborhood itself also sits at a transition point between high and low density areas. High quality public spaces can help to bridge these gaps.

4. **The importance of Korean identity; the challenge of cross-cultural connections.** The strong Korean identity of 먹자골목/“Food Let's Eat Alley” is one of Murray Hill’s strengths and prides. Yet bridges have yet to be established among and across the broader set of cultures and ethnicities in the community.

5. **How can each of Murray Hill’s communities authentically connect with or express themselves through Barton Avenue?** Residents and visitors alike value Murray Hill for its “authentic” character, yet there are often divergent definitions of authenticity.
Visions for Barton Avenue

1. The Streetshare Model (Governance & Programming)
2. Design Concepts
1. The Streetshare Model

Governance and Programming for Barton Avenue
What is a Streetshare?

A scalable and cross-cultural practical and values framework for community-based governance and programming, meant to facilitate community ownership and stewardship.
Potential partners

- Art and Heart
- Acorn Mortal Arts
- Browne St. Community Church
- Comunidad Con Propósito
- East-West Music School
- Fo Guang Shan New York Temple
- JHS 189 Q School, Including the Adult and Continued Education Program
- Korean American Civic Empowerment (KACE)*
- Korean American Senior Citizen Society of Greater New York
- Korean Traditional Music and Dance Institute
- MinKwon Center*
- NY Shaolin Temple Kung Fu Center
- Queens Council on the Arts
- Queens Public Library*
- Safari Day Care
- Searing Adult Day Care Center
- Sikh Center
- Street Lab*
- Street Life Ministries
- The Shield Institute
- Wolfe Orth Museum

- Greater Flushing Chamber of Commerce
- Korean American Family Service Center*
- Korean Community Media Broadcasting
- Merchant's Association*
- Queens College at CUNY
- Queens Historical Society
- YMCA*
- YWCA*

- Design Trust for Public Space
- Murray Hill Neighborhood Association
- Small Business Services (SBS)*

Innovation Partner — An organization/agency which can help scale up the Open Streets through more complex & consist programming, governance, and physical design. These partners also have access to more resources: financial, personal, or otherwise.

* = Current Partner
Governing the Streetshare

**Barton Avenue Streetshare Governance Structure**

**Friends of Barton Ave (FoBA)**
- Asian American Federation
- Murray Hill Merchants’ Assn.
- Other local businesses/orgs that have capacity & familiarity with the area

*Oversees*

**Barton Stewards**
- A formalized community volunteer network

*Source from*

**Local neighbors**

**Partner matching**
- Brings together compatible programming partners to maximize their combined resources

*Undertakes*

**Community roundtables**
- Open forum for local groups external to FoBA to participate in major decisions
Friends of Barton Avenue (FoBA)

Governing board comprised of AAF, MHMA, and other partners with interest and organizational capacity

Facilitates...

1. **Community Roundtable**
   a. Open forum for local groups external to FoBA to participate in major decisions

2. **Barton Stewards**
   a. Formalized community volunteer network
FoBA’s Networks for Outreach and Communication

1. **A Barton Avenue Streetshare** Facebook and/or Instagram page.
   a. Community Calendar
   b. Events submissions form

2. **Resource Fairs**
   a. A tabling event to connect local residents to community resources also provides a place to network and raise awareness in the wider community.

3. **Partner Matching**
   a. Brings together compatible programming partners to maximize their combined resources
Funding the Streetshare

- Funding via programming partners
- “Plug and Play” partners
- City and private grants

See our report’s appendix for detailed funding information

Existing funding for Barton Avenue:

- Small Business Services (SBS)
- Department of Transportation (DOT)
- Personal budgets of AAF & MHMA
Case Study: **Cross-Cultural Public Space at Avenue C Plaza**

**Site:** Avenue C Plaza

**Location:** McDonald Avenue & Avenue C, Kensington, Brooklyn

**Jurisdiction:** DOT Plaza

**Established:** 2010

**Governing group:** Kensington Cultural Council (KCC), which includes:

- ArtBuilt
- Arts & Democracy
- Bangladesh Institute for Performing Arts
- Casa Cultural
- The Singing Winds
- Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts NY (NOCD-NY)
Activating Barton: Suggested Programming

**Priorities**
- Performances + festivals
- Celebrating culture + community
- Movement + play
- Learning
- Building connections
- Community stewardship
- Barton Day

**Potential activities**
- Annual Korean Festival
- Moon festival
- Concerts
- Sogo Dance
- Karaoke
- Public markets
- Community gallery and art walk
- Block parties
- Food tour
- Movie night
- Ping pong
- Martial arts classes
- Yoga
- Boxing
- Dance classes
- Events for local business owners to connect
- Events for children and caregivers to connect and play
- Calligraphy class
- Cooking class
- Language exchange
- Resource distribution

*Based on public surveys*
Barton as a **Community Resource Hub**

- **Resource fairs**
  - Events for local business owners to connect.
- **Events for children and caregivers** to connect and play. (YWCA)
- **Language exchange groups** (Queens Public Library, Queens College at CUNY, and the Queens Historical Society)
Annual Events

- Barton Day (Season opener)
- Closing of the Season
- Design Days (with growth)
- Cultural festivals
Innovation Partners

Innovation partners help scale up Barton’s capacity through more complex programming and access to resources.

- YWCA
- Queens College at City University of New York (CUNY)
- Design Trust for Public Space
- Photographer Janice Chung & her exhibition ‘Photoville’
Governance + Programming: Inside-Out & Outside-In

“Inside-Out” Activities:

- Primary & secondary school art, performance, and civic events
- Plant exchange & “greening” days (“BYOPlant”)
- Morning & Evening wellness classes

“Outside-In” Activities:

- Korean Food Fair
- Street Lab “Meet a Small Business” Pop-up
- Neighborhood History Tour by the Queens Historical Society

Source: Street Lab
2. Designing a Neighborhood Anchor

Four Design Concepts for Expanded Public Space
Our design recommendations center around the idea that Barton Avenue can become the anchor for a network of expanded public space in Murray Hill’s 먹자골목/“Food Alley.”

Each of our four concepts incorporates the following elements that residents have expressed as important to them:

- Areas for peace, relaxation, and just hanging out
- A place that can be activated for lively cultural events
- Suitable to a wide range of community programming
- Improved tree cover and shade for the summer months
- Connection to the surrounding local businesses where people love to eat
Concept 1: Branching Out

The Open Street is extended to encompass the full length of Barton Ave

Implementation: Identify parking solutions, build understanding of neighboring businesses’ needs, secure near-term streetscape investments.
Concept 2: Plaza Time

Barton Avenue becomes a plaza through the DOT Plaza Program

**Implementation:** Build relationships with DOT, make a plan for becoming a management partner

Shade sail over flexible seating offers respite from the summer sun
Concept 3: Town Square

Barton Avenue becomes a DOT plaza and the adjacent LIRR plaza is redesigned simultaneously to create a cohesive public space.

Implementation: Build public & political support, work towards an administrative agreement between DOT & MTA.
Concept 4: Cap the Tracks

A deck is added over the LIRR tracks creating a unified public space between Barton and 141st Avenues.

With the tracks capped, the possibilities are endless.

**Implementation:** Build broad public, political, and administrative support and secure large-scale funding.
Temporary Activations

The L

The U

The Megablock

Street closures branching from Barton Avenue on a weekend, seasonal, or event-specific basis

Can be paired with any of the four design concepts, or even earlier
Parking Opportunities

There are a number of private parking lots in the area which are **not being used to their full capacity**. AAF or the Merchants Association may be able to secure agreements for weekend, seasonal, or special event use of these spaces.

**High Potential Lot: Gleason Funeral Home**
- Approximately 50 spots
- Just three blocks from Barton Ave

**Dedicated Spots:**
- Exploring with DOT whether dedicated spots could be created for patrons of the 먹자골목 / Food Alley
- Metered at the same rate as those on 41st Avenue to facilitate circulation
Next Steps
At any scale that AAF and its partners are able to reach, we believe Barton Avenue can and will blossom.

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Short-term steps

Many of the recommendations for governance and programming rely on increased capacity on AAF’s part, or on a larger governing body to facilitate these activities. **In the short term, we suggest the following steps to build local partnerships and expand capacity:**

1. **Identify one to two additional partners** to join AAF and MHMA in managing the Open Street to build capacity in the short term

2. **Pursue grants** that are aligned with current programming and design priorities

3. **Prioritize Plug-and-Play Partners** as they can provide immediate activation of Barton Avenue with limited input required from AAF

4. **Focus on local networking** to build connections for future seasons

5. **Host one-off events** with new partners to experiment with programming

6. **Identify and make an initial contact** with a priority Innovation Partner
Thank you!