



SHELTER SKELTER

With a record 54,667 homeless people in New York City today, there is a serious need for shelters in the city. The Department of Homeless Services has to open up shelters on a regular basis to keep up with the demand for a safe place to sleep. But who decides where homeless shelters go? And why are some boroughs taking on more shelters than others?

CUP and teaching artist Patrick Rowe tackled this question with a group of public high school students from College Now at Hostos Community College. CUP's latest *Urban Investigation* explores the decision-making process for siting homeless shelters in New York City. The students interviewed a Community Board District Manager, a City Council Member, representatives from an advocacy group, a shelter provider, and the Department of Homeless Services. They share their findings with this poster.

WHO IS HOMELESS TODAY?

Today's population in the shelter can very easily be a college graduate, a business person, or someone who ended up losing their apartment because of the economy.
- Eddie LaGuerra, non-profit shelter provider

1/3 of the families in NYC that are homeless are working, many full time.
- Steve Levin, City Council Member

SOME SOLUTIONS

The budget for the Department of Homeless Services is \$1 billion. We should increase that by 10% to give ourselves excess capacity to do more services, and to provide more subsidies for families to move out, so that we are getting families out of the system.
- Steve Levin, City Council Member

I would convene a meeting of the Borough Board and say, "We have some serious problems in the Bronx, and we should start addressing them." And through negotiation come up with a borough plan to present to the Mayor's Office, the Department of Homeless Services, and other agencies. We'd sit down with them and say "We're over-saturated in CB4, let's see how we can properly distribute these particular facilities."
- Jose Rodriguez, Bronx CB4

WHO DECIDES WHERE HOMELESS SHELTERS GO?

The Bronx is one of the areas that sends the most families into the shelter system. Many times when communities in the Bronx oppose a shelter, they're opposed to their own neighbors who've been driven out by rising rents.
- Sam Miller, Picture the Homeless

We have an open-ended RFP, a request for proposals. Landlords work with a social service provider to create a plan of what they want to do at that location. They present it to us for review, and we determine if the proposal fits our needs.
- Lisa Black
NYC Department of Homeless Services

The best proposals are the ones that have a range of essentials nearby, such as transportation and supermarkets.
- Lisa Black
NYC Department of Homeless Services

We like to keep families applying to shelters close to their support systems, their children's school, and to their last known address.
- Lisa Black
NYC Department of Homeless Services

It is better to stay within your community. That's where your base is, your friends, your family, your church, all your support systems.
- Kendall Jackman, Picture the Homeless

Because there's this capacity issue, you need to keep on siting more and more emergency shelters. So landlords, particularly under the previous administration, are opening up regular apartments as for-profit shelters.
- Steve Levin, City Council Member

DOES THE COMMUNITY HAVE A SAY?

In the past, there wasn't enough consultation preceding some of these siting issues, so one of the first things we did as an administration this year was add an amendment to the RFP that said "If you want to put a shelter in this neighborhood, be a good neighbor and tell everyone before you do it."
- Lisa Black
NYC Department of Homeless Services

If the community doesn't have an active voice in the siting of a homeless shelter in their neighborhood, then quite frankly governance itself is failing.
- Jose Rodriguez, Bronx Community Board 4

In addition to working with elected officials, we also work closely with community groups. We try to dispel the myths of homelessness and educate everyone about what we're doing to address inequality throughout the city.
- Lisa Black
NYC Department of Homeless Services

We want the public to have a say, but at the same time we don't want communities that just don't want homeless people because of prejudice. Otherwise, there would be no way for shelters to go in any neighborhood.
- Steve Levin, City Council Member

NEIGHBORHOOD IMPACT

On the negative side, we are not addressing the issues that have placed this individual or this family into this particular situation. The impact [of shelters] is a revolving door of the people that come in. There is no sustained presence in the neighborhood.
- Jose Rodriguez, Bronx CB4

Our shelter gives people a second chance to get back on their feet. We provide a lot of opportunities to people in the immediate area. That's a big, big asset because it creates economic opportunities. We also purchase a lot of materials from local vendors.
- Eddie LaGuerra, NAICA non-profit shelter provider

Why So Many in the Bronx?



The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement, particularly among historically underrepresented communities.

This project is one of CUP's *Urban Investigations* — project-based afterschool programs in which public high school students explore fundamental questions about how the city works. Students collaborate with CUP and teaching artists to create multimedia teaching tools that reach audiences in the fields of arts and social justice. www.cometocup.org



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