

Research Question: How can rezoning and cleaning of the Gowanus Canal increase commercial and economic activity?

Script

Introduction

Hello, I'm [Megan Gelin], and I'm [Khady Niasse], and we will be focusing on how rezoning and cleaning of the Gowanus Canal can increase commercial and economic activity.

We are going to start with the history of the canal:

History [Khady]

The Gowanus creek area was purchased in 1600 by the dutch. The land was used for farming tobacco and for fishing for large oysters. As time went on, they turned the Creek into the Gowanus Canal.

The area became a center for manufacturers that would use the canal to ship their products. This shows that the land has been used for commercial activities for a long time. In the 1800s, the neighborhoods of South Brooklyn were growing at a high rate and many of its sewage waste would be dumped in the canal. At that time the Gowanus was known as a slum filled with Irish immigrants and their houses were flooded with the sewage water.

The canal was also polluted from the establishments around the canal. Gowanus had coal gas manufacturing plants, oil refineries, machine shops, chemical plants, cement makers, and a sulfur producer.

To deal with the polluted canal, a pumping station was constructed in 1911. The polluted water was pumped from the head of the canal at Butler Street to the Buttermilk Channel through a 6,000 feet long tunnel.

In 1941, The Gowanus Expressway was built causing an incline of the use of the canal. In 1961, The pumping station broke in and was abandoned.

Today, The city is working on rezoning a large part of the Gowanus. Which will allow for larger residential and commercial buildings to be constructed.

Current State [Megan]

The current state of the Gowanus Canal can tell a lot about the neighborhood around it and how it is being affected, starting with rezoning.

A Gowanus rezoning plan will create 8,200 new apartments by 2035, which is expected by the de Blasio administration of rezoning. This will make the area more expensive. The plan reshapes the industrial community with residential development including 3,000 units. The goal of the rezoning is to make the area more active in every way. The more active the area is, the more economically and commercially active the Gowanus Canal becomes. Under the plan, low-rise neighborhoods would transform into development by boosting density and encouraging mixed-use projects between Fourth Avenue and Smith Street. However, by allowing the buildings to be by the waterfront, this will make the rent higher and it will get high demand.

This plan can only be somewhat promising with the engineering aspect in mind as well as the toxic state of the waterfront. The Gowanus Canal sewage system has greatly affected the surrounding area due to the runoff of waste that gets dumped into the canal during the days providing heavy rains. Residents are encouraged not to use too much water in order to minimize the flow of dirty water getting into the canal. The smell in the air that comes from the canal is anything but welcoming. During storms and other natural disasters, the water level rises, and businesses surrounding the canal are at high risk of getting flooded causing great damage to their properties. Any businesses that do get affected have no other option but to take the losses and try to rebuild. Insurance costs are too high and it seems unfair when the state doesn't consider this error as a part of their own. A lot of other things should be considered as making the area a more healthy and stable environment.

New York could do things differently by putting more effort into projects for the canal before adding housing. It puts a lot of residents at health risk, but it seems that the focus is always on making money instead of making a cleaner, livable environment. If

housing was put in a place that is hazardous for floods and the like, the money could only be meant to be made off of individuals paying for repairs or frequent health checkups. The city deliberately denies working on the canal, and I feel it is because it doesn't seem that serious enough and it won't provide any other substantial benefits. I feel like "clean" means decent enough in NYC. If it's not killing anybody at a concerning rate, then it's "nothing to worry about." A majority of the five boroughs have been riddled with trash and the streets are only being cleaned for so long until things start getting noticeably uncanny. I feel that New Yorkers have every right to a clean and safe environment that they live in and pay taxes for. If somebody fell in and eventually came out undead – or similar of that nature – New York City will definitely be the cause of a deadly apocalypse.

Cleaning [Khady]

Now that we have already talked about the canal's current state, We will now jump to how the government is planning to clean the canal and their future planning of the area.

First, let's talk about how they plan to clean the canal:

How they plan to clean:

The US Environmental Protection Agency issued a formal order to officially start the first phase of a \$506 million cleanup for the Gowanus Canal and it is expected to take about 30 months to complete. The order covers both the cleanup of the upper canal which is denominated as Remediation Target Area and the 1st Street turning basin.

They will clean it based on years of detailed engineering, scientific studies and design work. The work required by the order involves full-scale dredging and capping. Since the government is putting millions of dollars to clean up the canal and the canal toxicity came from manufacturers

They might limit the number of manufactures in the area by rezoning the area and bringing more residential and commercial in the place which will increase activities in the area. Power company National Grid is expected to receive the \$100 million of the bill on the entire cleanup because it's one of the manufactured-gas plants that polluted the waterway.

Since the Industrial Revolution, textile manufacturers, gas refineries, and coal shippers have all dumped their toxic waste directly into the canal made it a festering cocktail of poison slime and heavy metals. This might lead the government to have restrictions to not allow manufacturers near the canal and create activities around the canal that will draw visitors to come in the area which will increase the economic activity in the area.

Now we will talk about future planning:

Future planning:

The Department of City Planning will launch a “find out about Gowanus this fall” which is a development to re-plan the Gowanus area. Most individuals stated they would be open to that type of development, but only if it provided a way to reap affordable housing, jobs, and infrastructure investments.

The GCC has partnered with a landscape architecture firm to develop a vision for the Gowanus that can accommodate the diversity of uses and improve environmental quality, without sacrificing the waterway’s idiosyncratic character.

The work is a plan to reshape the industrial community with residential development including 3,000 units.

The Proposed plans are intended to meet the long-term vision of a thriving, inclusive, and more resilient Gowanus where existing, future residents and workers can participate in civic, cultural, and economic activities. Developers will be required to contribute to public spaces also.

The plan will also consider how to create park-like space and Also have different heights maintained by the buildings so that at some places people can access the waterfront and have panoramic views from on high. The Gowanus' rezoning proposal will create some 8,200 new apartments by 2035. Which is anticipated by a de Blasio administration rezoning?

Current Activities [Megan]

There are a handful of locations in the Gowanus neighborhood that encourage some activity. A few of which are the 718 Cyclery, the Black Mountain Wine House, and

the Royal Palms Shuffleboard Club. Being that they are the most popular attractions in Gowanus, how could that popularity and activity be introduced around the Gowanus Canal? Places like Sheepshead Bay where they have a line of seafood restaurants on one side where customers can eat with a nice waterfront view or the Hudson River Piers where they offer a restaurant on a boat, there is a Circle Line Cruise, a canoeing service, and the Intrepid Museum that offers exciting exhibits. These locations offer commercial activities as well as public spaces that individuals come to enjoy, jog, or bike around. A clean waterfront view is also the major reason for these successful attractions.

Let's take a look at this Oasis map and see what kind of commercial activities are present in the Gowanus neighborhood. Say, for example, that we wanted to know where the fast-food restaurants are. With the fast-food options selected, you can see here based on the location of these orange dots, that the fast-food restaurants are mainly present on the outskirts of the Gowanus neighborhood. Let's try the commercial districts, and we get the same verdict. Here is where we start to see a clear pattern.

Now let's look at the commercial zoning in the area. It appears that the areas in red are basically the areas with the most activities and popular businesses. If you notice Fulton Street at the top of this map, it has this dark red in the area. And anyone that's been to Fulton Street knows what to expect. Fulton is the most expensive retail stretch in Brooklyn. In Gowanus at the arm of the canal, there is also a red square. So what could be in this square of the Gowanus neighborhood?

This square is labeled as a C8-2 District. And as it states here, C8 Districts are bridging commercial and manufacturing uses, providing for automotive and other heavy commercial services that often require large amounts of land. So let's see what's there in Google Maps. It shows the most prominent stores in this square and they are Staples and Uhaul, that's fair. However given my experience from my neighborhood, those specific businesses aren't always bustling or popular - especially the U-Haul. Does this still qualify as "heavy commercial?". Taking a closer look at the Street View for this particular area didn't show much for activities. There was a school and a Cubesmart in the distance. That was one side on the third avenue, so now let's check the other side on the fourth avenue. There's the Staples next to a Pep Boys, a cluster of other stores, and going further down, we get to see the Uhaul. Nothing particularly interesting. I'd recolor the zoning area to a very pale red.

Possible Solution [Khady and Megan]

Megan: I feel that if there were more enticing activities within the Gowanus area around the canal, it would become a more popular place as well as encouraging a more clean environment. The canal cleaning project would be greatly enforced as an interesting commercial area would attract more tourists and finances. Having retail stores and food restaurants would make the Gowanus Canal a nice public space.

When traveling throughout this area, you're not presented with a chaotic or energetic environment that you would find in other neighborhoods on their popular streets. There were no convenient stores, comfy restaurants, or apparel shops. The entertaining activities available were much further away from the canal and surrounded the edge of the Gowanus neighborhood. The closer you were to the canal, the less life you saw. A lot of potential improvements could help this neighborhood flourish. And the first step, of course, is to get the canal cleaned.

Khady:

I believe that if the government takes the action of cleaning and rezoning the Gowanus Canal area into a residential and commercial area and also provides an open space, it will bring people to the area. That will also increase the economics of the areas because people love waterfronts especially with the fact that you can have both a waterfront view and a panoramic view of the Brooklyn skyline.

Fin

This is the end of the Case Study of the Gowanus neighborhood involving the commercial activity and rezoning around the Gowanus Canal. We hope you enjoyed this research experience.