

# Flushing West Neighborhood Planning Study: History and Context

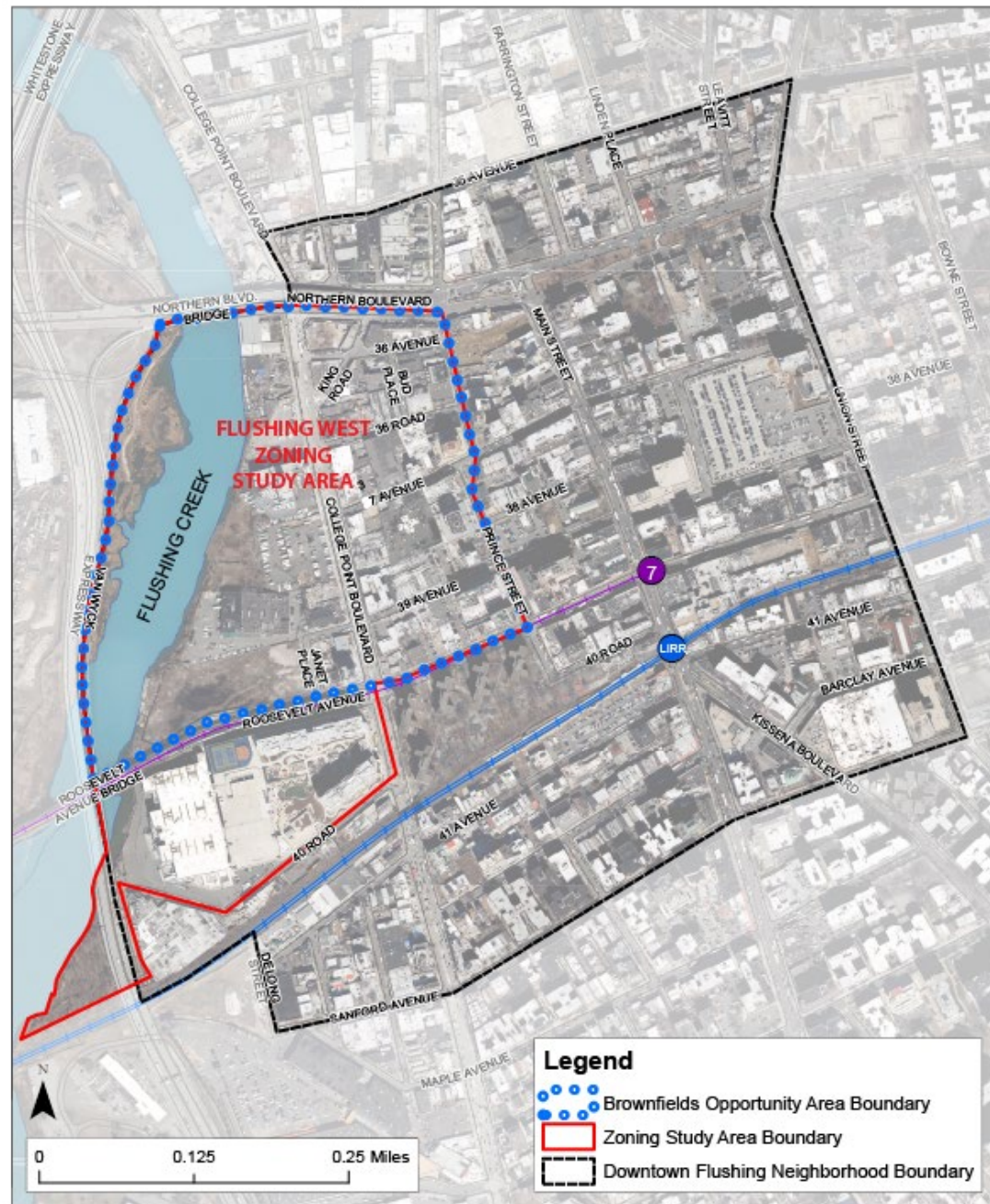


# Flushing West Neighborhood Study Area

The comprehensive Flushing West Neighborhood Study Area is located in Queens Community District 7. It encompasses Flushing's retail core, which is centered at the intersection of Roosevelt Avenue and Main Street and is bound by 35th Avenue to the north, Union Street to the west, Sanford Avenue to the south and the Van Wyck Expressway/Flushing Creek to the west. Within the larger neighborhood study area, the 11-block Flushing West zoning study area is located in the western portion of Downtown Flushing, bounded by Northern Boulevard to the north, 40th Road to the south, Prince Street to the east and the Van Wyck Expressway and Flushing Creek to the west.

Downtown Flushing has a vibrant mix of office, retail, residential and institutional uses. A wide range of commercial uses - including small offices, service-providing businesses, retail goods stores, restaurants and groceries and produce markets - densely line extensive portions of the area's main thoroughfares and side streets. The area is well-served by two transit lines, including the terminal station of the No. 7 subway line, the Long Island Railroad's Flushing-Main Street Station and numerous MTA/NYCT bus lines.

The Flushing West study area is less than two miles east of LaGuardia Airport, and Downtown Flushing lies underneath the airport's primary approach path. John F. Kennedy International Airport is located about eight miles to the south.



# History

Flushing has a rich history. From its time of Dutch settlement to the present, Flushing continues to be a hub of activity and change.

The settlement was originally named Vlissingen and chartered by the Dutch in 1645 on land acquired from the Matinecoc Indians, an Algonquin tribe that had settled in much of present-day eastern Queens. In 1657, its settlers protested Governor Peter Stuyvesant's ban on all religious practices except those of the official Dutch Reform Church, and signed a document called the Flushing Remonstrance calling for religious freedom. This document became the basis for the notion of freedom of religion expressed in the Bill of Rights.

The town of Flushing was primarily a rural farming settlement for much of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, known for thriving commercial tree and plant nurseries, including the Prince, Bloodgood and Parsons nurseries. In 1857, three years after a railroad was run between Hunter's Point and Flushing, the town had begun to grow and its boundaries were expanded.

Its growth accelerated in the twentieth century, spurred by the completion in 1909 of the Queensboro Bridge, and the introduction of rail road service to Manhattan in 1910 by the Long Island Rail Road Port Washington Branch. In 1928 the New York City Subway's IRT Flushing Line began service from Main Street and Roosevelt Avenue. Flushing grew into a suburban-style town throughout the first half of this last century and its commercial heart was located along Main Street terminating at Northern Boulevard and anchored by the palatial former RKO Keith's movie theater.

As its commercial activity increased, warehouse and industrial uses occupied the waterfront by the Flushing Creek. Constructed during the mid-1920s by the W&J Sloane furniture company, the T-shaped concrete-clad building topped by a classical clock tower and cupola, now occupied as a warehouse by U-Haul, remains a prominent structure in this portion of Flushing.

Today downtown Flushing continues to be a hub of activity and change. An extensive and detailed history of Flushing, including significant landmarked buildings, the pursuit of religious freedom and local links to the Underground Railroad, can be found in the Flushing Library.



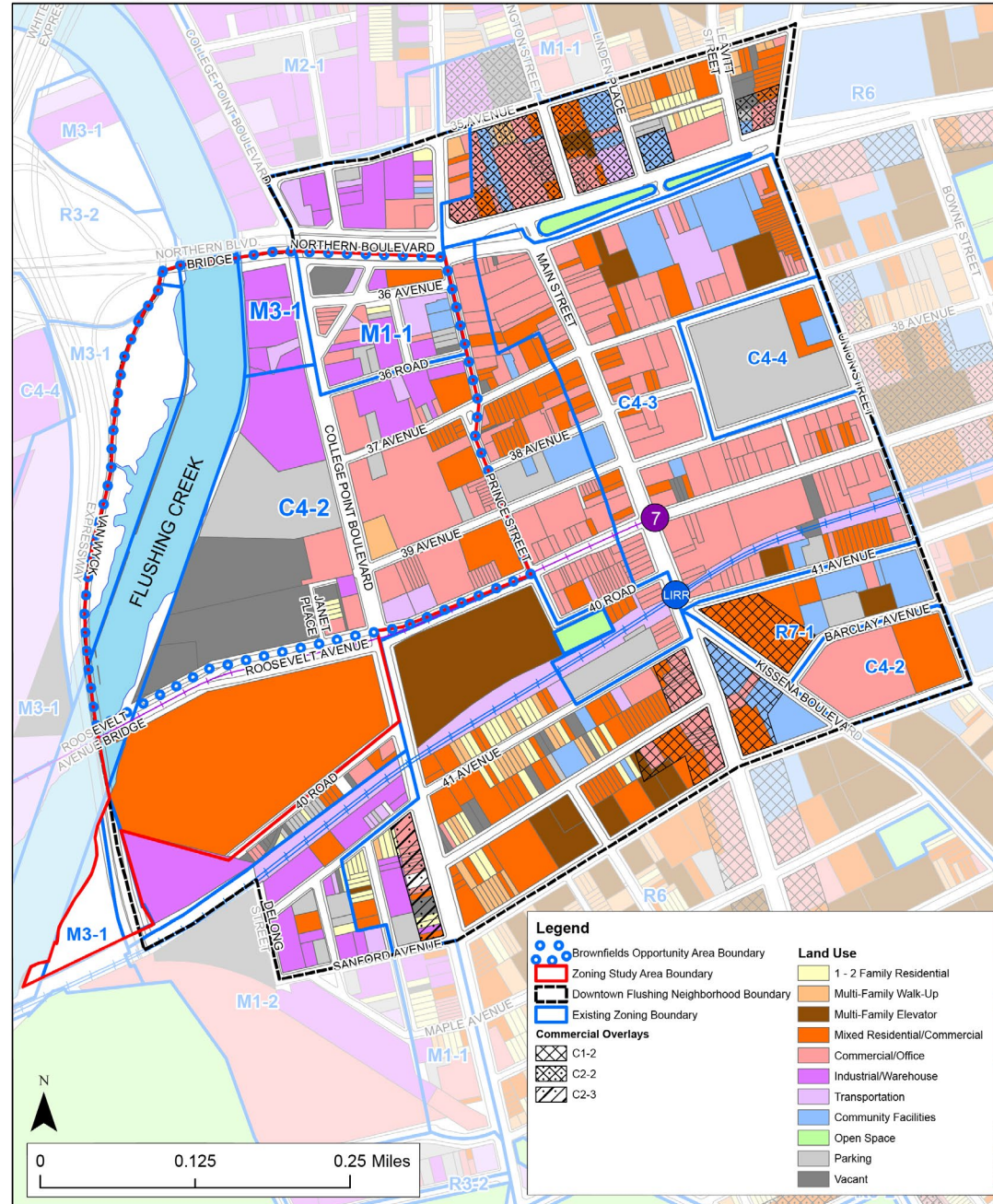
The Flushing Waterfront, 1927 (NY Public Library)

# Land Use and Zoning

The current zoning in the Flushing West Zoning study area is comprised of C4-2, M1-1 and M3-1 districts. The C4-2 zoning allows for a broad range of commercial, residential, and community facility uses. In the M1-1 and M3-1 zoning districts, commercial and industrial uses are allowed, but no residential uses are permitted. The zoning study area's 118 tax lots encompass approximately 47 acres, and primarily contain low-rise commercial and light industrial structures.

In the past, residential uses were less common within the study area, but in recent years several new 6- to 12-story residential buildings with ground floor retail uses have been built along the west side of Prince Street on the edge of the study area as allowed by the current C4-2 zoning.

Recent development activity in the rezoning study area includes a variety of new hotels, commercial offices and market-rate residential buildings as allowed under existing C4-2 zoning.



## Past Planning Efforts

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Over the last two decades, New York City agencies, including the Department of City Planning, the New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC), and the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT), in concert with the community, have carried out a number of studies and actions aimed at improving Downtown Flushing. These studies and resultant actions include the creation of Downtown Flushing Planning Framework in 1993, the implementation of a Waterfront Access Plan (WAP) and a rezoning of Downtown Flushing in 1998, and creation of the Downtown Flushing Development Framework in 2004 - a comprehensive land use planning strategy for the future growth and sustainability of the area. The 1998 rezoning of Downtown Flushing and WAP implementation resulted in areas west of Prince Street to the Flushing River rezoned from manufacturing zones to a commercial district, and requirements for redevelopment of waterfront sites to provide public access. The 2004 Downtown Flushing Development Framework identified additional issues related to the area's development quality and zoning, including a vision for redevelopment of the Municipal Lot 1 site that provided a town square-like open space.

## Environmental Context

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The Flushing West Brownfield Opportunity Area (BOA) is roughly bounded by Northern Boulevard to the north, Roosevelt Avenue to the south, Prince Street to the east and the Van Wyck Expressway and Flushing Creek to the west. BOAs are neighborhoods or areas affected by brownfields - vacant or underutilized property where contamination or perceived contamination has impeded investment and redevelopment. Through the BOA Program, funded by the State, brownfields are transformed from liabilities to community assets that generate businesses, jobs and revenue for local economies and provide new housing and public amenities.

Included in the BOA and the Study's goal to provide a well-defined waterfront access and public space amenity plan, clean-up of the Flushing Creek is a high priority. The section of Flushing Creek just to the north of the Study Area is lined on both sides by industrial uses, including concrete plants and asphalt manufacturers. Construction along the eastern side of the creek within the Study Area has been limited and the shoreline is not accessible to the public. Wetlands lie along the western side of the creek. As the lead agency on efforts to clean up the Creek, the Department of Environmental Protection's is currently seeking DEC's approval for a Long-Term Control Plan for the Creek.

# Demographics

## Demographic Analysis

In order to study the area's demographics, four Census tracts were identified: tracts 849, 853, 869 and 871. These four Census tracts cover both the Flushing West Zoning Study Area and the Downtown Flushing Neighborhood Context Area (see Figure 1).\*

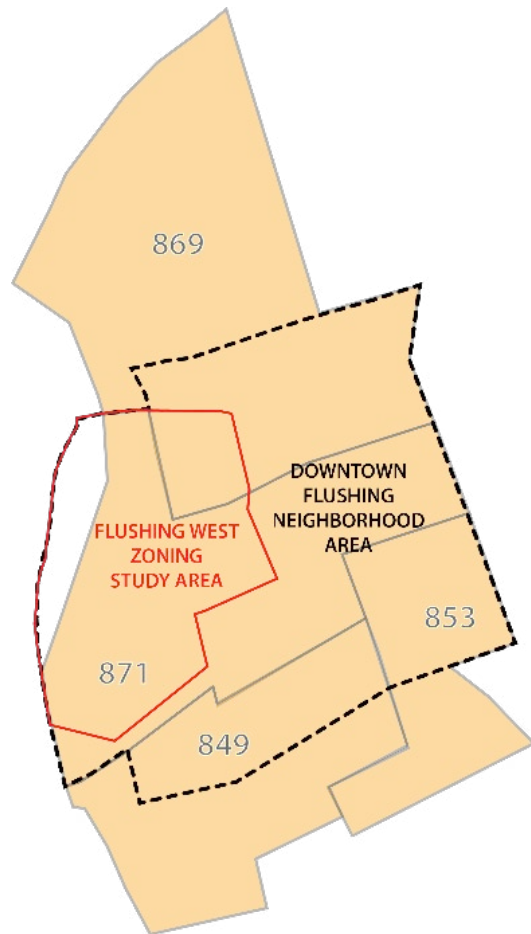


Figure 1

## Race/Ethnicity

The Flushing West Study Area currently has a population of 16,244 people who live in approximately 6,469 housing units. Although the population is a small portion of the roughly 2.2 million residents in Queens County, it is one of the densest neighborhoods. The area is a multi-cultural and multi-lingual immigrant hub, with a significantly large Asian population (see Figure 2) – 71.1 percent, which is about three times that of the county overall. The largest ethnic group is Chinese (see Figure 3); the Chinese-immigrant population of Flushing surpassed Manhattan's Chinatown years ago. Compared to the county and city overall, a high percent of the area's residents do not have U.S. citizenship (see Figure 4).

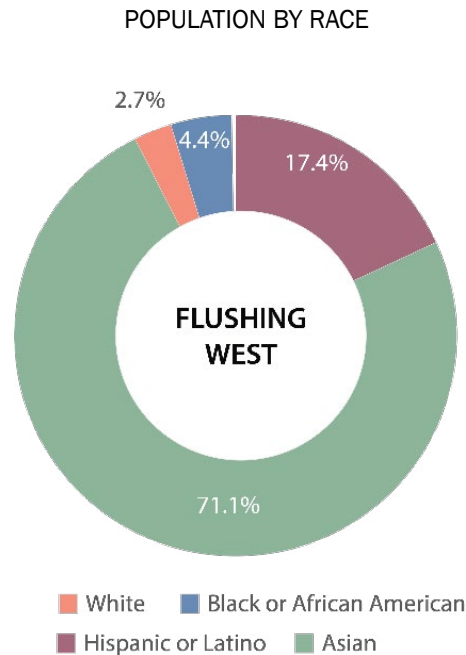


Figure 2

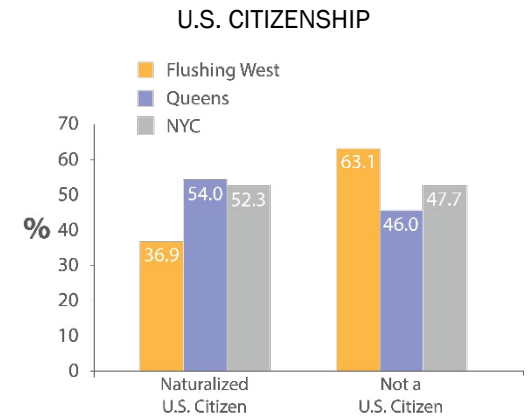


Figure 4

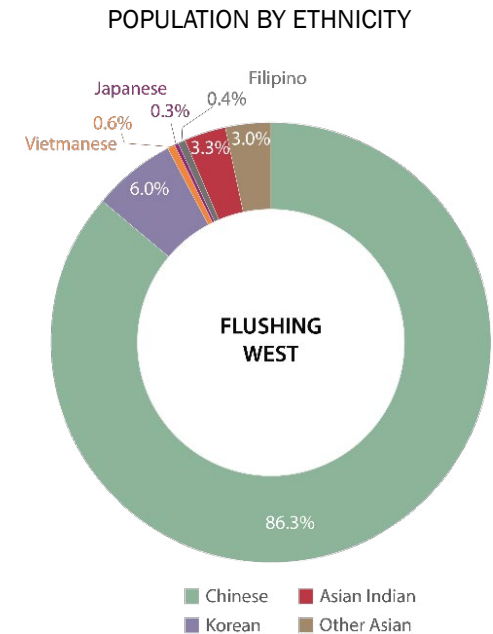


Figure 3

\*Demographic data sourced from U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009-2013 5-year estimates.

# Demographics

## Income/Employment

Although the area's percent of employed workforce is comparable to the county and city overall (56.5 percent; 58.1 percent; 56.6 percent, respectively), its median household income is much lower: \$34,428 (see Figure 5). The highest share of households in Flushing West are in the \$15,000 - \$25,000 income bracket (19.2 percent), while the highest share of households in the county and city overall are in the \$50,000 - \$74,000 income bracket (18.1 percent and 15.7 percent, respectively. See Figure 6).

High employment levels combined with a low median household income indicate that the majority of the workforce are employed in low-paying jobs. Figure 7 depicts the dominant type of employment as service-sector jobs (35.7 percent), which can include retail, food service, beauty service, etc. These services are prominently seen lining major commercial corridors such as Roosevelt Avenue, Union Street and Main Street, and are prime destinations for the area's visitors.

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

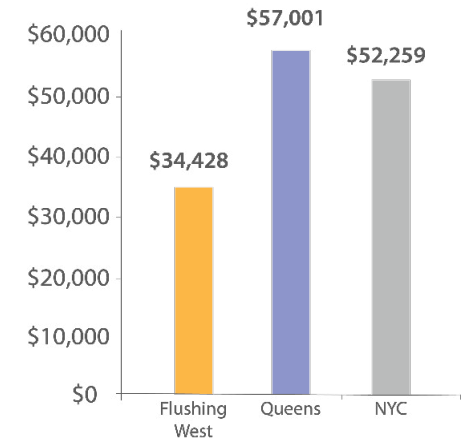


Figure 5

INCOME BRACKETS (% of households)

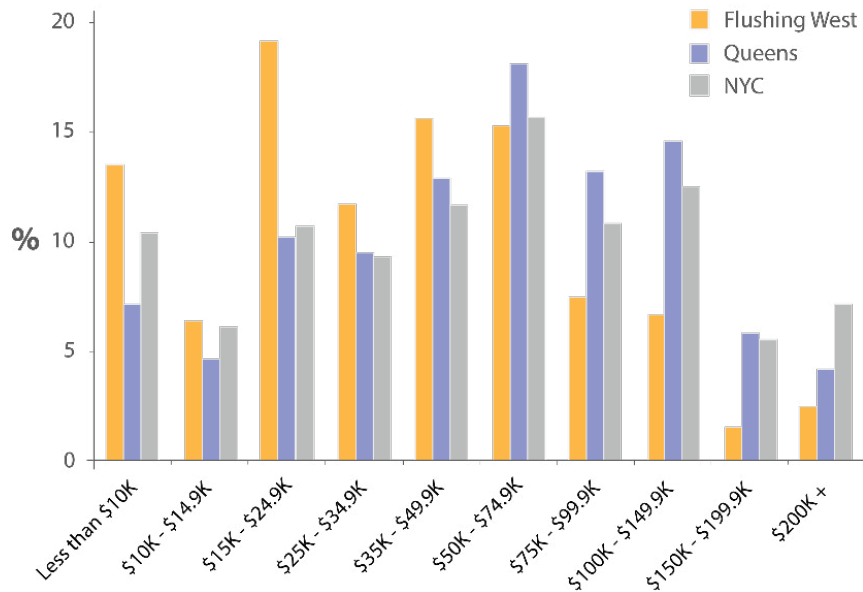


Figure 6

TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT

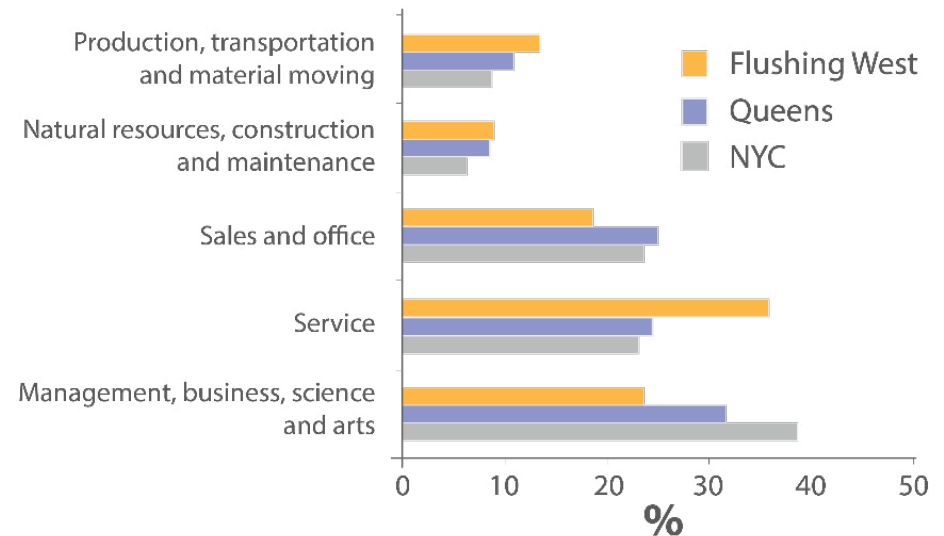


Figure 7

# Demographics

## Travel Behavior

68 percent of households in the area are zero-vehicle households, while the majority of households in the county overall have one or more vehicles (62.6 percent, see Figure 8), showing a stark contrast in car ownership. Meanwhile, the most common mode of transportation to work is public transit, which is comparable to the county and city overall (52.3 percent; 51.7 percent; 55.9 percent, respectively. See Figure 9.). Notably, the percent of workers walking to work is higher in Flushing West (20.8 percent) than the county and city, which indicates a portion of the population who work in the same neighborhood they live in. With a low vehicle ownership rate, the data shows that the area is highly dependent on utilizing public transit and walking to get to where they need to go.

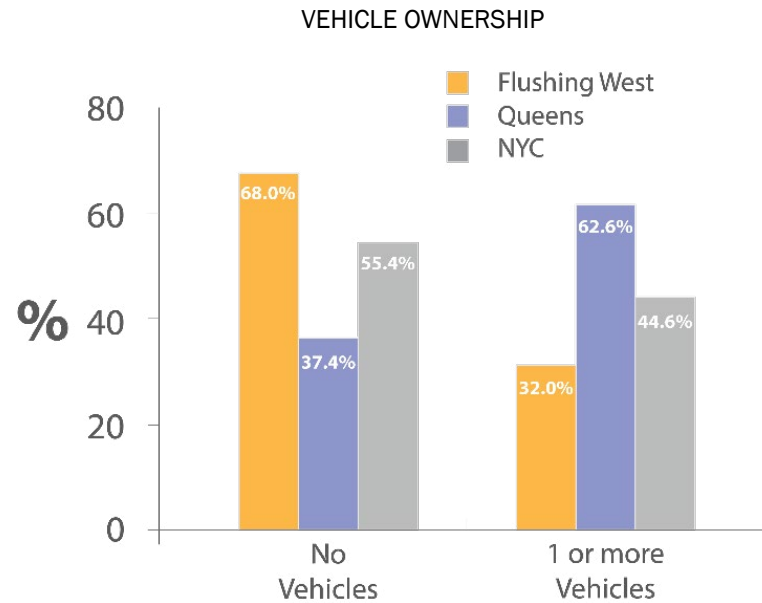


Figure 8

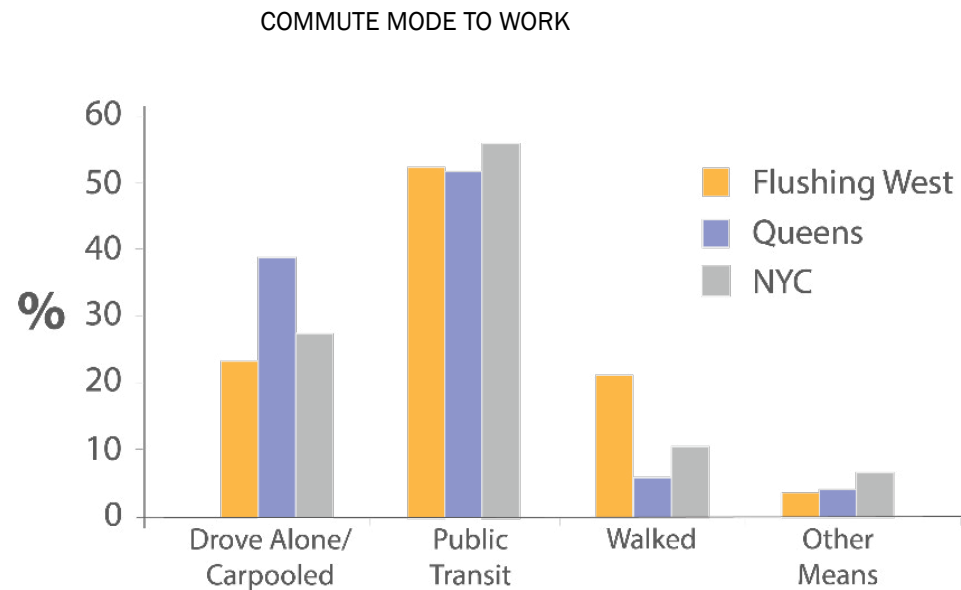


Figure 9