



End of Year Report January 2015

Who we are & what we do: Queens Neighborhoods United is a broad-based organizing coalition that aims to build power and develop leadership in the neighborhoods of Corona, Elmhurst, and Jackson Heights. Our work consists of talking to vendors, residents, community members, business owners, and other local organizations. We focus on issues of displacement, gentrification, over-policing, immigration and all relevant intersections.

Why we do what we do: From sky-rocketing rents to increased "Broken Windows" policing, we want to emphasize the voice of our community against the forces that seek to marginalize and displace us. We see our elected and appointed officials poorly represent their constituents, and a rising narrative that claims our community is "broken" and needs to be fixed. Local officials introduce superficial solutions, like Business Improvement Districts and increased police presence by way of a Taskforce, all while ignoring the fact that our community has been consistently and historically underserved. The proposed Jackson Heights/Corona BID will not improve our community, the same way increased police surveillance will not keep us safer. It will only raise rents, squeeze out small businesses, and homogenize our cultural home. We need more public funds allocated to local job creation programs, mental health services, general street upkeep, and alternatives to Broken Windows policing; we do not need undemocratic public-private partnerships like the BID invading our communities. We simply call on the City to do its job.

Below we list our events, victories and general findings from 2014:

1. Collective Anti-BID Response:

Through door knocking in buildings and canvassing on streets, we were able to inform merchants, tenants, vendors, and general community members about the BID. Many of them had never heard of the BID, and were not aware of its proposed expansion. The collective response was overwhelmingly anti-BID. We successfully collected over 200 tenant and merchant ballots against the BID, and almost 1000 petitions denouncing the BID. At public meetings in July, over 100 community members spoke out against the BID and denounced it as a tool for displacement and gentrification.

We also staged "cleaning actions" as a way to protest the narrative that our community is inherently dirty. We discovered that garbage collection was not as frequent as it should be, especially considering the foot traffic that Roosevelt Avenue attracts. In fact, on nearly every block we found overflowing garbage cans.

QNU has also been involved in the larger city-wide anti-displacement movement. We are in touch with college professors from Queens College, The CUNY Graduate Center and The New School who are looking at BIDs as tools for displacement. QNU has been featured in their classes, and coalition members have spoken in their classes. Similarly, QNU was part of the “Right to Remain” project, which highlights displacement across the city and the country. We were featured next to communities from Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Arizona who are also fighting against displacement.

2. Interest in Collective Organizing

After various conversations, it became evident that Roosevelt Avenue merchants and tenants were really interested in organizing themselves. They wanted to know more about the BID and how to fight against it. They wanted to be better informed about their rights and how to find strength in numbers. This sparked the creation of the Merchants Association and the Tenants Association. A lot of leaders were born at those meetings and we hope they continue into 2015. We also engaged a lot of youth who were interested in getting more involved in their community. They attended clean-ups and painting events and were trained in outreach methods. We strongly believe that an organized community is a safe community.

3. Proposed Taskforce & Increased Policing:

As the Anti-Police Brutality movement built momentum, QNU was able to analyze how increased policing is often used as a tool for displacement. QNU began working with New Yorkers Against Bratton and joined forces with the local Copwatch team. Our members patrolled the streets of Jackson Heights and Corona and witnessed the over-policing of our community. The current style of policing, also known as Broken Windows Policing, does not function to protect immigrant communities of color like ours. In fact, increased reactionary policing will only work to make our community more vulnerable and susceptible to higher incarceration rates. Lastly, QNU was part of a speak-out and march to the 115th police precinct organized by Desis Rising Up & Moving (DRUM) against police brutality in Queens. Alongside over 100 community members, QNU marched through Jackson Heights and shut down several streets. Our members spoke about police harassment and abuse.

4. The Resignation of the BID Executive Director

Seth Taylor, the Executive Director of the 82nd St. Partnership, resigned from his position in late 2014. We believe that it was our organizing efforts that led to his resignation. However, we want to emphasize that he is simply an individual in the larger gentrification process. While we can consider his resignation a win as it disrupted the BID process, we must stay vigilant. The BID has hired Leslie Ramos as the new Executive Director. She has declined to meet with us, and has not shared her plans for our community. Regardless of the individual put in power, QNU still firmly stands against all BIDs and the at-large displacement of communities of color like ours.

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