

Social Designers

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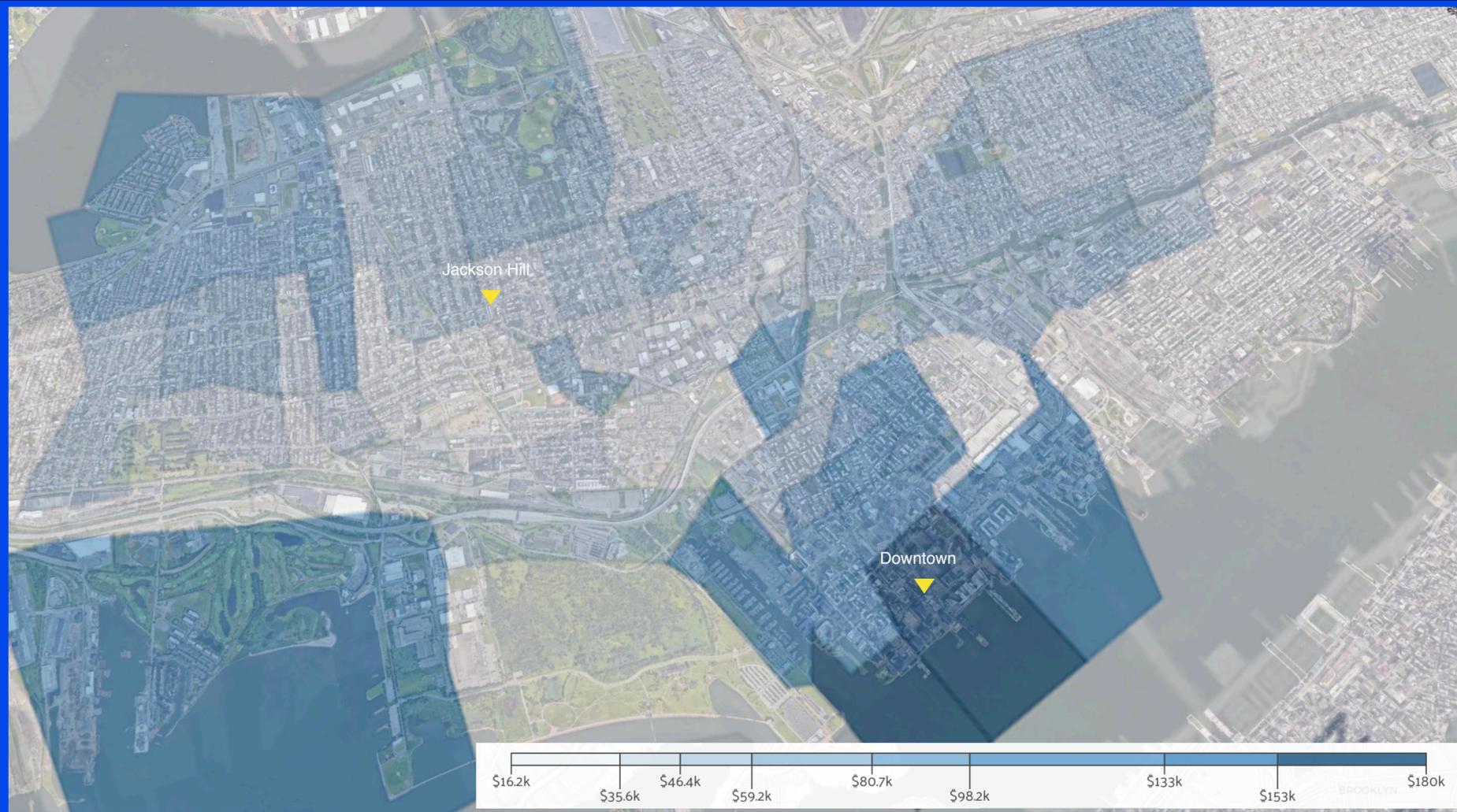
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Income Displacement Map

Social Design Goal:

How might we prevent collective displacement from occurring in the Jackson Hill District of Jersey City?

Through a series of interviews with residents, who for most, happen to also be activists for their block, community or district, we discovered a convergent concern: inequity for Jersey City families. The problem is deep and wide. From an affordable housing crisis, to a severely underfunded school system, to disproportionate street violence - families who have made Jersey City their home for generations are seeing progress in the city,

but not experiencing it in their neighborhood. While the speed of change and widening inequity conspire to create a demoralizing outlook on the future of Jersey City's socioeconomic diversity, we met a few who are committed to closing the disparity. And we collaborated with one who is empowered to represent her community through the Jackson Hill Redevelopment Plan.

Croson Study

Black and brown communities are not sharing in the economic revitalization.

Jersey City's Croson Study is was 10-year study that analyzed procurement data related to redevelopment and the construction industry for women and minority owned businesses(W/MBE). It began in 2001 and pulled from procurement practices from 2002 to 2008. The study was completed in 2011.

Disparity was found in all categories. W/MBEs won the following percentages in prime spending:

- Construction:** 8.49%
- Architecture & Engineering: 3.89%
- Professional Services: 6.38%
- Other Services: 0.66%
- Goods & Supplies: 1.41

Jersey City ignored correcting this disparity. Although the study provided recommendations, it went to a committee who stripped away key recommendations.

And so much time has passed since the original study it is now being restudied at a smaller scale. City government has the privilege to let time pass. As redevelopment increases the cost of living in Jersey City, minority and working class communities are at risk of collective displacement.

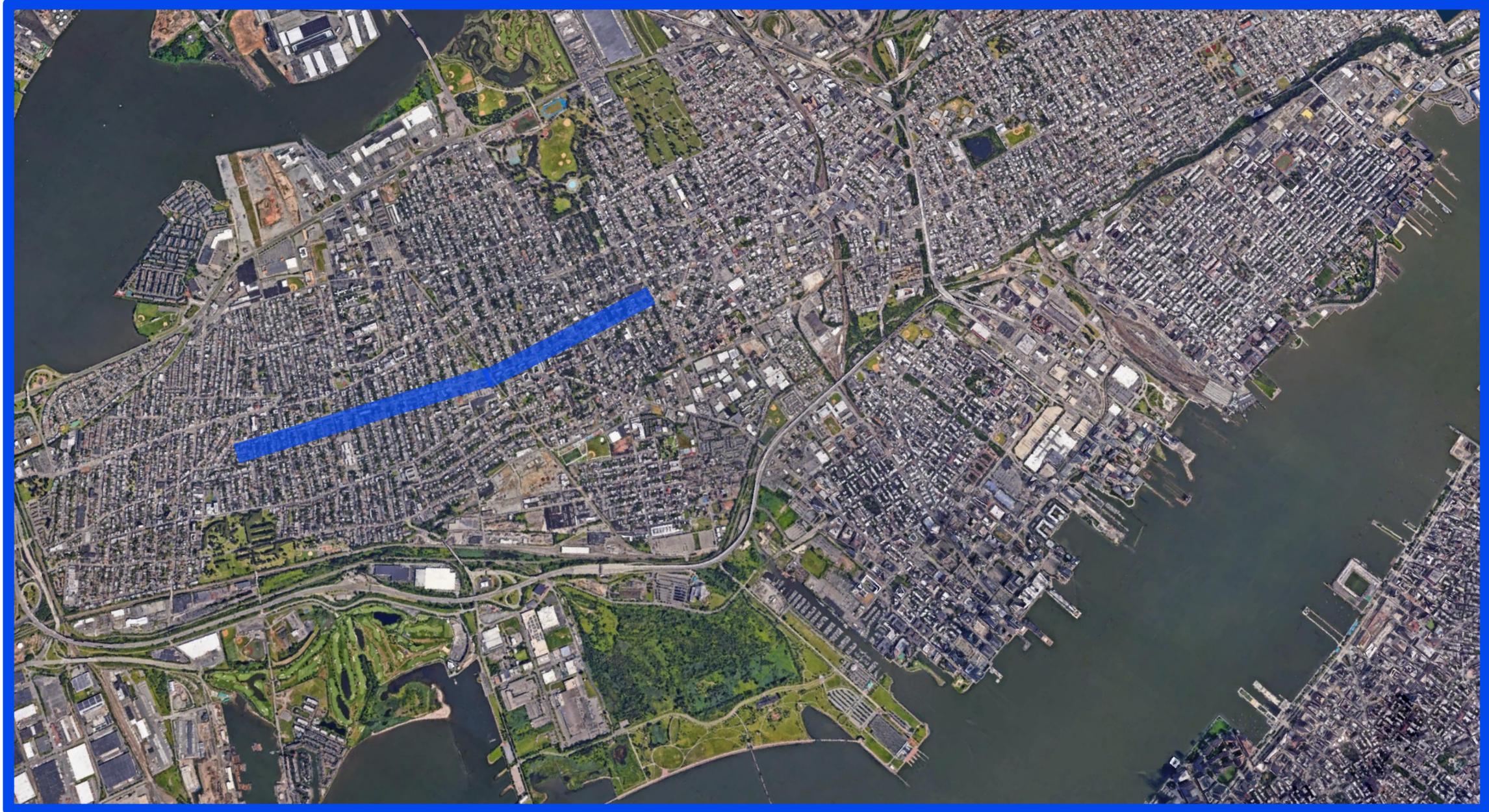


Broken Connection

The combination of ignoring disparity and top-down planning policies that do not take into account on-the-ground consequences have caused mistrust in Jersey City Government.

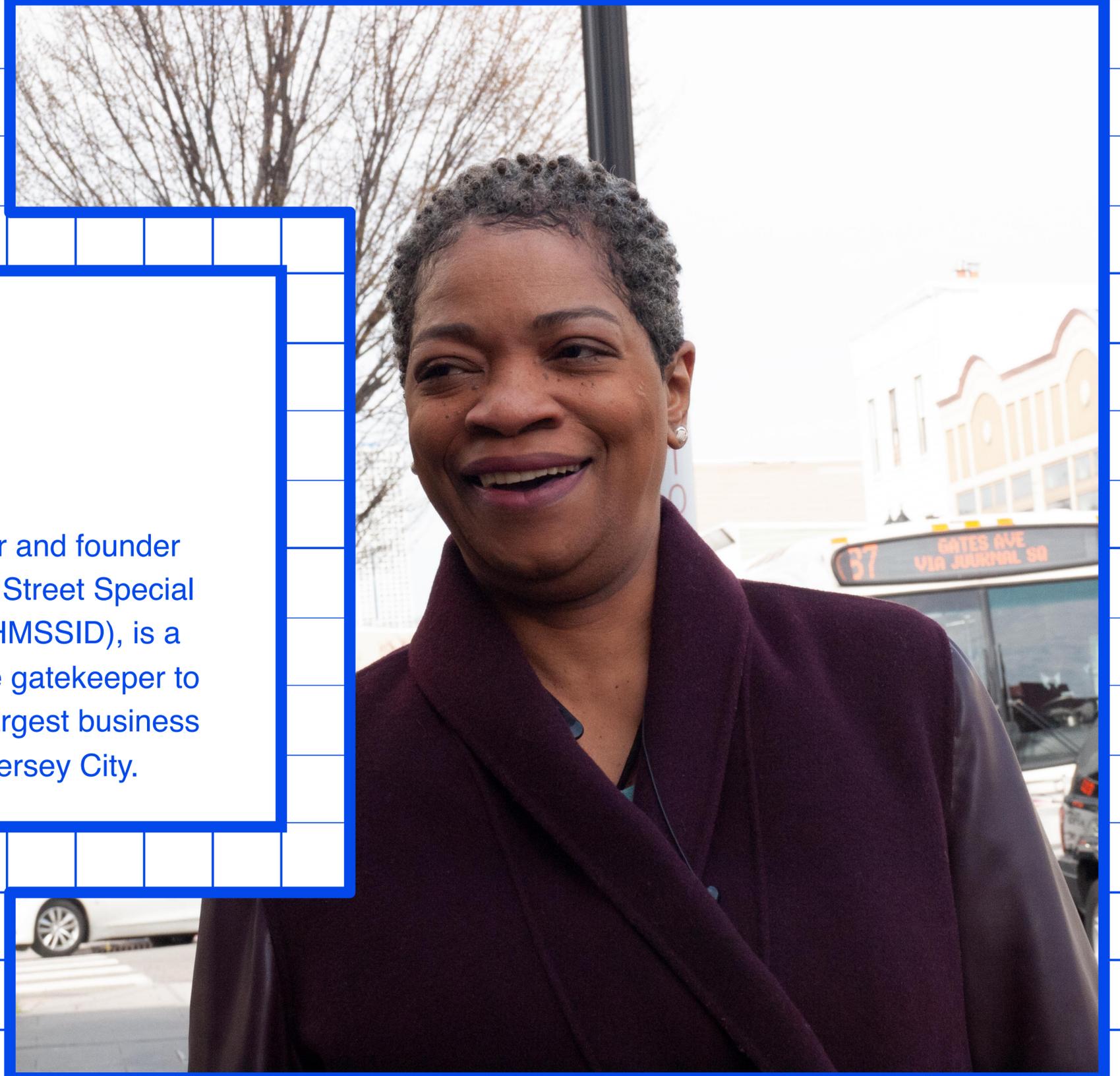
Jackson Hill

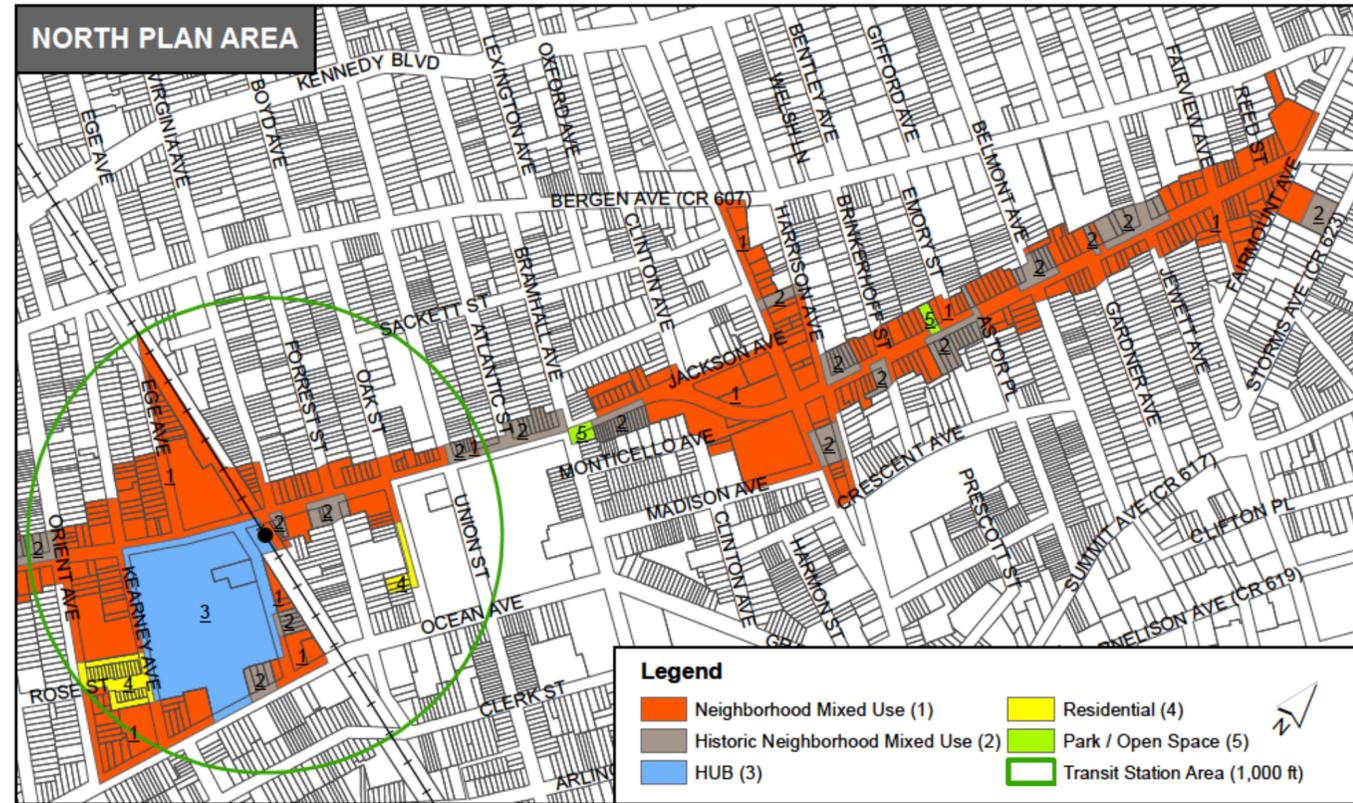
The Jackson Hill district is home to inter-generational African American and Latinx communities. The current demographic makeup (from the 2010 census) is African American (42.2%) and Latinx (26.8%). Moore's Lounge, considered by Michele as part of the heart of her community, is a 50 year-old business which is home to a grassroots jazz scene and a host of community events and services to the people of Jackson Hill.



Michele Massey

Michele Massey, director and founder of the Jackson Hill Main Street Special Improvement District (JHMSSID), is a district advocate and the gatekeeper to redevelopment for the largest business and residential area in Jersey City.



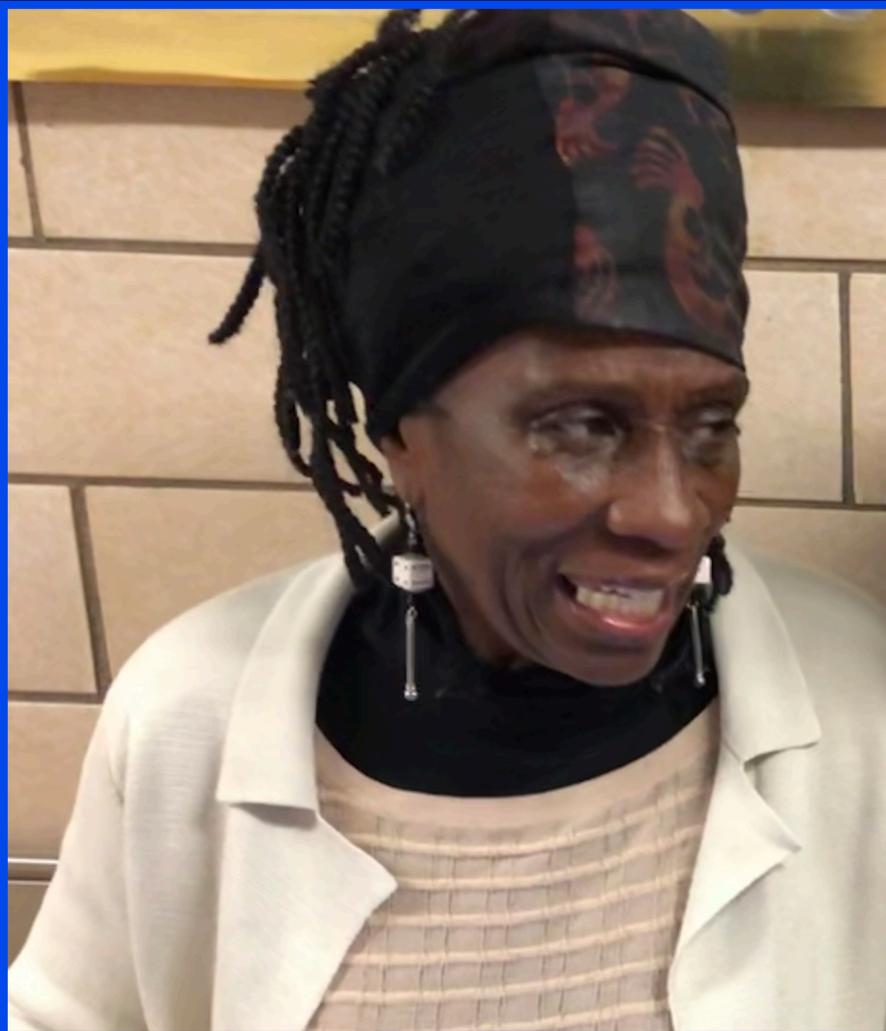


Jackson Hill Redevelopment Plan

The redevelopment plan is a zoning document. It lays out what is legally permissible for developers to build in neighborhoods. We are working specifically on the Jackson Hill Redevelopment Plan (JHRP). Community empowerment is built into the plan through JHMSSID. In Michele's words:

"I have conversations with community members. The complaints I hear inform how the plan needs to be revised."

Since its 2016 amendment, the JHRP is ready for more changes. The need for affordable housing and jobs is alongside the need for a parking plan. This was an unforeseen problem in the area of displacement caused by gentrification. We set out to understand why.



Sharon

Resident
Retired McNair Academic High School Teacher
President of the Union Street Block Association

“

I don't like to go out after 4pm. Last year I paid \$400 in tickets. Where can you park safely?

The city #4 bus was taken away. The community discussed their concerns about having no bus, but still it was suspended.

Beginning June 1st, the Light Rail station will be shut down for one year.

The disparity, I can't stand. They're running the poor people out.

The Intersection of Road Safety and Redevelopment

In February 2019, Jersey City formally adopted the Vision Zero campaign to eliminate fatal and serious injury traffic crashes by 2026. Through a year-long process of studying and engaging community, the campaign adopted a multi-prong strategy to reduce fatalities which included reducing speed with streetscapes and increasing punitive measures to reinforce safer driving behavior.

What happens when a city implements a vision to have less cars on the road, while encouraging high density development in working class neighborhoods dependent on vehicles?

Vision Zero

"Capitalize on the unique opportunity Jersey City has to make walking, biking, and taking transit preferable to driving for the majority of everyday trips in the community."

Jackson Hill Redevelopment Plan

"Reduce automobile dependency by encouraging high density development in close proximity to mass transit and neighborhood services with low automobile parking ratios and with bicycle parking requirements."

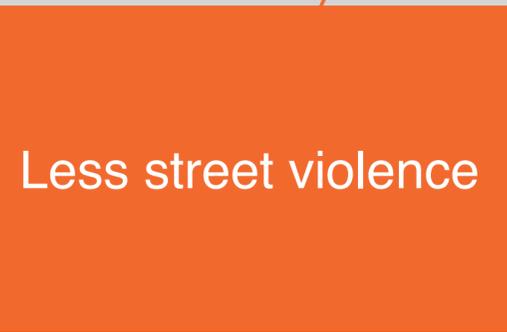
Current Conditions for Displacement



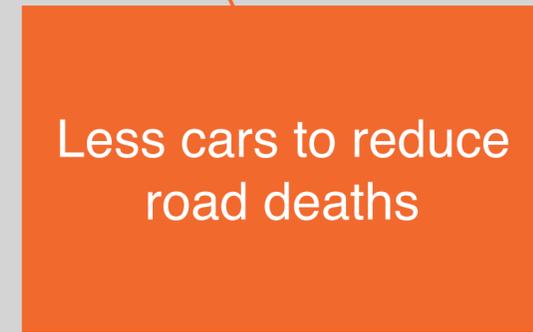
The Inequitable Path to Safety



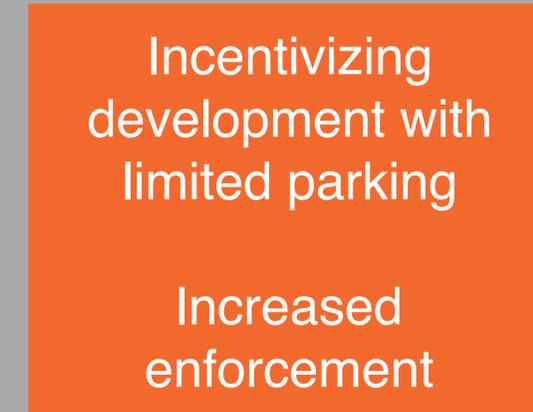
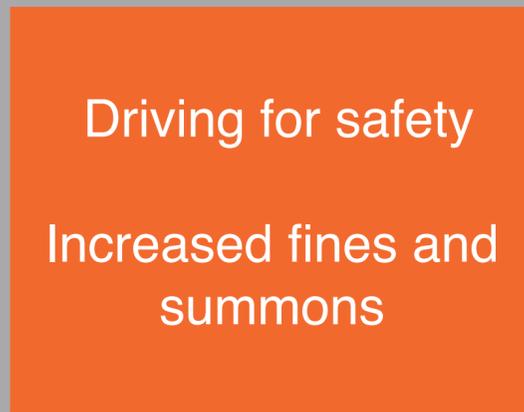
Vision



shared outcome



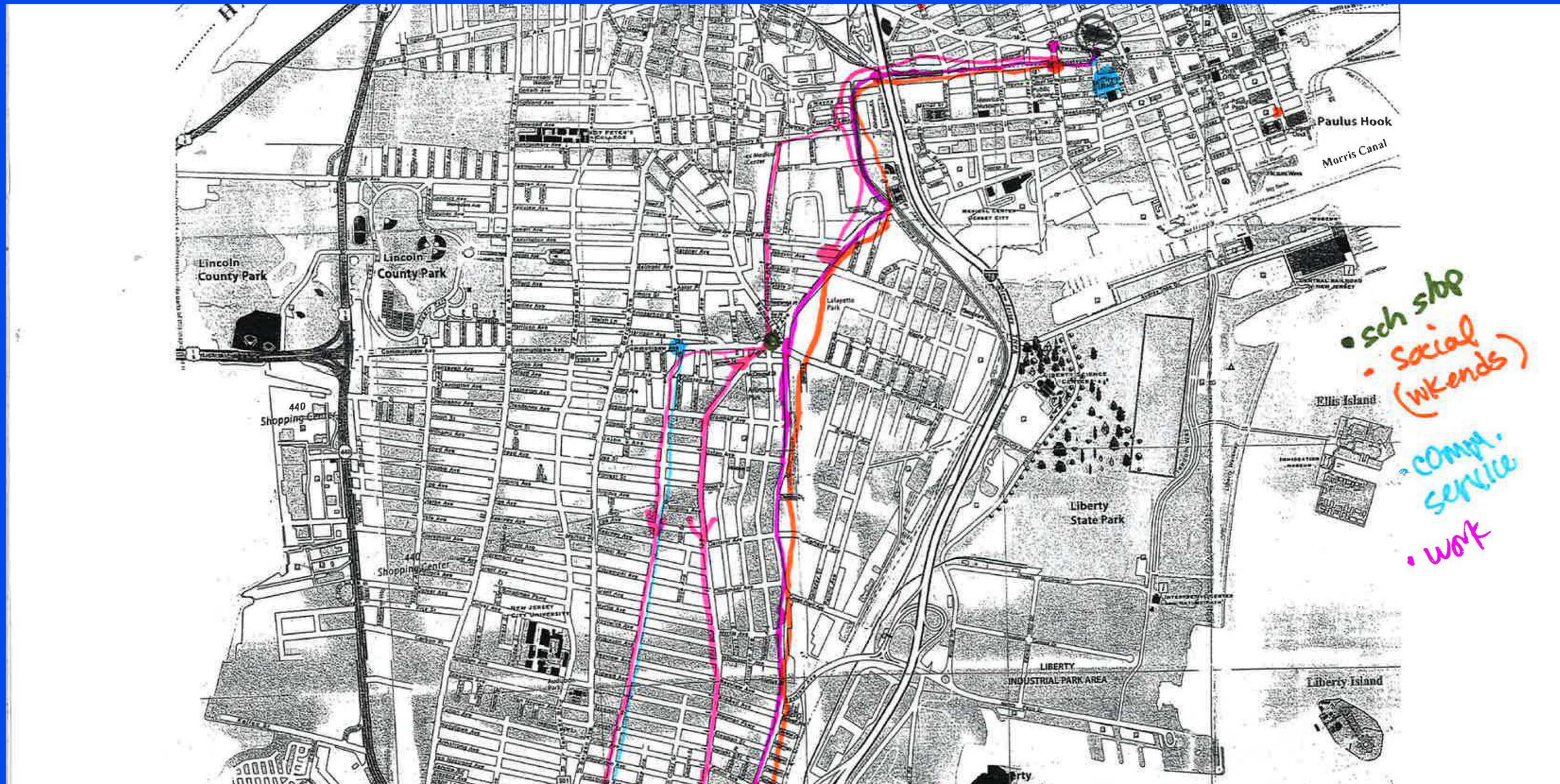
Current Conditions



ECONOMIC LOSS

ECONOMIC GAIN

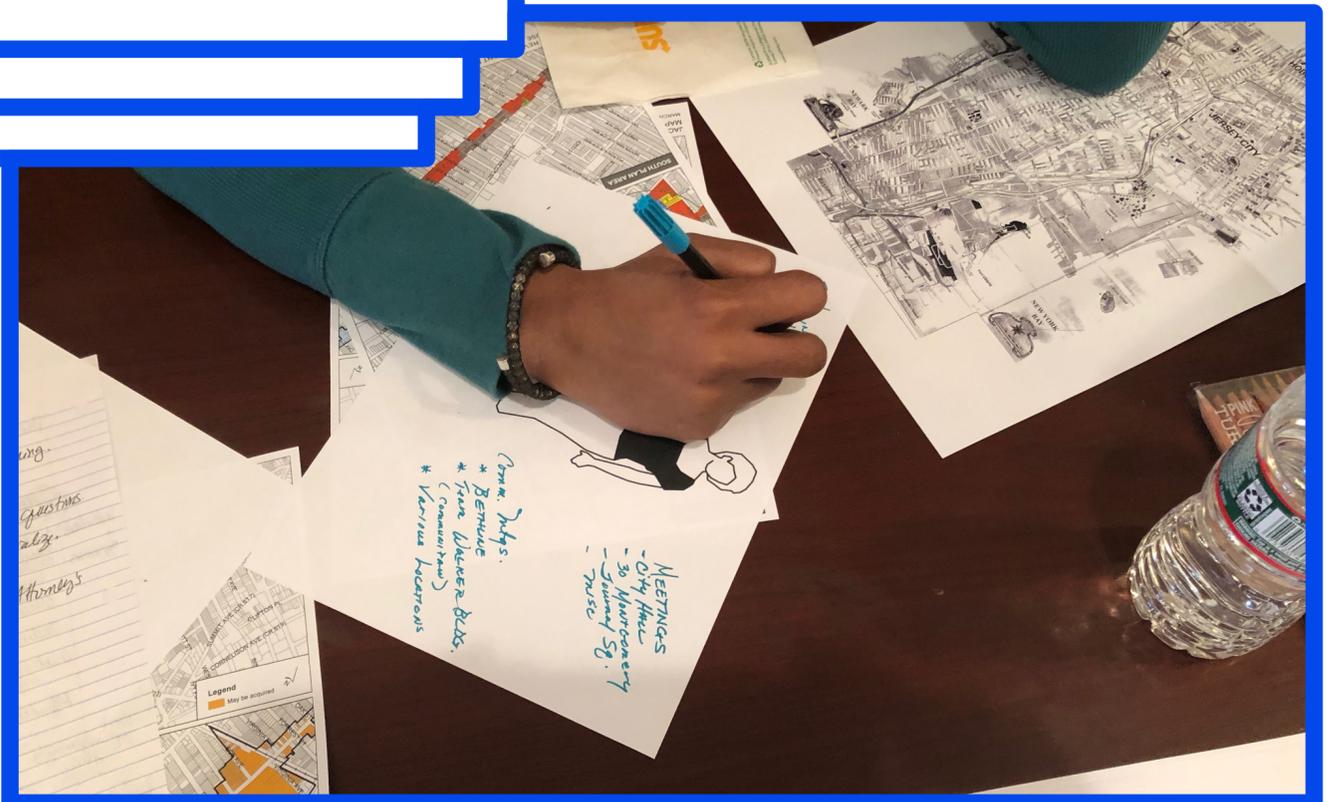
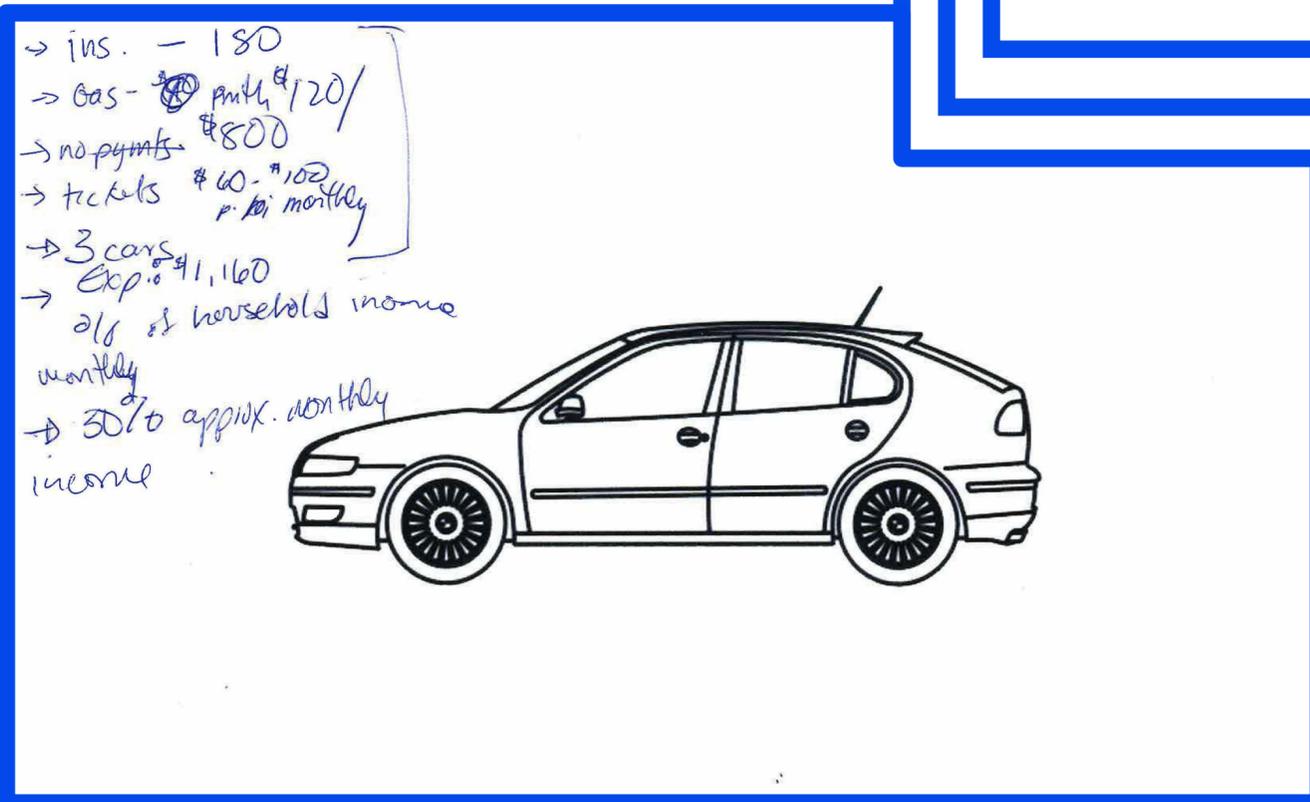
Prototype 1



What is the evidence for needing a car?



Prototype 1



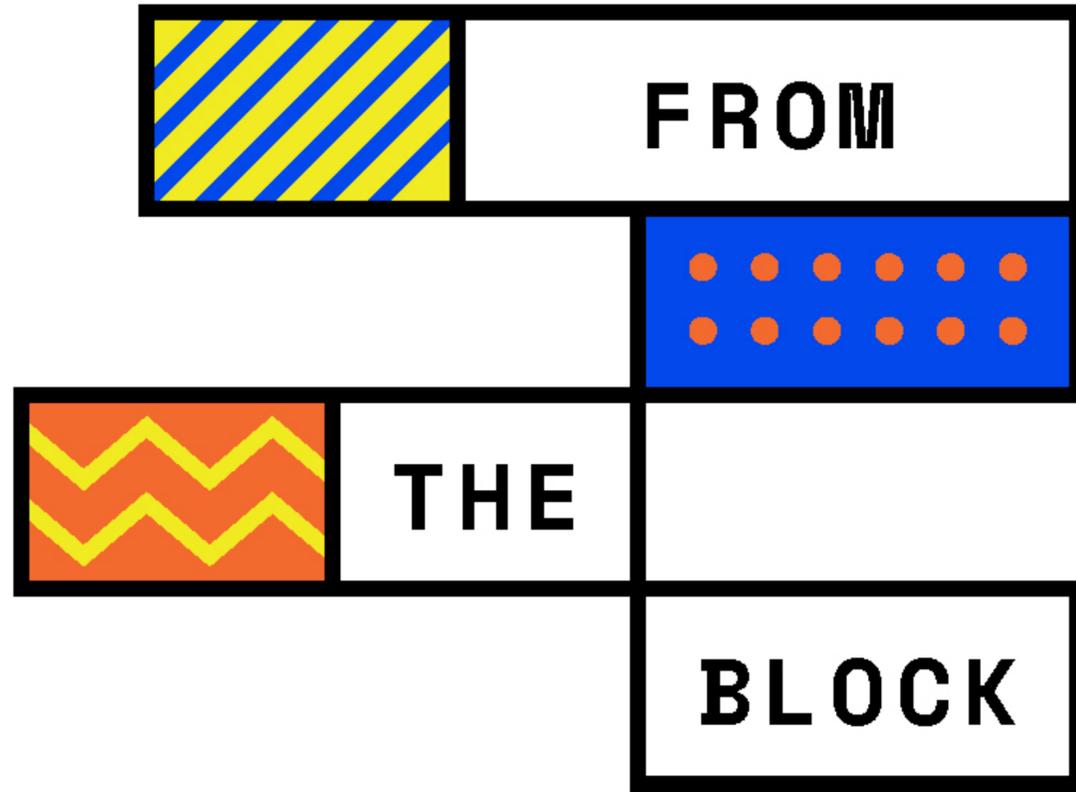
User Feedback

Mapping visualized the individual stories and evidence for the multitude of reasons for depending on a car. We made slight tweaks on our prompts and got feedback to use a larger map for our subsequent user testing.



Mapping is great. Information get lost or people cannot perceive a problem with just words. When we're able to show imagery, we can present a better story.

Michele



A civic engagement tool supporting grassroots activists in elevating local knowledge to shape city policies.

Through physical and digital data gathering tools, *From the Block* aims to equip community members to collect and analyze localized data with the goal of ensuring equitable conditions for communities of concern.

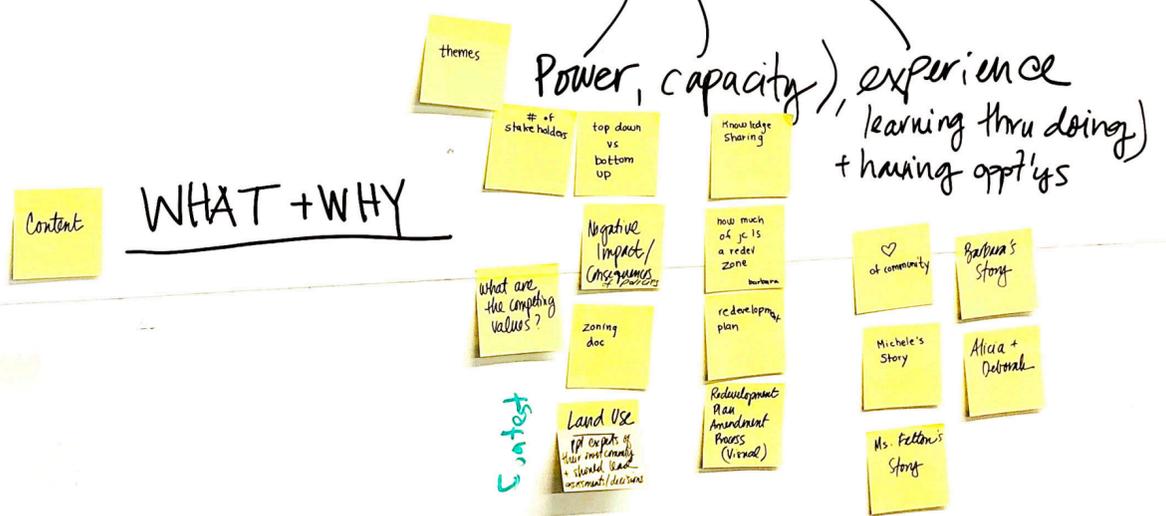
FROM THE BLOCK

Xyz

Goal: Creating conditions to Realize Potential
Tone: Curiosity + humility
Values



3 Transparency (who we are, why we're here)
- Education Clusters, equity design



Design Values

Inclusion

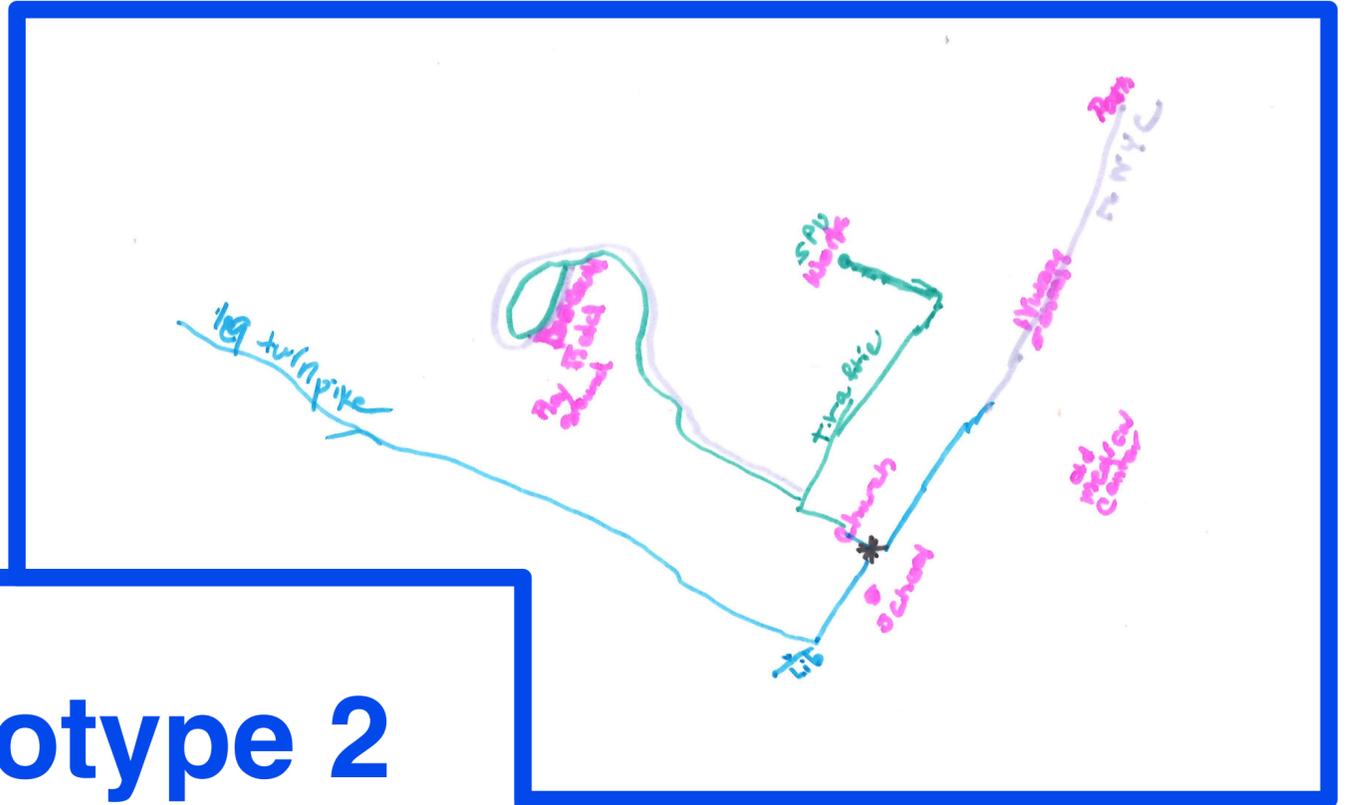
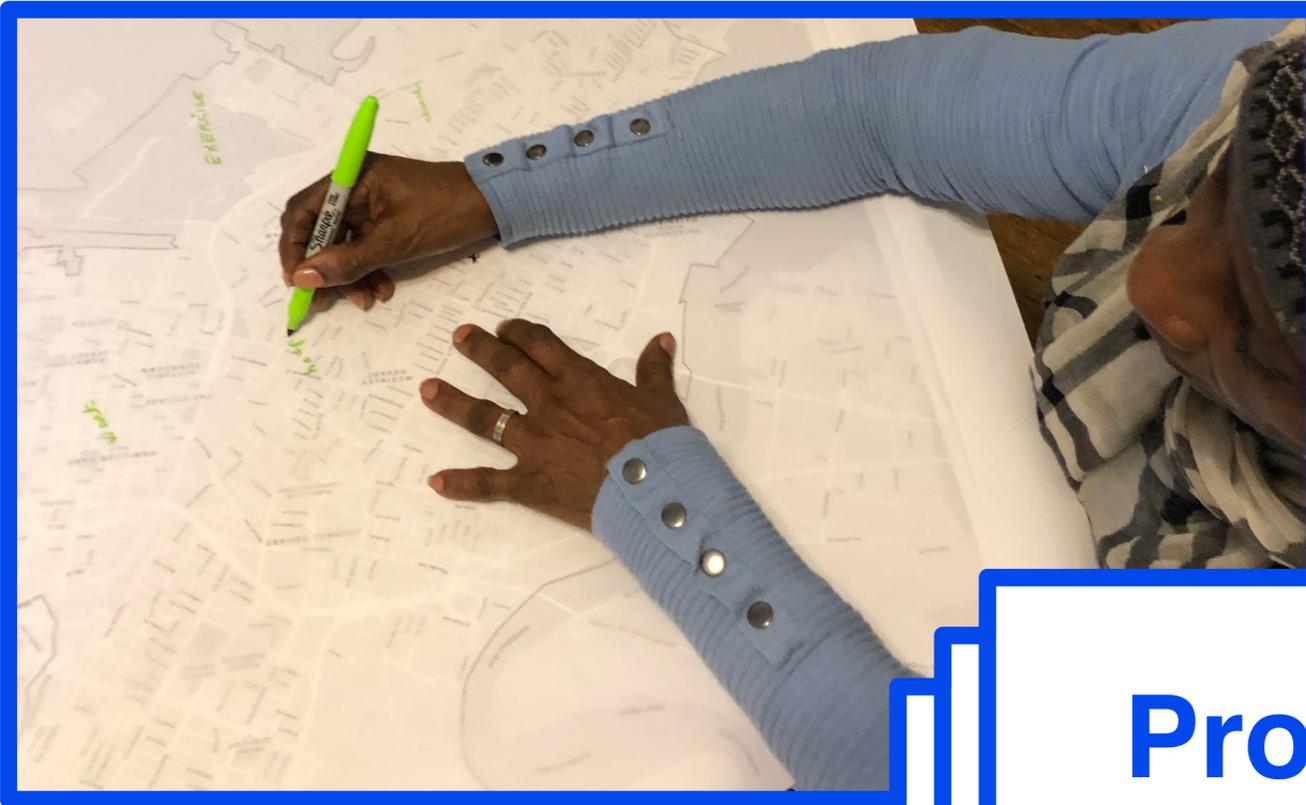
Diversity of stakeholders

Cohesion

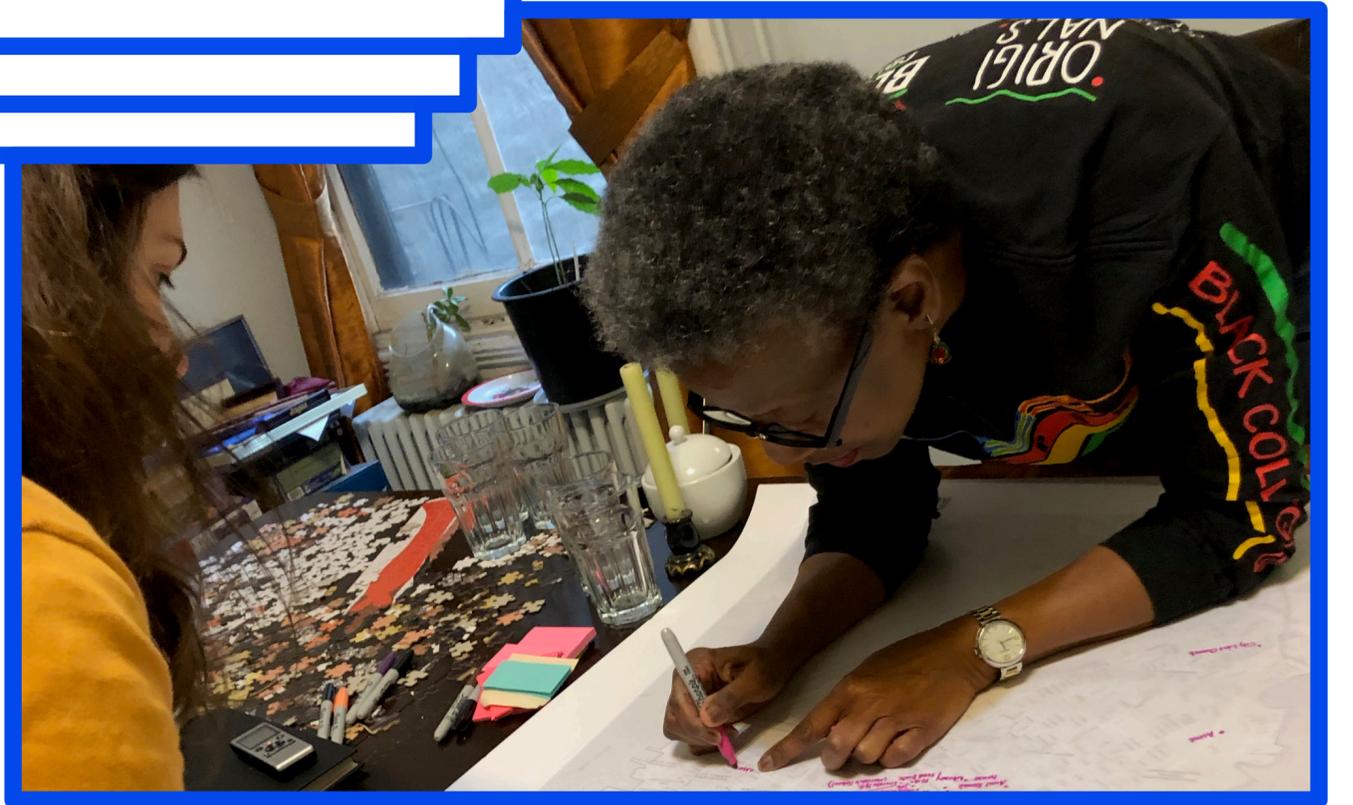
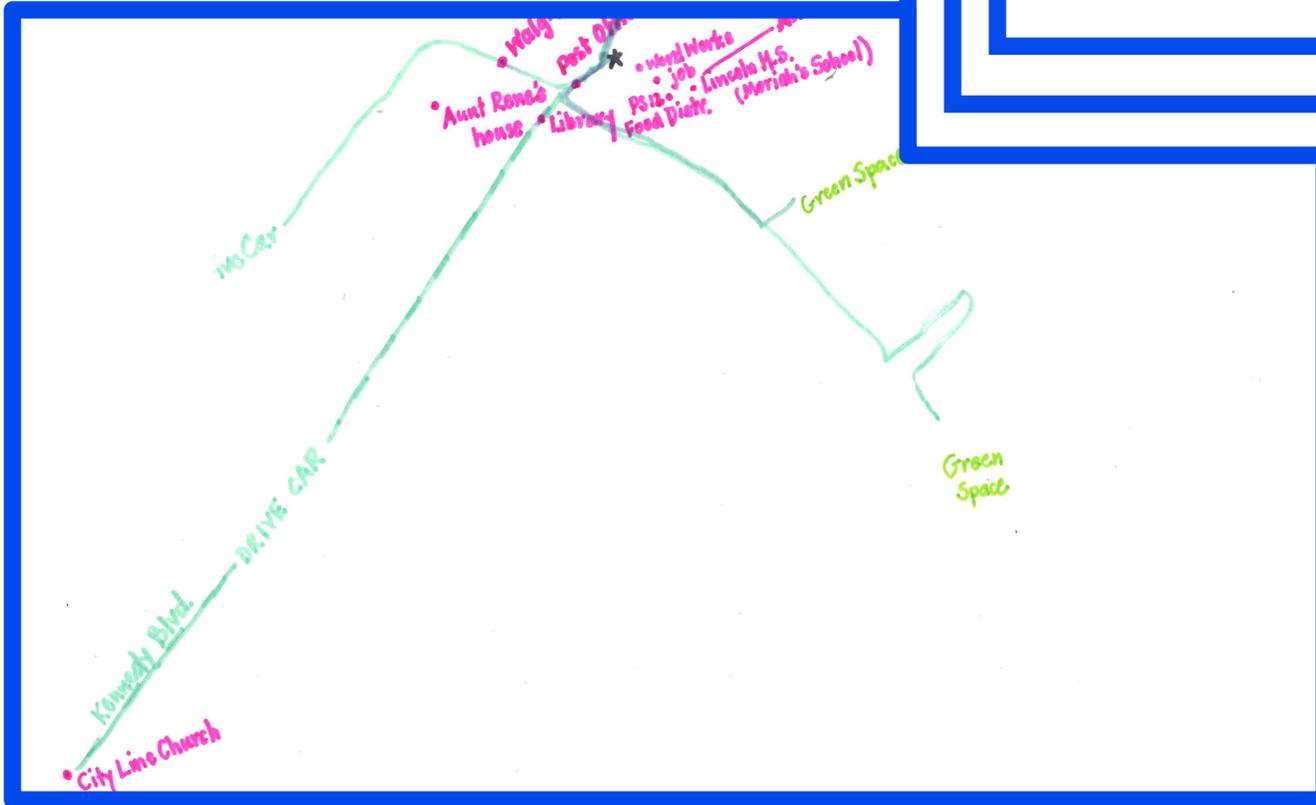
Shared goals, build shared experience

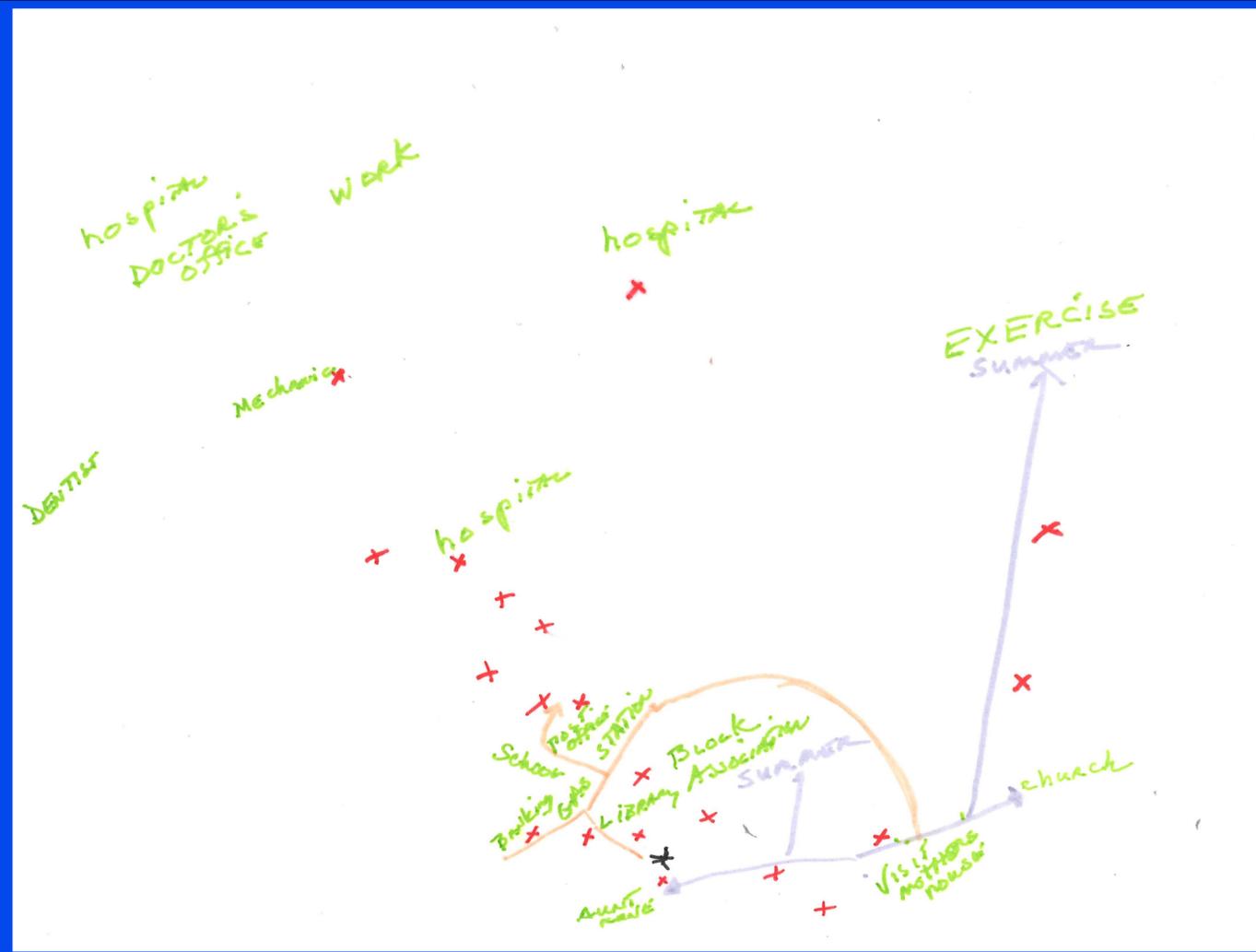
Transparency

Who we are, why we're here



Prototype 2



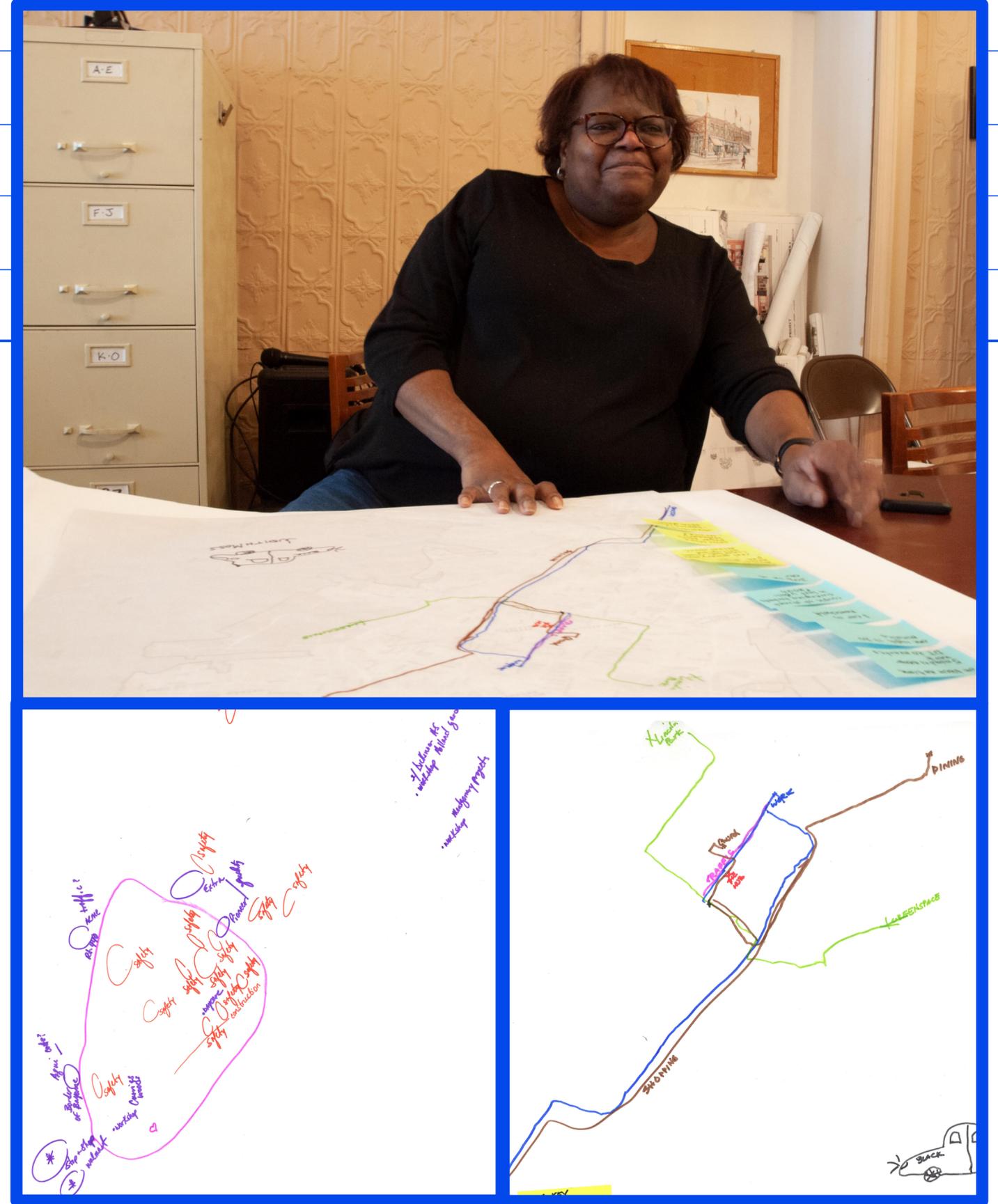


We prototyped the second iteration of our mapping with more community members at one of their homes.

“ *It made me think about how I use my time.* ”

Prototyping at JHMSSID

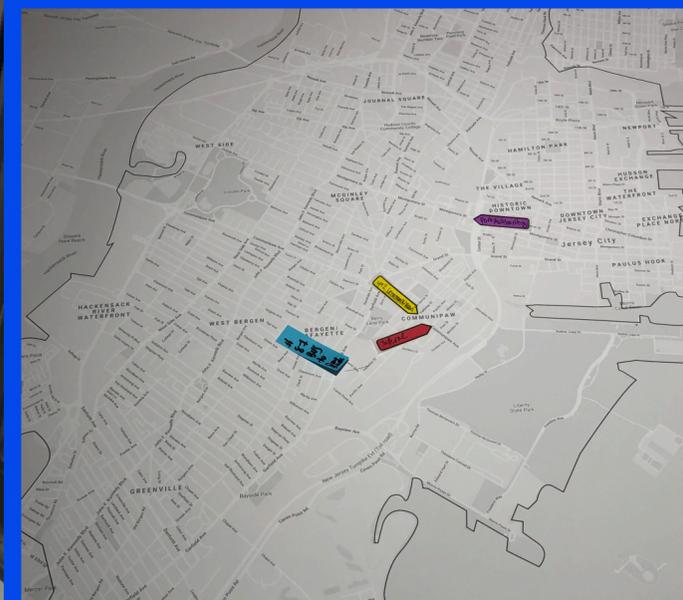
We connected with another grassroots activist tackling violence in Michele's community. As well as an employee in the district.



Prototyping Sidewalk Intervention

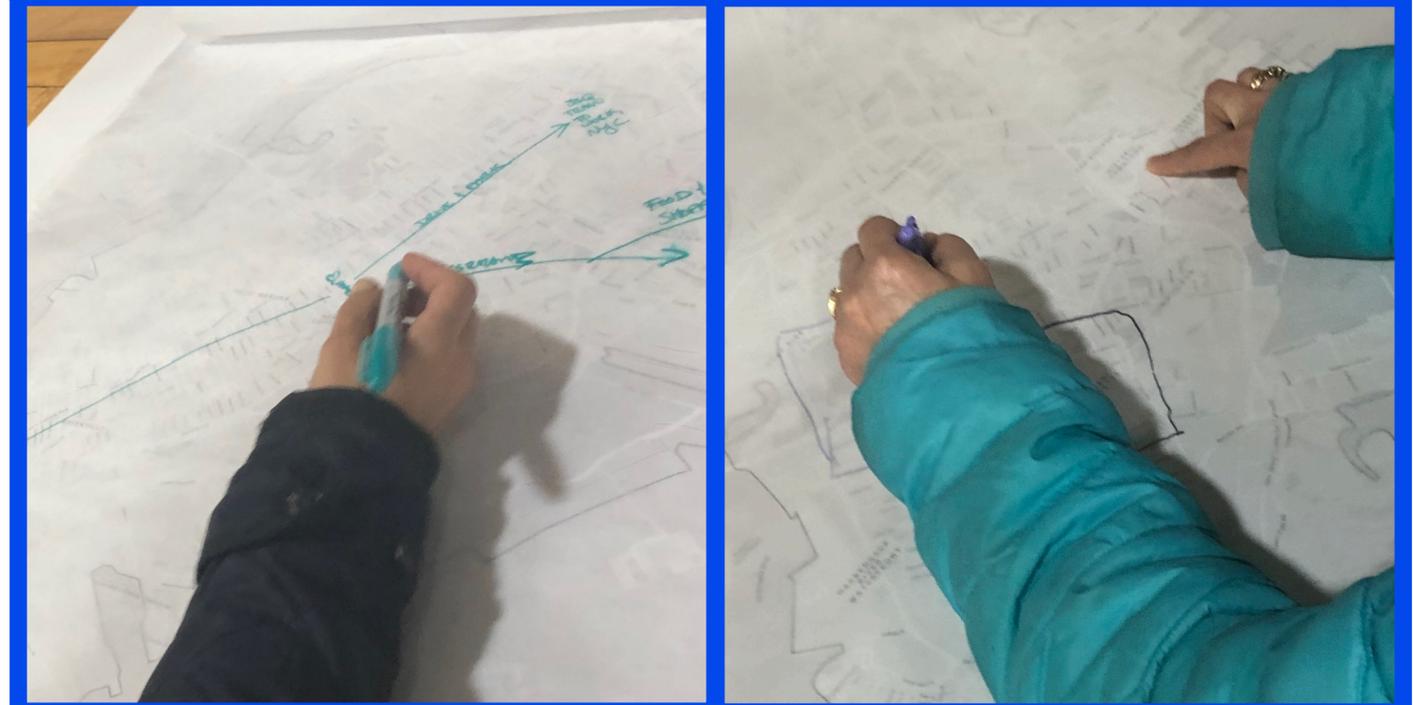
We wanted to test the data collection process in a high traffic public space in the Jackson Hill District. The Hub (recently renamed by the city as Jackson Square) was identified as the heart of their community by a few of our users. So we took our mapping prompt to the grocery store, Extra.

We anticipated that people would be pressed for time, and so we picked the top three mapping prompts coupled with qualitative questions.



Prototyping at Block Association Meeting

Our next prototyping session took place at a community block association meeting. We learned that members weren't familiar with the Vision Zero policy, but were versed in their negative experience with parking. We left with a resident-informed ground-up solution.



Through this discussion at the meeting, a resident made a simple observation. That people are not parking efficiently and as cars shift throughout the day, large gaps are left that could have been a viable spot.

So Sharon decided to test this idea by chalking parking spaces on her block and we supported her effort.



Prototyping Defined Parking Spaces

We measured each space to be 18' and drew lines into the street with sidewalk chalk. Sharon chose a block on her street that had no driveways to make this prototype most effective. We marked 27 spots as well as one of the spaces lost due to the "No Parking" sign. Over the course of a day we found that 3 spots were consistently lost.

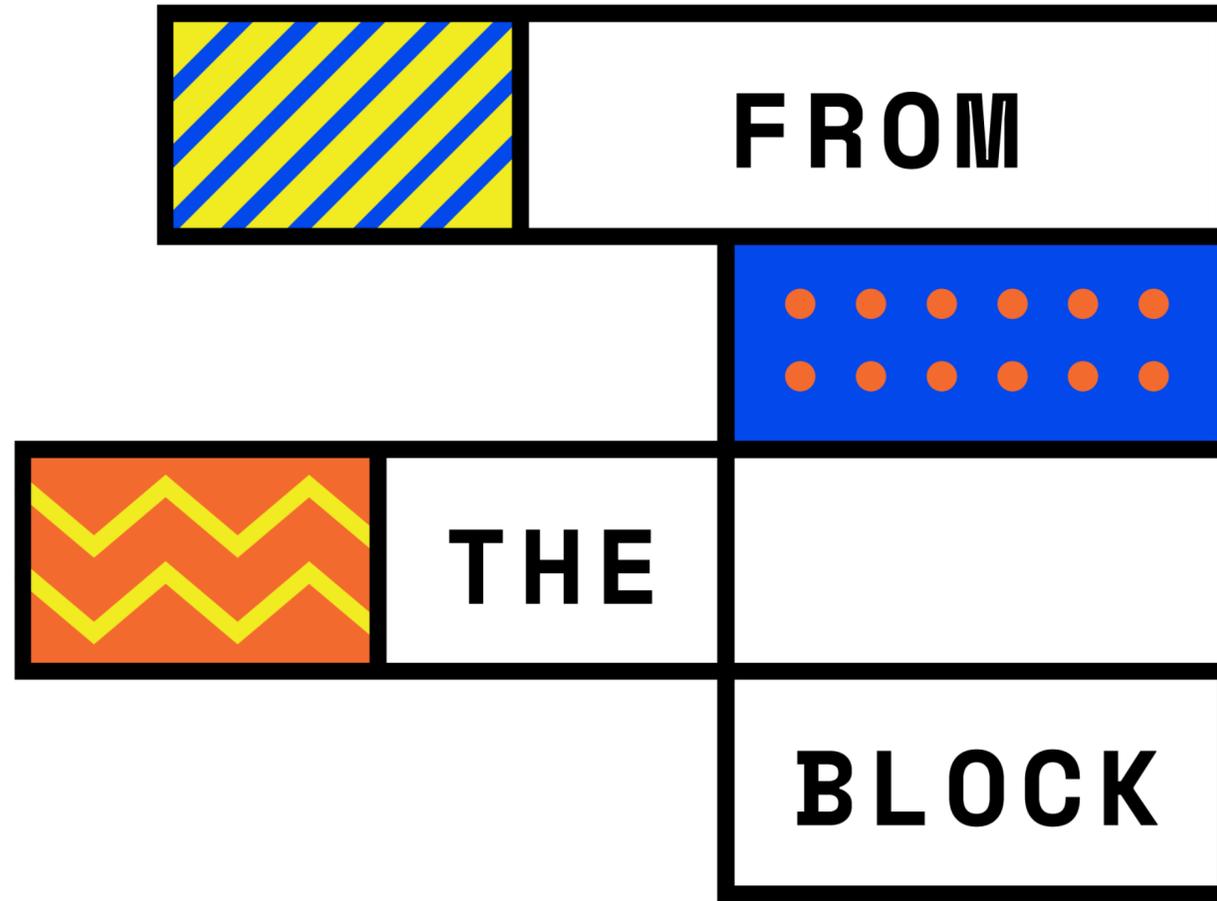


Michele's Comments

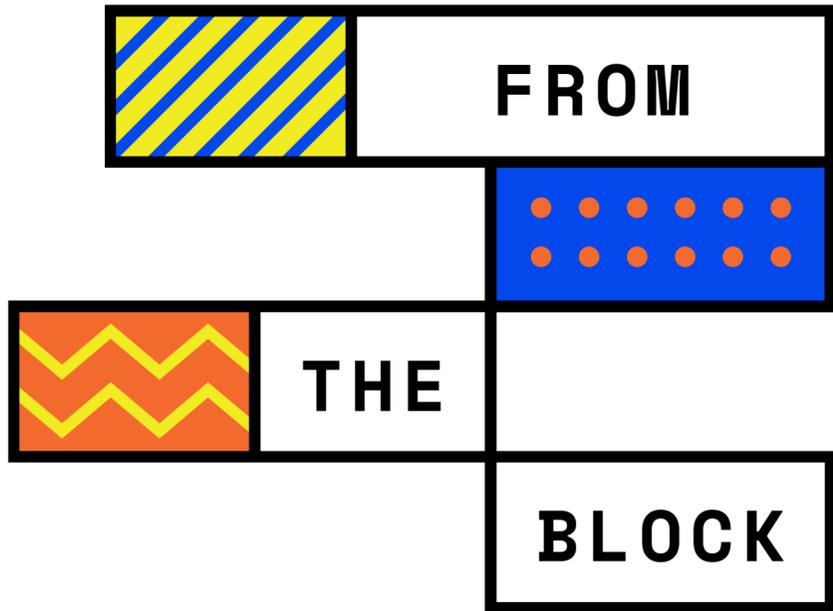
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This goes beyond parking and displacement.

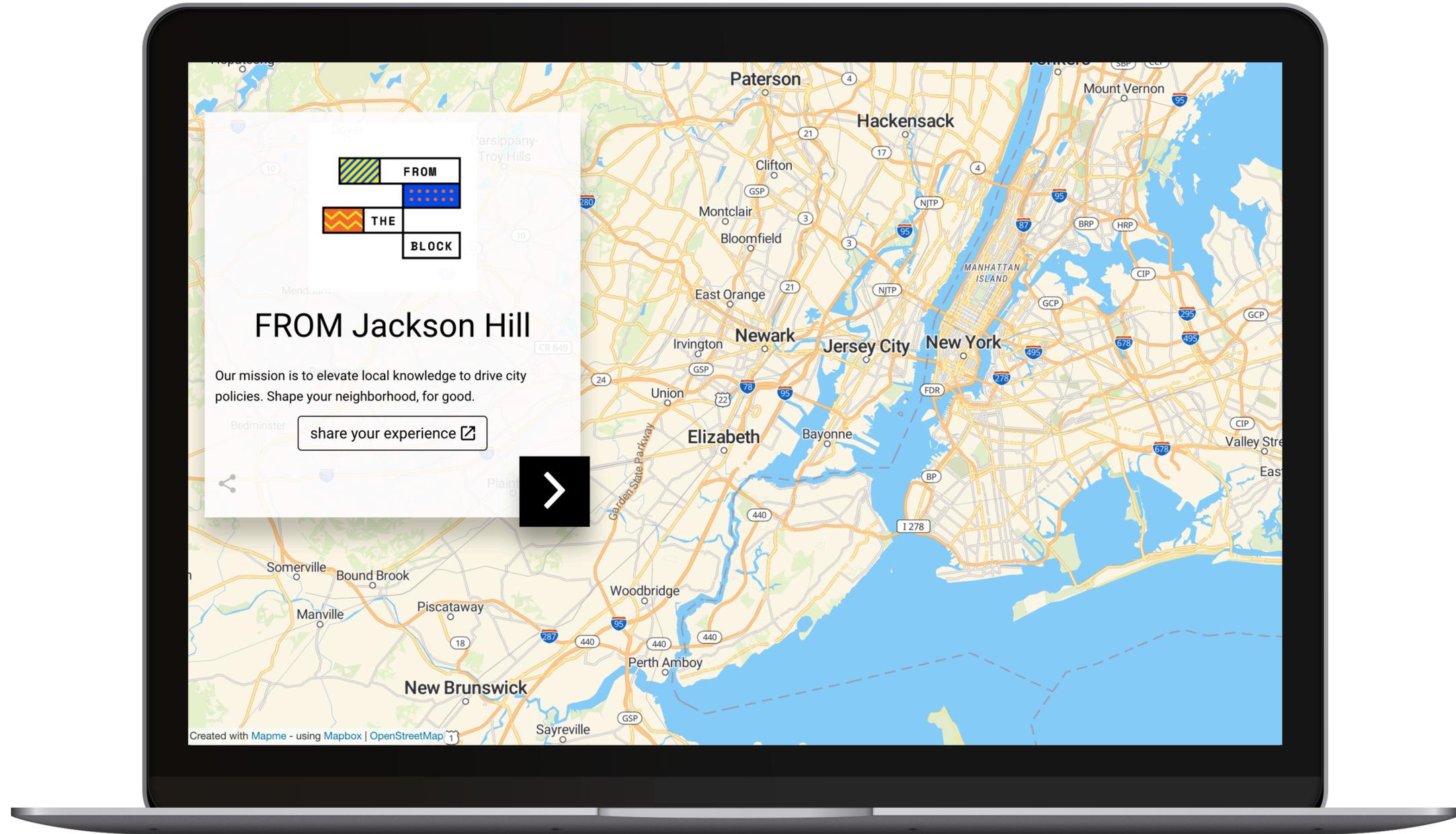
We could engage the community in ways outside of a public meeting — I want to share this with the councilman.

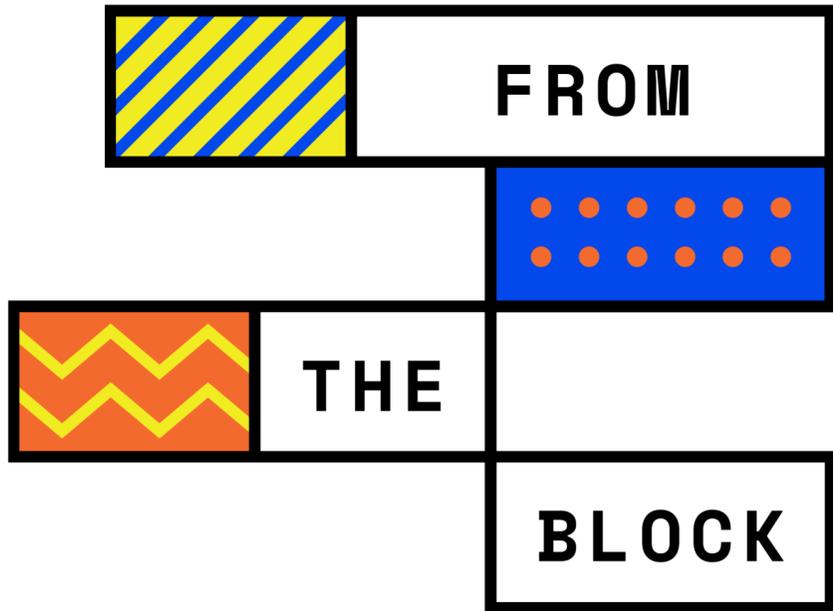


A civic engagement tool supporting grassroots activists
in elevating local knowledge to shape city policy

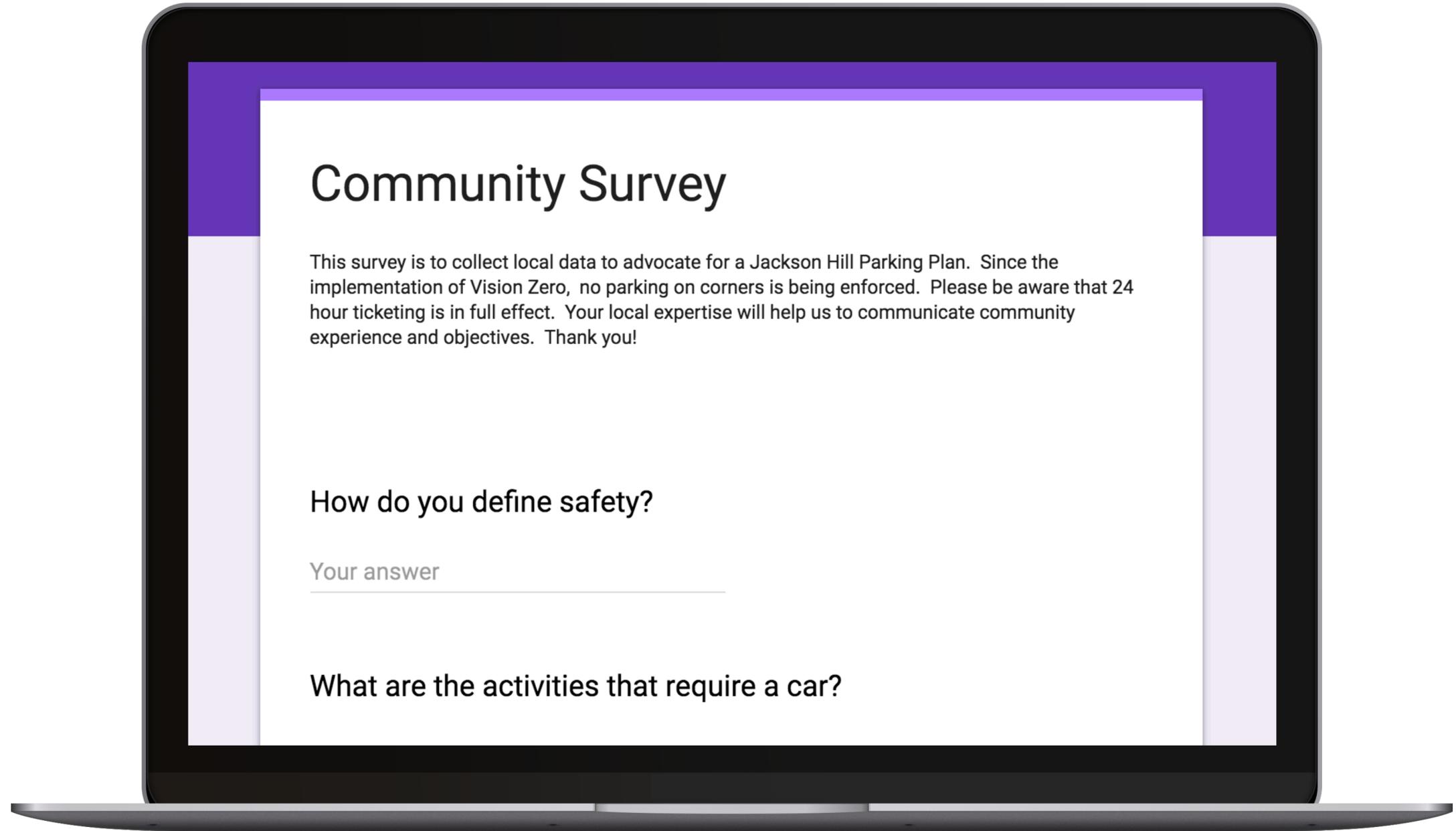


Elevating local knowledge to
shape city policy





Google Surveys to capture data



Theory of Change

General Goal

mitigate displacement of low-income communities in Jersey City

Pre-conditions

increased amendment to the Jackson Hill Redevelopment Plan to benefit existing residents

decreased ignoring of the needs of the Jackson Hill Community by city government

increased organization and participation in action around shared goal

increased community informed/led interventions

increased network

increased collective evidence to advocate for community needs

increased opportunities to participate in making negative impact of policy known

increased shared goals about shared issue: parking

increased bond

increased data confirming resident experience and common knowledge

increased knowledge about how city policy is impacting day-to-day lives of residents

increased creation of shared language around an issue: parking

increased collection of localized data specific to Jackson Hill reflecting resident expertise

increased access to information about Jersey City policy affecting parking

increased connection about shared issue: parking

increased knowledge of Michele and her role as a liaison between community and city government

increased outlet for

Intervention

FROM THE BLOCK

Learnings & Conclusions

Teamwork

This year we continued to build the teamwork that began in the first year of DSI. The things that made us most effective as a team were trust, support, and respect.

Sharpening Baseline Definitions

This past year we delved deep into the forces at play in the gentrification of Jersey City. From speaking to experts in the community we sharpened our language and definition of gentrification. In our work, gentrification means creating the condition for collective displacement for a socioeconomic group. We are seeing this in Downtown Jersey City. High rise luxury building are raising the rental prices to the extent that low income and working class groups can no longer afford to live there.

Systems View

We sharpened our systems thinking and got as close to root of the problem as possible. We learned that even the tax incentives used to build the downtown high rises are creating economic disparity. These tax incentives move the tax burden from the developers over to the community and school system. These types of top-down government planning have limited stakeholders and therefore limited interests represented. In this way they create invisible forces that disrupt the community.

Bottom-up Solutions

With this knowledge, we saw the necessity of bottom-up solutions that come from the community. We positioned ourselves to do work to support community engagement for a redevelopment plan in Jackson Hill. We hoped to take a preventative approach with a neighborhood where minority and low income groups are under threat of displacement. Parking, our case study, continued to build our knowledge of the impact of top-down planning as well as the wealth of community expertise.

Asset-Based

It is important to not tell stories of deficit. Gentrification narratives are often framed as a new frontier ripe for growth and development. This ignores the existing community and neighborhood culture. Our intervention took into account the strong social capital in Jackson Hill and took steps to co-create ways to strengthen these networks.

Next Steps/ Looking Forward

Our collaboration with Michele from the Jackson Hill Business District is long term. Moving forward, we will continue to prototype *From The Block* with block associations and community groups in Jackson Hill; both in person and through the website.

We plan to continue scaling our work within the Jackson Hill neighborhood. Parking has been our case study for this first phase of prototyping. We are planning to expand this form of place-based activism to other topics concerning the redevelopment plan. This includes affordable housing and jobs. We'd like to map what renters view as affordable, block by block, as well as what businesses they'd like to see in the area. The mapping exercises created evidence for needing a car and uncovered gaps in services including access to health care, fresh produce and green space.

We would also like to connect Jackson Hill with other community groups who have successfully staved off gentrification like DNSI in Roxbury, MA. Our goal is to have *From The Block* to be community-led before we step back. Our vision is that this style of elevating local knowledge will enable community to develop from within.

THE DESIGNERS



We're Jelynne and Zoe, the team of social designers behind this project.

FROM the Philippines and raised in Jersey City, @i.am.jelynne is a policy reformer and founder of @litmjc. Her leadership role is rooted in her background in hospitality and from her family: to be in service of others.

FROM Keene, NH, Zoe comes from the nonprofit sector working for the YWCA Cambridge and was attracted to Jersey City for her masters thesis because of its great sense of community and small town feel.

@fromtheblock.xyz
www.fromtheblock.xyz

