

WHAT IS GREEN GENTRIFICATION?



Green gentrification occurs when efforts to add or improve green spaces (such as parks, green schoolyards, resilience measures, street trees, etc.) result in a rise in property values and the displacement of low-income, often long-term residents, who in many cases tend to be communities of color. This change may or may not be intentional. While greening efforts are necessary and welcome, policymakers and private developers often neglect to consider solutions that will protect an area's original community members. Put simply, green gentrification is similar to a tug-of-war between creating greener cities and maintaining housing affordability, when in fact, communities need both.



in property value



displacement of low-income community members

Green Gentrification impacts individuals, families, and communities by making a neighborhood less affordable and welcoming to the long-term residents, causing the sense of community and belonging to erode and the financial burden to displace them.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF GREEN GENTRIFICATION?

The High Line, Manhattan

The High Line is 1.5-mile long public park built on an abandoned elevated railroad stretching from the Meatpacking District to the Hudson Rail Yards. Since opening to the public in 2009, [researchers have pointed out that the project has raised adjacent housing values by 35%](#).



Photo: Daniel Chu

Sunset Park, Brooklyn

A recent [surge of development in Sunset Park has led to a dramatic rise in the cost of housing](#). Since Bush Terminal park opened in November, 2014, the average price of a condo in Sunset Park shot up, far outpacing Brooklyn as a whole. Day by day, the neighborhood is turning wealthier—and [whiter](#)—as longtime residents are priced out of their homes.



Photo: Jazmyn Blackburn

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF GREEN GENTRIFICATION?

There are well documented benefits of urban greening, but green gentrification threatens to undo or undermine these benefits. [Many studies](#) show that there are numerous health benefits from urban greening, such as improved “overall well-being, reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and a boost in immune function.” However, these benefits are not distributed equitably.

Scholars have found that there can be many unintended negative consequences when urban greening leads to gentrification in previously underinvested areas. For example, a [scoping review](#) found that “longtime, marginalized residents are negatively impacted by green gentrification as they experience a lower sense of community, feel that they do not belong in green space, and, in many studies, use green space less often than newcomers.” [Researchers](#) have also linked gentrification to a variety of health concerns such as greater occurrence of alcohol use, preterm births, [mental](#) health concerns, and poorer self-reported health outcomes.



HOW CAN GREEN GENTRIFICATION BE AVOIDED OR MINIMIZED?

Urban renewal and greening can inarguably cause unintended consequences to environmental justice communities, but **choosing not to improve underrepresented areas isn't a good answer**, as it leaves historically disadvantaged communities in suboptimal living conditions.

So, how can we continue improving climate and environmental resources and resilience infrastructure without causing harm to existing residents?

Ask longterm residents what *they* think.

Some [research](#) indicates that urban renewal policies that are inclusive of vulnerable populations from inception are less likely to cause gentrification and more likely to have a beneficial impact on health through physical and social improvements. This is consistent with NYC-EJA's experience in similar processes and aligns with the Jemez Principles of Democratic Organizing, as working directly with the impacted populations from the beginning to ensure that your approach and policies align with their needs and priorities is a proven (when done appropriately) way to improve outcomes for environmental justice communities and increase the success of infrastructure projects.

[Others](#) have asserted that to improve the quality of life for all New Yorkers, the NYC government needs a two-prong approach in which the city collaborates with local community members to understand their desires and concerns, constructing traditional greenspaces that incorporate community input. This must be paired with enacting protective housing measures that are tailored to the unique needs of each neighborhood and will stabilize the affordable housing market in addition to the improvement of greenspaces

EXAMPLES OF CITIES ATTEMPTING TO ADDRESS PAST MISTAKES AND PROTECT COMMUNITIES FROM BEING DISPLACED:

Washington, D.C. — In 2015, the community-based organization [Building Bridges Across the River](#) (BBAR) and city officials announced plans to build the first elevated green space, which could have led to local displacement similar to historical gentrification. As a result, BBAR worked with local communities to ensure that the project had an equity-centered agenda that protected the community.

Philadelphia, PA — another example of how improving the community and protecting residents can go hand in hand. Philadelphia implemented new legislation, the [Longtime Owner Occupants Program](#) which protects against displacement, even as prices in the city increase. Numerous protections for residents allow for both an improvement in the community and protection against gentrification.

Providence, RI — in 2020 the city created [Green Justice Zones](#), which were formed in tandem with the city's [Capital Improvement Plan and the Climate Justice Plan](#). The goal is for these Zones to improve the local area, address inequities and ensure that the original residents have a say in the process.