

ASIAN ENCLAVES UNDER PRESSURE: SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
IN FLUSHING AND BOSTON'S CHINATOWN

A Research Paper

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ABSTRACT

Asian American communities experience intersecting challenges of social and environmental injustices that threaten residents' healthy long-term standard of living and even lead to displacement. This research case investigates and examines the injustices faced by two Asian enclaves on the eastern coast of the United States: Flushing in New York City and Chinatown in Boston. This research takes a comparative case study approach to explore the impact of environmental pollution, lack of infrastructure, and development of upscale housing on these marginalized communities. This paper highlights how systemic neglect and unequal development disproportionately affect the lives of low-income Asian immigrants and Asian Americans and how community organizing and inclusive urban planning can resist these unjust conditions and aid in transformative change. This paper contributes to environmental and social justice in ethnic enclaves by proposing strategies for equitable and inclusive development.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

I'm Jessi, and my Chinese name is Ziwei Guo. I was born in Ordos, Inner Mongolia. Some people think I grew up on the grasslands, but the truth is that Ordos is located on the Loess Plateau (Huangtu Plateau), where soil erosion is the most challenging problem. From a young age, I thought I was an environmentalist and wanted to protect the Earth. I studied Land Resource Management as an undergraduate but switched to City and Regional Planning as a graduate student. In my opinion, "What is the biggest difference between humans and animals?" Animals can stay in their natural environment forever, but people must return to the city to live. Therefore, I began to think that cities are the center of the study of sustainable development in the world.

In my past experiences, whenever I talked about "environmental protection" or "fairness and justice," I was always considered an ideal state that could not be realized. I also wondered if I had idealized the world too much, but after thinking about it for a long time, I still chose to do what I wanted to do and be who I wanted to be. My power does not change the world, but my determination is precious.

A quote from *The Melting Pot* affirms my viewpoint: *We fight all the way, not to change the world, but not to let the world change us.*

To those who fight courageously against life's injustices.

May your struggle forge a fairer world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for everyone, everything, and every moment I met at Cornell; they taught me so much beyond knowledge. Especially my Chair, Dr. Minner, her encouragement and support were very important to me from courses to labs (Just Place Lab) to essays. It allowed me to progress academically, and also taught me that a colorful and diverse life doesn't depend on a single decision. Another person I would like to thank is my professor, Dr. Carruthers, who was the first person to reach out and pull me out when I was at an emotional low point, and I think I will never forget that conversation with him. In the world of Chinese kids, emotions are not supposed to be displayed in school; teachers do not deal with your moods. But my experience at Cornell healed the first twenty years of my life, and what I felt inside was genuine concern from my dear professors.

In addition, thanks to my resilient self who persisted through depressive storms and anxiety whirlwinds, I have grown braver, more confident, and more resolute through these two years. Architecture, Art, and Planning (AAP) has also made me more passionate about my major and made me determined to continue exploring urban planning. Though my PhD application outcome remains uncertain next year, I think I will never give up easily on continuing to improve myself, and I will not stop exploring the world either. Because “*This vibrant act of youth needs no curtain call.*” (花样年华,永不落幕)

My last tribute is to those who know I am not perfect but still love me.

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PREFACE

This research project began with my personal experience. As an Asian, in every North American city that I visit, I choose restaurants in Asian enclaves. When I went to Flushing, the strong smell of the factories, the dirty street environment, and the congested traffic made me feel physically very uncomfortable. The same feeling reappeared when I walked down the streets of Boston's Chinatown as if I had broken through a dimensional wall into a neighborhood two decades behind in urban planning and road construction. These Asian enclaves have a rich culture and unique charm, but have been neglected by urban development and have become out-of-place city areas.

Therefore, I would like to explore the reasons behind the unfair conditions in Asian enclaves. Not only do I hope that the Asian communities can gain the same rights and enjoy the same life, but I also hope that I can encourage more ethnic groups who are facing unfair challenges to insist on fighting for their legitimate rights.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social and environmental injustices cause some communities or groups to suffer disproportionately from systemic inequalities (Camacho, 1998). Social injustice means that marginalized communities or minorities often do not enjoy equal access to resources, opportunities, and rights, which exacerbates community vulnerability and marginalization. Environmental injustice means these communities bear the burden of greater severity or variety of environmental hazards and are often excluded from environmental benefits and participation in decision-making (Maantay, 2002). Overlapping with these two concepts, communities that face social injustice, such as racism, poverty, and discrimination, are often more vulnerable to higher risks of pollution, poorer infrastructure, and inadequate urban infrastructure services.

Asian American enclaves demonstrate this overlap between social and environmental injustices. Historically, Chinese and other Asian immigrants in the United States encountered unfair treatment because of systemic discrimination and exclusion, and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 forced Asian immigrants into segregation (Digital Exhibits at Santa Clara University, n.d.). Chinatowns emerged in the 19th century as a place where Chinese immigrants could survive under entirely different conditions, maintain their culture, and find a common haven belonging to the Asian community. Although these enclaves have persevered and exhibited resilience, they have long been underserved. Marginalized Asian communities often include working-class individuals with limited English proficiency and restricted employment opportunities, sometimes leading to concentration in low-wage service industries. These people often face the social injustices associated with low-income communities, including overcrowded housing, lack of voice, and the environmental injustices associated with living closer to sources of pollution and areas lacking green space. These problems

often converge to leave these Asian communities without basic social benefits and cultural respect.

This paper discusses the social justice and environmental justice challenges faced by Asian communities, focusing on two case studies: Flushing in New York City and Chinatown in Boston, Massachusetts. Flushing is a neighborhood in the Queens borough, one of the largest Asian immigrant communities in the United States (Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, 2022) (See Fig. 1.) It is a vibrant ethnic enclave struggling to cope with rapid urban and infrastructural development pressures. Boston's Chinatown, the oldest Chinese enclave in New England, is a historically important neighborhood but has been under pressure from decades of urban renewal and development. In this research paper, I investigate how gentrification, displacement, and environmental burdens have affected these communities. In this research, I find structural planning decisions that have perpetuated environmental and social injustices in Flushing and Boston's Chinatowns. I then discuss strategies to promote equity for residents of Asian communities, as well as policies and planning to preserve the cultural heritage of these neighborhoods. The purpose of this research paper is to inform more fair and equitable urban planning that can empower Asian American enclaves and Asian communities..

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

In many cities, social and environmental justice are deeply intertwined and significantly impact whether some communities or groups have equitable living conditions. Social justice ensures equitable access to social resources and fundamental rights; environmental justice guarantees equal access to safe, healthy, and adequate green spaces. In the United States, Asian communities have endured the stress of inequity due to a historical legacy of marginalization, language barriers, and differential treatment. Many scholars have emphasized the uniqueness of Asian enclaves, such as Flushing in New York City and Chinatown in Boston, where historical legacies of exclusion, as well as the economic pressures that currently exist, exacerbate injustices. This literature review seeks to understand the many challenges Asian communities face in urban development and how these inequities can be countered as the city grows.

Environmental justice theory focuses on disadvantaged communities bearing the risks posed by the environment and receiving fewer environmental benefits. Bullard (1990) discusses the concept of environmental injustice, emphasizing how communities of color, including Asians, are more likely to face the hazards of environmental pollution as a result of systemic neglect. Maantay (2006) shows how urban planning and zoning impact communities' land use for marginalized groups. Julie Sze's (2006) study of immigrant neighborhoods in New York City illustrates how cities exacerbate health inequities through concentrated pollution. Soja's (2010) concept of spatial justice emphasizes that a truly equitable city must ensure that all communities have the right to decide how space is planned and used. In this view, meaningful community participation is vital to achieving justice in urban development.

Zhou & Kim's (2006) racial capital theory refers to the ambivalence of resource distribution within Asian communities, emphasizing how community power hides systemic neglect by the city government. Under the influence of racial capitalism, even immigrant enclaves that have successfully developed economically may, intentionally or unintentionally, result in communities experiencing the effects of speculative development and unbalanced public investment, which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable.

2.2 Gentrification

Gentrification is a common and critical issue in Asian community enclaves, which is often associated with economic stress and displacement. Lin (2020) highlights how gentrification in Flushing has brought about economic growth as well as accelerated displacement, creating problems such as severe housing shortages for vulnerable communities. Interestingly, the gentrification in Flushing is not only driven by non-Asian developers; wealthy Asian investors and developers have played a significant role in reshaping communities, exacerbating the situation of gentrification. Kwong (2023) illustrates how the development of upscale dwellings and commercial ventures in Boston's Chinatown has led to cultural erosion as well as displacement, even affecting the cohesion and precipitating an identity crisis within the community. In this instance, gentrification not only alters the physical environment but also destabilizes the social fabric of communities that have traditionally provided refuge for immigrants.

2.3 Ethnic Enclaves

Ethnic enclaves provide crucial social support but often bear a disproportionate share of the burdens imposed by their environment and circumstances. Historically marginalized Asian enclaves face severe urban pressures, poor urban environments, overcrowded living

conditions, and shortages of social resources and infrastructure. Brugge et al.'s (2000) study found that residents of Boston's Chinatown acquired respiratory illnesses at disproportionate rates due to the construction of the highways (I-90 and I-93) and the high levels of vehicle emissions. Similarly, in Flushing, intensive development has exacerbated pollution, traffic congestion, and inadequate health services (Zander et al., 2020). Although the economy is vibrant, rapid economic growth has compounded environmental inequities.

2.4 Methodology

I draw on themes identified in the literature review, such as the importance of community land trust mechanisms in preventing displacement (Mass. Gen. Laws c. 121A; Dudley Neighbors, Inc., 1988) and the impact of luxury zoning overlays on rent trajectories (Rubin, 2020). This study compares two case studies of Asian immigrant enclaves: Flushing in New York City and Chinatown in Boston. In this research, I employ case study methods to explore each enclave's challenges from multiple perspectives. Document analysis is used to understand each enclave's policy context and historical development. Included are urban planning and policy documents for Flushing neighborhood and Boston's Chinatown, such as municipal redevelopment plans, zoning plans, and community land trust proposals. In addition, I reference news reports that include published interviews with stakeholders in the community. I also incorporate key demographic characteristics of these areas, including population growth, changing racial composition, median household income, and housing costs over time. I also incorporate references to spatial data and maps. These case study methods are used to examine how each enclave's policy framework shapes its built form and demographic characteristics. The references to stakeholder interviews aim to confirm exactly what is happening, to reflect on how zoning changes, land trust strategies, or negotiation of community benefits affect the Asian enclave's situation.

2.5 Study Limitations

2.5.1 Only Document Analysis

Relying primarily on published plans, zoning codes, and grant applications, so may overlook informal or undocumented community efforts and gray-market practices.

2.5.2 Geographic Boundary

Boundaries for “Flushing” and “Boston’s Chinatown” do not perfectly align with census tracts and neighborhood service areas, so some spatial boundaries in the map may differ from the official definition.

2.5.3 Absence of field interviews.

While stakeholder quotes from news reports are used, I didn't have any field interviews myself, so the content was limited in getting up-to-date feedback and feelings from the residents.

3. CASE STUDY 1: FLUSHING, NYC

3.1 Historical Background and Demographics

Flushing is located in the borough of Queens, New York City, which was once a quiet suburb that transitioned to an immigrant community after the enactment of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Wave after wave of immigrants from China, Korea, and other Asian countries came to the area, resulting in major changes over half a century. Now, Flushing has become a bustling "Asian Center" known for its Asian restaurants, markets, and businesses. In particular, Flushing's commercial center, Main Street and Roosevelt Avenue, is one of New York's busiest intersections (Zander et al., 2020). Flushing has an excellent transit system, a full complement of transportation hubs, and its proximity to LaGuardia Airport. Asians have made up two-thirds of Flushing's population by 2020 and remain a preferred landing spot for new immigrants (Fig.2). The benefits of economic growth from a growing population are accompanied by the challenge of displacement through overcrowding or rapid urbanization. (Zander et al., 2020) The landscape of mid-rise buildings and newer mid-rise apartments is packed with people, creating what we know as the "crowded network of streets and sidewalks," a hallmark of Flushing. Due to the rapid commercialization and development of upscale projects, Flushing's long-time residents and immigrant-run small businesses often face pressures from rising rents and displacement due to overcrowded housing.



Figure 1. Map of the village of Flushing, Queens County, New York. Flushing, N.Y

Note: Roullier, G. A. & Welcke, R. A. (1894) . *Map of the village of Flushing, Queens County, New York.* Flushing, N.Y.: G.A. Roullier. [Map] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004625793/>.

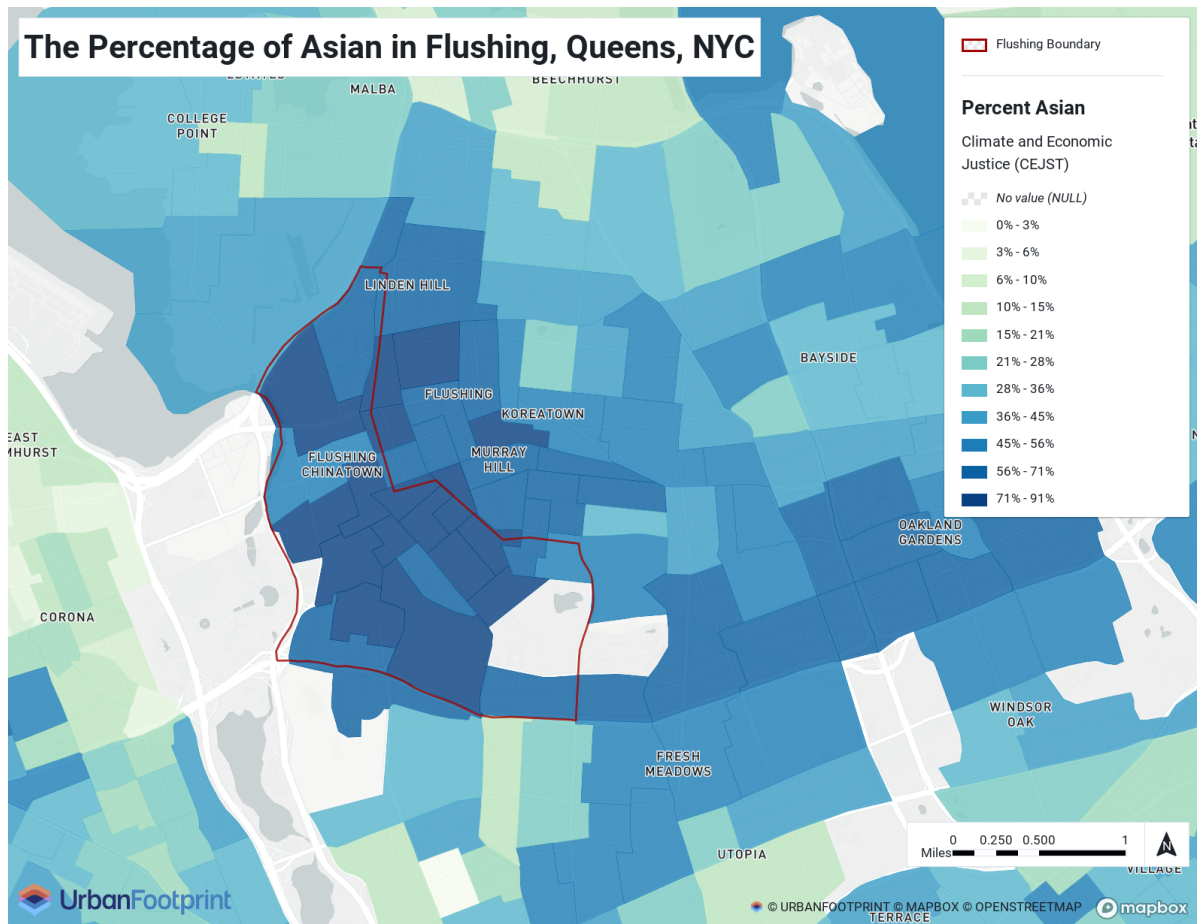


Figure 2. The Proportion of Residents Who Identify as Asians in Flushing, Queens, NYC.

3.2 Environmental Issues

3.2.1 Water Resources and Pollution

Flushing's enduring environmental problem illustrates a multifaceted instance of systematic neglect. This predominantly immigrant, low-income region, flanked by Flushing Creek and Flushing Bay, demonstrates the repercussions of a century of industrial exploitation on its waterways, epitomizing the intersection of ecological degradation and social inequality. The historical record indicates persistent oil spills and untreated sewage (Hu, 2023). Furthermore, industrial pollution has inflicted significant cumulative harm: soil analyses along Flushing Creek reveal PCB concentrations reaching 25.3 mg/kg, which

are 506 times the New York State guideline, with lead levels of 1,850 mg/kg (NYSDEC, 2022). These historical contaminants are paired with New York City's antiquated combined sewer system, which released 23 billion gallons of untreated wastewater into local waterways in 2022 alone (New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, 2023). The system often releases untreated wastewater during precipitation, transforming waterways into malodorous, murky dangers that communities have long condemned.

This environmental load illustrates structural inequities stemming from environmental racism, a phenomenon reported by Bullard (2000), wherein minority communities experience pollution exposures that are 20-50% more than those in mostly white neighborhoods. Environmental organizations have labeled the situation as an emblem of “environmental racism,” wherein vulnerable people disproportionately endure the consequences of pollution while lacking political remedies (Fig.3).

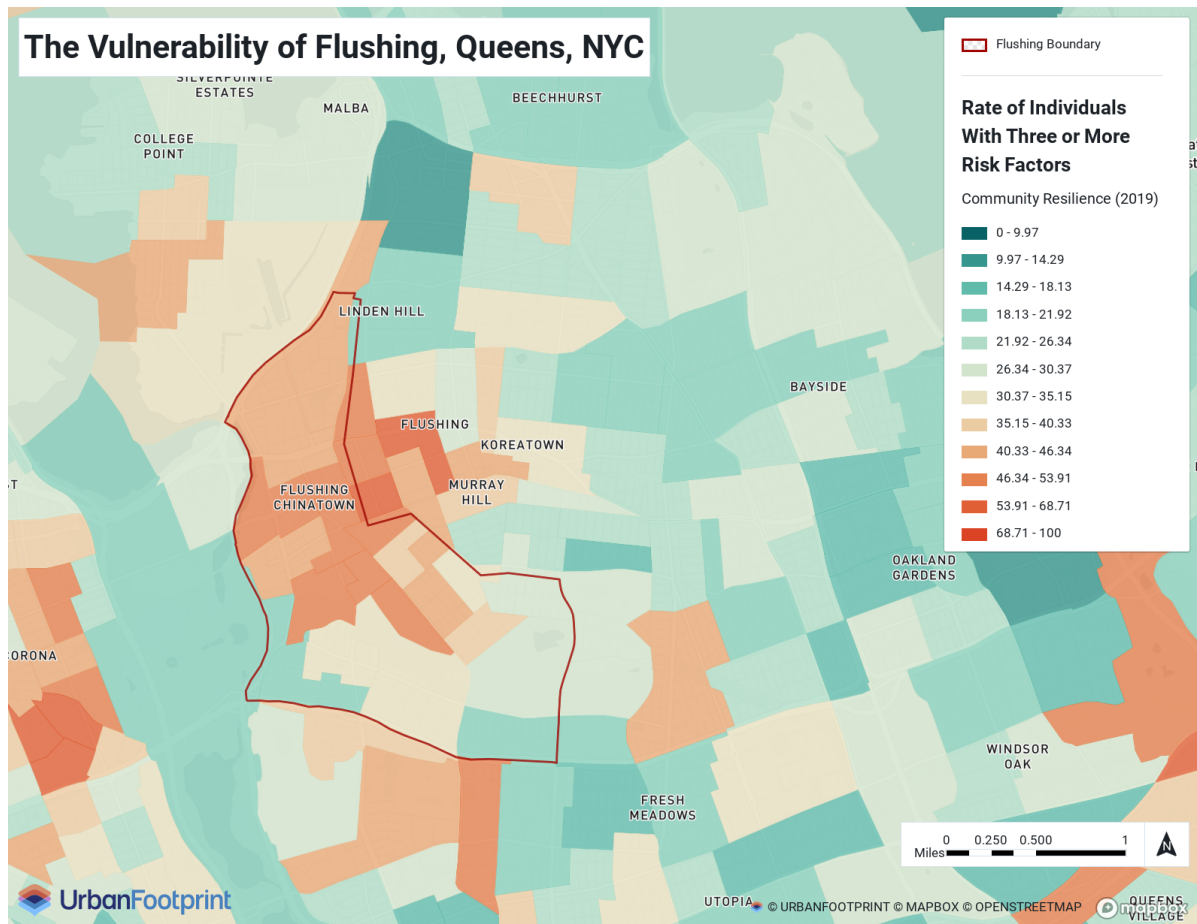


Figure 3. The Vulnerability of Flushing, Queens, NYC

The 2016 Flushing Bay Restoration Vision, developed by the Guardians of Flushing Bay and Riverkeeper, advocates for the restoration of 3.2 miles of bioregional depressions and 12 acres of wetlands as a method of ecological rehabilitation (Zander et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the execution of this plan has been impeded by financial deficiencies and organizational resistance. As of 2023, only 11% of the green infrastructure components have been completed, which is in stark contrast to the swift approval of the \$2 billion Special Flushing Waterfront District (Guardians of Flushing Bay, 2023). The approval of this 13-tower luxury construction occurred without a requisite environmental impact study, potentially intensifying stormwater runoff and gentrification pressures (Hu, 2023). Despite these hazards, 73% of Flushing residents have inadequate access to multilingual environmental health guidance, highlighting systemic communication barriers (Fig.4).

Nonetheless, the absence of regulatory action continues to underscore how infrastructure neglect and zoning policies may together endanger public health in communities of color. The Flushing Waterfront Coalition and similar community organizations have initiated 14 enforcement cases against negligent authorities since 2020, utilizing the legal frameworks of the Clean Air Act (Chung, 2020).

3.2.2 Air Pollution and Noise

Flushing's air quality is disproportionately burdened by the triple impact of surface traffic, airline operations, and city infrastructure on the predominantly Asian immigrant community. The area's heavy vehicle and traffic use, with frequent congestion on Main Street and many surrounding arterials, results in vehicular emissions constituting a significant pollutant in this community, with peak traffic densities reaching 1,632 vehicles/hour on Main Street, which is 47% higher than the average for Manhattan (NYCDOT, 2022). This congestion produces hazardous PM_{2.5} concentrations of 12.8 µg/m³, which is 156% higher than the WHO guidelines by 156%; NO₂ levels of 42 ppb, 2.1 times the EPA standard (NYC Air Quality Portal, 2023). (Fig.4) Asian residents of New York, especially those concentrated in Flushing, are twice as exposed to high levels of fine particulate pollution as white residents (Moura et al., 2019). These delicate particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) and pollutants, such as traffic-related vehicle exhaust (NO₂ & CO₂), contribute to elevated asthma and cardiovascular health risks (Chen et al., 2013).

In addition to experiencing pollution from road transport, LaGuardia Airport, which is located across the street from Flushing Bay, has 214 flights per day at 1,200 feet over residential areas. Jet exhaust deposits 18.7 tons/year of ultrafine particles (UFP < 0.1 µm) on washout, which is associated with a 17% increased risk of stroke per 10,000 UFP/cm³ (Nunez, 2020)(Fig.4). Aircraft flying at low altitudes during the initial takeoff phase not only produce constant noise but also release large amounts of exhaust fumes,

thus increasing the air pollution burden. Residents of northeastern Queens have reported that the increased number of routes and airplane flights has caused the noise to become unbearable and has even caused some people to move out of the area (CBS New York, 2016). Finally, there is also pollution from the construction of the city's infrastructure, with diesel-powered construction vehicles for the Waterfront DC project emitting 6.2 tons of PM2.5 per year, the equivalent of 9,300 buses (New York City Department of City Planning, 2020).

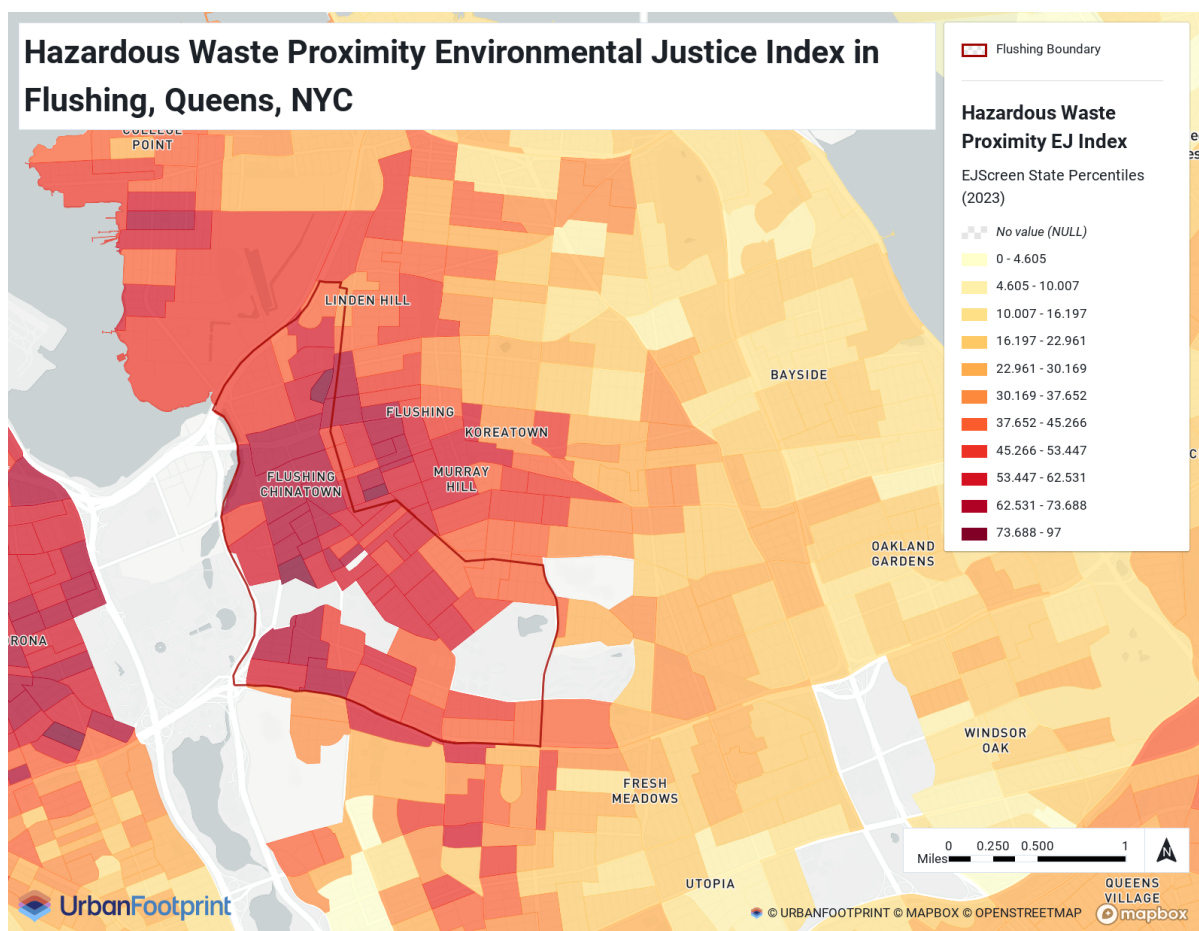


Figure 4. The index of hazardous waste proximity EJ in Flushing, Queens, NYC

3.3.3 Waste Management and Street Cleaning

Flushing's rapid population growth patterns have outpaced sanitation services, leading to serious quality of life issues. Downtown Flushing's restaurants, food markets, street vendors, and shoppers generate large amounts of trash, with its more than 1,400 food establishments generating 18.2 tons of commercial waste per day (New York City Department of Small Business Services, n.d.) Sidewalks are littered with trash, even though the sanitation department sweeps the streets daily and frequently picks up trash in the area. One trash can is shared by every 428 pedestrians, compared to a citywide ratio of 1:287 (New York City Department of Small Business Services, n.d.). Inadequate sidewalk infrastructure is another factor that causes the already narrow road to be littered with garbage, making it even more difficult for a huge number of pedestrians to pass through. This disparity has forced businesses to adopt survival strategies, with 89% of Flushing restaurants paying \$800 monthly in private fees for supplemental waste removal (Asian American Federation, 2021). In addition to this, street vendors in Flushing are required to pay private waste haulers \$120 per week for their waste disposal (Queens Schneider, 2023). This practice exacerbates the unfair experiences of Asian immigrants, and the paradoxical practice is undoubtedly increasing their risk of being fined.

3.3.4 Housing Affordability and Displacement

The Flushing housing crisis is intertwined with environmental justice issues. As the neighborhood's foreign-born population soared to 72.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022), speculative development drove median rents up 41%, triple the New York City average, while household income levels did not rise. This disparity is exacerbated by the fact that the Minkwon Center has documented 327 cases of tenant harassment and 48 cases of unlawful evictions between 2018-2020, particularly against residents with limited English proficiency (Zander et al., 2020). In 2020, the local community coalition proposed the Flushing Waterfront Rezoning Plan, which would create a 29-acre waterfront special

district with 1,725 apartments and other amenities (Kully, 2020). The area has a median rent of \$3,200/month and a privatized waterfront promenade. Critics call this a classic case of "green gentrification," using environmental improvements (the waterfront promenade) as a selling point for upscale development, but it excludes some local communities with average or even low wages from the pool of potential consumers. The threat is that Flushing may no longer be an easily accessible enclave for new immigrants and working-class Asians, which undermines the cultural fabric of Flushing. This threat has sparked the rise of radicalism, and the Flushing experience shows how immigrant neighborhoods can become neglected and sacrificed areas during an economic boom. For example, nearly 55,000 signatures were collected in opposition to a proposed 90-unit transitional-housing facility, culminating in a sit-in by community leaders at Queens Borough Hall that forced HPD to renegotiate and add 30 permanently affordable units to the plan (Mohamed, 2022). It also illustrates how the conflict between community sustainability and social justice has become a pressing issue. This reveals a systemic pattern: Since 2014, 92% of the reoccurrences in New York City have occurred in minority-majority neighborhoods, yet only one affordable unit is generated for every nine market-rate units (ANHD, 2020).

Flushing, Queens, epitomizes the intersection of environmental racism, infrastructure neglect, and green gentrification. A century of industrial pollution, combined sewer overflows, and other issues consistently highlight the problem that the city's sustainability agenda often affects able Asian communities because of racial and economic inequality.



Figure 5. The photo of the Flushing community street. (Ziwei, Guo)

4. CASE STUDY 2: CHINATOWN, BOSTON

4.1 Demographic and Historical Context

Established in the late 19th century as a compact neighborhood adjacent to downtown Boston, Boston's Chinatown is often considered New England's only remaining historic Chinese enclave; other early urban Chinatowns in Providence and Portland were erased by mid-20th-century redevelopment, whereas Boston's remains an active cultural and commercial district (Alonso, n.d). For more than 140 years, it has been the center of Boston's Chinese-American community. Unlike the challenges caused by Flushing's rapid growth, Boston's Chinatown has always faced pressures of urban rezoning. The community was initially made up of Chinese immigrants who came to Boston after working for the railroads and West Coast industries, then faced exclusion and violence in the late 1800s. They gathered in a small area near Boston's South Station and built a community of homes, restaurants, laundromats, and social organizations.

During the 20th century, Chinatown withstood many challenges. (Ali et al., 2018) Urban renewal hit the neighborhood particularly hard in the 1950s and 1960s. Massachusetts Department of Public Works planned and constructed the massive highway I-93 through Chinatown and built the Massachusetts Turnpike I-90 on the other edge to serve as an extension, expropriating land and bulldozing more than 1,200 residential units (Cockhren et al, 2024). This led to the fragmentation of the neighborhood and resulted in the rapid loss of neighborhood territory. In the 1970s, what was left of the south end of Chinatown was zoned for adult entertainment in Boston, further disrupting the neighborhood (Alonso, n.d). Institutions such as Tufts Medical Center also continued to expand into Chinatown. Notably, in 1993, the Chinatown community (led by the Chinese Progressive Association) prevented the construction of a 455-car garage on the neighborhood's land.

This event became known as the “Parcel C” fight, remembered for its successful resistance to environmental racism and institutional encroachment (Leong, 1995).

Today, Chinatown is home to approximately 6,000 residents, about 70% Asian (primarily Chinese), including many older immigrants and low-income families. It remains a gateway for new immigrants and the center of Chinese culture in Boston, but it is surrounded by high-value real estate such as downtown offices, luxury condominiums, and hospitals.

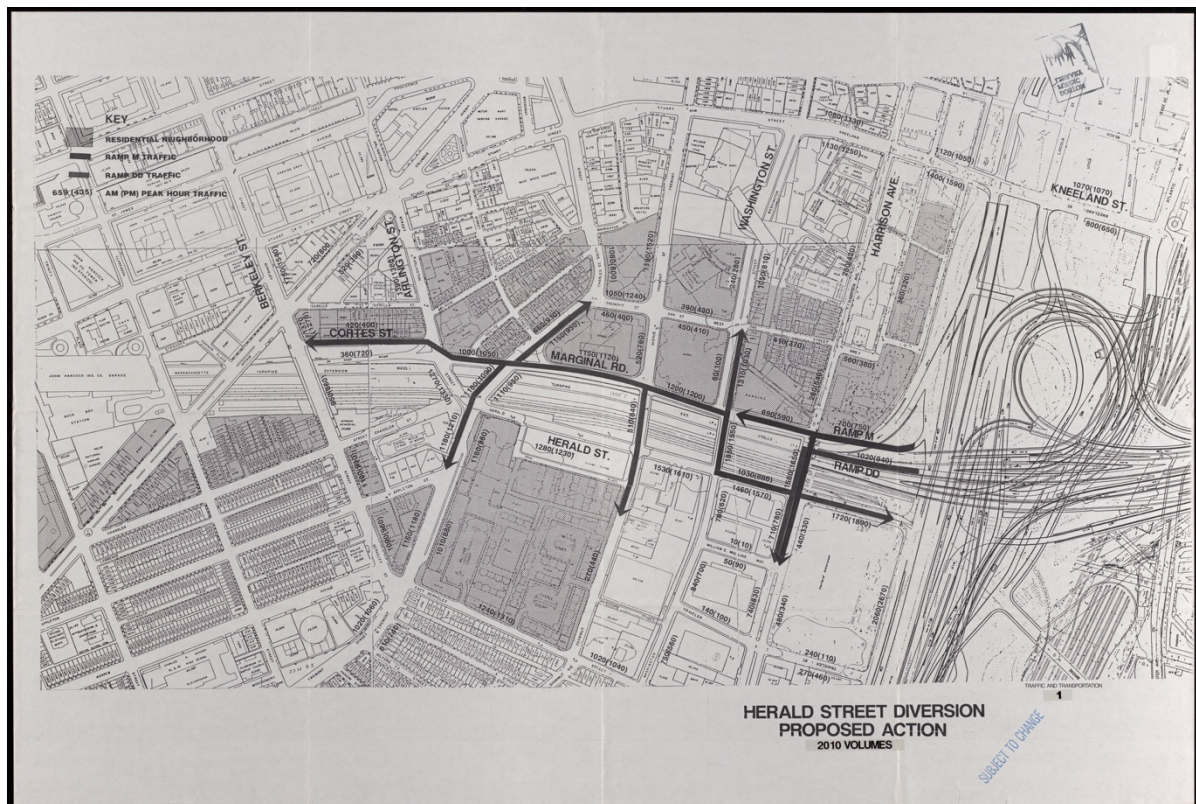


Figure 6. "Herald Street improvements." Map.

Note: Boston Redevelopment Authority. "Herald Street improvements." Map. Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1987. *Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center*. Retrieved from <https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:0v83bg96d>

4.2 Environmental Justice and Social Justice

4.2.1 Air Pollution and Health Impacts

Chinatown has inferior air quality and is surrounded by major highways and busy surface streets. Traffic emissions, especially trucks and diesel buses on highways and surface streets, are a persistent problem. Interstate 93 (I-93) and the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) collectively pass approximately 300,000 vehicles per day, contributing to especially traffic-related air pollutants (TRAPs) such as nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and ultrafine particulate matter (Dimitri et al., 2023). In fact, Chinatown near the I-90 and I-93 interchange is the most impacted by vehicular emissions in all of Massachusetts. The “Union of Concerned Scientists” (UCS) reports that transportation particulate levels in the area are 43% higher than state levels. (Moura, et al., 2019). An academic study of the community measured an annual average of 26,000 ultrafine particles per cubic centimeter in the air in Chinatown, which is several times higher than in the Boston community, where traffic density is lower. These ultrafine particles (<0.1 μm in diameter) and NO₂ from diesel exhaust penetrate deeply into the lungs and bloodstream, seriously affecting the health of Chinatown residents (Dimitri, et al., 2023) (Fig.7). For adults in Chinatown, asthma and cardiovascular disease rates are among the highest in Boston, with long-term exposure to highway emissions (Cockhren et al., 2024)

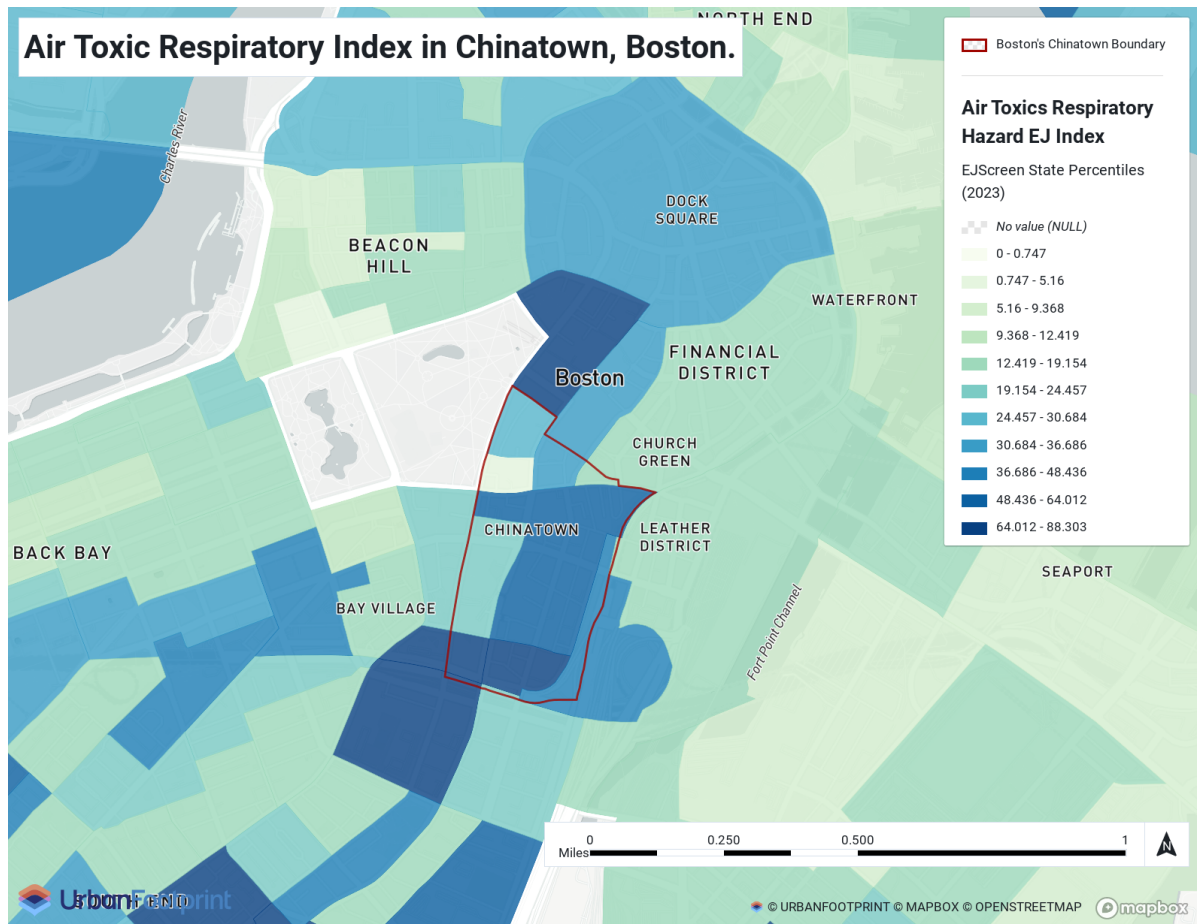


Figure 7. Air Toxic Respiratory Index in Chinatown, Boston.

Notably, these outdoor air hazards are combined with indoor environmental stresses. A landmark study conducted by Brugge et al. (2000) found progressively higher rates of respiratory disease among Chinatown residents. Mold, insect infestations, and lead paint problems in many outdated apartments further deteriorate air quality. Compared to other Boston neighborhoods, Chinatown residents are approximately 20% more likely to suffer from respiratory illness (CPA, 2021). Residents complain of soot on windowsills and respiratory irritation, especially among many older people and children in the community. Overall, the high level of transportation emissions and inappropriate living conditions present a serious public health challenge.

4.2.2 Water Pollution and Infrastructure Challenges

Chinatown's physical and historical background makes it especially susceptible to water-related infrastructure challenges. The neighborhood was first constructed on a reclaimed mudflat (a former tidal bay in the South Bay), leading to low-lying terrain and a high water table, which caused inadequate drainage and susceptibility to floods (Resilient Cities Network, n.d.). Chinatown is located in a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) designated floodplain, which is expected to flood regularly by 2070. In addition, with a rising water table, excess groundwater can damage the foundations of old brick row houses, which some residents have observed gradually sinking as wooden piles invade the water and become rotted (He, 2025).

The vulnerability of this infrastructure has been revealed in recent years. The Chinatown area has seen many water main ruptures; notably, in 2022, water overflowed onto the street, resulting in pavement deterioration (Patkin, 2022). The infrastructure of Chinatown has deteriorated due to aging components and challenging settings (Fig.8).

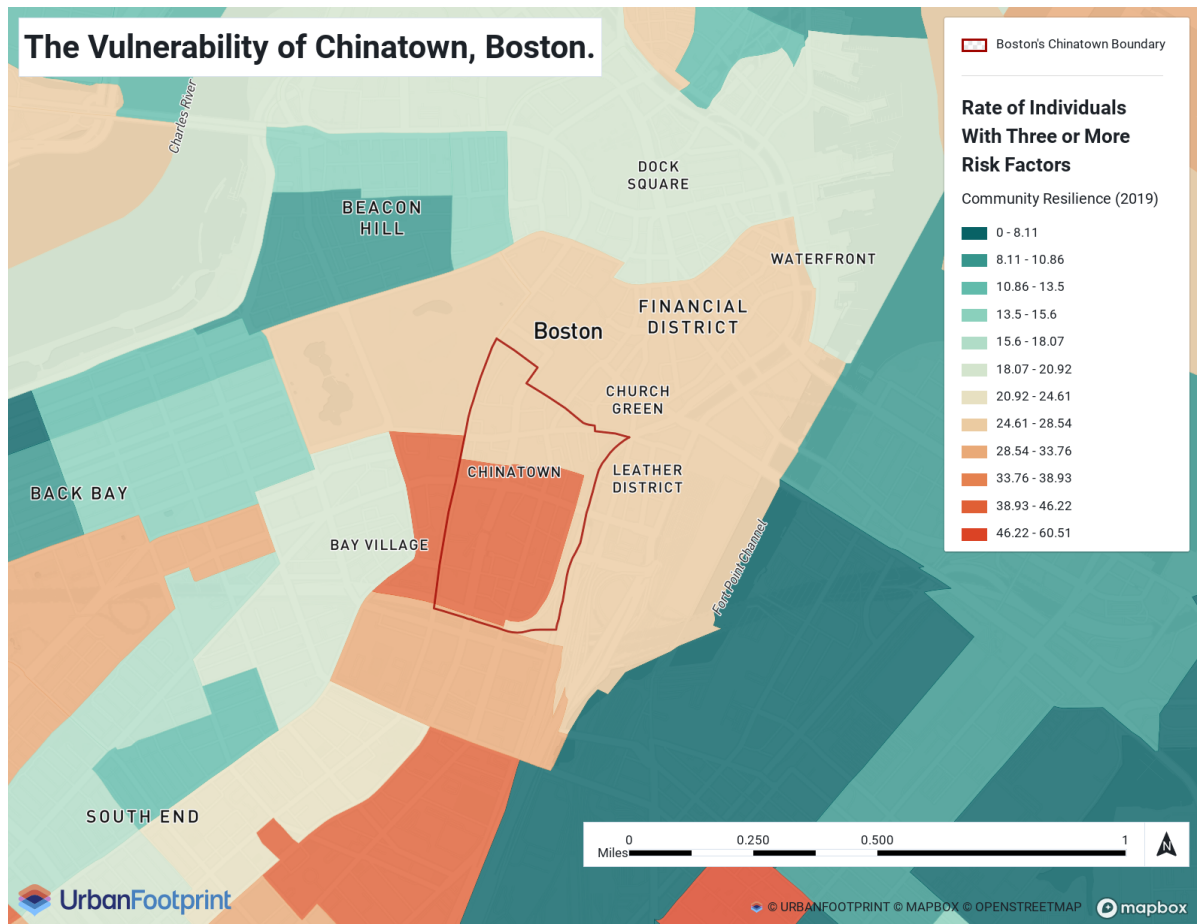


Figure 8. The Vulnerability of Chinatown, Boston

Investing in resilience against regular spills and the increasing risk of catastrophic weather requires substantial funding guided by community involvement. Boston's Chinatown is not located near the Charles River but is part of the lower Charles River watershed; hence, the community is equally impacted by the Charles and pollution. Particularly in Chinatown, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) notes that combined sewer overflows (CSOs) spew untreated sewage and precipitation straight into the river after heavy rain. 2024's (MWRA) Although during the past two decades, the water quality of the Charles River has improved significantly. Though it is still not ideal, over the past 20 years, the Charles River now boasts a "B" certification from the EPA in 2022 (EPA, 2022).

Older infrastructure and fewer resources that communities like Chinatown deal with have caused cascading effects from regional water contamination, ranging from stormwater mismanagement to drinking water discrepancies. Improved physical infrastructure and environmental governance are needed to ensure that Chinatown's residents have equitable access to safe and clean water.

4.2.3 Lack of Green Space and Open Space

Chinatown is known for its lack of open space and parks, and this lack of green space has profoundly affected the neighborhood's well-being. Decades of urban development have carved up parcels of land in Chinatown neighborhoods, such as highway construction, commercial expansion, and urban renewal. According to the Boston Open Space Program (2014), the downtown area, including Chinatown, has only 2.17 acres of artificially protected open space per 1,000 residents, compared to the citywide average of 7.59 acres. In Chinatown alone, the number is even lower; an oft-cited figure is 0.3 acres per 1,000 residents, highlighting the extreme scarcity of parks (MAPC, 2020). Aside from a small amusement park (Big East Village) and a small plaza (Oxnard Gateway Plaza), there are few places for residents to experience green or outdoor recreation. Canopy cover in Chinatown is about 10%, well below the Boston average, resulting in a poor urban landscape for the neighborhood (Lowe, 2023). Due to the lack of greenery and shade, Chinatown has become a distinct urban heat island, with summer temperatures in dense neighborhoods 5-10 degrees Fahrenheit higher than in greener neighborhoods. This lack of open space directly results from historical injustices, as land has been used for freeways and real estate development

4.2.4 Poor Housing Conditions and Overcrowding

Substandard housing conditions seem to be the norm in Chinatown, where it is common for families or multiple people to share small apartments or even single rooms. Due to the scarcity of affordable housing, many low-income residents live in extremely overcrowded units or bed and breakfasts. One resident described living in a Chinatown group home with eight units on each floor, sharing a bathroom and kitchen, and only being able to cook in his bedroom with a small rice cooker (MAPC, 2020). This overcrowded and aging housing creates health problems and safety hazards such as inadequate heating, pests, mold growth, and fire risks.

The Chinatown residents face extreme rent burdens that limit their housing options. According to the U.S. (Fig.9) Census Bureau's American Community Survey 5-year estimate (2020), over 27% of Chinatown residents live below the poverty level, and 42% of households earn under \$35,000 per year. (American Community Survey, 2020). In addition, the high demand for housing has led to illegal short-term rentals and highly speculative vacancies. Vacant apartments are used as real estate investments by Airbnb (Melissa Hung, 2018), which not only worsens living conditions but also undermines community cohesion.

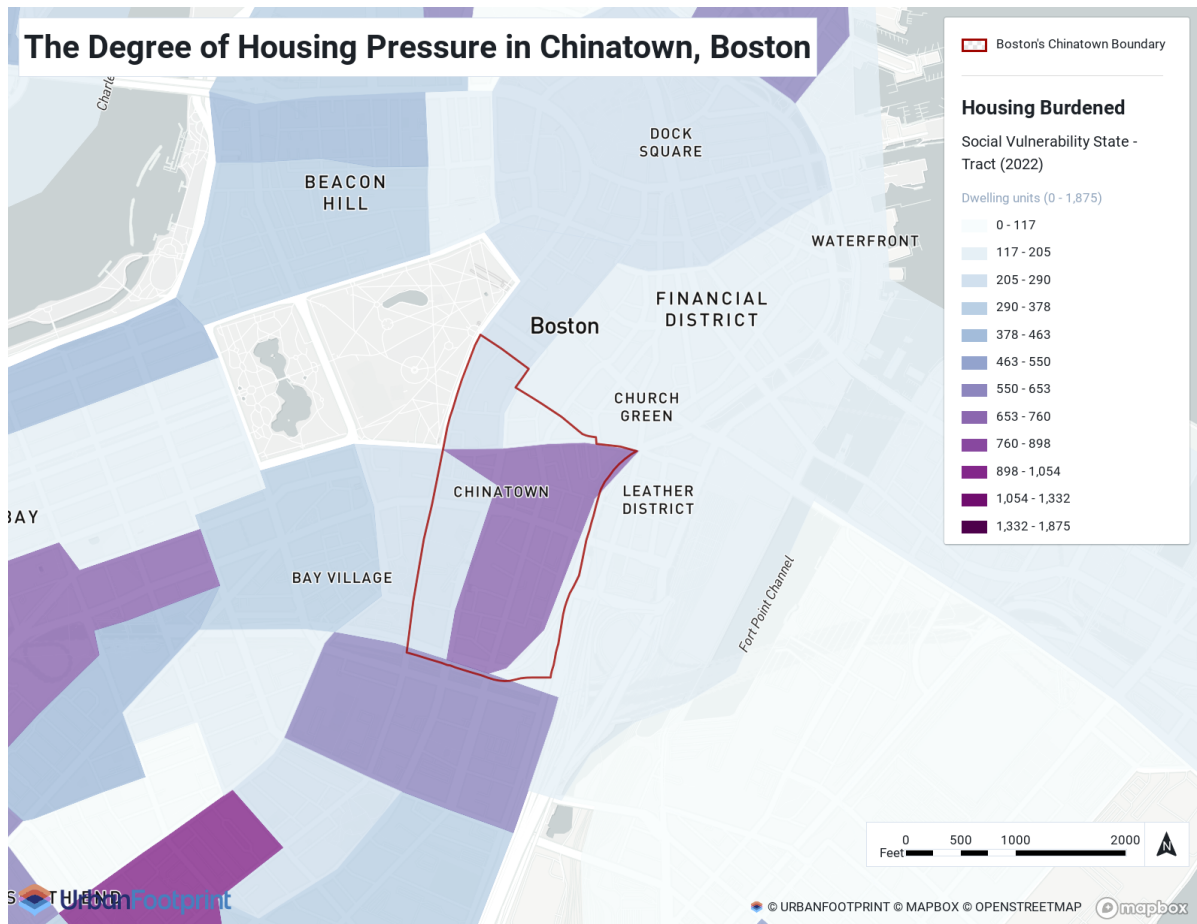


Figure 9. The degree of housing cost-burdened in Chinatown, Boston

Note: Housing cost-burdened occupied housing units with annual income less than \$75,000 (30%+ of income spent on housing costs) estimate, 2018-2022 ACS

All of these situations disproportionately affect the interests of vulnerable groups such as the elderly and the new immigrant working class, many of whom in Chinatown live on fixed incomes. New immigrants' limited English proficiency prevents these residents from obtaining housing elsewhere due to language barriers that cause these residents to rely on Asian immigrant enclaves for social support and local services. The result is a pattern of unfair socio-environmental stress: unhealthy housing, high rent burdens, and fear of eviction.

4.2.5 Socioeconomic Disparities and Displacement

The housing struggles and socioeconomic disparities in Boston's Chinatown have caused the neighborhood to experience waves of displacement. Many Chinatown residents work in low-paying service jobs such as restaurant servers, nail salons, and clothing store clerks. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 ACS, household incomes in Chinatown are well below the citywide median income, with high poverty rates. While the ACS does not directly provide specific median income data for Boston's Chinatown neighborhood, local analyses and community reports estimate that the median income for the neighborhood is approximately \$25,555 (American Community Survey, 2020). This figure represents approximately 63% of the city's median household income, highlighting the significant income disparity within the city. Economic disparities exacerbate injustice (Posey, 2016).

Displacement has long been a key issue, and with Boston's booming real estate industry, Chinatown has witnessed the rapid rise of luxury condominiums and the results of capital involvement. According to the Chinatown Master Plan (2020), the number of high-end or luxury residential units in the neighborhood increased from 561 in 2000 to 2,602 in 2018 (Rubin, 2020). Property values have also been on the rise: in 1990, housing values in Chinatown were roughly in line with Boston as a whole, but by 2010, prices in Boston were almost twice as high as those in Chinatown (HLRN, 2017).

Knowing that the median monthly rent in Chinatown was about \$3,381 in 2015, it was at that time the highest of any Boston neighborhood. By the winter of 2020, the median rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Chinatown had climbed to \$3,400 per month. Community advocates see this as a “displacement crisis,” where people are not only losing their places of residence and stable jobs, but Chinatown is in danger of losing its identity as an ethnocultural gathering place. Even though the residents who remain have a place to live, they are anxious about possible evictions and rising rents, as 40% of Chinese-American households do not have formal lease protection (Main & Bell, 2019). Due to the

2020 COVID pandemic, most of the restaurants in Chinatown could not operate, resulting in many Chinese workers who do not speak English being forced to become unemployed. Due to the language barrier, they had difficulty applying for emergency relief funds. (Fig.10) Without jobs to earn a living, many low-income Asian immigrant families were on the verge of eviction (ji, 2022). According to Boston indicators, “as of October 11, 2020, restaurants and hotel spending by all consumers decreased by 21.8% compared to January 2020” (Ciurczak, 2020). According to the ACS, the percentage of Asian Americans in Boston's Chinatown has declined from 76% in 2010 to 55% in 2020, a larger decline than any other neighborhood in Boston. This indicates the exclusion of original longtime residents and their replacement by new non-Asian immigrants (Cao et al., 2025).

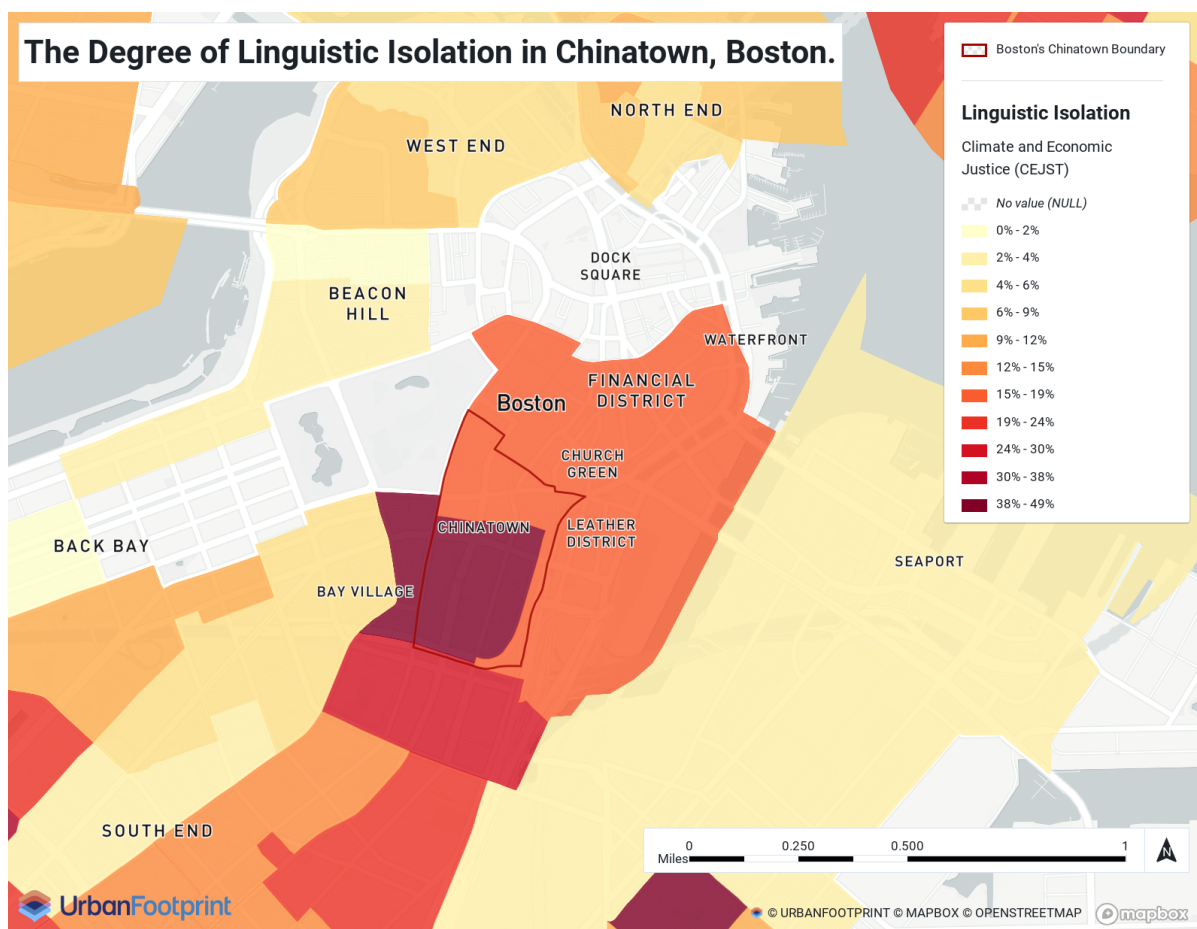


Figure 10. The Degree of Linguistic Isolation in Chinatown, Boston.

Displacement in Chinatown takes many forms, and another notable driver is the proliferation of short-term rentals (e.g., Airbnb) in what were once residential units. Melissa (2018) reports that short-term rentals have spilled over into Chinatown, rapidly taking over much of the housing stock and displacing residents. The emergence of this situation has tightened the supply of housing and pushed up rents as apartments go to new and new temporary occupants rather than meeting the needs of the community. Displacement is not only a loss of housing, but also a loss of community. As CPA Director Karen Chen observes, evictions can create a sense of separation between residents and the community institutions they rely on and the culturally familiar neighborhoods (Main & Bell, 2019).

It is these injustices that inspire Boston's Chinatown with its community activism and resilience. The community has worked hard at the grassroots level to obtain some improvements, such as stopping C-block garages to prevent proposed parking establishments from accelerating the pollution of the environment (Leong, A., 1995). In addition to this, the creation of new branch libraries is being considered, as well as bilingual voting and services, so that residents who are not proficient in English can have voting support. These actions show that the community has also put effort into fighting injustice, but broader policy interventions are needed.



Figure 11. The photo of the main street in the Chinatown community. (Ziwei, Guo)

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

5.1 Flushing, NYC vs. Chinatown, Boston

Both Flushing and Boston's Chinatowns face similar problems: one driven primarily by development pressures, marginalization, and discriminatory planning, resulting in an Asian community burdened with environmental issues and social inequality. Flushing's size has allowed it to absorb an influx of immigrants, but gentrification and displacement are creeping into the neighborhood. Rising rents and the rezoning of upscale apartments threaten the basics of life for low-income Asian residents (Pellegrino et al., 2020). In contrast, the injustices facing Boston's Chinatown stem from historical marginalization and spatial constraints. The small geographic size of Boston's Chinatown means that any loss of housing or land has immediate impacts, such as a severe housing shortage and a reduction in green space. In short, Flushing is more of a challenge in terms of sustaining the development of the neighborhood and balancing the development of new projects with the interests of the older residents, while Boston's Chinatown seeks to adapt and preserve within the existing urban fabric.

A key issue is land availability; Flushing covers about 853 acres in north Queens (New York City Department of City Planning, 2012), including underutilized lots and former industrial spaces where developers have been able to build high-rise buildings from the ground up. By contrast, Boston's Chinatown encompasses about 137 acres (Chinatown Community Land Trust, 2025), which is surrounded by existing buildings with no vacant or green spaces. So, many new development must occur as infill in this dense community. Thus, Flushing has excellent potential for expansion as well as increased urban infrastructure; however, improvements to the physical conditions of Chinatown are very limited and can only be considered in terms of policy or the transformation of neighboring neighborhoods.

From a demographic perspective, Flushing is a pan-Asian immigrant enclave with a more diverse population. At the same time, Boston's Chinatown Junction has a more homogeneous population with lower incomes and an aging population. This means that both neighborhoods share similar issues but have different capabilities and resources. Environmentally, both neighborhoods bear excessive burdens, including poor air quality, noise, lack of green space, and inadequate infrastructure. Flushing's dire environmental conditions are the result of the fast expansion of immigrant enclaves without adequate oversight (Pellegrino, et al., 2020). In contrast, many of the environmental problems in Boston's Chinatown are the result of the legacy of discriminatory urban planning in the mid-20th century, when minority neighborhoods were subdivided for urban rezoning (Alonso, n.d.).

Community members in both Asian enclaves mobilized against these injustices. The difference, however, is that middle-class business owners in Flushing have some influence and can contribute to some of the efforts to make a difference (McGowan, 2016). Each year, the Flushing BID surveys all catch basins in the area and lists those that are clogged with trash. The organization then reports this list to 311 for inspection by the Sewer Maintenance Department, which is responsible for removing waste and thereby improving the efficiency of the sewer system in downtown Flushing (Flushing BID, 2019). Additionally, between 2018-2019, Asian Americans for Equality led a lawsuit against a proposed hotel development on Sanford Avenue. The proposed project would exacerbate stormwater runoff into Flushing Bay. Pushback on the project ultimately forced the developer to incorporate green roofs and permeable pavers into the design (Lin, et al., 2020).

Chinatown relies heavily on nonprofit organizations and student volunteers to drive progress (Main & Bell, 2019). The Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) has been hosting

“Know Your Rights” workshops and trains hundreds of low-income families each year in eviction defense and safe harbor housing options (CPA, 2021). Chinatown Community Land Trust mobilizes residents around a shared equity model. Trust mobilizes residents around a shared equity model, dedicating underutilized parking lots to permanent affordable housing and small parks (Chinatown CLT, 2023).

Both cases illustrate a core tenet of environmental justice theory in practice. Regardless of its form, environmental injustice consistently results in minority communities bearing heavier environmental risks but receiving fewer benefits and protections. Both Flushing and Chinatown demonstrate that Asian American enclaves, like many other neighborhoods that are comprised predominantly of residents of color are often disproportionately affected by pollution, inadequate facilities, and social inequality.

5.2 Common Trends with Other Asian Enclaves

The challenges facing Flushing and Boston's Chinatown are not unique. Similar patterns of injustice and community resistance are found in other Asian enclaves across North America. These examples highlight that what happened to Flushing and Boston's Chinatown is just one part of a vast phenomenon in which urban development often clashes with the rights and resilience of minority communities. Other examples abound. Philadelphia's Chinatown was founded in the 1870s, and in late 1906, the city's Vine Street Expressway (I-676) cut directly through the Chinatown neighborhood, confiscating hundreds of properties and bisecting the community (Uteuova, 2023). Recently, the Chinatown neighborhood objected to plans to build a new \$1.3 billion arena on the East Side of Market because of the NBA's Philadelphia 76ers' win (Chen & Tobier, 2024). The community expressed concern that the arena will lead to the gentrification of the Asian enclave due to rising home prices and rents in the neighborhood, or congested traffic interfering with residents' normal lives.

Similarly, Seattle's Chinatown-International District (CID) was separated by freeways (I-90) and sports stadiums in the 1960s. This transformation placed a heavy social burden on the multiracial Asian American enclave (Alonso, n.d.). In Montreal's Chinatown (the only remaining Chinatown in Quebec), the city's long history of investing in the management of Chinatown's public amenities has resulted in inadequate street lighting and broken sidewalks, which negatively impact an aging community (Chinatown Reimagined Form, 2023). Beginning in 2021, developers targeting Chinatown's location acquired a large number of parcels with historic buildings around Zhongshan Park with plans to convert them into upscale condominiums and hotel chains. This upscale development has resulted in higher average rents in the neighborhood and the displacement of residents (Parks Canada Agency, 2011). Another example is Vancouver's Chinatown, Canada's only well-preserved 19th-century Chinese immigrant neighborhood. Through time, the area has experienced oppression dating from the Chinese Exclusion Act and the persecution of segregation, as well as the squeeze of urban sprawl on the neighborhood (City of Vancouver, 2017).

6. POLICY RESPONSES AND SOLUTIONS

Addressing the intertwined social and environmental injustices that exist in Asian enclaves such as Flushing and Boston Chinatown is difficult, but lessons are learned through the policies and interventions of other Chinatown and minority communities that have faced similar challenges. Measures specific to Flushing and Boston Chinatown are then proposed in the context of these two neighborhoods.

6.1 Environmental Health Interventions

On the environmental front, targeted interventions can reduce harm in both communities. One approach to air pollution is to improve traffic management and emission controls. In Boston's Chinatown, researchers have recommended installing advanced air filtration systems in buildings most vulnerable to high levels of highway pollution and advocating for stricter laws on trucks and public transportation in the area (Dimitri, 2023). In addition, the State of Massachusetts Department of Transportation should encourage building a cap on the I-93 highway, which would allow for the expansion of parkland, alleviating the lack of green space in the community, and reducing noise and pollution. Cities such as Seattle have experimented with highway reconstruction, capping I-5 and connecting downtown to First Hill, adding 20 acres of parkland and affordable housing (Lid I-5, n.d.). If a similar project were implemented in Boston's Chinatown, it could be transformative. Now, the Boston Transportation Department has a program on I-90 called "Reconnecting Chinatown." They mentioned: "We are planning a better, safer, greener, and more attractive connection between the two sides of the open-cut Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) in Chinatown." (City of Boston, 2025).

In Flushing, air quality issues are linked to public transportation facilities. Older diesel buses have high PM2.5 emissions, and several bus routes have hubs in Flushing, so there

could be a push for the MTA to accelerate the phase-out of diesel buses, which could be extended to the Flushing neighborhood under the Clean Transportation Act (2021) that the City of New York has already passed. In addition, reducing emissions from private vehicles is important for Flushing's air quality. Just as Manhattan already charges up to \$15 per trip for cars entering the island, the MTA and NYC DOT are using Queens Boulevard as a pilot. Tolling cars entering the main lanes of Flushing during peak hours. Modeling by CBD's Environmental Assessment shows that even smaller zones can reduce trips by 3-5% by private automobiles and reduce NOx emissions by nearly 6%. (MTA, 2023)

Flushing has an active BID that could lead the community to successfully build a green corridor, which is a connected chain of vegetated streetscape features that manage runoff, improve air quality, provide shade, and offer continuous public infrastructure. Since 2012, the Downtown Flushing Transit Hub BID has managed scenic upgrades along Main Street and Roosevelt Boulevard as well as street sanitation (Flushing BID, n.d.). A successful model is the "Green Corridor" project in Medellín, Colombia, which created a network of vegetated trails in the downtown area, significantly reducing urban heat and improving the environment (Yeung, 2024). New York City could invest in anti-pollution plants along Flushing's main streets (Main St, Roosevelt Ave) and retrofit parking lot rooftops with community gardens and emulate Medellín's rainwater irrigation system to alleviate New York's summer drought conditions. In summary, investing in environmental improvements is the most crucial key decision. Not only does it address injustice by improving infrastructure conditions, but it also provides social benefits and equal rights for minority groups.

6.2 Preservation of Cultural Identity and Heritage District

In response to the loss of cultural identity, some cities have begun to formally recognize and protect Chinatown communities. As mentioned earlier, both Montreal and San Francisco have tried to preserve Chinatown's distinctive architecture and cultural heritage. The government identifies neighborhoods as historic or cultural districts to ensure that new construction is appropriate to the neighborhood context and to protect traditional businesses. Because of Boston's Chinatown's history and the lack of protection for historic districts, establishing a Chinatown Cultural Preservation District helps maintain the community's scale and essential character. Additionally, it can promote tourism and economic activity, as the Mid-Autumn Festival parade and the Chinese New Year Lion Dance in Boston's Chinatown attract many visitors. In the more complex and expansive Flushing neighborhood, cultural preservation can manifest as a multilingual storefront signage program and grants for traditional businesses (e.g., Chinese medicine stores and Asian supermarkets) to update their stores and upgrade. Preservation of landmarks is an important strategy in Flushing, such as the successful listing of Flushing Town Hall on the National Register of Historic Places. (Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2016) As Flushing has become known as an Asian enclave, some of Flushing's Asian-inspired festivals have become important symbols in New York City. Festivals and public art celebrating these Asian heritages help to consolidate cultural identity and also contribute to increasing recognition and respect for Asian culture and Asian identity, thereby helping Asian enclaves gain more rights and fairness.

6.3 Community Land Trust and Affordable Housing Preservation

The Community Land Trust (CLT) model is one of the most powerful tools for fighting displacement and protecting community integrity. A prime example is the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) in Roxbury, Boston, a predominantly Black and Latino neighborhood adjacent to Chinatown. In the 1980s, DNSI negotiated with the Boston

Redevelopment Authority and was certified under Massachusetts General Laws c. 121A. (1988) This law granted DNSI the right to acquire and hold vacant land, even using eminent domain, to create a CLT. This allowed residents to develop permanent affordable housing, community gardens, and parks on previously blighted land.

DSNI's CLT now manages over 225 affordable housing units and has transformed dozens of abandoned parcels into useful community spaces (Thriving Communities, 2023). DSNI's success demonstrates that community ownership of land can effectively combat speculative displacement and improve environmental conditions. For example, the DSNI cleaned up an illegal dump and planted green space where the dump once stood (Thriving Communities, 2023).

In recent years, Boston's Chinatown has created a neighborhood land trust that purchases endangered townhouse buildings. The townhouses, with multi-family residences on the upper floors and stores on the lower floors, maintain the traditional Chinatown pattern of “mixed commercial and residential” buildings. In Flushing, the CLT can secure publicly owned land, rezoned parcels, and preserve truly affordable housing. Empowering Flushing's immigrant community organizations to manage land in trust, such as the Urban Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) - The Flushing CLT Coalition has called for at least 30% of the waterfront to be included in the CLTs (Kully, 2020). In addition to strengthening inclusionary zoning (Mandatory Inclusionary Housing, MIH), the current MIH requires developments to provide 25-30% affordable housing to increase the percentage of affordable housing (New York City Council, n.d).

6.4 Community-Driven Impact Assessments

A consistent theme in addressing environmental justice is including input from affected communities in planning. Flushing and Boston Chinatown have active community groups

that should have a stronger voice in land use decision-making. Boston could formally adopt a displacement impact assessment requirement that would mandate an evaluation of whether any proposed development in vulnerable neighborhoods is likely to result in the displacement of residents (Main & Bell, 2019). This is similar to an Environmental Impact Assessment but focuses on housing and cultural impacts; it could flag projects that raise rents or eliminate affordable housing and require mitigation strategies.

In New York, the city's ULURP process could be strengthened by asking communities to give strong input on neighborhood projects like Flushing. Some New York community boards have recently pushed for Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) with developers (Kully, 2020). These agreements require developers to provide specific amenities or mitigation measures, such as affordable housing, local hiring, and environmental improvements, in exchange for community support of the project. For example, the CBA for the Flushing waterfront project ensures the inclusion of park space and guarantees water cleanup. Empowering groups such as the Flushing Rezoning Community Coalition during the negotiation process was important. The “Site C” victory in Boston's Chinatown is a classic example of how sustained grassroots opposition organized a harmful project and galvanized the community to make clear how important the land was to them (Leong, 1995). This demonstrates community resilience and the value of community. Also, in Manhattan's Chinatown, New York, the community board created a comprehensive rezoning plan in 2008 to limit luxury high-rises and protect affordable housing (The Independent, 2020). In Los Angeles' Chinatown, activists recently formed a CLT and pushed for creating anti-displacement zones to preserve affordable single-room occupancy housing. Each success story emphasizes that solutions must engage communities as key stakeholders, not just as recipients of top-down policies.

6.5 Policy Enforcement and Accountability

Many injustices persist not because of a lack of laws but because of a lack of enforcement. For example, in New York City, despite laws against harassment of tenants by landlords and illegal subdivision of housing units, immigrant tenants in Flushing may be unaware of their rights or unable to access meaningful help. Strengthening the ability of individual agencies to enforce housing codes and protect tenants in these neighborhoods is critical, either by adding more Chinese-speaking or other Asian language-speaking prosecutors, and the addition of defense or legal aid attorneys who speak Asian regional languages. In this way, tenants' rights will be defended more efficiently. New York City agencies should also work with community groups to support the reporting of violations and to draw greater attention to them.

Environmental regulations also need to be enforced: making sure that construction sites in Flushing are vacant of backhauls and noise, making sure that individual restaurants properly dispose of kitchen waste oil so that it doesn't clog downspouts, and making sure that trucks that meet the standards for meal preparation are on the road.

Both New York City and Boston have written environmental justice policies. Massachusetts passed an Environmental Justice Act in 2021: An Act Creating a Next-Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts Climate Policy (Chapter 8 of the Acts of 2021). The bill halts plans for a new natural gas compressor station in the Everett neighborhood in 2022 and successfully requires the government to reevaluate the air pollution impacts of the I-93 expansion. However, it lacks a proactive enforcement mechanism and requires residents to organize a complaint to set off a review.

New York State also passed a law (Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) & Environmental Justice Policy (DEC Policy DEP-29). The law protects Flushing residents by rejecting a proposal to build a waste treatment plant in Flushing in 2020. However, the policy's limitations are reflected in the excessive number of exemptions, and

public infrastructure projects can apply for exemptions from environmental policy review. Beyond that, even businesses that violate environmental justice policies are merely required to rectify the situation with no fines or actual criminal liability.

Both Massachusetts and New York have been remarkably effective in organizing new pollution and allocating funds. However, the repair of historical injustices and the intensity of enforcement still need to be strengthened. Ultimately, community empowerment, protective regulations, and aggressive investment in infrastructure and housing are required. The experience of other ethnic enclaves suggests that neither pure market forces nor one-time projects will solve these problems; sustained engagement and creative policy development are needed.

7. CONCLUSION

The cases of Flushing, New York City, and Chinatown, Boston, illustrate the complex interplay between social and environmental justice in urban Asian American communities. Both communities, while different in both history and size, suffer from marginalization, whether through neglect or outright displacement, as a direct result of today's inequalities in housing, health, and the environment.

This investigation focused on how gentrification and development pressures contribute to displacement and threaten cultural identity in both areas, while residents also suffer disproportionate environmental burdens such as air pollution, lack of green space, and poorly developed infrastructure. These conditions are not accidental; they stem from a persistent inattention to the welfare and rights of minority communities. The freeway through Chinatown, the luxury condos zoning in Flushing, and the lack of enforcement of environmental justice all reflect a pattern of systemic injustice that has persisted in Asian enclaves.

However, many actions and policies now exist that bring hope and resilience to these communities. Community activism in Boston's Chinatown has been stopping harmful projects and is now pioneering tools such as community land trusts to create adequate space for residents (Alonso, n.d). In Flushing, a diverse coalition of residents and community organizations came together to demand that development projects include community benefits and draft alternative vision plans for a sustainable waterfront (Zander, 2020). Looking across North America, other Chinatowns with minority enclaves are blazing the path of exhaustion, not only to preserve the community's land and buildings, but also its cultural spirit and inclusiveness.

A Call to Action

Policymakers, urban planners, and community advocates must work together to ensure that these enclaves do not fall victim to urban regeneration or climate change, but rather are beneficiaries of equitable development. Critically assessing the impact on vulnerable communities before approving projects and elevating the voice of communities in the overall decision-making process means that “justice” can be incorporated into urban planning. It also means investing in building and maintaining truly affordable housing, repairing environmental hazards, and providing amenities in neglected neighborhoods.

For researchers and planners, I hope this research paper is an effective call to refine our framework for sustainable development, including cultural and social sustainability, as exemplified by the many immigrant neighborhoods in Flushing and Boston's Chinatown that contribute so much to the city's social and economic institutions. Ensuring that they have equitable access to a healthy environment, adequate living space, and the right to determine their own living environment is, at the same time, the embodiment of an inclusive and humane city. By implementing the policies and practices discussed, and listening to the voices of local residents. Start now to right the wrongs of history and ensure that places like Flushing and Chinatown continue as vibrant, justice, and sustainable communities.

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