

# Fulton Street Mall: New Strategies for Preservation and Planning

## Executive Summary



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Fulton Street Mall: New Strategies for Preservation and Planning is a collaborative project of the Pratt Center for Community Development and Minerva Partners. Its goal is to lay the groundwork for Fulton Street Mall's future by combining the best historic preservation and redevelopment measures in order to preserve and nurture the Mall as a unique and vibrant public place.*

The project was developed using a “values-based” preservation planning approach, a relatively new method for studying and planning the future of historic places. Values-based preservation planning recognizes that places – or spaces made culturally meaningful by use and users – are important to different types of constituents for different reasons. It takes



into consideration that meaning and value change over time: in order to fully understand the meaning of a place, and its potential for the future, one must examine the various ways in which the place is valued by different contemporary constituents. This requires looking at the economy, the built environment, and the culture of a place, as a whole, before determining what should be retained or transformed. And it requires deliberately bringing the voices of Mall users into the conversation.

Over a year's research and consultation, we found that the Fulton Street Mall is an important place to many different groups of people who feel a strong stake in its future. Economically, the Mall is thriving.

The place has long supported – and still does support – social activity and social bonds woven out of economic activities and cultural expressions.



Like the Greek agora, Arab souk, or near-Eastern bazaar, the Mall is an economic marketplace that fosters many types of interaction, functionally serving as a public square that has considerable historical and cultural value. But despite its popularity among a diverse range of shoppers and visitors, and its profitability, it is often maligned by some who live or work nearby as a place in need of radical transformation.

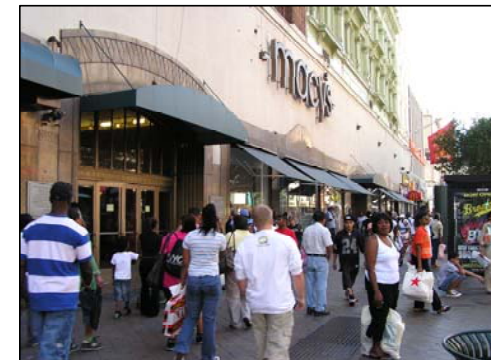


This report details our research findings and proposes a number of actions designed to advance historic preservation, redevelopment, and community development goals in concert.

# FINDINGS

*After conducting surveys and interviews with a broad set of stakeholders; land use studies; economic analysis; historical research; and policy exploration, we arrived at five key findings.*

1. Fulton Street Mall's historic buildings are past, present, and future cultural and economic resources that are currently under utilized, poorly maintained, and often hidden from public view.
2. The Mall has a thriving and diverse economy that supports a variety of retail types, with an equal number of national chain stores and local independent shops, and a surprisingly strong network of small vendor-entrepreneurs.
3. Shoppers, workers, and visitors value the Mall as an important place that they count on as much for social networking as they do for shopping.
4. The Mall functions significantly but poorly as a public space, having deficiencies in the quality and quantity of standard amenities, as well as foreboding side streets leading to and from Fulton Street.
5. Negative perceptions of the Mall among non-users – perceptions that do not accord with our research – are a significant challenge to preserving the culture of the Mall and nurturing its future.



# STRATEGIES

*To respond to these findings we recommend five strategies that will build on Fulton Street Mall's strengths, address its deficiencies and fill the gap between perception and reality. Given the level of user enthusiasm for the Mall, and its brisk commerce, the strategies are aimed at improving the Mall for its current users and broadening its appeal to workers and residents in the areas immediately adjacent to it.*

1. Address the physical appearance of the Mall with innovative and culturally sensitive façade improvement, building conservation and new building design techniques that embrace the aesthetic theme of “old meets new.” We believe this can be done with an administrative approach, developing and implementing new guidelines within the existing zoning framework (without necessarily requiring a zoning change).
2. Better utilize buildings by activating their upper stories and carefully planning a mix of uses (retail, arts/cultural, residential) that support the dynamism and diversity of the Mall and make it a 24-hour place. This can begin with several demonstration projects that model particular upper floor uses at appropriate locations.
3. Promote and enhance the current retail themes found on the Mall: urban wear, Hip Hop fashion and music, and “uniquely Brooklyn.”
4. Improve the public realm and enliven the side streets – through urban design, streetscape, and cultural programming – to enhance the experience of shoppers and visitors on Fulton Street, as well as workers and residents to the north and south. This will facilitate the public gathering that takes place in this vibrant marketplace.
5. Engage a broad and diverse group of stakeholders in the planning process from this point forward.



It is important for planning activities to address Fulton Street at three scales: individual buildings; block fronts and assemblages; and the Fulton Street Mall as a whole. Because there are multiple voices guiding this thinking, solutions too are multiple and varied.



## NEXT STEPS

*Changes to the Fulton Street Mall's built environment, managed in ways that resonate with historical patterns and traditions as well as the wants, needs, and styles of current shoppers and merchants, can broaden the Mall's constituency without displacing those who currently shop there. The solution to many of the short- and medium-term issues and opportunities of the Mall lie in the creative use, layering, or packaging of existing policies and programs.*

- Model potential upper floor uses by matching specific sites to expanded retail use, arts & cultural use, and mixed-income residential; and demonstrate creative application of existing funding incentives and policy strategies.
- Implement guidelines, incentives and enforcement for better building maintenance, culturally sensitive façade and storefront improvements, innovative signage strategies.
- Market the Mall based on its existing cultural strengths and retail mix.
- Address streetscape issues, lack of urban design amenities, and unappealing side streets.
- Create a planning task force with a diverse and broad set of stakeholders.

As the context of downtown Brooklyn grows and changes with new plans for office and residential development, Fulton Street Mall becomes an increasingly important resource. If we can successfully blend old and new, tap all the unrealized cultural and physical opportunities, and bring many diverse voices to the table, the Mall will continue to serve as a vibrant commercial center and important social space for its current constituents while at the same time attracting new shoppers and visitors and strengthening its local support network.

In nurturing the best possible future for Fulton Street Mall, we will be preserving a significant, unique and broadly appealing place in the heart of downtown Brooklyn.

