

FACT BRIEF | MARCH 2016

Fifty Years of Historic Preservation in New York City

The year 2015 marked the 50th anniversary of the creation of New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), which has the authority to designate areas as historic districts and to designate individual, interior and scenic landmark sites. The LPC aims to achieve a wide array of goals through preservation, from safeguarding historic assets to promoting tourism, enhancing property values, and furthering economic development. This fact brief does not seek to assess progress in meeting those goals, but rather to describe the extent of historic preservation in New York City and explore some of the differences between historic districts and non-regulated areas. This brief draws on our full report, *Fifty Years of Historic Preservation*, and focuses on historic districts as such districts include the majority of parcels regulated by the LPC.

Finding 1

LPC Regulation Extends to 3.4 percent of Lots in New York City; 27 percent of Lots in Manhattan are LPC-regulated

Figure 1 provides a visual analysis of the way historic districts have spread across the five boroughs of New York City from 1965 through 2014. During the first two decades following the passage of the landmarks law, nearly all of the historic districts and district extensions were located in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Between 1965 and 1984, 28 historic districts or district extensions were designated in Brooklyn, 15 were designated in Manhattan, and only five in the remaining boroughs. However, in subsequent decades, the LPC designated 21 districts or district extensions in Queens,

the Bronx, and Staten Island out of a total of 83 in that later period.

While recently designated districts have been more geographically dispersed, Figure 1 shows that in 2014, most historic district lots were still concentrated in just a few areas of New York City. In Manhattan, a substantial share of lots located within the Upper East Side, Upper West Side, and south of 14th Street were covered by historic district regulation. The areas surrounding downtown Brooklyn and Prospect Park also had a high concentration of lots in historic districts.

Figure 2 reports the share of lots and lot area regulated by a historic district or individual or interior landmark across boroughs. By 2014, 3.4 percent of the city’s lots and 4.4 percent of the city’s land area were either located inside a historic district or were protected as an individual landmark. However, the coverage across boroughs ranges widely. In Manhattan, 27 percent of lots were designated either as a historic district, individual landmark or interior landmark, and these lots comprised just one fifth of the lot area in Manhattan. The coverage is notably different in the other boroughs. In Queens, just 1.6 percent of lot area is covered by an LPC designation. The corresponding percentages are 5.2 in Brooklyn, 3.2 in the Bronx and 3.1 percent in Staten Island.

Finding 2

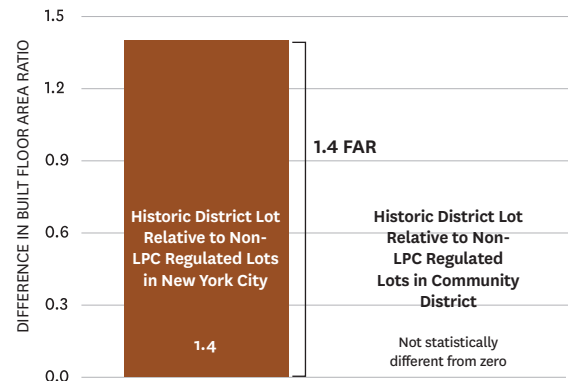
Historic Districts and Nearby Areas are Equally Dense

Figure 3 shows that on average across the city, lots inside historic districts were actually built at a greater density in 2014 than lots not regulated by the LPC. To measure built density, we use built *Floor Area Ratio*, or FAR, which is the total floor area of a building divided by the size of a lot. We find that historic district lots were built to an average of 2.4 FAR, while lots not regulated by the LPC

were built to an average of 1.0 FAR. This difference is largely due to the greater concentration of historic districts in the high-density borough of Manhattan. When we look separately by borough, we see little difference in the built FAR of lots inside and outside historic districts. Further, Figure 4 shows that when we control for variation between community districts with a regression analysis, we see no statistically significant difference between the built FAR of historic district lots and other lots in the same community district.

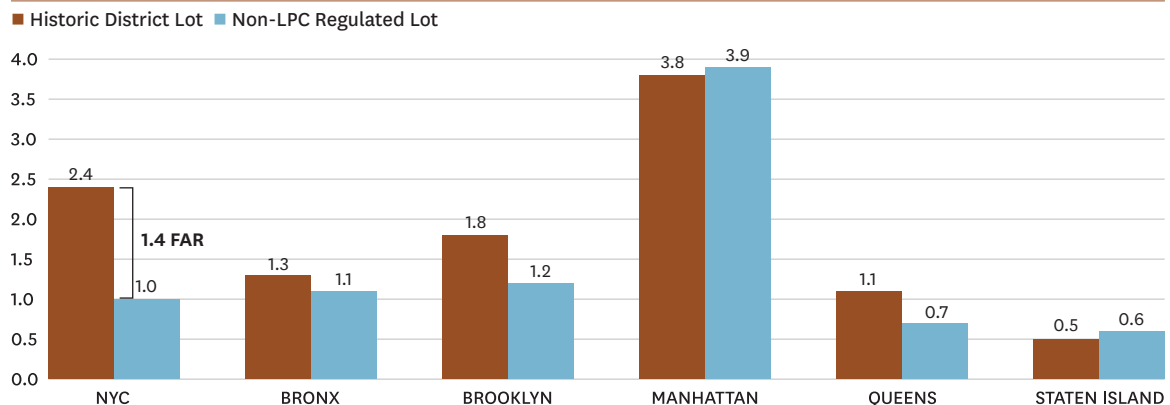
Notably, while historic district lots are generally built to the same density as other lots within their

Figure 4: 2014 Difference in Built Floor Area Ratio Between Lots Inside and Outside of Historic Districts Falls to Zero Within Community Districts



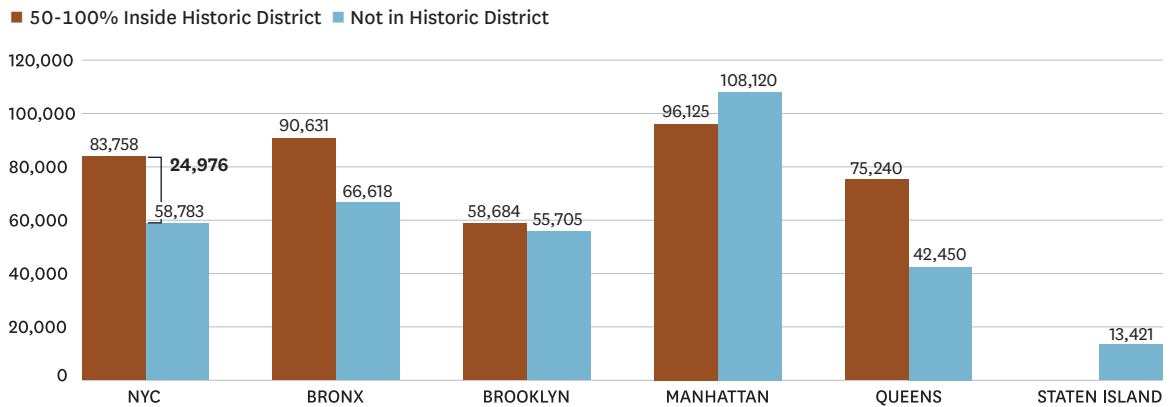
Sources: Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center

Figure 3: Built Floor Area Ratio of Lots by Historic Status, 2014



Sources: Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center

Figure 5: Population Density in Neighborhoods by Historic District Coverage (Per Square Mile), 2012

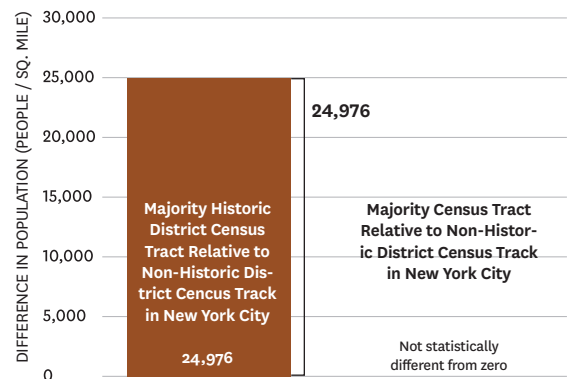


Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center
 Note: Staten Island does not have any census tracts that are mostly covered by a historic district.

same community district, they tend to use up more of their development potential, as they are zoned, on average, to somewhat lower allowable density. On average, historic district lots used seven percentage points more of their allowable floor area than non-LPC-regulated lots in the same community district.

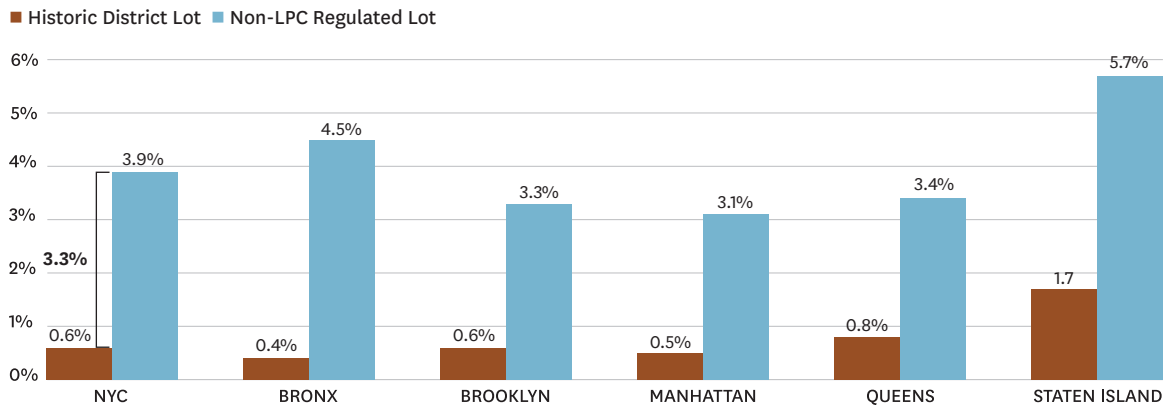
Moving from buildings to populations, Figure 5 shows that census tracts that are mostly included in a historic district had higher population densities on average than other tracts. But this pattern was not consistent across all boroughs. While population density levels were significantly higher within census tracts fully included in a historic district than within other tracts in the Bronx and Queens, the difference is minimal in Brooklyn and reverses in Manhattan. Indeed, Figure 6 shows that on average, within community districts, census tracts mostly covered by historic districts and census tracts not covered by historic districts were equally dense. Thus, the citywide difference in population density can again be explained by the concentration of historic districts in parts of the city with higher population density.

Figure 6: 2012 Difference in Population Density Inside and Outside of Historic Districts Falls to Zero Within Community Districts



Sources: Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center

Figure 7: Percentage of Lots with a New Building (2004-2014) by Historic Status



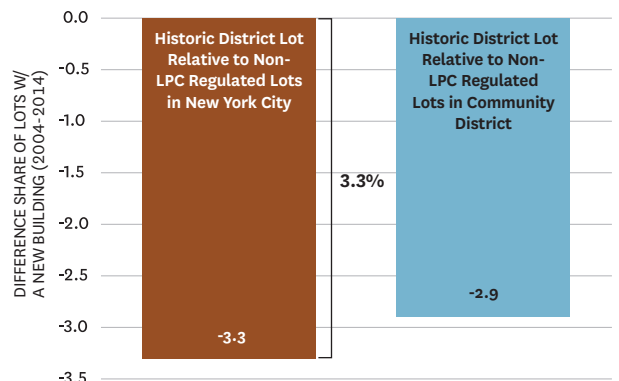
Sources: Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center
Lots designated as part of a historic district between 2004 and 2014 are excluded.

Finding 3

Historic Districts Saw Fewer New Buildings

Figure 7 shows that lots inside historic districts by the start of 2004 were considerably less likely to see new construction between 2004 and 2014 than other lots. Within historic districts, six out of every 1,000 lots saw a new building constructed during this 11-year (2004-2014) period as compared to 39 out of every 1,000 lots outside of historic districts. This basic difference holds for all boroughs and also holds when we control for variation between community districts as shown in Figure 8. Specifically, our analyses show that lots inside of historic districts were 2.9 percentage points less likely to see new building activity during this period than lots not regulated by the LPC in the very same community district. Some of this difference in new construction was due to the smaller share of sites within historic districts that were vacant or built out to less than half of their permitted residential floor area, which we dub “soft sites.” However, we also find that residential soft site lots covered by historic districts in 2007 were less likely to be redeveloped with new buildings between 2008 and 2014 than soft sites not under LPC regulation.

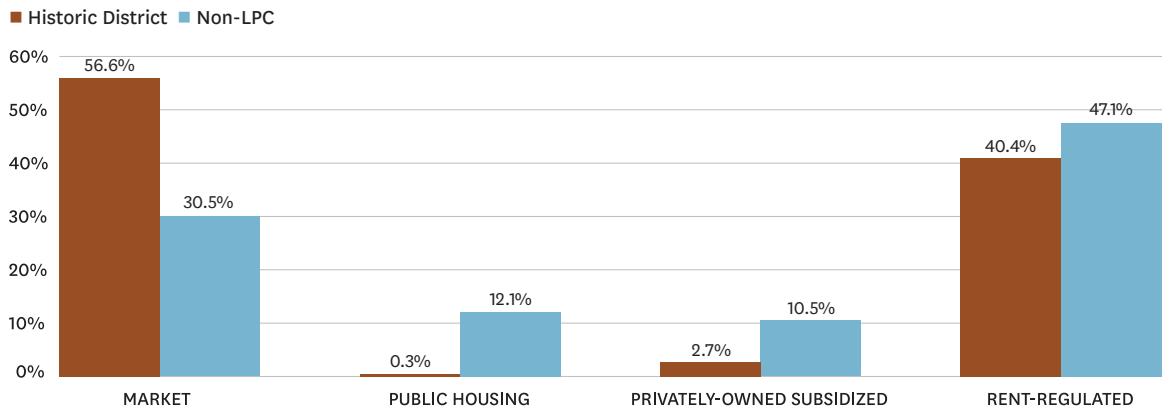
Figure 8: Difference in Share of Lots with a New Building (2004-2014) Inside and Outside of Historic Districts Remains Statistically Significant Within Community Districts



Sources: Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center

Lots designated as part of a historic district between 2004 and 2014 are excluded.

Figure 9: Distribution of Multifamily Rental Units by Type and Historic Status, 2013



Sources: New York City Housing Authority, John Krauss, New York City Department of Finance, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center

Finding 4

Historic District Lots Were No Less Likely to Receive an Alteration Permit

While looking citywide, we find that lots in historic districts were significantly more likely to have seen officially-recorded major alteration activity (that changed the certificate of occupancy) between 2004 and 2014 than non-LPC-regulated lots. However, this difference appears to be driven by the fact that historic districts were located in areas of the city that generally saw more renovation activity. When we look within community districts, we find that properties in historic districts were no more likely to receive an Alteration 1 permit between 2004 and 2014 than other non-LPC properties in the same community district.

Finding 5

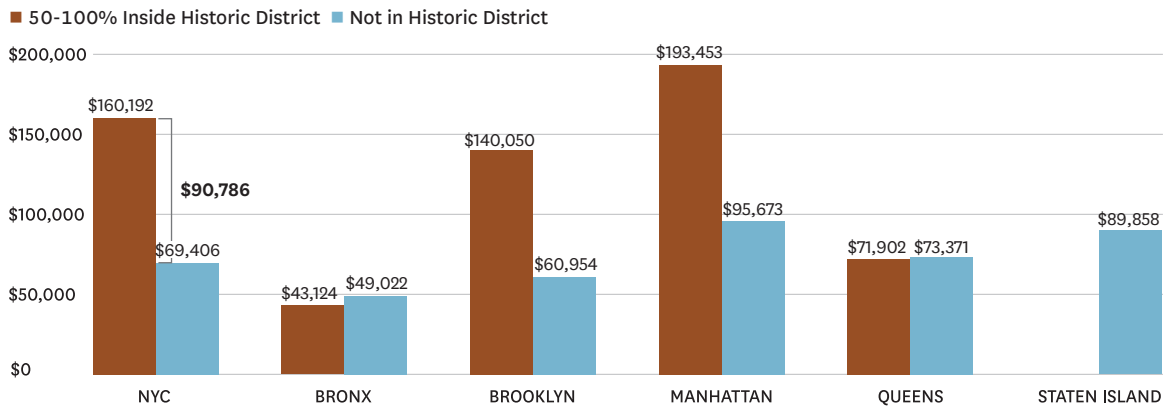
Rental Stock in Historic Districts Have a Higher Proportion of Market Rate Units

Figure 9 shows that a larger proportion of the rental units in 5+ unit buildings on historic district lots were market-rate in 2013 than in non-LPC-regulated multifamily buildings. Within historic districts, 56.6 percent of rental units were market rate, as compared to 30.5 percent of rental units on lots unregulated by the LPC. Much of this difference

was driven by the fact that public housing units made up a far smaller share of rental units within historic districts. Only 0.3 percent of total multifamily rental units in historic districts were public housing units, as compared to 12.1 percent of the multifamily rental stock not regulated by LPC. Privately-owned, income restricted subsidized units also comprised a much smaller share of multifamily rental units in historic districts at just 2.7 percent compared with 10.5 percent for units not regulated by LPC. The percentage of multifamily rental units that were rent-regulated (i.e. not public housing and not privately-owned income restricted) was more similar, with 40.4 percent of units within historic districts rent-regulated as compared to 47.1 percent of other rental units. These differences all remain even when comparing rental units inside and outside of historic districts within the community district.

While multifamily rental units on the lots inside historic districts were less likely to be rent-regulated, they were no more likely to exit rent stabilization or rent control than other units in the same neighborhood. Specifically, once we account for the fact that historic districts tend to be located in community districts with stronger rental markets and the initial number of rent-regulated units, we find that buildings with rent regulated units

Figure 10: Average Household Income by Historic District Coverage of Census Tracts, 2012



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center
 Note: Staten Island does not have any census tracts that are mostly covered by a historic district.

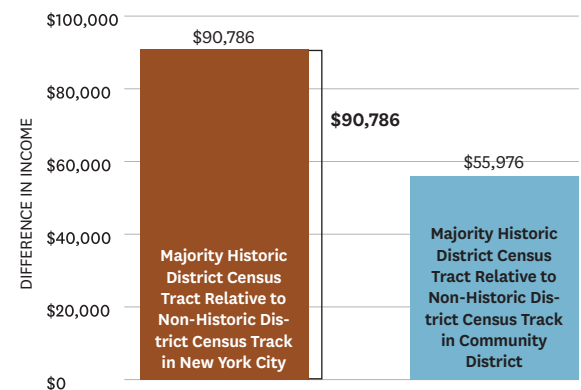
within historic districts experienced an equivalent decline in the number of rent-regulated units between 2007 and 2013 as rent-regulated buildings in the same community district that were not under LPC jurisdiction.

Finding 6

Residents of Historic Districts were Higher Income, More Highly Educated, and More Likely to be White

Our analysis reveals a striking difference in the socioeconomic status of households living inside and outside historic districts, with neighborhoods mostly inside historic district boundaries tending to house residents with significantly higher incomes and educational attainment. Figure 10 shows that these differences were particularly large in Manhattan and Brooklyn, but they generally hold within other boroughs as well. In Manhattan, the mean income for households living in neighborhoods mostly inside of a historic district was \$193,453—more than double the mean income of \$95,673 for households living in tracts fully outside of the historic district. In Brooklyn, the mean income in neighborhoods mostly inside of a historic district was \$140,050 compared to

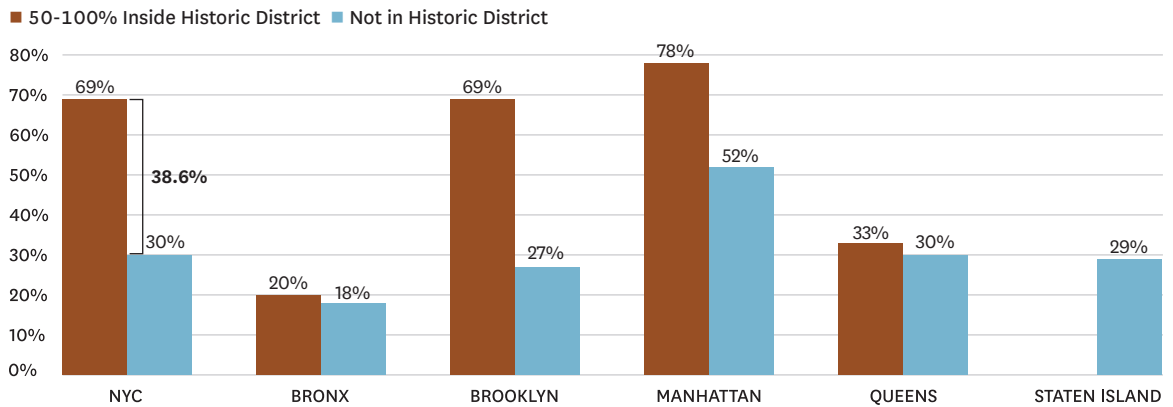
Figure 11: 2012 Difference in Income Inside and Outside of Historic Districts Falls but Remains Statistically Significant Within Community Districts



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center

\$60,954 for tracts outside of districts. In Queens, however, we saw very little difference between the census tracts mostly inside historic districts and those fully outside of them.

Figure 12: Average Percentage of Residents with a College Degree by Historic District Coverage, 2012

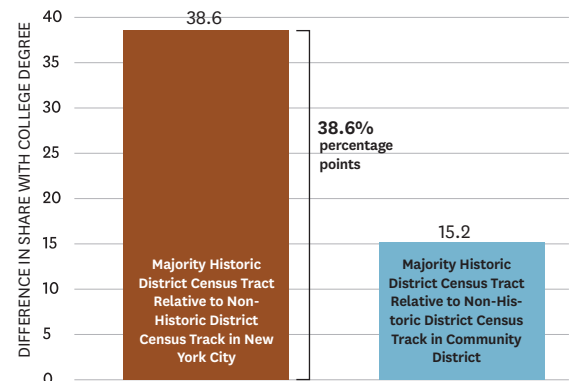


Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center
 Note: Staten Island does not have any census tracts that are mostly covered by a historic district.

Figure 11 shows that these general differences hold even within community districts. Census tracts inside historic districts, on average, housed residents with higher incomes than did other census tracts within the same community district.

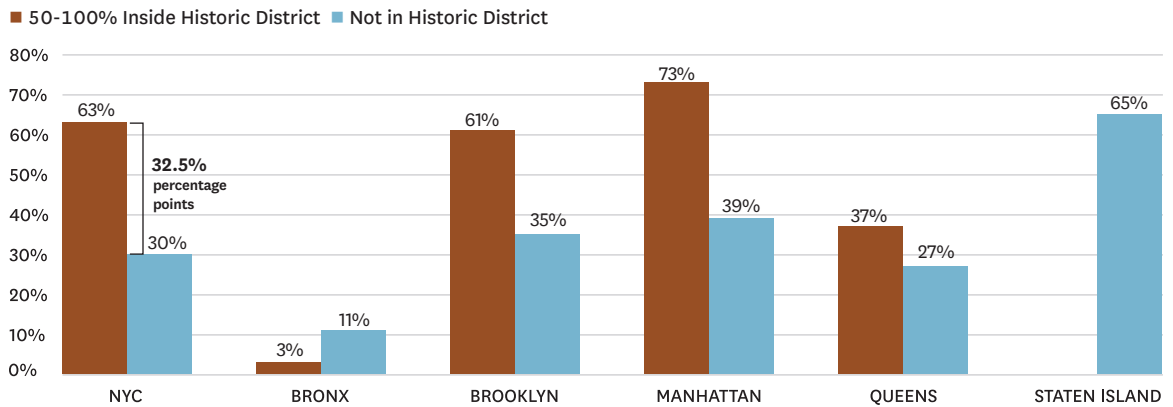
Similarly, across all boroughs, tracts with a majority of properties in historic districts had a larger share of residents with college degrees as shown in Figure 12. Again, differences are particularly striking in Manhattan and Brooklyn. In Manhattan, 78 percent of residents aged 25 and older in tracts mostly included in historic districts had a college degree as compared to 52 percent of those in tracts outside of historic districts. In Brooklyn, the differences were even sharper, with 69 percent of adult residents in tracts mostly included in historic districts holding college degrees as compared to just 27 percent of those in tracts outside of districts. The differences were smaller but still notable in the Bronx and Queens. As Figure 13 shows, significant differences were also present when comparing historic district census tracts to non-historic district census tracts within the same community district.

Figure 13: 2012 Difference in Share College Educated Inside and Outside of Historic Districts Falls but Remains Statistically Significant Within Community Districts



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center

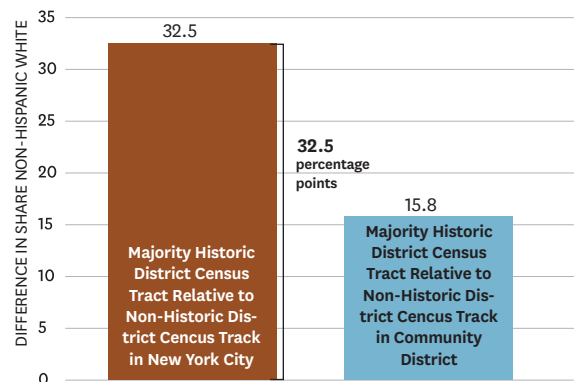
Figure 14: Average Percentage of Residents who were Non-Hispanic White by Historic District Coverage, 2012



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center
 Note: Staten Island does not have any census tracts that are mostly covered by a historic district.

In all boroughs, a larger share of the population was non-Hispanic white in tracts with a majority of residential units in historic districts, as shown in Figure 14. Citywide, 63 percent of residents in tracts mostly covered by a historic district were white, compared with 30 percent in tracts not at all covered by a historic district. These racial differences hold up in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens, and were particularly stark in Manhattan, where 73 percent of residents in tracts mostly included in historic districts were white as compared to 39 percent for tracts not covered by a historic district. As Figure 15 shows, the racial differences fall somewhat but still persist when comparing historic district census tracts to non-historic district census tracts within the same community district.

Figure 15: 2012 Difference in Share Non-Hispanic White Inside and Outside of Historic Districts Falls but Remains Statistically Significant Within Community Districts



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Landmarks Preservation Commission, MapPLUTO, NYU Furman Center



Conclusion

Over its first 50 years, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designated 114 historic districts and 17 district extensions across New York City and over individual and interior landmarks on over 1,200 lots, covering 3.4 percent of the city's lots. When we compare properties in historic districts to nearby properties that are not under the regulation of the LPC, we find some striking differences and some surprising similarities. First, historic districts were generally built to the same density levels as other neighborhoods when measuring density as the amount of floor area per square foot of land or the number of people per square mile of land. While lots in historic districts tended to be zoned for somewhat less density than other nearby lots, they were actually *built* to the same density levels. In other words, they used up a greater share of their development capacity than lots located outside of historic districts, but within the same community district.

Going forward, we could see density differences, however, as lots within historic districts were less likely to see new buildings than those not under LPC regulation, suggesting that designation was providing some level of protection from development. Yet lots within historic districts were equally likely to receive an alteration permit.

As for the housing stock, the multifamily rental units within historic districts were significantly more likely to be market rate, although rent-regulated units within historic districts were no more likely to exit regulation than those in nearby tracts. Consistent with these differences in rental housing stock, the residents of historic districts were higher income, more highly educated, and more likely to be non-Hispanic white.

These findings are part of a larger analysis describing the nature of historic preservation in New York City. For 50 years, the Landmarks Preservation Commission has worked to protect the historic assets of the city. By comparing the neighborhoods and lots regulated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission to other areas, this brief brings to light differences in the population characteristics, housing stock and development capacity of neighborhoods. To be sure, the differences we find should not be interpreted as having been caused by the designation of districts. Some of the differences may have existed long before designation. Still, by highlighting the ways in which these preserved neighborhoods differ from others, we hope this report offers a useful snapshot of the nature of historic preservation in New York City.

Authors:

Ingrid Gould Ellen

Brian J. McCabe

Eric Edward Stern

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the New York Community Trust and the J.M. Kaplan Fund for making this research possible.

The NYU Furman Center advances research and debate on housing, neighborhoods, and urban policy.