

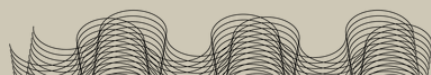
2026 PRESERVATION CONFERENCE



THE PRESERVATION OF MANUFACTURING

SUMMARY REPORT

SUMMER 2026



HISTORIC DISTRICTS COUNCIL

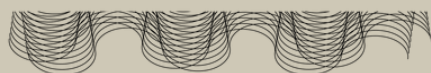


TABLE OF CONTENTS

3. Introduction

7. Findings

10. Recommendations

16. Panel Summaries

Panel 1: Practitioners and Community

Panel 2: Developers and Local Development Corporations

Panel 3: The Future



Photo by HDC.

INTRODUCTION

On April 10, 2026, the Historic Districts Council (HDC) welcomed more than 100 preservationists, makers, manufacturing advocates, elected officials, architects, planners, and community members to Baruch College for our 2026 conference, *Making It In New York: The Preservation of Manufacturing*. The conference offered three panel discussions examining the history, current state and future of urban industry in New York City. As part of the conference programming, HDC also hosted a series of walking tours exploring the city's industrial heritage and active manufacturing landscapes, including the Brooklyn Army Terminal, Brooklyn Navy Yard, and Garment District, as well as a film screening of *Made in Brooklyn* (1994).

The conference and programming showed that **manufacturing in the city is not obsolete**. The sector continues to provide critical economic, cultural, and workforce functions, particularly for immigrant and working-class communities. However, the sector faces mounting challenges, including real estate pressure, policy fragmentation, limited city-wide advocacy, weak workforce pipelines, and a lack of political prioritization.

Left unchecked, market forces will continue to favor higher-value land uses over industrial. At the same time, there is clear opportunity: **demand for industrial space remains strong**, emerging sectors are growing, and successful models—particularly nonprofit-led or cooperative approaches—offer replicable paths forward.

While many of the challenges facing manufacturing fall outside the traditional scope of historic preservation, **the conference demonstrated that preservationists have an important role to play**. Speakers highlighted numerous examples of historic industrial buildings that remain highly functional spaces for production, with their continued use reducing redevelopment costs by preserving valuable industrial infrastructure.

At the same time, manufacturing contributes to the cultural identity, economic diversity, and historic character of many neighborhoods. **Preservation tools—including historic tax credits, adaptive reuse, industrial heritage documentation, public education, advocacy, and community planning—can help retain the physical spaces and cultural ecosystems that support manufacturing.**

The conference therefore asked not only how New York City can preserve historic industrial buildings, but also **how preservationists can partner with manufacturers, planners, elected officials, and community organizations to support the continued presence of making and production in the city**. The discussions that followed highlighted both the opportunities and limitations of preservation as a tool for sustaining manufacturing in New York City.

Making It in NYC Today

In New York City today, manufacturers are concentrated in industrial areas across all five boroughs, including the **Garment District in Manhattan; North Brooklyn and Bushwick; Red Hook, Gowanus, and Sunset Park in Southwest Brooklyn; Long Island City, Maspeth, and Ozone Park in Queens; Hunts Point and Port Morris in the Bronx; and industrial areas of Staten Island.**

WHAT NEW YORK MAKES

Food & Beverages · Apparel & Textiles · Furniture & Architectural Woodwork · Metalwork · Printing · Cosmetics · Machinery & Electronics · Specialty Products

Much of what is made in New York today is custom, specialized, and high-end rather than mass-produced. Increasingly, the city's manufacturers include **small-scale and highly specialized producers working at the intersection of traditional craft, design, technology, and fabrication.**



Manufacturing Legacy

Once the nation's leading center of clothing production, the **Garment District** has seen much of its manufacturing disappear, but garment makers and specialized trades continue to operate within its historic lofts and skyscraper factories.

HDC's walking tour explored both this manufacturing legacy and the district's continued role as a place of production. Photo courtesy of HDC.



Contemporary Production

Mushroom Queens is one of 23 small manufacturing businesses operating in GMDC's rehabilitated 1906 factory in **Ozone Park**.

The company has adapted the building's 1950s-era office addition, using former private offices as climate-controlled growing rooms for different stages of mushroom production. Photo courtesy of Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (GMDC).



Aurora Lampworks in **Bushwick** restores, replicates, and fabricates custom lighting fixtures for architects, designers, artists, and historic buildings. Founder Dawn Ladd described how the network of specialized makers and suppliers in New York helped draw her business to the city in the first place.

Today, Aurora continues to rely on nearby businesses—including glassworkers and ironworkers—to produce the components needed for its work. A single finished fixture often depends on an increasingly fragile network of skilled, local makers.

Photo courtesy of Aurora Lampworks.



WORKSPACE11 is an architectural metal and art fabrication studio based at **Powerhouse Arts** in **Gowanus**, an adaptive reuse project that transformed a former power station into a purpose-built arts and fabrication facility. JP Cole described the move as especially beneficial for the studio's metalworkers, providing specialized ventilation and infrastructure that can be difficult to find in conventional industrial spaces.

Powerhouse Arts also brings fabricators working across metal, ceramics, print, and other disciplines under one roof, making collaboration easier and strengthening the network of makers that businesses like WORKSPACE11 depend on.

Photo by Angela Emilia Klein, courtesy of WORKSPACE11.



Tom's Sons International Pleating in the **Garment District** has been in the family for four generations, after the family brought its pleating tradition to New York from Lebanon. The photo above shows Lean Kalajian, George's father, at work in the family business. To illustrate why the district's concentration of specialized manufacturers still matters, owner and panelist George Kalajian described working on Lady Gaga's dress for her appearance during Bad Bunny's famous Super Bowl performance, which had to be produced in just 24 hours. After a last-minute color change, the designer sourced fabric, brought it to Kalajian to be pleated, took it elsewhere for assembly, and then went out again for the lining—all within a single day.

As Kalajian explained, "There's so many businesses that are all dependent on each other. And people literally run back and forth within minutes at a time, sometimes multiple times per day to go and get what they need."

Photo by Christopher Payne, courtesy of Tom's Sons International Pleating.

FINDINGS

The following findings summarize the major themes and ideas that surfaced repeatedly throughout the conference:

Historic industrial buildings remain highly functional for manufacturing.

Speakers from Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (GMDC), WORKSPACE11, and CookFox Architects described how many historic industrial buildings continue to meet the needs of contemporary manufacturers. Designed for production, these structures often contain features that are difficult and expensive to replicate today, including freight elevators, high floor-load capacities, abundant natural light, loading docks, and flexible floor plates. As industrial historian Betsy Hunter Bradley observed, "the building itself is a tool of production." Numerous case studies showed that historic industrial buildings remain productive assets, continuing to support contemporary manufacturing through the specialized infrastructure they were originally designed to provide.



GMDC rehabilitated this 1906 factory building in **Ozone Park** using historic tax credits, preserving its industrial infrastructure while adapting it to support 23 contemporary manufacturing businesses. Furniture maker Spatial Relations is one of the building's tenants, benefiting from the original, large windows and abundant natural light that continue to make the space well suited for production. Photos credit: Tim Soter, courtesy of GMDC.

Historic tax credits and adaptive reuse can help finance manufacturing space.

Preservation can support manufacturing by making the rehabilitation of historic industrial buildings financially feasible. GMDC described using historic tax credits to rehabilitate older industrial buildings while adapting their existing industrial infrastructure to

accommodate new manufacturers. Rather than replacing functional production spaces, the organization reuses existing features—from freight elevators and loading facilities to former industrial workspaces and office layouts—reducing redevelopment costs while preserving buildings designed for manufacturing. Together with nonprofit ownership models, these preservation incentives can help preserve affordable manufacturing space while supporting the continued productive use of historic industrial buildings.

Manufacturing depends on ecosystems.

Manufacturing succeeds through networks of suppliers, fabricators, distributors, training centers, and skilled workers that rely on close geographic proximity. Whether discussing the Garment District, Red Hook, or Southwest Brooklyn, panelists described manufacturing as an ecosystem rather than a collection of individual businesses. These ecosystems include businesses of different sizes and functions, supported by a nearby labor pool whose skills, relationships, and institutional knowledge are closely tied to place. Preventing the displacement of both manufacturing businesses and workers helps sustain the economic vitality, living industrial character, and sense of place that distinguish these neighborhoods. Once disrupted, these networks can be difficult or impossible to recreate elsewhere.

Market pressures and competing land uses continue to displace manufacturing.

Throughout the conference, speakers identified rising land values, competing development pressures, and decades of land-use policy that have favored residential and commercial development over manufacturing as the principal challenges facing New York City's industrial sector. Businesses described repeated relocations, while advocates and elected officials pointed to the steady loss of industrial land and the limited policy tools available to retain productive uses.

Panelists argued that many manufacturers remain economically viable, but often struggle to compete for space in a real estate market where other uses generate higher returns. Current market incentives and public policies rarely recognize the long-term economic, workforce, and community benefits of maintaining manufacturing space. Throughout the conference, participants called for stronger planning, better coordination between land-use and economic development policy, and targeted incentives that would enable manufacturing to remain part of New York City's future.

Manufacturing needs stronger data and advocacy.

Many panelists agreed that manufacturing remains underrecognized despite its continued importance to New York City's economy. Speakers described significant gaps in data about existing manufacturers, making it difficult for policymakers to fully understand the

sector's scale, diversity, and economic contributions. They also observed that manufacturing lacks the public visibility and coordinated political advocacy afforded to issues such as housing, leaving industrial businesses underrepresented in land use and economic development decisions.

These challenges reinforce one another: without better data, manufacturing is more difficult to advocate for, and without stronger public awareness and political support, it is less likely to be prioritized in policymaking. The conference highlighted the need for improved data collection, public education, and coordinated advocacy to ensure that manufacturing is fully considered in future planning efforts.

Manufacturing is part of New York City's living cultural heritage.

Manufacturing preserves not only jobs and economic activity, but also specialized skills, traditions, and forms of knowledge that have been passed between generations. Throughout the conference, panelists described manufacturing as a source of cultural continuity, connecting workers, businesses, and communities to longstanding traditions of making. For preservationists, these businesses represent a form of living heritage that complements the preservation of historic buildings and neighborhoods.

Industrial activity contributes to the unique character of neighborhoods such as Red Hook, Bushwick, and the Garment District. Panelists with lived experience working and living in manufacturing areas challenged the notion that concerns about losing the sector can be dismissed as mere nostalgia—arguing that the businesses, workers, and productive uses that shape these neighborhoods are part of what makes them distinctive and livable. As Council Member Jennifer Gutierrez noted in the final panel, people often fall in love with neighborhoods because of the industries, makers, and working landscapes they encounter there. Preserving manufacturing also means preserving the sense of place that makes communities feel at home.



Council Member Jennifer Gutiérrez described the familiar smell of fresh noodles from neighborhood food manufacturers in the **North Brooklyn IBZ** as part of what makes the area feel like home.

Walking from the train, she encounters the smells of local manufacturers and workers ending their shifts—everyday experiences that tie manufacturing to the neighborhood's identity and sense of place. As these businesses face growing displacement pressures from nightlife and other higher-value uses, she argued that these qualities are “a reason to organize around.”

Photo by HDC.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preserving manufacturing in New York City will require collaboration among preservationists, planners, economic development agencies, elected officials, manufacturers, and community organizations. While many of the challenges facing the sector extend beyond the traditional scope of historic preservation, certain preservation tools can support the sector and complement broader planning efforts.

The following recommendations stem from discussions throughout the conference.

1

Expand preservation tools to protect and rehabilitate industrial buildings.

Many historic industrial buildings remain well suited for contemporary manufacturing. Their continued use can reduce redevelopment costs and preserve specialized industrial infrastructure. Preservation tools—including State and National Register designation and historic rehabilitation tax credits—should be more widely used to support the continued productive use of these buildings.

Potential strategies include:

- **Identify more eligible industrial buildings and districts for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places:** Many historic industrial buildings remain eligible for listing but have never been documented or nominated. Register designation can be particularly valuable for larger, multi-building industrial landscapes, including remaining historic industrial districts in areas such as Red Hook and Sunset Park, where recognizing an entire district can better reflect the interconnected character of the industrial environment. Listing also serves an important practical purpose: State or National Register designation is a prerequisite for historic rehabilitation tax credit eligibility, making documentation and designation a critical first step toward assembling the financing needed to rehabilitate productive industrial buildings while keeping them in productive use.
- **Expand the use of federal and state historic rehabilitation tax credits to finance the rehabilitation of industrial buildings for continued manufacturing:** Historic rehabilitation tax credits can make the rehabilitation of older industrial buildings financially feasible while preserving the infrastructure that many manufacturers continue to rely upon. The City should increase awareness of these programs while providing dedicated technical assistance to help property owners and small manufacturers navigate and access incentives that may otherwise be beyond their capacity to pursue.
- **Increase education and outreach about the historic significance of industrial districts and the preservation incentives available to their property owners:** Because pursuing State and National Register designation and historic tax credits generally requires the



While landmarking and historic tax credits saved the Austin, Nichols and Company Warehouse building in **Williamsburg**, manufacturing activity moved out. The building is now luxury condos. Left photo: Museum of the City of New York; Right photo: HDC

cooperation of building owners, these tools depend on owners, developers, and lenders understanding both the historic value of industrial properties and the financial opportunities associated with their preservation. Preservation organizations such as HDC can play an important role in building this awareness, particularly in historic manufacturing districts where coordinated outreach could encourage owners to pursue designation and rehabilitation incentives while retaining productive uses.

2 Encourage adaptive reuse, new development, and ownership models that retain manufacturing space.

Too often, the adaptive reuse of industrial buildings has resulted in conversions to residential or commercial uses, preserving the structures while losing the manufacturing activities. Presentations provided replicable examples of historic industrial buildings successfully adapted for contemporary manufacturing. Future redevelopment should build on these models by retaining productive uses within historic buildings while also incorporating manufacturing space into new development in historically industrial areas.

Potential strategies include:

- **Establishing zoning incentives for projects that retain historic industrial buildings while preserving manufacturing uses:** Given that development decisions are primarily driven by financial incentives, the City should explore zoning tools—such as modest floor area bonuses or other regulatory flexibility—for projects that permanently preserve historic industrial buildings while maintaining long-term manufacturing space. Such incentives could encourage adaptive reuse that preserves both the city's industrial heritage and its productive economy.
- **Create a Mandatory Inclusionary Manufacturing program that integrates light industrial space into new development:** As Nina Rappaport and other panelists emphasized

during the conference, manufacturing need not be separated from other urban uses. Similar to Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH), a Mandatory Inclusionary Manufacturing program could require or incentivize light industrial space within new development and redevelopment projects in appropriate locations. This could include vertical mixed-use models that place compatible manufacturing on lower floors with housing or other uses above, allowing neighborhoods to accommodate growth while retaining space for production.

CASE STUDY

300 Huntington Street in the **Gowanus Industrial Business Zone** demonstrates how new development can retain space for production in a historically industrial neighborhood. When Monadnock Construction sought a zoning map amendment to construct its new office headquarters, then-Council Member Brad Lander and the Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation (SBIDC) negotiated an agreement permanently reserving 10,000 square feet for light manufacturing and industrial uses within the new development.

SBIDC subsequently helped market the affordable industrial space to manufacturers. Today, the mixed-use building combines Monadnock's offices and other commercial uses with local manufacturers including Brooklyn Granary & Mill and Hazel Village.

Source: Micaela Skoknic, Director of Development & Communications, Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation (SBIDC), correspondence with HDC, August 2026; NYC Council, Committee on Land Use, Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises, hearing record regarding 300 Huntington Street, 2021.

- **Supporting nonprofit ownership models and shared manufacturing facilities that expand access to affordable industrial space:** By prioritizing long-term affordability over short-term financial returns, nonprofit and community-owned organizations can provide stable, affordable space for manufacturers. Properties redesigned as shared facilities can further strengthen manufacturing ecosystems by giving small businesses access not only to affordable workspace, equipment, and specialized infrastructure, but also to shared services and organizational support that can help them grow and remain competitive. Nonprofit operators can assist tenants with MWBE and other certifications, workforce training, referrals, government navigation, succession planning, and access to public contracting opportunities.

3

Strengthen policy, planning, and data collection for manufacturing districts.

Manufacturing remains disadvantaged by land-use policies and market conditions that favor higher-value development. Industrial districts should be recognized as essential economic infrastructure, with planning policies that support their long-term health.

Potential strategies include:

- **Expanding and strengthening protections for Industrial Business Zones (IBZs) and other manufacturing districts:** Manufacturing depends on the stability of industrial districts and the interconnected businesses they support. Although IBZs help focus public investment and signal a commitment to industrial retention, they do not fully protect manufacturing areas from rezoning, conversion, or ongoing market pressures. The NYC Industrial Plan released by the Department of City Planning in December 2025 proposed distinguishing between primary and secondary industrial areas within existing IBZs, potentially reducing the areas prioritized for industrial retention. At the time of this report, it remains unclear how the current mayoral administration will approach these recommendations or the existing IBZ framework. Strengthening IBZ protections—by limiting incompatible non-industrial uses, discouraging rezonings that reduce manufacturing capacity, and extending similar protections to other historically manufacturing areas—would help reduce displacement, preserve productive land, and provide businesses with the long-term certainty needed to invest and grow.
- **Requiring industrial impact assessments when major rezonings or redevelopment proposals would result in the loss of manufacturing space:** Building on the City's existing environmental review process, industrial impact assessments could provide a more systematic evaluation of how rezonings and redevelopment proposals would affect manufacturing businesses, industrial employment, and local production ecosystems. Better information about these impacts would help policymakers weigh the long-term economic and community consequences of land use decisions alongside other planning considerations.
- **Developing neighborhood-specific industrial plans for key manufacturing areas, including the Garment District, Red Hook, Sunset Park, East Williamsburg, and Long Island City:** New York City's manufacturing districts have distinct histories, industries, and economic needs. Neighborhood-specific planning efforts can identify local priorities, respond to unique development pressures, and build on existing strengths while helping ensure that manufacturing remains an integral part of each area's future.
- **Continuing implementation of the city's manufacturing strategic planning process through regular data collection, public reporting, and engagement with manufacturers:** Effective planning depends on a better understanding of where manufacturing occurs, who it employs, and the challenges businesses face. The city's manufacturing strategic planning process provides an important framework for coordinating land use and economic development policy, but its long-term success

will depend on regular data collection, transparent public reporting, and sustained engagement with manufacturers, workers, and community organizations.

4

Invest in workforce development and skills training.

The long-term future of manufacturing depends on sustaining the skilled workforce that occupies them. Many specialized trades require years of training and that stronger apprenticeship programs, vocational education, and partnerships between industry and educational institutions are needed to maintain New York City's manufacturing economy.

- **Supporting training initiatives that preserve specialized manufacturing skills and facilitate knowledge transfer between generations of workers:** Many of the skills highlighted throughout the conference are passed directly from experienced craftspeople to newer generations of workers. Investing in long-term training and mentorship programs can help preserve specialized knowledge, ensure the continuity of traditional trades, and strengthen the resilience of New York City's manufacturing sector. The Department of Small Business Services, working in partnership with Career and Technical Education programs, CUNY, unions, Industrial Business Service Providers, and industry organizations, should expand apprenticeship and mentorship opportunities that pair experienced workers with new entrants and support long-term training in specialized manufacturing trades.
- **Supporting workforce transitions into green manufacturing:** In addition to preserving specialized trades, the City should invest in retraining programs that help experienced industrial workers apply their existing skills to emerging green manufacturing industries. From a preservation perspective, building material reuse offers just one opportunity to apply traditional construction and fabrication skills while advancing more sustainable building practices, reducing demolition waste, and extending the life of existing materials.

5

Recognize industrial districts as sites of living cultural heritage and civic infrastructure.

The conference highlighted longstanding traditions of making that connect workers, businesses, and communities across generations. These activities are part of New York City's living cultural heritage, contributing to the identity and sense of place of neighborhoods across the city.

Industrial districts also provide essential infrastructure for the city's broader cultural and creative economy. Manufacturers, artists, designers, and fabricators often depend on the same physical conditions—including affordable workspace, large floor plates, high ceilings, freight access, and proximity to materials and specialized trades. Preserving these districts can therefore sustain not only manufacturing, but also the networks of cultural production that depend upon it.

Potential strategies include:

- **Exploring special district designations or overlays that protect the spatial conditions supporting manufacturing and cultural production:** Neighborhoods such as Red Hook, Sunset Park, Gowanus, and the Garment District demonstrate how manufacturing, fabrication, design, and cultural production can form interconnected ecosystems. Rather than treating these uses as competing priorities, the City should explore planning tools that protect affordable production space and the industrial building types and infrastructure they share. Models such as Powerhouse Arts demonstrate how historic industrial buildings can support the intentional co-location of manufacturing and cultural production without sacrificing productive uses.
- **Recognizing legacy manufacturers through publications, awards, and public programs:** Many manufacturers represent generations of specialized knowledge, craftsmanship, and cultural tradition that extend beyond the buildings they occupy. Publications, exhibitions, awards, grants, and other public programs can celebrate longstanding businesses and the people and organizations preserving industrial spaces for continued production, reinforcing the idea that New York's industrial heritage remains living and evolving.

HDC is already taking a step in this direction through the creation of **The Makers Award**, which will recognize the artisans, creators, and fabricators who preserve, restore, and renew New York City's historic buildings and neighborhoods. By celebrating the skilled craftspeople whose work sustains the city's built heritage, the award reinforces the connection between historic preservation and the living traditions of making that continue to shape New York City.

PANEL SUMMARIES

Panel 1: Practitioners and Community

Who is doing the work of advocating for industries and individual businesses, especially in neighborhoods where manufacturing has historically been an anchor?

This panel featured manufacturers representing several of New York City's specialized production trades. Drawing on their own experiences, panelists described **the challenges of remaining in the city, the value of industrial networks and skilled labor, and the work required to keep these industries viable for future generations.**

Panelists:

Jeffrey Spring, President, Modern Art Foundry

Dawn Ladd, Principal, Aurora Lampworks

George Kalajian, Owner, Tom's Sons International Pleating

JP Coyle, Partner, WORKSPACE11

Moderated by **Ben Dreith**, US Editor, Dezeen

The conference opened with a discussion among manufacturers and fabricators whose businesses represent several of New York City's most specialized production traditions, including bronze casting, lighting restoration, garment pleating, and architectural metal fabrication.

Jeffrey Spring described Modern Art Foundry as a third-generation bronze casting business founded in 1932. The foundry has produced major works familiar to New Yorkers, including Alice in Wonderland in Central Park and works by Louise Bourgeois. After more than 70 years in Astoria, the company recently relocated to Glendale, Queens, **after the cost and complexity of maintaining its longtime historic industrial building became untenable.** Spring explained that the business had to shift its model in order to survive, partnering with a foundry in Philadelphia while retaining its New York presence.

Dawn Ladd of Aurora Lampworks focused on the importance of **local supplier networks.** Her company moved to New York in 1990 in part because of the concentration of vendors and restoration-related trades clustered around the city. She noted that those networks have dramatically contracted, recalling what one supplier who stopped making chain told her: "I could make more money by signing this paper and selling this building than I can making chain for the rest of my life." For Ladd, **the loss of such businesses creates holes in the restoration ecosystem that are difficult to fill.**

George Kalajian of Tom's Sons International Pleating described the Garment District as an interdependent production system that cannot simply be relocated. He explained that

pleaters, cutters, sewers, fabric suppliers, button makers, graders, and other trades rely on minute-by-minute proximity. In one example, he described a Lady Gaga dress that had to be produced in 24 hours, requiring fabric to move rapidly between multiple specialized businesses. Kalajian stressed that the Garment District contains generations of immigrant craft knowledge: “You have centuries of knowledge from all over the world [that] came here for one century and created this incredible garment making technology.” **Losing that knowledge, he warned, would be irreversible.**



Founded in **Astoria** in 1932, **Modern Art Foundry** has cast many of New York City's most recognizable public artworks, including José de Creeft's Alice in Wonderland sculpture in Central Park, as well as Louise Bourgeois's celebrated spider sculptures. The foundry's work demonstrates how generations of specialized craftsmanship continue to shape cities' cultural landscape. Photos courtesy of Modern Art Foundry.

JP Coyle of WORKSPACE11 discussed the value of purpose-built industrial space. After multiple reactive relocations, the studio moved to Powerhouse Arts, a former power station now adapted as a fabrication hub. Unlike many older spaces where metalworkers operate with improvised ventilation and infrastructure, Coyle described Powerhouse as a building designed with fabrication in mind. He also stressed the importance of South Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation, which helped WORKSPACE11 navigate displacement and relocation.

Several themes emerged from the discussion. First, panelists commented that manufacturing businesses often fall into a policy gap: too small or traditional to benefit from programs aimed at large industry or technology, but too space-intensive and specialized to operate like ordinary small businesses. Second, real estate pressure remains the dominant threat. Relocation is expensive, disruptive, and in some cases nearly fatal to businesses.

Coyle noted that WORKSPACE11 was forced to front roughly half a million dollars in buildout and relocation costs after being displaced through an eminent-domain process and was still pursuing reimbursement years later.

The panel also underscored the importance of **workforce development and knowledge transmission**. Many skills discussed on the panel take years to learn and cannot be replaced by technology alone. Kalajian illustrated this point through a story about a younger employee trained on a CNC machine who froze when asked to cut by hand after the machine broke. “No one will ever learn how to use the CNC machine before they learn how to use scissors in their hands,” he said. Ladd and others called for **longer-term, subsidized internship and apprenticeship programs**, noting that short-term placements are not enough for highly specialized trades.

The panel framed manufacturing as both economic infrastructure and cultural heritage. These businesses produce the physical details of New York’s built environment, sustain skilled jobs, and preserve forms of knowledge that cannot easily be recreated once lost. As Ben Dreith noted in moderating the discussion, much of this labor is hidden within the finished buildings, artworks, and interiors that New Yorkers experience every day. The conversation underscored a persistent challenge for advocates: **helping the public recognize the value of industries that are often invisible**, even as they continue to shape the city’s neighborhoods, economy, and historic built environment.



JP Coyle describes how **WORKSPACE11**’s home at **Powerhouse Arts**—an adaptive reuse of the historic Brooklyn Rapid Transit Power Station—brings different but related fabrication trades under one roof, allowing makers to collaborate on site. Photo by HDC.

Panel 2: Developers and Local Development Corporations

How has industry survived and thrived in New York City, and what role have historic industrial buildings played?

This panel featured development professionals who have successfully preserved and adapted historic industrial buildings for continued manufacturing use. Presenters discussed **the challenges of these projects and how thoughtful rehabilitation has enabled these buildings to remain home to manufacturers and makers.**

Panelists:

Mary Habstritt, President, Roebling Chapter, Society for Industrial Archeology

Micaela Skoknic, Director of Development & Communications, Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation (SBIDC)

Cassandra Smith, Senior Project Manager, Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (GMDC)

Nina Rappaport, Steering Committee Member, Western Queens Community Land Trust / Creator, Vertical Urban Factory

Moderated by **Ian Volner**, Journalist

The second panel shifted the conversation from manufacturers themselves to the developers and organizations that maintain industrial fabric for continued manufacturing use. Speakers examined **how industrial buildings have been preserved, adapted, and reused**, while also exploring **the policies and institutions needed to sustain manufacturing** in a city where development pressures often favor other uses.

Mary Habstritt opened the discussion by highlighting the challenges of preserving industrial heritage through traditional preservation tools, such as landmarking. Unlike many landmarked buildings, industrial structures were often designed by engineers rather than architects and valued for their efficiency rather than their architectural style. Habstritt shared several preservation campaigns, from efforts to save historic gantry cranes at Domino Sugar to advocacy for the Austin, Nichols & Company Warehouse, illustrating both the opportunities and limitations of traditional preservation frameworks when applied to industrial sites. She noted that **many preservation successes have resulted in the survival of industrial buildings, but not necessarily the industrial uses they once housed.**

Micaela Skoknic focused on the industrial ecosystem of Southwest Brooklyn, where the Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation (SBIDC) supports more than 2,000 businesses and thousands of industrial workers, many of whom continue to operate in the historic industrial buildings that define Sunset Park, Gowanus, and Red Hook. She explained how the organization helps businesses remain in these neighborhoods by providing technical assistance, financing support, workforce development, and other services that **strengthen local manufacturers and reduce the risk of displacement.** Describing manufacturing neighborhoods as **"living ecosystems,"** she emphasized the



Exterior views of **GMDC's** rehabilitation of a 1906 factory building in **Ozone Park**. Using historic rehabilitation tax credits, the project preserved the building's industrial infrastructure while adapting it to accommodate 23 contemporary manufacturing businesses. Top photo: Tim Soter. Bottom photo: © Frederick Charles.

importance of local supply chains, workforce opportunities, and long-standing industrial businesses. She shared the example of a garment manufacturer at the Brooklyn Army Terminal that survived the pandemic after receiving assistance from SBIDC to secure capital and pivot to producing personal protective equipment, ultimately preserving 50 local jobs. Skoknic characterized **the preservation of industrial activity as "a subversive act"** in a city where higher-value land uses continually place pressure on manufacturing districts.

Cassandra Smith described Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (GMDC)'s work acquiring and rehabilitating industrial buildings for small manufacturers. Using GMDC's former hat and cap factory in Ozone Park as a case study, she demonstrated how **historic industrial buildings continue to meet the needs of contemporary production**. Features such as heavy floor loads, large freight elevators, loading docks, and generous natural light remain highly desirable for modern manufacturers. The building, once occupied by a single company, now houses 23 businesses ranging from woodworkers and metal fabricators to mushroom growers and perfume producers. Smith noted that **preserving and adapting older industrial buildings is often more affordable than constructing new facilities** and can help retain both jobs and manufacturing activity within the city.

Nina Rappaport discussed the Queensboro People's Space initiative, a proposal to transform a former Department of Education warehouse in Long Island City into a community-owned hub for manufacturing, workforce development, arts organizations, and small businesses. She argued that **manufacturing in New York has evolved beyond large factories and increasingly consists of smaller, cleaner, and more flexible forms of production that can coexist with other community uses**. Drawing on years of research and advocacy, Rappaport questioned **whether city agencies fully understand the scale and diversity of contemporary manufacturing activity**, noting that many industrial businesses remain largely invisible within planning discussions.

During the discussion, panelists repeatedly returned to the **role of public policy in shaping the future of industrial districts**. Several speakers expressed concern that **industrial land continues to be lost to competing uses** despite longstanding commitments to protect manufacturing areas. Panelists discussed the relationship between industrial jobs, affordable housing, and economic diversity. As Smith observed, not every worker wants—or is able—to participate in office-based industries, making **manufacturing an important source of employment for New Yorkers without college degrees**.

The panel concluded with a discussion of potential policy solutions. Suggestions included **stronger protections for industrial zoning, renewed and improved commitments to Industrial Business Zones**, and even a form of "**mandatory inclusionary manufacturing**" that would require new developments in historically industrial areas to incorporate space for light industrial uses.

Panel 3: The Future

What role does nostalgia play in preserving these places? Should adaptive reuse of industrial buildings for new uses be considered a win? In an ideal world, what do we need to have industry thrive in historic locations?

The final panel looked ahead to the future of manufacturing in New York City, considering **how preservation can help protect not only historic industrial buildings, but also the businesses, workers, and neighborhoods they support.**

Panelists:

Rick Cook, Founding Partner, CookFox Architects

Carly Baker-Rice, Executive Director, Red Hook Business Alliance

Jennifer Gutiérrez, Council Member, New York City Council

Tessa Maffucci, Fashion Historian, Pratt Institute, and New York Fashion Workforce Development Coalition

Moderated by **Karrie Jacobs**, Architecture Writer and Critic

The conference concluded by looking forward, asking **what policies, planning approaches, and coalitions will be necessary to sustain manufacturing in New York City over the coming decades.**

Moderator Karrie Jacobs opened by reflecting on her own long-standing interest in industrial policy and manufacturing as a driver of urban vitality. Recalling an article she wrote more than a decade ago, she questioned **why cities routinely convert industrial buildings into luxury housing or artist studios rather than adapting them for new forms of production.** Manufacturing, she argued, remains one of the few sectors capable of creating diverse employment opportunities while strengthening local economies.

Rick Cook discussed the role of historic industrial buildings in shaping both New York's identity and its future. Using projects such as Terminal Warehouse and St. John's Terminal as examples, he described industrial buildings as repositories of **"embodied human effort, embodied human craft, [and] embodied human skill."** He argued that **preservation and environmental stewardship are closely linked**, both rooted in the responsibility to care for inherited resources. Looking ahead, Cook suggested that **zoning incentives could encourage developers to preserve historic industrial fabric and retain manufacturing uses**, noting that development incentives often shape outcomes more effectively than mandates alone.

Carly Baker-Rice focused on the challenges facing Red Hook, where industrial businesses face mounting pressures from redevelopment, rising real estate values, and the loss of affordable workspace. Echoing earlier presenters, she emphasized that **preservation efforts must extend beyond individual buildings to encompass entire economic**

ecosystems. Red Hook’s strength, she argued, lies not in any single business but in the dense network of manufacturers, artists, retailers, and service providers that support one another. She described ongoing efforts to develop proactive strategies that preserve both industrial activity and neighborhood character while accommodating necessary growth. “We’re not just looking to preserve buildings,” she said, “but also preserve use.”

Council Member Jennifer Gutiérrez discussed efforts to elevate manufacturing as a public policy priority. Drawing on her experience representing parts of Bushwick, Williamsburg, Greenpoint, and Ridgewood, she argued that **manufacturing remains an essential source of stable, middle-class employment**, particularly for immigrant communities and workers without college degrees. She highlighted recent initiatives including legislation requiring



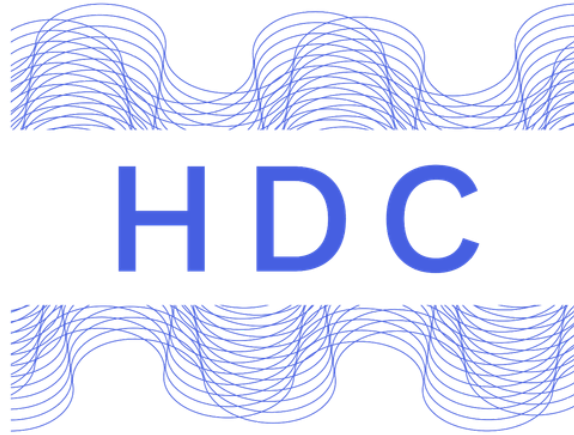
The conference concluded by looking forward, asking what policies, planning approaches, and coalitions will be necessary to sustain manufacturing in New York City over the coming decades. Photo by HDC.

the city to develop a long-term manufacturing strategy and advocacy efforts that secured protections for industrial areas during the City of Yes process. While acknowledging that manufacturing rarely receives the same political attention as housing, she argued that **preserving industrial jobs should be viewed as equally important to the city's future.**

Tessa Maffucci used New York's fashion industry as a case study for understanding the relationship between manufacturing, place, and identity. She noted that ready-to-wear fashion was largely invented in New York and that the Garment District's buildings were specifically designed to support the industry's unique production processes. Yet despite fashion remaining one of the city's largest employment sectors, manufacturing businesses continue to face displacement and rising costs. Maffucci emphasized that **many policy decisions affecting the Garment District have been made without sufficient data** about the businesses still operating there, prompting the Fashion Workforce Development Coalition to conduct its own business census and outreach efforts.

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was **the disconnect between city planning processes and the realities of contemporary manufacturing.** Panelists noted that many policymakers lack direct experience with manufacturing and often underestimate its economic and cultural significance. Several speakers also highlighted the challenges posed by real estate speculation and rising land values, arguing that **industrial businesses are frequently displaced not necessarily because they are unsuccessful, but because other land uses generate higher returns.**

The conversation repeatedly returned to the **importance of visibility and public understanding.** Speakers observed that many New Yorkers have little exposure to how products are made or where manufacturing still occurs within the city. Audience members raised concerns about the loss of vocational education, declining familiarity with skilled trades, and the growing disconnect between consumers and production. Panelists discussed how **stronger workforce development programs, public engagement, and educational initiatives** could help rebuild awareness of manufacturing's continued relevance.



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