



Queens Needs More Retail to Serve its Growing Population

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BY FELIX CIAMPA

As new development continues to transform Queens, the borough desperately needs more diverse retail outlets to support that growth and strengthen the local economy.

Without more diverse options, Melva Miller, Deputy Borough President to Melinda Katz, is concerned that shoppers will be more likely to leave the borough and head to outlets on Long Island. Miller noted at ULI New York's Borough Development Series forum on June 9, that shopping migration is already beginning to take place — and the numbers reveal why.

While Queens' population of 2.3 million nearly matches Long Island's 2.8 million, its supply of big-name retail — stores like H&M, Target and DSW — doesn't even compare. The Greater Jamaica Development Corporation (GJDC) found that Long Island has around 170 of these high-profile shopping and dining outlets, while Queens only has 55, or less than a third as many.

That disparity will only lead to a widening gap and more missed chances for the borough's economy as its population continues to grow. And that growth shows no signs of slowing down. According to U.S. Census data, more than 30 percent of New York City's residential growth in 2015 took place in Queens, surpassing every other borough.

As officials consider tackling the issue, they should look first to Jamaica, where foot traffic is reaching all-time highs but retail diversity is sorely lacking.

Nearly half a million commuters pass through Jamaica each day, including more than 42,000 daily riders at the Jamaica Center subway stop, which is one of the busiest in the city. GJDC President Hope Knight told ULI New York's audience that those visitors and residents simply aren't able to access the retail options they want on Jamaica Avenue, which doesn't provide the big-name options that shoppers are more likely to find outside the borough.

With thousands of mixed-income apartments and two chain hotels on the way, Knight called this an opportunity, rather than a problem — and real estate industry players should be listening. Jamaica is the kind of up-and-coming, transit-rich neighborhood that can and should serve as one of New York's top hospitality hubs.

The good news is that the industry can also look to a few recent examples of successful retail growth in Queens, especially in Flushing. In that neighborhood, Sky View Parc has combined hundreds of condos with more than 700,000 square feet of retail space, providing the right mix needed to support a vibrant new community. Flushing Commons has taken a similarly effective approach by focusing on attracting a wide array of high-profile retail tenants, including Queens' first Nordstrom Rack and Uniqlo outlets. Both developments have found success.

Applying those lessons to Jamaica and other neighborhoods will be the difference between losing more business to Long Island and building a diverse retail base that serves the needs of a growing borough.

ULI New York was proud to sponsor the June 9 forum to give voice to that important concern and help members of the real estate industry learn more about what can really drive the future of Queens. We hope public and private sector leaders will work together and make greater efforts to provide the borough's residents and visitors with the retail diversity they demand and deserve.

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