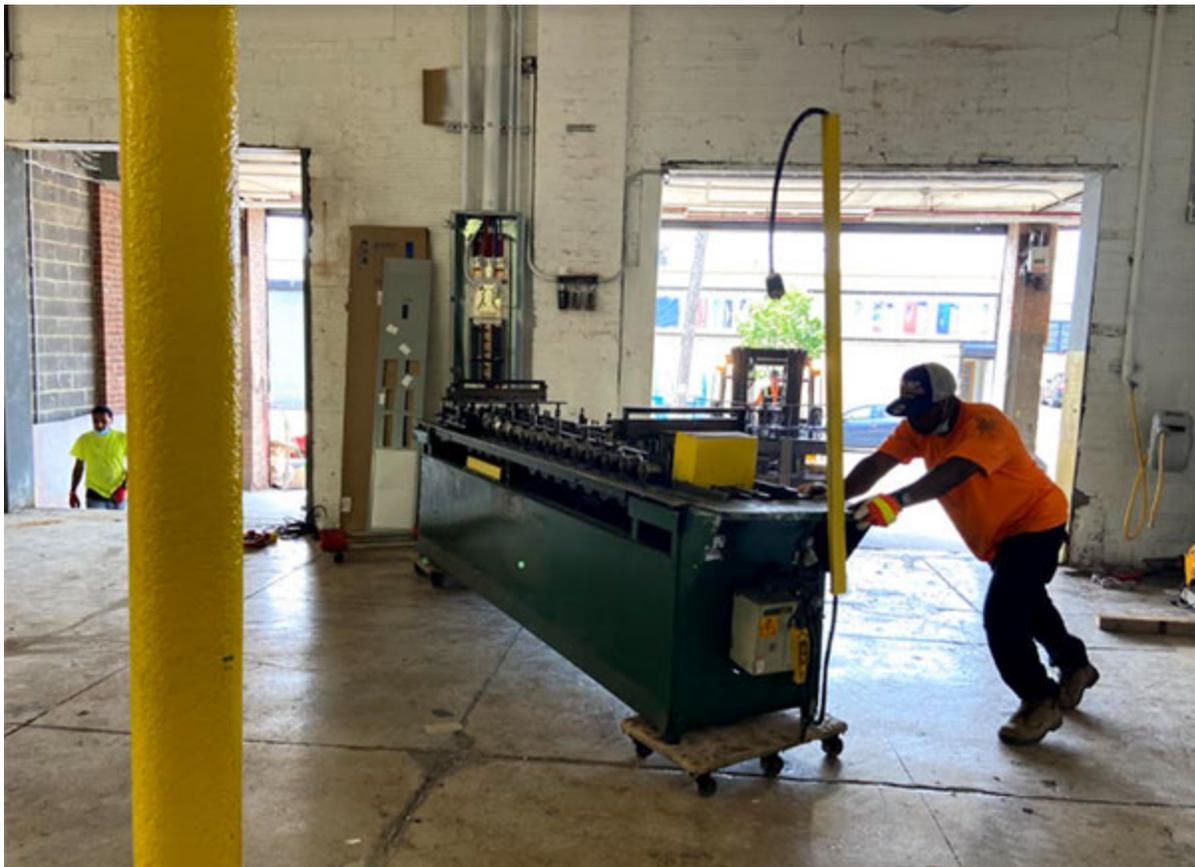


For an Equitable Recovery, New York Must Utilize Our Manufacturing and Industrial Sector

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Opinion

November 13, 2020 | by [Leah Archibald](#), [Nancy Carin](#), [Quincy Ely-Cate](#), [Niles French](#) & [Ben Margolis](#)



DNJ Mechanical Corp. moving into Maspeth (photo: BOC Network/Maspeth Industrial Business Association)

As we get deeper into the current crisis, it's becoming clearer that New York won't simply bounce back to "normal." We need effective strategies to transform our city's infrastructure and economy. Policies aimed at protecting and growing industrial jobs can improve not only our citywide economy, but the nearby low-income residential communities and the lives of the predominantly of-color manufacturing workforce.

As industrial business service providers, we ask our current and future decision-makers to look more closely at the role industrial land, businesses, and jobs can play in ensuring an equitable recovery in New York City.

New York City has 21 officially designated Industrial Business Zones (IBZs) whose land is zoned for industrial uses, including traditional manufacturing of goods like furniture, clothing, and machines, as well as food production, wholesale, and sanitation facilities, warehousing, and research labs. Not all of the city's manufacturing land exists within these areas, but the protection offered by the IBZ designation helps to mitigate the impact of speculation and prevent industrial businesses from being pushed out of the city in favor of other, more lucrative uses.

So why does it matter if we keep industrial businesses in New York City?

We are at the intersection of three crises: the COVID-19 pandemic; an economic collapse triggered by the pandemic and worsened by decades of disinvestment and inequality; and systematic racial injustice highlighted by this year's massive protests and the pandemic's disproportionate impact on low-income communities and communities of color. The manufacturing and industrial sector provides a key to addressing all three crises. New York's industrial businesses make and distribute PPE and other medical equipment, boost our local economy, and provide good jobs for workers of color and minority-owned businesses.

In 2019 in New York City, manufacturing jobs paid an average annual wage of \$69,161. Meanwhile, food service jobs paid \$30,685 per year, and retail jobs paid \$38,450. Mayor de Blasio and the City Council has devoted lots of creative energy to ensuring that restaurants can continue operating; we want to see that same energy aimed at ensuring the success of industrial businesses that pay twice as much to a workforce that is 80% people of color and 50% foreign-born. These are the jobs for the people who have been most impacted by COVID-19, situated in the neighborhoods most impacted by COVID-19.

Many aspects of city policy affect the industrial sector's ability to thrive: land use and planning, transportation, economic development, workforce development, small business services, environment and sustainability, and others. We need to see our city's leaders taking a smart and integrated approach to these areas that recognizes the critical role of manufacturing.

The Department of City Planning's recently released draft framework for a Comprehensive Waterfront Plan, which puts forward the goals of resiliency, equity, and health, is one example of a process where this approach is important. We want to see a strong emphasis on the waterfront's role in providing equitable economic activity, not only for port use but also as a home and supportive ecosystem for the industrial employers and workers that sustain the health of our communities.

Here are three ways the city can support manufacturing jobs:

Adopt a new approach to land use that preserves the industrial business zones and additional manufacturing land. This approach, which the Department of City Planning explored in the North Brooklyn Industry & Innovation Plan, would prioritize more intensive, job-generating industrial uses that support the city's resiliency, and restrict non-compatible uses like stand-alone office space and recreational facilities.

Increase alignment and collaboration between and among city agencies whose work impacts the manufacturing sector. This includes agencies that may not be assumed to focus on economic development, but whose purview affects business growth, such as the Department of Transportation, Department of Sanitation, and Department of Buildings.

Make better use of the resources that the IBZs already have, including the support networks built and sustained by the Industrial Business Service Providers. Many of these organizations have historical roots in New York City's industrial neighborhoods, and they have the ability to leverage their deep knowledge of the communities' needs to inform city policy and to disseminate information about programming to businesses in their respective communities.

As New York City continues to confront these deep-seated crises, we hope that decision-makers will recognize and embrace the manufacturing sector's role as part of the way forward to a more equitable future.

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