



HIGH-END GAME
A rendering from the Downtown Brooklyn Redevelopment Plan shows potentially dramatic changes.

It's been two years since the City Council passed the Downtown Brooklyn Redevelopment Plan, a 60-block rezoning intended to spur office construction (and create as many as 18,500 jobs) in the central business district. Advocates argue that the coming condos will create a long-desired 24/7 environment in an area that can be desolate at night. Critics, however, say its main effect has been to spur high-end residential development where affordable housing is in short supply. The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and Families United for Racial and Economic Equality are incensed about the use of public dollars for upscale residences, and are demanding that the plan be updated to include more low-income apartments.

The twist in the downtown debate is that locals are also questioning what the upscaling means for the Fulton Street Mall, where elegant 19th-century architecture meets gaudy signage, and national chain stores coexist with street vendors. While the strip is a wildly successful mecca for down-market bargains and hip-hop fashions, attracting as many as 100,000 shoppers a day, it's largely unused by the residents of some surrounding neighborhoods—a disconnect that plays along racial lines.

The mall's culture is shaped by the tastes of young, working-class black shoppers; according to a recent survey, residents of Bed-Stuy, one mile to the east, visit the mall in the greatest numbers. Lavish Scars, a former Corcoran Group broker from nearby Fort Greene, can be found on most days selling

audiobooks of his novel, *Heaven Is a Lifestyle*, at a table opposite Fulton Street landmark

AT STAKE: The future of the Fulton Street Mall and the nature of available housing in the Downtown area

THE COMBATANTS: Developers and the mayor's office vs. ACORN and other affordable-housing advocates, along with Fulton Street Mall frequenters

"No one is taking into consideration the needs of the people that are already here. It seems like everything that is being planned for Downtown Brooklyn is all about excluding us, not including us."

—Scherrille Murray, a Downtown resident and an associate of Families United for Racial Equality

Albee Square. "This is my target audience: young black and Latino women who enjoy shopping," says Scars. "My book takes place in Fort Greene, and I talk about sneaking into the movie theater that used to be on Fulton, where the Brooklyn Tabernacle is now. This place is me."

Other residential neighborhoods near downtown are increasingly white and high-income, and the folks there, by and large, don't shop on Fulton Street. "With the exception of Macy's, Fulton Mall is not really used by the people who live in walking distance," says Sue Wolfe, president of the Boerum Hill Association. "It just doesn't have the stores or restaurants that would attract us to come and shop. With some enlightened landlords, I think that could change."

But the notion that Fulton Street needs changing is problematic. According to the Fulton Street Improvement Association, rents run as high as \$200 a square foot—higher than in many areas of Soho. It's the third-busiest shopping district in the city and vacancies are rare. "It's beloved by the people who use it," says Vicki Weiner, a preservation specialist researcher with the Pratt Center for Community Development and coauthor of "Fulton Street Mall: New Strategies for Preservation and Planning," a recent study prepared in response to the Downtown Brooklyn plan. "It's very successful and significant as a social space, particularly for the African-American community, and that element of the mall really should be preserved." —Jesse Serwer