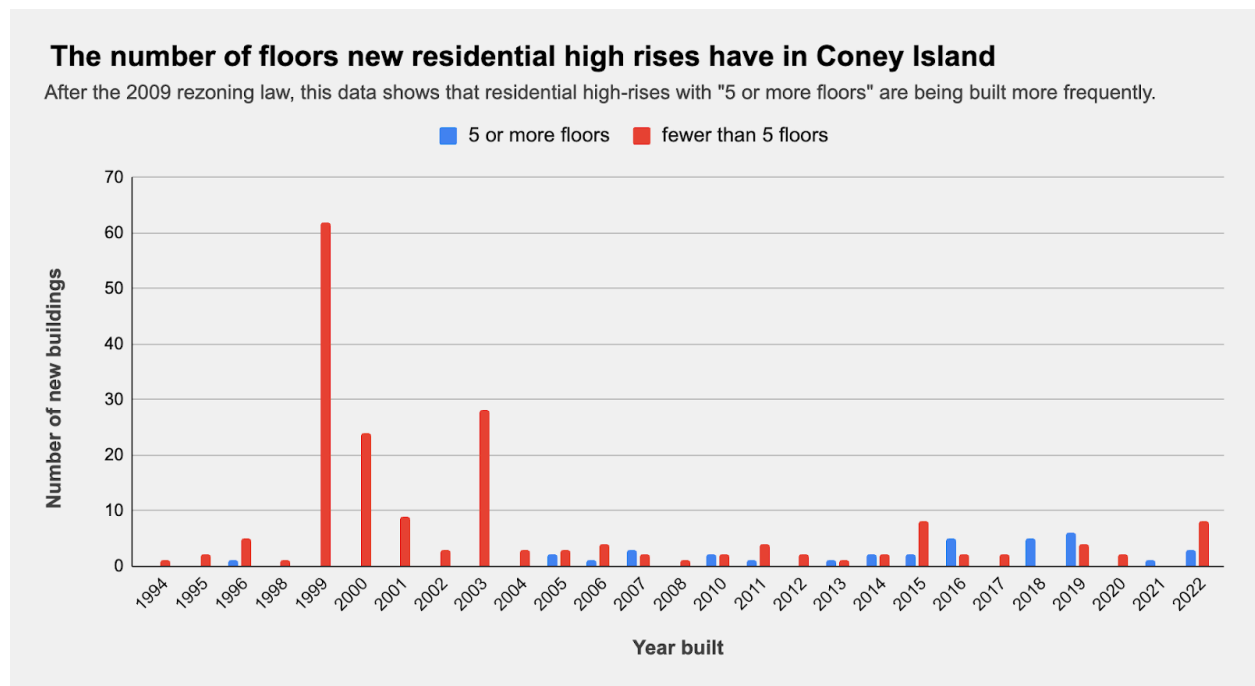


How a building boom is changing Coney Island's landscape

by Sami Marshak

A surge in luxury development in Coney Island since the pandemic is changing the landscape of the neighborhood. Residents say new apartment buildings are popping up like weeds.

At least 28 high-rises are under construction or have been completed in the past 15 years, four since 2022, according to tax lot data published by the Department of City Planning.



In this context, high-rise is defined as a building with 5 or more floors.

Source: [NYC Primary Land Use Tax Lot Output](#). Chart: Sami Marshak

This upswing in development, specifically since 2022, occurred because of the rezoning of Coney Island in 2009. Longtime local resident and community advocate Craig Hammerman said construction has now kicked into high gear after halts from the 2008 recession and 2012 Superstorm Sandy. It spiked in 2015, but paused once again during the pandemic, because of supply chain disruptions, labor shortages and construction delays.

According to him, these new residential high-rises do not have a connection to the 2022 Thor Equities casino proposal. The city will announce the winners of the three casino bids in New York City sometime in late 2025.

The rezoning plan, which aimed to shrink Coney Island's amusement district and expand the residential areas surrounding it, [stated](#) it would revitalize the neighborhood by making Coney a year-round amusement destination, while also providing new affordable housing opportunities.

Dominic Recchia, a former New York councilman and current consultant and attorney [working](#) for Thor Equities, the developer of "The Coney" proposal, was also a lobbyist for the rezoning plan back in 2009. He said that it's been "a dream" to see the development finally take hold.

"You just don't need only low-income housing. You need affordable, some market rate...that's what makes a diversified community. And that's what's happening in New York. More and more development," he said.

But Howard Breuer, a journalist who's currently writing a book called "Luna" about Coney Island's history, said that the rezoning isn't the only factor sparking the change.

"I think it probably has more to do with modern market forces than with the rezoning, but maybe it needed to have both to make it happen," said Breuer.

Breuer grew up in Coney Island and used to live in Trump Village. He said the shopping center/over there was always "sacrosanct" and the hub of that community.

"When a few years ago we learned that they were going to just quietly tear down the shopping center and remake it as a retail/ residential complex with these three huge buildings, we really had a 'there goes the neighborhood reaction.'"

Charles Denson, executive director of the Coney Island History Project, also believes the area's development boom in the past year is tied to pro-development policies, like the "City of Yes" proposal, which recently passed City Council and aims to add more affordable housing to all New York City neighborhoods.

"In some neighborhoods, it's good. In some neighborhoods, it doesn't work," he said. "It's a shame to build this giant wall of high rises in the center of Coney Island, which had this unique zoning that could have been used for public facilities."

In a [report](#) done by The City, Coney Island has gained 1,920 new residential units since 2013. From 2009-2018, there were 797 income-restricted units built in Coney Island. From 1999-2008, there were zero, according to the Department of City Planning, who didn't specify what "income-restricted" meant.

Some of the new residential high-rises have no affordable aspect to them at all. Over a ten-year period from 2010-2020, 71% of new units in Coney Island were market-rate, according to [data](#) compiled by NYU Furman Center.



1515 Surf Avenue, from different angles on Coney's landscape.

Market rate apartments, like 1515 Surf Avenue, a 26-story apartment- built in 2023- and 1 Ocean Drive- built in 2019- have residents of greater wealth. Hammerman said this means they are likely to own cars and shop outside the community, since Coney Island does not have many grocery stores.

The need for affordable housing is great, in an area with a comparatively lower median income to the median income borough and city-wide. NYCHA developments account for almost 12% of all Coney Island housing units, [totaling](#) 5,863 occupied units.

It is also one of Brooklyn's most diverse neighborhoods, with Black and Hispanic residents accounting for 21% and 17% of the population respectively.

Yet no data seems to be readily available to show who the new affordable developments are actually awarded to through a citywide lottery system, or the percentage of Coney Islanders who get to live there.

But according to Rekkia, Coney Islanders already have first “dibs” for these apartments, and the “City of Yes” proposal will allow NYCHA residents to have the first opportunity to move into new developments.

Hammerman said that residents might not even know they can apply for affordable housing units and that the application process can be daunting, requiring a great deal of paperwork and concentration. “I would love to see if local residents are benefitting from the creation of this affordable-housing, because that was the idea. Whether or not that’s coming to pass, a lot of people would like to know with assurance,” said Hammerman.



Craig Hammerman, Coney Island resident and community advocate, being interviewed on the Brighton Beach boardwalk.

Both Hammerman and Denson believe that the city has not invested enough in Coney Island's infrastructure to accommodate the surge of buildings, especially after superstorm Sandy, which devastated the area.

While the NY State Office of the Comptroller published a report stating that they made investments into sewers for storm-water management, MTA improvements, and improved street design, Denson said that the investments did not help the west end of Coney Island, which floods frequently.

“It doesn't make sense to watch the city encourage this high scale, high density development to take place on the front lines of climate change and sea level rise without a corresponding investment in infrastructure,” said Hammerman. “It means that ultimately, we are all going to be paying the price for the next catastrophe that strikes the area.

Research

I worked with Anna Minsky from the research center over the course of four separate sessions. She helped me parse through spreadsheets from the Department of Buildings Permit Issuances and PLUTO. Though I was going to use both datasets, we decided to only use the PLUTO data for this assignment, because the DOB permit issuance data did not have a clear pattern for “building types.” This made it hard to know if the data that was being filtered was residential or not. The PLUTO data should be linked to the chart. See tab “filtered to 9+ stories, after ‘09” for a list of the apartment buildings in my news peg.

Plotting “number of floors” and “year built,” against the number of new buildings, the data was also filtered using Coney Island 2010 census tracts and a date range from 1993- 2022 (2022 was the last year the data was updated). “Number of floors” was subsequently grouped into two categories to delineate high-rises.

Coney Island rezoning plan:

https://www.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/plans/coney-island/coney_island.pdf

2024 Coney Island Rezoning Lookback Report by Department of City Planning:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/56358e3d4c3c43f9b334c8473838b983>

An Economic Snapshot of Coney Island and Brighton Beach- Office of New York State Comptroller: <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/report-14-2025.pdf>

Coney Island FY26 District Needs Assessment (received paper copy at CB 13 meeting)

2009 Coney Island Comprehensive Plan:

https://www.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/plans/coney-island/presentation_01_2009.pdf

Articles:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/04/nyregion/economic-development-corporation-and-2-other-groups-admit-to-illegal-lobbying.html>

<https://www.crainsnewyork.com/who-owns-block/coney-island-adds-new-apartment-towers-bid-reinvent-surf-avenue>

<https://www.crainsnewyork.com/real-estate/helm-equities-proposes-18-story-mixed-use-development-neptune-ave-coney-island>

<https://www.crainsnewyork.com/real-estate/elie-fouerti-looks-build-high-school-and-community-facility-coney-island>

<https://www.crainsnewyork.com/real-estate/coney-island-affordable-housing-project-poised-massive-expansion>

https://www.thecity.nyc/2022/10/27/hurricane-sandy-coney-island-climate-change-development/?fbclid=IwY2xjawGpqNdleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHTAOjAIoyyh66qGOYHqL51GdOHqDWqdBIb5BYA1hG9EuDryKkQz83fEQxw_aem_ARiOhciKTXD663uy6KClQQ

Sources

Craig Hammerman, community advocate and Brighton Beach resident

Charles Denson, Executive Director of Coney Island History Project

Evelyn Orlansky Strasser, Coney Island resident and former CB 13 member

Howard Breuer, longtime CI resident and writing a book about the history of CI called Luna

Dominic Recchia, “The Coney” consultant and attorney, former NYC Councilman

Eddie Mark, CD13 District Manager

Further reporting: Waiting for replies from these agencies to confirm data and add context

- Department of Housing Preservation Department (HPD)- The first people I was in touch with for an interview from HPD stopped answering, I called the office again and got in touch with someone else, who put me in a group email chain with other press people. I sent in my questions to them and also asked if I could speak with someone- they said they’ll get back to me.
- NYC Economic Development Corporation, who was involved in the 2009 rezoning push. Similar situation here. They sent me answers to some data questions which weren’t helpful, so I’m asking them to look more closely at some reports on Monday.
- I wasn’t able to get in touch with NYU Furman Center after calling and emailing. Will keep trying.
- The Department of City Planning declined an interview, but sent me their latest lookback report on Coney Island. They said they will get back to me about when the PLUTO data will be updated to include 2024 statistics; the latest updated PLUTO data available was 2022.

Possible other sources to contact:

- I reached out to the Department of Buildings but they said DCP would be a better option. Either way, I recently found the CI DOB liaison named Kenneth Lazar. Should I reach out to him?
- Would appreciate some other ideas on who to contact.