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# Meeting the Urban Health Challenge: Southern Bronx Community Tour Briefing Booklet

*Prepared by*

**The Center for Occupational & Environmental Health,  
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*with the guidance and assistance of:*

**The Bronx Community Board 1 Committee for Improved  
Environmental Quality in Hunts Point**

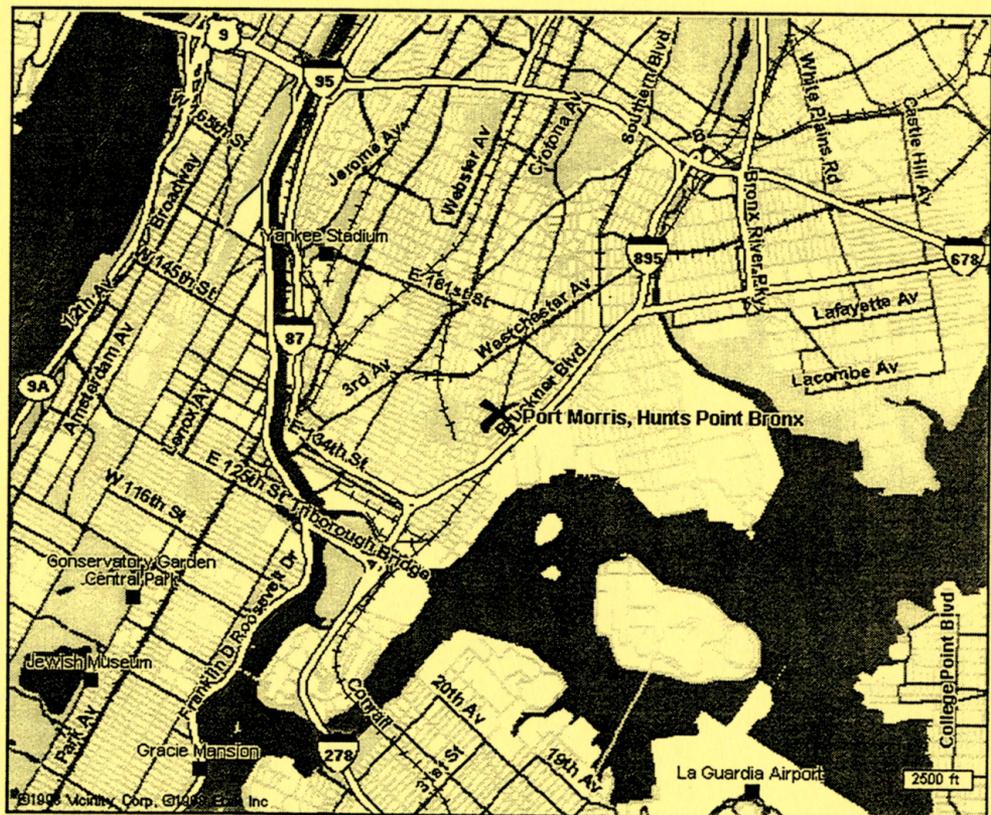
**Office of the Bronx Borough President**

**Community District 2 Environmental Subcommittee**

**South Bronx Clean Air Coalition**

**We Stay / Nos Quedamos**

**The Point**



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## Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in these booklets reflect a synthesis of many conversations and experiences with residents, organizations and agencies involved in public health and planning efforts in the Southern Bronx. They are the sole responsibility of Hunter College Center for Occupational and Environmental Health and do not necessarily express the beliefs or opinions of co-sponsoring organizations or community tour participants.

# Meeting the Urban Health Challenge Southern Bronx Community Tour

## **Introduction**

This tour guide provides an overview of two community districts in the Bronx to elucidate the overlapping themes of public health, the physical and built environment, and urban planning. As the tour proceeds, we encourage you to take note of some of the following concerns, issues and strengths that participating organizations draw attention to: existing and proposed solid waste management facilities, the Bronx Empowerment Zone, areas of high environmental burden, and efforts in the areas of Port Morris, Hunts Point, and the Hub/Mott Haven/Melrose to develop and renovate housing, create parks and greenways.

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## *A Brief History of the Bronx*

The Bronx is the only one of New York City's five boroughs that is part of the mainland; the others are islands. A mixture of hills, plains and marshes, the Bronx is a geographically large and diverse borough. Jonas Bronck, a farmer, was the first settler in this area. Until the Civil War, the area was a collection of farms and small country villages. At that time, Port Morris was developed as a deepwater port, the village of Mott Haven was established, and Mott Iron Works was founded. The U.S. Capitol Dome was cast at one of many local foundries. There were numerous piano factories and many other industrial and commercial uses.

The City of New York annexed much of the Bronx in 1874. This was followed by the construction of bridges to Manhattan, and the extension of the rapid transit system. These infrastructure improvements facilitated the continued industrial, commercial and residential development of this community. The Bronx was an exciting place to be and, until World War II, an area where upwardly mobile working families moved from Manhattan. During this period, for example, the area called the Hub was an important entertainment and shopping center with movie theaters, burlesque houses and opera.

After World War II, the economic climate changed in the Southern Bronx. There was a large out-migration to suburban communities. Arterial highways were constructed over and through the Bronx for the benefit of these growing suburbs. Local industries closed and moved. Yet, new waves of immigrants continued to move into an area whose economic base was rapidly disappearing. During the 1960s through the 1980s, the Southern Bronx experienced abandonment, a dramatic loss in housing, rampant poverty, economic and social stress, and crime that led to the common view of the "South Bronx" as a dangerous, ravaged area.

Since then, the area has begun to rebuild. New commercial and industrial development, new housing construction, and improved services have all contributed to an improvement in physical and social conditions. Much of this has been accomplished through community-based planning efforts that have included local citizens and their organizations (local governing boards, non-profit organizations, churches, and businesses). The designation of the Bronx Empowerment Zone promises greater economic development. Still, much remains to be done. During this tour we will see successes and areas where problems still remain. As we look at examples of health and planning here, it is important to see these districts as communities to learn from, sources of knowledge and laboratories for redevelopment.

This tour is visiting two community districts in the Bronx. Community District 1 (CD1) is made up of several neighborhoods with distinct identities: Port Morris, Mott Haven, and Melrose. Community District 2 (CD2) includes the neighborhoods of Hunts Point, Longwood and Intervale Valley.

## *Part I: People and Health*

### Some Facts about the Population:

The population and character of the neighborhoods that comprise CD1 and CD2 are predominantly Latino and Black. Between 1980 and 1990, the number and percent of Asians has increased, while the number and percent of Whites has decreased.

1990 Population	Black (non-Hisp.)	Hispanic	White (non-Hisp.)	Other
CD1: 77,214	23,563 (31%)	51,627 (66%)	1,317 (2%)	707 (<1%)
CD2: <u>39,443</u>	<u>7,463 (19%)</u>	<u>31,115 (79%)</u>	<u>552 (1%)</u>	<u>313 (&lt;1%)</u>
TOTAL: 116,657	31,026 (28%)	82,742 (71%)	1,869 (2%)	1,020 (<1%)

The community is young in comparison to other parts of New York City. The population in these areas is growing more young and old at the same time. The median age in CD1 is 26.1 years, while in CD2 it is 25.4, significantly younger than the median age for the Bronx (30.9) and New York City as a whole (33.7). The increase in population occurred principally among children under 9 years and adults between 25 and 29 years and over 70 years of age.

Households in CD1 and CD2 are more likely to have children living with them than in New York City as a whole. About 50% of CD1 and 54% of CD2 households have children under 18, compared to just over 30% in New York City. More than 60% of these households are headed by single women.

### Income:

The economic health of these neighborhoods is troubling. Median household income in CD1 and CD2, about \$9,900 in the two districts, is a stunningly low 33% that of New York City as a whole. More than 65% of all children in these districts live in poverty. About 61% of all residents received public assistance in 1995. Though public assistance rates are declining Citywide since welfare reform, they are declining less among Blacks and Hispanics than among Whites.

### Education:

Residents in CD1 and CD2 are among the least likely to have completed high school or equivalency degrees in New York City, both reflecting and exacerbating employment problems. Nationwide, about 81% of adults older than 25 have graduated high school. In New York City as a whole, about 68% have graduated. In CD1, only 37.4% and in CD2, only 36.3% have graduated. Only 3.4% of the population in these areas are college graduates, about one-eighth that of the City and the nation overall.

### Employment Status / Types of Employment:

The people of Community Districts 1 and 2 have long lived near and worked in the manufacturing industries of the Southern Bronx. But between 1980 and 1990, the percent employed in manufacturing fell 43%, from 28% in 1980 to just 16% in 1990. Employment shifted during the same period toward greater employment in health and other services (26% of the workforce), and retail trade jobs (16%), jobs that typically pay less and provide fewer benefits than skilled work in

manufacturing. Both districts are characterized by high unemployment rates, large numbers of workers outside the labor force, and a large percentage of working poor.

Major employers in the area include professional and related services, especially the health services, retail trade, and manufacturing industries. Loss of jobs were most acute in the manufacturing trades. For example, in CD2, almost 1,200 jobs were lost from a working population of about 18,000 between 1980 to 1990 (US Census). More recently however, this area has experienced a growth in its business economy and greater diversity in its employers, including special trade contractors, trucking, warehousing, apparel, food and kindred products purveyors. For example, in the Port Morris section of CD1 there are 389 industrial establishments that employ 10,319 workers. Major employers include Lincoln Hospital Center (3200 employees), the local school district (2000 employees), the Bronx Central Post Office, and Hostos Community College. The Bronx Terminal Produce Market and Food Distribution Center in the Hunts Point area of CD2 employs over 20,000 people. Though there are more jobs today in the area than in 1990, employers do not necessarily hire the local residents, a source of ongoing tension and consternation.

### **A Note on Crime:**

There has been a significant decrease in crime over the past few years; nonetheless, the Community Boards of each district continue to place increased law enforcement high on their list of community needs. Programs such as A Safe City, Safe Streets, Operation Clean Sweep, SNAG (Street Narcotics and Guns), and CPOP (Community Policy Program) were applauded for their presumed contribution to the reduction in crime, but concerns are still expressed over the level of uniformed and administrative police within the communities. Areas of concern include youth crime, gang violence, drug related crime, violent crime against women and children, prostitution, and nuisance crimes. Both districts continue to lobby for increased police personnel as well as additional Housing Authority police to patrol the 11 housing projects in CD1. Prevention programs in effect such as Operation Safe Home, Drug Elimination Program, and Safe Corridor are been successful in reducing crime and drug traffic in housing areas and schools, but continued funding is needed.

### **Selected Health Facts:**

The people of CD1 and CD2 face a variety of health, safety, and environmental problems. Relevant issues include poor use of prenatal care services and consequent high infant mortality rates, high rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, high prevalence and exposure risk for HIV and AIDS, high rates of tuberculosis, asthma, and chronic substance abuse. Additionally, violent crime, particularly against children and women, remain high despite drops in crimes rates in other categories such as grand larceny, robbery, and assault.

#### *Pre-Natal and Infant Care:*

This area has one of the highest rates of infant mortality in New York City as well as one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy. Nearly 10% of all infants born in the Hunts Point-Mott Haven District are to mothers under the age of 18 years, and according to the United Hospital Fund, more than 25% of all expectant mothers receive no or late prenatal care.

Since the health of newborns is strongly related to the health of mothers, low birth weight health statistics are among the best indicators of population health. Low birth weight (under 2,500 grams, or about 5 pounds, 5 ounces) is associated with poor prenatal care, poor nutrition preceding and

during pregnancy, complications of pregnancy and compromised health of mothers. These underweight infants are at greater risk for mortality, developmental disability, respiratory ailments and prolonged hospitalization. About 9% of babies born in New York City and nearly 12% in CD1 and CD2 were low birth weight. Infant mortality, or the incidence of death before the first birthday, was 7.2 per 1,000 live births in the U.S. In these areas of the Bronx, infant mortality is 40% higher than the city as a whole.

### *Asthma:*

Asthma is a growing problem among urban children globally. New York City has one of the highest rates in the U.S. Little is known about the prevalence of asthma, as the State only gathers data on asthma hospitalizations. About 11 of every 1,000 children under 15 were hospitalized in 1996 for asthma in New York City, more than twice the national average. In the Bronx, the hospitalization rate is 17.3 per 1,000. CD1 and CD2 have the highest rates in the Bronx, about 22 per 1,000 with rates slightly higher in Mott Haven than in Hunts Point and Port Morris. Asthma rates rose most dramatically in these areas in the early 1990s and have since leveled off. Though there is little agreement on why the rates have risen so markedly, asthma is a product of both housing conditions and general environmental health and may reflect poor access to preventive and primary health care services. Hunts Point is one of three communities selected in 1998 by the NYC Council for the development and demonstration of community-based prevention programs that seek to control indoor and outdoor triggers of childhood asthma.

### *Lead Poisoning:*

Lead poisoning in New York City is principally a function of housing history and condition. Residential lead-based paint is more likely to be a source of exposure for children in formerly middle and upper-middle class housing where premium paints were used, but where conditions have deteriorated. In these areas of the Bronx, the rate of childhood lead poisoning in 1995 was about 2.5 per 1,000, about average for New York City as a whole.

### *HIV/AIDS:*

AIDS has had a profound impact on this community. In Mott Haven, for example, the death rate from AIDS is 132 per 100,000, nearly twice the rate of New York City as a whole; in Morrisania, it is 167, more than two and one-half times the rate in New York City.

## *Part II: The Physical Environment*

### **Housing:**

In the 1970s and 1980s, a large number of housing units were lost in the Bronx to fire, destruction and abandonment. Only recently have a number of rehabilitation and new construction projects been underway in these districts. In CD1, about half the population lives in 11,149 public housing units in 11 developments. Most are described as severely deteriorated and under policed. CD1 also has a substantial number of buildings that were abandoned by their owners and taken possession by the City. Some are occupied, others are vacant or illegally "squatted." Among the larger new developments, Melrose Commons and St. Anne will provide 2,000 units of moderate and middle income housing and are key parts of the Bronx's revitalization plans.

In CD2, housing is predominantly medium density apartment buildings and row houses. The Hunts Point peninsula, to the east of the Bruckner Expressway, is a 20 block residential community of about 9,000 surrounded by manufacturing and other industrial and commercial uses.

### **Waterfront:**

The southern border of CD1 is the Harlem River whose waterfront is the largely abandoned and soon to be redeveloped Harlem River Railyards. To the east of CD2 lies the East River. The Port Morris and Hunts Point waterfront areas are considered "working waterfronts" in the City's comprehensive waterfront plan and designated as a Significant Maritime Industrial Area (SMIA). This status protects existing uses, a source of consternation among community residents desperate for waterfront access and more green space.

### **Industrial and Commercial Areas:**

Nearly 10 percent of the land in CD1 and CD2 is designated industrial and manufacturing as compared to just 1 percent for New York City as a whole. The old Port Morris area, long in decline, now is an emerging industrial center; the Hunts Point area is a regional food distribution center; and the Hub-Mott Haven-Melrose area is the principal retail and commercial center. The industrial tracts are composed of both small scale uses such as automotive repair shops and large scale uses, including waste transfer stations..

The Harlem River Rail Yard, now owned by the NY State Department of Transportation, is being developed to improve freight rail access into and out of New York City.

### **A Note on Environmental Issues:**

The communities of CD1 and CD2 are home to many community-based organizations concerned with environmental conditions. They have made links between perceived noxious land use and high rates of disease and discomfort in the communities. Among the complaints and concerns are:

- ◆ the large number of heavy manufacturing industries and commercial traffic in close proximity to residential areas;
- ◆ the high volume of diesel truck traffic and its concomitant air pollution and safety risks to pedestrians and residents;

- ◆ the numerous solid and putrescible waste transfer and management facilities and the concern that the closing at the end of 2001 of the major landfill for New York City (Fresh Kills) will bring a greater reliance upon the area's marine access for movement of more garbage;
- ◆ poor state of street repair;
- ◆ vacant lots, abandoned housing and poor pest control; and
- ◆ new industrial development and a concern that public health impacts are will not be adequately considered.

There are very few parks within CD1 and CD2 and those that exist are described by the Community District Boards as suffering from inadequate maintenance, staffing and security. A tree census completed by We Stay / Nos Quedamos found just two trees per acre in the peninsula of Hunts Point.

### Sources:

Information in this document was primarily obtained from the following sources:

Community Boards 1 and 2, Statements of District Needs, Fiscal Year 1999.

United States Census Data, 1990.

Socioeconomic Profiles, City of New York Department of City Planning, 1990.

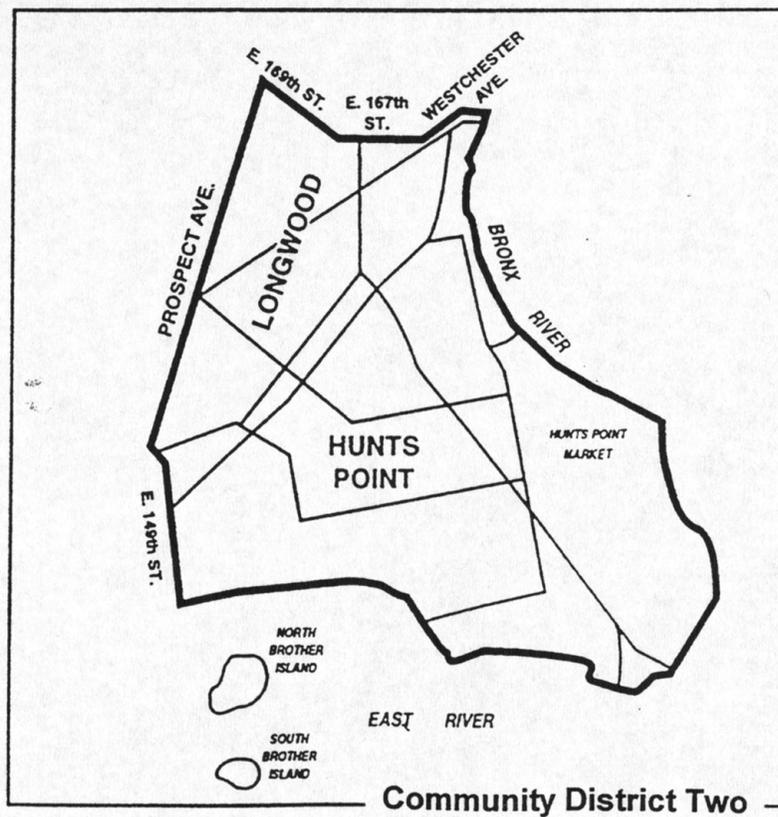
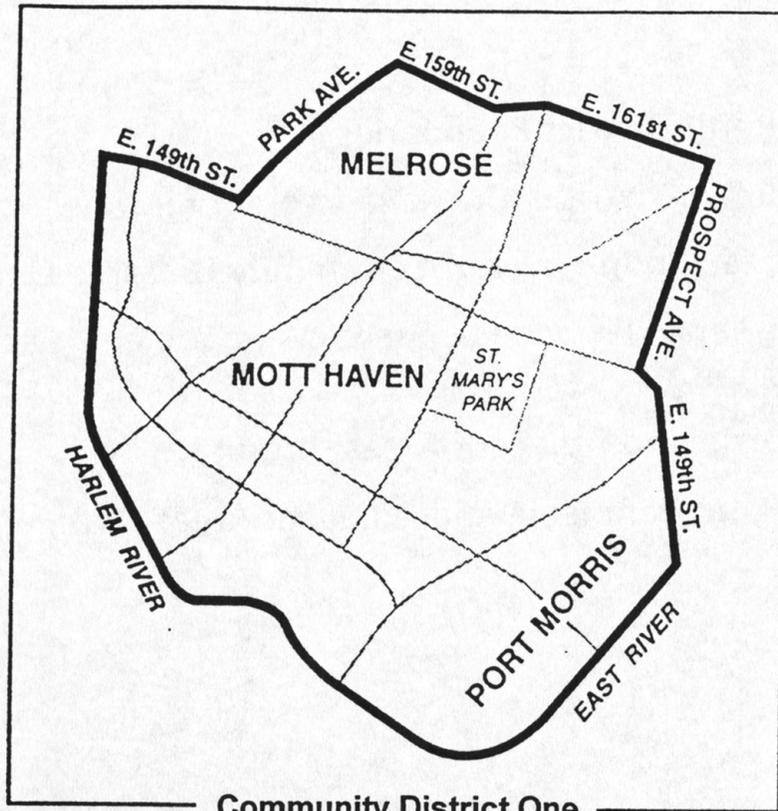
Willensky, Elliot, and White, Norval. AIA Guide to New York City. Harcourt Brace & Company, New York, 3rd Edition, 1988.

Maps, unless otherwise noted, were produced with LandView III, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The software may be obtained via the internet at: <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/tiger>.

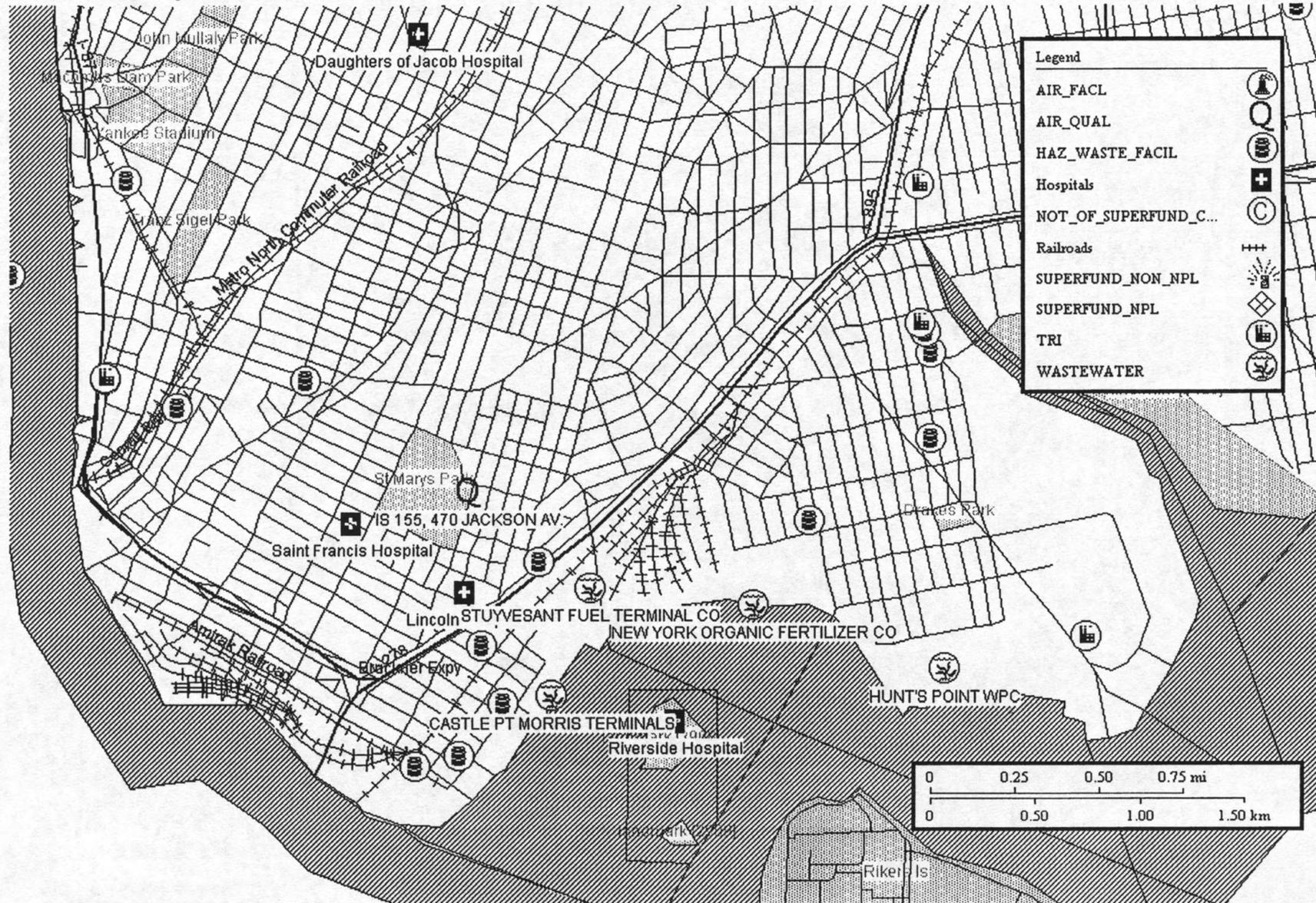
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3. Percent Living in Poverty, Community Districts One and Two
4. Existing and Proposed Waste Management Facilities in the Southern Bronx
5. Port Morris and Adjacent Areas, Bronx NY
6. Hunts Point Peninsula and Adjacent Areas, Bronx NY

# Community District Boundaries



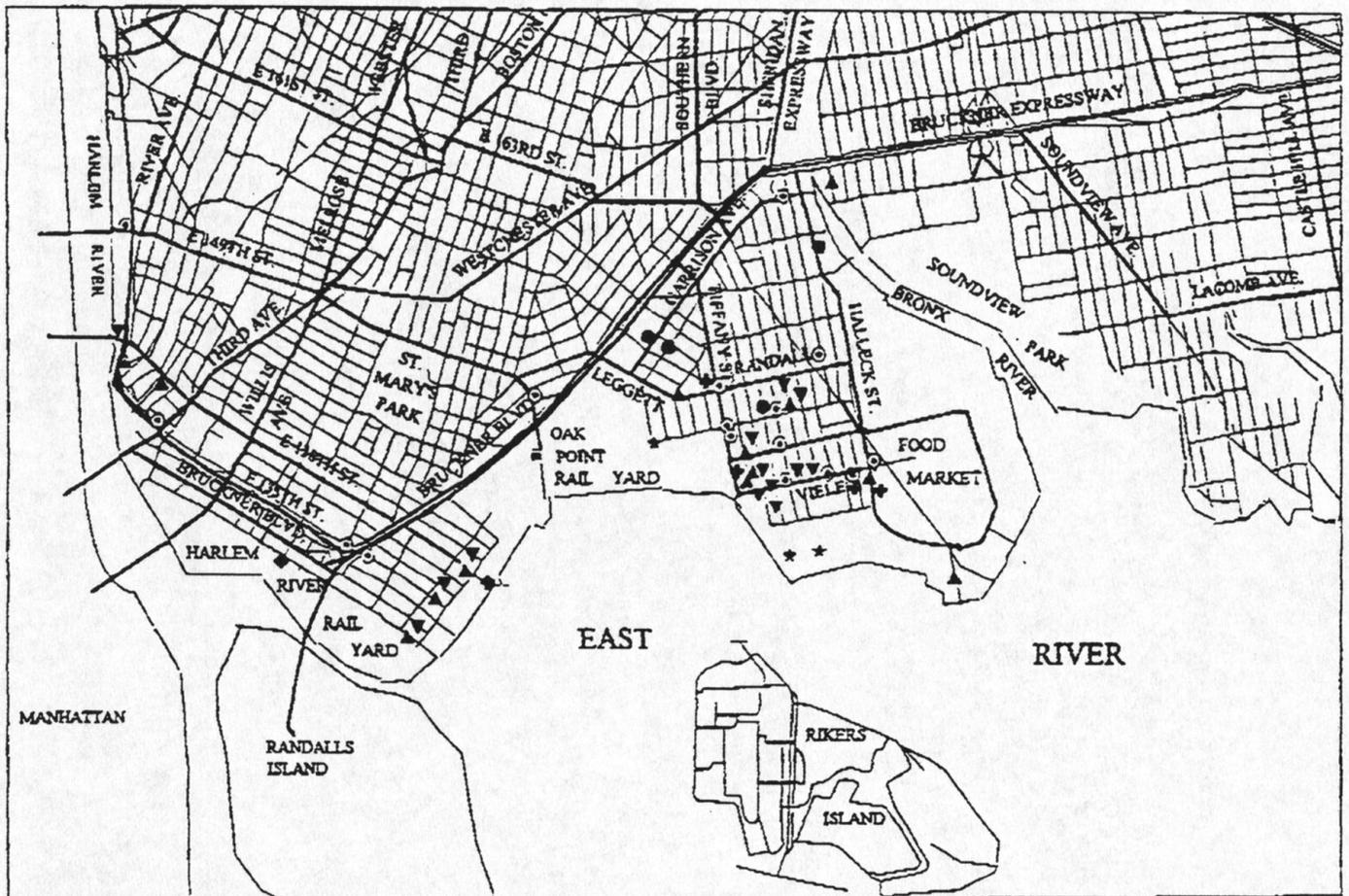
# Community Districts One and Two, Bronx NY



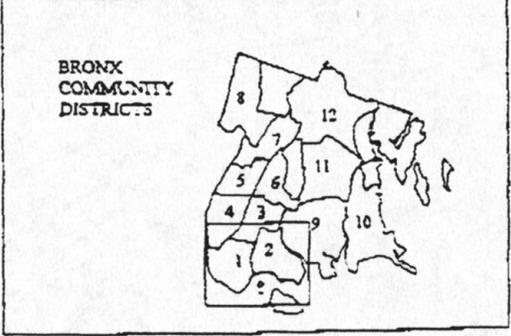
# Percent Living in Poverty (1990 Census), Community Districts One and Two, Bronx NY



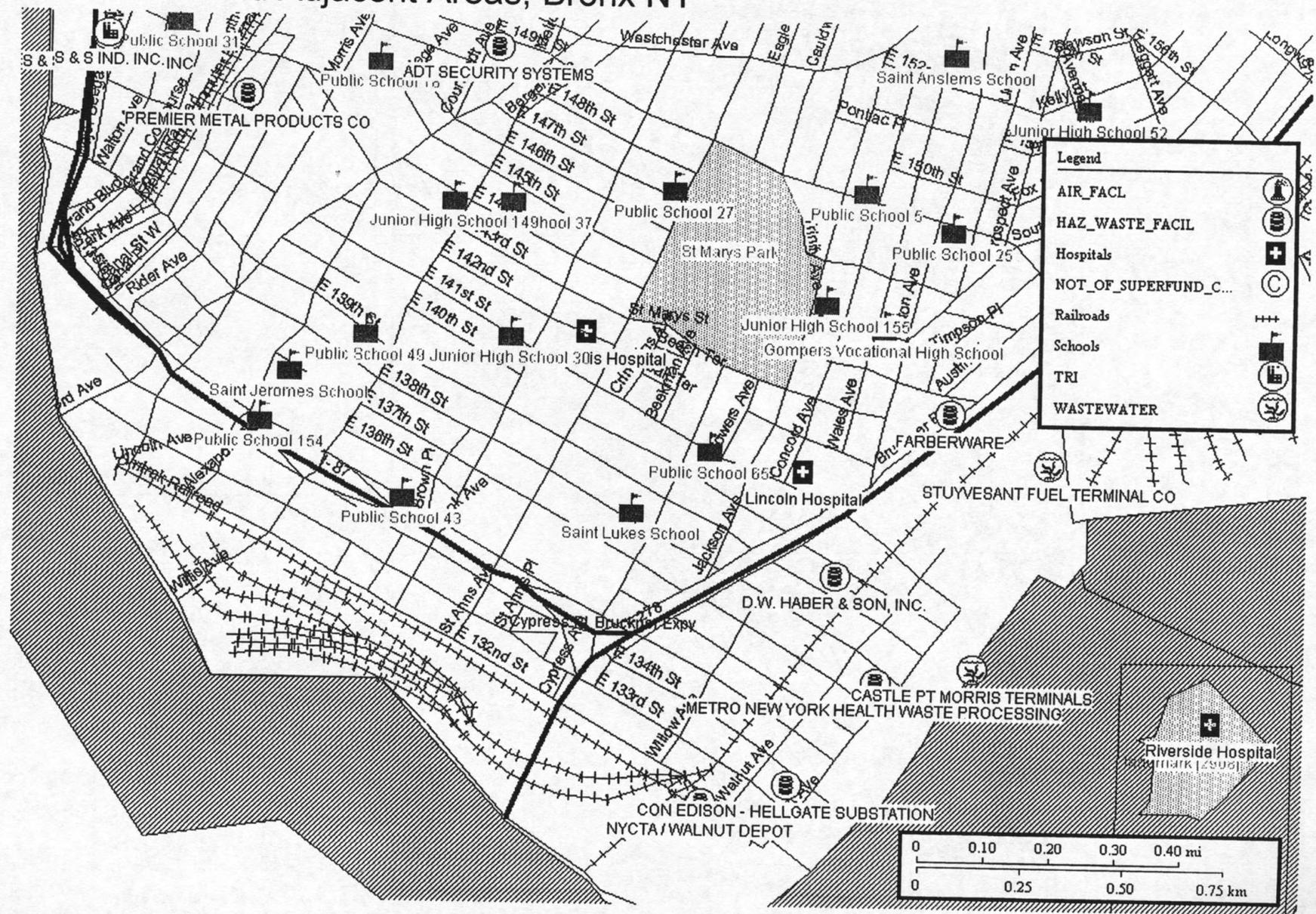
# EXISTING AND PROPOSED WASTE MANAGEMENT FACILITIES IN THE SOUTHERN BRONX



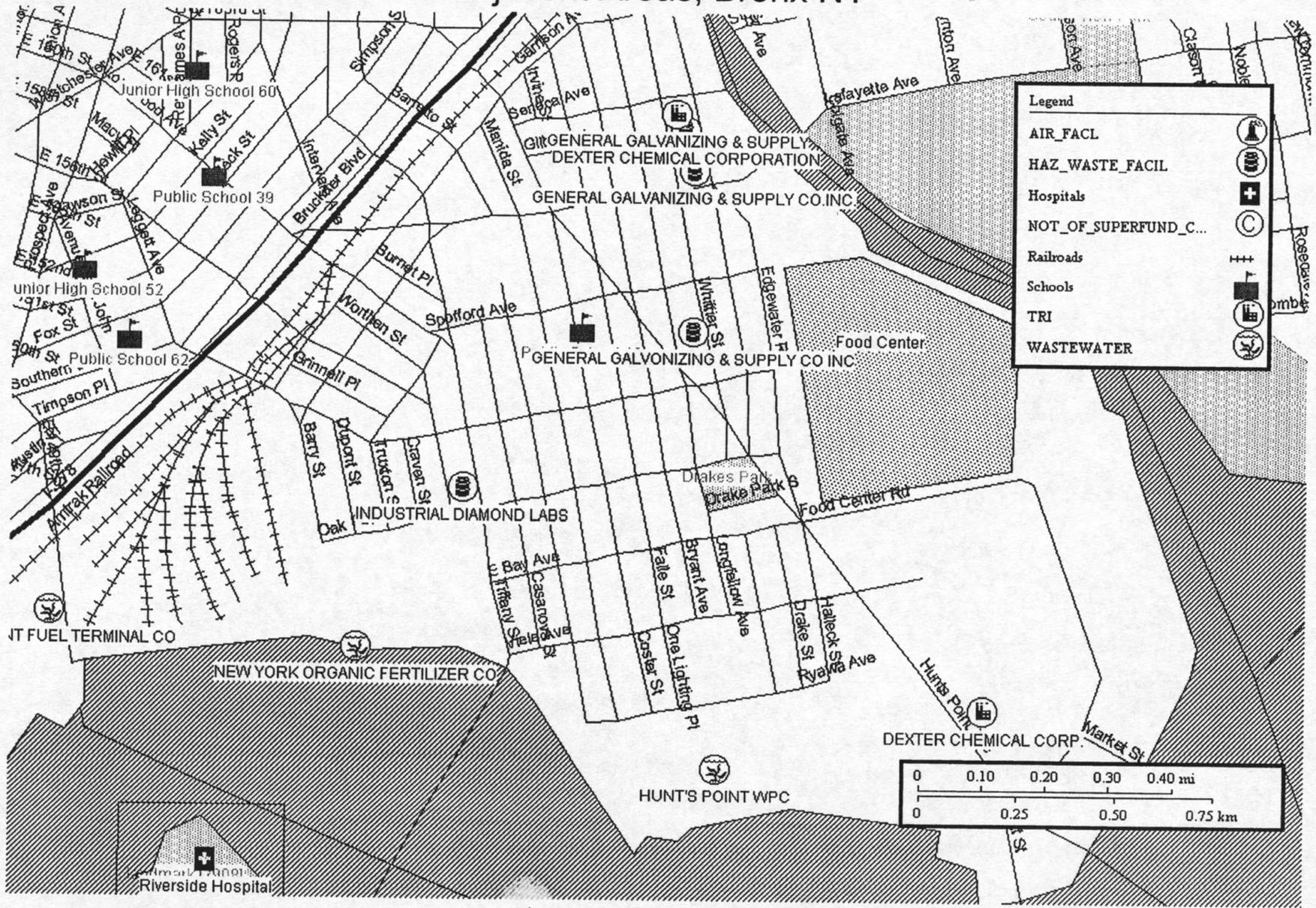
- LEGEND**
- ⊙ CARTING
  - ▲ FILL
  - ◆ HARLEM RIVER RAIL YARD
  - ⊕ MEDICAL
  - ▼ NON-PUTRESCIBLE C&D
  - NON-PUTRESCIBLE RECYCLING
  - ▲ PUTRESCIBLE
  - ★ WATER TREATMENT/BIOSOLIDS
  - TRUCK ROUTES



# Port Morris and Adjacent Areas, Bronx NY



# Hunts Point Peninsula and Adjacent Areas, Bronx NY



**Legend**

- AIR\_FACL
- HAZ\_WASTE\_FACIL
- Hospitals
- NOT\_OF\_SUPERFUND\_C...
- Railroads
- Schools
- TRI
- WASTEWATER

