

Former Brooklyn small business owners: rezoning pushed us out

BY RACHEL MONAHAN
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The city's efforts to develop [downtown Brooklyn](#) for more office space have come at the expense of small business owners, a new survey found.

The study by [Urban Justice Center](#) and Families United for Racial and Economic Equality reported 57% of the businesses have moved or been forced to close.

The report takes aim at the city's 2004 rezoning, noting it upped real estate prices and encouraged developers to build higher at the expense of local residents and minorities.

"The displacement is so severe here," said [Harvey Epstein](#) of the Urban Justice Center, who called on the city to set aside loans and grants for small businesses as was done when [Williamsburg](#) and [Greenpoint](#) were rezoned. "It's not like it happened on its own... This is after the city took direct action to rezone this community."

Officials defended the city's efforts to improve the area.

"Downtown Brooklyn is one of the fastest growing urban centers in [America](#)," said [Joe Chan](#), president of the [Downtown Brooklyn Partnership](#). "The Downtown Brooklyn Partnership [works] to connect small business owners with available resources and appropriate service providers."

Maisha Morales was lucky enough to find new retail space for Gallery Religious Supplies last year, after she was booted from Albee Square Mall, but it came at a price. Her rent tripled.

"When so many people were evicted from the mall, you had so many people trying to reach out and find the nearest location, so landlords took advantage," said Morales, 35, who lives in [Fort Greene](#).

Morales started working for the store in college and bought the shop in 2001. She built up the business and had started to negotiate a 20-year lease in the mall when it was sold.

In the last year she spent \$120,000 - all of her savings and some of her parents' retirement funds.



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Maisha Morales

Morales recently protested her treatment (right) along with her son, Anthony, 9. Moving has been a hardship, and the city should do more to help small businesses, she said.

"It's not easy for a business to get up and leave," she said. "I've basically been struggling."

"We want [Brooklyn](#) back," said [Jeff Garguilo](#), 56, former owner of Bagel Guys, who was evicted after 10 years in his location at 102 Willoughby St. "We want the developers to give back to small businesses...who made it desirable land for the city."

"We built it in the last 25 years, and now it's their profit and our loss."

Opened in 1997, Bagel Guys had a "prime spot" between the [Verizon](#) building and the [Chase Manhattan](#) offices.

That business vanished, but Garguilo, of [Sheepshead Bay](#), decided to stick it out for the moneymaking opportunities that would surely materialize with new condo buildings going up.

Then he was evicted last summer. Given 90 days to move his equipment out, he was forced to sell for cents on the dollar, he said.

"It's kind of sad, isn't it?" he said.

"I strongly believe in pride of business, economic development, but if that means displacing the roots of the community. I believe it's not right," said [Joyce Kiehm](#), 53.

She and her husband, Jee Kiehm, 57, had a classic American success story - until they were evicted in February from their downtown Brooklyn shop.

Immigrants from [South Korea](#), they opened Lawrence Street Wigs and Hats in 1986. The shop employed four people and sold wares mostly to an African-American clientele.

"I lost everybody, not only my business," said Joyce Kiehm. "I lost my friends, my longtime clientele, employees. Some of them worked for me for 15 years."

The Kiehms, who live on [Roosevelt Island](#), were still searching for space in the area they can afford. They still get calls from customers, looking to have wigs repaired - something other shops don't do, they said.



Tracy for News / Jeff Garguilo

"I tried really hard, but because of the rezoning the rent has gone up twice or three times," said Joyce Kiehm.



Tracy for News / Jee Klehm