Brownsville, the Brooklyn neighborhood that has battled crime and poverty for a long time, is in need of a few wins—and a nascent network of community groups and investors is working to provide just that.

Once home to poor Jewish immigrants and offering refuge to a ragtag collection of radicals and socialists at the turn of the 20th century, Brownsville has the largest concentration of public housing in New York City and the U.S. Some 60% of its housing stock is owned by the city.

Parts of Brownsville are slated for rezoning under Mayor Bill de Blasio’s affordable-housing plan for the broader East New York area, approved by the city Planning Commission.

But change won’t come easy.

Brownsville’s high schools have the lowest graduation rate citywide, and the neighborhood, despite progress, still ranks among the most crime-ridden areas per capita in the five boroughs. Last year, the 73rd police precinct, which includes
Brownsville and the neighboring Ocean Hill community, recorded 14 murders, down from 74 in 1993.

Another key statistic: In the seven major felony categories tracked by the New York Police Department, there were two crimes per 100 people last year in the 73rd police precinct, which includes Brownsville, compared with 1.24 per 100 people across the City, according to a Wall Street Journal calculation using police and census statistics. The neighborhood was in the news recently for an alleged rape in a public playground that prosecutors decided not to pursue, citing a lack of reliable evidence and inconsistent accounts.

The neighborhood covers just two square miles but has a population of 86,500, according to city estimates, denser than many parts of Brooklyn. Roughly a third of its residents live below the poverty line—double the citywide rate—and more than half receive public assistance.

But several civic-minded nonprofit and revitalization projects have cropped up, with well-funded and ambitious first steps in the works: rehabbing long-neglected stretches of Belmont and Pitkin avenues.

The Dream Big Foundation is funding several startups, including its first planned retail opening: 3 Black Cats Cafe, a specialty bakery and pastry shop, on Belmont Avenue, said Pernell S. Brice III, Dream Big’s executive director. The cafe, set to open in mid-April, will have a section in the back with computers and free Wi-Fi, and will serve coffee from La Colombe Coffee Roasters.

“There are not a lot of places to sit down and talk with someone in Brownsville. Mostly, it’s just takeout,” said Ionna Jimenez, one of three sisters opening the pastry shop. “We wanted to show that people from Brownsville can come back and work here.”

Rapper Lupe Fiasco and his nonprofit Neighborhood Start Fund, along with the Brownsville Community Justice Center, are working to revitalize a long-neglected stretch of Belmont Avenue near Pitkin Avenue.

And a co-founder of Noma, the Copenhagen eatery consistently ranked as one of the world’s top restaurants, has unveiled plans to open a 40-person restaurant, bakery,
The restaurant, not yet named, is a collaboration between Claus Meyer, who is opening a Nordic food hall in Grand Central Terminal, and Lucas Denton, who worked at the city's Commission on Human Rights and now runs Meyer's nonprofit, The Melting Pot, in the U.S. Its goal, the nonprofit says, is to promote “cultural uplift through the culinary arts.”

Developers already have taken notice of the need for new housing in Brownsville, as the relentless quest for affordability lures New Yorkers farther east.

Habitat for Humanity built a $5.8 million, four-story affordable condominium complex on a vacant lot on Mother Gaston Boulevard. It follows similar affordable-housing projects, including the Hegeman, a 161-unit building on Hegeman Avenue that opened in 2013, and two projects in the works with Kingdom Faith Developers to build condos on unused church property.

Acknowledging that change to Brownsville, given its density and relative isolation, is slower than the rest of Brooklyn, developers are looking to convert upper floors of mixed-use buildings into condos, said Edward Gevinski, a director at Cushman & Wakefield who focuses on investment sales in Brooklyn.

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Schools: Brownsville is in District 23, one of the smallest in the city and among the lowest-performing public-school districts.

In 2015, 13.3% of District 23 students in grades three through eight received a proficient score on the English Language Arts exam, compared with 2.6% in 2013. On the math exam, 13% received a proficient score in 2015, compared with 11.2% two years earlier.

Area charter schools include Achievement First Brownsville Charter School, which runs from kindergarten through eighth grades; Leadership Prep Ocean Hill Charter School, which runs from kindergarten to fifth grades; and Brownsville Collegiate Charter School, which runs from kindergarten through sixth grades and is part of the Uncommon Schools network.

Outdoor markets: MGB Pops, an outdoor marketplace on Mother Gaston Boulevard that runs from May through November, includes food and pop-up stores from local restaurants and retailers. The Brownsville Community Farmers Market, on Rockaway and Sutter avenues, runs on Saturdays from July through November.
<table>
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<th>Neighborhood</th>
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| Brownsville  | $400,000 | 615 Saxton St, Apt. 1 | This is a three-bedroom, one-bathroom townhouse on two levels, with a washer and dryer, living room and backyard. It is a few blocks from the Rockaways Avenue train stop. Year Built: 1990  
Square Footage: 1,100  
Property Plus: The backyard is huge.  
Property Minus: There is just one bathroom. Listing Date: Nov. 9  
Listing Agent: J. Phillips of 117 Franklin  
Open House: By appointment |
|              | $550,000 | 156 Gotham St, Apt. 1 | This is a five-bedroom, three-bathroom brick semi-detached house designed for two families. There are separate entrances for the units, a finished basement and a shared driveway. Year Built: 1940  
Square Footage: 1,792  
Property Plus: It has a boiler and interior room.  
Property Minus: Parts of the property are in need of renovation. Listing Date: Feb. 26  
Listing Agent: Jean Paul Ho of Brooklyn Real Property  
Open House: Saturday, 2-4 p.m. |
|              | $749,000 | 132 East 93rd St | This is a four-family brick, semi-detached house with a driveway, a new gas boiler and hot water tank. It has seven bedrooms and four bathrooms and is possibly an investment opportunity. Year Built: 1910  
Square Footage: 3,100  
Property Plus: The projected rent roll of the property is $72,000 a year.  
Property Minus: This property could use updates throughout. Listing Date: Feb. 19  
Listing Agent: Alex Kudhevi of Exit Brokaway Green Light  
Open House: By appointment |