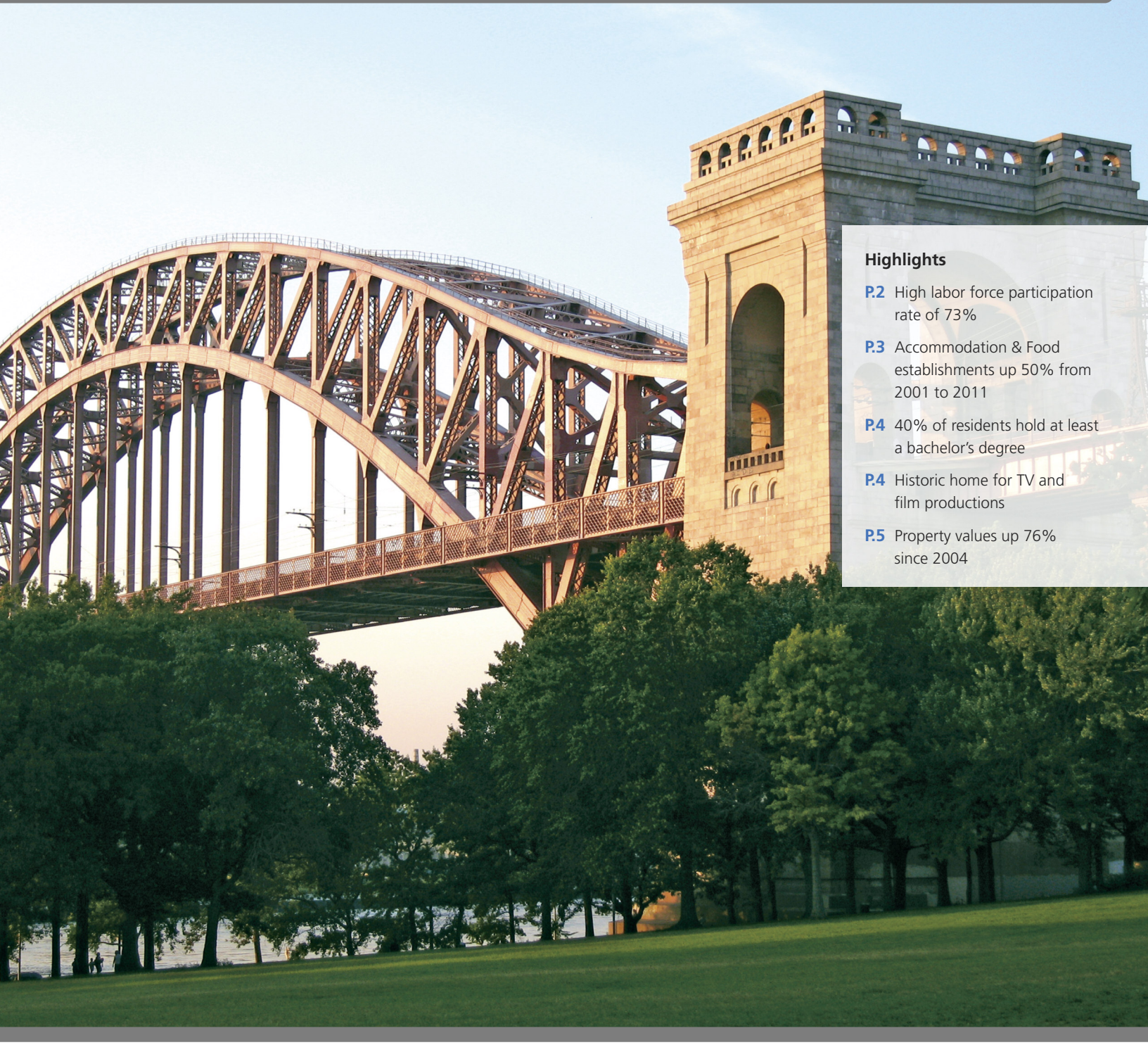
NEIGHBORHOOD TRENDS & INSIGHTS

Exploring New York City Communities

ASTORIA, QUEENS | APRIL 2014



Highlights

P.2 High labor force participation rate of 73%

P.3 Accommodation & Food establishments up 50% from 2001 to 2011

P.4 40% of residents hold at least a bachelor's degree

P.4 Historic home for TV and film productions

P.5 Property values up 76% since 2004

NYCEDC Economic Research & Analysis

Center for Economic Transformation

Astoria, located in the northwest quadrant of Queens, has a long history as a business and residential community. First settled during the colonial era, when it was known as Hallett's Cove, the area was incorporated as a village in 1839 by American entrepreneur Stephen Halsey. In an unsuccessful attempt to get John Jacob Astor to invest in the area, Halsey renamed it Astoria—though Astor reportedly never set foot in the village.[1] Astoria became part of Long Island City in 1870 and New York City in 1898.[2]

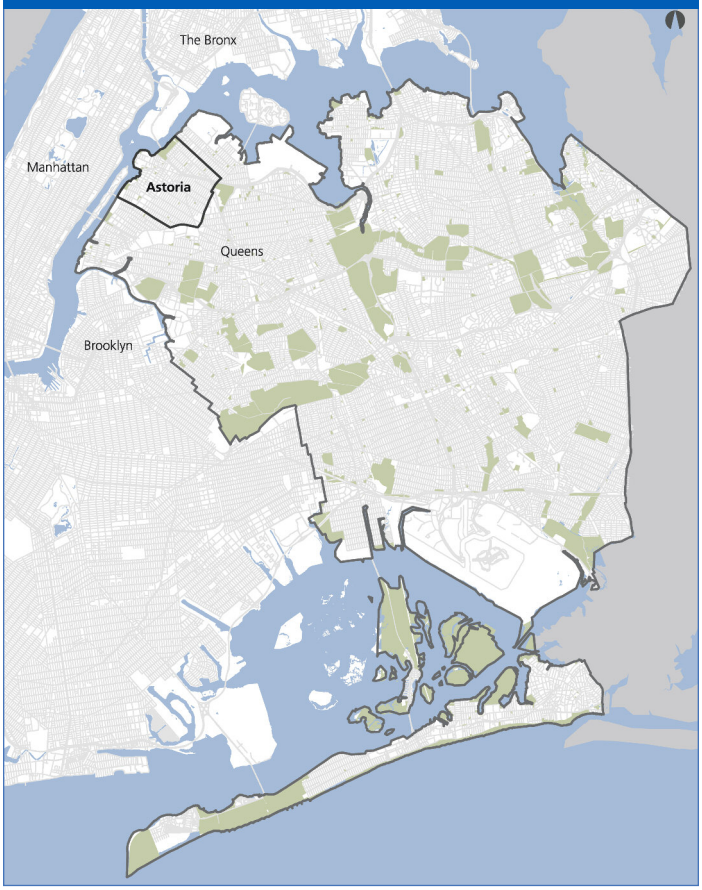
Astoria today is growing due to its proximity to Manhattan, bustling street life, cafés and restaurants, and comparatively affordable rents (see Figure 1). While Astoria has long been known for Greek and Italian residents, it has also attracted migrants from all over the world. Its streets reflect a variety of cultures and traditions; more than 15 street festivals are already scheduled for 2014, including the Epitaphios Procession of thousands of candle-bearing Greek Orthodox worshippers on Good Friday and a parade and carnival celebrating the Feast of Saint Anthony in June.

As is true of most neighborhoods in New York City, Astoria's boundaries are open to debate. Some definitions of the neighborhood extend as far north as the East River and as far south as Queens Plaza. For the purposes of this analysis, we define Astoria as bounded by 36th Avenue and Ditmars Boulevard (North and South) and the East River and 49th Street (East and West). This has the advantage of distinguishing Astoria from Long Island City to the south and Steinway/Ditmars to the north (see Steinway & Sons box, p5).

While neighboring Long Island City has sustained significant transformations in recent years, its history as an industrial hub distinguishes it from Astoria, which has been more residential since New Yorkers began building private mansions there in the mid-1800s. Today, a condo boom has brought new housing units to many of Astoria's north-south streets, while east-west avenues have developed into bustling commercial corridors.[3]

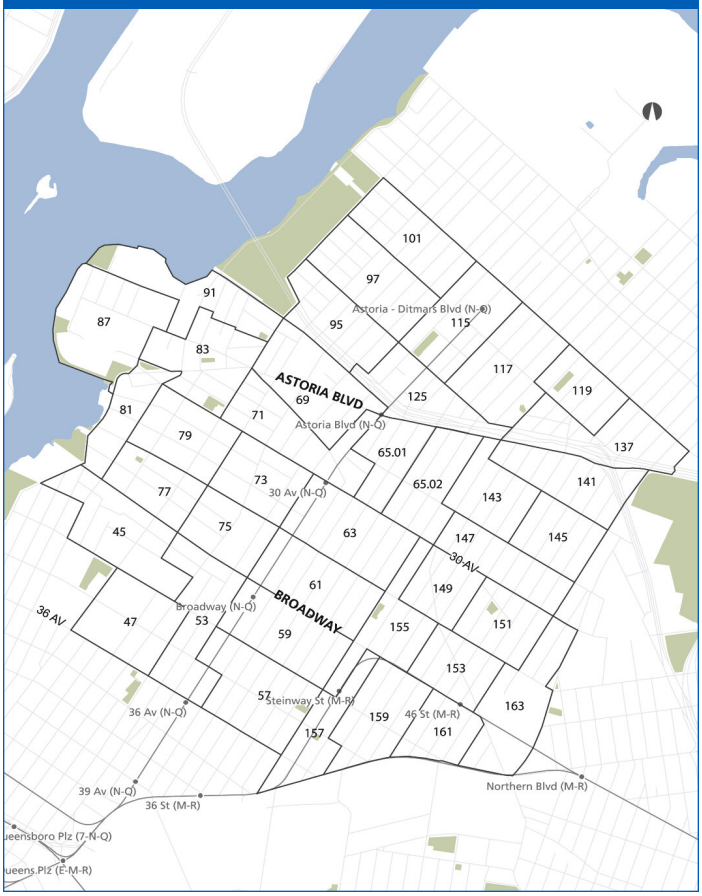
This snapshot utilizes Census data aggregated for the 40 Census tracts in the area (see Figure 2) to suggest trends and developments in the Astoria neighborhood. In some instances, data sources that use larger geographic units, such as ZIP codes, were used that may extend into regions outside the defined area.

Figure 1: Astoria in Context of New York City



Source: Map generated by NYCEDC MGIS

Figure 2: Selected Census Tracts for Astoria Study Area



Source: Map generated by NYCEDC MGIS

Resident Employment

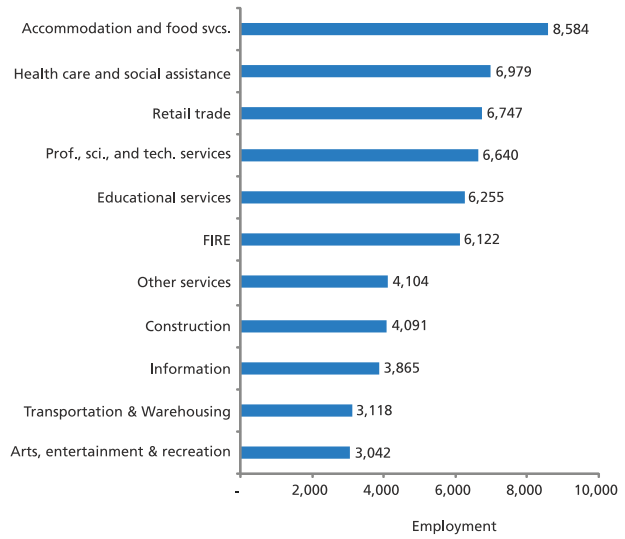
According to the 5-year 2012 American Community Survey estimates, approximately 68,476 Astoria residents held employment in 2012. The unemployment rate for the neighborhood in 2012 was slightly lower than the City average—9.2% in Astoria versus 10.2% in New York City overall. Astoria's unemployment rate was also lower than that of Queens as a whole (9.6%), while its labor force participation rate was higher (73.1% compared to 65.0%).

Astoria's median household income was $53,237, higher than that of the City as a whole ($51,865), but marginally lower than that for Queens residents overall ($56,780). On an individual basis, earnings from work were 9.9% higher for Astoria residents in 2012 than for Queens as a whole. Female workers living in Astoria out-earned female workers in Queens as a whole by 13.1%.

Accommodation and Food Services, which employed nearly 8,600 Astoria residents (12.5%), was the leading sector of employment for the neighborhood in 2012 (see Chart 1). 9.0% of Astoria residents worked in food preparation and serving-related occupations—a reflection of the many restaurants in the area (see Chart 2 below, and Restaurants box, p6). Other significant employment sectors for Astoria residents included Health Care and Social Assistance (10.2%), Retail Trade (9.9%), and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (9.7%).

Industrial and related establishments also employed many residents. Manufacturing, Construction, Transportation & Warehousing, Utilities, and Wholesale Trade collectively employed 16.9% of residents in 2012.

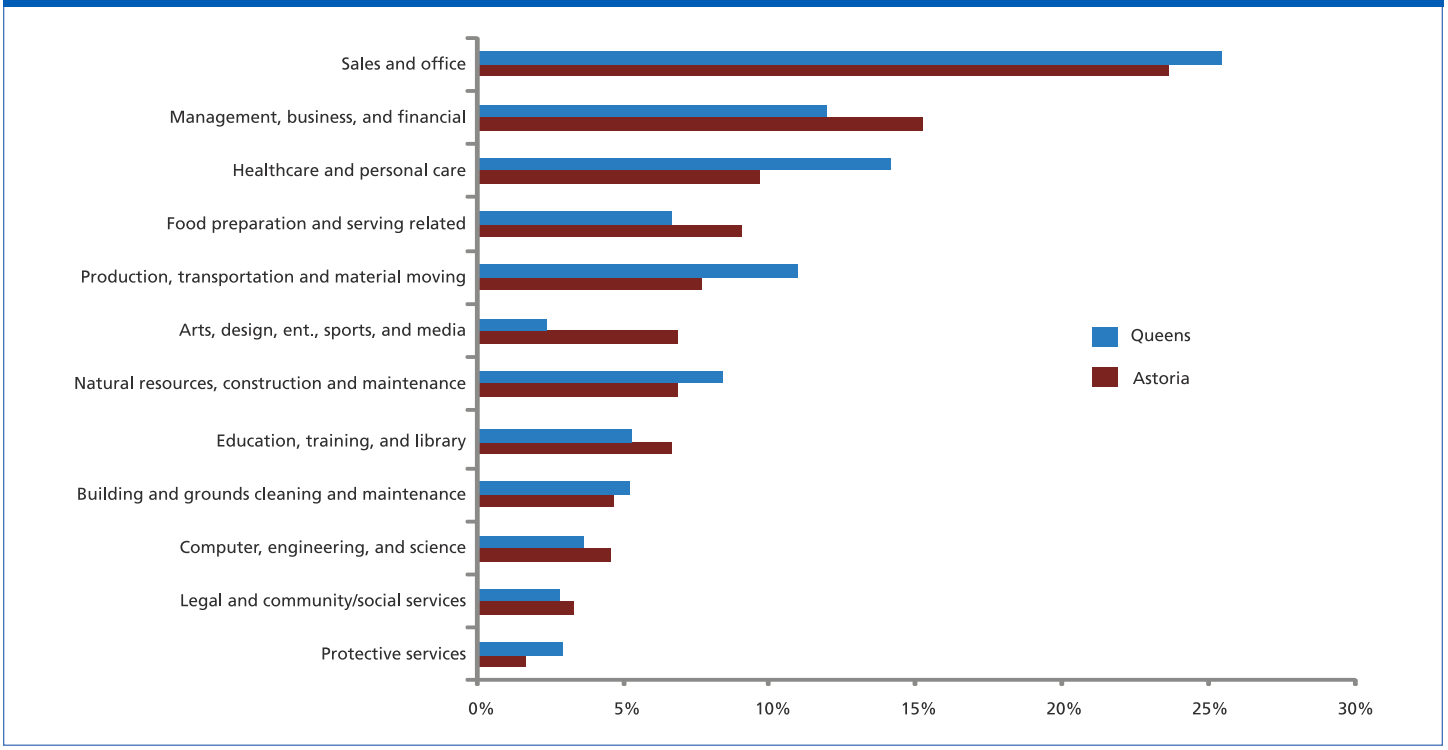
Chart 1: Top Industries Employing Astoria Residents



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Sample 2008-2012

Astoria residents had a shorter average commute time relative to Queens residents overall (36 minutes versus 42 minutes). And Astoria residents were nearly a third more likely to rely on public transportation to get to work than Queens residents as a whole.

Chart 2: Share of Occupations Employing Astoria vs. Queens Residents



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Sample 2008-2012

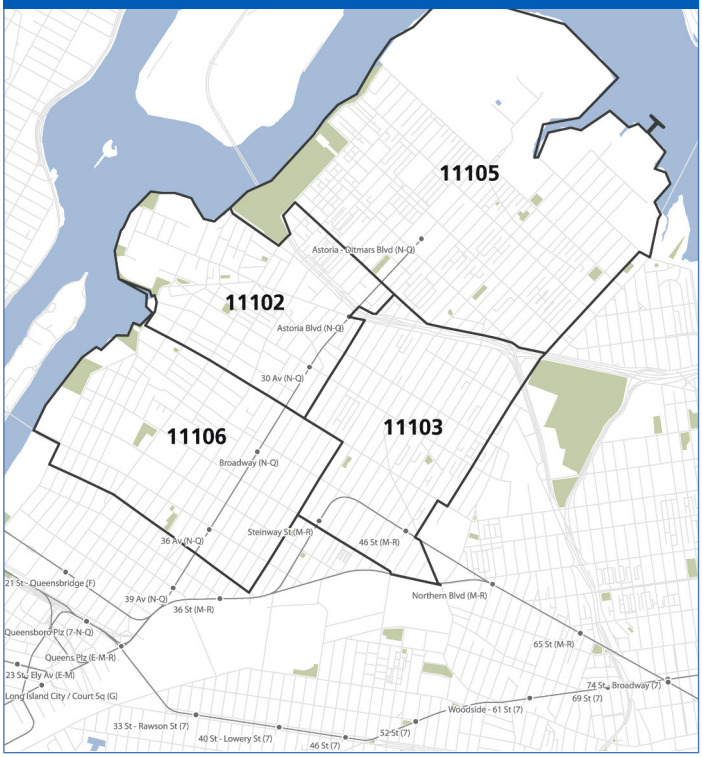
Economy and Business

The U.S. Census Bureau reports data on business establishments and employment for the ZIP codes 11102, 11103, 11105, and 11106 that encompass Astoria (see Figure 3). Though the number of overall employees working in Astoria from 2001 to 2011 remained flat at around 34,000 workers, the number of establishments in the neighborhood rose by 479, or 14.6%, in those ten years (see Chart 3). This simultaneous increase in establishments and flat employment illustrates the growing importance of small businesses to the neighborhood.

The number of employees per establishment in Astoria fell 12.4% from 2001 to 2011, from 10.4 to 9.1 employees. Northern Astoria establishments (ZIP 11105) grew the fastest over the decade with a 17.9% increase. However, employment grew the most in central Astoria (ZIP 11103), increasing 13.7% to nearly 10,000 workers from 2001 to 2011.

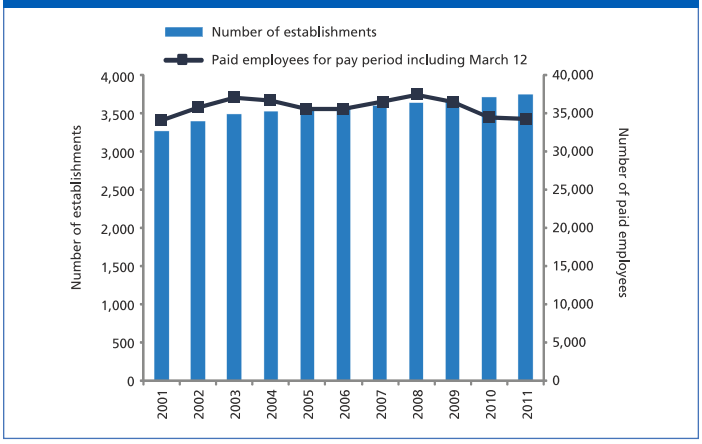
Examining employment by sector, Retail Trade had the most establishments in Astoria in 2011 with 606 (see Chart 4). Accommodation and Food Service establishments grew by over 50% from 2001 to 2011 and were responsible for over 32% of all of Astoria's new establishments. While Astoria is often regarded as a primarily residential neighborhood, industrial establishments account for more than a quarter (27.3%) of establishments in the area, higher than their share in Queens as a whole (25.8%). Nearly 600 of these are construction establishments. Industrial establishment concentration is higher in Astoria's southern neighbor, Long Island City, where industrial establishments encompass nearly half (46.2%) of the area's establishments. Finally, the number of Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation establishments tripled between 2001 and 2011 (see Astoria: Hollywood on the East River, p4).

Figure 3: Astoria ZIP Codes



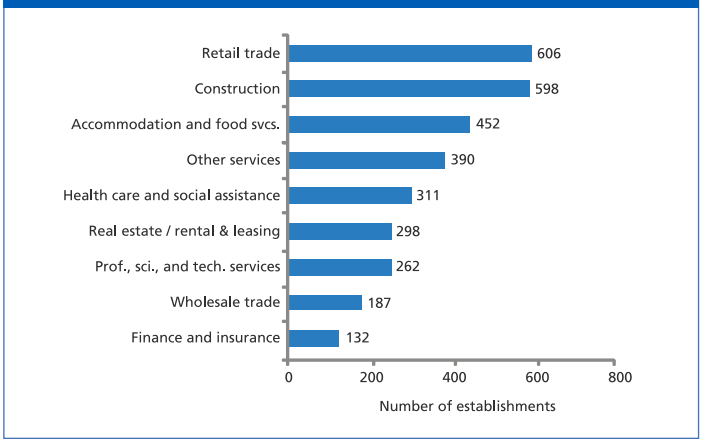
Source: Map generated by NYCEDC MGIS

Chart 3: Establishments and Employees in Astoria ZIP Codes



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 County Business Patterns

Chart 4: Astoria Establishments by Industry, 2011



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 County Business Patterns

Demographics

Astoria's total population fell 6.0% from 1970 to 1990, before jumping by 14.1% from 1990 to 2000. The most recent 2010 Census shows evidence that some of these population gains have reversed, with the neighborhood's population falling 9.8% in 2010 from 139,778 to 126,146 people. However, given recent strong housing demand and business growth in the neighborhood, questions have been raised by residents and others about the accuracy of the 2010 population count.[4]

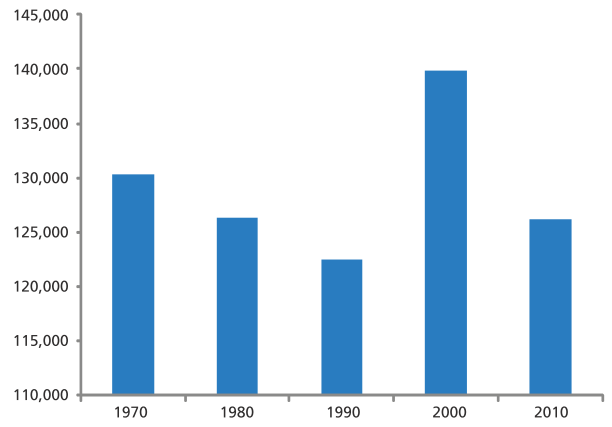
Regardless, the labor force—people over 16 who are employed or actively seeking work—grew 12.4% since 2000, from 67,135 in 2000 to 75,451 in the 2012 American Community Survey 5-year sample. The share of Astoria's young adult population from 25 to 34 also increased to 26.3% by 2010, up from 22.9% in 2000 and significantly up from 12.6% in 1970. As the labor force and the share of young adult population has grown, the share of one- and two-person households in Queens

Community District 1 (encompassing both Astoria and Long Island City) rose to 71.1% in 2012 from 66.4% in 2005.

Astoria residents constitute a relatively well-educated group, with 40.2% of the population aged 25 and older holding a bachelor's degree or higher, up from 26.0% in 2000. This is more than a third higher than the share in Queens overall, where 29.9% of residents held at least a bachelor's degree in 2012.

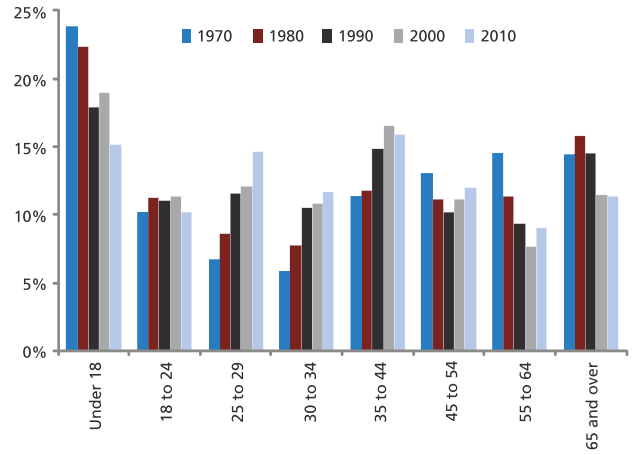
Residents of Greek and Italian descent have long called Astoria home and form the two largest ethnic communities, representing 8.8% and 10.3% of the population, respectively, in 2012. Their share of the population has declined since 2000, however, by 10.2% and 16.1%. Taking their place are new migrants who have arrived from Europe, Asia, and elsewhere in New York and the United States.

Chart 5: Population of Astoria, 1970–2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1970-2010 Decennial Census). Accessed through Minnesota Population Center. National Historical Geographic Information System (NHGIS), www.nhgis.org

Chart 6: Age Distribution of Astoria, 1970–2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (1970-2010 Decennial Census). Accessed through Minnesota Population Center. National Historical Geographic Information System (NHGIS), www.nhgis.org

Astoria: Hollywood on the East River?

Astoria has a long history of involvement in New York City's movie scene. Astoria Studios opened in 1920 as the home of the Famous Players-Lasky film company. It was bought in the 1980s by real estate developer George Kaufman and renamed Kaufman Astoria Studios. The studio is home to such popular television shows as *Orange is the New Black* and *Nurse Jackie*, as well as the perennial children's favorite *Sesame Street*. In December, Kaufman became home to New York City's only outdoor backlot—an area with permanent exterior buildings for filming outdoor scenes—located on a de-mapped block of 36th Street between 34th and 35th Avenues.[5]

Nearby, the Museum of the Moving Image preserves the history of film and television as a medium. The museum opened in 1988 and underwent a major expansion and redesign in January 2011 that doubled its size. Almost 144,000 people visited the museum during FY 2013, up from 89,000 before the expansion in FY 2011. About 400 screenings per year take place in the museum's two theaters. The museum's ongoing exhibition, *Behind the Screen*, explores how moving images are made, marketed, and shown.[6]

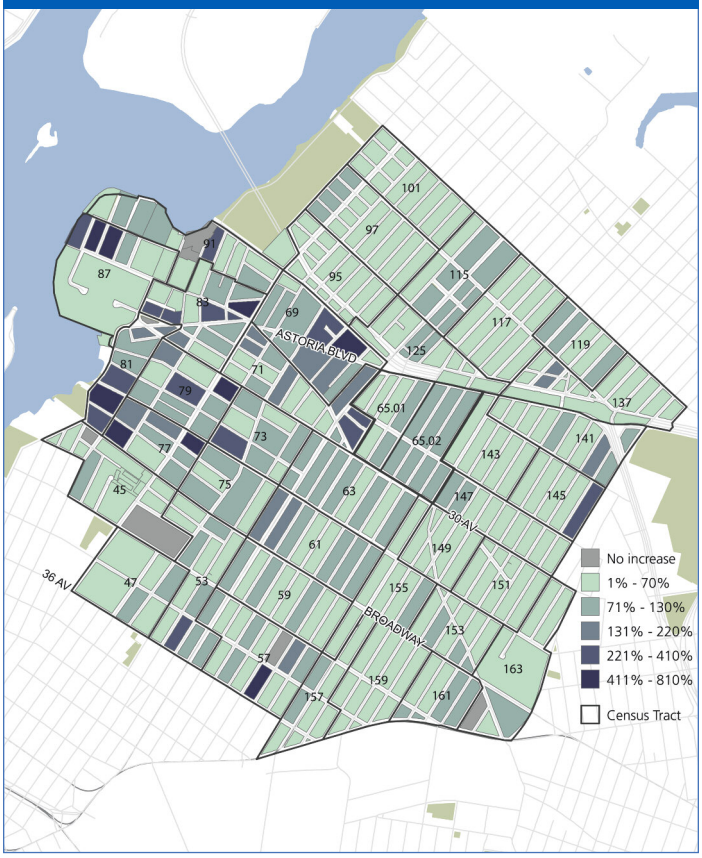
Besides the Museum and Kaufman Astoria Studios, the Queens Council on the Arts and the Frank Sinatra School of the Arts also call Astoria home. Productions filmed in Astoria in recent months include the television shows *The Americans, The Blacklist, Person of Interest,* and *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. Astoria also hosts screenings during the Queens World Film Festival, which began in 2011 and took place in March this year.

As productions have grown, supported by a 30% tax credit granted to productions shot in New York State, so have the motion picture industry's contributions to New York City's economy. In total, 26 episodic series were filmed across New York City in 2013 and 2014, up from 7 in 2002 and 2003. The City's entertainment industry employs over 130,000 New Yorkers, contributing approximately $7.1 billion to the local economy annually; 4,000 ancillary businesses support production throughout the five boroughs.[7] Hal Rosenbluth, president of Kaufman Astoria Studios, observed, "To visualize the positive effects of the film industry on a local economy, stay through to the end of the credits."[8]

Based on American Community Survey 5-year estimates, there were about 58,500 housing units in Astoria in 2012. Of the occupied housing units, 82.0% were renter-occupied, a much higher share than in Queens overall (55.5%) or Manhattan (77.4%). Residents in 12.5% of the occupied housing units moved in 2010 or later, compared to 8.4% in all of Queens, indicating that Astoria has higher residential turnover than other areas in the borough. The neighborhood also has two public housing complexes under the New York City Housing Authority—Astoria and Ravenswood, which together house about 7,700 residents.[9]

Average property values in Astoria rose by 75.9% from 2004 to 2013, more than in Queens overall and comparable to the City as a whole (66.6% and 72.8%, respectively). Real estate developers have targeted Astoria for larger-scale developments. In November, the *New York Times* reported that more than 8,000 apartments are planned for Long Island City and parts of Astoria over the next three years.[10] Hallets Point, a $1 billion project by Lincoln Equities Group, approved by City Council in October, will be built south of Astoria Park on the East River and will add 2,200 apartments to the neighborhood, with 20% of them designated as affordable housing.[11] Hallets Point is adjacent to Astoria Cove, a proposed 1,800 unit development from Alma Realty that plans to add a promenade, restaurants, and a supermarket.[12] Another waterfront development site sold for $26.5 million in January 2014, and a large development on Broadway that is zoned for mixed use went under contract in early February.[13]

Figure 4: Change in Average Assessed Values by Block in Astoria, 2004–2013



Source: NYC Department of City Planning, PLUTO database; analysis and map generated by NYCEDC MGIS

Steinway & Sons

Just north of Astoria lies the Steinway neighborhood, the legacy of an entire town planned and developed beginning in 1871 by Steinway & Sons as home to their piano factory and workers. William Steinway bought the 400 acre space just across from Manhattan with the goal of relocating his employees away from the labor unrest in Manhattan that characterized the 1860s.[14] While the factory operates today at a reduced 440,000 square foot capacity, the legacy of William's "Steinway Village" remains very much visible throughout the area. The original town featured housing for workers and others, a library, streetcars, and even a church. Two of the original apartment buildings that housed factory employees still stand along 20th Avenue and 41st Street. William's own home—aptly dubbed the Steinway Mansion—has been preserved as a historic landmark. The lending library that was created for employees/residents of Steinway Village was later incorporated into the Queens Library System, while the tunnel under the East River that William built to move people between Manhattan and Queens is now serviced by the No. 7 subway line.[15]

Pianos, however, are Steinway's greatest legacy. The factory continues to produce roughly 2,500 pianos per year, each requiring at least nine months to assemble.[16] This labor-intensive production process, which mirrors methods the factory first employed more than 150 years ago, is perhaps why Steinway & Sons stands out as one of New York City's largest manufacturing employers. The 300 craftspeople at its New York City location continue to manufacture all of the company's Grand pianos in their entirety.[17] Though piano sales are down more than 86% in the U.S. since peaking in 1909, Steinway sales have reportedly remained steady as worldwide demand continues to grow for its iconic product.[18] 97% of concert pianists used Steinways during the 2011/2012 concert season.[19]

The prices of property for rental and purchase have been rising. According to StreetEasy, a single family home in Astoria now sells for a median price of $480,000, closer to the Brooklyn median price ($579,000) than that of Queens ($359,000).[20] Modern Spaces, a real estate firm, reports that prices in Astoria are currently at their peak, with average per-square-foot sales prices of $644.[21] CoStar data indicate that the asking rent per unit in Astoria's multi-family properties was $2,461 in Q4 2013, up 13.6% from $2,167 in Q1 2009.

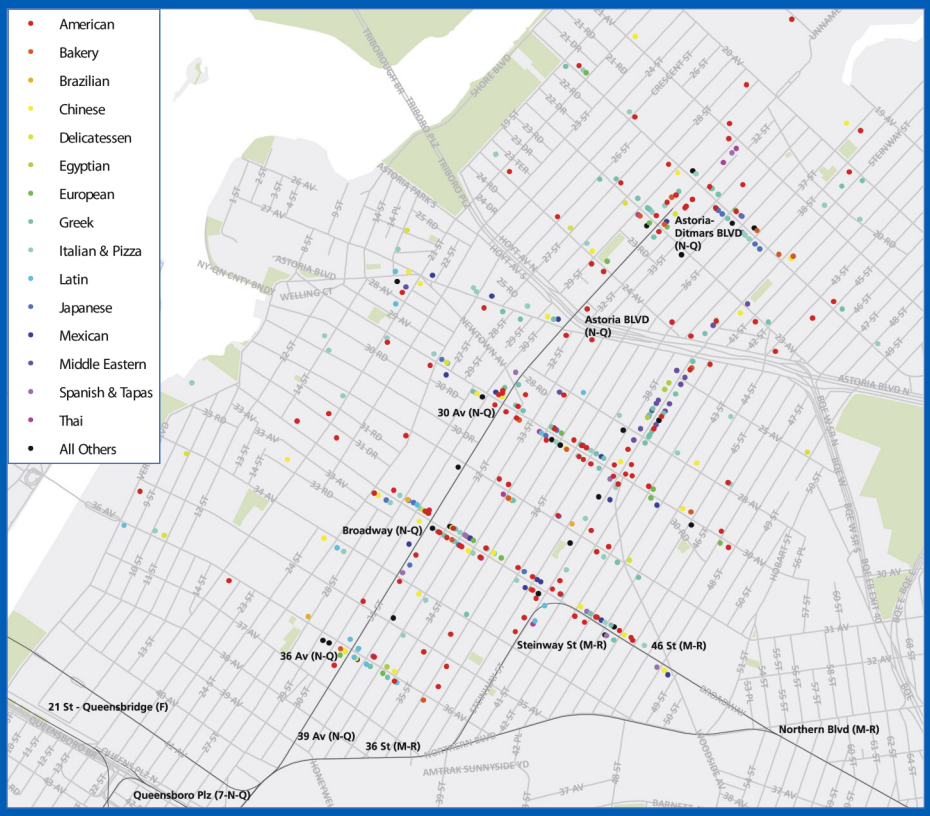
Office and retail properties are also in high demand in the neighborhood. Office properties had a direct vacancy rate of just 2.6% in the last quarter of 2013, down from 11.2% as recently as the first quarter of 2011. Retail availability is similarly low, with a direct vacancy rate of 2.7% in Q4 2013 and average direct rental rate of $67 per square foot per year, up from $42 in Q1 2009. A decrease in crime has contributed to the rise in real estate demand in Astoria, mirroring trends across New York City as a whole. Major felony offenses in Astoria fell by 50 percent from 2000 to 2013, and Astoria's precinct currently has one of the lowest crime rates in the City, with just 0.60 crimes per 1,000 residents in February 2014.[22]

Restaurants in Astoria

Mirroring its diverse ethnic population, Astoria is home to many cuisines. More than 560 restaurants of 55 different cuisine types are scattered throughout the neighborhood (see map below). While Astoria remains a favorite place for Greek and Italian food in New York City, Astoria's culinary palette has diversified along with its inhabitants. One of the neighborhood's best-known restaurants is decidedly all-American. Bareburger, an organic take on the traditional patty, opened on 31st Avenue in Astoria in 2009. In the five years since, founder Euripides Pelekanos and partners have opened 16 new locations throughout the City and surrounding regions, with plans to open 14 more by the end of 2014 in locations as far-flung as Santa Monica, Toronto, and Berlin.[23]

Despite intercontinental success stories such as Bareburger's, plenty of restaurateurs see Astoria as a prime location in and of itself. The number of full-service restaurants in Astoria increased 57% from 2001 to 2011, while the number of limited-service restaurants and snack and nonalcoholic beverage bars in the neighborhood both rose by more than 80% over the same period. Although the concentration of younger residents in Astoria has been increasing, the number of drinking establishments (those serving alcoholic beverages) declined 17% over the decade.[24]

Restaurants in Astoria by Cuisine (ZIP Codes 11102, 11103, 11105, 11106)



Source: NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Restaurant Inspection Results as of February 2014

Acknowledgements

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About NYCEDC

The New York City Economic Development Corporation is the City's primary engine for economic development charged with leveraging the City's assets to drive growth, create jobs and improve quality of life. NYCEDC is an organization dedicated to New York City and its people. We use our expertise to develop, advise, manage and invest to strengthen businesses and help neighborhoods thrive. We make the City stronger.

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