



## **Council of Senior Centers & Services of NYC, Inc.**

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**“IT’S BROKEN, FIX IT”**

### **A RENOVATION STUDY OF NEW YORK CITY SENIOR CENTERS**

**JANUARY, 2008**

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**“IT’S BROKEN, FIX IT”  
RENOVATION NEEDS OF NYC SENIOR CENTERS  
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**HIGHLIGHTS OF SURVEY FINDINGS:**

In September of 2007, Council of Senior Centers and Services disseminated a renovation needs survey to all its senior center members. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the renovation needs of senior centers throughout New York City. The survey is part of the report title, “It’s Broken, Fix it”. The report will examine the results from the survey that 160 out of 329 senior centers citywide responded to.

**Please note that all percentages in this report are based on the number of senior centers that responded to the survey:**

- 160 senior centers throughout the five boroughs indicated a need to renovate their senior centers.
- 55 % of senior centers are in need of kitchen renovations; an increase from 35% reported three years ago. <sup>1</sup>
- 52% of senior centers need their walls to be painted, repaired or both
- 49% of senior centers need their bathrooms renovated
- Senior center directors stated concern for their senior center’s physical infrastructure, and the impact it will have on the future of senior centers many of them have not been able to the funds from DFTA, City Council or Borough Presidents.
- The 75-85 age group grew by 5.1% since the 1990 census and the 85 and older group grew by 18.7 % since 1990. <sup>2</sup> Senior centers need to be renovated and modernized to accommodate and provide meals for this expanding age group. If senior centers are to become nutritional centers as projected by DFTA, it needs additional funding and support to meet this initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Senior Center and Services, Sackman, Bobbie. . “ More with Less is Impossible” pg 3 (2005)

<sup>2</sup> Growing Old in New York City:The Age Revolution. Sackman, Bobbie. (New York, New York 2006)

The survey documented widespread need for senior center renovation in all five boroughs. There are various senior centers through out New York City that do not have reliable heating or air conditioning; or kitchens often too small or obsolete; plumbing systems that are deteriorating; and insufficient space to support the burgeoning senior population. Thousands of seniors consider their center their second home because of the meals and services it provides. Senior centers should provide safe havens, attractive rooms, handicapped accessibility, sufficient space for recreational activities and modern equipment.

## **SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS:**

### **I. Locations and building type of senior centers**

There are 329 senior centers in New York City. The centers cater to a linguistically and culturally diverse population of seniors age 60-100+. The senior centers provide meals, health screenings, citizenship classes and entitlement programs in the language of the senior population. Senior centers speak the language of their members; Spanish, English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Yiddish, Hindi, and Russian. They celebrate traditions and provide meals that are unique to each ethnic and cultural group.

### **II. City-owned or city-leased senior centers**

Some senior centers in New York City are in city- owned or city-leased properties. This means that the city agencies are responsible for maintaining the senior centers

- 44% of senior center directors indicated that their senior center is in city-owned/leased
- 45% of senior center directors are not in city-owned/leased properties

### **III. More than just a senior center**

Seniors attend senior centers out of their own choice. The centers provide more than just meals. Senior centers provide social services, meals-on-wheels, transportation,

socialization, legal services, adult day services, educational and health promotion activities, and counseling. Seniors are among peers when they enter a senior center.

Senior centers that responded to the survey reported:

- 31% of senior centers have a meals-on-wheels program
- 15% of senior centers provide adult day services
- 11% of senior centers provide NORC

#### **IV. Major renovations are needed in New York City senior centers**

One hundred sixty senior centers responded to this survey documenting tremendous need for renovations. The lack of renovations in their facilities truncates their ability to meet the needs of senior participants. Senior center directors throughout all five boroughs indicated kitchen renovation as their greatest need. Kitchen renovation includes expansion of kitchens, modernization of equipment and appealing dining room furniture.

The number of seniors in New York City are increasing and so is their level of poverty. Twenty percent of NYC's elderly live below poverty, twice the national elderly poverty rate. According to the 2007 CSCS study, Hunger Hurts: A Study of Hunger Among New York City's Elderly, one-third of the seniors interviewed experienced "food insecurity" (everything from worrying about food, skipping meals, to being hungry). Twenty percent of younger seniors, aged 60-64, experienced food insecurity. Thirty-three percent of Blacks and thirty-two percent of Hispanic seniors fear running out of food before their next check.<sup>3</sup>

A senior shouldn't have to worry about their next meal, finding a place to sit or worry whether they may fall because of an uneven floor. Senior centers that responded to the survey reported:

- 55% need kitchen renovations, an increase from 35% reported in 2005<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Hunger Hurts: A study of hunger among New York City's elderly, Sackman ( 2007)

<sup>4</sup> More with Less is Impossible: No New Money=Less Capacity to Serve Seniors. Sackman, Bobbie, Zvorych, Kathleen. (New York, New York 2005)

- 52% need their walls painted and/or repaired, an increase from 37% reported in 2005<sup>5</sup>
- 58% in Brooklyn need their bathrooms renovated
- 60% in Manhattan need to renovate their kitchens
- 48% in the Bronx need new floors
- 57% in Staten Island need new plumbing systems

## **V. Senior Center equipment needs to be replaced with new and durable equipment**

In order for senior centers to attract new seniors or to augment programs and services, new, durable and modern equipment is needed to make the senior center attractive and inviting. Equipment that is used in the kitchen needs to be adequate to provide meals to the center members. Furniture and other equipment used by seniors need to be upgraded and modernized instead of the institutional style tables and chairs. Ripped, dirty, and old furniture sends a message to seniors; their health and well being are not important. Seniors want to walk through the doors of welcoming, attractive and safe centers. The city and community providers should work together to make this happen.

- 47 % of senior centers that responded need new furniture
- 38% of senior centers that responded need new freezers
- 37% of senior centers that responded need of new stoves
- 53% of senior centers in the Bronx need new stoves
- 66% senior centers in Staten Island need new refrigerators
- 59% of senior centers in Manhattan need new furniture
- 48% of senior centers in Brooklyn need new refrigerators
- 66% of senior centers in Staten Island need new steam tables

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<sup>5</sup> More with Less is Impossible: No New Money=Less Capacity to Serve Seniors. Sackman, Bobbie, Zvorych, Kathleen. (New York, New York 2005)

## **VI. Senior centers need more funds**

Senior Centers throughout New York City are in need of more funding. The funding that is currently allocated to senior centers isn't suffice to cover expenses such as: food, heating, rent, maintenance, transportation and staff. Senior centers need additional funds to continue providing meals and services. Additional funding by city government allows senior centers to hire more staff, expand educational and recreational programs and serve more seniors in need of meals, counseling, translation, and entitlement services.

Additional funding also provides for the renovations needed in senior centers. With additional funds senior center directors could repair equipment used by seniors, expand physical space in the senior center, and modernize their center to make it more appealing, safer, and comfortable for seniors to enter.

### **Attempts by senior centers that responded to receive capital funds:**

- 56% requested DFTA for renovation funds
- 27% are negotiating with DFTA for funding.
- 85% of Staten Island senior centers requested additional funds from DFTA; 16% receive some funding, while 83% never received a response.
- 59% of Bronx senior centers requested renovation funds from DFTA;
- 42% are negotiating with DFTA while 50% haven't had a response from DFTA.
- 50% of Staten Island senior centers that responded did not receive a response to their funding request
- 66% of Manhattan senior centers that responded to the survey, indicated that their renovation needs would be resolved; unfortunately some are still waiting
- 66% of Queens's senior centers that responded indicated in the survey that their renovation needs were met, but they also indicated that the problems still persist.

- Senior centers located in the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA), which is city-owned property, asked NYCHA for capital dollars after being directed by DFTA to do so. For those that applied to NYCHA for financial assistance, 24% did not receive a response. Thirty-nine percent of senior centers were notified that their problems would be resolved; things were not fixed as promised.

The lacks of renovations of senior centers pose a very serious risk to the senior members and their staff. Various senior center directors throughout the five boroughs indicated that their senior centers have poorly functioning fire alarms, others, no sprinkler system, some noted no ventilation in the bathrooms, and others requested the need for additional space. These renovations are necessary to ensure a healthy and safe environment for seniors and are beyond the capacity of the senior center to fix on their own.

- 71% of senior centers in Staten Island indicated problems with pest control
- 11% of senior centers in the Bronx reported the need for sprinkler systems
- 22% of senior centers in Manhattan documented a need for fire alarms

## VII. Requesting additional monies, capital-city funds

In addition to asking DFTA or NYCHA for funds, senior center agencies and directors also turn to their City Council Member, Borough President, and DFTA for city capital funds. City capital funds are monies that are used for major renovation needs that exceed \$500,000. In order to qualify for city capital funds a senior center needs to have a long term lease or be the owner of the center. There are several challenges to qualify for city capital funds: first, the senior center must be on city-

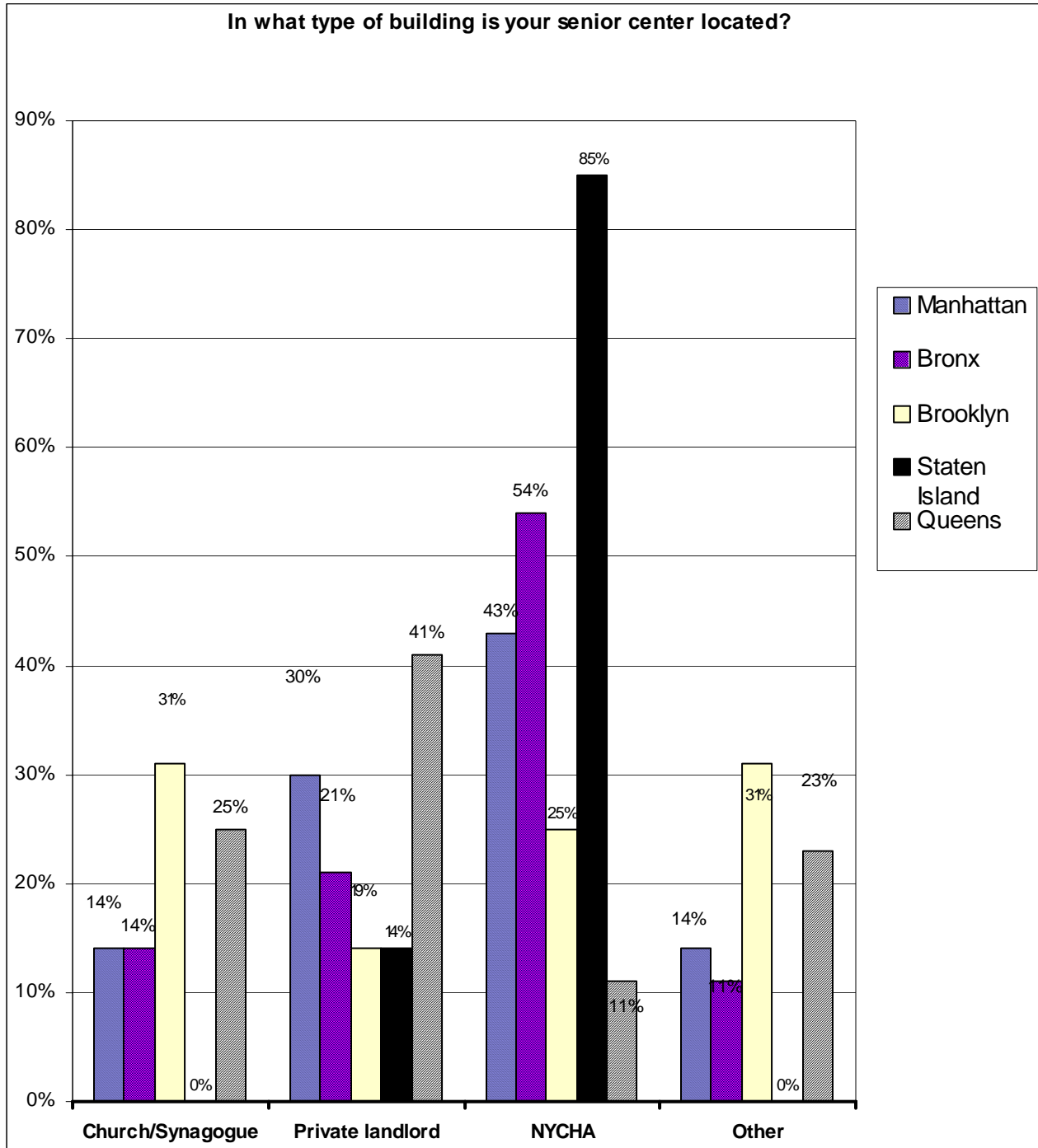
owned property (only senior centers in NYCHA buildings are); secondly, the amount needed to qualify is inappropriately high, \$500,000; and thirdly, the senior center must have a long term lease on the property. Some centers have been at their site for a decades and do not have the lease available or available. Another formidable barrier is that to finally obtain the funds could take up to 2 years or more. Senior centers responding to the survey reported:

- 44% of senior centers are not on city-owned/leased properties
- 32% of senior centers applied for city capital funds
- 68% of senior centers did **not** apply for city capital funds
- 47% of senior centers agencies requested city capital funds from their City Councilmember
- 32% of senior center agencies requested city capital funds from their Borough President
- 28% of senior center agencies requested DFTA for city capital funds
- 30% of the senior center agencies received city capital funds compared to 60% that were denied funds
- Of those that were not approved for city capital funds, 15% were denied because their senior center is in non city-owned property.
- 12% of senior center agencies were denied because their renovation needs fell below \$500,000
- 36% were awarded city capital funds but were waiting to receive it

## **VIII. Concerns Reported by Senior Centers**

- “ This whole center has to be redone, this center is very dangerous”  
“NYCHA just comes in and takes pictures but does nothing about it”-  
Bronx senior center
- Getting housing to see what is wrong, not getting cooperation from all sides and lack of communication is very frustrating”- Brooklyn senior center
- “ In spite the fact that we were promised that they would have the architectural plans drawn up when we had raised most the money, they have not done this. Without the plans we cannot get foundation funds. And without a lease, which we have not had for 22 years, we cannot get foundation funds and we are having trouble accessing the NYS money for the equipment and furniture upstairs”- Manhattan senior center
- “I am a firm believer that a room that is clean and fresh makes people feel better. We are limited in our resources because we share our facility with housing. We get our seniors involved in decorating and making the place look nice”- Staten Island senior center

1. **In what type of building is your senior center located?** (check all that apply):  
 church or synagogue \_\_\_\_\_  
 private landlord \_\_\_\_\_  
 NYCHA building \_\_\_\_\_  
 other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

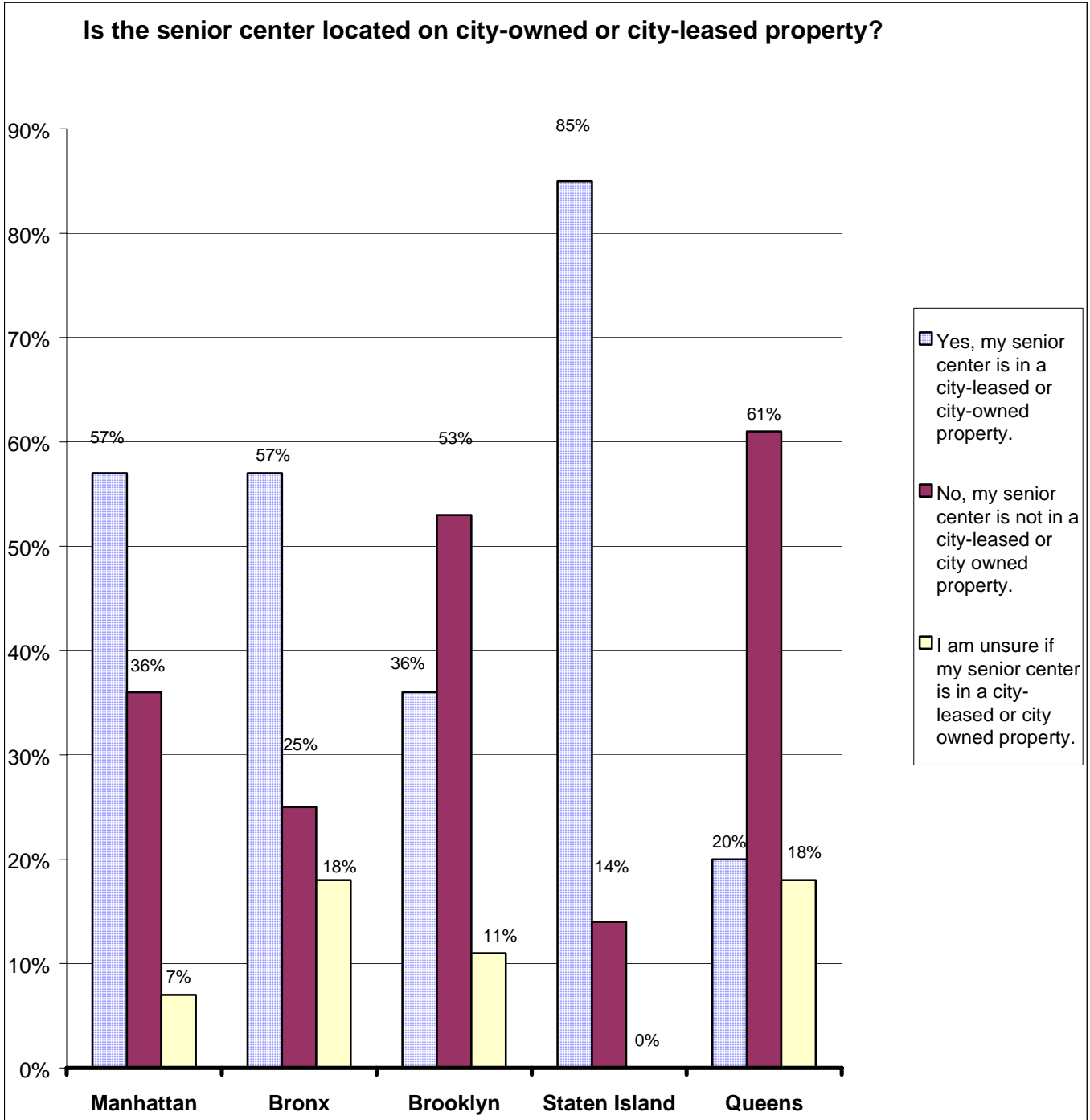


**2. Is the senior center located in city-owned or city-leased property?**

(note: All NYCHA sites are city-owned.)

\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_ don't know

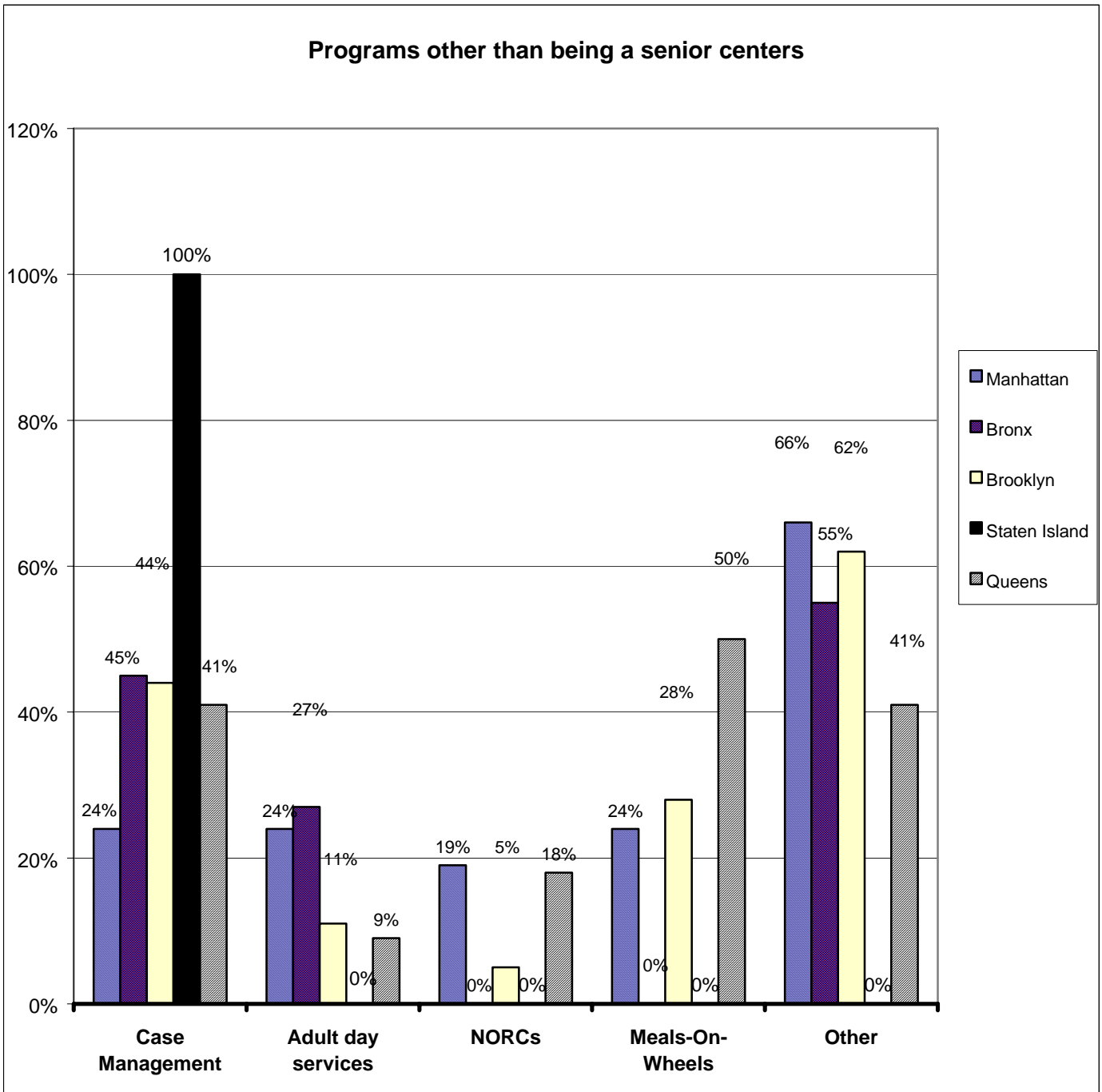
If yes, specify type of building \_\_\_\_\_



**3. Programs other than senior centers:**

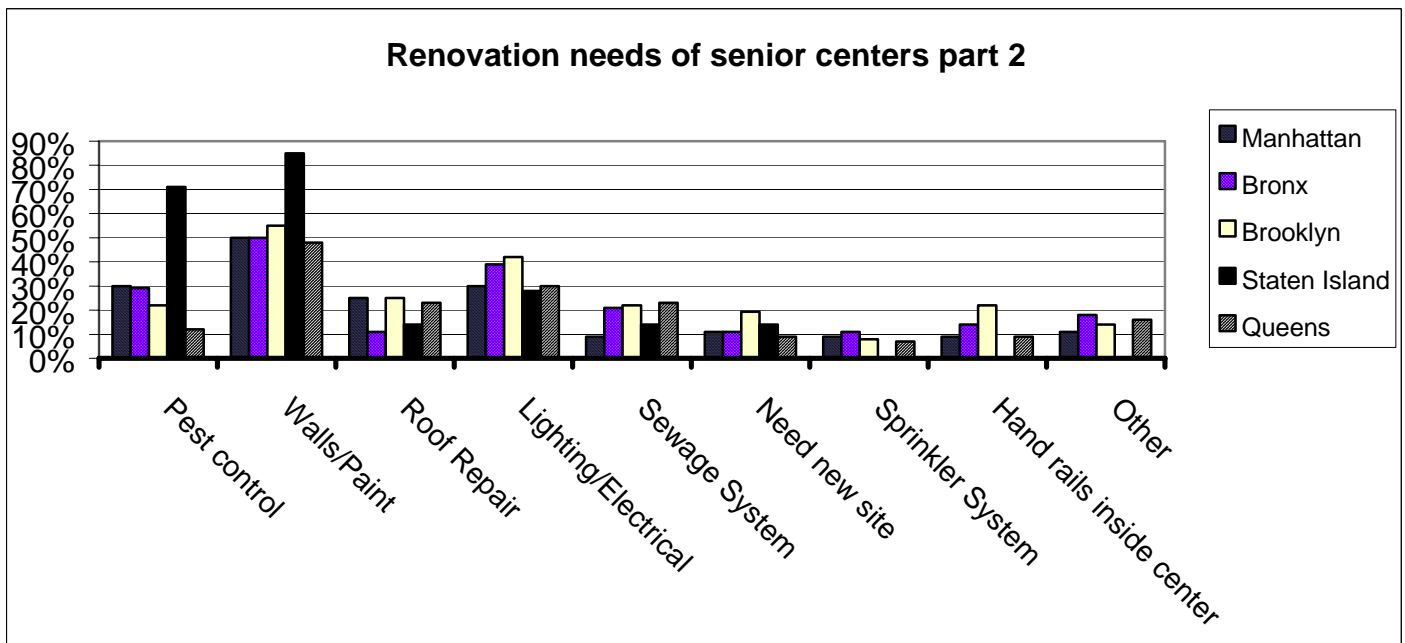
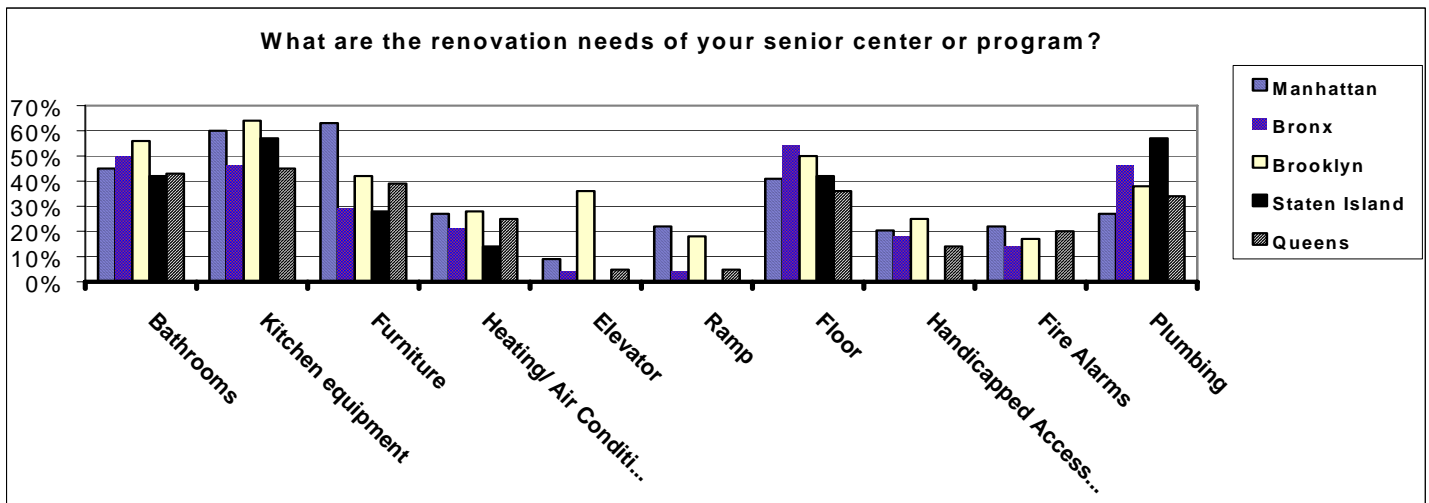
**Type of program:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Case management
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adult day services
- \_\_\_\_\_ NORCs
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meals-on-wheels (not located in senior centers)
- \_\_\_\_\_ other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_



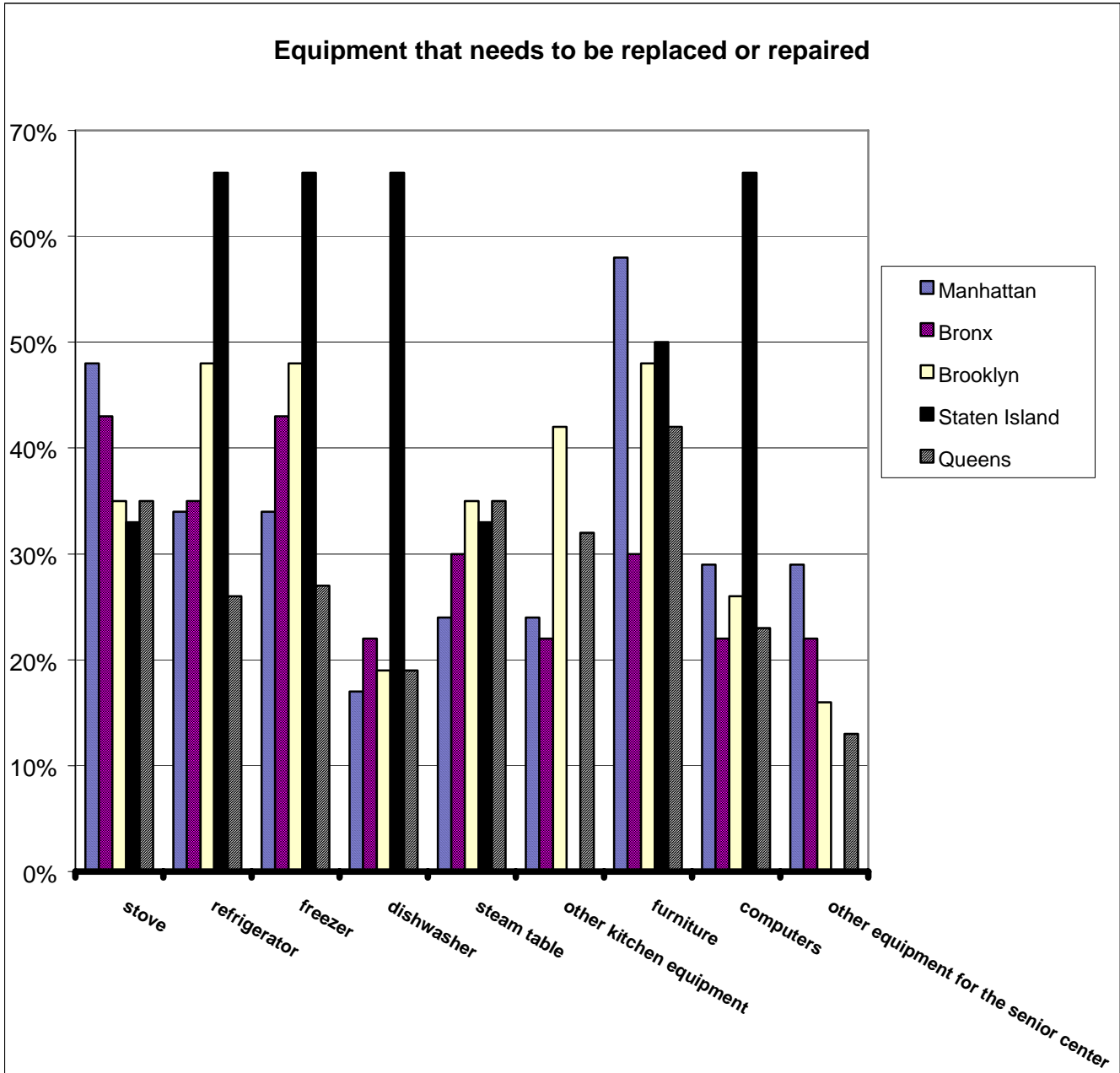
4. What are the renovation needs of your senior center or program? (Check all that apply):

- |                                |                                   |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Bathrooms _____                | Handicapped Accessibility _____   |
| Kitchen Equipment _____        | Fire Alarms _____ Furniture _____ |
| Plumbing _____                 |                                   |
| Heating/Air Conditioning _____ | Pest Control _____                |
| Elevator _____                 | Walls/Paint _____                 |
| Ramp _____                     | Roof Repair _____                 |
| Floor _____                    | Lighting/Electrical _____         |
| Sewage System _____            | Hand rails inside center _____    |
| Need new site _____            | Other (specify) _____             |
| Sprinkler system _____         |                                   |

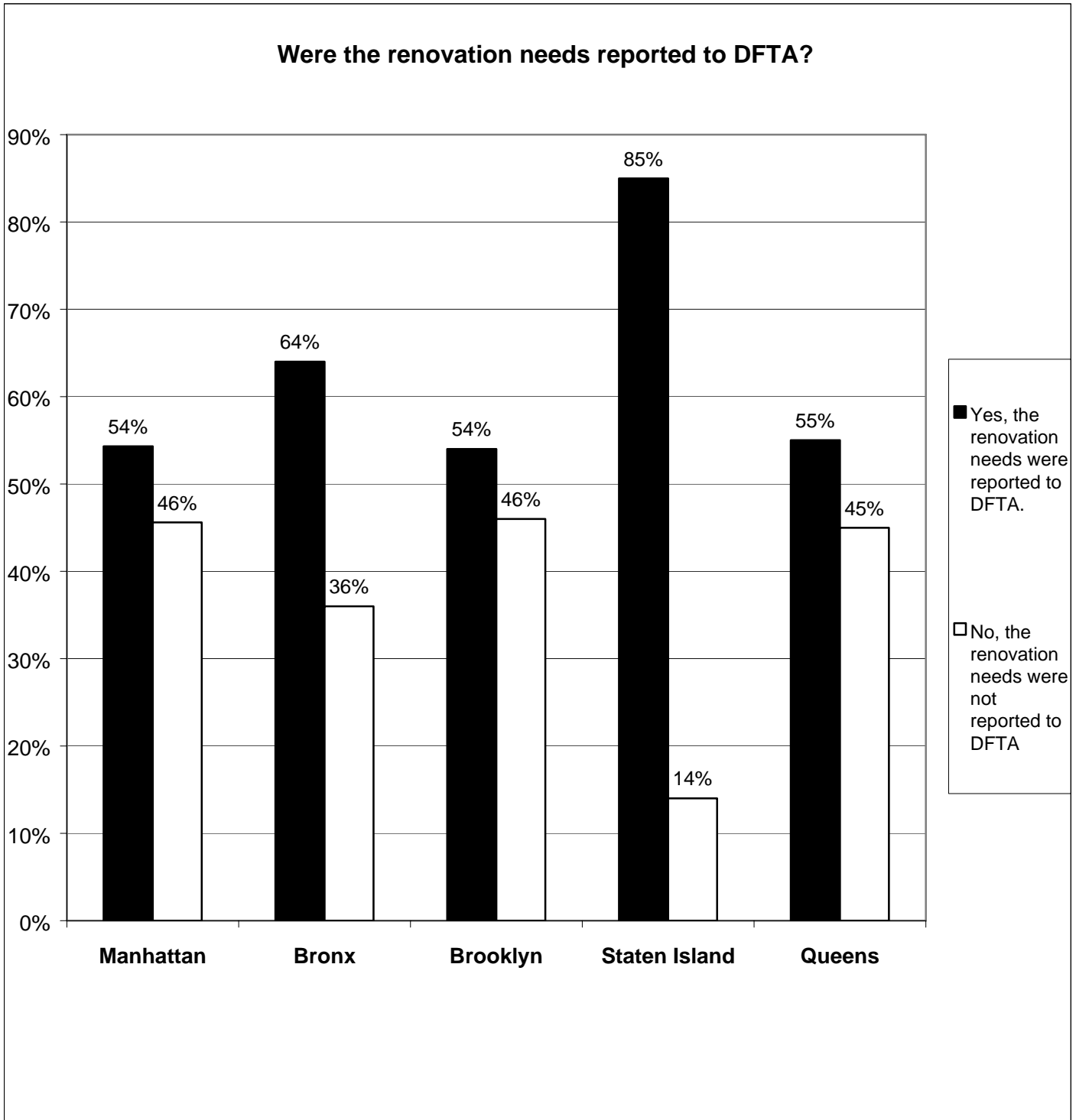


**5. Describe equipment that needs repair or replacement:**

- stove
- refrigerator
- freezer
- dishwasher
- steam table
- (other kitchen equipment – please specify)
- furniture
- computers
- other equipment in the senior center



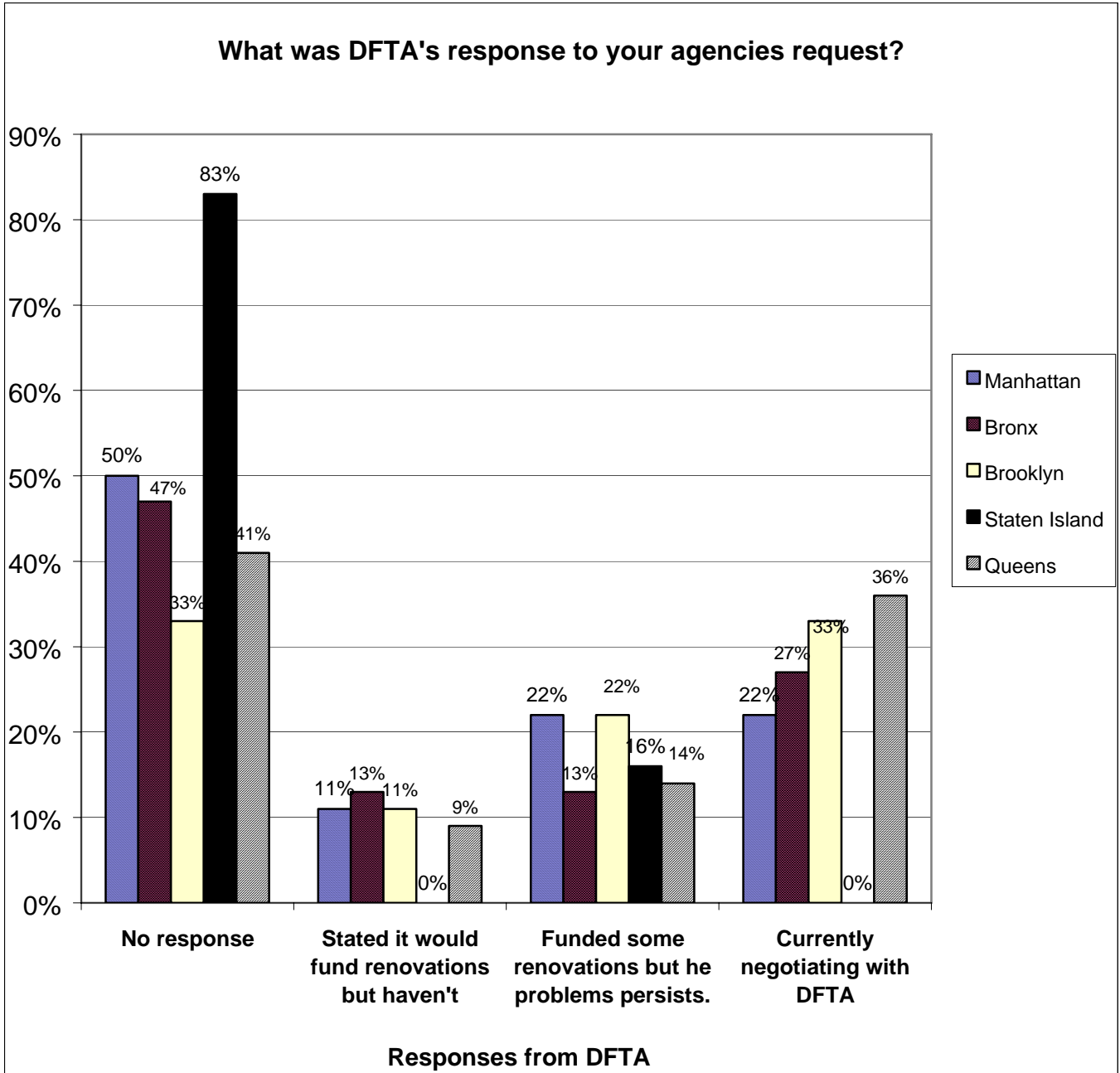
6. Have you reported the renovation needs to DFTA: \_\_yes \_\_ no  
If so, what date \_\_\_\_\_



**6B. If you reported it, what was the response? (check all that applies)**

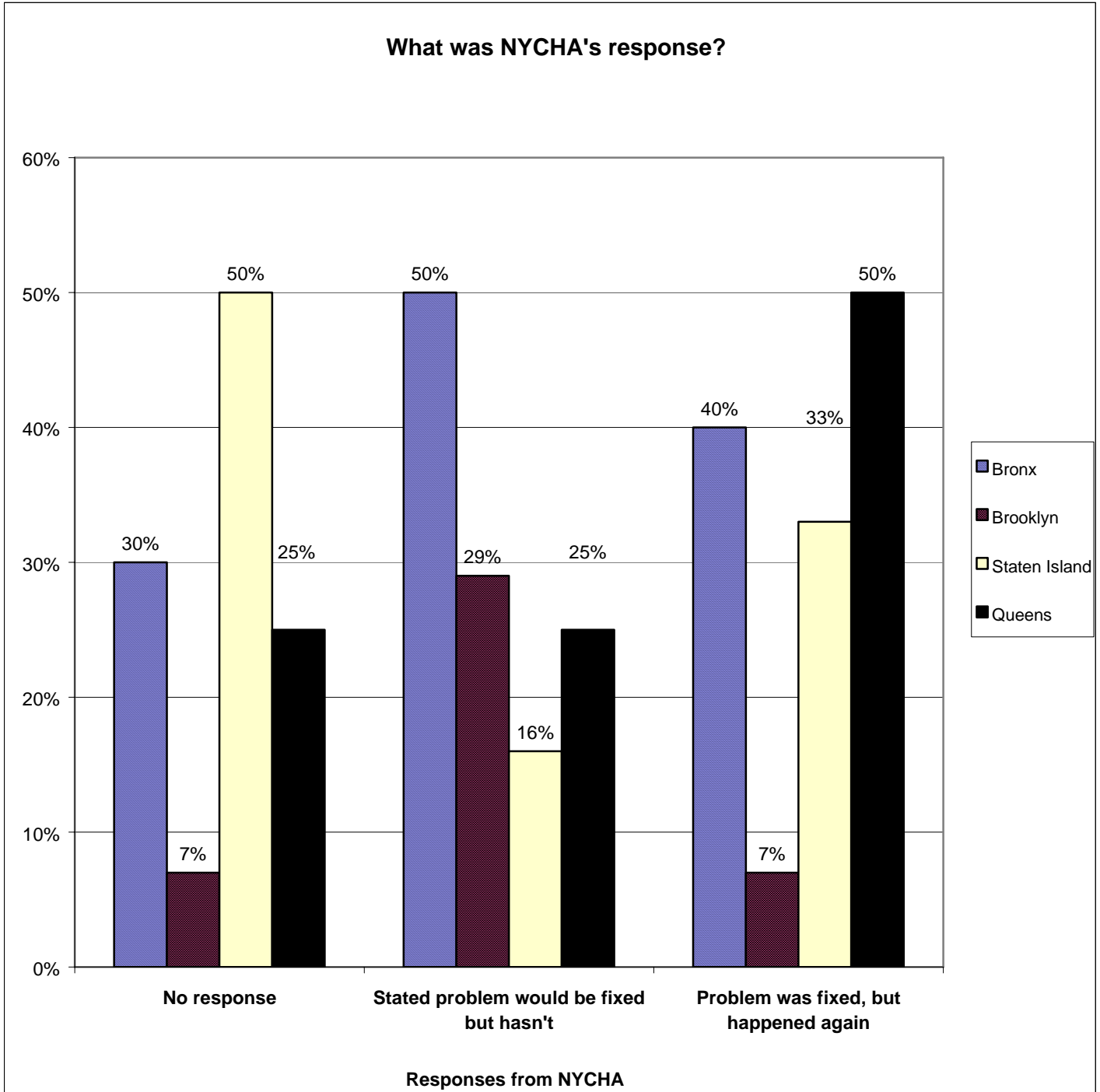
DFTA:

- no response
- currently negotiating with DFTA for funding
- stated they would fund the renovations, but haven't
- funded some renovations, but the problem happened again  
(specify) \_\_\_\_\_



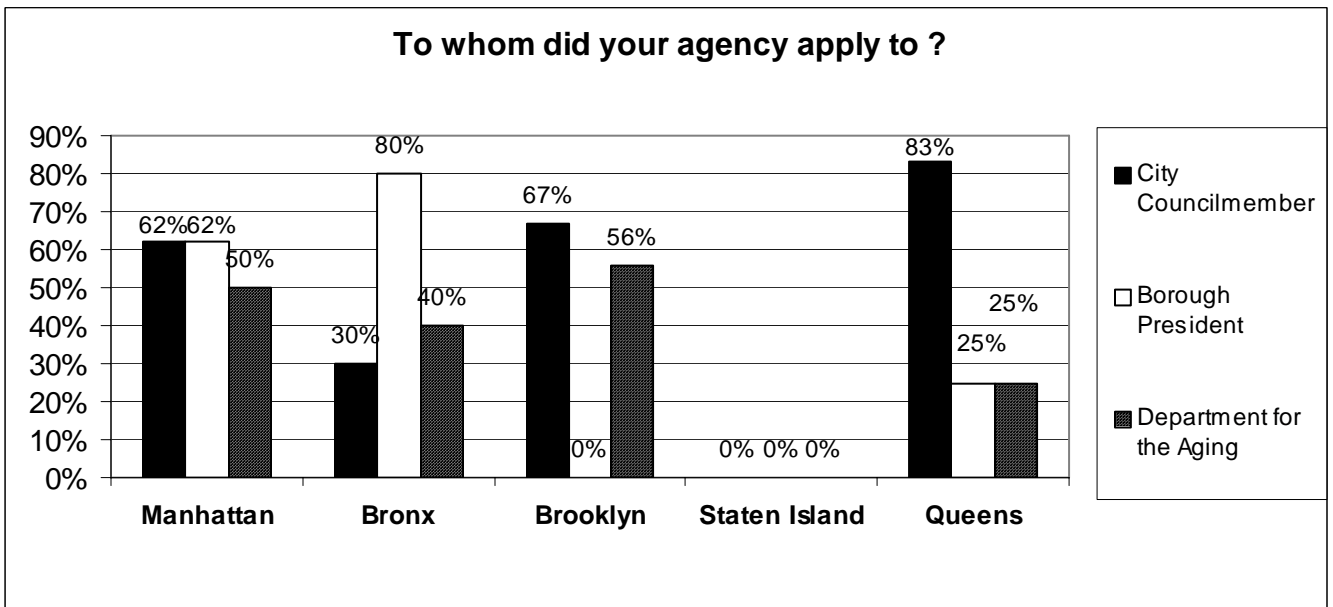
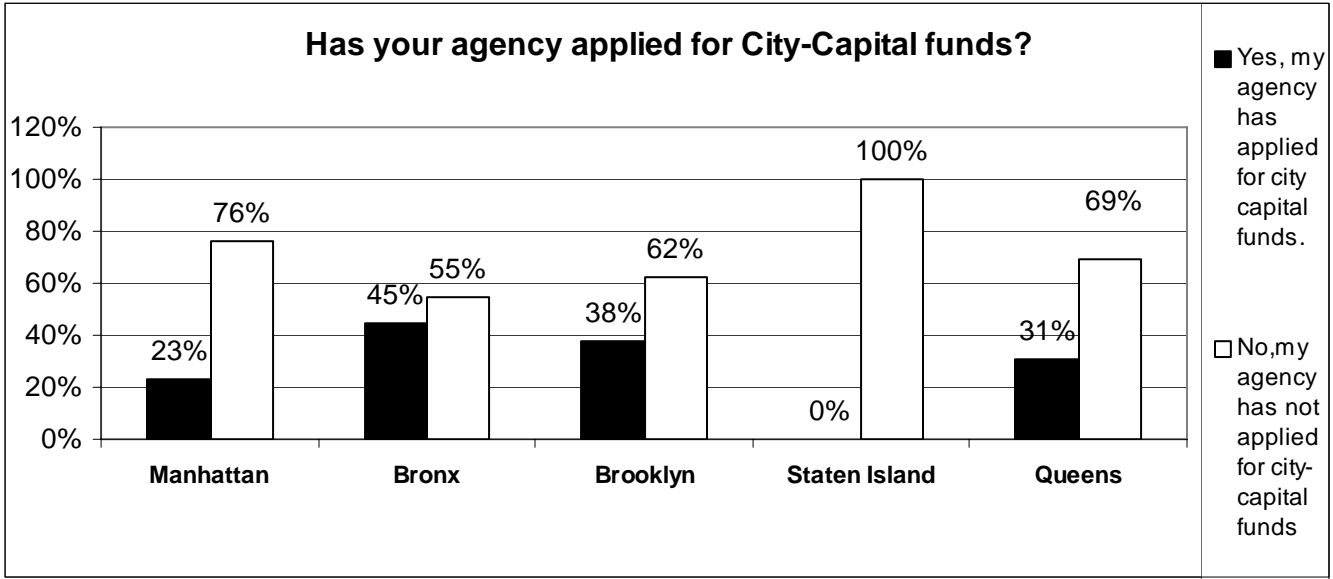
6C. NYCHA response to renovation needs:

- \_\_\_ no response
- \_\_\_ currently negotiating with NYCHA for funding or renovations
- \_\_\_ stated they would fix it, but haven't
- \_\_\_ fixed it, but the problem happened again  
(specify problem) \_\_\_\_\_



**7. City Capital Funds:**  
**a. Has your agency applied for City Capital funds? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no**  
**If yes, who did you apply to and when (check all that apply):**

\_\_\_\_\_ City Councilmember(s) - Please name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Borough President - Please name \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Department for the Aging



7B. Did you receive the capital funds? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

If no, why not? (check all that apply)

\_\_\_ Ineligible because in non-city owned property

\_\_\_ Ineligible because in a religious institution

\_\_\_ Needed under \$500,000 (minimum amount for capital dollars)

\_\_\_ Awarded capital funds but haven't received them yet  
when were the funds awarded - \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

