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My name is George Janes and I'm the Executive Director of the Environmental Simulation Center. The ESC is a not-for-profit organization that specializes in applying technology to planning and design problems.

Late in 2005 Capalino + Company conducted a field survey of land uses along the Gowanus Canal in the Industrial Business Zone. They have asked the ESC to examine that field survey and compare it to New York City's official database of land uses, Primary Land Use Tax Lot Output (PLUTO).

In the absence of a future land use plan for the area, it is fair to assume that existing land uses should help guide policy decisions like the IBZ boundaries. The most recent PLUTO data show 47% of the land in the Canal area in industrial or manufacturing uses, while just 6% of the land is vacant; supporting the idea that much of the Canal's area supports industrial and manufacturing, and vacancy is low.

The field survey tells a somewhat different story. Manufacturing and industrial uses account for 32% of the land uses in the Canal, while more than half of those uses are warehousing & distribution uses, which include large spaces employing few people. Subtracting warehousing & distribution uses, 15% of the Canal's land use is in manufacturing and industrial uses.

Which begs the question, just what is going on in the Canal?

According to the field survey, 34% of the area is vacant land, vacant building, or parking. Seven percent is now commercial. Much commercial development, like the Lowe's development to the south, can be done as-of-right. Many "big-box" retail uses are allowed in M-zones. These uses often have trouble finding suitable sites in New York City and may be attracted to the Canal's relatively large sites, access, and ability to develop as-of-right.

Uses that are allowed as-of-right in M1 an/or M2 districts include:

- Local retail
- Transient hotels*
- Hospitals*, hospital staff housing*
- Office buildings
- Mini-storage
- Automobile showrooms and services
- Movie, recording and art studios
- Trade schools
- Artists in residence***

* Not allowed "as-of-right" in M2 districts

** Limitation on size

*** With certification by the Dept of Cultural Affairs and Fire Dept.

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The field survey shows some of these uses moving into the Canal. A transient hotel is here, artists-in-residence structures here and here, a music studio/school and a fencing school here. Each of the sites I just mentioned are currently described as industrial or manufacturing uses in the City's database. The data suggest if the Pluto database was used to help define the boundaries of the IBZ in the Gowanus area, other data sources should be considered.

If the City wants to preserve land for industrial space and industrial jobs, then the approach it takes should be effective. The Gowanus Canal data show that simply keeping the M-zone designation won't necessarily lead to preserving industrial space and industrial jobs. We have already seen big box retail enter this area, and the portions of the Canal with low utilization and large lots may very well attract these uses that are in demand and which are looking for a suitable home in the City.

In conclusion, changing land uses along the Gowanus Canal and their relation to the Zoning Resolution is a complicated issue, which calls for a more comprehensive examination and perhaps a plan or planning framework to help guide future land use policy decisions along the Canal.