

125th Street/River to River study

Advisory Committee comments

April 28, 2004

Development

There are many unrecognized historic resources in Harlem. Historic preservation should be a priority in this study, perhaps meriting its own specialized category.

New commercial construction tends to be aesthetically unattractive, lacks architectural innovation and does not reflect Harlem's historic architectural character. 125th Street is a unique corridor and should be treated with architectural sensitivity.

Several recent development proposals in the East Harlem Triangle area are happening without adequate community input.

125th Street has lots of one-story buildings. These are opportunities for new development.

The critical mass of national chains has been reached. The city should emphasize preservation of local businesses to maintain a balanced diversity of retail uses. However, a greater variety of retail (including some stores that are present downtown) may be appropriate on 125th Street so that residents do not have to travel downtown to shop.

There is a need for a comprehensive housing strategy to address the need for affordable housing. In addition, attention should be paid to NYCHA tenants' associations if proposed developments would affect NYCHA residents.

The city seems purposely vague in describing development opportunities. Legitimate public participation must be part of this planning process.

The study should include an analysis of upper-story vacancies on 125th Street (patterned after a similar study in the South Bronx).

The private ULURP application for the rezoning of Harlem Hotel site should not take place separately from a potential corridor-wide rezoning.

The rezoning proposal should consider MX zones that allow a diversity of uses. The city should also consider zoning districts that have low retail square footage to preserve local businesses and also consider new opportunities for light industry.

Some new commercial signs are out-of-scale and detract from the corridor.

The city should consider zoning bonuses and tax incentives to encourage local businesses and cultural organization in new developments

In addition to 125th Street, the city should explore potential residential and retail opportunities along the intersecting avenues.

The city should investigate other cities' mechanisms for monitoring design.

Transportation

Phase I of the proposed Second Avenue subway should serve East Harlem through 125th Street instead of stopping at 96th Street.

The study should evaluate the feasibility of light-rail service along 125th Street.

In addition to traffic congestion, the study should include specific recommendations to improve pedestrian mobility to create a more walkable community.

The 1967 Model Cities plan recommended transportation solutions on 124th and 126th streets. These recommendations never came to fruition and should be revisited.

Culture

New culture-related activities are critical to the revitalization of 125th Street. Cultural development activities should not necessarily target tourists, but should also attract NYC residents. Culture-related uses enhance the demand for restaurants and related business activities.

Urban Design

The city should use caution in approaching the idea of a “24-hour” corridor. Noise pollution is an issue in the residential neighborhoods surrounding 125th Street during the day and night. However, enhancing some night-time activities is important.

Pests are a problem, perhaps more around 125th Street than other parts of the city.

Environment

The city should implement LEEDS standards in all new commercial construction

Waterfront

The west-side waterfront around 125th Street is inundated by city services including a salt pile, the bus depot, and the Marine Transfer Station facility. These items should be removed.

Salt piles should be covered to reduce impacts on surrounding uses.

Process/Timeline

The planning process should include binding requirements to ensure that community recommendations are integrated in a meaningful way over the long-term.

The Department of Sanitation should be included in the interagency team.

The planning process should ensure continued benefits to minority populations. Examples should be considered from other cities, including Atlanta and Washington DC. The city should define the beneficiaries of the opportunities that are proposed.

Establish a communications process to ensure clarity

The city should hire black and Latino participants for the interagency team.

The interagency team should clarify its communication process with the Advisory Committee, especially for notifications of future meetings.

Make sure that all future venues have proper acoustics so that all comments can be heard.