

SUMMARY OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMENTS

At the June 23rd meeting, approximately 60 representatives from several civic and cultural groups and community residents participated in the Streetscape meeting, the first topic-specific 125th Street Study meeting.

After a brief presentation about the different streetscape elements on 125th Street, attendees broke out into discussion groups and shared opinions about street furniture, public art, vending and utilities. The groups also discussed ways to achieve the 125th Street streetscape goals of **Identity**, **Continuity** and **Amenity**. Streetscape elements can create a sense of identity on the commercial and cultural corridor. Continuity is another important aspect of streetscape and could establish a clear visual relationship along the entire 125th Street corridor. Streetscape elements can also be a great amenity by contributing to the overall aesthetic of the street and performing basic utility functions.

The following comments are intended to reflect the dialogue that took place during the streetscape meeting and will be considered by the interagency team as preliminary recommendations are refined. The Advisory Committee and the public will have the opportunity to review the team's preliminary recommendations at several points before the final Streetscape Design Guidelines document is issued during the winter of 2004.

Identity: Streetscape should reinforce the unique character of 125th Street.

What defines 125th Street's character?

- 125th Street is Harlem's "Main Street" and its unique cultural and political history needs to be expressed through new streetscape elements.
- 125th Street's character is defined by its mix of uses. Harlem residents and visitors come to 125th Street for the unique shops, concessions, and cultural venues.
- An active pedestrian environment defines 125th Street and is an existing asset. Certain sidewalk obstacles, including some existing vendors and street furnishings, should be addressed.
- 125th Street is a commercial *and* cultural corridor. There should be more public art on 125th Street such as rotating temporary installations, banners, and other projects on streets, sidewalks, and subway projects. There should be public art opportunities for local African American and Latin American artists.
- Signage and awnings should reflect the community's identity as well as convey the individuality of the corridor's businesses. Large commercial signs should be evaluated in future zoning discussions.
- Previous streetscape plans should inform the current effort.
- Future zoning discussions will influence the streetscape discussion.

Continuity: Streetscape should establish a coherent experience from river to river.

How could visual continuity be accomplished?

- Pedestrians should be encouraged to travel from river to river. Placing sidewalk plaques along the entire corridor to tell the story of local heroes and important sites is a compelling way to draw people along the street.
- Equally-spaced overhead elements could also create a sense of continuity. An example of such an element could be flags of every African nation.
- Current lighting is unmemorable and insufficient; it does not speak to the uniqueness of the corridor. The spatial consistency of lighting is more important than design uniformity. However, consistent lighting placement and uniform design could create a canopy effect over the street.
- A way-finding signage system that incorporates historic and cultural references could serve a dual purpose: to promote a unified 125th Street while, at the same time, express the differing character along the corridor.

- Subway stops serve as prominent gateways to 125th Street. Well-designed, coordinated “portals” around the subway entrances could contribute to visual continuity.
- The western and eastern extension of the 125th Street BID district would be the best option for funding improvements and maintaining elements that establish continuity.

Amenity: Streetscape should create an accessible, safe and pleasant environment.

What elements could be added or removed to improve the way they serve the public?

- Adam Clayton Powell Plaza should be a very important public amenity. In order to make the space livelier and more inviting, public art, trees, and bicycle racks should be provided, the seating should also be reconfigured, the lighting improved, and day- and night-time programs should be explored.
- Real and perceived security issues are a concern. Lighting improvements, especially at the eastern and western extremes of the corridor, would improve the corridor. Fences and barbed wire also contribute to the negative image of 125th Street and should be removed.
- Roll-down gates do not positively contribute to the pedestrian environment. See-through or mesh gates could provide an additional lighting. Well-designed and creative gates could also provide surfaces for community artists. Different uses, such as cafes and clubs, would also help light the street.
- There is not enough seating for pedestrians, especially for the elderly and tourists. The open-slab bench and the tree-guard benches are good seating options.
- More trees should be planted on 125th Street. The trees that exist are small and subject to abuse from vehicles and pedestrians. A stewardship program could help improve the trees and plantings on 125th Street.
- Information kiosks are needed at more regular intervals along the corridor. The daily demands of nearby residents need to be balanced with the interests of tourists. Another resource for visitors that should be considered is public restrooms.
- Trash on the street is problematic. Local stakeholder involvement in the 24-hour upkeep of the street should be fostered. More garbage cans would have a very positive effect on the street.
- Waterfront access on the East side is crucial. This area could be a great public amenity and should be a design priority.