

ZONING WORKSHOP

Group Discussion Notes

26 January 2005

Summary of Key Points

1. Promote mixed-use development
2. Preserve continuous ground floor retail character
3. Encourage more residents on 125th Street to achieve a balance of uses and expand the life of the street into the evening
4. Develop and market commercial office space and provide career opportunities for local residents
5. Target greater density to segments that can accommodate it such as the Central Business District and Regional focus area
6. Explore contextual zoning with height restrictions to protect historic areas
7. Maintain the unique historic character of the CB10 area (mention streets)
8. Develop a "community benefit agreement" to ensure local advantage from greater density
9. Preserve light, air, and major view corridors
10. Ensure maximum participation by all Community Boards, stakeholders, residents and Columbia University



river to river

Compilation of all Comments

Mixed Use

- Mixed use is a good idea; Participants talked about commercial/retail on the street, an office floor above, and residential over office
- Mix uses would be a good for the street but would not like to see greater heights all around; would like to see medium density, not high density.
- Support for mixed-use development; recognize that this would mean making recommendations for increases in density.
- There is a strong need for mixed use development. Mixed-use development was seen as very important to all group members.
- Encourage mix of uses and greater diversity of businesses
- Encourage mix of commercial development and trade with jobs for local residents.
- Parking structures may not be an appropriate type for 125th Street as it breaks continuity with the surrounding uses

Residential use

- Support for more residential uses on 125th Street in order to expand the life of the street into the evening hours
- Residential use on the 125th Street corridor should not interrupt retail along the ground floor
- Residential space is not too important; Group participants felt that people may not want to live on a busy street. Mixed feelings expressed with a conclusion that residential space is acceptable as long as there is a balance (i.e. residential space not considered a priority over commercial space)
- Emphasis should not just be placed on the need for a residential component along the corridor; it should be balanced by a diversity of uses
- Residential units should be located around the transportation nodes intersections. The bulk of the buildings should be setback to preserve the openness that exists today.

Economic Development and Jobs

- How can we protect existing businesses while promoting economic development?
- Economic development activity proposed for the area between Park Avenue and Second Avenue
- Strong need for commercial office space along the 125th Street corridor. According to participants there needs to be a series of strategies implemented that would market commercial office space
- Bringing more commercial space to the corridor would allow for the creation of better jobs. Most retail jobs are low wage paying jobs. Group interested in seeing jobs that have the potential for career ladder opportunities.
- Historically, 125th Street has been a regional shopping area. 125th Street history is grounded in its important commercial activity.
- Would like to see more diversified employment. Retail jobs are low wage and have a low level of job retention
- Great concern on how to achieve economic vitality with a density that is not too aggressive.
- Jobs in itself not sufficient, there needs to be a mechanism to give back to the community. Levy a fee on developers and create bonds for local business incentives and activate community life and cultural activities. (This concept was named "Community Benefit Agreement")

Height, Massing, and Density

- There were two areas that the Group Members identified on the Zoning Map that could benefit from greater density. These areas are (1) the Central Business District and (2) the Regional Focus area.
- Height restriction is very important in the historic portion of the corridor; Group recognized that density will rise as a whole from existing conditions but would like to see lowest practical FAR to be applied to the CB 10 area. Want to see no more than 12-14 story buildings. Group would like to see no new buildings higher than the historic Theresa Hotel. Expect that the corridor will be higher to the east and west. Mentioned the notion of a height valley towards the historic core.
- 125th Street should have contextual zoning
- Consider 125th Street as a Special Purpose District

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- FAR of 6 – 10 may be appropriate between Park and Second
- Taller buildings may be allowed in the following areas (circled on map)
 - North side of 125th Street between Morningside Ave and Frederick Douglass Blvd. (includes site just east of Frederick Douglass)
 - North side of 125th and 126th Streets between Park Avenue and First Avenue
- Place taller buildings on north side of the street. We should not have tall building blocking sunlight and views
- Lower heights along the southern edge of the street and higher heights in the north side to prevent street being in shadow all day long.
- Limit building footprints to prevent shadowing of the street
- Concern expressed about the height of future buildings. How high is too high?
- Re-evaluate the concept of placement of tall buildings in the corner? Corner buildings may cause shadows that would impact the diagonal lots and the street.
- Distance between towers should be considered carefully so we don't have a wall of tall buildings
- Apply sky exposure plane at the rear of the lots on the north side of 125th street, in order to protect light on 126th street especially on blocks with the historic brownstones
- Discussion about requiring lower heights on lots fronting 126th street on the south side, like Gotham Plaza, which steeps down towards 126th street with the parking structure.

Urban Design

- Protect school yard on 126th between Frederick Douglass Blvd. and Adam Clayton Powell Jr.
- Preserve vistas by ensuring that tall buildings are setback from the Lenox Avenue. North-South corridors should preserve the wide vistas that they offer now
- Preserve a low rise vista along Lenox Avenue
- Plaza at State Office building should be treated carefully to preserve light in the plaza. It should become a centerpiece for the community
- Ensure that State Office Building Plaza is not shaded

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- Would like to see the elimination of roll down gates along the corridor which causes a sense of unattractiveness along the corridor
- What is the common thread along the corridor? Maybe it is transportation. Culturally the three CBs are very different and are expressed differently in use and physical fabric.
- General agreement with the urban design sub areas as shown on the map; group members perceived the corridor more in terms of the CB boundaries
- Proposal for new commercial use in buildings along 125th Street between the Grant Houses
- Regional shopping centers should be along the Avenue and not necessarily along the 125th Street Corridor
- There should be a mechanism for funding culture and identity as part of a "community benefit agreement"

Historic Preservation

- Consider the uniqueness of the CB 10 area as a historic district. Preservation and respect for context is key for this area
- There is a potential historic district between Morningside and Lenox
- Preserve historic character in the block between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and Lenox Avenue (south side)
- Historic preservation of key landmark buildings and/or facilities along the corridor should be carefully reviewed. Buildings should be looked at on a case by case basis.
- Preserve the following: Bishop Building and Blumstein

Community Participation

- 125th Street spans three Community Boards; Zoning benefits all three Boards; all three must sit together at the same table for discussions such as these
- More community members to participate in this process. Want residents to be part of the process not just groups and vested interests
- Would like to see Columbia University be a part of every meeting

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Other questions and concerns

- What is the Zoning / FAR on streets such as 86th, 72nd, 92nd?
- Why did a rezoning occur if we are working on a rezoning plan now? Come to us before a plan for the corridor is done.
- Why don't you get on the agenda of the regular Community Board meetings in addition to separate meetings?
- Transportation should be added to the list of goals when the City looks at the framework for the 125th Street corridor
- Ownership of the corridor should be identified in order to understand the impact of the increase in density, and who will ultimately benefit
- Is it really possible to protect the brownstones for air and light through zoning?