



Morrisania Air Rights Housing Development

EXISTING STATIONS

MELROSE



MELROSE

FILLING IN THE GAPS



INTRODUCTION

SYNOPSIS

The Melrose Metro-North Station is located along East 162nd Street between Park and Courtlandt Avenues at the edge of the Morrisania, Melrose and Concourse Village neighborhoods of the Bronx. It is located approximately midway on the 161st /163rd Street corridor spanning from Jerome Avenue on the west and Westchester Avenue on the east. This corridor was identified in PlaNYC as one of the Bronx's three primary business districts, and contains many regional attractions and civic amenities including Yankee Stadium, the Bronx County Courthouse, and the Bronx Hall of Justice. A large portion of the station area is located within the Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Area, and has seen tremendous growth and reinvestment in the past decades, with Courtlandt Corners, Boricua College, Boricua Village and the future Bronx Music Heritage Center all within a close proximity of the station. The station area is also approximately half a mile from the Hub, another of the borough's primary business districts. Despite these assets and recent revitalization, years of uncoordinated public and private investment have created an incohesive urban fabric.

Significant improvements throughout the corridor could bolster land uses, access, and bridge the gap between neighborhoods, community assets, and business districts. This section examines these potential improvements in an array of categories, and identifies several linchpin sites critical to the future success of the corridor and accessibility to the station.

“ The South Bronx is undergoing an incredible transformation. The longest and most community-driven part of this transformation is in the Melrose neighborhood which is rich in history and culture. WHEDco is honored to bring life the fruits of a decades-long planning effort with its new Bronx Commons project.”

| Nancy Biberman, CEO, Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation (WHEDco) |

HISTORY

The history of the Melrose area is particularly important not only because it is representative of the story of the South Bronx, but because it shaped the physical form and features which are Melrose today.

The area surrounding the Melrose station was originally part of the vast Morris family estate. In the mid-nineteenth century, the family granted railroad access through the estate to the New York and Harlem Rail Road (the predecessor to the Harlem Line). In the 1870s, this part of the Bronx was annexed into New York City, and the Third Avenue Elevated was soon extended to the area. Elevated and subway mass transit prompted large population growth in the neighborhood, and soon 5-6 story tenements replaced one- and two-family homes.

Typical of the Bronx, a majority of this growth was comprised of immigrant populations, namely Irish, Italian and Jewish Americans. This time period, the early decades of the twentieth century, also coincided with the construction of Yankee Stadium and the Bronx County Courthouse along 161st Street, establishing the corridor—especially at its intersection with the Grand Concourse—as one of the most vital in the Borough. After World War II, the immigration patterns into the Bronx began to shift; whereas the families leaving the Bronx were generally middle income, new residents and those that stayed were generally lower income. The combination of these demographic shifts left the City with a shrinking tax base and less monetary resources to allocate



FIGURE 1 | Melrose Station platform, East 162nd Street between Park and Courtlandt Avenue.

COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS | Melrose Study Area

Metro-North Station Weekday Ridership (2011)



13 inbound passengers
126 outbound passengers

NYC Subway Station Daily Ridership (2012)*

- D 161st St-Yankee Stadium: 27,604 weekday | 35,820 weekend
- 2 3rd Ave-149th St: 24,580 weekday | 25,356 weekend
- 4 149th St-Grand Concourse: 13,599 weekday | 13,024 weekend

- Melrose has a strong presence of subsidized and public housing; Melrose Houses has 2,670 residents, Andrew Jackson Houses 2,570 residents, and Morrisania Air Rights 1,952 residents.⁴ This is also evident in the high renter occupied unit percentage, 89%.
- The area has a large African-American community compared to the Bronx at large.
- The Melrose neighborhood has seen a dramatic increase in population, growing faster than the overall city average.

	STUDY AREA ^{1,2}	THE BRONX	NEW YORK CITY
Hispanic	58%	53%	29%
African-American	47%	35%	22.8%
Renter Occupied Units	89%	79%	68%
Housing Units with No Access to a Vehicle	74%	59%	56%
With Access to One Vehicle	23%	30%	31%
Take Public Transit or Walk to Work	76%	64%	67%
Population Density (per square mile)	68,800	32,536	26,953
Unemployment Rate (2010)	9%	12%	11%
TOTAL POPULATION	42,708	1,365,725	8,336,697

¹ The study area is based on select Census tracts within a 1/2 mile radius of the Melrose station. ² United States Bureau of the Census, 2006-2010 American community Survey 5-Year Estimates. ⁴ NYCHA. http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/html/developments/dev_guide.shtml
* MTA Subway Ridership, 2012. http://www.mta.info/nyct/facts/ridership/#chart_s



FIGURE 2 | Charlotte Street in the South Bronx, circa 1980. The South Bronx, including the Melrose neighborhood, became a national symbol for urban decay during the 1970s and 1980s due to the rise in vacant lots, fires, drugs, and violence.
 Source: John Fekne / CC-BY-SA-3.0, via Wikimedia Commons from Wikimedia Commons

towards public services. By the late 1970s, New York City was on the brink of bankruptcy, the 3rd Avenue Elevated Rail ceased operations in the Bronx, and the South Bronx became a national symbol of urban decay. This trend continued in Melrose through 1980's.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, several community groups and grassroots organizations rallied to bring new life and resurgence to the South Bronx. The Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Area was established for large portions of the neighborhood through col-

laboration between community groups and the City of New York.

Over the past few decades, with sustained investment from the city and private sectors, Melrose has experienced an amazing rebirth. Blocks where only one or two buildings remained in the early 1980s have been completely transformed and reconstructed. Community groups and affordable housing developers, working in collaboration with the City, have resurrected large areas. Along 161st Street,

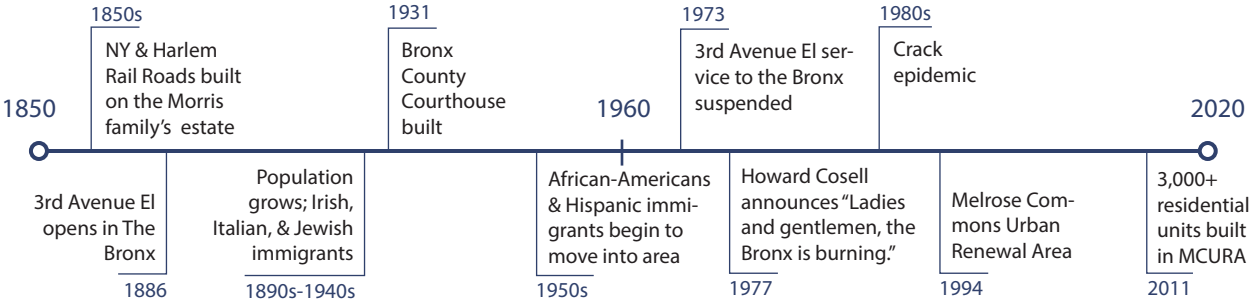


FIGURE 3 | Melrose Neighborhood timeline.



FIGURE 4 | Hayden Lord Park reconstruction in 2013. DreamYard, a local youth advocacy arts group, led the initiative to rehabilitate the park, adding mosaics, landscaping, and farming. The Melrose neighborhood has transformed in large part due to local and youth-based initiatives. Source: DreamYard. <http://dreamyardproject.wordpress.com/>

new capital investment can be seen in the Bronx Hall of Justice, reconstruction of Yankee Stadium and the new Yankees 153rd Street Metro-North Station, as well as the numerous mixed use developments within the Melrose Commons URA.

KEY FEATURES

The Melrose Metro-North Station is located one block from the East 161st Street commercial corridor which has been identified in PlaNYC as one of the borough's three primary business districts. The sections below discuss the key features in and around the corridor.

Public Housing

The Morrisania Air Rights facility is a series of three New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) public housing towers, 19, 23 and 29 stories tall. They are unique in terms of location because, as the name suggests, they were built utilizing the 'air rights' from MTA's Metro North rail corridor, and are located directly above the tracks, immediately south of the station entrance. Completed in 1980, the project consists of 843 apartment units and roughly 1,834 residents.

Aside from Morrisania Air Rights, several other NYCHA housing projects are within walking distance of the Melrose Metro North station. The largest of these includes President Andrew Jackson Houses and Melrose Houses, both located south of the station. Completed in 1952, Melrose Houses is a complex composed of eight 14 story buildings. Its 1,019 apartments house approximately 2,476 people. Roughly a decade later Jackson Houses was completed, in 1963. This project has seven 16 story buildings with 868 apartment units, and houses about 2,354 people.

Institutional Buildings

West of the station, East 161st Street hosts multiple institutional buildings near its intersection with the Grand Concourse, including the Bronx Supreme Court, the Bronx Criminal Court, the Bronx Hall of Justice, as well as several government offices, including those of the Borough President. The courts employ roughly 1,500 people within the area, and bring over 3,000 additional people into the area daily through routine jury duty and other legal obligations.



Land Uses

- One and Two Family Homes
- Multi-Family Walkups
- Multi-family Elevator buildings
- Mixed Com/Residential Buildings
- Commercial Buildings
- Institutional Buildings
- Manufacturing Buildings
- Transportation/Utility Buildings
- Park/Open Space
- Parking Lots
- Vacant Land

Transportation

- Metro North Harlem Line
- B/D Subway Lines
- Bus Routes
- 4 Subway Line

Notable Land Uses Features:

- ① Multi-family walkups north of the station, in addition to a mix of commercial buildings
- ② High density residential buildings, particularly along East 156th Street
- ③ Commercial and institutional buildings west of the station, especially along Concourse Village East
- ④ Manufacturing buildings east of the station

Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Area

The Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Area plan, is a community development plan established in the 1990s (see Figure 6). City owned properties which have been redeveloped under the Urban Renewal Plan have resulted in more than 25 new residential and mixed-use developments which have resulted in the construction of over 3300 residential units, affordable units for seniors, permanent housing for previously homeless New Yorkers, the development of Boricua College and Boricua Village, and will soon include the Bronx Music Heritage Center and affordable housing for musicians.

Commercial Hub

South of the station area, the Hub is located at the confluence of 3rd Avenue, 149th Street, Melrose Avenue and Westchester Avenue, making a 'bow-tie' intersection. The Hub has historically been the largest shopping district in the Borough. In the depression-era it was characterized by many movie palaces and vaudeville theaters, including the Bronx Opera House and the Jackson Theater. Today it has a number of stores at various scales, housing both local businesses and national chains.

Yankee Stadium

Further down the 161st Street Corridor, west of the station area and the Courthouses, Yankee Stadium sits between the Harlem River and the 4 train on River Avenue. This stadium, the home of the New York Yankees, was opened in 2009 across the street from the original Yankee Stadium. It houses roughly 81 home games a year between April and September, and additional games in October when the Yankees make the playoffs. The stadium has a capacity of roughly 50,000, and attracts over 3.2 million spectators annually.¹ Additionally, the stadium has hosted large scale concert venues.

TRANSPORTATION

The Melrose Metro-North station is located on East 162nd Street, between Park Avenue and Courtlandt Avenue. It is separated from the primary commercial corridor, East 161st Street, by the Morrisania Air Rights housing project and Railroad Park. Prior to the NYCHA housing, the station was located along 161st Street, and even afterwards had a presence along the corridor, with station entrances located under the plaza along the north side of the street. The station was shifted northward in 2006 because of community concerns over safety. While the plat-

form now benefits from daylighting, the location of the entrance is isolated from the activity provided by the corridor.

The station provides access south to Grand Central Terminal in roughly 19 minutes, and provides access north all the way to Wassaic, with key stops at Bronxville, Mount Vernon West, Scarsdale and White Plains. Transfer is available at the Fordham Station to the Metro-North New Haven Line and then at New Rochelle to the Northeast Corridor of Amtrak.

Similar to other Bronx Harlem Line stations, the majority of users are reverse commuting, and ridership remains very low. In fact, over 90% of riders are going outbound at the Melrose station. The Melrose Station is not handicapped accessible, and like several other Bronx stations, the platform can only accommodate the first 2 cars of the train.

Aside from Metro-North, the area has many transit options. Approximately half a mile west of the station, the B, D and 4 trains can be accessed at River Avenue and East 161st Street, adjacent to Yankee Stadium and in close proximity to the Bronx Supreme Court. The B/D can also be accessed along the Grand Concourse, northwest of the station, at 167th Street. South of the station, the area benefits from its proximity to the Hub, which is roughly half a mile away. The 2 and 5 trains are accessible at 3rd Avenue and 149th Streets, and the 4, 2 and 5 trains can be accessed at Grand Concourse and East 149th Street near Lincoln Hospital and Hostos Community College. East of the station, subway access is more difficult as the previous service along 3rd Avenue (the 3rd Avenue El), was removed in the 1970s. Now the nearest subway east of the station is the 2, 5 with stops at Jackson Avenue, Prospect Avenue, and Intervale Avenues, all closer to a mile away.

Bus service is heavily utilized in the community, and several options are available. The Bx6 runs along East 161st and 163rd Streets between Hunts Point Food Center in the Bronx and Riverside Drive in Manhattan. The Bx41, which has just obtained Select Bus Service (SBS), runs along Melrose and Webster Avenues, between the Hub and East Gun Hill Road. The Bx15, which offers a limited-stop service as well, runs along 3rd Avenue between Fordham Plaza and 125th Street in Manhattan. Bx21 runs along Third Avenue and Boston Road between Westchester Square and Port Morris. The Bx32 runs along Morris and Jerome Avenues between the VA Medical Center in University Heights, and Port Morris. The Bx1 and Bx2 run along the Grand Concourse between Mott Haven and Riverdale, or Sedgwick Avenue, respec-



FIGURE 5 | (Top) Hall of Justice and Concourse Plaza on East 161st Street. (Bottom) The Hub, East 149th Street and 3rd Avenue. Greater connectivity within the Melrose neighborhood would create a more united sense of character and create opportunities for residential and commercial development.

Source: @ New York City Department of Transportation

MELROSE COMMONS URBAN RENEWAL AREA

By the early 1990s, with home to fewer than 6,000 residents, the 33-block area encompassed by the Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Area had experienced significant population loss. In 1992 the community learned the city had designated Melrose Commons as an urban renewal area and had plans for redevelopment that would displace the current population. In response, a grassroots community organization called Nos Quedamos (We Stay) was founded, whose name became synonymous with its mission. The organization was comprised of home owners, business owners, and tenants with the mission to stop the Urban Renewal Plan's certification. In 1993 with the help of a community and city government partnership, certification was ceased, and worked to create an alternate redevelopment plan. The partnership, led by Nos Quedamos, was given six months to redraft the Urban Renewal Plan which was signed into law in 1994.²

Eight goals were identified to inform the new version of the Urban Renewal plan. These goals addressed resident concerns about the affordability

of new developments, opportunities for expansion of existing businesses, inappropriate use of public open space, and issues with proposed street alignment. The first goal was to ensure that there was no involuntary displacement of the existing community. The plan also sought to allow for mixed income development and affordable housing appropriate to the scale of the neighborhood. Another goal was to make sure the plan was environmentally conscious and sustainable, and that it included open space and addressed concerns about safety. The plan respects the street and movement patterns of the community and allowed for an appropriate distribution of commercial space. These principles have guided the physical development of the neighborhood over the last 19 years resulting in new sustainable mixed use development which reflected urban design guidelines. This growth has been accommodated without any displacement of the community. Since its inception, the plan has been amended twice to facilitate additional opportunities, and its final sites will soon be developed.

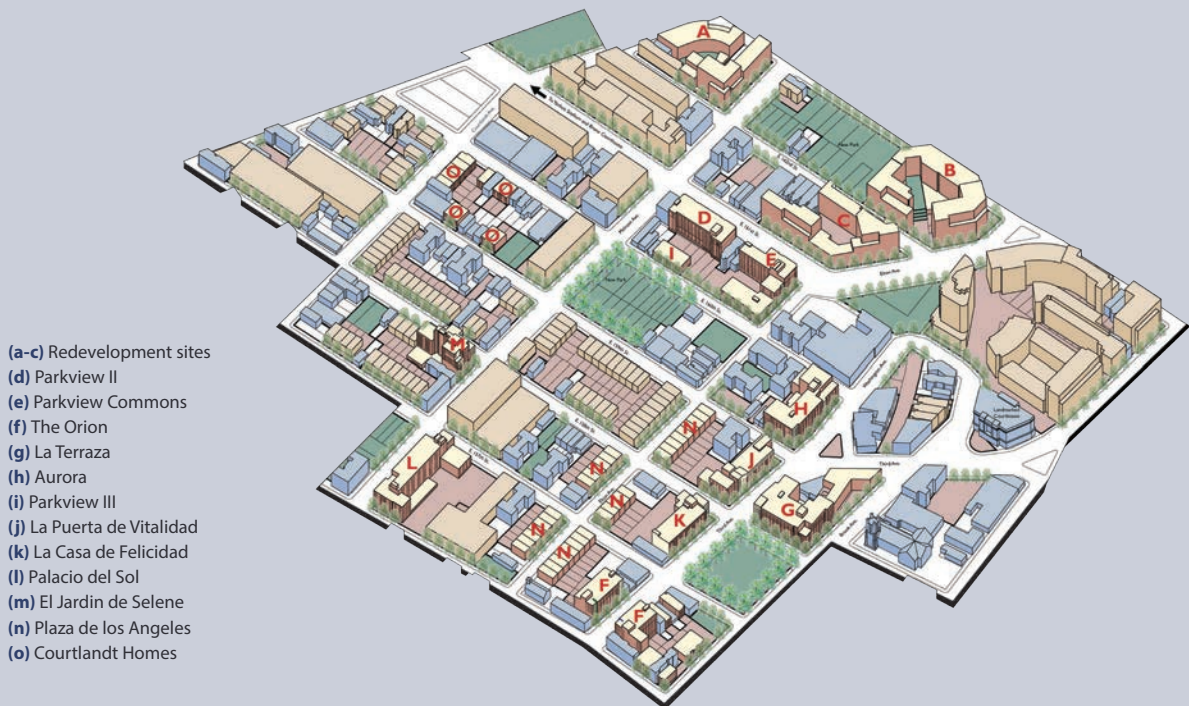


FIGURE 6 | The Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Area Plan, developed by Magnusson Architecture and Planning (MAP) and the local community group Nos Quedamos in 1994. The Plan continues to evolve, with many new projects being constructed or in development in recent years (labeled with red letters on figure 5).

Sources: Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Plan, New York City Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1994. Congress for New Urbanism. <http://www.cnu.org/resources/projects/melrose-commons-lead-neighborhood-development-2012>

tively. The Bx1 has Limited-stop service. Additionally, the Bx19 can be accessed at the Hub for service along Southern Boulevard to the Botanical Gardens, and the Bx13 service can be accessed near Yankee Stadium for service between Gateway Mall and the George Washington Bridge Bus Station.

LAND USE & ZONING

Aside from the Urban Renewal Area, the land use in the Melrose and Morrisania neighborhoods is governed by zoning regulations which can be seen in Figure 8. Zoning in and around 161st Street corridor generally permits mid to high-density residential uses with commercial uses permitted along most of the corridor itself. A diverse mix of affordable housing can be found throughout the area from large tower-in-the-park NYCHA developments; smaller semi-detached and attached housing; and the new mid-density housing seen as part of the Urban Renewal Area.

The station, and adjacent properties high-density housing communities, including the Morrisania Air Rights and Morrisania II Apartments along East 161st

Street, are zoned with a higher -density residential district. No commercial overlay has been mapped on these particular housing parcels, so commercial uses are not permitted. Moving east from the station, the 161st Street corridor generally maintains this high-density zoning district designation, except that commercial overlays, permitting local commercial uses, are mapped nearly contiguously to Third Avenue. A mid-density regional commercial district is mapped at the intersection of 3rd Avenue. Parking requirements in the area are relatively low.

West of the station, along the East 161st Street corridor between Grand Concourse and Concourse Village East, there is a mix of regional commercial districts and high density residence districts with commercial overlays.

Continuing west towards Yankee Stadium, at the junction of East 161st Street and the Grand Concourse, is the Special Grand Concourse District (C), created in 1989 to protect the art deco style and scale of the area's apartment buildings. This special district designation and landmarks designation limits ground floor retail uses outside aside from a few prominent intersections including 161st.



FIGURE 7 | A *casita* ("little house" in Spanish) in the Melrose neighborhood. These neighborhood gardens and public spaces were developed from vacant and abandoned land by Puerto Rican and Dominican groups to help improve their community.

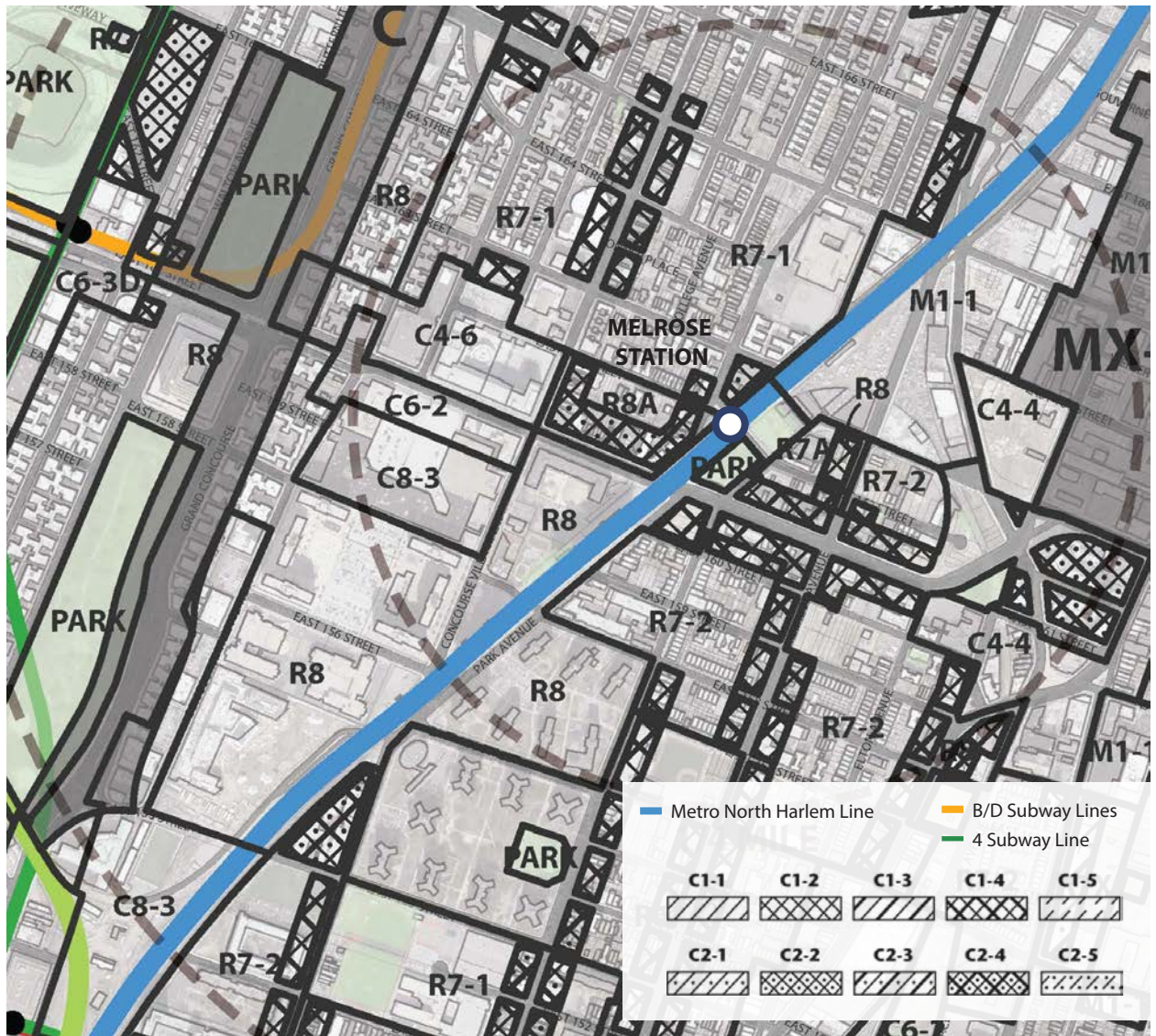


FIGURE 8 | Zoning map of the Melrose neighborhood.

The MX District along 3rd Avenue and north of 163rd Street permits the range of uses, from residential and commercial to light manufacturing. The MX district designation has been successful as a tool to transition neighborhoods from manufacturing uses to commercial and residential ones, and in helping to revitalize the area. The large manufacturing district northeast of the station, in contrast, does not permit residential uses. This area has several open semi-industrial uses, and several parcels with geometries that are unique and potentially difficult to develop.

The area also has several parks and public spaces. Joyce Kilmer and Franz Sigel Park provide more than 20 acres of open space along the west side of the Grand Concourse north and south of 161st street

respectively. Railroad Park sits east of the northernmost Air Rights building, between 161st and 162nd Street and provides a de-facto gateway from East 161st Street to the station. O'Neill Triangle is a small open space located in front the Boricua College site.

Finally, a notable feature of the Melrose and Morrisania communities is a unique series of community gardens which are sprinkled throughout the area (see Figure 7). Affectionately known as casitas (Spanish for little house), many evolved from Puerto Rican and Dominican community groups improving vacant land in their community. Many casitas have been painted and adorned in the vibrant colors found in their Caribbean homelands, and have become unique and treasured community assets.

CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS: OVERVIEW

The Melrose and Morrisania neighborhoods have witnessed an extraordinary grassroots transformation utilizing a substantial mix of public and private investment. Despite the unique assets of the community and the significant reinvestment seen in the last two decades, there are many challenges facing the 161st Street corridor and the surrounding areas. The station area and the center of the 161st Street corridor sits on the fringe of several community boards, council districts and police precincts, resulting in several portions of the neighborhoods which manifest this 'edge' condition through a lack of cohesiveness and interconnectedness with surrounding areas. Even the 161st Street Business Improvement District (BID) ends at Morris Avenue, leaving out more than half of the corridor. As a result, the corridor is a piecemeal collection of developments which vary widely in scale, activity, quality, maintenance, relationship to the street, and in the provision of streetscape amenities.

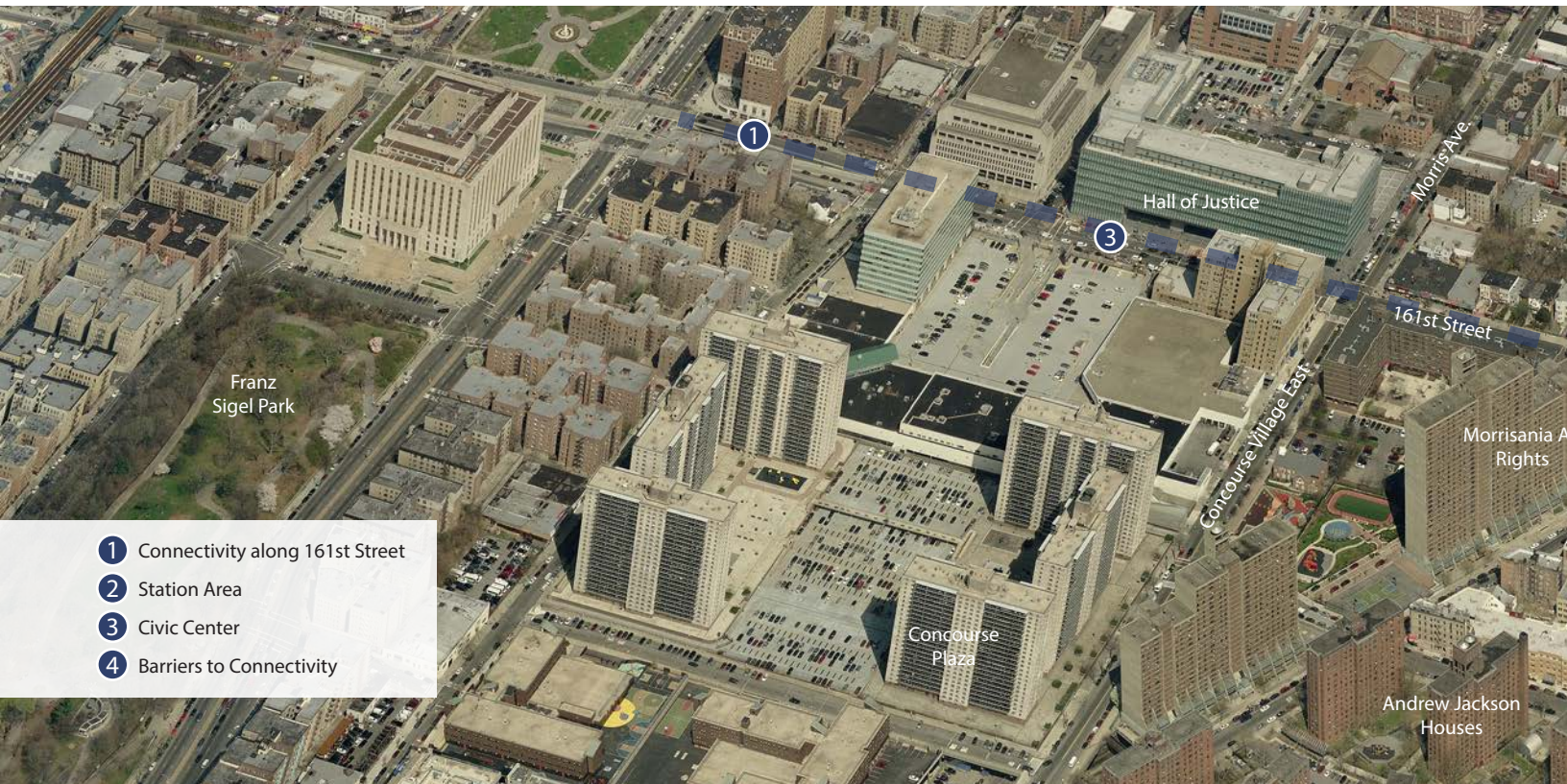
One of the major challenges for the Melrose community is achieving continuity, whether along the 161st Street corridor, or between this corridor into adjoining neighborhoods and between borough

business districts. While many blocks have an ideal density and environment conducive to walkability (as described in the TOD Strategies section), often an adjoining block does not achieve these goals, causing the corridor, as a whole, to fall short of being a successful, walkable commercial corridor.

For the purpose of this section, these challenges and recommendations are discussed in four focus areas (see Figure 9):

- 1 General connectivity problems faced along the 161st Street Corridor
- 2 Station area challenges, including specific impediments along the 161st Street corridor between Morris and Melrose Avenues
- 3 Civic center challenges in a portion of the 161st Street corridor, generally between Yankee Stadium and Morris Avenue
- 4 Barriers to connectivity with other neighborhoods, including:
 - Intersection of 161st Street with Third Avenue
 - Manufacturing districts located northeast of the station area; NYCHA housing to the south of the station

FIGURE 9 | Recommendation focus areas in Melrose.
Source: © 2011 Pictometry International Corp.



CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS: CONNECTIVITY ALONG 161ST STREET

The low ridership of the Melrose Station reflects how little it is used to support the economic development of Melrose. Improved frequency, service options, and access to the station could bolster service to the many legal professionals employed in the courthouses, serve a role to reverse commuters similar to the Fordham station, serve as regional access to the Hub, and could also serve as an auxiliary station to access Yankee Stadium on game days. Service aside, the lack of cohesiveness along the corridor poses a significant barrier which prevents full station utilization.

The opening of the Bronx Hall of Justice represented a significant investment in the community. The addition to existing courts and related civic institutions housed along 161st Street will help to maintain and increase the large number of jobs associated either directly or indirectly with the courts. For example, the large supply of lawyers, judges, court officers, and jurors within the courthouses present local restaurants and delis with a constant supply of patrons. Despite this obvious co-dependency, the area lacks the number and diversity of retail and service amenities that would be expected from such an em-

ployment generator. Not only does the lack of retail limit economic growth of the corridor, it limits its walkability as few venues are bustling with activity. While the Hall of Justice sits just a block west of the station, few of its employees utilize the convenience of the station. The walk is brief, but requires walking by the Morrisania Air Rights, the Morrisania II Apartments, and a strip of neglected homes and an underutilized, poorly maintained commercial strip. The 161st Street Business Improvement District (BID) ends at the courthouse, so typical BID activities like public realm maintenance, and pedestrian improvements stop abruptly at the BID boundary. East of the BID boundary, sidewalks are poorly maintained and there are problems with sanitation. Several small walkability problems in this area combine to create an unpleasant pedestrian experience and thus pedestrian traffic drastically drops east of Morris Avenue. Both portions of 161st Street also lack streetscape amenities which would lend consistency to the corridor.

A similar phenomenon limits the potential of the station to serve Yankee Stadium. The new 153rd Street station is a great asset to serve game day passengers, however it is limited in that it only serves passengers along the Hudson Line. The Melrose Station could serve a much wider regional transit network as both the Harlem and New Haven lines pass





FIGURE 10 | (Top) Banners at Boricua College help guide pedestrians. (Bottom) Plazas surrounding the Air Rights buildings largely remain abandoned and under-utilized.

through the station. Unfortunately, the New Haven line currently does not stop at Melrose station, and the Harlem line only stops with local service. Currently, many game day passengers riding into the city via Metro North, from Connecticut for example, must currently overshoot the stadium, exit at Harlem 125th Street station and either return north by way of the Metro North Hudson Line or the 4 subway train, one block east of the 125th Street station. This is a missed opportunity to conveniently deliver passengers without the double-back, and to capitalize on the additional foot traffic. Amenities such as restaurants, hotels and apparel spaced intermittently along a walkable 161st Street corridor could serve passengers, and would bring in a lot of additional revenue to the corridor. Service is only part of the problem, as 161st street does not cohesively support the pedestrian traffic that would be associated with such a service change.

Vacant lots, vacant ground floors, and inconsistent provision of streetscape amenities all deter walkability along the corridor. While the western half of the corridor has antique themed street lamps, these switch abruptly at Melrose Avenue to cobra-head lamps. Conversely, Boricua College lamp banners are a welcomed amenity on the east side of the corridor, but institutional or BID markers are not found on the western portion. Street tree planting is piecemeal. While some blockfronts contain a well-maintained, closely spaced new canopy of trees, others have very haphazard placements or only one or two trees per blockfront. These nuances and variation all combine to subtly convey shifts in community pride, investment, and ownership, limiting the potential for 'place-marking' and a holistic corridor. General recommendations along the corridor are addressed below, and more specific recommendations for individual parcels are addressed in subsequent sections.

Recommendations

- Expanding the 161st Street Business Improvement District (BID) eastward along the corridor to include more parcels.
- Conducting a market study along the corridor to determine the unmet demand for various retail and office uses. This data could be shared with property owners in the BID to solicit new tenants and explore higher density development, as applicable.
- Exploring a zoning special district, such as an Enhanced Commercial District, to map over the entire 161st Street corridor. This would ensure that significant portions of the ground floor are

CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS: STATION AREA

Figure 11 shows the critical components surrounding the station area in the vicinity of the 161st Street Corridor. This section details specific challenges which are generated by each of these components that must be remedied in order to make a cohesive corridor.

METRO-NORTH STATION

The entrance to the station, located on 162nd between Park and Courtlandt, as shown in Figure 11, is hidden and uninviting. 161st street is a main neighborhood arterial, and despite its proximity, the station is currently invisible to both pedestrians and vehicles traveling down the 161st Street corridor. There is limited way-finding signage and furthermore, the Metro-North right-of-way travels under the decking of the Morrisania Air Rights at this point, thus riders cannot see the tracks or hear the train to guide them to the station. The station lacks a singular formal

- allocated to retail and service uses both as it develops, and potentially, as uses change. This district could also ensure parking is screened, and that minimum amounts of transparency are provided for retail uses. Increasing the amount of commercial uses along the corridor was a high priority to the community. Ensure that sidewalk cafes are permitted.
- As new retail stores are developed and vacant stores are occupied, explore developing design guidelines for storefronts, signage and awnings to develop continuity along the commercial corridor. This could be coordinated through a BID or community organization.
 - Develop consistent streetscape along the corridor to unite the various elements. Antique themed lamps should be continued to 3rd Avenue. Lamppost banners could be implemented west of Boricua for different institutions. Street trees should be evenly spaced throughout the corridor for continuous canopy. Crosswalks could be inlaid with a decorative theme. Sidewalks should be consistently well-maintained.

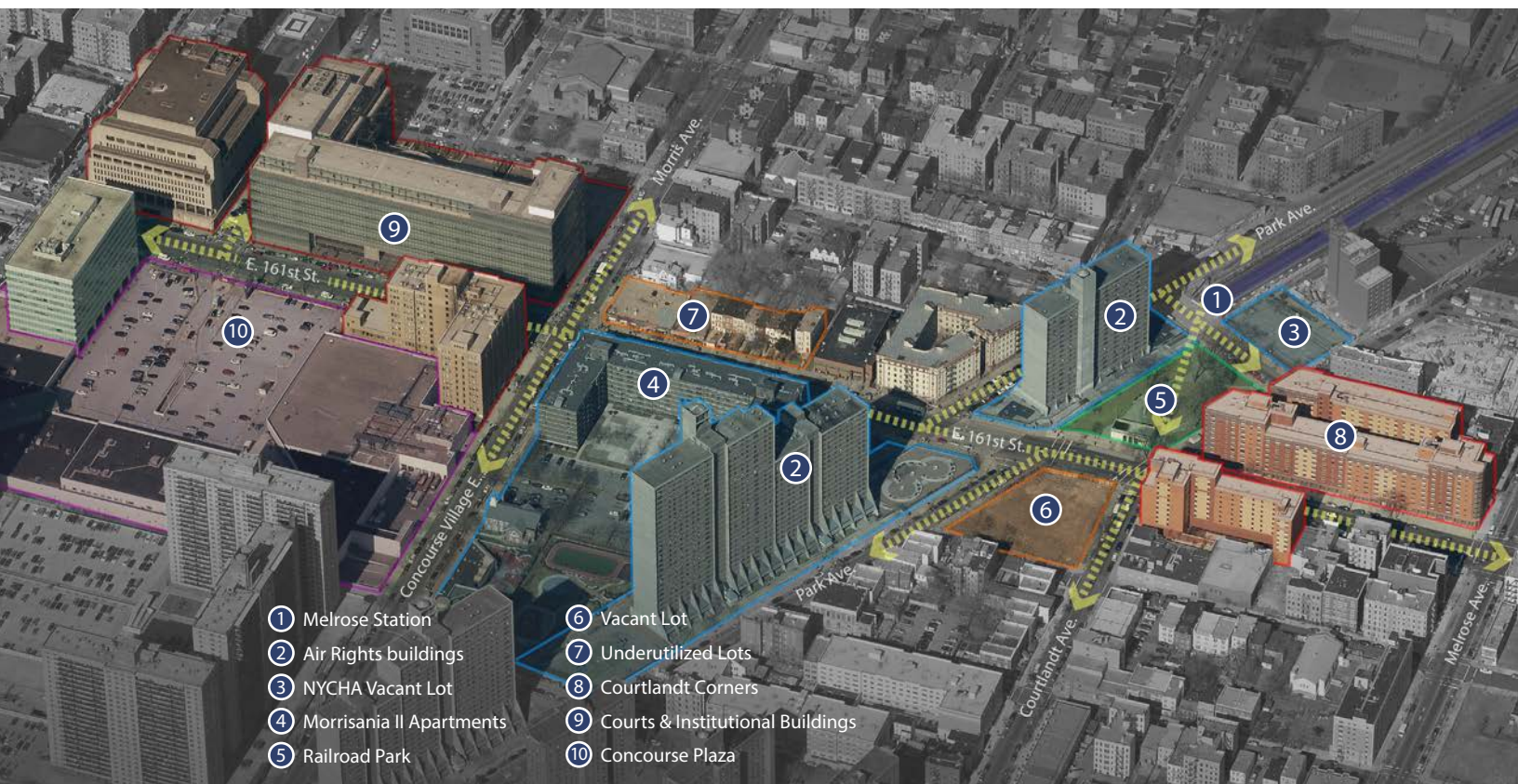


FIGURE 11 | Key sites in the Station Area; the recommendation section analyses current issues and provides potential recommendations for these sites. *Source:* © 2011 Pictometry International Corp.

building or structure to house ticketing machines, schedules, a waiting area, and an elevator for handi-cap access to the platforms.

Perceived safety around the station suffers due to this isolation away from the corridor, as well as a lack of lighting around the station and adjacent parcels that do not support transit activity. Adjacent to the station, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) controls a vacant lot used for trash storage, and across the street, the Morrisania Air Rights blank concrete walls serve as an unfriendly greeting to the neighborhood. Diagonally from the station sits Railroad Park which serves as a de-facto gateway to the station for those who know it's there.

Recommendations

- Improve signage to the station from local attractions, and vice versa.
- In the short term, exploring the display of train arrival and departure times in a prominent location closer to 161st Street, possibly within Railroad Park.
- In the mid-term, explore moving primary inbound and outbound platform access onto 161st Street. This could be done within the Morrisania Air Rights plaza on the north side of 161st Street.
- In the long term, explore a more formal station structure which consolidates station amenities such as a warming hut, shelter, ticket dispensing, and arrival/departure times into a prominent location. The current station entrances on 162nd street could be retained as secondary access.

MORRISANIA AIR RIGHTS

At all community outreach events, the challenge that received the most attention and discussion was consistently the Morrisania Air Rights public housing complex, owned and managed by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), shown in Figure 12. The buildings' challenges have also been widely acknowledged by NYCHA; the City needs to provide support in efforts to address these issues.

Upon arrival to the Melrose station, the windowless 19 story façade of the northernmost tower is the first vista of the neighborhood. The orientation of the three buildings follows the railroad, and each tower spans nearly the entire length of their respective blocks, essentially creating a three block-long, 20-story wall. Instead of serving as a gateway, the

Figure 12 Existing Conditions:

- 1 Morrisania Air Rights facade provides little visual interest and performs poorly in energy efficiency
- 2 Large blank walls are a bleak gateway into the neighborhood and deter from the pedestrian experience
- 3 Limited wayfinding signage to the station
- 4 Un-utilized ground floor spaces and niches at Morrisania Air Rights
- 5 Lack of connection to the 161st Street corridor
- 6 Under-utilized Morrisania Air Rights plaza needs better amenities and better connection to the street
- 7 Station entrance along 161st was closed and relocated to 162nd street out of safety concerns
- 8 Pedestrian crossings and sidewalk are in need of maintenance

Figure 12 Potential Improvements:

- 1 Add panels to Morrisania Air Rights facade to improve building aesthetics and energy performance
- 2 Incorporate artistic murals on the ~20 story blank facades of Morrisania Air Rights
- 3 Continue to add pedestrian way-finding signage to the station
- 4 Create unified 161st Street streetscape theme, and incorporate street lamps, banners, etc. Switch litter receptacles to solar trash compactors
- 5 Redesign Morrisania Air Rights plaza and gradually incorporate station entrances and station functions
- 6 Permit commercial uses so that ground floors of the Morrisania Air Rights are able to provide more active uses
- 7 Improve crosswalks and add pedestrian countdown timers at intersections

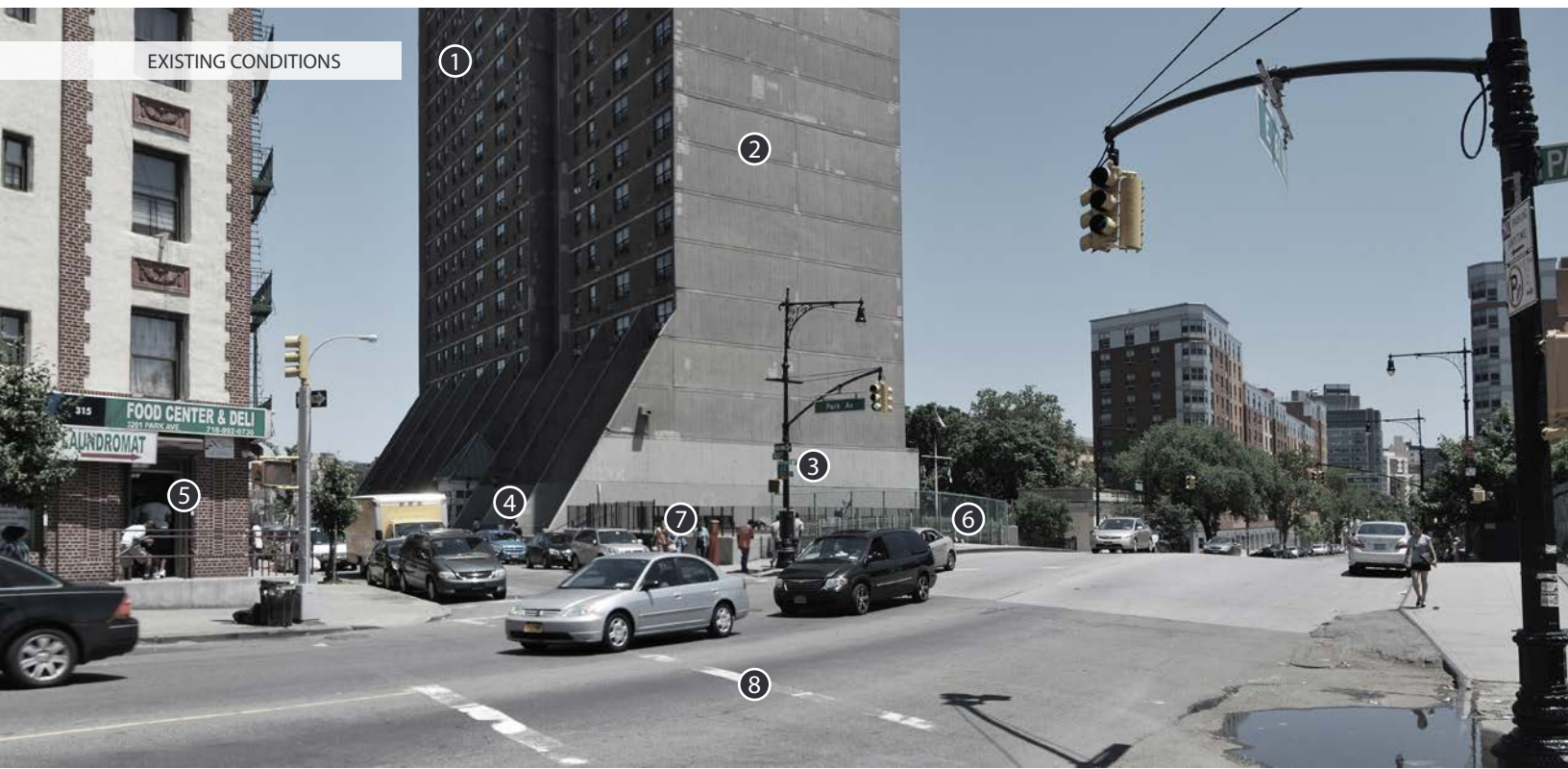


FIGURE 12 | Morrisania Air Rights, at the northeast intersection of 161st Street and Park Avenue. (Top) Current conditions; (bottom) potential improvements.

size and scale serve more as a visual barrier between Concourse Village and the Morrisania and Melrose neighborhoods along 161st Street.

The spare design of such a large series of buildings contributes to the complex's notoriety. Not only is the narrow tower face oriented towards the Melrose Station windowless, each subsequent tower façade, including those fronting on the north and south side of 161st Street, is also windowless, from the ground to the roof. Large brick expanses, small windows, exposed concrete floor slabs and structural walls with few other articulations or adornments make for a spare design. From the pedestrian experience, this is exacerbated by monumental concrete formwork extending from the building base into the tower. Since the entire tower is setback from the street, this repetitive structure (which is evocative of flying buttresses in medieval cathedrals) results in bleak, abandoned niches along the entire broadside of the tower. A long-abandoned community center occupies much of the ground floor of the tower closest to the station and its vacant/unused front faces Railroad Park. Unfortunately the combination of these windowless, underutilized spaces, setback from the street and devoid of activity results in a desolate streetscape that many community members avoid because of safety concerns.

Each tower's narrow face is flanked by underutilized open space in the form of playgrounds, plazas, or former basketball courts. In general, open spaces that are easily seen and accessible from sidewalks, and have a mix of amenities and planting typically are utilized more than those which are elevated, offer few amenities and suffer from an overabundance of hardscape. Unfortunately, most of the open spaces associated with Morrisania Air Rights are in the latter category, and are disconnected from the sidewalk and community activity with tall, unwelcoming security fences, and are often elevated above street to the extent that the open space is no longer visible. Along 161st and 162nd streets, these open spaces are physically separated from the sidewalk by ventilation shafts from the Metro North train. Trees and planting beds, as well as a mix of seating options, are essential amenities in any urban plaza, yet here the plazas are almost entirely hardscape with few if any plantings, thereby encouraging very little pedestrian activity.

Adjacent to the station, on the east side, NYCHA also retains a vacant lot which has periodically been used as a storage site for the trash of the entire complex, which can negatively affect the station with odors.

Recommendations

- Support NYCHA's interest in improving building aesthetics. Explore the feasibility of placing public art or murals on the blank walls on the north and south facades of the buildings in the short term. A mural program could be pioneered on those facades facing the station and 161st street first, and then expand to other facades in the mid-term. This effort could involve NYCHA residents and local grassroots organizations in a mural which displays the deep cultural history of the area. In the long-term, NYCHA and community groups could explore funding opportunities to make 'green retrofits' to the building. Exposed concrete floor slabs typically result in poor thermal performance. Adding an additional façade and insulating layer could improve building performance and, if panels alternated color tones at 20-40' intervals, could provide needed aesthetic variation at the same time.
- Explore the feasibility of placing commercial uses in the ground floors and in under-utilized plazas, and create an income generator for NYCHA. If feasible, the areas should be rezoned to permit commercial uses. A mid-term solution could be to place pre-fabricated commercial kiosks into the structural bays along Park Avenue and the plazas at the ends of the Air Rights buildings. Lights from stores and activity from customers could help community members feel safer walking through the area, and station passengers would have amenities more conveniently accessible. Long term solutions would be to formalize these commercial uses with more permanent structures;
- If commercial uses in the structural niches prove unfeasible, consider incorporating terraced planting into the niches to break down the scale and harshness of concrete or consider using these niches to daylight the platform with glazing that mimics the diagonal of the structure.
- In a Metro-North and NYCHA collaboration, explore re-opening the entrances to the Metro North platform in the Air Rights plaza on the north side of 161st Street. In the mid-term, explore renovating the plaza to be publicly accessible and contain amenities found in more successful public plazas, such as trees, planting and a variety of seating types. In the long term, a pavilion-like structure could be added to serve as a more formal station house for Metro-North ac-



FIGURE 13 | Courtlandt Corners on 161st Street and across the street from Railroad Park, is a new development completed in 2011. The apartments present a new architectural and economic model for affordable housing in the area.

cess, and to break-up the scale of the Air Rights building.

- Improve the connection of the Air Rights tower with Railroad Park by exploring the feasibility of removing the physical barriers that divide the open spaces. In the long term, a community facility tenant might be sought to re-occupy the ground floor side of the Air Rights building. This use could serve as a de-facto patrol on the park, provide an additional amenity to residents and generate income for NYCHA.
- With regard to the vacant lot adjacent to the station, short term improvements would include cleaning the trash from the lot, as the proximity to the station makes it highly visible and odorous to passengers. Mid-term solutions could

ensure that the ideal zoning is in place on the vacant lot so that when development occurs, it results in desirable forms and mix of uses. This development could potentially be leveraged to provide handicap access to the station.

RAILROAD PARK

Railroad Park, as shown on Figure 11, is a half acre park located just east of the northernmost Air Rights tower between 161st Street and 162nd Street. While the name suggests its role as a sort of ancillary station amenity, several challenges limit its full potential as a gateway to the station. Although the park is relatively well-maintained by the Department of Parks and Recreation, it is perceived to be unsafe by residents. Poor lighting and a lack of surrounding ac-

tivities contribute to this sentiment. A former comfort station at the park entrance serves as a stately entry point, but does not maximize its functionality or street presence by offering more active uses. Rigid barriers between the park and the Air Rights development leave a harsh edge condition. The center of the park, an ellipse with two surrounding paths, has a forlorn tree stump surrounded by dead grass.

Recommendations

- Renovate and repurpose the comfort station to allow commercial uses. This will enliven the park, improve the streetscape and could provide needed amenities for rail passengers like coffee, snacks, and newspapers. The South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation (SOBRO) had success utilizing the former comfort station in Keltch Park in the Bronx as a Wendy's restaurant.⁵
- Change the name of the park from 'Railroad Park' to 'Melrose Station Park' to reflect its importance as a gateway to the station. Displaying this name change on the repurposed comfort station, as well as posting station information and schedules would reinforce this notion.
- Add more lighting to the park and keep it lit during hours of station operation.
- Remove the stump in the open space, and explore a redesign of the central open space. To ameliorate the underutilized patch in the center of the park, explore either re-orienting the paths around the oval (to reflect the worn dirt path that bisects the open space directly to the station), or explore improving the central oval with planting and seating.
- Remove the barriers, which are not serving a need, between the Air Rights towers and the park in the long-term so that the open spaces can be connected seamlessly.

VACANT LOT

Across from Railroad Park sits a privately owned vacant lot along 161st Street, which can be seen on Figure 11. Vacant lots are generally unsightly, and in the case of the South Bronx, serve as a reminder of previous abandonment. The site is a critical connection between the heart of the 161st Street Corridor and Melrose Commons/Boricua Village. There has been recent interest to develop this privately owned and its prominent location and size make it a crucial development parcel.

Figure 14 Existing Conditions:

- 1 Vacant lot discourages connectivity along the thoroughfare
- 2 Limited streetscape and pedestrian amenities
- 3 Comfort station in Railroad Park is underutilized
- 4 Railroad Park is in need of more active programming
- 5 Railroad Park and the Morrisania Air Rights plazas are separated by large concrete walls
- 6 No place-making or way-finding signage

Figure 14 Potential Improvements:

- 1 Develop strong street wall along southern side of 161st Street
- 2 Add street trees and street lamps at regular intervals
- 3 Explore Enhanced Commercial District to ensure active uses are provided on the ground floor
- 4 Renovate comfort station in Railroad Park to provide active uses. Change name to 'Melrose Station Park'
- 5 Improve connection between Morrisania Air Rights plaza and Railroad Park
- 6 Improve crosswalks and add pedestrian countdown timers at intersections
- 7 Incorporate way-finding signage and banners which promote a sense of place

EXISTING CONDITIONS



POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS



FIGURE 14 | Vacant lot, at the northeast intersection of 161st Street and Courtlandt Avenue. (Top) Current conditions; (bottom) potential improvements.

Recommendations

Community organizations and city agencies should work to ensure that the development provides:

- a mixed-use, high density building which adheres to the best practices for walkability, includes provision of a strong street wall and a balance of articulation and variation;
- a well-considered façade with quality materials and ample transparency in the residential units;
- active and transparent ground floor retail spaces which are built to meet the needs of potential tenants; and
- streetscape amenities, like street trees. Benches and bus shelters could be requested, where appropriate.

COURTLANDT CORNERS

Moving east of the vacant lot, the Courtlandt Corners development shown on Figure 13 spans most of the north and south block frontages along 161st Street between Courtlandt Avenue and Melrose Avenue. This particular development serves as a fine prototype for future development in the neighborhood.

Prominent street walls ranging from eight to ten stories cradle the sidewalk, and material changes and articulation every 20-30 feet add an attractive mix of variety to the façade. Street trees were planted at the appropriate intervals in front of the building. However, despite all these achievements, the ground floor commercial space remains largely vacant. This is harmful to the walkability of the corridor for several reasons. Not only is there no pedestrian traffic generated by the retail, there are no tenants and buzzing activity to lend an air of safety over the surrounding streets. This ground floor vacancy is most likely not due to an over-saturation of retail space in the area. In fact, market data demonstrates that significant retail demand exists in nearly every retail segment (see Figure 16). The explosive population growth in the area has likely outpaced the provision of retail and service amenities which would meet the demand of these growing neighborhoods.

Recommendations

- Address the ground floor vacancies. If a 161st Street corridor market study were conducted, the findings could highlight several viable tenants. This should be done in coordination with



FIGURE 15 | Morrisania II Apartments on 161st Street, west of the station. Although scaled in greater context with adjoining developments than Morrisania Air Rights, the design and inactive street uses are still challenges for the neighborhood. Across the street from the apartments, low-scaled buildings and underutilized lots contribute to the lack of activity.

MELROSE MARKET DEMAND

With approximately 68,800 people per square mile, the Melrose neighborhood in the Bronx is extremely dense. An estimated 62,000 people live within a half mile from the Melrose Metro-North station and it is projected that by 2018 the population will grow by 3.84%. In Melrose, over 6,000 residential units have recently been planned, completed, or are under construction. In addition to the growing population, Melrose receives many visitors each year. The Bronx Hall of Justice court house one block west of the Metro-North station includes 47 court rooms, and nearby Yankee Stadium attracts over 3.2 million spectators annually.

With a large population and visitor base, there is a great opportunity for the 161st Street retail corridor to capture consumer spending. However, based on 2013 Claritas retail opportunity data within a half mile of the station area, residents are shopping elsewhere for a variety of goods including clothing, furniture and food services.⁴ Of the over \$630 million in resident expenditures for all retail sales including food establishments, only \$326 million are being spent locally, leaving a gap of over \$304 million. The retail establishments in the area are not meeting the consumer demand.

The Melrose Retail Strategy (MRS), a collaboration between the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) focuses on strengthening retail corridors in the Melrose neighborhood by providing a wider selection of retail to the community. A study conducted in 2007 pointed to the area's high density, the demand for a variety of retailers including restaurants, name brand stores and bookstores, and an expected 58% increase in retail expenditure per square mile from 2006 to 2010. Even though Melrose is a lower income area, purchasing power is high and spending often exceeds reported income. MRS reached out to retailers and brokers to increase awareness of the neighborhood's spending power and leasing opportunities in order to encourage retailers to locate in Melrose.

Strengthening the 161st Street corridor would provide convenient amenities for the population, hold money in the local economy, and capture spending from visitors. In addition to drawing attention to Melrose's retail potential, EDC is evaluating the feasibility of transit and street improvements for pedestrian access as a way to help transform a retail corridor.

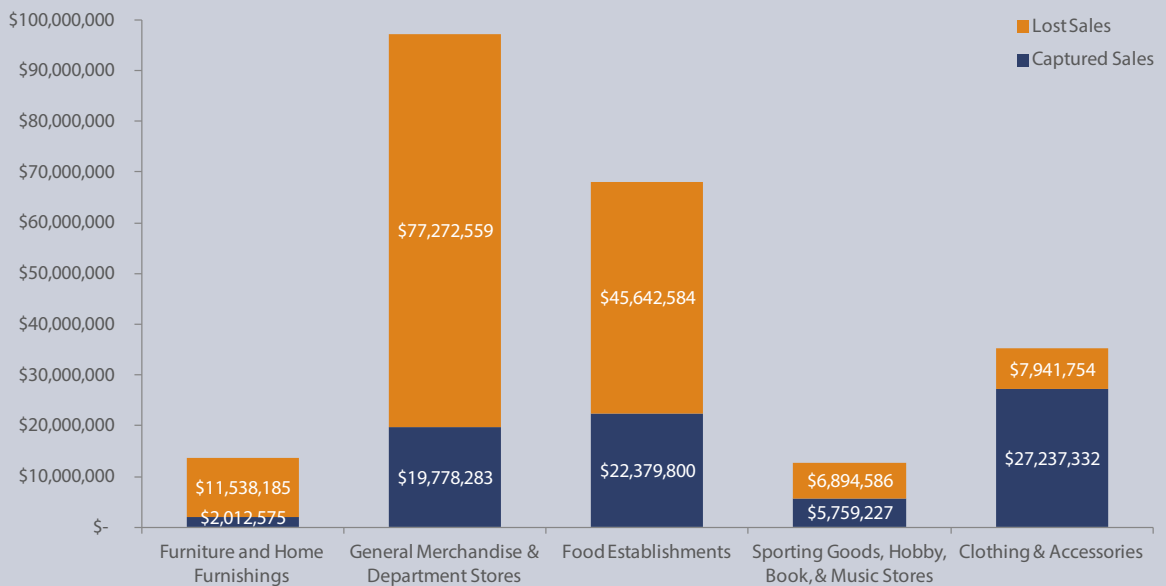


FIGURE 16 | 2013 Claritas Melrose market study findings. Consumer spending by Melrose residents, notably general merchandise & department stores and food establishments, largely occurs outside the neighborhood. Although a low-income community, Melrose has large purchasing power; by increasing local amenities and commercial development, Melrose has the potential to keep a greater amount of this consumer spending within the neighborhood.

HPD, the NYC Office of Small Business Services (SBS), Phipps and other developers.

- Expand the Business Improvement District (BID) to include these parcels, as it might help with marketing and tenanting retail space.
- Encourage the attraction of several tenants, at various sizes, with an array of uses, and differing signage and window displays in order to lend a new vibrancy to this part of the corridor.

MORRISANIA II APARTMENTS

Moving west along 161st Street from the station area, one encounters the Morrisania II Apartments, as shown in Figures 11 and 15. This building is also under NYCHA control, and while it has a similar material aesthetic to the Air Rights towers, it is scaled more in context with adjoining developments on adjoining blocks, and has a vastly better relationship to the street than its neighbor. The building is used for senior housing, which serves an important need in the community. While its facade does have minor articulation, in the form of fluctuating recesses every 20 - 30 feet, the monotony of materials, exposed concrete slabs, small irregularly shaped windows, and largely inactive ground floor helps contribute to the lack of pedestrian activity east of the civic center.

Recommendations

- Explore utilizing the fenced-in setback areas for passive recreational uses that benefit seniors, such as seating areas and tables.
- Explore the feasibility of commercial uses or community facility uses where it will not eliminate residences. The former would require a commercial overlay. Retail uses and community facilities could benefit seniors and area residents by providing additional amenities in close proximity.
- Renovations and commercial retrofits could generate additional revenue to the building and vastly improve the streetscape.

UNDERUTILIZED LOTS

Across the street from Morrisania II Apartments, the northern block frontage of 161st Street closer to Morris Avenue is vastly underutilized considering the potential sizes and range of uses. One story 'tax-payers', or simple structures whose revenue serve to pay the taxes on a property while the owners wait to develop a larger building, occupy the western half of this block-front. Three story homes occupy the cen-

tral portion of the block. These low-scaled buildings are in stark contrast to the permitted scale seen on at the Hall of Justice on the adjoining block, and the poor level of maintenance and lack of upkeep evidenced on these properties is a barrier to the connectivity of the corridor.

Recommendations

- Conduct a 161st Street corridor market study to explore the feasibility of different development scenarios. These parcels were recently rezoned in 2009, and there is potential to develop a significant commercial or mixed-use development.
- Improve streetscape. Redevelopment would trigger the provision of certain amenities, like street trees. Community groups could request other amenities, such as benches and a bus shelter, from DOT, where appropriate.
- Expand the Business Improvement District (BID) over these lots to encourage better sidewalk maintenance and help with attracting potential retail tenants.

Figure 17 Existing Conditions:

- 1 Large-scale institutional presence provides little ground floor retail
- 2 Concourse Plaza surface parking lot fronts the 161st Street retail corridor
- 3 Large void in the street wall
- 4 Gate is cold and unwelcoming
- 5 Few streetscape amenities provided along the block-front
- 6 Curb cuts create an interrupted and dangerous pedestrian experience

Figure 17 Potential Improvements:

- 1 Promote ground-floor retail with ample amounts of transparency
- 2 Promote redevelopment; recent rezoning permits a substantial building with required street walls
- 3 Eliminate curb cuts from 161st Street.
- 4 If large scale commercial redevelopment is infeasible in the short-term, promote temporary uses along the parking lot edge, such as food trucks and fruit carts, to activate the sidewalk
- 5 Improve streetscape with amenities such as street trees and benches placed at regular intervals

CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS: CIVIC CENTER

Figure 17 highlights the challenges associated with major elements of the civic center of 161st Street west of the station area. This section describes the specific challenges which are generated by each of these elements. In order to make a cohesive corridor which connects with the station area and other major assets, these challenges must be mitigated.

COURTHOUSES & INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS

The civic center on 161st Street, west of the station area, as shown on Figure 11, has a number of courts and institutional buildings. Owing to their various eras of construction, each has a unique architectural style, ranging from Neoclassical, to Art-Deco, to Bru-

talist, to the modern Hall of Justice. Despite these various architectural styles implemented over many years, they all share a commonality: the ground floor of each institutional building lacks retail uses. This is pronounced by the large scale of these buildings, and the extensive spans of blank walls that many of them exhibit at the street level.

While some degree of this inactivity is presumably due to security concerns in a post - 9/11 era, it has dire consequences for the walkability and mix of uses in the neighborhood. During business hours, hundreds of lawyers, police officers, and other professionals can be found meeting with their clients in front of each courthouse. Thousands of professionals, public servants, legal clientele and jurors walk through these blocks every day. The life they bring to the street is ample to support a whole host of retail and service establishments; however, there are extremely few shops to grab lunch in, few sit down restaurants, and few other forms of retail and ser-

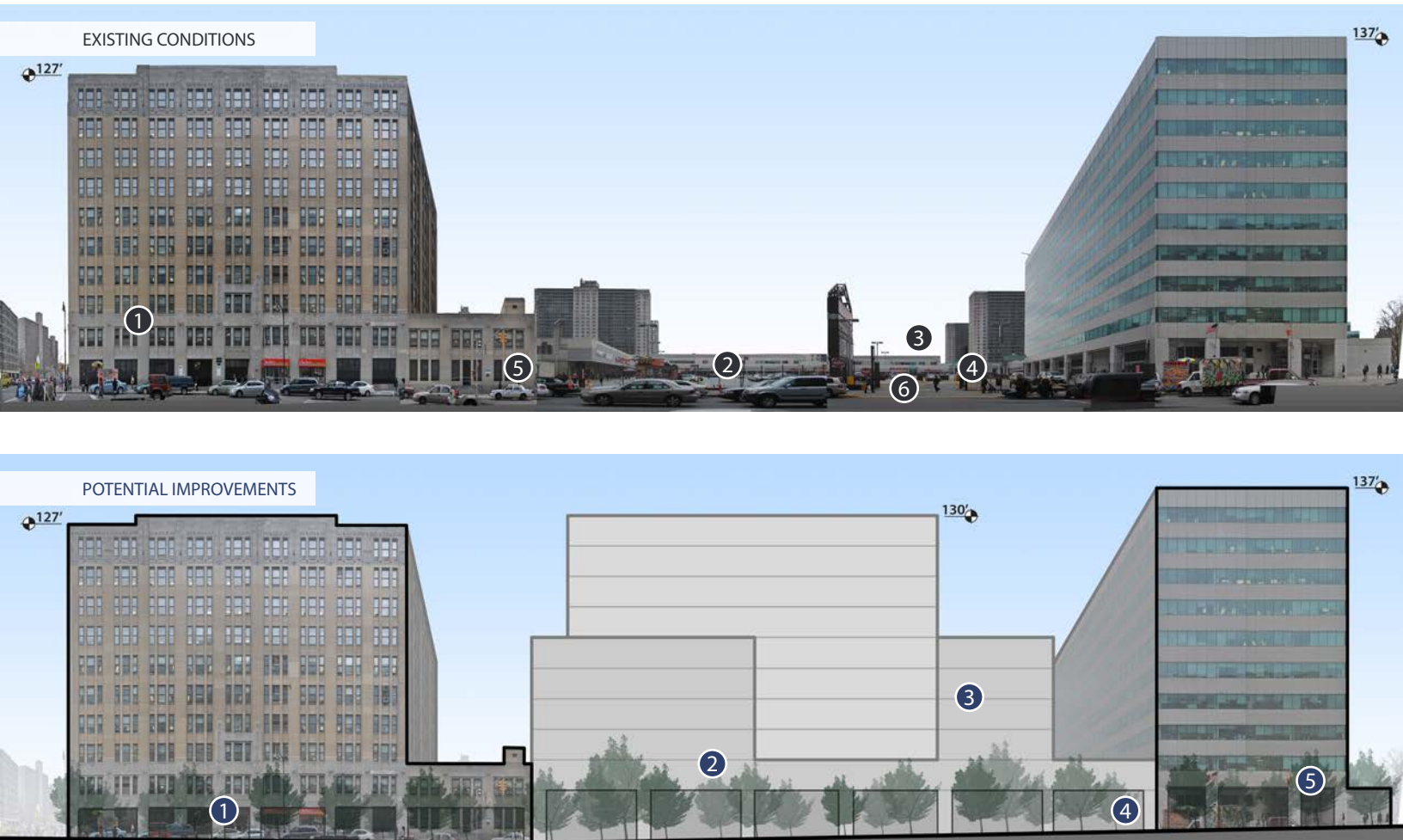


FIGURE 17 | Recommendation for increasing building block in Concourse Plaza. (Top) Current conditions; (bottom) potential improvements.



FIGURE 18 | Concourse Plaza, across the street from the Bronx Hall of Justice on East 161st Street. The low-scale buildings and large parking lot are largely out of context in the area, prioritizing automobile access to these amenities over pedestrian access

VICES to support daily activities. These are critical amenities not only to sustain daily activities, but also to enliven the corridor beyond business hours into the night. Streetscape amenities like benches, street trees and cafes are also notably lacking, and would contribute immensely to these block-fronts, especially given their high levels of pedestrian traffic, where sidewalk widths can accommodate them.

Recommendations:

- Explore the regulatory hurdles to providing retail uses and streetscape amenities (such as street trees and benches) in and around these buildings, especially the courthouses. In some institutional buildings, such as the Melrose Central building, ground floor retail is already being introduced through retrofits. If feasible, this type of re-purposing should be encouraged.
- If renovating ground floors and providing streetscape amenities in and around the courthouse buildings proves infeasible due to regulatory barriers, explore providing artwork to break up the blank walls, especially on the criminal court building.

- Explore the provision of civic or BID related lamppost banners around this portion of the corridor.
- Improve crosswalks in the mid-block in front of courthouse. Explore the feasibility of ground-plane decorative inlays which would further connect pedestrians to the public plaza behind courthouse. This would be an ideal high-traffic area to pilot these inlays before implementing throughout the corridor.
- Implement recommendations from the DCP Transportation study, East 161st Street and River Avenue Corridors Transportation Study.

CONCOURSE PLAZA

Concourse Plaza, located across the street from the Bronx Hall of Justice, as shown on Figure 17, is a jarring counterpoint to the high-density, pedestrian-oriented institutional buildings surrounding it. Built on a former rail yard, the plaza is designed like a quintessential suburban strip mall, replete with large amounts of parking between the building and the sidewalk. The plaza consists of several

one story shops with a central food court and a theater. While the retail and entertainment amenities are sorely needed in the community, the design is from a different era. At the time built, the plaza was a great investment for the community; however, urban regional shopping and the neighborhood have since transformed. Buffered from the street by iron gates, and few entrances to a sea of parking, the plaza clearly was designed with the vehicle, not the pedestrian, in mind. This type of strip mall development was typical of when Concourse Plaza was built; however urban regional shopping centers near transit amenities should be designed to seamlessly fit into the pedestrian environment and utilize transit options. The automobile-oriented design of this strip mall seems out of place in such a prominent location, and detracts from its context.

Recommendations:

- Conduct a 161st Street corridor market study to explore the feasibility of different development scenarios on these lots. These parcels were recently rezoned in 2009, and there is potential to develop a significant commercial or mixed-use development.
- Promote large-scale redevelopment using findings of the market study. Several of the current uses in the mall could be retained in a reconfigured building. Redevelopment would trigger the provision of certain amenities, like street trees. Community groups could request other amenities, such as benches and a bus shelter, from DOT, where appropriate.
- In the interim, promote temporary uses such as food trucks along the parking lot edge. This will generate activity, screen the parking lot, and, if lined along the sidewalk edge, give some semblance of a street wall.

CHALLENGES & RECOMMENDATIONS: CONNECTIVITY

Figure 11 shows the major connectors, or walkable thoroughfares, both to other neighborhoods and to other business districts from the 161st Street corridor. In many of these connectors, significant obstructions occur that must be remedied in order to cohesively interweave differing neighborhood fabrics, resources and economic activities. This section details specific obstacles to the success of seamless pedestrian connections to the Hub and to other neighborhoods from 161st Street.

OLD COURTHOUSE

The Beaux-Arts style old Bronx County Courthouse is positioned prominently at 161st Street and 3rd Avenue. It was completed around 1915, and only functioned as the county courthouse for roughly two decades when those functions were moved to a newer county courthouse along the Grand Concourse. Listed on the National Register of Historic places in 1982, the building suffers from disrepair and abandonment. This is made all the more significant by recent redevelopment all around the old courthouse in the form of Boricua College and Boricua village.

The bleakness of the courthouse is made worse by an empty plaza in front as 3rd Avenue intersects Brook Avenue and 161st Street. The bend in 3rd Avenue showcases this intersection prominently in the sight lines north of the Hub. Improving the state of the courthouse and the surrounding plaza would help in the connectivity and walkability of the thoroughfare.

Recommendations:

- Renovate and adaptively re-use the old courthouse.
- Locate a public plaza in the open space in front of the courthouse. Its prominent sight line along Third Avenue makes it an ideal focal point for a structure. A kiosk programmed with an active use could draw people into and through the space. This could spur interest and support the feasibility of the courthouse re-use. Amenities in the plaza should include planting, trees, and a variety of seating. The plaza came under HPD ownership as part of the Melrose Commons URA. If ownership was transferred to City Department of Transportation, the site could be developed through the City DOT plaza program.
- Explore the feasibility of closing the portion of Brook Avenue north of 3rd Avenue to vehicular traffic. This could be converted to a pedestrian walkway that connects the open spaces in and around Boricua Village.
- Strengthen the Third Avenue corridor by ensuring new development will have prominent street walls and active ground floor uses. Typical streetscape amenities should be consistent and compatible with those on 161st Street.
- Program the open spaces around the courthouse in Boricua Village with events and activities.

MANUFACTURING DISTRICTS

North of the Melrose Station, several properties are located within a manufacturing district. Due to their relatively low density, of all the areas located within a half-mile radius of the station, this area has the most potential for new growth.

Currently businesses within this area include low-intensity uses like junk yards and storage space. Not only are these open industrial uses detrimental to the environment, they employ relatively few people. Additionally, although current zoning permits less intensive commercial uses, few operate in this area. Since these districts do not permit residential use, fewer people are on the streets at a given time. This absence of commercial and residential uses makes for an inactive area, which makes residents passing through feel unsafe. With low permitted densities and restricted uses, reinvestment is scarce, and unkempt poorly maintained lots are prevalent. Even sidewalks are poorly maintained and devoid of streetscape amenities. This area not only serves as a large barrier between the Melrose station area and the growing Morrisania neighborhood to the northeast, but also is a north-south barrier between the Concourse Village neighborhood and the Morrisania neighborhood.

Recommendations:

- Explore the expansion of the existing Mixed – Use district (MX-7) westward to include the area zoned M1-1. This would permit light manufacturing uses, and their associated jobs, to remain, while permitting most commercial, community facility and residential uses to be located in the area. This could spur new development and investment, increase density, and improve the perception of safety for new residents, workers and patrons walking the street.
- Study the Manufacturing District to consider the following:
 - appropriate floor area for commercial and manufacturing uses;
 - appropriate parking requirements;
 - an appropriate contextual Residential District to pair with to ensure new buildings are developed with prominent street walls; and
 - reducing the scale of proposed Residence Districts in the vicinity of the lower residential context in the area of the Clay Avenue Historic District

- Create an area-specific strategy to address potential development difficulties due to unique site geometry, such as zoning lots where the street lines creates lot angles less than 75 degrees. Examples could include liberalizing the maximum residential lot coverage requirements on corner zoning lots, and the minimum rear yard equivalents for residential uses on through lots
- Eliminate the special permit required to develop along rail-right-of ways. The abandoned rail spur to Port Morris is not an active rail spur, and sites along it already have considerable hurdles such as irregular site geometries and the need for environmental remediation.

Figure 19 Existing Conditions:

- 1 Abandoned Courthouse perpetuates feeling of disinvestment in the surrounding area
- 2 Few retail uses or attractions to generate pedestrian activity
- 3 Empty asphalt triangle at prominent sight line in front of courthouse triangle
- 4 No ground-floor activity to connect with commercial uses along 3rd Avenue
- 5 Side street is disconnected from 161st Street and Boricua Village

Figure 19 Potential Improvements:

- 1 Close down this portion of Brook Avenue to vehicular traffic. Resurface and add moveable tables and chairs, umbrellas and planters. Opportunity for bike share location
- 2 Define southern end of plaza with kiosk structure. Program with active use. Add permanent stadium style seating on top of kiosk
- 3 Configure a plaza space on axis with courthouse entrance
- 4 Add street trees and antique street lamps at regular intervals. Street lamps could have decorative banners. Add bus shelter. Potential to remove on-street parking and add planting or bioswale
- 5 Strengthen Third Avenue corridor by ensuring new developments will have prominent street walls and active ground floor uses
- 6 Renovate and adaptively re-use old courthouse



FIGURE 19 | (Top) The Old Bronx Courthouse, 161st Street and 3rd Avenue, current conditions. (Bottom) Potential improvements.



FIGURE 20 | Melrose Houses, 156th Street to 153rd Street and Morris Avenue to Cortlandt Avenue. The large NYCHA property created “superblocks,” cutting off residents from the street grid and decreasing neighborhood connectivity.

OTHER NYCHA PROPERTIES

The Andrew Jackson Houses and Melrose Houses also controlled by NYCHA provide serious obstacles to connectivity. Located roughly halfway between the 161st Street corridor and the Hub, they should lend themselves to cohesively stitching these neighborhoods together, yet, because of their ‘tower-in-the-park’ design, they have little relationship to the street and the surrounding urban fabric.

Along Cortlandt Avenue for example, one side of the street is characterized with moderate density three to five story buildings built at regular intervals with ground floor commercial uses while the NYCHA side is characterized by superblocks, monotonous 15-16 story towers set back from the street and surrounded by gated off open space. Ground floor commercial on this side of the street is neither provided nor permitted. Considerable portions of this side of the street are also allocated to on-street parking, with parking spaces turned diagonally.

All of these combine to disconnect the NYCHA complexes from the neighborhood fabric, and serve as a barrier between two business districts rather than a connector.

Recommendations:

- Explore options to develop prototypes for ground floor commercial infill development along the avenue frontages. If this was feasible, a commercial overlay would need to be mapped to permit commercial uses along the avenues.
- Explore the opportunity to re-establish the grid through the properties. This would break up the superblocks, and allow for more infill development to line the streets in the long-term.

CONCLUSION

The Melrose and Morrisania neighborhoods have proved tremendously resilient through the past few decades. Not only have they survived, they have thrived to become one of the fastest growing neighborhoods in the city. Pockets of vitality are numerous, and if these could be interwoven into a more cohesive and consistent urban fabric, the neighborhood would be poised to thrive.

The strategies suggested in this Section will bolster connectivity along the 161st Street corridor as well as with other neighborhoods, and will help reinforce a walkable community that is intricately connected to its transit resources. The continued transformation of the community will not only improve the quality of life for current residents, employees and visitors of the Melrose and Morrisania neighborhoods, but will continue to lay the groundwork for a community integral to the future of the Bronx.

SOURCES

¹ ESPN. <http://espn.go.com/mlb/attendance> <http://espn.go.com/mlb/attendance>

² Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Plan, New York City Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1994.

³ 2013 Nielsen Company.

** Nielsen' RMP data is derived from two major sources of information. The demand data is derived from the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE Survey), which is fielded by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The supply data is derived from the Census of Retail Trade (CRT)*

⁵ Keltch Park. <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/keltchpark/facilities/restaurants>

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

- Create a consistent pedestrian environment along the 161st Street Corridor that focuses on gaps in walkability and creates stronger connections to the Hub and Yankee Stadium/Civic Center areas.
- Implement phased improvements to create a gateway from the station area to the surrounding community. This should include DCP, NYCHA, Parks, NYC DOT and Metro-North enhancements with the goal of creating 360 degrees of activity around the station area.
- Adopt a long-term land use strategy which helps to knit together recent investments in the community. This strategy should:
 - Identify opportunities to incorporate additional commercial uses along commercial corridors
 - Re-examine manufacturing districts, especially those in close proximity of the station area
 - Identify additional opportunities for mixed use development