PLANNING FOR A
GREENER
EAST HARLEM

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Introduction to East Harlem
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Summary
Manhattan Community Board 11 in East Harlem commissioned a group of first year Columbia Graduate Urban Planning student to provide recommendations for improving Park Avenue as it passes through their district. This study area concentrates on Park Avenue from 116th Street to 132nd Street, between Madison Avenue to the west and Lexington Avenue to the east.

Dominated by the elevated Metro-North Railroad, this portion of Park Avenue is a unique part of East Harlem. The study area has an excess of surface parking lots—an attribute rarely found in Manhattan—a mix of residential, commercial and industrial land uses, vacant land and a lack of pedestrians and retail activity. This desolate picture is in stark contrast to Park Avenue south of 96th Street, where the buried Metro-North rail line has allowed for some of the highest real estate values in the city.

Today, East Harlem has one of the lowest median household incomes in the city and suffers from high rates of diabetes and asthma. Despite these hardships, many parts of East Harlem remain vibrant. Its lively street life, flourishing Puerto Rican, Mexican and African-American culture and steadily declining crime rate have contributed to new residential construction in other parts of East Harlem. However, the district is experiencing significant demographic shifts. In 2009, CD11’s total population was 113,328; 7% of Manhattan’s total population. The total population of Community District 11 has remained relatively constant over the past 30 years, but there have been considerable

1. Appendix: Age Distribution & Total Population Chart
This studio believes these interests can align with the sustainability priorities of the City as set out in Mayor Bloomberg’s PlaNYC 2030, which range from housing sustainability and affordability to improved public infrastructure systems. Furthermore, the Park Avenue corridor could become the seam that knits together two currently divided parts of East Harlem as a vibrant center for living, working and recreation in the community.

To accomplish this vision, the studio's goals look to combine the community board’s interests with those of the city as a whole. These goals are:

1. Attract affordable housing development along park avenue that is sensitive to the current built character of East Harlem
2. Improving the physical character of the park avenue corridor through urban design and public space improvements that reflect the interests of the present & future community
3. Increasing access to local services & employment opportunities

1. Maintain & expand affordable housing units
2. Contextual development through good urban design
3. Improve local services & employment opportunities
INTRODUCTION TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

CD11 is comprised of four types of housing: 1-2 family houses, multi-family walk-ups, multi-family apartments, and mixed use, which altogether make up 29% of the land area in East Harlem. Of all housing, nearly a quarter (23%) are multi-family apartment buildings. Rentals comprise 92% of residential units, which is high compared to the 75% average for all of Manhattan.

Rental rates have also been on the rise, currently at 27% of the City’s Average Monthly Income (AMI). Although this does not deviate far from the accepted standard, given the median household income of our population is $579,368, any increased rent burden has impacts on a family’s budget for other necessities like education, health, food or transportation. In 2009, the vacancy rate of East Harlem was 2.7%, compared to 3.8% for deteriorate, the issue of the safety and health of inhabitants becomes another risk with deteriorating structures.

Currently, the neighborhood contains 24 NYCHA projects in addition to units developed by HPD and community based housing organizations. The share of publicly subsidized housing has declined recently, likely related to the ending of Mitchell-Lama contracts, which were enacted to encourage more affordable housing for low and middle-income residents. As these contracts have expired, 40,000 Mitchell Lama units have been lost since 1990 in New York City.

The numbers of commercial and residential real estate sales transactions in CD11 were on the decline until 2002, and have been on the rise since. Though we can make no claims as to the causes behind this trend, the partial rezoning for housing.

In 1990, publicly subsidized units comprised 5% of all rental units in the district, the highest concentration of subsidized housing in the country. East Harlem contains the highest concentration of subsidized housing in the country. In 1990, publicly subsidized units comprised more than 60% of the housing stock. Today, the figure has declined to 33.8%. Public and subsidized rental housing units make up 68.8% of all rental units in the district, the highest share of any district in the city. The need for affordable housing is also made evident when we consider that 90% of all housing stock is 50 years or older. As the buildings age and

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

New York City, further illustrating the demand for housing.

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of East Harlem between 2003 and 2007 and the recent construction of market housing that followed could play a role in raising housing prices. Of the 19.6% of land area in East Harlem that was rezoned in 2003-2007, residential uses only saw a 2.9% increase. Given these changes, it is no surprise to find CD11 is skeptical of whether future rezonings will address the needs of the community. There is some current construction for new affordable housing units such as the 314 units proposed at 1951 Park Avenue, and CB11 is hoping a future rezoning will bring more affordable housing to the area.

• 92% of housing units are rental, compared to 75% Manhattan Average

• Subsidized units make up 68.8% of rentals in the district, the highest in the city

• In 2009, 64.6% of residents over the age of 16 used public transit to get to work

New York City, further illustrating the demand for housing.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

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INCENTIVIZING TOOLS

Affordable housing is defined as below market housing that is limited to residents with a specified income relative to the city’s average median income (AMI). Frequently used mechanisms to incentivize or encourage affordable housing include:

1. Density bonuses, where developers are given a higher FAR if they include more affordable units. This is usually initiated through the Inclusionary Housing Program, which offers two strategies:

   • The original R10 Program, which increases the maximum FAR from 10.0 to 12.0 in applicable areas (residential and commercial) within an R10 zoning district so long as 20% of units remain permanently affordable. Below market units must be affordable to households at or below 80% AMI, which in New York City is a rent of $1540/month.

   • In ‘Inclusionary Housing’ designated areas (East Harlem is not mapped as in one of these areas), a bonus of 33% of FAR can be obtained for 20% of units being affordable housing.

2. Tax abatements, credits and other financial tools that lower the cost of a development. These methods include:

   • The Low Income Housing Tax credit (LIHTC) is a 1986 initiative by HUD to incentivize affordable rental housing in the private market. LIHTCs are awarded to developers who can sell these credits to investors in order to raise money for the project. This allows the debt to remain lower because it is securitized by HUD, allowing for more affordable rents. LIHTCs are administered through States, which use a competitive process to allocate credits.

   • The New York City Acquisition Fund is another way that NYC encourages affordable housing by providing financial mechanisms for more easily acquiring and aggregate land for development. The City leverages several banks and other financial institutions to create a $200 million guarantee pool that reduces risk for affordable housing developers at the early stages of capital and land acquisition.

   • 421-a tax benefits provide a declining property tax exemption for multi-family residential developers who build on vacant, predominantly vacant land or land recently built on with a non-conforming use. Complete tax exemption can stretch up to 21 years in northern Manhattan and usually contain 20% or more affordable housing units — units for households who earn 60% of AMI, a monthly rent of $1150. Units have to remain affordable for 35 years.

   • The New York City Housing Development Corp. issues tax-exempt and taxable bonds to finance low-cost mortgages to developers for the creation and preservation of multi-family affordable housing.

   • The 80/20 New Construction Housing program gives tax breaks to developers who set aside 20% of units in their building as affordable for 15-30 years. After this period, they can become market rate.

7. Furman Center for Real Estate & Urban Policy, State of New York City’s Housing and Neighborhoods 2010

8. Furman Center for Real Estate & Urban Policy, State of New York City’s Housing and Neighborhoods 2010

9. Furman Center for Real Estate & Urban Policy, State of New York City’s Housing and Neighborhoods 2010

10. AMI for New York City is the average of the five boroughs as well as Nassau, Suffolk, Putnam, Rockland and Westchester — the metropolitan area.
Changes to the current minimum parking requirements required by the zoning code could encourage both affordable housing, contextual development, good urban design and discourage car use in an area with good public transit.

Minimum parking requirements date back to the 1961 Zoning Resolution and dictate that a certain number of off-street spaces must accompany all buildings. Academic research and communication with affordable housing developers have found that if built underground, parking spaces can cost as much as $25,000 to $85,000 each. In new developments where this is the case, the developer often accounts for this cost either by reducing the number of units built to avoid the expensive materials needed for tall buildings or by increasing the price of each unit.

If you include the parking lots underneath the viaduct, our conservative estimates based on site visits are that there are approximately 1,300 off-street parking spaces in the study area. We believe these high numbers are a result of several factors: past urban renewal, minimum parking requirements for new developments and the convenience of using the space beneath the viaduct for City agency parking. The City has little incentive presented to them to change utilization of the space under the viaduct because of municipal parking convenience.

Such high numbers of off-street parking on Park Avenue represent a significant spatial mismatch in an area where the 2000 census reported over 87% of East Harlem residents don’t have access to a car. Furthermore, public transit access is especially good in East Harlem. In 2009, 64.6% of residents over age 16 used public transit to get to work, a higher percentage than the Manhattan average. The area has subway lines the 2, 3, 4 and 5 — as well as local line 6. There are 16 local bus lines in the area. Together, the public transit systems give East Harlem access to Manhattan, and all boroughs. Additionally, twice as many people bicycle to work in East Harlem than the Manhattan average. 

**BUILDING REQUIREMENT EXEMPTIONS**

Reducing parking requirements could either increase the number of affordable housing units provided or decrease the cost of affordable housing units. This could be done through several methods:

1. **An amendment to the zoning text on affordable housing parking requirements could be made to further lower or eliminate parking requirements**
   - Affordable housing developments already have reduced parking requirements, but some affordable housing buildings in New York City have been proposed or built without any off-street parking. This is the case at a recently approved 314 unit affordable housing development at 1951 Park Ave in the Park Avenue Corridor where all 94 required parking spaces were waived following a special request to the City. This and other examples demonstrate the arbitrary nature of the zoning and the feasibility of affordable housing developments built without parking.

2. **Expand the Lower Manhattan Parking Maximums Zone**
   - Currently, off-street parking requirements are waived for new developments in Manhattan south of 96th street on the east side and 110th Street on the west side. Discussions at the Department of City Planning indicate that extending these boundaries northwards is being explored. If the zone were extended into East Harlem, this could make building affordable housing more attractive to developers by reducing their costs through eliminating off-street parking requirements.

3. **The City could create a special purpose ‘public transportation’ district along Park Ave that requires a fee in-lieu of parking spaces dedicated to providing free transit passes to tenants**
   - A special purpose district is designated by the Department of City Planning and has special zoning regulations that respond to “distinctive neighborhoods with particular issues and goals” (Zoning Handbook, 2011). Many special districts have recently been approved in the City, including the recently approved 125th Street Special District. A special district where a developer pays a fee in-lieu of providing off-street parking that goes to providing free transit passes is feasible, especially in an area with great public transit. Similar policies exist or have been proposed in cities like San Diego, Los Angeles and Toronto.

   This option seems particularly promising due to the presence of the Metro-North rail line, which is currently underutilized by the neighborhood—only 1.3% of Community District 11 residents use the rail line to get to work—likely due to higher fares. Providing Metro-North passes to residents can provide efficient access to Midtown Manhattan, all MTA subway lines, the Bronx, and suburban stations. This policy would have the indirect affect of lessening the strain on the Lexington 4,5,6 Subway line, currently one of the most congested routes in the city.

**METHODS**

All actions require the Department of City Planning to make zoning amendments. Now is a good opportunity to push for parking requirement innovations because City Planning is currently studying residential parking requirements with the intention of making policy changes. The Park Avenue corridor might be a good place for such zoning reforms to be tested.
Thoughtful urban design provides the glue that could hold together any planning improvements to the Park Avenue Corridor. By enhancing the feeling, look and function of the street, new affordable housing developments and economic activity will have a far greater chance of succeeding. Furthermore, the changes in store for the corridor will have less of a chance of harming the vibrancy around the community if they occur within a context specifically designed to mitigate the negative externalities that often accompany new developments—blank ground level walls, shadows, the absence of retail and a lack of good public spaces.

Furthermore, a plan focusing on urban design has the potential to tackle many other longstanding inequities in the community, including high asthma and diabetes rates, a lack of public space, and the currently uninviting presence of the Metro-North viaduct. By encouraging good urban design as a means to make the corridor more vibrant, livable and stimulate the local economy, new buildings should help to improve the street and the spaces surrounding the street. This will allow the viaduct to become an opportunity rather than an obstacle for reactivating the corridor. Furthermore, it aligns the interests of the community with some of the overarching goals of the City like creating public plazas, managing storm water runoff, transforming local transit stations into multi-modal hubs and other initiatives.

The current context outlined above has informed the following urban design recommendations:

1. Lighting improvements
2. Noise mitigation
3. Stormwater management
4. Public space improvements
5. Revitalizing the 125th Street Metro-North Station

**LIGHTING IMPROVEMENTS**

In meetings held with Community Board 11, residents have expressed a wariness, even outright fear, of walking under the viaduct. The current street lighting is inadequate in properly lighting the road. The abundance of vehicles under the viaduct and the physical structure of the viaduct itself act as a barriers to visibility, blocking pedestrians and cars from seeing each other. These concerns regarding poor lighting, shadows and visibility make crossing the street dangerous and heighten the perception that the space is unsafe.

Adding street lighting can be accomplished both through requirements for developers and through partnership with the Department of Transportation. New construction should be required to incorporate street lighting both on the sidewalk and onto building facades to improve lighting on both sides of the sidewalk. In areas where new development will not occur, the Department of Transportation can provide additional street lighting. People are more likely to use a space if it is not perceived as unsafe or unwelcoming—both of which are affected by street lighting.

Another way to improve lighting is to ensure that sunlight reaches the street by limiting streetwall heights and mandating setbacks. If residential development were to occur under the current zoning of R7-2 where no requirements for streetwall heights and setbacks exist, new development could further darken the corridor by adding shadows. Quality Housing zoning codes that add urban design requirements provide a precedent for sky exposure plains that ensure sunlight reaches the street. We recommend that DCP create new setback and streetwall height requirements for the Park Avenue corridor that maximize sunlight to address the shadows caused by the viaduct.

Allowing more sunlight to reach the street by expand sidewalks is also a possibility. Like the 2008 125th Street rezoning guideline to increase the width of sidewalks, Park Avenue could benefit from an expanded sidewalk to prevent new buildings from blocking sunlight reaching the street. This could occur on the western sidewalk between 118th and 124th streets where there are no buildings, allowing

Illustration of proposed lighting conditions (existing conditions inset)
for lot lines to be more easily pushed further back from the road. However, property owners would need to be convinced of the benefit of expanded sidewalks or somehow compensated for the loss of part of their property to the public realm. Raising their FARs or providing the option of a development rights transfers could be considered.

Examples exist in Manhattanville where proposals to expand sidewalks underneath a viaduct have been passed. However, Park Avenue would be very different in that it would not require the use of eminent domain as it was in Manhattanville since there are no existing buildings on the recommended portion of the street, only parking lots. A wider sunlit sidewalk would encourage pedestrians and sidewalk retail uses and enliven Park Avenue. They are also characteristic of Harlem’s other avenues, several of which are 30 feet wide.

NOISE MITIGATION

Noise from the Metro-North trains is another concern that needs to be addressed, as it presents an obstacle for both residential and pedestrian growth along Park Avenue. A 2010 Environmental Assessment Statement conducted for the 1951 Park Avenue residential development assessed the noise levels as a factor to be conscious of, but it was found that the viaduct was actually quieter than elevated MTA subway trains. Since residential developments near to elevated subways have flourished in many areas throughout New York City as well as in other cities like Chicago, there are precedents that give evidence to residential and commercial development in the corridor succeeding.

As mentioned above, requirements for setbacks and expanded sidewalks could be applied as noise mitigation techniques. These would decrease exposure to noise by increasing the distance between housing units and the viaduct. In addition, these strategies would reduce the canyon effect of tall streetwalls built close to the tracks.

New developments and retrofits of old buildings should require the use of special building materials like multi-paned windows and architectural sound barriers that would dampen the noise for tenants. Examples exist in the 1951 Park Avenue development as well with the East River Plaza development plan.

Noise and echoes from the viaduct would also be decreased with the addition of street trees. This would be easy where sidewalks are widened, and would complement work already in progress by the MillionTreesNYC campaign. In addition to decreasing noise, additional street trees would make the corridor more attractive, clean, and would assist in the management of stormwater runoff. This city funded initiative would be a simple solution to add green space to the corridor—another amenity in shortage.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

Stormwater management systems could easily be coupled with recommendations for wider sidewalks and Greenstreets. Any new development along Park Avenue that would widen a sidewalk should include permeable paving, structural soil, and underground catchment basins in order to decrease greywater runoff and stress on an already overwhelmed sewer system.

Permeable paving allows stormwater to pass through the pavement and back into the water table, rather than through the city’s sewer system for treatment. Structural soil can be used underneath permeable sidewalks and roads and allows street trees to develop much larger root networks. Bigger street trees would not only make Park Avenue more attractive and welcoming, they would take in more stormwater and help improve air quality in East Harlem — a particularly important issue due to high incidences of asthma in the area.

Underground catchment basins that collect runoff during a heavy storm event rather than inundate the sewer system could also be implemented. Only once the basins are full would they begin to empty into the system. This would allow an underground supply of water to street trees and planters, decreasing the cost of maintenance to the community.

PUBLIC SPACE IMPROVEMENTS

Public space is an amenity that is lacking along the Park Avenue corridor. East Harlem currently lacks public open space in relation to other New York City districts. While 45% of the district is technically considered open space, when Randall’s and Ward’s Islands are removed, that number drops to 15% and compares poorly to the city’s district average of 27%. Due to low accessibility to Randall’s and Ward’s Islands—verified by surveys reporting that few residents visit the islands—East Harlem is in need of open public space.

Park Avenue presents a good opportunity to increase the share of public open space by better utilizing the roadway underneath the viaduct. Currently leased by the Department of Transportation or the Economic Development Corporation to private or public parties as parking lots on a monthly basis, it is our understanding that contracts can be terminated. This proposal outlines three ways to accomplish this and meet the needs and concerns that face the community.

In the short term, the DOT and EDC should try temporary pilot programs that reclaim the spaces for pedestrians on either a block-by-block or seasonal basis (winter snow removal). Planters, plastic bollards, moveable street furniture and paint that delineate the space for pedestrians has been used by the DOT through the NYC Plazas Program in other parts of the city. Part of the program criteria is that there must be a shortage of open space in the community. Given our findings, we feel the Park Avenue corridor fits the bill. If accomplished through the NYC Plazas Program, DOT would...
work with the community and pay for design and construction of the open space.

To increase the amount of open public space in East Harlem, areas under the viaduct that are near attractions like the Metro-North station and the Urban Garden Center at 116th Street can be transformed. This new open space under the viaduct can serve as connections to the recreational facilities that will be proposed. In the short-term, this could be accomplished by adding tables and benches for people passing by to rest. The corridor would be improved by the increased pedestrian amenities for lunch-goers and people-watchers, drawn to the corridor by other land-use improvements.

CB11’s April 2011 Retail Analysis study, measuring demand for certain uses under the viaduct, found that 80% of respondents wanted more fresh produce vendors. The study also revealed that 90% of surveyed residents want more fitness and recreation places in the neighborhood. The high rates of diabetes and asthma in the community combined with these existing resident demands amount to significant health concerns in the district that could be addressed through urban design interventions.

A weekly market that uses the City’s Health Bucks initiative should be implemented under the viaduct. Health Bucks are $2 coupons that can be used at certain city farmer’s markets. The health of the community could be greatly improved by addressing the connections between food and diabetes, while maintaining economic health by stimulating the local food sector.

Increasing access to fresh food and farmers markets also supports local agriculture and small farms with more sustainable practices than large-scale farmers. An often overlooked environmental benefit to producing and eating local fresh food is that it reduces energy use by having less highly packaged and processed goods.

Attractions such as basketball courts or adult playgrounds with fitness equipment should be added to the new space. These single-purpose attractions would help to draw people to the corridor for extended periods of time and add to the street life, ultimately creating a more vibrant atmosphere in the corridor. Additionally, these new sports facilities would serve to combat the high diabetes and asthma rates the community faces by increasing opportunities for physical activity.

These recreational and fitness uses could be included between 126th and 127th Street with the pedestrian plaza situated at the south end. Directly north of this location are community institutions such as the Choir Academy and Children’s Storefront School. In addition to residents on this end of Park Avenue, community members could also benefit from an additional communal resource underneath the viaduct. As this is just north of the 125th Street Metro-North Station, a potential commercial corridor, the new open space at the 126th-127th block would provide another linkage for circulation in and around the viaduct.

A second potential location would be between 117th and 118th Streets with the pedestrian plaza directly situated at the south end. The Urban Garden Center is directly across the street which would stimulate more foot traffic for both attractions. Though a field does exist at 120th, it belongs to PS79 and may not always be open. As this new space would be adjacent to the new L+M residential developments and close to St. Paul’s school and church, this would be a great opportunity for more recreation and exercise.

Other ideas like dog parks similar to the one at Marcus Garvey, handball courts, popular throughout New York City and soccer arenas could be successful. Playing fields, playgrounds, or baseball diamonds are possibilities.

Another option is to incorporate outdoor fitness equipment into the public spaces. The New York Institute of Technology has installed an adult fitness playground at their campus in Long Island, which includes seven resistance training machines. Implemented underneath the viaduct, this would give members of the community greater opportunities to improve their health and enjoy the outdoor spaces. An option for these installations would be to apportion part of the funds from developers adjacent to the viaduct as part of their public space requirements.

If these options are pursued for the Park Avenue Viaduct, a more detailed survey about specific recreational uses desired in the community should be conducted and more investigate work into other recreational spaces around the world could be done (see Appendix). These new public open spaces should be seen as strategies to enhance the quality of life in East Harlem.
The Metro-North commuter rail station at 125th Street is currently in need of improvement. Located under the viaduct at the intersection of Park Avenue and 125th Street, it is surrounded by empty or underutilized space. Community Board 11 has expressed concerns about safety in the area around the Metro-North stop as far as “dark spots” behind the station and at exits, and that the current condition of the station discourages commuters from transferring to local subway and bus stops. Furthermore, although 64.6% of residents over the age of 16 used public transit to get to work in 2009, the 2000 Census reported that only 1.3% of residents in Community District 11 used the railroad.

The Metro-North station is a unique amenity in East Harlem, and it should be utilized to provide maximum benefits for the community. Efforts should also be made to improve connectivity between local New York City transit and the commuter rail with the long-term goal of decreasing automobile use in a district with one of the highest asthma rates in New York City (21.6%). Strategies to improve the quality of the 125th Street Metro-North station and aim to make it an inter-modal hub include aesthetic enhancements, improved signage, better bicycle amenities, and implementation of a car-share program.

Urban design strategies used to enhance the Metro-North station could improve traveler experience, increase use of the station, and improve connectivity to different transit modes. While the lighting around the station and under the viaduct meets minimum requirements according to the Manhattan Borough Commissioner of Transportation, improved lighting would increase safety and visibility at and around the station. Other aesthetic improvements could include news stands, public art, and outdoor seating.

Better signage at the station could also help to remedy the current lack of connectivity between the Metro-North rail line and local transit. Existing signage outside of the station points in the direction of the closest subway station at 125th Street and Lexington Avenue, but better wayfinding signage including a comprehensive listing of local transit options as well as directions could make the transition to other modes less intimidating for travelers. This signage could also promote the many cultural institutions, landmarks, and other attractions in East Harlem.

During examination of bicycle amenities at the station, we observed very limited bicycle parking, much of which was obstructed by other objects. Meanwhile, bicycles were seen chained to parking lot fences, lamp posts and other fixtures. The Furman Center has reported that East Harlem has more than twice the Manhattan average of people who commute to work by bicycle (2.6% vs. 1.1%). 2.6% represents almost 3,000 people in East Harlem, and cycling is a sustainable and equitable form of transportation that should be encouraged in East Harlem. Better bicycle parking would accommodate the existing demand as well as encourage trip linking between the commuter rail and other public transit options. In addition to bicycle parking, signage should also be added to increase driver awareness of the presence of cyclists, especially because of the poor visibility resulting from the viaduct.

These improvements, when paired with plans to increase commercial development around the station and zoning stipulations providing transit passes to residents, can transform the station into an inter-modal hub and shift the demand from car use onto existing local transit with better connectivity.

As noted by Community Board members and evidenced by the volume of parked cars around the station, many people using the commuter rail drive to the station instead of using public transit. Transforming one of the existing parking lots near the Metro-North station into a car-sharing lot could help to decrease this automobile use. Implementing car-share in East Harlem can also benefit local residents, 87% of which do not have access to a car (2000 Census). This would increase transportation options and accessibility for residents without the high costs of automobile ownership and maintenance. Increasing alternative options to the private automobile must be a priority for Community Board 11 and its residents in a district that has high rates of asthma and underutilized land; they can have the long-term effects of decreasing private car use and parking demand, effectively decreasing the negative consequences of auto use as well as the amount of parking.
One strategy for tackling the economic hardships East Harlem faces is the economic development of the Park Avenue corridor to support commercial and light manufacturing growth. The many vacant lots and proximity to major commercial corridors provide particularly good opportunities to attract new businesses, jobs and pedestrians to Park Avenue.

East Harlem would benefit from more employment opportunities, which can help address the currently low median household income levels in the district. East Harlem also needs to provide a wider variety of stores for the residents around Park Avenue to patron. These needs go hand in hand.

An anchor for economic development on Park Avenue is light manufacturing and food production. There is a budding food manufacturing cluster on Park Avenue. As one of the only industrial sectors in New York City still showing signs of growth, this cluster should be encouraged for the ‘good jobs’ it provides. Park Avenue’s proximity to the Hunt’s Point Terminal Market – the nation’s largest food distribution center — to the existing light manufacturing zoning on Park Avenue, these should be taken advantage of. Furthermore, with a new food manufacturing business incubator now located at La Marqueta at 114th and Park Avenue, the many underutilized lots along the street should facilitate the continued growth of the food manufacturing sector.

There is also high level of “out-shopping” identified in the 2011 East Harlem CB-11 Retail Analysis based on survey data collected from the four commercial corridors of East Harlem. This “out-shopping” pointed to a lack of retail diversity in the area, leading to residents leaving the district to spend their money. According to the analysis, there is $766.4 billion of potential sales leaving the community due to resident shopping outside of the neighborhood. If this money were to stay within the community, it could support East Harlem’s local economy and neighborhood development. If amenities are developed on Park Avenue, businesses will hire employees, and the money spent at the local businesses will stay within the neighborhood, bolstering the continued growth of businesses and the economic vitality of the community as a whole.

There is also a unique C8-3 zoning north of 125th street on the west side of Park Avenue permitting manufacturing and heavy commercial uses that has allowed for a wide variety of uses, including office space, gas stations, and artists’ studios to locate on the street.
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Food Manufacturing in New York City.** February 2007.

Manufacturing Businesses: “More Than a Link in the Food Chain: A Study of the Citywide Economic Impact of


19,200 residents, 2,500 of whom are self-

is $5 billion in gross sales, employing some

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industry in jobs. According to one study, the

food manufacturing has surpassed the auto

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is $5 billion in gross sales, employing some

19,200 residents, 2,500 of whom are self-

employed.16 In addition, food manufacturing

is especially important for immigrants and less educated individuals who make up the majority of workers in the sector.

Food manufacturing also provides jobs with

annual wages averaging $32,000, significantly

higher than, say, restaurant jobs where many

immigrants and less educated individuals often find work.

The benefits of food manufacturing do not

end there. The same study shows that the

job multiplier ratio in New York City’s food

manufacturing sector is 1.76, showing the

potential impact such jobs can have on local economies and job markets.

Preserving and expanding existing light manufacturing zones along Park Avenue could increase employment opportunities, particularly in the food production sector. Doing so would protect currently flourishing industries such as food production while allowing for their growth. This can be done by adjusting the current light manufacturing zoning code from the now existing M1-2 and M1-4 to M1-5M, allowing the manufacturing sector to harness private market interest in residential development by redirecting it to providing work spaces for budding food businesses. M1-5M can do this because it allows for residential uses but mandates that a certain floor area is reserved for manufacturing or commercial uses.

The Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone Development Corporation (UMEZ) has been an important factor in ensuring local hiring practices among developers, which could ensure that new businesses recruit workers from the neighborhood. East Harlem's East River Plaza, which opened in 2009 between 116th and 119th Streets along FDR Drive, was home to a retail job placement program per an agreement between developers, the tenants of East River Plaza, and UMEZ. The agreement stipulated that within three years of full operation, 75% of its store employees would be locally hired, though developers are obligated to only 35%. This can only be achieved with supplementary job fairs and skills training workshops—in East River Plaza’s case, at the cost of $350,000 over four years.

M1 districts are often viewed as “buffers” between higher-zoned manufacturing districts and residential or commercial districts because they facilitate uses that are compatible within neighborhoods. Light manufacturing zones in the area include some industrial bakeries and auto repair shops.

Current M1 districts include parts of Brooklyn Community District 1 (Greenpoint and Williamsburg) and parts of Brooklyn Community District 2 (DUMBO). This zoning is also often used retroactively for converting older industrial buildings into mixed-use residential buildings in areas like Southeast Chelsea; however, along Park Avenue, this zone could be used in the reverse to prevent current light manufacturing from being displaced from the corridor. This is because it would allow for property owners to benefit from residential development as long as they keep some manufacturing spaces. These spaces, in turn, could go to local businesses—for example, entrepreneurs who graduate from HBK Incubates, Hot Bread Kitchen’s food business incubator.

An MX code could also work by allowing for either manufacturing or residential uses to exist in an area, but there is no guarantee that there will be a mix of both uses within this zoning district. Although the intention of an MX zone is to promote mixed use, there is simply no mechanism in place to keep industry in a residential uses drive up higher land prices and rents.17

With the price of manufacturing space in New York City doubling from $6 to $9 per square

foot in 2000 to anywhere between $12 and $18 per square foot in 2009, food manufacturing in New York City is becoming increasingly unaffordable for new businesses. This change

---


to the zoning code could be a way to grow the industrial food cluster around Park Avenue. 18

Although having a mix of both food manufacturing and residential buildings along Park Avenue is currently strongly recommended to grow such a sector, there should ultimately be a public discussion over what kinds of uses the community would like to see along Park Avenue. An M1-5M zone with a mix of both food manufacturing and residential buildings could provide the benefit of good jobs for the community. But more importantly, Park Avenue should not become a bedroom community, but a lively street that is active throughout the day — one that is in keeping with the vibrancy present elsewhere in East Harlem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOT AREA</th>
<th>TOTAL FLOOR AREA PRESERVED FOR MANUFACTURING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 5,000 ft^2</td>
<td>One floor, plus 25% of floor area in buildings of 7+ stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 – 10,000 ft^2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000+ ft^2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CREATE A NEW COMMERCIAL ZONING AROUND THE 125TH STREET METRO-NORTH STATION

NEW YORK CITY HAS ALREADY IDENTIFIED THE AREA AS A SITE FOR COMMERCIAL REVITALIZATION

If the commercial zoning on Park Avenue as it approaches 125th Street were updated, local businesses in East Harlem could benefit from the increased presence of people working in the neighborhood. Particularly around the 125th Street Metro-North station, there are large opportunities to spur transit oriented development in the area, allowing for car-free commuters to work in the neighborhood during the day while also providing new work spaces for local entrepreneurs to start their business.

This proposal comes in light of a $3.5 million HUD grant awarded to the New York-Connecticut Sustainable Communities Initiative Grant in April 2011, a bi-state consortium that seeks to “expand economic opportunity by creating and connecting residents to jobs.” 19

New York City Planning Commissioner Amanda Burden has since expressed interest in encouraging transit-oriented development around MTA Metro-North Railroad and MTA Long Island Railroad stations.

Just a month prior to that, in March 2011, the New York City Economic Development Corporation issued a Request for Expression of Interest regarding the purchase or lease and redevelopment of the Corn Exchange Building at 125th Street and Park Avenue, just steps from the Metro-North Station.

This renewed interest in both the station and an historic building at the corner of 125th Street and Park Avenue reflect more of the same potential that can be seen throughout the rest of the corridor. The Park Avenue corridor would be a prime location to direct higher density commercial development, especially if Park Avenue becomes increasingly residential farther from 125th Street.

Bringing these ideas to fruition would likely involve a rezoning of the C6 commercial zoning on the northwest portion of the corridor. The current zoning allows for floor-to-area ratios of up to 10, and while these densities are appropriate for the area and typical for buildings in central business districts, a contextual zoning would be desirable to ensure that development is in character with the existing urban fabric.

The 2011 CB-11 Retail Analysis highlighted the New York City Economic Development Corporation as one of the largest obstacles in any revitalization of the corridor. However, merely changing the zoning for encourage residential buildings and employment opportunities is not enough to guarantee that there are feet on the street.

The 2011 CB-11 Retail Analysis highlighted currently unmet demands for goods and services in East Harlem. By providing information as to the types of retail demanded by the community, the chances of success for new retail in the district can be increased.

INCENTIVIZE RETAIL ALONG PARK AVENUE

Ideally, retail would be supported by the growth in expenditures from increased commercial and residential development so that it provides the community with a wider variety of retail options. Increasing commercial and residential development goes hand-in-hand with expanding retail opportunities. Park Avenue is currently devoid of pedestrian activity, representing one of the largest obstacles in any revitalization of the corridor. However, merely changing the zoning for encourage residential buildings and employment opportunities is not enough to guarantee that there are feet on the street.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
There are two ways to encourage retail. First, the existing commercial overlays on the southwest portion of Park Avenue could be preserved. The current zoning already allows for neighborhood retail on the street level through a commercial overlay on residential buildings southwest of 125th Street. The previously proposed expanded sidewalks can here be utilized by future markets, cafés, and other small businesses. This would enliven Park Avenue as similar outdoor displays do elsewhere in Upper Manhattan.

Secondly, by pursuing the urban design guidelines mentioned before, Park Avenue could become more attractive to pedestrians and, consequently, businesses. Pedestrian improvements around the city have shown to positively benefit surrounding businesses through more foot traffic, which contributes to greater spending. If ideas such as wider, greener sidewalks were to be adopted, more people and more businesses would likely be attracted to the area to benefit from them.
The viaduct on Park Avenue is an urban design opportunity that, if partnered with well-designed, affordable housing, could also spur the local economy and reap tremendous rewards for the surrounding neighborhood and its residents. Park Avenue in East Harlem can be a destination and an asset to the community, rather than an obstacle. In summary of the analysis and strategy recommendations, stakeholders in the development of Park Avenue should work toward maintaining and increasing affordable housing, developing public space through best practices in urban design, and creating economic opportunity.

ENSURE WELL-DESIGNED AFFORDABLE HOUSING

New zoning proposals and bargaining tools to increase affordable housing.

- Amendments to the affordable housing zoning text to reduce affordable housing developer costs associated with expensive minimum parking lot requirements.
- Expansion of the Lower Manhattan parking maximums zone to East Harlem and Park Avenue will allow for better use of space for community improvement amenities.
- Creation of a special public transportation district to support sustainable transportation options.

IMPROVE CHARACTER THROUGH URBAN DESIGN

Urban design guidelines that guide development of the Park Avenue corridor based on community needs.

- Lighting improvements under and around the viaduct will improve resident and visitor safety.
- Noise Mitigation of the Metro-North train will improve the corridor environment for retail and pedestrians.
- Public Space improvements along Park Avenue such as increased green and recreation spaces will improve the quality of the corridor’s built and natural environment.
- 125th Street Metro-North Station improvement to aesthetics, signage to guide pedestrians, and bike amenities.

INCREASE ACCESS TO SERVICES & EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

New land use policy recommendations that promote new business & stimulate the local economy.

- Preserve and expand light manufacturing zoning to promote light manufacturing business development along Park Avenue.
- Encourage transit-oriented commercial development at the 125th Street Metro-North Station to increase the incentive for passing commuters to visit East Harlem.
- Incentivize retail along Park Avenue to support established and new locally owned businesses and make diverse shopping amenities available to residents and visitors.
## Community District 11 Age Distribution, 1980-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years</td>
<td>8,312</td>
<td>9,075</td>
<td>8,176</td>
<td>7,908</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>8,353</td>
<td>8,457</td>
<td>9,922</td>
<td>4,705</td>
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<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>10,943</td>
<td>8,663</td>
<td>8,961</td>
<td>8,059</td>
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<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>7,821</td>
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<td>5,123</td>
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<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>15,200</td>
<td>12,891</td>
<td>13,415</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>15,589</td>
<td>19,011</td>
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<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>13,564</td>
<td>14,174</td>
<td>17,704</td>
<td>11,506</td>
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<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>12,047</td>
<td>11,197</td>
<td>12,826</td>
<td>12,071</td>
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<tr>
<td>55 to 64 years</td>
<td>10,582</td>
<td>9,560</td>
<td>9,463</td>
<td>14,162</td>
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<tr>
<td>65 to 74 years</td>
<td>7,613</td>
<td>7,344</td>
<td>7,523</td>
<td>6,756</td>
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<tr>
<td>75 and older</td>
<td>4,399</td>
<td>5,204</td>
<td>6,189</td>
<td>8,547</td>
<td>94.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>114,423</td>
<td>110,599</td>
<td>117,705</td>
<td>113,328</td>
<td>-1.0%</td>
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</table>


## Manhattan Age Distribution, 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years</td>
<td>93,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>63,842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>65,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>74,777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>106,798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>351,058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>266,495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>217,211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64 years</td>
<td>181,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 74 years</td>
<td>112,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 and older</td>
<td>95,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>1,629,054</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2009 American Community Survey

## Community District 11 Racial Composition, 1980-2009

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
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APPENDIX

**Data Sources:** 1980, 1990, 2000 Census, 2009 American Community Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $15,000</td>
<td>32,156</td>
<td>20,160</td>
<td>16,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000 - $24,999</td>
<td>5,405</td>
<td>8,000</td>
<td>8,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000 - $34,999</td>
<td>2,753</td>
<td>5,350</td>
<td>5,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000 - $49,999</td>
<td>1,823</td>
<td>2,593</td>
<td>2,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000 - $64,999</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>1,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$65,000 - $99,999</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>$37,159</td>
<td>$53,222</td>
<td>$49,080</td>
<td>$64,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan</td>
<td>$37,159</td>
<td>$54,359</td>
<td>$60,145</td>
<td>$70,526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD11</td>
<td>$23,957</td>
<td>$25,160</td>
<td>$27,470</td>
<td>$28,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$100,081</td>
<td>$68,855</td>
<td>$57,361</td>
<td>$51,096</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Median Household Income (Inflation Adjusted)**

<table>
<thead>
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<td>$68,855</td>
<td>$57,361</td>
<td>$51,096</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Total Populations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>113,328</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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**Total Populations**

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<th>2010</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<td>113,328</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
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</table>

**EXEMPLARY PUBLIC SPACE**

In proposing ideas for improving the urban design and public spaces underneath and along Park Avenue viaduct, it can be useful to look at other places where revitalization underneath highways or viaducts have been successful. In Portland, OR, St. Louis, MO, and Victoria, BC, Canada, these cities have taken advantage of the spaces underneath their highways for skate parks. Because there are so many limitations on skate-boarding or places for bicycle tricks, these sports often occur in areas where it is undesired or unsuitable. In these cases, public or private property will often get damaged and make the public space more uninviting to other users. By providing an amenity to include skateboarders, cities is able to avoid further damage to public spaces by providing a space that is made for these sports. Public spaces should be a place that is available and considerate of all users.

In Hoboken, New Jersey, the city is conducting a similar project to revitalize their 14th Street Viaduct. They envision transforming an antiquated structure into a safe, state-of-the-art viaduct complete with expanded pedestrian walkways, improved lighting, narrowed streets, a dog run, playground, multi-use recreation and other spaces. Through community workshops and an active push from the county – multiple stakeholders gained the support and funds necessary to go through with the project.

**EXAMPLES OF PUBLIC SPACE**

Our studio is not the only group interested in influencing Park Avenue’s growth. The Harlem Community Development Corporation has also produced a plan that proposes reinventing the corridor as a mile-long market — the latest in a long history of market proposals for Park Avenue that began as far back as the 1970s. Affordable & market rate housing developers already have a footing in the area.

In Hoboken, New Jersey, the city is conducting a similar project to revitalize their 14th Street Viaduct. They envision transforming an antiquated structure into a safe, state-of-the-art viaduct complete with expanded pedestrian walkways, improved lighting, narrowed streets, a dog run, playground, multi-use recreation and other spaces. Through community workshops and an active push from the county – multiple stakeholders gained the support and funds necessary to go through with the project.