

WEST HARLEM

Master Plan Toward a New Waterfront – 125th St. to 137th St., Broadway to the River

In this fourth and final newsletter, we are pleased to summarize the recommendations of the Master Plan. A warm thanks to all who participated in developing the Master Plan, as your input strongly influenced the ultimate recommendations. This plan will serve as a guide in the efforts to redevelop the West Harlem neighborhood, and we look forward to your continued involvement.

Introduction

The narrow strip of waterfront property between St. Clair Place/125th Street and West 133rd Street used to be a center of commerce and recreation, resplendent with ferry service and maritime trade. Just inland of the waterfront, the Manhattanville neighborhood was a thriving manufacturing district, bustling with assorted industries, such as meat packers, doll manufacturing, and the nascent automobile industry. Today, this waterfront area is underutilized and marked by storage facilities, auto-repair, gas stations, and parking lots.

The New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC), on behalf of the City of New York, developed a Master Plan setting forth recommendations for reactivation of the waterfront and for redevelopment of the inland district.

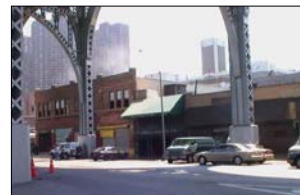
Background

The Study Area is situated within the Manhattanville valley, a valley that was formed by a river that ran down 125th Street, and is set against the northern border of Morningside Heights. The Study Area's topography is punctuated by the series of viaducts: the Henry Hudson Parkway, the Amtrak rail tracks, Riverside Drive, and the elevated subway above Broadway. Each transverse further separates the waterfront from the upland. The Study Area's zoning – primarily for manufacturing uses – reinforces the area's isolation by excluding the development of higher density and mixed uses.

The Study Area's physical isolation creates both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity is to take advantage of the Study Area's history and geography to create an enclave of redevelopment that is unique to the Manhattan landscape.



The challenge is to connect the Study Area to its surrounding environment, both physically and economically. The waterfront should be connected to the upland community and to the Manhattan Greenway. Equally important, the local residents, businesses, and institutional communities should have strong links to greater Harlem and Manhattan's economy.



Existing conditions on 12th Avenue (left) and the waterfront (right).

Summary of Recommendations

The Master Plan is comprised of three components, or stages, of redevelopment. They are:

- Stage 1: Waterfront.** A series of piers would bring visitors closer to the waterfront through a variety of activities, including fishing, excursion water tours, boating, and ecological exploration. New plantings and play areas would attract a visitor's interest, as bikers and pedestrians make their way along the waterfront. A restaurant, visitors center, and/or small shops would help to create a destination at the water's edge.
- Stage 2: Transportation.** Creation of a vibrant community requires improved roadways and public transportation. A potential MetroNorth stop at 125th St., improved bus service, and a ferry landing would create an intermodal center to support this need. Reconfiguration of the Henry Hudson Parkway ramps and partial closing of waterfront streets would improve the pedestrians' experience. Streetscape improvements along 125th Street and 12th Avenue would demarcate the waterfront's proximity and enhance street life.
- Stage 3: Upland Development.** Public improvements to the infrastructure – transportation and waterfront – would encourage infill development within the Study Area. Changes to the zoning would allow for uses that are currently restricted or not permitted, including park uses and street front retail. Partnerships with the area's institutions and organizations would enhance the utilization of existing programs and engender new cultural and commercial development.

Stage 1

Waterfront

EDC manages the narrow strip of land -- 80' wide -- along the waterfront between St. Clair Place and West 133rd Street. The site is bounded by Marginal Way to the east and the Hudson River to the west. To create a successful waterfront destination, it is important to maximize this space.

The conceptual design for the waterfront accomplishes this by expanding the useable space over the water. Three new piers -- one larger one for excursion boats and potential ferry service and two smaller ones for small boats and ecological education -- are proposed to line the water's edge. In addition, a wharf along the northern end of the site brings visitors down to the water.



The design for the waterfront has a series of linear elements. These elements connect the site to the north and south, and they parallel the linearity of the overhead viaducts. Further refinement of the waterfront design will take place during the next phase of design work.

Stage 1: Next Steps

1. Proceed with Final Design of the Waterfront in Coordination with the Community
2. Secure Funds for Construction of Waterfront Improvements (~\$16 million)
3. Construct Waterfront Improvements



View looking south from the wharf.

To separate active space from contemplative space, the waterfront is divided into two areas: the Slope and the Plaza. The Slope consists of a lawn, plantings, and seating area. It slants toward the water and is located at the northern end of the site. The Slope would be an ideal spot to sit and watch small boats make their way down the Hudson.

The Plaza allows for active gathering space, and consists of open areas as well as the development of "urban streams." The urban streams are linear planting areas with grasses, trees, and a naturalized drainage system. A bikeway continues from Riverside Park through the Plaza, weaving its way through the urban streams.



View looking north from the plaza.

The ultimate test of a project is its longevity. A priority for EDC is to establish a community amenity that serves as a focus of activity. To create this activity and to help generate income that could assist with maintenance costs, it is envisioned that a private developer or institution would create a 10,000 sq. ft. building at the north end of the site. Uses might include a restaurant, retail space, and a visitors or education center.



A view of the excursion pier, looking north.

Stage 2

Transportation

The second part of the plan recommends transportation improvements, including an **intermodal hub** consisting of new transit stops and potential ferry landing, **streetscape** improvements along 125th Street, and **roadway redesign**.

Streetscape

To connect the upland to the water, streetscape improvements will help guide visitors down 125th Street. The improved aesthetics of the streetscape would send a clear signal to local entrepreneurs that West Harlem is ripe for redevelopment. Additional improvements could be made to the 125th Street subway structure, creating a clear view corridor to the water, and along 12th Avenue to encourage street-front retail and marketplace activities.

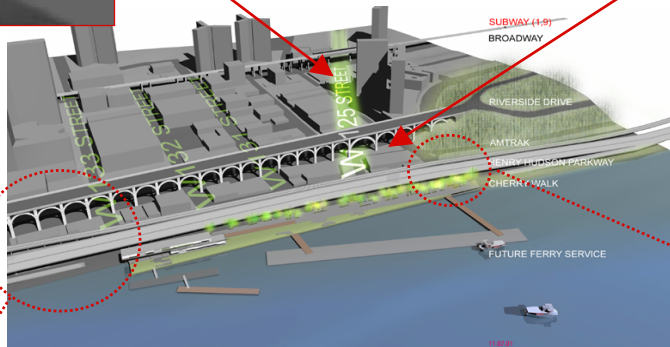


Widened sidewalks, new tree plantings, public street-art, and a possible bike lane will greatly enhance 125th Street.

Intermodal Hub

As the area continues to grow, there should be a longer-term goal of improving public transportation access. In this regard, a hub of intermodal activity (i.e. multiple transit uses) is proposed. Bus lines would extend to Twelfth Avenue, and a bus turnaround at 125th Street would be integrated with the proposed 125th Street Metro-North stop. In addition, EDC will continue to coordinate with the appropriate agencies to pursue the option of ferry service from the excursion boat pier.

Development of a potential MetroNorth stop at 125th Street would create a new core of pedestrian and commuter traffic. The MTA is currently investigating this option as part of the Penn Station Access Study.



Changes to the Henry Hudson exit and entrances would substantially improve traffic safety.

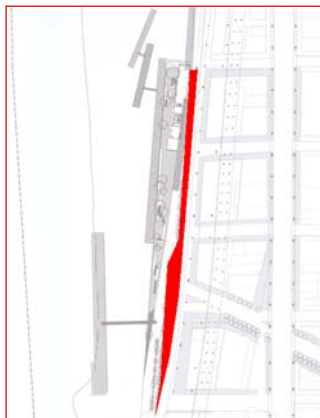
Stage 2: Next Steps

1. Coordinate with CDOT to Implement Short-Term Traffic Improvements
2. Identify Funding (\$7M) and Implement Streetscape Improvements on 125th St.
3. Coordinate with SDOT to Implement H. H. Parkway Ramp Improvements (~\$8M)
4. Coordination with MTA for Intermodal (Rail and Bus) Improvements
5. Coordination with CDOT and Port Authority for Potential Ferry Service

Roadway Redesign

Traffic from the Henry Hudson Parkway comes sweeping down onto Marginal Street. The challenge was to develop a traffic plan that would improve both traffic flow and pedestrian safety. After extensive traffic surveying, the study engineers developed a plan that would help to change the character of Marginal Way to serve the local neighborhood.

In the short term, the consultants recommend narrowing Marginal Way from four-lanes to two-lanes and using special paving to denote a local street. This short term action would narrow Marginal Street by 20,500 sq. ft., adding nearly a half-acre of area to the public waterfront. This area is shown in the diagram to the left.



The area shown in red is the space that would be gained for public use by the short-term roadway improvements.

The long-term concept calls for the reconfiguration of the Henry Hudson Parkway on- and off-ramps (see above). This vision would enable the partial closure of Marginal Way. Without the ramp changes, closure of Marginal Way would compromise traffic flow in the area, adding to congestion and queuing.

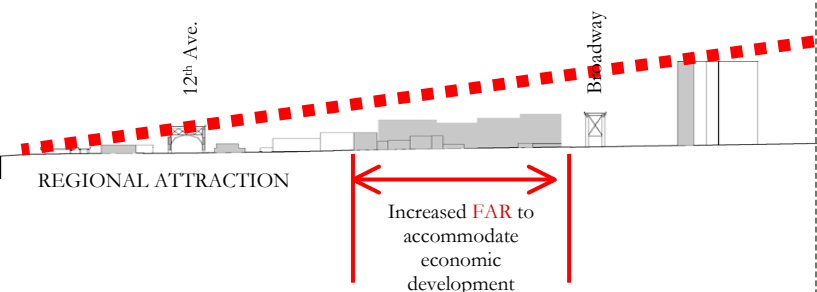
Stage 3

Upland Development

The third component of the Master Plan is for economic and institutional development, which calls for substantial private investment. With a new waterfront and the transportation improvements completed in Stages I and II, the Study Area is prepared to take advantage of: (1) institutional partner development with Columbia University and City College, (2) the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone benefits, and (3) the existing industrial building stock.

The objective is to create a vibrant, working neighborhood. To do so, it is recommended that:

- A mix of research, commercial and institutional uses be created upland.
- Development reflects the area's topography (a valley)
- Mid-rise infill development is encouraged near Broadway
- 12th Avenue is activated for street-front retail



This diagram indicates that infill development should be below the dashed red line, complementing the Manhattanville valley's topography.



The Study Area's current zoning restricts the type of businesses that can be developed. For example, the building pictured to the right, the Alexander Doll Factory, could not be constructed today because of the Study Area's strict density rules. With changes to the zoning, infill development that complements the existing building stock would be permitted.

Government can help to assure that redevelopment occurs in a manner that complements the area's history and is consistent with community development goals. Specific actions should be to:

- Change the **zoning** to allow for a greater mix of uses within the West Harlem waterfront area. In addition, the density, or F.A.R., should be increased to allow for the development of contextual buildings that are similar in size to many of the area's larger 5-story industrial buildings.
- Create **partnerships** with the the educational institutions, Empowerment Zone, HiWay125 (a technology zone), and the 125th Street BID to engender greater private investment upland.
- Encourage private property owners to develop 12th Avenue as a retail corridor, with a focus on food and entertainment.

Stage 3: Next Steps

1. Initiate rezoning to increase uses and density in coordination with DCP and the community
2. Create partnerships with business organizations and local academic institutions for targeted marketing of the area
3. Encourage developers, local entrepreneurs, and others to infill area, with an emphasis on strengthening the 12th Ave. and 125th St.

W. Harlem Working Committee

As part of the Master Plan, EDC formed a task force, or Working Committee, to provide input. EDC would like to thank the following elected officials, government agencies, and organizations for their participation in the Working Committee:

- 144th Street Landmark Block Association
- City College: CUNY
- Columbia University
- Community Board 9, Chair
- Community Board 9, Chair, Harlem Piers Committee
- Congressman Charles B. Rangel
- Council Member Robert Jackson
- Council Member Stanley Michels
- Fairway Supermarket
- General Grant Resident Association
- Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce
- Hamilton Heights West Harlem CPO
- Harlem Community Development Corporation
- Harlem Visitors and Convention Center
- Hamilton Heights HDPC Council
- Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields
- Manhattanville Resident Association
- Metropolitan Transportation Authority NYC Transit
- Morningside Heights Historic District Committee
- Morningside Heights/West Harlem Sanitation Coalition
- N Retail Store
- NYC Department of City Planning
- NYC Department of Parks and Recreation
- NYC Department of Transportation
- NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
- NYS Department of State
- NYS Department of Transportation
- NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
- North River Community Environmental Review Board
- State Assembly Member Keith L. Wright
- State Assembly Member Herman D. Farrell Jr.
- State Senator David A. Paterson
- State Senator Eric T. Schneiderman
- Tiemann Place Volunteers
- Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone
- Urban Kayak
- West Harlem Coalition
- West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. (WEACT)

In addition, EDC thanks Community Board 9, private citizens, and businesses who contributed their time and thought to the Master Plan. For further information, or for additional copies of the Master Plan summary report, please call EDC at (212) 619-5000.