

B. HISTORIC CONTEXT

Following several decades as a commercial waterfront village consisting of stables, warehouses, ice-houses, and factories, Manhattanville developed into a thriving industrial district in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Spurred by transportation improvements in the mid-1800s, including a rail station and ferry terminal at 130th Street, the area was ideally located for quick shipment of goods to New Jersey and points north. Initially, the neighborhood attracted the dairy and meatpacking industries, which required expedient shipment for perishable goods. In the early 20th century, construction of the IRT subway system, including the Manhattan Valley IRT viaduct, created a housing boom in the Manhattanville area and a commercial corridor formed along Broadway—effectively transforming the village into the urban area it is today. While housing was developed throughout Manhattanville, the study area itself remained a manufacturing and trade-related hub in large part due to the 1916 zoning resolution that deemed the study area as “unrestricted,” thereby allowing for industrial use.

When demand for automobiles increased after World War I, ample space, unrestricted zoning, and visibility from the elevated IRT subway line made Manhattanville an excellent choice for automobile service facilities. Manhattanville’s ferry and rail access was of particular importance, as cars were manufactured in the Midwest and delivered by sea and rail freight to the study area. Automobile showrooms and service centers, including the Chevrolet service station (built in 1918) at 3300 Broadway, the Glidden Buick Company service station (built in 1920) at 3259 Broadway, the prominent six-story Studebaker Building (built in 1923) on West 131st Street west of Broadway, and the Warren Nash Service Station (built in 1927), also on Broadway, gave the area between West 125th and West 135th Streets the name “Automobile Row.”¹ During this time in the eastern portion of the study area, garages and gas stations replaced most stables, warehouses, and other industrial uses—even some residential buildings had showrooms on their ground floor. In addition to auto-related uses, the meatpacking industry clustered along Twelfth Avenue near the rail line during the 1930s.

The continued construction of roadway projects throughout New York City, including the nearby George Washington Bridge (1927) and Henry Hudson Parkway (1934), strengthened the demand and accessibility for the services provided by the study area’s businesses. At its high point in 1940, the automobile industry in Manhattanville employed approximately 3,500 workers.² However, during the 1940s new car showrooms and large service stations were replaced by used-car dealers and independent repair shops, due largely to World War II. At the same time, non-auto-related industrial firms increased their presence in the area. For example, the Warren Nash building was sold to the Connecticut Envelope Company, which used half the space and rented the other floors to light-industrial businesses. Historic Sanborn maps from 1951 show a mix of auto-related uses, such as garages, dealerships, and used-car lots; manufacturing uses, such as printers ink manufacturing, milk processing, a bologna factory, and a radio manufacturer; and storage uses for furniture and used cars, among other goods.

1 Much like automotive dealerships today, service stations typically included space for receiving shipments of new cars, for detailing or adding custom accessories to cars, to make repairs for existing customers, and a showroom for new-car sales.

2 Historic Preservation Program, Graduate School of Architecture, Columbia University. “A Preservation Plan for Hamilton Heights and Manhattanville.” 1996-1997.

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By the late 1950s, Manhattanville's proximity to water and rail transportation became less vital, as trucking became the primary transportation mode for shipping. This change precipitated an end to ferry service, the dock areas soon disappeared, and the neighborhood's physical and social connection with the waterfront was greatly diminished. At the same time, the manufacturing sector, an important employer in Manhattanville, began to decline throughout New York City, including the study area, as businesses moved to other parts of the United States and overseas in search of lower operating costs.

According to a 1984 planning study conducted for the Harlem Urban Development Corporation (HUDC), Manhattanville contained 111 businesses in 1965, employing a total of 5,395 people. By 1984, HUDC's survey of the area found 91 firms employing 1,916 people—a job loss of 64 percent. The number of manufacturing businesses had decreased from 19 to three, meat wholesalers had decreased from 18 to 11, and active warehouses had decreased from nine to three. According to the study, only a few large employers were still present in the area in 1984, including a manufacturing firm with 600 employees, two smaller manufacturing firms with 94 workers between them, and several meat wholesalers that collectively had 135 employees. Since the 1960s, the study area's manufacturing and meat and dairy processing businesses have slowly been replaced by other uses already present in the area, including moving and storage businesses, wholesale supply firms, parking lots and garages, food services, and gas stations. These uses remain in the study area today.

Since the early 1990s, the study area has also become home to an increasing number of firms with office-related and service-related functions. In fact, the public sector is now the largest employer in the study area, due in large part to the Manhattanville Bus Depot and New York City Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and the New York Police Department (NYPD) offices located in the Warren Nash Service Station building at 3280 Broadway. However, auto-related jobs, once the core of the study area's employment, now represent only about 6 percent of the study area's workforce.

Other private sector employment primarily includes a mix of smaller entertainment, institutional, business, and professional service firms. For example, at West 131st Street and Twelfth Avenue on the lot of a former meatpacking business, a recently renovated brick building now houses a restaurant, a fitness consultant, a television production firm, an architecture firm, and an information technology company. Until recently, the former factory site at 637 West 125th Street was occupied by Reality House, a substance abuse, HIV treatment, and job training center, and is now office space for Columbia University. In addition, the Studebaker Building is now being renovated to house offices for Columbia University. These office- and service-related uses have helped keep employment above 1984 levels, as there are approximately 2,100 jobs in the study area today, a slight increase from about 1,900 jobs cited in the 1984 HUDC report.

Despite this trend, however, there are few buildings in the study area that can accommodate contemporary office or multi-purpose use. While the few high-quality multi-story buildings mentioned above could accommodate adaptive reuse, many lots are occupied by one- to two-story warehouses unsuited for office or service-related use. In general, the footprint and gross square footage of many buildings in the study area make them functionally obsolete for most contemporary commercial uses and many industrial uses, except perhaps for automotive and storage uses. Internal circulation is often limited to stairs or to a single (often obsolete) elevator. Even some auto-related uses cannot efficiently operate within many of the existing buildings because of their outdated design and engineering, such as low

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floor-to-ceiling heights and dense column spacing. In addition, due to the extensive history of auto-related and other industrial uses at a majority of lots in the study area, environmental concerns may make adaptive reuse cost prohibitive.

Development in Manhattanville since the 1950s has been centered on a series of urban renewal projects focused on residential slum clearance just outside the study area. In 1955, the New York City Housing Authority constructed the 21-story General Grant Houses south of West 125th Street and east of Broadway, followed in 1959 by the 20-story Manhattanville Houses, located directly east of the study area. In 1964, the New York City Planning Commission (CPC) announced several possible urban renewal sites, including a section of Manhattanville east of the study area, where “blight and deterioration were so advanced that much of the recommended renewal treatment is likely to be redevelopment.”¹ In 1965, the study area itself became the focus of urban revitalization efforts when the CPC created a Manhattanville Urban Renewal Study Committee to examine redevelopment options for the area between West 125th and West 135th Streets and St. Nicholas Avenue and the Hudson River; however, redevelopment plans were never implemented.² Four years later, Columbia University, the Negro Labor Committee, and the New York City Housing and Development Administration proposed a renewal project for the area between West 125th and West 135th Streets, from Broadway to the Hudson River. The project, though never built, aimed to create 15,000 to 20,000 jobs, 30,000 housing units, a marina, and recreational and cultural facilities, including the construction of 3 million square feet of space for industrial enterprises with residential housing above.³ In 1976, directly north of the study area, the 35-story, 1,190-unit Riverside Park Community apartments at 3333 Broadway were built to house low- and middle-income residents. As discussed above, the Manhattanville Bus Depot, completed in 1991, is the only large-scale development built within the study area for decades.

Despite some limited reuse of industrial buildings for office use, few redevelopment or renovation projects have taken place within the manufacturing-zoned study area in more than a decade. While northern Manhattan has generally seen a great deal of real estate interest and development over the past five years, with central Harlem as the epicenter of commercial redevelopment, relatively little investment has been made to structures within the study area. In fact, 87 percent of structures in the study area were built more than 50 years ago, with few signs of significant remodeling efforts, as demonstrated by the extent of poor physical conditions cited later in this report.⁴ The advanced age and small size of a substantial percentage of the structures in the study area contribute to their functional obsolescence. Floor plates and column spacing designed for manufacturing, warehousing, and auto-related uses nearly a century ago are not well suited to contemporary business operations, particularly service sector employers.

Nearby, Harlem’s recently revamped 125th Street commercial corridor, which has attracted retail national chains and local favorites, like Citarella, ends abruptly at Broadway, where the study area begins. In 1996, Fairway Market opened directly west of the study area on Twelfth Avenue and has become a popular grocery shopping destination for the region’s residents. Northwest of the study area, at West 135th and Twelfth Avenue, an old warehouse is currently being renovated for restaurant use.

1 Lawrence, O’Kane. “Worst City Slums Due for Renewal,” *New York Times*. April 14, 1964.

2 Kaplan, Samuel. “Planners Scored on West Harlem,” *New York Times*. April 12, 1965.

3 Kihss, Peter. “Columbia Spurs Massive Renewal North of 125th St.,” *New York Times*. May 14, 1968.

4 Age of buildings estimated by DOB and Thornton Tomasetti, Inc.

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Also under construction in Manhattanville is the new Gatehouse Theater, an additional facility of Aaron Davis Hall performing art space at West 135th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. In addition, institutional redevelopment continues to the east (City College) and the south (Columbia University). However, while there has been surge of redevelopment in surrounding residential and commercial areas, the study area has remained largely unaffected, with little physical investment made to existing structures or properties. One exception is the recent renovation of four residential properties on Broadway, between West 132nd and West 133rd Streets.

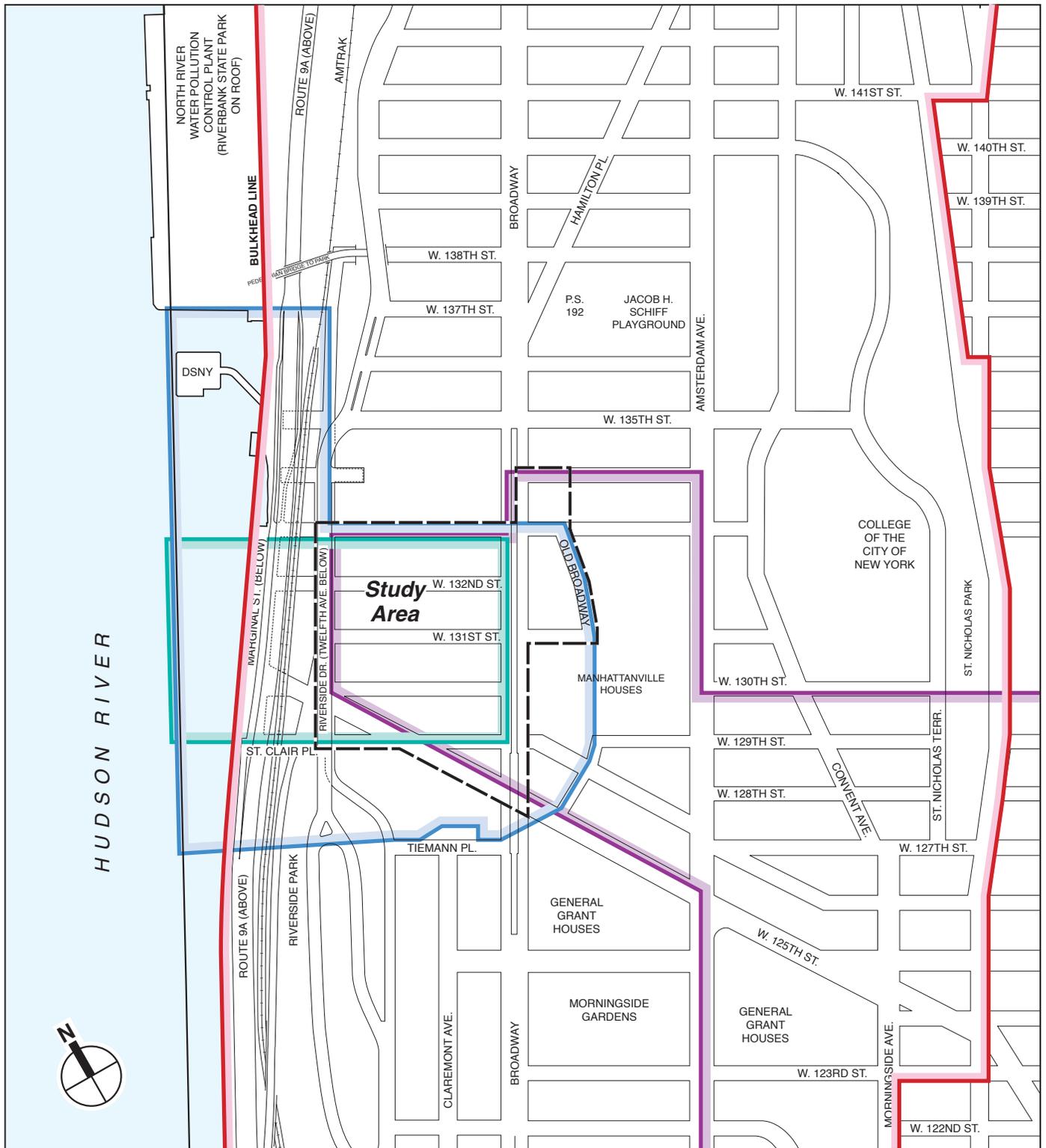
RECENT PLANNING AND PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVES

All or part of study area has been included in several recent planning and public policy initiatives, including the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone UMEZ (1994), the Harlem on the River Plan (2000), the New York City Economic Development Corporation's (EDC's West Harlem Master Plan (2002), and Community Board 9's 197-a Plan. Figure 5 shows the geographic boundaries of these four initiatives.

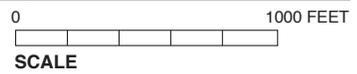
In 1994, the Clinton Administration established 72 empowerment zones in the nation's most impoverished urban areas in an effort to revitalize distressed communities by using public funds and tax incentives as catalysts for private investment. Initial aid of \$100 million was given to 10 "Round One" zones—areas most desperately in need of assistance. Two of these original empowerment zones were created in New York City: the Bronx Empowerment Zone and the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone (UMEZ). Not all of upper Manhattan was eligible for assistance, as only the most distressed tracts were included in the new zone, which includes the study area. UMEZ has assisted several businesses and projects in other parts of the empowerment zone; however, little activity or investment has occurred within the study area. Few businesses have moved into the study area and taken advantage of the UMEZ benefits, although there have been many examples of successful reinvestment in other parts of the UMEZ, including Velma's Party Shop at 139 West 116th Street, Karrot Health Food Store at 304 West 117th Street, Art Gallery and Studio at 312 West 118th Street, and Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine at 2090 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Blvd.

West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. and Community Board 9 initiated the "Harlem on the River Plan" in 1998 in response to an EDC Request for Proposal to develop a portion of the Harlem waterfront. The study examined the area bounded by West 133rd Street on the north, Broadway on the east, West 125th Street on the south, and the Hudson River on the west, which included a majority of the study area. The plan recommended developing the Harlem Piers area as a local and regional resource, promoting a vibrant wholesale and retail marketplace with family entertainment, art, cultural and environmental education uses, and improving traffic and pedestrian issues. It also recommended the condemnation of adjacent private property.

Building on this plan, the EDC created the West Harlem Master Plan in 2002. Recommendations of the plan intended to reduce the underutilization of properties, improve employment opportunities, and enhance community character. The plan envisioned a new waterfront park at Harlem Piers, transportation improvements, and opportunities for upland development. Specifically, it recommended changing restrictive zoning to allow for a greater variety of uses and bulk in the area near Broadway, and economic and institutional development, including partner development with Columbia Univer-



- Study Area Boundary
- Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone
- Harlem on the River Plan
- EDC's West Harlem Master Plan
- Community Board 9 197-a Plan



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sity and City College. The waterfront park, stretching from West 125th Street to West 132nd Street, has been approved and is expected to be completed in 2008.

The Community Board 9-proposed 197-a Plan makes several land use and zoning recommendations for the Manhattanville neighborhood. These include, among other things, creating a special purpose zoning district in Manhattanville to encourage niche industrial firms, studying and adopting contextual zoning, and exploring development of underbuilt sites.

Finally, just outside the study area two more planning initiatives are underway that aim to improve access to the Hudson River waterfront. In 2005 the Manhattan Borough President's Office (MBPO) and the New York Department of State Division of Coastal Resources released the "Take Me to the River Concept Plan," that targets the area directly north of the study area. This plan provides recommendations for strengthening the cultural and economic resources of West Harlem and explores opportunities for physical improvements along the waterfront and throughout its project area. MBPO is currently seeking a consultant to assist in implementation of some of these recommendations. In 2006 DCP completed their 125th Street River-to-River Study, which recommends a special zoning district directly east of the study area along 125th Street. The district aims to strengthen the corridor's continuity, maintain its unique character, encourage a diverse mix of businesses, and encourage movement off Broadway to the north and south.