

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the effects of the proposed project on urban design and visual resources. The proposed project would result in redevelopment of the Victoria Theater site, which includes a vacant State-owned theater that has been determined eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The Victoria Theater comprises two buildings. The South Building fronts onto West 125th Street and contains the original entrance and lobby of the theater. The North Building is located on West 126th Street and contains the former auditorium and other accessory public spaces. The proposed project would retain, restore, and reuse the South Building as part of the proposed project and redevelop the site of the North Building with approximately 360,000 square feet (sf) of residential, hotel, retail, parking, and cultural uses in a new building.

Under the *CEQR Technical Manual*, urban design is defined as the totality of components that may affect a pedestrian's experience of public space. These components include streets, buildings, visual resources, open spaces, natural resources, and wind. An urban design assessment under CEQR must consider whether and how a project may change the experience of a pedestrian in a project area. The *CEQR Technical Manual* guidelines recommend the preparation of a preliminary assessment of urban design and visual resources, followed by a detailed analysis, if warranted based on the conclusions of the preliminary assessment. The analysis provided below addresses urban design characteristics and visual resources for existing conditions and the future without and with the proposed project.

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

The proposed project would not result in any changes to natural features, open spaces, or streets in the study area. It would maintain the streetwalls of West 125th and 126th Streets, and the footprint and lot coverage of the project site building would not change. The proposed development would be considerably larger—in terms of both bulk and height—than what currently exists on the site and what is permitted by zoning, but would be consistent with City goals to encourage new mixed-use development, to expand cultural uses, and to develop housing (including affordable housing) along the 125th Street corridor.

The new building on the North Building site would set back a minimum of 30 feet from the façade of the South Building on West 125th Street. The proposed setback is designed to respect and reflect the height of the historic South Building. The façade of the new building would be clad in glass curtain wall, designed to be light and transparent and as such, not compete visually with the South Building's historic masonry façade. An open atrium would be created along the west side of the building, setting the bulk of the structure away from the adjacent low-rise buildings located to the west on West 125th and 126th Streets, including the historic Apollo Theater.

The project would improve the pedestrian experience of the study area, be in keeping with the developing mixed-use character of the study area, and would support the needs of the community, including a hotel for the underserved Upper Manhattan market, affordable housing, and multi-purpose performing arts space.

The views along significant corridors are expected to remain substantially the same, although views toward the project site would now include a new, tall building. From within the study area—as well as from more distant viewpoints—the proposed new building would join the Hotel Theresa, St. Nicholas Towers, and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building as prominent features of the study area’s skyline, above the surrounding lower-scale development. The proposed project would not obstruct any views to important visual resources, or eliminate any existing view corridors.

Overall, this analysis concludes that the proposed project would not have any significant adverse impacts related to urban design and visual resources.

B. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

Based on the *CEQR Technical Manual*, a preliminary assessment of urban design and visual resources is appropriate when there is the potential for a pedestrian to observe, from the street level, a physical alteration beyond that allowed by existing zoning. Examples include projects that permit the modification of yard, height, and setback requirements, and projects that result in an increase in built floor area beyond what would be allowed ‘as-of-right’ or in the future without the proposed project.

To facilitate the redevelopment of the project site, a number of discretionary actions would be required, including zoning overrides for total floor area, Floor Area Ratio (FAR), maximum building height, maximum base height, permitted number of residential units, and required square footage per parking space. Therefore, as the proposed project would be expected to result in physical alterations beyond those allowed by existing zoning, it meets the threshold for a preliminary assessment of urban design and visual resources.

The *CEQR Technical Manual* guidelines state that if the preliminary assessment shows that changes to the pedestrian environment are sufficiently significant to require greater explanation and further study, then a detailed analysis is appropriate. Examples include projects that would potentially obstruct view corridors, compete with icons in the skyline, or make substantial alterations to the streetscape of a neighborhood by noticeably changing the scale of buildings. Detailed analyses also are generally appropriate for area-wide rezonings that include an increase in permitted floor area or changes in height and setback requirements, general large-scale developments, or projects that would result in substantial changes to the built environment of a historic district or components of a historic building that contribute to the resource’s historic significance. Conditions that merit consideration for further analysis of visual resources include when the project partially or totally blocks a view corridor or a natural or built visual resource and that resource is rare in the area or considered a defining feature of the neighborhood; or when the project changes urban design features so that the context of a natural or built visual resource is altered (i.e., if the project alters the street grid so that the approach to the resource changes; if the project changes the scale of surrounding buildings so that the context changes; or if the project removes lawns or other open areas that serve as a setting for the resource).

Compared to the future without the proposed project, the proposed project could potentially make noticeable alterations to the streetscape of the surrounding area by noticeably changing the

scale of buildings and would remove a portion of the Victoria Theater, a historic building. Therefore, the proposed project would meet the threshold for a detailed assessment of urban design and visual resources. This analysis is provided below.

C. METHODOLOGY

As defined in the *CEQR Technical Manual*, urban design is the totality of components that may affect a pedestrian’s experience of public space. This detailed assessment considers the effects of the proposed project on the experience of a pedestrian in the study area. The assessment focuses on those project elements that have the potential to alter the built environment, or urban design, of the project area, which is collectively formed by the following components:

- Streets—the arrangement and orientation of streets define location, flow of activity, street views, and create blocks on which buildings and open spaces are arranged. Other elements including sidewalks, plantings, street lights, curb cuts, and street furniture also contribute to an area’s streetscape.
- Buildings—a building’s size, shape, setbacks, pedestrian and vehicular entrances, lot coverage and orientation to the street are important urban design components that define the appearance of the built environment.
- Visual Resources—visual resources include significant natural or built features, including important view corridors, public parks, landmark structures or districts, or otherwise distinct buildings.
- Open Space—open space includes public and private areas that do not include structures including parks and other landscaped areas, cemeteries, and parking lots.
- Natural Features—natural features include vegetation, and geologic and aquatic features that are natural to the area.

The *CEQR Technical Manual* recommends an analysis of pedestrian wind conditions for projects that would result in the construction of large buildings at locations that experience high wind conditions (such as along the waterfront, or other location where winds from the waterfront are not attenuated by buildings or natural features), which may result in an exacerbation of wind conditions due to “channelization” or “downwash” effects that may affect pedestrian safety. The project site is not on the waterfront and is not in a location that experiences high wind conditions. Therefore, a pedestrian wind conditions analysis is not warranted.

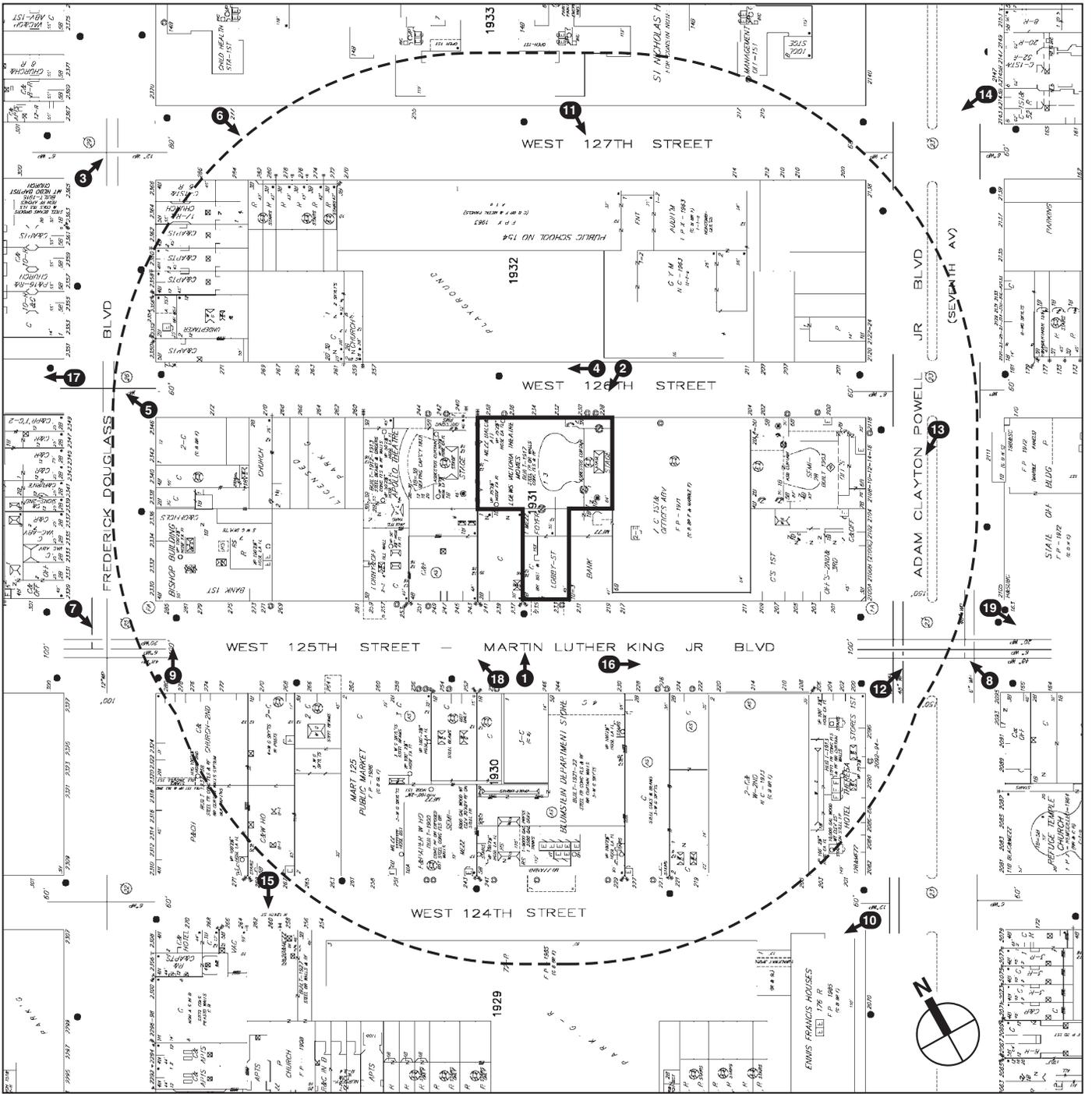
The study area for the urban design and visual resources analysis has been defined as the area within 400 feet of the project site (see **Figure 8-1**). This study area roughly extends from West 127th Street to the north, West 124th Street to the south, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard to the east, and Frederick Douglass Boulevard to the west. Views to taller buildings outside the study area that are available within the study area’s viewshed are also considered.

D. EXISTING CONDITIONS

URBAN DESIGN

PROJECT SITE

The project site is composed of the Victoria Theater, which is located on the north side of West 125th Street midblock between Frederick Douglass Boulevard and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard (See Views 1 and 2 of **Figure 8-2**). The project site is a T-shaped through lot with approximately 50 feet of frontage on the north side of West 125th Street and 150 feet of frontage



-  Project Site Boundary
-  Study Area (400-Foot Perimeter)
-  Photograph View Direction and Reference Number



Urban Design and Visual Resources Reference Map
Figure 8-1



Victoria Theater—South Building, view from West 125th Street 1



Victoria Theater—North Building, view from West 126th Street 2

Photographs of Project Site,
Views 1 and 2
Figure 8-2

Victoria Theater

on the south side of West 126th Street. The Victoria Theater comprises two Neoclassical-style buildings. The South Building fronts onto West 125th Street and contains the original entrance and lobby of the theater. It has a footprint of approximately 5,000 sf and is three stories (approximately 45 feet) tall. The North Building is located on West 126th Street and contains the former auditorium and other accessory public spaces. It has a footprint of approximately 15,000 sf and is three stories (approximately 78 feet) tall. The North Building presents a plain brick façade with a fire escape on West 126th Street. The South Building contains two ground floor retail storefronts facing West 125th Street, under the theater's marquee. The storefront on the east side of the building is currently vacant. The storefront on the west side of the building is currently occupied by a nail salon. The Victoria Theater fully covers its lot. The project site is currently underbuilt relative to its allowable FAR under current zoning, at a built FAR of approximately 4.5 and an allowable FAR of 5.16.

STUDY AREA

The street pattern in the study area generally follows the typical Manhattan grid, with wide (100-150 foot) avenues running north-south and narrow (60-80 foot) cross streets running east-west, creating long, wide blocks. West 125th Street, at 100 feet wide, is an exception to this pattern. Just north of the study area, the street pattern is interrupted by a superblock bounded by West 127th and 131st Streets and Frederick Douglass and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevards. This superblock, approximately 15.63 acres in size, contains the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) St. Nicholas Houses, which includes thirteen 14-story (120-foot-tall), X-plan buildings set back from the streetlines within a landscaped campus (see View 3 of **Figure 8-3**). West 129th Street extends west partially into this site, which also contains surface parking lots, play yards, meandering pedestrian paths, basketball courts, and the red-brick, decorative Salem Methodist Episcopal Church at the northwest corner of West 129th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard.

The major pedestrian and vehicular thoroughfares in the study area are West 125th Street, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard, and Frederick Douglass Boulevard. West 125th Street is Harlem's main retail and commercial artery, and thus the wide sidewalks along this busy two-way, 100-foot-wide corridor are typically filled with shoppers. Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard is a 150-foot-wide, north-south oriented, two-way street with a landscaped median; Frederick Douglass Boulevard is 100 feet wide, north-south oriented, and carries traffic in both directions. The other streets in the area are one-way and narrower (60-80 feet wide). During field visits, very few pedestrians were observed along West 124th, 126th, and 127th Streets, where there are no retail storefronts.

The topography of the area is generally flat, with a very slight rise from east to west. There are no natural features in the study area. Open space within the study area is limited to the Clayton Williams Community Garden at the northwest corner of West 126th Street and Frederick Douglass Boulevard; the paved play yard of the Harriet Tubman Learning Center (P.S. 154, described below), facing the north side of the project site on West 126th Street is also in the study area but is not accessible to the general public (see Views 4 and 5 of **Figure 8-4**). At the northern edge of the study area, the St. Nicholas Houses, as described above, have open spaces, play equipment, and basketball courts for residents. Due to the small number of open spaces in the area, vegetation is mainly limited to street trees and the landscaped median on Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard. Thus, the study area is distinctly urban in its visual character, with streets flanked by concrete sidewalks. Parked cars are located on most streets; along the north side of West 127th Street between Frederick Douglass and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevards, cars



St. Nicholas Houses, view northeast from West 127th Street and Frederick Douglass Boulevard 3



P.S. 154 play yard, view west from West 126th Street 4



Clayton Williams Community Garden, view west from Frederick Douglass Boulevard 5

Photographs of Study Area,
Views 4 and 5
Figure 8-4

are parked perpendicular, rather than parallel, to the street. There are typical street furniture elements (e.g., bus shelters, newspaper bins) and modern lampposts throughout the study area, and some large signage on the sides and façades of buildings. Along West 125th Street, the lampposts are a unique, rectangular design in brown-painted metal, reflecting the special status of this corridor. A number of New York City Transit (NYCT) bus routes run along West 125th Street, as well as Frederick Douglass and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevards, and thus there are a number of bus stops and shelters located at regular intervals along these streets.

Within the study area, building heights, footprint sizes, and lot coverages vary. Some buildings—predominantly the older buildings built as residential or mixed-use structures—have small footprints, are less than 6 stories tall, are located on small, narrow lots (no more than 25 feet wide), and occupy only the front portion of their lot, leaving the rear yard areas open (see Views 6 and 7 of **Figure 8-5**). Others, including P.S. 154, the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building, and the St. Nicholas Houses, are taller and/or have large footprints, and occupy very large, through-block sites but only cover a portion of their lot, with the remaining portions reserved for play yard, public plaza, or open space uses. Most of the commercial buildings in the study area have medium-sized footprints, are located on medium-size lots, and fully cover their lot (see Views 8 and 9 of **Figure 8-6**). Footprint shapes are mostly rectangular but also include the X-shaped St. Nicholas Houses. Late 19th- and early 20th-century buildings are typically clad in brick, with more contemporary structures faced with a mix of concrete, cast stone, brick, and glass.

Above the ground-floor level, many buildings along West 125th Street contain retail or office space, some of which is occupied by non-profit organizations and government agencies. In addition, most of the storefronts that face West 125th Street occupy block-through lots. As a result, the south side of West 126th Street and the north side of West 124th Street include the rear of these buildings, which function as service areas—many of these buildings have curb cuts and loading entrances on these frontages (see View 10 of **Figure 8-7**). The lack of storefronts or other pedestrian-related uses on these streets contributes to the low levels of observed pedestrian activity. In addition to retail uses, West 125th Street contains a variety of cultural and institutional uses, many of which are historically important to the Harlem neighborhood, including the Apollo Theater and the Studio Museum in Harlem. As described in more detail in Chapter 2, “Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy,” the West 125th Street corridor was rezoned in 2008 to increase residential and commercial density. This rezoning established urban design controls that reflect the special context of West 125th Street. Specifically, the maximum allowable building height in the C4-7 zoning district within the Core Subdistrict (where the project site is located) was set at 195 feet, to reflect concerns that arose through the public review process.

Other major developments in the study area include P.S. 154, which as noted above is located midblock between West 126th and 127th Streets and Frederick Douglass and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevards. P.S. 154 is a Modernist-style, 3-story building clad in concrete with large blue panels and constructed in 1963. The long, rectangular structure has its main entrance on West 127th Street, facing the St. Nicholas Houses (see View 11 of **Figure 8-8**). Its paved play yard is enclosed by chain link fencing on West 126th Street (see View 4, above). At the eastern edge of the study area is the Adam Clayton Powell State Office Building, a 19-story (251-foot-tall) building clad in concrete and dark glass. The building is sited at the northwest corner of its lot, set back from West 125th Street (see View 12 of **Figure 8-9**). It is surrounded to the south and east by a paved plaza that includes a colorful mural attached to adjacent buildings and a statue of Powell. The Hotel Theresa, at the southwest corner of West 125th Street and Adam



View east on West 127th Street, from Frederick Douglass Boulevard 6



South side of West 125th Street, view from Frederick Douglass Boulevard 7

Photographs of Study Area,
Views 6 and 7
Figure 8-5



View to northwest corner of Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and West 125th Street 8



View north on West 125th Street, near Frederick Douglass Boulevard 9

Photographs of Study Area,
Views 8 and 9
Figure 8-6



View west on West 124th Street from Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard 10



P.S. 154, main entrance on West 127th Street 11

Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building,
view north from West 125th Street

12



Victoria Theater

Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard, is one of the most prominent buildings in Harlem, both culturally and architecturally. It is 13 stories (172 feet in height), and its gleaming white brick and terracotta façades are adorned with distinctive geometric ornament (see View 13 of **Figure 8-10**). The study area also includes a new 7-story residential building at the southwest corner of West 127th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard, clad in brick, concrete, and metal panels, and a mixed-use building that hosts the Aloft Hotel at the southeast corner of West 124th Street and Frederick Douglass Boulevard (see Views 14 and 15 of **Figure 8-11**). The Aloft Hotel building is 12 stories tall (six stories of hotel, six stories of residential use) and clad in red brick.

At 19 stories (251 feet) in height, the Adam Clayton Powell State Office Building is the tallest building in the study area, followed by the St. Nicholas Houses at 14 stories (120 feet) and the Hotel Theresa at 13 stories (172 feet). Other tall residential buildings in Harlem that are within the study area's viewshed include, looking north from West 125th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard, the Esplanade Gardens Cooperative, a series of four towers topping out at 27 stories (246 feet) in height, located at Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and West 147th Street; and the NYCHA Drew Hamilton Houses, a series of five 21-story (181-foot-tall) buildings on a site at West 141st Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard. Looking east from this location, two of the four 35-story (328-foot-tall) buildings of the Taino Towers complex at East 122nd to 123rd Streets between Second and Third Avenues can be seen in the distance, as can the 32-story (321-foot-tall) 1990 Lexington Avenue tower. Taller commercial buildings in Harlem that can be seen looking east from West 125th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard include the 14-story (184-foot-tall) 55 West 125th Street; the Koch Building (described below) and the 10-story (132-foot-tall) Harlem Center building at West 125th Street and Malcolm X Boulevard. Looking west along West 125th Street and Frederick Douglass Boulevard, the 10-story Hotel Trades Union Building can be seen, as well as the NYCHA Grant Houses in the distance (described below) and the newly constructed 12-story (119-foot-tall) Balton Houses at West 127th Street between Frederick Douglass Boulevard and St. Nicholas Avenue. Looking south from West 125th Street and Frederick Douglass Boulevard, the new 12-story (120-foot-tall) residential building at 2280 Frederick Douglass Boulevard can be seen just south of the Aloft building, and looking north from this location the top levels of the 29-story (244-foot-tall) Lionel Hampton Houses can be seen, located approximately six blocks north of the project site, as well as the Drew Hamilton complex.

VISUAL RESOURCES

Visual resources are an area's unique or important public view corridors, vistas, or natural or built features. These can include historic structures, parks, natural features (such as rivers), or important views.

PROJECT SITE

While the West 125th Street façade of the Victoria Theater is considered a visual resource, due to its low scale and siting (flush with adjacent buildings) it is not particularly prominent or distinct in surrounding views, except in close proximity on West 125th Street. From the sidewalks adjacent to the project site, the main façade, vertical sign, and marquee of the adjacent Apollo Theater can be viewed, as can Blumstein's Department Store at 230 West 125th Street on the south side of West 125th Street. Views west along West 125th Street end with the 13-story (131-foot-tall) NYCHA Grant Houses in the distance. Views east along the street include the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building and the Hotel Theresa in the near distance, and one of the East River anchorages for the Triborough (now the Robert F. Kennedy) Bridge in the far distance (see View 16 of **Figure 8-12**).

Hotel Theresa, view south from
Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard

13



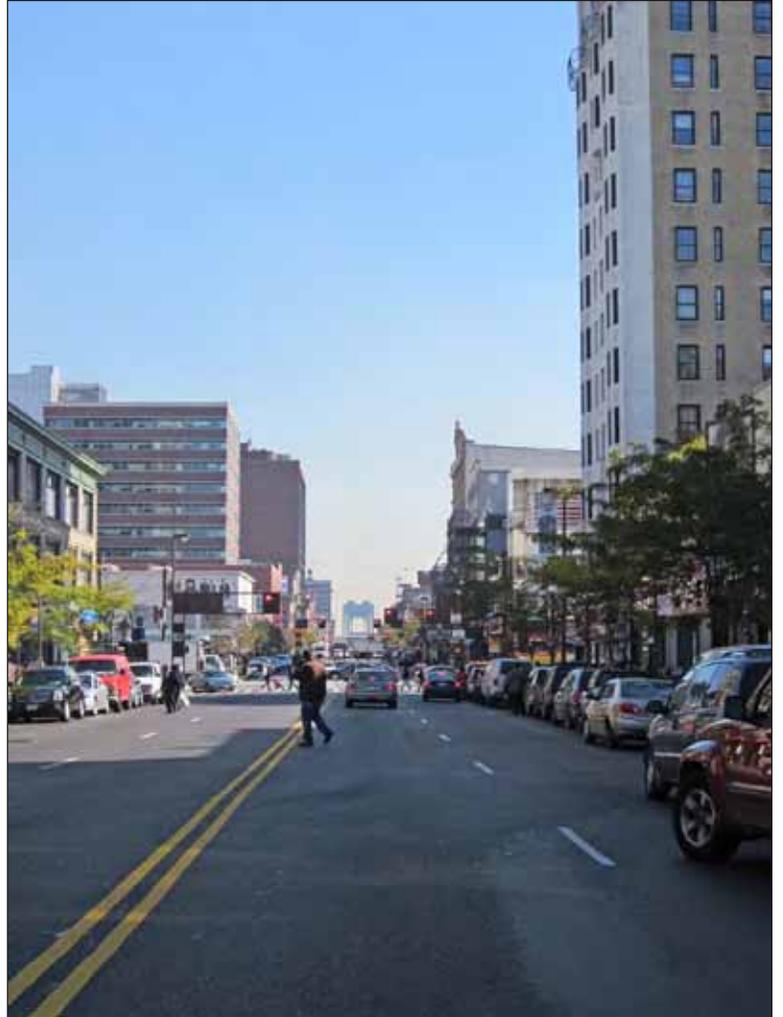


New condominium at southwest corner of West 127th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard 14



Aloft Hotel, view from West 124th Street 15

Photographs of Study Area,
Views 14 and 15
Figure 8-11



View east on West 125th Street 16

STUDY AREA

Within the study area, views north and south along Frederick Douglass Boulevard continue for long distances but do not contain any distinctive features. Because it is surrounded by lower-scale development, the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building is visible throughout much of the study area. The Hotel Theresa's bright white brick and terra-cotta façade and height relative to lower-scale surrounding development make this building also notable in views from Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and portions of West 125th Street. Views west on West 124th, 125th, and 126th Streets terminate at the NYCHA Grant Houses, as West 125th Street angles to the north west of Morningside Avenue around the superblocks containing that development (see View 17 of **Figure 8-13**). Views west on West 126th Street also include the decorative façade of P.S. 157, located on St. Nicholas Avenue (see View 18 of **Figure 8-14**). Views east on West 124th and 127th Streets continue for long distances, with no distinctive elements; views east from West 126th Street include the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building. From West 126th Street looking north, the towers of the St. Nicholas Houses can be seen above low-scale P.S. 154. From the north side of the intersection of West 125th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard, the decorative façade of the 6-story H.C.F. Koch and Company Building at 132 West 125th Street on the south side of West 125th Street can be seen (see View 19 of **Figure 8-15**). As described above, taller residential and commercial buildings within Harlem also are visible from within the study area.

E. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT

PROJECT SITE

Absent the proposed project, the Victoria Theater site is expected to remain largely vacant and could continue to deteriorate. The tenant occupying the storefront on the west side of the building would be expected to remain in the building. As it would be only partially occupied, the project site would remain an underutilized part of the West 125th Street commercial corridor.

STUDY AREA

None of the developments under construction or planned within the project's Central Harlem neighborhood are located within the 400-foot study area for this analysis. There are several developments expected to occur outside of the study area, however, that could result in taller structures that would be visible from the study area. These include the construction of a 10-story mixed-use building on the vacant lot at 2135-2139 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard, and the redevelopment of the vacant lot at West 125th Street and Lenox Avenue with a new hotel use. In addition, the Mart 125 site, south and west of the project site across West 125th Street, is expected to be developed in the future with retail and cultural space.

F. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

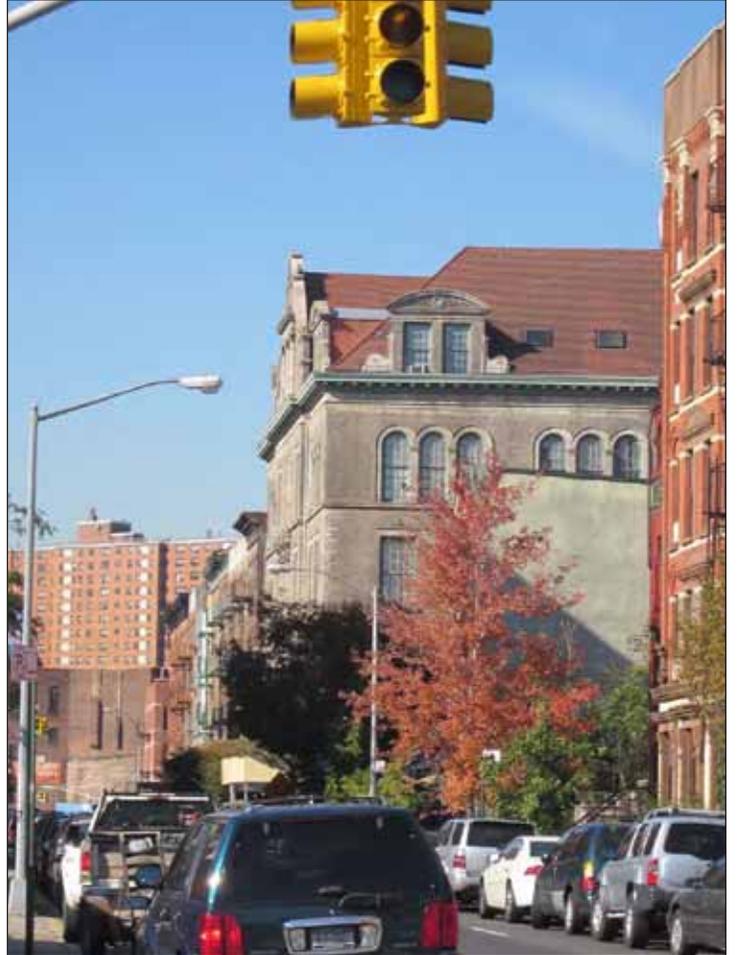
URBAN DESIGN

PROJECT SITE

The proposed project would involve the demolition of the Victoria Theater's North Building and the restoration of the theater's South Building. The North Building would be replaced with a new 26-story, approximately 290-foot-tall (excluding rooftop mechanicals) building containing cultural, hotel, and residential uses, (see **Figures 8-16, 8-17 and 8-18**). The South Building would be retained with the façade restored to its 1917 appearance, including recreation of the



View west on West 125th Street 17



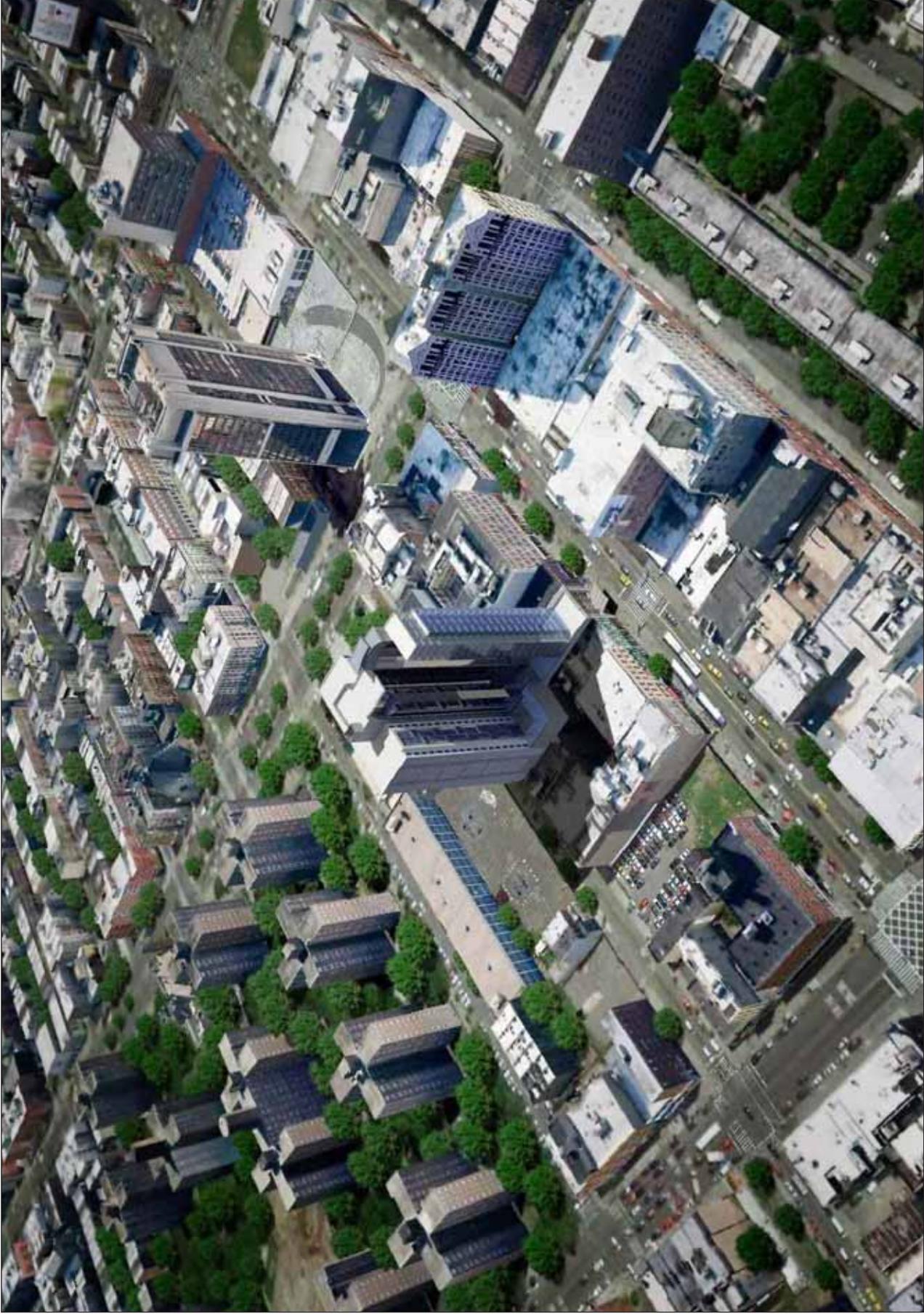
View west on West 126th Street, from Frederick Douglass Boulevard 18



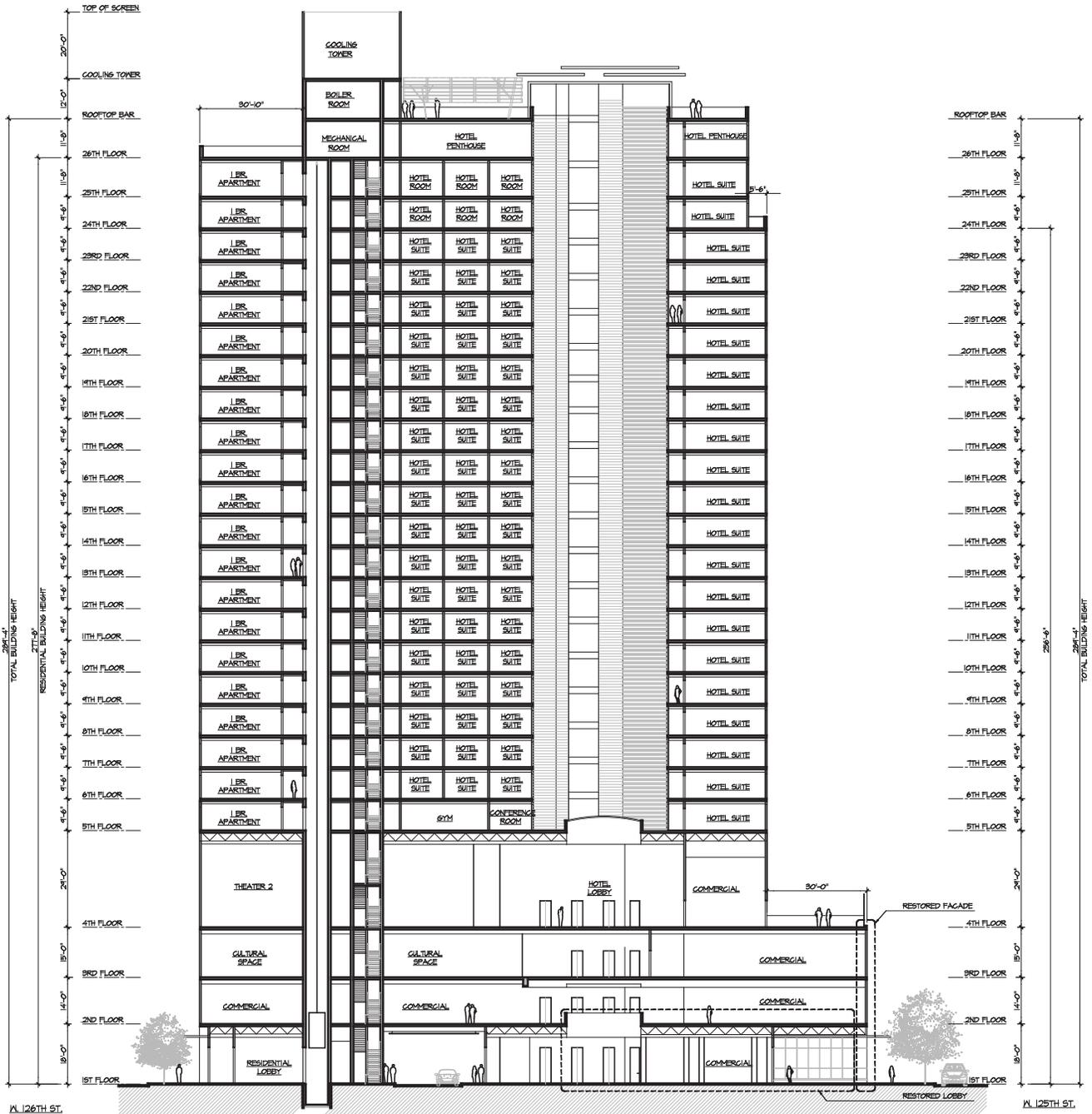
H.C.F. Koch and Company Building, view from Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard 19



NOTE: FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY



Illustrative Rendering of Proposed Project, Birdseye View
Figure 8-17



Illustrative North-South Building Section
Figure 8-18

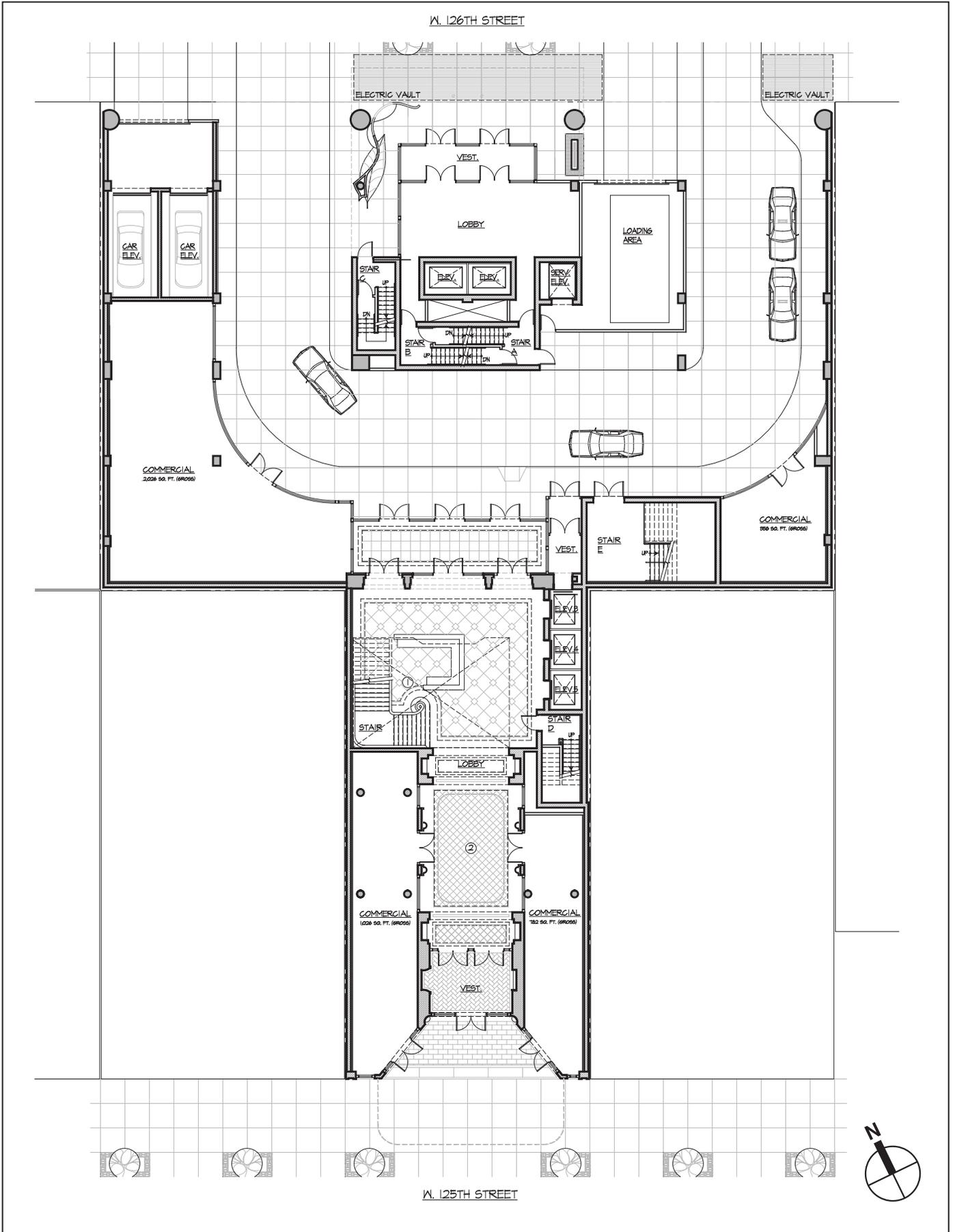
original vertical blade sign and restoration of the horizontal marquee to its historic configuration. The lobby and foyer of the South Building would serve as the public entryway to the cultural events and the hotel. In total, the proposed project would be approximately 360,000 gsf in size and have a floor area ratio (FAR) of 17.25, compared to the existing building size of approximately 90,000 gsf and FAR of 4.5. The proposed development would be considerably larger—in terms of both bulk and height—than what currently exists on the site and what is permitted by zoning. As described in Chapter 1, “Project Description,” to facilitate the redevelopment of the project site, a number of discretionary actions are proposed, including zoning overrides for total floor area, FAR, maximum building height, maximum base height, permitted number of residential units, and required square footage per parking space. The lot coverage of the site would continue to be at 100 percent, and the tower coverage on the site would be approximately 65 percent. The typical floorplate size of the tower would be approximately 13,000 sf.

The entrance to the residential portion of the new building and a vehicular drop-off area would be provided on West 126th Street (see **Figures 8-19** and **8-20**). A visually transparent, glazed curtain wall with pedestrian entrances would be located between the South Building and the vehicular drop off on West 126th Street, allowing access into the restored foyer and lobby and the cultural events spaces and hotel located in the new building. The presence of ground-floor retail use and the visually transparent wall between the South Building and West 126th Street would activate this portion of West 126th Street. The use of the restored lobby and foyer of the South Building as the public entryway to the building’s cultural events and the hotel would enhance the visual appearance of the building and the pedestrian experience on West 125th Street.

The new building on the North Building site would set back a minimum of 30 feet from the façade of the South Building on West 125th Street (see **Figure 8-16**, above). The proposed setback is designed to respect and reflect the height of the historic South Building. The façade of the new building would be clad in glass curtain wall, designed to be light and transparent and as such, not compete visually with the South Building’s historic masonry façade. An open atrium would be created along the west side of the building, setting the bulk of the structure away from the adjacent low-rise buildings located to the west on West 125th and 126th Streets, including the historic Apollo Theater.

STUDY AREA

As in the future without the proposed project, the proposed project would not result in any changes to natural features, open spaces, or streets in the study area. It would maintain the streetwalls of West 125th and 126th Streets, and as noted above the footprint and lot coverage of the project site building would not change. The proposed development would be considerably larger—in terms of both bulk and height—than what currently exists on the site and what is permitted under zoning, but would be consistent with City goals to encourage new mixed-use development, to expand cultural uses, and to develop housing (including affordable housing) along the 125th Street corridor. Although the proposed building would be taller and bulkier than the other buildings surrounding the project site, as described above the built context of the study area includes a mix of both shorter and older structures as well as more recently constructed and taller buildings. The proposed building would be 26 stories tall (approximately 290 feet, excluding rooftop mechanicals), and thus would exceed the maximum height limit established by the 2008 rezoning of West 125th Street. The proposed project would have a total FAR of 17.25, which would be well above the allowable FAR of 5.16. While the new building would be





NOTE: FOR ILLUSTRATIVE PURPOSES ONLY

taller than the maximum height limit allows, the overall bulk and height of the proposed building would be in context with the taller buildings in the study area, including the approximately 251-foot-tall, 402,662 gsf Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building. Furthermore, the proposed development would not be out of context with the height of large residential and commercial developments in Harlem that are within the study area's viewshed, which as noted above include the Esplanade Gardens Cooperative (246 feet), Taino Towers (328 feet), 1990 Lexington Avenue (321 feet), and Lionel Hampton Houses (244 feet).

As described above, the restoration of West 125th Street façade of the South Building would enhance its visual appearance, reactivate the building's public entryways on this street, and improve the pedestrian experience on West 125th Street. The façade of the new building would be clad in glass curtain wall, designed to be light and transparent and as such, not compete visually with the South Building's historic masonry façade. While the proposed new building would be of a more contemporary design than the historic theater, the surrounding area already includes buildings of contemporary design and materials. The project has been designed to step back from West 125th Street, which would respect both the historic 125th Street façade of the Victoria Theater and the predominantly low-scale nature of the buildings along this block of West 125th Street. As described above, the broader West 125th Street viewshed also includes the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building, the Hotel Theresa, and a variety of taller residential and commercial buildings in Harlem.

The proposed project would introduce a different mix of uses to the project site compared with the future without the proposed project, but these uses would be compatible with existing and former uses on the project site and in the study area. Compared to future conditions without the proposed project with which the project site would remain largely vacant, the proposed project would revitalize a long-dormant site and introduce active uses, businesses and pedestrians. As described in Chapter 6, "Shadows," the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts from new shadows on historic structures or landscapes with sunlight-dependent features.

The restoration of the South Building's façade on West 125th would restore and revitalize an important historic component of West 125th Street, improving the appearance of the streetscape and the pedestrian experience of this area. Compared to the North Building, which presents a plain brick façade with a fire escape on West 126th Street, the new residential entrance and vehicular drop-off area would be much more active and would enhance the pedestrian's experience along this street. In addition, the presence of ground-floor retail use and the visually transparent wall between the South Building and West 126th Street would activate this portion of West 126th Street and also enhance the pedestrian environment. The new curb cuts to be developed on West 126th Street would be consistent with the streetscape features currently encountered by pedestrians along this street as well as along West 124th Street within the study area.

Overall, the project would improve the pedestrian experience of the study area, be in keeping with the developing mixed-use character of the study area, and would support the needs of the community, including a hotel for the underserved Upper Manhattan market, affordable housing, and multi-purpose performing arts space.

VISUAL RESOURCES

PROJECT SITE

As described above, while the West 125th Street façade of the Victoria Theater is considered a visual resource, due to its low scale and siting it is not particularly prominent or distinct in

Victoria Theater

surrounding views, except in close proximity along West 125th Street. The project has been designed to step back from West 125th Street, which would respect the historic 125th Street façade of the Victoria Theater and allow it to be viewed as a distinct entity along this corridor. Existing views from sidewalks adjacent to the project site would not be altered with the proposed project.

STUDY AREA

In the future with the proposed project, views along the corridors noted above are expected to remain substantially the same, although views toward the project site would now include a new, tall building. From within the study area—as well as from more distant viewpoints—the proposed new building would be anticipated to join the Hotel Theresa, St. Nicholas Towers, and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building as prominent features of the study area’s skyline, above the surrounding lower-scale development. The proposed project would not obstruct any views to important visual resources, or eliminate any existing view corridors.

Overall, the proposed project would not have any significant adverse impacts on urban design and visual resources. *