



WEST 125TH STREET

STRATEGIES FOR A CORRIDOR IN TRANSITION

MAY 2020

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125th Street BID Capstone Project

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125th Street BID Capstone Project

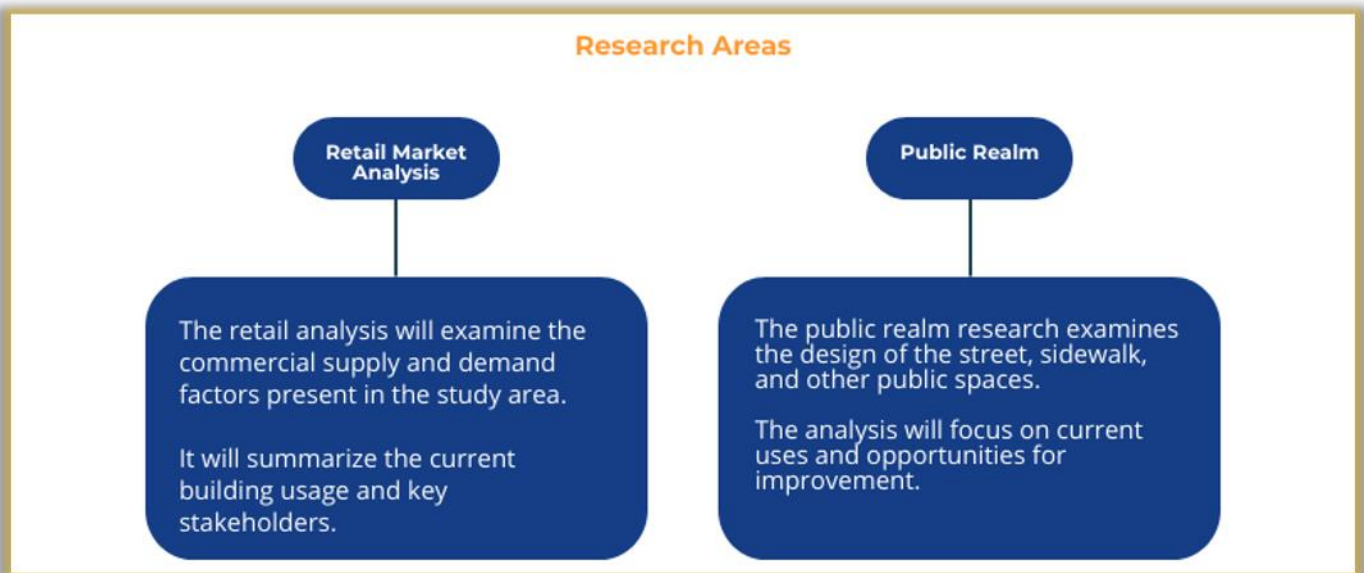
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strategies for a Corridor in Transition

Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) has partnered with Harlem's 125th Street Business Improvement District (BID) through a graduate capstone course to publish economic and community development recommendations for a two-block area of West 125th Street from Broadway to Morningside Avenue.

The report outlines the key insights gained from conducting research in the study area over a four-month period. The report provides recommendations on how the study area can *invite sustainable, community-driven economic development that will appeal to a diverse user base and make the 125th Street corridor a destination for everyone.*



The report is divided into two research areas, as shown above. Recommendations follow the research findings, providing specific actions to achieve the stated goal. These recommendations include:

- The most appropriate businesses for the study area are healthy dining options, dining options with seating, bars, day-care centers, a laundromat/service centers and

Executive Summary

recreational/fitness centers. These businesses best satisfy the aggregate needs of the stakeholders analyzed in the report.

- Improve street, sidewalk, and public space design to increase safety and accessibility. Make the public realm welcoming to all users.
- Engage with General Grant Housing residents and provide ample opportunities for employment and job training. Ensure that residents' needs are met in designing and developing the appropriate mix of businesses and other community assets.

COVID-19 will have lasting impact on the study area, so the recommendations listed above should be enacted in the medium to long term. Given the circumstances, the report also recommends special COVID-19 recovery measures to be implemented in the short term.





Introduction

Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) has partnered **with** Harlem's 125th Street Business Improvement District (BID) through a graduate capstone course to publish economic and community development recommendations for a two-block area of West 125th Street. The BID is supervised by the 125th Street District Management Association and stretches from Morningside Avenue in the West to 5th Avenue in the East. It is composed of property and business owners, community and government leaders, residents, and staff who work closely together to improve the experiences of those who live, work, visit, and invest in the Harlem community. The BID seeks to catalyze economic development, encourage ongoing revitalization, celebrate and build upon existing cultural assets, develop additional public space, facilitate active tourism, and to create a high-quality urban environment which contributes to an identity for the Harlem community. Although the study area is outside of their current boundaries, as part of greater 125th Street the BID is seeking to create connectivity and congruity for the street. They have already taken steps to integrate the study area into greater 125th Street; for example, during the winter holidays, the BID extended the street light decorations to include the study area. Acts like this create continuity for 125th Street, and through this capstone, the BID is open to more ideas and projects that can contribute to that goal.



Image 1: Study Area indicated by pink line on 125th Street

125TH Street in Harlem was designed to be a main thoroughfare in the original 1811 grid plan, when it was designated as one of 15 streets in Manhattan that are 100 feet in width rather than 60. Today, it remains a vital transportation artery, but has come to represent much more; it is a cultural, economic, and social epicenter that has retained its identity throughout tumultuous periods of change.

Despite the significance of 125th street as a whole, there are certain portions that seem to be an afterthought in economic development. This report focuses on the two-block section of West 125th Street situated between Broadway and Morningside Avenue. In this report, this section is referred to as the “study area.”

There are a number of factors that make this section stand out from the rest of 125th Street. As shown in image 1, the **street design** becomes diagonal at Morningside Avenue, which makes it the only east/west street to do so between Harlem and Greenwich Village. This results in complex traffic patterns and pedestrian safety problems.

Several different communities intersect in the study area. Along the south side of 125th Street, the vast majority of space consists of the northern boundary **General Grant Housing**, one of the biggest NYCHA housing projects in Manhattan. To the west of the study area, **Columbia University** is expanding its campus into Manhattanville and has already completed significant construction, opening sites such as The Forum¹ and additional student housing. Finally, to the north of the study area, Janus Properties is developing the **Manhattanville Factory District**, a major commercial development complete with businesses and office space.

There is also interest in re-development in certain areas of the study area, including a **soft site** on the Southeast corner of 125th and Broadway. This area is the only retail that is on the south side of the study area adjacent to General Grant Houses. The owner of the building is open to

¹ The Forum is a Columbia-owned community center in Manhattanville. For more information, see Section 2.1.2

development recommendations, which are made later in this report, and it is also included in a re-zoning effort that could allow mixed use on the site.

The study area is ripe for such development considering that, much like other spots along 125th Street, it is a **transit hub**. The 1 Train stops at the corner of Broadway and 125th connecting Upper Manhattan and downtown; there are several bus lines including the M104, Bx15, M100, and other vital lines connecting Manhattan with other boroughs. Commercial and private motor vehicles also populate the roadways, often making the street crowded with many fast-moving vehicles. Additionally, the area is accessible by bicycle, and there is a Citibike station at 125th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, and six other docking stations within a two-block radius of the study area.

The study area attracts a smaller number of visitors compared to the other blocks of 125th Street. It appears to be an area that is disconnected from the rest of the street, and has not yet fully developed its own resources, attractions, services, retail spaces, and walkable streets. With this in mind, the BID has tasked the capstone workshop with the following:

- Analyze this section of 125th Street by highlighting retail, commercial, and development opportunities to assist the BID in its work with developers, investors, retailers, and the City of New York
- To examine trends and patterns of the current consumer demand and supply and conduct a commercial audit on the study area
- Identify strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats of the study area and determine a strategic direction for revitalization
- To provide strategies for a responsive and vital retail mix; improved safety in the corridor; enhancing the pedestrian experience; improving outreach and collaborations among new tenants and users; and to locate and include diverse historic restaurants and other traditional services within the study area.

Essential to this report is understanding and creating an environment that intentionally connects and brings people together, while ensuring that all stakeholders are actively engaged and their voices are heard. The residents of General Grant Housing, in particular, are a key stakeholder that should be intentionally included in all future analysis and development.

1.1 COVID-19

In the current economic climate, we cannot ignore the uncertainty present in all considerations of future development. Due to COVID-19, many of the recommendations presented in this report will not take priority in the immediate wake of the pandemic. With this in mind, we have included special COVID-19 recommendations specific to disaster recovery. Without knowing when or how the social distancing requirements will be lifted, we have based these recommendations on best practices from other communities around the country, while taking into consideration first-hand accounts from stakeholders in the study area.

*The recommendations included here are rooted in the **prioritization of people** – be they residents, business owners, students, visitors, or others – and will therefore be compatible with a post-coronavirus world.*

There is no doubt that the post-COVID-19 study area will look differently than it did before the virus. However, we maintain that the underlying needs of residents and businesses will not drastically change.

1.2 Project Goal

Invite sustainable, community-driven development that will appeal to a diverse use base and make 125th Street corridor a destination for everyone.


The study area sits at the intersection of three very different communities -- Columbia University students and faculty, General Grant Houses, and the Factory District -- while acting as an important connecting piece to the rest of Harlem. This creates a diverse mix of potential customers for the businesses located in the study area. The accessibility of the study area

through public transit, Harlem's historic cultural significance and the proximity to one of the world's premier universities makes it a promising place to grow a business, live, study, shop and work. This report aims to not only improve the study area for the benefit of the stakeholders who already use it, but also to transform the area into a destination in its own right, where New Yorkers and visitors alike journey for shopping, food, entertainment, business, community space, and togetherness.



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Por Mes
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citi bike nyc.com/rfs
REDUCED FARE BIKE SHARE
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Amsterdam Av & W 125 St
West Harlem
citi bike

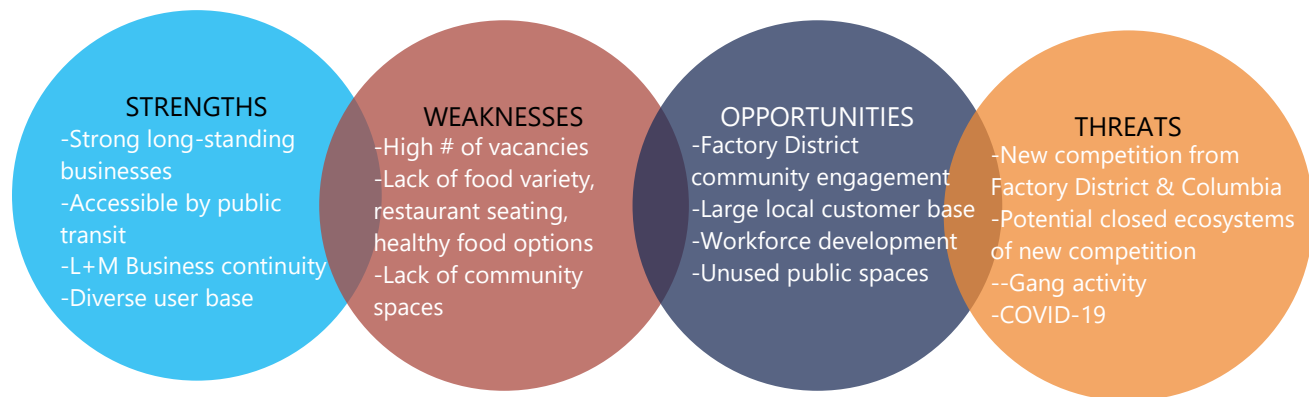


Map of the West Harlem area showing the Citi Bike network. The map includes street names, bike stations, and a legend. Below the map, there is a small inset map of the entire city of New York with a red dot indicating the location of the West Harlem area.

West Harlem
citi bike

Research
Findings

2.1 SWOT Analysis



2.2 Retail Market Study

The Retail Market Study is divided into the supply and demand factors that affect the study area. The supply side analyzes current usage within the study area. The units in the study area are highlighted in yellow in *image 2* below. The demand side analyzes the different stakeholders present in the study area. These stakeholders represent the largest volume of



Image 2

potential customers. Their areas of influence are highlighted in blue (Columbia University faculty/students),

green (NYCHA residents) and

pink (Factory District employees) in *image 2*.

2.1.1 Supply Side

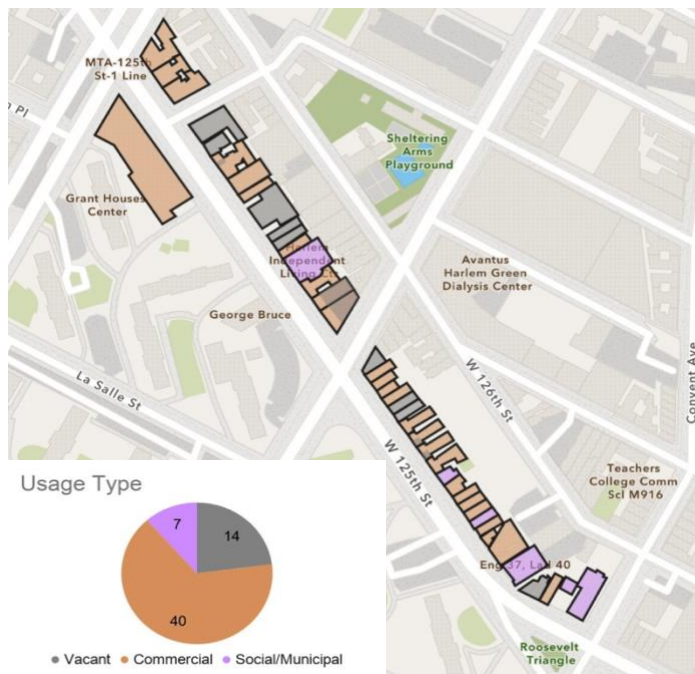


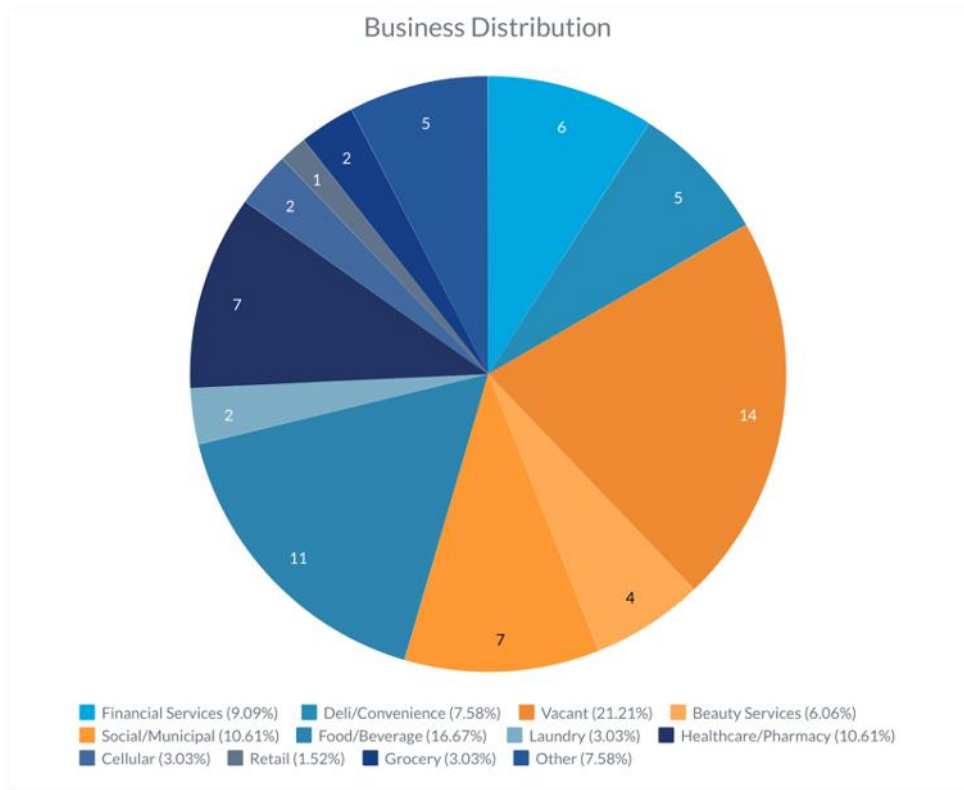
Image 3: Map of usage types in study area

Among the total 61 parcels in our study area, 40 are commercial, seven are municipal/social and 14 are vacant. A majority of the usage is on the north side of 125th Street, as only one unit is located on the south side alongside Broadway and next to General Grant Housing. This parcel on the south side is a key soft site and will be discussed in detail later in this report. The lack of usage on the south side is due to the monopolization of space by General Grant Housing. On the south side of 125th Street where the ten General Grant

buildings are located, there are no stores, no connecting streets (although there are pathways), and for the most part, the frontage is characterized by a mixture of grass, spotty and ill-maintained foliage, and improvised parking and waiting areas for cars and taxis. Currently, NYCHA does not allow for commercial activity in this space. The underutilization of this free space is a weakness to the supply side of business in the study area.

Current Uses - Composition of Existing Businesses

With 11 units, food/beverage accounts for the majority – 25% - of the 40 total commercial usages in the study area. However, it's important to note that only one restaurant (Presto Mexican Grill – located on the north side of 125th towards Morningside) has an accommodating indoor seating area. The other ten units offer only takeout or delivery, or have



very limited seating, if any at all. Other than Presto Mexican Grill, there are no healthy food options in the study area; unfortunately, fast, greasy food is the dominant option.

Other usages include seven

healthcare/pharmacies, six financial services/banks, five deli/convenience stores, four beauty

Figure 1: Business distribution

services, two

laundromats and two grocery stores. Laundromats and grocery stores seem to be undersupplied based on field surveys we conducted with General Grant residents and Columbia University students, as well as forecasts of future demand.

Vacancies

Vacancies in the study area are extremely high, not only in terms of units but also square feet and duration of non-use. There are 14 units of vacancies, accounting for 23% of the total 61 units. The study area has 516,193 square feet of potential use, among which 105,484 square feet are vacant (20%). These numbers are based on research conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic and are likely to increase.

Our research indicates two principal causes for the high vacancy rate in the study area: rent spikes and the difficulties of business licensing. From 2007 to 2017, retail rents rose by 22% on average in [New York City](#). The owner of Luis Furniture, a furniture store in the study area, previously occupied two floors in their current building, but had to squeeze into one due to an increase in rent. The second floor has been vacant since.



Image 4: Vacant laundromat (left) on 125th Street

process is cumbersome and costly. The privilege of offering alfresco dining needs additional licensing and has a price.

Licensing is the second factor contributing to high vacancies. To open a restaurant, owners need certificates, permits and licenses from various city and state agencies, including the Health

Department. This onerous

An important vacancy to note is the abandoned laundromat -- owned by Columbia University - - on the northside of 125th Street next to Old Broadway. Several small business owners in the study area mentioned that the property has been vacant “for as long as they can remember”. The abandoned building destroys continuity and creates an unlit space that foments an unwelcoming environment. It is counterproductive to the goal of generating more foot traffic in the study area.

A representative from Columbia’s Office of Government and Community Affairs mentioned that the property is reserved for affordable housing for low-income residents displaced by Columbia University’s Manhattanville campus. The representative mentioned that construction for the housing units will not take place in the near future and that the site could remain vacant

for up to ten more years. Columbia could create a better usage for this site. This is discussed further in Section 3.1. This high vacancy



Figure 2: Highlighted business insights

rate represents a weakness in the study area. Not only do vacancies represent lost revenue, they are eyesores to the community and stimulate unsafe street environments due to lack of lighting and limited eyes on the street. Other businesses in the study area suffer because of this dynamic. Vacancies are counterproductive to the stated goals of this report.

However, vacancies also represent a wonderful opportunity. As the study area changes with the coming developments, new businesses that fit the new needs of the new and current stakeholders can take over the empty spaces. Filling current vacancies with new businesses is a less painful process than current businesses going out of business to make way for the coming change.

Successes in Study Area

[L+M Development Partners](#) has successfully remodeled storefronts in the northeastern section of the study area and recruited desired businesses to fill them. L+M rehabilitated storefronts to create both continuity among businesses and an aesthetic appeal. This invites and attracts more customers. Furthermore, L+M recruited businesses that filled important commercial needs such as Footgear NYC, a shoe store. L+M's success in the study area could serve as a potential model for further development.

[El Puerto restaurant](#) is another great example of a business that appeals to a wide variety of customers. The business is locally owned and is a staple in the community. Its delicious food is enjoyed by celebrities, Columbia University students, and General Grant residents.

Future Supply (Competition)

Manhattanville Factory District - The Manhattanville Factory District will drastically increase the number of businesses near the study area. This creates competition for existing business within the study area and poses a significant threat. The [Taystee building](#) alone will provide 20,000 square feet of restaurant and retail space. A representative from SCG Retail, a company hired by Janus Properties to recruit commercial tenants to the Taystee building, said the

primary focus of the building will be bars and restaurants. This, combined with other commercial units within the Factory District, will give Factory District employees little incentive to leave the development when searching for food or retail options. Furthermore, the dining and retail options in the Factory District could attract potential customers that would otherwise shop within the study area.

However, the existence of adjacent new business can also serve as an opportunity. If the dining, entertainment and retail options generate significant demand, new/existing businesses within the study area can then tap into the increased demand as well. Success in the Factory District could produce beneficial network effects within the study area. Businesses within the study area could supplement or complement successful businesses in the Factory District. Novelty and variety create demand, so a successful bar or restaurant in the Factory District could create demand for a bar or restaurant within the study area because customers will search for something new or different.

Columbia Manhattanville Campus - Columbia University's new Manhattanville campus could also pose a threat to businesses within the study area. We spoke with a representative from Columbia's Office of Government and Community Affairs and were told that Columbia wants to create an environment that draws in surrounding stakeholders rather than send campus visitors out. The new campus could potentially house businesses that cater to the needs of students and professors. This would inevitably include dining options and coffee shops and could include entertainment options as well. If the Manhattanville campus can successfully create an autonomous economy that caters to both the needs of its daily visitors as well as outside stakeholders, businesses in the study area will suffer.

However, it's very difficult to completely satisfy the wide-ranging wants/needs of such a numerous and diverse population. It's more likely that the foot traffic generated by the Manhattanville campus creates demand that cannot be satisfied by businesses within the campus alone. Demand would then spill out into the study area. Therefore, it's important to

understand the wants/needs of those visiting the Manhattanville campus as well as impediments to them shopping or accessing the study area.

2.1.2 Demand Side

General Grant Housing Residents

General Grant residents, who live in the heart of the study area and number in the thousands, represent the largest potential customer base for businesses in the study area. Although residents might not have large amounts of disposable income, their volume and proximity dictate that businesses in the study area cater to them as customers.

Residents currently lack healthy dining options, as the study area is dominated by fast and greasy food. Residents also lack spaces to eat and relax as the sidewalk is underutilized and most dining options do not offer adequate seating. Residents also need more basic services such as laundromats and day care centers.

The young residents in General Grant Housing represent an important target demographic. They spend a lot of time in the study area and are likely to spend the money they have there. These young people need places to congregate and socialize and a recreation center could serve that purpose. This would be especially useful in the winter, where the basketball courts on General Grant property are not necessarily usable. Additionally, [community basketball courts are mostly used by men and boys](#); they generally do not appeal to girls and other gender minorities to the extent that they appeal to boys.

Healthier Food Options	•Residents have expressed a need for healthier food outside the quick, greasy options currently available.
Casual Restaurants	•Residents have expressed a need for places to sit and relax. Lack of seating in the current dining areas prevents this.
Day Care	•Residents who have children and work need places for them to stay during the day.
Laundromat	•Residents need places to clean their clothes. There are currently only 2 laundromats in the study area and they are very crowded.
Recreation Center	•Young residents spend a lot of time in the study area and need places to congregate and exercise.
Entertainment/Culture	•Residents need places to be entertained after work and on the weekends. Community centers, live music or bars could satisfy this need.
Boutique Retail	•Residents still need non-basic essentials such as shoes and clothing.

Figure 3: Demand for General Grant Housing Residents

Columbia Students and Faculty

[The Columbia Manhattanville campus](#) is an expansion to Columbia's current Morningside Heights campus. The Manhattanville campus will be spread across 17 acres between Broadway and Riverside and from where 125th Street crosses 129th up to 133rd Street. Unlike the Morningside Heights campus, Manhattanville will have an 'open-concept', which aims to stimulate more interconnectedness with the surrounding community. Key buildings in the new campus include:

- The Forum - a coffee shop / meeting place open to the public that is sandwiched between 125th and 129th
- The Jerome L. Greene Science Center - a laboratory and research center on 129th St.
- Lenfest Center for the Arts - a state-of-the-art performance, screening and presentation center located on 129th St.

- Columbia Business School - relocating from the Morningside Heights campus to between 130th and 131st St. Planned opening for 2021.

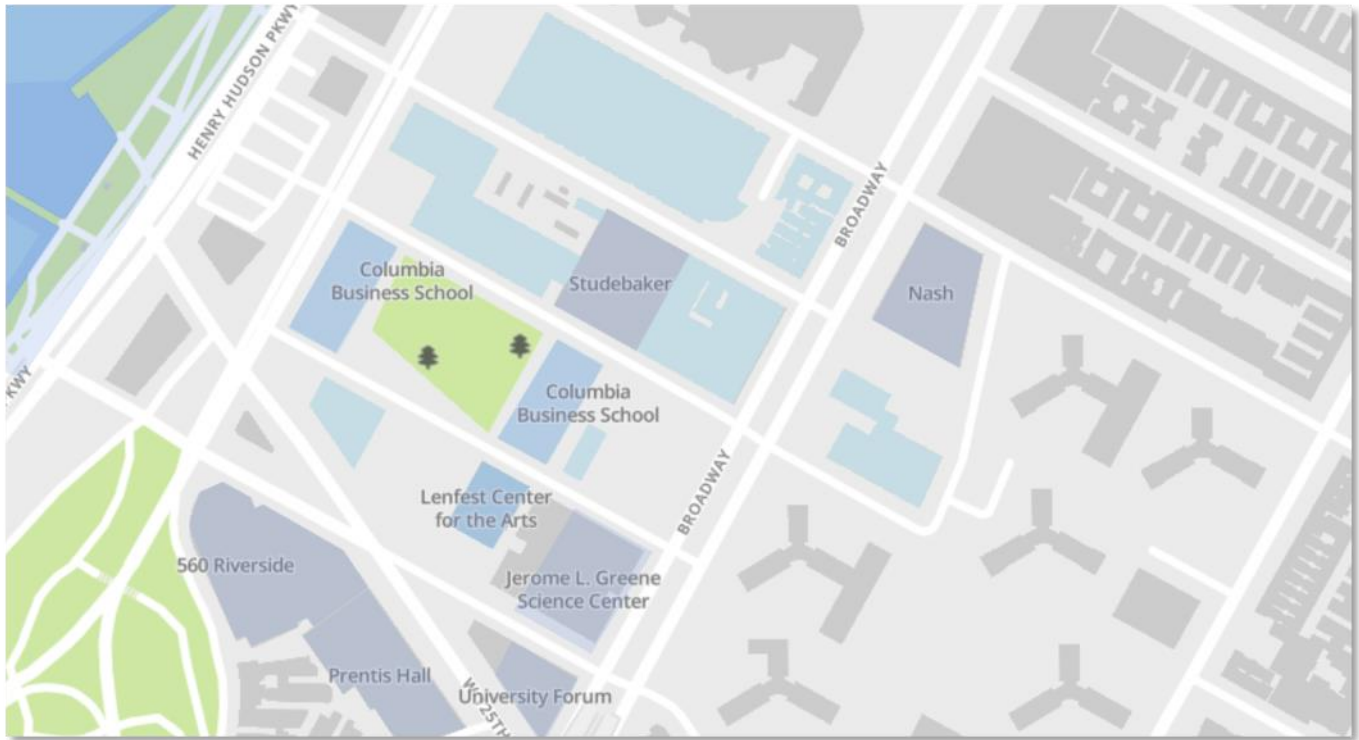


Image 5: Map of new Manhattanville Campus

The new campus will bring Columbia University students and faculty to the study area. Students and faculty will need places to be entertained during the evenings and on weekends, and places to eat and work during the day. Columbia University also owns the site of the former McDonalds on the southside of 125th and Broadway and is converting the space into a residential tower for graduate and faculty housing. It will be over 30 stories tall and have more than 100 residential units. Although the tower's location across from General Grant Housing and alongside single-story businesses does make it appear out-of-place, it represents a major opportunity for businesses within the study area. Hundreds of new potential customers will be living across the street. These new residents will need places to eat, shop and be entertained. Furthermore, this will create a demand for grocery stores and basic services related to living such as laundromats and clothing retailers.

According to a survey of several Columbia students while they were at The Forum, students often come to the Forum to study or meet friends but very infrequently go across the street to shop or walk in the study area. Also, they come exclusively during the day. However, they expressed a positive interest in visiting the study area if their needs are met. One student said, *"I would love to see more healthy food options in the study area. Now I have to go to 116th Street or Harlem's Main Street to get my lunch."* Another student said, *"I would love to seek entertainment options on 125th Street if there were more options in the future."*

Manhattanville Factory District Employees

Healthier Food Options	•Students and faculty often need to eat on the go and prefer healthy options. First person surveys corroborate this need.
Fast-Casual Restaurants	•Factory District businesses will want restaurants to have business lunches/dinners. Worker
Coffee Shops	•Students and faculty will want places to meet/work/study and coffee shops are the generally preferred destination.
Bars	•Students and faculty will want spots to drink, socialize and unwind after class and in their free time.
Entertainment/Culture	•Students and faculty will want to be entertained and/or participate in cultural events after class and on the weekends.
Grocery Stores	•Students and faculty will want a close place where to buy groceries, especially with the new residential tower.
Boutique Retail	•Students and faculty might want places to shop (clothing, local art, bookstores, gifts, home goods, etc.).
Laundry/Dry Cleaning	•Students and faculty will want places to wash and dry clean their clothes as a part of everyday living.

Figure 4: Columbia Student and Faculty Demand

[The Manhattanville Factory District](#) is an ambitious development project by Janus Properties located in the northeast section of our study area. The development site is over three acres, consists of more than 20 buildings and provides more than one million square feet of 'industrial chic' floor space for businesses. The flagship buildings - Mink, Sweets, Malt and Taystee - all have unique and interesting histories. These four buildings alone provide 750,000 square feet of floor space for businesses. The Taystee building (which is still under construction) is the development's principal building and provides 350,000 square feet of brand new, first class, LEED-certified, mixed-use commercial floor space. The development will provide only office/retail space, meaning no new residential units will be constructed. The

Figure 5
Manhattanville
Factory District
Employee
Demand

Sit-down restaurants	•Factory District businesses will want more upscale dining options for important meetings or celebrations and after-work dinners.
Fast-Casual Restaurants	•Factory District businesses will want restaurants to have business lunches/dinners, and grab-and-go lunch options.
Healthy food to-go	•Workers will want quick, healthy options that they can grab-and-go or eat quickly before returning to work.
Coffee Shops	•Workers will want places to meet/work outside the office and coffee shops are the generally preferred destination.
Bars	•Workers will want spots to drink, socialize and unwind after work.
Entertainment/Culture	•Workers will want to be entertained and/or participate in cultural events after work. This could include art galleries, live music, movie theatres, bowling, etc.
Fitness	•Workers will want places to exercise before and after work.
Day care	•Workers will want a space to leave their children during the workday.
Laundry/Dry Cleaning	•Workers will need a convenient place to wash and dry clean their clothes.
Grocery Store	•Workers will want a place near to their office where they can buy groceries or dinner to bring home.
Boutique Retail	•Workers will want places to shop (clothing, local art, bookstores, gifts, home goods, etc.) during their lunch breaks or after work.

Manhattanville Factory District will increase demand within the study area because the new

Factory District employees will need places to eat, shop and be entertained. They might also need services, such as laundromats and day care, which are more useful to be consumed close to where they work than elsewhere. The table above presents potential business demand generated by Factory District Employees.

A courtyard on the northside of 125th Street, near Amsterdam Avenue, will link the Factory District development to the study area. This courtyard will give Factory District employees easy access to 125th Street, stimulating demand for businesses in the study area. The courtyard also provides a path from the 1 Train to the Factory District, allowing Factory District employees to pass through the study area. This gives Factory District employees greater exposure to the businesses present within the study area, which further stimulates demand.

2.2 Public Realm

Much of the 125th Street corridor is accessible to and heavily used by the public, represented by the residents, business owners, shoppers, students, workers and visitors who go through or to the area. Each of the users who visit businesses, residences, or community institutions nearby and those who are just passing through, must use existing infrastructure to complete their journey. The streets, sidewalks, pedestrian plazas, transit hubs, building facades, and green spaces on 125th Street are important components that can make or break the neighborhood. The following sections explain existing conditions and patterns of usage in the public realm.

2.2.1 High Density of Pedestrians & Unsafe Patterns of Usage

In order to study the patterns of sidewalk and pedestrian street usage in the study area, the team mapped [desire lines](#), or the user-created paths through a space. Many walkways are pre-determined by urban planners; sidewalks, crosswalks, and other formal paths are meant to direct pedestrians into certain behavior patterns. Although these codified paths are helpful to note, observing uses in real-time is a better reflection of how those spaces are actually used.

The initial mapping of the pedestrian pathways along the 125th Street corridor showed a high

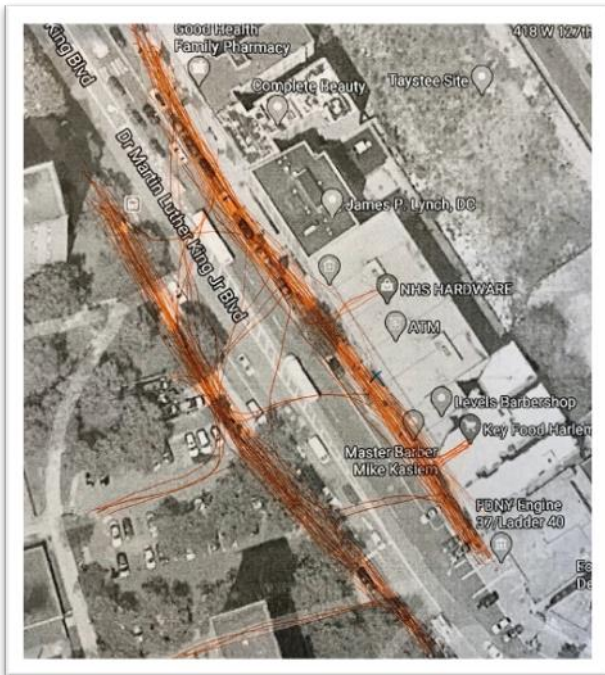


Image 6: Mapped desire lines along 125th Street,

density of foot traffic in the area. In a 10-minute period, anywhere between 25 and 100+ people walked through the area. The area is heavily trafficked during daylight hours, which is an important asset.

125th Street is also a heavily trafficked vehicular corridor. Many cars, trucks, and buses pass through and stop each day, making it a very busy place.

Preliminary observations show that people often cross the street on their own accord in places where there is not an easily

accessible crosswalk. This poses a serious safety risk to pedestrians and a liability to the city. People use the crosswalks when they are readily accessible, but there are large swaths of road without crosswalks, such as the stretch between Morningside Avenue and Amsterdam Avenue. The Roosevelt Triangle, surrounded by Morningside Avenue, 125th Street, and Hancock Place, is an especially complex section that is heavily trafficked by both pedestrians and vehicles. In these areas, people choose to cross without a crosswalk, endangering themselves, the motorists, and cyclists around them.

Additionally, General Grant Houses was not planned in a way that is compatible with the street; there are 3 sidewalk exits along 125th Street from the General Grant green space, two of which can be seen in Image 6. None of those exits align with a crosswalk to get to the retail on the other side, indicating that the planning of General Grant Houses did not prioritize those residents as customers.

2.2.2 Underutilized sidewalk space

Although the sidewalks in the study area are wide, there is little usage of the sidewalk as anything other than a highway for people. The sidewalk therefore becomes a “through space” that only serves to transport people from one place to another. Business activity in the area, for example, does not integrate with the sidewalk for better pedestrian visibility and use. Rather, businesses remain firmly behind their entrance walls and doorways, creating a distinct separation between the public space of the sidewalk and the private space of the business. By underutilizing sidewalk space, the area becomes less inviting. People instead pass through quickly and move on to their final destination instead of lingering.

2.2.3 Lack of nighttime activity

Although the study area is crowded and bustling during the day, the nighttime tells a very different story. There is little to no nighttime business activity. Many of the businesses only remain open during daylight hours. There are no bars or restaurants that draw a crowd after the sun goes down. This lack of “eyes on the street” after dark leads to feelings of insecurity. This creates a cycle whereby an unsafe atmosphere leads to an area devoid of people, which increases the feelings of lack of safety, and perpetuates the cycle. This is exacerbated on the south side of 125th Street due to the complete lack of business in the General Grant Houses space.

2.2.4 High Level of Connectivity/Disconnect Between Mobility & Attractions

The 125th Street corridor is highly connected to the surrounding neighborhoods and to the greater City of New York. The 1 Train subway stop on 125th Street and Broadway is a highly trafficked stop that connects upper Manhattan to lower Manhattan. It carries Columbia students, local residents, commuting workers and visitors to the area. With the added benefit of being an elevated subway stop, it is an iconic and visible symbol of connectivity in the area.

This characteristic, however, also creates a barrier. The height and physical separation of the train stop from the activity of the nearby streets creates a disconnect between the spaces. Many Columbia students, for example, go directly from the subway stop to The Forum, without ever exploring the eastern part of 125th Street. There are many missed opportunities for generating foot traffic in the study area due to this disconnect.

The area is additionally well-connected by numerous bus routes and micro mobility, like the Citibike docked bike share portal. These elements connect the study area to nearby attractions and allow for easy mobility.



Image 7: Roosevelt Triangle

all sides by streets and is connected to adjacent sidewalks by five crosswalks.

Although the area experiences heavy pedestrian flows on a daily basis, there is no distinct sense of place for the greenspace. Because the actual park is barred to public entry, passersby can only make use of the benches on the perimeter. People waiting for the bus do make use of these benches, but our observations indicate that few other people do. Even though the sidewalk surrounding Roosevelt Triangle is wide enough for additional activation, no such activity takes place.

2.2.5 Utilization of Roosevelt Triangle

Roosevelt Triangle -- the small piece of gated green space and sidewalk on 125th Street, Morningside Avenue, and Hancock Place -- is another asset of the study area that is underutilized. The greenspace is home to the Harlem Hybrid sculpture created by [Richard Hunt](#), who is one of the foremost African-American sculptors in the US. It is gated and does not allow public entry. Its perimeter is a wide sidewalk that contains benches and a bus stop. It is surrounded on



Image 8: Roosevelt Triangle from the north side of 125th Street

2.2.6 Utilization of Space Surrounding Grant Houses



Image 9: A sign outside General Grant Houses prohibits activity in the green space

Although there is a significant amount of greenspace between the buildings of the General Grant Houses, this space goes entirely unused. A sign on the perimeter of the space prohibits activities like picnics, BBQs, and lawn sports. Although there are playgrounds and other amenities available, prohibiting use of empty spaces damages the lifestyle of residents and creates an empty and useless space; in its place could be a thriving and vibrant community hub that brings people together and activates the street.

2.2.7 Garden Space Near George Bruce Public Library

The library situated in front of General Grant Houses on 125th Street houses a small green space that has been used as a garden and educational area for the library. It is gated from the street, the only official entrance being through the library. In the winter, there are no active uses for the space which



Image 10: George Bruce Public Library with adjacent green space

essentially adds more underutilized space along the south side of the street with General Grant Houses.



Welcome to
**GENERAL GRANT
HOUSES**

Recommendations

3.1 Create a Mix of Commercial Use Spaces Suited to the Area

Although the key stakeholders (and potential customers) in the study area have varying levels of disposable income and diverse commercial wants/needs, there are a few necessities common to all of them. Everyone needs to eat, everyone needs childcare, everyone needs shoes and clothing, and everyone wants to be entertained in their free time. There are certain businesses that cater to all stakeholders in the study area:



Healthy Food Options - both Columbia students at the Forum and General Grant residents have expressed a desire for healthier food options in the study area. Factory District employees will also want healthy food options for lunch breaks and after work.



Dining Options with Seating - there are very few dining options in our study area that have seating areas. General Grant residents have expressed a desire for places to rest and enjoy food or beverage. This need will only increase as foot traffic increases with the development of Columbia University's Manhattanville campus and the Factory District.



Bars - everyone wants a place to socialize and be entertained. Bars satisfy both these needs. Bars also provide street activity and lighting in the evenings and could make the study area safer and livelier.



Day Care - General Grant residents have expressed a need for day care facilities. Factory District employees and Columbia students/faculty with children will need places near to where they live and work to drop off their kids for the day.



Laundry / Dry Cleaning - both small business owners and General Grant residents have expressed a desire for my laundromats. That need will only increase as the residential tower is built and the Factory District opens.



Recreation / Fitness - all stakeholders in the study area will need a place to exercise. Although Columbia students/faculty have a gym access through the university, the

gym is in poor condition and is far from the study area. Factory District employees will want a place to exercise or take fitness classes before or after work. As mentioned earlier, young General Grant residents spend a great deal of time in the study area and will need productive outlets to spend their energy. It is important to note, however, that these stakeholders have different levels of disposable income. Multiple iterations of recreational outlets might be needed or if there is only one, tiered pricing would need to be employed to reach the highest number of potential customers.



Boutique Retail - all stakeholders in the study area (as well as those who might visit) need clothing, accessories or materials for their hobbies. Furthermore, people like to shop during their lunch break or after work/class. Boutique shops that are differentiated from what can be purchased from Amazon would be successful in the study area.

Furthermore, every business does not need to satisfy the wants of every stakeholder. Representatives from L+M Partners explained that when designing the correct business mix for a given area, individual businesses can cater to individual needs of a specific customer group *if* a good number of businesses already cater to core needs -- such as the ones listed above. However, when viewed holistically, the aggregate business mix should cater to the majority of *all* key stakeholders' commercial wants/needs.

Businesses that do not cater to every key stakeholder, but are nonetheless important, are listed below:



Coffee Shops - Columbia students and Factory District employees will want places to congregate and to work. Ploughshares, a new coffee shop on Amsterdam Avenue near 126th Street is a good example of what could be successful. People visit to get their caffeine fix while holding meetings or working at their computer.



Occasion Dining - Factory District employees and Columbia faculty will have a demand for more dining options where they can go for special occasions. Factory

District businesses will need places to hold company parties or important business meetings. Columbia faculty will need the places for similar purposes. However, these two unique stakeholders have higher disposable income than the others, so this type of commercial use should be minimal. Additionally, any dining should make an intentional effort to integrate fully into the community. Building owners could prioritize renting restaurant space to local community members to maintain street culture and benefit current residents.



Community Center - General Grant residents have expressed a desire for a recreational location to socialize, exercise and/or be entertained. A community center could serve as a day care center, a location to host cultural events as well as a productive, safe place where young General Grant residents go to pass time and exercise. However, a community center serves more of a social use than a commercial one, so it will likely generate no revenue. There are already several basketball courts in proximity to General Grant Houses; however, as noted earlier, these primarily appeal to boys and men. It is important to create a space for socializing and recreation that appeals to residents regardless of gender; some ideas include:

- Promoting feelings of ownership of already existing space through creating [mural-style basketball courts](#) in collaboration with children (especially girls and gender minorities) from General Grant. If girls participate in a revitalization of the basketball courts, they may feel more comfortable using them.
- Survey General Grant women and girls to better understand their recreation needs and desires, and how those may differ from men and boys. Basketball courts are fun, but do not provide girls with the same exercise and social opportunities as boys.
- Any new community center should prioritize the safety of women and girls in its design

3.1.1 Vacancies as Opportunities: Further Study

As noted earlier, high vacancies in the study area cannot be separated from rent spike and licensing. Therefore, this report recommends for the BID to 1) conduct further study into the

reasons behind rent spikes have occurred on 125th Street in the past decade, in order to slow down rent increases in the future and help release rent pressure for small businesses to survive; 2) collaborate with other stakeholders to hold workshops and provide consultancy platforms to help start-up businesses through the licensing process including sidewalk licensing, in order to create a more diversified and attractive mix of businesses.



Potential New Development: Laundromat & Soft Site

Abandoned Laundromat. As mentioned in the *Retail Market Study*, Columbia University owns the site with the abandoned laundromat on the northside of 125th next to Old Broadway. The site will eventually be used for affordable housing, but that development could take up to ten years to come to fruition. It's important to do something with the space in the interim to create a productive community asset out of the current blight.

To accomplish this, the BID could work with Columbia and other stakeholders to board up the laundromat completely and convert it into a temporary art space. The BID already has relationships with local artists to help recruit them or community members

to paint or graffiti the space as a reflection of their community. In order to ensure the space is used productively instead of as a negative space to be vandalized, the BID could hold a publicized community event where artists work on the space in front of a crowd. The BID could provide lighting for the space in the evenings to highlight the community's work and to prevent vandalism. This is the simplest recommendation, with no reconstruction or repurposing required of the indoor space. However, there are other options that include:

- Repurpose the indoor space as a pop-up retail store in which

Columbia provides booths to local artists for them to sell their goods

- Reopen the laundromat, potentially with the addition of a bar, like [these examples](#)
- A restaurant/community center hybrid similar to [TERANGA](#) in East Harlem
- A community center where Columbia can provide the trainings and workshops mentioned in this report – the proximity of this location to George Bruce Public Library would be conducive to greater collaboration for training events
- Expand Columbia's employment office (currently located near 125th and Broadway) so it is more visible to the community

Reutilizing the site would convert the space into a community asset as well as display that the BID and other partners have a vested interest in the neighborhood.

Soft Site: 125th and Broadway. The only commercial site on the south side of the study area is on the corner of 125th and

Broadway. The site is included in a larger rezoning process along Broadway sponsored by City Council for rezoning, and mixed uses should be encouraged. Located next to the 1 Train subway station, this site is in a prime spot to attract customers. There is also pathway out of General Grant Housing that leads directly to the site.

The site could engage the surrounding community and be an attraction for visitors. The recommendations provided for this specific site are an elaboration on the recommendations provided in Section 3.1; those should serve as an overarching guideline for this site as well. However, possible recommendations for this site specifically include:

Entertainment / Cultural Venue: The ideal business would attract customers based on its ability to entertain them in a unique way. The space could serve as an entertainment hub where people can go to listen to live music and enjoy delicious food and alcoholic beverages. *Restaurants/Bars:* The site's location makes it an ideal place for sit-down restaurants or bars. People can easily

access the site, so it could become a simple location for people to meet up for a drink after work or class. This same logic makes it a great place for dining options as well.

Recreational Center: As mentioned in the recommendations above, fitness / recreational needs are shared by all stakeholders. A recreational or fitness center is more plausible for this site rather

than other locations because the site is particularly large. However, as mentioned earlier, the stakeholders in the study area have varying levels of disposable income. This would need to be a key consideration when deciding the appropriate type of recreational or fitness center.

3.2 Encourage Workforce Development & Engage Community

Workforce development typically works by preparing workers with the necessary knowledge and skills for a specific type of job with the objective of placing workers in jobs with long-term career development opportunities. Under the leadership of the 125th Street BID, community, business, and nonprofit organizations can coordinate workforce development efforts. Residents of General Grant Housing want sustainable employment and they see this as a means to decrease poverty, provide for their families and create generational wealth. Furthermore, workforce development can provide at-risk youth with a path that leads them to higher education, employment, and a long-term career, therefore ensuring an independent future for themselves and their families. Stable employment increases spending power, increasing demand for businesses in the study area.

The 125th Street BID could lead the way in enhancing workforce development among residents of General Grant Houses and the surrounding community by:

- Facilitating a partnership with the George Bruce Public Library, Columbia Business School and the Forum to increase the number of career sessions available. Financial literacy and asset building is important and career sessions can be expanded to include workshops and training beyond resume building and interviewing skills through resident forums and targeted communication.
- Encouraging the expansion of the [Pathways to Apprenticeship program](#) (P2A) and increase the number of participants from General Grant Housing and provide them with supportive services like transportation, child-care and small financial loans to cover costs incurring during the program. P2A assists people from low-income communities gain access to union construction apprenticeships.

- Introducing a local [Data Analyst Training Accelerator](#) (DATA) program (similar to the NYC Tech Talent Pipeline program and specifically for residents of General Grant Housing and Manhattanville) which aims to provide an accessible pathway to data analyst careers for underrepresented New Yorkers. It can be an in-person immersive training program targeted towards at-risk youth at no cost, either part-time or full-time and co-designed with industry leaders offering in-demand skills in advanced Excel, SQL, Python and digital marketing-related analytics and entrepreneurial skills.

It is also important to engage General Grant Housing residents through community outreach programs, education, and information sharing, with a special focus on at-risk youth and senior citizens. The study area is literally home for General Grant Housing residents. Creating a harmonious and fulfilling community for residents serves to create a study area conducive to foot traffic. Feedback from local leaders and residents indicates that General Grant Housing residents want support, resources, and opportunities that will improve their economic and social livelihoods and well-being.

Connecting residents in our study area to community programs and sustainable economic opportunities by generating jobs, and providing additional capacity and strategic support, can be achieved through a BID-led partnership with local businesses and other stakeholders that have an interest in the community. For instance, community organizations can provide additional space for high quality programs and a direct communication link to a point of contact at General Grant Housing. Additionally, the BID can host workshops and information sessions highlighting new and existing business owners to share their experiences/insight of starting and running a successful business. This provides a platform for information sharing between different stakeholders while simultaneously engaging residents therefore building relationships and trust.

3.3 Make the 125th Street Corridor Safer & More Accessible

Initial research demonstrates a high level of pedestrian activity in the study area. This density of activity, however, is marred by dangerous conditions that detract from the pedestrian experience and make it difficult to navigate the area. A number of short and long-term recommendations could improve safety conditions and access for users, additionally improving economic and community outcomes of the neighborhood. The 125th Street BID, together with the Manhattan Borough office, Community Board 9, and the Department of Transportation can target this area in a constructive, multiagency fashion to make it a safe, accessible, and pedestrian-friendly street. It is important throughout this process to maintain a goal of easing *feelings* of safety as well as *actual conditions* of safety.

3.3.1 Conduct Studies to Determine Locations for Street Improvements

From initial observations we found that existing street design and infrastructure has resulted in unsafe pedestrian conditions. Where there are no crosswalks, people cross the motorist-heavy street of their own accord, endangering themselves and those around them.

Additional studies could be completed to better understand the existing street conditions. Based on preliminary findings, we propose the addition of [midblock crossings](#) that would allow pedestrians to safely traverse the length of the street. These crosswalks could be brightly colored and contribute to a vivacious environment. They would also further slowdown traffic, making not only the immediate area, but also the surrounding streets, safer for all users. The exact location of midblock crossings would depend on further study. Our initial findings indicate, however, that crossing(s) in the area between Morningside Avenue and Amsterdam Avenue would be beneficial.

Once there is a better understanding of existing conditions, other street safety improvements, such as a [road diet](#) or additional pedestrian-priority improvements, would greatly enhance the area.

3.3.2 Use Additional Street Lighting to Improve Nighttime Sight Lines

Lighting both on the street and on building facades can greatly [improve](#) nighttime outcomes. Environments that are lit well feel safer and more accessible, leading to a higher presence of users. These users will contribute positively to economic outcomes and the overall success of the area. The BID has already experienced success with providing street lighting and décor; they could build upon this success by providing year-round lighting to improve sight lines and contribute to connectivity.

3.3.3 Increase Feelings of Safety & Access for General Grant Housing Residents

The residents of the NYCHA housing development are in a unique and powerful position. They are one of the largest user groups of the study area and interact with it on a daily basis. The residents are customers at local businesses, riders of nearby public transit, and pedestrians on the sidewalks. They are also a group of stakeholders that have commonly been overlooked or left behind in processes of economic development and public realm improvements.

General Grant Housing residents should be active participants in the process of making 125th Street safer and more accessible. They are experts in where midblock crossings would be most useful, what corners are not well lit in the evening hours, and what additional public realm improvements would make their lives easier and more enjoyable. The BID could develop a line of communication between the housing residents and themselves; this could empower the residents to contribute to ideas and make their needs for the area known.

3.3.4 Use Tactical Urbanism to Project & Plan Improvements

Urban planning changes often come with a high price tag. They are costly, in terms of money spent, political capital necessary, and time. [Tactical urbanism](#), the [Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper](#) approach to public realm improvements, are a great way to get the process started.

Experimenting with easy, temporary, and low-cost projects can have great results in their own right, and often catalyze long-term change.

For example, in Seattle, members of the community [painted a crosswalk](#) painted colors of the Pan-African flag (red, green, and black) to pay homage to the African American legacy of the neighborhood. The action later helped in the formation of a [Community Crosswalks](#) program by the local Seattle government that allowed communities to apply to have an artistic crosswalk in their neighborhood. The City also provides resources to residents on how to gain matching grants to fund the improvements.

Other improvements, like taking back sections of streets for pedestrian activity, can be done simply with traffic cones to keep cars out. These types of short-term experiments can lead to

lasting positive change for communities.

3.3.5 Close Hancock Place to Vehicular Traffic



Image 11: Hancock Place between Roosevelt Triangle and General Grant Houses

This street, along with Morningside Avenue and

Amsterdam Avenue, surround the Roosevelt Triangle, creating

a complex and dangerous

system of roads through the study area. It is a one-way, three-lanes-wide stretch of roadway. It presents a perfect opportunity to be closed to vehicular traffic in favor of pedestrian activity. Taking back this small stretch of roadway from cars will increase the size of Roosevelt Triangle and provide more space for public space users to enjoy.

In the short term, simple, low cost additions, such as strategically spaced planters to block off the road, will keep cars out. Using moveable, lightweight chairs and tables will invite users to

make the space their own. It can be a space for passive enjoyment, or active engagement, with farmers markets, spaces for children to play, etc. In the longer term, more permanent fixtures can be informed by the short-term activations. The pedestrianization of [Time Square](#) provides best practices that can inform this case.

3.4 Make 125th Street More Welcoming

The character of a neighborhood is evident in everything from the saxophone music coming from the 3rd story apartment window to the bodega owner's cat prowling the sidewalk. No other place is this character more on display, however, than the public spaces -- the streets, sidewalks, facades, greenspaces, and transit hubs. These elements create the visual identity of a neighborhood and can welcome users or repel them. The BID plays an important role in supporting and advocating for these elements.

3.4.1 Ensure Upkeep of Corridor & Environment

One of the simplest ways to improve a corridor is to keep it clean. A well-kept space invites people in and creates a welcoming environment for users to enjoy. It is also a good opportunity for the 125th Street BID to have a personal presence in the neighborhood and build good will. Having uniformed personnel on foot or on bicycles cleaning up trash and talking with people in the area does two things simultaneously: it keeps the area clean, and those people cleaning it serve as ambassadors for the space ensuring that people connect the BID with reliable street maintenance.

3.4.2 Create a Vibrant Atmosphere

Simple solutions that improve any space, like planters filled with colorful flowers, can make a street welcoming and visually enjoyable. The upkeep of these planters also offers a chance to have additional ambassadors in the space (see above recommendation). It could also be an

opportunity to invite community members to participate; children can paint the planters and learn to garden by keeping them fresh and well cared for. The BID could brand planters and other street décor that it provides to show its interest in caring for the study area.

3.4.3 Utilize Blank Spaces for Artistic Endeavors

Blank walls are great spaces for colorful and inviting murals. Old Broadway, which transects 125th Street, hosts a large mural dedicated to Harlem's history of activism. The mural was part of a [grassroots effort](#) to highlight the history between Malcolm X and Yuri Kochiyama, led by [local artists and activists](#). The project was completed in 2015 and the mural has not been maintained, although it remains an important example of community engagement in public space. Large sidewalks, gateways, and green space can host interactive sculptures, like [the cube in Astor Place](#) that moves as people work together to push it. The BID could catalyze efforts to create more public art in the study area by engaging the community in revitalization efforts including re-painting the Malcolm & Yuri mural, creating colorful sidewalks discussed in Section 3.5.5, adding art to the 125th Street 1 station discussed in section 3.5.2, or involving residents in reimagining Roosevelt Triangle.

3.4.4 Encourage Businesses to Take Advantage of Sidewalk Proximity

Active sidewalks invite people into businesses on the street and reduce barriers between public and private space. The BID could encourage owners in the area to take advantage of available space outside their businesses to create a more vibrant street and attract customers. Something as simple as an A-frame chalkboard outside of a food establishment adds to the atmosphere of the corridor. Restaurants also have the opportunity to put chairs and tables for their customers on the sidewalk. A planter with a small bench outside of a business changes the street for the better. Helping businesses to navigate the permitting process, and, where possible, making the permit process easier and more accessible, will improve economic outcomes and increase street activity.

3.5 Capitalize on the Connectivity of the Study Area

This section of 125th Street has the potential to be a prominent entrance to Harlem by nature of its connectivity via public and private transit. The subway and bus lines connect easily to Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens, including direct connection to LaGuardia Airport; the street is a corridor for private vehicles coming from Henry Hudson Parkway; and in 2017 the study area was included in a Citibike expansion effort to add stations between 110th and 130th Streets. The goal of improving the connectivity of our study area is to not just make it safer for pedestrians and drivers, but to make it an extension of greater Harlem that holds the same cultural, social, and economic appeal.

3.5.1 Study Area as “Gateway to Harlem”

The study area is perfectly situated to be an entrance into Greater Harlem, with multiple points of entry by train, bus, bike, and soon-to-be ferry. The BID could capitalize on this by branding it as such and encouraging people to access Harlem through West 125th. This will increase foot traffic and provide greater exposure to the small businesses located in the study area. It is imperative in this process to not just include but highlight the voices and input of General Grant Houses residents and other community members who have a history interest in their community. With the buy-in of residents, the project will experience more success and generate community pride.

3.5.2 Improve 125th Street Subway Station

The 125th Street stop on the 1 Train is notorious for broken escalators and sub-par hygiene. The BID could advocate for technical improvements and prioritizing a clean station. There is also an opportunity to reimagine the look of the station. Riding north on the 1 Train, this stop is starkly different from the preceding ones; it is above ground, dirtier, and there is no place marker for what is located outside the train station. The two stops before 125th have tile art as important markers of *place*. The 125th Street station could announce itself as a gateway to Harlem through signage that identifies important places in proximity to the stop. The BID could

work with the Department of Transportation and community artists to design the walls in the stairs leading up to the station. The Washington Heights station on the 1 train at the 191st Street station is accessed by a long tunnel full of graffiti art which was done by [city-enlisted artists to beautify the passage](#). It was a collaboration between the Department of Transportation and the [Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance](#). Something similar could be done at the 125th Street station, bringing together local residents and Columbia students to collaborate and beautifying the station.

3.5.3 Reorient Parking to Create Connectivity

The vehicular parking that is available on the north side of 125th Street faces perpendicular to the flow of traffic on the street. This widens the street, enlarging the distance pedestrians must cross to get safety from one side of the street to the other. It also creates a large physical barrier between the street and sidewalk. If these spots were instead made parallel to the street, the extra space could be used to widen the sidewalk for additional activation:

benches, planters, street vending, etc.



Image 13: Parking on the north side of the street is perpendicular to the flow of traffic.

3.5.4 Take Action to Ensure Cyclist Safety

There is a large presence of cyclists on the 125th Street corridor and in the greater neighborhood. These cyclists are currently afforded no additional protections, and are left to either ride on the sidewalk, endangering pedestrians, or take their chances on the street where they run the risk of a collision with a motorist. The BID could recommend further studies that investigate the potential of [protected bike lanes](#) or other cyclist safety measures. This would not only make existing cyclists (and all road users) safer, but it would also encourage more people to utilize micro mobility options, such as bike share (Citibike), scooters, skateboards, and others.

3.5.5 Use Colorful & Branded Wayfinding to Connect the Separate Regions of Greater 125th Street



Image 14: Colorful Sidewalk in Washington, DC
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2017.06.09_DCRainbowCrosswalks,_Washington,_DC_USA_6236_\(34395293433\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2017.06.09_DCRainbowCrosswalks,_Washington,_DC_USA_6236_(34395293433).jpg)

The different sections of the 125th Street corridor are currently separated both spatially and visually. Broadway transects 125th Street and creates a disconnect between the westside, with Columbia's new Manhattanville development, and the

eastside. Although The Forum is open to the public, and not just limited to Columbia University students, many users on the other side of Broadway would not be aware of that community asset. The BID could use a shared visual identity, like [colorful crosswalks](#), signs, and murals, that would facilitate greater connectivity. These elements also lead to [improved safety outcomes](#) for both pedestrians and drivers; drivers instinctively slow down and pedestrians feel more welcome. These elements can also serve as iconic gateways, gaining neighborhoods publicity and recognition for their progressive street design.

A photograph of a city street scene, likely in New York City, featuring a tall brick building, bare trees, and a bus. A large orange circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text. The background shows a street with cars, a pedestrian, and a bus with 'M100' and 'EAST HAVEN 2 AVENUE' visible on its destination sign. The sky is blue with some clouds and birds.

COVID-19 Special Recommendations

With the presence of COVID-19 into New York City, many neighborhoods, West Harlem included, have experienced great hardships. The underpinnings of urban life -- density, proximity, public transit -- are being questioned and the landscape of our cities are changing. While NYC copes with devastating loss, it also looks to rebuild and recover stronger than ever before.

We recognize that many of our earlier recommendations may not be feasible in the wake of this pandemic. With that in mind, we have compiled recommendations informed by disaster recovery best practices in order to improve the response and establish the new normal.

4.1 Community Action Recommendations

Residents of General Grant Houses, along with all NYCHA residents, are especially vulnerable to this disease. With over 1,400 families, General Grant Houses are some of the most densely populated apartments in the city, making it a [potential hotspot](#) for the virus.

Any recovery plans must prioritize NYCHA residents; they are a vital part of the community and represent a bulk of the residents in the study area. When NYCHA residents thrive, the community thrives.

4.1.1 Focus on Community

Most economic recovery assistance will come from city, state, and federal resources; community entities, such as Community Board 9, Columbia University, Factory District, and other stakeholders could focus on people's safety and well-being. For Columbia University especially, COVID-19 recovery is an important opportunity to show the community that they are willing and able to invest in the people. Organizations in the study area can do this by:

- Continue to provide masks and hand sanitizer to local businesses and residents which will likely continue to be difficult to find in markets

- Maintain community COVID data to keep people informed on the trends even after restrictions are lifted

4.1.2 Maintain Clean Public Spaces

Fear of the virus, even after the restrictions are lifted, will likely prevent some people from venturing out of their homes at the same rate as before COVID-19. It is therefore essential that the city and businesses put forth additional effort to maintain clean public spaces to increase the safety of the community. This could involve:

- Hand sanitizer stations in active areas, such as the subway station, bus stops, and active sidewalks
- Closing streets to cars to provide ample space for social distancing
- Cleaning wipes at Citibike stations to encourage safe usage

4.1.3 Community Support Systems

There are 3 churches, an office for Community Board 9, and a community development nonprofit located in the study area. All of these entities have some sort of interest in rebuilding in the aftermath of COVID-19. Although they may not have many resources, they can create community support systems that will be invaluable to the residents and businesses owners in the area. Strong communities are communities where neighbors check in on each other and are interested in taking care of each other; community organizations can support this type of connection through individual and collective outreach.

4.1.4 Prioritize the Laundromat Space

Columbia University has the resources to revitalize the laundromat space that they own in the study area. During recovery, the prioritization of developing this space into something residents and business owners could connect with would go a long way in reviving the community; new and exciting places bring hope and increased public activity. The

recommendations provided in section 3.1 would benefit the community and should be prioritized after COVID restrictions are lifted.

4.1.5 Rehabilitate the Green Space

In the same way, George Bruce Public Library could make use of their green space to create a safe, active area that could uplift the community. [Vibrant green spaces have been shown to decrease feelings of depression](#) and help nearby residents recover from mental fatigue. The library therefore has an opportunity to provide much-needed mental support to their community after an extraordinarily difficult time. The library could:

- Be sure to maintain a clean space with regular, visible sanitations
- Set ample outdoor seating and allow food and drinks to be brought in to the garden area to give residents a place to eat take-out

4.1.6 Targeted Campaign to Encourage Patronage of Small Businesses

Small businesses will likely experience the most losses from COVID-19, and those in the study area are no exception. Once restrictions are lifted, it will be important to make people feel comfortable patronizing local small businesses to assist in economic recovery for the community. To do this, there could be an organized, combined effort to reach out to residents and other community members to inform them of safety measures being taken by the public and small businesses in the area, and to encourage them to shop local. Potential campaigns include:

- Host an outdoor small business fair in the study area while practicing social distancing. Close the street for a day to allow more people in the area.
- A "Small Business Saturday" campaign which encourages area residents to buy lunch or dinner from a local restaurant on Saturdays – discount codes could be used

- Highlight one small business a day for a set amount of time – this could be via a widely-read platform and could tell the story of the owner, how the business is adapting to the pandemic, any local employees, and what residents can do to support the business

4.2 Small Business Action Recommendations

There is no doubt that the study area will look different post-shut down than it did in January. Still, when the restrictions start to be lifted, businesses in the study area that have survived could take several steps to ensure their longevity and relevance in the new normal.

4.2.1 Utilize Available Loans and Assistance

There are many levels of government and nonprofits offering small business loans and grants. Below is a short list, but businesses should be sure to stay up to date on available help through Community Board and Business Improvement District listservs, New York City Government website, and state and national level agency websites.

- [StreetSense.com](https://www.street Sense.com) has many resources for small businesses including a re-opening guides for restaurants and boutique stores
- The State of New York has several resources available to small businesses including: [The Covid-19 Application for the Suspension of Debt Collection Activity](#), [The Emergency Small Business Relief Loan Fund](#), and the [CDFA Common Thread](#).
- The City of New York has paused accepting applications for loans and grants; businesses should check the city's small business website [here](#) for updates
- NYC has published a checklist for businesses in order to help them plan to stay in business throughout and after the shutdown. The checklist can be found [here](#).
- The Columbia Business School published the [Small Business Pandemic Resiliency Guide](#)
- A number of private companies are offering small business grants and loans, including: [Shea Moisture](#) to assist minority-owned businesses; [HelloAlice](#), in partnership Verizon; and [Google](#) and [Facebook](#) are both offering ad credits for small businesses

- Uptowngrandcentral.org has [an extensive list of available loans and assistance](#) for small businesses, specifically in Harlem.

4.2.2 Improve online presence & delivery systems

Many businesses in the study area do not have an online presence, or if they do, it is through Facebook and not well-maintained. To increase accessibility of the business, a concerted effort could be made to increase the online visibility of the stores. Potential customers should be able to check online to if the business is still operating and in what capacity. Potential ways of achieving this include:

- Collaboration with Columbia University, George Bruce Public Library, and Janis Properties to host workshops teaching business owners internet fluency and how to adapt brick-and-mortar businesses to online shops.
- Take advantage of free online platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram; more information in 4.2.3 below

This effort could be catalyzed by the BID and in collaboration with and assistance by Columbia University, George Bruce Public Library, or Janis Properties in the interest of establishing community trust while reviving an area that is important for everyone involved.

4.2.3 Re-Utilize Current Space to Prioritize Social Distancing

Many small businesses are implementing innovative practices in order to continue to serve customers during the shutdown. Businesses in the study area could do the same, for example:

- Take advantage of free online platforms such as Facebook and Instagram in order to reach customers and continue serving products; for example, Facebook and Instagram Live allow businesses to show product to customers in real-time. Businesses could consider setting up an order system through one of these platforms.

- Repurpose door space in order to serve customers without having to let them inside the store or restaurant. For example, weather permitting, set up a pick-up bar/table at the door or on the sidewalk to make delivery easy and safe.

4.2.4 Attract Customers with Clean & Welcoming Spaces

Businesses could reassure customers that they are practicing high levels of cleanliness in order to ensure the comfort and safety of everyone. Businesses should put cleanliness into practice and advertise that they are doing so; this will help re-attract customers to the business.

4.2.5 Host Job Fair When Preparing for Re-Hire

Businesses across the country have been forced to let employees go due to the virus; however, when restrictions are lifted, businesses will need at least some of those employees back. Current and new businesses in the study area could collaborate with NYCHA, community organizations, and the Columbia employment office to host a post-coronavirus job fair. This could be held at one of the churches in the study area and prioritize hiring local employees. It will make applying easier for applicants, as they can speak with multiple businesses in one space, and it will make hiring more convenient for the businesses.



Conclusion

Presently, 125th Street in Harlem continues to maintain a strong identity despite going through periods of tremendous population growth and infrastructural strain, disinvestment, and urban renewal. Lying at the intersection of three very distinct communities, the study area is suitable for economic development considering it possesses a number of traits which makes it stand out from the rest of 125th Street in Harlem. The study area has a high vacancy rate but there is an opportunity to create a holistic and inclusive environment despite which intentionally connects and brings people together in spite of being home to one of the largest housing projects in New York City. Additionally, the study area has a diverse and mixed group of residents with a wide array of needs. Residents of General Grant Housing represent the largest potential customer base for new and existing businesses within the area but residents lack spaces to eat, relax, shop and socialize. Columbia's University's Manhattanville expansion and the Manhattanville Factory District will bring an influx of students, faculty and prospective employees both within and outside the study area and they will also need eateries, retail cultural and recreational spaces.

Conversely, 125th Street in Harlem is a very busy and heavily trafficked vehicular corridor with many people haphazardly crossing the street particularly in the study area. This poses a safety risk to pedestrians. There is a high level of connectivity, but a disconnect between mobility and attractions. Furthermore, there is a lack of nighttime activity and underutilized sidewalk space by existing businesses. Areas around General Grant Housing and the Roosevelt Triangle also remain underutilized. Nonetheless, making the 125th Street corridor safer and accessible to pedestrians is crucial for economic and safety outcomes in the neighborhood. Environments which are well-lit provide a feeling and sense of safety. Encouraging businesses to take advantages of their proximity to the sidewalk, experimenting with street planters and using blank spaces for artistic endeavors significantly contribute to making the study area more aesthetic appealing.

Inviting a sustainable, community-driven economic development is vital to making the 125th Street corridor a destination for everyone. For instance, L+M Development Partners has successfully renovated a few storefronts therefore spurring economic development. Nevertheless, based on retail study analyzing both supply and demand, there needs to be a mix of commercial use that suits the study area based on the needs and wants of all stakeholders. Capitalizing on potential development sites to incentivize economic development is a key element to generating sustainable employment. It's very important to include the residents of General Grant Housing in the process of making the study area a prime destination so they feel included considering many tenants have lived in the neighborhood for many years. Columbia University has the capacity to provide space for high quality community programs and provide a platform for information sharing between different stakeholders while simultaneously engaging residents thus building relationships and trust.



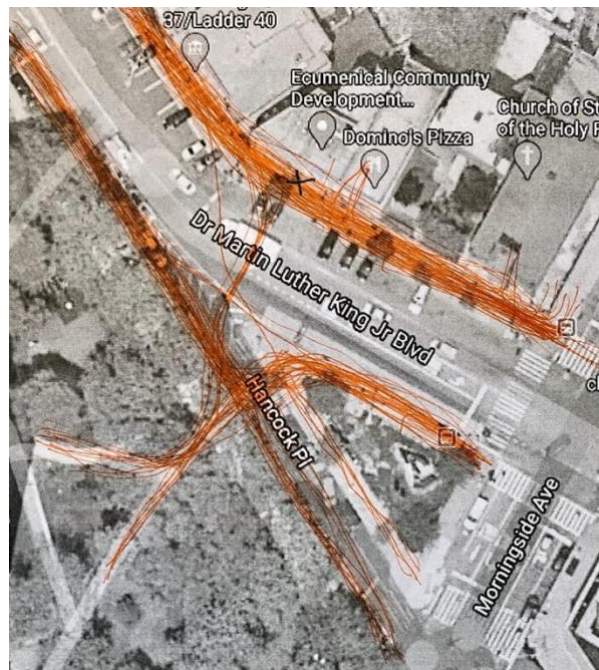
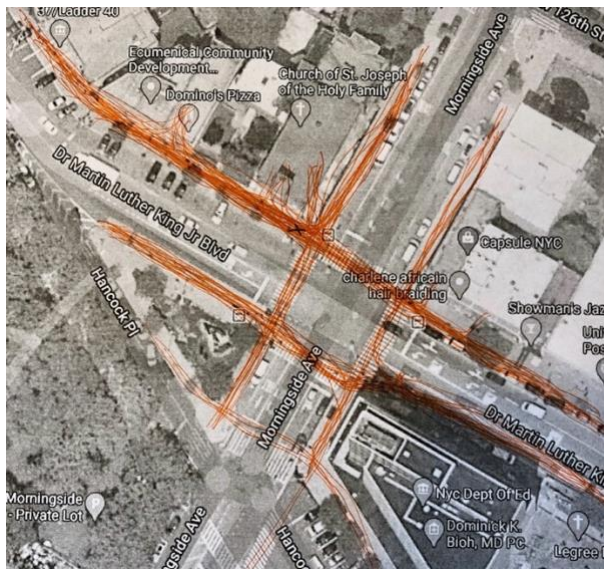
Acknowledgements

This report was produced for the 125th Street Business Improvement District in conjunction with Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) as a Capstone Consultancy project. The authors, Eve Critton, Anthony Hascheff, Mercy Kimanthi, Tianyi Tang, and Emma Troxler are graduate students concentrating in Urban and Social Policy. Ethel Sheffer, an urban planner and Commissioner of the New York Public Design Commission, oversaw the research and production of this report. Any views expressed herein are the authors' own and do not necessarily represent those of SIPA or the BID. We would like to express our gratitude to Merit E. Janow, the Dean of SIPA, Suzanne Hollmann and Josephine Vu from the SIPA Capstone office. We would also like to thank Barbara Askins, CEO and President of the 125th Street BID, for providing valuable guidance and suggestions throughout this process, and for the opportunity to collaborate with the BID.



Appendix

Appendix 1: Desire Lines (Continued)



Appendix 2: Retail Analysis Database

As part of the Retail Analysis, our retail team compiled a database of all current uses in the study area, including the zoning, owner, current land use, square feet, and more. That database is attached to the report as an excel sheet.