EAST 116th STREET STOREFRONT REVITALIZATION PROJECT

NEW YORK STATE | Downtown Revitalization Initiative

UNION SETTLEMENT

OBRA ARCHITECTS



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PROJECT APPROACH

Ambitious long-term goals, including the economic revitalization of the neighborhood and the strengthening of the social ties that hold its community together, frame the East 116th Street Storefront Revitalization Project. Led by Union Settlement and funded through the East Harlem Downtown Revitalization Initiative, the project will provide design support and capital improvements to small businesses between Park Avenue and Pleasant Avenue, upgrading the storefronts that shape the character of the street.

By giving careful attention to small, concrete elements (a sign, an awning, a well-lit entrance), the project aims to contribute to the long-term prosperity of the businesses and residents who make up the corridor.

Rather than applying a top-down, one-size-fits-all standard, the project begins by observing, classifying, and analyzing the corridor's storefronts as they exist today. East 116th Street has long been the commercial heart of East Harlem, shaped by generations of communities who have left their mark on its signs, colors, and storefronts. The guidelines that follow grow out of that survey and out of conversations with business owners. They address function and durability while respecting the layered character that gives the street its cultural identity.

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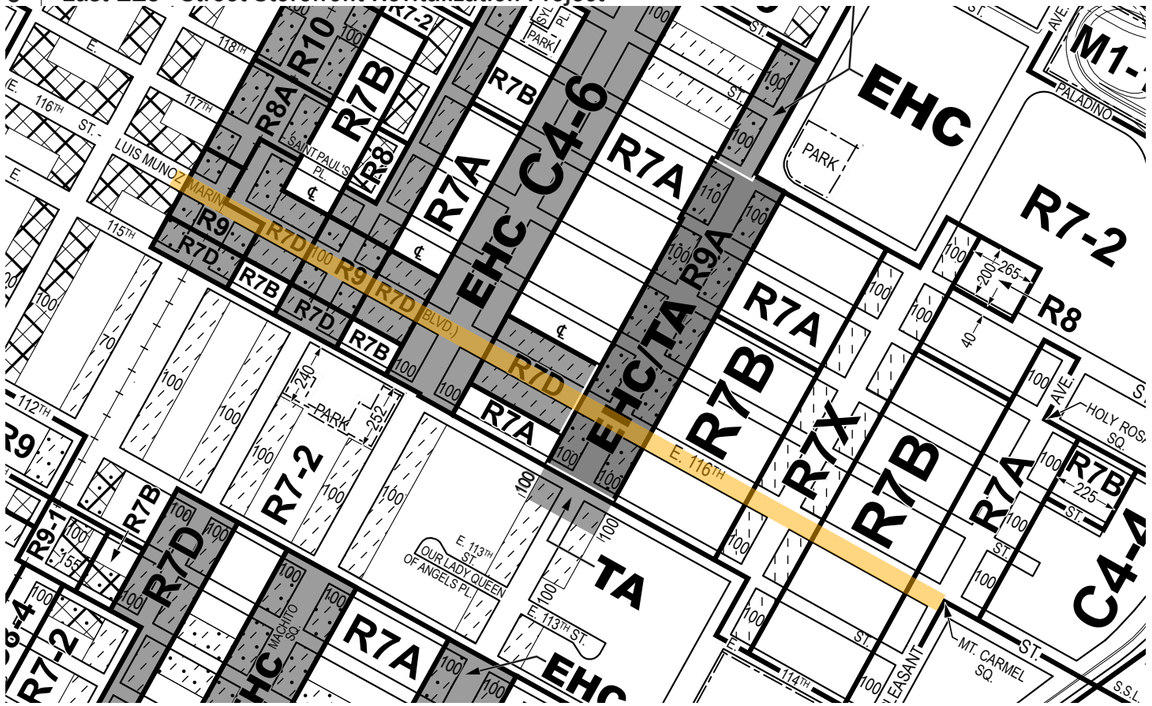
SITE OVERVIEW



Project Site



New York City Zoning Map

The zoning map shows the zoning districts and commercial overlays along East 116th Street between Park and Pleasant Avenues, which determine where commercial uses and signs are permitted. The historic resources map, a screenshot from the New York State Cultural Resource Information System (CRIS), shows documented historic properties along the corridor. The yellow dots indicate buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Because the project is funded by New York State, storefront improvements to buildings listed on or eligible for the State or National Register of Historic Places require review and approval by the New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) before work begins. Each property should be checked in CRIS early in design, and time for SHPO review should be included in the project schedule.



CRIS Historic Resources Map



Storefront Elevations - Park and Lexington Av. (South)



Storefront Elevations - Park and Lexington Av. (North)

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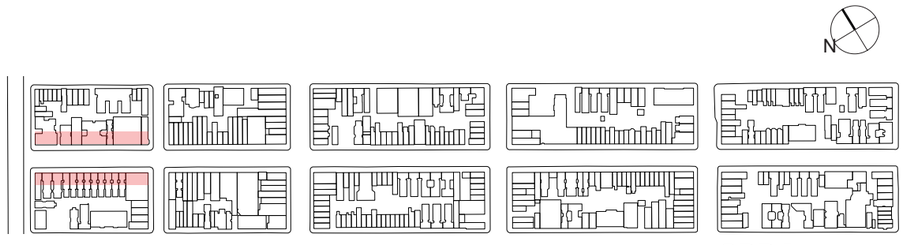
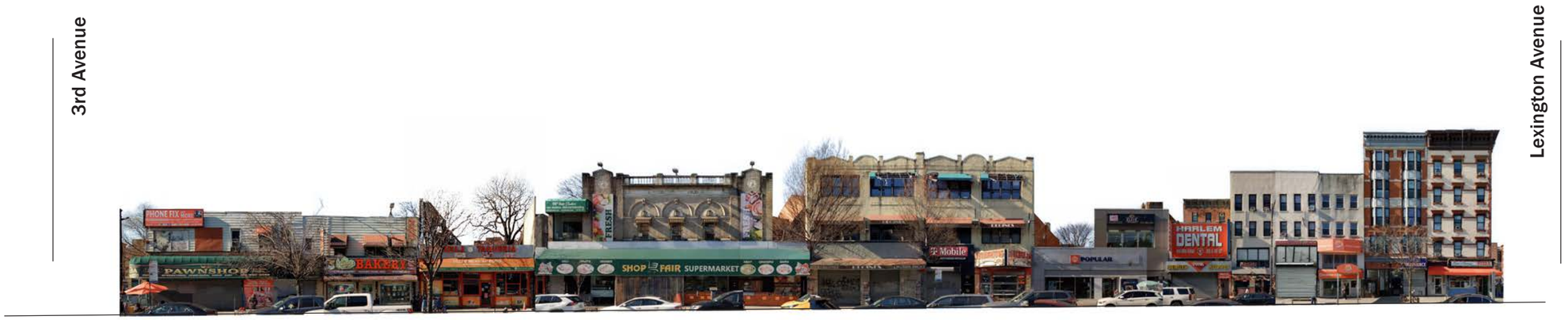




Storefront Elevations - Lexington and 3rd Av. (South)



Storefront Elevations - Lexington and 3rd Av. (North)



2nd Avenue



3rd Avenue

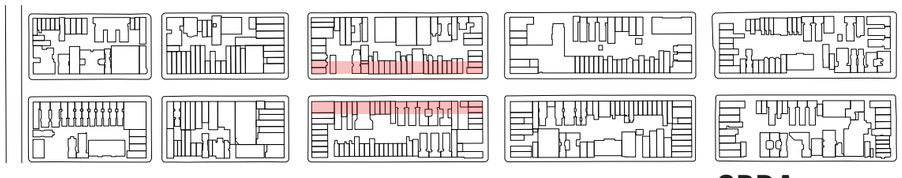
Storefront Elevations - 3rd and 2nd Av. (South)

3rd Avenue



2nd Avenue

Storefront Elevations - 3rd and 2nd Av. (North)



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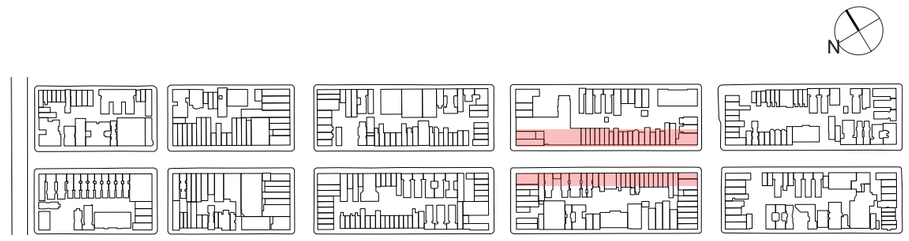
Storefront Elevations - 2nd and 1st Av. (South)



Storefront Elevations - 2nd and 1st Av. (North)

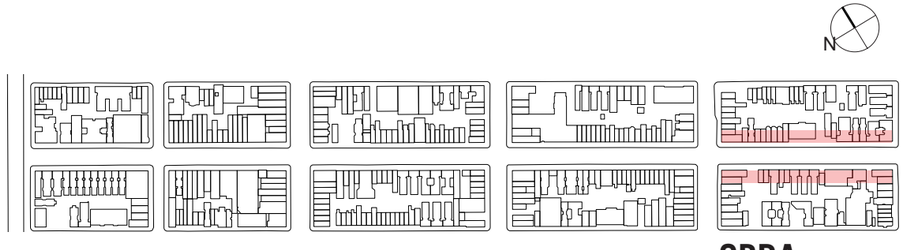




Storefront Elevations - 1st and Pleasant Av. (South)



Storefront Elevations - 1st and Pleasant Av. (North)



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Harlem, 1938. Hansel Mieth—The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images



Children playing in the snow, Spanish Harlem, 1960



Children playing hopscotch in Spanish Harlem, 1965



Outdoor merchandising on East 116th Street, East Harlem, 1968



East Harlem, 1970, Vergara, Camilo J., photographer



Capturing East Harlem in the 80s, Joseph Rodriguez



Capturing East Harlem in the 80s, Joseph Rodriguez



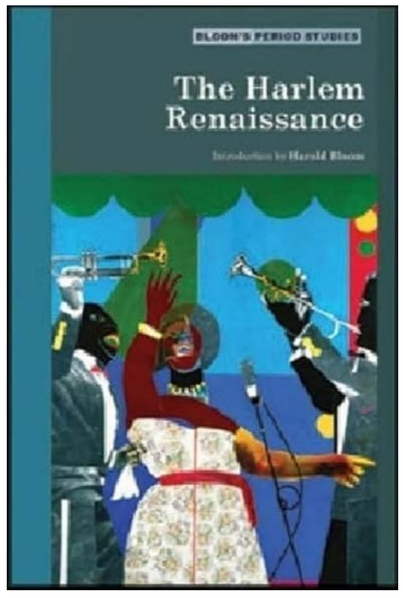
East Harlem, 2025



East Harlem, 2025



East Harlem, 2025



Journalist Ed Morales describes Spanish Harlem as the place “where hip-hop and salsa trumps classical, prime real estate gives way to inner city”



Harlem, 1938. Hansel Mieth—The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images



Harlem 1958, East 126th Street © 2021 Courtesy Art Kane Archive

Street vendor selling Mexican and Puerto Rican records in Spanish Harlem, 1965

Crowd watching a Jazzmobile street concert in Spanish Harlem, 1965



Capturing East Harlem in the 80s, Joseph Rodriguez



Capturing East Harlem in the 80s, Joseph Rodriguez



Block Party at East 110th Street, 1980's, El Museo del Barrio



Salsa Saturdays at La Marqueta, © John McCarten / New York City Council



Tito Puente Mural, East 110th Street



Salsa dancing at La Placita de la Marqueta, Krisanne Johnson



Looking east from Lexington Avenue at 116th Street, 1925



Looking east from Lexington Avenue at 116th Street, 2026



Looking west from Second Avenue to Third Avenue at 116th Street, 1926



Looking west from Second Avenue to Third Avenue at 116th Street, 2026



Looking northwest from Park Avenue, 116th Street, 1933



Looking northwest from Park Avenue, 116th Street, 2026



1940s Tax Department photographs, 2nd Avenue - 116th Street



187 East 116th Street, 2026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Anatomy of the Storefront



Upper Floor Windows

Keep upper-floor windows free of signs, coverings, and equipment so the building's original window pattern remains visible.

Lintel

Frieze

Pilasters

Stringcourse

Cornice

Preserve existing cornices and original materials to maintain the building's architectural character and the continuity of the block.

Quoins

Preserve quoins and other masonry details, and keep them free of signs, conduit, and mounted equipment.

Flat Panel Sign

Mount flat against the building within the sign band, between the storefront cornice and the awning. Keep signs simple and in scale with the building, so they clearly identify the business without overwhelming the storefront.

Fixed Awning

Mount awnings above windows and doors to provide shade and weather protection without projecting excessively over the sidewalk. Use durable, fade-resistant fabric.

Lighting

Use shielded fixtures to highlight signs, entrances, and display windows, creating a welcoming storefront after dark without glare.

Security Camera

Install security cameras discreetly, with concealed wiring, to minimize visual clutter.

Security Grille

Use open-mesh security grilles to maintain visibility into the storefront when closed, with gate housings recessed or finished to match the facade.

Tree Guard

Use tree guards to protect street trees while keeping a clear walking path.

Entrance

Keep entrances welcoming and easy to find, with durable doors and clear glass for visibility and easy access.

Tree Pit

Keep tree pits clean and free of trash and obstructions to support healthy street trees.

Service Window

Keep service windows clearly defined and easy to use, with a simple design that fits the rest of the storefront.

Facade Material

Coordinate storefront materials, colors, and proportions to create a cohesive design that complements the building and the corridor.

Sidewalk

Keep a clear walking path, with displays, signs, and merchandise kept close to the storefront.

Signage

Signage establishes a storefront's identity and helps a business connect with the street. Signs should be clear, legible, and scaled to the building and its surroundings, while leaving room for the self-expression that makes each business recognizable. Together, the signs along a block shape how the whole street is read, so each sign should balance standing out with fitting in.

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Placement

- Signs should be placed with the building's architectural character, the storefront's dimensions, pedestrian movement, viewing distances, and the surrounding streetscape in mind.

Sign Band

- Primary signs should be located within a consistent sign band above the storefront, typically between the top of the storefront opening and the sill of the second-floor windows. Align sign placement, proportions, and spacing with the building's architectural features, especially windows, and with adjacent storefronts. Where a building has several storefronts, coordinate their signs so they read as a group.

Blade Signs

- Blade signs can supplement the primary sign and improve visibility from either direction along the sidewalk. Signs should be positioned so they are easily seen by pedestrians without overwhelming the facade or competing with neighboring storefronts. Projecting signs are subject to size, projection, and clearance limits (see Signage Regulations).



Flat Panel Signs



Window Signs



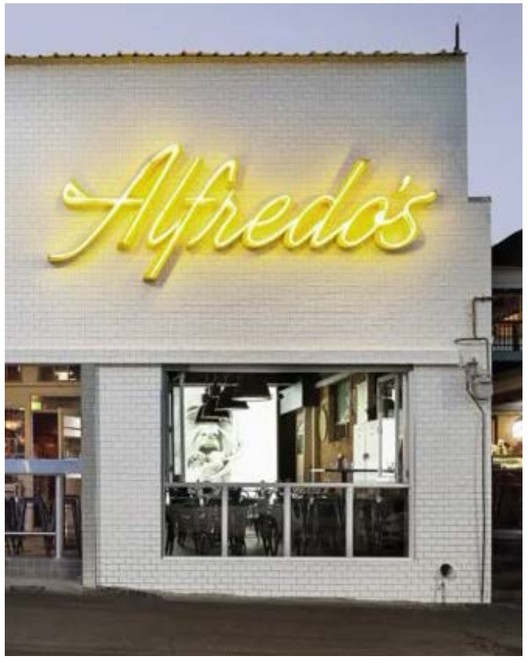
Blade Signs

Illuminated Signs

- If a sign is illuminated, shielded fixtures should be used that direct light downward or onto the sign face to limit glare and keep light out of upper-floor residential windows. Illuminated signs are subject to smaller size limits than non-illuminated signs (see Signage Regulations). Flashing or animated signs are not recommended.

Abandoned Signs and Hardware

- Abandoned signs, brackets, conduit, and other hardware left from previous businesses should be removed, and patch and finish the facade where they were attached.



Neon Signs



Illuminated Signs



Letter Signs

Awning

Awnings add character and definition to a storefront while protecting customers and window displays from sun and weather. Well-chosen color, material, and form can complement the building's architecture, and careful placement preserves architectural details and keeps the sidewalk comfortable for pedestrians.

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Size and Alignment

- Awnings should be sized and placed with sidewalk width, pedestrian movement, storefront proportions, and weather protection in mind, and align them with storefront bays and window openings. Awning projection and clearance are regulated (see Awning Regulations).

Consistent Profile

- Awning profile, projection, and height should be kept consistent across the building, including where a building has several storefronts. Colors and materials that complement the building should be selected. Awnings with open ends and undersides keep a lighter, less obtrusive appearance.

Coordination with Grilles

- Awning placement should be coordinated with security grille housings so the two do not compete for the same space above the storefront.

Materials and Mounting

- Use durable, fade-resistant fabrics and corrosion-resistant frames. Anchor frames into sound construction appropriate to the facade, and keep mounting hardware neat and finished to match the storefront. Frame and fabric materials must meet fire-safety requirements (see Awning Regulations).

Mounting Height

- Awnings should be mounted within or just above window and door openings, below the sign band and cornice, so they do not cover signage, transoms, display windows, or decorative elements.

Awning Graphics

- Awning graphics should be kept simple and legible, limited to the business name and street address. Lettering on an awning is treated as a sign and is subject to size limits (see Awning Regulations).



Fixed Awning



Retracable Awning

Lighting

Lighting makes storefronts visible and inviting after dark and helps the sidewalk feel safer and more comfortable. On a busy commercial street, storefront lighting does much of the work of lighting the sidewalk itself, especially in the winter months when stores are open well past sunset. Well-placed fixtures highlight entrances, signs, and window displays, drawing attention to the business without overwhelming the street. Lighting should complement the building's architecture and be considered together with neighboring storefronts, so the block reads as continuous and well lit rather than as a patchwork of bright and dark frontages.

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Supplemental Lighting

- Add exterior lighting where street lighting leaves entrances, display windows, or the sidewalk in front of the store poorly lit.

Fixture Selection

- Coordinate fixture placement, size, finish, and style with the storefront and its architectural details, and keep fixtures within the storefront's own frontage.

Light Direction and Glare

- Aim light at the sign, entrance, and display windows rather than washing the whole facade. Use shielded, downward-directed fixtures, preferably full-cutoff, to limit glare and keep light off neighboring properties and upper-floor windows. Avoid flashing or blinking lights.

After-Hours Display Lighting

- Where possible, keep display windows lit after closing so the street stays active and visible at night.

LED Fixtures and Electrical Work

- Use energy-efficient LED fixtures with a warm color temperature, generally 2700K–3000K. Exterior electrical work requires a licensed electrician and a permit (see Lighting Regulations).



Fixtures



Exterior and interior lighting


Display window lighting

Security Grilles

Security features should protect a business without turning the storefront into a blank wall after hours. Roll-down gates, grilles, and reinforced doors should be integrated with the building's design and, where possible, preserve views into the storefront when closed. A street lined with open, visible storefronts feels safer and more active at night.

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Integrated Design

- Integrate grilles with the storefront design, coordinating tracks, housings, and operating mechanisms with signage, awnings, lighting, louvers, window framing, and doors.

Open Gates

- Use open-mesh, perforated, or link-style gates that allow views into the storefront when closed. Align grille edges with window and door frames, and conceal hardware, wiring, and supports. Requirements for gate visibility have recently changed (see Security Grille Regulations).

Gate Housings

- Recess gate housings within the sign band or finish them to match the surrounding facade.

Window Bars

- At windows at or near the ground floor, use fixed window bars that are consistent with the building's age and character, set within the masonry opening. Keep bars aligned with the window frame and finish to match it.

Security Glass

- Laminated or impact-resistant glass can provide security with less reliance on closed grilles.

Artwork on Gates

- Where a solid gate remains, consider artwork on the gate face to discourage graffiti and enliven the street after hours (see Artwork).



Security Gate


Impact Glass


Window Guard

Glass

Transparent storefronts connect the inside of a business with the sidewalk. Passersby can see merchandise and activity, and people inside stay connected to the street. Clear glass makes a frontage more inviting, brings natural light into the store, and puts more eyes on the street, which helps the block feel safer at night. Signs, posters, and covered glass reduce these benefits, so window space given over to them should be kept modest.

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Clear Glass

- Keep storefront glass as clear as possible. Limit signs, stickers, posters, and flyers so that at least 70% of each window remains unobstructed. Avoid opaque film, full-window graphics, and permanently closed blinds.

Window Signs

- Treat lettering on the glass as signage. Keep it to the business name, hours, and essential information, preferably as individual applied letters rather than solid panels. Window signs are subject to sign regulations (see Signage Regulations).

Transoms

- Keep transoms glazed. Avoid filling them with air-conditioning units or opaque panels. Where ventilation is needed, coordinate louvers with the storefront framing.

Energy Code

- Replacement storefront glass must meet energy code requirements, which the project's design professional will document (see Glass Regulations).

Window Displays

- Use the area just inside the glass for displays. Avoid placing shelving backs, coolers, or storage against the window.







Entrance

The entrance is a customer's first physical contact with a business, and it should be easy to find and easy to use. Durable, commercial-grade doors with generous glass let people see inside before they enter and extend the storefront's transparency to the door itself. A heavy door or a hard-to-reach entrance can turn away customers using wheelchairs, strollers, walkers, or shopping carts, so an entrance that is easy for everyone to use benefits every business. In buildings with apartments above, a clear distinction between retail and residential entrances helps visitors and residents alike.

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Entrance Placement

- Make the entrance a clear part of the storefront composition, aligned with storefront bays and display windows. Keep the retail entrance visually distinct from any residential entrance in the same building.

Accessibility

- Door width, thresholds, hardware, and the clear space in front of and behind the door are regulated for accessibility, and altering an entrance may require accessibility upgrades (see Entrance Regulations).

Address Numbers

- Display the street address clearly at or above the entrance.

Door Hardware

- Use door hardware that can be operated with one hand without tight grasping, pinching, or twisting the wrist, such as lever handles or pulls. Automatic or power-assisted openers can make heavy doors easier to use.

Clear Entry

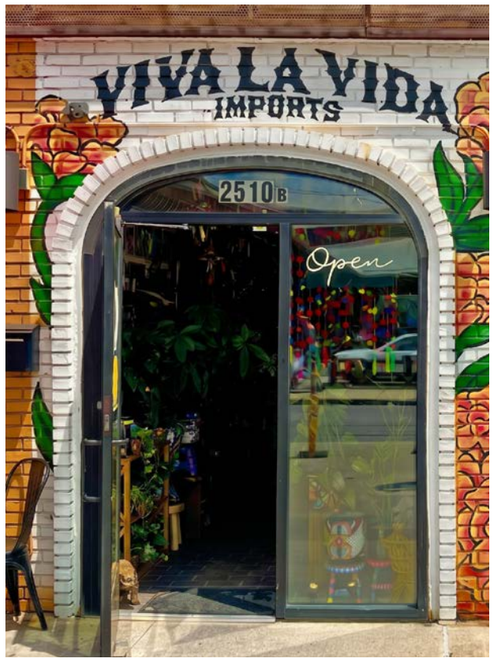
- Keep the entrance clear of merchandise, displays, and other items, inside and out, so people have room to approach, open, and pass through the door.

Recessed Entries

- Keep recessed entries well lit and finished, so they read as part of the storefront rather than as a dark corner after hours.







Artwork

Artwork adds character and visual interest to storefronts and gives a business a way to express its identity and connect with the surrounding community. East Harlem has a long tradition of public murals, and new work on 116th Street becomes part of that tradition. Well-placed murals, installations, and decorative elements make the sidewalk more engaging, and should complement the building's architecture while leaving windows, entrances, and the sidewalk clear.

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Placement

- Place artwork where it complements the facade, leaving window surrounds, decorative masonry, cornices, and entrances uncovered. Avoid painting masonry that has never been painted.

Art vs. Advertising

- Favor artwork that adds visual interest over artwork that works as advertising. Artwork that includes business names or logos may be treated as a sign (see Artwork Regulations).

Paints and Coatings

- Use durable, weather-resistant paints suited to the facade material, applied over a properly prepared surface. An anti-graffiti coating can protect the finished work.

Local Artists

- Consider working with local artists, whose work can reflect the neighborhood's history and community.

Agreements and Approvals

- Agree on the design of the mural or other artwork with the property owner, the artist, and the project team before work begins. A written agreement with the artist should address credit, upkeep, and what happens if the work must be removed in the future (see Artwork Regulations).







Sidewalk and Street

The sidewalk in front of a business is where the storefront meets the life of the street. Outdoor seating, planters, and sidewalk displays can draw pedestrians in and make the street more lively, while keeping the sidewalk clear and comfortable for everyone who shares it.

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Sidewalk Displays

- Keep sidewalk displays, signs, and merchandise close to the storefront and scaled to the sidewalk width, so they do not crowd pedestrians or neighboring businesses. Display size and placement are regulated (see Sidewalk and Street Regulations).

Trash Storage

- Plan space for trash and recycling bins, ideally inside or at the rear of the building, so they stay out of the walking path and away from the storefront when not set out for collection.

Deliveries and Utilities

- Plan sidewalk use around deliveries and collection. Keep utility access points and street amenities unobstructed, and remove damaged or abandoned items.

Outdoor Dining

- For restaurants with outdoor dining, arrange tables, chairs, and planters to create a comfortable seating area that stays visually connected to the restaurant and does not crowd entrances, neighbors, or street infrastructure. Outdoor dining requires a license and DOT approval (see Sidewalk and Street Regulations).

Street Furniture

- Choose planters, benches, and other furniture that complement the storefront, in durable, low-maintenance materials. Place them so they keep a clear walking path and do not block trees, utilities, entrances, or neighboring storefronts. Most fixed sidewalk elements require City approval (see Sidewalk and Street Regulations).



Outdoor Dining



Benches



Planters

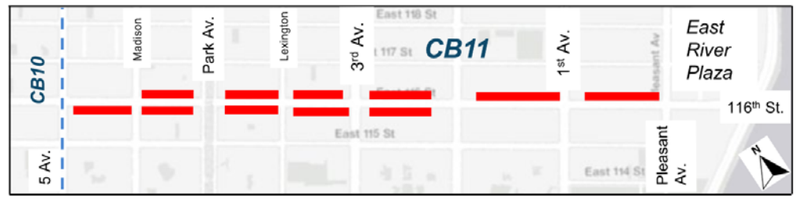
116th Street Redesign (NYC DOT)

The 116th Street Project is a city-led initiative by the NYC Department of Transportation to improve transportation, pedestrian safety, and public space along 116th Street between Morningside Avenue and Pleasant Avenue. The project includes 2.5 miles of dedicated bus lanes, traffic signals that give buses priority at intersections, safer crossings, protected bike lanes on Pleasant Avenue, updated curb rules to improve access for deliveries, and approximately 35,000 square feet of new pedestrian space. These improvements aim to create a more accessible, pedestrian-friendly streetscape, encouraging people to walk along the commercial corridor and visit local businesses.

The street redesign and these storefront guidelines share a goal: a corridor that is safer, easier to walk, and more inviting to visit. The redesign changes the street; the guidelines address the storefronts that line it. More people on the sidewalk means more people passing each storefront, which makes clear signage, lit display windows, and open, visible frontages more valuable. Businesses planning storefront or sidewalk improvements should coordinate with the new street layout, especially for sidewalk furniture, outdoor dining, and deliveries.



New Pedestrian Space



Proposed Offset Bus Lane



Rendering of E 116th Street overhaul, via NYC



E 116th Street, September 2026



Painted Pedestrian Spaces

Regulatory Guidelines

Signage

The limits below are general guidance. Confirm them against the current NYC Zoning Resolution, Construction Codes, and Rules of the City of New York for the specific property, sign type, and installation. East 116th Street between Park and Pleasant Avenues includes C1-5 and C2-5 commercial overlays within R9, R7D, R7B, R7X, and R7A residence districts; a C4-6 district; and portions of the Special East Harlem Corridors (EHC) and Special Transit Land Use (TA) districts. Sign regulations in these special districts follow the underlying district rules. Confirm the zoning of each property on the NYC Zoning Map (ZoLa).

Permits and Installation

- A DOB sign permit is required for signs, except painted signs and non-illuminated wall signs of 6 sq ft or less (Administrative Code §28-105.4.5).
- A sign with an electrical connection requires a separate electrical permit filed by a licensed electrician. An illuminated sign that extends beyond the building line also requires an annual illuminated sign permit.
- Licensed sign hanger: Hanging or attaching a sign to the outside of a building must be performed by, or under the direct supervision of, a licensed sign hanger (Administrative Code §28-415.1). This does not apply to signs that are both 75 sq ft or less and 25 lbs or less (§28-415.2).

Surface Area (ZR §§32-641 to 32-644)

The total surface area of all signs on a zoning lot may not exceed the non-illuminated limit.

District	Non-illuminated (§32-642)	Illuminated
C1, C2	3 × street frontage, max 150 sq ft	3 × street frontage, max 50 sq ft (§32-643)
C4	5 × street frontage, max 500 sq ft	5 × street frontage, max 500 sq ft (§32-644)

Projection and Clearance

- Zoning (ZR §32-652): Double-faced signs, such as blade signs, may project up to 18 in beyond the street line. All other signs may project up to 12 in.
- Building Code (BC §3202.2.1.8): No part of a projecting sign may be less than 10 ft above the sidewalk or closer than 2 ft to the curb line.
- Awnings (ZR §32-653): Signs on awnings and canopies must be non-illuminated, no larger than 12 sq ft, with letters no taller than 12 in, and limited to the business name or address.

Height (ZR §§32-655, 32-656)

C1 and C2: no higher than 25 ft above curb level.

- C4: no higher than 40 ft above curb level.
- Wall signs may not extend above the roof or parapet, except vertical signs no wider than 28 in, which may extend up to 15 ft above the roof.

High-Density Districts (ZR §32-672)

In C4-6 districts, and in C1 or C2 districts mapped within R9 districts, most signs other than window signs must be placed within a horizontal band no more than 3 ft tall, with its base no higher than 17 ft above curb level.

Mixed Residential Buildings (ZR §32-68)

On the residential portion of a mixed building, signs must follow residence district sign regulations.

Residence Districts Without a Commercial Overlay (ZR §22-20)

Where a frontage is zoned residential without a commercial overlay, signs are generally limited to non-illuminated identification signs (§22-221). Signs may project no more than 12 in (§22-241) and may not extend above the ground-floor ceiling or 20 ft above curb level, whichever is lower (§22-242). Generally, one sign is permitted per use (§22-25). Lettering on awnings may not exceed 12 in (§22-221(b)).

Prohibited Locations (BC Appendix H, §H103.1)

Signs may not be attached to a fire escape or exterior stair, may not obstruct a fire escape, and may not interfere with openings required for natural light or ventilation.

Awning

Review the current NYC Building Code, Zoning Resolution, and DOB filing requirements before designing or replacing an awning, and confirm LPC requirements where applicable. The limits below are general guidance and must be verified for the specific property, awning type, and installation.

Permits

- Awning installations and replacements are filed with DOB under the General Construction (GC) work type. Lettering or graphics on an awning require a separate or subsequent Sign (SG) filing.

- Motorized or illuminated awnings require an electrical permit, with work performed by a licensed electrician.

Projection and Clearance (BC §3202.2.3)

Awnings must be supported entirely by the building.

- Storefront awnings (§3202.2.3.1): may project up to 8 ft beyond the street line, with no part lower than 8 ft above the sidewalk. A flexible valance may hang down to 7 ft above the sidewalk. The awning box or cover may project no more than 12 in.

- Awnings over individual windows or doors (§3202.2.3.2): may project up to 5 ft beyond the street line, with no part lower than 8 ft above the sidewalk.

- Canopies that extend over the sidewalk on posts or other supports are regulated by NYC DOT, not the Building Code, and require DOT approval (BC §3105.1).

Construction and Materials (BC §3105.3)

- Awnings must be designed to resist wind and other loads under the Building Code, and structural members must be protected against deterioration.
- Frames must be noncombustible.

- Fabric coverings must pass NFPA 701 flame testing or have a flame spread index of 25 or less. Plastic or sheet metal coverings are also permitted.
- Awnings may be fixed or retractable.

Signs on Awnings (ZR §32-653)
In commercial districts, signs on awnings must be non-illuminated, no larger than 12 sq ft, with letters no taller than 12 in, and limited to the business name or address. In residence districts, lettering on awnings may not exceed 12 in (ZR §22-221(b)). See Signage Regulations.

Awnings Over Outdoor Dining (BC §3111.3)
Awnings supported entirely by the building may be installed over unenclosed sidewalk cafés, with at least 8 ft of clearance above the sidewalk. They must comply with §3105 and outdoor dining requirements.

Maintenance
Keep awnings, frames, and fasteners in safe condition, and do not obstruct exits, fire escapes, building systems, or the sidewalk.

Lighting

Review the current NYC Building Code, Electrical Code, Energy Conservation Code, and Zoning Resolution before installing or modifying exterior lighting, and confirm LPC requirements where applicable. The requirements below are general guidance and must be verified for the specific property and lighting installation.

Permits
- New or modified exterior lighting requires a DOB electrical permit, with work performed by a licensed electrician, in accordance with the NYC Electrical Code (2025 edition).

Fixtures Over the Sidewalk (BC §3202.2.1.5)
Light fixtures supported entirely by the building may project up to 2 ft beyond the street line, provided no part of the fixture is lower than 8 ft above the sidewalk. Fixtures or poles installed on the sidewalk itself require NYC DOT approval.

Light and Nearby Residences (ZR §32-64)
Illumination from signs may not project or reflect onto residences in a way that interferes with their reasonable use and enjoyment. Externally lit signs may not direct light into residential windows.

Illuminated Signs (ZR §§32-643, 32-644)
Illuminated signs are subject to smaller size limits than non-illuminated signs in C1 and C2 districts. Flashing signs are permitted in C4 districts but not in C1 or C2 districts. See Signage Regulations.

Energy Code (NYCECC Section C405)
New exterior lighting must meet the NYC Energy Conservation Code's limits on exterior lighting power and its requirements for automatic lighting controls, such as timers or photocells.

Security Grilles

Review the current NYC Building Code, Fire Code, Electrical Code, and DOB filing requirements before installing or replacing security grilles, and confirm LPC requirements where applicable. Verify the building's occupancy classification and exit arrangement for the specific property.

Permits
- Installing or replacing a storefront security grille requires DOB permits, obtained through a registered design professional.
- Motorized grilles require an electrical permit, with work performed by a licensed electrician.

Grille Visibility (Local Law 75 of 2009)
Local Law 75 of 2009 required most storefront roll-down grilles to provide at least 70% visibility into the storefront by July 1, 2026. In 2026, the City Council repealed that requirement (Int. 910-A). Open-mesh grilles are recommended in these guidelines.

Grilles at Entrances and Exits (BC §1010.1.4.4; FC §1027.3.8)
- Horizontal-sliding or vertical security grilles are permitted at the main entrance of business, mercantile, and storage occupancies where their operation is essential to the business.
- Grilles must be openable from the inside without a key, special knowledge, or special effort while the space is occupied, and must be secured in the fully open position while the public is present.
- Where two or more exits are required, no more than half of them may be equipped with security grilles.

Bars and Gates on Fire Escape Windows (FC §§1025.4, 1025.5, 1027.7.2)
Bars, grilles, or gates over windows that open onto a fire escape must be an FDNY-approved type (with an FDNY Certificate of Approval), must be releasable from inside without a key or tool, and must be kept in good working order. Fixed bars are not permitted on these windows.

Glass

Review the NYC Zoning Resolution, Building Code, Energy Conservation Code, and LPC requirements where applicable before replacing or altering storefront glazing. Requirements depend on the property's zoning and on whether it is located within or outside the Special East Harlem Corridors (EHC) district.

Ground-Floor Transparency (ZR §§32-30, 32-34, 138-31)
- Within the EHC district: Ground-floor frontages facing East 116th Street are designated Tier C street frontages (§138-31). Alterations to existing storefronts on these frontages may not reduce transparency or increase the extent of a blank wall (§32-34).
- Outside the EHC district: Ground-floor frontages in commercial overlays are generally Tier A street frontages. Alterations to existing storefronts may not increase an existing non-compliance with the ground-floor streetscape rules by more than 10% (§32-34).

Energy Code (NYCECC Chapter C5)
Replacement storefront glazing must meet the NYC Energy Conservation Code's requirements for alterations to existing buildings, including window performance and air sealing.

Entrance

Review the current NYC Building Code (Chapter 11 and ICC A117.1), the federal 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, and the NYC Energy Conservation Code before altering a storefront entrance. Requirements depend on the scope of work and the building's existing conditions, and must be confirmed by the project's design professional.

Accessibility When Altering an Entrance

- Altered entrances must comply with the accessibility requirements of the NYC Building Code (Chapter 11 and ICC A117.1) and the 2010 ADA Standards to the extent technically feasible.
- Under the ADA, when an alteration affects the usability of a business's primary function area, the path of travel to it, including the entrance, must be made accessible. Spending on these path-of-travel improvements is required up to 20% of the cost of the overall alteration (28 CFR §36.403).

Doors (BC §§1010.1.1, 1010.1.7, 1010.1.9; ADA §404)

- Clear width and height: at least 32 in of clear opening, measured with the door open 90°, and at least 80 in of height.
- Thresholds: no more than ½ in high, with changes over ¼ in beveled no steeper than 1:2. For existing or altered thresholds, the ADA allows up to ¾ in if beveled (ADA §404.2.5).
- Hardware: operable with one hand, without tight grasping, pinching, or twisting the wrist, and mounted 34 to 48 in above the floor.
- Clear floor space: maneuvering clearances are required on both sides of the door and vary with the approach direction and door swing (ADA §404.2.4; ICC A117.1 §404).
- Door surface: the bottom 10 in on the push side must be smooth across the full width (ADA §404.2.10).

Vestibules (BC §1010.1.8; NYCECC)
Where two doors are in a series, the space between them must be at least 48 in plus the width of any door swinging into that space. The energy code requires vestibules at certain building entrances, but entrances to spaces under 3,000 sq ft are generally exempt.

Sidewalk Elements
Ramps, steps, or other entrance elements built on the public sidewalk require NYC DOT approval.

Clearances
Merchandise, security devices, and fixtures may not reduce the required door clearances or obstruct exits.

Artwork

Murals and other artwork on a storefront are generally subject to fewer regulations than signs, but artwork that includes commercial content is treated as a sign.

When Artwork Is a Sign (ZR §§32-311, 32-60)
The portion of a mural that includes the business name, address, logos, or other text related to the building or its tenants is considered a sign. It counts toward the zoning lot's permitted sign area and must meet sign regulations (see Signage Regulations). Painted signs do not require a DOB sign permit, but must still comply with zoning.

The federal Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA) gives artists rights that can limit future changes to or removal of their work, so property owners should put a written agreement in place with the artist before any artwork is installed.

Sidewalk and Street

Sidewalks are public space regulated by NYC DOT, DSNY, and DCWP. Review the current NYC Administrative Code, DOT Highway Rules, and Dining Out NYC rules before placing displays, furniture, or outdoor dining on the sidewalk or roadway.

Sidewalk Displays and Signs (Admin Code §19-136)
Merchandise displays and sandwich-board (A-frame) signs may extend no more than 3 ft from the building and may be no more than 5 ft high. Sidewalk displays are prohibited on designated "zero sidewalk display" streets.

Fixed Sidewalk Elements (34 RCNY §§7-02, 7-04)
Benches, large planters, ramps, steps, and other structures on, over, or under the sidewalk generally require a revocable consent from NYC DOT.

Outdoor Dining (Admin Code §19-160; 34 RCNY Chapter 5)
Sidewalk and roadway cafés require a Dining Out NYC license and DOT approval.

- Sidewalk cafés (§5-11(a)): must keep an unobstructed pedestrian clear path at least equal to the greater of 50% of the sidewalk width or 12 ft on Global Corridors, 10 ft on Regional Corridors, and 8 ft on other streets.
- Roadway cafés (§5-11(b)): may be no more than 40 ft long and 8 ft wide, must maintain a 15-ft emergency travel lane, and must be separated from adjacent cafés by 3 to 6 ft. Roadway cafés are not permitted in bus lanes, bus stops, bike lanes, or No Standing or No Stopping zones.
- In 2026, the City authorized year-round roadway cafés. Confirm current requirements with DOT before applying.

Construction on the Sidewalk (34 RCNY §§2-05, 2-11)
Storefront work that occupies the sidewalk requires DOT permits and must generally maintain a 5-ft-wide pedestrian path, or provide an approved detour.

Where to Learn More

Zoning

- NYC Zoning Map (ZoLa) – Look up any property's zoning district, commercial overlay, special district, and landmark or historic district status.
- NYC Zoning Resolution – The full, searchable text of the Zoning Resolution.
- Commercial District Sign Regulations (ZR §32-60) – Surface area, projection, height, and illumination limits for C1, C2, and C4 districts.
- Residence District Sign Regulations (ZR §22-20) – Sign rules for residentially zoned frontages.
- Special East Harlem Corridors District (ZR Article XIII, Chapter 8) – Special district rules for portions of the corridor, including the Tier C designation for East 116th Street.
- Ground-Floor Streetscape Regulations (ZR §32-30) – Transparency and blank wall rules for Tier A, B, and C street frontages, including alterations to existing buildings (§32-34).
- NYC Zoning Help Desk: (212) 720-3291, for questions about how zoning applies to a specific property.

Building Codes and Permits

- NYC DOB: Sign Permits – When a permit is required, how to file, and licensed sign hanger requirements.
- NYC DOB: Installing a Business Sign – A step-by-step guide for business owners.
- NYC DOB: Accessory Business Signs (presentation) – Accessory vs. advertising signs, permit exemptions, and common violations.
- NYC DOB NOW: General Construction FAQs – How awnings and canopies are filed, including separate sign filings for lettering.
- NYC Building Code, Chapter 31: Special Construction – Awning design, materials, and fire-safety requirements (§3105) and awnings over sidewalk cafés (§3111).
- NYC DOB: Electrical Code – The current NYC Electrical Code and electrical permit requirements.
- NYC DOB: 2025 Energy Conservation Code – Announcement of the current energy code, including lighting power and control requirements.
- NYC DOB: Security Grille Service Notice – Permit requirements for installing or replacing storefront security grilles.
- FDNY: Approved Fire Escape Window Gates – Window gate products with a current FDNY Certificate of Approval.
- NYC Fire Code, Chapter 10: Means of Egress – Requirements for security grilles and window gates at exits and fire escapes.
- U.S. Access Board: 2010 ADA Standards, Doors (§404) – Federal requirements for accessible doors, thresholds, hardware, and clearances.
- NYC DOB: Storefront Project Requirements – DOB filing, energy, and accessibility requirements for storefront alterations.
- NYC Building Code, Appendix H: Signs – Construction, location, and safety requirements for outdoor signs.

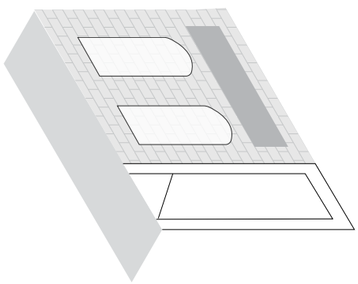
Sidewalk and Street

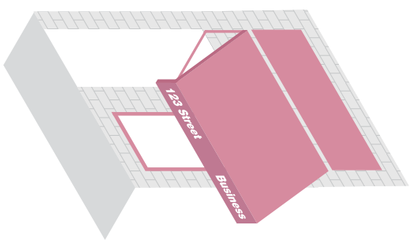
- NYC DOT: Dining Out NYC Rules – Siting, clear path, and design rules for sidewalk and roadway cafés.
- NYC DSNY: Setout and Containers for Businesses – Lidded bin requirements, setout times, and bin storage.
- NYC 311: Sidewalk Displays and Signs – Size and placement limits for merchandise displays and sandwich-board signs.
- NYC DOB: Revocable Consent (Code Notes) – Structures on or over the sidewalk that require DOT approval.

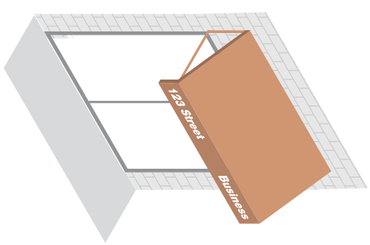
Artwork

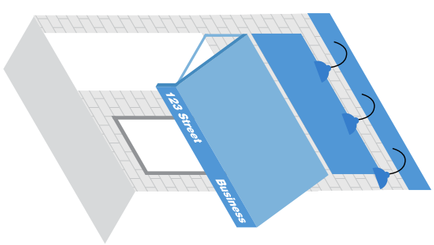
- U.S. Copyright Office: Visual Artists Rights Act – The federal text of artists' rights (17 U.S.C. §106A) and the rules for works incorporated in buildings (§113).

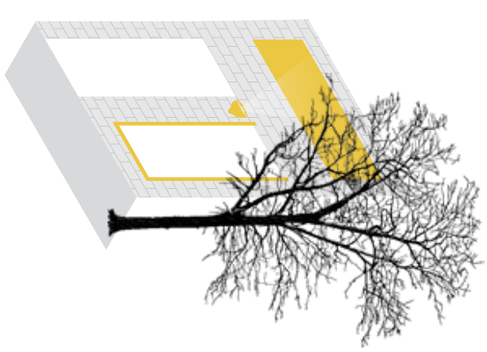
TYPOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION

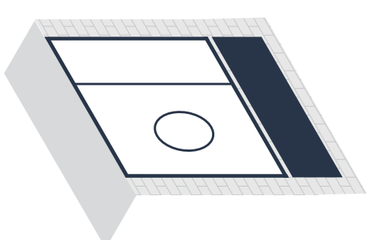


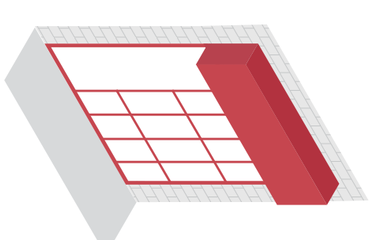


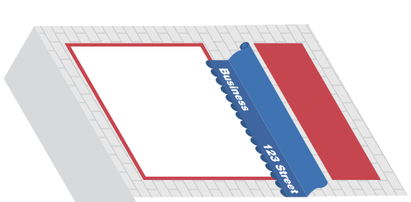


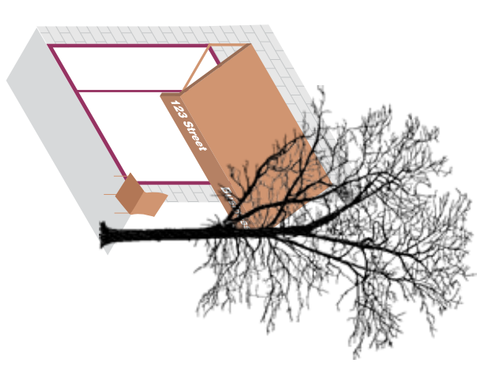


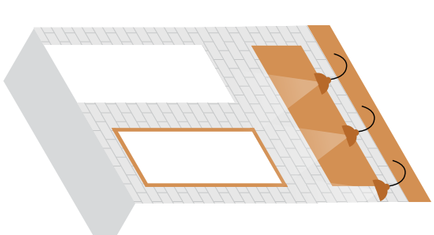




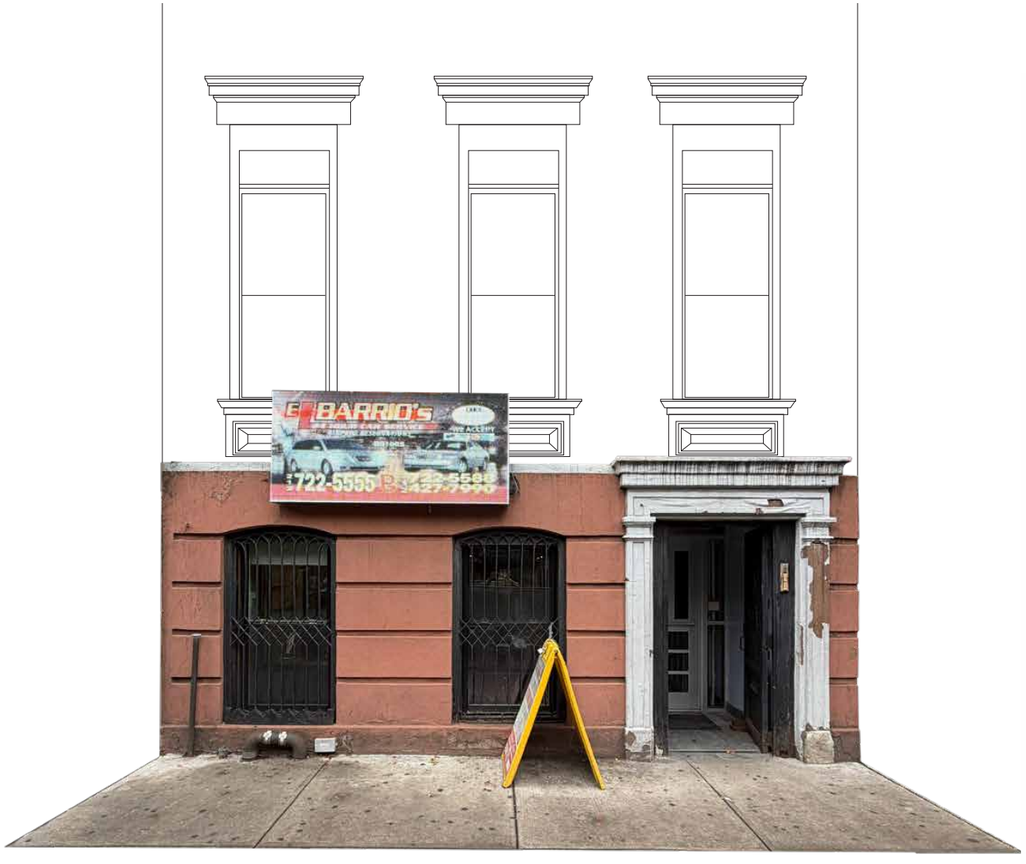




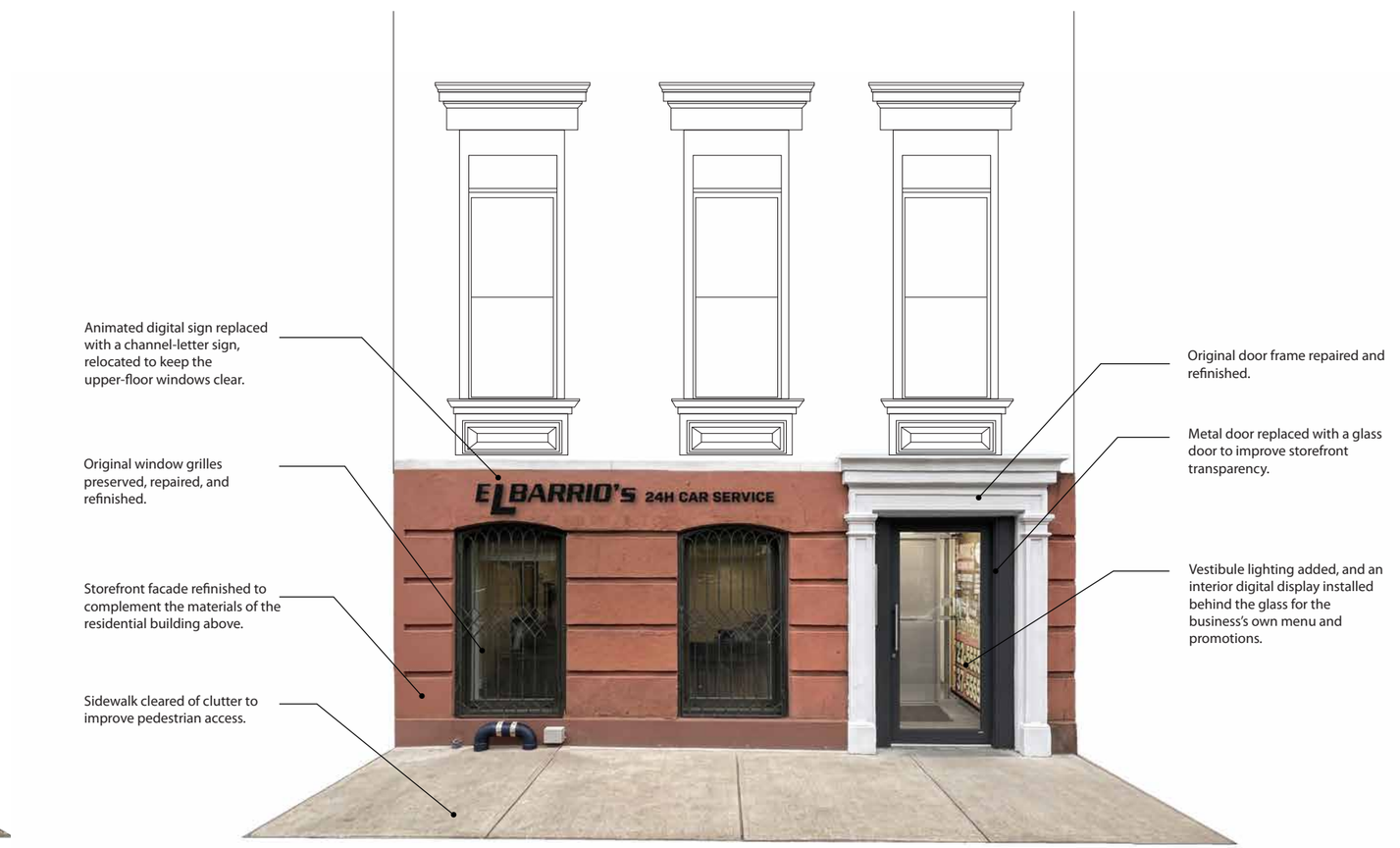




Residential-Facade Storefront



Existing Condition



Proposed Condition

All Glass Storefront



Existing Condition



Metal sign band added above the storefront to frame the frontage and provide a defined area for signage.

Sign repositioned to improve visibility and legibility.

Accordion gate refinished and retained.

Stained and covered glass replaced with clear glass to improve visibility into the store.

Metal storefront frame refinished, with new framing added to define the storefront composition.

Proposed Condition

Storefront with a Display Window



Existing Condition



Proposed Condition

STOREFRONT INVENTORY

South - Park Avenue



1637 Park Ave



102 East 116th Street



106 East 116th Street



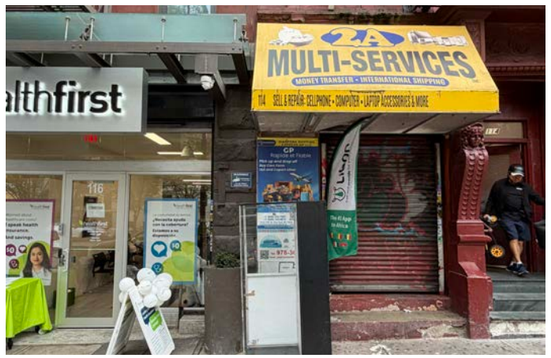
108 East 116th Street



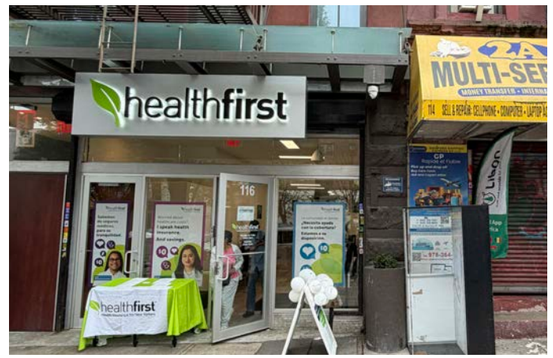
112 East 116th Street



112 & 114 East 116th Street



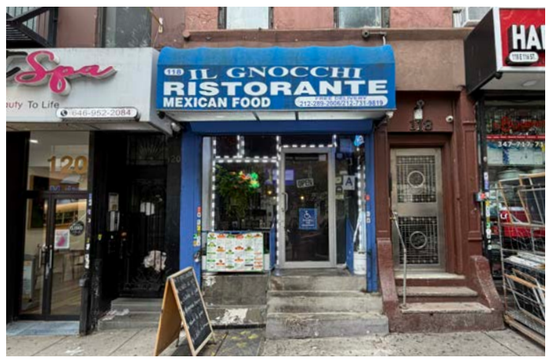
114 East 116th Street



116 East 116th Street



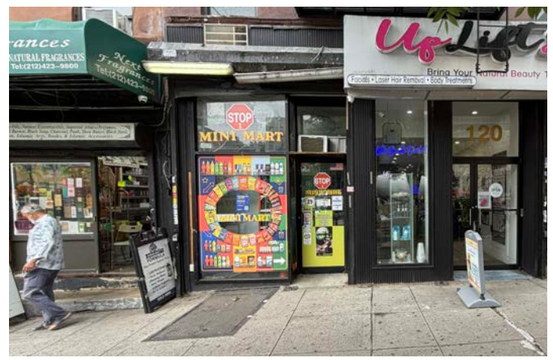
118 East 116th Street



118 East 116th Street



120 East 116th Street



120 East 116th Street



122 East 116th Street



122 East 116th Street



124 East 116th Street



124 East 116th Street



126 East 116th Street



128 East 116th Street



130 East 116th Street



1870 Lexington Ave



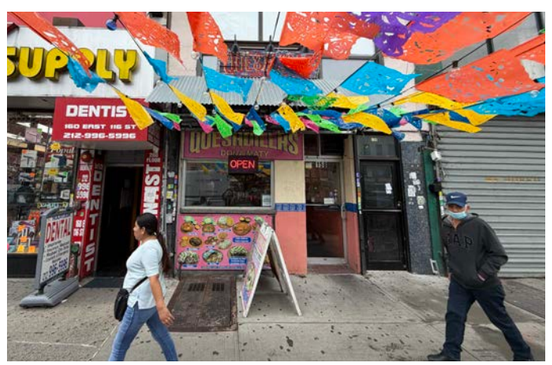
150 East 116th Street



152 East 116th Street



154 East 116th Street



158 East 116th Street

Lexington Avenue



160 East 116th Street



164 East 116th Street



168 & 170 East 116th Street



170 East 116th Street



178 East 116th Street



184 East 116th Street



186 East 116th Street



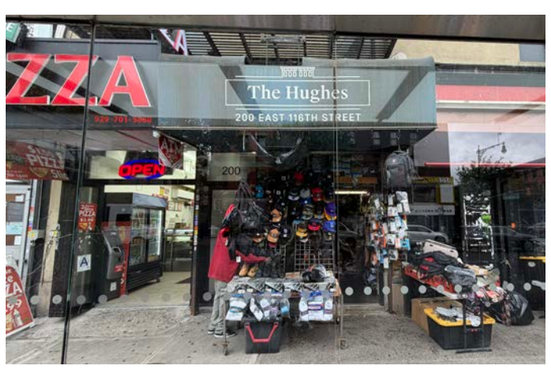
2120 3 Ave



2120 3rd Ave



2121 3rd Ave

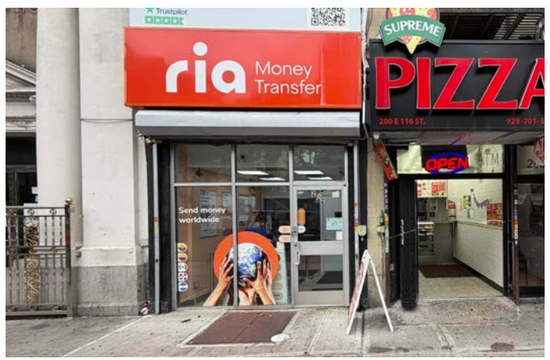


200 East 116th Street



200 East 116th Street

3rd Avenue



202 East 116th Street



208 East 116th Street



210 East 116th Street



220 East 116th Street



222 East 116th Street



224 East 116th Street



228 East 116th Street



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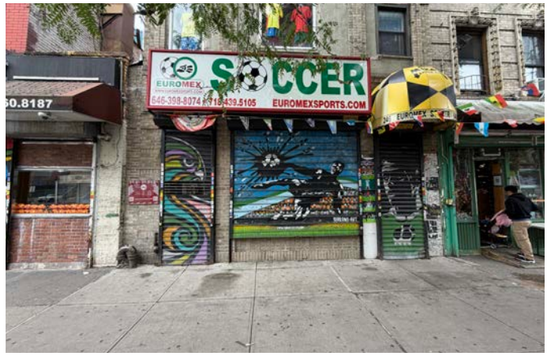


246 East 116th Street



248 East 116th Street

2nd Avenue



2257 2nd Ave



2256 2nd Ave



304 East 116th Street



308 East 116th Street



322 East 116th Street



324 East 116th Street



338 East 116th Street



344 East 116th Street



350 East 116th Street



352 East 116th Street



354 East 116th Street



356 East 116th Street



360 East 116th Street

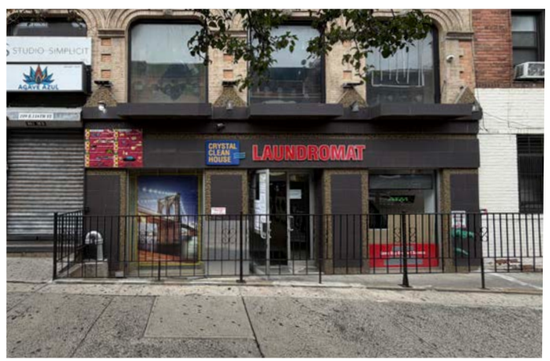


2257 1st Ave

North - Park Avenue



107 East 116th Street



109 East 116th Street



125 East 116th Street



137 East 116th Street

Lexington Avenue



145 East 116th Street



147 East 116th Street



149 East 116th Street



151 East 116th Street



153 East 116th Street



155 East 116th Street



157 East 116th Street



159 East 116th Street



161 East 116th Street



163 East 116th Street



165-167 East 116th Street



169 East 116th Street



171 East 116th Street



173 East 116th Street



175 East 116th Street



179 East 116th Street



187 East 116th Street



2128 3rd Ave

3rd Avenue



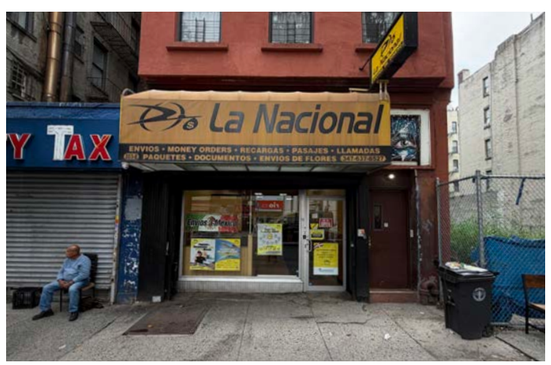
201 East 116th Street



201 East 116th Street



201 East 116th Street



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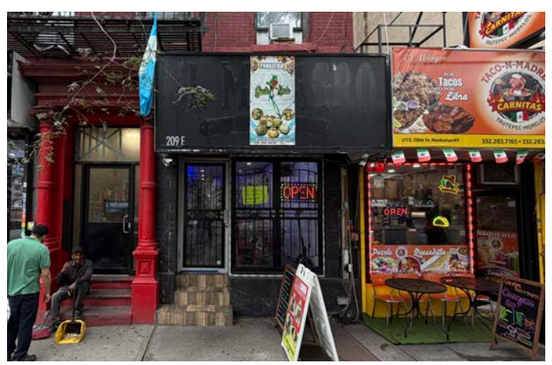


209 East 116th Street



211 East 116th Street



215 East 116th Street



217 East 116th Street



219 East 116th Street



223 East 116th Street



227 East 116th Street



229 East 116th Street



231 East 116th Street



237 East 116th Street

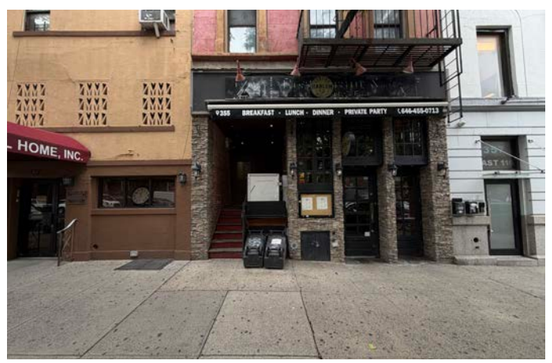


245 East 116th Street



2261 2nd Ave

2nd Avenue



355 East 116th Street

1st Avenue



409 East 116th Street



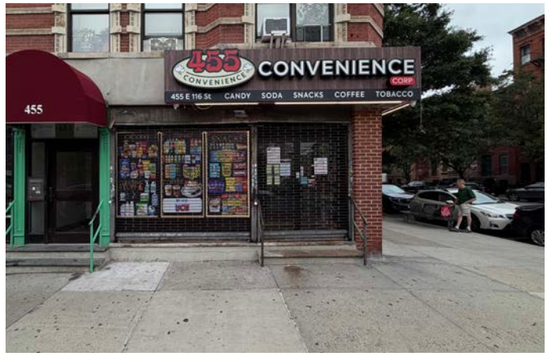
419 East 116th Street



451 East 116th Street



455 East 116th Street



455 East 116th Street

NEW YORK STATE | Downtown Revitalization Initiative

UNION SETTLEMENT

OBRA ARCHITECTS