

October 2, 2007

Harlem's 125th Street Named One of 10 Great Streets in America

RICH IN CULTURAL HISTORY, STREET HAS PROVED ITS RESILIENCE

NEW YORK, NY — The American Planning Association (APA) announced today that 125th Street in Harlem has been designated one of 10 Great Streets for 2007 through APA's *Great Places in America* program. APA Great Places exemplify exceptional character and highlight the role planners and planning play in creating communities of lasting value.

[Click here for details, map, and photos](#)

"We're excited to name 125th Street at one of the first corridors to be designated an APA Great Street," said APA Executive Director Paul Farmer, FAICP. "This street, as with Harlem, has had a turbulent and, at times, strained history. Yet, through hard times and good, 125th has withstood the changes and remains one of the cultural touchstones for black Americans."

APA selected 125th Street as one of 10 Great Streets in America because it has managed to maintain a strong identity through periods of tremendous population growth and infrastructural strain, disinvestment, and urban renewal. It is a piston of economic, social, cultural, and transit activity for Harlem at the same time maintaining its vital role as a walkable and livable place for residents, workers, and visitors alike.

"Locally renowned and internationally celebrated, 125th Street is Harlem's Main Street. 125th Street not only serves as a regional business corridor but also functions as a local retail street that offers a multitude of cultural, commercial and institutional resources, many of which have historic importance for the Harlem community and the city," said Amanda M. Burden, director of the Department of City Planning in New York City. "We're honored that APA has selected 125th Street as one of this year's Great Streets."

Added Curtis L. Archer, President of Harlem Community Development Corporation, "We are very excited that the American Planning Association has chosen 125th Street as one of America's 10 Great Streets for 2007. We are working closely with the City of New York and the local community to ensure that the proposed rezoning accomplishes all our sustainability goals: "green" buildings, good jobs, affordable space for community-based businesses and, most importantly, a lasting cultural presence that keeps the historic essence of 125th Street alive for generations to come."

Laid out in the 1811 Commissioner's Plan of New York City, 125th Street has undergone a series of ups and downs. From the height of the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s and 1930s to urban renewal projects after World War II, 125th Street has shown a resilience that is unmatched in many cities. Playing a major role in bringing back the street has been the 125th Street Business Improvement District (BID). Since 1993, it has been responsible for cleanup, maintenance, and promotion efforts, as well as creating an environment that encourages development while addressing the community's social needs.

The past decade has seen a resurgence of investment for new housing, retail, and renovation in the area. The new activity, has led "Harlem's Main Street" to undergo an extensive review in order to further develop its identity as a regional business district and a premier cultural, arts, and entertainment corridor, notes Edwin Marshall of the New York City Department of City Planning.

An important component of the new vision for 125th Street is a proposal to allow "cultural bonuses" along 125th Street, adds BID President and CEO Barbara Askins. These bonuses will encourage new development and revitalization along the street from the East River to the Hudson River to allow cultural uses and activities.

Complementing the city's new zoning proposals is an approved distinctive street lighting and lamppost

project by the 125th Street BID with funds from Assemblyman Keith Wright and the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone.

Also, the Harlem Community Development Corporation is working with the New York State Office of General Services to redesign the plaza in front of the Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. State Office Building. Trees for shade and a buffer from the street will be added to the plaza, which hosts a farmers' market during the summer and provides residents convenient access to fresh regional produce. New waste receptacles allow for advertising from local and national businesses while pole banners welcome people to the district.

Another important step in uptown revitalization is the Harlem Pier Project, which is expected to be completed in early 2008 and involved the support of U.S. Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.). The \$19 million project is part of the city's West Harlem Master Plan and will include a new bicycle and pedestrian path, docking pier, recreational and fishing pier, and landscaped open space.

APA Great Places offer better choices for where and how people work and live. They are enjoyable, safe, and desirable. They are places where people want to be — not only to visit, but to live and work everyday. America's truly great neighborhoods are defined by many criteria, including architectural features, accessibility, functionality, and community involvement. Through Great Places in America, APA recognizes the unique and authentic attributes of essential building blocks of great communities — streets, neighborhoods, and public spaces.

The nine other APA Great Streets for 2007 are Bull Street, Savannah, Georgia; Canyon Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico; Delmar Loop, University City and St. Louis, Missouri; Main Street, Northampton, Massachusetts; Monument Avenue, Richmond, Virginia; North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois; South Temple Street, Salt Lake City, Utah; St. Charles Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana; and Ocean Drive, Miami Beach, Florida. For more information about these streets, and the list of APA's 10 Great Neighborhoods for 2007, visit www.planning.org/greatplaces.

This year's 10 Great Streets and 10 Great Neighborhoods will be celebrated as part of APA's National Community Planning Month in October 2007, designed to recognize and celebrate the many residents, leaders, officials, and professionals who contribute to making great communities. For more about National Community Planning Month, visit www.planning.org/ncpm.

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Harlem's 125th Street New York, New York

Main Street of Black American Culture

Combine a major Manhattan transportation artery, cultural epicenter, architectural polyglot, and famed destination and the result is 125th Street in Harlem — a capital of African American cultural life since the early 20th century.

The American Planning Association has selected 125th Street in Harlem as one of 10 Great Streets in America because it has managed to maintain a strong identity through periods of tremendous population growth and infrastructural strain, disinvestment, and urban renewal. In addition it is a piston of economic, social, cultural, and transit activity for Harlem, with increasingly more walkable and livable places.

Laid out in the 1811 Commissioner's Plan of New York City, 125th Street is one of 15 broad crosstown streets that fall approximately every 10 blocks along the tilted north-south axis of Manhattan Island. Unlike the others however, 125th has outstanding connectivity with New York's major transportation corridors: it runs from the Hudson to the East River and connects the arterial Henry Hudson Parkway, the FDR Drive, and the Triborough Bridge, and is served by a number of subway and bus lines.

A broad array of architecture is found here, including early single-family brownstones, tenement apartments, warehouses, art deco commercial structures, early office buildings, and mid-century modern buildings. For the most part the buildings are low-scale in height, which avoids the "canyon" effect of Manhattan's taller streets.

During the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, there was an influx of black residents and rich cultural traditions. The world famous Apollo Theater on 125th helped launch the careers of such prominent black entertainers as Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, James Brown, Stevie Wonder, and Aretha Franklin.

After World War II, the street and surrounding neighborhoods began to decline as the Federal Housing Act fueled urban renewal and "slum" redevelopment in major cities throughout the U.S. Although a limited amount of "superblock" housing was constructed along 125th Street during this period, other nearby "urban renewal" redevelopment projects contributed to the destruction of historic Harlem housing and exacerbated disinvestment in the area.

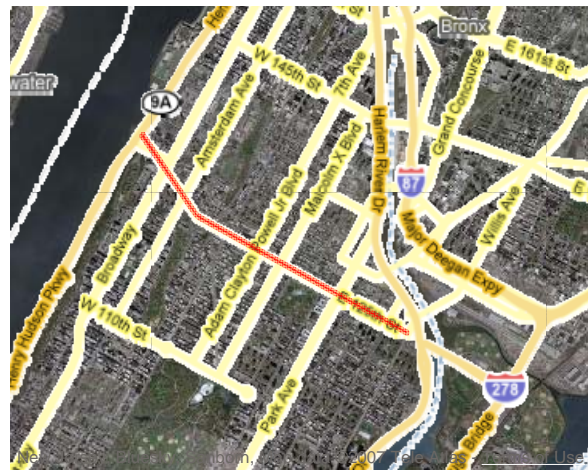
New activity on the street has led to an extensive review of "Harlem's Main Street" in order to further develop its identity as a regional business district and a premier cultural, arts, and entertainment corridor, notes Edwin Marshall of the New York City Department of City Planning.

But this development cannot succeed without preserving the street's historic role as a communal and pedestrian-oriented space. Complementing the city's new zoning proposals is a street lighting and lamppost project being sought by the 125th Street Business Improvement District, while the Harlem Community Development Corporation is working with the New York State Office of General Services to redesign the plaza in front of the Adam Clayton Powell,



Wall mural at 125th and Lenox Avenue. Courtesy of Pepper Watkins.

New York, New York



View larger New York, New York map



The grounds of the General Grant Houses at 125th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. Courtesy of Pepper Watkins.



The Victoria Theater. Courtesy of Pepper Watkins.



Green Market at the Adam Clayton Powell State Office Building Plaza. Courtesy of Pepper Watkins.



125th Street Streetscape between 5th and Lenox Avenues. Courtesy of Pepper Watkins.

Jr. State Office Building. Trees for shade and a buffer from the street will be added to the plaza. During the summer, the plaza hosts a farmer's market, which brings fresh regional produce to the street.

Deeply rooted in community priorities, future changes to 125th Street will shape the physical and social environment into a more walkable, more livable, more shoppable space whose greatness, already long recognized, will continue.



View of Apollo Theater. Courtesy of straightedge217.

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