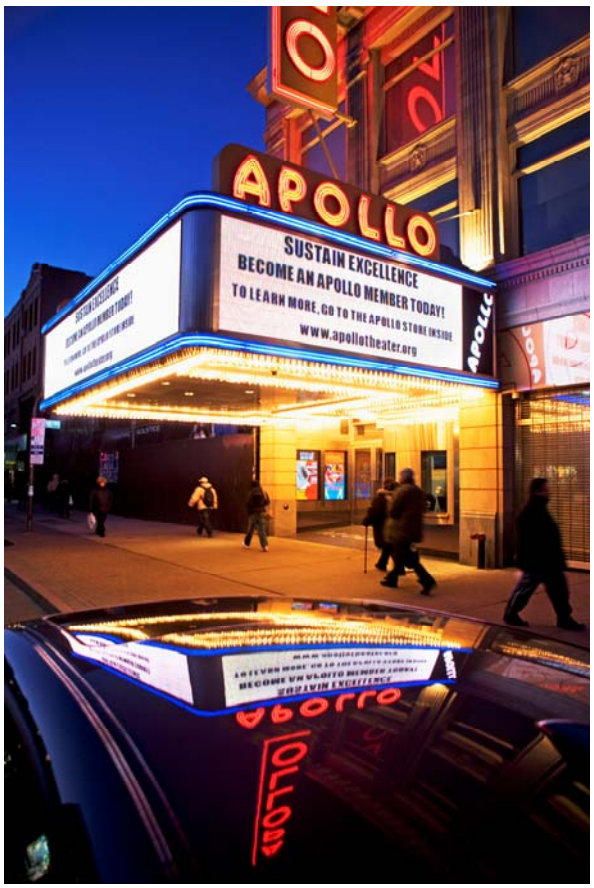
125TH STREET RETAIL CULTURAL PLAN, HARLEM



UMC recent worked with the 125th Street BID, New York to develop a commercial position on redevelopment opportunities in the area based on a niche of culture. 125th Street is experiencing retail growth pressure. The demographic shifts in the local neighborhoods (including a more mature marketplace, increased wealth, increased ethnicity, in addition to the acceptance of Harlem by national chains) has resulted in new retail development. The result has been a rise in retail rents. Another effect has been the displacement of many small independent retailers (including African American ones) with larger, national chains.

The challenges for 125th Street are related to the following:

- Managing expectation regarding growth, rent expectations of developers versus retailers' ability to pay, the value of the land, development opportunities, and demand for upper-level square footage from either residential or office uses.
- Preserving and enhancing the unique cultural attributes specifically related to Black/African American culture of 125th Street despite development pressure to build bigger developments
- Offering opportunities for small independent retailers to flourish along 125th Street yet allow for redevelopment (along with increased Floor Area Ratios)
- Enhancing the linkages between the cultural attributes and the retail opportunities
- Increasing development of vacant lots/vacant sites
- Maintaining the neighborhood focus
- Bringing in better quality products and services
- Serving a more mature market.

The plan worked with local developers and property owners to develop a position for the BID with respect to the City's rezoning plans. The plan works to retain and enhance the cultural related businesses in the area while allowing for increased density development using subsidies and cultural density bonusing. The hard work has been acknowledged by the American Planning Association honoring 125th Street as one of the top ten streets in America for its unique cultural touchstones.