

Food Oriented Developmet in East Harlem

Leveraging rezoning on the Park Avenue Corridor



HISTORIC &
CULTURAL
RESOURCES

AFFORDABLE
HOUSING

TRANSPORTATION
&
INFRASTRUCTURE

COMMUNITY
PLAN

COMMUNITY
FACILITIES &
SERVICES

WHO WE ARE

Ascendant Neighborhood Development (AND) has supported the stabilization and growth of East and Central Harlem communities, advocated for preservation of affordable housing, and helped thousands of New Yorkers live with dignity and respect.

Since then, AND has renovated and redeveloped 22 vacant and underutilized buildings to provide much-needed housing, built five new buildings – including three buildings exclusively for low-income elders – and supported the transformation of entire blocks that had suffered from neglect and decay during widespread disinvestment in the 1970s and 1980s.

Today, Harlem, Northern Manhattan, and communities across New York City are reckoning with a new kind of housing challenge, as rapid increases in market-rate residential and commercial development propel speculation, drive up rents, and encourage tenant harassment and displacement.

As we enter our fourth decade, AND is meeting these new challenges head on. We are rehabilitating and refinancing our existing buildings to preserve long-term affordability and enhance our residents' quality of life. We are launching new and innovative projects that will expand housing opportunity for all. Thank you for helping us to build homes and raise up communities in NYC.

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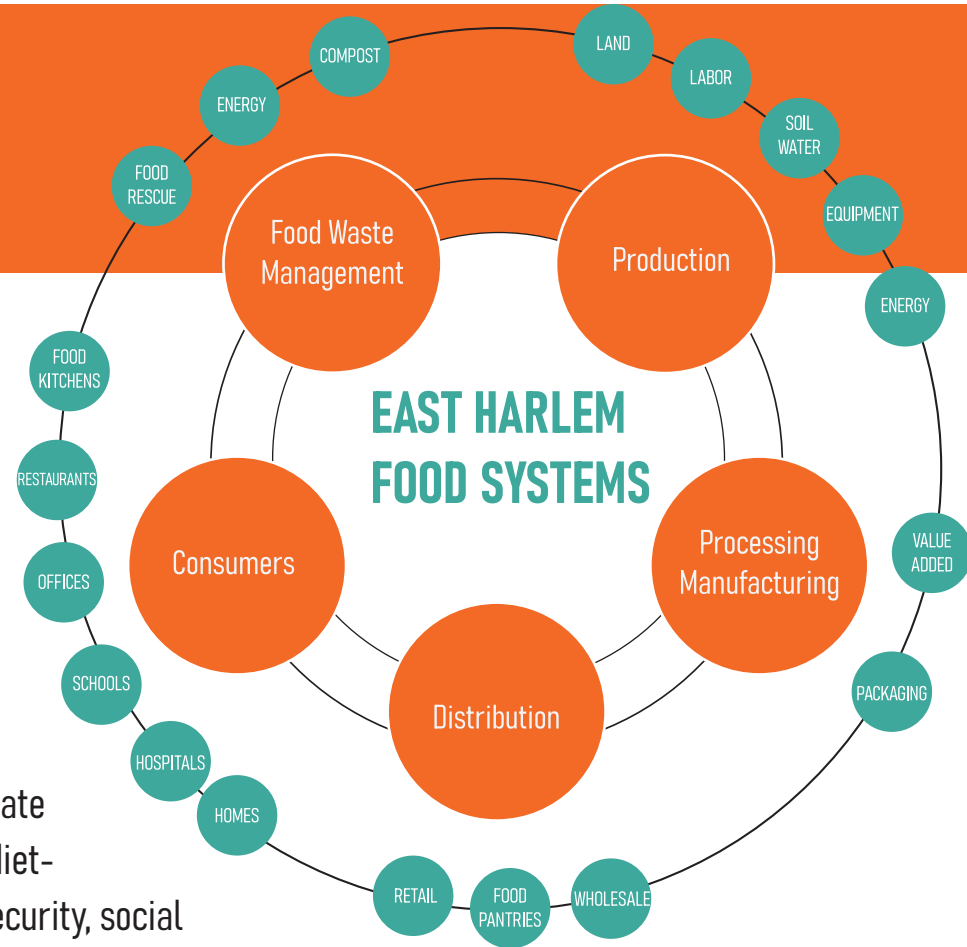
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Introduction

Food is central to the health, well-being, cultural heritage, economic and social resilience of low-income communities, which are often communities of color. Healthy, sustainable, accessible foods can mitigate the risks of experiencing diet-related illnesses, food insecurity, social isolation, and environmental degradation.



There are two main dimensions to food security that should be considered: the production and supply of an adequate quality and quantity of food, and the ability of people to access food. What households spend for food is determined by both item prices and selections. Household food surveys show low-income families tend to spend their food dollars differently and spend less per pound for nearly all broad food groups than do all households combined. They are able to do this by purchasing lower cost items within the broad food groups. The lowest 20% of income households spend on average 20% (\$4,850) on Food and 45% on Housing, while the 20% highest income Households spend 11% (\$13,200) and 30% respectively. Food spending increases with household income, as wealthier households buy higher-quality food items and more convenience foods. But for lower-income households, who live in communities that have a higher ratio of small stores to supermarkets than high income communities, a higher proportion of spending goes toward food. However, going beyond food access is fundamental to understand the symbolic gentrification of foods to rising rents, appropriation, dispossession and ethnic displacement.

Impact of Covid-19 on Food Systems

The Coronavirus Disease of 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic threatened the lives and livelihoods of people and significantly impacted the food system in New York City. Before the COVID-19 crisis began, more than 1.1 million people lived in food-insecure households. According to reports by the Food Bank for NYC, approximately 75% of food pantries and soup kitchens surveyed during the first months of the pandemic reported an increase in the number of visitors and nearly one-third reported the number of visitors at their programs had more than doubled. Black and Latino adults were more than twice as likely as white adults to report that their household did not get enough to eat. The pandemic is not yet over, and the future remains tenuous for people who have experienced uncertain access to enough food for their families. It is likely that it will take time for food insecurity levels to recover. There is an urgent need to reimagine how to distribute resources and shift our focus on resilient, long-term and creative ways to redistribute local food systems. We all deserve equal access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food especially during a pandemic that has left thousands of people unemployed and on the verge of eviction.

Goal

This report seeks to address the issues of food insecurity and sovereignty in East Harlem. We argue that the 2017 East Harlem rezoning plan should be leveraged to propose site-specific and community-driven projects to develop joint- initiatives between the affordable housing sector and the community food systems, as a first step to achieve food sovereignty. This Report is an effort to examine what is happening rather than simply what is wrong in this community, revealing geographies of ethnic retails, self-reliance and collaboration that unfold within spatialized food inequities. We seek to provide guidance to ensure the rezoning of EH benefits the local community directly through increasing access to affordable housing and affordable and healthy food by, diversifying food- and retail-scape to increase local job availability and food supply chains; leveraging existing public and non-profit programs and existing local assets to create a more robust community food sovereignty system. Ultimately, food justice is fundamentally about racial and ethnic justice.

Limitations

Governance

It is relevant before proceeding with this report to indicate some definitions and limitations. There are limitations in considering the extent in which a community can be economically self-reliant. Food systems in any city, whether small or large, are always a hybrid food system, it combines different modes of food provisioning and food production, that ranges from a global to a local scale. It also intersects at different scales and scopes with other urban systems such as affordable Housing provision, for this reason place-based initiatives are fundamental to understanding how the different urban systems interact with each other to leverage them into the creation of a more resilient, affordable, and diverse foodscape. In most cities, large corporations dominate lower-income urban markets by offering cheaper products that are negatively affecting local food production and distribution, place-based initiatives could help diversify the food supply.

Changing whole systems

Broadly speaking systems can be understood as a set of elements that are interconnected in some way to produce their own outcomes over time. Complex systems constantly reorganize or adapt themselves in response to changes. In cities particularly, these impacts might include real estate (de)investment, economic crises, natural disasters or health crises, like the Covid-19 Pandemic. The health of a system depends on its resilience, its ability to adapt after a specific disturbance and to shape change. In this sense, this report does not seek to replace open conversations on the opportunities and challenges of East Harlem Rezoning and upcoming developments, but to focus on synergies to create diverse, resilient and strong food systems that include Affordable Housing and community facilities to contribute to the eradication of poverty and hunger. This can not be done if we don't address the most important underlying issues of food, structural inequality, sovereignty, social exclusion and racism.

Key terms



Food Security

Food security is part of the first aspect of CFS. Food security means that communities, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Based on this definition, four barriers to food security can be identified:

- Economic and physical access to food: Affordability and location, this aspect concerns with the location and monetary limitations of accessing food.
- Food availability: Even if food retailers are in close proximity, people may not be able to buy the healthy food that they want or need.
- Food utilization and stability over time: Many individuals lack the knowledge, skills or time needed to buy and cook foods from scratch. There is also a lot of misinformation about nutrition and healthy foods in the media meaning many people do not know where to start
- Appropriateness: The ability of available goods to satisfy the preferences of specific groups of people with distinctive food preferences; primarily ethnic groups but also others such as local food advocates who prefer to buy locally produced foods. In this situation is where ethnic food markets and restaurants are so important to working for food security in multi-ethnic contexts.

A central argument in this report is that food systems planning should include all actors, including both formal and informal food systems stakeholders, by recognizing both of them as fundamental resources for understanding the local foodscape and addressing food security. It is important to recognize the work informal food systems do and their clear contribution to food systems and the urban economy. They highly contribute to the preservation of the food culture, ethnic food availability and to urban food security, particularly for low-income households.

Food Sovereignty



Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to define their own food and agriculture; to protect and regulate domestic agricultural and food production and trade in order to achieve sustainable development objectives. This means to be able to determine the extent to which they want to be self-reliant. Food sovereignty is an urgent environmental and social justice matter that should be addressed by establishing more localized food systems to alleviate food insecurity and if done properly mitigate or eradicate it.

Landscapes, foodscapes and retail-scapes

Landscapes assessments refer to both how residents physically navigate their environment, where to shop and how to get there, for example, and more meaningful concerns, like memory, nostalgia, personal and communal priorities, hope and engagements with history. Food and retail landscape assessment is embedded between a macro level analysis of food discrimination and microlevel analysis of how residents navigate their unequal landscape. The macro level context is influenced by national and local policies. The micro landscape examines how people move within this context on a daily basis. This assessment is an effort to examine what is happening rather than simply what is wrong in the community, revealing realities of self-reliance that unfold within unequal food and retail spaces. Landscape assessment center agency, rather than lacking. Particularly, considering how this agency becomes a reality within the structural constraints of food systems.

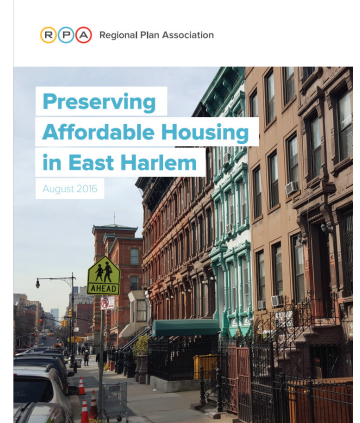
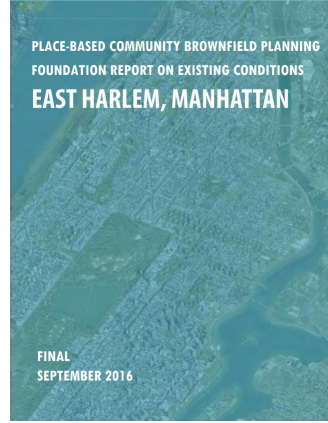
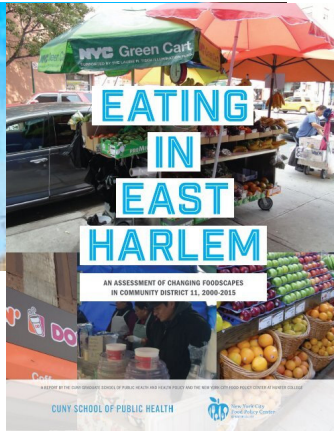
Community Food System in Food oriented developments

Community Food Systems (CFS) are interconnected and multi-scalar processes that encompass two different aspects. The first aspect of a CFS is concerned with the entire food cycle: the production, processing, marketing, consumption, and disposal of edible goods. This first sphere intersects with non-food sectors, such as transportation, education, workforce, and economic development, among others. CFS act as urban circular economies enablers by creating a tool to map opportunities to save resources and reduce waste across the value chain while fostering local economic development and social inclusion. (illustration1)



The second aspect consists in the recognition that food systems involve a multi-stakeholder and community-based process. CFS include people in different stages of life; faiths and cultures; social and economic corporations; government institutions and research centers. Multi-stakeholder planning often includes food community led networks at various levels and is open to new forms of democratic governance (such as food councils). In the case of East Harlem, leveraging the recently established Friends of La Marqueta (FoLM) organizational structure, could be a first step to start mapping and developing a CFS. These new governance structures manage the power relations between the different stakeholders to decide upon food systems and strategic planning. From food procurement and catering services in municipal facilities to organic waste and land use management, local food councils can influence food systems across the value chain. The ability for key actors, distributors, processors, and consumers, to come together at the local level creates a breeding ground for innovative solutions and new business models.

Context



East Harlem as a neighborhood

ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

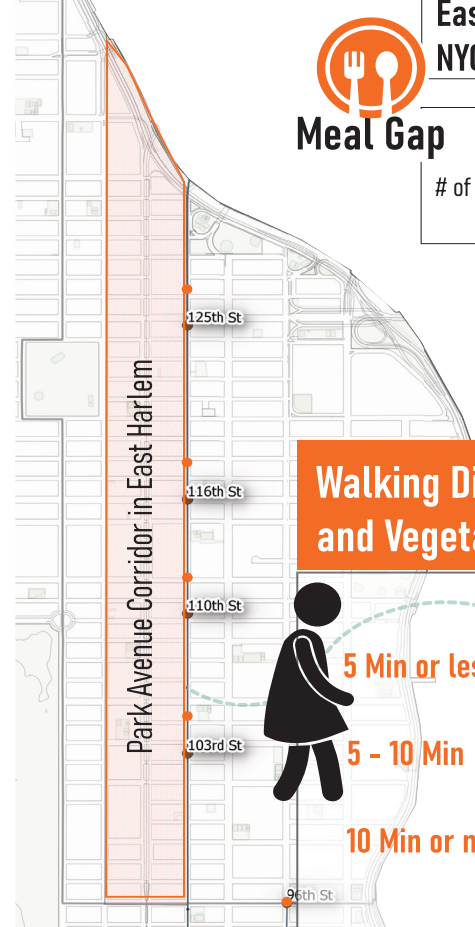
Supermarket to Bodega Ratio



1 TO 17
East Harlem

1 TO 17
Park Avenue

Study Area



Meal Gap 4,548,222

of meals needed per year for food security

% Food insecure residents
East Harlem | 21.9%
NYC | 15.4%

% SNAP Benefits
East Harlem | 32.9%
NYC | 21%

Walking Distance to Fresh Fruit and Vegetables



	East Harlem	NYC
5 Min or less	58%	49%
5 - 10 Min	18%	18%
10 Min or more	23%	32%

DEMOGRAPHICS

	Latino	Black	White	Asian/Pacific Islander	Other
East Harlem	45.7%	30.7%	13.8%	7.8%	2%
NYC	29%	22%	32%	15%	2%



35.3 years
Median age

78.3 years
Life expectancy

STRESSORS TO FOOD INSECURITY



Median Household Income
East Harlem | \$39,039
NYC | \$73,277

Poverty rate
East Harlem | 34.1%
NYC | 8.8%



Unemployment
East Harlem | 6.2%
NYC | 5%



Extreme Housing Burden
East Harlem | 23.4%
NYC | 28%

FOOD CONSUMPTION

% At least one serving of Fruits and Vegetables per day

East Harlem | 21.9%
NYC | 15.4%

No fruits or vegetables yesterday

East Harlem | 16%
NYC | 13%

% One or More 12-ounce Sugary Drinks per day

East Harlem | 29%
NYC | 23%

HEALTH STATUS

Obesity (percent of adults):

East Harlem | 28%
NYC | 24%

Childhood Obesity (percent of public school children):

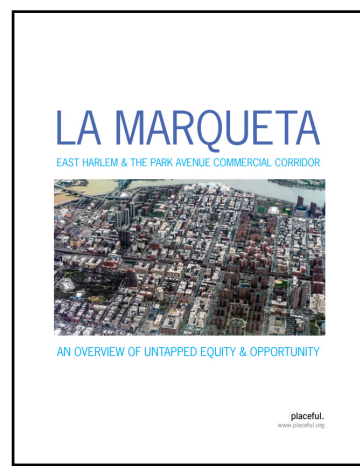
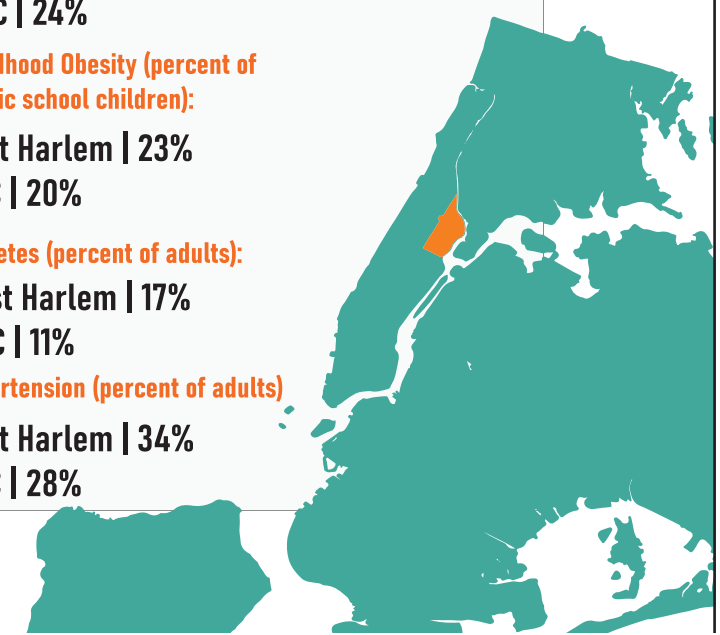
East Harlem | 23%
NYC | 20%

Diabetes (percent of adults):

East Harlem | 17%
NYC | 11%

Hypertension (percent of adults)

East Harlem | 34%
NYC | 28%

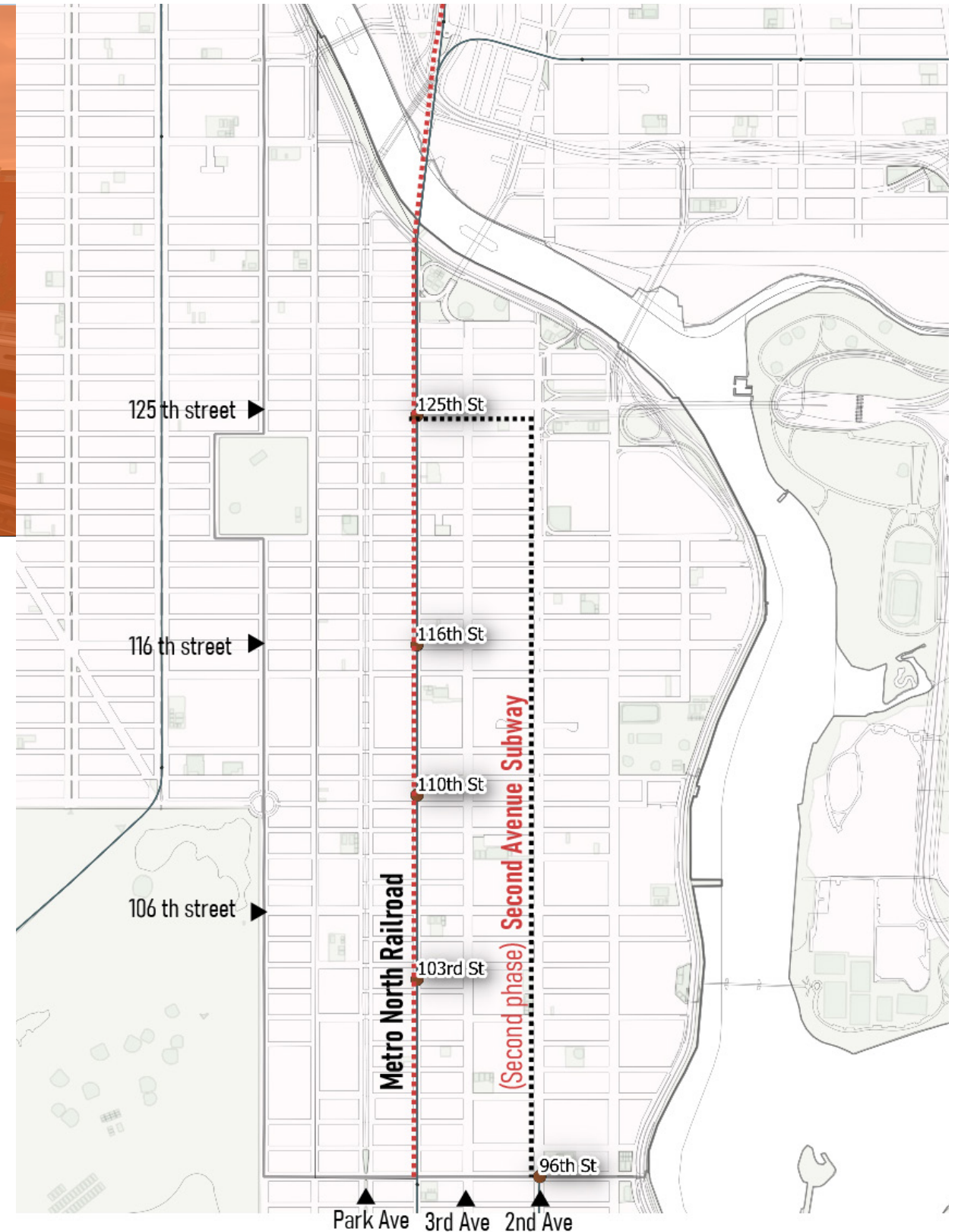


Existing infrastructural systems in East Harlem



In addition to the socioeconomic factors, food access also depends on local infrastructure such as public transportation, public space quality and proximity to retail grocery stores. Car ownership in East Harlem is relatively low compared (0-18%) to the Upper east side (>34%). Blanchard and Lyson describe in their research how low-income households without cars must use public transportation if grocery stores are not located within walking distance, which might cause households to go shopping less frequently and use close convenience stores to buy food. Limited access to public transportation may cause households without cars to spend more time and money to travel to grocery stores.

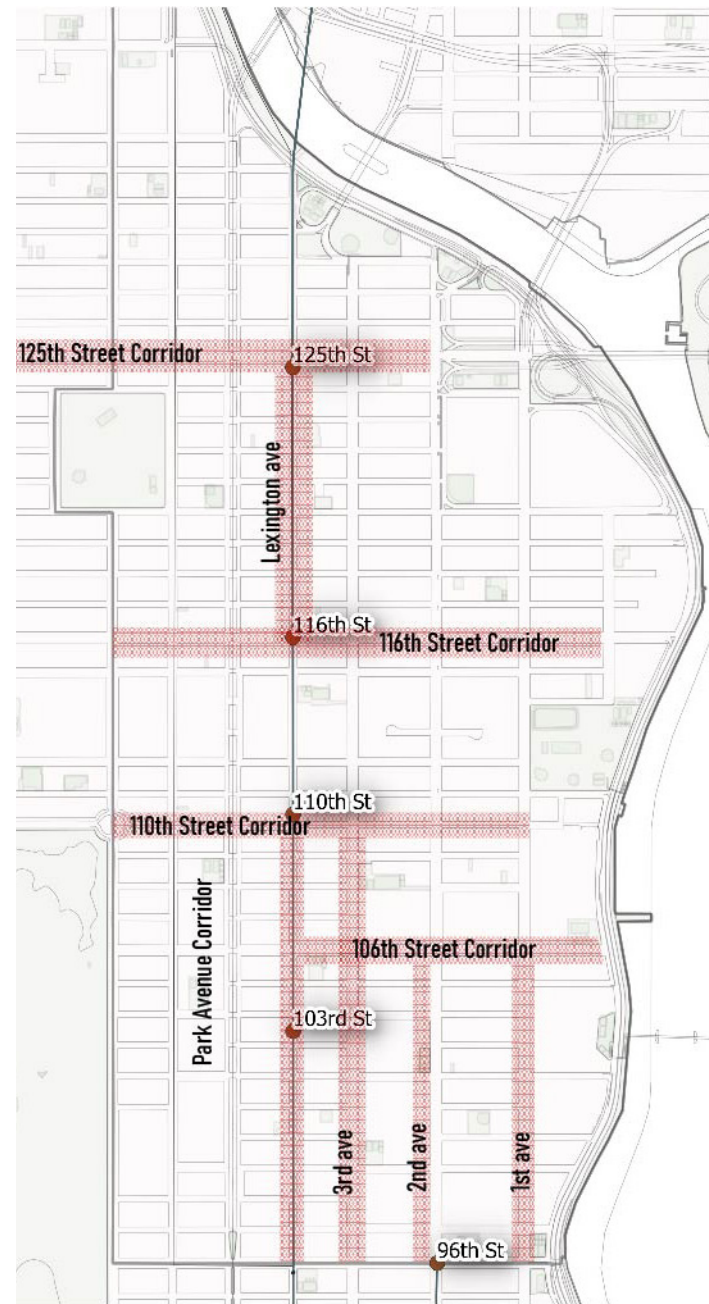
Park Avenue is one of New York's most interesting infrastructure corridors for a variety of reasons. It is home of the Metro-North Railroad viaduct that extends from Grand Central Terminal at 42nd Street to 133rd Street and the Harlem River. Along this corridor it traverses striking contrasts; from the economically depressed areas of East Harlem to the most valuable real estate south of 96th street.



Map 1: Massive Transportation System in East Harlem, Metro North Railroad and Second Avenue Subway

East Harlem commercial corridors

East Harlem has three main Commercial Corridors, 125th Street a Business Improvement District, and transit-accessible home to a variety of small businesses and cultural institutions. The 116th Street corridor which marks the center of “El Barrio,” and embodies the thriving Hispanic and Latino community that has kept growing in the neighborhood over the past several decades. Mexican and Dominican restaurants line the commercial strip, surrounded by shops offering affordable goods for local shoppers and visitors. Right next to 116th street, on the intersection with the Park Avenue corridor sits ‘La Marqueta’, a historically relevant neighborhood market that has housed Latino-owned small businesses and other vendors for many years. Moving to the south of East Harlem we find the Lexington, 3rd, 2nd, and 1st Avenue corridors, as well as the 110th and 106th cross streets. These corridors offer a modest array of restaurant, retail, and cultural options for the neighborhood.

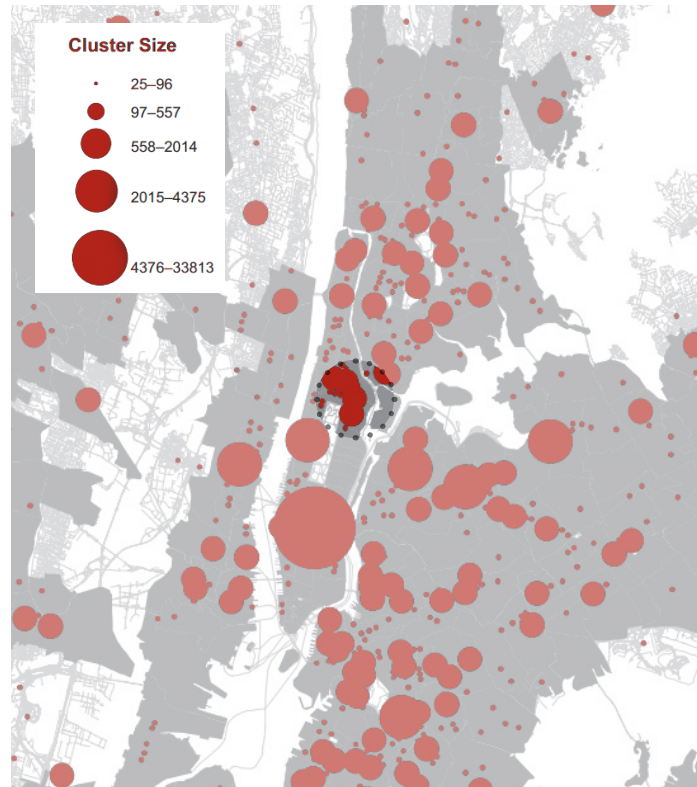


Map 2. Commercial Corridors in East Harlem

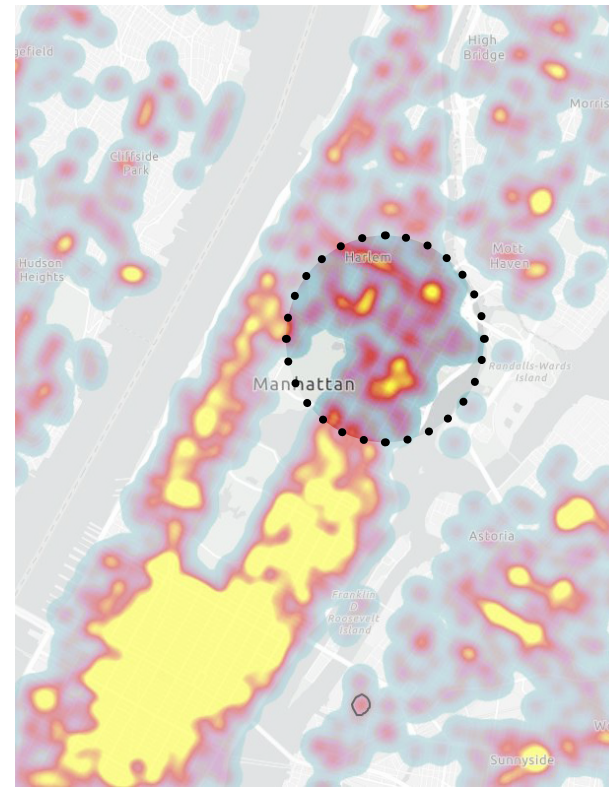
Retail deserts

Most of the studies on the disadvantages of poor urban neighborhoods have focused on the quality of public community facilities. However, the quantity and quality of local private amenities, such as grocery stores and restaurants, can also have important quality of life implications for communities. Some research suggests that a smaller number of retails implies a more limited choice, and the lack of competition leads to higher prices where “the poor pay more” for many basic goods and services. This report focused on understanding neighborhood stores whose customers represent primarily the immediate vicinity. These retails reflect most likely the composition of neighborhood residents. Literature suggests that the goods most likely to be sold at neighborhood stores include groceries, health and beauty products, and general household items, such as cleaning and household supplies. In addition to retail, some prime services like laundry services, coffee shops, and limited service restaurants, and beauty salons were considered in this report.

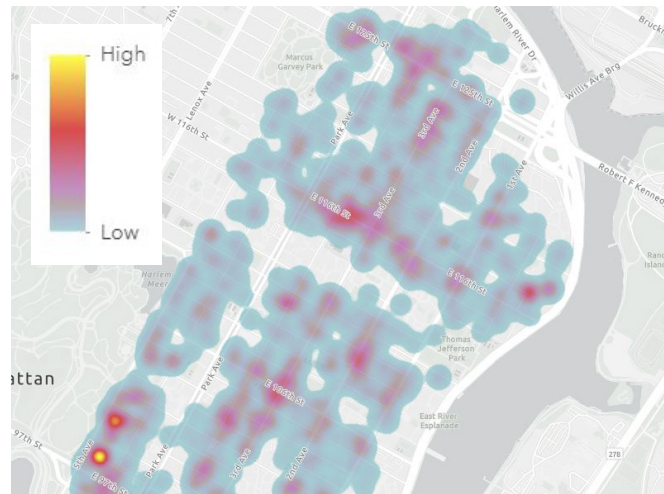
Meltzger and Schuetz’s research suggests poor neighborhoods are more disadvantaged in food service than in retail, and within retail, the differences are smallest for basic necessities, such as grocery stores and pharmacies. Also, poor neighborhoods have a much higher proportion of unhealthy chain restaurants. However, predominantly Latino neighborhoods have more diverse food services and greater physical access to retail corridors than predominantly White and Black neighborhoods. Together, these results suggest that residents in relatively low-income neighborhoods have retail activity nearby, but that it is less dense and composed of smaller and less diverse options (both of which could have implications for the quality and cost of the goods and services). Finally the results showed that low-income neighborhoods have greater access to transit and more retail space per building. This is important because, in spite of possessing some characteristics that would, theoretically, make these neighborhoods more appealing to retail businesses, they still face less retail access overall.



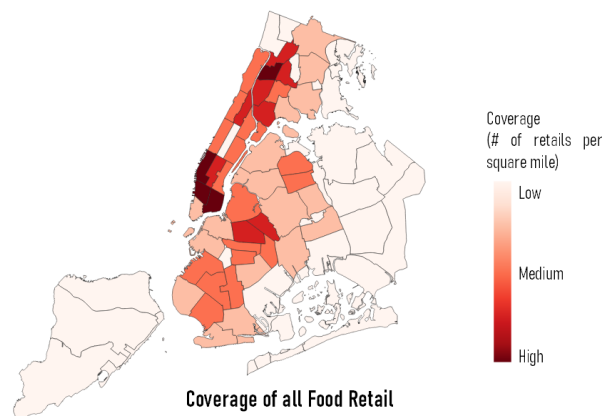
Map 3. Commercial storefront clusters NYC



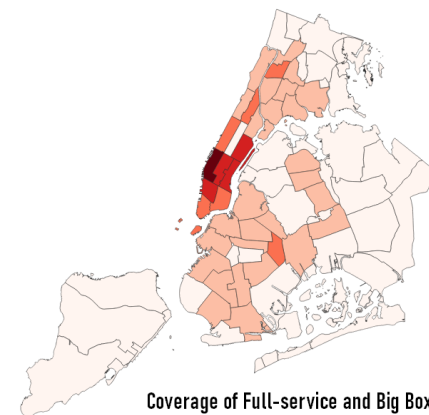
Map 4. Heatmap of commercial storefronts in Manhattan



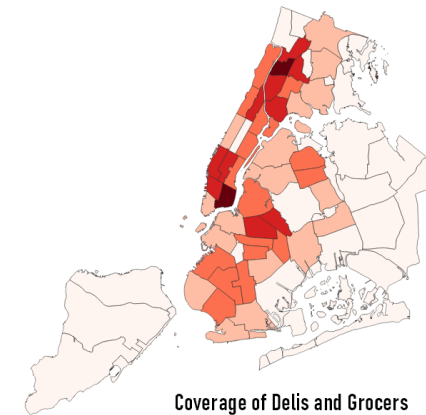
Map 5. Heatmap of commercial storefronts in East Harlem



Coverage of all Food Retail



Coverage of Full-service and Big Box



Coverage of Delis and Grocers

In Maps 3 to 5 we can see how East Harlem has considerably less density of storefronts than other parts in NYC, especially retail rich neighborhoods like the Upper West Side and Lower Manhattan, whose cluster size ranges between 558 stores to 4375, compared to 97 to 557 for East and West Harlem. In Map 4 and 5 specifically, we can see that there are not many high retail density areas in East Harlem. Most of the commercial corridors have low to middle density, except for some areas close to central Harlem 125th and to the Lower East Side on 3rd avenue.

On the other hand, on Map 6, it becomes clear how Food retail's density, measured as the number of Food retailers per square foot, changes in the different Community Districts. The first Map shows the overall density of Food retailers in every community board in NYC. In this case, East Harlem has a medium to low density compared to other higher density areas like Central Harlem, South Bronx and Lower Manhattan. The second and third Maps are more interesting, because they show the difference in density of Delis and Grocers and Full Service Supermarkets and Big box. East Harlem has a low density of Full-service restaurants and a middle to low density of Delis and Grocers. It is important to highlight that most of the Full-service restaurants are located in Lower Manhattan and the lower East Side. Reinforcing the idea that the wealthiest Community Districts have a higher density of big retail food stores.

More importantly than answering if East Harlem is a retail desert or not, is to question the impact that Street commerce has on generating economic, health and environmental benefits for a city. Smaller and sometimes locally owned stores along city streets tend to produce greater economic benefits for a town than do national big-box chains. An example of this is that a significant share of the revenues generated by small, locally owned stores returns back into the local economy.

As we can see, Main streets primarily serve communities of color which have been historically subjected to a cycle of policies whose effect has been the dismantling or gentrification of their neighborhood. Social psychiatrists have argued for years that the urban landscape, not only food access, specifically its capacity to foster social cohesion, is a condition for optimal health. Retail and street composition and design are fundamental pieces for fostering a high quality of life environment. City planners, and policy makers ought to consider how to develop policies that foster social cohesion in the built environment.

Map 6. Retail coverage of Food Retail, Delis and Grocers, and Full-service grocery stores and Big Box

Why East Harlem? Why Park Avenue?

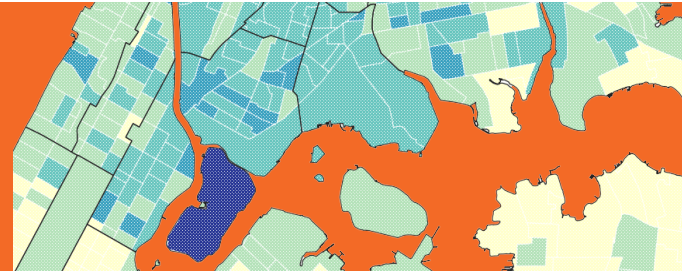


The completion of East Harlem Rezoning in 2017 and the launch of Phase II of the Second Avenue Subway extension by the MTA, puts East Harlem on the verge of a major transformation. The combined impact of both projects without a strong community-oriented development will likely result in inequitable growth and accelerate trends towards gentrification and displacement in the neighborhood. East Harlem continues to be one of the poorest neighborhoods in New York City. As of 2018, 32% of East Harlem residents still depended on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Snap), compared to 20% city-wide. For many, SNAP and soups Kitchen are insufficient resources to provide food to their families. Even though East Harlem has the second highest public housing density in the city, issues such as employment availability, aging public housing infrastructure, rising cost of food, transportation and other essential commodities make living conditions difficult. Many low-income families must choose between buying groceries and paying rent, especially at the end of the month, when SNAP typically runs out. Even families who receive housing assistance are often food insecure, sometimes eating what is cheap rather than what is nutritious.

The story of Park Avenue Corridor in East Harlem, former Fourth ave, is directly related to the history of railroads in the city. In the early nineteenth century the New York & Harlem Railroad (later bought by New York Central) needed a place to run its steam locomotives into the city. The City in turn decided that Park Avenue would be the perfect place for that. Today, Park Avenue is home to the Metro-North Railroad, which extends as a tunnel from Grand Central Terminal at 42nd Street to a portal at 97th Street where it rises to a viaduct north of 99th Street and continues throughout East Harlem over the Harlem River into the Bronx over the Park Avenue Bridge.

Park Avenue is also home to twelve of the twenty-seven NYCHA Campuses located in East Harlem. It is a peculiar place where public and affordable housing meets, Lots vacancy, Parking Lots, and Community Gardens. It is a corridor where you can find Welfare, Education, Health and Human Services facilities, but at the same time, it is a street that lacks retail, full-service restaurants, grocery stores and food traffic. Park Avenue is a corridor of contrast and it is in this condition that the rezoning has to be leveraged to meet the community's needs.

East Harlem findings

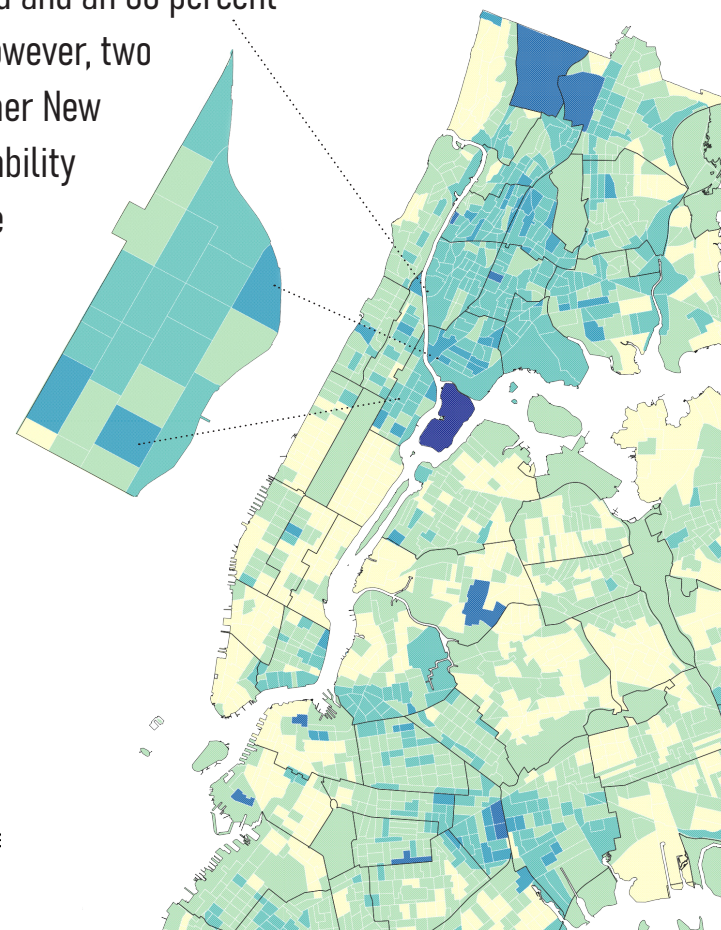
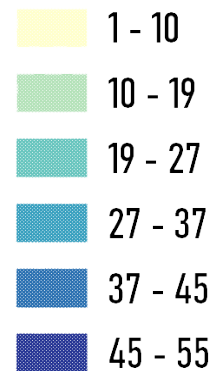


East Harlem Foodscapes

Foodscapes tell the story of how and where people in East Harlem relate with their food. This concept describes not only the technicalities of food acquisition, availability and consumption but also the institutional arrangements, cultural and social spaces, and policies that shape how and what people eat.

According to the Urban Food Policy Institute at CUNY, East Harlem has a multitude of organizations and individuals dedicated to improving local food environments and reducing food insecurity and diet-related diseases. They identified that by 2015, 64 organizations provided nutrition education in East Harlem; there were 22 food security programs, and dozens of agencies serving institutional food and an 80 percent increase in the number of supermarkets. However, two problems are still more common than in other New York City neighborhoods; healthy food availability and the fact that diet-related diseases have remained persistent.

Percentage of Food Insecured residents



Map 7. New York city share of Food Insecured Residents by census tracts

Food Systems in East Harlem



Photo x: 103rd Street Community Garden

A food system is a complex web of activities involving production, processing, transport, and consumption. Food systems include the governance and economics of food production, its sustainability, waste, how food production affects the natural environment and the impact of food on individual and population health.

To consider the diverse interactions of people and institutions requires multi-stakeholder planning that includes food social systems at various levels, and conduciveness to new forms of democratic governance, such as food councils. Democratic governance of food systems recognizes that community members should be able to manage the relations between the different stakeholders to decide upon food availability and strategic plans for the neighborhood. Shifting the lens completely toward foodscapes in East Harlem allows us to create a lens through which we can examine health, poverty, economic development, culture and happiness. Without access to healthy and affordable food for all residents, no community can be vibrant and prosper and sustain itself.

East Harlem's foodscape has changed significantly since the late 1990s, when it started experiencing significant public and private investment. Community activists concerned about the food landscape advocated successfully for the creation of a Pathmark Supermarket. In 2003 the City conducted a rezoning proposal to make 125th Street a retail and entertainment hub. The rezoning contributed to the displacement of the Pathmark supermarket by increasing the development potential of the Pathmark site as well as nearby parcels in the rezoned area.



Photo x:

Today, the neighborhood has more food retail establishments, including Costco, Target, and Aldi in East River Plaza, a shopping center on the East River, as well as a variety of independent, smaller size grocers. Also by 2015 there was an established network of healthy food alternatives, including eighteen Green Carts, seven farmers markets, and community supported agriculture (CSA). This suggests an increase in fruit and vegetable availability.

An assessment of East Harlem's foodscape from 2000-2015 was conducted by the CUNY School of Public Health. The report concluded that even though the neighborhood's foodscape has diversified, by 2015 it had four times as many fast food restaurants as in 2000, and 26% more bodegas. It also showed that the increase in chain retailers had not improved the local economy, but on the contrary, that the increase in food outlets between 2000 and 2015 took the profits generated within East Harlem outside of it.

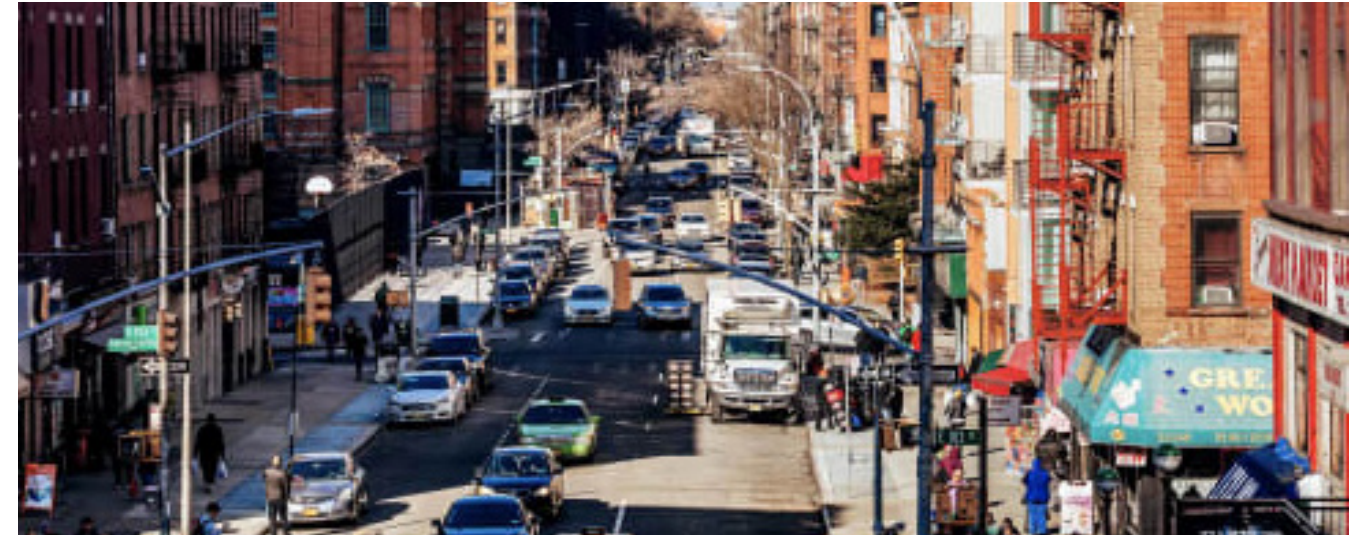


Photo x: Front Stores x street, East Harlem

There is the notion that overall economic activity must be increased in the community to bring more businesses, commercial activity, and employment opportunity. Bringing vibrancy to a neighborhood is important if that vibrancy benefits the community and the local businesses. Commercial displacement has become a concern because owners of commercial spaces, which are not subject to government rent controls, have sought, as leases expire, to rent to businesses that can afford higher rents. Increasing real estate value also puts pressure on the owners of so-called 'soft sites', parcels that have buildings substantially smaller than the maximum allowable FAR under existing zoning, to sell their properties or develop them with structures that maximize development potential. In East Harlem is concerning that four of the community's 18 supermarkets are located on soft sites that could accommodate higher-density residential and/or commercial uses

The aim should be focused on investing heavily in renovating existing and supporting emerging local businesses. New competitive retails could overshadow smaller but nevertheless critical businesses that serve minority populations who cannot compete on volume, pharmacies are critical to elderly residents, ethnic grocers to ethnic communities, multilingual tax accountants to people that face language and technological access barriers to online tax filing. The influx of higher-income residents and cultural and commercial uses that attract higher-income visitors may also lead to 'food gentrification'. Equally important, residents remaining in East Harlem can experience the loss of a sense of place as the food establishments they are used to frequenting change or close.



Photo x:

Between 2006 and 2016, average Manhattan retail asking rents rose from \$108 per square foot annually to \$156, an increase of 44.4 percent. East Harlem has a total number of 778 storefronts, of which 119 (15%) are Restaurants and Bars, 59 are Hair, Nail and Beauty Salons and 58 are Clothing and Jewelry stores. Food and liquor stores and Delis and Bodegas make up approximately 5% each of the storefront in East Harlem.

The concentration of large medical facilities, such as Mount Sinai Hospital, makes health care the largest employer in East Harlem. By 2016 medical facilities were the largest employers. They represented only 2 percent of the businesses and were responsible for 68 percent of the private sector jobs. The retail sector, however, was responsible for 2,620 jobs, or 7 percent of area jobs. These jobs had an average annual salary of \$29,000, lower than the citywide average for retail employment (\$40,400). Economic growth is reported to be strong in East Harlem. By 2016, private sector employment reached a record 39,980 jobs, one-third more than ten years earlier. The number of businesses and total sales has also increased rapidly.

The private sector's average salary was the fifth-highest of the 55 Census-defined neighborhoods in New York City. However, only 6 percent of the residents worked in East Harlem, and household income was the seventh-lowest in the City. On the other hand, the number of retail jobs in East Harlem increased by 940 between 2006 and 2016, representing 10 percent of the private sector jobs added during this period. More than half of the retail job gains occurred in 2010 after the East River Plaza opening. Since then, there has been little change in retail employment.

Food production and processing

According to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), industries in the Food Manufacturing subsector transform livestock and agricultural products into products for intermediate or final consumption. The industry groups are distinguished by the raw materials (generally of animal or vegetable origin) processed into food products.

Establishments primarily engaged in retailing bakery and candy products made on the premises not for immediate consumption are included. At 66.8%,

bakeries and tortilla manufacturing accounted for about 2/3 of food

manufacturers in New York State. No other industry had

more than 10% of industry firms. More than 2/5 of food

manufacturing workers were in bakeries and tortilla

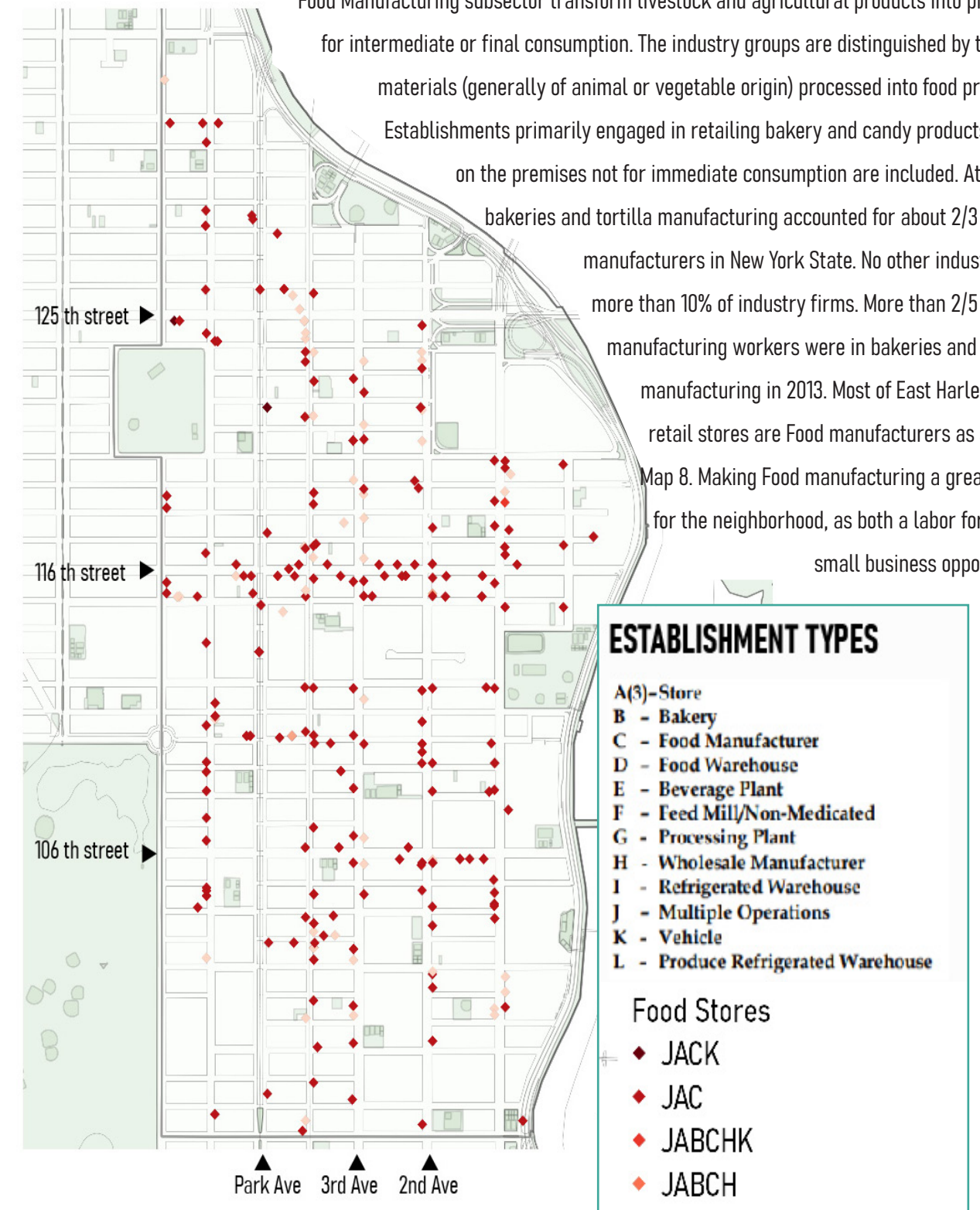
manufacturing in 2013. Most of East Harlem Food

retail stores are Food manufacturers as seen in

Map 8. Making Food manufacturing a great asset

for the neighborhood, as both a labor force and

small business opportunity.



Map 8. Distribution and type of Food retail stores in East Harlem



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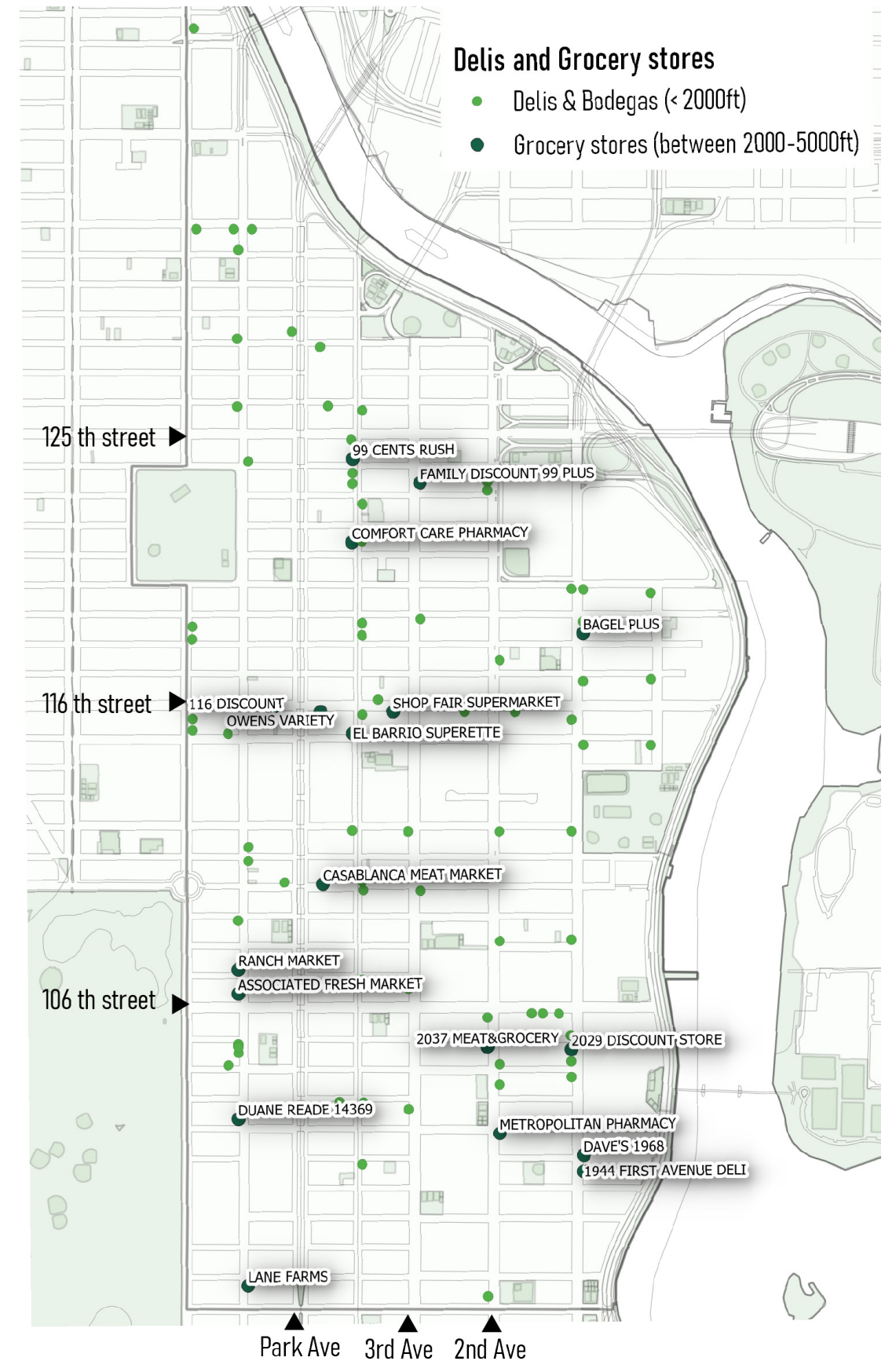
There are 267 food retailers in East Harlem that are part of the leisure and hospitality sector. This sector had an average salary of \$31,100 and accounted for 2,210 jobs in 2016 (6 percent). Most of the jobs (80 percent) were in restaurants and bars. The sector added 960 jobs over the past ten years. Most food businesses in East Harlem employ 3-10 people, with an overall average of 8 employees. More than two-thirds of businesses had fewer than five employees, and more than three quarters had fewer than ten employees. While only 2 percent of the businesses employed 100 or more workers, they accounted for 68 percent of the area's jobs. The smallest businesses in terms of the number of employees are located along 116th street and have between 3-5 employees.

Food landscapes, Delis, Bodegas, and Grocers

The true centerpieces of East Harlem economy seem to be the corner bodegas, and the ethnic retails. They appear to represent the diversity of mom-and-pop stores in the neighborhood; there is hardly a block without at least one of those. From 96th Street to 125th to Fifth Avenue to the East River, East Harlem is a neighborhood of contrasts, tensions, resistance, and constantly changing. Food retail businesses, though requiring capital, have relatively low barriers to entry for low-income entrepreneurs. Thus, small food retail businesses are particularly useful to the health of a community because many low-income communities have a rich heritage of knowledge and expertise in food production. Culinary practices can be representative of cultural identity, and also provide bridges to engaging all ages and skill levels in a community.

We have already broadly discussed that disparities in resources, including food stores, exist at the neighbourhood level and that the greatest disparities are seen in minority neighbourhoods. The same neighbourhoods that might experience an increased risk of obesity and diabetes. However, less is known about whether differences in availability of resources by African American or Latino race/ethnicity exist within a single minority community.

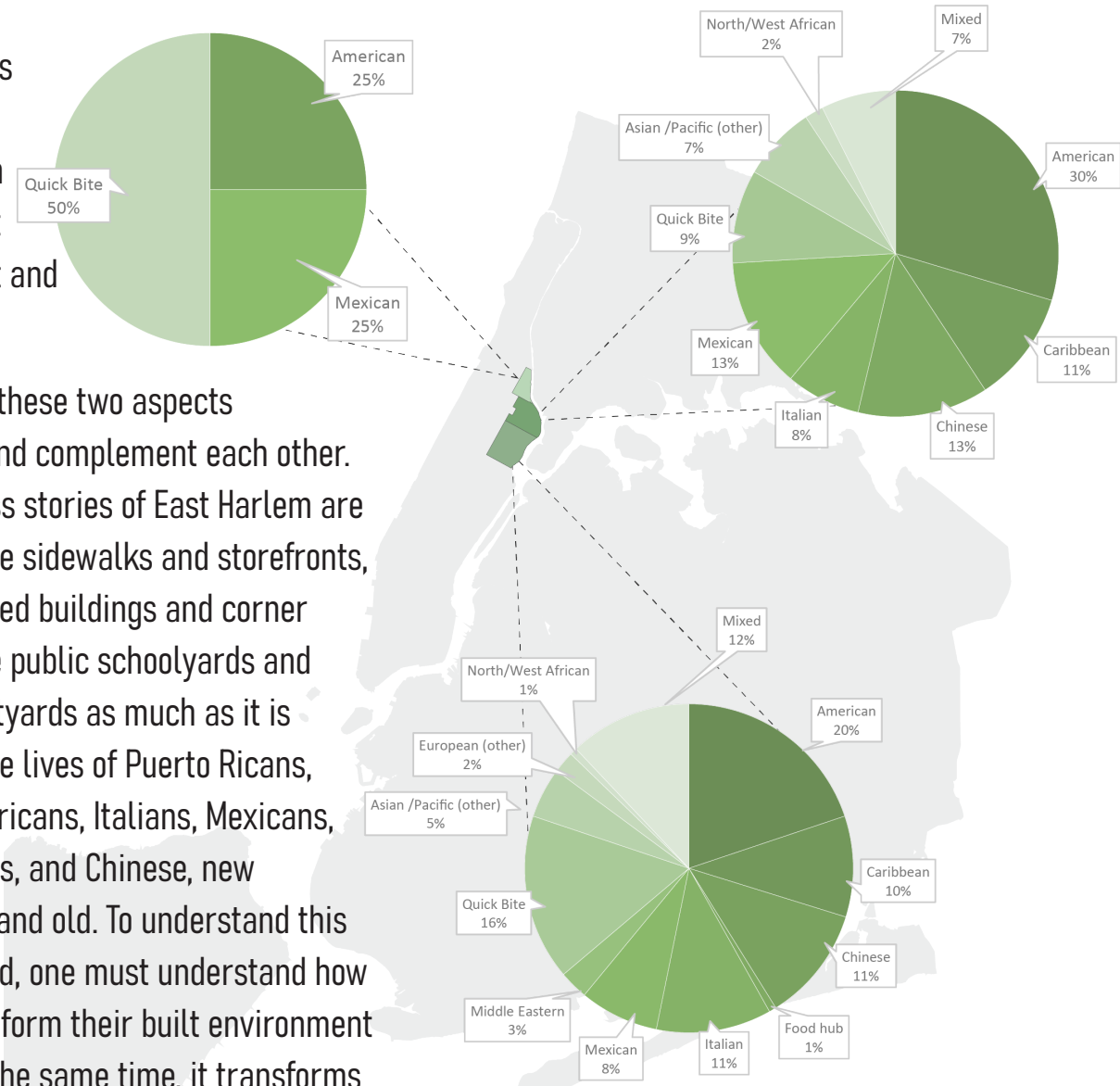
There is a presumed “emptiness” and “vacancy” embedded in the understanding of food deserts. Advocates and policymakers outside of these neighborhood spaces often overlook or do not see the ways in which residents make their own ways to navigate food insecurity and reflect their hopes and desires for their communities more broadly. Gardens, food street vendors, food retailers and neighborhood grocers characterized East Harlem’s foodscape. However, it is the supermarket that always emerges as the principal component of food systems, so much so that narratives around fixing broken food systems often begin with the supermarket and not with the ways people have historically created local foodscapes.



Ethnic retail clusters

East Harlem's history is embedded in both its built environment and its people.

Sometimes, these two aspects contradict and complement each other. The countless stories of East Harlem are written in the sidewalks and storefronts, the abandoned buildings and corner bodegas, the public schoolyards and project courtyards as much as it is written in the lives of Puerto Ricans, African Americans, Italians, Mexicans, West Africans, and Chinese, new immigrants and old. To understand this neighborhood, one must understand how people transform their built environment and how at the same time, it transforms people.



Map 9: Ethnic retail clusters in East Harlem by Zip Code

Policy debates around food environments and their impacts on health have been dominated by the notion that low-income neighborhoods of color are food deserts, because they lack large supermarkets and therefore may have a limited access to fresh, affordable and healthy foods. Other authors argue that this conceptualization is misleading and potentially detrimental to the health of poor communities because it ignores the contribution of smaller stores, particularly that of so-called ethnic markets.

This conceptualization around food deserts is a reflection of classes and racialized biases of foodscapes, by ignoring the day-to-day relationship with food in low-income communities, while favoring private corporate intervention. East Harlem is a special place. 116th street and 106 street corridors mark the cultural crossroad of Puerto Rican and Mexican East Harlem. On the other eastern side, at Pleasant avenue, with an array of mixed commerce, remains the last vestige of Italian Harlem. And there, in what seems like the least-visited corner of East Harlem, on the ruins of a factory, lie Home Depot and Costco. West of Fifth Avenue, 125th, known as Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard is Central's Harlem's economic development and urban renewal area. This street extends all through East Harlem and has meant for many a disruption of African American culture.

Third Avenue is home to some West Africans who have taken up residence in East Harlem; they arrive from different parts like Ghana and Nigeria. East Harlem is not known for being a Chinese enclave. However, their presence is felt in both housing and small businesses along Second Avenue. Businesses that are owned and operated by members of an ethnic group and that offer culturally specific goods and services to co-ethnic consumers are known as ethnic retails. And even though there is no specific data on the number and variety of ethnic retail in East Harlem, walking around and actively participating in the neighborhoods is enough to understand the presence and importance of these retails for the community.

East Harlem retail and food-scape is not only central for people's health but for supporting emotional and physical wellbeing, developing social ties, and sustaining communities both culturally and economically. The Ethnic retail map is only a small picture of the diversity and complexity of East Harlem's ethnicfood-scape. Corner Stores like Bodegas and Delis for example, are responsible for most of the quick-bite food market in East Harlem, are not necessarily places for healthy and affordable food. However, they might become symbols of local institutions. Bodegas are normally community owned and they might represent both a nostalgic past and a desired future of store ownership for many neighborhood residents.

Existing Urban Food security initiatives



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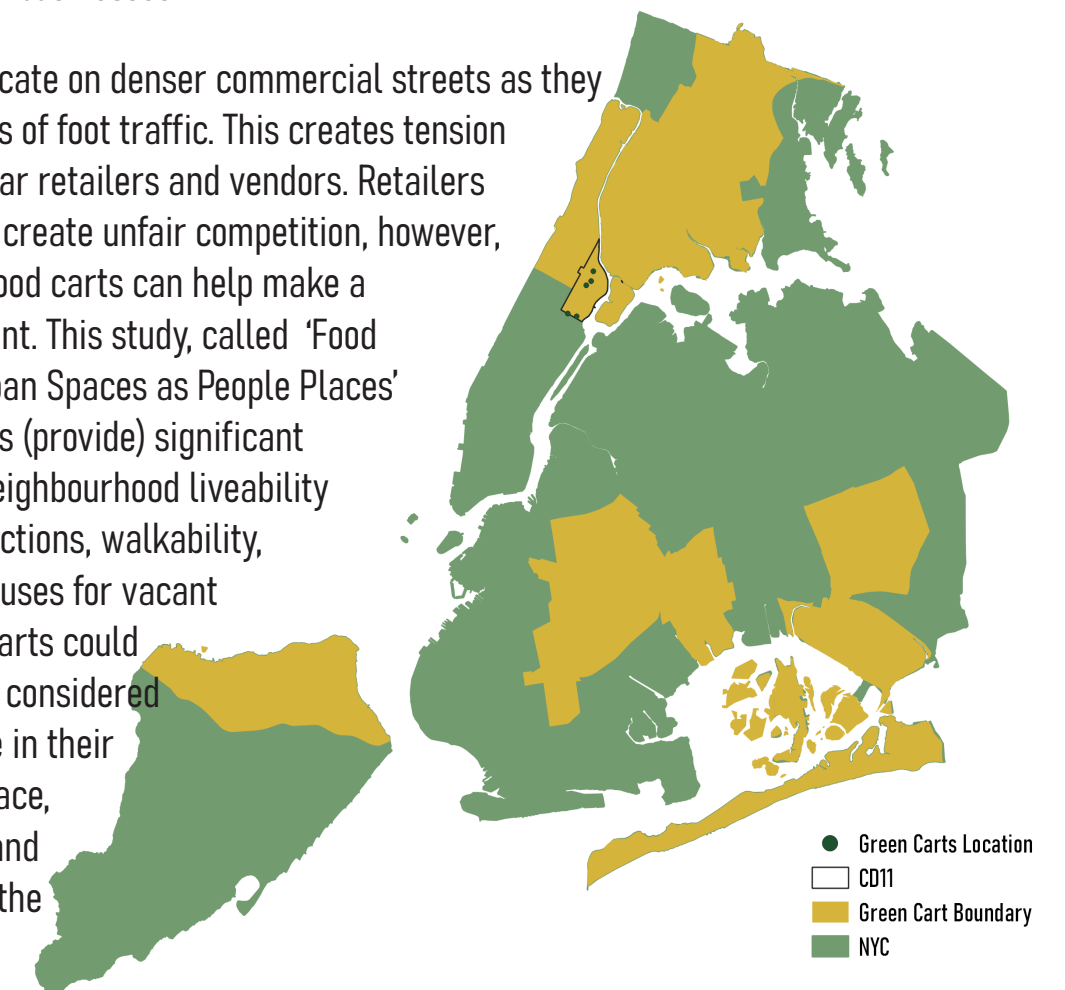
Urban food security projects, such as farmers' markets, urban agriculture, seek to promote healthy eating habits by selling fresh produce. Many projects often struggle because they assume that increase access and lower prices will automatically generate demand and involvement. Instead, studies focused on ethnic communities show that food choices, and receptivity toward food security projects, are affected by two types of perceived cultural affiliation: the food promoted and the food source. This research indicates that food culture and preferences, rather than cost and availability, explains minority community's limited responses to messages encouraging healthy eating.

Food security and food availability efforts must use diverse strategies. They must address the multilevel factors influencing food habits, both suppliers and consumers. Urban agriculture projects in low-income urban neighborhoods should focus on generating an opportunity to explore sustainable and healthy food systems that are equitable and respectful of local traditions. A community-led and community-based approach is a source of creative, constructive and local knowledge that help implement programs that successfully target all residents in different stages of life.

Green carts and Street vendors

In 2009, in response to Food availability issues, the Mayor's Office and several partners launched Green Carts permits, an effort to increase access to healthy food and decrease health disparities in some of New York's poorest neighborhoods, like East Harlem (See Map #). The idea was to create a new class of food vendor permits for selling fresh produce. This is one strategy that contributes to improving produce access among New Yorkers and highlights the importance of street vendors in urban contexts. It is important to take into account that while vending income can vary depending on the zone it is located, most food vendors do not earn much and see it as a last resort or a step towards opening a brick and mortar business. However, lately, Street Vending has become more attractive for independent workers because of the business model structure. Specially because street vendors are not burdened by excessive bureaucracy or adherence to rules and formalities and business start-up costs are much lower compared to those of brick and mortar businesses.

Street vendors tend to locate on denser commercial streets as they benefit from higher levels of foot traffic. This creates tension between brick-and-mortar retailers and vendors. Retailers often claim that vendors create unfair competition, however, research suggests that food carts can help make a neighborhood more vibrant. This study, called 'Food Cartology: Rethinking Urban Spaces as People Places' concluded that 'food carts (provide) significant community benefits to neighbourhood liveability by fostering social interactions, walkability, and by providing interim uses for vacant lots'. In this sense Food carts could contribute and should be considered as an important measure in their creative use of empty space, animating such spaces, and increasing visitorship to the area.



The Green Cart Boundaries represent collections of NYC Police Precinct Boundaries that represent area where Green Carts are allowed to operate in one New York City borough only.

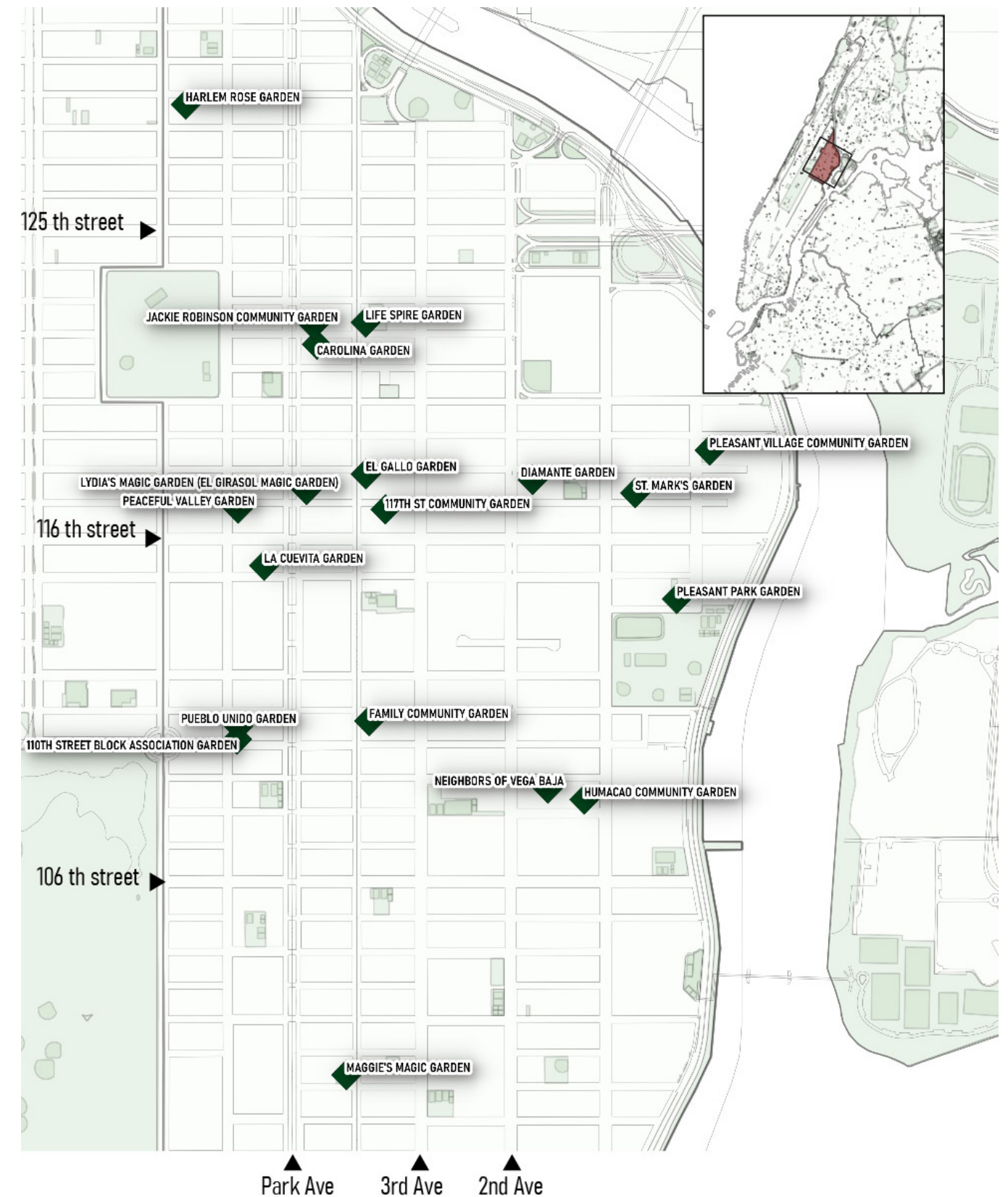
Map 10: Greencarts boundaries, and Fruits carts location

Gardens as Community place-making

East Harlem is known for its community gardens. Along with the Lower East Side, it has one of the highest concentrations of gardens in Manhattan. Within our study area, and just outside of it, there are currently 22 gardens, many of them have long been important community assets. Community gardens have become broadly popular in the U.S and are growing to become an integral part of the urban fabric. They intersect three fundamental urban elements, sociability, food production and urban green infrastructure. The term Community garden is used from a variety of land types and uses. It has been broadly described as “...tangible arenas in which urban residents can establish and sustain relations with one another, with elements of nature, and with their neighborhood”

A study conducted in 2018 reported that the 35 gardens in East Harlem offered residents an estimated 18,000 square meters of community garden space. About half of the garden area is green space and more than one third is planting space. Also, the casitas found in the gardens served as central gathering places for gardeners. This shows that gardens are of central importance to many gardeners' lives and ignite a strong sense of attachment to place.

Community gardens are broadly considered to have direct positive benefits to neighborhoods. They do so as a result of the members' participation and dedication to engage and sustain them, in contrast to other urban green infrastructure, such as street trees, which residents generally view as the responsibility of city agencies to provide and maintain. Community gardens are well known for providing space for neighbors to grow fresh, healthy food close to home. Beyond improving food access, community gardens provide the space for powerful neighborhood change. When a group of neighbors joins together to organize, build, and manage a community garden, they bring an impressive array of benefits to their community. Besides this, community gardens also contribute to urban sustainability issues, as well as general positive health outcomes. Urban residents are more likely to have limited access to green spaces. Community gardens can contribute to a neighborhood's quality of life by increasing green space while at the same time provide a source of fresh and affordable produce. It can also provide economic opportunities through collaboration with farmer's markets and other business ventures.



Map 11: Community Gardens location in NYC

Food Markets



Image x:

Finally, the promotion of local food markets, such as farmer's markets or foodhubs markets, is another strategy for making healthy, locally produced food more accessible. The intention in promoting them is also to promote the development of the local economy through food production, which is currently still quite weak. Markets such as La Marqueta represent a unique challenge for retail planning, because of their complexity and their diverse forms and functions. Markets as so many other collective retail forms intersect at different community levels, political, economical and social. They benefit people greatly by exposing them to one another. According to Morales, professor at the Department of Sociology of University of Wisconsin-Madison, markets can be used as "social tools" to connect people, activities and space, both ethnically and economically. This can be particularly seen in Farmer's Markets that emphasize urban health and food access equity. However, La Marqueta alone is not sufficient to meet the retail needs of both its community and a broader consumer base.



Park Avenue Corridor

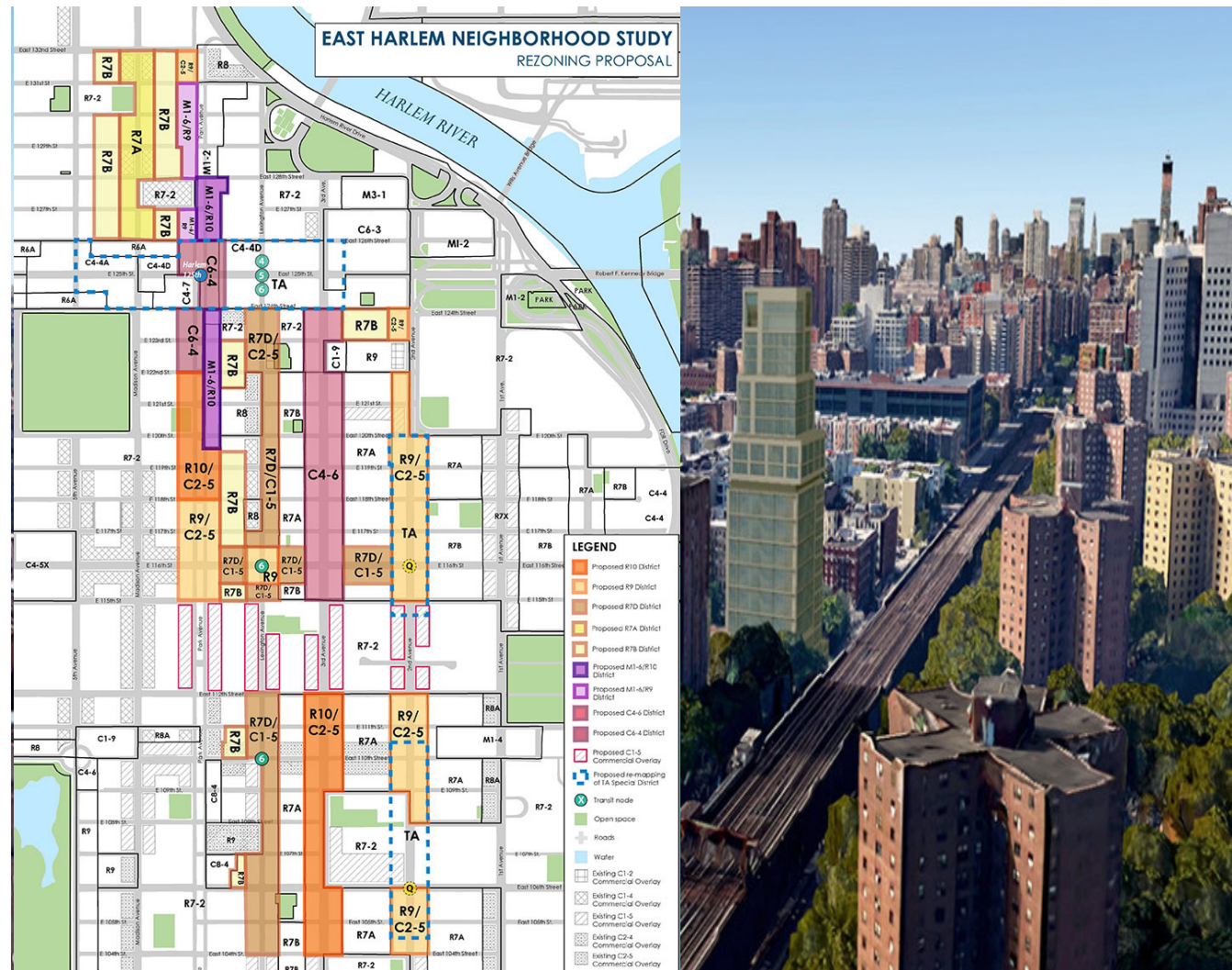
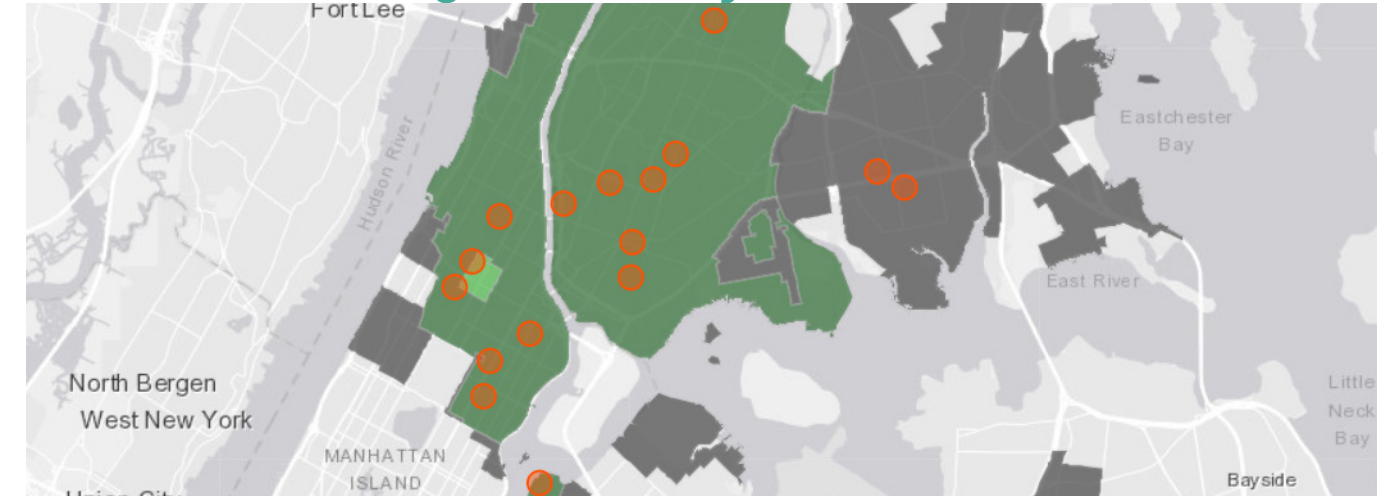


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The New York City Department of City Planning (DCP), together with the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), developed the East Harlem Initiative, a series of land use actions, including zoning map amendments and zoning text amendments. The process was accompanied by the community through the East Harlem Community Plan, and after a long process some Terms of Agreements were met. The Proposed Actions would affect an approximately 96-block area of the East Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan, Community District 11. The area that is subject to the Proposed Actions is generally bounded by East 104th Street to the south, East 132nd Street to the north, Park Avenue to the west, and Second Avenue to the east.

Role of Rezoning in Food Systems



Map 11: FRESH Zones and future Grocery stores project's location

Some of the most powerful tools that planners use is the ability to rezone land. Planners and Advocates of sustainable, healthy food systems typically focus on strategies of zoning to improve local foodscapes. Some of these strategies range from allowing urban agriculture in residential, commercial, and vacant areas, offering developers bonuses to include supermarkets in their buildings; or restricting fast food establishments with high rates of obesity and diet-related diseases. However, they often overlook the unintended effects of zoning on food, ignoring the impact of the changes to the food ecosystem they create. In New York City Early efforts at food planning in New York City focused on reducing diet-related diseases Foodscape urban plans, have consisted of integrating approximately 900 food-producing gardens into the cityscape.

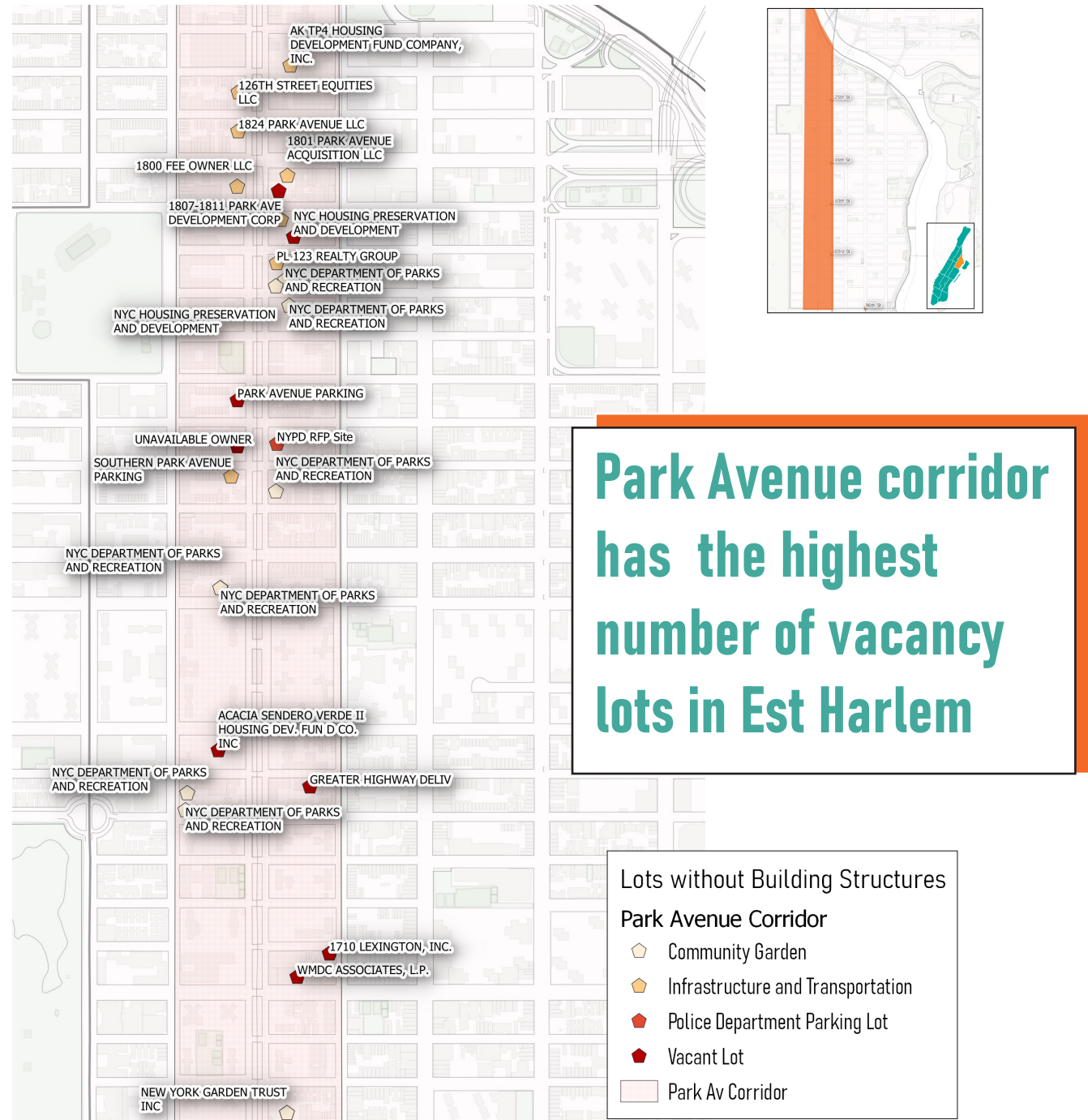
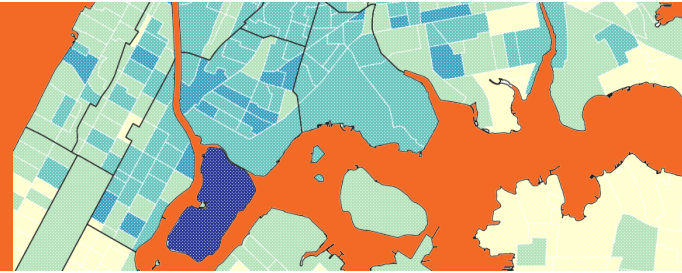
Spatial planning has also been used to provide incentives for grocers to move to neighborhoods lacking access to healthy food. In 2009, the NYCDCP created the program Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH). This program seeks to combine financial and zoning incentives for supermarkets in neighborhoods. Since its start in 2009, 39 FRESH supermarkets have been approved for financial and/or zoning incentives, three of which are located in East Harlem, one is being built in the Park Avenue corridor, one in Lexington Av and one on Third Ave.

According to Nevin Cohen in his paper, Unintentional food zoning, “zoning changes that are ostensibly not about food have in fact resulted in some of the most significant food impacts. This is partly, he added because NYC has relied heavily on zoning to direct its growth and achieve their goals. Rezoning can have direct and indirect effects on foodscapes. In the first place, it can have direct spatial effects on uses, size, density, as well as location and type of retail. Indirectly it can exacerbate the gaps in food access by introducing demographic changes that consequently could change spending patterns that determine the types of businesses a neighborhood can support.

Some previous zoning decisions have directly affected food retail in East Harlem, increasing property values and making one-story supermarkets economically infeasible or carving out spaces for particular types of food retailers such as Costco, the world’s second-largest retailer. For example in 2003 a study conducted by the DCP led to a rezoning proposal to make 125th Street a retail and entertainment hub. The new zoning designation allowed denser and taller buildings in the area and introduced mixed-use developments on lots that were once zoned only for commercial activity. This process contributed to the displacement of the Pathmark supermarket, which opened in 1997 and was the product of a long struggle in the community for access to a full-service supermarket.

Also Programs like New York City’s FRESH program have become the primary policy to address ‘food deserts’ and food insecurity. In East Harlem this program has offered tax breaks and other incentives to three supermarkets to locate their stores in the community. Even though supermarkets are one of the things that residents want, focusing only and primarily on this policy might undermine the community’s food self-sufficiency and focus efforts on private investment instead of the community’s economic resilience. We need to imagine possibilities where a new kind of urban food system is possible, One with community sovereignty potential. Food access is intricately tied to community sustainability and resilience, where individuals can only flourish when the community does as well.

Park Avenue findings

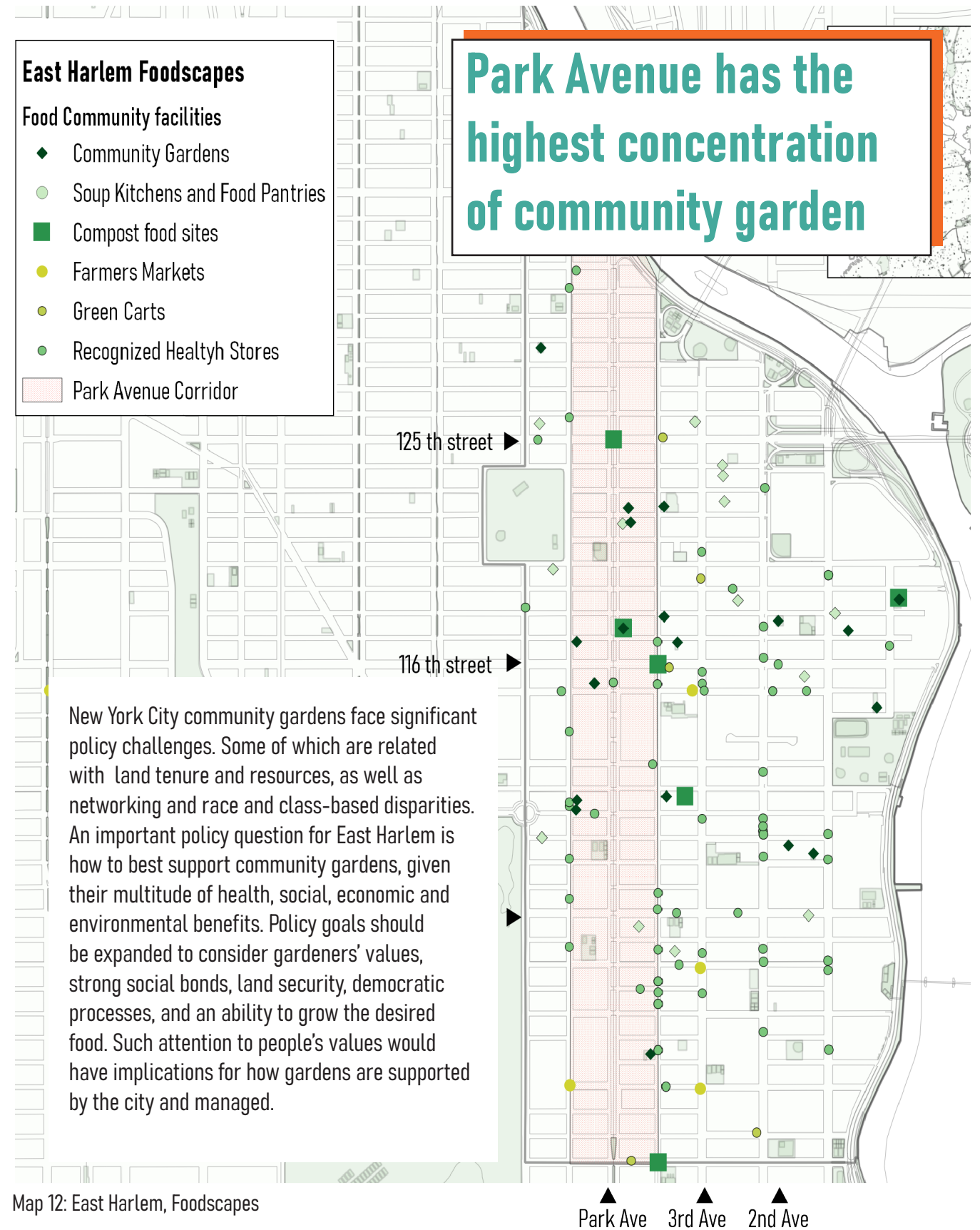


Map 16: Lots without building structure

East Harlem Foodscapes

- Food Community facilities**
- Community Gardens
 - Soup Kitchens and Food Pantries
 - Compost food sites
 - Farmers Markets
 - Green Carts
 - Recognized Healthy Stores
 - Park Avenue Corridor

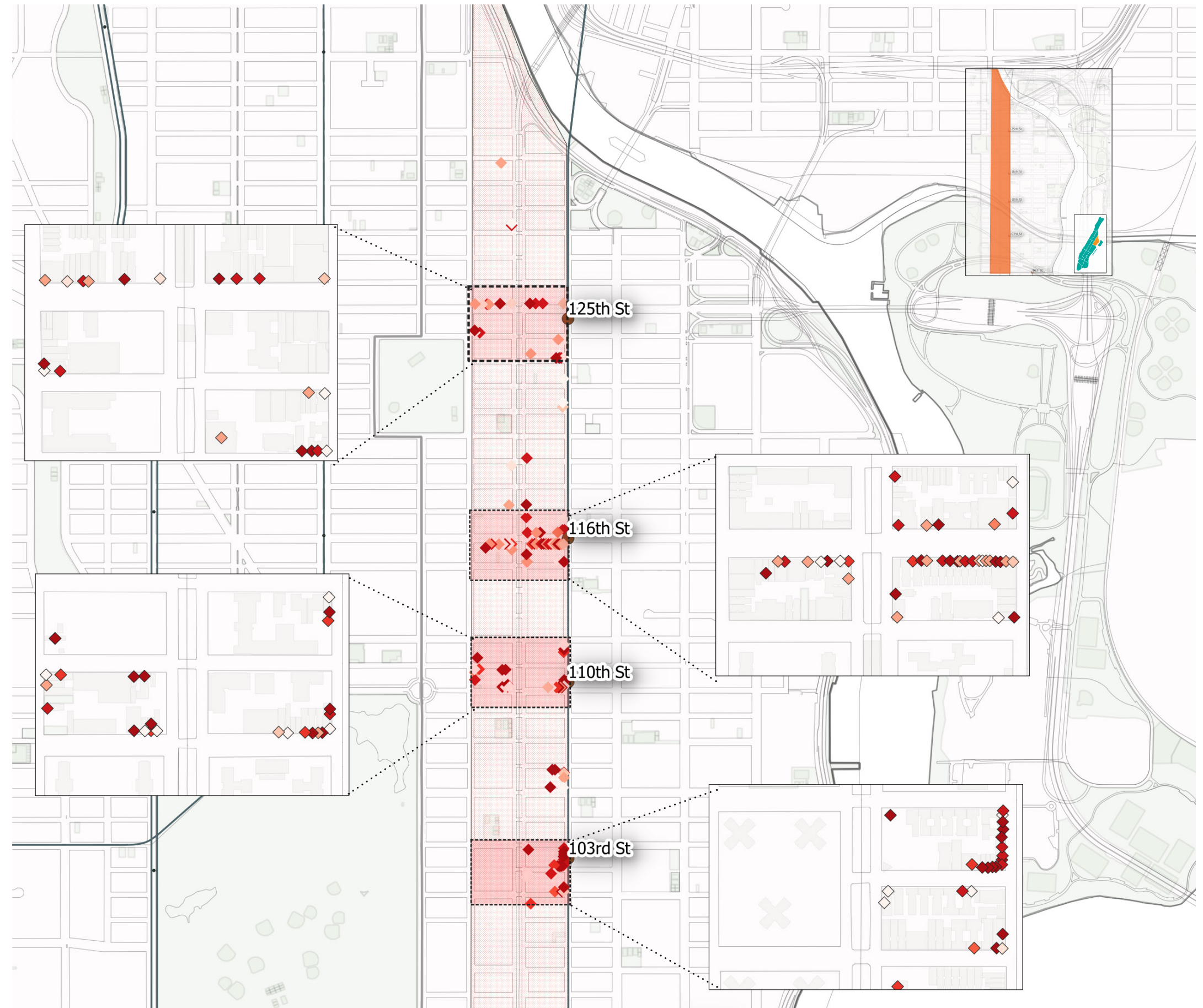
Park Avenue has the highest concentration of community garden



Map 12: East Harlem, Foodscapes

Park Avenue Corridor is not considered a commercial corridor and has very few Food related retail. Especially Full-service restaurants.

- COMMERCIAL**
- ◊ Bodegas & Delis
 - ◊ Coffee Shops
 - ◊ Pharmacies
 - ◊ General Merchandise
 - ◊ Grocery Store
 - ◆ Restaurant
 - ◆ Service Business
 - ◆ Other



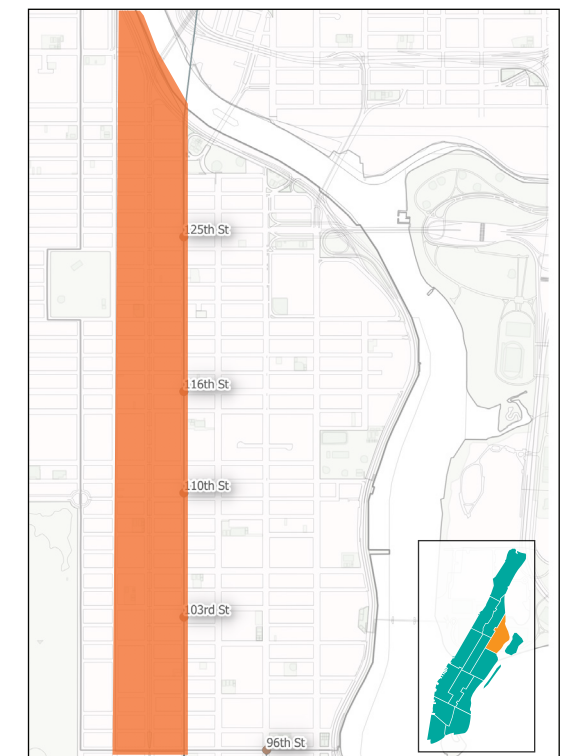
Map 15: Park Avenue corridor store fronts



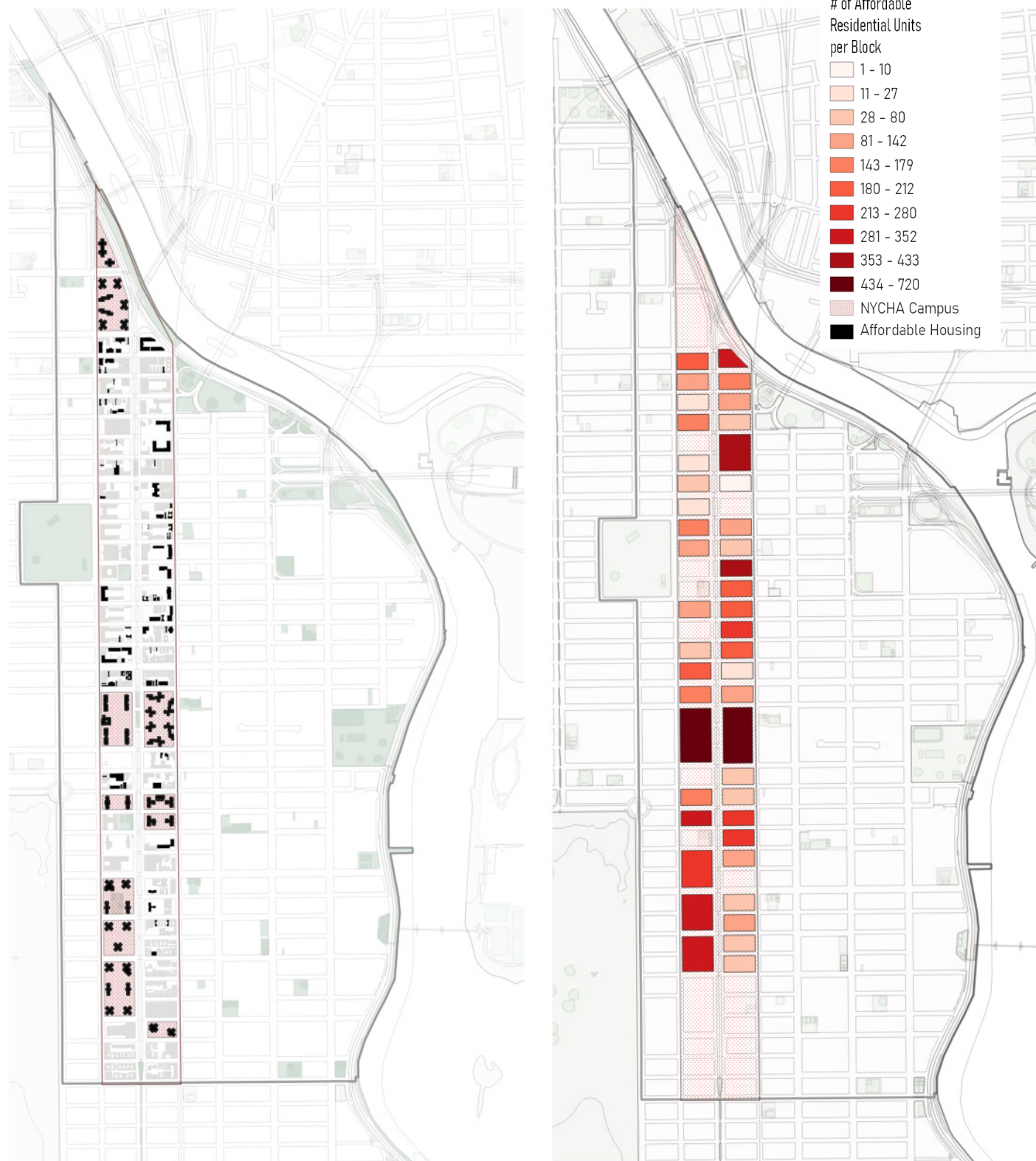
Park Avenue Corridor has the highest concentration of Welfare and Education facilities and most people are employed in the Health sector and Education

Community Facilities

- Child Welfare
- Youth Welfare
- Adult Welfare
- Senior Welfare
- Education
- ◆ Soup Kitchen
- ◆ Human Services
- ◆ Health Services
- △ Community Center
- ▲ Community Gardens
- ▲ Parks
- ▲ Cultural Institution

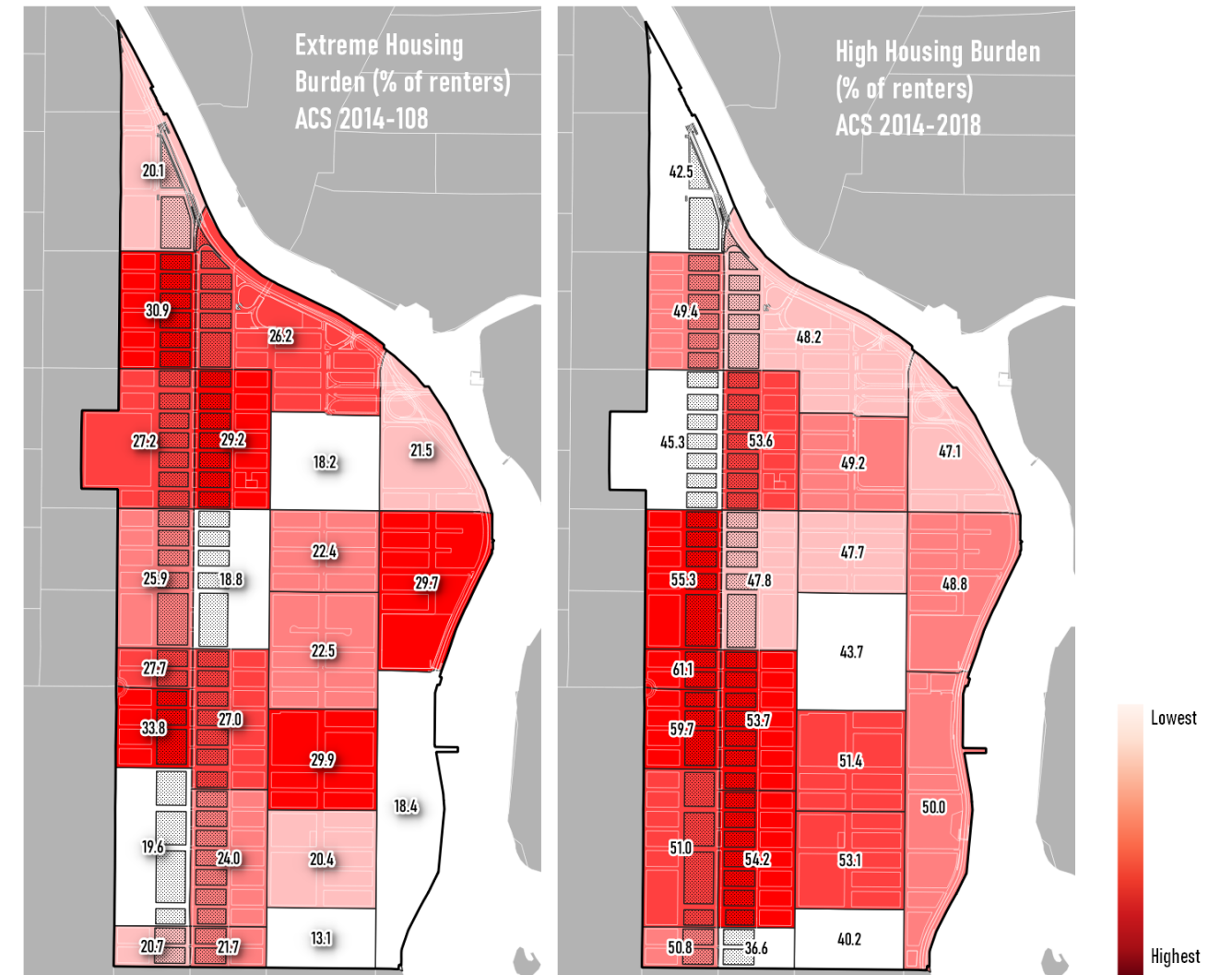


Map 17: East Harlem community facilities



Map 13: Park Avenue corridor NYCHA and affordable housing units

Park Avenue has the highest concentration of NYCHA Campuses in East Harlem, but the highest concentration of High and Extrem housing burden.



Map 14: Park Avenue corridor housing burden per Census Tract

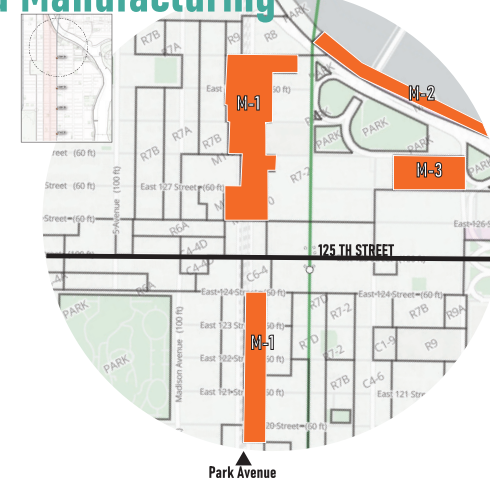
Recommendations

Community Governance

Food systems planning should be driven by the cooperation of public agencies, professional planning think-tanks, community based organizations and anchor institutions. The planning should include the support of food distribution by developing central fresh food markets. Like La Marqueta, that enables community owned retailers to distribute food affordably within the city. Civil society organisations, especially, play a fundamental role in planning food systems by bringing about the expansion of household and community gardens. They propose alternative food sources and distribution that could lead to both safe local food and fair food supply chains. They also support neighbourhood planning that highlights the role of urban agriculture, locally owned retailers and Bodegas in enhancing social cohesion, raising environmental awareness and managing waste.

Food systems are too complex to be covered by a single plan and institution. The best approach should integrate and facilitate an articulation of multi-scalar, sectoral, spatial and strategic planning practices between the various formal and informal food sectors. This strategy allows us to understand how food systems really work, while at the same time avoiding the difficulties of large scale collaboration and consensus building, which can conceal structural injustice. This could be a first step to integrating food into urban planning networks in which spaces are opened up for everyone to participate in creating food systems. While all the food actors have specific agendas, there are planning interrelations between the various actors. Public agencies and food corporations should work to develop shared visions to achieve their mutual benefits.

Food Manufacturing



An anchor for economic development on Park Avenue is food production and light manufacturing (M1), specifically located in the northern part of the Corridor. Park Avenue light manufacturing zoning's proximity to the Hunts Point Terminal Market on the Bronx should be taken advantage of together with the food manufacturing business incubator located at La Marqueta at 114th. Furthermore, the many underutilized lots along the street should facilitate the continued growth of the food manufacturing sector, with the construction of new affordable retail, food hubs and food incubators.

Affordable Retail spaces

To prevent the exclusion of more affordable, community-oriented retail, city governments should adopt innovative policies to support below-market-rate rents for businesses that support community needs but cannot sustain asking rents in an area. Finally, in order to tackle the challenges posed by online commerce head on, city governments would also be wise to establish staff positions for retail planners in their economic development or planning departments. Such roles could help coordinate the various parallel efforts that support street commerce via zoning amendments, urban design guidelines, transportation investments, street upgrading projects, events and festivals, as well as through the development of new policy tools to enable inclusionary retail. An inclusionary affordable commercial space program in zoning would require additional study but could be useful as a limited tool in certain circumstances to close a retail gap and promote equitable economic development.

