

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

DRAFT

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Metro North Plaza

other names/site number _____

name of related multiple property listing N/A

2. Location

street & number 307 East 101st Street, 345 East 101st Street, 310 East 102nd Street

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

not for publication

city or town Manhattan

vicinity

state New York code NY county New York code 061 zip code 10029

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official _____ Date _____

Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register

 determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register

 other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

Metro North Plaza
Name of Property

New York, NY
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
3	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling

EDUCATION/School

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Multiple Dwelling

EDUCATION/School

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Modern Movement

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: BRICK

roof: SYNTHETIC

other:

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

Metro North Plaza, located at 305 East 101st Street, opened in the summer of 1971 as public housing located in the Metro North neighborhood of East Harlem, Manhattan. Metro North Plaza is situated on a 2.29-acre site in Manhattan bounded by East 102nd Street to the north, First Avenue to the east, East 101st Street to the south, and Second Avenue to the west. The complex consists of three tan and brown brick buildings that rise seven, eight, and eleven-stories high. The buildings are sited parallel to the street on three sides of the block, creating an internal hardscaped courtyard. Along Second Avenue there a mixture of commercial and residential buildings that are between one and five stories in height. Buildings No. 1 and 3 are separated by the Church of the Resurrection, which appears to have been constructed c. 2009 as a mixed-use building and replaced an earlier church that had been in the same location. Proceeding clockwise from the southwest corner of the site, Building No. 1 is a seven-story rectangular building parallel to East 101st Street; Building No. 3 is an eight-story "L" shaped building at the corner of East 101st Street and First Avenue; and Building No. 2 is an irregularly shaped eleven-story building parallel to East 102nd Street. Metro North Plaza is sited amid a group of other public housing complexes built over a thirty-year period in this small neighborhood of East Harlem. They include East River Houses (1941) and Wilson Houses (1961) to the east and Gaylord White House (1964) and Washington Houses (1947) to the west. All five complexes have been determined eligible for listing on the National Register. The blocks surrounding the subject property are generally characterized by mid-to-late-twentieth century mid-rise and high-rise residential buildings, some of which are also owned by NYCHA.

The Metro North buildings were designed by architect William Lescaze and the landscape plan was designed by landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg. At its opening, the complex contained 275 apartment units that housed approximately 654 people. A childcare center has been located on the main floor of Building No. 2 since the building's opening in 1971; however, a second childcare center was opened at the first floor on Building 3.

The Metro North Plaza buildings are designed in a functional design aesthetic and are clad in tan and brown brick with little ornamentation, typical of the public housing design employed by NYCHA. The complex features non-historic one-over-one replacement windows, and replacement entrance doors, although the window and door openings remain in the same location. The placement of the buildings wrapping the site perimeter allowed for the maximizing of units counts on the available lot, while also allowing for tenant amenity spaces at the interior of the site. Pathways between buildings and breezeways located at Building No. 2 allow for interior site access. Overall, the site is largely hardscaped with limited site features consisting of concrete sidewalks and small concrete planter beds located outside of the front entrance of Buildings No. 1 and No. 2. Today, the site features a basketball court behind Building No. 3 with hardscaped areas such as concrete sidewalks and walkways with street trees and some interior courtyard trees remaining.

Narrative Description

Setting: Metro North Plaza is located in the southeastern portion of East Harlem, Manhattan, sometimes referred to as Metro North. This area of the neighborhood takes its name from Metropolitan Hospital, which was constructed in 1955 at 1901 First Avenue, which is two blocks directly south of Metro North Plaza. The neighborhood covers roughly thirty blocks, from 96th Street to 106th Street and from 3rd Avenue to the East River. Metro North Plaza is located at the heart of the neighborhood. Metro North Plaza is bounded to the north

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

by East 102nd Street, to the east by First Avenue, to the south by East 101st Street, and to the west by existing mixed-used buildings fronting Second Avenue. Buildings No. 1 and 3 are separated by the Church of the Resurrection. The surrounding streets are arranged in a typical grid-like pattern and are composed primarily of mixed-use residential and commercial buildings. The neighborhood is densely developed with little to no off-street parking. Each block is surrounded by concrete pedestrian sidewalks with mature trees planted throughout.

Site: Metro North Plaza consists of three buildings located on an irregularly shaped lot, approximately 2.29 acres (99,752 sq. ft.) in size. The buildings were placed on the perimeter of the site, parallel to and hugging the surrounding streets, allowing for an internal courtyard for tenants. Building 1 is at the southwest of the site, parallel to 101st street; Building 3 is an L-shaped building at the southeast corner that hugs the corner of 101st Street and First Avenue, and Building 2 is at the north of the site parallel to 102nd Street. The site is urban in nature, displaying simple features, typical of urban public housing. Today the complex has limited site features consisting of concrete sidewalks and small concrete planter beds located outside of the front entrance of Buildings No. 1 and 2, a basketball court located behind Building No. 3 and some interior courtyard trees and street trees remaining.

Exterior: Metro North Plaza consists of three brick slab buildings of different heights. Building No. 1 is a seven-story building on East 101st Street; Building No. 2 is an eleven-story building on East 102nd Street, and Building No. 3 is an eight-story “L” shaped building at the corner of East 101st Street and First Avenue.

In general, the three buildings feature a tan and brown brick exterior laid in a running bond. The roof of each building is flat and features a wide metal cornice with a white metal balustrade. Fenestration consists of replacement one-over-one aluminum windows framed individually or in pairs. Based on available historic drawings, the original windows largely consisted of two-over-two aluminum double-hung windows with some three-light aluminum projected windows. Today, most of the windows are fitted with child safety guards. A penthouse projects above the main roofline at the rear of Buildings 1 and 3.

The main entrance to each of the buildings is sheltered by a flat metal portico. Each entrance also features original ceramic tile surrounding its exterior. The entrances consist of aluminum doors with single-light glazing encased in aluminum-frames with square sidelights and transoms. Based on a review of historic drawings, the configuration of the main entrances appears to be original to the building, though the entrances themselves are non-historic replacement doors.

Interior: The buildings at Metro North Plaza are largely uniform at the interior and will be discussed as a group, with individual building variations noted below. On the interior of each building, the primary public space includes the first-floor lobbies and the corridors at each floor. The lobbies feature a central elevator and two staircases leading to the first-floor corridor on either side. An aluminum door with a single rectangular light encased in an aluminum-frame with rectangular sidelights and transom is located on the main elevation and allows access to the lobby vestibule. An identical door serves as the main point of entry from the vestibule to the main lobby. The lobby remains in its historic configuration and features two central elevators and two sets of scissor staircases leading to each floor. Historic finishes within the lobbies include terrazzo floors and ceramic mosaic tile walls. There are also locations of replacement tile flooring, and the ceilings are painted plaster.

The upper floors are occupied by housing units. The corridors at each floor remain in their historic configuration and volume; some of the finishes within the corridor appear to be replacements. Finishes in the corridors include asphalt tile flooring and painted plaster walls. Doors to apartment units are single-leaf metal doors. The apartment unit layouts appear to be in their historic configuration. Finishes in units include

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

replacement tile flooring, painted plaster walls, and painted popcorn ceilings. The apartment bathrooms have ceramic tile flooring, painted plaster walls, metal medicine cabinets, ceramic sinks, and ceramic tubs. Apartment kitchens have linoleum countertops and wood cabinets. Interior apartment doors are wood.

Vertical access throughout each building is primarily provided by one utilitarian stairway and the primary elevator bank located at center of the building. Generally speaking, the stairs are utilitarian in design, featuring concrete treads and simple metal railings. The elevators, located in the center of each building, consist of two elevator cabs. The cabs feature simple painted metal doors and surrounds. Throughout the building, HVAC/MEP equipment is largely concealed within walls and above ceilings, except in secondary, mechanical spaces. This includes fire and life safety sprinklers and HVAC equipment, which are concealed above the ceilings.

As the complex features three different buildings (Building No.1, 2, and 3), the slight variations between each building are discussed in more detail below.

Building No. 1

Building No. 1 is a seven-story rectangular plan building that fronts East 101st Street. The façade, or south elevation, is fifteen bays wide with a centrally located entrance on the first story. The exterior of the elevation is largely covered in brown brick, but features four, one-bay projections covered in tan brick. The westernmost bay on the south elevation features an additional metal door that allows access to the former perambulator room. A brick and concrete ramp is located along the eastern half of the elevation and allows access to the main entrance. The west and east elevations are four bays wide and feature the same materiality as the south elevation. The rear, north elevation is fourteen bays wide and faces the interior courtyard. The two central bays form a central tower with a two-story penthouse that projects above the rest of the roofline and contains vertical access to the building (stairway and elevators). The central tower is blind other than an emergency exit on the first floor and four individually framed windows on the penthouse.

At the interior, the general floorplan of Building No. 1 consists of a short, narrow corridor wrapped by rooms with vertical access at the center of the corridor on the north side. The first floor includes the main lobby, two utility rooms (former perambulator room), and four apartment units on either side of the lobby. The basement/cellar level is utilitarian in nature and features a trash room, pump room, and tenant storage spaces. The upper floors are occupied primarily by a mix of four- and five-bedroom apartments. Vertical access throughout the building is primarily provided by a set of utilitarian scissor stairs and the primary elevator bank located at the center-rear of the building.

Building No. 2

Building No. 2 is an eleven-story rectangular plan building that fronts East 102nd Street. A one-story childcare center and two-story boiler annex, constructed ca. 2019, are located off of the building's west elevation. The one-story childcare center features the same tan and brown brick as Building 2 and is original to the complex. The façade, or north elevation, fronts East 102nd Street and is sixteen bays wide. The main entrance is centrally located on the first story. The elevation is characterized by alternating bays of tan and brown brick with the tan brick bays projecting from the main elevation. The centrally located main entrance is two bays wide and the door assembly projects slightly from the rest of the entrance and is flanked on either side by rectangular sidelights. An additional metal door that allows access to the utility space (formerly the perambulator room) is located east of the main door.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

The first story features two-bay-wide breezeways separated by square columns clad in brick to the east and west of the central entrance. The breezeways allow access to the rear of the building. The one-story childcare center and two-story boiler annex are located on the westernmost end of the elevation. The childcare center lacks fenestration at the north elevation and the ca. 2019 boiler annex features a pair of metal doors that serve as a service entrance.

The west and east elevations are four bays wide and feature the same materiality as the south elevation. The rear, south elevation is eighteen bays wide and faces the interior courtyard. A centrally located penthouse projects from the roof. The penthouse lacks fenestration.

At the interior, the general floorplan of Building No. 2 consists of a long, narrow corridor wrapped by rooms. Vertical access is located at the center of the corridor with two stairways located on the north side and two elevators on the south side. The first floor includes three sections. The east and west sections are connected to the central section via an open breezeway. The central section features the main lobby with utility rooms, trash room, perambulator room, and tenant storage space located on either side of the lobby. The east section features storage space and a public restroom. The west section features the childcare center and boiler room. The childcare center features several playrooms, a kitchen and office spaces. The basement/cellar level is utilitarian in nature and features utility rooms and pipe access space. The upper floors are occupied primarily by a mix of one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments. Vertical access throughout the building is primarily provided by two sets of utilitarian scissor stairs and the primary elevator bank located at the center of the building.

Building No. 3

Building No. 3 is an eight-story L-shaped building at the corner of East 101st Street and 1st Avenue. The façade, or south elevation faces East 101st Street and is twelve bays wide with an entrance located east of center on the first story. The elevation is characterized by alternating bays of tan and brown brick with the tan brick bays projecting from the main elevation. The west and east elevations are thirteen and twelve bays wide, respectively, and share the same materiality as the south elevation. A historic ramp allowing access to a below-grade tenant storage room is located along the east elevation. The rear, north, elevation is twelve bays wide and faces the interior courtyard.

At the interior, the general floorplan of Building No. 3 consists of a narrow L-shaped corridor wrapped by rooms with vertical access at the center of the corridor. The first floor includes the main lobby, apartment units, and daycare space located along the east side of the building in what were formerly apartment units and the perambulator room. Finishes within the daycare space include linoleum tile flooring, painted plaster walls, and painted popcorn ceilings. The basement/cellar level is utilitarian in nature and features a trash room and tenant storage space. The upper floors are occupied primarily by a mix of one-, two-, three-, and four-bedroom apartments. Vertical access throughout the building is primarily provided by a set of utilitarian scissor stairs and the primary elevator bank located at the center of the building.

Alterations: The building has not undergone any significant changes to character-defining features since it was constructed in 1971. Permits and drawings identifying the dates of alterations have not been found; therefore, additional research needs to be undertaken to determine the exact dates or general date ranges of the alterations. Based on available historic documentation, the windows were originally aluminum and steel windows in multiple operating configurations including double-hung and projected/awning. These windows have been replaced throughout with one-over-one aluminum windows. Original entrances and door assemblies appear to remain intact, while entrance doors themselves have been replaced. The brick exterior has received routine

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

maintenance, including selective repair and brick replacement. As tenants moved in and out, apartment units have received minor finish alterations including changes to flooring, bathroom fixtures, and appliances.

Courtyard

Based on available historic documentation, the original plan was simple and called for trees to be planted along all sides of the buildings, both along the street and in the interior courtyard created by the three buildings. A central plaza was located between Building No. 1 and the childcare center in Building No. 2. An additional recreation area was located behind Building No. 3. Today the two sections feature a basketball court and a playground.

Integrity: Metro North Plaza retains sufficient integrity to convey its historic significance as a government-funded public housing complex in East Harlem that reflects 1960s-70s era issues in providing affordable housing in this neighborhood of New York City. The building is in its original location and retains its setting within a heavily developed neighborhood with a mix of mid- and high-rise commercial and residential buildings. The buildings have remained in continual use as public housing since its construction in 1971. As public housing, the complex was designed with minimal exterior ornamentation that consisted of a simple brick veneer atop CMU block structure. Although the complex has undergone renovations required by its continuous use as housing and community space, such as window and door replacement, and updated appliances and finishes in units, it remains largely as it did upon opening. At the exterior, the buildings retain their original massing, form, and exterior covering. Most original door and door assemblies remain intact; although windows have been replaced, they remain in their original locations. Original landscaping plans called for trees to be planted along the street and the interior courtyard. These plans have been largely retained, although some trees in the courtyard are no longer extant. At the interior, the buildings retain their original layouts although some original finishes have been replaced. The original plans for the children's center called for it to be connected to the rest of Building No. 2 by an open breezeway. Today, the building is still in use as the Union Washington Day Care Center. Overall, Metro North Plaza retains a sufficient degree of integrity to the period of significance.

Metro North Plaza
Name of Property

New York, NY
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1971-1973

Significant Dates

1971

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

William Lescaze, Architect

M. Paul Friedberg, Landscape Architect

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance is based on the dates of construction of the housing complex, from 1971 to 1973. The period of significance conveys the building's construction and use as public housing, as well as its association with the Metro North Citizens' Committee.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

N/A

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

(Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Metro North Plaza, a public housing project in East Harlem, is significant under criterion A in the areas of politics/government and social history as one of several early twentieth century public housing projects in Harlem developed by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) in collaboration with local community groups in an attempt to fulfill the needs of the neighborhood residents. During the 1930s and 1940s, Harlem became seriously overcrowded as the population had tripled since 1920 and the majority of residents lived in overcrowded and poorly maintained tenement buildings. As local civic leaders demanded that the city take action to improve the neighborhood conditions, NYCHA designated East Harlem a “high-density slum neighborhood,” making it one of the authority’s main focuses in the post-war era. Largely relying on the Title 1 program under the US Housing Act of 1949, by 1960, Harlem had the largest concentration of public housing in the country, with an estimated 60,000 people living in thirteen NYCHA complexes. However, the the growing concentration of buildings and units also brought growing criticism in Harlem, particularly from residents and local community groups, which recognized the need for new dwellings but found NYCHA’s replacement housing inadequate to deal with the social issues resulting from the high-rise complexes and their density within the neighborhood. In response, the city began to seek input from local citizens and groups. In this case, NYCHA partnered with the local community organization Metro North Citizens’ Committee (MNCC), led by the Reverend Norman Eddy, which played an integral role in the mid-twentieth-century efforts to improve living conditions in East Harlem. Beginning in 1963, the MNCC held meetings to encourage the revitalization of this area of Harlem, later meeting with Mayor Robert F. Wagner to discuss the need for redevelopment and working with NYCHA and its architect to discuss the buildings and site. Over the course of almost a decade, NYCHA and MNCC, along with advisors from the mayor’s Housing Executive Committee, created a plan for the redevelopment of the Metro North neighborhood. First envisioned by community architects Whittlesey and Conklin as six-story public housing, Metro North Plaza was ultimately designed by William Lescaze, a prolific architect known for his efforts to create ethical urban living conditions, as three towers of different heights enclosing a courtyard designed by landscape architect M. Paul Friedberg. Even after Lescaze received the commission, however, the MNCC continued to pressure NYCHA to incorporate its concerns into the final design, and a number of these were accommodated. Metro North Plaza is a good example of public housing built in this period in which NYCHA tried to reconcile various priorities and needs, finding itself moderately successful. It also helps to document the massive amount of public housing built in East Harlem in the post-war period, a campaign that had a profound effect on the physical and social character of the neighborhood. The period of significance is based on the dates of construction, 1971-1973.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

Narrative Statement of Significance

Metro North Neighborhood

Metro North Plaza is located in an area of East Harlem in Manhattan known locally as the Metro North Community. The neighborhood takes its name from Metropolitan Hospital, which constructed a new location in 1955 at 1901 First Avenue. The neighborhood covers roughly thirty blocks from 96th Street to 106th Street and from 3rd Avenue to the East River. Metro North Plaza is located at the heart of the neighborhood.¹ Over the years, the neighborhood has been home to a number of diverse communities, including Irish, Germans, Russian Jews, Italians, Blacks, and Puerto Ricans.²

The area known as Metro North, remained largely rural and undeveloped until the mid-to-late nineteenth century when the completion of elevated transit and subway lines allowed for more residential development in the area – specifically in the form of apartments and brownstones. Many of these residential developments were occupied by the city’s growing immigrant population. Prior to the construction of apartments and brownstones, many Irish immigrants lived in simple frame buildings in East Harlem, drawn in to work on the city building projects of the mid-nineteenth century.³ By the 1870s, land in this area had become desirable attracting more prominent immigrants (largely Irish and German) who managed to acquire enough wealth to move out of the crowded neighborhoods of lower Manhattan. This led to a surge in housing development – specifically in the form of brownstones and flats.⁴ By 1879, the area surrounding the future site of Metro North Plaza was platted, but lots remained largely unimproved.⁵ The lots along 1st and 2nd avenues and 102nd Street featured lots improved with brick dwellings under five stories. The east portion of the block along 101st Street remained largely undeveloped. By 1911, the block was completely developed. The surrounding neighborhood similarly followed suit and was fairly densely developed by that time with few vacant lots.

In the 1890s, developers changed tactics, moving away from brownstones and instead focused on constructing four- and five-story brick tenement houses in order to address the need for affordable housing for New York’s rapidly growing immigrant population.⁶ By the early 1900s, the southern area of East Harlem, including the area surrounding the future site of Metro North Plaza, became a densely developed neighborhood largely characterized by brick tenement houses intended for poor immigrant populations.⁷ In the following decades, the neighborhood suffered from issues surrounding sanitation and quality of living created by poor building design, deficient infrastructure, and inadequate public services.⁸ In the early twentieth century, multiple ethnic enclaves were located in the neighborhood including: Jewish Harlem located west of Lexington Avenue, Black Harlem located on the northwest side of the neighborhood, and Italian Harlem, located east of Third Avenue. According to one local source, “This was Fiorello LaGuardia’s congressional district, and the largest Italian neighborhood

¹ *Hearings Before the National Commission on Urban Problems*. United States: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968. p. 51

² Marissa Marvelli, “East Harlem South / El Barrio: Reconnaissance-Level Historic Resource Survey,” Prepared for Ascendent Neighborhood Development Corporation and Landmark East Harlem, July 2021-February 2022, 5.

³ Marvelli, 31.

⁴ Marvelli, 31-32.

⁵ Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, "Plate 23:" New York Public Library Digital Collections, 1879, Accessed February 17, 2023, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/96d64220-0b66-0132-db4f-58d385a7bbd0>

⁶ Marvelli, 33.

⁷ Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, "Plate 32: Bounded by E. 108th Street, East River, E. 101st Street, Second Avenue, E. 97th Street and (Central Park) Fifth Avenue," New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1897. Accessed February 17, 2023; Marvelli, “East Harlem South Survey,” 34.

⁸ Marvelli, 5.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

in the United States—far larger than the historic Italian settlement on the Lower East Side known as Little Italy.”⁹

After the end of World War I, large portions of the Jewish population left East Harlem for more affluent areas, including portions of the Bronx. After the departure of the Jewish population, Italian Harlem expanded west into what had been known as Jewish Harlem. Around the same time, large populations of Blacks and Puerto Ricans migrated to the neighborhood: Blacks migrating from the southern United States in what became known as the Great Migration, and Puerto Ricans migrating from Puerto Rico after being forced off their land by large U.S. sugar and coffee monopolies.¹⁰ As one researcher describes it, “The overcrowding of Harlem as a result of the Great Migration and housing segregation had by the 1930s become a serious and distinct social issue...population had exploded by 83,000 in 1920 to 204,000 in 1934.”¹¹

By the 1930s, conditions in East Harlem had worsened due to the Depression. Situations of overcrowding and lack of building maintenance became even more widespread.¹² Even after the rest of the country emerged from the Depression, living conditions in the area did not improve. Landlords left buildings to deteriorate and crumble and wealthier white families left East Harlem for more affluent areas, increasing the inherent segregation and racism that was visible in Harlem. By the post-war era, living conditions became so poor that East Harlem was one of the main targets for large urban renewal developments. Local civic leaders, including state representatives, called on the city government to do something about the conditions in East Harlem, which coincided with plans set in motion by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA).¹³

In 1934, New York City became the first city in the United States to establish a local public housing authority: the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). The early years of NYCHA’s history focused on the development of low-rise housing developments, such as Harlem River Houses, some designed with federal programs and funding, such as the PWA. In the early 1940s, under Chairman Swope, NYCHA announced a program that would focus on “high density slum neighborhoods,” which coincided with the desire of Robert Moses and other city planners for slum clearance for much of Manhattan’s existing tenements. By 1943, NYCHA decided to focus on these tenement districts, including the Lower East Side, Brownsville, and East Harlem. According to one researcher, NYCHA’s goal was for ‘New York’s high-density slums (to) be replaced by high-rise superblocks.’¹⁴

The neighborhood surrounding the future site of Metro North Plaza reflected this trend. Redevelopment in the area began with the eleven-story East River Houses (completed in 1941), located just one block northeast of the future site of Metro North Plaza.¹⁵ According to historian Richard Plunz, in his book *A History of Housing in New York City*, “The high-rise, government-subsidized precedent set by East River Houses remained the exclusive model for housing development in East Harlem.”¹⁶ In 1946, the *New York Times* predicted that the “large-scale public and private housing developments...[would] eradicate the slum areas and transform Harlem into one of the most attractive neighborhoods of the city.”¹⁷

⁹ Nathan Glazer, “Letter from East Harlem,” *City Journal*, Autumn 1991, <https://www.city-journal.org/article/letter-from-east-harlem>

¹⁰ Marvelli, 40.

¹¹ Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked* (Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 32.

¹² Marvelli, 41.

¹³ Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 143.

¹⁴ Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 129.

¹⁵ Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City*, Rev. edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 245.

¹⁶ Plunz, 246.

¹⁷ Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 128.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

By 1957, NYCHA alone had cleared over 137 acres of “slums” in East Harlem alone, destroying much of the inherent fabric of the neighborhood, shifting populations, and precipitating the loss of over 2,000 stores for residents.¹⁸ What followed was the repeated use of the NYCHA version of the “Tower in the Park” model, which focused on the use of tall red-brick towers with minimal ornamentation set within some sort of greenspace, although on the urban island of Manhattan, the existing conditions often led to minimal greenspace and more hardscaping. These towers would house the greatest number of people, as it was required under the “slum clearance” system to provide housing for all those displaced under the program. Thus East Harlem turned from a neighborhood of early twentieth century tenements to a “linked series of superblocs create[ing] one of the largest concentrations of public housing in the country.”¹⁹

Criterion A: Politics/Government, Social History, Community Planning and Development

Metro North Association, Metro North Citizens’ Committee and NYCHA

In the post-war era, NYCHA had designated much of East Harlem, including the Metro North neighborhood, for slum clearance and public housing development, as the area featured aging tenements, was subject to redlining, and one of the streets in the neighborhood (East 100th Street) was named by the media as “the worst block” by contemporary newspapers. However, as NYCHA focused on development in East Harlem, clearing over a hundred acres of existing buildings and displacing thousands of residents, there was growing criticism in Harlem, particularly from residents and local community groups, who recognized the need for new dwellings but found NYCHA replacement housing inadequate with social issues resulting from the high-rise complexes and their density within the neighborhood. In 1962, area residents and activists organized the Metro North Association (MNA) to try and create their own vision for what the Metro North neighborhood redevelopment could entail, rather than just another NYCHA superbloc. One of MNA’s subcommittees, the Metro North Citizens’ Committee (MNCC), played an integral part in the development of the Metro North Plaza. MNCC held its first meeting in December 1963.²⁰

Soon after its founding, MNCC hired the architecture firm Whittlesey and Conklin to serve as community architects and create a redevelopment plan for the Metro North neighborhood. Whittlesey and Conklin shared a vision with the Metro North community members. Whittlesey and Conklin brought with them the guiding principles that were integral to their former firm, Mayer, Whittlesey, and Glass, and neighborhood revitalization became the overall inspiration and vision for the entire project. Whittlesey and Conklin designed a site-specific rehabilitation plan that employed spot demolition, vest-pocket parks, and selective building to open up the tenement blocks without completely demolishing and rebuilding them. Whittlesey and Conklin’s design was an “explicit attempt to preserve the social and built infrastructure of the tenement streetscape while upgrading the housing stock and providing new amenities.”²¹

In June of 1964, MNA met with New York City Mayor Robert F. Wagner and other officials to discuss the need for redevelopment in the Metro North neighborhood. MNA presented the mayor with plans for the Metro North neighborhood that he generally favored. During the meeting, Mayor Wagner also recognized the MNA as the group officially representing the Metro North neighborhood. In September 1964, the mayor’s Housing

¹⁸ Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 146.

¹⁹ Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 143.

²⁰ Rev. Eddy to NYCHA, April 7, 1966, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

²¹ Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2010), 339.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

Executive Committee met with MNA and held a conference to layout concrete plans for the neighborhood, specifically for those living at 322 East 100th Street. That same month, five buildings located on the north side of East 101st Street were declared unfit for human habitation by the Department of Buildings. In October, these five buildings were evacuated through a joint effort of the Department of Relocation and MNCC. This event occurred in advance of the immediate need to clear land for the future Metro North Plaza complex. On October 9, 1964, the MNA again met with the mayor's Housing Executive Committee to discuss plans for the neighborhood.²²

In March of 1965, MNA held a Metro North Conference. Available archival materials indicate that the local community was plagued by questions and concerns over any type of proposed redevelopment in the area. A letter from the Reverend Eddy, the head of MNCC, to General E.J. McGrew, who oversaw the Design Department at NYCHA, indicated that NYCHA staff (including McGrew) were present at that conference. In the correspondence, Eddy stated that McGrew's statement at the conference "gave the people exactly the information they wanted" and that his speech helped quell fears on the proposed housing development and its design.²³ The letter also mentions that the "good representation of City officials impressed the members of the neighborhood." Eddy said, "It is going to make our work here much easier."²⁴ Interestingly, Mayor Wagner's office published a press release earlier in 1965, prior to the conference, announcing that that a new six-story public housing complex was planned for the block between East 101st and East 102nd Streets west of First Avenue (the future site of Metro North Plaza) and that redevelopment of the Metro North neighborhood was the "first in a series of actions to be taken by a number of City Agencies in cooperation with community leaders."²⁵ This may have prompted or prodded NYCHA to become more involved in communication and community outreach with the MNCC and other local groups.

After their initial meetings with NYCHA, MNCC hoped to secure its community architects, Whittlesey and Conklin, as the architects for this new public housing project. Though research did not specifically uncover why the organization preferred Whittlesey and Conklin, it is presumed that it was a result of their prior collaboration in the plan design. By May of 1965, the MNA had obtained 967 tenant signatures in favor of this appointment. Despite these local efforts, NYCHA appointed well-known Modern architect William Lescaze as architect for the project in 1965. MNCC leader, the Reverend Eddy, stated that although the committee was disappointed that the tenants' petition was overridden, they were happy with the choice of William Lescaze, given his experience with designing other public housing complexes.²⁶ In November 1965, Lescaze expanded the official project team when he personally chose A.A. Abdalian as the structural engineer, Sidney Barbenel as the mechanical engineer, and M. Paul Friedberg & Associates as the landscape architect.²⁷

According to available archival correspondence, Whittlesey and Conklin were considered for the job of project architect; however, NYCHA staff had concerns over the speed with which they could complete the design and the height of the building itself. NYCHA was considering an eight-story tower of fireproof construction, while Whittlesey and Conklin were focused on a six-story tower of non-fireproof construction. An internal memorandum indicates that NYCHA's experience with Whittlesey and Conklin on the recently completed Gaylord White Houses had not been wholly positive and that there were concerns that the architects were

²² Eddy to NYCHA, April 7, 1966, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

²³ Eddy to NYCHA, April 7, 1966, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

²⁴ Eddy to NYCHA, April 7, 1966, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

²⁵ Metro North Plaza Houses Press Release, 1965, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

²⁶ Eddy to NYCHA, April 7, 1966, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

²⁷ NYCHA to William Lescaze, December 28, 1965, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

inefficient and expensive, both of which were potential issues for the federally-funded Metro North project. Lescaze, on the other hand, had proven an extensive knowledge of apartment design and had previously designed buildings for NYCHA on time and within budget.²⁸

Once Lescaze was appointed, the MNCC wasted no time asking for a meeting with the architect to thoroughly familiarize Lescaze with the Metro North neighborhood, its residents, and the group's master plan for the neighborhood. They stressed to NYCHA that they had a special committee working on both planning and relocation and were prepared to cooperate with NYCHA and Lescaze, but just wanted to be part of the conversation.²⁹ NYCHA responded by promising to set up a meeting prior to any design approvals.³⁰

What followed over the next few years was essentially the creation of two separate projects designed in parallel, one by NYCHA and its appointed architect, Lescaze, and the other by MNCC and its preferred architects, Whittlesey and Conklin. While Lescaze was the official architect for Metro North Plaza, Conklin continued to work with the Reverend Eddy and the MNCC to refine the proposed development, continuously pushing Lescaze and NYCHA to consider his firm's ideas.

In 1968, the Reverend Eddy represented MNCC at the National Commission on Urban Problems. Eddy stated that at the time, approximately half of the 25,000 neighborhood residents lived in low-income public housing and the rest lived in tenements built between 1880 and 1910. He went on to speak about the Metro North Community and the efforts made by the committee. According to Eddy, the Metro North Community was "determined to rebuild itself physically and spiritually under its own leadership with its own plans, developing its own power to get them executed."³¹

During the conference, Eddy laid out the existing public housing located in the community, including public housing like the East River Houses (completed in 1941), George Washington Houses (completed in 1956), the Wilson Houses (completed in 1961), and the Gaylord White Houses (completed in 1964 as dedicated senior housing). The reverend then went on to discuss proposed and in-process housing projects. He stated that in addition to rehabilitation work slated for existing housing, public housing in the area was to be small and experimental. A new, small, federally funded public housing project planned by Metro North residents was underway and would consist of a 2.5-acre site with three buildings planned to fit into the existing neighborhood. The buildings would contain 275 units and be seven, eight, and eleven stories tall.³² The project described in the report was Metro North Plaza. According to Eddy, the project was planned by MNCC and its community architects, Whittlesey and Conklin, in coordination with NYCHA and the NYCHA appointed architect, William Lescaze.³³

Metro North Redevelopment Plans and the Design for Metro North Plaza

What eventually became NYCHA's Metro North Plaza was first conceived as part of a larger idea to revitalize the Metro North neighborhood as a whole. This neighborhood revitalization was conceptualized in a large

²⁸ Memo, E.J. McGrew Jr, NYCHA, March 1965, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023; Letter NYCHA to Robert F. Wagner, June 3, 1965, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

²⁹ Eddy to NYCHA, January 21, 1966, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

³⁰ NYCHA to Eddy, January 24, 1966, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

³¹ *Hearings Before the National Commission on Urban Problems*, United States: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968. p. 51

³² *Hearings Before the National Commission*, 53.

³³ *Hearings Before the National Commission*, 53, 61.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

redevelopment plan created by MNCC's community architects Whittlesey and Conklin. The original Metro North redevelopment plan consisted of site-specific rehabilitation using spot demolition, selective building, and the creation of vest-pocket parks. The goal was to upgrade housing and create new amenities while preserving the social and built infrastructure created by the earlier tenement housing. The plan included redevelopment in a seven-block area bounded by Second Avenue, East 104th Street, FDR Drive, and East 99th Street.³⁴



7.13. Proposed Metro North Redevelopment, by Whittlesey and Conklin, October 1965. In keeping with the various critiques of urban renewal and modernist urbanism leveled by the mid-1960s, the Metro North plan offered a more neighborhood-friendly design, including spot demolition and rehabilitation, vest-pocket parks, and no street closures. Due to financial problems, the entire eastern portion was never built. Only the block by the river saw the light of day. Union Settlement Association Records, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

Proposed Metro North Redevelopment, by Whittlesey and Conklin, October 1965³⁵

By 1966, Whittlesey and Conklin reduced their plan to a four-block area bounded by Second Avenue, East 102nd Street, FDR Drive, and East 100th Street. It would feature a six-story public housing building, non-public housing, a new school (P.S. 50), housing along the riverfront, a narcotics rehabilitation center, recreation and play areas, and a public plaza named "Metro Plaza."³⁶

³⁴ Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 339.

³⁵ Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 341.

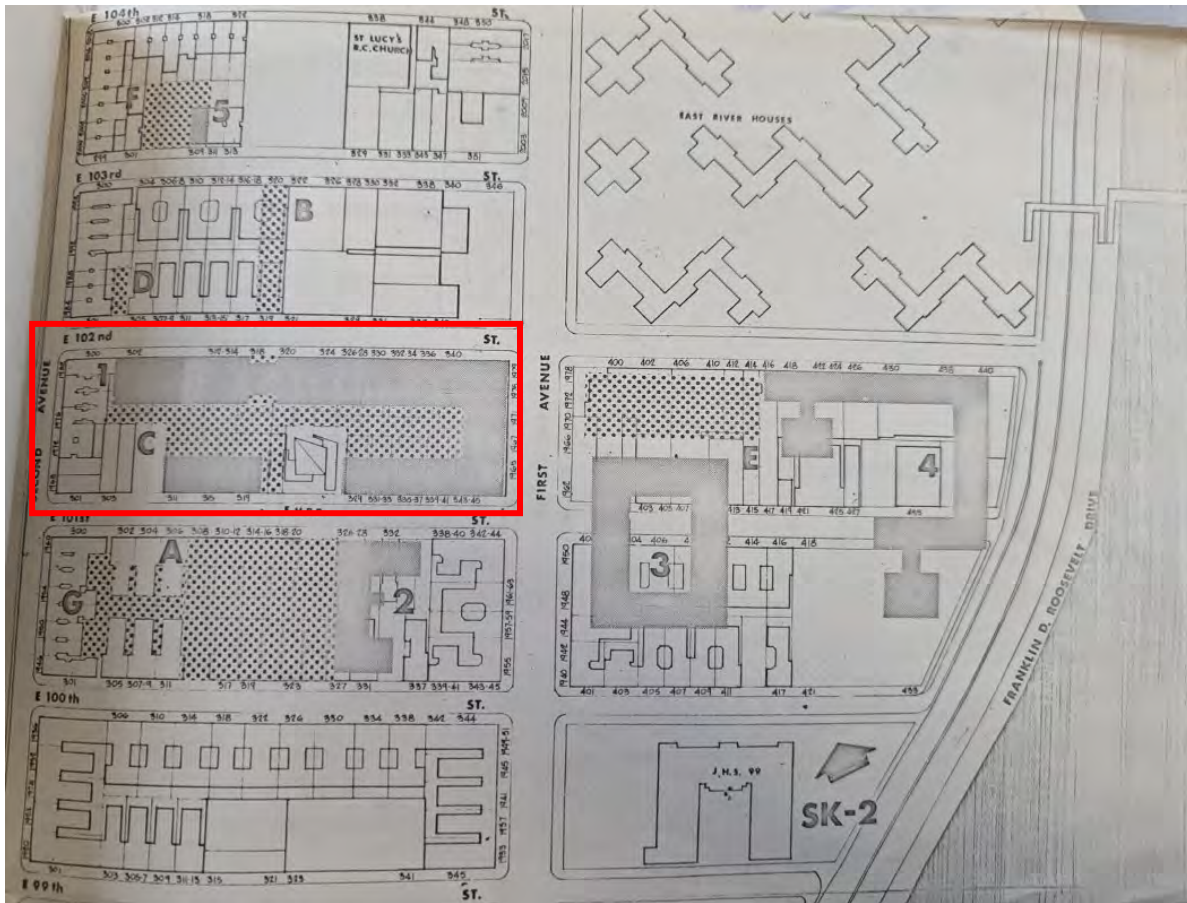
³⁶ Whittlesey & Conklin, "Metro North Recreational Plan," 1966, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State



Updated Metro North Redevelopment Proposal, by Whittlesey and Conklin, October 1966³⁷

However, the buildings proposed for rehabilitation were outside of the area designated by NYCHA as the “Urban Renewal Area,” which only included specific lots between 101st and 102nd Streets. The urban renewal area had been submitted to and approved by HUD in 1966, when the city was given formal permission to undertake the planning stages for the proposed redevelopment, as well as acquisition, relocation, and site clearance.³⁸ The fact that a smaller area was designated may be a result of the numerous other public housing sites already constructed within this part of East Harlem, including East River Houses, the Wilson Houses, Gaylord White, and others, which were all built prior to Metro North.

³⁷ Whittlesey & Conklin, “Metro North Recreational Plan.”

³⁸ Charles Horan, Regional Director of Urban Renewal at HUD, May 24, 1965.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

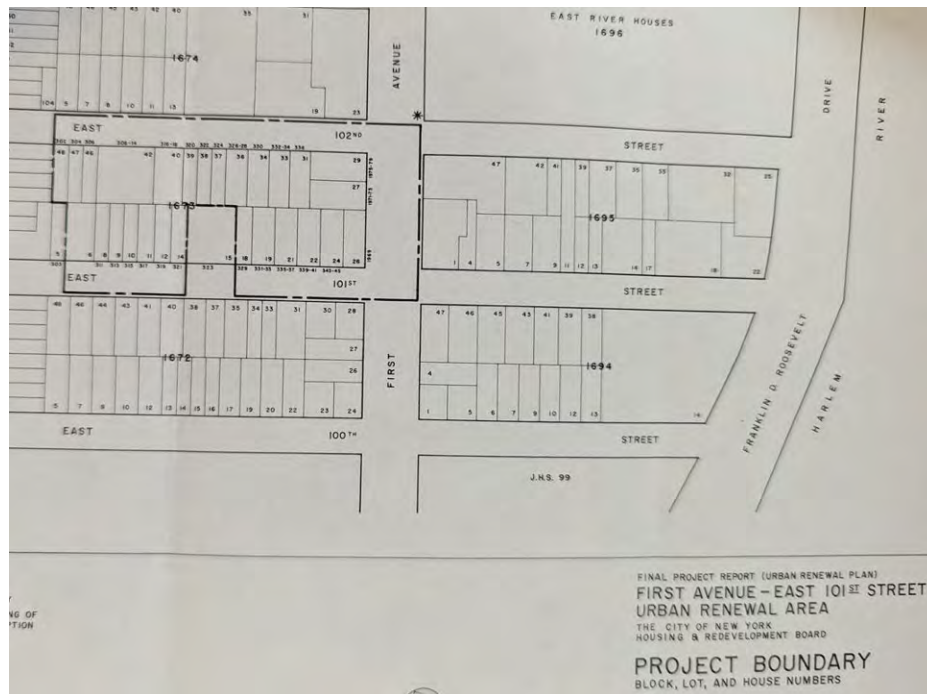


Image showing Urban Renewal Area as defined by NYCHA in 1966

According to the Rev. Eddy, at the 1968 National Commission on Urban Problems, the plan had somewhat changed and could be divided into four main categories: rehabilitation of existing tenements, construction of new public housing, new middle-income housing, and other construction including churches, parks, and other community resources.³⁹

Throughout the design process, Lescaze, NYCHA, and MNCC all had different ideas of how Metro North Plaza should look and specifically about the height of the buildings. In attempting to work with the plan originally provided by the MNCC and Conklin, NYCHA wanted to increase the proposed height of the buildings from six-story to eight-story towers, while Lescaze thought that one or two of the towers should be taller. According to Lescaze, this would necessitate fewer piles than the low buildings and be more economical.⁴⁰ However, in November 1965, NYCHA directed Lescaze not to consider proposing buildings over eight stories tall.⁴¹

Available archival documentation indicates that both MNCC and NYCHA were concerned about the amount of daylight in the courtyards, as well as the number of potential units that could be provided, and the amount of outdoor space that would be available on the lots. Correspondence between the MNCC, NYCHA, and Conklin indicates that Eddy met with Conklin several times during 1965, and both Eddy and McGrew had concerns with Conklin's lower-rise building design. Archival documents dating to March of 1965 include suggestions from NYCHA to Conklin that he explore the potential for taller buildings, one document noting that the development could better maximize space with an eight-story building of approximately the same height, as that would reduce coverage of the plot from 43 to 32 percent, retaining the same number of units.⁴²

³⁹ *Hearings Before the National Commission*, 53.

⁴⁰ Lescaze to NYCHA, November 3, 1965, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

⁴¹ NYCHA to Lescaze, November 15, 1965, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

⁴² Memo, E.J. McGrew Jr, NYCHA, March 1965, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

Here again, it is important to note that each of the planning entities, NYCHA and MNCC, were pursuing their own design track for the Metro North development. For example, the MNCC and Conklin were still focused on the Whittlesey and Conklin concept of six-story public housing because it would best fit into the existing tenement streetscape, and in April 1966, a new plan for six-story public housing was submitted to Lescaze and NYCHA for their review.⁴³ At the same time, in March 1966, Lescaze submitted three different plans for NYCHA to review: one involving two eight-story buildings and one ten-story building, one involving two sixteen-story buildings, and one consisting of two eleven-story buildings with a small one-story building to be used for on-site tenant amenities.⁴⁴

However, it is also important to note that the two entities and their associated architects communicated frequently, as is evidenced by the available archival correspondence. There are letters from NYCHA to Conklin regarding the proposed six-story buildings, asking if they could be taller to allow for additional units, as well as letters from NYCHA to the Reverend Eddy in 1966 reassuring him and the MNCC that the design had not yet been finalized for Metro North, and that a subcommittee consisting of the MNCC, Lescaze, and McGrew, the NYCHA Director of Design, would meet at NYCHA offices to discuss the proposed development. NYCHA also reached out to the Reverend Eddy to get his support on certain design items, as evidenced by one letter from McGrew in November of 1966 asking for the MNCC's support regarding the proposed day care center.

During the planning process, MNCC worked with NYCHA to effectively speed up the demolition of derelict buildings and the redevelopment of the larger neighborhood. On December 7, 1965, the tenants of 1969 First Avenue, one of the buildings located on the future site of Metro North Plaza, asked the Department of Buildings to place a vacate order on their building. Despite efforts by tenants to get help, conditions did not improve. On March 3, 1966, tenants appealed to MNCC asking for help in obtaining a vacate order. On March 9th, MNCC contacted the Department of Buildings in hopes of expediting the process. According to the letter, enforcing a vacate order and providing tenants with relocation benefits would not only help improve the lives of those living in the building, but it would also help expedite plans for the new Metro North Plaza.⁴⁵

Based on available archival and historic map data, it is estimated that buildings on approximately eighteen parcels were demolished as part of the clearance needed for the construction of Metro North Plaza. Five of the buildings within the development area were already vacant prior to their demolition, and several were smaller brick buildings less than five stories in height. The majority of the buildings were owned by larger real estate companies, but some were owned by individuals/families. It is estimated that the construction of Metro North caused the displacement of somewhere between 100 and 150 families, which is based on the number of units within the standing buildings.

By 1968, Lescaze's final plan was in place, which consisted of three buildings reaching seven, eight, and eleven stories in height. It was a combination of several of his earlier designs that had been reviewed by both NYCHA and MNCC. The buildings featured a wide variety of apartment sizes to accommodate the elderly as well as large families.⁴⁶ In 1969, William Lescaze passed away prior to the completion of Metro North Plaza. Architects Hausman and Rosenberg took over as project architects and completed the project.⁴⁷ The Metro

⁴³ NYCHA to Eddy, January 24, 1966, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

⁴⁴ Lescaze to NYCHA, March 7, 1966, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

⁴⁵ MNCC to Department of Buildings, March 9, 1966, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

⁴⁶ *Hearings Before the National Commission*, 53.

⁴⁷ Max B. Schreiber, Acting Director of Design for NYCHA to Donald Schatz, NYCHA Secretary, April 29, 1969, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

North development did not include all of the aspects that were part of the original design of Conklin and the MNCC, as the buildings selected by the MNCC and Conklin for rehabilitation were outside of the designated urban renewal area, and therefore could not be considered by NYCHA as part of the project. However, the design of the development was still influenced by the concerns and input from the MNCC and Conklin, as is shown by archival correspondence. The MNCC frequently met with NYCHA as part of a designated subcommittee, consisting of the MNCC, the NYCHA director of design, and the official architect, Lescaze, to discuss the design of the proposed development. Archival documentation shows that between 1965 and 1968, Lescaze issued several design concepts that were in response to comments and concerns from MNCC.

Metro North Plaza officially opened in the summer of 1971. The complex consisted of a seven-story building on 101st Street, an eleven-story building on East 102nd Street and an eight-story, L-shaped building on wrapping around East 101st Street and 1st Avenue. At its opening, the complex contained 275 apartment units, including twenty-one, four-bedroom, one-bathroom units and fourteen, five-bedroom, one-and-a-half-bathroom units. A childcare center operated by Union Settlement was located in one of the buildings. The housing project was named Metro North Plaza Houses in honor of the large community effort that went into the project. According to the official press release, “This [project] has come about because of the concentrated effort and dedication of the people of the Metro North Community, who in partnership with the New York City Housing Authority and the City Administration have been instrumental in the planning, developing, and carrying out the physical and social renewal within the Metro North Area.”⁴⁸

NYCHA’s Legacy in East Harlem

With the massive scale of planned redevelopment, East Harlem became one of the testing grounds for NYCHA and its reliance on red brick towers, and the impact on the overall neighborhood, including Metro North Plaza, is difficult to measure. One former NYCHA administrator described the effect of the authority’s actions in East Harlem as having “destroyed the neighborhood, flattened out the neighborhood for a couple of years before they could build it up. By that time nobody wanted to live in a deserted area.”⁴⁹ The wall of NYCHA housing that stretched from the East River to Jefferson Park in East Harlem created a visual reminder of the division of Manhattan.

NYCHA’s reliance on the tower form, preferred because they provided the largest number of units most economically, added to the overall institutional feel. According to a former director of design at NYCHA, “two factors largely shaped the buildings of this period...efficient use of elevators and economical fireproof construction.”⁵⁰ And while some sites, such as Metro North, featured a variety of building sizes, the “occasional mixture of these high rises with six-story buildings did little to relieve the visual or psychological impact. Internally, high rises often had long hallways with many units...thus creating more anonymity” for the residents.⁵¹ And while the high-rise was the building type of choice for development in Manhattan, Bloom notes that any private sector high-rises contemporary with NYCHA developments such as Metro North Plaza generally enjoyed such features as “the addition of balconies, more plentiful windows, and glazed brick [which] broke up the monotony” that could characterize the superblock.⁵²

⁴⁸ Metro North Press Release, NYCHA Archives, Accessed March 2023.

⁴⁹ Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked* (Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 132.

⁵⁰ Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 135.

⁵¹ Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 135.

⁵² Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked*, 141.

Metro North Plaza

New York, NY

Name of Property

County and State

For the residents of public housing, this increased emphasis on economizing and standardization invariably led to an overall institutional feel. As one author describes: “Rooms are typically very small; dining areas, for example, often have insufficient space to permit families to eat together. Closets were usually built without doors, bathrooms without showers or showerheads.”⁵³ Catherine Bauer, one of the foremost experts on public housing in the period, summarized it as follows:

*Standardization is emphasized rather than alleviated in project design, as a glorification of efficient production methods and an expression of the goal of “decent, safe and sanitary” housing for all. But the bleak symbols of productive efficiency and “minimum standards” are hardly an adequate or satisfactory expression of the values associated with American home life.*⁵⁴

The rows and rows of towers in East Harlem “ultimately contributed to the growing isolation of an immobile and impoverished ‘underclass’ that lacked the skills and support services to adapt and prosper in New York’s changing post-war economy,” and, despite efforts to engage the community, such as with the design and development of Metro North, it can be argued that NYCHA’s overarching goal of slum clearance did nothing more than recreate the same social problems in a new setting.⁵⁵

Comparative Analysis: NYCHA Housing in East Harlem

NYCHA constructed multiple affordable housing projects in Harlem during the mid-to-late-twentieth century. Upper Park Avenue Community Association (UPACA) 5 and 6 (completed 1986), was also constructed as a result of NYCHA’s efforts to collaborate with community organizations. Additionally, like Metro North Plaza, the Gaylord White Houses was sited within an existing block that featured additional buildings outside of the NYCHA development and involved a great deal of involvement from a community organization (Union Settlement). As such, Metro North Plaza fits within a larger context of NYCHA projects that resulted from cooperative efforts with a local community organization, as well as NYCHA houses that were sited within an existing block. However, Metro North stands out as an early example of a local organization working directly with NYCHA in an effort to revitalize its neighborhood.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Date of Const.</i>	<i>Architect/Landscape Architect</i>	<i>NRHP Listed (Y/N)</i>	<i>Single or Multiple Bldgs</i>	<i>Vest Pocket</i>	<i>Community Organization</i>
Metro North Plaza	1971	William Lescaze	N	Single	Y	Metro North Citizens Committee
Gaylord White	1964	Mayer, Whittlesey & Glass, Architects	N	Single	Y	Union Settlement
Corsi Houses	1973	Samuel Paul, Architects; Joseph R. Gangemi, Landscape Architect	N	Single	Y	LaGuardia Houses
Jackie Robinson Houses	1973	Bond Ryder Associates	N	Multiple (2)	N	Community Association of the East Harlem Triangle
UPACA (Site 5)	1986	Sanchez & Figueroa, Architect; Bale & Bainnson	N	Single	Y	UPACA

⁵³Michael Schill, “Distressed public housing: Where do we go from here?” 60, 2,3 (University of Chicago Law Review).

⁵⁴ Catherin Bauer, “The Dreary Dreadlock of Public Housing,” *Architectural Forum*, 1957, accessed <https://placesjournal.org/article/catherine-bauer-and-the-need-for-public-housing/>

⁵⁵ John T. Metzger, “Rebuilding Harlem: Public housing and Urban Renewal, 1920–1960,” *Planning Perspectives*, 255.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

		Landscape Architects				
UPACA (Site 6)	1986/7	Samuel Paul and David J. Paul Architects; P. De Bellis Landscape Architect	N	Single	Y	UPACA

Table 1: List of NYCHA housing complexes with community involvement in Harlem

- **Gaylord White Houses (1964)** – The complex was completed in 1964 as standalone elderly affordable housing in East Harlem, Manhattan. Designed by Mayer, Whittlesey & Glass, the Gaylord White Houses consists of a 20-story tower and nine-story extension at the northwest corner of East 104th Street and 2nd Avenue. A one-story children’s center and three-story community center are located along East 104th Street and are connected to the main building. Similar to Metro North Plaza, the Gaylord White Houses were sited within an existing block among unaffiliated buildings. Gaylord White serves as another example of NYCHA working closely with a neighborhood organization (Union Settlement) in the overall design of a development, in this case working with Union Settlement specifically on the community center and amenities for senior center.



- **Corsi Houses (1973)** – Corsi Houses consists of a sixteen-story rectangularly shaped building with two, two-story wings housing a community/senior center. The building was designed by Samuel Paul and is located on a 0.75-acre site in East Harlem. The land for the building was previously owned and occupied by LaGuardia Houses an East Harlem settlement house. They donated the land for Corsi Houses in exchange for space in the building. The site had little space for landscaping, so the roof terrace above the community center was originally used for outdoor activities, however, the space no longer serves this purpose. The building served as senior only housing and the two-story wings featured a community center operated by LaGuardia Houses. The community involvement related to Corsi Houses is similar to Gaylord White. Both sites had land donated by a community organization in return for use of a portion of the new building. Similar to Gaylord White, the building is located within a densely developed block surrounded by other buildings.



Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

- Jackie Robinson Houses (1973) – Designed by architects Bond Ryder Associates and landscape architects Finley & Madison, Jackie Robinson Houses consists of two, nine-story towers connected by a seven-story hyphen. The first floor of the hyphen serves as a breezeway connecting the two buildings. Jackie Robinson Houses is located in East Harlem and is bounded by E 129th Street to the north, Lexington Avenue to the east, E 128th Street to the south, and Park Avenue to the west. Jackie Robinson Houses was constructed by NYCHA as a multi-family complex for low-income families. A daycare is located in the north tower. The project was constructed with involvement from the Community Association of the East Harlem Triangle (CAEHT). The group was formed in 1965 and appointed by Mayor Lindsey as the official developers of the East Harlem Triangle Renewal Area. CAEHT worked with NYCHA to design and build the Jackie Robinson Houses.
- This collaboration between NYCHA and a community organization is similar to Metro North Plaza.



- UPACA Site 5 (1986) – Designed by architects Sanchez & Figueroa and landscape architects Bale & Bainnson, UPACA Site 5 is an eleven-story L-shaped building used exclusively for senior housing. Located on a 1.5-acre site along Lexington Avenue in East Harlem, Manhattan, the building features some parking. Landscaping includes large grassy area, tenant garden with perimeter trees, bushes, paved walkway, benches, fenced grassy areas with trees and plantings, and a paved entrance courtyard with benches.
- UPACA Site 6 (1987) – UPACA Site 6 is a twelve-story rectangular building located on a one-acre site along Lexington Avenue in East Harlem, Manhattan. The building was designed as senior housing by architects Samuel and David J. Paul and landscape architect P. DeBellis. The site features a fenced grassy area, rear tenant garden with benches, tables, trees, fenced grassy areas with trees and bushes flanking entrances, and some parking.



Both UPACA Site 5 and 6 were named for their association with the Upper Park Avenue Community Association (UPACA). UPACA was founded by Harlem residents Mary Iemma and Margaret Jenkins in 1963. Their mission was to redevelop Lexington Avenue between 117th and 124th Streets. This collaboration between NYCHA and a community organization and the subsequent naming of the building after said organization is similar to Metro North Plaza. UPACA completed multiple earlier projects that are not part of the NYCHA portfolio. However, they were

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

constructed as affordable housing for residents of East Harlem. For example, in 1974 a thirty-two-story building known as UPACA Towers was constructed. The development was similar to Metro North in that it also contained a daycare center. UPACA Towers was design by Roger Glasgow, and according to one source was the first of its size to be designed by a black architect.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Metro North Plaza was completed in 1971 as a result of joint efforts by NYCHA and the local community organization, Metro North Citizens' Committee led by the Reverend Norman Eddy. Set within the East Harlem neighborhood, which had been earmarked for slum clearance and public housing development by NYCHA since the early 1940s, Metro North Plaza is an example of a public housing development influenced by both grass roots public involvement and NYCHA design guidelines. Over the course of almost a decade, the two entities along with advisement from the Mayor's Housing Executive Committee created a plan for the redevelopment of the Metro North neighborhood. First envisioned by community architects Whittlesey and Conklin as six-story public housing, Metro North Plaza was ultimately designed by William Lescaze as three towers. After Lescaze's death in 1969, the project was completed by architects Hausman and Rosenberg. The project resulted in three towers, seven, eight, and eleven stories high located on the block bounded by East 102nd Street to the north, First Avenue to the east, 101st Street to the south, and Second Avenue to the west.

Additional Information

William Lescaze, Architect

William Lescaze, born in Switzerland in 1896, became one of the pioneers of American modernism. Lescaze studied architecture at the Ecole Polytechnique Federale in Zurich, Switzerland. After receiving his Master of Architecture in 1919, he spent a brief time in France working in the areas most impacted by World War I. In 1920, Lescaze moved to the United States where he became a citizen in 1929.

Before opening his own firm in New York City in 1923, Lescaze worked for Hubbell & Benes in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1929, he partnered with George Howe and opened offices in both New York and Philadelphia. In 1934, he reestablished a firm under his own name, which he directed until his death in 1969. Throughout his career he designed a number civic and commercial buildings including the City and Municipal Courts Building (NRHP 1972) in Manhattan, the 1 New York Plaza Building, and the Church Peace Center at the United Nations.⁵⁷ Lescaze also designed a few other NYHCA projects besides Metro North Plaza including the Williamsburg Houses (NRHP 2021) in Brooklyn and the Manhattanville Houses (nominated 2023) in West Harlem.

Reverend Norman Eddy

Born in 1920, the Reverend Norman Eddy was a Yale-educated minister originally from Connecticut. He experienced a spiritual awakening while serving in Syria during World War II. After the war, he enrolled in the Union Theological Seminary, and in 1951 he became an ordained minister in the Congregational Church. That same year, Eddy settled in East Harlem where he started multiple programs and organizations to help those in the community. Eddy was an early advocate of narcotics treatment and helped establish one of New York City's first counseling centers for addicts, located on 100th Street in East Harlem. The center offered mental health

⁵⁶ "32-Story Building With Over 300 Units Dedicated in Harlem," *New York Times*, December 5, 1974.

⁵⁷ "Biographical History," William Lescaze Papers, Syracuse University Libraries, Special Collections Research Center, Accessed April 2023, https://library.syracuse.edu/digital/guides/print/lescaze_w_prt.htm.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

services, job placement, and applications for the small number of rehabilitation and detoxification programs in existence. In addition to this program, Eddy organized multiple citizens' committees including the Metro North Citizens' Committee, The East Harlem Credit Union Committee, and The East Harlem Narcotics Committee. According to his obituary in the *New York Times*, "his ultimate goal was never to be East Harlem's rescuer, Mr. Eddy told interviewers in later years; rather, it was to help East Harlem rescue itself."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Paul Vitello, "The Rev. Norman Eddy, a Minister in East Harlem, Dies at 93," *New York Times*, June 30, 2013.

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

“32-Story Building with Over 300 Units Dedicated in Harlem.” *New York Times*, December 5, 1974.

“Biographical History.” William Lescaze Papers. Syracuse University Libraries. Special Collections Research Center. Accessed April 2023, https://library.syracuse.edu/digital/guides/print/lescaze_w_prt.htm.

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Whittlesey & Conklin, “Metro North Recreational Plan.” 1966, NYCHA Archives. Accessed March 2023.

U.S. Census 1960.

Metro North Plaza
Name of Property

New York, NY
County and State

Vitello, Paul. "The Rev. Norman Eddy, a Minister in East Harlem, Dies at 93." *New York Times*, June 30, 2013.

Zipp, Samuel. *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York*.
New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: **NYCHA Archives**

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.29
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 _____
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

UTM References

1. Latitude: 40.787800, Longitude: -73.943897
2. Latitude: 40.787065, Longitude: -73.94215
3. Latitude: 40.786603, Longitude: -73.942506

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

4. Latitude: 40.786893, Longitude: -73.943231
5. Latitude: 40.7870806, Longitude: -73.9430694
6. Latitude: 40.7872278, Longitude: -73.9433194
7. Latitude: 40.7869778, Longitude: -73.9434861
8. Latitude: 40.7872639, Longitude: -73.9441750
9. Latitude: 40.7875083, Longitude: -73.9440083
10. Latitude: 40.7875556, Longitude: -73.9441083

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nominated property includes the entire parcel on which the buildings are situated and all property historically associated with the nominated property during the period of significance. No extant or historically associated resources have been excluded.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cindy Hamilton, Caitlin Herrstadt, Linda Santoro CONTACT: Kathleen LaFrank. NYSHPO

organization Heritage Consulting Group date March 2024

street & number 15 W Highland Avenue telephone 215-248-1260

city or town Philadelphia state PA zip code 19118

e-mail chamilton@heritage-consulting.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5- or 15-minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

See enclosed Pre-Rehabilitation Photographs

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State

Additional Items:

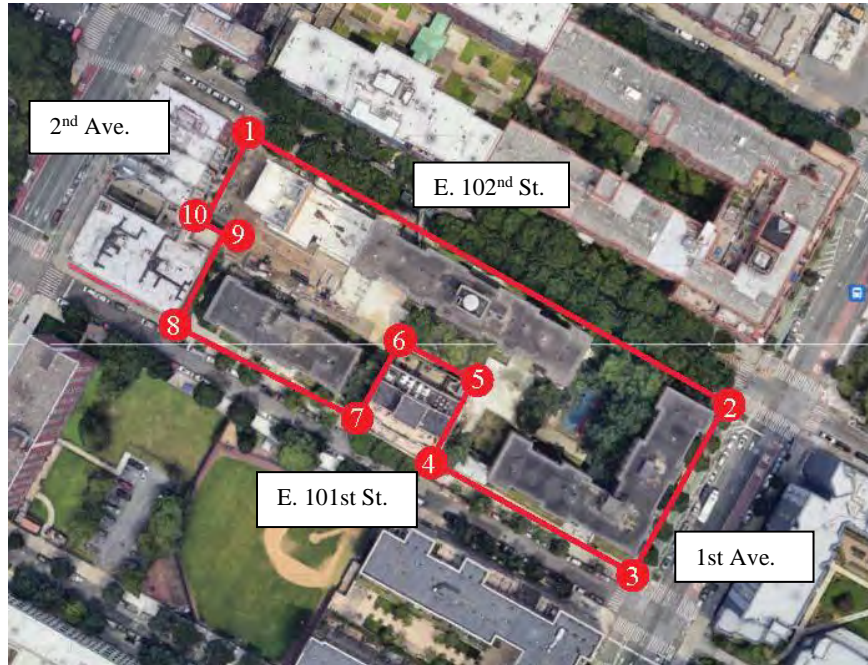
Metro North Plaza - Boundary Map

Metro North Plaza Site Map

 Boundary

Datum Points

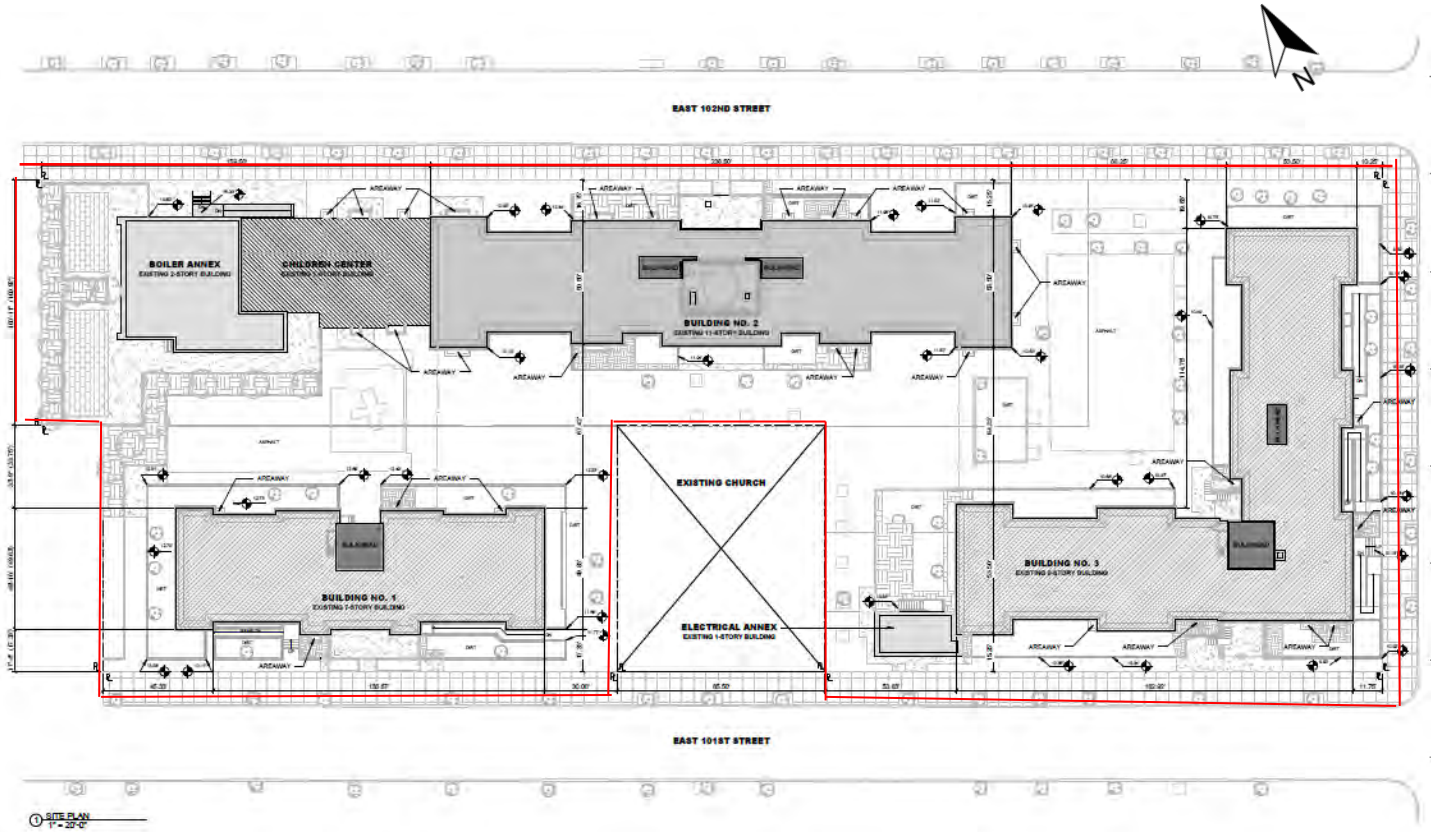
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5. 40.7870806, -73.9430694
6. 40.7872278, -73.9433194
7. 40.7869778, -73.9434861
8. 40.7872639, -73.9441750
9. 40.7875083, -73.9440083
10. 40.7875556, -73.9441083



Metro North Plaza
Name of Property

New York, NY
County and State

Metro North Plaza – Site Map



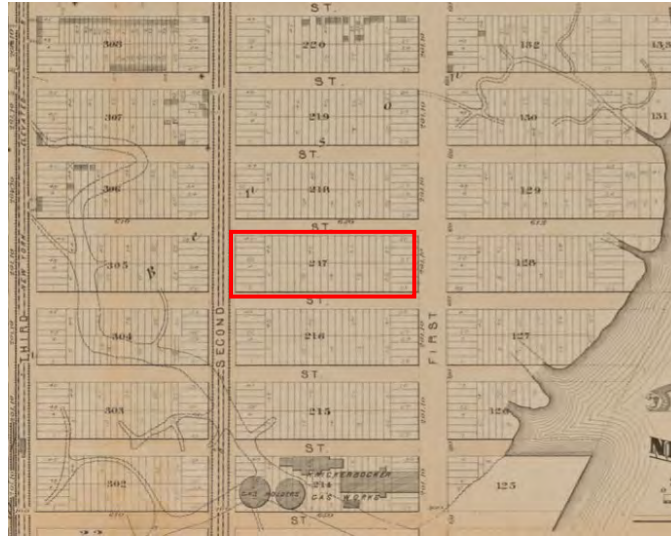
Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

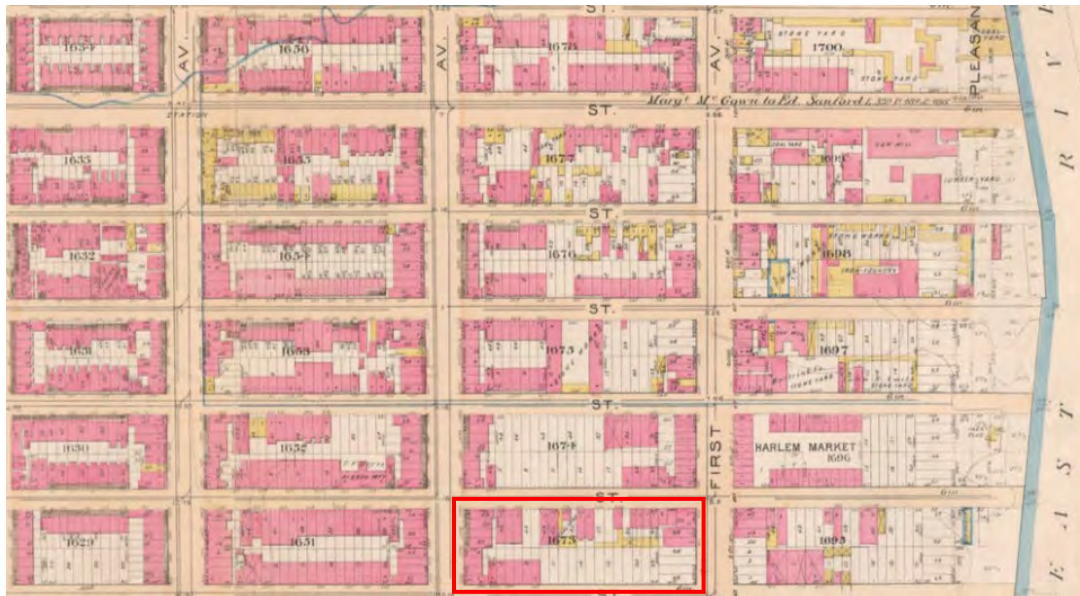
New York, NY

County and State

Metro North Plaza – Historic Maps



*1879 Pincus and Firyal Map
(red outline indicates the future site of Metro North Plaza)*



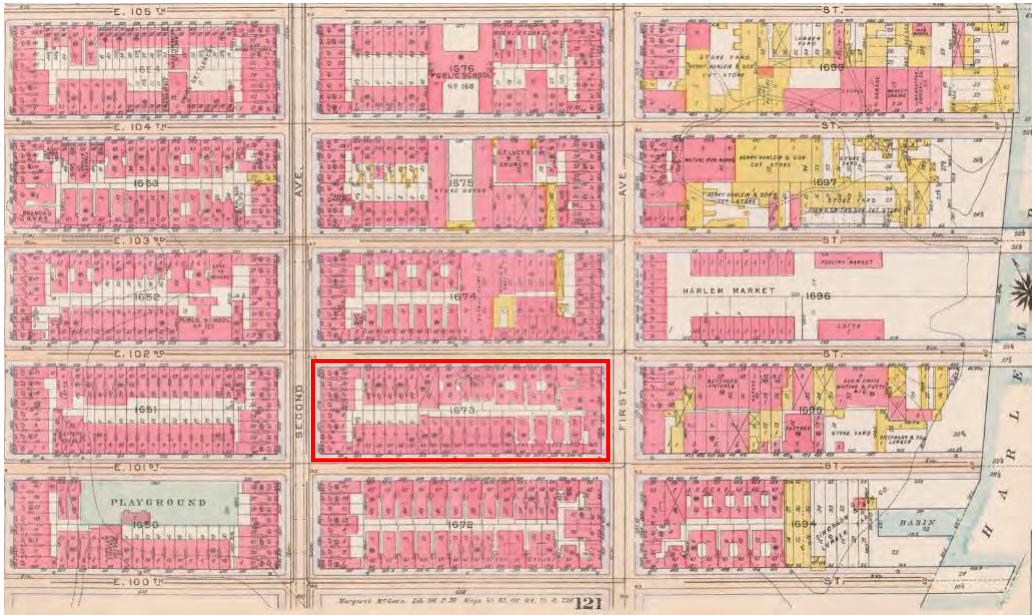
*1897 Pincus and Firyal Map
(red outline indicates the future site of Metro North Plaza)*

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State



*1911 Pincus and Firyal Map
(red outline indicates the future site of Metro North Plaza)*



*1951 historic aerial
(red outline indicates the future site of Metro North Plaza)*

Metro North Plaza

Name of Property

New York, NY

County and State



1974 historic aerial
(red outline indicates Metro Plaza North)



Image showing existing NYCHA public housing in the Metro North Community

Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.





307

ELEVATOR
EMERGENCY
CALL POLICE

8



WELCOME TO
Metro North Plaza
New York City
Housing Authority





BY THE WAY 'LOBBY' IS

T-146 TB-46

NYCHA ISO HEATING DIVISION

METRO NORTH PLAZA

EXIT



BUS LANE
&
BUSES ONLY
RIGHT TURNS



1st
Henry G. Street









EXIT

Alphabet cards: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z

Months

Handwritten text: "Hand a name", "Check your", "Check to the", "The name", "Keep your hands", "to yourself!"

Colors

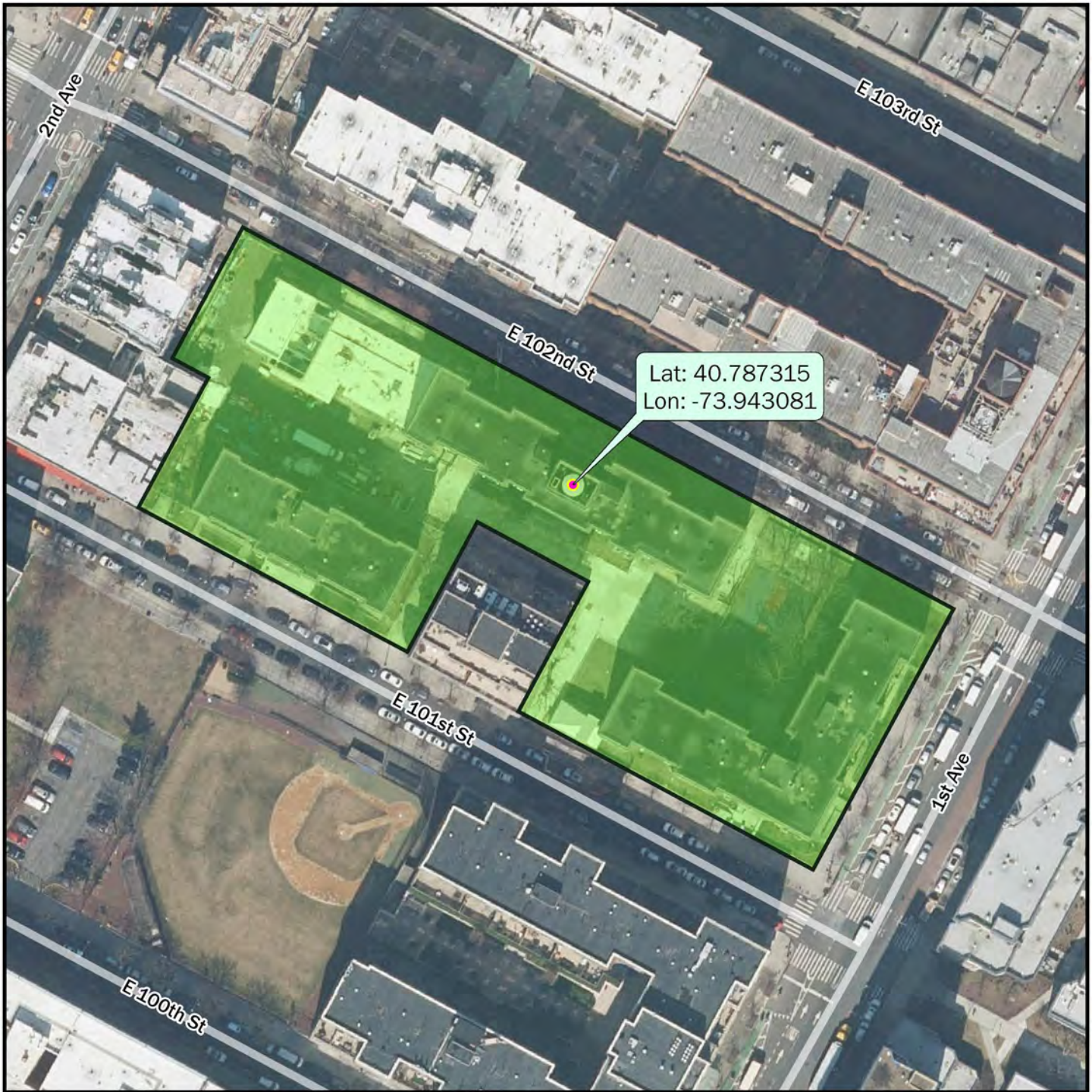
pink	blue	purple	brown	teal
green	red	orange	yellow	grey

2

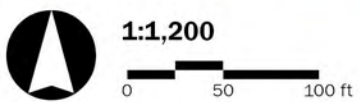
Science Center


Two

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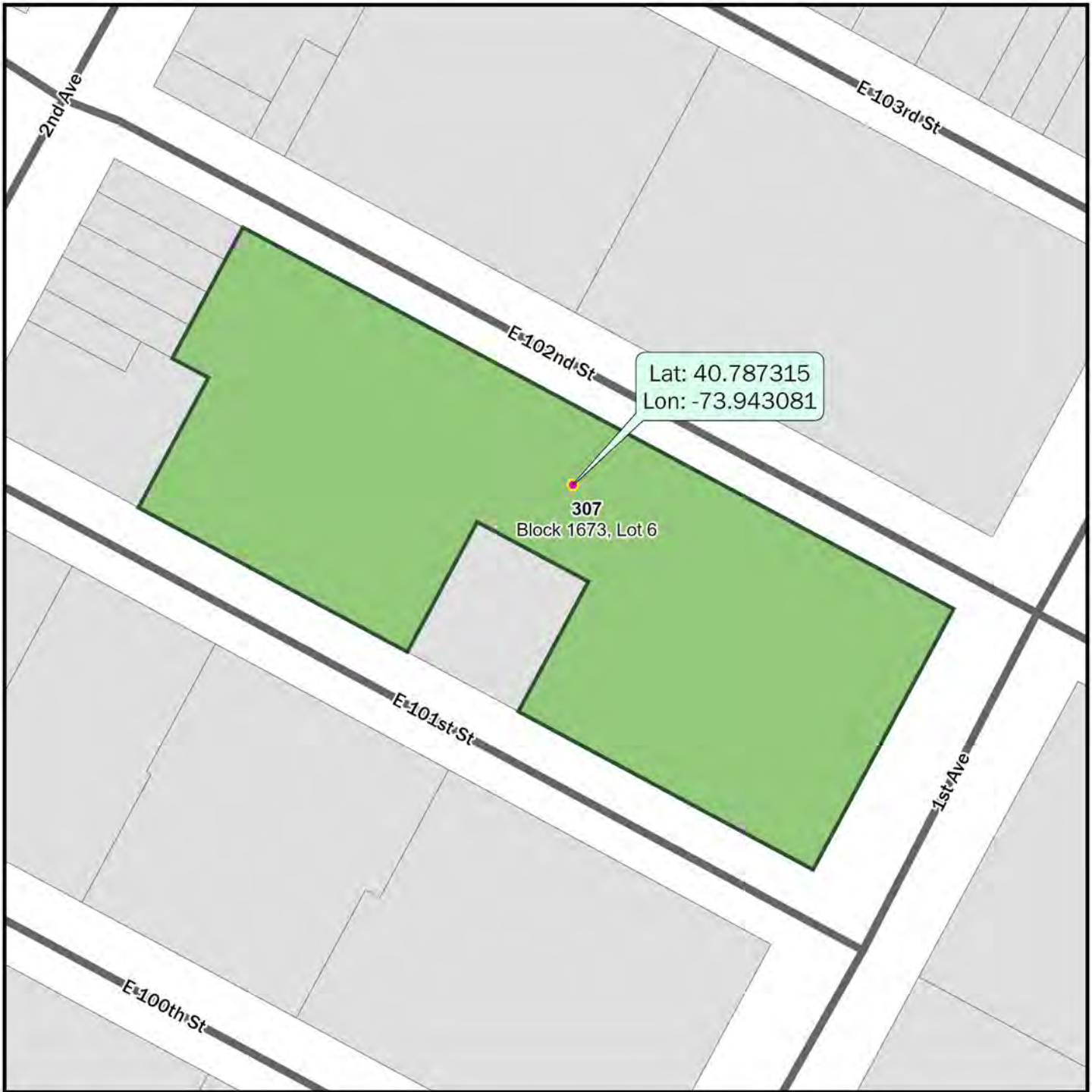


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Lon: -73.943081



 Nomination Boundary (2.32 ac)





1:1,200



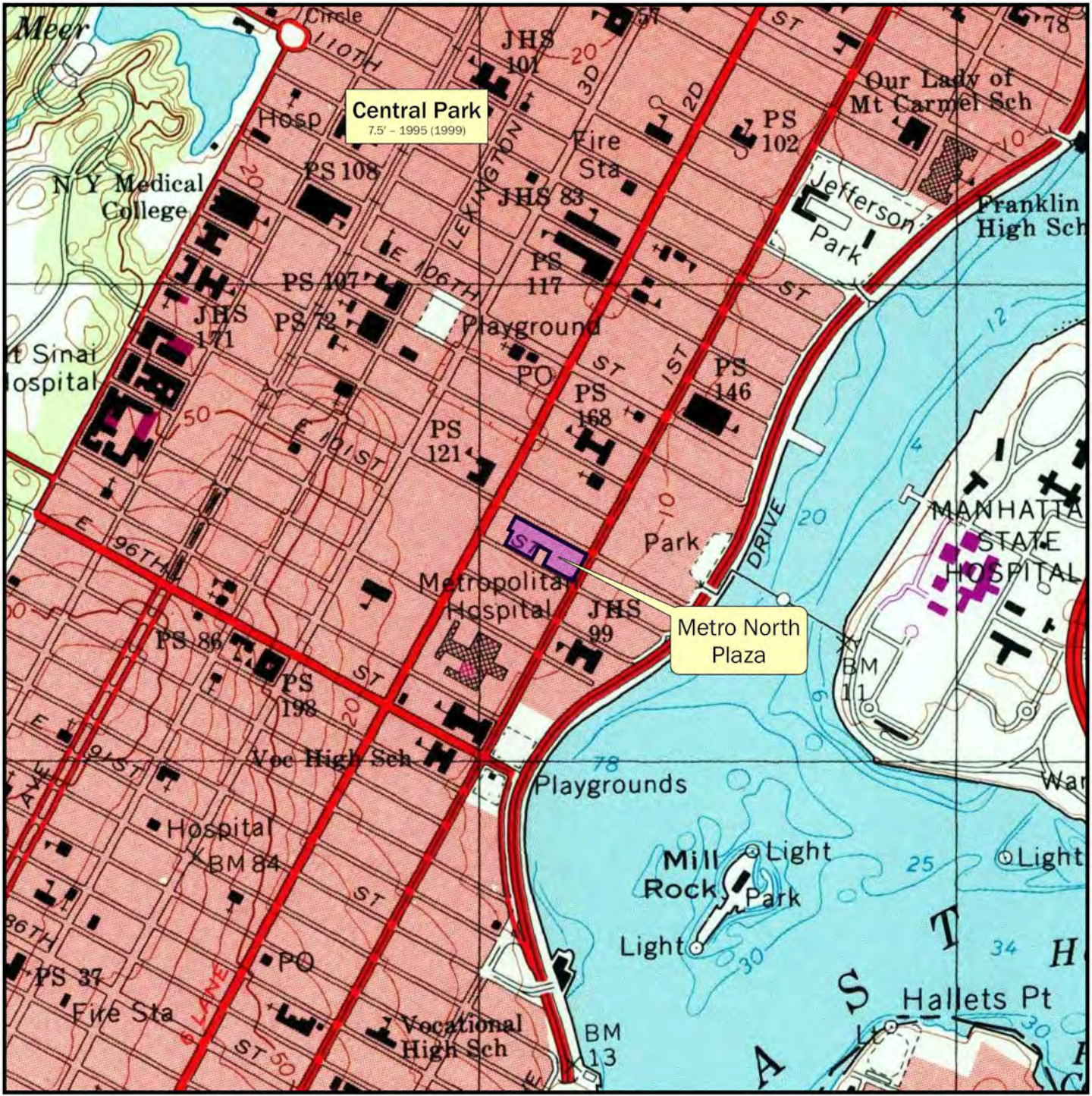
Nomination Boundary (2.32 ac)



Tax Parcels



New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation



1:12,000



Metro North Plaza



New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation