

Reimagining the Lower East Side Manhattan

Danna Reyes

Background

In the winter of 2009, The University of Michigan Master of Urban Design Studio went to Manhattan to observe the physical form and activities of the Lower East Side. The objectives of the studio were to communicate ideas graphically as a means of representation to persuading outcomes of an urban design process. This project displays a work in progress, midway through the winter semester.



Central Park

Manhattan Skyline

Project Overview

New York City's housing projects located in the Lower East Side of Manhattan are products of government supported public housing. These housing projects were built between World War II and the 1970's, in efforts to provide low-income families a place to live while working in manufacturing industries.



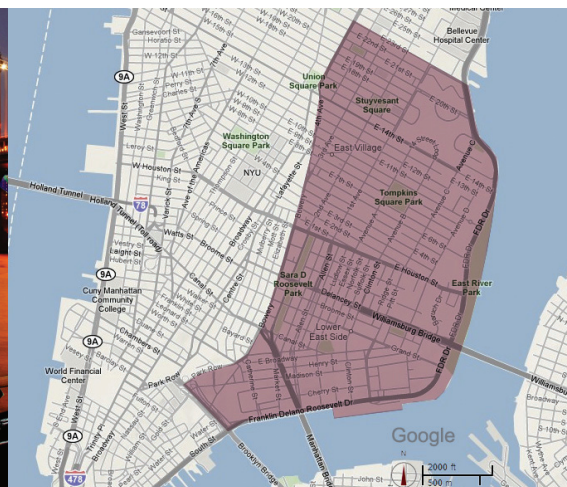
Streetcar Transportation

Virtual Cityscape

As government support for the projects dwindles, questions arise concerning what to do with the Modernist Housing Projects, and whether or not they should be sold to a private market. The challenge with this proposition is that there is a high demand for low income housing in Manhattan. In order to maintain a balance of housing for the low-income working-class and upper-middle-class society, accommodation must be made to fulfill the requirements of both. Efforts to design for higher density are key for the upcoming increase of urban settlement. Connectivity through transportation systems is needed in the proposal and development on the East River waterfront.



New York Skyline Redefined



Lower East Side Manhattan Map

Children at Play



Manhattan Bridge Tunnel



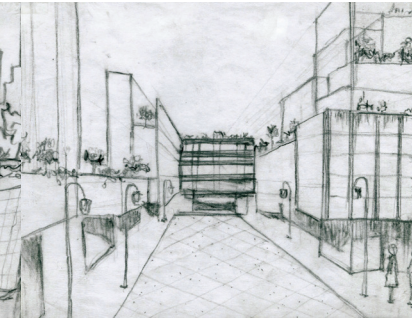
Statue of Liberty



Recreational Spaces



Interactive Plazas



Walkable Streetscapes



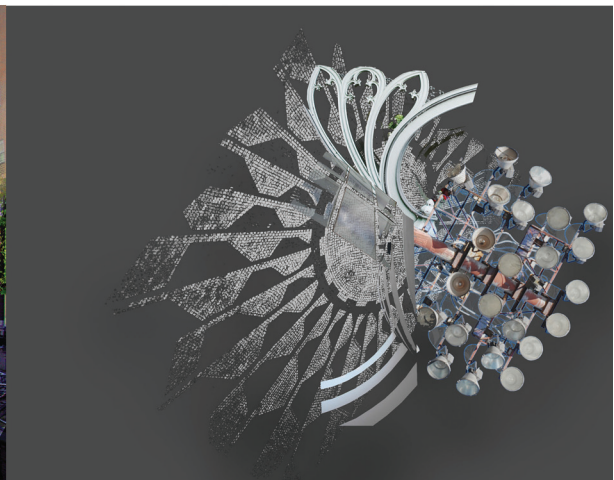
In analyzing the housing projects, the existing building conditions consist of ‘slab’ and ‘point’ block construction. They are in fairly good condition with a few deteriorating facades. The ground coverage is low with minimal accommodations for shops and restaurants. Transportation is reduced to personal vehicles and various bus routes.

Design Concept

During our first visit to New York City, I took photo documentations of various features and sites of the city. As part of my analysis and design methods, I constructed a collage to represent my experience of the urban city fabric,



Proposed Canal through Housing Projects



“Perceptions” a NYC collage

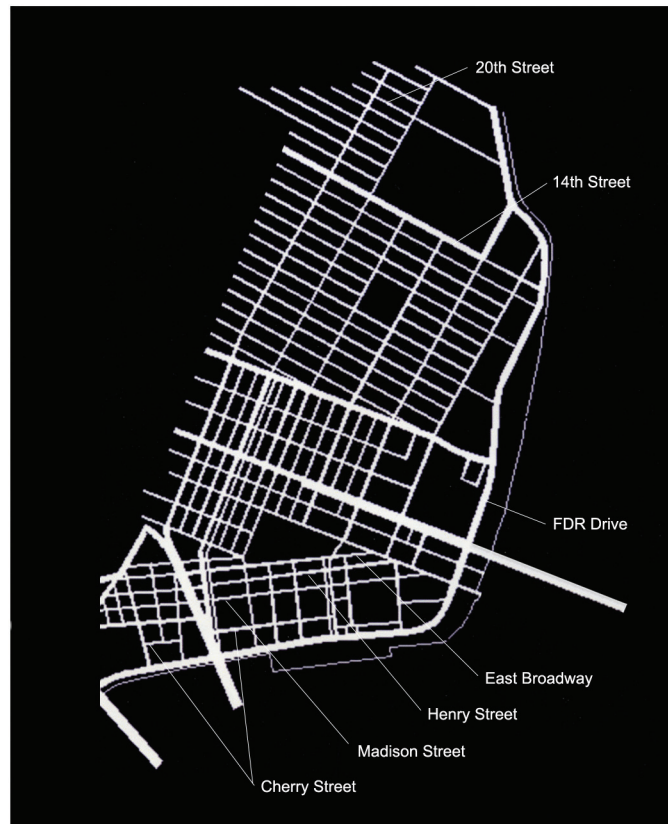
which I refer to as “Perceptions,” a NYC collage. These experiences are mapped from locations throughout New York, such as Central Park, The Guggenheim Museum, The Manhattan Bridge, open parks and plazas, and The Statue of Liberty. The collage conglomeration merged the idea for programming events to create a “lively” and walkable urban development. To recreate the skyline of New York is to introduce a new building type with a facade that attracts upcoming new inhabitants (within the ages of 20 and 30) to the Lower East Side.

The previous sketches reflect spaces that I envision for the future housing project neighborhoods. The urban spaces are designed to facilitate community events, through Recreational Spaces. Walk-able Streetscapes would create sustainable environments, with rain garden and green roof installations. Interactive Plazas promote public spaces, accessible through Streetcar Transportation with programmed events. In studying the existing figure ground of the Lower East Side, showing the neighboring districts: East Village, China Town, Little Italy, and Gramercy Village, the density is located inland and minimal ground coverage occurs in the Public Housing Projects. Providing dense block coverage is the key to creating maximum housing developments.

The street plan study reveals a lack of street circulation within the public housing. Access is limited to housing occupants, creating a sense of isolation and discontinuity. Also, the interfering influence of the interstate, Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) Drive, runs parallel to the water’s edge. It divides the land, creating a barrier, restricting access to a few footbridges from the housing projects to the open spaces on the waterfront. FDR Drive is a major connector of the downtown financial district from the Battery to uptown, leading up to the Triborough Bridge, and to the international airport. It runs nine and one-half miles along the eastern edge of the island. Currently, FDR Drive is closed to commercial traffic due to inadequate design to interstate standards. It has a maximum speed limit of 40 MPH.



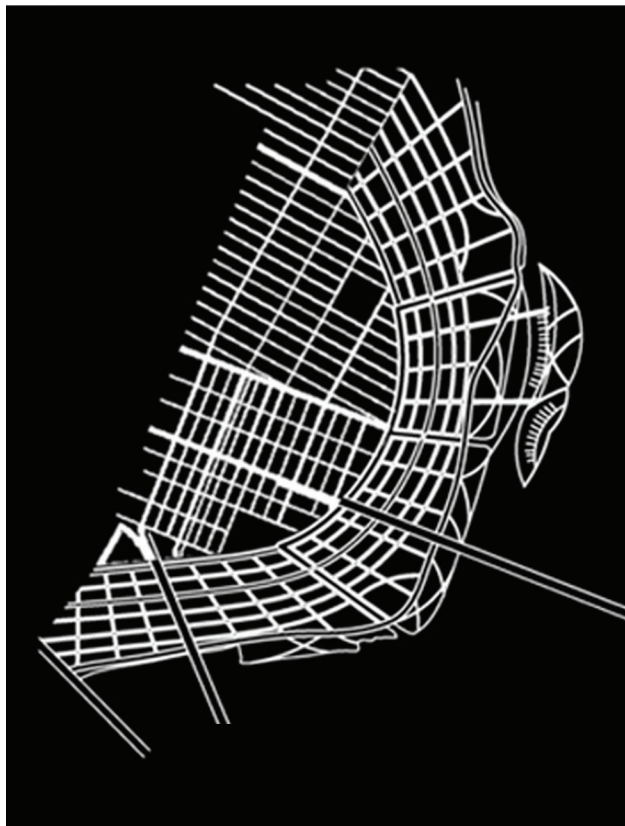
Existing Figure Ground
Lower East Side of Manhattan



Existing Street Plan



Proposed Block Plan
Lower East Side of Manhattan



Proposed Street Plan

The dominant character of FDR Drive is one of the programmatic design considerations of my project. The Lower East Side of Manhattan lacks efficient mass transportation. Subway stops are more than a five to ten minute walk away. Buses are available, but people (especially tourists) hesitate to ride them because they are perceived as untimely and unfamiliar. The main mode of transportation is personal vehicles. Currently, this part of town is distant from shops and restaurants, and has a fragmented street pattern.

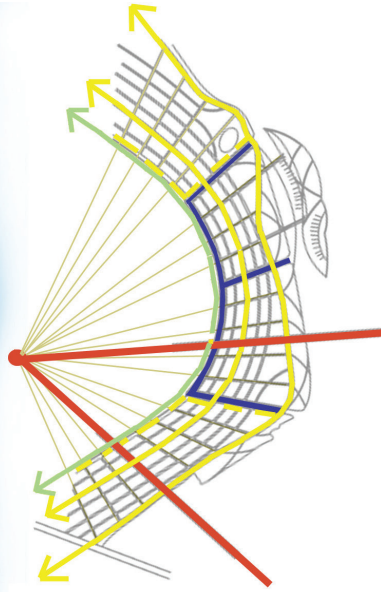
Informed by this site research and analysis, I am proposing a new type of street pattern that complements circular flow with accessible block orientation. This would create angular views of the magnificent New York City skyline. Its focal point intersects where the linear projection of the Williamsburg Bridge and the Manhattan Bridge converge. The point marks the Cleveland Plaza near Broadway.

Another significant design consideration are the streets in the southern portion of the Lower East Side, such as East Broadway, Henry Street, Madison Street, and Cherry Street, that run parallel to FDR Drive. These streets are arrayed in a linear fashion around the focal point extending northward to Fourteenth Street around to Twentieth Street. The waterfront is reprogrammed to accommodate the new dense blocks with housing (ranging from low to middle incomes), outdoor activities, shops, restaurants, public and private institutions, and a sports arena.

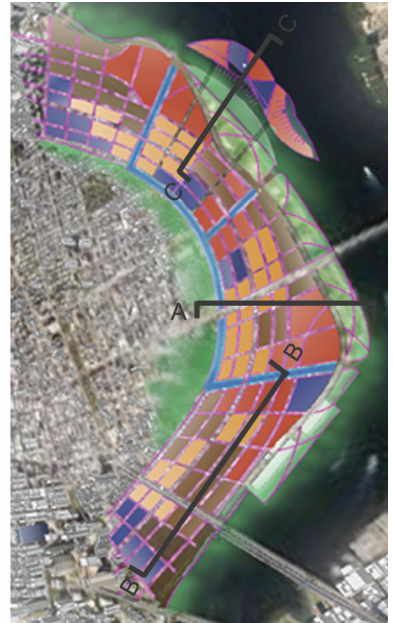
Introducing a new streetscape and redeveloping the site with these programmatic elements enhances connectivity from the Financial District to the lower part of Midtown. The newly developed Housing Projects are mixed within the middle to high income housing, in an effort to ensure that land value is balanced between various groups and to encourage the growth of a diverse demographic. The proposed streetscape blends into the 'knitted' urban fabric and creates a new identity for the Lower East Side of Manhattan.



District Map of Manhattan



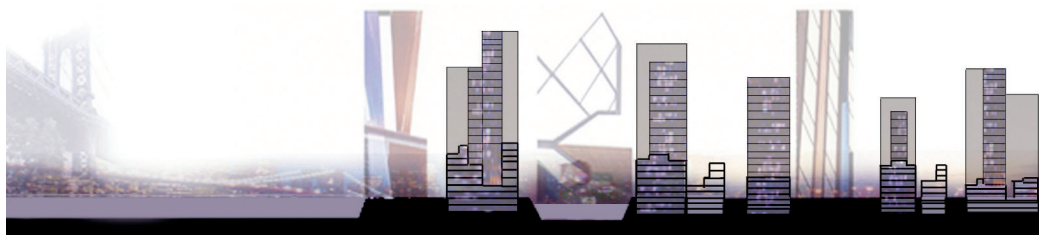
Concept Diagram



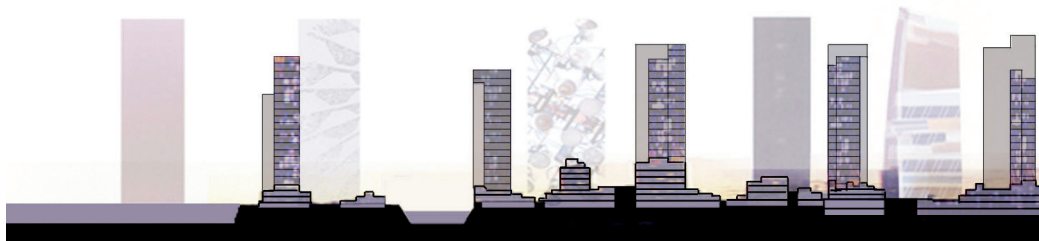
Land Use Map and Site Sections

- New Streetscape
- Continuous Overpass
- Streetcar
- Bridges
- Canal

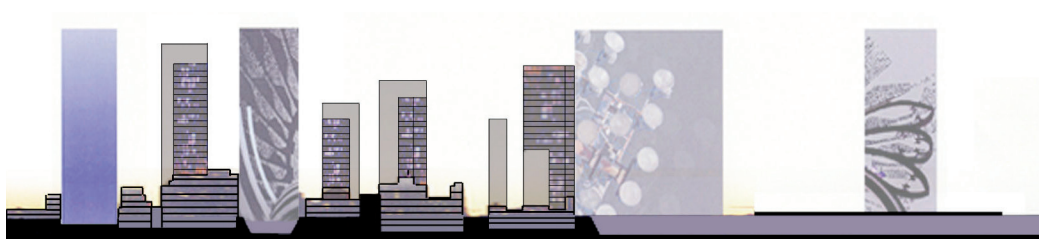
- Multi-family
- One-two family
- Commercial
- Open Space
- Institution



Section A



Section B



Section C