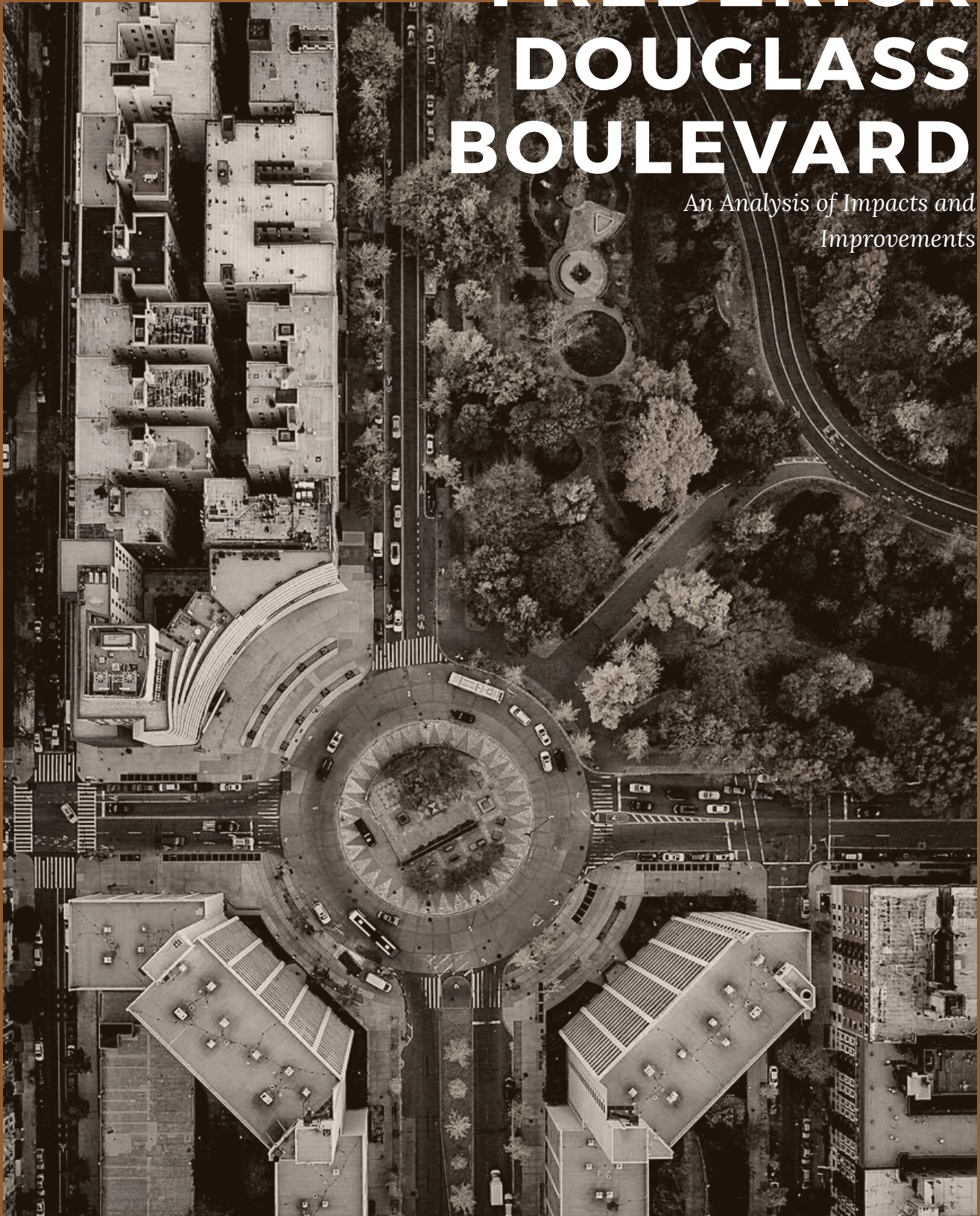


# FREDERICK DOUGLASS BOULEVARD

*An Analysis of Impacts and  
Improvements*



Geryel Osorio Godoy | Matthew Shore | Nile Johnson  
Professors: Flores Forbes | John Reddick  
Columbia University | GSAPP | Spring 2022

# CONTENTS

## Introduction

- Background ..... 4
- Positionality ..... 5
- Argument ..... 5

## Methodology

- Literature Review ..... 6
- Case Studies ..... 9
- Stakeholder Analysis ..... 11

## Conclusion

- Recommendations ..... 14

## References



## INTRODUCTION

Situated in the center of Harlem, known globally as a mecca for Black people, Frederick Douglass Boulevard (FDB) is one of the neighborhood's main mixed-use, north-south boulevards. It extends from Frederick Douglass Circle Plaza at the northwestern corner of Central Park at West 110th Street - otherwise known as the gateway to Harlem - up to West 155th Street. The boulevard is a tale of indigenous and African American history, a place that saw the Harlem Renaissance, urban blight, and tremendous socioeconomic change throughout the last two to three decades, much of which was caused by the 2003 rezoning of the boulevard approved under former New York City (NYC) Mayor Bloomberg's administration.

Depending on who you talk to in the neighborhood or in the City about the rezoning, you'll get different views on the state of the neighborhood prior to the rezoning, the needs of the neighborhood prior to the rezoning, the community visioning and community engagement process that occurred to spark conversations on reinventing the corridor, political motives at the time, who benefited from the rezoning, who was disadvantaged and whether the rezoning was a success or not. Therefore, our research question for this FDB project is as follows: Since 1999, how has the FDB First Action Plan and 2003 FDB rezoning contributed to displacement and/or advancement of low and middle-income Black residents on FDB and its surrounding areas of Central Harlem?



## BACKGROUND

The 2003 rezoning of FDB was influenced by and built off of the 1999 study of FDB and the FDB First Action Plan in 2000 set forth by Columbia University's Urban Technical Assistance Project (UTAP) for Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields. Akin to the Pratt Center for Community Development, Columbia's UTAP was an effort overseen by several faculty and alumni of the Columbia Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) to use GSAPP's resources - intellectual and capital - to provide technical assistance for community development efforts across Harlem and Upper Manhattan for the likes of public entities and local community development corporations, such as Abyssinian Development Corporation. From 110th Street to 135th Street on FDB in Harlem, UTAP was able to survey the existing conditions of the FDB area's land use, urban design and socioeconomic status. At the time of the survey, 18.7 percent of the land around FDB was vacant due to an era of urban renewal dating back to the Robert Moses era of slum clearance and large scale, top-down public housing and infrastructure projects. Seeing this, UTAP proposed several recommendations for the FDB First Action Plan, including: greening, accessibility improvements, public artwork installments, greater storefront and residential entrance visibility, increased Floor Area Ratio (FAR) on all new developments, and using vacant lots as residential development sites.





# POSITIONALITY

The position that we built this research on stems from our identities as young students of color, from marginalized backgrounds, either from New York or elsewhere, and attending an Ivy League institution. We posit our scholarly thinking through the belief that the most vulnerable groups of people in society deserve a more just, equitable, and timely delivery of resources to advance in their life. Either through housing, economic resources, workforce development, education, healthcare, and etc. We are committed to ensuring that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) in Harlem, next door to Columbia, are no longer disadvantaged as they've been from years of marginalization from racism, redlining, pollution, negative public health implications, gentrification, displacement, housing instability, food insecurity, etc. Our unique positionality not only shapes our work but influences our interpretation, understanding, and, ultimately, our belief in the truthfulness and validity to analyze the Frederick Douglass Boulevard First Action Plan and Rezoning in Harlem.

# ARGUMENT

Based upon interviews with longtime community leaders in Harlem, literature review, and quantitative data analysis, we argue that the FDB rezoning in Harlem disadvantaged low-income + working class BIPOC residents by not ensuring adequate affordable housing development and by prioritizing a wealthier, more affluent populace. Harlem's leaders did not have the best interests of their long-term residents, which is clear with the lack of emphasis on receiving community input for the FDB rezoning -compared to Harlem's 125th Street rezoning.



# METHODOLOGY

1

**Literature Review  
and Case Studies**

2

**Stakeholder  
Analysis**

3

**Proposal and  
Recommendations**

Our literature review consisted of the following:

- *ZONED OUT! RACE, DISPLACEMENT, AND CITY PLANNING IN NEW YORK CITY* by Tom Angotti and Sylvia Morse; and,
- *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* by Neil Smith.

Zoned Out detailed several things:

Firstly, the "rezoning supported real estate market trends, benefitting property owners and speculative investors without including protections for tenants."

Secondly, "The city did not include a robust affordable housing program even though residents were clearly demanding it in the public review process that preceded the rezoning. Residents expressed concerns about the lack of low-income housing programs in public meetings with multiple city agencies, some of them unrelated to the rezoning. The city's position, as one reporter put it, was that "it's not worth sinking low-income subsidies into a community where housing can easily sell at market rate" with the right zoning incentives"

---

## LITERATURE REVIEW (CONTD.)

Thirdly, the new developments on FDB "were outside of the price range of the average Harlem resident, and the new units were not marketed to them. The Livmor, for instance, a luxury condominium on Frederick Douglass Boulevard built after the rezoning, offered: 'one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments from 808 to 2,100 square feet and priced from the mid \$400,000s to \$1.1 million or \$1.2 million, some with private roof terraces. Amenities [...] include a yoga studio, a media room with projection TV, a children's play space and a kitchen for catered events.'"

It's clear, Angotti and Morse argued, that " new residential development explicitly targeted higher income households moving into the neighborhood, rather than creating new rental or homeownership opportunities for Harlem's longtime, mostly black residents." Additionally, to put the level of FDB's displacement into perspective: "From 2000 to 2013, in the Frederick Douglass Boulevard rezoning area, the total population increased by 18 percent; the white population increased 455 percent while the black population declined by 5 percent, and the Latino population declined by 13 percent."

Lastly, the level of community input received was minimal. According to Angotti and Morse, "Many residents may not have been aware of the plan: the DCP under Bloomberg primarily disseminated zoning information through community boards, which have limited reach and disproportionate engagement from older residents and homeowners. This rezoning was among the earliest of the Bloomberg administration's nearly 140 rezonings and many may not have been familiar with the complex land use review process or the plan's potential impacts. Another reason could be the solid support for the rezoning by the Harlem political establishment."

Neil Smith's book also provides historical context on Harlem's gentrification, stating: "For more than ten years, before the corporation was disbanded, Dennis Cogsville was president of the Harlem Urban Development Corporation, an off-shoot of the defunct State Urban Development Corporation and a major vehicle for gentrifying Harlem. Its offices are on the eighteenth floor of the Harlem State Office Building, which provides a breathtaking vista of Harlem stretching south to Central Park and the spires of midtown beyond."

---

## LITERATURE REVIEW (CONTD.)

Cogsville commuted in from New Jersey. He was a major player in launching 'Harlem Gateway' on the northern edge of the Park in the mid-1980s. 'That's going to be a tough project,' he said, looking out at the tenements below:

But here's how we're going to do it. Starting from 110th Street, we will make a first beachhead on 112th Street. You know, some anchor condominium conversions. Then a second beachhead up on 116th Street.

That'll be a hell of a job. There's drugs, crime, everything up there. But we're going to do it. Essentially the plan is to circle the wagons around and move into Central Harlem from the outskirts. On 110th Street, sixteen months later, it was time for the groundbreaking for 'Towers on the Park.' Dennis Cogsville was there, but it was US Senator Alfonse D'Amato who took center stage at the ceremony. D'Amato, a powerful politician who would soon come under intense suspicion in relation to his brother's corrupt real estate dealings, offered his own vision of how to make Harlem 'not be Harlem again.' But he was confronted by an organized community protest chanting and singing their opposition to the gentrification of Harlem. Calling the condominium project "beautiful" and "New York at its best," D'Amato glared at the protestors and, as the New York Times described the scene, he then bellowed: 'I'd like to sing too.' He 'broke into a brief, off-key aria: 'Gen-tri-fi-ca-tion. Hous-ing for work-ing people. A-men'"



---

# CENSUS TRACT ANALYSIS OF FDB AREA

Examining the census tracts in the FDB area - New York County 197.02, 216, 218, 201.02, 220, 257, and 222 - provided us with the following data in regards to the long-term impacts of the 2003 FDB rezoning from 2010 to the near-present.

In regards to racial composition in 2010, total estimate population in FDB area was 32018 Latinx people accounted for 20%, Whites 18%, Blacks 56% and Asians 4%.

In 2020, the population in FDB area was 35452. Latinx people accounted for 19%, Whites 26%, Black 43% and Asians 6%.

On the other hand, in regards to income, \$69,743 was average median household income in in the FDB area in 2011 and \$115,888 average median household income in 2020.

This is clearly a sign of gentrification in the FDB area that, among other factors, was accelerated by the FDB rezoning due to a lack of affordable housing development, preservation, and community input from long-term residents, among other factors.

# CASE STUDIES

## East New York Community Land Trust

We selected two case studies to discuss, in order to learn more about community land trusts in New York City, and to try and apply this learning to our recommendations for Frederick Douglass Boulevard. These examples show us what could be possible on our chosen site on FDB.

The first case study is the East New York Community Land Trust. East New York is a neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY, characterized by its majority black and brown population, low incomes, and dilapidated housing projects. The East New York Community Land Trust (ENY CLT) is a grassroots organization founded by residents and community organizers in East New York (ENY) and like all community land trusts, they aim to preserve housing affordability in ENY and the neighboring area of Brownsville. They are democratically BIPOC lead, and use the methods of “community organizing, education, and multi-generational engagement” to meet their founding goals. More specifically, in order to provide quality affordable housing, as well as quality community facilities and amenities, the ENY CLT acquires and leases land in the area to either ensure the construction of affordable housing or public spaces such as community centers or gardens. They enact ground lease agreements on lots with pre-existing housing, the contents of which stipulate that the property owner must keep the housing both decent and inexpensive.

Some of ENY CLT’s current campaigns include advocating for and educating the public about abolishing tax liens, a harmful practice which entails New York City selling its debt in the form of unpaid taxes and bills to a debt collecting agency, which then proceeds to profit from pursuing these debts. ENY CLT argues that this practice fuels dis-ownership, since homeowners often have to resort to taking out predatory loans or selling in order to settle these debts, especially in black and brown communities.

We believe that the EAST NY CLT is an excellent example of what could potentially happen in Harlem. Their vision for an East New York that is led by the residents, and for the residents, is inspiring, all while giving voice and power to groups which have previously been marginalized and disenfranchised, similar to the overlooked community voices in Harlem.



“Our vision is for a healthy, **self-sustaining community** where our needs are provided **‘for us, by us’** and where we can build the generational wealth of the whole community”

-ENYCLT Mission Statement

# CASE STUDIES

## Cooper Square



Our second case study is the Cooper Square Community Land Trust. The history surrounding The Cooper Square CLT is rich and fascinating. The community land trust itself was created in 1991, but the group had been advocating since 1959 as the Cooper Square Committee. In 1959, Robert Moses was planning to level an 11-block area in the Lower East Side called Cooper Square and replace it with “affordable housing,” which in this case, were union-sponsored co-ops. The Cooper Square Committee (CSC) of residents and businesses formed thereafter, with the mission to oppose Moses because even the cheapest of the proposed co-ops would be outside of the financial means of the majority of the residents at the time. In 1961, the Committee came up with its own plan for the area that included preserving housing and building new low-income housing. After ten years of advocacy, New York City officially accepted the plan, called the Alternate Plan for Cooper Square; this was to be the first community-initiated plan ever adopted in the city.

The list of the Cooper Square Committee's accomplishments is long. In 1984, they developed 146 low-income apartments on Stanton Street. The following year, they advocated for, and won 150 units of senior housing on the Bowery and East 5th Street, with 49% of the apartments reserved for local residents. In 1988, they sponsored the Cube Building, which was the first co-op for formerly homeless families in America. The Cooper Square Community Land Trust developed 54 units of supportive housing at 29 East 2nd Street in 2008, and a decade later in 2018, they worked with the Ali Forney Center to develop an LGBT youth transitional housing project. Their prolific track record for creating solid, inexpensive housing in an increasingly expensive neighborhood inspires this group even further to apply some of their methods to our recommendations for Frederick Douglass Boulevard.

The Cooper Square Community Land Trust isn't only concerned with keeping Cooper Square affordable, they are also dedicated to keeping the community alive and vibrant, as the trust also conducts art programs and organizes food giveaways. The Cooper Square CLT is an example of how a CLT can be more than just a solution for housing, it can be a pathway to a stronger community. Harlem, with its reputation and history of housing and hosting some of the most vibrant Black and Brown artists would likely benefit if community leaders adopted some of the methods used by CSCLT, especially on Frederick Douglass Boulevard, Harlem's Gateway.





# STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

In order to gain insightful information on FDB's rezoning impacts and formulate recommendations for its future, we conducted interviews with several individuals who have lived and worked in Harlem for many years. We must acknowledge that due to the short length of our semester and multiple academic and work-related commitments, we were unable to interview as many people as we would have liked. This final report is a living document that could be possibly built upon with further academic research and it would certainly benefit from the perspectives of more residents in Harlem.

We thank the following interviewees for taking the time to meet with us and provide their perspectives on Frederick Douglass Boulevard:

- Curtis Archer (President of Harlem Community Development Corporation);
- Tom Angotti (Co-Author of *Zoned Out!*);
- Nellie Hester Bailey (Co-Founder of the Harlem Tenants Council);
- Michael Henry Adams (Harlem-based preservationist); and,
- Gregory Baggett (Founder, NY Council for Housing Development Fund Companies).

Curtis reflected on his time in Harlem where he moved in the 80s and mentioned that FDB was one of the most rundown streets in Harlem, let alone the City. There was a lot of illegal drug activity on the street at the time and vacant lots. To paraphrase Curtis, you would not have seen a single White person on the street at the time, unless it was to obtain drugs. The son of Robert Kennedy, David Kennedy, Curtis mentioned, was robbed on this street during the time. Seeing the redevelopment that the 2003 FDB rezoning brought to the FDB area, Curtis is in support, saying that it brought much needed amenities to the area, such as food markets, restaurants, and retail, things that were scarce in the neighborhood prior to the rezoning. Curtis also celebrates the efforts of Flores Forbes, the borough planner of Manhattan Borough President, C. Virginia Fields, who helped the rezoning happen, stating that the boulevard's future is clear: a destination for restaurants and businesses, not a place for additional affordable housing. When asked if the rezoning led to displacement, Curtis mentioned that there wasn't many people around prior to the rezoning.

Tom, on the other hand, sided with the arguments made in *Zoned Out!* that the FDB rezoning did gentrify and displace Black residents. Tom encouraged us to contextualize the issue by looking at rezonings across Harlem, from the 125th rezoning to the Manhattanville rezoning. When asked about community land trusts (CLTs), Tom mentioned that they, while not faultless, help protect residents from being displaced, due to their long-term protection of affordability.

---

# STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Nellie had strong words of criticism for C. Virginia Fields and the redevelopment that she created in Harlem, agreeing that Fields caused gentrification and displacement of low-income and working class Black residents. Nellie also took it a step further and stated that Harlem's own Black political establishment redeveloped Harlem not because they cared about the interests of vulnerable Black residents, but because they wanted to enrich themselves. It was Nellie who recommended that Neil Smith's *New Urban Frontier* be a source of our study.

Speaking to Michael Henry Adams offered a different take. Michael, opposes the displacement that the FDB rezoning created, but enjoys the contextual architectural style that exists along the boulevard. Michael sees the importance of having truly affordable housing in Harlem's FDB area, but not at the expense of historic townhouses that should be landmarked. Michael believes that FDB's buildings have the potential to add affordable apartment units on top of existing buildings. This proposal would likely have to remove existing height limits that were placed onto buildings as a result of the 2003 FDB rezoning.

Lastly, we spoke to Gregory Baggett who is, for the Municipal Art Society of New York, hosting a walking tour of Frederick Douglass Boulevard that will examine displacement in the FDB area that came about as a result of the FDB rezoning. Gregory acknowledges that the argument made in his tour is imperfect and based on information that may not be entirely credible. Over time, Gregory has come to realize that the policymakers and planners involved in the FDB rezoning truly did not understand the long term consequences their plans would have caused. Arguments of gentrification and displacement on FDB need much further examination Gregory implied. Lastly, Gregory stated that two things remain unresolved in research: the commercial plans for 116th Street near FDB and why the local community board didn't do enough to ensure adequate community feedback prior to the 2003 FDB being approved. Thanks to Gregory, our research team may be able to present our report and recommendations at the community forums that he is planning for May 2022 in Harlem that will touch on the topics of CLTs, among other things. Our presentations at these forums could potentially inspire community members to reevaluate the rezoning of FDB and discuss its future.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

There are 3 major sets of recommendations that stem from our research this semester. These are by no means mutually exclusive and are meant to interrelate to better serve the community in Central Harlem.

First, Community Land Trusts are a proven tool, across the U.S., to preserve vital affordable housing stock and for protecting poor and working class neighborhoods and communities of color from real estate speculation and displacement. We recommend a strong public investment in CLTs and policymaking to stabilize housing and promote a just recovery. CLTs are community-governed nonprofits that own land and ensure that it is used for permanently-affordable housing and other community needs.

As planners, there is a responsibility to advocate for more just policies like calling on the city to restrict the transfer or sale of public land to CLTs and other nonprofits that commit to permanently-affordable housing and community-led development.

Second, the area could also better financially and socially support congregations and mosques that are having difficulty paying rent, or in the midst of dealing with an eviction.

Finally, we recommend strengthening opportunities to increase 100% affordable housing units. The average rent for a 1-bedroom apartment in Central Harlem, is currently \$2,300. While the average median income is about \$55,000. Yet, at least 35% of the population earns less than \$20k.





# PROPOSAL

Community Land Trust with 100% affordable housing on current vacant lot



**Potential CLT Site:** 2136 Frederick Douglass Blvd.  
(Near W. 116th & FDB)





## CONCLUSION

With the myriad of hardships faced by Harlem and its surrounding community over the last three decades and more, the vibrancy and resiliency of this neighborhood remains evident. From the smell of fried chicken and peanuts, the sounds of gospel choirs and saxophone melodies, to the imagery of Sunday dresses and children returning home from school. These soft moments blend seamlessly with the architecture, design, and historic elements of Frederick Douglass Boulevard. As the construction of luxury apartments, abandonment of vacant retail spaces, and celebration of beginnings for small businesses all experience simultaneous and contradictory journeys, it is urgent and critical for planners to co-conspire with and plan for those that can no longer afford to have a healthy, affordable, quality of life in Harlem.

---

## SOURCES

- Angotti, T., Morse, S., DePaolo, P., Marcuse, P., & Stein, S. (2016). *Zoned Out! Race, Displacement and City Planning in New York City* (1st ed.) [E-book]. Terreform.
- Bureau, U. S. C. (2022, April 11). Data. Census.gov. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data.html>
- Fullilove, M. T., Green, L., & Fullilove, R. E. (1999). Building momentum: an ethnographic study of inner-city redevelopment. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89(6), 840–844. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.89.6.840>
- Grosso, J. (2020). *Emerald City: How Capital Transformed New York* (1st ed.). John Hunt Publishing.
- Slatin, P. (2012, March 28). *Rezoning Changes Character of Frederick Douglass Blvd. in Harlem*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/28/realestate/commercial/rezoning-changes-character-of-frederick-douglass-blvd-in-harlem.html>
- Smith, N. (1996). *The new urban frontier: Gentrification and the revanchist city*. London: Routledge.