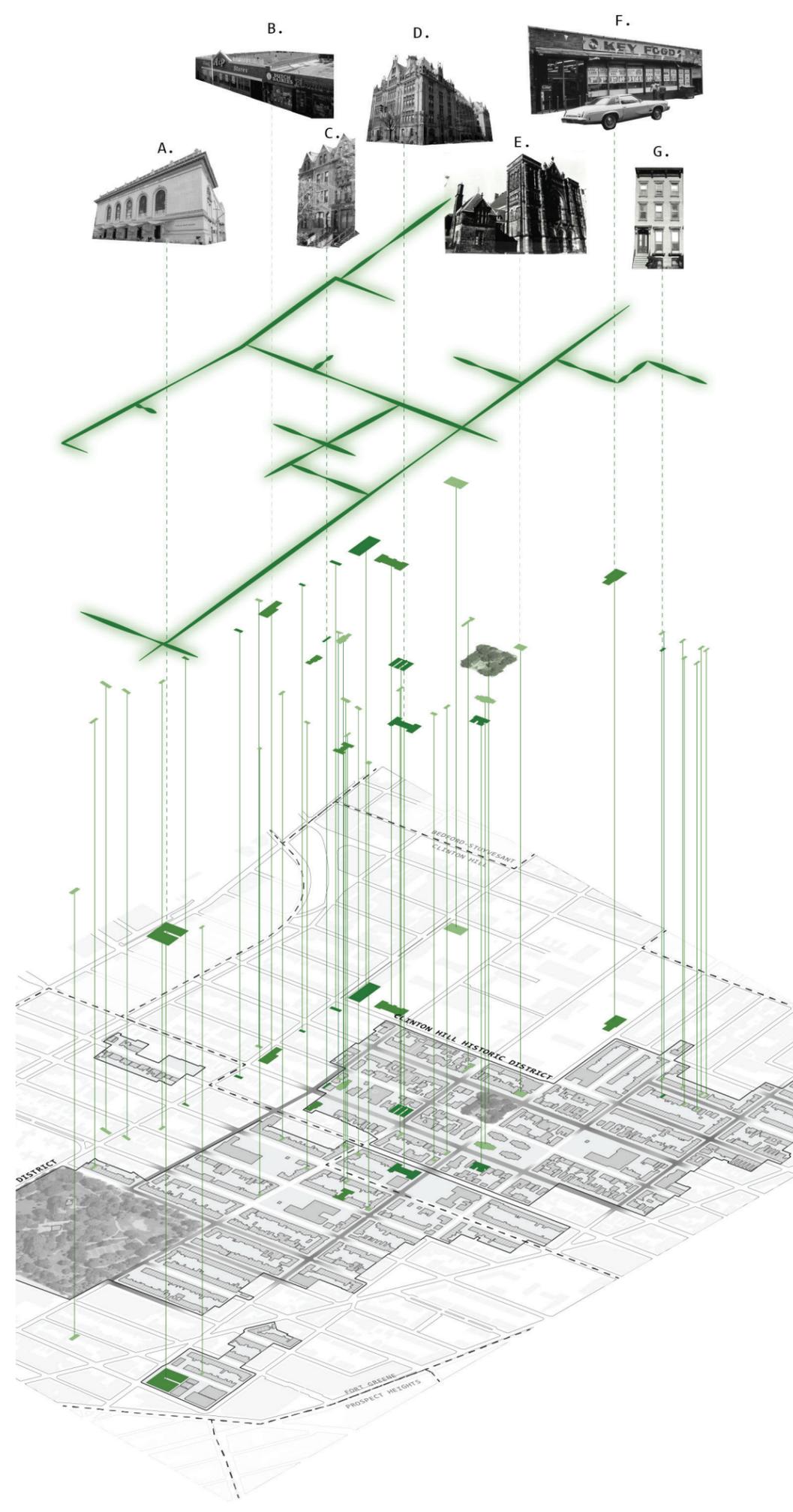


MONUMENT TO MEMORY

Broadening Historic Preservation

Daniela Deu



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Social Mapping in Clinton Hill and Fort Greene - Before & After Overlay

INTRODUCTION

Clinton Hill is an example of how solely focusing on preserving the built environment and not considering the preservation of existing residents can fuel displacement and promote gentrification. The limited selection of financial incentives and policy tools available to residents has alienated many legacy neighbors from actively participating in the process of preservation.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The National Register of Historic Places offers

protection to buildings that are listed. With the designation, homeowners have access to financial incentives to maintain the historic value of their property. However, recent discourse in preservation circles has made it clear that the evaluation of what is considered 'significant' is flawed and often biased. The available criteria (A-D), primarily focuses on architectural characteristics and style, or a "significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history"¹.

The word *OUR* is vague, and in practice the definition of what constitutes as significant is not broad enough to represent the many different cultures that are part

¹ "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation." National Register Bulletin. National Parks Service, 1995. https://www.nps.gov/subjects/national-register/upload/NRB-15_web508.pdf.

of our built environment. Thus, the determination of significance is based on the narrow view of preservationists, which might not correspond to the feeling of the residents in a community. Because preservation today predominantly focuses on the architecture of a very specific time frame, there is rarely incentive to create strategies that reveal and preserve other human histories if they are not eligible under criteria A.

PRESERVATION CRITERIA²

Criteria A - "Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history"

Criteria B - "Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past"

Criteria C - "Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction"

Criteria D - "Yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to prehistory or history"

ISSUES

In the 80s, a lack of city investment and maintenance in this predominantly black neighborhood resulted in the acceleration of the demolition, vacancy, and slow dilapidation of many homes in Clinton Hill. In the absence of city help, community organizations and block associations were the leading voices and stakeholders in this neighborhood's preservation movement. Eventually, their activism attracted the Landmark's Preservation Committee to designate Clinton Hill as a historic district in 1981³.

The designation of the historic district and the subsequent financial incentives for preservation

² "How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation."

³ "Clinton Hill Proposed Historic District." Columbia University Libraries. New York (NY). Landmarks Preservation Commission., 1977. <https://archive.org/details/ColumbiaUniversityLibraries?query=Clinton%2Bhill%2Bproposed%2Bhistoric%2Bdistrict.,p.13>

helped transform the neighborhood's architectural integrity. As a result, housing prices have continued to soar since its designation.

However, these changes coincided with the beginning of massive demographic shifts that would alter the neighborhood's fabric. When viewed through a purely economic and architectural lens, the historic district designation was hugely successful as a tool that restored the urban fabric of the neighborhood. But when considering the social impact of this designation, there are key issues that have shaped the neighborhood that exists today:

The first of these issues is the acknowledgment that when the neighborhood was predominantly black, despite block associations working to protect their built environment, there was little access to city funds or incentives. It was only after the arrival of white

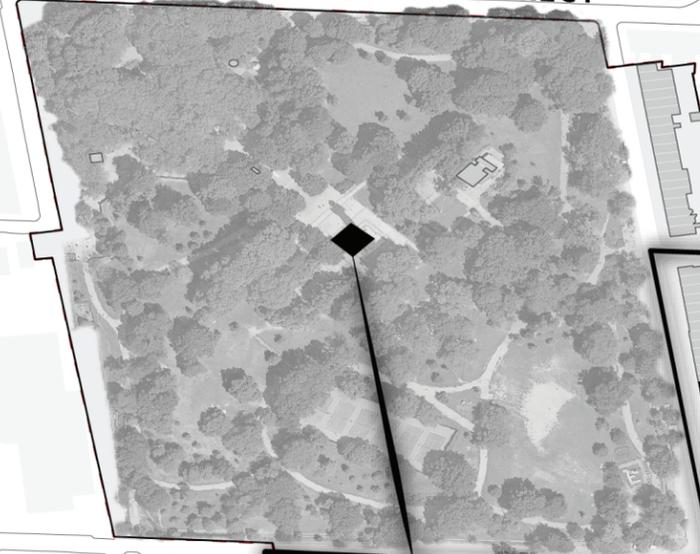


Color(ed) Theory (2014-2017)

Image Sources: Amanda Williams Studio

These series of maps visualize new historic routes that elevate the everyday lives of the interviewees from the Social Mapping Exercise. Their routes expand beyond the historic district boundaries to reveal that there is more historical significance in this neighborhood that the 19th century homes that have been prioritized through preservation.

FORT GREENE HISTORIC DISTRICT



CLINTON HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT



**FORT GREENE
PROSPECT HEIGHTS**

**CLINTON HILL
FORD-STUYVESANT**

'Brownstoners'⁴ and the involvement of Pratt Institute that LPC designated the neighborhood and made these financial incentives available.

Secondly, there was little access to other financial incentives such as grants or non-profit investments. Although tax credits were available, these can still become a financial burden for lower-income homeowners. This is particularly difficult when considering the added costs often associated with living in a historic district. Primarily, the extra length required to process changes, the need for an architect, and the material standards homeowners are required to meet.

The designation of Clinton Hill as historic district and the financial incentives provided by the LPC did not provide any means to limit or reduce displacement, as it focused entirely on the preservation of the built environment. Seeing the beginnings of gentrification occurring in Clinton Hill and the strength of the real estate market in the 80s, they prioritized targeting these populations rather than facilitating legacy residents to be part of the preservation process.

As one New York Magazine interviewee noted in the 1970 article *The Happy Reawakening of Clinton Hill*, "it would be a tragedy if the original black residents were to be forced out in the name of 'revival'"⁵. Unfortunately, revival, in this case, did result in the displacement of many longtime black Clinton Hill residents.

DESIGN

The goal of this project is to challenge our understanding of what it means to preserve the built environment, and to reveal the memory within these structures as a means to stitch a community back together.

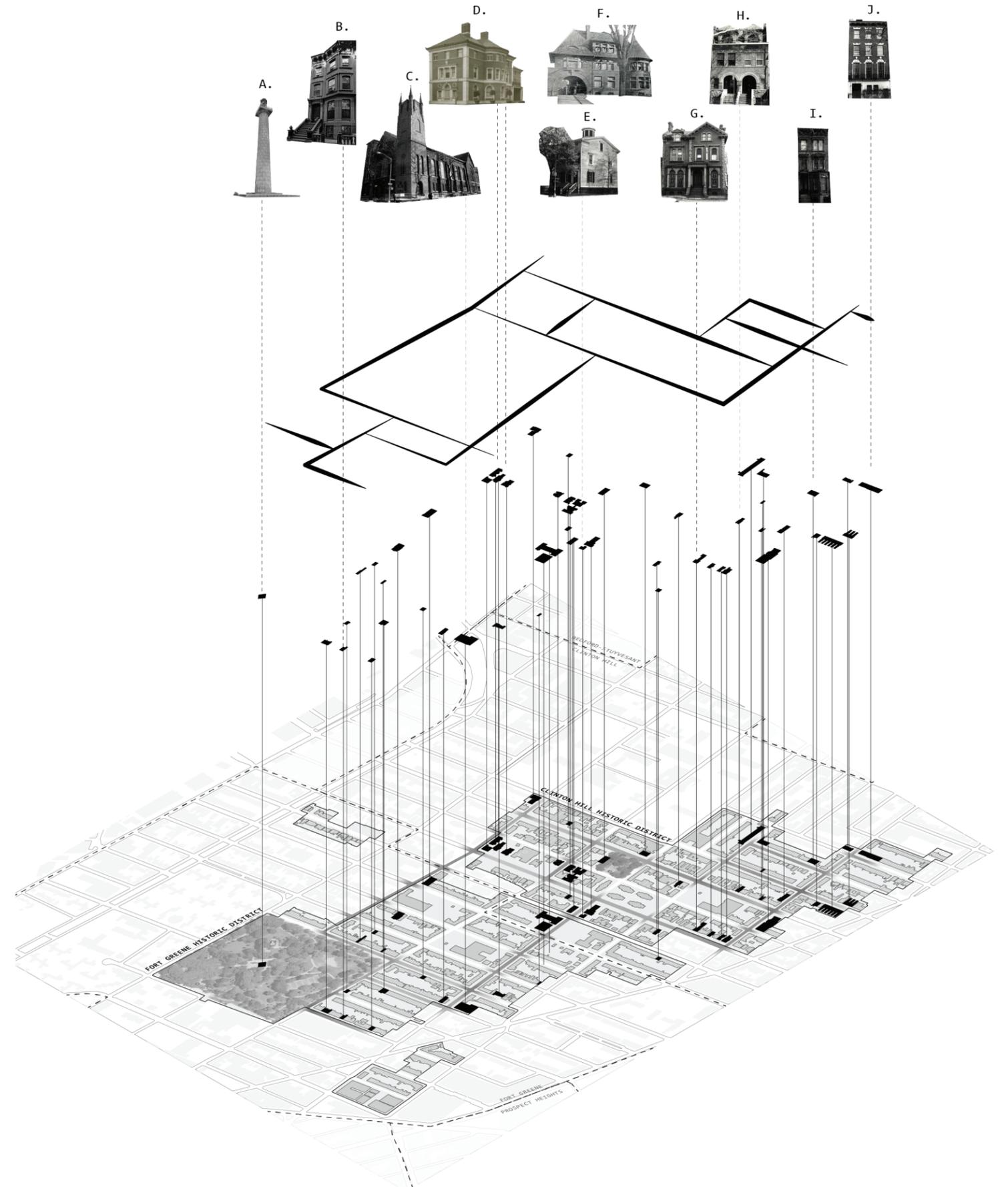
Following the example set by Amanda Williams in her project *Color(ed) Theory*, through color she is able to highlight vacant buildings prior to demolition and provoke passerby to recall the life that once resided



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: 241 Clinton Avenue (1981), Apartments on Clinton Avenue (1981), 69 Saint James Place (1981)

LEFT: Historic District notable buildings and visiting route

Image Sources: Clinton Hill Historic District Nomination Form



⁴ Davis, L. J. "The Happy Reawakening of Clinton Hill." New York Magazine . February 2, 1970., p.40

⁵ Davis, L. J. "The Happy Reawakening of Clinton Hill." New York Magazine . February 2, 1970., p.40

there. Similarly, this project aims to challenge our notion of what historic preservation means. It will move beyond the built environment to preserve the memory of the people who inhabited this space by creating permanence in human and social memories rather than only preserving the space where these memories occurred. Thus, it will envision a new preservation narrative that elevates the history of everyday people, as that is the true fabric of a neighborhood.

Additionally, due to the limited financial incentives available that focus on reducing displacement and incentivising community bonds, this project will also include a policy suggestion in a Brooklyn context.

The first portion of this proposal is the creation of a new series of significant buildings and routes derived from the previous social mapping exercise.

These new routes will be consolidated and made physical. By elevating over the historically protected buildings, it reinforces the notion that it is the bonds between people that make a neighborhood significant. Architecture is the space where these interactions take place, it should not be prioritized over the wellbeing of residents.

Finally, the policy proposal will introduce a new financial incentive to motivate owners of historic properties to convert their basement units into community accessible spaces where knowledge and memory can be exchanged.

Furthermore, the social mapping exercise revealed that the dissolution of social bonds for legacy residents contributes to their displacement. By re-invoking the memory of the life that once occurred in these spaces to create social connections between new and old residents, is a means to reduce any additional displacement.

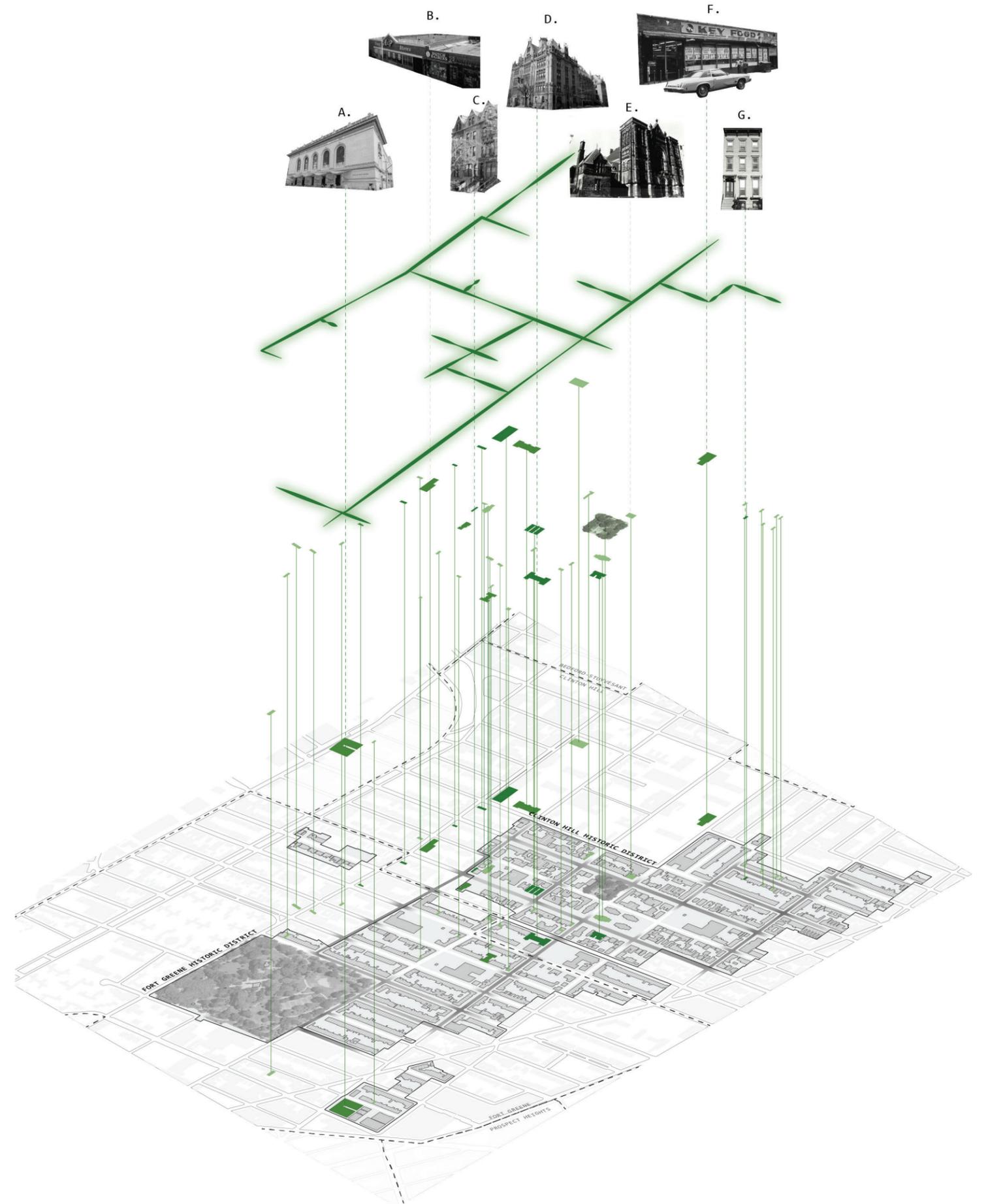
Programs that recall experiences past are a means to create a bridge between new and old residents and create new social networks that are not reliant on financial exchange (restaurants or coffee shops).



FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: 397 Waverly Avenue (1981), Queen Mary of All Saints Church (1981), Fulton Court (1981)

LEFT: Reimagined Historic District Route

Image Sources: Clinton Hill Historic District Nomination Form





215 Clinton Avenue - Today



215 Clinton Avenue - Visualized Route

PRESERVATION INCENTIVES

1. EXISTING INCENTIVES

- Property Tax Abatement
- Rehabilitation Tax Credits
- Payments in Lieu of Taxes
- Preservation Easements

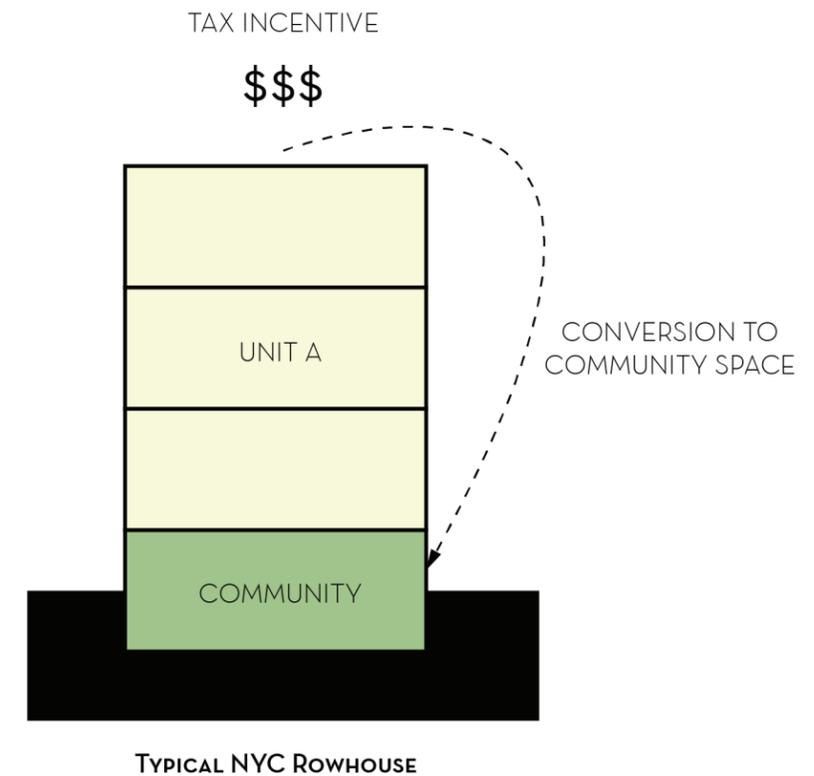
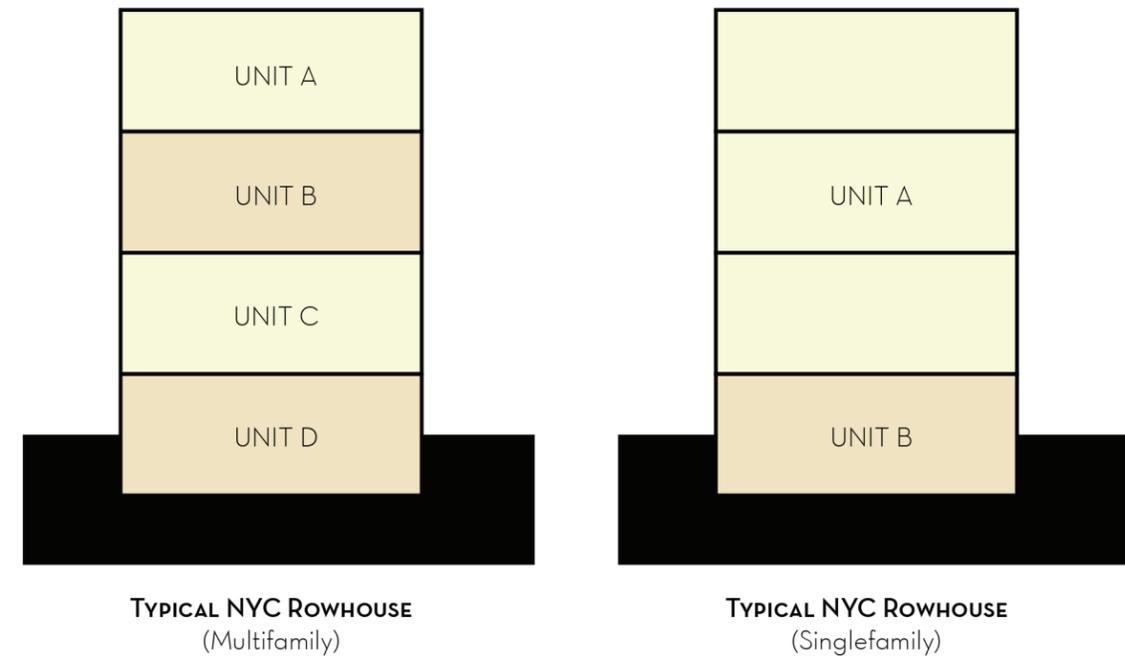
These 4 incentives all relate to the preservation of the architectural features of the building. There can be additional tax reductions if there is public use, but generally the priority of these incentives is to protect structures

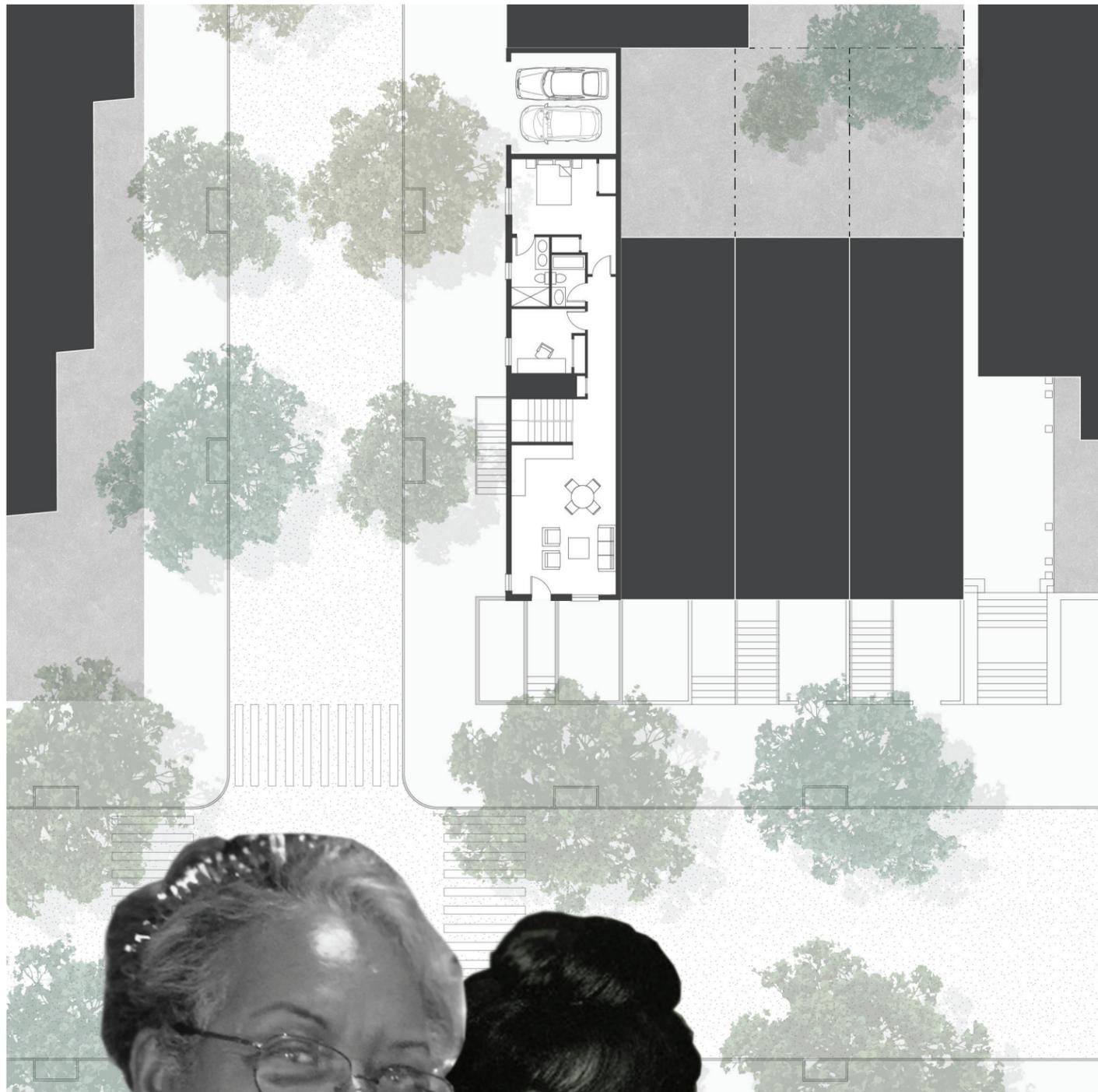
2. ANTI DISPLACEMENT

Today, there are no significant incentives for the preservation of existing communities in historic districts. There is a need for a viable financial strategy that would make preserving communities worthwhile for homeowners.

3. NYC BASEMENT UNITS

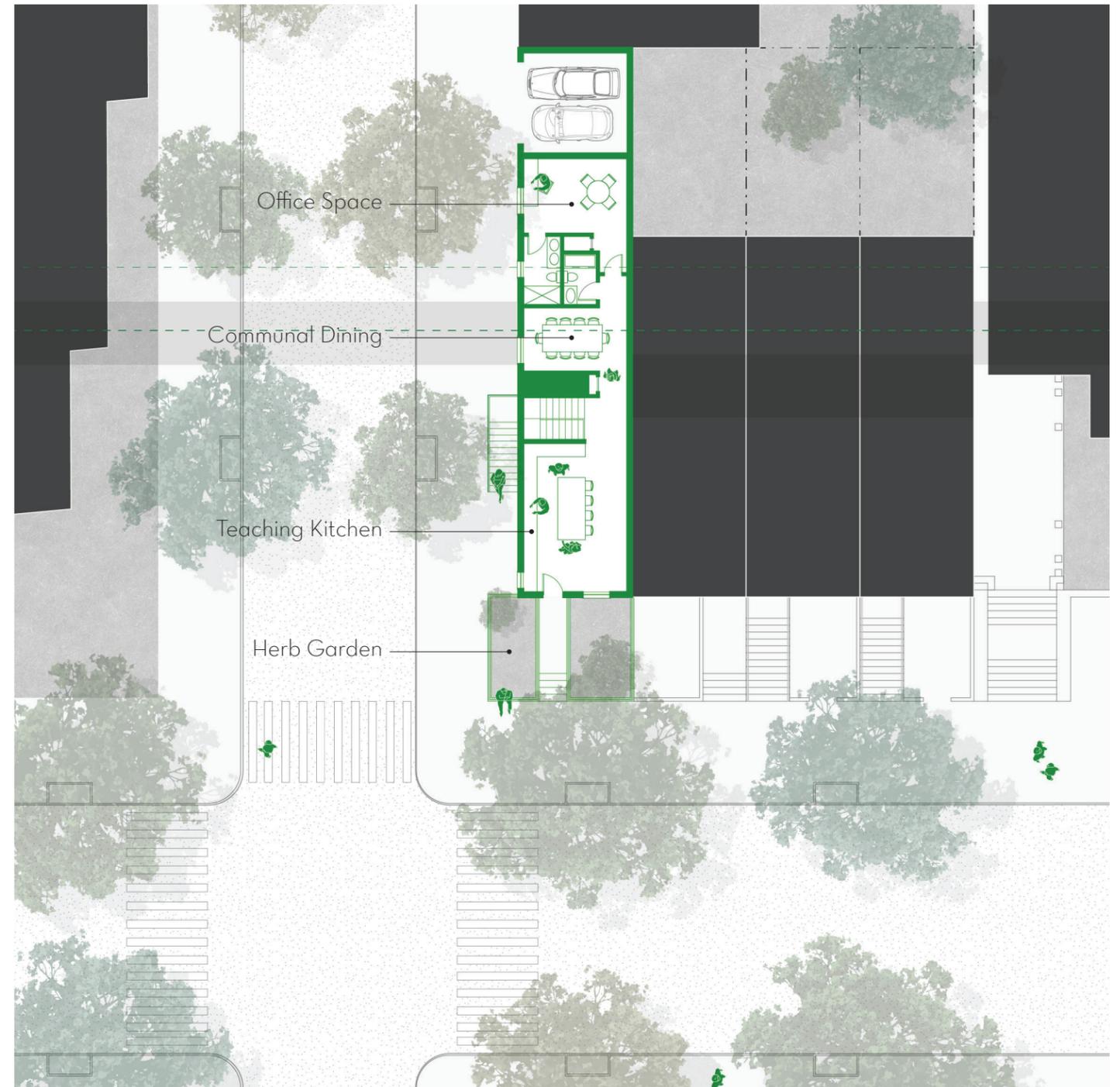
Providing homeowners in historic districts a tax benefit to lease their basement units as community spaces (especially in dense residential neighborhoods with few civic amenities) can be a way to create the space needed for non transactional forms of social cohesion.





SARAH HURST JENOURE
80 years old

Former Clinton Hill Resident of 50 years



215 Clinton Avenue - Proposed Communal Space, Opposite Page: Existing Basement Unit Plan

Sara is an avid cook, and when she lived in Clinton Hill, she would often host dinner parties for her neighbors. During these dinners, her home would become a point of social cohesion.

Many of her friends would also come visit to be taught to make some of her signature meals and drinks. After leaving, she continues to share her recipes through email, but the opportunity is lost to learn from her skilled example.

The basement unit of 215 Clinton Avenue, Sara's former home, has been a doctor's office and a rental unit in past lives. With this new preservation incentive, the space can be converted into a communal kitchen where different residents - new and old - can share their recipes and meals together. It is an opportunity to bond over good food while doing the work to create new social bonds between residents.