

# FROM TRASH TO TREASURE



**A Report on the Community Visioning Process for the  
135th Street Garbage Marine Transfer Station**

**Prepared by: WE ACT for Environmental Justice**



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**FROM TRASH TO TREASURE**

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*Designed by Ed Towles*

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## Partners: WE ACT for Environmental Justice



Photo Credit: Glamour Magazine

**W**est Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. (WEACT for Environmental Justice) is a Northern Manhattan community-based organization whose mission is to build healthy communities by assuring that people of color and/or low-income participate meaningfully in the creation of sound and fair environmental health and protection policies and practices.

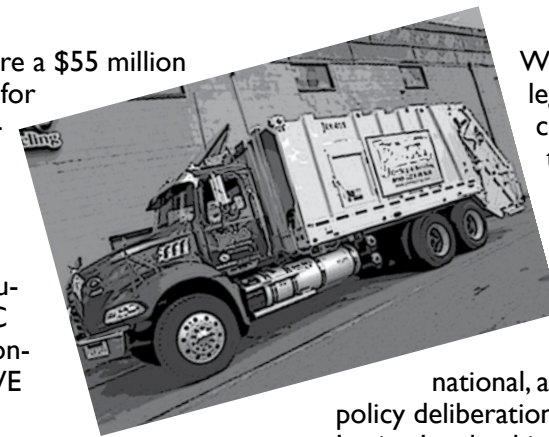
Established in 1988, today WE ACT is building healthy communities in Northern Manhattan by working to secure: Clean Air/ Climate Justice; Affordable, Equitable Transit; Reducing Waste, Pests & Pesticides; Toxic Free Products; Good Food in Schools; Sustainable Land Use; Open & Green Space; and Healthy Indoor Environments.

For over two decades, WE ACT has been a nationally recognized, award-winning organization with expertise in research, environmental law, policy, environmental health, community organizing, and coalition building.

WE ACT helped secure a \$55 million odor abatement plan for the North River Sewage Treatment Plant and obtained a \$1.1 million environmental benefit fund for the West Harlem Community by suing the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (WE ACT vs. NYCDEP).

WE ACT with Manhattan Community Board 9 led a 10-year community-based planning initiative to secure the creation of the West Harlem Piers Park, which opened along the Hudson River in 2009.

WE ACT created the political will that led to the clean-up of the nation's largest fleet of diesel buses (operated by the MTA). After WE ACT and other environmental groups engaged the MTA and influenced their operations, these buses now use alternative fuels, hybrids, and diesel retrofits (clean air technology).



WE ACT won passage of State legislation banning the chemical BPA in children's products through our Just Green coalition and advocacy efforts in 2010.

WE ACT is a leader in the Climate Justice Movement to impact local, national, and international climate policy deliberations through the Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change, a 33-member nationwide coalition founded and facilitated by WE ACT.

WE ACT is working to impact state policy on transportation options through the New York State Transportation Equity Alliance (NYSTEA), a 75-member statewide group founded and facilitated by WE ACT.

WE ACT opened a Washington Office in 2011 to coordinate federal policy campaigns and to engage in federal agency rulemaking.



## Partners: Manhattan Community Board 9



The community-based planning process to redevelop the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station (MTS) continues to be a source of hope, vision and pride for our community. Manhattan Community Board 9 has strongly promoted this project over the years, which will bring a better quality of life and improved economic development to the area. Manhattan Community Board 9 fully supports the concept and thanks WEACT for their great contributions in making it possible to bring this project to fruition.

The purpose of Manhattan Community Board 9 is to ensure that New York City's services are accessible and responsive to the needs of all residents, organizations, businesses, and institutions in West Harlem. Manhattan Community Board 9 considers each neighborhood a village, a community unique in its own way, rich in cultural diversity and steeped in historical significance.

The New York City Charter mandates that

all community boards advise and inform their respective constituencies on matters relevant to their immediate neighborhoods. Manhattan Community Board 9 convenes 10 committee meetings each month: Arts & Culture; Economic Development; Health & Environment; Housing; Landmarks & Preservation; Land Use & Zoning; Safety, Uniform Services, & Transportation; Senior Issues; Waterfronts, Parks, & Recreation; and Youth, Education, & Libraries.

Manhattan Community Board 9 encompasses the area from 110th Street in the South to 155th Street in the North, St. Nicholas, Edgecombe, Bradhurst, Manhattan, and Morningside Avenues in the East, and Hudson River on the West. Manhattan Community Board 9 has the largest concentration of institutions of higher learning in the world, many famous churches, handsome neighborhoods, and a diverse resident community.

## History of the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station



The history of the 135th Street solid-waste Marine Transfer Station along the West Harlem waterfront reveals a story of America's race relations during the 1950s, a time when the American economy thrived off of the post-war boom and when the government targeted communities like West Harlem as a dumping ground for the rest of the city.

After the introduction of the Interborough Rapid Transit and Independent Subway System subway lines in the early 1900s and 1930s, respectively, residential and commercial development around West Harlem boomed. While many of America's wealthiest citizens owned

land and homesteads in the village of Harlem through this time, the waterfront retained an industrial character.

From the turn of the century through the 1920s, the Harlem Piers were used as shipping grounds for large warehouses and businesses, such as the Burn Brothers Coal Company and McCormack Sand Company. The rail line between Riverside Drive and Marginal Street provided freight service to the entire West Harlem Piers neighborhood. The western end of Saint Clair Place was used as a recreational venue and location of the Palisades Ferry. In 1937, the 135th Street pier housed the nation's largest floating armory.



In the early 1900s, Harlem's population was mostly comprised of European immigrants from Ireland, Germany, Hungary, Russia, England, Italy and Scandinavia<sup>1</sup>; the African American population was a meager 4%<sup>2</sup>. Throughout the 1900s to 1930s, Manhattan's entire African American population did not exceed 2%<sup>3</sup>. Yet neighborhoods were becoming incredibly ethnically concentrated. In 1930, Harlem emerged as a "Black Mecca" and its African American population boomed to more than 70%. The majority of the white population relocated to both other parts of Manhattan and outside the borough.



Construction of the George Washington Bridge and the Henry Hudson Parkway in the 1930s and 1940s ushered in the demise of the ferry and freight rail service in the Harlem Piers area. The new, elevated parkway isolated the riverfront from the neighborhoods. The neighboring industrial businesses were relocated, and the piers themselves began to deteriorate. The meat packing industry had retained a solid presence in the area, but competition from Hunts Point triggered a steady decline and many of the old meat packing buildings were abandoned, dilapidated, or converted to

alternate uses. The problems plaguing Harlem escalated in the New York City Riot of 1943, which was a response to the declining conditions in the area and to rampant racism, poverty, and segregation. Strikes continued through the 1940s and 1950s, largely in response to unfair rent increases and poor workers' rights.

### History of West Harlem Piers Park

From 1998 to 2009, when the park opened, residents of West Harlem collaborated with government, neighborhood businesses, and local institutions to carry out the *Harlem on the River Initiative*. Led by WE ACT for Environmental Justice and Manhattan Community Board 9, the project aimed to transform the dilapidated waterfront at 125th Street and the Hudson River into the beautiful green oasis West Harlem Piers Park is today.

The West Harlem community was angered by the city's disconnected plan that did not address the needs of residents. Almost immediately after approving the development of the West

Harlem Piers Park, the city shared its intention of reopening and expanding the 135th Street MTS; had the city's 135th Street MTS expansion been approved, the new West Harlem Piers Park would have been situated directly downwind of the noxious facility.

Despite the addition of a community treasure, West Harlem residents were still dealing with a number of noxious polluting facilities that were often located next door to homes, schools and places of worship. One such West Harlem-based polluting facility was the garbage Marine Transfer Station (MTS) on 135th Street.



New York City's Department of Sanitation determined that every borough was required to have one Marine Transfer Station operating 24 hours a day. West Harlem's 135th Street MTS was assigned this role as Manhattan's 24 hour operating station. In contrast, the East 91st Street MTS, located in the affluent Upper East Side, closed daily at 2 p.m.

Every day, the 24-hour operations burdened the community with noise pollution, foul odors, harmful diesel exhaust from garbage trucks, and an increased presence of prostitutes due to the excess of lingering male sanitation workers.<sup>4</sup> According to the September 2002 *New York City Department of Sanitation Marine Transfer Station Conversion Report* developed by the Environmental Engineering Firm, Greely and Hansen, during the years of 1997 and 1998, the 135th Street MTS received on average 1,145 daily tons of garbage. On peak days, such as those following a holiday when garbage pick-up was suspended, the 135th Street MTS received as much as 2,570 tons of garbage a day, more than double the average daily tonnage. Most of the waste handled at

the facility consisted of residential, institutional and governmental waste managed by the New York City Department of Sanitation. Because the 135th Street MTS ramp could not handle the sheer weight of more than one garbage truck at a time, the trucks piled up along 12th Avenue, 133rd Street, and 132nd Street. At times, as many as 93 garbage trucks would line up to dump refuse inside the MTS. Many of these trucks idled for hours on end and as a result, the West Harlem Piers area became concentrated with high levels of harmful diesel pollution, exacerbating asthma-triggering conditions of a neighborhood already with an asthma rate three times the national average<sup>5,6</sup>.

Daily, the collected garbage would be barged by diesel-fueled tug boats to Staten Island's Fresh Kills, the city's last remaining garbage landfill. When the tugboats were moved to the 135th street MTS they too would spew diesel pollution into the air impacting the surrounding neighborhood. During the 1993 mayoral elections, then-candidate Rudy Giuliani promised Staten Island residents that, should he be elected, Fresh Kills would be shut down.

<sup>1</sup> "History of Harlem." *Harlem Tours: Welcome to Harlem provides the following tours and Harlem tour packages - jazz, gospel, walking, soul food, for groups and individuals*. Web. 28 July 2009. <[http://welcometoharlem.com/page/harlem\\_history/](http://welcometoharlem.com/page/harlem_history/)>.

<sup>2</sup> Beveridge, Andrew. "An Affluent, White Harlem?" *Gotham Gazette*. Aug. 2008. Web. 28 July 2009. <<http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/demographics/20080827/5/2620>>.

<sup>3</sup> Beveridge, Andrew. "An Affluent, White Harlem?" *Gotham Gazette*. Aug. 2008. Web. 28 July 2009. <<http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/demographics/20080827/5/2620>>.

<sup>4</sup> "Voices That Must Be Heard: Harlem: Where the city's waste flows upstream." New York Community Media Alliance. Web. 21 July 2009. <[http://www.indypressny.org/nycma/voices/109/news/news\\_1/](http://www.indypressny.org/nycma/voices/109/news/news_1/)>.

<sup>5</sup> Siegal, Nina. "Neighborhood Report: Harlem; Will a Harlem Plant Become a Son of Fresh Kills?" *New York Times*. 4 July 1999. Web. 21 July 2009. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/07/04/nyregion/neighborhood-report-harlem-will-a-harlem-plant-become-a-son-of-fresh-kills.html?scp=1&sq=135th%20marine%20transfer%20station&st=cse>>.

<sup>6</sup> Santora, Marc. "U.S. Praises Program in City for Children with Asthma." *New York Times*. 14 Jan 2005. Web 15 November 2013. <[http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/14/nyregion/14asthma.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/14/nyregion/14asthma.html?_r=0)>



Mayor Giuliani and his administration stuck to his promise during his term, closing Fresh Kills landfill and the eight marine transfer stations that served Fresh Kills, including the 135th Street MTS.

Unfortunately, without a comprehensive waste transfer plan to replace the City-based MTS system, the city was forced to work with private contractors who hauled New York City's refuse to out-of-state facilities in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Virginia. The exorbitant cost of sustaining this system quickly became untenable and in 2003, the city issued a request for proposals to study the issue of reopening and expanding its marine transfer stations into "solid waste containerization plants."

One of the marine transfer stations selected for reopening and expansion was the 135th Street station. The proposed retrofits would have increased the MTS' waste processing

by 300%. Instead of the previous traffic of an average 93 garbage trucks, the retrofits would have enabled 350 trucks to deliver 4,000 tons of garbage to the 135th Street MTS. Although the city planned to reopen and retrofit all of New York City's eight marine transfer stations, a research study by Greeley and Hansen LLC found that only three of the eight stations were able to be retrofitted and all of these stations were located in communities

of color: West Harlem's 135th Street MTS, Queens' North Shore MTS, and the South Bronx's Hunts Point MTS.

In response to the city's plan, WE ACT for Environmental Justice, Manhattan Community Board 9, and a coalition of more than 40 community leaders and organizations launched the **Fair Share Not Lion's Share** campaign. The campaign cited West Harlem's existing disproportionate environmental and public health burdens, including its two sewage treatment plants, five of Manhattan's six bus depots, five garbage truck facilities, and a state Superfund site. WE ACT and the coalition's organizing and advocacy proved strong and persuasive; in 2004 Mayor Bloomberg promised that the 135th Street MTS would not reopen as a waste transfer facility and the MTS at East 91st Street would reopen instead<sup>7</sup>. The 135th Street MTS remains closed today.

<sup>5</sup> Martin, Douglas. "Sanitation Chief Seeking to Keep Transfer Stations in Service." New York Times. 30 Apr. 1999. Web. 21 July 2009. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/04/30/nyregion/sanitation-chief-seeking-to-keep-transfer-stations-in-service.html?scp=8&sq=135th%20marine%20transfer%20station&st=cse>>.

<sup>7</sup> Urbina, Ian. "20-Year Plan for City's Trash Entails \$340 Million Renovation of 4 Marine Transfer Stations." New York Times. 8 Oct. 2004. Web. 30 June 2009. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/08/nyregion/08trash.html?scp=24&sq=bloomberg&st=nyt>>.

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### Existing Condition Assessments



In 2003, Greeley and Hansen, LLC analyzed the 28,000 square foot, two-story 135th Street MTS facility's access ramp and the piers (North, Central, South, and East) which support the overwater structure<sup>8</sup>.

In the structural condition assessments, Greeley and Hansen, LLC found that the Central, South and East Piers were in good condition, the North Pier was in fair condition, and the access ramp was in poor condition.

The area of the 135th Street MTS is classified

as an "M1-I industrial zone" because of its close proximity to residential areas. This classification puts the MTS under the strictest regulations for an industrial zone. Should the 135th Street MTS (part of New York City's Coastal Zone 5) be considered for rezoning, WE ACT will work with Manhattan Community Board 9 and New York City's Waterfront Revitalization Program to ensure that the redevelopment of the 135th Street MTS is aligned with the Waterfront Revitalization Program's policies.

<sup>8</sup> Information about the physical condition of the 135th street abandoned MTS obtained from: Greeley and Hansen LLC. West 135th Street Marine Transfer Station Special Underwater Inspection: Report of Findings. Rep. No. 203010.02A. October 17, 2003. Print.



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## Goals of the Trash to Treasure Campaign

- Clearly and effectively relay West Harlem residents' visions for the redesign and use of the 135th Marine Transfer Station (MTS).
- Transform the existing 135th Street MTS into a facility that would enhance the quality of life for current and future Northern Manhattan residents.
- Report on the process that led to the re-design and re-use of the 135th Street MTS.



Photo credit: Charles Santos

# FROM TRASH TO TREASURE

## Community Visioning Process

The Trash to Treasure Campaign was designed to engage local residents in an effort against designating West Harlem neighborhoods as the dumping ground for the rest of Manhattan. In 2004, as a result of WE ACT and other local leaders' extensive organizing and advocacy, Mayor Bloomberg guaranteed that the 135th Street MTS would not reopen as a waste transfer facility. Based on the success of The Harlem on the River community process to envision the 125th Street West Harlem Piers Park, Northern Manhattan's newest waterfront park in decades, the city appointed WE ACT and Manhattan Community Board 9 to host meetings to determine the reuse of the 135th Street MTS. A meeting was held in May 2010 and over 70 West Harlem residents came together to share ideas on the future reuse of the 135th Street Marine Transfer Station.

After an informative presentation from Savona Bailey-McClain, Manhattan CB9's then-Chair of the Economic Development and Waterfront Committee, the meeting participants separated into facilitation groups discussing Manhattan CB9's November 2009 MTS "Re-use Resolu-



tions." The resolutions are as follows:

- 1) Waterfront Environmental Center
- 2) Hydroponics & Aquaculture "Aquaponics" Center with a restaurant,
- 3) Recreational Waterfront Facilities and Boathouse, and
- 4) Trade Show with Exhibition Space.

The Community Visioning Process Meeting also had two breakout sessions and a Q&A session. In the breakout sessions, participants discussed and presented their ideas for the MTS' re-use and re-design. This report summarizes the ideas resulting from the 135th Street MTS Community Visioning Process Meeting and will be disseminated for feedback to all participants in electronic and hard-copy formats. Upon receiving feedback, WE ACT and Manhattan CB9 will host steering committee meetings and community meetings.



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## Potential Uses for the Marine Transfer Station

### **Waterfront Environmental Center**

The community saw value in creating an ecology or environmental center on-site to foster educational literacy for Harlem residents, serve as a resource for nearby schools and provide employment opportunities for neighborhood residents. The ecology/environmental center could also work in partnership with city/state agencies and academic centers for scientific research on topics such as water and air quality monitoring in Harlem.

### *Current Waterfront Environmental Center Models*

#### *Lower East Side Ecology Center*

The center focuses on educating and engaging the public on issues pertaining to the environment and resource conservation. Lower East Side Ecology Center frequently works with children from local schools.

<http://www.lesecology-center.org/>

Urban Divers Estuary Center's Harlem River Ecology Center (UDEC) This indoor and outdoor learning landscape offers a modest estuary aviary, and reptarium, with various interactive exhibits about urban estuaries,

urban watersheds, and local maritime history. UDEC's Harlem River Ecology Center provides environmental education programs, environmental stewardship community activities, youth development, cultural enrichment, and maritime activities.

<http://www.urbandivers.org/harlem.php>

#### *Masonville Cove Environmental Education Center*

This center, located on Maryland's Baltimore shore, boasts a natural landscape with hiking trails, wetlands, and various programs on urban ecology.

<http://www.masonvillecove.org/>



*Kingman Island Environmental Education Center* Upon completion, the Washington D.C.-based Kingman center will run programs on urban environments.

<http://www.allbusiness.com/finance-insurance-real-estate/real-estate/4410620-1.html>

#### *Oyster Bay Waterfront Center*

Inside this community marine education center are classrooms, a community center and 200-seat auditorium, hatchery, and office space.

<http://www.thewaterfrontcenter.org/>

### **Hydroponics & Aquaculture "Aquaponics" Center**

Aquaponics, incorporates both aquaculture, the farming of freshwater marine plants and animals, and hydroponics, a method of growing plants in an aquatic nutrient solution void of soil. An aquaponics system would offer the community a truly sustainable method of farming. Once an aquaponic system has been established it requires very little effort and time to maintain the system. After installation of an aquaponic system, the biggest efforts are the initial establishment of the grow beds and fish tank.





Once established, the aquaponic system virtually runs by itself, and less than 30 minutes of daily maintenance is required to keep the system going<sup>9</sup>. This mainly involves feeding the fish daily and occasionally harvesting the fresh vegetables and fish when fully grown. Further, the system offers educational benefits, which include educating residents on how to grow food and ecologic systems.

Potential drawbacks include the fact that these systems are extremely expensive to setup and also require highly specialized knowledge to ensure their success. Further, fish waste and antibiotics cause undesirable runoff that can seriously pollute the surrounding water<sup>10</sup>. This would require more advanced engineering systems to make sure the project did not increase the pollution in the river.

#### *Current Aquaponics Models*

##### *The Culinary Arts Center*

This center in Columbia, Missouri has a state-of-the-art kitchen, comparable to some of the

finest restaurants in the country. But, unlike most other restaurant kitchens, the lead instructor, Brook Harlan and his students never have far to go when in need of fresh herbs. A kitchen classroom aquaponic system provides cilantro for tortilla soup and salsa fresh sweet and lemon basil for making pungent pesto and thyme to flavor stock. Many other herbs, plus the tilapia are grown in the classroom, harvested fresh and used daily in the preparation of a wide variety of foods.

#### *Current Hydroponics Models*

##### *Science Barge Project*

Originally a project of New York Sun Works and BrightFarm Systems, this project is an educational hydroponic facility, now housed in Yonkers, New York. NY Sun Works and BrightFarm Systems continue to provide technical and design services for clients wishing to develop high performance, environmentally-sustainable urban farms.

[http://nysunworks.org/?page\\_id=9](http://nysunworks.org/?page_id=9)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.backyardaquaponics.com/Travis/CostBenefitAnalysisofAquaponicSystems.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> "The End of Food." Google Books. Web. 28 July 2009. <[http://books.google.com/books?id=aniW3gclsMUC&pg=PA311&lpg=PA311&dq=commercial+aquaculture+drawbacks&source=bl&ots=pr82vRuvf6&sig=mKRvuDhWSqT3Hv017zAa-xwH-lo&hl=en&ei=knNfStDSAo-kMMSVta4C&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=3](http://books.google.com/books?id=aniW3gclsMUC&pg=PA311&lpg=PA311&dq=commercial+aquaculture+drawbacks&source=bl&ots=pr82vRuvf6&sig=mKRvuDhWSqT3Hv017zAa-xwH-lo&hl=en&ei=knNfStDSAo-kMMSVta4C&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3)>.

#### *Current Aquafarming Models*

##### *Aquatic Research and Environmental Assessment Center*

At this Brooklyn College-based center, Dr. Martin Schreiber has long-conducted research on aquaculture.

<http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/academics/centers/areac.php>

##### *The Urban Aquaculture Center*

The 135th Street MTS re-designers can look to this Milwaukee-based center's 5-year plan for ideas on a successful aquaculture center's construction and funding.

<http://urbanaquaculturecenter.com/>

##### *University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)*

This for-profit joint venture between UAF and Pike's Waterfront Lodge is an example of the type of most common waterfront hydroponic projects.

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/>

#### **Recreational Waterfront Facilities and Boathouse**

Participants from the Community Visioning Process discussed their desire to expand the 135th Street MTS into a recreational waterfront facility and boathouse. To attract additional patrons to the area, community members suggested including activities such as kayaking and rowing.

#### *Current Recreational Waterfront Facilities and Boathouse Models*

##### *The Chelsea Piers*

Chelsea Piers, located in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood, provides visitors with numerous restaurants, athletic/recreational facilities, Wi-Fi spots, and film production facilities.

##### *The Whitehall Projects*

The Whitehall projects run along the Hudson River and feature recreational waterfront activities.





Urban Divers and Downtown Boathouse are both interested in redevelopment of the MTS and would be able to provide education on water exploration and ecological systems. Unfortunately, the drawbacks to such recreational waterfront/boathouse facilities are the high associated costs. Urban Divers and Downtown Boathouse estimate that the start-up fees can range from \$30,000 - \$50,000, and an additional \$5,000 is needed for paddles and life jackets. Recreational waterfront/boathouse facilities also incur high insurance costs and a team of specially-trained professional staff are required.

Aside from the high costs, the location of the 135th Street faces infrastructural problems, as the docks at West Harlem Piers Park are ill-suited for large crowds waiting for kayaking or boating activities.

#### **Trade Show and Exhibition Space**

Community residents would benefit from the re-envisioned 135th Street MTS' transformation into a multipurpose trade show and

exhibition space. The space would not only create economic benefits for the community and increase exposure to the surrounding piers, but would also be able to display art by local artists, students and residents. Periodically, the space could also host flea markets and food stalls.

The space could also be an educational tourist destination and raise awareness of environmental justice by featuring a tribute to the African American experience, a history of the 135th Street MTS, and information on its impacts on the community.

#### **Other Commercial Uses**

- Rental space for meetings
- One pier designated for commerce
- Underground Railroad exhibition, highlighting the role of the Hudson River in United States' history of slavery
- Library
- Senior center
- Vendor for recycled metal and electronics

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## Guidelines for MTS Redevelopment

**WE ACT and Manhattan Community Board 9 will continue to work together to advance the vision of a transformed 135th Street MTS.**

***The Community Visioning Process participants' guidelines for the MTS' redevelopment are as follows:***

1. Provide opportunities for both recreational purposes and community job development through restaurants, fitness and recreational facilities, and ecological education classrooms
2. Be consistent with the 197-A Plan adopted by Manhattan Community Board 9
3. Ensure that the intended re-uses of the MTS are compatible with zoning regulations
4. Connect to public transit access and expand existing bus routes
5. Improve on-water access to the Hudson River
6. Install street-side handicap-accessible ramps which connect the MTS

***Community Visioning Process participants suggest that the re-designed MTS building:***

1. Meet at least silver LEED Certifications
2. Integrate native plants in the landscaping
3. Utilize photovoltaic panels and a green roof/walls
4. Install gray water systems to reduce water usage
5. Maximize the usage of renewable energy sources
6. Not exceed its existing foot print over the water
7. Not exceed a height of three stories
8. Not contribute to any water and/or air quality pollution during construction and operation
9. Be open and accessible to all community residents

***Community Visioning Process participants suggest that the MTS developer:***

1. Be selected in consultation with the West Harlem community
2. Reasonably abide by the recommendations outlined in the Community Visioning Process
3. Be responsible for funds to create an educational entity
4. Make every effort to hire locally-based construction workers
5. Contract with minority and women owned businesses where possible



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## Community Proposals



Two key goals that emerged from the Community Visioning Process were to 1) increase tourism and 2) improve the area's economy, with a greater emphasis on the latter goal. Therefore, the various proposals discussed during the Community Visioning Process all provide a possibility of generating revenue and employment for local residents. Overall, the community residents envisioned

the restructured 135th Street MTS would transform from a community hazard into a valuable neighborhood addition.

### **Physical Structure**

In regards to the physical structure, the Community Visioning Process participants expressed their preference for a multi-use building as opposed to a single-use building. In

order to create a sustainable building with minimal environmental and public health impact, they stressed the importance of utilizing ecologically aware practices, from efficiently using water and energy resources to selecting environmentally-friendly building materials.

*Community Visioning Process participants' recommendations for a sustainable building include:*

- Install solar panels to generate and supply the structure with solar electricity
- Explore the potential for wind energy and/or water turbine energy from the Hudson River
- Develop a storm-water collection system
- Construct green walls and a green roof on the building
- Develop an aquaponics system (elaborated upon in subsequent sections)

By adhering to such practices, WEACT and Manhattan Community Board 9 can ensure that the risk increased by the 135th Street MTS' operations is not reintroduced into surrounding neighborhoods.

### **Green Production**

The Community Visioning Process revealed residents' desire to incorporate foliage into the redesign in the forms of a green roof, green wall, and a plant-filled atrium to welcome visitors.

Utilizing resource-saving green building infrastructure drastically helps to lower a building's environmental impact and reduce urban heat-island effects. Such infrastructure can be installed on a building's integrative roof/wall





or separate free-standing wall. A green roof/wall consists of a waterproof membrane and growing medium used to sustain vegetation. The green wall/roof's vegetation is completely sustainable because it retains rainwater that would otherwise run off the sides of a building and overflow sewer systems.

A green wall/roof acts as a biofilter and enhances air quality. By absorbing harmful airborne contaminants and greenhouse gases, a green wall/roof effectively reduces greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere.

Further, a green roof/wall provides a layer of insulation around the building and keeps the building cooler in summer and warmer in

the winter. Consequently, the green roof/wall reduces the use of temperature-regulating systems and their associated carbon emissions. The layer of insulation also serves as a sound barrier and guard against harmful ultraviolet rays and damaging weather conditions.

The Community Visioning Process participants conceptualized that a green roof/wall be installed both inside and outside of the transformed MTS to maximize the benefits from the structure. On the green roof, visitors would be able to enjoy a view of the River bank State Park located north of the MTS. There are several green walls around New York City which can be used as models.



### **Aesthetics**

Community residents expressed a strong desire for the future MTS structure to incorporate glass walls, mirrors, and indoor seating facing the Hudson River. In the spring and summer, the glass walls and decorative mirrors would maximize natural light and minimize electricity use for lighting. The community also suggested that a portion of the refurbished building have a glass floor in order to make the Hudson River visible.

At the Community Visioning Process, residents suggested that the structure be a geodesic dome with a green roof cantilever. The residents also desired that the MTS complement the other streetscapes already in existence along 12th Avenue and West 125th Street.

### **Transportation**

The current location of the 135th Street MTS is not well-served by public transit. Currently, the two nearest bus stops to the location are the M4 bus on Broadway and 133rd Street and the M15 bus on Saint Clair Place and 125th Street, neither of which are conveniently located to offer transit riders access to the MTS. Alterations to traffic circulation and transit access are necessary to accommodate visitors drawn to the redesigned 135th Street MTS.

### **Recommendations to increase pedestrian access to the MTS:**

- Extend the M15 bus route northward along 12th Avenue
- Advocate for a shuttle connecting the MTS to existing transit systems
- Advocate for water taxis at the piers, similar to those operating at Chelsea Piers
- Install street-accessible ramps to the water, similar to those built at Harlem River Park
- Amend traffic design in the MTS area to prioritize pedestrian mobility and safety, especially along Marginal Street and Riverside Drive

### **Additional Ideas**

- Security and Safety
- Noise Pollution
- Bus/Parking access
- Space for trade shows and retail options
- Space for a children's recreational center
- Space for an environmental resource and research center
- Increase in the number of stories of the MTS structure once the multi-use facility is complete



## Next Steps

1. Meet with Manhattan CB9 leadership, including its committee and board members
2. Convene regular meetings of the Steering Committee
3. Engage representatives from the following offices on the history and current status of the 135th Street MTS:
  - Elected officials representing the area (across all levels of government)
  - New York City Department of Sanitation
  - New York City Department of Parks & Recreation
  - New York City Economic Development Corporation
  - New York City Mayor's Office
  - Manhattan Borough President
  - Broader Northern Manhattan community
4. Mobilize stakeholders to engage in a master planning process



## Dedication and Acknowledgements



**W**e dedicate this report to the late Manhattan Community Board 9 President, Pat Jones. She made an offer the residents of Community Board 9 could not refuse, her talent and her time. Pat Jones was an avid fan of West Harlem and Mario Puzzo's the Godfather, and we were grateful for her leadership on this project. We would like to thank all of the community residents who participated in the community visioning process as well as Derval Thomas, WEACT's project officer at the Region 2 US EPA and the countless others that continue to tirelessly advocate for healthy communities. We thank Karl Crutchfield for photographing the work of WEACT and Manhattan Community Board 9 to advance the 135th Street MTS community visioning process.

WEACT for Environmental Justice and Community Board 9 would like to sincerely thank the Rockefeller Brothers Fund for supporting our efforts to protect the health of our communities.

# FROM TRASH TO TREASURE

## Contacts

West Harlem Environmental Action Inc. (WEACT for Environmental Justice)  
[www.weact.org](http://www.weact.org) • [www.weact.org/facebook](http://www.weact.org/facebook) • [www.weact.org/twitter](http://www.weact.org/twitter)

New York Office:  
1854 Amsterdam Avenue, 2nd Floor  
New York, NY 10031  
Phone: (212) 961-1000 • Fax: (212) 961-1015

Washington, D.C. Office:  
50 F Street, NW, 8th Floor  
Washington, DC 20001  
Phone: (202) 495-3036 • Fax: (202) 547-6009

Community Board # 9 Manhattan  
[www.cb9m.org](http://www.cb9m.org) • [info@cb9m.org](mailto:info@cb9m.org)

16-18 Old Broadway  
New York, NY 10027  
Phone: (212) 864-6200 • Fax: (212) 662-7396





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(WEACT for Environmental Justice)

New York Office:  
1854 Amsterdam Avenue, 2nd Floor  
New York, NY 10031  
Phone: (212) 961-1000 • Fax: (212) 961-1015

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Washington, DC 20001  
Phone: (202) 495-3036 • Fax: (202) 547-6009

[www.weact.org](http://www.weact.org)

