A. INTRODUCTION

According to the *CEQR Technical Manual*, an analysis of urban design and visual resources is appropriate if a proposed project would; a) result in buildings that have substantially different height, bulk, form, setbacks, size, scale, use or arrangement than exists in an area; b) change block form, demap an active street or map a new street, or affect the street hierarchy, street wall, curb cuts, pedestrian activity or street space elements; or c) would result in above-ground development in an area that includes significant visual resources.

An assessment of the Proposed Development's potential effects on urban design was provided in the EAS document dated April 2, 2010, which concluded that the Proposed Development facilitated by the Proposed Action would not result in any significant adverse impacts on urban design in the study area. As the Proposed Development would be constructed on an existing developed block, it would not alter any natural features, street patterns, or block shapes in the study area. In addition, the Proposed Development would enhance the area's streetscape by replacing a fenced and underutilized area along St. Nicholas Avenue with a landscaped publicly-accessible plaza, which would also serve as the entrance to the proposed building. The Proposed Development would infill the low-rise streetwall along West 155th Street with a taller mid-rise mixed-use residential building. The museum and child care uses proposed along West 155th and St. Nicholas Avenue would further revitalize this currently inactive and blank blockfront, and the Proposed Development would enliven the surrounding streets with street plantings and trees, and greater pedestrian activity. The Proposed Development, at 13-stories tall, would not be substantially different in bulk, scale, height, or form than many other mid to high-rise buildings located within the area, including the 22, 20, and 15-story residential buildings located one block to the west of the Proposed Development Site on Amsterdam Avenue and West 155th Street.

However, as the Proposed Action would result in new development within or adjacent to a designated historic district, as well as the demolition of an existing building within a S/NR-listed historic district, an assessment of visual resources was deemed to be warranted and is provided in this chapter. As detailed below, the Proposed Action and subsequent construction of the Proposed Development is not expected to result in any significant adverse impacts on visual resources.

An area's visual resources are its unique or important public view corridors, vistas, or natural or built features. For CEQR analysis purposes, this includes only views from public and publicly accessible locations and does not include private residences or places of business. Visual resources could include views of the waterfront, public parks, landmark structures and districts, or natural resources. As recommended by the *CEQR Technical Manual*, the study area for the visual resources analysis is coterminous with the study area used for the analysis in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," delineated by an approximate ¼-mile radius around the proposed rezoning area (refer to Figure 6-1, "Urban Design and Visual Resources Study Area"). As per the guidelines of CEQR, only views of visual resources from public and publicly accessible locations are assessed.

B. EXISTING CONDITIONS

Proposed Development Site

The Proposed Development Site is currently occupied by a low-rise commercial structure, which is identified as a contributing building to the S/NR Sugar Hill Historic District. Given the extensive width of West 155th Street and the area's change in elevation, the garage building is visible from a distance along that corridor, although given its low height it is not particularly prominent (see Figure 6-2). However, as described in Chapter 5, "Historic Resources," an architectural assessment report conducted by Higgins Quasebarth & Partners LLC indicates that the building has been modified over time, with alterations made to the structure's entries and window bays, including: modifications to the ground-floor openings on the West 155th Street elevation, non-original glass block infill at the second-floor windows on both facades, paint on the brick facade, and the removal of historic signage. The report indicates that non-original infill at the first and second floors has changed the overall transparency and symmetry of the structure's 1920s design. The exposed common red brick and non-original entry on the east elevation have also changed the original character of this facade. Thus, the building is not visually distinguished, as many of its most notable historic features have been altered or removed, nor does there appear to be any especially notable historic events associated with this garage.

Surrounding Study Area

There are a number of visual resources in the vicinity of the proposed rezoning area, including views of significant historic and architectural landmarks within historic districts and views of open spaces, as well as one natural resource. These include two major parks, Highbridge Park and Jackie Robinson Park, Fordham Cliffs, the area's most notable natural feature, as well as several designated historic resources, including the S/NR Sugar Hill Historic District and NYCLPC Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Historic District, the 155th Street Viaduct and Macomb's Dam Bridge, and 409 Edgecombe Avenue. Additional visual resources located further away include Trinity Cemetery to the west and the Harlem River to the east. Each of these resources is described briefly below, and their locations are indicated in Figure 6-1. Figure 6-3 provides illustrative photos of these visual resources.

S/NR Sugar Hill Historic District and NYCLPC Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Historic District

The boundaries of the NYCLPC-designated Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Historic District (Northeast and Northwest) are different from the S/NR district, as illustrated in Figure 6-1. The rezoning area is included within the boundaries of the S/NR district but is mostly excluded from the NYCLPC-designated district, with the exception of the approximately 692 sf portion of Lot 14 located within the rezoning area, which falls within both districts. The S/NR Sugar Hill Historic District, designated in 2002, consists of 414 contributing buildings, which are primarily late nineteenth and early twentieth century row houses and apartment buildings. It is bounded to the south by West 145th Street and to the north by West 155th Street, running irregularly along the side streets west of Convent Avenue and in some cases as far west as Amsterdam Avenue. The hilly



* Proposed Development Site

1/4-Mile Study Area

Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Northwest Historic District

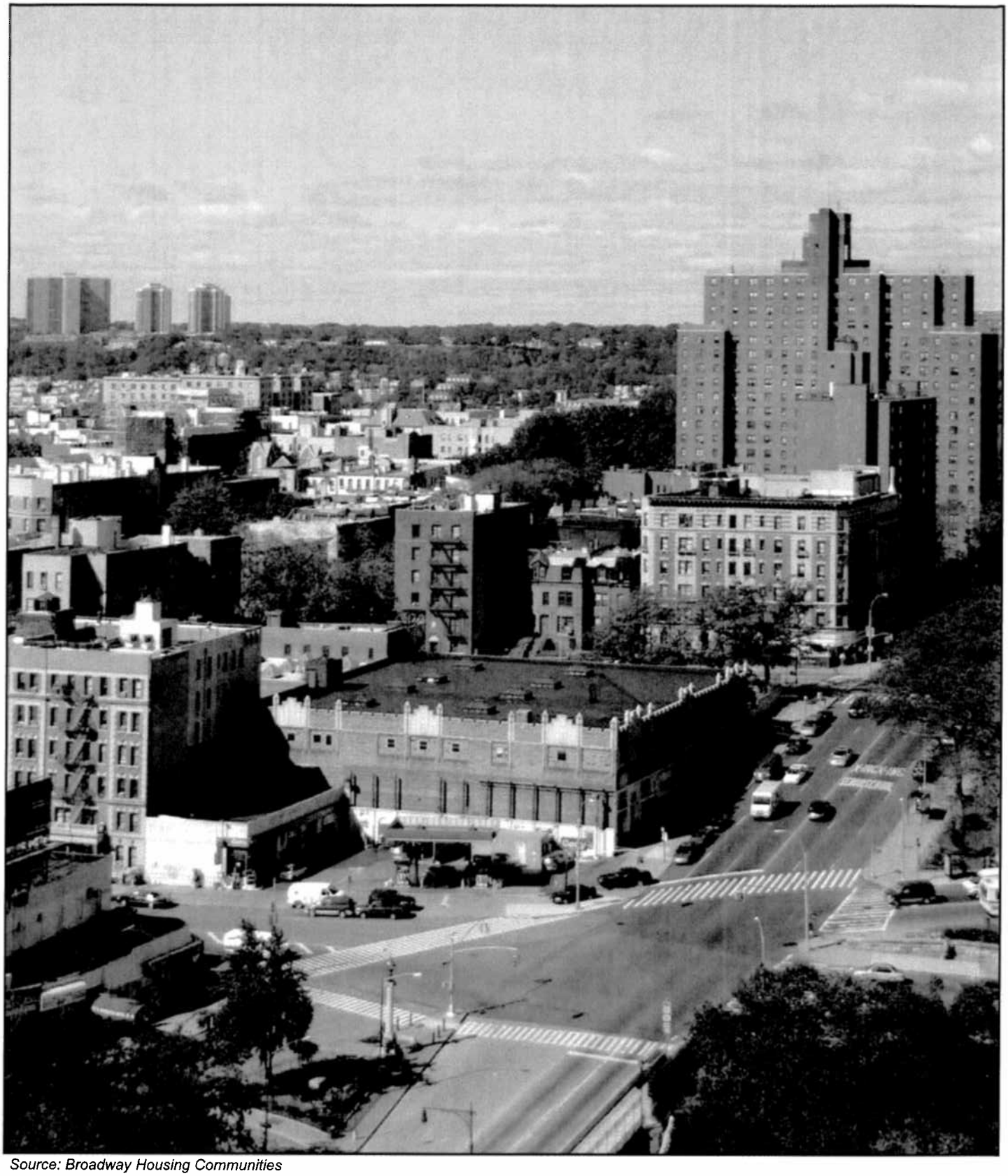
Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Northeast Historic District

Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Historic District & Extension

Figure 6-1
Visual Resources Study Area

Figure 6-2

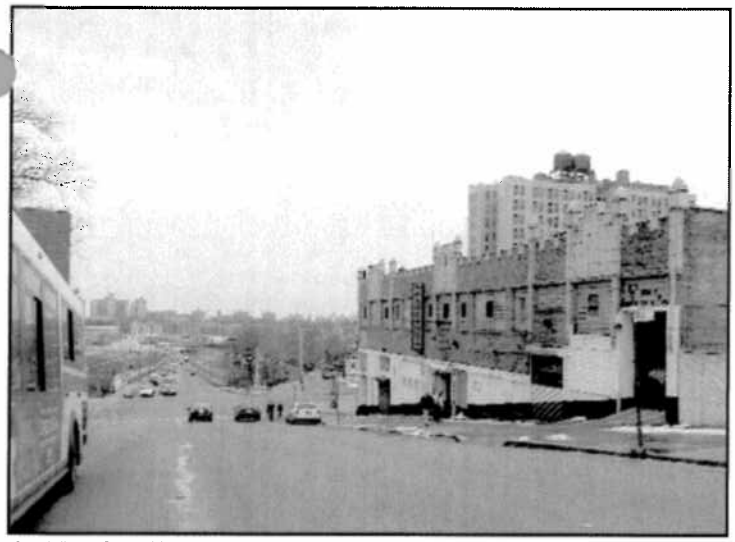
Bird's Eye View of Proposed Development Site and Immediate Vicinity



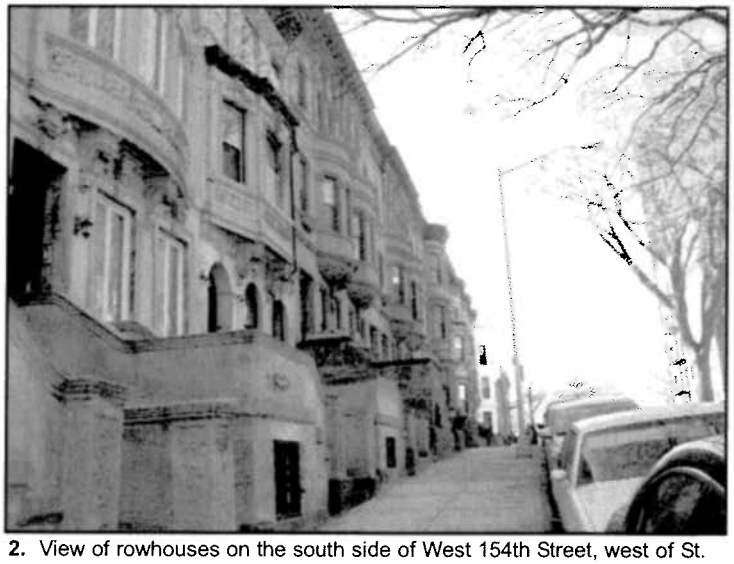
Source: Broadway Housing Communities

View from 155th Street Viaduct looking southwest towards Proposed Development Site. Historic district buildings are in the center of photo and to the left of site, Highbridge Park is visible in foreground right, and northern portion of Jackie Robinson Park visible in foreground left.

Figure 6-3
Visual Resources in the Study Area



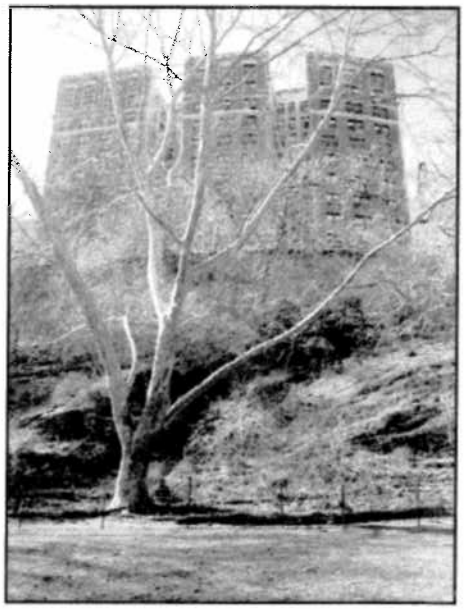
1. - View from West 155th Street at St. Nicholas Avenue, looking west towards the 155th Street Viaduct (in the distance), and the Bronx beyond. Proposed Development Site is to the right of photo.



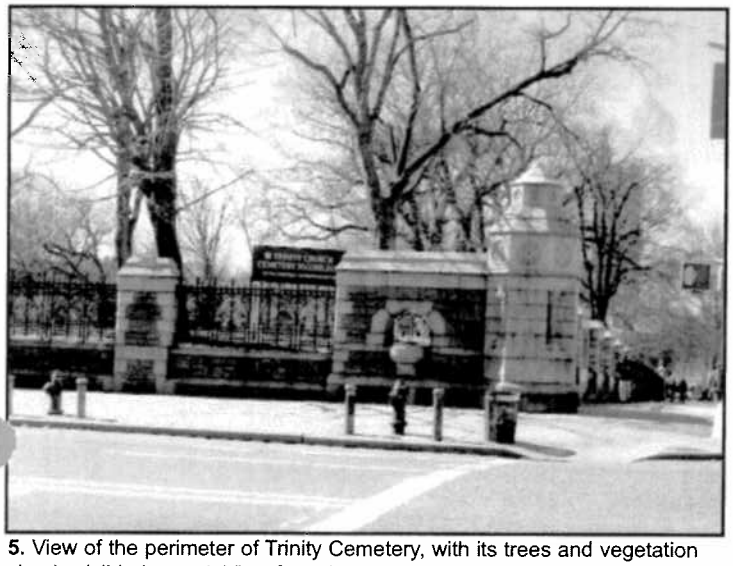
2. View of rowhouses on the south side of West 154th Street, west of St. Nicholas Avenue. These buildings fall within both the S/NR historic district and the NYCLPC Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Northwest historic district.



3. View of Jackie Robinson Park from Edgecombe Avenue, looking south-east. The difference in grade caused by the Fordham Cliffs is clearly visible in photo (Bradhurst Avenue visible in the background, at the lower elevation).



4. View from Bradhurst Avenue looking west through Jackie Robinson Park, illustrating difference in grade caused by the Fordham Cliffs. The building at 409 Edgecombe Avenue, a NYCLPC-designated and S/NR-listed individual landmark, is visible in the background, located above of the cliff.



5. View of the perimeter of Trinity Cemetery, with its trees and vegetation clearly visible beyond. View from Amsterdam Avenue and West 155th Street looking southwest.



6. View of Highbridge Park. View is from Edgecombe Avenue at West 157th Street, looking southeast.

Source: Google Street View

topography, parks, and numerous trees create vistas that juxtapose the natural and urban environments.

The NYCLPC Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Northeast Historic District was designated in 2001. Nearly all of the buildings in this historic district were constructed between 1905 and 1930, a period when developers ceased building single-family houses and began to build medium-size apartment buildings. These structures are located on uninterrupted block fronts that extend along St. Nicholas Place and Edgecombe Avenue, from West 150th to West 155th Streets. Nearly all of the thirty-two buildings in this historic district are apartment houses; two attached single-family residences are also included in the district. Most of the buildings are five or six stories tall, and generally have brick and stone facades, reflecting popular neoclassical styles, especially Renaissance and Colonial Revival.

The NYCLPC Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Northwest Historic District, designated in 2002, includes approximately 97 buildings and extends from the southwest corner of Convent Avenue and West 151st Street and the west side of St. Nicholas Avenue, just south of West 151st Street, north to the southwest corner of St. Nicholas Avenue and West 155th Street. Buildings in this historic district face on Convent Avenue, St. Nicholas Avenue, St. Nicholas Place, and West 152nd, West 153rd, West 154th, and West 155th Streets. Besides the row houses, there is one freestanding mansion, dating from 1887, in the district. A few middle-class apartment buildings were also erected during the late nineteenth century, but most of the district's multiple dwellings date from the early twentieth century. In total, there are 33 apartment houses in the district. These apartment houses are either five or six stories tall and almost all have brick facades with limestone bases and terra-cotta trim. In addition, this district contains a taxpayer containing a store with residence above and a masonic lodge, the only institutional building within the boundaries.

As illustrated in Figure 6-1, the northern portion of the NYCLPC-designated Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Historic District and Extension also falls with the ¼-mile study area. Designated in 2000 and 2001, this district contains residential buildings of great architectural and cultural merit. The finest row houses were treated as block-long compositions in which materials and decorative features were arranged to create unusually coherent streetscape

Fordham Cliffs

One of the most unique natural feature of the study area is the topographic drop known as the Fordham Cliffs. This geological rupture creates a formidable topographic shift in the landscape all the way from Inwood Hill Park at the tip of Manhattan to Morningside Park at the south end of Harlem. Caused by a geological rupture and a shift of the eastern plates of the Northern Manhattan Plateau, the Fordham Cliffs drop more than 70 feet, contributing to the unique physical characteristics of several Harlem parks – Morningside, St. Nicholas, Jackie Robinson and Highbridge. In the study area, the Cliffs present an obstacle in terms of access and connectivity between neighborhoods. There is a drop varying between 60 to 70 feet from Edgecombe to Bradhurst Avenue (Jackie Robinson Park – refer to photos 3 and 4 in Figure 6-3) and a drop of more than seventy feet from Edgecombe Avenue to the Polo Grounds (Highbridge Park). The Cliffs essentially separate the immediate environs of the Proposed Development Site on high ground from the Polo Grounds/Ralph Rangel Houses and Bradhurst neighborhoods at the bottom (to the east).

Highbridge Park

Highbridge Park is a 118.75-acre park that extends from West 155th Street north to Dyckman Street, between Edgecombe and Amsterdam Avenues. This park derives its name from New York City's oldest standing bridge, the High Bridge (1848), which was built to carry the Old Croton Aqueduct over the Harlem River, and was assembled piecemeal between 1867 and the 1960s, with the bulk being acquired through condemnation from 1895 to 1901. The park is widely known for its important landmarks, the Highbridge tower and the High Bridge (the city's oldest standing bridge), and also offers natural beauty and recreational fun, including a recreation center with pool, open vistas and an unusual geologic makeup. Among its strongest features are the magnificent cliffs and large rock outcroppings that dominate the park.

Jackie Robinson Park and Play Center

Jackie Robinson Park is a 12.77-acre park that extends from West 155th Street south to 145th Street, between Bradhurst and Edgecombe Avenues, which provides ten blocks of recreational resources. There is a topographical difference of approximately 70 feet from Edgecombe Avenue, the western boundary of the park, to Bradhurst Avenue, its eastern boundary, as illustrated in photos 3 and 4 of Figure 6-3. Along with its pool opening in 1936, a recreation center was created the same year. The park's other features include two baseball diamonds, basketball courts, volleyball courts, and two playgrounds, one with a water play area In addition, the park includes a bandshell that hosts concerts throughout the warm season. The Jackie Robinson (Colonial Park) Play Center was designated by NYCLPC in April 2007, including the swimming pool, bath house, former diving pool, band shell, dance floor terrace and extension between West 148th and West 150th Streets, retaining walls, fencing, stairways, linking pathways, playground, former wading pool and comfort station. NYCLPC also granted landmark protection to the interior of the complex's bath house.

155th Street Viaduct and Macomb's Dam Bridge

Spanning the Harlem River between West 155th Street and St. Nicholas Place in Manhattan, and Jerome Avenue and East 162nd Street in the Bronx, Macomb's Dam Bridge and 155th Street Aqueduct were designated in 1992. Known until 1902 as Central Bridge, this is the oldest metal truss swing bridge and the third-oldest bridge in the city. The ensemble consists of a swing bridge over the Harlem River with an intricate latticework of steel crowned with four finials; stone end piers capped by shelter houses; a camelback span over the railroad tracks in the Bronx; the 155th Street steel viaduct with tall stairways in Manhattan; and a shorter steel approach road in the Bronx.

409 Edgecombe Avenue

This 13-story building, originally called the Colonial Parkway Apartments, was designated in 1993. Constructed in 1916-1917 and set on a ridge overlooking central Harlem (see photo 4 in Figure 6-3), this was the most prestigious address for African-American New Yorkers from the 1930s through the 1950s. Notable for its conspicuous height and illustrious tenants, the curving thirteen-story apartment house attracted such luminaries as Thurgood Marshall, Aaron Douglass, and W.E.B. Dubois. The E-shaped building dominates the block and the wide façade curves to follow the route of Edgecombe Avenue as it turns west.

Trinity Cemetery

The study area also includes the 24-acre Trinity Cemetery, which lies on both sides of Broadway between 153rd and 155th Streets (see photo 5 in Figure 6-3). Calvert Vaux, co-designer of Central Park in Manhattan and Prospect Park in Brooklyn, designed a Gothic-style bridge across Broadway on the south side of 155th Street, which linked the two properties owned by Trinity Church. The bridge stood from 1872 to 1911, when it was demolished to make way for a large chapel on the eastern corner. The only remaining active cemetery in Manhattan, this quiet retreat includes giant hundred-year-old oaks and elms overlooking grassy knolls and manicured walkways, and provides seating and views of the Hudson River.

Harlem River

The Harlem River is an approximately 8-mile long waterway separating the boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx, and flows between the Hudson River and the East River. The Harlem River is located approximately five blocks to the east of the rezoning area and falls outside the ¼-miel study area. However, due to the area's elevation changes, the Harlem River is visible from the eastern portion of the view corridor along West 155th Street, as well as other east-west through streets in the study area.

C. THE FUTURE WITHOUT THE PROPOSED ACTION (NO-ACTION)

In the future without the Proposed Action, the RWCDS assumes none of the properties within the proposed rezoning area would be redeveloped, and the existing visual character of the rezoning area would remain unchanged. The Proposed Development Site would continue to be occupied by a 2-story public parking garage (Lot 21). It is expected that the study area's current land use trends and general development patterns would continue. As discussed in Chapter 2, "Land Use, Zoning, and Public Policy," two developments are expected to occur within the ¼-mile study area in the future without the Proposed Action.

Parts of two blocks to the east of the proposed rezoning area are expected to be rezoned from C8-3 to R8/C1-4, which would facilitate the planned redevelopment of a 125-space parking facility with a new mixed-use building. This development, according to available information, is expected to be completed by 2012 and is planned to consist of a 12-story mixed-use building that would include approximately 272 residential units and 32,800 sf of retail uses, as well as 144 public parking spaces. In addition, the School Construction Authority (SCA) has proposed to construct the Community Health Academy of the Heights, a proposed 572-seat intermediate school, on a site located at 1970 Amsterdam Avenue between West 157th and West 158th streets, which comprises a NYCHA development.

Thus, in the future without the Proposed Action, the overall visual character of the study area is anticipated to remain similar to existing conditions due to the limited amount of development projected to occur. In the future without the Proposed Action, existing views of visual resources in the study area are not expected to undergo substantial change. Planned developments within the

study area are not anticipated to affect the area's visual resources or eliminate or obstruct view corridors. Nor would they affect views of significant historical or architectural resources.

D. PROBABLE IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Development Site contains a 2-story garage that has been identified as a contributing building to the S/NR Sugar Hill historic district, which would be demolished to allow for construction of the Proposed Development. Although demolition of this structure has been identified as a significant adverse impact on architectural resources (refer to Chapter 5, "Historic Resources"), it is not expected to result in a significant adverse impact with respect to visual resources. As described above, the garage is not visually distinguished, as many of its most notable historic features have been altered or removed, and the brick façade shows wear, nor is it typical or characteristic of the surrounding historic district, as it exhibits a different scale, use and style. With the loss of many of the historic features that make this building a contributing resource, its demolition would not diminish the special architectural and historic character of the rest of the S/NR historic district because it would not create a significant change in the overall context or cohesion of the historic district as compared to existing or No-Action conditions. This is particularly due to the site's location on the northern periphery of the historic district and the core of historic and architecturally significant buildings.

The existing garage would be replaced by a new 13-story mixed-use building, as described in Chapter 1, "Project Description". The building mass of the Proposed Development has been developed by the project architects to complement the historic forms of the surrounding historic districts, and is expected to use modern materials and design. The Proposed Development, at 13-stories (120 feet high), would be taller than the existing structure on the site, and would therefore be more prominent in views along the adjacent streets, particularly along West 155th Street. However, it would not eliminate any public views of visual resources, including historic resources, in the surrounding area.

As described in Chapter 1, "Project Description," the Proposed Action would enable the location of the main entrance to the Proposed Development on St. Nicholas Avenue through a landscaped plaza, which would improve and enhance the area's visual character. The proposed landscaped entry plaza on St. Nicholas Avenue would be a publicly accessible community resource that highlights the presence of the Old Croton Aqueduct underneath. Although the plans for the plaza have not yet been finalized, it is expected that the entry plaza would be landscaped, and may include a linear configuration of concrete pavers to locate the Aqueduct, distinguishing it from the surrounding paved open space. This proposed plaza would be a visual asset to the neighborhood, and would greatly enhance the area's visual character.

In the future with the Proposed Action, views of visual resources in the vicinity of the rezoning area would not experience any significant adverse changes. Although the site's geological height will make the Proposed Development visible from a distance, the new building would relate well to the taller contemporary buildings in the study area, particularly those along the West 155th Street corridor. In addition, the Proposed Action would not eliminate any public views of historic resources in the area, as these resources and their distinguishing characteristics are oriented to and viewed from the public streets, and these views would not be obstructed by the Proposed

Development. View corridors along West 155th Street, St. Nicholas Avenue, and St. Nicholas Place, would not change as a result of the Proposed Development. While views of the study area from locations to the north, east and west would change, the Proposed Development would not block views of any visual resources from these vantage points.

By redeveloping a currently underutilized garage site, the Proposed Action and resultant Proposed Development would alter the visual environment of historic resources and historic districts in the vicinity of the site. However, it would not affect the architectural characteristics that make these resources eligible for inclusion on the State and National Registers or designation as a New York City Landmark, either in terms of their architectural quality or historic significance. The Proposed Development would also not block any view corridors along public streets or sidewalks.

It should also be noted that one of the measures identified to partially mitigate the significant adverse impact on historic architectural resources calls for the applicant to consult with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation regarding the design of the new building (refer to Chapter 12, "Mitigation"). This would help ensure that the Proposed Development would be visually complementary with its historic surroundings.

Given the above, no significant adverse visual resources impacts are expected as a result of the Proposed Action.

E. CONCLUSION

The Proposed Development would not result in any significant adverse impacts on visual resources in the study area. The Proposed Development would not block views of any significant visual resources in the surrounding area. Although the Proposed Action would result in the demolition of the existing garage structure on the site (which has been identified as a contributing building to the S/NR Sugar Hill historic district), it is not expected to result in a significant adverse impact with respect to visual resources as many of the building's most notable historic features have been altered or removed. With the loss of many of the historic features that make this building a contributing resource, its demolition would not diminish the special architectural and historic character of the rest of the S/NR historic district because it would not create a significant change in the overall context or visual cohesion of the historic district as compared to existing or No-Action conditions.

The proposed new structure would be much more visible than the existing on-site building; however, as the Proposed Development is expected to be consistent with the massing, height, and design of other existing mid- to high-rise multifamily mixed-use residential buildings in the area, particularly along West 155th Street, this added height and greater visibility would not constitute a significant adverse visual impact. Moreover, the Proposed Action would improve and enhance the area's visual character by facilitating the provision of a landscaped entry plaza on St. Nicholas Avenue. Therefore, given the above, it is not expected that the Proposed Development would adversely impact views of visual resources in the area, and no significant adverse visual resources impacts are expected as a result of the Proposed Action.