

## East Harlem Rezoning

High-rise and low-rise on Park Avenue. Photo by Drew Dies, www.structuresnyc.com.

### Hunter F. Armstrong

CIVITAS has been working on a multi-year project with Community Board 11’s zoning task force to make the case for rezoning the western section of East Harlem. The focus is to balance key priorities of the neighborhood, including land use policies to promote contextual development and protection of lowrise midblocks, and to create opportunities for affordable housing. The study area for the project specifically focuses on the Lexington Avenue corridor and blocks west to Fifth Avenue between 96th and 142nd Streets.

### Finishing The Job:

Beginning in the late 1990s, CIVITAS recognized the need for improved contextual zoning in East Harlem. Since 1961, most of the neighborhood had been zoned R-72—a “one size fits all” designation that has no height limit and does not distinguish between low-rise sidestreets and bustling mixed-use avenues. Improved zoning would allow East Harlem to preserve the village-like feeling of many of its side streets with their concentration of row houses and tenements, and at the same time provide the opportunity for

modern housing and increased mixed-use retail activity along some of the area’s widest avenues.

When the NYC Department of City Planning rezoned 57 blocks of East Harlem in 2003, they promised to “take another look” at the remainder of the neighborhood, the western half. The earlier effort, which created contextual height and bulk districts in mid-blocks and avenues, was the first Manhattan rezoning of Mayor Bloomberg’s administration and was approved with full support—and no opposition—from the community and property owners. The 2003 rezoning was led and financed by CIVITAS working with Community Board 11. Now, in 2011, we are asking the City to finish the job and approve the remainder of East Harlem for contextual development.

As part of the initial site survey process, CIVITAS interns and volunteers worked with Community Board 11 to identify the “soft spots” for real estate development and to show the threatened state of the neighborhood’s scale. Documenting East Harlem’s potential for inappropriate change will help make the argument for improved land use policies. Criteria for soft spots included: vacant lots, parking lots and “underbuilt” lots with one story commercial structures or vacant upper floors. Also included in the analysis were community facilities such as schools, religious institutions or public buildings that might be redeveloped in the future. Community facilities receive extra development rights when building out their lots. The survey involved a comprehensive block-by-block study of the area and encompassed 85 blocks between 96th and 142nd Street, including the Lexington Avenue corridor and west.

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CIVITAS is a union of citizens concerned with the quality of life on the Upper East Side and in East Harlem. Since 1981 CIVITAS has worked to improve the urban environment, advocating for better land use, zoning and urban planning, affordable housing, public transportation, clean air and water, and public access to the waterfront. Visit us at [www.civitasnyc.org](http://www.civitasnyc.org).

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#### Key observations:

- A high concentration of soft spots in the Park Avenue corridor adjacent to the Metro North railroad viaduct
- A large number of soft spots, including historic structures, in the 116th Street corridor, a residential and commercial “main street” in East Harlem
- 200 soft spots located in the survey area

#### What are the next steps?

Rezoning requires a block-by-block knowledge of the community, its built form, and plans for the future. CIVITAS and Community Board 11 are developing recommendations to share with the community for the most appropriate scale and uses for each block in the study area. ●

*To learn more about the rezoning process, visit: [www.civitasnyc.org/live/east-harlem-rezoning](http://www.civitasnyc.org/live/east-harlem-rezoning) and watch a video tour illustrating the impact of land use policies on new development.*



An early 20th Century flats building crowded out by new development on Lexington Avenue. Photo by Drew Dies, [www.structuresnyc.com](http://www.structuresnyc.com).

## Survey Reveals Mixed Reviews for East Side Select Bus Service

### Tali Cantor

Since the October 2010 launch of the Select Bus Service (SBS), riders have had a chance to assess the new express bus that has replaced the M15 LIMITED route on First and Second Avenues between Houston and 125th Streets. The M15 SBS follows on the success of the Bx12 SBS route in the Bronx, which improved bus speed by 20%, and MTA NYC Transit and NYC Department of Transportation have pledged similar improvements on the East Side. In order to gauge the success and shortfalls of SBS’ first few months, CIVITAS conducted a survey from November 1 to January 3 focusing on rider experience in the areas of ticketing, boarding, traffic flow, and overall efficiency. We will share a complete survey analysis with MTA, DOT, elected officials, and the community along with constructive feedback for improvement.

The survey, which gathered over 250 responses, revealed that a majority — 62% — had a positive overall experience with SBS. Nevertheless, the implementation of new bus procedures such as off-board ticketing, proof of payment receipts, three bus entrances, and a designated bus lane opened the door for much confusion and criticism from riders who were quite comfortable with the preexisting system. Mixed reactions ranged from general

confusion — “method of buying tickets is a fiasco” and “bus stops are not clearly posted” — to more location specific complaints about broken machines — “when one machine breaks during rush hour there can easily be a line of 50 or more people.”

Despite this negative feedback, the majority observed that SBS is accomplishing its mission of providing “a faster ride than before” and note that “the service has a lot of potential once the concept catches on among passengers.” ●

*You can read the survey questions and more about CIVITAS’ SBS initiatives at:*

*[www.civitasnyc.org/live/bus-rapid-transit](http://www.civitasnyc.org/live/bus-rapid-transit)*

## SBS Tips

- Recognize** SBS buses with their 3 low entrances and flashing blue lights
- Receipts** for SBS are transferable to local buses while SBS is in its pilot phase
- Transfer** from SBS to another bus or subway with the same metrocard that was used to obtain an SBS receipt
- Press** the yellow button twice to select “senior fare” on the coin machines
- Report** broken metrocard machines to 718-330-1234. Provide the stop location and machine number



Photo by Drew Dies, www.structuresnyc.com.

# Letter from the President

**Who Knew...** in 1981 that thirty years later, the CIVITAS “Citizens Light Brigade” would be as active as ever in leading the efforts to improve the quality of life in this vibrant part of Manhattan?

As we celebrate CIVITAS’ 30th Anniversary, we want to acknowledge the organization’s sustainers that have made it possible to reach our 30th year and to continue working for quality of life on the Upper East Side and in East Harlem.

Legions of sustainers have supported the leadership of August Heckscher, Genie Rice, Gorman Reilly, Carolyn Greenberg and Joseph Walsh. Following in their footsteps, I am honored to have been elected, along with Executive Vice President Jim Tripp, to carry on the mission of CIVITAS, and the legacy of its sustainers, into its 4th Decade!

In the next few months CIVITAS will be conducting a Public Needs Survey to obtain the views, concerns, and priorities of the communities we represent in the areas of land use, zoning, transportation, streetscape and environmental quality. The results will allow for a more proactive approach in advocating and initiating new projects, consistent with the original vision of CIVITAS.

We look forward to a new generation of the “Citizens Light Brigade” to continue the labor of love of the many sustainers before them.

Felipe Ventegat

## CIVITAS Presents ‘Nasty Newsracks’...

CIVITAS presented information about “nasty newsracks” to the Sutton Area Community in November. Information in the presentation included how to spot a newsrack violation, and how to report violations to 311. CIVITAS is also building support for a New York City Council oversight hearing on the proliferation of “nasty newsracks” across the city. Do you have an abandoned, graffiti-covered or garbage-filled newsrack on your block? Look out for these placement and maintenance violations:

- Within 15 feet of any fire hydrant
- Within 5 feet of a corner
- Within any bus stop
- Within 15 feet of the entrance or exit of a subway station
- On any cellar door, grating, utility maintenance cover or other similar location
- Containing garbage
- Broken door

Guidance for identifying and reporting newsrack violations to 311 and a sample letter to send to Councilmember James Vacca (District 13, Bronx), Transportation Committee Chair, are available at: [www.civitasnyc.org/live/newsrack-enforcement](http://www.civitasnyc.org/live/newsrack-enforcement).

Show your support for a NYC Council oversight hearing to address this quality of life and visual blight issue by sending in your letter or email [and](mailto:info@civitasnyc.org) by signing the online petition: [www.ipetitions.com/petition/newsracks](http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/newsracks)

## Second Avenue Subway

CIVITAS continues to participate in public meetings, and a New York State Senate oversight hearing, to call for better conditions for the Second Avenue merchants and for improved design of the mechanical and ancillary ventilation structures. In a first step to improve conditions for Second Avenue pedestrians and merchants, the MTA has announced its “good neighbor” standards to regulate sidewalk accessibility and maintenance. The pilot block will be between 92nd and 93rd Streets, next to the tunnel boring machine’s vertical conveyor. MTA has announced that the remainder of the program will be launched throughout 2011. Other ideas that have been consid-

ered are promoting Second Avenue business on MetroCards, and in subway and bus ads.



Hunter Armstrong addresses NYS Senators about subway construction at a November public hearing. The entire video recording can be found at [www.nysenate.gov/senator/bill-perkins](http://www.nysenate.gov/senator/bill-perkins)

Support Second Avenue businesses and find deals at the Second Avenue Shopper blog, [www.2ndavenueshopper.com](http://www.2ndavenueshopper.com).

## Public Needs Assessment: Launching February 2011

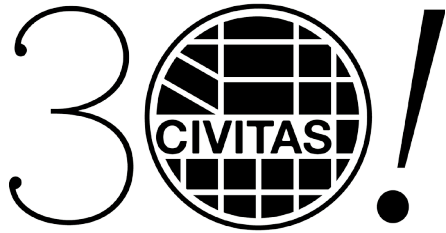
CIVITAS is working with NYU Wagner graduate students in urban planning to create a public needs assessment survey to help plan for the future of the Upper East Side and East Harlem, the communities served by CIVITAS. The survey will evaluate the needs of the neighborhood within the four key areas that CIVITAS addresses: land use planning and zoning, transportation, environmental quality and streetscapes. Expect to hear from us via the mail, email and even on the street to gauge your interests for the future of the neighborhood. Results from the survey will be presented at a community meeting in March. Stay tuned for details:

[www.civitasnyc.org/live/publicneedssurvey](http://www.civitasnyc.org/live/publicneedssurvey)

## Coming up...

CIVITAS is co-sponsoring a free screening of the critically acclaimed film *GASLAND* ([www.gaslandthemovie.com](http://www.gaslandthemovie.com)), a documentary on the controversial impact of hydrofracking, the process of drilling for natural gas.

Wednesday, February 9, 6:30-9 pm  
Dalton School, 108 East 89th Street ●



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## *Celebrate CIVITAS 30th Anniversary on March 3, 2011*

Join Honorary Co-Chairs **Honorable Pete Grannis & Ainslie Grannis**  
In Presenting the August Heckscher Award for Community Service to

***Tony Bechara, Chair, and El Museo del Barrio,***  
*a standout cultural institution in East Harlem and in New York City*  
&

***Paul Buckhurst, Frank Fish and Georges Jacquemart, Principals of BFJ Planning,***  
*a land use planning and transportation consulting firm, well-respected for its work  
on the Upper East Side and in East Harlem*

Awards will be presented by **Bruce Fowle**, Founding Principal, FXFOWLE and  
**Susan Henshaw Jones**, Director of the Museum of the City of New York



**March 3, 2011  
Americas Society, 680 Park Avenue  
6-8:30 pm**

The benefit co-chairs are David Beer, Janis M. Eltz, Jamie Gibbs, Jeanne McAnaney,  
Steven Narker, Genie Rice and Sava Thomas

Music will be provided by the Alex Donner Orchestra

To buy your ticket, call 212.996.0745 or visit: [www.civitasnyc.org](http://www.civitasnyc.org)