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## The changes coming to Harlem's 125th Street make it a hot spot

***Note: Two Aufgang designs cited below: The Corn Exchange Bank Building and the Victoria Theater site***

By Steve Cuzzo

The 125th Street of Harlem mythology is fast disappearing. River to river, a whirlwind of new development, redevelopment and “repositioning” is sweeping away old for new.

The Apollo Theater, under the guidance of a foundation chaired by banking titan Richard Parsons, happily seems immortal. But many small fried-chicken and fish joints and inexpensive clothing stores are on their way out — if not this year, soon after.

Scaffolds on every block herald the coming of new storefronts for which A-list retail brokers are seeking tenants.

A boom in national retail and entertainment chains — including AMC Magic Johnson Theatres, H&M, Old Navy, Gap Factory Store, Applebee's and Red Lobster — has been widely reported. Less recognized is that they represent merely the first wave of a tsunami of new investment.

The changes are lamented by some Harlem residents and merchants who fear the loss of what many regard as the historic Main Street of African-American life's unique qualities. But for better or worse, the influx of global wealth and the higher rents that come with it are facts of life all over the city.

Gentrification of 125th Street may sadly displace some venerable businesses — but longtime residents can look forward to having better goods and services that were for too long denied them.

The 800-pound gorilla of the emerging scene is Jeff Sutton's nearly finished 200,000-square-foot retail building at 100 W. 125th St. at Lenox Avenue, where Whole Foods, American Eagle, Burlington Coat Factory, Raymour & Flanigan and Olive Garden have signed leases.

The six-story structure, opening in 2016, will be Harlem's new center of commercial gravity, across the street from Marshalls-anchored Harlem Center and Marcus Samuelsson's Red Rooster restaurant and nightclub.

The energy pulses far east and west of that critical corner. Here's just a partial list of what's coming, starting from the west:

1) 324 W. 125th St. (at St. Nicholas Avenue). Jeff Sutton is replacing an antiquated old structure with two levels of modern retail.

2) P.C. Richard, 309 W. 125th St. (between St. Nicholas Avenue and Frederick Douglass Boulevard). The electronics and appliance retail chain plans to open a 20,000-square-foot store in the first half of 2016.

3) Victoria Theater site, 233 W. 125th (between Frederick Douglass and Adam Clayton Powell Jr. boulevards). The Lam Group filed for Buildings Department permits last week to demolish the long-shuttered three-story cinema on the site, signifying that work is to begin in earnest on a 26-story, \$164 million project to be anchored by a Renaissance by Marriott Hotel and have apartments, retail and cultural uses.

4) Studio Museum in Harlem, 144 W. 125th (between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and Lenox Avenue). The well-regarded museum devoted to African--descended artists is to be replaced with a larger, \$122 million facility, partly backed by city funds and designed by Tanzanian-born British architect David Adjaye. Construction is to start in 2017.

5) Bed Bath & Beyond, 5 W. 125th St. (between Fifth and Lenox avenues). Under construction, opening 2016, in a new building where WeWork has also leased office space.

6) 69 E. 125th St. (between Park and Madison avenues). Greystone Property Development is working on a 12-story building with rental apartments and retail. Cushman & Wakefield is marketing the storefronts.

The next two projects are at the west corners of Park Avenue, which is darkened in both directions by the elevated MetroNorth railroad line. Its shadow extends to the south blockfront between Lexington and Park avenues, notoriously the site of a camp of homeless drug addicts.

But city officials and the NYPD have taken notice. Meanwhile, the city, MTA and local businesses and civic groups are planning \$6 million in upgrades to the street and sidewalk under the 125th Street viaduct to make it safer and more welcoming.

7) Corn Exchange Building, 81 E. 125th St. (at Park Avenue). The beautifully restored, partially landmarked 132-year-old building has 25,000 square feet of office space on the market via Colliers and 10,000 square feet of retail through the Heller Organization. Colliers Executive Managing Director Eric Yarbrow said the whole address might be leased to a single user. Office asking rents are \$50 a square foot on lower floors and \$53 on floors 7 and 8.

8) 1800 Park Ave. (at East 125th Street). Ian Bruce Eichner planned to build a 600,000-square-foot pair of apartment-retail buildings, but has put the shovel-ready site up for sale, via NGKF's Geoffrey Newman. It could fetch up to \$150 million, my colleague Lois Weiss reported. But we now hear Eichner might be open to a joint venture with another developer.

9) 142-196 E. 125th St. (at Lexington Avenue). Gary Barnett's Extell bought the former Pathmark site last year but has yet to announce its plans for the corner.

10) 2321-2325 Third Ave. (at East 125th Street). The city this month put out a request for proposals to develop a commercial-residential project at what's now a 7,000-square-foot vacant lot.