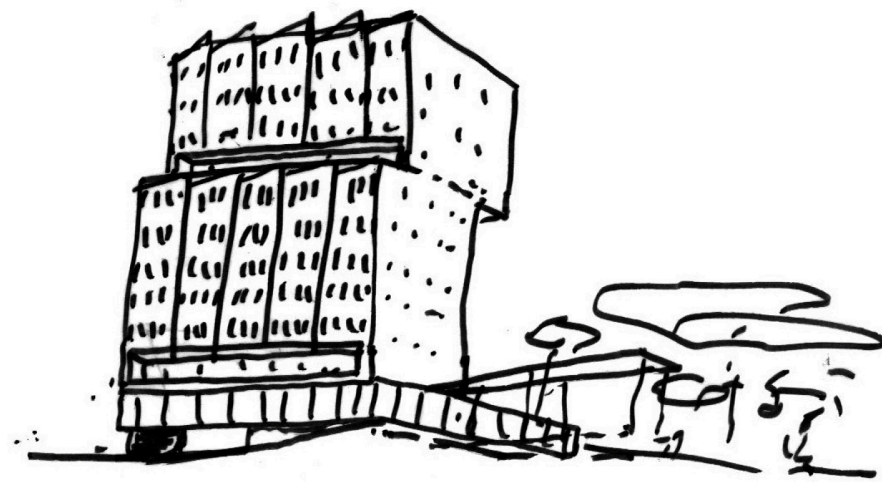


**SUGAR
HILL**



Sugar Hill 155th Avenue
NY
Jacob Drung

- 1. Project Background**
- 2. Context and Design**
- 3. Disciplinary Context**
- 4. General Assessment**

1: Project Background

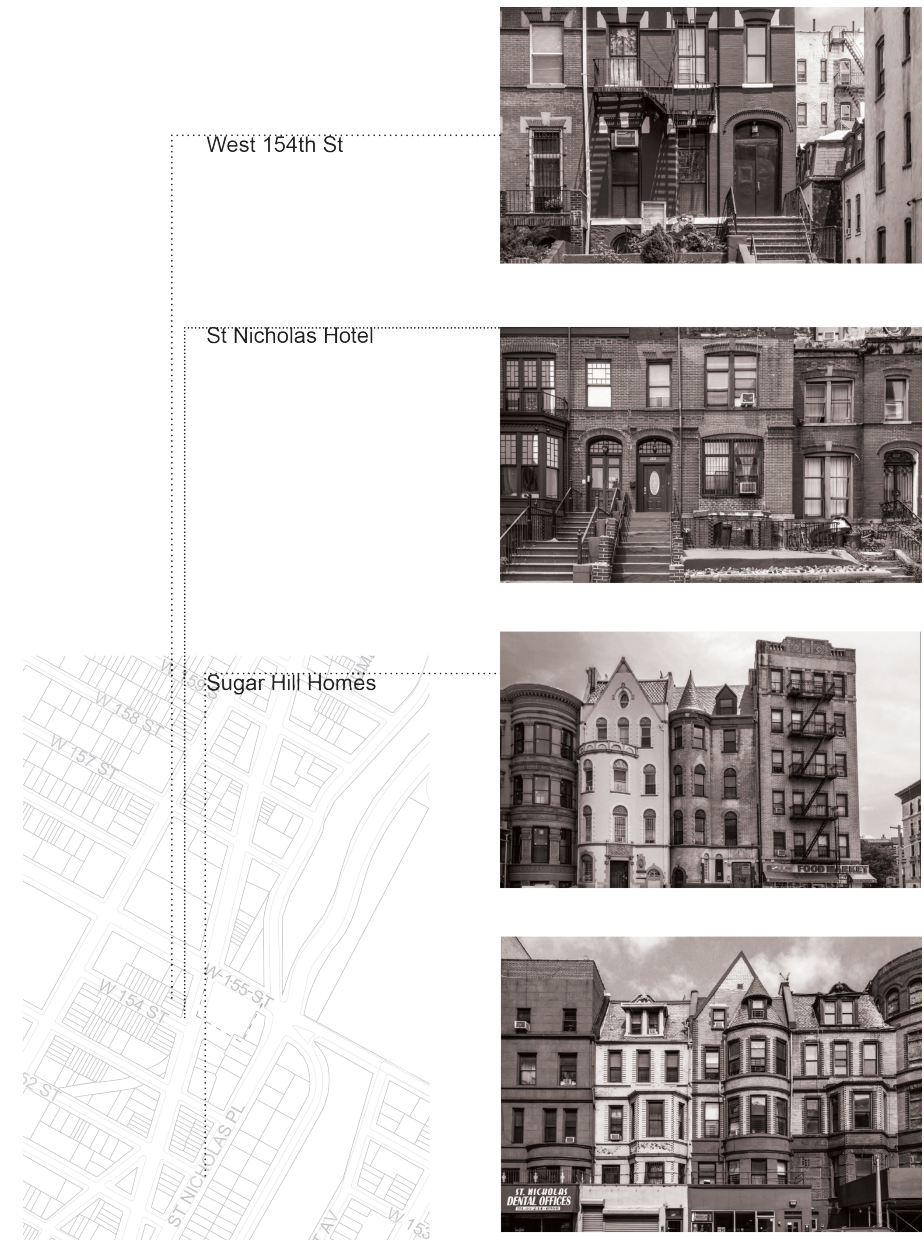


“Located at Harlem’s Sugar Hill, was commissioned by Broadway Housing Communities in January, 2008. Broadway Housing Communities (BHC) is a not for profit organization with a 25 year track record of developing and managing nationally recognized, innovative community-based housing and programs to redress poverty and homelessness. For this proposed development, Broadway Housing Communities (BHC), was led by Ellen Baxter.”

“Located along 155th Street, an important east-west connection between Harlem and the Bronx across a tangle of iron bridges, the dark, almost gloomy 13-story building sits between 19th-century brownstones to the west, an industrial mix to the east, and the topographically undulating green expanses to the north, punctuated by the towers of the New York City Housing Authority’s (NYCHA) Polo Grounds public housing complex.”

“Sugar Hill Rezoning- Final Environmental Impact Statement.” Sugar Hill Environmental Impact Statement - DCP. Accessed October 11, 2020. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/applicants/env-review/sugarhill-final.page>.

“Our Mission & History.” Broadway Housing Corporation. Accessed October 13, 2020. <https://www.broadwayhousing.org/mission-history>.



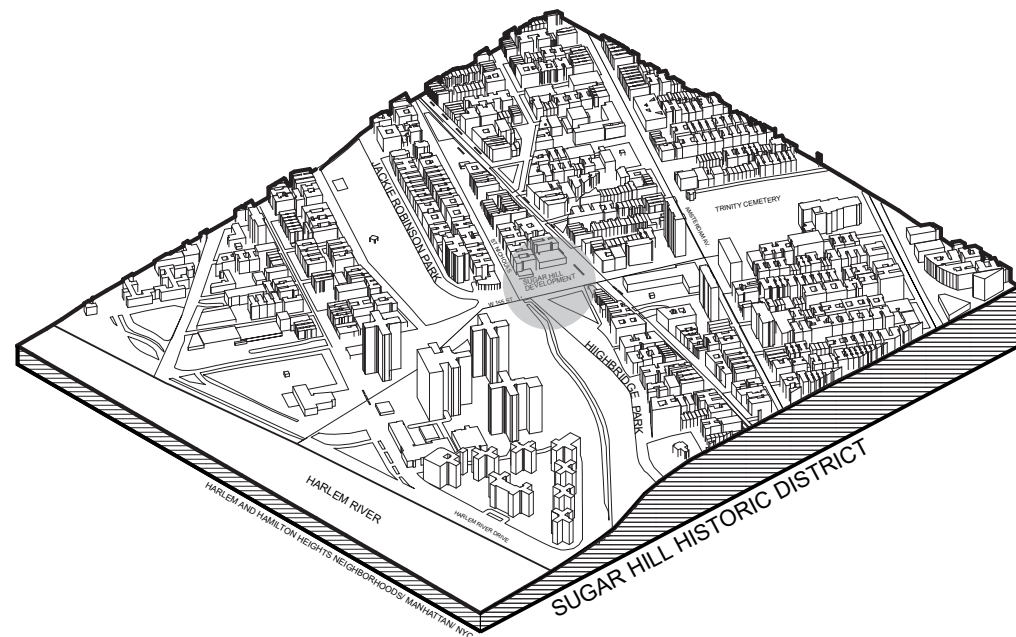
West 154th St



St Nicholas Hotel

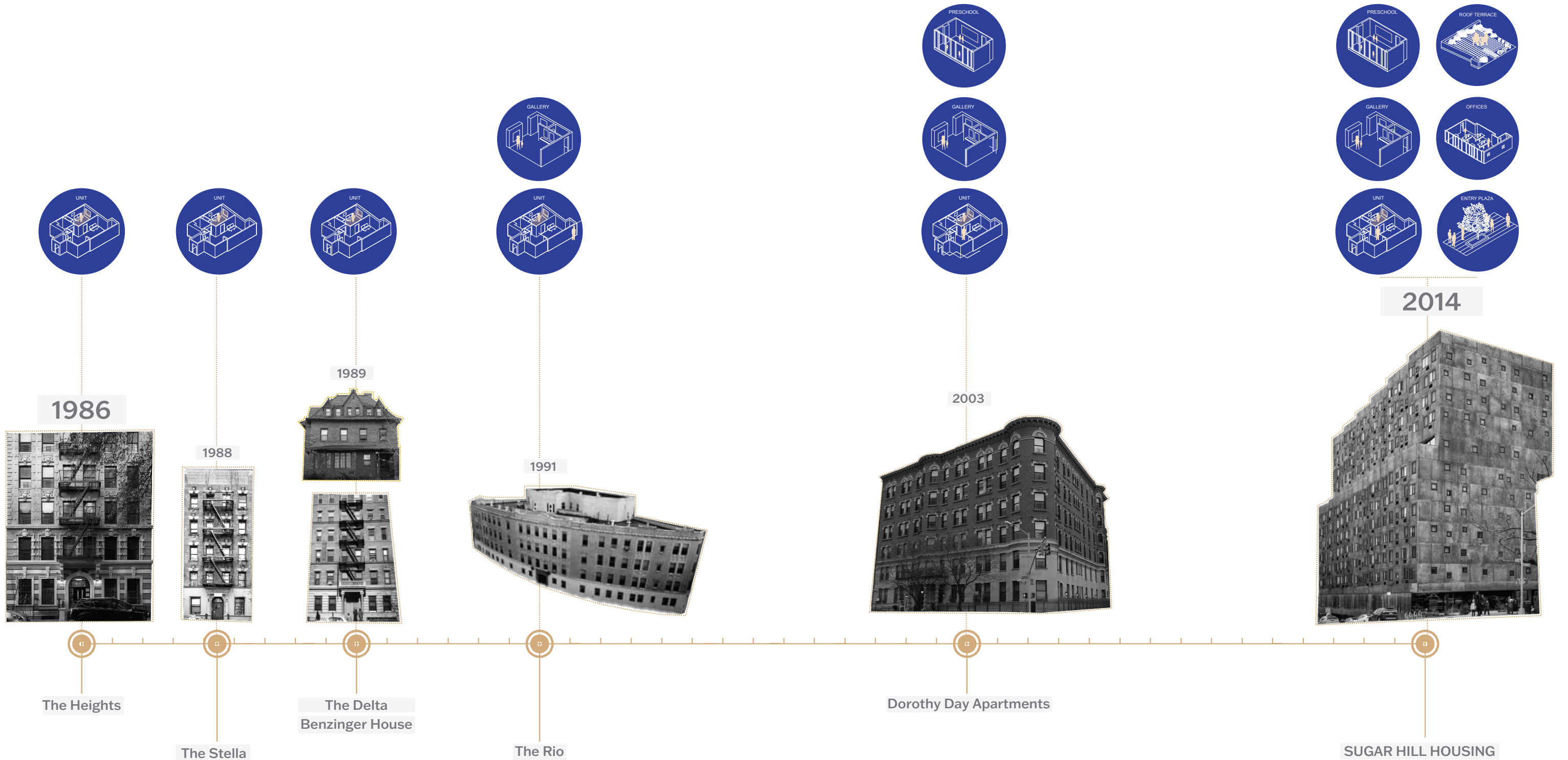


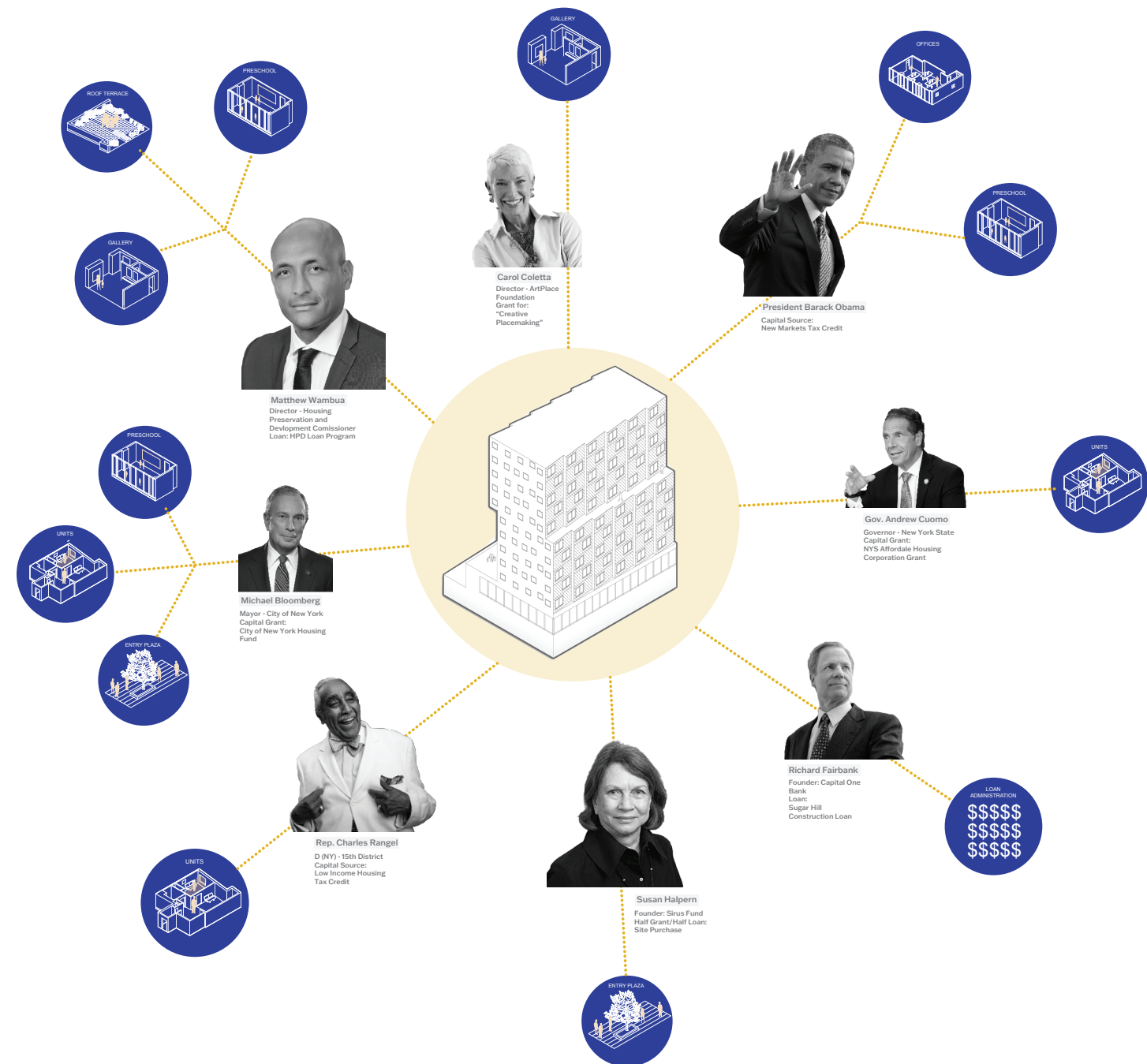
Sugar Hill Homes



The Hamilton Heights/ Sugar Hill Northwest Historic District is located at the northwestern corner of the northern Manhattan area that, in the early twentieth century, came to be known as Sugar Hill. This is at the southern portion of the area known, from the late 1840s through the early twentieth century as Washington Heights. The historic district includes approximately 97 buildings and extends from the southwest corner of Convent Avenue and West 151 st Street and the west side of St. Nicholas Avenue, just south of West 151 st Street, north to the southwest corner of St. Nicholas Avenue and West 155th Street. Buildings in the historic district face on Convent Avenue, St. Nicholas Avenue, St. Nicholas Place, and West 152ndct, West 153rdct, West 154th, and West 155th Streets. Since its initial development, the historic district has been home to a wide variety of New Yorkers, both native and foreign born, of varied ethnicity and races and from various economic levels. By the 1930s, the area became known as “Sugar Hill,” a neighborhood that attracted many of the city’s most prestigious African-American residents. Today, the Hamilton Heights/ Sugar Hill Northwest Historic District remains an architecturally-distinguished and culturally-significant neighborhood.

Dolkart , Andrew S. “Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Northwest Historic District Designation Report ,” n.d.





Broadway Housing Communities is both a developer and community organization that has existed within Harlem since 1983. The corporation was founded out of a number of existing foundations within the New York area that were focused on increasing housing availability to the homeless and under-housed as well as those with special needs.

"Our Mission & History." Broadway Housing Corporation. Accessed October 13, 2020. <https://www.broadwayhousing.org/mission-history>.

The founders of BHC, Ellen Baxter and Kim Hopper, had initially worked on a legal fight in the late 1970s, fighting for what would eventually become a ruling that stated all homeless persons had "the basic and fundamental right to an emergency shelter." BHC was eventually developed to help with the implementation of this ruling.

Initially BHC buildings were relatively modest in scale. The Heights was the first BHC project to open its doors and housed 55 formerly homeless men and women. This was soon followed by The Stella, The Delta and the Benziger-Abraham House and The Rio, all within the next 5 years. The Rio became the first BHC project to also integrate gallery space and artists studios among the traditional housing program.

With the development of The Dorothy Day Apartments in the early 2000s, the State of New York, became a major financial partner, reducing the amount of private philanthropy and fundraising that was required for the project. This project also became one of the first to have a widely varied program - beyond just space for art, a more extensive cultural program was instituted, along with an early childhood education center - paving the way for Sugar Hill.

The financing of Sugar Hill Housing was procured by BHC from a number of different sources. Susanne Schindler notes that the two main sources were provided by the Federal Government - the Low Income Housing Tax Credit and the New Markets Tax Credit. As these funding sources are available throughout the USA, BHC wanted to show that this process could be repeated elsewhere. These grants were administered by Capital One Bank who also provided the construction loans for the project.

Schindler, Susanne. "Architecture vs. Housing: The Case of Sugar Hill." Urban Omnibus. The Architectural League of New York, January 23, 2018. <https://urbanomnibus.net/2014/09/architecture-vs-housing-the-case-of-sugar-hill/>.

Further grants were given by the City and State of New York. The New York Housing, Preservation and Development Commission also provided large loans. Much of the additional financing was received from private donors, most notably Susan Halpern's Sirius Fund and The ArtPlace Foundation.

2: Context and Design

COMMUNITY
IN ACTION



BHC Broadway Housing Committee Sugar Hill Children's Museum & Arts Center

Sugar Hill



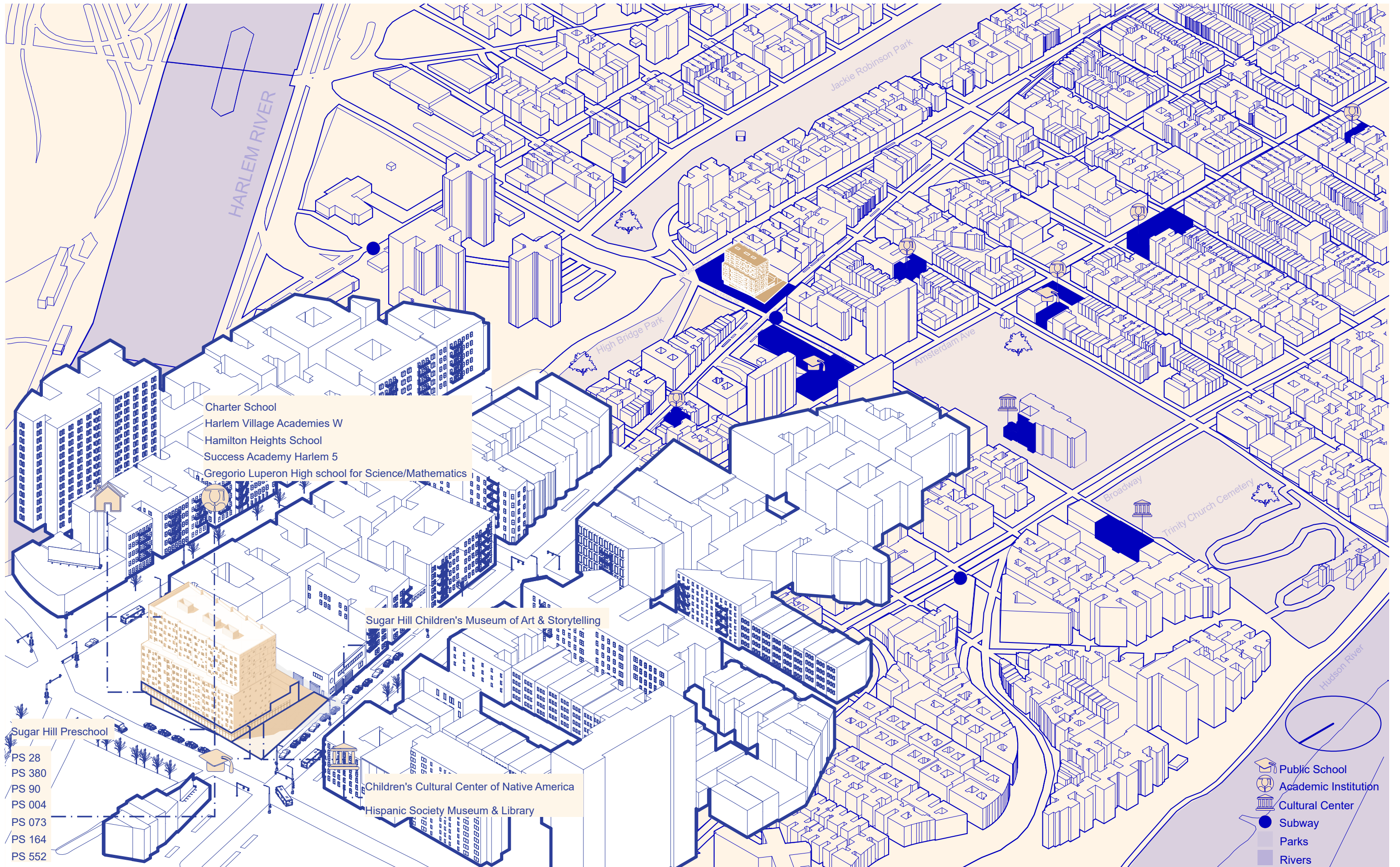
The development responds to the Sugar Hill district's need for housing, especially for the Harlem demographic and population that had faced poverty, homelessness and did not have access to the cultural platform. The vast majority of New Yorkers experience poverty, today more than before. Poverty in New York City greatly influences children. On a larger scheme of things in concentrated neighbourhoods, this issue is linked to low-performing schools and high rates of violence, unemployment, substance abuse and teen pregnancy that also directly affects child development and wellbeing. Statistically speaking, poverty in Harlem is now at 25.1% in relation to 17.3% citywide.



"Sugar Hill Rezoning- Final Environmental Impact Statement." Sugar Hill Environmental Impact Statement - DCP. Accessed October 11, 2020. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/applicants/env-review/sugarhill-final.page>.

During the Harlem renaissance, the rapid force of gentrification in West Harlem and Washington Heights makes low-income families especially vulnerable. This mixed-use development offers housing opportunities for households in poverty buttressed by educational and cultural resources that can affirmatively contribute to the revitalization of West Harlem. By providing 124 units of housing in varying sizes, which would serve 51 single adults and 73 families ranging in income from homelessness to 80% of the Area Median Income, this project targets the demographic and neighbourhood needs. The key objectives are:

- +providing quality housing and services to the City's lower-income families;
- +expanding the supply of affordable housing in the City
- +Transforming an underutilized garage site into a green model of urban community revitalization that integrates affordable housing, education and cultural resources.



Charter School
 Harlem Village Academies W
 Hamilton Heights School
 Success Academy Harlem 5
 Gregorio Luperon High school for Science/Mathematics

Sugar Hill Children's Museum of Art & Storytelling

Children's Cultural Center of Native America
 Hispanic Society Museum & Library

Sugar Hill Preschool

- PS 28
- PS 380
- PS 90
- PS 004
- PS 073
- PS 164
- PS 552

- Public School
- Academic Institution
- Cultural Center
- Subway
- Parks
- Rivers



• Who is the designer(s), and what is their agenda? Adjaye Associates strives for an architecture that enriches daily life and meets the diverse needs of the communities they serve, from the intimate to the expansive. Adjaye Associates believes architecture presents opportunities for transformation—materially, conceptually, sociologically—and can act as a catalytic mechanism for bridging and creating relationships between the human body, society and the world. “As a multidisciplinary studio, research is indispensable to our process, and we undertake the responsibility of articulating narratives through understanding the past in order to create a vibrant, socially and environmentally responsible future.” Notions of place-making, identity, memory and meaning, are central to the design process. The scheme incorporates a public program, with a children’s museum and early childhood center, which resonate with Adjaye Associates’ commitment to a wider urban and cultural responsibility.

“A closer look reveals how intelligent organization fits five uses into a challenging site. The childcare center, the museum, and the housing each has a distinct point of access off a plaza along St. Nicholas Avenue.”

My approach is to design from the inside out and my buildings have been said to ‘unfold cinematically’. The starting point is to gain an understanding of a client’s needs and the way in which a sequence of spaces will be used.

David Adjaye



Sugar Hill Development

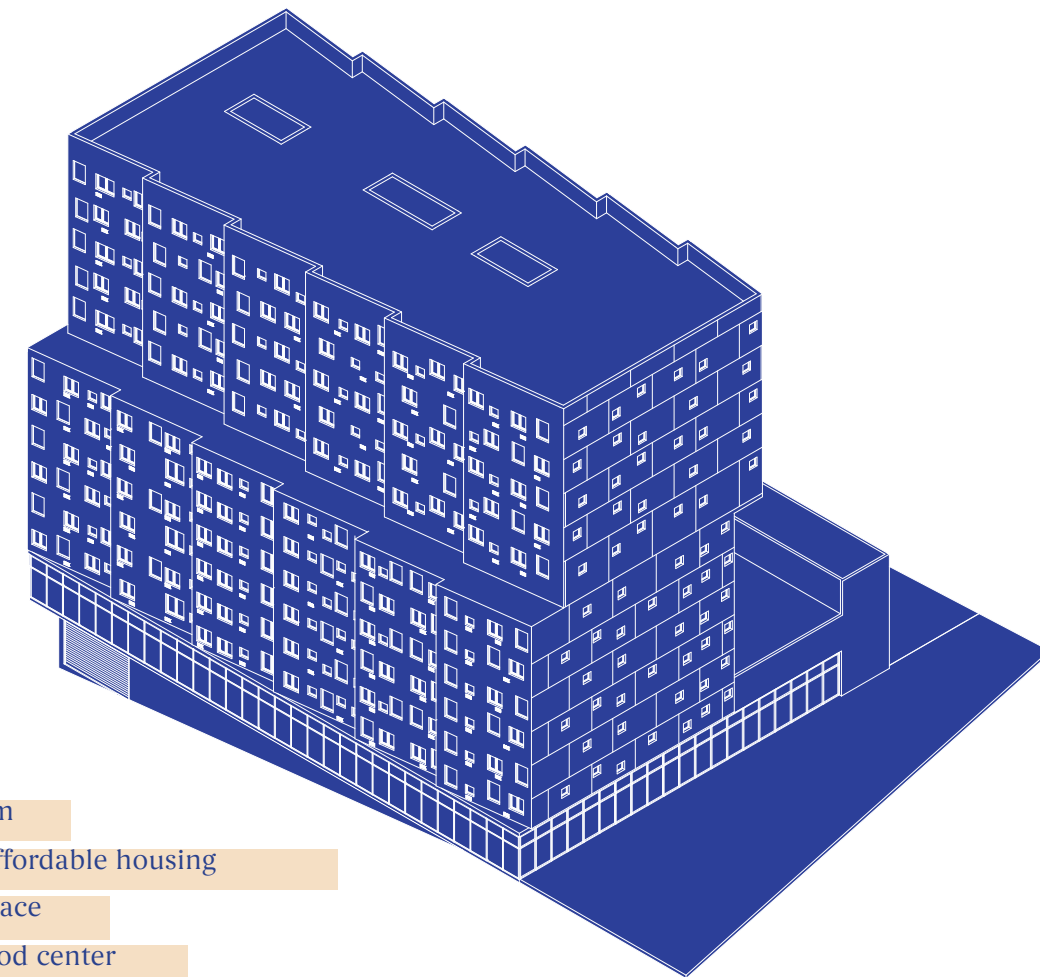
Client:
Broadway Housing Communities (BHC)

Design Consultant: Adjaye Associates
London, England

Architect of Record:
SLCE Architects LLP

Building Area: 191,000 sf

13-story building,
124 Units



a rooftop farm

124 units of affordable housing

BHC office space

early childhood center

Sugar Hill Children’s Museum of Art & Storytelling

a parking garage

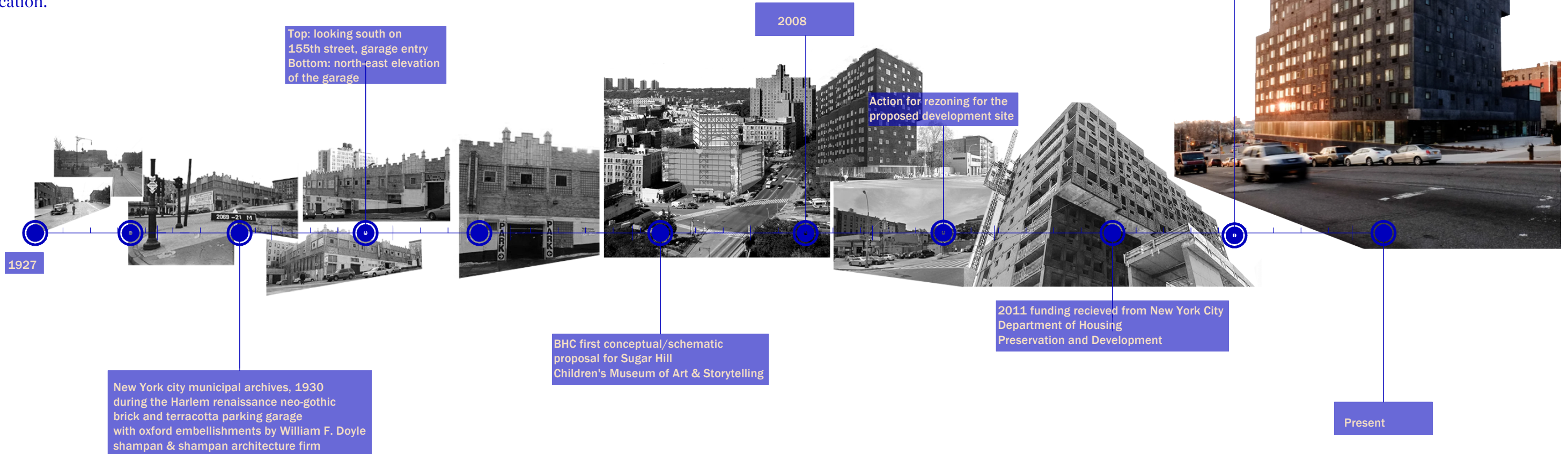
The childcare center — six classrooms given full-height glazing to the north and east and two open-air courtyards to the south — takes up most of this level. The museum, beginning with a narrow lobby fronting the plaza, expands into the ground below, daylit through skylights. And the housing, with a only narrow entrance leading straight into the depths of the building, expands up. A community room, BHC offices, and a terrace occupy the setback level, and the building is ultimately topped off by a rooftop farm. A commercial space is reserved for non-profit tenants along 155th Street. The commercial parking garage, on the building's lowest level, is adjacent to the gas station on the corner of St. Nicholas Place." Sugar Hill is not just 19th-century brownstones or post-war highrises; it's a heterogeneous mix. His appeal argued that the "raw materiality" and the "textural density [of the façade] becomes an emotional signature over time." Realizing the project also required experience, BHC retained SLCE as the architect of record. The firm has a long track record of housing and previously had been working with BHC on zoning studies for the Harlem site.

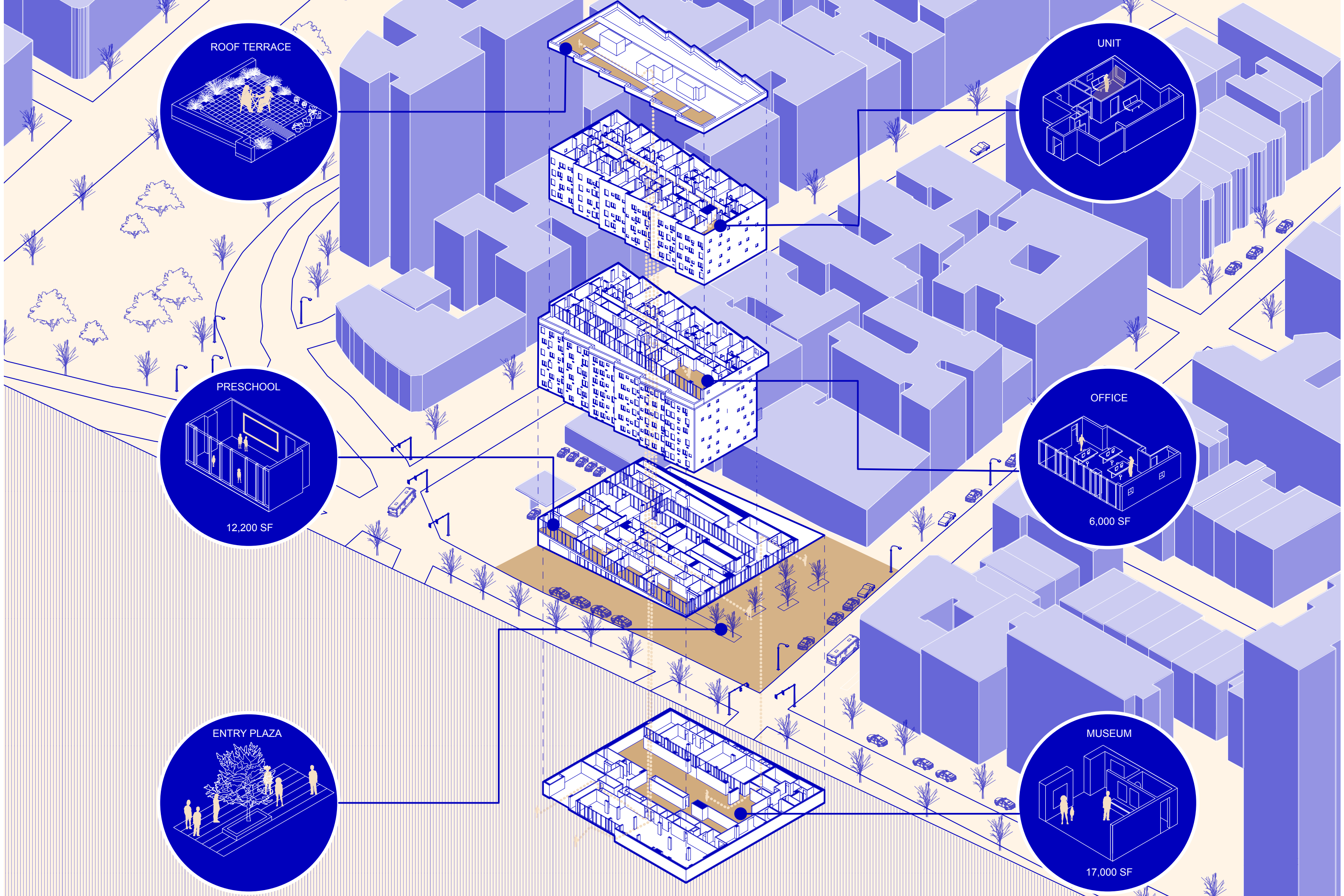
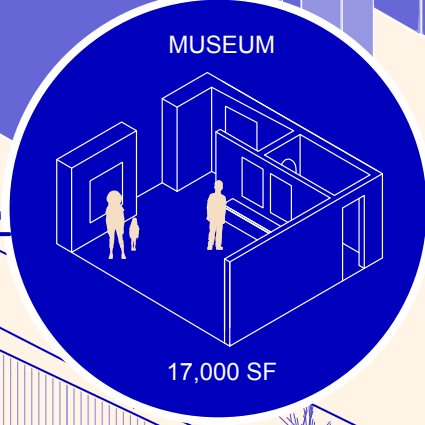
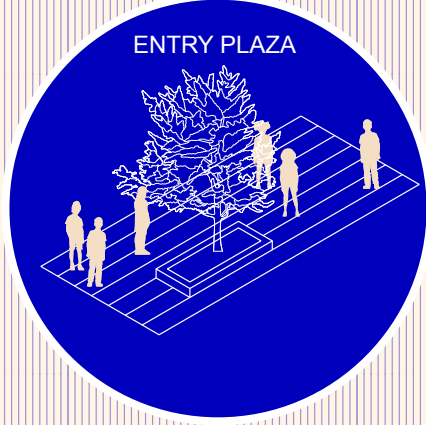
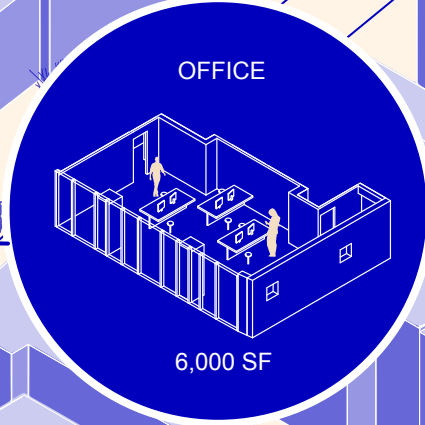
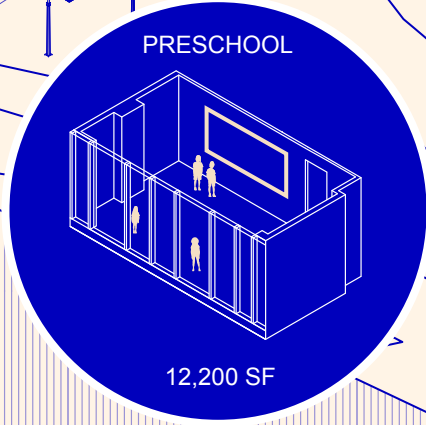
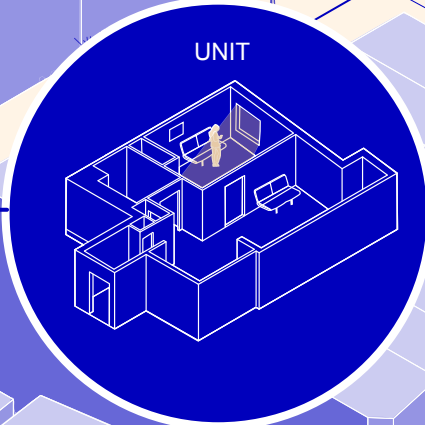
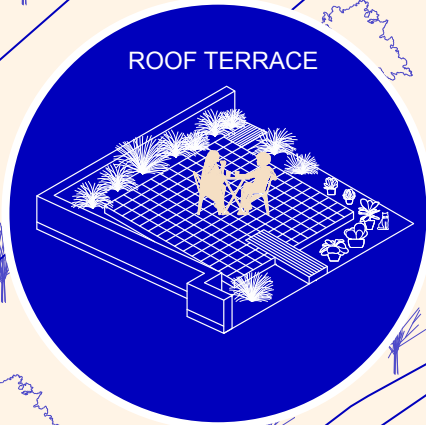
"Architecture vs. Housing: The Case of Sugar Hill." Urban Omnibus, January 23, 2018. <https://urbanomnibus.net/2014/09/architecture-vs-housing-the-case-of-sugar-hill/>.

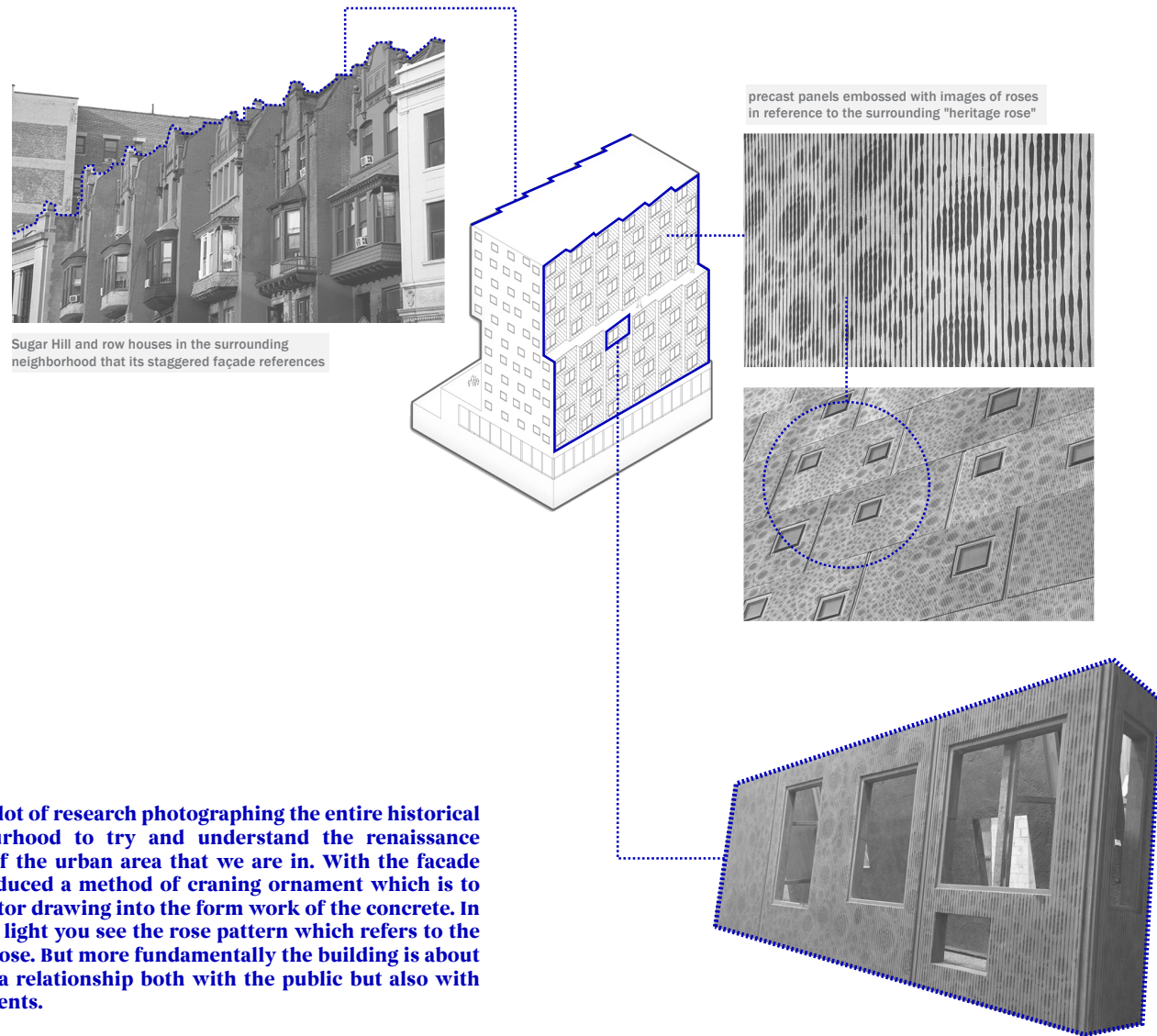
Main Issues Tackled by Designer and Client:

Permanent homes for thousands of adults, children and families; high quality early childhood programs that improve outcomes for resident and community children; and opportunities for local artists to exhibit their work and engage the community. Sugar Hill presents an opportunity to complicate and move beyond this simplistic binary. Rather, it offers important insights into the constraints that shape housing development in New York today, especially housing intended for lower than market rents. (Tackled disparities between "housing" and "Architecture" - An attempt to give proper architecture to social housing).

It is not particularly innovative in terms of what kind of apartments were built, however, the design clearly prioritized the exterior and non-residential parts; in Yakas's words, "the museum and daycare are fantastic, but the housing is what it is." The building nonetheless aims to achieve LEED Silver certification.

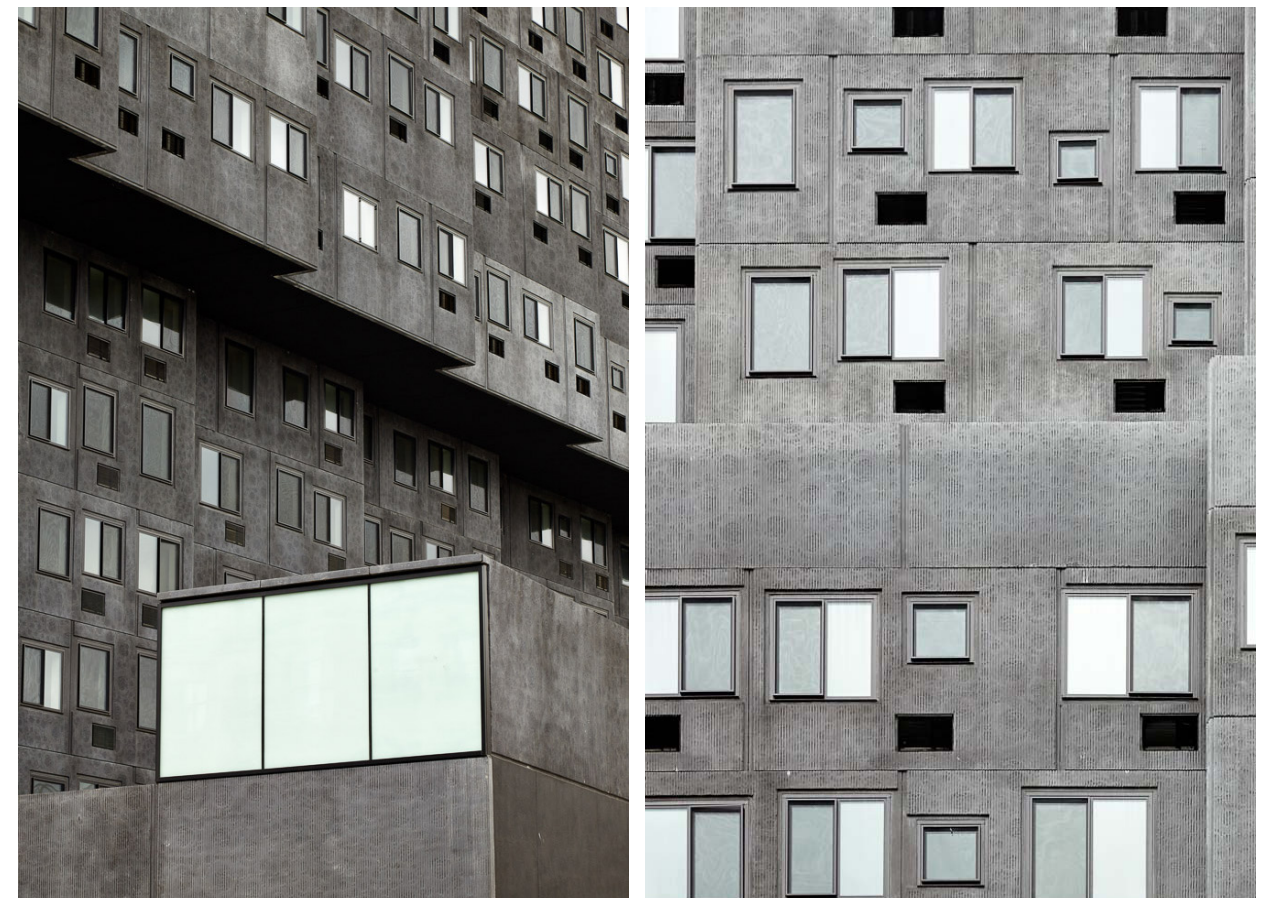




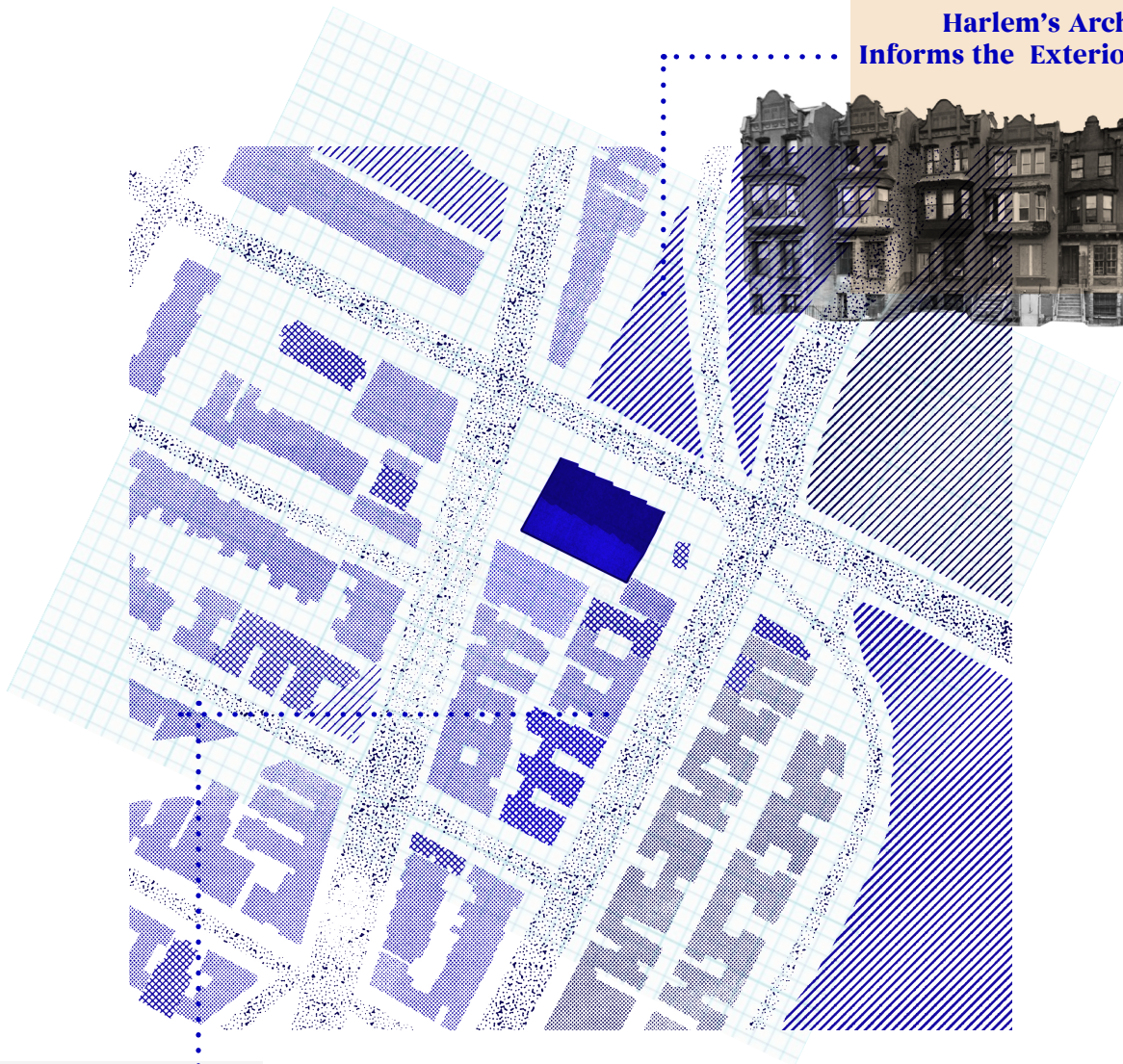
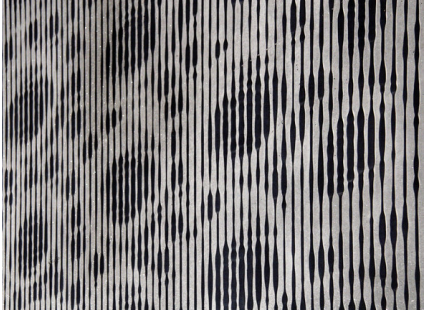


We did a lot of research photographing the entire historical neighbourhood to try and understand the renaissance quality of the urban area that we are in. With the facade we introduced a method of craning ornament which is to put a vector drawing into the form work of the concrete. In different light you see the rose pattern which refers to the Harlem rose. But more fundamentally the building is about creating a relationship both with the public but also with the residents.

David Adjaye



3: Disciplinary Context



The Sugar Hill housing project brings together many stakeholders - financially, in the community, and by partnering with children's arts organizations. Broadway Housing Committee (BHC) has prioritized implementing social programming with a focus on children's art and education, as they believe it is a key ingredient to ending generational poverty. The project is innovative in its programming, and when asked, residents spoke very positively about the social experiences that are offered in their building.

Programmatic Structure

Residential

124 units in the building - all below market housing. Serving those who were underhoused and those with designated percentages of the neighbourhood average income.

Lobby

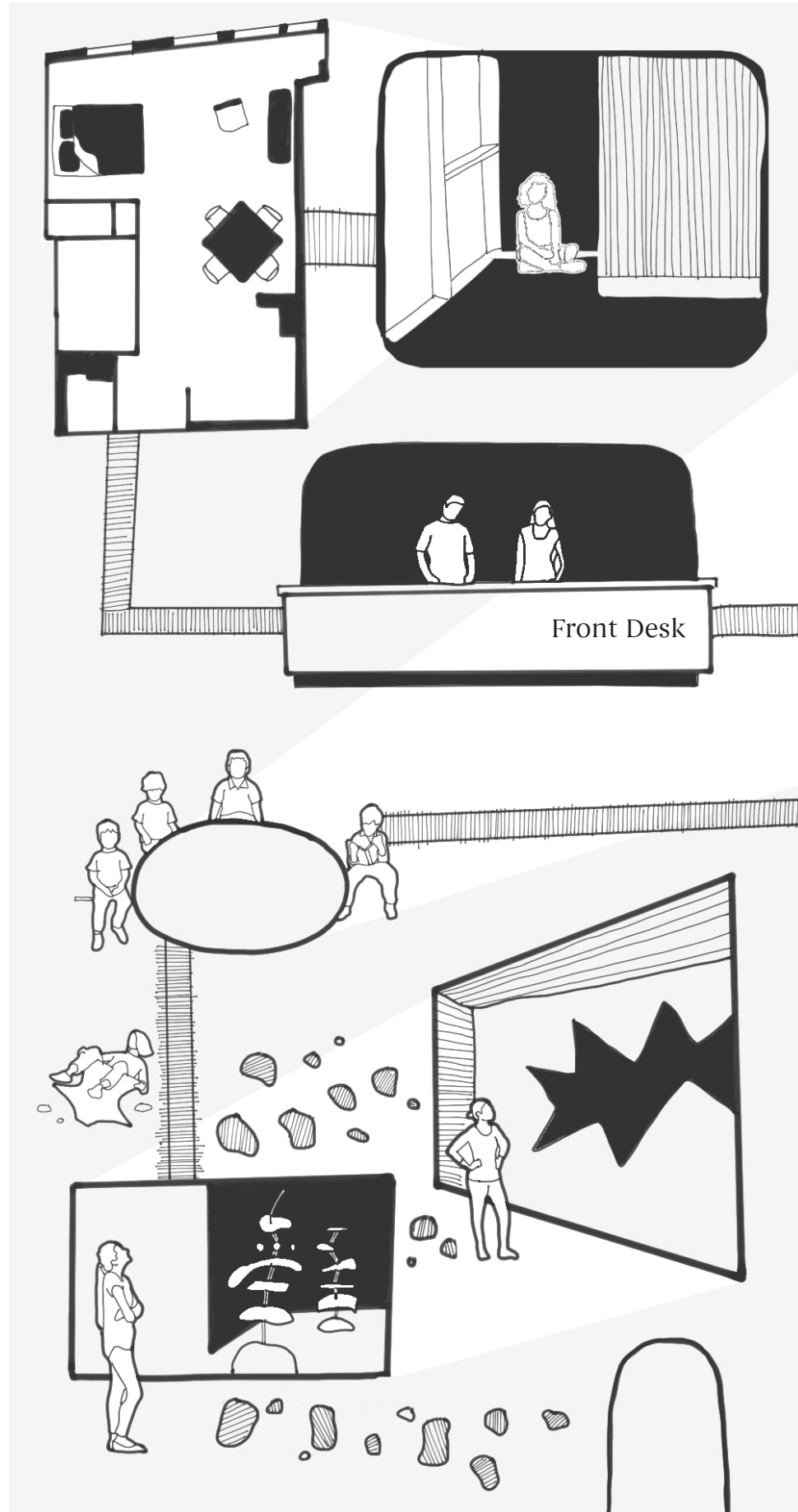
1/4 of residents in BHC properties spend time working at the front desk. All guests must be checked in.

School

There is an Early Years Childcare Centre, and many classrooms integrated with the museum, and in the floor above.

Children's Museum

The Sugar Hill Children's Museum for Art and Storytelling resides in the basement level of the building. Skylights are strategically used to bring daylight into the basement level.



“Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) funds housing on a per-unit basis, independent of the unit size: the studios thus “cross-subsidize” the larger units and developers are discouraged, or have no incentive, to build larger apartments. When I asked him about the unit sizes, Adjaye admits that he did not question the program given to him by BHC and acknowledges that perhaps he should have.”

The multi-use programming at Sugar Hill, and the new model for funding has created what the BHC, the developers, and the architect would claim is a “new typology” for below-market housing. The population of its residents is vastly underserved, and when asked about their experience living in the building, typically reply with positive remarks regarding the social programming, and not too much to say regarding the architectural experience. Ironically, without the name brand architect attached to this project, the funding may never have arrived to build it.

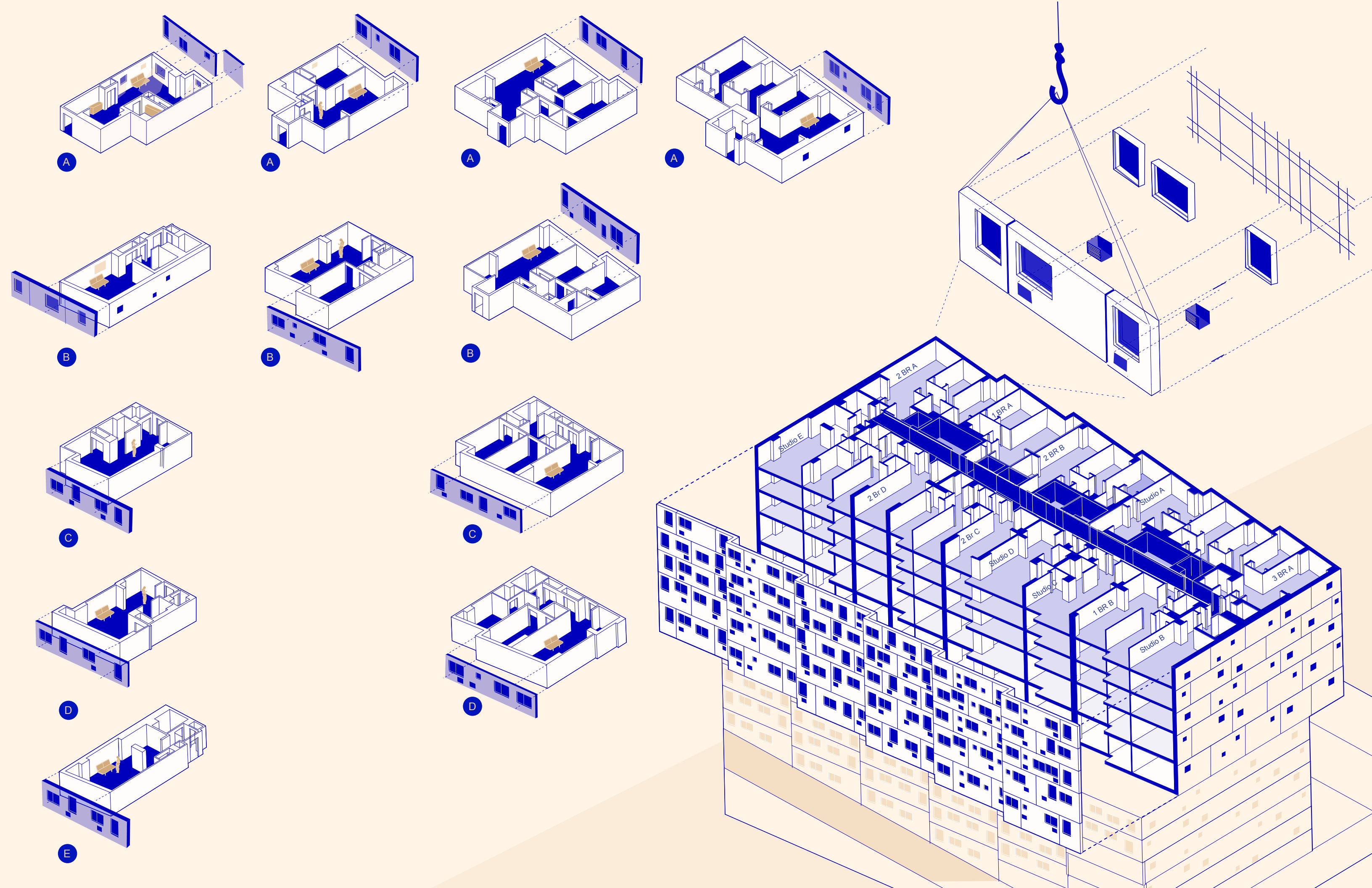
Susanne Schindler, Michael Kimmelman, and others have questioned the efficacy of this supposedly new way of approaching a community housing project, if it is not one that is replicable (due to the players involved) and doesn't altogether reconsider the residential spaces that it delivers. Each floor typically has “five studios, two one-bedrooms, four two-bedrooms, and only one three-bedroom. Multigenerational or multi-family households, let alone a live-work set up, are all but excluded.” This arrangement seems odd given the radical family-oriented programming that occurs on the main floors.

Schindler explains how the Sugar Hill project will likely follow the same path as South Bronx's Via Verde before it. “Explicitly conceived as a project to advance design in below-market housing by providing a model that would be “affordable, sustainable, and replicable,” the project has since been deemed “unreplicable” in policy circles due to its above-average unit cost.

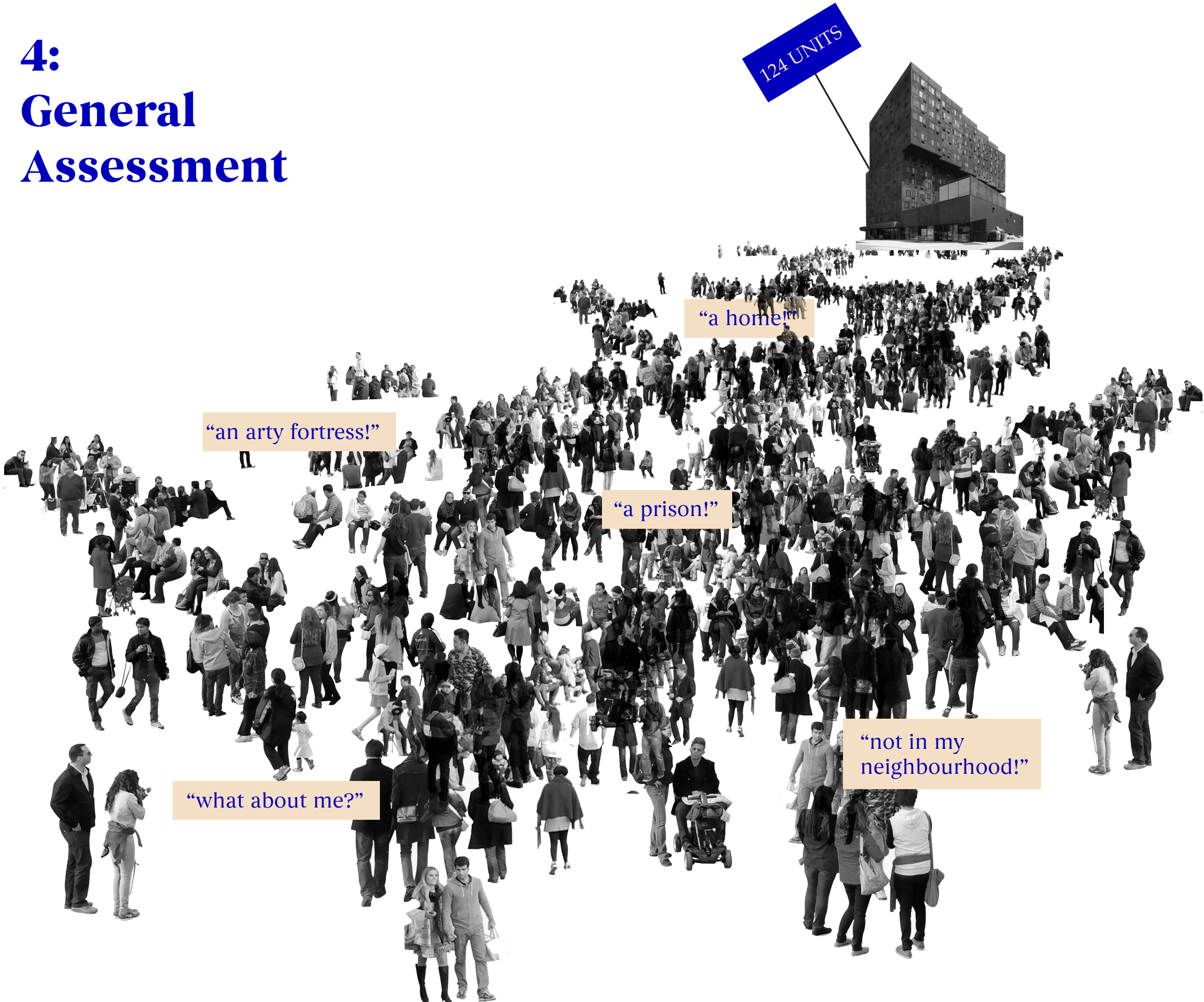
Additionally, it's worth mentioning that the building is operated as a non-profit by its developer, BHC. However, “the units' income- and price-restrictions generally expire after only 15 or 30 years, all the while generating 10+ percent return for the partners. As Ellen Baxter puts it, “permanent affordability is not really accurate. It's our intention, ... but it is legally impossible to write into the documents because that would [aim to] control the market.” Systemic barriers to low-market housing exist because the neoliberal market is still the head determinant of what and how projects are built.

Schindler, Susanne. “Architecture vs. Housing: The Case of Sugar Hill.” *Urban Omnibus. The Architectural League of New York*, January 23, 2018. <https://urbanomnibus.net/2014/09/architecture-vs-housing-the-case-of-sugar-hill/>.

Kimmelman, Michael. “Sugar Hill Housing Will Have a School and a Museum.” *The New York Times*, October 6, 2014.



4: General Assessment



The response from the neighbourhood has varied over the years that the project has been occupied. Many in the community will quickly denounce its austere form, while those who are residents seem to be indifferent. The units are very standard, and many are happy to be housed.

However, the project speaks to a greater need in the neighbourhood for below-market housing - one that vastly outweighs the impact of this one building. 124 units were constructed, the large majority were studios and one bedrooms, largely ignoring the need for multi-generational and family-friendly housing. Yet, BHC received over 40,000 applications for the building's 124 units.

Harlem's Most Inventive New Building Looks Odd, But It's for a Purpose

The Sugar Hill development is an affordable-housing complex full of supportive amenities and innovations. But some are having a hard time with its neo-brutalist style.



HOME ABOUT US SECTIONS ARCHIVES PUBLISHERS PICKS VIDEOS GET THE



Could it be more hideous? This makes the old time "projects" that New York is famous for look positively pleasant. If you didn't know what it was, you would probably guess it's a prison.



MANHATTAN CONTRARIAN

The housing shouldn't be one of them.

It has shortcomings, but "high density housing project" isn't one of them... This design does not fit in with my neighborhood. This neighborhood is not the "poor" neighborhood that the NYT depicts.

The New York Times
ARCHITECTURE REVIEW
Building Hope and Nurturing Into Housing



Broadway Housing Communities is pushing the envelope, admirably. Mr. Adjaye has squeezed a lot into the building. But subsidized housing always involves trade-offs.
The housing shouldn't be one of them.

Quality, functional and affordable housing for those who need it is most important to me. I agree that it should not come at the expense of this neighborhood's cultural/historic integrity.

The top five floors abruptly cantilever. Some neighbors say it looks like a prison. An "arty fortress," was New York Magazine's phrase.

Michael Kimmelman *The New York Times*

"This is an achievement we can all be proud of," "a remarkable development on Sugar Hill,"

"rich cultural resource that will build on the grand tradition of arts in Sugar Hill."



Mayor Michael Bloomberg on the \$80.2 million sugar hill development

There was initially a backlash to the building form, being described as an "arty fortress" by the New York Mail. Adjaye responded to the criticism by referring to his earlier works, mainly residential homes for wealthy artists in London, England. He was quick to denounce the criticisms aimed at Sugar Hill regarding its form.

"He rejects the notion that a lay audience cannot appreciate his design approach. "It is a cliché that poor housing has to be 'pretty,'" he says, positing any superficial niceness as condescending and pointing to the numerous all-black, multi-textured private residences he has worked on in London, Brooklyn, and New York's Upper East Side. He rightly asks: "Why is it that this is 'cool' for rich people but 'tough' for poor people?"

It is tough to measure the impact of this building over time, as it is relatively new. BHC is not advertising any further developments, so it is difficult to gauge whether the typology was as radical and replicable as they intended for it to be. A few things are clear.

"Hiring an emerging architect achieved what BHC sought: an iconic building in terms of massing and new perspectives in terms of construction. However, in terms of the actual housing, ingrained economic logic seems to have prevented everyone involved from moving beyond established models."

As Schindler points out, there needs to be a formalized way of rethinking the typology of below-market housing, so that the housing is able to speak to the needs of all members of a community. She argues that if architects are given freedom, perhaps through open competitions, there might be opportunity to develop a typology that balances the spatial, formal, and financial needs of a housing project.

However, an architectural competition feels like a half-baked solution and while architectural agency is a critical part of the whole, it recalls Billy Fleming's piece on "Design and the Green New Deal". He argues that "if landscape architects want to remake the world, we can start by remaking our discipline." It seems that as architects, if we want to remake the typology of housing, we will need to start by looking inward. Otherwise, our architectural solutions will fall short of the radical re-thinking that community housing in the era of climate change, racial inequity, and injustice, calls for.



Sunken House by David Adjaye

<https://www.archdaily.com/213736/sunken-house-ad-jaye-associates>



Nanjing House by David Adjaye

<https://www.metalocus.es/en/news/light-box-nanjing-house-david-adjaye-associates>

Fleming, Billy. "Design and the Green New Deal." *Places Journal*, April 1, 2019. <https://placesjournal.org/article/design-and-the-green-new-deal/>.

