

Architecture and Democracy in the Valley of Giants

Benjamin Evans - 4828445

Democracy and the global city

As sociologist Saskia Sassen describes, New York City is a global city.¹ Along with London, Paris, Tokyo, Shanghai and Beijing to name a few, New York's financial power is enormous. Large international companies work closely with politicians and mayors because their extreme wealth can have a great influence on urban futures. According to thinker Wendy Brown, this global capital is "undoing democracy"². Many have written about the USA's shrinking democracy, a consequence of neo-liberalism, of surveillance capitalism³, of a disassociation between citizen and city-dweller⁴, its weaknesses and its failures to deliver on urgent matters such as climate change.⁵ Most will be familiar with democracy, but this does not mean it is understood. According to Tony Fry, this is one of democracy's major problems. The rise of the neoliberal movement and the free market has turned the political character of democracy into an economic one. Globalised metropolises like New York City are experiencing a financialisation of the housing market, putting people's voices, homes, into further peril.⁶

Defining democracy and its origins

Democracy at its core deals with the practice of social equality. By giving every citizen a vote, freedom of speech, agency, a chance to express personal views and participate, society supposedly would become more equal. The majority vote wins and the majority rules, because according to Condorcet's jury theorem, the majority vote is statistically more likely to be 'correct'.⁷

Democracy is generally believed to have originated in ancient Greece. Its root comes from the Greek language: demos (the people) and -kratia (power, rule). Therefore, the term 'democracy' together means 'the ruling people', the power of the people. It implies a system of government where decisions are made collectively, and is characterised by equality amongst its members. According to Charles Jencks, the ideal democratic system consists of four organs: the executive, the legislative, the judiciary and the media. The people and the public square make the fifth power, in which "a certain planned contradiction" is built into it.⁸ Competition is an essential ingredient in democracy, as are conflict, deliberation and protests. The result of this deliberation and planned conflict is a decision, a new law, a new building, road, public square to which everyone must live by and with, even if one does not agree with it.

A shrinking democracy

Today, democracy is at risk. Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben wrote that "there is a shift from the model of the polis founded on a centre, that is, a public centre or agora, to a new metropolitan spatialisation that is certainly invested in a process of depoliticisation, which results in a strange zone where it is impossible to decide what is private and what is public."⁹ The city, or 'polis', is changing from a place of political encounter, disagreement and democratic negotiation to a space overly controlled by private individuals and policies.¹⁰ Esra Akcan, an author and professor at Cornell University states that "many contemporary political philosophers are warning about de-democratisation taking place throughout the world today."¹¹ The rise of the neoliberal movement and the free market has overshadowed democracy. It has been suggested that society has entered the age of 'post-democracy' meaning the interests of the people are no longer represented. The government instead represents the interests of a small group of business elites.¹²

Planning and democracy in New York City's built environment

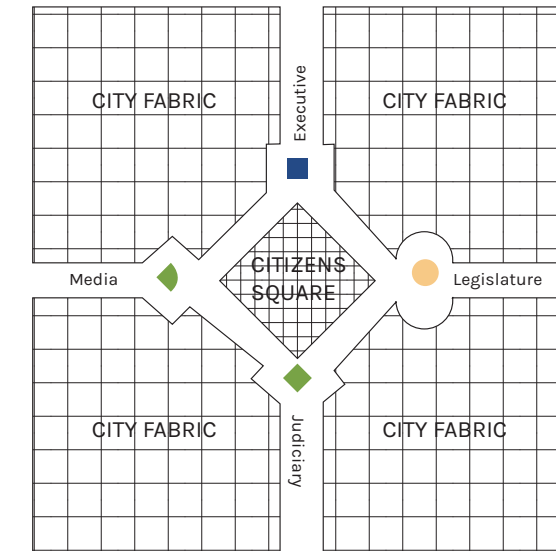
In New York City, especially in Midtown, the built environment is synonymous with power and money. Large financial organisations are "engaging in the materialities of urban space"¹³ by investing in real estate because in New York City, form follows finance¹⁴. Here, democracy is best expressed through planning. The ULURP process (Uniform Land Use Review Procedure) is a democratic procedure designed to review building applications. It verifies that they fit within zoning laws, informs the public and holds public hearings where the local community can participate, raise concerns and express opinions on an advisory basis.

However, 90% of buildings in New York are built as-of-right, which means that the ULURP process and public hearings are by-passed entirely. Building applications are granted an as-of-right planning permit, which is a much faster process, if they fit within the existing zoning laws. These zoning laws are supposed to protect public assets in the city such as public space, light and air. The as-of-right process is good for fast economic growth, which has been beneficial to the city's rapid expansion historically, providing many jobs. However, as will be described later, public assets are no longer protected by zoning laws, and the as-of-right process is shrinking democracy in the city. The spatial consequence of this is increasingly visible in these strange zones, where public and private merge together, like Central Park cast in shadow and a general lack of open space that is truly public, like POPS (Privately Owned Public Spaces).

IDEAL DEMOCRATIC STATE

DEFINITION:

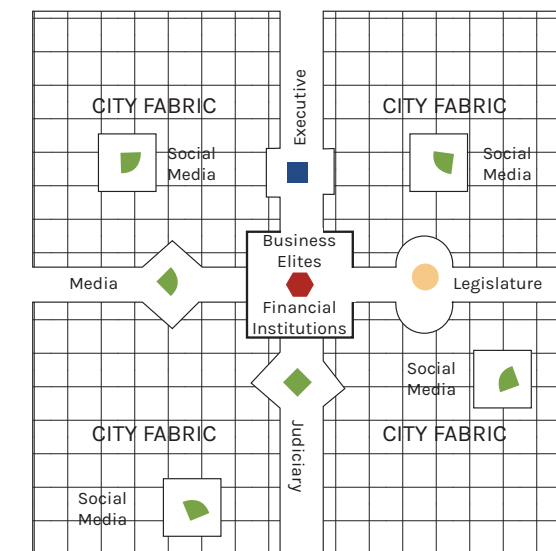
THE NURTURING OF DISAGREEMENT THROUGH PROPERLY CONSTRUCTED MATERIAL AND SYMBOLIC SPACES FOR DISSENSUAL PUBLIC ENCOUNTER AND EXCHANGE.



POST DEMOCRATIC STATE

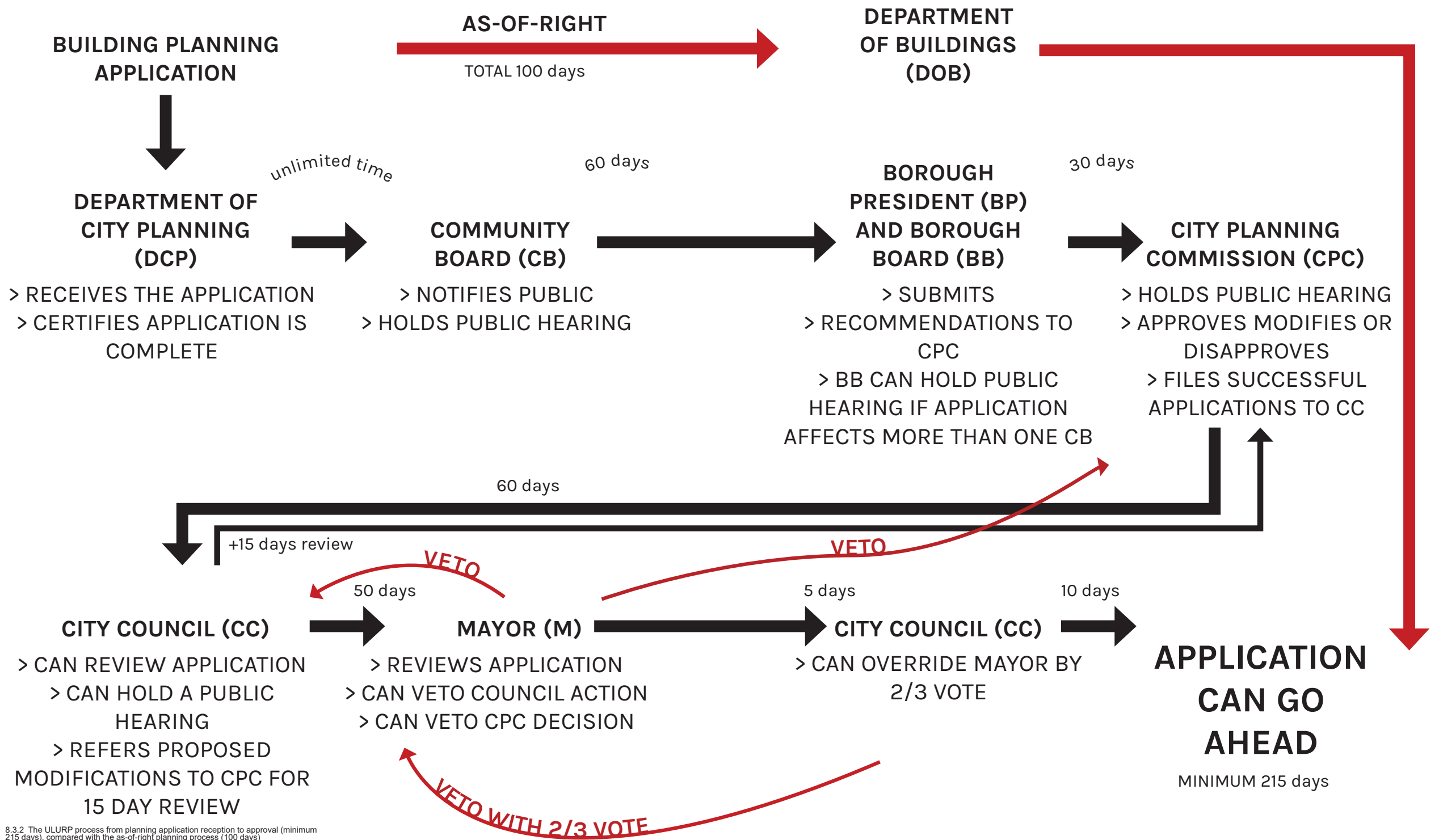
DEFINITION:

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS REMAIN FORMALLY INTACT, HOWEVER, THE POLITICIANS BECOME MORE DEPENDENT ON BIG CORPORATIONS AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS. POLITICIANS INCREASINGLY DO NOT REPRESENT THE INTERESTS OF THE ORDINARY PEOPLE IN THEIR SOCIETIES; THEY DO, HOWEVER, SEEM TO INCREASINGLY REPRESENT THE INTERESTS OF A SMALL GROUP OF BUSINESS ELITE WHICH IS LARGELY GLOBALLY ORIENTED.



8.3.1 Diagrams redrawn based on Maggie Kenwick Jencks' drawing of the Ideal Democratic State (top) and the Post-Democratic State (bottom), showing the four conflicting organs of democracy (executive, legislature, judiciary and media) and the citizens square in the middle, or the public space.

LONG & COMPLEX PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS



8.3.2 The ULURP process from planning application reception to approval (minimum 215 days), compared with the as-of-right planning process (100 days)

A democratic society's ambition is to create balance between public and private ambitions. In New York City, this balance is shifted towards those with money because equality is often thought of as an economic question. The two opposing forces, the local community and the private financial forces should be mediated by the city, in the form of public institutions. For this project, I am proposing a public institution as a highly efficient planning department and public forum that mediates between Manhattan's 12 Community District Boards and the force of private developers within the island. The public institution finds the balance and final outcomes are the result of a compromise between two opposing desires.

Community-based planning in the Sutton District

New York City does have democratic processes integrated into its planning strategies and sometimes residents can have an impact. New York City is divided into 59 Community Districts, Manhattan has 12 and The Valley of Giants contains Community Districts 5, 6 and 8. Each one consists of up to 50 volunteer members appointed by the local borough president and they periodically advise and vote on matters pertaining to land use, zoning, city budgets and service delivery. The community boards can serve as mobilising institutions for communities opposed to certain projects.

For example, in Sutton Place, a residential area between East 51st and 59th street, a 300 metre residential supertall had begun construction. A strong community exists within the Sutton Place district and the residents fought against the development of the tower that was considered considered out-of-scale and inappropriate to the character of the neighbourhood. Residents formed the East River 50s Alliance (ERFA) and through a legal process of community-based planning, were successful in changing the zoning laws to tower-on-a-base requirements meaning 45% of the building is required to be below 150 feet. They also changed the designation of the area into a Voluntary Inclusionary Housing zone that is supposed to incentivise developers to build affordable housing by awarding bonus FAR. The changing of the zoning law was a success for the neighbourhood. However, the battle against 3 Sutton Place was lost as the project is being built to 800 feet. One Sutton resident I interviewed on the subject said the building was "an insult to everyone in the community". Other residents are not as worried and wish only that their rents don't increase beyond what they can afford. Furthermore, the new zoning law does not strictly prohibit tall buildings, it only makes it harder to do so, thus creating a new loophole.

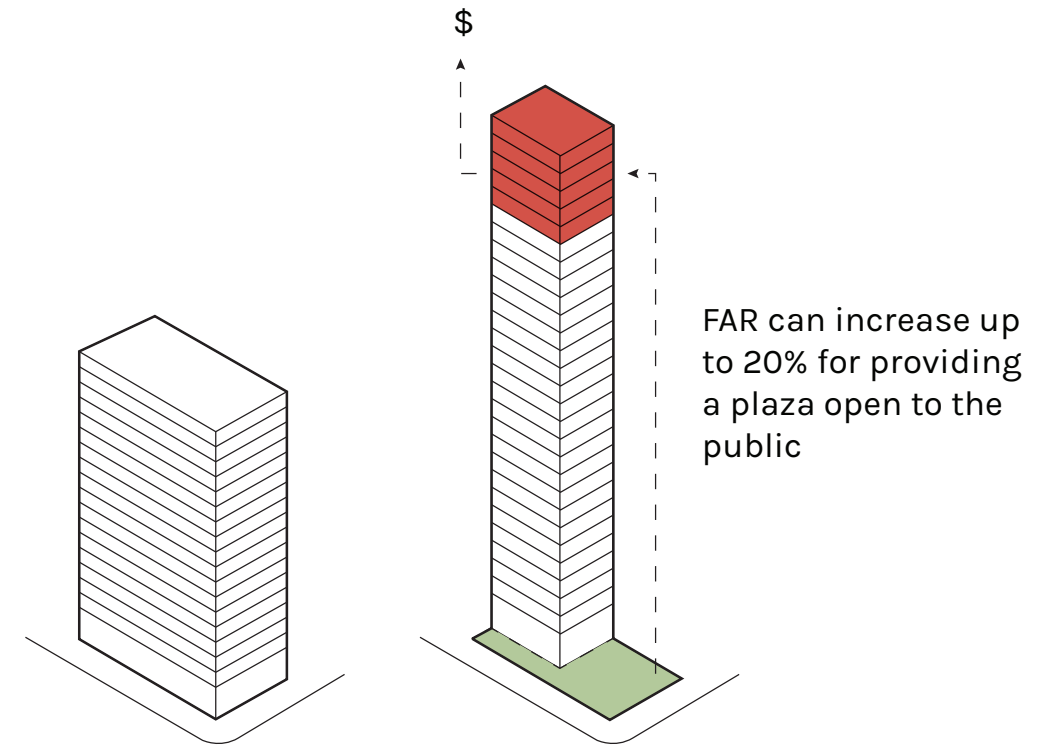
The ERFA showed an active commitment to playing a role in the future of their neighbourhood, against powerful capitalist forces and the financialisation of the housing market. The ERFA's achievements are a good example of community-based planning. The digital age facilitated the communication necessary, their website like an online modern day agora or forum. But could a physical space have facilitated the open discussion and deliberations that occurred on the internet and encouraged a transparency at an earlier stage in the construction process? Currently, public hearings occur mostly in the Community Board offices or in the NYU Dentistry auditorium. The latter is offered to the Community Board for use but the space is not dedicated to the board. During my visit to a public hearing in this auditorium, a member of the board informed me that they have been looking for a more permanent, dedicated space to hold the board meetings. This space should allow for office space, exhibitions,

assemblies and debates. Other Community Boards in the city are also looking for a permanent purpose built spaces to host their meetings. Furthermore, complex legal documents with visualisations only experts in planning can produce are not accessible to all community boards. Sutton Place, with its privileged, well connected and well educated demographics was able to be so effective because they have the right network and resources to build an effective argument.

Zoning

The skyline in the Valley of Giants (VoG) is changing and a new typology of super tall buildings has been emerging. 432 Park Avenue, the needle-thin residential tower, 426 metres tall can be seen from almost anywhere in the city. One Vanderbilt is the tallest office tower in the area and caps out at 397 metres. The speed of this new construction has "triggered surprise, and even disorientation" amongst New Yorkers, bewildered by how such tall buildings could be approved¹⁵. The as-of-right process has allowed the city to grow faster, which is good for the economy, but it also bypasses the opinions of locals who have to live with the environmental consequences of new construction. The origins of the Zoning Resolution date back to 1916. It was designed to ensure that most development could be built as-of-right and at the same time respect city requirements that protect street levels of light and air that make the city healthy and liveable. The way the city would look in the future was illustrated quite clearly by artists like Hugh Ferriss who showed how the set-back aesthetic corresponds to the zoning law requirements of the city.

The latest big change to the zoning law was made in 1961, that favoured the use of public plazas (or POPS) in exchange for bonus FAR. This has defined the aesthetic of many parts of the VoG that has the largest number of POPS in New York City. Some provide welcome open space and seating in the area, but many are poorly designed, badly maintained and lack in quality resulting in underusage. Furthermore, the changes to the zoning law and technological progress has created opportunities for the exploitation of loopholes that have made possible the construction super tall buildings, to the surprise and dismay of many New Yorkers. The issue is not only the height of the buildings and their environmental impacts. Billionaire's Row on 57th street consists of 8 new supertall ultra-luxurious residential towers. They are the physical representation of the financialisation of the housing market. These condos are usually bought by foreign investors as financial assets who only occupy them for a few weeks every year. They offer little to the local community that usually opposes them and the towers cast long shadows on valuable public assets such as Central Park. They are also not required to have affordable housing and those that do have been granted uncapped exemption from property taxation for 35 years. This tax exemption in New York City's highest-market area costs the city 1.4 billion dollars a year.¹⁶ Furthermore, luxury condominium towers are not regulated in terms of maximum size and minimum number of apartments provided. 432 Park Avenue for instance provides 104 oversized apartments. Under the zoning law, it could have provided 508 apartments.¹⁷ The current zoning laws are no longer able to protect the needs of residents. Their voices are no longer represented and the future growth of the city is not the product of a democratic process supposedly at the heart of American society.



8.3.3 POPS, a zoning mechanism for bonus FAR awarded to developers for providing plazas (Privately Owned Public Space). Source: Own diagram



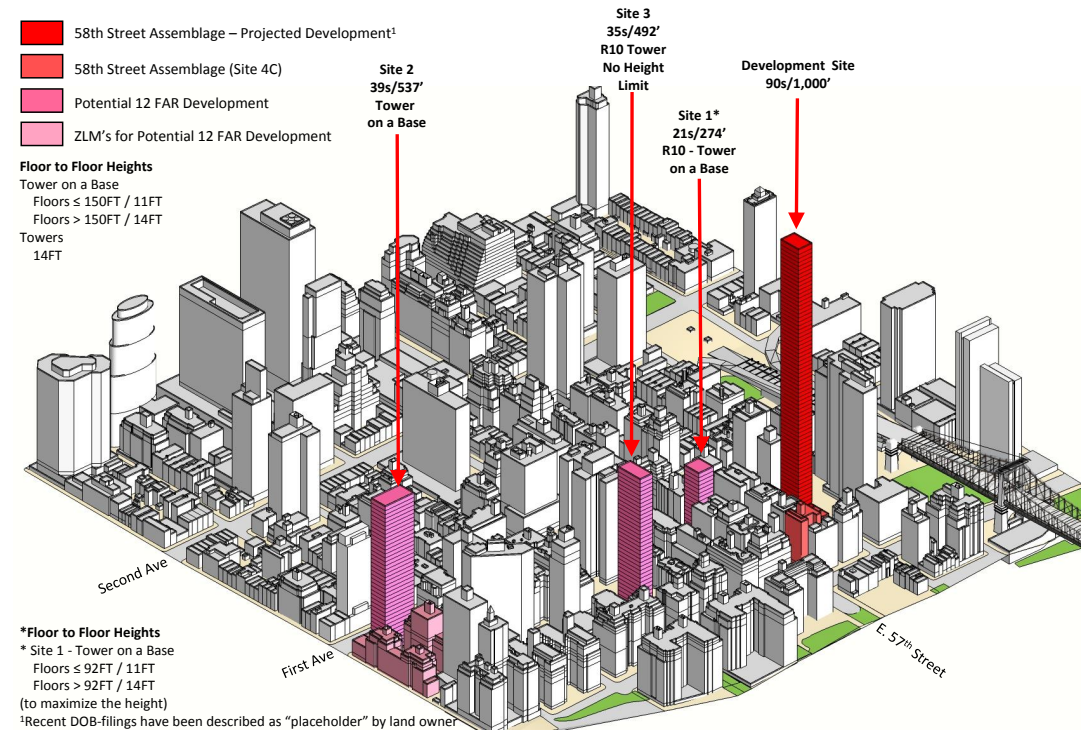
8.3.4 Example of POPS, a strange zone where "it is impossible to decide what is public and what is private." The spaces are privately owned, but publicly accessible. Source: Own picture



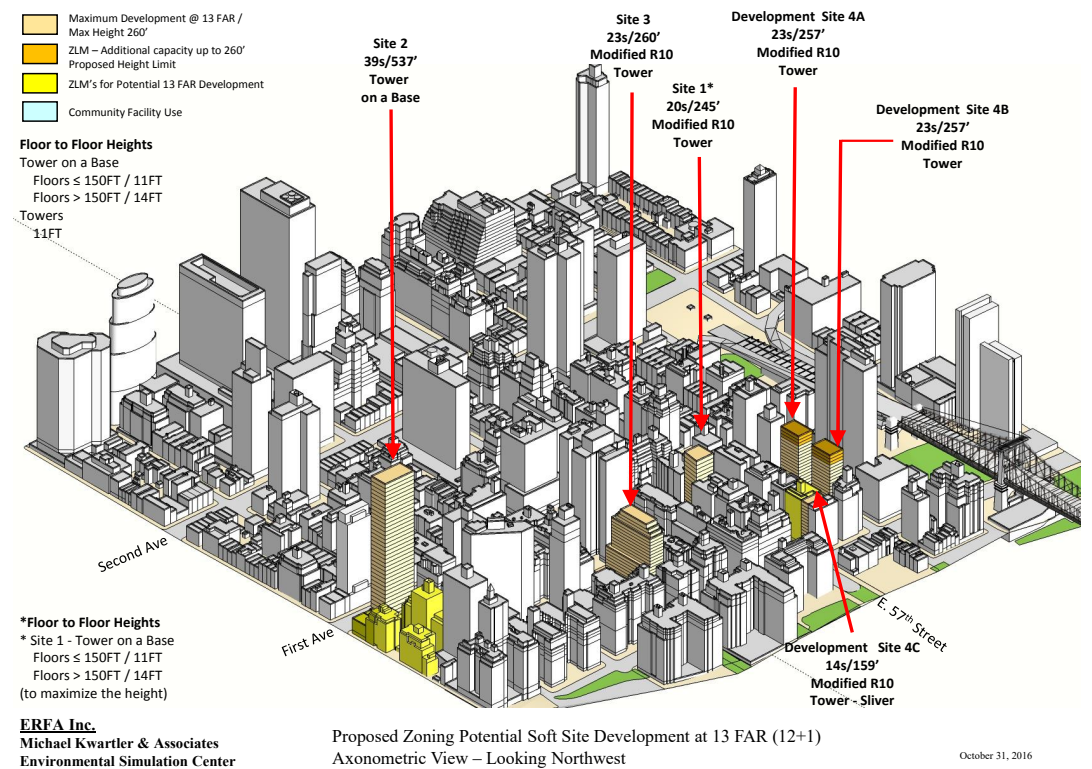
8.3.5 The city of New York is about to change dramatically. A view of future needle supertall skyscrapers about to be built and already built. Source: Reddit



8.3.6 Shadows cast across the south end of Central Park by supertall skyscrapers on Billionaire's Row, a physical result of a shrinking democracy. Source: Manhattan Arts Society



8.3.7 Document produced by the East River Fifties Alliance and Community Board 6 to change the zoning law in Sutton District. It shows the complexity and knowledge required to produce such a document in order to have an impact. This image shows how new developments could take shape under the current zoning laws. Source: ERFA



8.3.8 Document produced by the East River Fifties Alliance and Community Board 6 to change the zoning law in Sutton District. It shows the complexity and knowledge required to produce such a document in order to have an impact. This image shows the proposed zoning change and the resulting lower new buildings that could be built. This zoning proposal was accepted. Source: ERFA

Rezoning and the case for the financial force

The rezoning of Hudson Yards in 2005 which has led to the construction of a new business and technology center on the Hudson River has caused a surge in building vacancy in the VoG. Many Fortune 500 companies with headquarters in the VoG that are responsible for large proportion of the area's tax base are moving to Hudson Yards. The aging building stock and lack of new construction is responsible for the move, and the public realm needs money to improve pedestrian circulation and amenities in the area. In 2017, the Midtown office district around Grand Central Station and Park Avenue was rezoned in order to promote new construction of taller office and mixed use buildings. Air rights can be transferred from landmarks and District Improvement Bonuses awarded for improving the subway system and pedestrian experience in the area. The Grand Central Core was rezoned from 15 FAR to 24 FAR and the subdistrict from 12.0 to 21.5 FAR. One Vanderbilt is a result of this rezoning and JPMorgan Chase, a fortune 500 company, are in the process of building their new headquarters. Therefore, the financial force is necessary to retain through rezoning in order to provide capital necessary for changes to occur. The local community can also benefit from these changes.

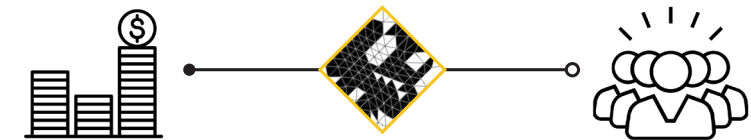
Today, the city is about to see a third major change to its zoning law: the removal of the maximum residential FAR of 12.0. The aim of this zoning change is to densify high rise areas in the city and to encourage the construction of 1 million affordable homes by 2040 in areas that have existing infrastructure to support such an expansion. The change is a response to New York City's housing crisis, where homelessness has doubled in the last 10 years¹⁸, overcrowding rose 20% between 2008 and 2014¹⁹ and more than 30% of renters pay more than half their income in rents.²⁰ The Valley of Giants is a prime area that could support densification and many more residential high rises can be expected in the next 40 years. According to the Regional Plan Association's 2018 report, "repealing the FAR cap will enable more local control and creation of more affordable housing."²¹ The report outlines that a removal of the FAR cap means new buildings will be subject to review under the ULURP process. Under this new zoning law, the city will grow exponentially and public hearings will play a central and crucial role in many more developments. To ensure good design and avoid unintended consequences, issues such as massing, height, required community facilities and public space "could help to be shaped by the local neighbourhood and elected officials together during the ULURP process."²²

This is good news for democracy in the Valley of Giants, in theory. To ensure this happens in the right way, a dedicated space for public review at the center of the Valley of Giants' activity could be implemented that brings together developers, city officials, neighbourhood representatives and the general public to discuss, debate and deliberate on how this new rezoning will take shape and how new projects and neighbourhoods will be designed. The as-of-right process will be minimised and public hearings on new construction will happen much more often. However, the ULURP process must be shortened in order to retain New York City's identity and competitive edge as a fast growing city. The project proposes to fast-track the planning process with public reviews included. It will accomplish this by slightly altering the planning procedure and by providing space for a larger planning department and extra trained staff and facilities to process applications faster, more efficiently

and accurately and to provide expert technical and visualisation assistance to community boards. The spaces in which this mediation between stakeholders takes place, where democracy can be carried out can play an important role. This is the basis of my research question:

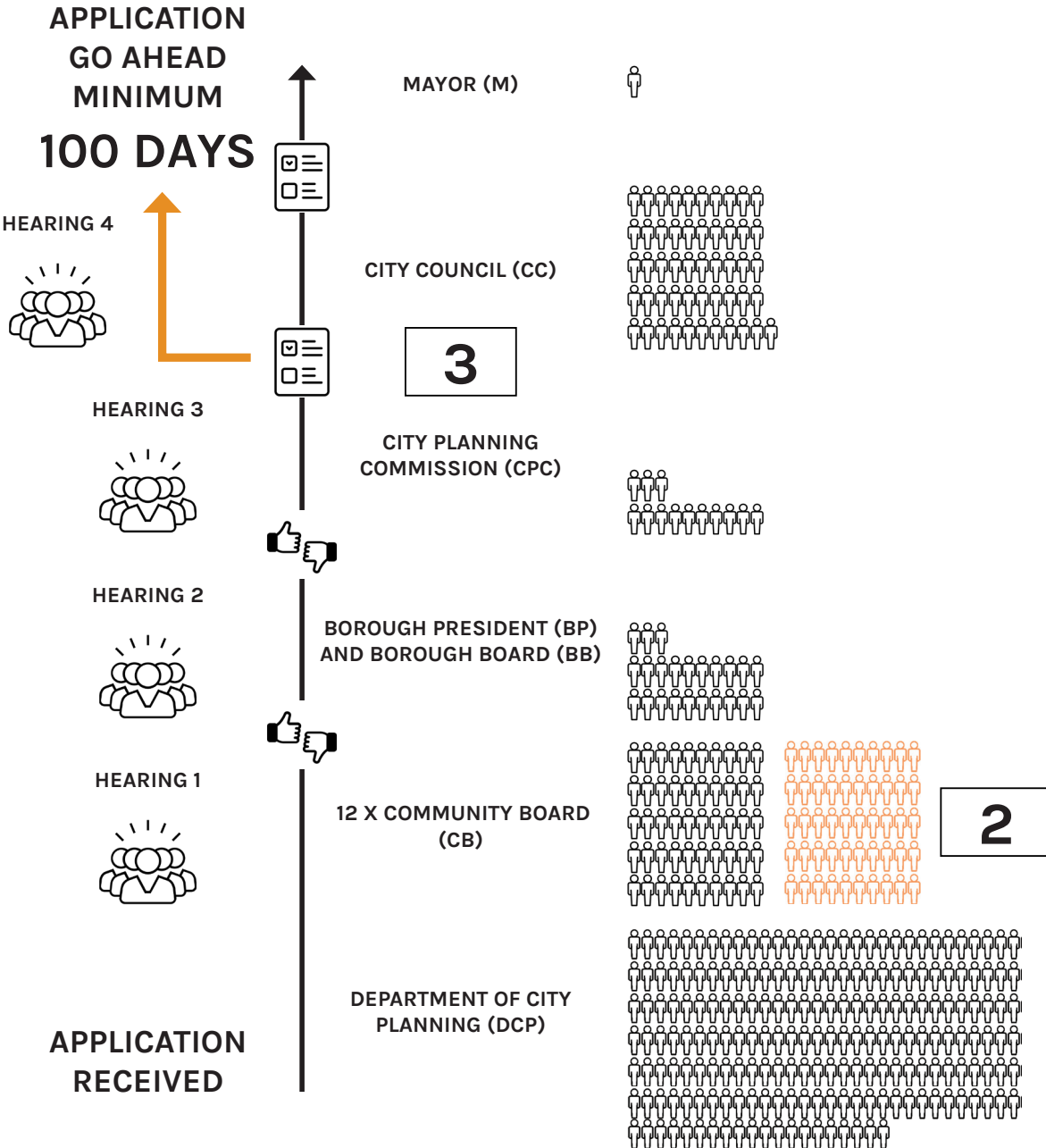
How can a public institution play the role of mediator between financial forces and the local community?

In an age of post-democracy, developers, neighbourhoods and the city must return to the most original form of democracy, where conflict and deliberation decide on the future of the built environment. Neighbourhoods need a seat at the table, a dedicated space that offers more than an online petition, street protest or an advisory vote. The post-democratic era is at bay and a neutral space for deliberation can ensure that the Valley of Giants' future built environment expresses the collaborative, community spirit of its residents. The public institution can be a space of encounter, between members of society whose paths would not usually cross.



HOW CAN A PUBLIC INSTITUTION PLAY THE ROLE OF MEDIATOR BETWEEN FINANCIAL FORCES AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY?

HOW TO FAST TRACK THE PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS

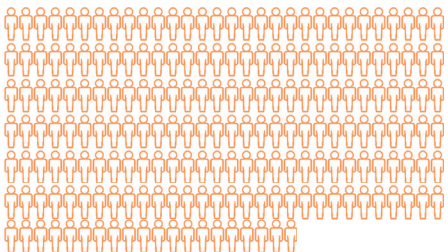
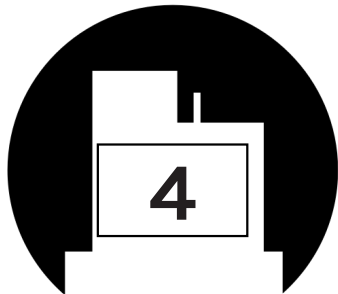


1. ENLARGE THE DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING TO PROCESS APPLICATIONS FASTER

2. PROVIDE MORE STAFF AND VISUALISATION EXPERTS AVAILABLE TO ASSIST TO COMMUNITY BOARD'S NEEDS

3. ALLOW SIMPLE PROJECTS TO OBTAIN PERMISSION AFTER THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION VOTE

4. HOUSE THIS PROCESS IN A FORUM THAT IS CENTRAL, ACCESSIBLE, AND HAS DEDICATED SPACES TO HOLD PUBLIC HEARINGS AND EXHIBITIONS



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Design Brief

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Site Location

The site is located at 109 East 42nd street where the Grand Hyatt hotel currently stands. Standing adjacent to Grand Central Station, the hotel has been marked for demolition in light of the city's 2017 rezoning of Midtown East which has allowed for the construction of much taller buildings. The purpose of the rezoning is to "ensure the area's future as a world-class business district and major job generator" and "to expand the City's tax base, add thousands of permanent jobs in East Midtown and fund improvements to the subway and pedestrian network."¹ Reducing energy consumption, improving the public realm with spaces that leverage the iconic views of landmarks in the area and improving transit access are listed as further ambitions.

This densification is largely seen as a counter-development to Hudson Yards which has attracted many big and long-standing corporate tenants away from Midtown. Midtown East used to be the corporate centre of New York City, housing prestigious law firms, big advertising agencies, headquarters of national and international corporations and branch offices of downtown banks. Today the area is home to 250,000 jobs and generates 10 percent of the city's property tax revenue. However, the average building age is 75 years² and they no longer meet contemporary design standards for office space.

Site History

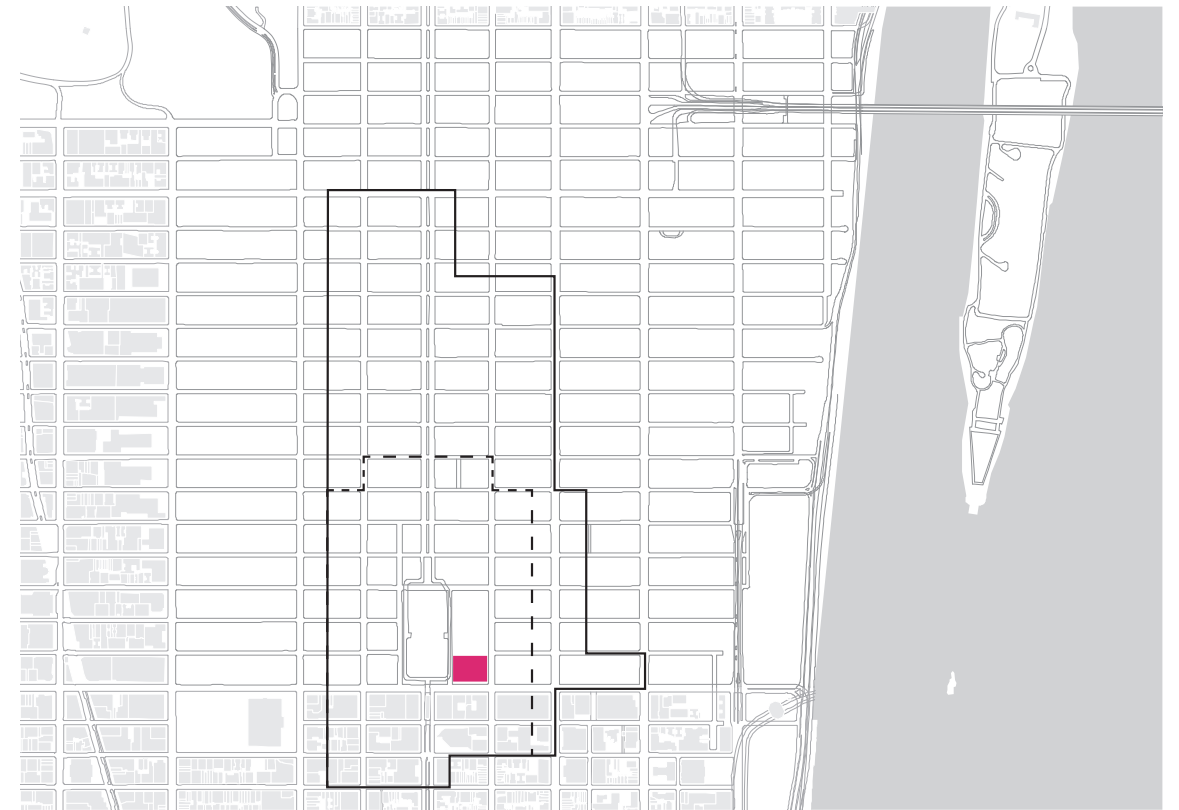
The Grand Hyatt hotel was originally known as the Commodore Hotel built in 1919 and once billed as "the most wonderful hotel in the world."³ It was named after Cornelius 'Commodore' Vanderbilt who also built Grand Central Terminal. The hotel was one of the first large luxurious hotels built as part of Terminal City, the name given to the zone around Grand Central Station where the city's newest and tallest towers were. Architects Warren and Wetmore designed many of them: the Vanderbilt, Biltmore, Roosevelt, Commodore, Yale Club, the Post Office building, the Marguery residential tower and others. 42nd Street in 1930 had become the commercial, hotel and transportation hub of New York City. Le Corbusier described it as a "City of Incredible Towers" and province of "great masters of economic destiny ... up there like eagles in the silence of their eminences."⁴

In the 1970s, the hotel was in a bad condition. The city was experiencing the effects of the oil crisis and the hotel was in need of some refurbishment. In 1976, Donald Trump, who was looking to enter the real estate market, bought the hotel, gutted the interior

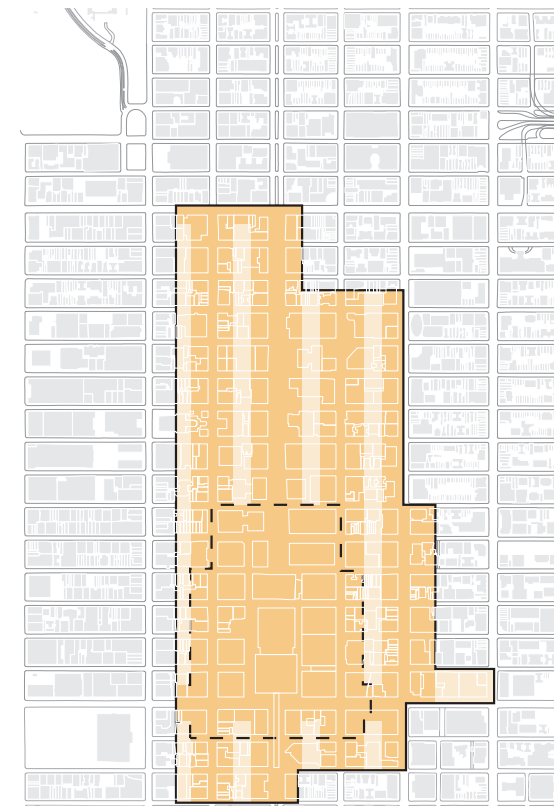
down to the structure, covered the old façade with a reflective glass curtain wall, and re-opened the hotel in 1980 as the Grand Hyatt. The new façade was described by the American Institute of Architects as "an utter and inexcusable outrage" and was generally badly received because its character did not fit in with the rest of 42nd street. James Taub wrote in the *The New York Review of Books* of its "blindingly reflective glass skin."⁵ After Terminal City became increasingly unpopular and development around Times Square became the new focus, the Grand Hyatt "found itself marooned on East 42nd street."⁶ Today, with Grand Central Station's refurbishment, Midtown East's rezoning and the construction of One Vanderbilt on the other side of the station, the area is becoming exciting again. The old Commodore Hotel, now the Grand Hyatt, finds itself under the threat of the wrecking ball. The once central and important hotel that hosted many well-known historic personalities such as Jimmy Walker and Einstein could be erased from history and replaced by what will likely be a new supertall glass tower. However, this has not happened yet, and this project will investigate whether any part of the old hotel is worth preserving, not only for historical reason, but also for the sustainable reuse of materials and existing buildings. The building has suffered from a non-preservationist approach over the years. The interior was completely removed, except for a lobby, and the façade has been covered over. It is unclear what remains of the facade beneath the curtain wall and what condition it is in.

Choice of site

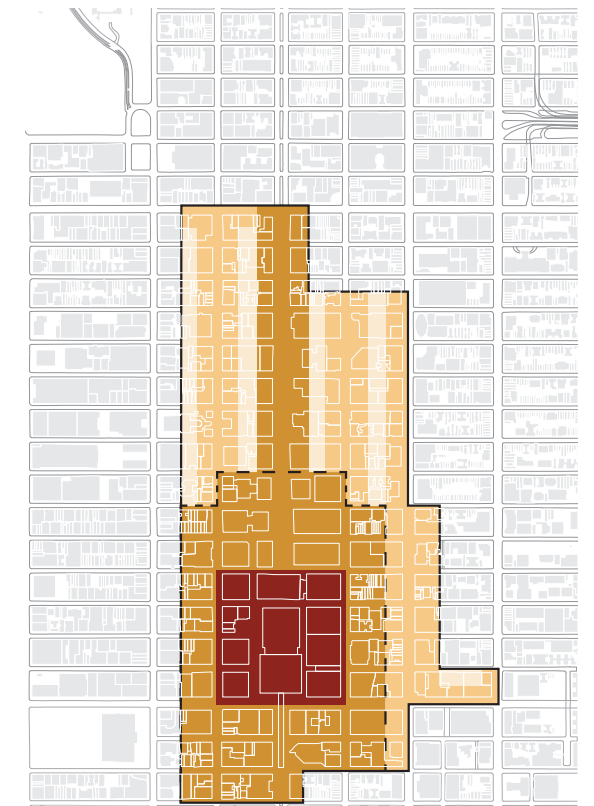
This site was chosen because it is owned by the state of New York which is ideal for a building that includes a civic program. Its proximity to Grand Central Station means that it is very well connected, accessible and visible to users and passers-by. The recent rezoning of the area means a lot of new construction will occur which will call for many public reviews. Therefore, placing the building in the middle of this development zone is both strategic and symbolic of the city's commitment to a democratic participatory approach to urban development. The ease of access means people can come from all over the city to work and attend the public reviews, or drop in spontaneously because they happen to be walking by. The potential for improvement to the public realm is significant, but there is a further societal potential for a radical form of democracy. By streamlining the public review process and strengthening the democratic infrastructure, public participation in urban matters can be improved and the right to the city solidified into the urban fabric.



8.3.9 Site Location



8.3.10 Previous zoning of Midtown East



8.3.11 2017 Rezoning of Midtown East



Site analysis

The existing building consists of a plinth and a top. The plinth contains all of the event spaces, restaurants, lobby, museum, gallery and retail. The top contains 1,298 hotel rooms of varying sizes. Though the building contains many columns, ceiling heights in the plinth can reach 7-8 metres, while in the hotel rooms, they range from 2.4 to 2.7 metres. The plinth's original masonry façade which remains under the reflective glass can be revealed to show the original ornamentation. Based on pictures of the Commodore Hotel and online testimonies from people who remember the hotel before it's refurbishment, the plinth's original façade has been damaged but is still there, and some ornaments remain. The top was mostly brick and unornamented. This together with the low ceiling heights forms the argument for retaining the plinth, but demolishing the top part.

The site is surrounded on all four sides by designated landmarks: Grand Central Station, the Chrysler Building, the Graybar building and the Pershing Square buildings. The first two being the most iconic and recognisable, preserving views of the façade of GCS and the roof of the Chrysler will be central to the new project. The east façade of GCS has been hidden since 1919 when the Commodore hotel was constructed. The new proposal should be set back, revealing the hidden ornamented façade for the first time in 100 years and create a public space from which it can be seen. The site is also located above a very congested subway station that runs diagonally across the site. A new entrance to the subway station could be accessed from this new public space facing GCS's revealed East facade, making for a dramatic view when users leave the station. It would have the added benefit of improving wayfinding and orientation in the area. The subway station's location beneath the site will make the positioning of structure very important because the building will straddle the station underground. Between the site and the Graybar building is a retail corridor running from Lexington Avenue through to Grand Central Station. The proposal could provide added access to this retail and create a new route from 42nd street to Lexington Avenue.

Air rights

The site is located within the Grand Central Core, meaning it is immediately adjacent to Grand Central Station. The maximum FAR, under the 2017 rezoning, has been increased from 15 to 24. To achieve this, the site must use the District Improvement Bonus which would raise the FAR to 18. By using both the DIB and the Landmark Transfer mechanism, the maximum FAR of 24 can be achieved. Named the 'Superior Development Special Permit', the city will also award another 6 FAR, giving a total 30 FAR for "buildings that demonstrate extraordinary public benefits and exemplary design excellence".⁷ This includes significant improvements to the skyline, a superior site plan and massing, and make significant contributions to the pedestrian network, such as a new indoor/outdoor public space and a direct and generous connection to the underground pedestrian network.

Grand Central Station has 1.3 million square feet of available air rights, some of which could be purchased for increased square footage. J.P. Morgan Chase bought 680,000 square feet of air rights from the station for \$353/sqft, a deal that totalled \$240m. This deal also generated \$42m for the funding of public realm improvements,

a caveat for the transfer of air rights. It can be assumed that a similar price for air rights will be granted for the chosen site.

Building Typology and Program

For the building to be viable and the choice of site justified, the program will be mixed and complex. The site has a privileged location within the Grand Central Core and qualifies for the 30 FAR awarded to 'Super Developments', because its plot area is 57,282 sqft (the minimum is 40,000sqft). The building typology will be a mixed-use building combining public, commercial, hotel and municipal functions. If 30 FAR is the target for the project, the maximum buildable floor area is 1.7 million sqft. The building will be a public private partnership, much like Grand Central Station was, because the land is owned by the city but private capital will be required to create a building of exceptional quality. A division is suggested below:

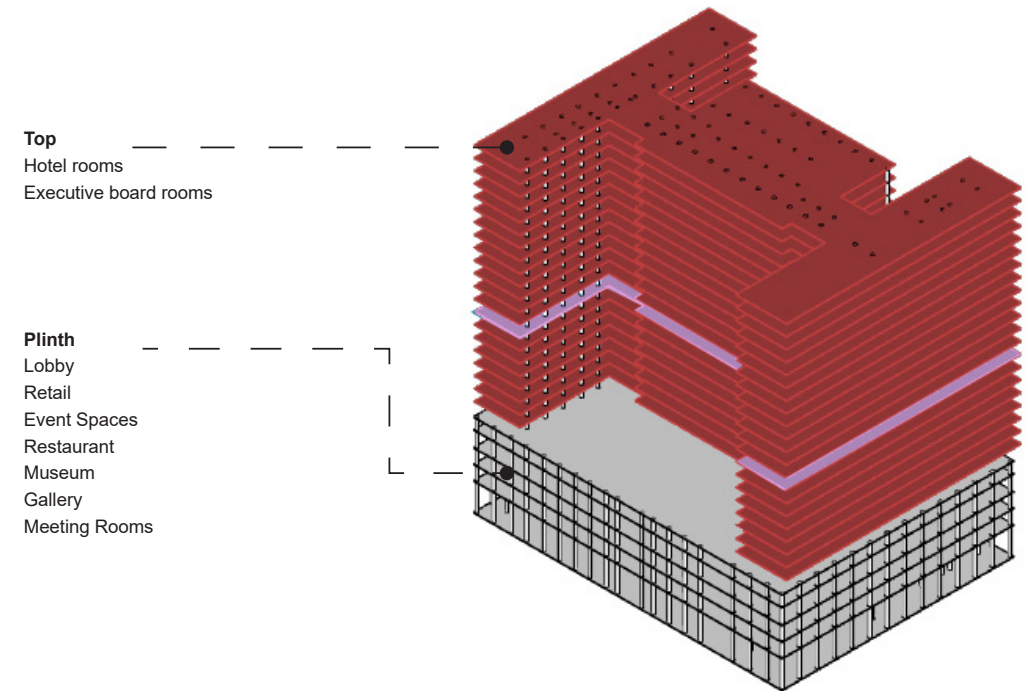
- Public Space 1,600m2
- Forum 2,876m2
- Municipal offices 31,020m2
- Hotel 21,150m2
- Commercial 103,706m2

Organisational study of program

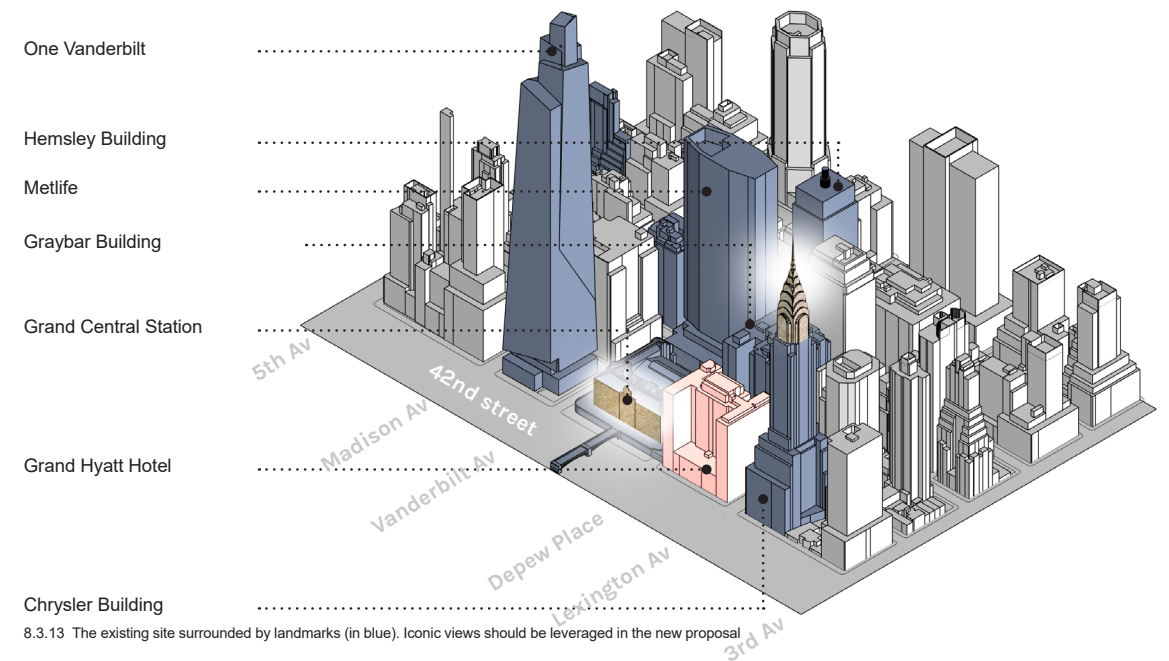
At its base, a new public space in front of Grand Central Station's revealed façade will be created that incorporates a new and large entrance to the subway below ground. The open space will serve as an entrance to the lobby from which the public forum spaces and municipal functions will be accessed. Separate entrances will be created for the commercial and hotel functions. The retained base of the existing building will contain the public functions while the top will contain the private commercial and hotel functions.

Design Ambition

The design should refresh the sense of the existing building by revealing the façade and retaining some interior spaces such as the lobby and event spaces. The difference between the public and private spaces should be made clear through different use of material and massing, but this will be clear from the combination of old and new. The project must seek an innovative way of meeting the needs of local communities as well as those of new businesses whose presence in Midtown will contribute to financing improvements of the public realm. The project should push for a model that redefines the notions of growth away from purely financial reasons, and symbolises this in its form and materials. If a radical shift was made towards an economy of Sustainment, as Tony Fry writes in Design as Politics⁸, the public institution and its ties with civic and private functions will be redefined, mutually beneficial and working towards common objectives of sustaining and advancing life. Natural ventilation design strategies such as Earth, Wind, Fire principle developed by Ben Bronsema at TU Delft could be used as a guiding principle to reduce energy required for heating and cooling. Heat transfer between the different functions of the building throughout the day can also be applied. Using a more extensive underground network can play a defining role in reducing material and insulation requirements.



8.3.12 Existing Grand Hyatt Hotel program organisation. The plinth could be retained while the top is demolished to allow for taller ceiling heights



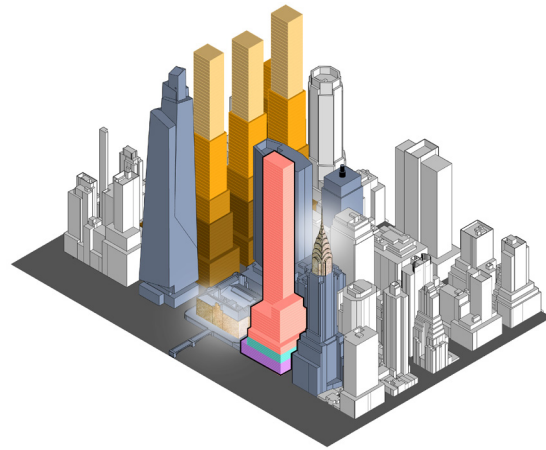
8.3.13 The existing site surrounded by landmarks (in blue). Iconic views should be leveraged in the new proposal

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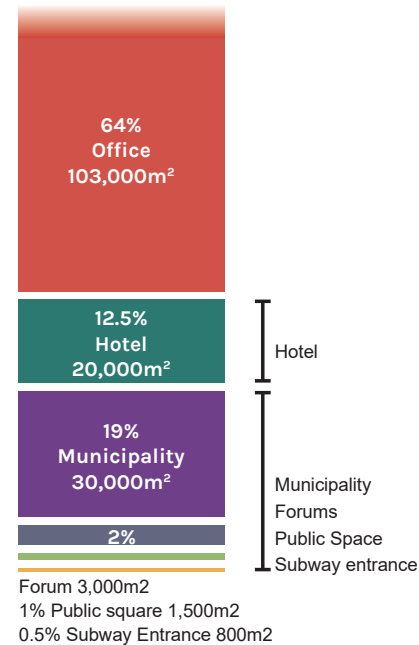
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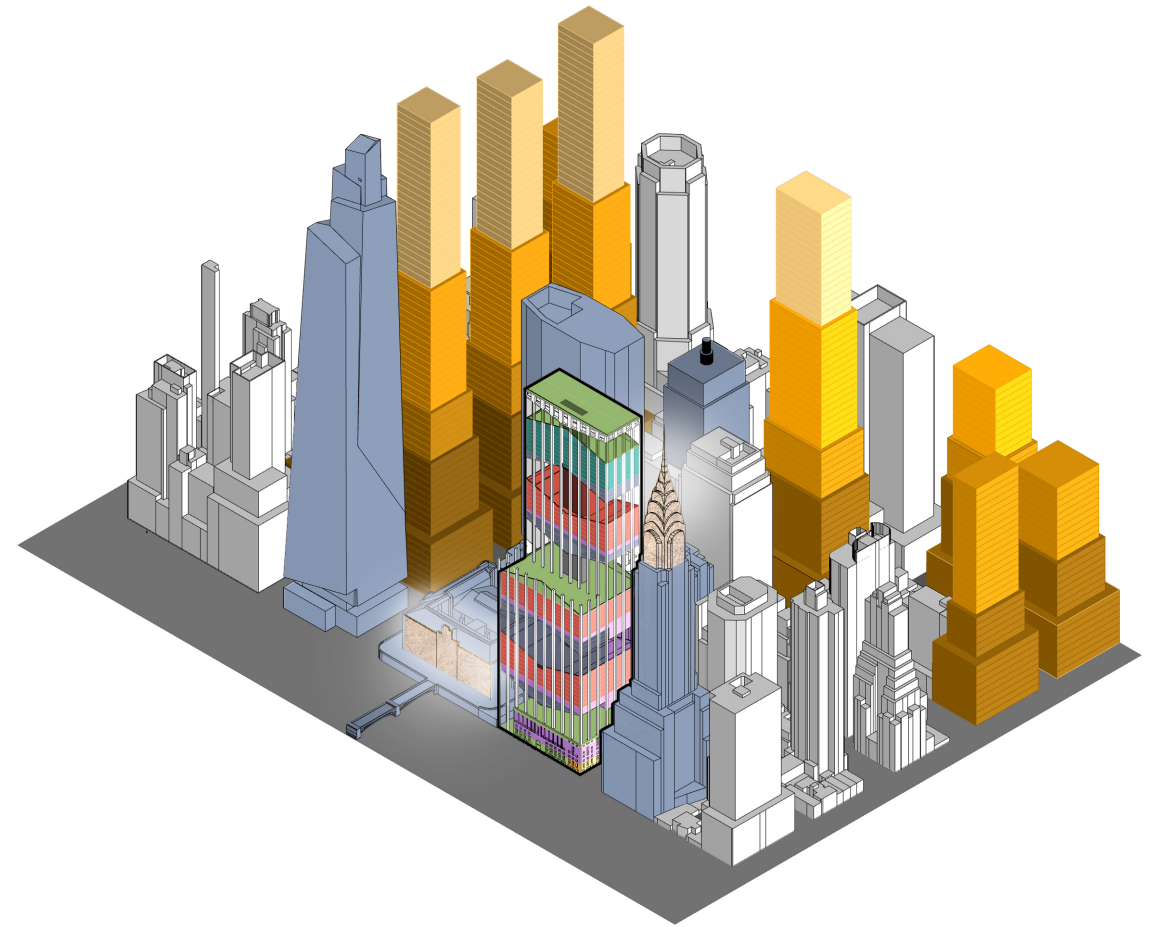
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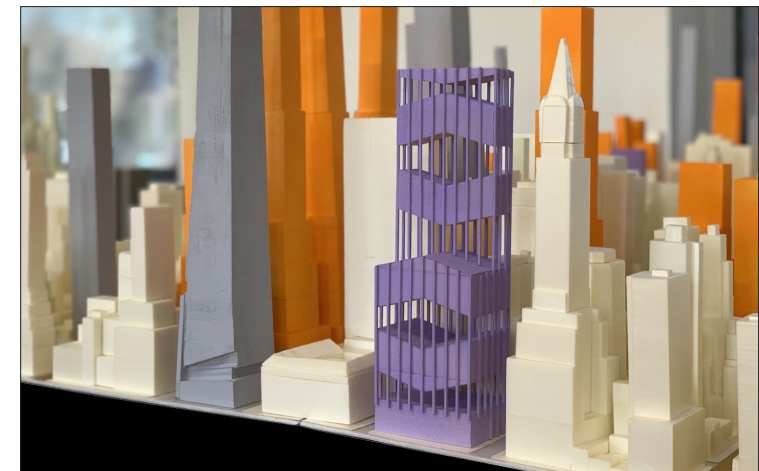
8.3.14 Previous Massing Proposal at P2



8.3.15 Program Bar at P2, with P4 assignment



8.3.16 Second massing proposal, subject to change



8.3.17 Second massing proposal model, subject to change

Reflection Paper

Benjamin Evans - 4828445

The relationship between research and design

In the dawn of a new phase in Midtown Manhattan's growth, the Manhattan Forum acknowledges the conflicting interests between financial forces and local communities in the processes of city planning. Currently, 90% of building applications are built as-of-right, meaning that as long as building plans respect the zoning laws, public hearings do not take place. This accelerates the speed of construction in the city, which historically has been beneficial to the growth of the economy, because public hearings delay planning approval times considerably. However, Manhattan communities are therefore not given a chance to raise concerns on the impact of new construction on public assets, such as Central Park, which now has a large portion of it cast in shadow.

By providing the New York City Department of City Planning and Manhattan's 12 Community Boards with the forum and office spaces needed to process building applications faster, and hold public hearings more often, the Manhattan Forum attempts to mediate discussions and foster the deliberation and debate necessary for a healthy and democratic future urban growth.

The group research focussed on topics such as history, mobility, public space, real estate, for which hard data could be found. My contribution to this research was to the history chapter and the real estate chapter. Through the research and analysis of how the city grew I became interested in the mechanics of the city's building planning process, the spaces of the supposedly democratic public hearings and to what extent the local inhabitants have a say in the city's future.

Having closely studied how Manhattan's urban fabric developed over time since 1609 to the present, it became clear to me that the construction and growth of the city has been as much about destruction as it is about creation. The native Lenape people, who inhabited the land before the Dutch and British arrivals, lost much of their population and culture and clearly were not respected. Neither was the land itself, its extensive wildlife, rivers and streams cropped to perfect rectangle named Central Park. Central Park played a large role in the development of my graduation topic.

Manhattan is marked by an extraordinary speed of construction. Especially in the early 20th century, hundreds of skyscrapers were built in Midtown. Zoning laws were created as a set of design guidelines to ensure light and air were retained and street level while allowing the city to grow rapidly. This proved to be a successful strategy economically, as Midtown eventually attracted many Fortune 500 companies that make significant tax contributions to the city.

On the other hand, advances in engineering and technology have made possible the design of much taller buildings which the zoning

laws, last modified in 1961, were not designed to regulate. As a result, Central Park and other smaller spaces have come under the threat of shadows cast by new typologies of skyscrapers in the city: the supertalls and the needles. These luxury residential towers, many of which are built in Midtown along Billionaire's Row, not only widen the gap between rich and poor, but are also having an impact of the quality of spaces in the city that are meant for everybody by casting long shadows. Furthermore, local communities are not given a space and time to express their concerns over the impact of new buildings in the city before they are built. My interest in the relation between architecture and democracy stemmed from the Manhattan Arts Society's reports on this matter.

Aspect 2: Relationship between your graduation topic and your studio topic

The aim of this studio is to study different urban conditions, this year's being Midtown, and how it is affected by social, economic, environmental and political changes. The studio is particularly interested in how the city will grow and change to accommodate for future ambitions and needs whether it be changes in the working environment, transport or the building's consumption of raw materials and energy. The studio also asks that we see the world not only through the lenses of the architect, but also through the lenses of a planner, organiser, politician, economist, philosopher, strategist, humanitarian and visionary.

My graduation topic touches on several themes such as democracy, the planning process and public space. I have researched and incorporated many philosophical and theoretical ideas such as Tony Fry's 'Design As Politics', a focus on how design can be applied to transform society, using the culture of Sustainment (or sustainability) as a design goal, or Henri Lefebvre's 'The Right to the City', and his ideas on participation and alienation. I have read sociological and economical literature such as 'The Global City' by Saskia Sassen, and 'Urban Warfare' by Rachel Rolnik for their analysis and critique of the financialisation of the housing market and 'Form Follows Finance' by Carol Willis, for the way finance, economy and architecture in New York City become one and the same thing.

As Midtown is about to enter a new phase in its development, the Manhattan Forum reimagines the planning process required for building application approvals as one that can increase citizen participation in an attempt to strengthen a weakened democracy. The project combines political ambitions and economical ambitions with symbolic ones by placing the site adjacent to Grand Central Station, the historical epicentre of the growth of Midtown, where today the concentration of new office development is predicted to occur. The project reuses an existing building, the Commodore

Hotel built in 1919 and refurbished by now president Donald Trump in 1976. In reality, this building is likely to be demolished to make way for a supertall office tower. Though the integrity of the original building was severely compromised by the 70s refurbishment, research showed that certain façade and spatial elements of the original structure can still be preserved while making spaces on top for city growth. The symbolic significance of this site, the program of the Manhattan Forum and wider city vision for growth within this area were carefully considered to produce a building that responds holistically to several design criteria, for which several lenses were used. How to make a public building, a symbol of democracy, change the way the city grows for the benefit of all parties involved?

Aspect 3: Research method and approach chosen by the student in relation to the graduation studio

A cross-disciplinary approach was chosen for the research of this project, a project I believe to be suitable to this year's Complex Projects ambitions. The use of mapping techniques for descriptive research and physical modelling for representation and morphological studies helped to extract both qualitative and quantitative research. Context-led research was used establish a common typology in the area. In this case, the site is surrounded by landmarks: a transport hub, Grand Central Station, a set back office typology, a modernist icon, the MetLife Building, ornate detailing on the Pershing building façade, and a supertall glass skyscraper, One Vanderbilt. Ray Lukas' notion of the unique helps to understand the special characteristics of the site, including its history. Terminal City, once had a clear identity, with its monumental setback limestone hotels. Today, it has evolved to become a mixture of old and new, some have been given new glass facades, such as the Grand Hyatt Hotel, and some newer buildings are clad almost entirely in glass, except for some terracotta detailing, a small reference to the past, such as One Vanderbilt. Predictive analysis and three-dimensional modelling helped visualise which sites are likely to be built and to what heights. Given glass is still the most common façade material for new buildings, obtaining ever more advanced levels of transparency, low levels of reflectiveness, larger sizes and technically performing, it can be predicted that Terminal City will see many more tall glass buildings in the future.

A typological study of municipal buildings and civic buildings showed a tendency for a classical style of architecture, with expressive columns and majestic staircases as recurring features. Manhattan's Civic Centre is a quintessential example of this typology, a literal neo-classical style, resembling Ancient Greek notions of democracy, that one would have to call outdated. Though the ancient Greek's notions of democratic spaces are still of significant influence today, and their

approach to public space in the city is very strong, I wanted to avoid simply copying the style, as has been done in many places, to simply represent an image of democracy.

Aspect 4: Relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific relevance.

Until now, the approach to city growth in New York City has been that more is better. Too often, city growth has not been kind to local populations, and change usually results in destruction. Now in the globalised world, growth results in the destruction both locally and on the other side of the planet where raw materials are extracted and tonnes of carbon dioxide is released causing global warming. The construction of cities like New York has too often favoured the financial force behind the real estate business over the needs of communities. When the government represents the interests of small groups of business elites, this is when the post-democratic state begins, as Peter Crouch outlines in his post-democratic theory. The Manhattan Forum tries to intervene in this tendency, by rebalancing how decisions are made on matters of city growth, so more voices from different perspectives are heard.

In the context of climate change, it is clear that eternal economic growth is not possible, due to its very nature as an extractive process, as has been noted by Saskia Sassen. So far, economic growth has been resource-heavy. Large quantities of irreplaceable raw materials are being extracted for construction, and we are now reaching the point where resources are dangerously scarce. Like many bubbles, this one is likely to burst. The supertall, mostly vacant, luxury residential needle skyscraper typology is a product of our time, and signifies only that we are not seeing this needed societal change yet, this de-growth. While skyscrapers and density themselves are not the problem, (they are materially more efficient than large expanses of low rise buildings, they also reduce commuting times responsible for carbon emissions), vacant skyscrapers certainly are. The Manhattan Forum's ambitions are to reduce (ideally eliminate), the number of buildings built that have detrimental effects on the environment, social life and public spaces.

Professionally, the role of the architect is changing as it becomes more complex and interwoven with different disciplines. The construction industry is responsible for over 40% of carbon emissions, a significant amount. As future architects we share the responsibility to change current design processes, to use material more efficiently, to reuse existing buildings where possible and design to reduce energy consumption. The Manhattan Forum, integrates a climate regulation system, using natural ventilation, daylight and sun shading where possible into the design of the building. Rainwater is collected and a geothermal tank used for heating and cooling purposes.

Reflection Paper

Benjamin Evans - 4828445

Aspect 5: Ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered during graduation

Several aspects have been troublesome during the development of this project and remain so. The Manhattan Forum is not the first project to tackle the issue of democratic representation in architecture. In general, the issue falls within the problem of the aestheticisation of democracy. The concept of democracy is one that is difficult to define precisely and one that is constantly changing. The ancient Greek notion of the agora has been fetishised, and copied in today's civic buildings that adopt the neo-classical style. The image of columns, pediment and steps are instantly recognisable, but one must be conscious of how un-democratic Ancient Greek civilisations were. Most people living in cities in those days were slaves to the wealthier, and women were not allowed to vote. Therefore, is this reference truly appropriate to our social ambitions of equality and representation today? Perhaps subconsciously, even being aware of the dangers of neo-classicism, the proposal retains some influences, with its pronounced columns, steps, and abstracted pediment shape. This could be considered a failure to find a truly new identity for the representation of democracy in architecture. But in my defence, I believe that the overall expression of the building makes an abstraction of classical building characteristics, avoiding the neo-classical label.

The other aspect I had internal battles with was the influence of the design of parliament buildings on the scheme. The idea of the forum and the place of discussion, housed in a theatrical space could be accused of making a spectacle out of democracy. This is something Plato has criticised. Parliaments are usually run and used by elites, therefore, it was important for the Manhattan Forum to not express a luxurious elitist culture, but rather one that is open to all. The angled form of the forums is the essence of the expression of the project, but how significant a contribution should they make? Is the theatre really the space of democracy, or is it falling into the trap of aestheticisation of the political? The moment someone steps forward and claims the stage and speaks in front of others, does this not create a power dynamic of authority over the audience, one of being spoken to, of being told? Perhaps it does. However, within an audience, the self dissolves into a heterogeneous whole and each audience member holds a different opinion, thus creating an opposing power that can challenge and hold the speaker accountable, thereby mediating power balances. The auditorium is therefore the space and physical manifestation of this mediation, where democracy can be strengthened again.