



# Putting *Eighth* First

Why the Future of Eighth  
Depends on Investment

# *Eighth Avenue: the Gateway to the City*

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The global significance of Eighth Avenue between West 33rd Street and West 42nd Street cannot be overstated. It is the 'Gateway to New York City' for 1.1 million people every day. This critical corridor between Penn Station and Port Authority Bus Terminal hosts over 100,000 jobs and 3.5 million annual tourists. When employees and visitors arrive in New York, most step out onto Eighth Avenue. This space is their first impression, their benchmark, and their lasting memory of our city.

However, the deteriorated sidewalks and roads leading into Midtown from the nation's busiest transportation hubs put underinvestment on full display. Pedestrians are abandoned to navigate temporary walkways, confusing signage, potholes, uneven sidewalks, broken curbs, and unsightly scaffolding as they traverse the corridor. They are accosted by a myriad of safety and social conditions, from drug dealing to the crisis of the unhoused and mentally unstable on our streets. The result is a public realm in disarray that fails to match the corridor's economic importance, presents a barrier to residential development, and prohibits the most transit rich area in Manhattan from becoming a vibrant 24/7 community.

Though the corridor has been neglected for decades by previous administrations, there has never been a more important time for New York City to invest comprehensively in Eighth Avenue's future. The recent MSMX rezoning has unlocked the Garment District's potential to play a major role in alleviating New York's housing crisis, but the environment on and around Eighth Avenue is not conducive to residents. At the same time, \$17 billion in federal and regional investment is being poured into the redevelopment of the Port Authority Bus Terminal and Penn Station transportation hubs on either end of Eighth Avenue. This will create gleaming, new anchors that will bring even more people to the corridor. They simply cannot be met by the current conditions. This moment presents once-in-a-lifetime opportunities for the city that should not be squandered.

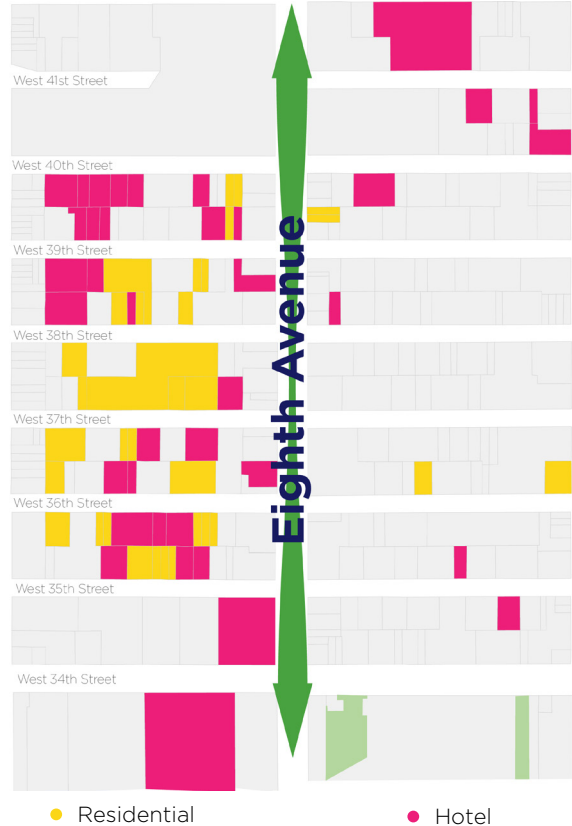
- » Capitalize on Adjacent Transit Investment – To capitalize on the unprecedented \$17 billion investment in the redevelopments of the Port Authority and Penn Station, we must improve the corridor that links these new landmarks on either end of Eighth Avenue.
- » Enhance the Gateway to New York – To encourage business and tourism, this Gateway to New York must make a better impression, particularly once the new transit hubs come online.
- » Spur Residential Development – To encourage critical residential development in highly desired proximity to business and transit hubs, Eighth Avenue must become more conducive to a 24/7 population.
- » Improve Safety and Lower Crime – To encourage the development of an active 24/7 community, Eighth Avenue must look and be safer.

By implementing strategic improvements to streetscape, infrastructure, and social conditions, Eighth Avenue can transform into a corridor worthy of its global importance as a place for people to live, work, and visit.

**JOBS**

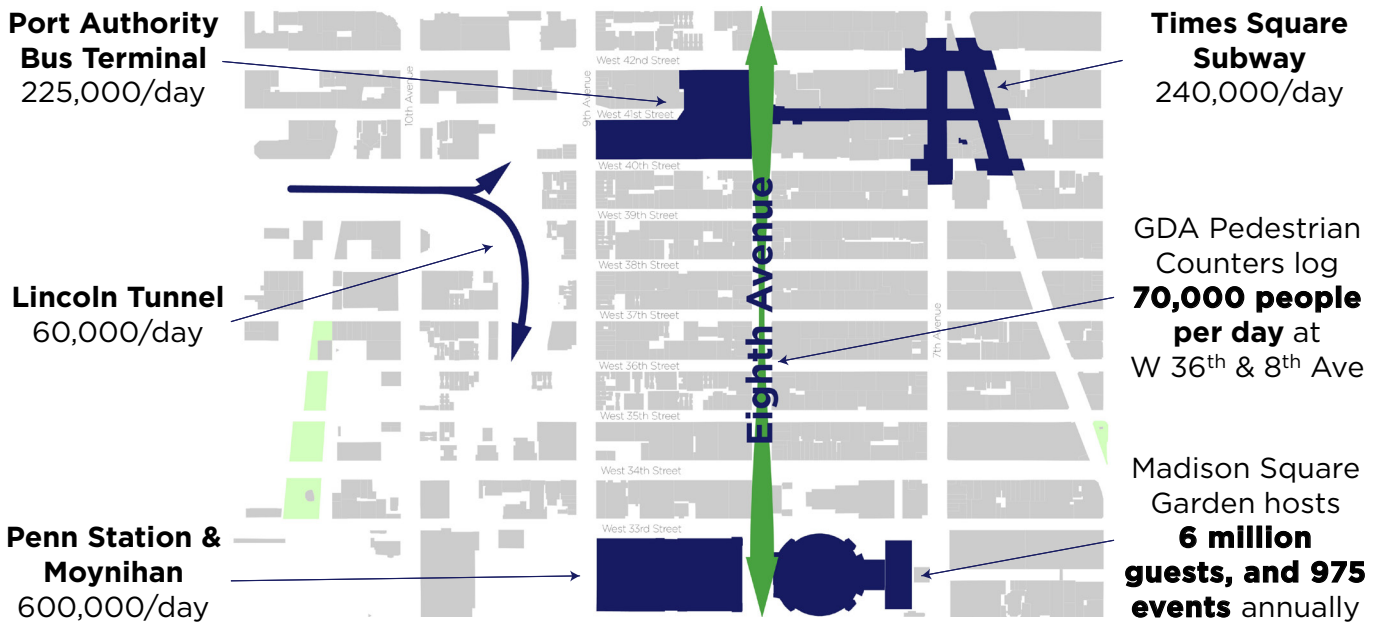


**HOTELS AND RESIDENTIAL**



Data from MapPLUTO and NYC Industrial Data Explorer

**DAILY RIDERSHIP FOR KEY TRANSIT HUBS ALONG EIGHTH AVENUE**



Sources: MTA, GDA Pedestrian Cameras, and Amtrak

# Current Challenges Along *Eighth*

## EXISTING EFFORTS

The Garment District Alliance (GDA) has worked tirelessly to improve the Eighth Avenue corridor for over thirty years. GDA spends \$2.5 million each year on public safety, sanitation, and maintenance for Eighth Avenue. GDA security staff monitor the corridor from 6 AM to 8 PM, responding to more than 1,000 complaints every year regarding peddling, homelessness, drug dealing, addiction, or harassment. GDA sanitation staff routinely sweep the street, but face harassment and routine biohazard waste. Bulky waste and trash bags are placed along pedestrian islands out of necessity because the current road configuration prevents waste collection from accessing the curb from the street. GDA pays for horticulture in an attempt to soften the environment and contracts with social service workers to offer assistance to those in need. GDA has advocated for limited hours for POPS, removal of scaffolding, replacement of MTA subway grate covers, improved lighting, and the repair of broken streetscape elements. However, these efforts represent piecemeal fixes for degraded social and physical infrastructure whose solutions remain out of budget and political scope for a business improvement district.

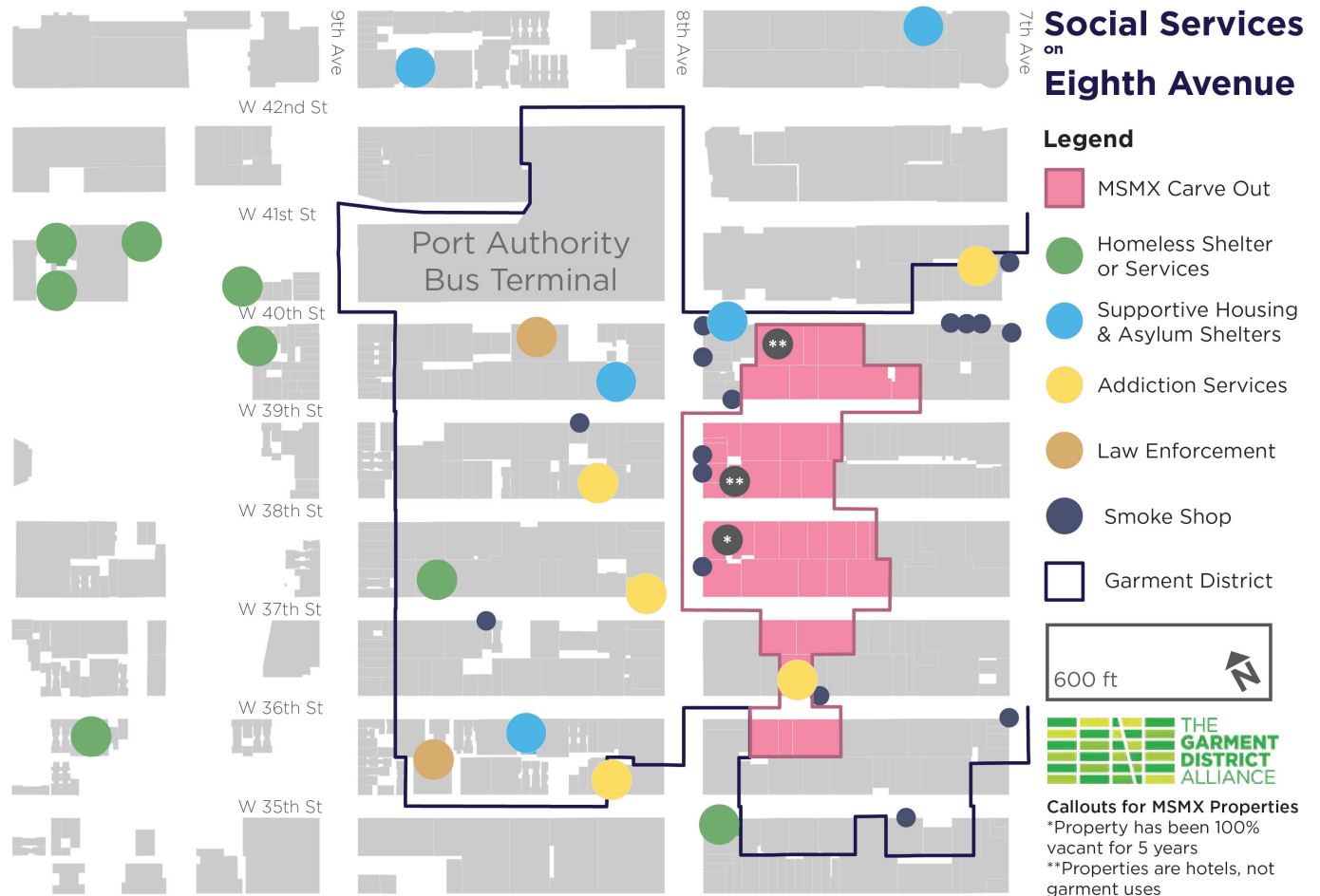
Over the past two years, the Midtown Community Improvement Coalition (MCIC), has served as a forum for the GDA to collaborate with elected officials, local nonprofits, and 15 city agencies to actively manage Eighth Avenue. The MCIC has helped address social and infrastructure issues by activating community resources to drive operational changes. The group's efforts, while successful, are only able to address the low hanging fruit, but not the underlying causes or misguided policies.

## PUBLIC REALM IN DISTRESS

With Penn Station, Port Authority Bus Terminal, and the Times Square Subway, Eighth Avenue has the highest density of transit access in New York. Yet, the corridor remains underbuilt, lined by Class C office buildings. Investment is discouraged by a history of crime, drug use, and homelessness. For decades, outdated zoning has limited development opportunities. The Midtown South Mixed-Use Plan only partially remedied this issue. Most notably, 37 buildings, some flanking Eighth Avenue, were excluded from the opportunity to convert to residential.

When visitors arrive on Eighth Avenue, they encounter a public realm marred by visual chaos, deteriorating infrastructure, and inadequate pedestrian space. The inconsistency of temporary sidewalks, painted curb extensions, and scant lighting create poor conditions that invite behavioral chaos. People trample tree pits, throw waste in planters, and peddle drugs from folding tables. These conditions are by design; disinvestment in the public realm and an over-saturation of social services have invited a culture of disorder, which deters investment, discourages new housing and commercial development, and suppresses economic opportunity for Midtown West.

# THE GARMENT DISTRICT ALLIANCE



Map of social services in proximity of Eighth Avenue



Photos of social conditions along Eighth Avenue

# Current Challenges Along *Eighth*

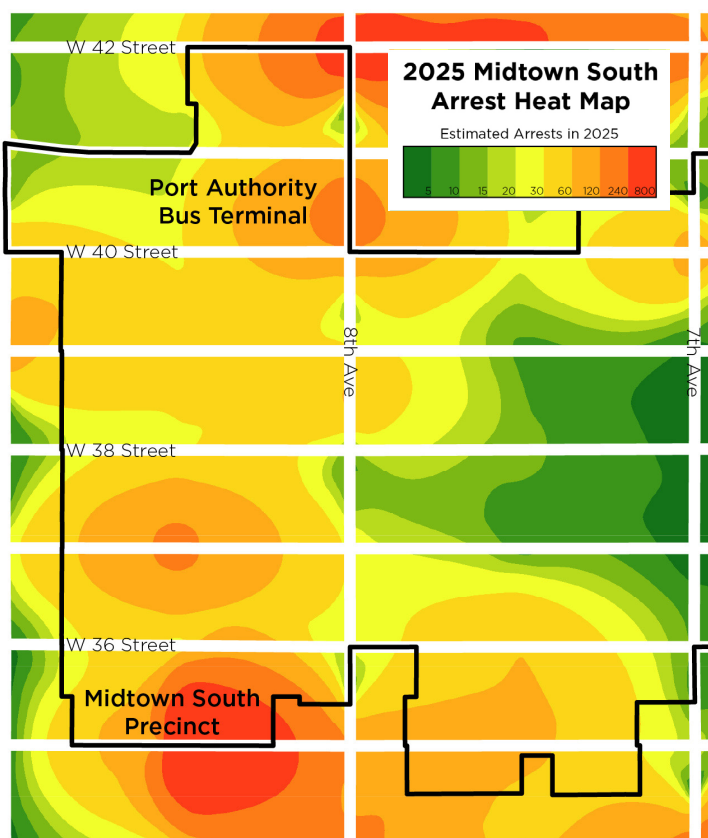
## SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER AND CRIME

Eighth Avenue is the most transit accessible place in New York City, yet its starting office rents are 20% lower than those on Seventh Avenue and 50% of rents on Sixth Avenue. Much of this can be attributed to interconnected social and infrastructure conditions at the street level, which make the corridor feel unsafe and undesirable.

The Eighth Avenue corridor stands out from most of the city when it comes to drug-related arrests, street crime, and other quality of life concerns. This is in large part due to the over-saturation of social service providers and harm reduction centers on and around Eighth Avenue. These entities bring a vulnerable population of addicted and mentally ill individuals to the neighborhood, who in turn attract a criminal element that preys on them.

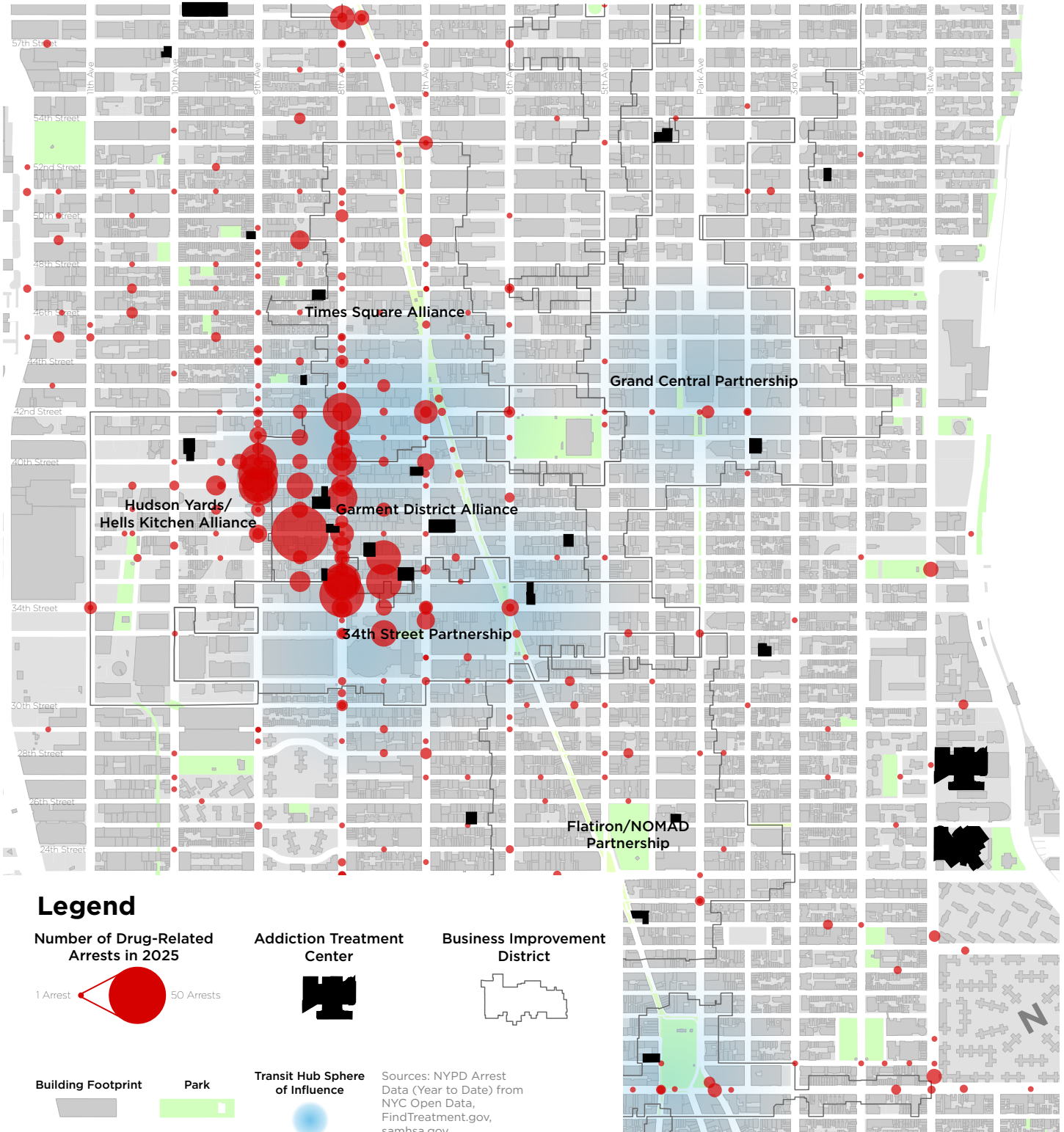
The degraded streetscape serves as a stage for drug dealing and public drug use. Drug users can exhibit psychosis and aggression, sometimes leading them to commit larceny against pedestrians and retailers. The symptoms of substance use disorder can be difficult to distinguish from mental illness or homelessness and are often linked. Former Councilmember Erik Bottcher described these conditions as a “humanitarian crisis unfolding on the streets” in a 2024 letter to former Mayor Eric Adams. Liam Stack, a culture and politics reporter from the New York Times, profiled this issue in 2024, describing Eighth Avenue as a “Dickensian parade of humanity,” noting that Eighth Avenue “...is strewn with garbage and pockmarked by potholes and pools of unidentifiable fluid. People suffering from addiction and mental illness roam the street.”

These observations attest to the interconnectedness of social issues and public realm conditions along Eighth Avenue. Both need improvement.



Data collected from NYPD Arrests

# DRUG-RELATED ARRESTS IN MIDTOWN MANHATTAN, 2025



Drug arrest map using NYPD Arrest Data

# Current Challenges Along Eighth

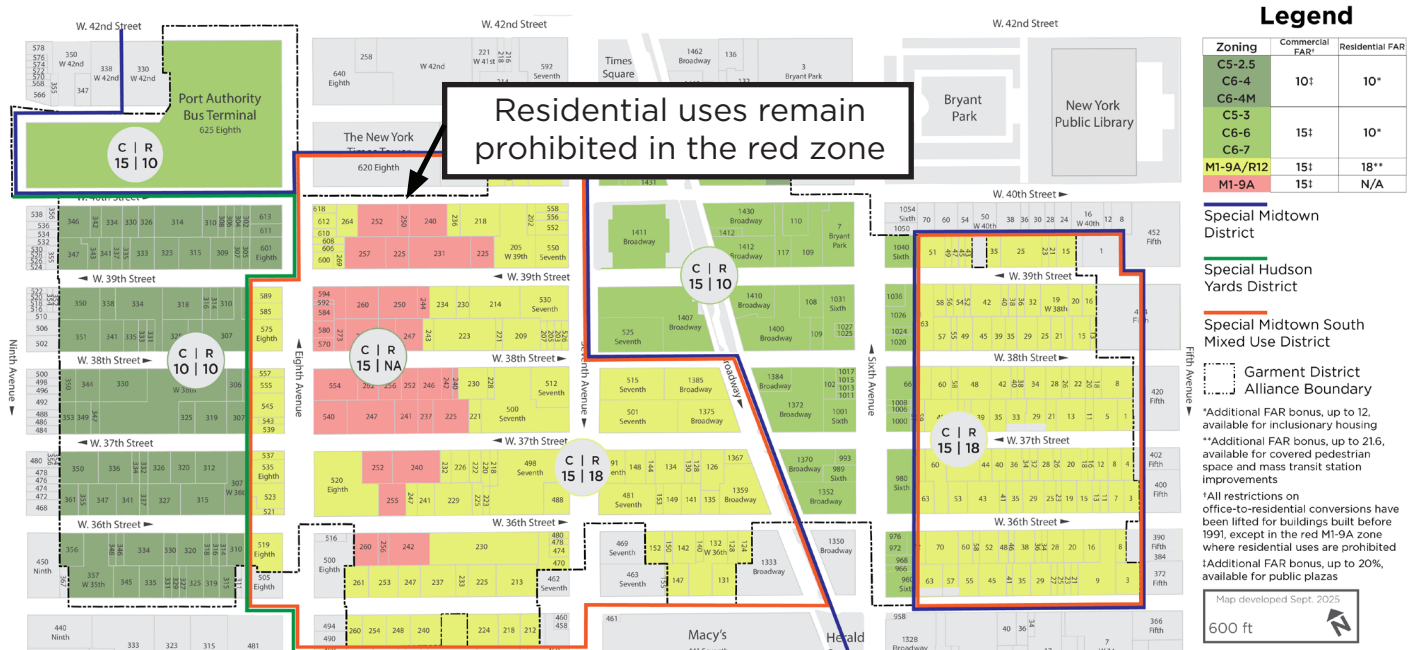
## BARRIERS TO RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Midtown South Mixed Use Rezoning was intended to unlock the potential for up to 10,000 new units of housing in the Garment District by removing restrictions on residential conversions between Eighth and Ninth Avenues and allowing for residential conversions and development in the former industrial M1-6 zone of Midtown.

However, the rezoning has several critical flaws. There are 37 buildings flanking Eighth Avenue that were excluded from the opportunity to convert to residential, representing a potential loss of 1,000 units of housing, 250 of which would have been affordable units. Unlike housing in outer Boroughs, these homes would have been in the heart of Midtown, with highly desirable access to employment, transportation, and amenities.

In addition, limiting residential conversion opportunities deters investment and reduces the value of these properties and those adjacent to them. Disinvestment ultimately impacts the public realm, which further discourages residential development in an area which is perfectly situated for it.

Lifting these restrictions and investing in the streetscape would encourage the development of much-needed affordable housing along Eighth Avenue. This would allow a new resident population to create a 24/7 mixed use community that would improve real and perceived safety. These new residents would also advocate for the corridor, which has been a political forgotten stepchild for decades. Eighth Avenue serves as the border between Community Districts, State Senate Districts, Sanitation Districts, Neighborhood Tabulation Areas, and Citywide District Tabulation Areas, always on the margin. Building a population in this area would spur narratives that recenter attention on the value and importance of Eighth Avenue.

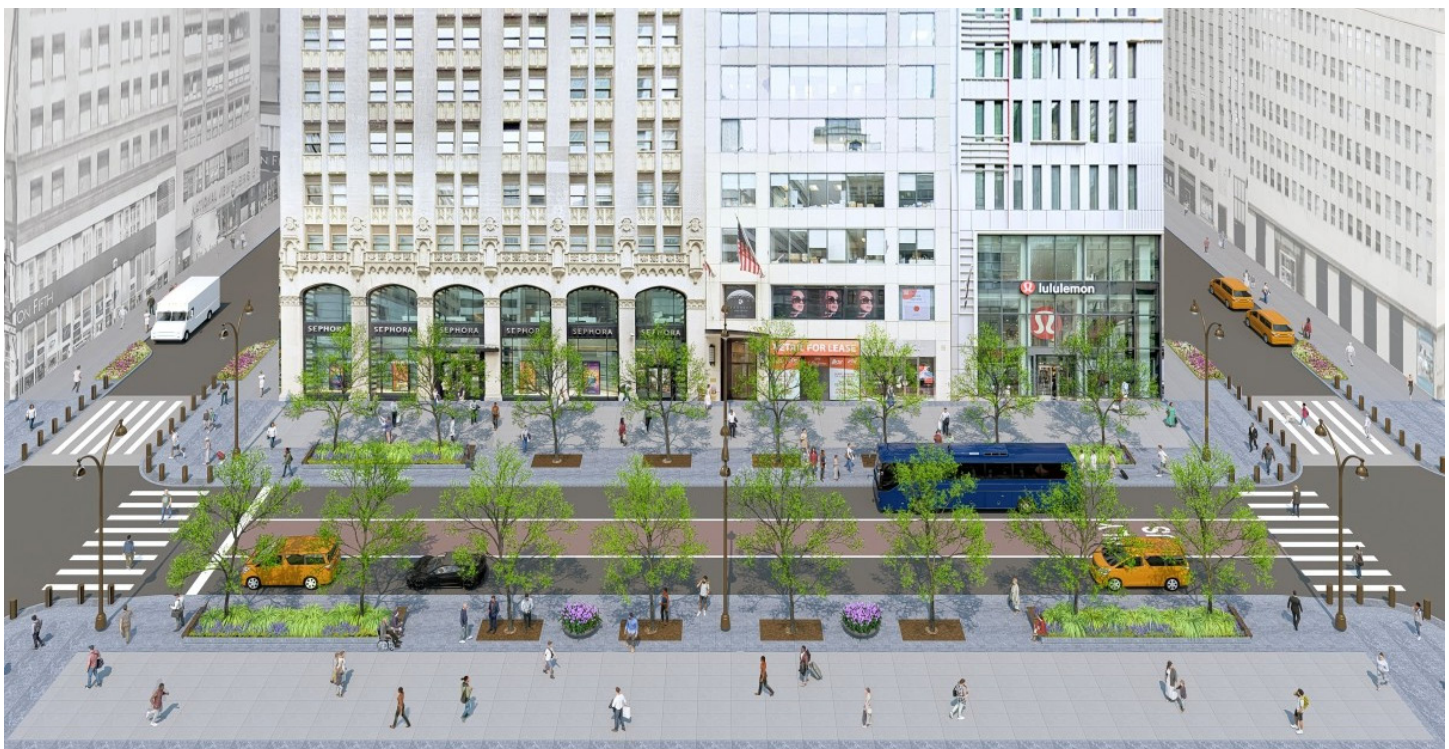


**EIGHTH AVENUE TODAY**



Pedestrian crowding along Eighth Avenue during rush hour

**WHAT EIGHTH AVENUE COULD BE WITH INVESTMENT**



Rendering from Future of Fifth

# How *Eighth* can Flourish

## **PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF EIGHTH**

At this critical time, strategic improvements to streetscape, infrastructure, and social services on Eighth Avenue will transform this vital artery into a corridor that is befitting its role as the Gateway to New York and a place where people want to live, work, and visit.

These suggested improvements are informed by decades of work by the GDA and our partners to address social and infrastructural issues along Eighth Avenue that have been limited by a lack of policy change and public investment. As funding flows towards the transit hubs anchoring the corridor, the city must seize this opportunity and invest in the environment which connects them: Eighth Avenue.

### **A Comprehensive Plan**

With a comprehensive plan to create a world-class streetscape, address social conditions, and open the corridor to residents and new investment, Eighth Avenue will become a model for how holistic urban reimagination can invite housing opportunity, drive economic development, and create lasting change.

### **Complete Street Approach**

A complete street approach is needed to create a compelling public realm. Updated, brighter lighting is needed to illuminate sidewalks and deter crime. Full extended sidewalks and concrete curb extensions are necessary to accommodate the massive pedestrian capacity of the improved transit hubs anchoring the corridor; a widened protected bike line will accommodate increased bike traffic; green infrastructure will provide shade and a calming aesthetic; flood mitigation efforts will reduce the risk of pluvial flooding; strategically designed seating will allow people to enjoy Eighth Avenue without destroying horticulture; improved signage will support wayfinding for tourists and commuters.

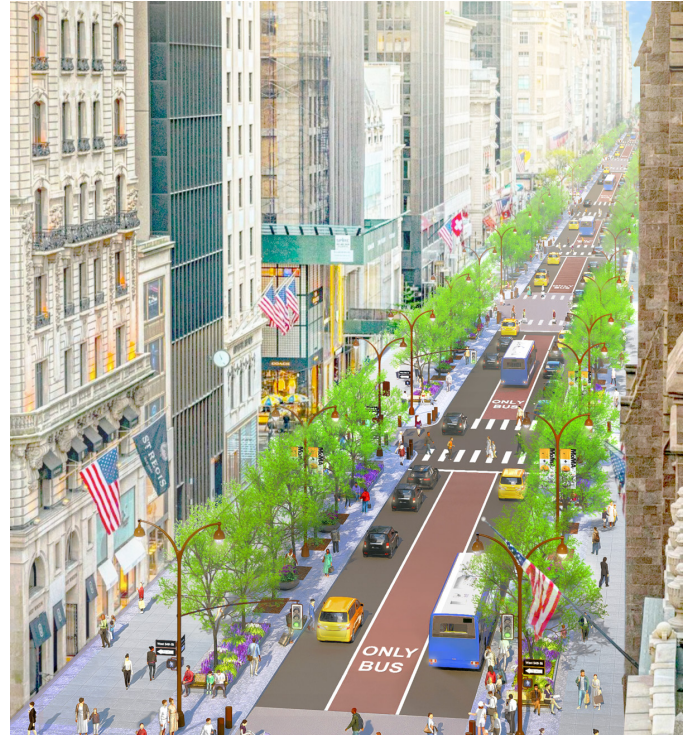
### **Programmatic improvements**

Programmatic improvements will leverage the benefits of public realm improvements. Enforcing fair-share principles and increasing addiction outreach will mitigate public drug use; a higher quality streetscape paired with social service outreach will shift homelessness towards shelters; improved emergency care protocols will direct those in crisis to the care facilities they need; lifting residential restrictions within the MSMX carve-out will increase opportunities for housing and spur private investment.

Current Conditions



Possible Future



Current Conditions



Possible Future



# Putting *Eighth* First

## MOVING FORWARD

Eighth Avenue's challenges are significant but can be solved. The corridor's assets—unmatched connectivity, potential for housing, massive pedestrian volumes, substantial employment base, and tourism infrastructure—provide the foundation for transformation. Comprehensive public investment commensurate with the corridor's importance to the city's economy and reputation is sorely needed. The Future of Eighth Avenue depends on it.

This effort cannot happen alone. It will require a robust coalition of partners to identify shared goals, create a cohesive vision, secure funding, design a plan, and implement it. The Garment District Alliance is actively working to connect stakeholders to build momentum for this effort. As we do this work, we invite people to reach out, share guidance, and identify a path forward. The goal is to highlight that investment and systemic change are needed to improve Eighth Avenue, and that the current transportation projects anchoring the corridor present the opportune moment to act.

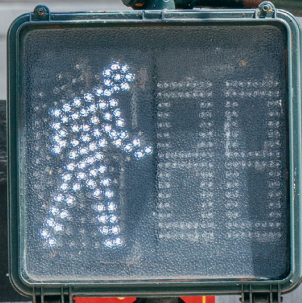
To provide feedback or questions, please reach out to Barbara Blair via email at [bblair@garmentdistrictnyc.com](mailto:bblair@garmentdistrictnyc.com)



Eighth Avenue looking north

498 ← 480  
**Eighth Ave**

**← ONE WAY**  
DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION





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All photos taken by Alexander Ayer unless otherwise noted

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