THE CITY OF NEW YORK

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

# FORT GREENE MARKET AREA

## URBAN RENEWAL DESIGNATION

*MARCH 13, 1963*

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

Cal. No. 3

Designation, pursuant to Section 504, Article 15 of the General Municipal Law of New York (Urban Renewal Law), of the area bounded by State Street, Hanson Place, Greene Avenue, Clermont Avenue, Fulton Street, Vanderbilt Avenue, Pacific Street, Fourth Avenue, Atlantic Avenue and Third Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn, as an Area Appropriate for Urban Renewal (Fort Greene Market Area).

CP-17760

March 13, 1963

On June 18, 1962 the City Planning Commission submitted to the Mayor its 1962-63 Urban Renewal Study Program. An outgrowth of the Commission's ongoing comprehensive planning and Community Renewal programs, this document outlined clear-cut policy goals and renewal objectives:

1. Emphasizing conservation and rehabilitation;
2. Minimizing relocation of households;
3. Providing a net addition to the housing supply with emphasis on middle-income and low-rent housing;
4. Strengthening our economic base; and
5. Relating renewal to the development of essential cultural, recreational, institutional and transportation facilities.

In addition, the Commission outlined basic operating principles which were used in selecting its choice of renewal areas. These criteria included renewal opportunities which are non-recurring; which offered multiple planning advantages; which alleviated imminent threat of blight, which complemented existing renewal activity; which provided a logical starting point, and which offered a promise of successful local participation and self-help.

Among the areas proposed for urban renewal study was the Fort Greene Market area. The Commission proposed a broad renewal program for this area which was described as follows in the Urban Renewal Study Program report:

"The imminent move of the Fort Greene Meat Market to new quarters makes it imperative that the City act promptly to plan for renewal in this key area of Brooklyn.

"Study of this area now offers multiple advantages: it will enable us to investigate the best re-use of the market site and its immediate surroundings;

it will consider the traffic problems at the intersection of Flatbush and Atlantic Avenues -- one of the busiest intersections in the City; it will open the way for improvement of Long Island Rail Road facilities located in the area; and it will assess the problems of existing housing in the broader area surrounding the market site.

"Redevelopment in this area, plus possible rehabilitation of structures in the surrounding neighborhood, can transform this presently drab and deteriorating section into a major asset for Brooklyn and the City. It is a major transportation hub, serving the City and region. Studies of this area will explore the possibility of federal demonstration grants to assist in improving transportation resources.

"As part of this study, we will also consider the problems of adjacent residential areas -- such as the Fort Greene Park section -- with an eye toward possible rehabilitation and neighborhood conservation programs to upgrade and protect the surrounding community."

The Fort Greene Market Area announced for study in June 1962, had the following tentative boundaries: De Kalb Avenue on the north, Flatbush Avenue on the west, Pacific Street on the south and Clermont-Vanderbilt on the east. As the staff work progressed, it became apparent that planning recommendations could be made for the section south of Hanson Place-Greene Avenue but that the northern portion presented planning problems which required additional study. Rather than postpone action, the tentative proposals for the southern section were formulated and a public hearing on this portion was held by the City Planning Commission on February 25, 1963.

Before application can be made for Federal funds to assist in the preparation of more detailed plans and subsequent renewal action, it is necessary to designate the area as an Area Appropriate for Urban Renewal pursuant to Section 504, Article 15 of the General Municipal Law of the State of New York. Such designation is the subject of this report.

The Commission also proposes to adopt, pursuant to Section 197 of the New York City Charter, a modification of the Master Plan Containing Areas Suitable for Development and Redevelopment, relating to the same area. This matter is the subject of a separate report (CP-17759, March 13, 1963).

The Commission proposes to approve, pursuant to the New York State Public Housing Law, a Plan and Project for a Federally-aided public housing project, proposed to be erected on a site within the Fort Greene Market Urban Renewal Area. Advancement of the public housing project at this time, is designed to provide for relocation resources in connection with clearance

of other parts of the urban renewal area. This matter is the subject of a separate report (CP-17787, March 13, 1963).

## DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

The area is bounded on the north by State Street, Hanson Place and Greene Avenue; on the east by Clermont and Vanderbilt Avenues; on the south by Pacific Street and Atlantic Avenue; and on the west by 3rd and 4th Avenues. It is the southeast gateway to the Downtown Brooklyn shopping area and the Civic Center. The Long Island Rail Road's Flatbush Avenue Terminal is located on this site, which is Brooklyn's most important hub for rail, rapid transit and vehicular transportation. Adjacent to the area are some of the City's important cultural, recreational and business institutions.

Careful planning studies preceded the development of planning recommendations for the area. The conditions of all buildings were evaluated by several exterior surveys and checked against census data. Interior surveys were made for a sample of residential buildings which recorded their deficiencies in detail. A detailed field survey was conducted which identified each establishment and determined the activities conducted on land or in the buildings. These field surveys also determined the various building types. Previous traffic reports prepared by the office of the Borough President and the Traffic Department were studied and traffic volumes on local streets were analyzed.

The Fort Greene Market Area covers 18 blocks, totalling some 85 acres. The old meat market, itself, centering around Fort Greene Place and Atlantic Avenue, is in deteriorating condition and has contributed to traffic congestion and general physical decline in the area. Between Atlantic Avenue and Pacific Street, the Long Island Rail Road yards are located in an open cut extending from 5th Avenue east to Vanderbilt Avenue.

The area is characterized by a conglomeration of warehouses, retail stores, manufacturing plants, and old residential structures ranging from well-maintained houses to dilapidated and hazardous buildings. The number of boarded-up structures and vacant residential and commercial units attest to the steady decline of this area over the years.

An exterior survey of building conditions indicates that over two-thirds of the structures in the area are in either poor or bad condition.

Another deterrent to the healthy development of this area has been the heavy traffic and congestion along Atlantic, Flatbush and 4th Avenues. This has been aggravated by inadequate loading and parking facilities for existing businesses and industry.

The central and northern portion of the area is primarily residential. There are approximately3,800 persons now living in the total area. This represents more than a 10 per cent reduction in population since the 1960 Census. This decline is due primarily to buildings being vacated, condemned or reduced in occupancy because of enforcement of City codes and ordinances.

Clustered around South Oxford Street and South Portland Avenue, and around Greene Avenue and Clermont Avenue are a number of attractive and charming town houses and brownstones -- many of which are substantially well-maintained or show signs of being rehabilitated. Other residential portions of the proposed renewal area stand in stark contrast, with serious dilapidation and obvious health hazards prevalent. About half of these structures have been converted from family use to rooming houses. These are occupied by single persons, many of whom are transient.

## CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY OF THE FORT GREENE MARKET AREA

As part of the City Planning Commission's ongoing Community Renewal Program, the general Fort Greene-Clinton Hill area was studied during 1961. A series of broad planning studies were undertaken to determine local conditions. This program included interviews with local residents and organizations, and institutional representatives. The selection of the Fort Greene Market Area as part of the 1962-63 Urban Renewal Study Program, resulted in part from this examination of the broader community.

When the Fort Greene Market Study was announded in June 1962, staff work in this smaller area was intensified. Two activities were undertaken immediately with the local community:

1. More than 100 persons were interviewed;
2. The nature of the study was interpreted to local organizations.

Initial presentations were made to the YMCA Public Affairs Committee, the Hill Layman Civic Association, the University Clinton Hill Renewal Effort (U-Care), the Hub Association, the Brooklyn Academy of Music Fort Greene Committee, and the Brooklyn Hospital Auxiliary.

As the study progressed, local citizens felt the need for a central committee to express their preferences. On October 15, 1962 a meeting was called to form a Fort Greene Market Citizen's Study Committeee. Individuals from different groups living in the area and the leadership of voluntary civic associations, local, public and private agencies, and institutions were invited to this gathering. A local clergyman, long concerned with civic affairs and community planning, was elected chairman with an executive committee consisting of the president of a block association, and two homeowners. All committee members were active in many neighborhood organizations and institutions. The Brooklyn Music School provided the officers with working space.

After becoming familiar with the study, the committee discussed local problems and the study process with other individuals and groups. During November and December, the Committee made a special effort to prepare the Community for several technical surveys conducted by the staff of the Department of City Planning and Consultants. Notices were posted in all buildings being surveyed and the purposes of the surveys were interpreted to their occupants. A climate of cooperation was created.

As the date approached for the setting of the public hearing, the Commission prepared a written statement of preliminary planning recommendations with an illustrative map.

More than 2,000 copies of these recommendations with the annoucement of the public hearings were distributed in the Fort Greene Market Area. Between January 16, 1963 and February 25, 1963, nine meetings were arranged by the Citizen's Study Committee at which 500 different persons participated. In addition, meetings were arranged for special groups such as the workers in Health and Welfare Agencies and Educational and Cultural institutions and others who wishes to consider particular aspects of the recommendations. A meeting was called by the Borough President at which the preliminary planning

recommendations were presented to representatives of major borough-wide organizations.

In preparing for the public hearing, the Committee discussed the need for a presentation before the Commission that would enable all points of view to be expressed effectively and with a minimum of repetition, by both supporters and opponents of the recommendations.

As the study of the northern section of the area progresses, local citizen groups will review new findings and alternate planning recommendations with the staff of the Community Renewal Program.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RENEWAL

Proposed renewal treatment calls for a combination of residential and commercial redevelopment, improved transportation facilities, and the institution of a conservation and rehabilitation program in the remaining sections of the area(see accompanying map). Preliminary estimates indicate that of 41 acres of developed land, exclusive of railroad yards and streets, 33 acres would be cleared and 8 acres -- about 25 per cent of the net area -- would be conserved or rehabilitated.

In general, the conservation-rehabilitation sections, which include approximately 400 dwelling units, lie along State Street near 3rd Avenue, along the northern part of South Oxford Street, South Portland Avenue, and the east side of South Elliott Place; and along Greene Avenue and Clermont Avenue in the northeast corner of the recommended renewal area. In addition, three other structures are specifically proposed for conservation: the building at 749 Atlantic Avenue; the Carlton Nursing Home at 403-409 Carlton Avenue; and a division of the Scovill Manufacturing Company,Inc. at 470 Vanderbilt Avenue.

The excellent location of this area in relationship to transportation, shopping, educational , cultural and recreational facilities makes it ideal for new housing. The construction of housing in this long-dormant area would inject new vitality and augment efforts to conserve and improve the neighborhood. Provision of a range of low- and moderate-rental apartments also would serve people of varied incomes.

With a view toward minimizing hardships for low-income families in this area, the Commission recommends that the construction of low-rent housing proceed ahead of the other renewal actions to make available an important relocation resource within the same neighborhood. Improved City programs should insure sensitive response to the needs of individuals currently living in substandard housing.

Some 580 low-rent housing units are recommended for the area located generally south of Fulton Street between Clermont Avenue and Carlton Avenue. The area recommended for middle-income housing will accommodate approximately 1,000 new dwelling units to be located along Cumberland Street south of Fulton Street; in the general area north of Atlantic Avenue between Fort Greene Place and Cumberland Avenue; and in the general area north of Fulton Street, between Cumberland Street and Clermont Avenue.

The proposal for middle-income and low-rent housing is consistent with the City's announced goals to bring about a net increase in the housing supply through the urban renewal process. It is estimated that there are 1,050 occupied units in the proposed clearance area-- of which only about half are occupied by families of two or more persons. The recommended redevelopment would bring about a net increase of approximately 500 units, and -- because it would emphasize family size apartments -- bring the total population of the area from some 3,800 to about 7,000.

It is estimated that the new housing, as proposed, would add approximately 500-600 elementary school children to current enrollments in the over-all area. Therefore, it is proposed that four acres be set aside for educational and recreational use. A new elementary school should be planned as an integral part of the new residential development. This would also help relieve present overcrowding in nearby schools. In addition, the Commission recommends that a park and playground be provided to serve the entire neighborhood.

Renewal recommendations also call for commercial redevelopment along Flatbush Avenue between Hanson Place and Pacific Street. This gateway to Brooklyn's downtown shopping area and Civic Center has excellent potential for new development and for the relocation of businesses displaced by clearance action.

The Long Island Railroad yards, located between Atlantic Avenue and Pacific Street, 5th Avenue and Vanderbilt Avenue, are not included in the potential redevelopment acreage listed in the summary. However, it is recommended that this strategic area be developed for commercial and light industrial use by the construction of a platform over the yards and the erection of new facilities to accommodate these uses. This proposal should be thoroughly explored with the Long Island Rail Road during the project planning stage, along with exploratory engineering studies to determine the most feasible terminal plan for accomodating future Long Island passenger train service; to provide convenient passenger transfer to adjoining subway lines; and to rationalize passenger and freight yard facilities.

Vital to the renewal of this area is the need to improve vehicular traffic conditions which present serious problems at the Atlantic Avenue-Flatbush Avenue intersection. The Commission believes that an overpass carrying Atlantic Avenue traffic over Flatbush Avenue would be a desirable improvement. This requires much more intensive study, however, and questions relating to the exact location, and land required for rights-of-way will have to be resolved during the project planning stage.

# SUMMARY

## Land Area

| | |
|---|---|
| Net area(exclusive of railroad yards and streets) | 41 acres |
| Streets | 35 acres |
| Railroad yards | 9 acres |
| TOTAL | 85 acres |

## Population

| | |
|---|---|
| 1960 | 4,300 |
| 1963(estimated) | 3,800 |

## Recommended Renewal Treatment

| | |
|---|---|
| Rehabilitation and Conservation | 8 acres |
| Redevelopment for: | |
| Middle-Income Housing | 12 acres |
| Low-Rent Housing | 6 acres |
| Commercial and Light Industry | 10.5 acres |
| School and Playground | 4 acres |
| Street rights-of-way adjustments | 3.5 acres |
| TOTAL | 44 acres |

## Proposed New Residential Units

| | |
|---|---|
| Middle-Income | 1,000 |
| Low-Rent | 580 |
| TOTAL | 1,580 |

## Future Population

| | |
|---|---|
| Now in area | 3,800 |
| Estimated to remain | 1,500 |
| Estimated new population | 5,500 |
| Estimated population after renewal | 7,000 |

PUBLIC HEARING

On January 16, 1963 (Cal. Nos. 38 and 39), the City Planning Commission fixed February 25, 1963 as the date for public hearings on the designation of the urban renewal area and on a modification of the Master Plan relating thereto.

On February 13, 1963 (Cal. No. 20) the Commission fixed February 25, 1963 as the date for a hearing on the proposed public housing project within the Fort Greene area. A combined hearing on all three matters was duly held on February 25, 1963 (Cal. Nos. 3, 4 and 5).

There were 28 speakers at the public hearing. These included representatives of local and city-wide civic, community, religious and business organizations as well as individual residents, store owners and other interested persons from within and near the proposed area. The Commission is also in receipt of numerous communications and statements from individuals and organizations in reference to this matter.

Many of the questions raised had been brought to the attention of the Planning Commission as a result of numerous discussions and meetings in the community. Speakers at the public hearing testified to the value of the program of local citizen participation facilitated by the Planning Commission.

At the public hearing and in communications received by the Commission there was general agreement with respect to the need for renewal action in the Fort Greene Market area. Substantial approval of the over-all renewal concept was expressed. There was some opposition to particular elements of the preliminary renewal proposal and recommendations were made for modifications of specific portions.

Opposition was expressed to the public housing proposed to be included within the urban renewal area and recommendations were made that all of the residential areas be utilized for middle-income housing. Most speakers supported the proposed distribution of public and middle-income housing and some speakers requested additional public housing units.

Several speakers objected to the proposed traffic overpass and noted possible adverse effects on adjacent property.

Representatives of community groups in adjacent areas contended that a Junior or Senior High School should be provided in the area.

It was recommended that the area over the present Long Island Railroad station be utilized for a community or institutional use.

There was divided opinion with respect to the allocation of commercial and industrial areas. Some contended that there should be more, some less. A few speakers claimed that the proposed commercial areas would provide competition with nearby downtown Brooklyn commercial centers.

It was recommended that the conservation areas should be extended to include additional properties within the area which were thought worth preserving.

Recommendations were made for extension of the renewal program to include additional areas to the north.

## CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC HEARING STATEMENTS

In view of the specific criticisms and objections expressed at the public hearing as well as in reports, communications, and statements submitted to the Commission, certain elements of the urban renewal recommendations are here further reviewed.

The concern of many people with respect to possible overloading the area with low-rent public housing is understandable and the Commission has carefully considered this matter. All of the existing and approved low-rent public housing projects in this section of the City are located at a considerable distance from the presently proposed public housing site. The nearest large-scale housing developments are middle-income or fully tax-paying projects under Title I of the National Housing Act. In the urban renewal area itself, it is proposed to construct approximately 580 low-rent units and 1,000 middle-income units. Considering the over-all development in surrounding areas and the proposed allocation of low- and middle-income units in the urban renewal area, it is our view that the proposed urban renewal plan will provide for a suitable economic balance, a desirable diversified neighborhood and will help meet the needs of households requiring relocation.

With respect to the objections to the proposed overpass for vehicular traffic at Flatbush and Atlantic Avenues, it should be noted that this intersection constitutes one of the most serious traffic bottlenecks in the City. Satisfactory solution to this traffic problem can only be achieved through careful comprehensive planning, including provision for a suitable grade separation for vehicular traffic. Because of subsurface transit tracks, an overpass would be the only feasible grade separation. The Commission therefore recommends that planning of an overpass be undertaken in connection with the preparation of an urban renewal plan for this area. The recommended location of industrial and commercial uses adjacent to the overpass and suitable protection including setbacks would eliminate or minimize possible adverse effects of the overpass.

With respect to the school situation, it is noted that the planning recommendations include provision for an elementary school within the urban renewal area. There was considerable advocacy for a Junior High School in the area. The Commission staff has carefully reviewed the Junior High School situation. While the nearby 7th to 9th grade schools at present are overcrowded, the condition can be eliminated and provision made for junior high school children from the urban renewal area by the currently planned construction of new schools for the surrounding areas. The current Capital Budget includes funds for design and site acquisition for Junior High Schools 293 and 320, and funds for site acquisition for new Junior High School 318 within this general vicinity. Study of the over-all school situation indicates that after construction of these schools adequate accommodations for all the school children in this section of Brooklyn can be provided by means of redistricting.

With reference to the recommendations for the use of the area over the present Long Island Railroad station for a community or institutional use, it is noted that the commercial designation for this area does not preclude such use. If the Housing and Redevelopment Board, in developing a plan for this area can secure the requisite sponsorship and work out suitable arrangements for a community or institutional facility, this would be within the Commission's planning recommendations.

With reference to recommendations for utilizing the air rights over the Long Island Railroad tracks for housing, we find that this area, located between the heavy traffic on Atlantic Avenue and the heavy industrial uses on the southerly side of Pacific Street, would not be an appropriate location for housing. If suitable plans for decking the railroad tracks can be worked out, the most appropriate use of this area would be commercial or industrial.

With reference to recommendations for extension of conservation and rehabilitation areas, within the Fort Greene Market Area, the Housing and Redevelopment Board may recommend such treatment where the Board deems it appropriate, after further study.

With reference to recommendations for the extension of the urban renewal area, the reason for limiting the proposed renewal program to the area here under consideration are outlined in a previous section of this report. The adjacent area to the north will continue to be the subject of study in the 1962-63 Urban Renewal Study Program.

## FINDINGS AND ADOPTIONS

The City Planning Commission hereby finds, pursuant to Section 504, Article 15 of the General Municipal Law of the State of New York (Urban Renewal Law), that the area bounded by State Street, Hanson Place, Greene Avenue, Clermont Avenue, Fulton Street, Vanderbilt Avenue, Pacific Street, Fourth Avenue, Atlantic Avenue and Third Avenue, Borough of Brooklyn, is a sub-standard and insanitary area by reason of deteriorated buildings, inadequate street design and incompatible land uses, and that this area is appropriate for Urban Renewal. The Commission finds that appropriate treatment for this area includes clearance and redevelopment, development of railroad air rights, conservation and rehabilitation, improvement of railroad facilities and vehicular traffic improvement as hereinabove described in the section of this reported titled Recommendations for Renewal. These recommendations and the general areas to which they apply as shown on the attached map titled "Planning Recommendations" and dated March 13, 1963, are hereby declared to be a part of the Commission's findings and adoptions.

It is noted, that the present action does not constitute approval of an Urban Renewal Plan. Such a plan is to be subsequently prepared by the Housing and Redevelopment Board and submitted to the Commission for review and certification after a public hearing in accordance with the provisions of the law. Final determination is subsequently made by the Board of Estimate, after another public hearing, as provided in the Urban Renewal Law.

FRANCIS J. BLOUSTEIN, Acting Chairman; JAMES FELT, HARMON H. GOLDSTONE, ELINOR C. GUGGENHEIMER, LAWRENCE M. ORTON, JAMES G. SWEENEY, Commissioners.

**PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS** · **CITY PLANNING COMMISSION · CITY OF NEW YORK** · MARCH 13, 1963

1 COMMERCIAL

2 MIDDLE-INCOME HOUSING, SCHOOL & PLAYGROUND

3 MIDDLE-INCOME HOUSING & LOCAL SHOPPING

4 LOW-RENT HOUSING

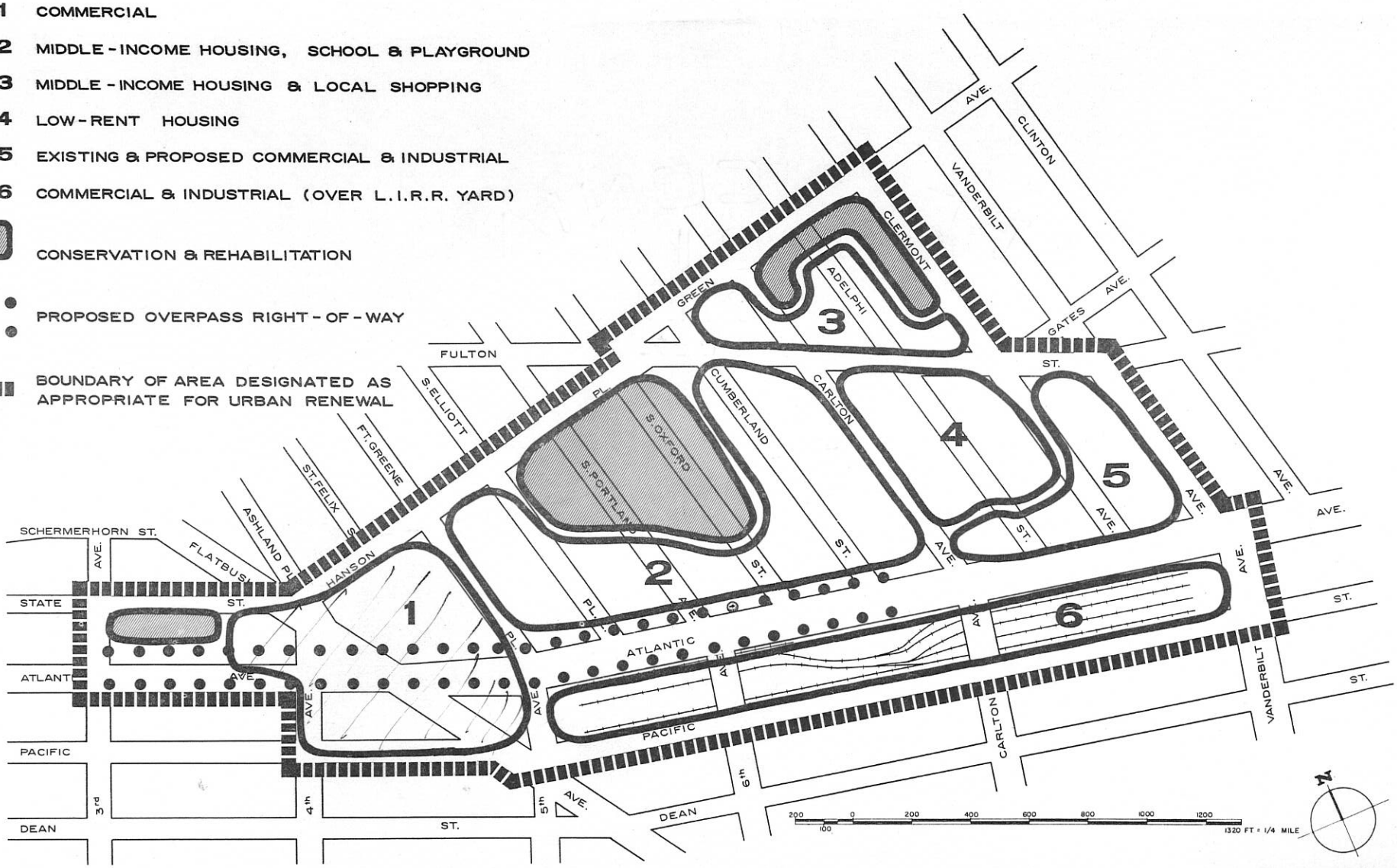
5 EXISTING & PROPOSED COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL

6 COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL (OVER L.I.R.R. YARD)

CONSERVATION & REHABILITATION

PROPOSED OVERPASS RIGHT-OF-WAY

BOUNDARY OF AREA DESIGNATED AS APPROPRIATE FOR URBAN RENEWAL




# FORT GREENE MARKET AREA

**BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN · NEW YORK**