

Yorkville, Then and Now: A Vanishing Ecosystem

Neighborhoods are more than zip codes. They are ecosystems—complex, living networks where homes, schools, small businesses, and neighbors co-evolve. In Yorkville, this delicate ecosystem is under pressure. Ritzy high-rises now stand where tenement buildings, corner pharmacies, shoemakers, bakeries, and walk-up apartments once formed a vibrant, interdependent web of daily life. What is the cost of such transformation?

This isn't about nostalgia—it's about refusing to let our city hollow itself out in real time. A healthy neighborhood, like any living ecosystem, depends on more than just new construction. It needs people of all ages, incomes, and backgrounds. When that balance is destroyed, we lose more than just old buildings. We lose memory. We lose continuity. We lose people.

Preservation isn't a barrier to growth. It's how a city holds onto its soul while making room for its future. Because once these buildings are gone—once the communities they held are scattered—the ecosystems they supported collapse and they don't come back.

The ten before-and-after photo pairs below capture corners along Second and Third Avenues, spanning East 71st to East 86th Streets—each one a small but telling example of a neighborhood in flux. “Then” photos are sourced from the FRIENDS Archives unless otherwise noted, while the “Now” photos show the current appearance of these locations.



Northeast Corner of East 71st & Second Avenue

Then: Six 5-story 50-feet high 5 buildings with 59 affordable housing units above small businesses.

Now: No plans or renderings have been revealed for the new structure, but the site could give rise to a very tall luxury residential building.



Southwest Corner of East 71st & Second Avenue

Then: Five 5-story buildings with more than 50 affordable housing units above ground-floor retail including three restaurants.

Now: Demolition is currently in progress to clear the site for a residential development, though specific project details have not yet been disclosed.



Southwest Corner of East 72nd & Second Avenue

Then: At least six 5-story buildings with affordable apartments above ground-floor retail including a grocery store and a pharmacy.

Now: The site is being cleared for a 21-story residential building that will include 53 condominium units and retail space. An adjacent five-story annex is said to include four affordable housing units.



Northwest Corner of East 77th & Second Avenue

Then: Two 4-story buildings with ground-floor retail and affordable apartments above.

Now: A 36-story, 500-foot-tall luxury condo tower with 62 units and retail space on the ground floor.



Northwest Corner of East 86th & Third Ave

Then: A children's clothing store, an optical shop, and the iconic Papaya King—a lively, accessible corner serving the neighborhood.

Now: The site is being excavated for a 210-foot, 17-story luxury condominium with only 25 exclusive units.



Northwest Corner of East 82nd Street & Third Ave

Then: 45 relatively affordable housing units sat above a Food Emporium grocery store—an anchor for both residents and the broader neighborhood.

Now: The site is under construction for a 478-foot, 39-story mixed-use tower that will include 125 condominium units.



Northwest Corner of East 80th & Third Ave

Then: Five 4-story buildings stood here, with stores on the ground floor and 36 affordable housing units above.

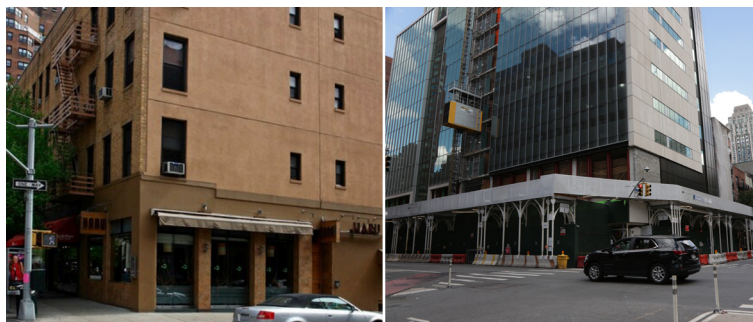
Now: The site is awaiting demolition to make way for a 508-foot-tall structure, 34-story, building. The proposed building will include 66 units and commercial space.



Southeast Corner of East 77th Street & Third Avenue

Then: A row of 4-story buildings housing small businesses and restaurants on the ground floor, and affordable apartments above.

Now: The Goldman Health Care Pavilion, a 215-foot-tall, 15-story medical building scheduled to open in 2026.



Northeast Corner of East 76th Street Ave & Third Avenue

Then: The 76th Street end of the same block on Third Avenue, lined 4-story buildings and small businesses and a restaurant on the ground floor.

Now: The Goldman Health Care Pavilion spans the entire east side of Third Avenue from 77th to 76th Street.



Southeast Corner of East 75th Street & Third Avenue

Then: A row of 5-story buildings with a grocery store, café, restaurant, and a beauty supply shop—local businesses that served the community—with affordable apartments above.

Now: The construction is nearing completion for a 214-foot, 18-story residential building that will include 125 condo units with ground-floor retail space.