

96TH STREET STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to foster preservation and to encourage the correct development of East 96th Street and its surrounding neighborhood.

Present as-of-right zoning regulations allow extremely tall buildings to be constructed that would create walls along the street.

Modification of these zoning regulations are proposed to establish a planning guide that will improve East 96th Street aesthetically, economically and socially as well as encourage developers to invest in the neighborhood.

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INTRODUCTION

The first zoning resolution in the nation was created in New York City in 1916. The resolution was created to protect the streets from being turned into dark canyons.

The city fathers believed that laws and regulations would guarantee automatic improvements in the quality of the city. Unfortunately, these laws have backfired more times than not causing adverse effects on many parts of the city.

Today the New York laws have become more complicated with the purpose of improving and protecting the city. Many special districts (preservation district, midtown, etc.) and special committees (The Landmarks Commission, etc.) have been formed.

In some cases, the zoning resolutions have worked to improve the quality of life in the city. For the most part they have had an adverse effect on the city. An example relates to the building of large office floor areas and the accommodation of enough open space for light. Zoning regulations allow bonus floor area for any plazas and arcades provided by developers. As a result, midtown New York is flooded with tall buildings that pierce the sky and with plazas that are unusable all too often because of their location, size or design.

In other cases these special committees make it so difficult for developers to build that plots in need of development are left untouched.

East 96th Street is a clear example of how zoning laws have failed to improve the street. As of right zoning permits the construction of massive blocks of buildings that obstruct light and does not require open spaces or public amenities. The complete building potential of this prime location can be utilized.

This project is an attempt to analyze how one can improve the city architecturally and, at the same time, make it economically feasible for developers to build.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

East 96th Street is three-quarters of a mile long between Fifth Avenue (Central Park) and the FDR Drive (East River) and extends as a one-way exit from the Central Park transverse road. Ninety-seventh Street acts as the west bound connection through Central Park. The east end of 96th Street terminates below the FDR Drive viaduct with on and off ramps or service road connections occurring on both sides of the FDR Drive.

The present population of East 96th Street includes the following groups:

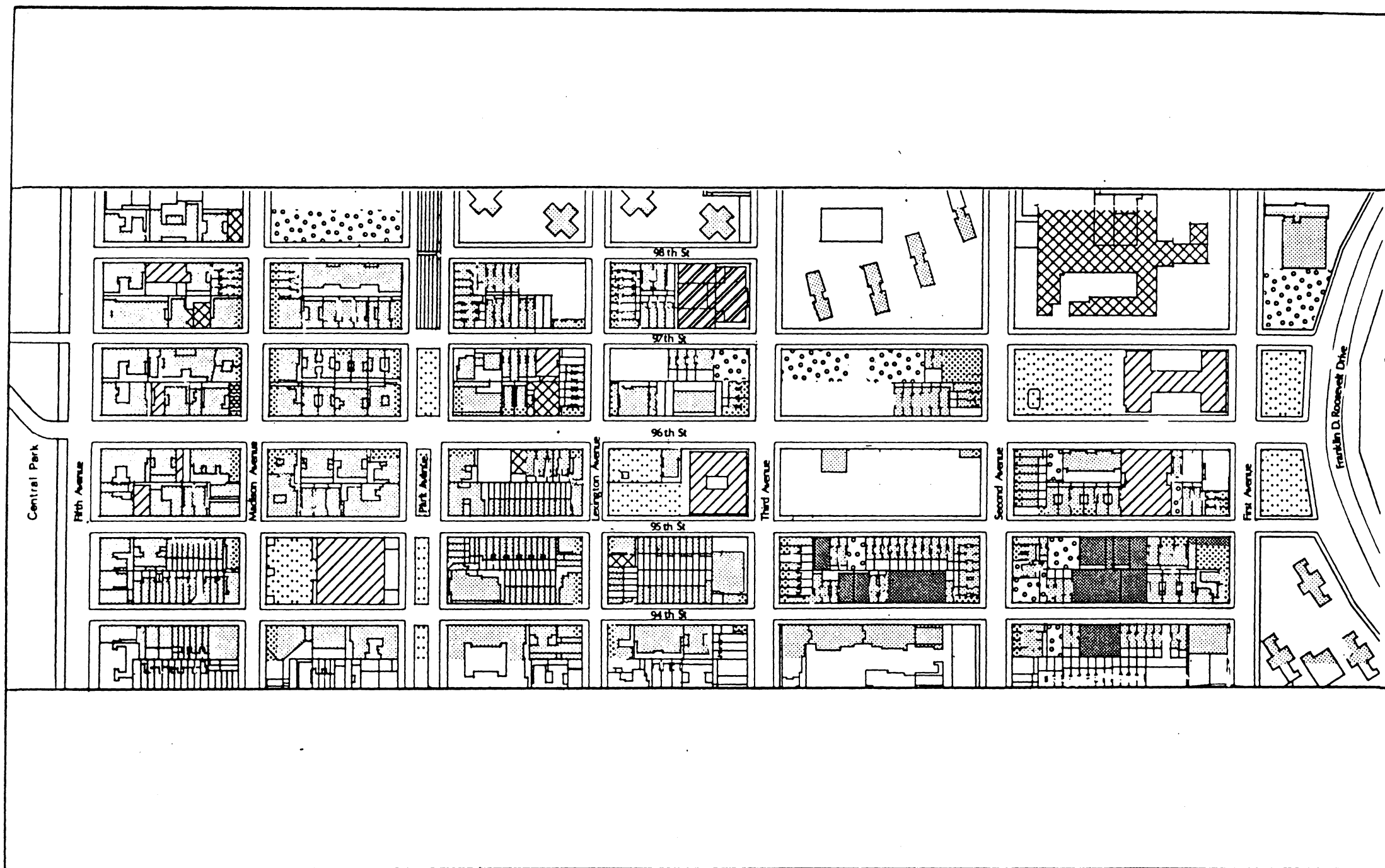
- 1) middle and lower income blacks and Hispanics
- 2) residents who have lived in rented housing for long periods, and
- 3) professionals -- predominately white upper middle class

The streets and its immediate environs are characterized by sharp contrasts. There are high quality residential structures and attractive institutions. And there are rubble strewn vacant sites ripe for development.

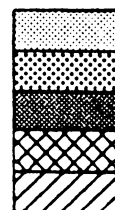
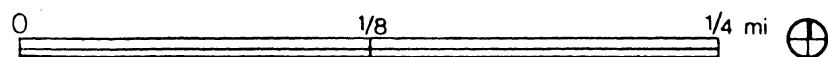
There is building renovation in progress, and there are buildings badly in need of rehabilitation. Some blocks are lined with well-maintained trees while other blocks are devoid of landscaping. There are under-utilized and deteriorating playgrounds that contrast with populated play areas. There are residential brownstone buildings, turn of the century elevator apartment buildings, and new high rise apartment buildings. There are a variety of community and institutional uses as well as several commercial establishments along the street. The economics of the street range from high to low.

East 96th Street ties disparate functions together and is a major city artery linking the FDR Drive, the upper east side, Harlem, and the upper west side. This street also links Manhattan to other boroughs (Queens, Bronx and Brooklyn) of the city and to Westchester and Suffolk Counties.

East 96th Street is a very important street in the city because of its special character and its relationship to the upper east side and to Harlem.



East 96th Street Study

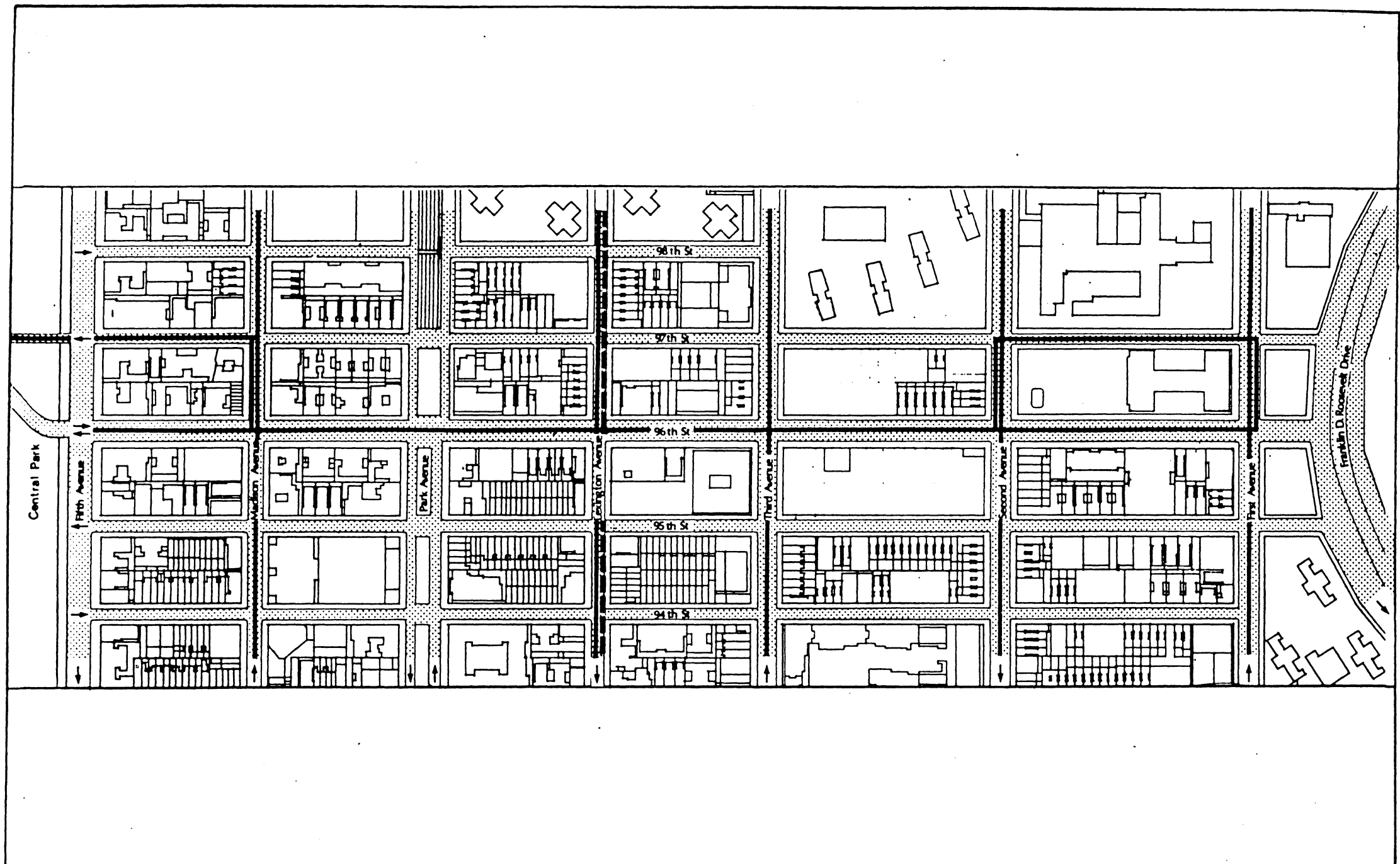


Land Use

Residential
Retail
Commercial
Institutional
Schools

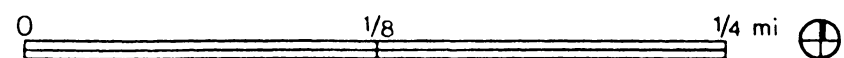
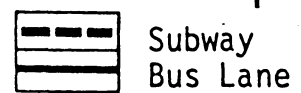


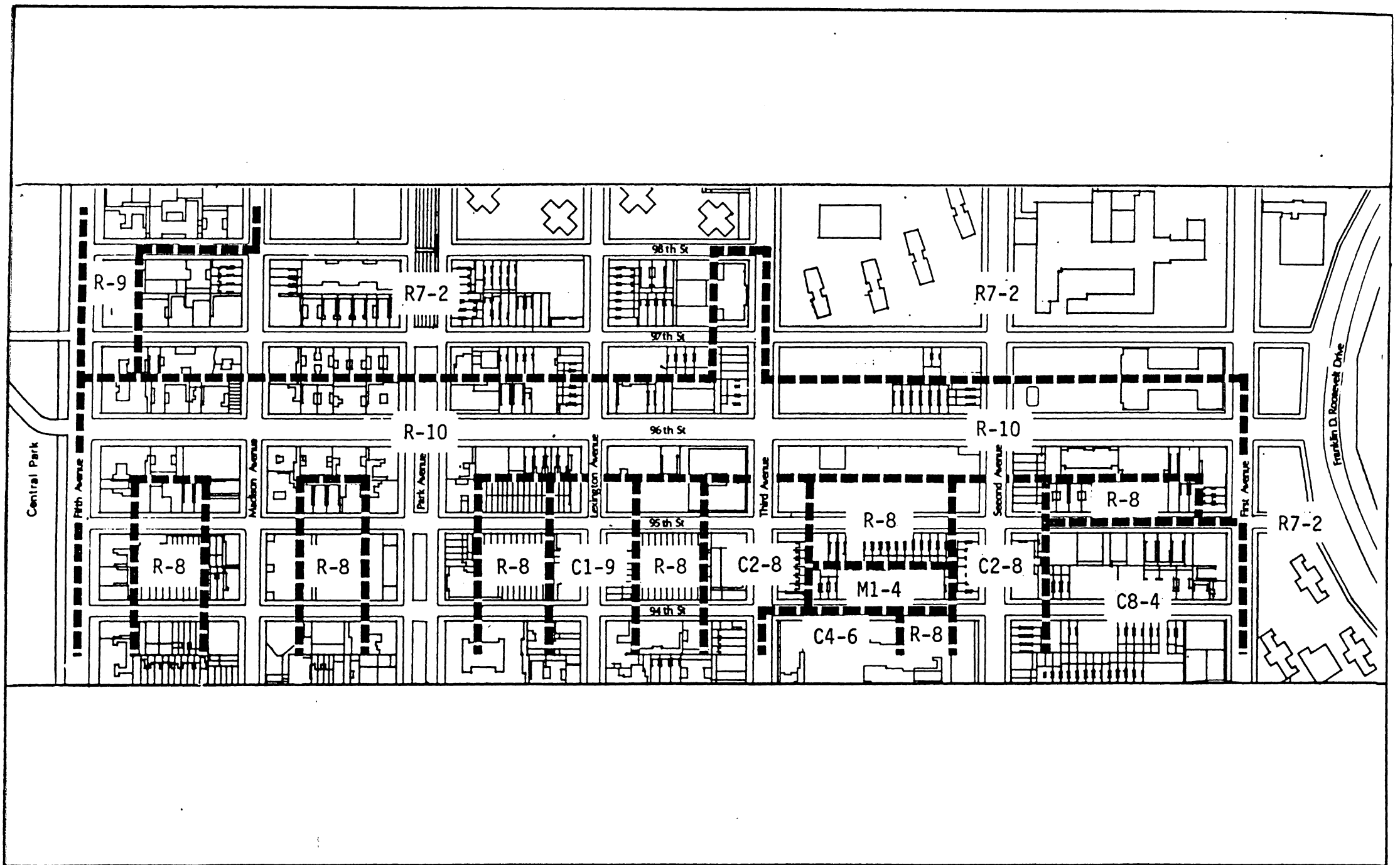
Public Utility
Parking/Gas Station
Open Space



East 96th Street Study

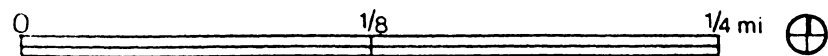
Transportation

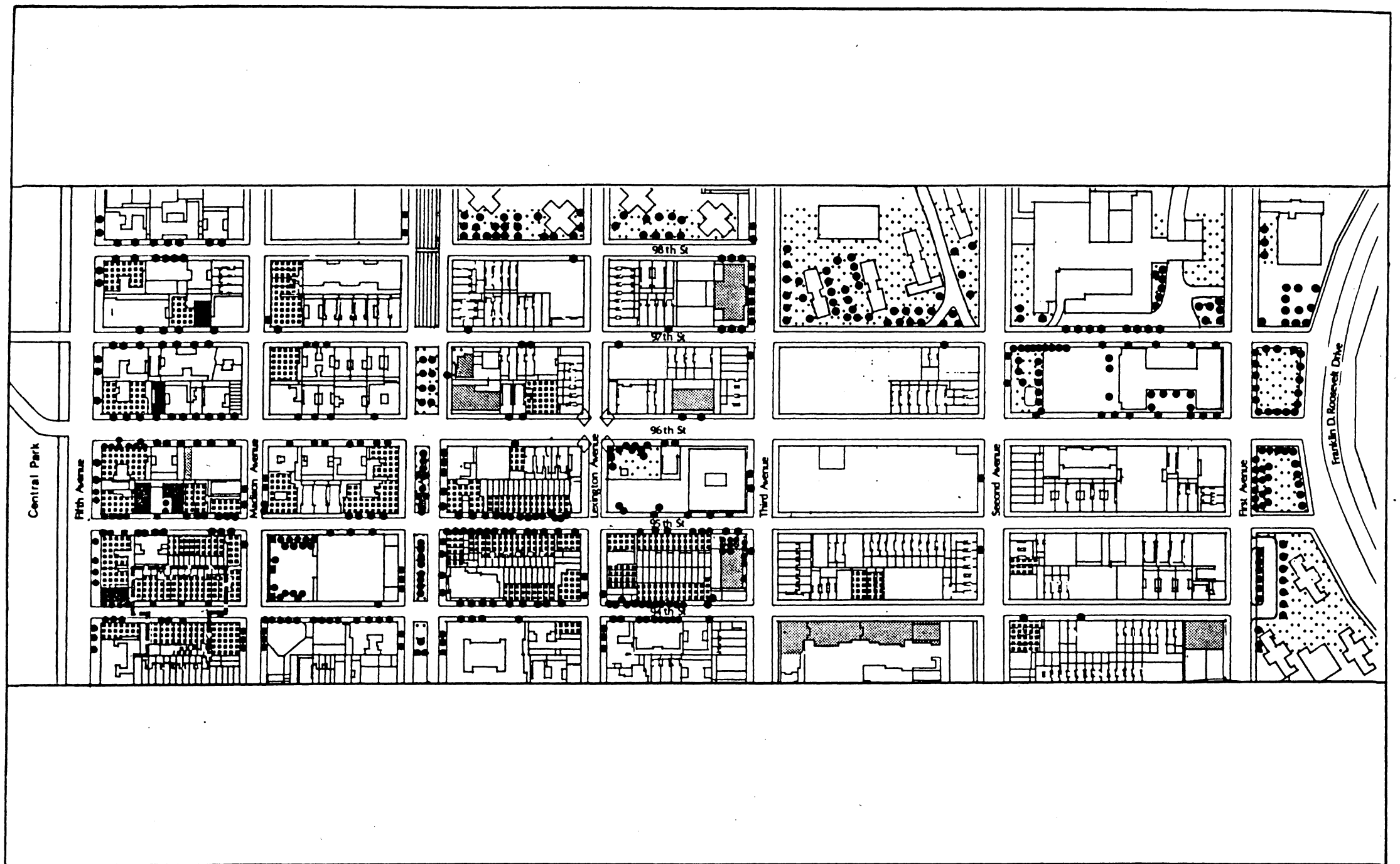




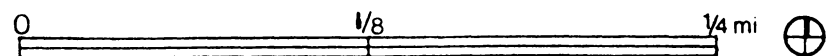
East 96th Street Study

Zoning





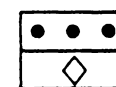
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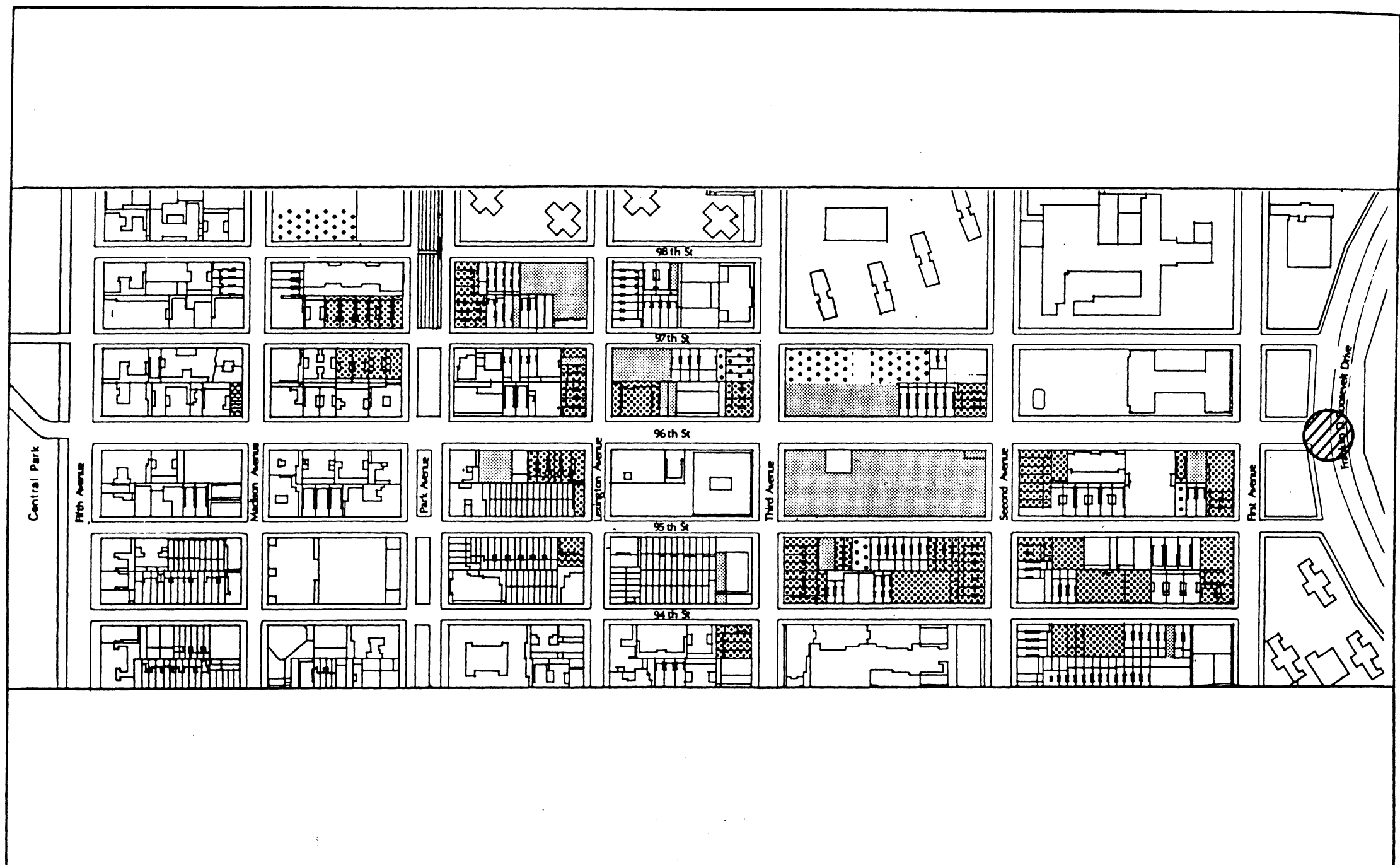
Physical Assets



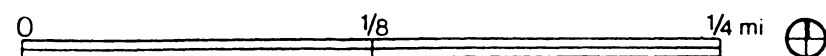
Landmark District
Landmark Buildings
Bldgs of Architectural Merit
Recent Construction
Parks and Landscaping



Street Trees
Subway



East 96th Street Study

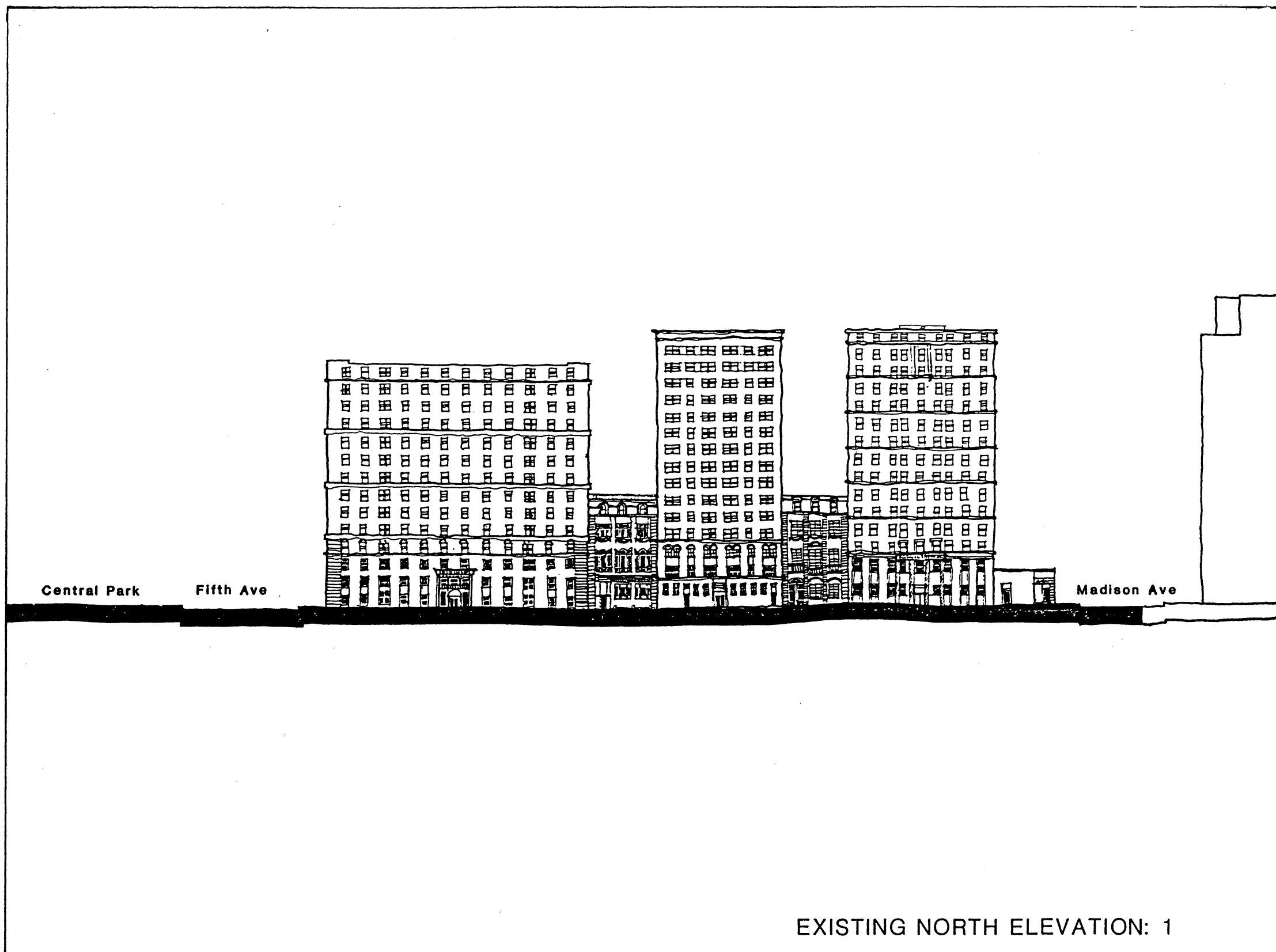


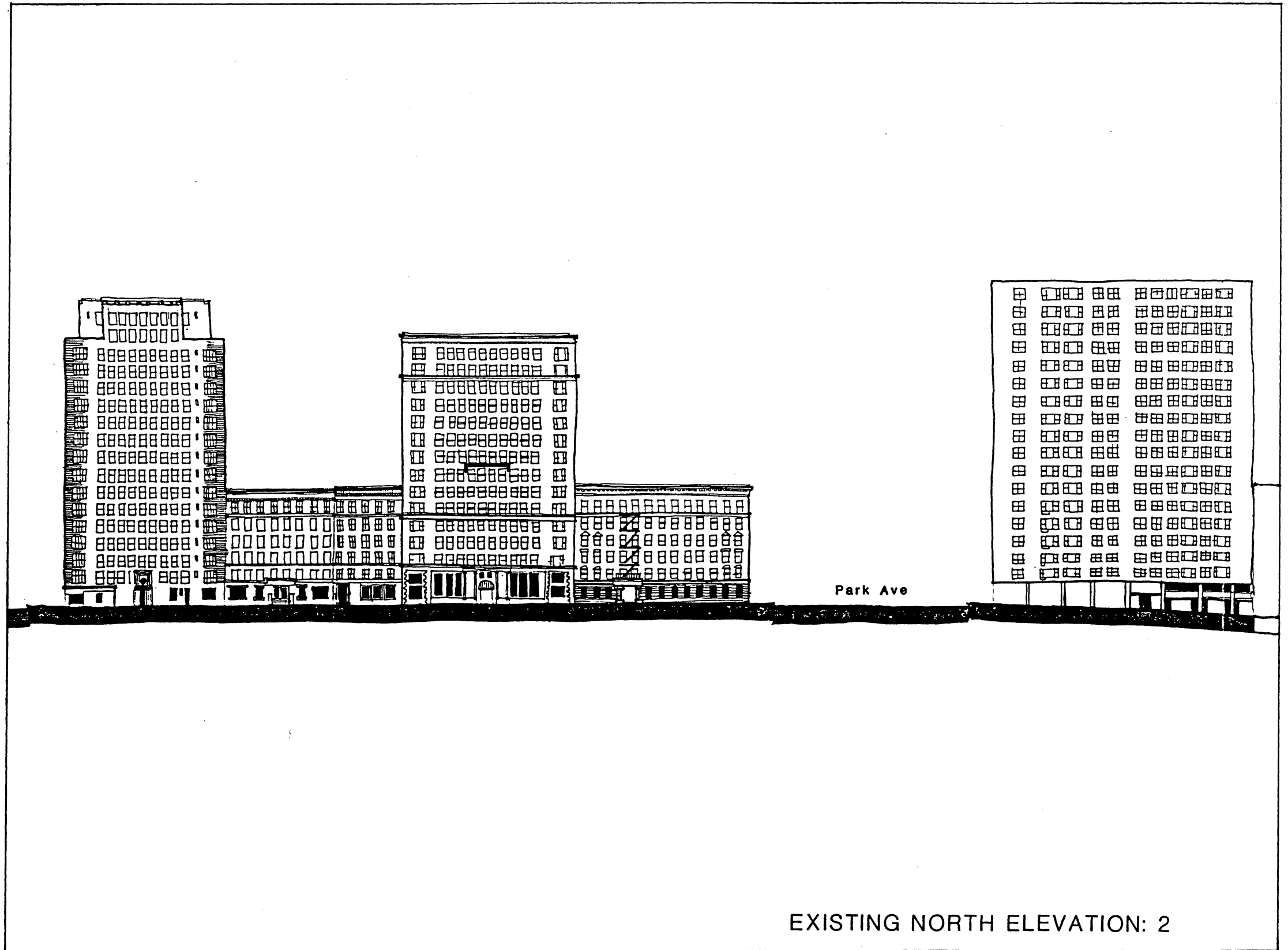
Development Opportunities

- Buildings in Poor Condition
- Surface Parking
- Vacant Sites
- Traffic Congestion

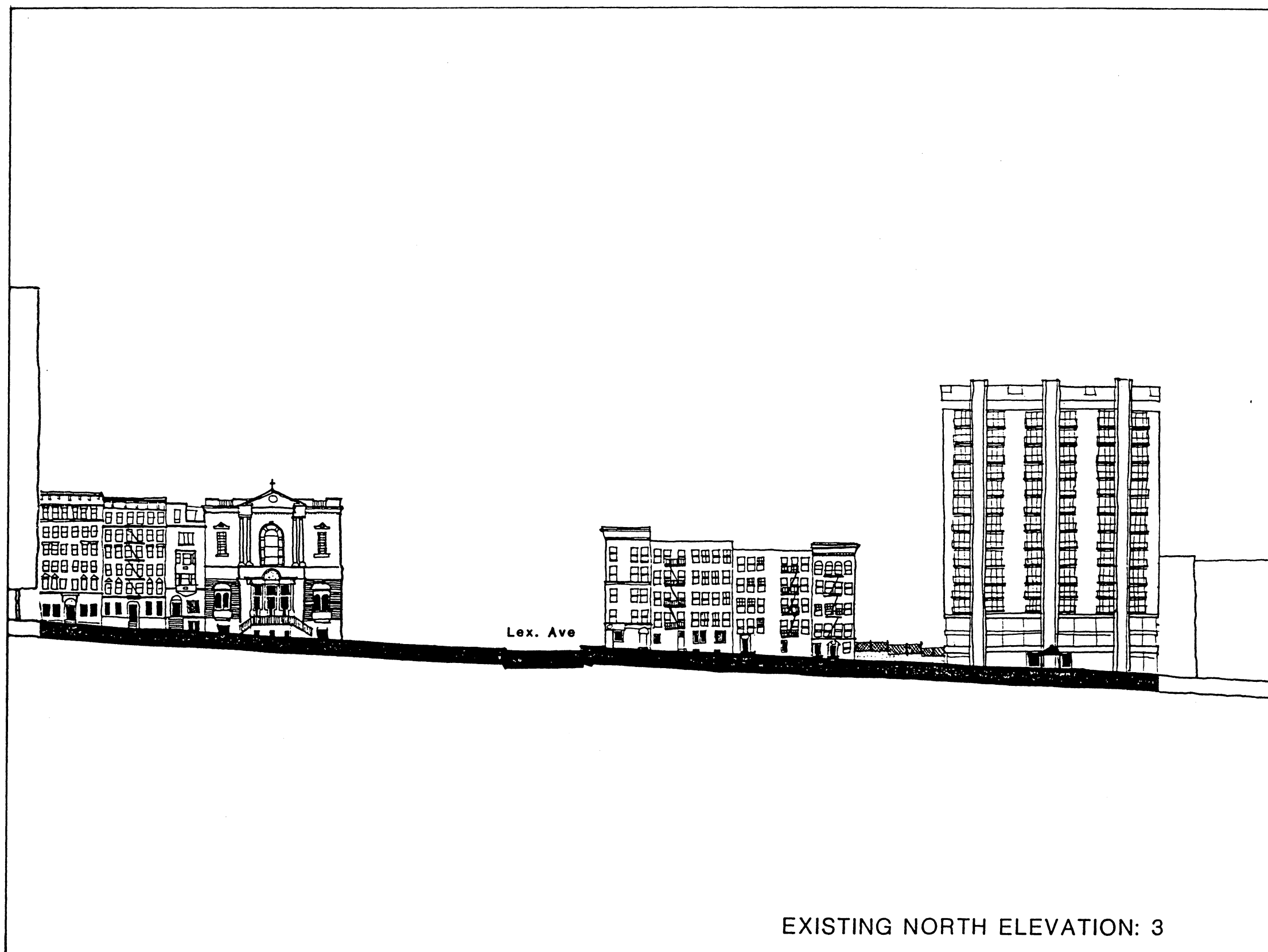
SITE PROBLEMS

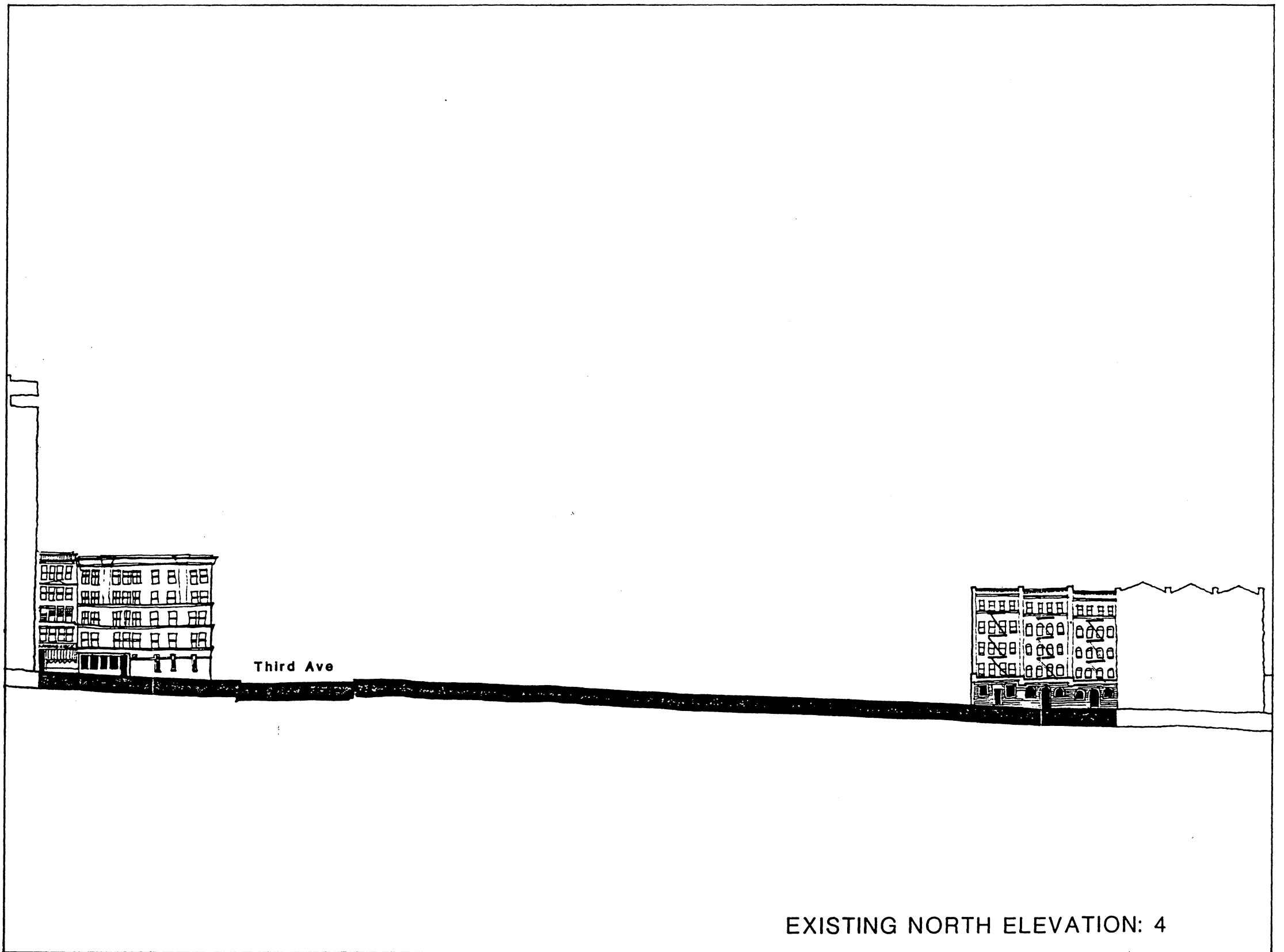
- 1) There is an absence of basic structure.
- 2) There is an absence of central planning (long term, short term).
- 3) Image and character are lacking for a main street of importance.
- 4) There are no focal points for this three-quarter mile long street.
- 5) There is no continuity in either building height or density, or in other elements such as trees, retail locations, etc.
- 6) Existing retail establishments are in poor condition and uninteresting and provide little interaction with pedestrian or street traffic.
- 7) The few public amenities (parks, open spaces, etc.) are poorly maintained.
- 8) There is traffic congestion of vehicles at the FDR Drive exit and of pedestrians at subway stations and bus stops. There is poor pedestrian access to parks and to views of the East River.

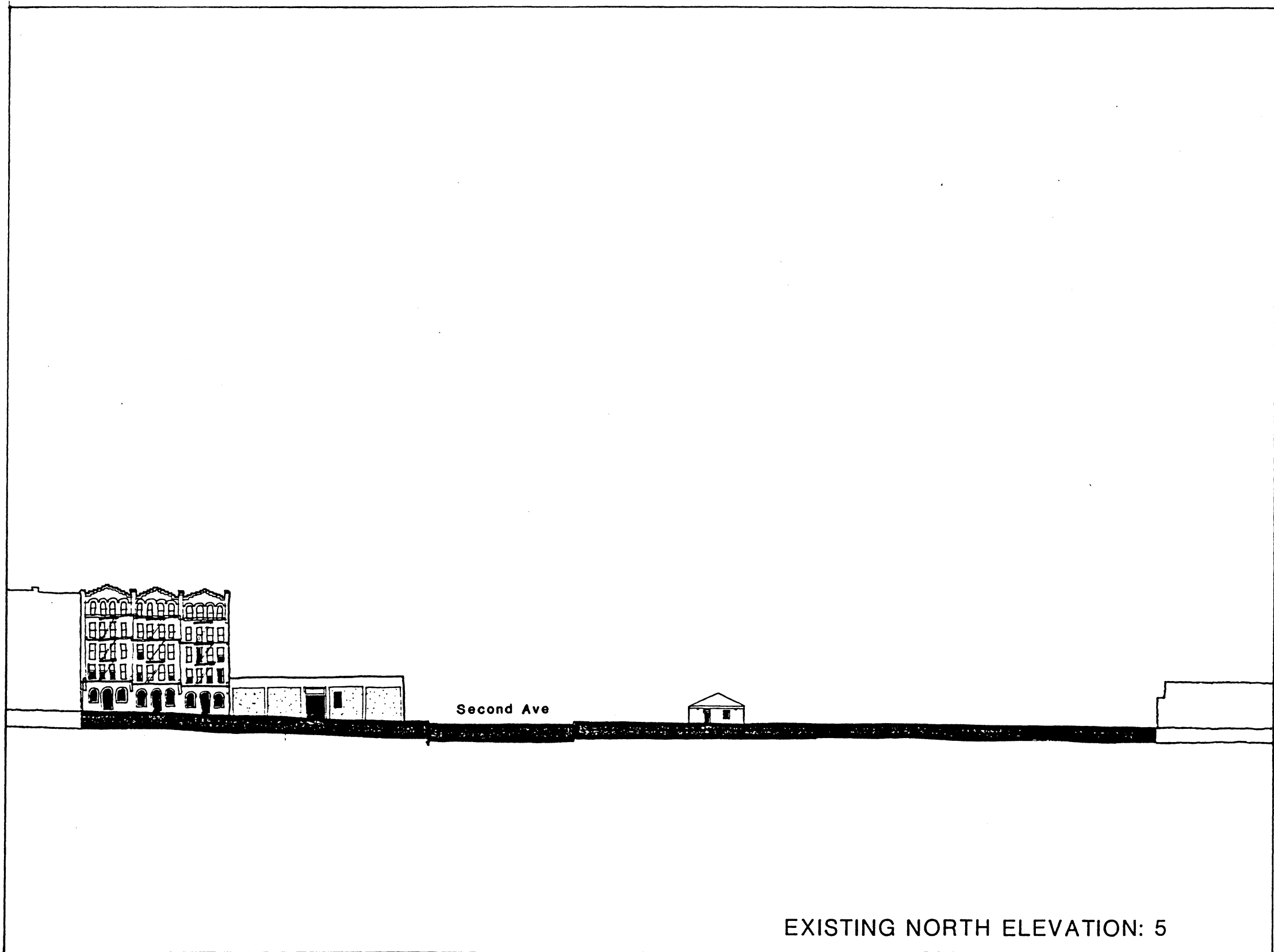


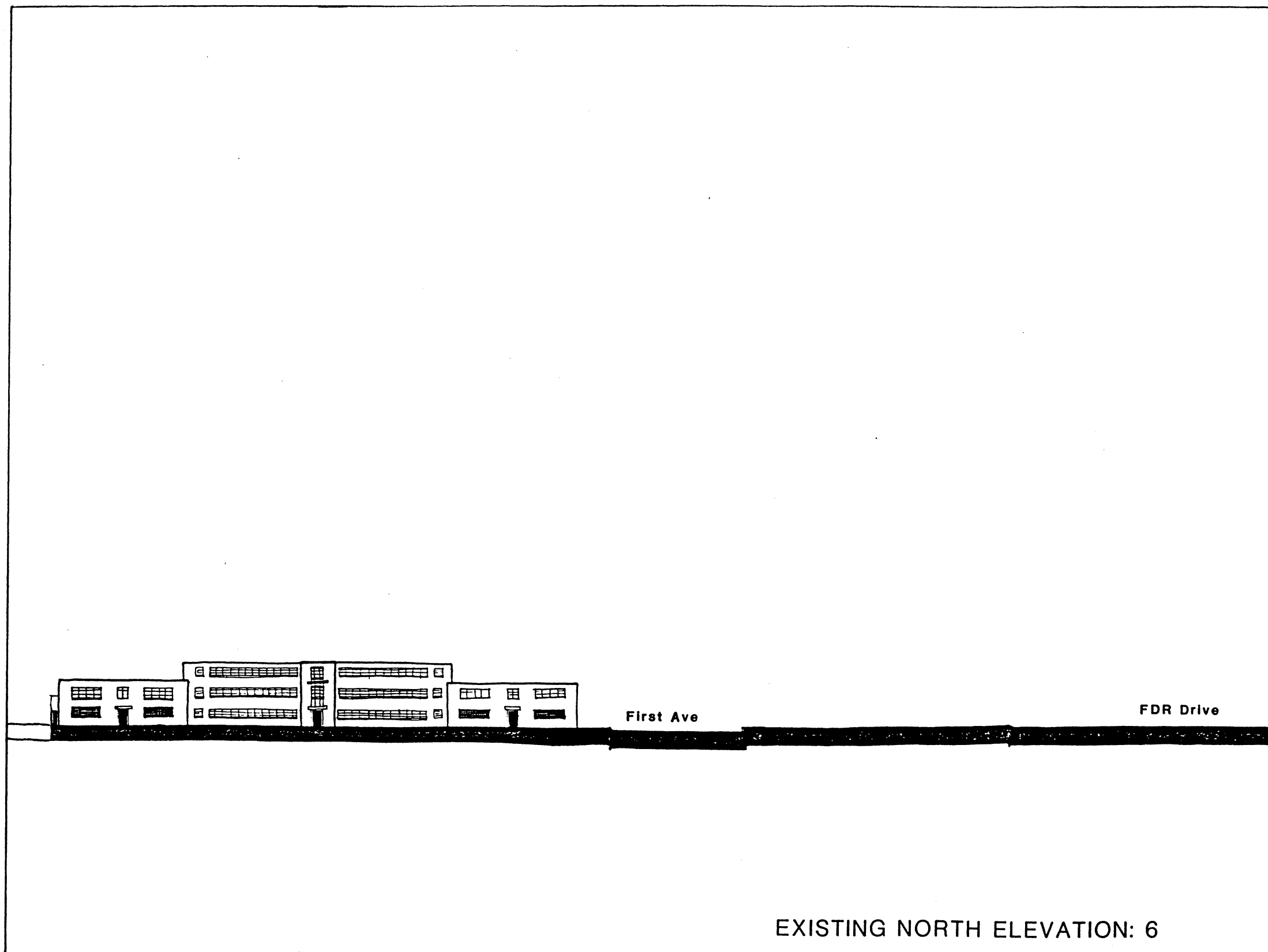


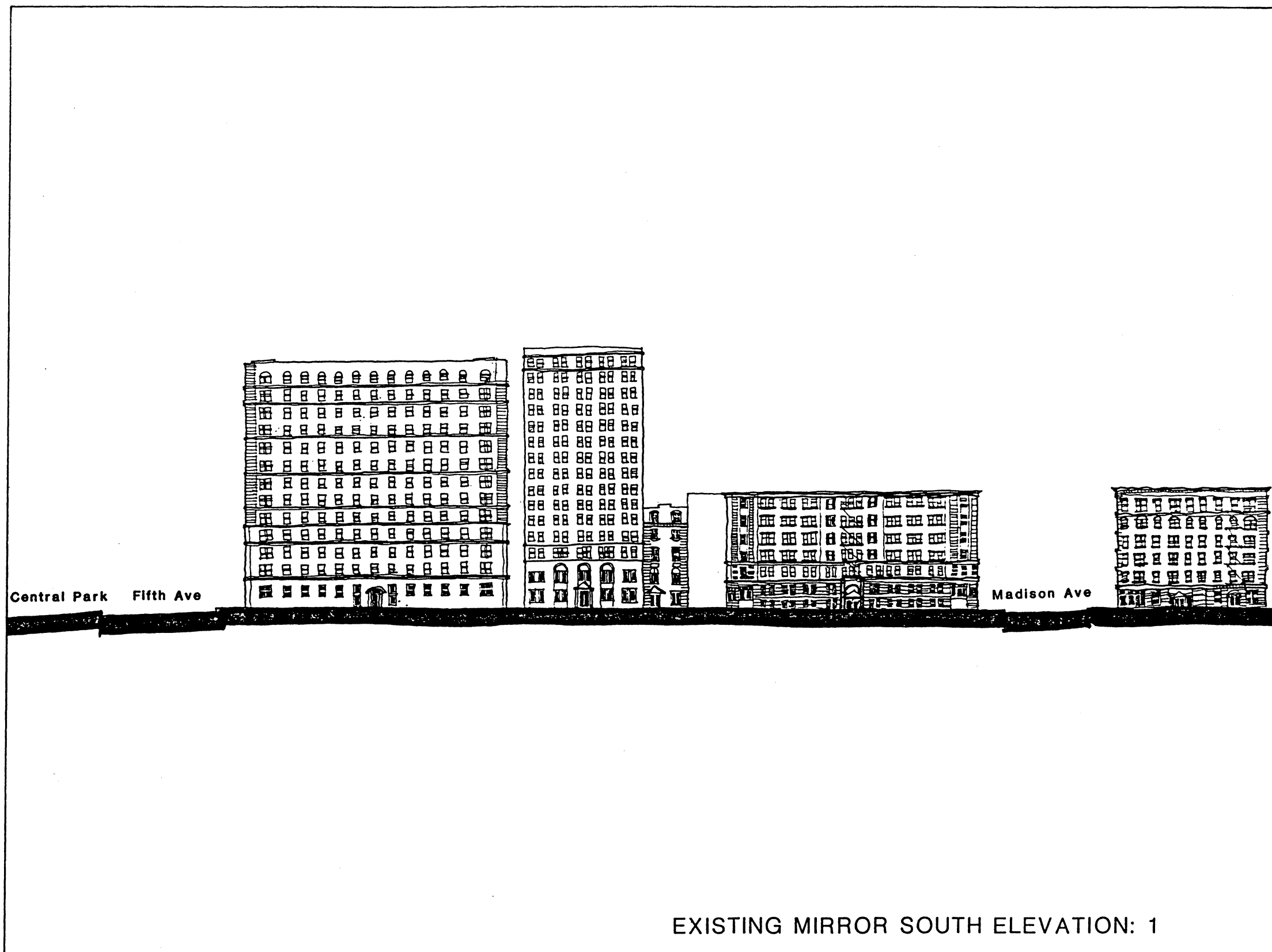
EXISTING NORTH ELEVATION: 2

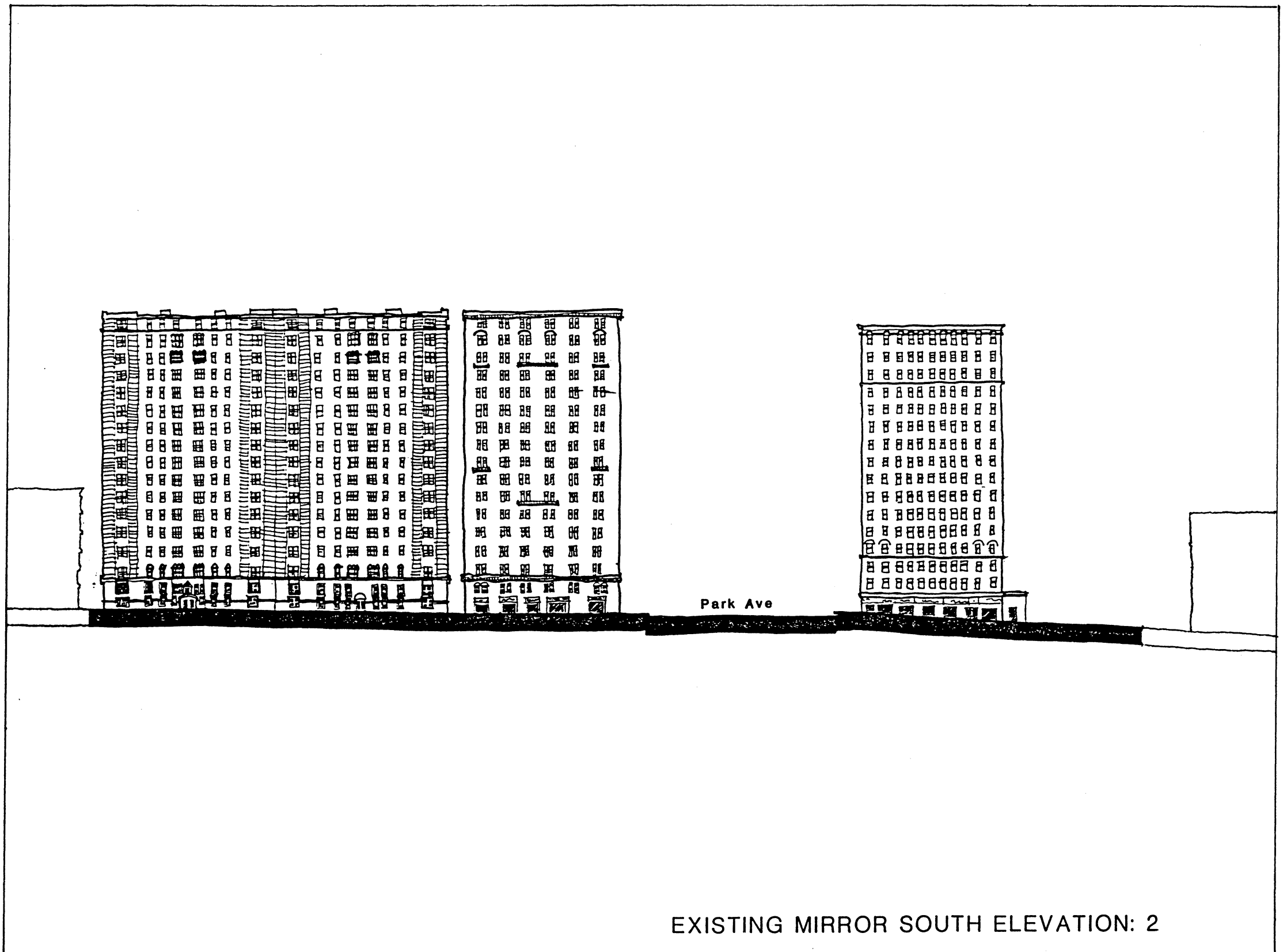


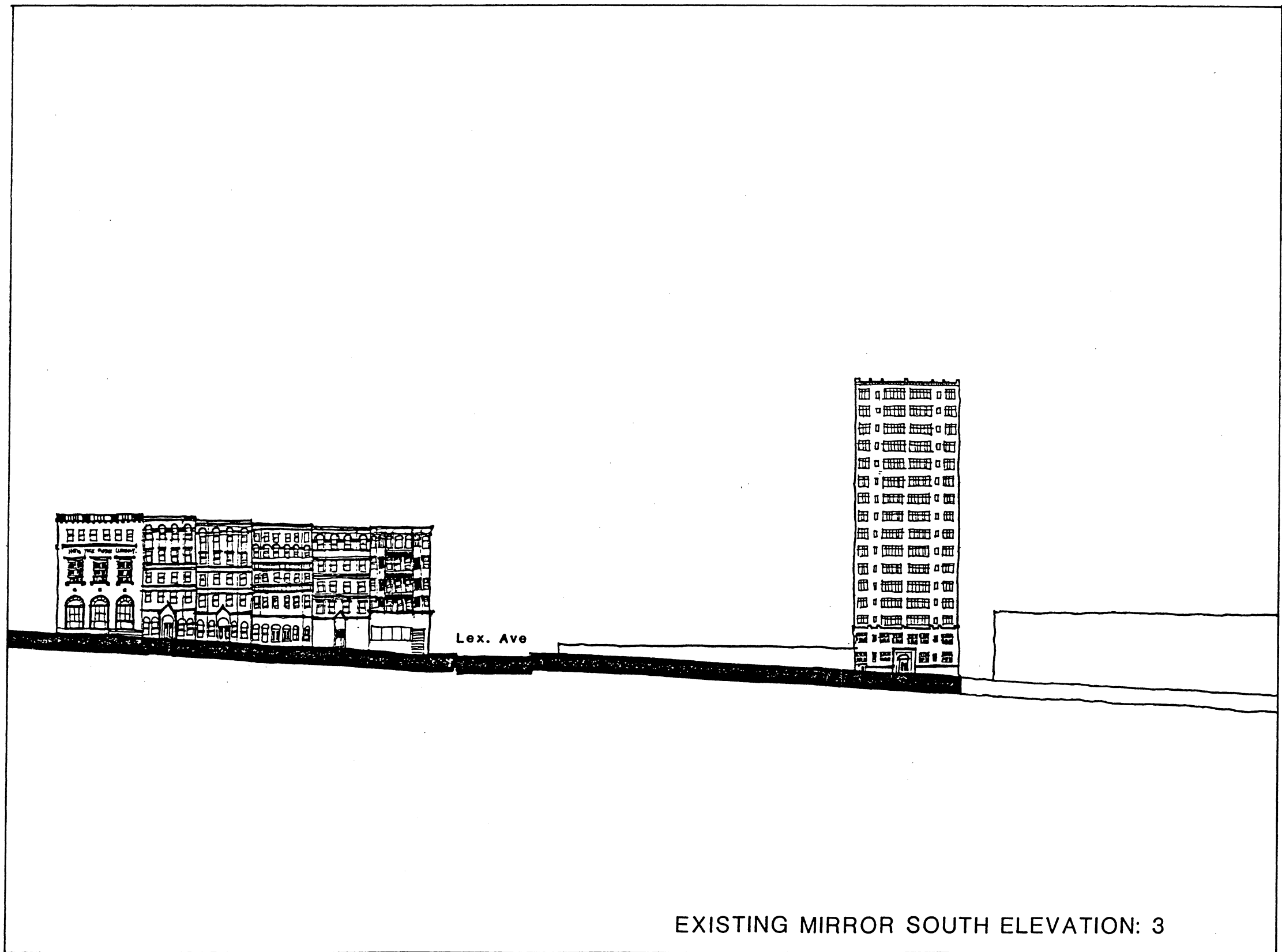




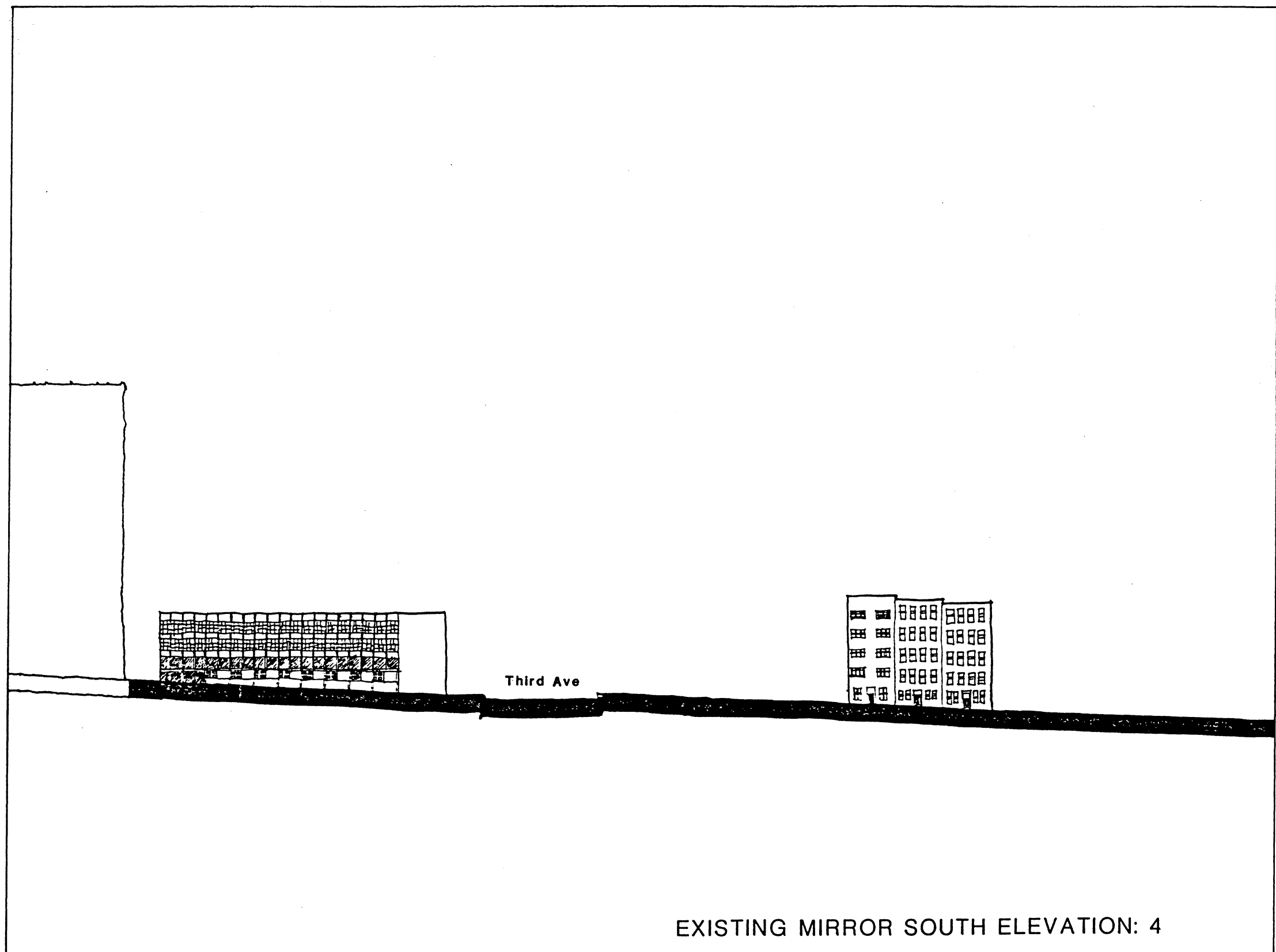




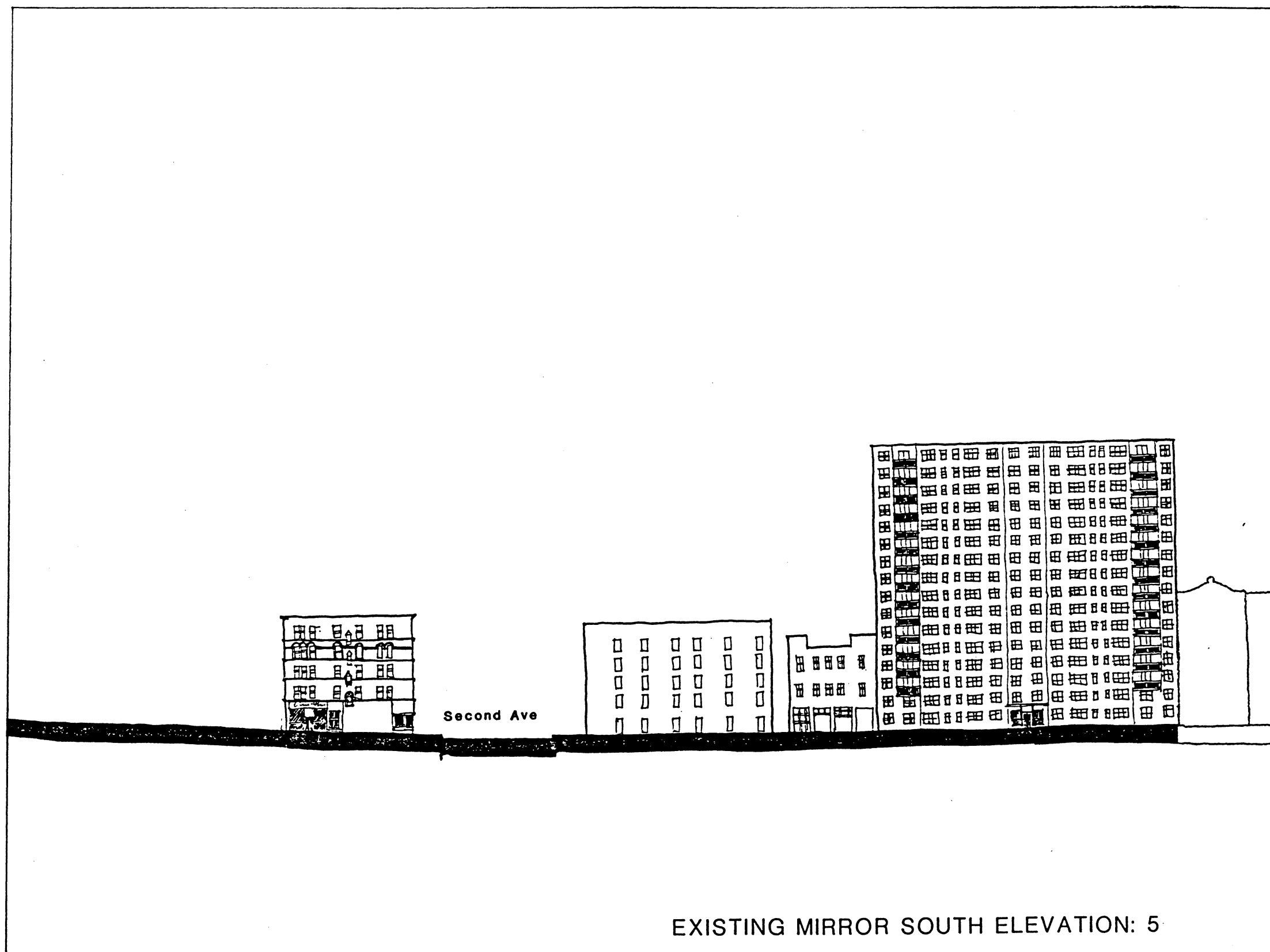


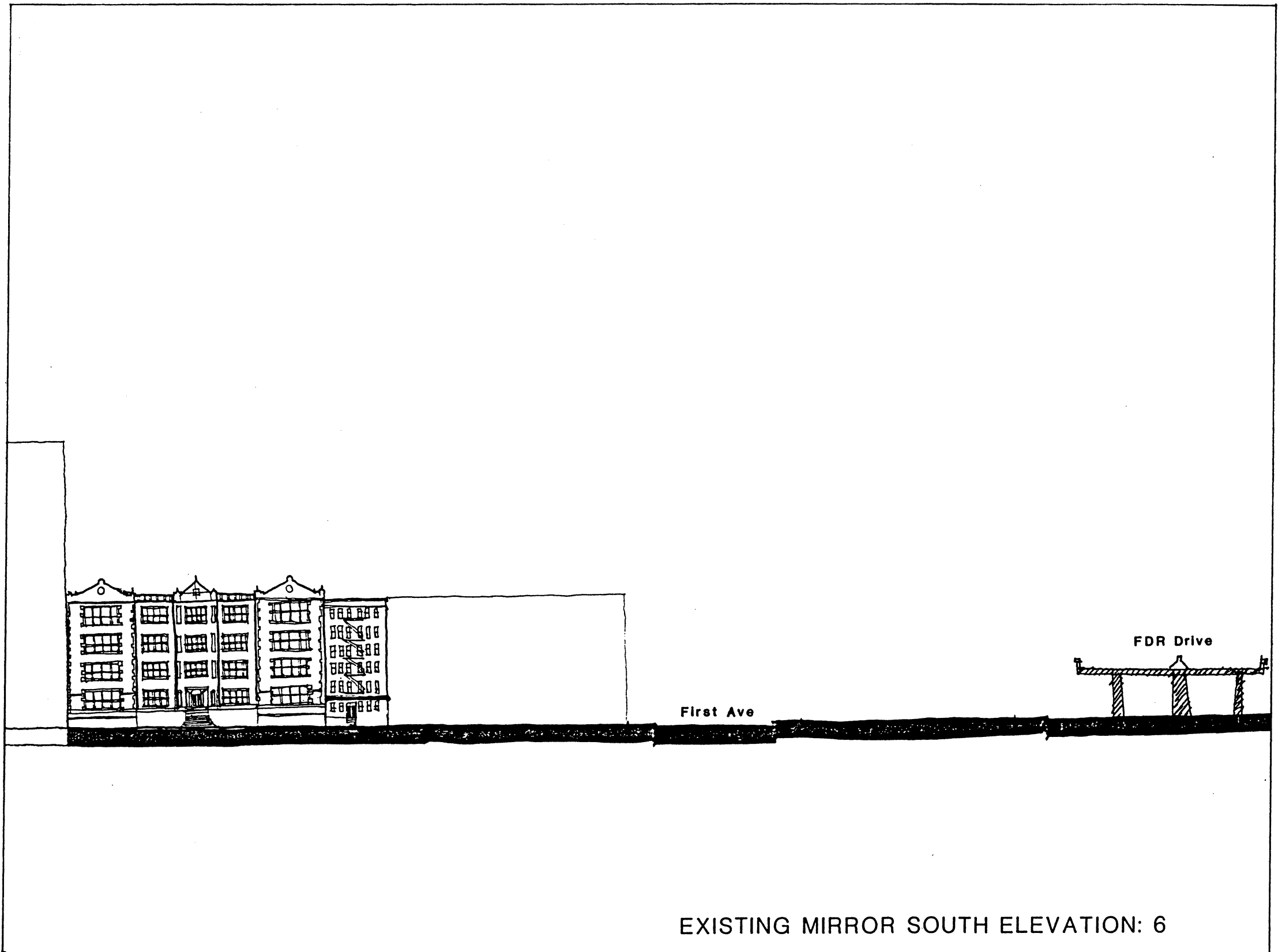


EXISTING MIRROR SOUTH ELEVATION: 3



EXISTING MIRROR SOUTH ELEVATION: 4

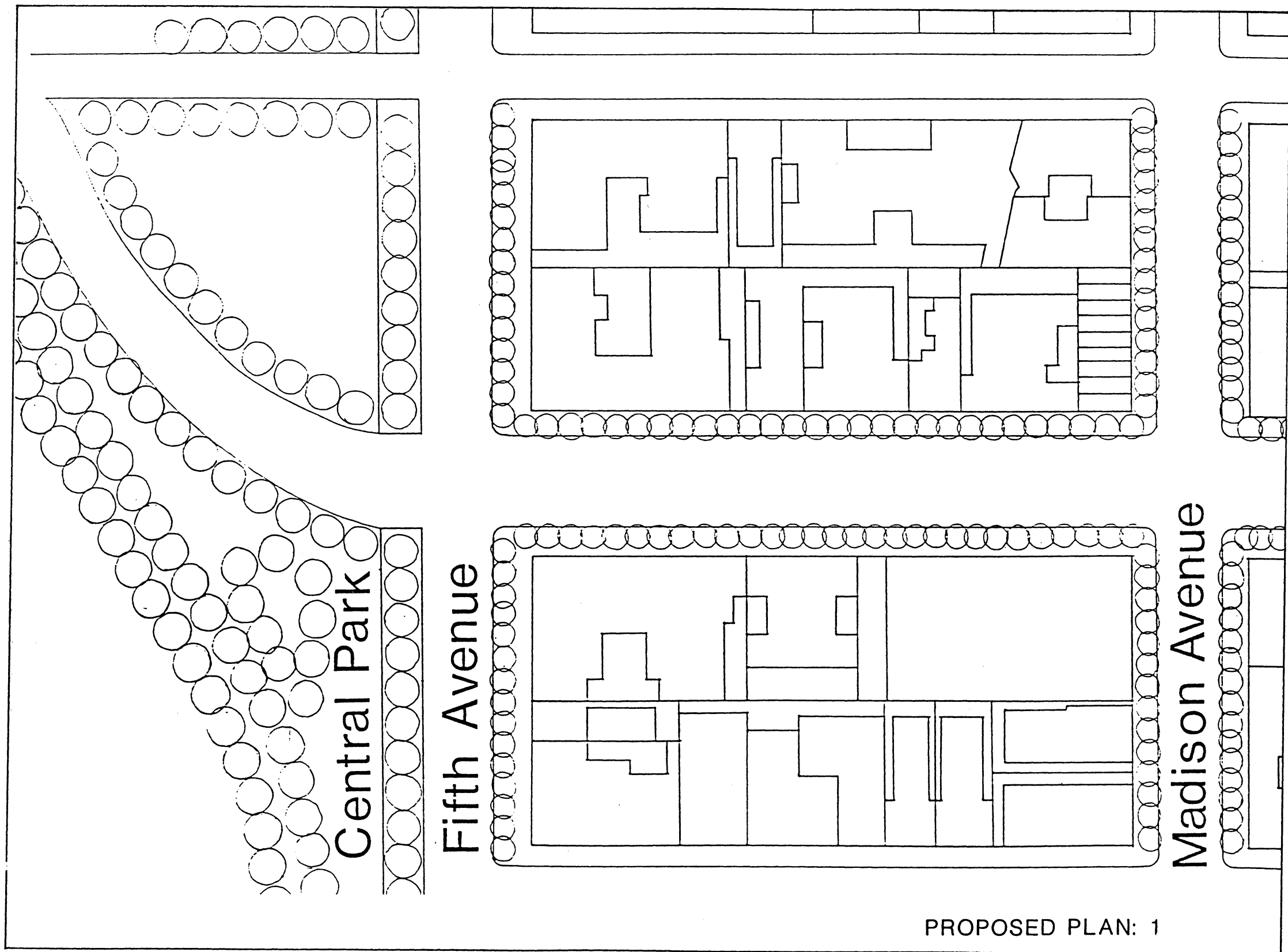




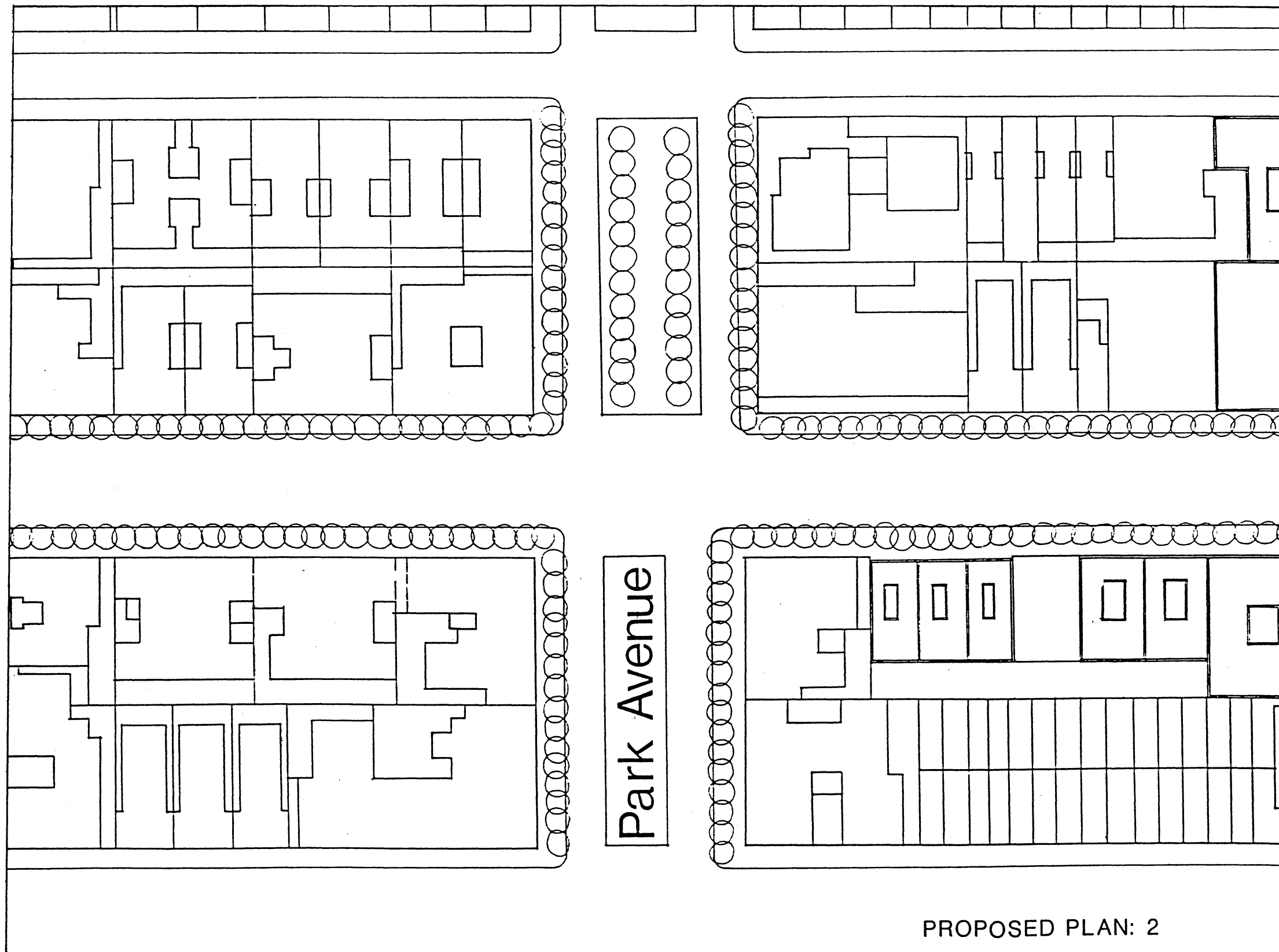
PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS

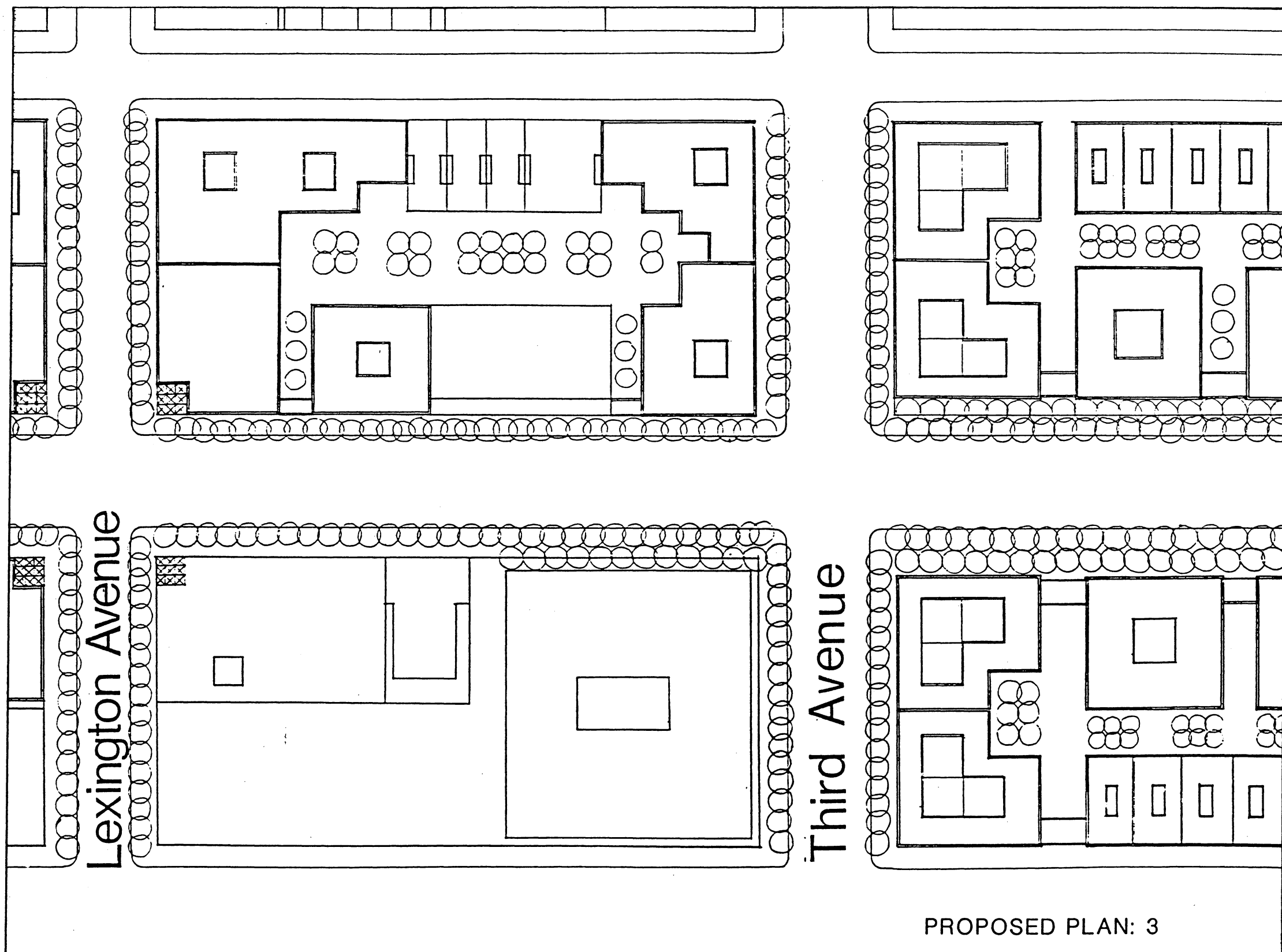
Proposed recommendations for the correct development of East 96th Street include the following:

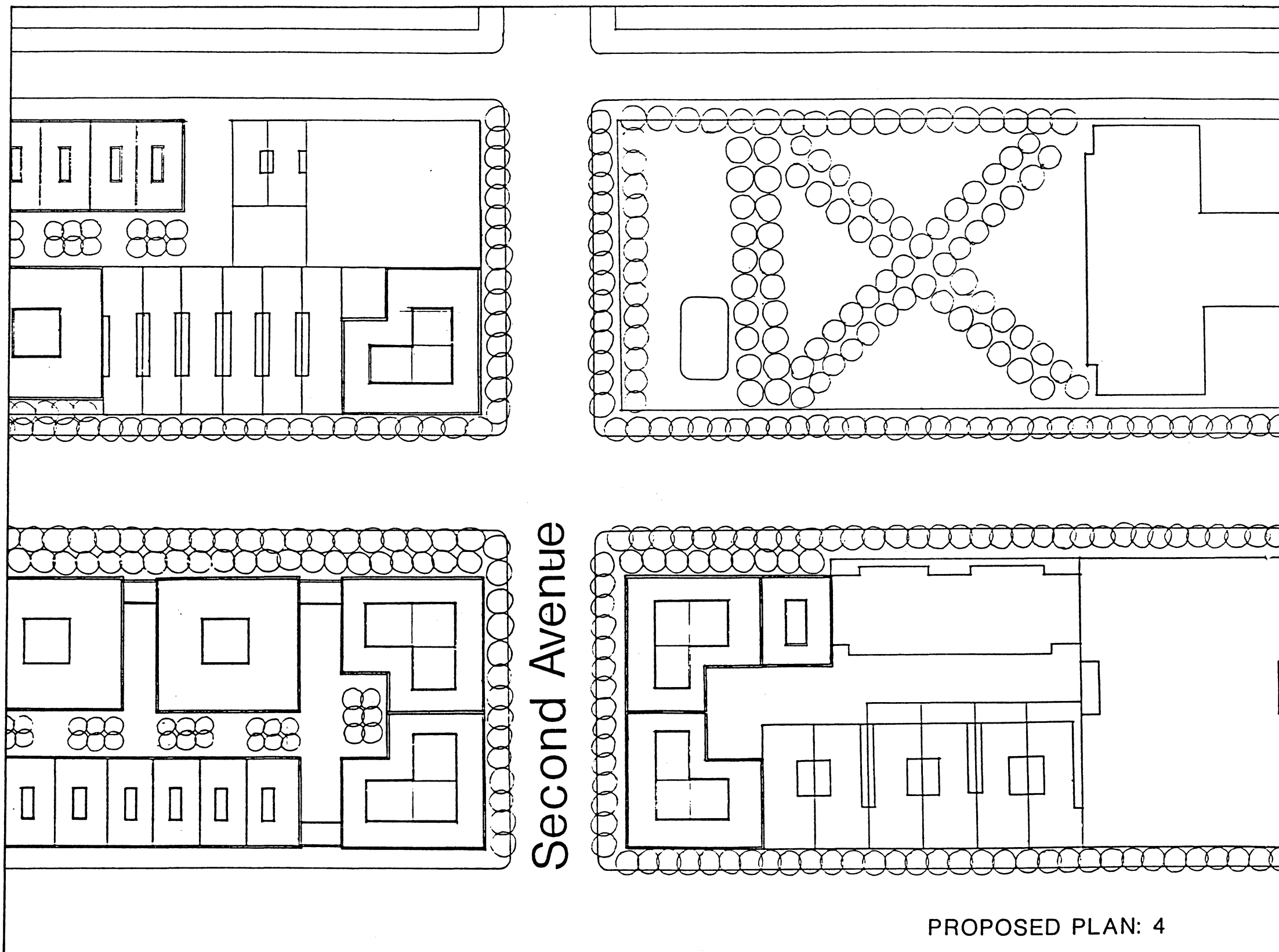
- 1) Modify present as-of-right zoning so that buildings with tall elements at street corners and lower elements at the middle of the block are the pattern rather than the present zoning which allows developers to construct a continuous building wall along the block. This modified building envelope strengthens the character of street corners and allows for more light to reach rear courts and open spaces. A neighborhood within the block is created.
- 2) Where there are existing high and low buildings that are to be maintained in a block, it is proposed that new construction in that block not exceed the height of the existing high building. Aesthetically, the continuation of the present lower building height of approximately five stories would be ideal but would not be economical for development because of high land costs, and would not provide as much housing as is needed in the area.
- 3) It is recommended that developers be given a bonus for providing amenities (open spaces, parks, trees, arcades, etc.) even though they may not be in the same land parcel being developed but are part of the total street development. Thus, the quality of the whole street is improved.
- 4) To accommodate various socio-economic groups a certain percentage of apartments would be rented to middle and lower income families to provide housing for them. Tenant selection would be made by a committee from the City Planning Commission.
- 5) The image of East 96th Street would be improved by defining the ends of the street. The west end of the street is well established by the trees of Central Park, and existing high quality residential buildings between Fifth, Madison, and Park Avenues. The eastern end of the street is not so well defined. By creating a promenade on the East River that acts as a major focal point, the end of the street is established and a space for outdoor concerts, fairs, jogging, etc. is provided.
- 6) All new buildings along the street must provide arcades and retail space at the ground level. The blocks between the park and the river are also to be tree lined. Present zoning allows retail spaces along the avenues that intersect 96th Street but not on 96th Street itself. This is to be revised, as 96th Street is a major artery for vehicles. It is only natural that pedestrian movement reflect this. Retail spaces, arcades, and trees will encourage pedestrian interaction at ground level, and will reinforce strong linear movement.
- 7) Existing parks on East 96th Street are to be refurbished in conjunction with the development of new open spaces including the promenade at the eastern end of the street. These spaces will act as secondary focal points on the street.
- 8) To relieve vehicular congestion, the 96th Street exit to the FDR Drive is to be one way south, and at 97th Street a one way north exit is recommended.
- 9) To relieve pedestrian congestion at Lexington Avenue and 96th Street, four covered arcade corners providing space at subway stairs are proposed. This development also acts as a mid-point of visual emphasis on the street.
- 10) Pedestrian access to existing First Avenue parks and the new East River promenades is provided by bridges across First Avenue and a bridge from the 97th Street end of parks across the FDR Drive.

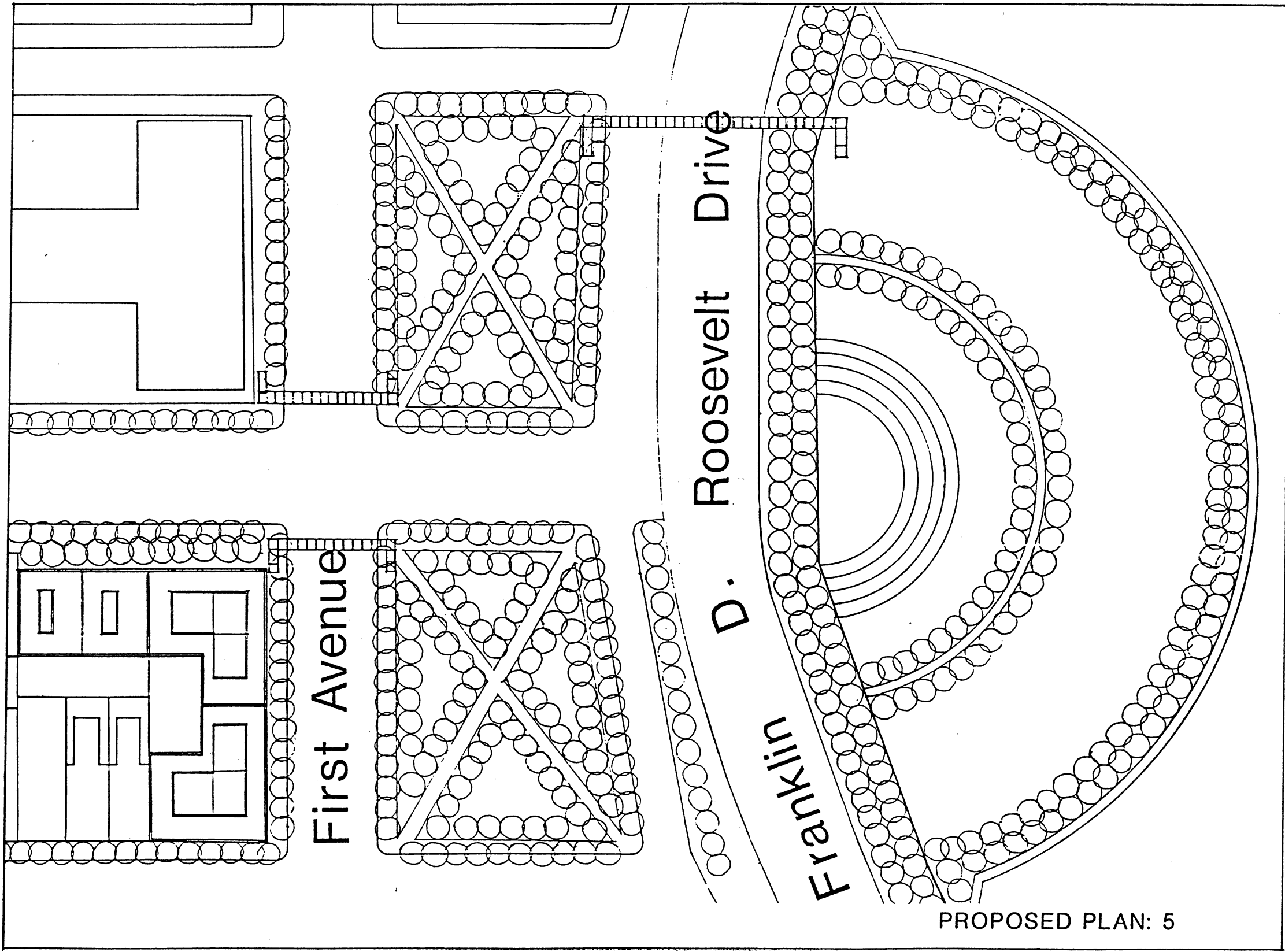


PROPOSED PLAN: 1

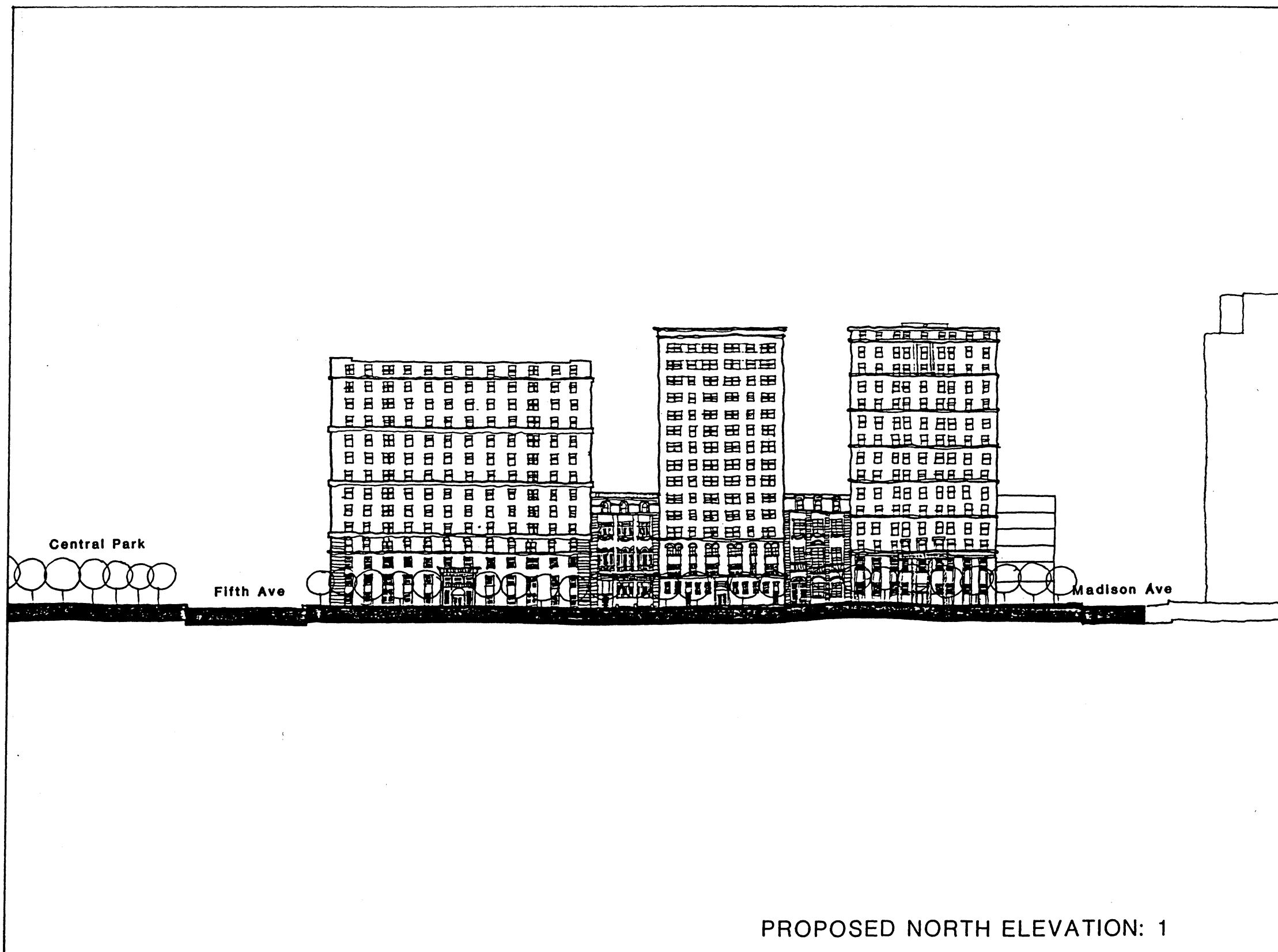


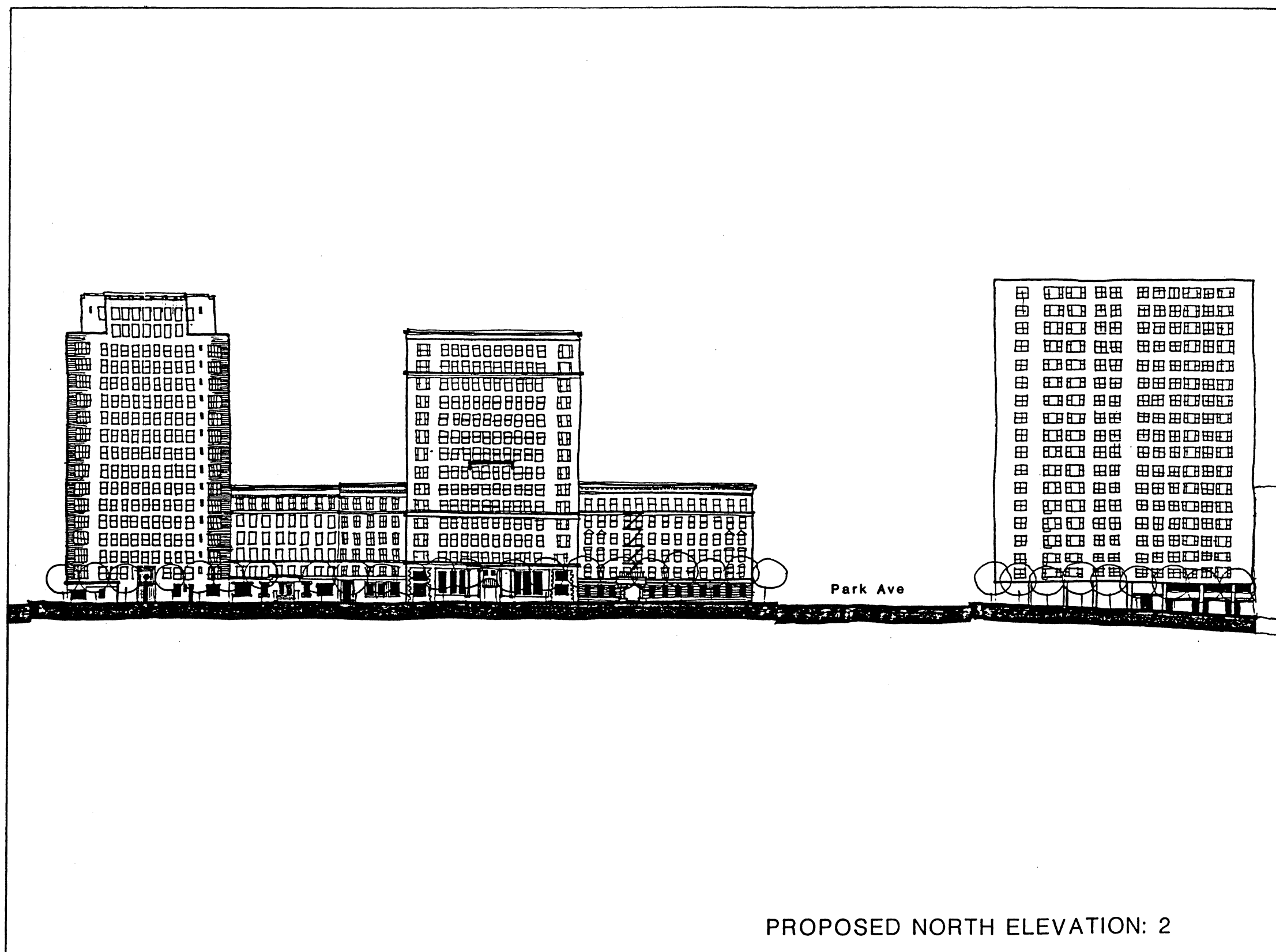


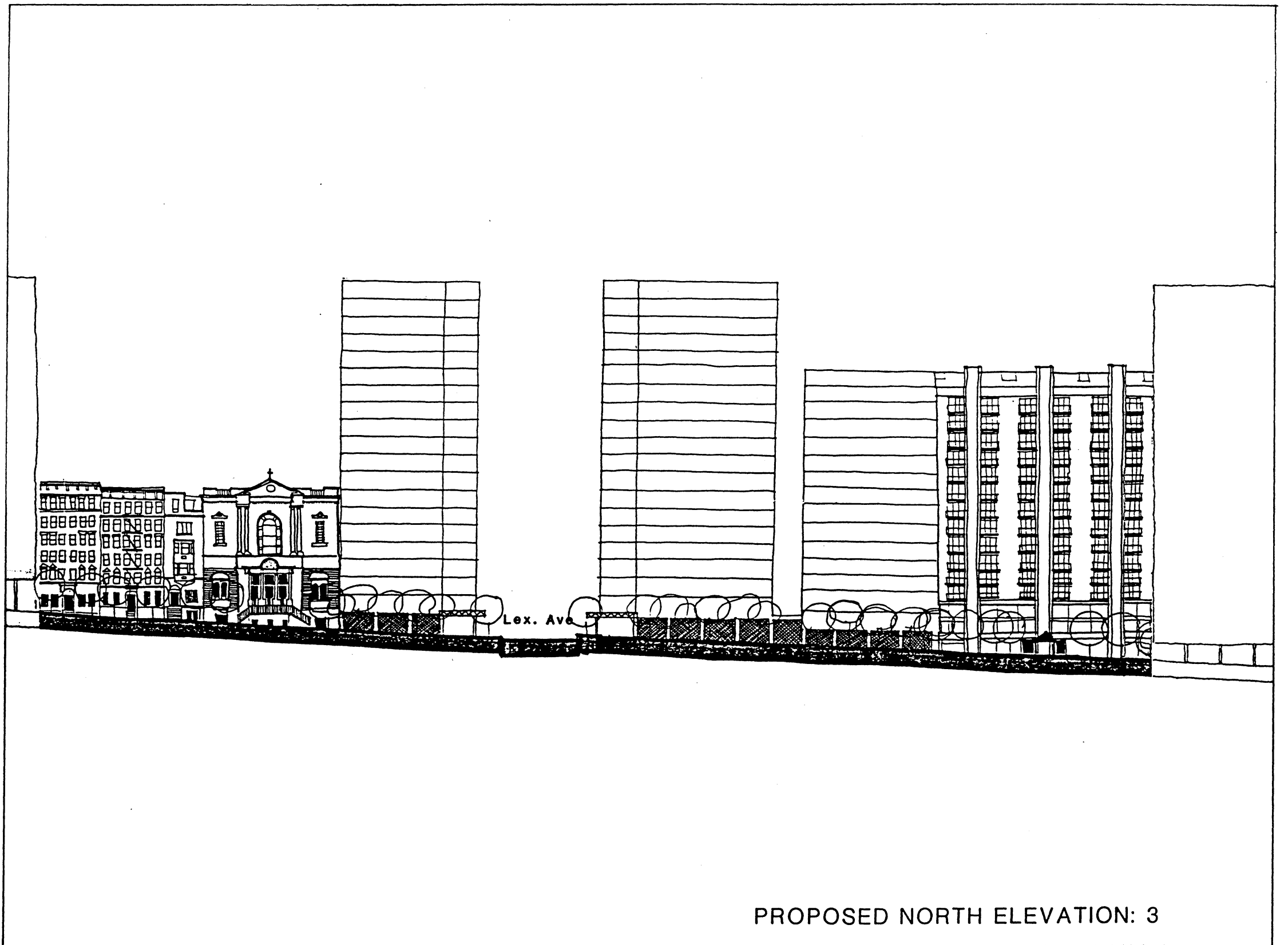




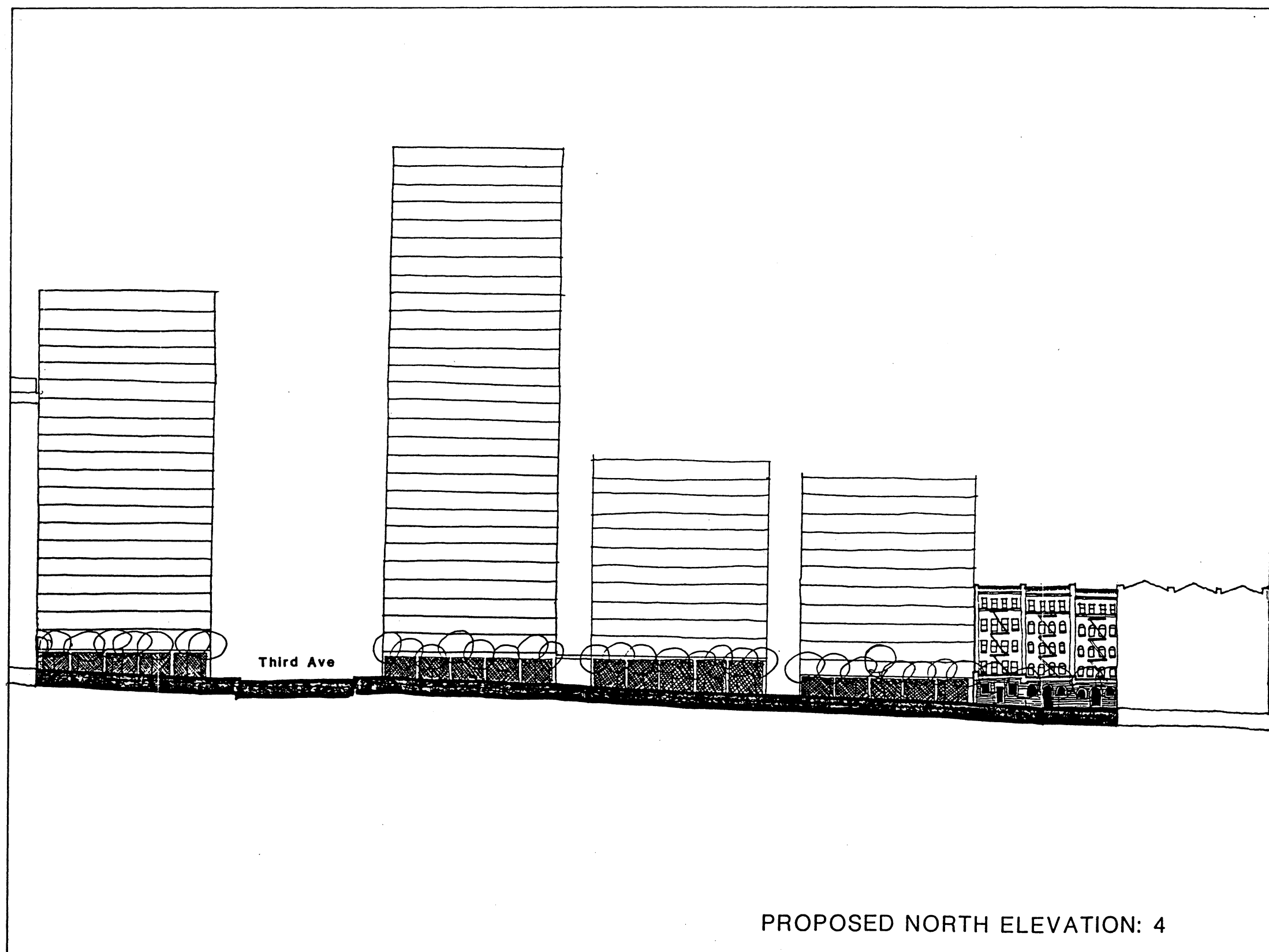
PROPOSED PLAN: 5

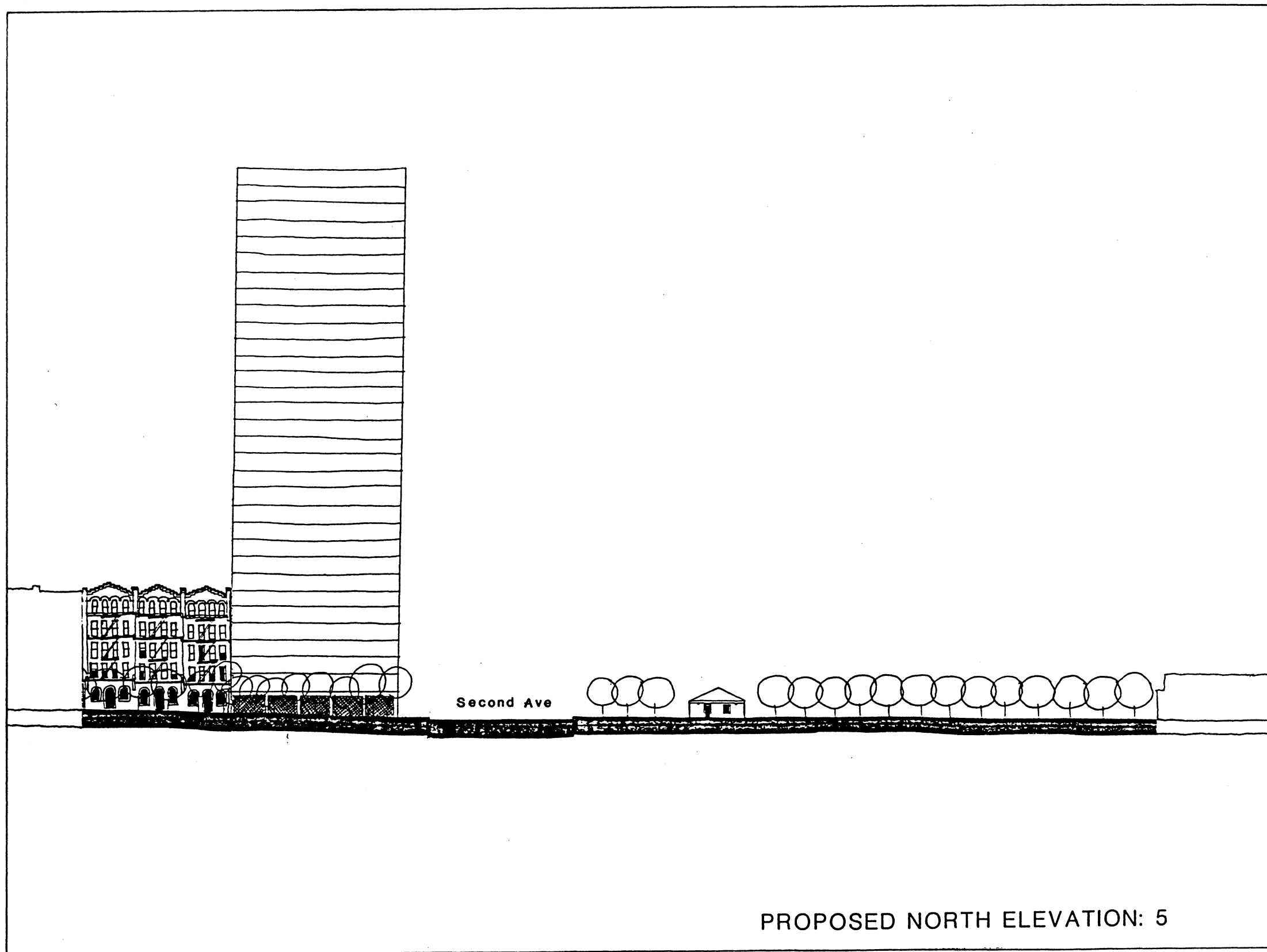




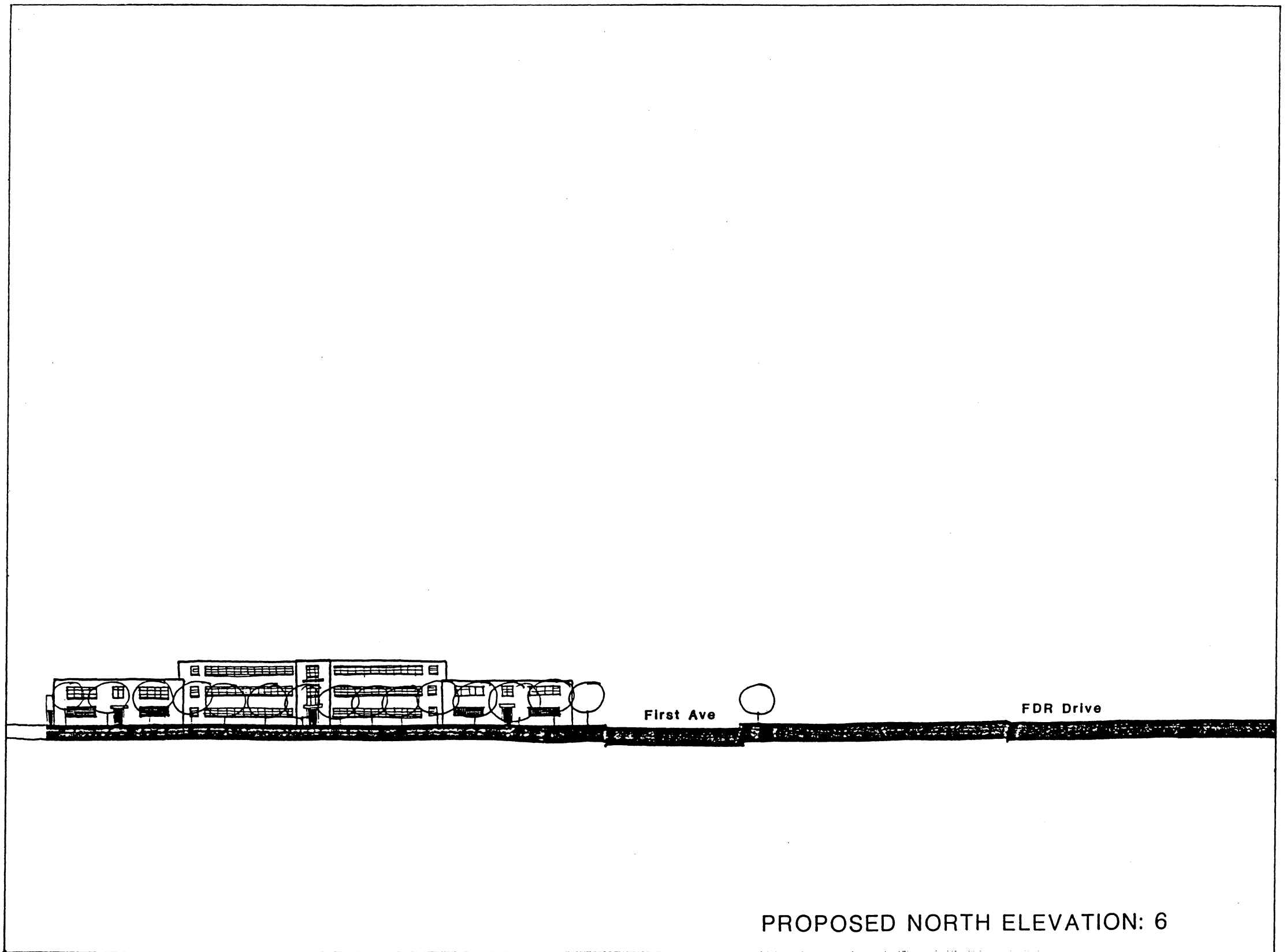


PROPOSED NORTH ELEVATION: 3

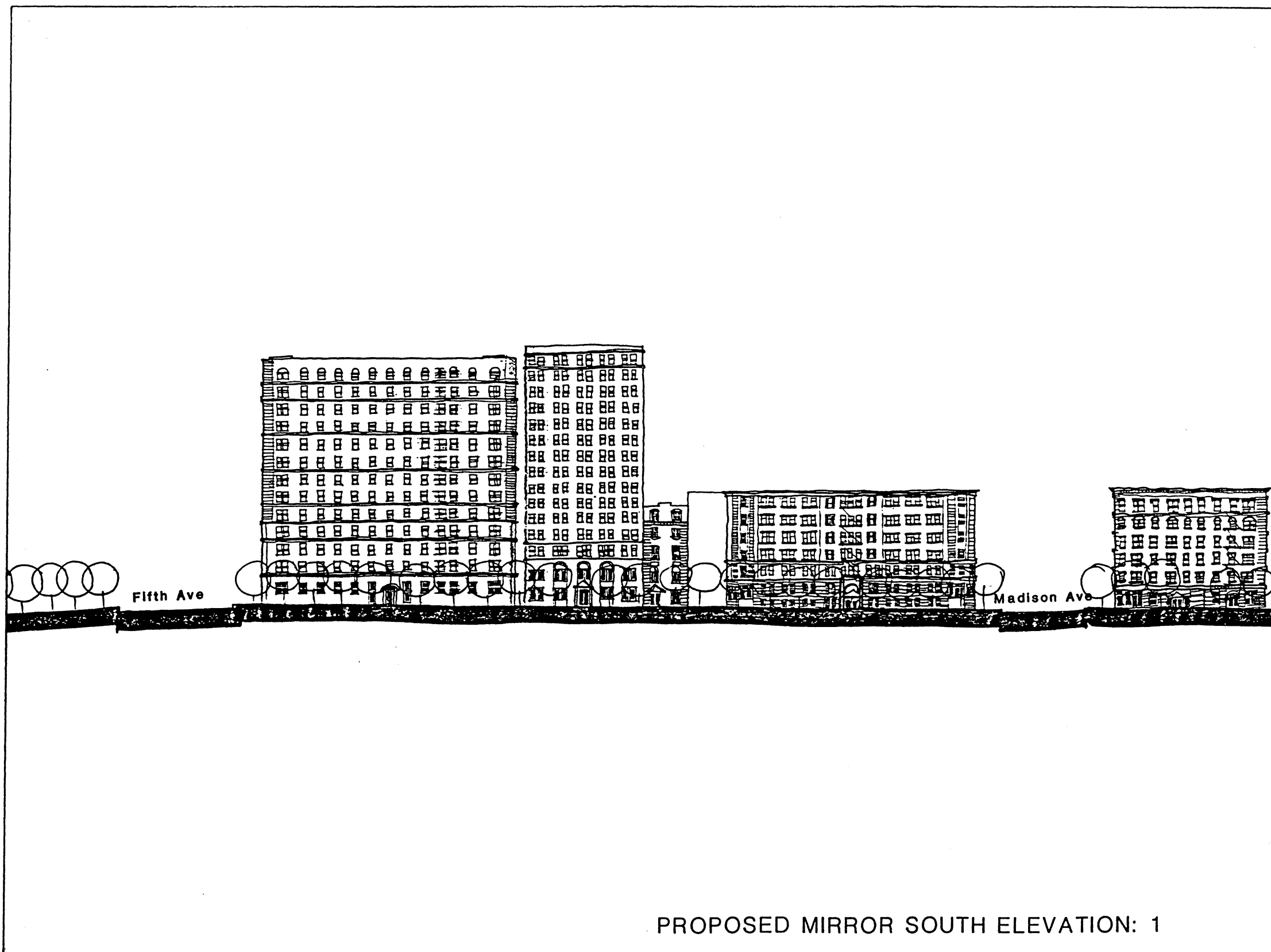


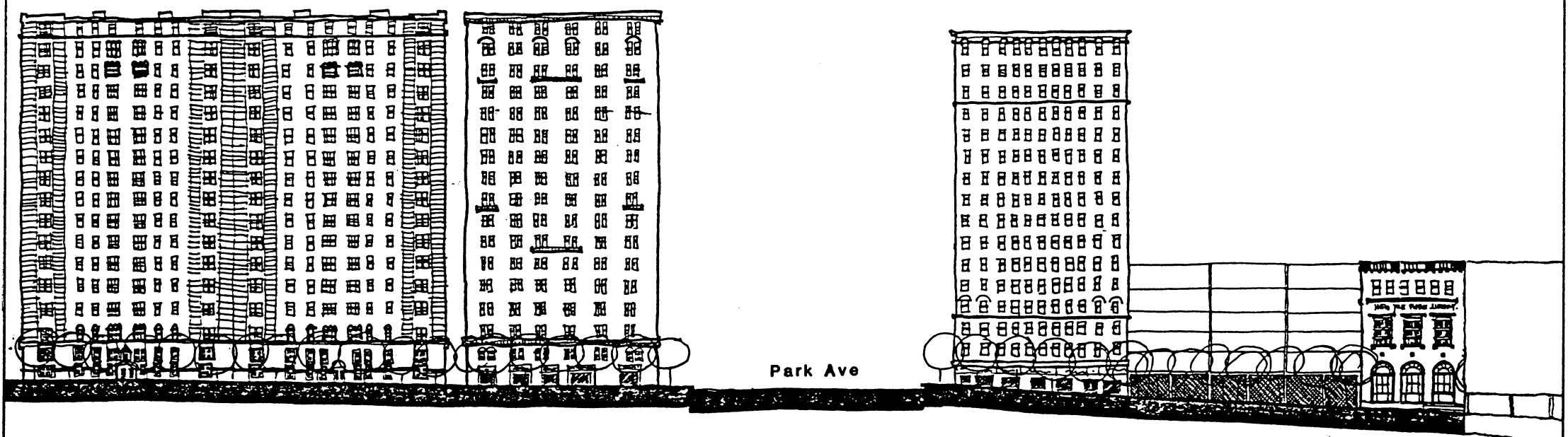


PROPOSED NORTH ELEVATION: 5

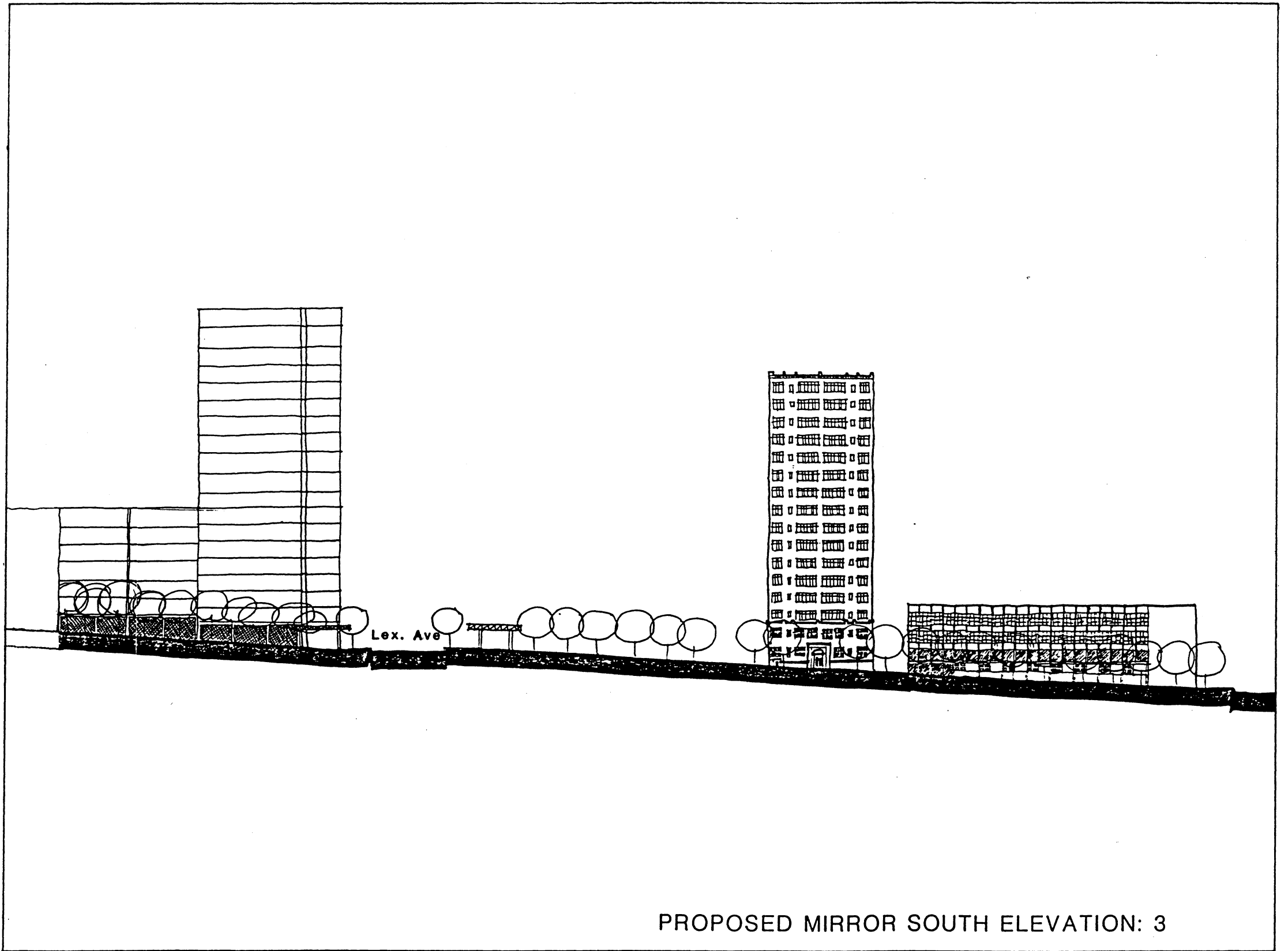


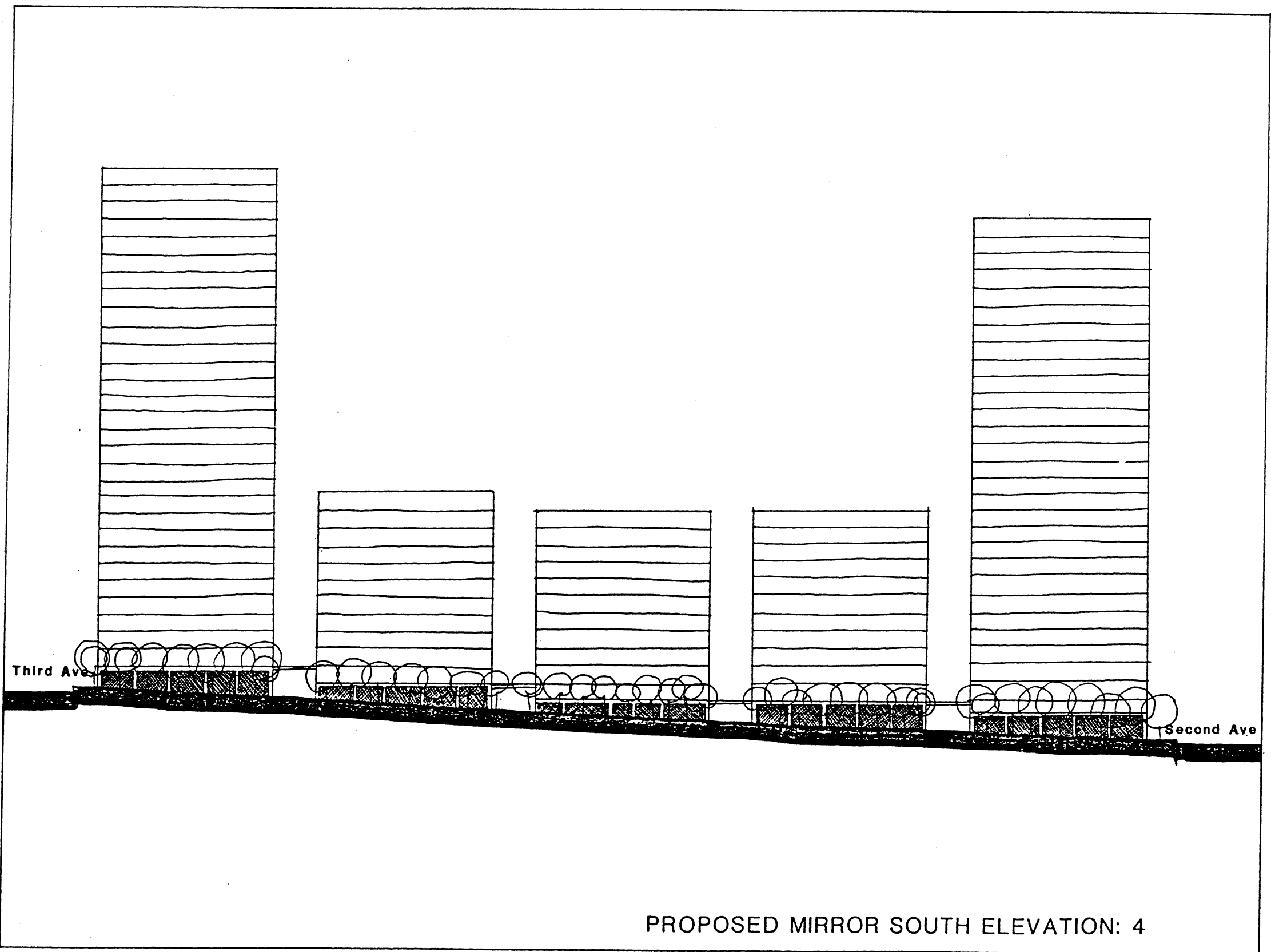
PROPOSED NORTH ELEVATION: 6

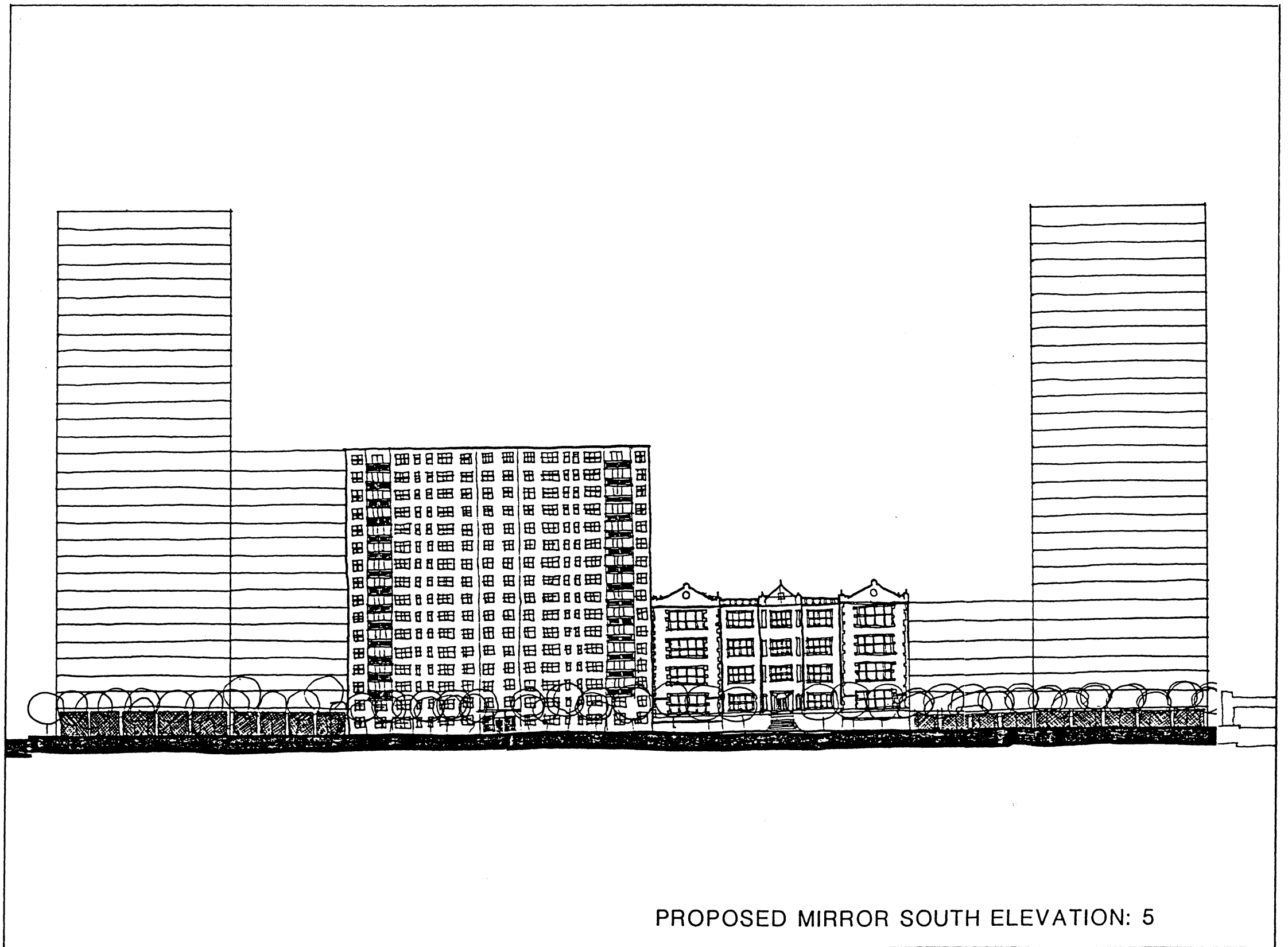




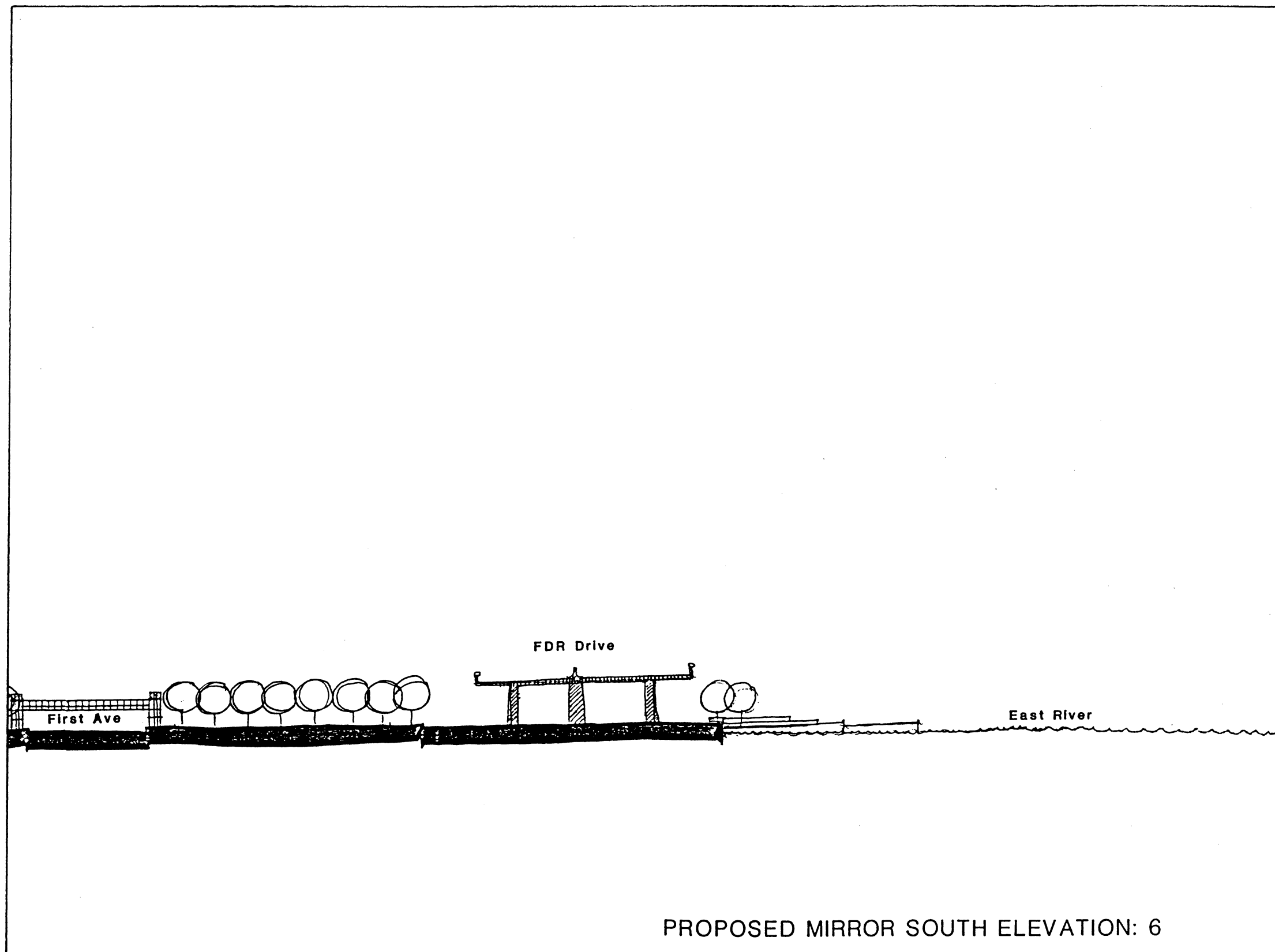
PROPOSED MIRROR SOUTH ELEVATION: 2

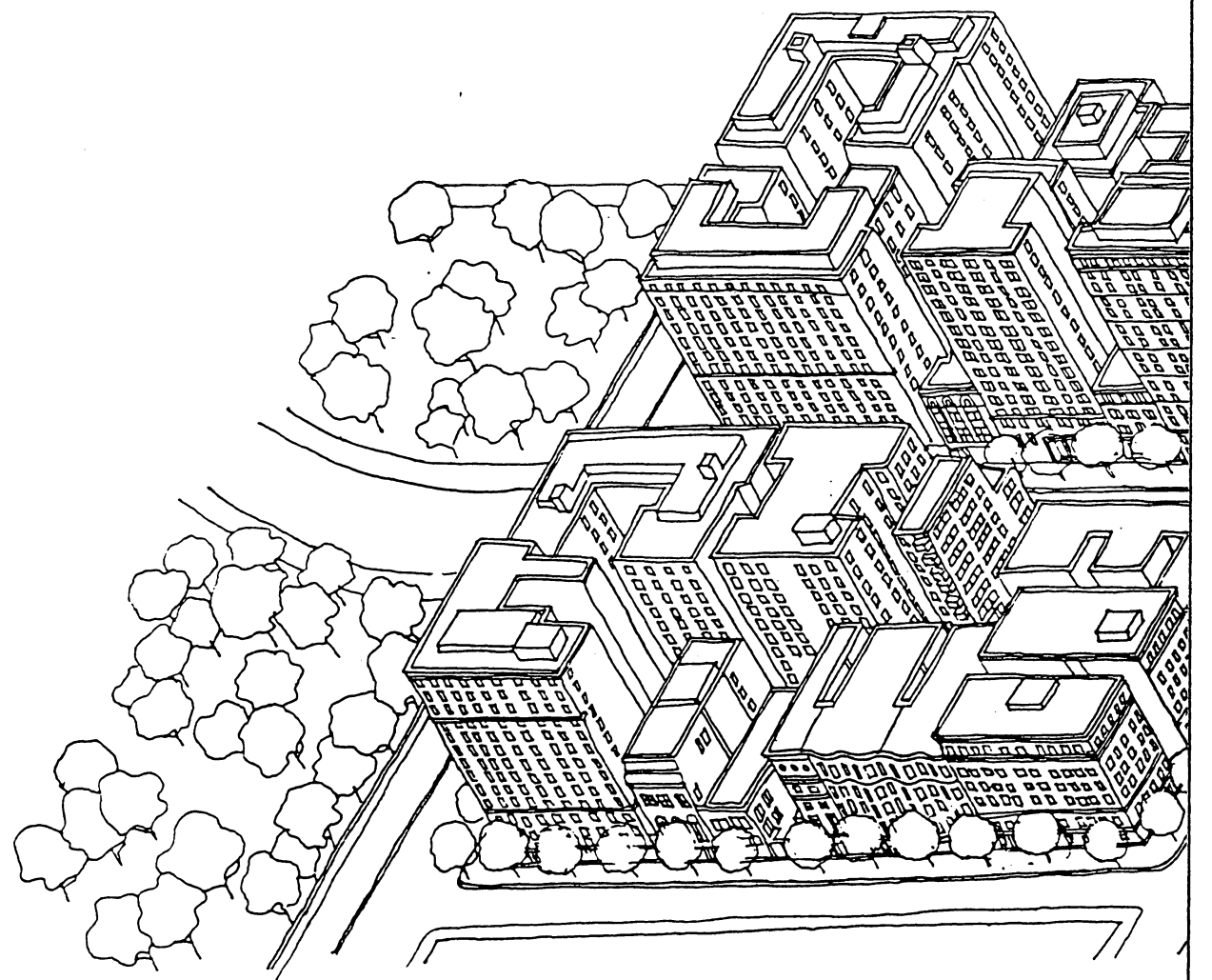




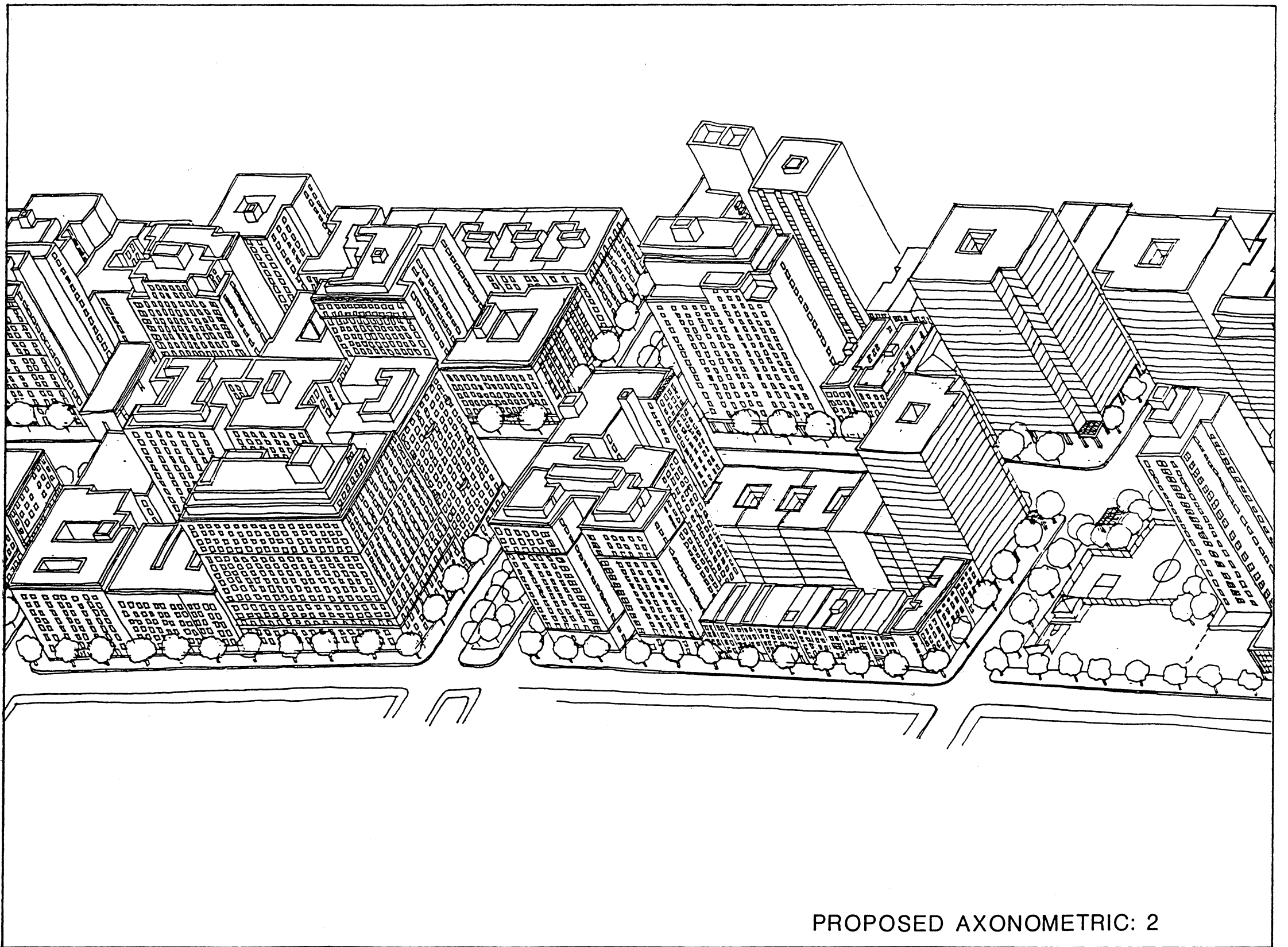


PROPOSED MIRROR SOUTH ELEVATION: 5

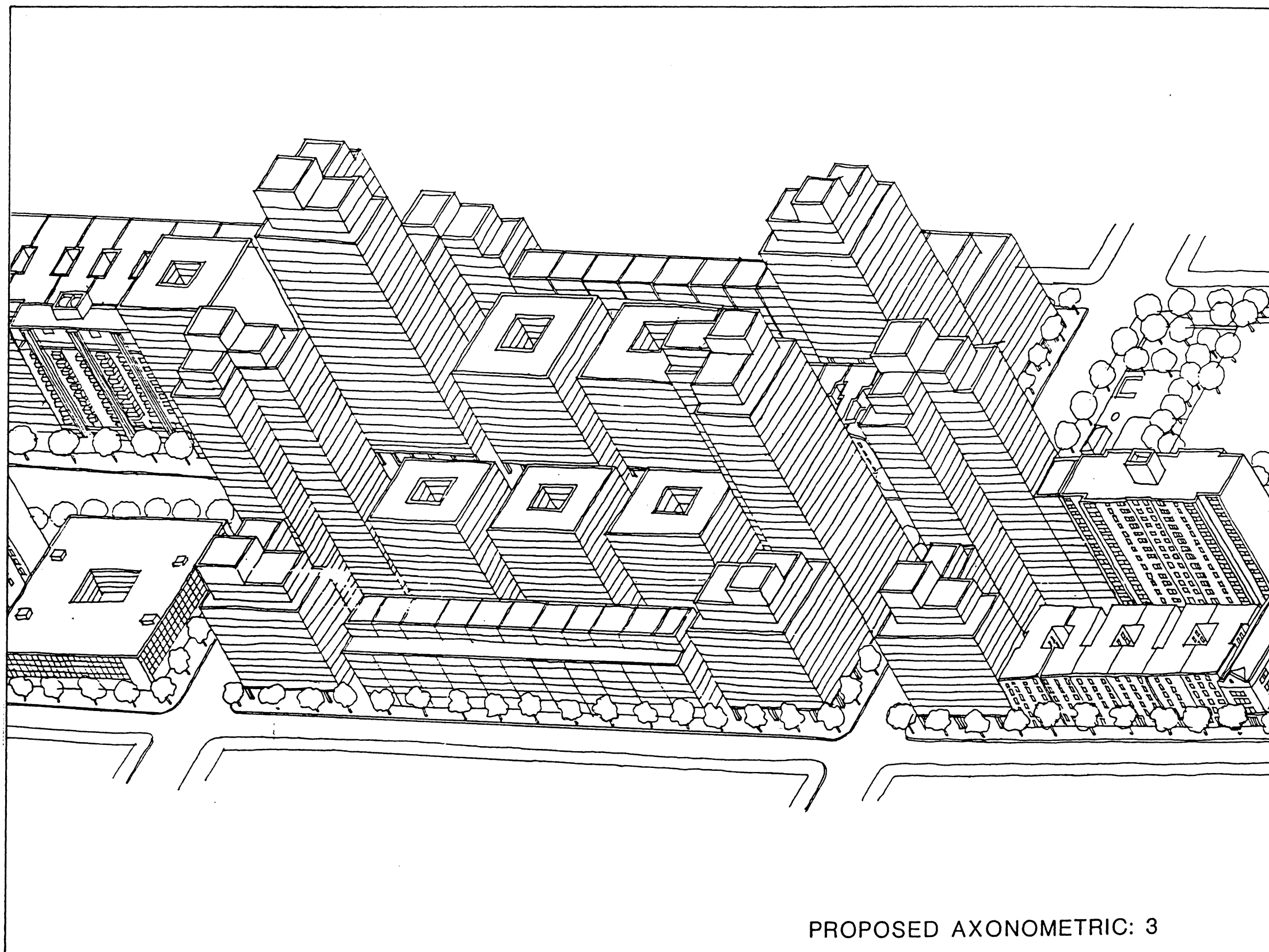


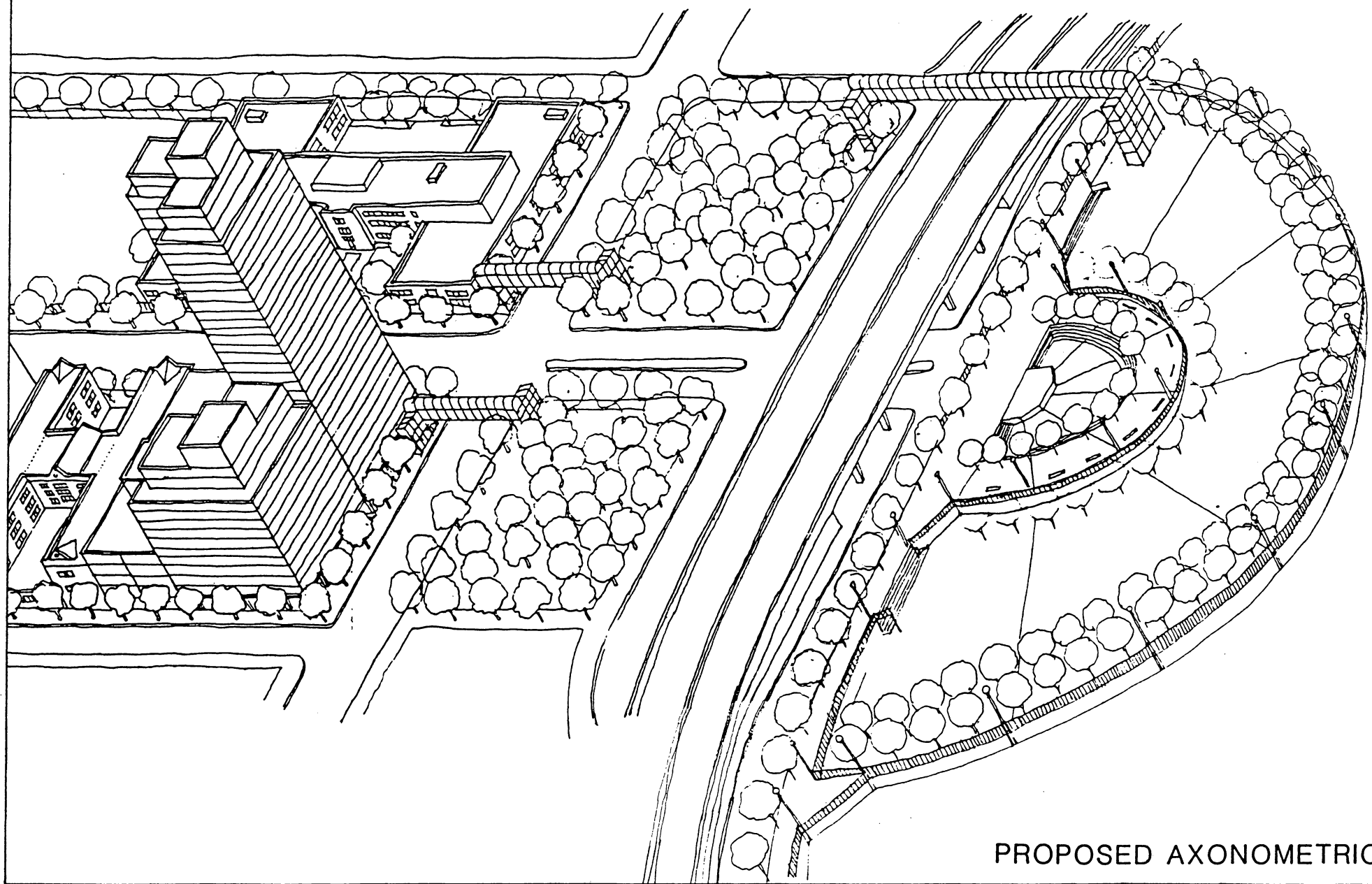


PROPOSED AXONOMETRIC: 1



PROPOSED AXONOMETRIC: 2





PROPOSED AXONOMETRIC: 4

CONCLUSION

Whether an architect creates an object, a building, a street, or a city in various scales or styles, it is the maintenance of good quality that is the most critical aspect that determines whether or not one is a good architect.

Laws and regulations are created in the hope that they will automatically provide instant solutions to problems and a foolproof quality control.

A good architect can create buildings that improve the physical environment without regulations.

Social, physical, and economic constraints are not an excuse to create a poor quality environment but should be taken as a challenge!

"The architect should be equipped with knowledge of many branches of study and varied kinds of learning for it is by his judgment that all work done by the other arts is put to test." Vitruvius

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