

## Macys, Herald Square (aka 151 west 34th street, aka 441-459 7th avenue)

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**1902, Designed by Architects De Lemos & Cordes  
(later expansions from 1924 and 1931 designed by Architect Robert D. Kohn, not shown )**



It is hard to imagine any argument for *not* bestowing LPC Landmark status on Macys, a building which is an important cultural symbol as well as a powerful work of architecture that provides much of the character for one of the city's busiest areas. It deserves NYC Landmark status for being the beloved institution that draws crowds of tourists and locals, and for symbolizing the ascendance of high-volume retail culture in this country. Macys popularized glamor for the masses by using innovative retailing techniques, in an exuberantly stylish setting. The store is the physical embodiment of their triumphant commercial success.

The richly ornamented, monumental building has architectural merits in addition to its cultural significance which entitle it to an LPC designation.

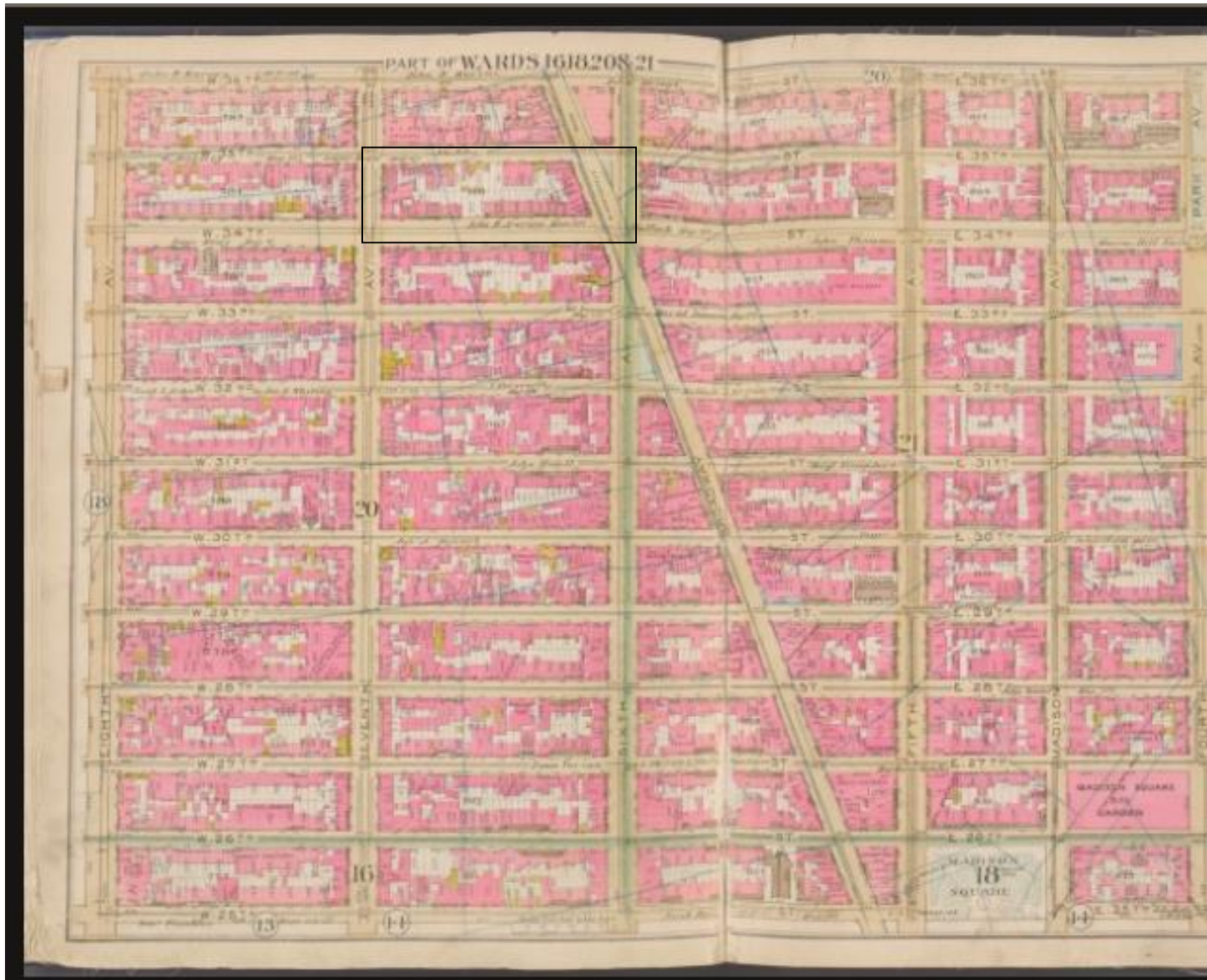
## History

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Astor's home on Fifth Avenue and 34<sup>th</sup> street, built in 1856 demolished in the 1890s



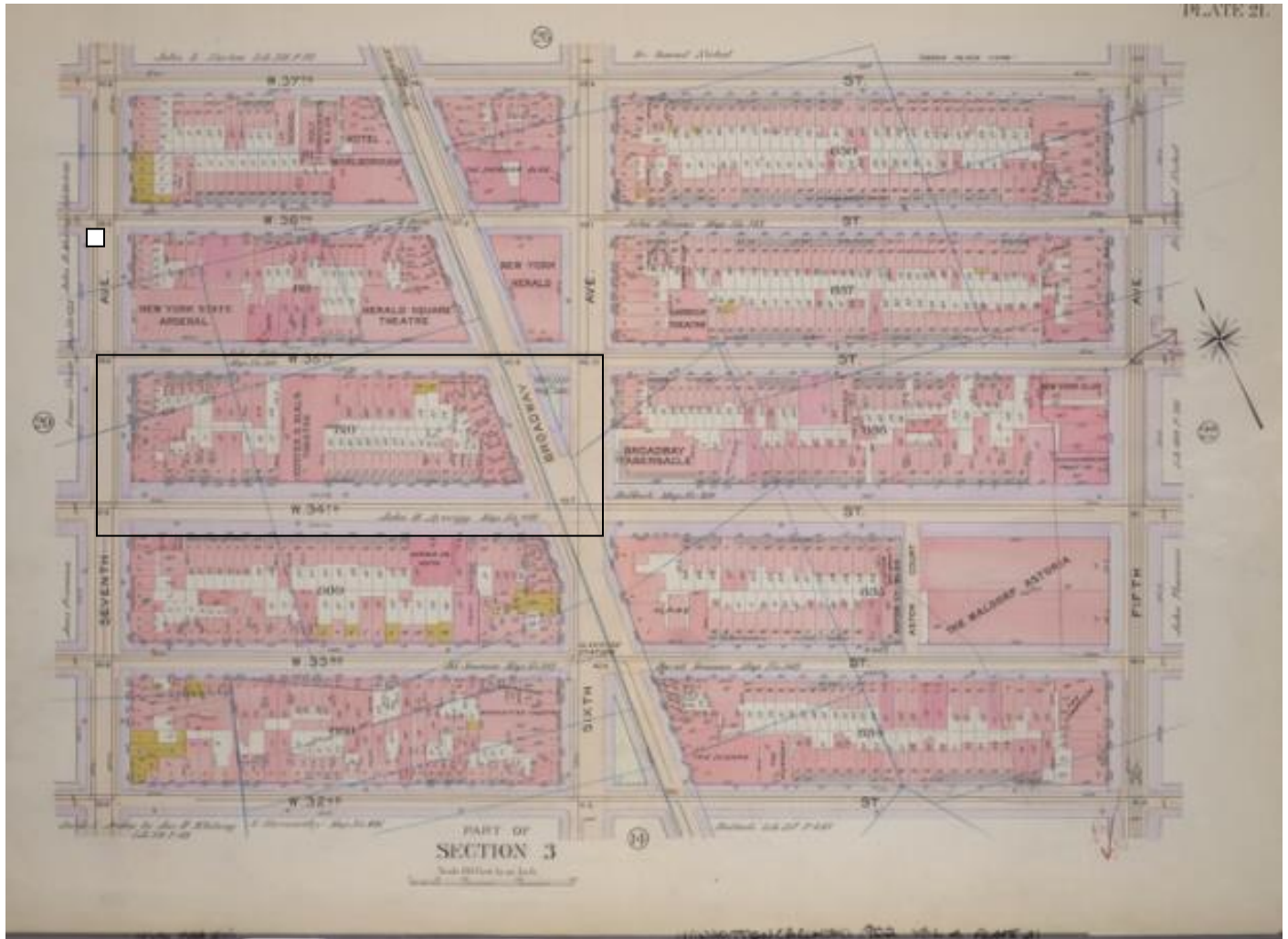
<sup>3</sup>Herald Square evolves from Newspaper Headquarters to Retail Center



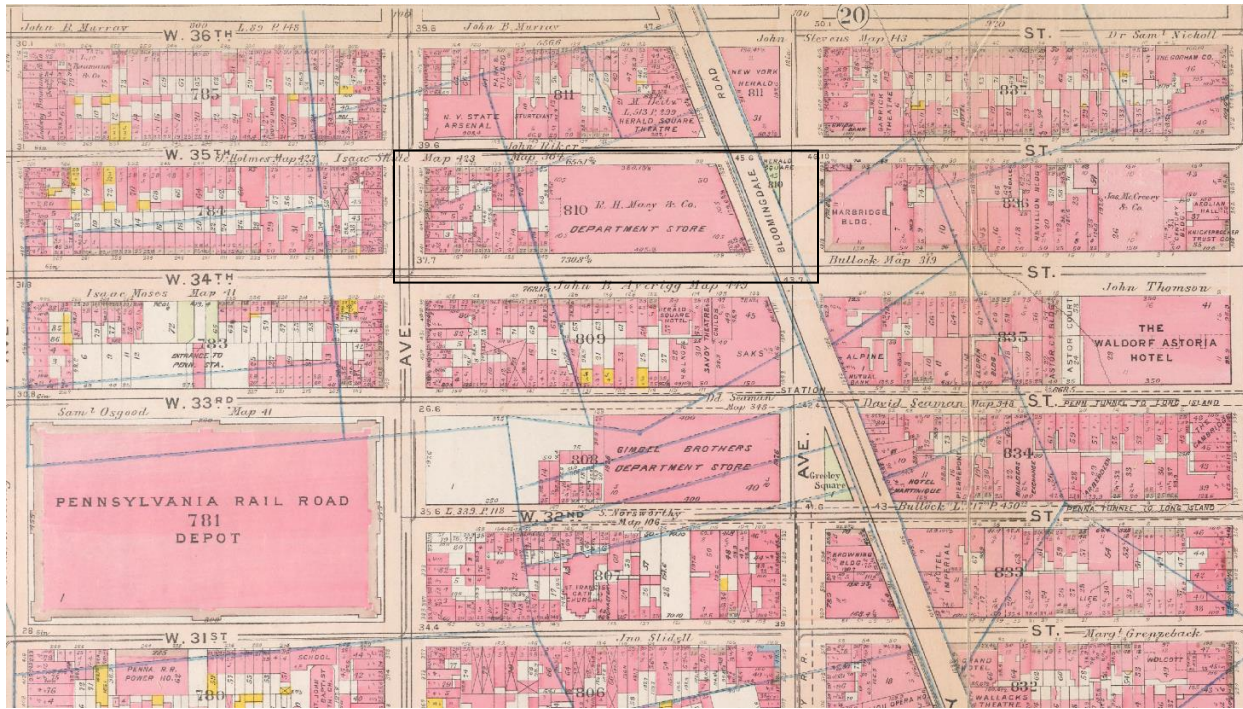


<sup>2</sup> 1891





<sup>2</sup> 1899



<sup>2</sup> 1911 (first building)

<sup>1</sup> Construction of "east" building in 1902





Although constructed in 3 phases, and a mixture of at least two architectural styles, Beaux- Arts on the original 1902 east portion and Art Deco on the 1931 western extension, the building still presents an overall cohesive aesthetic. The consistent use of red brick, with limestone ornamental banding, columns and enframements creates a unified overall impression, even though the massing and the ornamental motifs vary around the building. The materials, and colors and basic scale of the ornamentation unify it. This is reinforced by the window frames and spandrel panels in (now oxidized, green) copper, as well as other simulated “oxidized copper” details, and the consistent use of divided light windows with elongated proportions on all floors above the main level.



**34<sup>th</sup> street Facade**

Macys does look like two different buildings depending on if you're looking at it eastern Beaux Arts eastern side (The style is also sometimes referenced as "Palladian", due to its arched divided light windows), or its Art Deco western side, but somehow the two are stitched together so artfully that the line between the two styles is not jarring. This is part of its success as a building. It is "schizophrenic", but that is actually its charm.

**1941 Tax Map photos**



**Southeast Corner**



The NYC Municipal Archives Digital Collections website

**Southwest Corner**

The Classical elements of arched windows, pedimented window enframements, pronounced horizontal banding and ornate ironwork and balustrades in the original 1902 eastern portion slowly morph into the more streamlined deco western portion, with stepped massing and more pronounced horizontal bays, terminated by the pronounced chamfered southwest corner with its iconic colossal vertical Macys sign in stainless steel. Another consistent element around the building is the painted metal marquee awning at the entrances.



The exterior has a high degree of architectural integrity, having changed little since it was completed with the western addition in 1931, and the addition of showcase windows on the Broadway storefront in 1939. Those windows became world famous for their elaborate holiday displays, which were described as "six little mini-theaters". Macys windows became the impetus for other famous retail holiday window extravagances., and they continue to draw crowds to their seasonal displays. Some minor alterations are barely detectable, and only some signage and miscellaneous security devices etc. have been added over the decades. These have made almost no impact on the overall aesthetic of the building. One of the most significant losses to the building was the elaborate lampposts that originally adorned the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor balustrade and the upper balustrade, where they had punctuated the silhouette of the building





Macys presides over Herald Square, and has a tremendous presence on 34<sup>th</sup> street between 7<sup>th</sup> avenue and Broadway. The southwest corner at 7<sup>th</sup> avenue is highly visible to visitors entering the city from Penn Station's various entrances on or near 7<sup>th</sup> avenue, giving a glamorous and fanciful taste of the architectural treats the city has in store for its visitors.



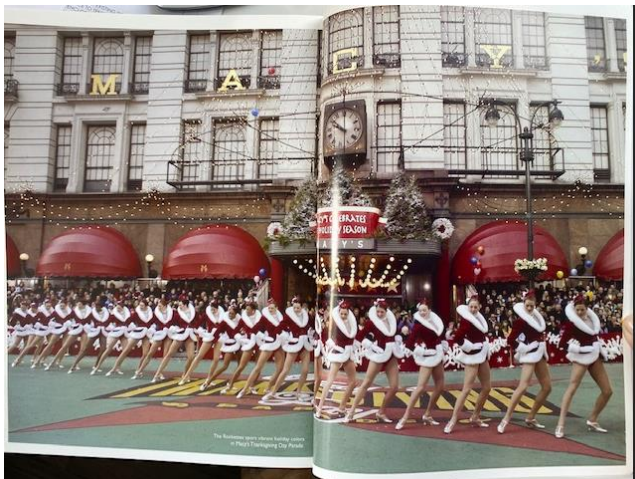
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The store's cultural significance stems from its reputation to be the "World's Largest Department Store" at approximately 2,500,000 square feet, which was popularized by the 1947 Hollywood film *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*. It is also the terminus of the Macys Thanksgiving Day Parade, the original site of the "Santaland" Christmas event, the Spring Flower Show, and other events which have become mainstays of various holidays in NYC. The Macys 4<sup>th</sup> of July Fireworks, though no held near the store, adds an additional layer of significance to Macys as an Institution being a quintessential NYC Landmark.



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Macys as a store is also culturally important for the innovations its owners brought to the world of retail. R.H. Macy pioneered the idea of a “Department Store” with any conceivable product available in a specific section of a floor. Macys was the first to have a managerial hierarchy that streamlined running the store. They also revolutionized marketing with signage and promotions, and *Branding* which was reinforced by the aesthetics of the store, inside and out. Macy’s signature red star used in advertising and other branding, is also a consistent motif of the exterior ornamentation. To this day Macy’s signature logo is highly recognizable, and its iconic “two faced” edifice is a beloved symbol of Macys as an important part of New York City for well over a century



### Architectural Integrity and “Sense of Place”



A “Sense of Place” is created by the backdrop Macys gives to Herald Square, but also the impact the western side has of on people flowing in from Penn Station, and the 34<sup>th</sup> street façade is a beautiful, rich mixture of styles, motifs, and massing concepts that still hangs together as a unified whole.

A gorgeous building with a monumental scale that makes it undeniably a major part of the overall atmosphere of the area. Macys’ significance has already been recognized is listed on National Register of Historic Places in 1978 and was made a National Historic Landmark in 1978, and SR listed in 1980 (Source CRIS.parks.ny.gov).

Its age makes it eligible for landmark status



Corner of 34<sup>th</sup> street and 7<sup>th</sup> avenue

**Herald Square façade (Broadway)**





Corner of 35<sup>th</sup> street and Broadway





Corner of 34<sup>th</sup> street and Broadway (The “Notch”)



### 35<sup>th</sup> street (Rear Façade)



### Threat to Macys

Proposed 900-foot-tall tower to be built above the existing structure, proposed in February 2020. It would add 1.5 million square feet of commercial space to the building, and the expansion includes a 235-million-dollar plan to upgrade Herald Square, improving ADA accessibility, transit connections, open



air shelter structures and other plaza improvements and even a new entrance to Penn Station, as a “give backs” to the community. However, some speculate that the increased commercial space will would put an enormous strain on an already overburdened area for commuters.

<sup>5</sup> *“Layla Law-Gisiko, a member of the local community board, had a pointed reaction to the idea of more people flooding into the area: “Disastrous, disastrous, disastrous.”*

The improvements allege the potential to spark 4.29 billion dollars 2.69 in NYC tax revenue, and 4.29 billion dollars. It is not fully through the review process yet.

Stakeholders:

- Macys, inc.
- The 34<sup>th</sup> street partnership
- Manhattan Community Board 5
- Visitors to NYC
- Commuters

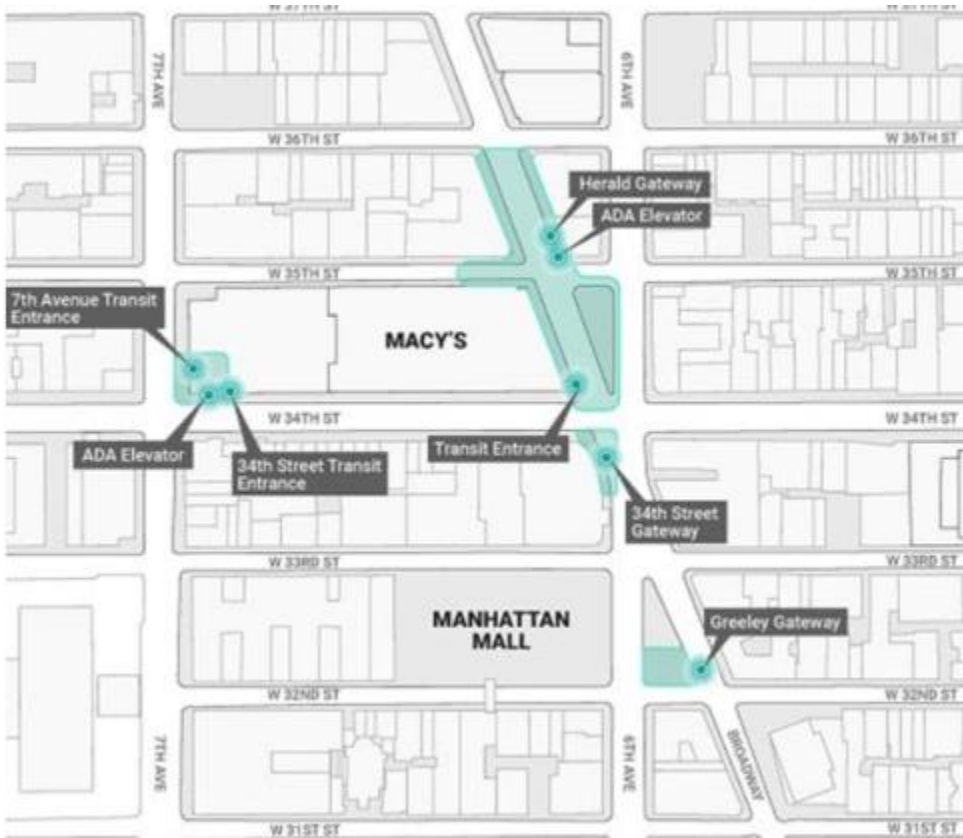
Rendering: FX Collaborative (Architects)







Macys' proposed changes for the neighborhood<sup>3</sup>



While I strongly support preserving Macys as a NYC Landmark, I am not opposed to a major addition. However, any addition should be architecturally strong enough to belong on a building as magnificent as the current structure is. The proposed tower by FX Co. does not meet the aesthetic standards this building merits. While I applaud its stepped massing, and its distinctly smaller footprint than that of the existing building, the style and detailing of it are too ordinary and uninspiring for this context. This is not to say that the tower should be the same or similar style as the current buildings, but that it should harmonize well with the original and *adds* to it appropriately. There is already a precedent for shifting styles on the is building, so a new style could be fitting for a tower. If the LPC grants Macys Landmark status, the commission can have control over the aesthetics of the addition. It may not be easy to strike just the right note to marry a stepped tower to this already stepped “base”, but it is possible

Norman Foster’s 2006 tower addition to Joseph Urban’s 1928 original 6 story “base” is an excellent example of an addition powerful enough to belong on an extraordinary base. Some architectural features visually tie the Foster building to the Urban, and it is in perfect proportion to its base. It is true that the Urban building was originally designed to *be* a base for a tower, so Macys is different in that regard. But a tower on Macys could similarly augment the original structure.



## Bibliography

<sup>1</sup>Grippe, Robert M. *Macys: The Store. The Star. The Story*. Garden City, NY: Square One Publishers, 2009.

## Other References

<sup>2</sup> *New York City Tax Map Photos*. The NYC Municipal Archives Digital Collections Website. <https://nycma.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/>

<sup>3</sup> Geographic Guide World <https://www.geographicguide.com/>

<sup>4</sup> Morris, Sebastian. *New York Yimby*. Digital Newsletter  
Pr<https://newyorkyimby.com/2021/05/macys-unveils-expanded-vision-for-900-foot-skyscraper-and-public-plaza-at-herald-square-flagship-store.html>  
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<sup>5</sup> Chung, Jen. *Gothamist*, *Macys Will Spend \$235 Million To Improve Herald Square, and Bring New Skyscraper to Area*. May 11, 2021

Haag, Matthew. *The New York Times*, *Should Macy's Build a Giant Tower In One of N.Y.'s Most Congested Neighborhoods?* July 1, 2019



