

Modeling Urban Scenes

by

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Objective of Clinic

- **Enhance awareness of what elements contribute to an urban scene**
- **Examine those elements in more detail**
- **Show examples of how modelers have captured those elements in urban scenes**

What are Urban Scenes?

- **Urban - of, relating to, or designating a city or a town**
- **There can be a variety of scenes that can be considered “urban”**
- **e.g., a small town, an industrial area, or a large city**

All Usually Have Several Things in Common

- **Congestion**
- **People**
- **Commercial buildings that are close together**
- **Traffic**
- **Signs**

How to Start?

- **First decide what role your railroad is going to play in the urban scene (or what role the urban scene will play in your railroad)**
- **For example,**
- **Will it just be the mainline passing through?**
- **Will it have a passenger terminal, and if so, how big?**
- **Will it have industrial sidings for switching?**

- **Will it be a terminus for your railroad?**
- **Will it be the basis for your railroad?**

Determine what kind of Urban Scene it will be

- Large City?
- Smaller town or city?
- Industrial?
- Modern or run down?

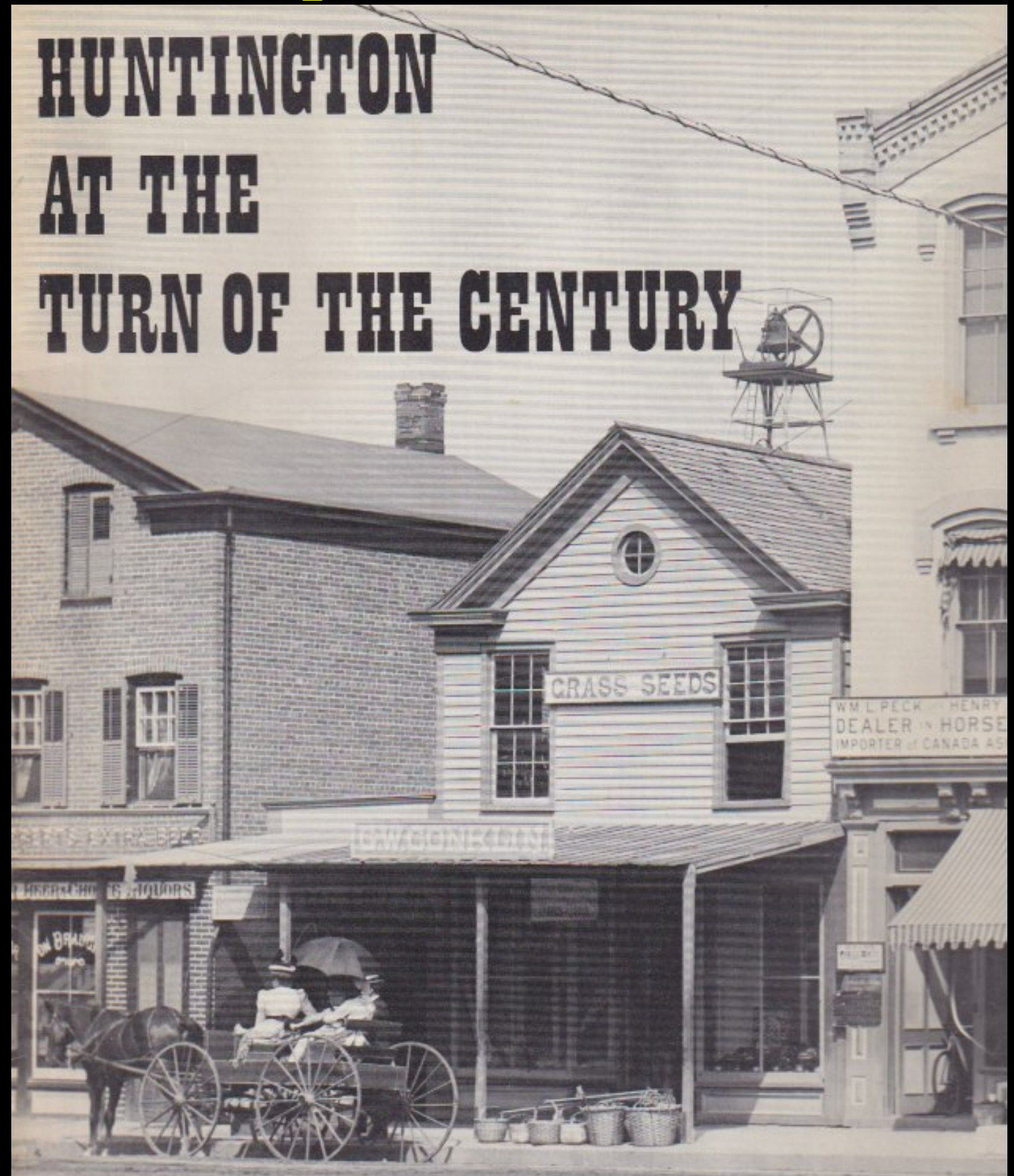
- **My original plan was to model the Long Island Rail Road's Port Jefferson Branch, which ran from Hicksville to Port Jefferson. I also wanted to model the portion that ran from Hicksville to Jamaica in Queens**
- **The plan for my first expansion was to model the City Terminal Zone, which ran from Jamaica to Pennsylvania Station in NYC**
- **The plan for my second expansion was to model the car float yard in Long Island City, Holban Yard, and to capture the “ambiance” of Brooklyn by modeling Flatbush Avenue (Atlantic Branch)**

Find Photos of Areas/ Scenes you want to Model

- **Unless you have a specific memory or image of an urban scene you want to model, some research can be helpful**
- **Books about the Railroad you model likely will have a wealth of photos**
- **Find books with historical photos of the area you want to model**
- **Internet, local historical societies, etc. are a good source of photos, maps, etc.**

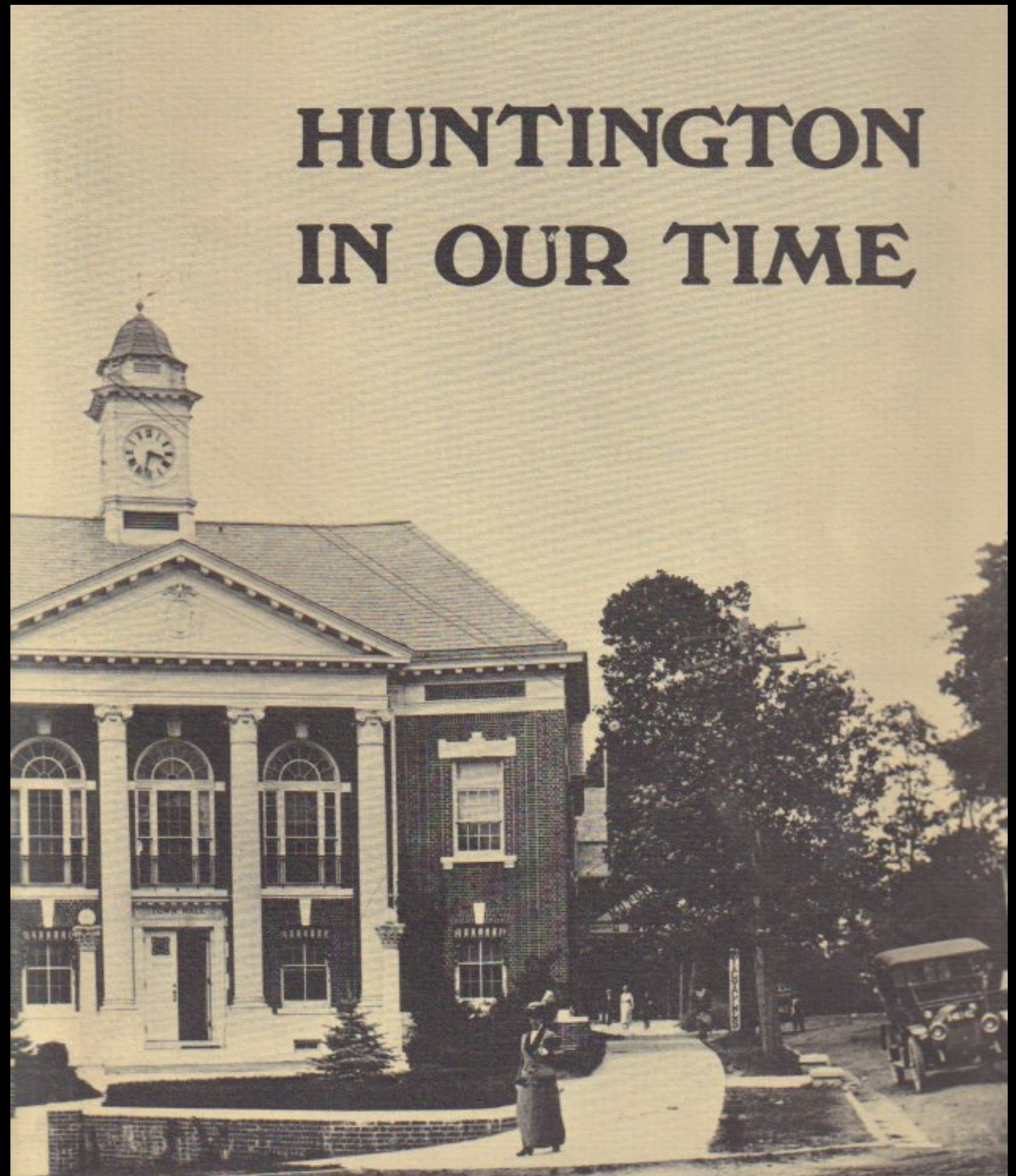
Example

- Book published by Huntington Historical Society in 1974



Example

- Book published by Huntington Historical Society in 1975





Huntington, NY in the 1950's

Small suburban town 40 miles east of NYC



Photo of Huntington, NY in 1960's



Current Photo of Huntington, NY



New York City



New York City



New York City



New York City



Industrial Siding in NYC



Industrial Siding in NYC



Brooklyn Street



Brooklyn Street



Brooklyn Street



Brooklyn Street

Note NYC Skyline in background



Brooklyn Street



Brooklyn Street

Characteristics of these Scenes

- Buildings in Huntington are primarily one and two story buildings.
- Many building have awnings
- Streets are two lane with parking on each side
- NYC photos show tall buildings and streets depicted as “Canyons.”
- NYC streets are also primarily two lane with parking on each side

- **Industrial sidings are amid factories**
- **Buildings show weathering and grime**
- **Tracks are set in road pavement**

Brooklyn Streets

- **Colorful, unique signs**
- **Lots and lots of signs**
- **Some stores are closed with burglar bars**
- **Most buildings are colorfully painted and no more than 3-4 stories high**
- **Many with fire escapes in front**

Elements of an Urban Scene

- **Railroad Tracks**
- **Streets**
- **Buildings**
- **Background**
- **Congestion**

Railroad Tracks

- If railroad tracks are main line with no switching, they can run in background with street scene in foreground. Consider elevating track behind buildings
- If tracks are in industrial sidings or run through town, move to foreground or such that viewers can see trains.
- Operating sessions that involve coupling and uncoupling cars favor tracks that are easily accessible
- For industrial sidings, use smaller gauge track if possible



Railroad Tracks Run Through Center of Main Street in Moorehead City, N.C.



Moorehead City, N.C.



Cross harbor RR in NYC







Cross Harbor RR in NYC

Note different pavements (concrete, cobblestone, and worn off asphalt on top of cobblestone)



Vic Smith's City Edge RR

Note tracks both running up center of foreground street and elevated in background



**Another picture of Vic Smith's City
Edge Railroad**



Another View of Vic Smith's City Edge Railroad



Nostrand Avenue Siding in Brooklyn on my LIRR layout

Mainline tracks are in front at edge of layout. While siding trackage is in background, it is within arm's reach and accessible during operating sessions



Holban Yard On My LIRR Layout

Yard and mainline tracks are in foreground and easily accessible. Urban scene (Flatbush Ave. in Brooklyn) is in background



**Another View of Holban Yard on my
LIRR Layout**



Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn (Before I added the EL)



**Flatbush Avenue with more people and cars
and an overhead EI**



Flatbush Avenue After I Added the EL



Under the EL

Streets

- **Urban streets are often just 2 lane with parking on both sides**
- **There are sidewalks for pedestrians**
- **Parking is at a premium in urban areas so parking meters are common**
- **Utilities are often underground, so manhole covers are in roads and sidewalks**
- **Rainwater has to go somewhere, so curbs should have sewer grates**
- **Streetlights are common in urban areas**

- **Add fire hydrants, phone booths, sidewalk elevators**
- **Add street signs (e.g., speed limit, stop, no U-turn, no right turn)**
- **Add traffic lights at intersections**
- **Add street markings (e.g., RR crossing, crosswalk, double line in center, parking spaces)**
- **Many urban areas often have trees planted along sidewalks**
- **Streets can be a mixture of concrete, asphalt, cobblestone. Try to model what was used in your area**
- **Add people! Lots of people going about their business are indicative of the hustle and bustle of cities.**

Buildings

- **Buildings should be prototypic of the local architecture**
- **Weathering buildings will add realism**
- **Add interiors to storefronts that viewers will see**
- **Use wax paper or other transparent, light-diffusing material on windows**
- **Add signs and awnings to storefronts**
- **Fire Escape Landings and ladders are common on City buildings. Adding these to your building increases realism**



**Trying to Capture the “flavor” of
Huntington, NY in the 1960’s**



New York City on My Layout



**Trying to Capture the “Canyons” of
New York City**

Another Attempt at Creating “Canyons” on my LIRR Layout



High-rise Buildings in New York City on my LIRR Layout





The EL in New York City



Long Island City on My Layout





Jamaica Station on My Layout

Tichy Fire Escapes on a high-rise building



More fire escapes



And more





And more

Signs are an Integral Part of Urban Scenes

- **Signs are designed to attract customers**
- **Therefore, signs are designed to be eye-catching, stand out, and be noticed**

Making Signs

- **An easy way to make unique, eye-catching signs is from internet photos**
- **The signs for the stores on the Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn part of my layout are from photos of real stores on Flatbush Ave. and other parts of New York City (Queens, Manhattan)**

- **Search for photos of storefronts**
- **Find photos with the storefront sign viewed head-on (not angled)**
- **Make sure there are no obstacles (tree branches, telephone or power lines, fire escapes, etc.) in front of the sign**
- **Move the photo into an editing program and crop the photo so everything but the sign is eliminated.**
- **Resize the resulting sign to fit the building you plan to mount it on**
- **Print it out (I use glossy photo paper), cut out the sign, and mount it on stiff cardboard or styrene plastic, then glue it to the storefront**



Storefront Sign from the Internet



Signs made from photos on the internet

- Store Sign from Internet





More signs made from internet photos



And more



**Miller Engineering Theater Marquee
Adapted to Walthers Palace Theater**



Found This One on the Internet!

Consider Adding Icons to Some of Your Signs

- **Small icons of various objects are available in most craft stores**
- **You can identify your industries and then see if appropriate icons are commercially available**
- **Or you can find icons you like, and fashion a store or industry around the icon**

- **Coffee Cup Icon mounted above a cafe**





**Guitar and “Fender” Icons Mounted on
a Rooftop Sign**

- **Beer Mug Icons on a Piels Beer Brewery Sign**



- Doughnut and Coffee Cup Icons Above a Cafe



Backgrounds

- **The intent of backgrounds is to give the illusion of depth**
- **For urban scenes, backgrounds should make the viewer feel the city extends far beyond the actual back of the layout wall**
- **There are numerous ways to do this**

- **smaller scale buildings glued on top of scale building flats**
- **high-rise buildings behind lower, foreground buildings**
- **Building Flats**
- **printed backdrops glued to the back wall of the layout**
- **A combination of all of the above**

Smaller Scale Buildings Glued on Top of scale Building Flats

- **If you model in HO scale, use HO scale building flats against the back wall of your layout, making sure they rise above all foreground buildings**
- **Glue N scale building flats on top of the HO scale building flats.**
- **If you model in O scale, use HO scale building flats on top of the O scale buildings. If you model in N scale, use Z scale building flats**
- **Cut pieces of cardboard or sheet styrene into a trapezoid shape the same height as the N scale building front, paint them several shades darker than the color of the N scale building front, and glue them along one side of the N scale building front**
- **This will give the illusion of depth**





**High-Rise Buildings Behind Lower Foreground Buildings
Rod Stewart's Layout**



**High-Rise Buildings behind Lower
Foreground Buildings**
Vic Smith's City Edge Layout

Building Flats

- Building Flats are photos of individual buildings. Can be mounted on foam board
- Very realistic-looking, very thin, and convey a 3-dimensional picture
- They can be the same scale you are modeling, or a smaller scale to convey distance
- A wide variety are available from Trackside Flats (tracksideflats.com)
- Inexpensive (most are in the \$5-\$8 range)



Pino's La Forchetta
Pizzeria & Restaurant
Pino's La Forchetta - Landmark of Park Slope

NEW
Caporal



Printed Backdrops

- **One way to get the illusion of depth is to use printed backdrops**
- **There are several companies that sell photographic backdrops of a variety of scenes, including industrial areas and cities**
- **These can usually be purchased with or without an adhesive backing and to lengths specified by the customer**



NYC Backdrop From Backdrop Junction in front of Sunnyside Yard on my LIRR

Sky has been cut away from backdrop photo and
then backdrop glued to wall

- **Another option is to find a photograph of a scene you like, and have it made into a custom backdrop**
- **If it is not free, you may have to purchase it from the person who took the photograph**



Brooklyn Skyline Photo from Wikipedia

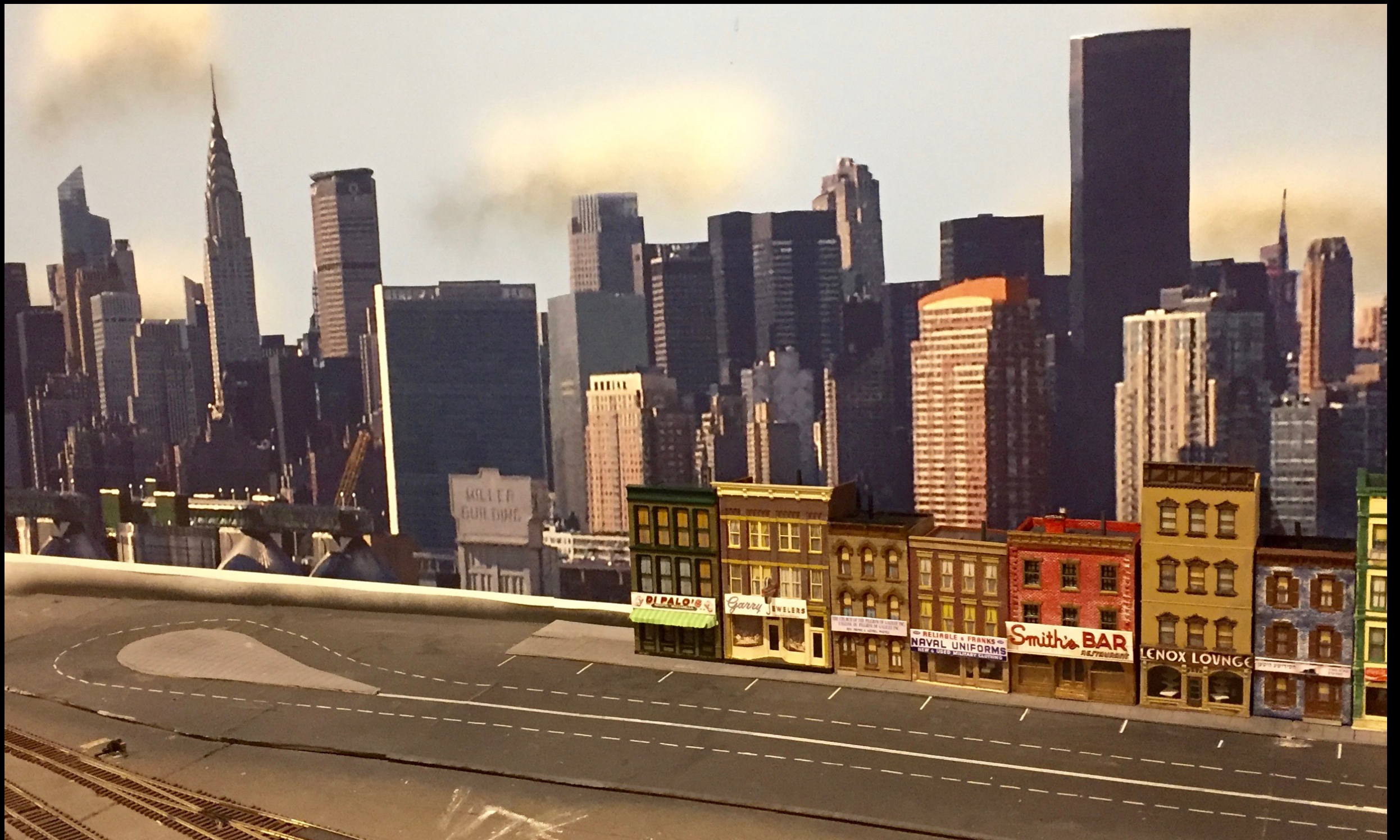
Note that since I only wanted a skyline, I did not need the water or roads in the lower part of the photo



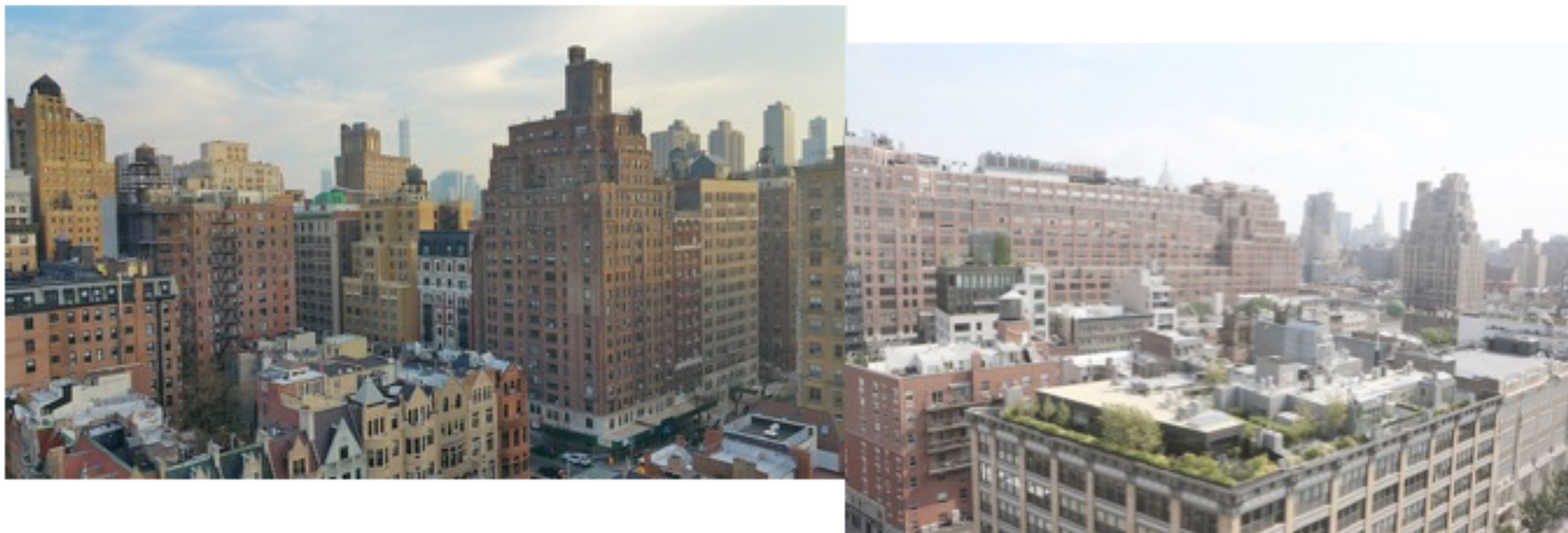
Brooklyn Backdrop Mounted

Note that I cut away the sky, and raised backdrop 3" above the layout track elevation.





Example #2 - NYC Scene



Example #3 - Another Brooklyn Skyline Backdrop Made From Merging Two Photos Found on Pixabay (photos there are free)



**Same Merged Photo with Sky Cut Away
and Mounted 3" Above Top of Benchwork**



MTH Subway Cars Above Flatbush Avenue



**LIRR H16-44 #1505 pulling a string of P-54
“Ping Pong” Coaches into Long Island City**

- **I hope this clinic was useful**
- **The intent was to show examples of how to capture an urban scene.**
- **My layout has over 800 vehicles and over 2,000 figures to help capture the urban environment**
- **How you capture urban scenes on your layout will depend on where you are modeling and the time setting you are modeling**

- More information on Backdrops, including making custom, photographic backdrops is available at <http://potomac-nmra.org/Clinics/BrianSheron/Backdrops-Brian.pdf>
- This clinic is posted at <http://potomac-nmra.org>. Follow the links to “Clinics”
- I can be reached at **BWSheron@mac.com**

**Thank You Very Much for
your Attention**

Questions?