

Framework for the Future

Managing Public Space in New York City for Equity, Safety & Joy



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About Open Plans

Open Plans' mission is to promote a people-first street culture that prioritizes community, active mobility, and connection.

We use grassroots advocacy and policy changes to help transform how people experience New York City's public spaces.

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Contents

- Executive Summary.....1**
- Introduction4**
 - Developments in Public Space Since 20208
- What is Public Space Management..... 14**
 - Defining Public Space Management..... 16
 - Stewardship..... 18
 - Community Coordination..... 20
 - Facilitation.....21
 - Current Public Space Management Actors24
 - Benefits of Public Space Management 30
 - Challenges of Current Public Space Management 40
- Recommendations: A Framework for the Future46**
 - Dispatch Local Public Space Teams to Ensure
Equitable Access to Safe and Accessible Public Space..... 50
 - Change the Way the City Thinks About
Public Space Management 72
 - Make Public Space Partners Feel Like Partners
& Lower the Barrier to Entry76
- Appendix.....84**
- References86**
- Acknowledgments.....90**
 - Interviewees..... 90
 - Image Credits 91

Executive Summary

Local public spaces are vital to city life. They are where neighbors mingle, children play, and New Yorkers are afforded moments of relaxation, joy, and community. Yet, New York City’s few plazas and Open Streets are the exception to the rule of car-dominated streets, and even these exceptions lack a cohesive framework through which they are managed and cared for. Without that framework, well-managed public spaces will never be an expected, integral part of our city landscape. Despite recent progress, the City still prioritizes the movement and storage of vehicles in our public spaces. This narrow approach costs us dearly: we forfeit the proven economic boosts of public space, thousands of potential jobs, and the chance for more vibrant neighborhoods that are welcoming, green, and safe.

It doesn’t have to be this way. **This report outlines a first for New York City – a true framework for managing public space.** We define in concrete terms what public space management is, why it’s important, and the numerous challenges the City’s current approach poses. Then, we present recommendations for creating a real framework for public space management and how to make it a reality. Our approach relies on the creation of, and investment in, a Public Space Team for every Community District in New York City to provide neighborhoods the resources, opportunities, and attention they deserve. This would be paired with reforming the administrative process to cut through red tape and shifting the City’s approach to public space to explicitly include management, not just public space creation. With vision and political will, we can create equitable, safe, and people-centered public spaces for all New Yorkers.

Public Space Management Now

- Public space management can be understood through three pillars: **Stewardship, Community Coordination, and Facilitation**.
- Over the past several years, New York City has made some progress — Open Streets, Open Restaurants, the appointment of the Chief Public Realm Officer, school streets — but this **progress is inadequate and lacks a wider framework through which to view management**.
- **The current system is deeply flawed** — it places undue burden on volunteers and residents to manage their own spaces, creates red tape that is cumbersome to overcome to do something as simple as host a block party, and continues to prioritize the movement and storage of motor vehicle traffic over all other needs.

Why Invest in Public Space Management

- At the most basic level, public space management is **necessary to allow public spaces to function to their fullest potential**.
- A cohesive public space framework would **create thousands of reliable jobs — many entry-level** — and provide a massive boost to our local economies and small businesses.
- Quality public space management increases public and street safety, mitigates the effects of climate change, and fosters health and well-being for residents.
- Well-managed public spaces result in **vibrant communities**, and meaningful public engagement and transparency makes it easier for residents to access and understand their government.
- Robust public space management facilitates joy in our neighborhoods and produces a world class city we continue to be truly proud of.

Recommendations

- **Create a local Public Space Team for each and every Community District in the city;** this team would be composed of a Public Space Facilitator, a Coordinator, and a crew of Stewards to provide leadership, coordination, and care for the public space in their district.
 - **The local Public Space Team would manage and create public spaces with input from residents,** ensuring that high quality public space is distributed equitably across the city, particularly in residential areas, working-class neighborhoods, and neighborhoods of color.

[Learn more on p. 50.](#)
 - Our proposal includes a detailed budgetary analysis which shows that this revolutionary investment in **public space management for every neighborhood in the city can be accomplished for less than 0.3% of the City budget.**

[Learn more on p. 65.](#)
- **Formalize existing City public space roles, create new ones, and convene leaders to understand pain points and concerns** to shift the City's focus from solely public space creation to an approach that includes local public space management.
 - Create a new position of Deputy Commissioner for Public Space Management & Creation at the Department of Transportation, formalize and build out the role of the Chief of Public Realm Officer, and coordinate a shift in all relevant agencies towards local public space projects to **provide the necessary administrative infrastructure to carry out public space management.**
- **Alleviate administrative burdens and cut red tape** in order to empower current public space partners to truly be partners and lower the barrier to entry.
 - Existing, trusted public space partners deserve to be treated as such rather than just another entity that provides services to the city; **easing administrative burdens of permitting and insurance** helps this goal while making it easier for new partners to active public space.



Introduction



Introduction

Good public spaces make a city feel alive; they are where children play, free time is spent, and community is built. They are places where older residents can sit and rest, and where friends can meet and connect. Vibrant, safe, and plentiful public spaces allow people to better enjoy their daily lives, let local businesses thrive, and help our environment. These spaces don't just appear, however. They must be thoughtfully created and managed. And currently, New York City lacks a cohesive framework to create and manage public spaces.

The public realm, more commonly understood as public space, encompasses the space in between buildings: our streets, sidewalks, plazas, and more.* Public space management is the action and framework for managing, maintaining, and stewarding that space. In public space discourse, creation and design are emphasized while management is largely ignored.¹ New York City has historically not carried out robust public space management, and City-led public space projects mostly center large capital projects on commercial corridors made for economic growth, like Broadway Vision. These projects are ambitious and make a more livable city. However, the City has largely neglected the management and maintenance of smaller, more local public spaces, particularly on small commercial corridors and in residential areas.

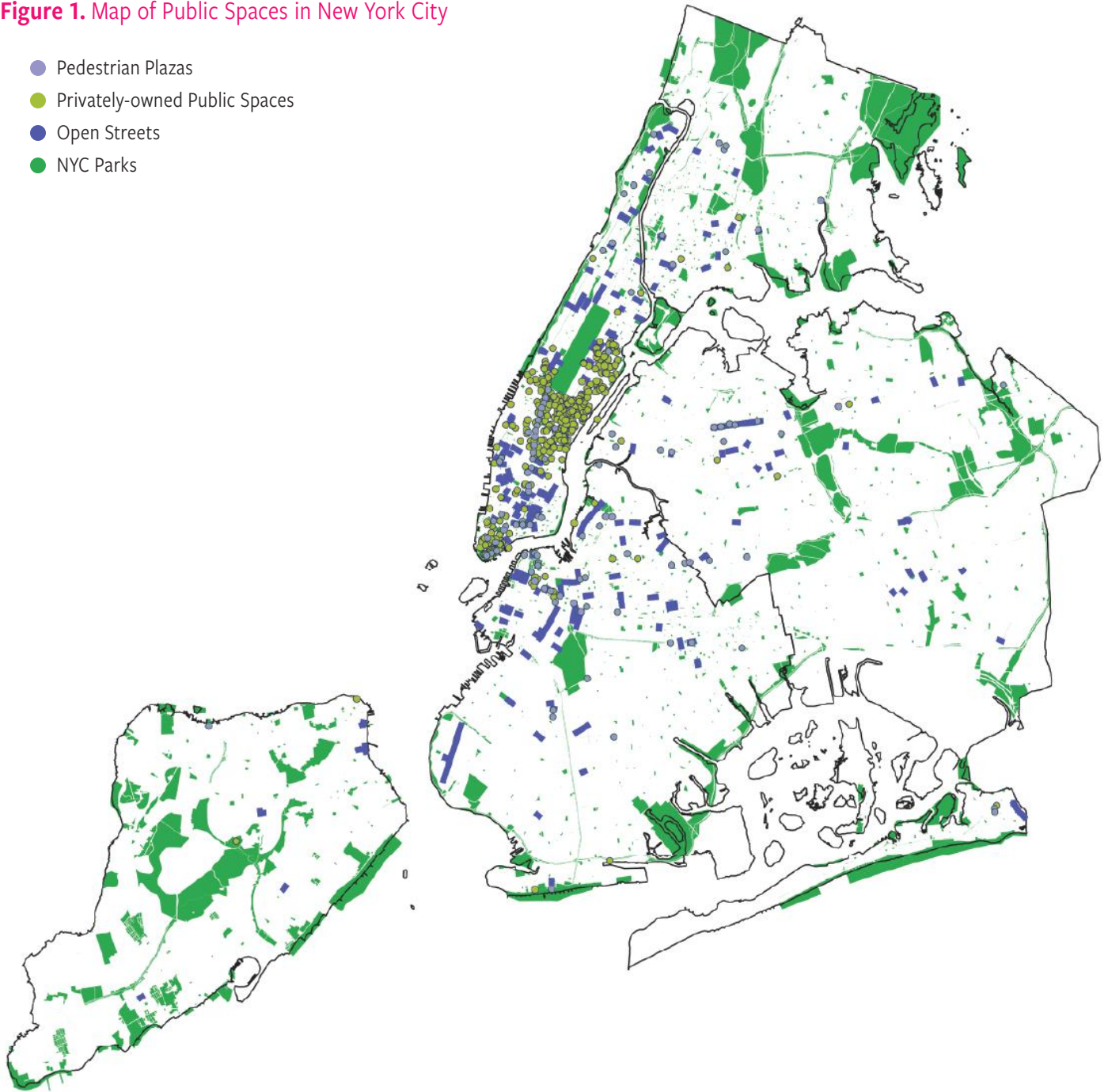
*Parks are also an integral part of the public realm. However, this report focuses on our streets and sidewalks.

▼ Pedestrianized public spaces have proven to be popular, efficient uses of space that allow for connection, community, and relaxation.



Figure 1. Map of Public Spaces in New York City

- Pedestrian Plazas
- Privately-owned Public Spaces
- Open Streets
- NYC Parks



▲ **Source:** Map of Public Spaces in New York City, Realm of Possibility: 15 Ways NYC is Improving Public Space For New Yorkers

Without a framework for management, New Yorkers are robbed of joyful and robust public spaces.

Though, there have been some public space management projects throughout the past two decades that have seeded the concept of management. The Bloomberg Administration created over 50 pedestrian plazas, reconstructed Times Square as an expansive pedestrian space, and provided funds to improve stormwater management. During the de Blasio Administration, the OneNYC Plaza Equity Program was launched to provide much-needed plaza maintenance to under-resourced neighborhoods; the program is now called the Public Space Equity Program, providing resources to many types of public space in addition to plazas. These programs have been a boon to New York City, though have lacked a larger management framework.

Without a framework for management, New Yorkers are robbed of joyful and robust public spaces. The local public spaces that exist are managed in silos, with too much dependence placed on volunteers and nonprofits to manage, organize, and maintain the space. This is an immense individual and group burden, and only those with the time, resources, and dedication can take this task on. This, coupled with the City's approach to public space improvements as marquee economic projects, exacerbates geospatial, racial, and economic inequalities in public space access.

Developments in Public Space Since 2020

2020

Open Streets and Open Streets for Schools launch as pandemic responses. Open Streets explodes in popularity as an easy and safe way for communities to gather.



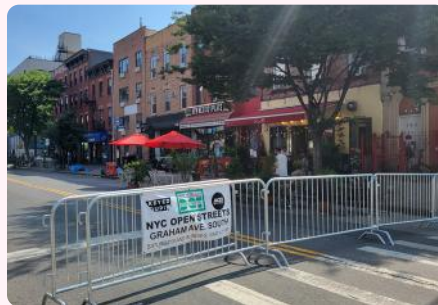


The city launches its first curbside dining program, Open Restaurants, offering a lifeline to struggling business owners and diners in need of safe options.



Several blocks along Fifth Avenue in Midtown become a holiday Open Street. It's an immediate success, relieving congested sidewalks and creating a festive atmosphere for shoppers and tourists.

2022



Popular Open Streets begin to struggle as pandemic funding dries up and volunteers experience burnout from the heavy burden of managing these spaces on their own. The program shrinks from 86 miles to just 20.



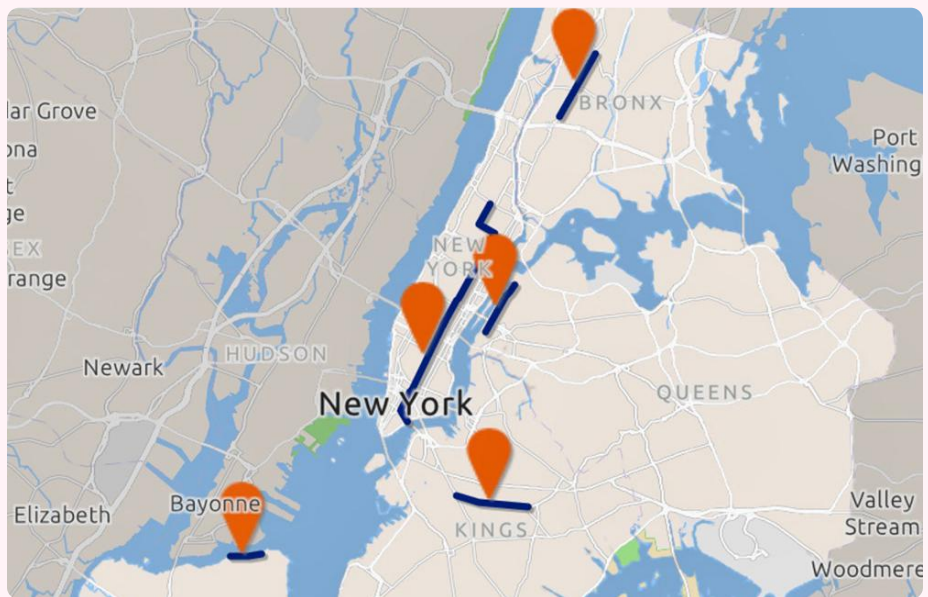
DOT launches Trick-or-Streets to open streets up for children to safely celebrate Halloween and Dia de los Muertos.

2023

Mayor Adams announces Ya-Ting Liu as the city's first-ever Chief Public Realm Officer. Liu and a small staff liaise with agencies, pursue streamlining policies, and spearhead big picture projects like the permanent Open Restaurants program, Meatpacking District and Broadway Junction redesigns, 5th Avenue Holiday Streets, and completing Broadway Vision.



Summer Streets expands to all boroughs, allowing residents across the city to reclaim space in their neighborhoods, even if only for a few days.



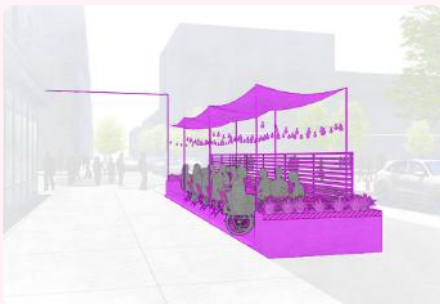
Trick-or-Streets and the Fifth Avenue Holiday Street are expanded.



There are tangible and intangible benefits we lose out on by lacking a framework for public space management. Well-managed public spaces reduce crime, access to public space improves public health outcomes, and public spaces drive commercial growth for small businesses. Public space management generates a significant number of quality, stable jobs, both from City initiatives and by creating additional private sector jobs through the stimulation of the local economy. Less easy to measure are the impacts on our sense of community. Without local public spaces, New Yorkers are less likely to go out and be in spaces with their neighbors. Children are less likely to play, neighbors are less likely to chat, and our neighborhoods become less vibrant and dynamic places to live. Well-maintained community amenities, supplementary sanitation, and beautiful green space all make a neighborhood feel more like home.

With a framework for local public space management, we envision a more livable city.

With a framework for local public space management, we envision a more livable city. Streets would be safe for all users of all ages and abilities. Streets, playgrounds, and plazas would be clean and provide children, parents, and neighbors a place to play and relax. The space at the curb would be allocated to benefit all New Yorkers. Residents could be involved in their neighborhoods without being forced to take on undue burdens. Pedestrian streets, green markets, Open Streets, wider sidewalks, block parties, school streets, outdoor cafes, and other amenities would not be concentrated in wealthy, white neighborhoods, but be available for all New Yorkers. This future is possible with a cohesive framework for managing public space and the financial investment to implement it.



Open Restaurants becomes permanent as Dining Out NYC. Despite calls for a year-round curbside program, it is limited to April through November.



DOT announces a \$30 million allocation for Open Streets, prioritizing new programs in underserved neighborhoods. It's an important step toward much-needed City support.





Welcome to the
31st Ave Open Street

Walk | Bike | Meet | Play | Dine | Shop Local!

Pedestrian & bicycle access only.
No motor vehicles and no parking allowed.

To learn more, visit www.31stAveOpenStreet.org

URBAN FARM STAND
Celtic | Sun-Kissed Cider | Local | Apple Pie | 100% Sugar

- 100% Organic
- Locally Sourced
- Fresh Daily
- Seasonal
- Sustainable
- Eco-Friendly



In our city, there have been capital public space projects planned and executed, and some slow steps in the right direction. Still, over the past several decades, progress has been halting. Programs like Open Restaurants and Open Streets show that the Administration and Department of Transportation (DOT) can quickly act to transform our city's streets, but for the most part, they do not. Instead, public space management as a whole continues to be fractured, siloed, and mostly non-existent. While some community groups have found ways to manage local public space and organize with neighbors about the importance of it, they have done so in the face of the structural, administrative, and financial barriers that stand in their way. And, more than that, our city's streets continue to be oriented towards the movement of vehicular traffic rather than the movement of people.

No one person or entity is responsible for this situation. Decades of policy decisions and bureaucratic inertia have led us here. But it doesn't have to be this way. This report evolves and iterates upon our 2020 report A Proposal for the Office of Public Space Management, refocusing recommendations to better fit the current landscape. It explains what public space management is and what it could be if we are ambitious enough to seize the moment and make real, structural change. By creating a truly local framework to manage public space in the form of a local Public Space Team, shifting the lens through which our city agencies view public space management, and empowering current partners and making them truly feel like partners while lowering the barriers to entry, we can create joyful, safe, and abundant public spaces all across New York City.

2024



Summer Streets' hours of operation are expanded to 3PM.



The Chief Public Realm Officer releases Realm of Possibility, a report outlining Liu's agenda and priorities for cutting red tape, improving New Yorkers' experience of public space, and building equity. There are nods to management, like a Clean Team that provides sanitation on critical corridors, but it falls short of reshaping the city's approach to public space management.



What is the future of New York City's public spaces?

What is Public Space Management?





What is Public Space Management?

Defining Public Space Management

Public spaces have many moving parts. First, there is the land itself. Whether it is a street, a sidewalk, a plaza, or something else completely, that space is operated by one or multiple parties. Then, there is the physical infrastructure: permanent or temporary street furniture (benches, tables, chairs, umbrellas, trash bins), green infrastructure (tree pits, bioswales, planters), mobility infrastructure (bus and bike lanes, micromobility corrals). Finally, there is what happens in the space — not only the planned events and programming, but also the administrative and budgetary tasks that make them happen.

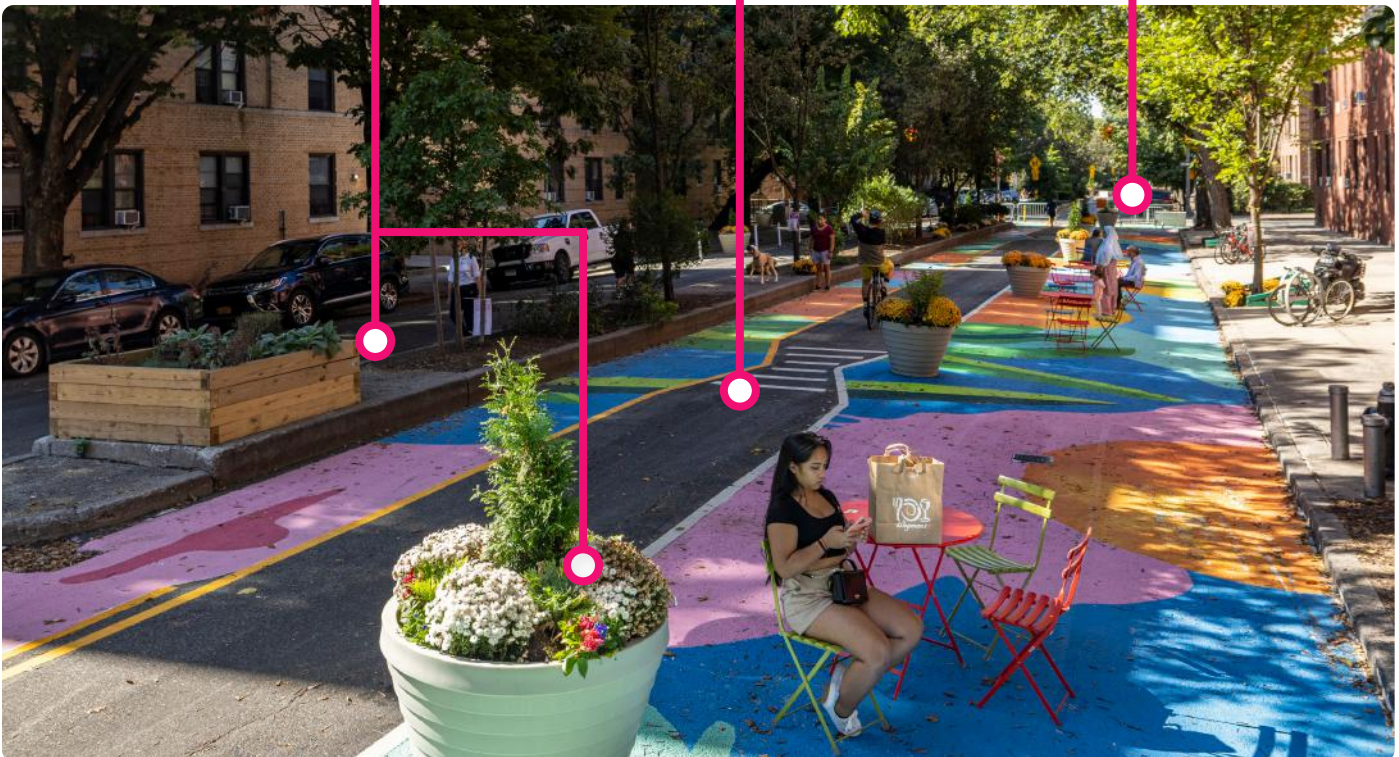
▼ Just one slice of public space can hold so many uses and functions, as can be seen here on the 34th Avenue Open Street.

Green infrastructure
tree pits, bioswales,
and planters

Mobility infrastructure
corrals, micromobility,
and bus lanes

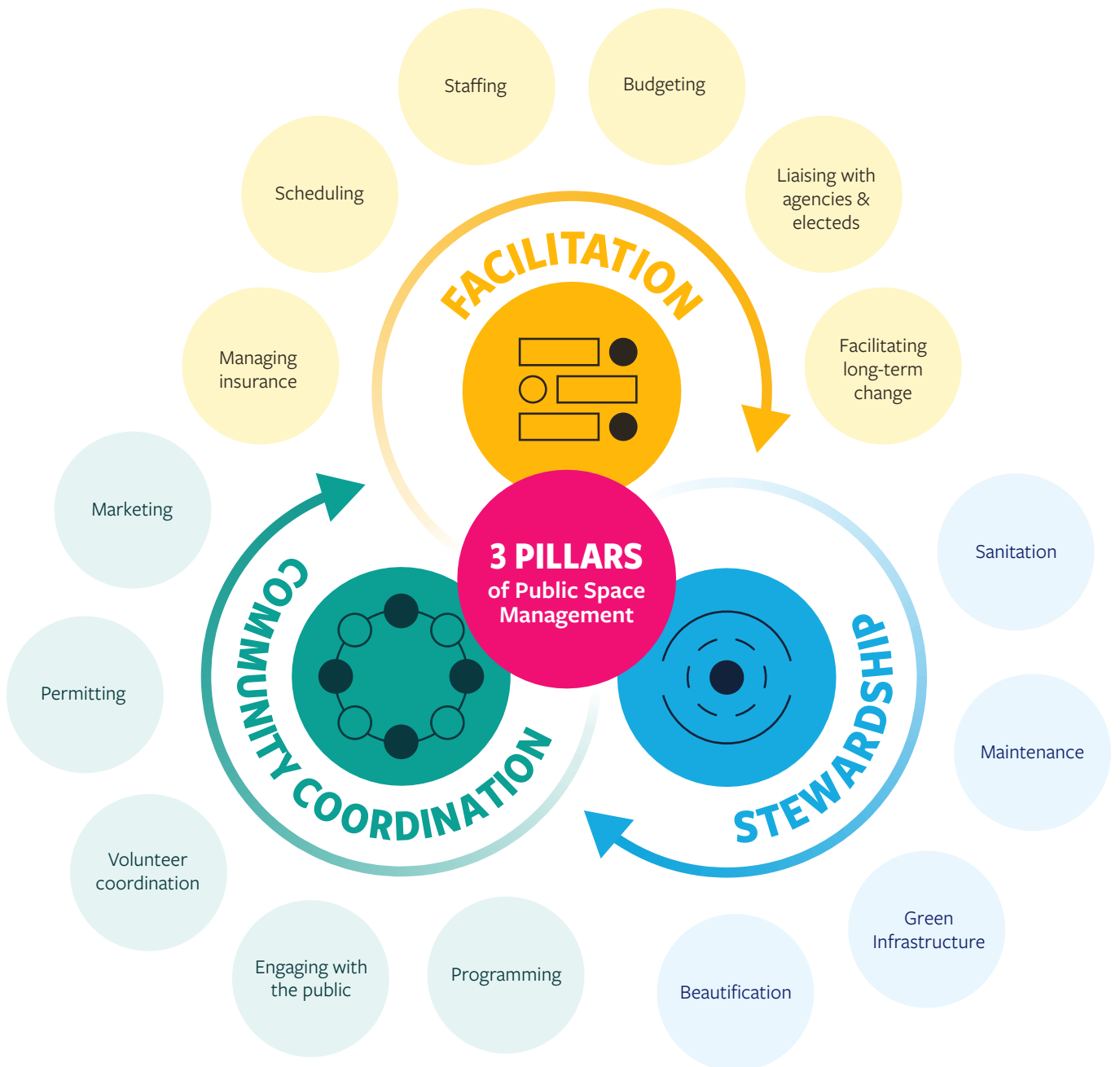
Permanent & temporary physical infrastructure
median, tables, chairs,
and trash bins

Events, programming, administrative, and budgetary tasks



The people who currently help manage these many moving parts take on a broad assortment of tasks, ranging from minute details to long-term planning. To more clearly categorize these duties, we have divided the concept of public space management into three key pillars: **Stewardship, Community Coordination, and Facilitation**. Each pillar is defined by both the actions within it and the time frame in which it happens, although this list is not exhaustive. It is important to note that while these pillars are separate, they have significant overlap with each other as each pillar relies on the other to function.

Figure 2. Three Pillars of Public Space Management



Stewardship

Stewardship is the day-to-day, on-the-ground maintenance of a public space and all its infrastructure. Stewardship is essential in making sure a public space works well for its users and remains inviting.

Sanitation

A space that has garbage lying around, whether it be in the form of litter or trash bags, is unsightly, unsanitary, and a potential barrier to mobility; garbage on the streets and sidewalks also attracts rats. Additionally, if snow isn't properly prepared for or promptly removed, it poses mobility and safety hazards.

Functions: litter removal, trash pick-up, containerized trash, maintaining trash receptacles, snow preparation and removal, ensuring curb uses can be carried out

Maintenance

The hard infrastructure of a space must be in place and in good condition. This not only includes street infrastructure like benches, boulders, and street barricades, but also the street and sidewalk itself.

Functions: placing and removing temporary infrastructure (barricades, movable tables and chairs), ensuring interactive infrastructure remains usable (bike racks/bike share, LinkNYC, benches, street lighting), making sure the street, curb, and sidewalk are accessible to all users

Green Infrastructure

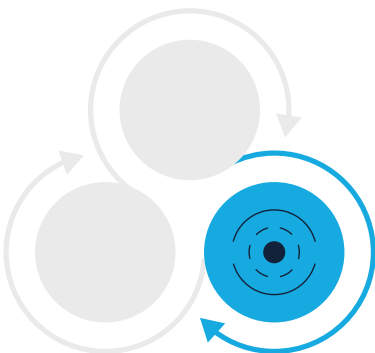
Green infrastructure is essential in helping to combat and mitigate the effects of climate change while also making a place more lively and beautiful. Particularly important for New York City, green infrastructure can increase flood resilience and alleviate the heat island effect.

Functions: maintaining bioswales, tree pits, and other urban horticulture to allow the vegetation in them to thrive and mitigate flood waters, fostering trees and greenery that relieve residents of oppressive heat

Beautification

A space should be well-maintained, clean, and beautiful. All other functions also feed into the beauty of a place.

Functions: removing trash from the space, maintaining green infrastructure to make the space feel alive, maintaining any street art, cleaning vandalized surfaces, and replacing vandalized street infrastructure



Keeping Neighborhoods Clean

Local supplemental sanitation and beautification is crucial in ensuring residents feel the effects of public space management in their everyday lives. Almost all BIDs provide such services — usually taking up the majority of their budgets — and many other local public partners use a variety of volunteer and contracted supplemental sanitation services. Discussed in the **Labor** section of this report, the City contracts with organizations like ACE, the Hort, and others to provide some support. The Chief Public Realm Officer has also announced plans to create a Clean Team to mobilize in commercial corridors without BIDs and in non-commercial corridors.²

Recently, the Sanitation Foundation engaged in a pilot called the Clean City Alliance to provide supplemental sanitation services to underserved commercial corridors. In Bed-Stuy and Crown Heights, Brooklyn, teams were dispatched every day from 8 AM to 4 PM on 50 blocks. These blocks included major corridors like Nostrand and Utica Avenues, and a whopping 130,000 pounds of litter were collected just from these corridors. Residents and business owners remarked at the difference the sanitation services made and wanted such services to be permanent — showing that consistent and quality public space management makes a difference.³



Community Coordination

Community Coordination is the community-centered management of public space. Much of Community Coordination is making sure that a public space is activated and that the residents and users of a public space are heard.

Programming

Curating and arranging programming makes a public space thrive. Events like dance lessons or an artist's exhibition bring together neighbors to activate a space, and more consistent programming like weekly tai-chi classes, monthly legal assistance, or holiday celebrations provide stable and reliable engagement.

Functions: finding appropriate and reliable programming, finding an appropriate space for the programming, performing outreach to determine what programming is wanted, working with the volunteer or contractor who is conducting the programming to arrive and carry it out, creating a programming calendar

Engaging with the public

The managers of public spaces are often on the ground, hearing directly from the public every day about the good and bad aspects of the spaces. Oftentimes, a "public space manager" does not view their role so formally. To them, "public engagement" means simply chatting with their neighbor about the public space they help out at while swinging by the bodega, or walking their dog.

Functions: taking feedback from those in the space, engaging those who may be unsure of how space should be allocated, articulating the benefits and importance of public space, connecting residents with resources

Volunteer coordination

Oftentimes, volunteers are essential in making sure a public space operates well. In the current system, volunteers are too often relied upon due to a lack of resources. However, in an ideal system, volunteers aren't relied on, but are invited to be more invested in their community.

Functions: recruiting potential volunteers in and outside of the public space, assigning tasks to volunteers, taking in volunteer feedback on the functions of the public space

Permitting

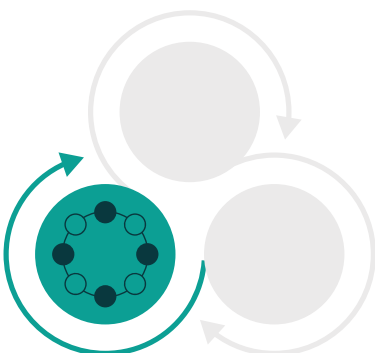
In order to use a public space for most events and activations (i.e. programming and activity), permission from the City is necessary.

Functions: knowledge of which permit to submit when, ensuring a space complies with City standards for events, (often) meeting the current requirement of liability insurance

Marketing

Without informing the community about the availability and programming in a given public space, it can be difficult to attract neighbors to patronize a space.

Functions: posting on social media, graphic design, sending out newsletters, posting flyers and signs around the neighborhood



Facilitation

Facilitation is the high-level, problem-solving aspect of public space management. Long-term planning, management, and vision are essential in making sure a public space has staying power.

Facilitating long-term change

Many public spaces go through a number of iterations in collaboration with the public and City (creating plazas, Street Improvement Projects, etc).

Functions: taking meaningful community feedback on ways the neighborhood could improve, coordinating with the City based on the need and desire for change (bike/bus lanes, road diets, creating plazas and Street Improvement Projects, improving and modernizing curb management)

Liaising with agencies and elected officials

Because public space partners are the caretakers of a given place, they are often in close contact with the relevant agencies (DOT, Parks, Sanitation, SBS, etc.) to discuss how to improve the public space.

Functions: informing agencies about issue areas, communicating feedback generated from users of the public space

Budgeting

Without a proper budget and funding, a public space cannot thrive to its fullest potential.

Functions: cost analysis, fiscal planning

Staffing

People are essential in making public space work. Presently, public spaces are too reliant on unpaid volunteers.

Functions: finding paid staff to ensure stability in a space, coordinating committed and eager volunteers to foster community and engagement

Scheduling

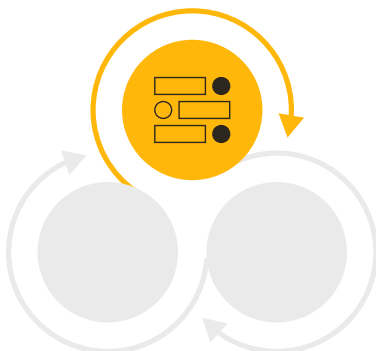
If the public space isn't open all days or times of the year (a seasonal Open Street, for example), it's important to plan around peak timing.

Functions: understanding when it's best for a space to open and close based on weather and other seasonal factors, adapting year-to-year to increased demand

Managing insurance

The City currently requires public space partners to have liability policies at a minimum of \$1 million — a financial burden that impedes partners in creating more vibrant programming — for many events and activities.

Functions: managing the purchase and management of liability insurance, collaborating with the City when exemptions are allowed

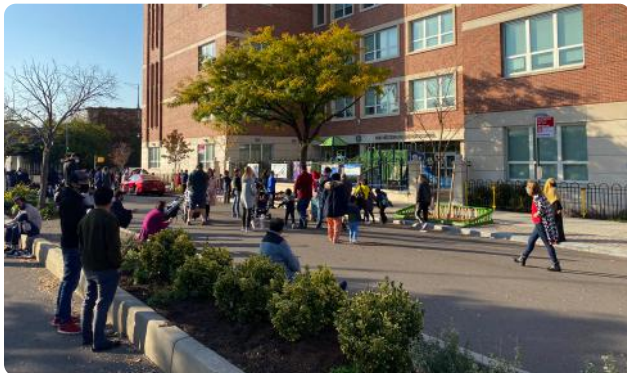


New York City's Gold Standard for Public Space

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 34th Avenue in Jackson Heights, Queens was opened up to neighbors as an Open Street and has served as a vital community hub ever since. Since its founding, the Open Street has grown to be the largest in New York City — stretching 26 blocks — due to the commitment of its volunteers and, eventually, City support. Strong leaders like co-founders Jim Burke and Nuala O'Doherty, along with dozens of volunteers under the 34th Avenue Open Streets Coalition, manage the street. Throughout the many iterations of 34th Avenue, this management has included: organizing programming, picking up trash, moving barricades and furniture, partnering with local non-profits, setting up new funding mechanisms, finding places to store street furniture, arranging classes to teach new immigrants about their rights and city regulations, and much more. The programming is vibrant and diverse, ranging from cumbia classes to kid-centered programming teaching math skills, to holiday celebrations of the Lunar New Year and Dia de los Muertos. Friends of 34th Avenue Linear Park, now known as Alliance for Paseo Park, was

also instrumental in the Open Streets' founding, as well as presenting a vision for how the corridor could evolve into a linear park; Jackson Heights ranks amongst the lowest in park space per capita in the city.

The leadership of these community-led groups was recognized by DOT and the City when they provided them with the services of the Horticultural Society (the Hort). Instead of relying on volunteers to do the sanitation, maintenance, and moving of the barricades and furniture, the Hort now carries out those duties — a massive lift off of organizers' shoulders. This allows organizers to focus much more on Community Coordination and Facilitation (as defined in **Defining Public Space Management**). In 2023, the space was designated and co-named Paseo Park (meaning a stroll or walk in Spanish), and is being centered around pedestrians and cyclists. The management of 34th Avenue/Paseo Park is a model for what public space management could look like everywhere: strong leadership, community involvement, and a City-funded stewardship team.⁴



► Vibrant programming on the 34th Avenue Open Street can provide assistance for community members — through clothing drives or ESL classes — and foster stronger bonds.



Current Public Space Management Actors

While there is currently no holistic structure for public space management, many actors attempt to fill the gaps in various ways. In many cases, management is off-loaded to various stakeholders and neighborhood advocates other than the City that have little capacity or ability to adequately perform this function. The various stakeholders include:

DOT

Department of
Transportation

BIDs

Business Improvement
Districts

Open Streets & CBOs

Open Streets &
Community-Based
Organizations

Public

Mayor's Office / CPRO

Mayor's Office / Chief
Public Realm Officer

CBs

Community Boards

Council Members

City Council

SAPO

Street Activity Permit
Office

SBS

Department of Small
Business Service

DSNY

Department of
Sanitation

MTA

Metropolitan
Transportation
Authority

DEP

Department of
Environmental
Protection

Parks

Department of Parks &
Recreation

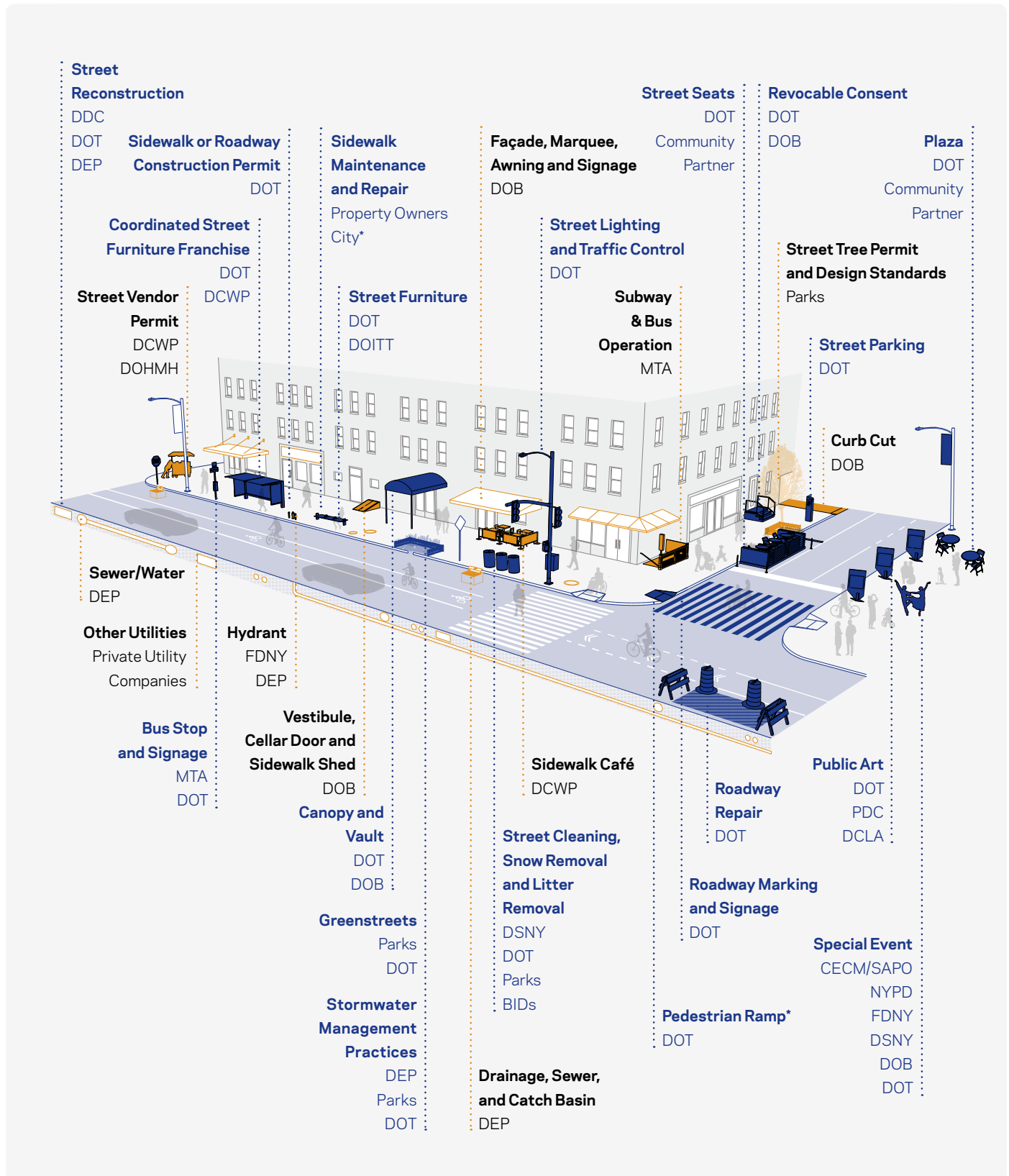
NYPD

New York Police
Department

DOB

Department of Buildings

Figure 3. Agency Roles on the City's Streets



▲ Source: Agency Roles on the City's Streets, New York City Department of Transportation Street Design Manual

The City

The Administration and agencies serve as the centralized location for the regulation of public space. The Chief Public Realm Officer (CPRO) is located within the Mayor’s Office, as is the Street Activity Permit Office (SAPO) which allows organizations and individuals to arrange street activations. DOT has jurisdiction over our city’s streets, and is ultimately responsible for most uses and activities within them. The Department of Sanitation services many public spaces, and the City has contracts with the ACE Program and the Horticultural Society of New York to perform scattered maintenance. Recently, the CPRO announced plans for a Clean Team that would be dispatched by DOT and service corridors that aren’t served by Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).⁵ Aside from the Administration, individual City Council Members provide discretionary funds for supplemental sanitation and beautification services in their district.

While these functions are aspects of public space management, **the City lacks an integrated framework to tackle these functions and empower local public space management, leading to a piecemeal approach.** This approach insufficiently meets the needs of neighborhoods around our city.

Business Improvement Districts

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are the incubators for some of the most innovative and well-managed public spaces in the city. BIDs are a public-private partnership made up of local businesses (primarily funded by a tax on properties within the BID’s boundaries called a special assessment), with the goal of managing and maintaining the area to stimulate business. Many BIDs across the city have realized that public space management is not only good for communities, but good for business as well. They use their resources in order to hire staff and contractors to perform Stewardship, Community Coordination, and Facilitation functions. However, **BIDs cover just 4% of the city’s streets and sidewalks, and very few working-class neighborhoods — and no residential neighborhoods — have BIDs.**⁶ Further, different sized BIDs have different resources and priorities.

BIDs have proven to be an effective executor of public space management, but they tend to serve wealthy commercial districts leaving the rest of the city without public space management.



Volunteer Groups

The City often partners with and relies on volunteer groups to perform essential public space management functions in addition to organizing with neighbors in support of public space to get projects off the ground. While this is particularly true for Open Streets groups, coalitions, and nonprofits, other organizations like “Friends of” and other independent local organizations are often relied on to almost entirely manage their public space. While many groups step up to this challenge, in many cases it is too heavy a burden and space ends up not being managed at all.

Volunteer groups typically lack the resources and people power to sustain a public space over time without the City stepping in to assist them.

Other Actors

There are a number of other formal and informal entities that participate in public space management. However, the majority of them focus primarily on sanitation and maintenance rather than robust programming or other management functions.

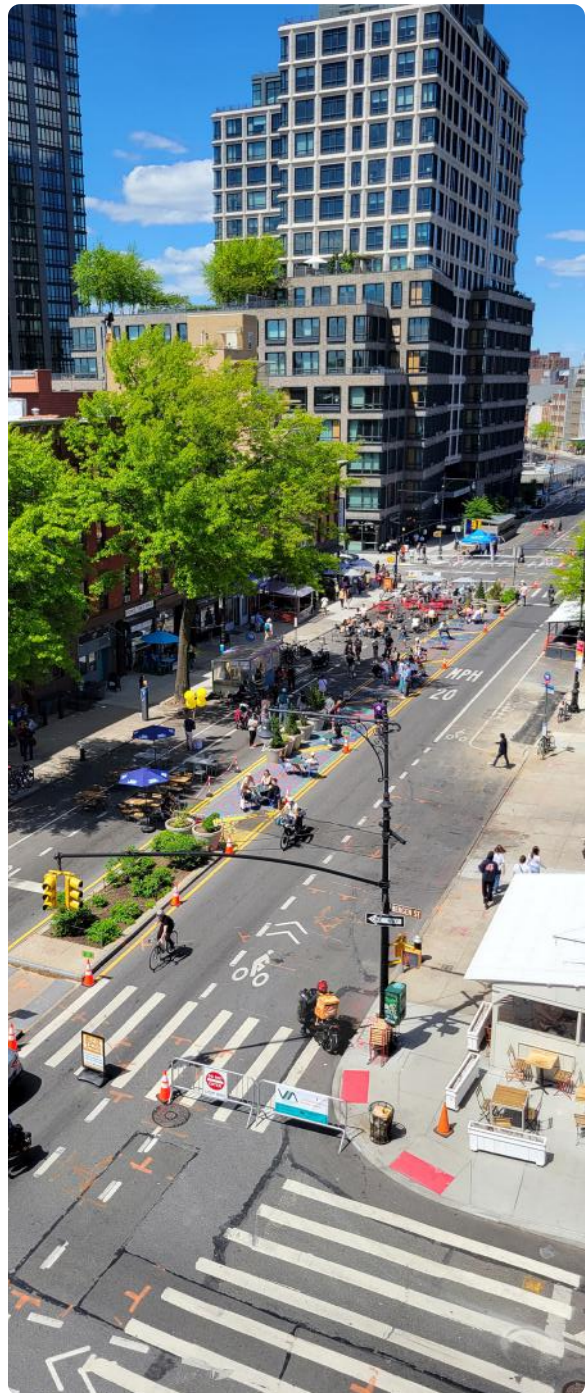
- Some parks alliances and conservancies, while more focused on parks management, have expanded their reach to also manage the surrounding streetscape.
- Merchants’ Associations are another type of organization that can bring public space management to a commercial corridor.
- Block associations — a collection of neighbors on their block that organize into a formal organization — can place time, effort, and money into managing their space.
- Buildings, especially buildings with doormen or superintendents, often become key caretakers of the public space immediately outside their building. All building owners are legally responsible for some functions like shoveling snow, but can also end up maintaining planters or other beautification efforts. While this can work well in places with the resources to do so, the majority of buildings do not have such resources.
- Individual New Yorkers manage the space around them by removing trash and maintaining green infrastructure. This presents the same issue as buildings managing space; it creates a widely different experience of the streets and sidewalks across the city in areas where residents have the resources and free time to perform maintenance.

Shrinking Assistance = Shrinking Public Spaces

Without sufficient monetary, administrative, and operational assistance, well-loved and volunteer-led public spaces often have no choice but to shrink or cease operation completely. This was shown to be a trend with the Open Streets program; the miles of Open Streets shrunk from 86 to 20 in just two years.⁷ This is largely due to a lack of systemic public investment in volunteer-led public spaces, and a lack of a public space management framework.

There are examples of such closures and shrinkages in the 2024 season. Instead of running from late April to October, the Vanderbilt Open Street was forced to only run from May to September with fewer Sunday hours — resulting in 40% fewer operating days and hours. In another case, the 5th Avenue BID in Park Slope completely pulled out of its management of the 5th Avenue Open Street, leaving it in limbo.⁸ Eventually, the 5th Avenue Open Streets Merchants Association agreed to manage the Open Street, but it shrunk from 15 blocks to just four.⁹ Both the Prospect Heights Neighborhood Development Council (the operators of the Vanderbilt Open Street) and the 5th Avenue BID specifically cited a lack of funding from DOT as their reasoning for shrinking and pulling out of management respectively.¹⁰

▶ The vibrancy that Open Streets can provide is sorely undercut by the lack of consistent funding provided by the City.



Benefits of Public Space Management

The benefits of public space and public space management are often presented as self-evident: they boost the economy, help the environment, and improve belonging, among other things. Below we present academic studies, case studies, and other evidence to support these claims concretely. While the truth of the matter is that there has not been much academic focus on public space management (as has been noted by researchers many times) there is still a wealth of evidence that shows that quality public spaces have a multitude of benefits.¹¹



Economy

New York City’s small businesses benefit greatly from urban public spaces and public space management. In their analysis of the Open Streets program, DOT found that corridors with Open Streets outperformed nearby control corridors in sales growth, number of businesses that stayed open, and new restaurants and bars on the corridor. For example, Ditmars Boulevard between 33rd Street and 36th Street in Astoria (which featured the Ditmars Open Street) saw a 44% increase in taxable sales while a similar nearby corridor without an Open Street saw a 7% decrease in taxable sales.¹² And in a DOT analysis of sustainable streets, Willoughby Street in Brooklyn saw an 18% increase of pedestrian volume and combined sales 47% higher than the baseline after a pedestrian plaza was installed.¹³



Public space partners help too; the mere presence of BIDs (and potentially other public space management entities) is a revenue generator, as commercial real estate sale prices rose from 15.8-31.2% in BID areas.¹⁴ Public space management creates vibrant and successful business corridors, with 50% more time spent in areas with creative placemaking interventions.¹⁵

Quality, abundant, and green public spaces are also a good investment and good for the economy at large. There are a host of economic benefits that public spaces create including increased investment, business retention, employment opportunities (detailed in the **Labor** section), support for tourism,

and residential and commercial property values.¹⁶ Green infrastructure in public spaces also provides economic benefits, increasing foot traffic and reducing overall energy consumption.¹⁷ The simple presence of street trees themselves create enormous economic benefits. As a result of their aesthetic, amenity, shade, water-regulating, carbon reduction, and air quality benefits, the mean benefit of street trees is \$129 per tree per year, with a benefit-to-cost ratio of 5.43 (i.e. for every dollar spent, \$5.43 is generated).¹⁸ That means that the existing 666,000 street trees planted in New York City create \$86 million in benefits a year, with the City committed to planting thousands more in the Realm of Possibility report.¹⁹

Labor

Citywide public space management would also provide thousands of stable jobs for those who need them most. The cohesive framework we present would generate over a hundred City jobs along with thousands of contracted workers carrying out the on-the-ground maintenance (i.e. Public Space Facilitators, Coordinators, and Stewards, further described in **A Budgetary Proposal for Local Public Space Teams**). Existing programs provide a good look into what such a jobs program would look like in practice.



Many careers in public space management have a low barrier-to-entry, and can provide all kinds of New Yorkers, particularly our most vulnerable New Yorkers, with stability and financial independence.

► Investing in public space stewardship creates jobs, fosters community, and demonstrates good public space management.

The Association of Community Employment Programs for the Homeless (ACE) works with individuals who have experienced homelessness, incarceration, and addiction and provides them with job training and employment for long-term stability. Recently, they have taken on a sanitation initiative where they employ New Yorkers to maintain public spaces across the city. In their 2023 Annual Report, they detail that over 140 people were employed full-time in that program which cleaned 2,000 block faces, collected 14 million pounds of trash, and removed 8,500 instances



of illegal postings and graffiti.²⁰ Another similar type of program offered by the nonprofit Goddard Riverside — called the Green Keepers — works with people who are (re)entering the workforce by employing them to do local horticulture and sanitation.²¹ Many careers in public space management have a low barrier-to-entry, and can provide, particularly to our most vulnerable New Yorkers, stability and financial independence. Under a cohesive public space management framework, these beloved programs would continue to exist, receive more funding, and be complimented by a citywide stewardship program.

The City has begun to invest in aspects of public space management, and there is more to do. In March 2024, DOT announced further funding to existing partners the Horticultural Society of New York (the Hort) and Klen Space, \$27 million and \$3 million respectively.²² Before this investment, the Hort already employed dozens of people to maintain public spaces, supporting 70 public spaces, 125+ city blocks, and 200,000 square feet of public plaza space.²³

Private sector jobs are created as a result of investing in public space management as well. Good public space management has a multiplier effect on the labor market, creating additional jobs as the economy is stimulated by investment. Small businesses on commercial corridors seeing increased sales and restaurants taking advantage of outdoor dining may hire additional staff.

The number of jobs created as a result of public space management depends on the level of investment — which is why it is vital to fund quality and abundant public space management.

Community & Civic Infrastructure



When people have green public spaces in their neighborhood, they have a higher self-perception of quality of life.

When people are surrounded by quality public spaces, they are more connected to their communities and their city at-large. When people have green public spaces in their neighborhood, they have a higher self-perception of quality of life.²⁴ There is also more social cohesion — a sense of community, trust, and acceptance — in neighborhoods that have quality and green streetscapes and public spaces.²⁵ And in communities of color that have historically experienced disinvestment in public space, public spaces have the opportunity to serve as a source of community pride, an opportunity to highlight artists of color and build community wealth as was seen in Reimagining the Civic Commons' public space investments in Chicago, Detroit, and Memphis.²⁶

Public space is also key in reducing loneliness. The COVID-19 pandemic created distance between us and our neighbors, and sparked a loneliness epidemic that is still felt today. Public space is an important part of creating connection and social life, and plays a key role in remedying this epidemic. Research



▲ Cultural programming provides an opportunity for neighbors to feel seen, and engage in their practices in and with their community.

▶ Activating public spaces provides a much needed third space for people to use.



found that the better managed a public space was, the more effective it was, and that in spaces with volunteer stewardship, there were fewer lonely visitors.²⁷ Creating opportunities for residents to volunteer in their public spaces is essential for building community and a sense of communal pride.

Good public engagement in public space management breaks down bureaucracy, provides neighbors with reliable ways to provide feedback and receive assistance, and allows for a more transparent and accessible government. Instead of being bogged down by excessive bureaucratic forms to provide feedback, direct public engagement through agency employees allows the neighborhood to be shaped in the way residents want it to be. Creating and maintaining public spaces should be easy for residents. And, when there is a management framework in place, it is. Good public space management means that residents do not need institutional knowledge to have their voices heard or be involved with the public spaces in their neighborhoods.

Safety

People-centric public spaces and streets increase the physical safety of residents. Research has shown that by implementing aspects of Complete Streets — traffic calming measures, pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure, and other street improvements — streets become tangibly safer for cyclists and pedestrians.²⁸ Many of the most innovative and community-led public spaces in New York City have reclaimed space and created more pedestrian and micromobility-friendly spaces. Paseo Park, also known as the 34th Avenue Open Street in Jackson Heights, Queens, evolved from a community-led effort into



PASEO PARK AFTER 2021 STREET IMPROVEMENTS

Studies have shown that walkable, green neighborhoods are less likely to experience both property and violent crimes.

↓ 72%
reduction in injuries

↓ 55%
reduction in crashes

► Beautiful, well-managed public spaces can and should exist and provide their benefits across our city.



► The expansion of car-free infrastructure and public spaces helps reduce car dependency and our impact on the climate crisis.



a 26-block linear park. Along the way it has adopted vibrant programming for residents, as well as walkability and cyclist improvements.²⁹ As a result, crashes and injuries along 34th Avenue between 69th Street and Junction Boulevard fell 55% and 72% respectively in 2021 when compared to pre-pandemic numbers — with these impacts being present even outside of the Open Streets' operating hours.³⁰ Clean streets also increase street safety; studies find that litter increases the frequency and severity of crashes, with greater risk to those using micromobility, and that 25,000 crashes per year in North America can be attributed to litter.³¹ Community-led public space initiatives have the opportunity to improve our neighborhoods and the safety on our streets.

In addition to street safety, quality public spaces are also effective in reducing neighborhood crime and increasing perceived safety. Studies have shown that walkable, green neighborhoods are less likely to experience both property and violent crimes.³² This relationship is particularly pronounced in low-income neighborhoods — neighborhoods that have experienced systematic disinvestment in public and green space.³³ Lowering localized air pollution — such as by planting trees — also has the potential to reduce crime in the immediate vicinity.³⁴ Not only do green public spaces reduce crime in neighborhoods, but they also increase perceived safety; and perceptions are often powerful in shaping where people shop, walk, and spend their time.³⁵

Climate

Public, green spaces are essential in combating the climate crisis. Such spaces improve air quality, increase biodiversity, and help manage water flow by acting as urban drainage systems.³⁶ By creating and maintaining green spaces, we are better positioning ourselves to deal with and mitigate the effects of climate change — including by making our neighborhoods less susceptible to flooding, lowering surface temperatures as the temperature rises, and tackling the heat island effect.³⁷ In fact, street trees can reduce the surrounding air temperature by up to 6°F, with a reduction of up to 25°F when directly under a tree.³⁸ The effects of climate change disproportionately affect neighborhoods of color, making public space management a climate justice issue.³⁹

It is well known that personal vehicles contribute greatly to climate change, making up over half of all transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions.⁴⁰ More public spaces and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure reduce car usage, which reduces carbon emissions and air pollution. Public spaces and sustainable infrastructure also encourage more dense neighborhoods, and denser neighborhoods are more sustainable neighborhoods.⁴¹



Improves flood resilience

► Community gardens and urban horticultural infrastructure allows for education on how to care for plants, as well as opportunities for neighbors to make their neighborhoods greener.



Combats the heat island effect

Street trees reduce air temps by up to 6°F and up to 25° when directly under one

Lowers surface temps

Access to quality public space is linked to improved health outcomes. The effects of air pollution are exacerbated by high temperatures; in areas where there is more green space and less air pollution from vehicles, the surrounding temperature and issues with respiratory diseases like asthma, particularly in children, are reduced.⁴² This is particularly important for low-income communities and communities of color which have significantly higher rates of asthma.⁴³ Not only are health outcomes improved by access to public space, but healthy behavior is also encouraged. Access to quality public spaces is associated with more physical activity. And that association is amplified if the public space is of better quality; people with access to such spaces were 50% more likely to achieve high levels of walking.⁴⁴ In low-income neighborhoods, this access to free public space is extremely important in ensuring there is somewhere for physical activity. In a study on how parks are used in low-income communities, researchers found that patrons of the park used it as their primary method of physical activity, and identified that there simply aren't enough parks and public spaces.⁴⁵ It's vital to public health that all residents, especially children, have ample space to socialize and play.



► Public spaces encourage healthy, active behavior, as seen by neighbors enjoying this mural by Brooklyn-based Misha Tyutyunik on the Beverly Road Pedestrian Plaza.

Those with access to quality public spaces have lower levels of psychosocial distress, even if they did not frequent the public space.



These beneficial health outcomes extend to mental health as well. By having more public spaces and more green space, there are reductions in noise pollution (particularly from vehicles) and reductions of self-reported stress and cortisol levels.⁴⁶ The more natural sounds created by green public space create a more pleasant environment for its residents.⁴⁷ Those with access to quality public spaces have lower levels of psychosocial distress, even if they did not frequent the public space.⁴⁸ Further, public spaces are associated with lowered levels of poor mental health for adults, and fewer emotional and behavioral problems among children.⁴⁹

An integral part of public space management is keeping a space clean, which promotes wellbeing and public health. BIDs and Open Streets groups spend a large portion of their budget on supplemental sanitation, including litter removal and additional bagging and emptying of trash receptacles. One of New York City's most intractable problems is directly related to trash: rats. Though the Mayor has appointed a Rat Czar and employed many new strategies to kill rats and limit their population growth, we can't solve the problem without cleaning up the trash on our streets.⁵⁰ While the Mayor's trash containerization program will help, overflowing corner trash cans and litter are a major contributor to our rat problem. Cohesive management of our public spaces will help.

- ▶ Car-free public spaces let kids enjoy spaces where they might have otherwise felt in danger of traffic.



Challenges of Current Public Space Management

The current reality of public space management presents a number of challenges for the city, for partners, and for the general public.

1

The City continues to prioritize the movement of vehicle traffic as the primary use of our streets.

For 100 years the City has prioritized the movement and storage of vehicles above all other uses of the street. While there have been some changes in the last 20 years, fundamentally the Department of Transportation is still primarily an agency focused on vehicles — evidenced by its budget, staffing, and allocation of resources. In order to get the public space that New Yorkers deserve, we will need a mindset shift at DOT and a budget that reflects these values.

2

Public space management is fractured and siloed.

The appointment of Ya-Ting Liu as the Chief Public Realm Officer has been an important first step towards good public space management and improved inter-agency coordination. Importantly, it is just a first step. No one person can coordinate between all agencies, private and public interests, and communities alone. Even beyond her role, the execution of public space management is divided between the City, BIDs, nonprofit and volunteer groups, and neighbors — and what little public space management the city does is piecemeal and siloed.

3

There is inequitable access to quality public space management.

BIDs are a driving force for good public space management, but they are scattered across the city inequitably — mostly located in Manhattan and the inner parts of Brooklyn and Queens. And even if a neighborhood has a BID, it does not mean that that BID has the resources or desire to sufficiently manage public space, as BID revenues are inherently linked to a neighborhood's wealth. Aside from this, certain communities have experienced historic disinvestment and lack of public space improvements which must be remedied.

The Arduous Process of Creating Community-Led Public Space

Creating community-led public space is rarely easy. In the case of West 103rd Street’s Open Street and subsequent Street Improvement Project (SIP), change was arduous and, at times, bitter.⁵¹ Starting in 2019, Open Plans and Street Plans supported community residents in their effort to connect Central and Riverside Parks through 103rd Street — with the street serving as a vital connector for the nearby Frederick Douglass House. Soon after, the pandemic began and the W. 103rd St. Open Street Community Coalition (later simply named Park to Park 103) was formed by local organizations who created and maintained an Open Street between Amsterdam and Riverside Drive.

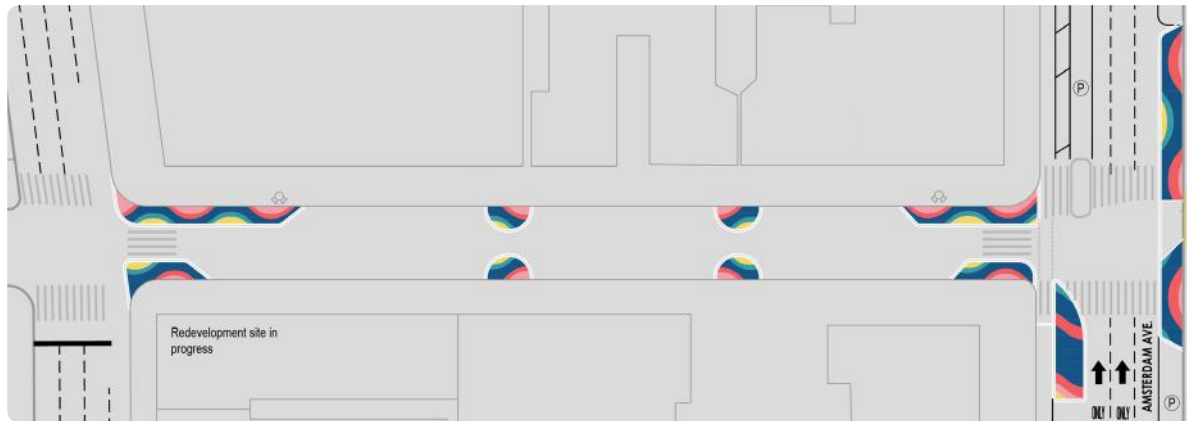
Throughout the previous and following years, Open Plans, Street Plans, and Park to Park

103 conducted surveys, programming, and other fact-finding endeavors to determine the best path forward for the corridor. After collaboration with residents, the block association, local organizations, and DOT, Park to Park 103 and DOT settled on a SIP that would create safer pedestrian crossings through extended sidewalks, daylighting, and other vital infrastructure.

However, the vocal minority of car owners who were worried about the reallocation of just 10 parking spaces created a hostile and difficult environment. A professional mediator was called in for a discussion about the corridor, and later a single protestor was arrested after they tried to obstruct DOT construction of the street improvement.⁵² Despite the small but loud opposition to the relatively small-



scale, community-led project, the project has been completed. The Street Improvement Project has continued operations, stewarded by a clean-up crew of youth ambassadors, the local Columbus Amsterdam BID that tends to the street every Tuesday, and local volunteers and the Horticultural Society of New York who handle plantings and weekly plant care.



4

There is a lack of attention given to residential areas.

Currently, public space management is generally focused on commercial areas while residential streets are left out. Two of the most robust activators of public space — BIDs and Open Streets organizations — are designed to function best in commercial areas and where businesses draw pedestrians. But, the lion’s share of where New Yorkers actually live, residential neighborhoods, lack the opportunity and ability to get needed improvements and activate their public spaces.

5

Many communities that want to create a public space often can’t do so.

This can be due to a number of reasons: a lack of monetary resources and/or time needed to adequately manage the space, the inability to get liability insurance (if the group isn’t incorporated or if they don’t have the funds), or a lack of institutional knowledge about the burdensome bureaucracy that groups must wade through in order to be allowed to operate and maintain their public space in the first place.

► Bedford Slip in Brooklyn was closed off to traffic temporarily, blooming into a popular pedestrian space. Despite the proven success of the space, the City still reduced the space to only weekend hours after the nearby temporary construction completed.



How New York City’s Broken Permitting System Costs Local Organizations

In spring of 2024, a school on the Upper West Side applied for a permit for their annual spring fair. Throughout the past several years, the school had applied for and was accepted for a Block Party permit for the event — which costs a simple \$25 fee. However, when they applied for a Block Party permit for 2024, their request was denied and reclassified as a Street Event with little explanation why or guidance on how to remedy it. This reclassification meant that the permit cost a whopping \$5,025. This school was not the only one that experienced this about-face; several schools were forced to cancel their spring events due to the outsized cost. Instead of making it easier for local organizations to host events, the current opaque permitting system makes it more burdensome or impossible.



6 **Even when residents know what they want, City processes are so unclear and opaque that there is a lack of empowerment to realize activation.**

Many smaller, local groups are unaware of existing City programs or how they work (such as the ability to get a bench or a bike rack or a parklet) and don't know how to advocate for what they need. Even when groups do figure out the options and come to agreement, it's often impossible to actually get desired changes implemented due to bureaucracy and a lack of systemic assistance. The City lacks a clear framework and process for change.

7 **New Yorkers are deeply dissatisfied with the quality of their public spaces and streets.**

Surveys have shown that across the city, New Yorkers think their neighborhoods are unclean and poorly maintained. Just 34% of New Yorkers positively rate the cleanliness of their neighborhood, and 33.6% positively rate the maintenance of their streets.⁵³ When people feel apathy for their public spaces, they feel less connected to them.

8 **Communities lack ownership of public spaces, and lack a process for generating consensus on the use of their public space.**

Residents should have a say in what goes on in their neighborhoods. Currently, there is no reliable mechanism to do so; current outlets like Community Boards and 311 calls have limited purview and power, and in many cases, don't engage well with the public. Without clear rules about how decisions on public space usage are made, ways for residents to be truly involved, and responsibility for decision-making, the process of allocating public space is filled with strife and uncertainty.

9 **Current public space activation relies heavily on programming.**

Many public spaces are car-centered most of the time, meaning that in order to feel welcoming to people they must be activated through programming that takes work and resources to provide. Well-designed and maintained spaces can be gathering spots without active programming. Seating, greenery, and slow/no cars provide a space where people organically gather even without any programming. However, the City very rarely creates public spaces in that model.

Recommendations: Framework for the Future





In order to ensure quality public space management, we can't rely on piecemeal marquee projects in certain neighborhoods. Instead, we have to develop a framework of management that gives each neighborhood the attention and flexibility they deserve. To do so, we have identified three main areas in which there is need for improvement.

Dispatch Local Public Space Teams to Ensure Equitable Access to Public Space

p. 50

1

Change the Way the City Thinks About Public Space Management

p. 72

2

Make Public Space Partners True Partners & Lower the Barrier to Entry

p. 76

3



Dispatch Local Public Space Teams to Ensure Equitable Access to Public Space

1

Geographic, economic, and cultural divides in our city have made it so that quality public space — not to mention adequate public space management — is not available widely across the city. Many commercial areas in working-class neighborhoods have been neglected and under-resourced. And due to the city’s focus on public space improvements in wealthier commercial areas, residential neighborhoods have largely been forgotten. The street and public space improvements that have been placed in residential areas are more reactionary than cohesive and proactive, and maintenance is sparse. These dynamics continue to perpetuate issues of spatial inequity — the areas that have the time and funds to stage public space activations are more likely to have those activations formalized by the city.

We must be able to foster quality public space management and creation in both residential and commercial areas. This can change through a local Public Space Team that facilitates the management of public spaces, works with local public, private, and nonprofit partners to proactively plan and manage spaces, and directly stewards them. **We recommend hiring City-employed local Public Space Teams that would be the facilitators, coordinators, and stewards of New York City’s public spaces.**

What is a Local Public Space Team?

Local Public Space Teams are conduits for change, creative problem solvers, stewards of space, and serve as the bridge between the public, local organizations, and the government. They would consist of a Public Space Facilitator (PSF), a Public Space Coordinator (PSF), and a number of Public Space Stewards (PSS), each tasked with a crucial aspect of public space management. The Facilitator and Coordinator would be employed at DOT under the Office of Livable Streets and serve on the Community District level, while Stewards would be contracted employees. The Team would have an in-district office, and would serve as the primary connector between the public and government when it comes to public space changes and improvements.

Stewards, Coordinators, and Facilitators can be largely understood through the three pillars of public space management: Stewardship, Community Coordination, and Facilitation. However, as is true with the pillars themselves, there is some overlap in the duties and responsibilities of the Team, particularly between Facilitator and Coordinators, as the latter is intended to supplement the former. In the following sections, we will explore, in depth, the roles and responsibilities of the Teams. Below are some duties the Team would fulfill, and who would fulfill them.

Figure 4. The Public Space Team

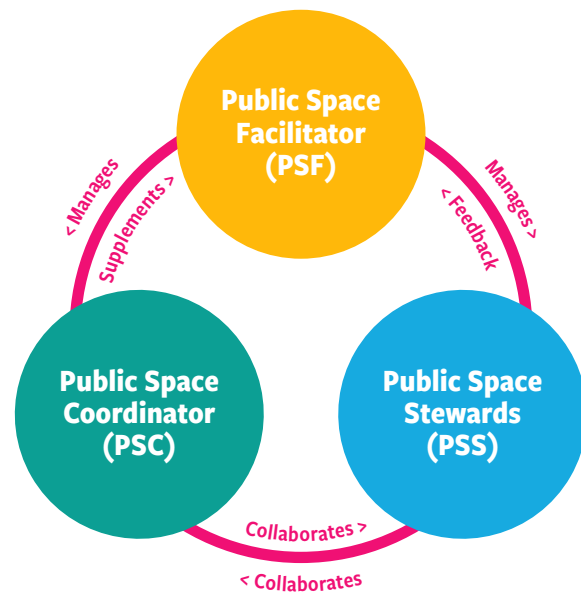


Table 1. Responsibilities of the Public Space Team

	Facilitator	Coordinator	Steward
Stewardship			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining the space including moving tables and chairs, barricades, and other street furniture 	PSF	PSC	PSS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performing functions like picking up litter, street sweeping and bagging, power washing, graffiti removal, clearing storm water grates, and snow and ice removal 	PSF	PSC	PSS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planting, maintaining, and watering green infrastructure 	PSF	PSC	PSS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informally surveying the street and fixing minor issues like picking up litter, adjusting signs, and checking in with neighbors 	PSF	PSC	PSS
Community Coordination			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speak with local public space partners and businesses to understand their day-to-day needs 	PSF	PSC	PSS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide local organizations with support for programming to ensure a public space is well-utilized and available for community events 	PSF	PSC	PSS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make walking rounds to meet and talk with neighbors about what they've been hearing and seeing, promoting a safe environment 	PSF	PSC	PSS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinating the routes on which Stewards would conduct sanitation, maintenance, and beautification 	PSF	PSC	PSS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote events and activations in public spaces in the community 	PSF	PSC	PSS

Facilitation

- Serve as the primary liaison between public, private, government, and neighborhood parties for public space improvements and management

PSF PSC PSS
- Work with local elected officials and the Community Board to do broader community engagement in addition to the existing DOT outreach to understand what the community — not just the vocal few — wants their neighborhood to look like

PSF PSC PSS
- Collaborate with neighbors to understand local public space issues, articulate the importance of people-centered public spaces, and address problems and questions as they arise

PSF PSC PSS
- Identify spaces in coalition with neighbors that could become new public spaces

PSF PSC PSS
- Liaise with the city, especially DOT, on long-term changes to the streetscape and public spaces in the neighborhood based on community desire like additional spaces, plazas, activated curb space, Open Streets, Street Improvement Projects, and bike/bus lanes

PSF PSC PSS
- Manage the curb in their district, understanding how it's operating, what's missing, and what uses could be best utilized where

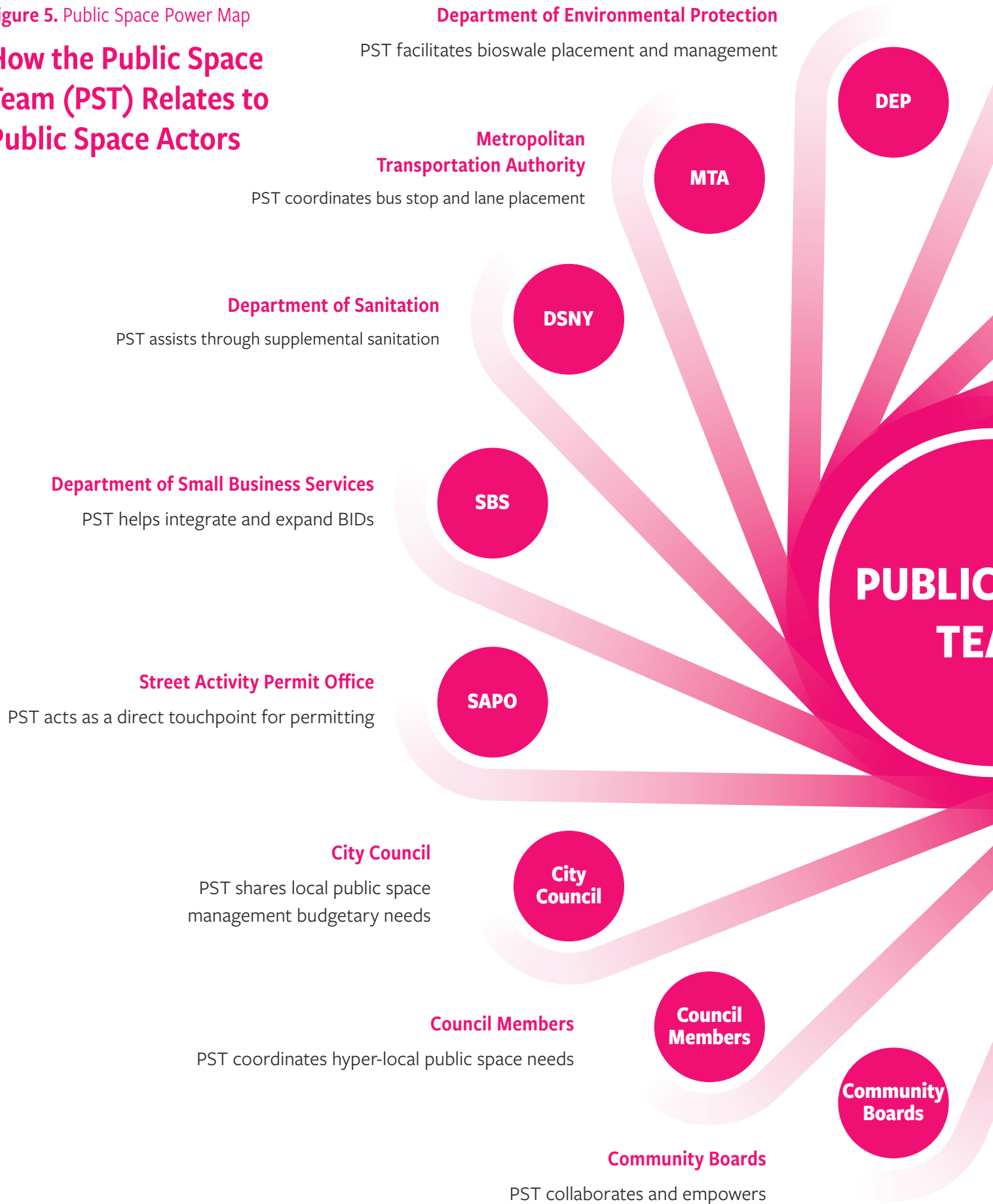
PSF PSC PSS
- Work in coalition with local organizations to ensure the system works for them, working towards liability or permit reform for example

PSF PSC PSS
- Craft a Public Space Needs Statement to specifically address the community's needs for public space and the streetscape to the City Council and Mayor's Office

PSF PSC PSS

Figure 5. Public Space Power Map

How the Public Space Team (PST) Relates to Public Space Actors



PUBLIC SPACE PROGRAM

Department of Parks & Recreation

PST facilitates tree bed placement and maintenance

Parks

NYPD

New York Police Department

PST informs where people feel safe

DOB

Department of Buildings

PST identifies needs for curb cuts

DOT

Department of Transportation

PST builds trust and coordinates hyper-local approach

BIDs

Business Improvement Districts

PST integrates into planning framework

Open
Streets
& CBOs

Open Streets & Community-Based Organizations

PST provides capacity, assistance, and integration

Public

Public

PST informs and empowers

Mayor's
Office /
CPRO

Mayor's Office / Chief Public Realm Officer

PST bridges the gap between city-wide and local projects

How the Public Space Team (PST) Relates to Public Space Actors

Department of Transportation (DOT)

PST builds trust and coordinates hyper-local outreach

- Conducts hyper-local community outreach on existing and potential projects
- Builds trust as a local liaison that is truly ingrained in the community
- Helps coordinate between different agencies and the Mayor's office
- Allows for more transparency with DOT decision making through outreach

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

PST integrates into planning framework

- Integrates BIDs into the public space management framework and process through outreach
- Provides additional administrative (and potentially financial) capacity to less-resourced BIDs
- Makes the area surrounding the BID more attractive, thereby increasing foot traffic throughout the entire neighborhood
- Provide additional insight to BIDs as to what the public wants and thinks

Open Streets & Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)

PST provides capacity, assistance, and integration

- Provides additional administrative (and potentially financial) capacity to organizations
- Can act as a liaison between local groups that may not have an existing relationship with DOT

- Provides information about Open Street (and other) policies that may change
- Empowers informal groups to become formal if they wish, and empowers groups that may not exist yet to form

Public

PST informs and empowers

- Empowers the public by providing more direct access to city processes and interactive outreach and feedback processes
- Acts as a conduit for the public's ideas to be brought to DOT
- Shares information through newsletters and public meetings on projects and activations in the district
- Builds public trust in city government by providing transparency

Mayor's Office / Chief Public Realm Officer (CPRO)

PST bridges the gap between city-wide and local projects

- Connects the goals of large, capital city-wide public space creation to localized public space management
- Allows the Administration to directly focus on big-picture planning
- Provides public feedback on City-led initiatives and local projects
- Collaborates with the Chief Public Realm Officer to continue to iterate on public space creation and management

Community Boards (CBs)

PST collaborates with and empowers

- Collaborates with and empowers Community Boards to advise on local public space projects
- Assists in knowledge-sharing through newsletters and public meetings on projects and activations in the district
- Keeps the Community Board directly informed on potential and new initiatives

Council Members (CMs)

PST coordinates on hyper-local public space needs

- Allows current discretionary funds going towards supplemental sanitation to go towards other public space needs, benefiting the district
- Communicates public needs and wants directly to the Council Member
- Works in coalition to make community-led projects a reality

City Council

PST shares local public space management budgetary needs

- Shares public space management needs statements to identify additional areas for funding

Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

PST facilitates bioswale placement and management

- Collaborates to determine the best placement and management of rain gardens

Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks)

PST facilitates tree bed placement and maintenance

- Assists and recommends the placement and management of tree beds

New York Police Department (NYPD)

PST informs where people feel safe

- Identifies where people feel safe - and not safe - in a given neighborhood

Street Activity Permit Office (SAPO)

PST acts as a direct touchpoint for permitting

- Assists the public in navigating the permitting process, easing work for SAPO staff
- Helps identify potential roadblocks to be fixed for those submitting permits

Department of Small Business Services (SBS)

PST helps integrate and expand BIDs

- Works in coalition with SBS to fully integrate existing BIDs into the management framework
- Identifies potential areas where new BIDs may be ripe for creation

Department of Sanitation (DSNY)

PST assists through supplemental sanitation

- Assists in sanitation through contracted supplemental sanitation
- Helps identify curbside areas for containerized trash and corners that may need trash receptacles

Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA)

PST coordinates bus stop and lane placement

- Assists and recommends the placement and maintenance of bus lanes and bus stops

Department of Buildings (DOB)

PST identifies needs for curb cuts

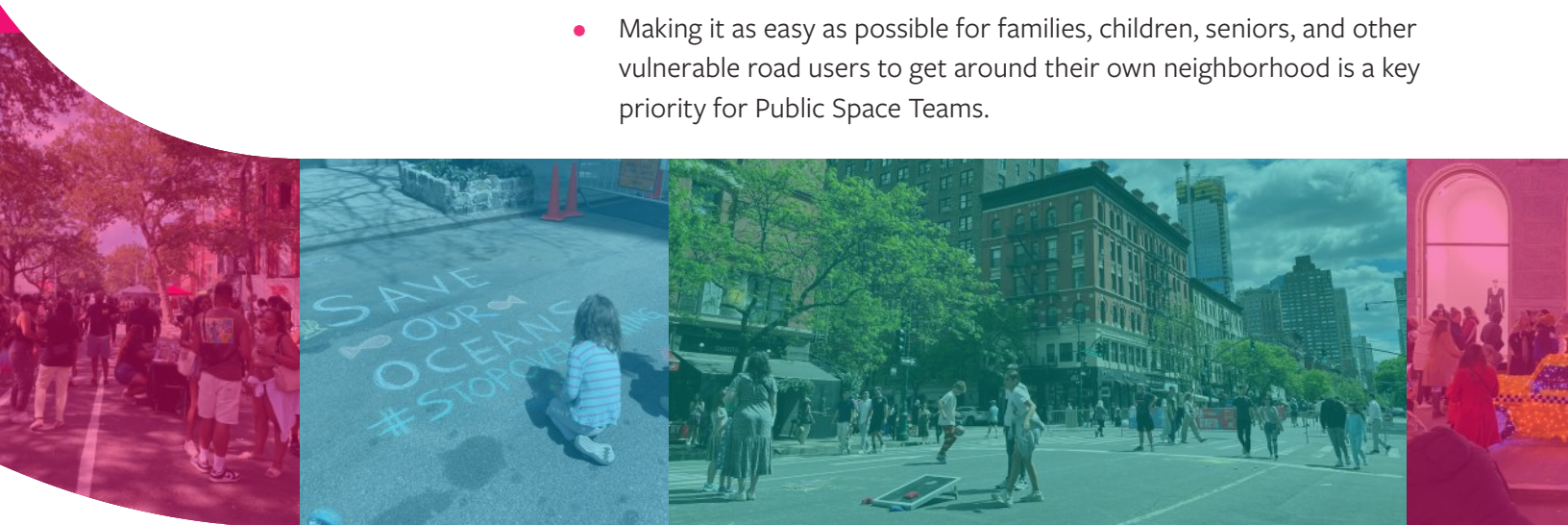
- Assists to identify illegal curb cuts
- Flags issues with scaffolding in the district

A Public Space Team's Role in Different Contexts

The role of a Public Space Team will vary depending on the existing land uses and local structures in their district. A district may have a large, well-resourced BID or may have very few public spaces at all. These different geographies require that Public Space Teams remain flexible and operate differently in different areas. Below is a general framework for what work could look like in each of the major land use types:

Residential

- In residential neighborhoods, Public Space Teams should work to facilitate community engagement to ensure the neighborhood is safe and accessible for all users, and that vibrant public spaces are created and maintained. This includes working with the community to determine what spaces can be activated as well as the types of activation that would take place.
- There are many advocates, both organizations and individuals, in residential neighborhoods and they should be recognized and integrated in the Public Space Team's process. Teams should work with local leaders and organizations that have been working on these issues to serve as a catalyst for change. Although many of them are not as formal as a BID, they can be extremely impactful in imagining and making change.
- A focus on safety, comfort, and quality of life — while it is important in all land use areas — should be paramount in residential neighborhoods.
- Making it as easy as possible for families, children, seniors, and other vulnerable road users to get around their own neighborhood is a key priority for Public Space Teams.



Commercial

- There are a few very well-staffed and well-resourced BIDs across the city. In such an area, Public Space Teams should focus on areas outside of the BID's geography that lack the resources and institutions to create the types of spaces that may exist in the BID. Teams should compliment the work of the BID (working alongside them when appropriate).
- Many BIDs are smaller or mid-sized with less dedicated funding for public space improvements and projects. In these cases, Public Space Teams can work with BIDs to help execute potential projects that may not have existed without the support of the City. Like in an area with a large BID, Teams should look to activate space outside of the BID, and to complement the work of the existing BID.
- Most commercial areas in the city have no BID. In this case, Public Space Teams can help act as a BID-like entity, being a hub for local businesses to share ideas for public space improvements. In places where it is appropriate, Teams can even help organize businesses to create a BID or Merchants' Association.
- It is important to remember that the role of Public Space Teams is for the public, and not just business. While there are many times where these interests align, it is the Team's role to think of the people using the space, and not just the businesses that occupy it.

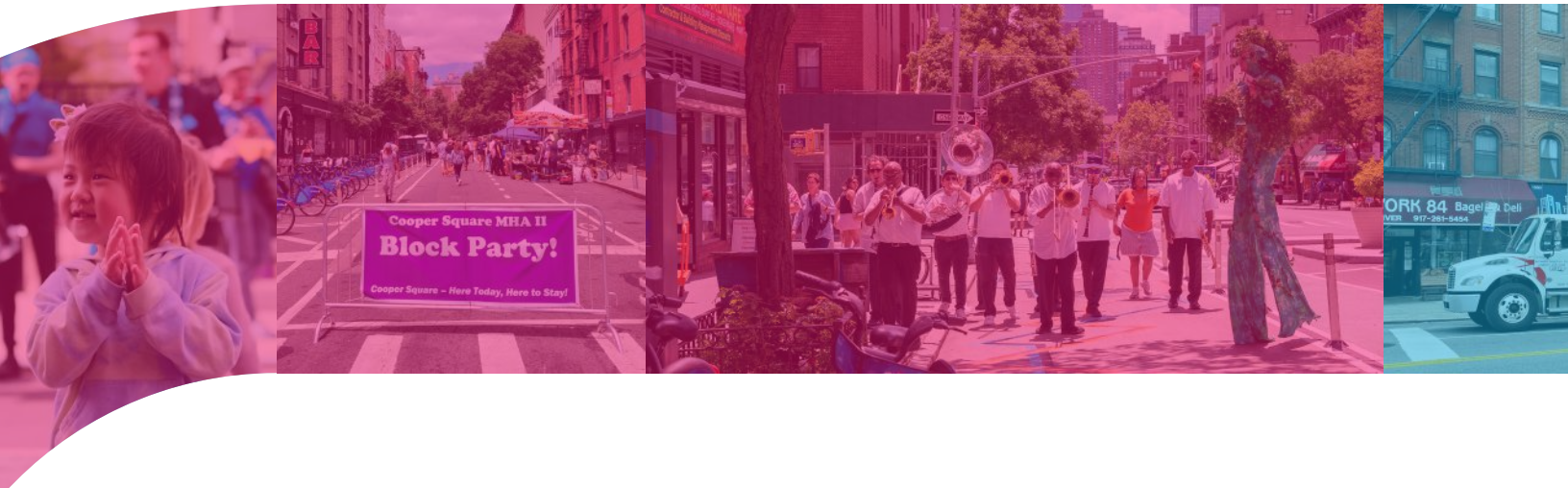
Industrial

- Public Space Teams' roles in industrial zones are more limited than in commercial and residential zones. There is a renewed commitment by the City to ensure that many industrial zones remain industrial.
- One key way a Team can operate in an industrial space is by helping to manage truck traffic and parking. This can be done by working to implement loading zones, micro-distribution hubs, and other existing and new strategies to manage trucks.
- In industrial areas, it is important to create infrastructure that benefits the workforce in the area. This includes ensuring workers have safe and green paths to worksites and public spaces to take breaks and eat meals.
- There are some industrial zones that are shifting uses, and in those areas it is important to ensure that they become walkable and livable in their own right. This is particularly important when shifting from an industrial zone, because the focus of the infrastructure goes from the movement of trucks and cars to the movement of people.



When a Public Space Team Could Help

To better illustrate how a Public Space Team would be useful in the management and activation of public spaces, below are some scenarios where they would be helpful.



Marta and her neighbors want to activate their block and put together a block party during the summer.

She has heard that you need a permit, but doesn't know where to start. She contacts her local Public Space Team, and they describe the process to her via email. They also inform her that she can visit their office to be walked through the process. She takes them up on this offer, and together they submit the application, and hold the block party the next month!

The block party is a huge success. Those on the block enjoy it, and neighbors from adjacent blocks come by to join in on the fun. As the party winds down, they talk about how they should do things like this more often. This makes Marta think, and shortly after, she reaches out to the Public Space Team again, wondering how she could activate the block and hold community events more often.

The Public Space Team tells Marta they believe the street would be a great addition to the Open Streets program, and

that they could help her apply if that would be something her neighbors were interested in. Together, over the next few weeks, the Public Space Coordinator and Marta call, text, and knock on the doors of their neighbors to ask them if they would be interested in an Open Street on their block — and they're interested! Under this new system, the Public Space Team, along with one or several community members, can act as the partner operating the Open Street. The Public Space Facilitator and Marta fill out the application, are approved, and have regular programming beginning the next spring.

In this scenario, Marta would have had to navigate the permitting system alone resulting in a potentially incorrect submission, or no submission at all. She also would not have known that her block would be a good site for the Open Streets program. A Public Space Team helps guide residents through how they can activate the public space in their neighborhood.



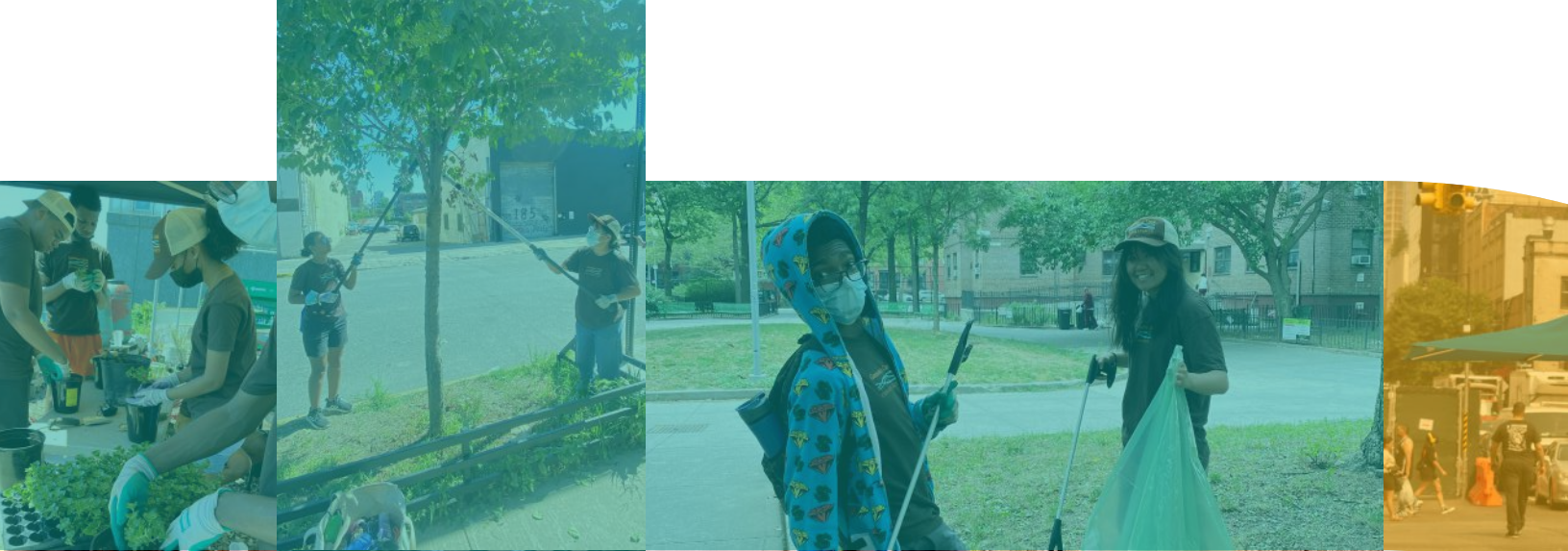
Sean owns and operates a deli in the neighborhood, and whenever he gets deliveries, the truck is always double parked in the street.

He recognizes this is an issue for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers — while also putting the delivery worker at risk — and would like a loading zone to be placed in front of his store. He had started to reach out to central staff at DOT once or twice to get one put in, but he would get busy managing his business and forget to follow up.

Sean decides to reach out to the local Public Space Team via email and describes the issue he is having. The Public Space Facilitator notes the time and place at which the deliveries occur, and lets Sean know they will conduct site visits over the next two weeks. After visiting the site during deliveries, noting the conditions on the street, and documenting those conditions, the Public Space Facilitator lets Sean know that they will reach out to their colleagues in the DOT with this information and recommend the placement of a loading zone.

The Public Space Facilitator liaises with the appropriate staff within the DOT, sending them the documentation and recommending a loading zone. Because the documentation and site visit were already conducted by the Public Space Facilitator, the DOT simply reviews the information, and within a few weeks, a new loading zone is placed in front of Sean’s deli.

In this scenario, Sean may have continued to forget to follow up with DOT, and the delivery truck would continue to be a barrier for all road users. A Public Space Facilitator and Team can serve as a liaison between local businesses/organizations and the City, making processes easier for both parties — in this case, easing the burden on central DOT staff by surveying the site so that a direct recommendation could be made to the relevant office.



Kwame notices a part of a sidewalk in his neighborhood that accumulates litter.

The litter is unsightly and attracts rats, which bothers him and his neighbors. While he cleans up the area the first few times he sees the trash, he notices it is a recurring problem.

He reaches out to the local Public Space Team with a photo of the trash, and a description of where it is. The Public Space Facilitator heads out to that location, and verifies the conditions and documents them. They clean up the area, and inform the Public Space Stewards that that spot needs special attention during regular cleaning.

The Public Space Facilitator notifies Kwame that they visited the area and lets the Public Space Stewards know to pay special attention to that area during clean up. The Public Space Facilitator also works with the Department of Sanitation to get an additional waste receptacle to accommodate the extra litter in the area. Over the next few weeks, Kwame notices that the trash no longer collects in that area, and the rats are gone. During that time, the Public Space Team visits the site and reaches out to Kwame to verify that the problem has been resolved.

In this scenario, Kwame may have had to take it upon himself to handle the recurring issue of litter build up, or decide to leave it alone. A Public Space Team can act as a second set of ears on the ground, listening to more local-level neighborhood concerns and acting upon them — in this case, providing supplemental sanitation to a specific problem area.

Carli has seen street furniture that has been installed around the city, and decides she wants some street seating on her block.

She spoke with some of her neighbors, who agreed with her, but isn't sure where to start. So she goes to speak to her local Public Space Team.

The Public Space Facilitator hears Carli's request for street seating, and visits the block to determine where it may be possible to put the seating. The block seems like a good candidate for seating to be placed in the curb, and the Facilitator returns to Carli and asks if she knows any other neighbors who may also be interested in street seating. Carli connects the Public Space Team with the neighbors she shared the idea with, and the Public Space Facilitator determines that the site is good and that neighbors on the block want street seating.

Working with their colleagues in DOT, the Public Space Coordinator and the neighbors decide on an ideal space to place the street seating in the curb. The Public Space Coordinator places notices informing those on the block that a change is coming, and serves as the point person for questions or concerns. They hear from neighbors on the block, explain the change in detail, and a few weeks later, street seating is installed on Carli's block for all to enjoy. Public Space Stewards clean and maintain the seating, ensuring it continues to be a benefit to the community.

In this scenario, Carli likely would not have been able to get street seating on her block at all. The current program for street seating, Street Seats, requires a third-party maintenance partner for the space and is almost always required to be in front of a business or institution. A Public Space Team can serve as a conduit for change in residential neighborhoods, unlocking potential public spaces for residents.





A Budgetary Proposal for Local Public Space Teams

In order to better grasp the feasibility and affordability of local Public Space Teams, we conducted a thorough budgetary analysis of such a program.*

Employed at DOT's Office of Livable Streets, local Public Space Teams would take advantage of the existing staff and support of the Department. By hiring a local Public Space Team — a Facilitator, Coordinator, and a group of Stewards — for every Community District, the City would provide quality public space management to every neighborhood responsive to the diversity of the city's communities and built environment while serving as a vital foundation for public space growth. We estimate that such a proposal would cost the City \$320 million in recurring annual spending, less than 0.3% of the City's budget. This spending would support:

- 1 A Public Space Facilitator and a Public Space Coordinator for every Community District, complete with an office in each district for on-the-ground management.
- 2 Services to enhance community-tailored public space management, such as funds for surveys, outreach meetings, and research.
- 3 A team of contracted Public Space Stewards to provide supplemental sanitation and street beautification services in highly trafficked neighborhoods currently lacking such services.
- 4 Permanent Open Streets in each Community District.

*For further information on how this budgetary proposal was calculated, please view our methodology in the Appendix.

Hiring a Public Space Facilitator and a Coordinator to support the Facilitator in every Community District would cost \$17 million a year.⁵⁴ An additional \$23 million would help support these new positions with an office in each District, funds for items such as surveys and printing, and miscellaneous office expenses.

The bulk of new spending, \$292 million, would be for Public Space Stewards to provide supplemental sanitation (\$218 million), street beautification (\$66 million), and permanent Open Streets (\$8 million). These estimates are based on current spending by BIDs for these services. The typical BID provides seven-day-a-week supplemental sanitation services such as street sweeping and bagging, power washing, graffiti removal, snow and ice removal, and street furniture maintenance.⁵⁵ Many also engage in street beautification and horticulture, such as planting flower beds and maintaining tree pits, improving sidewalks, or painting murals. With an annual investment of \$292 million a year, about 20% of all blocks citywide not already covered by a BID would be provided with these levels of services, along with supporting a month of programming for Open Streets in each neighborhood. However, this spending could also be flexed to provide, for example, one-day-a-week services for all blocks in a neighborhood. Public Space Facilitators would use their discretion, backed-up by their knowledge of on the ground conditions, to allocate their neighborhood's share of funding to best meet the community's existing needs.

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding. Number of positions reflects only positions hired by the City of New York, not those contracted to outside vendors.

Table 2. Proposed Public Space Management Budget

Spending Item	Proposed Budget	No. of Positions
Public Space Facilitators	\$8,889,259	59
Public Space Coordinators	\$8,361,214	59
Total, Personal Services	\$17,250,474	118
Public Space Stewards (Contracted Services)	\$291,485,320	N/A
Supplemental Sanitation	\$217,462,456	N/A
Streetscape Beautification	\$66,207,512	N/A
Open Streets	\$7,815,352	N/A
Rent for Community Offices	\$22,504,716	N/A
Supplies and Other	\$536,219	N/A
Total, Other than Personal Services	\$314,526,255	N/A
Less, Existing Spending	(\$11,678,750)	N/A
Grand Total	\$320,097,978	

Note: Excludes Open Streets, personal service, supplies and other spending, which would be allocated equally across Community Districts, and rent, which would be variable in each District.

Table 3. Spending Breakdown of Supplemental Sanitation and Streetscape Beautification Services Estimate, by Borough

Borough	Total Cost	% of Cost	% of Population
Manhattan	\$58,440,180	21%	19%
The Bronx	\$46,496,617	16%	17%
Brooklyn	\$76,166,588	27%	31%
Queens	\$74,872,288	26%	27%
Staten Island	\$27,744,294	10%	6%
Grand Total	\$283,669,967	100%	100%

In addition, our proposal would employ around 2,900 New Yorkers for stewardship work.⁵⁶ In this proposal, the program is completely up and running in one year with the full budget allocation; in practice, this program could be phased in over several years. In doing so, Public Space Teams could be placed first in Priority Investment Areas as defined by the Streets Plan, and then expanded.

We determined the breakdown of corridors covered by Stewards based on DOT’s Pedestrian Mobility Plan, which identifies the most trafficked streets.⁵⁷ Those most heavily trafficked streets not already covered by a BID are likely to have the highest need for additional services, particularly in some of the city’s most disadvantaged neighborhoods.



0.3%

If this entire spread represents the annual budget of the City of New York for 2024 (\$112.4 B), the pink circle represents our proposed budget for Public Space Teams.

With 0.3% of the city budget, we can have...

Improved neighborhood management

A dedicated Public Space Facilitator and Coordinator for every Community District would ensure responsive and tailored public space management that adapts to the diverse needs of the city's communities.



Support for underserved neighborhoods

High-traffic, disadvantaged areas not currently receiving sufficient services would get the attention they need, addressing long-standing inequities in public space maintenance.

Expanded Open Streets program

Permanent Open Streets would be introduced citywide, creating more car-free spaces for residents to enjoy.



Enhanced Community Engagement

Funding would support localized surveys, outreach meetings, and research, allowing public space management to reflect each community's unique needs.

BID-level services for more areas

20% of all city blocks not currently covered by Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) would receive BID-level services, like street cleaning, beautification, and maintenance, improving public spaces in underserved areas.

Job Creation

The program would employ 2,900 New Yorkers in low barrier-to-entry stewardship roles, contributing to local job growth.

Change the Way the City Thinks About Public Space Management

2

Creating more cohesive public space management requires a conscious effort from all levels of City government to come together and better understand how to collaborate and work with partners on the ground.

The City has made some strides in large, marquee public space projects, but the present approach leaves smaller, more local projects out to dry; we can and should do both.

We need a framework for public space creation, and more importantly, for management. The Chief Public Realm Officer (CPRO) was a first step at breaking silos and creating a more cohesive management process. Creating more cohesive public space management requires a conscious effort from all levels of City government to come together and better understand how to collaborate and work with partners on the

ground. Regardless of the implementation of our full proposal for Public Space Teams, each proposal below would be important steps towards better public space management.

- 1 **Appoint a Deputy Commissioner for Public Space Management & Creation at DOT**
- 2 **Have the Chief Public Realm Officer coordinate the shift to local public space management**
- 3 **Formalize and expand the role of the Chief Public Realm Officer**
- 4 **Update the mandate of the Office of Livable Streets at DOT to explicitly include public space management in addition to public space creation**
- 5 **Create a more robust engagement framework to hear from the public about improvements**

1

Appoint a Deputy Commissioner for Public Space Management & Creation at DOT

Leadership goes a long way in creating policy change. And currently, DOT lacks the structural leadership to effectively enact change in the realm of public space management. While the agency has a number of Deputy Commissioners, including Deputy Commissioners for Sidewalks & Inspection Management, Traffic Operations, and even the Staten Island Ferry, it has no such position dedicated to public space. Appointing a Deputy Commissioner for Public Space Management & Creation would be a crucial step cementing DOT's role in both aspects of public space. This person would cut across the bureaucracy in DOT and other agencies to collaborate on ways to create and manage public spaces.

2

Have the Chief Public Realm Officer coordinate the shift to local public space management

The shift from a focus on large, marquee projects to local management of public spaces will need to be a conscious, facilitated effort. One of the key functions of the Chief Public Realm Officer's role is to break silos with stakeholders, particularly City stakeholders. We recommend that she continue her vital work in this area, and convene City agencies in a similar style to the Public Space Avengers outlined in *Realm of Possibility* (including but not limited to DOT, SBS, DSNY, Parks, DEP, MTA, DOB, NYPD, CECM/SAPO), as well as current public space partners to determine how best to make this shift.⁵⁸ Potential focus areas include:

- Determining how dedicated City-funded Public Space Teams would plug into various city functions
- Continuing to reform the permitting process to make it work for all stakeholders
- Easing burdensome regulation to unlock the economic potential of vibrant public spaces

3

Formalize and expand the role of the Chief Public Realm Officer

The Chief Public Realm Officer (CPRO) is tasked with breaking silos, bringing agencies and stakeholders together, and innovating in the public realm. This is a sizable task for one position with only two staff members. As the Independent Budget Office notes, a key measure of success of newly created governmental units is “the ability to traverse administrations,” providing solutions for “unique policy issues [coming] from many stakeholders.”⁵⁹ Therefore, we recommend that the position of CPRO be formalized, and provided with more resources, capacity, and staff. This could be done in a number of ways, including creating a Mayor's Office of the Public Realm, or using legislation to formalize the role within an agency.

4

Update the mandate of the Office of Livable Streets at DOT to explicitly include public space management in addition to public space creation

By creating the Office of Livable Streets, DOT has recognized the importance of viewing the streetscape as a whole rather than considering it in its piecemeal parts (just sidewalks, just the roadbed, etc.), and acknowledging public spaces as being part of a livable city. However, while DOT does carry out some management of the spaces it creates, there is a lack of an explicit mandate or cohesive framework for the Office of Livable Streets to manage public spaces. We recommend that the Office take this under its belt, and consider additional ways it can assist and directly participate in management (including Public Space Teams as described in **Dispatch Local Public Space Teams to Ensure Equitable Access to Safe and Accessible Public Space**).

5

Create a more robust engagement framework to hear from the public about improvements

Engaging neighbors in a robust, comprehensive way helps empower them to continue to be involved in their public spaces. While DOT has carried out some fairly robust public outreach campaigns — most recently with the Smart Curbs pilot outreach process using in-person workshops, intercept surveys, and online tools to collect information — there must continue to be a more localized approach to public outreach. Some methods include:

- Conducting door-to-door outreach on hyper-local projects to engage with neighbors who may not be in the local information loop or tech-savvy
- Continue to use online tools like the Smart Curbs Feedback Map, which garnered over 300 responses
- Work alongside local organizations like faith-based organizations, schools, and community groups to spread the word and collect feedback

Make Public Space Partners True Partners & Lower the Barrier to Entry

3

The process shouldn't be dreaded by existing partners who are familiar with the system, and it shouldn't be impenetrable to individuals and groups who have no knowledge of the system.

There are many public space partners on the ground doing inspiring work, but they have to deal with excessive bureaucracy and a lack of funding. Further, the City often treats public space partners like any other vendor or contractor they work with despite the fact that public space partners help the City fulfill their stated (and mandated in the case of the Streets Plan) goals to create more public space. These changes, which could be done quickly with sufficient political will, would make current partners' lives easier and lower the barrier to entry for prospective partners. Even if our proposal for Public Space Teams is fully

implemented, local partners will continue to play a critical role in public space management and we must make it easier for them to operate.

- 1 Overhaul the liability and indemnification systems so that unnecessary burden isn't placed on public space partners.
- 2 Improve our broken permitting system, making it easier for everyday New Yorkers and public space partners to host street events.
- 3 Create a Trusted Partners program for public space partners to reduce barriers and bureaucracy
- 4 Reimburse public space partners in a timely manner
- 5 Create diverse and creative revenue streams to provide additional funding to public space partners
- 6 Further involve the Department of Education in School Streets

1 Overhaul the liability and indemnification systems so that unnecessary burden isn't placed on public space partners.

Presently, a \$1 million liability insurance policy is required for public space partners to hold many events and to steward street improvements that help meet the City's streets goal. However, for small, local organizations, this cost is extremely burdensome. For some, it eats away at their already small budgets, restricting the programming and enrichment they can provide. Others find it unfeasible at the start and never provide that sort of service due to the cost. And others still are simply a collection of individual volunteers who donate their time and lack the official entity to even apply for such insurance. The City should indemnify public space partners — taking on the liability for events and infrastructure that helps it meet its stated goals and loudly publicize this change with existing partners and the public. While issues of insurance requirements are mentioned in the Realm of Possibility report, they are only outlined to be “reduced” and not eliminated in most cases.⁶⁰ Completely lifting this requirement would not only ease financial burdens, but also make it procedurally easier for those partners to carry out programming. It would also encourage the creation of more public spaces across the city, helping meet crucial equity goals.

2 Improve our broken permitting system, making it easier for everyday New Yorkers and public space partners to host street events.

Our permitting system is deeply flawed and serves as a barrier for public space partners and everyday New Yorkers alike. It is confusing, frustrating, and can be extremely costly for small organizations. While there are a number of loopholes that exist that make it easier for partners to circumvent some bureaucracy, these are not to be mistaken for rules — loopholes can be taken away at any moment in time and only “in the know” partners are even aware of them. Below, we suggest some initial steps to ease the permitting process.

- **Foster collaboration and culture-sharing between SAPO and DOT.**

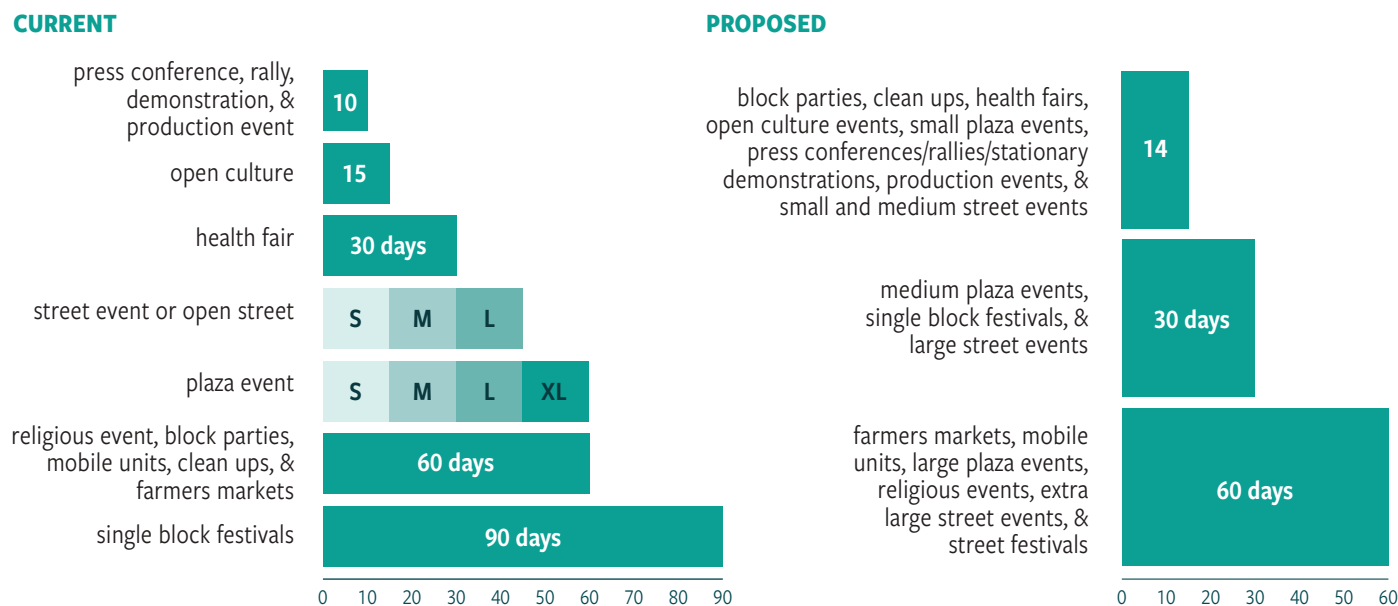
Public space partners and everyday New Yorkers often apply for a permit, and are approved, denied, or reclassified for reasons that are unclear to them. It is the City's job to clearly communicate how and why these actions occur, particularly denials and reclassifications. We encourage SAPO to work with DOT on these important communications to improve New Yorkers' experience with and perception of City processes. Such collaboration has been mentioned in the Realm of Possibility report in the form of the Public Space Academy, and we recommend an ongoing partnership

to meet permitting issues with a mindset of problem-solving that prioritizes New Yorkers’ user experiences.⁶¹

- **Unify and shorten review periods for applications.**

Presently, the review periods for Street Activity Permits are seemingly arbitrary and make it more difficult and confusing for everyday New Yorkers to plan events. As examples: a block party which would close a street to traffic requires 60 days notice while a health fair, an event which similarly closes a street (or plaza) to traffic, requires 30 days notice. An Open Culture event, on the other hand, would require 15 days notice while a Small Street Event would require 14 days notice. We recommend more explicitly unifying review into 60 day, 30 day, and 14 day periods and shortening the review time for a number of events, as follows:

Figure 6. Current and Proposed Street Permit Application Deadlines



- **Create a cohesive online portal for submitting permits.**

SAPO has many permits required for public space partners under its umbrella. However, there are other permits that may be required of partners that are not under SAPO that could create confusion or bureaucratic holdup for partners. First suggested by Design Trust for Public Space in their Neighborhood Commons report, we likewise recommend a digitized, unified, and cohesive online portal for all permit application processes.⁶²

3

Create a Trusted Partners program for public space partners to reduce barriers and bureaucracy

Public space partners (especially Open Streets partners) are burdened by the administrative paperwork that goes along with programming and permitting; for each event, a separate permit must be filed. Some partners have been granted workarounds like bundling multiple permits together in one application, but these are informal loopholes that can be taken away at any time. In *Realm of Possibility*, the Chief Public Realm Officer outlined a Public Space Academy that would serve as a process for public space partners to eventually become Trusted Partners.⁶³ We agree that this process is essential, and if the Academy is implemented, we urge the City to ensure that it is well publicized and remains open to a wide variety of formal and informal public space partners.

Even if our proposal for Public Space Teams is fully implemented, local partners will continue to play a critical role in public space management and we must make it easier for them to operate.

4

Reimburse public space partners in a timely manner

There are a number of grant programs for public space partners that various City agencies provide for them to carry out their work. However, when partners take advantage of such programs, they are often met with incredibly untimely reimbursements that take months to come through. Such a slow reimbursement process makes it difficult for small organizations to even take on grants because they don't have the expendable capital to use and wait months for reimbursement, even more so for a collection of volunteer residents on a street. While this process is not exclusive to public space partners and permeates through many City reimbursement processes, it is a barrier to the creation of more abundant and equitable public space. We recommend the City work to resolve this issue and allow for more timely reimbursements for partners.

5 Create diverse and creative revenue streams to provide additional funding to public space partners

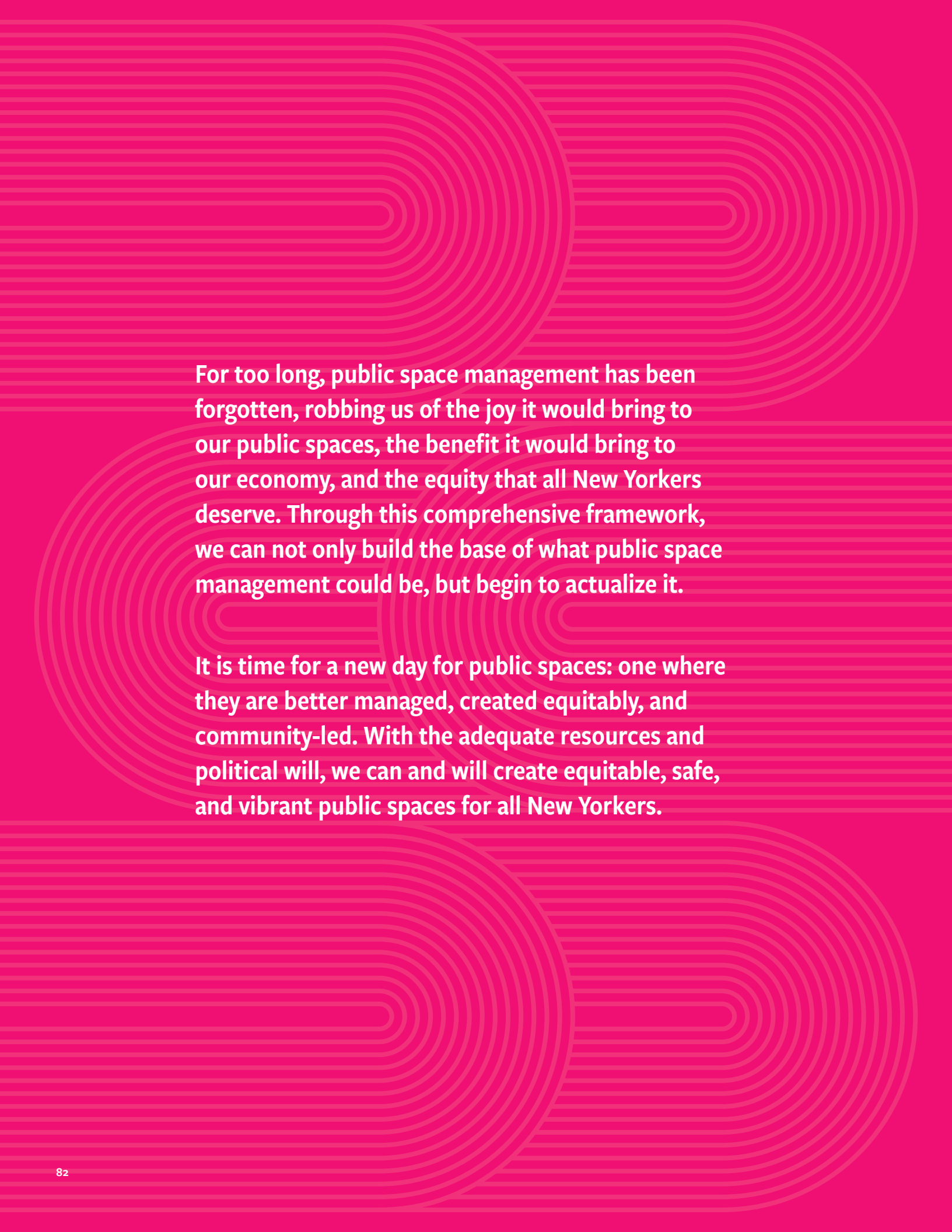
We and other organizations have highlighted the need for additional funding for public space management. While the bulk of public space management funding will come from existing tax dollars, it's important to explore additional levers to raise and provide money for our public spaces, both within government and otherwise.

The Center for an Urban Future assembled a list of 20 new ideas to fund parks, titled *Paying for the Growing Needs of NYC's Parks*.⁶⁴ We believe that many of these ideas can be expanded to cover all public spaces, including public space management. Particularly, we believe that the city should implement a public space surcharge for stadium events (Idea 1), a stormwater fee (Idea 2), a property transfer tax fee (Idea 4), and a contribution from all hotel stays (Idea 6) and assign that money to a public space fund. These creative ideas can help raise revenue for all public spaces.

We have heard directly from operators of Open Streets that the rule against selling merchandise on an Open Street is a lost stream of revenue. It seems unreasonable that an Open Streets operator cannot sell branded merchandise to those willing to support the Open Street's operation. We recommend that the rule against merchandise sales be lifted, permitting the low-scale sales of products like branded t-shirts, totes, and other merchandise.

6 Further involve the Department of Education in School Streets

School streets (formally known as Open Streets Full Closure: Schools) is a program run by DOT to allow for safe pick-up, drop-off, and space for recreation for schools by closing off the street in front of it to vehicle traffic. Open Plans has helped over 20 schools successfully apply for this program and we believe that further involving the Department of Education (DOE) in the process would be beneficial; the DOE has built-in institutional knowledge of which schools would be great candidates for the program (e.g. schools that are near crash-prone intersections, have the organizational capacity, and have accommodating street design). We recommend the creation of an Office of School Streets within DOE which would coordinate directly with DOT on school streets. Its duties would include identifying potential candidates, guiding them through the application process (which could potentially be expedited with DOE involvement), and continued support of those that become enrolled in the program.



For too long, public space management has been forgotten, robbing us of the joy it would bring to our public spaces, the benefit it would bring to our economy, and the equity that all New Yorkers deserve. Through this comprehensive framework, we can not only build the base of what public space management could be, but begin to actualize it.

It is time for a new day for public spaces: one where they are better managed, created equitably, and community-led. With the adequate resources and political will, we can and will create equitable, safe, and vibrant public spaces for all New Yorkers.



Appendix

Budget Estimate Methodology

We estimated the fully loaded cost per employee by searching through comparable jobs based on their listed responsibilities and issue areas and identifying the civil service title of each position. For each civil service title, the payroll data for fiscal year 2023 was used to estimate average overtime and other earnings for each full-time (35 hours a week) active employee with the same title within DOT. Fiscal year 2023 figures were inflation adjusted to fiscal year 2025 dollars based on the compounded annual growth in the salary and wages budget across both Executive Budgets. Public Space Facilitator is a blend of “Project Manager” and “Community Coordinator.” FICA and PMT taxes are added based on the total salary, overtime, and other pay. Health insurance premium of \$23,320 was added to each new employee, based on Citizens Budget Commission report “The Cost of a Growing City Workforce” with the health insurance premium estimated for fiscal year 2025 based on the compounded annual growth rate of the citywide healthcare contributions between fiscal year 2018 and 2025 across both Executive Budgets. This figure is a blend of the single and family healthcare insurance premiums. Welfare funds are added based on collective bargaining agreements for DC37. All other fringe benefits, including workers’ compensation and unemployment are added based on the average budget per Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent employee in the Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget. A per head cost of \$20,872 was added to each new employee to reflect the budgetary impact of new employees on long-term pension and OPEB liabilities, based on Citizens Budget Commission report “The Cost of a Growing

City Workforce,” adjusted to fiscal year 2025 dollars. It is worth noting that this reports the accrued liabilities of new hires – as pension contributions start two years after an employee is first hired – not year one budgetary impacts, and assumes new hires maintain employment long enough to qualify for retirement benefits. Methodology Table 1 shows the breakdown of short-term, year one costs, and long-term costs in fiscal year 2025 dollars.

Supplemental sanitation and streetscape beautification are based on Fiscal Year 2022 BID average spending per linear foot. These figures were estimated in fiscal year 2025 dollars by using the compounded annual growth rate in both figures between fiscals 2016 and 2022. The DOT NYC Pedestrian Mobility Plan shapefile is used as the base map to calculate the number of linear street feet citywide, net of those already covered by a BID, which was estimated through a spatial join of the shapefile of existing BID coverage. Then, streets are subset to those within one of the 59 populated Community Districts (excluding parks, airports, etc.). Of these, we used Pedestrian Mobility Plan corridor categories as a proxy for need for supplemental services and applied the BID costs per linear feet to: 75% of “Global,” 66% of “Regional,” 66% of “Neighborhood,” 25% of “Community,” and 5% of “Baseline” streets. **Table 3** shows the breakdown of spending on supplemental sanitation and streetscape beautification by borough based on these parameters. The estimated budget is net of existing supplemental sanitation spending provided by Council through the discretionary Schedule-C budget, which this

Note: Other Fringe Benefits include welfare fund and annuity contributions by type of worker based on DC37 collective bargaining agreements; federal payroll taxes (FICA) to total salaries of 7.65 percent, overtime, and other pay; the MTA Payroll Mobility Tax of 0.47 percent to total salaries, overtime, and other pay; workers compensation, and unemployment benefits.

Methodology Table 1. Annual Costs of Hiring, Fiscal Year 2025 Dollars

Spending Item	
Salaries, Overtime, and Other Pay	\$11,368,066
Health Insurance	\$2,949,410
Other Fringe Benefits	\$470,157
Total Short-Term Cost	\$14,787,633
Pensions	\$590,632
OPEB	\$1,872,209
Total Long-Term Cost	\$2,462,841

would replace. The Open Streets budget estimate was based on numbers provided by a partner with direct experience managing and operating an Open Street, with costs normalized to the number of blocks and number of days of Open Streets. The estimate represents 10 blocks per Community Districts, with 32 days of programming.

“Supplies and Other” OTPS spending includes spending on object codes “Other Services And Charges,” “Property And Equipment,” and “Supplies And Materials,” less spending on “Heat Light & Power” for smaller City agencies under 200 employees, normalized to the cost per full-time or full-time equivalent employee. These represent several budget code items, such as advertising, data processing, printing, office furniture, postage, and other general spending for supplies and materials. Additionally, we estimated the cost of leasing offices in each Community District, using existing rent budgets for Community Boards for those which pay rent. The average spending per Board was used, an estimate which includes both rent and heat, light, and power. Both estimates use data from the Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget.

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Interviewees

31st Avenue Open Street Collective

John Surico — Chairperson

34th Avenue Open Streets Coalition

Jim Burke — Co-Founder

Community Steward Solutions

Blaise Backer — Principal

Design Trust for Public Space

Elana Ehrenberg — Director of Strategic Partnerships

Downtown Jamaica Partnership

Whitney Barrat — President

Jahnavi Aluri — Vice President of Planning & Special Projects

Flatbush Nostrand Junction

Business Improvement District

Kenneth Mbonu — President & Executive Director

Gowanus Canal Conservancy

Andrea Parker — Executive Director

Jennings Street Open Street

Y. Lonnie Hardy — VP/Director, Caldwell Enrichment Program Inc.

Avily Parker — Organizer

Meatpacking District Management Association

Evan Sweet — Director of Neighborhood Planning and Operations

North Brooklyn Parks Alliance

Katie Denny Horowitz — Executive Director

Regional Plan Association

Maulin Mehta — New York Director

NYU Marron Institute Sustaining Places Initiative

Tim Tompkins — Fellow

Street Plans

Mike Lydon — Co-Founder & Principal

Street Vendor Project at the Urban Justice Center

Carina Kaufman-Gutierrez — Deputy Director

Sunset Park 5th Avenue Business Improvement District

David Estrada — Executive Director

The individuals listed generously provided their professional insights and experiences during the creation of this report. Appearance on this list does not necessarily indicate endorsement of any or all recommendations herein. Interviewees are ordered alphabetically by organization.

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