

# 2023

ANNUAL REPORT



Open Plans' mission is to transform how people experience New York City's streets.

STREETSBLOG

STREETOPIA  
UPPER WEST SIDE



STREETFILMS

Open Plans uses grassroots advocacy and policy change to inspire structural reforms and cultural shifts.

We promote a people-first street culture that prioritizes community, safety, joy, mobility and empowerment.



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W 25 St



ALL TRAFFIC  
LEFT TURN ONLY

NO LEFT TURN

ONE WAY



# *From our Co-Executive Directors*



Lisa Orman



Sara Lind

Looking back on 2023, we could not be more proud of our staff and the work we've done at Open Plans, Streetsblog, and Streetfilms. Making even small changes in New York City is hard work. But when we see that work result in real change on the streets and in City Hall, the smallest incremental win is enormously gratifying. This year was especially sweet as it was our first as co-Executive Directors. We are honored to collaboratively lead this tremendous team of movers and shakers.

Back in 2020, our idea of a central City office focused on the public realm was just a glimmer in our eye – but in 2023, that glimmer made progress toward becoming reality. Just three years after our pioneering 2020 proposal for an Office of Public Space Management, Mayor Adams announced New York's first-ever Chief Public Realm Officer, tasked with thinking holistically and strategically about our public space. The announcement was a triumph for public space and for Open Plans. The victory came early in 2023 and set the stage for a year of celebrations and big ambitions, bolstered with the reassurance that steadfast, skillful advocacy pays off.

That victory was one of many firsts in 2023. In June, following the launch of our report *Curb the Chaos*, Open Plans hosted our first-ever convening that gathered stakeholders from around the country to explore challenges and solutions at the curb; we successfully advocated for the city to expand Summer Streets into every borough; and in October, we staged a studio apartment within two parking spots to demonstrate the tradeoffs that parking mandates force us to make. These successes solidified Open Plans as dynamic, innovative, visionary – and inspiring real-world change.

Our work with communities also reached new highs in 2023. Our advocates and organizers spread far and wide, presenting to community boards and school communities about benefits like daylighting, curb reform, and school streets. We even began to help New Yorkers understand how and why to apply to their



community boards. This impactful engagement is the essential other half of our government-level policy work. It's where we build grassroots support and empower New Yorkers to make change.

Nothing is more empowering than knowledge, and no one keeps New Yorkers informed like StreetsblogNYC and Streetfilms. They reveal the truth about our city – the good and the bad. Streetsblog's award-winning reporting on license plate fraud raised an alarm and sparked new legislation in two of the states that sell the most fraudulent plates used in New York; their unmatched coverage on our agencies and mayoral administration kept New Yorkers informed on what's happening behind the scenes. Streetfilms showcased the big infrastructure projects worth celebrating, fostering support for more. Their visit to Paris gave New Yorkers, and our government, something to aspire to.

In this report, you'll see other ways that Open Plans made a difference in 2023. We are helping New Yorkers imagine a different city and making that image a reality. We look forward to another transformative year in the work toward a more people-centered, productive city.

With thanks,  
Lisa and Sara

# *Strategic Planning for Open Plans Advocacy*

Open Plans Advocacy closed out 2023 by adopting the first multi-year strategic plan in the organization's history. Balancing bold ambitions with political realities, the plan carves a guiding path for substantive change in New York City over a five-year period. In four separate but interconnected areas of livability, Open Plans has set bold objectives, each with supporting tactics, year-by-year goals, and success metrics.

Deftly navigating such a complex system of policy and advocacy – at the city, state, and community levels – requires a strong compass. This strategic plan will usher Open Plans into its most productive era, setting guiding principles as the organization continues to grow in size, scope, and influence.

1

## Public space management

Expand the amount of people-centered space in New York City as well as the management structure – at the City, partner, and community levels – that maintains and develops it.

2

## Parking and curb reform

Continue to be a leading voice for parking and curb innovation, working with City agencies to pass widespread parking reform (on and off the street) as well as with communities to empower them to advocate for more diverse, people-centered uses of their curbs.

3

## Reducing driving

Develop a strategic plan for reducing the overall number of vehicle miles traveled in New York City, analyzing best practices from around the world and setting target goals for a diverse group of drivers.

4

## StreetopiaUWS

Distill Open Plans' citywide work into targeted advocacy to the Upper West Side community, where Open Plans has cultivated and fostered a strong base of support. Leveraging long-standing relationships with residents, advocates, and local officials, socialize livability concepts and advance organizational goals at the neighborhood level.

*“Having a central community pedestrian thoroughfare really improves the quality of life of this city and I hope it becomes more permanent and widespread.”*

Dana, Manhattan Resident





# *A year of firsts for New York's public realm*

Open Plans' clear-eyed vision on the opportunities and benefits of public space paid off right from the start of 2023. In collaboration with citywide partners, we had been lobbying for the mayoral administration to create a position to coordinate between agencies and eliminate the red tape and siloed thinking that delays and diminishes critical projects. And in February 2023, Mayor Adams announced the creation of the Chief Public Realm Officer. This position is a critical aspect of achieving our goal of realigning the City's approach to public space management. It's a significant leap forward for Open Plans and the entire city.

Piggybacking on this huge win in City Hall, Open Plans also successfully helped secure a \$30 million investment from DOT to fund public spaces in more diverse, less-resourced neighborhoods. And, speaking of bringing joyful, life-affirming spaces to more areas of the city, Open Plans also

spearheaded a historic expansion of Summer Streets, which ran in all five boroughs for the first time in its history.

We also continued to work with schools citywide, to help them apply for school streets: safe, car-free spaces, either in front of or adjacent to their physical buildings. Many of those schools were accepted by NYC DOT and others are well on the pathway toward operating a school street. One principal in the Bronx, where her students had no access to outside space or parks, called their car-free oasis "magical."

Lastly, New York City's outdoor dining program is now permanent thanks to Open Plans and other advocates. The new program, officially called Dining Out NYC, was not made year-round as we would've liked, but the revolutionary passage is still a big win that provides basic protections that we hope to see expanded in the future.



# Convening leaders & sharing knowledge about New York City's curbs & parking



In 2023, Open Plans' thought leadership on curb reform kicked into high gear. In June, we published an extensive research report called *Curb the Chaos: Solutions for Cities at the Curb*. The report drew from interviews with approximately 40 cities around the country to better understand the current landscape of curb management: the challenges, solutions, and benefits. The report explored dynamic pricing, using the curb for the public good, loading zones, using technology for automated enforcement, and more. Later that month, we hosted leaders, stakeholders, and technology companies to collaborate, brainstorm, and share best practices at a one-day convening and hosted a walking tour to show participants how these curb challenges play out everyday in New York City.

We also led the public dialogue on parking mandates and continued to work closely with the Department of





City Planning is calling for the full elimination of parking mandates as the City of Yes for Housing Opportunity text amendment took shape. This antiquated practice requires developers to build new parking, whether it's needed or wanted. These mandates raise the cost of construction, which in turn raises the cost of rents and renders many affordable projects unable to be built – to say nothing of the increase in driving that parking mandates cause – making neighborhoods more spread apart, less walkable, and less safe. We published a [white paper](#) on the topic in March; then hosted a real-life installation – [a staged studio apartment within two \(mandated\) parking spots](#) – that allowed attendees to step inside the trade-offs between cars and people that parking mandates force us to make.

On the Upper West Side, Streetopia published a [report on current conditions and challenges of micromobility lanes](#). About 50 volunteers rode every UWS bike lane and route (protected and unprotected) multiple times, taking



photographs and rating the infrastructure. The report also included a survey, which illuminated just how disastrous the area's poor infrastructure was to the adoption and equity of these modes. We also led the push for a residential trash containerization pilot in Harlem, clearing sidewalks of mounds of trash and using the curbside lane to benefit the public at large.

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# *Educating & empowering New Yorkers*



Open Plans continued our work engaging directly with community members across the five boroughs, educating them on issues that affect their neighborhoods and getting them involved in creating change. We hosted a series of webinars on ways to engage – most notably through community board membership and participation. We walked attendees through the process of applying, what it's like to be on a board, and what makes for a successful community board application. And it paid off; at the end of the season, several new appointees share our mission and vision for a better New York. Many others are now actively engaging in their communities for the first time.

And by meeting directly with community boards across the city, Open Plans helped launch a grassroots movement for daylighting. Daylighting is a proven treatment for livable streets that's used effectively all over the country, but not extensively or universally here in New York City. Our advocacy team connected with several boards and helped them pass resolutions for universal daylighting in their districts. The popularity of daylighting with community boards was an energizing bit of progress and proof that our work with communities is making an impact.



Lastly, we hosted our second annual internship program, drawing from public and private colleges and graduate programs. Throughout the year we received news from several of our inaugural-class interns that they landed their first post-graduate jobs, armed with all that they learned at Open Plans. We are thrilled to watch them grow and thrive!

# Streetfilms

Throughout the year, Streetfilms amplified the work of local advocates with films on the new double width bike lanes on Third, Ninth and Tenth Avenues in Manhattan, the groundswell to daylight every intersection in the city (leading to the Adams administration committing to implement this known street safety tool at 1,000 intersections), and demonstrating how drastic alterations to iconic streets have created more people-friendly spaces (think: Queens' 34th Avenue, Broadway from Union to Times Square).

In the fall, Streetfilms traveled to Paris to learn more about their post-Covid bike boom, local beautification efforts and their stunning school streets program. During one month, Streetfilms boasted 1 million X (formerly Twitter) views in a 30-day window. Finally, Clarence Eckerson, Jr., our Streetfilms Director, was named one of the top 50 most influential American cyclists by Escape Magazine.



# Streetsblog

StreetsblogNYC had a wildly successful 2023. Our series on **“Ghost Plates”** (drivers who evade traffic camera detection by altering or defacing their license plates to make them unreadable) and fake temp tags (fraudulently issued temporary license plates that allow motorists to evade insurance requirements, ticketing and more) directly impacted legislation and enforcement. New Jersey and Georgia - two of the states where the most fake tags come from - both passed bills that actually cracked down on the very problem we identified, and suspended the licenses of several rogue dealers cited by name in our coverage. One New Jersey lawmaker credited Streetsblog with sounding the alarm. Similarly, our ongoing coverage of covered or obscured license plates in advance of congestion pricing finally led other media outlets to realize how important the issue has become.

We also broke crucial stories that help build a narrative on Mayor Adams’s administration, including:

- How Adams set up an entirely new office, staffed by a non-transportation official, to oversee and delay DOT safety projects.
- How Mayor Adams willfully ignored requirements under the Streets Master Plan to build bus and bike lanes, breaking his promise to the most vulnerable.
- How the Mayor’s arm’s length view of congestion pricing promised to undermine the central business district toll program when it starts in the spring.

## Streetsblog’s Award-Winning Year

### Ghost Tags

by Jesse Coburn  
*Sidney Award*

### Always Scared

by Jesse Coburn  
*Sigma Award, Silurians Press Club Award, Casey Feldman Award*

### “What Is Green Development?”, “Developer Blasts Harlem Pol”

by Julianne Cuba  
*Silurians Press Club Award*

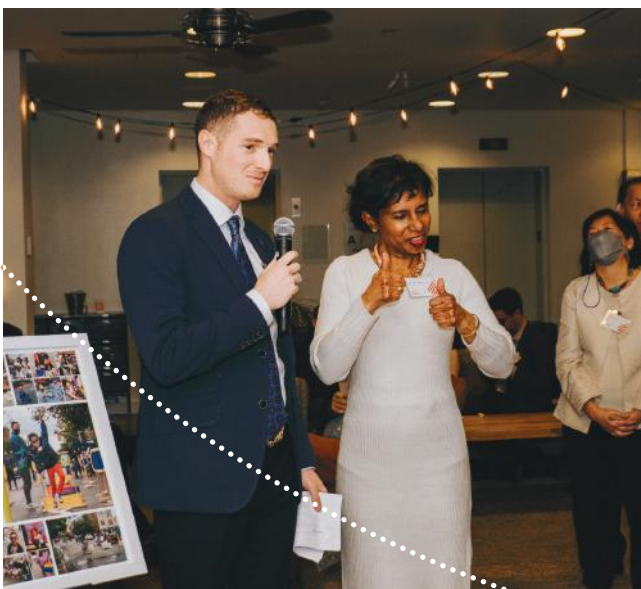
### “Rebuilding the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway”

by Julianne Cuba and Kevin Duggan  
*Silurians Press Club Award*



# Public Space Awards

Open Plans hosted its inaugural fundraising awards event in 2023, celebrating the people and organizations that make New York City's public spaces as unique and vibrant as they are. The atmosphere of the event itself was a reflection of the close-knit, people-centered community that Open Plans and these public space champions are building in the city!







**Awardees for Open Plans' 1st Annual Public Space Awards**

**Meatpacking District**  
*Best Public Space Evolution Over Time*

**Paseo Park**  
*Most Inspirational Project in NYC*

**Park Slope Fifth Avenue Business Improvement District**  
*Best Small BID*

**Hoboken Department of Transportation & Parking**  
*Curbside Safety Award*

**Gowanus Canal Conservancy**  
*Curbside Climate Award*

**Clean Air Green Corridor**  
*Best School Street*

**Lonnie Hardy**  
**Jennings Open Street, Bronx**  
*Activist Award*

**Soapbox Presents**  
*People's Choice Award*  
*Best Public Space Activator*

*People's Choice Award Nominees*

**Bindlestiff Family Circus**

**Drag Story Hour NYC**

**The Longest Table**

**Street Lab**



## Our Donors

Open Plans gratefully acknowledges the support of the individuals, foundations, and corporations listed below, whose generous gifts allow us to fulfill our mission.

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# Support Open Plans

Since 2000, Open Plans has been helping New Yorkers envision – and realize – a more people-centered city. On the steps of City Hall, we advocate for policy changes that promote safety, accessibility, and mode shift. On the ground in our neighborhoods, we urge communities to dream big about their streets, sidewalks, plazas, and parklets.

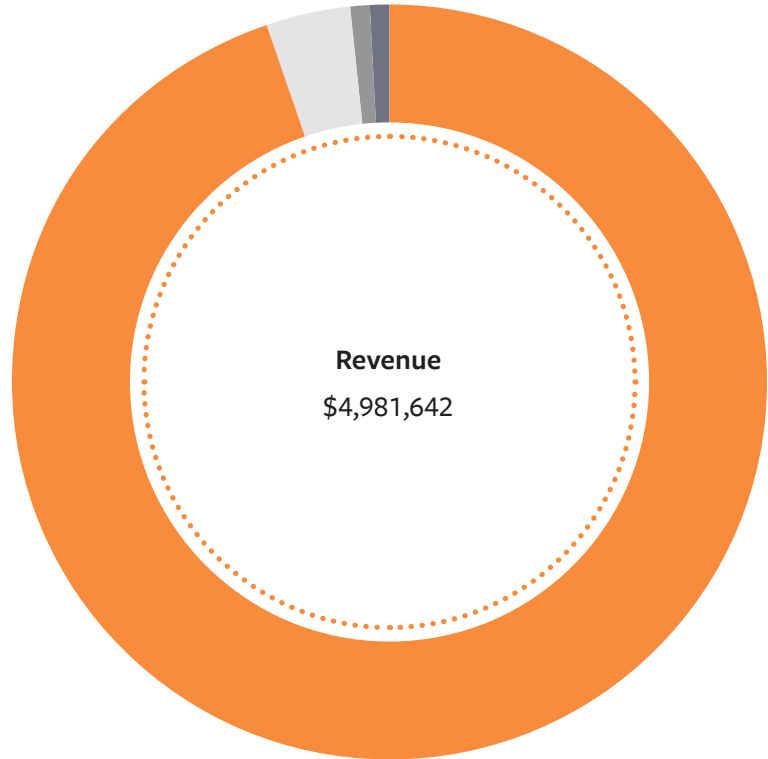
We believe that everyone should have access to safe and joyful public space. When you support Open Plans, you help make that happen. Thank you for inspiring transformative change! Your support allows this dedicated and ambitious team to stay nimble while fiercely pursuing outcomes that will make New York City a better place to live, work, and play.

To donate, please visit [openplans.org/support](https://openplans.org/support).



# Financials

2023 marked a new phase of strategic growth for Open Plans, Inc. and the organization’s financial picture reflected that. Momentum for people-centered spaces in New York City was more powerful than ever and this attracted new levels of support as Open Plans expanded in both size and reach. We ended the year having exceeded our goal for total number of donors by 22% (a 24% increase over 2022) and increased money raised from 2022 by 150%. Our expanding citywide advocacy, deep community connections, and robust policy initiatives attracted hundreds of new donors to Open Plans. As our fundraising program grows, we’ll seek to build upon these new relationships to cultivate a robust and diverse group of longtime, loyal supporters.

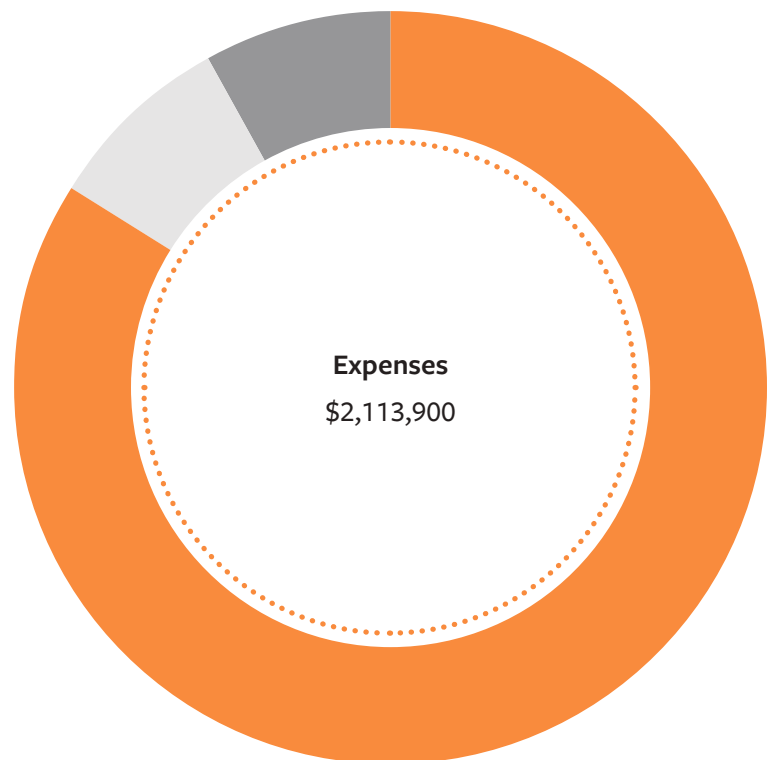


## Revenue

- Contributions & grants 94.81%
- Investment Returns 3.59%
- In-kind contributions 0.93%
- Other income 0.67%

## Expenses

- Program 84.04%
- Management & General 8.16%
- Fundraising 7.8%



To see a full financial statement for the year 2023, please visit [openplans.org/about](https://openplans.org/about)

**Expenses**  
\$2,113,900



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### Streetfilms

Clarence Eckerson Jr.  
Director of Video Production

## SUMMER INTERNS

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V Hoy, Pratt Institute, Urban  
Placemaking and Management  
graduate program

Noah Miller, Pratt Institute,  
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College, Urban Sustainability

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intern, Manhattan Center for  
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### StreetsblogNYC

Jonah Schwarz, NYC high  
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Auden Oakes, NYC high school  
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