



What interventions, partnerships or stakeholders are we missing?

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Design to welcome youth & incentivise youth programs

Pedestrianize some streets

Parking Lot Conversion

Design for Movement & Play

School Yards: for Play, Health, Resilience & Community Use

Reclaim spaces from cars for play & gathering

Connect to Youth

Incorporate trees & Green Infrastructure

Activate under utilized spaces

Make Transit Affordable & Fun + Invest in Bike Bus Routes

School Rooftops for play

Reclaim parking spots & activate front of schools

Intergenerational Parks of Belonging

Spaces & features for every age

Family Friendly Bike infrastructure

Program youth centered Plazas

growing up!
Reshaping Neighborhoods for NYC Youth

URBAN DESIGN FORUM

A Free to Grow Forefront Fellowship Capstone Project by Eduarda Aun, James Francisco, Stephany Lin, Niyanta Muku, Rujuta Naringrekar and Nasra Nimaga

Illustration by Pete Gamlen

A Forefront Fellowship Capstone Project

Why Neighborhoods?

New York City's children and youth deserve spaces and opportunities to flourish. NYC, with all of its dynamism, creativity, and resources, should be unmatched as an enriching and nurturing place for children to grow up. Instead, young families with children are leaving the city at increasingly faster rates, driven by the daunting challenges of raising children here. Facing population loss and fiscal pressures, the mayoral administration has proposed budget cuts to schools, libraries, and youth programs.

Instead, this is precisely the time to invest more in our children's well-being, in all facets of their experiences in the city and in their daily lives – from school, to home, to all the spaces in between. This is a call to center children and youth in our city by centering them at the scale that matters most: *the neighborhood*.



NYC Neighborhoods for Children & Youth

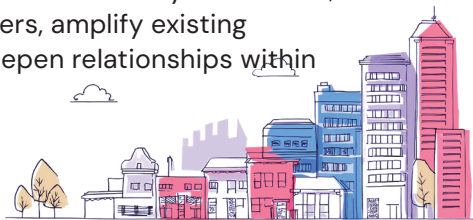
Through neighborhoods, children and youth grow up and experience the city. Neighborhoods are the setting for spaces where our kids learn, play, and interact with others: everywhere from schools to libraries, parks, streets, transit stations, stores, and businesses.

When they offer safe and accessible spaces for children and youth to play, hang out, and get around, neighborhoods encourage autonomy, physical activity, and social interaction. However, the city's neighborhoods and spaces are often deeply hostile to families and young people: from subway infrastructure that forces caregivers to haul strollers up long flights of stairs, to roads with speeding cars and traffic, to the no-loitering signs pervasive across businesses and building entryways. Neighborhood spaces also often exclude many types of young people: parks may offer playgrounds only for young children, for example, or lack social spaces for teenagers who do not gravitate towards sports. New York City neighborhoods also continue to suffer from massive inequitable disparities in the quality and health of their environments, from street tree plantings to neighborhood parks to school facility conditions. Without quality spaces and accessibility for all, especially our most vulnerable, neighborhoods can alienate their own children and youth.

This project offers neighborhood planning and design approaches that place children and youth at the center. We recognize the power and agency of their own observations, experiences, and desires, and seek pathways to bring their visions to life.

Envisioning Neighborhood Spaces: Starting at the School

We apply a physical design lens to envision the system of neighborhood spaces themselves and the untapped opportunities between them. "Unlocking" these spaces must center youth voices, foster strong ties between key stakeholders, amplify existing successful programs and spaces, and deepen relationships within neighborhoods.



Our proposals stem from the school as a starting point for action.

Within neighborhoods, schools serve as central hubs for children, youth, and community life. They often mark the start and end points of students' daily journeys through the city, whether they live in the same neighborhood as their school or go to school far away from home, as is the case for many of New York's middle and high schoolers. Moreover, as the largest portfolio of city-owned buildings dedicated to children, schools are the foremost sites for the City to impact its youth. Their scale, presence, and accessibility make them vital anchors for large-scale transformations in the community.

From the school, we extend out into the other spaces that comprise the neighborhood: the streets and sidewalks around the school, followed by the range of possible public and private neighborhood spaces. We also examine the streets and infrastructure facilitating movement across all these spaces. At each scale, we highlight and build on existing best practices, to underscore what the city should aspire for all neighborhoods, within each neighborhood's unique contexts, communities, and history.

<i>The school grounds...</i>	<i>Around the school...</i>	<i>Neighborhood spaces...</i>	<i>The Connecting network...</i>
...are made up of internal spaces within the school building and external spaces for outdoor play and learning.	...features streets, curbs and sidewalks that are directly adjacent to the school grounds.	...encompass forms of public spaces and private spaces where youth spend their time	...is made up of transitory spaces which youth travel to get from place to place.

Towards Neighborhood Planning for NYC

Comprehensive planning and implementation of effective and sustainable interventions requires robust neighborhood planning systems. And yet, New York's tools for consistent neighborhood planning are extremely limited. There is no system in place for regular, consistent neighborhood planning; generally, the city conducts neighborhood plans in advance of a targeted rezoning. Outside of this, each agency tends to develop their own plans and priorities, resulting in agency-specific assessments of particular neighborhoods to prioritize for capital projects. Examples of these assessments include: the Parks Department's analysis of neighborhoods with less open space and higher socioeconomic needs, or the Department of Transportation's analysis for Priority Investment Areas based on neighborhood need and lack of prior investment. These are important and laudable programs but undeniably result in uncoordinated neighborhood investments. Additionally, not only do city agencies face limited capacity and resources across the large scale of NYC's five boroughs, but the existing structures to work cross-sector across multiple agencies are limited and inconsistent.

Community organizers, community-based organizations, and everyday neighborhood residents across New York also step in to advocate and provide for child and youth spaces, but they too are strapped for resources, support, and capacity.

City agencies and community partners need new pathways to neighborhood planning and collaboration, in order to provide for intentional, well-connected spaces in neighborhoods that serve the full spectrum of child and youth needs. We propose three main citywide governance and policy priorities that foreground these collaborations, to amplify impact across agency silos, each with their own visions and tactical strategies:

1. Systemize neighborhood planning for children and youth
2. Create organizational infrastructure for New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) to proactively coordinate neighborhood-based initiatives
3. Provide proactive, reliable funding streams for capital and maintenance



A Call To Action

Our aim is to provide a blueprint for city leaders, agencies, designers, planners, community organizers, and anyone else who shapes the built environment to actively center children and youth in the long-term design and planning of our neighborhoods. As a call to action, we seek to inspire collective creativity, imagination, stewardship, and problem solving.

We envision an NYC of neighborhoods that encourage youth to thrive and move around in healthy, engaging, affirming ways, through an ecosystem of spaces in their neighborhoods that support and consciously include them. Of course, the built environment alone will not solve the systemic challenges facing children and families in New York, like the affordability crises of housing and childcare. Our focus here on physical neighborhood spaces centers on reimagining what the experience of joyful, nurturing neighborhoods can look and feel like. To tackle these broad issues, we offer a two-pronged approach to envisioning neighborhood change for children and youth:

1. A set of physical design interventions to spark reimagining the system of neighborhood spaces and the untapped opportunities within them.
2. Implementation pathways that align and strengthen collaboration across city agencies and other neighborhood stakeholders.

Ultimately, we seek systems changes that can enable and advance the design of neighborhood spaces that shape kids' everyday lives. Changes at the systems level, both physically designed systems of spaces as well as systems of governance, policy, and funding, to help shift the city from one-off initiatives towards high-quality standards and resources that reach more if not all neighborhoods.

Growing Up: Reshaping Neighborhoods for NYC Youth is an ongoing project that we collectively hope to expand on and one that presents an opportunity for you as our audience to share ideas that we have not included in this work hence the gaps on the illustration. Please let us know what partnerships, interventions or stakeholders we are missing.

Scan the QR code for a link to the full report!
Contact us: growingupforefront@gmail.com

