

A Vision for Lt. Frank McConnell Park



chhaya
Community Development
Corporation

Project partners:

hive
PUBLIC SPACE

För

**LOCAL
CENTER**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Local Center is a collaborative initiative by **Urban Design Forum** and the **Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development**, with generous support from the Mellon Foundation as the lead funder. Additional major support is provided by the Charles H. Revson Foundation, the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, the NYC Green Relief & Recovery Fund, the Lily Auchincloss Foundation, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. This initiative unites neighborhood leaders, designers, and government agencies to bring community-driven visions to life at Lt. Frank McConnell Park in Richmond Hill, Queens, New York.

Queens-based non-profit **Chhaya CDC** teamed up with design firms **Studio Fōr** and **Hive Public Space** to activate and maximize the use of Lt. Frank McConnell Park in a one and a half year long process, beginning in the summer of 2023. Through a series of community engagement activities, our team spoke to community members and leaders to try and understand what might lead them to use the park. This community engagement led to a community informed design led by Studio Fōr and Hive Public Space. Dubbed the **Richmond Hill Community Arts Hub**, it debuted at the Richmond Hill Arts Festival in September 2024, our culminating activation to showcase the park and the deep arts and cultural organizing that's embedded in Richmond Hill.

With a long term goal around sustaining the use of the park for and by the community, the team plans to ensure programming in the park in 2025 with a small regrants initiative to allow Richmond Hill based organizations to host events in Lt. Frank McConnell Park. We plan to continue to advocate for accessible and equitable public spaces in Richmond Hill, a community that deserves to be recognized and properly resourced.



RICHMOND HILL

LT. FRANK
MCCONNELL
PARK



Chicago/DC
Community
Arts/2011
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INTRODUCTION

Project Goals

1. Cultivate agency of community members
2. Create a secular gathering space for community engagement and organizing
3. Celebrate and showcase the cultures and heritage of Richmond Hill
4. Build resident engagement to preserve culture in public space long term
5. Connect community members to services and other resources

Project Team



Chhaya CDC is a Queens based non-profit founded to support building the power, economic well-being, and housing stability of Indo-Caribbean and South Asian New Yorkers.

Jessica Balgobin
Farzana Linda
Annetta Seecharran

För

Studio För and **Hive Public Space** came together out of a shared love for New York City and an understanding that public spaces are integral to the health and well-being of our neighborhoods, especially those that are overlooked. Their approach is community-centered and collaborative, and through this project, they aim to facilitate the creation of an equitable, inclusive space for and by the communities of Richmond Hill.



StudioFör
Ayesha Agha
Gabo Halili
Fauzia Khanani
Laney Vela

Hive Public Space
Alexandra Gonzalez
Priti Patel



Urban Design Forum
Daniel McPhee
Katherine Sacco
Martha Snow
Hadley Stack

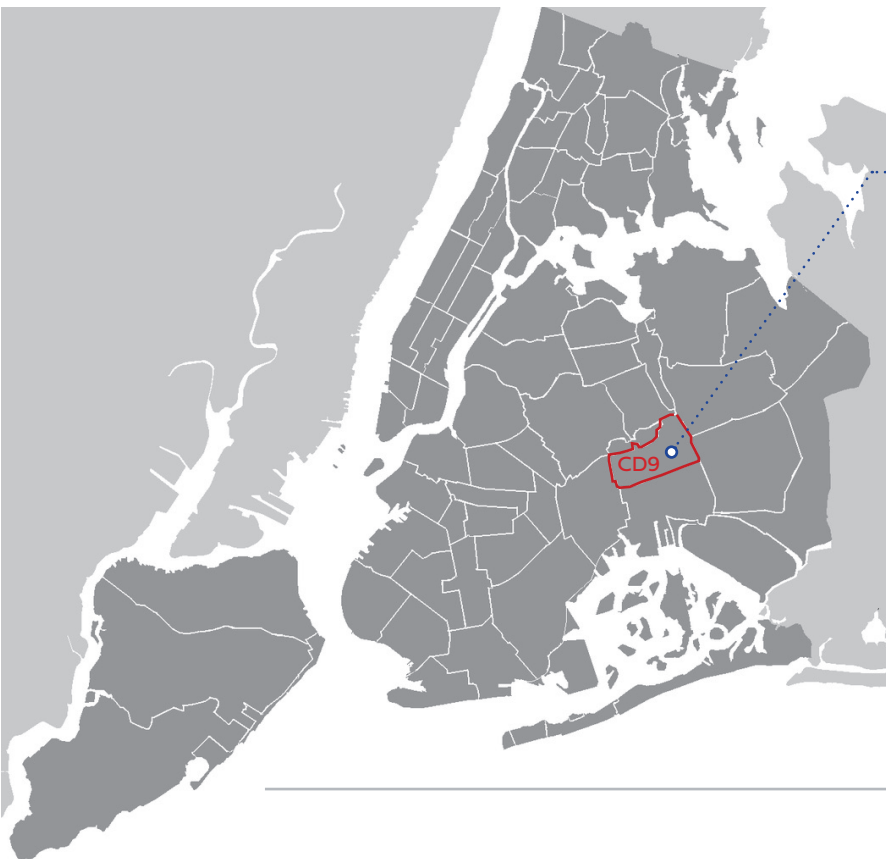
**Association for
Neighborhood and Housing
Development**
Gina Lee
Barika Williams

Richmond Hill Neighborhood Context

Neighborhood Profile

Richmond Hill, located in south Queens, is a thriving New York City neighborhood with many community anchors, such as community-based organizations like **Chhaya CDC** and Caribbean Equality Project, small businesses including restaurants, retailers and professional services, & faith-based organizations for the many religions represented there. Despite this community being so diverse and active, there are little to no public gathering spaces in the neighborhood to support its residents as well as the organizations, much less any that reflect these communities and are safe, inclusive, and respectful of its diversity.

Within New York City, Richmond Hill is represented by **Community District 9**. Within CD9, there are only **0.1 acres** of city parks per 1,000 residents as compared to **1.8 acres** for NYC overall.



Richmond Hill Queens has been home to Caribbean, Punjabi, and Latinx communities for over 50 years.

The neighborhood has been underserved on many fronts: for example, schools in the area are considered to be some of the most overcrowded and lowest performing in the City.

Despite the neglect, there is **vibrant organic civic life**, primarily around religious institutions and small businesses, along with a recent groundswell of community organizing. Yet, there are no public gathering spaces in the neighborhood, much less any that reflect these communities and are safe, inclusive, and respectful of its diversity.

Demographics

A 2020 study by the NYC Department of Small Business Services documented Richmond Hill’s primary demographics as follows: **33% Hispanic, 26% Asian, and 16% Black.**

However, we know that several challenges exist with the current data about who lives in Richmond Hill. Richmond Hill is known to be **undercounted** when it comes to the census, so it is safe to assume that the above statistics do not present an accurate picture of the neighborhood.

Second, documenting Indo-Caribbean communities across the US and in NYC has been complex, as Indo-Caribbeans opt to identify as “Asian” or “Other.” Again, this reflects an inaccurate count of Indo-Caribbean residents.



Phagwah Parade 2023



Phagwah Parade 2024



Signage on Liberty Ave



Alex Krales/THE CITY

Organizations present

Richmond Hill is home to **deeply local organizing** that aims to address key issues that have emerged in the neighborhood. Below is a visual representation of the organizations that are active and providing services in the community.

Indo Caribbean Alliance

Richmond Hill Block Association

South Asian Youth Action

United Madrassi Association

River Fund

RICHMOND HILL ORGANIZATIONS

Jahajee

Desis Rising Up and Moving

Community Board 9

RH/SOP Lions Club

South Queens Women's March

Chhaya CDC

Caribbean Equality Project



“We are an Afro-Indo-Caribbean LGBTQ immigrant rights organization in Richmond Hill. I’ve lived in this neighborhood for a long time, and I haven’t been a part of many events. I can name only a few, which means that it’s important for them to keep occurring, and what it means for people that look like us to be hosting them so that people don’t feel like aliens are overtaking their space and taking over their neighborhoods, but rather people that live in them are approaching them and taking care of them and creating spaces for a community to congregate and get to know one another so they feel more in touch with their neighborhoods.”

Caribbean Equality Project

“Jahajee Sisters is a gender justice organization. We support survivors of domestic violence, gender-based violence, specifically in the Indo-Caribbean community, and we support gender non-conforming folks as well as women. This park is usually, what’s the opposite of activated? ... barren, and also more importantly there aren’t a lot of women and children that come through this park and this is a really important effort to sort of reclaim the space and get folks to be more comfortable and safe. Like, I think that’s a huge part of it is the safety and there’s always safety in numbers. So I think it’s part of that really important shift in this organization, in this community, to really center folks and, yeah, bring folks back to actually enjoy the spaces that we call home.”

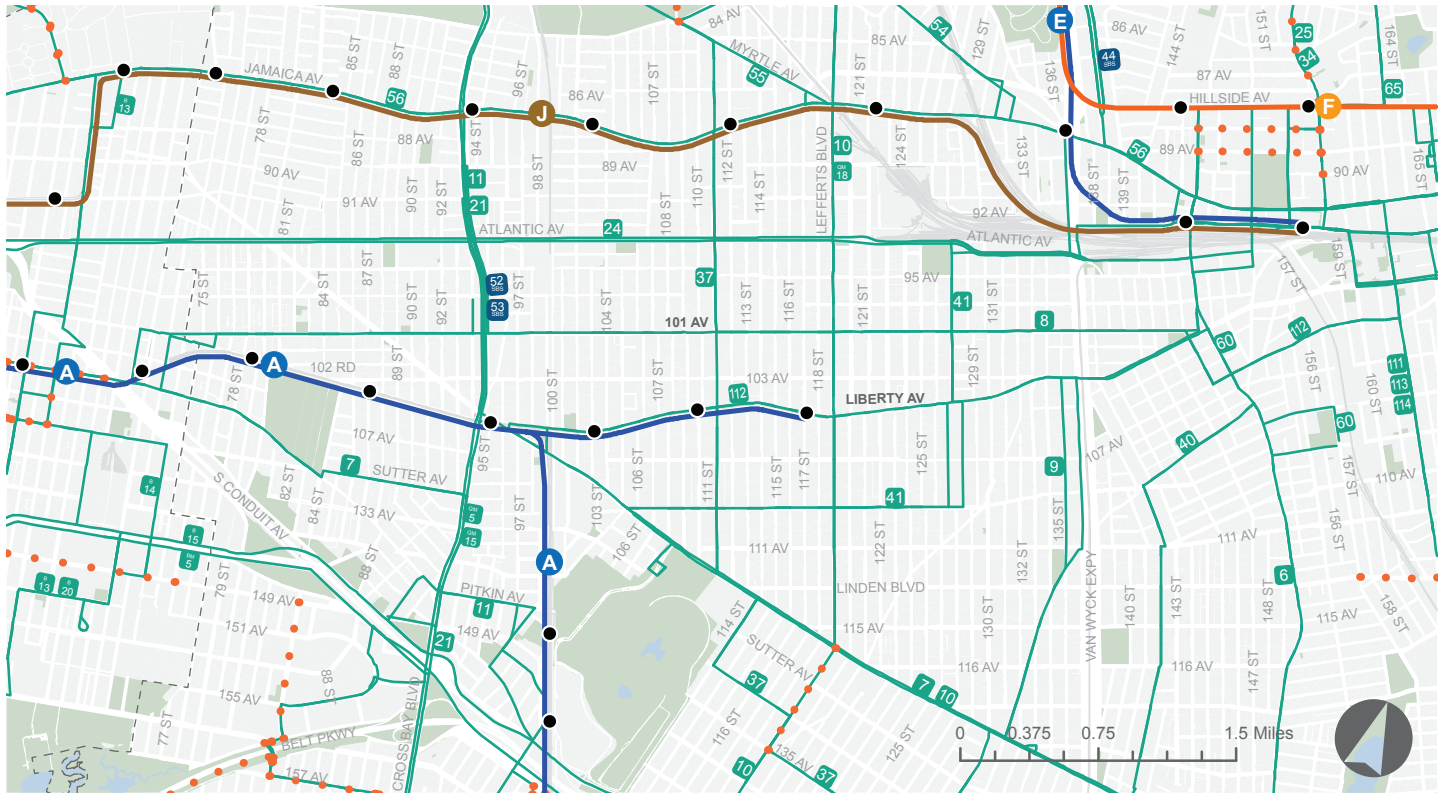
Jahajee Sisters

“DRUM is a intergenerational South Asian and Indo-Caribbean organization focusing around the working class and how are we organizing in order to get the resources that we actually need for our communities, because knowing that there are resources that is not being allocated to us, and it is our power, and it is our duty to actually fight for our resources. They make it so hard for us to actually fight for it that it’s impossible, but with organizing, like everybody here at this event, this **Richmond Hill Arts Festival, it’s like, it’s empowering and like inspiring that, you know, to see all these people, like, whether service-based organizers or like an organization actually like doing the work to actually make sure that we get the resources.”**

DRUM Chapter Leader

Public Transportation

The public transportation in Richmond Hill is unique and has been difficult for residents trying to commute in and out of the community. Below is a transportation map created by NYC SBS.



▲ Richmond Hill Transportation

— Bus Routes

●●● Bicycle Lanes

— NYC Subway

- The **A train** is one of the main MTA train lines that Richmond Hill residents rely on to get out of Queens. This line has multiple routes, with only one route that ends directly in Richmond Hill, on Liberty Avenue. The other routes stop on the border of Richmond Hill and Ozone Park, and head into Far Rockaway.
- The **Lefferts Boulevard–Ozone Park** station opened in 1915.

Transportation has been a challenge as **commuting to different parts of South Queens is difficult.**



These neighborhoods are quite **car dependent, and bike lanes are very limited.**



Richmond Hill is one of the NYC neighborhoods that currently **lacks Citibike access**



Public Space Needs of Richmond Hill

There is a need to maximize the open space we have. However very little research has been conducted in this neighborhood to measure the needs of this community and provide quantifiable metrics to improve outcomes.

What we do know is:



CB9 ranks 46 out of 59 for residents within a 5-minute walk of a park.

CB9 needs more inclusive public spaces for residents and local organizations.

An SBS 2020 study cites that Richmond Hill's **residents recognize the lack of public spaces and parks for gathering and activities.**

EXISTING CONDITIONS OF LT. FRANK MCCONNELL PARK

History of Park

Our project site was informally used as a public park for more than two decades before it was officially designated as a **NYC Department of Parks** site in 1944. In 1964, it was renamed for Lieutenant Frank McConnell, the first neighborhood resident killed in World War I.

Additionally, the Morris Park World War I Memorial, a large granite monument adorned with a bronze plaque, is located in **Lt. Frank McConnell Park**. Currently, the Park functions primarily as a sitting space with fixed benches and very shaded by an abundance of pin oaks.



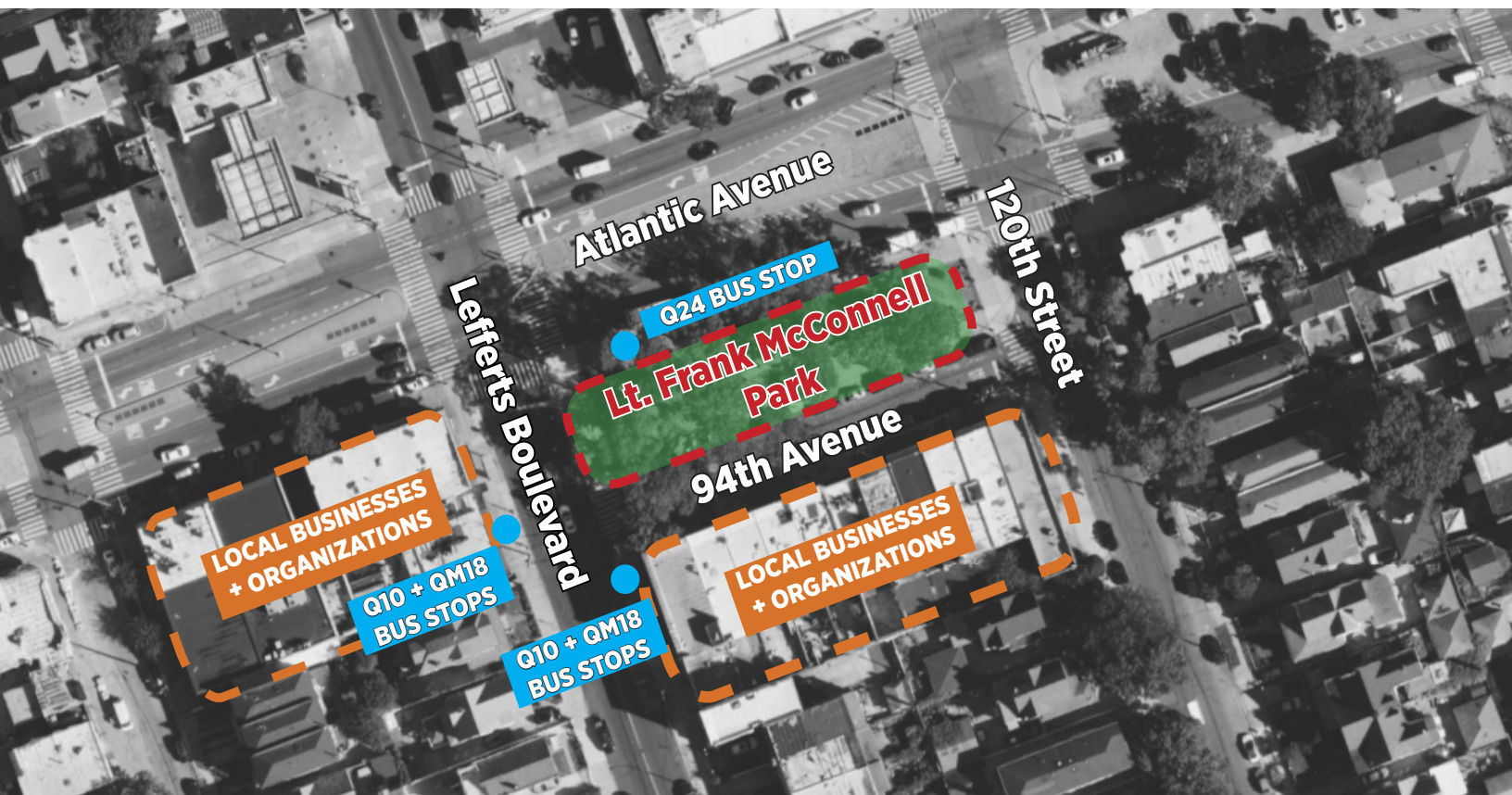
CITY OF NEW YORK
CONSTRUCTED 1943
RECONSTRUCTED 2005
LT. FRANK MCCONNELL
MEMORIAL PARK
MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG, MAYOR
HELEN M. MARSHALL, BOROUGH PRESIDENT
DENNIS P. GALLAGHER, COUNCIL MEMBER
ADRIAN BENNETT, COMMISSIONER
HELEN L. OGRINZ, RLA DESIGNER
PARKS & RECREATION

Location of Park

Lt. Frank McConnell Park is located at **94th Avenue and Atlantic Avenue** between Lefferts Boulevard and 120th Street. It is a long, narrow and triangular shaped strip and more often than not thought of as a public plaza versus a public park due to its shape and existing layout. The north, west and south sides of the Park are lined with local businesses while the east side is residential. The major thoroughfares that flank the north and west sides of the Park make it a heavily traversed area via foot, automobile and public transit.

“...I find that **our neighborhood is just filled with so much like cultural vibes**, like we just have so much great music, so much great food, and we also just like have a great like, I feel like a great space to call home because **we have so much of our cultural traditions that we have carried from wherever we’ve come from.**”

Richmond Hill Resident
Fall Festival



Users and Uses of Park

Based upon our team's observations of the space over the course of 18 months, we found that the Park is frequented by a variety of people and for various uses as well. In terms of Park users, we identified the following people and/or groups who frequented the space and also noted what activities brought them there:

- People **passing through the park** on their way to a local business,
- **Local residents** during their commute to/from home, work, or school,
- **Commuters** waiting for the local MTA Q10 and/or Q24 buses,
- **People taking a break** during their workday,
- Seniors who come to the park during the day and early evening, and
- **Locals with unmet needs** who are currently residing in the Park.

“Some of my cousins used to come here all the time when we were younger to play ... and it was, it just filled with so much like great childhood memories. I think when I got like a little bit older, I realized that the park also served as like a **hub for the homeless community...”**



Physical Opportunities and Challenges

Based on site observations and conversations with users

As we spent more time observing the Park and the people in it, we were able to identify existing **challenges** of the space as well as potential **opportunities** for how we could potentially make it more accessible and inclusive.

Challenges

- The current layout and configuration of the Park is **not conducive for larger group gatherings** or events such as exercise sessions or sports,
- The existing **benches are limiting** in fostering interaction or allowing more than 4 people to sit together,
- There are often a large number of **people passing through** and congregating at the northeast entrance to the park while waiting for the Q24 bus which seems to deter people from using that side of the park,
- The existing, **low fencing** on the perimeter of the Park and walkways within the Park are potential tripping hazards for those walking through the space, especially at night, while also limiting access to the existing, small green spaces there,
- There is very **minimal lighting** in the Park which may create a feeling of being unsafe in the space again at night.



Low Fencing



People passing through



Insufficient Lighting



Benches location

Opportunities

- The existing benches that allow for individuals or **3-6 people to convene** in the space in a seated manner,
- The existing **lawn spaces** could be utilized for **future programming** in a more natural, soft setting,
- The existing wide sidewalks on both the north and south sides of the Park which could be utilized for larger events which could spill out into these spaces as well onto **94th Avenue** if we obtained an **Open Streets permit**,
- The existing large, **oak trees** which provide shade and a calming sound when there is a breeze or wind,
- The Park is in very close proximity to many **local businesses** which we would hope to incorporate into our future programming to promote their services and use of the park,
- The Park is relatively well-maintained by the NYC Parks Department which would support the general use and accessibility to the space for local residents as we further developed the site, and
- The existing foot traffic through the park which could help to inform the community about our project, allow us to easily engage with neighbors to learn about what they would desire in the space, and would hopefully bring neighbors to future events and programming,



Lawn spaces



Seating configuration



Oak trees



94th Avenue

ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH

The Local Center initiative not only provides residents in Richmond Hill an opportunity to voice their needs and concerns but also sets a precedent for community engagement as a **tool for developing an inclusive and shared vision for the neighborhood's public spaces**. With its rich history and diverse population, Richmond Hill presents unique potential for collaboration among city agencies, local organizations, community leaders, and local creatives through intentional and varied engagement approaches.

Our engagement approach aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. Focus on Community Assets

Take an assets-based approach to framing engagement questions and activities, building on local strengths and aspirations, rather than concentrating on barriers to implementation.

2. Connect to and Include BIPOC Voices

Focus efforts on closing historic gaps in outreach and engagement, especially with BIPOC residents, businesses, youth, and cultural organizations.

3. Keep it Fun and Make it Playful

Make participation in the engagement process an enjoyable, interactive experience Using Art and Play as vehicles for trust-building, communication, and storytelling.

4. Community-Driven Design

Value the contributions of community members, and allow community feedback to drive the design process.



TIMELINE

OUTREACH

Back to School Fair

AUG 29, 2023 – PS 56Q
AUG 31, 2023 – PS 273Q

Neighborhood Outreach

OCT 10 + 27, 2023
DEC 15, 2023
JUN 27, 2024

Diwali Festival 2023

NOV 03, 2023

Richmond Hill Housing Fair

NOV 18, 2023
MAY 11, 2024

Phagwah Parade

APR 7, 2024

South Queens Women's March Workshop

APR 20, 2024

Partners' Breakfast Convening

FEB 6, 2024



2023

Diwali

2024

FALL

WINTER

Visioning Session

OCT 2023

Design Charrette

FEB 29/2024



Fall Festival *

NOV 5, 2023



Winter Festival *

DEC 26, 2023

* Events at Lt. Frank McConnell Park went through a NYC Parks permitting process at least 21 days prior to the event date

Paint Parties

JUN 22 + 27, 2024 *

JUL 18, 2024



Phagwah Parade

SPRING

SUMMER

FALL

"Art in the Parks"

APR 2024

Installation

LAUNCH / CELEBRATION

Richmond Hill Arts Festival

SEP 21, 2024



Youth Design Workshop

MAR 5, 2024



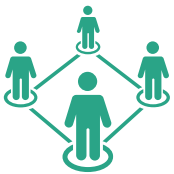


ENGAGEMENT TYPES



Visioning

A variety of engagement tools and activities were used to gather input from a wide range of community members.



Park Activation + Community Building

On-site community events that demonstrate desired park activities and bring community members along our implementation process by providing opportunities to participate in the making of the design intervention.



Outreach (flyering + promotion)

Team members shared information about the project and upcoming park events during key community events and connected directly with surrounding businesses.

By the Numbers



OUTREACH

~1,000



STORIES COLLECTED

57



COMMUNITY SURVEYS

3



VISIONING EVENTS

4



BUSINESSES ENGAGED

28



PARK ACTIVATION EVENTS

3



Visioning

A variety of engagement tools and activities were used to gather input from a wide range of community members.

Project Flier + Informational Brochure

A printed brochure captured the key goals of the project and served as an extension of the project flier as an invitation to community members and potential partners to learn about ways to support park activation.

Community Survey

Printed surveys and shareable links were provided in English, Spanish and Punjabi at all engagement events and on social media to help reach a wider audience and learn more about existing conditions and future desires.

On the ground surveys were also deployed to evaluate user experiences before and during a large community activation at the park.

Partners' Visioning Session

Key leaders representing advocacy and cultural organizations based in South Queens were invited to share local insights, identify challenges and opportunities, and re-envision the park as a space for all.

On site Community Events | Input Gathering and Activation

The team hosted on site events to draw community members to the park, elicit conversations and gather formal and informal feedback about future opportunities while demonstrating new and creative park uses.

Partners' Breakfast Convening

Potential programming partners were invited to brainstorm future activities and events that could help activate the park, and assess their organization's programming capacity in the upcoming year.

Youth Design Workshop

Afterschool workshop at Richmond Hill High School in partnership with South Asian Youth Action to hear from local teens. The team shared information about the project, reviewed community goals, and gathered ideas about their desires for using the park as well as preliminary design feedback about the proposed art piece.



Youth Design Workshop | Richmond hill High School

FALL FESTIVAL

Frank McConnell Park

 ~80
of attendees



“During the summertime, during the springtime, I spend with my daughter and family here. My mom also comes sometimes.”



Activities

- Free chai for attendees
- Project Information and goals
- Stickers activity for future Park activations
- Decorating leaves art activity
- Games - Cornhole, Connect4, Jenga
- Storytelling Station
- Survey administration

Partners

- South Queens Women’s March tabled and sidewalk art



WINTER FESTIVAL

Frank McConnell Park

 ~60
of attendees



DECEMBER 16
11AM - 3PM

Winter Festival

at Lt. Frank McConnell Park

Come and celebrate with your neighbors and dream up what you'd like to see happen in this space!

For more information, scan the QR code or please contact **Jessica Balgobin** at jessica@chhayadc.org 929 581 2123

Free chai!

hive
PUBLIC SPACE

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LOCAL CENTER

“...It’s great to see what you’re doing in the neighborhood.”



Activities

- Free chai and hot chocolate for attendees
- Project Information and goals
- Sticker activity for future Park activations
- Decorating snowflakes art activity
- Games - Cornhole, Connect4
- Storytelling Station
- Survey administration



YOUTH DESIGN WORKSHOP

Richmond Hill High School



“Holding more events and having more stuff happen here would make it better.”



Activities

- Free pizza for participants
- Input from youth about their desires for using the park
- Design feedback about art piece
- Project Information and goals
- youth about their desires for using the park as well as preliminary design feedback about the proposed art piece.



PARTNERS' BREAKFAST CONVENING

Chhaya's Richmond Hill Office



“ During the summertime **this organization and others might come and organize a street fair or carnival for kids - it will be great.**”



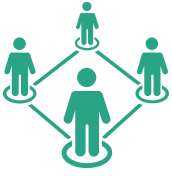
Activities

- Breakfast for attendees
- Introductions
- Project Information and goals
- Empathy building activity
- Discussion about programming in the park

Partners

- South Queens Women's March
- Jahajee Sisters
- Sakhi for South Asian Survivors
- River Fund
- Queens Museum
- Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning





Park Activation + Community Building

On-site community events that demonstrate desired park activities and bring community members along our implementation process by providing opportunities to participate in the making of the design intervention.

Storytelling

During our various outreach activities, we were able to connect with community members and collect their personal stories and anecdotes. These interactions provided us with more knowledge and history about the neighborhood in general and their experiences there as well as the desires for what public space and, specifically, what Lt. Frank McConnell Park could be for them. Much of what we heard influenced and informed our activations and our final design for the Community Arts Hub.



Storytelling Station

"I've lived in five different parts of Queens Yeah, Jamaica, Jackson Heights, Corona, Regal Park, Forest Hills, **I'm a Queens resident.** I've lived here **since 1979.** So what you guys are doing is very needed because **a lot of people move out of Queens because they feel that the parks are not exactly what they should be"**

Queens resident

" I don't usually just come in and sit down, I know **my uncle** does though. He'll come here and he'll just **sit and talk with people, see the birds."**

RH resident

"...I think that it's wonderful that this space, which seemed underutilized, is being used, and especially with an **arts lean and focus**, and sort of an open door, like anyone who wants to come and be a part of it, you are **welcome to get involved.** I think that is fantastic. I know that there is an established population that likes to utilize this park, and I'm just hoping that that can be blended so that **everyone has the opportunity to feel like they're included and no one feels like they're being pushed out or what have you."**

RH resident / father of 3

"I have been to this park when I was younger, we used to play catch the dog and the stick...That's a nice memory. And then the deli, we would go there all the time after school. Maybe **I've outgrown it, I suppose."**

RH resident

PAINT PARTIES

Frank McConnell Park

 ~20
of attendees



“...It’s nice to see people here during the day doing something.”



Activities

- Painting elements for the structure (supplies provided)
- Free Iced Tea and samosas for attendees and park visitors
- Project Information and goals

Partners

- Hester Street | Richmond Hill Community Timeline
- South Queens Women’s March



PAINT PARTY

Liberty Ave & 121st street

 ~20
of attendees



“My kids love painting so we’ll be at the next one.”

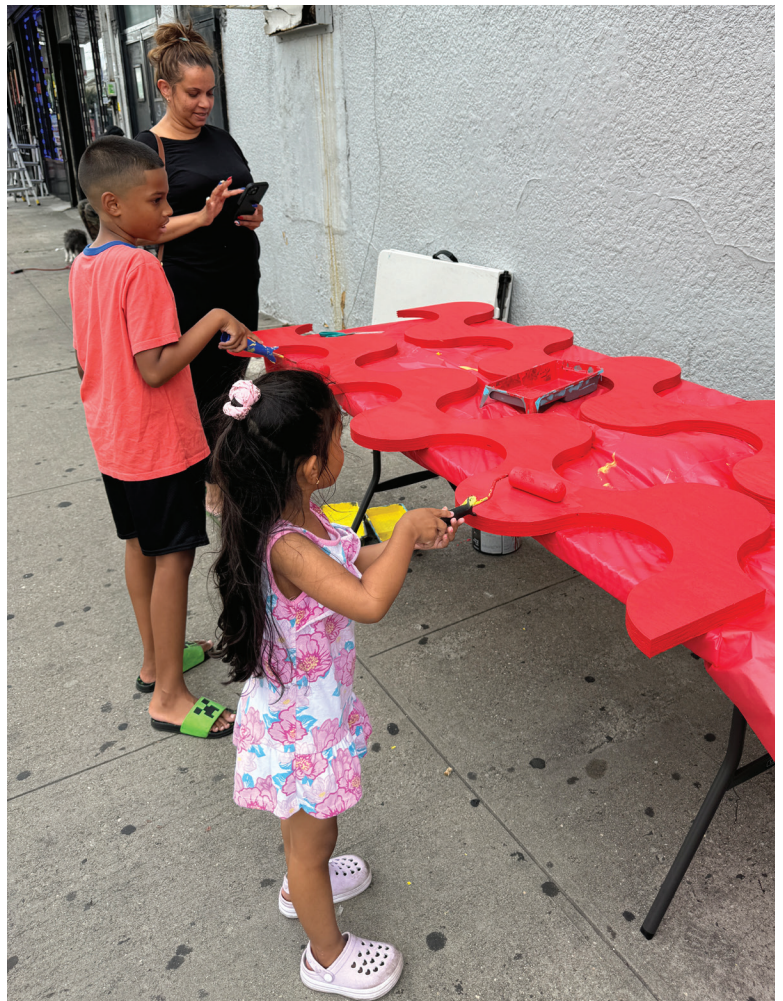
“It will be great if we have colorful art here.”

Activities

- Painting elements for the structure (supplies provided)
- Free Iced Tea and samosas for participants
- Project Information and goals

Partners

- Hester Street | Richmond Hill Community Timeline





Outreach (flyering + promotion)



Team members shared information about the project and upcoming park events during key community events and connected directly with surrounding businesses.

EVENTS OUTREACH

Diwali Festival 2023

NOV 03, 2023

Lefferts Boulevard and Liberty Avenue, in front of Tropical Isle

of attendees: ~150

2023 Richmond Hill Housing Fair

NOV 18, 2023

Richmond Hill High School

of attendees: ~180

2024 Richmond Hill Housing Fair

MAY 11, 2024

103-33 Lefferts Blvd.

of attendees: ~300

Phagwah Parade

APR 7, 2024

Start at Sybil's Bakery, end at Phil Rizzuto Park

of attendees: ~500

South Queens Women's March Workshop

APR 20, 2024

Queens Public Library: Lefferts Blvd & Liberty Ave

of attendees: ~30

DIRECT OUTREACH

Local businesses, religious institutions, and community partners were **reached** and park and project information was shared.

Back to School Fair

AUG 29, 2023 – PS 56Q

AUG 31, 2023 – PS 273Q

Neighborhood Outreach

OCT 10 + 27, 2023

DEC 15, 2023

JUN 27, 2024

CB9 Meeting

Team shared project goals and progress with members of **Community Board 9** to provide an opportunity for feedback before applying for the Art in the Parks permit.



FINDINGS/EMERGING THEMES

The team reached over **1,000 community members** representing the diverse ages and cultures of Richmond Hill and collected over **425 ideas** for Lt. Frank McConnell Park.

Input gathered from engagement revealed critical community needs as well as valuable programming needs, and desired public space characteristics.



Community Needs

“It’s really great to see that we’re going to try to **activate this park as a safe space** for the community.”

“I didn’t even know there was a **park** there.”



Programming Needs

“...I **did enjoy the play**, and it’s a wonderful thing for the community to, you know, let me keep, **let me hope that more great things will happen.**”

“**More activities** - right now it’s just benches.”



Visioning Board | Winter Festival



Community Needs

Secular Public Spaces. Communities thrive when they have access to diverse, well-maintained public spaces that cater to a wide range of needs. In Richmond Hill, the need for outdoor spaces, **free from private, religious or political affiliation** was emphasized throughout the information gathering phase. People are seeking a **neutral ground for social interaction, fostering inclusion and cultural diversity.**

“If there was like a **market here with local vendors and food trucks.** I’m sure there would be more people”

Passive and Active Spaces. Many community members voiced their desire for passive outdoor spaces in the neighborhood that offer **relaxation, and active outdoor spaces** for play and community gatherings. Both types of spaces can help to **support mental and physical well-being in different ways.**

“We could add more **flowers and plants** to make it beautiful! We can add swings for little kids so they can play.”

Unmet Basic Needs. Equally important are basic **quality of life needs** that some people in the park and in the neighborhood presented, such as **affordable housing, stable employment, and food security.** Addressing these needs is essential for building resilient, thriving communities where everyone has the **opportunity to live healthy, fulfilling lives.**

“I would love to see programming and space that caters to all the **immigrants who come here for better opportunities.**”



StreetLab



River Fund



South Queens Women's March



Programming Needs 1/2

Community Gathering. A place that could function daily for small scale activities as well as for special events, celebrations, and programs for all ages and different audiences.

“My Church doesn’t have an actual building so we are always looking for **public space that we can use to gather.**”

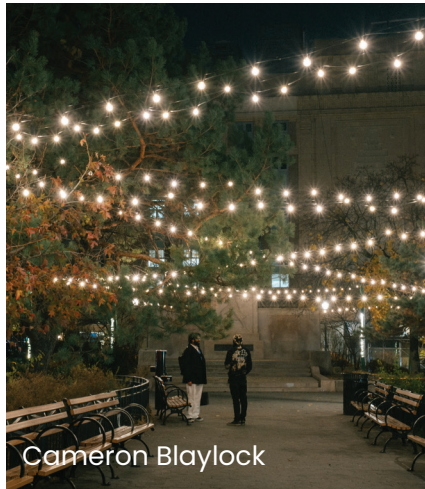
Artistic and Cultural Expression. There is a desire to see colorful elements and artistic lighting in the park. Many would like to attend community performances by local artists, go to a marketplace with local artisans, celebrate cultural storytelling, and enjoy programs that reflect local values, and interests and welcome everyone.

“I would love to have **street food** here - having food festivals, having music, just **community and cultural events** here would be amazing - we could also have **zumba and fitness classes**”

Educational Learning Opportunities. A space to read or study, and take a class. There is significant interest in learning about Richmond Hill’s recent history, and connecting with others through skill building programs like **English language classes** and **fitness sessions**.

“I think there needs to be some focus, something here that focuses on **children and teenagers.**”

When asked,
“What do you dream of doing at Lt. Frank McConnell Park?”
several programming themes emerged from the multitude of responses:



Cameron Blaylock



Lyfted Media





Programming Needs 2/2

Recreation and Play. In addition to walking, jogging, and biking in the park, people mentioned installing features that would support other types of exercise and active play or sports for children. Surface games, lawn games and table games that encourage multigenerational interaction were highlighted.

“My recommendation is to make a **playground** for little kids like a small **see-saw and slide.**”

Relaxation + Quiet Contemplation. Areas for relaxation in an urban oasis, with colorful flowers, plants, and more greenery. Many requested tables and chairs to be able to sit comfortably and share a meal or a conversation with friends. Others advocated for a community garden where neighbors can care for plants and flowers and also enjoy sitting in a horticultural green space.

“We can add some **flowers and plants more to make it colorful,** so it looks more beautiful.”

When asked,
“What do you dream of doing at Lt. Frank McConnell Park?”
several programming themes emerged from the multitude of responses:



DESIGN RESPONSE/CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Based on the input gathered, our team developed **concepts that responded to key programming desires. Partner feedback helped to drive design direction towards a multifunctional community arts hub.** In order to make the arts hub come to fruition, we then needed to explore existing NYC Department of Parks programs that our project could fall under. With support from the Urban Design Forum and the open channel established through the Local Center Initiative, our team identified the NYC Parks' **Art in the Parks** program as a potential route for our project to become a reality. The Art in the Parks program supports one year long art installations in public parks across NYC which our concept would fall under. Our team began conversations with the program liaison to develop our concept and final design.

People of Color Collective supported our team in the fabrication and installation of the Richmond Hill Community Arts Hub.

“ The artwork looks beautiful as well. Simply just having something like a **play in the park is really nice. Even people walking by can just come by and wonder what’s going on. **That’s something that brings people to come to these events... It’s nice just seeing people coming together. ”****

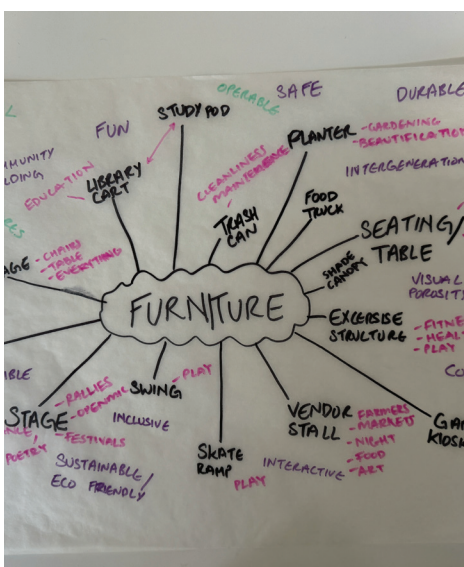


Features

The **Richmond Hill Community Arts Hub** is a multi-use installation that serves as a locus of community, art, culture, and education. The structure is a **plug-and-play events space, and a monument for the community.**

Integrated within this art piece is a **stage, seating, storage, library, and planters.** Seating of various heights strives to accommodate all needs and abilities, and the stage provides a space for music, dance, poetry, theater performances, open mic nights, children's storytimes, a reading nook, yoga or exercise classes, lectures and talks, and numerous other community gatherings. The Little Library supports local readers and brings people of all ages in, and planters add vibrancy and life, while the storage area holds folding chairs and tables and other resources to help facilitate community events of all types.

The design of the structure is a reflection of the local community, emphasizing **neighborhood pride and serving as a monument to Richmond Hill,** while featuring colors representing the numerous and diverse flags of community members' home nations. In the evenings, lighting around the structure brings illumination, a warm ambiance, and a sense of safety to the park, signaling that the space is open and available to the community at all times.



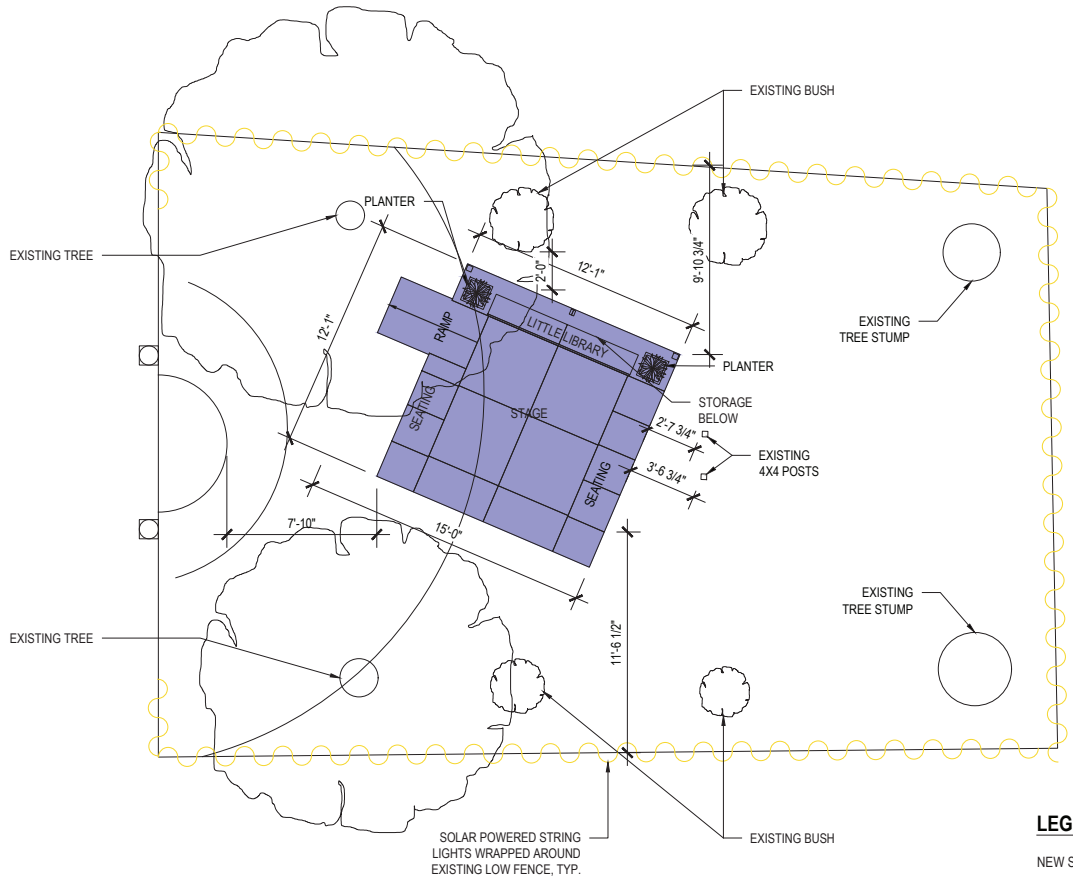
Project development





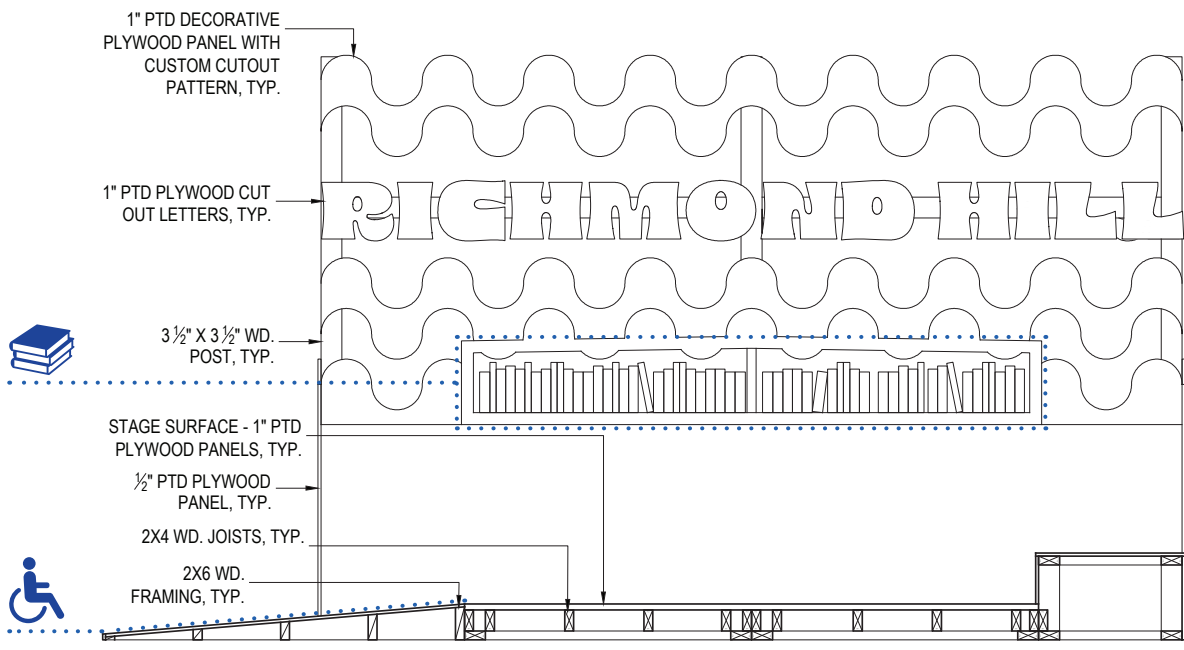
Painting the structure



Installation



LEGEND
 NEW STRUCTURE 
 NEW LIGHTING 



LAUNCH / CELEBRATION

Richmond Hill Arts Festival

 ~120
of attendees



RICHMOND HILL ARTS FESTIVAL

SEP 21 1-6 PM

Featuring:
the debut of new play, **Flood Sensor Aunty,**
a community **Toy Swap,**
and the launch of **Richmond Hill Community Arts Hub!**

at Lt. Frank McConnell Park!
on Atlantic Ave. and Lefferts Blvd.

Partners:
 Caribbean Cultural Project
 JAHAJEE
 DRUM
 ShareParty
 SOUTH BRONX WOMEN'S MARCH

Organizers:
 chhaya
Community Development Corporation
 hive
PUBLIC SPACE
 För
 LOCAL CENTER

For more information, scan the QR code or please contact **Jessica Balgobin**
jessica@chhaya.org
925 581 2122

The **Richmond Hill Arts Festival** was the culmination of over a year of work - a community celebration, and the opening of the Arts Hub.

The event was a day-long festival featuring various performances including welcome speeches by the organizers and design team, an original **play, poetry recitals, music and dance performances** on the structure itself.

The entire park was also activated, with partnering community organizations as well as city organizations tabling and offering services to the community.



Cameron Blaylock

Festival Lineup

1. **Flood Sensor Aunty** written and directed by Sabina Sethi Unni
2. **Priya Dadlani** | Poet
3. **Helena Rampersaud** | Poet
4. **Natraj Performing Arts Center**
5. **Roshni Samlal** | Tabla and
Camila Celin | Guitar



The event highlighted **community connections** and introduced the structure by demonstrating its use.

LAUNCH / CELEBRATION

Richmond Hill Arts Festival

Local businesses also participated, using the opportunity to advertise and connect with residents.

Food and refreshments were distributed while various activities took place, including a **collective art project** run by **Seema Shakti**, coloring and games stations for kids, voting registration and election information, domestic violence education and support services, henna art, block printing and poster making, and many more!



Partners included CEP (Caribbean Equality Project), DRUM (Desis Rising Up and Moving), Jahajee, SAYA (South Asian Youth Action), Shareparty, South Queens Women's March, and Womankind.



Over **100 community members** attended and participated in the event



Cameron Blaylock



RECOMMENDATIONS

On site **observations**, a multitude of **stories and ideas from community members**, and **lessons learned from each event** that was hosted at the park, by this team, helped to inform the following **design and programming recommendations** that may continue to incrementally cultivate a more community focused public space.



Design Recommendations



Community Recommendations



Authentic



Leaf-shaped sign with red and blue markings.

Leaf-shaped sign with orange and blue markings.

Blank white leaf-shaped sign.

Leaf-shaped sign with pink and purple markings and the text 'Happy Halloween'.

Leaf-shaped sign with orange and black markings and the text 'Happy Halloween'.

Leaf-shaped sign with green and pink markings and the text 'Joyful'.

Leaf-shaped sign with yellow and green markings and the text 'DTS'.

Leaf-shaped sign with pink and white markings and the text 'Amelia 11-5-22'.

Leaf-shaped sign with white and blue markings and the text 'Deborah'.

Leaf-shaped sign with teal and white markings and the text 'Alisha 11-5-22'.

Leaf-shaped sign with green and yellow markings and the text 'HAPPY HALLOWEEN'.

Leaf-shaped sign with pink and black markings and the text 'Happy Halloween'.

Blank white leaf-shaped sign.

Leaf-shaped sign with orange and white markings and the text 'Safe Community Spaces'.

Leaf-shaped sign with pink and white markings and the text 'Devi'.

Leaf-shaped sign with orange and yellow markings and the text 'F'.

Leaf-shaped sign with pink and blue markings and the text 'BE HAPPY'.

Leaf-shaped sign with white and black markings and the text 'McCONNELL PARK'.

Leaf-shaped sign with yellow and blue markings and a smiley face.

Leaf-shaped sign with white and blue markings and the text 'Safer COMMUNITY 0909'.

Leaf-shaped sign with blue and white markings and the text 'McCONNELL PARK'.

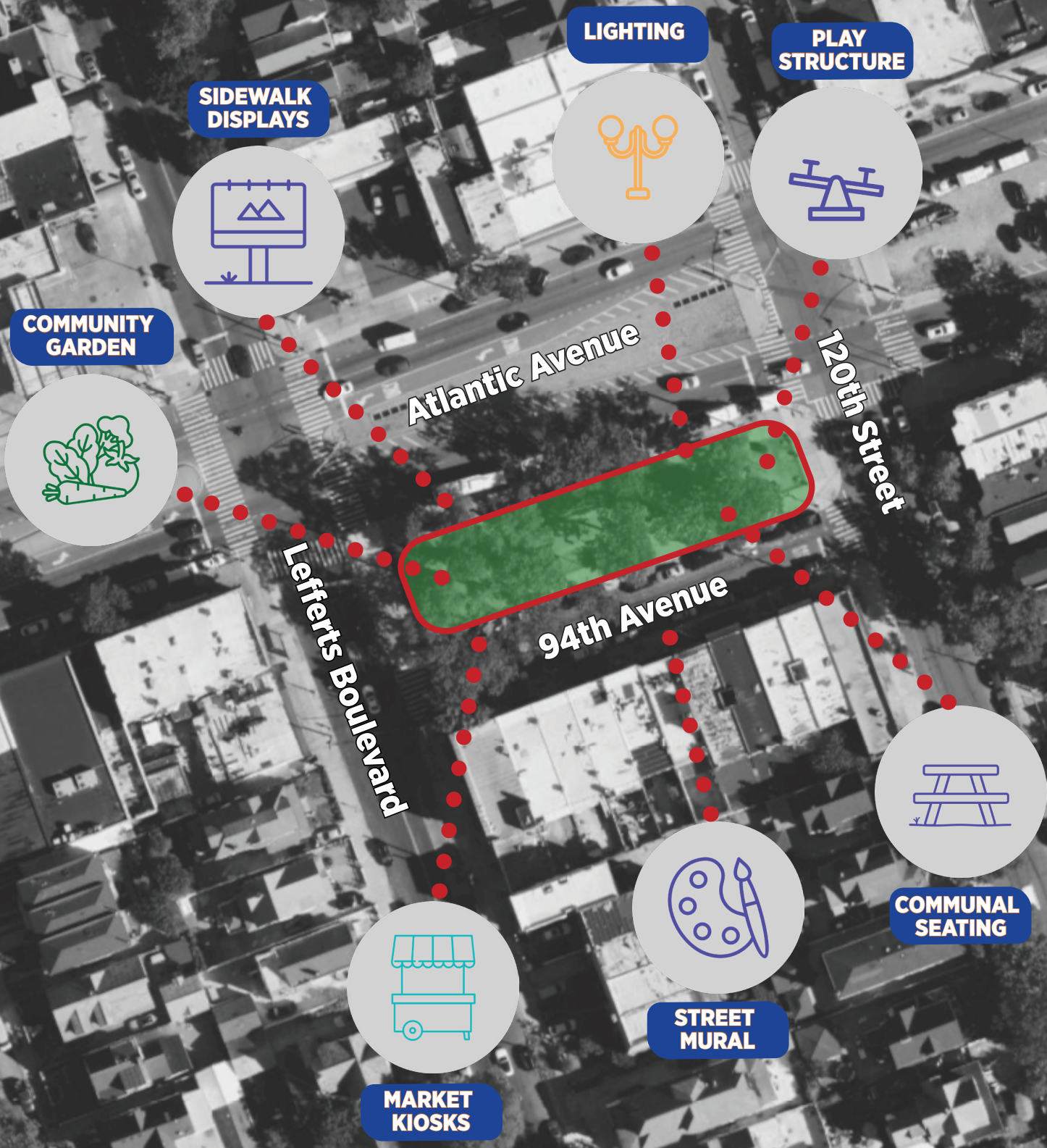
Leaf-shaped sign with yellow and red markings and the text 'McCONNELL PARK'.



Design Recommendations

- Evaluate park uses post implementation of the Community Arts Hub and consider the next iteration of the structure to continue to anchor a variety of programming needs (**Arts Hub 2.0**)
- Consider bringing events to Smokey Park when larger community crowds are expected.
- Figuratively expand Lt. Frank McConnell Park as a public space by reclaiming 94th Avenue, between 120th Street and Lefferts Boulevard – start with Open Street events, mural → outdoor dining → community place, experimental programming
- Consider other design interventions like ambient lighting, horticulture (new, healthier trees, flowering plants), beautification interventions , canopy installations, play features, fitness features, mini-sporting facilities, etc.
- Conduct ethnographic research and share the history of Richmond Hill through information plaques/sidewalk markers
- Continue gathering local input and feedback to develop permanent public art reflective of the community (artwork)
- Work with local partners to steward a community garden with culturally appropriate foods

FUTURE VISIONS FOR LT. FRANK MCCONNELL PARK



Community Partner Recommendations

Short Term

Continued programming in 2025 with regranting

With 2024 wrapping up our year of programming, we wanted to ensure that the Arts Hub would see continued use and programming into 2025. Our immediate next steps for Lt. Frank McConnell Park involves regranting some of the Local Center funding to local Richmond Hill partners who have been instrumental in helping our team think about what is possible in Lt. Frank McConnell Park. **South Queens Women's March, Caribbean Equality Project, and DRUM** (Desis Rising Up and Moving) have all been involved from the beginning stages of our team's work in Richmond Hill, and they were ideal organizations to continue programming before the community arts hub comes down in September 2025. The idea behind regranting partially stemmed from the hope that partners that already program extensively in the community might be able to utilize the park to host existing programming, or create something new.



Partners who accept the regrant will be required to sign an MOU with Chhaya, and agree to host at least two events per organization in Lt. Frank McConnell Park before June 2025. The partners are encouraged to work together as a cohort or work independently to create programming.

Maintenance and Continued Engagement

In addition to incentivized programming, we plan monthly maintenance checks for the arts hub to ensure that the structure doesn't sustain damages and remains safe for community use until September 2025. We also hope to continue to engage with local businesses to encourage community care of the arts hubs.



Community Partner Recommendations

Long Term | Advocacy and Community Stewardship

Permanent activation/structure

While the Community Arts Hub was a huge feat and made possible through the NYC Parks Department Arts in the Park program, one limitation involves an exhibition timeline of one year. The Arts Hub is slated to be taken down in September of 2025, highlighting the urgency for programming before it comes down, and the need for sustained activity in the park afterward. Our ultimate dream for Lt. Frank McConnell Park involves some sort of permanent structure, perhaps a reimagination of the Community Arts Hub that could be built to stand in the park permanently to sustain community excitement and momentum. We imagine that over time, the community will view this park as a place to gather, rest, and celebrate the neighborhood. A transformed Lt. Frank McConnell Park might also involve the exploration of an open street on 94th Avenue. Of course, this would depend on funding, community desire, political buy-in, and working alongside government agencies.

Community Stewardship

At the outset of this project, we envisioned the activation of Lt. Frank McConnell to evolve from Chhaya CDC led to community led and stewarded. During the initial year and a half of community building and shifting the community's perception of the park, it became very clear that building toward community stewardship of the park was going to extend well beyond the Local Center's programming timeline. We imagine that Lt. Frank McConnell Park will be home to continuous programming by community partners who provide much needed resources and who bring art and creativity to Richmond Hill community members. We hope that through continuous programming and engagement in the park that folks in the community might naturally become stewards of the space, ensuring that the park is truly for the community.



INSPIRATION

Transforming the existing structure into a permanent stage is a long-term vision. In the meantime, envisioning an **Arts Hub 2.0** offers an opportunity to build on the successes of the first iteration while introducing additional benefits for the community.

Canopy / roof can provide protection from the elements while serving as a canvas for a striking **art piece**. Highly visible, the artwork can transform this space into a **community beacon**.

The structure's height also offers an opportunity to incorporate additional **lighting and sound equipment** for added functionality and visual impact.

FUTURE VISIONS

Lt. Frank McConnell Park and Beyond

Continued park programming hosted by on the ground partners

There is a clear, demonstrated need for viable public space in Richmond Hill to support the burgeoning community organizing and civic engagement that is so deeply rooted in the community. Our activation in Lt. Frank McConnell was an initial step to try and reclaim public space for community use, and to demonstrate the potential of a naturally occurring space in the neighborhood. Community partners utilize the corners of busy intersections and empty outdoor spaces owned by local businesses to reach community members organically, and while these methods have been successful, we saw a desire for accessible public spaces, especially along cultural corridors like Liberty Avenue and 101st Avenue.

Community members also voiced a desire for more accessible spaces for leisure, relaxation, and play. Richmond Hill also experiences a shortage of third places, where folks can gather safely as a respite from school and work. Passersby at Lt. Frank McConnell Park that we spoke to told us they hoped the park could be more family friendly with activities for children. Though there are several larger parks like Smokey Park, community members still expressed an interest in seeing a space where dance, performance, art, and food could be showcased and celebrated.

More funding for placemaking work

Because there is a clear and present need for utilization and maximization of public spaces in Richmond Hill, there is a need to fund work to support initiatives like the Local Center.

More resources to meet basic needs of Richmond Hill community members

One of our goals for this park activation was to **make resources more accessible to community members** who might have otherwise not known about what is available to them in Richmond Hill. Many park users had the chance to learn about Chhaya's services, and the services of our partners that often joined us during engagement sessions and events. However, there were many community members who experienced issues such as substance dependence, job insecurity, lack of immigration status, and houselessness that we as a team struggled to find resources to address. We attempted to connect with local food pantries to help program the space, but we always found that organizations did not have capacity to move their programming to the park. Other services, like job navigation and houselessness, are of course systemic across the city. However, there really aren't localized resources in Richmond Hill that are established to support folks in their immediate search for jobs or housing. Our work in the park over the last year and a half has exposed many of the gaps in Richmond Hill that exist and impact our community's most marginalized members.



CALL TO ACTION

Are you interested in being a part of the community that activates Lt. Frank McConnell Park?

Whether you're a part of a community based organization, or you're a lover of the arts, we'd love to help you navigate the process of utilizing the space for programming. The **Community Arts Hub** is a natural space for small gatherings, small performances, and has onsite storage with chairs and tables for community use. We can also help navigate the NYC Parks permitting process.

Reach out to Jessica Balgobin at

jessica@chhayacdc.org or info@chhayacdc.org to find out more!



RICHMOND HILLS

GRAB A

Chhaya CDC
Richmond Hill Community
Art Exhibit 2024
Presented in partnership with
Richmond Hill Community Centre
Richmond Hill, Ontario
For more information visit
www.chhaya.org