

“Under the Bruckner” Art Installation *at The Soundview Economic Hub*



“Transforming this space into a public plaza featuring a new exhibition by local artists is a powerful first step towards the longer term vision YMPJ holds. We were delighted to match YMPJ with an all-star interdisciplinary design team of Ennead Architects, Public Works Partners, Buro Happold, and Cozen O’Connor who helped to make it possible.”

-Daniel McPhee, Executive Director of the Urban Design Forum



Photograph by Martha Snow

Under the Bruckner at the Soundview Economic Hub, 2024

Introduction

On September 8th, 2024, ‘Under the Bruckner’ officially opened as an art installation and public space, taking a monumental step forward in YMPJ’s 10-year long effort to activate and occupy the underutilized space under the Bruckner Expressway at Bronx River Avenue. This report documents the installation, which was completed as part of the Local Center ‘Rooted Cultures’ initiative, and envisions the future transformation of ‘Under the Bruckner’ into the Soundview Economic Hub.

Project Goals

Led by Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, Inc. (YMPJ), the Soundview Economic Hub is a vision to transform an underutilized space under the Bruckner Expressway into a community hub for economic development, climate, and social resilience, using arts and culture programming as a gateway for resident advocacy. As a first step toward implementation of the Soundview Economic Hub, the project team activated 7,500 sf of the underpass with an art installation, vendors, and weekly programming. From September through November 2024 we programmed the site actively with activities like book readings, workshops, music and more. We have been able to open the site as a public plaza, available to the community from dusk till dawn, seven days a week, to interact with and enjoy with art and seating.

Funders

‘Under the Bruckner’ was funded by the Local Center, a collaboration between Urban Design Forum (UDF) and Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD).

Project Team

The project team was led by YMPJ with support from Bronx Defenders. The design team was a collaboration between Ennead, Public Works Partners, Buro Happold, and Cozen O’Connor.



The Bronx
Defenders

ennead



BURO HAPPOLD



Site Overview

The site is located under the Bruckner Expressway, at Bronx River Avenue (near 1425 Bruckner Blvd, Bronx, NY 10472).

The initial project vision, developed by YMPJ in 2022, was published as the Soundview Economic Hub Conceptual Reuse Plan and highlighted the community's hopes from the site:



1. Focus on community resiliency and build community power.
2. Invoke community creativity by supporting local artists and creatives.
3. Support early-stage enterprises and provide entry level entrepreneurial opportunities.

These guided our work through 2024.

Regulatory Agency Engagement

To understand the permitting and approvals processes for the site, we met with NY State Department of Transportation (SDOT) and the following divisions from New York City Department of Transportation (CDOT): Public Realm Partnerships and Programs, Arterventions Program, and Street Lighting Division. We learned that the columns and overhead structure were permitted by SDOT, while the ground, fence, and occupancy of the space was primarily permitted through CDOT.

Community Engagement

Our work built upon YMPJ's community engagement from prior years, our primary goals being to confirm stated community preferences on potential activations within the space. These visioning activities took place at community events through summer and fall 2023 to define these visions for the artwork. An additional element included engagement with Bronx-based and interviews with artists and gallery owners. This set of conversations helped our design team to understand requirements for a well-crafted request for artist proposals.



Local Artists Engagement

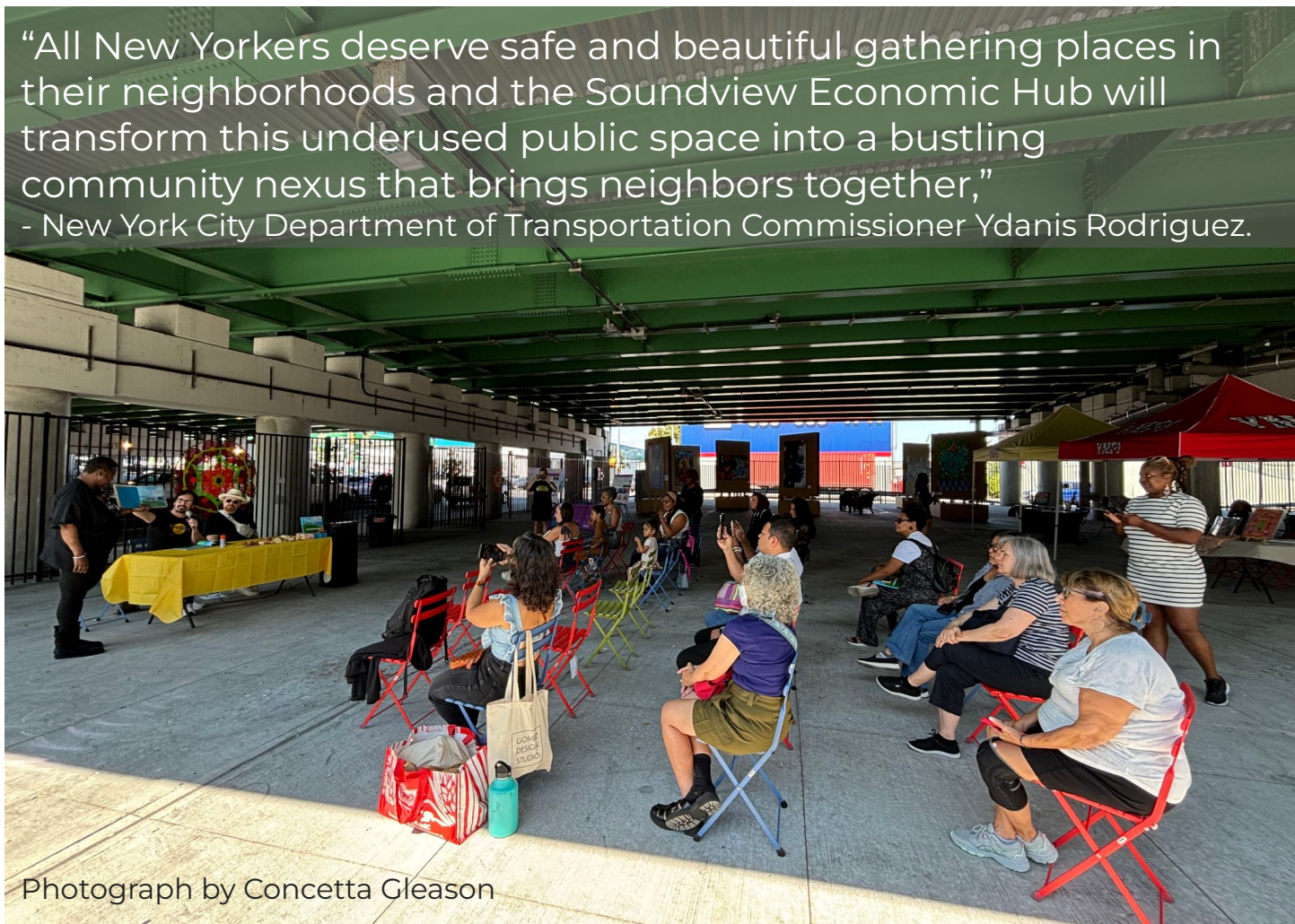
In February 2024, we issued a call for Bronx-based artists, seeking those committed to enhancing the space and celebrating the diversity of the Bronx. We received 14 submissions and selected three artists to commission new works, alongside 14 additional art panels previously commissioned by YMPJ in 2018.

The team engaged local artists early in developing the Call to Artists, which was crucial for understanding their needs and fostering trust. Key needs included fair compensation, detailed information about space constraints, basic supplies, and sufficient time to create their artwork. We also learned that artists would need support with permitting processes, so we maintained open lines of communication to assist them. For structural pieces, approval from a licensed structural engineer was required. Our sculptors were enthusiastic about collaborating with our structural engineer to bring their visions to life in the new public space.

Small Business Engagement

YMPJ engaged over 100 Bronx local businesses in 2024. As part of the activation, seven Bronx local businesses participated in the vendor trials. These vendors were from varied industries including food and catering, flowers, non-profits, art/crafts, books, and more. Through our surveys, we found out that at least 60% of visitors and customers coming to the Soundview Economic Hub came to shop and visit a particular vendor during the activation.





“All New Yorkers deserve safe and beautiful gathering places in their neighborhoods and the Soundview Economic Hub will transform this underused public space into a bustling community nexus that brings neighbors together,”
- New York City Department of Transportation Commissioner Ydanis Rodriguez.

Photograph by Concetta Gleason

Opening

For 10 years, Soundview, Bronx River, and Hunts Point communities have worked to re-imagine and reclaim this large portion of underutilized space under the Bruckner Expressway at Bronx River Avenue. On September 8th, the Soundview Economic Hub was opened to the public. The art on display, titled “Under the Bruckner,” emphasizes the diversity of local culture and creative talent within the Bronx. Since then, the site has remained open sunrise-sunset every day, with programming and vendor activation scheduled for Sundays. Through the fall we hosted a total of 5 events, 3 volunteer days and a grand opening. We interacted with over 400 stakeholders including community members, local businesses, artists and more. Our grand opening held on October 4, 2024 gained local press attention and we were featured in various articles (refer Appendix A).

Small Business Trials

A critical component of activating the space was to work on the long term vision of providing economic opportunity to vendors. In the short term the goal was to receive feedback from the vendors on site on the space, to support the long term vision. Much like the general public, vendors responded overwhelmingly positively to this initial transformation of the space. Each vendor surveyed recommended additional investments in signage, advertisement, and wayfinding.

Programming

Alongside vendors, the weekly programming celebrates the diversity of the community. The local programming is reflective of what is to come with the future vision of the Soundview Economic Hub. Events have included a Literacy Day, workshops and a book launch. We also celebrated Halloween: “Spooktacular Under the Bruckner”, that included a costume swap, and other fun activities for children. We concluded our scheduled activities with a painting day with volunteers by painting and creating our ‘vault into the future’, a shipping container describing our vision for the site.



“'Under The Bruckner' is a space where creatives are fed and showcased. The Bronx is a magical place, and YMPJ is highlighting that,”
- Chef Chrystina Casado, Owner of Brunch At Zion's

Feedback

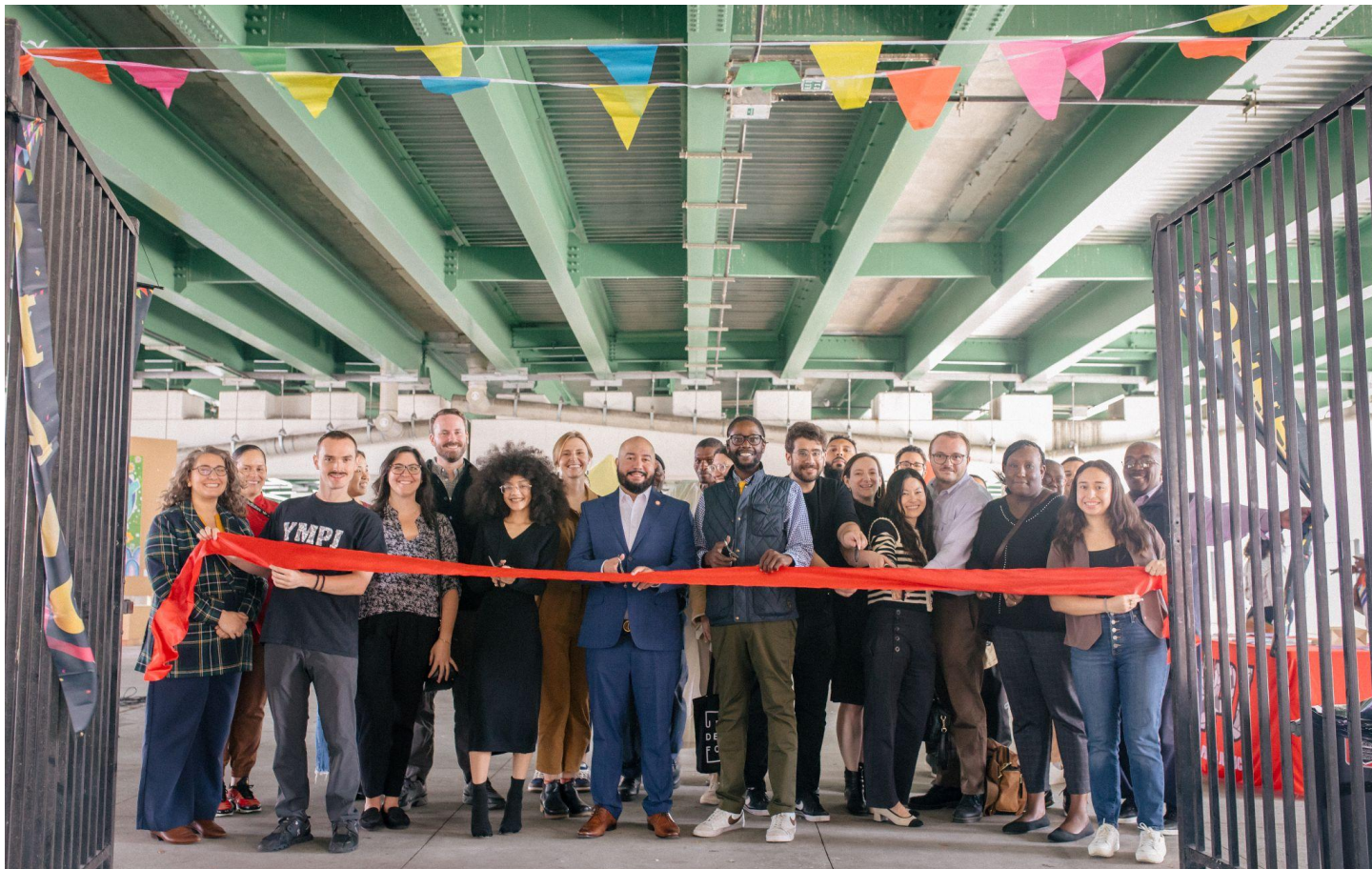
13 individuals took a survey prior to its transformation into a functioning public space. 18 have since taken the survey post-activation.

- Based on a comparison of pre- to post-activation surveys, the activation has improved the space on all measures. Respondents across the board have indicated they feel **safer**, feel **represented**, and **more likely to return** compared to the pre-activation baseline.

Below are some key findings from post-activation survey responses:

- Respondents appreciated that space is **open, but confined**. The enclosed nature of the space allows parents to feel more comfortable letting children safely explore the space within these confines.
- Respondents want **more cultural programming** (e.g. more vendors, live performance, cultural programming) and **more promotion** of the space itself (e.g. more, better signage, wayfinding, marketing).
- Respondents indicated that the programming itself plays a large role in their feeling safe.
- The space **requires lighting**. The current lack of electricity compromises broader perceptions of safety, particularly at night.
- While many walk by the site, a large number of respondents reported passing by the space in a private vehicle. That many users interact with the space through vehicles further underscores the need for **effective external signage**.





“What we are seeing here is 1.7 Billion dollars invested by the state to revitalize this area and to address environmental issues. Back then Assemblymember Marcos Crespo had the vision to revitalize this place, with art and more..It’s great to see that the vision has been realized..I want to thank David Shuffler and the team from YMPJ for not losing sight and ensuring that we are taking a dark and ugly space and we are bringing true art to the South Bronx”

-Councilmember Rafael Salamanca, from City Council District 17

“We are proud to bring our design expertise to support YMPJ’s vision for the Soundview Economic Hub. Through design and urban planning, we have transformed a formerly vacant area under the Bruckner Expressway into a public space that celebrates Bronx artists and provides a new gathering hub for the community.”

- Masha Konopleva, Associate and Co-Director of Ennead Lab

“It is our responsibility as designers to support our local NYC community organizations through design and advocacy. We are proud to have collaborated on the structural and lighting design with a team of thoughtful designers and community members, transforming this reclaimed public space into a destination for gathering and art, and showcasing a vision for the future of the Soundview Economic Hub.”

- John Sloane, a Senior Lighting Designer with Buro Happold

“Cozen O’Connor is honored to play a role in bringing the Soundview Economic Hub to life and to help YMPJ transform this unused space into an asset to the local community,”

- Rachel Scall, a Member in Cozen O’Connor’s Zoning & Land Use Practice

“We’re thrilled to showcase the incredible talents of these Bronx-based artists in a fresh, dynamic way. Huge thanks to YMPJ and our design partners—Ennead Architects, Buro Happold, and Cozen O’Connor—for trusting us to help bring their bold vision for the Soundview Economic Hub to life. Exciting things are ahead!”

- Melissa S. Lee, CNU-A, Principal of Public Works Partners

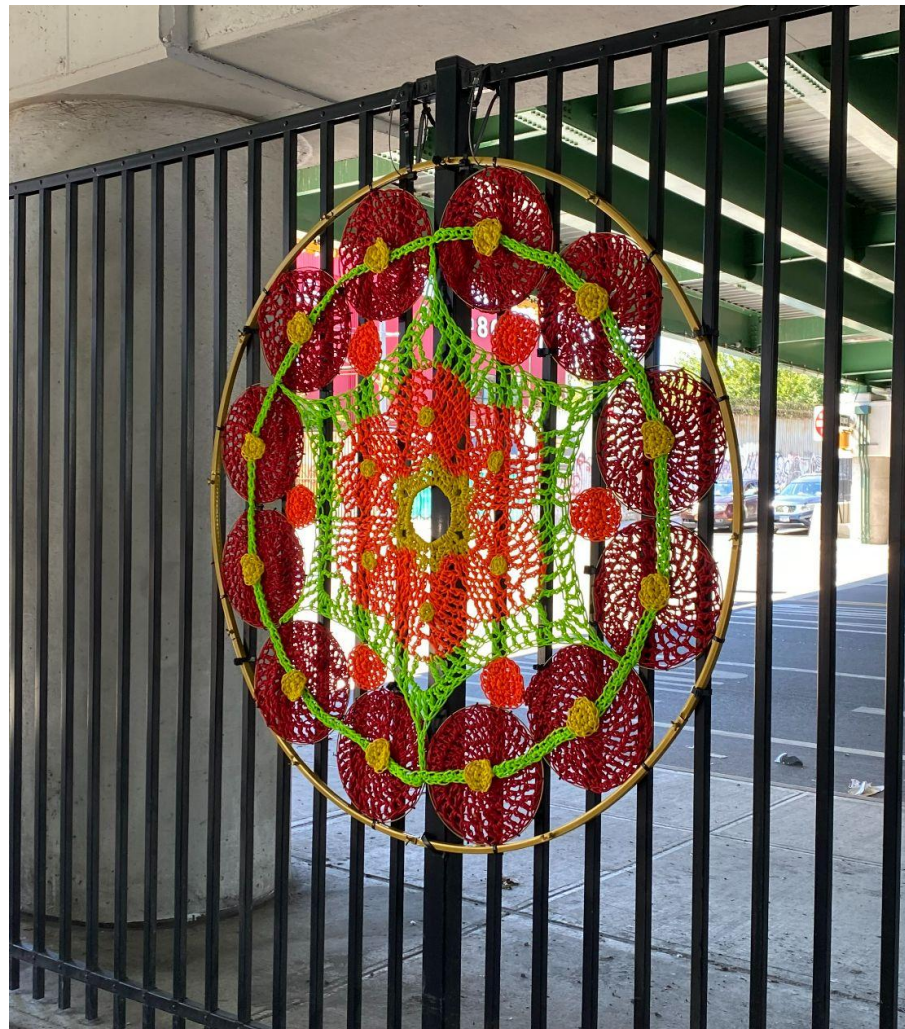


Photograph by Cameron Baylock

Budget

The total cost of the Under the Bruckner public art installation was \$125,000.00 in 2024. This budget includes personnel, design support and three(3) new art pieces in addition to exhibiting 14 previously commissioned art pieces.

There are some other features that were designed to be installed in the site however they were not added due to budget restrictions. YMPJ has these features included in their fundraising plans for 2025.¹



Art piece 1: Crochet Circles



Art piece 2: Tears of the Burning Bronx (Panel)
Art piece 3: Bronx River sanctuary (Sculpture)

¹ See slide 9 titled future funding needs for a detailed list

2024 Activation and Programming Budget		
Personnel		
	Program Staffing Costs	\$ 35,000.00
Personnel Total		\$ 35,000.00
Other Than Personnel Services (OTPS)		
	Consultant (Technical Assistance Team)	\$ 40,000.00
	Consultant	\$ -
	Building Supplies	\$ 7,888.30
	Fabrication costs	\$ 26,609.00
	Computer Expenses	\$ -
	Equipment Purchase	\$ 2,265.11
	Publication & Subscription	\$ -
	Postage & Delivery	\$ 550.00
	Printing & Copying	\$ 68.00
	Dues, Fees & Membership	\$ 389.59
	Public Relation & Marketing	\$ -
	Meeting, Conference & Related Expenses	\$ -
	Travel, Transportation & Accommodation	\$ -
	Stipends	\$ 10,480.00
	Photo Audio & Video	\$ -
	Miscellaneous	\$ 1,750.00
Total OTPS		\$ 90,000.00
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$ 125,000.00

Future Funding Needs

Budget Items	Costs
Bird Deterrent	\$800.00
Portable Stage	\$4,200.00
Acoustic Wall	\$11,400.00
Air Quality Monitor	\$230.00
Air Quality Display Installation	\$40,000.00-\$100,000.00
Turf (20 ft by 40 ft)	\$10,000.00
Entry Column Paint	\$140.00
Entry Portals	\$1,000.00

External Funding Opportunities

Art Funding

- NYC DOT-funded Initiatives: Community Commissions
 - YMPJ can consider applying for the Community Commissions program, in which NYC DOT itself funds the commission. According to NYC DOT's description of the program, eligible groups include community-based organizations that have experience planning and maintaining public art. "NYC DOT identifies priority sites for temporary art that are in need of beautification, large enough to accommodate artwork, and accessible to a diverse audience. An open call is released in partnership with community partners to solicit proposals from professional artists for a list of priority sites. NYC DOT collaborates with selected artists to implement projects within one year of approval. In addition to a project fee, NYC DOT provides engineering support for sculptural installations."
- Percent for Art
 - Administered by NYC Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA), The Percent for Art program oversees the statutorily-required 1% public art set-aside for eligible city-funded construction projects. YMPJ should keep this initiative in mind if/when NYC DOT embarks on a larger-scale capital project within the space



Acknowledgements

This public space activation and art installation has been an initiative of Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, Inc (YMPJ) in partnership with the Local Center.

We would like to thank all those who made our work possible, and especially the many volunteers who spent their weekends building the installation.

Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, Inc.

David Shuffler
Emendya Diaz
Reece Brosco
Madhur Bhadsavle

Bronx Defenders

Aleciah Anthony

Local Center

Dan McPhee, Urban Design Forum
Hadley Stack, Urban Design Forum
Martha Snow, Urban Design Forum
Gina Lee, ANHD
Barika Williams, ANHD
DaeQuan Collier
Cameron Blaylock

NY City Department of Transportation

Kyle Gorman
Leah Rosofsky

NY State Department of Transportation

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Nick Hornig, Ennead Lab
Paul Carey, Ennead Lab
Amairani Marin Tovar, Public Works Partners
Daniel McCombie, Public Works Partners
Joel Hochman, Public Works Partners
Melissa Lee, Public Works Partners
Alan Erickson, Buro Happold
John Sloane, Buro Happold
Maya Hladisova, Buro Happold
Peri Chain Gorman, Buro Happold

Legal

Jennifer Nellany, Cozen O'Connor
Mateo Rendon, Cozen O'Connor
Rachel Scall, Cozen O'Connor
Vivien R. Krieger, Cozen O'Connor

Fabrication

Elliot Berkowitz, Riverside Builders
James Wisniewski, Riverside Builders



RIVER BRINGING IT

WAREHOUSE SPACE
FOR LEASE
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PROLOGIS

Photograph by Cameron Blaylock

Appendix A Process and Design

Permitting and Approvals

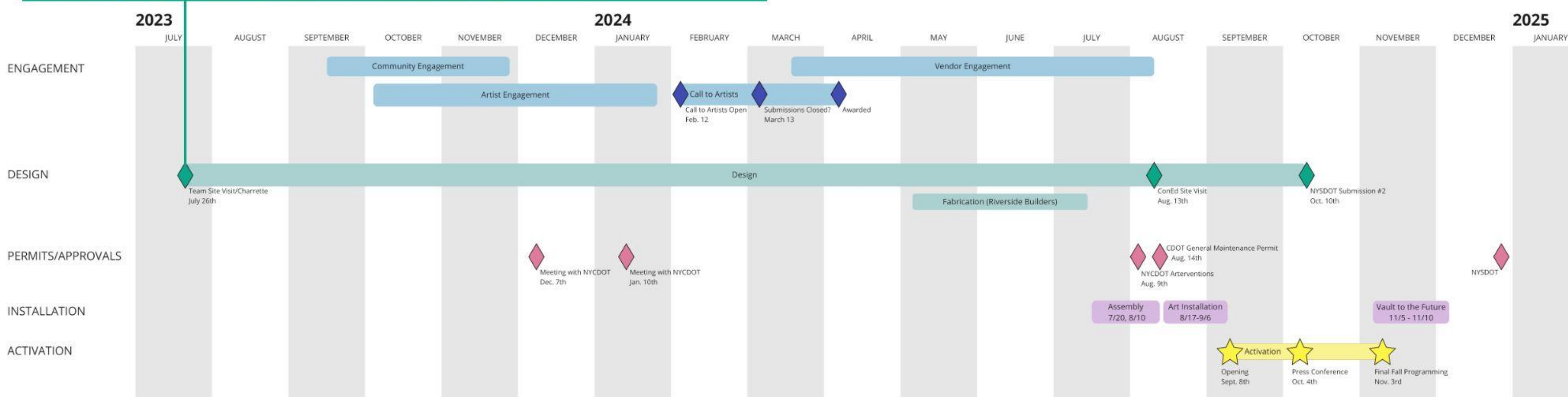
Given the complex overlap of City and State DOT, it took several meetings to fully understand what would be permissible in the space. Bolting into the ground or hanging structure from the overhead structure were quickly ruled out, as was painting the ground.

For the art installation, we received a CDOT general maintenance permit and an Arterventions permit, with a plan to apply for the Street Plaza program in the spring of 2025.

SDOT provided us with a Use & Operation permit and a highway-work permit to temporarily attach electrical wiring to the underside of the highway and paint the columns. In addition, SDOT approved our placement of the 'Vault to the Future' (a shipping container) as long as it complied with clearances defined by their maintenance team.

Access to electricity was the most challenging aspect of the design to resolve. The existing lights under the highway are owned by SDOT but have been turned off for the duration of the installation, with no clear pathway to turn them on at the time of writing. CDOT Street Lighting recommended we pursue a pole tap and helped us identify a light-pole in the area that met the requirements. ConEd performed a site visit and gave us a cost estimate for running a new power line, but the team determined it was cost prohibitive and better suited for a more permanent project.

We applied for a fire hydrant permit to provide water to the site, but have not yet received it.



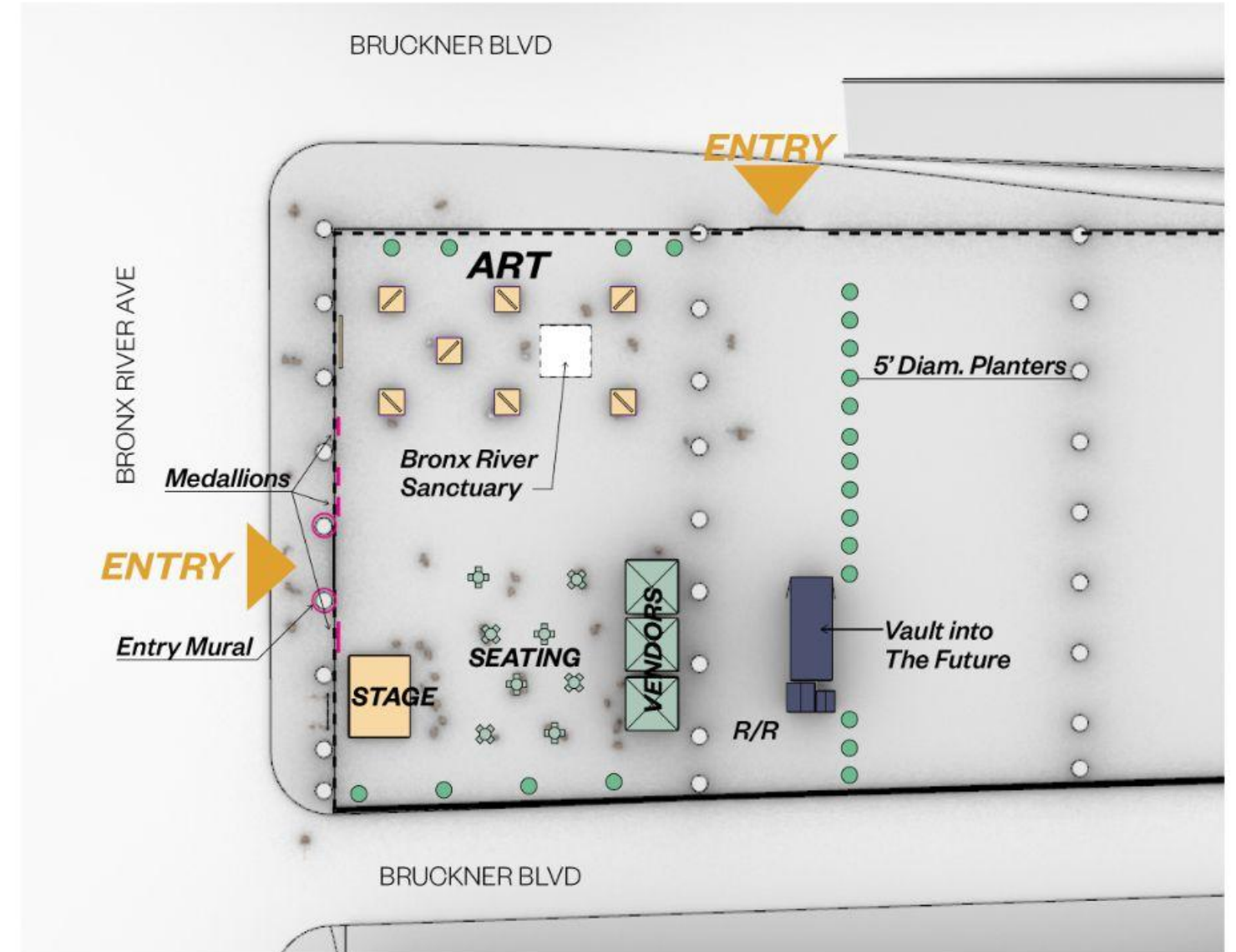
Design and Fabrication

Our design mandate was to create an interactive art installation that honored the history of self-determination in the Bronx and supported the future development of the Soundview Economic Hub. Although the site is 30,000 square feet, we determined that it was best to activate the western column bay first. In addition, we quickly learned how environmentally challenging the site was: surrounded by vehicular traffic, expansive, loud, and predominantly in shadow. In response, we designed a modular system for displaying artwork that is grand yet respectful; weighed down to resist hurricane winds yet movable; engaging and safe. We used natural materials and designed the modules to incorporate seating and uplighting. In addition, the modules are durable and disassemblable, in case they need to be relocated. The art modules were CNC-milled at Riverside Builders and assembled by project team members and community volunteers.



The art installation includes fourteen art panels that were commissioned by YMPJ in 2018 but never previously displayed. We hung the art panels on the display modules, with the exception of the diptych [11A/B], which we hung on the fence. The art installation incorporates and celebrates the three pieces that were procured through the artist RFP: Natalie Collette Wood's sculpture piece sits among the art display modules, Ruth Marshall's crochet circles hang on the western fence, and Suki Watashi's piece is hung on one of modules.

The site design also features a zone for vendor stalls, a zone for performances, movable seating, and a 'Vault to the Future' which provides storage space as well as additional project images.



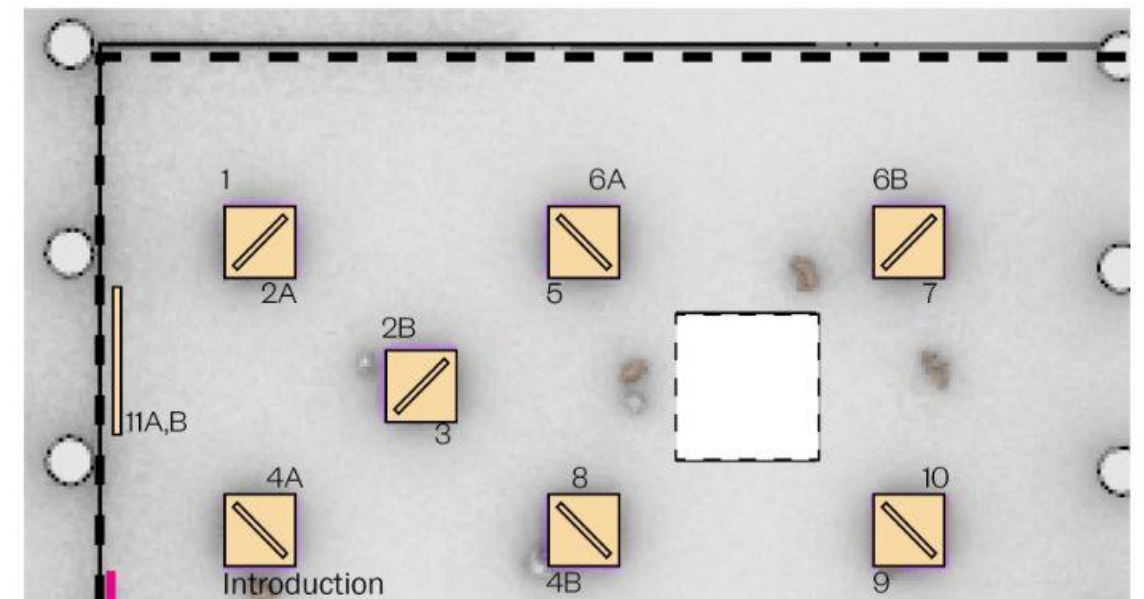
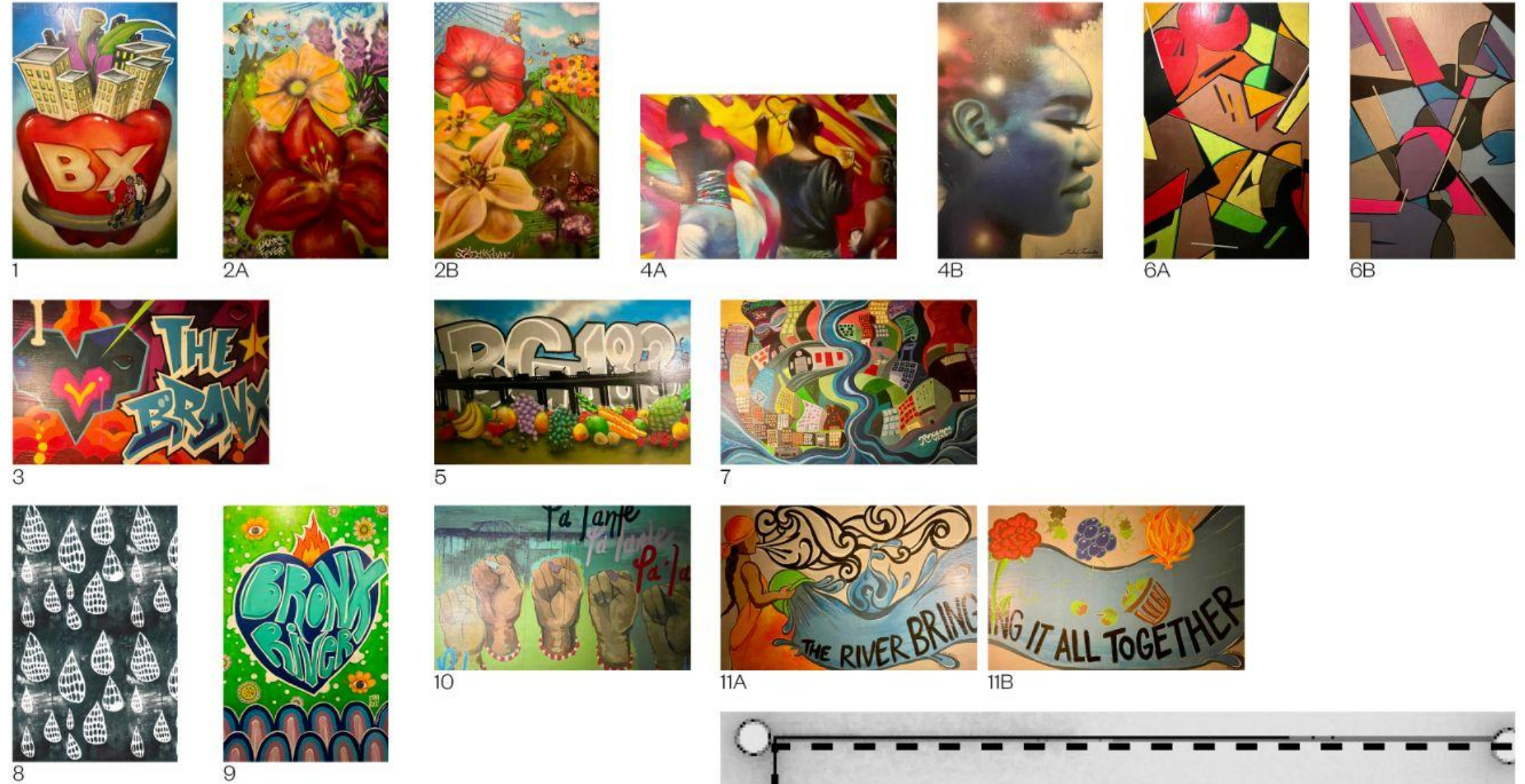
Ruth Marshall, 2024
Crochet Circles



Natalie Collette Wood, 2024
Bronx River Sanctuary

Art Display

- Panel 1: NICER (TATS Cru)
- Panels 2A + 2B: Lady K Fever
- Panel 3: BG183 (TATS Cru)
- Panel 4A + 4B: André Trenier
- Panel 5: BG183 - TATS Cru
- Panels 6A + 6B: Ology Collective (Ski, Col, and 2esae)
- Panel 7: Roxanne Rodriguez:
- Panel 8: Suki Watashi - "Tears for the Burning Bronx"
- Panel 9: Laura Alvarez
- Panel 10: Sharon de la Cruz - "Palante"
- Panels 11 A+B: Edward L. Mouzon, Jr. and Darryl L. Mouzon - "The River Brings it all Together"



Key Plan

Maintenance

Given the heavy vehicular traffic that surrounds the site, dust and soot continuously accumulate on all vertical surfaces. Throughout the installation period, the project team paid for a power washing service three times and manually cleaned the site countless others. At the time of writing, the site does not have access to water. A fire hydrant access permit was submitted but has not yet been approved.

The site does not have city-provided garbage or recycling receptacles. The NYC Sanitation department has agreed to pick up trash on select occasions, but a more permanent solution is recommended.

The beams and lighting fixtures of the Bruckner Expressway are highly popular with birds. The design team recommends installing bird deterrent spikes along select beams to protect the integrity of the artwork and enhance the occupant comfort of the site. SDOT approved YMPJ's self-installation of temporary bird guards by adhesive, provided YMPJ assumes full responsibility for obtaining, installing, maintaining the guards and holds full liability for any potential risks of the guards.



In Progress: Design Elements

The team proposed a series of lighting interventions to increase safety and promote placemaking in the space at night:

- Each art module has been fitted with a PAR38 floodlight which is aimed at the art. This lighting not only serves the artwork, but increases brightness in the space, adding to the perception of safety.
- Above the performance/vendor stall area, an arrangement of string lighting was designed to provide sparkle and ambient lighting.

The modules have a twist lock plug that can be pulled out of the top to connect to future power connections. In order to get power, there are two components that need to be installed:

1. A series of twist lock receptacles mounted to the highway beams. A scheme designed by Buro Happold for execution by a licensed electrician is currently pending SDOT review.
2. A power source will need to be "tapped" in order to provide power to the circuit, from one of the following options:

- A. Pole tap on Bronx Blvd. Street pole must not have traffic equipment. Permit is available for 60 days.
- B. Tap into electrical meter on site. This would require an electrician to install a breaker panel that can feed the power circuits.
- C. Establish new service with ConEd by cutting conduit into the street from the nearest manhole cover. A costly but permanent solution.



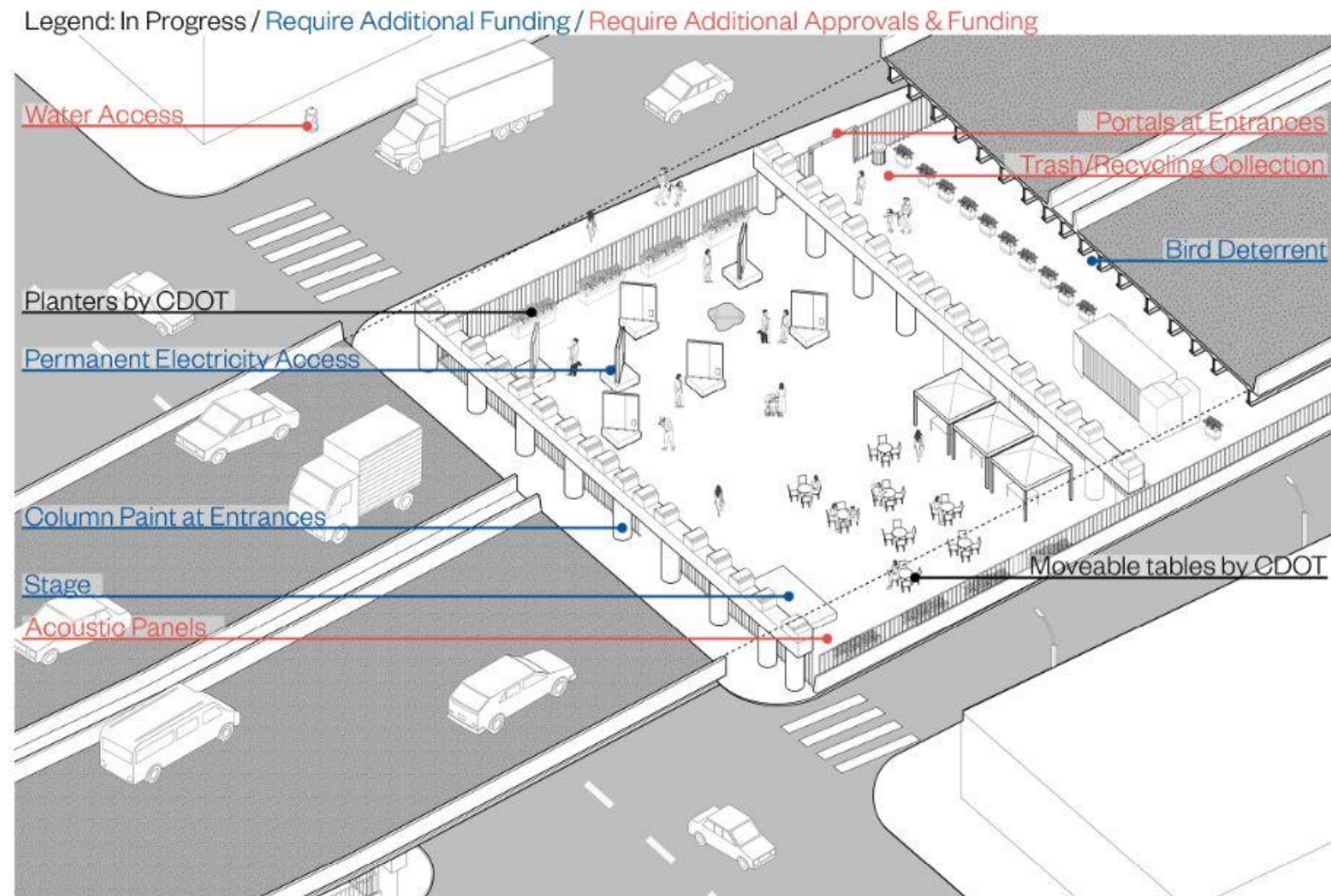
In Progress: Permitting and Approvals

NYCDOT Arterventions permit requires an extension to extend the installation period from 5 months to 11 months. After 11 months, YMPJ might be able to submit a new application, particularly if new artwork is proposed.

YMPJ plans to apply for a plaza designation in spring of 2025.

SDOT has approved the location of the 'Vault into the Future' and has confirmed that the 15ft horizontal and 7ft vertical clearance is adequate for annual maintenance activities (bridge washing and drainage cleaning). However, if structural repairs are required, YMPJ will have to hire a moving service to relocate the shipping container.

YMPJ's permit for fire-hydrant access was not approved (reason unknown). The permit would provide water for maintaining the plants and power-washing the site.



In Progress: Design Elements

CDOT will attach a 8"x10" information sign to the fence. The project team proposed a 'portal frame' to signify entrance to the site but was not able to receive a stamped engineering memo in time for installation. SDOT advised against painting signage on the columns, so the design team submitted an application for a mural design. At time of writing, permit for painting columns is being reviewed by SDOT.

CDOT and the Hort Society planned to provide planters and movable tables, but have not done so yet (estimated delivery date unknown at time of writing). CDOT provided movable chairs, which YMPJ sets out every morning.

The noise from the vehicular traffic surrounding the site results in an aurally uncomfortable space that makes it difficult to hold a conversation. The size and material of the art modules creates some acoustic relief within the 'art zone.' The design team recommends to deploy 'acoustic shells' around the stage and other noise-sensitive areas. However, to truly mitigate the issue, a fully enclosed space is recommended.



In Progress: Outreach & Engagement

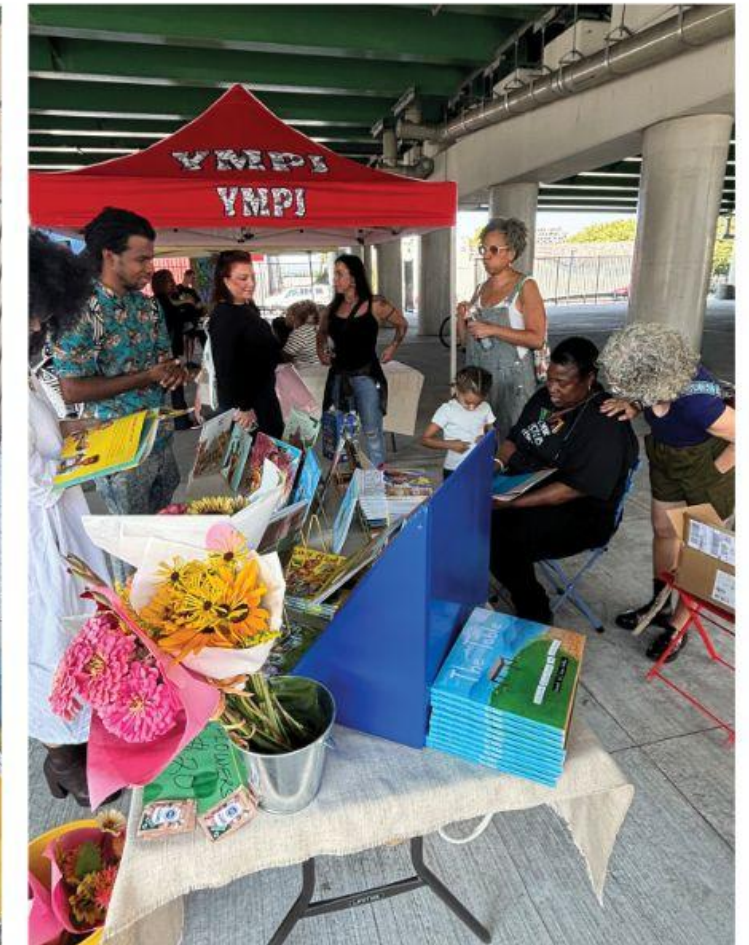
YMPJ has held weekly Sunday programming alongside local vendors since the opening of the site on September 8th. Outreach has been conducted via their website, social media platforms, and local news networks. Continuous engagement is recommended for community members to learn more about the space and the programming. An evening Artist Open House was initially planned for August 2024 but was postponed due to the lack of lighting. The event is being proposed for spring of 2025 when programming plans to resume due to warmer weather.



9/08/24 Under the Bruckner Opening



9/15/24 "The Table" Book Launch



Press to Date

- Pix11:
 - ◆ <https://pix11.com/news/local-news/community-advocates-and-partners-unveil-soundview-economic-hub-plaza-in-the-bronx/>
 - ◆ <https://www.yahoo.com/news/community-advocates-partners-unveil-soundview-010904945.html>
 - ◆ <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/community-advocates-and-partners-unveil-soundview-economic-hub-plaza-in-the-bronx/vi-AA1rIRZh>
- Reel:
 - ◆ https://www.instagram.com/lifewithrj_arts/reel/DAIPGuvObUu/
- Bronx Times:
 - ◆ <https://www.bxtimes.com/soundview-grand-opening-new-public-art-space/>
 - ◆ Page 36 (see image)
- City.nyc:
 - ◆ <https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/10/10/soundview-economic-hub-bruckner-expressway-bronx/>
- Bronx 12
- CBS

Soundview community celebrates grand opening of new public art space

BRONX TIMES REPORTER, OCT. 18-OCT. 24, 2024

Representatives of multiple Bronx organizations and Soundview community members and leaders gathered to celebrate the grand opening of a new public art space on Thursday, Oct. 4.

The Soundview Economic Hub, located under the Bruckner Expressway on Bronx River Avenue, will be filled with art, music, workshops, cultural programs, activities and local vendors.

The opening of the arts space was organized by the Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice (YMPJ), in partnership with Council Member Raphael Salamanca Jr. and the New York City Department of Transportation, among other organizations.

In addition to a ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the Soundview Economic Hub's opening, the celebration also featured a table filled with coffee, different flavors of tea, desserts and more, courtesy of Chef Chrystina Casado of Brunch at Zion's. Wilde Flowers and Books Founder and CEO Concetta Gleason was also present, with a table full of books.

Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice Executive Director David Shuffler said the new space will feature 20 different pieces of art, including paintings, sculptures and more. He also expressed appreciation for the local vendors who came out to show off their products and take part in the grand opening celebration.



The ribbon cutting ceremony with Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice members, including ribbon-cutters featured artist Suki Watashi (center left) and Executive Director David Shuffler (center right), and New York City Council Member Raphael Salamanca (center), as well as many others.



(Left to right) New York City Council Member Raphael Salamanca, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice Executive Director David Shuffler and Fidel Malena, the Bronx Regional Representative from the Office of Governor Kathy Hochul, conversing during the event.



Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice Executive Director David Shuffler (second from left), Daniel McPhee (back row, seventh from left) and Gina Lee (red shirt, far right) of the Local Center and many others celebrate the opening of the Soundview Economic Hub.



Wilde, Flowers and Books Founder and CEO Concetta Gleason (left) and Winsome Bingham (right), the author of "Soul Food Sunday" and "The Table," holding her books. Photos by Jewel Webber



Photograph by Cameron Blaylock