

Streets Ahead

Five Routes to a Thriving City

Co-Chairs' Letter

Dear New Yorkers,

Our streets are the lifeblood of our city. The COVID-19 crisis brought into sharp relief what we already knew - our streets are essential, not only for fresh air, but as spaces to slow down, observe, and connect. Now, two years later, we are in a moment that demands radical imagination, where we have the opportunity to realize the immense potential of our streets as reimagined public spaces.

Imagination is truly at the heart of this effort. When we began our work in 2021, we were fortunate to be joined by a group of talented and creative thinkers and we encouraged them to think big. They delivered an exciting vision and we are thrilled to share the results.

As our new mayoral administration charts a path towards recovery, we should take the lessons from the spirited experimentation of the past few years and put them into action. We believe that with the right partnerships, leadership, and investment, the public sector has the transformative power to reshape the built environment in the interest of all New Yorkers.

We want to extend sincere gratitude and thanks to our Fellows who contributed to this effort: a multidisciplinary group of advocates, public servants, designers, developers, and artists shaping the city today. We look forward to working with the City to consider and create opportunities for more vibrant, resilient streets for people.

Margaret Newman + Michelle Delk

Co-Chairs, Streets Ahead
Urban Design Forum Board of Directors

Introduction

Why do we love New York City streets?

Is it popping into your favorite local deli? Or your hairdresser right around the corner? Or maybe it's the summer block party that's complete with music, a flowing hydrant, and a bouncy house? Or is it the stoop concert that spills onto the sidewalk? Or that taco from the vendor near your subway stop? New York streets at their best are the places where New Yorkers, young and old, can mingle, strike up a conversation, and make an unlikely connection.

In New York, our streets are our backyards, our front porches, and our living rooms where we play, dine, exercise, gather, and rejoice. We understand each other better when we share the everyday experiences that happen in our public spaces.

In 2020, we realized what is possible in New York with fewer cars.

In a moment of crisis, we witnessed the astounding potential of a city where traffic slowed and lanes were emptied. Now, as the city returns, we have the opportunity to retain the best of these new public spaces. Streets have the ability to evolve to meet not just the needs of New Yorkers to get from point A to point B; we can employ them to fight the climate crisis, strengthen our neighborhood economies, champion our cultural community, and support the mental and physical health of all New Yorkers.

Our streetscapes are ready for transformation.

Known as the "public Right of Way," New York's streets are publicly-owned and publicly-controlled. In one of the most densely populated cities in the country, the 32,000 acres of roadway (or over 25% of the city's land area) is our greatest opportunity for public space and public benefit. With pressing needs for open space, access to nature, and alternative transportation options, we can assign new roles for public space that has been dedicated to car movement and storage for decades.

We show our values on our streets.

We believe that equity means that every New Yorker has a safe and dignified neighborhood, healthy and reliable transportation options, and accessible public amenities like libraries, schools, parks, and healthcare facilities. We believe that equity means that a child playing on the street in East New York should feel as safe as a child playing in the Upper West Side. We believe that an essential worker should be able to get to their job as easily from Corona as from Chelsea, and that bike delivery drivers should feel safe on the job from vehicular violence no matter what neighborhood they're in.

As we reckon with keeping New Yorkers safe, we must fundamentally consider how streets have negatively impacted certain neighborhoods with poor air quality, unsafe walking conditions, or lack of mobility options for people with all abilities. Transforming streets can't fix everything but they can be critical tools to supporting thriving and safe communities paired with abundant affordable housing, accessible healthcare, and good paying jobs. Our only path towards a more thriving New York is one that centers equity, accessibility, environmental justice, and safety in all decisions.

We can create corridors that center community, not just commutes.

We know that in order to realize the possibilities of our city, we must confront the ways that congestion and vehicle emissions are making our city less healthy, and recognize that the amount of space we have allocated for cars is out of balance with what is needed for people. At the same time, we recognize that many New Yorkers currently rely on cars for their livelihoods and for accessible transportation, and know that in order for us to realize our streets as a public realm, we must also invest in robust, accessible public transportation. Our streets are not one-size fits all; they have the capacity to serve their neighborhoods and communities in unique ways.

How we worked

We know that transforming New York's streets will need brilliant minds and transformative ideas. We convened nearly 50 Urban Design Forum Fellows – a multi-racial, multi-generational group of professionals ranging in industries and backgrounds – to envision new possibilities for streets in 2023 and 2030. We wanted to illustrate what could be done under the leadership of a visionary two-term mayor, and what could be done tomorrow.

We chose five lenses to focus on: Commerce, Culture, Climate, Care, and Continuity. Fellows learned from over 30 local and global stakeholders and engaged in design sprints, pairing the visionary with the practical to surface both creative visions and tactical recommendations.

We are grateful to join the chorus of recent efforts like Transportation Alternatives' 25x25 Campaign, Regional Plan Association's Re-Envisioning the Right of Way, the Al Fresco Coalition, and many more to boldly reimagine our streets. This platform is meant to serve as a hopeful provocation and a tool to work together to achieve the city we want to live in. We hope these ideas will contribute to the collective discussion on the future of our streets.

Think big, act now

This is a moment to think big. In the following pages, you'll find a suite of ideas that point us towards long-term goals to achieving safer, livelier streets, along with "Act Now" ideas that offer us a place to start within the year.

You will also find illustrated possibilities for future streets. Though these are based on locations in the five boroughs, they are not intended as rigorous design proposals. We recognize and encourage the need for robust community-led visions to lead the way, and for affected communities to have defining roles in shaping the futures of their neighborhoods. Join us in imagining the future of New York's streets, and in charting the path forward together.

Streets for Commerce

WHAT IF OUR STREETS INCLUDED...

- A** Smart loading zones in the curb and sidewalk that are flexible to adapt their use based on the time of day
- B** Vibrant outdoor dining that enlivens the neighborhood
- C** Clearly sited space for street vendors and their customers
- D** Connections to shared power and storage for micro-businesses and street programmers
- E** Beautiful, clean waste containers that store commercial and consumer waste underground
- F** Dedicated space for last-mile delivery bikes and micro-distribution vehicles
- G** Thriving public spaces like plazas and Open Streets for pedestrians to shop, gather, and rest



The Vision

Commercial corridors are the economic engines of our neighborhoods. From the bodega to the bookstore, these spaces are vital to the health and vibrancy of our city and street life.

Our commercial corridors were hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic; New York lost almost 170,000 jobs in restaurants and retail, 41% of the total private sector jobs lost since 2019 [1]. In immigrant-owned businesses and MWBEs that were disproportionately impacted, we now see record retail vacancy. Outdoor dining and the Open Storefronts program emerged as design solutions early on for some businesses, but left many other entrepreneurs without creative means for commerce.

As small businesses try to regain their footing today, they face many other spatial challenges unrelated to the pandemic. The rise in e-commerce has fundamentally reshaped the role of the street, threatening brick-and-mortar retail and flooding neighborhoods with delivery trucks. Shifting commuting patterns due to the rise of working from home will continue to impact the city's core office districts and the small businesses commuters would patronize on a daily basis.

We envision Commercial Streets that are bustling, adaptable, welcoming, accessible places that help to build community wealth and promote a prosperous environment for businesses of all sizes, especially the mom-and-pops. Our vision for achieving commercially thriving New York City streets is one that prioritizes equity for small businesses and businesses run by Black and brown New Yorkers. To do this, we believe citywide changes to streets should make it easy to do business by cutting through the red tape, while local changes can amplify the defining characteristics of New York's distinct neighborhoods that attract both new and old patrons.



Recommendations

1 Institute first mile waste collection and subsurface storage.

Building on the new framework for the Commercial Waste Zones Plan laid out by the NYC Department of Sanitation (DSNY), the City could build out a network for retail waste to be collected by smaller transport vehicles (e.g. gator cart or small flatbed electric vehicles) on a frequent basis. Commercial waste could be taken to a nearby transfer point where it is carted away to a larger vehicle for removal to a landfill. Larger cost and site feasibility studies for subsurface storage should be undertaken.

ACT NOW: Pilot on-street shared waste containers.

DSNY and the NYC Department of Transportation (DOT) could partner to expand the Clean Curbs pilot program to include using street space for innovative waste containerization. Explore on-street containers with subsurface storage as consolidated drop points for retail waste to be serviced by carting trucks. Heavily subsidize participation in Clean Curbs by offering city funding for both community partners and hauling partners.

2 Expand flexible loading zones into every neighborhood.

On-street consolidated delivery and loading zones for homes and businesses can better manage the current chaos of curbside deliveries. By 2030, the City could build on the NYC City Council's December 2021 law to implement 500 new dedicated loading zones across the city each year for the next three years, and consider expanding the initiative to all commercial corridors that need it. Flexible loading zones (indicated by sensors or with changing indicators) could accommodate off-hour delivery in the early morning and late evening hours, and act as public space during the daytime.

ACT NOW: Invest in commercial cargo bike infrastructure.

Cargo bikes have proven to be an effective method of reducing the number of delivery trucks on the road. Expand and make permanent the Commercial Cargo Bicycle Pilot by DOT, allocating curb space for cargo bike loading.



3 **Activate micro-distribution centers in each borough.**

By 2030, DOT could develop a pilot program for micro-distribution centers in every borough, where delivery trucks unload at distribution point(s) at neighborhood peripheries and transfer to smaller, local delivery vehicles. DOT, New York State DOT, and NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) could lead a feasibility study to identify city-owned real estate that align with existing truck routes.

ACT NOW: Transform vacant storefronts for temporary micro-distribution needs.

In 2023, the NYC Department of City Planning (DCP) and NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC) could pilot a program with real estate developers or private micro-distribution logistics companies to transform vacant retail or other under-utilized ground-floor space to act as micro-distribution hubs, where delivery companies could pay to use space. Design standards should be developed to ensure these spaces have active and engaging storefronts and ensure pedestrian accessibility, and a study should be undertaken to understand impacts on the health of brick and mortar businesses.

4 **Create hubs for shared connectivity and power on the streets.**

As visitors traverse the city, businesses often bear the burden of serving as the de facto resource for public services like restrooms, seating, and shelter during inclement weather. By 2030, DOT could pilot and build out shared amenities hubs across all commercial districts and corridors for local and visiting patrons with services like charging stations, drinking water, bathrooms, and wifi.

ACT NOW: Pilot a neighborhood shared service hub.

DOT and NYC Department of Small Business Services (SBS) could partner to lead a design competition to pilot neighborhood shared service hubs that provide onsite equipment storage for microbusinesses, storefronts and community organizations for items like traffic cones, snow shovels, seating, or programming materials for Open Streets.

5 **Update the Street Design Manual to include the relationship between storefronts and the streets.**

In light of increasing logistics challenges, DOT and SBS could add to the existing Street Design Manual to include neighborhood design guidelines and a kit-of-parts that address the relationship between storefront businesses and the street.

ACT NOW: Assign a task force to address storefront businesses.

In 2023, the Interagency Public Realm Working Group, should investigate immediate opportunities to clarify street space use for storefront businesses.

6 **Expand and equip underinvested BIDs and community-based maintenance partners.**

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) currently only cover 2% of the City's land area. Building on the Mayor's plan in Rebuild, Renew, Reinvent to launch a BID 2.0 model, the City could prioritize fully funding existing smaller BIDs in outer boroughs and supporting the easy creation and public funding of new BIDs to provide better management of public streetscapes and plazas in historically underinvested neighborhoods. The City could fund and embed a

designer or planner in every existing under-resourced BID to equip them with the expertise to oversee capital grants and projects.

ACT NOW: Create a Street Innovation Fund.

In 2023, the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic and Workforce Development and SBS could create a dedicated fund for BIDs with operating budgets of less than \$500,000 to incentivize innovative street and public space design and programming.

ACT NOW: Expand SBS's Neighborhood 360° Program.

Expand SBS's Neighborhood 360° Program and explore the creation of neighborhood-based conservancies that could equip hardest-hit communities with additional small businesses and public realm support.

7 **Launch a Citywide Equity BID.**

The current model for BIDs prioritizes neighborhoods with greater access to private investment. By 2030, the City could establish a citywide fund to resource neighborhoods without BIDs with public space maintenance funds.

ACT NOW: Launch a public space funding audit.

In 2023, the Interagency Public Realm Working Group, announced in Rebuild, Renew, Reinvent, could launch a study to better understand gaps and opportunities in public space maintenance funds across the city, to inform the launch of a Citywide Equity BID.

8 **Develop a comprehensive framework for street vendors.**

Street vendors are an essential part of a neighborhood's economy, yet are often not considered when designing our city's streets. The NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP), in partnership with SBS, DOT, and others, could develop a policy and regulatory framework that includes clear guidelines for siting, sanitation, utility hookups, and street design to provide consistency, transparency, and equity in managing vendor commerce on our streets and plazas.

ACT NOW: Design with street vendors and their changing needs.

In 2023, the Interagency Public Realm Working Group could partner with community-based organizations to conduct listening tours with street vendors and micro-businesses to determine specific spatial challenges to address in the framework.



Streets for Culture

WHAT IF OUR STREETS INCLUDED...

- A** Car-free space to connect anchor institutions like libraries and schools

B Packable stages and seating for performances

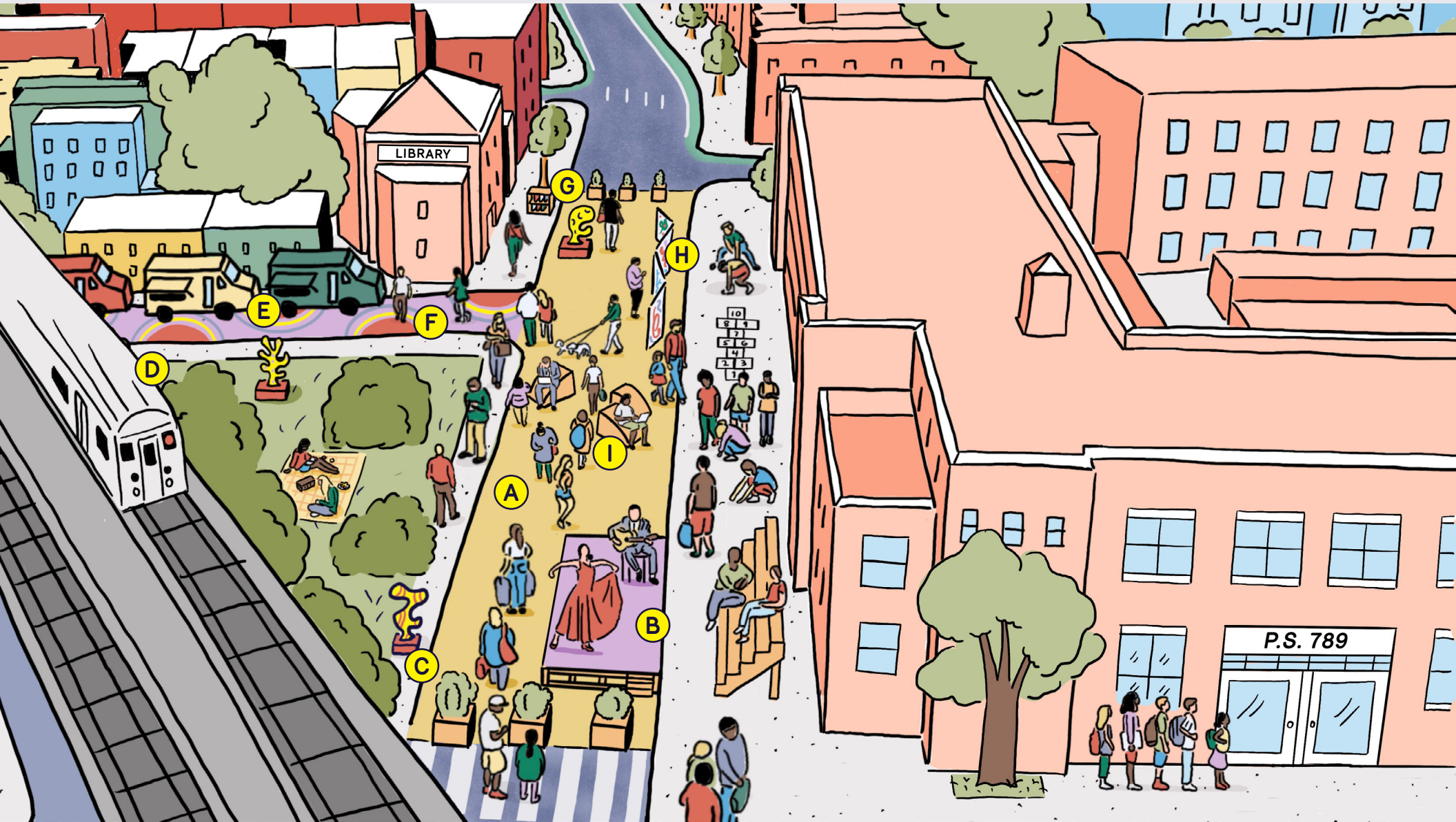
C Re-imagined monuments and memorials to honor all kinds of New Yorkers and history
- D** Robust public transportation between cultural hubs

E Space for food vendors to share their culinary traditions

F Community-responsive murals
- G** Expanded public library offerings, like reading rooms

H Mobile galleries to exhibit artwork

I Creative seating to gather, play, and rest



The Vision

As New Yorkers took to the streets to clap, sing, dance, and protest in the summer of 2020, we saw more than ever that culture connects us, builds safety, and fosters empathy.

We also witnessed how streets can serve as new cultural spaces, demonstrated by the creative reclamation of street space for Black Lives Matter murals from Morris Ave in the Bronx to Richmond Terrace in Staten Island, theater and dance in the Lower East Side, and outdoor live music in the Meatpacking District. Artists, cultural stewards, and cultural makers supported their communities through culinary and design traditions, literary practices, and storytelling.

Culture is not only the fabric that connects communities, it is also a major economic force in the city. As theaters, museums, and performance venues shuttered, cultural workers were left with few venues to safely share their work. New York State saw nearly 32,000 jobs in the performing arts lost in 2020, while in New York City alone, performing arts jobs declined 72% - the sharpest job losses of any industry in the city's economy. The City answered the call with the Open Culture program, working in tandem with Open Streets to provide new spaces for artists to present their work in the open air. There is significant opportunity to broaden the reach of the program and evolve other government programs to more robustly invest in streets for culture.

We envision Culture Streets as sites to support thriving, creative communities with temporary activations and permanent interventions on our streets. Culture Streets should place equity at the core by prioritizing neighborhoods with limited outdoor space and organized resources, and uplifting voices, traditions, and stories of Black, Latino, Asian and immigrant New Yorkers. We imagine a city whose streets can be easily activated and used by local communities, and are spaces that respect and amplify existing traditions while serving as instruments for cultural stewardship and preservation.



Recommendations

1 Create a network of Culture Streets around anchor institutions.

Community anchors like libraries, schools, and cultural institutions are essential neighborhood resources, yet they can often be spatially disconnected from each other and other neighborhood public amenities. By 2030, the City could designate and build 20 Culture Street adjacent to community anchor institutions that are permanently closed to car traffic. These streets could create a robust network of public space for performance, gathering, learning, and celebration, connected by a transportation network with multiple modes of mobility for bicycles, scooters, pedestrians, and public transit.

ACT NOW: Site Culture Streets with School Streets and libraries.

By 2023, the City could build on DOT's School Safety projects by designating an Open Street adjacent to every public school, prioritizing schools that have little access to open space in a neighborhood first. DOT could also partner with the New York City public library system to expand Outdoor Reading Rooms adjacent to public libraries in the warmer months.

ACT NOW: Launch a NYC Culture Streets Passport.

Drawing inspiration from initiatives like Culture Pass, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) could launch a program to encourage exploration of culture streets programming across the city.

2 Expand technical assistance for Culture Streets.

Many small arts organizations lack the infrastructure to host audiences on the street. The City could expand the current technical assistance program for Open Streets partners to include Culture Streets, working to connect smaller arts organizations and individual artists with Culture Streets near anchor institutions. Anchors could help provide key amenities such as access to bathrooms and drinking water to support cultural activation in the street, as well as cover liability and permitting costs.

ACT NOW: Create a returning festival fast-track permitting process.

The City could create a ‘fast-track’ permitting process for communities or organizations that have successfully hosted the same street festival in the last five years to encourage robust yearly programming.

3 Build a thriving ecosystem of local artists to activate the Right of Way.

DCLA could launch a new set of grants for local artists and community members to activate Right of Way spaces around libraries, schools, and cultural institutions. This work could complement private funds like [Creatives Rebuild New York](#).

ACT NOW: Relaunch New York City Artists Corps 2.0.

In 2023, the City could relaunch an expanded version of [New York City Artist Corps](#), prioritizing funding artists in neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID-19 to program Open Streets. To reduce barriers, the City could build on the current roster of approved local artists that can activate the Right of Way in their communities.

ACT NOW: Partner aspiring cultural workers with community organizations.

The City could resource low-to-moderate income (LMI) neighborhoods with aspiring cultural workers through university programs like [CUNY Cultural Corps](#) or the [Summer Youth Employment Program](#), who will help program and curate public space community-based activations.

4 Pilot new types of temporary arts spaces in the roadway.

Artists performing in the Right of Way often lack the physical infrastructure to support their crafts. DOT and DCLA could launch a Request For Proposals in every borough to develop innovative and flexible designs for temporary arts spaces, such as a packable stage and seating, a mobile gallery, moveable barriers, lighting, sound, or other cultural needs. The final selection should prioritize partnerships with neighborhood-based artists and designers to create responsive and unique local infrastructure.

ACT NOW: Design and deploy a kit-of-parts for flexible culture streets.

In 2023, building on successful programs like [StreetLab](#), [Micro](#), and [Photoville](#), work with designers to develop temporary adaptable kits for community members that can support a diverse range of cultural activities on the street.

5 Co-site street safety and permanent cultural infrastructure.

By 2030, the City can enhance safety infrastructure while creating more permanent cultural spaces in the Right of Way. To do that, the City could boost investments across cultural programs through DOT and DCLA’s Percent for Art program and City Council’s Participatory Budgeting to create community-driven plans for permanent cultural infrastructure.



6 Enhance government arts programs to meet new streets needs.

The City can allocate robust funding opportunities to support different kinds of cultural practices in the street where appropriate for each community. Enhance and expand existing programs such as Open Culture, the DOT Plaza Program, Public Artists in Residence, Asphalt Art, Arterventions, and Temporary Art to serve more New Yorkers, while marshaling funding to less-resourced community partners.

ACT NOW: Reduce barriers to Open Culture.

In 2023, the City could broaden accessibility of the Open Culture program expanding eligibility to individuals and organizations without 501(c)(3) status. Use the [MTA Music Underground Program](#) as a model for connecting artists & performers with cultural sites on NYC streets.

7 Embed artist voices in all levels of neighborhood street design and planning.

By 2030, Borough Presidents could ensure every Community Board assigns an artist on every transportation committee or creates a committee dedicated to arts and culture.

ACT NOW: Assign a cultural planner to street projects around anchor institutions.

For all street improvement initiatives around cultural organizations, schools, or libraries, assign a cultural planner, community organizer, or artist with deep roots in the neighborhood to help liaise street project planning and design with community members and the project team in both the planning, design, and implementation.

ACT NOW: Launch Phase III to Building Community Capacity.

In 2023, launch a third phase of the [Building Community Capacity Program](#) for developed artist coalitions in program neighborhoods to actualize and implement capital projects in the streetscape.



ACT NOW: Strengthen community engagement with the cultural community.

In 2023, the Interagency Public Realm Working Group should hold listening sessions with artist coalition organizations like [HueArts](#) and [DanceNYC](#) to better understand barriers to community and artist participation in streetscape and neighborhood planning, and identify strategies for improvement.



Streets for Climate

WHAT IF OUR STREETS INCLUDED...

- A** Cool and permeable pavement to let water drain

B Dedicated space for micro-mobility parking like bikes and scooters

C Green walls that supported biodiversity and habitat for animals
- D** Shaded spaces for gathering that can generate energy

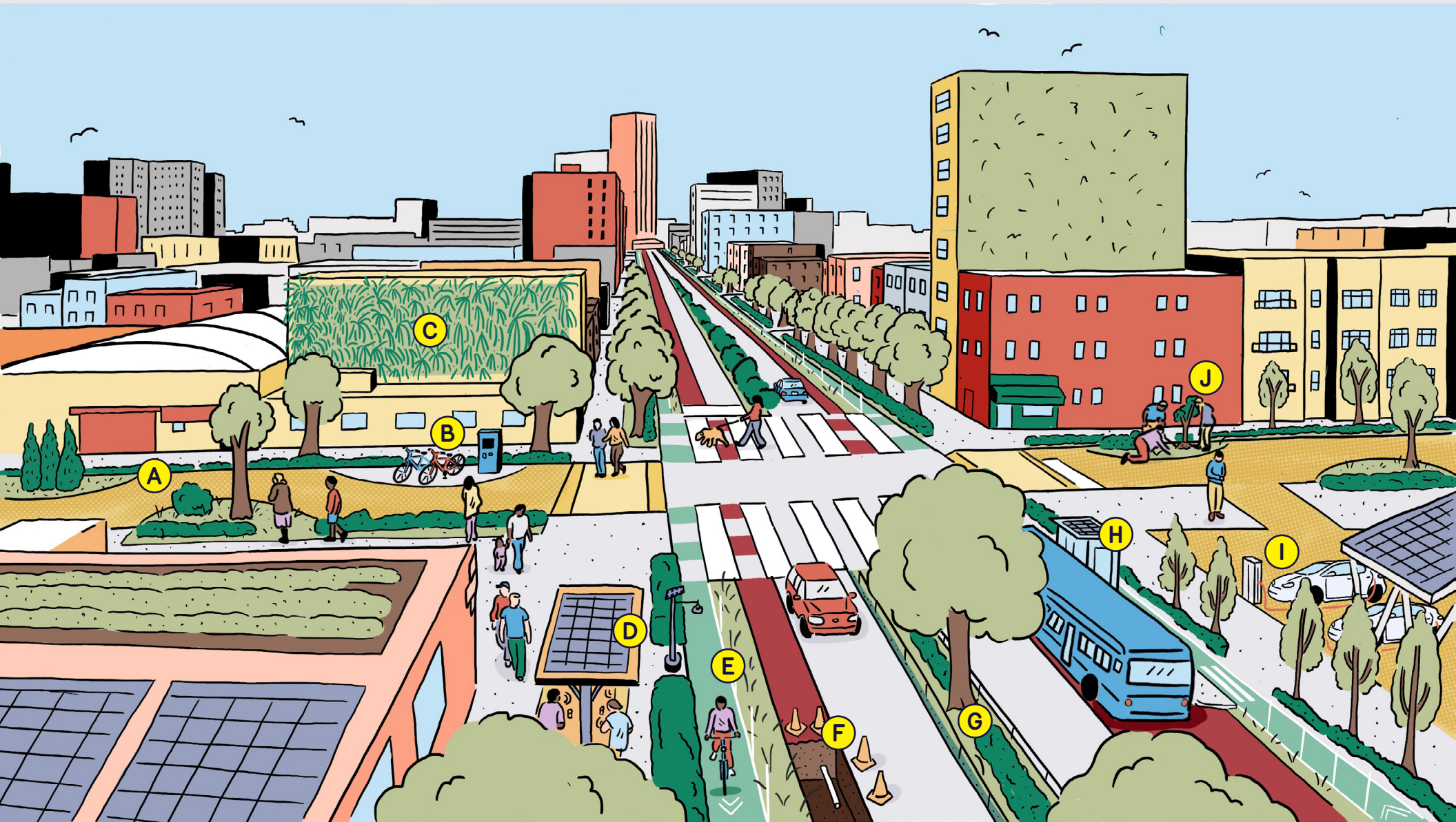
E Bike lanes that are protected from cars by plants and trees

F Improvement projects that also increase resiliency
- G** Green infrastructure like rain gardens and bioswales

H Protected bus shelters that can regenerate energy

I Space for charging electric vehicles

J Thriving green space stewarded by community groups and used for environmental justice education



The Vision

The climate crisis is at our doorstep. We must ensure that all New Yorkers are safe not only from vehicular violence, but also from dangerous effects of the public health crisis that is climate change.

Last Summer, Hurricane Ida reminded us that New Yorkers are at risk of death, injury, and displacement by increasingly severe weather events that cause landmark flooding and extreme heat. NYC’s Heat Vulnerability Index [2] reveals that Black and brown neighborhoods that were hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic are also the most vulnerable during heat waves and disproportionately impacted by poor air quality.

With streets encompassing over 25% of New York City’s land area, [3] these dark, impervious surfaces contribute significantly to the rising temperatures and stormwater runoff that are putting so many of residents and businesses at risk. Neighborhoods that have faced decades of disinvestment are also often without green spaces that create cooler and cleaner air [4].

To fight decades of environmental racism, we must equip environmental justice communities with the tools to battle extreme weather. Every change we make to our streets, whether electric, sewer, or fixing a pothole, can be an opportunity to prepare our city for bold climate action.

WE ENVISION CLIMATE STREETS IN THREE WAYS:

- **Climate Streets reclaim 25% space for nature and habitat** that support biodiversity, sequester greenhouse gas emissions, reduce urban heat, and mitigate inland flooding.
- **Climate Streets reclaim 25% space for zero-emission transportation** and a range of micro-mobility options to improve health and safety in our streets.
- **Climate Streets reclaim 25% space for people** to move about and enjoy streets safely and reduce our dependence on private, carbon-intensive vehicles.

Recommendations

1 Enact a Street Climate Action Plan to be implemented in all public Right of Way projects.

NYC’s Chief Climate Officer could spearhead a Street Climate Action Plan (Street CAP) that urges all street decisions to support the realization of Climate Streets. Integrated into the Streets Plan, and following guidance from DSNY, DEP, DOT, the Mayor’s Office of Climate and Environmental Justice (MOCEJ) and others, the plan could provide a framework for the coordination, multi-scale design, and ongoing maintenance of the city’s street network, and develop opportunities for partnerships with BIDs, Community Based Organizations (CBOs), and other organizational partners to enact the plan.

ACT NOW: Mobilize a Climate Action Task Force.

In 2023, the Interagency Public Realm Working Group should convene a Climate Action Task Force to strategize how to achieve Climate Streets. This group could be responsible for setting clear citywide goals and enacting the process for creating a Street CAP.

The task force could also partner with DOT and the NYC Department of Design and Construction (DDC)’s leadership to develop an evaluation framework to review every project within the public Right of Way to ensure it supports and prioritizes climate adaptation and decarbonization goals.

2 Use the Healthy Streets Program to expand the urban tree canopy by 25%.

Increasing the city’s street tree canopy, which was estimated to be 22% in 2017[5], is vital to reducing the Urban Heat Island Effect, improving air quality, and increasing biodiversity. The City could leverage the Federal Infrastructure Bill (H.R. 3684)[6]’s Healthy Streets Program to increase tree cover by 25% in neighborhoods most immediately impacted.

ACT NOW: Launch the ‘NEXT Million Trees’ project.

The Mayor could build on the success of Million Trees NYC by committing to another million trees by 2030. By advancing the Greenstreets Agreement between NYC Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and DOT, the City could expand partnerships with existing organizations like the Natural

Areas Conservancy, and empower environmental justice organizations by funding tree-planting in their initiatives. The City could also further invest in the existing urban parkway system through the DOT Greenway program.

3 Mobilize federal investment to support community stewardship and climate mitigation.

To increase funding, the City could make most of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act through Community Development Block Grants by appropriating funding to capital improvements that directly address climate mitigation in historically underinvested residential communities.

City agencies could explore opportunities to increase funding to community-based organizations or BIDs to run programs for the stewardship of nature-based solutions in the Right of Way, including tree planting, youth education, plant cultivation, and environmental justice education.

ACT NOW: Expand Cool Streets this Summer.

The City could invest and expand on Cool Streets, part of the [Cool it! NYC program](#) to equip neighborhoods with misting stations, hydrant caps, and shading structures on more streets in the warmest months, to ensure that communities can safely enjoy the public realm and seek respite.

4 Pilot new nature-based solutions in the Right of Way.

MOCEJ could partner with community-based organizations in environmental justice neighborhoods to identify and implement new strategies that reduce climate risks like native planted areas, pollinator gardens, and blue infrastructure in the roadway. Use pilot initiatives to test and improve upon existing technology like permeable paving, shade structures, and bioswales in the Right of Way. Support community-driven projects like the [Clean Air Green Corridor](#) on 182nd Street in realizing their visions.

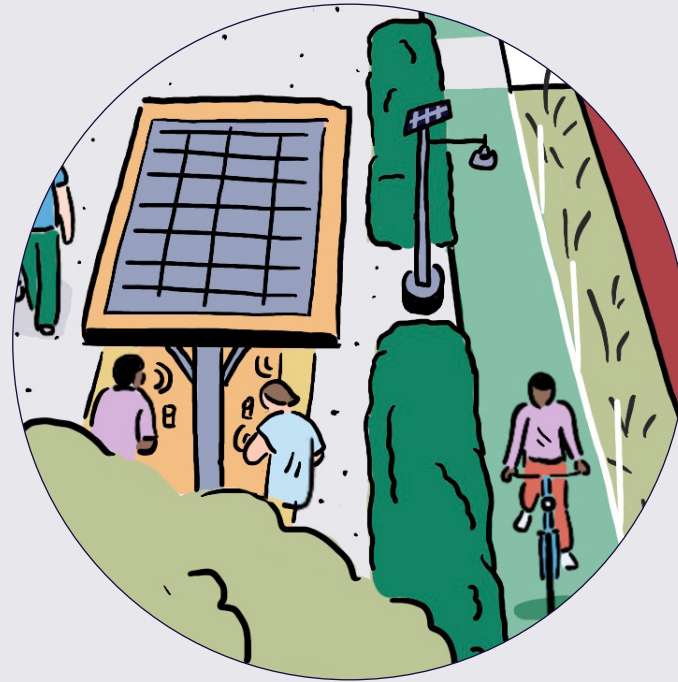
ACT NOW: Pilot new street cooling designs.

In 2023, the City could fund local community-based organizations to pilot their own Cool Streets programs, incentivizing local participation in community design competitions, block parties, and more. The City could

engage with designers to test new flexible, low-cost methods for cooling on the streets, applying lessons from pilots like [Refreshing Waters](#).

ACT NOW: Invest in the maintenance of nature-based solutions.

The City could advance their goals of creating more green jobs by allocating new funding for staff to DPR and DEP and to workforce organizations like the Horticultural Society to support ongoing maintenance of nature-based solutions in the Right of Way.



5 Install energy generating technologies in the Right of Way.

DDC could make the most of the Right of Way as a place for generating alternate sources of energy by using innovative technologies such as street illumination powered by solar panels, battery charging stations, or solar canopies over public shading structures.

ACT NOW: Ignite new design ideas for energy generating shading structures.

In 2023, the City could partner with a design organization to facilitate the generation of new ideas for structures like bus shelters and canopy seating in the Right of Way that could serve multiple purposes for climate benefit, such as shading, energy generation, or misting.

6 Use congestion pricing to invest in solutions to decarbonize city streets.

Currently, less than 1% of vehicles registered in the five boroughs are electric. The City should continue to create substantial opportunities for New Yorkers to use reliable, safe public transportation, and expand ways to access transportation methods such as e-bikes, scooters, and car-shares. The City could surpass its goal of 10,000 new electric vehicle charging stations in the street by 2030.

ACT NOW: Fast track PlugNYC.

DOT could expand their target of new curbside electric vehicle charging stations to 3,000, beating the commitment of 1,000 set forth in [Electrifying New York](#).

ACT NOW: Implement one ultra-low emission zone in each borough.

Cities like Barcelona and London have successfully implemented zones in their city centers that restrict access for the highest polluting vehicles. Prioritizing environmental justice neighborhoods first, New York could follow suit by identifying a zone in each borough to implement similar efforts that will improve air quality and reduce congestion. Explore adding into the current Congestion Pricing scheme.

7 Zoning for Climate Streets.

The City could work with DCP to undertake a review of zoning and building codes to better understand potential barriers and opportunities for realizing Climate Streets. Revisiting elements like [Zone Green](#) and the [Yards Text Amendment](#) could serve as a starting point to transform regulations as needed to support climate goals.

ACT NOW: Transform CEQR to center climate impact.

The City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR) could be a powerful tool to prioritize climate adaptation and decarbonization in the street. The City could restructure current CEQR staff and resources to prioritize climate adaptation and decarbonization goals.

8 Study co-benefits of nature-based solutions for economic growth and health.

Drawing from existing resources like the [NYC Street Tree Map](#), and the Trust for Public Land's [Economic Benefits of Parks in NYC Report](#), the City could launch a study to assess the benefits of nature-based solutions to make the case for broader investment. The City could work with the Comptroller's Office and the Independent Budget Office (IBO) to conduct cost-benefit analyses for small scale projects. DEP and MOCEJ could partner with SBS and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to study how investments like tree plantings, green infrastructure, habitat restoration, and use of renewable energy can have cross-sector benefits including economic growth and lower public health costs.



Streets for Care

WHAT IF OUR STREETS INCLUDED...

- A** Pocket parks with water features to offer rest and respite

B Inclusive social seating that caters to a variety of users

C Dedicated space for community engagement on the street

D Public restrooms in vacant storefronts
- E** Outdoor dining that can double as a public space

F Public space for play and gathering

G Safety infrastructure that includes nature and beauty

H Shared storage for community programming
- I** Robust traffic calming elements like raised crosswalks

J Access to water for drinking and tree care through converted fire hydrants

K Access to power for device charging



The Vision

Safe streets don't only protect pedestrians from traffic violence. They focus on the daily experiences of children, older adults, Black and brown people, and people with disabilities who are often at higher risk in the public Right of Way.

As Open Restaurants blossomed in the summer of 2020, sidewalks and parking spaces transformed into new space for dining and gathering safely. But structures and seating arrangements that now claim the roadway have also created a new maze of obstacles that add to the challenges that New Yorkers with disabilities already face in public space.

For centuries, cities have been designed for able-bodied people. Historically, the lack of genuine inclusive community engagement in design has resulted in a built environment that is inaccessible and unwelcoming to many. And now, as New Yorkers navigate an increasingly complex roadway, we are seeing the ways that our streets are becoming even more inhospitable.

Our vision for Care Streets centers safety, care, and healing for New Yorkers of all ages, races, and abilities. Care Streets should cater to the needs and priorities of people with disabilities from early on in the design process, broadening our definitions of accessibility beyond provisions for people with physical impairments to include mental health (like neurodiverse New Yorkers). The Right of Way should be designed by and for the New Yorkers that use it. Care Streets are flexible and provide a variety of essential amenities, from shade, quiet areas, and seating, to basic utilities like drinking water, wifi, and charging power. They are maintained and cared for with community members, supporting better mobility, cleaner streets, and safer neighborhoods.



Recommendations

1 Fund long-term, ongoing and inclusive engagement for street design.

Our street design processes should be inclusive of those who may not be design- or policy-fluent, or tech-savvy. By 2030, the City should leverage funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) – following the example of [the Kresge Foundation](#) – to support community-led visioning and engagement processes for streetscape transformation projects and programming.

ACT NOW: Expand DOT's Street Ambassador program.

In 2023, DOT could expand the Street Ambassador program to facilitate better community engagement that accounts for barriers to participation like language, childcare, design and policy fluency. Teams could utilize high-tech and low-tech on-site tools such as augmented-reality, polling, and participatory mock-ups.

ACT NOW: Pilot field offices in every community district.

The City could work with community-based organizations to establish local engagement hubs or "field offices" that will support more ongoing engagement from all City agencies in the neighborhoods they help to shape. Look to examples like the Field Office created through Neighborhoods Now, or to City initiatives to launch IDNYC, Culture Pass, NYC Census, and more.

ACT NOW: Expand Participatory Budgeting to fund community-driven street projects.

The City Council could expand the participatory budgeting program across every council district and prioritize community-driven street activations.

2 Transform streets adjacent to NYCHA campuses.

Drawing on principles laid out in NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA)'s [Connected Communities Guidebook](#), DOT could partner with NYCHA to create shared and pedestrianized streets adjacent to campuses that would support increased physical activity, reduce speeding, and enhance social connectivity.

ACT NOW: Launch Phase III of NeighborhoodStat.

In 2023, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice could partner with DOT to include streets adjacent to NYCHA campuses in the next iteration of the NeighborhoodStat Action Plan Agenda. Resources could be allocated to resident-designed solutions for community safety and well-being, like play spaces, lighting, and seating.

3 Strengthen focus on accessibility of the streetscape.

While some new uses of street and sidewalk space have increased accessibility, others have made the public realm less accessible to New Yorkers with disabilities. The NYC DOT could work with the Mayor's Office of Persons with Disabilities (MOPD), DOHMH, and others to incorporate new guidelines for accessibility of the streetscape in the existing Street Design Manual.

ACT NOW: Adapt Privately-Owned Public Spaces (POPS) Guidelines for the Right of Way.

In 2023, DOT could work with DCP to broaden and adapt the use of the guidelines for POPs to account for public amenity zones in the street.

4 Widen the definition of accessibility to include mental health.

The current regulations for accessibility only include accommodations for physical accessibility. By 2030, the City could include design for mental health in an updated version of the Street Design Manual and as a new design consideration in DDC's Project Excellence Principles.

ACT NOW: Launch a Mental Health in Public Space Task Force.

By 2023, the Interagency Public Realm Working Group should launch a mental health task force, with a mandate to learn from designers, healthcare experts and service providers, to develop a design framework for neurodiverse populations in the public realm framed through safety, accessibility, and mobility.



5 Make bold moves for public infrastructure in the streets.

Many streets lack critical infrastructure for people. Partnering with utility companies and City agencies like DEP and DOT could invest in public amenities like water fountains and access to free wifi in a new toolkit of streetscape improvements.

ACT NOW: Convert hydrants for water access.

In 2023, DOT, DEP, DPR and the NYC Fire Department (FDNY) could expand the Cool Streets program by equipping more neighborhoods with spray cap attachments for hydrants and assembling community stewards like the Hydrant Education Action Teams to support safe use. Additionally, the City can seek proposals from designers to develop new retrofit attachments that convert hydrants for tree care and water fountains.

ACT NOW: Expand LinkNYC and retrofit light poles.

The City could expand LinkNYC stations to previously underserved neighborhoods, partnering with local CBOs to place where most needed. Pilot retrofitting light poles for access to device charging in the Right of Way, and include emergency call buttons that connect directly to a local crisis response team.

6 Develop permanent and accessible bathrooms for all New Yorkers.

As of 2019, there were only 1,103 public bathrooms around New York City, with only two open 24/7 [7]. By 2030, the City could develop public-private partnerships and incentives to fund and maintain staffed public bathrooms. The City could subsidize conversion of ground floor vacant retail space, creating jobs and a source of income for building owners.

ACT NOW: Explore low-cost and temporary solutions for bathroom deserts.

By 2023, the Interagency Public Realm Working Group should launch a public bathrooms task force to implement new designs for accessible restrooms on the street. For highly trafficked neighborhoods, the City could install bathroom trailers to occupy parking spaces in front of vacant storefronts, managed by public-private partnerships.

7 Design multi-use street furniture.

Streets and public spaces are becoming clogged with many one-use items. As new uses from 2020 and beyond become clear, the City could invest in furniture and safety infrastructure that can serve multiple functions and time scales, and house them in a new toolkit of street amenities.

ACT NOW: Source multi-use design ideas.

In 2023, DOT could host a design competition to pilot new types of flexible street furniture, such as modular seating, safety barriers, and planters to support street usability and biodiversity.

ACT NOW: Pair restaurants and CBOs to share outdoor space.

In 2023, DOT and SBS could pilot a "Street Buddy" program in each borough, pairing restaurants equipped with outdoor dining set-ups with local community and cultural organizations to use the space for civic meetings during the restaurants' off-hours.

8 Prioritize safety for vulnerable populations.

2021 was the deadliest year of Vision Zero, with record levels of traffic violence killing 273 people in New York City alone. By 2030, the City should expand traffic calming strategies like chicanes, bumpouts, raised crosswalks, and expanded public space that prioritize pedestrian safety and clarify visibility for drivers. The City should prioritize these projects near schools and Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities, learning from interventions like "We Protect Schools" in Barcelona.

ACT NOW: Identify 10 priority Safe Streets.

By 2023, DOT should identify 10 sites for "Safe Streets" to pilot safety measures around schools, churches, and other target areas. Consider undertaking Round 4 of Safe Streets for Seniors to identify additional priorities.

9 Invest in community-led street safety initiatives.

Many challenges such as substance abuse and mental health crises often play out on our streets, and too often fall to police by default. As an alternative, the City could realize a holistic plan to invest in community-led safety initiatives by 2030, equipping community organizations with crisis response teams that include mental healthcare professionals.

ACT NOW: Support community 'safe walks'.

The City could fund community organizations that administer programs like 'safe walks' to accompany residents from subway stations to their homes and offer other supportive services.

10 Fund community groups to increase local street stewardship.

By 2030, the City could increase funding for community stewardship programs, prioritizing resources to smaller outer borough BIDs, block associations, and other community groups to better manage on-the-ground maintenance in pedestrian-focused spaces.

ACT NOW: Launch technical assistance partners for smaller nonprofits and civic organizations.

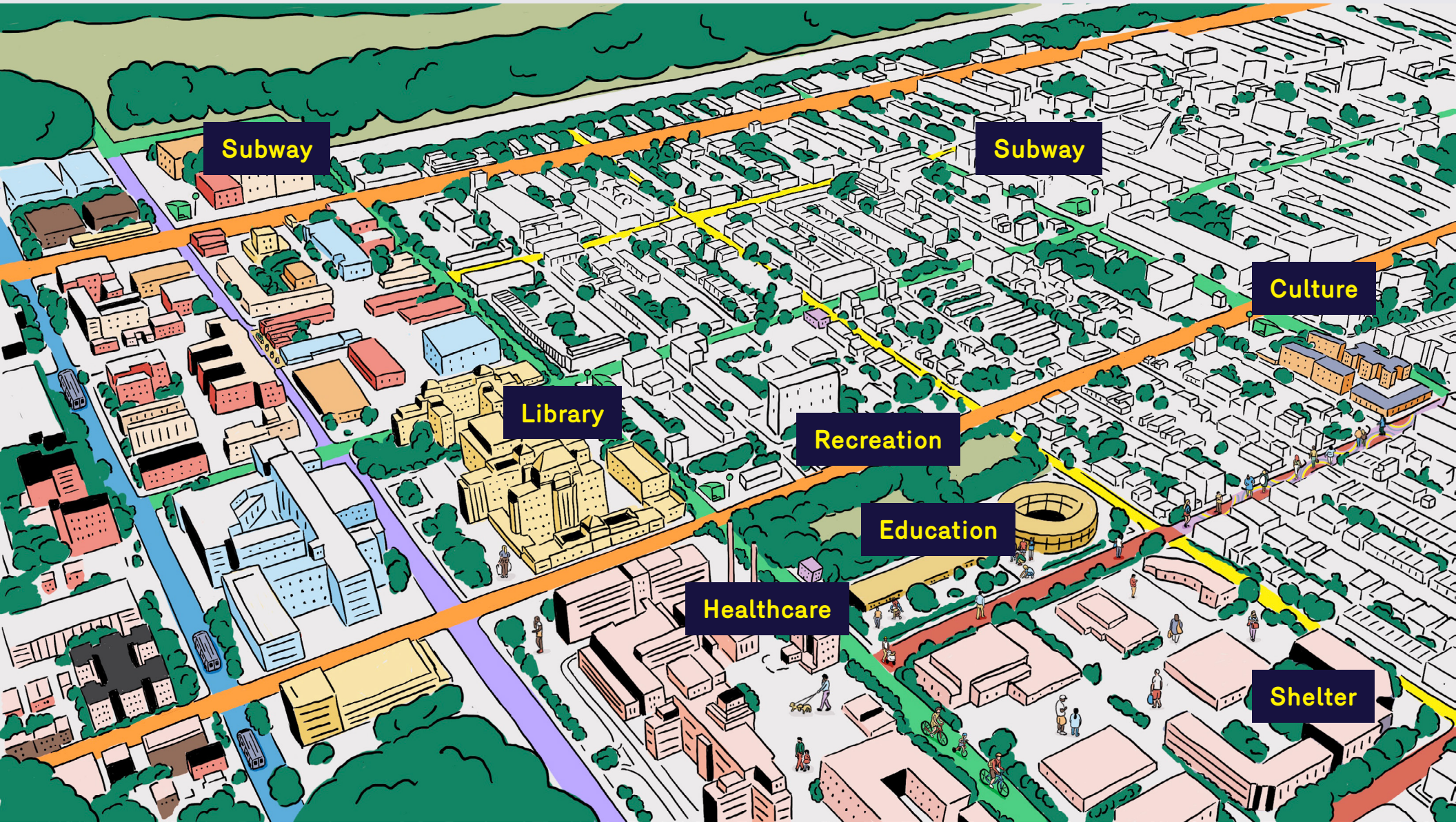
By 2023, the City could launch a technical assistance partners program that matches well-funded BIDs and conservancies with lower-resourced BIDs and CBOs to share knowledge on streetscape and public space stewardship, taking lessons from the Institute for Urban Parks.



Streets for Continuity

WHAT IF OUR NEIGHBORHOODS WERE CONNECTED BY:

- Community Corridors
- Culture Streets
- Freight Corridors
- Micro-Mobility Greenways
- Commercial Corridors
- Open Streets
- Bus Boulevards

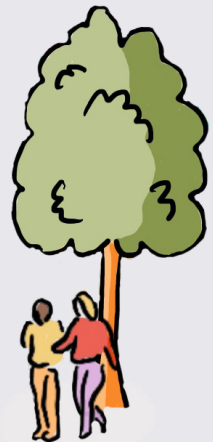


The Vision

Over the past two years, the breadth of new types of street activations has been astounding. Roads that were primarily built for cars became classrooms, restaurants, yoga studios, and community gathering spaces. In many cases, these new uses emerged on the city grid without rhyme or reason; Open Streets could begin and end suddenly, often leaving pedestrians or bicyclists stranded on a busy traffic corridor.

The maintenance and programming of Open Streets also emerged by ability, leaving neighborhoods with fewer resources less equipped to manage their new public spaces. Now, two years later, the City has the opportunity to move from response to a formal integration of the design, governance, usage, and maintenance of transformed streets, while planning for new additions in a holistic way.

Our vision for Continuity in our streets is one that plans for integrated street networks as part of the neighborhood fabric. Streets should be context appropriate, while connecting New Yorkers to key resources like public transportation and shared services. Streets can serve specific purposes that maximize their public benefit, while allowing flexibility for community-determined priorities. We have an opportunity to plan our streets, buildings, public spaces, and transportation comprehensively.



Recommendations

1 Create a Mayor's Office of the Public Realm.

With many stakeholders in city government managing aspects of the public realm, priorities can often become competing instead of complementary. Drawing on recommendations by the Municipal Art Society for A Public Champion for the Public Realm, the City could establish an Office of the Public Realm within the Mayor's Office with the power to coordinate and mandate cooperation between city agencies and local elected officials with respect to city streets and other aspects of the public realm. The Office could house local Public Space Managers to understand site- and neighborhood-specific local challenges and improve connected networks of public space.

ACT NOW: Appoint a Chief Public Realm Officer.

By 2023, the Mayor could appoint a Chief Public Realm Officer, who can steward the Interagency Public Realm Working Group launched in Rebuild, Renew, Reinvent. Reporting to the Deputy Mayor of Operations, this position could coordinate with DOT, DSNY, DPR, and DDC. The Chief Public Realm Officer could also ensure coordination with the Deputy Mayor for Economic and Workforce Development and the Deputy Mayor for Strategic Initiatives and their offices (including DCP, DCLA, the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, the Public Design Commission, SBS, the Office of Civic Engagement, the Public Engagement Unit, and others).

The Chief Public Realm Officer could oversee the Interagency Public Realm Working Group to establish the holistic vision, management strategies and public engagement approach to make the Office of the Public Realm a success.

2 Develop a unified framework of street usage to guide future changes.

Building off of previous efforts like the recent Regional Plan Association study Re-Envisioning the Right of Way that defines categories of streets based on use, density, transportation access, distance to public space, or schools, the Office of the Public Realm should develop a unified framework for street usage and design. This framework could be used for prioritizing expansion of the Open Streets network, Bike Boulevards, and future DOT initiatives.

ACT NOW: Map current street categories.

Building on the approved NYC Streets Plan, The Office of the Public Realm, working closely with NYC DOT and other relevant city agencies, should begin creating a unified framework by mapping new street categories to better understand existing use.

3 Build a new network of Community Corridors.

Under the unified framework, the City should define civic and public uses as the nodes of the network that guide the framework. Schools, hospitals, libraries, parks, plazas, and civic buildings would be the focus of Community Corridors, creating a new network of pedestrian-oriented streets. These could be modeled after multi-street Open Streets, such as 34th Street in Queens, which connects schools and residential areas.

ACT NOW: Define a Community Corridor in every borough.

By 2023, The Office of the Public Realm should work with community stakeholders to define a target site for a Community Corridor in all five boroughs.

4 Build a holistic platform for community input on streets.

By 2030, The City could build on platforms like [Participate.nyc](#) to uplift grassroots efforts and empower communities to have a voice in changes to their streets.

Using the platform, which would include embedded street-level detailed map capabilities, and would build on the StreetsPlan MetroQuest Survey, communities would have the ability to propose changes to their streets, or to weigh in on changes to streets proposed by DOT or other entities in a practical and constructive way. The platform could also include a toolbox, including a wide range of feasible design interventions as inspiration for communities to imagine what is possible.

As a whole, the platform would be a way for communities to propose changes and garner support - both political and operational - and for city agencies to fold hyperlocal knowledge and ideas into their

thinking. Enacted by liaisons in each district from the Office of the Public Realm, the platform would help community groups such as block associations, civic groups, and arts organizations engage in conversations with the City.

ACT NOW: Convene a community input platform task force.

By 2023, the Interagency Public Realm Working Group should convene a task force, including members of the DOT Street Ambassadors program, to design an initial outreach strategy for a community input platform.

5 Advance a data-driven approach to streets.

Although New York City has innovated in open source data collection, such as with Comp Stat and Crash Stat, it does not collect consistent data on public life.

By 2030, the City should use data and metrics on street use as a design tool for new infrastructure investments. DOT, in partnership with the Office of the Public Realm, should establish an ongoing system of data collection and visualization to understand how people use and experience the public realm, and define successes and failures in street interventions. The database should be public, and include qualitative and socioeconomic data to ensure equitable investments and planning.

ACT NOW: Partner with BIDs that are collecting data.

By 2023, the Interagency Public Realm Working Group should pair BIDs already collecting public life data with civic groups or block associations to share tools and knowledge on robust data collection processes.

6 Develop a holistic public space management framework.

By 2030, the Office of the Public Realm could institutionalize a public space management framework that incorporates long-term, citywide visioning and dedicated funding for public space management to ensure it is equitably distributed across the city. The Office of the Public Realm could lead the strategy to ensure cross-neighborhood and cross-agency uniformity and coordination in managing and overseeing street and plaza maintenance and activity.

ACT NOW: Study challenges for competing uses on the street.

By 2023, the Office of the Deputy Mayor of Operations, in partnership with the Interagency Public Realm Working Group, should begin to develop a public space management framework to determine the key challenges and competing needs on the street.

7 Institutionalize a street and public realm maintenance & engagement corps.

A robust public realm maintenance and engagement corps could boost our economic recovery and provide jobs to New Yorkers, while helping new open spaces like Open Streets and public plazas thrive through cleaning and robust programming.

By 2030, the Office of the Public Realm could partner with NYC Service to build a network of corps members that act as both maintenance workers and engagement stewards. The City should continue to partner with the [Horticultural Society](#) and BIDs, and expand the program by learning from initiatives like [Uptown Grand Central's partnership with Positive Workforce](#) on successful local workforce development strategies.

ACT NOW: Marshall the City Cleanup Corps to less-resourced neighborhoods.

In 2023, the City should expand on the City Cleanup Corps to support the cleaning and maintenance of streets and public spaces, starting with Summer Street Stewards deployed at every Open Street in the warmer months. The City should support less-resourced BIDs (with budgets under \$500k), and mobilize the program to fill the gaps for areas not covered by BIDs.

8 Invest in and connect to public transportation.

Investment in public transportation is critical to the success of street transformation. In order to ease traffic congestion and reliance on cars, we must invest substantially in fast and far-reaching bus service, expanded bike and scooter share, and regional scale transportation reform.

ACT NOW: Connect transformed streets to public transportation.

Streets free of car traffic have the potential to serve as connectors between alternate modes of transportation. In 2023, DOT could partner with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) to establish a plan to network stations and bus networks with streetscape improvements such as bike storage, pedestrian avenues and bike ways to maximize their impact.

9 Harness federal investment for street improvements.

Funds from the Federal Infrastructure and Jobs Act Bill could be used to invest in safety infrastructure on NYC streets that also serve goals for Commerce, Culture, Climate, and Care.

10 Use creative funding strategies like congestion pricing to reinvest in streets.

To combat New York City's aging infrastructure, the City should leverage initiatives like congestion pricing, toll roads, City-run parking garages, paid parking, curb space fees and more to reinvest into streetscape improvements that support a more accessible public realm.

ACT NOW: Add street improvement to congestion pricing legislation.

In 2023, the City could advocate for investments in street improvement in congestion pricing legislation.



The Road Forward

We are at the beginning of a historic recovery for our city. It is imperative that we seize this moment to end roadway fatalities, equip our streets to combat an escalating climate crisis, and bring our neighborhoods together after a period of deep isolation.

The last two years have shown us what is possible with nimble, collaborative work together. We invite you, our elected and appointed officials, to remain fearless and continue this work.

To Mayor Eric Adams:

A vision for a safe city is possible to achieve in eight years if we recognize that our Right of Way is an essential piece of the puzzle. Your investment in the Streets Plan is a powerful beginning; you have built the team to follow through and leave a transformative legacy of streets that create healthier and safer communities. Now is the time to be courageous, and to bring your attention to aligning the city agencies who care for our streets under unified leadership, a common agenda, and robust investment to ensure they can get stuff done.

To our Deputy Mayors:

Interagency coordination can only work when driven by our Deputy Mayors. Our City has to perfect the management of the new and evolving public realm now. This is an important opportunity to open up new pathways for collaboration, set a plan in motion, and agree that streets are public space.

To the new Interagency Public Realm Working Group:

We have a once in a generation opportunity to help government work better for all of us and the public realm. Dream big for our streets and public spaces, establish better communication channels, and break down every silo to move this work forward.

To the NYC Department of Transportation:

We have discovered that streets are New York’s greatest public spaces. Embrace your responsibility as the stewards of these spaces, and don’t be afraid to ask or advocate for what you need to get it right.

To all New York City agencies that touch our streets:

The beauty of the streets is that they intersect with all of our mandates - as useful as they are for transportation, they are also necessary for health, safety, recreation, and more. Keep partnering across city government, experimenting with new ideas, and scaling up what works best.

To the New York City Council:

For our streets to succeed, we need your investment. Fully fund the Streets Plan so that New Yorkers can experience the benefits of safer streets. And embrace your power to fund community-led pilots in your neighborhood to test new uses of the street.

Onward!

Acknowledgments

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Special Thanks

Special to the Urban Design Forum Streets Ahead Program Committee for their strategic advice and stalwart support:

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Thanks to the following individuals who graciously lent their expertise as part of the Streets Ahead series. The recommendations in this platform do not necessarily reflect their views or those of their organizations:

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About Next New York

Streets Ahead is a part of the Next New York series, an annual inquiry into a defining issue facing the city. Each year, through local dialogues, international exchanges, and interdisciplinary working groups, we work to catalyze new ideas for New York’s built environment. Ideas that emerge inform programs, collaborations with city agencies, and pilot projects to inspire fresh thinking for the future of the city.

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