

BUILDING A FAMILY-FRIENDLY CITY

Design Guidelines for a Safer, More Livable, Public Realm



— WOMEN —
FORWARD
— NYC —

NYC DESIGN

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COVER PHOTO: NYC Department of Transportation
Lego Installation at Johnny Hartman Plaza on Hamilton Place in Harlem



Letter From the Mayor

My fellow New Yorkers,

Our administration is committed to making New York City the best place to raise a family; that includes creating the best public spaces to take your family because these public spaces are at the heart of our city. From parks and playgrounds to pools and walking paths, New York City’s public realm provides families with safe, accessible, and inclusive spaces to spend time together.

Through this “Building a Family-Friendly City” report, we outline some of the best practices for making sure those public spaces support young children, parents, and older adults alike. This report not only lays out concrete steps from the planning process to the construction phase to the ongoing maintenance afterwards to make sure our public spaces support families; it provides real-world examples of projects in New York City that have successfully used these strategies.

We are excited to release this report, which helps fulfill a key commitment in our city’s “[Women Forward NYC](#)” initiative to make New York City the most women-forward city in the United States.

Finally, this report is not meant to sit on a shelf or buried deep in a government website. It is meant to serve as a vital resource for urban planners, designers, public servants, and private partners to use when designing the next generation of public spaces, providing tangible tools that we can use to make New York City the best place to raise a family.

Sincerely,



Eric Adams

Mayor

Letter from the Chief Public Realm Officer and Executive Director of the Public Design Commission

Dear New Yorkers,

The way we design our public realm shapes how families experience our city. Our streets, plazas, parks, and buildings are where children learn to explore their world, where parents and caregivers build community, and where families of all ages gather and thrive. New Yorkers deserve beautiful and well-maintained public spaces that fit their daily needs.

In collaboration with our city agencies, we are releasing Building a Family-Friendly City to set a clear standard for how our public spaces can better serve families across our city. They build upon our core values of promoting innovative and sustainable design, preserving neighborhood character, enhancing the public realm, and ensuring equitable and safe access to public spaces.

We recognize that family-friendly design is about more than just building physical spaces like playgrounds. It means creating safe routes to schools and parks; ensuring adequate seating, shade, and lighting; providing clean and accessible restrooms; and designing spaces that serve multiple generations. It means thinking about the needs of parents with strollers, elderly grandparents, teenagers seeking their independence, and young children learning to navigate their city. We are a diverse city, and we want to make sure our spaces are inclusive and welcoming to all.

These guidelines are meant to serve as a resource for our partners across government and the design community as we consider the various ways to make our public spaces as family-friendly as possible. Our city agencies lead by example, already implementing many of these guidelines across numerous projects in their portfolios, which we have highlighted through various examples and case studies in this report. We look forward to continuing to implement these principles with the goal of building the most family-friendly city in the world.

Sincerely,



Ya-Ting Liu

Chief Public Realm Officer



Sreoshy Banerjee

Executive Director,
Public Design Commission

Make Stuff Fun: Guidelines for a Family-Friendly City

The Office of the New York City Mayor is committed to making New York City the best place to raise a family. To achieve this, our public spaces must be designed to be inclusive and welcoming to the diversity of this city, including families with children, older adults and their caregivers, and people with disabilities. Additionally, designing a family-friendly city includes promoting health, wellness, and climate resilience in our public realm to ensure a sustainable future.

The Mayor's Office continues to prioritize public realm improvements, a primary goal of Mayor Adams's mission to both rebuild the city's economy and promote physical and mental health through safe, clean public spaces. Since January 2022, the Adams administration has added the equivalent of more than 85 football fields of public space.

Building off this work as well as the Adams administration's commitment to support women and families through [Women Forward NYC](#), **this document outlines a set of guidelines meant to inspire design and programming that includes all New Yorkers, and that helps to bring joy, play, and safety into the public realm.** These guidelines represent some of the best practices used by city agencies¹. Where feasible and relevant, the city strives to use these principles to make our spaces more family-friendly. We also encourage the private sector, non-profit, and other government agencies to draw inspiration from these guidelines.

The principles for creating family-friendly design to bring joy, play, and safety into the public realm are:

1 MAKE SPACES ENGAGING AND WELCOMING:

- ▶ Engage diverse perspectives when designing public spaces.
- ▶ Design public spaces with multi-generational users' and family groups' needs, convenience, and comfort in mind.
- ▶ Consider safety features and measures when creating public spaces.

¹ While this document comprehensively outlines principles that currently exist within New York City's public realm, not every principle outlined in this report is relevant to each completed project.

2

REMOVE BARRIERS AND INCREASE ACCESS:

- ▶ Practice universal design to provide play options for users of all ages and abilities.
- ▶ Design more accessible, connected public spaces.
- ▶ Make signage and wayfinding systems easier to see and read.

3

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE:

- ▶ Build with climate resiliency and sustainability in mind.
- ▶ Consider long-term social equity, physical and mental health, and community well-being.
- ▶ Design adaptable spaces that can evolve with the needs of the community.



Glossary

Ambient air temperature: The temperature of the air over the ground in a particular place.

Biodiversity: The variety of all living things in an area, including plants, animals, fungi, and micro-organisms.

Companion seating: A type of seating that is adjacent to or aligned vertically to a spot reserved for a mobility device, such as a wheelchair.

Cloudburst: A sudden, heavy downpour where a lot of rain falls in a short amount of time.

Ground-level play: Play components that can be approached and used at ground-level.

Heat island: Pockets of heat that form in urban areas, making them a higher temperature than surrounding areas, due to factors such as a concentration of buildings, roads, and infrastructure that re-emit the sun's heat and have limited planted areas.

Neurodivergence: A non-medical term to describe when someone's brain processes, learns, and/or behaves differently than what is considered "typical".

Open Streets: New York City's Open Streets program transforms streets into public space open to all. These transformations allow for a range of activities that promote economic development, support schools, facilitate pedestrian and bike mobility, and provide new ways for New Yorkers to enjoy cultural programming and build community.

Pedestrian scale lighting: lighting designed to be lower to the ground, typically 12-14 feet above the ground, to illuminate pathways for pedestrian safety and comfort.

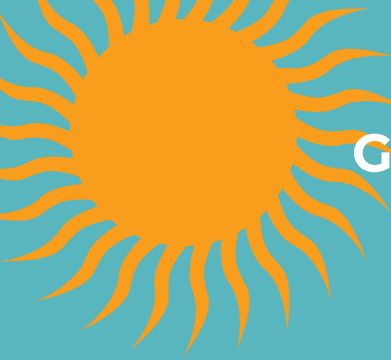
Public realm: Publicly-owned spaces, including streets, parks, and plazas.

Sensory play: Any form of play that intentionally stimulates the senses, such as touch, sight, smell, taste, and hearing.

Transfer platforms: Platforms that are designed to transfer children who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices onto a play surface.

Universal design: broad-spectrum architectural planning concepts aimed at creating buildings, products, and environments that are inherently accessible to both able-bodied individuals and those with physical disabilities. Universal design must take into account all applicable laws, codes, and standards related to accessibility.





Guidelines to Bring Joy, Play, and Safety to NYC's Public Realm

**MAKE SPACES
ENGAGING AND
WELCOMING**



**REMOVE BARRIERS
AND INCREASE
ACCESS**

**PLAN FOR
THE FUTURE**



Creating design and programming for New Yorkers, inclusive of all ages and abilities



Approach to Creating the Guidelines

These guidelines were created in partnership with city agencies, state partners, non-profit groups, and private-sector partners working in public realm and design. We also surveyed New York City residents to hear what people living, working, and playing in the city every day want to see in their public spaces, and incorporated their feedback into the guidelines.

Public Spaces

To understand New Yorkers' experiences in the public realm, we surveyed a demographically representative sample of almost 8,000 New York residents through an online survey². The findings from the survey are detailed below.

As of December 2024, 84 percent of New Yorkers citywide live within walking distance of a park³. New York City's public spaces are widely used by its residents, and a majority of respondents surveyed spend time in public spaces a few times a week or more (60 percent).



In the past 12 months, how often have you spent time in public spaces around New York City?

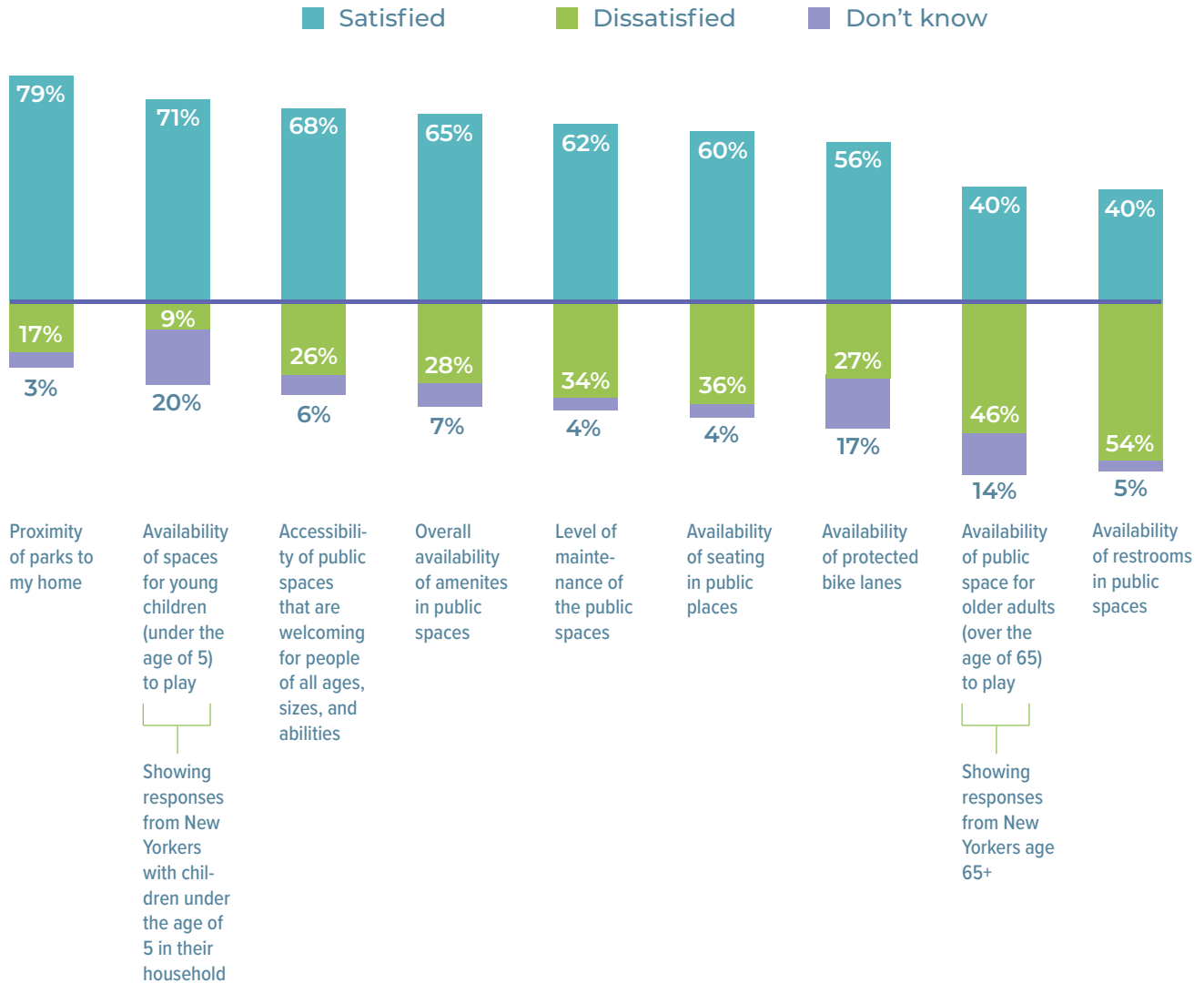


² Between the dates of October 9, 2024 through October 31, 2024, Zencity administered an online survey to residents of New York City. 7,971 were recruited using targeted ads on various platforms (e.g., social media, apps for Android and IOS) as well as online survey panels. Using data from the US Census Bureau, this survey employed quotas to match the distribution of race, ethnicity, age, and gender in New York City, ensuring that the sample represents the entire population of the city.

³ Source: <https://www.nycgovparks.org/planning-and-building/planning/walk-to-a-park>; walking distance is considered 1/4-mile or less for sites such as small playgrounds and sitting areas; or a 1/2-mile or less for larger parks.

New Yorkers are satisfied with many aspects of our public realm. New Yorkers are most satisfied with their proximity to a park (79 percent); accessibility of public spaces that are welcoming for people of all ages, sizes, and abilities (68 percent); overall availability of amenities in public spaces (65 percent); and level of maintenance of the public spaces (62 percent). Those with children under 5 years old are also satisfied with the availability of spaces for young children to play (71 percent).

Overall, how satisfied are you with each of the following in New York City?



However, many New Yorkers were dissatisfied with availability of public restrooms (54 percent), and New Yorkers aged 65 and older expressed dissatisfaction with availability of public spaces for older adults to play (46 percent).

Concerns over feelings of safety when spending time in public spaces are also a real issue for many New Yorkers, both in the daytime (75 percent) and at night (87 percent). Further, feeling safe is the most important factor whether or not New Yorkers spend time in public spaces (46 percent).



How concerned are you about each of the following? (showing very + somewhat concerned)

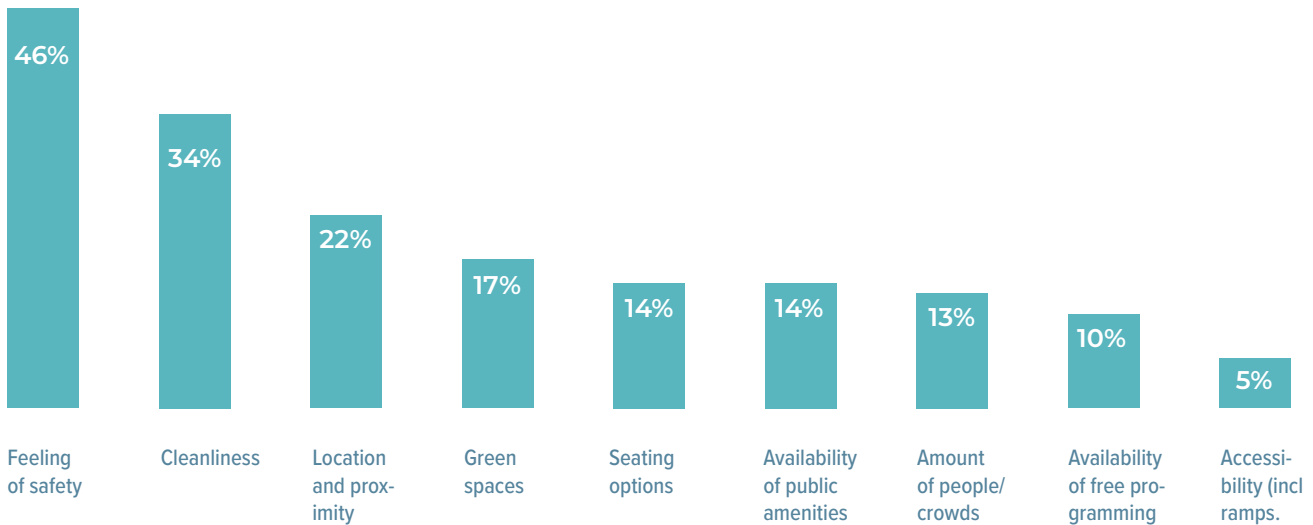
Safety when spending time in public spaces around New York City during the nighttime



Safety when spending time in public spaces around New York City during the daytime



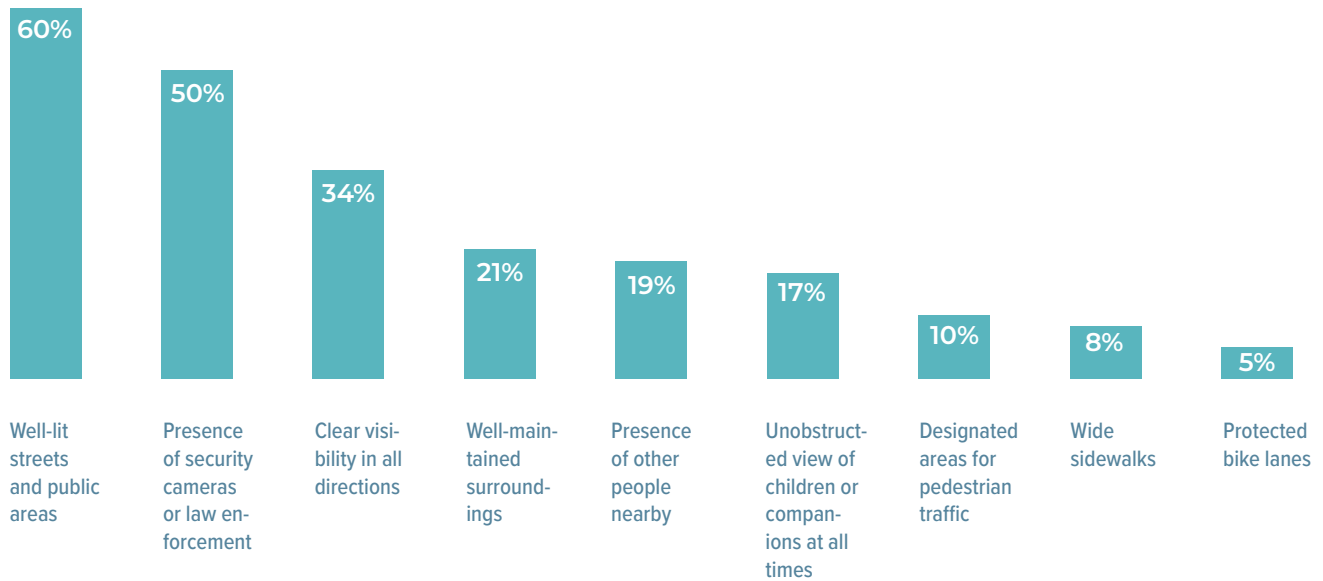
Which of the following is most important to you when deciding to spend time in public spaces around New York City?



New Yorkers would feel safer in public spaces with: well-lit streets and public areas (60 percent), presence of security cameras or law enforcement (50 percent), and clear visibility in all directions (34 percent).



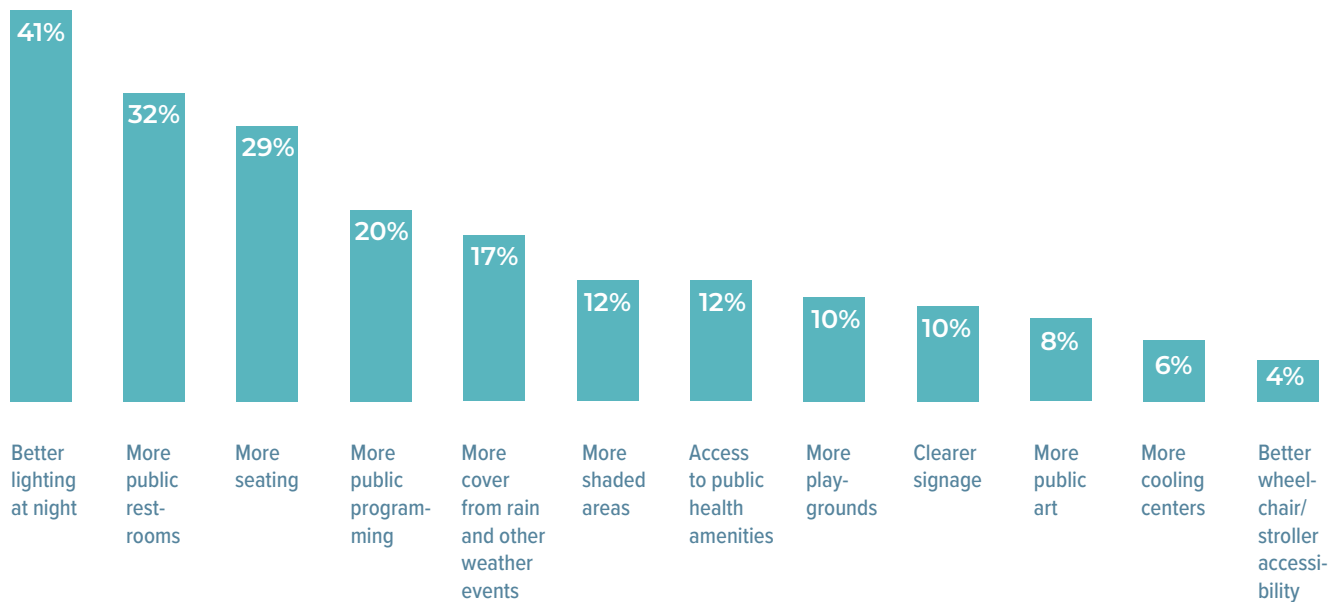
Which of the following would most improve your feeling of safety when spending time in public spaces around New York City?



New Yorkers also noted that better lighting (40 percent), more public restrooms (32 percent), and more seating (29 percent) would make them want to spend more time in public spaces.



Which of the following would make you want to spend more time in New York City's public spaces?



These findings make clear what New Yorkers value in their public spaces, and what they would like to see more of to make New York a more family-friendly city. From increasing the number of public restrooms available to New Yorkers to improving public safety, New York City strives to be the best city to raise a family.



PHOTO: Department of Transportation
Bayside Village Business Improvement District

**MAKE SPACES
ENGAGING AND
WELCOMING**



Incorporating community feedback throughout the design process is a critical step to creating an inviting, welcoming, and engaging public space. Public spaces are meant to support the diverse needs of the surrounding community; listening directly to that community is crucial to ensuring those needs are reflected in the final design.

Engage diverse perspectives when designing public spaces through:

- **Proactive Outreach:** Engage the public early in planning and collaborate during the design process through various outreach formats, including community visioning, focus groups, and meetings. The design of safe transportation routes to these places is another key element.
- **Diverse Participation:** Diversify stakeholder representation by fostering participation from people with different ages, backgrounds, religions, genders, and abilities to offer a wide range of ideas, insights and experiences, to inform the design process.
- **Remove Barriers to Participation:** Mitigate barriers that may hinder communities' participation, such as providing language interpreters and scheduling community input meetings when working parents and caregivers can participate.
- **Multi-Modal Engagement:** Provide multiple ways for the public to participate, including surveys and hybrid meetings.



- **Communication Channels:** Use existing communication channels to collect and respond to community feedback, such as community input meetings, 311 calls, or the local community board.

Design public spaces with multi-generational users' and family groups' needs, convenience, and comfort in mind through:

- **Engaging Play:** Provide game and play equipment such as ping pong tables, cornhole, climbing features, and other sports facilities to encourage active play without digital distractions, particularly for teens.
- **Playful Water Features:** Integrate playful and interactive water features, like active water play zones, into parks, plazas, and Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) for play and relief from the heat.
- **Adult Fitness Equipment:** Incorporate fitness spaces within the sight lines of child play areas so all people—caregivers and people without children—can work out and engage in fitness activities for free. Adult fitness equipment should be clearly separated from the playground for children's safety.
- **Seating for All:** Include a variety of seating options as space allows, such as benches with backs and armrests to help older adults or those with disabilities sit, stand, and rest, as well as tables, chairs and seating arranged for social interaction and views. Consider the space between benches or other seating areas to provide both space for wheelchairs⁴ and seating at intervals for caregivers and small children who may need to rest on a long walk.
- **Family-Friendly Restrooms:** Integrate features such as changing stations in all restrooms where feasible and incorporate exterior all-weather drinking fountains and bottle fillers into building facade of restroom facilities where feasible to provide drinking water to the public in all seasons.
- **Lactation Rooms:** Provide safe and comfortable places for people who breast-feed to express breast milk or nurse.⁵
- **Drinking Water:** Add drinking fountains and bottle fillers where feasible to make drinking water readily available in public spaces, helping families stay hydrated and help keep cool in summer.
- **Public Health Amenities:** Provide public health amenities like menstrual products in publicly-accessible areas where feasible, such as libraries.

⁴ Spaces for mobility devices next to a bench or other linear seating feature should be 3 feet wide to provide adequate space and enable the ability to be seated next to a companion. Space should be left at some tables in each seating area so a mobility device can pull up to the table.

⁵ NYS Civil Rights law provides a parent the right to breast/chestfeed their baby in any location, public or private, where the parent is otherwise allowed to be, whether or not the nipple of the breast/chest is covered during breast/chestfeeding.

- **Space for Bicycles and Strollers:** Establish clear spaces for bicycles and strollers in public spaces where feasible to keep pathways open, accessible and easy to navigate.
- **Active Streetscapes:** Allow ground floor uses of buildings as well as encourage windows and doors that face the street to help animate streetscapes and engagement with the public realm. Pop-ups, temporary installments, and programming can also help to activate empty storefronts and streetscapes.
- **Refuse Disposal:** Install trash receptacles to discourage littering, prevent pests, and promote a clean environment.

Consider safety features when creating public spaces through:

Pedestrian Pathways: Foster pedestrian safety while in the public realm by widening narrow sidewalks, reconstructing existing sidewalks in poor condition, minimizing sidewalk obstructions (such as newspaper boxes, vertical utility structures, etc.), creating more Open Streets and plazas, extending pedestrian crossing times at crosswalks to accommodate slower walking speeds, constructing pedestrian safety islands, and introducing pedestrian zones near schools and older adult centers.

Safe Streets: Enhance street safety by narrowing roadways, installing stop controls and signals, expanding the bike network through greenways, building protected bike lanes and bike boulevards, creating more shared streets and lowering vehicle speeds⁶ to make getting to and from play areas in the public realm easy and safe and to promote family-friendly cycling.



PHOTO: NYC Department of Transportation
Speed limit reductions following the passage of Sammy's Law.

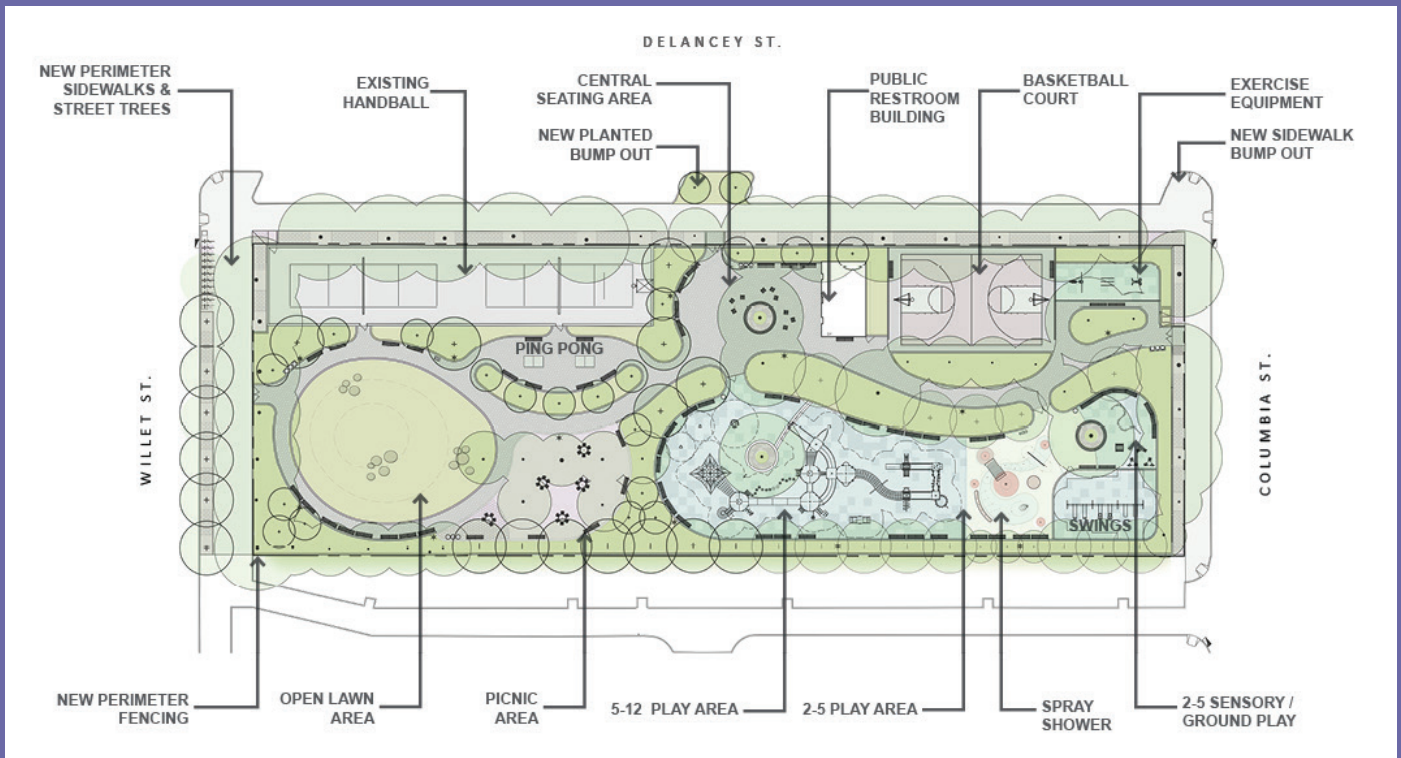
⁶ Passed in the 2024 legislative session in Albany, Sammy's Law grants New York City the authority to reduce speed limits to 20 MPH with proper signage on individual streets. For roads undergoing safety-related redesigns, speed limits may be further reduced to 10 MPH.



PHOTO: NYC Department of Transportation; Art by Chenlin Cai
“The Beauty of Four Life Essentials 衣食住行之美”
Painted asphalt pedestrian space in Chinatown, Manhattan

- **Artful Plazas and Pedestrian Spaces:** Apply graphics in plazas and expanded pedestrian space to make streets more vibrant, more welcoming, and enhance safety.
- **Clear Sight Lines:** Develop perimeters and paths in public spaces to provide proper sight lines for intuitive and safe pathways while providing a preview of what is ahead for comfort and peace of mind for walkers.
- **Low and Minimal Fences:** Minimize the use of fencing to only what is required to keep a space functional and maintainable. When fences are used, keep them shorter than eye level wherever high fencing is not needed for a particular sport or other necessary use to improve sight lines and make spaces more welcoming. Where not needed, eliminate fences entirely.
- **Lighting:** Provide adequate and safe level of illumination in public spaces, including pedestrian scale lighting throughout plazas, where feasible, to enhance programming, art, and holiday displays, improve visibility, and create a comfortable, safe environment.
- **Reduce Fall Risk Factors:** Install features that reduce fall risk, such as grab bars, handrails, slip resistant flooring or pavements, and pedestrian scale lighting in dry and wet spaces such as restrooms, sloped walkways, and exterior staircases to enhance safety, especially for children and caregivers.
- **Play Equipment Safety:** Ensure all playgrounds meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines, and National American Society for Testing Materials (ASTM) and Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) safety guidelines followed by NYC Parks.

Guidelines in Action | Luther Gulick Park, Manhattan



Luther Gulick Park is an approximately 1.5-acre park located in Lower Manhattan along Delancey Street between Willet Street and Columbia Street, offering essential passive leisure and active recreation space for the surrounding community in the Lower East Side. Reconstructed in 2020, the park includes several different uses, including passive seating areas, ping pong tables, an adult fitness area, basketball and handball courts, a playground with a spray shower, and a new public restroom. Luther Gulick Park exemplifies many family-friendly features that make the park engaging and welcoming for New Yorkers of all ages, including:

- **Proactive Outreach:** Plans for the reconstruction of the park were created with significant community input. The community provided programming requests, including a design for both passive and active uses. Participants requested good connectivity through the park including a good east-west connector. A less rectangular design was desired by attendees. The finished park incorporated feedback from these suggestions.
- **Engaging Play:** Children of different age groups (2-5 years and 5-12 years) have ramped play areas, and the park also features sports courts, including a basketball court and four handball courts as well as an area with two ping pong tables to engage people of all ages.
- **Playful Water Features:** The park contains a spray shower with on-demand, timed water features started by users activating at a push-button bollard, providing opportunities for play and heat respite while also limiting water use.

- **Adult Fitness Equipment:** The park has a dedicated outdoor fitness area featuring tai chi wheels, parallel bars, and a sit-up bench.
- **Seating for All:** Spaces next to backed benches and at picnic tables allow mobility device space for adjacent companion seating throughout the park.
- **Family-Friendly Restrooms:** A new public restroom was constructed featuring ADA-compliant bathrooms with changing stations in both the men's and women's bathrooms. A year-round drinking fountain was installed on the building façade to ensure drinking water throughout the year.
- **Drinking Water:** Drinking fountains were replaced and a bottle filler was added to make drinking water readily available throughout the park.
- **Refuse Disposal:** Trash receptacles were installed throughout the park helping to discourage littering while also deterring pests and promoting a clean environment.
- **Pedestrian Pathways:** Wide pathways are provided throughout the park, and the surrounding sidewalks were reconstructed ensuring safe routes for pedestrians within and around the park.
- **Clear Sight Lines:** Pathways throughout the park maintain visibility at path intersections and park entries. Trees provide generous shade near paths and were limbed above eye level to preserve sight lines. Ornamental trees are strategically placed away from paths and low growing shrubs and perennials were selected for planting beds to avoid obstructing views throughout the park.
- **Lighting:** The park is illuminated throughout the entire property.

Luther Gulick Park is owned and maintained by NYC Parks.





REMOVE BARRIERS AND INCREASE ACCESS



Removing barriers and increasing accessibility means using universal design so that people of all ages and abilities can easily enter, move around, and play in public spaces. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility is a legal requirement to ensure accessibility. Where feasible, design in public spaces should go beyond these basic requirements to add comprehensive features that make it easier and more comfortable for users of all abilities to enjoy spending time in public spaces.

Practice universal design to provide play options for users of all ages and abilities through:

- **Sensory Play:** Create multi-sensory experiences, such as scented plants or interactive touch and sound features, to engage user's five senses. These features can be enjoyed by people of all ages, from children to older adults, encouraging exploration and fostering intergenerational connections.
- **Universal Play Environments:** Design flexible, multi-use play spaces and structures where children of all abilities, ages, languages, and backgrounds can play together to foster growth in physical development, emotional intelligence, and build sociocultural connections. This includes transfer platforms, ramped play units where space allows, and ground-level play features for mobility device accessibility.



PHOTO: NYC Parks
Wheelchair accessible play features
in Nautilus Playground, Queens

- **Design for Neurodivergence:** Create places, where space allows, for individuals to reduce stimuli from their environment.

Design more accessible, connected public spaces through:

- **Generous Sidewalks:** Design wide and clear pedestrian walkways with gentle slopes for comfortable pedestrian circulation. Install ADA-compliant pedestrian ramps to ease stroller access and provide a usable path for people with mobility devices.
- **Protected Bike Lanes:** Provide protected bike lanes as a safe option for people using mobility devices, older adults using tricycles, or other micromobility options to travel in the public realm. Where feasible, have tactile surface treatments that slow down riders at key intersections for added safety.



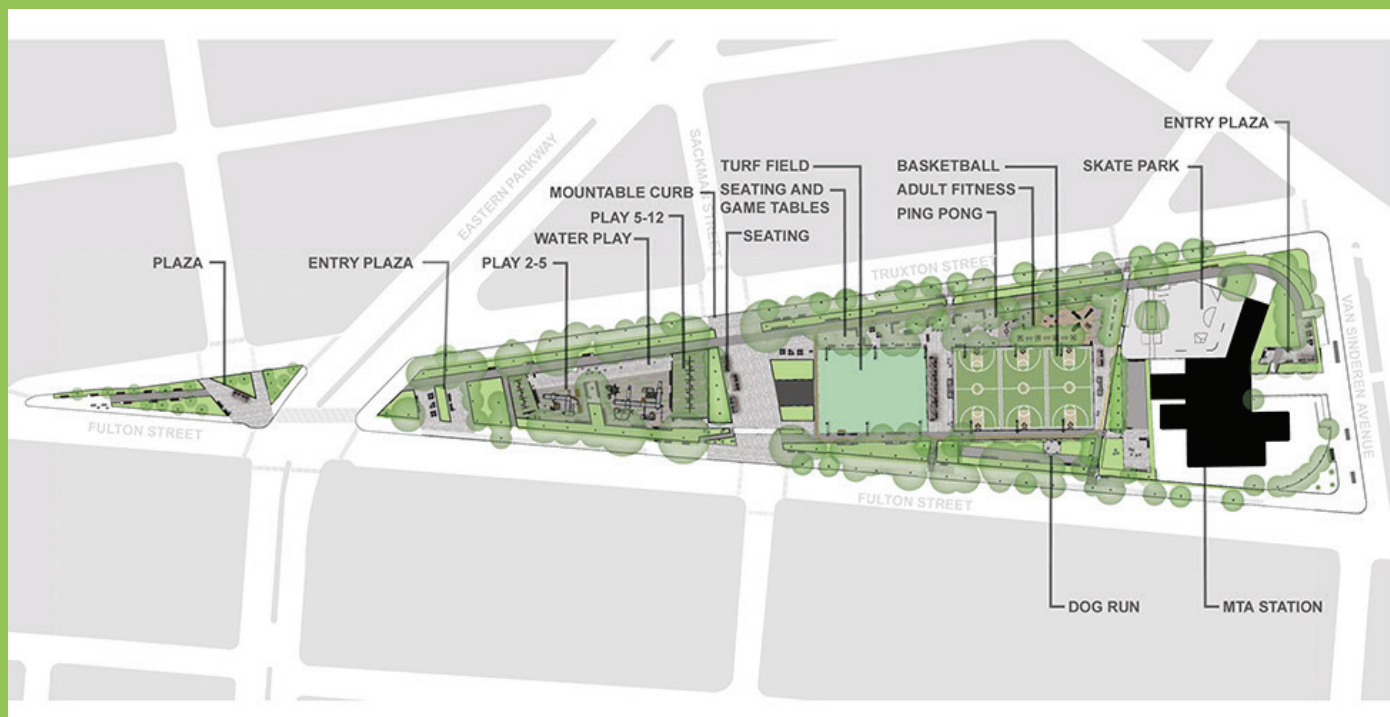
PHOTO: NYC Department of Transportation
Art by Saint-Cyr Art Studio
Bike barrier at 25th Street and Broadway in Manhattan

- **Rest Options:** Provide seating options, leaning bars, and shade where possible at bus stops and along pathways to allow for respite and adequate support for all, including older adults and families with small children.
- **Transit Accessibility:** Consider access and comfort for transit riders, including bus shelters, seating options, and bus boarding islands.
- **Gentle Entrances:** In entrance locations where designing for full ADA access is structurally infeasible, minimize slope, reduce the number and height of steps, and include handrails to support persons with disabilities, persons with strollers, and elderly persons.
- **Companion Seating:** Include spaces for mobility device that facilitate adjacent companion seating at picnic tables, benches, tables with chairs, bleachers, and other seating types so persons using mobility devices can sit shoulder-to-shoulder.

Make signage and wayfinding systems easier to see and read with:

- **Legible Signage:** Follow the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices regulations for traffic control signage. For wayfinding signage use high-contrast colors (e.g., white or gray font on black or blue), legible fonts and font sizes, icons, and provide braille text or audio options where feasible.
- **Language Accessibility:** Provide information and rule signs in the most used languages in a community—with all written languages on maps matching signage on streets and buildings—and incorporate standard graphic symbols at entrances and recreation facilities to make people from all backgrounds feel welcome.
- **Sign Placement:** Place signage at the most clearly visible or central area, such as at entrances or intersections, and considering the placement and dimensions of signage for individuals using mobility devices while also avoiding poking hazards for toddlers or small children.
- **Signage for Accessible Routes:** Provide signage pointing out accessible routes to buildings that provide public programming and services.

Guidelines in Action | Callahan Kelly Playground, Brooklyn



Callahan-Kelly Playgrounds is a 3.25-acre park located in Brooklyn on Fulton Street and Truxton Street, between Eastern Parkway and Van Sinderen Avenue. The playground was reconstructed into a multi-generational destination as part of the East New York Neighborhood Plan rezoning. After a design process that involved community input, construction was completed in August 2023. The Callahan-Kelly Playground exemplifies many features of removing barriers and increasing accessibility to public spaces, including:

- **Sensory Play:** The project includes sensory features such as a spray shower and an assortment of ground-level play, including a zylofun panel, labyrinth vibe panel, bongo panel, and rain sound wheel panel that provide numerous sensory experiences for playground users to touch and hear while they play.
- **Universal Design Elements:** It also includes ground-level play, transfer platforms and ramped play units to promote accessible play.
- **Design for Neurodivergence:** Play features including the hillscape wave climber and play smart cube provide quiet spaces for children with neurodiversity if needed.
- **Companion Seating:** Spaces were added between and adjacent to benches and other seating elements to provide room for mobility device users to sit alongside their companion and other park users.
- **Rest Options:** Seating options and shade structures are included in recreational spaces and transitional plazas providing places for users to rest.

- Generous Sidewalks: Paving patterns were extended to the street curb where the plaza surrounds the parks to invite the community to enter at key locations, enhancing access for users and serves as a recreational gateway and welcoming entrance to the nearby transportation hub.



PHOTO: NYC Parks

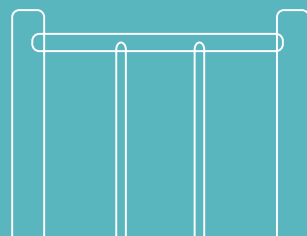
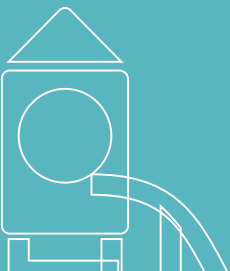
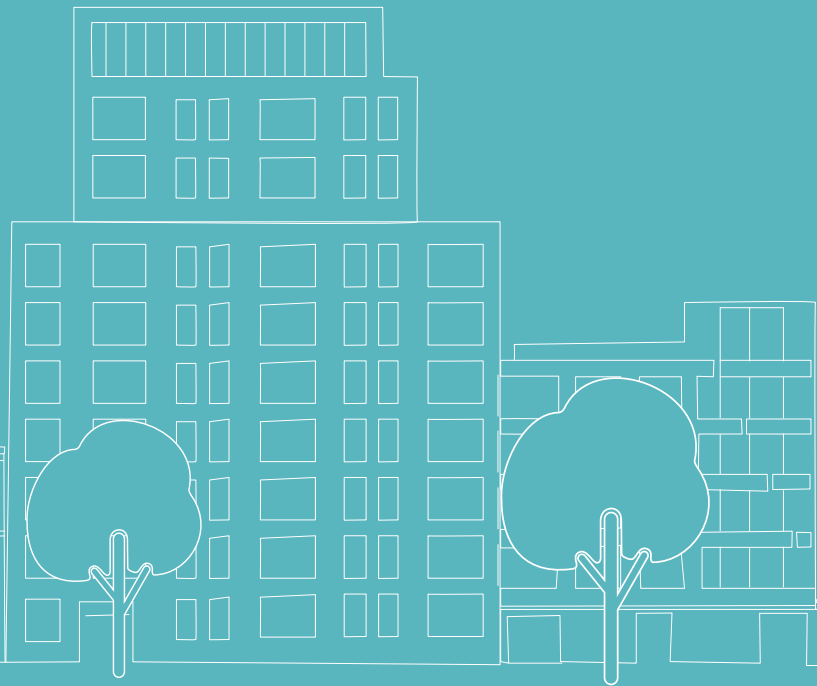
Play panels at Callahan-Kelly Park in Brooklyn allow sensory play at ground level. These panels allow children of all abilities to play next to one another.



PHOTO: NYC Parks

Play equipment at Callahan-Kelly Park in Brooklyn offers space where children – including those with neurodiversity – can find a quieter space to reduce stimuli.

**PLAN FOR
THE FUTURE**



Planning for the future means that public spaces should do “double duty”—fulfilling community needs while also supporting broader sustainability, climate resiliency, and health goals.

Build with climate resiliency and sustainability in mind through:

- **Existing Tree Canopy:** Preserve and protect existing trees and their root systems—considering their health and growth early in the design process—for shade, comfort, heat island mitigation, and UV protection.
- **New Tree Canopy:** Plant new shade trees where feasible directly to the south, east, and west of spaces where people gather, particularly heavily paved areas, bus stops, sitting areas, and sports courts. Focus on planting tree species that will provide the most shade when mature and consider trees first before installing shade structures for sustainability.
- **Materials That Stay Cooler:** Integrate high-solar reflectance index (SRI) value materials and coatings on pavements and surfaces to reduce the amount of solar radiation absorption and help lower the ambient air temperature. Consider materials that are less heat absorbent for site furnishings, particularly in areas exposed to direct sunlight.



- **Native Landscaping for Biodiversity:** Choose native and regionally-appropriate plants where feasible to enhance the beauty and characteristics of the environment while using fewer resources to grow than non-native plants. Resilient plants create inviting spaces and provide outstanding ecological benefits while helping to mitigate flooding concerns.
- **Cloudburst Management:** Incorporate green infrastructure that absorbs, holds, and transfers rainwater to another place, such as porous pavement, and other stormwater management practices that protect and maintain public amenities from flood risks while mitigating stormwater management challenges.



PHOTO: Department of Environmental Protection

- **Water Reuse:** Clean and reuse rainwater for irrigation and cooling towers, where feasible, to enhance water security and resilience in drought conditions.
- **Double Duty Design:** Use public spaces as climate infrastructure where feasible, maximizing shade and incorporating stormwater absorption to promote climate resilience in these spaces.

Consider long-term social equity, physical and mental health, and community well-being through:

- **Outdoor Learning Areas:** Find opportunities to build and leverage existing green spaces for all people to engage with nature and learn about creature wildlife in community gardens, plazas, and parks.
- **Cooling Centers:** Leverage libraries, community centers, older adult centers, and public housing facilities to do double duty and provide cool, air-conditioned spaces for those who do not have air-conditioning in their homes.
- **Active Transportation:** Choose infrastructure plans that encourage active modes of transportation, such as biking and walking, to promote physical and mental health.
- **Green Space:** Incorporate grass, trees, or other vegetation where possible to support communities' physical and mental health.
- **Environmental Education Stations:** Install signage along greenways, bike paths, waterfronts, or beaches with information and displays for environmental learning, such as local weather patterns, climate change impacts, and sustainable practices.

Design adaptable spaces that can evolve with the needs of the community through:

- **Maintenance:** Consider the maintenance needs of public spaces in the design process to ensure spaces are easy to maintain, identifying maintenance partnerships where possible.
- **Multi-Generational Programming:** Design spaces for activities that can be used and enjoyed by all age groups, from children to teens to parents and older adults, such as walking circuits, sensory gardens, and decorative water features, to support diverse and evolving demographics over time.
- **Flexible, Adaptive, and Inclusive Areas:** Create neutral and flexible areas that can be used year-round and adapt to changing needs of communities.
- **Greenways:** Develop greenways that provide safe and scenic routes of travel to recreation destinations, extend the reach of parks, increase tree canopy for shade, add more pervious ground cover for stormwater retention, and plant resilient vegetation to beautify the neighborhood.
- **Accessible Climate Infrastructure:** Ensure that flood protection infrastructure—which often requires elevating structures and changing grades—is accessible for all users.

Guidelines in Action | The Pollinator Port Project, Citywide



The New York City Department of Transportation (NYC DOT), The Horticultural Society of New York (The Hort), and Rutgers University are collaborating to create habitats for at-risk native bee populations in select NYC DOT public plazas and Open Streets. As part of the project, ‘bee hotels’ and ‘bee bunkers’ will be installed, and vegetation will be planted to provide nourishment for bees and other pollinators. The installations provide connections between other green spaces across the city and will attract tickle bees, a small, native bee species that rarely sting. The Pollinator Port Project exemplifies how public spaces can be leveraged for programming that promotes sustainability, environmental learning, and principles of planning for the future through:

- **Landscapes That Promote Biodiversity:** Native flowers planted in public spaces through this project beautify public spaces and promote the native bee populations.
- **Outdoor Learning Areas:** This project provides an opportunity for the community to engage with nature, and researchers from Rutgers University will also use the project to study the city bees, their use of provided habitats, and how they move across the city.

- **Maintenance:** The city’s partnership with The Hort ensures reliable upkeep of the project as The Hort currently provides maintenance, operations, and horticultural care at 30 plazas, 25 Open Streets, and other public spaces in underserved communities across the city.
- **Multi-Generational Programming:** The Hort hosts an annual “Bee Jubilee” where New Yorkers can volunteer to help spot bees that are marked by the scientists and identify where the bees travel, engaging community members of all ages.

This project includes NYC DOT plazas and Open Streets in Fordam Plaza, Parkside Plaza, Cooper Sq Plaza, Quisqueya Plaza (Dykman Plaza), Gates Ave, 34th Ave, and Water Street (on Staten Island).



PHOTO: The Hort

Conclusion

Designing with family-friendly design values in mind is paramount to ensuring that public spaces are inclusive and safe for all who live, work, and play in our city. The City of New York remains committed to incorporating family-friendly design values into our public realm and we invite our state, federal, other cities, non-profit, and private partners to join in our efforts.

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Additional Design Resources

[Active Design Guidelines](#)

[Active Design Guide for Community Groups](#)

[Active Design Playbook for Early Childhood Settings](#)

[Accessible Playgrounds Definitions](#)

[Addressing Unacceptable Inequities: A Chronic Disease Strategy for New York City](#)

[Age-friendly NYC: New Commitments for a City for All Ages](#)

[Aging in Place Guide for Building Owners](#)

[Designing and Planning for Flood Resiliency: Guidelines for NYC Parks](#)

[Designing New York: Streetscapes for Wellness](#)

[High Performance Landscape Guidelines: 21st Century Parks for NYC](#)

[Language Access Plan: City of New York Parks and Recreation](#)

[Neighborhood Coastal Flood Protection Project Planning Guidance](#)

[NYC Climate Resiliency Design Guidelines](#)

[NYC School and Youth Safety: A Pedestrian and Bike Action Plan](#)

[Pedestrian Safety and Older New Yorkers](#)

[Principles of Good Urban Design for New York City](#)



